

welcome to Italy



Bella Vita

In few places do art and life intermingle so effortlessly. This may be the land of Dante, Michelangelo, da Vinci and Botticelli but it's also the home of Salvatore Ferragamo, Giorgio Armani and Gualtiero Marchesi. Food, fashion, art and architecture – you'll quickly learn that the root of Italian pathology is an unswerving dedication to living life well. A surprising number of Italians care deeply about the floral aftertastes of sheep cheese, the correct way to cut marble and the nuances of a Vivaldi concerto. Lurking behind the *disinvoltura* – the appearance of effortlessness – is a passionate attention to life's fine print. So slow down, start taking note of life's details and enjoy your own *bella vita*.

Bon Appetito

Then there's the food. Italy is quite literally a feast of endless courses, but no matter how much you gorge yourself, you'll always feel as though you haven't made it past the antipasti. Even the simplest snack can turn into a revelation, whether you're downing a slice of Slow Food pizza, a paper cone of *fritto misto* (fried seafood) or pistachio-flavoured gelato. The secret is an intense, even savage, attention to top-notch ingredients and fresh, seasonal produce. Although the origins of Italian food are earthy and rustic, and the Slow Food Movement aims to protect those artisanal roots, the modern Italian kitchen is also endlessly inventive. Get creative in Eataly's Slow Food super-



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Despite incessant praise, Italy continues to surprise and delight. If you get it right, travelling in the bel paese (beautiful country) is one of those rare experiences in life that cannot be overrated.

(left) View of Malcesine across Lago di Garda (p267)
(below) Duomo, Milan (p229)



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market, sample top-class wines at Rome's International Wine Academy and tour vineyards and olive groves to learn the latest production techniques that go into making that award-winning wine and olive oil sitting on your dining table.

Bel Paese

As if in homage to its people's love of fashion, Italy's outline – a 'boot' – makes it one of the most recognisable countries in the world. It is long and elegant – *c'e bella* – and is flanked on three sides by four Mediterranean seas (the Adriatic, Ionian, Ligurian and Tyrrhenian). The northern wall of the Alps and the Dolomites frostily encircle the north, fringed by sparkling glacial lakes,

while fiery volcanoes – Vesuvius, Etna and Stromboli – simmer in the south. Beyond the stereotypical image of art cities and museums, Italy is a place for doing as well as seeing. What can top descending the vertical chasm of the Gola Su Gorropu gorge or riding cowboy-style across the marshes of the Maremma and diving sun-split waters full of coral and barracuda? So, just when you think every nook and cranny of this amazing country has been explored, experienced and exhausted, flick through a few pages of this book and discover that some of Italy's best-kept secrets lie right beneath your nose.