

italian alphabet

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|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| <i>Aa</i> a | <i>Bb</i> bee | <i>Cc</i> chee | <i>Dd</i> dee | <i>Ee</i> e |
| <i>Ff</i> e-fe | <i>Gg</i> jee | <i>Hh</i> a-ka | <i>li</i> ee | <i>li</i> e-le |
| <i>Mm</i> e-me | <i>Nn</i> e-ne | <i>Oo</i> o | <i>Pp</i> pee | <i>Qq</i> koo |
| <i>Rr</i> e-re | <i>Ss</i> e-se | <i>Tt</i> tee | <i>Uu</i> oo | <i>Vv</i> voo |
| <i>Zz</i> tse-ta | | | | |

italian



introduction

All you need for *la dolce vita* is to be able to tell your *Moschino* from your *macchiato* and your *Fellini* from your *fettuccine*. Happily, you'll find Italian (*italiano ee-ta-ly-a-no*) an easy language to start speaking as well as a beautiful one to listen to. When even a simple sentence sounds like an aria it can be difficult to resist striking up a conversation – and thanks to widespread migration and the huge popularity of Italian culture and cuisine, you're probably familiar with words like *ciao*, *pasta* and *bella* already.

There are also many similarities between Italian and English which smooth the way for language learners. Italian is a Romance language – a descendent of Latin, the language of the Romans (as are French, Spanish, Portuguese and Romanian), and English has been heavily influenced by Latin, particularly via contact with French.

Up until the 19th century, Italy was a collection of autonomous states, rather than a nation-state. As a result, Italian has many regional dialects, including Sardinian and Sicilian. Some dialects are so different from standard Italian as to be considered distinct languages in their own right. It wasn't until the 19th century that the Tuscan dialect – the language of Dante, Boccaccio and Petrarch – became the standard language of the nation, and the official language of schools, media and administration. 'Standard Italian' is the variety that will take you from the top of the boot to the very toe – all the language in this phrasebook is in standard Italian.

The majority of the approximately 65 million people who speak Italian live, of course, in Italy. However, the language also has official status in San Marino, Vatican City, parts of Switzerland, Slovenia and the Istrian peninsula of Croatia. Italian was the official language of Malta during the period of the Knights of St John (1530–1798) and afterwards shared that status with English during the British rule. Only in 1934 was Italian withdrawn and substituted with the native Maltese language. Today, Maltese people are generally fluent in Italian. It might surprise you to learn that Italian is also spoken in the African nation of Eritrea, which was a colony of Italy from 1880 until 1941. Most Eritreans nowadays speak Italian only as a second language. Italian is widely used in Albania, Monaco and France, and spoken by large communities of immigrants worldwide. This chapter is designed to help you on your adventures in the Italian-speaking world – so, as the Italians would say, *In bocca al lupo!* *een bo-ka-loo-po* (lit: in the mouth of the wolf) – good luck!