

Culture Briefing Italy



A traveler's guide
to the culture and customs
of the Italian people

Geotrail Research Center

Culture Briefing

Italy

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ISBN 0-937281-16-6

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Published by

GEOTRAVEL RESEARCH CENTER, INC.

1970 E. Osceola Pkwy., Suite 352
Kissimmee, Florida 34743-8629
Tel: 407-348-9368 • Fax: 407-348-7330
E-mail: publisher@CultureBriefings.com
Web site: <http://www.CultureBriefings.com>

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INTRODUCTION

Italy is a modern, industrialized country, and most Italians enjoy a high standard of living.

Since World War II, Italy has developed from a primarily agricultural nation into one of the world's seven major industrial countries. Many businesses in Italy, though, are family owned. Relative to other strong industrial nations, Italy has few multinational corporations.

With regard to language and religion, Italy is a homogeneous country, but it is quite diverse culturally, economically and politically. Before 1860, what is now Italy was a land of regional cultures and varied states, living together inharmoniously and often in outright war. As a result, each region has its own history and cultural background.

Italy's distinctive, boot-shaped peninsula juts from southern Europe into the central Mediterranean Sea. It is a mountainous country. The Alps run across the northern border, and the Appeninne Mountains run the length of the peninsula.

The country is about 700 miles (1,127 kilometers) long and ranges from 95 (153 kilometers) to 155 miles (249 kilometers) wide. It's peninsula location gives it a coastline extending 4,560 miles (7,338 kilometers).

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In addition to the peninsula, the Italian nation includes the Mediterranean islands of Sardinia and Sicily, both of which are also mountainous. Sardinia rises from the Mediterranean about 120 miles off the mainland's southwest coast. Sicily sits just off the boot's "toe."

The country completely surrounds two independent nations — San Marino and the State of Vatican City, which is located within the Italian capital city of Rome.

As with many long, narrow countries, Italy has a decided north-south split. The south is considered to be that portion of the country extending south from just below Rome. About a third of the population lives in the south.

Northern Italy tends to be home to heavy industry. Southern regions lean more toward agriculture, although the northern Po River basin holds some of the country's richest farmland.

Northern and southern Italians typically have different temperaments. There is also uneven wealth distribution. The north is far richer than the south, where unemployment is consistently high and organized crime discourages investment.

Italy's problems include illegal immigration, a struggle

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against organized crime, high unemployment and the lower wages in southern Italy compared to the more prosperous north.

Fast Facts

Official Name: Italian Republic
Capital:..... Rome
Official Language: Italian
Head of State: President Carlo Azeglio Ciampi
Head of Government: Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi
Population (est. July 2002): 57,715,625
Population Increase/Year (est. 2002):..... 0.05%
Percent of Population under 15 (est. 2002): 14.1%
Life Expectancy (est. 2002): 79.25 years
Infant Mortality (est. 2002):..... 5.76/1,000 births
Literacy (1998): 98%
Gross Domestic Product per Capita (est. 2001): \$24,300
GDP Growth Rate (est. 2001): 2.1%
Percent of Work Force in Agriculture (2001):..... 5%
Unemployment (est. 2001): 10%
Inflation (est. 2001):..... 2.7%

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Italian Republic



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Italy within Europe



HISTORY

During the 8th and 7th centuries BC, various peoples began to move into what is today Italy. Greeks settled on the southern tip of the peninsula. Etruscans, Latin Romans and other groups from northern and central Europe moved down the peninsula.

The Etruscans dominated central Italy and the Greeks and Phoenicians the south and Sicily. Historians are not sure of the exact origins of the Etruscans, but many think they came from the ancient kingdom of Lydia in what is today Turkey.

The Roman Empire

The Romans, whose capital was in Rome, and the Etruscans eventually clashed. In 509 BC the Romans were victorious, establishing the first Roman republic.

The Romans expanded their control of the peninsula by conquering the Greeks in 272 B.C. Over the next hundred years, Rome fought three Punic Wars with Carthage — located in present-day Tunisia. During these wars, the Romans also seized Sicily and Sardinia.

Rome continued to extend its borders. Spain and Greece fell to the Romans, and by 63 BC almost the entire Mediterranean belonged to Rome. In 49 BC, Julius Caesar

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expanded the empire north, conquering Gaul — today's France. By the end of the 1st century A.D., the Roman Empire stretched from Great Britain to Egypt.

The empire's far flung borders, however, were vulnerable to attack, and by the 3rd century the Roman Empire began to decline under the onslaught of Asian and Germanic tribes.

Following the 5th-century collapse of the Roman Empire, political unity was lost both on the peninsula and the islands.

Italy became a land of small states, principalities and kingdoms which not only fought among themselves but which were also the focus of ambitious foreign powers. Over the next thousand years, successive waves of Byzantines, Germans, Arabs, Normans, French, Spaniards and Austrians attacked and seized parts of Italy.

In the 11th century, both central and northern Italy began to prosper commercially. By about 1200 much of Italy was divided into numerous and prosperous city-states, which had strong commercial ties with the rest of Europe. Many of these city-states were run by rich and powerful families.

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The Renaissance

The wealthy merchant class of these city-states proved to be lovers of the arts, commissioning paintings, sculptors, architects and even poets. Around 1300, this patronage helped spark a major cultural movement known as the Renaissance, or rebirth.

For the next 300 years, political rivalries diminished, and the Renaissance brought a revival of classical art, architecture, literature, and learning. It developed a philosophy that emphasized the human being as the master of his or her destiny rather than a victim of fate.

The Renaissance's impact was not just felt in Italy, but in the rest of Europe as well.

During the Renaissance people tended to be knowledgeable of and excel in many subjects. Leonardo da Vinci, for example, was not just an expert scientist or skilled engineer or accomplished artist — he was all three.

By 1600, both the Renaissance and Italy were on the decline. The Renaissance did, however, foster in many the idea of a single Italian nation.

Over the following centuries, Italy's city-states were again invaded — by the French, the Spanish and the Austrians.

A unified Italy

Nationalist movements aimed at driving foreign armies from the peninsula began to rise in the early 1800s. In 1831, a Genoan named Giuseppe Mazzini began an unsuccessful independence movement known as the *Risorgimento* — resurgence.

In the mid-1800s, Victor Emmanuel II turned to the French for help in ousting the Austrians from northern Italy. And in 1859, French and Italian forces defeated the Austrians. The following year, 1860, much of northern and central Italy voted to unite. On September 7, 1860, southern Italy and Sicily united with the north. In 1861, Victor Emmanuel II was proclaimed King of Italy. The country became a constitutional monarchy with a parliament elected under limited suffrage.

Unified Italy proved to be an unstable nation. While Victor Emmanuel's government administered the various regions, the nation had no distinct, single language and few unifying customs. Within its first 35 years, the government had 33 cabinets.

The new nation's economy remained in poor shape for decades, pushing millions to emigrate to other countries, seeking a better life. In total, between 1861 and 1973 some 26 million Italians left Italy. About 6 million went to the United States, some 7 million to other European

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countries. When the economy improved after 1973, about 4 million Italians returned home.

When World War I broke out, Italy at first remained neutral, but later entered the war on the side of Great Britain and France. During the war Italy lost 600,000 men.

After World War I, Italy remained in poor shape. The economy was lagging and many people were still impoverished. The political situation remained unstable. And Italians were generally frustrated and disillusioned.

The Mussolini era

A charismatic, schoolteacher-turned-politician named Benito Mussolini caught the eye of the Italian public. A persuasive orator, Mussolini appealed to all classes of Italians. In 1921, he founded the Fascist Party, and it won 35 seats in parliament.

On October 24, 1922, Benito Mussolini, with the support of conservatives and former World War I soldiers, demanded that his Fascist Party be entrusted with the government. Mussolini threatened to seize power by force if his demands were not met. Four days later, the king, Victor Emmanuel III, asked Mussolini to form a new government. Although the king remained as titular head

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of state, he had little power.

At first Mussolini governed constitutionally. But in 1924 he suspended the constitution and proceeded in stages to establish a dictatorship. He forbid parliament to initiate legislation and gave himself power to make laws. In 1926, he suppressed all opposition parties.

To ensure no one threatened his dictatorship, Mussolini had his enemies murdered, and he created a secret police force to deal with opponents.

As the Nazis rose to power in Germany, Mussolini allied himself with Hitler. In 1940, Italy declared war on France and the United Kingdom, and in 1941 moved with Germany and Japan to declare war on the Soviet Union and the United States.

Mussolini's army, however, lost practically every World War II battle it engaged in. As a result, the Germans occupied Italy to militarily strengthen it.

The Allies invaded Sicily in 1943, and the Italian people generally welcomed them as liberators. Following the Sicily invasion the King dismissed Mussolini and appointed Marshal Pietro Badoglio as prime minister.

The Badoglio government declared war on Germany, and

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the Germans then quickly occupied most of the country. They restored Mussolini to power, and he led a brief-lived regime in the north.

During the last two years of the war, an anti-fascist resistance movement developed and harassed German forces. The Germans were finally driven from Italy in April 1945.

The Italian Republic

After the war, Italians voted in 1946 to abolish the constitutional monarchy which had led the country since 1861. A new constitution in 1948 created a republic with a parliamentary form of government, and it reinstated Italian freedoms taken away by the Fascists.

In the 1950s, aid from the U.S. government's Marshall Plan pumped up the economy. The country's post-war politics were dominated by the Christian Democrat party, and people enjoyed continued economic prosperity.

In the late 1960s, however, Italy began to experience dramatic social, economic, political, and religious developments. Inflation and unemployment increased when the economy fell into recession in 1974. Government deficits rose rapidly as it paid huge bills for oil imports. Only massive international loans prevented the country go-

ing bankrupt.

As economic problems worsened a wave of kidnappings and political violence swept the country. Public confidence in the government declined, and support for the Communist Party increased. The Communist Party then entered the government through a coalition with the Christian Democrats.

In the late 1970s, the violence and lawlessness that plagued society throughout that decade worsened. Extreme left-wing terrorists, known as the Red Brigades, became outraged by the Communists allying themselves with the government. They began to prey on politicians, police, journalists and businessmen, murdering hundreds. In 1978, the Red Brigades kidnapped and murdered the former Christian Democrat prime minister Aldo Moro. The murder so outraged the authorities and the Italian people that it marked the beginning of the end for the Red Brigades.

The 1980s and 1990s

In 1983, the Socialists were elected to head the government with Bettino Craxi as prime minister. The Craxi government remained in power until 1987, making it the longest-running government since World War II. In 1987, the Christian Democrats again took the reigns of government.

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From 1992 to 1997, Italy faced significant challenges. Voters became disenchanted with past political paralysis, massive government debt, extensive corruption, and organized crime's considerable influence. They demanded political, economic, and ethical reforms.

In 1993 referendums, voters approved substantial changes, including moving from a proportional electoral system to one based on a mainly majority vote and the abolishment of some ministries.

Major political parties, beset by scandal and loss of voter confidence, underwent far-reaching changes. New political forces and new alignments of power emerged in the March 1994 national elections. There was a major turnover in the new parliament, with 452 out of 630 deputies and 213 out of 315 senators taking their seats for the first time.

The 1994 elections also brought media magnate Silvio Berlusconi into office as Prime Minister. However, Berlusconi was forced to step down in January 1995 when one member of his coalition, the Freedom Pole, withdrew support.

The Berlusconi government was succeeded by a technical government headed by Prime Minister Lamberto Dini, which fell in early 1996.

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In April 1996, national elections were again held and led to the victory of a center-left coalition — the Olive Tree — led by Romano Prodi. Prodi's government became the third-longest to stay in power before he lost a vote of confidence by just three votes in October 1998.

A new government was formed with another center-left coalition led by former-communist Massimo D'Alema. Prime minister D'Alema, however, resigned following the center-left losses in regional elections. He was succeeded in April 2000 by Giuliano Amato.

The center-left's control of government came to an end in national elections in May 2001, when a conservative alliance led by Silvio Berlusconi captured a majority of seats in the upper and lower houses of parliament.

THE ITALIAN PEOPLE

Customs and Ways

Italians are generally a warm, friendly, and exuberant people. They are inclined to be good-natured extroverts, easy-going and fun-loving. They have a love of life, and enjoy living it to the fullest. For Italians, the good life is having their health, family, serenity and financial security.

The institution of the family is of prime importance to Italians, and people take seriously their responsibilities as sons and daughters, mothers and fathers.

Another main characteristic of the Italians is that they are individualists. Still, Italians are also a social people, greatly enjoying the company of others. Social activities are an important part of life. People enjoy conversation and delight in passing the time of day chatting. They also like visiting one another, especially on Sundays and holidays. City folks generally schedule visits to the homes of their friends and neighbors, rural people usually drop in unannounced.

People value education, intelligence, imagination and inventiveness. They prize loyalty in personal relations, and among family members loyalty is paramount. Punctuality, however, is not a prime concern with many Italians, especially for social events.

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Italians typically have a good sense of humor, which at times may be self-deprecating. They have a love of theatrics and can often be dramatic. And while they tend to be a hard working people, they are careful to maintain a balance between work and leisure.

People strive to maintain a good reputation in their social circle. They seek the approval of their peers. Italians value friendships, but strong friendships are not common. To an Italian, a friend is as precious as a family member, and friendship involves total acceptance, availability and support.

Italians have a definite dislike of authority. They also dislike regimentation, preferring an unstructured life. They find strict morality stifling.

National identity is weak among Italians, except when it comes to the country's national sports teams. Italians tend to identify with their hometown or village before their region or country. The Italian word for this is *campanilismo*. And people typically refer to an individual by his or her city of origin.

Italians generally hold the institution of government in low regard, neither trusting government officials nor obeying the laws they make — including, for many, paying income taxes. One estimate says Italy's gross national

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product would increase by 20 percent if everyone reported their full income.

People, however, follow political doings with a passion, even though they view their government's workings as a farce and their political leaders as fools.

Obviously, it's not governmental rules and regulations that keep Italian society from falling into chaos. Instead, it's the family and the Catholic Church that bind the culture.

Italians are generally considerate of others. They stress social courtesies and value good manners. People are respectful of elders and stand when an older person enters the room.

An exception to this consideration of others occurs in crowded public places, when Italians tend to set their consideration aside. A slight push or shove is not thought to be rude.

Another exception occurs when you put an Italian behind the wheel of a car. They drive fast and aggressively, even running red lights. They seem unconcerned about getting into an accident.

Italian men have a tradition of gallantry. They treat

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women courteously — standing when they enter a room, holding doors for them and picking up the tab. But Italian men also tend to flaunt their masculinity, and it's unlikely you'll see them lending a hand in domestic chores. They see their role as the protectors of the family's females. Until the late 1960s, it was legal in Italy for a man to kill another man if he sexually harmed or had an affair with his wife, sister or daughter.

When it comes to the opposite sex, Italians interact easily, and flirting is part of the Italian spirit.

An Italian's sense of personal space is much less than that in many other cultures, and Italians will stand close to one another when talking. And for men, frequent touching is the rule. Men who are good friends may hug each other when meeting, shake hands with both hands or hold the other's arm at the elbow while shaking hands. While talking, one may touch the other's forearm to show cordiality and good will. Two men may walk down the street arm in arm.

Two women may also walk arm in arm. Generally, though, women do not touch each other. And touching between the genders is reserved for lovers.

Italians tend to be dignified, but they strive to maintain an easy formality. Despite their dignity, Italians are also

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an emotional people. They readily show affection in public. Couples may be amorous. People generally do not see modesty as a virtue.

Many Italians, especially those in the south, have a penchant for talking with their hands. Sometimes they may communicate just with hand gestures. In fact, hand gestures are so numerous that there is actually a dictionary of Italian gestures.

Showing a well-dressed, confident appearance is extremely important to Italians. The concept is known as *la bella figura*. Regardless of wealth or social class, whether your home is in the city or the countryside, in the rich, prosperous north or the poor south, presenting a good, stylish appearance is all important. Even if it means not having enough money for some necessities.

Although lovers of good wine, the desire to present a good image keeps Italians from letting themselves get drunk. To do so, would make them appear sloppy and out of control.

People enjoy an early evening stroll around town — a *Passeggiata*. Of course, they'll be dressed to look their best. When during their stroll they meet someone they know, people stop to shake hands and chat a while. Upon leaving, they shake hands again.

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While many people strive to be cosmopolitan, they also maintain a respect for tradition. They take great pride in their cultural heritage. They maintain a deep respect for the arts, and creativity is encouraged at an early age for both boys and girls.

Italians have a long-standing custom of seeking and granting favors from people in power, or *raccomandazione*. *Raccomandazione* uses friendships, both political and personal, to seek favors ranging from putting in a good word for someone to quashing legal proceedings to getting a job. Surveys continually show Italians think the best way to get a job is not by merit but through *raccomandazione*.

Such influence peddling is often the theme of Italian jokes. A movie, *Il Portaborse (The Briefcase Carrier)*, even spoofed *raccomandazione*. In it, a Rome traffic cop catches the mayor speeding and writes him a ticket. The cop's family, however, berates him for writing a ticket instead of asking the mayor for a favor.

Another longstanding tradition is taking a nap after lunch, but that's slipping away in today's business world.

Many Italians tend to be superstitious, clinging to ancient folk beliefs. The number 13 is considered unlucky, and many hotels do not have a room number 13 or a

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13th floor. Some people will not marry, leave on a trip or start an important project on a Tuesday or Friday. Others, fearing bad luck, will not walk under a ladder, put a hat on a bed or sleep with their feet pointing at the door.

Italy has north-south differences in its culture. People in the industrialized north, lead a faster-paced life than those in the south. They feel the pressures imposed on them by an industrial society. They value organization, punctuality, reliability and economic success. Time is important and not to be wasted.

Southerners, on the other hand, enjoy a more relaxed lifestyle. People in the south can take the time to let their warmth and friendliness come through. They take their time doing business, and family values have a higher priority than economic success.

Despite the southern Italian's good nature, though, in the southern regions of Sicily, Calabria and Campania — where the Mafia reigns — law and order are problematic, and violence lies just below the surface.

Do's and Don'ts

To keep you on the right foot while in Italy, here's some tips.

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- Make sure you dress well. Don't wear shorts, old clothes or sweatsuits. Italians dress elegantly and, if you want to make a good impression, you need to look good even when dressing casually. Jeans are okay if they are clean, neat and stylish.
- Women would do best to avoid wearing shorts or sleeveless or skimpy tops.
- When visiting a church, women should cover their head.
- When introducing people, there is a hierarchy. Introduce the lesser person to the more important, the man to the woman, the younger to the older.
- Men and women greet each other with hand shakes. But when you greet a women, let her extend her hand first. Close friends of both sexes hug upon greeting or they touch cheeks and give an air kiss. In the south, however, kissing cheeks between men is reserved for family members.
- When greeting someone, take off your hat. You can even add a slight bow.
- Shake hands with Italians both when meeting and departing, no matter how often or brief the encounter. Shake hands also with children.

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- Make eye contact while shaking hands.
- *Buon giorno* means “Good Day” or “Good Morning” and is used until about 1 p.m. *Buona sera* means “Good Afternoon” or “Good Evening.”
- An informal greeting, used only between friends, is *Ciao* (pronounced chow). It means both “Hi” and “Good Bye.” Never use *Ciao* with a stranger.
- Never use someone’s first name until the person specifically asks you to do so. You’ll find younger people gravitate to first names quicker than their elders.
- Italians often use professional or academic titles for university graduates: *Professore* (Professor or medical doctor), *Dottore* (for someone with a liberal arts degree), *Avvocato* (for a lawyer) and *Ingegnere* (for someone with a technical degree).
- If you are unsure of someone’s proper title, use *Dottore*.
- If not using a professional or academic title, use *Signor* (Mr., Sir), *Signora* (Madame, Mrs.) or *Signorina* (Miss, for women under 18).
- To show great respect or deference to a person use the title *Don*, for men, or *Donna* (Doh-na), for women, be-

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fore the individual's first name.

- In a crowd, Italians do not consider it rude to shove or push slightly. Try not to be offended by the practice.
- If wearing a hat, remove it when entering a building.
- Cover your mouth when yawning or sneezing.
- Don't mimic Italian hand gestures.
- Maintain eye contact when talking. If you don't, Italians may think you're hiding something.
- Good conversation topics include food, good restaurants, sports in general and soccer and bicycling in particular, family life, where you come from, your business or your job, local events and local news. Non-controversial, general politics is okay, but avoid talk of Italian politics or World War II.
- When discussing sports, do not say anything negative about local or national Italian teams.
- Avoid personal questions, such as where someone lives or what he or she does for a living.
- Do not ask a lot of questions of new acquaintances —

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that's considered rude.

- You'll boost your prestige if you can hold your own when talking about Italian literature and art.
- Read and become familiar with Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Many Italians are able to quote large chunks of this Italian author's work.
- Italians are generous when giving a gift. If you're giving one, don't skimp on it. Italians wrap their gifts beautifully and open them in front of the giver.
- Gifts for the kids are always appreciated.
- When buying flowers as a gift, get an odd number, and don't buy chrysanthemums.
- Do not give handkerchiefs, a brooch or a set of knives. They are associated with sadness.
- If you stay with a family, bring a gift with you when arriving, and send a gift after you leave. You might consider giving whiskey, cognac, California wines, cigars or something typical from your hometown area, perhaps craft items or quilts.
- Italians generally entertain friends at a restaurant. If

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you're invited to a home, consider it a significant honor.

- Italians would consider it ungracious for you to decline a very insistent invitation to lunch or dinner. If visiting a home before dinner, you will generally be expected to stay for the meal. Again, to refuse may be considered impolite, especially in the south.
- When visiting a home, always bring a gift. Flowers, a plant, chocolates, a vase or pastries would be fine. If invited for a meal, several bottles of wine would also work well.
- Be sure to compliment your host on the home.
- Pay attention to the home's children.
- After about a half hour of conversation, you and the family will take your seats at the table. Italians not only enjoy their meals but enjoy talking about the food as they are eating. You can use the opportunity to express your compliments on the food and drink.
- Do not start eating until the lady of the house starts. She will also be the first to sit down and the first to get up.
- If staying in a family's home, at the meal table you'll

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have a napkin ring with cloth napkin. The cloth napkin is to be reused, generally for about five days before being changed. At the end of the meal, refold your napkin and return it to the ring.

- When Italians dine with guests, the meal is typically a lengthy one — anywhere from one to four hours.
- Do not rest your hands in your lap. Rest your forearms — not your elbows — on the table.
- A knife and fork placed above your plate are for desert.
- Italians do not use bread plates. Just place your bread on the table next to your plate. They also do not butter their bread.
- Don't roll pasta on to your fork the American way — with your fork against a spoon. Instead, take two or three strands and wrap them around your fork using the deep sides of your pasta plate.
- When cheese is served, use your knife to pick up a piece to put on your bread or a cracker.
- Use your knife and fork to eat most fruits.
- Take small portions at first. Your hostess will be sure

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to offer you seconds and it's impolite to refuse. When offered seconds, politely decline at first. When your host insists, you can accept. If you don't want thirds, when your host insists tell him you really are full.

- When you finish eating, put your knife and fork parallel on your plate.
- Wine is so much a part of Italian life that they practically consider it a food, so don't over imbibe. Italians find drunkenness extremely offensive.
- If you don't want the host to keep refilling your wine glass, sip it slowly so it remains close to full.
- Females should not pour wine — Italians think it's unbecoming.
- If you spill a little wine on the tablecloth, don't be too upset — spilt wine brings good luck.
- Wait until everyone is finished eating before leaving the table.
- Send the hostess a thank-you note the next day.

Conducting Business

With their warm, outgoing nature, doing business with Italians is generally pleasant and enjoyable. The biggest hassle to doing business in Italy is the country's bureaucratic red tape.

You'll find your Italian counterparts to be a friendly lot. But don't let their congeniality lull you into forgetting they are savvy and businesswise. Keep in mind that you are dealing with the descendants of the people who invented many business practices in use today, including banking, insurance and double-entry bookkeeping.

Your appearance is important, and you should strive to look your best. In the Italian business world people tend to dress formally. For men, choose a conservative, well-tailored business suit and tie. Women should wear conservative, but expensive-looking dresses or suits. Businesswomen can do as Italian women do in summer — go without hose.

The pace of Italian business is slower than in America, especially in the south of Italy. High pressure tactics will not be appreciated. It's important to establish a personal relationship with your Italian colleagues. Italians like to deal with people they know and trust.

Pragmatism and improvisation are important in the Ital-

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ian business world, and you'll find your Italian counterparts to be receptive to new ideas and fresh solutions.

Italians keep their work and private lives separate. They seldom work at home or on weekends, so don't ask on Friday afternoon if something can be ready first thing Monday. And never call your associates at home.

Schedule your business trips for periods other than mid-July through August (vacation time) or between Christmas and January 6.

Gift giving is common in business, although not always on the first meeting. Play it safe, though, and carry a gift in your briefcase in the event your counterparts present you with one. Good business gifts include: high-quality liquor, books, recorded music and desk accessories. Avoid cheap or practical gifts, money, personal items and knives or scissors (bad luck).

People will expect you to be on time for your appointments. Don't break an appointment. Italians consider that to be extremely impolite. If you find you are going to be unavoidably late, telephone.

While it's expected that you will be punctual, your Italian associates may not be.

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Meetings are generally informal and unstructured. Most, especially initial meetings, usually begin with casual, non-business conversation. Families are a good topic here.

Lunch or dinner meetings are common. At dinner, though, the goal is more to get to know one another, so business discussions are typically limited.

In some business meetings, you may find the Italian propensity for everyone to talk at once coming out. Other meeting, though, may be quite orderly. It all depends on the ground rules set out at the beginning.

Meetings tend to be a test of support for decisions, not a vehicle for making them. Decisions are typically made before meetings, and cleared by everyone involved before being presented.

Business cards are important to Italians. Give your card to each person in a meeting. Cards are exchanged only once, so remember to whom you give yours. When receiving a business card, look at it carefully, especially the name and title. Then place it on the table in front of you or put it in your briefcase.

Italians may carry three business cards. One contains business and contact information as well as the

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individual's educational degrees and professional titles. A second duplicates the first except it contains no professional titles. A third just bears the individual's name and is used for social occasions.

Should your associate give you a card without professional titles, or crosses out the title on a business card, it indicates a less formal relationship between the two of you.

Even if you know someone well enough to use their first name, don't do it in a business meeting. Be sure to use an individual's title with his or her last name. A blanket title is *Dottore* or *Dottoressa*. *Signor* and *Signora* will also do.

The Italian business world tends to be very status conscious. You'll find the firms you deal with will have a rather rigid hierarchy with little, if any, fraternization among the ranks.

Subcultures

Italy has an extremely homogeneous society. Its population, though, includes small clusters of German-, French- and Slovene-Italians in the north and Albanian- and Greek-Italians in the south. Larger cities generally have a number of Gypsy, or Rom, families. Their precise num-

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bers, however, are difficult to calculate.

Italy has traditionally been a country of emigrants. In the last two decades of the 20th century, however, the country has received an influx of immigrants. Most minorities have arrived from Ethiopia, the Philippines and Egypt. In the 1980s, Italy saw a rise in illegal immigration from North and West Africa and Turkey. Still, Italy has fewer ethnic minorities than its European neighbors.

Regional differences have created some tensions among Italians. Many northern Italians are prejudiced against their southern neighbors. The prosperous northerners feel they pay too much in taxes to subsidize the south. People in the south, on the other hand, tend to resent the better job opportunities and higher incomes of those in the north.

Northern-southern differences, however, are currently not as pronounced as in the past.

Class Distinctions

Formerly, social status in Italy was determined by wealth, family history and family connections. Today, social position depends increasingly on a person's education and financial success.

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Italian society divides into an elite or governing class, a middle class, a working class and a rural class.

About 10 percent of the population falls into the elite class — the country's intellectuals and professionals, the wealthy business owners and the land-owning aristocracy.

The middle class includes about 35 percent of the population. These people are the country's white collar workers, artisans and small business owners. Another 35 percent of the people make up the working class — the blue collar workers.

The rural class, about 20 percent of the population, consists of small landowners, tenant farmers and day laborers.

Language

Italian is the country's official language. It is a Romance language which evolved from Latin and is a relative of Spanish and French. But the language also has numerous dialects.

Following the fall of the Roman Empire, the local variants of Latin developed into regional tongues. During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Tuscany was the

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area's dominant economic, political and cultural power. And the Tuscan dialect became the language of literature and eventually the standard, official national language.

Many people still speak a regional dialect at home and standard Italian outside the home. Dialects have remained prevalent in Italy because the country came into being relatively recently and because its mountainous terrain has helped isolate one region from another.

With so many dialects being spoken on the Italian peninsula, many of which could not be fully understood by speakers of other regional dialects, Italians developed a propensity to use gestures to clarify their meaning.

While Italians today use more gestures than other Europeans, the use of gestures is declining. And more refined Italians do not use hand gestures and may even consider them rude.

Among the gestures Italians use are:

- Waving goodbye with the palm up and waving the fingers up and down.
- Patting someone on the shoulder to show approval.

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- Shrugging the shoulders means, “I don’t know,” or “I don’t care.”
- Rubbing the fingertips against the lapel of your jacket means, “I’m the best.”
- Crossing the fingers in front of your mouth — “I swear it.”
- Biting your lip — “that’s bad.”
- Biting your fingers shows you’re angry.
- Drilling your cheek with your finger — “good” or “delicious.”
- Kissing your fingertips — “excellent, deserves a kiss.”
- Moving your hand loosely up and down in front of your body — “how boring, what a pain.”
- Outstretched hands with the bottom one repeatedly beating against the top one — “go away.”
- Moving your outstretched hands up and down with fingers splayed — “calm down, take it easy, go slow.”
- Pulling down the lower eyelid — “be alert, keep your

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eyes open, he or she is crafty.”

- Hand on stomach — I can’t stand him or her, it’s eating me up.”
- Tapping the temple — indicates “stupidity.”
- Tapping the forehead — “use your brains.”
- Hand on your forehead with pinky outward — “Do you think I’m stupid?”
- Hand extended, palm up, fingers slightly curled — “What do you really want?”

Gestures also have regional meanings. In the north, for example, the chin flick (flicking the chin with the back of your fingers) is a strong gesture of disregard, meaning “I couldn’t care less.” In the south, flicking the chin simply means a simple, emotionless “no.”

About 2.5 million people speak a non-Italian main language. There are pockets of German, French and Slovene speakers in the northern border areas. The country also has speakers of Slavic languages, Armenian and Catalan.

Many Italians are bilingual, with English being a major second language. Some, especially older folks, speak French as a second language.

HOME AND FAMILY

About two-thirds of Italians own their own home, and one-fourth — mainly the upper classes — own a second home, perhaps a country estate or home handed down from generation to generation or maybe a renovated rural farmhouse.

About 70 percent of Italians make their home in urban areas. Urban Italians generally live in multi-story apartment buildings. Most apartments are equipped with modern conveniences and appliances. Some older ones, though, can be run down and have unreliable plumbing. Housing is in short supply in many cities, especially for the poor and the middle class. Newly-arrived poor often live in shanties on the outskirts of cities until they can afford something better.

People living in the suburbs or rural areas usually have a house. The typical Italian house is a two-story brick or stone structure. The roof is usually tile and most houses have an enclosed yard.

Regardless of the type of home or a possibly drab exterior, the interior spaces of an Italian home are typically well-decorated.

The family forms the backbone of Italian society and is the country's stabilizing force. Family members main-

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tain strong ties, and not just with the immediate family but with more distant kin as well. Italians spend more time together as a family than people in most other Western cultures.

Traditionally, the family was patriarchal with three, sometimes even four, generations living in the same home. When children married, they lived in the home of the son's parents. Italian villas were made to easily add on an additional apartment for the newlyweds.

Italy's patriarchal families were headed by the grandfather, who was also the economic leader. Upon the grandfather's death, his authority passed on to his eldest son. To help maintain family continuity, the grandfather's first grandson was named after him.

Occupations were generally passed down the line from father to first-born son. It was acceptable for younger sons, however, to change professions.

Today, modern life is putting a strain on the Italian family. Although the family bond remains extremely strong, the family has changed. The divorce rate is increasing and many couples are opting to live together rather than marrying, especially in the north. Even in the more conservative south, single parents are no longer rare.

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In the urban north, residents of crowded, expensive cities might only be able to afford a small home without room for their parents, and families tend to be nuclear with one or two children. Southern families tend to be larger and some still have several generations living in the same household.

The father is generally the head of the household today. He may be authoritarian and likely to keep his distance from the children.

Grown children typically live at home with their parents until married rather than moving out on their own. Many Italians would consider it shameful if an unmarried son were to leave his mother's home to live on his own.

Married children generally live near their parents and visit frequently and often take many meals with them. Adult children may also join the family business.

Family loyalty, family pride and solid family values still remain paramount. The family name is all important and is not to be tarnished.

Family members are ready to lend a hand to help each other out. Grandparents typically help out with child care. Parents, especially, help their children, even their

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adult children. Parents may buy a home for their offspring or pay for an apartment, even if such a step represents a financial strain.

Parents are unconditionally devoted to their children. They tend to be short on discipline and long on love. The Italian affection for children extends also to the young ones of strangers.

The role of children consists of being an equal member of the family. Children are treated as individuals and are allowed to express their opinions.

At birth, boys have traditionally been preferred over girls, but that appears to be changing. Boys, however, receive preferential treatment within the family, for they can carry on the family name. Male children tend to be treated like royalty with their seemingly every whim satisfied. They are seldom criticized and often go unsupervised.

Girls, on the other hand, tend to be watched more carefully than boys and are groomed to be demure but strong, self-sacrificing women.

While the father is head of the household, the mother has responsibility for bringing up the children, teaching them manners and right from wrong.

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Mothers have an especially strong bond with their sons, and sons are the pride and joy of their mothers. Sons typically revere their mothers over their fathers. And as adults, sons continue reverence for their mother over their own wives and children. Mothers will continue to give their sons any care or attention needed throughout adulthood.

Elders remain an important part of the family, helping to make important domestic decisions. Typically, elderly parents will live with their children rather than in a nursing home.

Marriage

Italy's marriage rates are among Europe's highest, and its divorce rates, although increasing, are among the lowest.

Italians begin dating both in groups and as couples. Typically, people out on a date may go dancing or to the movies. When a couple becomes engaged, the engagement tends to be lengthy, lasting several years.

Women generally marry by age 26. The average age for men when they marry is 29. Men normally wait until they have finished their education and found a job before marrying.

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Just about all Italian Roman Catholics get married in the Church, following the Church's traditions. Some couples, however, are choosing to live together before marrying.

Divorce is legal but granted only after at least three years of legal separation.

Family Size

Although birth control is frowned upon by the Catholic Church, Italy's declining population clearly shows that it is used by most Italians. The country has one of Europe's lowest birth rates and highest abortion rates.

Italian women have an average of 1.2 children.

The Role of Women

With the demise of the patriarchal family, Italian women have increased their power and status. Until the late 1960s, it was illegal for women — but not men — to have an extramarital affair. Abortion and divorce were also illegal.

In the 1970s, Italy legalized divorce and women received the right to get alimony and child support from their former husbands. Despite its legalization, divorce rates

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did not rise significantly.

With one salary insufficient to raise a family, many women take a job outside the home, and women now make up a substantial part of the Italian workforce.

Women also received in 1970s equal rights in the workplace, including the right to equal pay with men. Women can now get five months paid childbirth leave and six months unpaid leave plus a guarantee of being able to return to the same job.

In the late 1970s, despite being a Catholic country, Italy legalized abortion. Women can also get government funds for an abortion.

While the legislature has established the equality of women, Italian society still tilts toward the male. Conservative men tend to see women as *angelo del focolare* — angels of the hearth, meaning their responsibilities lie with church, children and kitchen.

The business world tends to be male dominated, and only a few women are found in the professions or hold managerial positions. Those that do are typically found in family-owned companies.

A survey conducted in 2001 reveals much about the lot

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of Italian women. According to the survey, Italian women work longer hours than other European women. They spend at least eight hours on the job, about 90 minutes doing housework and 30 minutes cooking. Husbands, according to the survey, do 15 minutes of housework — less than men in any other European country.

The survey also reported that almost 40 percent of Italian women say they are unhappy in their marriages.

Health and Welfare

The extended family is Italy's primary social and economic support system.

Italy implemented a universal, free medical care system in the 1970s. Charges were introduced to the healthcare system in 1988. Patients now pay some dental and prescription costs, a daily hospital charge and a yearly health fee. Under the plan, individuals can choose their family physician.

Private health care is also available, but the patient must pay the full cost.

Healthcare quality varies as each region administers its own system. But Italians generally do not give their hospitals high marks. State run hospitals mirror the ineffi-

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ciency of the Italian government in general. Many are overcrowded. In the south, patients may have to have relatives bring them their meals.

Dress

Italians take pride in their appearance and spend a considerable part of their budget on their wardrobe. When going outside the home, people tend to dress up. Many Italians form their opinions about someone based on the way he or she dresses.

Both men and women display a sense of style and typically dress elegantly. At work, Both sexes generally wear stylish suits.

Even when dressing casually, Italians are elegant. Men generally wear trousers and casual shirts. For women, casual dress typically means slacks or skirts. Older women generally wear dresses.

Italy is a major center of the European fashion industry, and Italian youth tend to be followers of the latest fashions.

Food and Dining

Italians love to eat and are passionate about their food.

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They consider good cooking an art. People are proud of their country's cuisine and justifiably so — Italian food is also extremely popular outside of Italy. Pasta and pizza, in particular, have become popular around the world. But Italian cuisine is much more sophisticated than just macaroni, tomatoes and olive oil — the main ingredients in what the Italians refer to as “international” cuisine.

Rather than a national cuisine, Italian food is regional. People prefer to use ingredients found in their particular region, and every region has developed over the centuries its own culinary specialties. Hence, the great variety in Italian cuisine.

Recipes tend to be individualized. A dish prepared in one region, or even one restaurant, will differ from the same dish prepared in in a different region or restaurant.

Among Italy's regional specialties are:

- Bologna: *mortadella* (bologna with peppercorns), *prosciutto* (very thin slices of dried, salted ham), *tortellini* (“small, doughnut-shaped pasta filled with meat”).
- Florence and Tuscany: *bistecca alla Fiorentina* (charcoal-broiled steak), *fagioli all'uccelletto* (white beans with garlic, olive oil, sage and tomato paste).

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- Genoa: *gnocchi* (potato-flour dumplings), *pesto* (a pasta sauce made from crushed basil leaves, garlic, olive oil, Parmesan cheese and pine nuts).
- Milan and Lombardy: *osso buco* (veal shank in tomato sauce with onions, wine and stock), *polenta* (a cornmeal porridge).
- Naples: *mozzarella in carrozza* (a deep-fried cheese sandwich), pizza.
- Rome: *abbacchio al forno* (roast suckling lamb), *cannelloni* (tube-shaped pasta filled with meat or ricotta cheese and covered with tomato sauce).
- Sicily: *caponata* (eggplant, tomatoes, green pepper and olives cooked in olive oil), *cassata alla Siciliana* (layers of sponge cake alternating with cream, ricotta cheese, candied fruit, chocolate and liqueur).
- Venice: *fegato alla Veneziana* (thin slices of calves' liver sauteed with onions), *risi e bisi* (rice and peas).

Pasta is an Italian staple. Most people, especially in the south, eat it daily, although rice is sometimes substituted in the north. The shape of northern and southern pasta differs. In the south it's tubular shaped while in the north it's flat.

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Although pasta is a simple food made from just flour and water and sometimes eggs, Italians make it in more than 500 different varieties.

The length, thickness and shape of a pasta determines how much sauce it can absorb. Light sauces accompany long, thin noodles. Thicker pasta dishes use heavier sauces — meat, cream or tomato. Smaller pastas, like shells, elbow macaroni and rings, work well in soups. Larger shells and macaronis — rigatoni, for example — are stuffed with cheese and baked. With their pasta, people enjoy a tomato sauce (*pomodoro*) or a meat sauce (*ragù*).

Italian cooks typically use fresh ingredients. Many women shop daily for groceries. In addition to modern supermarkets, most cities, towns and villages have food markets where vendors sell their foodstuffs from a variety of stalls.

People eat breakfast around 7 a.m to 8 a.m. Breakfast is generally light — coffee and a croissant, a pastry or cookies.

Folks in the north eat lunch around 1 p.m. A northern lunch tends to be casual, perhaps even a sandwich. In the south, lunch may be eaten later and be more formal. Dinner is eaten from around 7 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Although

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some southern Italians may eat still later.

Italians traditionally ate their main meal at midday. That, however, is changing. In today's busy world many people are eating their main meal at dinner. Lunch and dinner, however, tend to be pretty much the same, except that when one is the large, main meal, the other will generally be smaller, with less food.

Families typically dine together for the main meal, and it tends to be a slow one, lasting anywhere from two to four hours. It may start with *antipasto* (literally, pre-food) — the appetizer. Cold cuts are a typical *antipasto*. The next course is a rice or pasta dish. The main course follows, typically meat — veal is a favorite — poultry or fish, a vegetable and a salad. Salad dressing is typically just olive oil and vinegar. This may be followed by cheese (Italy has literally hundreds of different cheeses), fruit, a sweet dish and coffee.

Frozen desserts of sherbet or ice cream are popular. *Gelato* is the generic name for these dishes.

When guests attend a meal, the most important male guest will be seated on the hostess's right. The most important female guest will be seated on the host's right.

The table is typically set with three plates in front of

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each diner. The first for the antipasto, the middle for the pasta course and the bottom for the main course. Each course is generally served separately, and the dishes are cleared before bringing out the next course.

A wine glass rests above and to the right of the plates. Italians generally will refill a wine glass as soon as the drinker empties it.

For a formal table setting, Italians will place a small salad fork and a regular fork to the left of the plates. To the right sit a knife and a large soup spoon. Above the plates, horizontally, lie a smaller knife, fork and spoon for coffee and dessert.

Italians dine continental style — fork in the left hand, knife in the right, no switching. Diners also use their knife to push food on to their fork.

Italians seldom use their fingers when eating. To put a piece of cheese on their bread, people will use a knife to stab the cheese. They use a knife and fork on fruit, except for grapes and cherries. They use their fingers to eat them.

Bread and wine are served throughout the meal. Diners do not have a bread plate. Instead they rest their bread right on the table next to their plate.

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Wine and water are the typical beverages for lunch and dinner. Many Italians favor local wines. However, the internationally known Chianti — a red wine grown in the Chianti region — is quite popular throughout the country.

Italians rarely drink without eating, and getting intoxicated is frowned upon.

Coffee is also favored, especially for breakfast and at the end of a meal. They drink espresso — a strong coffee brewed by forcing steam under pressure through darkly roasted, powdered coffee beans. For a lighter beverage, they mix or top espresso with steamed milk or cream to come up with cappuccino.

Italians generally drink their coffee quickly rather than lingering over it. People typically have three or four espressos a day. Some point to that as the reason behind the Italian's lively character.

Despite being world-renowned for their cooking, people, especially younger Italians, are turning increasingly to fast food.

EDUCATING THE CHILDREN

Italian schools are mostly state run, although elementary schools generally fall under the control of local authorities. The country also has a sprinkling of Catholic religious schools and elite private institutions. The government also controls the non-public schools, and both public and private institutions have similar curriculum.

Schools generally have a low pupil-to-teacher ratio. Teachers hand out heavy homework loads and give tough examinations at regular intervals. Parents expect their children to study diligently.

Schooling is mandatory for children from ages six to 14. Preschools are available, though, for the three- and four-year-old children of working mothers. About 90 percent of eligible children attend preschool. Five-year-olds can attend kindergarten.

Children attend elementary school for five years, from ages 6 through 10. Three years of intermediate schooling follows elementary classes. At 14, children enter secondary school. To qualify for secondary schooling, intermediate students must pass an examination — the *diploma de licenza media*.

In the secondary schools, a student's education becomes specialized. They choose one of four courses of study: clas-

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sical, technical, professional or artistic.

Students enrolled in classical studies further specialize in one of four branches: humanities, scientific, linguistic (modern languages) or education — in preparation to teach elementary school. Technical training prepares students for practical jobs.

To graduate from secondary school, students must pass a nationwide, two-day oral and written examination — the *maturità*, which is similar to the French *baccalauréat*.

The educational system guarantees admission to a university for any student graduating from secondary school. Tuition is free, except for a few elite establishments.

Universities are generally overcrowded, and only about 30 percent of those enrolling remain to get their degree.

Most higher-learning institutions do not have on-campus housing, so students enroll in a local university and live at home.

RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

The Italian Republic has no official religion, but about 85 percent of native-born Italians are nominally Roman Catholic.

Today's Italians, though, are not strict adherents to Roman Catholicism, and attendance at Mass is not high. The Church, however, still plays an important moral role in people's lives. The Church also wields significant social and political clout. Despite that clout it was unable to prevent legalization of divorce and abortion in the 1970s.

One of the Church's main roles in Italy today is providing health and welfare services to the needy — food shelters and programs for the elderly, the handicapped, the mentally ill, prostitutes and the drug addicted. The Church also offers job hunting assistance to the unemployed.

Only about one-fourth of Italians attend church regularly. That's down from about two-thirds in the 1940s and 1950s. Those still attending Mass on a regular basis are mainly the elderly, women and young children.

Although they may not go to Mass frequently, many Italians still adhere to Church rituals. Ninety-nine percent of Catholic children are baptized, about 95 percent make

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their First Communion and 82 percent receive their Confirmation. And practically all marriages take place in the Church.

Italians venerate a variety of saints. Each city, town and village has its own patron saint. Various trades and professions have their saints. Illnesses are the preserve of particular saints, including St. Marina for headaches, St. Venanzi for rheumatism and St. Paolo for dog bites. Even body parts are put in charge of individual saints, including St. Lucia for the eyes and St. Blaise for the throat.

Some Italian Roman Catholics, especially in the south, still retain folk beliefs. Under these practices a particular village woman, for example, may be thought to have special powers. She would be consulted to predict the future, to obtain love potions or to secure winning lottery numbers.

The Vatican, the center of Roman Catholicism and home to the pope, is located within the city of Rome. The Vatican, however, is a separate, sovereign state. With the agreement of the Vatican in 1984, the Italian government abolished Roman Catholicism as the country's official state religion.

Although a predominately Catholic country, the consti-

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tution requires religious freedom for all, and Italy has about 500,000 Protestants, nominal numbers of Jews and a growing Moslem immigrant population.

MAKING A LIVING

Italy has an industrial economy in the north and an agricultural one in the south. Services contribute the most to the Italy's gross domestic product, followed by industry and then agriculture. The country also has a strong tourism sector.

Industry

Since World War II, Italy has shifted from an agricultural economy to become a major industrialized nation. Italy belongs to the Group of Eight (G-8) industrialized nations and ranks as the world's fifth largest industrial economy.

Small- and medium-sized, family-owned manufacturing businesses located in the north, especially the Milan-Turin-Genoa triangle, form the backbone of Italy's industrial economy. Milan generates about a third of the country's tax revenue.

Italy has few multinational companies. Italians prefer to keep their businesses small so the family can maintain control. These small businesses, though, enjoy a reputation for producing top-quality goods.

Italy has few natural resources, and most raw materials needed for manufacturing and 80 percent of energy

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sources are imported.

The country's industrial output, however, is on a par with that of France and the United Kingdom. Italian industry is diversified and strong in product design, textiles and household appliances. Other major products include: iron and steel, motor vehicles, precision machinery, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, petroleum refining, ceramics, textiles, clothing and shoes.

Italy's top-three corporations are Fiat (automobiles), Olivetti (computers) and Pirelli (tires).

Similar business tend to congregate in a particular city. The city of Como, for example, is home to a large concentration of silk manufacturers. Ceramics producers congregate in Sassulo. Textile manufacturers in Prato.

This concentration of similar business has its advantages. If a large order would strain one firm's capacity, it will subcontract to other businesses in the area. It also encourages local competition and innovation.

The Italian high-fashion industry has a worldwide reputation, and designer clothes are exported from the country's fashion centers in Florence, Milan and Rome. Among the internationally known designers are Armani, Benetton, Ferragamo, Gucci and Versace.

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Italy also has a thriving crafts industry. Certain towns have particular areas of expertise. Craftsman in Cremona, Lombardy, are skilled violin makers. Carrara, in Tuscany, is home to marble cutters. Murano, near Venice, is renowned for glassworks.

Although home to large numbers of craftsmen, Florence does not specialize in a particular skill. Rather, its streets are filled with the shops of silversmiths, woodcarvers, metal sculptors, leather workers, goldsmiths and silkweavers.

Italy has a large state owned sector. These business are run mainly by two holding companies: the Institute for Industrial Reconstruction (IRI) and the National Hydrocarbons Groups (ENI). IRI owns major electronics, steel, telecommunications, engineering, shipbuilding and aerospace companies. ENI is strong in energy and chemicals. These public sector business, however, are inefficient.

Italy also has a significant underground economy, employing substantial numbers of people. They work, however, for low wages with no benefits.

Italians typically work a five-day, 40-hour week. Most people work from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m with an hour off for lunch. The traditional two-hour lunch break from about

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1 p.m. to 3 p.m. is gradually disappearing.

Around 35 percent of the work force are union members.

Employees receive from four to six weeks vacation plus 10 paid national holidays. Many also get a one-month's-salary bonus in December and a quarterly cost-of-living increase.

Still, the lot of the Italian worker is not always an easy one. Unemployment is persistently high, especially in the more rural south where it is often almost twice as high as in the north.

Parts of southern Italy are poverty-stricken. Income levels are much lower there than in the north, and many in the south have moved north to seek factory jobs.

The agricultural regions of the south are under the grip of the area's Mafias in Sicily (*Cosa Nostra*), Naples (*Camorra*) and Calabria (*'ndrangheta*). The Mafias control wholesale markets and much of the illegal drug trade. They bleed business by demanding protection money and manipulate public works contracts and politics. Those delving too deeply into their activities are killed.

Some estimates put the value of Mafia businesses at between \$1 billion and \$10 billion a year — putting them

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on a par with multinationals the size of Exxon.

With much of the area controlled by the Mafia, major corporations are reluctant to locate in southern regions.

Agriculture

Much of Italy's rugged, mountainous land is unsuitable for farming, and most farms are family-owned and quite small, averaging just 17 acres (7 hectares).

The southern region is the country's main agricultural area. Farmers in the south specialize in fruits, vegetables, olive oil, wine and durum wheat.

While northern Italy is primarily an industrialized region, it does have an important agricultural sector, producing grains, sugarbeets, soybeans, meat and dairy products.

Italy is a major producer of wine and cheese. Its wine production is on a par with that of France.

PASSING LEISURE TIME

Italians enjoy simple pleasures such as taking a walk, eating a meal or sitting in a cafe chatting and watching the world go by. Italians are also big television watchers. Large-prize television game shows are popular.

People spend much leisure time with the family. Family outings to the beaches along the country's extended coastline are popular during summer. Many families enjoy a leisurely Sunday lunch together at a restaurant.

Other favored leisure activities include attending a dance or taking in a movie or a soccer game.

Italians are proud of their cultural heritage, and they enjoy cultural events. Many enjoy going to the opera, and every major town has its opera house.

Bars are popular for daytime visiting and socializing. The Italian bar (*caffè*) is similar to the British pub in that it is as much a social center as well as a place to have a drink or an espresso. Most bars serve a variety of munchies, pastries and sandwiches.

In the evening, before dinner, people dress up and enjoy strolling through the town square, greeting and chatting with friends.

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Betting, much of it illegal, is popular among Italians. They readily buy tickets for the thousands of national and local lotteries, and they bet on soccer games, boxing matches and cycling races.

Italians get from four to six weeks vacation a year, and practically the entire nation takes a summer vacation from about July 20 to August 20.

Festivals

Italy has a staggering number of festivals. Harvest festivals celebrate a variety of crops, other festivals honor a variety of animals, some commemorate patron saints, still others celebrate the seasons. Many festivals focus on the performing arts, others reenact historic events. Lenten Carnivals are popular in some cities.

Easter Week and Good Friday in many towns are marked by processions of penitents through the streets or reenactments of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem. On the Monday after Easter Sunday many families go on a picnic in the country.

Summer is a time of food festivals which center on local specialties and produce. Also during summer, many towns celebrate their national day, commemorating the time when they were independent city-states. Festivi-

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ties generally include a parade, a fair, a mock battle, games and perhaps a horse race or a jousting tournament. Italians not only enjoy going to fairs and festivals they also enjoy participating in them and dressing in costumes.

Italian religious and national holidays include:

- New Year's Day (January 1)
- Epiphany (January 6)
- Easter (variable)
- Easter Monday (variable)
- Liberation Day (April 25), which commemorates the country's liberation in World War II
- Labor Day (May 1)
- Anniversary of the Republic (June 2)
- Assumption of the Virgin Mary (August 15)
- All Saint's Day (November 1)
- Immaculate Conception (December 8)
- Christmas Day (December 25)
- St. Stephen's Day (December 26).

Sports

Soccer is by far the Italian's favorite sport, and people are fiercely loyal to their local teams. Adults watch regional, national and international games on television. Children play the game everywhere.

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Professional cycling, auto racing and boxing are also followed by many Italians. American-style baseball and basketball are popular. Italians picked up the sports from Americans stationed in Italy following World War II.

Italians also enjoy swimming, boating, tennis, skiing and horseback riding. Small-town residents enjoy playing *bocce* (pronounced BOH-chay), a type of lawn bowling.

Many rural Italians engage in hunting — birds, rabbits and wild boar. Fishing is also popular.

THE ARTS

For centuries Italy was a birthplace and a center of the arts, shaping art movements throughout Europe and the world. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Italy has more than 40 percent of the world's great art works.

While the Renaissance was the highlight of Italy's arts, their influence did not die with the Renaissance. Contemporary artists, architects, composers, designers, filmmakers and writers continue to make significant contributions to Western culture.

Renaissance

Italy's finest artistic endeavors came about in the 15th and 16th centuries, during the Renaissance. The Renaissance began in Florence in the early 1400s when artists began to study the ancient Greeks, adopting their ideas about form and proportion.

Renaissance artists felt the human body should be portrayed in an ideal or heroic manner. They created human figures that were well proportioned and posed in flattering ways. They also strived to impart emotion to their works.

Italian arts of the Renaissance created a great and last-

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ing influence on the development of Western civilization.

Two of the most famous masters of the Renaissance were Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo. Leonardo da Vinci was a true Renaissance man. He was an engineer by training as well as a masterful painter, sculptor and architect.

One of Leonardo's finest paintings is *The Last Supper*. He painted the faces of each disciple with a different expression, believing that the face should be painted in such a way that it will be easy to understand what the individual is thinking.

Michelangelo considered himself first and foremost a sculptor, despite his many masterpieces in other media. Michelangelo took on non-sculpting work only reluctantly. On the contract for his acclaimed paintings on the Sistine Chapel's ceiling, he pointedly signed his name "Michelangelo the sculptor."

Michelangelo's sculpture's include *Moses*, the *Bound Slave*, his renowned *David* and the *Pietà*. Interestingly, *Pietà* is the only work Michelangelo signed.

Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo also worked in architecture, as did Filippo Brunelleschi, the leading architect of the early Renaissance. He built the first Re-

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naissance building, a hospital in Florence, and the churches of San Lorenzo, Santo Spirito and Santa Croce, also in Florence.

Among the Renaissance's renowned artists was Raphael. His famed *School of Athens* captures both the intellectual atmosphere and the zest with which Renaissance ideas were argued.

Another painter, Masaccio, was the early 15th century's leading artist. The late 15th century saw the works of such giants as Sandro Botticelli and Piero della Francesca. Botticelli's masterpieces included *Adoration of the Magi*, *Birth of Venus* and *Venus and Mars*.

During the Renaissance, Italy developed a new style of theater — *commedia dell'arte*. An outgrowth of the ancient Roman farce, these comedies had simple plots. For example, two unlikely people might fall in love or a lower-class person might trick an upper class individual.

Commedia dell'arte actors had to be versatile. Their roles required them not only to act but to also sing, dance, fence and perform circus tricks.

Literature

Italian literature developed in Florence in the 13th cen-

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ture with a flourishing school of poetry. Italy's most renowned work of literature is Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Not only is the *Divine Comedy* considered the finest work written in Italian, it is an important historical document about life in the Middle Ages. Written between 1310 and 1321, the epic describes the author's journey through Hell, Purgatory and Heaven.

The *Divine Comedy* is still popular among Italians today, and many people can and do frequently quote portions of it.

Two of Dante's contemporaries in Florence also rose to literary prominence — Boccaccio and Petrarch. Boccaccio is most noted for the *Decameron*, a short-story collection dealing with a group of young men and women who fled to a villa near Florence to escape the 1348 plague. Petrarch's writings include 350 sonnets he wrote for Laura, a married woman he had loved in his youth.

Petrarch composed his works in Latin, but Boccaccio and Dante wrote in the Tuscan dialect. Dante's *Divine Comedy* did much to establish Tuscan as Italy's national language.

Modern-day Italian writers have also achieved renown. In the mid-1900s, playwright Luigi Pirandello won the Nobel prize and writers Italo Calvino, Alberto Moravia,

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Ignazio Silone and Umberto Eco earned international attention with their works.

Umberto Eco, especially, has achieved international fame with his novels *The Name of the Rose* and *Foucault's Pendulum*.

Music

Opera developed in Florence in the late 16th century, originating as a musical representation of Greek tragedy. Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643) is generally considered to be opera's founding father.

Early in the 17th century, operas also began to be produced in Rome, Venice and Naples. As opera swept across Italy, each city developed its own style, but Naples became its main center. Early operas there leaned toward the comic.

The 19th century was especially productive for operatic composers. Rossini wrote his classic comic opera *The Barber of Seville* in 1816. Giuseppe Verdi, thought by many to be Italy's greatest composer, wrote 26 operas, including *Rigoletto* in 1851 and *Aida* in 1871.

Giacomo Puccini, who died in 1924, was the last of the great Italian opera composers. His favored theme was

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the woman who loved too much. And he put her in such works as *La Bohème*, *Manon Lescant*, *Madama Butterfly* and *Tosca*.

POLITICAL WAYS

Italy is a parliamentary republic. Under a constitution adopted in 1948, the Italian people are guaranteed freedom of speech, religion, thought and the press.

A president serves as the chief of state. The president is elected by an electoral college consisting of both houses of Parliament and 58 regional representatives. The president serves a seven-year term.

The presidency is mainly a ceremonial office. The president's most important functions are to nominate the prime minister, to approve the cabinet and to dissolve Parliament.

A prime minister serves as the head of government, overseeing its day-to-day running and signing legislation. The prime minister is referred to as the president of the Council of Ministers (the cabinet).

The prime minister is usually the head of the legislature's majority party or a majority coalition of parties. The president appoints the prime minister and the Parliament confirms the appointment with a vote of confidence. The Parliament can also remove a prime minister at any time with a vote of no confidence. Thus, the prime minister serves at the will of the legislature.

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The prime minister nominates and the president approves the cabinet, known as the Council of Ministers. The Council of Ministers has 22 ministries, which form the basic structure of the country's public administration, implementing policies and laws.

The Italian bureaucracy, though, is notoriously slow. Italy is burdened by 2,000 years of laws. While new laws are added, none are repealed, even those dating back to the Romans. In addition, the government has faced an influx of European Union regulations.

The parliamentary legislature is bicameral, consisting of the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies.

The Senate has 315 seats, of which 232 are directly elected and 83 are elected by regional proportional representation. The Senate also has a small number of senators for life, including former presidents of the republic. Senators serve seven-year terms.

The Chamber of Deputies has 630 seats. Of these, 475 are directly elected while 155 are elected by proportional representation. Members serve five-year terms.

While both the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies have equal power, over time the chamber has become the leading body. Either house of Parliament, however, may origi-

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nate bills, which must be passed by a majority of both houses.

In Italian politics numerous parties hold seats in Parliament, making it difficult for one party to gain a majority. Typically they create coalitions to form a majority. Coalition governments are generally center-right or center-left. Unfortunately, Italy has a history of these coalitions collapsing amidst disputes, power struggles and scandals. And since World War II, the average Italian government has lasted less than 12 months.

Italians have universal suffrage for citizens 21 and over. Turnout for elections is very high, generally reaching more than 90 percent of the electorate for parliamentary elections.

Local Administration

Italy divides into 20 autonomous administrative regions, which have limited governing powers. While the Italian government is primarily centralized, the regions do have responsibilities for administering some public functions, including healthcare.

Some regions favor a more federal system of government, which would give them increased autonomy from the central government in Rome. In an October 2001 consti-

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tutional referendum, 60 percent of voters endorsed a proposal to give the regions more say over taxes, education and environmental issues.

The regions are: Valle d' Aosta, Piedmont, Liguria, Lombardy, Trentino-Alto Adige, The Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany, Umbria, The Marche, Abruzzi, Molise, Apulia, Basilicata, Calabria, Campania, Lazio Sicily and Sardinia.

Since the 19th century, Sicily, Calabria and Campania have been largely governed by a hidden government — the Mafia.

Originally, the Mafia formed to establish law and order in the lawless regions of Sicily. But their tactics were violence and intimidation. Members were sworn to secrecy, keeping them from revealing the activities of their “brothers.” Anti-Mafia officials, and even their families, have met with violence and murder.

By the 1970s, the Mafia had become heavily involved in drug trafficking and money laundering. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Italian government stepped up its anti-Mafia activities, making it illegal to be a member of the Mafia organization.

The government met with some success when, in the late

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1980s, it achieved convictions on more than 300 Mafioso. The Mafia, however, continues to be a potent force in southern Italy.

Parties

Italy's system of government is rather complicated. The parties run the government and people vote for parties rather than individuals.

The country has numerous political parties, many of them small. Major parties include the Christian Democrats, the Democratic Party of the Left (formerly the Italian Communist Party), Forza Italia and the National Alliance.

Italy's political parties are powerful, and the country runs on a system of patronage. Government jobs, including regional and local appointments, are handed out according to political affiliation.

Many a person's job, house, pension, promotion or contract depends on a local party official. So, for people living in an area run by, say the Christian Democrats, it makes sense for them to join the Christian Democrat party, to take part in their social activities and to make sure the Christian Democrats stay in power — even should the party prove incompetent.

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The patronage system has given Italy a notoriously inept and inefficient bureaucracy. The country's civil servants are hired according to who they know not what they know. And once hired, they are employed for life, regardless of how incompetent one may be.

Political Situation

Because the government comprises so many small political parties, there is often much disharmony and infighting among politicians. Consequently, important reforms rarely get made. At times, debate centers on restructuring the government to ensure future stability. But those in power have not been able to reach a consensus on the steps to take.

Italians view their government as grossly inefficient and corrupt, and the government has developed a reputation for bureaucratic red tape. Italians, though, have learned to live with the situation. Instead of butting heads with the bureaucracy, people go around it, relying on friends and relatives to get things done.

In May 2001, a conservative alliance led by Silvio Berlusconi captured a majority of seats in both houses of parliament. Berlusconi's coalition includes his own Forza Italia, the National Alliance and four smaller conservative groups.

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Prime Minister Berlusconi promised to lower taxes, modernize the country's sluggish economy and to streamline the bureaucracy.

USEFUL CONTACTS

American Chamber of Commerce

Via Cantu 1
20123 Milano
Telephone: 39-2-869-0661
Fax: 39-2-805-7737

Embassy of the Italian Republic

1601 Fuller St. NW
Washington, DC 20009
Telephone 1-202-238-5500
<http://www.italyemb.org>

The Holy See Apostolic Nunciature

3339 Massachusetts Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20008
Telephone: 1-202-333-7121

The Holy See (Embassy)

Vatican City
Villino Pacelli
Via Aurelia 294
00165 Rome
Telephone: 011-396-46741

Italian Tourist Board

630 Fifth Ave.

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Suite 1565
New York, NY 10111
Telephone: 1-212-245-5618
<http://www.italiantourism.com>
<http://www.enit.it>

U.S. Consular Agent - Genoa
Via Dante 2
Telephone: 39-010-584-492
Fax: 39-010-553-3033

U.S. Consular Agent - Palermo
Via Vaccarini 1
Telephone: 39-091-305-857
Fax: 39-091-625-6026

U.S. Consular Agent - Trieste
Via Roma 15
Telephone: 39-040-660-177
Fax: 39-040-631-240

U.S. Consulate - Florence
Lungarno Amerigo Vespucci 38
Telephone: 39-055-239-8276/7/8/9 or 39-055-217-605
Fax: 39-055-284-088

U.S. Consulate - Milan
Via Principe Amedeo 2/10

CULTURE BRIEFING: ITALY

Telephone 39-02-290-351
Fax: 39-02-290-35-273.

U.S. Consulate - Naples
Piazza della Repubblica
Telephone: 39-081-583-8111
Fax: 39-081-761-1804

U.S. Department of Commerce
Country Desk Officer — Italy
Telephone: 1-202-482-2177

U.S. Department of State
Country Desk Officer — Italy
Telephone: 1-202-647-4426

U.S. Embassy
Via Veneto 119/A
Rome, Italy
or: Box 100, APO AE 09624
Telephone: 39-06-46741
Fax: 39-06-4674-2217
<http://www.usembassy.it>

U.S. Information Service
Via Boncompagni 2
00187, Rome, Italy
Telephone 011-39-6-4674-2655
<http://www.usis.it>

ITALY CONSULAR INFORMATION SHEET

The U.S. State Department's latest Consular Information Sheet is quoted below.

Country Description

Italy is a developed democracy with a modern economy. Tourist facilities are widely available. Additional information may be obtained from the Italian Government Tourist Board by telephone at 212-245-5618 or via the Internet: <http://www.enit.it>.

Entry Requirements

A valid passport is required. Italian authorities may deny entry to travelers who attempt to enter Italy without a valid passport. A visa is not required for tourist stays up to three months. For further information concerning entry requirements for Italy, travelers may contact the Embassy of Italy at 1601 Fuller St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009, tel. 202-328-5500 or via the Internet: <http://www.italyemb.org>, or the Italian Consulates General in Boston, Chicago, Detroit, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, Newark, New Orleans, New York, Philadelphia, or San Francisco.

Tourists staying other than in hotels for more than one month should register with the local police station and

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obtain a permesso di soggiorno (permit to stay) within eight days of arrival in Italy. Visitors to Italy may be required to demonstrate to the police upon arrival sufficient means of financial support. Credit cards, ATM cards, travelers' checks, prepaid hotel/vacation vouchers, etc. can be used to show sufficient means.

In an effort to prevent international child abduction, many governments have initiated procedures at entry/exit points. These often include requiring documentary evidence of relationship and permission for child's travel from the parent(s) or legal guardian not present. Having such documentation on hand, even if not required, may facilitate entry/departure.

Dual Nationality

U.S. citizens born in Italy and/or who are also Italian citizens may be subject to compulsory military service and other laws imposing special obligations upon them in Italy. Those who might be affected should inquire at an Italian embassy or consulate regarding their status before traveling to Italy. In some instances, dual nationality may hamper U.S. Government efforts to provide protection abroad. For additional information, please see the Consular Affairs home page on the Internet: <http://www.travel.state.gov> for our Dual Nationality flyer.

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Safety/Security

There have been occasional episodes of violence in Italy, most often connected to Italian internal developments or social issues. In 2001, there was violence associated with the demonstrations against the G-8 Meeting in Genoa. At various times, Italian authorities have found bombs outside public buildings; they have received bomb threats and were themselves the subjects of letter bombs. These incidents have all been ascribed to organized crime or anarchist movements. Americans were not targeted or injured in these instances. In March 2002, Americans were warned by the Department of State about possible actions by extremist groups in Italy.

Crime

Italy has a low rate of violent crime, little of which is directed toward tourists. But petty crimes such as pick-pocketing, theft from parked cars, and purse snatching are serious problems, especially in large cities. Most reported thefts occur at crowded tourist sites, on public buses or trains, or at the major railway stations, Rome's Termini, Milan's Centrale, Florence's Santa Maria Novella, and Naples' Centrale. Clients of Internet cafes in major cities have been targeted. Elderly tourists who have tried to resist petty thieves on motor scooters have suffered broken arms and collarbones.

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Thieves in Italy often work in groups or pairs. Pairs of accomplices or groups of street urchins are known to divert tourists' attention so that another can pick-pocket them. In one particular routine, one thief throws trash or waste at the victim; a second thief assists the victim in cleaning up the mess; and the third discreetly takes the victim's belongings. Criminals on crowded public transportation slit the bottoms of purses or bags with a razor blade or sharp knife, then remove the contents. Theft of small items such as radios, luggage, cameras, briefcases, and even cigarettes from parked cars is a major problem. Robbers take items from cars at gas stations often by smashing car windows. Thefts have also been reported from occupied vehicles waiting in traffic or stopped at traffic lights.

In a scam practiced on the highways, one thief punctures the tire of a rental or out-of-town car. An accomplice signals the flat tire to the driver and encourages the driver to pull over. When the driver stops, one thief helps change the tire, while the other takes the driver's belongings. Please use particular caution driving at night on highways, when there may be a greater incidence of robbery attempts. There have been occasional reports of break-ins of rental cars driven by Americans when the precautions mentioned above were not followed during stops at highway service areas.

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On trains, a commonly reported trick involves one or more persons who pretend to befriend a traveler and offer drugged food or drink. Also, thieves have been known to impersonate police officers to gain the confidence of tourists. The thief shows the prospective victim a circular plastic sign with the words “police” or “international police.” If this happens, the tourist should insist on seeing the officer’s identification card (*documento*), as impersonators tend not to carry forged documents. Tourists should immediately report thefts or other crimes to the local police.

The loss or theft abroad of a U.S. passport should be reported immediately to the local police and the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate. If you are the victim of a crime while overseas, in addition to reporting to local police, please contact the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate for assistance. The embassy/consulate staff can, for example, assist you to find appropriate medical care, to contact family members or friends and explain how funds could be transferred. Although the investigation and prosecution of the crime is solely the responsibility of local authorities, consular officers can help you to understand the local criminal justice process and to find an attorney if needed.

U.S. citizens can refer to the Department of State’s pamphlet, *A Safe Trip Abroad*, for ways to promote a more

trouble-free journey. The pamphlet is available by mail from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402, via the Internet at http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs, or via the Bureau of Consular Affairs home page at <http://travel.state.gov>.

Medical Facilities and Insurance

Medical facilities are available, but they may be limited outside urban areas. Public hospitals sometimes do not maintain the same standards as hospitals in the United States, so travelers are encouraged to obtain insurance that would cover a stay in a private Italian hospital or clinic. It is almost impossible to obtain an itemized hospital bill from public hospitals, as required by many U.S. insurance companies, because the Italian National Health Service charges one inclusive rate (care services, bed and board). The Department of State strongly urges Americans to consult their medical insurance company prior to traveling to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and if it will cover emergency expenses such as a medical evacuation. U.S. medical insurance plans seldom cover health costs incurred outside the United States unless supplemental coverage is purchased. U.S. Medicare and Medicaid programs do not provide payment for medical services outside the United States. Many travel agents and private companies offer insurance plans to

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cover overseas health care expenses, including emergency services such as medical evacuations.

When making a decision regarding health insurance, Americans should consider that many foreign doctors and hospitals require payment in cash prior to providing service and that a medical evacuation to the United States may cost well in excess of \$50,000. Uninsured travelers who require medical care overseas often face extreme difficulties, whereas travelers who have purchased overseas medical insurance have found it to be life-saving when a medical emergency has occurred. When consulting with your insurer prior to your trip, please ask if payment will be made to the overseas healthcare provider or whether you will be reimbursed later for incurred expenses.

Some insurance companies include coverage for psychiatric treatment and for disposition of remains in the event of death. Information on medical emergencies abroad, including overseas insurance programs, is provided in the Department of State's Bureau of Consular Affairs brochure, *Medical Information for Americans Traveling Abroad*, available via the Bureau of Consular Affairs home page or autofax: (202) 647-3000.

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Other Health Information

Travelers should always carry a prescription for any prescription drugs they are taking and should know the generic name of the drug. Most prescription drugs available in the United States can also be found in Italy. If you are taking an unusual medicine that is difficult to find even in the United States, we suggest that you bring an ample supply of the medicine with you when you travel. Mailing prescription drugs to Italy is time-consuming and complicated. Information on vaccinations and other health precautions may be obtained from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's international traveler's hotline at 1-877-FYI-TRIP (1-877-394-8747); fax 1-888-CDC-FAXX (1-888-232-3299), or by visiting the CDC Internet home page at <http://www.cdc.gov>.

Traffic Safety and Road Conditions

While in a foreign country, U.S. citizens may encounter road conditions that differ significantly from those in the United States. The information below concerning Italy is provided for general reference only, and it may not be totally accurate in a particular location or circumstance.

Safety of Public Transportation: Good

Urban Road Condition/Maintenance: Fair

Rural Road Condition/Maintenance: Good

Availability of Roadside Assistance: Excellent

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Streets in cities are often narrow, winding and congested; lane markings are often nonexistent; traffic lights are limited and often disobeyed; and a different convention of right-of-way is observed. Italy has over 5,600 kilometers (3,480 mi.) of Autostrada, or superhighways. Commercial and individual drivers travel and pass on these well-maintained roads at very high speeds. Accidents in which excessive speed is a contributing factor do occur.

In rural areas, a wide range of speed on highways makes for hazardous driving. Roads are generally narrow and often do not have guardrails. Travelers in northern Italy, especially in winter, should be aware of ground fog and poor visibility, which cause multiple-car accidents each year. Most Italian-specification automobiles are equipped with special fog lights. Roadside assistance in Italy is excellent on the well-maintained toll roads, but limited on secondary roads.

For specific information concerning Italy's drivers' licenses, vehicle inspection, road tax and mandatory insurance, please contact the Italian Government Tourist Board (ENIT) offices via the Internet at: <http://www.enit.it>, tel. 212-245-4822 or the A.C.I. (Automobile Club Italiano) at Via Magenta 5, 00185 Rome, tel. 39-06-4477. For information on obtaining international drivers' licenses, please contact AAA or the American Automobile Touring Alliance.

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Aviation Safety Oversight

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has assessed the Government of Italy's Civil Aviation Authority as Category 1 -- in compliance with international aviation safety standards for oversight of Italy's air carrier operations. For further information, travelers may contact the Department of Transportation within the United States at telephone 1-800-322-7873, or visit the FAA Internet website at <http://www.faa.gov/avr/iasa/>. The U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) separately assesses some foreign air carriers for suitability as official providers of air services. For information regarding the DOD policy on specific carriers, travelers may contact the DOD at telephone (618) 229-4801.

Customs Regulations

Italian customs authorities may enforce strict regulations concerning temporary importation into or export from Italy of items such as professional equipment, commercial samples, advertising materials and/or goods for exhibition and fair purposes. Tax-free shopping rules are strictly enforced. Please be sure you have read and understood all the procedures and conditions regarding refunds before purchasing any item. It is advisable to contact the Embassy of Italy in Washington, D.C. or one of Italy's consulates in the United States for specific information regarding customs requirements. The U.S.

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Customs Service may impose corresponding import restrictions in accordance with the Convention on Cultural Property Implementation Act. (Please contact the Customs Service at telephone 202-927-2336 or Internet <http://exchanges.state.gov/education/culprop> for further information.)

Italy's customs authorities encourage the use of an ATA (Admission Temporaire/Temporary Admission) Carnet. ATA Carnet Headquarters, located at the U.S. Council for International Business, 1212 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10036, issues and guarantees the ATA Carnet in the United States. For additional information, please call (212) 354- 4480, or send an e-mail to atacarnet@uscib.org, or visit <http://www.uscib.org> for details.

Criminal Penalties

While in a foreign country, a U.S. citizen is subject to that country's laws and regulations, which sometimes differ significantly from those of the United States and may not afford the protections available to the individual under U.S. law. Penalties for breaking the law can be more severe than in the United States for similar offenses. Persons violating Italian law, even unknowingly, may be expelled, arrested or imprisoned. Penalties for possession, use or trafficking in illegal drugs in Italy are

strict, and convicted offenders can expect jail sentences and heavy fines.

Special Circumstances

Strikes and other work stoppages occur frequently in the transportation sector (national airlines, airports, trains, and bus lines). Most are announced in advance and are of short duration. Reconfirmation of domestic and international flight reservations is highly recommended

Disaster Preparedness

Several major earthquake fault lines cross Italy. Large Italian cities do not lie near fault lines, however, smaller tourist cities, such as Assisi do lie near fault lines and have experienced earthquakes. General information about disaster preparedness is available via the Internet from the U.S. Federal Management Agency (FEMA) at <http://www.fema.gov>. Detailed information on Italy's earthquake fault lines is available from the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) at <http://www.usgs.gov>.

Italy also has several active volcanoes generating geothermal events. Mt. Etna, on the eastern tip of the Island of Sicily, has been erupting intermittently since 2000. The eruptions are relatively small in scale. Mt. Vesuvius, located next to Naples, is currently capped and

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not active. Activity at Mt. Vesuvius is monitored by an active seismic network and sensor system, and no recent seismic activity has been recorded. Two of Italy's smaller islands (Stromboli and Vulcano in the Aeolus Island chain north of Sicily) also have active volcanoes with lava flows. Detailed information on volcano activity in Italy is available from the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) at <http://www.usgs.gov>.

Children's Issues

For information on international adoption of children and international parental child abduction, please refer to our Internet site at http://travel.state.gov/children's_issues.html or telephone (202) 736-7000.

Registration/Embassy and Consulate Locations

Americans living in or visiting Italy are encouraged to register at the Consular Section of the U.S. Embassy in Rome or at one of the three U.S. Consulates General and obtain updated information on travel and security within Italy.

The U.S. Embassy in Rome is located at Via V. Veneto 119/A. Tel: 39-06-46741 and fax: 39-06-4674-2217. Internet address: <http://www.usembassy.it>.

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The U.S. Consulates are located in:

Florence, at Lungarno Amerigo Vespucci 38. Tel. 39-055-239-8276/7/8/9, or 39-055-217-605; fax: 39-055-284-088.

Milan, at Via Principe Amedeo 2/10. Tel. 39-02-290-351 and fax: 39-02-290-35-273.

Naples, at Piazza della Repubblica. Tel. 39-081-583-8111 and fax: 39-081-761-1804.

There are U.S. Consular Agents located in:

Genoa, at Via Dante 2. Tel. 39-010-584-492 and fax: 39-010- 553-3033.

Palermo, at Via Vaccarini 1. Tel. 39-091-305-857 and fax: 39- 091-625-6026.

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