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ROME BY LIGHT

See the Eternal City's ancient monuments
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ROME BY LIGHT

See the Eternal City in a whole new light—literally. **Tiffany Parks** explains.

Wandering through the ruins of Ancient Rome, it's impossible not to wonder what it must have looked like when it was new, before the ravages of time had sown their destructive work. It's natural to wish to be able to travel back through history to see these monuments in all their original glory. However, modern day denizens and visitors to Rome can take advantage of something their ancient counterparts couldn't have imagined in their wildest dreams: the magnificent sites illuminated by dramatic shafts of light that render them even more evocative and mysterious. When lit by the glow only modern technology can provide, a crumbling temple, the walls of an imperial palace, or a row of marble columns reaching toward the heavens, create a chiaroscuro masterpiece worthy of Caravaggio. So put off your sightseeing until after dark, when the power of electricity makes Rome truly eternal.

CINEMATOGRAPHIC CITY

It's not surprising that some of the most iconic and visually arresting films of all time have been shot in Rome. The Eternal City's art and monuments—ancient and otherwise—create a backdrop that can take any scene from lackluster to extraordinary. This is doubly the case when a genius cinematographer like Vittorio Storaro is behind the camera. Three-time Oscar-winner for his work on films *Apocalypse Now*, *Reds*, and *The Last Emperor*, Storaro has been listed as one of the ten most influential cinematographers in the history of film by the International Cinematographers Guild. One of Storaro's greatest passions is his native city, in particular, its ancient monuments.

In an exciting new project, Storaro has designed an innovative lighting system

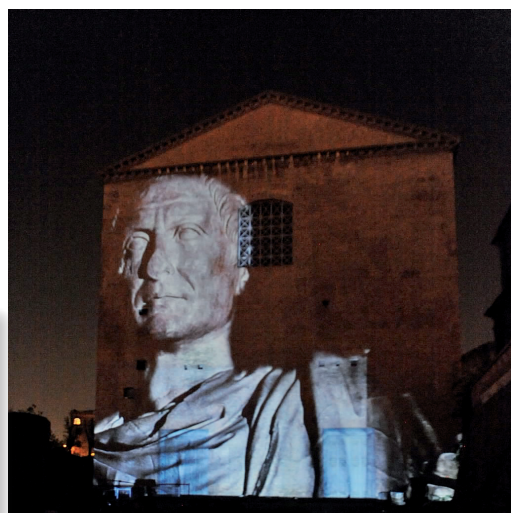
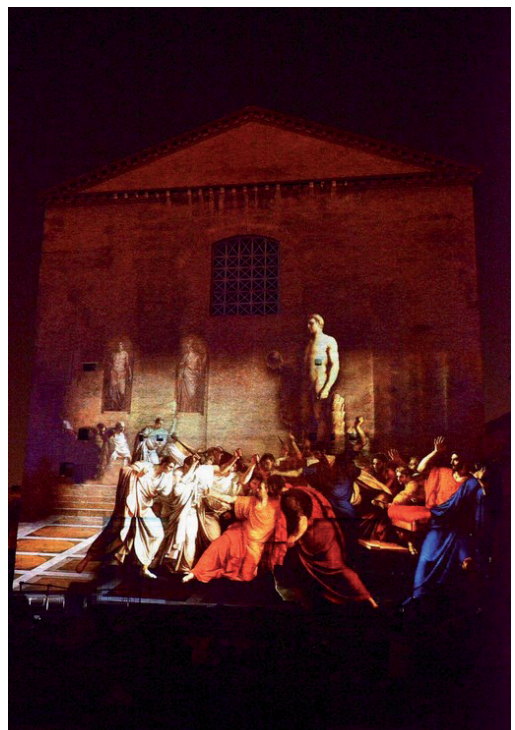
for one of the most important ancient sites in the city, the Imperial Fora. The fora that line the north side of the now-pedestrian-only Via dei Fori Imperiali, namely those of Augustus, Nerva, and Trajan, are illuminated as never before, thanks to a system of high-precision yet low-energy LED lights. Storaro used his legendary artistic vision, along with help from his architect daughter Francesca Storaro, to create a scene that is worthy of any Hollywood epic. Visitors can appreciate the delicate bas-reliefs on the 2nd-century AD column of Trajan, perhaps the most eye-popping sight in the area, in greater detail than ever before possible, or see Augustus' Temple of Mars surrounded by a halo of light, Storaro's concept for a symbol of the "*pax romana*," or the peace Augustus brought to the empire. Enjoy an evening stroll through this magical space that, just over a year ago, was a chaotic, traffic-clogged thoroughfare.

THE COLOSSEUM IN THE MOONLIGHT

The Colosseum is considered one of the most haunted places in the world, no doubt due to the dizzying numbers of people who lost their lives there—usually in exceedingly gruesome ways. In the late 19th

century, it was a popular place for nighttime visits, particularly for curious "Grand Tour" travelers like Daisy Miller, the heroine of Henry James' eponymous novella. But since it was transformed from an abandoned ruin into one of the world's most visited archeological sites in the early 20th century, visiting the interior of this massive monument after dark has simply not been an option. Until recently. For the past few years, the Colosseum has been opening its doors after hours during the warmer months in order to give visitors the opportunity to see the Colosseum in a whole





new light. On a daytime visit during the heat of high summer, the magnificent arena can feel like nothing so much as an over-crowded, scorching dust bowl. Now, evening guided group tours give eager visitors a completely different Colosseum experience, as well as an unforgettable night.

The 75-minute tour begins on the arena floor—a normally inaccessible area—where visitors can peer down into the eerie underground cavities of the hypogeum and gaze up at the succession of arches that make up the perimeter of the monument, rendered even more evocative by the dramatic lighting. The guides recount the history of the great amphitheater, from the famous gladiatorial duels to the wild beast hunts, as well as details of the architecture. Next, visitors head underground to tour the narrow passageways where gladiators and animals once waited before meeting their fate on the arena floor, utilizing primitive elevators that lifted them from the hypogeum to the bloody stage above. The visit culminates with a view from the Colosseum's highest accessible level, where a panorama that includes the Arch of Constantine, the Temple of Venus and Roma, and the slopes of the Palatine Hill awaits, all lit vividly against the indigo sky.

Virtual Time Travel

The Imperial Fora are getting more than just lit up this summer. The digital multi-media show that was launched last year at the Forum of Augustus in honor of 2000 years since the great emperor's death, is back with a vengeance. In fact, the project has now been expanded to

include the Forum of Caesar as well. Journalist Piero Angela and physicist Paco Lanciano are the masterminds behind this captivating project, making it possible to take a virtual trip back in time to the Rome of the Caesars. The experience begins with a walk through an ancient underground tunnel that leads to the usually off-limits archeological sites—a tunnel that is open to visitors for the first time since it was excavated in the last century.

Each emperor's forum was the physical representation of his power, incorporating a temple to a divinity particularly important to the respective emperor within the structure. The Forum of Julius Caesar, located south of Via dei Fori Imperiali near the Curia Julia, was inaugurated in 46 BC, just two years before Caesar's untimely death. In addition to the marvelous columned portico, the forum contained the Temple of Venus Genetrix, a goddess Caesar claimed was one of his own ancestors. Augustus' Forum, on the opposite side of the street, boasted the Temple of Mars the Avenger, a sanctuary that was considered in its time to be "greater than any in existence." Completed in 2 BC, the temple was conceptualized by Augustus after he successfully avenged his great-uncle Caesar, killing his assassins Brutus and Cassius in 42 BC. Cutting-edge multi-media effects recreate the original appearance of the forum, projecting images directly onto the ancient walls to give viewers a visual understanding of what the sites were truly like in their heyday. Meanwhile, the gripping narrative of Piero Angelo (translated into one of eight languages by way of personal earphones), leads audience members on this unique journey into the past.

○ IMPERIAL FORA ILLUMINATED

Vittorio Storaro's cinematographic lighting can be viewed any time of night free of charge along Via dei Fori Imperiali.

○ COLOSSEUM BY NIGHT

75-minute group tours run every Monday, Thursday, Friday,

and Saturday night from 8:20pm to midnight. €20 (€18 reduced). Reserve at www.coopculture.it.

○ VOYAGE INTO ANCIENT ROME

Forum of Augustus: Multi-media shows run daily every 20 minutes from 9pm to 12midnight. €15 (€10 reduced).

Forum of Caesar: Multi-media shows run daily every 20 minutes from 9:20pm to 11:50pm. €15 (€10 reduced.)

Combined ticket to both shows: €25 (€17 reduced). Disabled access available. Purchase tickets at www.viaggioneifori.it.