**Italy** ([Italian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_language%22%20%5Co%20%22Italian%20language): *Italia* [[iˈtaːlja]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help%3AIPA/Italian) ([listen](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1d/It-Italia.ogg))), officially the **Italian Republic** (Italian: *Repubblica Italiana* [[reˈpubblika itaˈljaːna]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help%3AIPA/Italian)), is a country in Europe. Located in the heart of the [Mediterranean Sea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mediterranean_Sea%22%20%5Co%20%22Mediterranean%20Sea), Italy shares [open land borders](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_borders) with [France](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/France), [Switzerland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Switzerland%22%20%5Co%20%22Switzerland), [Austria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austria%22%20%5Co%20%22Austria), [Slovenia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slovenia%22%20%5Co%20%22Slovenia), [San Marino](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Marino), and [Vatican City](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vatican_City%22%20%5Co%20%22Vatican%20City). Italy covers an area of 301,340 km2 (116,350 sq mi) and has a largely [temperate seasonal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temperate_climate%22%20%5Co%20%22Temperate%20climate)and [Mediterranean climate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mediterranean_climate%22%20%5Co%20%22Mediterranean%20climate). With around 61 million inhabitants, it is the [fourth-most populous EU member state](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_European_Union_member_states_by_population%22%20%5Co%20%22List%20of%20European%20Union%20member%20states%20by%20population) and the most populous country in [Southern Europe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southern_Europe%22%20%5Co%20%22Southern%20Europe).

Due to its central geographic location in Europe and the Mediterranean, Italy has historically been home to a myriad of peoples and cultures. In addition to the various [ancient Italian tribes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_ancient_peoples_of_Italy%22%20%5Co%20%22List%20of%20ancient%20peoples%20of%20Italy) and [Italic peoples](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italic_peoples) dispersed throughout the [Italian Peninsula](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_Peninsula%22%20%5Co%20%22Italian%20Peninsula) and [insular Italy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Insular_Italy%22%20%5Co%20%22Insular%20Italy), beginning from the [classical](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_antiquity) era, [Phoenicians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phoenicians), [Carthaginians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Carthage) and [Greeks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magna_Graecia) established settlements in the [south of Italy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southern_Italy%22%20%5Co%20%22Southern%20Italy), with [Etruscans](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Etruscans%22%20%5Co%20%22Etruscans)and [Celts](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Celts%22%20%5Co%20%22Celts) inhabiting the [centre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Italy) and the [north](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Italy%22%20%5Co%20%22Northern%20Italy) of Italy respectively. The Italic tribe known as the [Latins](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latins_%28Italic_tribe%29) formed the [Roman Kingdom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Kingdom) in the 8th century BC, which eventually became a [republic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Republic%22%20%5Co%20%22Roman%20Republic) that [conquered](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_conquest_of_Italy%22%20%5Co%20%22Roman%20conquest%20of%20Italy) and [assimilated](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romanization_%28cultural%29%22%20%5Co%20%22Romanization%20%28cultural%29) its neighbours. In the first century BC, the [Roman Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Empire) emerged as the dominant power in the [Mediterranean Basin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mediterranean_Basin%22%20%5Co%20%22Mediterranean%20Basin) and became the leading cultural, political and religious [centre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caput_Mundi) of [Western civilisation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_world). The [legacy of the Roman Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legacy_of_the_Roman_Empire%22%20%5Co%20%22Legacy%20of%20the%20Roman%20Empire) is widespread and can be observed in the global distribution of [civilian law](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civilian_law%22%20%5Co%20%22Civilian%20law), [republican governments](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republican_government%22%20%5Co%20%22Republican%20government), [Christianity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Christianity%22%20%5Co%20%22History%20of%20Christianity) and the [Latin script](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latin_script).

During the [Early Middle Ages](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Early_Middle_Ages%22%20%5Co%20%22Early%20Middle%20Ages), Italy endured [sociopolitical collapse](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire%22%20%5Co%20%22Fall%20of%20the%20Western%20Roman%20Empire) and [barbarian invasions](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barbarian_invasions), but by the 11th century, numerous rival [city-states](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_city-states) and [maritime republics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maritime_republics), mainly in the northern and central regions of Italy, rose to great prosperity through shipping, commerce and banking, laying the groundwork for modern capitalism. These mostly independent statelets served as Europe's main trading hubs with Asia and the Near East, often enjoying a greater degree of democracy than the larger [feudal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feudalism) monarchies that were consolidating throughout Europe; however, part of central Italy was under the control of the [theocratic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theocratic%22%20%5Co%20%22Theocratic) [Papal States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Papal_States), while [Southern Italy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southern_Italy%22%20%5Co%20%22Southern%20Italy) remained largely feudal until the 19th century, partially as a result of a succession of [Byzantine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Byzantine_Empire), [Arab](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Islam_in_southern_Italy%22%20%5Co%20%22History%20of%20Islam%20in%20southern%20Italy), [Norman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norman_conquest_of_southern_Italy), [Angevin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Valois-Anjou) and [Spanish](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crown_of_Aragon%22%20%5Co%20%22Crown%20of%20Aragon) conquests of the region.

The [Renaissance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renaissance) began in Italy and spread to the rest of Europe, bringing a renewed interest in [humanism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renaissance_humanism%22%20%5Co%20%22Renaissance%20humanism), [science](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renaissance_science), [exploration](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renaissance_exploration) and [art](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renaissance_art). Italian culture flourished, producing famous scholars, artists and [polymaths](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polymaths%22%20%5Co%20%22Polymaths) such as [Michelangelo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michelangelo), [Leonardo da Vinci](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leonardo_da_Vinci), [Raphael](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raphael), [Galileo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galileo_Galilei) and [Machiavelli](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niccol%C3%B2_Machiavelli%22%20%5Co%20%22Niccol%C3%B2%20Machiavelli). During the Middle Ages, Italian explorers such as [Marco Polo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marco_Polo), [Christopher Columbus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christopher_Columbus), [Amerigo Vespucci](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amerigo_Vespucci%22%20%5Co%20%22Amerigo%20Vespucci), [John Cabot](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Cabot) and [Giovanni da Verrazzano](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giovanni_da_Verrazzano) discovered new routes to the [Far East](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Far_East) and the [New World](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_World), helping to usher in the European [Age of Discovery](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Age_of_Discovery). Nevertheless, Italy's commercial and political power significantly waned with the opening of trade routes that bypassed the Mediterranean.[[14]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italy#cite_note-natgeo-14)[[15]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italy#cite_note-15)[[16]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italy#cite_note-bouchard-16) Centuries of infighting between the Italian city-states, such as the [Italian Wars](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_Wars%22%20%5Co%20%22Italian%20Wars) of the 15th and 16th centuries, left the region fragmented, and it was subsequently conquered by [European powers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Power_%28international_relations%29%22%20%5Cl%20%22Modern_Age_European_powers%22%20%5Co%20%22Power%20%28international%20relations%29) such as [France](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_French_Empire), [Spain](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_Empire) and [Austria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austrian_Empire%22%20%5Co%20%22Austrian%20Empire).

By the mid-19th century, rising [Italian nationalism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_nationalism%22%20%5Co%20%22Italian%20nationalism) and calls for independence from foreign control led to a period of revolutionary political upheaval. After centuries of foreign domination and political division, [Italy was almost entirely unified](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_unification%22%20%5Co%20%22Italian%20unification) in 1871, establishing the [Kingdom of Italy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Italy%22%20%5Co%20%22Kingdom%20of%20Italy) as a [great power](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_power%22%20%5Co%20%22Great%20power). From the late 19th century to the early 20th century, Italy rapidly industrialised, namely in the north, and acquired a [colonial empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_Empire),[[18]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italy#cite_note-allempires.com-18) while [the south](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southern_Italy) remained largely impoverished and [excluded from industrialisation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy_of_Italy%22%20%5Cl%20%22North%E2%80%93South_divide%22%20%5Co%20%22Economy%20of%20Italy), fuelling a large and influential [diaspora](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_diaspora). Despite being one of the [main victors](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Big_Four_%28World_War_I%29) in [World War I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_I), Italy entered a period of economic crisis and social turmoil, leading to the rise of a [fascist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_Fascism%22%20%5Co%20%22Italian%20Fascism) dictatorship in 1922. Participation in [World War II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_II) on the [Axis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Axis_powers) side ended in military defeat, economic destruction and the [Italian Civil War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_Civil_War%22%20%5Co%20%22Italian%20Civil%20War). Following the [liberation of Italy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_Campaign_%28World_War_II%29%22%20%5Co%20%22Italian%20Campaign%20%28World%20War%20II%29) and the rise of the [resistance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_resistance_movement%22%20%5Co%20%22Italian%20resistance%20movement), the country abolished the [monarchy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monarchy_of_Italy%22%20%5Co%20%22Monarchy%20of%20Italy), reinstated democracy, enjoyed a prolonged [economic boom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_economic_miracle%22%20%5Co%20%22Italian%20economic%20miracle) and, despite periods of sociopolitical turmoil (e.g. the *[anni di piombo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anni_di_piombo%22%20%5Co%20%22Anni%20di%20piombo)*, the [Maxi Trial](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maxi_Trial), and *[mani pulite](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mani_pulite%22%20%5Co%20%22Mani%20pulite)*) became a major [advanced country](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Developed_country%22%20%5Co%20%22Developed%20country).

Today, Italy is considered to be one of the world's most culturally and economically developed countries, with its economy ranking eighth [largest in the world](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_GDP_%28nominal%29%22%20%5Co%20%22List%20of%20countries%20by%20GDP%20%28nominal%29) and third in the [Eurozone](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eurozone%22%20%5Co%20%22Eurozone). As an advanced economy, it has the sixth-largest worldwide [national wealth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_wealth%22%20%5Co%20%22National%20wealth), and is ranked third for its central bank [gold reserve](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gold_reserve%22%20%5Co%20%22Gold%20reserve). Italy has a very high level of [human development](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_development_index%22%20%5Co%20%22Human%20development%20index), and it stands among the top countries for [life expectancy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_life_expectancy). The country plays a prominent role in regional and global economic, military, cultural and diplomatic affairs, and it is both a [regional power](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regional_power%22%20%5Co%20%22Regional%20power) and a [great power](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_power%22%20%5Co%20%22Great%20power). Italy is a [founding](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inner_Six%22%20%5Co%20%22Inner%20Six) and [leading](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_Four_%28Western_Europe%29%22%20%5Co%20%22Big%20Four%20%28Western%20Europe%29) member of the [European Union](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Union%22%20%5Co%20%22European%20Union)and a member of numerous international institutions, including the [UN](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UN), [NATO](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NATO), the [OECD](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/OECD), the [OSCE](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/OSCE), the [WTO](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WTO), the [G7](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/G7), the [G20](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/G20), the [Union for the Mediterranean](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_for_the_Mediterranean), the [Council of Europe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Council_of_Europe), [Uniting for Consensus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uniting_for_Consensus%22%20%5Co%20%22Uniting%20for%20Consensus), the [Schengen Area](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schengen_Area) and [many more](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foreign_relations_of_Italy%22%20%5Cl%20%22International_institutions%22%20%5Co%20%22Foreign%20relations%20of%20Italy).

As a reflection of its cultural wealth, Italy is home to 54 [World Heritage Sites](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Heritage_Sites), the [most in the world](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Heritage_Sites_by_country%22%20%5Cl%20%22Countries_with_major_concentrations_of_World_Heritage_Sites%22%20%5Co%20%22World%20Heritage%20Sites%20by%20country), and is the [fifth-most visited country](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Tourism_rankings%22%20%5Co%20%22World%20Tourism%20rankings).



[Etruscan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Etruscan_civilization) fresco in the [Monterozzi necropolis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monterozzi_necropolis%22%20%5Co%20%22Monterozzi%20necropolis), 5th century BC.



[Matera](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matera), which dates from Palaeolithic, is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world.



The [Colosseum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colosseum%22%20%5Co%20%22Colosseum) in Rome, built c. 70–80 AD, is considered one of the greatest works of [architecture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Architecture) and [engineering](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Engineering) of ancient history.



The [Roman Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Empire) at its greatest extent, 117 AD



The [Iron Crown of Lombardy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iron_Crown_of_Lombardy%22%20%5Co%20%22Iron%20Crown%20of%20Lombardy), for centuries symbol of the [Kings of Italy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Italy_%28Holy_Roman_Empire%29).



[Marco Polo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marco_Polo), explorer of the 13th century, recorded his 24 years-long travels in the *[Book of the Marvels of the World](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Travels_of_Marco_Polo%22%20%5Co%20%22The%20Travels%20of%20Marco%20Polo)*, introducing Europeans to Central Asia and China.



Flag of the [Italian Navy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_Navy%22%20%5Co%20%22Italian%20Navy), displaying the coat of arms of the most prominent [maritime republics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maritime_republics): [Venice](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_Venice%22%20%5Co%20%22Republic%20of%20Venice), [Genoa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_Genoa%22%20%5Co%20%22Republic%20of%20Genoa), [Pisa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_Pisa) and [Amalfi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republic_of_Amalfi)



[Italian states](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_historic_states_of_Italy#Late_Middle_Ages) before the beginning of the [Italian Wars](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_Wars%22%20%5Co%20%22Italian%20Wars) in 1494



[Leonardo da Vinci](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leonardo_da_Vinci), the quintessential [Renaissance man](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renaissance_man%22%20%5Co%20%22Renaissance%20man), in a self-portrait, c. 1512. [Royal Library](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Library_of_Turin%22%20%5Co%20%22Royal%20Library%20of%20Turin), [Turin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turin%22%20%5Co%20%22Turin)



[Christopher Columbus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christopher_Columbus) leads expedition to the New World, 1492. [His voyages](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voyages_of_Christopher_Columbus) are celebrated as the discovery of the Americas from a European perspective, and they opened a [new era](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Early_modern_period%22%20%5Co%20%22Early%20modern%20period) in the history of humankind and sustained contact between the two worlds





[Victor Emmanuel II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victor_Emmanuel_II_of_Italy), 1st king of Italy, and [Camillo Benso, Count of Cavour](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camillo_Benso%2C_Count_of_Cavour), 1st Prime Minister of Italy



The *[Altare della Patria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Altare_della_Patria%22%20%5Co%20%22Altare%20della%20Patria)* in Rome, national monument of Italy dedicated to King Victor Emmanuel II, holds the [tomb of the Unknown Soldier](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tomb_of_the_Unknown_Soldier_%28Italy%29%22%20%5Co%20%22Tomb%20of%20the%20Unknown%20Soldier%20%28Italy%29) since the end of World War I



[Sergio Mattarella](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sergio_Mattarella)
[President of Italy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/President_of_Italy)
since 2015



[Giuseppe Conte](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giuseppe_Conte)
[Prime Minister of Italy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prime_Minister_of_Italy)
since 2018

