

First in history: Rome's Colosseum opens its underground to public

- A Monitor Desk Report

Date: 30 June, 2021



Rome: The Colosseum in Rome has marked a huge milestone by opening its subterranean levels to the public.

It is not only the first time in 2,000 years that the area -- described as the "heart" of the building -- has been open; since the underground levels, or "hypogea," were where gladiators and animals waited before going into combat, this is the first time in the monument's history that the public has ever been allowed in.

Now, tourists will be able to walk through the passageways on a wooden platform and admire the corridors and archways which interconnected the hypogea between the rooms where gladiators and animals waited, before entering the elevators which would catapult them onto the arena.

✖ Back then, the hypogea were illuminated by candlelight. But with the arena's original ground level long destroyed, it is visible from the Colosseum's upper levels, and the sunlight filters down into its depths.

[Italy's Ministry of Culture](#) unveiled the enormous restoration of the vaults and passageways where those going into combat awaited. The works were a joint project in conjunction with

Italian fashion brand Tod's and company CEO Diego Della Valle attended an unveiling ceremony.

Speaking at the ceremony, Alfonsina Russo, Director of the Colosseum Archaeological Park, said that the works will allow people to understand better how the Colosseum used to function.

✖ "This restoration is absolutely important for the archaeological research because it enables us to reconstruct its history," she said.

"This was the backstage of the shows that went on in the area. [It is the location for] all the preparation, even the technology -- they brought props, men and animals up into the area through a series of elevators and cargo lifts."

The restoration project -- which has seen the entire Colosseum restored over the past decade -- was started by Tod's CEO Diego Della Valle and Rome's Archaeological Heritage Department in 2011. The fashion house has contributed EUR 25 million (USD 30 million) for the operation.

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