

How do Ancient Sites Affect Tourism and Accessibility? A Participant Observation of Three Sites in Rome, Italy.



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Introduction

Rome's ancient history attracts millions of tourists yearly to sites such as the Roman Forum, Capitoline Hill, and the Victor Emmanuel II monument. This study analyzes how accommodations, or the lack of accommodations, affect tourists' experience at the three sites.



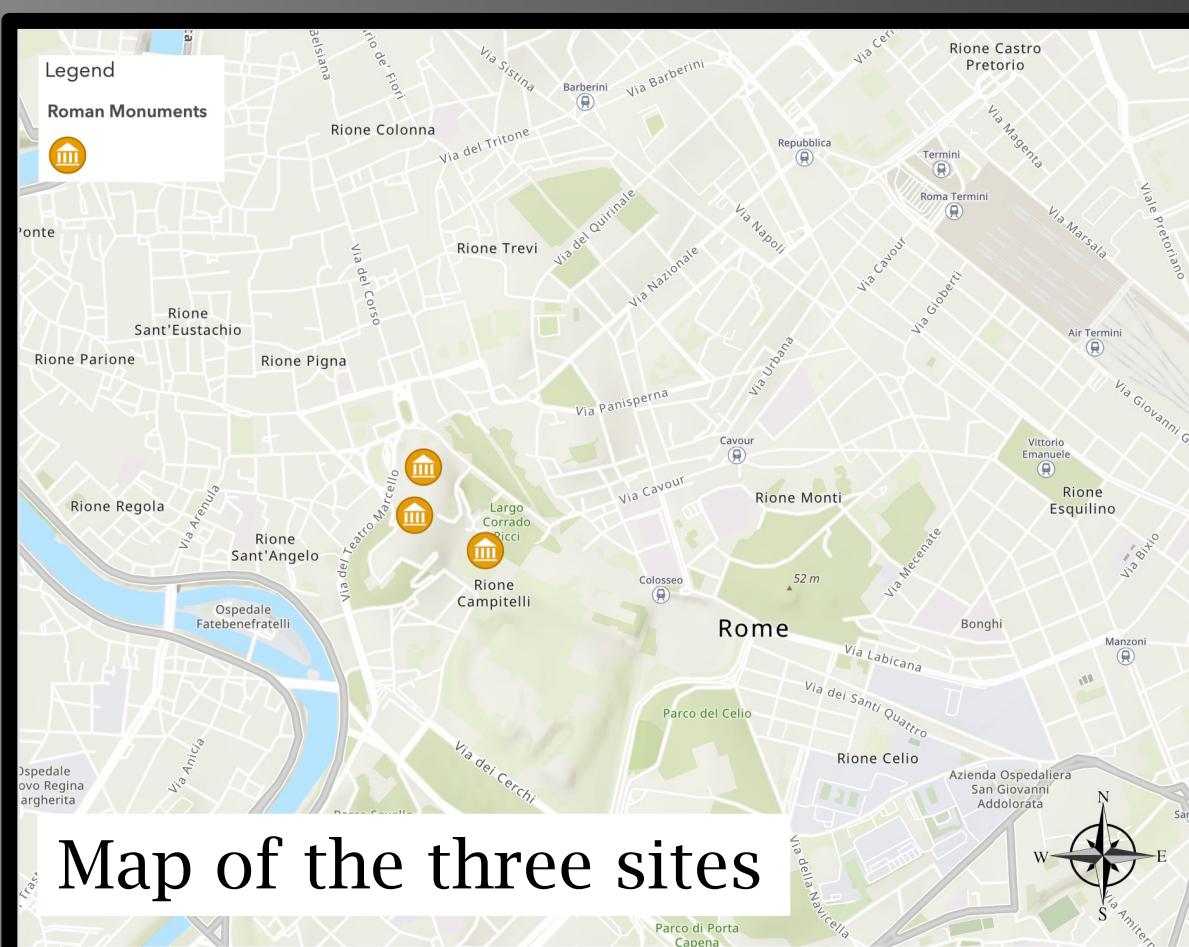
The Roman Forum



Capitoline Hill



Victor Emmanuel II Monument



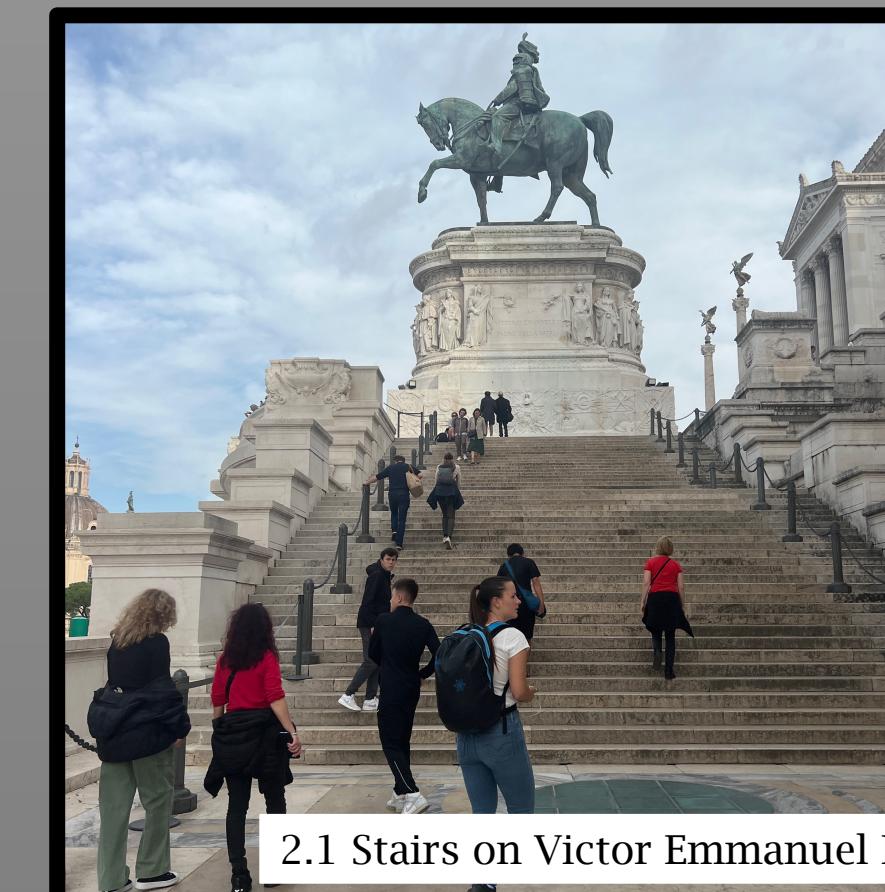
Map of the three sites

Methodology

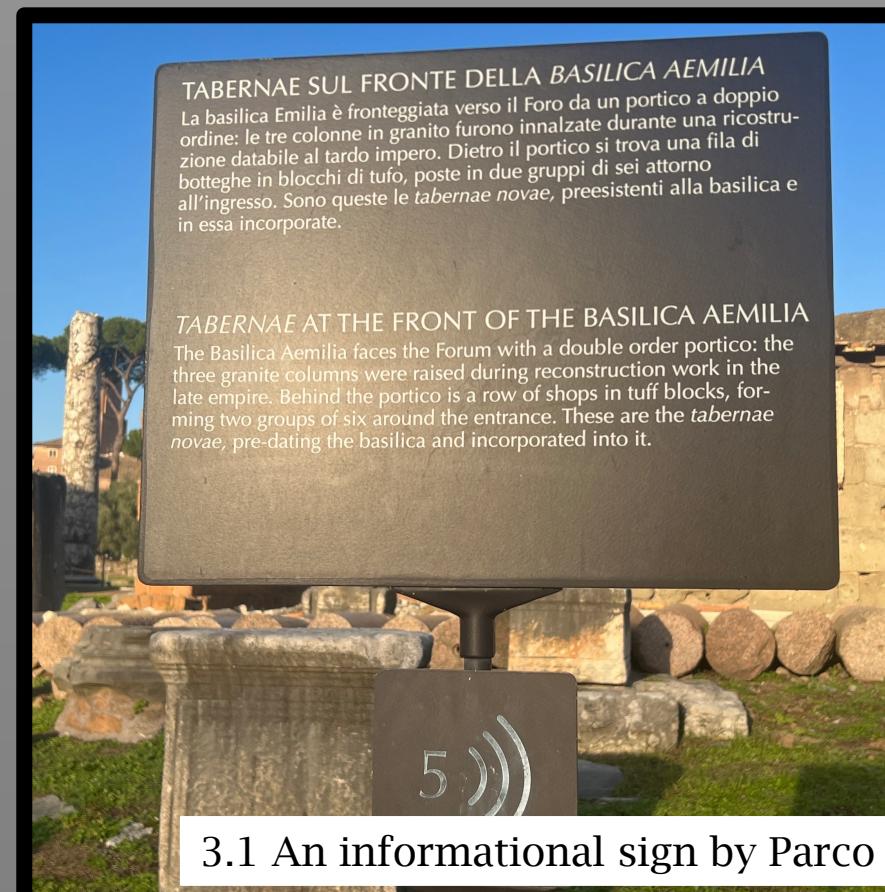
I collected most data through participant observation while I studied abroad in Rome, Italy. The research was done on-site by taking notes, recordings, and pictures from a tourist's perspective. I also build upon other academic papers already completed about tourism in Rome.



Scan for an in-depth participant observation!



2.1 Stairs on Victor Emmanuel II



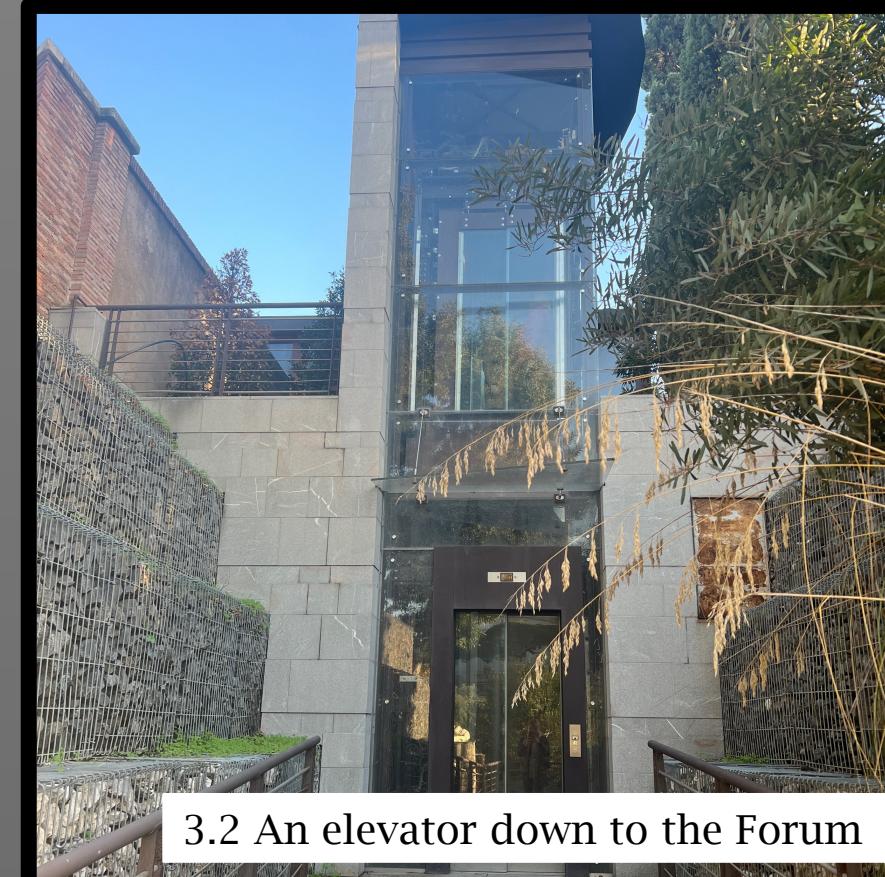
3.1 An informational sign by Parco



1.1 Capitoline's Main Entrance



2.2 An informational sign by VIVE



3.2 An elevator down to the Forum

The Roman Forum

- The Forum has two entrances. The Via della Salara Vecchia entrance, closer to the Victor Emmanuel Monument, has a paved entrance.
- People with disabilities and their accompanying persons receive free entry.
- Elevators are available at both entrances to help people with mobility impairments get down to the Forum site (Figure 3.2).
- There is easy accessibility to the Imperial Forum of Caesar, but its entrances closes at 3:15 for the public. There are smooth ramps.
- The signs have facts in English and Italian (Figure 3.1).
- Most signs have audio-tour numbers. The audio guides have eight other languages (Figure 3.1).
- Some of the signs have faded letters, especially the English. Signs closer to the ground have braille for the blind.
- Many directional signs show the best ways for people in wheelchairs and where the nearest accessible exit is. The wheelchair symbol makes them easy to depict.
- Many places within the Forum are bumpy and rocky, making it impossible for wheelchairs and strollers to comfortably get around.
- The Forum offers bypasses, including smooth ramps with handles, to dodge almost every bumpy road.

Victor Emmanuel II Monument

- The monument consists of many steps, but the Aracoeli entrance is equipped with a wheelchair lift that has access to the Terrazza Italia.
- Nevertheless, people with wheelchairs will not fully experience walking the glorious steps up the monument (Figure 2.1).
- Tickets to the terrace, further up from the Terrazza Italia, are free for people with disabilities and their accompanying person. The terrace has an elevator.
- 90% of the monument is accessible to people in wheelchairs, according to the website.
- There are Tactile tours every other Saturday for visually impaired visitors.
- There are Italian Sign Language tours every other Saturday for hearing-impaired visitors.
- Informational signs are written in English and Italian (Figure 2.2).

Overall Successes

- Elevators.
- Free admission to people with disabilities.
- Many languages are offered.
- Monument websites have accessibility information.

Overall Challenges

- Many stairs.
- Long wheelchair paths.
- Lack of signage directing wheelchair users to paths.
- Not much help for other forms of disabilities.

Capitoline Hill

- The main entrance to Capitoline Hill has stairs, making it inaccessible to wheelchair users (Figure 1.1).
- There are wheelchair accesses up the hill, but the roads are long. Some aren't paved, and the roads are bumpy.
- There is a set of two stairs leading to the Capitoline entrance. These stairs exist throughout the circumference of the building.
- There is an elevator/platform-serving room that can take people with wheelchairs to the first floor of the museum. The museum recommends that visitors call in advance for assistance.
- Elevators and ramps can take people in wheelchairs throughout the entire museum, even to the terrace.
- The hill itself has one-level steps. The floor is made of cobblestone, which limits mobility.
- Informational signs are not abundant on the hill, but they read in both English and Italian.

Conclusion

Before my study, I predicted the Victor Emmanuel II monument would have the highest accessibility due to its modernized architecture and durability. Different companies control the three monuments' tourism. Musei Capitolini runs Capitoline Hill, VIVE runs the Victor Emmanuel II Monument, and Parco drives tourism in the Roman Forum. Each company treats accessibility for tourists differently.

Capitoline Hill provides wheelchair access, but the winding roads pose challenges. Musei Capitolini suggests using taxis, but strikes or high demand may limit availability. Wheelchair barriers include cobblestone floors, stairs, and gravel plazas.

VIVE cannot guarantee the full experience for people in wheelchairs because the monument mostly consists of stairs. However, VIVE's website explains how people in wheelchairs can avoid these barriers with the use of elevators and stair lifts.

Parco excels with directional signs, ramps, and elevators for wheelchair users at the Roman Forum, along with braille signage for the blind, which the other two monuments lack.

Despite Rome's overall need for better mobility, these three tourist sites strive to assist people with disabilities, especially those in wheelchairs.

My study revealed my hypothesis was incorrect. Now, I believe that the Roman Forum is the most accessible for people with disabilities due to the greater demand for visits, leading to a stronger incentive to enhance accessibility.

References

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