

Everyday life in ancient Rome

Rome was the most magnificent city in the ancient world. Splendid public buildings like the Forum and Colosseum were surrounded by homes, temples, shops and public baths. It was home to around a million people from across the Roman Empire and was busy, bustling and probably very smelly. Here are some important aspects of life in ancient Rome.

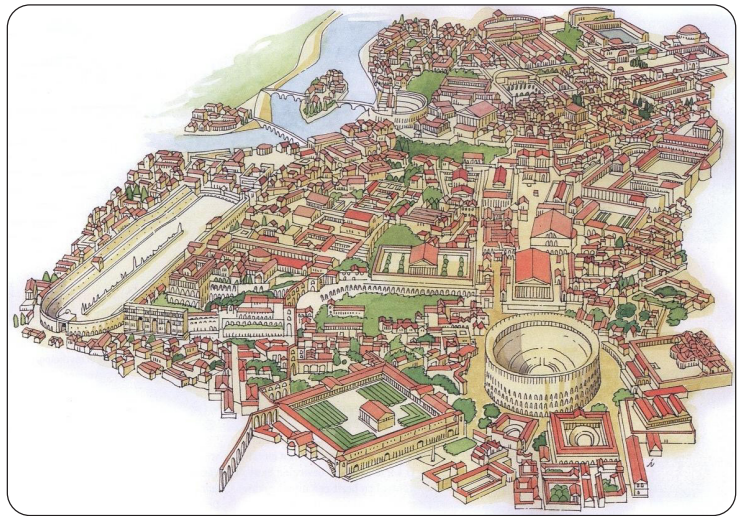


Image from: Wikimedia Commons/Public domain

Homes

There were a variety of homes in ancient Rome. Most were made from stone, brick and tiles. Richer Romans lived in large, comfortable houses, called *domūs*, which were decorated with mosaic floors and frescos on the walls.

The atrium, or entrance hall, had an open roof and a shrine, called a *lararium*, where family members worshipped the gods. Bedrooms, a dining room, indoor toilets and a study surrounded the atrium. As well as the family, slaves also lived and worked in many Roman homes.



Atrium of a *domus* in Pompeii, Italy

Poorer Romans rented rooms in smaller apartment blocks built from bricks, called *insulae*. They were small and had no indoor toilets or running water, so residents had to use public toilets and baths. *Insulae* did not have a kitchen because of the risk of fire, so poorer people couldn't cook at home.



Remains of *insulae* at Ostia, Italy



Family

The head of the household was called the *paterfamilias* and everyone had to obey him. In return, he was expected to treat his wife, children and slaves kindly. The mother of the family was the *materfamilias* and in charge of the home and children. At home, boys learned how to run a business and take care of a family from their fathers. Girls learned how to look after the home from their mothers. However, young children still had time for some fun. They played with dolls and toys and enjoyed play fights with wooden swords.



Image from: Wikimedia Commons/Public domain

Relief carving of a Roman family

School

Boys went to school when they were six or seven years old and learned Latin, Greek, mathematics, poetry and public speaking. They wrote using a stylus and a wax tablet and read books that were written on parchment scrolls. Teachers were strict and beat pupils who did not learn their subject by heart. Girls and poorer children rarely went to school, but many still learned to read and write. Children in wealthy families were taught at home.



Image from: Getty Images/DEA PICTURE LIBRARY

Relief carving of two schoolboys reading scrolls

Leisure time

Romans loved to visit amphitheatres to watch gladiator contests, where two slaves used a range of different weapons to fight each other to the death. They also loved theatre, music and chariot racing. Romans visited the public baths to relax and meet friends. Dice games were also popular.



Image from: Getty Images/Print Collector

Mosaic scene of a gladiator fight



Clothes

Most men wore short, knee length tunics made from cloth. However, some Roman citizens also wore long lengths of fabric called togas. These were quite uncomfortable but were a symbol of citizenship and importance. Women wore floor length tunics called *stolas*, pinned at the shoulder with *fibulae*. They also wore a draped cloth called a *palla*. Rich Roman women wore jewellery and had elaborate hairstyles.



Statues of wealthy Roman citizens

Food

Food in ancient Rome came from all countries in the Roman Empire. Wine and olive oil travelled from France, Spain and Greece and grain was shipped from North Africa. Fresh foods and meat were farmed outside Rome and fishermen provided fish and oysters from the sea. The slaves of wealthy Romans prepared great feasts with many different courses and wine to drink. Guests lay on couches and ate with their fingers. The poor could not afford to eat such foods. Many survived on bread, or hot porridge and soup, which they bought from a hot food shop called a *thermopolium*.



Thermopolium in Naples, Italy



Fresco of shoppers buying bread from a market stall



Mosaic featuring Roman foods



Jobs

There were many different jobs in ancient Rome. Merchants bought and sold food and other goods, such as leather and pottery, from countries across the Empire. Shop owners sold food and household items and farmers and fishermen worked outside the city. Some male citizens worked for the government, keeping records and collecting taxes. Women in richer homes did not work, but many ordinary women earned money by weaving cloth or working in shops.



Relief carving of a Roman butcher

Slaves

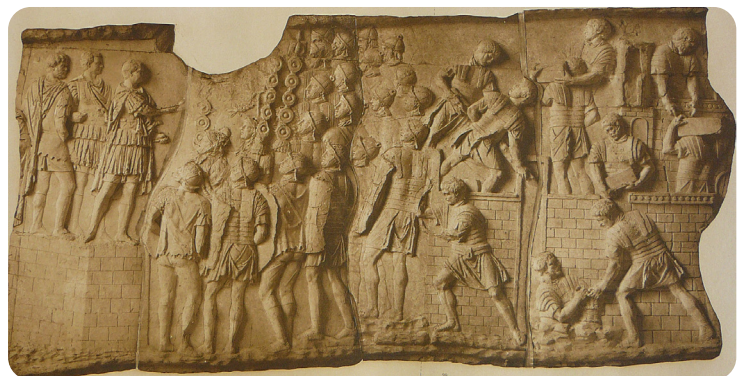
Slaves were men and women from the countries that had been conquered by the Roman army. They had no freedom and could be bought or sold. Slaves had many different roles and worked for their owners in homes, farms and mines. Many slaves were treated cruelly but some owners were kind and freed their slaves after many years of good service.



Relief carving of slaves washing their owner's hair

Army

Roman soldiers served in the army for 25 years. They were well trained, well equipped and disciplined. They were also skilful builders and built forts, bridges and roads in the countries that they conquered. They played an essential part in the life of Rome, because they conquered new lands, brought riches and slaves to Rome and defended the Empire from attack.



Relief carving of Roman soldiers building a fort

