



### *cultural note*

in northern Italy a single woman is usually able to eat at a restaurant without being approached. But looking around will attract attention, and men will stare and smile.

In southern Italy, however, men are not accustomed to the idea that a woman wants to dine alone, and she may be bothered. Bring reading or work materials with you, which will indicate you are alone by choice.

## Country Background

### History

Italy has been the name of this region for over 3,000 years. Evidence of early Latin/Italic tribes dates from 2000 B.C. The Etruscans arrived around 1200 B.C. bringing their own culture and laws, and conquered vast central areas of the peninsula.

Greek civilization dominated southern Italy around 600 B.C., and much of Greek culture was subsequently adopted by the Romans. The Roman Empire had tremendous impact on Italian social, legal, political, artistic, and military culture.

With 3,000 miles of coastline, Italy proved a logical prey for invaders. After the fall of the Roman Empire, there were repeated invasions from many countries, including France, Austria, Spain, and Germany. Italy became a country of sharply diverse city-states.

### *cultural note*

Italy's geographic structure produced distinct regions, each with its own dialect, politics, and culture, which frequently warred with one another. This is one reason why family life became a central focus. The motto "Family First" reflected Italians' need to preserve and protect not only their relatives but their regional cultures.

By 1870 Italy had become a politically unified monarchy. The final monarch abdicated in 1946.

The most notorious political figure from Italy's recent past is Mussolini, the fascist dictator known as *Il Duce*. Mussolini controlled Italy's government from 1922 to 1943. He supported Hitler during World War II, until Italian supporters of the Allies assassinated him and overthrew the Fascists.

Italy did not become a politically unified constitutional republic until the 1946 national elections. Corruption scandals in the early 1990's tainted most major political parties,

resulting in the 1994 election of reform candidates led by Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi.

## Type of Government

The Italian Republic is a multiparty parliamentary republic. There are two legislative bodies, a 325-seat Senate and a 630-seat Chamber of Deputies. The president is the chief of state, while the prime minister is the head of the government.

## Language

Italian is the official language. There are many diverse dialects. English is spoken by many business people.

### *cultural note*

Europe's oldest university was founded in Bologna in the twelfth century.

## Religion

There is no official religion, although the population is predominantly Roman Catholic.

## Demographics

The current population of Italy is 57 million (1991 estimates). The populace is overwhelmingly ethnic Italian; less than 2 percent are foreign-born.

## Cultural Orientation

### Cognitive Styles: How Italians Organize and Process Information

In Italy information is readily accepted and great discussions occur, but little movement is seen in the opinions of the participants. Information tends to be processed subjectively and associatively. Italians will look at the particulars of each situation rather than appeal to a law or rule to solve a problem.

### Negotiation Strategies: What Italians Accept as Evidence

Subjective feelings are more important than faith in an ideology or objective facts when deciding what is true. However, the ideologies of the church do permeate nearly all transactions. Italians who have a higher education tend to use facts to back their arguments.

### Value Systems: The Basis for Behavior

The ideologies of the Roman Catholic church exert the most influence. The following three sections identify the Value Systems in the predominant culture—their methods of dividing right from wrong, good from evil, and so forth.

### Locus of Decision-Making

The individual is responsible for his or her decisions but is often expected to defer to the interests of the family or organizational unit. There is an admiration for urban life and an enduring loyalty to region and family.

## Sources of Anxiety Reduction

The extended family is getting smaller but is still the major source of security and stability. Anxiety, as well as security, is produced by seeking success in the eyes of the extended family and society. There are strong Catholic and Communist segments that can work in opposition, but are not completely incompatible. The church gives a sense of structure to the majority. Italians are remarkably diverse, but they also have a strong capacity for social and cultural resilience and continuity.

## Issues of Equality/Inequality

There are extreme contrasts between rich and poor. The population is stratified by income. Patron-client relationships provide a strong social and political base. Even though there is a large German-speaking group in the north, and many mutually unintelligible dialects, there is one standard language that binds the country together. Women have made slow progress toward equality.

## Business Practices

### Appointments



### *punctuality*

- Be on time, especially in the industrial north, where business is often conducted with 'Americanstyle' pressure and efficiency.
- Italian business people prefer to deal with people they know, even if that acquaintance has been a perfunctory handshake at a trade fair. Before you invest in travel to Italy, be sure to engage a strong contact representative who can make appropriate introductions and appointments for you.
- Write first for an appointment, in Italian if you want an immediate reply.
- Follow up your letter by telex, fax, or telephone call.
- Be very aware of summer vacation periods. Most firms are closed in August. If you write for an appointment in mid-July, you may not get a satisfactory reply until September.
- Italians like to get acquainted and engage in small talk before getting down to business. They are hospitably attentive. Expect to answer questions about your family.
- Plan appointments between 10:00 and 11:00 A.m., and after 3:00 P.m.
- Northern business hours are usually 8:30 A.M. to 12:45 P.m. and 3:00 to 6:30 P.m., Monday through Friday. Many businesses are open Saturday mornings.
- In central and southern Italy, business hours are from 8:30 A.M. to 12:45 P.m. then 4:30 or 5:00 to 7:30 or 8:00 P.m., Monday through Friday, and 8:30 A.M. to 12:45 P.m. Saturday. The southern business pace is more relaxed.
- There may be fewer public holidays in Italy than in many Latin countries, but business people must be aware that practically every Italian city celebrates the feast of its patron saint as a legal holiday and much of the city literally shuts down.



## Negotiating

It is important to understand corporate hierarchy. Titles may not coincide with the U.S. conception of responsibility, and authority goes with the individual, not necessarily the title.

### *cultural note*

corporations often have a horizontal chain of authority. Italians call it a *cordato* (which actually means a team of mountain climbers on the same rope). This parallel channel is based on levels of personal, reciprocal concern.

The *cordata* concept is very difficult to fully explain to outsiders. But it exists and, to facilitate business, one should have a reliable contact who has full knowledge of a company's inside structure.

- The pace of negotiations is usually slower than in the United States. The more important the contract, the more study is going on behind the scenes. Any obvious sense of urgency is thought to weaken one's bargaining position.
- A dramatic change in demands at the last minute is often a technique to unsettle the other side. Be patient and calm; just when it appears impossible, the contract may come together.
- One does not exchange business cards at social occasions; but it is normal at business functions- especially since an Italian would feel it impolite to ask a foreigner to spell out her or his name.
- Italian cards are often plain white with black print. Usually, the more important the person, the less information is on the card.
- Conversational subjects that are highly appreciated are Italian culture, art, food, wine, sports such as bicycling and especially soccer, family, Italian scenery, and films.
- Your host may be negative about something in his or her country or its politics, but don't agree too strongly and never offer criticisms of your own.
- Avoid talking about religion, politics, and World War II.
- Italians do not usually tell off-color jokes, and are uncomfortable when acquaintances do.
- Never ask someone you have just met at a social gathering about his or her profession. To do so is considered gauche, even insulting.



## Business Entertaining

- Italian hospitality plays an important role in business life, and most often means dining in a restaurant. No matter how you feel, refusing an invitation will offend.

### *cultural note*

when dining, Italians keep both hands above the table, not one resting on the lap.

There be three plates: a small one on top for antipasto, under it a deep dish for pasta or soup, and a large plate on the bottom for the main course.

Use your knife (not your fingers) to pick up cheese, and don't eat any fruit except grapes or cherries with your hand.

Italians consider wine as a food to be sipped, not as a means of relaxation. Therefore, to drink too much is considered very offensive.

- Business dinners involve only a small, important group. If you are the host, consult with your Italian contact before extending invitations. You cannot be aware of all the "inside" personalities and ranks, so ask for help.
- Ask your Italian client's secretary to suggest a favorite restaurant.
- Dining is a serious business, and real prestige can be gained or lost at the table. At the propitious moment one may bring up business.
- Paying may equate to prestige, and Italians may even slip the waiter a generous tip before dinner to make sure you do not get the bill.
- The check will not be brought until you ask for it. Get a waiter's attention by saying *sentà*, an idiom meaning "hear me" or "come here." You may also raise your hand slightly and say *carnariere* or *signorina*.
- Women executives will find it extremely difficult to pay.
- Keep the receipt for the restaurant bill. Sometimes "tax police" check restaurant bills outside for adherence to tax laws.
- In a restaurant you will have to ask for ice, since Italians usually do not serve drinks cold (they think ice-cold things are unhealthy).

### *cultural note*

- Breakfast (*la prima colazione*) is normally at 8:00 A.m. and consists of rolls, bread, butter, perhaps some jam, and strong coffee or chocolate.
- "Lunch" (*1a colazione*) is the full-course, main meal of the day, and serving starts at 1:00 P.m.
- "Dinner" (*1a cena*) is again a light meal. Service starts around 7:00 P.m. and may be served in some areas until 10:00 P.m.

### Time

- Italy is one hour ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (G.M.T. + 1), or six hours ahead of U.S. Eastern Standard Time (E.S.T. + 6).

### Protocol



#### Greetings

- As a guest, you will be introduced first. The most senior or eldest person present should always be given special deference.
- Shake hands with everyone present when arriving and leaving. At a large gathering, if no one is giving formal introductions, it is proper to shake hands and introduce yourself
- Handshakes may include grasping the arm with the other hand.
- Women may "kiss" good friends on either cheek (it is rather more like pressing the sides of each face together).
- Close friends and male relatives often embrace and slap each other on the back.



## Titles / Forms of Address

- Do not use first names unless you are invited to-formality is still appreciated. Executives and subordinates in offices generally do not address one another by their first names.
- Professors and doctors are highly esteemed; use the title *Dottore* for a man and *Dottoressa* for a woman. It is better to use a title (even if you are unsure); always err on the side of caution. It will be accepted as an understanding of "status earned" even if not academically achieved.
- Personal titles are used in all forms of address, spoken and written. Like *Dottore* they can be used with or without the surname. Attorney Green is *Avvocato Verdi*, *Signorina Avvocata* is Miss Attorney, and so forth. Find out these details before the meeting if possible.



## Gestures

- Latins "talk with their hands," and most gestures are usually both expressive and innocuous.
- You may see a disgruntled man quickly stroke his finger tips under his chin and thrust them forward. This is a sign of defiance and/or derision, somewhat like thumbing your nose in the United States.
- Another gesture has two versions: Holding your hand palm down with the index and little fingers straight out, and the others curved inward, symbolized the devil's horns, and the message is to ward off evil. If the same gesture is done with the fingers pointing upward, it is an obscene message.



## Gifts

- Business gifts are sometimes given at a senior managerial level. They should be small and not obviously expensive, but made by craftsmen of prestige. Consumables like liquors or delicacies, or crafts from the visitor's country, may be appropriate.
- Do not give gifts that are obviously a vehicle for your company's logo.
- Note that some Italian firms have privately published glossy, top-quality illustrated books suitable for coffee-table display.
- A small gift may be given to any staff member who has been particularly helpful. Travel alarm clocks, pens, silver key chains, executive diaries, or calculators are good gifts as long as they are name brands. Flowers (see next paragraph) or chocolates are acceptable for a secretary.
- If you are invited to someone's home, bring gift-wrapped chocolates, pastries, or flowers. Never give an even number of flowers. Do not give chrysanthemums; they are used for funerals. Do not give a brooch, handkerchiefs, or knives, all of which connote sadness.
- If you give wine, be certain it is of excellent vintage-many Italians are wine connoisseurs.



## Dress

- In the business world, good clothes are a badge of success. Women dress in quiet, expensive elegance; men's ties and suits should also be fashionable and well-cut.
- Keep in mind Italy is a major center of European fashion. Even casual clothes are smart and chic.
- Women wear pants in cities, but shorts are a rarity. You may be stopped if you try to go into a church while wearing shorts or a sleeveless top.