

# History

Few countries have been on such a roller-coaster ride as Italy. The Italian peninsula lay at the core of the Roman Empire; one of the world's great monotheistic religions, Catholicism, has its headquarters in Rome; and it was largely the dynamic city-states of Italy that set the modern era in motion with the Renaissance. But Italy has known chaos and deep suffering, too. The rise of Europe's nation-states from the 16th century left the divided Italian peninsula behind. Italian unity was won in blood, but many Italians have since lived in abject poverty, sparking great waves of migration. The economic miracle of the 1960s propelled Italy to the top league of wealthy Western countries but, since the mid-1990s, the country has wallowed in a mire of frustration. A sluggish economy (hit hard by the global slump that began in 2008), seemingly ineffective and squabbling government, widespread corruption and the continuing open sore of the Mafia continue to overshadow the country's otherwise sunny disposition.

A wide-ranging general site with potted Italian history is [www.arcaini.com/italy/italyhistory/italyhistory.html](http://www.arcaini.com/italy/italyhistory/italyhistory.html). It covers everything from prehistory to the post-war period, and includes a brief chronology.

## THE ETRUSCANS, GREEKS & MYTH

Of the many tribes that emerged from the millennia of the Stone Ages in ancient Italy, the Etruscans dominated the peninsula by the 7th century BC. Etruria was based on city-states mostly concentrated between the Arno and Tiber rivers. Among them were Caere (modern-day Cerveteri), Tarquinii (Tarquinia), Veii (Veio), Perugia (Perugia), Volaterrae (Volterra) and Arretium (Arezzo). The name of their homeland is preserved in the name Tuscany, where the bulk of their settlements were (and still are) located.

Most of what we know of the Etruscan people has been deduced from artefacts and paintings unearthed at their burial sights, especially at Tarquinia, near Rome. Argument persists over whether the Etruscans had migrated from Asia Minor. They spoke a language that today has barely been deciphered. An energetic people, the Etruscans were redoubtable warriors and seamen, but lacked cohesion and discipline.

At home, the Etruscans farmed and mined metals. Their gods were numerous and they were forever trying to second-guess them and predict future events through such rituals as examining the livers of sacrificed animals. They were also quick to learn from others. Much of their artistic tradition (which comes to us in the form of tomb frescoes, statuary and pottery) was influenced by the Greeks.

Indeed, while the Etruscans dominated the centre of the peninsula, Greek traders settled in the south in the 8th century BC, setting up a series of independent city-states along the coast and in Sicily that together were known as Magna Graecia. They flourished until the 3rd century BC and the ruins

*Roman Sex*, by John Clarke, is the result of decades of investigation into Roman eroticism, sexual mores and social attitudes. It is at once a serious anthropological retrospective and an amusing look at a society whose attitudes to sex were very different from our own.

## TIMELINE

c 700,000 BC

Evidence of early Stone Age settlements have been found in various locations around Italy. As long ago as 700,000 BC, primitive tribes lived in caves and hunted elephants, rhinoceros, hippopotamus and other hefty beasts.

2000 BC

The Bronze Age reaches Italy. By now, the hunter-gatherers have settled as farmers. The use of copper and bronze to fashion tools and arms marks a leap in sophistication accompanied by more complex social organisation.

474 BC

The power of the Etruscans in Italy is eclipsed after Greek forces from Syracuse and Cumae join to crush an invading Etruscan armada off the southern Italian coast in the naval Battle of Cumae.

*The Oxford History of the Roman World*, edited by John Boardman, Jasper Griffin and Oswyn Murray, is a succinct and clearly set out introduction to the history of ancient Rome.

Explore the world of ancient Rome in virtual fashion at [www.vroma.org](http://www.vroma.org). Essentially a teaching tool, it can be used to discover all sorts of aspects of ancient Roman life.

Edward Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* is the acknowledged classic work on the subject of the Empire's darker days. Try the abridged single-volume version.

of magnificent Doric temples in Italy's south (at Paestum) and on Sicily (at Agrigento, Selinunte and Segesta) stand as testimony to the splendour of Greek civilisation in Italy.

Attempts by the Etruscans to conquer the Greek settlements failed and accelerated their decline. The death knell, however, would come from an unexpected source – the grubby but growing Latin town of Rome.

The origins of the town are shrouded in myth, which says it was founded by Romulus (who descended from Aeneas, a refugee from Troy whose mother was the goddess Venus) on 21 April 753 BC on the site where he and his brother, Remus, had been suckled by a she-wolf as orphan infants. Romulus later killed Remus and the settlement was named Rome after him. At some point, legend merges with history. Seven kings are said to have followed Romulus and at least three were historical Etruscan rulers. In 509 BC, disgruntled Latin nobles turfed the last of the Etruscan kings, Tarquinius Superbus, out of Rome after his predecessor, Servius Tullius, had stacked the Senate with his allies and introduced citizenship reforms that undermined the power of the aristocracy. Sick of monarchy, the nobles set up the republic. Over the following centuries, this piffling Latin town would grow to become Italy's major power, gradually sweeping aside the Etruscans, whose language and culture had disappeared by the 2nd century AD.

## THE ROMAN REPUBLIC

Under the republic, *imperium*, or regal power, was placed in the hands of two consuls who acted as political and military leaders and were elected for nonrenewable one-year terms by an assembly of the people. The Senate, whose members were appointed for life, advised the consuls.

Although from the beginning monuments were emblazoned with the initials SPQR (Senatus Populusque Romanus, or the Senate and People of Rome), the 'people' initially had precious little say in affairs. (The initials are still used and many Romans would argue that little has changed.) Known as plebeians (literally 'the many'), the disenfranchised majority slowly wrested concessions from the patrician class in the more than two centuries that followed the founding of the republic. Some plebs were even appointed as consuls and indeed by about 280 BC most of the distinctions between patricians and plebeians had disappeared. That said, the apparently democratic system was largely oligarchic, with a fairly narrow political class (whether patrician or plebeian) vying for positions of power in government and the Senate.

The Romans were a rough-and-ready lot. Rome did not bother to mint coins until 269 BC, even though the neighbouring (and later conquered or allied) Etruscans and Greeks had long had their own currencies. The Etruscans and Greeks also brought writing to the attention of Romans, who found it useful for documents and technical affairs but hardly glowed in the

### 396 BC

Romans conquer the key Etruscan town of Veio, north of Rome, after an 11-year siege. Celebrations are short-lived, as invading Celtic tribes sweep across Italy and sack Rome in 390 BC.

### 264–241 BC

War breaks out between Rome and the empire of Carthage, which stretches across North Africa and into Spain, Sicily and Sardinia. By war's end Rome has become the western Mediterranean's prime naval power.

### 218–202 BC

Carthage sends Hannibal to invade Italy overland from the north in the Second Punic War. He is cut off when Rome invades Spain. Carthage is finally destroyed in a third war in 149–146 BC.



literature department. Eventually the Greek pantheon of gods formed the bedrock of Roman worship. Society was patriarchal and its prime building block the household (*familia*). The head of the family (*pater familias*) had direct control over his wife, children and extended family. He was responsible for his children's education. Devotion to household gods was as strong as to the increasingly Greek-influenced pantheon of state gods, led at first by the triad of Jupiter (the sky god and chief protector of the state), Juno (the female equivalent of Jupiter and patron goddess of women) and Minerva (patron goddess of craftsmen). Mars, the god of war, had been replaced by Juno in the triad.

Slowly at first, then with gathering pace, Roman armies conquered the Italian peninsula. Defeated city-states were not taken over directly; rather they were obliged to become allies. They retained their government and lands but had to provide troops on demand to serve in the Roman army.

79

A massive eruption of Mt Vesuvius showers molten rock and ash upon Pompeii and Herculaneum. Pliny the Younger later describes the devastating eruption in letters and the towns are only rediscovered in the 18th century.

476

German tribal leader Odovacar proclaims himself king in Rome, sealing the end of the western half of the Roman Empire. The peninsula sinks into chaos, and only the eastern half of the Empire survives intact.

568

Lombards invade and occupy northern Italy, leaving just Ravenna, Rome and southern Italy in the Empire's hands. Other tribes invade Balkan territories and cut the eastern Empire off from Italy.

This relatively light-handed touch was a key to success. Increasingly, the protection offered by Roman hegemony induced many cities to become allies voluntarily. Wars with rivals like Carthage and in the East led Rome to take control of Sardinia, Sicily, Corsica, mainland Greece, Spain, most of North Africa and part of Asia Minor by 133 BC.

By then, Rome was the most important city in the Mediterranean, with a population of 300,000. Most were lower-class freedmen or slaves living in often precarious conditions. Tenement housing blocks (mostly of brick and wood) were raised alongside vast monuments. One of the latter was the Circus Flaminius, stage of some of the spectacular games held each year. These became increasingly important events for the people of Rome, who flocked to see gladiators and wild beasts in combat.

## JULIUS CAESAR

For a detailed rundown of Roman emperors from Caesar to Caligula, check out [www.roman-emperors.org](http://www.roman-emperors.org).

Born in 100 BC, Gaius Julius Caesar would prove to be one of Rome's most masterful generals, lenient conquerors and capable administrators. He was also avid for power and this was probably his undoing.

He was a supporter of the consul Pompey (later known as Pompey the Great), who since 78 BC had become a leading figure in Rome after putting down rebellions in Spain and eliminating piracy. Caesar himself had been in Spain for several years, dealing with border revolts, and on his return to Rome in 60 BC, formed an alliance with Pompey and another important commander and former consul, Crassus. They backed Caesar's candidacy as consul.

*I, Claudius and Claudius the God*, by Robert Graves, delve into all sorts of aspects of imperial Rome at the time Claudius was in charge.

To consolidate his position in the Roman power game, Caesar needed a major military command. This he received with a mandate to govern the province of Gallia Narbonensis, a southern swathe of modern France stretching from Italy to the Pyrenees, from 59 BC. Caesar raised troops and in the following year entered Gaul proper (modern France) to head off an invasion of Helvetic tribes from Switzerland and subsequently to bring other tribes to heel. What started as an essentially defensive effort soon became a full-blown campaign of conquest. In the next five years, he subdued Gaul and made forays into Britain and across the Rhine. In 52–51 BC he stamped out the last great revolt in Gaul, led by Vercingetorix. Caesar was generous to his defeated enemies and so won the Gauls over to him. Indeed, they became his staunchest supporters in coming years.

The Roman Marcus Tullio Tiro invented shorthand in 63 BC.

By now, Caesar also had a devoted veteran army behind him. Jealous of the growing power of his one-time protégé, Pompey severed his political alliance with him and joined like-minded factions in the Senate to outlaw Caesar in 49 BC. On 7 January, Caesar crossed the Rubicon river into Italy and civil war began. His three-year campaign in Italy, Spain and the Eastern Mediterranean proved a crushing victory. Upon his return to Rome in 46 BC, he assumed dictatorial powers.

## 754–56

Frankish king Pepin the Short enters Italy at the request of Pope Stephen II, defeats the Lombards and declares the creation of the Papal States in return for a controlling influence over the rest of the country.

## 902

Muslims from North Africa complete the occupation of Sicily, installing an enlightened regime that encourages learning of the Greek classics, mathematics and other sciences. Agriculture flourishes and Sicily lives in comparative peace for two centuries.

## 962

Saxon king Otto I is crowned Holy Roman Emperor in Rome, the first in a long line of Germanic rulers. His meddling in Italian affairs led to the first serious clashes between papacy and empire.



He launched a series of reforms, overhauled the Senate and embarked on a building programme (of which the Curia, p114, and Basilica Giulia, p114, remain).

By 44 BC, it was clear Caesar had no plans to restore the Republic, and dissent grew in the Senate, even among former supporters like Marcus Junius Brutus who thought he had gone too far. Unconcerned by rumours of a possible assassination attempt, Caesar had dismissed his bodyguard. A small band of conspirators led by Brutus finally stabbed him to death in a Senate meeting on the Ides of March (15 March) 44 BC, two years after he had been proclaimed dictator for life.

In the years following Caesar's death, his lieutenant, Mark Antony (Marcus Antonius), and nominated heir, great-nephew Octavian, plunged into civil war against Caesar's assassins. Things calmed down as Octavian took control of the western half of the empire and Antony headed to the east, but when Antony fell head over heels for Cleopatra VII in 31 BC, Octavian went to war and finally claimed victory over Antony and Cleopatra at Actium, in Greece. The next year, Octavian invaded Egypt, Antony and Cleopatra committed suicide and Egypt became a province of Rome.

## AUGUSTUS & EMPIRE

Octavian was left as sole ruler of the Roman world and by 27 BC had been acclaimed Augustus (Your Eminence) and conceded virtually unlimited power by the Senate. In effect, he had become emperor.

Under him, the arts flourished. Augustus was lucky in having as his contemporaries the poets Virgil, Horace and Ovid, as well as the historian Livy. He encouraged the visual arts, restored existing buildings and constructed many new ones. During his reign the Pantheon (p119) was raised and he boasted that he had 'found Rome in brick and left it in marble'.

The long period of comparatively enlightened rule that he initiated brought unprecedented prosperity and security to the Mediterranean. The Empire was, in the main, wisely administered (although there were some kooky exceptions, such as the potty Caligula).

By AD 100, the city of Rome is said to have had more than 1.5 million inhabitants and all the trappings of the imperial capital – its wealth and prosperity were obvious in the rich mosaics, marble temples, public baths, theatres, circuses and libraries. People of all races and conditions converged on the capital. Poverty was rife among an often disgruntled lower class. Augustus had created Rome's first police force under a city prefect (*praefectus urbi*) to curb mob violence, which had long gone largely unchecked. He had also instituted a 7000-man fire brigade and night watchman service.

Augustus carried out other far-reaching reforms. He streamlined the army, which was kept at a standing total of around 300,000. Military service ranged

The 22 gripping episodes of the joint BBC and HBO TV blockbuster, *Rome*, combine rich historical content with good old sex, blood and intrigue. The series covers the period from Caesar's campaign in Gaul to Augustus' victory over Cleopatra and Mark Antony in Egypt. The drama is top class but the eye for historical detail is equally captivating.

Gaius Caligula, apart from engaging in incest with his sisters, is also said to have proposed making his horse a consul.

### 1130

Norman invader Roger II is crowned king of Sicily, a century after the Normans landed in southern Italy and so creating a united southern Italian kingdom. Norman culture and architecture fuse with Byzantine and Muslim styles.

### 1202–03

Venice leads Fourth Crusade to Holy Land on a detour to Constantinople in revenge for attacks on Venetian interests there. The Crusaders plunder Constantinople, topple the Byzantine emperor and install a puppet ruler.

### 1282

Charles of Anjou creates enemies in Sicily with heavy taxes on landowners, who rise in the Sicilian Vespers revolt. Having toppled Charles, they hand control of the island to Peter III, King of Aragón.

### IMPERIAL ROLL-CALL

**31 BC–AD 14 Augustus (Octavian)** – Arguably the single greatest ruler Rome knew, Augustus ushered in a period of uncommon good administration and peace, known as the Pax Romana or Pax Augusta, as well as definitively burying the Republic.

**14–37 Tiberius** – A steady governing hand but prone to depression, Tiberius had a difficult relationship with the Senate and withdrew in his later years to Capri (p660), where, they say, he devoted himself to drinking (he was dubbed Biberius) and orgies.

**37–41 Gaius (Caligula)** – Tiberius looks sober beside grand-nephew Caligula. Sex, including with his sisters, and gratuitous, cruel violence were high on his activities list. He emptied the state's coffers and suggested making a horse consul before being assassinated.

**41–54 Claudius** – Apparently timid as a child, he proved ruthless with his enemies (among them 35 senators), whose executions he greatly enjoyed watching. A prudent ruler at home, he began the occupation of Britain in 43.

**54–68 Nero** – Nero loved playing the fiddle and chariot racing; he started the trend of public races. The people accused him of playing the fiddle while Rome burned to the ground in 64. He blamed the disaster on the Christians, executed the evangelists Peter and Paul and had others thrown to wild beasts in a grisly public spectacle. He later cleared prime real estate for his Domus Aurea complex (p112).

**69–79 Vespasian** – A tough military man who occupied northern England and Wales, Vespasian also built the Colosseum (p112) and promoted public works. He is said to have quipped on his deathbed, 'I must be turning into a god'.

**81–96 Domitian** – A sound administrator, Domitian oversaw a massive rebuilding programme (including his enormous palace complex at Palatino, see p112) in Rome that few emperors matched before or after.

from 16 to 25 years, but Augustus kept conscription to a minimum, making it a largely volunteer force. He consolidated Rome's three-tier class society. The richest and most influential class remained the Senators. Below them, the so-called Equestrians filled posts in public administration and supplied officers to the army (control of which was essential to keeping Augustus' position unchallenged). The bulk of the populace filled the ranks of the lower class. The system was by no means rigid and upward mobility was possible.

A century after Augustus' death in AD 14 (aged 75), the Empire had reached its greatest extent. Under Hadrian (76–138), the Empire stretched from the Iberian peninsula, Gaul and Britain to a line that basically followed the Rhine and Danube rivers. All of the present-day Balkans and Greece, along with the areas known in those times as Dacia, Moesia and Thrace (considerable territories reaching to the Black Sea), were under Roman control. Most of modern-day Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Israel were occupied by Rome's legions and linked up with Egypt. From there a deep strip of Roman territory stretched along the length of North Africa to the Atlantic coast of what is today northern Morocco. The Mediterranean was a Roman lake.

### 1309

Pope Clement V shifts the papacy to Avignon in France (for almost 70 years). Clement had been elected pope four years earlier but refused to rule in Rome, which was hostile and riven by factional infighting.

### 1348

The Black Death (bubonic plague) wreaks havoc across Italy and much of the rest of western Europe. Florence is said to have lost three-quarters of its populace.

### 1506

Work starts on St Peter's Basilica, to a design by Donato Bramante, over the site of an earlier basilica, in Rome. Work would continue on the most important church in Christendom until 1626.

**98–117 Trajan** – Known as a ‘civilian emperor’ (as commemorated in his grand arch in Benevento – p659), Trajan was no slouch in the battlefield either, taking territory north of the Danube river in the Dacian wars, absorbing Armenia and defeating the Parthian empire in the east.

**117–138 Hadrian** – A tireless traveller and commander, Hadrian consolidated the Empire, built a defensive wall in northern England, reformed the law code and was a fine architect. Among his creations were the Pantheon in Rome (p119), built over the original temple, and the Villa Adriana (p181) in Tivoli.

**161–180 Marcus Aurelius** – The opium-smoking philosopher emperor. A prudent administrator, he found himself at war in the north for much of his reign after barbarian tribes had invaded Italy – the first such raids in centuries.

**193–211 Septimius Severus** – After scatty Commodus (the son and successor of Marcus Aurelius), Severus brought some hard military sense to bear, embarking on a long campaign in Mesopotamia against the Parthians (a victory arch – the Arco di Settimio Severo – commemorates this in Rome, see p115) and stabilising the Empire.

**284–305 Diocletian** – Diocletian introduced the *tetrarchy* (rule of four) with two senior emperors (*augustus*) in east and west, seconded by lieutenants (*caesar*). In 303 he launched an Empire-wide persecution of Christians.

**306–337 Constantine I** – He not only reversed policy on Christians, making Christianity the official religion of Rome, but established the New Rome, Constantinople, which would eventually become the capital of the Eastern Empire, later Byzantium.

**364–375 Valentinian I** – The last of the great warrior emperors, Valentinian spent most of his reign campaigning in Gaul and along the Danube to keep the Empire intact.

**378–395 Theodosius I the Great** – Although based in Constantinople and mostly busy dealing with rebellion and invasion in the Balkans, Theodosius can be thought of as the last ruler of a united empire, outlasting several co-rulers.

This situation lasted until the 3rd century. By the time Diocletian (245–305) became emperor, attacks on the Empire from without and revolts within had become part and parcel of imperial existence. A new religious force, Christianity, was gaining popularity and under Diocletian persecution of Christians became common, a policy reversed in 313 under Constantine I, who granted freedom of worship.

The Empire was later divided in two, with the second capital in Constantinople (founded by Constantine in 330), on the Bosphorus in Byzantium. It was this, the eastern Empire, which survived as Italy and Rome were overrun. This rump empire stretched from parts of present-day Serbia and Montenegro across to Asia Minor, a coastal strip of what is now Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel down to Egypt and a sliver of North Africa as far west as modern Libya. Attempts by Justinian I (482–565) to recover Rome and the shattered western half of the Empire ultimately came to nothing.

## POPE & EMPERORS

In an odd twist, the minority religion that Emperor Diocletian had tried so hard to stamp out saved the glory of the city of Rome. Through the chaos of

### 1508–12

Pope Julius II commissions Michelangelo to paint the ceiling frescoes in the restored Sistine Chapel. Michelangelo requests complete artistic discretion to decide on context, and the central nine panels recount stories from Genesis.

### 1534

The accession of Pope Paul III marks the beginning of the Counter-Reformation. He establishes a militant Jesuit order in 1540 and the Holy Office of the Inquisition, whose task is the pursuit of heretics in 1542.

### 1582

Pope Gregory XIII replaces the Julian calendar (introduced by Julius Caesar) with the modern-day Gregorian calendar. The new calendar adds the leap year to keep it in line with the seasons.

## SO JUST WHAT DID THE ROMANS DO FOR US?

It is often said that the Romans were not overly original, copying the Greeks in art, literature and science. But they were an ingenious lot who came up with some practical ideas that can only, however grudgingly, have impressed the folk they went about conquering.

The Romans gave us the loo. Rome's Cloaca Maxima, or Big Sewer, was created in the 8th century BC and is still in use! Romans came up with flushing latrines and regular clean water supply via aqueducts. The Turks can't really claim a patent on Turkish baths, since the idea of steam rooms and hot tubs is Roman. Indeed, the Romans created public and private bath complexes throughout the Empire. Fourth-century-AD Rome had 11 public baths, some 900 private ones and more than 1000 public fountains.

The word 'plumbing' comes from the Latin word for lead, *plumbus*. Even today, old European plumbing uses lead pipes instead of 20th-century options such as PVC. Indeed, it took Europeans until well into the modern era to discover the benefits of regular bathing and proper sanitation.

The Romans were great civil engineers and another of their lasting brainwaves was...roads. As the Empire grew, so did its ancient system of 'motorways'. Road engineering was an incredible feat of accuracy when you consider that the Romans had no modern instruments. With the roads came other bright ideas – postal services and wayside inns. Messages could be shot around the Empire in a matter of days or weeks by sending despatch riders. At conveniently spaced locations (not unlike modern truck stops) the riders would change mounts, have a snack and continue on their way. This worked better than many modern postal systems in Europe. The Romans even devised a type of odometer, a cogwheel that engaged with the wheel of a chariot or other vehicle to count every Roman mile travelled.

To access a complete list of all the popes and biographies on each, check out the encyclopaedia page of New Advent ([www.newadvent.org](http://www.newadvent.org)). Click on 'popes', 'list of', and there they all are, from St Peter to Benedict XVI.

invasion and counter-invasion that saw Italy succumb to Germanic tribes, the Byzantine reconquest and the Lombard occupation in the north, the papacy established itself in Rome as a spiritual and secular force.

The popes were, even at this early stage, a canny crowd. The papacy invented the Donation of Constantine, a document in which Emperor Constantine I had supposedly granted the Church control of Rome and surrounding territory. What the popes needed was a guarantor with military clout. This they found in the Franks and a deal was done.

In return for formal recognition of the popes' control of Rome and surrounding Byzantine-held territories henceforth to be known as the Papal States, the popes granted the Carolingian Franks a leading if ill-defined role in Italy and their king, Charlemagne, the title of Holy Roman Emperor. He was crowned by Leo III on Christmas Day 800. The bond between the papacy and the Byzantine Empire was thus broken and political power in what had been the Western Roman Empire shifted north of the Alps, where it would remain for more than 1000 years.

The stage was set for a future of seemingly endless struggles. Similarly, Rome's aristocratic families engaged in battle for the papacy. For centu-

### 1600

Giordano Bruno, Dominican monk, rebellious intellectual and proud philosopher who rejected much traditional Church teaching, is burned alive at the stake in Rome for heresy after eight years of trial and torture at the hands of the Inquisition.

### 1714

The end of the War of the Spanish Succession forces the withdrawal of Spanish forces from Lombardy, which comes under Austrian control. The Spanish Bourbon family establishes an independent Kingdom of the Two Sicilies.

### 1805

Having made himself emperor of France, Napoleon is proclaimed king of the newly constituted Kingdom of Italy, comprising most of the northern half of the country. A year later he takes the Kingdom of Naples.

ries, the imperial crown would be fought over ruthlessly and Italy would frequently be the prime battleground. Holy Roman Emperors would seek time and again to impose their control on increasingly independent-minded Italian cities, and even on Rome itself. In riposte, the popes continually sought to exploit their spiritual position to bring the emperors to heel and further their own secular ends.

The clash between Pope Gregory VII and Emperor Henry IV over who had the right to appoint bishops (who were powerful political players and hence important friends or dangerous foes) in the last quarter of the 11th century showed just how bitter these struggles could become. They became a focal point of Italian politics in the late Middle Ages and across the cities and regions of the peninsula two camps emerged: Guelphs (Guelfi, who backed the pope) and Ghibellines (Ghibellini, in support of the emperor).

## THE WONDER OF THE WORLD

The Holy Roman Empire had barely touched southern Italy until Henry, son of the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick I (Barbarossa), married Constance de Hauteville, heir to the Norman throne in Sicily. Of this match was born one of the most colourful figures of medieval Europe, Frederick II (1194–1250).

Crowned Holy Roman Emperor in 1220, Frederick was a German with a difference. Having grown up in southern Italy, he considered Sicily his natural base and left the German states largely to their own devices. A warrior and scholar, Frederick was an enlightened ruler with an absolutist vocation. A man who allowed freedom of worship to Muslims and Jews, he was not to everyone's liking, as his ambition was to finally bring all of Italy under the imperial yoke.

A poet, linguist, mathematician, philosopher and all-round fine fellow, Frederick founded a university in Naples and encouraged the spread of learning and translation of Arab treatises. From his early days at the imperial helm, he was known as Stupor Mundi (the Wonder of the World) for his extraordinary talents, energy and military prowess.

Having reluctantly carried out a crusade (marked more by negotiation than the clash of arms) in the Holy Land in 1228–29 on pain of excommunication, Frederick returned to Italy to find Papal troops invading Neapolitan territory. Frederick soon had them on the run and turned his attention to gaining control of the complex web of city-states in central and northern Italy, where he found allies and many enemies, in particular the Lombard league. Years of inconclusive battles ensued, which even Frederick's death in 1250 did not end. Several times he had been on the verge of taking Rome and victory had seemed assured more than once. Campaigning continued until 1268 under Frederick's successors, Manfredi (who fell in the bloody Battle of Benevento in 1266) and Corradino (captured and executed two

The Arabs introduced spaghetti to Sicily, where 'strings of pasta' were documented by the Arab geographer Al-Idrisi in Palermo in 1150.

For a range of topics on medieval Italy, see [www.medioevoitaliano.org](http://www.medioevoitaliano.org). The site contains links to many subjects, mostly in Italian but also in English. You can join special interest forums.

### 1814–15

The Congress of Vienna, held after the fall of Napoleon, is held to re-establish the balance of power in Europe. The result for Italy is largely a return of the old occupying powers.

### 1848

Revolts across Europe spark rebellion in Italy, especially in Austrian-occupied Milan and Venice. King Carlo Alberto of Piedmont joins the fray against Austria, but within a year Austria recovers Lombardy and the Veneto.

### 1860

In the name of Italian unity and the Savoy king, Vittorio Emanuele II, Giuseppe Garibaldi lands with 1000 men, the Red Shirts, in Sicily. He takes the island and lands in southern Italy.

### A WHIFF OF HELLFIRE

Politics in Italy's mercurial city-states could take a radical turn. When Florence's Medici clan rulers fell into disgrace (not for the last time) in 1494, the city's fathers decided to restore an earlier republican model of government. This time there was a twist.

Since 1481, the fat-lipped Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola had been in Florence preaching repentance. His bloodcurdling warnings of horrors to come if Florentines did not renounce their evil ways somehow captured everyone's imagination and the city now submitted to a fiery theocracy. He called on the government to act on the basis of his divine inspiration. Drinking, whoring, partying, gambling, wearing flashy clothes and other signs of wrongdoing were pushed well underground. Books, clothes, jewellery, fancy furnishings and art were burned on 'bonfires of the vanities'. Bands of children marched around the city ferreting out adults still attached to their old habits and possessions.

Pleasure-loving Florentines soon began to tire of this fundamentalism, as did Pope Alexander VI (possibly the least religiously inclined pope of all time) and the rival Franciscan religious order. The local economy was stagnant and Savonarola seemed increasingly out to lunch with his claims of being God's special emissary. Finally the city government, or *signoria*, had the fiery friar arrested. After weeks at the hands of the city rackmaster, he was hanged and burned at the stake as a heretic, along with two supporters, on 22 May 1498.

years later by French noble Charles of Anjou, who had by then taken over Sicily and southern Italy).

### FLOURISHING CITY-STATES

While the south of Italy tended to centralised rule, the north was heading the opposite way. Port cities such as Genoa, Pisa and especially Venice, along with internal centres such as Florence, Milan, Parma, Bologna, Padua, Verona and Modena, became increasingly insolent towards attempts by the Holy Roman Emperors to meddle in their affairs.

The cities' growing prosperity and independence also brought them into conflict with Rome, which found itself increasingly incapable of exercising influence over them. Indeed, at times Rome's control over some of its own Papal States was challenged. Caught between the papacy and the emperors, it was not surprising that these city-states were forever switching allegiances in an attempt to best serve their own interests.

Between the 12th and 14th centuries, they developed new forms of government. Venice adopted an oligarchic, 'parliamentary' system in an attempt at limited democracy. More commonly, the city-state created a *comune* (town council), a form of republican government dominated at first by aristocrats but then increasingly by the wealthy middle classes. The well-heeled families soon turned their attentions from business rivalry to political struggles, in which each aimed to gain control of the *signoria* (government).

John Julius Norwich's *A History of Venice* is one of the all-time great works on the lagoon city in English and is highly readable. He has also published *Venice: Paradise of Cities*.

## 1861

By the end of the 1859–61 Franco-Austrian War, Vittorio Emanuele II has Lombardy, Sardinia, Sicily, southern and parts of central Italy under his control and is proclaimed king of a newly united Italy.

## 1870

The Prussian invasion of France forces Paris to withdraw its contingent from Rome. The pope now has no hope of resisting the assault by the Italian army. The following year, the national parliament moves to Rome.

## 1915

Italy enters WWI on the side of the Allies to win Italian territories still in Austrian hands. Austria had offered to cede some of the territories that Italy wanted, but Italy insists the offer is insufficient.

In some cities, great dynasties, such as the Medici in Florence and the Visconti and Sforza in Milan, came to dominate their respective stages.

War between the city-states was a constant and eventually a few, notably Florence, Milan and Venice, emerged as regional powers and absorbed their neighbours. Their power was based on a mix of trade, industry and conquest. Constellations of power and alliances were in constant flux, making changes in the city-states' fortunes the rule rather than the exception. Easily the most stable and long the most successful of them was Venice.

In Florence, prosperity was based on the wool trade, finance and general commerce. Abroad, its coinage, the *firenze* (florin), was king.

In Milan, the noble Visconti family destroyed its rivals and extended Milanese control over Pavia and Cremona, and later Genoa. Giangaleazzo Visconti (1351–1402) turned Milan from a city-state into a strong European power. The policies of the Visconti (up to 1450), followed by those of the Sforza family, allowed Milan to spread its power to the Ticino area of Switzerland and east to the Lago di Garda.

The Milanese sphere of influence butted up against that of Venice. By 1450 the lagoon city had reached the height of its territorial greatness. In addition to its possessions in Greece, Dalmatia and beyond, Venice had expanded inland. The banner of the Lion of St Mark flew across northeast Italy, from Gorizia to Bergamo.

These dynamic, independent-minded cities proved fertile ground for the intellectual and artistic explosion that would take place across northern Italy in the 14th and 15th centuries. After centuries of Church-dominated obscurantism, the arrival of eastern scholars fleeing Constantinople in the wake of its fall to the Ottoman Turkish Muslims in 1453 (marking the end of what had once been the Roman Empire), prompted a reawakening of interest in classical learning (the importance of human reason, as opposed to divine order), especially the works of Aristotle and Plato. This coincided with a burst of new and original artistic activity that would soon snowball into the wonders of the Renaissance (see p53). Of them all, Florence was the cradle and launch pad for this fevered activity, in no small measure due to the generous patronage of the long-ruling Medici family.

## CAVOUR & THE BIRTH OF ITALY

The French Revolution at the end of the 18th century and the rise of Napoleon awakened hopes in Italy of independent nationhood. Since the glory days of the Renaissance, Italy's divided mini-states had gradually lost power and status on the European stage. By the late 18th century, the peninsula was little more than a tired, backward playground for the big powers.

Napoleon marched into Italy on several occasions, finishing off the Venetian republic in 1797 (ending 1000 years of Venetian independence) and

America was named after Amerigo Vespucci, a Florentine navigator who, from 1497 to 1504, made several voyages of discovery in what would one day be known as South America.

Swiss Henri Dunant created the Red Cross after witnessing the horrors of the Battle of Solferino during the Franco-Austrian War.

### 1919

Two years after returning wounded from WWI, former socialist journalist Benito Mussolini forms a right-wing militant group, the *Fasci Italiani di Combattimento* (Italian Combat Fasces), precursor to his Fascist Party.

### 1922

Mussolini and his Fascists stage a march on Rome in October. King Vittorio Emanuele III, fearful of the movement's growing popular power and doubting the army's loyalty, entrusts Mussolini with the formation of a government.

### 1929

Mussolini and Pope Pius XI sign the Lateran Pact, whereby Catholicism is declared the sole Italian religion and the Vatican is recognised as an independent state. In return, the papacy acknowledges the Kingdom of Italy.

creating the so-called Kingdom of Italy in 1804. That kingdom was in no way independent but the Napoleonic earthquake spurred many Italians to believe that a single Italian state could be created after the emperor's demise.

It was not to be so easy. The reactionary Congress of Vienna restored all the foreign rulers to their places in Italy.

Count Camillo Benso di Cavour (1810–61) of Turin, the prime minister of the Savoy monarchy, became the diplomatic brains behind the Italian unity movement. Through the pro-unity newspaper, *Il Risorgimento* (founded in 1847) and the publication of a parliamentary *Statuto* (Statute), Cavour and his colleagues laid the groundwork for unity.

Cavour conspired with the French and won British support for the creation of an independent Italian state. His 1858 treaty with France's Napoleon III foresaw French aid in the event of a war with Austria and the creation of a northern Italian kingdom, in exchange for parts of Savoy and Nice.

The bloody Franco-Austrian War (also known as the war for Italian independence; 1859–61), unleashed in northern Italy, led to the occupation of Lombardy and the retreat of the Austrians to their eastern possessions in the Veneto. In the meantime, a wild card in the form of professional revolutionary Giuseppe Garibaldi had created the real chance of full Italian unity. Garibaldi took Sicily and southern Italy in a military blitz in the name of Savoy king Vittorio Emanuele II in 1860. Spotting the chance, Cavour and the king moved to take parts of central Italy (including Umbria and Le Marche) and so were able to proclaim the creation of a single Italian state in 1861.

In the following nine years, Tuscany, the Veneto and Rome were all incorporated into the fledgling kingdom. Unity was complete and parliament was established in Rome in 1871.

The turbulent new state saw violent swings between socialists and the right. Giovanni Giolitti, one of Italy's longest-serving prime ministers (heading five governments between 1892 and 1921), managed to bridge the political extremes and institute male suffrage. Women were, however, denied the right to vote until after WWII.

## FROM THE TRENCHES TO FASCISM

When war broke out in Europe in July 1914, Italy chose to remain neutral despite being a member of the Triple Alliance with Austria and Germany. Italy had territorial claims on Austrian-controlled Trento (Trentino), southern Tyrol, Trieste and even in Dalmatia (some of which it had tried and failed to take during the Austro-Prussian war of 1866). Under the terms of the Triple Alliance, Austria was due to hand over much of this territory in the event of occupying other land in the Balkans, but Austria refused to contemplate fulfilling this part of the bargain.

The Italian government was divided between a non-interventionist and war party. The latter, in view of Austria's intransigence, decided to deal

Alessandro Volta invented the electric battery in 1800 and gave his name to the measurement of electric power.

*History of the Italian People*, by Giuliano Procacci, is one of the best general histories of the country in any language. It covers the period from the early Middle Ages until 1948.

### 1935

Italy seeks a new colonial conquest through the invasion of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) from Eritrea, but takes seven months to capture Addis Ababa. The League of Nations condemns the invasion and imposes limited sanctions on Italy.

### 1940

Italy enters WWII on Nazi Germany's side and invades Greece, which quickly proves to be a mistake. Greek forces counter-attack and enter southern Albania. Germany saves Italy's bacon in 1941 by overrunning Yugoslavia and Greece.

### 1943

Allies land in Sicily. King Vittorio Emanuele III sacks Mussolini. He is replaced by Marshall Badoglio, who surrenders after Allied landings in southern Italy. German forces free Mussolini and occupy most of the country.



with the Allies. In the London pact of April 1915, Italy was promised the territories it sought after victory. In May, Italy declared war on Austria and thus plunged into a 3½-year nightmare.

Italy and Austria engaged in a weary war of attrition. When the Austro-Hungarian forces collapsed in November 1918, the Italians marched into Trieste and Trento. The post-war Treaty of Versailles failed to award Rome the remaining territories it had sought.

These were slim pickings after such a bloody and exhausting conflict. Italy lost 600,000 men and the war economy had produced a small concentration of powerful industrial barons while leaving the bulk of the civilian populace in penury. This cocktail was made all the more explosive as hundreds of thousands of demobbed servicemen returned home or shifted around the country in search of work. The atmosphere was perfect for a demagogue. The demagogue was not long in coming forth.

One of the young war enthusiasts had been the socialist newspaper editor and one-time draft dodger, Benito Mussolini (1883–1945). This time he volunteered for the front and only returned, wounded, in 1917.

The experience of war and the frustration shared with many at the disappointing outcome in Versailles led him to form a right-wing militant political group that by 1921 had become the Fascist Party, with its black-shirted street brawlers and Roman salute. These were to become symbols of violent oppression and aggressive nationalism for the next 23 years. After his march on Rome in 1922 and victory in the 1924 elections, Mussolini (who called himself the Duce, or Leader) took full control of the country by 1926, banning other political parties, trade unions not affiliated to the party, and the free press.

By the 1930s, all aspects of Italian society were regulated by the party. The economy, banking, massive public works programmes, the conversion of coastal malarial swamps into arable land and an ambitious modernisation of the armed forces were all part of Mussolini's grand plan.

On the international front, Mussolini at first showed a cautious hand, signing international cooperation pacts (including the 1928 Kellogg Pact solemnly renouncing war) and until 1935 moving close to France and the UK to contain the growing menace of Adolf Hitler's rapidly re-arming Germany.

That all changed when Mussolini decided to invade Abyssinia (Ethiopia) as the first big step to creating a 'new Roman empire'. This aggressive side of Mussolini's policy had already led to skirmishes with Greece over the island of Corfu and to military expeditions against nationalist forces in the Italian colony of Libya.

The League of Nations condemned the Abyssinian adventure (King Vittorio Emanuele III was declared Emperor of Abyssinia in 1936) and from then on Mussolini changed course, drawing closer to Nazi Germany. They backed the rebel General Franco in the three-year Spanish Civil War and in 1939 signed an alliance pact.

For more on the history of Fascist Italy, see [www.thecorner.org/home.htm](http://www.thecorner.org/home.htm). Here you can trace Mussolini's rise to power and the tumultuous years of his rule. Click on Totalitarianism.

Claudia Cardinale starred in the 1984 Italian film *Claretta*, on the racy life and tragic end of Clara Petacci, Mussolini's lover. Given the chance to flee when they were captured, she instead tried in vain to shield the Duce from the partisan execution squad's bullets.

Eugenio Corti's *Il Cavallo Rosso* (The Red Horse) is an extraordinary personal account of Corti's time in Russia in WWII and his return to Italy. Unabashedly on the Catholic right of Italy's political spectrum, this absorbing book provides an insightful, if at times 'politically incorrect', look at modern Italy at war and peace.

## 1946

Italians vote in a national referendum to abolish the monarchy and create a republic. King Umberto II, who had succeeded to the throne in May, leaves Italy and refuses to recognise the result.

## 1957

Italy joins France, West Germany and the Benelux countries to sign the Treaty of Rome, which creates the European Economic Community (EEC), now known as the EU. The treaty takes effect on 1 January 1958.

## 1970

Parliament approves the country's first ever divorce legislation, vociferously opposed by the Church. Unwilling to accept this 'defeat', the Christian Democrats call a referendum to annul the law in 1974. Italians vote against the referendum.

### MEDITERRANEAN MASSACRE

When Italy's Marshall Badoglio announced the end of fighting between Italy and the Allies on 8 September 1943, partying broke out on the pretty Greek island of Cephalonia. It was occupied by the Italian Acqui division and a hodgepodge of other units (some 12,000 military in all), whose men were only too pleased to swap rifles for wine bottles.

A much smaller contingent of German troops was rather less amused and, on 10 September, they demanded the Italians surrender. The Italian commander, General Gandin, tried to play for time but on 14 September, his men voted to resist. By then the Germans were landing reinforcements on the island. The ensuing battle lasted a week. Under constant bombardment by Ju87 Stuka dive-bombers, the Italians had no chance.

After surrendering on 22 September, summary executions went on for days and several thousand prisoners drowned when their transport ships bound for Germany were sunk. Some estimates put the death toll at around 9500. Of those, only some 1500 died in battle. Hitler himself had ordered the execution of all Italian prisoners on the island, considered traitors.

Denis Mack Smith produced one of the most penetrating works on Italy's dictator with his book *Mussolini*. As well as tracing Mussolini's career it assesses his impact on the greater evil of the time, Hitler.

Roberto Rossellini's *Roma Città Aperta* (Rome Open City), starring Anna Magnani, aside from being a classic of Italian neo-realist cinema, is also a masterful look at wartime Rome. The film is the first in his *Trilogy of War*, followed by *Paisà* and *Germania Anno Zero* (Germany Year Zero).

WWII broke out in September 1939 with Hitler's invasion of Poland. Italy remained aloof until June 1940, by which time Germany had overrun Norway, Denmark, the Low Countries and much of France. It seemed too easy and so Mussolini entered on Germany's side in 1940, a move Hitler must have regretted later. Germany found itself pulling Italy's chestnuts out of the fire in campaigns in the Balkans and North Africa and could not prevent Allied landings in Sicily in 1943.

By then, the Italians had had enough of Mussolini and his war and so the king had the dictator arrested. In September, Italy surrendered and the Germans, who had rescued Mussolini, occupied the northern two-thirds of the country and reinstalled the dictator.

The painfully slow Allied campaign up the peninsula and German repression led to the formation of the Resistance, which played a growing role in harassing German forces. Northern Italy was finally liberated in April 1945. Resistance fighters caught Mussolini as he fled north in the hope of reaching Switzerland. They shot him and his lover, Clara Petacci, before stringing up their corpses (along with others) in Milan's Piazzale Lotto.

### THE COLD WAR IN ITALY

In the aftermath of war, the left-wing Resistance was disarmed and Italy's political forces scrambled to regroup. The USA, through the economic largesse of the Marshall Plan, wielded considerable political influence and used this to keep the left in check.

Immediately after the war, three coalition governments succeeded one another. The third, which came to power in December 1945, was dominated by the newly formed right-wing Democrazia Cristiana (DC; Christian

#### 1980

A bomb in Bologna kills 85 and injures hundreds more. The Red Brigades and a Fascist cell both claim responsibility. Analysis later points to possible para-state terrorism in Operation Gladio but nothing has been proved.

#### 1999

Italy becomes a primary base in NATO's air war on Yugoslavia. Air strikes are carried out from the Aviano airbase from 24 May until 8 June, when Serbia accepts international ground forces in Kosovo.

#### 2001

Silvio Berlusconi's right-wing Casa delle Libertà (Liber-ties House) coalition wins an absolute majority in national polls. He promises to run Italy like a corporation but the following five years are marked by economic stagnation.

Democrats), led by Alcide de Gasperi, who remained prime minister until 1953. Italy became a republic in 1946 and De Gasperi's DC won the first elections under the new constitution in 1948.

Until the 1980s, the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI; Communist Party), at first under Palmiro Togliatti and later the charismatic Enrico Berlinguer, played a crucial role in Italy's social and political development, in spite of being systematically kept out of government.

The very popularity of the party led to a grey period in the country's history, the *anni di piombo* (years of lead) in the 1970s. Just as the Italian economy was booming, Europe-wide paranoia about the power of the Communists in Italy fuelled a secretive reaction that, it is said, was largely directed by the CIA and NATO. Even today, little is known about Operation Gladio, an underground paramilitary organisation supposedly behind various unexplained terror attacks in the country, apparently designed to create an atmosphere of fear in which, should the Communists come close to power, a right-wing coup could be quickly carried out.

The 1970s were thus dominated by the spectre of terrorism and considerable social unrest, especially in the universities. Neo-Fascist terrorists struck with a bomb blast in Milan in 1969. In 1978, the Brigate Rosse (Red Brigades, a group of young left-wing militants responsible for several bomb blasts and assassinations), claimed their most important victim – former DC prime minister Aldo Moro. His kidnap and (54 days later) murder (the subject of the 2004 film *Buongiorno Notte*) shook the country.

Despite the disquiet, the 1970s was also a time of positive change. In 1970, regional governments with limited powers were formed in 15 of the country's 20 regions (the other five, Sicily, Sardinia, Valle d'Aosta, Trentino-Alto Adige and Friuli Venezia Giulia, already had strong autonomy statutes). In the same year, divorce became legal and eight years later abortion was also legalised, following anti-sexist legislation that allowed women to keep their own names after marriage.

## THE BERLUSCONI ERA

A growth spurt in the 1980s saw Italy become one of the world's leading economies, but by the mid-1990s a new and prolonged period of crisis had set in. High unemployment and inflation, combined with a huge national debt and mercurial currency (the lira), led the government to introduce draconian measures to cut public spending, allowing Italy to join the single currency (euro) in 2001.

The old order seemed to crumble in the 1990s. The PCI split in two. The old guard minority, Partito della Rifondazione Comunista (PRC; Refounded Communist Party), was led by Fausto Bertinotti until crushing election defeat in 2008 (when it failed to reach the minimum 5% of the vote cut-off mark for entry to parliament). The bigger and moderate breakaway wing reformed

Liposuction was first tried out by Dr Giorgio Fisher, a Roman gynaecologist, in 1974.

Although much has happened since it was written, Paul Ginsborg's *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943–1988* remains one of the single-most readable and insightful books on post-war Italy.

Not long after WWII, Norman Lewis penned *The Honoured Society*, an intriguing study of Sicily, and in 2000 he returned to the subject, and especially the Mafia, with *In Sicily*.

### 2005

Pope John Paul II dies aged 84. His death unleashes a wave of sorrow and crowds outside St Peter's chant *santo subito* (sainthood now). He is succeeded by Benedict XVI, the German Cardinal Ratzinger.

### 2006

In April, Berlusconi narrowly loses general elections to a broad centre-left coalition led by the technocrat Romano Prodi, who immediately runs into trouble with the Telecom bugging scandal and the pension reform quagmire.

### 2006

Juventus, AC Milan and three other top Serie A football teams lose points and receive hefty fines in a match-rigging scandal that also sees Juventus stripped of its 2005 and 2006 championship titles.

*Gomorra*, (published in English as *Gomorrah: Italy's Other Mafia*), by Roberto Saviano, is an extraordinary look at how the organised crime gangs of Naples, together known as the Camorra, dominate the city, indulge in blood-curdling gang war violence and spread the tentacles of their illegal doings around the world. A fascinating read, it has also been brought to the screen in Matteo Garrone's *Gomorra*, shot mostly with non-professional actors. It won the Grand Prix at Cannes in 2008.

*The Dark Heart of Italy*, by Tobias Jones, is an engaging, personal look at contemporary Italy, plagued as it has been by (real or imagined) conspiracies, corruption and terrorism.

itself as Democratici di Sinistra (DS; Left Democrats) and, in 2007, merged with another centre-left group to create the Partito Democratico (PD).

The rest of the Italian political scene was rocked by the Tangentopoli ('kickback city') scandal, which broke in Milan in 1992. Led by a pool of Milanese magistrates, including the tough Antonio di Pietro, investigations known as Mani Pulite (Clean Hands) implicated thousands of politicians, public officials and businesspeople in scandals ranging from bribery and receiving kickbacks to blatant theft.

The old centre-right political parties collapsed in the wake of these trials and from the ashes rose what many Italians hoped might be a breath of fresh political air. Media magnate Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia (Go Italy) party swept to power in 2001 and, after an inconclusive two-year interlude of centre-left government under former European Commission head Romano Prodi from 2006, again in April 2008.

Together with the right-wing (one-time Fascist) Alleanza Nazionale (National Alliance) under Gianfranco Fini and the polemical, separatist Lega Nord (Northern League), Berlusconi sits at the head of a coalition known as Popolo della Libertà (People of Liberty) with an unassailable majority.

Led by the former mayor of Rome, Walter Veltroni, the PD was unable to recover after winning only 38% of the vote in the 2008 elections. In quick succession, the PD was worsted in municipal elections around the country and regional polls in Friuli Venezia Giulia, Abruzzo and Sardinia. This latter defeat, in February 2009, led Veltroni to quit, leaving the chronically divided left in chaos.

From 2001 to 2006, Berlusconi's rule was marked by a series of laws that protected his extensive business interests (he controls as much as 90% of the country's free TV channels). He also spent considerable time hitting out against what he claimed to be the country's 'politicised' judges. The latter have been looking into his myriad business affairs since the beginning of the 1990s, but one trial after another has collapsed.

One of Berlusconi's first acts in 2008 was to resolve the long-standing garbage crisis in Naples. A complex issue dating to the early 1990s, garbage disposal bottlenecks have put Naples through several malodorous moments, with vast amounts of refuse piling up all over the city and its surrounding areas. Corruption, poor administration, overflowing rubbish dumps and controversy over where to locate incinerators have all contributed to the problem. No sooner in the chair as prime minister, Berlusconi made for Naples and later sent in the army to calm protests and get things moving again. By July, the PM had declared the crisis over.

Stinking garbage is not Naples' only problem. In recent years, more blood has flown in the streets of Naples than anywhere else in Italy as a result of Mafia violence. Since 2004, around 60 to 100 people a year have died in gang warfare as rival clans of the Camorra cut each other up.

## 2007

Former heir to the Italian throne, Vittorio Emanuele di Savoia, is cleared of corruption and fraud charges in connection with alleged illicit dealings, among others, involving the casino in Campione d'Italia, an Italian enclave in Swiss territory.

## 2008

Italy's national airline, Alitalia, files for bankruptcy and is later resurrected, in reduced form with fewer routes, aircraft and staff, as a private airline.

## 2009

Italy's Constitutional Court overturns a law giving Berlusconi immunity from prosecution while in office, opening the possibility that he could stand trial in several court cases. The prime minister refuses to resign.

# Italian Art

The history of Italian art is in many ways also the history of Western art. A browse through any text on the subject brings up the names of seminal movements and periods including classical, Renaissance, mannerist, baroque, futurist and Metaphysical – all of which were forged in Italy by a pantheon of artists including Giotto, Da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael, Bernini, Botticelli and Caravaggio. The country itself is one huge art gallery, full of museums and churches housing a treasure trove of art that is unmatched anywhere in the world. There's no way the visitor can see it all, but one thing's for sure: no trip around the country can be complete without a fair few gallery, church and museum stops along the way.

## CLASSICAL & ANCIENT ART

In art, as in so many other realms, the ancient Romans looked to the Greeks for examples of best practice. They had plenty of opportunity to do so, as the Greeks had settled many parts of Sicily and southern Italy as early as the 8th century BC, naming it *Magna Graecia* and building great cities such as Syracuse and Taranto. These cities were famous for their magnificent temples, many of which were decorated with sculptures modelled on, or inspired by, masterpieces by Praxiteles, Lysippus and Phidias. The archaeological museums in Naples (p645), Palermo (p766) and Syracuse (p811) contain many such examples.

Sculpture continued to flourish in southern Italy into the Hellenistic period, and it also gained great popularity in central Italy, where the primitive art of the Etruscans (the people of ancient central Italy) was influenced and greatly refined by the contribution of Greek artisans, who came here through trade. A great example of this is the 6th-century terracotta *Apollo of Veio*, miraculously preserved and now on display at the Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia (p126) in Rome.

In Rome itself, sculpture, architecture and painting flourished under first the Republic and then the Empire. But the art that was produced in Rome during this period was different in many ways from the Greek art that influenced it. Essentially secular, it focused less on harmony and form and more on accurate representation, mainly in the form of sculptural portraits. Anyone who spends time browsing the collections in the Museo Palatino (p113) and the Museo Nazionale Romano: Palazzo Massimo alle Terme (p128) in Rome cannot fail to be struck by how lifelike – and often deeply unattractive! – the marble busts of the emperors and their families are. Innumerable versions of Pompey, Titus and Augustus all show a similar visage, proving that the artists were seeking verisimilitude in their representations, and not just glorification.

Another way in which the art of ancient Rome differed from that of Greece is in its purpose. The Greeks saw art as being solely about harmony, beauty and dramatic expression, but starting with Augustus (63 BC–AD 14), the Roman emperors used art to promote propaganda messages that were strengthened through associations with classical Greece and the golden age of Athens. This form of narrative art often took the form of relief decoration recounting the story of great military victories – the Colonna di Traiano (Trajan's Column, p116) and the Ara Pacis Augustae (Altar of Peace, p124) are two excellent examples of this tradition. Both are magnificent, monumental examples of art as propaganda, exalting the emperor and Rome in a form that no-one, either then or now, can possibly ignore.

We regularly consulted EH Gombrich's seminal work *The Story of Art* when writing this chapter. First published in 1950, it gives a wonderful overview of the history of Italian art.

Italy has more World Heritage-listed sites than any other country in the world; many of its 44 listings are there in the guise of repositories of great art.

While the emperors commissioned these portraits and public monuments, wealthy members of Roman society also dabbled in the arts. They built palatial villas and decorated these with statues that were sometimes looted from the Greek world, and sometimes copied from Greek originals. Today, museums in Rome are bursting at the seams with such trophies. Some, such as the *Galata Morete* (Dying Gaul, c 240–200 BC) in the Capitoline Museums (p117) in Rome, were copies of Greek originals; others, such as the extraordinary *Laocoön and His Sons* (c 160–140 BC) in the collection of the Vatican Museums (p133), are original.

Roman villas were decorated with another form of art, too. While the Etruscans had used wall painting – most notably in their tombs at centres such as Tarquinia (p183) and Cerveteri (p182) – it was the Romans who refined the form and concentrated it on landscape scenes executed with startling naturalness. Wonderful, richly coloured examples of such paintings can today be appreciated at the Museo Nazionale Romano: Palazzo Massimo alle Terme (p128) in Rome.

## BYZANTINE ART

In 330, Emperor Constantine, a convert to Christianity, made the ancient city of Byzantium his capital and renamed it Constantinople. The city became the great cultural and artistic centre of Christianity and it remained so up to the time of the Renaissance, though its influence on the art of that period was never as fundamental as the art of ancient Rome.

The Byzantine period was notable for its sublime ecclesiastical and palace architecture, its extraordinary mosaic work and – to a lesser extent – its painting. Its art was influenced by the decoration of the Roman catacombs and the early Christian churches, as well as by the Oriental Greek style, with its love of rich decoration and luminous colour. Byzantine artworks de-emphasised the naturalistic aspects of the classical tradition and exalted the spirit over the body, so glorifying God rather than man or the state.

In Italy, the Byzantine virtuosity with mosaics was showcased in Ravenna, the capital of the Byzantine Empire's western regions in the 6th century. Three churches were built or endowed by the Emperor Justinian and his wife Theodora. These churches, with the Chora Church (aka Kariye Müzesi) in Istanbul, are considered to house the very best of Byzantine mosaic art. The hand-cut glazed tiles (*tesserae*) in Ravenna's Basilica di Sant'Apollinare in Classe (p466), Basilica di San Vitale (p465) and Basilica di Sant'Apollinare Nuovo (p466) catch the light, and glint and gleam in the dark church surrounds. Though they depict biblical and other imagery with extraordinary naturalness, they also impart an enormous sense of grandeur and mystery, perhaps hinting that they depict stories and scenes that have an ecclesiastical power much greater than the simple worshipper could ever hope to fully appreciate.

## ART IN THE MIDDLE AGES

The Italian Middle Ages have often been regarded as simply a 'dark' age between the Roman and Byzantine Empires and the Renaissance. However, to ignore this period would make it very difficult to understand all subsequent Italian history. This is because Italy as we know it was born in the Middle Ages. The barbarian invasions of the 5th and 6th centuries began a process that turned a unified empire into a land of small independent city-states, and it was these states – or rather the merchants, princes, clergy, corporations and guilds who lived within them – that started the craze in artistic patronage that was to underpin the great innovations in art and architecture that were to characterise the Renaissance.

Continuing the trend kick-started in the Byzantine period, ideas of clarity and simplicity of religious message began to outweigh ideals of faithful representation during this time. This is why, at first glance, many pictures of the period look rather stiff. There is nothing of the mastery of movement and expression that had been the pride of Greek art and that had been adopted by the Romans.

Painting and sculpture of this period played second fiddle to its architecture, which is commonly known as 'Romanesque'. Complementing this architectural style was the work of the Cosmati, a Roman guild of mosaic and marble workers who specialised in assembling fragments of coloured stones and glass mosaics and combining them with large stone disks and strips of white marble to create stunning intricate pavements, columns and church furnishings such as baldachins. There are good examples of Cosmati work in Rome's Chiesa di Santa Maria in Cosmedin (p122), the Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore (p127) and the Chiesa di Santa Maria Sopra Minerva (p119).

## THE GOTHIC STYLE

The Gothic style was much slower to take off in Italy than it had been in the rest of Europe. It marked the transition from the art of the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, and saw artists once again joyously draw inspiration from life itself rather than solely from religion. Occurring at the same time as the development of court society and the rise of civic culture in the city-states, its art was both sophisticated and elegant, highlighting attention to detail, a luminous palette and an increasingly refined technique. The first innovations were made in Pisa by sculptor Nicola Pisano (c 1220–84), who emulated the example of the French Gothic masters and studied classical sculpture in order to represent nature more convincingly, but the major strides forward occurred in Florence and Siena.

### Giotto and the 'Rebirth' of Italian Art

The Byzantine painters in Italy knew how to make use of light and shade and had an understanding of the principles of foreshortening (how to convey an effect of perspective). It only required a genius to break the spell of their conservatism and to venture into a new world of naturalistic painting. And genius came in the form of Florentine painter Giotto di Bondone (c 1266–1337). Giotto's aims and outlook owed much to the great sculptors of the northern cathedrals, and his methods owed much to the Byzantine masters. But his painting was radically different, focusing on the creation of dramatic narrative and the accurate, or 'natural', representation of figures and landscape. The Italian poet Giovanni Boccaccio wrote in his *Decameron* (1348–53) that Giotto was 'a genius so sublime that there was nothing produced by nature...that he could not depict to the life; his depiction looked not like a copy, but the real thing'.

Boccaccio wasn't the only prominent critic of the time to consider Giotto revolutionary – the first historian of Italian art, Giorgio Vasari (see the boxed text, p55), said in his *Lives of the Artists* (1550) that Giotto initiated the 'rebirth' (*rinascità* or *renaissance*) in art. Giotto's most famous works are all in the medium of the fresco (where paint is applied on a wall while the plaster is still damp), and his supreme achievement is the cycle gracing the walls of the Cappella degli Scrovegni (p383) in Padua. It's impossible to overestimate Giotto's achievement with these frescoes, which illustrate the stories of the life of the Virgin and Christ. In them, he abandoned popular conventions such as the three-quarter view of head and body and presented his figures from behind, from the side or turning around, just as the story demanded. Giotto had no need for lashings of gold paint and elaborate

Many Renaissance painters included self-portraits in their major works. Giotto didn't, possibly due to the fact that friends such as Giovanni Boccaccio described him as the ugliest man in Florence. With friends like those...



**FRA' FILIPPO LIPPI: THE RENEGADE MONK**

Filippo Lippi (1406–69), one of the greatest Tuscan painters of his era, entered the Carmelite order as a monk aged only 14. Vasari writes in his *Lives of the Artists* that 'Instead of studying, he spent all of his time scrawling pictures on his own books and those of others'. It's perhaps not surprising, then, that Lippi eventually left the order. In fact, he abducted a novice who was sitting for the figure of the Madonna in a fresco he was painting for the Duomo in Prato, renounced his vows and married her. Their son, Filippino (1457–1504), followed in his father's artistic footsteps. History doesn't relate whether he shared his dad's peccadilloes.

ornamentation to impress the viewer with the significance of the subject. Instead, he enabled the viewer to feel the dramatic tension of the scene through a naturalistic rendition of figures and a radical composition that created the illusion of depth. They are works of enormous emotional power and stunning virtuosity.

Giotto's oeuvre isn't limited to the frescoes in the Cappella degli Scrovegni. His Life of St Francis cycle in the Upper Church of the Basilica di San Francesco (p580) in Assisi is almost as extraordinary, and was to greatly influence his peers, many of whom worked in Assisi during the decoration of the church. One of the most prominent of these was the Dominican friar Fra' Angelico (c 1395–1455), a Florentine painter who was famed for his mastery of colour and light. His *Annunciation* (c 1450) in the convent of the Museo di San Marco (p492) in Florence is perhaps his most accomplished work.

Artistic genius, like madness and profligacy, often runs in the family. Italian artistic dynasties include the Bellinis (Jacopo, Gentile and Giovanni), Lorenzetti (Ambrogio and Pietro) and Pisano (Nicola and Giovanni).

**The Sienese School**

Giotto wasn't the only painter of his time to experiment with form, colour and composition and create a radical new style. The great Sienese master Duccio di Buoninsegna (c 1255–1319) successfully breathed new life into the old Byzantine forms using light and shade. His preferred medium was panel painting rather than the fresco, and his major work is probably his *Maestà* (Virgin Mary in Majesty) in the Museo dell'Opera Metropolitana (p539) in Siena.

It was in Siena, too, that two new trends took off: the introduction of court painters and the advent of secular art.

The first of many painters to be given ongoing commissions by one major patron or court, Simone Martini (c 1284–1344) was almost as famous as Giotto in his day. His best-known painting is the stylized *Maestà* (1315–16) in the Museo Civico (p538) in Siena, in which he pioneered his famous iridescent palette (one colour transformed into another within the same plane).

The Lorenzetti brothers, Pietro (c 1280–1348) and Ambrogio (c 1290–1348), were also working in Siena around this time. They can be said to be the greatest exponents of what, for a better term, can be referred to as secular painting. Ambrogio's *Allegories of Good and Bad Government* (1337–40) in the Museo Civico is a magnificent achievement, lauding the results that good government can have (in this case, of course, using the example of Siena) and warning of the gruesome results that bad government can lead to. In the frescoes, he applies the rules of perspective with an accuracy previously unseen, creating a deep and realistic pictorial space. The frescoes are also significant in the development of the Italian landscape tradition. In *Life in the Country*, one of the allegories, Ambrogio successfully depicts the time of day, the season, colour reflections and shadows – a naturalistic depiction of landscape that was quite unique at this time.



## THE EARLY RENAISSANCE

During the 15th century (Quattrocento), painting overtook its fellow disciplines of sculpture and architecture and became the pre-eminent art form for the first time in the history of Western art. Its great achievements built on many of the innovations introduced by Giotto and the painters of the Sienese school: the exploration of perspective and proportion, a new interest in realistic portraiture, and the beginnings of a new tradition of landscape painting. At the start of the Quattrocento, most of these were explored and refined in one city – Florence.

The first innovations of this period were in sculpture and architecture. Sculptors Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378–1455) and Donatello (c 1382–1466) replaced the demure drapery-clad statues of the Middle Ages with dynamic and anatomically accurate figures reminiscent of the great works of ancient Greece and Rome.

Architect Filippo Brunelleschi (1377–1446), the designer of the dome of Florence's Duomo, was also heavily influenced by the achievements of the classical masters. But he was able to do something that they hadn't been able to do themselves – discover and record the mathematical rules by which objects appear to diminish as they recede from us. In so doing, Brunelleschi gave artists a whole new visual perspective and a means to glorious artistic ends.

One of the first artworks created according to these rules was the *Trinity*, a wall painting in the Basilica di Santa Maria Novella (p491) in Florence. Painted around 1428 by Masaccio (1401–28), it is commonly considered to be one of the founding works of Renaissance painting. Even his peers acknowledged how important Masaccio's works were – Leonardo da Vinci praised him for his faithful study of nature and adopted a similar mathematical 'stage management' in his famous *Last Supper* fresco, which graces a wall in the refectory of the Chiesa di Santa Maria delle Grazie (p265) in Milan.

Acknowledging the radical innovation of the work of Masaccio and of Giotto before him, the artists of this period were no longer content to repeat the old formulas handed down by medieval artists. Like the Greeks and Romans, they began to study the human body in their studios and workshops by asking models or fellow artists to pose for them. Their aim was to make the figures in their paintings look as realistic as possible, and then animate the figures themselves using the new rules of perspective. Andrea Mantegna (1431–1506), who was based in Padua and Mantua, was responsible for the painting that is the most virtuosic of all perspectival experiments that occurred during this period – his expressive and highly realistic *Dead Christ* (c 1480), with its figure of Jesus shown in dramatic foreshortening. When you see it in the collection of the Pinacoteca di Brera (p270) in Milan it's easy to imagine how radical it must have seemed when it was first exhibited.

Sometimes innovation can lead to the creation of new problems, and this was something that the Florentine artists of this time soon had to face. Medieval painters had been unaware of the rules of perspective, but this had enabled them to distribute their figures over the picture in any way they liked in order to create a harmonious whole. But the painters of the Quattrocento found that the rigid new formulas they were experimenting with often made harmonious arrangements of figures difficult, resulting in groups that appeared artificial. This was particularly the case with large works such as altar paintings, which needed to be seen from afar and were required to fit into the architectural framework of the whole church. Artists such as Sandro Botticelli (c 1444–1510) led the way in pursuing a solution to this challenge, seeking to make a painting both perspectively accurate and harmonious in

In *M: The Man Who Became Caravaggio*, Peter Robb gives a passionate personal assessment of the artist's paintings and a colourful account of Caravaggio's life, arguing he was murdered for having sex with the pageboy of a high-ranking Maltese aristocrat.

During the Renaissance, the average artist earned about a third of the salary of a lawyer – today, it's about a fifth.

composition. His *Birth of Venus* (1485), now in the collection of the Uffizi (p487), was one of the most successful attempts to solve this problem. It's not perfect – witness Venus' unnaturally elongated neck – but it was certainly an impressive and incredibly beautiful attempt.

## THE HIGH RENAISSANCE

There is a surfeit of highlights in the history of Italian art, but the beginning of the 16th century (the Cinquecento) tops them all. At this time the centres of artistic excellence and innovation shifted from Florence to Rome and Venice. This reflected the political and social realities of the period, namely the transfer of power in Florence from the Medicis to Savonarola, and the desire of the popes in Rome to counter the influence of Martin Luther and his Reformation movement by making the Church's home in Rome so magnificent that it would cause any dissenters to be humbled – and brought back into line – as a result.

The Cinquecento was the time of geniuses such as Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564) and Raphael Santi (1483–1520) – the archetypal 'Renaissance men'. All three were painters and architects of genius; Leonardo was also a self-trained scientist and mathematician of extraordinary vision, and Michelangelo was quite possibly the greatest sculptor in the history of art. Together, they were to unalterably change the face of Western art.

Leonardo, a Florentine, had so many talents that it is hard to isolate only a few for comment. In his painting, he took what some critics have described as the decisive step in the history of Western art – namely, abandoning the balance that had previously been maintained between colour and line and choosing to modulate his contours using colour. This technique is called *sfumato* and it is perfectly displayed in his *Mona Lisa* (now in the Louvre in Paris).

Michelangelo, another Florentine, saw himself first and foremost as a sculptor, and there's no doubt that his skill in this medium was unsurpassed then and even now. His mastery in accurately portraying the human body is evident in all of his sculptural work – most famously in his *David* in the Galleria dell'Accademia (p493) in Florence – but he is best known for his painted ceiling of the Sistine Chapel (p135) in Rome, with its extraordinary depictions of the human body. Here, Michelangelo took a different path from his peers – his figures are not just realistic, they are emotive visual representations of the human experience, animated by more than just a mastery of perspective and an accurate rendering of anatomy.

Raphael was from Urbino. His paintings demonstrate his skill in rising to that previously mentioned challenge faced by the painters of the Quattrocento – namely achieving harmonious and perspectively accurate arrangement of figures. The best examples of this are his paintings *The Nymph Galatea* (c 1514) in the Villa Farnesina in Rome and *La Scuola d'Atene* (The School of Athens) in the Stanza della Segnatura (p135) in the Vatican Museums. His many paintings of the Madonna and Child – all of which demonstrate his adoption of Leonardo's innovative *sfumato* – epitomise the Western model of 'ideal beauty' that was forged in this period and perseveres even today.

While Leonardo, Michelangelo and Raphael were perfecting their treatment of figure arrangement and form to achieve complete visual unity, the Venetian artists Giorgione (c 1477–1510) and Titian (c 1490–1576) followed a different path, seeking to unify their compositions through the use of colour and light. The best example of this is Giorgione's enigmatic *La Tempesta* (The Storm) in the Gallerie dell'Accademia (p358) in Venice, which is suffused with light and an impression of airiness.

For a readable, well-illustrated guide to Italian Renaissance art, have a look at Andrew Graham-Dixon's *Renaissance*, the companion book to the BBC TV series.

One of the few well-known female artists of the Italian Renaissance was Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–1652), whose style is reminiscent of Caravaggio's. See her work in Florence's Uffizi (p487) and Palazzo Pitti (p495).

## Mannerism

By 1520, artists such as Michelangelo and Raphael had pretty well achieved everything that former generations had tried to do. No problem of draughtsmanship seemed too difficult for them, no subject matter too complicated. At this point, they and other artists began to demonstrate a distortion of natural image in favour of heightened expression; this movement was derided by later critics, who called it mannerism. Works such as Titian's *Assunta* (Assumption, 1516–18) in the Chiesa di Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari (p360) in Venice and Raphael's *La Trasfigurazione* (1517–20) in the Pinacoteca (p134) of the Vatican Museums are good examples of this style.

## BAROQUE ART

By the end of the century, two artists who had grown tired of mannerism took very different approaches to painting in an attempt to break the deadlock caused by the achievements of their predecessors.

Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1573–1610), the Milanese-born *enfant terrible* of the late-16th-century art world, had no liking for classical models or respect for 'ideal beauty'. Described by the writer Stendhal as a 'great painter [and] a wicked man', Caravaggio was as notorious for his work as he was for his behaviour. He was condemned by some contemporaries for seeking truth rather than ideal beauty in his art; they were shocked by his radical practice of copying nature faithfully regardless of whether it was beautiful or not. But even they were forced to admire his skill with the technique of *chiaroscuro* (the bold contrast of light and dark) and his employment of *tenebrism*, where dramatic *chiaroscuro* becomes a dominant and highly effective stylistic device.

Annibale Caracci (1560–1609) was the major artist of the baroque Emilian, or Bolognese, school. With his painter brother Agostino he worked in Bologna, Parma and Venice before moving to Rome to work for Cardinal Odoardo Farnese. In works such as his magnificent frescoes of mythological subjects in the Palazzo Farnese (p121) in Rome, he employed innovative illusionistic elements that would prove inspirational to later baroque painters such as Cortona, Pozzo and Gaulli. However, Caracci never let

Carol Reed's 1965 film *The Agony and the Ecstasy* is based on the 1961 novel by Irving Stone. Charlton Heston's portrayal of Michelangelo is so bad that it's strangely compelling. His co-stars include Rex Harrison as Pope Julius II and Harry Andrews as Bramante.

Over the centuries, Michelangelo's *David* (p493) has been struck by lightning, attacked by rioters and had his toes bashed with a hammer. Despite all this, he's still looking trim and terrific.

### GIORGIO VASARI'S *Lives of the Artists*

Painter, architect and writer Giorgio Vasari (1511–1574) was one of those figures rightfully described as a 'Renaissance Man'. Born in Arezzo, he trained as a painter in Florence, working with artists including Andrea del Sarto and Michelangelo (he idolised the latter). As a painter, he is best remembered for his floor-to-ceiling frescoes in the Salone dei Cinquecento (p486) in Florence's Palazzo Vecchio. As an architect, his most accomplished work was the elegant loggia of the Uffizi (he also designed the enclosed, elevated corridor that connected the Palazzo Vecchio with the Uffizi and Palazzo Pitti and was dubbed the 'Corridoio Vasariano' in his honour). But posterity remembers him predominantly for his work as an art historian. His *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors and Architects, from Cimabue to Our Time*, an encyclopaedia of artistic biographies published in 1550 and dedicated to Cosimo I de' Medici, is still in print (as *The Lives of the Artists*) and is full of wonderful anecdotes and – dare we say it – gossip about his artistic contemporaries in 16th-century Florence. Memorable passages include his recollection of visiting Donatello's studio one day only to find the great sculptor staring at his extremely lifelike statue of the *Prophet Habakkuk* and imploring it to talk (we can only assume that Donatello had been working too hard). Vasari also writes about a young Giotto (the painter whom he credits with ushering in the Renaissance) painting a fly on the surface of a work by Cimabue that the older master then tried to brush away. The book makes wonderful pre-departure reading for anyone planning to visit Florence and its museums.

## WHO'S WHO IN RENAISSANCE & BAROQUE ART

**Nicola Pisano (c 1220–84)** The most important precursor of Renaissance sculpture; famous for his pulpit in the Baptistery (1259–60), Pisa.

**Cimabue, Cenni di Pepo (c 1240–1302)** Giotto's master and the last great painter working in the Byzantine tradition; known for his *Maestà* (*Virgin in Majesty*; 1280–85) in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence.

**Giovanni Pisano (c 1250–315)** Nicola's son, also known for a Pisan pulpit, this time in the Duomo (1302–10).

**Pietro Cavallini (c 1250–330)** Mosaic designer most famous for his *Last Judgement* (1293) in the Basilica di Santa Cecilia in Trastevere, Rome.

**Duccio di Buoninsegna (c 1255–1319)** Head honcho of the Sienese school; his masterwork is the *Maestà* in the Museo dell'Opera Metropolitana in Siena.

**Giotto di Bondone (c 1266–1337)** Said by Vasari to have ushered in the Renaissance; two masterworks: the Cappella degli Scrovegni (1304–1306) in Padua and the upper church (1306–11) in Assisi.

**Pietro Lorenzetti (c 1280–1348)** Died in the plague; his best works are the frescoes in the lower church of the Basilica di San Francesco in Assisi.

**Simone Martini (c 1284–1344)** Duccio's pupil and one of the greatest Sienese painters; his best work is the *Maestà* (1315–16) in the Museo Civico in Siena.

**Ambrogio Lorenzetti (c 1290–1348)** Pietro's younger brother also died of the plague; best known for his *Allegories of Good and Bad Government* (1337–40) in the Museo Civico, Siena.

**Sandro Botticelli (c 1444–1510)** *Primavera* (c 1482) and *The Birth of Venus* (c 1485) are among the best-loved of all Italian paintings; both are in the Uffizi.

**Perugino (Pietro di Cristoforo Vannucci; 1446–1524)** Another Umbrian (hence his name); search out his *Saint Sebastian* (after 1490) in the Museo e Galleria Borghese, Rome.

**Domenico Ghirlandaio (1449–94)** One of the greatest of all Tuscan masters; his fabulous frescoes include those in the Tornabuoni Chapel in the Basilica di Santa Maria Novella in Florence.

**Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519)** A genius so flabbergasting that the term polymath (aka Renaissance Man) had to be coined to explain him; best known for his *Last Supper* in the Chiesa di Santa Maria delle Grazie, Milan.

**Luca Signorelli (1455–1523)** Umbria's most famous artist; his masterwork is the *Last Judgement* in Orvieto Cathedral.

**Filippino Lippi (1457–1504)** Filippo's son; his best work is probably in the Chiesa di Santa Maria Sopra Minerva (c 1489–92) in Rome.

**Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564)** The big daddy of them all; everyone knows *David* (1504) in the Galleria dell'Accademia in Florence and the Sistine Chapel ceiling (1508–12) in Rome's Vatican Museum.

**Giorgione (c 1477–1510)** Venetian painter of the High Renaissance; his *La Tempesta* (*The Storm*) in the Galleria dell'Accademia in Venice is the most enigmatic work of the Renaissance.

**Raphael Santi (1483–1520)** Originally from Urbino; painted luminous Madonnas and fell in love with a baker's daughter, immortalising her in his painting *La Fornarina*, now in the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica in Rome.

**Andrea del Sarto (1486–1531)** Florentine painter who was admired by Michelangelo and who taught Vasari; his most oddly titled work is the *Madonna of the Harpies* (1517), now in the Uffizi.

In 1799, Napoleon seized one of the Vatican's most precious artworks, the Greek marble sculpture of *Laocoön and His Sons* (p134), and installed it in the Louvre. It was returned to Rome in 1816, after his fall from power.

the illusionism and energy of his works dominate the subject matter as these later painters did. Strongly influenced by the work of Michelangelo and Raphael, he continued the Renaissance penchant for idealising and 'beautifying' nature.

The roots of baroque art lay in religious spirituality and stringent aestheticism. Its artists and patrons aimed to use it to combat the rapidly spreading Protestant Reformation and, at the same time, emphasise the importance of the Catholic religion. Considering this aim, it seems somewhat strange that its style displayed worldly joy, rich decoration and uninhibited sensuality. The works of this period utilise stage-like settings, dramatic light, swirling draperies and vivid colour. It seems that the baroque artists cottoned on to something that the marketers of our age use as a mantra – if you make a product or message sexy you will be able to sell it effectively.

**Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378–1455)** Followed his father into the goldsmith's trade; creator of the *Doors of Paradise* (1425–52) for the Baptistery in Florence.

**Donatello (c 1382–1466)** Florentine born and bred; his *David* (c 1430) in the collection of the Museo del Bargello in Florence was the first free-standing nude sculpture produced since the classical era.

**Fra' Angelico (1395–1455)** So good was his behaviour and so extraordinary his artistic talent that he was made a saint in 1982; his best-loved work is the *Annunciation* (c 1450) in the convent of the Museo di San Marco in Florence.

**Paolo Uccello (1397–1475)** Painter and mathematician who loved playing with perspective; best-known work is *The Battle of San Romano* (1450–1456), a part of which is in the Uffizi, Florence.

**Masaccio (1401–28)** Died tragically young; creator of *The Expulsion* (1426–27) in the Brancacci Chapel, Florence.

**Filippo Lippi (1406–69)** Renaissance Florence's bad boy (see the boxed text on p52); everyone loves his *Madonna and Child* (c 1452) in the Palazzo Pitti in Florence.

**Piero della Francesca (1412–92)** His double portrait of Federico Sforza and his wife Battista (c 1472) in the Uffizi is one of the most famous works of the Renaissance.

**Giovanni Bellini (1430–1516)** The best known of a family of Venetian painters and brother-in-law of Andrea Mantegna; known for his *San Giobbe Altarpiece* (1487) in the Galleria dell'Accademia in Venice.

**Andrea Mantegna (1431–1506)** Venetian-born, started a painter's apprenticeship aged only 11; his masterpiece is the *Dead Christ* (c 1480) in the Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan.

**Andrea della Robbia (1435–1525)** Ceramic sculptor; son of Marco, brother of Luca. Best known for his medallions on the exterior of the Spedale degli Innocenti in Florence.

**Titian (c 1490–1576)** Real name Tiziano Vecelli; seek out his *Assumption* (1516–18) in the Chiesa di Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari (I Frari), Venice.

**Bronzino (1503–1572)** Real name Agnolo di Cosimo but called Bronzino because of his dark complexion; Cosimo I de' Medici's favourite portrait painter – look for the family pictures in the Uffizi in Florence.

**Giorgio Vasari (1511–1574)** Artist, architect and art historian (see the boxed text on p55).

**Tintoretto (1518–1594)** The last great painter of the Italian Renaissance, known as 'Il Furioso' because of the energy he put into his work; look for his *Last Supper* in the Chiesa di Santo Stefano, Venice.

**Paolo Veronese (1528–1588)** Born in Verona (hence his name) but worked in Venice; known for his controversial *Feast in the House of Levi* (1573) in the collection of Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice.

**Annibale Caracci (1560–1609)** Born in Bologna, this baroque master is best known for his frescoes in the Palazzo Farnese in Rome.

**Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1573–1610)** The bad boy of the baroque art scene; his most powerful work is the *St Matthew Cycle* in the Chiesa di San Luigi dei Francesi in Rome.

**Giuseppe de Ribera (1591–1652)** Though Spanish-born, most of this painter's mature work was created in southern Italy, including the Capella di San Gennaro in the Duomo in Naples.

**Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–1653)** The Renaissance's only high-profile female artist; best known for her gruesome *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (c 1610) in the Uffizi.

**Gianlorenzo Bernini (1598–1680)** The sculptor protégé of Cardinal Scipione Borghese; best known for his *Rape of Persephone* (1621–22) and *Apollo and Daphne* (1622–25) in Rome's Museo e Galleria Borghese.

Perhaps the best known of all baroque artists was the sculptor Gianlorenzo Bernini (1598–1680), who used works of religious art such as his *Vision of Saint Theresa* in the Chiesa della Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome to arouse feelings of exaltation and mystic transport in the viewer. In this and many other works he achieved an extraordinary intensity of facial expression and a totally radical handling of draperies. Instead of letting these fall in dignified folds in the approved classical manner, he made them writhe and whirl to add to the effect of excitement and movement. This trick was soon imitated all over Europe.

## THE NEW ITALY

By the 18th century, Italy was beginning to rebel against years of foreign rule – first under the French in Napoleon's time and then under the Austrians.

The Italian equivalent of Impressionism was the Macchiaioli movement based in Florence. Its major artists were Telemaco Signorini (1835–1901) and Giovanni Fattori (1825–1908). See their work in the Palazzo Pitti's Modern Art Gallery (p495).

Filippo Tommaso Marinetti published his *Manifesto of Futurism* on the front page of the *Le Figaro* newspaper in France, thus ensuring it would gain international attention.

But although new ideas of political unity were forming, there was only one innovation in art – the painting and engraving of views, most notably in Venice, to meet the demand of European travellers wanting souvenirs of their grand tours. The best-known painters of this school are Francesco Guardi (1712–93) and Giovanni Antonio Canaletto (1697–1768).

Despite the slow movement towards unity, the 19th-century Italian cities remained as they had been for centuries – highly individual centres of culture with sharply contrasting ways of life. Music was the supreme art of this period and the overwhelming theme in the visual arts was one of chaste refinement. The major artistic movement of the day – neoclassicism – was as popular here as it was elsewhere in Europe and its greatest local exponent was the sculptor Antonio Canova (1757–1822). Canova renounced movement in favour of stillness, emotion in favour of restraint and illusion in favour of simplicity. His most famous work is a daring sculpture of Pauline Bonaparte Borghese as a reclining *Venere Vincitrice* (Conquering Venus), in the Museo e Galleria Borghese (p125) in Rome.

Canova was the last Italian artist to win overwhelming international fame. Italian architecture, sculpture and painting had played a dominant role in the cultural life of Europe for some 400 years, but with Canova's death in 1822, this supremacy came to an end.

## MODERN MOVEMENTS

The two main developments in Italian art at the outbreak of WWI could not have been more different. Futurism, led by poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876–1944) and painter Umberto Boccioni (1882–1916), sought new ways to express the dynamism of the machine age. Metaphysical painting (*Pittura Metafisica*), in contrast, looked inwards and produced mysterious images from the subconscious world.

Futurism demanded a new art for a new world and denounced every attachment to the art of the past. It started with the publication of Marinetti's *Manifesto del Futurismo* (Manifesto of Futurism, 1909), and was backed up by the publication of a 1910 futurist painting manifesto by Boccioni, Giacomo Balla (1871–1958), Luigi Russolo (1885–1947) and Gino Severini (1883–1966). In their manifesto, the painters wrote that 'Everything is in movement, everything rushes forward, everything is in constant swift change'. An excellent example of their theory put into practice is Boccioni's *Rissa in Galleria* (Brawl in the Arcade, 1910) in the collection of the Pinacoteca di Brera (p270) in Milan. This was painted shortly after the manifesto was published and clearly demonstrates the movement's fascination with frantic movement and with modern technology and life. They weren't interested in the heritage of Italian art, and they saw war as a means of destroying the past and starting anew out of the chaos. The movement lost its impetus with the outbreak of WWI.

Metaphysical painting also had a short life. Its most famous exponent, Giorgio de Chirico (1888–1978), lost interest in the style after the war, but his work held a powerful attraction for the surrealist movement that developed in France in the 1920s. In fact, De Chirico was part of the very first surrealist exhibition at the Galerie Pierre in Paris in 1925. Stillness and a sense of foreboding are the haunting qualities of many of De Chirico's works of this period, which show disconnected images from the world of dreams in settings that usually embody memories of classical Italian architecture. A good example is *The Red Tower* (1913), which is in the Peggy Guggenheim Collection (p359) in Venice.

After the war, a number of the futurist painters began to flirt with Fascism. They believed that the new state offered opportunities for patronage and

The Italian countryside is home to a number of contemporary sculpture parks, including the Fattoria di Celle ([www.goricoll.it](http://www.goricoll.it)), Il Giardino dei Tarocchi ([www.nikidesaintphalle.com](http://www.nikidesaintphalle.com)), the Castello di Rivoli (p226) and Villa Manin (p422).

public art and that Italy could once again lead the world in its arts practice. This period was known as 'second futurism' and its main exponents were Mario Sironi (1885–1961) and Carlo Carrà (1881–1966).

The local art scene became more interesting in the 1950s, when artists such as Alberto Burri (1915–95) and the Argentine-Italian Lucio Fontana (1899–1968) experimented with abstract art. Fontana's punctured canvases were characterised by *spazialismo* (spatialism) and he also experimented with 'slash paintings', where he made actual holes or slashes in his canvases and dubbed them 'art for the space age'.

Burri's work was truly cutting-edge. His assemblages were made of burlap, wood, iron and plastic and were avowedly anti-traditional. *Grande Sacco* (Large Sack) of 1952, which is in the collection of the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea (p126) in Rome, caused a major controversy when it was first exhibited.

In the 1960s, a radical new movement called *Arte Povera* (Poor Art) took off. Its followers used simple materials to trigger off memories and associations. Major names include Mario Merz (1925–2003), Giovanni Anselmo (b 1934), Luciano Fabro (b 1936–2007), Giulio Paolini (b 1940) and Greek-born Jannis Kounellis (b 1936). All experimented with sculpture and installation work.

In the 1980s, there was a return to painting and sculpture in a traditional (primarily figurative) sense. Dubbed 'Transavanguardia', this movement broke with the prevailing international focus on conceptual art and was thought by some critics to signal the death of avant-garde. The artists who were part of this movement include Sandro Chia (b 1946), Mimmo Paladino (b 1948), Enzo Cucchi (b 1949) and Francesco Clemente (b 1952).

Contemporary artists of note currently working in Italy include Paolo Canavari, Angelo Filomeno, R&di Martino, Adrian Paci, Paola Pivi, Pietro Roccasalva and Francesco Vezzoli.

Those interested in viewing examples of 20th-century Italian art should visit the collection of the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea (p126) in Rome, the Peggy Guggenheim Collection (p359) in Venice and the Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea (see the boxed text, p272) and Pinacoteca di Brera (p270) in Milan.

Italy's major contemporary art event is the world-famous Venice Biennale ([www.labiennale.org](http://www.labiennale.org); p369), held every odd-numbered year. It's the most important survey show on the international art circuit.



# The Culture

Imagine you wake up tomorrow and discover you're Italian. How would life be different, and what could you discover about Italy in just one day as a local? Read on...

## A DAY IN THE LIFE OF AN ITALIAN

*Sveglia!* You're woken not by an alarm but by the burble and clatter of the *caffettiera*, the ubiquitous stovetop espresso maker. You're running late, so you bolt down your coffee scalding hot (an acquired Italian talent) and pause briefly to ensure your socks match before dashing out the door. Yet still you walk blocks out of your way to buy your morning paper from Eduardo, your favourite news vendor, and chat briefly about his new baby – you may be late, but at least you're not rude.

On your way to work you scan the headlines: a rebuttal of the pope's latest proclamation, yesterday's football results and today's match-fixing scandal, and an announcement of new EU regulations on cheese. Outrageous! The cheese regulations, that is; the rest is to be expected. At work, you're buried in paperwork until noon, when it's a relief to join friends for lunch and a glass of wine. Afterwards you toss back another scorching espresso at your favourite bar, and find out how your barista's latest audition went – turns out you went to school with the sister of the director of the play, so you promise to put in a good word.

Back at work by 2pm, you multitask Italian-style, chatting with co-workers as you dash off work emails, text your schoolmate about the barista on your *telefonino* (mobile phone), and surreptitiously check *l'Internet* for employment listings – your work contract is due to expire soon. After a busy day like this, *aperitivi* are definitely in order, so at 6.30pm you head directly to the latest happy-hour hot spot. Your friends arrive, the decor is *molto design*, the vibe *molto cool*, and the DJ *abbastanza hot*, until suddenly it's time for your English class – everyone's learning it these days, if only for the slang.

By the time you finally get home, it's already 9.30pm and dinner will have to be reheated. *Peccato!* (Shame!) You eat, absent-mindedly watching reality TV while recounting your day and complaining about cheese regulations to whoever's home – no sense giving reheated pasta your undivided attention. While brushing your teeth, you discuss the future of Italian theatre and dream vacations in Anquilla, though without a raise, it'll probably be Abruzzo again this year. Finally you make your way to bed and pull reading material at random out of your current bedside stack: art books, *gialli* (mysteries), a hard-hitting Mafia exposé or two, the odd classic, possibly a few *fumetti* (comics). You drift off wondering what tomorrow might hold... imagine if you woke up British or American. English would be easier, but how would you dress, and what would you be expected to eat? *Terribile!* You shrug off that nightmare, and settle into sleep. *Buona notte.*

## Social Ties

From your day as an Italian, this much you know already: Italy is no place for an introvert. It's not merely a matter of being polite – each social interaction adds meaning and genuine pleasure to daily routines. Conversation is far too important to be cut short by tardiness or a mouthful of toothpaste. All that chatter isn't entirely idle, either: in Europe's most ancient, entrenched bureaucracy, social networks are essential to get things done. Putting in a good word for your barista isn't just a nice gesture, but an essential career

Nice work, if you can get it: about 30% of Italians have landed a job through family connections, and in highly paid professions that number rises as high as 40% to 50%.



boost. As a Ministry of Labour study recently revealed, most people in Italy still find employment through personal connections.

If you're between the ages of 18 and 34, there's a 60% chance that's not a roommate in the kitchen making your morning coffee: it's mum or dad. This is not because Italy is a nation of pampered *mammoni* (mama's boys) and spoiled *figlie di papà* (daddy's girls) – at least, not entirely. According to the time-honoured Italian social contract, you'd probably live with your parents until you start a career and a family of your own. Then after a suitable grace period for success and romance – a couple of years should do the trick – your parents might move in with you to look after your kids, and be looked after in turn.

Lately this contract has begun to break down. Official statistics reveal that most Italian women aged 29 to 34 now prefer careers and a home life without curfews or children. According to Italy's most recent census, Italian women represent 65% of college graduates, are more likely than men to pursue higher education (53% to 45%), and twice as likely to land responsible positions in public service – though Italy still has fewer women in parliament than other Western European nations, and Italian men enjoy 80 more minutes of leisure time daily than Italian women.

But while one in 10 Italian women still lives with her parents by age 35, twice as many men do. This adds some sitcom-worthy awkwardness to the dating scene, as in the reality dating show *La sposa perfetta* (The Perfect Wife), where women competed for an eligible bachelor's attention by performing domestic duties, and his mother chose the winner. After the show aired on the government-backed RAI channel, incensed Italian women threatened to withhold €200 of their taxes earmarked for public broadcasting, and the show was not renewed (see p62).

As desirable as living independently might be, it isn't always an option in the midst of Italy's current recession. Consider the skyrocketing rents and temptations of home cooking, and it's no wonder the number of adult Italians living with their parents has grown in recent years – hence the mobile-phone chorus heard at evening rush hour in buses and trams across Italy: '*Mamma, butta la pasta!*' (Mum, put the pasta in the water!).

## BETTER LIVING BY DESIGN

As an Italian, you actually did your co-workers a favour by being late to the office to give yourself a final once-over in the mirror. Unless you want your fellow employees to avert their gaze in dumbstruck horror, your socks had better match. The tram can wait as you *fa la bella figura* (cut a fine figure).

Italians have strong opinions about aesthetics and aren't afraid to share them. A common refrain is *Che brutta!* (How hideous!), which may strike visitors as tactless. But consider it from an Italian point of view – everyone is rooting for you to look good, and who are you to disappoint? The shop assistant who tells you with brutal honesty that yellow is not your colour is doing a public service, and will consider it a personal triumph to see you outfitted in orange instead.

If it's a gift, though, you must allow 10 minutes for the sales clerk to *fa un bel pacchetto*, wrapping your purchase with string and an artfully placed sticker. This is the epitome of *la bella figura* – the sales clerk wants you to look good by giving a good gift. When you do, everyone basks in the glow of *la bella figura*: you as the gracious gift-giver and the sales clerk as savvy gift consultant, not to mention the flushed and duly honoured recipient.

As a national obsession, *la bella figura* gives Italy its undeniable edge in design, cuisine, art and architecture. Though the country could get by on its striking good looks, Italy is ever mindful of delightful details. They are

Satirist Beppe Severignini's *La Bella Figura: A Field Guide to the Italian Mind* offers some practical insights for travellers, such as this tip on cappuccinos: 'After ten o'clock in the morning it is unethical, and possibly illegal, to order one'.

On average, Italians get six weeks of holidays a year, but spend the equivalent of two weeks annually on bureaucratic procedures required of working Italian citizens.

Born an Assisi heiress, introduced to the joys of poverty by St Francis himself, and co-founder of the first Franciscan abbey, St Clare gained another claim to fame in 1958 as the patron saint of TV.

### ITALIAN TELEVISION: THE SOUND & THE FURY

As heretical as it sounds to foreigners accustomed to worshipping Italian cuisine in the reverent hush of expensive restaurants, many Italians bolt dinner in front of blaring televisions. On average, Italians watch four hours of TV per day, and the flickering parade of recycled reality stars, vacant-eyed *valette* (spokesmodels) and celebrity interviews induces what Italian sociologists have identified as a soporific state.

According to a 2008 poll, only 24% of Italians trust TV as a reliable source. Italians are more likely to trust online news sites like *Corriere della Sera* ([www.corriere.it/english](http://www.corriere.it/english)), *La Repubblica* ([www.repubblica.it](http://www.repubblica.it), in Italian), *Il Manifesto* ([www.ilmanifesto.it](http://www.ilmanifesto.it), in Italian) or *L'Unità* ([www.unita.it](http://www.unita.it), in Italian), perhaps with good reason: in 2008, Reporters Without Borders ranked Italy below Taiwan, Mali and Bosnia in freedom of the press, calling Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's TV empire a 'conflict of interest' that threatens democracy. Yet 80% of Italy's population relies on TV news as its prime information source, including three main channels run by the Berlusconi-backed Mediaset company.

Under duress to restore public trust and improve public TV programming, Romano Prodi purged reality shows from public RAI channels in 2008. But in 2009, on-again, off-again prime minister Berlusconi chose a *Grande Fratello* (Big Brother) contestant, a soap-opera starlet, a TV costume-drama actress and a recent Miss Italy contestant to represent Italy as members of the European Union parliament. Given impending Italian elections and a brewing scandal involving 'Papi' Berlusconi and a teenage starlet, this move was not the most media-savvy: the EU parliamentary selections were broadly denounced in Italy's press, and Berlusconi's party suffered significant losses at the polls.

everywhere you look, and many places you don't: the intricately carved cathedral spire only the bell-ringer could fully appreciate, the toy duck hidden inside your chocolate *uova di pasqua* (Easter egg), the absinthe-green silk lining inside a sober grey suit sleeve. Attention to such details earns you instant admiration in Italy – and an admission that sometimes, non-Italians do have style.

### THE PEOPLE

Who are the people you'd encounter every day as an Italian? On average, about half your co-workers will be women – quite a change from 10 years ago, when women represented just a quarter of the workforce. But a growing proportion of the people you'll meet are already retired. One out of five Italians is over 65, which explains the septuagenarians you'll notice on parade with dogs and grandchildren in parks, affably arguing about politics in cafes, and ruthlessly dominating bocce tournaments.

You might also notice a striking absence of children. Italy's birth rate is the lowest in Europe, at just under one child per woman. Dismayed by such incontrovertible evidence of contraception in an ostensibly Catholic culture, the pope recently called on Italian women to return to traditional roles as wives and mothers. The state is also concerned that a shrinking Italian workforce will mean fewer taxes to fund services for growing numbers of pensioners, and instituted an incentive of €1000 for any Italian woman to give birth. But neither Church nor State can cajole Italian women into motherhood, and Italy's birth rate remains below replacement level.

### Multiculturalism & National Identity

But wait, you say: during your day as an Italian, you chatted with a news vendor named Eduardo about his baby. Right you are: like a growing percentage of Italy's population, Eduardo is an immigrant. (His Spanish name would be spelled Edouardo in Italian.) Eduardo probably lives and

works in a northern Italian city, like three-fifths of Italy's immigrants. But as a Peruvian, Eduardo is not representative of Italy's immigrants, the majority of whom are European – primarily Albanian, Ukrainian and especially Romanian (see p64).

## NORTH VS SOUTH

Immigration is the newest development in the century-old debate over Italian identity. From the Industrial Revolution through the 1960s, cultural frictions focused on internal migrants from Italy's largely rural southern 'Mezzogiorno' region (from Calabria to Abruzzo, plus Sicily), arriving in industrialised northern cities for factory jobs. Just as northern Italy was adjusting to these 'foreign' southerners, political and economic upheavals in the 1980s brought new arrivals from Central Europe, Latin America and North Africa, including Italy's former colonies in Tunisia, Somalia and Ethiopia.

## FROM EMIGRANTS TO IMMIGRANTS

From 1876 to 1976, Italy was a country of net emigration. With some 30 million Italian emigrants dispersed throughout Europe, the Americas and Australia, remittances from Italians abroad helped keep Italy's economy afloat during economic crises after Independence and WWII. Today, people of Italian origin account for more than 40% of the population in Argentina and Uruguay, more than 10% in Brazil, more than 5% in Switzerland and the US, and more than 4% in Australia, Venezuela and Canada.

By comparison, immigrants account for just 6.3% of Italy's own population today, though according to Caritas, the rate of immigration is growing faster in Italy than other European nations. Most Italians today choose to live and work within Italy, yet fewer are entering blue-collar agricultural and industrial fields – so without immigrant workers to fill the gaps, Italy would be sorely lacking in tomato sauce and shoes. As a visitor, you'll glimpse immigrant workers in restaurant kitchens and hotels, in low-paid service jobs that keep Italy's tourism economy afloat.

Italians were the world's fastest *telefonino* (mobile phone) adopters in 2000 and, according to government estimates, within three years virtually every adult Italian had a *telefonino* – not to mention obsessive text-messaging teens.

## ITALY'S IDENTITY CRISIS

As a founding member of the European Union in 1993, Italy became subject to EU regulations on everything from immigration to cheese-making, raising concerns that Italian identity would be lost. Many feared immigration would dilute Italian culture, and promises of immigration crackdowns helped Silvio Berlusconi win elections in 1994 and 2008. Right-wing group Lega Nord introduced 2002 'security laws' mandating detention and expulsion for immigrants suspected of crimes or lacking papers, raising Amnesty International's concern for asylum-seekers and law-abiding immigrants.

However, Italy's immigration policy also created an unlikely coalition among Catholics, leftists and capitalists. Catholic charities and leftist groups established centres across Italy to help immigrants acclimatise and seek citizenship. Supporters of this integrationist approach point out that 'foreigners' aren't the source of all of Italy's crime and terrorism – after all, the Camorra, Brigade Rosse (Red Brigades) and other underground Italian organisations terrorised the country for decades. Meanwhile, free-market economists emphasise that more taxpayers mean more funds for Italian social services, and immigrants are statistically more likely to start small businesses needed for Italy's economic recovery.

### FRIENDS, ROMA, COUNTRYMEN...

Anti-immigrant rhetoric took an alarming turn in Italy in 2008. Romanians and Roma have been lumped together and targeted as unwelcome 'gypsies', though according to the *New York Times*, all Romanians in Italy and about three-quarters of Italy's Roma are now Italian or EU citizens. In 2008, a young Jewish-Romanian immigrant was beaten to death by neo-Nazi groups in Verona, and two Roma camps in Naples were torched by neo-Nazi gangs allegedly tied to Naples' Camorra crime syndicate. The same year, several rapes across Italy were swiftly (and mostly falsely) blamed on African immigrants, spurring calls for vigilante 'patrols' of African-immigrant neighbourhoods. Meanwhile in Rome, 20 masked men beat Indian, Bangladeshi and Chinese shopkeepers with baseball bats and lead pipes. Witnesses heard assailants curse, 'Get out, bastard foreigners!'

But not all Italians are willing to let extremists have the last word. In May 2009, a radical law to punish undocumented immigrants – including potential refugees – with summary deportation and fines was denounced by Italian human rights groups, the Vatican, the UN and mass protests in Rome. Italy's Amnesty International office appealed to the EU to curb incendiary anti-immigrant rhetoric by Italian politicians, and ban anti-immigrant vigilantism. While many commentators saw echoes of 1930s Italy in 2008 vigilante attacks and inflammatory speech, Italian history also provides a basis for empathy and understanding. As writer Claudio Magris observed in *The Times*, recalling Italy's recent past as a nation of emigrants, 'We, above all, should know what it is like to be strangers in a strange land.'

### Religion, Loosely Speaking

Although you read about the Church in the news headlines, you didn't actually attend Mass on your day as an Italian. The Church remains highly influential in Italy, and *La Famiglia Cristiana* (The Christian Family) is Italy's most popular weekly magazine. But you'll notice that except for tourists, Italian churches are often empty: according to a 2007 Church study, only 15% of Italy's population regularly attends Sunday mass.

As you'll notice in Italian headlines, Church doctrine is often the subject of popular debate. An Umbrian teacher's suspension for removing the crucifix from his public classroom in 2009 sparked arguments over Church symbols in public buildings, and fuelled ongoing debates over the appropriate division of Church and State in Italy. The pope's latest book shot to the top of Italian bestseller lists in 2007, as did the anticlerical tract *Perché non possiamo essere cristiani (e meno che mai cattolici)* (Why we can't be Christian (and even less, Catholics)) by mathematician Piergiorgio Odifreddi, who examines apparent contradictions in Church doctrine and posits an inverse relationship to the development of civil society.

If the Church hasn't always been entirely consistent, neither have its critics. Many Italians who fiercely debate the Vatican's right to interfere in policy decisions regarding divorce, abortion, civil unions and condom use to prevent AIDS have welcomed the pope's foreign policy interventions and personal appeals to end war in the Middle East. The Vatican's move to initiate dialogue with Muslim leaders has been widely credited with easing social tensions for Italy's 1.2 million Muslims, and the Church's many charitable organisations lauded for providing essential support to those in need where the State leaves off. While the Church remains top of mind for many Italians, Italy remains officially secular, and its citizens variously Muslim, Jewish, atheist, Catholic, agnostic and ambivalent.

### ECONOMICS & POLITICS: FIGHTING WORDS

Your day as an Italian may not seem like *la dolce vita*, but it's pretty ideal in today's Italy. You had a job to go to (albeit a contract gig), took a decent *pausa* (midday break), and left work promptly at the end of the day. In industrial

Although primarily set inside the Vatican, the 2009 blockbuster *Angels and Demons* (based on Dan Brown's bestselling sequel to *The Da Vinci Code*) was denied the right to film there. The Church took offence at misrepresentations of the Catholic group Opus Dei's devotional practices, which emphasize charity rather than mortification of the flesh as depicted in *The Da Vinci Code*.

cities like Milan, *la pausa* is no longer the traditional two-to-three-hour rest, and longer working hours help explain the previously unthinkable 15kg of *surgelati* (frozen foods) consumed per capita each year (still well below the UK's 45kg). In these days of double-digit unemployment and opportunities limited to contract or part-time work, times are as tough as microwaved beef.

The international financial market crisis is the latest harbinger of bad news for Italy's economy. In the 2002 conversion from lire to the euro, prices were typically rounded up while salaries were rounded down, and Italy's exports became less competitively priced in the global market. The past three years have brought governmental upheavals: bribery scandals implicating Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's cohorts helped Romano Prodi unseat Berlusconi, who then staged a comeback on a platform to end economic stagnation. Now that global downturn has diminished economic expectations, pundits speculate about whether Berlusconi will hang onto his hot seat for long.

Yet Italy remains strangely stable in its instability. Economists scratch their heads in wonder that a country that has witnessed the rise and fall of more than 50 governments since WWII keeps reinventing itself as a global contender. Pundits are confounded by the staying power of on-again, off-again Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, whose latest imbroglios involve compromising photos of a wild party at his private villa and an alleged affair with a teenager. Still, Italy's proportional representation system allows popular dissatisfaction to be counted in losses at the polls, and occasional bold prosecutions of official corruption ensure some turnover of ideas at every level of government.

But perhaps the saving grace of Italian public policy is that Italians don't always wait for changes to happen from the top down. Ordinary Italians keep the powers that be in check and on task with highly coordinated strikes, mass street protests, outspoken newspapers and scathing political commentary that permeates popular culture. Political discussion inevitably involves much rolling of eyes and throwing up of hands, but these should not be taken as signs of resignation – in Italy, it's more of a fighting stance.

## ARTS

Arriving late to work seems like an achievement in Italy, where temptations to play hooky abound: music venues hitting every sonic frequency from opera to punk rock; cinemas and theatres where you'll laugh and sob into your popcorn; bookshops brimming with this small country's preposterously outsized literary contributions; and museums, churches and palaces virtually wallpapered with priceless art. Roman ruins share city blocks with futuristic office buildings that seem poised for takeoff to Mars – for more on these, check out the special section on architecture (p157).

## Literature

Italy's readers are thoroughly spoiled for choice, with gripping *gialli* (mysteries), ancient classics, magic-realist fables, epic romps through history and, for those romantic occasions, some highly suggestive poetry.

## MYSTERY & SUSPENSE

The most popular genre in Italy today dominates Italy's bestseller list, especially Andrea Camilleri's cranky but savvy Sicilian inspector Montalbano in such capers as *Il ladro di merendine* (The Snack Thief). Sunny Sicily is also the scene of the crime in Leonardo Sciascia's *Il giorno della civetta* (The Day of the Owl), where a visiting police inspector from Parma witnesses a killing only to be told in no uncertain terms that the murder didn't happen, the

Ignazio Silone's bestselling *Bread & Wine* is the story of a 1930s Communist leader on the run from the Fascists who goes into hiding disguised as a small-town priest, but ultimately must answer the question: is the mantle of faith just a costume, or his true self?

For Dante with a pop-culture twist, check out Sandow Birk and Marcus Sanders' satirical, slangy translation of *The Divine Comedy*, which sets *Inferno* in hellish Los Angeles traffic, *Purgatorio* in foggy San Francisco and *Paradiso* in New York.

Sorry, Woody Allen: the world's most likable neurotic is the antihero of Italo Svevo's *Zeno's Conscience*, whose love life stumps his therapist and who smokes to have the satisfaction of quitting. No wonder this is James Joyce's favourite comic novel.

## COMICS: NOT JUST FOR BAMBINI ANY MORE

You might be surprised to notice spiffy suited businessmen on trains thumbing through some familiar *fumetti* (comics). In 1931 local writers and comic artists began endowing Walt Disney's mascots with Italian attitude, scathing topical humour, and rollicking back-stories in *Topolino* (Mickey Mouse), the continuing Continental adventures of Donald, Mickey et al. But Italian comics have truly come into their own and of age with graphic novels such as Piero Macola's *Solo andata* (One Way), a WWII soldier's journey in the harrowing tradition of Art Spiegelman's Pulitzer Prize-winning graphic novel *Maus*. See just how bold and biting satirical indie Italian *fumetti* can be at [www.sciacaloelettronico.it/webcomix/webcom.htm](http://www.sciacaloelettronico.it/webcomix/webcom.htm) (in Italian).

Sicilian Mafia doesn't exist, and he'd be better off in Parma. Umberto Eco brought intellectual weight to the genre with *Il nome della rosa* (The Name of the Rose) and *Il pendolo di Foucault* (Foucault's Pendulum) – not to mention sheer bulk, at 600-plus pages of arcane detail and plot twists.

## CLASSICS

Roman epic poet Virgil (aka Vergilius) decided Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* deserved a sequel, and spent 11 years and 12 books tracking the outbound adventures and inner turmoil of Aeneas, from the fall of Troy to the founding of Rome – and died in 19 BC with just 60 lines to go in his *Aeneid*. As he himself observed: 'Time flies'.

Legend has it that fellow Roman Ovid (Ovidius) was a failed lawyer who married his daughter, but there's no question he told a ripping good tale. His *Metamorphose* chronicled civilisation from murky mythological beginnings to Julius Caesar, and his how-to seduction manual *Ars amatoria* (The Art of Love) inspired countless Casanovas. It also caused him no end of trouble: he was exiled for seducing the daughter of Emperor Augustus.

Any self-respecting Italian bookshelf also features one or more Roman rhetoricians. To *fare la bella figura* among academics, trot out a phrase from Cicero or Horace (Horatio), such as 'Where there is life there is hope' or 'Whatever advice you give, be brief'.

## HISTORICAL EPICS

Italian authors find illumination even in Italy's darkest hours. Set during the dark days of the Black Death in Florence, Boccaccio's *Decameron* has a visceral gallows humour that foreshadows Chaucer, Shakespeare and William S Burroughs. Italy's 19th-century struggle for unification parallels the story of star-crossed lovers in Alessandro Manzoni's *I promessi sposi* (The Betrothed), and causes an identity crisis among Sicilian nobility in Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's *Il gattopardo* (The Leopard).

Wartime survival strategies are memorably chronicled in Elsa Morante's *La storia* (History), and in Primo Levi's harrowing autobiographical account of Auschwitz in *Se questo è un uomo* (If This Is a Man). World War II is the uninvited guest in *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*, Giorgio Bassani's heart-breaking tale of a crush on a girl whose aristocratic Jewish family attempts to disregard the rising tide of anti-Semitism, much as socialites graciously ignore a breach in manners.

## SOCIAL REALISM

Italy has always been its own sharpest critic, and several 20th-century Italian authors captured their own troubling circumstances with unflinching accuracy. Grazia Deledda's *Cosima* is her fictionalised memoir of coming of age and into her own as a writer in rural Sardinia, despite family circumstances

The backdrop for Boccaccio's masterwork is illuminated at Decameron Web ([www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian\\_Studies/dweb/](http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/dweb/)), which covers 14th-century society from power politics to magic tricks.

'Book curses' in the margins of Italian medieval library books warned borrowers that failure to return a book was a grave offence, subject to fatal attacks of giant bookworms and eternal damnation.

clouded by death, alcoholism and deceit. Deledda became one of the first women to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, and set the tone for such bitter-sweet recollections of rural life as Carlo Levi's *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* (Christ Stopped at Eboli). In the autobiographical epic, a dissident doctor is exiled under the Fascists to a malaria-afflicted southern Italian town (see p733) beyond the reach of medicine, missionaries, politicians, and all but the most forlorn hope.

Topics too excruciating to discuss or ignore – jealousy, divorce, parental failings – are addressed head-on by pseudonymous author Elena Ferrante in her brutally honest, bestselling *The Days of Abandonment*. But Italy's most hush-hush subject is Naples' Camorra crime syndicate, and the romantic whitewash usually applied to Mafioso machinations is stripped clean by Roberto Saviano's sand-blasting prose in *Gomorra* (see p68). Though the book was listed as fiction in Italy, Saviano received death threats resulting in his relocation from Italy – and a bold 2008 public denunciation of the Camorra by six Italian Nobel laureates.

## FABLES

Italian fables aren't much like Aesop's: they don't end in a simple moral, but instead show how wisdom often seems like madness, and vice versa. The most universally beloved Italian fabulist is Italo Calvino, whose titular character in *Il barone rampante* (The Baron in the Trees) takes to the treetops in a seemingly capricious act of rebellion that makes others rethink their own earthbound conventions. In Dino Buzzati's *Il deserto dei Tartari* (The Tartar Steppe), an ambitious officer posted to a mythical Italian border is besieged by boredom, thwarted expectations and disappearing youth while waiting for enemy hordes to materialise – a parable drawn from Buzzati's own dead-end newspaper job.

Over the centuries, Niccolò Machiavelli's *Il principe* (The Prince) has been referenced as a handy manual for budding autocrats, but also as a cautionary tale against unchecked 'Machiavellian' authority. Likewise 1934 Nobel Prize winner Luigi Pirandello won Mussolini's support to found a national theatre, only to be ostracised for staging an ambiguously critical fable about a changeling – that, and calling Il Duce 'a top hat that could not stand upright by itself'.

## POETRY

Some literature scholars claim Shakespeare stole his best lines and plot points from earlier Italian playwrights and poets. Debatable though this may be, the Bard certainly has stiff competition from 13th-century Dante Alighieri as the world's finest romancer. Dante broke with tradition in *Divina commedia* (The Divine Comedy) by using the familiar Italian, not the formal Latin, to describe travelling through the circles of hell in search of his beloved Beatrice. Petrarch (aka Francesco Petrarca) added wow to Italian woo with his eponymous sonnets, applying a strict structure of rhythm and rhyme to romance the idealised Laura. He might have tried chocolates instead: Laura never returned the sentiment.

If sonnets seem flowery to you, try 1975 Nobel laureate Eugenio Montale, who wrings poetry out of the creeping damp of everyday life, or Ungaretti, whose WWI poems hit home with a few searing syllables. His two-word poem seems an apt epitaph: *M'illumino d'immenso* (I illuminate myself with immensity). Poems by Pier Paolo Pasolini feature the same antiheroes as his films (see p68) – hustlers and prostitutes in postwar Italy, icons of a nation scraping by on its wits and looks. For the bawdiest poetry of all, head to an Italian *osteria*, where by night's end cheap wine may inspire raunchy rhymes sung in dialect.

Melania Mazzucco's *Vita* is the story of two Italian children who journey from impoverished southern Italy to New York in an epic quest not for fame or meaning, but much more basic needs: food and life.

The original newspaper serial of Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio* ended with the puppet's gruesome death by hanging – but in the book, Pinocchio is granted a new life as a real boy, and tiny tots are spared a few nightmares.

Women authors aren't a novelty on the Italian literary scene – find essays, operas, philosophy, novels, poetry, theology and travel writing by Italian women dating from the 13th to the 20th century at [www.lib.uchicago.edu/efts/IWW/](http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/efts/IWW/).



## Music

Italy is known for achievements in opera and classical music, but it's also adapted international pop, punk and hip hop to local tastes. Jazz is another popular import that rings out in historic venues in Perugia during Umbria Jazz (p570), Orvieto in Umbria Jazz Winter (p597), Siena Jazz ([www.sienajazz.it](http://www.sienajazz.it)) and Vicenza Jazz ([www.comune.vicenza.it](http://www.comune.vicenza.it)).

## ITALIAN CINEMA

### Nitty-Gritty Neorealism

Unflinching tales of postwar woe shot in gorgeous yet gritty black and white make *Citizen Kane* seem like a rough cut, and Francois Truffaut like a latecomer.

- *Ladri di biciclette* (The Bicycle Thief), Vittorio de Sica, 1948. A special Oscar was awarded to this film about one father's doomed attempts to provide for his son without resorting to crime in war-ravaged Rome.
- *Mamma Roma*, Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1962. Anna Magnani becomes an allegory for postwar Italy as an aging prostitute trying to make an honest living for herself and her delinquent son.
- *Roma, città aperta* (Rome, Open City), Roberto Rossellini, 1945. A story of love, betrayal, survival and resistance in Nazi-occupied Rome, shot and released while the memory of occupation was still raw.

### Crime & Punishment

Italy's acclaimed new dramas combine the truth-telling of classic neorealism, the taut suspense of Italian thrillers and the psychological revelations of Fellini.

- *Gomorra*, Matteo Garrone, 2008. Based on Roberto Saviano's exposé of the Camorra crime syndicate, Garrone shows mafia machinations minus Hollywood romanticism, revealing brutality in waste disposal and high fashion.
- *Il Divo*, Paolo Sorrentino, 2008. The Cannes Jury Prize winner explores the life and career of former prime minister Giulio Andreotti, from his migraines to his alleged mafia ties.
- *La bestia nel cuore* (Don't Tell), Cristina Comencini, 2005. A woman uncovering repressed memories of sexual abuse seeks answers, leaving a trail of still more secrets behind her.

### Romance, Italian Style

Italy's date movies merit a warning label: may induce delirious proposals and severe pangs of nostalgia.

- *Il postino* (The Postman), Michael Radford, 1994. Exiled poet Pablo Neruda brings poetry and passion to a drowsy Italian isle and a misfit postman, played with heartbreaking subtlety by the late, great Massimo Troisi.
- *Nuovo cinema paradiso* (Cinema Paradiso), Giuseppe Tornatore, 1988. A bittersweet Oscar winner about a director who returns to Sicily and rediscovers his true loves: the girl next door and the movies.
- *Pane e tulipani* (Bread and Tulips), Silvio Sordini, 2000. A housewife left behind at a tour-bus pit stop runs away to Venice, where she befriends an anarchist florist, an eccentric masseuse and a suicidal Icelandic waiter – until she's pursued by an amateur detective.

### Fellini: A Category of His Own

Italy's singular auteur creates surreal visions of men adrift in the shallows of their own lives and relationships, with plotlines prone to pirouettes – if it's easy, it's not Fellini.



## OPERA

The art form originated here, and *fischi* (mocking whistles) still possess a mysterious power to blast singers right off stage. In December 2006, a substitute in street clothes had to step in for Sicilian-French star tenor Roberto Alagna when his off-night aria met with vocal disapproval at Milan's legendary La Scala. Best not to get them started about musicals and 'rock opera', eh?

- *La dolce vita* (The Good Life), Federico Fellini, 1960. This tale of hedonism, celebrity, and suicide features Anita Ekberg frolicking in the Trevi Fountain, Marcello Mastroianni as a reporter unprepared to witness human misery, and Jesus whisked away by helicopter.
- *La strada* (The Road), Federico Fellini, 1954. A naive girl is sold to a callous circus performer played by Anthony Quinn in this wrenching road movie.
- *8½*, Federico Fellini, 1963. A director under pressure to make a box-office hit retreats inward, only to rediscover his own demons and failed relationships.

## Spaghetti Westerns

Southern Italy doubles as the Wild West in high-noon showdowns featuring flinty characters and Ennio Morricone's terminally catchy whistled tunes (doodle-oodle-oooh, wah wah wah...)

- *C'era una volta il West* (Once Upon a Time in the West), Sergio Leone, 1968. A widow seeks revenge for her husband's murder with Henry Fonda's quick draw and high-tension storytelling by budding screenwriters Bernardo Bertolucci and Dario Argento (see below).
- *Il buono, il brutto, il cattivo* (The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly), Sergio Leone, 1966. Leone and Clint Eastwood team up for another payload of gunfights, booze, betrayal and pure box-office gold.
- *Per un pugno di dollari* (A Fistful of Dollars), Sergio Leone, 1964. A gunslinger played by a squinting Clint Eastwood plays factions in a tense standoff against one another for profit.

## Tragicomedies

Italy's best comedians pinpoint the exact spot where pathos intersects the funny bone – but without an appreciation for Italian slapstick and dialect, some hilarity is lost in translation.

- *Amici miei* (My Friends), Mario Monicelli, 1975. A group of aging pranksters turn on one another in this satire that reflects Italy's own postwar midlife crisis.
- *Caro diario* (Dear Diary), Nanni Moretti, 1994. Italy's answer to Woody Allen navigates a Vespa through Rome traffic while obsessing over the meaning of city life, insomnia, and Jennifer Beals' performance in *Flashdance*.
- *La vita è bella* (Life is Beautiful), Roberto Benigni, 1997. A father tries to protect his son from the brutal realities of a Jewish concentration camp by pretending it's all a game – an Oscar Award-winning turn for actor-director Benigni.

## Shock & Horror

Sunny Italy's darkest dramas deliver more style, suspense and falling bodies than ultrahigh Prada platform heels on a slippery Milan runway.

- *Blow-Up*, Michelangelo Antonioni, 1966. Style trumps substance in this story of a swinging-'60s fashion photographer who spies dark deeds unfolding in a photo of an elusive young Vanessa Redgrave.
- *Suspiria*, Dario Argento, 1977. Gruesome deeds in a ballet school makes tutus seem incredibly sinister and Stephen King seem squeamish.
- *Un borghese piccolo piccolo* (An Average Little Man), Mario Monicelli, 1977. An ordinary man goes to extraordinary lengths for revenge, starring Alberto Sordi in a standout example of a comedian nailing a serious role.

Openings at La Scala regularly sell out faster than rock concerts – and when a Verdi opera's on the bill, you'd think the Beatles were getting back together. Book your tickets online pronto at [www.teatroallascala.org](http://www.teatroallascala.org).

The word 'diva' was invented for legendary sopranos like Parma's Renata Tebaldi and Italy's adopted Greek icon Maria Callas, whose rivalry peaked when *Time* quoted Callas saying that comparing her voice to Tebaldi's was like comparing 'champagne and Coca-Cola'. Both were fixtures at La Scala, along with the wildly popular Italian tenor to which others are still compared, Enrico Caruso. Tenor Luciano Pavarotti (1935–2007) also remains beloved for attracting broader public attention to opera, while bestselling blind tenor Andrea Bocelli became a controversial crossover sensation with what critics claim are overproduced arias sung with a strained upper register.

Salvatore Licitra is poised to become Italian opera's next big tenor, having stepped in for Pavarotti on his final show at New York's Metropolitan Opera in 2002. Friuli-born soprano Fiorenze Cedolins is enjoying wide-ranging success, performing a requiem for the late Pope John Paul II, recording Tosca arias with Andrea Bocelli, and scoring encores in Puccini's *La Bohème* at the Arena di Verona Festival.

### CLASSICAL

Italy's classical contributions can be heard at music venues around the globe, including Vivaldi's ubiquitous *Four Seasons*, played on prized Stradivarius violins from Cremona. Within Italy, there's an ongoing revival of 'early music' from the medieval through Renaissance and baroque periods. Ensembles in Venice, Naples, Milan and Rome play historically accurate arrangements on period instruments like recorders and harpsichords, creating surprisingly funky Renaissance dance tunes and groovy late-medieval polyphonic vocals.

Many early music compositions can be heard today in the same venues where they would have been heard hundreds of years ago: Gregorian chants sung by monks at the frescoed St Francis of Assisi (p580); choral music in Pisa's High Renaissance Duomo (p523) during the annual Anima Mundi festival; and Venetian party music at Carnevale (p369). Classical-music buffs also plan trips around Florence's Maggio Musicale Fiorentino (p498), and enjoy international orchestras year-round in Ravello ([www.ravelloarts.org](http://www.ravelloarts.org)).

### LEGGERA (POP)

Most of the music you'll hear booming out of Italian taxis and cafes to inspire sidewalk singalongs is Italian *musica leggera* (light music). This term covers homegrown rock, jazz, folk and hip-hop talents, as well as perpetrators of perniciously catchy dance tunes and pop ballads. The San Remo Music Festival

*La vita è bella* (Life Is Beautiful) remains the most successful subtitled foreign-language film to date, winning two Academy Awards and raking in about \$280 million.

### OPTIMAL OPERA VENUES

- **Milan's Teatro alla Scala** (p264) Standards for modern opera were set by La Scala's great iron-willed conductor Arturo Toscanini, and are ruthlessly enforced by La Scala's feared *loggione*, opera's toughest and most vocal critics in the cheap seats upstairs.
- **Venice's La Fenice** (p357) Risen twice from the ashes of devastating fires, 'The Phoenix' features great talents on its small stage.
- **Arena di Verona** (p397) Rising talents ring out here, thanks to forward-thinking organisers and the phenomenal acoustics of this Roman amphitheatre.
- **Roman Baths of Caracalla** (p130) The dramatically decrepit summer venue for the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma was the site of the first concert by the Three Tenors (Luciano Pavarotti, Plácido Domingo and Jose Carreras), with a recording that sold an unprecedented 15 million copies.
- **Teatro San Carlo in Naples** (p654) Europe's oldest opera house, a Unesco World Heritage site, and the former home of Italy's most famous *castrati* – male sopranos traditionally with surgically enhanced upper ranges.

(televised on RAI 1) annually honours Italy's best songs and mercifully weeds out the worst early on, unlike the wildly popular Italian version of *X Factor*.

While Rome is a Bermuda Triangle for rockers with drug habits – Sid Vicious, Kurt Cobain and sundry Smashing Pumpkins overdosed there – Milan is out to prove punk's not dead with the annual indie-fest Rock in Idro and the city's crossover rap-punk sensation Articolo 31. On the south side, Neapolitan hip-hop acts like 99 Posse, La Famiglia and Bisca mix Italian sounds over heavy beats and Neapolitan dialect, while Puglia artists like Sud Sound System remix Jamaican dancehall and Italy's hyperactive *tarantella* folk music into a new genre: '*tarantamuffin*'. In the singer-songwriter category, scratchy-voiced troubadour Vinicio Capossela sounds like the long-lost Italian cousin of Tom Waits, and the late Fabrizio de André was Italy's answer to Bob Dylan, with thoughtful lyrics in a musing monotone.

For a self-guided crash course in Italian music, surf the links provided on the Biblioteca Nazionale Music Research Office's Italian Music Homepage at <http://ospiti.cilea.it/music/entrance.htm>.

## Theatre & Dance

Entertainment has been not a privilege but a right in Italy ever since Rome promised citizens 'bread and circus' (food and entertainment). Travelling Commedia dell'Arte troupes spread the antics of Pulcinella (aka Punch of Punch and Judy fame) and friends across Italy starting in the Renaissance, but after WWII left Italy's finest venues in ruins, the future of Italian performing arts was uncertain.

Instead of staging a grand comeback, Milan decided to start small in 1947 with the Piccolo Teatro (Little Theatre), featuring low ticket prices and risk-taking productions. The Piccolo staged Dario Fo's 1971 triumph *Morte accidentale di un anarchico* (Accidental Death of an Anarchist) and in 2006 overcame controversy to stage Fo's latest work, *L'anomalia bicefala* (The Two-Headed Anomaly), a satire about Berlusconi and his wife. The Piccolo proved too popular for its size, leading to other less *piccolo* Piccolo Teatros. Among the independent venues springing up in the 1970s was Rome's landmark all-women Teatro della Maddalena, staging daring works like Dacia Maraini's *Dialogo di una prostituta con un suo cliente* (Dialogue Between a Prostitute and Her Client).

Today Bologna, Naples, Milan and Rome boast the most vibrant theatre and dance scenes, though the Spoleto Festival and other summertime extravaganzas bring performing arts to smaller venues nationwide. Ballet in Italy dates from the Renaissance and can be seen nationwide, and several Italian opera companies incorporate *corps de ballet* into performances. Other dances range from folkloric forms like the *tarantella* to competitive *B-boying* (break dancing).

## SPORT

Scandals continue to rock the world of football cycling, and water sports, and as you may have read in the papers, Italy is no exception. But let's be honest, sports fans: once the action starts, all eyes and some very good bets are on Italy.

Any bar or pizzeria with a TV is a good spot to catch the action among fellow sports fans, and even the smallest Italian hamlet has a football pitch, and many have arenas.

## Calcio (Football)

Even Italy's most hardcore *calcio* (football) fans admit certain shortcomings in Italy's game. Yes, Italians do play a bombastically offensive game, and Italy's best players frequently trade teams and nations for the right price. Yes, match-fixing 'Calciopoli' scandals resulted in revoked championship titles and temporary demotion of Serie A (top-tier national) teams, including the mighty Juventus. Italy defender Marco Materazzi possibly did whisper something highly impolite about the womenfolk of Zinedine Zidane's

### GOING THE DISTANCE FOR THE RESISTANCE: GINO BARTALI

In 1943–44, the Assisi Underground hid hundreds of Jewish Italians in Umbrian convents and monasteries, while the Tuscan Resistance forged travel documents for them – but the refugees needed those documents fast, before they were deported to concentration camps by Fascist officials. Enter the fastest man in Italy: Gino Bartali, world-famous Tuscan cyclist, Tour de France winner, and three-time champion of the Giro d'Italia. After his death in 2003, documents revealed that during his 'training rides' throughout the war years, Bartali had carried Resistance intelligence and falsified documents to transport Jewish refugees to safe locations. Bartali was interrogated at the dreaded Villa Triste in Florence, where suspected anti-Fascists were routinely tortured – but he revealed nothing. Until his death, the long-distance hero downplayed his efforts to rescue Jewish refugees even with his children, saying, 'One does these things, and then that's that.'

family, causing the French midfielder to lose his legendary cool and the 2006 World Cup final to Italy.

Yet when Italian footballers are in top form, no one in the stands can be bothered disputing footballers' salaries, egos or word choice. When the ball ricochets off the post and slips fatefully through the goalie's hands, roughly half the stadium is cursing someone's mother, while the other half is ecstatically shouting *Gooooooooooooooooooooo!* Hooliganism is less popular in Italy than more intimate victory celebrations – hospitals in northern Italy reported a baby boom nine months after Italy won the 2006 World Cup.

### Ciclismo (Cycling)

Poor sports often complain that Italy's champion cyclists have all the advantages, and they're not wrong. Many cyclists covet signature *celeste*-hued Bianchis the way drivers dream of red Ferraris, and Bianchi's limited-edition *Reparto Corse* racing bicycles are still produced in bleeding-edge R&D labs in Bergamo. Then there's the training terrain: Italy's rugged mountain and coastal byways are some of the world's toughest and most scenic cycling routes, providing motivation for beginners and challenges for Olympians like Paolo Bettini.

Italian champions also have style, often sporting the Giro d'Italia's prized *maglia rosa*, or pink shirt, for fastest overall time, and the coveted *maglia verde*, or green shirt, for fastest hill climbs. In 2008, for the first time in more than a decade, a non-Italian was greeted as the overall winner of Giro d'Italia in Milan. Yet Alberto Contador and other members of the Spanish team couldn't shake the taint of Operación Puerto blood-doping scandals, although most were cleared of wrongdoing by the Union Cycliste Internationale. Meanwhile, Italian 2006 Giro champion Ivan Basso and 2009 stage winner Michele Scarpo admitted to involvement in the doping scandals, and were suspended for two seasons.

### Water Sports

In a peninsula brimming with lakes, you might expect to find a few good swimmers – but Italy has more than its share. Italy's men's and women's water polo teams are consistently ranked among the top five worldwide; Italy's divers have been competing at Olympian standards since Klaus Dibiasi took home his first of three gold medals in 1968; and Italian women swimmers keep breaking world records, especially Federica Pelligrini in freestyle swimming. Free divers have been known to plummet to depths of 250m without oxygen in Lignano, and Gianluca Genoni set a new world record in 2008 in Mantova by remaining underwater without oxygen for 18 minutes and three seconds.

Italy's culture of corruption and *calcio* (football) is captured in *The Dark Heart of Italy*, where English expat author Tobias Jones wryly observes, 'Footballers or referees are forgiven nothing; politicians are forgiven everything.'

# Food & Drink

Let's be honest: you came for the food, right? Wise choice. Just don't go expecting meals in Italy to remind you of the swankiest five-star Italian restaurant back home. On the contrary: once you've had a hearty *farro* (spelt) soup warm you to the core in some tiny Tuscan *osteria* (rustic restaurant), or picnicked on fresh salami *panini* (crusty sandwiches featuring Italian cold cuts) in front of Milan's Duomo, you'll be struck with culinary amnesia. Has anything tasted this good, ever? Probably not. The Accademia della Cucina Italiana (Italian Academy of Cuisine) announced in 2008 that an average of six out of 10 dishes served at Italian restaurants outside Italy aren't prepared correctly. According to the organisation's London representative, Benito Fiore, out of 320 Italian restaurants in the UK, only 20 were of a high standard, and 200 received failing marks.

Blame it on the Italians – they make it look easy, but it's not. Each ingredient must be chosen for its scent, texture, ripeness and ability to play well with others. This means getting to the right market early and often, and remaining open to seasonal inspiration. To balance the right ingredients in exactly the right proportions, Italian cooks apply an intuitive Pythagorean theorem of flavours you won't find spelled out in any recipe – but you'll surely know the winning formula when you taste it.

## TUTTI A TAVOLA

Everyone to the table! Traffic lights are merely suggestions, queues fine ideas in theory, and governments destined to be overturned, but this is one command every Italian heeds without question. To disobey would be unthinkable – what, you're going to eat your pasta cold? And insult the cook? Even anarchists wouldn't dream of it.

The Italian culture of food directly contradicts what we think we know of Italy. A nation prone to perpetual motion with Vespas, Ferraris and Bianchis pauses for lunch – hence the term *la pausa* to describe the midday break. Power-lunchers throw ties over their shoulders and prop sunglasses on foreheads to better take it all in, and supermodels endanger designer dresses with pasta *puttanesca* (with spicy tomato sauce). Big talk and bigger gestures have been Italian trademarks ever since Caesars and popes first started speechifying, but an eerie hush descends when food is placed on an Italian table. The Italian suffix *-issimo*, so often used to add emphasis to adjectives (*bellissimo*, *bravissimo*) is markedly absent at mealtime. High praise is a simple, unexaggerated *buono* (good) or *giusto* (correct), or appreciative silence punctuated with the sound of gently slurped noodles. The TV may be on (see p62), but when the pizza is good, TV will be ignored. Afterwards, feel free to give your *complimenti* to the chef – and in the right circumstances, a hearty handshake and cheek kisses may be in order.

You never really know Italians until you've broken a crusty loaf of *pagnotta* (bread) with them – and once you've arrived in Italy, you'll have several opportunities daily to do just that. Following are listings of what you can look forward to at each meal, with some latitude for regional variations (p437). Good luck with your arduous sociological research, and here's hoping you have cause to kiss the cook.

## Collazione (Breakfast)

Breakfast in Italy is a perfectly good excuse to get out of bed, if not the most lavish meal of your day. Some B&Bs are restricted by licence to provide

Less is more: most of the recipes in Ada Boni's classic *The Talisman Italian Cookbook* have fewer than 10 ingredients, yet the robust flavours of her osso bucco, polenta, and wild duck with lentils are anything but simple.

Eat well and prosper: Slow Food founder Carlo Petrini and legendary chef Alice Waters point the way forward in *Slow Food Nation: Why Our Food Should Be Good, Clean, and Fair* (2007).

Italy, a nation of efficiency experts? Believe it: the average Italian *casalinga* (homemaker) spent seven hours in the kitchen daily in 1950, but now she's got her routine down to 40 minutes.

only packaged foods, so if breakfast is the most important meal of your day, ask what it entails. In general, think Continental, not eggs, pancakes, ham, sausage, toast and orange juice. Those menu offerings are only likely to appear at weekend *brrrunch* (pronounced with the rolled Italian *r*), an American import now appearing at trendy urban eateries in Italy. Expect to pay upwards of €20 to graze a buffet of hot dishes, cold cuts, pastries and fresh fruit, usually including your choice of coffee, juice or cocktail.

The mainstay of Italian breakfast is scalding hot espresso, cappuccino (espresso with a goodly dollop of foamed milk) or *caffè latte* – the hot, milky espresso beverage Starbucks mistakenly calls a *latte*, which will get you a glass of milk in Italy. An alternative beverage is *orzo*, a slightly nutty, noncaffeinated roasted-barley beverage that looks like cocoa.

The ideal accompaniment to your coffee is pastry, usually without adornments such as butter and jam; some especially promising options are below.

**Cornetto** The Italian take on the French croissant is usually smaller, lighter, less buttery and slightly sweet, with an orange-rind glaze brushed on top.

**Crostata** The Italian breakfast tart with a dense, buttery crust is filled with your choice of fruit jam, such as *amarena* (sour cherry), *albicocca* (apricot) or *frutti di bosco* (wild berry). You may have to buy an entire tart instead of a single slice, but you won't be sorry.

**Doughnuts** Homer Simpson would approve of the *ciambella* (also called by its German name, *krapfen*), the classic fried-dough treat rolled in granulated sugar, sometimes filled with jam or custard. Join the line at kiosks and street fairs for *fritole*, fried dough studded with golden raisins and sprinkled with confectioners' sugar, and *zeppole* (also called *bigné San Giuseppe*), chewy doughnuts enriched with ricotta or *zucca* (pumpkin), rolled in confectioners' sugar, and handed over in a paper cone to be devoured dangerously hot.

**Viennoiserie** Italy's colonisation by the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the 19th century had its upside: a vast selection of sweet buns and other rich baked goods. Standouts include cream-filled brioches and *strudel di mele*, an Italian adaptation of the traditional Viennese *apfelstrudel*.

## Pranzo (Lunch)

Many shops and businesses still close for *la pausa*, a two- to three-hour midday break to return home, enjoy lunch, rest up and come back to work wired on espresso and ready for action. But in major cities, commuters don't have time to make the trip home, and use their break to run errands, socialise and grab lunch on the go.

At some ruthlessly efficiency-minded workplaces, *la pausa* has been scaled back to a scandalous hour and a half – barely enough time to get through the lines at the bank to pay bills and bolt some *pizza al taglio* (pizza by the slice). A *rosticceria* (roisserie) or *tavola calda* ('hot table') also serves hot items on the go, such as roast chicken and *suppli* (fried risotto balls with a molten mozzarella centre). Quick bites at bakeries and bars include *panini* and *tramezzini* (triangular, stacked sandwiches made with squishy white bread).

Some public-sector jobs still hold *pranzo* sacred, and allow enough time for a sit-down meal with wine and coffee; below is what's on the menu.

## ANTIPASTI (APPETISER)

Bread is deposited on the table as part of your €1 to €3 *pane e coperto* (bread and 'cover', or table service), along with oil and vinegar for dipping. You might also score some olives or *sott'aceti* (vegetables such as artichokes or red peppers in olive oil and vinegar), *grissini* (Turin-style breadsticks), or even a basket of salami or other cured meats. But tantalising offerings on the antipasti menu may include the house bruschetta (grilled bread with a variety of toppings, from chopped tomato and garlic to black-truffle spread) and seasonal treats such as *insalata caprese* (fresh mozzarella

Fifty years ago, Italy's *Domus* magazine dispatched journalists nationwide to collect Italy's best regional recipes. The result is Italy's food bible, *The Silver Spoon*, now available in English from Phaidon (2005).

According to recent figures, Italians spend €50 billion per year on eating out; Americans spend twice that amount.

## REVOLUTION ON TAP

Still or sparkling aren't your only water choices in Italy, where 270 brands of bottled water add up to a €5 billion industry. But now that designer waters are hitting €5 per bottle and littering the countryside with discarded plastic containers, Italian diners are rebelling and demanding tap. As Italian comedian Beppe Grillo protests: 'It's putting rain in a bottle and then making you pay for it.' Join the revolt, or stick to your bubbly bottled Pellegrino with pride – just don't forget to recycle.

with ripe tomatoes and basil leaves) or *prosciutto e melone* (cured ham and cantaloupe).

## PRIMO (FIRST COURSE)

The highlights of this starch-based course are pasta, risotto, gnocchi and polenta. You may be surprised how generous the portions are – a *mezzo piatto* (half-portion) might do the trick for kids.

*Primi* menus usually include ostensibly vegetarian or vegan options, such as pasta *con pesto* – the classic Ligurian basil paste with *parmigiano reggiano* (Parmesan) and pine nuts – or *alla norma* (with eggplant and tomato, Sicilian style), *risotto ai porcini* (risotto with pungent, earthy porcini mushrooms) or the extravagant *risotto al Barolo* (risotto with high-end Barolo wine, though actually, any good dry red will do). But even if a dish sounds vegetarian in theory, before you order you may want to ask about the stock used in that risotto or polenta, or the ingredients in that suspiciously rich tomato sauce – there may be beef, ham or ground anchovies involved.

Meat eaters will rejoice in such legendary dishes as *pasta all'amatriciana* (Roman pasta with a spicy tomato sauce, *pecorino* cheese and *guanciale*, or baconlike pigs' cheeks), *osso bucco con risotto alla milanese* (Milanese veal shank and marrow melting into saffron risotto), *pappardelle alle cinghiale* (ribbon pasta with wild boar sauce, a Tuscan speciality) and *polenta col ragù* (polenta with meat sauce, a Northern favourite). Near the coasts, look for seafood variations like *risotto al nero* (risotto cooked with black squid ink), *spaghetti con le vongole* (spaghetti with clam sauce), or *pasta ai frutti di mare* (pasta with seafood).

## SECONDO (SECOND COURSE)

Light lunchers usually call it a day after the *primo*, but foodies pace themselves for meat, fish or *contorni* (side dishes, such as cooked vegetables) in the second course. These options may range from the outrageous *bistecca alla fiorentina*, a 3in-thick steak served on the bone in a puddle of juice, to the more modest yet impressive *carciofi alla romana* (Roman artichokes stuffed with mint and garlic). A less inspiring option is *insalata mista* (mixed green salad), typically unadorned greens with vinegar and oil on the side – croutons, crumbled cheeses, nuts, dried fruit and other frou-frou ingredients have no business in a classic Italian salad.

## FRUTTI E DOLCI

'*Siamo arrivati alla frutta*' ('we've arrived at the fruit') is an idiom roughly meaning 'we've hit rock bottom' – but hey, not until you've had one last tasty morsel. Imported pineapple has been a trendy choice of late, but your best bets on the fruit menu are local and seasonal. *Formaggi* (cheeses) are another option, but only diabetics or the French would go that route when there's room for *dolci* (sweets). Think beyond dental-work-endangering *biscotti* (twice-baked biscuits) and consider *zabaglione* (egg and marsala custard),

The Julia Child of Italian cuisine is Marcella Hazan, who inspired legions of traditionalist home chefs worldwide with *The Classic Italian Cook Book* (1973), later expanded into her encyclopaedic *The Essentials of Classic Italian Cooking* (1992).

Pellegrino Artusi's 100-year-old *Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well* covers tricks and quips: 'Let's leave to the English the taste for eating boiled vegetables without any seasoning... we southern types need our food to be a little more exciting.'



### APERITIVI: WINING & DINING FOR LESS

The hottest recession trend in Italy is *aperitivi*, often described as a 'before-meal drink and light snack'. Don't be fooled. Italian 'happy hour' is dinner disguised as a casual drink, accompanied by a buffet of antipasti, pasta salads, cold cuts and some hot dishes (this may include your fellow diners: *aperitivi* is prime time for hungry singles). You can methodically pillage buffets in Rome and Milan from about 5pm to 8pm for the price of a single drink – which crafty diners nurse for the duration – while Venetians enjoy *ombre* (wine by the glass) and bargain seafood *cicheti* (Venetian tapas). *Aperitivi* are wildly popular among the many young Italians who can't afford to eat dinner out, but still want a place to enjoy food with friends – leave it to Italy to find a way to make recession seem stylish.

cream-stuffed profiteroles or Sicilian *cannoli*, the cream-stuffed shell pastry immortalised thus in *The Godfather*: 'Leave the gun. Take the *cannoli*.'

### Caffè (Coffee)

No amount of willpower or cajoling is going to move your feet into a museum after a three-course Italian lunch, so you must administer espresso immediately. Sometimes your barista will take pity and deliver your cappuccino with a *cioccolatino* (a square of chocolate) or grant you a tiny stain of milk in a *caffè macchiato*. On the hottest days of summer, you may be allowed a *granita di caffè* (coffee with shaved ice and whipped cream). But usually you'll be expected to take espresso as it comes, with scant sweetness and no apology, like a nasty breakup. The 'what doesn't kill you, makes you stronger' principle applies to Italian coffee breaks: if you survive the scalding liquid tossed down your throat, well then, you're ready to get on with your day.

Don't believe the hype about espresso: one diminutive cup packs less of a caffeine wallop than a large cup of French-pressed or American-brewed coffee, and leaves drinkers less jittery.

### Merenda (Snack time)

Since a hearty appetite is necessary to soldier through a proper Italian meal, Italians aren't generally big snackers. Kids are the exception. *La merenda*, a sweet treat midmorning or after school, gives indulgent grandparents an opportunity to bond with youngsters and adults reason to wax nostalgic about lost youth. If you suffered a childhood of healthy snacks, make up for lost time and join the kids for gelato (ice cream) or pastries with *caffè latte* or tea. Vegetables are not considered suitable – when a couple is a bad match, you can say they go together *come cavoli a merenda* ('like cabbage at snacktime').

Night owls in need of *spuntini di mezzanotte* (midnight snacks) are in luck: *pizza al taglio* and gelaterie in entertainment zones and university areas stay open late, many pubs offer *panini*, and most jazz clubs offer a full (if overpriced) dinner menu.

### Cena (Dinner)

'Oh, I can hardly eat anything tonight', you may hear Italian friends claim after a marathon weekend lunch. 'Maybe just a bowl of pasta, a salad, some cheese and fruit...' Bear this in mind when you've been invited to someone's home, even for a 'light dinner' – wine and elastic-waist pants are always advisable. In restaurants, diners concerned with budgets and the ability to budget from their chairs will be relieved that there is no obligation to consume both a *primo* and *secondo*, and antipasti and dessert are strictly optional.

That said, you may want to organise your travels, finances and exercise regime around a lavish dinner at one of Italy's fine-dining establishments, such as Cracco-Peck, the restaurant at Peck (see the boxed text, p274), in Milan or Open Colonna (p154) in Rome. Many top-ranked restaurants open

only for dinner, with a set-price meal that leaves the major menu decisions to your chef, and frees you up to concentrate on the noble quest to conquer four to six tasting courses. *Forza e coraggio!* (Strength and courage to you!)

## WINES

A sit-down meal without wine in Italy is as unpalatable and forlorn as pasta without sauce. Not ordering wine at a restaurant can cause consternation – are you pregnant or a recovering alcoholic, or was it something the waiter said? Italian wines are considered among the most versatile and ‘food-friendly’ in the world, specifically cultivated over the centuries to elevate regional cuisine (see p437).

Wine isn’t an afterthought to a meal in Italy, but a consideration as essential as your choice of dinner date. Some Italian wines will be as familiar to you as old flames, including pizza-and-a-movie Chianti or reliable summertime fling Pinot Grigio. But you’ll also find some captivating Italian varietals and blends for which there is no translation (eg Brunello, Vermentino, Sciacchetrà), and intriguing Italian wines that have little in common with European and American cousins by the same name (eg Merlot, Pinot Nero aka Noir, Chardonnay).

Many visitors default to carafes of house reds or whites, which in Italy usually means young, fruit-forward reds to complement tomato sauces and chilled dry whites as seafood palate-cleansers. But with a little daring and the list below, you can pursue a wider range of options by the glass or half-bottle.

**Sparkling wines:** Franciacorta (Lombardy), Prosecco (Veneto), Asti (aka Asti Spumante; Piedmont), Lambrusco (Emilia-Romagna)

**Light, citrusy whites with grassy or floral notes:** Vermentino (Sardinia), Orvieto (Umbria), Soave (Veneto), Tocai (Friuli)

**Dry whites with aromatic herbal or mineral aspect:** Cinque Terre (Liguria), Gavi (Piedmont), Falanghina (Campania), Est! Est!! Est!!! (Lazio)

**Versatile, food-friendly reds with pleasant acidity:** Barbera d’Alba (Piedmont), Montepulciano d’Abruzzo (Abruzzo), Valpolicella (Veneto), Chianti Classico (Tuscany)

**Well-rounded reds, balancing fruit with earthy notes:** Brunello di Montalcino (Tuscany), Refosco dal Pedulunco Rosso (Friuli), Dolcetto (Piedmont), Morellino di Scansano (Tuscany)

**Big, structured reds with velvety tannins:** Amarone (Veneto), Barolo (Piedmont), Sagrantino di Montefalco secco (Umbria), Sassicaia and other ‘super-Tuscan’ blends (Tuscany)

**Fortified and dessert wines:** Sciacchetrà (Liguria), Colli Orientali del Friuli Picolit (Friuli), Vin Santo (Tuscany), Moscato d’Asti (Piedmont)

## OTHER DRINKS

Italy’s perfectly quaffable pilsner beers and occasional red ale pair well with roast meats, pizza and other quick eats, but wine is considered appropriate for a proper Italian meal – and since many wines cost less than a pint in Italy, this is not a question of price, but a matter of flavour. A declaration that *acqua dal rubinetto* (tap water) will do instead of bottled is becoming less disconcerting in the age of environmental awareness (see p75), but failure to order a postprandial espresso may shock your server. You may yet save face by ordering a digestive, such as a *grappa* (a potent grape-derived alcohol), *amaro* (herbal bitters) or *limoncello* (sweet lemon-scented liqueur). Fair warning though: Italian digestives can be an acquired taste, and they pack a punch that might leave you snoring before *il conto* (the bill) arrives.

## CELEBRATIONS & FESTIVALS

Perhaps you’ve heard of ancient Roman orgies with trips to the vomitorium to make room for the next course, or Medici family feasts with sugar sculptures

*Gambero Rosso* (Red Shrimp) magazine delivers the inside scoop on authentic Italian cuisine, with in-depth regional features and tips on where to find the best value for price at restaurants nationwide. Check out its English website: [www.gamberorosso.it/portaleEng/Homepage/homepage](http://www.gamberorosso.it/portaleEng/Homepage/homepage).

Italy’s oldest known wine is Chianti Classico, with favourable reviews dating from the 14th century and a growing region clearly defined by 1716.

Tap water is perfectly potable in Italy, but in 2006 the average Italian drank 178L of bottled water – four times as much as UK drinkers.

## A NATION OF AFICIONADOS

Not sure what to pair with your wild-boar pasta, and there's no sommelier in sight? Try canvassing your fellow diners: any self-respecting adult Italian has opinions about wine to spare. Though plenty picky about their pairings, Italian aficionados aren't snobbish – far from being dictated by critics, Italy's wine-steeped culture comes from sailors and monks.

During the Roman Empire, garum fish sauce with water was a favoured drink, and Rome waged naval campaigns to secure garum from Spain and North Africa. Roman philosopher Pliny the Elder waxed rhapsodic about garum, pepper and cinnamon c AD 77 in his *Natural History* – and in what was already an Italian national habit, complained bitterly about the prices. Because garum was costly, Roman legions often had to make do with fermented grape juice shipped to distant outposts in barrels. Pliny dedicated an entire *Natural History* volume to viticulture and ranking wines by growing region, conceding that wines from Campania weren't half bad.

In the Middle Ages, Venice built a maritime empire importing precious spices – and once ordinary Italians got a whiff of what was cooking in noble homes, they weren't about to settle for dubious meats and unsalted bread with mead, like certain northern Europeans. Communion wine grown by monks was readily available throughout Italy, and far more affordable than spices to add flavour to a meal.

With maritime trade and bumper crops from the 11th to 13th century meeting basic food needs, Italians could afford to get creative, curing meats, cave-ageing cheeses and developing speciality wines to complement increasingly sophisticated local foods. By the 14th century, Italians were already extolling the virtues of Chianti – which, as your fellow diners will surely point out, is not a bad choice with boar pasta.

worth their weight in gold? If you were hoping to party with Julius Caesar or get Michelangelo to sculpt you in sugar, you're a bit late – but you're still in time to enjoy a proper Italian feast. Anyone in Italy during major holidays can hardly avoid copious speciality foods. Christmas means stuffed pasta, seafood dishes and *panettone* (yeasty golden Christmas cake studded with raisins and dried fruit). Lent gives way to Easter bingeing with the obligatory lamb, *colomba* (dove-shaped cake) and *uove di pasqua* (foil-wrapped chocolate eggs with toy surprises inside).

Some Italian holidays dispense with the religious premise and are all about the food. During summer and early autumn, towns across Italy celebrate *sagre*, the festivals of local foods in season. You'll find a *sagra del tartufo* (truffles) in Umbria, *del pomodoro* (tomatoes) in Sicily and *del cipolle* (onions) in Puglia (wouldn't want to be downwind of that one).

## WINE & COOKERY COURSES

You can hardly throw a stone in Italy without hitting a culinary course in progress, but there are better ways of finding a cookery school. Here are a few, for starters:

**Città del Gusto** (☎ 06 551 12 21; [www.gamberorosso.it/portaleEng/cdg/homepage](http://www.gamberorosso.it/portaleEng/cdg/homepage); Via Fermi 161, Rome) Six floors of hot, nonstop gourmet-on-gourmet action, from live cooking demonstrations and TV-show tapings to wine courses in the 'Theatre of Wine'. All workshops and demos are run by *Gambero Rosso*, Italy's most esteemed food magazine.

**Culinary Adventures** ([www.peggymarkel.com](http://www.peggymarkel.com)) Indulge in and learn about cooking Italian dishes with local, sustainably sourced ingredients at decadent weeklong courses in Sicily, Elba, Amalfi and Tuscany.

**Eataly** ([www.eatalytorino.it](http://www.eatalytorino.it)) Turin's mall-sized monument to artisanal food offers samples, wine-tasting, and afternoon workshops on aphrodisiac dinners, becoming a chef and sommelier secrets. Workshops start at €60, but some are offered in Italian only.

**International Wine Academy of Roma** (☎ 06 699 08 78; [www.wineacademyroma.com](http://www.wineacademyroma.com); Vicolo del Bottino 8) Individual wine-tasting events cost about €30, a five-wine tasting followed by a

Here's to your health: Recent research shows that Sardinian red wines have two to four times the normal levels of procyanidins, grape-seed compounds associated with heart health in laboratory mice.

To find out what local food festivals are happening when in Italy, check out [www.sagrepaesane.it](http://www.sagrepaesane.it).

four-course meal with wine pairing runs to €180 (minimum two people), and a tour of Lazio wineries guided by a Wine Academy oenologist ranges from €300 to €360. See p142 for more information.

**Italian Food Artisans** ([www.foodartisans.com/workshops](http://www.foodartisans.com/workshops)) Slip behind the scenes in restaurant kitchens and private homes, and discover Italy's best-kept food secrets in Cinque Terre, Sicily, and Tuscany on one-day workshops or five-day adventures with cookbook author Pamela Sheldon Johns.

**Tasting Places** ([www.tastingplaces.com](http://www.tastingplaces.com)) Recent offerings include excursions to regional Slow Food festivals, a 'White Truffle and Wine' weekend in Piedmont, and gourmet getaways in the Veneto and Tuscany.

## EAT YOUR WORDS

Get on speaking terms with your food. For more on useful phrases and pronunciation guidelines, see p906.

### Food Glossary

#### CONDIMENTS & FLAVOURINGS

aceto	a-che-to	vinegar
aglio	a-lyo	garlic
miele	mye-le	honey
olio	o-lyo	oil
oliva	o-lee-va	olive
pepe	pe-pe	pepper
peperoncino	pe-pe-ron-chee-no	chilli
sale	sa-le	salt
tartufo	tar-too-fo	truffle
zucchero	tsoo-ke-ro	sugar

#### DAIRY & EGGS

burro	boo-ro	butter
latte	la-te	milk
formaggio	for-ma-jo	cheese
panna	pa-na	cream
uovo/uova	wo-vo/wo-va	egg/eggs

#### DRINKS

acqua	a-kwa	water
birra	bee-ra	beer
caffè	ka-fe	coffee
tè	te	tea
vino (rosso/bianco)	vee-no (ro-so/byan-ko)	wine (red/white)

#### FRUIT

arancia	a-ran-cha	orange
ciliegia	chee-lee-e-ja	cherry
fragole	fra-go-le	strawberries
limone	lee-mo-ne	lemon
mela	me-la	apple
melone	me-lo-ne	cantaloupe; musk melon; rockmelon
pesca	pe-ska	peach
pera	pe-ra	pear
pomodori	po-mo-do-ree	tomatoes
uva	oo-va	grapes

#### MEATS

agnello	a-nye-lo	lamb
bistecca	bees-te-ka	steak

Although some producers find these official Italian classifications unduly costly and creatively constraining, the DOP (Denominazione di origine protetta) and DOC (Denominazione di origine controllata) designations are awarded to wines that meet regional quality-control standards.

**capretto**  
**coniglio**  
**fegato**  
**manzo**  
**pollo**  
**prosciutto cotto**  
**prosciutto crudo**  
**salsiccia**  
**trippa**  
**vitello**

*ka-pre-to*  
*ko-nee-lyo*  
*fe-ga-to*  
*man-zo*  
*po-lo*  
*pro-shoo-to ko-to*  
*pro-shoo-to kroo-do*  
*sal-see-cha*  
*tree-pa*  
*vee-te-lo*

kid (goat)  
 rabbit  
 liver  
 beef  
 chicken  
 cooked ham  
 cured ham  
 sausage  
 tripe  
 veal

## PREPARATIONS

**alla griglia**  
**arrosto/a** (m/f)  
**bollito/a** (m/f)  
**cotto/a** (m/f)  
**crudo/a** (m/f)  
**fritto/a** (m/f)

*a-la gree-ly*  
*a-ro-sto/a*  
*bo-lee-to/a*  
*ko-to/a*  
*kroo-do/a*  
*free-to/a*

grilled (broiled)  
 roasted  
 boiled  
 cooked  
 raw  
 fried

## SEAFOOD

**acciughe**  
**aragosta**  
**calamari**  
**cozze**  
**frutti di mare**  
**gamberoni**  
**granchio**  
**merluzzo**  
**ostriche**  
**pesce spada**  
**polpi**  
**sarde**  
**seppia**  
**sgombro**  
**tonno**  
**vongole**

*a-choo-ge*  
*a-ra-go-sta*  
*ka-la-ma-ree*  
*ko-tse*  
*froo-te dee ma-re*  
*gam-be-ro-nee*  
*gran-kyo*  
*mer-loo-tso*  
*os-tree-ke*  
*pe-she spa-da*  
*pol-pee*  
*sar-de*  
*se-pya*  
*sgom-bro*  
*to-no*  
*von-go-le*

anchovies  
 lobster  
 squid  
 mussels  
 seafood  
 prawns  
 crab  
 cod  
 oysters  
 swordfish  
 octopus  
 sardines  
 cuttlefish  
 mackerel  
 tuna  
 clams

## STARCHES

**pane**  
**patate**  
**riso**

*pa-ne*  
*pa-ta-te*  
*ree-zo*

bread  
 potatoes  
 rice

## VEGETABLES

**asparagi**  
**carciofi**  
**carota**  
**cavolo**  
**cipolle**  
**fagiolini**  
**finocchio**  
**funghi**  
**insalata**  
**melanzane**  
**peperoni**  
**piselli**  
**rucola**  
**spinaci**

*as-pa-ra-jee*  
*kar-cho-fee*  
*ka-ro-ta*  
*ka-vo-lo*  
*chee-po-le*  
*fa-jo-lee-nee*  
*fee-no-kyo*  
*foon-gee*  
*in-sa-la-ta*  
*me-lan-dza-ne*  
*pe-pe-ro-nee*  
*pee-ze-lee*  
*roo-ko-la*  
*spee-na-chee*

asparagus  
 artichokes  
 carrot  
 cabbage  
 onions  
 green beans  
 fennel  
 mushrooms  
 salad  
 aubergine  
 capsicum; peppers  
 peas  
 rocket  
 spinach

# Environment

## THE LAND

Italy's distinctive shape makes it one of the most easily recognisable countries in the world. Its long bootlike mainland peninsula protrudes south into the Mediterranean, flanked by two major islands – Sicily (to the south) and Sardinia (to the west) – and a host of smaller ones.

Bound on three sides by four Mediterranean seas (the Adriatic, Ionian, Ligurian and Tyrrhenian), the country has more than 8000km of coastline. Coastal scenery ranges from the low-lying beaches of Sardinia to the dramatically precipitous cliffs of the Amalfi Coast.

More than 75% of Italy is mountainous and two ranges dominate the landscape. The Alps stretch 966km from east to west across the northern boundary of the country. The western sector is the highest with peaks rising above 4500m. The Valle d'Aosta includes Mont Blanc (Monte Bianco; 4807m), Monte Rosa (4633m), the Matterhorn (Monte Cervino; 4478m), and Gran Paradiso (4061m). The lower eastern sector features the spectacular sawtoothed peaks of the Dolomites. The Alpine foothills are bejewelled by a string of grand lakes, including Lago di Garda, Lago Maggiore and Lago di Como.

More than 1000 glaciers, all in a constant state of retreat, dot the Alps. The best known is the Marmolada glacier on the border of Trentino and Veneto, which is popular with skiers and snowboarders.

The second mountain chain, the Apennines (Appennini) stretches 1350km from Genoa to Calabria. The highest peak is the Corno Grande (2912m) in the Gran Sasso d'Italia group (Abruzzo).

Only a quarter of Italy's land mass can be described as lowland. One of the largest areas is the heavily populated and industrialised Po valley plain. Located at the foot of the Alps, it is bisected by Italy's longest river, the 628km Po.

Italy has a complex geological history characterised by marked environmental and climatic changes. The crucial moment in the formation of the peninsula came around 40 million years ago when the African continental plate butted up against the European land mass. The collision forced the edge of the European plate to fold under. Over the centuries the African continent then pushed sheets of the southern European continental plate up to 1000km north over the folds. This process created the Alps and Apennines and explains why some of the higher strata of the Alps are actually older than lower levels.

By around two million years ago, after the landscape had been shaped and reshaped by the combined forces of continental plate movement and erosion, the Italian peninsula had almost arrived at its present form. The sea level continued to rise and fall with the alternation of ice ages and periods of warm weather, until the end of the last ice age around 10,000 to 12,000 years ago.

## WILDLIFE

Italy is not renowned for its wildlife-watching, but you will be surprised by how many different species naturally dwell in the country, particularly in the national parks and nature reserves. Common mammals include deer, chamois (mountain goats), ibexes, wild boars, wildcats, hedgehogs, hares and rabbits.

## Animals

Bears roam central and northern Italy. Along with the 50 Marsican brown bears that prowl the Parco Nazionale d'Abruzzo, Lazio e Molise, around 20 brown bears are at large in the Parco Naturale Adamello-Brenta, partly as a result of their reintroduction from Slovenia. Not everyone is happy.

Italy's equivalent of the National Trust, the Fondo per l'Ambiente Italiano (FAI), is dedicated to safeguarding Italy's artistic and environmental heritage. Read all about it at the easy-to-navigate website [www.fondoambiente.it](http://www.fondoambiente.it).

Aimed at amateur enthusiasts, Christopher Kilburn and Bill McGuire's *Italian Volcanoes* provides an in-depth account of Italy's key volcanic districts.

Try Paul Sterry's *Complete Mediterranean Wildlife* for a general guide to the flora and fauna of the region.

Farmers have seen their hen pens raided and some pasture land is now deemed off-limits.

The Parco Nazionale dei Monti Sibillini, straddling Umbria and Le Marche, is home to more than 50 species of mammal, including the wolf, porcupine, wildcat, snow vole and roe deer. Up above, golden eagles, peregrine falcons and rock partridges are among the 150 types of bird inhabiting the park. There are also more than 20 types of reptile and invertebrate, including the Orsini viper and *Chirocephalus marchesoni* (a small, rare crustacean that lives exclusively in the Lago di Pilato).

Parco Nazionale Arcipelago Toscano occupies one of the main migratory corridors in the Mediterranean. The islands of Elba, Giglio, Capraia, Gorgona, Pianosa, Giannutri and Montecristo provide endless nesting possibilities for birds. Species include falcons, wall creepers, various types of swallow and the red partridge. Other unusual wildlife includes the tarantula gecko and the endemic viper of Montecristo. Swordfish, tuna and dolphins are common along the coastline.

The Parco Nazionale del Circeo in Lazio also coincides with the main migratory routes. The park is a good place to spot water birds such as the spoon-bill and greater flamingo, as well as rare birds of prey like the peregrine.

White sharks are known to exist in the Mediterranean (particularly in its southern waters) but attacks are extremely rare.

## ENDANGERED SPECIES

Extensive changes in land use, combined with the Italians' passion for *la caccia* (hunting), have led to many native animals and birds becoming extinct, rare or

## EARTHQUAKES & VOLCANOES

Italy is one of the world's most earthquake-prone countries. A fault line runs through the entire peninsula – from eastern Sicily, up the Apennines and into the northeastern Alps. It corresponds to the collision point of the European and African continental plates and still subjects a good part of the country to seismic activity. Italy is usually hit by minor quakes several times a year and devastating earthquakes are not uncommon in central and southern Italy. The most recent, measuring 6.3 on the Richter scale, struck the central region of Abruzzo on 6 April 2009, killing 308 people and leaving up to 65,000 homeless.

In recent decades fatal quakes have been recorded in Molise (2002), Umbria and Le Marche (1997), Campania (1980) and Friuli (1976). Italy's worst 20th-century earthquake hit southern Italy in 1908, when Messina and Reggio di Calabria were destroyed by a seaquake registering seven on the Richter scale. Some 86,000 people were killed by the quake and subsequent tidal wave.

Italy also has six active volcanoes: Stromboli and Vulcano on the Aeolian Islands; Vesuvius, the Campi Flegrei and the island of Ischia near Naples; and Etna on Sicily. Stromboli and Etna are among the world's most active volcanoes, while Vesuvius has not erupted since 1944. This has become a source of concern for scientists, who estimate that it should erupt every 30 years. The longer before the next blast, the more destructive it is likely to be, and with some three million people living in the vicinity the consequences could be catastrophic.

On Sicily, Etna eruptions are fairly frequent, although rarely dangerous. In September 2007 an eruption blew lava 400m into the air and created a huge cloud of smoke and ash that forced the closure of nearby Catania airport. In May 2008, lava was sent spewing 5km into the nearby Valle del Bove.

Stromboli's last big blow came in spring 2003, when an eruption sent around 10 million cu metres of volcanic rock plunging into the sea, setting off an 8m tidal wave that affected areas more than 160km away. In February 2007 two new craters opened on the volcano's summit.

Related volcanic activity produces thermal and mud springs, notably at Viterbo in Lazio and on the Aeolian Islands. The Campi Flegrei, near Naples, is an area of intense volcanic activity, which includes hot springs, gas emissions and steam jets.



### OUT OF THE BLUE

An 87,500-sq-km area of the Mediterranean between southeast France, northwest Italy and northern Sardinia (encompassing Corsica and the islands around Elba) was set aside in 2002 as a unique protected zone, the Pelagos Sanctuary, for Mediterranean marine mammals. Fin whales and striped dolphins make up 80% of sightings in the area but many other species also cruise through.

endangered. There is still a powerful hunting lobby in Italy, which continues to play an important role in the country's environmental politics.

In the 20th century 14 species became extinct in Italy, including the alpine lynx, sea eagle, black vulture and osprey (although there is an ongoing reintroduction project for ospreys in Parco Regionale della Maremma in Tuscany and in 2007 a pair bred in Sardinia). Under laws introduced progressively over the years, many animals and birds are now protected, but according to Legambiente 127 animal species and 11 plant species are still at risk of extinction.

Those species that are making a comeback after being reintroduced in the wild are the brown bear, which survives only in the Parco Naturale Adamello-Brenta in Trentino, and the lynx, which is extremely rare and found mainly in the mountains around Tarvisio in Friuli-Venezia Giulia.

Wolves are now more common: over the last 20 years the population has naturally increased from 100 (in the 1970s) to 500 to 600 animals colonising the northern Apennines and the western Alps. But despite concerted conservation efforts, the endemic Marsican brown bear of Abruzzo has been less successful – there are probably no more than 50 individuals and its risk status is still critical.

Otters thrive in the Parco Nazionale del Cilento e Vallo di Diano in Campania and a small population has been found in the Parco Nazionale del Pollino. Another extremely rare marine animal is the monk seal; the occasional sighting keeps hopes alive that a few survive in the sea caves on the east coast of Sardinia. The magnificent golden eagle was almost wiped out by hunters, but there are now about 500 pairs throughout Italy. A small colony of griffon vultures survives on the west coast of Sardinia, near Bosa, but reintroduction programs have begun at the Massiccio del Velino (Central Apennines) and have produced about 70 breeding pairs. The bearded vulture, known in Italy as the *gipeto*, was reintroduced in the Alps in 1978 and 60 to 70 individuals have now been recorded.

### Plants

The long-established human presence on the Italian peninsula has had a significant impact on the environment, resulting in the widespread destruction of forests and vegetation and their replacement with crops and orchards. Aesthetically the result is not always displeasing – much of the beauty of Tuscany, for instance, lies in the combination of olive groves, vineyards, fallow fields and stands of cypress and pine.

Italy's plant life is predominantly Mediterranean. Three broad classifications of evergreen tree dominate – ilex (or evergreen oak), cork and pine. The occasional virgin ilex and oak forest still survives in the more inaccessible reaches of Tuscany, Umbria, Calabria, Puglia and Sardinia. These ancient woods are made up of trees that can reach up to 15m high and whose thick canopies block out light to the forest floor, preventing most undergrowth. Most common are ilex stands that have been created, or at least interfered

*Wild Flowers of the Mediterranean* by Marjorie Blamey and Christopher Grey-Wilson is a field guide to over 2500 species of flowers, trees, grasses and ferns found around the Mediterranean, including mainland Italy, Sardinia and Sicily.

with, by humans. They tend to be sparser than the virgin forest, with smaller trees and abundant undergrowth.

After the ilex, the most common tree is the cork. Often it is mixed in with ilex and other oaks, although in Sicily and Sardinia it is possible to come across pure cork forests.

There are three types of pine: the Aleppo pine; the domestic pine, especially common in Tuscany and also known as the umbrella pine for the long, flattened appearance of its branches; and the maritime pine, which, in spite of its name, is generally found further inland than the other two.

Ancient imports, which are an inevitable part of much of the Italian countryside (especially in southern Tuscany), include the olive and cypress. The former comes in many shapes and sizes, the most striking of which are the robust trees of Puglia.

Much of the country is covered by *macchia* (maquis), which is a broad term that covers all sorts of vegetation ranging from 2m to as much as 6m in height. Typical *macchia* includes aromatic herbs such as lavender, rosemary and thyme, as well as shrubs of gorse, juniper and heather, and, if the soil is at all acidic, broom. Orchids, gladioli and irises flower beneath these shrubs and are colourful in spring.

## NATIONAL PARKS

Italy has 24 national parks and well over 400 nature reserves, natural parks and wetlands. The national parks cover approximately 1.3 million hectares (5% of the country) and play a crucial part in the protection of the country's flora and fauna.

## ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Environmental awareness in Italy has improved in recent years, mainly in response to the effects of climate change, high levels of urban smog and the perennial problem of waste disposal.

Much of Italy's industrialised north and many of the country's main cities suffer from high levels of air pollution. While sulphur dioxide levels have been reduced in recent years, primarily by substituting natural gas for coal, much of the smog and poor air quality can be attributed to the fact that Italy has one of the highest per-capita levels of car ownership in the world. In an attempt to tackle this car-dependency, municipal authorities have introduced a series of initiatives. In January 2008, Milan introduced Italy's first congestion charge, while several cities including Milan and Rome have initiated bike-sharing schemes. On a national level, in 2009 the Italian government committed itself to building four nuclear power plants in an attempt to reduce dependence on oil and gas and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Inadequate treatment and disposal of industrial and domestic waste is another major cause of pollution, particularly in Campania where the sight of rubbish rotting on the streets of Naples has become sadly familiar. At the heart of the problem lies a chronic lack of facilities – there are insufficient incinerators to burn the refuse and the landfill sites that do exist are generally full, often with waste dumped illegally by the local Mafia, the Camorra.

The official parks website ([www.parks.it](http://www.parks.it)) offers comprehensive information on Italy's national and regional parks, marine reserves and designated wetlands, as well as details of local wildlife and educational initiatives.

## PEOPLE POWER

**Legambiente** ([www.legambiente.com](http://www.legambiente.com)) is a nonprofit organisation created in 1980 to safeguard Italy's environment and promote sustainability, based on the philosophy 'think globally, act locally'. It relies on the work of local and regional environmental groups throughout Italy.

In coastal areas there are other environmental challenges. A 2008 report by Legambiente highlighted three major areas of concern: construction, pollution and illegal fishing. Of these, it stressed construction as the most insidious threat to the environment.

## NATIONAL PARKS

National park	Features	Activities	Best time to visit	Page
Abruzzo, Lazio e Molise	granite peaks, beech woods, bears, wolves	hiking, horse-riding	May-Oct	p626
Alta Murgia	rocky plateaus, canyons, forests	hiking, cycling, horse-riding	Apr-Oct	p713
Appennino Tosco-Emiliano	mountains, forests, lakes	skiing, cycling, hiking, horse-riding	Feb-Oct	p452
Appennino Lucano-Val d'Agri	hills, lakes, beech woods, wetlands	hiking, cycling	Apr-Oct	p739
Arcipelago di La Maddalena	rocky islets, beaches, uncontaminated seas, <i>macchia</i>	boating, diving, swimming	Jun-Sep	p861
Arcipelago Toscano	Elba, rocky islands, beaches, seabirds	hiking, diving, windsurfing	Apr-Sep	p531
Asinara	albino donkeys, former prison	cycling, boat tours	Jun-Sep	p860
Aspromonte	coniferous forests, high plains, vertiginous villages	hiking	May-Oct	p750
Cilento e Vallo di Diano	silent hills, Greek temples, dramatic coastline, caves	hiking, swimming, bird-watching	May-Oct	p693
Cinque Terre	colourful villages, terraced hillsides, olive groves	hiking	Apr-Oct	p208
Circeo	forests, sand dunes, wetlands	hiking, bird-watching	May-Oct	p190
Dolomiti Bellunesi	rock spires, highland meadows, chamois, deer	skiing, hiking, mountain biking	Dec-Oct	p399
Foreste Casentinesi, Monte Falterona e Campigna	rolling forest, monasteries, wolves, eagles	hiking	May-Oct	p557 boxed text
Gargano	ancient forests, limestone cliffs, grottoes	swimming, hiking, cycling	Jun-Sep	p696
Gennargentu e Golfo di Orosei	plunging coastline, remote peaks, prehistoric ruins	hiking, sailing, climbing	May-Sep	p868
Gran Paradiso	mountains, lush meadows, Alpine villages, ibexes	skiing, snowboarding, hiking, climbing, mountain biking	Dec-Oct	p254
Gran Sasso e Monti della Laga	ragged peaks, wolves, birds of prey	skiing, hiking, climbing	Dec-Mar, May-Sep	p620
Majella	mountains, deep valleys, wolves, bears	hiking, cycling	Jun-Sep	p624
Monti Sibillini	mysterious mountains, ancient hamlets, wolves, eagles	hiking, mountain biking	May-Oct	p616
Pollino	mountains, canyons, thick forest, orchids	rafting, canyoning, hiking	Jun-Sep	p743
Sila	wooded hills, lakes, remote villages, mushrooms	skiing, hiking, canyoning, horse-riding	Dec-Mar, May-Oct	p748
Stelvio	Alpine peaks, mountain huts, glaciers, forests	year-round skiing, hiking, cycling	Dec-Sep	p335
Val Grande	mountains, woods, highland wildernesses, Alpine refuges	skiing, hiking, horse-riding	Apr-Nov	p220
Vesuvio	active volcano, black lava, woods	hiking	Apr-Oct	p672

According to the environmental organisation Legambiente, turnover in the illegal waste disposal business topped €18.4 billion in 2007, making it one of the Mafia's most lucrative sidelines.

Since the boom in beachside tourism in the 1960s, Italy's coast has been heavily developed and while this has undoubtedly brought short-term advantages, it has also put a great strain on natural resources. Environmentally inspired opposition has been largely out-gunned by the powerful construction lobby, although it has not been without its moments. In July 2004 Sardinia's then-regional president Renato Soru outlawed all new building within 2km of the Sardinian coast, a move that the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) hailed as 'perhaps Italy's first "long-sighted policy" in the environmental protection sector'. When news of this ban broke, critics lost little time in decrying the negative effects it would have on tourism, a mainstay of the island economy. In the end, the opposition proved too much for Soru and he was defeated in regional elections by Ugo Cappellacci who has promised to do away with the controversial ban.

But it's not all bad news and it is still possible to find clean beaches in Italy, particularly in southern Puglia, Calabria, Sardinia and Sicily.

The issue of construction – and the regulations that govern it – has long been a contentious subject in Italy, and in April 2009 it was brought into sharp focus by two very different events. The first was an announcement by PM Berlusconi that he intended to relax planning-permission rules for home

## WORLD HERITAGE-LISTED SITES

Italy has 44 World Heritage sites, more than any other country. The Vatican City, technically a separate nation, is also Unesco-listed. The full list of Italian sites:

- Rock drawings in Valcamonica
- Chiesa di Santa Maria delle Grazie and Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper*
- Rome's historic centre, the properties of the Holy See in Rome enjoying extraterritorial rights, and the Basilica di San Paolo Fuori-le-Mura
- Florence's historic centre
- Piazza dei Miracoli, Pisa
- Venice and its lagoon
- San Gimignano's historic centre
- Matera's *sassi* and the *chiese rupestri* (cave churches)
- Vicenza and the Palladian villas of Veneto
- Crespi d'Adda
- Ferrara and the Po Delta
- Naples' historic centre
- Siena's historic centre
- Castel del Monte
- Ravenna's early Christian monuments
- Pienza's historic centre
- The *trulli* of Alberobello
- The Palazzo Reale and park at Caserta, the aqueduct of Vanvitelli, and the Complesso Monumentale Belvedere at San Leucio
- Archaeological area of Agrigento
- Archaeological areas of Pompeii, Herculaneum and Torre Annunziata
- Padua's botanical garden

extensions. This, he said, would promote spending and help kick-start the economy. Environmentalists and opposition MPs replied that it would more likely lead to an outbreak of uncontrolled construction. The second event was the devastating earthquake that struck Abruzzo, killing 308 people and leaving much of L'Aquila city centre uninhabitable. In the days following the tragedy, tough questions were raised as to why many modern buildings, which had supposedly been built in compliance with strict building regulations, had failed to withstand the 6.3 magnitude quake.

Fears of seismic activity are just one of the concerns surrounding the Messina Bridge project. Ever since it was unveiled in 2005, the project to build the world's longest single-span suspension bridge – some 4km long – between Reggio di Calabria and Messina in Sicily has courted controversy. Critics, including the WWF and Legambiente, argue that the money, an estimated €6 billion, would be much better spent improving the area's existing transport infrastructure. They also say that a bridge of such Pharaonic dimensions will spell disaster for local sea and bird life, whilst also enriching the local Mafia. However, Berlusconi's government is behind the project, believing that it will act as a motor for the regional economy, and in 2009 it was given the green light.

In 2009, Italy could boast 226 beaches and 60 marinas with the coveted blue flag eco-label. Get details on [www.blueflag.org](http://www.blueflag.org).

Learn how to reduce your footprint while holidaying in the Alps at [www.respectthemountains.com](http://www.respectthemountains.com). There are useful tips about everything from off-piste skiing to reducing waste in the resort.

- Cathedral, Torre Ghirlandina and Piazza Grande, Modena
- Amalfi Coast
- Porto Venere, the Cinque Terre, and the islands of Palmaria, Tino and Tinetto
- Residences of the Royal House of Savoy
- Su Nuraxi di Barumini, Sardinia
- Villa Romana del Casale
- Archaeological area and basilica of Aquileia
- Parco Nazionale del Cilento e Vallo di Diano with the archaeological sites of Paestum, Velio and the Certosa of Padula
- Urbino's historic centre
- Villa Adriana at Tivoli
- The Basilica di San Francesco and other Franciscan sites in Assisi
- Verona
- Aeolian Islands
- Villa d'Este at Tivoli
- Baroque towns of the Val di Noto, Sicily
- Sacri Monti (sacred mountains) of Piedmont and Lombardy
- Etruscan *necropoli* of Cerveteri and Tarquinia
- Val d'Orcia, Tuscany
- Syracuse and necropolis of Pantalica
- Le Strade Nuove in Genoa and Palazzo dei Rolli
- Mantua and Sabbioneta
- Rhaetian railway in the Albula/Bernina landscapes, Central Alps in Italy and Switzerland
- The Dolomites

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) has an Italian chapter at [www.wwf.it](http://www.wwf.it). Alongside its conservation efforts, it works towards combating climate change and promoting sustainable lifestyles.

At the other end of the country, climate change is making itself felt in the Alps, which are experiencing their warmest period since records began. This is bad news not only for the environment but also for the local ski industry. Resorts at an altitude below 1400m are particularly at risk; fortunately, however, the Italian ski areas are at relatively high altitude where snowfall is more reliable.

On the world stage, Italy is committed to many international agreements, including the Kyoto Protocol, under which it agreed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 6.5% below 1990 levels by 2012. It is also a participant, along with France, Germany and the UK, in the European Union Emissions Trading Scheme, an initiative with emission-reduction incentives.

In April 2009, Italy hosted the G8 environment summit in the Sicilian town of Syracuse. Environment ministers agreed that urgent action was required to combat climate change and to try to slow the rate of species loss, a result that the WWF met with muted praise. While welcoming agreement on species loss, it noted a failure 'to advance on some key issues, including emission reduction targets'.



# Architecture

A photograph of St Peter's Basilica in Rome, showing the large dome and the facade with columns and statues. The image is taken from a low angle, looking up at the building against a clear blue sky. The dome is the central focus, with its intricate ribbed structure and the cross on top. The facade below the dome features a series of columns and statues. The overall tone is bright and clear.

St Peter's Basilica (p132): Rome's monument to artistic genius and religious devotion

JOHN ELK III



**Architects working in Italy have always celebrated the classical. The Greeks, who established the classical style, employed it in the southern cities they colonised; the Romans refined and embellished it; Italian Renaissance architects rediscovered and altered it to the requirements of their day; and the Fascist architects of the 1930s referenced it in their powerful modernist buildings. Even today, architects such as Richard Meier are designing buildings in Italy that clearly reference classical prototypes. Why muck around with a formula that works, particularly when it can also please the eye and make the soul soar.**

There was a period not so long ago when Italy's great tradition of architectural innovation and excellence seemed to be a thing of the past. Fortunately, the situation has changed. After a long period of decline, Italian architecture is back strutting its stuff on the world stage, with architects such as Massimiliano Fuksas; King, Roselli & Ricci; Cino Zucchi; Ian+; ABDR Architetti Associati; 5+1; Garofalo Miura; and Beniamino Servino designing innovative and important buildings. This means that if you're as interested in contemporary architecture as you are in the seminal architectural works of ancient Rome and the Renaissance you're sure to find a sojourn here supremely satisfying.

For a glossary of architectural terms used in this book, see p916.

Richard Meier's Museo dell'Ara Pacis (p124)

PAOLO CORDELLI



## top five ARCHITECTS

### Filippo Brunelleschi (1377–1446)

Brunelleschi blazed the neoclassical trail; his dome for Florence's Duomo announced that the Renaissance had arrived.

### Leon Battista Alberti (1404–72)

This great humanist didn't just design great buildings – he also wrote influential treatises on how to do it.

### Donato Bramante (1444–1514)

After a stint as court architect in Milan, Bramante went on to design the tiny Tempietto and huge St Peter's Basilica in Rome.

### Michelangelo (1475–1564)

Architecture was but one of the many strings in this great man's bow; his masterworks are the dome of St Peter's Basilica and the Piazza del Campidoglio in Rome.

### Gianlorenzo Bernini (1598–1680)

The king of the Italian baroque is best known for his work in Rome, including the magnificent baldachin, piazza and colonnades at St Peter's.



Gaze skyward through the oculus of the Pantheon (p119)

JOHN ELK III

## CLASSICAL

Only one word describes the buildings of ancient Italy: monumental. Never ones to think or act on a small scale, the Romans built an empire the size of which had never before been seen, and went on to adorn it with buildings cut from the same pattern. Huge but graceful amphitheatres, aqueducts and temples joined muscular and awe-inspiring basilicas, arches and thermal baths spreading from Rome as far as Saudi Arabia and Slovakia. Having learned a few valuable lessons from the Greeks, who had colonised southern Italy as early as the 8th century BC and built magnificent cities such as Paestum and Syracuse, the Romans refined architecture to such a degree that their building techniques, designs and mastery of harmonious proportion underpin most of the world's architecture and urban design to this day.

The Greeks invented the architectural orders (Doric, Ionic and Corinthian), but it was the Romans who employed them in bravura performances. Consider the Colosseum (p112), with its ground tier of Doric, middle tier of Ionic and penultimate tier of Corinthian columns. The Romans were dab hands at temple architecture, too. Just witness Rome's exquisitely proportioned Pantheon (p119), a temple whose huge but seemingly unsupported dome showcases the Roman invention of concrete, a material that is as essential to the modern construction industry as Ferrari is to the F1 circuit.

Basilica di Santa Croce (p493), Florence

GIORGIO COSULICH



Venetian Gothic: Ca' d'Oro (p350)

KRZYSZTOF DYDYNSKI



## BYZANTINE

After Constantine became Christianity's star convert, the empire's architects and builders turned their considerable talents to the design and construction of churches. The emperor commissioned a number of such buildings in Rome, but he also expanded his sphere of influence east, to Constantinople in Byzantium. His successors in Constantinople, most notably Justinian and his wife Theodora, went on to build churches in the style that became known as Byzantine. Brick buildings built on the Roman basilican plan but with domes, they had sober exteriors that formed a stark contrast to their magnificent, mosaic-encrusted interiors. In architecture as in life, what comes around goes around, and eventually this style found its way back to Italy in the mid-6th century. The best examples, the Basilica di San Vitale (p465) and Basilica di Sant'Apollinare in Classe (p466), are found in Ravenna. These churches were built on a cruciform rather than basilican plan and their interiors featured exquisite mosaics that glinted and gleamed in the dark surrounds of the church.

## ROMANESQUE

The next development in ecclesiastical architecture in Italy came from Europe. The European Romanesque style became momentarily popular in four regional forms – the Lombard, Pisan, Florentine and Sicilian Norman. All displayed an emphasis on width and the horizontal lines of a building rather than height, and featured church groups with *campaniles* and baptisteries that were separate to the church. The Florentine and Pisan styles displayed facade decoration including white and green marble used alternatively; the Lombard style featured elaborately carved facades and exterior decoration featuring bands and



arches; and the Sicilian Norman style encompassed a mix of Saracen and Norman influences. To garner an appreciation of the Italian Romanesque, check out the Sicilian-Norman Cattedrale di Monreale (p773); the magnificent cathedral group (p523) in Pisa; and the Lombard Modena Cathedral (p446).

## GOTHIC

The Italians didn't embrace the Gothic as enthusiastically as the French, Germans and Spanish did. Its flying buttresses, grotesque gargoyles and over-the-top decoration were just too far from the classical ideal that was (and still is) bred in the Italian bone. There were, of course, exceptions. The Venetians, never adverse to a bit of frivolity, used the style in grand *palazzi* such as the Ca' d'Oro (p350) and on the facades of important public buildings such as the Palazzo Ducale (p356). The Milanese, always keen to adopt the latest fashion, employed it in the shamelessly over-the-top Milan Duomo (p263); and the Sieneese came up with an utterly gorgeous example in Siena Cathedral (p538).

## EARLY RENAISSANCE

When the dome of Florence's Duomo (p481) was completed in 1436, Leon Battista Alberti called it the first great achievement of the 'new' architecture, one that equalled or even surpassed the great buildings of antiquity. Designed by Filippo Brunelleschi, the dome was as innovative in engineering terms as the Pantheon's dome had been 1300 years before, and its design was clearly inspired by the spirit of antiquity. It was Brunelleschi's major commission after the harmonious neoclassical portico of his Spedale degli Innocenti (p492) built in Florence in 1419–21, which had offered a sharp contrast to the late-Gothic syntax of its time. Together with a later work in the same city, the Cappella de'Pazzi (p493) in the Basilica di Santa Croce, these works by Brunelleschi epitomise what architecture of

Oblique view of the cathedral and iconic Leaning Tower (p523), Pisa

JOHN ELK III





Syracuse's sumptuous cathedral (p809)

BETHUNE CARMICHAEL

the 15th century became known for – an elegance of line and innovation in building method that referenced antiquity and celebrated modern man's place at the centre of the universe.

## HIGH RENAISSANCE

The architectural rebirth that occurred during the Early Renaissance originated in Florence, but the refinements that followed in the 16th century mainly occurred in Rome, where a progression of popes enticed architects and artists from all over Italy and Europe to build bigger and ever-more-beautiful buildings. A number of these were designed by the great Donato Bramante, a devotee of pure classicism and the architect of buildings such as the perfectly proportioned Tempietto (p131) of the Chiesa di San Pietro in Montorio in Rome, often described as the pinnacle of High Renaissance architecture. In other parts of Italy, architects equally fascinated with the architecture of ancient Rome were also designing buildings of note. Chief

among them was the Veneto-based architect Andrea Palladio, whose elegantly symmetrical Villa Capra (aka La Rotonda p388) was strongly influenced by Bramante's Tempietto.

## BAROQUE

All that Renaissance restraint and insistence on pure form was sure to lead to a backlash at some stage, so it's no surprise that the next major architectural movement in Italy was noteworthy for its exuberant – some would say decadent – form. The baroque movement took its name from the Portuguese word *barroco*, used by fishermen to denote a misshapen pearl. Compared to the pure classical lines of Renaissance buildings, its output could indeed be described as 'misshapen' – Andrea Palma's facade of Syracuse Cathedral (p809), Guarino Guarini's Palazzo Carignano (p226) in Turin, and Gianlorenzo Bernini's baldachin in St Peter's (p132) in Rome are dramatic, curvaceous and downright sexy structures that bear little similarity to the classical ideal.

## 19TH CENTURY

There was so much going on politically in Italy at this period that it almost seems as if no-one had any time to concentrate on architecture. One of the few movements of note stemmed directly from the Industrial Revolution, and saw the application of industrial innovations in glass and metal to building design. A good example is the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II (p264) in Milan, designed in 1865 by Giuseppe Mengoni.

## EARLY 20TH CENTURY

Architecture was as vibrant and exciting in Italy as it was in the rest of Europe at this time. The local version of art nouveau, called 'Lo Stile Floreale' or 'Liberty' in Italian, was notable for being more extravagant than most – just check out Giuseppe Sommaruga's 1903 Casa Castiglione, a large block of flats at Corso Venezia 47 in Milan, for proof. When modernism entered the scene, it took two forms. The first was purely theoretical and was based on Marinetti's influential *Futurist Manifesto* of 1909. The second form was rationalism, which was promoted in Italy by two groups. The first was known as the Gruppo Sette and consisted of seven architects inspired by the

Bauhaus; its most significant player was Giuseppe Terragni, whose outstanding work is the 1936 Casa del Fascio (now called Casa del Popolo) in Como. The second, and rival, group was MIAR (Movimento Italiano per l'Architettura Razionale, the Italian Movement for Rational Architecture), led by Adalberto Libera. This influential architect is best known for his Palazzo dei Congressi in EUR (p138), a 20th-century suburb of Rome that is home to a number of architecturally significant buildings. Like many Italian architects of their time, Libera and Terragni designed their uncompromisingly modernist buildings for the Fascist authorities, and their work is sometimes described as 'Fascist Architecture'.

## LATE 20TH CENTURY

Though Italy became famous for its cutting-edge international fashion and design industries in the second half of the 20th century, the same can't be said for its architecture. One of the few high points came in 1956, when architect Gio Ponti and engineer Pier Luigi Nervi designed the Pirelli Tower in Milan. Ponti was the highly influential founding editor of the international architecture and design magazine *Domus*, which had begun publication in 1928; and Nervi was at the forefront of the development of reinforced concrete, an innovation that changed the face of modern architecture. Later in the century, architects such as Carlo Scarpa, Aldo Rossi and Paolo Portoghesi took Italian architecture in different directions. Veneto-based Scarpa was well known for his organic architecture, most particularly the Brion Tomb and Sanctuary at San Vito d'Altivole. Writer and architect Rossi was awarded the Pritzker Prize in 1990, and was known for both his writing (eg *The Architecture of the City* in 1966) and design work. Rome-based Paolo Portoghesi, who still practises architecture, is an academic and writer with a deep interest in classical architecture. His best-known Italian building is the Central Mosque (1974) in Rome, with its luminously beautiful interior.



Picture perfect: Bramante's Tempietto (p131)

PAOLO CORDELLI

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Modernising Rome's cityscape: MAXXI art gallery

## THE ARCHITECTURAL SCENE TODAY

The current king of Italian architecture is undoubtedly Renzo Piano, whose 2002 Auditorium Parco della Musica (p171) in Rome is considered to be internationally significant. Piano's heir apparent is Massimiliano Fuksas, whose projects are as whimsical as they are visually arresting. His most significant works to date are the futuristic Milan Trade Fair Building, which opened in 2005, and the San Paolo Parish Church in Foligno. His Centro Congressi Nuvola (New Congress Center), on which construction recently commenced in the Roman suburb of EUR, looks like topping both of them, though.

Most exciting – and unusual for Italy – are the many projects by high-profile foreign architects that have recently been completed or are currently under way. Richard Meier has two recent Roman buildings to his credit: the controversial Ara Pacis pavilion (p124) and the sculptural Chiesa Dives in Misericordia, a light-drenched church in suburban Rome that was commissioned by the Vatican to celebrate the 2000 Jubilee. Other projects of note include Zaha Hadid's ferry terminal in Salerno, high-speed train station in Naples and MAXXI art gallery in Rome (the last opening in 2010); Peter Eisenman's train stations at Pompeii; David Chipperfield's San Michele Cemetery extension in Venice (p366) and Palace of Justice in Salerno; Arata Isozaki's much-anticipated extensions to the Uffizi in Florence (p487); and Tadao Ando's acclaimed Punta della Dogana (p358) and Palazzo Grassi renovation (p358) in Venice.

But that's certainly not all that's going on. The most exciting building program since the Renaissance is currently under way in Milan, where the local authorities are hoping to see a Bilbao-style urban regeneration lead to an increase in visitor numbers and an enhanced international profile. Works include the 'City Life' project, in which the former trade fair-ground is being redeveloped and will boast the three tallest buildings in Milan: one designed by Daniel Libeskind, one by Zaha Hadid and one by Arata Isozaki.





# Live to Eat

Stock up on fruit and vegetables at colourful Campo de' Fiori (p121), Rome

WILL SALTER



Olives ready for snacking

ORIAN HARVEY



Stirring hot curds to make mozzarella

ALAN BENSON

**Have you tried the local cheese? This isn't a question – it's a commandment. Protest that you're full, and your Italian host will seem crestfallen; say that you've already tried the cheese the next town over, and moral indignation ensues. *Non è uguale!* 'Not the same thing!' sniffs your offended host. To salvage international diplomatic relations, you must try the cheese. That's when you discover that, actually, the *pecorino* (sheep's-milk cheese) on the other side of the hill is markedly different. Encouraged, your host will make an impassioned case for particular milk-fat percentages and cave-aging processes. It doesn't matter if you don't understand a word of Italian; you're bonding over the cheese. But unless this is the last stop on your itinerary, leave some time and stomach capacity for the next town, and the next *pecorino*.**

The word for Italian pride of place is *campanilismo* but a more accurate word would be *fornaggismo*: loyalty to the local cheese. Clashes among medieval city-states involving castle sieges and boiling oil have been replaced by competition in speciality foods and wines. National holidays may pass unmarked, but Italians can party for a week to celebrate the local eggplant at a summer *sagra* (harvest festival). Compasses are unnecessary in Italy: subtle flavour variations will pinpoint your location like a gastronomic GPS. There may be more to life than food, but as you graze your way across Italy, you'll have a deliciously hard time remembering what exactly that is.

## TUSCANY

It seems unfair that Tuscany gets to look so good and eat so well. Even peasant soup becomes a royal feast with the addition of farm-fresh eggs, local *pecorino*, toasted bread, and a drizzle of Tuscany's prized golden olive oil: all hail the *acquacotta* (lit-

Pungent *cinghiale* (wild-boar) salami for sale.

DAVID TOMLINSON





erally ‘cooked water’, or soup). To top that, try anything featuring fungi, especially wild mushrooms or suave, smoky porcini. In a swanky *ristorante*, you might luck into delicate San Miniato white truffles or the poisonous-when-raw honey agaric.

But for all their lofty first-course sentiments, Tuscans have a way with meat, herbs and olive oil that sometimes verges on pornographic (as does the region’s bawdy humour, right back to Boccaccio). Hedonists will love to see a whole boar, pheasant or rabbit on a spit basted with a sprig of rosemary. Pampered Maremma beef makes a splendid *spiedino toscano* (mixed grill with rosemary) or try tender, hulking *bistecca alla fiorentina*, the bone-in steak that Tuscans insist should be ‘three fingers thick’.

## SICILY

The island off the boot of Italy has cuisine with kick: wild-caught tuna and sardines, tomatoes with more punch than Rocky Balboa, and five kinds of blood oranges that look like cathedral windows when sliced and taste like heaven. Ancient Arab influences make pasta dishes velvety and complex, and sweets nothing short of spectacular. Plan your meals around Sicilian *dolci* (sweets): take the *cannoli* (pastry shells stuffed with sweet ricotta), or sample Italy’s finest gelato in fruit flavours that revive tastebuds. Worthy mains are tuna baked in a sea-salt crust and *farsumagru* (five different meats rolled together and baked with wine and cheese), and prime *primi* (first courses) include rich stuffed cannelloni (tubes usually made of fresh egg pasta). Deep frying is an art, especially *fiori di zucca ripieni* (cheese-stuffed squash blossoms) and *arancini siciliani* (Sicilian risotto balls). Pair with devilish Nero d’Avola red wine, and you’ll soon be singing Sicily’s praises in dialect.

## ROME & LAZIO

Rome offers food fit not for a king, but a pope. Espresso is a revelation in a cup at Caffè Tazza d’Oro (p166), and Roman thin-crust pizza may well convert devotees of the chewier Neapolitan variety. Roman antipasti are the ultimate papal indulgences, from wood-fired bruschetta (grilled bread

Plump Sicilian tomatoes

ALAN BENSON



Caffè corretto: espresso with grappa

ALAN BENSON



Ribbons of fresh *tagliatelle*

ALAN BENSON

with savoury toppings) to the *frito romano*, a fried-food platter with *carciofi* (artichokes), *baccalá* (cod) and *suppli* (risotto balls). The Vatican isn't as rich as Rome's staple pastas: spaghetti carbonara (with bacon, egg and cheese) and *bucatini all'amatriciana* (tube pasta with tomato, *pecorino romano* and *guanciale*, or pigs' cheeks).

At this rate, only centurions will have room for *secondi* (second courses). Romans enjoy *trippa alla romana* (tripe with tomato and mint) but the real crowd-pleaser is *saltimbocca* (veal sautéed with prosciutto and sage). Finish with tiramisu (espresso-soaked cake with mascarpone cheese) and be on your merry Applan Way.

## UMBRIA

Gourmets go wild for Umbria, where locals can be found foraging alongside the local boar for wild asparagus, mushrooms and the legendary black Norcia truffles. White truffles are more rare and subtle in flavour, but grate a pungent Umbrian black truffle atop fresh *tagliatelle* egg pasta and you'll discover one of the most instantly addictive flavours on the planet.

Umbria presents another dilemma: do you binge on wild-boar sausages and prosciutto from legendary Umbrian *norcinerie* (butcher shops), or hearty, vitamin-rich spelt soups and Castelluccio's nutty green lentils, the exceptional legume granted DOC-quality status? Whatever you decide, drink accordingly: a powerful red *sagrantino di Montefalco*, or crisp, mildly acidic

The much-revered truffle in antipasto form

ALAN BENSON



Orvieto white. Anyone serious about chocolate heads to Perugia for dessert, especially Sandri (p572) and the annual Eurochocolate summit in October.

## EMILIA-ROMAGNA

Blood lust isn't strictly required to appreciate Emilia-Romagna's cuisine, but it doesn't hurt. Here cold-cut platters feature *prosciutto di Parma*, salami, *salsiccia* (sausage) and mortadella, plus *zampone* (trotters) and *coppa*, a surprisingly ideal combination of neck meat and lard cured in brine. As if that's not enough protein, menus feature meat-stuffed tortellini, baked lasagne with a *ragù* (meat sauce), and *pasta alla bolognese* with white wine, tomato, oregano, beef, and belly pork. No wonder Bologna is affectionately called *la grassa* (the fat one).

Yet for all its mouthwatering mystery meats, Emilia-Romagna is best known for supplying two tricks for any great salad: *parmigiano reggiano* (Parmesan) and Modena aged balsamic vinegar. So come for the carnage, but stay for the salad and unexpectedly fizzy red Lambrusco.

## NAPLES & CAMPANIA

Explosions of flavour come with the territory in Campania, where hot capsicum pepper, spring onions, citrus and tomatoes thrive in the soil of the volcano that buried Pompeii. Slap local buffalo-milk mozzarella and fresh basil atop a slice of *cuore di bue* (beef heart) tomatoes for an unforgettable *insalata caprese* (Caprese salad), or put it with basil and tomato sauce on pizza dough for a Neapolitan *pizza margherita* designed to resemble Italy's flag, and inspire Italian patriotism in the hearts (or at least stomachs) of Milanese anarchists.

Surf meets turf in Campania, with coastal catches and fields of durum wheat. Adults slurp *spaghetti con vongole* (spaghetti with clams) or pasta *cacio e pepe* (made with zesty

Simple, perfect *pizza margherita*

JEAN-BERNARD CARILLET







Tending the vines in Barolo country (p240)

ALAN BENSON



Wild asparagus

ALAN BENSON

*caciocavallo* cheese and pepper), while kids devour authentic macaroni and cheese or pizza (anchovies highly recommended). The dessert of choice is *rum baba*, a rich rum cake brought from France and made Neapolitan with decadent eruptions of cream.

## PIEDMONT

Lactose-intolerant lightweight drinkers might find themselves a bit compromised in Piedmont, home to the irresistible gorgonzola and *castelmagno* blue cheeses, the powerfully compelling red Barolo wine, and the sassy, acid-tongued young Gavi white wine (best when drunk less than a year old, a mere teenager in wine years). Piedmont is also the purveyor of Italy's most potent mixers: sweet vermouth and bitter wormwood, better known as the purportedly psychotropic ingredient in absinthe.

But lest you get carried away with strong drink and decadent cheese plates, Piedmont offers other tantalizing surprises. White truffles from Alba and chocolates and nougat from Turin are the obvious gourmet draws, but here in the home of Slow Food (p243) you'll find plenty of below-the-radar, locals-only treats. Look for delicately perfumed white vinegar, risotto made with superior-grade local Carnaroli rice and frog meat, *tupalone* (donkey-meat stew), and snails stewed in wine.

## PUGLIA

Imagine the Wild West with better food and you'll have some idea what to expect from Puglia. *Zorro* films were shot here, Mafia dons from the Sacra Corona Unita still hide out in the region, and for years even the bakers were renegades, dodging baking taxes and official bans on private ovens. With miles of parched wheat fields stretching towards the horizon, a wayward spark from illegal stone ovens could endanger Puglia's supply of fresh pasta – but the universities regulating ovens often looked the other way.

Now the local loaves are legit, and *focaccia ripiena* (stuffed bread) and calzone (pizza pockets) can be had without resorting to speakeasy tactics. But Pugliese cooks are still sneaking breadcrumbs into all kinds of local dishes, like sole *gratinato* (with savoury bread-

crumbs), *strascinati con la mollica* (pasta with breadcrumbs and anchovies) and *tiella di verdure* (baked vegetable casserole). Brindisi provides the essential liquids: peppery olive oil and fruity, greenish-tinged Locorotondo wine.

## VENEZIA & VENETO

The visual blitz that is Venice tends to leave visitors bug-eyed, weak-kneed and grasping for the nearest *panino* (sandwich) or plate of *risi e bisi* (risotto with peas). But there's more to La Serenissima than simple carbo-loading. Early risers will notice local foodies risking face plants in canals as they grab *raddichio di Treviso* (a ruffled red leafy vegetable) and prized Bassano del Grappa asparagus from produce-laden barges. From here, make a beeline for kiosks selling *fritole* (doughnuts), also known here as *krapfen*, and Piazza San Marco for a prime spot at Caffè Florian (p375) and a cocoa dense and decadent enough to appease Aztec gods.

Lunchtime is a fine excuse to pop a cork on some *prosecco*, the Veneto's beloved bubbly, and start working your way methodically through the extensive seafood menu: tender octopus salad, black squid-ink risotto, and *granseole* (spider-crab). Further inland, you'll find sausages, roasted pumpkin, and calf liver laced with tasty reminders of Veneto's contributions to the spice trade.

## LIGURIA

Gush about pesto and focaccia you've enjoyed outside Liguria and you risk losing foodie credibility here. Ligurians are exacting about their refined dishes, especially pesto, which involves grinding basil, pine nuts and garlic with mortar and pestle to release the flavours, and striking the right balance of *pecorino* or *parmigiano reggiano*, salt and Ligurian olive oil. Only then may the pesto be gently stirred into hand-twisted *trofie* pasta or minestrone soup. To stir the pot among genteel Genovese, ask about adding potato to pesto – a subject of debate ever since Cristoforo Colombo and other local explorers introduced the New World ingredient.

With 350km of coastline, windswept Liguria has rugged good looks and a cuisine strong on seafood and hardy herbs.

Octopus is grilled, stewed, made into salad...

ALAN BENSON



Fresh fish, Mercato di Porta Nolana (p645)

GREG ELMS





*Burrida* is seafood simmered in white wine, parsley, garlic, onions and oregano – Liguria’s snappy comeback to French bouillabaisse. Coastal winters call for *mesciua*, a rich chick-pea stew, and scorching summers for white wines from the terraced coastal vineyards of Cinque Terre.

## LOMBARDY

Milk bars and sushi may sound like a bizarre combination, but like the outlandish collections at Milan Fashion Week, Lombardy pulls it off with style. The latest culinary comeback is *latterie* (‘milk bars’), comfort-food restaurants featuring cheese, vegetables and simple homemade pasta instead of heavy dishes like *risotto milanese con ossobucco* (veal shank and marrow with saffron rice). Fusion experiments don’t always work out – margaritas with bitter local Campari, for example – but Lombardy’s crossroads cuisine has its genius breakthroughs. *Crudi* (aka ‘Italian sushi’) includes whitefish and sweet *scampi* (prawn) served *crudo* (raw) with olive oil, aged balsamic vinegar, fresh black pepper and optional *salsa di soia* (soy sauce).

Worth hunting down like designer sample sales are artisanal *salumerie*, where *bresaola*, salami and other cured meats are made with hand-cranked equipment. Local polenta variations to watch for include Mantua’s *gras pistá* with salt pork and Bergamaschi *polenta e osei*, with tiny butter-basted birds to crunch like an ogre, bones and all.

## SARDINIA

Eat like a shepherd and party like a Saudi prince on the island famed for potent sheep’s cheese and powerful glitterati. Sardinian rock lobster is the order of choice in luxury resorts lining the Emerald Coast, but savvy foodies know to head inland for smoky, slow-roasted suckling pig and pungent *casu-marzu* (aged sheep’s cheese injected with maggots) to accompany *carta da musica* (crispy, crackerlike Sardinian flatbread). Leave room for multiple desserts: nutty *torta di mandorle* (almond cake), baroque *gattó* (confectionery cakes) that look like edible cathedrals, and *pastissus*, stuffed almond cookies moulded into fish, birds and abstract sculptures.

Wines here are strictly limited-edition, and the best are often reserved for family and very honoured guests. But while you’re in the neighbourhood, you may luck into an exceptionally crisp white Vermentino, forceful Cannonau, or spunky red Malvasia that would never make it as far as the mainland.

A medley of teeth-shattering Sardinian biscuits

DALLAS STRIBLEY



# Outdoors



The Dolomites provide a dramatic backdrop for a hike (p314)

WITOLD SKRYPCZAK



Skiing in the Parco Naturale  
delle Dolomiti di Sesto (p341)

WITOLD SKRYPCZAK

**Blessed with hills, mountains, lakes and more than 8000km of coastline, Italy offers much more than Roman ruins and Renaissance art. Adrenaline addicts can get their fix in any number of ways: there's mountain biking, climbing and skiing in the Alps, hard-core hiking in the Dolomites and horse riding in the Apennines; you can climb active volcanoes in Sicily and shoot white-water rapids in Calabria. Less daunting, Tuscany's rolling landscape offers tasty cycling.**

On the coast, sport goes beyond posing on packed beaches. The precipitous peaks of the Amalfi Coast harbour a hidden network of ancient paths, while further north Sardinia's cobalt waters boast some of Italy's best diving. Windsurfers flock to the northern lakes to pit themselves against fierce local winds.

## SKIING

Most of Italy's top ski resorts are in the northern Alps. Sestriere hosted the downhill events at the 2006 Winter Olympics, and names like Cortina d'Ampezzo, Madonna di Campiglio and Courmayeur will be familiar to serious ski buffs. But skiing is not limited to the north:

## top five COUNTRY PURSUITS

### Best coastal ramble

A stroll down Lovers' Lane (Via dell'Amore) is the perfect introduction to the celebrated Cinque Terre (p208) coastline

### Best boozy bike ride

Slake your thirst on fine wine as you pedal round Chianti (p498), Tuscany's revered red wine district

### Best boat exploration

Sardinia's wild and awe-inspiring east coast is best explored by boat from Cala Gonone (p868)

### Best cowboy fantasy

Saddle up and head into the remote hills of Abruzzo's Parco Nazionale d'Abruzzo, Lazio e Molise (p626) on horseback

### Best place to watch birds

The wetlands of the Po Delta (p463) attract more than 300 bird species and ornithologists from across Europe



travel down the peninsula and you'll find popular resorts throughout the Apennines, in Lazio, Le Marche, Abruzzo and Calabria. On Sicily, there's even skiing on Mt Etna.

Facilities at the bigger centres are generally world-class, with pistes ranging from nursery slopes to tough black runs. As well as *sci alpino* (downhill skiing), resorts might also offer *sci di fondo* (cross-country skiing) and *sci alpinismo* (ski mountaineering).

The ski season runs from December to late March, although there is year-round skiing in Trentino-Alto Adige and on Mont Blanc (Monte Bianco) and the Matterhorn in Valle d'Aosta. As a general rule, January and February are the best, busiest and most expensive months.

Skiing in Italy is not cheap, especially in the famous Alpine resorts. The best way to save money is generally to go for a *settimana bianca* ('white week') package covering accommodation, food and ski passes.

## SNOWBOARDING

Ski purists might lament the fact, but snowboarding has arrived in Italy. Two hot spots are Madonna di Campiglio (p324) in Trentino and Breuil-Cervinia (p255) in Valle d'Aosta. Madonna's facilities are among the best in the country and include a snowboard park with descents for all levels and a dedicated boarder-cross zone. Breuil-Cervinia, situated at 2050m in the shadow of the Matterhorn, is better suited to intermediate and advanced levels.

## HIKING & WALKING

Italy is a walker's paradise. Thousands of kilometres of *sentieri* (marked trails) criss-cross the peninsula, ranging from tough mountain treks to gentle lakeside ambles. In season (the end of June to September), the jagged peaks of the Dolomites provide superb walking and spectacular scenery. To the east, trails traverse the high passes and beautiful valleys of the Parco Nazionale del Gran Paradiso in Valle d'Aosta.

Idyllic rest stops aplenty along the Iglesiente Coast (p846), Sardinia

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Trek up Mt Etna (p806)...if you dare

DIANA MAYFIELD

Celebrated for its picturesque countryside, Tuscany offers mountain trekking in the Apuane Alps and delicious rambles through Chianti wine country. Further north, Liguria's Cinque Terre is another favourite destination.

In central Italy, Abruzzo's national parks are among Italy's least explored. Here, you can climb Corno Grande (p620), the Apennines' highest peak, and explore vast, silent valleys. Sicily and Sardinia also have a number of parks that provide wonderful walking, in particular Sicily's mountainous Parco Naturale Regionale delle Madonie and the Parco Nazionale del Golfo di Orosei e del Gennargentu in eastern Sardinia. You can also brave active volcanoes on foot – Vesuvius near Naples, Etna in Sicily and Stromboli and Vulcano on the Aeolian Islands.

For spectacular sea views head to the Amalfi Coast and Sorrento Peninsula, where age-old paths disappear into wooded mountains and ancient olive groves. At the other end of the country, there are heady vistas in the mountains and valleys around the northern lakes.

Tourist offices can generally provide walking information and basic maps.

## CYCLING

Whether you want a gentle ride between trattorias, a 100km road race or a teeth-rattling mountain descent, you'll find a route to suit in Italy. Tourist offices can usually provide details on trails and guided rides.

## SELVAGGIO BLU – THE ULTIMATE CHALLENGE

Reckoned by many to be the toughest trek in Italy, Sardinia's seven-day *selvaggio blu* (Savage Blue) is not for the faint-hearted. Stretching 45km along the Golfo di Orosei's imperious coastline, it's a far cry from the well-marked trails that criss-cross the rest of the island. The trek traverses wooded ravines, chasms, gorges and cliffs and passes many caves. It's not well signposted (a deliberate decision to keep it natural) and there's no water en route. Furthermore, it involves rock climbs of up to UIAA grade IV+, and abseils of up to 45m.

If you don't fancy doing the full trek, a good alternative is to do the four-day hike from Cala Gonone to Baunei.

For information on the *selvaggio blu*, Italian speakers can consult [www.selvaggioblui.it](http://www.selvaggioblui.it), a comprehensive website with descriptions of each day's walk, advice on what to take and when to go (namely in spring or autumn).

Tuscany's famously rolling countryside is a favourite with cyclists, particularly the wine-producing Chianti area south of Florence. In Umbria, the Valnerina and Piano Grande (p594) at Monte Vettore have beautiful trails and quiet country roads to explore. Further north, the flatlands of Emilia-Romagna are ideally suited for bike touring.

In summer many Alpine ski resorts offer seriously good cycling. Mountain bikers will be spoilt for choice in the peaks around Lago di Garda and the Dolomites in Trentino-Alto Adige. Another challenging area is the tough, granite landscape of the Supramonte in eastern Sardinia.

The best time for cycling is spring, when it's not too hot and the countryside is looking its best. If cycling is a focus of your trip, get hold of a copy of Lonely Planet's *Cycling Italy*.

## DIVING

Diving is one of Italy's most popular summer pursuits, and there are hundreds of schools offering courses, dives for all levels, and equipment hire.

One of Italy's most famous dive sites is the small volcanic island of Ustica, whose magnificent waters shimmer with coral and brightly coloured fauna. Another Sicilian hot spot is Lipari, the largest of the Unesco World Heritage-listed Aeolian Islands.

The volcanic waters of Ustica (p774) are home to Mediterranean barracuda

## top five ADRENALINE RUSHES

### Skiing the Matterhorn

The Matterhorn's vertiginous high-altitude slopes offer wild off-piste skiing (p255)

### Power riding in the lakes

Test your mettle mountain biking the tough Alpine trails of Monte Baldo (p308) near Lago di Garda

### Shooting the Sardinian breeze

Windsurfers head to Porto Pollo (p861) on Sardinia's windswept north coast to pit themselves against fierce local conditions

### Swimming with barracuda

Shoals of barracuda accompany divers and underwater photographers in the iridescent waters around Ustica (p774)

### Running the rapids

On an inflatable tube, in a kayak, or on a raft – there are various ways to run the Sesia's white-water rapids in northern Piedmont (p257)

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Ride the wild rapids of the Sesia river at Alagna Valsesia (p257)

Sardinia also has wonderful diving. You can explore the Mediterranean's largest underwater cave in the waters off Alghero or investigate sunken ships near Cagliari.

On the mainland, the Punta Campanella Marine Reserve off the Sorrento Peninsula supports a healthy marine ecosystem, with flora and fauna flourishing among underwater grottoes and ancient ruins. Dives are run out of the small village of Marina del Cantone.

Over on the Adriatic, there's great diving on the Isole Tremiti, three tiny islands off the coast of Puglia.

Most diving schools open seasonally, typically from about June to October. If possible, avoid August, when the Italian coast is besieged by holidaymakers and prices are at their highest.

Information is available from local tourist offices and online at **Diveltaly** ([www.diveitaly.com](http://www.diveitaly.com), in Italian).

## WHITE-WATER SPORTS

A mecca for water rats, the Sesia river (p257) in northern Piedmont is Italy's top white-water destination. At its best between April and September, it runs from the slopes of Monte Rosa down through the spectacular scenery of the Valsesia. Operators in Varallo offer various solutions to the rapids: there's canoeing, kayaking, white-water rafting, canyoning, hydrospeed and tubing.

In Alto Adige, the Val di Sole is another white-water destination, as are the Monti Sibillini in Umbria.

At the southern end of the peninsula, the Lao river rapids in Calabria's Parco Nazionale del Pollino provide exhilarating rafting, as well as canoeing and canyoning.

## WINDSURFING

Considered one of Europe's prime windsurfing spots, Lago di Garda enjoys excellent wind conditions: the northerly *peler* blows in early on sunny mornings, while the southerly



*ora* sweeps down in the early afternoon. The two main centres are Torbole, home of the World Windsurf Championship, and, 15km south, Malcesine.

For windsurfing on the sea, Sardinia is a hot spot. In the north, Porto Pollo, also known as Portu Puddu, is good for beginners and experts – the bay provides protected waters for learners, while experts can enjoy the high winds as they funnel through the channel between Sardinia and Corsica. To the northeast, there's good windsurfing on the island of Elba, off the Tuscan coast.

Equipment hire is available at all the places mentioned here.

## SAILING

Sailors of all levels are catered to in Italy – experienced skippers can island-hop on chartered yachts, weekend boaters can explore hidden coves in rented dinghies and speed freaks can take to the lakes in sporty speedboats.

Liguria has a long seafaring tradition, and swish Santa Margherita is a good place to pick up a boat.

Down south, sailors will find rich pickings on the Amalfi Coast, where the prime swimming spots are often only accessible by boat. It's a similar story on the Costiera Cilentana and the islands of Elba, Capri and Procida.

Sardinia and Sicily also provide superb sailing. In Sardinia, Cala Gonone is the ideal base for sailing the stunning Golfo di Orosei; in Sicily, the Aeolian Islands' cobalt waters are a dream for holiday mariners.

## HORSE RIDING

Horse riding is a popular way of exploring Italy's great outdoors. Tourist offices should be able to provide details of local riding facilities.

In the Parco Nazionale d'Abruzzo, Lazio e Molise, the wild hills around Pescasseroli

Parasurfing on Lago di Garda (p307)

DENNIS JONES



Sail the Mediterranean on the *Royal Clipper*

HOLGER LEUBE





are a memorable place to saddle up. Further north, summer horse riding is also popular in Piedmont (p220), the Brenta Dolomites (p322) and the Parco Nazionale del Gran Paradiso (p255) in Valle d'Aosta.

## CLIMBING

Climbers have long appreciated Italy's mountainous hinterland and rocky coastline. The huge rock walls of the Dolomites set testing challenges for rock climbers of all levels, with everything from simple, single-pitch routes to long, multipitch ascents, many of which are easily accessible by road. To combine rock climbing with high-level hiking, you can clip onto the *vie ferrate* (trails with permanent steel cords) in the Brenta Dolomites.

For hard-core mountaineering, alpinists can pit themselves against Europe's highest peaks in Valle d'Aosta. Courmayeur and Cogne, a renowned ice-climbing centre, make good bases.

To the south, the Gran Sasso massif (p620) is a favourite. Of its three peaks, Corno Grande (2912m) is the highest and Corno Piccolo (2655m) the easiest to get to.

Other hot spots include Monte Pellegrino outside Palermo in Sicily, and Domusnovas and the Supramonte in Sardinia.

The best source of climbing information is the **Club Alpino Italiano** (CAI; [www.cai.it](http://www.cai.it)).

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