THE CITY OF ROME

Ancient Rome - the capital of the Empire and home of the Roman emperors - was a city of huge contrasts. As well as many huge, splendid public buildings, there were plenty of rickety, overcrowded apartment blocks, and while wealthy citizens enjoyed a life of incredible luxury, many ordinary Romans were desperately poor.

CITY OF MARBLE

Rome was constantly changing, as each emperor tried to leave his mark on the city by putting up impressive new buildings and monuments. The Emperor Augustus spent huge amounts of money on transforming Rome completely, boasting proudly that he had found it a city of bricks and left it a city of marble.

At the heart of the city was the Roman Forum - a large, open space used as a market square and meeting place. Around the Forum, there were basilicas - large buildings used as law courts - and grand temples. Near one end was the *Curia* - or Senate House. As Rome grew, the Roman Forum was no longer big enough for everyone to meet, so some emperors built their own larger *fora* nearby.

Here, you can see a reconstruction of the Roman Forum at the height of the Empire.

WALKING THE STREETS

Most streets in Rome were extremely narrow, unbearably crowded and incredibly noisy. Carts were banned from the city during daylight hours to try and make more room, and shopkeepers displayed their goods in the streets. The main streets were swept clean, but the smaller alleys could be ankle-deep in waste. People often threw their refuse out of the window - an added hazard for anyone passing by.

NIGHT LIFE

As soon as dusk fell, an endless stream of delivery carts began rumbling through the city. Rome had no streetlights, so at night the city was plunged into darkness. Thieves and murderers lurked on street corners, and wealthy citizens wouldn't leave home without a group of slaves to guard them. The poet Juvenal joked that it would be foolish to go out after dark without first making a will.

The buildings were faced with thin slices of gleaming white marble.

The temple of Castor and Pollux was dedicated to the twin sons of the god Jupiter.

The temple of the goddess Vesta, where the Vestal Virgins kept a sacred fire burning