Italy, Holy See (Vatican City) and San Marino

Recent Embassy Notices for American Citizens

COUNTRY DESCRIPTION: Italy is a developed democracy with a modern economy. The Holy See is a sovereign entity that serves as the ecclesiastical, governmental and administrative capital of the Roman Catholic Church, physically located within the State of the Vatican City inside Rome, with a unique, non-traditional economy. San Marino is a developed, constitutional democratic republic, also independent of Italy, with a modern economy. Tourist facilities are widely available. Read the Department of State Background Notes on Italy, the Holy See, and San Marino for additional information.

REGISTRATION / EMBASSY LOCATION: If you are going to live in or visit Italy, please take the time to tell our Embassy or the nearest Consulate about your trip. If you check in, we can keep you up to date with important safety and security announcements. It will also help your friends and family get in touch with you in an emergency. Here’s the link to the Department of State’s travel registration page.

Local embassy information is available below and at the Department of State’s list of embassies and consulates.

The U.S. Embassy Rome
Via V. Veneto 119/A, Rome, Italy
Telephone: 39-06-46741
Facsimile: 39-06-4674-2217

ENTRY / EXIT REQUIREMENTS Italy is a party to the Schengen agreement. As such, U.S. citizens may enter Italy for up to 90 days for tourist or business purposes without a visa. The passport should be valid for at least three months beyond the period of stay. For further details about travel into and within Schengen countries, please see our Schengen Fact sheet.

For all other purposes, you need a visa and you must get one from the Italian Embassy or Consulates before entering Italy. For further information concerning visas and entry requirements for Italy, you may contact the Embassy of Italy at 3000 Whitehaven Street NW, Washington, DC 20008, or via telephone at (202) 612-4400; or Italian Consulates General in Boston, Chicago, Detroit, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, Newark, New Orleans, New York, Philadelphia, or San Francisco, accessible through the Italian Embassy website.

Are you a non-resident? Americans staying or traveling within Italy for less than three (3) months are considered non-residents. This includes persons on vacation, those taking professional trips, students registered at an authorized school, or persons performing research or independent study.

Under Italian law, all non-residents are required to complete a dichiarazione di presenza.
(declaration of presence). Tourists arriving from a non-Schengen-country (e.g. the United States) should obtain a stamp in their passport at the airport on the day of arrival. This stamp is considered the equivalent of the declaration of presence. Tourists arriving from a Schengen-country (e.g. France) must request the declaration of presence form from a local police office (commissariato di zona), police headquarters (questura) or their place of stay (e.g hotel, hostel, campgrounds) and submit the form to the police or to their place of stay within eight business days of arrival. It is important that applicants keep a copy of the receipt issued by the Italian authorities. Failure to complete a declaration of presence is punishable by expulsion from Italy. Additional information may be obtained (in Italian only) from the Portale Immigrazione and the Polizia di Stato.

**Are you a resident?** Americans staying in Italy for more than three (3) months are considered residents and must obtain a permesso di soggiorno (permit of stay). This includes Americans who will work or transact business and persons who want to simply live in Italy. An application "kit" for the permesso di soggiorno may be requested from one of 14,000 national post offices (Poste Italiane). The kit must then be returned to one of 5,332 designated Post Office acceptance locations. It is important that applicants keep a copy of the receipt issued by the post office. Additional information may be obtained from the Italian immigration website. Within 20 days of receiving the permit to stay in Italy, Americans must go to the local Vital Statistics Bureau (Anagrafe of the Comune) to apply for residency. It generally takes one to two months to receive the certificate of residence (Certificato di Residenza).

The U.S. Department of State is unaware of any HIV/AIDS entry restrictions for visitors to or foreign residents of Italy.

Information about dual nationality or the prevention of international child abduction can be found on our website. For further information about customs regulations, please read our Customs Information sheet.

**SAFETY AND SECURITY:** Several major earthquake fault lines cross Italy. Principal Italian cities, with the exception of Naples, do not lie near these faults; however, smaller tourist towns, such as Assisi, do lie near faults, and have experienced earthquakes. An earthquake severely damaged the town of L'Aquila in 2009. General information about disaster preparedness is available online from the U.S. Federal Management Agency (FEMA). Detailed information on Italy’s earthquake fault lines is available from the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS).

Italy also has several active volcanoes generating geothermal events. Mt. Etna, on the eastern tip of the island of Sicily, has been erupting intermittently since 2000. Mt. Vesuvius, located near Naples, is currently capped and not active. Activity at Mt. Vesuvius is monitored by an active seismic network and sensor system, and no recent seismic activity has been recorded. Two of Italy’s smaller islands, Stromboli and Vulcano, in the Aeolian Island chain north of Sicily, also have active volcanoes with lava flows. Detailed information on volcano activity in Italy is available from the USGS.

Politically motivated violence in Italy is most often connected to Italian internal developments or social issues. Italian authorities have found bombs outside public buildings, received bomb threats, and were subjects of letter bombs. Buildings or offices are sometimes the targets of firebombs or Molotov cocktails at night. They are instigated by organized crime or anarchist movements. Americans were not targeted or injured in these instances.
Demonstrations may have an anti-American character. Even demonstrations intended to be peaceful have the potential to turn confrontational and possibly escalate into violence. You should take common sense precautions and follow news reports carefully. Stay up to date by reading the Embassy’s Demonstration Notices.

Italy remains largely free of terrorist incidents; however, like other countries in the Schengen area, Italy’s open borders with its Western European neighbors allow the possibility of terrorist groups entering/exiting the country with anonymity.

Stay up to date by bookmarking our Bureau of Consular Affairs' website, which contains current Travel Warnings and Travel Alerts as well as the Worldwide Caution.

You can also call 1-888-407-4747 toll-free within the U.S. and Canada, or by calling a regular toll line, 1-202-501-4444 from other countries. These numbers are available from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday (except U.S. federal holidays).

You should always try to ensure your safety when traveling overseas. Take some time before travel to improve your personal security—things are not the same everywhere as they are in the United States. Here are some useful tips for traveling safely abroad.

**CRIME:** Italy has a moderate rate of crime. You should exercise extra caution at night and at train stations, airports, nightclubs, bars and outdoor cafes. If you are drinking heavily, your ability to judge situations and make decisions may be impaired and this can make you a target for crime. Young drinkers are particularly vulnerable to robbery and physical and sexual assault.

Petty crimes such as pick-pocketing, theft from parked cars, and purse snatching are serious problems, especially in large cities. Pick-pockets sometimes dress like businessmen. You should not be lulled into a false sense of security by believing that well-dressed individuals are not potential pick-pockets or thieves. Most reported thefts occur at crowded tourist sites, on public buses or trains, or at the major railway stations: Rome’s Termini; Milan’s Centrale; Florence’s Santa Maria Novella; and Naples’ Centrale and Piazza Garibaldi. You should also be alert to theft in Milan’s Malpensa Airport, particularly at car rental agencies. Clients of Internet cafes in major cities are also targeted. Be careful with your bag or purse, as thieves on motor scooters are very quick and can snatch a purse off of your arm from a moving scooter. Resisting these thieves can be hazardous, as some tourists have suffered broken arms and collarbones.

Thieves in Italy often work in groups or pairs. Pairs of accomplices or groups of children are known to divert tourists' attention so that another can pick-pocket them. In one particular routine, one thief throws trash, waste or ketchup at the victim; a second thief assists the victim in cleaning up the mess; and the third discreetly takes the victim's belongings. Criminals on crowded public transportation slit the bottoms of purses or bags with a razor blade or sharp knife removing the contents.

Some travelers in Rome, Florence and Naples have reported incidents where criminals used drugs to assault or rob them. These incidents have been reported near Rome’s Termini train station, at bars and cafes near Rome’s Campo de Fiori and Piazza Navona, and at bars or cafes in the center of Florence and Naples. Criminals using this tactic “befriend” you at a train station, restaurant, café, or bar, and then offer you a drink which is laced with a sleeping drug. When you fall asleep, criminals steal your valuables and may sexually assault you.
Thieves are also known to have impersonated police officers in order to steal. The thief shows you a circular plastic sign with the words "police" or "international police" and then in perfect English asks to see your identification and your money. If this happens to you, you should insist on seeing the officer's identification card (documento), before handing over your wallet as impersonators tend not to carry forged documents. You should immediately report thefts or other crimes to the actual police.

Be alert to the possibility of carjackings and thefts while you are waiting in traffic or stopped at traffic lights. This has been a particular problem in Catania, Sicily. Use particular caution driving at night on highways, when thieves are more likely to strike. There may be a greater incidence of robbery attempts. Americans have reported break-ins of their rental cars during stops at highway service areas; thieves smash car windows and steal everything inside. Theft of small items such as radios, luggage, cameras, briefcases, and even cigarettes from parked cars is prevalent. Vehicles parked near beaches during the summer can be broken into and robbed of valuables. Lock car doors whenever you park, and do not leave packages in your car in plain view.

The U.S. Secret Service in Rome is assisting Italian Law Enforcement authorities in investigating an increase in the appearance of ATM skimming devices. These devices are attached to legitimate bank ATMs, usually located in tourist areas, and capture the account information stored electronically on the card’s magnetic strip. The devices consist of a card reader installed over the legitimate reader and a pin-hole video camera mounted above the keypad that records the customer’s PIN. ATMs with skimming devices installed may also allow normal transactions to occur. The victim’s information is sold, traded on-line, or encoded on another card such as a hotel key card to access the compromised account. Here are some helpful hints to protect against and identify skimming devices:

1. Use ATMs located in well-lighted public areas, or secured inside the bank/business
2. Cover the keypad with one hand as you enter your PIN
3. Look for gaps, tampered appearance, or other irregularities between the metal faceplate of the ATM and the card reader
4. Avoid card readers that are not flush with the face of the ATM
5. Closely monitor your account statements for unauthorized transactions

Organized criminal groups operate throughout Italy, but are more prevalent in the south. They occasionally resort to violence to intimidate or to settle disputes. Though the activities of such groups are not generally targeted at tourists, visitors should be aware that innocent bystanders could be injured.

In many countries around the world, counterfeit and pirated goods are widely available. Transactions involving such products may be illegal under local law. In addition, bringing them back to the United States may result in forfeitures and/or fines. The Computer Crime and Intellectual Property Division in the U.S. Department of Justice has more information on this serious problem.

According to Italian Law (Law 80 of May 14, 2005), anyone caught buying counterfeit goods (for example, DVDs, CDs, watches, purses, bags, belts, sunglasses, etc.) is subject to a fine of no less than EUR 1,000. Police in major Italian cities enforce this law to varying degrees. You are advised to purchase products only from stores and other licensed retailers to avoid unknowingly buying counterfeit and illegal merchandise.
INFORMATION FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME: If you or someone you know is the victim of a crime abroad, you should contact the local police and the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate (see end of this sheet or see the Department of State list of embassies and consulates). If your passport is stolen, we can help you replace it. For violent crimes such as assault and rape, we can, for example, help you find appropriate medical care, contact family members or friends and help you get money from them if you need it. Although the investigation and prosecution of the crime is solely the responsibility of local authorities, consular officers can help you to understand the local criminal justice process and to find an attorney if needed.

The local equivalent to the “911” emergency line in Italy is: 113.

Please see our information on victims of crime, including possible victim compensation programs in the United States. Please see also information regarding assistance for victims of crime in Italy.

CRIMINAL PENALTIES: While you are traveling in another country, you are subject to its laws even if you are a U.S. citizen. Foreign laws and legal systems can be vastly different than our own. These criminal penalties will vary from country to country. There are also some things that might be legal in the country you visit, but still illegal in the United States, and you can be prosecuted under U.S. law if you buy pirated goods or engage in child pornography. While you are overseas, U.S. laws don’t apply. If you do something illegal in your host country, your U.S. passport won’t help you avoid arrest or prosecution. It’s very important to what’s legal and what’s not where you are going. Persons violating Italian laws, even unknowingly, may be expelled, arrested, or imprisoned. Penalties for possessing, using, or trafficking in illegal drugs in Italy are severe, and convicted offenders can expect long jail sentences and heavy fines.

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES: Strikes and other work stoppages occur frequently in the transportation sector (national airlines, airports, trains, and bus lines); most are announced in advance and are of short duration. Reconfirmation of domestic and international flight reservations is highly recommended.

U. S citizens using public transportation while in Italy are reminded they must adhere to local transportation laws and regulations. You must purchase train tickets and validate them by punching them in validating machines usually located near the entrance of train tracks prior to boarding. Failure to follow this procedure may result in an on-the-spot fine by an inspector on the train. You must purchase bus tickets prior to boarding and validate them immediately after boarding. Tickets may be purchased at tobacco stores or kiosks. Failure to follow this procedure may result in an immediate fine imposed by an inspector on the bus. If the violator does not pay the fine on the spot, it will automatically double and will be forwarded to the violator’s home address.

U.S. citizens driving in Italy are reminded that they must adhere to the local driving laws and regulations. Vehicle traffic in some historic downtown areas of cities and towns throughout Italy is limited by a system of permits (called “ZTL” and functioning the same way as an electronic toll system in the United States might on the freeway). Cameras record the license plates of cars driving in parts of the city that require a permit. Although most of the automated verification stations are clearly marked, if a driver passes one it is impossible to know at the time that a violation occurred or has been recorded. Violators are not pulled over or stopped, and there is no personal contact with a police officer. Whenever possible, the fines imposed for these violations are forwarded to the driver’s home in the United States to request payment. The fines are cumulative for each time a driver passes a control point. A similar system of
MEDICAL FACILITIES AND HEALTH INFORMATION: Medical facilities are available, but may be limited outside urban areas. Public hospitals, though generally free of charge for emergency services, sometimes do not maintain the same standards as hospitals in the United States, so you are encouraged to obtain insurance that would cover a stay in a private Italian hospital or clinic. It is almost impossible to obtain an itemized hospital bill from public hospitals, as required by many U.S. insurance companies, because the Italian National Health Service charges one inclusive rate (care services, room and board).

In parts of southern Italy, the lack of adequate trash disposal and incineration sites has led to periodic accumulations of garbage in urban and rural areas. In some cases, residents have burned garbage, resulting in toxic emissions that can aggravate respiratory problems.

The U.S. Navy initiated a public health evaluation in the Naples area in 2008. After finding levels of bacterial and chemical contamination of potential health concern, particularly in samples of area well water, the Navy recommended all personnel living off-base in the Naples area use only bottled water for drinking, cooking, ice-making, and brushing teeth. For more information on safe food and water precautions, see the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website.

Good information on vaccinations and other health precautions can be found via the CDC website. For information about outbreaks of infectious diseases abroad, consult the World Health Organization (WHO) website. The WHO website also contains additional health information for travelers, including detailed country-specific health information.

MEDICAL INSURANCE: You can’t assume your insurance will go with you when you travel. It’s very important to find out BEFORE you leave. You need to ask your insurance company two questions:

- Does my policy apply when I’m out of the U.S.?
- Will it cover emergencies like a trip to a foreign hospital or an evacuation?

In many places, doctors and hospitals still expect payment in cash at the time of service. Your regular U.S. health insurance may not cover doctors’ and hospital visits in other countries. If your policy doesn’t go with you when you travel, it’s a very good idea to take out another one for your trip. For more information, please see our medical insurance overseas page.

TRAFFIC SAFETY AND ROAD CONDITIONS: While in a foreign country, U.S. citizens may encounter road conditions that differ significantly from those in the United States. Italy has one of the highest rates of car accident deaths in the European Union. Streets in Italian historic city centers are often narrow, winding, and congested. Motor scooters are very popular, and scooter drivers often see themselves as exempt from conventions that apply to automobiles. Pedestrians and drivers should be constantly alert to the possibility of scooters’ sudden presence. Most vehicle-related deaths and injuries involve pedestrians or cyclists who are involved in collisions with scooters or other vehicles. Be particularly cautious if you rent a scooter. You should remain vigilant and alert when walking or cycling near traffic. Pedestrians should be careful, as sidewalks can be extremely congested and uneven. Drivers of bicycles, motorcycles, and other vehicles routinely ignore traffic signals and traffic flows, and park and drive on sidewalks. For safety, pedestrians should look carefully in both directions before crossing streets, even when using a
marked crosswalk with a green avanti ("walk") light illuminated.

Traffic lights are limited and often disobeyed, and a different convention of right-of-way is observed. Italy has over 5,600 kilometers (3,480 mi.) of Autostrada, or superhighways. Commercial and individual vehicles travel and pass on these well-maintained roads at very high speeds. In rural areas, a wide range of speed on highways makes for hazardous driving. Roads are generally narrow and often have no guardrails. Travelers in northern Italy, especially in winter, should be aware of fog and poor visibility, responsible for multiple-car accidents each year. Most Italian automobiles are equipped with special fog lights. Roadside assistance in Italy is excellent on the well-maintained toll roads, but limited on secondary roads. Use of safety belts and child restraining devices is mandatory and headlights should be on at all times outside of urban areas.

U.S. citizens driving in Italy should also note that, according to Italian regulation, if a resident of a non-European Union country (e.g. the United States) violates a traffic law, the violator must pay the fine at the time the violation occurs to the police officer issuing the ticket. If the citizen does not or cannot pay the fine at the time, Italian regulation allows the police officer to confiscate the offender’s vehicle (even if the vehicle is a rental vehicle).

For specific information concerning Italian driving permits, vehicle inspection, road tax, and mandatory insurance, contact the Italian Government Tourist Board (ENIT), tel: 212-245-5618; or the A.C.I. (Automobile Club d’Italia) at Via Marsala 14A, 00185 Rome, tel: 39-06-4998-2496. For information on obtaining international drivers licenses, contact AAA or the American Automobile Touring Alliance. Please refer to our Road Safety page for more information. Visit the website of Italy’s national tourist office and national authority responsible for road safety.

**AVIATION SAFETY OVERSIGHT**: The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) assessed the Government of Italy’s Civil Aviation Authority as being in compliance with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) aviation safety standards for oversight of Italy’s air carrier operations. Further information may be found on the FAA safety assessment page.

**CHILDREN’S ISSUES**: Please see our Office of Children’s Issues web pages on intercountry adoption and international parental child abduction.

* * *

This replaces the Country Specific Information for Italy dated July 16, 2009, to update all sections.