

The New York Times

TRAVEL

Midnight at the Museum, Breakfast at the Vatican

FEB. 11, 2014



**Stephanie
Rosenbloom**
THE GETAWAY

How about breakfast at the Vatican Museums before they open?

Or cocktails amid the fossils at the Natural History Museum, London, after it closes?

Museums and monuments are allowing small groups of tourists to experience their collections outside of regular admission hours, providing an intimacy and serenity once available only to docents and V.I.P.'s. A number of travel companies — Cox & Kings, Smithsonian Journeys, Kensington Tours, Abercrombie & Kent, Tauck and

Adventures by Disney — also offer some private after-hours tours as part of vacation packages. And there are plenty of lively after-hours affairs, too. Some institutions offer them each week, like the [Rubin Museum of Art](#) in New York, where on Friday nights visitors can tour Himalayan-themed exhibits and sample pan-Asian tapas to music sets (be it house, Latin or Afrobeat) from guest D.J.'s. There are also annual festivities, like the European Night of Museums event, when museums throughout Europe welcome visitors until the wee hours.

So when planning your next getaway, remember: You don't necessarily have to visit during official admission times. Sometimes it will cost you extra; other times, you'll pay less. Here's a guide to some of the most popular attractions in the United States and Europe, where art and history can be had with an aperitif or — perhaps even better — without the crowds.

ROME

Colosseum. When travelers think about taking an off-hours tour in this ancient city, it's usually to see the Vatican Museums and the Sistine Chapel. But you can also do so at the Colosseum during evening tours of the arena where you can walk in the footsteps of gladiators. Dark Rome's tour includes a visit underground as well, down into the tunnels where those gladiators (not to mention wild animals) awaited their fate. Tickets from about \$101; [Colosseum Underground Evening Tour with Arena Floor and Roman Forum Highlights](#).

Vatican Museums. For several years a number of companies have been offering tours during which you can gaze at masterpieces by Leonardo, Caravaggio and Raphael without being jostled by buzzing throngs of fellow tourists. They include: Italy With Us, Viator and Dark Rome, which also offers a new before-hours package: a breakfast with Italian food and an American buffet (a "pancake chef" will be on hand) in the outdoor Pinecone Courtyard at the Vatican, followed by a tour of galleries and rooms just after opening. Tickets from about \$175; [VIP Early Breakfast inside the Vatican Museums with Sistine Chapel and St. Peters Basilica](#).