Italy (Italia)

The Italian Republic is a country located in Southern Europe, bordering Austria, Switzerland, France, Slovenia, and the Mediterranean Sea while also enclaving the two sovereign states of San Marino and the Holy Sea (Vatican City). Italy became a nation-state in 1861 when King Victor Emmanuel II united the regional states of the peninsula, as well as the islands of Sicily and Sardinia. After a fascist dictatorship under Benito Mussolini starting in the 1920s that also allied itself with Nazi Germany, Italy became a democratic parliamentary republic in 1946. Since December 2016, Italy’s government has been led by Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni of the Democratic Party.

Quick Facts

Area: 301,340 sq. km. (slightly larger than Arizona)
Capital: Rome (2,873,598)
Languages: Italian (official), German, French, Slovene
GDP Per Capita: $36,300
Head of State: President Sergio Mattarella
Head of Government: Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni

Religion

The biggest religious group in Italy are Christians with roughly 80% of the share. Of those 80%, the majority are Roman Catholics, with small groups of Jehovah’s Witnesses and Protestants also present. Most of the remaining 20% are either atheists or agnostics, while some 800,000 to 1 million Muslims are also living in Italy. Freedom of religion is provided under the Italian constitution and there is no state recognized or official religion. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church plays a significant role in society, not least due to the Vatican, the home of the government of the Roman Catholic Church and of the Pope, being an enclave in the midst of Italy’s capital, Rome.

Ethnicity & Demographics

The largest ethnic group in Italy are the Italians, including minorities such as German-Italians, French-Italians, Slovene-Italians, Albanian-Italians, and Greek-Italians. Additionally, there is a number of non-Italian ethnicities present, such as Romanians, Maghrebi and Arabs, and Ukrainians. Due to its geographic location as a peninsula in the Mediterranean Sea, Italy has been the destination of many African refugees and asylum seekers that arrive by boat. This continues to be a challenge for Italy.

Moreover, Italy’s death rate outnumbers its birth rate. Because of a positive net migration rate, however, Italy still experienced a slightly positive population growth rate of 0.23% in 2016. Italy has a specifically big problem with its aging population, as it has the most rapidly aging population in all of Europe, as well as the lowest birth rate.
CONTEMPORARY ITALY & RELATIONS TO EUROPE

Italy has a diversified economy, which is divided into a developed industrial north, dominated by private companies, and a less-developed, highly subsidized, agricultural south, where unemployment is much higher. The Italian economy is driven in large part by the manufacture of high-quality consumer goods produced by small and medium-sized enterprises, many of them family-owned. It also has a sizable underground economy that is estimated to account for as much as 17% of the GDP. Although Italy is the third-largest economy in the euro zone, its exceptionally high public debt and structural impediments to growth render it vulnerable to scrutiny by financial markets. Especially youth unemployment is a big issue in Italy, with figures as high as 40% in 2014. Besides the sluggish economic growth, other problems persistent in Italy include organized crime, corruption, and economic disparities between southern and northern Italy.

As part of the “Inner Six”, Italy was among the founding member states of the European Communities in 1958. It has also been an inaugural member of the euro zone since 1999, making the euro its currency. Moreover, Italy is a member state of the border-free Schengen area. Italy has 73 seats in the European Parliament and has held the revolving presidency of the Council of the EU 12 times between 1959 and 2014.

ITALIANS IN THE USA

Between 1900 and 1915, 3 million Italians immigrated to America, making it the biggest nationality of new immigrants during that time. Today, more than 17 million Americans claim Italian ancestry. Perhaps the most well-known result of this immigration is the establishment of Little Italy in New York City, one of the largest Italian communities in the US. Besides New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and other New England states host major Italian communities.

FAMOUS ITALIANS

Among some of the most famous Italians are explorers Christopher Columbus, Amerigo Vespucci, and Marco Polo, scientists Leonardo da Vinci and Galileo Galilei, models Monica Bellucci and Carla Bruni, political philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli, singers Andrea Bocelli and Luciano Pavarotti, philosophers Cicero, artist Raphael, fashion designers Giorgio Armani and Donatella Versace, and composer Giuseppe Verdi.

ITALIAN WORDS

Hi .................................................. Ciao
Bye ................................................ Ciao
Good morning ......................... Buon giorno
Yes .................................................... si
No ..................................................... no
Please ................................... Per favore
You are welcome .................. Prego
Thank you ................................. Grazie
How are you? ......................... Cómo stai?
I do not understand ............... Non capisco
I understand ................................. Capisco
What is your name? .............. Mi chiamo Frank…
My name is ........................... Mi chiamo Frank…
Where are you from? ............. Di dove sei?
Do you speak English? .......... Parli inglese?

USEFUL LINKS