



ROY'S ITALY

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This is a short "book" to help those going to Italy for the first time to enjoy their trip even more by knowing just enough about Italy, the Italian people and the Italian language to have a really great time. Almost every American wants to go to Italy and live and experience the Italian lifestyle. Everyone who does not speak Italian or who does not know much about Italian history is more than nervous about the trip. Ahhhh! So one, uses an online language program, buys computer language programs, or audio books or Italian For Dummies, etc. usually several weeks before the trip. As we say in *Brooklyn Italian, fagetaboutit!* It is not going to happen. If you think you can learn the Italian language and learn about the Italian people in a few weeks or a few months, *fagetaboutit!* So what to do?

What to do is read this little book and take it for granted that after spending ten years in Italy and being a really smart guy (*che?*) that I am going to give you the scoop on getting by in Italy and really enjoying your experience. A no brainer. No matter how nervous or worried or whatever you are, you will have a good time if you follow my advice. Quite frankly, even if you did not know about this book, you will still have a great time in Italy regardless of anything else. Italy is fantastic. The people are great. Everything you have heard about it in terms of art, fashion, food and just the physical beauty of Italy is absolutely true. Even if you are the most clueless person on the planet, you will get by and have a great time.

So what is so different about my approach to teaching you all you need to know about coming to Italy and having a great time? What makes me so "smart"? Well, I have been living here for 12 years and am married to a wonderful Italian woman (who lived in New York for about 30 years). I live in Villa San Giovanni in Tuscia. It is a typical Italian village (population 1,300). I am the only American in the village. The only way to make money here is to teach English. Every child in Italy takes English in school. For many years. None of them can speak it! Everyone gets on my case for not speaking Italian fluently. I tried to explain that it is not easy, actually impossible to learn a new language as one gets older (I am 78 but act like a 17 year old). So, my plan was to teach everyone here English. I started teaching English classes. After a couple of years I began to understand the differences between the languages and the people.

What I realized and had never seen in any Italian language course were the underlying things that provide one with a proper understanding of what is really going on. As an example, after a lesson with 3 of my wonderful young students it occurred to me (I don't know why) that, wholly cow, there are no such things as Spelling Bees in Italy. So I talked about it with my students and they were like, what the heck are you talking about?? So I explained that in the US we have this huge deal every year called *Spelling Bees*. Local, regional, state and finally a national contest

and it's a big deal. The reason is, of course, that Italian is pronounced exactly (99% of the time) as it is spelled! So if you ask a child to spell a word, of course they can. Good news. Italian is easy to read and pronounce.

Another example is (and it seems so obvious once you get understand it) that every (again 99%) Italian word ends in a vowel. That's why the language is so beautiful. By far, it is the most beautiful language (at least to me) as every word has a "soft" ending. Opera in Italian is the best for this reason. Everyone's name ends in a vowel. As opposed to English, where almost every word ends in a consonant (except for the letter e which at the end of a word does not really act as a normal vowel but is more of an accent mark telling you that the previous vowel has a long pronunciation). The only words in English that end in a vowel are usually of foreign origin (*pizza, piano, aqua, etc.*).

In addition to language, my little "book" (you might be reading this on your iPhone or Kindle, etc.) will give you insights into the people, their customs, the euro, driving a car, sight seeing, eating, buying stuff, and a bunch more practical traveling advice.

Most importantly, this book should give you the confidence of really enjoying your trip/vacation regardless of your current state of anxiety.

Roy



Italy

Depending on your knowledge level of history and geography, you may have a somewhat idealized view of Italy and Italians. Good, because for the most part whatever image and expectation you have of Italy will be realized. It is unbelievably beautiful. Ancient ruins are everywhere. Art is everywhere. The food is fantastic. The weather is great particularly during the summer and fall. And, Italians truly love America and Americans. They really do. Very few speak English but then again very few Americans speak Italian. Not a problem.

It is a large country with many unique geographic areas, from the Alps in the north to Sicily in the south. However, when I say large, it is a relative thing. We Americans really don't know how large large is because America is really huge. Big time huge. But we live there so we don't really see it. So, how large is Italy? Well, it would easily fit into the State of California (it is smaller than 5 US states: Alaska, Texas, California, Montana and New Mexico). As a matter of fact, it is approximately 80% the size of CA. It has 60,000,000 people compared to CA's 38,000,000. Sounds as if it is densely populated. It is not. The vast majority of Italy consists of open spaces. Just a few kilometers north of Rome are huge commercial farms.

We think of Italian history as ancient history but in fact, Italy the republic is a new entity, only founded in 1948. The US is much older as a country. The modern country of Italy is an amalgamation of formerly separate countries, kingdoms, principalities, Papal States and the like. Although there is a common Italian language called standard Italian, it is in fact not spoken widely as there are as many Italian dialects as there are regions. Even small villages (such as where I live) have their own dialect. In fact, what some consider dialects are actually different Romance languages (Sicilian and Milanese for instance).

There is a north/south orientation to Italy (as with most countries I suppose) in terms of the people. Generally speaking, the people in the north consider themselves superior to those in the south. Thus the Milanese look down upon just about everyone else in Italy. And Romans have only the greatest disdain for those in Napoli. The wealthiest live in the north. The poorest in the south.

Geographically, there is in fact not a north/south orientation although most would say there is. Italy does not lie from north to south but rather from the northwest to the southeast. In fact, if you drive true north out of Rome you will pass through L'Aquila and soon run into the Adriatic Sea not the Alps. Check out Italy on a map and see what I mean.

One of the cool things you can do during your trip is not visit just one country, Italy, but three countries. Italy, the Vatican and San Marino. Italy is somewhat unique in that there are two independent states within it. Moreover, there is a part of Italy in the north that is completely contained within Switzerland! So you could visit there and make it four countries for the price of one.

Your Trip

Where should you go and what should you do? That of course depends totally on you. You might be the 20 cities in 10 days kind of person. Or you might be the 1 resort in 10 days kind of person. This guide is not a sightseeing guide. There are a zillion of them on the market. My only suggestion is that if you want to see the "real" Italy you are not going to find it in Rome or Florence (any more than you find the "real" US in NYC or LA). You have to get off the beaten track to find a village like ours, as this is truly the real Italy. However, most people do the big tourist thing the first time and if they come back, they give the "real" Italy a shot. After friends stay with us in Villa San Giovanni, almost to a person they comment, "This is just what I was looking for..."

One other thing I would give you advice on is that Italians know how to do the beach! I thought I was a beach person and would teach them a thing or two about how to do the beach. Duh! Italy is a peninsula sticking out in the sea and has thousands of miles of shoreline and beaches. I would highly recommend that if you have a chance, spend part of your vacation on the sea. In August, it is unbelievably crowded (but a nice crowded) as everyone is on vacation with most at the beach. The rest of the year is great and you can find great bargains for housing.

Lodging

Being a tourist Mecca, Italy has thousands of hotels and now of course thousands of AirB&B type of accommodations. Compared to the US, accommodations are very reasonable. In our village for instance, you can get a great B&B for 40 euros a night. Even the best hotels are inexpensive compared to the US. As an example, my daughter and I recently spent a long weekend in Venice at a 5 star hotel. One of the best I have ever stayed in. It was about \$250 a night. In NYC it would have been at least \$800. Probably more. However, the hotel I usually stay in Venice is \$150 a night. Right near the Rialto Bridge. Great place. And breakfast is always included in the price where ever you go. In Florence we stay in a B&B that is 40 euros a night.

Museums and Monuments

Oh boy. So much to see and so little time. The number one thing to do is to buy your tickets in advance! If you want to see the David in Florence for instance, if you don't buy a ticket in advance, you probably won't see it. Even if you are willing to stand in line for hours. My recommendation is to buy a ticket from a tour company. You will get an English speaking guide (who is normally fantastic). And you will get right in. You want to see the Vatican Museum (a must), buy a guided tour visit. You will get right in at the allotted time and pass by the thousands (and thousands) of people waiting in line. I don't know the exact prices for the guided tours but let's say it's \$50. Believe me, it's a real deal.

Buying Stuff In Italy

Italy is actually quite inexpensive. I live here on my Social Security pension. Not much, but is good enough to live a very comfortable live style (my wife owns our modest home). In Brooklyn it doesn't come close to paying the rent. Food here is fresh and very inexpensive. We go to a local outdoor market on Tuesdays and buy enough fresh vegetables for 2 weeks. Cost? About \$25! We buy meat from our friend and butcher Filippo. It is unbelievable and about half the price of meat in the US. I belong to a golf club that who's dues would be 5 times higher in the US. Clothing and household items are very reasonable. The only really high cost items here are energy related. Car fuel, electricity and gas are super expensive as Italy has no energy resources of its own. My cell phone is \$15 a month. TV satellite is about \$50. Internet service is \$35 a month.

Speaking the Language

I believe it was an old Steve Martin joke about France and the French but I will use Italy instead. "I love Italy and Italians but the only problem is that they have a different word for everything!"

If you do not already speak Italian fluently, then you will not become fluent before you go to Italy. Not in two weeks, two months or even more time. So what to do? Well, you can take a class, buy some books (Italian for Dummies is not bad), buy a computer program, use an on-line service (DuoLingo and Babbel are pretty good) or just accept the fact that you will not be speaking Italian on your trip. So, just follow my advice and all will be well. Read ahead.

TWENTY WORDS/PHRASES IS ALL YOU NEED!

Small talk is small talk wherever you go. Italians love small talk and don't expect or want much more! To get along just fine and enjoy your trip "communicating" with people you meet along the way, you really only need to learn a few things (and pronounce them well which we will talk about in the next section). In order of usage, here is what you should learn:

Buongiorno – it literally means good day but really means hello. It is said to everyone you meet during the day up until about 2 pm when you begin saying,

Buonasera – which literally means good evening but really means hello after 2pm.

You say buongiorno or buonasera to anyone and everyone you meet. Even strangers on the street. If you make eye contact you say buongiorno/buona sera. Constantly. These two phrases make up 50% of my daily speech!

Si – which means yes and,

No – which of course means no.

Grazie – thank you and

Prego – which is the most common way of saying "you're welcome"

However, these two words are also a way of saying please. Please in Italian is *per favore* but is not used as commonly as the way we say please. Italians rarely say something like this "May I have a cup of coffee, please". When I first came here I thought maybe they were a little rude not saying please. But it is just a different way of expressing the same thing. Rather than saying *per favore*, they typically say *grazie* or *prego* in its place.

Ciao – This word is the quintessential Italian word if there ever was one. It is so familiar and beloved that it has entered into the English language (and many other languages). It is both a greeting and a goodbye expression (aloha is the only other example I know of). However, it is an informal word, only used between people that know each other well. It is incorrect to use it with a stranger and particularly with an elderly person who you do not know or are not related to. This is somewhat important as Italian has formal and familiar ways of saying things. Thus, in most situations, you should not use *ciao*, but rather say *buon giorno* or *buona sera* upon greeting and

Arrivederci – which is Italian for goodbye. It's such a fun word if you can trill your r's and pronounce it correctly! More on pronunciation soon.

Mi scusi – is excuse me and even sort of sounds like it. Most Italians (although not all) are very polite and say *mi scusi* often along with its sister phrase,

Mi dispiace – which is I'm sorry.

When in doubt, use these two expressions. You will always be well received. For instance, you can say, *Mi dispiace*,

Io non parlo italiano – meaning I'm sorry. I don't speak Italian. It's kind of an interesting thing to say because you are saying you don't speak Italian but are saying it in Italian! Shows you're trying and that goes a long way. You might follow that with,

Parli Inglese? – or do you speak English? Be surprised if the person does as most Italians do not speak English. Tourist areas are different of course but the average Italian does not speak English and is reluctant to do so in most cases not because they are being a little snobby (can you say France?) or haven't taken English classes but because they are embarrassed to do so as their pronunciation of English is very poor. English is very difficult to pronounce for an Italian. Very.

Come sta? – is the formal way of asking someone, How are you? *Come stai* is the informal version. Just as in English, asking someone how they are is a common part of greetings. The answer is usually

Bene, grazie – or fine thank you. My most common response to *come stai* is,

Cosi, cosi – or so, so. A nice phrase I think and if you use it, it shows a little more facility with the Italian language.

Mi chiamo e – is My name is (Roy). Of course you might want to ask the person what their name is and would do so with come si chiama?

Permesso? – This is the equivalent of May I, i.e., you are asking permission. More importantly, it is almost always used when entering someone's home. It is a sign of respect. My wife would never enter someone's home without saying it, even if it were a close friend or relative. Kind of nice actually.

Questioni pratiche - well, this means practical questions and I don't expect you to use this expression but I thought I would throw all the practical short questions into one section. Kind of cheating as it puts it over the top for just 20 words/phrases. But these all come into play at some point. They include **Chi?** for Who? **Cosa?** for What? **Dove?** for Where? **Come?** for How? **Perche** for Why? (and an interesting word as it also means because) and **Quanto?** For How much?

That's it. Learn these words, expressions and questions and you will get along just fine. Of course, you need to pronounce them properly.

Google Translate Conversation Mode

Google Translate is fantastic. For instance, you can see a sign in Italian, point your phone at it, press the button and Google will translate the text. However, the most important feature for a traveler is the conversation mode. Easy to use. You press the button and say for instance "Where is the train station". The Italian hears "Dov'e fjdlsjfdjkd". Then you hold the phone up to them and they say "dalsjòfjjjjajdsf" and you hear "ljaòfdasjfdasjk". Real time translation. It's just great. I am never going to be fluent in Italian, but use Google Conversation mode when something important needs to be said and understood.

PRONUNCIATION OR WHY "THERE ARE NO SPELLING BEES IN ITALY"

I've had a lot of big DUH! or Homer Simpson DOH! moments here in Italy. LOL. One of them took place a couple of years into my living here. I had three girls I taught on Saturday mornings. They had been with me for 15 lessons or so. I was reading the news online before they came over and was reading about the results of the US National Spelling Bee competition. I always followed it as spelling was something my mother was big on and it stuck with me. I decided to ask the girls about it (I always like a topic to discuss in English to improve conversational skills). So I bring the subject up and ask them if they have ever participated in a spelling bee at any level. Well, the 3 of them are looking at me like I've grown a new head. And then, the big DUH! went off in my head. There are no frigging spelling bees in Italy! It's impossible because Italian is pronounced e-x-a-c-t-l-y as it is spelled! Well, at least 99.9% of the time it is and that's close enough.

Once you know the sound of the letters, you can pronounce anything. And the name of the letter is the sound. For instance in Italian the letter "e" is pronounced "eh" or like our letter named "a". It is always an "a" or "eh" sound. No exceptions (well, so rarely you are never likely to run into one). So the word for where is dove or doh

veh. The word for how is come or coh meh. This is true for all vowels and most consonants (again a few exceptions particularly with the letter "c").

THE IMPORTANCE OF VOWELS IN ITALIAN

Vowels are more important in Italian than in English. Much, much, more. It took me a while to figure this out even though it was staring me in the face all along. In addition to their normal importance (the role of vowels in English) and the fact that Italian vowels and English vowels are identical there are two major differences between English and Italian when it comes to them. The first is the soon to be obvious difference in their sounds. Only the "O" has a similar sound. The other 4 vowels are totally different.

However, the most important difference between English and Italian is that virtually every Italian word and every Italian name ends in a vowel! Pull out your Italian dictionary and check it out. Every single word will end in a vowel. If it does not, then that is an indication that the word is not Italian but some other language. For instance, there are the words bar, gas and computer in Italian but they come from English. And the Italian words for North, South, East and West are Nord, Sud, Est and Oest. But they are in fact Latin words. All Italian names (people or place) end in a vowel. This is in contrast to English wherein almost all words end in a consonant. The exception is the letter "e" but in fact an "e" at the end of a word is not acting as a vowel normally acts. It tells you whether the preceding vowel has a long or short sound.

So, the answer as to why Italian is such a beautiful language and why Italian opera is the most beautiful (don't even get started on German opera being beautiful...) is due to the fact that all the words have a soft ending!

Unfortunately, the vowel sounds are different and can be confusing to both English and Italian speakers alike. Those sounds are:

A, a - in Italian this is pronounced as "ah"

E, e - in Italian this is pronounced as "eh" as in our letter "a"

I, i - in Italian this is pronounced as "ee" as in our letter "e"

O, o - in Italian this is pronounced as "oh" just as in English

U, u - in Italian this is pronounced as "ooo"

So, same letters, different sounds. My Italian English students find it almost impossible to pronounce the English vowels properly. Almost impossible.

Say these vowel sounds to yourself over and over. Remember the good news. There is only one sound per vowel (as opposed to English where each vowel can have many different sounds, i.e. , long or short).

THE ITALIAN ALPHABET

Well, you might think that English and Italian use the exact same alphabet and you would be sort of right. In actuality Italian has fewer letters than English. Pure Italian does not have a "J", "K", "W", "X" or "Y"! You may see words in Italian that contain these letters, but the words are in fact, not of Italian origin.

However, just because Italian does not contain these letters doesn't mean that Italian doesn't contain the same sounds that these letters produce. It does, but just in a different way.

For instance, I live in Villa San Giovanni in Tuscany. This is another of those DUH moments. San Giovanni is of course the Italian way of saying Saint John. Notice the J in John. Well Giovanni is not pronounced Gee oh van nee as us English speakers would say it but rather as Joh van nee. Thus a Gi before a vowel (it's a little more complicated but this is good enough) is not a "g" and an "i" but rather a "j". Thus no need for a letter "j". Same for the letter "k". A "k" sound in Italian is made with the letters ch as in the words che (what) or chi (who).

Driving in Italy

People are always asking me what is it like to drive in Italy. The hidden questions are, is it safe? Are Italians crazy drivers? Will I die? Should I forget driving and just take the trains? Things like that.

Well, the good news is that driving in Italy is a great way to see the country and in fact, if you are going to do a "grand tour" is a necessity if you are not part of a large guided tour group where transportation is arranged for you.

Yes, Italy has a great train system but they pretty much run only between major metro areas. If you want to visit the hundreds of smaller locations you can only do it with an automobile (a car in Italy is called a "macchina" which means machine).

So you will need to rent a car. Not a problem. However, make sure you get one large enough for the number of occupants and your luggage. For the most part, cars in Italy are small and have little trunk space. You have been warned! If it's just two of you, no problem, you can use the small trunk and the backseat. However, for 3 or 4 people, rent a larger car.

Almost all cars in Italy have a stick shift. More than 90%. If you cannot drive a stick shift make sure you reserve a car with an automatic. However, be aware that at the moment you go to pick up your rental, they may not have an automatic available regardless of your reservation.

Almost all cars use diesel fuel (called gasolio while gasoline is called benzina). Fuel prices are some of the highest in the world. Currently (2020) gas is approximately \$7 a gallon (it's been as high as \$10 since I have lived here)! However, most cars are extremely fuel-efficient and get great mileage. My 16 year old Alpha Romeo 147 averages 45 MPG!

Distance and speed are of course in kilometers not miles. It can be somewhat disconcerting to see a speed limit sign that says 100 (kilometers per hour). However it is easy to convert to miles per hour. Just multiple by .6. Thus, 100 kph is 60 mph (100 x .6). Simple. Likewise distance. If you see a sign that says Rome is 200 kilometers away just multiply by .6 to find out that means it is 120 miles away.

Roads in Italy are pretty good. They have the Autostrada system, which is sort of like the Interstate system in the US. However, it is mostly a toll system and the tolls are quite high (use your credit card in the machine rather than a toll booth person). The speed limit is 130 kph. Or about 80 mph! There are limited access roads between most major points not connected via the Autostrada. Speed limits are usually in the 90 kph range. Then there are thousands of miles of local roads that are quite beautiful to drive on. However, Italian roads are not as safe as what you typically find in the US. They are poorly lit at night if at all. They are poorly marked. There is less room for error should something go wrong (like a flat tire).

The "bad" news regarding driving in Italy is that Italy has one of the highest fatality rates of any modern country. Particularly compared to the US. The reasons are really three fold. First, as mentioned above, the road system is not as safe as what one normally finds in the US. Second, traffic law enforcement is totally different in Italy. Compared to the US, it is non-existent. This lack encourages what we would consider reckless driving on a part of the driving public. Surprisingly this behavior is particularly true of affluent Italians driving high-end cars (BMW's Mercedes, Audis, large SUV's etc.). Speeding, tail gating and dangerous passing on 2 lane roads is quite common.

Another contributing factor is that driving patterns are very inconsistent meaning that there are many types of vehicles and drivers on the road from the aforementioned reckless elite to farmers riding their tractors on major thoroughfares.

Traffic law enforcement in Italy is odd to say the least. The biggest difference is that the major law enforcement, traffic or otherwise, is conducted primarily by two federal police forces, the Carabinieri and the Polizia. They are widely feared by the driving public but not for concern over traffic violations but because of having incorrect documents (driving licenses, registration, insurance, passports etc). The standard method of operation is for these police to stand along the side of the road and wave people over with a little paddle. There is no such thing as probable cause. You never see police on patrol like you do in the US. If you do see them on the road it is because they are going from one place to another, not patrolling. There are local police also, but they operate in a similar manner. I have never seen someone stopped by the police for a moving violation.

Speed cameras are the norm. Most speeding tickets are given this way. Be on the watch out.

Stop signs here (and they do say STOP) are treated as yield signs. Be warned.

Driving in the big cities seems chaotic but works. Just go with the flow ("when in Rome, do as the Romans do").

Motor scooters and motorcycles are everywhere and are ubiquitous in the big cities. Everywhere! In Rome alone there are an estimated 300,000 of them. And they do not obey traffic laws. Again, go with the flow. That's the way it works here and it does work (even though it may irritate us Americans).

Be careful in driving and parking in some older parts of major cities. There are restricted areas for residents only. You may end up with a substantial ticket (150 euros is not uncommon) in the mail a month after you get home from say Florence. To be safe, try to park your car in a garage and leave it there. Walk around.

Finally, make sure you have a GPS device of some sort. Tom Tom is quite popular here. Most smart phones have Google Maps or something similar. But have something. It makes driving so much less stressful.

Eating and drinking

Of course you are excited about eating Italian food. And drinking Italian wine. I hope so, because 99% of restaurants in Italy have only Italian food and wine. The only exception is a surprisingly large number of Japanese restaurants (run by Chinese!). Now that might sound like nirvana but I can tell you after living here for a while that I get a craving for non Italian food and drink at times! However, you will only be here a short time and thus, may be totally satisfied with eating only Italian food and drinking only Italian wine.

A funny (as in odd) thing about average Italians, even sophisticated urban Italians don't go out to eat nearly as often as Americans. Not even close. Going out to a restaurant is usually related to some special event. So the restaurant scene is quite different than the US. Very high-end restaurants are almost non-existent. Even in Rome and other major metro areas. There are basically 4 types of eating establishments in Italy. At the high end you have a *ristorante*. Then a *trattoria*. Then a *pizzeria*. And then a bar.

Let's start with a Bar. Bar's are ubiquitous. Everywhere there are Bars. In our little village there are four. However, even though the word is bar (from English of course) it is not a bar as we know it. It is a coffee (caffè) bar primarily. Italians have a love of coffee. But again not our type of coffee. They drink what we would call espresso. It's a little tiny cup of coffee freshly made. Italian's constantly stop into a bar, order a caffè, drink it and leave, all in 5 minutes or less. They stand and drink it and leave. In big cities, it is about 1 euro. In villages like ours it is 80 cents. I have mine lungo, al vetro (meaning a little more water and in a small glass rather than a cup). Even the lowliest bar in the lowliest village produces a great caffè. If not, they will go out of business. It is almost impossible to find an American coffee. There is a caffè Americano which is an espresso with hot water added to it. Only in large American related hotels can you get something that resembles American coffee. And don't ever ask for a *cappuccino* after noontime! A big no no.

A bar also sells alcoholic beverages. But, don't bother asking for a martini (American martini) or a Cosmo! Lol. They have no idea what you are talking about. I have taught many Italian barista's how to make a gin and tonic. Most Italians do not drink alcohol the way we do. They don't drink gin, vodka, rum etc. I have never seen an Italian drink a cocktail. If they drink something strong it is usually grappa as a digestive. And speaking of booze, it is very cheap here. Very. No taxes as Italians don't drink much booze. You can get a nice bottle of gin here for \$6.

Most bars sell sandwiches. The majority sell pre packaged Panini's or tramezzini. A Panino (3 euro) is usually heated up on a grill. A tramezzino (a euro fifty) is a one half sandwich made from white bread with no crust. Hot or cold. Sometimes you can get frozen meals. I must say that these prepackaged meals are pretty decent if you are looking for a quick inexpensive bite to eat.

Bars can also sell cigarettes if they have a license. Of our 4 bars, none can sell cigarettes (another store does). Cigarettes sell for anywhere from 4 to 6.00 euro.

In many bars you can pay bills electronically. Buy credit for your telephone (most Italians do not have a contract but buy minutes for their phone). In some villages near train stations you can buy train tickets (as in most villages with a train station you can not buy a ticket at the station). Some have services such as Western Union.

In other words, a local bar serves many functions and is the life blood of small villages. (An example is that if our only ATM (or Bancomat in Italy), is not working, I go to my bar, Chiosco and borrow money from Fransesco the owner of the bar).

If you want an American type cocktail you have to be in a major city with hotels that cater to Americans. However, most medium size cities (50,000 population or more) do have at least one "pub" along the lines of an Irish pub.

Pizzerias

I have lived in several places in the U.S. Mostly New York City and Chicago. Both have a somewhat unique pizza tradition. In NYC you get a large somewhat thin "pie" with whatever you want on it. In Chicago you get a deep dish pizza. There are many other styles all over the country. In Italy, pizza is a whole other deal. The most well known is of course a traditional Neapolitan pizza from Naples or Napoli. It is thin. It is fantastic. It is very inexpensive. Our next door neighbors in the village have the one of two pizzerias in town. The pizza is to die for. Their other meals are pretty good but the pizza is exceptional. And only 5 euro. I eat half for dinner and half the next day for lunch. In NYC it would go for \$15 and be a sensation. In Italy, it is pretty much average.

However, pizza in Italy has many forms. It is a general term for something made from pizza dough. Focaccia is a pizza that is just cooked dough, maybe with rosemary sprinkled on top. Most bakeries and many bars sell pizza that is eaten cold for lunch or taken to the beach or for eating in the field when working. It is cut with scissors.

Trattoria

A trattoria is a family restaurant that serves basic Italian food. Pretty good food and wine at very reasonable prices. Soups, pasta, meat, vegetables etc. Not gourmet, just good. Local wine comes in a carafe. Very inexpensive. More....

The Ristorante

A Ristorante is a more upscale establishment. Fine food, fine wine. More expensive.

Japanese Restaurants

Want some French food? Greek? Spanish? American? Well, good luck with that. However, there are a large number of Japanese restaurants here. Lol. Why? Well it used to be there were a large number of Chinese restaurants here. But, when the SARS virus scare came about the Chinese owners decided to switch to Japanese restaurants! As people were afraid of chinese related things. And the Japanese restaurants are for the most part pretty darn good. In our large city near us, Viterbo (about 70,000 population) there are several Japanese restaurants. The most popular of which have a 20 euro all you can eat menu. You want 20 pieces of tuna sushi? No problem. Our favorite, Akira, has iPads at the table. You just punch in what you want and it comes out 5 minutes later. I don't know how they make money but it is a real treat. Quite common all over Italy.

Fast Food

Fast food in Italy is found in bars. However, in most major metro areas you can in fact, find American fast food restaurants. Lol. Ok, you didn't come to Italy for American fast food but if you have children or food challenged adults, a stop at McDonald's or Burger King might save the day. When I go to Rome, I go to a Burger King with our good friend's daughter and we pig out on a cheese Whopper, fries and a beer! About 12 euro! There are probably a couple of hundred McDonalds and Burger Kings in all of Italy. A novelty for Italians. Not much else. Of course no Starbucks. No Pizza Huts. A few KFC's. That's bout it.

One other fast food place of note is when you travel on the Autostrata. The eating establishments are very very good.

The Euro

Of course, Italy is part of the Euro Zone and thus uses the Euro. Currently (2020) a Euro costs \$1.12. This is a pretty good exchange rate for Americans. The exchange rate changes over time. When I bought my car here in 2008 the exchange rate was so high that one Euro cost \$1.58! The easiest way to explain it is this. When I first came to Italy in 2001 to meet my wife's family we stayed at a beach hotel for 99 euros a night. At that time the exchange rate was \$0.85. Thus the hotel cost \$85 a night. If we had stayed there in 2008, the hotel was still 99 euros a night but that would have been \$158 a night! So come on over now as the rate is great for Americans.

Don't bring a lot of US dollars. The conversion costs are exhorbatant. And outside of major metro areas, it is almost impossible to convert dollars to euros. Use Bancomats to get your Euros.

ATMs

An ATM in Italy is called a Bancomat. Unlike in the US where ATMS are everywhere, that is not so in Italy. They are mostly attached to banks. However, you can still easily find them. And they do accept most US debit and credit cards. The fees are not exhorbatant. So you don't have to bring wads of cash with you.

Credit Cards

Most US credit cards are excepted here. Ask however, as many places only accept cash. One exception is American Express which is not widely accepted.

Phone

My recommendation is that you bring and use your phone. You sure don't want to pay roaming charges so there are two ways to do this inexpensively. The first is to get an overseas deal with your phone company. All of them have some sort of plan. Most are reasonable. I highly recommend this. Particularly if there are multiple people in your entourage. I mean, if someone gets lost, you need to be able to contact one another. The second is to buy a SIM card here. They are pretty cheap. But I would still go with the first option.