

## Episode 100: Rome

### Summary

For our 100th episode, Nick and Wendy talk about their favourite city in the world: Rome, Italy. They discuss Rome's historical layers and the difficulty of having a functioning modern city on top of a ruined ancient city.

### Transcript

Nick: Today is our 100th episode! Can you believe that Wendy?

Wendy: No, I can't believe that, actually. It seems like a lot of episodes.

Nick: It is a lot of episodes. And can you also believe that in the ninety-nine previous episodes, we have not really talked about Rome?

Wendy: No, I can't believe that either, because that is probably our favourite city in the world, for both of us. And it's a very, very special place for us. And that seems very strange that we've not talked about it yet.

Nick: Well we were just trying to figure out<sup>1</sup> how to do it. And what we're going to do in some upcoming episodes is talk about our personal stories related to Rome, and we're also going to have some guests talking about their Roman stories as well. But for today, we're just going to talk about the majestic city that is Rome in all of its glory.

Wendy: OK, sounds like a good plan.

Nick: What I think is a good way to understand Rome or a good thing to introduce people to Rome with is something that people who visit Rome, even, have trouble understanding or have trouble getting to grips with<sup>2</sup>. And that's the fact that the city of Rome is the world's largest archeological site, and what that means is that underneath the modern city, there is an ancient city.

Wendy: Yep.

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<sup>1</sup> to figure out: to solve, understand, work out. See also: Episode 64.

<sup>2</sup> getting to grips with: beginning to understand or comprehend

Nick: And that can be really hard to fathom<sup>3</sup>, even when you're there. And so one of the best ways to really understand this is to visit some of the archeological sites, and in particular I'm thinking about the Roman Forum and the four temples at Largo Argentina. And what you can see there is that the ground level of these ancient ruins that have been excavated to their ground level is about ten metres lower than the modern ground level. And so you're on a modern road and you're looking down into this pit. But what it really means is that the ancient city was at that level, and that underneath the rest of the modern city, there are still ancient ruins that are yet to be discovered.

Wendy: Yes, and there are more and more that are being discovered all the time. Of course, they won't be able to discover them all and put them all on display because you would have to destroy the new city in order to do that. Umm, but, for example, they've been trying for many years to build a third metro line, a third subway line. Rome does not have a very good subway system. It only has two lines and it's not really very helpful for getting around in the city centre. It basically only goes out into the suburbs. And that's because every time they try to build another metro or subway station, they run into all these ruins underground. And so they are apparently finally going to build a third line but they've had to deviate<sup>4</sup> it, they are not able to make it go to some of the areas in the centre that they had wanted, precisely because they keep running into archeological sites and remains underneath the ground.

Nick: Yeah, the third line is actually partially open now, and so it has taken them many, many years to build. But this is the challenge of having a modern city on top of an ancient city. And so this is what makes Rome unique. And it's very difficult to have an efficient, modern city with this setting. Umm, but basically all of the rubble<sup>5</sup> of the ancient city has been built on top of for years, for centuries and centuries, and that's why you have the situation as it is today. So Piazza Venezia, which is more or less the centre of the modern city - it has five roads that go off it in different directions, and was, you know, an important area in the ancient city as well, it's right near to the Imperial Forums and the Roman Forum - they were trying to build a metro station there for many years. And we would see work going on there for many years as we would return to Rome for our trips there. And then I believe they've abandoned it as a possible site for a station because they just came across too many ruins. And now I believe that they've opened part of it for visiting, and so we'll get to see that, perhaps, when we go later this month.

Wendy: Yeah, I was there not too long ago, uhh, just on my own. And, yeah, there used to be lots of, umm, you know, scaffolding<sup>6</sup> and, uhh, places that were closed off as work areas where they were working on the metro. And all of that is gone

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<sup>3</sup> fathom: understand, comprehend

<sup>4</sup> deviate: make a path or course go a different way

<sup>5</sup> rubble: broken pieces, rocks, débris

<sup>6</sup> scaffolding: temporary structures erected for workers to build or repair buildings

now because, yeah, they've given up on those works. Uhh, but there is a new archeological site, uhh, where that work area used to be. Now there are ruins that you can see that have never (been) seen before, and that were hidden under the ground when we used to live there a few years ago.

Nick: And so anytime anyone wants to do any kind of building that requires digging underground in the centre of Rome, you always have to come in with archeological teams and if you find something, then you have to essentially pause the work that you're doing and let them go in and see what they can find. And then it may happen that it's too important and you have to stop the work that you're doing. And so, it's just really a unique place and it's just so extraordinary in this way, umm, that you just have all of these ruins just dotted<sup>7</sup> all around the city wherever you go.

Wendy: Yeah, and there are so many layers of history in the city itself, uhh, starting obviously with the ancient Romans and then you go through the medieval period and the Renaissance and Baroque and you see so many different representations of different art styles and architecture styles. And it's all jumbled<sup>8</sup> together and it can be kind of confusing, uhh, if you're not, you know, familiar with these periods of history and what was going on at that time. But as you learn more, you start to be able to pick them out and recognise them and, uhh, yeah, these things are dotted all over the city, you know. You can just be walking down a random street and then you'll find an ancient column that's embedded<sup>9</sup>, you know, into the wall, uhh, that you're walking past and you just come across like things like that all the time. There's so much there in Rome that you could spend a lifetime there and still not see it all.

Nick: Yeah, there's one particular example that I like which is a ... it's ruins of an ancient temple, and basically you have this kind of square or rectangular plan and then there are columns that still survive from that temple, and then subsequently those columns have been incorporated into three different buildings. This is, uhh, near the Teatro di Marcello, uhh, near the Tiber river. And so you can see these columns embedded like you said, but they're in three different churches or three different buildings, but they all actually come from the same ancient building, and so you can understand the layout of the ancient building. And you can see how these modern buildings - or not so much modern buildings, but later buildings - have been, kind of, uhh, superimposed on the floor plan of the ancient building.

Wendy: Yeah.

Nick: And it is interesting with the layers though. I remember one thing you used to say on your tours when we were tour guides in Rome, was you used to tell people that Rome is a Baroque city.

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<sup>7</sup> dotted: scattered or placed randomly

<sup>8</sup> jumbled: mixed or thrown together in a confusing way

<sup>9</sup> embedded: incorporated into

Wendy: Did I?

Nick: Yeah, you did. And it's fascinating to think that this ancient city could be described in that way as a Baroque city because of all the seventeenth century churches and architecture that are there.

Wendy: Hmm, I don't remember saying that, but, alright, I believe you. Umm, yeah, personally I don't think I would describe it that way today, because I do see it as this mix of so many different time periods. But, yeah, there's a lot of Baroque, because that's kind of the last great architectural and artistic period. Uhh, I mean I'm not a fan of modern art and architecture at all, so, umm, yeah, I don't regard those very highly. So I think of Baroque as being kind of the last one in that chronological line of art.

Nick: Yep, that's fair enough. So one of the challenges, as we've talked about, is trying to have a modern city that works, that functions, that helps the people who live there. One of the things that they've done recently is closed off this road that, uhh, runs near the ancient parts of the city, runs from Piazza Venezia, which we mentioned, to the Colosseum, and it's between the Roman Forum and the Imperial Forums. And it used to be an important traffic road and now it's closed for traffic. Because they're sort of trying to, sort of, turn it into an archeological park, this whole area, umm, but it's created a lot of controversy and I don't know if it will last or what they're going to end up doing. Currently as I understand it, you can still ... buses still go down that road and taxis still go down that road. So it kind of isn't the pedestrian thoroughfare<sup>10</sup> that it's supposed to be, umm, but normal cars have been prohibited from driving down there. And that's not good for people who live in that area, but what can you do?

Wendy: Yeah, yeah. Which is perhaps, you know, the worst scenario. So if they've closed it off to traffic but not to all traffic, so it hasn't really created, like you said, the pedestrian park, but, yeah, it's also at the same time still making it really inconvenient for the people who live there. Although I suppose it is meant to encourage to use public transport because it is only the public transport and the taxis that are allowed to go. Umm, so that is good. But, yeah, it is really complicated, as you said, to create a well-functioning, modern city when you have all of this history to protect.

Nick: Yep. Anyway, so that's just a little bit about Rome. We will talk more and more about Rome as we go forward. But this is our 100th episode, so we hope you enjoyed it!

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<sup>10</sup> thoroughfare: boulevard, major road

## Comprehension Questions

1. Why has Rome had difficulty building its third metro line and what is the current status of it?
2. How does Wendy say she would describe the city today?
3. Why did Nick point out the reusing of columns from one particular ancient temple?

## Exercises

*Use the words and expressions in the footnotes of the transcript to fill in the gaps.*

1. He just bought a Mac after years of using a PC, so he's still \_\_\_\_\_ using a different operating system.
2. We loved our trip to Greece but were disappointed that there was so much \_\_\_\_\_ on the Parthenon in Athens. The restoration of that building seems like it will never end!
3. The road that is now closed to most traffic in Rome - the Via Dei Fori Imperiali - was originally built by Mussolini as a \_\_\_\_\_ for his troops to march on.
4. In rural Italy, villages are \_\_\_\_\_ all over the landscape, especially on hilltops.
5. After an earthquake, authorities need to clear the \_\_\_\_\_ to search for survivors.
6. It's hard to \_\_\_\_\_ why he said such an awful thing. It's out of character.
7. She had a clear plan for how to proceed with her life, but unforeseen circumstances caused her to \_\_\_\_\_ from that path.
8. The GPS isn't working, so we need \_\_\_\_\_ how to get home from here. I don't know this area very well.
9. They just renovated their bathroom. One of the new features is that the lights are \_\_\_\_\_ in the ceiling. That way, the whole bathroom is well lit.
10. It was the first time he had to speak in public. He was very nervous and he \_\_\_\_\_ up all his words.

## Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions with a partner or in the [English in 10 Minutes Listeners group on Facebook](#):

1. Have you ever been to Rome? If so, did you like it? If not, would you like to go? Why or why not?
2. Wendy mentioned that the Rome metro system is not very good. What are some good metro systems that you know about? Why are they good?
3. What is your favourite time period for art and architecture?

## Answers

### Comprehension Questions

1. Because there are too many ruins underneath the ground. Nick said it is now partially open.
2. As a city of historical layers with a mix of different artistic and architectural styles.
3. Because columns on three sides of the temple have been used in three different buildings that stand today.

### Exercises

1. getting to grips with
2. scaffolding
3. thoroughfare
4. dotted
5. rubble
6. fathom
7. deviate
8. to figure out
9. embedded
10. jumbled