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EVEN IF YOU AREN'T A VIP LIKE *HOW I MET YOUR MOTHER* STAR NEIL PATRICK HARRIS, THE ROMÈ CAVALIERI HOTEL TREATS YOU LIKE ONE

Do as the Romans Do



Famous artwork graces the hotel lobby, above.

One Roman evening last April while traveling for a photo shoot with *Watch!*, Neil Patrick Harris admired the orange sunset backlighting the dome of St. Peter's Basilica. The view from each private balcony of the Rome Cavalieri, the actor said, "is truly outrageous. And each day, as I watched the mist dissipate and the sun glow stronger, it just got better and better."

April—which this year encompasses Easter, on the 4th—is the perfect time to visit Rome and Vatican City, the world's tiniest sovereignty that it surrounds, where Holy Week's picturesque processions and Masses offer once-in-a-lifetime experiences inside this capital of Catholicism. Spring is also a great season in which to steal away

to the Cavalieri, whose verdant, 15-acre hilltop grounds are a manicured Mediterranean park of pools and palm trees overlooking the brown and ochre rooftops of the Eternal City.

Part of the Waldorf Astoria Collection, a group of one-of-a-kind landmark hotels, the elegant, five-star Rome Cavalieri was constructed in the 1960s hedonistic heyday of the filmmaker Federico Fellini, and has since been continually lavished with up-to-date decor and conveniences in its 345 deluxe rooms, interspersed with furnishings of rare antiquity. The hotel's 25 suites, some of which connect to private rooftop gardens and outdoor minipools, have been individually decorated to showcase their various works of art, from original Karl Lagerfeld sofas to paintings by Andy Warhol and Robert Indiana.

Clockwise from right: Neil Patrick Harris poolside; paradise after dark, the ultraluxe Petronius Suite.



Tea with Tiepolo

The Cavalieri offers a tea service of Asia's most exotic blends and innovative creations such as "fruit sushi" on bone china under a trio of paintings by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo. Great food is, after all, central to Italian life, and the Cavalieri offers an *abbondanza* of award-winning culinary options. In the seventh-floor Imperial Lounge, a continental breakfast buffet is served with the typical cereals, pastries and yogurts, but also boasts thinly shaved ribbons of delicate prosciutto; fresh, exotic fruit jams; and a spreadable, honey-infused farmer's cheese that will make you banish any thoughts of your usual bagel with a shmear back to the States.

But the Cavalieri's true *pezzo forte* is the restaurant La Pergola, on a starlit upper-floor terrace. Here at Rome's only three-star Michelin eatery, chef Heinz Beck prepares signature dishes such as the menu he served to Michelle Obama and 13 other international first ladies at a luncheon during the nearby G8 summit: lobster medallions on eggplant puree with tomatoes and basil, veal with artichoke fritters, and spaghetti alla carbonara, a beloved Roman pasta dish made with cured pork.

Swordplay and Spa Treatments

To work off the desserts you've indulged in, such as *sfogliatelle* (an Italian puff pastry), the Cavalieri offers an 800-meter outdoor fitness trail, two Davis Cup red clay tennis courts and the Cavalieri Grand Spa Club, billed as Italy's most luxurious spa and fitness facility. Inside the club, a glass-domed indoor pool is fed by a cascading waterfall and adjoins a wood-burning fireplace, making the whole scene more than a little evocative of a swim through an ancient imperial palace.

Even more reminiscent of Rome's earliest days is the unique Gladiator Training Program the hotel offers on its grounds, developed in partnership with the Gruppo Storico Romano, a society devoted to the study and reenactment of gladiator culture. The intense two-hour workout teaches ancient combat techniques and comes complete

with traditional tunic, sandals, armor and authentic era weapons. But luckily for today's holiday gladiator, this modern contest ends not with being devoured by a lion, but instead with an infinitely more pleasant four-handed "Gladiator Massage" in the hotel spa—just one of the sensual, uniquely Italian experiences the Cavalieri has to offer.

Yes, Dogs Wear Cashmere

After that, you won't be the only one aglow. The Cavalieri's recently inaugurated Very Important Pet program will pamper your four-footed friend with a full day of spa treatments of his or her own, customized cashmere outfitting by Odilia Prisco Dog Haute Couture, and a four-course meal served, en suite of course, on Gucci dishware.

It may be fitting for a city founded in legend by twin brothers Romulus and Remus, suckled and raised by a she-wolf, to put its visiting canines on an Ionic pedestal. But here at the Cavalieri, it hardly seems fair. Because beckoned by such famous sights as the Colosseum and Fountain of Trevi, you will, of course, at some point have to venture out from the hotel. Meanwhile your best friend gets to simply stay, to continue enjoying his or her own little slice of La Doggie Vita. (Rome Cavalieri, Via Alberto Cadlolo, 101, Rome, Italy 00136. +39-06-35091 or romecavalieri.com) — Jim Colucci

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For reservations go to www.AmericanExpress.com