

shop

The Vatican City is not known for its shopping opportunities but unsurprisingly it has the biggest supply of religious souvenirs in the city, and the streets surrounding St Peter's are a perfect place to escape the queues and do some souvenir hunting. There are also some good markets to pick up fresh food for picnics as well as some excellent grocery shops selling Italian and international delicacies. Before Cardinal Ratzinger became Pope Benedict XVI, these were his local neighbourhood shops for 25 years.

Via Cola di Rienzo (map p. 120, A3-A4), with its wide pavements, is a popular shopping destination for locals and families to promenade at the weekend. It can easily be reached from Piazza del Popolo by crossing the Tiber, and there are many fashion stores here, which sell shoes, bags and other accessories.

Rome's largest **Castroni** store is situated at no. 196. It is a haven for Italian specialities such as *peperoncino* (chilli chocolate), black seppia pasta, and international foodstuffs: English jams and marmalades sit alongside sections of Oriental, Arab, Middle Eastern, Jewish and Mexican cuisines. Homesick Americans will be happy to find pancakes, chocolate pies and various coffees here. Best of all though is the bar, serving Italian cakes and various freshly ground coffees, some of which are house-produced, and can be taken home. Next door,

at no. 200, is the gourmet grocery **Franchi**, which shouldn't be missed if you intend to bring home some porcini mushrooms, Parma ham or other specialities, which they will vacuum pack for you. Franchi is a feast for the eyes and the palate, and you can also stop here for a three-course standing lunch.

The department store **Coin**, at no. 200/204, has a large supermarket in the basement, handy for picnics.

A large, picturesque **covered market** stands on the same street, spanning the block from Via Fabio Massimo to Piazza de Unita (map p. 120, A4-A3). Inside, you will find a good variety of fresh produce. The building was constructed in 1928 and the main facade has an impressive arched entrance while two fountains decorate the sides. Also popular is the **Trionfale market**, near the Vatican Museum on Via Andrea Doria (map p. 120, A2), with a superb variety of grocery



Holy souvenirs in the Vatican shopping district of Borgo Pio

stores for Romans and visitors. The prices are reasonable here, compared to other stores in the area. **Borgo Pio** (map p. 120, B3) is the most picturesque street in the Borgo area and is *the* place to buy rosary beads, miniature statues and postcards. The current pope, Benedict XVI, lived in this area when he first came to Rome in 1981 to take the role of prefect of the congregation, and chose to stay in this area rather than the apartment traditionally offered to holders of the post. In the afternoons

the then Cardinal Ratzinger would often go out for a walk along the streets near his apartment and would stop to speak with the shopkeepers along the Borgo Pio. One fruit-seller recalls how once the homesick cardinal asked him which apples were best for a strudel, while an electrician speaks of the time that they spoke 'just as if we were old friends' after he went to the cardinal's flat to fix a problem. Cardinal Ratzinger remained living in this district until he became pope in 2005.