

ITALIAN CUISINE is extremely varied: the country of Italy was only officially unified in 1861, and its cuisines reflect the cultural variety of its regions and its diverse history (with culinary influences from Greek, Roman, Gallic, Germanic, Goth, Norman, Lombard, Frank, Turkish, Hebrew, Slavic, Arab and Chinese civilizations). Italian cuisine is imitated all over the world.

To a certain extent, there is really no such thing as Italian cuisine in the way that one usually understands national cuisines. Each area has its own proud specialties, primarily at regional level, but also even at provincial level. Italian cuisine is not only highly regionalised, it is very seasonal. The high priority placed on the use of fresh, seasonal produce distinguishes the cuisine of Italy from the imitations available in most other countries.

Northern versus Southern Italian cooking

Traditional Italian cuisine is very regional and does not follow strict North-South patterns. To most, northern and southern Italian cuisines are differentiated primarily by the north using more butter and creams and the south more tomato and olive oil. In general terms, however, there is a marked difference between regional use of cooking fat and traditional style of pasta. Inland northern and north-eastern regions tend to favour more butter, cream, polenta, mascarpone, grana padano, and parmigiano cheeses, risotto, lasagna and fresh egg pasta. Coastal northern and central regions are somewhat of a bridge between north and south and often use tortellini, ravioli and are known for prosciutto. The southern regions are known for mozzarella, caciocavallo, and pecorino cheeses, olive oil, and dried pasta. Southern Italian cuisine also makes far greater use of the ubiquitous tomato.

Types of Italian coffee

Italian style coffee (*caffè*), also known as espresso, is a concentrated coffee prepared by forcing boiling water through finely ground coffee beans at high pressure. It is usually served in a demitasse in relatively small quantity. Caffè macchiato is a topped with a bit of steamed milk or foam; caffè ristretto is made with less water, and is stronger. Cappuccino is mixed or topped with steamed, mostly frothy, milk. It is generally considered a morning beverage. Caffelatte is generally equal parts espresso and steamed milk, similar to café au lait, and is typically served in a large cup. Latte macchiato (spotted milk) is a glass of warm milk with a bit of coffee.

Contrary to popular misconception, espresso is not made from special "espresso" beans. Rather, it is made from the same coffee beans as any other style of coffee. However, beans prepared for espresso are usually roasted dark, and are often a blend of coffees of various origins.

Italian wines

Italian cuisine cannot be separated from Italian wine. Most Italian wines of great renown are produced in three main Italian regions: Piedmont (Barolo), Venetia ([Amarone](#), Pinot Grigio, etc.) and Tuscany (Chianti, [Brunello](#)). Other great wine producing regions such as Puglie ([Primitivo](#)) and Sicily also produce some respected wines.

Holiday Cuisine

Italians celebrate each holiday with a different cuisine, each in turn having a specific meaning. At Christmas Italians often serve tortellini as a first course. The typical cake of the Christmas season is panettone .

On Christmas Eve a symbolic fast is observed (the so-called "cena di magro", the "light dinner") excluding meat but including many courses which are not by any means light, based mainly on fish and other seafood, but also on snails, even frogs, which curiously enough are not considered "meat".

In Sicily, as well as in many Italian communities worldwide, on March 19, La Festa di San Giuseppe (St. Joseph's Day), thanks are given to St. Joseph for preventing a famine in Sicily during the Middle Ages. The fava bean was the crop which saved the population from starvation, and is a traditional part of St. Joseph's Day altars and traditions. Other customs celebrating this festival include wearing red clothing, eating Sicilian pastries known as [zeppole](#) and giving food to the needy.

On Easter Sunday, lamb-based dishes are commonly served throughout both northern and southern Italy. Typical at Easter Sunday in Umbria and Tuscany is also a breakfast with Salami, boiled eggs, wine and Easter Cakes and pizzas.

Traditional menu structure

A traditional Italian menu consists of:

1. *antipasto* - hot or cold appetizers
2. *primo* ("first course"), usually consists of a hot dish like pasta, risotto, gnocchi, polenta or soup. There are usually abundant vegetarian options.
3. *secondo* ("second course"), the main dish, usually fish or meat. Traditionally veal, pork and chicken are the most commonly used meat, at least in the North, though beef has become more popular since World War II and wild game is very popular, particularly in Tuscany. Fishes are those fished nearby.
4. *contorno* ("side dish") may consist of a salad or cooked vegetables. A traditional menu features salad along with the main course.
5. *formaggio* and *frutta* (cheese and fruits): the first dessert, usually served together.
6. *dolce* ("dessert", such as cakes and cookies)
7. *caffè* ("coffee") (espresso)
8. *digestivo* which is liquors/liqueurs (grappa, amaro, limoncello) sometimes referred to as *ammazzacaffè* ("Coffee killer")

Although it has to be said that nowadays the traditional Italian menu is kept for high days and special events (as weddings) whilst the everyday menu only includes the first and second course, the side dish (more and more often joined to the second course) and coffee (if not in a hurry). One notable and often surprising aspect of an Italian meal, especially if eaten in an Italian home, is that the *primo*, or first course, is usually the more filling dish, providing most of the meal's carbohydrates, and will consist of either risotto or pasta (both being excellent sources). Modern Italian cuisine also includes single courses (all-in-one courses), providing carbohydrates and proteins at the same time (e.g. pasta and legumes).

ITALIA



Italy (Italian: *Italia*), officially the **Italian Republic**; (Italian: *Repubblica Italiana*), is a country located in Southern Europe, comprising the Po River valley, Italian Peninsula, and the two largest islands in the Mediterranean Sea, Sicily and Sardinia. Italians also refer to it as *lo Stivale* ("the Boot", due to its boot-like shape), *il Bel Paese* ("the Beautiful Country") or *la Penisola* ("the Peninsula" as an antonomasia). Italy shares its northern alpine boundary with France, Switzerland, Austria and Slovenia. The independent states of San Marino and the Vatican City are enclaves within Italian territory, while Campione d'Italia is an Italian exclave in Switzerland.

Italy has been home to many European cultures, including the Etruscans, the Greeks

and the Romans. Its capital Rome has been an important center of Western civilization, and is a historically important world city, especially as the core of ancient Rome and the Roman Catholic Church. For more than 3,000 years Italy experienced migrations and invasions from Germanic, Celtic, Frankish, Lombard, Byzantine Greek, Saracen and Norman peoples during the Middle Ages, followed by the Italian Renaissance period, in which the Italian Wars took place and various city-states were noted for their cultural achievements. Italy was divided into many independent states and often experienced foreign domination before the Italian unification, that created Italy as an independent nation-state for the first time in its history, took place. During the period under the Italian monarchy and during the world wars Italy experienced much conflict, but stability was restored after the creation of the Italian Republic.

Today, Italy is a developed country with the 7th-highest GDP and the 17th-highest Human Development Index rating in the world. It is a member of the G8 and a founding member of what is now the European Union (having signed the Treaty of Rome in 1957), of the Council of Europe and of the Western European Union and of the Central European Initiative. Starting from January 1, 2007, Italy is a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. It is considered by some a great power. Inhabitants of Italy are referred to as *Italians* (*Italiani*, or poetically *Italici*).

Vatican City

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Vatican City, officially **State of the Vatican City** is a landlocked sovereign city-state whose territory consists of a walled enclave within the city of Rome. At approximately 44 hectares (108.7 acres), it is the smallest independent nation in the world.^[1]

It was created in 1929 by the Lateran Treaty as a vestige of the much larger Papal States (756 to 1870). Vatican City is a non-hereditary, elected monarchy that is ruled by the Bishop of Rome — the Pope. The highest state functionaries are all clergymen of the Catholic Church. It is the sovereign territory of the Holy See (Latin:*Sancta Sedes*) and the location of the Apostolic Palace — the Pope's official residence — and the Roman Curia. Thus, while the principal ecclesiastical seat (Cathedral) of the Pope as Bishop of Rome (the Basilica of St. John Lateran) is located outside of its walls, in Rome, Vatican City can be said to be the governmental capital of the Catholic Church.



St. Peter's Square, and the obelisk from the Circus of Nero

Head of State

The Pope is *ex officio* head of state and head of government of Vatican City. He is simultaneously and primordially the bishop of the Diocese of Rome, and Supreme Pontiff of the Catholic Church. The term Holy See expresses the totality of his governance and pastoral ministry. His official title with regard to Vatican City is *Sovereign of the State of the Vatican City*.

The papacy is a non-hereditary, elective monarchy, chosen by the College of Cardinals. The pope is also technically an absolute monarch, meaning he has total legislative, executive and judicial power over the Vatican City. He is the only absolute monarch in Europe.

The pope is elected for a life term in conclave by cardinals under the age of 80. His principal subordinate government officials for Vatican City are the Secretary of State, the President of the Pontifical Commission for Vatican City State, and the Governor of Vatican City.

The current Pope is Benedict XVI, born Joseph Alois Ratzinger in Bavaria, Germany. Tarcisio Cardinal Bertone of Italy is the Secretary of State. Italian Archbishop Giovanni Lajolo serves as both the President of the Pontifical Commission and Governor. Both Bertone and Lajolo were appointed by Pope Benedict XVI in September 2006.

Italian Culture

Italy, as a state, did not exist until the unification of the country came to a conclusion in the year 1861. Due to this comparatively late unification, and the historical autonomy of the many regions that comprise the Italian Peninsula, many traditions and customs that we now recognise as distinctly Italian can be identified by their regions of origin, which further reflects the influence of the many different peoples that occupied those areas, and of the importance of religion, especially Roman Catholicism. Despite the pronounced political and social isolation of these regions that prevailed throughout Italy's history, Italy's contributions to the cultural and historical heritage of Europe remain immense. In fact, Italy is home to the greatest number of UNESCO World Heritage Sites (41) to date.

Visual Art

Italy has been a seminal place for many important artistic and intellectual movements that spread throughout Europe and beyond, including the Renaissance and Baroque. Perhaps Italy's greatest cultural achievements lie in its long artistic heritage, which is often validated through the names of Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Donatello, Botticelli, Fra Angelico, Tintoretto, Caravaggio, Bernini, Titian and Raphael, among many others. Beyond art, Italy's contributions to the realms of literature, science, and music cannot be overlooked.

Literature

With the basis of the modern Italian language established through the eminent Florentine poet, Dante Alighieri, whose greatest work, the *Divina Commedia*, is often considered the foremost literary statement produced in Europe during the Middle Ages and one of the greatest works of world literature ever, there is no shortage of celebrated literary figures; the writers and poets Boccaccio, Giacomo Leopardi, Alessandro Manzoni, Tasso, Ludovico Ariosto, and Petrarch, whose best known vehicle of expression, the sonnet, was invented in Italy. Prominent philosophers include Bruno, Ficino, Machiavelli, and Vico. Modern literary figures and Nobel laureates are nationalist poet Giosuè Carducci in 1906, realist writer Grazia Deledda in 1926, modern theatre author Luigi Pirandello in 1936, poets Salvatore Quasimodo in 1959 and Eugenio Montale in 1975, satirist and theatre author Dario Fo in 1997.

Science

In science, Galileo Galilei made considerable advancements toward the scientific revolution, and Leonardo da Vinci was the quintessential Renaissance Man. Italy has been the home of many great scientists and inventors: the physicist Fermi, one of the fathers of quantum theory and head of the Manhattan Project; the astronomer Cassini; the physicist Volta, inventor of the electric battery; the mathematicians Lagrange and Fibonacci; Nobel Prize in Physics laureate Marconi, inventor of the radio; and Antonio Meucci, disputable inventor of the telephone.

Music

From folk music to classical, music has always played an important role in Italian culture. Having given birth to opera, for example, Italy provides many of the very foundations of the classical music tradition. Some of the instruments that are often associated with classical music, including the piano and violin, were invented in Italy, and many of the existing classical music forms can trace their roots back to innovations of sixteenth and seventeenth century Italian music (such as the symphony, concerto, and sonata). Some of Italy's most famous composers include the Renaissance composers Palestrina and Monteverdi, the Baroque composers Corelli and Vivaldi, the Classical composers Paganini and Rossini, and the Romantic composers Verdi and Puccini. Modern Italian composers such as Berio and Nono proved significant in the development of experimental and electronic music.

Sport

Italians are renowned for their love of sports. Their zeal for sports events is, indeed, no less than legendary; from the Gladiatorial games of Ancient Rome, to the Stadio Olimpico of contemporary Rome, where prestigious football clubs compete regularly, the impact that sports has had on Italian culture is enduring and undeniable. Towards the alps, the popularity of winter sports grows, with many Italians from that region competing in international games and Olympic venues. Moving downwards the peninsula, the disparity between participation in sports becomes less regional. The incorporation of sports in many Italian festivities like Palio (see also Palio di Siena), and the Gondola race (regatta) that takes place in Venice on the first Sunday of September, affirms the role sports play in everyday Italian life. Popular sports include football, volleyball, rugby, cycling, and auto racing (a sport which shares its renown with a staple of Italian design, Ferrari), among others.