



Drinking in Rome, from Its Historic “Nasoni” to Its Bars and Speakeasies

Hailed as the “Queen of the Waters,” it's home to more fountains than any other city in the world



Italian Hours

Lucy Gordan



A typical nasone, Courtesy of Gabriella Massa, www.romaslowtour.com

Water has always been an integral part of Rome's landscape and culture from its ancient aqueducts and Imperial baths to its majestic Renaissance and Baroque fountains commissioned by her ruling popes, and since the mid-19th century, her "*nasoni*", or drinking fountains. Thus, thanks to her over 2,000 fountains—plus some 2,500 *nasoni*—today Rome, appropriately named "Queen of the Waters", is home to more fountains than any other city in the world.

The water in her earlier "monumental" fountains was and usually still is *non potabile* (undrinkable), but 2025's tourists and Jubilee pilgrims can count on the some 200 *nasoni* in the city center to quench their thirst. The other *nasoni* are located in parks, the EUR business district ((Esposizione Universale Roma), and the outlying residential neighborhoods. Over time they've become a beloved symbol of Rome, although they're now found in other Italian cities and towns as well, for a national total of 5,333. Not surprisingly, when Virginia Raggi, the first female mayor of Rome from 2016-2021, tried to close down nearly all the *nasoni*, leaving only 85 functional, the Romans rebelled and she had to abandon her plan.



One of Rome's most magnificent fountains, Trevi. Photo: PxHere

Nasoni were the idea of Freemason and anticlerical Luigi Pianciani, the first mayor of Rome after the Unification of Italy, and his alderman Rinazzi (first name unknown), to provide free continuously flowing water to their fellow citizens, since running water didn't yet exist in most Roman homes. It was also a time when the city government was trying to control the multiple cholera and typhoid epidemics caused by the unhealthy quality of Rome's "drinkable" water. The first twenty were installed between 1872 and 1874, the last three near the Colosseum in 2024, to commemorate their 150th birthday.

Originally *nasoni* were made of cast iron, weighed around 200 pounds, and were just over a meter tall. Three of these still exist today, in *Piazza della Rotonda* outside the Pantheon, in *Via San Teodoro* between the Forum and *Circus Maximus*, and in *Via delle Tre Cannelle* in the neighborhood called *Monti*. They were called *dragoni* not *nasoni* because they had three lion-headed spouts at their top.

Before long, brass—and more recently stainless steel—replaced cast iron and the three spouts became only one—long, curved, nose-shaped, hence the name *nasoni*. Each

spout has a small hole. If you cover the spout's mouth with your hand, water will flow upwards through the hole and reach your thirsty mouth. Otherwise, you can fill your personal water bottle at the spout's mouth and thereby avoid the food trucks and mini-markets selling water at exorbitant prices.



A dragone, the precursor of a nasone, Courtesy of Gabriella Massa, www.romaslowtour.com

However, if, after a long day, you're looking for a drink stronger than water, especially for their sweeping views, but also for their commendable cocktails, I recommend the rooftop bars at "The Court" overlooking the Colosseum, "Terrazza Les Étoiles" overlooking St. Peter's, "Roof Garden at Hotel Relais Fontana di Trevi", and the American Bar at the Hotel Forum.

In case of rain or during cold weather, a definite must is trendy "Drink Kong"; it's dark, but with a vibrant atmosphere accentuated by neon lights, near Rome's main railroad station at Piazza di San Martino ai Monti 8, tel. 0623488666. Reservations are recommended, open every day from 18:30 to 2 AM. Founded in 2018 by the half-Roman, half-Irish mixologist Patrick Pistolesi, "Drink Kong" is no. 33 of The World's 100 Best Bars 2024, but the list's no. 1 choice in Italy. A hub for cocktail cognoscenti, it's not just a place to drink, it's an experience.

Each listing on its cocktail menu includes its base spirit, a flavor map, and the type of serving glass. My favorites are Equinox made with Nordés gin, Ishtar made with Chinggis Khan Vodka, and Quetzal made with Herradura Plata Tequila. Its snack menu proposes a wide range of specialties from Japan, China, Mexico and New York Kosher.

Another special venue is the "Speakeasy Argot" at Via Cappellari 93 near Piazza Navona and Campo de' Fiori, tel. 393-6291320, open every day from 10 PM-4 AM. It's a club, so, when you book, you have to download the membership card. In addition to excellent cocktails served on imaginatively decorated black slate plates, there's live music. Don't leave without ordering the house "Papillon": whiskey, lime juice, lapsang tea syrup, pepper and ginger beer.

Nearby is "James Thomas Speakeasy" at Vicolo Cellini 30, tel. 370-1146287, open every day from 9 PM to 3:30 AM, with live jazz or dance music, a dance floor, authentic 1920's Prohibition-era décor, mixology lessons and an online store. Be sure to try the house cocktail: the "Cherry Bomb".

If it's peace in a homey, refined atmosphere you're looking for, head to the old-fashioned Liberty-style "Hotel Locarno" near Piazza del Popolo, at Via della Penna 22, tel. 063610841, reservations obligatory. It's a special place too for Sunday brunch.

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