*Competent Communicator 2: Organize your speech:*

**My Roman Holiday**

It used to be said with permissible license that digging anywhere in Rome, one finds history before one finds water. This turned out to be literally true when digging for Rome’s third metro rail turned into a major excavation, stalling the project but yielding many centuries old archaeological finds. Such is the omnipresence of historic art and architecture in Rome

Good afternoon TM o D, fellow Toast masters and welcome guests.

​When on your Roman holiday, be prepared to be overwhelmed by the City. Overwhelmed by its sheer size, its exquisite art and architecture and by its gourmet delights.

To start with, you will find that Rome is XXL.

Try the Colloseum for size. It could seat 50,000 people, which is more than the Wankhede Stadium in populous, 21st century Mumbai. But why? Because, twenty centuries ago, those rulers had the wisdom to recognise the importance of keeping its citizens happy and engaged. Incidentally, Julius Caesar was once in charge of mass entertainment, somewhat the equivalent of today’s Fun Manager. I hope you have the luck that I had: the night I chose to photograph the Colosseum. It was lit in golden light, indicating that a death row prisoner somewhere in the world has been spared his life. A happy irony, you will agree, that the centre of blood sport once should now celebrate escape from death. Two nights before, a photographer was murdered, not far from there. Therefore, as soon as I got a few pictures, I scooted to the nearby metro station and safely reached my room.

Another popular 70 mm setting is the Forum. Today, weeds have invaded the expanse, with only fragments of pillars and arches, shrines, temples and government buildings remaining, but it wouldn’t take hyper imagination to visualise life when Caesar and his entourage would pass to the beat of a hundred shoe –nailed hoods, making heads turn.

Adding to the sense of size is River Tuber winding through the city, a silent witness to history for 25 centuries. On either side of the BC-AD divide, the Roman Empire covered most land masses and waters across the globe. And Rome was *caput mundi* (capital of the world),

Rome was also the art capital of the world. Most so during Renaissance, the golden era for Italian art and architecture that featured Michelangelo, Bernini and Borromini among others. The Borghese Gallery, together with the Vatican Museum, holds the lion’s share of Italy's priceless art, the rest being in Uffizi in Florence. And while at Borghese, never mind the photography ban, you can take a snappy snap of David and move on. Art is ubiquitous in Rome, why, every door knob is a piece of art, representing the philosophy of art for art’s sake.

You will realise that Rome excelled not just in art, but also in architecture, engineering, mass entertainment, and of course, warfare. Arguably the most impressive architectural marvel of this period is the Pantheon. At 142 feet diameter, its perfectly hemispheric central dome and the eternal absoluteness of its geometry have inspired imitations including in the Vatican. Equally remarkable, though not visible, are the aqua ducts laid starting 312 BC, which still feed Rome’s water taps. Some of these achievements were a first for humanity, not just for Italy. Somewhat like American Neil Armstrong’s unsteady steps on the moon which came to be known as “a giant step for mankind”.

To introduce Italian cuisine to you will be an insult to both parties. But, some of what I learned at a meeting with Mr Olivetti, the Director General of the Slow movement, will interest you. The anti thesis of fast life and a fight against cultural invasion, Slow movement has been fighting to retain and regain Italy’s food diversity. I learned from Mr Olivetti that Italy produces over 600 varieties of vine and 410 kinds of cheese. These are vital ingredients that turn up on the dining table to orchestrate heavenly delights. And, how can I forget gelato, the Italian ice cream, especially the ginger flavour that the vivacious parlour girl offered me after confirming that I was from India.

Simply put, on your Roman holiday, you will be overwhelmed by its size, art and food. Rome will floor you with its bundle of gratification, for the intellect and all the senses. Rome is unique. It is steeped in history and legends. Obeying one of them, I threw a lone coin into the Trevi Fountain, which is believed to ensure one’s return. Therefore, I look forward to running into some of you on your Roman holiday, floppy hat and sun glasses and all, devouring a triple scoop of ginger gelato! Wouldn’t that be wonderful?

Bon Viagio. Ciao.