



Italian Customs & Travel Tips

There are many customs that many travelers aren't aware of. Here's a list of customs and travel tips that will help you navigate a new culture.

Tipping- This is the top question I get from travelers to Italy. In the states, we are used to having to tip at a restaurant, in Italy it isn't expected or obligatory. On your *conto* (bill) you'll see a word *coperto*, which means covered. This is a fee to cover the bread, oil, salt or anything else you'll be using at the table. The *coperto* can be from €1.50-€3.00 per person. If you want to leave extra euros after an amazing meal, the most you could leave is €5.00. Know that Italians make a living wage as waitstaff, unlike in the States.

Aperitivo-This is my favorite activity while living in Italy. Aperitivo can be compared to Happy hours where there are half price drinks and appetizers. The difference is that these are so popular for Italians after work. These start around 5pm and end around 7 pm. What's great about ***aperitivi*** is that you buy drinks and included in your drink price are buffets of delicious finger foods, pasta and crostini to name a few. These can be cheap ways to eat dinner, because there is a lot of food. This is also called ***apericena*** (tapas dinner). I highly recommend finding a local bar, pub, restaurant that offers these amazing early afternoon ***aperitivi***.

Water & Ice- Water is drinkable in Italy. From the tap, it's not always the best tasting but it is not harmful to drink. We will provide bottled water for those that prefer it over tap water. Ice is not readily available. Italians don't like to drink ice-filled drinks due to the fact Italians believe it hurts digestion. You are welcome to ask for ice when ordering drinks. Your cocktails will have ice just know that water served at your table will not have ice.

Porta via - Take away food is more common now than before the pandemic. Coffee to go is ***not*** common, don't assume you'll get a venti style cup for your *cappuccino*.

You'll find most people order pizza to go. You will not see a fancy restaurant offer you a to-go box. Don't ask for one. Can't finish your meal, order another glass of wine and enjoy the delicious pasta dish in front of you.

The Bill - *Il conto* - When you are sitting at a restaurant, Italians do not bother you every 5 seconds to ask how the meal is going. Also, they will not bring the bill without being asked for it. You can say, "***il conto, per favore.***" Italians allow you to sit at your table all night if you don't ask for the bill. So enjoy your slow paced meal and always order dessert.

Air Conditioning - Italians don't like air conditioning like Americans do. You'll see Italians wearing scarves in the summer if there's air conditioning blasting nearby. On a hot summer day in a room with a strong, cool air blowing, you could get a "***colpo d'aria***" or a hit of air. In older buildings, you won't see air conditioning offered. It's more common in renovated properties. **Note**: be sure to check before you rent, book an accommodation to check with the owner that air conditioning is included.

Afternoon Nap - *La pausa* in the afternoon between 1pm-4pm is when most stores, restaurants close. This tradition is when Italians would close up shop, go home and have lunch with family. Great work-life balance, I say. After lunch and a cat nap, stores open up until about 7pm. Which is the perfect time to head to a local bar for an aperitivo.

Bread - Tuscan bread is my favorite. Why? Because there's no salt added. You might wonder why, one of the stories is that salt was heavily taxed in the Middle Ages in Tuscany. Tuscans couldn't afford salt, so they started making their bread without it. It's been a tradition so you'll notice the difference in bread when you travel to different regions in Italy.

Church Dress code - Entering a church in Italy is a great relief from the heat in the summer months. However you must dress accordingly. Capris, long skirts, and shirts with sleeves is acceptable clothing to enter a church. If you are wearing a tank top, make sure you have a scarf with you to cover your shoulders.

ATMs-bancomat - When getting money in Italy, it's good to know which banks are the sister banks of your banks back home. Sometimes you can get charged less (lower/no conversion fees or withdrawal fees) when withdrawing money, but not always. You'll see ATMs (bancomats) randomly, near a tabacchi shop, in the middle of a piazza. I do not recommend using these ATMs. Try to stick with using ATMs from

European banks. For example, Banca Toscana, Monte dei Paschi, Banca Intesa, ChiantiBanca, BNL, Deutsche Bank.

Sciopero (show-pur-roh)- strike - If you hear or see this word it's not going to be a good day at the train station. Airlines, trains, buses, cabs and metros can go on strike anytime throughout the year. Usually there's a notice posted on their websites or your hotel will let you know. Even if there's a strike, there will always be a way to get around on different bus/train routes. It just might be difficult.

******I recommend having Euros with you at all times. A lot of small shops and cafes DON'T always accept credit cards for a small purchase. Italians always prefer cash over credit. At the grocery store or a winery, it's worth having some Euros handy for a small souvenir. ******

