

THE GETAWAY | STEPHANIE ROSENBLUM

# To See the Pope, Prayers Won't Help

Get a free ticket to an audience on your own. Or let a tour outfit do it for you.

SO YOU'RE OFF TO ROME and in addition to seeing the Colosseum, you want to see the new pope. But how?

Your best bet is to attend a general audience (also known as a papal audience), a weekly gathering that the American Catholic Church in Rome says includes prayers, blessings and a homily. It is not a Mass but, rather, a chance to listen to the pope and mingle with other attendees. (The rocker Patti Smith was among the most recent visitors.)

Tours both old and new enable those now flocking to Rome for a glimpse of Pope Francis, who assumed the role last month, to get a seat at an audience. There are weeklong romps through the Eternal City that include tours of ancient Rome and Assisi. There are half-day excursions with transportation to and from your hotel. And there are no-frills affairs for those who simply want to be escorted into the audience from just beyond St. Peter's Square.

Lasting about an hour and a half, audiences draw thousands of people and take place on Wednesday mornings in St. Peter's Square or in the Pope Paul VI Audience Hall. (During the summer, the general audience may take place outside of Rome at Castel Gandolfo.) Tickets are free and you can get them yourself, but to ensure admission, you should request them weeks in advance (and then pick them up in person in Rome).

There are a few ways to do that, according to the American Embassy to the Holy See in Rome. You can contact the American Catholic Church in Rome (Church of Santa Susanna) through the Web site [Santasusanna.org](http://Santasusanna.org), or e-mail the Bishops' Office for United States Visitors to the Vatican at [visitorsoffice@pnac.org](mailto:visitorsoffice@pnac.org); you may also send a fax to (39-06) 679-1448. Another option is to write to the Vatican: go to the Web site [Vatican.va](http://Vatican.va), choose your language, click on the "Prefecture of the Papal Household" link and then download the ticket request form, which you must fill out and mail (not e-mail) or fax.

If you'd rather pay a tour company to get tickets for you and provide a guide to take you there, you have several options.

ItalyVacations, the sister company of Perillo Tours, the family-owned travel company, offers one of the more full-blown tour experiences: a six-day "Meet Pope Francis" package starting at \$879 a person (based on double occupancy). The trip — "a great, cultural experience centered around the new pope!" as Perillo's Web



ABOVE, MAURIZIO BRAMBATI/EUROPEAN PRESSPHOTO AGENCY; TOP RIGHT, L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO, VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

site puts it — includes a seat at the general audience, a tour of the Vatican Museums and a day trip to the cities of Assisi (the birthplace of St. Francis, for whom the pope took his name) and Orvieto. Hotel accommodations, round-trip airport transfers and daily breakfast are also included; airfare is not. A complete itinerary is at [Italyvacations.com](http://Italyvacations.com).

Another travel company, Central Holidays, is introducing a six-day "Celebrating the New Pope in Rome" package starting at \$709 (based on double occupancy). The tour is not unlike Perillo's: in addition to attending an audience, it includes guided tours of the Vatican Museums and Sistine Chapel, an excursion to Assisi and Orvieto, hotels, round-trip airport transfers and

daily breakfast: [Centralholidays.com](http://Centralholidays.com).

For those who want to attend the general audience yet aren't interested in a weeklong tour, there are day tours that include round-trip transportation between major hotels and the general audience. Gray Line, for instance, will take you by bus past sites like the Piazza della Repubblica, Piazza Barberini, Via Veneto, Villa Borghese, Piazza del Popolo and its Egyptian obelisk, and Castel Sant'Angelo before arriving in Vatican City. About \$46 for adults; \$37 for children: [Grayline.com](http://Grayline.com).

City Discovery, another sightseeing company, also charges around \$46 for adults; \$37 for children. Its "Papal Audience With Pope Francis" half-day bus tour includes stops at the Piazza dell'Esquilino, Republic Square, the Mermaids Fountain, Villa Borghese, Castel Sant'Angelo and St. Peter's Square: [City-discovery.com](http://City-discovery.com).

Should you be averse to group travel, you can sign up for a program that offers little more than an escort to the general audience. No group bus trip. No lunch. Your guide simply meets you at Vatican City. Viator.com, a site that culls tours and activities from local guides and offers online reviews about them, has such a tour. For \$42 you receive a seat at the general audience and commentary from a guide about the history of St. Peter's Square and the papacy: [Viator.com](http://Viator.com).

If you have time and patience, you may want to procure the tickets yourself and go it alone. That said, some tour operators promise guests a seat during the audience (many people end up standing). The companies also take away the hassle: no need to book so far in advance, pick up tickets in Rome or navigate through the throngs of people.

Will there be a general audience when you visit Rome? It's typically a weekly affair but check the Web site of the American Catholic Church in Rome (see above). There may be changes during holidays and in the summer. For the pope's near-term schedule, there's — what else? — the Pope App. It's free and enables you to be reminded of a general audience ("udienza generale," in Italian, on the app) an hour before it begins, or just as it's beginning. The app also has news, text of the pope's previous audiences and other speeches, and a live feed tab.

Another way to see Pope Francis is to attend his Sunday Angelus at noon in St. Peter's Square. You do not need a ticket, though you do need to arrive early. While Pope Francis has chosen to live in the Vatican guesthouse rather than the Apostolic Palace as his predecessor Pope Benedict XVI did, according to news reports, he still delivers his message from the study window of an apartment in the palace.