

At the Restaurant

The magic of an Italian meal

Italy is rich with fabulous restaurants, some fancy, some modest, some country, some urban. They all have one thing in common: they offer great food. In addition to regular restaurants there are: the autogrill, roadside snack bar; the osteria, an informal place; the trattoria, which is a medium-priced, often family-run eating establishment; the pizzeria, specializing in pizzas of the region; the paninoteca, where sandwiches and salads are often available, and the tavola calda, which features a buffet of hot or cold dishes to eat in or take out. Enotecas were wine bars years ago, but now they serve small portions of food (assaggi) along with samplings of local wines.

If you just want a sandwich, you can go to a bar. A bar in Italy is similar to a café in the U.S. People go to the bar for their morning coffee and pastry, to grab a sandwich, and even to buy ice cream. Some bars also serve a few pasta or salad selections, so if you just want one course, that's a good choice.

Dinner in Italy is often much later than in the U.S. If you want to eat with the locals, eat late. And the farther south you move the later people eat. Lunch, between noon and two, is sometimes followed by a quick nap. Restaurants close between lunch and dinner. In larger cities, you may find restaurants open all afternoon.

Both il servizio (service charge/tip) and il coperto (cover charge for bread and water) are usually included in il conto (the bill). By Italian law, the gratuity is included in the bill, and extra tipping isn't necessary. If the service deserves it, leave your waiter a little extra.

If your budget is tight, consider the prix fixe menu, called menu turistico or prezzo fisso. It usually is a good buy as it often includes at least two courses, cover and service charges.

All eating establishments must, by law, post a menu outside. It's helpful to read it before being seated. Try the daily specials and the house specialties, as they are the best the chef has to offer and they are often made with seasonally fresh ingredients.

L'antipasto, which literally means "before the meal" and includes hot and cold appetizers such as crostini, bruschetta, and cold cuts.

Il primo, or "first course," usually consists of pasta, minestrone, risotto, or zuppa (soup). Pasta should be cooked *Al dente* (to the tooth), until it offers a slight resistance when bitten into, but which is not soft or overdone.



Il secondo, or "second course," is a meat, poultry, game, or fish dish.

Il contorno, or "side dish" which consists of vegetables such as melanzane (eggplant), spinaci (spinach), or insalata mista (mixed salad), is ordered separately, as it does not come with the second course.

Il dolce, or "dessert," ends the meal. It features favorite sweets such as tiramisù, or panna cotta.

La frutta, fresh fruit is often served after dessert.

Italians often say Buon appetito! or "Enjoy your meal" when the first course is served, and Salute! or "To your health" when toasting with a drink.

A typical Italian meal ends with an espresso, a dark, strong coffee brewed to have a thin layer of creamy, dark beige froth on the coffee's surface.

More Coffee Terms:

Caffè Americano American-style coffee, but stronger; weaker than espresso and served in a large cup.

Caffè corretto Coffee "corrected" with a shot of grappa, cognac, or Sambuca.

Doppio Espresso Double espresso.

Caffè freddo Iced coffee.

Caffè Hag Decaffeinated coffee, often referred to just as Hag.

Caffè latte Hot milk mixed with coffee and served in a glass for breakfast.

Caffè macchiato Espresso "stained" with a drop of steamed milk.

Caffè Ristretto Espresso with less water.

Cappuccino Espresso infused with steamed milk and drunk in the morning, but never after lunch

or dinner.

SOME USEFUL WORDS:

Il conto, per favore	Check Please
L'apribottiglia	Bottle opener
Il bicchiere	Glass
La bottiglia	Bottle
La caraffa	Carafe
Il cavatappi	Corkscrew
Il cestino del pane	Bread basket
Il coltello	Knife
Il cucchiaino	Spoon
La forchetta	Fork
Il macinino del pepe	Pepper mill
Il piatto	Plate
Il portapepe	Pepper shaker
Il portasale	Salt shaker
Le posate	Cutlery
La scodella	Bowl
Lo stuzzicadente	Toothpick
La tazza	Cup
La tovaglia	Tablecloth
Il tovagliolo	Napkin