

THE ITINERARY

Once inside the museum, the group is taken to the **Cortile della Pigna**, the Courtyard of the Pinecone – this is the official starting point of the tour. The Courtyard gets its name from the enormous bronze Pinecone from the Roman area stands. It was originally a fountain decoration in the Roman baths of Agrippa. A pair of bronze Roman peacocks from Hadrian's mausoleum stand on either side of the Pinecone. From the Courtyard visitors can admire the beautiful facades of the Vatican Palaces.

All throughout the tour the guide will also point out important architectural elements of the galleries and explain the buildings' history.

The next stop is at the **Belvedere Courtyard**. This is the famous Greco-Roman section of the museum that houses many acclaimed statues including the **Laocoon** and the **Apollo Belvedere**. The Laocoon dates from about 50 B.C. and illustrates an ancient story about a Trojan priest and his two sons who were killed by sea serpents. This sculpture was especially popular in the Renaissance as many great artists studied its anatomy. The Apollo Belvedere is so called because it is housed in the Belvedere Courtyard. It depicts the Greek god Apollo and has been considered the greatest ancient sculpture.

In the **Room of the Muses** (Sala delle Muse), the group stops to admire the **Torso del Belvedere** - a celebrated fragment of an ancient Greek statue by Apollonius. This sculpture is especially famous because Michelangelo studied it for its accurate anatomy. The influence this sculpture had on Michelangelo can be seen in his fresco of Last Judgement in the Sistine Chapel.

After that, the group visits the **Sala Rotonda**, the Round Room. There are many fine pieces in this room including the **Bust of Zeus**, the golden statue of **Hercules**, **Hadrian**, and the enormous **porphyry tub** that was originally in Nero's Golden House. The size of this tub gives visitors an idea of how the famously indulgent Roman ruler lived.

The next stop is in the **Greek Cross Room** (Sala a Croce Greca) where there are two porphyry sarcophagi that belonged to Saint Constance and to Saint Helen, the daughter and mother of the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great who legalized Christianity. One sarcophagus represents a battle between Romans and barbarians, while the other illustrates the Eucharistic grape harvest.

We then go to the upper floor where we stop in the **Candelabra Gallery**. The name of this gallery comes from the amazing marble candelabra from Hadrian's Villa in Tivoli. In this gallery there are many Roman copies of ancient Greek statues.

The **Gallery of Tapestries** is our next stop to admire its enormous antique tapestries. The tapestries were commissioned in the 16th century by Pope Clement VII to decorate the Sistine Chapel. These tapestries were designed by Raphael's students and woven in Brussels. This room is equipped with special climate control due to the fragility of these extremely precious tapestries. The tapestries represent various scenes from the New Testament, such as the Adoration of the Magi, the Massacre of the Innocents, and the Resurrection.

Next is the fascinating **Gallery of Maps**. The gallery is 120 metres long and took 3 years to paint its 40 panels. These topographical maps were the first complete set of their kind showing all of Italy. Also of note is the highly-detailed ceiling. From the windows in the Gallery of Maps visitors can admire the gorgeous Vatican gardens.

The **Sobieski Room** gets its name from the gigantic 19th century painting. This painting represents the victory of the Polish king John Sobieski III over the Turks during the battle of Vienna in 1683.

The **Immaculate Conception Room** was painted in the 19th century with frescoes representing the Immaculate Conception.

The group is then brought to the **Raphael Rooms**. These 4 rooms, originally the Papal residence, are covered almost entirely by frescoes painted by the Renaissance master in the early 16th century.

Room of the Segnatura – This room was originally the personal library and office of Pope Julius II, and was the first the Raphael painted. The frescoes in this room are the most celebrated of all the Raphael Rooms. The 4 main frescoes represent the fusion of classical and Christian themes. *The School of Athens* has portraits of many contemporary artists including Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and even Raphael's own self-portrait.

Room of Heliodorus – The frescoes in this room are a kind of propaganda for the Papacy, and each of the 4 major paintings includes a portrait of Raphael's patron, Pope Julius II. The visitor should note in particular *The Deliverance of Saint Peter from Prison*. The story is depicted in 3 episodes, and Raphael ingeniously incorporated the window grate into the story.

Room of the Fire in the Borgo – The paintings in this room depict episodes of famous Leos in history, as they were painted for Pope Leo X. The frescoes were designed by Raphael and painted by his pupils.

Hall of Constantine – These paintings are largely the work of Raphael's pupils, as the master died before their completion. The theme of this room is the triumph of Christianity over paganism, as Constantine was the Roman Emperor who legalized Christianity. The 4 major frescoes depict scenes from Constantine's life.

The group's last stop is in the **Sistine Chapel**. Because no talking is allowed in the chapel, the guide will make a stop before entering, and with the help of illustrated panels will explain the paintings that are in the chapel.

The chapel was built in the 15th century and was decorated with frescoes by the most famous artists of the time including Botticelli, Perugino, Ghirlandaio and Michelangelo.

Side Walls: There are 2 painting cycles along the Chapel's side walls. One depicts *The Life of Moses*, and the other is *The Life of Christ*. They were painted by Ghirlandaio, Perugino and Botticelli. Above these scenes are portraits of the Popes, and in the lunettes above the windows is the *Ancestors of Christ* series by Michelangelo.

Ceiling: The ceiling frescoes were commissioned by Pope Julius II from Michelangelo who painted them from 1508-1512. The area he painted covers 930 square metres and contains over 300 figures. The 9 main ceiling panels show scenes from the book of Genesis – the Creation of the World, and the Fall of Man. The most famous of these is the *Creation of Adam*. These scenes are surrounded by various Biblical figures as well as Prophets and Sibyls.

Entrance wall: Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*. He painted this fresco with its 391 figures, from 1535-1541. It depicts the Apocalypse as told in the book of Revelation. According to the Bible, Christ will return to judge all souls – the souls of the dead will rise from their graves to be judged if they are to go to heaven or hell. At the top of the painting are those who are going to heaven, and at the bottom are those who are being pulled by demons into the fires of hell. This painting was controversial for many reasons including that Michelangelo painted nude figures. It was called obscene, and another artist was hired to paint over the controversial areas. In this painting, Michelangelo painted the portraits of many of his contemporaries and his own self-portrait.

After visiting the Sistine Chapel, visitors are free to return to the museum and visit it at their leisure.

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