

Destination Italy

'I am young and send texts (sms),' Italy's prime-minister-cum-media-tycoon Silvio Berlusconi remarked with his Cheshire-cat smile in a TV interview in early 2009. Born in 1936 and keen to promote his sense of eternal youth, Berlusconi is the image of the Italian self-made man who once made his living singing on cruise ships but became wealthy in construction and, from 1980, the media.

Elected three times as prime minister since 1994 (most recently in a landslide in 2008), Berlusconi's electoral fortunes slipped in mid-2009 in nationwide provincial and municipal polls as he was enveloped by scandal. After his wife, former actress Veronica Lario, announced she would file for divorce and claimed her husband consorted with minors, an investigation was opened into the presence of call girls at parties hosted by the prime minister.

Berlusconi declared the claims to be part of a plot orchestrated by the left and publications like *La Repubblica* and *Espresso* (both owned by a rival tycoon). The prime minister has, since the early 1990s, been involved in numerous court cases related to claimed wrong-doing in his business affairs. Nothing has ever stuck but, as head of the government, he promoted an immunity law, passed in July 2008, that protects him from prosecution while in office. It came in before his British lawyer, David Mills, was convicted in February 2009 of taking bribes from a Berlusconi company to hush up evidence in other trials against Berlusconi.

In a sense, 'twas ever thus. The land that gave us Roman efficiency and Renaissance aesthetics has a turbulent history. The peninsula remained hopelessly divided into bickering city-states and small warring kingdoms after the fall of Rome and eventually succumbed to foreign control. Italy only reunited and regained independence in the late 19th century. Since then, what is today Europe's fourth largest economy has been a country of enormous contradictions.

The *Belpaese* (Beautiful Country) is one of the single greatest repositories of sensorial pleasures on earth. From art to food, from stunning and varied countryside to flamboyant fashion, Italy has it all. This is the country that brought us Slow Food, devoted to the promotion of fresh products and fine traditional, cooking. What started as a local protest against fast food has become a worldwide movement.

With 44 sites, Italy has more Unesco World Heritage sites than any other country on earth. Its great *città d'arte* (cities of art), like Rome, Venice and Florence, have been attracting visitors for centuries, and with good reason. At times, it seems like the country rests on its artistic laurels. This is not entirely true. Milan, the country's financial hub, has created one of Europe's biggest and most modern trade fairs and is planning a major residential development, the CityLife complex (p272), in the heart of the city. Venice is possibly the city that has, in appearance, changed least down the decades but it has recently opened a sleek new bridge over the Grand Canal and a spectacular contemporary art space at the Punta della Dogana.

Nature occasionally strikes hard at Italy's artistic wealth. Flooding in 1966 caused incalculable damage to Venice and Florence. One of the positive results of those disasters was the emergence of a new class of expert art restorers. Such expertise will be in demand in Abruzzo, struck by an earthquake (6.3 on the Richter scale) on 6 April 2009. It left 295 dead and 55,000 homeless. The city of L'Aquila, at the epicentre, was hit especially hard. Stupor at the collapse of the general hospital in L'Aquila turned to anger when it was

FAST FACTS

Population: 59.6 million

Area: 301,230 sq km

GDP: €1273 billion
(€21,359 per head)

GDP growth: -1%

Tourism contribution to
GDP: 11.5%

Inflation: 0.2%

Unemployment rate:
7.8% (10-13.5% in the
south)

Average life expectancy:
77.6 years (men), 83.2
years (women)

Highest point: Mont
Blanc (Monte Bianco) at
4807m

Coffee consumption: Ital-
ians drink 600 cups per
head a year, according to
one study!

revealed that it had been operating without permits and had not been built to meet the seismic standards of the area.

Berlusconi promised €8 billion for reconstruction and an anti-Mafia watchdog to make sure organised crime didn't benefit from these funds. He also moved the July G8 world economic summit from Sardinia to L'Aquila, at a time when Italy's economy was looking especially fragile. The International Monetary Fund predicted a 2.1% drop in Italian GDP in 2009 and further losses in 2010.

The question of the Mafia remains an open sore. The publication in 2006 of *Gomorra*, a chilling and personal account of the Naples Camorra by journalist Roberto Saviano, showed just how deep the problem goes.

Although Sicily's Cosa Nostra grabs many of the headlines, the Camorra is Italy's biggest organised crime group (if this mix of warring clans can be considered a single entity). Known to its own members as The System, it is involved in everything from drugs and arms trafficking to illegal industrial waste disposal. Occasionally there is good news on the crime front. In early 2009, Salvatore Zazo, a key Camorra boss involved in drug trafficking between Colombia and Naples, was arrested in Barcelona, Spain.

Immigration is a hot potato. Immigrants have forever changed the face of Italian cities and towns, bringing cultural enrichment and social tension. Berlusconi's centre-right administration has made illegal immigration a major issue and, in 2009, signed a deal with Libya allowing Italian Navy vessels to force boat people back to Libya. The first three boatloads were sent back in May, raising eyebrows from the UN to Brussels and causing an outcry at home. Further protest came with a new, hardline security law package passed in July. It makes illegal immigration a criminal offence and obliges doctors, among others, to report patients without legal papers to the police.

Berlusconi dropped another bombshell in February 2009 when he announced that Italy, which had turned its back on nuclear power in the 1980s, would build four reactors with the aid of the French EDF power giant.

Meanwhile, Pope Benedict XVI got himself into hot water after reinstating four arch-conservative bishops who had been under a papal ban since 1988. One of them, the British Bishop Richard Williamson had, only days before the Vatican's announcement, declared he did not believe in the Jewish Holocaust in WWII. Both the Pope and Williamson wound up making public apologies.

A feeling of apprehension pervades much of Italian society, but an irrepressible sense of humour allows Italians to poke fun at themselves and their leaders and get on with the good things in life. A lovely case in point is the 2008 film, *Il Divo* (p68), about long-standing political eminence Giulio Andreotti.

Getting Started

You could keep visiting Italy for the rest of your life and still not exhaust all it has to offer. It's a treasure chest of art, a living tableau of human history, a culinary delight, and a natural wonder with everything from craggy mountains and glistening glaciers to sparkling seas and golden beaches.

WHEN TO GO

The immediate response is 'any time'! On a more serious note, the best period is April to June. The weather then is sunny without being stifling, the countryside bursts with spring flowers, and the flood of summer tourism, largely dictated by school holidays, has yet to crash over the peninsula. Most Italians hit the road in July and August, so those two months – in which prices soar, tempers flare and the country broils – are best avoided.

The vision of Italy as the land of eternal Mediterranean sunshine is a trifle distorted. In the Alps, winters are long and severe. First snowfalls usually occur in November, and freak falls in June are not unusual. The ski season is high season in the Alps. Those mountains shield Lombardy from the extremes of the northern European winter, but cloud and rain are common – Milan comes close to being Italy's London.

Florence's position, nestled in a valley surrounded by hills, creates ovenlike conditions in summer. Rome experiences hot summers and mild winters. That tendency continues in the south: in Sicily and Sardinia you can expect very mild winters and long hot summers (a dip in the sea is possible from Easter to October).

Italy's calendar of religious, local and national festivals, along with cultural events, is busy year-round but bulges with possibility from Easter to September; see p25 for more information.

COSTS & MONEY

Italy isn't cheap, although compared with the UK and northern Europe the situation is not so bad. What you spend on accommodation (your single greatest expense) will depend on various factors, such as location (Turin is pricier than Taranto), season (August is crazy on the coast), the degree of comfort, and luck. At the bottom end you will pay €16 to €20 at youth hostels, where meals generally cost €10.

The cheapest *pensione* (small hotel) is unlikely to cost less than €25 for an extremely basic single or €40 for a double anywhere from Pisa to Palermo. You can stumble across comfortable rooms with their own bathroom from €50 to €80. Midrange hotels in the more expensive places such as Rome, Florence and Venice can easily cost from €80 to €150 for singles or €120 to €200 for doubles. In this guide, we provide (where appropriate) an approximate range of prices you can expect to pay for

See Climate Charts (p876) for more information.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- Valid travel insurance (p881)
- Your ID card or passport and visa if required (p887)
- A driving licence and car documents if driving, along with appropriate car insurance (p898)
- A set of smart casual clothes: T-shirts, shorts and dusty sandals don't cut the mustard in bars and restaurants in fashion-conscious Italy.

rooms at the upper price range in, where prices differ seasonally, low and high seasons.

Eating out is just as variable. In Venice, Milan and (believe it or not) Sardinia, you tend to pay a lot (and sometimes get little in return), while tourist magnets such as Florence and Rome offer surprisingly affordable options. On average you should reckon on at least €20 to €50 for a meal (two courses, dessert and house wine), although you can still find basic set-lunch menus for €10 to €15.

A backpacker sticking religiously to youth hostels, snacking at midday and travelling slowly could scrape by on around €50 per day. If staying in modest hotel accommodation, your average daily budget, including a sandwich for lunch and a simple dinner, as well as a couple of sights and some travel, might come to anything from €100 to €150 a day.

Public transport is reasonably priced but car hire (p898) can be expensive (as is petrol) and is probably best arranged before leaving home. On trains (p900) you can save money by travelling on the slower *regionale* (local) trains. Seniors, young people under 26 and families covering a lot of ground by train should consider asking for discount cards (see p902).

EU citizens should look out for discounts and free days at museums.

HOW MUCH?

Coffee at the bar €0.80-1

Bowl of pasta *al pesto*

€6-10

Gelato €2-3

Local newspaper €1

Foreign newspaper €2-3

City bus/tram ride €1

10-minute taxi ride €8-10

TRAVELLING RESPONSIBLY

Lonely Planet has always encouraged readers to tread lightly, travel responsibly and enjoy the magic independent travel affords. At a time when international travel continues to grow fast, we still believe in the benefits it can bring. As always, we encourage you to consider the impact your visit will have on the global environment and local economies, cultures and ecosystems.

Most Mediterranean countries suffer from the overdevelopment of tourism to some degree, especially in coastal areas, and Italy is no exception.

What can you do to limit your environmental footprint? For a start, you might consider a low-emission form of transport. Train travel in Italy, especially between the major city centres, is easy and affordable. There are also numerous InterRail and Eurail passes available, and InterRail has a single-country ticket worth considering if you're planning a big itinerary. A comprehensive network of coaches runs the length and breadth of the country. For more information on train and bus travel see the Transport chapter (p890).

On the ground look out for ecofriendly places to stay. Italy has a good network of *agriturismo* (farm-stay accommodation). Locally run tours, markets and courses are another good way to engage with the country and these are recommended throughout this guide.

Carbon Offset Schemes

Aviation is the fastest growing contributor to climate change. Yet it's not exclusively bad; mile for mile, the amount of carbon dioxide emitted for one person driving a car is about as much as that per passenger on a plane. The problem with flying is not only the carbon (and other greenhouse gases, such as water vapour) emitted. At high altitude, these gases have a greater effect on climate change.

Most forms of transport emit carbon dioxide to some degree and carbon offset schemes enable you to calculate your emissions so that you can invest in renewable energy schemes and reforestation projects that will reduce the emission of an equivalent amount of carbon dioxide. Some schemes focus just on emissions caused by flights, while others help you work out emissions from specific train, car and ferry journeys to enable you to offset your journeys whatever mode of transport you used.

Getting Around

Getting around on a local level can be a mixed experience in Italy. In cities such as Milan, Turin and, to a lesser extent, Rome, public transport is efficient and good value, although it can be terribly oversubscribed during peak hours. A number of city centres are closed to traffic and, in the south, restrictions on traffic apply during the summer months. This makes city centres a great deal more pleasant and has had a noticeable affect on pollution.

Madly buzzing scooters, however, remain a firm fixture in Italian city centres and, although they don't have a particularly high carbon footprint (roughly half that of a Smartcar), the number of them and the noise do contribute to urban pollution. They're much less environmentally friendly than bicycles.

In a growing number of smaller cities, like Bergamo, Brescia, Bologna, Florence, Lecce and Ravenna, cycling is popular and cheap bicycle-rental outlets are legion. A growing number of hotels offer guests the use of bikes free of charge. For more information, see the Getting Around sections in the regional chapters.

Accommodation

An increasing number of tourism businesses are now looking to cash in on the green euro, so it can be difficult to identify genuinely green options. Look out for some of the telltale signs of a genuine commitment to the environment. The eco-labelling scheme Legambiente Turismo (www.legambiente.turismo.it) lists some 300 establishments, from camping grounds through hotels to resorts, that it judges positively on use of water and energy resources, reduced waste production, and whether they offer good local cuisine and organic breakfasts. There's also an increasing number of family-run B&Bs and *agriturismo* (p872).

Slow Food

One of the best ways to help local economies is to shop locally. In Italy this isn't difficult, given that it is the home of the Slow Food Movement (www.slowfood.com) and countless excellent markets, farm restaurants. Seasonal, organic food is available (and prized) throughout the country. The guidebook *Osterie d'Italia* is an excellent source of information and, in 2007, Slow Food opened its very first supermarket, Eataly (p227; www.eatalytorino.it), in Turin, which gives local producers direct access to consumers for the first time.

Responsible Travel Information

Agriturismi (www.agriturismi.it) Online guide to farm accommodation.

Fondo Per l'Ambiente Italiano (www.fondoambiente.it) A rough Italian equivalent of the UK's National Trust, which restores historic houses and gardens and opens them up to the public.

Legambiente Turismo (www.legambienteturismo.it) Look for the 'Green Swan' eco-label that flags up genuinely ecofriendly places to stay.

Travel Foundation (www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk) The UK-based sustainable-tourism charity provides tips on how to travel more responsibly.

World-Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (www.woof.it) Learn about biodynamic and organic living in return for a few hours' work.

TRAVEL LITERATURE

Reams have been written on Italy and it seems like everyone's been at it, from DH Lawrence to Hermann Hesse, from Charles Dickens to Henry James. Much has also been penned in more recent times giving lucid insight into all aspects of the country.

TOP 10



MUST-SEE ITALIAN MOVIES

Before you start your real trip, why not embark on a celluloid adventure through Italy with some of the following classics, new and old? See p68 for reviews.

- *Il Postino* (1994) Director: Michael Radford
- *La Dolce Vita* (1960) Director: Federico Fellini
- *Ladri di Biciclette* (1948) Director: Vittorio de Sica
- *La Vita è Bella* (1997) Director: Roberto Benigni
- *Roma Città Aperta* (1945) Director: Roberto Rossellini
- *Mamma Roma* (1962) Director: Pier Paolo Pasolini
- *Nuovo Cinema Paradiso* (1988) Director: Giuseppe Tornatore
- *Pane e Tulipani* (2000) Director: Silvio Sordani
- *Caro Diario* (1994) Director: Nanni Moretti
- *Il Divo* (2008) Director: Paolo Sorrentino

TOP READS

Before the advent of cinema, writers conveyed the sights, feelings and sensibilities of Italians and their world in print. The following are just the tip of the literary iceberg. See p65 for reviews.

- *Cristo si è Fermato a Eboli* (Christ Stopped at Eboli; 1947) Carlo Levi
- *Il Gattopardo* (The Leopard; 1958) Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa
- *I Promessi Sposi* (The Betrothed; 1827) Alessandro Manzoni
- *Il Barone Rampante* (The Baron in the Trees; 1957) Italo Calvino
- *Il Nome della Rosa* (The Name of the Rose; 1980) Umberto Eco
- *Il Giorno della Civetta* (The Day of the Owl; 1961) Leonardo Sciascia
- *La Storia* (History; 1974) Elsa Morante
- *Se Questo è Un Uomo* (If This Is a Man; 1947) Primo Levi
- *Il Ladro di Merendine* (The Snack Thief; 2000) by Andrea Camilleri
- *Gomorra* (Gomorra; 2006) by Roberto Saviano

TOP STARS OF ITALIAN MUSIC

Italian pop and rock musicians have a loyal following and music radio stations play their latest singles day and night. Many successful musicians have had a big following down through several generations.

- Franco Battiato – Sicily-born Battiato composes a dreamy, often complex quality
- Pino Daniele – A bluesy, Neapolitan Bob Dylan
- Ivano Fossati – Popular singer-songwriter, also popular for his instrumental pieces
- Irene Grandi – Popular Florentine singer who, like many of her ilk, got started at the San Remo music festival
- Litfiba – Florentine rock band going strong since the 1980s
- Jovanotti (Lorenzo Cherubini) – Tuscan rapper with thoughtful lyrics. His 2009 single, 'Punto', was a hit
- Laura Pausini – Internationally admired pop singer
- Eros Ramazzotti – Exponent of soft pop whose 2009 hit, 'Parla Con Me', is typical
- Vasco Rossi – The incarnation of Italian rock
- Zucchero (Adelmo Fornaciari) – Another rock success

An Italian Education (Tim Parks) Parks takes a witty and observant look at the society around him as he watches his children navigate the Italian school system. In an earlier work, *Italian Neighbours*, he viewed a wider panorama, observing everything from Catholicism to racism.

The Dark Heart of Italy (Tobias Jones) Jones criss-crosses the country and attempts to come to grips with everything from football corruption to Berlusconi. And while he certainly throws light on the darker sides of Italian public life, Jones cannot but admire the passion for life in this complex land.

Heel to Toe: Encounter in the South of Italy (Charles Lister) Lister explores the glory and sadness of the south in his trip aboard a clapped-out moped.

Midnight in Sicily (Peter Robb) As much a love ode to the wonders of Italian cooking and lifestyle, this book is also a fine introduction to the black mysteries of organised crime in Italy.

Rambling on the Road to Rome (Peter Francis Browne) Browne follows, on foot, the road taken a century ago by Hilaire Belloc from Toul (France) to Rome and recounted in Belloc's *A Path to Rome*.

When in Rome (Robert J Hutchinson) A move to Rome to discover the Vatican led Hutchinson to research the seat of the Catholic church past and present. It is a fairly light-hearted affair, that some have labelled the Vatican version of *A Year in Provence*.

The Stones of Florence & Venice Observed (Mary McCarthy) With deceptive ease and flowing prose, McCarthy opens up all sorts of views on these two *città d'arte* (cities of art).

The Story of San Michele (Axel Munthe) A classic of travel writing of another era, Munthe's tales from Capri predate modern tourism and provide a rare insight into what this island was once like.

Trieste and the Meaning of Nowhere (Jan Morris) Acclaimed UK travel writer Jan Morris returns to a melancholy city she had known many years before and (re)discovers a timeless place with a rich and mixed heritage on the edge of Italy.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Apart from kicking off with the websites listed below, a little time surfing local blogs can sometimes turn up all sorts of local and quirky information.

Delicious Italy (www.deliciousitaly.com) Here's where to find that cooking course in Venice, learn about *mozzarella di bufala* (buffalo-milk cheese) and immerse yourself in Italy's fabulous food and wine.

Ente Nazionale Italiano per il Turismo (www.enit.it) The Italian national tourist body's website has everything from local tourist office addresses to gallery and museum details.

Italia Mia (www.italiamia.com) The best thing about this site is its mass of links. Click on art and, as well as a list of artists' biographies, you get links to museums and galleries. Elsewhere you can explore everything from Italian cinema to genealogy.

Italian Movie Trips (www.italian-movie-trips.com) Film buffs can check locations used across the country for a plethora of films.

Italiansrus.com (www.italiansrus.com) A mixed bag with anything from potted biographies (and links) of Old Masters and milestone architects to classic recipes.

Life in Italy (www.lifeinitaly.com) Want to get the latest in Italian news in English? This site offers a broad spectrum of ANSA national news agency reports on anything from current affairs to fashion.

Festivals & Events Calendar

FEBRUARY–APRIL

FESTA DI SANT'AGATA 3-5 Feb
Hysterical celebrations (p795) during which one million Catanians and tourists follow a silver reliquary bust of the saint covered in marvellous jewels.

SAGRA DEL MANDORLO IN FIORE 1st Sun in Feb
The Festival of the Almond Blossoms; a folk festival (p820) in Agrigento with open-air drama and music performances.

CARNEVALE
During the period before Ash Wednesday, many towns stage carnivals and enjoy their last opportunity to indulge before Lent. The carnival held in Venice (p369) is the most famous.

SA SARTIGLIA Sun & Tue before Lent
The highlight of carnival celebrations (p850) at Oristano. It involves a medieval tournament of horsemen in masquerade.

SETTIMANA SANTA
Notable processions take place in Taranto (Puglia; p730), Chieti (Abruzzo; p628), Sorrento (p678) and Trapani (Sicily; p827) during Holy Week. On Good Friday, the pope leads a candlelit procession to the Colosseum and on Easter Sunday he gives his blessing.

SCOPPIO DEL CARRO Easter Sun
A cartful of fireworks is exploded in Piazza del Duomo in Florence (p498) – a tradition dating to the crusades.

MAY

FESTA DI SANT'EFISIO 1 May
An effigy of Sardinia's patron saint is paraded around Cagliari on a bullock-drawn carriage amid a colourful procession (p841).

FESTA DI SAN NICOLA Around 7-9 May
A procession in Bari (p710) follows a statue of the saint for a ceremony out at sea.

PROCESSIONE DEI SERPARI 1st Thu in May
Held at Cocullo (p624), a statue of St Dominic is draped with live snakes and carried in the Snake-Charmer's Procession.

FESTA DI SAN GENNARO 1st Sun in May, 19 Sep & 16 Dec
The faithful gather in Naples' cathedral to wait for the blood of San Gennaro to liquefy (p649).

CORSA DEI CERI 15 May
Three teams, each carrying a *cerò* (massive wooden pillar, bearing the statue of a rival saint) race through Gubbio's streets in commemoration of Sant'Ubaldo, the city's patron saint (p589).

CAVALCATA SARDA 2nd-last Sun in May
Hundreds of Sardinians wearing colourful traditional costume gather at Sassari (p859) to mark a victory over the Saracens in the year 1000.

PALIO DELLA BALESTRA last Sun in May
The Crossbow Contest (p589) is held in Gubbio. The men of Gubbio and neighbouring Sansepolcro dress in medieval costume and use antique weapons.

CICLO DI SPETTACOLI CLASSICI mid-May–mid-Jun
Ciclo di Rappresentazioni Classiche (p812), a Greek classical-theatre festival, brings the stones of Syracuse's ancient 5th-century-BC amphitheatre back to life.

JUNE

INFIORATA 21 Jun
To celebrate Corpus Domini, some towns (including Bolsena and Genzano near Rome, Spello in Umbria and Noto in Sicily, p814) decorate a street with colourful designs made with flower petals.

FESTA DI SAN GIOVANNI 24 Jun
Celebrated with the lively Calcio Storico (p498), a series of medieval football-style matches played on Florence's Piazza di Santa Croce.

GIOCO DEL PONTE last Sun in Jun
Two groups in medieval costume contend for the Ponte di Mezzo in Pisa in the Bridge Game (p526).

FESTIVAL DEI DUE MONDI late Jun–mid-Jul
The Festival of the Two Worlds (p592) is an international arts event held in Spoleto, featuring music, theatre, dance and art.

PALIO DELLE QUATTRO ANTICHE REPUBBLICHE MARINARE
The Regatta of the Four Ancient Maritime Republics is a procession and boat race between four maritime rivals: Pisa, Venice, Amalfi and Genoa. It rotates between the towns: Pisa in 2010, Venice in 2011, Genoa 2012 and Amalfi 2013. It's usually held in June but can be delayed as late as September.

JULY

IL PALIO 2 Jul
A chaotic bareback horse race (p539) around the piazza in Siena, preceded by a parade in traditional costume.

ARDIA 6 & 7 Jul
More dangerous than Il Palio, this rough-and-tumble horse race (accompanied by gunshots; p852) at Sedilo celebrates the victory of the Roman Emperor Constantine over Maxentius in AD 312.

QUINTANA 2nd Sat in Jul & 1st Sun in Aug
A parade (p615) of hundreds of people in 15th-century costume, followed by a jousting tournament, is held at Ascoli Piceno.

FESTA DEL REDENTORE 3rd weekend in Jul
One of Venice's most popular festivities (p369), marked with a fireworks display over the Bacino di San Marco. A pontoon bridge is built to connect the Chiesa del Redentore on the Giudecca with the rest of Venice.

TAORMINA ARTE Jul & Aug
Films, theatre and concerts (p792) from an impressive list of international names make Taormina the summer star of Sicily.

AUGUST

I CANDELIERI 14 Aug
Town representatives in Sassari dress in medieval costume and carry huge wooden 'candlesticks' through the town (p859).

IL PALIO 16 Aug
A repeat of the famous horse race (p539) is held in Siena.

SAGRA DEL REDENTORE 28 & 29 Aug
Held in Nuoro, this folk festival (p865) is attended by thousands of people, dressed in traditional costume, from all over the island.

VENICE INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL late Aug or early Sep
The Mostra del Cinema di Venezia (p369) is held at the Lido and attracts the international film glitterati. Venetians grab the chance to gorge themselves on the latest films.

SEPTEMBER

PALIO DELLA BALESTRA 1st Sun in Sep
Sansepolcro (p558) in Tuscany hosts a rematch with crossbow sharpshooters from Gubbio.

REGATA STORICA 1st Sun in Sep
A Historic Regatta (above) of boats in period dress followed by gondola and other boat races along the Grand Canal in Venice.

OCTOBER

SALONE INTERNAZIONALE DEL GUSTO biennially every Oct
The home-grown anti-fast food organisation, the Slow Food Movement, hosts this international 'sybarites' get-together (p228) in Turin in even-numbered years.

NOVEMBER

FESTA DELLA MADONNA DELLA SALUTE 21 Nov
A procession (p369) to the Chiesa di Santa Maria della Salute in Venice gives thanks for the city's deliverance from plague in 1630.

FESTA DI SANTA CECILIA
A series of concerts and exhibitions (p541) in Siena to honour the patron saint of musicians.

DECEMBER

NATALE
The weeks preceding Christmas are studded with religious events. Many churches set up nativity scenes known as *presepi* – Naples (p639) is especially famous for these.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

CLASSIC CITIES

Two Weeks / Rome to Milan

A two-week whistle-stop tour will allow you a good taste of the tried and tested, with a couple of hasty side tours thrown in.

Start with three days in **Rome** (p90), home to St Peter's, the Sistine Chapel, the Colosseum and more. From there, push on north to the Renaissance jewel of **Florence** (p476) for a mind-blowing display of art in the Uffizi and around town. Squeeze in day trips to medieval **Siena** (p536) and pretty **Pisa** (p521), with its leaning tower. After four days in Tuscany, you might stop briefly in **Bologna** (p426), with its graceful monuments, bustling boulevards and great food, before proceeding to **Venice** (p345). Spend three days exploring the city's picturesque waterways and absorbing centuries of artistic and architectural grandeur. Set off westward for a one-day stopover in historic **Verona** (p392), home to the majestic Roman Arena and the fictitious Romeo and Juliet. From there proceed to **Milan** (p260), the country's financial hub that's also blessed with Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper*, the chic Monte Napoleone shopping district and nightlife along the Navigli.

Rome to Milan, via Florence and Venice, is a breathtaking 935km trip that you can do in a couple of weeks, but easily merits as much time as you can give it.



FROM TOP TO TAIL: THE GRAND TOUR One Month / Milan to Palermo

No longer the preserve of aristocratic young men, the Grand Tour is for anyone with time on their hands to make the most of a trip to Italy. Start in the north and work slowly south (or vice versa).

A good starting point is the financial metropolis and shopping capital of Italy, **Milan** (p260), from where you can head north and east to the glittering **Lombard lakes** (p293), then on to elegant **Verona** (p392) and the lagoon city of **Venice** (p345). Sample the architectural and culinary delights of **Bologna** (p426) before progressing to **Florence** (p476) for an art infusion. From there you could loop west to explore the Romanesque wonders of walled-in **Lucca** (p514) and **Pisa** (p521), of Leaning Tower fame. Swing southeast to experience the medieval splendour of **Siena** (p536) before continuing south to the equally enchanting Umbrian hill capital of **Perugia** (p564). From Perugia, let all roads lead you straight to **Rome** (p90) and discover the ancient city in all its glory before scampering on to **Naples** (p635), the chaotic metropolis of the south and one-time capital of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. Don't miss the fascinating ruins of **Pompeii** (p673) and the precipitous cliff towns of the **Amalfi Coast** (p681) before setting off east across the bottom of the boot into Puglia to **Lecce** (p721), with its extravagant baroque palaces, and the wild **Penisola Salentina** (p726) coast. Alternatively, opt for the road along the Calabrian coast and the ferry across to the sizzling island of **Sicily** (p756), with its wealth of history, good food, stark landscapes, island hideaways, beautiful beaches and volcanic splendour. Wind up in **Palermo** (p761), the southern island's fascinating capital.

To complete the Grand Tour you'll need at least a month, but you can extend it to as much time as you have available. Traverse a world of different cultures and a treasure chest of art along this 1720km trail from Milan to Palermo.



ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

NORTHERN NATURE

Two Weeks / The Lakes to the Dolomites

A short drive northwest of Milan's Malpensa Airport and you're on the edge of one of Italy's most serene scenes, **Lago Maggiore** (p295). Embark on a trail that skirts Italy's main centres in favour of its stunning natural beauty. Cyclists need to factor in more road time. Skirting the west flank of the lake, the trip will take you briefly into Switzerland (keep an ID or passport with you) via **Stresa** (p295), where you could stay a night. The road drops south again to **Como** (p299) on **Lago di Como** (p299); sleep in **Bellagio** (p302). From the northern tip of the lake, head east to the **Parco dell'Adamello** (p307) and **Parco Nazionale dello Stelvio** (p335); both have plenty of walking trails, and the latter has great skiing at **Bormio** (p336). You could follow the Val Venosta out of the park for a small town stop in **Merano** (p333). Southeast, **Bolzano** (p329) is another worthwhile city stopover with an Austrian feel of much of the Alto Adige.

From there, mountain roads spread north and east deep into the Dolomites, a dream in summer or winter. Head for the pretty villages of **Castelrotto** or **Siusi** in the **Alpe di Siusi** (p338) area and use them as bases for some inspiring Alpine walks. Further northeast are the popular **Val Badia** and **Parco Naturale di Fanes-Sennes-Braies** (p339). In the same area is the **Sella Ronda** (p329), a challenging four-valley ski route. Walking opportunities abound here and, further east among the towering peaks of the **Parco Naturale delle Dolomiti di Sesto** (p341), while **Cortina d'Ampezzo** (p400) is where the beautiful snow folk show off in their winter leisure time.

Just north of Milan lies one of northern Italy's glittering lakes, Lago Maggiore. From here you can start a 565km meandering jaunt eastward around the lakes and into the mountains to enjoy national parks, hiking or snowy slopes, cheerful Alpine towns and hearty cooking.



A SOUTHERN SWING

Two to Three Weeks / Round Trip From Naples

For the majority of visitors to Italy, a trip 'south' means bypassing Naples to have a look at Vesuvius and meander down the nearby Amalfi Coast before bolting back north to Rome. What a shame! A fascinating circuit would take you east from Naples on a tour through the heel and across the toe of the boot. Start by giving **Naples** (p635) a couple of days of your time. Head northeast to the Apennine town of **Benevento** (p659), famous for Trajan's Arch and Strega liqueur. Cross the mountains to reach the Adriatic coast at pretty **Trani** (p706), from where you can reach *trulli* (circular stone houses) country around **Alberobello** (p713). Nearby, **Ostuni** (p717) is a popular summer-holiday base with great restaurants. Further southeast lies the baroque city of **Lecce** (p721), around which you'll discover wild beaches along the Penisola Salentina. Make for pleasant **Gallipoli** (p728) and then edge around the coast to the once-proud naval city of **Taranto** (p729) before heading inland to **Matera** (p733), famous for its *sassi* (former cave dwellings). Dip into the ancient Greek world at **Metaponto** (p733), and from here, move down the coast into Calabria. You could greatly extend the tour by moving right around the long coast of this region, or cut across the **Parco Nazionale del Pollino** (p741), which straddles Calabria and Basilicata. After exploring here, proceed to the rugged and beautiful coast around **Maratea** (p740). After soaking in the views and taking a dip or two, begin the northward climb back into Campania, where you'll want to make a halt to view the extraordinary Greek temples of **Paestum** (p691). The northward march then brings you to **Salerno** (p689) and the **Amalfi Coast** (p681). From there, it's a busy coast promenade back to your starting point of Naples.

Beyond the chaos of Naples lies a fascinating and largely overlooked world. This 1180km loop leads across the Apennines, through pretty Puglia and across Basilicata before meandering back up the Tyrrhenian coast to Naples via Maratea, the Paestum temples and the Amalfi Coast.



TAILORED TRIPS

TASTEBUDS ON TOUR

When fast-food chains landed in Italy in the 1980s, indignant local foodies created **Slow Food** (www.slowfood.com). Now a worldwide organisation for the defence of good food and good practice using local products and tradition, Slow Food publishes an annual guide to Italy's eateries.

A trip to Italy's gastronomic heart – Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany and Umbria – is a must for sybarites.

Stock up your cupboards at Mercato delle Erbe in **Bologna** (p436) and complete your store with a bottle of the finest balsamic vinegar from **Modena** (p448). Now it's time for antipasto in one of the most famous of foodie towns, **Parma** (p452), home of Italy's best prosciutto and Parmesan.

For the *primo piatto* (first course) it's off to **Umbria** (p561) for some *umbricelli* pasta served with shaved truffles, or, if you're lucky, even the elusive *tartufo nero* (black truffle) from around **Norcia** (p594).

For the *secondo piatto* (second course), sample *bistecca alla fiorentina* (T-bone steak) from **Florence** (p476), or *porchetta*, suckling pig stuffed with its liver, wild fennel and rosemary, from **Perugia** (p564).

Wash it down with a glass of **Chianti** (p533). Finish off with *panforte* (a flat, hard cake with candied fruits and nuts) from **Siena** (p536), or *cantucci e vin santo* (crisp almond biscuits dipped in dessert wine), another Tuscan favourite.



WORLD HERITAGE SITES

With its vast historical legacy, it's no surprise that Italy is home to 44 Unesco World Heritage sites (the most in any one country). They are a grand mix of natural and built, but the latter are in the majority. You'll need plenty of time to get around them all (visit <http://whc.unesco.org> for a comprehensive list), but if you prefer the past in more manageable doses, you could try the following selection of Italy's World Heritage best.

Start at the Roman resort centre of **Tivoli** (p181) before pushing on to some of Tuscany's historic towns – take your pick from **Florence** (p476), **Siena** (p536), **San Gimignano** (p544), **Pisa** (p521) and **Pienza** (p551), as all their town centres are designated sites.

From Tuscany it's a short hop to the fine Romanesque cathedral in **Modena** (p446), the stunning early-Christian and Byzantine mosaics in **Ravenna** (p464) and the splendid Renaissance city of **Ferrara** (p459).

Then turn your attention to **Urbino** (p606), one of Italy's best-preserved and most beautiful hill towns. Finally, finish in **Assisi** (p580), the picturesque home of St Francis, which attracts millions of tourists and pilgrims each year.



THE GREAT OUTDOORS

We may more readily associate Italy with fine art and pleasures of the palate, but the country offers a vast panoply of breathtaking settings for enjoying all sorts of sports.

In winter, mountain ranges the length of the country are draped in a pristine sheet of snow. In the Alps especially, this natural treasure is exploited to the full for a range of winter sports. Skiing opportunities abound, but top locations include **Courmayeur** (p251) and chic **Cortina d'Ampezzo** (p400). **Madonna di Campiglio** (p324) caters especially to snowboarders. These and other magnificent mountain landscapes become excellent hiking territory in summer. The **Parco Nazionale del Gran Paradiso** (p254), which straddles Piedmont and Valle d'Aosta, is a source of endless hiking challenges. To up the ante, combine climbing with hiking using the *vie ferrate* in the **Brenta Dolomites** (p322). Serious climbers can scale the heights of **Mont Blanc** (p251), **Monte Rosa** (p256) and the **Matterhorn** (p255), frontier peaks separating Italy from France and Switzerland.

Want to get wet? Windsurf on Lago di Garda at **Nago-Torbole** (p310), go white-water rafting in Piedmont's **Valsesia** (p256), sailing in Sardinia's **Golfo di Orosei** (p868) or diving off the **Isole Tremiti** (p704). If you fancy soaring above it all, **Castelluccio** (p594) makes a spectacular launch pad for hang-gliding in Umbria.

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BEFORE THE ROMANS RULED

Bronze Age tribes on the island of Sardinia, Etruscans in central Italy and Greeks in the south – the world into which Ancient Rome emerged already had centuries of history behind it.

You could spend weeks searching out the mysterious *nuraghi*, defensive towers made of hefty basalt stone slabs and raised by Bronze Age engineers from about 1800 BC across Sardinia (p851). One of the most impressive is **Nuraghe Su Nuraxi**, near Barumini (p850) in the southern half of the island. Others well worth exploring are the **Nuraghe Losa** (p852) and **Nuraghe Santu Antine** (p859).

On the central Italian mainland, the Etruscans lived in city-states like **Cerveteri** (p182) and **Tarquinia** (p183). Both are outstanding places to explore the burial complexes left behind by this mysterious people. To admire the wonders of the Ancient Greeks in Italy, head further south for the mighty Doric temples of **Paestum** (p691).

For still more impressive Greek remains, you need to cross the Messina strait for Sicily, where you'll find temples at **Segesta** (p829), **Selinunte** (p822) and, with a whole valley of them, **Agrigento** (p820). In the southeast of the island is **Syracuse** (p808), with its grand ancient theatre, still in use today. On the mainland, the ruins of **Metaponto** (p733), where Pythagoras lived, is worth discovering if you're in the deep south.



The Authors



DAMIEN SIMONIS

Coordinating Author, Lombardy & the Lakes

Damien still remembers listening to crackly shortwave Italian broadcasts years ago on many an Australian midsummer night. It all started in Rome, part of a typical backpacking tour, and carried on as a university obsession. Damien has explored Italy from Bolzano in the north to the island of Lampedusa, way south of Sicily. He has lived in Milan, Florence, Venice and Palermo, and returns frequently for work and (especially) pleasure. Involved with this guide since its 2nd edition, Damien also wrote the original editions of Lonely Planet's *Venice*, *Best of Venice*, *Florence*, *Tuscany* and *Sardinia* guides. He was last seen working on the *Italian Lakes*, a new regional guide.

For this edition of *Italy*, Damien updated the Destination, Getting Started, Itineraries, History, Lombardy & the Lakes, Directory, Transport, Language and Health chapters.



ALISON BING

Culture, Food, Live to Eat, The Veneto

When not scribbling notes in church pews and methodically eating her way across Venice's *sestiere*, Alison contributes to Lonely Planet's *Venice*, *USA*, *San Francisco* and *Tuscany & Umbria* guides and architecture, food, and art glossies, including *Architectural Record*, *Cooking Light*, and *Italy's Flash Art*. Currently, she divides her time between San Francisco and a hilltop town on the border of Lazio and Tuscany with partner Marco Flavio Marinucci. Alison holds a bachelor's degree in art history and a masters' degree from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, a joint programme of Tufts and Harvard Universities – perfectly respectable diplomatic credentials she regularly undermines with opinionated culture commentary for newspapers, magazines, TV and radio.

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

Why is our travel information the best in the world? It's simple: our authors are passionate, dedicated travellers. They don't take freebies in exchange for positive coverage so you can be sure the advice you're given is impartial. They travel widely to all the popular spots, and off the beaten track. They don't research using just the internet or phone. They discover new places not included in any other guidebook. They personally visit thousands of hotels, restaurants, palaces, trails, galleries, temples and more. They speak with dozens of locals every day to make sure you get the kind of insider knowledge only a local could tell you. They take pride in getting all the details right, and in telling it how it is. Think you can do it? Find out how at lonelyplanet.com.



CRISTIAN BONETTO

Campania

Much to the chagrin of his northern Italian relatives, Cristian's loyalties lie with Naples. Such affection seems only natural for a writer of farce and soap with a penchant for running red lights. Based in Melbourne, Australia, Cristian makes regular trips to Campania and its capital to indulge his weakness for *mozzarella di bufala* and hot-blooded locals. His musings on the region have appeared in print from Sydney to London, while his Naples-based play *Il Cortile* toured Italy in 2003. Cristian's other Italian Lonely Planet titles to date are *Naples & the Amalfi Coast* and *Rome Encounter*.



GREGOR CLARK

Emilia-Romagna & Sicily

Gregor caught the Italy bug at age 14 thanks to a year living in Florence, during which his professor dad trundled the family off to see every fresco, mosaic, church and museum within a 1000km radius. He's been making regular return visits to Italy ever since, including longer stints in Venice and Le Marche, leading bike tours in the Po Valley, and huffing and puffing up every major pass in the Dolomites while researching Lonely Planet's *Cycling Italy*. A lifelong polyglot with a degree in romance languages, Gregor is a regular contributor to Lonely Planet titles, including *Brazil*, *Argentina*, *Portugal* and *New England Trips*. He lives with his wife and two daughters in Vermont, USA.



DUNCAN GARWOOD

Environment, Abruzzo & Molise, Outdoors, Sardinia

Duncan never set out to become an Italy buff, it just sort of happened after an encounter in a London pub and a subsequent move to Bari. More than 10 years later and he's still in Italy, now based in the Alban hills just outside of Rome. He got his first Lonely Planet commission in 2002 and has since then contributed to a raft of Italy guides, including the *Rome* city guide, *Naples & the Amalfi Coast*, *Sardinia*, and *Piedmont*. As he travels he's constantly revising his best-of lists which currently have Rome as top city, Sardinia as best beach hangout, and Abruzzo as most resilient region in the face of natural disaster.

**ABIGAIL HOLE****Rome & Lazio**

Chaos, beauty, endless summer, effortless cool, handsome inhabitants, the ice cream of your dreams, and picture-book countryside on your doorstep: Rome fits Abigail's view of an ideal city, and since she visited in 2003, she's never really left. She's married to an Italian, her first son was born in the Eternal City, and her Italian *famiglia* live here. She's written on Rome for various newspapers, magazines and websites, and contributed to Lonely Planet's *Best of Rome, Italy*, and *Puglia & Basilicata* guides. A freelance writer, she nowadays does her best to divide her time between Rome, London and Puglia.

**ALEX LEVITON****Umbria & Le Marche**

Alex updated the Umbria & Le Marche chapter for the 3rd edition in a row. Alex first visited Perugia in 1998, and has returned to work, live and travel throughout Umbria and Le Marche a dozen times since. Alex received a master's degree in journalism from the University of California at Berkeley in 2002 and has been freelancing and writing for Lonely Planet ever since. She lives mostly in San Francisco and sometimes in Durham, North Carolina, but one day dreams of buying a farmhouse in the Umbria hills.

**VIRGINIA MAXWELL****Italian Art, Architecture, Tuscany**

After working for many years as a publishing manager at Lonely Planet's Melbourne headquarters, Virginia decided that she'd be happier writing guidebooks rather than commissioning them. Since making this decision she's written or contributed to Lonely Planet books about nine countries, eight of which are on the Mediterranean. Virginia has covered Rome for previous editions of Lonely Planet's *Italy* and the north of the country for *Western Europe*. She is also the coordinating author of Lonely Planet's *Tuscany & Umbria*.

**JOSEPHINE QUINTERO****Puglia, Basilicata & Calabria**

Born in England, Josephine started travelling with a backpack and guitar in the late '60s (didn't everyone?), stopping off in Israel on a kibbutz for a year. Further travels took her to Kuwait, where she was editor of *The Kuwaiti Digest* and was held hostage during the Iraqi invasion. She moved to the relaxed shores of Andalucía, Spain, shortly thereafter from where she makes frequent trips to Italy to visit family and deepen her appreciation of the finer things in life.

**BRENDAN SAINSBURY****Liguria, Piedmont & Valle d'Aosta,
Trentino-Alto Adige, Friuli Venezia Giulia**

An expat Brit now living in Vancouver, Canada, Brendan first visited Italy as an inter-railer in the 1980s when he ran out of *soldi* in Venice and ended up falling asleep outside the ticket office at Milan railway station. He returned on his bike in 1992 and sprinted west out of Turin just in time to see Italian cycling hero Claudio Chiappucci nab a legendary Tour de France stage victory in Sestriere. As well as updating three chapters for this guidebook, Brendan is also the author of Lonely Planet's *Hiking in Italy*.

Behind the Scenes

THIS BOOK

This 9th edition of *Italy* was updated by Damien Simonis, Abigail Hole, Alex Leviton, Alison Bing, Brendan Sainsbury, Cristian Bonetto, Duncan Garwood, Gregor Clark, Josephine Quintero and Virginia Maxwell. The Health chapter was adapted from material written by Dr Caroline Evans. This guidebook was commissioned in Lonely Planet's London office, and produced by the following:

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THE LONELY PLANET STORY

Fresh from an epic journey across Europe, Asia and Australia in 1972, Tony and Maureen Wheeler sat at their kitchen table stapling together notes. The first Lonely Planet guidebook, *Across Asia on the Cheap*, was born.

Travellers snapped up the guides. Inspired by their success, the Wheelers began publishing books to Southeast Asia, India and beyond. Demand was prodigious, and the Wheelers expanded the business rapidly to keep up. Over the years, Lonely Planet extended its coverage to every country and into the virtual world via lonelyplanet.com and the Thorn Tree message board.

As Lonely Planet became a globally loved brand, Tony and Maureen received several offers for the company. But it wasn't until 2007 that they found a partner whom they trusted to remain true to the company's principles of travelling widely, treading lightly and giving sustainably. In October of that year, BBC Worldwide acquired a 75% share in the company, pledging to uphold Lonely Planet's commitment to independent travel, trustworthy advice and editorial independence.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Melbourne, London and Oakland, with over 500 staff members and 300 authors. Tony and Maureen are still actively involved with Lonely Planet. They're travelling more often than ever, and they're devoting their spare time to charitable projects. And the company is still driven by the philosophy of *Across Asia on the Cheap*: 'All you've got to do is decide to go and the hardest part is over. So go!'

superstar editor and intrepid fellow traveller: Paula Hardy; Venezia intelligentsia: Francesca Forni, Cristina Bottero, Rosanna Corró, Giovanni d'Este, Francesco e Matteo Pinto e Davide Amadio; editorial co-conspirator: Damien Simonis; the Melbourne mavens: Imogen Bannister, Herman So, Rachel Imeson; foodie vanguard: Raj Patel, Cindy Hatcher, Cook Here and Now, and Slow Food Viterbo; *ma soprattutto*: Marco Flavio Marinucci, for anything and everything.

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OUR READERS

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