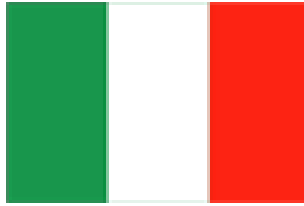


Italy



Map



Background

- **Land and Climate:** Italy is located in Southern Europe, and shares borders with France, Switzerland, Austria and Slovenia. The country covers 116,305 square miles, about the size of Arizona. It includes the islands of Sardinia and Sicily, and surrounds two independent nations: San Marina and Vatican City. The capital city is Rome. The Italian Alps run along the northern border, and the Po River Basin holds rich farmland and heavy industry. Winters are cold and rainy in the north, and summers are mild to hot. Coastal and southern regions tend to have mild winters and warm to hot, dry summers. Italy is subdivided into 20 regions including, for example: Lombardy, Trentino, Veneto, Tuscany, Umbria, Calabria, Sicily, and Sardinia.

People

- **Population:** Italy has the fourth-largest population in the European Union, at around 60 million. There is concern about the country's low birthrate. Around 67% of Italians live in

urban areas. Rome is the largest city, with more than 2.5 million people. Most of the country's inhabitants are ethnically Italian, but there also some ethnic Romanians, Moroccans, Germans, French, Slovenes, Albanian-Italians, and Greek-Italians.

- **Language and Greeting:** Standard Italian is the official language, but dialects differ throughout the country. Several regional languages are also spoken. Other languages are spoken by the immigrant population. Common second languages include English, French and German. The Italian government recognizes the existence of 12 linguistic minorities which are officially protected: Albanian, Catalan, Croatian, Franco-Provencal, French, Friulian, German, Greek, Ladin, Occitan, Sardinian, and Slovene. The remaining minority languages do not have official recognition and are categorized by the government as dialects. These include: Emiliano-Romagnolo, Ligurian, Lombard, Neapolitan, Piedmontese, Sicilian, and Venetian.
- **Religion:** The Italian constitution guarantees freedom of religion. Almost all Italians are Roman Catholic (87%); however attendance at services is not high (36.8% are active members). Secularism is common, and other religious groups include: Eastern Orthodox Christians, Greek Orthodox, Pentecostals, and Evangelicals, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Hindus. The country's oldest religious minority is the Jewish community (around 45,000 people). As a result of migration, 825,000 Muslims live in Italy (only 50,000 of these are Italian citizens). The Catholic Church is powerful both socially and politically in Italy. Vatican City, located in Rome, is home of the Roman Catholic pope and headquarters for the Roman Catholic Church.
- **General Attitude:** Italians refer to one another by their city of origin (Milanese, Roman, Florentine, etc.), and some regional differences remain. Generally, people in the industrialized north are more influenced by their European neighbors, and people in the south are known for being friendly and family oriented. Regional economic differences have led to tensions within the country because many in the more prosperous north feel that they are too heavily taxed to subsidize projects in the south and those in the south sometimes resent the higher incomes and employment rates in the north. In general, Italians consider social interaction very important and try not to miss social events.
- **Personal Appearance:** Italians, especially northern Italians, take pride in their appearance and tend to dress up often. Many people base their opinions of others on how they dress, and Italians seldom wear dirty or sloppy clothing. In many cities, clothing and shoe shops are very common. Italy, particularly Milan, is a major center of the fashion and design industries.

Lifestyle

- **Diet and Eating:** An Italian breakfast is light, and often consists of coffee or cappuccino and a cornetto (cream-filled croissant) or other pastry. Dinner is the main meal, and is eaten later in the evening than in the U.S, and may last longer. It traditionally can include: pasta, fish or meat, and vegetables. In the north and south, pasta is part of every main meal. Rice (*risotto*) is also common in the north. Italian pizza is different from American pizza, and differs in each region of Italy. Italians enjoy hundreds of cheeses, including mozzarella and Parmesan. At restaurants, the bill often includes a service charge, but leaving a small tip for the server can also be appropriate.

- **Recreation:** Leisure time is important to most Italians. Soccer is the most popular sport, and fans are often particular to certain city's team. Bicycling, horse racing, skiing, tennis, boxing, fencing, swimming, and track are also popular. Bocce is also played and is similar to lawn bowling. During the day, many Italians socialize in bars, which are like coffee shops.
- **Holidays:** Almost every city honors their local patron saint with an annual celebration. Other religious and national holidays include: New Year's Day, Epiphany (Jan. 6), Easter, Liberation Day (April 25, commemorating Italy's liberation in World War II), Labor Day (May 1), the Anniversary of the Republic (June 2), the Assumption of the Virgin Mary (Aug. 15), All Saints' Day (Nov. 1), Immaculate Conception (Dec. 8), Christmas, and St. Stephen's Day (Dec. 26).
- **Commerce and Currency:** Italy's economy is based on agriculture in the south, and employs around 10% of the country's labor force. The agricultural industry allows Italy to be nearly self-sufficient in food production. In the north, industry and small and medium size businesses are strong components of the economy. Italy is one of the world's largest wine producers and is a major producer of cheese. The industry sector accounts for one-third of the gross domestic product (GDP), and the service sector comprises about two-thirds of GDP.

Society

- **Transportation and Communication:** Buses and trains are the principal means of public transportation. Most households have at least one car, and many use scooters or motor bikes to travel around cities. Numerous radio and television stations broadcast regionally, and Italians have access to many daily newspapers.
- **Health:** Healthcare services are coordinated through government agencies, individuals can choose their family physician and the government pays for most services. Private care is available, but the patient pays for it. In 2005, a law banned smoking in enclosed public spaces. In 1998, a law made it mandatory to wear seatbelts.