



# Italy

## Introduction

Official Name: Italian Republic

Nationality: Italian

Area: 301,230 square kilometers (116,306 square miles)

Languages: Italian (official), German, French, Slovene

Currency: euro (EUR)

Location: Southern Europe, bordered by Austria, France, Vatican City, San Marino, Slovenia, and Switzerland with coastline on the Mediterranean Sea

## Statistical Information

Population	58.1 million
0-14 years	13.8 percent
15-64 years	66.4 percent
65+ years	19.9 percent
Birth rate	9 births/1,000
Death rate	11 deaths/1,000
Fertility rate	1.3 children/woman
Pop. growth rate	0.010 percent
Life expectancy	79.9 years
Literacy	98.4 percent
HIV/AIDS rate	0.5 percent
Ethnic groups	Italian (includes small populations of German-, French-, and Slovene-Italians)
Religion	90 percent Roman Catholic 10 percent other (Protestant, Muslim, Jewish, etc.)

## Economy

Italy has a modern market economy, comparable to that of France or the United Kingdom. The economy relies heavily on the industrial sector. Italy is sharply divided between the affluent north, which is developed and dominated by large industrial companies, and the less-affluent south, which is less developed and more agricultural. Unemployment levels in the south hover around 20 percent. The government has implemented several short-term reforms aimed at improving the competitiveness of

the market. In 2007, the government introduced a tax increase that helped the country to a nearly balanced budget for the first time since 2002.

## Government

Capital: Rome

Italy is a republic. The president is elected for a seven-year term by an electoral college consisting of the members of both houses of the parliament and 58 regional representatives. The prime minister is appointed by the president and has the support of a coalition of parties which together constitute a majority in both houses of parliament. The Council of Ministers is appointed by the prime minister and approved by the president. The legislature consists of the bicameral Parliament or Parlamento. The 315 members of the Senate, or Senato della Repubblica, are elected for five-year terms on the basis of proportional representation of the various political parties by vote. The 630 members of the Chamber of Deputies, or Camera dei Deputati, are elected by popular vote to serve a maximum of five years, or until the next parliamentary election.

## Climate

The mountainous region of northern Italy has an alpine climate. The rest of the country has a Mediterranean climate, which means mild, cool winters and hot, dry summers. Italy is also subject to heavy mist and fog, especially during the winter.

## Environmental Concerns

Italy has high levels of air pollution due to emissions from industrial plants. These emissions, which include pollutants such as sulfur dioxide, contribute to the formation of acid rain, which in turn damages lakes and surrounding ecosystems. Coastal and inland rivers in Italy are polluted by effluents from agricultural and industrial sources. The country has inadequate facilities for the disposal or treatment of industrial wastes.

## History

In the eighth century B.C., the first two unified civilizations established themselves in Italy. The Etruscans settled in central Italy, forming loosely bonded city-states. Their civilization represented the first known unification of parts of Italy. Greek colonists settled in southern Italy. They left a lasting cultural imprint; vestiges of Greek culture would influence Roman culture for centuries to come.

Between the ninth and seventh centuries B.C., the city of Rome was founded from a settlement of shepherds and farmers living in the Palatine hills. Legend states that the city of Rome was founded by Romulus in 753 B.C. Romulus became Rome's first king.

Rome expanded into a strong republican nation and eventually into a world empire. The empire expanded rapidly over the Mediterranean world; after Rome defeated the North African city-state of Carthage in 201 B.C., the empire controlled all the lands surrounding the Mediterranean. This facilitated the development of a strong trading system. The Roman Empire built an excellent system of roads and aqueducts and offered Roman citizenship to all free Italians. As the seat of the Roman Empire, Italy enjoyed a tax-free status, benefiting from the wealth of the empire. The Roman Empire represented the longest period of peace and prosperity that Italy has ever experienced. Christianity was born and eventually gained preferential status in the Roman Empire, spreading throughout the known Roman world.

Early in the fifth century A.D., barbarian tribes from northern Europe began to invade territories of the Western Roman Empire. Waves of Visigoths, Huns, Heruli, and Ostrogoths invaded the empire, further weakening it. In 476, Rome fell to the Germanic Heruli tribes. The Heruli chieftain Odoacer deposed Emperor Romulus Augustulus and took his place as the ruler of the Western Roman Empire.

Byzantine emperors continued to lay claim to the remains of the Western Roman Empire. The Byzantine emperor Zeno encouraged Ostrogoth ruler Theodoric the Great to invade Italy. He did, and in 493 captured the city of Ravenna, which was the Heruli capital. Theodoric killed Odoacer and began a long and peaceful rule over Italy. Under Theodoric's rule, Roman institutions were carefully preserved. Following the death of Theodoric in 526, his daughter Amalasantha ascended to the throne, ruling jointly with her husband. Amalasantha cultivated a friendship with the Byzantine empire, which angered

the Ostrogoths. After she was exiled and murdered in 535, Byzantine emperor Justinian I used her death as a pretext for the invasion and re-conquest of Italy.

The Byzantine Empire soon lost control of the coastal areas of southern and central Italy when the Lombards invaded and established a new kingdom in 569. The papacy grew in power, and became a distinguishing feature of Italian civilization. Although Italy was nominally ruled by the Byzantine Empire, the emperor made no effort to help the city of Rome when the Lombards attacked in 592. Pope Gregory took matters into his own hands, negotiating a temporary peace settlement with the Lombards.

When the Lombards again threatened Rome in 754, Pope Stephen II appealed to Pepin the Short, king of the Franks. Pepin defeated the Lombards and returned the conquered cities to the pope in exchange for papal recognition of his authority. Pepin's son, Charlemagne, again defeated the Lombards and was crowned emperor of the West in 800.

In 961, King Otto I of the Germans invaded Italy at the request of the pope. Otto defeated Beringer II, marquis of Ivrea, and was crowned Holy Roman Emperor by the pope in 962, unifying the kingdoms of Germany and Italy into the Holy Roman Empire. Italy remained a problem for subsequent German emperors, since the Alps prevented them from effectively extending control into Italy. The popes augmented the emperors' problems by asserting their own authority and influence over Italy.

In the 11th century the system of feudalism became strongly entrenched in southern Italy, but it failed to gain popularity in central and northern Italy, where rival lords remained independent of royal authority. The deep economic rift that still exists between northern and southern Italy has its roots in medieval Italy and the feudal system.

Beginning in the 10th century, the concept of cities began to grow in popularity, both for political and economic reasons. As contact and trade with the Muslim world grew, Italian merchants gained importance and cities became the focal points of trade. Cities formed alliances, and rival alliances went to war with one another to protect their commerce and industries. Constant rivalry precluded the formation of any alliance strong enough to unify Italy. In some cities, powerful nobles became despots, passing their authority over a city down to their children. Some cities managed to retain a republican form of government.

By the end of the 15th century, Italy was fragmented into the rival kingdoms of Sicily and Naples in the south, the Papal States and independent cities in central Italy, and various duchies in northern Italy. Constant warfare among the rival cities and duchies contributed to political turmoil, but the wars did relatively little harm compared to the Black Plague that ravaged Italy in 1348.

The Italian Renaissance reached its peak in the late 15th century. At the same time, political disunity among Italian city-states opened the door to foreign domination. In 1494, Charles VIII of France invaded Italy, beginning the Italian Wars, which lasted until 1559 and ended with most of Italy under Spanish rule. The War of the Spanish Succession from 1701-14 ended with Italy under French domination. By 1748, Naples and Sicily were under Spanish control, and the duchies of Milan, Mantua, Tuscany, and Modena were passed to Austria. The Papal States and the republics of Venice, Genoa, and Lucca retained independence. Despite a declining economy and political weakness, Italy continued to have a profound influence on European culture, most notably in the fields of music and architecture.

In 1796-97, Napoleon Bonaparte of France defeated Sardinian and Austrian armies in Italy. The Italians initially welcomed Napoleon as a liberator. Napoleon redrew the boundaries of Italy several times, and in 1805 created the kingdom of Italy, with himself as its king. Napoleon failed to unite Italy, however, and disillusioned Italian patriots formed secret revolutionary societies such as the Carbonari.

The Congress of Vienna (1814-15) restored Italy to its pre-Napoleonic state, but the Italian nationalist movement continued to grow. The unification movement, known as the Risorgimento, included three separate groups. Radicals desired a republican Italy, moderate liberals supported a return to monarchy under the House of Savoy, and Roman Catholic conservatives pushed for an Italian confederation headed by the pope.

In 1861, Victor Emmanuel II of the House of Savoy became king of a newly unified Italy, which did not include the Papal States, the territory around Venice, or Rome. The new Italian king was unable to annex the city of Rome until 1870 due to French protection of the Papal States. The Italian government and the papacy maintained a tense relationship, as the pope refused to cede his temporal power to the Italian king.

Italy initially chose to remain neutral at the outbreak of World War I, but later entered the war in 1915 on the side of the Allies after the Allies offered Italy territorial rewards. At the conclusion of the war, Italy was given much less territory than it had been promised. Italian discontent was widespread and led to political and social unrest, which eventually paved the way for the spread of fascism.

On October 27, 1922, fascist leader Benito Mussolini led a march on Rome and was made prime minister of Italy by the king. He soon gained dictatorial powers. He crushed all opposition, especially from the socialists and Communists. He strictly regulated the press and schools, imposed state controls on industry and labor, and set up a corporate state, which retained a fundamental basis in capitalism within a state controlled by the Fascist party and the military.

Mussolini's foreign policy was very aggressive and imperialistic. Italy conquered Ethiopia in 1936, made an alliance with Nazi Germany in the same year, and then sided with the rebels during the Spanish civil war of 1936-39. Mussolini continued to expand Italian holdings in North Africa.

At the outbreak of World War II, Italy took a neutral stance, but remained friendly to Germany. In June 1940, Italy declared war on Great Britain and France, allying itself with Germany and Japan. By 1943, Italy had suffered major losses: it had lost nearly all its North African colonies, and the Italian army was decimated and demoralized.

In July of 1943, the Fascist grand council turned on Mussolini. In response, King Victor Emmanuel II replaced Mussolini as premier and dissolved the Fascist party. In September, Italy surrendered to the Allies. Shortly thereafter, the new Italian government, under Pietro Badoglio, declared war on Germany. In April 1945, Mussolini was captured and executed.

In 1946, Victor Emmanuel II abdicated, leaving the throne to his son, Humbert II. Humbert ruled for only a month before Italians voted by only a small margin to establish a republican government. Humbert was exiled, and Italy adopted a new republican constitution on January 1, 1948.

After the end of World War II, Italy formed ties to the West, joining NATO in 1949. In 1951, it was a founding member of the European Steel and Coal Community, which was established by the Treaty of Paris and served as the basis for the modern

European Union. It was admitted to the United Nations in 1955.

Three major political parties emerged following World War II: the Christian Democrats, the Socialists, and the Communists. The Socialist party split into left-wing and right-wing factions, allowing the Christian Democrats to remain in power through successive governments, creating middle-of-the-road coalition governments.

By the 1960s the government was plagued with economic decline, corruption, and lawlessness. Both the extreme left and the extreme right were largely ignored by the coalition governments, leading to an increase in political violence. Political extremists terrorized politicians, businessmen, and intellectuals.

Political power in Italy has continued to pass through a series of coalition governments, as Italy's main political parties forge temporary alliances to gain larger percentages of voters. In May 2006, Giorgio Napolitano of the Democratic Party of the Left won the presidency. His term will last until 2013.

### **Ethnic Groups**

Italy has historically been a land of emigration, but over the past 20 years it has seen an influx of immigrants. Today, an estimated 4.9 percent of Italy's population is comprised of various immigrant groups. Approximately three million of Italy's immigrants are in the country legally; another estimated 0.8 to two million are illegal immigrants. Most illegal immigrants from Eastern Europe and Africa settle in southern Italy, working as agricultural day laborers. Over half of Italy's immigrants come from Albania, Morocco, China, Romania, Ukraine, Macedonia, the Philippines, Pakistan, or Tunisia.

### **Religion**

Nearly 90 percent of Italians identify themselves as Roman Catholic, although only 35.8 percent claim to be active members in the church. Catholicism has never been Italy's state religion, but it enjoys popularity due to the location of the Holy See, or Vatican City, the seat of Roman Catholicism. Vatican City is located in Rome, and though it is considered an independent entity, completely separate from Italy, it exerts a strong religious influence over the culture of Italy.

Judaism is the oldest religious minority in Italy. The first Jews in Italy were said to be Jewish ambassadors from Israel sent to Rome in 161 B.C. There have been Jewish communities in Italy ever since the Roman period.

The Waldensians, who migrated to northern Italy from France late in the twelfth century A.D., were officially recognized as a minority faith in 1848. The Waldensian faith originated in France in 1177, when Peter Waldo, a cloth merchant in Lyons, felt called by God to give his wealth to the poor and preach the gospel. He soon had a large number of followers who became known as the Poor Men of Lyons. The city of Lyons and the lords of the surrounding countryside imprisoned the Poor Men as heretics. In order to continue practicing their faith, they crossed the Alps into Italy in 1179. In the 1500s, the Waldensians wrote a confession of faith that linked their movement with the Calvinist Reformation. Today, the Italian Waldensian Church is a partner of the Reformed Church in America.

Other religious traditions have been imported by immigrants to Italy. This includes groups of Eastern Orthodox Christians, Baptists, Methodists, and Pentecostals, as well as small populations of Sikhs, Hindus, and Buddhists. Islam is growing; today there are over a million Muslims in Italy.

### **Culture**

**Food**—In Italian culture, food is a means of bringing family and friends together. Visitors to an Italian home will immediately be offered food and drink. Pasta is a traditional Italian food; soup, bread, meat, and fish are also popular. In traditional Italian society, the noon meal is the biggest meal of the day, while breakfast and dinner are lighter. Italians usually drink strong coffee or juice with lighter meals, and heavy noon meals are served with wine.

**Social status**—The differences between rich and poor in Italy are distinct. Italians who come from the industrial north are more likely to be middle- or upper-class, while Italians from the agricultural south are significantly less well off than northerners. New immigrants usually fall into the lower class, since they tend to be poor. Speech is a major means of social distinction in Italy; the more education a person has, the closer their speech will come to standard Italian. A regional dialect or accent is an immediate marker of a less wealthy and uneducated person. Expensive vacations, designer labels such as Versace and Armani, and opulent houses are symbols of high social status.

**Marriage**—In the past, Italian marriages were arranged, and women were required to bring a dowry to the marriage, although dowries were often waived among the poorer class. In modern Italy, young people are free to choose

their own marriage partner, though most choose not to marry. Some couples choose to live together without getting married. Others choose to live together until children are born. Some children choose to remain unmarried in order to care for aging parents.

**Children**—When children are young, Italian parents are often very indulgent. As they grow older, children are taught to be loyal to their family and defend it. Good children are expected to love their parents, and to avoid disgracing the family.

**Education**—Italian society places great emphasis upon education, especially higher education. Italy boasts several very old universities: the universities of Bologna, Padua, Rome, Florence, and Salerno all have their roots in medieval Italy.

**Etiquette**—Italians have less need for physical distance when conversing than Americans, and public embracing and kissing are more common than in America. Greetings are often accompanied by kisses. Eye contact is important to Italians; they feel that a person who avoids making eye contact is trying to hide something. Elders are highly respected, and younger people will step aside to allow them to enter a room first.

### **Dress**

Many Italian fashions are the same as those worn in the United States. Designer brands are popular among the younger and more affluent. Traditional fashions are still seen in rural areas of Italy, but among urban Italians, modern and even high-fashion styles are normal.

### **Travel/Transportation**

Streets in historic districts are often narrow, winding, and extremely congested. Motor scooters are a popular form of transportation, and scooter drivers tend to drive extremely fast, weave in and out of traffic, and often park and even drive on sidewalks. The reckless driving habits of scooter drivers are a hazard to both automobile drivers and pedestrians.

Pedestrian deaths in Italy are on the rise. There were a total of 1,188 pedestrian deaths in 2002, in addition to more than 17,000 pedestrian injuries. Most of these injuries and deaths were the result of collisions with scooters or other vehicles. Italy's sidewalks are uneven and crowded. Vehicles often ignore traffic signals, so pedestrians should exercise caution crossing streets even when the green "avanti" ("walk") light is lit.

Italy has over 5,600 kilometers (3,480 miles) of Autostrada, or superhighways. Although the Autostrada are very well-maintained, cars and trucks often drive and pass at high rates of speed, causing numerous accidents every year.

Rural roads are usually narrow and rarely have guardrails. In northern Italy, especially during the winter months, fog and poor visibility result in multiple-car accidents every year. Most Italian cars are equipped with fog lights, which help improve visibility. The use of seat belts and child safety seats is mandatory, and cars must use headlights at all times outside urban areas.

An American or Canadian driver's license is sufficient to drive in Italy. Travelers may apply for an international driving permit (IDP) if they desire, but it is not required by law.

### **Illness/Injury**

Emergency services at public hospitals are available free of charge. Availability of medical facilities may be limited outside urban areas.

### **Crime**

Overall, Italy's rate of crime is lower than that of the United States. However, tourists may be targeted by pickpockets and purse-snatchers, particularly on buses and subways in the large cities of Rome, Naples, Palermo, Venice, and Florence. Thefts from parked cars are also common in large cities.

ATM skimming devices are becoming more common, as in many areas around the world. Criminals attach these devices to ATMs, usually located in tourist areas. When a card is run through the ATM, the skimming device records the information stored in the card's magnetic strip. A tiny camera mounted above the keypad records the cardholder's personal identification number. The victim's information is then sold or traded online. To avoid becoming the victim of credit card fraud, only use ATMs located in well-lit public areas or inside a bank or business. Look for irregularities around the ATM's card reader such as gaps or other evidence of tampering. Cover the keypad with one hand as you enter your PIN to hide it from a hidden camera.

### **Safety and Security**

Although there have been warnings about possible terrorism, Italy has not been the target of any terrorist attacks. There have been no instances of political violence that has affected tourists since the end of World War II.

### **Entry/Exit Requirements**

Foreigners must have a valid passport. A visa is not required for tourist visits of up to 90 days. Travelers in Italy for any other purpose, such as work or study, or tourists who wish to stay longer than 90 days must have a visa.

Americans traveling or living in Italy for less than three months are considered non-residents. Hotels and resorts are required to submit a *dichiarazione di presenza*, or declaration of presence, for all non-resident visitors. Foreigners staying with relatives or friends are not required to submit a declaration of presence.

Americans who are staying in Italy for more than three months, for any purpose, are considered residents. Residents must obtain a *permesso di soggiorno*, or permit of stay. An application kit for the permit of stay can be obtained from any Italian post office, and must be returned to one of the 5,332 designated acceptance locations. Travelers must go to the local Vital Statistics Bureau to apply for residency within 20 days of receiving the permit. It generally takes one to two months to receive a certificate of residence.

For more information on visas and residency permits, contact the Embassy of Italy at 3000 Whitehaven St. NW, Washington, DC 20008; (202) 612-4400.

### **Immunizations**

No immunizations are required to enter Italy. Travelers are encouraged to ensure their routine vaccinations are up to date.

### **Special Circumstances**

Frequent strikes often cause standstills in the transportation sector, including national airlines, trains, and buses. Most strikes are short, only a few hours to a day long, and are announced in advance. Current information on strikes is reported in the *Herald Tribune* newspaper.

In certain areas of Naples and the region of Campania, the accumulation of garbage is a persistent problem. Frequent garbage collection strikes and inadequate dump facilities result in unsightly piles of uncollected garbage. Residents frequently resort to burning uncollected garbage, which may give off toxic fumes.

### **Electricity**

Italy adheres to the European Union standard of 230V/50Hz power. A power converter is necessary to use older American appliances in Italy. A set of plug

adapters will be necessary to make American types A and B plugs compatible with Italian outlets. Most recently-made computers and cell phones have been manufactured to operate on both European and North American electricity.