

History

Few countries have been on such a roller-coaster ride as Italy. The Italian peninsula lay at the core of the Roman Empire; one of the world's great monotheistic religions, Catholicism, has its headquarters in Rome; and it was largely the dynamic city-states of Italy that set the modern era in motion with the Renaissance. But Italy has known chaos and deep suffering, too. The rise of Europe's nation-states from the 16th century left the divided Italian peninsula behind. Italian unity was won in blood, but many Italians have since lived in abject poverty, sparking great waves of migration. The economic miracle of the 1960s propelled Italy to the top league of wealthy Western countries but since the 1990s the country has wallowed in a mire of frustration. A sluggish economy, ineffective and squabbling government, widespread corruption and the continuing open sore of the Mafia continue to overshadow the country's otherwise sunny disposition.

A wide-ranging general site on Italian history is www.arcaini.com/ITALY/ItalyHistory/ItalyHistory.html. It covers in potted form everything from prehistory to the postwar period, and includes a brief chronology.

THE ETRUSCANS, GREEKS & MYTH

Of the many tribes that emerged from the millennia of the Stone Ages in ancient Italy, the Etruscans dominated the peninsula by the 7th century BC. Etruria was based on city-states mostly concentrated between the Arno and Tiber rivers. Among them were Caere (modern-day Cerveteri), Tarquinii (Tarquinia), Veii (Veio), Perusia (Perugia), Volaterrae (Volterra) and Arretium (Arezzo). The name of their homeland is preserved in the name Tuscany, where the bulk of their settlements were (and still are) located.

Most of what we know of the Etruscan people has been deduced from artefacts and paintings unearthed at their burial sights, especially at Tarquinia, near Rome. Argument persists over whether the Etruscans had migrated from Asia Minor. They spoke a language that today has barely been deciphered. An energetic people, the Etruscans were redoubtable warriors and seamen, but lacked cohesion and discipline.

At home, the Etruscans farmed and mined metals. Their gods were numerous and they were forever trying to second-guess them and predict future events through such rituals as examining the livers of sacrificed animals. They were also quick to learn from others. Much of their artistic tradition (which comes to us in the form of tomb frescoes, statuary and pottery) was influenced by the Greeks.

Indeed, while the Etruscans dominated the centre of the peninsula, Greek traders settled in the south in the 8th century BC, setting up a series of independent city-states along the coast and in Sicily that together were known as Magna Graecia. They flourished until the 3rd century BC and the ruins of magnificent Doric temples in Italy's south (at Paestum) and on Sicily (at

TIMELINE

c700,000 BC

Evidence of early Stone Age settlements have been found in various locations around Italy. As long ago as 700,000 BC, primitive tribes lived in caves and hunted elephants, rhinoceros, hippopotamus and other hefty beasts.

2000 BC

The Bronze Age reaches Italy. By now, the hunter-gatherers have settled as farmers. The use of copper and bronze to fashion tools and arms marks a leap in sophistication accompanied by more complex social organisation.

474 BC

The power of the Etruscans in Italy is further eclipsed after Greek forces from Syracuse and Cumae join to crush an invading Etruscan armada off the southern Italian coast in the naval Battle of Cumae.

Agrigento, Selinunte and Segesta) stand as testimony to the splendour of Greek civilisation in Italy.

Attempts by the Etruscans to conquer the Greek settlements failed and accelerated their decline. The death knell, however, would come from an unexpected source – the grubby but growing Latin town of Rome.

The origins of the town are shrouded in myth, which says it was founded by Romulus (who descended from Aeneas, a refugee from Troy whose mother was the goddess Venus) on 21 April 753 BC on the site where he and his brother, Remus, had been suckled by a she-wolf as orphan infants. Romulus later killed Remus and the settlement was named Rome after him. At some point, legend merges with history. Seven kings are said to have followed Romulus and at least three were historical Etruscan rulers. In 509 BC, disgruntled Latin nobles turfed the last of the Etruscan kings, Tarquinius Superbus, out of Rome after his predecessor, Servius Tullius, had stacked the Senate with his allies and introduced citizenship reforms that undermined the power of the aristocracy. Sick of monarchy, the nobles set up the republic. Over the following centuries, this piffling Latin town would grow to become Italy's major power, gradually sweeping aside the Etruscans, whose language and culture had disappeared by the 2nd century AD.

THE ROMAN REPUBLIC

Under the republic, *imperium*, or regal power, was placed in the hands of two consuls who acted as political and military leaders and were elected for non-renewable one-year terms by an assembly of the people. The Senate, whose members were appointed for life, advised the consuls.

Although from the beginning monuments were emblazoned with the initials SPQR (Senatus Populusque Romanus, or the Senate and People of Rome), the 'people' initially had precious little say in affairs. (The initials are still used and many Romans would argue that little has changed.) Known as plebeians (literally 'the many'), the disenfranchised majority slowly wrested concessions from the patrician class in the more than two centuries that followed the founding of the republic. Some plebs were even appointed as consuls and indeed by about 280 BC most of the distinctions between patricians and plebeians had disappeared. That said, the apparently democratic system was largely oligarchic, with a fairly narrow political class (whether patrician or plebeian) vying for positions of power in government and the Senate.

The Romans were a rough-and-ready lot. Rome did not bother to mint coins until 269 BC, even though the neighbouring (and later conquered or allied) Etruscans and Greeks had long had their own currencies. The Etruscans and Greeks also brought writing to the attention of Romans, who found it useful for documents and technical affairs but hardly glowed in the literature department. Eventually the Greek pantheon of gods formed the bedrock of Roman worship. Society was patriarchal and its prime building block the household (*familia*). The head of the family (*pater familias*) had

The Oxford History of the Roman World, edited by John Boardman, Jasper Griffin and Oswyn Murray, is a succinct and clearly set out introduction to the history of ancient Rome.

Roman Sex, by John Clarke, is the result of decades of investigation into Roman eroticism, sexual mores and social attitudes. It is at once a serious anthropological retrospective and an amusing look at a society whose attitudes to sex were very different from our own.

396 BC

Romans conquer the key Etruscan town of Veio, north of Rome, after an 11-year siege. Celebrations are short-lived, as invading Celtic tribes sweep across Italy and sack Rome in 390 BC.

264–241 BC

War breaks out between Rome and the empire of Carthage, which stretches across North Africa and into Spain, Sicily and Sardinia. By war's end Rome has become the western Mediterranean's prime naval power.

218–202 BC

Carthage sends Hannibal to invade Italy overland from the north in the Second Punic War. He is cut off when Rome invades Spain. Carthage is finally destroyed in a third war in 149–146 BC.

Edward Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* is the acknowledged classic work on the subject of the Empire's darker days. Try the abridged single-volume version.

direct control over his wife, children and extended family. He was responsible for his children's education. Devotion to household gods was as strong as to the increasingly Greek-influenced pantheon of state gods, led at first by the triad of Jupiter (the sky god and chief protector of the state), Juno (the female equivalent of Jupiter and patron goddess of women) and Minerva (patron goddess of craftsmen). Mars, the god of war, had been replaced by Juno in the triad.

Slowly at first, then with gathering pace, Roman armies conquered the Italian peninsula. Defeated city-states were not taken over directly; rather they were obliged to become allies. They retained their government and lands but had to provide troops on demand to serve in the Roman army. This relatively light-handed touch was a key to success. Increasingly, the protection offered by Roman hegemony induced many cities to become allies voluntarily. Wars with rivals like Carthage and in the East led Rome to take control of Sardinia, Sicily, Corsica, mainland Greece, Spain, most of North Africa and part of Asia Minor by 133 BC.

By then, Rome was the most important city in the Mediterranean, with a population of 300,000. Most were lower class freedmen or slaves living in often precarious conditions. Tenement housing blocks (mostly of brick and wood) were raised alongside vast monuments. One of the latter was the Circus Flaminius, stage of some of the spectacular games held each year. These became increasingly important events for the people of Rome, who flocked to see gladiators and wild beasts in combat.

JULIUS CAESAR

Born in 100 BC, Gaius Julius Caesar would prove to be one of Rome's most masterful generals, lenient conquerors and capable administrators. He was also avid for power and this was probably his undoing.

He was a supporter of the consul Pompey (later known as Pompey the Great), who since 78 BC had become a leading figure in Rome after putting down rebellions in Spain and eliminating piracy. Caesar himself had been in Spain for several years, dealing with border revolts, and on his return to Rome in 60 BC, formed an alliance with Pompey and another important commander and former consul, Crassus. They backed Caesar's candidacy as consul.

To consolidate his position in the Roman power game, Caesar needed a major military command. This he received with a mandate to govern the province of Gallia Narbonensis, a southern swathe of modern France stretching from Italy to the Pyrenees, from 59 BC. Caesar raised troops and in the following year entered Gaul proper (modern France) to head off an invasion of Helvetic tribes from Switzerland and subsequently to bring other tribes to heel. What started as an essentially defensive effort soon became a full-blown campaign of conquest. In the next five years, he subdued Gaul and made forays into Britain and across the Rhine. In 52–51 BC he stamped

The colourful life and times of Julius Caesar are examined in greater detail at www.iol.ie/~coolmine/typ/romans/romans6.html.

79

A massive eruption of Mt Vesuvius showers molten rock and ash upon Pompeii and Herculaneum. Pliny the Younger later describes the devastating eruption in letters and the towns are only rediscovered in the 18th century.

476

German tribal leader Odovacar proclaims himself king in Rome, sealing the end of the western half of the Roman Empire. The peninsula sinks into chaos, and only the eastern half of the Empire survives intact.

568

Lombards invade and occupy northern Italy, leaving just Ravenna, Rome and southern Italy in the Empire's hands. Other tribes invade Balkan territories and cut the eastern Empire off from Italy.



out the last great revolt in Gaul, led by Vercingetorix. Caesar was generous to his defeated enemies and so won the Gauls over to him. Indeed, they became his staunchest supporters in coming years.

By now, Caesar also had a devoted veteran army behind him. Jealous of the growing power of his one-time protégé, Pompey severed his political alliance with him and joined like-minded factions in the Senate to outlaw Caesar in 49 BC. Caesar had to act fast to avoid political annihilation and so on 7 January, he crossed the Rubicon river into Italy and civil war began. His three-year campaign in Italy, Spain and the Eastern Mediterranean proved a crushing victory. Upon his return to Rome in 46 BC, he assumed dictatorial powers.

He launched a series of reforms, overhauled the Senate and embarked on a building programme (of which the Curia, p109, and Basilica Giulia, p110, remain).

By 44 BC, it was clear Caesar had no plans to restore the republic, and dissent grew in the Senate, even among former supporters like Marcus Junius Brutus

The Roman Marcus Tullio Tiro invented shorthand in 63 BC.

754–56

Frankish king Pepin the Short enters Italy at the request of Pope Stephen II, ousts the Lombards and declares the creation of the Papal States in return for a controlling influence over the rest of the country.

902

Muslims from North Africa complete the occupation of Sicily, installing an enlightened regime that encourages learning of the Greek classics, mathematics and other sciences. Agriculture flourishes and Sicily lives in comparative peace for two centuries.

962

Saxon king Otto I is crowned Holy Roman Emperor in Rome, the first in a long line of Germanic rulers. His meddling in Italian affairs led to the first serious clashes between papacy and empire.

I, Claudius and Claudius the God, by Robert Graves, delve into all sorts of aspects of imperial Rome at the time Claudius was in charge.

who thought he had gone too far. Unconcerned by rumours of a possible assassination attempt, Caesar had dismissed his bodyguard. A small band of conspirators led by Brutus finally stabbed him to death in a Senate meeting on the Ides of March (15 March) 44 BC, two years after he had been proclaimed dictator for life.

In the years following Caesar's death, his lieutenant, Mark Antony (Marcus Antonius), and nominated heir, great-nephew Octavian, plunged into civil war against Caesar's assassins. Things calmed down as Octavian took control of the western half of the empire and Antony headed to the east, but when Antony fell head over heels for Cleopatra VII in 31 BC, Octavian went to war and finally claimed victory over Antony and Cleopatra at Actium, in Greece. The next year, Octavian invaded Egypt, Antony and Cleopatra committed suicide and Egypt became a province of Rome.

AUGUSTUS & EMPIRE

Octavian was left as sole ruler of the Roman world and by 19 BC had been acclaimed Augustus (Your Eminence) and conceded virtually unlimited power by the Senate. In effect, the man who would rule Rome's destiny for 40 years had become emperor, although Augustus was careful to maintain some republican protocol to keep the aristocracy sweet.

Under him, the arts flourished. Augustus was lucky in having as his contemporaries the poets Virgil, Horace and Ovid, as well as the historian Livy. He encouraged the visual arts, restored existing buildings and constructed many new ones. During his reign the Pantheon (p113) was raised and he boasted that he had 'found Rome in brick and left it in marble'.

The long period of comparatively enlightened rule that he initiated brought unprecedented prosperity and security to the Mediterranean. The Empire was, in the main, wisely administered (although there were some kooky exceptions, such as the potty Emperor Caligula).

By AD 100, the city of Rome is said to have had more than 1.5 million inhabitants and all the trappings of the imperial capital – its wealth and prosperity were obvious in the rich mosaics, marble temples, public baths, theatres, circuses and libraries. An extensive network of aqueducts fed the baths and provided private houses with running water and flushing toilets. People of all races and conditions converged on the capital from all corners of the Empire. Poverty was rife among an often disgruntled lower class. Augustus had created Rome's first police force under a city prefect (*praefectus urbi*) to curb mob violence and petty crime, which had long gone largely unchecked. He had also instituted a 7000-man fire brigade and night watchman service, another first in the ancient world.

Augustus carried out other far-reaching reforms. He streamlined the army, which was kept at a standing total of around 300,000. Military service ranged from 16 to 25 years, but Augustus kept conscription to a minimum, making it a largely volunteer force. He consolidated Rome's three-tier class society.

1130

Norman invader Roger II is crowned king of Sicily, a century after the Normans landed in southern Italy and so creating a united southern Italian kingdom. Norman culture and architecture fuse with Byzantine and Muslim styles.

1202–03

Venice leads Fourth Crusade to Holy Land on a detour to Constantinople in revenge for attacks on Venice. They plunder Constantinople, topple the emperor and install a puppet ruler.

1282

Charles of Anjou creates enemies in Sicily with heavy taxes on landowners, who rise in the Sicilian Vespers revolt. Having toppled Charles, they hand control of the island to Peter III, King of Aragón.

The richest and most influential class remained the Senators. Below them, the so-called Equestrians filled posts in public administration and supplied officers to the army (control of which was essential to keeping Augustus' position unchallenged). The bulk of the populace filled the ranks of the lower class. The system was by no means rigid and upward mobility was possible. Augustus was an austere man with a conservative outlook, which he sought to impart to others and so restore a sense of moral fibre in Rome. His laws aimed at encouraging marriage and family values were, however, largely a failure.

A century after Augustus' death in AD 14 (aged 75), the Empire had reached its greatest extent. Emperor Trajan (53–117) was the last Roman ruler to carry out an openly expansionist foreign policy, adding Dacia to imperial territory and pulling Armenia into the Roman orbit as a client state. His successor, Hadrian (76–138), consolidated the frontiers and stabilised the Empire. It stretched from the Iberian peninsula, Gaul and Britain to a line that basically followed the Rhine and Danube rivers. All of the present-day Balkans and Greece, along with the areas known in those times as Dacia, Moesia and Thrace (considerable territories reaching to the Black Sea), were under Roman control. Most of modern-day Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Israel was occupied by Rome's legions and linked up with Egypt. From there a deep strip of Roman territory stretched along the length of North Africa to the Atlantic coast of what is today northern Morocco. The Mediterranean was a Roman lake.

This situation lasted until the 3rd century. By the time Diocletian (284–305) became emperor, attacks on the Empire from without and revolts within had become part and parcel of imperial existence. A new religious force, Christianity, was gaining popularity and under Diocletian persecution of Christians became common, a policy later reversed in 313 under Constantine I, who granted freedom of worship. The Empire was later divided in two, with the second capital in Constantinople (founded by Constantine in 330), on the Bosphorus in Byzantium. It was this, the eastern Empire, which survived as Italy and Rome were overrun. This rump empire stretched from parts of present-day Serbia and Montenegro across to Asia Minor, a coastal strip of what is now Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel down to Egypt and a sliver of North Africa as far west as modern Libya. Attempts by Justinian I (527–565) to recover Rome and the shattered western half of the Empire ultimately came to nothing.

POPE & EMPERORS

In an odd twist, the minority religion that Emperor Diocletian had tried so hard to stamp out came to save the glory of the city of Rome. Through the chaos of invasion and counter-invasion that saw Italy succumb to Germanic tribes, the Byzantine reconquest and the Lombard occupation in the north, the papacy established itself in Rome as a spiritual and secular force.

Gaius Caligula, apart from engaging in incest with his sisters, is also said to have proposed making his horse a consul.

For a detailed rundown of Roman emperors from Caesar to Caligula, check out www.roman-emperors.org.

1309

Pope Clement V shifts the papacy to Avignon in France (for almost 70 years). Clement had been elected pope four years earlier but refused to rule in Rome, which was hostile and riven by factional infighting.

1348

The Black Death (bubonic plague) wreaks havoc across Italy and much of the rest of western Europe. Florence is said to have lost three-quarters of its populace.

1506

Work starts on St Peter's Basilica, to a design by Donato Bramante, over the site of an earlier basilica, in Rome. Work would continue on the most important church in Christendom until 1626.

SO JUST WHAT DID THE ROMANS DO FOR US?

It is often said that the Romans were not overly original, copying the Greeks in art, literature and science. But they were a canny lot who came up with some practical ideas that can only, however grudgingly, have impressed the folk they went about conquering.

More than anything else, the Romans gave us the loo. Rome's Cloaca Maxima, or Big Sewer, was created in the 8th century BC and is still in use! Romans came up with flushing latrines and regular clean water supply via aqueducts. The Turks can't really claim a patent on Turkish baths, since the idea of steam rooms and hot tubs is Roman. Indeed, the Romans created public and private bath complexes throughout the Empire. Fourth-century-AD Rome had 11 public baths, some 900 private ones and more than 1000 public fountains.

The word 'plumbing' comes from the Latin word for lead, *plumbus*. Even today, old European plumbing uses lead pipes instead of 20th-century replacements such as PVC. Indeed, it took Europeans until well into the modern era to discover the benefits of regular bathing and proper sanitation.

The Romans were great civil engineers and another of their lasting brainwaves was... roads. As the Empire grew, so did its ancient system of 'motorways'. Road engineering was an incredible feat of accuracy when you consider that the Romans had no compasses or other modern instruments. With the roads came other bright ideas – postal services and wayside inns. Messages could be shot around the Empire in a matter of days or weeks by sending despatch riders. At conveniently spaced locations (not unlike modern truck stops) the riders would exchange their horses for fresh mounts, have a snack and continue on their way. This worked better than many modern postal systems in Europe! The Romans even devised a type of odometer, a cogwheel that engaged with the wheel of a chariot or other vehicle to count every Roman mile travelled.

The popes were, even at this early stage, a canny lot. The papacy invented the Donation of Constantine, a document in which Emperor Constantine I had supposedly granted the Church control of Rome and surrounding territory. What the popes needed was a guarantor with military clout. This they found in the Franks and a deal was done.

In return for formal recognition of the popes' control of Rome and surrounding Byzantine-held territories henceforth to be known as the Papal States, the popes granted the Carolingian Franks a leading if ill-defined role in Italy and their king, Charlemagne, the title of Holy Roman Emperor. He was crowned by Leo III on Christmas Day 800. The bond between the papacy and the Byzantine Empire was thus broken and political power in what had been the Western Roman Empire shifted north of the Alps, where it would remain for more than 1000 years.

The stage was now set for a future of seemingly endless struggles. Similarly, Rome's aristocratic families engaged in battle for the papacy. For centuries the imperial crown would be fought over ruthlessly and Italy would frequently be the prime battleground. Holy Roman Emperors would seek time and again to impose their control on increasingly independent-minded Italian

1508–12

Pope Julius II commissions Michelangelo to paint the ceiling frescoes in the restored Sistine Chapel. Michelangelo requests complete artistic discretion to decide on context, and the central nine panels recount stories from Genesis.

1534

The accession of Pope Paul III marks the beginning of the Counter-Reformation. He establishes a militant Jesuit order in 1540 and the Holy Office of the Inquisition, whose task is the pursuit of heretics in 1542.

1582

Pope Gregory XIII replaces the Julian calendar (introduced by Julius Caesar) with the modern-day Gregorian calendar. The new calendar adds the leap year to keep it in line with the seasons.

cities, and even on Rome itself. In riposte, the popes continually sought to exploit their spiritual position to bring the emperors to heel and further their own secular ends.

The clash between Pope Gregory VII and Emperor Henry IV over who had the right to appoint bishops (who were powerful political players and hence important friends or dangerous foes) in the last quarter of the 11th century showed just how bitter these struggles could become. They became a focal point of Italian politics in the late Middle Ages and across the cities and regions of the peninsula two camps emerged: Guelphs (Guelfi, who backed the pope) and Ghibellines (Ghibellini, in support of the emperor).

THE WONDER OF THE WORLD

The Holy Roman Empire had barely touched southern Italy until Henry, son of the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick I (Barbarossa), married Constance de Hauteville, heir to the Norman throne in Sicily. Of this match was born one of the most colourful figures of medieval Europe, Frederick II (1194–1250).

Crowned Holy Roman Emperor in 1220, Frederick was a German with a difference. Having grown up in southern Italy, he considered Sicily his natural base and left the German states largely to their own devices. A warrior and scholar, Frederick was an enlightened ruler with an absolutist vocation. A man who allowed freedom of worship to Muslims and Jews, he was not to everyone's liking, as his ambition was to finally bring all of Italy under the imperial yoke.

In his early years he concentrated on reining in the feudal nobility in Sicily and southern Italy, imposing centralised rule and bureaucracy that theoretically aimed for greater social justice under his absolute control. A poet, linguist, mathematician, philosopher and all-round fine fellow, he founded a university in Naples and encouraged the spread of learning and translation of Arab treatises. From his early days at the imperial helm, Frederick was known as *Stupor Mundi* (the Wonder of the World) for his extraordinary talents, energy and military prowess.

Having reluctantly carried out a crusade (marked more by negotiation than the clash of arms) in the Holy Land in 1228–29 on pain of excommunication, Frederick returned to Italy to find Papal troops invading Neapolitan territory. Frederick soon had them on the run and turned his attention gaining control of the complex web of city-states in central and northern Italy, where he found allies and many enemies, in particular the Lombard league. Years of inconclusive battles ensued, which even Frederick's death in 1250 did not end. Several times he had been on the verge of taking Rome and victory had seemed assured more than once. Campaigning continued until 1268 under Frederick's successors, Manfredi (who fell in the bloody Battle of Benevento in 1266) and Corradino (captured and executed two years later by French noble Charles of Anjou, who had by then taken over Sicily and southern Italy).

To access a complete list of all the popes and biographies on each, check out the encyclopedia page of New Advent (www.newadvent.org). Click on Popes, List of, and there they all are, from St Peter Benedict XVI.

The Arabs introduced spaghetti to Sicily, where 'strings of pasta' were documented by the Arab geographer Al-Idrissi in Palermo in 1150.

1600

Giordano Bruno, Dominican monk, rebellious intellectual and proud philosopher who rejected much traditional Church teaching, is burned alive at the stake in Rome for heresy after eight years of trial and torture at the hands of the Inquisition.

1714

The end of the War of the Spanish Succession forces the withdrawal of Spanish forces from Lombardy, which comes under Austrian control. The Spanish Bourbon family establishes an independent Kingdom of the Two Sicilies.

1805

Having made himself emperor of France, Napoleon is proclaimed king of the newly constituted Kingdom of Italy, comprising most of the northern half of the country. A year later he takes the Kingdom of Naples.

FLOURISHING CITY-STATES

While the south of Italy tended to centralised rule, the north was heading the opposite way. Port cities such as Genoa, Pisa and especially Venice, along with internal centres such as Florence, Milan, Parma, Bologna, Padua, Verona and Modena, became increasingly insolent towards attempts by the Holy Roman Emperors to meddle in their affairs.

The cities' growing prosperity and independence also brought them into conflict with Rome, which found itself increasingly incapable of exercising influence over them. Indeed, at times Rome's control over some of its own Papal States was challenged. Caught between the papacy and the emperors, it was not surprising that these city-states were forever switching allegiances in an attempt to best serve their own interests.

Between the 12th and 14th centuries, they developed new forms of government. Venice adopted an oligarchic, 'parliamentary' system in an attempt at limited democracy. More commonly, the city-state created a *comune* (town council), a form of republican government dominated at first by aristocrats but then increasingly by the wealthy middle classes. The well-heeled families soon turned their attentions from business rivalry to political struggles, in which each aimed to gain control of the *signoria* (government).

In some cities, great dynasties, such as the Medici in Florence and the Visconti and Sforza in Milan, came to dominate their respective stages.

War between the city-states was a constant and eventually a few, notably Florence, Milan and Venice, emerged as regional powers and absorbed their neighbours. Their power was based on a mix of trade, industry and conquest. Constellations of power and alliances were in constant flux, making changes in the city-states' fortunes the rule rather than the exception. Easily the most stable and long the most successful of them was Venice.

In Florence, prosperity was based on the wool trade, finance and general commerce. Abroad, its coinage, the *firenze* (florin), was king.

In Milan, the noble Visconti family destroyed its rivals and extended Milanese control over Pavia and Cremona, and later Genoa. Giangaleazzo Visconti (1351–1402) turned Milan from a city-state into a strong European power. The policies of the Visconti (up to 1450), followed by those of the Sforza family, allowed Milan to spread its power to the Ticino area of Switzerland and east to the Lago di Garda.

The Milanese sphere of influence butted up against that of Venice. By 1450 the lagoon city had reached the height of its territorial greatness. In addition to its possessions in Greece, Dalmatia and beyond, Venice had expanded inland. The banner of the Lion of St Mark flew across northeast Italy, from Gorizia to Bergamo.

These dynamic, independent-minded cities proved fertile ground for the intellectual and artistic explosion that would take place across northern Italy in the 14th and 15th centuries. After centuries of Church-dominated obscurantism, the arrival of eastern scholars fleeing from Constantinople in

For a range of topics on medieval Italy, see www.medioevoitaliano.org. The site contains links to subjects on medieval Italy, mostly in Italian but also in English. You can join special interest forums.

John Julius Norwich's *A History of Venice* is one of the all-time great works on the lagoon city in English and is highly readable. He has more recently published *Venice: Paradise of Cities*.

1814–15

The Congress of Vienna, held after the fall of Napoleon, is held to re-establish the balance of power in Europe. The result for Italy is largely a return of the old occupying powers.

1848

Revolts across Europe spark rebellion in Italy, especially in Austrian-occupied Milan and Venice. King Carlo Alberto of Piedmont joins the fray against Austria, but within a year the latter recovers Lombardy and the Veneto.

1860

In the name of Italian unity and the Savoy king, Vittorio Emanuele II, Giuseppe Garibaldi lands with a thousand men, the Red Shirts, in Sicily. He takes the island and lands in southern Italy.

the wake of its fall to the Ottoman Turkish Muslims in 1453 (marking the end of what had once been the Roman Empire), prompted a reawakening of interest in classical learning (the importance of human reason, as opposed to divine order), especially the works of Aristotle and Plato. This coincided with a burst of new and original artistic activity that would soon snowball into the wonders of the Renaissance (see p50). Of them all, Florence was the cradle and launch pad for this fevered activity, in no small measure due to the generous patronage of the long-ruling Medici family.

CAVOUR & THE BIRTH OF ITALY

The French Revolution at the end of the 18th century and the rise of Napoleon awakened hopes in Italy of an independent nation. Since the glory days of the Renaissance, Italy's divided mini-states had gradually lost power and status on the European stage. By the late 18th century, the peninsula was little more than a tired, backward playground for the big powers.

Napoleon marched into Italy on several occasions, finishing off the Venetian republic in 1797 (ending 1000 years of Venetian independence) and creating the so-called Kingdom of Italy in 1804. That kingdom was in no way independent but the Napoleonic earthquake spurred many Italians to believe that a single Italian state could be created after the emperor's demise.

It was not to be so easy. The reactionary Congress of Vienna restored all the foreign rulers to their places in Italy. This encouraged a series of revolts across the country over the ensuing decades. The rebellions of 1848 in Milan and Venice against Austrian rule (and largely republican in nature) tempted the Savoy kingdom of Piedmont and Sardinia to intervene on behalf of the rebels in Lombardy, but to no avail.

A battle had been lost, but by no means the struggle. Count Camillo Benso di Cavour (1810–61) of Turin, the prime minister of the Savoy monarchy, became the diplomatic brains behind the Italian unity movement. Through the pro-unity newspaper, *Il Risorgimento* (founded in 1847) the publication of a parliamentary *Statuto* (Statute), Cavour and his colleagues laid the groundwork for unity.

Cavour had been born into a well-to-do Turin family, travelled widely in Europe after an army career and in the 1830s became one of the richest men in Piedmont due to his business, banking and later farming activities. He entered politics in 1850 and two years later was prime minister of the Savoy kingdom's parliament.

He conspired with the French and won British support for the creation of an independent Italian state. His 1858 treaty with France's Napoleon III foresaw French aid in the event of a war with Austria and the creation of a northern Italian kingdom, in exchange for parts of Savoy and Nice.

The bloody Franco-Austrian War (also known as the war for Italian independence; 1859–61), unleashed in northern Italy, led to the occupation of Lombardy and the retreat of the Austrians to their eastern possessions in the Veneto. In the meantime, a wild card in the form of professional revolutionary

America was named after Amerigo Vespucci, a Florentine navigator who, from 1497 to 1504, made several voyages of discovery in what would one day be known as South America.

1861

By the end of the 1859–61 Franco-Austrian War, Vittorio Emanuele II has Lombardy, Sardinia, Sicily, southern and parts of central Italy under his control and is proclaimed king of a newly united Italy.

1870

The Prussian invasion of France forces Paris to withdraw its contingent from Rome. The pope now has no hope of resisting the assault by the Italian army. The following year, the national parliament moves to Rome.

1915

Italy enters WWI on the side of the Allies to win Italian territories still in Austrian hands. Austria had offered to cede some of the territories that Italy wanted, but Italy insists the offer is insufficient.

Alessandro Volta invented the electric battery in 1800 and gave his name to the measurement of electric power.

History of the Italian People, by Giuliano Procacci, is one of the best general histories of the country in any language. It covers the period from the early Middle Ages until 1948.

Giuseppe Garibaldi had created the real chance of full Italian unity. Garibaldi took Sicily and southern Italy in a military blitz in the name of Savoy king Vittorio Emanuele II in 1860. Spotting the chance, Cavour and the king moved to take parts of central Italy (including Umbria and Le Marche) and so were able to proclaim the creation of a single Italian state in 1861.

In the following nine years, Tuscany, the Veneto and Rome were all incorporated into the fledgling kingdom. Unity was complete and parliament was established in Rome in 1871.

The turbulent new state saw violent swings between socialists and the right. Giovanni Giolitti, one of Italy's longest-serving prime ministers (heading five governments between 1892 and 1921), managed to bridge the political extremes and institute male suffrage. Women were, however, denied the right to vote until after WWII.

FROM THE TRENCHES TO FASCISM

When war broke out in Europe in July 1914, Italy chose to remain neutral despite being a member of the Triple Alliance with Austria and Germany. Italy had territorial claims on Austrian-controlled Trento (Trentino), southern Tyrol, Trieste and even in Dalmatia (some of which it had tried and failed to take during the Austro-Prussian war of 1866). Under the terms of the Triple Alliance, Austria was due to hand over much of this territory in the event of occupying other land in the Balkans, but Austria refused to contemplate fulfilling this part of the bargain.

A WHIFF OF HELLFIRE

Politics in Italy's mercurial city-states could take a radical turn. When Florence's Medici clan rulers fell into disgrace (not for the last time) in 1494, the city's fathers decided on restoring an earlier republican model of government. This time there was a twist.

Since 1481, the fat-lipped Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola had been in Florence preaching repentance. His bloodcurdling warnings of horrors to come if Florentines did not renounce their evil ways somehow captured everyone's imagination and the city now submitted to a fiery theocracy. He called on the government to act on the basis of his divine inspiration. Drinking, whoring, partying, gambling, wearing flashy clothes and other signs of wrongdoing were pushed well underground. Books, clothes, jewellery, fancy furnishings and art were burned on 'bonfires of the vanities'. Bands of children marched around the city ferreting out adults still attached to their old habits and possessions.

Pleasure-loving Florentines soon began to tire of this fundamentalism, as did Pope Alexander VI (possibly the least religiously inclined pope of all time) and the rival Franciscan religious order. The local economy was stagnant and Savonarola seemed increasingly out to lunch with his claims of being God's special emissary. Finally the city government, or *signoria*, had the fiery friar arrested. After weeks at the hands of the city rackmaster, he was hanged and burned at the stake as a heretic, along with two supporters, on 22 May 1498.

1919

Two years after returning wounded from WWI, former socialist journalist Benito Mussolini forms a right-wing militant group, the *Fasci Italiani di Combattimento* (Italian Combat Fasces), precursor to his Fascist Party.

1922

Mussolini and his Fascists stage a march on Rome in October. King Vittorio Emanuele III, fearful of the movement's growing popular power and doubting the army's loyalty, entrusts Mussolini with the formation of a government.

1929

Mussolini and Pope Pius XI sign the Lateran Pact, whereby Catholicism is declared the sole Italian religion and the Vatican is recognised as an independent state. In return, the papacy acknowledges the Kingdom of Italy.

The Italian government was divided between a noninterventionist and war party. The latter, in view of Austria's intransigence, decided to deal with the Allies. In the London pact of April 1915, Italy was promised the territories it sought after victory. In May, Italy declared war on Austria and thus plunged into the 3½-year nightmare.

Italy and Austria engaged in a weary war of attrition. When the Austro-Hungarian forces collapsed in November 1918, the Italians marched into Trieste and Trento. The postwar Treaty of Versailles failed to award Rome the remaining territories it had sought.

These were slim pickings after such a bloody and exhausting conflict. Italy lost 600,000 men and the war economy had produced a small concentration of powerful industrial barons while leaving the bulk of the civilian populace in penury. This cocktail was made all the more explosive as hundreds of thousands of demobbed servicemen returned home or shifted around the country in search of work. The atmosphere was perfect for a demagogue. The demagogue was not long in coming forth.

One of the young war enthusiasts had been the socialist newspaper editor and one-time draft dodger, Benito Mussolini (1883–1945). This time he volunteered for the front and only returned, wounded, in 1917.

The experience of war and the frustration shared with many at the disappointing outcome in Versailles led him to form a right-wing militant political group that by 1921 had become the Fascist Party, with its black-shirted street brawlers and Roman salute. These were to become symbols of violent oppression and aggressive nationalism for the next 23 years. After his march on Rome in 1922 and victory in the 1924 elections, Mussolini (who called himself the Duce, or Leader) took full control of the country by 1926, banning other political parties, trade unions not affiliated to the party, and the free press.

By the 1930s, all aspects of Italian society were regulated by the party. The economy, banking, massive public works programmes, the conversion of coastal malarial swamps into arable land and an ambitious modernisation of the armed forces were all part of Mussolini's grand plan.

On the international front, Mussolini at first showed a cautious hand, signing international cooperation pacts (including the 1928 Kellogg Pact solemnly renouncing war) and until 1935 moving close to France and the UK to contain the growing menace of Adolf Hitler's rapidly re-arming Germany.

That all changed when Mussolini decided to invade Abyssinia (Ethiopia) as the first big step to creating a 'new Roman empire'. This aggressive side of Mussolini's policy had already led to skirmishes with Greece over the island of Corfu and to military expeditions against nationalist forces in the Italian colony of Libya.

The League of Nations condemned the Abyssinian adventure (King Vittorio Emanuele III was declared Emperor of Abyssinia in 1936) and from then on Mussolini changed course, drawing closer to Nazi Germany. They

Swiss Henri Dunant created the Red Cross after witnessing the horrors of the Battle of Solferino during the Franco-Austrian War.

For more on the history of Fascist Italy, see www.thecorner.org/hists/total/f-italy.htm. Here you can trace Mussolini's rise to power and the tumultuous years of his rule.

Denis Mack Smith produced one of the most penetrating works on Italy's dictator with his *Mussolini*. As well as tracing Mussolini's career it assesses his impact on the greater evil of the time, Hitler.

1935

Italy seeks a new colonial conquest through the invasion of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) from Eritrea, but takes seven months to capture Addis Ababa. The League of Nations condemns the invasion and imposes limited sanctions on Italy.

1940

Italy enters WWII on Nazi Germany's side and invades Greece, which quickly proves to be a mistake. Greek forces counter-attack and enter southern Albania. Germany saves Italy's bacon in 1941 by overrunning Yugoslavia and Greece.

1943

Allies land in Sicily. King Vittorio Emanuele III sacks Mussolini. He is replaced by Marshall Badoglio, who surrenders after Allied landings in southern Italy. German forces free Mussolini and occupy most of the country.

backed the rebel General Franco in the three-year Spanish Civil War and in 1939 signed an alliance pact.

WWII broke out in September 1939 with Hitler's invasion of Poland. Italy remained aloof until June 1940, by which time Germany had overrun Norway, Denmark, the Low Countries and much of France. It seemed too easy and so Mussolini entered on Germany's side in 1940, a move Hitler must have regretted later. Germany found itself pulling Italy's chestnuts out of the fire in campaigns in the Balkans and North Africa and could not prevent Allied landings in Sicily in 1943.

By then, the Italians had had enough of Mussolini and his war and so the king had the dictator arrested. In September, Italy surrendered and the Germans, who had rescued Mussolini, occupied the bulk northern two-thirds of the country and reinstalled the dictator.

The painfully slow Allied campaign up the peninsula and German repression led to the formation of the Resistance, which played a growing role in harassing German forces. Northern Italy was finally liberated in April 1945. Resistance fighters caught Mussolini as he fled north in the hope of reaching Switzerland. They shot him and his lover, Clara Petacci, before stringing up their corpses (along with others) in Milan's Piazzale Lotto.

Novelist Rosetta Loy provides a fascinating personal view of life in Rome under the Fascists in *First Words: A Childhood in Fascist Italy*. Loy places special emphasis on the changes wrought by Mussolini's anti-Jewish race laws.

THE COLD WAR IN ITALY

In the aftermath of war, the left-wing Resistance was disarmed and Italy's political forces scrambled to regroup. The USA, through the economic largesse of the Marshall Plan, wielded considerable political influence and used this to keep the left in check.

Immediately after the war, three coalition governments succeeded one another. The third, which came to power in December 1945, was dominated by the newly formed right-wing Democrazia Cristiana (DC; Christian Democrats), led by Alcide de Gasperi, who remained prime minister until 1953. Italy became a republic in 1946 and De Gasperi's DC won the first elections under the new constitution in 1948.

Until the 1980s, the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI; Communist Party), at first under Palmiro Togliatti and later the charismatic Enrico Berlinguer, played a crucial role in Italy's social and political development, in spite of being systematically kept out of government.

The very popularity of the party led to a grey period in the country's history, the *anni di piombo* (years of lead) in the 1970s. Just as the Italian economy was booming, Europe-wide paranoia about the power of the Communists in Italy fuelled a secretive reaction that, it is said, was largely directed by the CIA and NATO. Even today, relatively little is known about Operation Gladio, an underground paramilitary organisation supposedly behind various unexplained terror attacks in the country, apparently designed to create an atmosphere or fear in which, should the Communists come close to power, a right-wing coup could be quickly carried out.

Claudia Cardinale starred in the 1984 Italian film *Claretta*, on the racy life and tragic end of Clara Petacci, Mussolini's lover. Given the chance to flee when they were captured, she instead tried in vain to shield the Duce from the partisan execution squad's bullets.

1946

Italians vote in a national referendum to abolish the monarchy and create a republic. King Umberto II, who had succeeded to the throne in May, leaves Italy and refuses to recognise the result.

1957

Italy joins France, West Germany and the Benelux countries to sign the Treaty of Rome, which creates the European Economic Community (EEC), now known as the EU. The treaty takes effect on 1 January 1958.

1970

Parliament approves the country's first ever divorce legislation, vociferously opposed by the Church. Unwilling to accept this 'defeat', the Christian Democrats call a referendum to annul the law in 1974. Italians vote against the referendum.

THE CASE OF THE DISAPPEARING AIRLINER

On 27 June 1980, a domestic DC9 aircraft carrying 78 passengers on a flight from Bologna to Palermo simply disappeared off Italian control tower radar screens. The plane had gone down on a clear summer's night off the islet of Ustica, northwestern Sicily. For two years the official line was that it had suffered a technical difficulty. Subsequent investigations, which continued until 1999, threw up many theories but failed to clear up the mystery. Among the more popular theories are that the crash occurred when the plane flew inadvertently into a fire fight between Libyan and American or NATO fighter jets, that the airliner was shot down mistakenly by a mystery missile, or that a bomb had been planted on board. One theory even suggests a fighter flew so close to the jet as to throw it into a dive. The apparent lack of cooperation in providing information by the Italian air force fuelled media speculation and led to trials of several military figures for obstruction of justice and even treason. Hearings began in 2000 and led to a couple of convictions in 2004, overturned on appeal in late 2005. More than 25 years and millions of court transcript pages after the crash, we are no closer to knowing what really happened than on the day itself.

The 1970s were thus dominated by the spectre of terrorism and considerable social unrest, especially in the universities. Neo-Fascist terrorists struck with a bomb blast in Milan in 1969. In 1978, the Brigate Rosse (Red Brigades, a group of young left-wing militants responsible for several bomb blasts and assassinations), claimed their most important victim – former DC prime minister Aldo Moro. His kidnap and (54 days later) murder (the subject of the 2004 film *Buongiorno Notte*) shook the country. The government's intransigence in the face of the left-wing terrorists subsequently raised questions about why apparently nothing at all was done to save the statesman.

Despite the disquiet, the 1970s was also a time of positive change. In 1970, regional governments with limited powers were formed in 15 of the country's 20 regions (the other five, Sicily, Sardinia, Valle d'Aosta, Trentino-Alto Adige and Friuli-Venezia Giulia, already had strong autonomy statutes). In the same year, divorce became legal and eight years later abortion was also legalised, following anti-sexist legislation that allowed women to keep their own names after marriage.

THE BERLUSCONI ERA

A growth spurt in the 1980s saw Italy become one of the world's leading economies, but by the 1990s a new period of crisis had set in. High unemployment and inflation, combined with a huge national debt and mercurial currency (the lira), led the government to introduce draconian measures to cut public spending. A series of left and centre-left governments maintained this tough course in order to join the European monetary union and, in 2001, enter the single currency.

Liposuction was first tried out by Dr Giorgio Fisher, a Roman gynaecologist, in 1974.

Although much has happened since it was written, Paul Ginsborg's *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943-1988* remains one of the single-most readable and insightful books on postwar Italy.

1980

A bomb in Bologna kills 85 and injures hundreds more. The Red Brigades and a Fascist cell both claim responsibility. Analysis later points to possible parasite terrorism in Operation Gladio but nothing has been proved.

1999

Italy becomes a primary base in NATO's air war on Yugoslavia. Air strikes are carried out from the Aviano airbase from 24 May until 8 June, when Serbia accepts international ground forces in Kosovo.

2001

Silvio Berlusconi's right-wing Casa delle Libertà (Liberties House) coalition wins an absolute majority in national polls. He promises to run Italy like a corporation but the following five years are marked by economic stagnation.

The Dark Heart of Italy, by Tobias Jones, is an engaging, personal look at contemporary Italy, plagued as it has been by (real or imagined) conspiracies, corruption and terrorism.

Not long after WWII, Norman Lewis penned *The Honoured Society*, an intriguing study of Sicily, and in 2000 he returned to the subject, and especially the Mafia, with *In Sicily*.

The old order seemed to crumble in the 1990s. The PCI split in two. The old guard now goes by the title Partito Rifondazione Comunista (PRC; Refounded Communist Party), under the leadership of Fausto Bertinotti. The bigger and moderate breakaway wing reformed itself as Democratici di Sinistra (DS; Left Democrats).

The rest of the Italian political scene was rocked by the Tangentopoli ('kickback city') scandal, which broke in Milan in 1992. Led by a pool of Milanese magistrates, including the tough Antonio di Pietro, investigations known as Mani Pulite (Clean Hands) implicated thousands of politicians, public officials and businesspeople in scandals ranging from bribery and receiving kickbacks to blatant theft.

The old centre-right political parties collapsed in the wake of these trials and from the ashes rose what many Italians hoped might be a breath of fresh political air. Media magnate Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia (Go Italy) party, after a brief shot at power in 1994, won a major victory in elections in 2001.

Together with the right-wing (one-time Fascist) Alleanza Nazionale (National Alliance) under Gianfranco Fini and the polemical, separatist Lega Nord (Northern League), Berlusconi formed the Casa delle Libertà (House of Liberties) coalition with an unassailable majority.

Berlusconi was large on promises but in the end seemed to do little to yank Italy out of its mire. Indeed, his rule was marked rather more by a series of laws aimed principally at protecting his extensive business interests (he controls as much as 90% of the country's free TV channels). He also spent considerable time haranguing what he claimed to be the country's 'politicised' judges. The latter have been looking into his myriad business affairs since the beginning of the 1990s, but one trial after another has collapsed. Curiously, Berlusconi was an open supporter of the Clean Hands trials until judges started looking at his affairs.

Dubbed Il Cavaliere (The Knight) by the media, Berlusconi was narrowly beaten by a broad centre-left coalition under former prime minister and head of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, in 2006.

2002

The head of Fiat, Gianni Agnelli, dies as the Italian economy and his motor company (a symbol of national industrial prowess) languish in the doldrums.

2005

Pope John Paul II dies aged 84. His death unleashes a wave of sorrow and crowds outside St Peter's are chanting *santo subito* (sainthood now). He is succeeded by Benedict XVI, the German Cardinal Ratzinger.

2006

In April, Berlusconi narrowly loses general elections to a broad centre-left coalition led by the technocrat Romano Prodi, who immediately runs into trouble with the Telecom bugging scandal and the pension reform quagmire.

Italian Art

The history of Italian art is in many ways also the history of Western art. A browse through any text on the subject brings up the names of seminal movements and periods including classical, Renaissance, mannerist, baroque, futurist and Metaphysical – all of which were forged in Italy by a pantheon of artists including Giotto, Da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael, Bernini, Botticelli and Caravaggio. The country itself is one huge art gallery, full of museums and churches housing a treasure trove of art that is unmatched anywhere in the world. There's no way the visitor can see it all, but one thing's for sure: no trip around the country can be complete without a fair few gallery, church and museum stops along the way.

CLASSICAL & ANCIENT ART

In art, as in so many other realms, the ancient Romans looked to the Greeks for examples of best practice. They had plenty of opportunity to do so, as the Greeks had settled many parts of Sicily and southern Italy as early as the 8th century BC, naming it *Magna Graecia* and building great cities such as Syracuse and Taranto. These cities were famous for their magnificent temples, many of which were decorated with sculptures modelled on, or inspired by, masterpieces by Praxiteles, Lysippus and Phidias. The archaeological museums in Naples (p625), Palermo (p744) and Syracuse (p790) contain many such examples.

Sculpture continued to flourish in southern Italy into the Hellenistic period, and it also gained great popularity in central Italy, where the primitive art of the Etruscans (the people of ancient central Italy) was influenced and greatly refined by the contribution of Greek artisans, who came here through trade. A great example of this is the 6th-century terracotta *Apollo of Veio*, miraculously preserved and now on display at the Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia (p120) in Rome.

In Rome itself, sculpture, architecture and painting flourished under first the republic and then the Empire. But the art that was produced in Rome during this period was different in many ways to the Greek art that influenced it. Essentially secular, it focused less on harmony and form and more on accurate representation, mainly in the form of sculptural portraits. Anyone who spends time browsing the collections in the Museo Palatino (p108) and the Museo Nazionale Romano: Palazzo Massimo alle Terme (p120) in Rome cannot fail to be struck by how lifelike – and often deeply unattractive! – the marble busts of the emperors and their families are. Innumerable versions of Pompey, Titus and Augustus all show a similar visage, proving that the artists were seeking verisimilitude in their representations, and not just glorification.

Another way in which the art of ancient Rome differed to that of Greece is in its purpose. The Greeks saw art as being solely about harmony, beauty and dramatic expression, but starting with Augustus (63 BC–AD 14), the Roman emperors used art to promote propaganda messages that were strengthened through associations with classical Greece and the golden age of Athens. This form of narrative art often took the form of relief decoration recounting the story of great military victories – the Colonna di Traiano (Trajan's Column, p111) and the Ara Pacis Augustae (Altar of Peace, p118) are two excellent examples of this tradition. Both are magnificent, monumental examples of art as propaganda, exalting the emperor and Rome in a form that no-one, either then or now, can possibly ignore.

A Handbook of Roman Art, by Martin Henig, is a clear, readable introduction to the whole spectrum of Roman art.

While the emperors commissioned these portraits and public monuments, wealthy members of Roman society also dabbled in the arts. They built palatial villas and decorated these with statues that were sometimes looted from the Greek world, and sometimes copied from Greek originals. Today, museums in Rome are bursting at the seams with such trophies. Some, such as the *Galata morete* (Dying Gaul, c 240–200 BC) in the Capitoline Museums (p112) in Rome, were copies of Greek originals; others, such as the extraordinary *Laocoön and His Sons* (c 160–140 BC) in the collection of the Vatican Museums (p125), are original.

Roman villas were decorated with another form of art, too. While the Etruscans had used wall painting – most notably in their tombs at centres such as Tarquinia (p175) and Cerveteri (p174) – it was the Romans who refined the form and concentrated it on landscape scenes executed with startling naturalness. Wonderful, richly coloured examples of such paintings can today be appreciated at the Museo Nazionale Romano: Palazzo Massimo alle Terme (p120) in Rome.

BYZANTINE ART

In 330, Emperor Constantine, a convert to Christianity, made the ancient city of Byzantium his capital and renamed it Constantinople. The city became the great cultural and artistic centre of Christianity and it remained so up to the time of the Renaissance, though its influence on the art of that period was never as fundamental as the art of ancient Rome.

The Byzantine period was notable for its sublime ecclesiastical and palace architecture, its extraordinary mosaic work and – to a lesser extent – its painting. Its art was influenced by the decoration of the Roman catacombs and the early Christian churches, as well as by the Oriental Greek style, with its love of rich decoration and luminous colour. Byzantine artworks de-emphasised the naturalistic aspects of the classical tradition and exalted the spirit over the body, so glorifying God rather than man or the state.

In Italy, the Byzantine virtuosity with mosaics was showcased in Ravenna, the capital of the Byzantine Empire's western regions in the 6th century. Three churches were built or endowed by the Emperor Justinian and his wife Theodora. These churches, with the Chora Church (aka Kariye Müzesi) in Istanbul, are considered to house the very best of Byzantine mosaic art. The hand-cut glazed tiles (*tesserae*) in Ravenna's Basilica di Sant'Apollinare in Classe (p451), Basilica di San Vitale (p449) and Basilica di Sant'Apollinare Nuovo (p450) catch the light and glint and gleam in the dark church surrounds. Though they depict Biblical and other imagery with extraordinary naturalness, they also impart an enormous sense of grandeur and mystery, perhaps hinting that they depict stories and scenes that have an ecclesiastical power much greater than the simple worshipper could ever hope to fully appreciate.

ART IN THE MIDDLE AGES

The Italian Middle Ages have often been regarded as simply a 'dark' age between the Roman and Byzantine Empires and the Renaissance. However, to ignore this period would make it very difficult to understand all subsequent Italian history. This is because Italy as we know it was born in the Middle Ages. The barbarian invasions of the 5th and 6th centuries began a process that turned a unified empire into a land of small independent city-states, and it was these states – or rather the merchants, princes, clergy, corporations and guilds who lived within them – that started the craze in artistic patronage that was to underpin the great innovations in art and architecture that were to characterise the Renaissance.

We regularly consulted EH Gombrich's seminal work *The Story of Art* when writing this chapter. First published in 1950, it gives a wonderful overview of the history of Italian art.

Continuing the trend kick-started in the Byzantine period, ideas of clarity and simplicity of religious message began to outweigh ideals of faithful representation during this time. This is why, at first glance, many pictures of the period look rather stiff. There is nothing of the mastery of movement and expression that had been the pride of Greek art and that had been adopted by the Romans.

Painting and sculpture of this period played second fiddle to its architecture, which is commonly known as 'Romanesque'. Complementing this architectural style was the work of the Cosmati, a Roman guild of mosaic and marble workers who specialised in assembling fragments of coloured stones and glass mosaics and combining them with large stone disks and strips of white marble to create stunning intricate pavements, columns and church furnishings such as baldachins. There are good examples of Cosmati work in Rome's Chiesa di Santa Maria in Cosmedin (p116), the Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore (p122) and the Chiesa di Santa Maria Sopra Minerva (p114).

THE GOTHIC STYLE

The Gothic style was much slower to take off in Italy than it had been in the rest of Europe. It marked the transition from the art of the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, and saw artists once again joyously draw inspiration from life itself rather than solely from religion. Occurring at the same time as the development of court society and the rise of civic culture in the city-states, its art was both sophisticated and elegant, highlighting attention to detail, a luminous palette and an increasingly refined technique. The first innovations were made in Pisa by sculptor Nicola Pisano (c 1220–84), who emulated the example of the French Gothic masters and studied classical sculpture in order to represent nature more convincingly, but the major strides forward occurred in Florence and Siena.

Giotto and the 'Rebirth' of Italian Art

The Byzantine painters in Italy knew how to make use of light and shade and had an understanding of the principles of foreshortening (how to convey an effect of perspective). It only required a genius to break the spell of their conservatism and to venture into a new world of naturalistic painting. And genius came in the form of Florentine painter Giotto di Bondone (c 1266–1337). Giotto's aims and outlook owed much to the great sculptors of the northern cathedrals, and his methods owed much to the Byzantine masters. But his painting was radically different, focusing on the creation of dramatic narrative and the accurate, or 'natural', representation of figures and landscape. The Italian poet Giovanni Boccaccio wrote in his *Decameron* (1348–53) that Giotto was 'a genius so sublime that there was nothing produced by nature...that he could not depict to the life; his depiction looked not like a copy, but the real thing.'

Boccaccio wasn't the only prominent critic of the time to consider Giotto revolutionary – the first historian of Italian art, Giorgio Vasari, said in his *Lives of the Artists* (1550) that Giotto initiated the 'rebirth' (*rinascità* or *renaissance*) in art. Giotto's most famous works are all in the medium of the fresco (where paint is applied on a wall while the plaster is still damp), and his supreme achievement is the cycle gracing the walls of the Cappella degli Scrovegni (p367) in Padua. It's impossible to overestimate Giotto's achievement with these frescoes, which illustrate the stories of the life of the Virgin and Christ. In them, he abandoned popular conventions such as the three-quarter view of head and body and presented his figures from behind, from the side or turning around, just as the story demanded. Giotto had no need for lashings of gold paint and elaborate

Taschen's *Masterpieces of Western Art* is a lavishly illustrated book that covers Italian art from the Gothic period onwards.

ornamentation to impress the viewer with the significance of the subject. Instead, he enabled the viewer to feel the dramatic tension of the scene through a naturalistic rendition of figures and a radical composition that created the illusion of depth. They are works of enormous emotional power and stunning virtuosity.

Giotto's oeuvre isn't limited to the frescoes in the Cappella degli Scrovegni. His Life of St Francis cycle in the Upper Church of the Basilica di San Francesco (p565) in Assisi is almost as extraordinary, and was to greatly influence his peers, many of whom worked in Assisi during the decoration of the church. One of the most prominent of these was the Dominican friar Fra Angelico (c 1395–1455), a Florentine painter who was famed for his mastery of colour and light. His *Annunciation* (c 1450) in the convent of the Museo di San Marco (p474) in Florence is perhaps his most accomplished work.

The Sienese School

Giotto wasn't the only painter of his time to experiment with form, colour and composition and create a radical new style. The great Sienese master Duccio di Buoninsegna (c 1255–1319) successfully breathed new life into the old Byzantine forms using light and shade. His preferred medium was the panel painting rather than the fresco, and his major work is probably his *Maestà* (Virgin Mary in Majesty) in the Museo dell'Opera Metropolitana (p521) in Siena.

It was in Siena, too, that two new trends took off: the introduction of court painters and the advent of secular art.

The first of many painters to be given ongoing commissions by one major patron or court, Simone Martini was almost as famous as Giotto in his day. His best-known painting is the stylized *Maestà* (1315–16) in the Museo Civico (p521) in Siena, in which he pioneered his famous iridescent palette (one colour transformed into another within the same plane).

The Lorenzetti brothers, Pietro (c 1280–1348) and Ambrogio (c 1290–1348), were also working in Siena around this time. They can be said to be the greatest exponents of what, for a better term, can be referred to as secular painting. Ambrogio's *Allegories of Good and Bad Government* (1337–40) in the Museo Civico are magnificent achievements, lauding the results that good government can have (in this case, of course, using the example of Siena) and warning of the gruesome results that bad government can lead to. In the frescoes, he applies the rules of perspective with an accuracy previously unseen, creating a deep and realistic pictorial space. The frescoes are also significant in the development of the Italian landscape tradition. In *Life in the Country*, one of the allegories, Ambrogio successfully depicts the time of day, the season, colour reflections and shadows – a naturalistic depiction of landscape that was quite unique at this time.

THE EARLY RENAISSANCE

During the 15th century (Quattrocento), painting overtook its fellow disciplines of sculpture and architecture and became the pre-eminent art form for the first time in the history of Western art. Its great achievements built on many of the innovations introduced by Giotto and the painters of the Sienese school: the exploration of perspective and proportion, a new interest in realistic portraiture, and the beginnings of a new tradition of landscape painting. At the start of the Quattrocento, most of these were explored and refined in one city – Florence.

The first innovations of this period were in sculpture and architecture. Sculptors Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378–1455) and Donatello (c 1382–1466) replaced the demure drapery-clad statues of the Middle Ages with dynamic

In Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artists*, the 16th-century painter reflects on the lives of his contemporaries in Florence.

and anatomically accurate figures reminiscent of the great works of ancient Greece and Rome.

Architect Filippo Brunelleschi (1377–1446), the designer of the dome of Florence's Duomo, was also heavily influenced by the achievements of the classical masters. But he was able to do something that they hadn't been able to do themselves – discover and record the mathematical rules by which objects appear to diminish as they recede from us. In so doing, Brunelleschi gave artists a whole new visual perspective and a means to glorious artistic ends.

One of the first artworks created according to these rules was *The Holy Trinity, the Virgin, St John and Donors*, a wall painting in the Basilica di Santa Maria Novella (p473) in Florence. Painted around 1428 by Masaccio (1401–28), it is commonly considered to be one of the founding works of Renaissance painting. Even his peers acknowledged how important Masaccio's works were – Leonardo da Vinci praised him for his faithful study of nature and adopted a similar mathematical 'stage management' in his famous *Last Supper* fresco, which graces a wall in the refectory of the Chiesa di Santa Maria delle Grazie (p260) in Milan.

Acknowledging the radical innovation of the work of Masaccio and of Giotto before him, the artists of this period were no longer content to repeat the old formulas handed down by medieval artists. Like the Greeks and Romans, they began to study the human body in their studios and workshops by asking models or fellow artists to pose for them. Their aim was to make the figures in their paintings look as realistic as possible, and then animate the figures themselves using the new rules of perspective. Andrea Mantegna (1431–1506), who was based in Padua and Mantua, was responsible for the painting that is the most virtuosic of all perspectival experiments that occurred during this period – his expressive and highly realistic *Dead Christ* (c 1480), with its figure of Jesus shown in dramatic foreshortening. When you see it in the collection of the Pinacoteca di Brera (p260) in Milan it's easy to imagine how radical it must have seemed when it was first exhibited.

Sometimes innovation can lead to the creation of new problems, and this was something that the Florentine artists of this time soon had to face. Medieval painters had been unaware of the rules of perspective, but this had enabled them to distribute their figures over the picture in any way they liked in order to create a harmonious whole. But the painters of the Quattrocento found that the rigid new formulas they were experimenting with often made harmonious arrangements of figures difficult, resulting in groups that appeared artificial. This was particularly the case with large works such as altar paintings, which needed to be seen from afar and were required to fit into the architectural framework of the whole church. Artists such as Sandro Botticelli (1445–1510) led the way in seeking a solution to this challenge, seeking to make a painting both perspectively accurate and harmonious in composition. His *Birth of Venus* (1485), now in the collection of the Uffizi (p470), was one of the most successful attempts to solve this problem. It's not perfect – witness Venus' unnaturally elongated neck – but it was certainly an impressive and incredibly beautiful attempt.

THE HIGH RENAISSANCE

There is a surfeit of highlights in the history of Italian art, but the beginning of the 16th century (the Cinquecento) tops them all. At this time the centres of artistic excellence and innovation shifted from Florence to Rome and Venice. This reflected the political and social realities of the period – namely the transfer of power in Florence from the Medici to Savonarola, and the desire of the popes in Rome to counter the influence of Martin Luther and

Work out your roccoco from your Renaissance at www.artcyclopedia.com.

Among Leonardo da Vinci's amazing sketches are drawings of the world's first parachute, helicopter, aeroplane and car.

A website dedicated to the life and works of Michelangelo is at www.michelangelo.com/buonarroti.html.

Michelangelo spent six months in the quarries in Carrara in northern Tuscany selecting and buying marble that he planned to use for the sculptures that would form the tomb of Pope Julius II.

Carol Reed's 1965 film *The Agony and the Ecstasy* is based on the 1961 novel by Irving Stone. Charlton Heston's portrayal of Michelangelo is so bad that it's strangely compelling. His co-stars include Rex Harrison as Pope Julius II and Harry Andrews as Bramante.

his Reformation movement by making the Church's home in Rome so magnificent that it would cause any dissenters to be humbled – and brought back into line – as a result.

The Cinquecento was the time of geniuses such as Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564) and Raphael Santi (1483–1520) – the archetypal 'Renaissance men'. All three were painters and architects of genius; Leonardo was also a self-trained scientist and mathematician of extraordinary vision, and Michelangelo was quite possibly the greatest sculptor in the history of art. Together, they were to unalterably change the face of Western art.

Leonardo, a Florentine, had so many talents that it is hard to isolate only a few for comment. In his painting, he took what some critics have described as the decisive step in the history of Western art – namely, abandoning the balance that had previously been maintained between colour and line and choosing to modulate his contours using colour. This technique is called *sfumato* and it is perfectly displayed in his *Mona Lisa* (now in the Louvre in Paris).

Michelangelo, another Florentine, saw himself first and foremost as a sculptor, and there's no doubt that his skill in this medium was unsurpassed then and even now. His mastery in accurately portraying the human body is evident in all of his sculptural work – most famously in his *David* in the Galleria dell'Accademia (p475) in Florence – but he is best known for his painted ceiling of the Sistine Chapel (p127) in Rome, with its extraordinary depictions of the human body. Here, Michelangelo took a different path to his peers – his figures are not just realistic, they are emotive visual representations of the human experience, animated by more than just a mastery of perspective and an accurate rendering of anatomy.

Raphael was from Urbino. His paintings demonstrate his skill in rising to that previously mentioned challenge faced by the painters of the Quattrocento – namely achieving harmonious and perspectively accurate arrangement of figures. The best examples of this are his paintings *The Nymph Galatea* (c 1514) in the Villa Farnesina in Rome and *La scuola d'Atene* (The School of Athens) in the Stanza della Segnatura (p127) in the Vatican Museums. His many paintings of the Madonna and Child – all of which demonstrate his adoption of Leonardo's innovative *sfumato* – epitomise the Western model of 'ideal beauty' that was forged in this period and perseveres even today.

While Leonardo, Michelangelo and Raphael were perfecting their treatment of figure arrangement and form to achieve complete visual unity, the Venetian artists Giorgione (c 1477–1510) and Titian (c 1490–1576) followed a different path, seeking to unify their compositions through the use of colour and light. The best example of this is Giorgione's enigmatic *La tempesta* (The Storm) in the Gallerie dell'Accademia (p349) in Venice, which is suffused with light and an impression of airiness.

Mannerism

By 1520, artists such as Michelangelo and Raphael had pretty well achieved everything that former generations had tried to do. No problem of draughtsmanship seemed too difficult for them, no subject matter too complicated. At this point, they and other artists began to demonstrate a distortion of natural image in favour of heightened expression; this movement was derided by later critics, who called it mannerism. Works such as Titian's *Assunta* (Assumption, 1516–18) in the Chiesa di Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari (p350) in Venice and Raphael's *La trasfigurazione* (1517–20) in the Pinacoteca (p126) of the Vatican Museums are good examples of this style.

BAROQUE ART

By the end of the century, two artists who had grown tired of mannerism took very different approaches to painting in an attempt to break the deadlock caused by the achievements of their predecessors.

Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1573–1610), the Milanese-born *enfant terrible* of the late-16th-century art world, had no liking for classical models or respect for ‘ideal beauty’. Described by the writer Stendhal as a ‘great painter [and] a wicked man’, Caravaggio was as notorious for his work as he was for his behaviour. He was condemned by some contemporaries for seeking truth rather than ideal beauty in his art; they were shocked by his radical practice of copying nature faithfully regardless of whether it was beautiful or not. But even they were forced to admire his skill with the technique of chiaroscuro (the bold contrast of light and dark) and his employment of tenebrism, where dramatic chiaroscuro becomes a dominant and highly effective stylistic device. (For more information on Caravaggio, see the boxed text, p54).

Annibale Caracci (1560–1609) was the major artist of the baroque Emilian, or Bolognese, school. With his painter brother Agostino he worked in Bologna, Parma and Venice before moving to Rome to work for Cardinal Odoardo Farnese. In works such as his magnificent frescoes of mythological subjects in the Palazzo Farnese (p115) in Rome, he employed innovative illusionistic elements that would prove inspirational to later baroque painters such as Cortona, Pozzo and Gaulli. However, Caracci never let the illusionism and energy of his works dominate the subject matter as these later painters did. Strongly influenced by the work of Michelangelo and Raphael, he continued the Renaissance penchant for idealising and ‘beautifying’ nature.

The roots of baroque art lay in religious spirituality and stringent aestheticism. Its artists and patrons aimed to use it to combat the rapidly spreading Protestant Reformation and, at the same time, emphasise the importance of the Catholic religion. Considering this aim, it seems somewhat strange that its style displayed worldly joy, rich decoration and uninhibited sensuality. The works of this period utilise stage-like settings, dramatic light, swirling draperies and vivid colour. It seems that the baroque artists cottoned on to something that the marketers of our age use as a mantra – if you make a product or message sexy you will be able to sell it effectively.

Perhaps the best known of all baroque artists was the sculptor Gianlorenzo Bernini (1598–1680), who used works of religious art such as his *Vision of Saint Theresa* in the Chiesa della Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome to arouse feelings of exaltation and mystic transport in the viewer. In this and many other works he achieved an extraordinary intensity of facial expression and a totally radical handling of draperies. Instead of letting these fall in dignified folds in the approved classical manner, he made them writhe and whirl to add to the effect of excitement and movement. This trick was soon imitated all over Europe.

THE NEW ITALY

By the 18th century, Italy was beginning to rebel against years of foreign rule – first under the French in Napoleon’s time and then under the Austrians. But although new ideas of political unity were forming, there was only one innovation in art – the painting and engraving of views, most notably in Venice, to meet the demand of European travellers wanting souvenirs of their grand tours. The best-known painters of this school are Francesco Guardi (1712–93) and Giovanni Antonio Canaletto (1697–1768).

Despite the slow movement towards unity, the 19th-century Italian cities remained as they had been for centuries – highly individual centres of culture with sharply contrasting ways of life. Music was the supreme art of this period and the overwhelming theme in the visual arts was one of chaste refinement.

In *M: The Man Who Became Caravaggio*, Peter Robb gives a passionate personal assessment of the artist’s paintings and a colourful account of Caravaggio’s life, arguing he was murdered for having sex with the pageboy of a high-ranking Maltese aristocrat.

For a colourful account of Caravaggio’s life, check out Derek Jarman’s 1986 film, *Caravaggio*.

ON THE CARAVAGGIO TRAIL

Much of the information that scholars have gathered about Caravaggio's time in Rome has been gleaned from police records. This is because trouble with the law was a fact of daily life for the artist.

Caravaggio arrived in Rome around 1590 and soon gained a reputation for wandering around the streets of the historic centre, from Campo de' Fiori to the Pantheon, brandishing (and sometimes using) a long sword. One of his girlfriends was a prostitute who worked in Piazza Navona and he was arrested on several occasions, once for launching a tray laden with artichokes at a waiter in a restaurant and another time for throwing rocks at the windows of his former landlady's house.

The artist fled Rome in 1606 after a ball game in Campo de' Fiori during which he killed his opponent. He spent four years on the run in Naples, Malta and Sicily and died in Porto Ercole in Tuscany at the age of 36.

Caravaggio's paintings were controversial. He used peasants, beggars and prostitutes as his models, giving his Madonnas and saints a realism that was not always well received. On several occasions he had to repaint commissions for churches because the subjects were deemed to be too lifelike: the clergy refused to believe that saints could have had such dirty feet and fingernails.

Several of these rejected works were bought by prominent private collectors including Cardinal Scipione Borghese. Borghese is said to have used his influence in the Church (he was a nephew of Pope Paul V) to persuade several religious confraternities who had commissioned Caravaggio works to reject the completed paintings for being too 'realistic'. Caravaggio would then be constrained to produce a more acceptable version of the same subject, enabling Borghese to buy the offending work at a bargain price.

Most of Caravaggio's great works are in Rome. The *Madonna dei pellegrini* (Madonna of the Pilgrims) in the Chiesa di Sant'Agostino (p115) in Rome is regarded as one of his most alluring works and features a superbly serene Madonna surrounded by scruffy pilgrims. The St Matthew cycle in the nearby Chiesa di San Luigi dei Francesi (p115) is equally magnificent.

The Museo e Galleria Borghese (p119) contains six Caravaggios, including *Giovane con cestro do frutta* (Boy with a Basket of Fruit), the *Bacchino malato* (Sick Bacchus) and the famous *Madonna dei palafrenieri* (Madonna with Serpent), commissioned for a chapel in St Peter's Basilica but snapped up by Scipione Borghese.

The dramatic *Davide con la testa di Golia* (David with Goliath's Head) and *San Giovanni Battista*, showing a young St John the Baptist, were apparently given to Borghese by the artist in exchange for clemency from Pope Paul V for the murder he committed in 1606. The Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica (p117) at Palazzo Barberini in Rome has a striking *Narcissus* and a gruesome *Giuditta e Oloferne* (Judith and Holofernes). And finally, Caravaggio's *Deposizione nel sepolcro* (Descent from the Cross) is hanging in the Pinacoteca (p126) of the Vatican Museums.

The major artistic movement of the day – neoclassicism – was as popular here as it was elsewhere in Europe and its greatest local exponent was the sculptor Antonio Canova (1757–1822). Canova renounced movement in favour of stillness, emotion in favour of restraint and illusion in favour of simplicity. His most famous work is a daring sculpture of Pauline Bonaparte Borghese as a reclining *Venere vincitrice* (Conquering Venus), in the Museo e Galleria Borghese (p119) in Rome.

Canova was the last Italian artist to win overwhelming international fame. Italian architecture, sculpture and painting had played a dominant role in the cultural life of Europe for some 400 years, but with Canova's death in 1822, this supremacy came to an end.

MODERN MOVEMENTS

The two main developments in Italian art at the outbreak of WWI could not have been more different. Futurism, led by poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876–1944) and painter Umberto Boccioni (1882–1916), sought new ways

to express the dynamism of the machine age. Metaphysical painting (*Pittura Metafisica*), in contrast, looked inwards and produced mysterious images from the subconscious world.

Futurism demanded a new art for a new world and denounced every attachment to the art of the past. It started with the publication of Marinetti's *Manifesto del futurismo* (Manifesto of Futurism, 1909), and was backed up by the publication of a 1910 futurist painting manifesto by Boccioni, Giacomo Balla (1871–1958), Luigi Russolo (1885–1947) and Gino Severini (1883–1966). In their manifesto, the painters wrote that 'Everything is in movement, everything rushes forward, everything is in constant swift change'. An excellent example of their theory put into practice is Boccioni's *Rissa in galleria* (Brawl in the Arcade, 1910) in the collection of the Pinocoteca di Brera (p260) in Milan. This was painted shortly after the manifesto was published and clearly demonstrates the movement's fascination with frantic movement and with modern technology and life. They weren't interested in the heritage of Italian art, and they saw war as a means of destroying the past and starting anew out of the chaos. The movement lost its impetus with the outbreak of WWI.

Metaphysical painting also had a short life. Its most famous exponent, Giorgio De Chirico (1888–1978), lost interest in the style after the war, but his work held a powerful attraction for the surrealist movement that developed in France in the 1920s. In fact, De Chirico was part of the very first surrealist exhibition at the Galerie Pierre in Paris in 1925. Stillness and a sense of foreboding are the haunting qualities of many of De Chirico's works of this period, which show disconnected images from the world of dreams in settings that usually embody memories of classical Italian architecture. A good example is *The Red Tower* (1913), which is in the Peggy Guggenheim Collection (p349) in Venice.

After the war, a number of the futurist painters began to flirt with Fascism. They believed that the new state offered opportunities for patronage and public art and that Italy could once again lead the world in its arts practice. This period was known as 'second futurism' and its main exponents were Mario Sironi (1885–1961) and Carlo Carrà (1881–1966).

The local art scene became more interesting in the 1950s, when artists such as Alberto Burri (1915–95) and the Argentine-Italian Lucio Fontana (1899–1968) experimented with abstract art. Fontana's punctured canvases were characterised by *spazialismo* (spatialism) and he also experimented with 'slash paintings', where he made actual holes or slashes in his canvases and dubbed them 'art for the space age'.

Burri's work was truly cutting-edge. His assemblages were made of burlap, wood, iron and plastic and were avowedly anti-traditional. *Grande sacco* (Large Sack) of 1952, which is in the collection of the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea (p120) in Rome, caused a major controversy when it was first exhibited.

In the 1960s, a radical new movement called *Arte Povera* (Poor Art) took off. Its followers used simple materials to trigger off memories and associations. Major names include Mario Merz (1925–2003), Giovanni Anselmo (b 1934), Luciano Fabro (b 1936), Giulio Paolini (b 1940) and Greek-born Jannis Kounellis (b 1936). All experimented with sculpture and installation work.

In the 1980s, there was a return to painting and sculpture in a traditional (primarily figurative) sense. Dubbed 'Transavanguardia', this movement broke with the prevailing international focus on conceptual art and was thought by some critics to signal the death of avant-garde. The artists who were part of this movement include Sandro Chia

Filippo Tommaso Marinetti published his *Manifesto of Futurism* on the front page of the *Le Figaro* newspaper in France, so ensuring that it would gain international attention.

Emily Braun's *Italian Art in the 20th Century* gives an excellent overview of the subject and includes a generous number of illustrations.

Artist Francesco Clemente collaborated with Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat on paintings in the 1980s.

(b 1946), Mimmo Paladino (b 1948), Enzo Cucchi (b 1949) and Francesco Clemente (b 1952).

Contemporary artists of note currently working in Italy include mixed-media artist Stefano Arienti (b 1961), installation artist Mario Airò (b 1961), video artist Grazia Toderi (b 1963) and photographer Luisa Lambri (b 1969).

Those interested in viewing examples of 20th-century Italian art should visit the collection of the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea (p120) in Rome, the Peggy Guggenheim Collection (p349) in Venice and the Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea (p261) and Pinocoteca di Brera (p260) in Milan.

The Culture

Imagine you wake up tomorrow and discover you're Italian. How would life be different, and what could you discover about Italy in just one day as a local? Read on...

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF ITALY

Sveglia! You're woken not by an alarm but by the burble and clatter of the *caffetiera*, the ubiquitous stovetop espresso maker. You're running late this morning, so you bolt down your coffee scalding hot (an acquired Italian talent), chomp your *cornetto* (croissant), and pause only briefly to deliberate about what socks to wear. Yet still you walk a couple of blocks out of your way to buy your bus ticket and centre-left morning paper from Eduardo, your favourite news vendor, and chat briefly about his new baby – you may be late, but at least you're not rude.

On your way to work you scan the headlines: a rebuttal of the pope's latest proclamation, yesterday's football results and today's match-fixing scandal, and an announcement of new EU regulations on cheese. Outrageous! The cheese regulations, that is; the rest is to be expected. No time to stop today for a second espresso and snappy repartee with your favourite barista – a mountain of paperwork awaits at the office. You're still buried in it by lunchtime, so it's a relief to join friends for lunch and a glass of wine. Afterwards you browse a bookshop, pick up some olives at the market, and toss back another scorching espresso.

Back at work by 2pm, you multitask Italian style, chatting with coworkers as you dash off work emails, text dinner plans on your *telefonino* (mobile phone), and surreptitiously check the web for employment listings – your work contract is due to expire soon. After a busy day like this, *aperitivi* are definitely in order, so at 6.30 you head directly to the latest happy hour hot spot. Your friends arrive, the décor is *molto* design, the vibe *molto* cool, and the DJ *abbastanza* hot, until suddenly it's time for your tango class.

By the time you finally get home and kick off your shoes, it's already 9.30 and dinner will have to be reheated. *Peccato!* (Shame!) You eat, absent-mindedly watching reality TV while recounting your day and complaining about cheese regulations to whoever's home – no sense giving reheated pasta your undivided attention. While brushing your teeth, you discuss career plans and dream vacations. Finally you make your way to bed and pull reading material at random out of your current bedside stack: art books, *gialli* (mysteries), a hard-hitting Mafia exposé or two, the odd classic, possibly a few *fumetti* (comics). You drift off wondering what tomorrow might hold... imagine if you woke up English, or worse, American. How would you dress, and what would you be expected to eat? *Terribile!* You shrug off that nightmare, and settle into sleep. *Buona notte.*

Social Ties

From your day as an Italian, this much you know already: Italy is no place for an introvert. It's not merely a matter of being polite – each social interaction adds meaning and genuine pleasure to daily routines. Conversation is far too important to be cut short by tardiness or a mouthful of toothpaste. All that chatter isn't entirely idle, either. In Europe's most ancient, entrenched bureaucracy, social networks are essential to get things done. As a Ministry of Labour study recently revealed, most people in Italy still find employment through personal connections.

Nice work, if you can get it: about 30% of Italians have landed a job through family connections, and in highly paid professions that number rises as high as 40% to 50%.

If you're between the ages of 18 and 34, there's a 60% chance that's not a roommate in the kitchen making your morning coffee – it's mum or dad. This is not because Italy is a nation of pampered *mammoni* (mama's boys) and spoiled *figlie di papà* (daddy's girls) – at least, not entirely. According to the time-honoured Italian social contract, you'd probably live with your parents until you start a career and a family of your own. Then after a suitable grace period for success and romance – a couple of years should do the trick – your parents might move in with you to look after your kids, and be looked after in turn.

Lately this contract has begun to break down. Official statistics reveal that most Italian women aged 29–34 now prefer careers and a home life without curfews or children. But while only one in 10 Italian women still lives with her parents by age 35, twice as many men do. This adds some sitcom-worthy awkwardness to the dating scene, as witnessed in the latest reality dating show to scandalise Italy, *La sposa perfetta* (The Perfect Wife), where women compete for an eligible bachelor's attention by performing domestic duties, and his mother chooses the winner. After the show aired on the government-backed RAI channel, incensed Italian women threatened to withhold the €200 euros of their taxes earmarked for public broadcasting, and the Ministry of Culture promptly ordered an investigation.

As desirable as living independently might be, it isn't always an option in the midst of Italy's current recession. The plodding economy is making it harder for Italians to get ahead, even though many are putting in longer hours at work. Consider the skyrocketing rents and temptations of home cooking, and it's no wonder the number of adult Italians living with their parents has grown in recent years – hence the mobile-phone chorus heard at evening rush hour in buses and trams across Italy: '*Mamma, butta la pasta!*' (Mum, put the pasta in the water!).

BETTER LIVING BY DESIGN

As an Italian, you actually did your co-workers a favour by being late to the office because you gave yourself a once-over in the mirror. Unless you want your fellow employees to avert their gaze in dumbstruck horror, your socks had better match. The tram can wait while you *fare la bella figura*, or cut a fine figure.

Italians have strong opinions about aesthetics and aren't afraid to share them. A common refrain is *Che brutta!* (How hideous!), which may strike visitors as tactless. But consider it from an Italian point of view – everyone is rooting for you to look good, and who are you to disappoint? The shop assistant who tells you with brutal honesty that yellow is not your colour is doing a public service, and will consider it a personal triumph to see you outfitted in orange instead.

Satirist Beppe Severignini's *La Bella Figura: A Field Guide to the Italian Mind* offers some practical insights for travellers, such as this tip on cappuccinos: 'After ten o'clock in the morning it is unethical, and possibly illegal, to order one'.

THE INESCAPABLE TELEFONINO

Most chimes heard in piazzas these days aren't church bells. Italians were the world's fastest mobile-phone adopters back in 2000 and, according to government estimates, within three years virtually every adult Italian had a *telefonino*, and many children besides. This may seem excessive, but remember that as an Italian you'd be living with your parents until you're 34, and you'd appreciate the privacy mobile phones provide. Since Italy's Vodafone–Wind cellular oligopoly charges exorbitant rates for calls, many Italians of all ages prefer to use their *telefonino* for text messages instead. By comparison, only about half of Italy uses the internet, and much of the country still lacks the cable infrastructure for high-speed connections. But this may soon change with a recent development that's already maxing out available bandwidth and imperilling Italian work ethics: online picture phone calls.

If it's a gift, though, you must allow 10 minutes for the sales clerk to *fare un bel pacchetto*, wrapping your purchase with string and an artfully placed sticker. This is the epitome of *la bella figura* – the sales clerk wants you to look good by giving a good gift. When you do, everyone basks in the glow of *la bella figura*: you as the gracious gift-giver and the sales clerk as savvy gift consultant, not to mention the flushed and duly honoured recipient.

As a national obsession, *la bella figura* gives Italy its undeniable edge in design, cuisine, art and architecture. Though the country could get by on its striking good looks, Italy is ever mindful of delightful details. They are everywhere you look, and many places you don't: the intricately carved cathedral spire only the bell-ringer could fully appreciate, the toy duck hidden inside your chocolate *uova di pasqua* (Easter egg), the absinthe-green silk lining inside a sober grey suit sleeve. Attention to such details earns you instant respect in Italy.

THE PEOPLE

Who are the people you'd encounter every day as an Italian? On average, about half your co-workers will be women – quite a change from 10 years ago, when women represented just a quarter of the workforce. But a growing proportion of the people you'll meet are already retired. One out of five Italians is over 65, which explains the septuagenarian street gangs you'll notice out prowling parks, arguing about politics in cafés, and dominating bocce tournaments.

You might also notice a striking absence of children. Italy's birth rate is among the lowest in the world, and below replacement level at about one child per woman. Dismayed by such incontrovertible evidence of contraception in an ostensibly Catholic country, the pope recently called on Italian women to return to traditional roles as wives and mothers. The state is also concerned that a shrinking Italian workforce will mean fewer taxes to fund services for growing numbers of pensioners, and instituted a flat-out bribe of €1000 for any Italian woman to give birth. But neither Church nor State has proved a match for the famously feisty resolve of Italian women, and the birth rate has slowed still further.

Multiculturalism

But wait, you say: during your day as an Italian, you chatted with a news vendor named Eduardo about his baby. Right you are. Like a growing percentage of Italy's population, Eduardo is an immigrant. (His Spanish name would be spelled Edouardo in Italian.) The birth rate among immigrants in Italy is higher than among native-born Italians, and with immigration from Central Europe, North Africa, Latin America and East Asia on the rise, immigrants are expected to account for 10% of Italy's population by 2025.

Immigration is a vital development for Italy, which until the 1970s was a country of emigration and counted remittances as a key part of its economic base. Today most Italians are staying home, yet fewer are entering blue-collar agricultural and industrial fields – so without immigrant workers to fill the gaps, Italy would be sorely lacking in tomato sauce and shoes. Entrepreneurship is also needed to fuel Italy's economic growth, and statistically immigrants are more likely than Italians to start small businesses.

While Italy is gradually adjusting to the necessity of immigration, accepting the idea of a multicultural Italy is a slower adjustment. Anti-immigrant rhetoric has become a mainstay of Italy's Lega Nord and other extremist groups, and Milan's burgeoning Chinatown on Via Paolo Sarpi was the target of violent attacks in 2007. Strict rules requiring work contracts for immigration to be legal have drawn criticism from human rights groups defending

Italy's 2007 public high school exam essay topic was: 'The end of colonialism and the beginning of neocolonialism as reasons for immigration into Europe'. What, couldn't they come up with anything harder?

the legitimacy of immigration for political asylum and family reconciliation. Work contracts can be revoked at any time, leaving even long-term residents and their families without legal recourse to remain in Italy.

These measures certainly seem counterintuitive for a country in need of new arrivals. The old saw about immigrants being the cause of all crime has no teeth in Italy, where of course the term 'Mafia' originated. Terrorism is also a home-grown threat in Italy, where for over two decades right-wing terrorists, anarchists, and the Brigade Rosse (Red Brigades) systematically murdered hundreds of fellow Italians with homemade bombs and terrorised the nation with random acts of brutality. But recent reports of North Africans being used as drug mules by Naples syndicates have cast aspersions on law-abiding immigrants, and outrage over copyright-infringing Italian designer knock-offs has focused on *marrochini* (a derogatory term applied to hawkers of cheap goods that literally means Moroccans). Predictably, round-ups of immigrants suspected of criminal or terrorist activity have produced no obvious social impact, other than alienating an increasingly vital segment of Italy's population.

Religion, Loosely Speaking

When it comes to religion in Italy, paradoxes are as common as crucifixes. *La Famiglia Cristiana* (The Christian Family) is Italy's most popular weekly magazine – but you'll notice that except for tourists, Italian churches are often empty, even on Sunday. Polls show that the Italian electorate favours civil unions, which allow gay, lesbian, and cohabitating couples to be legally recognised, as in Spain, but the Vatican has repeatedly applied political pressure to block Italy's legalisation of civil unions. The pope's latest book shot to the top of Italian bestseller lists, as did the 2007 anticlerical tract *Perché non possiamo essere cristiani (e meno che mai cattolici)* (Why We Can't Be Christian (And Even Less, Catholics)) by mathematician Piergiorgio Odifreddi, who examines apparent contradictions in Church doctrine and posits an inverse relationship to the development of civil society.

But if the Church hasn't always been entirely consistent, neither have anticlerical critiques. Many who fiercely debate the Vatican's right to interfere in matters such as divorce and condom use to prevent AIDS have welcomed the pope's interventions and personal appeals to elected leaders to end war in the Middle East. The Vatican's move to initiate dialogue with Muslim leaders also has been widely credited with easing social tensions for Italy's one million Muslims, and the Church's many charitable organisations lauded for providing essential support to those in need where the State leaves off.

Church leaders often claim such selective approval of religious tenets undermines the very idea of faith, but even some devout Italians remain wary of strict Church adherence for fear of reprising Italy's absolutist bouts of inquisition, intolerance, and censorship. So for now, Italy remains officially secular, while its citizens are variously Muslim, Jewish, atheist, Catholic, or mostly just conflicted.

ECONOMICS & POLITICS: FIGHTING WORDS

Your day as an Italian may not seem like *la dolce vita*, but it's pretty ideal in today's Italy. You had a job to go to (albeit a contract gig), took a decent *pausa* (midday break), and left work promptly at the end of the day. In industrial cities like Milan, *la pausa* is no longer the two- to three-hour rest it once was, and longer working hours help explain the previously unthinkable 15kg of *surgelati* (frozen foods) consumed per capita each year (still well below the UK's 45kg). In these days of double-digit unemployment

On average, Italians get six weeks of holidays a year – but spend the equivalent of two weeks annually on bureaucratic procedures required of working Italian citizens.

TELEVISION: A BRIEF REPRIEVE

On average Italians watch four hours of TV per day, and the flickering parade of recycled reality stars, vacant-eyed *valette* (spokesmodels) and celebrity interviews induces what Italian sociologists have identified as a soporific state. Only one out of every 10 Italians actually buys one of Italy's 90 daily newspapers, and instead 80% of the population relies on TV news as its prime information source. True, some Italians peruse free internet news sites such as Corriere della Sera online (www.corriere.it/english/), La Repubblica (www.repubblica.it/in-italian/), Il Manifesto (www.ilmanifesto.it/in-italian/) or L'Unità (www.unita.it/in-italian/). But about half of Italy's high-speed internet subscribers rely on their connections for (you guessed it) downloading their favourite TV shows. Politician Romano Prodi has recently pledged to reform Italian TV, but as long as most non-State programming remains in the hands of conservative media mogul Silvio Berlusconi, the revolution will probably not be televised. Free-speech advocates and even TV hosts have decried Italy's dependence on TV, with 1.5 million Italians responding to a recent televised plea to turn off their TVs – for an entire minute. Hey, it's a start.

and opportunities limited to contract or part-time work, times are as tough as microwaved beef.

The transition to the euro is widely faulted as a cause for Italy's slipping economy, and Italians tend to romanticise the good old lire days when wine was cheap and plentiful, everyone ate both *primi* and *secondi*, and the populace was fashionably clad and dashing handsome. Then at the stroke of midnight, on 1 January, 2002, wine turned to water, *bistecca alla fiorentina* to hamburger, and princes to guys in last season's distressed designer jeans.

Somewhere in this fable, there is some truth. In the conversion from lire to euros, prices were typically rounded up, while salaries were rounded down. Overnight, Italy's exports became less competitively priced in the global market, and the country has yet to recover its losses. The country's prospects languished and cronyism flourished under media mogul Silvio Berlusconi, whose cohorts continue to be charged with bribery and improper handling of state contracts, despite laws passed granting Berlusconi himself immunity from prosecution.

Yet Italy remains strangely stable in its instability, even under the tenuous coalition government of Romano Prodi. Economists scratch their heads in wonder that a country that has witnessed the rise and fall of more than 50 governments since WWII has managed to keep reinventing itself as a global contender. Proportional representation and the occasional bold prosecution of official corruption have ensured some turnover of ideas and approaches at the highest level. But ordinary Italians help keep the powers that be in check with highly coordinated strikes, mass street protests, outspoken opposition newspapers, and scathing political commentary that permeates popular culture. Political discussion inevitably involves much rolling of eyes and throwing up of hands, but these should not be taken as signs of resignation – in Italy, it's more of a fighting stance.

ARTS

Good thing you were buried in your newspaper on your commute, because those tram windows reveal a parade of Italian temptations to play hooky. Arriving late to work actually seems like an achievement when you're surrounded by so much else to explore: music venues hitting every sonic frequency from opera to punk rock; cinemas and theatres where you'll laugh, cry, and hurtle headfirst through the gamut of human emotion; bookshops brimming with this small country's preposterously outsized literary

Italy's culture of corruption and *calcio* (football) is captured in *The Dark Heart of Italy*, where English expat author Tobias Jones wryly observes, 'Footballers or referees are forgiven nothing; politicians are forgiven everything.'

contributions over the last couple of millennia; and museums packed with paintings and sculpture that will leave you gaping and as bug-eyed as an art-struck goldfish.

Along your commute you may also notice the obligatory Roman ruins and cutting-edge office buildings that appear ready for takeoff to Mars – for more on these, check out the special section on architecture (p141). But if you're ready to ditch work and explore your many other enticing options in Italy, read on.

Literature

The toughest personal challenge of your day as an Italian may be the last: which book to choose from your nightstand. Italy's readers are thoroughly spoiled readers for choice, with gripping *gialli* (mysteries), ancient classics, magic-realist fables, epic romps through history, and for those romantic occasions, some highly suggestive poetry. To make your choice a little easier, following are some recommendations in each category.

MYSTERY & SUSPENSE

This is the most popular genre in Italy today, with top spots on Italy's best-seller list claimed by Andrea Camilleri's renegade private eye Montalbano in such capers as *Il re di Girgenti* (The King of Girgenti). Umberto Eco brought intellectual weight to the genre with *Il nome della rosa* (The Name of the Rose) and *Il pendolo di Foucault* (Foucault's Pendulum) – not to mention sheer bulk, at 600 and 640 pages respectively. Thoroughly researched with arcane detail and plot twists worthy of a contortionist, Eco's masterworks are widely admired, frequently referenced in scholarly treatises, and seldom read cover to cover.

But perhaps the most chilling scene of the crime is sunny Sicily in Leonardo Sciascia's *Il giorno della civetta* (The Day of the Owl). A visiting police inspector from Parma witnesses a killing in a piazza, only to be told in no uncertain terms that the murder didn't happen, the Sicilian Mafia doesn't exist, and he'd be better off in Parma. The culture of silence and intimidation Sciascia captures is brutally accurate, and makes the Corleonis and the Sopranos seem like rank amateurs.

CLASSICS

Italian bedtime stories can be all-night affairs, and then some. Roman epic poet Virgil (a.k.a. Vergilius) decided Homer's *Illiad* and *Odyssey* deserved a sequel, and spent 11 years and 12 books tracking the outbound adventures and inner turmoil of Aeneas, from the fall of Troy to the founding of Rome – and died in 19 BC with just 60 lines to go in his *Aeneid*. But he left us with some memorable lines: 'Fortune favours the bold', 'Love conquers all' and 'Time flies'.

Fellow Roman Ovid (Ovidius) may have been a failed lawyer and notorious Lothario who married his only daughter (eew), but there's no question he told a ripping good tale. His *Metamorphose* chronicled civilisation from murky mythological beginnings to Julius Caesar's glorious reign, and his how-to seduction manual *Ars amatoria* (The Art of Love) inspired countless Casanovas. It also caused him no end of trouble: he was exiled from Rome for seducing the daughter of Emperor Augustus.

Any self-respecting Italian bookshelf also features one or more Roman rhetoricians. To *fare la bella figura* among academics, trot out a phrase or two from Cicero or Horace (Horatio), such as 'Where there is life there is hope' or 'Whatever advice you give, be brief' – in the original Latin, of course.

In Tuscany, EM Forster devotees demand rooms with views, and Francis Mayes readers expect hidden frescoes and rebound romances with villa rentals. When Tuscany's fresh out of hotels and hotties, try Umbria – and hey, write your own bestseller.

Women authors aren't a novelty on the Italian literary scene – find essays, operas, philosophy, novels, poetry, theology and travel writing by Italian women dating from the 13th to the 20th century at www.lib.uchicago.edu/efts/IWW/.

COMICS: NOT JUST FOR BAMBINI ANYMORE

You might be surprised to notice spiffy suited businessmen on trains thumping through some familiar *fumetti* (comics) – but read over their shoulders, and you'll discover that this Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse are nothing like their fluffy Disneyworld doppelgangers. In 1931 local writers and comic artists began endowing Walt's mascots with Italian attitude, scathing topical humour, and rollicking back-stories in *Topolino* (Mickey Mouse), the continuing Continental adventures of Donald, Mickey et al. But Italian comics have truly come into their own and of age with graphic novels such as Piero Macola's *Solo andata*, one WWII soldier's journey in the harrowing tradition of Art Spiegelman's Pulitzer Prize-winning graphic novel *Maus*. See just how bold and biting satirical indie Italian *fumetti* can be at www.sciacaloelettronico.it/webcomix/webcom.htm (in Italian).

HISTORICAL EPICS

Much of Italian history already reads like a novel, and Italy's authors have made good use of this material. Set during the dark days of the Black Death in Florence, Boccaccio's racy, violent *The Decameron* has a visceral gallows humour that foreshadows Chaucer, Shakespeare and William S. Burroughs. Italy's 19th-century struggle for unification parallels the story of star-crossed lovers in Alessandro Manzoni's *I promessi sposi* (The Betrothed), and causes an identity crisis among Sicilian nobility in Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's *Il gattopardo* (The Leopard) – don't miss the celebrated film version by Luchino Visconti. Wartime survival strategies are memorably chronicled in Elsa Morante's *La storia* (History), and in Primo Levi's harrowing autobiographical account of Auschwitz in *Se questo è un uomo* (If This Is a Man).

SOCIAL REALISM

Italy has always been its own sharpest critic, and several 20th-century Italian authors captured their own troubling circumstances with unflinching accuracy. Grazia Deledda's *Cosima* is her fictionalised memoir of coming of age and into her own as a writer in rural Sardinia, despite family circumstances clouded by death, alcoholism and deceit. Deledda became one of the first women to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, and set the tone for such bitersweet recollections of rural life as Carlo Levi's *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* (Christ Stopped at Eboli). This book tells Levi's own story as a dissident doctor exiled under the Fascists to a malaria-afflicted southern Italian town (see p715) beyond the reach of medicine, missionaries, politicians, left only with army recruiters, tax collectors, and forlorn hope. Another clear-eyed allegory for life under Fascism is Alberto Moravia's *La romana* (The Woman of Rome), the story of an artist's model at the centre of intrigue among a failed revolutionary, a secret policeman, and a criminal. Like the city around her, this Roman sees her own fall clearly, but is powerless to stop it.

FABLES

Italian fables aren't much like Aesop's: they don't end in a simple moral, but instead point out life's absurd contradictions. Over the centuries, Niccolò Machiavelli's *Il principe* (The Prince) has been referenced as a handy manual for budding autocrats, and as a cautionary tale against unchecked 'Machiavellian' authority. Likewise, 1934 Nobel Prize winner Luigi Pirandello won Mussolini's support to found a national theatre, only to be ostracised by the party for staging an ambiguously critical fable about a changeling – that, and calling Il Duce 'a top hat that could not stand upright by itself.' The most universally beloved of Italian fabulists is Italo Calvino, whose titular character in *Il barone rampante* (The Baron in the Trees) takes to the treetops in a

Sorry, Woody Allen: the world's most likable neurotic is the antihero of Italo Svevo's *Zeno's Conscience*, whose love life stumps his therapist and who smokes to have the satisfaction of quitting. No wonder this is James Joyce's favourite comic novel.

seemingly capricious act of rebellion that makes others around him rethink their own earthbound conventions.

The original newspaper serial of Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio* ended with the puppet's gruesome death by hanging – but in the book, Pinocchio is granted a new life as a real boy, and tiny tots are spared a few nightmares.

POETRY

Some literature scholars claim Shakespeare stole his best lines and plot points from earlier 13th- and 14th-century Italian playwrights and poets. Debatable though this may be, the Bard certainly has stiff competition from 13th-century Dante Alighieri as the world's finest romancer. Dante broke with tradition in *Divina commedia* (The Divine Comedy) by using the familiar Italian, not the formal Latin, to describe travelling through the circles of hell in search of his beloved Beatrice. Petrarch (a.k.a. Francesco Petrarca) added serious wow to Italian woo with his eponymous sonnets, applying a strict structure of rhythm and rhyme to his professions of love to the idealised Laura. He might have tried chocolates instead: Laura never returned the sentiment.

If sonnets seem a bit soppy to you, read 1975 Nobel laureate Eugenio Montale, who wrings wry, ironic poetry out of everyday life. Through the shattered windows of picturesque villas he spies 'mouldy sofas and Ping-Pong tables', and in 'Murder is Not My Strong Point' he comments on mosquito blood lust. On a political note, Ungaretti's poems about WWI hit home with just a few searing syllables, like post-apocalyptic haiku. Poems by radical neorealist filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini feature the same antiheroes as his films – hustlers and prostitutes in postwar Italy, icons of a nation scraping by on its wits and looks. For the bawdiest poetry of all, head to an Italian *osteria*, where by night's end cheap wine may inspire raunchy rhymes sung in dialect.

Cinema & Television

Watching TV might seem an anticlimatic way to end your day as an Italian, but it's fairly typical. As heretical as it sounds to foreigners accustomed to worshipping Italian cuisine in the reverent hush of expensive restaurants, many Italians gulp down dinner in front of blaring televisions. Channel-surfers click away in hopes of a rerun of *La meglio gioventù* (The Best of Youth), the acclaimed 2003 miniseries chronicling Italy from the 1960s onward, or perhaps a prime-time feature film. The appearance of any of the following titles on a TV screen or theatre marquee is cause for celebration and *il popcorn*.

NITTY GRITTY NEOREALISM

- **Highlights** Unflinching tales of postwar woe shot in gorgeous yet gritty black and white make Citizen Kane seem like a rough cut, and Francois Truffaut like a latecomer.
- **Downsides** Active tear ducts and sudden tissue shortages.

Key Titles

- *Roma, città aperta* (Rome, Open City), director Roberto Rossellini, 1945. A story of love, betrayal, survival and resistance in Nazi-occupied Rome, shot and released while the memory of occupation was still raw.
- *Ladri di biciclette* (The Bicycle Thief), director Vittorio de Sica, 1948. A special Oscar was awarded to this film about one father's doomed attempts to provide for his son without resorting to crime in war-ravaged Rome.
- *Mamma Roma*, director Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1962. Anna Magnani becomes an allegory for postwar Italy as an aging prostitute who tries to make an honest living for herself and her delinquent son.

LARGER THAN LIFE: THE COLOSSALS

- **Highlights** Entire cities were rebuilt in Rome's Cinecittà movie studio, populated by casts of thousands in period costume captured in sweeping crane shots.
- **Downsides** The predominance of gladiator swords, Charlton Heston, Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor – all of them overly broad.

In the 1950s and '60s Italy was France's rival in cinema, but today France makes twice as many films as Italy annually.

Key Titles

- *Cleopatra*, director Joseph L Mankiewicz, 1963. Tops Heston's Ben-Hur for liberally applied bronzer, blinding star power of the Brangelina/Bennifer prototype known as Taylor-Burton, and cost overruns – thanks partly to enterprising Cinecittà employees who nicked props and equipment.
- *The Gangs of New York*, director Martin Scorsese, 2002. For his overblown gang warfare epic, Scorsese rebuilt the mean streets of 19th-century New York at Cinecittà, and brought Daniel Day-Lewis out of quasi-retirement as a cobbler in Florence for a bravura performance as an Irish street thug.
- *The Last Emperor*, director Bernardo Bertolucci, 1987. Cinecittà doubles for China and Bertolucci racks up Oscars with an epic strong on style and crane shots, yet oddly nostalgic for China's notoriously repressive Qing dynasty.

SHOCK & HORROR

- **Highlights** You knew sunny Italy had to have a dark side...
- **Downsides** Style and gore, together at last – wait, who said that was a good idea?

Key Titles

- *Blow-Up*, director Michelangelo Antonioni, 1966. Style trumps substance in this story of a swinging '60s fashion photographer who spies dark deeds unfolding in a photo of an elusive young Vanessa Redgrave.
- *Suspiria*, director Dario Argento, 1977. Gruesome deeds in a ballet school makes tatus seem incredibly sinister and Stephen King seem squeamish.
- *Un Borghese Piccolo Piccolo* (An Average Little Man), director Mario Monicelli, 1977. An ordinary man goes to extraordinary lengths for revenge, starring Alberto Sordi in a standout example of a comedian nailing a serious role.
- *La bestia nel cuore* (Don't Tell), director Cristina Comencini, 2005. A woman uncovering repressed memories of sexual abuse seeks answers, leaving a trail of still more secrets behind her.

FELLINI: A CATEGORY OF HIS OWN

- **Highlights** Intense, surreal visions of men adrift in the shallows of their own lives and relationships.
- **Downsides** The characters are psychotherapy archetypes, the lines cryptic, and the plotlines prone to pirouettes – but if it's easy, it's not Fellini.

Key Titles

- *La strada* (The Road), director Federico Fellini, 1954. A naive girl is sold to a callous circus sideshow performer played by Anthony Quinn, and when they hit the road together, the road hits them back even harder.

- *La dolce vita* (The Good Life), director Federico Fellini, 1960. The sweet life has a bitter aftertaste in this tale of hedonism, celebrity, and suicide featuring Anna Ekberg frolicking in the Trevi Fountain, Marcello Mastroianni as a hack reporter unprepared to witness human misery, and Jesus being whisked away by helicopter.
- *8½*, director Federico Fellini, 1963. A director under pressure to make a box-office hit retreats inward, only to rediscover his own demons and failed relationships.

SPAGHETTI WESTERNS

- **Highlights** Clint Eastwood's so taut and flinty you could light a match on him, with southern Italy co-starring as the Wild West.
- **Downsides** Musical scores that stay in your head for days, thanks to composer Ennio Morricone and his professional whistlers.

Key Titles

- *Per un pugno di dollari* (A Fistful of Dollars), director Sergio Leone, 1964. A gunslinger played by a squinting Clint Eastwood wanders into town in the midst of a standoff, plays the factions against one another for profit, and earns savvy Leone far more than a fistful of dollars.
- *Il buono, il brutto, il cattivo* (The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly), director Sergio Leone, 1966. Leone and Eastwood team up for a third payload of gunfights, booze, betrayal and pure box-office gold.
- *C'era una volta il West* (Once Upon a Time in the West), director Sergio Leone, 1968. A widow seeking revenge for her husband's murder gets more than she bargained for in spectacular shootouts featuring Henry Fonda's lethal stare and high-tension storytelling by budding screenwriters Bernardo Bertolucci and Dario Argento.

La vita è bella (Life Is Beautiful) remains the most successful subtitled foreign-language film to date, winning two Academy Awards and raking in about \$280 million.

SO FUNNY, I CRIED: TRAGICOMEDIES

- **Highlights** Italy's finest comedians are like acupuncturists, hitting the exact spot where pathos intersects the funny bone.
- **Downsides** Without an appreciation for Italian slapstick and dialect, much hilarity is lost in translation.

Key Titles

- *Totò, Peppino, e...la malafemmina* (Toto, Peppino, and the Hussy) director Camillo Mastrocinque, 1956. Charlie Chaplin and Jim Carrey have a serious rival in Naples' facial contortionist Totò, whose grins turn to grimaces in nanoseconds as he mistakenly attempts to rescue his nephew from a 'temptress' in the foreign country of Milan.
- *Amici miei* (My Friends), director Mario Monicelli, 1975. A group of aging pranksters turn on one another in this comic satire that reflects Italy's own postwar midlife crisis.
- *La vita è bella* (Life Is Beautiful), director Roberto Benigni, 1997. A father tries to protect his son from the brutal realities of a Jewish concentration camp by pretending it's all a game – an Oscar award-winning turn for actor/director Benigni, who accepted with an offer to make love to his audience in the firmament (um, thanks anyway).

ROMANCE, ITALIAN STYLE

- **Highlights** Date movies don't get much better than this unless Jane Austen gets involved.
- **Downsides** Side effects may include severe pangs of nostalgia and a vague artificial sweetener aftertaste.

Key Titles

- *Nuovo cinema Paradiso* (Cinema Paradiso), director Giuseppe Tornatore, 1988. A bittersweet, Oscar-winning film about a director who returns to his hometown in Sicily, and rediscovers his first true loves: the girl next door and the movies.
- *Il postino* (The Postman), director Michael Radford, 1994. Exiled poet Pablo Neruda brings poetry and passion to a drowsy Italian isle and a misfit postman, played with heartbreaking subtlety by the late Massimo Troisi.
- *Pane e tulipani* (Bread and Tulips), director Silvio Sordani, 2000. A housewife tourist abandoned by her bus tour at a pitstop heads for Venice instead, and befriends an anarchist florist, an eccentric masseuse, and a suicidal Icelandic waiter – until her husband sends a plumber obsessed with detective novels to find her.

Music

LEGGERA (POP)

Most of the music you'll hear booming out of Italian taxis and cafés to inspire sidewalk sing-alongs is Italian *musica leggera* (light music). This term covers a broad range of homegrown rock, jazz, folk, and hip-hop talents, as well as dangerous perpetrators of inane yet perniciously catchy dance tunes and those infernal pop ballads. The San Remo Music Festival (televised on RAI 1) annually honours Italy's best songs and mercifully weeds out the worst early on, unlike some other competitions we might mention (ahem, Simon Cowell). While Rome is a Bermuda Triangle for rockers with drug habits – Sid Vicious, Kurt Cobain and sundry Smashing Pumpkins overdosed there – Milan is out to prove punk's not dead with the annual indie-fest Rock in Idro. On the south side, Neapolitan hip-hop acts like 99 Posse and Bisca have a knack for mixing Italian sounds over heavy beats. In the singer-songwriter category, scratchy-voiced troubadour Vinicio Capossela sounds like the long-lost Italian cousin of Tom Waits, and the late Fabrizio de André was Italy's answer to Bob Dylan, with thoughtful lyrics in a musing monotone.

To follow Italian rap lyrics in English, check out this Neapolitan hip-hop blog: www.italianrap.com/masterfr.html.

OPERA

The art form originated here, and *fischi* (mocking whistles) still possess a mysterious power to blast divas right offstage. In December 2006, a substitute in street clothes had to step in for star tenor Roberto Alagna when his off-night aria met with vocal disapproval at Milan's legendary La Scala. Best not to get them started about musicals and 'rock opera', eh?

Divas & Italian Tenors

The word 'diva' was invented for legendary sopranos like Parma's Renata Tebaldi and Italy's adopted Greek icon Maria Callas, whose rivalry peaked when *Time* magazine quoted Callas saying that comparing her voice to

MUSIC TO YOUR EARS

Italy's calendar bursts with cultural events. Among the important opera seasons are those at Verona's Arena, Venice's Teatro La Fenice and La Scala in Milan. Major music festivals include **Umbria Jazz** (p554) in Perugia (July) and the **Umbria Jazz Winter** (p581) in Orvieto (late December/early January). Look out also for **Siena Jazz** (www.sienajazz.it), **Vicenza Jazz** (www.comune.vicenza.it) and Florence's Maggio Musicale Fiorentino (p491). International orchestras play annually in Ravello, which has a rich concert programme throughout the year (www.ravelloarts.org).

Tebaldi's was like comparing 'champagne and Coca-Cola'. Both were fixtures at La Scala, along with the wildly popular Italian tenor to which others are still compared, Enrico Caruso. Tenor Luciano Pavarotti (1935–2007) also remains beloved for attracting broader public attention to opera, while bestselling blind tenor Andrea Bocelli became a controversial crossover sensation with what critics claim are overproduced arias sung with a strained upper register. But with the La Scala fall from grace of Roberto Alagna, Salvatore Licitra is poised to become opera's next big voice, having stepped in for Pavarotti on his final show at New York's Metropolitan Opera in 2002. Friuli-born Fiorenze Cedolins is a soprano on a roll, performing a requiem for the late Pope John Paul II, recording Tosca arias with Andrea Bocelli, and scoring encores in Puccini's *La Bohème* at the Arena di Verona Festival (below).

For a self-guided crash course in Italian music, surf the links provided on the Biblioteca Nazionale Music Research Office's Italian Music Homepage at <http://ospiti.cilea.it/music/entrance.htm>.

Optimal Opera Venues

- **Milan's legendary Teatro alla Scala** (p267) Standards for modern opera were set by La Scala's great iron-willed conductor Arturo Toscanini, and are ruthlessly enforced by La Scala's feared *loggione*, opera's toughest and most vocal critics in the cheap seats upstairs.
- **Venice's La Fenice (The Phoenix)** (p363) The unbelievable comeback story of this theatre risen twice from the ashes is the inspiration for John Berendt's nonfiction bestseller *The City of Fallen Angels*.
- **Arena di Verona Festival** (p382) Rising talents ring out here, thanks to forward-thinking organisers and the phenomenal acoustics of this Roman amphitheatre.
- **Roman Baths of Caracalla** (p129) This dramatically decrepit summer venue for the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma was the site of the first concert by the Three Tenors (Luciano Pavarotti, Plácido Domingo and José Carreras), whose recording then sold an unprecedented 15 million copies.
- **Teatro San Carlo in Naples** (p627) Europe's oldest opera house, a Unesco World Heritage Site, and the former home of Italy's most famous *castrati* – male sopranos with upper ranges occasionally enhanced by, erm, surgical procedures.

CLASSICAL

Italy's classical contributions can be heard nightly at music venues around the globe, including ever-trendy Gregorian chants and Vivaldi's ubiquitous *Four Seasons*, played on prized Stradivarius violins from Cremona. But within Italy, there's also a modest revival of 'early music' from the baroque and Renaissance periods and the Middle Ages. Ensembles in Venice, Naples, Milan and Rome are playing historically accurate arrangements on period instruments like recorders and harpsichords, introducing audiences to surprisingly funky Renaissance dance tunes and groovy late-medieval polyphonic vocals.

Openings at La Scala regularly sell out faster than rock concerts – and when a Verdi opera's on the bill, you'd think the Beatles were getting back together. Book your tickets online pronto at www.teatroallascala.org.

Theatre & Dance

Entertainment has been not a privilege but a right in Italy ever since Rome promised citizens 'bread and circus' (food and entertainment) and dance and pantomime troupes made the rounds of public piazzas across Italy. Travelling Commedia dell'Arte troupes spread the antics of Pulcinella (aka Punch and Judy fame) and friends across Italy during the Renaissance, and throughout Europe in the 17th century. But after WWII left Italy's finest venues in ruins and short of funds for productions, the future of Italian performing arts was uncertain.

Instead of staging a grand comeback, Milan decided to start small in 1947 with the Piccolo Teatro (Little Theatre), featuring low ticket prices and

risk-taking productions. The Piccolo staged Dario Fo's 1971 triumph *Morte accidentale di un anarchico* (Accidental Death of an Anarchist) and in 2006 overcame controversy to stage Fo's latest work, *L'anomalia bicefala* (The Two-headed Anomaly), a satire about Berlusconi and his wife. The Piccolo proved too popular for its size, leading to other less *piccolo* Piccolo Teatros. Among the independent venues springing up in the 1970s was Rome's landmark all-women Teatro della Maddalena, which staged daring works like Dacia Maraini's *Dialogo di una prostituta con un suo cliente* (Dialogue Between a Prostitute and Her Client).

Today Bologna, Naples, Milan and Rome boast the most vibrant theatre and dance scenes, though the Spoleto Festival and other summertime extravaganzas bring performing arts to smaller venues nationwide. Ballet in Italy dates from the Renaissance, but other dances you may see at arts festivals include folkloric forms like the *tarantella* and more contemporary break dancing and B-boying.

Food & Drink

Let's be honest: you came for the food, right? Wise choice. Just don't go expecting meals in Italy to remind you of the swankiest five-star Italian restaurant back home. On the contrary: once you've had a hearty *farro* (spelt) soup warm you to the core in some tiny Lucca *osteria* (rustic restaurant), or picnicked on fresh salami *panini* (sandwiches) in front of Milan's Duomo, you'll be struck with culinary amnesia. Has anything tasted this good, ever? Probably not. According to the Accademia della Cucina Italiana (Italian Academy of Cuisine), an average of six out of 10 dishes served at Italian restaurants outside Italy aren't prepared correctly. According to the organisation's London representative, Benito Fiore, out of 320 Italian restaurants in the UK, only 20 were of a high standard, and 200 received failing marks.

Blame it on the Italians – they make it look easy, but it's not. Each ingredient must be chosen for its scent, texture, ripeness and ability to play well with others. This means getting to the right market early and often, and remaining open to seasonal inspiration. To balance the right ingredients in exactly the right proportions, Italian cooks apply an intuitive Pythagorean Theorem of flavours you won't find spelled out in any recipe – but you'll surely know the winning formula when you taste it.

Less is more: most of the recipes in Ada Boni's classic *The Talisman Italian Cookbook* have fewer than 10 ingredients, yet the robust flavours of her osso bucco, polenta, and wild duck with lentils are anything but simple.

TUTTI A TAVOLA

'Everyone to the table!' Traffic lights are merely suggestions, queues fine ideas in theory, and governments destined to be overturned, but this is one command every Italian heeds without question. To disobey would be unthinkable – what, you're going to eat your pasta cold? And insult the cook? Even anarchists wouldn't dream of it.

The Italian culture of food directly contradicts what we think we know of Italy. A nation prone to perpetual motion on Vespas, Ferraris and Bianchis pauses for lunch – hence the term *la pausa* to describe the midday break. Power lunchers throw ties over their shoulders and prop sunglasses on foreheads to better take it all in, and supermodels endanger designer dresses with pasta *puttanesca* (with spicy tomato sauce). Big talk and bigger gestures have been Italian trademarks ever since Caesars and popes first started speechifying, but an eerie hush descends when food is placed on an Italian table. The Italian suffix *-issimo*, so often used to add emphasis to adjectives (*bellissimo*, *bravissimo*) is markedly absent at mealtime. High praise is a simple, unexaggerated *buono* (good) or *giusto* (correct), or appreciative silence punctuated with the sound of gently slurped noodles. The TV may be on (see the boxed text, p61), but when the pizza is good, TV will be ignored. Afterwards, feel free to give your *complimenti* to the chef – and in the right circumstances, a hearty handshake and cheek kisses may be in order.

Eat well and prosper: Slow Food founder Carlo Petrini and legendary chef Alice Waters point the way forward in *Slow Food Nation: Why Our Food Should Be Good, Clean, and Fair* (2007).

You never really know Italians until you've broken a crusty loaf of *pagnotta* (bread) with them – and once you've arrived in Italy, you'll have several opportunities daily to do just that. Following are listings of what you can look forward to at each meal, with some latitude for regional variations (p437). Good luck with your arduous sociological research, and here's hoping you have cause to kiss the cook.

Collazione (Breakfast)

Breakfast in Italy is a perfectly good excuse to get out of bed, if not the most lavish meal of your day. Think Continental, not eggs, pancakes, ham, sausage, toast and orange juice. Those menu offerings are only likely to appear at

weekend *brrrunch* (pronounced with the rolled Italian *r*), an American import now appearing at trendy urban eateries in Italy. Expect to pay upwards of €20 to graze a buffet of hot dishes, cold cuts, pastries and fresh fruit, usually including your choice of coffee, juice or cocktail.

CAFFÈ

The mainstay of Italian breakfast is scalding hot espresso, cappuccino (espresso with a goodly dollop of foamed milk) or *caffè latte* – the hot, milky espresso beverage Starbucks mistakenly calls a *latte*, which will get you a glass of milk in Italy. Don't believe the hype about espresso: one diminutive cup packs less of a caffeine wallop than a large cup of French-pressed or American-brewed coffee, and leaves you less jittery. An alternative beverage is *orzo*, a slightly nutty, noncaffeinated roasted-barley beverage that looks like cocoa.

PASTRIES

The ideal accompaniment to your coffee is pastry, usually without adornments such as butter and jam; some especially promising options are below. Diabetics are best off sticking to bread, since most Italian pastry is faintly sweet.

- *cornetto* – the Italian version of the French croissant is usually smaller, lighter, less buttery and slightly sweet, with an orange-rind glaze brushed on top.
- *crostata* – the Italian breakfast tart with a dense, buttery crust and filled with your choice of fruit jam, such as *amarena* (sour cherry), *albicocca* (apricot) or *frutti di bosco* (wild berry). You may have to buy an entire tart instead of a single slice, but you won't be sorry.
- doughnuts – Homer Simpson would approve of the *ciambella*, the classic fried-dough treat rolled in granulated sugar, sometimes filled with jam or custard. For a gourmet twist, try *fritole*, fried dough studded with golden raisins and sprinkled with confectioners' sugar. At kiosks and street fairs, line up for *zeppole* (also called *beignet San Giuseppe*), chewy doughnuts enriched with ricotta or *zucca* (pumpkin), rolled in confectioners' sugar while hot, and handed over in a paper cone. The singular form is *zeppola*, but you'll never manage to eat just one.
- *maritozzi* – sweet buns, often with raisins, citron and nuts, which may be split open and loaded with *panna* (whipped cream).
- Viennoiserie – Italy's colonisation by the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the 19th century had its upside: a vast selection of sweet, dense baked goods. Standouts include cream-filled brioches and *strudel di mele*, an Italian adaptation of the traditional Viennese *apfelstrudel* without the rum and nuts.

Pranzo (Lunch)

Many shops and businesses still close for *la pausa*, a two- to three-hour mid-day break to return home, enjoy lunch, rest up and come back to work wired on espresso and ready for action. But in major cities, commuters don't have

Some call it a mission from God: 50 years ago, Italy's *Domus* magazine dispatched journalists nationwide to collect Italy's best regional recipes. The result is Italy's food bible, *The Silver Spoon*, now available in English from Phaidon (2005).

PICKY EATERS

Kids, vegans, allergies, squeamishness, pregnancy cravings and aversions can all be accommodated in Italy with some planning. The Italian vocabulary you'll need to explain your dietary demands are in *Eat Your Words* (p76); for practical advice on where to eat given your needs, consult p859. You may have heard that Italy is not the ideal place for a low-carb diet, but when in Rome, do what those *svelte* Romans do: binge on tasty seasonal vegetables, enjoy smaller portions of other dishes, treat yourself at least once a day, and walk it all off.

INTERVIEW WITH ANTONIO CARLUCCIO *Abigail Hole***In Italy, it's said that everyone's favourite cook is their Mamma. Is it the same for a famous gastronome?**

My Mamma inspired me as a teacher of life – I learned much of my cooking skills and passion from her. She was definitely the most important woman in my life.

Why do you think that food is so important in Italy?

They say that food is the second-most important thing in the world – it's up to you to discover the first... Food represents a daily joy for Italians. Much time, money, thought and passion is dedicated to the enjoyment of food. A mother or father who prepares food for the family is giving love and everyone is thankful and happy.

Do you get more pleasure out of cooking or eating?

Shopping is really important before even starting to cook or eat. I love spending time in the markets and choosing the best produce on offer that day, then I plan what to cook. For me cooking is a lot of fun, and eating – especially if in good company – is the ultimate in enjoyment.

In cooking, do you consider passion and flair to be more important than discipline and methodology?

Italian food does not need methodology or a great deal of discipline, but lots of passion and creativity. This is possible because every family's cooking and eating habits have been passed down through the generations from mothers, grandmothers and the heritage of their local customs.

How do you regard the traditional approach to cuisine that prevails in Italy?

Italian food is very regional, with some dishes like spaghetti and pizza available throughout but using different ingredients. Every region has wonderful dishes that are jealously guarded and defended passionately if someone attempts to criticise or deride them. I was raised appreciating dishes from many regions because my mother was an adventurous cook. There must be more than 10 thousand dishes to choose from throughout Italy.

How do you think the shape of pasta influences the taste of the dish? What is your favourite type of pasta?

There are large companies who employ people just to taste new shapes of pasta. At least 600 different shapes exist including flat, ribbed, tubular, hollow, shortcut, twisted with small sizes for soup and many, many more. They are ideally combined with particular sauces. I love pasta in all shapes and sizes.

What are your top restaurant recommendations in Italy?

There is a breed of new restaurants that I tend to avoid as they respond more to the Michelin Guide requirements than to traditional Italian food. There are also award-winning restaurants that I feel use a certain combination of ingredients more to shock their clientele and justify their high prices than please the palate. I understand a certain degree of discovery is useful but I tend to favour the traditional approach to Italian cooking. I tend to choose family-run restaurants that the locals frequent.

Antonio Carluccio is a restaurateur, chef and food writer.

time to make the 10-stop metro trip home for lunch, and use their break to run errands and grab lunch on the go.

At some ruthlessly efficiency-minded workplaces, *la pausa* has been scaled back to a scandalous hour and a half – barely enough time to get through the lines at the bank to pay bills and scoff some *pizza al taglio* (pizza by the slice). A *rosticceria* (roisserie) or *tavola calda* ('hot table') also serves hot items on the go, such as roast chicken and *suppli* (fried risotto balls). Quick bites found at bakeries and bars include *panini* (crusty sandwiches featuring Italian cold cuts) and *tramezzini* (triangular, stacked sandwiches made with squishy white bread).

But many government jobs still hold *pranzo* sacred, and allow enough time for a sit-down meal with wine and coffee. Anyone you see in a restaurant at 2.30pm probably belongs to this happy category – otherwise, you're looking

at a slacker, an heir/heirress, a tourist, a rock star, a retiree, a Lonely Planet researcher, or someone gainfully unemployed (best not to ask). Below is what's on the menu.

ANTIPASTI (APPETIZER)

Bread is deposited on the table as part of your €1 to €3 *pane e coperto* (bread and 'cover', or table service), along with oil and vinegar for dipping. You might also score some olives or *sott'aceti* (vegetables such as artichokes or red peppers, in olive oil and vinegar), *grissini* (breadsticks), or even a basket of salami or other cured meats. But tantalising offerings on the antipasti menu may include the house bruschetta (grilled bread with a variety of toppings, from chopped tomato and garlic to black truffle spread) and seasonal treats such as *insalata caprese* (fresh mozzarella with ripe tomatoes and basil leaves) or *prosciutto e melone* (cured ham and cantaloupe).

According to recent figures, Italians spend €50 billion per year on eating out – no wonder complaining about the bill has become a national pastime.

PRIMO (FIRST COURSE)

The highlights of this course are pasta, risotto, gnocchi and polenta. You may be surprised how generous the portions are – a *mezzo piatto* (half-portion) might do the trick for kids.

Primi menus usually include ostensibly vegetarian or vegan options, such as pasta *con pesto* (basil with Parmigiano cheese and pine nuts) or *alla norma* (with eggplant and tomato), *risotto ai porcini* (risotto with pungent, earthy porcini mushrooms) or the extravagant *risotto al Barolo* (risotto with high-end Barolo wine). But even if a dish sounds vegetarian in theory, before you order you may want to ask about the stock used in that risotto or polenta, or the ingredients in that suspiciously rich tomato sauce – there may be beef, ham or ground anchovies involved.

Meat eaters will rejoice in such legendary dishes as *pasta all'amatriciana* (pasta with a spicy sauce of tomato, *pecorino* cheese and *guanciale*, or pigs' cheeks), *ossobuco con risotto alla milanese* (veal shank and marrow melting into saffron risotto), *pappardelle alle cinghiale* (ribbon pasta with wild boar sauce) and *polenta col ragù* (polenta with meat sauce). Near the coasts, look for seafood variations like *risotto al nero* (risotto cooked with the black ink of octopus or squid), *spaghetti con le vongole* (spaghetti with clam sauce), or *pasta ai frutti di mare* (pasta with seafood).

The Julia Child of Italian cuisine is Marcella Hazan, who inspired legions of traditionalist home chefs worldwide with *The Classic Italian Cook Book* (1973), later expanded in her encyclopedic *The Essentials of Classic Italian Cooking* (1992).

SECONDO (SECOND COURSE)

Light lunchers usually call it a day after the *primo*, but foodies pace themselves for meat, fish or *contorni* (side dishes, such as cooked vegetables) in the second course. These options may range from the outrageous *bistecca alla fiorentina*, a three-inch-thick steak served on the bone in a puddle of juice, to the more modest yet impressive *carciofi alla romana* (Roman artichokes stuffed with mint and garlic). A less inspiring option is *insalata mista* (mixed green salad), typically unadorned greens – croutons, crumbled cheeses, nuts, herbs, dried fruit and other froufrou ingredients have no business in a classic Italian salad.

Pellegrino Artusi's 100-year-old *Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well* covers tricks and quips: 'Let's leave to the English the taste for eating boiled vegetables without any seasoning... we southern types need our food to be a little more exciting.'

FRUTTI E DOLCI

'*Siamo arrivati alla frutta*' ('we've arrived at the fruit') is an idiom roughly meaning 'we've hit rock bottom' – but hey, not until you've had one last tasty morsel. Imported pineapple has been a trendy choice of late, but your best bets on the fruit menu are local and seasonal. *Formaggi* (cheeses) are another option, but only diabetics, the seriously warped or the French would go that route when there's room for *dolci* (sweets). Think beyond dental-work-endangering *biscotti* (twice-baked biscuits) and consider *zabaglione*

REVOLUTION ON TAP

Still or sparkling aren't your only water choices in Italy, where 270 brands of bottled water add up to a €5 billion industry. But now that designer waters are hitting €5 per bottle and littering the countryside with discarded plastic containers, Italian diners are rebelling and demanding tap. As Italian comedian Beppe Grillo protests: 'it's putting rain in a bottle and then making you pay for it.' Join the revolt, or stick to your bubbly bottled Pellegrino with pride – just don't forget to recycle.

(egg and marsala custard), cream-stuffed profiteroles, or Sicilian *cannoli*, the cream-stuffed shell pastry immortalised thus in *The Godfather*: 'Leave the gun. Take the cannoli.' At least the wiseguy had his priorities straight.

CAFFÈ (COFFEE)

No amount of willpower or cajoling is going to move your feet into a museum after three courses, so you must administer espresso immediately. Sometimes your barista will take pity and deliver your cappuccino with a *cioccolatino* (a little square of chocolate) or grant you a tiny stain of milk in a *caffè macchiato*. On the hottest days of summer, you may be allowed a *granita di caffè* (coffee with shaved ice and whipped cream). But usually you'll be expected to take it as it comes, without sweetness or apology, like a nasty breakup. It's the 'what doesn't kill you, makes you stronger' principle: if you survive the scalding liquid tossed down your throat, well then, you're ready to get on with your day.

Snacks

MERENDA (SNACK)

Since a hearty appetite is necessary to soldier through a proper Italian meal, Italians aren't generally big snackers. Kids are the exception. *La merenda*, a sweet treat midmorning or after school, gives indulgent grandparents an opportunity to bond with youngsters and adults reason to wax nostalgic about lost youth. If you suffered a childhood of healthy snacks, make up for lost time and join the kids for biscuits, buns and *caffè latte* or tea. Vegetables are not considered suitable – when a couple is a bad match, you can say they go together *come cavoli a merenda* ('like cabbage for merenda').

APERITIVI (HAPPY HOUR)

The hottest Italian restaurant trend of late is *aperitivi*, often described as a 'before-meal drink and light snack'. Don't be fooled. Italian 'happy hour' is dinner disguised as a casual drink, which just so happens to be accompanied by a buffet of antipasti, pasta salads, cold cuts and some hot dishes (this may include your fellow diners). You can methodically pillage the buffet from about 5pm to 8pm for the price of a single drink, which crafty diners nurse for the duration. *Aperitivi* are wildly popular among the many young Italians who can't afford to eat dinner out, but still want a place to enjoy food with friends – leave it to Italy to find a way to make recession seem stylish.

SPUNTINO DI MEZZANOTTE (MIDNIGHT SNACK)

Clubgoers and jet-laggers, rejoice: you don't have to subsist on stale bar peanuts in Italy. Many *pizza al taglio* joints stay open late, especially when there's a football match on; enterprising gelaterie in entertainment zones and near universities keep scooping ice cream until well past bedtime; many pubs and clubs offer *panini* or *l'hamburger e patatine frite* (burger and fries); and most jazz clubs offer a full (if overpriced) dinner menu. Stay up all night,

Italy, a nation of efficiency experts?

Believe it: the average Italian housewife

spent seven hours in the kitchen daily in 1950, but now she's got her routine down to 40 minutes.

and you'll be rewarded with your choice of hot pastries at the bakery, and first pick of fresh fruit from the farmer's market.

Cena (Dinner)

This is usually less demanding than a sit-down lunch, unless you've been invited to someone's home – in which case all bets are off, and elastic-waist pants seem a wise investment. Those concerned about such niceties as health and expense will be relieved that there is no obligation to order both a *primo* and *secondo*, and that antipasti and dessert are entirely optional.

That said, you may want to plan your eating habits, budget and exercise regime around a lavish dinner at one of Italy's fine-dining establishments, such as Cracco-Peck (p264) or Antica Hostaria (p836). Many top-ranked restaurants open only for dinner, with a set-price meal that leaves the major menu decisions to your chef, and frees you up to concentrate on getting through four to six tasting courses. *Forza e coraggio!* (Strength and courage to you!)

The dinner drink menu is a delicate matter in most restaurants. Not ordering wine can cause consternation – are you pregnant, a recovering alcoholic or was it something the waiter said? Italy's perfectly quaffable Pilsner beers pair well with roast meats, pizza and other quick eats, but are not considered appropriate for fine dining. A declaration that *acqua dal rubinetto* (tap water) will do is equally disconcerting (see opposite), while failure to order a postprandial espresso may induce your server to look away in disapproval. You may yet save face by ordering a digestive, such as a *grappa* (a potent grape-derived alcohol), *amaro* (herbal bitters) or *limoncello* (sweet lemon-scented liqueur). Fair warning though: Italian digestives can be an acquired taste. They pack a punch that might leave you snoring before *il conto* (the bill) arrives.

CELEBRATIONS & FESTIVALS

Perhaps you've heard of the ancient Roman orgies with trips to the vomitorium to make room for the next course, or Medici family feasts with sugar sculptures worth their weight in gold? If you were hoping to party with Julius Caesar or get Michelangelo to sculpt you in sugar, you're a bit late – but you're still in time to enjoy a proper Italian feast. Anyone in Italy during major holidays can hardly avoid copious speciality foods. Christmas means stuffed pasta, seafood dishes and *panettone* (yeasty golden Christmas cake studded with raisins and dried fruit). Lent gives way to Easter bingeing with the obligatory lamb, *colomba* (dove-shaped cake) and *uova di pasqua* (foil-wrapped chocolate eggs with toy surprises inside).

But some Italian holidays dispense with the religious premise and are all about the food. During summer and early autumn, towns across Italy celebrate *sagre*, the festivals of local foods in season. You'll find a *sagra del tartufo* (truffles) in Umbria, *del pomodoro* (tomatoes) in Sicily and *del cipolle* (onions) in Puglia (wouldn't want to be downwind of that one).

WINE & COOKERY COURSES

You can hardly throw a stone in Italy without hitting a culinary course in progress, but there are better ways of finding a cookery school. Here are a few, for starters:

Casa Ombuto (www.italiancookerycourse.com) Recently dubbed by the *Observer* one of Europe's top 10 cookery courses, this seven-day course in Tuscany's Casentino valley combines rustic cuisine with swanky villa accommodations.

Città del Gusto (☎ 06 551 12 21; www.gamberorosso.it/portaleEng/cdg/homepage; Via Fermi 161, Rome) Six floors of hot, nonstop gourmet-on-gourmet action, from live cooking demonstrations and TV-show tapings to wine courses in the 'Theatre of Wine'. All workshops and demos are run by *Gambero Rosso*, Italy's most esteemed food magazine.

Gambero Rosso (Red Shrimp) magazine delivers the inside scoop on authentic Italian cuisine, with in-depth regional features and tips on where to find the best value for price at restaurants nationwide. Check out its English website: www.gamberorosso.it/portaleEng/Homepage/homepage.

Tap water is perfectly potable in Italy, but in 2006 the average Italian drank 178 litres of bottled water – four times as much as UK drinkers.

To find out what local food festivals are happening when in Italy, check out www.sagrepaesane.it.

DIY WINE TASTING

You probably can't cover all Italy's wines tonight without a monster hangover tomorrow, but you can learn to discern wine quality within a specific wine-growing region. Pick your wine type and region – say, Orvieto whites or reds from Abruzzo – then buy four bottles labelled with different quality classifications:

Denominazione di origine controllata e garantita (DOCG) Subject to strict, traditional production methods and tested for quality.

Denominazione di origine controllata (DOC) Vineyard sites and production methods are still regulated, but quality isn't guaranteed.

Indicazione geografica tipica (IGT) Produced in a traditional manner, but may include grapes that fall outside DOCG and DOC classifications.

Vino da tavola (table wine) Doesn't fall within DOCG and DOC regulations or traditional production guidelines.

On the bottom of four glasses, stick a piece of masking tape with a number corresponding to a particular bottle, then pour from that bottle into the glass. Mix up the glasses so you can't tell which is which, then taste each one. Compare notes with a friend, and try to describe what you taste. Rate your favourites, then take a look at the numbers: which was your clear winner? Do the official quality classifications hold true for you, or did you find a standout *vino da tavola* and a disappointing DOCG wine? To be scientific about it, perhaps you need a second round and another opinion, possibly from that Italian hottie at the end of the bar...

Culinary Adventures (www.peggymarkel.com) Indulge in and learn about cooking Italian dishes with local, sustainably sourced ingredients at decadent week-long courses in Sicily, Elba and Tuscany, and intensive three-day courses in Rome and Florence.

International Wine Academy of Roma (☎ 06 699 08 78; www.wineacademyroma.com; Vicolo del Bottino 8) Individual wine-tasting events cost about €30, a five-wine tasting followed by a four-course meal with wine pairing runs €180 (minimum two people), and a tour of Lazio wineries guided by a Wine Academy oenologist ranges from €300 to €360. See p135 for more information.

La Cucina del Garga (☎ 055 21 13 96; www.garga.it) Learn Tuscan cookery in context at a one-day class in Florence or a four- or eight-day excursion to southern Tuscany, under the tutelage of Florence's own Trattoria Garga.

Tasting Places (www.tastingplaces.com) Recent offerings include excursions to regional Slow Food festivals, a 'White Truffle and Wine' weekend in Piedmont, and a Sicilian villa homestay with lavish meals and farm visits.

Follow the puff-pastry highs and tepid-terrines lows as one enterprising foodie works her way methodically through *The Silver Spoon's* 2000-plus authentic Italian recipes at <http://exploringsilver.spoon.blogspot.com/>.

EAT YOUR WORDS

Get on speaking terms with your food. For more on pronunciation guidelines, see p884.

Useful Phrases

I'd like to reserve a table.

Vorrei riservare un tavolo.

vo-ray ree-ser-va-re oon ta-vo-lo

I'd like the menu, please.

Vorrei il menù, per favore.

vo-ray eel me-noo per fa-vo-re

Do you have a menu in English?

Avete un menù in inglese?

a-ve-te oon me-noo een een-gle-ze

What would you recommend?

Cosa mi consiglia?

ko-za mee kon-see-lya

I'd like a house/local speciality.

*Vorrei una specialità di casa/
questa regione.*

vo-ray oo-na spe-cha-lee-ta dee ka-za/
dee kwe-sta re-jo-ne

Please bring the bill.

Mi porta il conto, per favore.

mee por-ta eel kon-to per fa-vo-re

Is service included in the bill?*Il servizio è compreso nel conto?***I'm a vegetarian.***Sono vegetariano/a. (m/f)***I'm a vegan.***Sono vegetariano/a. (m/f)*eel ser-vee-tsyo e kom-pre-zo nel *kon-to**so-no ve-je-ta-rya-no/a**so-no ve-je-ta-ly-a-no/a***Food Glossary**

acciughe	<i>a-choo-ge</i>	anchovies
aceto	<i>a-che-to</i>	vinegar
acqua	<i>a-kwa</i>	water
aglio	<i>a-lyo</i>	garlic
agnello	<i>a-nye-lo</i>	lamb
alla griglia	<i>a-la gree-ly-a</i>	grilled (broiled)
aragosta	<i>a-ra-go-sta</i>	lobster
arancia	<i>a-ran-cha</i>	orange
arrosto/a (m/f)	<i>a-ro-sto/a</i>	roasted
asparagi	<i>as-pa-ra-jee</i>	asparagus
birra	<i>bee-ra</i>	beer
bistecca	<i>bees-te-ka</i>	steak
bollito/a (m/f)	<i>bo-lee-to/a</i>	boiled
burro	<i>boo-ro</i>	butter
caffè	<i>ka-fe</i>	coffee
calamari	<i>ka-la-ma-ree</i>	squid
capretto	<i>ka-pre-to</i>	kid (goat)
carciofi	<i>kar-cho-fee</i>	artichokes
carota	<i>ka-ro-ta</i>	carrot
cavolo	<i>ka-vo-lo</i>	cabbage
ciliegia	<i>chee-lee-e-ja</i>	cherry
coniglio	<i>ko-nee-lyo</i>	rabbit
cotto/a (m/f)	<i>ko-to/a</i>	cooked
cozze	<i>ko-tse</i>	mussels
crudo/a (m/f)	<i>kroo-do/a</i>	raw
fagiolini	<i>fa-jo-lee-nee</i>	green beans
fegato	<i>fe-ga-to</i>	liver
finocchio	<i>fee-no-kyo</i>	fennel
formaggio	<i>for-ma-jo</i>	cheese
fragole	<i>fra-go-le</i>	strawberries
fritto/a (m/f)	<i>free-to/a</i>	fried
frutti di mare	<i>froo-te dee ma-re</i>	seafood
funghi	<i>foon-ghee</i>	mushrooms
gamberoni	<i>gam-be-ro-nee</i>	prawns
granchio	<i>gran-kyo</i>	crab
insalata	<i>in-sa-la-ta</i>	salad
latte	<i>la-te</i>	milk
limone	<i>lee-mo-ne</i>	lemon
manzo	<i>man-zo</i>	beef
mela	<i>me-la</i>	apple
melanzane	<i>me-lan-dza-ne</i>	aubergine
melone	<i>me-lo-ne</i>	cantaloupe; musk melon; rockmelon
merluzzo	<i>mer-loo-tso</i>	cod
miele	<i>mye-le</i>	honey
olio	<i>o-lyo</i>	oil
oliva	<i>o-lee-va</i>	olive
ostriche	<i>os-tree-ke</i>	oysters

pane	<i>pa-ne</i>	bread
panna	<i>pa-na</i>	cream
patate	<i>pa-ta-te</i>	potatoes
pepe	<i>pe-pe</i>	pepper
peperoncino	<i>pe-pe-ron-chee-no</i>	chilli
peperoni	<i>pe-pe-ro-nee</i>	capsicum; peppers
pera	<i>pe-ra</i>	pear
pesca	<i>pe-ska</i>	peach
pesce spada	<i>pe-she spa-da</i>	swordfish
piselli	<i>pee-ze-lee</i>	peas
pollo	<i>po-lo</i>	chicken
polpi	<i>pol-pee</i>	octopus
pomodori	<i>po-mo-do-ree</i>	tomatoes
prosciutto cotto	<i>pro-shoo-to ko-to</i>	cooked ham
prosciutto crudo	<i>pro-shoo-to kroo-do</i>	cured ham
riso	<i>ree-zo</i>	rice
rucola	<i>roo-ko-la</i>	rocket
sale	<i>sa-le</i>	salt
salsiccia	<i>sal-see-cha</i>	sausage
sarde	<i>sar-de</i>	sardines
seppia	<i>se-pya</i>	cuttlefish
sgombro	<i>sgom-bro</i>	mackerel
spinaci	<i>spee-na-chee</i>	spinach
tartufo	<i>tar-too-fo</i>	truffle
tè	<i>te</i>	tea
tonno	<i>to-no</i>	tuna
trippa	<i>tree-pa</i>	tripe
uovo/uova	<i>wo-vo/wo-va</i>	egg/eggs
uva	<i>oo-va</i>	grapes
vino (rosso/bianco)	<i>vee-no (ro-so/byan-ka)</i>	wine (red/white)
vitello	<i>vee-te-lo</i>	veal
vongole	<i>von-go-le</i>	clams
zucchero	<i>tsoo-ke-ro</i>	sugar

Environment

THE LAND

Italy's distinctive shape makes it one of the most easily recognisable countries in the world. Its long bootlike mainland peninsula protrudes south into the Mediterranean, flanked by two major islands – Sicily (to the south) and Sardinia (to the west) – and a host of smaller ones.

Bound on three sides by four Mediterranean seas (the Adriatic, Ionian, Ligurian and Tyrrhenian), the country has more than 8000km of coastline. Coastal scenery ranges from the low-lying sparkling beaches of Sardinia to the dramatically precipitous cliffs of Amalfi.

More than 75% of Italy is mountainous and two chief ranges dominate the landscape. The Alps stretch 966km from east to west across the northern boundary of the country. The highest mountains are in the western sector, with peaks rising above 4500m. The stunning Valle d'Aosta includes Mont Blanc (Monte Bianco; 4807m), Monte Rosa (4633m) and the Matterhorn (Monte Cervino; 4478m), all shared with neighbouring France and Switzerland, and Gran Paradiso (4061m). The eastern sector is lower but no less beautiful. It is here that you'll find the Dolomites, blessed with spectacular scenery. The picture was altered slightly in mid-2004, however, when freak weather caused the collapse of some rocky peaks in the Dolomites. Scientists attributed the erosion to an exceptionally cold winter following the broiling summer of 2003.

The Alpine foothills are bejewelled by a string of grand lakes; the largest include Lago di Garda, Lago Maggiore and Lago di Como.

More than 1000 glaciers, all in a constant state of retreat, dot the Alpine area. The most well known is the Marmolada glacier on the border of Trentino and Veneto, which is popular with skiers and snowboard enthusiasts.

The second mountain chain, the Apennine (Appennini) range, is often described as the 'backbone' of Italy due to its shape and extent. The range curves roughly south from Genoa to Calabria and runs for 1350km. The highest peak is the Corno Grande (2912m) in the Gran Sasso d'Italia group (Abruzzo).

Only a quarter of Italy's land mass can be described as lowland. One of the largest areas is the Po valley plain. Located at the foot of the Alpine range, the plain is divided by the Po river, which at 628km is the longest river in Italy. The area is heavily populated and industrialised.

Italy has a complex geological history characterised by marked environmental and climatic changes. Around 100 million years ago a huge ocean called the Tethys covered the area now occupied by the peninsula. Gradually the ocean began to recede and various types of materials were deposited, including limestone, dolomite and sandstone, as well as the extensive coral reefs to the northeast from which the Dolomite mountain range was later formed.

The crucial moment in the formation of the Italian peninsula came around 40 million years ago when the African continental plate butted up against the European land mass. The collision forced the edge of the European plate to fold under. Over the centuries the African continent then pushed sheets of the southern European continental plate up to 1000km north over the folds. This process created the Alpine and Apennine chains and explains why some of the higher strata of the Alps are actually older than lower levels.

Both mountain chains underwent significant erosion, resulting in huge deposits of sand, gravel and clay at their feet and in part preparing the way

It is thought to have taken over 100 years for water from the Atlantic to fill the Mediterranean Sea when it was formed 5.5 million years ago.

Aimed at amateur enthusiasts, Christopher Kilburn and Bill McGuire's *Italian Volcanoes* provides an in-depth account of Italy's key volcanic districts.

EARTHQUAKES & VOLCANOES

A fault line runs through the entire Italian peninsula – from eastern Sicily, following the Apennine range up into the Alps of Friuli-Venezia Giulia in the northeast. It corresponds to the collision point of the European and African continental plates and still subjects a good part of the country to seismic activity. Italy is usually hit by minor quakes several times a year. Central and southern Italy, including Sicily, are occasionally rocked by devastating earthquakes.

The worst quake of the last century was in 1908, when Messina and Reggio di Calabria were destroyed by a seaquake (an earthquake originating under the sea floor) registering seven on the Richter scale. Almost 86,000 people were killed by the quake and subsequent tidal wave. In November 1980 an earthquake southeast of Naples destroyed several villages and killed 2570 people. An earthquake in the Apennine range in September 1997, which affected Umbria and Le Marche, killed 10 people and caused part of the vaulted ceiling of the Basilica di San Francesco d'Assisi, in Assisi, to collapse, destroying important frescoes. In late 2002, Molise was hit by a quake measuring 5.4 on the Richter scale, which destroyed a primary school in the hill-top town of San Giuliano di Puglia and killed 29 people. A quake of 5.2 on the Richter scale hit the area around Brescia in November 2004 and was felt in Switzerland and Austria.

Italy also has six active volcanoes: Stromboli and Vulcano on the Aeolian Islands; Vesuvius, the Campi Flegrei and the island of Ischia near Naples; and Etna on Sicily. Stromboli and Etna are among the world's most active volcanoes, while Vesuvius has not erupted since 1944. This has become a source of concern for scientists, who estimate that it should erupt every 30 years. The longer before the next blast, the more destructive it is likely to be. Some three million people live in the vicinity of the mountain – a disaster waiting to happen.

In 2001, officials were forced to close a tourist area and scientific monitoring station after lava flowed down Etna's southern slopes. Further activity in 2002, including a quake measuring 5.6 on the Richter scale, saw the temporary closure of Sicily's Catania airport. The mountain has been fairly quiet since early 2003. Stromboli was active in the spring of 2003 when an eruption sent around 10 million cubic metres of volcanic rock plunging into the sea, setting off an 8m tidal wave that affected areas more than 160km away. In February 2007 two new craters opened on the volcano's summit.

Related volcanic activity produces thermal and mud springs, notably at Viterbo in Lazio and on the Aeolian Islands. The Campi Flegrei, near Naples, is an area of intense volcanic activity, which includes hot springs, gas emissions and steam jets.

for the development of lowland areas. By around two million years ago, after the landscape had been shaped and reshaped by the combined forces of continental plate movement and erosion, the Italian peninsula had almost arrived at its present form. The sea level continued to rise and fall with the alternation of ice ages and periods of warm climate, until the end of the last ice age around 10,000 to 12,000 years ago.

WILDLIFE

Italy is not renowned for its wildlife-watching, but you will be surprised by how many different species naturally dwell in the country. If you head for the great outdoors you will have the chance to spot the more common mammals such as deer, chamois (mountain goats), ibex, wild boar, wildcats, hedgehogs, hares and rabbits. Touring the many national parks and nature reserves will increase your chances of seeing something a little more unusual.

Animals

There's a bear in there! Along with the 80 Marsican brown bears that roam the Parco Nazionale d'Abruzzo, Lazio e Molise, around 20 brown bears (12 of them born in 2005) are also at large in the Parco Naturale

Try Paul Sterry's *Complete Mediterranean Wildlife* for a general guide to the flora and fauna of the region.

Adamello-Brenta, partly as a result of their reintroduction from Slovenia. Not everyone is happy. Farmers have seen their hen pens raided and some pasture land is now deemed off limits.

The Parco Nazionale dei Monti Sibillini, straddling Umbria and Le Marche, is home to more than 50 species of mammal, including the wolf, porcupine, wildcat, snow vole and roe deer. As there are more than 150 types of bird inhabiting the park you're sure to see a diversity of colourful plumage and hear a wide range of birdsong. Species include the golden eagle, peregrine falcon and rock partridge. There are also more than 20 types of reptile and invertebrate living in the park, including the Orsini viper and *Chirocephalus marchesoni* (a small, rare crustacean that lives exclusively in the Lago di Pilato).

In the Parco delle Dolomiti Bellunesi you should easily spot mouflon sheep and chamois. Rather more elusive are the golden eagle and the rare alpine salamander.

Parco Nazionale Arcipelago Toscano occupies one of the main migratory corridors in the Mediterranean. The islands of Elba, Giglio, Capraia, Gorgona, Pianosa, Giannutri and Montecristo provide endless nesting possibilities for birds. Species include falcons, wall creepers, various types of swallow and the red partridge. Other unusual wildlife includes the tarantula gecko and the endemic viper of Montecristo.

Swordfish, tuna and dolphins are common along the coastline.

The Parco Nazionale del Circeo in Lazio also coincides with the main migratory routes. The park is a good place to spot water birds such as the spoonbill and greater flamingo, as well as rare birds of prey like the peregrine.

White sharks are known to exist in the Mediterranean (particularly in its southern waters) but attacks are extremely rare.

For a full list of national parks, see p83.

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) has an Italian chapter at www.wwf.it. Its main national conservation work is focused on the wolf, Marsican brown bear, Egyptian vulture, spadefoot toad, chamois, otter and Corsican red deer.

Where to Watch Birds in Italy, published by the Italian League for the Protection of Birds (LIPU), has more than 100 recommendations for species-spotting. Check out the website at www.lipu.it (in Italian). It also has a UK branch at www.lipu-uk.org.

ENDANGERED SPECIES

Extensive changes in land use and the environment, combined with the Italians' passion for *la caccia* (hunting), have led in the past to many native animals and birds becoming extinct, rare or endangered. There is still a powerful hunting lobby in Italy, which continues to have an important role in the country's environmental politics. The situation is slowly changing and though numbers have decreased in recent years, about 700,000 Italians still hunt.

In the 20th century 14 species became extinct in Italy, including the alpine lynx, sea eagle, black vulture and osprey (although there is an ongoing reintroduction project for ospreys in Parco Regionale della Maremma in Tuscany and in 2007 a pair bred in Sardinia). Under laws introduced

OUT OF THE BLUE

An 87,500 sq km area of the Mediterranean between southeast France, northwest Italy and northern Sardinia (encompassing Corsica and the islands around Elba) was set aside in 2002 as a unique protected zone, the Pelagos Sanctuary, for Mediterranean marine mammals. Fin whales and striped dolphins make up 80% of sightings in the area but many other species also cruise through here.

The Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society (www.wdcs.org), in collaboration with the Tethys Research Institute (www.tethys.org), organises responsible whale-watching 'Out of the Blue' holidays in the Ligurian Sea – home to a number of whale and dolphin species, including the 20m long, 70 tonne fin whale.

progressively over the years, many animals and birds are now protected, but the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) reports in the *Libro Rosso degli Animali d'Italia Vertebrati* (National Red Data Book) that 68% of Italy's vertebrates are still at risk, according to World Conservation Union criteria.

Those species that are making a comeback after being reintroduced in the wild are the brown bear, which survives only in the Parco Naturale Adamello-Brenta in Trentino, and the lynx, which is extremely rare and found mainly in the Alpine area around Tarvisio in Friuli-Venezia Giulia.

Wolves are now more common: over the last 20 years the population has naturally increased from 100 (in the 1970s) to 500 to 600 animals colonising the northern Apennines and the western Alps. But despite concerted conservation efforts, the endemic Marsican brown bear of Abruzzo has been less successful – there are probably no more than 50 individuals and its risk status is still critical.

Otters thrive in the Parco Nazionale del Cilento e Vallo di Diano in Campania and a small population has been found in the Parco Nazionale del Pollino; globally it has been estimated that there are roughly 250 individuals. Another extremely rare marine animal is the monk seal; the occasional sighting keeps hopes alive that a few survive in the sea caves on the east coast of Sardinia. The magnificent golden eagle was almost wiped out by hunters, but there are now about 500 pairs throughout Italy. A colony of griffon vultures survives with less than 100 individuals on the west coast of Sardinia, near Bosa, but reintroduction programmes have begun at the Massiccio del Velino (Central Apennines) and have produced about 70 breeding pairs. The bearded vulture, known in Italy as the *gipeto*, was reintroduced in the Alps in 1978 and 60 to 70 individuals have now been recorded.

Plants

The long-established human presence on the Italian peninsula has had a significant impact on the environment, resulting in the widespread destruction of original forests and vegetation and their replacement with crops and orchards. Aesthetically the result is not always displeasing – much of the beauty of Tuscany, for instance, lies in the combination of olive groves, vineyards, fallow fields and stands of cypress and pine.

Italy's plant life is predominantly Mediterranean. Three broad classifications of evergreen tree dominate – ilex (or evergreen oak), cork and pine. The occasional virgin ilex and oak forest still survives in the more inaccessible reaches of Tuscany, Umbria, Calabria, Puglia and Sardinia. These ancient woods are made up of trees that can reach up to 15m high and whose thick canopies block out light to the forest floor, preventing most undergrowth. Most common are ilex stands that have been created, or at least interfered with, by humans. They tend to be sparser than the virgin forest, with smaller trees and abundant undergrowth.

After the ilex, the most common tree is the cork. Corkwood has been long prized and there is not a cork tree standing today that is part of a virgin forest. Often they are mixed in with ilex and other oaks, although in Sicily and Sardinia it is possible to come across pure cork forests.

Wild Flowers of the Mediterranean by Marjorie Blamey and Christopher Grey-Wilson is a field guide to over 2500 species of flowers, fruit trees, grasses and ferns found around the Mediterranean, including mainland Italy, Sardinia and Sicily.

RESPECT THE MOUNTAIN

The Ski Club of Great Britain's 'Respect the Mountain' campaign (www.skiclub.co.uk) was designed to help safeguard the long-term future of skiing in the face of climate change. It urges skiers and snowboarders to choose resorts that employ ecofriendly practices, such as bio-diesel fuel in piste-bashers, solar panels for heating and hydro-electricity/wind energy for power.

There are three types of pine: the Aleppo pine (the hardest of the three); the domestic pine, especially common in Tuscany and also known as the umbrella pine for the long, flattened appearance of its branches; and the maritime pine, which, in spite of its name, is generally found further inland than the other two.

Ancient imports, which are an inevitable part of much of the Italian countryside (especially in Tuscany's south), include the olive and cypress. The former comes in many shapes and sizes, the most striking of which are the robust trees of Puglia.

Much of the country is covered by *macchia* (maquis), which is a broad term that covers all sorts of vegetation ranging from 2m to as much as 6m in height. Typical *macchia* includes herbs such as lavender, rosemary and thyme, as well as shrubs of the cistus family (gorse, juniper and heather) and, if the soil is at all acidic, broom. Orchids, gladioli and irises flower beneath these shrubs and are colourful in spring.

Where the action of humans and nature has been particularly harsh, or the soil is poor, the *macchia* becomes *gariga*, the very barest of scrub. Growth here is dominated by aromatic herbs such as lavender, rosemary and thyme.

NATIONAL PARKS

Italy has 21 national parks, with three more on the way, and well over 400 smaller nature reserves, natural parks and wetlands. The national parks cover just over 1.5 million hectares (5% of the country) and Italy's environmentalists are continually campaigning to increase the amount of land that is protected. The parks, reserves and wetlands all play a crucial part in the protection of the country's flora and fauna and there are regular conservation events and open days to promote them. Some of Italy's national parks:

The official Italian national parks website (www.parks.it) offers comprehensive information on individual parks, useful publications, details of local wildlife, weather forecasts and educational initiatives.

National park	Region	Page
Parco Nazionale Arcipelago Toscano	Tuscany	p513
Parco Nazionale d'Abruzzo, Lazio e Molise	Abruzzo	p610
Parco Nazionale dei Monti Sibillini	Umbria/Le Marche	p600
Parco Nazionale del Cilento e Vallo di Diano	Campania	p675
Parco Nazionale del Circeo	Lazio	p181
Parco Nazionale del Gargano	Puglia	p677
Parco Nazionale del Gennargentu e Golfo di Orosei	Sardinia	p846
Parco Nazionale del Gran Paradiso	Piedmont/Valle d'Aosta	p246
Parco Nazionale del Gran Sasso e Monti della Laga	Abruzzo	p606
Parco Nazionale del Pollino	Basilicata/Calabria	p722
Parco Nazionale del Vesuvio	Campania	p652
Parco Nazionale della Calabria	Calabria	p727
Parco Nazionale della Majella	Abruzzo	p609
Parco Nazionale della Val Grande	Piedmont	p211
Parco Nazionale dell'Arcipelago di La Maddalena	Sardinia	p839
Parco Nazionale dell'Asinara	Sardinia	p838
Parco Nazionale dell'Aspromonte	Calabria	p730
Parco Nazionale delle Cinque Terre	Liguria	p199
Parco Nazionale delle Dolomiti Bellunesi	The Veneto	p387
Parco Nazionale delle Foreste Casentinesi, Monte Falterona e Campigna	Emilia-Romagna & Tuscany	p541
Parco Nazionale dello Stelvio (Nationalpark Stilfserjoch)	Trentino-Alto Adige	p326

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Environmental awareness in Italy has improved in recent years, mainly in response to the effects of climate change, increasing urban smog and pollution of the country's extensive coastline. The Ministry for the Environment is taking an increasingly tougher line on environmental issues by gradually strengthening environmental laws in response to public opinion and as a result of EU directives. Like many industrialised countries, the Italian government wants to deal with climate change issues by encouraging energy efficiency without undermining economic growth.

Urban areas, the industrialised north of Italy and most of the country's main cities suffer from high levels of air pollution. While sulphur dioxide levels have been reduced in recent years, primarily by substituting natural gas for coal, much of the smog and poor air quality can be attributed to the fact that Italy has one of the highest per-capita levels of car ownership in the world. The increase in the use of motor scooters emitting noxious fumes has also contributed to this pollution. Visible evidence of the damage this causes can be seen on buildings where the stone has become blackened due to constant exposure to exhaust fumes and emissions. Reducing reliance on vehicles is one of the goals of the present government, and several cities have considered introducing a congestion charge similar to that in central London.

In coastal areas there are other environmental challenges. Inadequate treatment and disposal of industrial and domestic waste has frequently led to coastal pollution. Areas particularly affected include the Ligurian coast, the northern Adriatic and areas near major cities such as Rome and Naples. Since the boom in beachside tourism in the 1960s, there has been no shortage of ill-advised building on much of the Italian coast, which has brought some short-term advantages, but major medium and long-term disadvantages to local communities and the environment.

The degradation of coastal areas is a problem Italy shares with other Mediterranean countries. WWF International and the national WWF organisations of Mediterranean countries are trying to pressure the respective national governments to protect at least 10% of the Mediterranean coasts within the next 10 years (currently only 1% are protected). According to WWF, some 14% of all the coasts are degraded and damaged, including the Italian Adriatic coast. The Mediterranean itself has suffered greatly from pollution and overfishing. According to WWF, each year the Mediterranean carries 25% of the world's sea traffic.

However, it is possible to find clean beaches, particularly in southern Puglia, Calabria, Sardinia and Sicily. In particular, Sardinia still boasts some beautiful stretches of coastline, but a rash of development plans a few years ago set alarm bells ringing there too. In July 2004 millionaire Renato Soru won Sardinia's regional governorship, partly on a platform of protecting the island's environment. One of his first measures was to freeze all building within 2km of the coast while a controlled development plan was drawn up. A complete ban has now been introduced on new building in a belt extending from 300m to 5000m from the coast (depending on the vulnerability of the environment). WWF hailed this initiative as 'perhaps Italy's first "long-sighted policy" in the environmental protection sector'.

The Italian Ministry of Environment website (www.minambiente.it, in Italian) provides details on the country's biodiversity, protected areas, and links to agencies that work in conservation.

PEOPLE POWER

Legambiente (www.legambiente.com) is a not-for-profit membership organisation created in 1980 to safeguard Italy's environment and promote sustainability, based on the philosophy 'think globally, act locally'. It relies on the work of local and regional environmental groups throughout Italy.

RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL

Think about the impact of your trip. Here are a few tips on how you can tread lighter.

- Fly less, stay longer. Take the train, bus and ferry as much as possible.
- If you do fly, consider compensating for the carbon emissions by donating to a carbon offset scheme, such as Equiclimat (www.ebico.co.uk) or Pure (www.puretrust.org.uk).
- In the countryside, stick to footpaths wherever possible.
- Do not discard items that could start a fire (cigarette butts, glass bottles and so on) – forest fires are an annual torment.
- Do not pick wildflowers or wilfully damage tree bark or roots – some of the species you see are protected.
- Conserve water: take a shower instead of a bath and reuse towels.
- Save energy: turn off the air-conditioning and lights when you leave a hotel room.
- Stay in ecofriendly and locally run accommodation.
- Shop at local markets.

In 2005 the WWF and the national environmental group Legambiente condemned plans to build the world's longest single-span suspension bridge – some 4km long – between Reggio di Calabria on the Italian peninsula and Messina in Sicily. Environmentalists predicted this would spell disaster for local sea and bird life, not to mention the danger posed by building such a bridge in a seismically active region. In October 2006, Italian MPs voted to scrap the proposed construction amid additional fears that the vast project would enrich southern Italy's organised crime networks. Instead it was suggested that some of the money set aside for the project should be invested in improvements to transport infrastructure on the island, which has long been economically weaker than on the mainland.

As well as working to protect the Mediterranean, the Italian WWF cares for the Alps – not least because they are the source of some major rivers, such as the Reno and Po. Italy's ski resorts have also come under increasing scrutiny recently due to the increasingly warmer winters caused by climate change – the Alps are currently experiencing their warmest period since records began. Across the Alps, resorts at an altitude below 1400m are particularly at risk; however, the Italian ski areas are at relatively high altitude, especially in the northwest, and purpose-built resorts such as Sestrière are situated at high altitude where snowfall is more reliable.

On the world stage, Italy is committed to many international agreements dealing with issues as wide ranging as desertification, hazardous wastes, air pollution and marine dumping. Italy is a signatory to the Kyoto Protocol, under which it agreed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 6.5% below 1990 levels by 2008 to 2012. A climate change action plan was published in 2003, which included an increased reliance on natural gas and electricity (including renewable forms of energy). Since early 2005, Italy, along with France, Germany and the UK, has been participating in the European Union Emissions Trading Scheme, the precursor of the global market that is due to begin in 2008. As a member of the G8 group of nations (along with Canada, France, Germany, Japan, the UK, the United States and Russia), Italy has also supported measures aimed at reducing greenhouse gases, most recently at the 2007 G8 Summit in Heiligendamm, where members announced they would aim to consider at least halving global CO₂ emissions by 2050. Italy is due to host the G8 summit in 2009.

For details of Italy's cleanest beaches and marinas, see www.blueflag.org.

Italy has more World Heritage sites than any other country. The latest addition to the famous list is Le Strade Nuove and the system of the Palazzi dei Rolli in Genoa's historic centre. See p187.

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