

# Italy – Instructions For Use



## Things to look forward to...

- Lodging** A charming Tuscan villa and/or boutique hotels in hilltop villages
- Cuisine** Classic regional dishes, made only with fresh, local ingredients
- Culture** Thousands of years of history – art and architecture - on display
- Support** An experienced on-site trip organizer working in tandem with local experts



## Some perspective

I know many of you are experienced international travelers – some of you may even be international citizens – so I hope no one will take offense at some of these reminders...

...I borrowed much of this from a book by Nan McElroy and Allison Culliford, subtitled: “The Practical, On-site Assistant for the Enthusiastic (Even Experienced) Traveler” because I think it’s easy for any of us to fall into the trap of assuming that everyone behaves like us and values everything we do.

Can you say...

Dov’e’ il bagno?  
(doe-vay eel bahn-yo)  
“Where is the bathroom?”

# Leave the United States behind!

Nothing can force this delicious country to move at anything other than its own pace...



## It's a foreign country!

If you're not a frequent traveler outside the country, it can come as a shock that people not only do things differently, but prefer it their way. We don't understand this mainly because we don't live there. In our insulated environment, we know what we like and can expect, feel perfectly comfortable demanding it and being accommodated accordingly.

Once abroad – especially in Italy – it's best to shift into discovery mode (oh, that out-of-control feeling) to get the most enjoyment out of your trip.

Adopting the "Let's see how good you are at giving me what I want" attitude (sadly, not uncommon), will surely leave you disappointed, and often. You might better travel to Switzerland or Germany (or Florida), where order and logic reign supreme.

## Luggage

**However much luggage you're taking, it's too much.** Seriously.

There's a common "take everything" approach that makes much more sense when you're loading up for a road trip than for traveling in Europe. Concentrate instead on efficiency – you'll be much happier and unencumbered when navigating unfamiliar territory (even the Florence train station). You're not traveling to the Antarctic – you can always pick up the occasional item around almost any corner.

## Slow down

Don't try to see too much in too short a period of time, whether in one day or ten. Remember, each time you change locations you lose a day. Relocating always involves packing and preparation time the night before, the transfer itself, locating new lodgings and checking in, and getting oriented

once again. Slow down, allow time for rest, renewal, and a little dolce vita.

You don't have to see everything this trip; if you like it, trust us, you'll be back. Try traveling with less of an intention to "do" a town, and more on finding a way to absorb its character. Fellow travelers will quiz you: Did you do Orvieto? Were you here or there or there? "We found the very best cantina" (out of thousands?), or, visited that famous butcher (that's right, Sting Was There). If you're instead looking to connect more with the culture itself, look for opportunities to incorporate a bit of everyday Italy, and not just the prepackaged one.

Perhaps you'll have a chance to visit an absolutely unknown coffee bar more than once – you'll be recognized the second time, without a doubt (then don't tell anybody where it is).

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## **It's not a theme park**

Remember that Italy is a country, not a theme park. Because there's so much to see, it's only natural to view Italy as having been created specifically as a resort – it's been a tourist destination for centuries. It's tempting to expect English translations everywhere, crystal-clear directions and signage throughout the country, along with opening hours convenient to our needs. Before you even begin researching airfares, understand that this will simply not be the case. Destination Italy will also include traditional Italian values, culture, and approach to life; the more you search for this authentic Italy, the more important it will be to surrender to whatever you find there.

For Americans in particular, this one fact can be the most difficult to accept: sometimes there's nothing to be done. Operating in a strange environment can be a real test of your patience, but that's part of what we must expect when we travel. You'll inevitably encounter an irritating hitch here and there, usually when you least expect it. In these instances, it can be tempting to adopt a "Who's in charge here?" attitude, but trust us: your best strategy will be simply to ask for help. Pounding the counter or whipping out a credit card in an attempt to make something impossible materialize will get you exactly . . . nowhere. You'll be far more

likely to receive the assistance you require if you take on the role of an honored guest, not a paying customer.

## **Deep breath**

Take a deep breath before drawing the conclusion that something doesn't work or isn't there, just because you're not familiar with it. *Calma*, you've only been here a day or so, you're just over jet lag, and you've got a lot coming at you. Even if you're on a tight schedule, breathe once more; you're much more likely to find the answer you're looking for if you can search with a tranquil pair of eyes.

## **Someone can understand you**

Remember that there's always someone nearby who understands exactly what you are saying, good or bad. As Mark Twain warns us in *Innocents Abroad*, "The gentle reader has no idea what a consummate ass he can become until he has traveled abroad" We Americans, for example, are known for our gregariousness (not a bad thing), and for speaking *ad alta voce*, and in our own expansive surroundings, we're not used to being overheard. To avoid unintentionally insulting a mass of passersby in a moment of frustration in the more compact European environment (where

almost everyone speaks some English), take time to read up on how things operate, double-check openings and closings, get the maps you need, and allow plenty of time to handle the unexpected.

## **Be aware**

Make the pickpocket pick someone else. When in transit, dress comfortably and simply, instead of like an unconsciously wealthy traveler who's just put a boatload of cash exactly where an unconsciously wealthy traveler might put it – ready to be pilfered by an experienced pickpocket who knows them all too well. Leave your most expensive jewelry at home – it's just one less thing to worry about. If you're carrying lots of cash, put the bulk of it in a money belt that straps around your waist or hangs from your neck, or at least inside something that closes securely. Never keep all your money in one place, especially when in transit and in crowded tourist centers (popular piazzas, train stations, etc.), and never turn your back on your luggage or your purse. More on this in upcoming messages.

## **Of course...**

*Traveling with someone who knows the ropes - who's been there before, may be one of the best ways to enjoy yourself.*