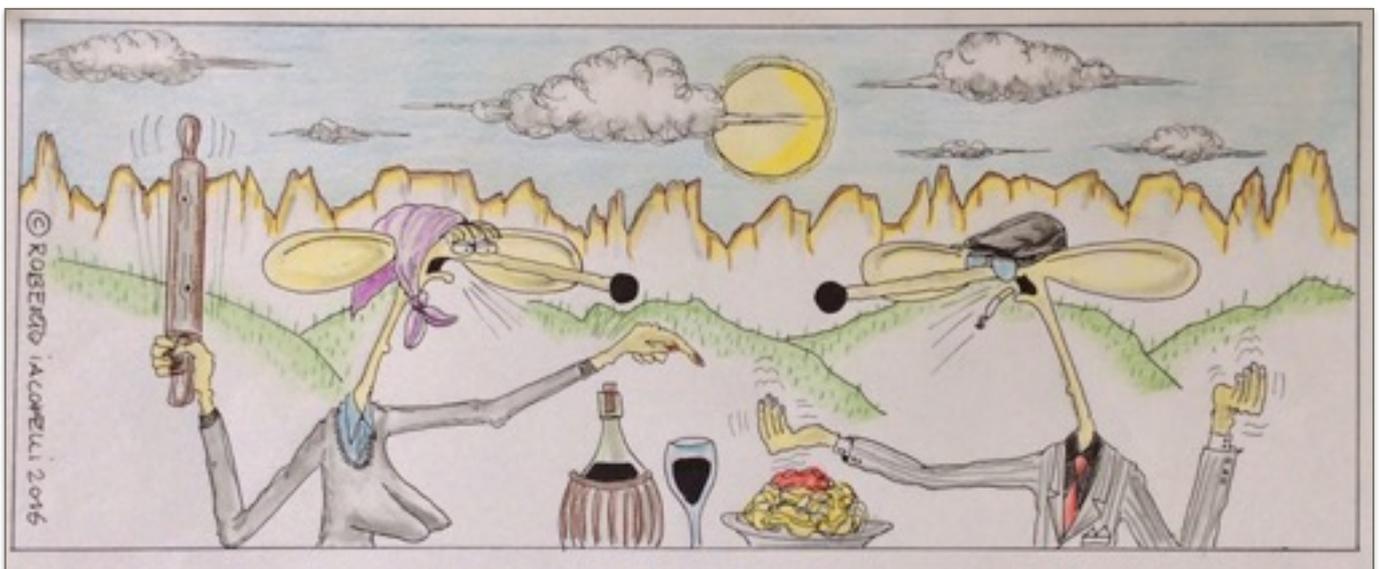


*How survive in Italy
and... the Italians...
A practical handbook
for tourists in Italy*



*This short handbook will help you
understand the oddities and charm of
my country.*

The first difficulty to overcome in Italy is understanding the "strange" organization of my country and the lifestyles of my fellow Italians.

To new arrivals, Italy may seem like a big mess, especially for the logistics of travel. Do not worry ... it really isn't that hard. There are good resources for traveling through Italy and visiting all parts of the country, but they are organized in "Italian style," not in the logical "Anglo / American style."

These notes will help you figure it out ahead of time so you can relax and have an exciting and fun vacation.

Many think that Italians are one generic people: spaghetti-eating, Vespa-riding (with a minimum of three per machine!), mandolin-playing members of the Mafia. Wrong!! In fact, the Italian people are a mix of more of 20 (or more) different ethnic groups, with different languages, different traditions, different ways of thinking, and different territories ... all gathered together in a small country! It is easy to see how this could be confusing for visitors.



Why is Italy like this?

A bit of history will help explain it.

Before the Roman Empire, tribes of many different ethnicities lived in the region. 500 years under the Romans failed to unify the cultures of these peoples. Indeed, during this long period, people from all over Europe circulated through what is now Italy, adding to the cultural diversity. During the 500 years following the fall of the Roman Empire the region experienced even more cultural influx in the form of various barbarian invasions. This is the basis of the extreme ethnic variety that characterizes Italy today.

When, in 1860, Garibaldi completed the unification of Italy, my ancestors from Verona and Tuscany probably did not understand each other. The new "Kingdom of Italy" then initiated the teaching of Italian in school as the standard language from Sicily to the Alps, with a special emphasis on this during the Fascist period. This academic endeavor continues on television today. In any case, Italians are still a mix of many different peoples, with different languages, different traditions, different life styles, etc. ... For you, as a tourist, the charm of Italy is that you can experience a complete change every 20 km! At least you can now understand the reason behind the "traditional confusion" of Italy ...

Here are some tips to better enjoy your time in Italy:



Information gathering and trip preparation

- If you can't find the information you need on the Internet, try the same search with the keyword in Italian. Unfortunately, many websites for local public transport (and other resources) are only in Italian. Google Translate is a good resource to help you and Google also provides an automatic translation service for search results in a different language.
- It is wise to reserve your tickets online for the most important museums, castles, and cultural attractions in Italy. This can save you hours in line at the entrance. Every important attraction has a website where you can reserve tickets and plan your visit.
- Once you are in Italy, always ask locals for information! Younger folks generally have better English skills. Ask the same question of at least two people and compare the answers. If the answers are different, ask a third person. Local knowledge is an important asset for you.



Travel in the Italian country, the Italian concept of the organization

- If you are used to driving a car with an automatic transmission on the large roads of the US with their slow speed limits, or if you are used to the British system of driving on the left ... you may find that driving a little Fiat 500 with manual gear on the narrow and winding roads across the passes in the Dolomites a bit scary. It may be better to rent a medium-sized car with automatic gear and - please - drive with care. Or, you may prefer to arrange your trip so that I can do the driving for you.

- Italian railways are nice and very inexpensive. The home page www.trenitalia.it is good and easy to use. Reservations are only necessary in high season. It is a good idea to have some coins of various denominations at hand to be able to enter the restrooms in the larger train stations.
- The large motorways in Italy are very good but are toll roads. You take a ticket when you enter the tollway and pay when you exit. Do NOT enter or exit in the yellow "Telepass" line, those are reserved for vehicles with a dedicated electronic device for automatic payment.
- Italian police are very helpful and friendly (only with tourists...), but rarely speak English. These are the different types of police in Italy: **Polizia** : regular police, only in big towns. **Carabinieri** : historical police. Every little town has a Carabinieri station. **Guardia di Finanza** : police for the business community. **Polizia locale** : local police, only for traffic on the road (like highway patrol).



Italian multiculturality, a incredible various and mixed situation

- In the Dolomites region you will find three main ethnic groups:
 - 1) **Italians** : (I'm from this group) They live in the southern valleys and speak the "Mountain venetian dialect" in one of two variations: Trentino or Bellunese.
 - 2) **Germans** : They live in the northern valleys and speak the "Tyrolean dialect," a old German dialect.
 - 3) **Ladins** : They are the original pre-Roman people of the eastern Alps. They live in four valleys in the central Dolomites and speak a "retro-Romanic language," which is a mix of Latin and the original rustic language.
- The main divide between ethnicities in the Dolomites is between the Ladins and everyone else. However, there is also quite a bit of confusion between the Germans and the Italians as well. In some valleys German is spoken, in other valleys Italian is the main language, and, along the main Adige valley between Trento and Bolzano, both languages are used. In Bolzano (my town) for example, the population is of 50% German-speaking and 50% Italian-speaking.
- Italy is traditional Catholic country. Sunday is a holiday and generally only churches are open in small towns and, in big towns, also some supermarkets.



*The Italian good food and good wine,
a constant in every region*

- American Express credit cards are not widely accepted in Italy, especially in the Dolomites region. It is better to use Visa or other types of cards. ATMs are available in most places. For small expenses use cash. Some small shops, restaurants and lodgings accept only cash.
- Each restaurant has a "wine of the home" (house wine / local wine). It is a good idea to choose this wine because it is not expensive and is typically good.
- The same is true for the "Menu del giorno" (menu of the day).
- If you order an "American coffee" in a café you will receive probably two shots of espresso + hot water ... worse if you order American coffee with milk ... you will receive a big "cappuccino."
- The café with a poor appearance but full of local people is the best place to enjoy the local specialties and a good coffee (not American coffee please ... :-)
- Grocery stores, especially in small towns, are usually closed on Sundays, have short hours on Saturday and are closed from 1-4 in the afternoon on other days.
- Many restaurants do not start serving the evening meal until 7pm (1900) or later. If you need to eat earlier, try a Trattoria or Osteria (more like a café or deli). Or buy from the grocery store.
- Mid-July through the end August and over Christmas are the peak tourist seasons. During these times you need to reserve every service (including me) well in advance.
- Northern Italy has a very good mobile phone network. For calls to Italy and those inside Italy you need to dial the entire area code, including the leading zero. Thus, calls start with: 0039 (or: +39).



General tips and final suggestions

Finally: ask me if you have any specific questions. An important part of my work is to help you with the logistical aspects of your travel. It is possible that it will take me some time to answer. Don't worry, that just means that I am in the mountains in a place without cell service or in the middle of a climb.

In perfect Italian style, I'm webmaster of my websites, SEO manager, secretary for the organization, salesman for my office and Mountain Guide of your tour! All in one! It keeps me busy!

I'm ready to start a tour with you! (... and ready to continue explaining the peculiarities of Italy and Italians!)

See you in the magical Dolomites!

