



**EXPERIENCE
ITALY**



If you were to pick one country that by its very nature embodied ingenuity, art and beauty, Italy would surely be it. Welcome to the country that ruled the world two millennia ago, with an empire that at its zenith reached all the way from Britain to Babylon, leaving roads, modern-day law, mileage and the Latin alphabet in its legacy. *Benvenuti* to the cultured land that gave us the piano and the violin, opera and ballet, and the celestial, exquisitely wrought visions of Michelangelo, Raphael, Giotto, da Vinci and Botticelli that cavort across gallery walls and church ceilings in Rome, Florence and Venice – each one a petal on the blooming flower of the Renaissance.

The art splayed flamboyantly across every town and city is wondrous, but even it cannot measure up to the ravishing allure of the country itself, which sweeps you up in its romantic embrace. Italy's love of indulgence shows in its obsession with *mangiare* (eating). And who can blame it? Parmesan and Parma ham, soft-centred Neapolitan pizza and fresh-fruit gelato, espresso and cappuccino, pasta in a zillion different guises, the lingering ricotta-filled sweetness of Sicilian *cannoli* and the mouth-puckering tartness of *limoncello* – every bite is a revelation, every meal an exuberant, three-hour-long feast. Just you wait.

This book is not your typical guidebook. Rather than describe hotels or restaurants, we want to introduce you to the personality and, dare we say, the very heart

of Italian culture and landscape. Which means this book is broken up not into regions or sights, but into five chapters divided by the themes that season Italian life, for visitors and locals alike:

- **Bravo Italia:** The Italian Icons You Already Love
- **Tradizione:** Treasured Heritage, Hill Towns & Harvests
- **Viva Italia:** Modern Life & the Italian Way
- **Che Sorpresa!** Underrated & Unexpected Experiences
- **Dolce Vita:** Indulging in Italy's Sweet Life

By leading you on a page-by-page scavenger hunt in this book, we want to show you how, whether you're cruising through the vine-ribboned countryside of Chianti in Tuscany, clambering in the Dolomites, or bustling for the freshest produce at a crowded Sicilian market, Italy will amaze, enlighten and enthrall like nowhere else on Earth. And everyone is welcome to take a generous bite out of it.

...and with that,
welcome to Italy

Contents

Introduction	2
Landscapes & Journeys	6
Food & Drink	8
Arts, History & Design	10
People & Culture	12
Impressions	14
A Day in Italy	16
Experiences by Region	18
Northern Italy	20
Central Italy	24
Southern Italy	28

Bravo Italy	32
Mangiare Bene	34
The Perfect Pizza	38
From Fiats to Ferraris	42
Football: Italy's Other Religion	44
Give Me Five!	48
Rome's Ancient Wonders	52
The Ruins of Pompeii	56
Where the Art Is	58
Italian Architecture	64
Know Your Grapes: A Short Guide to Italian Wine	70
Wine Trails: Friuli	74
Italian Design	80
Design Icon: The Vespa	84
Rome	86
Ten Ways to Fall in Love with Rome	88
The Vatican	92

Tradizione	96
The Slow Food Revolution	98
Following the Foodie Trail	100
Unearthing Treasures	104
Life on the Farm	106
Piecing It Together: Mosaics	108
Hiking in the Garfagnana	110
A Springtime City Break in Lucca	112
Shakespeare's Italian Plays	114
Hill Towns of Tuscany, Umbria & Le Marche	116
Lecce: Baroque Meets Papier Mâché	120
Emilia-Romagna's Soul Food	122
Reaping the Harvest	128
Viva the Violins!	132
Puglia's Peasant Cuisine	134
Pinocchio, Pulcinella & Opera dei Pupi	140
Over the Horizon: Salina	142
Florence	146
Florence from Above	148
Dante's Florence	150
Florence Day-Tripper: Fiesole	152

Viva Italia	154
All in the Family	156
Abbey & Monastery Devotions	160
Restoring Italy	162
A Snapshot of Cortona	166
Saints, Feasts & Festivals	168
Settimana Santa: Easter Holy Week	174
Walk Like an Italian	176
The Secret to a Long Life: Acciaroli	178
Galatina: Home of the Tarantella	180
Aperitivo Time	182
Not the Corleone You Know	184
Coffee Culture	186
Exploring Sicily's Markets	190
Coastal Life in Polignano & Monopoli	192
Hiking WWII's Freedom Trail	194
Milan	198
La Bella Figura: Milanese Style	200
Behind the Scenes at Milan's La Scala	202
Glamorous Adventures in Milan	204

Che Sorpresa!	206
Offbeat Stays	208
La Grassa, La Dotta & La Rossa	212
Mysteries of Sardinia's Ancients	214
Il Vallone dei Mulini	218
The Sassi of Matera	220
A Guide to Explosive Italy	224
Explosive Stromboli by Night	226
Törggelen in South Tyrol	228
Eating Gluten-Free in the Land of Pasta	232
Iron Roads of the Dolomites	234
The Wilds of Abruzzo	236
The Battle of the Oranges	240
Wonders of Ancient Sicily	242
In Hot Pursuit of Targa Florio	248
Travel Back in Time with the Cowboys of Tuscany	250
Naples	252
Naples, the City Below	254
Neapolitan Artisan Traditions	260

Dolce Vita	262
The Grand Tour	264
Italy on Rails	266
The Sweet Stuff: Tiramisu	268
The Scoop on Gelati	272
Yacht Life on the Costa Smeralda	274
Italy on the Silver Screen	276
Lake Garda: Lemon Houses & Olive Oil	280
Driving the Amalfi Coast Road	282
Little Luxuries on the Amalfi Coast	286
Living Luxe on Lake Como	288
Cioccolato Per Favore	290
A Night at the Opera	292
Fine Dining Italian-Style	294
A Walk in the Park	296
A Palazzo Here, a Villa There	300
The Versailles of Italy: Reggia di Caserta	302
Venice	304
Carnevale Season	306
Life on Water	308
Index	312

Landscapes & Journeys

Exploring postcard-worthy vistas



Above Amalfi Coast Road

Italy is *amore a prima vista* (love at first sight). We're not talking a mere flirtation, but a fully blown, red-hot love affair that grips you from the first instant you clap eyes on its landscapes, which inspire towards the lyrical and profound. Like a scalding-hot espresso shot, such intense beauty is a jolt to the system. The country's insanely lovely spread of deep-cut, vine-blanketed valleys, silver-green olive groves, wild mountains, hillsides frothed with pines and cypress trees, hissing volcanoes, powder-white beaches and medieval hill towns more than justify its nickname of the *bel paese* ('beautiful country').

This is true whether you are swinging along the nail-biting hairpin bends of the Amalfi Coast between ragged mountains and a sea of stained-glass blue, marveling at the cliff-clinging villages of Cinque Terre, discovering your favourite Roman neighbourhood, or lounging on a cove on Sardinia's Costa Smeralda. Try as we might, we can never convey on paper the romance of a peachy Sorrento sunset, the way the sea spreads out like a blue silk cloth in Capri at the hour when cicadas strike up their tentative drone, or the citrus-sharp perfume wafting from lemon houses on Lake Garda.

Travel here isn't about spectating – this is a country made for embracing life to



Above Matera

its fullest by slow touring, socialising or striking out on foot. Tick off medieval hill towns like rosary beads in Tuscany. Listen for the Duomo's out-of-tune chime sitting on piazza steps in Renaissance Venice, Florence and Lucca in the golden light of evening. Hole up for a day or two in a prehistoric *sassi* cave in Matera. Hike a heart-pumping *via ferrata* (iron road) in the pink-spined Dolomites, an off-the-radar trail in the wild Appenines of Abruzzo, or a path skirting a volatile volcano in the Aeolians. And let yourself fall for Italy time and time again.

Experiences

- Give Me Five! p48
- Ten Ways to Fall in Love with Rome p88
- Following the Foodie Trail p100
- Life on the Farm p106
- Hiking in the Garfagnana p110
- A Springtime City Break in Lucca p112
- Hill Towns of Tuscany, Umbria & Le Marche p116
- Lecce: Where the Baroque Meets Papier Mâché p120
- Over the Horizon: Salina p142
- Florence from Above p148
- Florence Day-Tripper: Fiesole p152
- Hiking WWII's Freedom Trail p194
- Offbeat Stays p208
- La Grassa, La Dotta & La Rossa p212
- Il Vallone dei Mulini p218
- The Sassi of Matera p220
- A Guide to Explosive Italy p224
- Explosive Stromboli by Night p226
- Iron Roads of the Dolomites p234
- The Wilds of Abruzzo p236
- In Hot Pursuit of Targa Florio p248
- The Grand Tour p264
- Italy on Rails p266
- Yacht Life on the Costa Smeralda p274
- Lake Garda: Lemon Houses & Olive Oil p280
- Driving the Amalfi Coast Road p282
- Living Luxe on Lake Como p288
- A Walk in the Park p296
- A Palazzo Here, a Villa There p300
- The Versailles of Italy: Reggia di Caserta p302

Food & Drink

An experience to savour



So you probably know that good food is the way to an Italian's heart, but we're not talking fancy-pants cooking: just quality ingredients, a pinch of know-how, a sprinkling of herbs, a dollop of love and generosity that knows no bounds. Carlo Petrini launched the Slow Food movement here in 1986, and today the Italian kitchen still hinges on the Holy Trinity of simplicity, seasonality and sustainability. Primary ingredients are given their chance to shine: be it a San Marzano tomato grown in volcanic soil below Mt Vesuvius, freshly caught seafood hitting a chilli-spiked grill in Naples, or a pungent, richly aromatic *tartufo bianco* (white truffle) unearthed in damp autumn woods near Alba.

The importance the Italians afford to *mangiare bene* (eating well) goes way beyond the need to satisfy appetites. The world grinds to a halt for *pranzo* (lunch), the latest political scandal is resolved with the barista over *un caffè*, a stroll in the *centro storico* detours via the gelateria, the pre-dinner *aperitivo* is a fine excuse to meet friends and gorge on a free buffet. Eating alone? Unheard of. As the proverb goes, *chi mangia da solo si strozza* (he who eats alone chokes).

Delis and markets brim with temptation: silky buffalo mozzarella from Campania, nutty Parmigiano cheese, wafer-thin Parma ham, syrupy balsamic from Emilia



Romagna, ricotta-oozing cannoli from Sicily and Turin chocolate. Not to mention velvety red Barolo, Amarone and Montepulciano wines from the vines of Piedmont, Veneto and Tuscany. Scoff *marinara* pizza, topped with tomato, garlic and oregano, hot and chewy from a wood-fired oven in Naples, crispy *panelle* (chickpea fritters) on Palermo's backstreets, or a humbly delicious meal of *fave e cicoria* (fava beans and chicory) in *cucina povera* country, Puglia. Just remember, flattery will win you new friends and second helpings.

Experiences

- Mangiare Bene p34
- The Perfect Pizza p38
- Know Your Grapes: A Short Guide to Italian Wine p70
- Wine Trails: Friuli p74
- The Slow Food Revolution p98
- Following the Foodie Trail p100
- Unearthing Treasures p104
- Emilia Romagna's Soul Food p122
- Reaping the Harvest p128
- Puglia's Peasant Cuisine p134
- Aperitivo Time p182
- Coffee Culture p186
- Exploring Sicily's Markets p190
- Törggelen in South Tyrol p228
- Eating Gluten-Free in the Land of Pasta p232
- The Sweet Stuff: Tiramisu p268
- The Scoop on Gelati p272
- Lake Garda: Lemon Houses & Olive Oil p280
- Little Luxuries on the Amalfi Coast p286
- Cioccolato Per Favore p290
- Fine Dining Italian-Style p294

Southern Italy



Above Mt Vesuvius, Campania

*Beautifully sun-bleached,
ancient and complex*



Above Sardinia

If you could squeeze the very essence out of Italy as easily as you can turn lemons into *limoncello*, the zesty, pithy bit would be the south. Presided over by ever-smouldering volcanoes, the southern cities brim with dilapidated beauty, speeding scooters, boisterous greetings and loveable chaos. This is as loud, unadulterated and passionate as Italy gets. Sun-baked towns are lined with sherbet-bright houses where bloomers hang out to dry in rosemary-scented breezes. Cliff-straddling resorts perch over coves strung out like pearls and a sea of pure sapphire. The interior is cloaked in citrus orchards, olive groves and pine woods that are thrumming with cicadas. In between, Greco-Roman ruins provide an insight into the ancient

world of frisky emperors and bodacious goddesses.

Toss aside your fixed itinerary for a moment, as the best way to get familiar with Campania, 'the boot' of Puglia, Basilicata and Calabria, and the islands – Sicily, Sardinia and the Aeolians – is to tune into their laid-back groove, listening to the waves and peering up to skies that never seem to have known dust or cloud. Welcome to the *Mezzogiorno* (Southern Italy)!

Once overlooked entirely as the down-and-out, dangerous cousin of Rome, Naples has spruced up its act of late and is now charged with a raw energy and theatrical edge. Back alleys of crumbling beauty lead to bountiful markets, baroque chapels, crowded piazzas and scruffy bars

with cocky baristas. Culture? You bet. The showstopper in the Unesco-listed *centro storico* is the Museo Archeologico Nazionale, with its haul of Roman treasures looted from Pompeii. But maybe you came for opera at the Teatro di San Carlo where Verdi was once musical director, a tour of the city's subterranean ruins, or, let's face it, the food. All Italians go into raptures about Neapolitan cooking. Pizza was born here and it's still legendary: giant, wood-fired discs topped with tomatoes, mozzarella, basil and a drizzle of olive oil. Then there's the spaghetti, perhaps spiked with hot pepper or served *alle vongole* (with clams).

Spreading out around Naples, Campania beguiles with its coastline and

"White heat rises from vineyards and silvery olive groves, mountains, forests and small fishing villages."

archaeological sites. Horizon-hogging Mt Vesuvius has blown its top more than 30 times and eerie Pompeii is a stark reminder of its malign forces, as is fossilised Herculaneum which suffered a similar fate. Further south, Paestum hides some of the best-preserved ancient Greek temples in existence. Beyond the history wow factor, the region romances with the ravishing Amalfi Coast – cliff-hugging Sorrento and flower-wreathed Ravello – and the chic island escapes of Capri and Ischia, with their clear waters for summer dreaming.

The boot is formed of Puglia, Basilicata and Calabria, a region made for slow touring because *fa troppo caldo* (it's too hot) to rush. White heat rises from vineyards and silvery olive groves, mountains, forests and small fishing villages. Beyond bolshie ports like Brindisi and Bari, there is the coastline of Promontorio del Gargano, bathed in pearly light; Matera, European Capital of Culture 2019, with its compelling *sassi* (cave dwellings) and 7000-year

history; baroque stunner Lecce; and the Valle d'Itria's beehive-like *trulli* houses. The region's earthy authenticity is reflected in its *cucina povera* (peasant cooking), using staples like durum wheat, tomatoes, artichokes, fava beans and whatever fish is going fresh.

Calabria's toe kicks Sicily into the Tyrrhenian sea. The island is spiced up with its own distinct identity, fabulous coastlines, terrifically preserved Greek temples and stratovolcano Mt Etna huffing and puffing away in the east. Gritty-but-pretty Palermo triumphs in food and culture, with its opera house, Arab-Norman churches, street food (try *panelle* – chickpea fritters – for starters) and cafes selling decadent *cannoli* (pastry tubes oozing sweet ricotta).

Sicily's island neighbours are the Aeolian Islands, where lava-spitting Stromboli rises in a perfect pyramid above a cobalt sea, and Sardinia, where you can flop with celebrities on some of the loveliest beaches on Earth.

