

Communications

Phones and other gadgets at your fingertips

In the past, staying connected to those back home seemed a daunting task. Prices were high and the coverage in Italy was poor. Nowadays there are options that not only are very inexpensive but are also easy to take advantage of and extremely functional.

Cell phones

First and foremost, in Italy, incoming cell phone calls are free. Also, since you can pre-pay your calls, you can control how much money you want to invest in the outgoing call time without worrying about receiving unexpectedly high bills. You can also continue to receive incoming calls with zero remaining credit.

Network operators are Telecom Italia Mobile (TIM, www.tim.it), Vodafone Omnitel (www.vodafone.it), Wind (www.wind.it), and H3G (www.h3g.it). If you want to use your cell phone in Italy, it must be a GSM tri-band. Check with your cellular carrier to make arrangements before departure. The major nationwide carriers — AT&T Wireless, Cingular Wireless, Nextel, Sprint PCS, T-Mobile and Verizon Wireless — offer international roaming service. This means the companies have partnered with carriers in other countries to provide expanded service to U.S. customers. Please keep in mind that roaming charges can be costly.

A cheaper option is to buy a prepaid SIM card at your destination, then swapping it with the card inside your phone. The tiny SIM card is the phone's life-support system: without it, the handset won't work. The card is usually located one layer beneath the battery. Pop the battery out and you should see the SIM card seated in a slot. Prepaid SIM cards typically come in per-minute increments. Costs vary, so shop around. Depending on the country you visit, you should be able to find a few phone operators selling prepaid SIM cards. When the amount of money on the card runs out, you have to purchase more time. You can add more time on the phone using your credit card, but in Italy most people buy more time with a "Ricaricard" that can be purchased at a tobacco shop, phone store or media store. These cards come in denominations of 25 or 50 Euro (sometimes they are available in smaller amounts). The card costs 5 Euro more than it is worth (service charge).

The card is a plastic card with a secret code on the back. Scratch off the silver covering the secret code on the card. Call the provider, select the option to recharge the phone.

Enter the secret code, wait for confirmation and you are all set. Keep in mind that if you use an overseas carrier's SIM card, your phone will no longer answer calls to your usual number — that's one advantage of paying the higher rates for international roaming with your original SIM card.

If you prefer, cellular phones can be rented in Italy with a prepaid amount of usage time. Arrangements can be made directly at the airport. Malpensa, in Milan, has a Rentacell office at Terminal 1. To order Rentacell service before your departure, contact the company by fax, telephone or email. All information is available on www.rentacell.it

Many find it easier to rent a cell phone before leaving the country. Some providers with good deals are www.travelcell.com and www.acetelecom.com



Useful Extras

Power Adapter/Converter Kit. This is one of those things that you need to take on an overseas trip but sometimes forget until you need it. Before you go, purchase a complete kit, such as Belkin's Business Traveler Converter Kit, which has both converters and tips for several major cell phones and PDAs. It's an indispensable tool.

Spare Battery. If you don't have a power adapter, packing an extra battery is the next best

thing.

Codes and public phones

Italy's country code is 39, so from the US to call Italy you must add the number 39 after 011.

Calls to land phones have a zero before each city code:

Milan 02	Rome 06
Florence 055	Turin 011
Naples 081	Venice 041
Bologna 051	Genoa 010

The zero is dropped if calling an Italian cellular number. Common codes for cellular numbers are: 335, 347, 337, etc.

The outgoing international code to the US is 001, followed by the American city code and the phone number.

Public telephones are available throughout Italy. These days most do not accept coins and operate by use of a phone card (Carta Telefonica) which may be purchased at any newsstand, post office, or local tobacco shop. They are available for 5, 10, and 20 Euros.

Emergency Numbers

Simply dial these numbers from anywhere in the country. They are toll free.

12	Telephone Directory Number
	Assistance
170	Operator for Collect Calls
4176	General International Information
112	Carabinieri
113	Emergency
	Police Help Number (also ambulance and fire)
115	Fire Department
116	A.C.I. (Italian Automobile Club) road assistance.
118	Medical Assistance
186	Telegrams
4161	Time
4114	Wake-up Call
803116	Automobile Club Road Service

187	Telephone (Telecom)
119	Cellular Telephone (TIM)
190	Cellular Telephone (VODAFONE)
155	Cellular Telephone (WIND)

Common expressions used to make a telephone call include:

Pronto?	Hello?
Chi parla?	Who is speaking?
C'è [Claudia], per favore?	Is [Claudia] in?
ArrivederLa	Good-bye

Internet

Internet booths operated by Telecom are available for public access at airports, major hotels and other public places. The term Internet Point is often used in Italy to define a place where access to computers connected to the internet is provided. Usually a per minute or per hour fee is charged. Others require the purchase of a card good for a minimum amount of time.

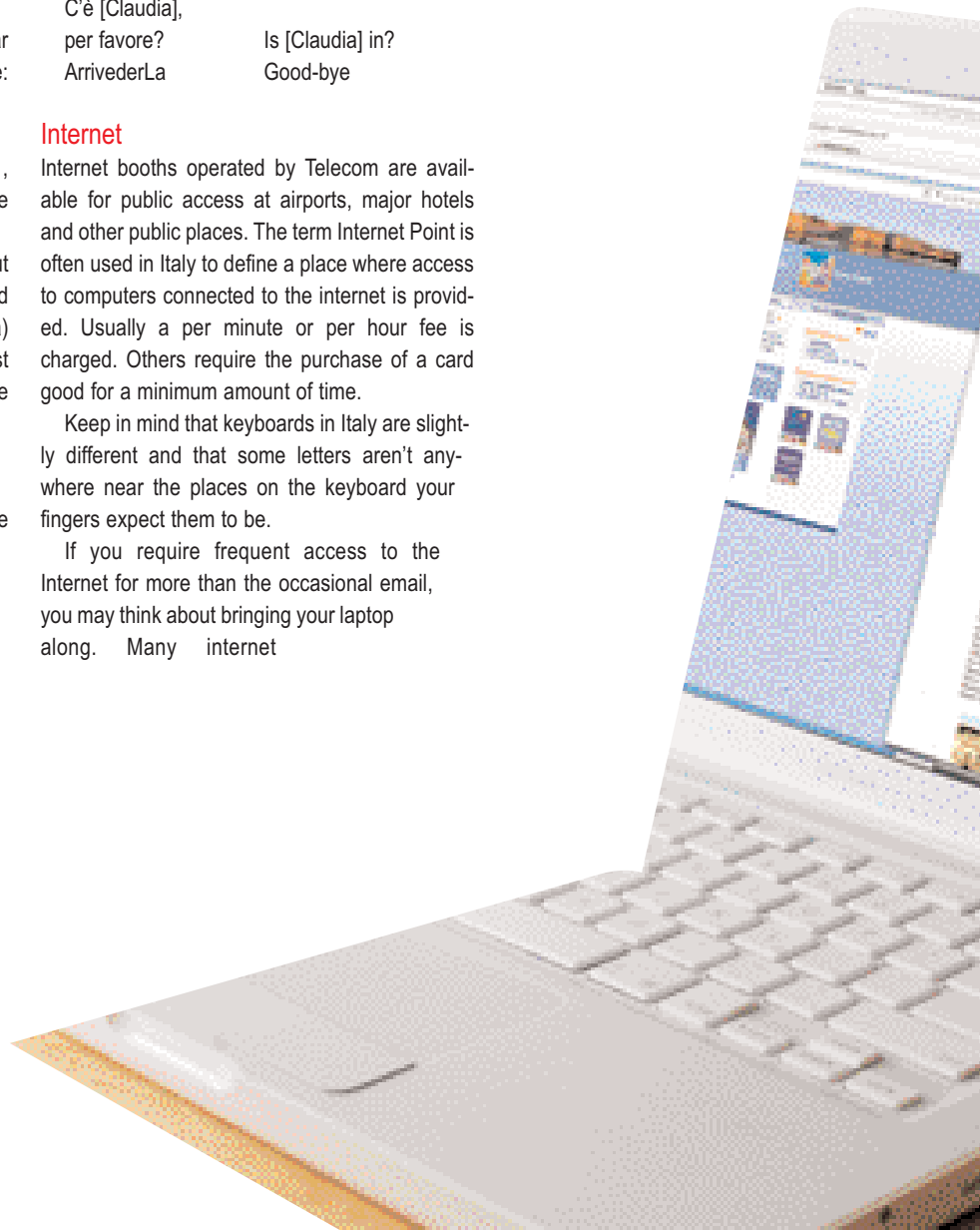
Keep in mind that keyboards in Italy are slightly different and that some letters aren't anywhere near the places on the keyboard your fingers expect them to be.

If you require frequent access to the Internet for more than the occasional email, you may think about bringing your laptop along. Many internet

points will allow you to tap into their wideband networks through an ethernet connection or wireless nodes. Many hotels also offer these services as well. Ask for their fee beforehand.

For a list of locations that offer WiFi hot spots and wireless 802.11b internet access, check out www.Wi-fihotspotlist.com

There are American companies that you can consult before leaving that provide Secured and Managed Internet access to travelers. With your Portable PC, PDA, mobile phone or any Internet enabled device, you will con-



nect to their network through Dialup, ISDN, Toll Free, WiFi and broadband. Technical support is available by phone 24-hours a day in English, Spanish and French.

They offer billing as you go, which allows you to control and manage your expenses on a daily basis. www.italy.dialer.net

To hook up the computer modem line one needs to purchase an adaptor in the US designated for Italy. In Italy, electricity is 220 volts, compared to the US 110 volts. You will need a voltage con-

Big cities have several internet cafes, while in smaller towns access may be less widely available. The local tourist office will have a computer or two for you to use.

Some internet points:

FLORENCE

Italian Point, Via Ricasoli 19/r, tel. 055.280119 = 30 PC

VENICE

Net House, Campo S.Stefano, s.Marco 2967, tel. 041.5208128 = 30 PC

ROME

Rimanet Cafe, v. Portico d'Ottavia 2, tel. 06.68891356 = 20 PC

PALERMO

Everalways, Corso Tukory 198, tel. 091.217652 = 55 PC

NAPLES

Multimedia, v.S.Giovanni Maggiore Pignatelli 34, tel. 081.5514708 = 40 PC

TURIN

Quinta Dimensione, Corso Svizzera 165, tel. 011.2309033 = 70 PC

MILAN

Mondadori Multicenter, v. Marghera 28, tel. 02.48047311 = 16 PC

BOLOGNA

Net Arena, v. de'Giudei 3/b, tel. 051.220850 = 13 PC

For more information: www.ecs.net/cafe

Post Offices

For snail mail, keep in mind that it usually takes from four to seven days for mail to arrive at its destination. Stamps are sold in post offices and in tobacco shops.

Post office hours vary but usually are
Weekdays – 8:00 or 8:30 a.m. to 1:00 or 1:30 p.m.

2:00 or 2:30 p.m.. to 5:30 or 6:30 p.m.

Saturday 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

www.laptoptravel.com

