



Before You Go to Italy, Just A Few Tips Regarding What to Expect & Know About...

How many Euros should I bring to Italy? Will my credit card work? What type of clothes do you recommend? All of the questions are answered here and if we've left anything out ~ just let us know and we'll be happy to answer! *Buon Viaggi!*

Hotels & Accommodations

On your Story Land & Sea Tour, you will probably be staying in a four or five-star hotel – all truly in the centers of the towns and villages.

In Europe, you will find that the first floor is not the ground floor, as it is in America, but rather what we would call the second floor. Elevators are usually much smaller than in the States, so if you are claustrophobic, you may prefer to take the stairs. However, you should find your room in the deluxe hotels to be spacious and comfortable, with high ceilings and large windows. And, to put you at ease, there should be at least one channel in English on the TV, such as CNN or the BBC.

You will generally find that extra towels, especially washcloths, can be in short supply, so you may want to pack a few just to have on hand. Also, don't be surprised to come back to your room at the end of your first day to find a white cloth spread out on the floor beside your bed. This may seem an odd custom, but it's merely so you have a place for your bare feet when you get out of bed.

Your deluxe hotel will serve a very nice breakfast in the mornings. You will probably want to arrange to meet your tour group so you can dine together. Generally, there will be eggs and bacon, pastries and croissants, fruit, juice, yogurt, and cereal. Coffee or tea may be brought to your table by a waiter unless otherwise specified.

When you leave your room at the beginning of each day, be sure not to leave valuables behind. Lock your luggage when unattended. If you do have valuables, such as money and jewelry, that need to be safeguarded, have them locked up by hotel management in advance of your departure for the day.

Your hotel will be situated in the city centre for easy access to most sites and other conveniences, but do remember that a certain amount of walking cannot be avoided.

The Money

Hands down, the best way to get cash in Europe is via the ATM. Memorize your Personal Identification Number (PIN) before leaving and plan on withdrawing euros (cash) for your purchases. Credit cards are the next best way to make purchases in Italy but not all locations accept them. Visa and MasterCard for sure are accepted, however, most vendors do not accept Discover or American Express.

How much money to take with you? It's truly up to you. You know your habits and preferences and therefore we recommend using the ATM and/or credit card approach.

Should you get Euros before leaving the US? We recommend you visit your local bank and order about \$USD250-350 worth of Euros to take with you. This is just in case you get delayed somewhere in Europe while on route. Of course your credit card will work fine in most establishments.

VAT

About the VAT – Value Added Tax

If you make a large purchase in any one store in Italy, ask the store how much is needed to qualify for a refund of the VAT. If you have spent the required amount the store owner will provide documentation that you will want to take to the airport upon your departure at the end of your vacation to obtain your refund. Keep the receipt and paperwork together and be sure to arrive a little earlier than usual to the airport to ask the ticket counter where to obtain your refund.

Clothing Recommendations

Lightweight cottons and linens are worn during the summer. Select a wardrobe that is adaptable and allows for layering. On the Rome tour, casual comfortable clothing is suggested during the day. Men can wear jackets at dinner but they are not a requirement. You should include a sweater, a jacket and/or windbreaker, and of course comfortable walking shoes. The best way to experience the cities of Italy is to walk! We recommend a walking regimen on a daily basis prior to leaving the US!

Gear that will come in handy. There are some items that are just a necessity on such a trip as this: Your digital camera, collapsible umbrella or some rain gear and a bathing suit in your packing. Also, be sure to bring along comfortable, worn-in, walking shoes. Did we mention we walk a lot in this tour? If you have any mobility issues, don't worry. Your tour captain has been notified and will assist you in securing extra transfers via taxis and shuttles should you need them (at your own expense).

Getting Around

When needed, you will be met at your hotel in the morning by your tour bus, usually a large van or mini motor coach, and your local tour guide. You will rely on them primarily for transfers to your next destination, or day trips away from town. Otherwise, you will meet your local guide at a location within walking distance of your hotel. And, unless you are engaged in a group activity, you are free to get around as you wish. Do not allow yourself to get distracted by looking around. Keep a clever, watchful eye on traffic at all times.

It's a Walking Experience!

Yes, be prepared to do a good deal of walking throughout the trip – it truly is the only way to explore – so comfortable shoes are in order! Once you get to your destination by transport, you will still be walking a lot to see places. A little exercise routine prior to your trip is not a bad idea just to get in shape. It will only improve your overall experience.

As far as amenities go, you will usually find modern toilet facilities readily available in the large cities. However, as you get out into the countryside and smaller communities, amenities can be substandard. You may find a ceramic hole in the ground to be the best toilet facility you can find, so be prepared for that event should it come.

Note: Public restrooms in Italy are often referred to as "Water Closets" or WC. They often cost up to 1 euro in change so be sure to keep change with you. Many coffee shops are happy to let you use their facilities with the purchase of a water or coffee as well.

When visiting restroom establishments there may be an attendant sitting outside the door with a plate or dish expecting a small tip. A few coins are fine, however, do not feel overly pressured to tip. If it feels appropriate, then do so.

Safety

Security is always a key factor when traveling abroad. Everyone in your group should be conscious of the need for safety. Whether you are flying or traveling on the ground, do whatever you can to deflect attention away from yourself. Dress in clothes that do not scream "I am a tourist!" T-shirts and ball caps emblazoned with American logos are not recommended. White sneakers and Hawaiian shirts are also a bad idea. You want to be comfortable, but think European or Continental as much as possible. Aside from the factor of calling attention to yourself, most Europeans dress very nicely, so you will see few of them dressed in such a casual manner.

Always keep an eye out for anything that looks suspicious, and report it to your tour captain or the local authorities. Do not alarm your fellow travelers, but do keep an eye out for one another. In the highly unlikely event you should find yourself in a security situation, remain calm and do not call attention to yourself. Only take extreme measures as a very last resort. It's not a fun topic, but safety is paramount.

Our Story Land & Sea Guides

One of the great features of a Story Land & Sea Tour is the wealth of knowledge and experience you will get from your local tour guides, who work with your Tour Captain to make sure you have a great experience. These are people who live in the area and make their living by showing you around their city and country. They may even give you hints or tips about great places to eat or shop on your downtime. You will come to appreciate these people for the great professionals they are, and you will remember them fondly when you look back at your vacation photos. So, treat them with the courtesy and respect they deserve. They will do the same for you. And while all base tips are included in your tour, you may wish to go beyond that to show your individual appreciation.

Phones

Contact your cell phone provider and ask about Global calling, texting and data plans for the time you are traveling. With apps available like Skype and WhatsApp, using data and/or the wifi at the hotel make keeping in touch easier than ever before.

Electrical in Europe: Converters

Yes, you will need an electrical adapter/converter to use your American volt appliances. WalMart® or Target® feature affordable converters. Make sure you are getting the correct one for the part of Europe or destination you are visiting.

Restaurants & Dining

During your Story Land & Sea Tour you will have a certain number of meals that are provided for you, but there will be times when you are free to go wherever you like. On nights that a meal is not provided for you, you will be invited to go with your Tour Captain to a local restaurant. However, if you choose to go it alone, stay away from chain-type establishments. Instead, opt for the local experience. If you are uncertain, ask your hotel clerk to recommend a good place that's close by. Stick with a ristorante or osteria for your evening meal.

Rest stops along the highway can have a nice choice of sandwiches and other fare. Some even have a wonderful selection of hot, home cooked meals. Don't be surprised, however, if you have to stand in rest stops or coffee shops along the way.

When visiting restroom establishments, you will sometimes find that the restroom is cared for by an attendant. They may sit outside the door with a plate or dish and expect to receive a small tip. A few small coins will do, but don't feel overly pressured to tip. If it feels appropriate to tip, please do so.

Keep all receipts. A Revenue Official may ask to see your receipt within feet of an eating establishment to make sure you've paid. You can potentially be fined if you cannot produce it.

And Now the Weather

Weather in Italy is much like most North American cities. Spring and Fall can average in the 70s with Summer temperatures going anywhere from 80s up to as high as 100 degrees. Be sure to pack layers and check weather websites for updates right before you leave for your vacation.

Mail in Europe

Your hotel concierge can assist with any items needing to be mailed or shipped.

Other Helpful Stuff

The customary gratuity to local guides and drivers is already included in your Story Land & Sea Tour. Additional gratuities should be extended on a voluntary, individual basis and not as a group. Personal Expenses such as phone calls, room service, alcoholic and bar beverages, laundry, airline excess luggage charges, visa fees and other optional incidental extras are not included and may be significant.

Itinerary Changes & Price Flexibility

Story Land & Sea Tours pledges to make every effort to operate all tours as advertised. Story Land & Sea Tours reserves the right to alter or curtail the itinerary, or substitute sightseeing, ports, hotels, and/or conveyances as deemed necessary. Any savings realized by these changes will be refunded to passengers. Any resultant added expense will be covered by Story Land & Sea Tours.

Travel Document Requirements

U.S. citizens will need a passport which will remain valid for 6 months after your return to the United States. U.S. citizens do not need a visa to enter Italy. Non-U.S. citizens should contact the Italian embassy or consulate to determine if visas are required to enter Italy. NOTE: Be sure to check the expiration of your passport. New passports and visas may take several weeks to obtain.

European Climate Control

European air conditioning should be considered as a climate-control system; most have three settings for the fan, plus a "cool" setting. Very few of the European systems actually have a temperature setting. In general, the amount of cool air that is produced from a European air conditioning system is far less than what you may have in your living environment.

Luggage & Handling through Customs

Due to space limitations aboard motor coaches and airlines on certain flights, only one average-size piece of luggage per person, weighing up to 50 pounds, is allowed. Luggage exceeding these restrictions is at risk of being left behind, or, if permitted on board, may be subject to additional excess luggage charges. Regulations within most airports require that travelers handle their own luggage through customs.

Need to bring a second bag with you on tour that you would like portaged? Inquire for costs for any extra suitcases needed per person to be portered on your trip. It is preferred to handle prior to your tour, however, if anything changes while on tour let your Tour Captain know if additional baggage portage is needed.

With the above information under your belt, you should be on your way to a great experience in Italy. Of course, there will be many things you will discover on your own during your trip that may enhance the overall experience. If you feel you have something valuable to share with future tour groups, please let your Story Land & Sea representative know upon your return.