

# Italy Travel Guide

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## Cost

The base price of the trip is \$3,575.00, which includes round-trip airfare, private airport transfers, transportation between cities, metro passes in Rome & Southern Italy, 7 nights' accommodations with in-suite baths, breakfast daily, 4 dinners, archeological guides in Rome & Southern Italy, walking tour guide in Florence, reserved entrance and audio-tour headsets for the Vatican Museum, reserved entrance to the Academia & Uffizi in Florence, entrance fees for all sightseeing described in the program, a Latin teacher as a chaperone and educator, and our Cultural Encounters travel agent/coordinator. Private rooms and adult travel rates will be a little higher, and are available by request. When we are traveling is as close to the off-season as we can get, and allows us to do more for a little less expense. We will squeeze in as much as we possibly can in our time abroad.

Italy isn't cheap, although compared with the UK and northern Europe the situation is not so bad. What you spend on accommodation (your single greatest expense after the flight) will depend on various factors, such as location, season, the degree of comfort, and luck. We will be staying in a combination of convents, small boutique hotels, and hostels- all will be safe, clean, & have in-suite bathrooms. Some of our accommodations are grand (it is their off-season) and some are nice, but all are unique and offer their own type of charm.

Eating out is also variable. In some cities, you tend to pay a lot (and sometimes get little in return), while tourist magnets such as [Florence](#) and [Rome](#) offer surprisingly affordable options. On average you should reckon on at least €20 to €50 for a meal (two courses, dessert, and 1 soda/juice/bottle of water), although you can still find basic set lunch menus for €10 to €15 or snacks for even less. Walk-in pizza places let you pay by the amount you want, kind of like ordering by-the-slice at home- you can specify how much you want, €1-3 worth is typical, and then they will cut your pizza out of a giant counter-sized pizza. Pizza from restaurants is different and comes like the pizza at Mandola's or Pieous, and it will cost more but is usually less expensive than an entrée. A bottle of water should cost about €1, unless you opt for a really big bottle.

After we arrive in Italy, Mrs. Cannon will collect the group tip money (€37) and then everyone on the trip can take turns tipping our tour guides, drivers, etc. Read the next section for more details on tipping. On a daily basis, you might buy yourself a meal, maybe some snacks (gelato!) or caffeine, and any souvenirs you might want to bring home. If you are frugal, you can have a wonderful time on about €30-40 per day spending money. If you want to buy anything expensive or have a nicer meal, plan to spend more. Things cost roughly the same in Italy as they do in the States, but the exchange rate is not in our favor.

## Money

The Euro is Italy's currency. The seven € notes come in denominations of €500, €200, €100, €50, €20, €10 and €5. The eight euro coins are in denominations of €2 and €1, and 50, 20, 10, five, two and one cents.

## Tipping

You are not expected to tip on top of restaurant service charges the way that we typically do in the US. But, it is customary to leave a little extra, called the *pane*, if you feel service warrants it. This is usually €1-2. In coffee/gelato shops, Italians often leave small change as a tip, maybe only €0.10. Tipping taxi drivers is not common practice, but you are expected to tip the porter at hotels.

Mrs. Cannon will collect our group tip shortly after we arrive, which will go to tip our Tour Guides (€3.5 for ½ day guides, €5 for full-day guides), our private Coach Drivers (€3 for baggage handling), and the Lodging staff where we stay (€1 per day). It looks like approx. €37 per traveler should cover it, which is roughly 45.00 USD. The tricky part is if someone needs extra attention or assistance; then you should carry a few extra Euros for tipping. For example- if the guide needs to take you for batteries, medication, etc.; or, if you aren't feeling well and the lodging staffs gives you extra attention.

### **Cash**

There is little advantage in bringing foreign cash into Italy. The best way to get Euros (and at the best exchange rate) is from ATM (*Bancomat*) machines. Prior to leaving the United States, check with your bank to ascertain whether its ATM card can be utilized in Italy and notify your bank and any credit card companies about your travel plans, including dates of travel, ALL stops along the way (including the airport in Atlanta & Paris), and make sure you get a phone number to call from Italy if you experience difficulty with your card/account. Your bank will probably charge you a fee for your ATM transactions. Increasingly, U.S. banks have also instituted fees for foreign exchange transactions executed via ATM's. In most places, ATM machines are operational 24 hours a day. Travelers checks are almost impossible to work with in Italy and lots of places will not take credit cards, so plan to withdrawal € once you arrive and make sure you have enough € for each day. Caveat: ATMs usually limit your daily withdrawal amount to €250, so plan ahead.

### **Moneychangers**

You can change money in banks, at the post office, or in a *cambio* (exchange offices). Post offices and most banks are reliable and tend to offer the best rates, but expect very long lines and a different attitude toward customer service. Commission fluctuates and depends on whether you are changing cash or checks. Generally, post office commissions are lowest and the exchange rate reasonable. The main advantage of exchange offices is the longer hours they keep, but watch for high commissions and inferior rates.

### **Taxes & refunds**

A value-added tax of around 20%, known as IVA (Imposta di Valore Aggiunto), is slapped onto just about everything in Italy. If you are a non-EU resident and spend more than €155 on a purchase, you can claim a refund when you leave. The refund only applies to purchases from affiliated retail outlets that display a 'tax free for tourists' (or similar) sign. You have to complete a form at the point of sale, then get it stamped by Italian customs as you leave. At major airports you can then get an immediate cash refund; otherwise it will be refunded to your credit card. For information, pick up a pamphlet on the VAT from participating stores.

### **Travellers cheques**

Historically, a safe way to carry money and possibly not a bad idea as a backup, travelers cheques have been outmoded by plastic. Various travelers have reported having trouble changing travelers' cheques in Italy, and it seems most banks apply hefty commissions, even on checks denominated in Euros.

### **Packing / Dressing** *\*\*see seperate packing list*

The spring in Italy is beautiful but also frequently wet and cold, so plan what you pack. Pack only what you can carry, and pack lightly. Elevators are not always readily available and you will be the one lugging your luggage around. It is best to carry-on your bag for the flight to Europe and then expand your bag (to hold your new souvenirs, etc.) and check it for the flight home. Sunglasses, a raincoat/poncho/small umbrella, and sunblock are essential. Bring several pocket packets of Kleenex and make sure to always have at least one on your person while we are out. It comes in handy as facial tissue, but it can also double as toilet paper when there is none. Never pack prescriptions or important documents in checked luggage! *Tip:* wear your bulkiest clothes/shoes & bring your jacket onto the plane with you to save space in your bag.

Bring any medication you take on a regular basis or that you have to keep around in case of allergic reactions. If there is a medicine that you cannot do without, it's not a bad idea to bring along a back-up prescription for it in case you lose it, etc. Take your own soap, shampoo, and toiletries to use in the hotels. Many hotels do not provide soap, or they give guests only one tiny bar per room. Washcloths, also, are rarely provided even in three- and four-star hotels, so bring one if you want one. European hotels tend to be smaller with fewer amenities, but it can be charming if you know to expect it.

As a traveler, you should try to dress to fit in with the locals and not stand out too much. It is safer and gives you an authentic way to experience the culture unique to where you are. As a rule, Italians dress well. They do not usually wear shorts, although you might see men and women wearing capri pants. Men aren't required to wear ties or jackets, but they are expected to look reasonably put together—and they do. Women dress modestly and do not wear heels or uncomfortable shoes unless they are taking a car to an event. A certain modesty of dress (no bare shoulders or knees) is expected in churches & ancient sites converted into churches, and this is strictly enforced. Dress casually and comfortably in layers, and make sure your outfits are versatile enough to wear for the whole day. We might not have time to change before dinner or evening activities, so make sure you are dressed accordingly and equipped for weather/temperature changes when you leave in the morning. **Leave your nice jewelry and non-functional expensive belongings at home.**

Pack lightly and plan on wearing things more than once. You can hand-wash & hang-to-dry while we are out and about. When planning outfits, items that will work together are best. No shorts or bare legs under short skirts- wear pants/tights because it will be chilly. Pack comfortable, layered clothing that is made of breathable fibers. Bring only sturdy, broken-in, comfortable walking shoes and/or boots.

As in Texas, weather is unpredictable. Therefore, check the forecast before we leave, but know it is impossible to predict all conditions. Brief afternoon thunderstorms are common in inland cities, so a small folding umbrella or lightweight raincoat will come in handy. Bring a coat, gloves, warm hat, scarf, and warm layers. In the spring, the weather is generally milder than in the northern US, but we live in Texas and Italy is colder than we might be used to unless you frequent colder climates. Also, the central heating may not be up to your standards, and interiors can be cold and damp; take wools, fleece, or flannel rather than sheer fabrics. But, also be prepared to put away the warm things if the weather is nice.

## Local laws and customs

It is a legal requirement in Italy to be able to show some form of identification at all times, if requested by the police or judicial authorities. In most cases, it should be sufficient to carry a photocopy of the data page of your passport. However, you should be prepared to be accompanied by the police to collect the original document, if necessary, or to produce it within twelve hours of notification. A driver's license or credit card is not sufficient proof of identity. If you are unable to produce satisfactory identification you may be detained until such a time as your identity has been established.

As long as parents' approve, Mrs. Cannon will collect everyone's passports once we make it through Customs in Italy and will hold onto them for you until/unless you need it prior to the trip home. Cultural Encounters suggests making a color copy of your passport & laminating it to carry around with you in case you need less formal identification, like for credit card purchases. If your passport came with a small, passport card, this is generally ok to carry around in your wallet. Make sure to leave a copy (or clear photo) of your passport and the front/back of your credit cards at home with a parent just in case.

New regulations are now in force in the Rome area regarding service and other charges made in local restaurants. The restaurant must:

- Display a menu outside the restaurant
- Only charge for bread if the customer specifically requests it

- Inform the customer of the prices being charged before he/she orders
- Show the wine list with the prices displayed
- Give a proper fiscal receipt for the bill, giving full details of the charges
- Not charge any cover-charge (*coperto*)

In the cities, especially Rome & Florence, you should observe public notices about conduct. You may be fined if you litter or spit out gum anywhere other than into the trash. It is also an offence to sit on steps/courtyards or to eat/drink in the vicinity of the main churches and public buildings in Florence. Italian authorities are engaged in a major effort to stamp out the illegal production and sale of counterfeit goods. Illegal traders operate on the streets of all major Italian cities, particularly tourist cities like Florence and Rome. Do not buy from illegal street traders: you run the risk of being stopped by the local police and incurring a large fine.

Touching produce or products with your bare hands in any Italian market is “*non va bene*” ...if in a supermarket, always use the disposable plastic gloves provided, weigh your own produce and print and attach price labels before checking out. If at a smaller vendor or outdoor market, let the proprietor handle the produce or product for you unless they invite you to touch it for further inspection. Many supermarkets and food markets still don't take credit cards; always have some € on hand.

### **Ordering & Tipping in Cafes & Restaurants:**

- 1) In a counter-service shop (coffee shop, gelateria, etc.) you order first and pay only after you've been served and have finished eating or drinking, unless you are getting your food to take away. The exception is in busy food-service places such as airports and train stations where you must pre-pay: decide what you want first, inform and pay the cashier, and take your receipt to the counter where you'll be served. It is cheaper to order and leave. It costs more to order and stand there to eat/drink, and it costs even more to sit there to eat/drink. Let them know your intentions, and then follow through with them.
- 2) Service is always included in the price you pay for your snack or meal, but it is still appreciated (if not expected) to leave a few coins, or if in more sophisticated surroundings, leave a 10% tip (but never more).
- 3) In a restaurant, trattoria or osteria, you will never be given your check – *il conto* – until you ask for it.

### **Internet:**

If you are taking your own iPad/laptop (not recommended!) you may use wifi hotspots (sometimes free) or hotel access. Internet cafes/storefronts can be found in most towns and all larger cities; you would use provided desktop computers and be charged by the minute. Beware: Italian keyboards vary from American ones; you will most likely be frustrated by an inability to find the @ symbol, among others!

## **Dangers & Annoyances**

It sometimes requires patience to deal with the Italian concept of service, which does not always follow the maxim that *the customer is always right*. While often courteous and friendly, some people in uniform or behind a counter (including police officers, waiters, and shop assistants) may regard you with supreme indifference. Long queues are the norm in banks, post offices, and government offices.

### **Theft**

Pickpockets and bag-snatchers operate in most cities, especially [Naples](#) and [Rome](#). You can reduce the chances of such petty theft by wearing a money belt (with money, credit cards and important documents) *under* your clothing or by carrying a cut-proof purse. Watch for groups of disheveled-looking women and children asking for money. Their favorite haunts are train stations, tourist sites, and shopping areas. If you see a group like this, take evasive action (such as crossing the street) or shout ‘*Va via!*’ (Go away!)

BUT, you will most likely not get robbed! People love to share horror stories about theft, but you do not need a money belt or cut-proof bag in order to not get robbed. All you need is awareness and common sense. If your hotel has a safe, use it. Wear bags or cameras slung across your body to make it harder to snatch them, walk around like you were born there, and you will be like all of the locals who do not wear money belts and somehow manage not to get robbed when they leave their home everyday. Don't flash an expensive camera or wad of cash while wearing your DON'T MESS WITH TEXAS shirt in crowded public places, and you will be fine. Italian women carry purses and bags around each day, and men carry bags and backpacks too.

### **In transit**

*Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)* Blood clots may form in the legs during a plane flight, chiefly because of prolonged immobility (the longer the flight, the greater the risk). The chief symptom of DVT is swelling or pain of the foot, ankle or calf, usually but not always on just one side. When a blood clot travels to the lungs, it may cause chest pain and breathing difficulties. Travellers with any of these symptoms should seek medical attention immediately. To prevent the development of DVT on long-haul flights, you should walk about the cabin, contract the leg muscles while sitting, and drink plenty of fluids. Since we will have a layover in Paris, you should get in plenty of walking and it will help break up the trip nicely.

### **Jet lag**

To avoid jet lag try drinking plenty of fluids and eating light meals. Upon arrival, get exposure to natural sunlight and readjust your schedule (for meals, sleep, etc.) as soon as possible. No naps when we arrive!

### **Traveler Safety**

Mrs. Cannon and our Cultural Encounters guide will be with you, but in case you get separated, somehow, it is good for you to know some safety tips. Italy is not a dangerous country for travelers. Clearly, as with anywhere in the world, travelers need to take certain precautions. Eye-to-eye contact is the norm in Italy's daily flirtatious interplay. If you don't intend to flirt, avoid eye contact with strangers on the street and never may eye contact with strangers on public transportation. Foreigners are particular objects of attention in tourist towns like [Florence](#) and more generally in the south. If you are the subject of any unwanted attention, point Mrs. Cannon or our Cultural Encounters guide in their direction, and we will handle it. Aside from alerting your chaperones, the best response you can make is to link arms with one of your fellow student travelers and ignore it. If all else fails, approach the nearest member of the police.

Use common sense. Stay with the group. Avoid walking alone, stay out of dark streets, don't hitchhike, and use some dress sense, too. Do not count or display your money on public transportation or on the streets. Wear your bag close to your body, and –if you are carrying a purse- wear it on the side opposite the street.

### **PHYSICAL DEMANDS AND ACCESSIBILITY**

The "Old World" is not just a marketing concept. When you are faced with more stairs than you ever climbed in one stretch, or steep stone steps with no railings, or rough cobblestone streets great for turning ankles, you will start to appreciate that it is *old*. You are likely to find yourself walking much more than at home, and being on your feet for much longer. Blisters are standard after the first day walking in Rome, moleskin is a great relief and a small to item pack. To put it in perspective, in just visiting the Vatican Museums and St. Peter's Basilica, you are likely to walk the better part of two miles!

### **HOTELS**

We are spoiled with space in North America. We have expectations about the size of hotel rooms that generally cannot be met in European city centers. Hotel rooms in Italy are no smaller, on average, than those in London and Paris. But, they are significantly smaller than in most American and Canadian hotels. You must also beware that many hotels have dorm-style, shared bathrooms instead of in-room bathrooms- but we will only be staying in places with in-room (ensuite) bathrooms for the 2016 Spring Break trip.

## **BATHROOMS**

This is one we can (almost) joke about. You may think the bathrooms of Europe are an adventure in themselves. Public bathrooms are frequently not stocked with toilet paper (bring travel pouches of Kleenex), and bathrooms at places like gas and train stations frequently charge a fee for admission. Every bathroom seems to be designed differently to keep you guessing. Some bathrooms are ridiculously small, or oddly shaped, to fit into very old architecture, while some are huge and may even have fireplaces in them. Sinks may be operated by pedals on the floor or knobs near the faucet, so look around. But, it is the tub/shower arrangement that most often requires an attitude adjustment. Sometimes, containing the spray from the shower seems hopeless. Tubs can be very narrow, and shower stalls can be so small that you need to squeeze into them. Some showers have no walls at all, so that the whole bathroom is designed as the drain. Then, there are the toilets, each of which seems to use a different technology, so you can find yourself at a loss for how to flush some of them (pull knobs, flush levels, seats vs. no seats, etc.). Try to laugh about these cultural variations, and try not to be irritated by them.

## **REAL ITALY**

Your first experience in Italy can be startling. It is an amazing bombardment of the senses. When faced with frustration or confusion, take a deep, cleansing breath and go with the flow. To get the most of a first trip to Italy, you need to suspend your expectations and judgments, at least for the first day or two.

Remember that you are in one of the most delightful and beautiful countries in the world and you have escaped the manic pace of everyday life. Italy moves at a leisurely pace, so embrace it. There is a fitting quote to remember from E. M. Forster's, *A Room with a View....* "One doesn't come to Italy for niceness. One comes for life..."