***Short History of Rome***

The heart of Italy, from ancient to modern times, has always been the city of Rome. Located in the region of Lazio, Rome's origins are traced by legend to Romulus and Remus, twin sons of Mars, the god of war. According to Roman mythology, the brothers disagreed over where to locate the new city. Each brother stood on one of Rome's seven hills, and six vultures circled over Romulus, signaling Mars' favor. Thus, on April 21, 753BC, the city that is now a world icon was founded.  
  
What began as a rural settlement quickly evolved into a bustling city that was strengthened by diverse influences. Building temples in the style of the Etruscans and incorporating key elements of Greek culture, Rome grew to become a republic around 509 BC and an empire by the end of the BC period.  
  
**The Roman Empire (5th Century BC to 5th Century AD)**  
  
The Roman Empire enjoyed a magnificent and expansive rule and oversaw the building of the Coliseum, the Baths of Caracalla and the Aurelian Walls. At its peak, the city of Rome had an estimated population of 1-2 million residents. Rome was, at that point, the largest city in the world, dominating the entire Mediterranean region and ultimately leaving lasting influences on every aspect of European life, from language and government to medicine and sports.  
  
But in the never-ending turmoil of the ancient world, change was inevitable. The Roman Empire was weakened by a declining population, plague, and political unrest. In 476 AD, the Emperor Romulus Augustus was deposed by the barbarian Odoacer, marking the fall of the Roman Empire and a transition into a new era.

**The Middle Ages (6th to 14th Century)**  
  
While other areas of Europe rose to prominence in culture and commerce, Rome suffered a decline over the next several centuries. From the fall of its empire in 476 until approximately 1,000 AD, a period known as the Early Middle Ages, Rome was in ruins. Its rebirth would not eventuate until the High Middle Ages and the event of the Renaissance.During the 9th and 10th centuries, the strength of the Papacy had been growing throughout Europe. By the time of the Renaissance in the late 13th century, the Vatican was a strong influence on both art and religion. During the Renaissance, scores of talented artists traveled to Rome to serve the papal court. From the frescoes of Michelangelo, Raphael and Sandro Botticelli in the Sistine Chapel to Michelangelo's architecture in St. Peter's Basilica, many of the most stunning artistic contributions of the Renaissance were created in Rome. The patronage of the church was responsible for the reemergence of the city to its former glory.

**From Foreign Rule To Capital City (1494 to Present Day)**  
  
Following the dark period of the Italian Wars (1494-1599) and the subsequent foreign domination of the Italian peninsula, the disparate regions enjoyed a relatively peaceful period under the Hapsburgs (1559 to 1713). The Napoleonic era (1713 to 1796) temporarily unified the regions and offered a form of independence, which was revoked in 1814 by the Congress of Vienna. This was the last straw, serving as a catalyst for the unification movement. In 1871 Rome was the final region to be annexed, and was chosen as the capital of the new Italian republic.  
  
This brief history of Rome has by definition covered only the highlights of Rome's evolution. With such a diverse cultural, religious and political history, it's no surprise that Rome is one of the most frequently visited cities of the modern world. Her walls encompass centuries of human endeavor, creativity, triumph and defeat. The Vatican is a favorite destination for many of the world's Catholics, and thousands more visit the city each year to view Roman relics, tour historic museums, and savor the sights and sounds of modern day Rome.