

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

■ BY MOTHER MARTHA

For many years, Friar Tuck and I were neighbors on Via Monte del Gallo, a narrow, quiet, residential street, which winds uphill from the Italian State Railway's St. Peter's station at the beginning of Via Gregorio VII to the Vatican-owned, spartan, rabbit-warren hotel *Casa Tra Noi* (www.hotel-casatranoiroma.com). With its ample parking lot for buses and its two chapels, it caters to groups, especially pilgrims.

Nearby, also on the hilltop, near the last stop on the no. 34 bus from Piazza Cavour past the Vatican and just a 15-minute walk to St. Peter's, are several choices of accommodations.

Tucked away on a little pedestrian lane, at Via Clemente Alessandrino 9, along the side of the small turn-of-the-last-century church Santa Maria dell'Immacolata Concezione (until recently home to the New York-based Franciscan Sisters of the Atonement), is the *Hotel Alessandrino* (www.hotelalessandrino.com). Its 26 rooms are all equipped with air conditioning, satellite color TV, mini-bar, safe deposit box, wi-fi, and bathrooms with showers. Prices, which vary according to season, include breakfast. Although it doesn't have a bar or restaurant, guests can bring their own food and drinks to the 5th-floor terrace with its unobstructed, breathtaking view of St. Peter's.

A few doors down on the same side of Via Monte del Gallo at no. 81 is *Villa Santa Maria*, run by the Sisters of St. Mary's Charity (tel. 39-0639387388, villasantamaria@tiscali.it). The perfect place for budget travelers, except perhaps for its 11 PM curfew and no food on the premises, its spacious, comfortable rooms cost 40 euros a night for a single, and 30 euros for person a night if the party counts more than one person.

Almost directly across the street at no. 62 is the bed-and-breakfast *Romadreaming* (www.romadreaming.it), which opened two years ago. Its 14 spacious rooms have double (never twin) beds. Some have views of St. Peter's, as do two large terraces open to all guests. "Two rooms can be made up as triples," Alessia, the very gregarious manager, told me. "We also have three apartments with a dining room, fully-equipped kitchen, bathroom, TV and sleeping area. This feature is



Stefano Navarini illustration

WANT A CHEAP ROOM
NEAR THE VATICAN? TRY
VIA MONTE DEL GALLO

particularly convenient for families. We've had many guests with a child who's a patient at nearby *Bambino Gesù*, Rome's Vatican-owned children's hospital." The rooms go by their color; they don't have numbers. Breakfast is room service. Prices vary from 55 euros in the low season to 100-150 euros in high season.

Downhill, just past the curve at no. 36, is the brand-new boutique *Fragrance Hotel St. Peter* (www.fragrancestpeter.it), inaugurated in April. It was formerly part of the convent of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, who still own the building and live next door. Its 28 beautifully-decorated

rooms have all the amenities. Three on the ground floor have their own garden, and a fourth is handicap-accessible. Several rooms have both a bathtub and a shower. Prices — 175 euros low season, 190 euros high season — include a generous breakfast. Add 25% for Room 402, "The Penthouse," which has its own terrace with an "almost hands-on" view of St. Peter's dome.

A curiosity: *Via Monte del Gallo* translates as "Rooster Mountain Street" and I've always thought that's what it meant, as the idea of roosters crowing in this seemed fitting. (Until the late 1950s, this street was the only one to the north of St. Peter's with buildings. Until the Second World War, from Porta Cavalleggeri northwards there was only farmland with field after field of grazing sheep.)

Instead, from *Fragrance Hotel's* website, assembled by its extrovert manager, Valeria, I learned that in this case *Gallo* means "Gaul" and was an insulting way to refer to a Frenchman, in this case, Charles III, Duke of Bourbon (1490-May 6, 1527). A French military leader, he was commander of the Imperial troops of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V during the Sack of Rome in 1527, the only time in history that the Swiss Guards saw combat. Charles, who died in combat, supposedly camped his troops here on this *Monte*.

According to another legend, reports the website, Benvenuto Cellini, the goldsmith, engraving sculptor and painter, wrote in his autobiography that he killed Charles with a shot fired from his harquebus from Castel Sant' Angelo. ○



Above: St. Peter's railroad station with convenient connections to Rome's beaches or to Rome's main railroad station and to the Metro (subway). Below: The congress center at *Hotel Casa Tra Noi*; a nighttime view from the terrace of *Hotel Alessandrino*; a brightly decorated room at the Bed & Breakfast *Romadreaming*; the exterior of *Fragrance Hotel St. Peter*

