

Episode 104: Roman Stories I (Nick)

Summary

In the first of our Roman Stories episodes, Nick shares the story of how he visited Rome for the first time and how he eventually came to live there and to fall in love with the city.

Transcript

Nick: Today we are starting a new mini-series on the podcast, which is called Roman Stories. And in this series, Wendy and I and some of our guests who have lived in Rome share their stories about the city, about why they went there, and what the appeal of Rome is to them. So for our first episode of the series, I guess we're starting with me.

Wendy: Hi Nick!

Nick: Hi Wendy.

Wendy: So, let's hear your Roman story then. What brought you to Rome?

Nick: Well, I was travelling around Europe at the time. I was 21 years old, and this was in 2001. And like many young Australians, and young people from elsewhere around the world, I was in Europe and visiting various countries and various cities. So I'd love to say that I'd always wanted to visit Rome since I was young or something like that, but really it was just one city among many that I was visiting and before I went there, I didn't really think of it as ... that it was going to be a particularly special place more than anywhere else. Umm, but of course once I arrived, then that all changed.

Wendy: Yeah, and you ended up spending quite a lot of time there. But you ... so you were not intending to move there or live there when you first arrived?

Nick: No, not at all, umm, but that's actually what happened. So I was coming towards the end of my trip in Europe, and I was going to go to London and work over the winter in London, because I had a visa to do that. And Australians can get a working holiday visa to work in the UK. So that was my plan, uhh, and it turned out that I arrived in Rome and I just stayed there.

Wendy: So what was it that made you stay then?

Nick: Gosh, it was a combination of a couple of different things. But I do remember ...well, firstly, I do remember when I arrived in Rome. I didn't really know that much about it, but I knew that I wanted to see the Colosseum. And actually I remember when we arrived at the hostel where we were staying, the girl who was working there said that they had a rooftop terrace and you could go up there and have views over the city, and I said, 'Can you see the Colosseum from there?' Because I'd just arrived and that was all I wanted to do, was to see the Colosseum. And she said, 'Yes,' and you could, you could just see a very small portion of it. You couldn't really understand the whole size and scale of the whole thing. Umm, but that was my first glimpse¹ of the Colosseum. And the next day, then I went to visit the Colosseum with a couple of other friends who I'd met along the way. And so that was the first thing that I did in Rome was to see the Colosseum because that was what I wanted to do and that was really what I knew about Rome was that it had this famous arena and, umm, so that was my first port of call² in Rome.

Wendy: So was it everything that you thought it would be?

Nick: Yeah, it was. Umm, I remember very specifically that when I walked in, I looked towards the ground as I was walking into the centre of the arena. So I didn't look up at all until I was kind of in the middle of it. And then I allowed myself to look up and look around and kind of have that first impression of the interior hit me at once rather than gradually as you slowly walk into the middle. Umm, although because it's quite gutted³ on the inside it's probably true that to really appreciate the size and scale of it, it's actually better from the outside.

Wendy: Yeah, that's probably true.

Nick: So that's what I did on my first day in Rome, on my first morning in Rome. And I remember on the first afternoon, it was later in the afternoon, and we'd also been to the Palatine Hill and maybe some other places in Rome. And then I went to an Internet café to check my email, as you did back in the day⁴, uhh, before we had smartphones and wifi and all of that. And that was where I read that two planes had crashed into the World Trade Centre. And it was September 11th of 2001 and that was my first day in Rome.

Wendy: Wow.

Nick: So it was quite an eventful day. I got to see the Colosseum and 9/11 took place. And so we went back to the hostel and they had, umm, American cable TV news and so we watched that and were pretty transfixed by it all, as everybody was. Umm, but, yeah, that was my first day in Rome.

¹ glimpse: brief or incomplete look (can be used as a noun and a verb). See also: Episode 34.

² port of call: stop on a traveller's itinerary (the original meaning was a port where a ship stops)

³ gutted: destroyed inside

⁴ back in the day (fixed phrase): at a time in the past when things were different

Wendy: And so then how did you end up staying there and ultimately kind of living and working there?

Nick: Well, a few days after that, I was in the Roman Forum, which is the other part of the ancient city apart from the Colosseum and the Palatine Hill that I'd seen on the first day. For some reason we had just missed the Forum or didn't go in it on that first day. Maybe we were ready to eat lunch or something after going to these other places. So I went in there on the Friday for the first time, uhh, having arrived on the Monday afternoon, and I saw someone giving a free tour of the Roman Forum, and we joined it in the middle of the tour. And then at the end of the tour we went up and chatted to him for a little bit, 'cause he was a very good guide and we had some questions about some other sites that we wanted to visit. And then you came along!

Wendy: I did?

Nick: Yes, you did, and that's where I met you for the first time.

Wendy: Yes, so I was actually working as a free tour guide in the Roman Forum at that time, myself. And I was friends with the guide who you had found and whose tour you had followed. And so, yeah, that is when we first met. But, so does that mean that I was the reason that you stayed in Rome?

Nick: Not quite, because then ... basically we'd only caught the second half of this tour and then you said to me and to the other couple of people that I was with that you were going to go to the beginning and start a new one. So we walked back to the other end of the Roman Forum with you, but then it turned out that someone else was ready to go before you and you weren't the next one in line. And so we went with her, and so I'd sort of done these two tours or one-and-a-half tours in the Roman, and for some reason - I don't really know why - I just thought, 'Hey, I could do this!' And I didn't have the knowledge that I needed or I'd never done this kind of work before, but it just seemed appealing, uhh, somehow. And then I contacted the guy who was running that company, umm, and he was looking for another guide and so he kind of trained me up a little bit and then I found myself giving tours in the Roman Forum.

Wendy: Yeah, which is pretty similar to what happened to me, but, uhh, we'll tell my story another day. But, yeah, people always think that it's so romantic when we tell them that we met in Rome. But actually it was not a romantic relationship from the start. So we met, but we didn't really think that much of each other!

Nick: I wouldn't go that far. That's not a very nice thing ... way to put it! But, umm, anyway I stayed for a few months. And actually then my parents and, umm, my brother Tim came from Australia for Christmas. We had Christmas in Rome. Because my brother Mark was also travelling, and so all of us spent Christmas in Rome. And so that was basically what I ended up doing, even though the tourism season was kind of over, I eventually stayed in Rome until I had to go to the United

States because I had something lined up there. So I never got back to London at all, and never continued to Greece, which I'd planned to visit. Umm, and so, yeah, I just stayed in Rome and basically fell in love with Rome.

Another thing that I really remember before I stayed there and started working was that the day after 9/11, we went to the Vatican, because on Wednesdays at the time - I'm not sure if it's still true, because we have a different Pope now - the Pope, who was John Paul the second, uhh, would speak to the masses or to the faithful in St. Peter's Square. And so we thought it would be really interesting to go and see what he had to say after 9/11. So I felt quite privileged to be there and hear that. I don't remember the specifics of what he said, but he obviously, umm, condemned⁵ the attacks and promoted, uhh, peace and non-violence and things like that. So that was a really interesting thing to see. And then I climbed ... we went into the Vatican but then later I climbed up to the dome of St. Peter's Basilica, to the *cupola*, and looked out over Rome, and that's when I decided that Rome was my favourite city of the cities that I'd visited to that point. And it was a little bit of a joke at the time with my family that basically every city I liked more than the previous one, so when I said, 'OK, Rome is my new favourite,' they said, 'Well, that won't last. Next week you'll have something else.' But now it's seventeen years later and Rome is still my favourite city.

Wendy: OK, so you would still say it's still your favourite city in the world of all the cities that you've ever visited?

Nick: Absolutely.

Wendy: Very cool. And so what is your favourite place now in the ... in Rome? Is it still the Colosseum?

Nick: No, it's now the Roman Forum, which is adjacent to the Colosseum. And that's because that's where we gave tours and it was just such an amazing place to do that. And it's just this incredible place where so much history took place. It's the civic centre of the ancient city, and so it's really just the absolute centre of the Roman world, or it was the centre of the Roman world. And we were just in Rome a week or so ago, and I went in there for the umpteenth time⁶. Umm, but I always love going in there, and so I was just happy to sit there and soak it up⁷ even after all these years.

Wendy: So would you say that you still love Rome now just as much, or even maybe more, than you did when you first arrived?

Nick: Definitely, because you appreciate it so much more when you have the knowledge that we've acquired. Umm, so at the beginning you're just kind of

⁵ condemned: strongly disapproved of

⁶ umpteenth time: having taken place many, many times

⁷ soak it up: enjoy the atmosphere or feeling of a place

looking around and saying, 'Wow, this is all amazing but I don't know what any of this is or I don't really understand the significance of it all.' And so the deeper that you delve⁸ into the history of it all, somehow the more remarkable it gets. And so even though we've seen some of these buildings so many times, they just somehow are still incredible every time that you see them.

Wendy: Yeah. So do you think that you might live in Rome again one day?

Nick: I don't know, that's, uhh, something we might have to discuss. But we certainly would like to. Uhh, it's just a matter of deciding whether it's the right thing to do. But for now we try to visit as often as we can. And I've been twice this year, which is not bad, although you've been four times, but we'll get to that maybe when we get to your episode. But, umm, for now we're happy to be able to visit. Umm, you know, we have cheap flights from Lisbon where we live, so it's fairly convenient to go, and so that ... I'll just have to make do⁹ with that for the time being¹⁰.

Wendy: Yeah, which is not too bad. Alright, well, thanks for sharing your Roman story.

Nick: You're very welcome.

⁸ delve: dig, investigate, research

⁹ make do: manage, survive, function in a situation that is not ideal

¹⁰ for the time being (fixed phrase): for now (temporary)

Comprehension Questions

1. What were the two big things that happened on Nick's first day in Rome?
2. Why did he end up living in Rome?
3. Why does Nick like Rome now more than ever?

Exercises

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

1. Her five-year-old daughter made her watch *Finding Nemo* for the _____.
2. Their grandfather is very nostalgic. He always talks about how, _____, he didn't have any technological devices and used to play outside all day.
3. Her iPhone broke so she'll have to _____ with her old Nokia until she can afford to buy a new one.
4. They're going on a cruise in Southeast Asia. Their first _____ after leaving Singapore will be Penang in Malaysia.
5. A huge fire raged for hours and by the time it was finally put out, their house was completely _____.
6. In Rome, Campo dei Fiori is an atmospheric square to go to in the late afternoon for a drink or a gelato, or to people-watch and generally just _____.
7. The President _____ the attack, but the general feeling is that his law enforcement agencies did not do enough to prevent it in the first place.
8. She wants to leave her job but she hasn't found another one yet so _____, she's going to have to stay with the job she doesn't like.
9. They went to see the President's motorcade pass by but there were so many people in front of them that they only got a _____ of him.
10. She wanted to _____ deeper into her family history, and when she did, she found out that she was distantly related to the royal family.

Discussion Questions

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

1. Nick said that Rome is his favourite city in the world. Which city is your favourite and why?
2. Would you like to be a tour guide in your home town or somewhere else? Why or why not?
3. Do you remember where you were and what you were doing when the 9/11 terrorist attacks took place?

Answers

Comprehension Questions

1. He visited the Colosseum, and the terrorist attacks in New York took place.
2. Because he followed two free tours of the Roman Forum and decided that he could do the same job.
3. Because he says that the more you learn and know about the city, the more you appreciate it.

Exercises

1. umpteenth time
2. back in the day
3. make do
4. port of call
5. gutted
6. soak it up
7. condemned
8. for the time being
9. glimpse
10. delve