

Welcome to Italy

If you get it right, travelling in the bel paese (beautiful country) is one of those rare experiences in life that cannot be overrated.

Cultural Riches

The French may rightfully brag about Paris, but Italy's showstopping cities include Venice, Florence and Rome. Epicentre of the Roman Empire and birthplace of the Renaissance, this sun-kissed over-achiever groans under the weight of its cultural catalogue: it's in Italy that you'll find Michelangelo's *David* and Sistine Chapel frescoes, Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* and *Primavera*, da Vinci's *The Last Supper*, and the classic villas of Andrea Palladio. And we haven't even mentioned the chariot-grooved streets of Pompeii, the Byzantine mosaics of Ravenna, or Giotto's revolutionary frescoes in Padua.

Bella Vita

In few places do art and life intermingle so effortlessly. This may be the land of Dante, Titian and Verdi, but it's also the home of Prada, Gualtiero Marchesi and Renzo Piano. Beauty, style and flair furnish every aspect of daily life, from those immaculately knotted ties and perfect espressos, to the flirtatious smiles of striking strangers. The root of Italian pathology is a dedication to living life well and, effortless as it may seem, driving that dedication is a reverence for the finer things. So slow down, take note, and indulge in a little *bella vita*.

Buon Appetito

It might look like a boot, but food-obsessed Italy feels more like a bountiful table. From delicate *tagliatelle al ragù* to velvety *cannoli*, every bite feels like a revelation. The secret: superlative ingredients and strictly seasonal produce. And while Italy's culinary soul might be earthy and rustic, it's equally ingenious and sophisticated. Expect some of the world's top fine-dining destinations, from San Pellegrino 'World's 50 Best' hot spots to Michelin-starred musts. So whether you're on a degustation odyssey in Modena, truffle hunting in Piedmont, or simply swilling powerhouse reds at Rome's International Wine Academy, prepare to swoon.

Luscious Landscapes

Italy's fortes extend beyond its galleries, plates and wardrobes. The country is one of Mother Nature's darlings, its geography offering rarely rivalled natural diversity. From the north's icy Alps and glacial lakes to the south's volcanic craters and turquoise grottoes, this is a place for doing as well as seeing. One day you're tearing down Courmayeur's powdery slopes, the next you could be riding cowboy-style across the marshes of the Maremma, or diving in coral-studded Campanian waters. Not bad for a country not much bigger than Arizona.



Why I Love Italy

By Cristian Bonetto, Author

Italy's 20 regions feel more like 20 independent states, each with its own dialects, traditions, architecture and glorious food. From nibbling on *knödel* in an Alto Adige chalet, to exploring souk-like market streets in Sicily, the choices are as diverse as they are seductive. Then there's the country's incomparable artistic treasures, which amount to more than the rest of the world put together. It's hard not to feel a little envious sometimes, but it's even harder not to fall madly in love.

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