

Episode 106: Roman Stories II (Wendy)

Summary

In the second episode of Roman Stories, Wendy talks about how she found herself living in Rome many years ago and why she keeps going back, as well as nominating her favourite neighbourhood in Rome.

Transcript

Nick: Today it's time for the second episode in our mini-series called Roman Stories. And I'm here with Wendy and today it's time for your story!

Wendy: OK then, I guess that's fair.

Nick: So, do you remember why it was that you were attracted to Rome or why you decided to visit Rome in the first place?

Wendy: Well, umm, it was kind of similar to your situation. I was travelling around Western Europe in general. I had a three-month Eurail pass, which is a pass where you can, umm, ride any train, basically, uhh, in Europe. And, so, yeah, Rome was just one of many places that I was planning on visiting on that trip. And I didn't really have a special connection with it more than anywhere else.

Nick: I know from what you've told me that you were very into art at the time.

Wendy: Yes.

Nick: And so, you know, I'd said previously that I was interested in seeing the Colosseum but maybe for you, you were more interested in the Vatican and the artistic works that are there.

Wendy: Yes, so that is very true. I had studied up a lot on art prior to coming to Europe on that first trip. I actually bought the book *Art For Dummies*, you might have ... people might have heard of the [For Dummies](#) series, where they take a subject and then really simplify it, umm, and write about it in a way that someone who knows nothing about that subject can understand it. So I bought *Art For Dummies* and that's how I learned about the great masterpieces of art that can be found in Europe as well as in other parts of the world. And so I did kind of build my European itinerary around wanting to see certain pieces of art. And...

Nick: Do you remember in particular what you were interested in in Rome? I imagine the Sistine Chapel?

Wendy: Of course, the Sistine Chapel and the Vatican Museums in general. So, as you know, the Sistine Chapel is part of the Vatican Museums in the way that it's laid out¹ now, so you have to buy a ticket to the Museums in order to get to the Sistine Chapel. And I think probably a lot of people who visit really just want to see the Sistine Chapel, and would probably buy a ticket just for that, if they could. But I was not one of those people. I wanted to see absolutely everything that was in the Vatican Museums. And so I probably spent about five or six hours inside the Museums, because it's huge. Uhh, and you have all kinds of works of art there. You have ancient Roman statues, uhh, you have, uhh, an art gallery of paintings, oil paintings, from different periods. And, uhh, yeah, I just spent the whole day looking at, probably, every single piece that was in there.

Nick: And so did it have this great impression on you, umm, more than maybe some of the other places that you'd visited in terms of the art? Did you feel like it was really truly special?

Wendy: I did, yeah. Umm, there are some amazing pieces in there. Umm, I mean, I can't say that I was an expert, I was probably just a wannabe² art expert or art enthusiast. But I was definitely blown away³ by a lot of the things that I saw there.

Nick: And is that your biggest memory or your biggest impression from your first visit? Or what can you remember about other places that you saw in Rome?

Wendy: Well, again, like you, I also stumbled on⁴ a free tour of the Roman Forum when I was there, and was also really intrigued by how this guide was doing this and, you know, how I might be able to do the same thing. So I also asked the guide a lot of questions and, uhh, yeah, just kind of, you know, kept a mental note in the back of my mind that that might be an option for something that I could do later down the line⁵.

Nick: Yeah, it's interesting that, you know, one of the main reasons you came was for the art, umm, and then later on, I don't know if it was true that first year, because I think your first year there was 2000, but by the time I arrived in 2001, people were also doing free tours in St. Peter's Basilica, so maybe that would have been more appropriate for you, given that you had read *Art For Dummies*.

Wendy: Yeah, maybe. I ... and I probably could have moved over to St. Peter's Basilica if I'd wanted to. But at that point I had really fallen in love with the Forum and with the ancient Roman history as well. And I was excited to learn more about

¹ laid out (phrasal verb: to lay out): set up, arranged

² wannabe (informal, *want-to-be*): aspiring expert, amateur

³ blown away (phrasal verb: to blow away): astonished, astounded, hugely impressed

⁴ stumbled on (phrasal verb: to stumble on *or* to stumble upon): found by accident, came across

⁵ down the line: at some point in the future

that. And I ... I was very gung-ho⁶, uhh, which was probably just part of my personality, and especially when I was younger back then and had more energy. So in between tours I would go into some museum or I would go see something new that I had never seen before in Rome, which you really can do, you know. You can spend your life exploring something new there every single day. And I had lots of really in-depth books - uhh, guide books and history books - and so I would typically do two tours, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. And in between I would grab lunch and then I would, you know, go into a museum or go see some kind of historical site. And then I would often do another tour that evening as well. So I was really busy.

Nick: Yeah, you definitely were. And even the rest of us would marvel⁷ at the energy that you had, umm, 'cause I would usually only do one tour in the Forum because that took it all out of me, because I had a high-energy type of tour and I just couldn't imagine doing a second one soon after doing the first one. Umm, so, how long did you spend in Rome then?

Wendy: Ooh, you're the one who's good with dates and times and things like that. Umm, I think that actually 2001 was my first year in Rome, I don't think it was 2000. But I had arrived much earlier. Because you arrived, as you told (us), uhh, in your Roman story, you arrived on September 11th. I had arrived in the spring of that year so I had already been there for several months already.

Nick: Right, but I think the first time you went as a visitor was the previous year.

Wendy: Ahh, yeah, OK. Yes, that's probably true. So, yeah, when I first, uhh, took a tour of the Roman Forum as a tourist, then that would have been in 2000. Uhh, and I would have just stayed for a few days, I don't remember exactly, but, umm, I'm guessing maybe three or four days.

Nick: OK, and so we haven't lived in Rome, either of us, since 2004, so it's been a long time, but we go back as often as we can. And so what are the reasons that you keep going back?

Wendy: Rome still feels more like home to me than anywhere else. Umm, although Lisbon is definitely growing on me⁸ and I really love being in Lisbon. But I just really have a connection with Rome. I love just walking the streets. I absolutely love the architecture, just looking up and seeing all these, kind of, ochre and terracotta coloured buildings. Umm, I love the language. I love listening to Italian and I love speaking Italian. I love the food, uhh, I'm writing a book right now about Italian food and, uhh, of course I love eating it as well. Umm, it's just the whole culture. I mean, and that is true of Italy as a whole, I really feel a strong connection with Italian culture. Umm, and particularly Rome, just because there's so many different

⁶ gung-ho (informal): enthusiastic, keen

⁷ marvel: be filled with wonder or admiration

⁸ growing on me (phrase): becoming more and more appealing or likeable

layers of history there. Uhh, you really can see, you know, everything from ancient times right up through Baroque and then I guess a bit of, you know, modern stuff as well, although I'm not a fan of the modern stuff. But you can see pretty much every period of history there and it's all jumbled together and it's so fascinating to pull it apart and, you know, the more you understand it, the more fascinating it is.

Nick: And so what would you say is your favourite place in Rome?

Wendy: Mmmm, that's hard actually. I would say probably Trastevere, just the neighbourhood of Trastevere, 'cause again, like I said, much of what I love about it is just wandering the streets. I'm a bit, you know, I don't have the energy for museums that I did 20 years ago so, umm, I'm more ... I more enjoy just, yeah, just soaking up⁹ the atmosphere and I think wandering around in Trastevere and having a meal there is a perfect way to do that.

Nick: Right, so Trastevere is what, exactly?

Wendy: So, uhh, the name literally means 'across the Tiber', uhh, Tevere is the Italian word for Tiber, the Tiber river that runs through Rome. And so Trastevere is the neighbourhood that is on the other side of the river from most of the rest of the city centre. And it has a distinct kind of flavour about it. And it's also known for having really good restaurants. So it's a place where people go and hang out¹⁰ at night.

Nick: Yeah, and I think when we first arrived in Rome, it was quite an off-the-beaten-track area, because, as you said, it's away from the main tourist sites. It's become a lot more popular in recent years with foreign tourists, but you don't think that's, umm, affected it in a negative way at all?

Wendy: No, I was just there, you know, just a couple of weeks ago and I really enjoyed it. I was actually there during the day and went there for lunch instead of for dinner. So I thought it was going to be really quiet, but it was a lot more lively. There were a lot more people there than I had expected that I would find during the day. But, no, it hasn't lost its magic for me.

Nick: Alright, well thank you for telling us your Roman story.

Wendy: You're welcome.

⁹ soaking up (phrasal verb: to soak up): taking in, enjoying

¹⁰ hang out: spend time with friends or family without doing anything in particular

Comprehension Questions

1. How did Wendy learn about art before coming to Rome?
2. What could Wendy do in Rome years ago that she can't do anymore?
3. Why does Wendy like Trastevere?

Exercises

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

1. The twins both want to be professional tennis players when they grow up. They _____ at players like Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal.
2. We ate dinner at a great restaurant last night. We just _____ it as we were walking home and had never realised it was there before.
3. They had never been overseas before their trip to Egypt and they were just _____ by all the amazing things they saw.
4. She wanted to make sure she left the company on good terms so that she might have the opportunity to come back at some point _____.
5. One of the joys of visiting a city like Rome or Paris is just walking around, _____ the atmosphere of it all.
6. I didn't like my new job at first, but now it's _____. I'm getting used to the company and my colleagues which is making it a lot easier.
7. She's really _____ about exercising. She wakes up at 5am every day to go to the gym before work.
8. He has a good camera but he's just a _____ photographer at the moment. He needs to learn how to use it before he can take the next step.
9. The museum is _____ in chronological order, so that you can see the advances in civilisation as you go through each room.
10. Piazza Trilussa in Trastevere is a place where young people like to go and _____ at night, especially on weekends. They just drink, chat and play music.

Discussion Questions

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

1. Wendy said one of the reasons she was drawn to Rome originally was because of the art. Do you like art? If so, which type(s)? If not, why not?
2. Is there a subject that you don't know anything about that you would like to learn about, perhaps through one of the *Dummies* books? Why?
3. Is there an area or neighbourhood in your city or town that you like walking around as Wendy does in Trastevere?

Answers

Comprehension Questions

1. She learned about art from a book called *Art For Dummies*.
2. She could spend hours in museums because she had a lot of energy for that type of tourism when she was younger.
3. She likes the atmosphere of Trastevere and just walking around the neighbourhood.

Exercises

1. marvel
2. stumbled on
3. blown away
4. down the line
5. soaking up
6. growing on me
7. gung-ho
8. wannabe
9. laid out
10. hang out