



La Dolce Vita

LIFESTYLE

A Little Italian

*The Essential Phrase Guide for Your
Holiday in Italy*

By *La Dolce Vita*
LIFESTYLE

Ciao!



You certainly don't need to speak Italian to enjoy a wonderful holiday in Italy. But knowing just a few words can make all the difference.

Italians genuinely appreciate it when visitors make an effort to speak their language. It doesn't have to be perfect, and it certainly doesn't have to be fluent. Simply saying *buongiorno* when you walk into a shop or *grazie* when someone helps you is often enough to earn a warm smile and instantly create a friendly connection.

To me, it's simply a matter of respect. When you're visiting another country, you're stepping into someone else's culture, traditions and way of life. Making an effort to speak a little Italian is a lovely way of showing your appreciation.

And if you can't quite find the right words? Don't worry. Just switch to English. Most people will happily help you.

I hope this little guide encourages you to use a few Italian phrases during your stay. You may be surprised by how many doors they open.

Buona fortuna!

Rémon & Sahin

A Little Italian Goes a Long Way

Italians absolutely love it when visitors try to speak their beautiful language. While they aren't always known for their patience, everything changes the moment you make an effort in Italian. Even a simple word or two is often met with genuine enthusiasm and appreciation.

There is one small warning, though. As soon as Italians think you speak their language, they'll happily launch into a full conversation. Before you know it, you'll be listening to colorful stories told with dramatic gestures and endless passion. Consider it a compliment, you've been welcomed into their world.

It's also worth remembering that Southern Italy has its own rich collection of regional dialects. Sit at a café terrace in a small town, listen to the conversations around you, and you'll hear expressions that don't appear in any Italian dictionary.

One phrase you're almost guaranteed to hear in Italy is:



"Mintite la giacca ca sta gira frischettu!"

It means:

"Put your jacket on, it's getting chilly!"

Don't be surprised if someone says this while you're still enjoying what feels like a perfectly warm evening. That's simply Italy where locals and visitors often have very different ideas about what counts as cold.

Did you know?

Many people assume everyone in Italy speaks exactly the same Italian. In reality, every region has its own expressions, accents and traditions. In Italy, especially around Salento, the local dialect is an important part of daily life and a source of great regional pride.

Greetings

These are the most useful Italian words and expressions to help you feel at home during your holiday in Italy.

English	Italian
Hello (informal)	Ciao
Hello (formal)	Salve
Good morning	Buongiorno
Good afternoon / Good evening	Buona sera
Have a lovely evening	Buona serata
Goodbye	Arrivederci
See you later	A dopo
See you tomorrow	A domani
How are you? (informal / formal)	Come stai? / Come sta?
I'm fine, thank you!	Bene, grazie!
Is everything alright?	Tutto bene?
It's so lovely to see you!	Che bello vederti!
Welcome!	Benvenuto / Benvenuta
Have fun!	Divertiti!
Have a wonderful holiday!	Buone vacanze!
Have a great weekend!	Buon weekend!

Did you know?

Greeting people is an essential part of everyday life in Italy. Whether you walk into a bakery, a boutique, a café or even a small neighbourhood shop, it's customary to acknowledge the people around you with a friendly

“Buongiorno” or “Buona sera.”

Skipping the greeting may come across as impolite, while taking just a second to say hello immediately creates a warm atmosphere. It's one of the simplest ways to show respect and it's often the quickest way to receive a genuine Italian smile.

Don't be surprised if locals greet complete strangers while walking through a village or waiting in line for a coffee. In Italy, friendliness and good manners are simply part of everyday life.

Local Tip

A smile and a cheerful “Buongiorno!” will often open more doors than perfect Italian ever could.



At a Bar, Restaurant or Shop

One of the highlights of any trip to Italy is the food. Whether you’re enjoying a long lunch overlooking the sea, browsing a local delicatessen or ordering your morning coffee at the neighbourhood bar, knowing a few simple Italian phrases makes every experience more enjoyable.

Below you’ll find the expressions you’re most likely to use during your holiday.



Did you know?

People in Italy usually eat much later than visitors from Northern Europe or North America. While you might be ready for dinner at 6:30 or 7:00 pm, many restaurant kitchens don’t open until 8:00 pm, especially during the summer months.

Arriving too early often means you’ll find an empty restaurant and staff still preparing for the evening service. Rather than rushing, take the opportunity to enjoy an aperitivo in the piazza, watch the world go by and embrace the slower pace of Italian life.

Once dinner begins, meals are meant to be enjoyed at leisure. It’s perfectly normal to spend several hours at the table with good food, local wine and even better company.

Local Tip

In Italy, asking for the bill isn’t considered rude—it simply lets your waiter know you’re ready to leave. Unlike in some countries, the bill is rarely brought to the table until you request it by saying:

“Il conto, per favore.”

You’ll blend in with the locals in no time.

English	Italian
Yes / No	Sì / No
Thank you	Grazie
Please	Per favore
You’re welcome / Here you are	Prego
Sorry (informal)	Scusa
Sorry (formal)	Scusi
I would like...	Vorrei...
How much does this cost?	Quanto costa?
The bill, please.	Il conto, per favore.
May I pay?	Posso pagare?
I’d like to reserve a table for two.	Vorrei prenotare un tavolo per due.
I’m vegetarian.	Sono vegetariano / vegetariana.
I’m vegan.	Sono vegano / vegana.
Do you have a table available?	Avete un tavolo libero?
We have a reservation under the name...	Abbiamo prenotato a nome di...
Is this dish spicy?	È piccante?
What would you recommend?	Cosa consiglia?
The same again, please.	Lo stesso ancora, per favore.
I didn’t order this.	Non ho ordinato questo.
It was absolutely delicious!	Era buonissimo!

Food & Drink

Food and drink are at the heart of everyday life in Italy. Whether you’re ordering an espresso at the local bar, enjoying an aperitivo at sunset or choosing a bottle of regional wine with dinner, these handy phrases will help you order with confidence.

English	Italian
A glass of wine	Un calice di vino
A bottle of water	Una bottiglia d’acqua
Sparkling water	Acqua frizzante
Still water	Acqua naturale
A beer, please	Una birra, per favore
An ice cream cone	Un cono
An ice cream cup	Una coppetta
An espresso, please	Un caffè, per favore
A cappuccino, please	Un cappuccino, per favore
Without sugar	Senza zucchero
With milk	Con latte
The menu, please	Il menù, per favore
What is today’s special?	Qual è il piatto del giorno?
This is delicious!	È buonissimo!
I’m allergic to...	Sono allergico / allergica a...
Gluten-free	Senza glutine

Did you know?

When you’re in Southern Italy, don’t ask for an espresso simply order “un caffè.”

To Italians, caffè automatically means a short, strong espresso. It’s served in a small cup, enjoyed in just a few sips and forms an essential part of daily life.

Ordering un caffè instead of an espresso instantly makes you sound more like a local.

Coffee Etiquette

One of Italy’s most famous unwritten rules concerns cappuccino.

While nobody will stop you from ordering one after lunch or dinner, Italians almost always drink cappuccino only in the morning, usually alongside a pastry for breakfast.

After a meal, the preferred choice is a simple caffè (espresso). If you order a cappuccino at 8:00 pm, don’t be surprised if you receive a slightly amused smile, it happens every day with tourists.

Local Tip

Standing at the bar for your coffee is often cheaper than sitting at a table. Many cafés charge a small service supplement (servizio al tavolo) if you’re served while seated.

Want to blend in? Step up to the counter, order your caffè, drink it like the locals. In under a minute and continue your day.



Shopping & Getting Around

Whether you’re exploring the charming streets of Lecce, browsing local markets in Ostuni or searching for a hidden beach along the Adriatic coast, these practical phrases will make getting around Italy much easier.

From asking for directions to finding the perfect souvenir, a few words of Italian are always appreciated.

English	Italian
Where can I find...?	Dove trovo...?
A pharmacy	Una farmacia
A supermarket	Un supermercato
A cash machine (ATM)	Un bancomat
Left	Sinistra
Right	Destra
Straight ahead	Dritto / Sempre dritto
Where is the toilet?	Dove trovo il bagno?
Open / Closed	Aperto / Chiuso
Do I need to pay for parking?	Devo pagare per il parcheggio?
Where is the parking meter?	Dov’è il parchimetro?
May I park here?	Posso parcheggiare qui?
How long does it take to walk there?	Quanto ci vuole?
Do you have this in another size?	Ce l’avete in un’altra taglia?
Do you have this in another colour?	Ce l’avete in un altro colore?
May I try this on?	Posso provarlo?
Could you gift wrap this, please?	Può farlo come regalo?

Did you know?

Many towns in Italy have different coloured parking zones, and it’s worth understanding what they mean before leaving your car.

- Blue lines usually indicate paid parking.
- White lines are generally free parking.
- Yellow lines are reserved for authorised vehicles or residents.

In many towns, parking charges are suspended during the early afternoon while locals enjoy their riposo the traditional midday break. Rules can vary from town to town, so it’s always worth checking the signs nearby.

Shopping Like a Local

Italy is famous for its family run boutiques, artisan workshops and bustling weekly markets. Rather than rushing, take your time browsing. Shop owners are usually happy to chat, recommend local products or tell you the story behind something handmade.

A friendly “Buongiorno” when entering a shop and “Grazie, arrivederci” when leaving are small gestures that are genuinely appreciated.

Local Tip

If you’re looking for authentic souvenirs, skip the tourist shops and visit a local artisan instead. Italy is renowned for its hand-painted ceramics, olive wood products, linen textiles and delicious regional specialities such as extra virgin olive oil, taralli and traditional wines. You’ll often return home with something far more memorable and you’ll be supporting local craftsmanship at the same time.



The Beach

With more than 800 kilometres of coastline, Puglia is home to some of Italy’s most spectacular beaches. From long stretches of golden sand to dramatic rocky coves and crystal-clear turquoise waters, you’ll find the perfect spot to relax almost everywhere you go.

These useful phrases will help you make the most of your day by the sea.

English	Italian
The beach	La spiaggia
The sea	Il mare
The waves	Le onde
The sand	La sabbia
The sun	Il sole
The shade	L’ombra
Is there a beach umbrella available?	È possibile avere un ombrellone?
I’d like a beach umbrella and two sunbeds, please.	Vorrei un ombrellone e due lettini, per favore.
Public beach	Spiaggia libera
Private beach	Spiaggia privata
Is it safe to swim here?	Si può fare il bagno qui?
The water is cold / warm.	L’acqua è fredda / calda.
How deep is it?	Quanto è profondo?
Is there a lifeguard?	C’è un bagnino?
Dangerous current	Corrente pericolosa
A towel	Un asciugamano
Sunscreen	La crema solare

Did you know?

Many visitors assume they have to pay for a place on the beach, but that’s not always the case.

Throughout Italy you’ll find plenty of spiagge libere, public beaches where you can simply spread out your towel and enjoy the sea free of charge. Alongside these are the lidi, privately managed beach clubs where you can hire sunbeds, umbrellas and often enjoy restaurants, bars and other facilities.

Both options have their charm. If you enjoy comfort and convenience, a lido is an excellent choice. If you prefer a more natural setting, a spiaggia libera allows you to experience the coastline just as many locals do.

Beach Etiquette

Life at the beach follows a relaxed rhythm in Italy. Families often arrive early in the morning, enjoy a long lunch and stay until sunset. During the hottest hours of the day, many people retreat to the shade for a leisurely meal or an afternoon rest before returning to the sea later on.

You’ll also notice that Italians rarely rush. A beach day is about slowing down, enjoying good company and embracing la dolce vita.

Local Tip

If you’re looking for the most beautiful beaches, ask a local rather than relying solely on Google Maps. Pugliesi are incredibly proud of their coastline and are often happy to recommend a hidden cove or quiet stretch of sand that most tourists never discover. Those insider tips often lead to the most unforgettable places.



Paying Compliments

One of the easiest ways to connect with Italians is by giving a genuine compliment. Whether you’re praising a delicious meal, admiring a beautiful town or complimenting someone’s style, a few kind words are always warmly received.

Don’t be surprised if the compliment is returned immediately. Hospitality, warmth and friendliness are deeply rooted in Italian culture.

English	Italian
How beautiful!	Che bello! / Che bella!
That’s delicious!	Che buono! / Che buona!
You look wonderful!	Stai benissimo!
What a beautiful place!	Che posto meraviglioso!
That’s fantastic!	È fantastico!
You speak Italian very well!	Parli molto bene l’italiano!
What a beautiful dress!	Che bel vestito!
What an adorable child!	Che bambino carino! / Che bambina carina!
What a beautiful car!	Che bella macchina!
Italians are so hospitable!	Gli italiani sono così ospitali!
This is the best pizza I’ve ever had!	La migliore pizza che abbia mai mangiato!
This is the most beautiful country in the world!	È il Paese più bello del mondo!

Did you know?

Italians don’t hold back when it comes to compliments. Whether it’s your outfit, your smile, your Italian pronunciation or simply your choice of wine, compliments are exchanged naturally and sincerely.

Returning a compliment is equally common. If you tell someone their food is delicious, their restaurant is beautiful or their town is stunning, chances are you’ll receive an enthusiastic smile and perhaps even another recommendation or a heartfelt conversation.

It’s one of the many reasons visitors often describe Italy as feeling so welcoming.

Beyond the Words

Compliments in Italy are often accompanied by expressive gestures, eye contact and genuine enthusiasm. Don’t be afraid to show your appreciation. Saying something with warmth and a smile matters far more than having perfect pronunciation.

The best compliments are always sincere.

Local Tip

If you’ve enjoyed a memorable meal, tell the owner or chef:

“Era davvero buonissimo!”
“It was absolutely delicious!”

Or simply say:

“Complimenti allo chef!”
“My compliments to the chef!”

It’s a small gesture that is always appreciated and who knows, it might even earn you an extra limoncello or a homemade dessert before you leave.

Pronunciation Guide

One of the best things about Italian is that it’s much easier to pronounce than you might expect. Unlike English, most words are spoken almost exactly as they are written. Once you know a few simple rules, you’ll be surprised by how quickly your confidence grows.

Remember, Italians genuinely appreciate the effort. A warm smile and an enthusiastic attempt are worth far more than perfect pronunciation.

The Vowels

Every vowel in Italian is pronounced clearly and distinctly. Unlike English, vowels are rarely swallowed or reduced.

Letter	Sounds like	Example
A	ah	father
E	eh	bed
I	ee	see
O	oh	more
U	oo	food

Each vowel keeps the same sound wherever it appears, making Italian wonderfully consistent.



Letters That Sound Different

Some combinations may look unfamiliar at first, but they’re easy to master.

Combination	Pronunciation	Example
C before A, O, U	Hard K sound	camera
C before E, I	CH sound	ciao, cena
G before A, O, U	Hard G sound	gatto
G before E, I	Soft J sound	gelato
GH	Hard G	spaghetti
GLI	Similar to the lli in million	famiglia
GN	Similar to the ny in canyon	gnocchi
SC before E, I	SH sound	prosciutto, scena
Z	Can sound like ts or dz, depending on the word	pizza, zaino

Stress Matters

In Italian, most words are stressed on the second-to-last syllable.

For example:

- Ge**LA**to
- Spa**GHET**ti
- Arri-ve**DER**ci
- Per fa**VO**re

Listening to native speakers is the quickest way to develop a natural rhythm.

A Few Helpful Tips

- Pronounce every letter you'll rarely find silent letters in Italian.
- Speak a little more slowly than you would in English.
- Don't be afraid to use your hands. Italians certainly do!
- Smile while speaking. Confidence often matters more than flawless pronunciation.

Did you know?

Many Italians can immediately hear that you're a visitor but they genuinely appreciate anyone who makes an effort to speak their language. Even if your pronunciation isn't perfect, you'll often receive encouragement rather than correction.

In fact, trying a few words in Italian usually leads to friendlier service, warmer conversations and unforgettable travel experiences.

Local Tip

If you're ever unsure how to pronounce a word, simply listen to a local and repeat it. Italians are usually delighted to help, and you'll quickly find yourself sounding more natural with every conversation.

Remember: it's not about speaking perfect Italian, it's about speaking with confidence and a smile.



Days of the Week

Knowing the days of the week can be surprisingly useful while travelling. Whether you're booking a restaurant, visiting a local market or checking museum opening times, these simple words will help you plan your stay with confidence.

English	Italian
Monday	Lunedì
Tuesday	Martedì
Wednesday	Mercoledì
Thursday	Giovedì
Friday	Venerdì
Saturday	Sabato
Sunday	Domenica
Today	Oggi
Tomorrow	Domani
Yesterday	Ieri
This week	Questa settimana
Next week	La settimana prossima

Did you know?

In Italy, the week officially begins on Monday, not Sunday.

You'll also notice that opening hours can differ from what you may be used to. While many tourist attractions are busiest at weekends, smaller family-run businesses often close for part of Monday, especially in Southern Italy.

During the quieter months, some restaurants and cafés may also take one or two days off each week, known as the *giorno di riposo* (day of rest). If you have your heart set on a particular restaurant, it's always worth checking in advance.

Markets Worth Visiting

Weekly markets are a wonderful way to experience authentic Italian life. Depending on the town, market day changes throughout the week, so learning the Italian names of the days can be surprisingly helpful.

You'll discover stalls selling:

- Fresh fruit and vegetables
- Local cheeses and cured meats
- Handmade ceramics
- Linen clothing
- Olive wood products
- Regional delicacies

Ask a local when the market is held, and you'll often discover one of the highlights of your trip.



Numbers

Numbers come in handy almost everywhere—from buying fruit at a local market to understanding prices, parking meters and restaurant bills.

Learning just a few will make everyday conversations much easier.

English	Italian
Zero	Zero
One	Uno
Two	Due
Three	Tre
Four	Quattro
Five	Cinque
Six	Sei
Seven	Sette
Eight	Otto
Nine	Nove
Ten	Dieci
Twenty	Venti
Thirty	Trenta
Fifty	Cinquanta
One hundred	Cento
One thousand	Mille

Did you know?

When shopping at local markets, Italians often combine words with gestures. Even if your pronunciation isn't perfect, simply pointing at the item you want and saying the number is usually enough.

One phrase you'll hear again and again is:

“Quanto costa?”
“How much does it cost?”

It's one of the most useful questions you can learn and will come in handy throughout your holiday.

Local Tip

Don't worry about memorising large numbers before your trip. Learning the numbers from one to ten, together with twenty, fifty and one hundred, will cover almost every everyday situation you'll encounter in Italy.



Emergencies

We all hope your holiday goes exactly as planned. But should you ever need assistance, knowing a few essential Italian phrases can make a stressful situation much easier.

Fortunately, Italians are generally very helpful, especially when they realise you're a visitor. Stay calm, speak slowly and don't hesitate to ask for help.

English	Italian
Help!	Aiuto!
Call an ambulance!	Chiama un'ambulanza!
Call the police!	Chiama la polizia!
There has been an accident.	C'è stato un incidente.
I feel unwell.	Mi sento male.
I need a doctor.	Ho bisogno di un medico.
Where is the hospital?	Dov'è l'ospedale?
Where is the pharmacy?	Dov'è la farmacia?
I've lost my passport.	Ho perso il passaporto.
I've been robbed.	Sono stato derubato. <i>(male)</i> / Sono stata derubata. <i>(female)</i>
I'm lost.	Mi sono perso. <i>(male)</i> / Mi sono persa. <i>(female)</i>
I'm in pain.	Ho dolore.
I'm allergic to...	Sono allergico / allergica a...
Please call a taxi.	Chiama un taxi, per favore.

Emergency Numbers in Italy

It’s always a good idea to save these numbers before you travel.

Service	Number
European Emergency Number	112
Ambulance	118*
Fire Brigade	115*
Coast Guard	1530

**Although the European emergency number 112 is now the primary number in most parts of Italy, you may still see the traditional emergency numbers displayed locally.*

Did you know?

Pharmacies (farmacie) in Italy are excellent places to seek advice for minor health problems. Pharmacists are highly trained and can often recommend effective treatment without the need to visit a doctor.

When a pharmacy is closed, you’ll usually find a notice on the door showing the nearest farmacia di turno, the pharmacy on duty that remains open outside normal hours.



Enjoy Your Holiday!

I hope this little phrase guide helps you feel more at home during your time in Italy

You certainly don’t need to speak perfect Italian. In fact, just a handful of words and a friendly smile are often enough to create memorable conversations and genuine connections.

Italians are proud of Italy, their traditions and their hospitality. Showing an interest in their language, even if it’s only with a simple buongiorno, per favore or grazie will always be appreciated.

Most importantly, slow down, embrace the local rhythm and enjoy everything this remarkable region has to offer.

Enjoy your holiday in Italy

Helpful Apps

If you ever find yourself searching for the right word, these apps can be invaluable during your trip:

- *Google Translate* – Instant translations, voice input and camera translation.
- *DeepL* – Excellent for natural, high-quality translations.
- *Duolingo* – Ideal if you’d like to continue learning Italian after your holiday.

Arrivederci!

Thank you for reading A Little Italian. May this guide help you discover not only a new language, but also the warmth, generosity and timeless charm of life in Italy.

La Dolce Vita Lifestyle begins with a simple Ciao!

