

# Next Steps 2026: Via Francigena and Beyond

## Reflection 1

### Arrival Rome: May 3-8

Arrived in Rome to clear skies and warm sunshine. Rome is the eternal city (Urbs Aeterna), but every return visit to Rome changes my perspective on this City beyond Time. While the larger story of Rome continues and evolves, my individual connection, given that it is 20 years since I first came to live in this city, is rendered more and more a memory belonging to a different time. The simple Italian flow of life has been transformed. Places where once you could enter freely and easily are now hampered by long queues and (ineffective) security. I'm no expert but I presume that the security guards are meant to be monitoring the security screens as bags pass through. A minor point - until its not.

Another change is that the small family trattoria which were memorial places of hospitality and reliably good food have gone the way of many businesses but after two decades this is to be expected.

The Eternal City thrives on its historical reputation as Caput Mundi, but in reality, it is as vulnerable to change and transition as any urban setting in the world. The fundamentals of this extraordinary city remain firmly entrenched but the patterns of connection change with each generation. This is why it survives because my own flimsy and temporal experience of this city quickly fade against the backdrop of the larger story that Rome tells. The irony is that while Rome's eternal claims are built upon the tangibility and stability of its historical character, our own personal claims of having forged some kind of relationship with the city remain nothing more than personal recollections of interest to a polite few.

However, there was one experience that suggested that Rome remembered me. Passing through immigration upon arrival at the airport, foreigners from outside of Europe must have their photo and fingerprints taken. It seems, with unexpected efficiency, that the Italians at least remember my fingerprints from when I applied for my *Il permesso di soggiorno* in 2006 and later. Even if it is at the level of whatever passes for bureaucracy here, Rome, at least, remembers my fingerprints.