

# Rome:

## a glorious past and a modest present

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In the past, Rome, which was founded in 753 BC was one of the most important centres of the civilized world. It was a real Ka'aba, to which Christians around the world came to make their pilgrimage to the Vatican, which was the centre of the Catholic world. It was also a world centre for scientists, artists and scholars of poetry, literature and mythology.



Plaza de Navona

ساحة نافونا



Basilica of San Pedro/ The Vatican

كنيسة سان بيدرو/الفاتيكان

A single visit to Rome may not be enough for one who is thirsty for history and culture. Why? Let us consider a few important points so we can experience cultural tourism at its best.

A historian said: "While the Greeks worked for their civilization as the image of the world, the Romans wanted to make the world an image of their civilization." This means that Rome was a military state which started wars in order to conquer the world for five to six centuries. Its troops did not stop and resistance of conquered peoples increased but the Romans'

determination to achieve their goals and to dominate the world never faded. They took advantage of ancient civilizations, such as the Greek, Pharaonic Assyrian, Persian, and others. One of the historians commented that: "The African giraffe walked side by side with the Indian elephant in the streets of Rome."

The Romans excelled in the field of legislation and were famous for the construction of gigantic buildings, bridges, canals and roads. They then built theatres, circus spaces and fighting theatres where thousands of spectators came to see wild

animals thrown at men, or fighting between men, where a lot of blood flowed.

Rome today is a vast museum of 40 sq. km. To take advantage of this prestigious heritage, the visitor must walk on foot and have a tourist guide book, with the names and dates of historical sites.

One of the main sites sought by visitors is the Colosseum, an ancient Roman theatre built between 72 and 80 AD. The festivities lasted for over a hundred days to celebrate its opening, in the presence of 50,000 spectators. It was the place for bloody fights to the death which were regarded as a form ▶

of leisure. Dr. Tharwat Oukasha commented in his book, "The Roman Art", that: "never in history had a theatre known such judgments with such scenes of most monstrous and despicable crimes." The theatre has also witnessed the killings of early Christians whose bodies were thrown to wild beasts.

At a distance of one kilometre, stands an exceptionally beautiful and elegant Roman-style building founded in 1885 by Victor Manuel. On its facade, a series of sculptures are spread over different entries. At their centre is a giant statue, and the summits of the two towers on both sides have sculptures of carriages pulled by horses. The building is now a museum, divided into two parts, one reserved for military items and another for fine arts, where various artistic and cultural events are organized.

Between these two sites, one notices a full ancient city located in a basin, with temples, major portals, columns (one of which is still standing), scattered stones, eroded engravings and scripts, streets and remnants of walls. On the west side, one finds a high ground with ruins in the middle of a forest. A few metres from Victor Manuel, there is a church founded on the ruins of an ancient Roman building dating back to the 6th century, known as Santa Maria in Cosmedin. It underwent various transformations and restorations during its history. The tower, which was added in the 12th century, is in a Baroque (Arab-Hispanic) style, which resembles that of the city of Leone and other cities in Spain. Within this church, there are Islamic decorations, such as stars of eight branches on the first floor, as well as religious frescoes and classic sculptures. The ceiling is in the wooden style of Toledo (the Baroque).

The style of the tower of Santa Maria has been reproduced in several churches in Rome, particularly in the tower of the Basilica of Santa Maria La Mayor, where you also find Andalusian influences from the Omayyad Mosque in Damascus.

Among the most beautiful and most interesting buildings is the Pantheon, a pagan temple, of circular shape, with a Roman facade and one of the biggest domes in Rome. Founded in the year 27 BC, in tribute to the Roman gods, it was ▶



The Colosseum

الكولوسيم



Plaza de San Pedro

ساحة سان بيدرو



Basilica of Santa Maria la Mayor

كنيسة سانتا ماريا الكبيرة

burned in 80 AD and rebuilt between 110 125 AD. With its interior in a series of beautiful columns, sculptures and religious frescoes it is currently very popular with tourists and lovers of architecture.

I also visited the Vatican, which is the centre of the Catholic world. It consists of several ancient buildings, including the most famous the Basilica of San Pedro, where many Christians were killed by pagan Roman authorities. Founded in their tribute by Emperor Constantine in 324, it was decorated with splendid decorations, motifs and religious sculptures representing various aspects of the stories of Jesus and the saints. Starting from 1506, thought was given to a new plan for this basilica. The architect Bramante started the task, followed by other architects and artists, such as Rafael, Sangalo, Beruzzi and Michelangelo who revised Barmante's plan and developed it by providing the basilica with a dome with two covers and decorating it with sculptures and frescoes. Other artists and architects participated in the renovation of the basilica,

including Bernini. In front of this church is a vast circular square called Nero, with a high column of Pharaonic origin in the middle. It is surrounded by many statues, believed to be the creations of Michelangelo.

In the interior, there are several prayer halls, one of them with a beautiful statue of Jesus Christ on the arms of the Virgin Mary, made by Michelangelo at the age of 24.

What is notable from the architectural and artistic points of view are the Andalusian influences to be found in this church and others which are similar to the Aljaferia Palace in Saragossa dating back to the Bani Houd, an Andalusia people.

It is well known that the baroque style, which appeared during the 13th and 14th centuries in Spain, is an Arab style mixed

with Christian artistic elements. It was transferred to Europe through Christian architects and artists who lived and studied in Spain. This style was adopted in various constructions in Italy, in particular church towers. It is therefore not strange that the architecture of the Vatican has integrated elements of the Islamic art.

Rome today continues to live its past and praise the glories of its empire that once conquered half the world. When I walked in its boulevards and streets, I felt the smell of the ancient past. But I did not see any modern buildings, like those in New York, London, Hong Kong, Dubai or Malaysia. Perhaps there is a desire to preserve the rule of this prestigious heritage and not allow modern constructions. ■



The tower of Santa Maria de Cosmedin  
برج كنيسة سانتا ماريا في كوسميدين



Victor Manuel Museum

متحف فكتور مانويل



The Pantheon

البنائون