

# Planning Your Trip to Florence

The capital of Tuscany is **Florence**, one of Italy's most famous cities. It was once the home of the colorful Medici dynasty, which actively encouraged the development of the Renaissance by sponsoring masters such as Donatello, Leonardo, and Michelangelo. Art treasures like those found at the Accademia (Michelangelo's *David*), the Uffizi Galleries (Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*), and the Pitti Palace (Raphael's *La Velata*) draw millions of visitors every year. Throw into the mix fabulous architecture (the Duomo with Brunelleschi's dome, Giotto's campanile, Santa Croce), fine restaurants and earthy trattorie, and leading designer boutiques and bustling outdoor markets, and the city of the Renaissance becomes quite simply one of the world's must-see sights.

Planning a trip doesn't have to be hard work. This chapter will help you smooth out most of your preparations for a trip to Florence.

## 1 Visitor Information

### TOURIST OFFICES

For general information in your home country, try your local branch of the **Italian Government Tourist Board (ENIT)** or [www.italiantourism.com](http://www.italiantourism.com). Some Frommer's readers have reported that the office isn't really that helpful.

**In the United States:** 630 Fifth Ave., Suite 1565, New York, NY 10111 (☎ **212/245-4822** or 212/245-5618; fax 212/586-9249); 500 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 2240, Chicago, IL 60611 (☎ **312/644-0996** or 312/644-0990; fax 312/644-3019); and 12400 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 550, Los Angeles, CA 90025 (☎ **310/820-1898** or 310/820-9807; fax 310/820-6357).

**In Canada:** 175 Bloor St. E., Suite 907, South Tower, Toronto, Ontario M4W 3R8 (☎ **416/925-4882**; fax 416/925-4799; [enit.canada@on.aibn.com](mailto:enit.canada@on.aibn.com)).

**In the United Kingdom:** 1 Princes St., London W1B 2AY England (☎ **020/7399-3562**; [italy@italiantouristboard.co.uk](mailto:italy@italiantouristboard.co.uk)).

## Integrated City Codes

In 1998, Italy incorporated what were once separate **city codes** (for example, Florence's was 055) into the numbers themselves. Therefore, you must dial the entire number, *including the initial zero*, when calling from *anywhere* outside or inside Italy and even within the same town. For those of you familiar with the old system, this means that now, to call Florence from the States, you must dial **011-39-055-XXX-XXXX**. Increasingly, you'll notice Florence numbers beginning with prefixes other than 055; these are usually cellphone numbers.

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For more specific details on **Tuscany**, contact the regional tourist office in Florence: APT, Via Manzoni 16, 50121 Firenze (☎ **055-23-320**; fax 055-234-6286; [www.firenzeturismo.it](http://www.firenzeturismo.it)). For **Umbria**, contact the Ufficio Promozione Turistica, Corso Vannucci 30, 06100 Perugia (☎ **075-50-41**; fax 075-504-2483).

## USEFUL WEBSITES

Websites and e-mail addresses are included throughout this guide for everything from tourist offices, hotels, and restaurants to museums and festivals.

The official site for Tuscany is [www.turismo.toscana.it](http://www.turismo.toscana.it), with links to every provincial tourist office site. The official Florence information site, [www.firenzeturismo.it](http://www.firenzeturismo.it), contains a wealth of up-to-date information (events, museums, practical details) on Florence and its province. Included is a searchable "hotels" form allowing you to specify amenities, categories, and the like; it responds by spitting out a list of comparable hotels, and it lists contact info and current room rates.

**Firenze by Net** ([www.mega.it/florence](http://www.mega.it/florence)), **Firenze.Net** (<http://english.firenze.net>), and **FlorenceOnLine** ([www.fol.it](http://www.fol.it)) are all Italy-based websites with English translations and good general information on Florence. Also check out **The Heart of Tuscany** ([www.nautilus-mp.com/tuscany](http://www.nautilus-mp.com/tuscany)), and **Chianti Doc Marketplace** ([www.chianti-doc.com](http://www.chianti-doc.com)). And of course there's **Frommer's** ([www.frommers.com](http://www.frommers.com)), where you'll find excerpts from *Florence, Tuscany & Umbria, 4th Edition*, occasional updated information, and links to travel packages from Gate 1 Travel ([gate1travel.com](http://gate1travel.com)).



## 2 Entry Requirements & Customs

### ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

U.S., Canadian, U.K., Irish, Australian, and New Zealand citizens with a **valid passport** don't need a visa to enter Italy if they don't expect to stay more than 90 days and don't expect to work there. If after entering Italy you find you want to stay more than 90 days, you can apply for a permit for an extra 90 days, which as a rule is granted immediately. Go to the nearest *questura* (police headquarters) or your home country's consulate.

For passport information and applications in the **U.S.**, call ☎ **202/647-0518** or check <http://travel.state.gov>; in **Canada**, call ☎ **800/567-6868** or check [www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/passport](http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/passport); in the **U.K.**, call ☎ **0870/521-0410** or visit [www.passports.gov.uk](http://www.passports.gov.uk); in **Ireland**, call ☎ **01/671-1633** or check [www.irlgov.ie/iveagh](http://www.irlgov.ie/iveagh); in **Australia**, call ☎ **131-232** or visit [www.passports.gov.au](http://www.passports.gov.au); and in **New Zealand**, call ☎ **0800/225-050** or check [www.passports.govt.nz](http://www.passports.govt.nz). Allow plenty of time before your trip to apply for a passport; processing usually takes 3 weeks but can take longer during busy periods (especially spring). When traveling, safeguard your passport and keep a copy of the critical pages with your passport number in a separate place. If you lose your passport, visit the nearest consulate of your native country as soon as possible for a replacement.

### CUSTOMS

#### WHAT YOU CAN BRING INTO ITALY

Foreign visitors can bring along most items for personal use duty-free, including fishing tackle, a pair of skis, two tennis rackets, a baby carriage, two hand cameras with 10 rolls of film or a digital camera, and 400 cigarettes or a quantity of cigars or pipe tobacco not exceeding 500 grams (1.1 lb.). There are strict limits on importing alcoholic beverages. However, for alcohol bought tax-paid, limits are much more liberal than in other countries of the European Union.

#### WHAT YOU CAN TAKE HOME

**FOR U.S. CITIZENS** US citizens who have been away for at least 48 hours are allowed to bring back, once every 30 days, \$800 worth of merchandise duty-free. You'll be charged a flat rate of duty on the next \$1,000 worth of purchases. Any dollar amount beyond that is dutiable at whatever rates apply. On mailed gifts, the duty-free limit is \$200. Be sure to have your receipts handy to expedite the declaration process. **Note:** If you owe duty, you are required to pay on your arrival in the U.S, by cash, personal check, government

or traveler's check, or money order, and in some locations, a Visa or MasterCard.

To avoid having to pay duty on foreign-made personal items you owned before you left on your trip, bring along a bill of sale, insurance policy, jeweler's appraisal, or receipts of purchase. Or you can register items that can be readily identified by a permanently affixed serial number or marking—think laptop computers, cameras, and CD players—with Customs before you leave. Take the items to the nearest Customs office or register them with Customs at the airport from which you're departing. You'll receive, at no cost, a Certificate of Registration, which allows duty-free entry for the life of the item.

With some exceptions, you cannot bring fresh fruits and vegetables into the United States. For specifics on what you can bring back, download the invaluable free pamphlet *Know Before You Go* online at [www.cbp.gov](http://www.cbp.gov). (Click on "Travel," and then click on "Know Before You Go. Online Brochure.") Or contact the **U.S. Customs & Border Protection (CBP)**, 1300 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20229 (☎ 877/287-8667) and request the pamphlet.

**FOR U.K./CITIZENS** Citizens of the U.K. who are returning from a European Union (E.U.) country will go through a separate Customs Exit (called the "Blue Exit") for E.U. travelers. In essence, there is no limit on what you can bring back from an E.U. country, as long as the items are for personal use (this includes gifts), and you have already paid the necessary duty and tax. However, customs law sets out guidance levels. If you bring in more than these levels, you may be asked to prove that the goods are for your own use. Guidance levels on goods bought in the E.U. for your own use are 3,200 cigarettes, 200 cigars, 400 cigarillos, 3 kilograms of smoking tobacco, 10 liters of spirits, 90 liters of wine, 20 liters of fortified wine (such as port or sherry), and 110 liters of beer.

**FOR CANADIAN CITIZENS** For a clear summary of Canadian rules, write for the booklet *I Declare*, issued by **Revenue Canada**, 2265 St. Laurent Blvd., Ottawa K1G 4KE (☎ 613/993-0534 or 800/959-2221; [www.cra-adrc.gc.ca](http://www.cra-adrc.gc.ca)). Canada allows citizens a C\$750 exemption if you've been out of the country for at least 7 days. You're allowed to bring back duty-free 200 cigarettes, 2.2 pounds of tobacco, 40 imperial ounces of liquor, 50 cigars, and 1.5 liters of wine. In addition, you're allowed to mail gifts to Canada from abroad at the rate of C\$60 a day, provided they're unsolicited and aren't alcohol or tobacco (write on the package "Unsolicited

gift, under C\$60 value”). All valuables should be declared on the Y-38 form before departure from Canada, including serial numbers of, for example, expensive foreign cameras that you already own. For more information, call the **Automated Customs Service** at ☎ **800/461-9999** toll-free within Canada or ☎ 204/983-3500 outside Canada.

**FOR AUSTRALIAN CITIZENS** The duty-free allowance in Australia is A\$400 or, for those under 18, A\$200. Personal property mailed back from Italy should be marked AUSTRALIAN GOODS RETURNED to avoid payment of duty. On returning to Australia, citizens can bring in 250 cigarettes or 250 grams of loose tobacco, and 1,125ml of alcohol. If you're returning with valuable goods you already own, such as foreign-made cameras, you should file form B263. A helpful brochure, available from Australian consulates or Customs offices, is *Know Before You Go*. For more information, contact **Australian Customs Services**, GPO Box 8, Sydney NSW 2001 (☎ **1300-363-263** within Australia, or 02-6275-6666 from overseas; [www.customs.gov.au](http://www.customs.gov.au)).

**FOR NEW ZEALAND CITIZENS** The duty-free allowance for New Zealand is NZ\$700. Citizens over 17 years can bring in 200 cigarettes, or 50 cigars, or 250 grams of tobacco (or a mixture of all three if their combined weight doesn't exceed 250g); plus 4.5 liters of wine or beer, or 1.125 liters of liquor. New Zealand currency doesn't carry import or export restrictions. Fill out a certificate of export, listing the valuables you are taking out of the country; that way, you can bring them back without paying duty. Most questions are answered in a free pamphlet available at New Zealand consulates and Customs offices: *New Zealand Customs Guide for Travellers, Notice no. 4*. For more information, contact **New Zealand Customhouse**, 50 Anzac Ave., Box 29, Auckland, NZ (☎ **0800/428-786** within New Zealand; 09-359-6655 from overseas; [www.customs.govt.nz](http://www.customs.govt.nz)).

### 3 Money

In January 2002, Italy retired the lira and joined most of Western Europe in switching to the euro. Coins are issued in denominations of .01€, .02€, .05€, .10€, .20€, and .50€ as well as 1€ and 2€; bills come in denominations of 5€, 10€, 20€, 50€, 100€, 200€, and 500€.

Exchange rates are established daily and listed in most international newspapers (or check [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com)). At this writing, 1€

equaled approximately \$1.20—a historic high, as the euro and dollar were usually on a par since the euro's inception. To get a transaction as close to the latest rate as possible, pay for as much as possible with credit cards and get cash out of ATMs.

Traveler's checks, while still the safest way to carry money, are going the way of the dinosaur. The aggressive evolution of international computerized banking and consolidated ATM networks has led to the triumph of plastic throughout the Italian peninsula—even if cold cash is still the most trusted currency, especially in smaller towns or cheaper mom-and-pop joints, where credit cards may not be accepted.

You'll get the best rate if you **exchange money** at a bank or one of its ATMs. The rates at "Cambio/change/wechsel" exchange booths are invariably less favorable but still a good deal better than what you'd get exchanging money at a hotel or shop (a last-resort tactic only). The bill-to-bill changers you'll see in some touristy places exist solely to rip you off.

## ATMs

ATMs are prevalent in all Italian cities and even the smaller towns. ATMs are linked to a national network that most likely includes your bank at home.

The **Cirrus** (© 800/424-7787; [www.mastercard.com](http://www.mastercard.com)) and **PLUS** (© 800/843-7587; [www.visa.com](http://www.visa.com)) networks span the globe; look at the back of your bank card to see which network you're on, then call or check online for ATM locations at your destination. Be sure you know your personal identification number (PIN) before you leave home and be sure to find out your daily withdrawal limit before you depart. Also keep in mind that many banks impose a fee every time a card is used at a different bank's ATM, and that fee can be higher for international transactions (up to \$5 or more) than for domestic ones (where they're rarely more than \$1.50). On top of this, the bank from which you withdraw cash may charge its own fee. To compare banks' ATM fees within the U.S., use [www.bankrate.com](http://www.bankrate.com). For international withdrawal fees, ask your bank.

You can also get cash advances on your credit card at an ATM. Keep in mind that credit card companies try to protect themselves from theft by limiting the funds someone can withdraw outside their home country, so call your credit card company before you leave home. And keep in mind that you'll pay interest from the moment of your withdrawal, even if you pay your monthly bills on time.

## CREDIT CARDS

**Visa** and **MasterCard** are now almost universally accepted at most hotels, restaurants, and shops; the majority also accepts **American Express**. **Diners Club** is gaining some ground, especially in Florence and in more expensive establishments throughout the region. If you arrange with your card issuer to enable the card's cash advance option (and get a PIN as well), you can also use them at ATMs.

Some credit card companies recommend that you notify them of any impending trip abroad so that they don't become suspicious when the card is used numerous times in a foreign destination and block your charges. Even if you don't call your credit card company in advance, you can always call the card's toll-free emergency number if a charge is refused—a good reason to carry the phone number with you.

## TRAVELER'S CHECKS

Traveler's checks are something of an anachronism from the days before the ATM made cash accessible at any time. However, keep in mind that you will likely be charged an ATM withdrawal fee if the bank is not your own, so if you're withdrawing money every day, you might be better off with traveler's checks—provided that you don't mind showing identification every time you want to cash one.

Most banks issue checks under the names of **American Express** (☎ 800/721-9768 in the U.S. and Canada; [www.americanexpress.com](http://www.americanexpress.com)) and **Thomas Cook** (☎ 800/223-7373 in the U.S. and Canada, or 44-1733-318-950 collect from anywhere in the world; [www.thomascook.com](http://www.thomascook.com))—both offer versions that can be countersigned by you or your companion—**Visa** (☎ 800/227-6811 in the U.S. and Canada, or 44-020-7937-8091 collect from anywhere in the world; [www.visa.com](http://www.visa.com)), or **Citicorp** (☎ 800/645-6556 in the U.S. and Canada, or 813/623-1709 collect from anywhere in the world). AAA members can obtain Visa checks without a commission fee at most AAA offices or by calling ☎ 866/339-3378. Note that you'll get the worst possible exchange rate if you pay for a purchase or hotel room directly with a traveler's check; it's better to trade in the traveler's checks for euros at a bank or the American Express office.

To report lost or stolen traveler's checks in Italy, call toll-free: **American Express** (☎ 800/872-000), **Thomas Cook** (☎ 800/872-050), **Visa** (☎ 800/874-155), or **Citicorp** (☎ 813/623-1709 collect from anywhere).



## 4 When to Go

The best times to visit Florence are in the **spring** and **fall**. Starting in late May, the **summer** tourist rush really picks up, and from July to mid-September Italy is teeming with visitors. August is the worst month to visit. Not only does it get uncomfortably hot, muggy, and crowded (the lines for the Uffizi and the Accademia can stretch for blocks), but the entire country goes on vacation at least from August 15 until the end of the month, and many Italians take off the entire month. Many hotels, restaurants, and shops are closed—except at the spas, beaches, and islands, which are where 70% of the Italians are headed. In **winter** (late Oct to Easter), most sights go on shorter winter hours or are closed for restoration and rearrangement, many hotels and restaurants take a month or two off between November and February, spa and beach destinations become padlocked ghost towns, and it can get much colder than most people expect—it may even snow on occasion.

### WEATHER

It can get uncomfortably hot at the height of August in Florence, a valley city. The long spring is temperate and very comfortable, with occasional showers. Fall is also fairly mild, with lots of rainfall being the only drawback. Winter, though mild for most months, can get quite cold in late December or January; it can drizzle a great deal, and snowfall isn't impossible.

### HOLIDAYS

Official state holidays include January 1, January 6 (Epiphany), Easter Sunday and Monday, April 25 (Liberation Day), May 1 (Labor Day), August 15 (Ferragosto and Assumption Day), November 1 (All Saints Day), December 8 (Day of the Immaculate Conception), December 25, and December 26 (Santo Stefano). Florence also shuts down to honor its patron, St. John the Baptist, on June 24.

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### Hot Tickets

For major events where tickets should be procured well before arriving on the spot, check out **Box Office** at ☎ **055-210-804** or [www.boxoffice.it](http://www.boxoffice.it). They will only deliver tickets to an Italian address, but you can buy ahead of time and have tickets held for you.

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## 5 Travel Insurance

Check your existing insurance policies and credit-card coverage before you buy travel insurance. You may already be covered for lost luggage, canceled tickets or medical expenses. The cost of travel insurance varies widely, depending on the cost and length of your trip, your age, health, and the type of trip you're taking.

**TRIP-CANCELLATION INSURANCE** Trip-cancellation insurance helps you get your money back if you have to back out of a trip, if you have to go home early, or if your travel supplier goes bankrupt. Allowed reasons for cancellation can range from sickness to natural disasters to the State Department declaring your destination unsafe for travel. (Insurers usually won't cover vague fears, though, as many travelers discovered who tried to cancel their trips in Oct 2001 because they were wary of flying.) In this unstable world, trip-cancellation insurance is a good buy if you're getting tickets well in advance—who knows what the state of the world, or of your airline, will be in 9 months? Insurance policy details vary, so read the fine print—and especially make sure that your airline or cruise line is on the list of carriers covered in case of bankruptcy. For information, contact one of the following insurers: **Access America** (☎ 800/807-3982; [www.accessamerica.com](http://www.accessamerica.com)); **Travel Guard International** (☎ 800/826-4919; [www.travelguard.com](http://www.travelguard.com)); **Travel Insured International** (☎ 800/243-3174; [www.travelinsured.com](http://www.travelinsured.com)); and **Travellex Insurance Services** (☎ 888/457-4602; [www.travellex-insurance.com](http://www.travellex-insurance.com)).

**MEDICAL INSURANCE** For travel overseas, most health plans (including Medicare and Medicaid) do not provide coverage, and the ones that do often require you to pay for services upfront and reimburse you only after you return home. Even if your plan does cover overseas treatment, most out-of-country hospitals make you pay your bills upfront, and send you a refund only after you've returned home and filed the necessary paperwork with your insurance company. As a safety net, you may want to buy travel medical insurance, particularly if you're traveling to a remote or high-risk area where emergency evacuation is a possible scenario. If you require additional medical insurance, try **MEDEX Assistance** (☎ 410/453-6300; [www.medexassist.com](http://www.medexassist.com)) or **Travel Assistance International** (☎ 800/821-2828; [www.travelassistance.com](http://www.travelassistance.com); for general information on services, call the company's Worldwide Assistance Services, Inc., at ☎ 800/777-8710; [www.worldwideassistance.com](http://www.worldwideassistance.com)).

Again, most health insurance plans covering out-of-country illnesses and hospital stays require you to pay your local bills up front (your coverage takes the form of a refund after you've returned and filed the paperwork). However, **Blue Cross/Blue Shield members** (☎ **800/810-BLUE** or [www.bluecares.com](http://www.bluecares.com) for a list of participating hospitals) can now use their plans and cards at select hospitals abroad as they would at home, which means much lower out-of-pocket costs. In Florence, the card is honored at the **Villa Donatello**, Piazza Donatello 14 (☎ **055-323-3373**).

**LOST-LUGGAGE INSURANCE** On international flights (including U.S. portions of international trips), checked baggage is automatically covered at approximately \$9.07 per pound, up to approximately \$635 per checked bag. If you plan to check items more valuable than the standard liability, see if your valuables are covered by your homeowner's policy, get baggage insurance as part of your comprehensive travel-insurance package, or buy Travel Guard's "BagTrak" product. Don't buy insurance at the airport, as it's usually overpriced. Be sure to take any valuables or irreplaceable items with you in your carry-on luggage, as many valuables (including books, money and electronics) aren't covered by airline policies.

If your luggage is lost, immediately file a lost-luggage claim at the airport, detailing the luggage contents. For most airlines, you must report delayed, damaged, or lost baggage within 4 hours of arrival. The airlines are required to deliver luggage, once found, directly to your house or destination free of charge.

## 6 Health

There are no special health risks you'll encounter in Italy. The tap water is safe, and medical resources are of a high quality. In fact, with Italy's partially socialized medicine, you can usually stop by any hospital emergency room with an ailment, get swift and courteous service, be given a diagnosis and a prescription, and sent on your way with a wave and a smile—and not even a sheet of paperwork to fill out.

In most cases, your existing health plan will provide the coverage you need. But double-check; you may want to buy **travel medical insurance** instead. (See the section on insurance, above.) Bring your insurance ID card with you when you travel.

If you suffer from a chronic illness, consult your doctor before your departure. For conditions like epilepsy, diabetes, or heart problems, wear a **Medic Alert Identification Tag** (☎ **800/825-3785**;

www.medicalert.org), which will immediately alert doctors to your condition and give them access to your records through Medic Alert's 24-hour hot line.

Pack **prescription medications** in your carry-on luggage, and carry prescription medications in their original containers, with pharmacy labels—otherwise they won't make it through airport security. Also bring along copies of your prescriptions in case you lose your pills or run out. Don't forget an extra pair of contact lenses or prescription glasses. Carry the generic name of prescription medicines, in case a local pharmacist is unfamiliar with the brand name.

Contact the **International Association for Medical Assistance to Travelers (IAMAT; ☎ 716/754-4883** or 416/652-0137; www.iamat.org) for tips on travel and health concerns in the countries you're visiting, and lists of local, English-speaking doctors. In **Canada**, contact them at 40 Regal Road, Guelph, Ont., N1K 1B5 (☎ **519/836-0102**; fax 519/836-3412); and in **New Zealand** at P.O. Box 5049, Christchurch 5 (fax 643/352-4630).

The United States **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** (☎ **800/311-3435**; www.cdc.gov) provides up-to-date information on necessary vaccines and health hazards by region or country. Any foreign consulate can provide a list of area doctors who speak English. If you get sick, consider asking your hotel concierge to recommend a local doctor—even his or her own. You can also try the emergency room at a local hospital; many have walk-in clinics for emergency cases that are not life threatening. You may not get immediate attention, but you won't pay the high price of an emergency room visit.

## 7 Specialized Travel Resources

### FOR TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

Italy certainly doesn't win any medals for being overly accessible, though a few of the top museums and churches are beginning at least to install ramps at the entrances, and a few hotels are converting first-floor rooms into accessible units by widening the doors and bathrooms. Buses and trains can cause problems as well, with high, narrow doors and steep steps at entrances. There are, however, seats reserved on public transportation for travelers with disabilities.

Luckily, there's an endless list of organizations to help you plan your trip and offer specific advice before you go. Many travel agencies offer customized tours and itineraries for travelers with disabilities. **Flying Wheels Travel** (☎ **507/451-5005**; www.flyingwheelstravel.com)

offers escorted tours and cruises that emphasize sports and private tours in minivans with lifts. **Accessible Journeys** (☎ 800/846-4537 or 610/521-0339; www.disabilitytravel.com) caters specifically to slow walkers and wheelchair travelers and their families and friends.

Other helpful organizations include the **Society for Accessible Travel and Hospitality** (☎ 212/447-7284; www.sath.org; annual membership fees \$45 adults, \$30 seniors and students), which offers a wealth of travel resources for all types of disabilities and informed recommendations on destinations, access guides, travel agents, tour operators, vehicle rentals, and companion services; and the **American Foundation for the Blind** (☎ 800/232-5463; www.afb.org), which provides information on traveling with Seeing Eye dogs.

## FOR GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

Since 1861, Italy has had liberal legislation regarding homosexuality, but that doesn't mean it has been looked on favorably in a Catholic country. Homosexuality is much more accepted in the north than in the south, especially in Sicily, although Taormina has long been a gay Mecca. However, all major towns and cities have an active gay life, especially Florence, Rome, and Milan, which considers itself the "gay capital" of Italy and is the headquarters of **ARCI Gay**, the country's leading gay organization with branches throughout Italy. Capri is the gay resort of Italy, rivaled only by the gay beaches of Venice.

**The International Gay and Lesbian Travel Association (IGLTA;** ☎ 800/448-8550 or 954/776-2626; www.iglta.org) is the trade association for the gay and lesbian travel industry, and offers an online directory of gay- and lesbian-friendly travel businesses; go to their website and click on "Members."

Many agencies offer tours and travel itineraries specifically for gay and lesbian travelers. **Above and Beyond Tours** (☎ 800/397-2681; www.abovebeyondtours.com) is the exclusive gay and lesbian tour operator for United Airlines. **Now, Voyager** (☎ 800/255-6951; www.nowvoyager.com) is a well-known San Francisco-based gay-owned and operated travel service.

The following travel guides and magazines are available at most travel bookstores and gay and lesbian bookstores, or you can order them online, where you can also visit Gay.com.

*Frommer's Gay & Lesbian Europe* (Wiley Publishing, Inc.) is an excellent travel resource, and includes chapters on Rome and Florence.

**Gay.com Travel** (☎ 800/929-2268 or 415/644-8044; www.gay.com/travel or www.outandabout.com), offers detailed listings and coverage of gay-owned, gay-oriented, and gay-friendly lodging, dining, sightseeing, nightlife, and shopping establishments, in every important destination worldwide.

*Spartacus International Gay Guide* (Bruno Gmunder Verlag; www.spartacusworld.com/gayguide) and *Odysseus: The International Gay Travel Planner* (Odysseus Enterprises Ltd.), both good, annual English-language guidebooks focused on gay men; the *Damron* guides (www.damron.com), with separate, annual books for gay men and lesbians; and *Gay Travel A to Z: The World of Gay & Lesbian Travel Options at Your Fingertips* by Marianne Ferrari (Ferrari International; Box 35575, Phoenix, AZ 85069), a very good gay and lesbian guidebook series.

## FOR SENIORS

Italy is a multigenerational culture that doesn't tend to marginalize its seniors, and older people are treated with a great deal of respect and deference throughout Italy. But there are few specific programs, associations, or concessions made for them. The one exception is on admission prices for museums and sights, where those over 60 or 65 will often get in at a reduced rate or even free. As a senior in Italy, you're *un anziano* (*una anziana* if you're a woman) or "ancient one"—consider it a term of respect and let people know you're one if you think a discount may be in the works.

Members of **AARP**, 601 E St. NW, Washington, DC 20049 (☎ 800/424-3410 or 202/434-2277; www.aarp.org), get discounts on hotels, airfares, and car rentals. AARP offers members a wide range of benefits, including *AARP The Magazine* and a monthly newsletter. Anyone over 50 can join.

Sadly, most major **airlines** have in recent years canceled their discount programs for seniors, but you can always ask when booking. Of the big **car-rental** agencies, only National currently gives an AARP discount, but the many rental dealers that specialize in Europe—Auto Europe, Kemwel, Europe-by-Car—offer seniors 5% off their already low rates. In most European cities, people over 60 or 65 get reduced admission at theaters, museums, and other attractions, and they can often get discount fares or cards on public transportation and national rail systems. Carrying ID with proof of age can pay off in all these situations.

**Grand Circle Travel**, 347 Congress St., Boston, MA 02210 (☎ 800/959-0405 or 800/321-2835; www.gct.com), is one of the

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**Tips A Note for Families & Seniors**

At most state-run museums, children under 18 and seniors get in free *but only if* they hail from one of the countries that has signed a reciprocal international cultural agreement to allow children and seniors this privilege. These countries include England, Canada, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, and indeed much of the world—but *not* the United States. (However, many museum guards either don't ask for citizenship ID or wave kids and seniors on through anyway.) Children and seniors, no matter what their nationality, also get discounts on trains.

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literally hundreds of travel agencies specializing in vacations for seniors. But beware: Many packages are of the tour-bus variety. Seniors seeking more independent travel should probably consult a regular travel agent. **SAGA Holidays**, 1161 Boylston St., Boston, MA 02115 (☎ 800/343-0273; [www.sagaholidays.com](http://www.sagaholidays.com)), has 40 years of experience running all-inclusive tours and cruises for those 50 and older. They also sponsor the more substantial “Road Scholar Tours” (☎ 800/621-2151), fun-loving tours with an educational bent. **Elderhostel** (☎ 877/426-8056; [www.elderhostel.org](http://www.elderhostel.org)) arranges study programs for those ages 55 and over (and a spouse or companion of any age) in the U.S. and in more than 80 countries around the world. Most courses last 2 to 4 weeks abroad, and many include airfare, accommodations in university dormitories or modest inns, meals, and tuition.

**FOR FAMILIES**

If you have enough trouble getting your kids out of the house in the morning, dragging them thousands of miles away may seem like an insurmountable challenge. But family travel can be immensely rewarding, giving you new ways of seeing the world through smaller pairs of eyes. As an added plus, little helps mature the kids faster than international travel.

**Familyhostel** (☎ 800/733-9753; [www.learn.unh.edu/familyhostel](http://www.learn.unh.edu/familyhostel)) takes the whole family, including kids ages 8 to 15, on moderately priced domestic and international learning vacations. Lectures, field trips, and sightseeing are guided by a team of academics.

You can find good family-oriented vacation advice on the Internet from sites like the **Family Travel Network** ([www.familytravelnetwork.com](http://www.familytravelnetwork.com)); **Traveling Internationally with Your Kids**

([www.travelwithyourkids.com](http://www.travelwithyourkids.com)), a comprehensive site offering sound advice for long-distance and international travel with children; and **Family Travel Files** ([www.thefamilytravelfiles.com](http://www.thefamilytravelfiles.com)), which offers an online magazine and a directory of off-the-beaten-path tours and tour operators for families.

## FOR WOMEN

Women will feel remarkably welcome in Italy—sometimes a bit too welcome, actually. Yes, it sometimes seems every young Italian male is out to prove himself the most irresistible lover on the planet; remember, this is the land of Romeo and Casanova, so they have a lot to live up to.

From parading and preening like peacocks to wooing each passing female with words, whistles, and, if they can get close enough, the entirely inappropriate butt-pinch, these men and their attentiveness can range from charming and flattering to downright annoying and frustrating. The more exotic you look—statuesque blondes, ebony-skinned beauties, or simply an American accent—the more irresistible you become to these suitors. And, as everyone around the world knows from watching Hollywood movies, American women are all uninhibited and passionate sex kittens. That this isn't actually true doesn't make much of a dent in Italian boys' fantasies.

Flirting back at these would-be Romeos, even mildly, only convinces them that you're ready to jump into bed. Heck, mere eye contact encourages them to redouble their efforts. Unless you want all this attention, take your cue from Italian women, who may wear tight skirts and fishnets but, you'll notice, usually ignore the men around them entirely unless it's someone they're already walking with.

If you find yourself moderately molested on a bus or other crowded place—mostly the infamous bottom-pinching and rather inappropriate rubbing—tell him to “*Smetti la!*” (stop it) and proceed to pinch, scratch, elbow, and so on to further discourage him or enlist the aid of the nearest convenient elderly Italian woman to noisily chastise the offender and perhaps whap him with her purse.

Note that much of the attention is kept to verbal flirtation and that occasional inappropriate touching that earns one a slap in the face. These men want to conquer you with their charm, not their muscles; rape is near unheard-of in Italy. Most women report feeling far safer wandering the deserted streets of an Italian city back to their hotels at 2am than they do in their own neighborhoods back home, and that feeling is largely justified. You'll probably get tons of ride offers, though, from would-be chivalrous knights atop their Vespa or Fiat steeds.



## FOR STUDENTS

You'd be wise to arm yourself with an **International Student Identity Card (ISIC)**, which offers substantial savings on rail passes, plane tickets, and entrance fees; your own school's ID will often suffice to snag you those discount admission at sights and museums across Europe, but the ISIC helps. It also provides you with basic health and life insurance and a 24-hour help line. The card is available for \$22 from **STA Travel** (☎ 800/781-4040, and if you're not in North America there's probably a local number in your country; www.statravel.com), the biggest student travel agency in the world.

If you're no longer a student but are still under 26, you can get an **International Youth Travel Card (IYTC)** for the same price from the same person, which entitles you to some discounts (but not on museum admissions). (*Note:* STA Travel bought competitors **Council Travel** and **USIT Campus** after they went bankrupt. It's still operating some offices under the Council name, but they're owned by STA.) **Travel CUTS** (☎ 800/667-2887 or 416/614-2887; www.travelcuts.com) offers similar services for both Canadians and U.S. residents. Irish students should turn to **USIT** (☎ 01/602-1600; www.usitnow.ie).

## 8 Getting There

### BY PLANE

#### FROM NORTH AMERICA

No carrier flies directly from the United States or Canada to any airport in Florence; however, with most airlines (and their affiliates) you can connect through a handful of European cities to the small international airports at Pisa or Florence. You may find it most convenient simply to fly to Rome and connect to Florence by plane (a bit over 1 hr.) or by train (close to 3 hr.).

**THE MAJOR AIRLINES** Italy's national airline, **Alitalia** (☎ 800/223-5730; www.alitalia.it), offers more flights daily to Italy than any other airline. It flies direct to both Rome and Milan from New York, Newark, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Miami. You can connect in Rome or Milan to any other Italian destination, including Florence. If you're flying from the New York City area and planning to connect to Florence, note that itineraries that route you through Milan often have a layover that's 3 hours shorter than one that routes you through Rome's airport.

**British Airways** (☎ 800/247-9297; www.ba.com) flies direct from dozens of U.S. and Canadian cities to London, where you can

get connecting flights to Pisa, Rome, or Milan. **Air Canada** (☎ 888/247-2262 or 800/361-8071 [TTY]; www.aircanada.ca) flies daily from Toronto and Vancouver to Rome. **Continental** (☎ 800/231-0856; www.continental.com) doesn't fly to Italy itself, but it's partnered with Alitalia for the Newark-to-Rome and New York JFK-to-Milan flights, so if you're a Continental Frequent Flyer you can reserve through Continental and rack up the miles.

**Delta** (☎ 800/241-4141; www.delta.com) flies daily out of New York JFK (you can connect from most major U.S. cities) to Rome and Milan, where it's possible to change to one of Delta's local partner airlines (Lufthansa, Iberia, and so on) for the last leg to Tuscany. From either city you can take a train to Florence, or from Rome you can connect to an Alitalia flight to Florence.

Possibly less convenient alternatives are **American Airlines** (☎ 800/433-7300; www.aa.com), whose flights from the United States to Milan all go through Chicago; **United** (☎ 800/528-2929; www.ual.com), which flies once daily to Milan out of New York, Newark, and Washington, D.C. Dulles; or **US Airways** (☎ 800/622-1015; www.usairways.com), which offers one flight daily to Rome out of Philadelphia. (You can connect through Philly from most major U.S. cities.)

## FROM GREAT BRITAIN & IRELAND

**British Airways** (☎ 0845/773-3377; www.ba.com) flies twice daily from London's Gatwick to Pisa. **Alitalia** (020/8745-8200; www.alitalia.it) has four daily flights from London to both Rome and Milan and three daily from London Gatwick into Florence. **KLM UK** (formerly Air UK; ☎ 08705/074-074; www.klmuk.com) flies several times per week from London Heathrow to Milan (both airports) and Rome. In each case, there's a layover in Amsterdam. No-frills upstart **Ryanair** (☎ 0871/246-0000 in the U.K.; www.ryanair.com) will fly you from London to Pisa (as well as Rome, Milan, Bologna, Ancona, and other Italian destinations); its competitor EasyJet (www.easyjet.com) flies from London to Milan and Bologna. Both usually charge less than £25 each way for such service.

The best and cheapest way to get to Italy from Ireland is to make your way first to London and fly from there to Rome or direct to Pisa (see above; to book through **British Airways** in Ireland, dial ☎ 800/626-747). **Aer Lingus** (☎ 0818/365-000 in Ireland; www.aerlingus.com) flies direct from Dublin to both Rome and Milan about 5 days a week. **Alitalia** (☎ 01/677-5171) puts you on a British Midland to get you to London, where you change to an

Alitalia plane for the trip to Rome. For **Ryanair**, call ☎ **0818/303-030** in Ireland.

### FROM AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND

**Alitalia** (☎ **02-9922-1555**; [www.alitalia.it](http://www.alitalia.it)) has a flight from Sydney to Rome every Thursday and Saturday. **Qantas** (☎ **13-13-13** in Australia, or 0649/357-8900 in Auckland, NZ; [www.qantas.com](http://www.qantas.com)) flies three times daily to Rome via Bangkok, leaving Australia from Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, or Cairns. Qantas will also book you through one of these Australian cities from Auckland, Wellington, or Christchurch in New Zealand. You can also look into flying first into London and connecting to Italy from there. (There are more flights, and it may work out to be cheaper.)

### GETTING TO FLORENCE FROM ROME'S AIRPORTS

Most international flights to Rome will arrive at **Fiumicino Airport** (officially named **Leonardo da Vinci International Airport**, but few, including the airlines themselves, call it that). Some inter-European and transatlantic charter flights may land at the less convenient **Ciampino Airport**. You can connect to a plane at either to take you to Florence's airport, but it's often simpler, almost as fast in the long run, and cheaper to take the train.

**Fiumicino** (☎ **06-659-51**; [www.adr.it](http://www.adr.it)) is 30km (19 miles) from Rome's center. You can take the **express train** (8.80€/€10) from Fiumicino to Rome's central train station, Termini. A taxi to the station costs about 36€ (\$43). From Termini, you can grab one of many daily trains to Florence. If you happen to fly into **Ciampino Airport** (☎ **06-7934-0297**), 15km (9 miles) south of the city, a none-too-frequent COTRAL bus will take you to the Anagnina metro station, where you can take the metro to Termini, the whole trip costing around 3€ (\$3.60). A taxi to Rome's center from Ciampino should run about 25€ (\$30).

### GETTING TO FLORENCE FROM MILAN'S AIRPORT

Your flight may land at either **Linate Airport** (☎ **02-7485-2200**; [www.sea-aeroportmilano.it](http://www.sea-aeroportmilano.it)), about 8km (5 miles) southeast of the city, or **Malpensa Airport** (☎ **02-2680-0613**), 45km (28 miles) from downtown—closer to Como than to Milan itself.

From **Malpensa**, a 40-minute express train heads half-hourly to Cadorna train station in western Milan rather than the larger or more central Stazione Centrale from which most trains onward to

Florence will leave (you'll have to take the Metro to get there). To grab a bus instead, which will take you directly to the central downtown rail station, your choices are **Malpensa Express** (☎ 02-9619-2301) which costs 5.05€ (\$6.05), or the slightly cheaper **Malpensa Shuttle** (☎ 02-5858-3185)—same service, different price: 4.50€ (\$5.40)—two or three times per hour for the 50-minute ride to the east side of Milan's Stazione Centrale.

From **Linate**, buses, **STAM buses** (☎ 02-717-100) make the 25-minute trip to Milan's Stazione Centrale, every 20 to 30 minutes daily from 7am to 11pm, and cost 2€ (\$2.40; buy on bus). The slightly slower city bus no. 73 leaves hourly for the S. Babila metro stop downtown (1€/\$1.20 for a regular bus ticket bought from any news agent inside the airport, but not on-board).

From Milan's Stazione Centrale, you can get trains to Florence (see "Arriving" in chapter 2).

## GETTING THROUGH THE AIRPORT

With the federalization of airport security, security procedures at U.S. airports are more stable and consistent than ever. Generally, you'll be fine if you arrive at the airport **2 hours** before an international flight; if you show up late, tell an airline employee and she'll probably whisk you to the front of the line.

Bring your **passport** as photo ID (you need that to get into Italy anyway!) and if you've got an e-ticket, print out the **official confirmation page**; you might need to show it at the security checkpoint.

Security lines are getting shorter, but some doozies remain. If you have trouble standing for long periods of time, tell an airline

### *(Tips)* The Milan Connection

Note that if you find yourself flying into Milan, the domestic airport (Linate) is separate from the international one (Malpensa), and transferring planes to a connecting flight to Florence requires switching airports (an 8€/\$9.60 bus connects the two airports), sometimes changing airlines, and an innate trust in the gods of luggage transfer. If you fly into Milan, a train to Florence is probably your best bet. This isn't a problem for flights on Alitalia, however, which uses Milan's Malpensa airport for both international arrivals and domestic departures—a blatantly nationalistic protectionist scheme which has all other major airlines, European and American, up in arms.

employee; the airline will provide a wheelchair. Speed up security by **not wearing metal objects** such as big belt buckles or clanky earrings. If you've got metallic body parts, a note from your doctor can prevent a long chat with the security screeners. Keep in mind that only **ticketed passengers** are allowed past security, except for folks escorting passengers with disabilities or children.

Federalization has stabilized **what you can carry on** and **what you can't**. The general rule is that sharp things are out, nail clippers are okay, and food and beverages must be passed through the X-ray machine—but that security screeners can't make you drink from your coffee cup. Bring food in your carry-on rather than checking it, as explosive-detection machines used on checked luggage have been known to mistake food (especially chocolate, for some reason) for bombs. Travelers in the U.S. are allowed one carry-on bag, plus a "personal item" such as a purse, briefcase, or laptop bag. Carry-on hoarders can stuff all sorts of things into a laptop bag; as long as it has a laptop in it, it's still considered a personal item. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has issued a list of restricted items; check its website at [www.tsa.gov](http://www.tsa.gov) for details.

The TSA has phased out **gate check-in** at all U.S. airports. Passengers with E-tickets and without checked bags can still beat the ticket-counter lines by using **electronic kiosks** or even **online check-in**. Ask your airline which alternatives are available, and if you're using a kiosk, bring the credit card you used to book the ticket. If you're checking bags, you will still be able to use most airlines' kiosks; again call your airline for up-to-date information. **Curbside check-in** is also a good way to avoid lines, although a few airlines still ban curbside check-in entirely; call before you go.

At press time, the TSA is also recommending that you **not lock your checked luggage** so screeners can search it by hand if necessary (and in this author's experience, they often find it necessary), and this often happens after you've abandoned it to the baggage handling system, so you won't be on hand to unlock the thing for them; they'll simply destroy the lock to get to your stuff. The agency says to use plastic "zip ties" instead, which can be bought at hardware stores and can be easily cut off.

## BY CAR

You'll get the **best rental rate** if you book your car from home instead of renting direct in Italy—in fact, if you decide to rent once you're over there, it's worth it to call home to have someone arrange

it all from there. You must be over 25 to rent from most agencies (although some accept 21).

Though it once was smart shopping to see what rates Italian companies were offering, they're all now allied with the big agents in the States: **Avis** (☎ 800/230-4898, or in Italy toll-free 199-100-133; www.avis.com), **Budget** (☎ 800/527-0700; www.budget.com), **Hertz** (☎ 800/654-3131 or 800/654-3001; www.hertz.com), and **National** (☎ 800/227-7368; www.nationalcar.com).

You can usually get a better rate by going through one of the rental companies specializing in Europe: **Auto Europe** (☎ 888/223-5555; www.autoeurope.com), **Europe by Car** (☎ 800/223-1516 or 212/581-3040; www.europebycar.com), **Kemwell** (☎ 800/678-0678; www.kemwell.com), and **Maiellano** (☎ 800/223-1616 or 718/727-0044). With constant price wars and special packages, it always pays to shop around among all the above.

When offered the choice between a compact car and a larger one, always choose the smaller car (unless you have a large group)—you'll need it for maneuvering the winding, steeply graded Italian roads and the impossibly narrow alleyways of towns and cities. Likewise, if you can drive stick shift, order one; it'll help you better navigate the hilly terrain. It's also a good idea to opt for the **Collision Damage Waiver (CDW)** that for only \$10 to \$20 a day gives you the peace of mind and nerves of steel that driving in Italy requires; you can pay only \$7 per day for this service if you buy it through a third party insurer such as Travel Guard (www.travelguard.com). Although the 19% IVA value-added tax is unavoidable, you can do away with the government airport pick-up tax of 10% by picking up your car at an office in town.

## BY TRAIN

Every day, up to 14 **Eurostar** trains (reservations in London ☎ 0875/186-186; www.eurostar.com) zip from London to Paris's Gare du Nord via the **Chunnel (Eurotunnel)** in a bit over 4 hours. In Paris, you can transfer to the Paris Gare de Lyon station or Paris Bercy for one of three daily direct trains to **Milan** (from which you can transfer to Florence) or two to **Florence**. Some of the Milan runs are high-speed TGV trains, a 6½-hour ride requiring a seat reservation. At least one will be an overnight Euronight (EN) train, with reservable sleeping couchettes; the Euronight leaves Paris around 10pm and gets into Milan around 8:45am. The two Euronight trains going directly from Paris to Florence take 12½ hours.

The definitive 500-page book listing all official European train routes and schedules is the *Thomas Cook European Timetable*, available in the United States for \$28 (plus \$4.50 shipping and handling) from Forsyth Travel Library, P.O. Box 2975, Shawnee Mission, KS 66201 (☎ **800/367-7984**) or at travel specialty stores. You can also order the schedule online at **[www.thomascooktimetables.com](http://www.thomascooktimetables.com)**.