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Fast Talk
Italian
GUARANTEED TO GET YOU TALKING
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before You Go</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chatting &amp; Basics</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sightseeing</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airport &amp; Transport</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating &amp; Drinking</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practicalities</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English to Italian Dictionary</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian to English Dictionary</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Before You Go

You can get by in Italy’s major cities without speaking Italian, but just a few phrases will go a long way in making friends, inviting service with a smile, and ensuring a rich and rewarding travel experience – you could experience a delicious meal at a no-menu trattoria, find a hidden art gallery off the tourist trail, or discover the best cappuccino in Rome.

PRONUNCIATION TIPS

The sounds of Italian can almost all be found in English, and if you read our coloured pronunciation guides as if they were English you’ll be understood. The stressed syllables are indicated with italics.

★ The only sound that does differ from English is the r, which is rolled and stronger than in English.

★ Most other consonants can have a more emphatic pronunciation too (in which case they’re written as double letters). The actual sounds are basically the same, but the more emphatic pronunciation can alter the meaning of a word, eg sono so·no means ‘I am’, but sonno son·no means ‘sleep’.

★ Note also that dz is pronounced as the ‘ds’ in ‘lids’ and ly as the ‘li’ in ‘million’.

MUST-KNOW GRAMMAR

The structure of Italian holds no major surprises for English speakers since the two languages are quite closely related.

★ Italian has a formal and informal word for ‘you’ (Lei lay and tu too respectively). When talking to someone familiar or younger than you,
use the informal *tu* form. Phrases in this book use the form that is appropriate to the situation. Where both forms can be used, they are indicated by *pol* and *inf* respectively.

★ Italian also distinguishes between masculine and feminine forms of words, eg *bello/bella be·lo/be·la* (beautiful), indicated in this book by *m* and *f*.

★ Verbs have a different ending for each person, like the English ‘I do’ vs ‘he/she does’. Travellers don’t need to worry too much about this though – if you use the dictionary form of a verb in all contexts, you’ll still be understood.

**SOUNDS FAMILIAR?**

Numerous Italian words are already part of the English vocabulary – most of us are familiar with *ciao, pasta, bella, maestro, mafia*...
1. What’s the local speciality?
Qual’è la specialità di questa regione?
kwa-le la spe·cha·lee·ta dee kwes·ta re·jo·ne
A bit like the rivalry between medieval Italian city-states, these days the country’s regions compete in specialty foods and wines.

2. Which combined tickets do you have?
Quali biglietti cumulativi avete?
kwa-lee bee·lye·tee koo·moo·la·tee·vee a·ve·te
Make the most of your euro by getting combined tickets to various sights. They are available in all major Italian cities.

3. Where can I buy discount designer items?
C’è un outlet in zona? che oon owt·let in zo·na
Discount fashion outlets are big business in major cities – get bargain-priced seconds, samples and cast-offs for la bella figura.

4. I’m here with my husband/boyfriend.
Sono qui con il mio marito/ragazzo.
so-no kwee kon eel mee-o ma·ree·to/ra·ga·tso
Solo women travellers may receive unwanted attention in some parts of Italy. If ignoring fails, have a polite rejection ready.

5. Let’s meet at 6pm for pre-dinner drinks.
Ci vediamo alle 6 per un aperativo.
chee ve·dyam·o a·le say per oon a·pe·ree·tee·vo
At dusk, watch the main piazza get crowded with people sipping colourful cocktails and snacking the evening away: join your new friends for this authentic Italian ritual!
What’s up?  Cosa c’è?  ko·za che
All OK?  Tutto a posto?  too·ta pos·to
It’s OK.  Va bene.  va be·ne
Great!  Fantastico!  fan·tas·tee·ko
That’s true.  È vero.  e ve·ro
Sure.  Certo.  cher·to
No way!  Per niente!  per nyen·te
You’re kidding!  Scherzi!  sker·tsee
If only!  Magari!  ma·ga·ree
Really?  Davvero?  da·ve·ro