



ITALIAN HEADSTART Cultural Notes



CONTENTS

Benvenuto	1
Geography	3
Language	9
History	11
Who Are the Italians?	16
Religion	23
Entertaining at Home	26
Dining Out	29
Wines	34
City Life	35
Entertainment	37
Sports	41

BENVENUTO (WELCOME)



Fethiye Mosque and Roman columns in Athens, Greece
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Villa Adriana in Tivoli, Lazio, Italy
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Roman Forum
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In studying the Italian Headstart course, you have shown your awareness of the important role that language plays in getting to know the people of another country. Almost everyone appreciates the efforts of a foreign visitor to speak the language of a host country, and the Italians are no exception. Even if your efforts at first fall short of your expectations, you'll find Italians eager to help you. As soon as you've mastered only a few phrases, you'll find a special welcome will be extended to you practically everywhere you go in Italy.

Along with language ability, a genuine interest in the cultural life of a host country can also work wonders. Like people everywhere, Italians are pleased to discover that foreign visitors are interested in their way of life and in their history, their customs, and their achievements as a nation. In turn, you will discover that learning about Italian culture will help you in your language study, since true mastery of any language requires an understanding of the people who speak it. This booklet offers only a brief introduction to a rich and varied culture that has evolved over many centuries. You will find many opportunities to learn more during your stay in Italy. To get started, read through this booklet. Decide to make the most of your stay in Italy by learning as much as you can about your host country, its people, and its language.



Old Roman bridge at Cangas de Onis
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GEOGRAPHY



Photo: Jensens
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Positano—a land jutting into the Mediterranean

It's easy to locate Italy on any map of Europe. Using only a bit of imagination you can recognize at once the famous high-heeled boot shape of the Italian peninsula jutting into the Mediterranean. At the toe of the boot is the island of Sicily. To the west is the island of Sardinia. Detailed maps show the many small islands just offshore, such as Elba and Capri. Altogether, these land masses--the peninsular mainland, the two large islands, and the many small islands, make up the Italian Republic (Repubblica Italiana), more simply known as Italy (Italia).

The total area of all these land masses is actually much less than that of California. Italy has about 116,000 square miles compared to California's approximately 158,000.

The population of Italy is about 56 million, or roughly one-fourth that of the United States. In Italy you will encounter a population density that is considerably greater than you are accustomed to. The squeeze may be four, five, or more times as great.

Most of Italy is mountainous, or at least hilly, and in many parts of the country farming is truly uphill work. In northernmost Italy are the Alps, the highest mountains in Europe, so high that they are snow-capped the year round. Running almost the entire length of the Italian peninsula are the Apennines, also a formidable range, with masses of jagged cliffs, barren plateaus, and peaks reaching nearly 10,000 feet.

Much of Italy's soil is poor, and life is hard for those who try to make a living from it. Much agricultural land is suited only for growing grapes and olives or for grazing sheep and goats. Italy has about 3,000 miles of coastline, and in many places the coastal lowlands provide some good cultivation. The lowlands of southern Italy, for example, are well known for their dependable crops of citrus fruits. But the best farmland is in the Po Valley in the north.

The Po Valley covers about one-sixth of Italy. Flowing a winding course eastward through the valley, the 220-mile long Po River is Italy's only long river. Rushing into it from the north are several tributaries formed by the drainage of melting Alpine ice and snow. Generations of Italian farmers have created hundreds of miles of irrigation canals to carry these life-giving waters to the farthest reaches of the valley floor. In the twentieth century, the rushing northern rivers have been harnessed to generate hydroelectric power to support heavy industry.

From the Po Valley come large crops of wheat, rice, sugar beets, and a wide variety of other vegetables. The region is also known for its fine herds of cattle and its abundant orchards of apples and peaches. Even so, Italy's large population requires imports of grain and other foodstuffs from other countries. About the only farm products that Italy produces in exportable quantities are citrus fruits, olive oil, wines, and cheeses.



Area north of Soresina, province of Cremona
Photo: Grasso83 (Fabio)

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Lowlands provide good cultivation.

The Alps form a curved barrier that separates Italy from the rest of Europe. On the other side of the mountains are France, Switzerland, Austria, and Yugoslavia. Although the Alps have been crossed by the most determined enemies, in the past they have helped protect Italy from invaders from the north. One famous crossing was accomplished with elephants by Hannibal of Carthage in his war against the Romans in the third century B.C.

Today a lot of Italians make their homes on the southern slopes of the Alps overlooking the Po Valley. Alpine Italy, as the region is called, along with the Po Valley region, the peninsula, and the Mediterranean islands, form four divisions of Italy along strictly geographic lines. Some geographers refer to these divisions as "the four Italys." If the Alps have separated the Italians from the other peoples of Europe, the Apennines have separated the Italians from each other. In the past, regional differences have kept Italians from unifying as a nation. Regional differences are still strong influences in Italian politics and social life. In some ways they add rich variety to Italian culture because regions continue to take great pride in their local customs. These may include a colorful annual festival celebrated nowhere else in quite the same way, or a special touch in making wine or cooking pasta. But regionalism is still the cause of rivalry and political and economic differences. The greatest rift of all is a general one between Italians of the north and south. No one knows the precise dividing line between peoples of the north and south. What is well known is that most heavy industry, good farmland, and a greater share of the nation's wealth are concentrated in the far north. In comparison with southerners, northerners are reputed to be tough-minded realists who perform well in business enterprises. Southerners are reputed to be more easygoing and more appreciative of the arts, and they find the leisure necessary to enjoy them.

Even the climates of the north and south are different. Although the Alps protect northerners from the severe winters of Europe, the climate of northern Italy is similar to that of the rest of Europe or the American Midwest, with warm summers and winter snowfall. Southerners enjoy a Mediterranean climate

with sunny days much of the year-round and with mild winters without snow. It can get very cold in the mountains in winter and very hot along the coasts in summer. Sicily enjoys a more moderate climate than some other parts of the country. Sicilian winters are warm and sunny by day, with chilly nights. Summers in Sicily are hot, but light sea breezes blow across the island. Spring and fall are about the same in Italy as in the American Midwest. They are ideal seasons for traveling, which is why most tourists choose these times of year to visit Italy.



Alghero, Sardinia
Photo: Mihai Sorin Sirbu
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Southerners enjoy a Mediterranean climate.

Italy is divided into 20 regions. Its two independent states are Città del Vaticano and San Marino. The capital is Roma, while Milano is considered the economic capital. An intense provincialism is a particular feature of Italy; in fact only in 1870 did Italy achieve national unity.

A region in Italy is a political division similar to a state in the United States. Within each region are provinces just as there are counties in American states. When we speak of the

regions of Italy, however, we are speaking of cultural as well as political divisions. At one time Italy's regions were independent entities with their own cultures and customs and today still preserve their own identities and traditions.



St Peter's Square in the Vatican City
Photo: François Malan

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Vatican City—a sovereign papal state



Milan Cathedral
Photo: Roby Ferrari
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Milan—Italy's economic capital

LANGUAGE

In the fourteenth century, people from different regions of Italy spoke and wrote in related speech types (dialects) derived from Latin. The works of one writer, Dante Alighiere, born in Florence in the region of Tuscany, gained such prestige that his style was imitated by others. Consequently, Tuscan gradually became a model for speaking and writing, and learned Italians agreed to use it as a basis for an idealized Latin. Today this Italian, called Idealized Standard Italian (ISI), is taught in schools throughout Italy. Although based on Tuscan, ISI also incorporates certain features from other dialects.

Italians pronounce ISI with the accents of their particular regions. These different pronunciations, together with regional features of vocabulary and grammar, constitute modern dialects. Some of these dialects are accepted as standard and are referred to as Practical Standard Italian (PSI); others, not so accepted, are called Nonstandard Italian (NSI). Many Italians speak PSI and NSI, but NSI is not used with outsiders. The dialects of NSI are so diverse that many are mutually unintelligible. A Venetian and a Roman, for example, or a Sicilian and a Tuscan, would have difficulty understanding each other if they spoke in their local (NSI) dialects.

Typically an Italian of this generation knows NSI, learns ISI in school, but speaks PSI in everyday business and social activities.

Sicilian is Italic in structure, one of the numerous neo-Latin dialects that evolved in the Holy Roman Empire during the Middle Ages. The Sicilian dialect (considered a language by some) has many words and expressions that distinguish it from other Italian dialects. Even within Sicily itself, there are significant differences in the dialects of the provinces and sometimes even in those of neighboring towns. In this, Sicily is

no different from any other place in the world. When a few Americans get together, it is not too difficult to tell if one comes from Boston, New York, New Orleans, or Chicago.

Most Sicilians, as well as inhabitants of the Italian peninsula and the neighboring islands belonging to the Republic of Italy, understand standard Italian. It is a different story, however, when they speak the national language--frequently you will hear differences in grammar or pronunciation. For instance, in Sicilian,

many e's and all final e's become i's,
many o's and all final o's become u's,
double l's usually become double d's.

The Catanian dialect also has its own peculiarities:

initial g's become y's,
initial ch sounds (c followed by i or e)
become sh's.

	<u>Italian</u>	<u>Sicilian</u>	<u>Catanian</u>
dog	cane	camì	
beautiful	bello	beddu	
she	ella	idda	
he	egli		
	illi (Lat)	iddu from the Latin <u>illu</u>	
rooster	gallo	addu	jaddu
cat	gatto	atta	jatta
hundred	cento	centu	scentu

HISTORY



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Hadrian's villa

Stories of the Italians before the founding of Rome are a combination of history and legend. Even stories about early Rome include many myths. What seems likely is that the city was founded in the eighth century B.C. by Latins, a tribal people who had lived in Italy for many centuries. The year 756 is the traditional date given for the founding of Rome, and legend says the name was derived from its founder, the Latin King Romulus.

At first the Romans ruled only a small part of Italy, but by 509 B.C. they had conquered the neighboring Etruscans and gained control of the peninsula.

After consolidating their hold on Italy, the Romans carved out a vast empire by establishing their mastery over all countries bordering on the Mediterranean, thus dominating all the then civilized nations of the West. By the end of the first century B.C., Roman armies had pushed northward to defeat tribal kingdoms in western Europe and Britain. Julius Caesar's perceived ambitions to bring an end to republican rule led to his assassination, but his nephew, Augustus, took advantage of the drift toward monarchy and became Rome's first emperor in 17 B.C.

As centuries passed, the Roman Empire weakened. In A.D. 476 the last emperor was overthrown and Rome fell. At the height of the empire it was said that "all roads lead to Rome". Indeed, Roman engineers had overseen the construction of a system of excellent roads that extended to some of the farthest reaches of the empire. Like these roads, Roman art and technology radiated out from Italy. Roman concepts of law and political administration were passed on to the people of western Europe to become the basis of their emerging civilizations. The European Romance languages (Spanish, Portuguese, French, Rumanian) developed from the Latin of the Romans, and Latin had a strong influence on other European languages as well.



Via Appia Antica, Rome
Photo: Radoslav Botev
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“All roads lead to Rome.”

The second great era during which the Italians did much to determine the course of western civilization came centuries later. Renaissance means "rebirth," and it is the name given to the period of European history from around 1350 to 1550 when a new spirit of adventure and discovery transformed the western world. Several of the great men of history were part of the Italian Renaissance. It was the time of Columbus, Vespucci, and Marco Polo. Michelangelo, da Vinci, and Raphael all lived during the Renaissance.



Quadriga of San Marco
Photo: Aleister Crowley
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Copy of the statue of David by Michelangelo on
the Piazza della Signoria in Florence, Italy
Photo: Massimo Catarinella
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Masterpieces of the Renaissance

Renaissance Italy was not a unified nation. The great cities -- Genoa, Naples, Milan, Florence, Venice, Pisa -- all operated as sovereign states. A large portion of central Italy (which included Rome) was known as the Papal States and was ruled by popes who were soldiers as well as princes of the Church. Rivalries among the city-states were intense and even led to warfare.

It was a time of intrigue and diplomacy as leaders sought to create alliances and maintain balances of power. Diplomats in other countries would one day study the political history of the Italian Renaissance for practical lessons in statecraft.

During the Renaissance, wealthy patrons commissioned artists to produce works that would glorify their cities. The Church paid artists to produce works on religious themes. An astonishing amount of Renaissance art has withstood the test of time. Renaissance works are national treasures in which Italians today take great pride.



Photo: Vladimir Menkov
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Detail

Renaissance mosaics line walls of the Vatican

Foreign invasions brought an end to the Renaissance. In the years and centuries that followed, Italy came to be dominated by the Spanish, the French under Napoleon Bonaparte, and the Austrians. In the nineteenth century a movement called Risorgimento sought to unite Italy into one kingdom. The movement's aims

were partly achieved in 1861 when parts of Italy agreed to unite under King Victor Emmanuel II. Giuseppe Garibaldi emerged as a hero of the struggle. In 1870 the rest of Italy joined the kingdom. Italy had become a poor country and experienced economic hardship in the years that followed. Many Italians emigrated, many of them to the United States. Italy joined with the Allies to fight against the Germans in World War I. Much fighting took place in northern Italy, and at the end of the war economic troubles were very severe. Benito Mussolini took control of the government in 1922 and set up a fascist dictatorship. Italy entered World War II on the side of Germany, but defeats in North Africa and Sicily turned the people against Mussolini. Mussolini was removed from power, and from 1943 until the end of the war Italy fought on the side of the Allies. In 1946 Italians voted to adopt a republican form of government.

Italy has been a parliamentary republic since 1946. The head of state is the president, who is elected by the parliament for a seven-year term. Unlike the president of the United States, the president of Italy does not wield executive power. Executive power is in the hands of a prime minister who is a member of parliament elected to this high office by other members of parliament. Parliament consists of two houses, a Chamber of Deputies (about 600 members) and a Senate (about 300 members). Members of parliament are affiliated with political parties and are elected by popular vote to serve five-year terms.

WHO ARE THE ITALIANS?



The Forum in Rome

Curia Julia relief - cropped
Photo: Radomil Binek
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No country is more alive with color and excitement. Italians love to get together for good food, wine, and spirited conversation. Speech is rapid and accompanied by expressive gestures. Laughter comes easily, and so does intense argument, even over matters of no apparent significance at all. What sounds like the rumblings of a murderous feud, complete with the banging of fists on tables, can easily prove to be a minor disagreement that is quickly settled and forgotten. Music is everywhere. Popular songs and opera arias pour forth from radios. A man sings to himself, and a passerby picks up the tune. An entertainer sings in a cafe, and guests and waiters join in. Harvests, weddings, and wedding engagements are just a few of the occasions that are enthusiastically celebrated with parties, processions, and festivals. It's all part of the Italian love for crowds and color.

Although Italians are known for their gregariousness and excitability, they are also capable of taking some things very seriously. Most Italians have strong religious convictions, for example, and believe in the power of prayer to get them through hard times. Family responsibilities are taken seriously. Eras

of greatness from their long history are reflected upon with quiet pride. Italians live with constant reminders of past glories. Practically every Italian city has at least one structure or monument that dates back to the Roman Empire or the Renaissance, the two eras when Italians had their greatest influence on western civilization.



Emperor Hadrian
Photo: Marie-Lan Nguyen
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Arch of Susa, Piemonte Italy
Photo: Duvilar
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Villa San Marco, Stabiae Italy
Photo: Mentnafunangann
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Constant reminders of past glories

Probably one of the first things you'll notice in Italy is the large number of other foreign visitors already there. It's a very popular place to visit. A lot of people around the world would happily trade places with you in order to enjoy an extended stay.

Every year the number of foreigners who visit Italy is in the tens of millions. Many are government and business representatives who participate in the day-to-day affairs of the industrial nation that is modern Italy. But others are tourists, scholars, artists, and even pilgrims. Some are fun-seekers who come to bask in the sunny climate, to savor the fabulous cuisine, or to enjoy the glamorous nightlife and the many opportunities for sports and recreation. Visitors with an interest in history may follow an entirely different itinerary and see world-famous ruins and structures that date back to the Roman Empire or to the Renaissance. Some visitors go on spiritual quests to sites where Christian traditions were born and where Roman Catholicism maintains sturdy institutions that have global outreach. Other visitors are mostly interested in the vast Italian contribution to western art and music. For them, Italy offers elegant museums and galleries where works of Italian genius are preserved, as well as concert halls and opera houses where time-honored classics by Italian composers are lovingly performed by some of the world's finest musicians. Some of the most knowledgeable admirers of Italian culture choose merely to stroll the streets of cities and villages to take in the wonders of Italian architecture, to pause at shops and stalls where craftsmen market their wares, and to observe Italians practicing the art of living, Italian style.



The New Wing, Braccio Nuovo, Vatican Museum,
Photo: Jesús Moreno
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Museum interior in Rome

Actually, the charm and dynamism of Italy have lured foreign visitors for centuries, and Italians have a tradition of extending a hearty welcome. Italians are an outgoing people who enjoy meeting other people. Many Italians speak two or three other European languages and take a keen interest in what's going on in the rest of the world.

As an American, you may be surprised at how much Italians know about the United States. Of course, our continent was "discovered" by an Italian from the city of Genoa (Christoforo Colombo) and named for an Italian from the city of Florence (Amerigo Vespucci). A lot of Italian families have branches in the United States as a result of immigration that began in heavy waves around the turn of the twentieth century. Today, Italy and the United States are NATO allies with many mutual interests in Europe and around the world. English is a popular second language in Italy, and many Italians--especially young people--enjoy American entertainment and popular culture as much as Americans do.

The family was, and to a considerable extent still is, a fundamental institution in Italian society. One school of thought attributes this fact to the political instability of Italy in the past centuries due to the division of the country into many small states and to the many foreign dominations. According to this theory, the individual has looked for security and stability within the family limits, thus creating a stronghold of loyalty and interests in the family itself. Another possible explanation for this strong family unity is the influence of the Catholic religion that places great emphasis on the closeness of the family members.

Italian youth, even at the present time, very seldom leave the family before getting married, and sometimes they continue to live with the family even after marriage. This is due partly to tradition and partly to economic reasons. Because of lack of lodging facilities on university premises, most students continue to live with their families while attending a university. Also, most students do not work while studying and therefore cannot afford to pay for rent or food.

Sometimes young couples continue to live with their parents because they need each other's cooperation. Elder members of the family often need health assistance, and, since an increasing number of women work outside the home, young parents need day care for their children.

However, although family unity is still very strong there is nevertheless a growing movement in the younger generation toward a less family-based society. Marriage is no longer considered the only possible status for a woman. Women have attained legal and moral equality, and increasing numbers of them are attaining university degrees and pursuing careers.

With the increase in the number of working women has come a decrease in the rate of births per family. The basic structure of the typical Italian family, which was once very large, is slowly changing. The institution of divorce, approved in 1972, liberalized family life. However, after an initial high rate of divorce due to the regularization of long-standing problems in family situations, the rate dropped rather conspicuously, leaving the impression that family ties still play an important role in Italian society.

Italians receive one or more Christian names at birth. However, only the first one is actually used, even on documents, except for the birth certificate which always bears all the names that were registered at the town hall at the person's birth.

As a general rule, a child's family name, or last name, is automatically the father's last name, even for children born out of wedlock.

Women who marry assume their husband's names and generally use only that name for social purposes. Legal documents, however, will show both names as follows: Maria Bianchi in Rossi, meaning that Bianchi is the maiden name and the in meaning "wife of." There are also cases in which a married woman may use either both names or only her maiden name. The latter is especially true if she is already known in a professional field by her maiden name.

In no case does an Italian woman use the first and last names of her husband, as an American might do in calling herself "Mrs. George Green," for example.

Although there are exceptions, widows generally keep their married names for all social purposes, but all legal documents will show both names as follows: Maria Bianchi vedova Rossi ("Maria Bianchi, widow [of] Rossi").

Italians love to talk, but they also tend to be very patient with foreigners who have difficulty trying to speak their language. At such times, Italians can be wonderfully friendly.

Adults usually address each other as Signore (Mr.), Signora (Mrs.), or Signorina (Miss). They also use the word Signor in connection with a person's last name or in connection with a person's professional title, such as Dottore (Doctor), Professore (Professor), Avvocato (Lawyer), etc. The word Lei (you) is a formal usage which connotes respectfulness.

Addressing a person by his or her first name or by the word Tu (you) connotes familiarity, and such usages are limited to very close friends, family members, and children.

When addressing a waitress or a store attendant, Italians may use Signorina or Signora on the basis of the women's age rather than on her actual marital status.

Italians shake hands quite readily, not only when they are introduced, but also when they get together with old friends. They also tend to shake hands upon taking their leave.

Sometimes, especially in a formal setting, a gentleman will greet a lady by kissing her hand.

Social relationships among Italians tend to be conducted on a formal basis for a longer period of time than Americans are accustomed to. Cordiality, long acquaintance, and even common interests do not diminish the number of niceties required by etiquette. Etiquette itself is not very different from what Americans are used to, but it is closely observed for a longer period of time.

Italians go out of their way to be helpful and courteous to foreigners. Courtesy dictates that you offer tips to porters, waiters, cabdrivers, bellboys, and others in service occupations. However, offering tips to others, simply because they have been kind enough to offer assistance, can be considered an insult.

RELIGION



Orvieto - September 2004
Photo: Fantasy
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Cathedral in Orvieto

Italy is religiously homogeneous, with 99 percent of the people Roman Catholic. Of the remaining one percent, Judaism has the largest number of members.

Catholicism has an impact on every facet of public life. For example, in all public ceremonies there is always a representative of the Catholic clergy. The dedication ceremony for a public building always includes a blessing by a Catholic priest. In public schools only the Catholic religion is taught, although students are now free to choose to participate or not.

Not all Italian Catholics are practicing Catholics. Some go to church only on important holidays such as Christmas and Easter. It would appear that some Italians are Catholic more out of tradition than because of personal convictions. However, whether because of convictions or respect for tradition, most Italians marry in church, baptize their children in the Catholic ritual, receive First Communion, and are buried according to Catholic precepts. In recent years young people have displayed a new interest in religion, and more youngsters are seen in church for Sunday mass, especially the less traditional mass during which more modern music is played and instruments other than the organ are used. Since the papacy of Pope Paul VI, the mass has been celebrated in Italian rather than Latin.

A religious phenomenon that takes place every Sunday in Rome is the gathering of thousands of people with a wide range of backgrounds and religious beliefs to receive the Pope's blessing in St. Peter's Square.



St. Peter's Basilica - Nave and dome canopy with papal altar
Photo: Manfred Heyde
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An interesting tradition is the festa del patrono. Each city, town, or village has a patron saint to whom the town is particularly devoted. On the day dedicated to their saint, the townspeople celebrate with bands, processions, fireworks, and often a fair. Until recently, each town could claim the day of their patron saint as a legal holiday. Now most religious holidays, including festa del patrono, are no longer legal holidays, but the tradition remains even in large cities. In Milan, for instance, the opera season at La Scala Opera House (which is one of the most important social events) always starts on St. Ambrose's Day, the day of Milan's patron saint.

If you visit a church or cathedral, it is important to dress appropriately. Even though dress standards have relaxed somewhat, you will not be permitted to enter in shorts, T-shirts, or a dress that is considered immodest.

ENTERTAINING AT HOME

Italians enjoy company, and they often spend their evenings entertaining.

Although there are differences of style between the American and the Italian ways of entertaining, none of these is so striking as to cause embarrassment. Those who notice these differences will usually find them interesting.

The first thing an American may notice at an Italian party (even an informal one) is that it is less casual than an American party. For example, the buffet dinner, which is popular in the United States, is almost unknown in Italy. This does not mean that Italians are stiff and formal, but that their traditional way of entertaining is different. Italians do not, however, expect to be entertained so formally in an American home. They enjoy the more relaxed way, but they usually reserve less formal entertaining to small groups of very close friends.

Dress for entertaining at home is also a bit more formal than in the United States. The host will probably wear a suit and the hostess a cocktail dress.

At a seated dinner, especially when there is more than one table, an Italian husband and his wife may be disappointed in being separated. They often expect to sit together, not only at the same table but also next to each other. This is not because they do not wish to mix, but because they draw a sense of security from each other, especially in a foreign environment where the language is often a barrier.

Table manners of American and Italians are also somewhat different. Italians use the knife in the right hand and do not pass the fork from the left hand to the right in order to eat. The main dish, meat and vegetables alike, is always eaten with the fork in the left hand while the knife is in the right hand. Neither hand is left on one's lap when not being used, but is kept resting on the table next to the plate.

The salad in an Italian dinner may be served with the main course or separately afterwards, but never as a first course.

Spaghetti is rolled on one's fork without the assistance of a spoon in the other hand.

Italians drink water and/or wine with their meals. For informal dinners, usually only one kind of wine is served. For more elaborate dinners (depending on the menu), both white and red wine may be served. One small but important detail to remember is that when pouring wine, Italians make sure that they pour it with the palm of the hand facing downward. Especially in the south, any other way of pouring wine may bring about ill feelings. Popular belief has it that persons condemned by the Mafia were warned of their impending death by being offered a drink poured with the palm of the hand facing upward.

Without the hostess's approval, guests do not smoke at the table until the end of the meal when coffee is served.

For very formal receptions or for a first invitation, guests do not usually bring presents in person. Instead, a plant or bouquet of cut flowers is usually sent a few hours in advance of the event. This gives the hostess a chance to set up the plant or flowers, thus adding a decoration to her house. If not sent before the event, it is also acceptable to send flowers the following day with a thank-you note. (Chrysanthemums are never offered to a hostess, not even on informal occasions, because they are generally associated with funerals.) On less formal occasions, a special bottle of wine or a box of chocolates is always a good gift, even though not obligatory.



Flower shop in Venice, Italy - cropped

Photo: ezioman

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Before a dinner, particularly a seated one, Italians offer a drink with tidbits such as olives, tiny crackers or pretzels, but not the cheeseballs, chips, vegetables with dips, or hot appetizers that Americans are accustomed to. Fancy cocktails are generally not served in Italian homes.

At a formal dinner, the guests do not compliment the hostess on the food, but rather on the interesting and pleasant company.

An invitation for dinner usually asks guests to arrive at 8 p.m. or later, and the meal may be served anywhere from half an hour to an hour after that.

DINING OUT



Friulian meats - Antica Trattoria Osteria Al Montone near Tarvisio in Friuli-Venezia Giulia / Italy
Photo: Joadl
cc-by-sa-3.0

An inexpensive, family-run restaurant is called a trattoria or osteria. The word ristorante usually refers to a restaurant that is both more elegant and more expensive than a trattoria. The ristorante usually has a longer menu, a wine list, and a more formal atmosphere. Both the ristorante and the trattoria/osteria have a cover charge (coperto) for the tablecloth, the place setting, and the bread. It is usually the first item on the bill.

In Italian restaurants one may either be seated by the waiter or select one's own table, provided it is not reserved (riservato).

When ordering a meal, one may order the complete meal at once or step-by-step, one course at a time.

It is important to realize that Italians consider any pasta dish (spaghetti, macaroni, noodles) as a beginning dish, very much like a soup, which does not constitute a meal in itself. When Italians simply want to sample some pasta, they ask for half a serving (mezza porzione). In Italy, pasta dishes are never served as side dishes.

Water and wine are served in pitchers or bottles, never in glasses. Butter is served only in formal restaurants, usually those frequented by Americans.

A service charge of 12 to 15 percent is added to the "service-included" (servizio compreso) bill. If the service was very good, it is customary to leave another 10 percent. A recent law has established that all restaurants must give patrons an itemized bill (ricevuta fiscale). The ricevuta is for the restaurant's bookkeeping. Patrons are required to show the ricevuta fiscale upon request to the tax inspectors who run spot checks at restaurant exits. If you do not have a receipt, both you and the restaurant could be fined.

Except for very exclusive restaurants or some of the more elegant hotel dining rooms, men are not required to wear ties or jackets, especially in the summer.



Ristorante dell'agnolo, Florence Italy
Photo: Sailko
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For the midday meal or when one is in a hurry, a tavola calda (cafeteria) or rosticceria (snack bar or carry out) is the best bet. Here one can find sandwiches, small pizzas, ready-made pasta dishes, beer, and soft drinks. Triangular-shaped tramezzini

filled with chicken, salmon, mushrooms, and other delicacies are excellent sandwiches for a quick lunch. Also excellent are the suppli' (large rice croquettes filled with mozzarella cheese and bits of ground meat, chicken giblets, mushrooms, etc., and dipped in a batter of eggs and bread crumbs and deep fried in oil). Suppli' (probably from the French word for "surprise") are also referred to as suppli' al filo or suppli' al telefono since, when eating them, the long strings of mozzarella cheese remind one of a telephone cord (filo).



Restaurant in Treviso, Italy
Photo: Aqwis
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In Italy, a pizzeria is a restaurant with a limited menu but a variety of pizzas. Pizzas, unlike those in the United States, are as large as dinner plates and are not served precut. Italian pizzas also have fewer toppings. Also be aware that pepperoni (the sausage) does not exist in Italy and should not be confused with peperoni, "peppers."

In Italy a bar is actually what we would call a café. It is an institution that is dear to the hearts of modern Italians. Italians who live abroad miss it a great deal. An Italian may go to a bar alone or with other people. The bar is used as a place to meet friends before going somewhere else for the evening. In small towns it is a place to spend the evening watching television. In smaller towns, particularly in Sicily, it is not advisable for a woman to go alone. Even in a group, a woman should not acknowledge the presence of Italian men, no matter how hard they stare or attempt to make conversation. A woman's attention to a man to whom she has not been properly introduced can encourage a familiarity that she may not want and may have difficulty getting out of.

During a normal day many Italians visit a bar several times. They go in the morning for espresso, the strong black coffee drawn from a machine and served hot in a small cup, or cappuccino, the same black brew served hot with cream in a glass. They go again just before lunch for an aperitivo, a cocktail to stimulate the appetite, or another espresso. After lunch they order another espresso. They're back again in the afternoon for more espresso, perhaps consumed with tramezzini. They return for a cocktail before supper and more espresso afterwards. It is always a brief, relaxing pause even though one often consumes drinks while standing at the counter instead of sitting at a table.

To order a cup of coffee or a drink, you order and pay at the cashier's desk (la cassa). Then the receipt (lo scontrino) is taken to the counter and the order is given to the bartender. An

extra lire to the bartender ensures fast service. When one is served, it is customary to give a 50-lire tip or a bit more for a large party.

Soft drinks are served without ice, but it may be requested if desired.

In many caf  s there is a rest room that may be used by either men or women.



Exterior and interior of Italian bar



Harry's Bar. Venice Italy.
Photos: Clayton Parker
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WINES

Italian wines are many and varied. They differ markedly from the wines of other countries and from each other. While some Italian wines are produced from a single type of grape, many are made from a precisely specified variety of grapes.

Italy produces more wine than any other country in the world--more than two billion gallons per year, of which more than 280 million gallons are exported.

Italy produces more than 3,500 varieties of wine. Most of them are known only locally, but some 200 varieties are well known among wine connoisseurs around the world. They include elegant wines to accompany fine dining, robust table wines, light wines, dry wines, still wines, and sparkling wines.

Italians generally feel that light wines go best with light foods, heavy wines go best with heavy foods, and sweet wines go best with dessert. Thus white wines, which are generally light, usually accompany fish and white meat. Red wines, which are usually stronger, are usually served with red meat.

Italians know that aging is not always a guarantee of superior quality in wines. It is, in fact, of negative value with white and light-bodied red wines.

Italians like to serve the white wines chilled and the red wines at room temperature.

CITY LIFE



Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II in Milan
Photo: Sergio Calleja (Life is a trip)
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Downtown Milan

Italy has been an urban-oriented country since the Renaissance. Of course the great cities had risen during the Middle Ages, the approximately 800-year span that preceded the Renaissance. By the later Middle Ages many cities had come to prove themselves as centers of political, economic, and cultural life. This brought about the development of a phenomenon of urbanization that was, even at that time, rather intense. Whoever wanted to undertake a political, commercial, or artistic activity resided in a city. In the countryside, small towns were often enclosed within protective walls or situated on the slope of a hill to be more easily defended. These towns provided lodgings for the landlord's peasants who left the town at sunrise to work the land and returned at sunset. Even today to a certain extent, the Italian lifestyle reflects this pattern.

Many of the Italian cities long ago reached the limits to which they could extend their boundaries. As a result, housing development has been essentially vertical, and today most urban Italians live in apartments. It is estimated that about 60 percent of the urban dwellers own their own lodgings, and that about 40 percent rent. Forms of ownership include cooperatives (generally the owners are people who belong to the same professional field) and condominiums. The two have specific laws that regulate them. Public housing is found in most large cities, and the government rents apartments to low-income families.

Further urban development due to industrialization has given rise to vast housing complexes (usually in the form of apartment buildings on the outskirts of cities).

Apartments can range from one room and bathroom (called monolocale) to very large apartments with as many rooms and bathrooms as in American houses. Unfurnished apartments are very bare, with no light fixtures (not even light bulbs), no washer and dryer, no cabinets in kitchen and bathrooms, and no kitchen appliances. Few closets (no walk-in closets) are found, and then only in the more modern buildings.

Italians still shop for groceries several times a week, preferring fresh vegetables and nonfrozen foods. Italian kitchens are not very large, and Italian kitchen appliances are small compared to American ones.

Many Italians who live in cities feel the need to spend their vacations at the seashore, in the mountains, or in the countryside. Wealthy families, and even many middle-class families, own vacation homes. Often families of peasant origin, attracted to the cities by industry, retain ties with their town of origin by owning a piece of property there.

ENTERTAINMENT



Photo: Peter Geymayer
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Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza

Culture and music form a most important part of Italian life, and there are countless official and unofficial theaters and concert halls in every major city. Although most of them are closed in the summer, many open-air performances take place at that time.

In theaters, curtain time is 9:15 or 9:30 p.m. Matinees are generally on Thursdays and Sundays at 5 p.m. and cost less than evening performances. Most theaters close one night a week, usually on Monday. Opening night at the theater is an elegant event.

For seating purposes, the theater is divided into the following sections: upper balcony (loggione), balcony (galleria), upper dress circle (seconda galleria), balcony dress circle (prima galleria), box (palco), orchestra (platea), stall (poltrone), and front stall (poltronissime). The usher is referred to as la maschera and is generally tipped.

Programs and refreshments can usually be bought in the lobby during intermission (intervallo).

In large cities there are a few English language theaters.

Opera and Ballet



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La Scala

The official opera and ballet season runs from November to May. In the summer months, open-air operas are performed in some cities, as, for example, in Rome, Florence, and Verona.

Tickets are obtainable from the box office (botteghino). Prices differ for opening-night performances, regular performances, and matinees (Saturdays and Sundays).

Italy's larger cities offer many concerts, many free of charge. Often concerts are given in churches, especially during the summer season.

Movies

Very few movie theaters show movies in their original language (v.o. - versione originale). Most movies are dubbed (doppiati) in Italian.

Tickets cannot be bought in advance, but usually there is no line outside theaters. Schedules are posted for the start of a movie, but you can enter the theater at any time. Movies generally run continuously. The usher (maschera) is generally tipped from 500 to 1,000 lire depending on the number of people in your party.

In the larger Italian cities, there are different categories (visioni) of movie theaters. There are those that show first-run features (prima visione), those that show second run features (seconda visione), and others.

Sale parrocchiali are small movie theaters attached to churches, often serving local groups of people. The Cineclub shows classic or avant-garde movies.

Films are classified as follows:

brillante	light comedy
comico	comical
commedia	comedy
(a episodi)	(short stories)
documentario	documentary
drammatico	dramatic
fantascienza	science fiction
fantastico	fantasy
grottesco	grotesque
musicale	musical
thriller/giallo	mystery

In addition, certain films are marked as vietato/proibito ai minori, "minors not allowed," or vietato/proibito ai minori di 18 anni, "below 18 not allowed."

Theater-Shows

Large cities offer a form of entertainment called the teatro cabaret. These entertainments are offered in small halls or theaters. Avant-garde in style, they are mostly dedicated to political and social satire. Sometimes spectators may have dinner or drinks during the show.

Nightclubs and Discotheques

The traditional nightclub (locale notturno) belongs to the past, even if a few still offer to a nostalgic public the thrill of a live band. What has taken the place of the nightclub is the discotheque (discoteca). Discotheques are either public or private (for members only) and have disc jockeys who select the music. It is not unusual for men or women without dates to get on the dance floor singly or in pairs and rearrange into male-female couples during the dance.

Television

The three major television stations (Rate 1, Rate 2, Rate 3) are owned and operated by the RAI (Radio Televisione Italiana), a government entity which, up to a few years ago, had a monopoly on both television and radio communications. Now a number of private stations transmit programs that are often of uneven quality.

Furthermore, in some Italian cities it is possible to receive telecasts (trasmissioni) in French from France, in French or Italian from Switzerland and Monaco (Monte Carlo), and in other languages from other countries in Europe.

Except for diplomatic personnel, all residents of Italy, both Italian and foreign, have to pay a single subscription fee (canone) to the RAI TV corporation for the use of one or more television sets. The amount of this tax changes depending on whether the set is in color or black and white. The canone is payable in a lump sum or in two yearly installments.

SPORTS

The national sport in Italy is soccer (calcio). Every Sunday from September through January the great stadiums of the country are filled with cheering crowds. Youngsters can be seen dribbling a ball on almost every back street, but, in the final analysis, calcio as a sport is practiced almost exclusively by professionals. In 1982 the Italian National Soccer team won the coveted World Soccer Championship in Madrid. This was the third time that Italy has won the championship cup, the most recent previous victory having been in 1938. The entire country literally closed down to celebrate.

Another popular Italian sport is bicycle-racing, both on roads and on racing tracks. The most popular race is the Giro d'Italia, which lasts 21 days. Contestants crisscross the country in every direction, often climbing difficult mountain passes.

In recent years, more emphasis has been put on the physical benefits that are derived from sports and, as a result, many parents enroll their children either in private sport clubs or in C.O.N.I. (Comitato Olimpico Nazionale Italiano). C.O.N.I. provides the facilities and equipment for hundreds of clubs and organizations and trains athletes in 32 different sports. Its prices are moderate and it has a very large membership.

Unlike those in the United States, Italian schools and universities do not place much emphasis on sports, partly because of a shortage or lack of facilities and partly because Italians prefer to practice sports more on an individual basis than on a team basis. On an individual basis, however, it is possible to practice a complete variety of sports at prices that range from reasonable to expensive.

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