

Things in Italy are different, therefore flexibility is the key to a successful pilgrimage.

The following is the long version of some cultural difficulties Americans often experience in Italy. Familiarity with the following information will reduce the surprises you will face on your pilgrimage. Please take the time to read this. (Note that a shorter version is in your Pilgrimage Guide.)

SPIRITUALITY (LA SPIRITUALITA')

The pilgrimage is first and foremost a spiritual endeavor and many people have told us that their lives have been transformed because of the pilgrimage. In order to receive the most spiritually from the pilgrimage, we recommend preparing for it by increasing your spiritual and sacramental life before leaving. We recommend reading our book, *The Road to Peace in Assisi*, before your pilgrimage. Our goals are to deepen your faith by immersion in the spirituality of saints, place, community, and simplicity. Remember that you are part of a group, and people have different expectations of what is spiritual; for some, it is devotional prayers, while for others it is an honest sharing of their personal lives. We recognize different types and levels of spirituality and try to present spirituality in an open manner. Also some people have told us that they prefer quiet time on the bus for prayer, so be considerate of others.

ACCOMMODATIONS (ALBERGHI E ALTRI ISTITUTI D'ACCOGLIENZA)

Hotel accommodations in Italy are comfortable, but may present some cultural differences. Italians are accustomed to smaller spaces and simpler lifestyles than North Americans. *Hotel rooms and bathrooms may be smaller with fewer amenities than what you are used to.* Some do not offer hair dryers, so you may want to bring one (with appropriate outlet adapter and voltage converter). Essential toiletries, like shampoo, hand soap, and towels, are provided, but you might want to bring a washcloth. Due to environmental conservation regulations, cultural customs, and the high cost of energy, *usage of air conditioning and heating is limited in hotels.* Some pilgrims use earplugs to help them sleep at night given the noisy character of Italian towns and guests. Tap water is safe to drink in Italy. Given the religious nature of the pilgrimage, and that we often utilize religious accommodations, pilgrims should adhere to the moral expectations within.

LUGGAGE / PACKING (LE VALIGIE)

Packing lightly is strongly recommended. It is recommended to *not* check-in a suitcase (which airlines often mis-connect, and now sometimes charge for). Instead, bring a smaller sized carry-on suitcase on board. If you do check a suitcase, never pack anything of value or necessity, such as money or medicine, which should go in your carry-on bag. Note that we do not offer portorage on the pilgrimage. Visit this website to help pack lightly: www.onebag.com. Italy is hot in the summer and cold in the winter; in the Fall and Spring, weather fluctuates. Dressy or formal clothes are not necessary or required. During the shoulder season, we recommend bringing loose-fitting clothing that can be layered and taken off or put on when necessary. Visit this site for average Italian temps: www.italiantourism.com/climate.html In the Fall, winter, and Spring, a coat is essential. Additionally, bring a *raincoat/poncho* (or small fold-up *umbrella*), a *comfortable pair of walking shoes*, and battery-powered *alarm clock*. For electric-powered items, such as hair dryers, you will need to bring both a *transformer and adapter*, as European household electricity operates at 220v (US at 110v). Often cell phone or digital camera battery chargers will operate off 220v or 110v and will not need the transformer, but still require the adapter to plug in. Make sure your checked-in suitcases are properly labeled with your name, US address and phone number. Your suitcases may be opened and searched for security reasons, so suitcase locks are not permitted.

HEALTH (LA SALUTE)

If you have any health concerns, please consult your doctor and notify us. *Pilgrims frequently comment that the pilgrimage is strenuous, as a lot of walking and stair climbing is required - some on hilly cobblestone streets.* If you are not used to walking, you should begin to do so before leaving. Check with your health insurance carrier to see if you will have health coverage in Italy; otherwise you should purchase travel insurance before departure. Travel insurance will also insure against unexpected problems that arise before departure and may prevent you from taking the trip. We work with MH Ross at: www.insuremytrip.com Tap water is safe to drink in Italy; however, travelers sometimes suffer from upset stomachs as their bodies adjust to different drink, foods, levels of exercise, and time change. If you suffer from motion sickness, you may want to bring Dramamine or bands, as 65% of Italy is hilly or mountainous.

MONEY/CURRENCY (I SOLDI)

Dollars are not accepted in Italy – you can only use Euros. The US dollar is not strong against the Euro, so things will appear expensive. Previous pilgrims have recommended planning on spending about 250 Euros per week (more or less depending on what you plan on buying). *The only things not included in the overall price are one meal per day (figure \$10-\$20 per meal), donations to collection plates during Masses, and tips to bus driver (estimate an average of \$10/day).* Once in Italy, *an easy way to get Euros is through an ATM machine with your ATM card, however Italian banks now require an external chip in your card; some pilgrims have found that their ATM cards do not work in some ATM machines. Traveler's checks have become increasingly obsolete, as few banks will redeem them.* Beware that exchange booths in Italy overcharge and sell Euros at bad rates. Credit cards can be a good option for payments, although pilgrims often comment that merchants are reluctant to accept them. We recommend contacting your financial institution to find out what charges will be incurred for using your ATM or

credit card in Italy; also let them know that you will be using your card in Italy, otherwise they might consider your overseas charges as suspicious.

MEALS (I PASTI)

The Mediterranean diet was recently declared as having inestimable cultural value for the entire world by the Unesco cultural division of the United Nations. But despite its delicious taste, schedules and quantities are different and may take some time getting used to. Breakfast (*prima colazione*) is served first thing in the morning and is *continental*. Those used to a hearty breakfast often comment that the food served is *light*. Breakfast consists of pastries, fruit, crackers, toast, jam, butter, cereal, sliced cheese, etc. Do not expect bacon and eggs, or anything cooked or salty. Espresso (concentrated amounts of coffee in small doses) or cappuccino is also served; note that Italian caffè is much stronger than American coffee. Lunch (*pranzo*) is the main meal of the day for Italians. Lunch begins at 1:00 and is *served in courses*. The first course (*primo piatto*) is almost always pasta, but sometimes rice. After the first course, comes the main course (*secondo piatto*). This consists of meat like pork, chicken, beef, veal, fish, or occasionally rabbit. The main course is accompanied by a *contorno*, or side dish – often a vegetable or salad. Dessert, consisting of fruit, follows. On special occasions ice cream or cake is served. Italians drink wine or water during meals, rarely soft drinks. (Note that some hotels include water and wine as complementary, while others charge separately.) Soft drinks are usually available for purchase – note that ice is rare in Italy. Italians often have an espresso or liqueur after a meal. Italian society slows down considerably after lunch, and most businesses and churches close from 1:00 until mid afternoon. (Note that nowadays in the big cities and touristy areas, shops and the important churches remain open.) Dinner for Italians is lighter than lunch. Dinner begins later, and usually kitchens are not prepared to offer dinner any earlier than 7:30pm. Note that most group meals offered during the pilgrimage are dinner, which will consist of the main lunch meal described above. The only exception is that sometimes soup is served instead of pasta for the first course. Sometimes pilgrims have commented that meals are too large. Eat only what you want and do not feel obligated to eat everything. Italians serve large meals to honor guests, and small amounts would be judged rude by Italian guests. **If you suffer from food allergies or eat a specialized diet, please note that hotels offer group meals and are sometimes unable to accommodate specialized diets.** Most are flexible, however, and do their best to work with guests.

PASSPORT (IL PASSAPORTO)

A current passport is required for international travel. **Your passport must be valid for at least 90 days after your scheduled return date.** As a US or Canadian citizen, you do not need a visa to enter Italy. **If you are not a US or Canadian citizen, check with the Italian consulate to see if you will need a visa in order to enter Italy.** If your passport is lost or stolen in Italy, a new passport must be issued at the US consulate in Rome in order to return home.

AIRLINE (LA COMPAGNIA AEREA)

We recommend arriving at the airport two and a half to three hours before your international flight. Check the TSA website for current travel policies: www.tsa.gov. If offering group airfare, St. Francis Pilgrimages makes reservations through airline group travel departments. For information on the flight status, luggage requirements, seat assignments, etc. visit the airline website. Note that St. Francis Pilgrimages has no control over seat assignments. Your airline ticket is electronic, or paperless. When you check in, show your passport and travel itinerary and the agent will print your boarding pass. We recommend checking the airline website a day or two before departure to see if there are any schedule changes.

TELEPHONE CALLS (LE TELEFONATE)

To make phone calls home to the US, you can purchase an international phone card within Italy; however, some pilgrims have told us that it is difficult to find public phones. If you use a calling card purchased in the US, make sure it offers service in Italy, in which case you must obtain the Italian toll-free access number and pin number before departure. Many people bring their own US cell phone, but make sure you have international roaming enabled before you leave. Note that it is very difficult to obtain a local SIM card in Italy for your US cell phone. Some pilgrims have noted that it is difficult to find internet access in Italy.

CHURCHES (LE CHIESE)

Despite the abundant artwork, churches should not be confused with museums, as they are primarily places of worship. Signs on churches have three words of expected behavior: *silenzio, decoro, rispetto* (silence, decorum, respect). Some of the big basilicas have church personnel to ensure people are dressed appropriately: dresses or shorts above the knees are not permitted, neither are sleeveless shirts. Photography is permitted inside some churches, but prohibited in others. Flashes should not be used on paintings, as they damage artwork, but are okay on stone mosaic. Some pilgrims have felt that excessive picture-taking by other pilgrims has detracted from their overall spiritual experience.

TIME ZONE/JET LAG (FUSO ORARIO)

The time zone in Italy is six hours ahead of the US East coast, and they observe daylight savings time as in the US. So at 8:00am in New York or Atlanta, it is 2:00pm in Italy. Europeans typically use a 24-hour clock instead of am/pm, thus 5:00pm is written 17:00. During the flight, in-flight videos about exercise and sleep are informative. Drink plenty of liquids during the flight and the first day upon arrival. It is strongly recommended to try to sleep on the overnight flight. If you cannot sleep on

the plane, at least close your eyes for a few hours – that will make a big difference. When you arrive in Europe, it will be early in the morning, but do your best to stay up the entire day and go to bed after dinner. Some health food stores sell natural items like Jet-stress or Cell Guard marketed to be effective against jet lag.

MAIL (LA POSTA)

Stamps may be purchased in Italy at tobacco shops (designated with a large ‘T’) or at the Post Office. Stamps to send letters to the US cost 90 cents (in euros) at time of this printing.

PUBLIC RESTROOMS (BAGNO PUBBLICO)

Public restrooms are identified by WC (water closet), and can sometimes be challenging to find. Note that public restrooms sometimes require a fee of around 50 cents for use. Sometimes public restrooms lack toilet tissue, so we recommend carrying tissue with you. Shop owners are generally reluctant to allow people to use their restroom without purchasing something.

SCHEDULES (GLI ORARI)

Please be respectful of schedules and be on time. On some days, there will be a full schedule, and excessive tardiness can cause problems in the itinerary. Your full participation in the scheduled itinerary is requested. Also, please be flexible, and know that at times we may need to modify the schedule due to factors out of our control. However, the spiritual nature of the pilgrimage will not change.

SHOPPING (FARE LE SPESE)

Shops are normally open from 9:00 am to 1:00 p.m. and then from 3:30 pm to 8:00 pm; however in large and tourist areas they usually remain open continuously. *Customer service is generally lousy in stores or restaurants.* Also, note that store windows are for ‘browsing’ and Italian merchants often expect you to purchase something if you enter. Italian cashiers are often short on change, and prefer small bills or the exact amount. Sales tax is included in the advertised price. To discourage tax evasion, by law you must keep your receipt within 100 meters of the store, although this law is rarely enforced. *Note that some pilgrims feel that excessive shopping detracts from the overall pilgrimage experience.*

CAUTION (AVVERTIMENTO)

Italy is on the whole a very safe country and violent crime is extremely rare, and Italians are generally friendly towards Americans. Nevertheless *there are pickpockets and thieves*, particularly in areas where large numbers of tourists are crowded, such as public buses and train stations in the cities. When the group is in vulnerable areas, it is recommended to carry valuables and documents in a hidden money belt. Note that there are beggars in the cities – use discretion as to whether or not you wish to give to them; poor boxes in churches may be more appropriate. While in the US, smiling and saying hello to people you do not know can be a sign of courtesy and politeness, in Italy it is usually done by acquaintances or relatives. A young woman should not smile at or make eye contact with a man on the street, which could lead to some unwanted attention. Women should also note that Italian culture is more accepting of certain male behaviors that could be considered harassment in the US.

**N.B.: most of your time on the pilgrimage will be structured and in groups, rendering such negative experiences very unlikely.*

Please visit our website: www.stfrancispilgrimages.com and then click on ‘Traveling in Italy’ for more information.

The pilgrim’s motto:

- 1. I am willing to be flexible.**
- 2. I’m neither in control nor in a hurry.**
- 3. I journey in faith, hope, and peace.**
- 4. I know God will provide for me.**
- 5. My goal is the journey, not the destination.**
- 6. I joyfully accept today’s sacrifices, challenges, and blessings.**