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Virtual Rome: Gladiator fights return to the Colosseum

Italian capital launches virtual tours of ancient Rome complete with gladiators, Vestal Virgins and Colosseum crowds.

By Nick Squires in Rome

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Archaeologists, architects, historians and designers have contributed to the technology

Vestal Virgins, bloodthirsty gladiators grappling with tigers and a portly toga-wearing guide are the highlights of a new high-tech attraction which aims to bring Ancient Rome to life.

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"3D Rewind Rome" opens this month in the Italian capital within sight of the Colosseum, the scene of fights to the death between gladiators, slaves and wild animals.

It blends video-game technology with animation to recreate life in the temples, tribunals and market places of the ancient city in 310AD, during the reign of Emperor Maxentius.

Gladiatorial scenes, graffiti-covered walls and dusty streets crowded with 60,000 virtual characters aim to give visitors a taste of what life was like in "Caput Mundi" – the centre of the ancient world.

"Now all of Rome is at your feet," says Sapietus, the chubby, balding 3D guide to a detailed virtual model of the city, developed by archaeologists, architects, historians and digital designers.

Tourists will be able to watch a rowdy Senate debate, see the plebeian goings-on of the working-class district of Suburra and get a glimpse into the hallowed sanctuary of the Vestal Virgins.

A financial crisis which sweeps the city will be all too familiar to contemporary viewers.

"Oh no! My life savings! I could have earned more by keeping my money under the mattress!" Sapietus complains.

The computer images are most startling during gladiatorial scenes in the Colosseum. At the preview, the audience wearing three-dimensional glasses leapt back when evil gladiator Bestia appeared to thrust his sword out of the screen.

The experience also includes glimpses of a gladiator locked in combat with a tiger.

The gladiators were brought to life with "motion capture" technology, using body-sensors on real people at the [modern-day Scuola Gladiatori in Rome](#), run by a local historical society.

The historical authenticity of Rewind Rome starts with its location. "When we were excavating the site we found the remains of barracks where the gladiators would live and train before walking through underground tunnels and emerging into the Colosseum," said Joel Myers, the British managing director of high-tech entertainment company Virtuality. "The aim is to help tourists better understand the archeological sites they see in Rome because very often they find them difficult to interpret."

- 3D Rewind Rome is at 5, Via Capo d'Africa, near the Colosseum, and opens on November 20. Bookings can be made now on the website, www.3drewind.com, which is in English and Italian. Adults: 10 euros; Children: 6.50 euros