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## ITALY GUIDE

wordtravels



Italy dips down out of Europe and into the Mediterranean like a lady's leg firmly planted in a sleek stiletto, so it's hardly surprising that Italians are known for their impeccable style and fashionable dress sense. They're also known for once having an empire that stretched across the globe, and for having the most spectacular churches, frescos, sculptures and Renaissance paintings in all of Europe.

The Italy of today is littered with the relics of more than 3,000 years of history, and an atmosphere that ranges from the Armani-wearing, scooter-driving, espresso-drinking buzz of its cities to the quiet, pastoral existence of its beautiful hillside olive farms and seaside fishing villages. Italy is also home to more UNESCO World Heritage Sites than any other country on earth, with an incredible 47 sites of global historical significance dotted around the

country.

From the depths of the canals in Venice, which floats on a series of islands in an Adriatic lagoon, and the bleached sands of San Remo on the Riviera, to the rocky crags of the Alps, Dolomites and Apennines, Italy has everything from beach holidays to luxury mountain ski resorts.

Italy's cities reveal awe-inspiring architecture from the curved arches of the Ponte Vecchio in Florence to the crumbling magnificence of the Colosseum in Rome. Home of da Vinci, Michelangelo, Caravaggio and Botticelli, its artworks are a visual delight to all visitors.

Nestled into the outskirts of Rome is the independent Vatican City, the seat of the Pope and home to the famous St Peter's Basilica and the Sistine Chapel. The influence of the Holy Catholic Church on the people of Italy is still evident today in a series of holy festivals, carnivals, and parades involving young and old alike in almost every city, town and village.

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### THE BASICS

#### TIME

GMT +1 (GMT +2, Apr - Oct)

#### ELECTRICITY

Electrical current in Italy is 230 volts, 50Hz. A variety of plugs are in use, including the European-style two-pin plug.

#### LANGUAGE

The official language of Italy is Italian. English is understood in the larger cities but not in the more remote parts of the country.

#### TRAVEL HEALTH

There are no specific health risks associated with travel to Italy and you should be able to travel without special vaccinations and medications. Medical facilities in Italy are good but travel insurance is still recommended for non-EU citizens as medical attention can be expensive. EU citizens can make use of Italy's health services provided they have a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC). Although it should be possible to get most medication in Italy, travel authorities always suggest that you take any prescribed medication that you require with you, in its original packaging, and with a signed and dated letter from your doctor explaining what it is and why you need it.

#### TIPPING

Tipping is customary in Italy and 10 to 15 percent of the bill is acceptable in restaurants (unless, as is increasingly the case, a 15 percent service charge has already been added to the bill). Hotels add a service charge of 15 to 18 percent, but it is customary to tip the service staff extra. Italians rarely tip taxi drivers, but a 5 to 10 percent tip is always appreciated.

#### SAFETY INFORMATION

Tourists in Italy should be vigilant to ensure their safety in public places and tourist sites as the Italian Government has warned that the risk of international terrorist attacks has increased. Domestic terrorism continues, but targets are usually Italian authorities; however, there is a slight possibility of being caught up in attacks. Tourists are vulnerable to pickpocketing and muggings in the bigger cities, particularly on public transport, in crowded areas and around tourist sites, and should exercise caution when carrying large amounts of cash and valuables. Make intelligent use of hotel safes and split valuables between people, bags and pockets to limit the damage if you are pickpocketed. Be particularly careful around the main train station, Termini. Visitors should be wary of groups of children, some of whom will distract attention while the others try to steal what they can. Strikes by transport workers take place regularly throughout Italy and delays are possible. Anti-austerity strikes have also become common and travellers are advised to avoid these mass gatherings which can degenerate into violence.

#### LOCAL CUSTOMS

In Italy, it is an offence to sit on steps and in courtyards near public buildings, including the main churches in Florence; eating and drinking in the vicinity should also be avoided. Shorts, vests or any other immodest clothing should not be worn inside churches.

#### BUSINESS

Italians can be very formal and old fashioned, but are also warm and welcoming. Face to face communication is best, and often a third party introduction can speed initial negotiations. Business attire is formal and very stylish, and handshakes are the norm. First impressions count for a lot in Italy. Expect plenty of gesticulating and interruptions, or people talking over each other. Business cards are used. Unfortunately the bureaucracy in Italy can slow down deal-making.

Business hours are usually 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday, but can vary according to season and region.

## COMMUNICATIONS

The international access code for Italy is +39. The outgoing code is 00 followed by the relevant country code (e.g. 0044 for the United Kingdom). All numbers must be preceded by 0, whether originating in Italy or out, unless calling a mobile phone. City/area codes are in use, e.g. 02 for Milan and 06 for Rome. There can be high surcharges on calls made from hotels. Public telephone boxes take phone cards for local and international calls, which can be bought from newsagents. Hotels, cafes and restaurants offering free wifi are widely available. As international roaming costs can be high, purchasing a local prepaid SIM card can be a cheaper option.

## DUTY FREE

Travellers over 17 years from non-EU countries do not have to pay duty on 200 cigarettes, 50 cigars or 250g of tobacco. As well as this, travellers do not have to pay duty on 4 litres of wine, 16 litres of beer or 1 litre of spirits over 22 percent volume, or 2 litres of alcoholic beverages less than 22 percent volume. Other goods up to the value of €300 is also permitted (reduced to €150 for children under 15).

Travellers from EU countries travelling within the EU are limited to 110 litres of beer, 90 litres of wine (of which 60 litres may be sparkling), 20 litres of fortified wine, 10 litres of spirits, 1kg of tobacco, 800 cigarettes, 200 cigars, 1kg of tobacco and 400 cigarettos, perfume up to 50g or 250ml eau de toilette, and other goods for personal consumption to the value of €175 per adult or €90 for children under 15 years. EU citizens are also able to claim tax back if the VAT rates in Italy are higher than those in their country of residence. Prohibited items include narcotic drugs, medicinal products, arms and weapons, explosives and protected animal and plant species.

## CLIMATE

Italy has a largely temperate climate with regional variations. In summer the northern parts of Italy are warm with occasional rainfall, the central region is somewhat stifled by humidity, and the south scorches under the dry heat. In winter, conditions in Milan, Turin and Venice are dominated by cold, damp and fog and Tuscany's winter temperatures approach freezing, while temperatures in the south of the country are more favourable, averaging 50 to 60°F (10 to 20°C). Most people visit Italy in the summer months between June and August; however, we think the best time to visit is in spring (April to May) and autumn (September to October) when the weather is good and there are fewer tourists. Travel is also cheaper off-season. The sea is warm enough for swimming between June and September. Visitors should note that most Italians take their vacation in August and many shops and restaurants are closed during this period; it also means that during August the coastal resorts are crowded with locals. The ski season runs between December and April and the best time to walk in the Alps is between June and September. The best time to visit Italy will vary depending on region and desired activities.

## ENTRY REQUIREMENTS FOR SOUTH AFRICANS

South African citizens must have a passport that is valid for three months beyond their intended stay, and a valid Schengen visa, to enter Italy.

## PASSPORT/VISA

The borderless region known as the Schengen Area includes the following countries: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. All these countries issue a standard Schengen visa that has a multiple entry option, and which allows the holder to travel freely within the borders of all the aforementioned countries. Furthermore, all foreign passengers to Italy must hold visible proof of financial means to support themselves while in the country, return/onward tickets, and the necessary travel documentation for their next destination. Note that visitors may be refused entry, either for public security, tranquillity, order or health reasons. Extensions of stay in Italy are possible, by applying to local authorities. NOTE: It is highly recommended that your passport has at least six months validity remaining after your intended date of departure from your travel destination. Immigration officials often apply different rules to those stated by travel agents and official sources.

## MONEY

The Euro (EUR) is the official currency, which is divided into 100 cents. Those arriving in Italy with foreign currency can obtain Euros through any bank, ATM or bureau de change. ATMs are widespread. Credit cards are accepted in upmarket establishments and shops around the cities. Banks are closed on weekends, but tend to have better rates than foreign exchange houses.

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## ITALIAN ALPS

The scenic Italian Alps comprise lush valleys and pine forests set against the backdrop of jagged white peaks stretching through the clouds. Towns nestle in the valleys and ski chalets nuzzle into the crevices offered by the generous mountains. Access to the area is provided by train or bus routes snaking through the Alps, but the international cable car connection over the mountains from Chamonix (in eastern France) is by far the most spectacular way to enter the region. Tourists flock to this famously beautiful region, and the largely French influence is extended to the street names.

The Gran Paradiso National Park is a sublime experience of waterfalls, cliffs and lush vegetation. Hiking is a big attraction along the scenic mountain trails that stretch for miles and are interrupted only by mountain huts and refuges. The best months for walking are July, August and September, when most of the snow has melted into the thirsty soil. Italy's best ski resorts are in the Valle d'Aosta, within the shadows of Mont Blanc and the Matterhorn. Courmayeur and Brevil Cervinia are both world-class resorts and the skiing is augmented by the matchless Italian love for cuisine and fine wines. The Italian Alps ski resorts generally cater for all levels of experience and you don't need to be a great skier to enjoy the slopes.

The valleys and higher mountains of the Italian Alps experience different climates, both in winter and summer. In winter the mountains are snow-covered, but are generally sunny with surprisingly warm daytime temperatures, while the valleys are often foggy. In summer the valleys experience warm, clear weather, while the mountains are covered in cloud. The altitude of the Alps means that nighttime temperatures will always be quite cold. Summer tends to be the rainy season, with frequent thunderstorms. The warmest temperatures, in winter and summer, are found in the great lakes region.

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## ITALIAN PHRASEBOOK

English	Italian	Pronunciation
hello	salve	sahl vey
goodbye	ciao	chow
thank you	grazie	grahtsi
please	per favore	por fa vor
yes/no	sì/no	see/noh
my name is	il mio nome è	ill mee-oh nohm eh
where is	dove è	dohv eh
do you speak English?	parlate inglese?	pahr laht eh in gles eh
I dont understand	i don' la t capisce	ee dohn la cup eesh
I need a doctor	ho bisogno di un medico	hor bee sog no dee uhn medico

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