

## How to Say Goodbye

How did I get here? Rome is deserted and empty and I'm stuck on an air mattress in the guest bedroom of my parents' house surrounded by boxes of childhood memorabilia and my dad's winter clothes. Looking at these desolate Roman landmarks on my laptop, I find myself relating to them in ways I never would've imagined. We are all disappointed, lonely, and bored. I miss those places, just as they probably miss their visitors. They're used to days filled with tourists travelling from all over the world, waiting in lines and checking off their bucket lists. Now, we view them longingly from our computers instead.

On my last night in Rome, my friends and I couldn't bear to stay on campus. We made noble plans to wander around all night and watch the sun rise over the Colosseum, but we soon settled for a trip to our favorite bar and one last drunken walk through the city instead. We stopped at Piazza Navona, the Pantheon, and the Trevi Fountain. We said goodbye to the memories we made there and the ones we never got the chance to make. It was both eerie and breathtaking to see those spaces in such a vulnerable state. Each landmark was bare and quiet, just as we know them to look today. My friends and I walked alone through the streets of Rome together one last time. No tourists, no sunshine, no cameras. As I cried looking in awe at the Trevi fountain's piercing blue water glistening through the darkness of the night, I felt Rome's presence hovering over me more than ever before. There was a bittersweet heaviness to it that I couldn't place. Looking back, I wonder if it was because the city was mourning along with us. Maybe that weight was Rome helping us figure out how to say goodbye.

Yes, it is initially jarring and upsetting to see Rome so empty and barren. It hurts today to feel so far away from where I should be. But I find a strange comfort in seeing those places look

just like they did on my last night in Rome. Even in the quiet of the night, Rome stands tall, proud of its history and aware of its beauty. Those buildings are older and wiser than I'll ever be. They have survived countless acts of terrorism, pandemics, and natural disasters, and still live to tell the tale. That final night taught me a lot about Rome that I had never noticed before. When the tourists head back to their hotels and the moon passes over the eternal city, everything is still there for those that need it. Before then, I had only seen those monuments filled to the brim with people in the daytime. I thought that was when Rome was in its prime. But in the nighttime, everything is just as we left it. Even in complete stillness, Rome has a beautiful story to tell. It is waiting to comfort those looking for clarity or understanding. Rome is not as scared of emptiness as we are. Most of all, it reminds us that after the hush of the night comes the sunshine and the familiarity of a new day. It is hard to see Rome empty now, but that's how it looks each night when the city goes to sleep anyway. Someday soon, we will all wake up from this fever dream to some sense of returned normalcy. Rome will welcome back its visitors, both the eager tourist and night owl alike, with open arms. Until then, we watch Rome from our bedrooms on our computers, dreaming of what could've been and longing for what's to come.