


# DISCOVERING SANTA MARIA DEL PRIORATO



Stefano, Jep and Ramona's nocturnal exploration begins here. One of the most famous of the gates in Rome seems to miraculously open. A stay in Rome cannot be said to be complete without a visit to the famous "keyhole" on the Aventine Hill. Only a few people know that the hole is not a keyhole at all. It would make no difference at all if you inserted a key, because there's no lock for it to fit into! It's only there for visual effect - to provide a view into the garden and see the dome of Saint Peter's in the distance perfectly framed by the greenery. Nobody really knows if the "keyhole" is an invention of the architect, Giovanni Battista Piranesi. In the mid-eighteenth century, Piranesi restored the piazza, and constructed the complex standing beyond this famous gate, of the Knights of Malta. Piranesi, who is better known as an engraver, was commissioned by Cardinal Giambattista Rezzonico to produce what would turn out to be his only building. On the extremity of the hill is a church. It features abundant white stucco work and symbols of the mission of the Order. At that time, the Order was still committed to defence of the Mediterranean, faced with the threat of Turkish incursions. In the heart of the park there is a Coffee House adorned with the symbols of the house of Pamphilj, indicating that the garden with its extraordinary gateway had been designed during the previous century, when Baroque architectural works featured many surprising visual effects.

## *For visitors*

Piazzale dei Cavalieri di Malta, 4

The keyhole can be seen by all, but visitors to the church and garden should call the Sovrano Militare Ordine di Malta (tel. +3906675811).