

# Architectural Wonders of Rome



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### Get Ready

If you're in Rome, you'll see a lot of old buildings and ruins. This booklet is to help you understand what you're looking at and why it matters. The Romans were incredible builders, and their architecture was about more than just looking good; it was about showing off their power, organizing society, and making life better for everyone.

### Roman Forum and Heart of Public Life

The Roman Forum was the center of everything in ancient Rome. It was the main public square, where people met to do business, talk about politics, and celebrate military victories. When you walk through its ruins today, you can see the foundations of temples, government buildings, and basilicas, which were not churches at the time but large public halls. This was the beating heart of the Republic and the early Empire. It's where the famous politicians made speeches and where the Roman people held their most important ceremonies.



### Colosseum: Symbol of Power and Spectacle

There's no more famous symbol of Rome's power than the Colosseum. This massive amphitheater was built by Emperor Vespasian and finished by his son Titus in 80 AD. Its purpose was to entertain the masses with gladiator fights, wild animal hunts, and public executions. The huge size of the Colosseum and the way it was built—with arched entrances, seating for over 50,000 people, and a complicated system of trapdoors—shows just how advanced Roman engineering was. For a Roman citizen, a visit here was a chance to feel connected to the power and glory of the empire.



### Pantheon: Masterpiece of Architecture

The Pantheon is a temple that's still almost perfectly preserved. What makes it so amazing is its giant dome, which was the largest in the world for over a thousand years. Its most unique feature is a huge circular opening at the top called the *oculus*, or "eye." This opening is the only source of light inside and makes the building feel even more impressive. The Pantheon shows just how well the Romans understood things like weight and structure, and it continues to inspire architects today.



### Baths and Social Scene

The Romans weren't just about work and fighting; they loved a good soak. Public baths, like the Baths of Caracalla, were more than just a place to get clean. They were huge social centers where people would go to exercise, read in a library, get a massage, or just hang out with friends. These buildings were massive and had fancy art and statues. The Baths of Caracalla, for example, could hold thousands of people at a time and show how important community and leisure were to the Roman people.



### Circus Maximus: The Thrill of the Race

Imagine a stadium that could hold over 150,000 people. That's what the Circus Maximus was like. Located in the valley between the Palatine and Aventine hills, this was Rome's main chariot racing track. The races were a big deal, and people would cheer on their favorite charioteers in a fever of excitement. While not much of the original structure remains, standing in the wide-open space of the Circus Maximus lets you feel the scale of this ancient entertainment and imagine the roar of the crowds.



### Other Notable Landmarks

As you explore Rome, you'll see many more landmarks that tell pieces of its story. You might see the Arch of Titus, built to honor the Roman victory over Jerusalem. Or you could see the massive Trajan's Column, which tells the story of Emperor Trajan's military campaigns in intricate carvings that spiral up to the top. Each of these structures was built to tell a story or to celebrate a victory, making the city itself a giant historical record. They stand as a testament to the fact that for the Romans, architecture wasn't just about shelter; it was about celebrating their achievements and telling their story to the world.





## Reflection Questions

1. Roman architecture was built to show power and improve society, not just to look good. How do structures like the Roman Forum or the Colosseum show both the power of Rome and how organized their society was?
2. The Pantheon is described as an "architectural masterpiece" because of its huge dome and the *oculus* (the opening at the top). What makes this building so impressive even today, and what does it tell you about the Romans' understanding of building and design?
3. Public baths, like the Baths of Caracalla, were more than just places to get clean; they were big social centers. What does this tell you about what was important to the Roman people, and how does it compare to places where people socialize today?
4. The Colosseum and Circus Maximus were built for massive spectacles like gladiator fights and chariot races. What do these types of entertainment and the huge size of the venues suggest about the Roman Empire's wealth, control, and its relationship with its citizens?
5. Structures like the Arch of Titus and Trajan's Column were built to celebrate victories and tell stories. How do these monumental structures help the city itself become a giant historical record, and what message do you think the Romans wanted to send with them?

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