

Italy



COVID-19 information: There are no COVID-19 restrictions in effect for Italy.

See www.italia.it (<http://www.italia.it/en/useful-info/covid-19-updates-information-for-tourists.html>) for updates.

(Information last updated 13 Aug 2022)

Italy (<https://www.italia.it/en>) (Italian: *Italia*), officially the **Italian Republic** (*Repubblica italiana*), was once the core of the mighty Roman Empire, and the cradle of the Renaissance. Along with Greece, it is regarded as the "birthplace" of Western culture, and it is also home to the greatest number of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the world, including high art and monuments.

Italy is famous for its delicious cuisine, trendy fashions, luxury sports cars and motorcycles, diverse regional cultures and dialects, as well as for its various landscapes from the seas to the Alps and Apennines, which makes reason for its nickname *Il Bel Paese* (the Beautiful Country).

In the shape of a boot, the country continues to be one of the world's most influential countries. It is a member of the European Union and shares borders with France, Switzerland, Austria, and Slovenia. There are thousands of things to do in this mesmerising country, and if you want to experience what living the life feels like, you're bound to find it in Italy.

Regions

Northwest Italy (Piedmont, Liguria, Lombardy and Aosta Valley)

Home of the Italian Riviera, including Portofino and the Cinque Terre. The Alps and world-class cities like the industrial capital of Italy (Turin), its largest port (Genoa) and the main business hub of the country (Milan) are near beautiful landscapes like the Lake Como and Lake Maggiore area and lesser-known Renaissance treasures like Mantova and Bergamo.

Northeast Italy (Emilia-Romagna, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Trentino-Alto Adige and Veneto)

From the canals of Venice to

the gastronomic capital Bologna, from impressive mountains such as the Dolomites and first-class ski resorts like Cortina d'Ampezzo to the delightful roofscapes of Parma and Verona, these regions offer much to see and do. German-speaking South Tyrol and the cosmopolitan city of Trieste offer a uniquely Central European flair.

Central Italy (Lazio, Abruzzo, Marche, Tuscany and Umbria)

This region breathes history and art. Rome boasts many of the remaining wonders of the Roman Empire and some of the world's best-known landmarks, combined with a vibrant, big-city feel. Florence, cradle of the Renaissance, is Tuscany's top attraction, and the magnificent countryside and nearby cities like Siena, Pisa and Lucca also offer a rich history and heritage. Abruzzo is dotted with picturesque cities such as L'Aquila, Chieti and Vasto, as well as Perugia, Gubbio and Assisi in Umbria.

Southern Italy (Apulia, Basilicata, Calabria, Campania and Molise)

Bustling Naples, the dramatic ruins of Pompeii and Herculaneum, the romantic Amalfi Coast and Capri, laidback Apulia, the stunning beaches of Calabria, and up-and-coming agritourism make the region a great place to explore. A significant portion of people of Italian descent in various parts of the world (the United States in particular) have ancestors from Southern Italy.

Sicily

The beautiful island is famous for archaeology, seascape and some of Italy's finest cuisine.

Sardinia

Large, gorgeous island some 250 km west of the Italian coastline offers mountains, beaches and the sea with some of the oldest historical structures dating back to the Nuragic Age.



Italy regions - Color-coded map

San Marino and the Vatican City are two microstates surrounded by Italy. As they use the euro, the Italian language and have no border controls, they are easy to visit. Another micro-state, according to some, is SMOM. That stands for the Sovereign Military Order of Malta; it issues its own passports and has two

locations in Rome: one at Via Condotti 68 near the Spanish Steps, the second on Aventine Hill where you can not enter, but can look through their famous keyhole, which provides a view through a well-tended garden that reveals three independent states: the SMOM, the Vatican City and Rome, Italy.

Cities

There are hundreds of Italian cities. Here are **nine** of its most famous:



Rome (seen from Trinità dei Monti)



Florence (River Arno, with Ponte Vecchio in the foreground)

- **1 Rome** (*Roma*) — The Eternal City has shrugged off sacks and fascists, urban planning disasters and traffic snarls and is as impressive to the visitor now as two thousand years ago
- **2 Bologna** — one of the world's great university cities that is filled with history, culture, technology and food
- **3 Florence** (*Firenze*) — the Renaissance city known for its architecture and art that had a major impact throughout the world
- **4 Genoa** (*Genova*) — an important medieval maritime republic; it's a port city with art and architecture
- **5 Milan** (*Milano*) — one of the main fashion cities of the world, but also Italy's most important centre of trade and business
- **6 Naples** (*Napoli*) — one of the oldest cities of the Western world, with a historic city centre that is a UNESCO World Heritage Site
- **7 Pisa** — one of the medieval maritime republics, it is home to the famed Leaning Tower of Pisa
- **8 Turin** (*Torino*) — a well-known industrial city, home of FIAT, other automobiles and the aerospace industry. Le Corbusier defined Turin as "the city with the most beautiful natural location in the world"
- **9 Venice** (*Venezia*) — one of the most beautiful cities in Italy, known for its history, art, and of course its world-famous canals

Other destinations

- **1 Amalfi Coast** (*Costiera Amalfitana*) — stunningly beautiful rocky coastline, so popular that private cars are banned in the summer months
- **2 Capri** — the famed island in the Bay of Naples, which was a favored resort of the Roman emperors
- **3 Cinque Terre** — five tiny, scenic, towns strung along the steep vineyard-laced coast of Liguria
- **4 Italian Alps** (*Alpi*) — some of the most beautiful mountains in Europe, including Mont Blanc and Mount Rosa
- **5 Lake Como** (*Lago di Como*) — its atmosphere has been appreciated for its beauty and uniqueness since Roman times
- **6 Lake Garda** (*Lago di Garda*) — a beautiful lake in Northern Italy surrounded by many small villages

- **7 Pompeii** and **8 Herculaneum** (*Ercolano*) — two suburbs of Naples covered by an eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in AD 79, now excavated to reveal life as it was in Roman times
- **9 Taormina** — a charming hillside town on the east coast of Sicily
- **10 Vesuvius** (*Monte Vesuvio*) — the famous volcano with a stunning view of the Bay of Naples

Understand



Capital	Rome
Currency	euro (EUR)
Population	60.3 million (2020)
Electricity	230 volt / 50 hertz (Europlug, Schuko, Type L)
Country code	+39
Time zone	Europe/Rome
Emergencies	112, 113 (police), 115 (fire department), 118 (emergency medical services)
Driving side	right
	edit on Wikidata

Italy is largely a peninsula situated on the Mediterranean Sea, bordering [France](#), [Switzerland](#), [Austria](#), and [Slovenia](#) in the north. The boot-shaped country is surrounded by the Ligurian Sea, the Sardinian Sea and the Tyrrhenian Sea in the west, the Sicilian and Ionian Sea in the South, and Adriatic Sea in the East. Italian is the official language spoken by the majority of the population, but as you travel throughout the country, you will find there are distinct Italian dialects corresponding to the region you are in. Italy has a diverse landscape, but it is primarily mountainous, with the Alps and the Apennines. Italy has two major islands: [Sardinia](#), off the west coast of Italy, and [Sicily](#), just off the southern tip (the "toe") of the boot. Italy has a population of around 60 million. The capital is [Rome](#).

History

Prehistory

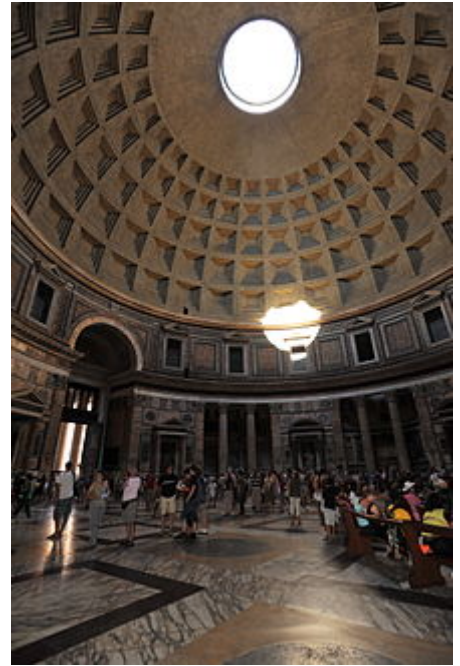
There have been humans on the Italian peninsula for at least 200,000 years. The Etruscan civilization lasted from prehistory to the 2nd century BC. The Etruscans flourished in the centre and north of what is now Italy, particularly in areas now represented by northern [Lazio](#), [Umbria](#) and [Tuscany](#). [Rome](#) was dominated by the Etruscans until the Romans sacked the nearby Etruscan city of Veii in 396 BC. In the 8th and 7th

centuries BC, Greek colonies were established in Sicily and the southern part of the Italy and the Etruscan culture rapidly became influenced by that of Greece. This is well illustrated at some excellent Etruscan museums; Etruscan burial sites are also well worth visiting.

The Roman Empire

See also: [Roman Empire](#), [Latin Europe](#)

Ancient Rome was at first a small village founded around the 8th century BC. In time, it grew into one of the most powerful empires the world has ever seen, surrounding the whole Mediterranean, extending from the northern coast of [Africa](#) to as far north as the southern part of [Scotland](#). The Roman Empire greatly influenced Western civilisation. Its steady decline began in the 2nd century AD, with a "crisis" in the 3rd century AD that hit particularly hard, bringing leaders who mostly relied on the military and were often deposed in just a few years of rule. The empire finally broke into two parts in 395 AD: the Western Roman Empire with its capital in [Rome](#), and the Eastern Roman Empire or Byzantine Empire with its capital in [Constantinople](#). The western part, under attack from the Goths, Vandals, Huns and numerous other groups finally collapsed in the late 5th century AD, leaving the Italian peninsula divided. After this, Rome passed into the so-called *Dark Ages*. The city itself was sacked by Saracens in 846. Rome went from a city of 1,000,000 people in the first century AD to barely a dot on the map by the seventh century AD, and the stones of its ancient monuments were removed to build new buildings.



The Pantheon, a huge Roman temple, which is a symbol of the Roman civilization in Italy.

From independent city states to unification

See also: [Franks](#), [Medieval and Renaissance Italy](#)

Following the fall of the Western Roman Empire, the Italian peninsula was divided into many independent city states, and remained so for centuries thereafter.

In the 6th century AD, a Germanic tribe, the Lombards, arrived from the north; hence the present-day northern region of [Lombardy](#). The balance of power between them and other invaders such as the Byzantines, Arabs, and Muslim Saracens, with the Holy Roman Empire and the Papacy meant that it was not possible to unify Italy, although later arrivals such as the Carolingians and the Hohenstaufens managed to impose some control. Thus Northern Italy was under the tenuous control of dynasties from what is now Germany and many cities vying for independence challenged the rule of both pope and emperor, siding with either against the other from time to time. In the south, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, a result of unification of the Kingdom of Sicily with the Kingdom of Naples in 1442, had its capital in Naples. In the north, Italy remained a collection of small independent city states and kingdoms until the 19th century. One of the most influential city states was the Republic of [Venice](#), considered one of the most progressive of its time. The first public opera house opened there in 1637, and for the first time allowed paying members of the general public to enjoy what had been court entertainment reserved for the aristocracy, thus allowing the arts to flourish. Italians turned to strongmen to bring order to the cities, leading to the development of dynasties such as the Medici in [Florence](#). Their patronage of the arts allowed Florence to become the

birthplace of the Renaissance and helped to enable men of genius such as Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo to emerge. Rome and its surrounding areas became the Papal States, where the Pope had both religious and political authority.

From 1494 onwards, Italy suffered a series of invasions by the Austrians, the French and the Spanish; the latter ultimately emerged victorious.

After Vasco da Gama sailed the Cape Route around Africa, and Christopher Columbus (who was from Genoa but working for the king and queen of Spain) sailed to the Americas, much of the Mediterranean commerce — especially with Asia through the Middle East — was displaced, making Italian merchants less important. While foreign empires such as Austria, France and Spain came to dominate the Italian peninsula, it remained a centre of the fine arts, and was from the 17th to the 19th century the main destination for the Grand Tour of wealthy young people from Britain and Europe.

The Kingdom of Sardinia began to unify Italy in 1815. Giuseppe Garibaldi led a drive for unification in southern Italy, while the north wanted to establish a united Italian state under its rule. The northern kingdom successfully challenged the Austrians and established Turin as capital of the newly formed state. In 1866, King Victor Emmanuel II annexed Venice. In 1870, shortly after France abandoned it (because they were preoccupied in a war against Prussia that would lead to German unification by 1871), Italy's capital was moved to Rome. The Pope lost much of his influence, with his political authority now being confined to the Vatican City, itself a result of a political compromise between the Pope and Benito Mussolini in the 1920s.

The Kingdom of Italy

See also: Italian Empire

After unification, the Kingdom of Italy occupied parts of Eastern and Northern Africa. This included the occupation of Libya, during which Italy scored a decisive victory over the Ottoman Empire.

At the outbreak of World War I, despite being in alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary, Italy refused to participate in the war. Eventually, Italy entered the war, but as allies of the United Kingdom and France. As a result of the victory of Italy and its allies, Italy annexed former Austro-Hungarian land. However, Italy was not able to obtain much of what it desired, and this, in addition to the high cost of the war, led to popular discontent. This was manipulated by the nationalists, who evolved into the Fascist movement.

In October 1922, the National Fascist Party, led by Benito Mussolini, a former socialist who was thrown out of the party for his pro-war stance, attempted a coup with its "March on Rome", which resulted in the King forming an alliance with Mussolini. A pact with Germany (by that time fascist as well) was concluded by Mussolini in 1936, and a second in 1938. During the Second World War, Italy was invaded by the Allies in June 1943, leading to the collapse of the fascist regime and the arrest, escape, re-capture and execution of Mussolini. In September 1943, Italy surrendered. However, fighting continued on its territory for the rest of the war, with the allies fighting those Italian fascists who did not surrender, as well as German forces.

Italian Republic

In 1946, King Umberto II was forced to abdicate and Italy became a republic after a referendum. In the 1950s, Italy became a member of NATO. The Marshall Plan helped revive the Italian economy which, until the 1960s, enjoyed a period of sustained economic growth. Cities such as Rome returned to being popular tourist destinations, expressed in both American and Italian films such as *Roman Holiday* or *La Dolce Vita*. In 1957, Italy became a founding member of the European Economic Community. Beginning with the *Wirtschaftswunder* (German for "economic miracle") of the 1950s, many Germans invested their new-

found wealth in vacations in Italy and Northern Italy has been particularly popular with Germans ever since. Even to the point that the spread of pizza (a speciality from the South) to Northern Italy is said to have originated with German tourists demanding what they thought to be "Italian food".

From the late 1960s till the late 1980s, however, the country experienced an economic and political crisis. There was a constant fear, inside and outside Italy, that the Communist Party, which regularly polled over 20% of the vote, would one day form a government. Many machinations by the parties of the establishment prevented this. Italy suffered terrorism from the right and the left, including the shocking kidnapping and murder of Prime Minister Aldo Moro, who shortly before had forged the "historic compromise" with the Communists. Some attacks thought to have been perpetrated by leftist groups are now known to have originated with right wing groups trying to discredit the Communist Party or with the Mafia. An involvement by the NATO "stay behind" organisation (supposed to function as a guerrilla force in the instance of a Soviet occupation), Gladio, that included many right-wing extremists has been alleged in several cases. This turbulent period is remembered as the Years of Lead, or *anni di piombo*.



The Trevi Fountain, symbol of 18th century Baroque Italy.

Since 1992, Italy has faced massive government debt and extensive corruption. Scandals have involved all major parties, but especially the Christian Democrats and the Socialists, which were both dissolved, after having dominated politics since the end of the war. The 1994 elections led to media magnate Silvio Berlusconi's tenure as Prime Minister; his allies were defeated in 1996, but emerged victorious in 2001. They lost the election in 2006, but won again in 2008, and lost in 2013. Berlusconi is a controversial figure inside and outside of Italy, and has found himself in court numerous times. Some people even say his political career began as an attempt to escape legal repercussions through parliamentary immunity. Following the 2018 elections, two populist parties agreed to form a government with a majority of seats in the Chamber of Deputies. This has resulted in an uneasy arrangement, with the anti-establishment *Movimento Cinque Stelle* (Five Star Movement, M5S) and the far-right *Legha* (League) uniting to form an unprecedented populist coalition government. This coalition broke down in 2019 over disagreements on the treatment of refugees from Africa, and a new coalition government comprised of M5S with and the centre-left *Partito Democratico* (Democratic Party, PD) was sworn in after that, though whether or not this coalition can solve the country's underlying structural problems remains to be seen.

Climate

The climate of Italy varies and often differs from the stereotypical Mediterranean climate it is known for. Most of Italy has hot, dry summers, with July and August being the hottest months of the year. Winters are cold and damp in the north, and mild and sunny in the south. The temperature differences across the country are more extreme in winter. For instance, on a typical winter day, you may very well have 6°C in Milan (north), 15°C in Rome (centre), and 21°C in Palermo (south). On the other hand, a typical summer day might bring similar temperatures to all three cities. Conditions on the peninsula's coastal areas can be very different from the higher ground and valleys of the interior; during the winter months, the higher altitudes tend to be cold, and during the summer months the heat is oppressive in the valleys. The Alps have a mountain climate, with mild summers and very cold winters. Below is a climate chart depicting the climate of Naples, Italy, which well represents a typical Italian coastal climate.

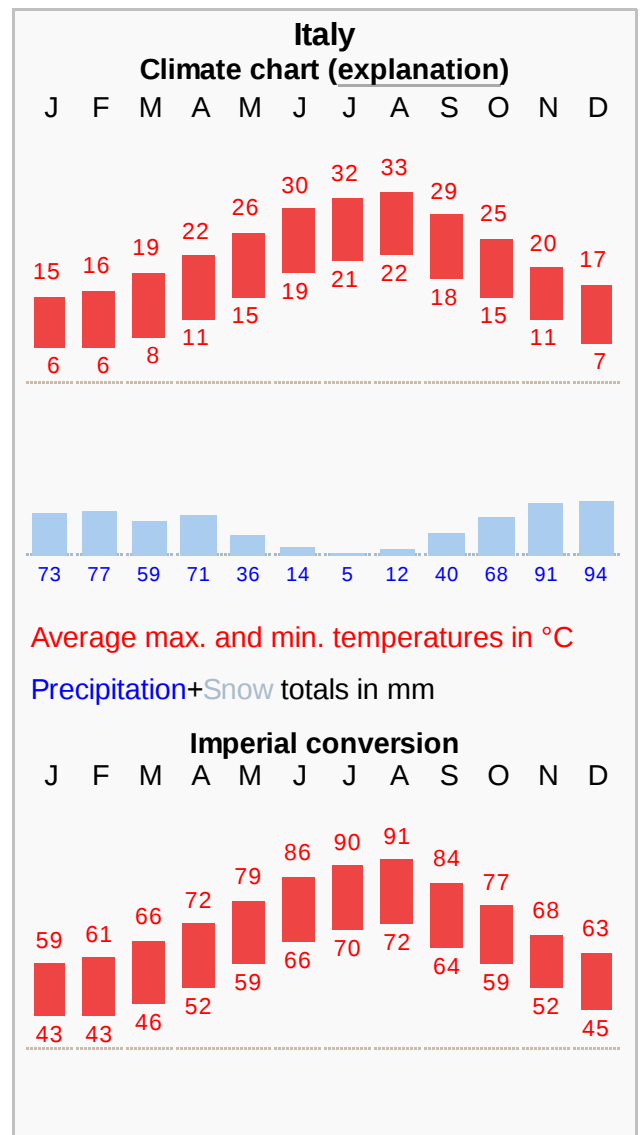
Read

Non-Guidebooks about Italy or by Italian writers.

- *Italian Journey* (original German title: *Italienische Reise*) by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe; a report on his travels to Italy via Innsbruck and the Brenner Pass. He visited Lake Garda, Verona, Vicenza, Venice, Bologna, Assisi, Rome and Alban Hills, Naples and Sicily from 1786–7, published in 1816–7.
- *The Agony and the Ecstasy* by Irving Stone — a biography of Michelangelo that also paints a lovely portrait of Tuscany and Rome.
- *Brunelleschi's Dome: How a Renaissance Genius Reinvented Architecture* by Ross King — a compelling story of one of the greatest structural engineering achievements of the Renaissance. The story of the building of the immense dome on top of the basilica in Florence, Italy.
- *Under the Tuscan Sun* by Frances Mayes — an account of a woman who buys and restores a holiday home in Cortona, Italy. Full of local flavour and a true taste of Tuscany.
- *The Sea and Sardinia* by D.H. Lawrence — describes a brief excursion undertaken by Lawrence and Frieda, his wife aka Queen Bee, from Taormina in Sicily to the interior of Sardinia. They visited Cagliari, Mandas, Sorgono and Nuoro. Despite the brevity of his visit, Lawrence distills an essence of the island and its people that is still recognisable today. Also by D.H. Lawrence is *Etruscan Places*, recording his impressions of Cerveteri, Tarquinia, Vulci and Volterra.
- *Italian Neighbours* and *A Season with Verona* by Tim Parks. Two portraits of contemporary life in Italy as seen by an English writer who lived just outside Verona.
- *Neapolitan Quartet Series* by Elena Ferrante. A series of novels that explores the intense friendship of two Italian women during the 1950s-1970s. Primarily set in Naples and Florence, this series of novels has received international attention for its depiction of Naples and the rich friendship between these two fictional characters.



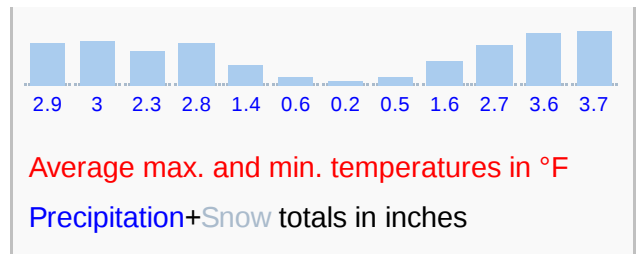
The modern 1960s Pirelli Tower in Milan is often considered a symbol of the new Italy, and of post-war economic growth and reconstruction.



Holidays

The Italian names are parenthesised.

- **1 January:** New Year's Day (*Capodanno*)
- **6 January:** Epiphany (*Epifania*)
- **March or April according to the Gregorian calendar:** Easter (*Pasqua*) and Easter Monday (*Pasquetta*)
- **25 April:** Liberation Day (*la Festa della Liberazione*)
- **1 May:** Labor Day (*la Festa del Lavoro*)
- **2 June:** Republic Day (*la Festa della Repubblica*)
- **15 August:** Ferragosto
- **1 November:** All Saints' Day (*Ognissanti*)
- **8 December:** Feast of the Immaculate Conception (*Immacolata Concezione*)
- **25 December:** Christmas (*Natale*)
- **26 December:** St. Stephen's Day (*Santo Stefano*)



Talk

See also: [*Italian phrasebook*](#)

Italian (*italiano*) is the language spoken natively by most Italians. Standard Italian is largely based on the dialect of Tuscan spoken in [Florence](#). Every region in Italy has a distinct native Italic language in addition to Italian that may or may not be spoken by locals, depending on the area. In Rome or Milan, the spoken language is nowadays usually Italian with some local influence, whereas in rural areas the local language is more common; though people usually speak *italiano*, too. Even though Italians call the native languages "dialects", they are separate languages, much like Chinese languages; they even have their own way of writing. Some of these languages also have their own rich literary traditions, the most important ones being Neapolitan, Venetian and Milanese.

German is the official language of [South Tyrol](#), an autonomous province of the country. Many of South Tyrol's residents (69.4% according to the 2011 census) have German as their first language, but the use of German is gradually declining.

In northern Italy, there are small pockets of other Romance languages like Ladin, a Rhaeto-Romance language related to Switzerland's Romansh. Friulano, another Rhaeto-Romance language, is still spoken by an important minority in the border region near Austria and Slovenia . There are several [Greek-speaking](#) enclaves in the southern regions of [Calabria](#) and [Puglia](#) and there are an estimated 100,000 [Albanian](#) speakers in Apulia, Calabria and Sicily—some of whom migrated in the Middle Ages and thus speak the rather medieval-sounding [Arberesh](#) language. Some regions have additional official languages: German in Alto Adige/ South Tyrol, Slovene and German in Friuli-Venezia Giulia and French in Valle d'Aosta. Slovene is spoken near the Slovenian border and in Gorizia and [Trieste](#). Most speakers of these minority languages also speak Italian.

English is spoken by shopkeepers and tour operators in tourist areas. Outside of the tourism industry, you're not guaranteed to find locals who are conversant in English. There are many reasons why many Italians cannot speak English, but to simplify: there isn't really a "culture" of learning foreign languages in Italy, all foreign films and TV shows are dubbed in Italian and at school teachers focus only on grammar rather than actually practicing the language. Before speaking English, begin the conversation in Italian and ask in Italian if the person understands English before switching. Always **simplify and speak slowly** when using English, especially if you are outside the touristy cities. **Most people above 50 never studied English at school and they are very unlikely to know a single word in English.** Younger people are

more likely to know basic English, but with a strong accent and do not expect them to be fluent. Realistically, the only people who are likely to speak fluent English are the students who study languages at university, and those who have lived abroad or travel abroad regularly for work. However, most people will make gestures to make themselves understood (that is exactly what Italians who don't know English do when they travel abroad).

The **Romance** languages Spanish, French, Portuguese and Romanian are not widely spoken but are similar to Italian, so some words will be understood, especially in written form. In the northwesternmost region (Valle d'Aosta) there are French- and Franco-Provençal-speaking minorities. In neighboring Piedmont, it's not uncommon to find people who speak French as well. Italian is somewhat similar to Spanish, so if you speak Spanish, locals will generally be able to puzzle you out with some difficulty, and you should also find it easy to pick up Italian.

Get in

Italy is a member of the Schengen Agreement.

- There are normally no border controls between countries that have signed and implemented the treaty. This includes most of the European Union and a few other countries.
- There are usually identity checks before boarding international flights or boats. Sometimes there are temporary border controls at land borders.
- A **visa** granted for any Schengen member is valid in all other countries that have signed *and* implemented the treaty.
- Please see Travelling around the Schengen Area for more information on how the scheme works, which countries are members and **what the requirements are for your nationality**.

Foreign military entering Italy under a Status of Forces Agreement do not require a passport and need only show their valid military identification card and travel orders. Their dependents, however, are not exempt from visa requirements.

All **non-EU**, EEA or Swiss citizens staying in Italy for 90 days or less have to declare their presence in Italy within 8 days of arrival. If your passport was stamped on arrival *in Italy*, the stamp counts as such a declaration. Generally, a copy of your hotel registration will suffice if you are staying at a hotel. Otherwise, however, you will have to go to a police office to complete the form (**dichiarazione di presenza**). Failing to do so may result in expulsion. Travellers staying longer than 90 days do not need to complete this declaration, but must instead have an appropriate visa and must obtain a residence permit (**permesso di soggiorno**).

Minimum validity of travel documents

- EU, EEA and Swiss citizens, and some non-EU citizens who are visa-exempt (e.g. New Zealanders and Australians), need only produce a passport which is valid for the entirety of their stay in Italy.
- Other nationals who are required to have a visa and even some who are not must have a passport which has **at least 3 months' validity** beyond their period of stay in Italy.
- For more information, visit this webpage of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy (<http://www.esteri.it/MAE/EN/Ministero/Servizi/Stranieri/IngressoeSoggiornoInItalia.htm>).



Pisa (the Piazza dei Miracoli, with the cathedral and the leaning tower)

By plane

Larger airports are served by the major European airlines. Intercontinental flights mainly arrive in Milan and Rome, the main gateways into the country.

Most mid-range international flights arrive in the following Italian cities:

- Rome - with two airports: Fiumicino (**FCO**^{IATA} - Leonardo da Vinci) and Ciampino (**CIA**^{IATA}) for budget airlines
- Milan - with two airports: Malpensa (**MLP**^{IATA}) and Linate (**LIN**^{IATA}); in addition, Bergamo (**BGY**^{IATA} - Orio al Serio) is sometimes referred to as "Milan Bergamo"
- Bologna (**BLQ**^{IATA} – Guglielmo Marconi)
- Naples (**NAP**^{IATA} - Capodichino)
- Pisa (**PSA**^{IATA} - Galileo Galilei)
- Venice (**VCE**^{IATA} – Marco Polo); in addition, Treviso (TSF - Antonio Canova) is sometimes referred to as "Venice Treviso"
- Turin (**TRN**^{IATA} – Sandro Pertini)
- Catania (**CTA**^{IATA} - Vincenzo Bellini)
- Bari (**BRI**^{IATA} - Palese)
- Genoa (**GOA**^{IATA} - Cristoforo Colombo)



Naples (a view over the city, showing Vesuvius)



Venice (the grand canal)

Prominent airlines in Italy

- **ITA Airways** (https://www.italyair.com/en_en/) (AZ), ☎ +39 892010. Flag carrier and national airline of Italy. It's part of the SkyTeam alliance, and also codeshares with other carriers outside the alliance. Rome Fiumicino (**FCO**^{IATA}) is the main hub, while Milano Malpensa (**MLP**^{IATA}) has been relegated to a lesser role.
- **Ryanair** (<http://www.ryanair.com>) (FR), ☎ +39 899 55 25 89. Ten bases plus eleven more destinations in Italy.
- **easyjet** (<http://www.easyjet.com>) (U2), ☎ +39 199 201 840. Two bases and many destinations in Italy.
- **Wizz Air** (<https://www.wizzair.com>) (W6), ☎ +39 899 018 874. Links some Italian airports with Eastern Europe.
- **Blu Express** (<http://www.blu-express.com/en/index.html>) (BV), ☎ +39 06 98956677. Mainly focused on domestic routes, links Rome Fiumicino with some international destinations.

By train

- From Austria via Vienna, Innsbruck and Villach
- From France via Nice, Lyon and Paris
- From Germany via Munich
- From Spain via Barcelona
- From Switzerland via Basel, Geneva and Zürich

- From Slovenia via Ljubljana to Opicina, a small village above Trieste or via Nova Gorica and a short walk to Gorizia, Italy

By car

Italy borders on France, Austria, Switzerland and Slovenia. All borders are open (without passport/customs checks), but cars can be stopped behind the border for random checks.

By bus

Eurolines (<https://www.eurolines.de/en/home/>), Megabus (<http://www.megabus.com>) and Flixbus (<http://www.flixbus.com>) offer domestic and international routes. There are regular buses between Ljubljana, Slovenian coastal towns and Istria (Croatia) and Trieste (Italy). These services are cheap and from Trieste onward connections with the rest of Italy are plentiful. There is also a bus that goes from Malmö, Sweden via Denmark, Germany and Switzerland and then goes through the country and then back to Sweden.

By boat

See also: *Ferries in the Mediterranean*

Ferries arrive from Greece, Albania, Montenegro and Croatia. Most of them arrive at Venice, Ancona, Bari and Brindisi.

Regular ferry services connect the island of Corsica in France to Genoa, Livorno, Civitavecchia, Naples and Northern Sardinia. Barcelona is connected to Civitavecchia and to Genoa.

Regular ferry services connect Sicily and Naples to North African harbours.

A hydrofoil service connects Pozzallo on the south-eastern coast of Sicily and Malta.

There is a year-round service between Trieste and Albania and summer services between Trieste and Piran (Slovenia) and Porec and Rovinj in Croatian Istria. The service between Trieste and Rovinj takes less than 2 hours, which is quicker than the bus service.

Get around

By train

Main article: *Rail travel in Italy*

Trains in Italy are generally a good value, frequent, and of uneven reliability. On some high-speed routes there is a choice between "Nuovo Trasporto Viaggiatori" (privately owned) and "Trenitalia" (state owned). On other routes, either Trenitalia or a regional operator provides the service.

- **Nuovo Trasporto Viaggiatori** (<http://www.italotreno.it/EN/Pages/default.aspx>), ☎ [+39 060708](tel:+39060708). NTV's ".Italo" high-speed trains serve major cities. It is a



Bologna (the red terracotta roofs and brick towers of the city's skyline)

luxurious service, and for some routes and dates, their prices are lower than the competition's.

- **Trenitalia** (<http://www.trenitalia.com/tcom-en>), ☎ +39 892021. Trenitalia runs a wide range of train types: **high-speed trains** (Frecciarossa, Frecciargento, Frecciabianca), **Intercity**, **regional trains** (Regionali, Regionali Veloci) and **international trains** (Eurocity, Euronight). High-speed trains are very comfortable, travelling up to 360km/h and stopping only at major stations and connect only the main cities. They charge a supplement to the standard ticket, which includes the booking fee. Regional trains are the slowest, cheapest and least reliable, stopping at all stations. Intercity trains are somewhere between high-speed and local trains. They are generally reliable. (updated Sep 2016)



Milan (the Piazza del Duomo, with the city's stunning medieval cathedral)

Train types

On long-distance trains there are 1st and 2nd classes. A 2nd class ticket costs about 80% the price of a 1st class ticket. On high-speed trains you can also choose between basic, standard and flexible tickets. Basic tickets are of course the cheapest. During commuter hours, on major north-south routes during the holidays, or before and after large political demonstrations, trains on the lower train types are often overcrowded.

Although between Milan and Naples (including Bologna, Florence and Rome), high-speed trains cut travel times in half, on other routes, such as between Rome and Genoa, Naples and Reggio Calabria, Venice and Trieste, they travel on the traditional line, with only marginally shorter travel times compared to Intercity trains.



Italy's high speed rail network

On long routes, such as Milan - Rome or Milan - Reggio di Calabria, Trenitalia operates special night trains: *Intercity notte*. They depart around 22.00 and arrive in the morning.

Getting tickets

The lines to buy tickets are often long and slow, so get to the station early. There are efficient, multilingual, touch-screen ticket machines, but the lines for them are often long, too, because there are few of them.

You can also buy tickets online on the Trenitalia website (<http://trenitalia.com/>); you will receive a code (codice di prenotazione (PNR)) that is used to pick up the ticket from a ticket machine in the station ("Self Service"). The site will show the "best" (usually more expensive) connections - you may select to "show all connections" (or "Regional trains") to see if there are slower but cheaper connections available.

For high-speed and intercity trains you can also choose a *ticketless* option. You get a PNR code via email and board the train directly. On board you must tell the conductor your PNR code.

High-speed trains can fill up, so if you're on a tight schedule, buy the tickets in advance. In general, you should buy the tickets *before* boarding the train. Fines start at €50. If you're running late and have no ticket, it's probably best to talk directly with the conductor (*il controllore* or *il capotreno*) outside the train before boarding.

Trenitalia Pass: you buy a number of days of travel to be used within 2 months, however you still have to pay a supplement on the compulsory reservation services, i.e. TBiz, Eurostar Italia, and Intercity which will be €5-25, depending on the train type. Details are on the [Trenitalia](http://www.trenitalia.com/tcom-en) (<http://www.trenitalia.com/tcom-en>) website, and also on the [International Rail website](https://www.internationalrail.com/A846-trenitalia) (<https://www.internationalrail.com/A846-trenitalia>).

Rules

You **must** validate the ticket before boarding most trains, by stamping it in one of the white boxes (marked *Convalida*). Tickets that specify the day and time of travel do not need to be validated.

The cheapest way to travel in a region is to buy a **zone ticket card**. A chart displayed near the validating machine tells you how many zones you must *pay* between stations. To buy a zone card for the next region, get off the train at the last station, buy the ticket, and board the next train (usually departing in about an hour).

A **smoking ban** in public places is in effect in Italy. Smoking on any Italian train is subject to a fine.

By plane

The advent of low-cost carriers made domestic air travel cheaper. When booked in advance, plane tickets for long trips are often cheaper than train fares. ITA Airways, Ryanair, Easyjet and Blue Express operate domestic flights while small, new airlines appear and disappear often.

By car

Main article: [Driving in Italy](#)

Italy has a well-developed system of motorways (*autostrade*) in the North, while in the South it's a bit worse for quality and extent. Most motorways are toll roads. The *autostrade* are marked with green signs, while general highways are marked with blue signs. Speeding on the *autostrade* is nowadays less common than in the past. There are automatic systems to punish speeding and hazardous driving. Italian Highway Patrol (*Polizia Stradale*) operates unmarked cars equipped with advanced speed radars and camera systems.

The tolerated alcohol limit is **0.50g/L** in blood, or **zero** for drivers under 21 years of age or with less than 3 years of driving experience.

Fuel prices are in line with those in western Europe and more expensive than in North America and Japan. As of December 2016, prices were about €1.65/L for gasoline and €1.53/L for diesel.

Traffic in large Italian cities is heavy and finding a parking spot ranges from a challenging to an impossible enterprise at times. Park your vehicle at a park-and-ride facility or somewhere in the outskirts and use public transport. Be careful with *Zone a Traffico Limitato* or **ZTLs** (Limited Traffic Zones) (<https://www.italybeyondtheobvious.com/dont-mess-with-ztl-zones>). They are restricted areas in the historical centres of many cities, where only authorised vehicles are permitted. Many tourists are fined (about €100) for entering a ZTL unknowingly.

EU licences are automatically recognised. If you don't have an EU driving licence, you need an International Driving Permit in addition to your home driver's license in order to drive. To obtain a recognition of your driving licence (*adeguamento* or *tagliando di riconoscimento*) you will need to pass a medical examination.

All motor vehicles in Italy must have insurance (*assicurazione*) for at least third party liability.

By bus

Local

Buy town bus tickets from corner shops, bus-company offices or automated machines before boarding (on *some* systems, tickets *might* be bought on-board from an automated machine). Buying tickets from the bus driver is generally not possible.

The payment system for most mass transit in Italy (urban trains, city buses, subway) is based on voluntary payment combined with variable enforcement. Tickets are bought before boarding and validated on an on-board machine; inspectors may board the vehicle to check the passengers' tickets and issue fines to those lacking a validated ticket. The inspectors are generally recognizable by some item displaying the company's logo. When issuing a fine, inspectors are allowed to ask to see your documents, and they have to give some sort of receipt with date, time and location. They are never allowed to directly collect the fine (which generally can be paid at a post office). Assaulting an inspector during his work is a serious offense.

Daily, weekly, monthly and year-round tickets are generally available, in addition to multi-use tickets. These may or may not need to be validated. In almost every city there's a different pricing scheme, so check ticket formulas and availability in advance. For tourists it may be very convenient to buy daily (or multi-day) tickets that allow unlimited travel within a single day or period. Major cities have some type of **City Card**, a fixed-fee card allowing travel on local public transportation, visits to a number of museums, and discounts in shops, hotels and restaurants.

Check for these possibilities at local tourist offices or on the city's website (which is often of the form www.comune.cityname.it as for example www.comune.roma.it).

Intercity

Intercity buses used to be a niche market in Italy, but now [Megabus](http://www.megabus.com) (<http://www.megabus.com>), [Flixbus](http://www.flixbus.com) (<http://www.flixbus.com>) and others have filled the vacuum.

By thumb

Hitchhiking in Italy is associated with the 1960s hippies and "on the road" kind of culture. Therefore, it is considered out-dated and useless. You will almost never find Italians hitchhiking unless there's a serious problem with the bus or other means of transportation. Also, it is nowadays common to spot prostitutes by the side of the road pretending to hitchhike to attract clientele so it's advisable to avoid being mistaken for one.



Palermo (cathedral)

Hitchhiking in the summer in touristy areas works well because you'll get rides from Northern European tourists, and it works well in rural areas as long as there is consistent traffic (because you're still playing the odds), but hitchhiking near large cities or along busy routes is **frustrating**. Hitchhiking along expressways and highways is forbidden by law and off the Autostrade, Italians are unlikely to pick up hitchhikers.

By boat

Approaching Italy by sea can be a great experience and is a good alternative to traditional onshore "tours". A yacht charter to Italy is a fulfilling way to experience the country. Although the yacht charter industry is smaller than one would expect for this incredibly popular tourist destination, there are many reasons to choose a yacht over a more conventional onshore approach. The Italian coast, like the French coast, attracts luxury yacht charters of the highest standards. "Touring" Italy from a private yacht is surprisingly convenient and comfortable. Italy's dramatic coastline is best appreciated from the sea. You may take a swim whenever you like, and many famous sights are near the seashore. Cruising on a private yacht shields one from the crowds and traffic infesting popular destinations.

Tuscany, the Amalfi Coast, Sardinia and Sicily are the main nautical regions. Each has its own flavor and is rewarding in its own particular way.

See

There is so much to see in Italy that it is difficult to know where to begin. Virtually every village has some sights.

- **Etruscan Italy.** If you have limited time and no potential to travel outside the main cities, then don't miss the amazing collection at the Etruscan Museum at Villa Giulia in Rome. Hiring a car gives access to the painted tombs and museum of Tarquinia or the enormous burial complex at Cerveteri and those are just the sites within easy reach of Rome.
- **The Greek influence.** Well-preserved Greek temples at Agrigento in the south-west of Sicily and at Paestum, just south of Naples, give a good understanding of the extent of Greek influence on Italy.
- **Roman ruins.** From the south, in Sicily, to the north of the country, Italy is full of reminders of the Roman empire. In Taormina, Sicily check out the Roman theatre, with excellent views of Mt. Etna on a clear day. Also in Sicily, don't miss the well-preserved mosaics at Piazza Armerina. Moving north to just south of Naples, Pompeii and Herculaneum were covered in lava by Mt. Vesuvius and, as a result, are well preserved. To Rome and every street in the centre seems to have a few pieces of inscribed Roman stone built into more recent buildings. Don't miss the Colosseum, the Roman Forum, the Aqueducts, the Appian Way, and a dozen or so museums devoted to Roman ruins. Further north, the Roman amphitheatre at Verona is definitely not to be missed.
- **Christian Italy.** The Vatican is the seat of the Roman Catholic Church. Although inside Rome it is officially a separate country. Don't miss St Peter's and the Vatican Museum. Rome, itself, has over 900 churches; many of these are worth a quick visit. Throughout Italy there is amazing Christian architecture covering the Romanesque (700–1200); Gothic (1100–1450); Renaissance (1400–1600); and ornate Baroque (1600–1830) styles. Although theft of artwork has been a problem, major city churches and cathedrals retain many



Roman bikinis. Mosaic from the Villa Romana at Piazza Armerina, Sicily.

paintings and sculptures, while others have been moved to city and Church museums. Frescoes and mosaics are everywhere, and quite stunning. Don't just look for churches: in rural areas there are some fascinating monasteries to be discovered. All but the largest churches are usually closed between 12:30 and 15:30.

- **The Byzantine cities.** The Byzantines controlled northern Italy until kicked out by the Lombards in 751. Venice is of course world famous and nearby Chioggia, also in the Lagoon, is a smaller version. Ravenna's churches have some incredible mosaics. Visiting Ravenna requires a bit of a detour, but it is well worth it.
- **The Renaissance.** Start with a visit to Piazza Michelangelo in Florence to admire the famous view. Then explore the museums, both inside and outside Florence, that house Renaissance masterpieces. The Renaissance, or Rebirth, (*Rinascimento* in Italian) lasted from the 15th to the 17th century and is generally seen as having begun in Florence. The list of famous names is endless: in architecture Ghiberti (the cathedral's bronze doors), Brunelleschi (the dome), and Giotto (the bell tower). In literature: Dante, Petrarch and Machiavelli. In painting and sculpture: Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Donatello, Masaccio and Botticelli.
- **Streets and squares.** You could visit Italy's cities, never go in a church, museum or Roman ruin, and still have a great time. Just wander around, keeping your eyes open. Apart from the Po and Adige valleys, most of Italy (including the cities) is hilly or mountainous, giving some great views. Look up when walking around to see amazing roof gardens and classical bell towers. In cities such as Rome, note the continued juxtaposition of expensive stores with small workplaces for artisans. Search for interesting food shops and ice cream shops (*gelaterie*). Above all, enjoy the atmosphere.
- **Operas.** If you are interested in famous Italian operas, they are performed in Milan, Verona, Parma, Rome, Venice, Turin, Spoleto, Florence, Palermo and Genoa.
- **Medieval hilltop towns.** Hundreds of these offer a backdrop of scenic landscapes.



Florence's cathedral; bell tower by Giotto to the left and the tower of the Palazzo Vecchio in front

Monuments

- UNESCO World Heritage

Islands

- Sicily
- Sardinia
- Capri
- Ischia
- Elba
- Procida
- Aeolian Islands
- Ustica
- Pantelleria
- Aegadi Islands



Stromboli

- Pelagie Islands

Museums

Every major city has museums, but some of them have national and international relevance.

These are some of the most important permanent collections.

- **Uffizi Museum** (<http://www.polomuseale.firenze.it>) (*Florence*). One of the greatest museums in the world and a must-see. Given the great number of visitors, advance ticket reservation is a good idea, to avoid hour-long queues.
- **Galleria dell'Accademia** (<http://www.galleriaaccademiefirenze.beniculturali.it>) (*Florence*). Home to Michelangelo's famous statue of David.
- **Brera Art Gallery** (<http://www.brera.beniculturali.it>) (*Pinacoteca di Brera*) (*Milan*). A prestigious museum in a fine 17th-century palace, which boasts several paintings, including notable ones from the Renaissance era.
- **The Etruscan Academy Museum of the City of Cortona** (<http://www.cortonamaec.org>) (*Cortona, Tuscany*).
- **Egyptian Museum** (<http://www.museoegizio.org>) (*Museo Egizio*) (*Turin*). Holds the second-largest Egyptian collection in the world, after Egypt's Cairo Museum collection.
- **The Aquarium** (<http://www.acquariodigenova.it/en/>) (*Genoa*). One of the largest and most beautiful in the world, in the **Porto Antico** (ancient port) in an area completely renewed by architect Renzo Piano in 1992.
- **Science and Technology Museum** (<http://www.museoscienza.org>) (*Milan*). One of the largest in Europe, holds collections about boats, aeroplanes, trains, cars, motorcycles, radio and energy. Has also acquired the Toti submarine, which is open to visitors.
- **Roman Civilization Museum** (<http://en.museociviltaromana.it>) (*Rome*). Holds the world's largest collection about ancient Rome and a marvellous reproduction (scale 1:250) of the entire Rome area in AD 325, the age of Constantine the Great.
- **National Cinema Museum** (<http://www.museonazionaledelcinema.org>) (*Turin*). In the historic **Mole Antonelliana** building, the symbol of the city.
- **Automobile Museum** (<http://www.museoauto.it>) (*Turin*). One of the largest in the world, with a 170-car collection covering the entire history of automobiles.
- **Capitoline Museums** (<https://www.museicapitolini.org>) (*Musei Capitolini*) (*Rome*). Large collections of artworks and archaeological findings from the Roman period to the Renaissance. The oldest public art museum in the world.
- **The Vatican Museums** (<http://www.museivaticani.va/content/museivaticani/en.html>) (*Vatican*). Visit the 54 "galleries" of the museums to see the Sistine Chapel, the rooms painted by Raphael, some amazing early maps, and artwork across the centuries, mostly Christian in focus.



The Uffizi gallery in Florence, considered one of the most prestigious art museums in the world.

- **Etruscan Museum** (*Villa Giulia, Rome*). Amazing collection of Etruscan art.

Do

Beaches and swimming

One of the great things about Italy is that its long thin shape means that when you get fed up with sightseeing, you are often near a beach. In many of the more popular areas, large sections of beach are reserved as paid beaches. In the season they cover almost the entire beach with rows and rows of sunbeds (*lettini*) and umbrellas (*ombrelloni*). You have the right to pass through these establishments without being charged to get to the sea, and should be able to walk along the sea in front of them. More affordable are the beaches in Calabria: Many are free, so you will only need to pay for equipment if you choose to rent any.

South of Rome there are 20 km of free beach at the Circeo National Park. This is thanks to Dr. Mario Valeriani (<http://www.valeriani.com/Mario-Valeriani.html>), who was in charge of that area after World War II and never gave permits to build anything, in spite of the very generous bribes offered by a multitude of would-be investors and millionaires, as he thought this was a natural marvel that should remain as it was intended. So today we can all enjoy this stretch of nature. You can bring your own chair and sun cover and you will only be charged a parking fee on the main road.

While renting *lettini* for the day is not particularly expensive at establishments, they can fill up very quickly. There are some free beaches everywhere: they are easily identifiable by the absence of regimented rows of *lettini*. They are often crowded: on a Saturday or Sunday in the summer you won't find an empty stretch of beach anywhere. Most establishments offer full services including entertainment, bar and restaurant, gym classes and kindergarten. Close to urban areas you will never be far from a fish restaurant on the beach or, at the very least, a bar. On the beach, topless women are more or less accepted everywhere but complete nudity is absolutely not accepted anywhere in Italy and it carries a hefty fine and/or arrest.

Classical music

Italy was the birthplace of Western opera during the late 16th century and, unsurprisingly, Italy is home to some of the world's most famous opera houses, the best known of which is the Teatro alla Scala in Milan. The first-ever opera was Jacopo Peri's *Dafne* (now lost), which was premiered at the Palazzo Corsi in Florence in 1598, though the oldest surviving opera that is still regularly performed today is *L'Orfeo* by Claudio Monteverdi, which was premiered at the court of Mantua in 1607. Yet another important city in the history of opera is Venice, in which the first public opera house was built, allowing paying members of the general public access to what was once court entertainment for the aristocracy. In fact, in the early 18th century, Italian opera was the most popular form of entertainment among the aristocracy in every European country except France, and even operas that premiered in non-Italian speaking areas such as London and Vienna were written in Italian. Many Italian composers, such as Monteverdi, Vivaldi, Rossini, Verdi and Puccini continue to be revered by classical music enthusiasts, and some of their pieces have even found their way into modern pop culture. In addition to the locals, many foreign composers such as Handel and Mozart also composed several critically acclaimed Italian operas which continue to enchant audiences to this day.

Besides opera, Italy has also been a key player in the development of other genres of Western classical music. The concerto was first popularised by the Italian composer Arcangelo Corelli during the Baroque period, and the symphony can trace its origins to the overtures of Italian Baroque opera. Ballet, despite its French name and terminology, and being more commonly associated with France or Russia, actually

originated in Italy during the Renaissance. In fact, it was *de rigueur* for European composers, regardless of their origin, to spend some time in Italy studying music, and to this day, most terminology used in Western music scores continues to be in Italian.

Visit the vineyards

Italy is famous for its wine. And its vineyards tend to be in the middle of some beautiful scenery. Taking an organised tour is probably best. Day trips can usually be organised through hotels in major wine areas such as Chianti or through the local tourism office. There are several companies offering longer tours that include meals and accommodation. A simple web search for "Italian vineyard tours" or "wine tour Italy" will find them. These longer tours emphasise good food, great wine and a high standard of accommodation and are thus expensive. If you rent a car and want to organise your own trips, a helpful website is that of the Movimento Turismo del Vino (<http://www.movimentoturismovino.it/?lang=en>). The Italian page has a link to *itinerari* which is not available in English. Even if you don't read Italian you can still find addresses and opening hours of some interesting wine producers. "Su prenotazione" means "By Appointment Only".



Wine-growing holding in the Chianti region

Cycling tours

Several companies offer cycling tours of the Italian countryside. They provide cycles, a guide and transportation for your suitcase, and for you if it all gets a bit too tiring. Tours vary to accommodate different interests. Normally you change city and hotel every day. If you like cycling this is an excellent way of seeing Italy off-the-beaten-track. Search Google, etc. for "Cycle Tours Italy" for companies.

Sailing

Sailing is one of the best ways to see the Italian islands such as Sardinia and Sicily. Most charter companies offer options from bareboat to crewed and cabin charter, with all types of the boats.

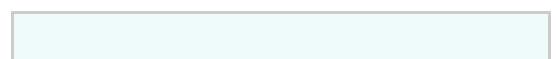
Spectator sports

Italy is sports crazy and as such soccer, Rugby Union and several other sports enjoy a devout, if sometimes violent, following. In the 1980s Italy was one of the most notable first adopters of American Football in Europe, though corruption in the national federation and scandals have greatly reduced interest in this sport since.

Cycling: Giro d'Italia (<https://www.giroditalia.it/en/>) is one of the world's top races, held over three weeks in May. There are lots of smaller events, which you may be forced to watch when they cause road closures.

Buy

Money



Italy uses the **euro**, like several other European countries. One euro is divided into 100 cents. The official symbol for the euro is €, and its ISO code is EUR. There is no official symbol for the cent.

All banknotes and coins of this common currency are legal tender within all the countries, except that low-denomination coins (one and two cent) are phased out in some of them. The banknotes look the same across countries, while coins have a standard common design on the reverse, expressing the value, and a national country-specific design on the obverse. The obverse is also used for different designs of commemorative coins. The design of the obverse does not affect the coin's acceptability .

Italy phased out the one- and two-cent coins in 2018, rounding prices to the nearest five-cent increment.

Exchange rates for euros

As of January 2023:

- US\$1 ≈ €0.9
- UK£1 ≈ €1.1
- AU\$1 ≈ €0.6
- CA\$1 ≈ €0.7
- Japanese ¥100 ≈ €0.7

Exchange rates fluctuate. Current rates for these and other currencies are available from [XE.com \(https://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/\)](https://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/)

Tipping

Tips (*la mancia*) are not customary in Italy but are offered when a special service is given or to recognise high quality service. Most restaurants, except those in Rome, have a price for the service *coperto* and waiters do not expect a tip; however, they will not refuse one. In cafés, bars, and pubs it's not uncommon to leave the change, saying to the waiter or to the cashier *tenga il resto* - "keep the change". Tip jars near the cash register are becoming widespread, but in public toilets, they are often forbidden. Leaving the change is also quite common with taxi drivers, and hotel porters may expect a little something. It is not possible to add tips manually to a credit card bill, so you'll need cash.

Shopping

Italy is an expensive country and its cities are more expensive than suburban and rural places. Usually, Southern Italy is less expensive than Northern Italy, especially for food; this will, of course, vary by location.

Meals can be had from as cheap as €3 (if you are happy with a sandwich [panino] or falafel from a street vendor); restaurant bills range from €10 (a burger with fries or salad and a soft drink from a pub) to €20 (a starter, main course and water from a regular restaurant).

Unless otherwise stated, prices are inclusive of IVA sales tax (same as **VAT**), which is 22% for most goods, and 10% in restaurants and hotels. On some products, such as books, IVA is 4%. In practice, you can forget about it since it is universally included in the display price. Non-EU residents are entitled to a VAT refund on purchases of goods that will be taken out of the European Union. Shops offering this scheme have a **Tax Free** sticker outside. Ask for a tax-free voucher before leaving the store and bring your passport. These goods have to be unused and unopened when passing the customs checkpoint upon leaving the EU.

While travelling through the countryside, do not rely on **credit cards**; in small towns they're accepted by only a few shops and restaurants. Cash is king around the country.

Opening hours

Opening hours in Italy are very complicated and they change from place to place. **Do not expect** stores to be open all day and always check opening times before going to a particular place. To simplify, generally the situation is as follows:

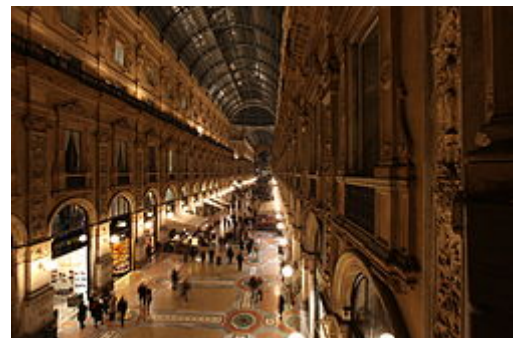
- Most shops are closed for lunch (between 12:30 and 15:30)
- Barber shops are closed on Mondays
- Banks are open to the public for about only 4 hours in the morning and barely an hour in the afternoon
- Restaurants will not open before 11:30 for lunch and 19:00 for dinner
- Many shops are closed on Sunday and some are closed on Monday, but don't take the rest of the week for granted: many will close on a specific day of the week

What to buy

Italy is a great place for all forms of shopping. Most cities, villages and towns, are crammed to the brim with many different forms of shops, from glitzy boutiques and huge shopping malls, to tiny art galleries, small food stores, antique dealers and general newsagents.

- **Food** is definitely one of the best souvenirs you can get in Italy. There are thousands of different shapes of pasta (not only spaghetti or macaroni). Then every Italian region has its local speciality like cheese, wine, ham, salami, oil and vinegar. Don't forget to buy Nutella. Note that some non-European countries (notably, the United States, Australia and New Zealand) have strict rules about what food items can be brought into the country from outside. Cured meats (and other uncooked produce) that you purchase in Italy may not be allowed into your country - check with your embassy or your customs agency to be sure, before you spend a large amount of money on something that may get confiscated.
- Italian **fashion** is renowned worldwide. Many of the world's most famous international brands have their headquarters or were founded in Italy.

Milan is Italy's fashion and design capital. In the city one can find virtually every major brand in the world, not only Italian, but also French, English, American, Swedish and Spanish. Your main place for la-crème-de-la-crème shopping is the Via Montenapoleone, but the Via della Spiga, Via Manzoni, Via Sant'Andrea and the Corso Vittorio Emanuele are equally luxurious, if less-prominent shopping streets. The Corso Buenos Aires is the place to go for mass-scale or outlet shopping. And, the beautiful Galleria Vittorio Emanuele in the centre and Via Dante boast some designer boutiques, too. Virtually every street in central Milan has clothing stores of some kind.



Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II in Milan

However, Rome and Florence, are also fashion centres, and boast being the birthplace of some of the oldest fashion and jewellery houses in Italy. When in Rome, the chic and beautiful Via dei Condotti, leading to the Spanish Steps, will be your primary point of shopping reference, with boutiques, but subsidiary streets such as Via dei Babuino, Via Borgognona, Via Frattina, Via del Corso and the Piazza di Spagna. In Florence, Via de' Tornabuoni is the main high-fashion shopping street, and there you'll find loads of designer brands. However, in both cities, you'll be able to find a plethora of chic boutiques, designer or not, scattered around the centre.

Prestigious brands such as Armani, Gucci and Prada can of course be found in Italian cities; since their pricing is set internationally, they will likely not be much cheaper than they are in your homeland.

- **Jewellery and accessory** shops can be found in abundance in Italy. There are many jewellery and accessory stores which hail from Italy. Vicenza and Valenza are considered the country's jewellery capitals, which are also famous for their silverware and goldware shops. All over Italy, notably Vicenza, Milan, Valenza, Rome, Naples, Florence and Venice, but also several other cities, you can find hundreds of jewellery or silverware boutiques. Apart from the famous ones, there are some great quirky and funky jewelry stores scattered around the country.
- **Design and furniture** is something Italy is proudly and justifiably famous for. Excellent quality furniture stores can be found all over, but the best deals are in Milan. Milan contains among the top design rooms and emporia in the world. For the newest design inventions, attend the Fiera di Milano in Rho, where the latest appliances are exhibited. Many Italian cities have great antique furniture stores. So, you can choose between cutting-edge, avant-garde furniture, or old world antiques to buy in this country, which are, by average, of good quality.
- **Glassware** is something which Venice makes uniquely but which is spread around the whole of the country. Venice is famously the capital of Murano (not the island), or glassware made in different colours. Here, you can get goblets, crystal chandeliers, candlesticks and decorations made in multi-coloured blown glass, which can be designed in modern, funky arrangements, or the classical style.
- **Books** can be found in bookshops in any city. The main book and publishing companies/stores in Italy include Mondadori, Feltrinelli, Hoepli or Rizzoli. Most big bookstores are found in Milan, Turin and nearby Monza, which are the capitals of Italy's publishing trade (Turin was made World Book Capital in 2006), however other cities such as Rome have many book shops. 99% of the books sold are in Italian.
- **Art** shops are found throughout Italy, notably in Florence, Rome and Venice. In Florence, the best place to buy art is the Oltrarno, where there are numerous ateliers selling replicas of famous paintings. Usually, depending in what city you're in, you get replicas of notable works of art found there, but also, you can find rare art shops, sculpture shops, or funky, modern/old stores in several cities.

How to buy

In a small or medium-sized shop, it's standard to greet the staff as you enter, not when you approach the counter to pay. A friendly 'Buongiorno' or 'Buonasera' warms the atmosphere. When paying, the staff usually expect you to put coins down on the surface or dish provided, rather than placing money directly into their hands (old money-handling etiquette to avoid messy coin droppings), and they will do the same when giving you your change ('il resto'). This is normal practice and is not intended to be rude.

Haggling is very rare and only ever takes place when dealing with hawkers. They will generally ask for an initial price that is much higher than what they are willing to sell for, and going for the asking price is a sure way to get ripped off. Hawkers often sell counterfeit merchandise (in some cases, very believable counterfeits), and that hoping to buy a Gucci purse for €30 off the street might not be in your best interest.

In all other situations, haggling will get you nowhere. Always be careful about counterfeit merchandise: Italian laws can apply fines up to €3000 to people who buy it (this mostly applies to luxury brand clothing or accessories).

Eat

See also: [*Italian cuisine*](#)

As one of the world's most renowned culinary traditions, it is unsurprising that Italian cuisine can be very good. Unfortunately, there are also many tourist traps that serve overpriced and mediocre food. Finding the right place to eat, preferably the ones patronised by Italians, is therefore important; ask locals for their recommendation if possible, or perhaps even ask your hotel or look at online review sites for recommendations. The downside is that it is rare to find English-speaking waiters in the non-tourist-trap restaurants, so be prepared to have to speak some Italian.

Cuisine

In Italy, cuisine is considered a *kind of art*. Great chefs such as Gualtiero Marchesi and Gianfranco Vissani are seen as half-way between TV stars and magicians. Italians are extremely proud of their culinary tradition and generally love food and talking about it. However, they are not so fond of common preconceptions, such as that Italian food is only pizza and spaghetti. They also have a distaste for "bastardised" versions of their dishes that are popular elsewhere, and many Italians have a hard time believing that the average foreigner can't get even a basic pasta dish "right".

Italian food in Italy is different from food marketed as "Italian" overseas. It is truly one of the most diverse in the world, and in any region, or even city and village you go, there are different specialities. For instance, it could be only misleading to say that Northern Italian cuisine is based on hearty, potato and rice-rich meals, Central Italian cuisine is mainly on pastas, roasts and meat, and Southern Italian cuisine on vegetables, pizza, pasta and seafood: there are so many cross-influences that you'd only get confused trying to categorise. And in any case, Italian cuisine is not just based on pasta and tomato sauce: that's only a tiny snippet of the nation's food; rice, potatoes, lentils, soups and similar meals are very common in some parts of the country. Italian food is based upon so many ingredients and Italians often have very discriminating tastes that may seem strange to visitors.

For instance, a **sandwich** stand might sell 4 different types of ham sandwiches that in each case contain ham, mayonnaise, and cheese. The only thing that may be different between the sandwiches is the type of ham or cheese used in them. Rustichella and panzerotti are two examples of sandwiches well-liked by Italians and tourists alike. Rather than large sandwiches with a piling of meat, vegetables, and cheese, sandwiches in Italy are often quite small, very flat (made even more so when they are quickly heated and pressed on a panini grill), and contain a few simple ingredients and often without lettuce or mayonnaise.



Trofie with pesto alla Genovese.



A traditional Italian meal, with beef with sauce and dark red wine.

The term **panini** may be somewhat confusing to travellers from Northern Europe where it has erroneously come to mean a flat, heated sandwich on a grill. In Italy the term is equivalent to "bread rolls" (plural - the singular is **panino**) which can be simple rolls or sometimes with basic filling. However instead of a sandwich why not try a **piadina**, which is a flat folded bread with filling, served warm and typical of the coast of Romagna?

Italian pasta is usually available with a myriad of sauces rather than simply tomato or Alfredo. Also, Italian pasta is often served a small amount of sauce. This is, in part, because pasta in a restaurant is usually regarded as the first course of a three- or four-course meal, not a meal in itself.

Structure of a traditional meal: Usually Italian meals for working days are: small breakfast, one-dish lunch, one-dish dinner. Coffee is welcomed at nearly every hour, especially around 10:00 and at the end of a meal. At the weekends and in restaurants (for other occasions), a meal typically consists of: *antipasti* (appetisers: marinated vegetables, mixed coldcuts, seafood, etc.), *primo* (pasta or rice dish or soup), *secondo* (meat or fish course) often with a side dish known as a *contorno*, and *dolce* (dessert).

Like the language and culture, food in Italy **differs region by region**. Local ingredients are also very important. In warm Naples, citrus and other fresh fruit play a prominent role in both food and liquor, while in Venice fish is obviously an important traditional ingredient.

Breakfast in Italy: this is very light, often just a cappuccino or coffee with a pastry (*cappuccino e cornetto*) or a piece of bread and fruit jam. Unless you know for certain otherwise, you should not expect a large breakfast. It is not customary in Italy to eat eggs and bacon and the like at breakfast - just the thought of it is revolting to most Italians. In fact, no salty foods are consumed at breakfast, generally speaking. Additionally, cappuccino is a breakfast drink; ordering one after lunch or dinner is considered strange and considered a typical "tourist thing". A small **espresso** coffee is considered more appropriate for digestion.

Another enjoyable Italian breakfast item is **cornetto** (pl. *cornetti*): a croissant or light pastry often filled with jam, cream or chocolate.

Lunch and dinner times may be very different from the ones outside of southern Europe, and most restaurant will be closed outside the usual Italian lunch and dinner times.

Lunch is seen as the most important part of the day, so much that Italians have one hour reserved for eating (and in the past, another hour was reserved for napping). All shops close down and resume after the two-hour break period. To compensate for this, businesses stay open later than in most other European towns, often until 20:00. Good luck trying to find a place open during the so-called "pausa pranzo" (lunch break), when visiting a small town, but this is not the case in the city centres of the biggest cities or in shopping malls.

Dinner time varies by region: in the north it is usually around 20:00 (even 19:00 in the homes), but it gets progressively later the further south one goes, up to 22:00.

Do not expect the kind of dedicated, focused service you will find in e.g. American restaurants. In Italy this is considered somewhat annoying and people generally prefer to be left alone when consuming their meal. You should expect the waiter to come and check on you after your first course, maybe to order something as second course.

Italy's most famous dishes like pizza or spaghetti are quite lame for some Italians, and eating in different areas can be an interesting opportunity to taste some less well known local specialities. Even for something as simple as pizza there are significant regional variations. That of Naples has a relatively thick, soft crust while that of Rome is considerably thinner and crustier. Both styles are thin-crust compared to American-style pizza, however.

When dining out with Italians, read the menu: almost every restaurant has a typical dish and some towns have centuries-old traditions that you are invited to learn. People will appreciate when you ask for local specialities and will gladly advise you.

In Northern Italy, at around 17:00, most bars prepare an **aperitivo**, especially in cosmopolitan Milan, with a series of plates of nibbles, cheese, olives, meat, bruschetta, etc. This is not considered a meal and it is considered gauche to indulge oneself in eating it as if it were dinner. All this food is typically free to anyone who purchases a drink but it is intended to be a pre-meal snack.

Regional specialities

Cities and regions have their own specialities, including:

- **Risotto** – Carnaroli or Arborio or Vialone Nano (etc.) rice that has been sautéed and cooked in a shallow pan with stock. The result is a creamy and hearty dish. Meat, poultry, seafood, vegetables, and cheeses are almost always added depending on the recipe and the locale. Many restaurants, families, towns, and regions will have a signature risotto or at least style of risotto, in addition or in place of a signature pasta dish (risotto alla Milanese is a famous Italian classic). Risotto is a typical dish in Lombardy and Piedmont.
- **Arancini** – Balls of rice with tomato sauce, eggs, peas and mozzarella cheese that are deep fried. A Sicilian speciality, they are now common nationwide.
- **Polenta** – Yellow cornmeal (yellow grits) that has been cooked with stock. It is normally served either creamy, or allowed to set up and then cut into shapes and fried or roasted. It is common in northern mountain restaurants, usually eaten with deer or boar. In the Veneto region, the best polenta is "polenta bianca", a special, tasty, and white cornmeal called "biancoperla".
- **Gelato** – This is the Italian word for ice cream. The non-fruit flavors are usually made only with milk. Gelato made with water and without dairy ingredients is also known as sorbetto. It's as fresh as a sorbet, but tastier. There are many flavors, including coffee, chocolate, fruit, and tiramisù. When buying at a gelateria, you have the choice of having it served in a wafer cone or a tub; in northern Italy you'll pay for every single flavour "ball", and the panna (the milk cream) counts as a flavour; in Rome you can buy a small wafer cone (around €2.50) a medium one (€3) or a large one (€3.50, 2020) without limit of flavours, and the panna is free.
- **Tiramisù** – Italian cake made with coffee, mascarpone, and ladyfingers (sometimes rum) with cocoa powder on the top. The name means "pick-me-up".

Pizza

Pizza is a quick and convenient meal. In most cities, **Pizza al taglio** shops sell pizza by the gram. When ordering, point to the display or tell the attendant the type of pizza you would like (e.g. pizza margherita, pizza con patate (roasted or french fries), pizza al prosciutto (ham), etc.) and how much ("Vorrei (due fette - two slices) or (due etti – two-tenths of a kilogram) or simply say "di più – more" or "di meno – less, per favore"). They will slice it, warm it in the oven, fold it in half, and wrap it in paper. Other food shops also sell pizza by the slice. Italians consider those a sort of second-class pizza, chosen only when you cannot eat a real pizzeria. Getting your meal on the run can save money – many sandwich shops charge an additional fee if you want to sit to eat your meal. In



Pizza Rucola

many parts of the country pizzas have a thin base of bread and not much cheese. The most authentic, original pizza is found in Naples – often containing quite a few ingredients, but most commonly *pizza margherita* (tomatoes, fresh basil and fresh mozzarella di bufala) or margherita with prosciutto.

The traditional, round pizza is found in many restaurants and *pizzerie*. It is rare to find a restaurant that serves pizza at lunchtime, however.

Take-away pizzerias (*pizzerie da asporto*) are becoming ubiquitous in many cities and towns. These are often run by north African immigrants and quality may vary, though they are almost always cheaper than restaurants (€4–5 for a margherita on average, though sometimes as low as €3) and are also open at lunchtime (a few are also open all day long). Some will also serve kebab, which may also vary in quality. Though take-away pizzas are also considered "second-class pizza" by most Italians, they are quite popular among the vast population of university students and they are usually located in residential areas. This is not to be confused with the ever so popular "Pizza al Taglio" shops in Rome. These are a sort of traditional fast food in the Capital City and can be found at every corner. Quality is usually very good and pizza is sold by the weight; you choose the piece of pizza you want, then it is weighed on a scale and priced.

Cheese and sausages

In Italy there are nearly 800 types of cheese, including the famous Parmigiano Reggiano and Grana Padano, and over 400 types of sausages.

Open-air markets offer a variety of cheeses and meats and are always open on Saturdays and usually other days, except Sunday, as well.

Restaurants and bars

Italian bars in the centre of major cities charge more (typically double whatever the final bill is) if you drink or eat seated at a table outside rather than standing at the bar or taking your order to go. This is because bars are charged a very high tax to place tables and chairs outside, so since most people do not use tables anyway, they had decided long ago to only charge those who do. The further away you are from the centre streets, the less this rule is applied. When calling into a bar for a coffee or other drink you first go to the cash register and pay for what you want. You then give the receipt to the barman, who will serve you.

Restaurants always used to charge a small *coperto* (cover charge). Some years ago attempts were made to outlaw the practice, with limited success. The rule now seems to be that if you have bread a coperto can be charged but if you specifically say that you don't want bread then no coperto can be levied. This has happened mainly because of backpackers who sat at a table, occupied it for an hour by just ordering a drink or a salad and consuming enormous amounts of bread.

When dining at restaurants, always wait to be seated by a waiter as attempting to seat yourself is considered to be very rude. Table manners in restaurants also tend to be formal; always keep your hands visible by resting your forearms on the table. You should never rest your elbows on the table, or put your hands on your lap. Also always be sure to hold the fork in your left hand, and the knife in your right. Also note that it is rude



Cheese - Formaggi misti



the menu

to ask for extra cheese to go with your pasta; it will be offered to you spontaneously when appropriate. Bread is meant to be eaten with the meal and not as an appetiser; it is either eaten with the main course, put in your soup or dipped in the sauce after you finish your pasta. Also be sure to ask for the bill when you're done; it is considered rude for a waiter to clear your table and bring you the bill before you ask for it.

Some restaurants now levy a service charge, but this is far from common. In Italian restaurants a large tip is never expected; just leave a euro or two and they will be more than happy.

The traditional meal can include (in order) *antipasto* (starter of cold seafood, gratinated vegetables or ham and salami), *primo* (first dish - pasta or rice dishes), *secondo* (second dish - meat or fish dishes), served together with *contorno* (mostly vegetables), cheeses/fruit, *dessert*, coffee, and spirits. Upmarket restaurants usually refuse to make changes to proposed dishes (exceptions warmly granted for babies or people on special diets). Mid-range restaurants are usually more accommodating. For example, a simple pasta with tomato sauce may not be on the menu but a restaurant will nearly always be willing to cook one for kids who turn their noses up at everything else on the menu.

If you are in a large group (say four or more) then it is appreciated if you don't all order a totally different pasta. While the sauces are pre-cooked the pasta is cooked fresh and it is difficult for the restaurant if one person wants **spaghetti**, another **fettuccine**, a third **rigatoni**, a fourth **penne** and a fifth **farfalle** (butterfly shaped pasta). If you attempt such an order you will invariably be told that you will have a long wait (because the time required for cooking isn't the same for all the types of pasta)!

When pizza is ordered, it is served as a *primo* (even if formally it is not considered as such), together with other *primi*. If you order a pasta or pizza and your friend has a steak you will get your pasta dish, and probably when you've finished eating the steak will arrive. If you want *primo* and *secondo* dishes to be brought at the same time you have to ask.

Most restaurants do not offer **diet food**. The few that do usually write it clearly in menus and even outside. To avoid cover charges, and if you are on a strict budget, many Italian railway stations have a buffet or self-service restaurant (Termini station in Rome is a great example of the latter). These are reasonably priced and generally the food is of a high quality.

Gastronomia

A gastronomia is a kind of self-service restaurant (normally you tell the staff what you want rather than serving yourself) that also offers take-aways. This can give a good opportunity to sample traditional Italian dishes at fairly low cost. These are not buffet restaurants. The food is sold by weight.

Drink

Bars, like restaurants, are non-smoking.

Italians enjoy going out during the evenings, so it's common to have a drink in a bar before dinner. It is called **Aperitivo**.

Within the last couple years, started by Milan, a lot of bars have started offering fixed-price cocktails at aperitivo hours (18 - 21) with a free, and often a very good, buffet meal. It's now widely considered stylish to have this kind of aperitivo (called **Happy Hour**) instead of a structured meal before going out to dance or whatever.

Wine

Italian wine is exported all over the world, and names like Barolo, Brunello, Prosecco, Valpolicella and Chianti are known everywhere. In Italy wine is a substantial topic, a sort of test which can ensure either respect or lack of attention from an entire restaurant staff. Doing your homework ensures that you will get better service, better wine and in the end may even pay less.

So before reaching Italy, try to learn a little about the most important wines of the region you are planning to visit. This will greatly increase your enjoyment. Italian cuisine varies greatly from region to region (sometimes also from town to town), and wine reflects this variety. Italians have a long tradition of matching wines with dishes and often every dish has an appropriate wine. The popular "colour rule" (red wines with meat dishes, white wines with fish) can be happily broken: Italy has many strong white wines to serve with meat (e.g. Sicilian or Tuscan chardonnays), as well as delicate red wines for fish (perhaps an Alto Adige pinot noir).

The price mark-ups charged by restaurants for wines on their wine list are not usually excessive, giving you a chance to experiment. In the big cities, there are also many wine bars, where you can taste different wines by the glass, at the same time as eating some delicious snacks. Unlike in many other countries, it is unusual for restaurants to serve wine by the glass.

The *vino della casa* (house wine) can be an excellent drinking opportunity in small villages far from towns (especially in Tuscany), where it could be what the patron would really personally drink or could even be the restaurant's own product. It tends to be a safe choice in decent restaurants in cities as well. *Vino della casa* may come bottled but in lower-priced restaurants it is still just as likely to be available in a carafe of one quarter, one half or one litre. As a general rule, if the restaurant seems honest and not too geared for tourists, the house wine is usually not too bad. That said, some house wines can be dreadful and give you a nasty head the next morning. If it doesn't taste too good it probably won't do you much good, so send it back and order from the wine list.

Italians are justly proud of their wines and foreign wines are rarely served, but many foreign grapes like *cabernet sauvignon* and *chardonnay* are increasingly being used.

Beer

Although wine is a traditional everyday product, beer is very common as well. Beer did not belong to the Italian tradition in the way that wine does, but in the last 30-odd years there has been an explosion of English-style pubs in every town, big or small, with usually a huge selection of any kind of beer, ale, stout and cider, from every country in the world.

DOC, DOCG, IGT?

The *Denominazione di origine controllata* certificate restricts above all the grape blend allowed for the wine, and in itself it is not yet a guarantee of quality. The same applies to the stricter *Denominazione di origine controllata e garantita*. These two denominations are indications of a traditional wine typical of the region, such as Chianti, and often a good partner for local food. But some of the best Italian wines are labeled with the less strict *Indicazione geografica tipica* designation, often a sign of a more modern, "international" wine.

Major Italian beers include Peroni and Moretti and these are usually the ones offered by daytime cafes. If you are serious about beer drinking, there are many bars that specialise in serving a wide range of bottled beers (see city articles for more details), as well as Irish pubs and similar establishments. There is an increasing number of micro-breweries around the country. They often are run by local beer enthusiasts turned brewers, running small breweries with a pub attached. Their association is called Unionbirrai (<http://www.unionbirrai.com/>).

In the Trieste region it is far more common to drink Slovenian beers and the most popular brands are 'Union' and 'Zlatorog'. Surprisingly it is often cheaper to buy Slovenian beer in Italy (Trieste) than in Slovenia itself.

Other drinks

- **Limoncello.** A liquor made of alcohol, lemon peels, and sugar. Limoncello can be considered a "moonshine" type of product (although usually made with legally obtained alcohol) as every Italian family, especially in the middle-south (near Naples) and southern part of the country, has its own recipe for limoncello. Because lemon trees adapt so well to the Mediterranean climate, and they produce a large amount of fruit continually throughout their long fruit-bearing season, it is not unusual to find many villa's yards filled with lemon trees bending under the weight of their crop. You can make a lot of lemonade, or better yet, brew your own limoncello. It is mainly considered a dessert liqueur, served after a heavy meal (similar to amaretto), and used for different celebrations. The taste can be compared to a very strong and slightly thick lemonade flavor with an alcohol tinge to it. Best served chilled in the freezer in small glasses that have been in the freezer. It is better sipped than treated as a shooter. A derived beverage is **Crema di Limoncello**, a mix of limoncello and heavy cream, giving it a milder flavour.
- **Grappa** is a highly alcoholic drink made by distilling grape skins after the juice has been squeezed from them for winemaking, so you could imagine how it might taste. If you're going to drink it, then make sure you get a bottle having been distilled multiple times.
- **San Pellegrino** is the most famous sparkling water in Italy and considered among the best. It can be found throughout Europe and beyond, but the best place to enjoy its distinct experience is in Italy itself. San Pellegrino can be found in almost every Italian supermarket or grocery store, and is also served in many restaurants. It can be enjoyed at room temperature or chilled.



A cold limoncello on a warm night

Limoncello and grappa and other similar drinks are usually served after a meal as an aid to digestion. If you are a good customer restaurants will offer a drink to you free of charge, and may even leave the bottle on your table for you to help yourself. Beware that these are very strong drinks.

Coffee

Bars in Italy offer an enormous number of possible permutations for a way of having a cup of coffee. What you won't get, however, is 100 different types of bean; nor will you find "gourmet" coffees. If you like that kind of stuff, better take your own. A bar will make coffee from a commercial blend of beans supplied by

just one roaster. There are many companies who supply roast beans and the brand used is usually prominently displayed both inside and outside of the bar.

The following are the most basic preparations of coffee:

- *Caffè* or *Caffè Normale* or *Espresso* – This is the basic unit of coffee, normally consumed after a meal.
- *Caffè ristretto* – This has the same amount of coffee, but less water, thus making it stronger.
- *Caffè lungo* – This is the basic unit of coffee but additional water is allowed to go through the ground coffee beans in the machine.
- *Caffè americano* – This has much more water and is served in a cappuccino cup. It is more like an American breakfast coffee but the quantity is still far less than you would get in the States. It started as an attempt to replicate the type of coffee preferred by occupying American soldiers during World War II, hence its name.

So far so good. But here the permutations begin. For the same price as a normal coffee, you can ask for a dash of milk to be added to any of the above. This is called *macchiato*. Hence, *caffè lungo macchiato* or *caffè americano macchiato*. But that dash of milk can be either hot (*caldo*) or cold (*freddo*). So you can ask, without the barman batting an eye, for a *caffè lungo macchiato freddo* or a *caffè Americano macchiato caldo*. Any one of these options can also be had decaffeinated. Ask for *caffè decaffeinato*. The most popular brand of decaffeinated coffee is HAG and it is quite usual to ask for *caffè HAG* even if the bar does not use that particular brand.

If you are really in need of a pick-me-up you can ask for a double dose of coffee, or a *doppio*. You have to specify this when you pay at the cash register and it costs twice as much as a normal coffee. All the above permutations still apply, although a *caffè doppio ristretto* may be a bit strange.

Additionally, if you need a shot of alcohol, you can ask for a *caffè corretto*. This usually involves adding grappa, brandy or sambuca; "corrected" being the Italian expression corresponding to "spiked". Normally it is only a plain coffee that is corrected but there is no reason why you could not "correct" any of the above combinations.

Then there are coffee drinks with milk, as follows:

- *Cappuccino* – Needs no introduction. If you don't like the froth you can ask for *cappuccino senza schiuma*.
- *Caffè latte* – Often served in a glass, this is a small amount of coffee with the cup/glass filled up with hot milk.
- *Latte macchiato* – This is a glass of milk with a dash of coffee in the top. The milk can be hot or cold.

Finally, in the summer you can have *caffè freddo*, which is basically plain coffee with ice, *caffè freddo "shakerato"* (shaked ice coffee) or *cappuccino freddo*, which is a cold milky coffee without the froth.

This list is by no means exhaustive. With a vivid imagination and a desire to experiment you should be able to find many more permutations. Enjoy!

Sleep

In major cities and tourist areas, you can find a good variety of accommodations, from world-class brand hotels to family-managed bed & breakfasts and room rentals, but hostels are really few.

Camping is a good way to save money and camping sites are usually well-managed, but especially during summer, managers tend not to accept last-minute groups of young people (given the high chance of problems that such groups of Italian guys tend to cause), so you'd better book in advance. Farmstays are an increasingly popular way to experience Italy, particularly in rural areas of Tuscany, Piedmont, Umbria, Abruzzo, Sardinia and Apulia. They provide a great combination of good and healthy food, wonderful sights and not-so-expensive prices. If you prefer self-catering accommodations, it's quite simple to find them on the wonderful Amalfi Coast or the less commercial and more genuine Calabria coast. An Italian specialty in small villages are scattered hotels for those who love participating in local lifestyle it is a balance between a hotel and a house.

Hotel star ratings can only be taken as a broad indication of what you will get for your money. There are many marvellous 2-star hotels that you will want to return to every year and many 5-star hotels that you will never want to set foot in again. The star rating, as in all countries, is based on a bureaucratic assessment of the facilities provided and does not necessarily relate to comfort. Often the only difference between a 3-star and 4-star hotel is that the latter offers all meals while the former only offers breakfast.

Cope

Electricity

Italy uses 220 V, 50 Hz. It has its own electrical plug design. The standard "European" flat two-prong plugs will fit, but most other plugs from abroad will not, or not fit safely, in the standard sockets. Sockets accepting French unearthed and German-type "Schuko" plugs (used in much of mainland Europe) can also be found quite often, especially in the north, and you'll find adapters for Schuko plugs in virtually all supermarkets. Adapters for other systems are not that ubiquitous but can be found at airports or in specialised shops. In private apartments or hotels you will often find all three types of electric sockets in one room so if your device won't fit in one socket keep trying.

Power surges and power failures are virtually unknown in Italy; the energy, water and gas systems are state-run and very well equipped and maintained since even before WW2; the electrical system is fully updated to the latest tech specs and every household is required to comply when renovating. That includes the remote villages in the South, too.

Learn

For a country that was the birthplace of the Renaissance period, Italians value education and learning and the country is home to several prestigious universities. Many of the world's oldest operating universities are situated in Italy and many of the world's greatest minds (e.g. *Leonardo da Vinci*, *Michelangelo*, *Niccolo Machiavelli*) were from Italy.

Although this all sounds impressive, Italy isn't a popular destination for foreign students yet. This is probably (emphasis on probably) because most university classes are conducted in Italian and a limited selection of courses is conducted entirely in English. It all depends on the university you wish to study at. Italian universities charge low tuition fees for all students, including international students.

As you may or may not expect, there is a wide gap between schools in Northern Italy and schools in Southern Italy. Education standards in Southern Italy are much lower than that of Northern Italy.

The province of Emilia-Romagna has some of the oldest universities in the world; the **University of Modena and Reggio Emilia** (<https://www.unimore.it/>) was founded in 1175 and the **University of Bologna** (<http://www.unibo.it>) (*Università di Bologna*), founded in 1088, is the oldest operating university in the world, unless you count Al Azhar in Cairo. It also happens to be the country's most prestigious university.

The **University of Palermo** (<https://www.unipa.it/>) (founded in 1806) and **University of Naples Federico II** (https://www.unina.it/en_GB/home) (founded in 1224) are Southern Italy's most prestigious universities.

The **Polytechnic University of Milan** (<http://www.polimi.it/en>) (*Politecnico di Milano*) is the oldest university in Milan and the country's largest and most prestigious technical university. To get admission into the university, you have to pass a competitive entrance exam. One may consider the Polytechnic University of Milan as the "MIT" of Italy.

Some American universities have satellite campuses in the country. **New York University** for example offers a study-abroad program in Florence and maintains its own campus in the country.

Work

If you are a citizen of a country that is a part of the European Union or the EFTA, you may work in Italy without any restrictions whatsoever. Everyone else including citizens of the United Kingdom requires a work permit to work in Italy. Obtaining a work permit requires you to deal with Italian bureaucracy, which has a reputation for being slow, complicated, and inefficient.

Overview

Italy is not usually considered a top destination for career advancement. An increasing number of Italians have moved abroad for work, and they often express discontent over the lack of opportunities in Italy. Some blame the Italian education system for failing to adequately prepare Italians for a competitive job market.

The country has a high level of unemployment, the country's economy is notoriously sluggish (on average the economy grows between 0 and 1% each year), and many Southern Italians move to Northern Italy due to the lack of opportunities in Southern Italy.

The Italian labour market tends to operate through personal contacts — it's not unusual for Italians to hire their close friends and family members. If you know someone that works somewhere, you can probably figure out quite an easy way to work there, too. It always helps to know people living in the area where you want to work, i.e., network!

Starting salaries range from €800 to €1,400 a month. There's a huge underground black market, though. This doesn't mean working in some kind of obscure crime syndicate: it simply means not being book-regulated. Most "black" workers can be found in small businesses such as bars, pubs and small shops, or as construction workers.

Important pointers

Hierarchy is very important in Italian companies and businesses, which means that you are expected to show respect to people much senior than you. There's absolutely nothing wrong with disagreeing with your superiors so long as you do it tactfully and respectfully.

Stay safe

For emergencies, call **113** (Polizia di Stato - State Police), **112** (Carabinieri - Gendarmerie), **117** (Guardia di Finanza - Financial police force), **115** (Fire Department), **118** (Medical Rescue), **1515** (State Forestry Department), **1530** (Coast Guard), **1528** (Traffic reports).

Italy is a safe country to travel in like most developed countries. There are few incidents of terrorism/serious violence and these episodes have been almost exclusively motivated by internal politics. Almost every major incident is attributed to organised crime or anarchist movements and rarely, if ever, directed at travellers or foreigners.

Crime

Violent crime rates in Italy are low compared to most European countries. If you're reasonably careful and use common sense you won't encounter personal safety risks even in the less affluent neighborhoods of large cities. However, petty crime can be a problem for unwary travellers. Pickpockets often work in pairs or teams, occasionally in conjunction with street vendors; take the usual precautions against pickpockets. Instances of rape and robbery are increasing slightly.

You should exercise the usual caution when going out at night alone, although it remains reasonably safe even for single women to walk alone at night. Italians will often offer to accompany female friends back home for safety, even though crime statistics show that sexual violence against women is rare compared to most other Western countries. In a survey by United Nations, 14% of Italian women had experienced attempted rape and 2.3% had experienced rape in their lifetimes.

The mafia, camorra, and other crime syndicates generally operate in southern Italy and not the whole country, and although infamous are usually not involved in petty crime.

Prostitution is rife in the night streets around cities. Prostitution in Italy is not exactly illegal, though authorities are taking a firmer stance against it than before. Brothels are illegal, though, and pimping is a serious offence, considered by the law similar to slavery. In some areas, it is an offence even to stop your car in front of a prostitute although the rows of prostitutes at the side of many roads, particularly in the suburbs, suggest that the law is not enforced. In general, being the client of a prostitute falls in an area of questionable legality and is inadvisable. Being the client of a prostitute under 18 is a criminal offence. It is estimated that a high percentage of prostitutes working in Italy are victims of human trafficking and modern-day slavery.

There are four types of police forces a tourist might encounter in Italy. The Polizia di Stato (State Police) is the national police force and stationed mostly in the larger towns and cities, and by train stations; they wear blue shirts and grey pants and drive light-blue-painted cars with "POLIZIA" written on the side. The



Mounted Carabinieri in Milan.

Carabinieri are the national gendarmerie, and are found in the smaller communities, as well as in the cities; they wear very dark blue uniforms with fiery red vertical stripes on their trousers and drive similarly-coloured cars. There is no real distinction between the roles of these two major police forces: both can intervene, investigate, and prosecute in the same way.

The Guardia di Finanza is a police force charged with border controls and fiscal matters; although not a patrolling police force, they sometime aid the other forces in territory control. They dress fully in light grey and drive blue or gray cars with yellow markings. All these police forces are generally professional and trustworthy, corruption being virtually unheard of. Finally, municipalities have local police, with names such as "Polizia municipale" or "Polizia locale" (previously, they were labelled "Vigili urbani"). Their style of dressing varies among the cities, but they will always wear some type of blue uniform with white piping and details, and drive similarly marked cars, which should be easy to spot. These local police forces are not trained for major policing interventions, as in the past they have mostly been treated as traffic police, employed for minor tasks; in the event of major crimes, the Polizia or Carabinieri will be summoned instead.

After leaving a restaurant or other commercial facility, it is possible, though unlikely, that you will be asked to show your bill and your documents to Guardia di Finanza agents. This is perfectly legitimate (they are checking to see if the facility has printed a proper receipt and will thus pay taxes on what was sold).

For all practical matters, including reporting a crime or asking for information, you may ask any police. The Italian Army has also been directly tasked with protecting key locations, including some city landmarks you may want to visit that might be target for terrorist attacks; in case of emergency you can, by all means, ask them for help, but they are not police officers and will have to call the police for you to report a crime and so on.

Police officers in Italy are not authorised to collect fines of any kind and have no authority to ask you for money for any reason (unless you are pulled over in your foreign vehicle and fined, see "Get around/By car" above).

Possession of drugs is always illegal, but it is a criminal offence only above a certain amount.

The main emergency number, handled by the State Police, used to be 113. The medical emergency number is 118, but personnel of the 113 call centre are trained to handle mistakes and will immediately hook you up with actual medical emergency services. Some regions (e.g. Lombardy) have adopted or are adopting the common European emergency number 112.

There are many bars in Italy that cater to tourists and foreigners with "home country" themes, calling themselves such things as "American bars" or "Irish pubs". In addition to travellers, these bars attract a large number of Italians who, among other reasons, go there specifically to meet travellers and other foreigners. While the motivation for the vast majority of these Italians is simply to have a good time with new friends, there may be one or two petty criminals who loiter in and out of these establishments hoping to take advantage of travellers who are disoriented or drunk. Travelling to these places in groups is a simple solution to this problem. Alternatively, if you are alone, avoid getting drunk!

When entering with a car into a city, avoid restricted, pedestrian-only areas (ZTL) or you could be fined about €100.

As in other countries, there are gangs known for tampering with ATMs by placing "skimmers" in front of the card slot and get a clone of your card. Check the machine carefully and, if unsure, use a different one.

Naples and Rome are the cities with the highest rates of crime towards tourists. These two cities are riddled with beggars and criminals and special care must be taken especially near such locations as the main historical monuments (the Colosseum for example) and the popular gathering places for tourists (Campo de' Fiori Square in Rome for example). It must be stated also that every train station in the country attracts lowlifes, and in general train stations, at night, are not places where one might want to linger too long.

Tourist scams

Read up on the legends concerning tourist scams. Most of them occur regularly in bigger cities such as Rome, Milan, or Naples.

Around popular tourist sites, there are people trying to sell cheap souvenirs. They may also carry roses and say they are giving you a gift because they like you but the minute you take their 'gift' they demand money. They are very insistent, pleading and pesty and often the only way to get rid of them is to be plain rude. Do the best you can to not take their "gifts" as they will follow you around asking for money. Simply saying "no" or "vai via" ("go away") will get them off your back until the next vendor comes up to you.

Another typical encounter throughout tourist spots is the fake 'deaf and dumbs' who enter restaurants or bars, leaving small objects (lighters, keychains, or small toys) on tables with a note asking for financial help. Do not examine their wares; leave them down and they will come back and collect it then leave.

A particular scam is when some plainclothes police will approach you, asking to look for "drug money" or to see your passport. This is a scam to take your money. You can scare them by asking for their ID. Guardia di Finanza (the grey uniformed ones) do customs work.

Another scam involves men approaching you, asking where you are from, and beginning to tie bracelets around your wrists. When they are done they will try to charge you upwards of €20 for each bracelet. If anyone makes any attempt to reach for your hand, retract quickly. If you get trapped, you can refuse to pay, but this may not be wise if there are not many people around. Carry small bills or just change, in your wallet, so if you find yourself cornered to pay for the bracelet, you can convince them that €1 or €2 is all you have.

Yet another scam involves being approached by a man, asking you to help break a large bill - usually €20 or €50. Do not give him your money. The bill he is giving you is fake, but at first glance it might seem real.

The best advice to avoid scams is to get away from anyone you have never seen before who starts talking to you.

When taking a taxi, be sure to remember the license number written on the car door. In seconds, people have had a taxi bill increased by €10 or even more.

Racism

Racially-motivated violence is rare but it does make the news a few times a year.

Italians may assume a person with prominent "foreign" features to be an immigrant and, regrettably, treat them with some measure of contempt or condescension.

Tourists can generally expect not to be insulted to their face, but unfortunately casual racism and bigotry is not absent from conversation (especially bar talk, and especially if sports games featuring non-white players are on).

Sports-induced attacks (hooliganism) on foreigners are not unknown, and supporters of foreign teams playing in Italy should exercise extra care not to wear their colours openly on the day of the game, outside of the sports ground.

Road safety

Driving in Italy is *fast-paced* and widely considered to be *wild*, especially when compared to other European countries. Drivers tend to change lanes quickly and tend to make hasty, irrational driving decisions. It's common for drivers to drive on the wrong side of the roads just to beat the traffic and get ahead of everyone else.

As a pedestrian, be careful when crossing roads, as not all vehicles will stop at marked crossings.

Stay healthy

Italian hospitals are public and offer completely free high-standard treatment for travellers in possession of an EHIC (EU/EEA citizens) or GHIC (UK citizens). As in other countries with universal healthcare, you may have to wait some hours to be treated unless you're in a serious condition. Emergency rooms are called "Pronto Soccorso". Emergency assistance is granted even to non-EU travellers. For non-emergency assistance, non-EHIC/GHIC-holders are required to pay out-of-pocket, there is no convention with US health insurances (although some insurance companies might later reimburse these expenses).



Careggi hospital in Florence.

Italy has a four-colour code of urgency, red being the most immediate (assistance is given without any delay) and white being the lowest (anyone with a red, yellow and green code will pass before you). With a white code, meaning the treatment is not urgent and does not necessitate emergency personnel, you are also required to pay for the full consultation, so do not go to the Pronto Soccorso just to check your knee after last year's fall.

Water

While safe to drink, the tap water (*acqua del rubinetto*) in some peninsular parts of Italy can be cloudy with a slight off taste. With the exception of certain towns that use mountain water for their municipal supplies, such as Spoleto, most Italians prefer bottled water, which is served in restaurants. Make sure you let the waiter/waitress know you want still water (*acqua naturale* or *acqua senza gas*) or else you could get water with either natural gas or with added carbonation (*frizzante* or *con gas*).

Rome, in particular, has exceptional pride in the quality of its water. This goes right back to the building of aqueducts channelling pure mountain water to all the citizens of Rome during Roman times. Don't waste plastic bottles. You can refill your drinking containers and bottles at any of the constant running taps and fountains dotted around the city, safe in the knowledge that you are getting excellent quality cool spring water - try it!

Water in southern Italy might come from desalination plants and sometimes may have a strange taste, due to extended droughts, but it is always perfectly safe as the state runs continuous tests. If in doubt use bottled water. Elsewhere tap water is perfectly drinkable and very well maintained. If not, a "non potabile"

warning is posted.

Many towns have fountains with tap water that you can use to refill your container, but do not use water from fountains with an "Acqua non potabile" sign on them.

Respect

Italy has a reputation for being a welcoming country and Italians are friendly and courteous, as well as **very** used to small talk and interacting with foreigners.

Culture and identity

Although this is a very broad generalisation, Italians in the North are perceived to be much more reserved compared to Italians in the South.

Despite stereotypes, it is uncommon for Italians to strike up conversations with strangers. Acting too familiar with someone can cause someone to be uncomfortable.

Italians are generally **neutral communicators**. They make efforts to be polite and respectful, but they are quite comfortable with speaking their minds. Sure, Italians are known for being sociable and talkative, but you should make every effort to be tactful with your words. Just because they seem confident does not mean that they are difficult to offend.

It is common for Italians to ask people personal questions and give people advice on all kinds of things. You can expect to be showered with lots of advice on what you're doing, what you're wearing, how to take care of your home, asked questions about your life story and background, what to see and not see, and so on. Try not to get upset or annoyed at this because the information that Italians convey is meant to help you in a good way, not a bad way. As a foreigner, you may not fully experience this, but know that this is common.

Italian society is less formal compared to other countries around Europe, especially when it comes to introductions. For instance, it's common for Italians to introduce people to friends in a casual manner.

In conversational settings, it is **very common** for people to interrupt or talk over one another. Shouting to make oneself heard is common, as is the use of animated hand gestures and swear words. What may seem like a shouting match in public may actually be a passionate conversation!

Italians are highly proud of their language and people will become noticeably more aloof if you approach them speaking English. Immediately conversing in English with someone may be seen as rude or even impolite, but since the country receives so many visitors, Italians have gradually gotten used to being spoken to in English and are grudgingly tolerant of this. To get on someone's good side, you should **ask someone if they speak English** before communicating. If you wish to leave a lasting impression on someone, say *Parla inglese?* (pron. Par-Lah-Ing-Lay-Zee) to someone.

If you're looking to practice your Italian skills, do not worry if you're not fluent in or if you think you're bad at Italian; any knowledge of Italian (even if you just know two words) is bound to impress the locals.

Once a foreigner has mastered the language sufficiently, though, he/she will be required to start using polite forms of speech when addressing older folk, people who are not in their circle of friends, and any office/store clerk they come in contact with. In fact, using familiar verb and pronoun forms is rather rare

except among friends, family, and sometimes peers. The Italian polite form of speech form uses the third singular person instead of the second person singular: "Lei" (also the word for "she", but used for both male and female as a formal way of saying "you") instead of "tu" (you [familiar]).

Italians greet family and close friends with two light kisses on the cheek. Males do, too. To avoid ending up kissing on the lips, first move to the right (kiss the other person on their left cheek) and then to the left. Other than that, the hand-shaking rules are the same as anywhere else in the western world.

Clothing

You will notice that in general Italians are quite obsessed with fashion and they **dress well** even in informal situations (this is particularly true in big cities, especially Milan, being one of the world's fashion capitals). After all, Italian fashion is famous worldwide.

However, this doesn't mean that Italians wear a suit and expensive clothes all the time, but if you dress in the 'whatever is comfortable' kind of way (like flip-flops outside the beach, sneakers outside sport activities, pajamas-like sweatshirts etc.) you will be considered 'strange'. Even if most tourists in Italy wear **sandals with socks** and large short-sleeved shirts, most Italians make fun of them (but almost never will they insult people to their face).

Whole essays can be written about the Italians' relationships with clothes. Three of the most important observations:

1. Most Italians (especially young ones from the upper and upper-middle social class) are very appearance-conscious; don't be surprised or insulted if you are looked at askance for your 'eccentricity' in not wearing the latest customised jeans or boots.
2. It's important not to judge people in return by their choice of clothing. Styles do not necessarily carry the same connotations in Italy that they would in Britain or some other countries. A woman in stilettos, miniskirt and full makeup at eight in the morning is probably just going to work in a bank. Almost all youths lounge about in skin-tight tee-shirts and casually knotted knitwear (and are very perplexed by the response they get when they take their sense of style and grooming to a less 'sophisticated' climate).
3. Sometimes, clothing rules are written. To visit a church or religious site you will need to cover yourself up; no bare backs, chests, shoulders and sometimes no knees, either. Sometimes museums and other attractions can also be strict; no bathing costumes, for example. If you want to visit a church or religious site it's a good idea to take something to cover yourself up with; for example a jumper or large scarf. Some churches supply cover-ups, such as sarongs are loaned to men with shorts so that they can modestly conceal their legs. Even where there are no written rules, bare chests and large expanses of sunburnt skin are unacceptable away from beaches or sunbathing areas, whatever the temperature is. It is considered impolite for a man to wear a hat in a Catholic church.

Sensitive issues

Italians in general do not trust their government, and it is very common for them to express feelings of dismay and frustration towards their government and politicians. It is not a societal taboo to discuss politics, but generally speaking, political discourse tends to be quite polarising.

Italians in general are modest about the role their country plays (or has played) in the world. This said, some aspects of Italian history (Benito Mussolini's fascist regime being one of them) are regarded with shame and dismay. Younger Italians may be more open about discussing such subjects, but the same cannot

be said for older Italians. Fascism is out of mainstream Italian politics and is viewed with contempt and scorn.

Unlike in other parts of Europe, communism has no negative connotations in Italy. For several decades of the 20th century, Italy had the largest communist party in the western world. The Communist Party of Italy was independent of the Soviet Union and associated with good government, many cities have a piazza or major street named after its most important founding figure, Antonio Gramsci, and there are some people in Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany (two communist strongholds) who are nostalgic towards the party.

Italians are often portrayed as "mobsters" in popular culture. It's **rude** to perpetuate this stereotype and Italians often get tired of hearing of such stereotypes. Generally speaking, the mafia is a rather sensitive issue and many Italians prefer to not talk about it.

The North/South divide is a sensitive issue for some. Unless you have a heart for lengthy, prolonged debates, it would be wise to refrain from comparing the North and the South or bringing the subject up. It's a lot more sensitive in the South than it is in the North.

Italy has twenty provinces and some people in some provinces (for example, Veneto, South Tyrol, and Sicily) are sympathetic to full autonomy or secession from Italy. If anything regarding regional politics has been brought up, it's best to stay neutral unless you have a heart for lengthy, passionate debates.

Don't compare one city/region to another; doing so is quite crass and Italians may think you are trying to start an argument. Italians are quite proud of their home cities/regions.

LGBT rights in Italy

Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons in Italy may face legal challenges not experienced by non-LGBT residents. Both male and female same-sex sexual activity is legal in Italy, but same-sex couples and households headed by same-sex couples are not eligible for the same legal protections available to opposite-sex couples.

Italian opinions have changed and people are now more supportive of LGBT rights, but tend to be more repressive than other European nations. Tolerance of others is part of the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, which, at the same time, holds generally negative views of gay sex. Nevertheless, there is a significant liberal tradition, particularly in the North and in Rome. Conservative Italian politicians such as former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi have expressed opposition to increasing gay rights. A Eurobarometer survey published in December 2006 showed that 31% of Italians surveyed support same-sex marriage and 24% recognise same-sex couple's right to adopt (EU-wide average 44% and 33%). A 2007 poll found 45% support, 47% opposition and 8% unsure on the question of support for a civil partnership law for gays. Civil unions for same-sex couples were recognised in 2016, and public opinion on the acceptance of LGBT people as a whole remains fairly positive, with 70-80% of Italians believing homosexuality should be accepted by society.

While more information can be found on LGBT-specific websites, a brief summary of the situation is as follows: while violence is uncommon against openly gay people, some Italians are disturbed by public displays of affection from same-sex couples and stares are very possible. Some same-sex couples prefer to avoid public attention. As is the case elsewhere, the younger generations tend to be more tolerant than older folks, but assumptions should not be made in either direction.

Religion

Although most Italians are nominally Roman Catholic, contemporary Italy is in general a secular society, and most Italians are rather relaxed in their religious observances. Atheism and agnosticism are also not uncommon, particularly in traditionally left-wing areas in Central and Northern Italy. While not all Italians respect Catholic religious traditions, even many atheists do, and as a visitor, you should, especially in the South.

Food

Italians, in general, have an **intricate relationship with food**. Unlike other countries, there are several food rules that you should be mindful of during your stay. Since the country receives so many visitors, cultural blunders are tolerated, but still, you should keep the following in mind if you want to get on locals' good sides and adapt to the Italian way of life.

- Most Italians drink **cappuccino** during breakfast. Ordering cappuccino after breakfast is considered awkward by most Italians and servers. If you want to sip on some coffee, consider ordering a **macchiato**.
- **Never criticise someone's food**; it is considered extremely rude.
- **Never criticise the food that is served to you at a restaurant**; it is considered extremely rude and staff members won't hesitate to defend the quality of food that is served to you. Also, do not expect waiters and staff members to dance to your tune.
- **Do not tell someone how to improve their cooking**. Italians would be **incredibly offended** by this.
- Don't confuse Italian food with Italian-American food. They are different cuisines and should be treated as such.
- Don't rush your meal. A meal with your Italian colleagues and/or friends can last for several hours. Savour it!
- **Do not decline an invitation to a business meal**; it is considered extremely rude and insulting to your Italian counterparts.

Connect

Internet access

WiFi

By law all public-access internet points must keep records of web sites viewed by customers, and even the customer's ID: expect to be refused access if you don't provide identification. Hotels providing Internet access are not required to record IDs if the connection is provided in the guest's room, although if the connection is offered in the main public hall then IDs are required.

Publicly available **wireless access** without user identification is illegal, so open Wi-Fi hotspots (like the ones you might expect to find in a mall or café) all have some form of (generally one-time) registration.

Certain internet activities are illegal. Beside the obvious (child pornography, trading in illegal products like drugs and weapons), copyright infringement is illegal even if no profit is made. However enforcement of copyright laws against P2P users is lax and cease&desist letters from providers are unheard of, *unless* using a University's WiFi. Certain websites (mostly related to online gambling and copyrighted material) have been blocked in Italy following court rulings.

There is a free, government run, public, nation-wide WiFi network called WiFi Italia (<https://wifi.italia.it/en/>), accessible through an app.

Mobile

The mobile phone market developed in Italy as early as 1993, so reception is guaranteed in the whole of the country, including far off the coast, the tallest mountains, and the smallest villages. 4G internet connectivity is available from all major Italian carriers.

Most carriers offer relatively cheap internet plans with plenty of traffic with unlimited calls and text messages.

There are three main carriers: TIM (<https://www.tim.it/>), Vodafone (<https://www.vodafone.it/portal/privati>) and Wind Tre (<https://www.windtre.it/>). However, it might be best to also check out smaller and "virtual" operators, that often charge less.

Generally speaking, internet plans only include connectivity when under a specific carrier's coverage. When roaming, internet costs can be very high. Coverage of major carriers is widespread, but it would be wise to check whether your carrier covers your area.

Telephone

Both the fixed and mobile phone systems are available throughout Italy.

Telephone numbers of the fixed system used to have separate prefixes (area codes) and a local number. In the 1990s the numbers were unified and nowadays, when calling Italian phones you must **always dial the full number**. For example you start numbers for Rome with 06 even if you are calling from Rome. All land line numbers start with 0. Mobile numbers start with 3. Numbers starting with 89 are high-fee services. If you don't know somebody's phone number you can dial a variety of phone services, the most used being 1240, 892424, 892892, but most of them have high fees.

To call abroad from Italy you have to dial **00** + *country code* + *local part* where the syntax of the *local part* depends on the country called.

To call Italy from abroad you have to dial *international prefix* + **39** + *local part*. Unlike calls to most countries, you should *not* skip the starting zero of the local part if you are calling an Italian land line.

In case of emergency call the appropriate number from the list below. Such calls are usually free and calls to 112, 113, 115, 118 can be made from payphones for free without the need of inserting coins. 112 (standard emergency number in GSM specification) can be dialed in any case for free from any mobile phone (even if your credit is empty or if you are in an area covered by a different operator)

- 112 EU emergency telephone number - Carabinieri emergency number - general emergency



Pay phones in Milan

- **113** Police emergency number
- **114** Blue Phone emergency number - children-related emergency (especially various forms of violence)
- **115** Fire Brigade emergency number
- **117** Guardia di Finanza - for customs, commercial and tax issues
- **118** Health emergency number - use this if you need an ambulance, otherwise ask for the local Guardia Medica number and they'll send you a doctor.
- **1515** State Forestry Department
- **1518** Traffic Information
- **1530** Coast Guard
- **803116** A.C.I. (Italian Automobile Club) This provides assistance if your car breaks down (if you have a rented car then call the number they provide), This is a service provided to subscribers to ACI or to other Automobile Clubs associated to ARC Europe. If you're not associated to any of them you'll be asked to pay a fee (approx. €80).

Always carry with you a note about the address and the number of your embassy.

If you are in an emergency and do not know who to call dial 112 or 113 (out of major towns, better to call **113** for English-speaking operators).

A few payphones remain in train stations and airports. Some of them work only with coins, some only with phone cards and just a very few with both coins and phone cards. Only a limited number of payphones (in main airports) directly accept credit cards.

Many companies are shifting their customer service numbers to fixed-rate number (prefix 199). These numbers are at the local rate, no matter where they are called from.

According to national regulations, hotels cannot apply a surcharge on calls made from hotels (as the switchboard service should already be included as a service paid in the room cost) but, to be sure, check it before you use.

Calls between landlines are charged at either the local rate or the national rate depending on the originating and destination area codes; if they are the same then the call will be local rate. Local calls are not free.

Mobile

Italians use mobile phones extensively, some might say excessively. The main networks are TIM (Telecom Italia Mobile, part of Telecom Italia, formerly state controlled), Vodafone, WindTre and Iliad.

Best advice is to buy a prepaid SIM card (€10 upwards) and a cheap mobile phone (€19 upwards) to put it in (if you don't have a cellphone already that you can use). It will be much more practical.

Mobile phones from Korea, Japan and North America will not work in Italy unless they are Tri-band.

Nearly all of Italy has GSM, GPRS, UMTS/HSDPA and LTE coverage, 5G technology is being rolled-out only in major cities as of Mar 2021. You must provide a valid form of identification, such as a passport or other official identity, to be able to purchase a SIM card. Unless you already have one, you will also be required to obtain a *Codice Fiscale* (a tax number) - or the vendor may generate one for you from your form of identification. Subscription-based mobile telephony accounts are subject to a government tax, to which *prepaid* SIM cards are not subject. Sometimes hotels have mobile phones for customer to borrow or rent.

Mobile tariffs used to be very complicated but nowadays most mobile operators offer contracts with unlimited calls and messages to all operators and at least a few tens of gigabytes of internet traffic for about €10/month. Usually there is a difference in cost even for incoming calls from abroad. If you can choose, calling the other party's land line could be even 40% cheaper than mobile.

Post

If at all possible, wait until you leave Italy before posting postcards, greeting cards and other items to friends and family back home. The Italian post is notorious for being slow, expensive and unreliable. In border towns and cities near the borders with France, Switzerland, Austria and Slovenia it may be best to cross the border to post - postcards from Slovenia to Britain can take just 2 days compared with over a week when posted across the border in Trieste, Italy.

When you do decide to send mail from Italy, there are two services: Poste Italiane (<https://www.poste.it/>) (red post boxes, available everywhere) and Globe Postal Service (GPS) (<https://www.globepostalservice.com/>) (yellow post-boxes, available in some shops).

Poste Italiane (<https://www.poste.it/>) offices can be found in every town and most villages - look for the *PT* symbol. When entering the post office you will usually have to take a ticket and wait for your number to appear on the screen when it's your turn. There will be different tickets for different services but for posting a parcel look for the yellow symbol with the icon of an envelope. Most post offices close at around 13:00 or 14:00 and only a central post office in most towns will re-open in the late afternoon.

Globe Postal Service (GPS) (<https://www.globepostalservice.com/>) sells stamps in tobacco/postcard shops, which also have their dedicated post boxes. Rates (<https://www.globepostalservice.com/faq/>) as of September 2018 are: €1.30 within Europe, and €2.50 for international mail. Delivery times (<https://www.globepostalservice.com/faq/>) are "slightly longer than national service", being: Europe: 14 days, international: 18 days. GPS has a feature where one can add videos/photos to a stamp via a QR-code, and allow tracking of the postcard.

Go next

The land border can be crossed to France, Switzerland, Austria, Slovenia, San Marino and Vatican City. Ferry service is provided to surrounding countries.

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