[Template:Pp-protected](/wiki/Template:Pp-protected" \o "Template:Pp-protected) [Template:Other uses](/wiki/Template:Other_uses) [Template:Use dmy dates](/wiki/Template:Use_dmy_dates) [Template:Ancient monuments in Rome](/wiki/Template:Ancient_monuments_in_Rome) The **Colosseum** or **Coliseum** ([Template:IPAc-en](/wiki/Template:IPAc-en) [Template:Respell](/wiki/Template:Respell)), also known as the **Flavian Amphitheatre** (Latin: *Amphitheatrum Flavium*; Italian: *Anfiteatro Flavio* [Template:IPA-it](/wiki/Template:IPA-it) or *Colosseo* [Template:IPA-it](/wiki/Template:IPA-it)), is an oval [amphitheatre](/wiki/Amphitheatre) in the centre of the city of [Rome](/wiki/Rome), [Italy](/wiki/Italy). Built of [concrete](/wiki/Concrete#History) and sand,[[1]](#cite_note-1) it is the largest [amphitheatre](/wiki/Amphitheatre) ever built. The Colosseum is situated just east of the [Roman Forum](/wiki/Roman_Forum). Construction began under the emperor [Vespasian](/wiki/Vespasian) in AD 72,[[2]](#cite_note-2) and was completed in AD 80 under his successor and heir [Titus](/wiki/Titus).[[3]](#cite_note-3) Further modifications were made during the reign of [Domitian](/wiki/Domitian) (81–96).[[4]](#cite_note-4) These three emperors are known as the [Flavian dynasty](/wiki/Flavian_dynasty), and the amphitheatre was named in [Latin](/wiki/Latin) for its association with their family name *(*[*Flavius*](/wiki/Flavia_(gens))*)*.

The Colosseum could hold, it is estimated, between 50,000 and 80,000 spectators,[[5]](#cite_note-5)[[6]](#cite_note-6) having an average audience of some 65,000;[[7]](#cite_note-7)<ref name=local>[Dark Tourism - Italy's Creepiest Attractions](http://www.thelocal.it/20150622/dark-tourism-italys-creepiest-attractions), The Local</ref> it was used for [gladiatorial](/wiki/Gladiatorial) contests and [public spectacles](/wiki/Roman_Empire#spectacle) such as [mock sea battles](/wiki/Naumachia) (for only a short time as the *hypogeum* was soon filled in with mechanisms to support the other activities), [animal hunts](/wiki/Venatio), executions, re-enactments of famous battles, and dramas based on [Classical mythology](/wiki/Roman_mythology). The building ceased to be used for entertainment in the [early medieval](/wiki/Early_Middle_Ages) era. It was later reused for such purposes as housing, workshops, quarters for a religious order, a [fortress](/wiki/Fortress), a [quarry](/wiki/Quarry), and a Christian shrine.

Although partially ruined because of damage caused by earthquakes and stone-robbers, the Colosseum is still an [iconic](/wiki/Icon) symbol of [Imperial Rome](/wiki/Imperial_Rome). It is one of Rome's most popular [tourist attractions](/wiki/Tourist_attraction) and has also links to the Roman Catholic Church, as each [Good Friday](/wiki/Good_Friday) the Pope leads a torchlit ["Way of the Cross" procession](/wiki/Stations_of_the_Cross#Modern_usage) that starts in the area around the Colosseum.[[8]](#cite_note-8) The Colosseum is also depicted on the [Italian version](/wiki/Italian_euro_coins) of the [five-cent euro coin](/wiki/5_cent_euro_coins).

[thumb|235px|The Colosseum](/wiki/File:Roma06(js).jpg) The Colosseum's original Latin name was *Amphitheatrum Flavium*, often anglicized as *Flavian Amphitheater*. The building was constructed by emperors of the [Flavian dynasty](/wiki/Flavian_dynasty), following the reign of [Nero](/wiki/Nero).[[9]](#cite_note-9) This name is still used in [modern English](/wiki/Modern_English), but generally the structure is better known as the Colosseum. In antiquity, Romans may have referred to the Colosseum by the unofficial name *Amphitheatrum Caesareum* (with *Caesareum* an adjective pertaining to the title [*Caesar*](/wiki/Caesar_(title))), but this name may have been strictly poetic[[10]](#cite_note-10)[[11]](#cite_note-11) as it was not exclusive to the Colosseum; Vespasian and Titus, builders of the Colosseum, also constructed an [amphitheater of the same name](/wiki/Flavian_Amphitheater_(Pozzuoli)) in [Puteoli](/wiki/Puteoli) (modern Pozzuoli).[[12]](#cite_note-12) The name *Colosseum* has long been believed to be derived from a [colossal statue of Nero](/wiki/Colossus_of_Nero) nearby<ref name=roth/> (the statue of Nero was named after the [Colossus of Rhodes](/wiki/Colossus_of_Rhodes)).[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed) This statue was later remodeled by [Nero's](/wiki/Nero) successors into the likeness of [Helios](/wiki/Helios) (*Sol*) or [Apollo](/wiki/Apollo), the sun god, by adding the appropriate [solar crown](/wiki/Solar_crown). Nero's head was also replaced several times with the heads of succeeding emperors. Despite its [pagan](/wiki/Paganism) links, the statue remained standing well into the medieval era and was credited with [magical powers](/wiki/Magic_(paranormal)). It came to be seen as an iconic symbol of the permanence of Rome.

In the 8th century, a famous epigram attributed to the [Venerable Bede](/wiki/Bede) celebrated the symbolic significance of the statue in a prophecy that is variously quoted: *Quamdiu stat Colisæus, stat et Roma; quando cadet colisæus, cadet et Roma; quando cadet Roma, cadet et mundus* ("as long as the Colossus stands, so shall Rome; when the Colossus falls, Rome shall fall; when Rome falls, so falls the world").[[13]](#cite_note-13) This is often mistranslated to refer to the Colosseum rather than the Colossus (as in, for instance, [Byron's](/wiki/George_Gordon_Byron,_6th_Baron_Byron) poem [*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*](/wiki/Childe_Harold's_Pilgrimage)). However, at the time that the Pseudo-Bede wrote, the [masculine noun](/wiki/Grammatical_gender) *coliseus* was applied to the statue rather than to what was still known as the Flavian amphitheatre.

The Colossus did eventually fall, possibly being pulled down to reuse its [bronze](/wiki/Bronze). By the year 1000 the name "Colosseum" had been coined to refer to the amphitheatre. The statue itself was largely forgotten and only its base survives, situated between the Colosseum and the nearby [Temple of Venus and Roma](/wiki/Temple_of_Venus_and_Roma).[[14]](#cite_note-14) The name further evolved to *Coliseum* during the Middle Ages. In Italy, the amphitheatre is still known as *il Colosseo*, and other [Romance languages](/wiki/Romance_language) have come to use similar forms such as *Coloseumul* (Romanian), *le Colisée* (French), *el Coliseo* (Spanish) and *o Coliseu* ([Portuguese](/wiki/Portuguese_language)).

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## History[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=1)]

### Construction, inauguration, and Roman renovations[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=2)]

[thumb|left|Colosseum](/wiki/File:Colosseo_2008.jpg) [thumb|right|250px|](/wiki/File:Colosseum_Ses_Titus_80AD.JPG)[Sestertius](/wiki/Sestertius) of Titus celebrating the inauguration of the Colosseum (minted 80 AD). [right|thumb|A map of central Rome during the Roman Empire, with the Colosseum at the upper right corner](/wiki/File:Map_of_downtown_Rome_during_the_Roman_Empire_large.png)

The site chosen was a flat area on the floor of a low valley between the [Caelian](/wiki/Caelian_Hill), [Esquiline](/wiki/Esquiline_Hill) and [Palatine Hills](/wiki/Palatine_Hill), through which a [canalised](/wiki/Canal) stream ran. By the 2nd century BC the area was densely inhabited. It was devastated by the [Great Fire of Rome](/wiki/Great_Fire_of_Rome) in AD 64, following which [Nero](/wiki/Nero) seized much of the area to add to his personal domain. He built the grandiose [*Domus Aurea*](/wiki/Domus_Aurea) on the site, in front of which he created an artificial lake surrounded by pavilions, gardens and porticoes. The existing *Aqua Claudia* [aqueduct](/wiki/Roman_aqueduct) was extended to supply water to the area and the gigantic bronze [Colossus of Nero](/wiki/Colossus_of_Nero) was set up nearby at the entrance to the Domus Aurea.[[14]](#cite_note-14) [upright|thumb|left|Cross-section from the](/wiki/File:L-Kolloseum.png) [*Lexikon der gesamten Technik*](/wiki/Lexikon_der_gesamten_Technik) (1904) Although the Colossus was preserved, much of the Domus Aurea was torn down. The lake was filled in and the land reused as the location for the new Flavian Amphitheatre. Gladiatorial schools and other support buildings were constructed nearby within the former grounds of the Domus Aurea. Vespasian's decision to build the Colosseum on the site of Nero's lake can be seen as a populist gesture of returning to the people an area of the city which Nero had appropriated for his own use. In contrast to many other amphitheatres, which were located on the outskirts of a city, the Colosseum was constructed in the city centre; in effect, placing it both symbolically and precisely at the heart of Rome.

Construction was funded by the opulent spoils taken from the [Jewish Temple](/wiki/Second_Temple) after the [Great Jewish Revolt](/wiki/Great_Jewish_Revolt) in 70 AD led to the [Siege of Jerusalem](/wiki/Siege_of_Jerusalem_(70)). According to a reconstructed inscription found on the site, "the emperor [Vespasian](/wiki/Vespasian) ordered this new amphitheatre to be erected from his general's share of the booty." Along with the spoils, estimated 100,000 Jewish prisoners were brought back to Rome after the war, and many contributed to the massive workforce needed for construction. The slaves undertook manual labor such as working in the quarries at Tivoli where the travertine was quarried, along with lifting and transporting the quarried stones 20 miles from Tivoli to Rome.[[15]](#cite_note-15) Along with this free source of unskilled labor, teams of professional Roman builders, engineers, artists, painters and decorators undertook the more specialized tasks necessary for building the Colosseum.

Construction of the Colosseum began under the rule of Vespasian<ref name=roth/> in around 70–72 AD (73-75 AD according to some sources)[[15]](#cite_note-15) The Colosseum had been completed up to the third story by the time of Vespasian's death in 79. The top level was finished by his son, [Titus](/wiki/Titus), in 80,<ref name=roth/> and the inaugural games were held in A.D. 80 or 81.[[15]](#cite_note-15) [Dio Cassius](/wiki/Dio_Cassius) recounts that over 9,000 wild animals were killed during the [inaugural games](/wiki/Inaugural_games_of_the_Flavian_Amphitheatre) of the amphitheatre. Commemorative coinage was issued celebrating the inauguration.[[16]](#cite_note-16) The building was remodelled further under Vespasian's younger son, the newly designated Emperor [Domitian](/wiki/Domitian), who constructed the [*hypogeum*](/wiki/Hypogeum), a series of underground tunnels used to house animals and slaves. He also added a gallery to the top of the Colosseum to increase its [seating capacity](/wiki/Seating_capacity).[[17]](#cite_note-17) In 217, the Colosseum was badly damaged by a major fire (caused by lightning, according to Dio Cassius[[18]](#cite_note-18)) which destroyed the wooden upper levels of the amphitheatre's interior. It was not fully repaired until about 240 and underwent further repairs in 250 or 252 and again in 320. Gladiatorial fights are last mentioned around 435. An inscription records the restoration of various parts of the Colosseum under [Theodosius II](/wiki/Theodosius_II) and [Valentinian III](/wiki/Valentinian_III) (reigned 425–455), possibly to repair damage caused by a major earthquake in 443; more work followed in 484[[19]](#cite_note-19) and 508. The arena continued to be used for contests well into the 6th century. Animal hunts continued until at least 523, when [Anicius Maximus](/wiki/Anicius_Maximus) celebrated his consulship with some [*venationes*](/wiki/Venationes), criticised by King [Theodoric the Great](/wiki/Theodoric_the_Great) for their high cost.[[14]](#cite_note-14)

### Medieval[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=3)]

[thumb|Map of medieval Rome depicting the Colosseum](/wiki/File:Coliseo_medieval.jpg) The Colosseum underwent several radical changes of use during the medieval period. By the late 6th century a small chapel had been built into the structure of the amphitheater, though this apparently did not confer any particular religious significance on the building as a whole. The arena was converted into a cemetery. The numerous vaulted spaces in the arcades under the seating were converted into housing and workshops, and are recorded as still being rented out as late as the 12th century. Around 1200 the [Frangipani family](/wiki/Frangipani_family) took over the Colosseum and fortified it, apparently using it as a castle.

Severe damage was inflicted on the Colosseum by the great earthquake in 1349, causing the outer south side, lying on a less stable [alluvial](/wiki/Alluvium) terrain, to collapse. Much of the tumbled stone was reused to build palaces, churches, hospitals and other buildings elsewhere in Rome. A religious order moved into the northern third of the Colosseum in the mid-14th century and continued to inhabit it until as late as the early 19th century[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed). The interior of the amphitheater was extensively stripped of stone, which was reused elsewhere, or (in the case of the marble façade) was burned to make [quicklime](/wiki/Quicklime).[[14]](#cite_note-14) The bronze clamps which held the stonework together were pried or hacked out of the walls, leaving numerous pockmarks which still scar the building today.

### Modern[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=4)]

[thumb|The Colosseum in a 1757 engraving by](/wiki/File:Giovanni_Battista_Piranesi,_The_Colosseum.png) [Giovanni Battista Piranesi](/wiki/Giovanni_Battista_Piranesi) During the 16th and 17th century, Church officials sought a productive role for the Colosseum. [Pope Sixtus V](/wiki/Pope_Sixtus_V) (1585–1590) planned to turn the building into a wool factory to provide employment for Rome's prostitutes, though this proposal fell through with his premature death.[[20]](#cite_note-20) In 1671 Cardinal Altieri authorized its use for [bullfights](/wiki/Bullfight); a public outcry caused the idea to be hastily abandoned. [thumb|180px|left|Allied troops consult a guidebook outside the Colosseum after liberation in 1944](/wiki/File:The_British_Army_on_Leave_in_Italy,_June_1944_TR1959.jpg)

In 1749, [Pope Benedict XIV](/wiki/Pope_Benedict_XIV) endorsed the view that the Colosseum was a sacred site where early Christians had been [martyred](/wiki/Martyr). He forbade the use of the Colosseum as a quarry and consecrated the building to the [Passion of Christ](/wiki/Passion_(Christianity)) and installed [Stations of the Cross](/wiki/Stations_of_the_Cross), declaring it sanctified by the blood of the [Christian martyrs](/wiki/Persecution_of_early_Christians_by_the_Romans) who perished there (*see* [*Significance in Christianity*](/wiki/#Significance_in_Christianity)). However, there is no historical evidence to support Benedict's claim, nor is there even any evidence that anyone prior to the 16th century suggested this might be the case; the [*Catholic Encyclopedia*](/wiki/Catholic_Encyclopedia) concludes that there are no historical grounds for the supposition, other than the reasonably plausible conjecture that some of the many martyrs may well have been.[[21]](#cite_note-21)[thumb|*Interior of the Colosseum, Rome* (1832) by](/wiki/File:Cole_Thomas_Interior_of_the_Colosseum_Rome_1832.jpg) [Thomas Cole](/wiki/Thomas_Cole), showing the [Stations of the Cross](/wiki/Stations_of_the_Cross) around the arena and the extensive vegetation

Later popes initiated various stabilization and restoration projects, removing the extensive vegetation which had overgrown the structure and threatened to damage it further. The façade was reinforced with triangular brick wedges in 1807 and 1827, and the interior was repaired in 1831, 1846 and in the 1930s. The arena substructure was partly excavated in 1810–1814 and 1874 and was fully exposed under [Benito Mussolini](/wiki/Benito_Mussolini) in the 1930s.[[14]](#cite_note-14) The Colosseum is today one of Rome's most popular tourist attractions, receiving millions of visitors annually. The effects of pollution and general deterioration over time prompted a major restoration programme carried out between 1993 and 2000, at a cost of 40 billion [Italian lire](/wiki/Italian_lira) ($19.3m / €20.6m at 2000 prices).

In recent years the Colosseum has become a symbol of the international campaign against capital punishment, which was abolished in Italy in 1948. Several anti–death penalty demonstrations took place in front of the Colosseum in 2000. Since that time, as a gesture against the death penalty, the local authorities of Rome change the color of the Colosseum's night time illumination from white to gold whenever a person condemned to the death penalty anywhere in the world gets their sentence commuted or is released,[[22]](#cite_note-22) or if a jurisdiction abolishes the death penalty. Most recently, the Colosseum was illuminated in gold in November 2012 following the abolishment of capital punishment in the American state of [Connecticut](/wiki/Connecticut) in April 2012.[[23]](#cite_note-23) Because of the ruined state of the interior, it is impractical to use the Colosseum to host large events; only a few hundred spectators can be accommodated in temporary seating. However, much larger concerts have been held just outside, using the Colosseum as a backdrop. Performers who have played at the Colosseum in recent years have included [Ray Charles](/wiki/Ray_Charles) (May 2002),[[24]](#cite_note-24) [Paul McCartney](/wiki/Paul_McCartney) (May 2003),[[25]](#cite_note-25) [Elton John](/wiki/Elton_John) (September 2005),[[26]](#cite_note-26) and [Billy Joel](/wiki/Billy_Joel) (July 2006). [thumb|The Colosseum today as a background to the busy metropolis](/wiki/File:Colloseum_through_the_city_street.jpg)

## Physical description[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=5)]

### Exterior[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=6)]

[thumb|Original façade of the Colosseum](/wiki/File:Roman_Colosseum_With_Moon.jpg) Unlike earlier Greek theatres that were built into hillsides, the Colosseum is an entirely free-standing structure. It derives its basic exterior and interior architecture from that of two [Roman theatres](/wiki/Roman_theatre_(structure)) back to back. It is elliptical in plan and is 189 meters (615 ft / 640 Roman feet) long, and 156 meters (510 ft / 528 Roman feet) wide, with a base area of [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert). The height of the outer wall is 48 meters (157 ft / 165 Roman feet). The perimeter originally measured 545 meters (1,788 ft / 1,835 Roman feet). The central arena is an oval 87 m (287 ft) long and 55 m (180 ft) wide, surrounded by a wall 5 m (15 ft) high, above which rose tiers of seating.

The outer wall is estimated to have required over [Template:Convert](/wiki/Template:Convert) of [travertine](/wiki/Travertine) stone which were set without mortar; they were held together by 300 tons of iron clamps.[[14]](#cite_note-14) However, it has suffered extensive damage over the centuries, with large segments having collapsed following earthquakes. The north side of the perimeter wall is still standing; the distinctive triangular brick wedges at each end are modern additions, having been constructed in the early 19th century to shore up the wall. The remainder of the present-day exterior of the Colosseum is in fact the original interior wall. [thumb|left|The exterior of the Colosseum, showing the partially intact outer wall (left) and the mostly intact inner wall (center and right)](/wiki/File:Colosseum_exterior,_inner_and_outer_wall_AvL.jpg)

The surviving part of the outer wall's monumental façade comprises three stories of superimposed [arcades](/wiki/Arcade_(architecture)) surmounted by a [podium](/wiki/Podium) on which stands a tall [attic](/wiki/Attic), both of which are pierced by windows interspersed at regular intervals. The arcades are framed by half-columns of the [Doric](/wiki/Doric_order), [Ionic](/wiki/Ionic_order), and [Corinthian](/wiki/Corinthian_order) orders, while the attic is decorated with Corinthian [pilasters](/wiki/Pilaster).[[27]](#cite_note-27) Each of the arches in the second- and third-floor arcades framed statues, probably honoring divinities and other figures from [Classical mythology](/wiki/Classical_mythology).

Two hundred and forty mast [corbels](/wiki/Corbel) were positioned around the top of the attic. They originally supported a retractable [awning](/wiki/Awning), known as the [*velarium*](/wiki/Velarium), that kept the sun and rain off spectators. This consisted of a canvas-covered, net-like structure made of ropes, with a hole in the center.<ref name=roth/> It covered two-thirds of the arena, and sloped down towards the center to catch the wind and provide a breeze for the audience. Sailors, specially enlisted from the Roman naval headquarters at [Misenum](/wiki/Misenum) and housed in the nearby *Castra Misenatium*, were used to work the [*velarium*](/wiki/Velarium).[[28]](#cite_note-28) [thumb|Entrance *LII* of the Colosseum, with](/wiki/File:Colosseum-Entrance_LII.jpg) [Roman numerals](/wiki/Roman_numerals) still visible

The Colosseum's huge crowd capacity made it essential that the venue could be filled or evacuated quickly. Its architects adopted solutions very similar to those used in modern stadiums to deal with the same problem. The amphitheatre was ringed by eighty entrances at ground level, 76 of which were used by ordinary spectators.<ref name=roth/> Each entrance and exit was numbered, as was each staircase. The northern main entrance was reserved for the [Roman Emperor](/wiki/Roman_Emperor) and his aides, whilst the other three axial entrances were most likely used by the elite. All four axial entrances were richly decorated with painted [stucco](/wiki/Stucco) reliefs, of which fragments survive. Many of the original outer entrances have disappeared with the collapse of the perimeter wall, but entrances XXIII (23) to LIV (54) survive.[[14]](#cite_note-14) Spectators were given tickets in the form of numbered pottery shards, which directed them to the appropriate section and row. They accessed their seats via [*vomitoria*](/wiki/Vomitorium) (singular *vomitorium*), passageways that opened into a tier of seats from below or behind. These quickly dispersed people into their seats and, upon conclusion of the event or in an emergency evacuation, could permit their exit within only a few minutes. The name *vomitoria* derived from the Latin word for a rapid discharge, from which English derives the word vomit.

### Interior seating[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=7)]

[thumb|left|The raked areas that once held seating](/wiki/File:Rome_(29096723).jpg) According to the [Codex-Calendar of 354](/wiki/Chronography_of_354), the Colosseum could accommodate 87,000 people, although modern estimates put the figure at around 50,000. They were seated in a tiered arrangement that reflected the rigidly stratified nature of Roman society. Special boxes were provided at the north and south ends respectively for the Emperor and the [Vestal Virgins](/wiki/Vestal_Virgins), providing the best views of the arena. Flanking them at the same level was a broad platform or *podium* for the [senatorial](/wiki/Roman_Senate) class, who were allowed to bring their own chairs. The names of some 5th century senators can still be seen carved into the stonework, presumably reserving areas for their use. [thumb|Diagram of the levels of seating](/wiki/File:Colosseum-profile-english.png) The tier above the senators, known as the *maenianum primum*, was occupied by the non-senatorial noble class or knights ([*equites*](/wiki/Equestrian_(Roman))). The next level up, the *maenianum secundum*, was originally reserved for ordinary Roman citizens ([*plebeians*](/wiki/Plebs)) and was divided into two sections. The lower part (the *immum*) was for wealthy citizens, while the upper part (the *summum*) was for poor citizens. Specific sectors were provided for other social groups: for instance, boys with their tutors, soldiers on leave, foreign dignitaries, scribes, heralds, priests and so on. Stone (and later marble) seating was provided for the citizens and nobles, who presumably would have brought their own cushions with them. Inscriptions identified the areas reserved for specific groups.

Another level, the *maenianum secundum in legneis*, was added at the very top of the building during the reign of [Domitian](/wiki/Domitian). This comprised a gallery for the common poor, [slaves](/wiki/Slavery) and women. It would have been either standing room only, or would have had very steep wooden benches. Some groups were banned altogether from the Colosseum, notably gravediggers, actors and former gladiators.[[14]](#cite_note-14) Each tier was divided into sections (*maeniana*) by curved passages and low walls (*praecinctiones* or *baltei*), and were subdivided into *cunei*, or wedges, by the steps and aisles from the vomitoria. Each row (*gradus*) of seats was numbered, permitting each individual seat to be exactly designated by its gradus, cuneus, and number.[[29]](#cite_note-29)

### Arena and hypogeum[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=8)]

[thumb|The Colosseum arena, showing the](/wiki/File:0_Colosseum_-_Rome_111001_(2).JPG) [*hypogeum*](/wiki/Hypogeum) now filled with walls. The walls were added early in the Colosseum's existence when it was decided it would no longer be flooded and used for naval battles. [thumb|](/wiki/File:Rome_Colosseum_inscription_2.jpg)[Latin](/wiki/Latin) inscription in the Colosseum The arena itself was 83 meters by 48 meters (272 ft by 157 ft / 280 by 163 Roman feet).[[14]](#cite_note-14) It comprised a wooden floor covered by sand (the Latin word for sand is *harena* or *arena*), covering an elaborate underground structure called the *hypogeum* (literally meaning "underground"). The hypogeum was not part of the original construction but was ordered to be built by Emperor [Domitian](/wiki/Domitian). Little now remains of the original arena floor, but the [*hypogeum*](/wiki/Hypogeum) is still clearly visible. It consisted of a two-level subterranean network of tunnels and cages beneath the arena where gladiators and animals were held before contests began. Eighty vertical shafts provided instant access to the arena for caged animals and scenery pieces concealed underneath; larger hinged platforms, called *hegmata*, provided access for elephants and the like. It was restructured on numerous occasions; at least twelve different phases of construction can be seen.[[14]](#cite_note-14) [thumb|left|Detail of the hypogeum](/wiki/File:Colloseum-hypogeum-detail.jpg) The *hypogeum* was connected by underground tunnels to a number of points outside the Colosseum. Animals and performers were brought through the tunnel from nearby stables, with the gladiators' barracks at the [Ludus Magnus](/wiki/Ludus_Magnus) to the east also being connected by tunnels. Separate tunnels were provided for the Emperor and the [Vestal Virgins](/wiki/Vestal_Virgins) to permit them to enter and exit the Colosseum without needing to pass through the crowds.[[14]](#cite_note-14) Substantial quantities of machinery also existed in the *hypogeum*. Elevators and pulleys raised and lowered scenery and props, as well as lifting caged animals to the surface for release. There is evidence for the existence of major [hydraulic](/wiki/Hydraulic) mechanisms[[14]](#cite_note-14) and according to ancient accounts, it was possible to flood the arena rapidly, presumably via a connection to a nearby aqueduct. However, the construction of the hypogeum at Domitian's behest put an end to the practise of flooding, and thus also to naval battles, early in the Colosseum's existence.

### Supporting buildings[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=9)]

[thumb|upright|The Colosseum – a view from the](/wiki/File:Colosseo3.JPG) [Oppian Hill](/wiki/Oppian_Hill) The Colosseum and its activities supported a substantial industry in the area. In addition to the amphitheatre itself, many other buildings nearby were linked to the games. Immediately to the east is the remains of the [*Ludus Magnus*](/wiki/Ludus_Magnus), a training school for gladiators. This was connected to the Colosseum by an underground passage, to allow easy access for the gladiators. The *Ludus Magnus* had its own miniature training arena, which was itself a popular attraction for Roman spectators. Other training schools were in the same area, including the *Ludus Matutinus* (Morning School), where fighters of animals were trained, plus the Dacian and Gallic Schools.

Also nearby were the *Armamentarium*, comprising an armory to store weapons; the *Summum Choragium*, where machinery was stored; the *Sanitarium*, which had facilities to treat wounded gladiators; and the *Spoliarium*, where bodies of dead gladiators were stripped of their armor and disposed of.

Around the perimeter of the Colosseum, at a distance of 18 m (59 ft) from the perimeter, was a series of tall stone posts, with five remaining on the eastern side. Various explanations have been advanced for their presence; they may have been a religious boundary, or an outer boundary for ticket checks, or an anchor for the [*velarium*](/wiki/Velarium) or awning.[[14]](#cite_note-14) Right next to the Colosseum is also the [Arch of Constantine](/wiki/Arch_of_Constantine).

## Use[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=10)]

[thumb|](/wiki/File:Jean-Leon_Gerome_Pollice_Verso.jpg)[*Pollice Verso*](/wiki/Pollice_Verso_(Gérôme)) (*Thumbs Down*) by [Jean-Léon Gérôme](/wiki/Jean-Léon_Gérôme), 1872

The Colosseum was used to host [gladiatorial](/wiki/Gladiator) shows as well as a variety of other events. The shows, called [*munera*](/wiki/Munera_(ancient_Rome)), were always given by private individuals rather than the state. They had a strong religious element but were also demonstrations of power and family prestige, and were immensely popular with the population. Another popular type of show was the animal hunt, or [*venatio*](/wiki/Venatio). This utilized a great variety of wild beasts, mainly imported from Africa and the Middle East, and included creatures such as [rhinoceros](/wiki/Rhinoceros), [hippopotamuses](/wiki/Hippopotamus), [elephants](/wiki/Elephant), [giraffes](/wiki/Giraffe), [aurochs](/wiki/Aurochs), [wisents](/wiki/Wisent), [Barbary lions](/wiki/Barbary_lion), [panthers](/wiki/Leopard), [leopards](/wiki/Leopard), [bears](/wiki/Bears), [Caspian tigers](/wiki/Caspian_tiger), [crocodiles](/wiki/Crocodile) and [ostriches](/wiki/Ostrich). Battles and hunts were often staged amid elaborate sets with movable trees and buildings. Such events were occasionally on a huge scale; [Trajan](/wiki/Trajan) is said to have celebrated his victories in [Dacia](/wiki/Dacia) in 107 with contests involving 11,000 animals and 10,000 gladiators over the course of 123 days. During lunch intervals, executions [*ad bestias*](/wiki/Damnatio_ad_bestias) would be staged. Those condemned to death would be sent into the arena, naked and unarmed, to face the beasts of death which would literally tear them to pieces. Other performances would also take place by acrobats and magicians, typically during the intervals.

During the early days of the Colosseum, ancient writers recorded that the building was used for [*naumachiae*](/wiki/Naumachia) (more properly known as *navalia proelia*) or simulated sea battles. Accounts of the inaugural games held by Titus in AD 80 describe it being filled with water for a display of specially trained swimming horses and bulls. There is also an account of a re-enactment of a famous sea battle between the [Corcyrean](/wiki/Corfu) (Corfiot) Greeks and the [Corinthians](/wiki/Ancient_Corinth). This has been the subject of some debate among historians; although providing the water would not have been a problem, it is unclear how the arena could have been waterproofed, nor would there have been enough space in the arena for the warships to move around. It has been suggested that the reports either have the location wrong, or that the Colosseum originally featured a wide floodable channel down its central axis (which would later have been replaced by the hypogeum).[[14]](#cite_note-14) *Sylvae* or recreations of natural scenes were also held in the arena. Painters, technicians and architects would construct a simulation of a forest with real trees and bushes planted in the arena's floor, and animals would then be introduced. Such scenes might be used simply to display a natural environment for the urban population, or could otherwise be used as the backdrop for hunts or dramas depicting episodes from mythology. They were also occasionally used for executions in which the hero of the story – played by a condemned person – was killed in one of various gruesome but mythologically authentic ways, such as being mauled by beasts or burned to death.

### Today[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=11)]

[thumb|A panorama of the interior of the Colosseum in 2016](/wiki/File:Panoramica_del_Coliseo_Romano_Febrero_2016.JPG)

The Colosseum today is now a major tourist attraction in Rome with thousands of tourists each year paying to view the interior arena, though entrance for citizens of the [European Union](/wiki/European_Union) (EU) is partially subsidised, and entrance is free for EU citizens under eighteen or over sixty-five years of age.[[30]](#cite_note-30) There is now a museum dedicated to [Eros](/wiki/Eros) located in the upper floor of the outer wall of the building. Part of the arena floor has been re-floored. Beneath the Colosseum, a network of subterranean passageways once used to transport wild animals and gladiators to the arena opened to the public in summer 2010.[[31]](#cite_note-31) The Colosseum is also the site of Roman Catholic ceremonies in the 20th and 21st centuries. For instance, [Pope Benedict XVI](/wiki/Pope_Benedict_XVI) led the [Stations of the Cross](/wiki/Stations_of_the_Cross) called the [Scriptural Way of the Cross](/wiki/Scriptural_Way_of_the_Cross) (which calls for more meditation) at the Colosseum[[32]](#cite_note-32)[[33]](#cite_note-33) on [Good Fridays](/wiki/Good_Friday).[[8]](#cite_note-8)

#### Restoration[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=12)]

In 2011 [Diego Della Valle](/wiki/Diego_Della_Valle), head of the shoe firm [Tod's](/wiki/Tod's), entered into an agreement with local officials to sponsor a €25 million restoration of the Colosseum. Work was planned to begin at the end of 2011, taking up to two and a half years.[[34]](#cite_note-34) Due to the controversial nature of using a [public-private partnership](/wiki/Public-private_partnership) to fund the restoration, work was delayed and began in 2013. [Template:As of](/wiki/Template:As_of) the restoration is estimated to be complete by 2016. The restoration is the first full cleaning and repair in the Colosseum's history.[[35]](#cite_note-35) The first stage is to clean and restore the Colosseum's arcaded façade and replace the metal enclosures that block the ground-level arches. The project plans to create a services center and to restore the galleries and underground spaces inside the Colosseum.[[36]](#cite_note-36) <gallery mode=packed> File:Colosseum 0731 2013.jpg|Colosseum 2013 File:Colosseum 0732 2013.jpg|Colosseum 2013 File:Exterior of the Colosseum.jpg|Colosseum 2012 File:Colosseum 0740 2013.jpg|Colosseum 2013 File:Colosseum 0748 2013.jpg|Colosseum 2013 File:Colosseum 0771 2013.jpg|Colosseum 2013 File:Colosseum 0762 2013.jpg|Colosseum 2013 File:Weed Whacking the Colosseum (2883935844).jpg File:Interior\_of\_the\_Colloseum,\_Rome.png|Colosseum 2014

</gallery>

## Significance in Christianity[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=13)]

[thumb|right|*The Christian Martyrs' Last Prayer*, by](/wiki/File:Jean-Léon_Gérôme_-_The_Christian_Martyrs'_Last_Prayer_-_Walters_37113.jpg) [Jean-Léon Gérôme](/wiki/Jean-Léon_Gérôme) (1883) The Colosseum is generally regarded by Christians as a site of the martyrdom of large numbers of believers during the [persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire](/wiki/Persecution_of_Christians_in_the_Roman_Empire), as evidenced by Church history and tradition.[[37]](#cite_note-37)[[38]](#cite_note-38)[[39]](#cite_note-39) On the other hand, other scholars believe that the majority of martyrdoms may have occurred at other venues within the city of Rome, rather than at the Colosseum, citing a lack of still-intact physical evidence or historical records.[[40]](#cite_note-40)[[41]](#cite_note-41) These scholars assert that "some Christians were executed as common criminals in the Colosseum—their crime being refusal to reverence the Roman gods", but most [Christian martyrs](/wiki/Christian_martyr) of the [early Church](/wiki/Early_Church) were executed for their faith at the Circus Maximus.[[42]](#cite_note-42)[[43]](#cite_note-43) According to [Irenæus](/wiki/Irenæus) (died about 202), [Ignatius of Antioch](/wiki/Ignatius_of_Antioch) was fed to the lions in Rome around 107 A.D and although Irenaeus says nothing about this happening at the Colosseum, tradition ascribes it to that place.[[44]](#cite_note-44)[[45]](#cite_note-45)[[46]](#cite_note-46)[[47]](#cite_note-47) In the Middle Ages, the Colosseum was not regarded as a monument, and was used as what some modern sources label a "quarry,"[[48]](#cite_note-48) which is to say that stones from the Colosseum were taken for the building of other sacred sites.[[49]](#cite_note-49) This fact is used to support the idea that, at a time when sites associated with martyrs were highly venerated the Colosseum was not being treated as a sacred site.[[50]](#cite_note-50) It was not included in the itineraries compiled for the use of pilgrims nor in works such as the 12th century [*Mirabilia Urbis Romae*](/wiki/Mirabilia_Urbis_Romae) ("Marvels of the City of Rome"), which claims the [Circus Flaminius](/wiki/Circus_Flaminius) – but not the Colosseum – as the site of martyrdoms.[[51]](#cite_note-51) Part of the structure was inhabited by a [Christian religious order](/wiki/Religious_order#Christian_tradition), but it is not known whether this was for any particular religious reason.

Pope Pius V (1566–1572) is said to have recommended that pilgrims gather sand from the arena of the Colosseum to serve as a relic, on the grounds that it was impregnated with the blood of martyrs, although some of his contemporaries did not share his conviction.[[52]](#cite_note-52) A century later Fioravante Martinelli listed the Colosseum at the head of a list of places sacred to the martyrs in his 1653 book *Roma ex ethnica sacra*. Martinelli's book evidently had an effect on public opinion; in response to Cardinal Altieri's proposal some years later to turn the Colosseum into a bullring, Carlo Tomassi published a pamphlet in protest against what he regarded as an act of desecration. The ensuing controversy persuaded [Pope Clement X](/wiki/Pope_Clement_X) to close the Colosseum's external arcades and declare it a sanctuary.[[53]](#cite_note-53)[thumbnail|right|Cross dedicated to the Christian martyrs, placed in 2000 by](/wiki/File:Cruz_del_Jubileo_2000_en_el_Coliseo_-_detalle.JPG) [Pope John Paul II](/wiki/Pope_John_Paul_II). At the insistence of St. [Leonard of Port Maurice](/wiki/Leonard_of_Port_Maurice), Pope [Benedict XIV](/wiki/Benedict_XIV) (1740–1758) forbade the quarrying of the Colosseum and erected [Stations of the Cross](/wiki/Stations_of_the_Cross) around the arena, which remained until February 1874.[[54]](#cite_note-54) [Benedict Joseph Labre](/wiki/Benedict_Joseph_Labre) spent the later years of his life within the walls of the Colosseum, living on [alms](/wiki/Alms), prior to his death in 1783.[[54]](#cite_note-54) Several 19th century popes funded repair and restoration work on the Colosseum, and it still retains its Christian connection today. A [Christian cross](/wiki/Christian_cross) stands in the Colosseum, with a plaque, stating:

The amphitheater, one consecrated to triumphs, entertainments, and the impious worship of pagan gods, is now dedicated to the sufferings of the martyrs purified from impious superstitions.[[44]](#cite_note-44)

Other Christian crosses stand in several points around the arena and every [Good Friday](/wiki/Good_Friday) the Pope leads a [Via Crucis](/wiki/Via_Crucis) procession to the amphitheater.

## Flora[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=14)]

[thumb|Plants on the inner walls of the Colosseum](/wiki/File:Colosseum-flora.jpg) The Colosseum has a wide and well-documented history of [flora](/wiki/Flora_(plants)) ever since [Domenico Panaroli](/wiki/Domenico_Panaroli) made the first catalogue of its plants in 1643. Since then, 684 species have been identified there. The peak was in 1855 (420 species). Attempts were made in 1871 to eradicate the vegetation, because of concerns over the damage that was being caused to the masonry, but much of it has returned.[[14]](#cite_note-14) 242 species have been counted today and of the species first identified by Panaroli, 200 remain.

The variation of plants can be explained by the change of climate in Rome through the centuries. Additionally, [bird migration](/wiki/Bird_migration), flower blooming, and the growth of Rome that caused the Colosseum to become embedded within the modern city centre rather than on the outskirts of the ancient city, as well as deliberate transport of species, are also contributing causes. One other romantic reason often given is their seeds being unwittingly transported on the animals brought there from all corners of the empire.

## Works modeled on, or inspired by, the Colosseum[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=15)]

* The *Kongresshalle*, or "Congress Hall", (1935, unfinished) at the [Nazi Party Rally grounds](/wiki/Nazi_Party_Rally_grounds), [Nuremberg](/wiki/Nuremberg), [Germany](/wiki/Germany)
* The [Summer Olympic Games](/wiki/Summer_Olympic_Games) [medal](/wiki/Olympic_medal) from 1928 to 2000, designed by [Giuseppe Cassioli](/wiki/Giuseppe_Cassioli), features a depiction of the Colosseum. At the [2004 Summer Olympics](/wiki/2004_Summer_Olympics) in [Athens](/wiki/Athens) the Colosseum was replaced by a depiction of the [Panathinaiko Stadium](/wiki/Panathinaiko_Stadium)
* The exterior of the [Vancouver Public Library](/wiki/Vancouver_Public_Library) in [British Columbia](/wiki/British_Columbia) resembles the current state of the Colosseum. It was designed by [Moshe Safdie](/wiki/Moshe_Safdie).
* The [Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum](/wiki/Los_Angeles_Memorial_Coliseum) entrance was inspired by the Colosseum.
* The [Palazzo della Civilta Italiana](/wiki/Palazzo_della_Civilta_Italiana) was very closely modelled on the Colosseum. It was built for Mussolini for the Universal Exhibition of 1942 but the exhibition never happened due to the outbreak of World War II. The architects were Giovanni Guerrini, Ernesto Bruno La Padula, and Mario Romano.

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## Popular culture references[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=16)]

The iconic status of the Colosseum has led it to be featured in numerous films and other items of popular culture:

* In the 1953 film [*Roman Holiday*](/wiki/Roman_Holiday_(1953_film)), the Colosseum famously serves as the backdrop for several scenes.
* In the 1954 film [*Demetrius and the Gladiators*](/wiki/Demetrius_and_the_Gladiators), the Emperor [Caligula](/wiki/Caligula) anachronistically sentences the Christian Demetrius to fight in the Colosseum.
* The conclusion of the 1957 film [*20 Million Miles to Earth*](/wiki/20_Million_Miles_to_Earth) takes place at the Colosseum.
* The [Bob Dylan](/wiki/Bob_Dylan) song "[When I Paint My Masterpiece](/wiki/When_I_Paint_My_Masterpiece)," first recorded in 1971 by [The Band](/wiki/The_Band) and later appearing on the album [*Bob Dylan's Greatest Hits Vol. II*](/wiki/Bob_Dylan's_Greatest_Hits_Vol._II), mentions both the "Spanish Stairs" (the [Spanish Steps](/wiki/Spanish_Steps)) and the Colosseum.
* In the 1972 film [*Way of the Dragon*](/wiki/Way_of_the_Dragon), [Bruce Lee](/wiki/Bruce_Lee) fought [Chuck Norris](/wiki/Chuck_Norris) in the Colosseum.
* In [Ridley Scott's](/wiki/Ridley_Scott) 2000 film [*Gladiator*](/wiki/Gladiator_(2000_film)), the Colosseum was re-created via [computer-generated imagery](/wiki/Computer-generated_imagery) (CGI) to "restore" it to the glory of its heyday in the 2nd century. The depiction of the building itself is generally accurate and it gives a good impression of what the underground *hypogeum* would have been like.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed)
* In the 2001 movie [*Megiddo: The Omega Code 2*](/wiki/Megiddo:_The_Omega_Code_2), the Colosseum is destroyed by a meteor.
* In the 2003 movie [*The Core*](/wiki/The_Core), the Colosseum is destroyed by huge bolts of lightning.
* The Colosseum was featured in the video game [*Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood*](/wiki/Assassin's_Creed:_Brotherhood). The Colosseum is of great importance to the entire [*Assassin's Creed*](/wiki/Assassin's_Creed_(series)) series as a whole: first, it was an entrance site to a Lair of [Romulus](/wiki/Romulus), second, the Lair beneath the Colosseum led directly to the [Temple of Juno Moneta](/wiki/Temple_of_Juno_Moneta) which housed the Apple of Eden, third, it was used in a Passion Play depicting [Jesus Christ's](/wiki/Jesus_Christ) crucifixion where an assassination attempt was unfoiled by the protagonist [Ezio Auditore da Firenze](/wiki/Ezio_Auditore_da_Firenze) and fourth, in the 21st century, Desmond Miles [freeran](/wiki/Freerunning) through the maze in the Colosseum in order to find the Temple of Juno Moneta below the [Basilica of Santa Maria in Ara Coeli](/wiki/Basilica_of_Santa_Maria_in_Ara_Coeli) and the Apple kept in it by Ezio in 1506.
* The Colosseum was featured as one of the locations of [Vitaly's](/wiki/List_of_Madagascar_characters#Vitaly) travelling circus in the animated film [*Madagascar 3: Europe's Most Wanted*](/wiki/Madagascar_3:_Europe's_Most_Wanted) (2012).
* The 2012 [augmented reality](/wiki/Augmented_reality) video game [*Book of Spells*](/wiki/Book_of_Spells), a companion to the [*Harry Potter*](/wiki/Harry_Potter) series, features an animated tale about the accidental destruction of the Colosseum by rioting wizards in 1754, and its magical rebuilding before the non-magical Romans woken up by the sound of the explosion arrived at the scene.
* The Colosseum features prominently in the video game [*Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood*](/wiki/Assassin's_Creed:_Brotherhood).
* A scene from the 2008 film [Jumper](/wiki/Jumper_(2008_film)) was filmed in the Colosseum.
* In the 2003 film [*The Lizzie McGuire Movie*](/wiki/The_Lizzie_McGuire_Movie), Lizzie McGuire performed as Isabella Parigi for the Italian Music Awards.

## See also[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=17)]

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## References[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=18)]

### Notes[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=19)]

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### Bibliography[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=20)]

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* [Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)
* [Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)

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## External links[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=21)]

[Template:Commons](/wiki/Template:Commons)

* [Official website](http://archeoroma.beniculturali.it/en/archaeological-site/colosseum)
* [Virtual tour of the Colosseum](http://rome.arounder.com/it/monumenti/colosseo/colosseum-by-night.html)
* [A 3D model of Colosseum on Sketchfab](https://sketchfab.com/models/544c64b6445e4899a17350c949b7766a)
* [Template:Cite NSRW](/wiki/Template:Cite_NSRW)

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