

Directory

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ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation in Italy can range from the sublime to the ridiculous with prices to match. Hotels and *pensionari* (guesthouses) make up the bulk of the offerings, covering a rainbow of options from cheap, nasty and ill-lit dosshouses near stations to luxury hotels considered among the best on the planet. Youth hostels and camping grounds are scattered across the country. Other options include charming B&B-style places that continue to proliferate, villa and apartment rentals, and *agriturismi* (farm stays). Some of the latter are working farms, others converted farmhouses (often with pool). Mountain walkers will find *rifugi* (alpine huts) handy. Capturing the imagination still more are the options to stay in anything from castles to convents and monasteries.

An original option born in the Friuli Venezia Giulia region is the **albergo diffuso** (www.albergodiffuso.com). In several villages, various apartments and houses are rented to guests through a centralised hotel-style reception in the village.

In this book a range of prices is quoted, from low to high season; these are intended as a guide only. Hotels are listed according to three categories (budget, midrange and top end). Half-board equals breakfast and either lunch or dinner; full board includes breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Prices can fluctuate enormously depending on the season, with Easter, summer and the Christmas–New Year period being the typical peak tourist times. There are many variables. Expect to pay top prices in the mountains during the ski season (December to March). Summer is high season on the coast, but in the parched cities can equal low season. In August especially, many city hotels charge as little as half price. It is always worth considering booking ahead in high season (although in the urban centres you can usually find something if you trust to luck).

As an average guide, a budget double room can cost up to €80, a midrange one from €80 to €200 and top-end anything from there to thousands of euros for a suite in one of the country's premier establishments. Price depends greatly on where you're looking. A bottom-end budget choice in Venice or Milan will set you back the price of a decent midrange option in, say, rural Campania. Where possible and appropriate, we have presented prices with the maximum low- and high-season rates thus: s €40–60, d €80–130, meaning that a single might cost €40 at most in low season and a double €130 at most in high season.

Some hotels barely alter their prices throughout the year. This is especially true of the lower-end places, although in low season there is no harm in trying to bargain for a discount. You may find hoteliers especially receptive if you intend to stay for several days.

For more on costs, see p20.

To make a reservation, hotels usually require confirmation by fax or, more commonly,

PRACTICALITIES

- Use the metric system for weights and measures.
- Plugs have two or three round pins. The electric current is 220V, 50Hz, but older buildings may still use 125V.
- If your Italian's up to it, try the following newspapers: *Corriere della Sera*, the country's leading daily; *Il Messaggero*, a popular Rome-based broadsheet; or *La Repubblica*, a centre-left daily with a flow of Mafia conspiracies and Vatican scoops. For the Church's view, try the *Osservatore Romano*.
- Tune into Vatican Radio (www.radiovaticana.org; 93.3 FM and 105 FM in the Rome area) for a run-down on what the pope is up to (in Italian, English and other languages); or state-owned Italian RAI-1, RAI-2 and RAI-3 (www.rai.it), which broadcast all over the country and abroad. Commercial stations such as Rome's Radio Centro Suono (www.radiocentrosuono.it) and Radio Città Futura (www.radiocittafutura.it), Naples' Radio Kiss Kiss (www.kisskissnapoli.it) and Milan-based left-wing Radio Popolare (www.radiopopolare.it) are all good for contemporary music.
- Switch on the box to watch the state-run RAI-1, RAI-2 and RAI-3 (www.rai.it) and the main commercial stations (mostly run by Silvio Berlusconi's Mediaset company): Canale 5 (www.canale5.mediaset.it), Italia 1 (www.italia1.mediaset.it), Rete 4 (www.rete4.mediaset.it) and La 7 (www.la7.it).

a credit-card number. In the latter case, if you don't show up you will be docked a night's accommodation.

Agriturismo & B&Bs

Holidays on working farms, or *agriturismi*, are popular with travellers and property owners looking for extra revenue. Accommodation can range from simple, rustic affairs to luxury locations where little actual farming is done and the swimming pool sparkles. *Agriturismo* business has long boomed in Tuscany and Umbria, but is also steadily gaining ground in other regions.

Local tourist offices can usually supply lists of operators. For detailed information on *agriturismo* facilities throughout Italy check out **Agriturst** (www.agriturist.com) and **Agriturismo.com** (www.agriturismo.com). Other sites include **Network Agriturismo Italia 2005** (www.agriturismo-italia2005.com), which in spite of its name is updated annually, **Agriturismo-Italia.net** (www.agriturismo-italia.net), **AgriturismoItalia.com** (www.agriturismoitalia.com) and **Agriturismo Vero** (www.agriturismovero.com).

B&B options include everything from restored farmhouses, city *palazzi* and seaside bungalows to rooms in family houses. Tariffs per person cover a wide range, from around €25 to €75. For more information, contact **Bed & Breakfast Italia** (☎ 06 687 86 18; www.bbitalia.it; Corso Vittorio Emanuele II 282, Rome, 00186).

Camping

Most camping grounds in Italy are major complexes with swimming pools, restaurants and supermarkets. They are graded according to a star system. Charges often vary according to the season, rising to a peak in July and August. Such high-season prices range from €6 to €20 per adult, free to €12 for children under 12, and from €5 to €25 for a site. In the major cities, grounds are often a long way from the historic centres. Many camping grounds offer the alternative of bungalows or even simple, self-contained flats. In high season, some only offer deals for a week at a time.

Independent camping is not permitted in protected areas but, out of the main tourist season, independent campers who choose spots that aren't visible from the road and who don't light fires shouldn't have too much trouble. Get permission from the landowner if you want to camp on private property.

Lists of camping grounds are available from local tourist offices or can be looked up on various sites, including www.campeggi.com, www.camping.it and www.italcamping.it. The Touring Club Italiano (TCI) publishes the annual *Campeggi in Italia* (Camping in Italy), listing all camping grounds, and the Istituto Geografico de Agostini publishes *Guida ai Campeggi in Europa* (Guide