

# DISCOVERING COLOSSEUM

With its nearly four million visitors every year, the Colosseum is the most popular monument in Rome (not counting the Sistine Chapel, which is located in the Vatican State). Following its inauguration in 80 AD under the Emperor Titus, the Colosseum became the emblem of Rome worldwide, and the embodiment of her power and glory. The monument appeared on coins, copies were built in other parts of the Empire, and it was an attraction for the entire population of the city and beyond. The specific location of this arena in this area of Rome was not the fruit of chance. Here, there had been a large natural lake commissioned by Nero in the gardens of his private villa, the Domus Aurea, or Golden House. On Nero's death, the Flavians decided to return this area to the people of Rome, and to build this enormous public building. The work was more important than just a town planning decision. It was also political. The building was first known as the Flavian Amphitheatre. However, by the Middle Ages when the record in regard to the functions and history of the ancient monuments had largely been lost, the amphitheatre came to be known as the Colosseum, due to the presence nearby of a "colossal" statue of Nero of a height of more than 30 metres. The statue was melted down, and, over a long period of time, the building itself was pillaged for its marble and building materials. Its many holes are the result, above all, of removal of the bronze cramps used to hold the marble adornments. The pillaging came to an end only in the eighteenth century, when Pope Benedict XIV wished the ritual Via Crucis to take place at the Colosseum. At the start of the eighteenth century, a tremendous earthquake struck the monument, which lost part of its outer ring on the southern side, where, nowadays, we still see the major modern reconstruction and restoration work. This side is practically never shown in postcards or films. Sorrentino chose this location precisely in order to present the world with view of Rome's most famous monument which is unfamiliar to many.

*For visitors*

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