# English Learning for Curious Minds

# Episode #130
# Rose Island
# 5th Feb, 2021

[00:00:00] Hello, hello hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:00:11] The show where you can listen to fascinating stories, and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:21] I'm Alastair Budge and today we are going to be talking about Rose Island, the time that an Italian engineer built an island off the coast of Italy and declared it to be its own independent nation.

[00:00:36] You might have seen that Netflix released a film about Rose Island in late 2020.

[00:00:42] But in today's episode we are going to go a little deeper.

[00:00:47] We'll start by telling the real story of Rose Island - how it all got going, what happened, and where you can find Rose Island today.

[00:00:57] Then we'll also talk about **attempts**[1] since then to create new countries, about what it actually means to be a country, and ask ourselves where the countries of the future might come from.

[00:01:11] Before we get right into that though, let me just quickly remind you that you can follow along to this episode with the subtitles, the transcript and its key vocabulary, so you don't miss a word and build up your vocabulary as you go along, over on the website, which is leonardoenglish.com.

[00:01:28] The website is also home to all of our bonus episodes, plus guides on how to improve your English in a more interesting way. So if you haven't yet checked that out, then the place to go to is leonardoenglish.com.

[00:01:43] Ok then, Rose Island.

[00:01:46] Our story starts with a young engineer called Giorgio Rosa, from Bologna, in Northern Italy.

[00:01:54] Rosa, if you hadn't guessed, means Rose in Italian.

[00:01:58] Rosa was born in 1925, and graduated as a mechanical engineer in 1950.

---

[1] times you try to do something

[00:02:07] The post war years, as we all know, were a time of free thinking, of challenging the **status quo**[2]. Italy was no exception, and indeed Italy had one of the largest student movements in Europe.

[00:02:21] Bologna was, and still is, a university town, and was later to be a centre of student **protests**[3].

[00:02:29] Rosa was, **by all accounts**[4], **keen**[5] to experiment with new styles of buildings and new engineering concepts, and was sick and tired of what he saw as **excessive**[6] government **bureaucracy**[7] that stopped him from doing so.

[00:02:46] In 1958, when he was 33 years old, he had the idea of creating a platform out in the Adriatic Sea, off the coast of Italy opposite a city called Rimini.

[00:03:00] Rimini, if you don't know where it is, is a bit further south than Bologna and just slightly north of Florence, on the eastern side of Italy.

---

[2] the present, normal situation

[3] public displays opposing an idea or situation

[4] according to what most people say

[5] very interested

[6] more than is necessary

[7] the system for controlling a country

[00:03:10] It's known as a summer, seaside **spot**[8], and is full of bars, restaurants, nightclubs and so on.

[00:03:18] Rosa had this idea to build a small island off the coast of Rimini, but **crucially**[9], the island would be more than 6 nautical miles, which is just under 10 kilometres, from the Italian coast.

[00:03:34] The reason why this is important will be familiar for those of you who remember one of the first episodes we ever recorded, on Who Owns The Sea.

[00:03:43] It's that, in 1958 at least, the territorial waters of a country **extended**[10] only 6 miles out from the coast.

[00:03:53] So, from the Italian coast until 6 miles out to sea was still part of Italy, it **belonged**[11] to the Italian state.

[00:04:01] But if you went out past 6 miles, it was no longer part of Italy, it was international waters, it didn't **belong** to anyone.

---

[8] place

[9] very importantly

[10] go from one place to another

[11] to be owned be

[00:04:10] So, going further than 6 miles out to sea meant that anyone technically had the right to do anything - this territory didn't **belong** to Italy any more than it **belonged** to Bhutan, or to Rosa.

[00:04:25] So, in 1958, Rosa started planning out his construction.

[00:04:31] He didn't have external investors, he didn't have any bank providing him with a big **loan**[12] to build an island, he was on his own, financially at least.

[00:04:42] The sea was about 40 metres deep, and it was 6 miles out to sea.

[00:04:48] The Adriatic is relatively calm, it's not like the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, but there were storms, large waves and so on.

[00:04:57] So, actually building an island in the middle of the sea that is **structurally sound**[13], that is safe, is **no mean feat**[14], it's not easy.

[00:05:07] To build it, Rosa **pioneered**[15] a concept that is very interesting, and allowed him to build a **proper**[16] **structure**[17] that was structurally safe.

---

[12] money that is given by a bank and is to be paid back over a long period of time

[13] not going to fall down

[14] not easy

[15] invented

[16] suitable, real

[17] something that has been built

[00:05:19] How he did this was by **dragging**[18] large, wide, **hollow**[19] pipes out to sea.

[00:05:25] These were **steel**[20] pipes, but when he was **dragging** them they didn't sink to the bottom because they were **sealed**[21], they were closed, and they were filled with air.

[00:05:37] So, much like huge **steel** ships don't sink to the bottom if they have enough **buoyant**[22] material inside, material which keeps them **afloat**[23], nor did Rosa's pipes.

[00:05:49] When he managed to bring the pipes to the site he had in mind, he dropped them to the bottom, so that they filled with water and stood up vertically on the seabed.

[00:06:01] He then put steel poles inside the large pipes, and pushed them deep into the ocean floor.

[00:06:09] The final stage, at least from the point of view of creating the legs for the island, was to fill the pillars with **concrete**[24], so that they didn't move.

---

[18] pulling

[19] having a hole in the middle

[20] a strong metal that is a mixture of carbon and iron

[21] closed

[22] able to float

[23] floating on water

[24] a hard building material

[00:06:19] Now it was just a case of putting the island on top.

[00:06:23] I say 'just' - evidently it wasn't completely simple - but the most complicated part of building the island was creating the legs for it to stand on.

[00:06:35] Rosa then added five floors to the island, and from **afar**[25] it looked a little bit like an **oil rig**[26].

[00:06:44] He even **drilled**[27] all the way down, 280 metres down, deep through the **seabed**[28], to a source of freshwater, so that the island had its own fresh water on tap.

[00:06:57] From the initial idea through to the final construction took almost 10 years, but by 1967 it was complete, and officially opened its doors to tourists on August 20, 1967.

[00:07:14] It was about 400 square metres, had a bar, a restaurant, a source of freshwater, and of course, a nightclub and a souvenir shop.

---

[25] from a long distance

[26] a large structure at sea used to remove oil from under the ground

[27] made a long, thin hole in the ground

[28] the solid surface of the sea

[00:07:22] During its construction, it was considered a bit of an **eccentricity**[29], with Rosa being a mad engineer that was doing something weird and strange, but that probably wouldn't **harm**[30] anyone.

[00:07:36] Tourists could come and visit from the **mainland**[31], and there were boats that left every day from Rimini to take tourists to the **concrete** island in the sea.

[00:07:47] So far so good.

[00:07:49] But on the first of May, 1968, Rosa did something that caught the attention of the authorities, not just in Rimini, but also in Rome.

[00:08:00] He declared his island to be an independent republic, with a President, a Finance Minister, a Minister for Internal Affairs, and a Minister for Foreign Affairs.

[00:08:12] It had its own **stamps**[32], and it set out plans to develop its own money, called milla.

[00:08:19] It was to be called The Republic of Rose Island, or Respubliko de la Insulo de la Rozoj in Esperanto, which was chosen to be the official language of the island.

---

[29] strange and unusual

[30] damage, hurt

[31] the main part of a country (on land)

[32] small pieces of paper fixed to an envelope before it is posted

[00:08:31] By the way, if you're interested in learning more about Esperanto, there's an episode on that too, it's number 69.

[00:08:38] As an independent republic, Rose Island wouldn't be part of Italy.

[00:08:44] It wouldn't need to respect Italian laws, it wouldn't need to use Italian money, and it wouldn't need to pay taxes to Italy.

[00:08:53] On the mainland, politicians scrambled to try to understand the legality, and the **implications**[33], of this.

[00:09:02] Could they actually do it?

[00:09:04] Was The Republic of Rose Island actually independent of Italy?

[00:09:09] If it was, it set a dangerous **precedent**[34], as theoretically anyone could set up their own republic if they went more than 10 km out from the coast.

[00:09:21] This was all going on at a particularly **sensitive**[35] time.

[00:09:25] Firstly, 1968 was a year of student protests throughout Europe, including in Italy.

---

[33] possible future consequences

[34] something that has happened in the past and therefore can happen in the future

[35] easy affected, fragile

[00:09:32] 1968 was also the start of what's now called The Years of Lead, Gli Anni Di Piombo, in Italy, which was a period of around 20 years of political **turmoil**[36].

[00:09:45] It was also right in the middle of the Cold War, and on the other side of Rose Island, across the Adriatic Sea, was Yugoslavia, led by the Communist leader Tito.

[00:09:56] And if you're **keen** on learning more about Tito, you'll want to listen to episode number 84.

[00:10:02] So, the late 60s was a very politically sensitive time, both internally in Italy and on a more global level.

[00:10:12] The existence of Rose Island was debated by politicians, and it was almost universally criticised, both by those on the right and the left.

[00:10:24] The central state, as you might imagine, was opposed to it, as they feared that this would result in a loss of tax revenues as well as set a **precedent** that this was something that other people could do.

[00:10:39] This also scared the Communists, as if you have a **reduction**[37] in taxes and a **reduction** in the state, that's not going to go down well with a political belief that focuses on the state paying for everything.

---

[36] a state of confusion

[37] making something smaller

[00:10:52] And for those on the right, they feared that this new island could be some kind of **hotbed**[38] of communism, a communist **hotspot**[39] just a short distance from the Italian mainland.

[00:11:05] If it became a communist republic, not only was it uncomfortably close to Italy, but there was also the accusation that Soviet nuclear submarines could hide under it, ready for an attack on Italy.

[00:11:20] And finally, there was the fear that it would be turned into some sort of Italian Las Vegas, a **den of iniquity**[40] where there was **gambling**[41], prostitution, and all sorts of activities that were illegal on the mainland.

[00:11:36] Given all of this, and the almost universal negative feeling by the authorities towards the island, the Italian government was quick to act.

[00:11:46] 55 days after independence was first proclaimed, the Italian police arrived and took control of the island.

---

[38] a place where an activity is concentrated

[39] a place where an activity is concentrated

[40] a place where immoral, bad things happen

[41] when people risk money on games

[00:11:55] They put a **blockade**[42] around it, a **barrier**[43] around the island, meaning that nobody could get onto it.

[00:12:02] Rose Island was dead, the dream was over, but the island was still there.

[00:12:07] It wasn't to last for long though. In February of the following year, February 1969, the Italian police **strapped**[44] two **tonnes**[45] of explosives to the pillars of Rose Island and **blew it up**[46].

[00:12:21] The pillars were **exceptionally**[47] strong, and they had to try twice to actually destroy the **structure**.

[00:12:28] Even after two attempts, the platform didn't **sink**[48] right away, and it took a storm later on in the month for it to **sink** to the ground.

[00:12:39] If you watch the Netflix film there is a very dramatic scene with the Italian navy bombing the island and Rosa and his colleagues standing there holding hands as the bombs explode nearer and nearer to the island.

---

[42] when an area is surrounded by soldiers

[43] a fence or gate that stops people passing through

[44] if you strap something to something else, you fix it in place

[45] 1 tonne = 1,000 kg

[46] made it explode

[47] very

[48] to go to the bottom of the sea (or a body of water)

[00:12:53] But, I'm sorry to say, that just didn't happen.

[00:12:57] The island **sunk**[49] to the bottom of the sea, nobody was harmed in the process, and that is where the island has remained ever since.

[00:13:06] And while you might think that this was a national, or perhaps even international story at the time, there's not that much evidence that it was particularly well-known at all until Netflix made a film about it last year.

[00:13:21] Not of course that this is **conclusive**[50] evidence, but I asked my Italian **in-laws**[51], who were teenagers at the time, and several Italian friends, and nobody had any memory of it at all.

[00:13:34] Indeed, outside of Rimini the story was really not very well known at all.

[00:13:40] But, to those who knew about it, Rose Island represented possibility.

[00:13:46] Shortly after Rose Island was destroyed, and on the other side of the world, an American millionaire who had made his money in Las Vegas real estate declared his own independent state.

---

[49] went to the bottom of the sea (or a body of water)

[50] showing that something is true

[51] parents of your husband/wife

[00:13:59] It was called the Republic of Minerva, and was built on an **artificial**[52] island off a **reef**[53] in the Pacific Ocean, near Tonga.

[00:14:09] Independence was declared on the 19th of January, 1972, but just over a month later, on the 24th of February, Tonga made a **claim**[54] on the territory, it was said that this wasn't an independent state, but actually part of Tonga.

[00:14:26] And this **claim** was accepted by all of the other neighbouring nations.

[00:14:31] So that was the end of the Republic of Minerva.

[00:14:35] And while in the 1960s or 1970s the idea of building your own little state might have been quite fun, and interesting from an ideological point of view, in recent years the idea of building a new independent nation has gained more and more **traction**[55].

---

[52] made by people, not nature

[53] a line of rocks or sand just above the surface

[54] say that something belongs to you

[55] if an idea gains traction, it becomes popular

[00:14:54] Especially for people with **libertarian**[56] beliefs and lots of money, creating your own island offers you the ability to be completely independent from governments, which if you are **libertarian** you probably don't have such a **high opinion**[57] of.

[00:15:09] It also **exempts**[58] you from paying taxes, and if you have a lot of money, which does often seem to be the case with **prominent**[59] **libertarians**[60], this is understandably an attractive **proposition**[61].

[00:15:22] Peter Thiel, the secretive Silicon Valley billionaire, has been a **vocal proponent**[62] of the creation of new, independent states, and has invested in companies that are trying to develop them.

[00:15:36] None have been successfully developed so far, but the reasons for this are mainly **regulatory**[63], rather than technological.

---

[56] someone who believes that people should be free to think what they want, with minimal government influence

[57] if you have a high opinion of something, you respect it

[58] allows you to not to something

[59] very well known and important

[60] people who believe in small government

[61] idea, offer

[62] someone who speaks in public about why something is good

[63] from a legal point of view

[00:15:45] That's to say that from an engineering **standpoint**[64], making your own **structure** isn't too difficult. But actually making it work from a legal, **regulatory** point of view, is a lot harder.

[00:15:58] To the **proponents**[65] of the idea of the creation of new, **libertarian**, independent states, the argument goes that you can choose where you want to live, with people who share your ideas, values, religions, **customs**[66] and how you think a state should be run.

[00:16:16] At the moment we don't really get much choice in the matter.

[00:16:20] You are born in a country, it has a government, and yes you might have the opportunity every few years to express your opinion on whom you would like to lead the country, just moving to another country isn't always possible.

[00:16:36] Plus, most countries have **inefficient**[67] governments that waste your money, **so the argument goes**[68], and in a world of thousands of independent small countries you could choose to go to the most efficient one, and the one that provided the best

---

[64] point of view

[65] people who believe something is good and speak publicly about it

[66] normal behaviours

[67] not working well

[68] used when you are explaining the point of view of another group

value for money and best suited your values, rather than whatever country you were born in.

[00:16:57] And in a world that is more and more populated, with cities and towns that are more and more **crowded**[69], and with technology that allows us to look further and **further afield**[70], not only into the oceans, but into space, this **libertarian** vision of the future could even be extended to allow you to choose not just what city you wanted to live in, not just what country, but also what planet.

[00:17:23] Rosa's **concrete utopia**[71] was just a 400 square metre **concrete** platform off the Italian coast, but its story does raise some really **thought-provoking**[72] questions.

[00:17:35] What is a country?

[00:17:37] Who should choose whether a country should or shouldn't exist?

[00:17:42] When, and where and under what conditions should new countries be able to be created?

---

[69] full of people

[70] further away

[71] a perfect society

[72] making you think

[00:17:49] And on a personal choice level, assuming that you could live in any country, assuming that this country was built up from nothing, what would that country look like?

[00:18:00] To most of us, it might not be a 400 square metre **concrete** platform in the sea, but if you think of the country of your dreams, your own personal **utopia**, it's probably not exactly the one you live in right now.

[00:18:15] And in a universe where new countries can be created, on the land, on the sea, and even in space, whether this is in 50, 100, or 500 years time, the possibility of being able to choose exactly the country you want to live in is understandably **appealing**[73].

[00:18:34] And if this universe of the future, of thousands of different **micronations**[74], proves to be true then history will surely look back at Giorgio Rosa as a visionary that was born 500 years before his time.

[00:18:50] OK then that is it for Rose Island.

[00:18:54] I hope that it's been an interesting one, and that you've learnt something new.

---

[73] attractive

[74] very small nations, often not recognised as full nation states

[00:18:59] Especially for the Italian members, I would love to know what you thought of this episode.

[00:19:04] Had you heard about the story of Rose Island - do you remember it, or do you remember hearing about its story? I'd love to know.

[00:19:12] You can head right in to our community forum, which is at community.leonardoenglish.com and get chatting away to other curious minds.

[00:19:21] And as a final reminder, if you are looking to improve your English in a more interesting way, to join a community of curious minds from all over the world, to unlock the transcripts, the subtitles, and the key vocabulary, and to support a more interesting way of improving your English, then the place to go to for that is leonardoenglish.com

[00:19:42] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English.

[00:19:48] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe, and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF PODCAST]

# Key vocabulary

| Word | Definition |
| --- | --- |
| **Attempts** | times you try to do something |
| **Status quo** | the present, normal situation |
| **Protests** | public displays opposing an idea or situation |
| **By all accounts** | according to what most people say |
| **Keen** | very interested |
| **Excessive** | more than is necessary |
| **Bureaucracy** | the system for controlling a country |
| **Spot** | place |
| **Crucially** | very importantly |
| **Extended** | go from one place to another |
| **Belonged** | to be owned be |
| **Belong** | to be owned be |
| **Loan** | money that is given by a bank and is to be paid back over a long period of time |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Structurally sound** | not going to fall down |
| **No mean feat** | not easy |
| **Pioneered** | invented |
| **Proper** | suitable, real |
| **Structure** | something that has been built |
| **Dragging** | pulling |
| **Hollow** | having a hole in the middle |
| **Steel** | a strong metal that is a mixture of carbon and iron |
| **Sealed** | closed |
| **Buoyant** | able to float |
| **Afloat** | floating on water |
| **Concrete** | a hard building material |
| **Afar** | from a long distance |
| **Oil rig** | a large structure at sea used to remove oil from under the ground |
| **Drilled** | made a long, thin hole in the ground |

**Seabed**          the solid surface of the sea

**Eccentricity**          strange and unusual

**Harm**          damage, hurt

**Mainland**          the main part of a country (on land)

**Stamps**          small pieces of paper fixed to an envelope before it is posted

**Implications**          possible future consequences

**Precedent**          something that has happened in the past and therefore can happen in the

future

**Sensitive**          easy affected, fragile

**Turmoil**          a state of confusion

**Reduction**          making something smaller

**Hotbed**          a place where an activity is concentrated

**Hotspot**          a place where an activity is concentrated

**Den of iniquity**          a place where immoral, bad things happen

**Gambling**          when people risk money on games

**Blockade**          when an area is surrounded by soldiers

| | |
|---|---|
| **Barrier** | a fence or gate that stops people passing through |
| **Strapped** | if you strap something to something else, you fix it in place |
| **Tonnes** | 1 tonne = 1,000 kg |
| **Blew it up** | made it explode |
| **Exceptionally** | very |
| **Sink** | go to the bottom of the sea (or a body of water) |
| **Sunk** | went to the bottom of the sea (or a body of water) |
| **Conclusive** | showing that something is true |
| **In-laws** | parents of your husband/wife |
| **Artificial** | made by people, not nature |
| **Reef** | a line of rocks or sand just above the surface |
| **Claim** | say that something belongs to you |
| **Traction** | if an idea gains traction, it becomes popular |
| **Libertarian** | someone who believes that people should be free to think what they want, with minimal government influence |
| **High opinion** | if you have a high opinion of something, you respect it |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Exempts** | allows you to not to something |
| **Prominent** | very well known and important |
| **Libertarians** | people who believe in small government |
| **Proposition** | idea, offer |
| **Vocal proponent** | someone who speaks in public about why something is good |
| **Regulatory** | from a legal point of view |
| **Standpoint** | point of view |
| **Proponents** | people who believe something is good and speak publicly about it |
| **Customs** | normal behaviours |
| **Inefficient** | not working well |
| **So the argument goes** | used when you are explaining the point of view of another group |
| **Crowded** | full of people |
| **Further afield** | further away |
| **Utopia** | a perfect society |
| **Thought-provoking** | making you think |

**Appealing**      attractive

**Micronations**      very small nations, often not recognised as full nation states


*We'd love to get your feedback on this podcast.*

*What did you like? What could we do better?*

*What did you struggle to understand?*

*Let us know in the forum community.leonardoenglish.com*