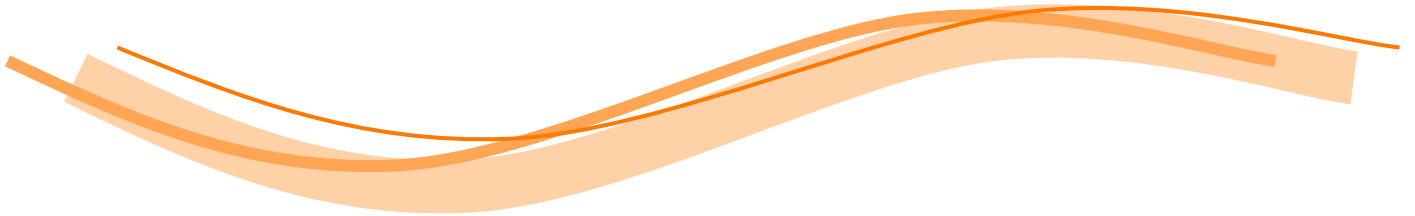




ITALY





ITALY	<p>The land of La Dolce Vita and the Eternal City</p> <p>Flavours, colours, smells, human warmth and the melodious language of romance - In short, Italy offers visitors a sumptuous feast for the senses. Italy retains an exceptional legacy from peoples who have occupied it throughout the course of its history. Over the centuries, it has seen great civilizations that still permeate Europe.</p> <p>Rome, Florence and Venice are particularly marked by this rich cultural heritage.</p>
Location	South central Europe
Geography	<p>Italy comprises the boot-shaped Italian Peninsula and a number of islands including the two largest in the Mediterranean, Sicily and Sardinia. It lies between latitudes 35° and 48° N, and longitudes 6° and 19° E.</p> <p>The country's total area is 301,230 km², of which 294,020 km² is land and 7,210 km² is water. Including the islands, Italy has a coastline and border of 7,600 km on the Adriatic, Ionian, Tyrrhenian seas (740 km), and borders shared with France (488 km), Austria (430 km), Slovenia (232 km) and Switzerland; San Marino (39 km) and Vatican City (3.2 km), both enclaves, account for the remainder.</p> <p>The Apennine Mountains form the peninsula's backbone and the Alps form its northern boundary, where Italy's highest point is located on Mont Blanc (4,810 m/15,782 ft). The Po, Italy's longest river (652 km), flows from the Alps on the western border to the Adriatic Sea. The 3 largest lakes are Garda (367 km²), Maggiore (212 km²), and Como (145 km²).</p> <p>The country is situated at the meeting point of the Eurasian Plate and the African Plate, leading to considerable seismic and volcanic activity. There are 14 volcanoes in Italy, three of which are active: Etna (the traditional site of Vulcan's smithy), Stromboli and Vesuvius. Vesuvius is the only active volcano in mainland Europe and is most famous for the destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum.</p>
Name	The name Italy is likely derived from the Latin Italia, borrowed through Greek from the Oscan Víteliú, meaning "land of young cattle". The bull was a symbol of the southern Italian tribes and was often depicted goring the Roman wolf as a defiant symbol of free Italy.
Population	With a population estimated in 60.4 million, Italy has the fourth-largest population in the European Union and the 23 rd largest population worldwide.
Language	Italian. English is widely spoken in tourist areas.
Currency	The euro became the official currency of Italy and 11 other participating countries on January 1, 1999. At the time of this writing (May 2014), Cdn\$1.52 was worth approximately 1€.
Tipping	This custom is practiced with flair in Italy - many people depend on tips for their livelihoods. In hotels, the service charge of 15% to 19% is

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	<p>already added to a bill. In addition, it's customary to tip the chambermaid .50€ (75¢) per day, the doorman (for calling a cab) .50€ (75¢), and the bellhop or porter 1.50€ to 1.95€ (\$2.20-\$2.85) for carrying your bags to your room. A concierge expects about 15% of his or her bill, as well as tips for extra services performed, which could include help with long-distance calls. In expensive hotels, these euro amounts are often doubled.</p> <p>In restaurants and cafes, 15% is usually added to your bill to cover most charges. If you're not sure whether this has been done, ask, "È incluso il servizio?" (ay een-cloo-soh eel sair-vee-tsoh?). An additional tip isn't expected, but it's nice to leave the equivalent of an extra couple of dollars if you've been pleased with the service. Checkroom attendants expect .75€ (\$1.10), and washroom attendants should get .50€ (75¢). Restaurants are required by law to give customers official receipts.</p> <p>Taxi drivers expect at least 15% of the fare.</p>
Government	Parliamentary democracy led by the Prime Minister
Documentation	Canadians need a Passport, but no Visa is required.
Time zone	Italy is 6 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (EST) in Canada. Daylight saving time goes into effect in Italy each year from the end of March to the end of October.
Health	Italy has an excellent modern health service, but all Canadian travellers should ensure that they have travel health insurance coverage, as otherwise, costs can be very high.
Safety tips	Italy is a modern European country, but as always, sensible precautions should be undertaken such as you would do at home in Canada.

CLIMATE	
General climate	<p>There is no such thing as a general climate in Italy – it varies hugely according to the region within the country and varies from typically Mediterranean to Alpine.</p> <p>It's warm all over Italy in summer; it can be very hot in the south, especially inland. The high temperatures (measured in Italy in degrees Celsius) begin in Rome in May, often lasting until sometime in October. Winters in the north of Italy are cold, with rain and snow, but in the south the weather is warm all year, averaging 10°C in winter.</p> <p>For the most part, it's drier in Italy than in North America, so high temperatures don't seem as bad because the humidity is lower. In Rome, Naples, and the south, temperatures can stay in the 30s Celsius for days, but nights are most often comfortably cooler.</p>
Today's weather	23C and sunny (May 8 th 2014) in Rome.
Best time to visit	From April to June and late September to October are the best months for traveling in Italy - temperatures are usually mild and the crowds

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	<p>aren't quite so intense. Starting in mid-June, the summer rush really picks up, and from July to mid-September the country teems with visitors. August is the worst month: Not only does it get uncomfortably hot, muggy, and crowded, but the entire country goes on vacation at least from August 15 to the end of the month - and many Italians take off the entire month. Many hotels, restaurants, and shops are closed (except at the spas, beaches, and islands, where 70% of the Italians head). From late October to Easter, most attractions go on shorter winter hours or are closed for renovation. Many hotels and restaurants take a month or two off between November and February, spa and beach destinations become padlocked ghost towns, and it can get much colder than you'd expect (it might even snow).</p> <p>High season on most airlines' routes to Rome usually stretches from June to the beginning of September. This is the most expensive and most crowded time to travel. Shoulder season is from April to May, early September to October, and December 15 to December 24. Low season is from November 1 to December 14 and December 25 to March 31.</p>
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GETTING AROUND	
Getting There	<p>Alitalia flies directly to Rome from Toronto. Flight time is around 8.5 hours. Address: 151 Bloor Street West, Suite 1105, Toronto, M5S 1S4 Phone: 1-800-3618336 Website: www.alitalia.ca</p>
Cities	<p>Rome “When in Rome, do as the Romans do”– delve into the city’s many formidable museums and basilicas, tantalize your taste buds with the unparalleled flavour of Italy and surround yourself with the pervading sense of history that is the Eternal City. The range of landmarks within the bounds of the city is staggering: there is the grand Colosseum and lavish Vatican City, the Sistine Chapel and so much more. “Roma” is a magnificent combination of old and new, and positively hums with lively markets, cheery cafés and of course, traffic. Rome is testament to the momentous Italian past - whichever way you look, Rome will mesmerize, amuse and enlighten... and have you planning your next visit before you’ve even left.</p> <p>The Vatican City - The Vatican city is not only a truly spiritual place but is impressive for its grandeur, art and of course St Peters – the biggest church in the World. Also not to be missed is the Sistine Chapel, whose ceiling is home to Michelangelo’s mural masterpiece.</p> <p>Colosseum - Known to the Ancient Romans as the “Flavian Amphitheatre” this symbol of the Roman Empire was host to 450 years of gladiators, lion feedings and “games”. It is a truly impressive sight.</p>

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Trevi Fountain - A beautiful rococo design, the Trevi Fountain is the place to stir romance. Legend has it by throwing a coin over your shoulder, into the fountain, you will return to Rome.

Pantheon - Nearly 1900 years after its construction this 2nd century AD pagan temple to the gods is remarkably still intact. Converted to a church in 608AD, Marcus Agrippa's extraordinary dome is the largest masonry vault ever built.

Spanish Steps – Nicknamed Rome's living room, the Spanish Steps are the perfect place to sit and people watch. Both tourists and locals can be seen sitting and relaxing on the steps that overlook the piazza.

Florence

What is it about Florence that gets pulses racing? Is it the feeling of sheer enchantment when you first see the mighty Duomo dominating the skyline, or perhaps knowing that you are surrounded by Renaissance artworks of the great masters? The clout of the Medici family is everywhere in the city's features, extending from art to architecture to culture.

It is this distant, celebrated past that has made modern-day Florence the thriving tourist centre that it is. With the opportunity to wine and dine in true Florentine style, visit historically colossal sights, gaze at artistic perfection and watch the sun set over the Arno, Florence is simply unrivalled.

The Academy (Galleria dell' Accademia) - One of the best known art museums in Florence, The Academy is home to sculptures by Michelangelo, including the "David", "The four prisoners" and the "Pieta of Palestina".

Duomo - This Italian Gothic cathedral was finished around 1367 and was originally completely covered with coloured marbles. The dome of the cathedral is an impressive sight on the Florentine skyline.

Piazza della Signoria - Florence's best piazza, this busy square is a place to sip coffee and take photos of the Fountain of Neptune.

Palazzo Vecchio - This grand palace was home to Florence's most famous rulers - the Medici Family. The interior is filled with its treasures of Florentine art and history.

Santa Croce Church - Built in the 14th century and started by St. Francis of Assisi, the church today entombs Florence's most famous historical figures including Michelangelo, Machiavelli, Rossini and a memorial to Dante. Outside you'll find numerous street vendors.

Venice

Venice is a dazzling blend of waterways, bridges, land and glorious architecture. For anyone in search of the past, you'll undoubtedly come across the astounding collection of Renaissance paintings, frescoes,

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	<p>mosaics and sculptures embellishing the interiors of basilicas and churches. And if you can't get there by foot, you'll get there by water. Bustling St. Mark's Square attracts flocks of tourists and pigeons alike, the intricacies of the Doges' Palace are magical... This age-old floating city is made from the kind of stuff fairy-tales are. Indeed, no amount of reading or flipping through picture books will prepare you for its breathtaking beauty.</p> <p>St Mark's Basilica - One of the most spectacular churches in the world the Basilica is adorned with Byzantine domes and gilded mosaics. Built in honour of St. Mark the city's patron saint, after his bones were kidnapped from Egypt in the 9th Century.</p> <p>St Mark's Square - Filled with café's, restaurants, pigeons and music - it's no wonder Napoleon dubbed this central gathering place as the 'finest drawing room in Europe'.</p> <p>Palazzo Ducale - The Palace of the Doges housed Venice's rulers for more than six centuries. It connects to the adjacent Prigioni Nuove ("New Prisons") via the Bridge of Sighs made famous by Lord Byron.</p> <p>Grand Canale - Venice is connected by 150-canals and 400-bridges. The Grand Canale is the most beautiful "street" in Venice and flows between opulent architecture - a gondola ride is a must do in this unique city.</p>
Distances	Venice to Rome is 400km; Florence to Rome is 230 km; Milan to Naples is 650 km.
Ferries	Ferries connect the mainland with the many islands of Italy, most notably Sardinia, Sicily, Elba and Capri.
Trains	Italy is well served by train service. The Italian rail system has different train types: TBiz, EurostarItalia, Eurostar Italia AV (for Alta velocita or high speed with the ESAV logo), Eurostar City Italia, IntercityPlus, Intercity, Espresso, Interregionale and Regionale which is often also used for suburban trains, Eurostar Italia and TBiz being the classiest. Generally speaking, for a given distance each tier costs from 40% to 100% more than the one below it. The train cars used by the TBiz and Eurostar Italia services are far newer than those used by the other types, but are not necessarily more comfortable; however many of them provide power sockets which may be useful if you plan on working on the train. On the other hand the cars used by Intercity trains might be split up into distinct, six-seater compartments, which is really nice when you're travelling in groups. A new level has been introduced recently. It is called Intercity-plus and it is just a way to have passengers pay more than the intercity fares. Recently, many of Interegionale trains have been classified as Intercity.
Car Rental	The three major rental companies in Italy are Avis (tel. 800/331-1084; www.avis.com), Budget (tel. 800/472-3325; www.budget.com), and Hertz (tel. 800/654-3001; www.hertz.com).

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	But be warned: driving in Italy is not for the faint-hearted! My first experience of driving abroad happened to be in Italy and it came close to making me a confirmed pedestrian...
Buses	Buy town bus tickets from corner stores and other shops before boarding. The payment system for most mass transit in Italy (trains, city buses, subway) is based on voluntary payment combined with sporadic enforcement. Specifically, you buy a ticket which can be used at any time (for that level of service, anyway) and when you use it you validate the ticket by sticking it into a machine that stamps a date on it. For tourists it may be very convenient to buy daily (or multi-day) tickets that allow you to travel as much as you want in a single (or more) day. Every major city also has some type of City Card, a fixed-fee card allowing you to travel on local public transportation and visit a number of museums and giving you discounts in shops, hotels and restaurants.
Passes	Italy Train Passes - This pass may be a good deal in that it grants unlimited travel on the national rail network of Italy (3 days of unlimited travel within a 2-month period). Travel days may be used either consecutively or non-consecutively. The pass sells for \$249 per person in first class or \$199 in second class. Children 4 to 11 pay \$125 or \$100, respectively.

ACCOMMODATION TYPES	From villas to castles to grand hotels to bed and breakfasts – the options are huge and depend upon the region, the individual traveller’s needs and your wallet!
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LIFESTYLES	
Kids	‘Bambinos’ are beloved in Italy and travelling with little ones opens many doors. It’s fun for the kids too, with lots of open air attractions as well as dramatic historical places to explore.
Teens	School age kids will see history come to life in places like Rome and Florence. Rent ‘Gladiator’ and then take them to the Colosseum...and let their imagination do the rest.
Romance	The most romantic experience imaginable is to experience the S-shaped Canal Grande in Venice , curving for 3.3km alongside historic buildings and under ornate bridges - the most romantic waterway in the world. Most first-timers are stunned by the variety of Gothic and Renaissance buildings, the elaborate styles of which could fill a book on architecture. A ride on the canal will give you ever-changing glimpses of the city's poignant beauty. Your ride doesn't have to be on a gondola; any public vaporetto (motorboat) sailing between Venice's rail station and Piazza San Marco will provide a heart-stopping view.
Honeymoons & Weddings	The Italian Lake District is a perfect honeymoon setting. Magnificent mountains frame idyllic lakes and picture-perfect villages are connected by tiny ferries amidst historical sites in abundance.

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Seniors	Guided tour packages , such as Trafalgar, are a very easy and civilized way of seeing as many of Italy's sights as possible without exhaustion setting in. The director Fellini once said, "A man should visit Italy at least twice in his life - once when he's young and can enjoy so many 'forbidden' fruits, and again when he's old and can sit in our timeless sun and enjoy la dolce far niente or the sweetness of doing nothing."
UNIQUES	Italy is home to the greatest number of UNESCO World Heritage Sites of any country in the world, a total of 49 as of 2014, and has rich collections of world art, culture and literature from many different periods.
Surprising	Tourism is one of the fastest growing and profitable sectors of the national economy: with 43.7 million international tourist arrivals and total receipts estimated at \$42.7 billion, Italy is the fourth highest tourism earner and the fifth most visited country in the world.
History	Italy's capital, Rome, was for centuries the political centre of Western civilisation as the capital of the Roman Empire. After its decline, Italy would endure numerous invasions by foreign peoples, from Germanic tribes such as the Lombards and Ostrogoths, to the Byzantines and later, the Normans, among others. Centuries later, Italy would become the birthplace of the Renaissance, an immensely fruitful intellectual movement that would prove to be integral in shaping the subsequent course of European thought. Through much of its post-Roman history, Italy was fragmented into numerous kingdoms and city-states (such as the Kingdom of Sardinia, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and the Duchy of Milan), but was unified in 1861, following a tumultuous period in history known as "Il Risorgimento" ("The Resurgence"). In the late 19th century, through World War I, and to World War II, Italy possessed a colonial empire, which extended its rule to Libya, Eritrea, Somalia, Ethiopia, Albania, Rhodes and the Dodecanese.
Books	Frommer's Italy
1000 Places to See Before You Die	There are nearly 60 pages devoted to Italian places: 62 entries in total, including Rome, Florence, Venice and Milan, plus islands, lakes, museums and historical sites a-plenty.
Must Sees	The three greatest cities of all: Venice, Florence and Rome.
SPORTS ACTIVITIES	Italy has a long sporting tradition. In numerous sports, both individual and team, Italy has good representation and many successes. The most popular sport is by far football. Basketball and volleyball are the next most popular/played, with Italy having a rich tradition in both. Italy won the 2006 FIFA World Cup, and is currently the second most successful football team in the world, after Brazil, having won four FIFA

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	World Cups. Italy has also got strong traditions in cycling, tennis, athletics, fencing, winter sports and rugby. Italian Scuderia Ferrari is the oldest surviving team in Grand Prix racing, having competed since 1948, and statistically the most successful Formula One team in history with a record of 15 drivers' championships.
Golf	Italy is not a major golfing destination, yet there are plenty of scenic courses all over the country. When the museums begin to lose their luster, the greens of a public golf course are never far away.
Fishing	Fishing in lakes and rivers is very popular and there is also sea fishing from coastal resorts.
Horse riding	The countryside has many stables from which it is possible to enjoy horseback riding by the hour or by the day.
Hiking	There's fabulous hiking in the Alps in the north of Italy and there are long distance paths elsewhere in the country too.
Cycling	Several companies offer cycling tours of the Italian countryside. They provide cycles, a guide, and transportation for your suitcase, and for you if it all gets a bit too tiring. Tours vary to accommodate different interests. Normally you change city and hotel every day. If you like cycling this is an excellent way of seeing Italy off-the-beaten-track.

CULTURE	
Arts	Italian painting is traditionally characterized by warmth of colour and light, as exemplified in the works of Caravaggio and Titian, and a preoccupation with religious figures and motifs. Italian painting enjoyed preeminence in Europe for hundreds of years, from the Romanesque and Gothic periods, and through the Renaissance and Baroque periods, the latter two of which saw fruition in Italy. Notable artists who fall within these periods include Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Donatello, Botticelli, Fra Angelico, Tintoretto, Caravaggio, Bernini, Titian and Raphael.
Music	From folk music to classical, music has always played an important role in Italian culture. Instruments associated with classical music, including the piano and violin, were invented in Italy, and many of the prevailing classical music forms, such as the symphony, concerto, and sonata, can trace their roots back to innovations of 16th and 17th century Italian music. Italy's most famous composers include the Renaissance composers Palestrina and Monteverdi , the Baroque composers Alessandro Scarlatti, Corelli and Vivaldi , the Classical composers Paganini and Rossini , and the Romantic composers Verdi and Puccini . While the classical music tradition still holds strong in Italy, as evidenced by the fame of its innumerable opera houses, such as La Scala of Milan and San Carlo of Naples, and performers such as the pianist Maurizio Pollini and the late tenor Luciano Pavarotti, Italians have been no less

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	<p>appreciative of their thriving contemporary music scene. Italy is widely known for being the birthplace of opera. Italian opera was believed to have been founded in the early 17th century, in Italian cities such as Mantua and Venice. Later, works and pieces composed by native Italian composers of the 19th century and early 20th century, such as Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, Verdi and Puccini, are amongst the most famous operas ever written and today are performed in opera houses across the world. La Scala opera house in Milan is also renowned as one of the best in the world. Famous Italian opera singers include Enrico Caruso, Alessandro Bonci, the late Luciano Pavarotti, and Andrea Bocelli, to name a few.</p> <p>La Scala Opera Season, Teatro alla Scala, Milan. At the most famous opera house of them all, the season opens on December 7, the feast day of Milan's patron St. Ambrogio, and runs into July, and September to mid-November. Even though opening-night tickets are close to impossible to get, it's worth a try; call tel. 02/860-775; www.teatroallascala.org for information and reservations.</p>
<p>Films</p>	<p>Italian cinema has a long history and has produced many classics of the celluloid. The country has also been the backdrop of countless Hollywood-produced films.</p> <p>Ralph Fiennes starred in director Anthony Minghella's The English Patient (1996), which used many small towns in Tuscany for its setting. Minghella also directed The Talented Mr. Ripley (1999), with its wonderful scenes of Italy. Cher, impersonating Peggy Guggenheim, appeared in Tea with Mussolini (1999), a semiautobiographical tale from the early life of director Franco Zeffirelli. Frances Mayes's Under the Tuscan Sun (2003), directed by Audrey Wells, was as light as a gentle glass of wine and just as enjoyable. Russell Crowe won an Oscar for his appearance in Ridley Scott's Gladiator (2000).</p> <p>I have chosen Under the Tuscan Sun for my Pinterest board of Places in Films: http://pinterest.com/pin/228768856042981992/</p>
<p>Museums</p>	<p>There are countless museums in Italy – here are some of the most famous:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The Vatican Museums (Rome): Rambling, disorganized, and poorly labeled they might be, but these buildings are packed with treasures accumulated over the centuries by the popes. There's the incomparable Sistine Chapel, such priceless ancient Greek and Roman sculptures as Laocoön and the Belvedere Apollo, buildings whose walls were almost completely executed by Raphael (including his majestic School of Athens), and endless collections of art ranging from (very pagan) Greco-Roman antiquities to Christian art by European masters.

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•**Galleria Borghese (Rome):** One of the world's great small museums reopened a few years ago after a 14-year restoration breathed new life into the frescoes and decor of this 1613 palace. That's merely the backdrop for the collections, which include masterpieces of baroque sculpture by a young Bernini and paintings by Caravaggio and Raphael.

•**National Etruscan Museum (Rome):** Mysterious and, for the most part, undocumented, the Etruscans were the ancestors of the Romans. They left a legacy of bronze and marble sculpture, sarcophagi, jewelry, and representations of mythical heroes, some of which were excavated at Cerveteri, a stronghold north of Rome. Most startling about the artifacts is their sophisticated, almost mystical sense of design. The Etruscan collection is housed in a papal villa dating from the 1500s.

•**Uffizi Gallery (Florence):** This 16th-century Renaissance palace was the administrative headquarters, or uffizi (offices), for the Duchy of Tuscany when the Medicis controlled Florence. It's estimated that up to 90% of Italy's artistic patrimony is stored in this building, the crown jewel of Italy's museums. This is the world's greatest collection of Renaissance paintings.

•**Bargello Museum (Florence):** Originally built as a fortress palace in 1255, this imposing structure is now a vast repository of some of Italy's most important Renaissance sculpture. Donatello's bronze David is a remarkable contrast to the world-famous Michelangelo icon.

•**National Gallery of Umbria (Perugia):** Italian Renaissance art has its roots in Tuscan and Umbrian painting from the 1200s. This collection, on the top floor of the Palazzo dei Priori (parts of which date from the 1400s), contains a world-class collection of paintings, most executed in Tuscany or Umbria between the 13th and the 18th centuries. Included are works by Fra Angelico, Piero della Francesca, Perugino, Duccio, and Gozzoli, among others.

•**Academy Gallery (Venice):** One of Europe's great museums, this is an incomparable collection of Venetian painting, exhibited chronologically from the 13th to the 18th century. It's one of the most richly stocked art museums in Italy, boasting hundreds of works by Bellini, Carpaccio, Giorgione, Titian, and Tintoretto.

•**Peggy Guggenheim Collection (Venice):** A comprehensive, brilliant modern art collection, assembled by legendary arts patron Peggy Guggenheim, is housed in an unfinished palazzo along the Grand

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	<p>Canal. The collection is a cavalcade of 20th-century art, including works by Max Ernst (one of Ms. Guggenheim's former husbands), Picasso, Braque, Magritte, and Giacometti.</p> <p>•Brera Picture Gallery (Milan): Milan is usually associated with wealth and corporate power, and those two things can buy a city its fair share of art and culture. The foremost place to see Milan's artistic treasures is the Brera Picture Gallery, whose collection - shown in a 17th-century palace - is especially rich in paintings from the schools of Lombardy and Venice. Three of the most important prizes are Mantegna's Dead Christ, Giovanni Bellini's La Pietà, and Carpaccio's St. Stephen Debating.</p> <p>•National Archaeological Museum (Naples): Naples and the region around it have yielded a wealth of sculptural treasures from the Roman Empire. Many of these riches have been accumulated in a rambling building designed as a barracks for the Neapolitan cavalry in the 1500s. Much of the loot excavated from Pompeii and Herculaneum, as well as the Renaissance collections of the Farnese family, is in this museum, which boasts a trove of Greco-Roman antiquities.</p>
<p>Festivals</p>	<p>Carnevale, Venice. At this riotous time, theatrical presentations and masked balls take place throughout Venice and on the islands in the lagoon. The balls are by invitation only (except the Doge's Ball), but the street events and fireworks are open to everyone. Contact the Venice Tourist Office, APT Venezia, Castello 5050, 30122 Venezia (tel. 041-5298711; www.turismo.venezia.it). The week before Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent.</p> <p>Holy Week observances, nationwide. Processions and age-old ceremonies - some from pagan days, some from the Middle Ages - are staged. The most notable procession is led by the pope, passing the Colosseum and the Roman Forum up to Palatine Hill; a torch-lit parade caps the observance. Sicily's observances are also noteworthy. Beginning 4 days before Easter Sunday; sometimes at the end of March but often in April.</p> <p>Il Palio, Piazza del Campo, Siena, Tuscany. Palio fever grips this Tuscan hill town for a wild and exciting horse race from the Middle Ages. Pageantry, costumes, and the celebrations of the victorious contrada (sort of a neighborhood social club) mark the spectacle. It's a "no rules" event: Even a horse without a rider can win the race. For details, contact the Azienda di Promozione Turistica, Piazza del Campo 56, 53100 Siena (tel. 0577-280551; www.terresiena.it). Early July to mid-August.</p>

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ATTRACTIONS	
Beaches	<p>Surrounded by water on all sides, Italy has a unique coastline with nooks and crannies that create quiet swimming coves and picturesque seascapes. Italy participates in the Blue Flag Programme, so travelers can easily identify beaches that are safe for swimming by the distinct blue flag. The beaches are most crowded during July and August when Italians join the throngs of foreign tourists heading to the beach to escape the heat. Whether you're searching for an upscale resort or a secluded seaside village, there's a lounge chair on the sea just waiting for you. Here are some highlights:</p> <p>Amalfi Coast Most visitors experience the Amalfi Coast while navigating the twists and turns during a scenic drive on the coastal road. The view is breathtaking with jagged cliffs and blossoming flowers, but the best way to experience the coast is to visit one of its seaside villages. The busiest stretch of the coast curves between the villages of Amalfi and Positano. Erosion has destroyed much of the beach areas in this region leaving small private beaches at hotels and beach clubs. The fanciest hotel in Amalfi is the expensive Hotel Santa Caterina where you can walk a winding garden path to the beach and take the elevator, carved into the rocky cliffs, back up to the hotel. Positano has been a welcome beach retreat since the days of Roman nobility and even the ancient Greeks. There are 2 public beaches - the secluded Fornillo beach and the main beach center at Spiaggia Grande. The elegant Il San Pietro di Positano hotel is the utmost in luxury with a private beach cove for sunbathing and swimming.</p> <p>Capri Located off the Sorrento peninsula in southern Italy, Capri is a rocky, mountainous island that's a favorite with starlets and jet setters. While many of the island's hotels boast great views of the clear blue sea, the J.K. Palace Capri is the only one with direct beach access. You can easily explore the area's best beaches on your own. The best beach on the north side is the wide expanse at the Bagni di Tiberio while the south side of the island has Marina di Mulo. Most beaches are supported by beach clubs which provide beach access as well as facilities, towels and chairs for a nominal fee. Save time and avoid the steep walk back to town by taking a quick boat ride to the beach from the Marina Grande.</p> <p>Italian Riviera Visitors flock to the Italian Riviera for great hiking and sunny days at</p>

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the beach. At the center of it all is Cinque Terre, 5 small villages set in the cliffs hugging the distinctive coastline. Monterosso is the resort town with charming hotels, busy beaches and plenty of restaurants to feed hungry tourists. The beach here is open to the public and free, though there are many spots where you can pay for a comfy lounge chair and umbrella for shade. Escape the crowds by hiking to the smaller town of Riomaggiore where you can relax on the rocky beach before continuing your journey along the seaside trails. Take a break from the beach to enjoy some of the town's famed pesto atop a heaping plate of pasta.

Tuscany

Tuscany is known for its rolling hills, great wine and classic Italian culture. But Tuscany also has a beach scene with sandy white shores and quaint seaside villages. In western Tuscany, Maremma has a booming cowboy culture as well as almost 160 kms of coastline overlooking crystal clear water. Castiglione della Pescaia is an affordable beach town with plenty of water sports including sailing and windsurfing. The best scuba diving can be found further south in Monte Argentario's coves and bays. Tuscany's largest beach town is one of the farthest points south on the Italian Riviera. Viareggio is a classic resort town with art nouveau buildings, bustling nightlife and endless food. While the town has pleasant beaches and an active seafront promenade, it's best known for its wild Carnival festival, a tradition since 1873.

Sicily

The beaches around Sicily range from sandy white shores to exotic black sands, making for unique beach getaways around the island. If you're visiting the capital city of Palermo, the beaches at Mondello Lido are just a few miles away. This stretch of beach is lined with hotels as well as restaurants and bars making for a vibrant nightlife. On Sicily's east coast, visitors to Taormina can easily get to the best beaches at Lido Mazzaro. The journey to the beach is part of the fun as beachgoers climb aboard a funicular, or cable car, for a quick ride down to the beach. For a vastly different beach experience, adventurers can take a boat from the town of Milazzo in northeast Sicily to the exotic black sand beach in the Aeolian Islands. Located on the island of Vulcano, Spiaggia Sabbie Nere has calm waters and dark volcanic sand. It's also conveniently located near the island's hot mud baths.

Sardinia

The sunbathers and fancy yachts compete with the natural beauty of

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	<p>the beaches along Sardinia's Costa Smeralda, or Emerald Coast. Sardinia's northeast shore, with its stunning azure waters and still blue grottoes, is a getaway for royalty, with classy resorts and 56 kms of gorgeous coastline. But the luxe life comes with a hefty pricetag at the area's most posh resorts including the dreamy Cala di Volpe with interesting archways and turrets adding to the royal Mediterranean flair. The Cala di Volpe private beach is a 5-minute boat ride from the resort. Nearby, The Prince's Beach, or Spiaggia del Principe is a secluded paradise, surrounded by thick dense shrubs providing even more privacy. The area comes alive in the warm months with most resorts opening just from April through October</p> <p>Venice Venice may be surrounding entirely by water, but there are few beaches in the city. The best beaches are found on Lido, an almost 11 km long sandbar sitting in the Venice Lagoon and Adriatic Sea. Just 10 minutes by waterbus from St. Mark's Square, this area has the well-earned nickname of the "Island of Gold" thanks to its unique beauty and sandy golden shores. The loveliest beaches are in front of Lido's historic grand hotels. The Hotel des Bains, immortalized in Thomas Mann's "Death in Venice," is lined with thatched beach huts while the Hotel Excelsior beachfront sports elegant white cabanas. The beaches are open from May through September and there's an admission fee to access the beach and amenities.</p>
Wildlife	<p>Italy has been very successful in restoring wildlife to previous ranges in the country.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Red and roe deer and wild boars have returned to much of the Apennines after being forced out more than a century ago. - In 1970 there were fewer than 100 wolves; today there are over 500 and they have spread from the Abruzzi up to the Alps. - Brown bears had disappeared from the Trentino and the Friuli-Venezia-Giulia regions; now they are back. - Once just an occasional presence on the ponds of Sardinia, thousands of pink flamingo pairs now nest in lagoons along the coast. - The last specimen of the bearded vulture was killed in 1912, but today the birds once again fly over the Stelvio and Gran Paradiso National Parks. - The European lynx had not been sighted for almost a century, and is now seen in many areas in both the Alps and Apennines. - In the 1960s the Sardinian red deer was extinct in Corsica and barely surviving in Sardinia. There are many more today, with over a thousand in the WWF Monte Arcosu Oasis in Sardinia alone.
Parks	<p>There are 23 Italian national parks covering about five percent of the country.</p>

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National Parks in the North of Italy

One of the major national parks in the north of Italy is the dello Stelvio national park. This national park is located amidst the section of the Italian Alps that are close to the border with Austria. The Main Italian cities which are closest to this national park in Italy are Venice and Verona, both of which are about 100-150km south of the national park. This national park is home to valleys and mountain peaks, some of which tower to nearly 4000 metres above sea level. Skiing is a popular attraction for this national park not only in winter, but even during the spring and summer months. Skiing is possible all year round in this national park because it is also home to the largest glaciers in Europe, which of course do not melt. This national park is also a popular walking destination and several charming little Italian villages can be seen this way.

National Parks in Central Italy

The main national park in the centre of Italy is the Monti Sibilini National Park. This national park is located approximately in the middle of the Apennine mountain chain which runs from the north of Italy in Genoa to the Calabria region of southern Italy. The main cities in Italy which are closest to this national park are Rome which is about 100km east of the national park, while Perugia and Assisi are located approximately the same distance to the north of the national park. Monti Sibilini separates the Lemarche region of Italy in the east from the Umbria region of Italy in the west. Although the peaks of the mountains in this national park are only about half the height of mountains found in the Alps, this national park is the most popular skiing destination in central Italy during the winter months. This national park is also home to an impressive array of animals and visitors have the chance of spotting wolves and falcons if they are lucky.

National Parks in the South of Italy

The main national park in the south of Italy is the Del Pollo National Park. This national park is the gateway to the Calabria region in the south of Italy and must be traversed if travelling to Sicily from mainland Italy. This national park is situated at the end of the Apennine mountain range so mountain peaks are not as high as those in national parks in other parts of Italy. In addition to mountains, this national park also has plenty of canyons which make for interesting viewing. Mountain biking, walking and canoeing are all popular activities at this national park in Italy.

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Gardens	In terms of design, Italian renaissance gardens are the best in Europe and, arguably, the best residential gardens in the world. Their design was led by wealthy and artistically inclined patrons who were able to draw upon a wide range of brilliant artists and highly skilled garden craftsmen. There can hardly be a better arrangement for making gardens, as proved by the high quality of Italian garden design. To find out more: www.gardenvisit.com/gardens/in/italy
Historical Sites	Are you kidding? History is all around you in Italy. From pre-historic sites in Sardinia, great classical Greek sites in Sicily, the Roman achievements in Rome and Pompeii, Renaissance masterpieces in Florence and Venice...no other country on this planet has such a rich historical heritage.

OTHER ACTIVITIES	
Shopping	<p>Milan is one of Europe's hottest fashion capitals. You'll find a range of shoes, clothing, and accessories unequalled anywhere else, except perhaps Paris or London. Even if you weren't born to shop, stroll along the streets bordering Via Montenapoleone and check out the elegant offerings from Europe's most famous designers.</p> <p>Glass: Venetian glass, ranging from the delicate to the grotesque, is world-famous. In Venice you'll find literally hundreds of stores peddling Venetian glass in a wide range of prices.</p> <p>Leather: The Italians craft the finest leather in the world. From boots to luggage, from leather clothing to purses (or wallets), Italian cities - especially Rome, Florence, Venice, and Milan - abound in leather shops selling quality goods. This is one of Italy's best values and if you shop carefully, you can find lots of quality handcrafted leather products.</p>
Markets	<p>Markets are the heartbeat of many Italian towns and cities – they are a wonderful place to meet the people and absorb all the unique sights, sounds and smells of authentic Italian life. Here is a selection from just one city – Florence.</p> <p>SAN LORENZO MARKET: From Piazza S. Lorenzo to Via dell'Ariento, all around the Basilica of San Lorenzo (in the very historical center of the city) you can find what may be the most important market of the city. Just walk around searching for clothing, articles in leather and souvenirs. It is closed on Sundays and Mondays.</p> <p>MERCATO CENTRALE: Stalls inside the San Lorenzo central market, in Via dell'Ariento you'll find the best food market of the city. Walk in and discover. It opens every morning from 7.00 to 14.00, except for</p>

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	<p>Sunday and public holidays. In winter it is open only on Saturdays and days before holidays.</p> <p>SANT'AMBROGIO: Located in Piazza Ghiberti and Piazza Sant'Ambrogio, the market is both indoor and outdoor. Just walk around to discover fresh fruits and vegetables, clothes, flowers, shoes and house-ware stands. Then, move inside to discover a large selection of fresh meat and fish, pasta, general groceries and a wide array of farm direct cheeses. Hungry? Take a seat in their connected restaurant (inexpensive and delicious). The market it's open every weekday (except Sunday) from 7.00 to 14.00.</p> <p>MERCATO "DELLE CASCINE": Situated in the very beautiful Parco delle Cascine (the bigger "park" of Florence) each Tuesday morning opens (from 7.00 to 14.00) what is arguably the biggest and cheapest market in town! If you're searching for fruits, vegetables, clothing, general groceries, house-ware stands, antiques, telephone cards, shoes and whatever else you can think of, then come here.</p> <p>MERCATO DELLE "PULCI": The famous Flea Market of Florence is located in Piazza dei Ciompi and opens (every day from 9.00 to 19.30). If you're lucky enough to go there on the last Sunday of every month, the stalls extend into the surrounding streets. Here you can find furniture and objects from the past, prints, coins and jewellery. You can also find affordable treasures amidst the bric-a-brac and dusty books. It's worth a trip if only to get insights on Italy's past through the artifacts displayed in these cluttered stalls. On the last Sunday of each month about 100 more stands, distributed also in the surrounding streets, enrich the market.</p>
<p>Nightlife</p>	<p>Italian nightlife ranges from the refined (anyone for Opera?) to the raunchy (Naples' nightclubs are legendary!). If you are city-based, you will find the right evening's entertainment for you.</p>
<p>Casinos</p>	<p>There's a long history of casinos and gambling in Italy:</p> <p>Casino de la Vallee (Via Italo Mus, Saint Vincent) The largest casino in the country, Casino de la Vallee features 95 table games and 512 slot and video poker machines. Games include 5 Card Stud, American Roulette, Blackjack, Caribbean Stud Poker, Chemin de Fer, Craps, English Roulette, French Roulette, Poker, Punto Banco and Trente Quarante.</p> <p>Casino Municipale di Campione d'Italia (Piazzale Milano 1, Campione d'Italia) Features baccarat, blackjack, craps, Punto Banco, roulette, European roulette and Chemin de Fer. 225 gaming machines are also available.</p> <p>Casino Municipale di Sanremo (Corso degli Inglesi 18, San Remo)</p>

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	<p>This casino features two restaurants and live entertainment. There are a total of 433 gaming machines and 38 table games. These games consist of American roulette, baccarat, blackjack, and French roulette.</p> <p>Casino Municipale di Venezia (Lungomare Marconi 4, Venice) This summer casino is closed from October through April. When open, its business hours are 4pm until 2:30 am during the week and 4pm until 3:30am on the weekends. Games include 30-40, baccarat, backgammon, blackjack, bridge, gin rummy and French roulette. International bridge, backgammon and gin rummy tournaments are also held.</p> <p>Casino Municipale di Venezia (Palazzo Vendramin Calergi, Venice) This winter casino is closed from May through September. When it's open, it operates from 3pm until 2:30 am on the weekdays and 3pm to 4:45am on the weekends. Games include 30-40, backgammon, blackjack, bridge tournaments and French roulette.</p>
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CUISINE	
Food	<p>Modern Italian cuisine has evolved through centuries of social and political changes. Ingredients and dishes vary by region. However, many dishes that were once regional have proliferated in different variations across the country. Cheese and wine are major parts of the cuisine, playing different roles both regionally and nationally with their many variations and Denominazione di origine controllata (regulated appellation) laws. Coffee, and more specifically espresso, has become highly important to the cultural cuisine of Italy. Some famous dishes and items include pasta, pizza, lasagna, focaccia, and gelato.</p>
Wine	<p>Wine is produced from almost every region of the country. Here are some of the most well-known areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Latium (Lazio, outside Rome): The region around Rome is known for predominantly white wines that include Marino, Est! Est!! Est!!!, Colli Albani, and the famous Frascati ("the wine of the popes and the people"). All these are derived almost exclusively from Malvasia and Trebbiano grapes or from combinations of the two. The region's most famous producers of Frascati are Fontana Candida, Via di Fontana Candida 11, 00040 Monte Porzio Catone, Roma (tel. 06-9401881); www.fontanacandida.com, whose winery, 23km southwest of Rome, was built around 1900; and Gotto D'Oro-Cantina Sociale di Marino, Via del Divino Amore 115, 00040 Frattocchie, Roma (tel. 06-93022226; www.gottodoro.it). To arrange visits, contact the Gruppo Italiano Vini, Villa Belvedere, 37010 Calmasino, Verona (tel. 045-6269600; www.gruppoitalianovini.com). • Tuscany & Umbria: Some of Italy's most scenic vineyards lie nestled

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among the verdant rolling hills of these two stately regions. In fact, the most famous kind of wine in Italy (chianti) is indelibly associated with Tuscany, whereas the (usually white) Orvieto and the (usually red) Torgiano are closely associated with Umbria. One of Tuscany's largest vintners is Banfi, Castello Banfi, Sant'Angelo Scalo, Montalcino, 53024 Siena (tel. 0577-840111; www.castellobanfi.com). Near Siena are two other good choices: Biondi-Santi, Loc. Greppo 183, 53024 Montalcino (tel. 0577-848087; www.biondisanti.it), and Casa Vinicola L. Cecchi, Loc. Casina dei Ponti 56, 53011 Castellina in Chianti (tel. 0577-54311; www.cecchi.net).

- **Emilia-Romagna:** Composed of two distinct areas (Emilia, to the west of Bologna, around the upriver Po Valley; and Romagna, to the east, centered on the delta of the Po), the region is known to gastronomes as the producer of some of Italy's best food, with wines worthy of its legendary cuisine. Emilia's most famous wine is Lambrusco, 50 million bottles of which are produced every year near Modena and Reggio Emilia. Less well known but also highly rated are the Colli Piacentini wines, of which Cantine Romagnoli, Via Genova 20, Villò di Vigolzone 29020 (tel. 0523-870129; www.cantineromagnoli.it), is a rising star. Wines from Romagna are made from Sangiovese, Trebbiano, and Albana grapes and are well respected, cropping up on wine lists throughout the country.

- **The Veneto:** The humid flatlands of the eastern Po Valley produce memorable reds and whites in abundance, including everything from soft-white Soaves and pinot grigios to red Valpolicellas and merlots. Important vineyards in the region are Azienda Vinicola Fratelli Fabiano, Via Verona 6, 37060 Sona, near Verona (tel. 045-6081111; www.fabiano.it), and Fratelli Bolla, Piazza Cittadella 3, 37122 Verona (tel. 045-6190256; www.bolla.com). Smaller, but well respected because of recent improvements to its vintages, is Nino Franco (known for its sparkling prosecco), in the hamlet of Valdobbiadene, Via Garibaldi 147, 31049 Valdobbiadene, Treviso (tel. 0423-972051). For information on these and the dozens of other producers in the Veneto, contact the Azienda di Promozione Turistica, Via Degli Alpini no. 9, Piazza Bra, 37121 Verona (tel. 045-8068680; www.tourism.verona.net).

- **Trentino-Alto Adige:** The two most important wine-producing regions of northwestern Italy are the Alto Adige (also known as the Bolzano or Sudtirol region) and Trento. The loftier of the two, the Alto Adige, was once part of the Austro-Hungarian province of the South Tirol. More Germanic than Italian, it clings to its Austrian traditions and folklore and

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grows an Italian version of the Gewürztraminers (a fruity white) that would more often be found in Germany, Austria, and Alsace. Venerable winegrowers include Alois Lageder (founded in 1855), Tenuta Loüwengang, Vicolo dei Conti 9, 39040 in the hamlet of Magré (tel. 0471-809500; www.lageder.com), and Schloss Turmhof, Via Castello 4, Entiklar, Kurtatsch, 39040 (tel. 0471-880122; www.tiefenbrunner.com). The Trentino area, a short distance to the south, is one of the leading producers of chardonnay and sparkling wines fermented using methods developed centuries ago. A winery worth a visit is Cavit Cantina Viticoltori, Via del Ponte di Ravina 31, 38100 Trento (tel. 0461-381711; www.cavit.it).

- **Friuli-Venezia Giulia:** This region in the Alpine foothills of northeastern Italy produces a light, fruity vintage that's especially appealing when young. One of the largest and best-respected wineries is Marco Felluga, Via Gorizia 121, Gradisca d'Isonzo, 34072 Gorizia (tel. 0481-99164; www.marcofelluga.it). Another producer known for its high-quality wines is Eugenio Collavini Vini & Spumanti, Loc. Gramogliano, Via della Ribolla Gialla 2, 33040 Corno di Rosazzo, Udine (tel. 0432-753222; www.collavini.it).

- **Lombardy:** The Po Valley has always been known for its flat vistas, midsummer humidity, fertile soil, and excellent wines. The region produces everything from dry, still reds to sparkling whites with a champagnelike zest. Guido Berlucchi, Piazza Duranti 4, Borgonato di Cortefranca, 25040 Brescia (tel. 030-984381; www.berlucchi.it), one of Italy's largest wineries, is especially welcoming to visitors.

- **The Piedmont:** Reds with rich, complex flavors make up most of the wine output of this high-altitude region near Italy's border with France. One of the most interesting vineyards is in a 15th-century abbey near the hamlet of Alba: Renato Ratti Cantina, Abbazia dell'Annunziata, La Morra, 12064 Cuneo (tel. 0173-50185; www.renatoratti.com).

- **Campania:** The wines produced in the harsh, hot landscapes of Campania, around Naples in southern Italy, seem stronger, rougher, and, in many cases, more powerful than those grown in gentler climes. Among the most famous are the Lacryma Christi (Tears of Christ), a white that grows in the volcanic soil near Naples, Herculaneum, and Pompeii; Taurasi, a potent red; and Greco di Tufo, a pungent white laden with the odors of apricots and apples. One of the most frequently visited vineyards is Mastroberardino, Via Manfredi 75-81, Atripalda, 83042 Avellino (tel. 0825-614111; www.mastroberardino.com).

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sicily: Because of its hot climate and volcanic soil, Sicily is home to countless vineyards, many of which produce only simple table wines. Of the better vintages, the best-known wine is Marsala, a dessert wine produced in both amber and ruby tones.
Restaurants	<p>Every sort of restaurant can be found in Italy and often the most memorable are the most humble regional places. Here is just one suggestion each for the three great cities:</p> <p>La Terrazza (Rome; tel. 06-478121): You get two winning elements here: some of the finest cuisine in Rome and a panoramic view toward Michelangelo's dome of St. Peter's. The constantly changing menu takes advantage of the best seasonal ingredients, and the chef constantly dazzles discerning palates with new taste sensations. This prestigious restaurant is located in the Hotel Eden.</p> <p>Cibrè (Florence; tel. 055-2341100): Fabio Picchi, the chef-owner, serves the most innovative cuisine in Florence. Cibrè consists of a restaurant, a less formal trattoria, and a cafe/bar across the street. The impossibly old-fashioned small kitchen doesn't have a grill and doesn't turn out pastas; it specializes in sophisticated creations based on age-old Tuscan recipes with a twist. Don't miss the flourless chocolate cake.</p> <p>Antico Martini (Venice; tel. 041-5224121): Founded in 1720 as a spot to enjoy the new trend of drinking coffee, this restaurant is one of the best in Venice. Replete with paneled walls and glittering chandeliers, the Martini specializes in Venetian cuisine.</p>

MORE INFO	
Brochures	Italian Government Tourist Board , 175 Bloor St. E., South Tower, Ste. 907, Toronto, ON M4W 3R8 (tel. 416/925-4882; fax 416/925-4799).
Website	For information before you go, contact the Italian Government Tourist Board (www.enit.it and www.italiantourism.com). Another helpful website is www.initaly.com .

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES	Rome, Turin, Venice, Florence, Naples, Tuscany, Sardinia, Italian Lakes, Amalfi Coast, Capri, Skiing in the Italian Alps, Viareggio, Pisa, Dolomites, San Gimignano, Siena, Vatican City.
Magic Moment	We are staying in a hotel that could only be in Italy... The Villa Pitiana is an imposing fortified farmstead of the Middle Ages transformed into a nobleman's country home and finally to unique accommodations. It stands as a yellow painted confection of architectural styles amidst gardens, pools, olive groves and woods. We wander from a hearty breakfast of local fare through the echoing halls to the steps leading out

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	<p>to the garden terraces. And stop in wonder. For we are on an island in the clouds. Early morning mists completely shroud the slopes below and we appear to be floating in our palace in the sky. Distant sounds of valley farms filter through the mist and the scents of the garden complete the perfect start to another day in Tuscany...</p>
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