

When in Rome, do as the Romans do

Youtube: <https://youtu.be/N4yaX8NwsdE>

Today's vocabulary is a proverb. A proverb is a wise saying that gives you some advice for how you should live your life. Today's proverb is: *When in Rome, do as the Romans do*. *Rome*, of course, is the capital city of Italy. I know in many languages it's pronounced *Roma*, but in English, it's pronounced *Rome*. So the proverb means: when you go to Rome, you should do what the Romans are doing. Or, more broadly, it means anytime you go to a different place you should do what the local people are doing. For example, imagine this conversation of two foreigners who are in Japan:

“Why are you wearing kimonos?”

“Because this is Japan.”

“But you're not Japanese.”

“Yes, but you know what they say: *When in Rome, do as the Romans do*.”

Now this proverb, we don't always need to use it to describe a visit to a foreign country or a faraway city. It's just-- it can be used anytime you're in a new situation or a different place. Even something very simple, like going to your neighbor's house for dinner. Your neighbor may have slightly different customs for dinner than you do. But when in Rome, do as the Romans do, or when you're at your neighbor's house, you can follow your neighbor's customs. Or if you go to a different school, for example, and the different school has a slightly different routine than the routine you're used to at your school. When in Rome do as the Romans do, or when you're at a different school, you can follow their routine.

This proverb in conversation is almost always shortened. People seldom say the whole phrase: *When in Rome, do as the Romans do*. More often people will just say: *When in Rome* and leave the rest of it unsaid. For example: “You know what they say, *when in Rome*.”

Many countries have similar proverbs, but interestingly the nuance can be different from country to country. For example, in Japan there is a similar proverb: When you go to another village, you should follow the other village's rules. This seems to be the same proverb, and yet the nuance is different. In Japanese, it's used to say that you have a responsibility to follow the rules of the other village. You *must* follow the rules, it's your duty. But, on the other hand, in English when we use, *When in Rome*, we're often just talking about doing something that's convenient. It's more convenient for you to follow the local customs. It will cause less trouble. Also sometimes, not always but sometimes, *When in Rome* is used in English as an excuse for bad behavior. For example, imagine two people are at a party where there is a lot--there are a lot of people drinking alcohol. One of them starts to drink alcohol a lot.

The other one says, “You really shouldn't drink that much.”

He says, “I know but when in Rome.”

So he is using the fact that everyone else around him is doing something as an excuse for bad behavior himself. *When in Rome*. It's not always used like this, but it can be often used as an excuse for bad behavior. So let me know if you agree with the proverb, yes or no, and also let me know if you have any similar proverbs in your own language and what is the nuance of the proverbs in your own language. Is it for convenience, can it be an excuse for bad behavior or is it seen upon-- sorry, is it seen as a duty to adapt the local customs when you travel. Let me know what the proverb means in your own language.