

When you think of Rome, what's the first image that pops into your head? For many, it's the imposing, dramatic Colosseum, the largest surviving relic from Ancient Rome.



STORY OF THE COLOSSEUM

The largest amphitheatre ever built, the Colosseum was created under Emperor Vespasian in just nine years. Considered one of Italy's most accomplished architectural triumphs and now a modern Wonder of the World, it was created to host gruelling gladiator contests, re-enact bloody battles and showcase wild animal hunts.

Symbolising celebration and bloodshed, the Colosseum seated 50,000 spectators at the height of its glory. It was ceremonially opened by Titus in 80AD with inaugural games that lasted for 100 days. Legendary games and animal battles continued to be held until the 6th century.

Civilians and nobility alike were entertained - watching mighty battles where man and animal alike were torn to shreds - albeit in separate tiers. Notably, admission was free to the public - it's thought that this was to boost the Emperor's popularity and gain civilians' support.

Withstanding centuries of numerous earthquakes, vandalism and fires, the astounding beauty of the Colosseum's ruins remain arguably the most popular historical site in Rome. It was carefully restored in the 1990s as part of a conservation project. After further restoration in 2017, the top tier was opened to the public for the first time in 40 years.

Did you know that the Colosseum is just a nickname bestowed to the stadium after the demise of the Roman Empire? The true name is the Flavian Ampiteatre, as it was built during the Flavian dynasty. The Colosseum's name originated from the nearby destroyed statue called the Colossus of Nero.

In an unusual move for a structure known for its grisly games of the past - 10,000 animals were killed at the height of the battles - since the millennium the Colosseum has become a symbol of life as a protest against the death penalty. At night, whenever anyone around the world is released from death row or a death sentence is commuted, the Colosseum's night illumination transforms from white to gold.

Today, on a visit to soak up the Colosseum's dark and fascinating history, visitors can enjoy the panoramic views at sunset from the third tier and view the enclosures where the lions and tigers were kept. Walk in the footsteps of gladiators, treading the same path they took as they waited to meet their fate.

