Roman Houses

Most of Roman Britain was a wild place, with forests and mountains where few people lived. People mainly lived in small villages of wooden houses with thatched roofs, much as they had before the Romans arrived.

However, some wealthy Romans lived in villas and palaces. Villas were large farms with a big house for the owners. They had lots of servants and farm workers to help run the villa.

The floors of Roman buildings were often richly decorated with mosaics (tiny coloured stones). Mosaic floors were a statement of wealth and importance. Rich Romans decorated the floors of their main rooms with mosaics. These were stuck to the floor with mortar, a type of cement.

Some Roman homes were kept warm with an underfloor heating system called a 'hypocaust'. The floor was raised up by piles of tiles or stone pillars to allow warm air to circulate.

What were rich Romans town house like?

Wealthy Roman citizens in the towns lived in a domus. They were single-storey houses which were built around a courtyard known as an atrium. An atrium was a small open courtyard with rooms opening off it, where the children would play and in which there was a pool to collect rainwater.

A rich Roman house had many rooms including kitchen, bath, dining, bedrooms and rooms for slaves.
A long covered porch, or veranda, with a low wall and pillars, was built along the front of the house to keep the rooms cool in the summer.

At night and in bad weather, wooden shutters covered up the glassless windows so that the rooms were usually dark and gloomy inside. The only lamps were made of clay or metal and burned oil or fat.

**Click here for a plan of a Roman house**

Poor Romans lived in simple flats. These were called *insulae*. They often only contained one or two rooms. There was no running water.

**Roman Towns**

The Romans built many new towns which were full of fine buildings and temples. These were often protected by walls and there was everything a citizen of Roman Britain would need inside the town gate- houses, shops, meeting spaces, workshops, temples, toilets, bathhouses and an amphitheatre.

The Romans introduced the idea of living in big towns and cities. Roman towns were laid out in a grid. Streets criss-crossed the town to form blocks called ‘insulae’. In the middle was the ‘forum’, a big market square where people came to trade.

Many towns had running water and sewers. Aqueducts were bridges for bringing water to the towns.

The *forum* or market-place was the most important public area in a Roman town. It was a large courtyard where the townspeople would gather to listen to speeches and where local farmers and tradesmen could set up their stalls. At one side of the forum would be the basilica which was the law court and a town hall.

Some Roman towns continued to exist and still exist today. If a place-name has ‘chester’, ‘caster’ or ‘cester’ in it, it’s almost certainly Roman (for example, Gloucester, Doncaster and Manchester). The word ‘chester’ comes from the Latin word ‘castrum’ which means ‘a fort’.

London was a Roman city too, although they called it ‘Londinium’. When the Romans invaded, they built a fort beside the River Thames. This was where traders came from all over the empire to bring their goods to Britain. It grew and grew, until it was the most important city in Roman Britain.
Roman Buildings

Greek architecture influenced Roman builders with its use of columns and pediments (the triangular upper part of the front of a classical building). The Romans used these elements but added their own ideas too as they were excellent engineers. They found new ways to improve the structure of buildings. These ideas included the use of arches, vaults, and domes (a vault is an arch that forms a ceiling or a roof.)

Roman developments in building construction made it possible to build larger, taller buildings. Many modern buildings borrow Roman elements of design and structure. The dome of the U.S. Capitol building is a well-known example.

The Romans developed a form of concrete that was both light and strong. They poured the mixture into hollow walls or over curved forms to create strong vaults. Concrete is a common building material today.

Most of the Roman villas found by archaeologists in England, are in the south of England. The governor of Britain had a palace in London. Another palace was beside the sea, at Fishbourne (near Chichester in West Sussex)

The colosseum in Rome is another famous Roman building, an oval amphitheatre also known as the Flavian Amphitheatre. An amphitheatre is a Roman style theatre like we have today, but Romans used the colosseum (which could hold up to 80,000 spectators) for gladiatorial contests (fighting competitions), public spectacles such as mock sea battle, animal hunts, executions, re-enactments of famous battles, and dramas based on Classical mythology. The building ceased to be used for entertainment in the early medieval era. It was later reused for such purposes as housing, workshops, quarters for a religious order, a fortress, a quarry, and a Christian shrine.

Information sourced from: http://www.bbc.co.uk/guides/z2dr4wx
http://history.parkfielddict.co.uk/romans/roman-villas
http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/ancient-rome/roman-houses/
https://uk.pinterest.com/pin/570127634050327348/