

## David McGuffin's Roman Colosseum Audio Walking Tour

### TICKETS –

A €16 ticket for the COLOSSEUM-FORUM-PALATINE HILL comes with a reserved entrance time and is valid for 24 hours from the first use. You must arrive for entry at your reserved time. Access is at the public entrance of the Colosseum (on the east side) nearest the Arch of Constantine. Holders of this ticket can upgrade to the SUPER INTEGRATIVE TICKET on-site for €4; however, you will have to wait in the ticket queue. Better to purchase the upgrade when booking online.

A €22 ticket known as the FULL EXPERIENCE TICKET comes with a reserved entrance time and is valid for 48 hours from the first use. With this ticket, one can enter through the less crowded Stern Gate (on the east side), and have access to the Arena and Underground levels. This ticket gets you into the Roman Forum and Palatine Hill areas, the Imperial Forum, and temporary exhibits. A list of all participants must be submitted upon entry, so be sure to bring a printed list with full names, DOB, and passport information for everyone in your group.

There is a €2 fee for booking online.

OPEN DAILY 08:30 until one hour before sunset. Most likely, Apr-Aug until 19:15, Sept until 19:00, Oct until 18:30. Other months can close as early as 16:30. Last entry is one hour before closing time. See website for specific details and hours.

OFFICIAL WEBSITE: <https://www.coopculture.it/en/the-colosseum.cfm>

<https://www.thecolosseum.org/facts/>

Hello Everyone , this is DM, and welcome to my audio guided tour to the Roman Colosseum. This audio walking tour in and around the Colosseum is designed to be experienced in real-time. That is, without pausing. However, depending on the crowds and queues, you are welcome to take it at your own pace, and pause to enjoy the experience.

Now, let's get going!

This massive arena is the first image that comes to mind when I think of Rome. Constructed by the Emperor Vespasian (the first of several "Flavian" emperors) it was inaugurated in AD 80 as the Flavian Amphitheatre.

Before going inside the Colosseum, let's take a look from the outside. A good vantage point is on the north side, near the Colosseum Metro Station. If you have time, try to find the steps, about 50 feet to the right leading up to the street above the Metro station. If you don't want to make the climb, then try to position yourself between the Metro station and the north side of the Colosseum.

There will be crowds, pickpockets, students, and locals asking you to join a guided tour, and tourists wandering around looking for the entrance. Ignore them, if you can, and concentrate on the colossal structure in front of you.

The Romans were always seeking ways to take a Greek idea and put a new Roman twist on it. The Flavian Amphitheatre is no exception. In essence, the Romans took the plans for a Classical Greek theatre and built two of them end to end, coming up with the design for a huge freestanding "amphi" theatre.

Nero, Emperor Vespasian's predecessor, had constructed a lavish palace just over the hill, behind the Metro station. The site where the Colosseum sits today was once a large man-made lake surrounded by porticos, balconies, and grand walkways. This palace complex, known as the Domus Aurea (Golden House), contained a colossal 100-foot bronze statue of the Emperor Nero. After the Flavian Amphitheatre was constructed, Vespasian had Nero's colossal statue placed out in front of his colossal new amphitheatre. The combination of the colossal statue of Nero and the colossal amphitheatre seemed to stick and the amphitheatre took on the nickname of the Colossal-seum, or Colosseum.

Nero's statue has perished, but it once stood over there to the right, on the grassy area where the tall cypress trees are growing, between the Colosseum and the wrought iron fence flanking the forum area.

Even compared to today's modern sports stadiums, this Colosseum was massive. Four stories reached 157 feet to the sky. Its footprint covers six acres, and 50,000 to 80,000 Romans could sit, comfortably, and watch the games. The yellow-ish **travertine** stone you see today was painted bright white, with multi-colored trim adorning the arches and columns.

Notice the foundation of the Colosseum is below the present-day ground level. After the fall of Rome, the Colosseum decayed. It was used as stables, housing projects, a dumping ground, and its many of its stones were carted off for new construction projects.

The four levels are constructed in the same manner. On the ground floor, notice the same arch is repeated around the entire perimeter, forming a ridged ring to support the other stories. Many believe the Romans were the first to use the arch in construction (although it appears in Etruscan a century before the Romans). Regardless, you can find the arch all over the Roman world. Craftsmen constructed an arch-shaped form made of wood, then lay pre-cut stones up the sides and up around the arch. At the top, a triangular key-stone was wedged in place, the wooden form was removed, and the arch was stronger than a solid wall. As you can see, this process was repeated all the way the four stories.

The Romans were practical builders. They were not into frills and aesthetically pleasing facades. Function took precedence over beauty. Hence the functional arches that held everything together. But do notice there was some ornamentations. See the columns on each level? They are not there to support anything. In fact, they are only half columns used to decorate and break up the monotony of the structure.

On the ground level the columns tops, the capitals, are flat and rounded. The second level has columns with rolled, scrolled capitals, and the third level as leafy capitals. Then notice the fourth level uses a combination of all three styles. These capital styles were defined by the Greeks, a century before the Romans. The plain flat ones is known as Doric, the scrolled one is named Ionic, and the leafy capital is Corinthian.

In each of the arches were places statues of Roman gods and historical figures to add even more grandeur to the Colosseum's appearance. By the way, this was not the only amphitheatre in the Roman empire. There are more that 200 such amphitheatres scattered from the middle east to the Atlantic. But the colossal Amphitheatre in Rome was the biggest and greatest of all!

Finally, take a close look and the ground level arches, which served as entrance and exit doors. Over here on the north side you may be able to make out Roman numerals etched above each doorway. Romans had clay entry "tickets" that defined their entry door, section, and seat number, just like we do today at our modern stadiums.

OK, let's head to the entrance. That's around the corner, to the right, on the west side of the Colosseum. It won't be hard to find, it's where all the people are standing in queues.

Make sure you get in the correct line. There are queues for ticket-buyers, those with pre-purchased tickets and passes, and for groups. Choose the correct line. Ask if you are unsure and get in line.

Because of the crowds, it may take a while, but your ultimate goal is to get out into the open arena, where all the Roman action took place. But, before getting there, you must pass through a security check, then the interior entry hallways, and finally through a ticket turnstile. If you do not have a pre-purchased ticket, you'll be diverted to another queue to buy a ticket on the spot.

Here is a little more information while you shuffle through the queue.

You are in interior of the Colosseum, on the ground floor. See all those potholes in the walls? The huge stones, making up the arches we saw from the outside, were originally held together with iron pegs, buried into the stone. No mortar was used. The Colosseum became a relic after the fall of Rome and its ready-cut stones were cannibalized for easy building material in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Later, when iron was at a shortage, the Colosseum's iron pegs were chiseled out to make weapons for war, as well as hinges, railing, and later, even bullets.

Earlier, I mentioned the Colosseum opened in 80 AD. Construction began earlier in 72 AD. It was funded by the spoils of war from the first siege of Jerusalem during the 70 AD. Emperor Vespasian carted loads of treasures and 60,000-100,000 Jewish slaves. Those slaves, directed by Roman engineers, labored for 8 years to build the Colosseum.

The Romans were known as great builders and pioneered many construction techniques still in use today. We've talked about the arch, but they also invented concrete. Essentially, the Romans would construct a shell of bricks and mortar and then pour concrete in the void making for a super strong and sturdy structure. These concrete-filled shells were then covered with gleaming white travertine marble for a finishing touch of grandeur. Once inside the Colosseum be sure to note the many examples of this brick-and-mortar shell filled with concrete construction method.

By the way, you are standing in one of the many interior hallways of the Colosseum. Just like our stadiums today, the wide walkways, stairs, and ramps were designed to get people into and out of the amphitheatre quickly. The Latin term for these walkways is *Vomitorium*, the word from which our English word, vomit, originates. Inside, lining the walkways, were a multitude of kiosks in which vendors would sell official team merchandise, bowls of spaghetti, pizza and maybe even Bud Light.

Hopefully, by now you are through the security and ticket turnstiles, and inside the Colosseum. If not, you may want to pause this audio guide.

After passing the ticket turnstiles, tourists are sometimes forced to follow a specific route. No worries, your ultimate goal is to get outside in the open arena. It does not matter if this is on the ground floor or up on the second floor. Just follow the crowds and get out into the open arena.

Wherever you end up, upstairs, downstairs, north, south, east, or west; belly up to the railing and listen to my spiel.

You are in a sports stadium, just like the one in or near your hometown. There is multilevel seating, with rows, stairs, and aisles leading to each assigned seat. With some imagination, you can visualize the rings of seating circling the arena. Notice the buttresses and supports for the tunnels leading to the second level. Even higher up, you can still see the remains of dual stairs leading up to the cheap seats on level three.

And down below, is the oval-shaped playing field. 50,000 to 80,000 fans could look down, each with a pretty good view of the action. The arena is laid out on an east/west axis, perhaps to take advantage of the sun's trajectory. Speaking of the sun, the Roman engineers devised a set of canvas sails that were drawn over the spectators as the sun made its way across the stadium. The guys in the cheap nose-bleed seats never had to sweat it out in the boiling sun! But, the important people, Senators, Politicians, and Emperors probably had to battle the sun's rays at some point during the day.

Look at the field, the playing surface. It may be difficult to imagine just how the exposed skeleton/foundation you see here. You are looking at the tunneling and foundations which once supported the floor of the playing field. These skeletal pillars and passageways were once covered with wooden planks on which a foot of sand was spread to make the playing field. By the way, *Arena* in Latin means sand, thus the origin of our modern term for an

oval-shaped stadium. The Colosseum's arena was 282 feet by 164 feet, slightly smaller than our modern football field, but plenty big enough for the Roman games. It is interesting to note this ratio, 5x3 has been known throughout history as the golden ratio representing the perfect order existing in nature. It is the same ratio our modern computer and TV screens use in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Find the bronze cross on ground level. It is on the arena's north side, directly on the 50-yard line. The cross was placed there in 2000 by Pope John Paul II to commemorate the Christian martyrs who were sacrificed in the Roman arena. It is thought to occupy the place where the emperor's box was constructed.

In Roman times, the games would begin with participants, gladiators, and pageantry entering from the west end (90-degrees, counter-clockwise from the cross). The procession would continue counterclockwise, and pause at the south 50 yard line, a place reserved for the Vestal Virgins. Nine young ladies appointed to attend the eternal flame of Rome, over in the Forum, next door. The parade moved on until the emperor's box, where all stopped to pay homage to the boss.

The games began with opening acts in the morning, animals against animals. Then proceeded later to animals against men, women against midgets. Each game ended with at least one of the participants dead and carted out of the arena. Animals were kept in cages, in the passageways under the arena's floorboards. You can see  $\frac{3}{4}$  of those passageways today.  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the arena is covered with a plywood floor, helping us to imagine what it would have looked like in Roman times.

All the while, spectators would be watching from the stands. Some, brought their own hibachis, cooked chicken wings, and drank wine. No kidding, it's proven in the museum on level two!

During lunch, the entertainment continued with executions of prisoners, thieves, and enemies of the state. The Romans were innovative in these executions. So would be simply thrown to the lions and eaten alive. Others would be made to dress up as mythological characters and play out their role to the death.

In the late afternoon the games would progress to the main event. Professionals, called gladiators, were pitted one against the other. The battles were cruel, gruesome, and bloody. You've seen it in the movies, and that's a pretty good representation of the main events.

The Colosseum was constructed for the enjoyment and entertainment of the citizens of Rome. Admission was always free, and events were often sponsored by politicians. The Colosseum opened in AD 80 with a 100-day festival of events in which 2,000 men and 9,000 animals were killed in one sort of competition or the other.

OK, try to make your way up to the second level if you are not already there. Then work your way around to west side, with views of the Roman Forum across the way. Remember the cross is on the north, so west is 90 degrees counter clockwise from the cross.

Let's have a quick review of Roman history. The Romans built and ruled their empire roughly from 500 BC to 500 AD. About 1000 years. The empire grew and expanded for 500 years. It stayed solid and steady for 200 years and was at its peak when the Colosseum was built. Then around AD 200, it began a slow decline for about 300 years.

The first 500 years saw Rome as a Republic, ruled by elected senators. The Republic's economy was built mostly on farming and slave trading. As it expanded, there many mouths to feed. The last 500 years, Rome was an Empire, and ruled by an emperor called Caesar. The economy then shifted and was funded by conquests of foreign lands and the spoils of wars while supplied slave labor, income, and booty.

Hopefully you are on the western end of the second level. Look away from the arena area, to see what's nearby the Colosseum. The big white marble arch is dedicated to Emperor Constantine who ruled Rome from 280 to 337 AD and is known for legalizing Christianity. Leading away from the arch, and into the Roma Forum is the via Sacra, the sacred way, once the "main" street of Rome. It is the stone-covered street with people on it, not vehicles. The Via Sacra heads up hill to the Arch of Titus, which is at the entrance of the Roman Forum. And, to the left of the Forum and Arch of Titus rises Palatine Hill, the home to many imperial palaces, lots of excavated ruins, and the pretty pine trees that look like umbrellas, known as... umbrella pines.

OK, let's wrap it up. With Constantine and the coming of Christianity, the Colosseum and its deadly games fell out of vogue. Contests and gladiators sporadically occurred here until they were outlawed in 435. As the Empire died, so did the Colosseum. It fell into disuse, its foundations, walls, and infrastructure crumbled and the amphitheatre sat as a relic of a bygone era.

Earlier I mentioned that in the Middle Ages it was cannibalized for building materials, iron, and marble. Various groups of "squatters" moved in and contributed to its decay. Wind, rain, fire, and age all played a part in its demise. Then in 1349, a big earthquake toppled the south side.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, several popes dedicated parts of this pagan Colosseum as places of Christian worship. The quake damage from 1349 was repaired and wall were shored up with new support walls of bricks and mortar. This is what you see today.

If it weren't for those popes and the Christian church, the Colosseum would probably be in crumbles, buried beneath modern street today.

There is only one way out of this sightseeing tour. Find the stairs leading down. Follow the Exit or *Uscita* signs to the ground level. Exit on the south side, opposite from where you entered. You pop out looking at a wall about 6 feet high, a street with traffic beyond, and the Arch of Constantine to your right. The Roman Forum and Palatine Hill are included with the ticket to the Colosseum. If you are up for it, wander up the via Sacra, through the Roman Forum, and exit up the hill to the right onto, the Imperial Forum Road.

Thanks for sticking with me. I hope you've enjoyed this audio tour of the Flavian Amphitheatre, the Roman Colosseum.

Your Adventure Starts Here!