

Episode 124: Roman Stories V (Jovanka)

Summary

Our guest Jovanka tells us how she arrived in Rome from New Zealand, why she stayed there, what her favourite Roman places are, and what changes she has noticed after recently returning to Rome for the first time in years.

Transcript

Nick: In today's episode of Roman Stories, I'm talking to my friend Jovanka. And Jovanka, last time you told us about your home country of New Zealand, and this time you're going to tell us about Rome, which is where we met and became friends. Umm, but what I wanted to ask you firstly is that in Australia, it's very common for young people to go to Europe or elsewhere, but mostly Europe, when they're in their early 20s, if they can afford it. And in New Zealand, it seems like this is even more popular and it's even codified, and you even have a name for it, which is the Overseas Experience, or the OE, for short. So why do you think it is that so many young people from New Zealand like to go to Europe and discover other parts of the world?

Jovanka: Yeah, I think because we're such a small country and we're so isolated¹ and far away from everywhere else, I think there is, yeah, a desire to explore, and experience, umm, the rest of the world. And I think, yeah, I think New Zealanders are pretty adventurous at heart², and, yeah, it is kind of a cultural thing in that you do, like, a big OE, most people do what we call - so we have an acronym for it, OE - Overseas Experience - after high school, before university. So that's, yeah, it's interesting, I actually didn't realise that Australia doesn't have that same terminology. Do you not? No, you don't have an OE. OK, umm, yeah, also, like, we're a pretty new country, so in terms of history, we've only got a couple of hundred years of history where, in going to Europe and other parts, you see things that are thousands of years old that are, yeah, older than our civilisation or our country in New Zealand. So, yeah, there's lots of reasons, I think.

Nick: And did you have any personal reasons particular to you, or was it just more of this general desire to see other places?

¹ isolated: separated, apart from (Note that unlike in some Romance languages, *isolated* does not refer to whether a building retains heat. That word in English is *insulated*.)

² at heart: fundamentally, in reality

Jovanka: Uhh, so for me, I guess mine might have been a bit different actually, 'cause I was wanting to start a new life overseas. I was wanting to get away from my family, actually, if I'm to be honest. So I actually packed up. When I left, I wasn't intending to go for two years. I packed all my last belongings in two suitcases and was planning to, like, find a home overseas. I didn't know where that was going to be, but it was going to be somewhere. And that ended up being Rome, actually.

Nick: So, yeah, you spent some time in Ireland and spent some time travelling, but then you ended up³ in Rome. So how was it that you came to be in Rome and that you came to stay in Rome?

Jovanka: So, umm, so as you mentioned before, I had been living in Ireland briefly. And my friend from New Zealand came over to visit, and then we had planned a trip around Europe together. And so we started off in Spain and headed around all the different countries but ended up in Italy. And my friend and I were in Rome for six days and we were just walking around the streets and we both just had this feeling that we wanted to live there, wanted to stay there, 'cause it was so magnificently beautiful. And we'd actually planned to stay with a friend in Pisa for a couple of months, but when we were on our way up there, she had emailed to say she had broken up with her boyfriend and wasn't going to be there. And so we had to make an alternative plan, and because we loved Rome so much, we decided to come back to Rome and, yeah, try and find jobs there and try and stay, yeah.

Nick: So you just turned around and came back?

Jovanka: Yeah, yeah, pretty much.

Nick: And so you did a lot of different jobs at the beginning, right? And a lot of jobs that probably weren't a lot of fun.

Jovanka: Uhh, yeah. So, uhh, just for, to be able to stay there, umm, so the initial jobs that we could get were au pairing or babysitting jobs, because people wanted English-speaking babysitters. I also had a cleaning job, so I cleaned an office, uhh, which was an interesting experience. Uhh, and then working in, so, and then, worked in an Irish pub for a little bit, meanwhile also actually doing, and then started doing a few tours. So, yeah, it was a real range of different jobs that I did.

Nick: And so did you find, you know, having originally gone there and loved it from the tourism point of view - it's easy to fall in love with Rome when you're there for a few days - then when you started living there, how did that change or affect the way you thought about the city?

Jovanka: To be honest it was a really tough time, like, to ... bureaucracy, I think I struggled, oh, 'cause I had actually a number of other jobs that I had in hostels and things, and didn't manage to keep those for very long. And language barrier was a

³ ended up: eventually began living there following a long process or journey

big factor. But I found, I actually found it quite, like in terms of the bureaucracy and all the paperwork that you had to do, everything was so difficult, and that really stressed me out⁴. And so, but for some reason it was the place that kept me there. Like, I just loved it so much, like, the aesthetic⁵ beauty of it and everything. And I guess aspects of the culture, like the food and things like that. But, yeah, there was something that kept me there even though it was a really, it was a tough city to live in. And language barrier as well, like I didn't even know 'hello' when I, before I got there. So, like, not, I mean that's partly why you have, umm, like, bad experiences with people as well, it's 'cause you can't necessarily speak the language, and so there's a lot of misunderstanding there as well which I think was part of it in the beginning, but, yeah, still.

Nick: And did you ever consider leaving earlier than you did, or were you committed to seeing it out⁶?

Jovanka: I think, to be honest, there was one point where I lost my job, and I hadn't ... I had, like, 50,000 lira left, which is, like, fifty dollars. But I also felt like, like, something was against me, like in terms of, like, it was so just difficult to, like, get a job and earn money. And so I was just, like, 'Oh, maybe I should just go,' but at the same time I didn't want to, so I stayed. So I kept on, yeah. And, yeah.

Nick: OK, so what are some of your favourite places or what's your favourite place in Rome if you have one in particular?

Jovanka: Ahh, so, umm, my favourite place actually is ... I've got two, sorry. One's Isola Tiberina (Tiber Island). So I used to love going there, umm, mainly because I love Ponte Rotto, which is the ruins of the oldest bridge to Rome. So often when I lived there, I used to go - like if I needed some time out to reflect or whatever - I'd go down there and just sit and watch the river. And my second, I love Avantine Hill. So there's an orange garden there, which is, yeah, I find a really special place, so I like going there. But there's so many places I love, but if I had to pick two, those would be my favourites.

Nick: That's interesting.

Jovanka: Yeah.

Nick: 'Cause those are not, sort of, famous places in terms of tourism.

Jovanka: Yeah.

Nick: But they're both really cool places. Actually, the Isola Tiberina, the Tiber Island, our friend Hayley gave birth there, uhh, because there's a hospital there.

⁴ stressed me out: caused me to be stressed (mentally or emotionally strained)

⁵ aesthetic: relating to beauty

⁶ seeing it out: finishing something, taking something to its full conclusion

And so Paul and I - another friend of ours - and I went to visit her and see the baby the first day that, umm, she was born.

Jovanka: Wow, that's an amazing story, wow!

Nick: Umm, OK, and so now ... this was many years ago that we loved in Rome. So you've gone back a couple of times since, being, let's say, older and wiser. Umm, and you were even there just a week or two ago. And so when you come back to Rome now, do you see changes in Rome or in yourself, or how do you view it now?

Jovanka: Ohh, big question. Umm, so the only real changes in terms of the city of Rome, umm, like it has become a lot dirtier in terms of litter⁷ and things. So, and when I said that my favourite place is Isola Tiberina before, it's quite sad for me to go there now, 'cause there's a lot of litter and a lot of rubbish, so that kind of detracts from⁸ the beauty a bit. Umm, in terms of changes from myself, I'm definitely different, like in terms of ... because I'm older as well. Like, even how Italian people address me, I'm addressed as 'signora' and there's more of a respect thing. And it was just a whole different experience. It still feels like home, like going there, I just feel like it's putting on a pair of comfy⁹ track pants¹⁰ or something. Like I feels like I love, like it totally feels like I'm going home every time I go there. Umm, and also, yeah, and I guess it's also (being) older and wiser, just kind of seeing it more from their eyes, like what it must have been like from, you know, having foreigners that, you know, can't really speak the language or whatever. Like I can kind of see why some of those experiences that ... like, why it was so difficult, and why, but yeah. But for me, yeah, I guess seeing it from other people's viewpoints a bit more, yeah.

Nick: OK, and apart from the two places you mentioned before, if you had a day in Rome where you were free, what kind of things would you do?

Jovanka: OK, so, I'd basically just walk around. So I went ... umm, so on my first day there, like this time on holiday, I just wanted to walk around. So I went to Isola Tiberina first actually, and then up to, umm, and then up to the Avantine Hill, but if I had a day, so I usually take visitors on the ultimate tour, so, and that's from, umm, that includes, oh goodness, yeah, so Piazza di Spagna, Trevi Fountain, then going up to, uhh, like the Colosseum, through the Forum, then past Circus Maximus, up Avantine Hill, to see, like, to look through the keyhole and over to St. Peter's, and then down to the Mouth of Truth, and then across to the Isola Tiberina, and then a walk around Trastevere, and then like dinner, in, like, umm, a restaurant in the

⁷ litter: trash or rubbish that has been thrown on the ground rather than being put in a bin

⁸ detracts from: takes away from, lessens

⁹ comfy: common shortening of comfortable

¹⁰ track pants: loose pants for wearing at home or for warming up for sport, also called sweat pants (American English)

centre. So that would be, like, one day of, like, all where I used to take guests when they came.

Nick: Right, that's a big day.

Jovanka: It's a big day, I know, but we did it though. It was awesome!

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

Jovanka: Cool.

Comprehension Questions

1. Why did Jovanka want to leave New Zealand?
2. Why did Jovanka move to Rome to live?
3. What is the biggest change she noticed in Rome after recently visiting?

Exercises

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

1. When you're a child, you're taught to put things in the bin or recycle them, and not to _____ on the street.
2. After a long day at work, she likes to come home, take a bath, put on her _____ and relax in front of the TV.
3. After moving all over the States as a child, he _____ living in San Francisco and he loves it there.
4. Unfortunately there is scaffolding on the front of the church, so that _____ its beauty.
5. That wasn't a nice thing she said, but she's actually a very kind person _____.
6. He still has another year left on his contract, but he's not completely happy, so he has to decide if _____ will be worth it or not.
7. They grew up on a small farm that was very _____ and so they didn't have neighbours or friends to play with when they were kids.
8. When buying a new couch, you want something that's _____ but also something that fits with the rest of your furniture.
9. When buying shoes, she's more interested in what's comfortable than in their _____ appearance. That's why she likes crocs!
10. It was a very high-pressure job and it often _____. Eventually I had to quit for my own well-being.

Discussion Questions

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

1. Would you want to leave your home country and start a new life by yourself somewhere else like Jovanka did? Why or why not?
2. If friends or guests visit you, what do you like to do with them? Do you have an 'ultimate tour' of your city or town like Jovanka does in Rome?
3. Is litter a problem where you live or in places you've been? What do you think can be done about this problem?

Answers

Comprehension Questions

1. She wanted to get away from her family (it's a long story) and start a new life in a different country.
2. Because she was supposed to stay with a friend in Pisa, but it fell through so she went back to Rome instead.
3. That it's a lot dirtier than it used to be. (While she was in Rome, [an article was published in the New York Times](#) talking about exactly that.)

Exercises

1. litter
2. track pants
3. ended up
4. detracts from
5. at heart
6. seeing it out
7. isolated
8. comfy
9. aesthetic
10. stressed me out