



## TOURITALYNOW's Insider Italy Vacation Checklist

### 1. Design and Book Your Trip

This is the fun part, making the final decisions about what kind of trip to Italy you want to take and when you want to take it. One consideration is what works best for you, an escorted tour or a customized tour. An escorted tour involves a group with a predetermined itinerary and activities. The group can be large or small, depending on the package. The itinerary typically includes scheduled sightseeing and meals with some down time and some meals on your own. Be sure to study the possible itineraries and packages closely, and choose between a small group and a larger one. A customized tour is pretty much what you make it, you set the itinerary before you leave, of course, but you build it around your wishes. You also, in customized tours, travel with people you know, one or a small group. As for the "when" of it, every month has its advantages. Summer is hot and can get crowded, but if that's the best time for you to take an Italy vacation, we'll make it work for you. September and October offer delightful weather, as do April and May. Again, this is something to discuss with a travel expert.

### 2. Get or Renew Your Passport

If you need a passport, either your first or if your old one has expired or is close to expiring, make sure you allow enough time to get one. It can take six weeks or longer during rush season, even longer during unusually busy times, which are impossible to predict. To apply for the

first time, you must apply in person and will need proof of citizenship and a passport-size photo, among other things. If you are applying for a child age under age 17, study the requirements closely.

If you are pressed for time, you can apply through the U.S. State Department on an expedited basis. You can also turn to a rush passport service. You'll pay additional for these services.

You can renew your passport by mail if you meet certain requirements. If you already have a passport, remember to confirm that it is valid for at least three months after your return date. So if your return flight is on October 15, 2011, your U.S. passport must be valid through January 15, 2012. Italy is party to the Schengen Agreement, which allows U.S. travelers to enter the country for up to 90 days without a visa. The passport validity requirement is part of that agreement.

On the Web: [travel.state.gov/passport/](http://travel.state.gov/passport/)

### 3. Purchase Travel & Medical Insurance

We at Tour Italy Now highly recommend travel insurance. We also want to make sure you understand just what travel insurance is and what it does and does not do. There are actually several types of travel insurance. Trip cancellation and trip interruption insurance will reimburse you if you have to cancel your trip ahead of departure or if you have to interrupt your trip. Travel insurance can also



include coverage for lost luggage. Medical evacuation insurance typically gets you to the nearest hospital, but it does not cover medical repatriation, that is, medically accompanied return to your home city back in the U.S., so if that makes sense, ask about that.

As for health insurance, call your health insurance provider and verify that it covers Italy. Many U.S. policies do, some do not. However, if your plan cover Italy and you need medical treatment in Italy, you will likely have to pay in full for the service and will be reimbursed by your provided upon submitting a claim. If your health insurance provider does not cover Italy, you can get health coverage for your trip from your travel insurance provider.

It sounds complicated. It's not. Tour Italy Now recommends you not take any risks with your dream vacation to Italy!

#### **4. Jumpstart Your Italian Experience**

One of life's great pleasures is looking forward to going somewhere new, there's nothing quite like the anticipation leading into a wonderful trip. Once you've booked your Italy vacation, purchase a guidebook (or several if that's your guidebook style) and read up on some of your destinations. There are many wonderful guidebooks from which to choose, your best bet is to head to the bookstore, poke around the travel book sections and purchase what strikes your fancy. This way, you can get a sense of what you want to do on your trip, planning within your itinerary as it were, and purchase advance tickets for museums and other attractions as well as select a day excursion or two (more on that below). We suggest you start keeping a list of places you absolutely must see!

We also suggest watching a few Italian movies, something relatively recent like "Cinema Paradiso" or "Life Is Beautiful." There are also tons of Italian movie classics, such as Fellini's evocative, dreamy "Amarcord" or the atmospheric and haunting "Bicycle Thief." Try and get to the most authentic Italian restaurant in town. Watch a few cooking shows. (Ciao, Italia, anyone?) If you're social, get into the Italy Twitter-Facebook scene. Start following the English versions of an Italian newspaper, or, if you like Italian soccer, check out a website like Goal.com/Italy.

Tour Italy Now invites you to get social with its dynamic online community. You can subscribe to the blog, participate in Facebook discussions, follow us on Twitter. Not only will this jumpstart your trip, it will open up a whole new world of Italofiles.

*[TourItalyNow.com/Blog](http://TourItalyNow.com/Blog)  
[Facebook.com/TourItalyNow](https://Facebook.com/TourItalyNow)  
[Twitter.com/TourItalyNow](https://Twitter.com/TourItalyNow)*

#### **5. Purchase Advance Museum & Day-Excursion Tickets**

Your trip should include some down time, even if it's one of Tour Italy Now's escorted tours. Check your itinerary to see what you'll be visiting and how much free time you have, and make a list on what sights you absolutely positively want to see besides those already on the schedule. Consider purchasing some of your museum tickets in advance through Tour Italy Now. This will save you lots of time, because purchasing on site can mean waiting in line for hours. We want to emphasize that you don't want to overdo it, we do not want you to buy tickets to too many museums, because you will over schedule yourself and end up



rushing and that is not what vacation is supposed to be about. It's a balancing act. One rule of them is one major museum a day. If you want to do two, make sure one's first thing in the morning and the other towards the late afternoon, and make sure you factor in the distance between the two. We strongly suggest you leave yourself some free time, leave moments to stroll and explore, but also schedule some sightseeing.

On the Web: [TourItalyNow.com/Italy-Museums](http://TourItalyNow.com/Italy-Museums)

## **6. Staying Connected in Italy: Wi-Fi & Cell Phone Use**

First, the easy part: Wi-Fi is available in many hotels and cafes in large cities like Rome, Florence and Milan, but it can be spotty and it is not as widely available in remote areas. When it is available, you will likely pay a fee to use the service, many Internet cafes are not conveniently located to your hotel. Your best bet is to plan not to depend too much on it during your Italy travels, if that's possible in this day and age. We know it is!

Cell phones are another matter. If your cell is "unlocked," and many are, you can use it outside of the country, but charges can be exorbitant, it's best to find another approach. Many travelers get an Italian "SIM" card (SIM stands for Subscriber Identity Module) when they get to Italy, either on contract or "PAYG" (Pay As You Go) at stores like TIM, Wind, or Vodafone. Customer service can be tricky if you don't speak Italian! Again, surrendering to the possibility that you might be unconnected for stretches while vacationing in Italy is advisable. If you do bring electronic devices, remember to also bring an adaptor and/or converter.

If you have a smart phone, you can install Skype or services like Viber. If you have a smart phone, make sure you understand what "roaming" fees might apply for texts and other data sent and received while traveling in Italy (or anywhere else for that matter). We've heard stories of unsuspecting travelers getting zapped with huge bills for texting or web surfing while on vacation.

One way around the phone and data conundrum is renting a portable Wi-Fi bubble from an outfit like TEP Wireless. At this writing, there is unlimited data use on TEP rentals in Italy, provided you are only traveling in Italy (rates are higher for use in more than one country). One-country use rates start at \$8 a day.

On the web: [www.tepwireless.com](http://www.tepwireless.com)

## **7. Make Photocopies, or Scans, of All Essential Documents**

Tour Italy Now cannot emphasize how important it is to make a copy of all essential travel documents before you depart on your trip to Italy and leave a complete set behind with a trusted, and reachable, friend or relative. We also recommend scanning copies of all important documents and emailing them to yourselves, but emphasize that you should also leave a complete set of hard copies, as well as a list of all important numbers, behind in case of limited Internet access.

What do we mean by essential? Your passport, driver's license, if you're traveling with a child age 16 or younger, their birth certificate (you must show a copy of a birth certificate to replace a lost passport). You should also type up a list of all important numbers: your credit and debit card numbers and



expiration dates, credit card and debit cards' international customer service telephone numbers, your traveler check numbers, your flight and reservation numbers, as well as the airline's international customer service number and of course your tour operator telephone number with all hotel information as well. Also include copies of prescriptions for all prescription medication and eyeglass prescriptions, too. Tour Italy Now definitely belongs to better safe than sorry school of travel!

## 8. Organize Credit Cards & Cash (Euros)

Tour Italy Now recommends that you get euros before your departure, either from a currency exchange if you live in a city or from your local bank, which may need a week or more to order them. Also before you leave, contact the customer service folks at every debit and credit card you plan to use while traveling in Italy. If you do not, some banks and card companies will freeze your accounts because of what they deem is suspicious activity - even though it's just you buying a gelato in Rome. Also before you leave, make sure your debit-card PIN number is four numbers or less. Some Italian "bancomats," or ATM's, will only accept PIN numbers of four or fewer digits. Most Italian ATM's accept Cirrus and Plus cards, so you should be set with those.

As for credit cards, VISA and MasterCard are accepted throughout Italy. Discover is also accepted, but not as widely. American Express is not widely accepted. Always be sure to have some euros on you, as some establishments take neither credit or debit cards. You will incur international transaction fees for your credit card use while traveling in Italy. There, your best

bet is to discuss this with your credit card's customer service folks before your departure.

Traveler's checks, once an absolute necessity for foreign travel, are no longer accepted as payment at many restaurants and hotels. Still, it can't hurt to have a stash on hand, kept separate from your debit and credit cards, in case you have the misfortune of losing your wallet. That way, you can exchange them for euros at a bank.

## 9. Taxes, Tips & Price Hints

Italy has a sales tax, called a VAT, or "value-added tax." Unlike our sales tax, the VAT is included in all prices, it is not added on at checkout. So, a book or a scarf or sunglasses with the price tag of 10 euros will cost 10 euros when you pay. There is an add-on tax for hotel guests in Rome, Florence and Venice. Each city pegs the tax to the hotel's star rating. So, for three nights in a three-star hotel, the tax is 18 euros for two people. The taxes are structured somewhat differently in each city, like U.S. hotel taxes, so expect variations. You will be expected to pay in cash.

Tipping is more relaxed in Italy than in the U.S. Many Italian customers do not tip at all, unless a meal or service is sensational. We saw one estimate that only 10% of Italians tipped. In restaurants, the tip, or coperto, is included. But check the bill! That apparently is changing. Others leave a euro or two if it's a more expensive restaurant or the service was sensational, for their waiter or for a tour guide or a hotel concierge. There is one school of thought that says Italians expect Americans to tip, so if you liked the service, your gratuity will be welcome. How to sort through this range of advice, what to tip and when? Tour



Italy Now recommends tipping between 5 and 10% in restaurants (including coperto), including pizzeria and trattoria, and, in the case of theater ushers, bathroom attendants and hotel porters, between one and two euros.

As for prices, the rule of thumb there is the closer you are to a major tourist attraction, the higher the prices will be at restaurants and shops as well. If you go to the beach, expect to pay a rental for those bright-colored beach chairs that line Italian beaches. Your hotel can recommend one to you, they often have relationships with beach managers.

## 10. Packing Tips

The best packers we know make a packing list for each trip and use it faithfully when they pack. The rule of thumb is to pack light. Most escorted tours only allow one medium suitcase (size 21' x 26') and one small carry on bag per person. What item seems to trip up travelers most? Shoes. You'll need at least one pair that's perfect for walking, already broken in so you don't waste precious trip time nursing blisters. Test-walk all pairs in fact. Limit the number of pairs of shoes - some swear three pairs are enough - since they take up so much space. Remember to pack for a range of temperatures; evenings can get cool in the fall and spring. For carrying items while sightseeing, some travelers swear by bags with cross-body straps. Remember to bring your prescription medication, vitamins, etc. Important reminder: Do not pack medication in your checked baggage! In fact, do not pack anything important or valuable, like your trip research or your jewelry, in

your checked baggage. You could try to avoid checking your bags, and pack everything in a carry-in, but for a trip that lasts more than a few days, and one in which you will probably purchase a few items, that's tricky. If you plan to shop on your trip, pack an extra bag for your wonderful Italian purchases!

Also, if you plan to bring along a blow dryer or any other electronic devices, remember to also bring an adaptor and/or convertor. Be sure to check the specifications of your electronic items. The voltage in Italy is 220v. So if the input of your electronic item says 100-240v, it converts automatically, so you're ok. If the item is above that voltage you may need to buy a converter or you risk burning out the product. Most cell phones and cameras do not need a converter, but check to be safe.

Finally, there are some clothing requirements due to the churches. You typically can't get in showing your shoulders. The Catholic Church does not mess around. However, a short sleeve shirt or a scarf would be enough to get you in. Also, no skirts or shorts shorter than knee length are allowed. Nothing is more frustrating than traveling across the Atlantic Ocean and not being able to get into the Vatican because you are not dressed appropriately. So follow the guidelines and you'll be fine.

Hope you enjoyed the Tour Italy Now's Insider Italy Vacation Checklist!

***Have an amazing time in Italy!***

