The Romans got the idea of a bathhouse from the Greeks. The difference being that the Greeks had separate thermae (bathing areas) and the palestrae (exercise areas) and the Romans put these two things together in one building. In the Roman baths, there were tepidarium where the water was tepid, the calidarium, which has hot water and the frigidarium that had cold water. In addition to the thermae and the palestrae, the Romans added libraries, shops, lecture halls, and art galleries creating a community-gathering place. The baths were made possible in Rome because of the aqueducts that brought water from distant sources into their cities and towns and sewage systems. Roman hydraulic engineering allowed a constant flow of fresh water into the baths and outflow of used water, which eliminated the possibilities of water-borne diseases. During the time of Ancient Rome, public bathing was a daily ritual and social event. Because of this, by 400 A.D. there were more than 800 baths around. Some parts of the two largest baths, those of Caracalla and Diocletian, remain. Bathing was a public activity and for the Romans it was vital for their health and represented the refreshment of the mind, spirit and body. It was a public activity in Rome because only the wealthy could afford to have private baths. Even the poorest citizens could use the baths because they were either free or cheap to enter. The baths, especially the Baths of Caracalla and Diocletian, required a lot of employees to keep them running smoothly. Slaves and convicts did the hardest and most uncomfortable jobs and worked in the networks of service rooms, tunnels, and passageways beneath the baths. Those who worked above the ground at the actual bath areas were also slaves but some were actually paid employees. The baths of Rome were basically destroyed in 537 when the invading Goths destroyed the city’s aqueducts.

The Baths of Caracalla were built during the time of Ancient Rome between 212-217 CE. Caracalla’s Father, Septimius Severus, started the baths in 206 and then the baths were completed in 217 CE under the reign of Caracalla. Caracalla was one of 3rd century’s most brutal emperors. It was mainly built out of concrete and brick. The outer surfaces were faced with travertine and the inner walls with stucco, and marble, but today most of it has disappeared. The inside was also decorated with mosaics, frescos, and statues. The main buildings of the Baths of Caracalla are arranged around a central hall with a plaster for sports and exercise on each side. Originally, the Baths of the Caracalla were 228 meters long, 116 meters wide, and 38.5 meters tall, occupying thirty acres and fitting 1,600 bathers at once. The design of the baths included high vaulted rooms, groin vaults, dome octagons, semi-circular chambers, and column porticoes. Beneath the rooms of the baths there is a network of service and storage rooms, tunnels, and corridors that made the functions of the baths. Also that was where the heating plant and its furnaces and water supply systems were located. Because the Baths of Caracalla were located at the edge of the ancient city and therefore wasn’t as destroyed as much as the other baths and is the most preserved. Unfortunately during the time of the Renaissance in the 16th century some of the decorations have were taken because of the desire for antiquities and need for building materials. The Baths of Caracalla held opera performances beginning in 1937 during the rule of Mussolini and stopped in 1993. Today, the Baths of Caracalla are a tourist attraction.
The largest of the baths in Rome are the Baths of Diocletian, which were commissioned by Maximian in 298 A.D and finished by emperor Diocletian between 305 and 306 A.D. Like the Baths of Caracalla, the Baths of Diocletian were made from concrete and the design included central vaults and decorations of stucco, statues, and frescos. Although the Baths of Caracalla and the Baths of Diocletian were roughly the same size, a big portion of the Baths of Caracalla was gardens where as in the Baths of Diocletian most of the area was dedicated to baths. The Baths of Diocletian could fit about 3,000 bathers. It was located near the Viminal Hill, near Termini. Because of this the Baths of Diocletian have been altered and destroyed more then the Baths of Caracalla. From the Middle Ages until the 16th century, many popes have used the ruins of the Baths of Diocletian for monasteries, granaries, and prisons. In the 16th century, Michelangelo converted the main hall of the Baths of Diocletian into the church of S. Maria degli Angeli. Since Michelangelo respected classic antiquity, he preserved the vaulted hall and the eight giant red granite original columns, and tried to change very little of it. A huge portion of the area was destroyed during the 1870’s during Rome’s urban development. Since 1889, part of the central bath block houses the National Roman Museum.

It’s hard to actually picture what the Baths of Caracalla and the Baths of Diocletian were like when they were originally built and used because the areas are pretty destroyed and redone, especially that of Diocletian. The many different functions and activities available in the Baths of Caracalla and the Baths of Diocletian reminds me of a fancy resort or a modern-day community center like the YMCA. During my trip in Budapest, we went to the Hungarian baths. It was interesting actually experience what going to the baths would be like and to see the differences between the Hungarian baths and the Roman ones. For instance, the Hungarian baths are just baths and don’t have other things inside of it like the Roman baths. I think it would be amazing to see the original Baths of Caracalla and Baths of Diocletian when they were finished being built in Ancient Rome. Based on the reconstruction pictures, I feel like they would have been absolutely stunning. I’m sure the Romans back when the baths were impressed by the size and beauty of the baths.
