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**Italy** officially the **Italian Republic**  is a country consisting of a [peninsula](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_Peninsula%22%20%5Co%20%22Italian%20Peninsula) delimited by the [Alps](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alps%22%20%5Co%20%22Alps) and surrounded by [several islands](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_islands_of_Italy%22%20%5Co%20%22List%20of%20islands%20of%20Italy). Italy is located in [south-central Europe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South-Central_Europe%22%20%5Co%20%22South-Central%20Europe) and it is also considered a part of [western Europe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Europe).  A [unitary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unitary_state%22%20%5Co%20%22Unitary%20state) [parliamentary republic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parliamentary_republic%22%20%5Co%20%22Parliamentary%20republic) with its capital in [Rome](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rome), the country covers a total area of 301,340 km2 (116,350 sq mi) and shares [land borders](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_and_territories_by_land_borders%22%20%5Co%20%22List%20of%20countries%20and%20territories%20by%20land%20borders) with France, Switzerland, Austria, Slovenia, and the [enclaved](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enclave_and_exclave%22%20%5Co%20%22Enclave%20and%20exclave) microstates of [Vatican City](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vatican_City) and [San Marino](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Marino). Italy has a territorial [exclave](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enclave_and_exclave) in Switzerland ([Campione](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Campione_d%27Italia)) and a maritime exclave in Tunisian waters ([Lampedusa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lampedusa_e_Linosa)). With around 60 million inhabitants, Italy is the [third-most populous member state of the European Union](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).

Due to its central geographic location in [Southern Europe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southern_Europe) and [the Mediterranean](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mediterranean_Basin), Italy has historically been home to myriad peoples and cultures. In addition to the [various ancient peoples](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_ancient_peoples_of_Italy%22%20%5Co%20%22List%20of%20ancient%20peoples%20of%20Italy) dispersed throughout what is now modern-day Italy, the most predominant being the [Indo-European](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proto-Indo-Europeans) [Italic peoples](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italic_peoples%22%20%5Co%20%22Italic%20peoples) who gave the peninsula its name, beginning from the [classical](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_antiquity%22%20%5Co%20%22Classical%20antiquity) era, [Phoenicians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phoenicians%22%20%5Co%20%22Phoenicians) and [Carthaginians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Carthage%22%20%5Co%20%22Ancient%20Carthage) founded colonies mostly in [insular Italy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Insular_Italy%22%20%5Co%20%22Insular%20Italy),[[18]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italy#cite_note-WaldmanMason2006-18) [Greeks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Greece%22%20%5Co%20%22Ancient%20Greece) established settlements in the so-called [*Magna Graecia*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magna_Graecia) of [Southern Italy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southern_Italy), while [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) inhabited [central](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Italy%22%20%5Co%20%22Central%20Italy) and [northern](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Italy%22%20%5Co%20%22Northern%20Italy) Italy respectively. An Italic tribe known as the [Latins](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latins_%28Italic_tribe%29%22%20%5Co%20%22Latins%20%28Italic%20tribe%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) with a government of the [Senate and the People](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SPQR%22%20%5Co%20%22SPQR). The Roman Republic initially [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 on the Italian peninsula, eventually [expanding and conquering](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rise_of_Rome%22%20%5Co%20%22Rise%20of%20Rome) parts of [Europe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Europe), [North Africa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Africa) and [Asia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asia). By 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 a [leading cultural, political and religious](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legacy_of_the_Roman_Empire%22%20%5Co%20%22Legacy%20of%20the%20Roman%20Empire) [centre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caput_Mundi), inaugurating the [Pax Romana](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pax_Romana), a period of more than 200 years during which Italy's [law](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_law), [technology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_technology%22%20%5Co%20%22Roman%20technology), [economy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_economy), [art](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_art), and [literature](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latin_literature%22%20%5Co%20%22Latin%20literature) developed. Italy remained the [homeland of the Romans](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Italy%22%20%5Co%20%22Roman%20Italy) and the [metropole](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metropole%22%20%5Co%20%22Metropole) of the empire, whose [legacy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legacy_of_the_Roman_Empire%22%20%5Co%20%22Legacy%20of%20the%20Roman%20Empire) can also be observed in the global distribution of culture, governments, [Christianity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity%22%20%5Co%20%22Christianity) 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 the [fall of the Western Roman Empire](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%22%20%5Co%20%22Barbarian%20invasions), 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%22%20%5Co%20%22Maritime%20republics), mainly in the northern and central regions of Italy, rose to great prosperity through trade, commerce and banking, laying the groundwork for modern [capitalism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capitalism%22%20%5Co%20%22Capitalism). 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%22%20%5Co%20%22Feudalism) 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%22%20%5Co%20%22Papal%20States), while [Southern Italy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southern_Italy) remained largely feudal until the 19th century, partially as a result of a succession of [Byzantine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Byzantine_Empire%22%20%5Co%20%22Byzantine%20Empire), [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/Capetian_House_of_Anjou%22%20%5Co%20%22Capetian%20House%20of%20Anjou), [Aragonese](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crown_of_Aragon) and other foreign conquests of the region. The [Renaissance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renaissance%22%20%5Co%20%22Renaissance) 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%22%20%5Co%20%22Renaissance%20exploration) 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). During the Middle Ages, Italian explorers 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. Centuries of rivalry and 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 Italy fragmented and several Italian states were conquered and further divided by multiple European powers over the centuries.

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) in 1861, establishing the [Kingdom of Italy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Italy) as a [great power](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_power%22%20%5Co%20%22Great%20power).[[24]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italy#cite_note-24) 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%22%20%5Co%20%22Italian%20Empire), 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).[[26]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italy#cite_note-26) Despite being one of the [four main allied powers in World War I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Big_Four_%28World_War_I%29%22%20%5Co%20%22The%20Big%20Four%20%28World%20War%20I%29), Italy entered a period of economic crisis and social turmoil, leading to the rise of the [Italian 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%22%20%5Co%20%22Axis%20powers) 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 the country abolished their [monarchy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monarchy_of_Italy%22%20%5Co%20%22Monarchy%20of%20Italy), established a democratic Republic and enjoyed a prolonged [economic boom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_economic_miracle%22%20%5Co%20%22Italian%20economic%20miracle), becoming a highly [developed 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 advanced countries, with the world's [eighth-largest economy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_GDP_%28nominal%29) by nominal GDP (third in the [European Union](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Union%22%20%5Co%20%22European%20Union)), sixth-largest [national wealth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_wealth%22%20%5Co%20%22National%20wealth) and third-largest central bank [gold reserve](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gold_reserve%22%20%5Co%20%22Gold%20reserve). It ranks very highly in [life expectancy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Life_expectancy), quality of life,[[30]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italy#cite_note-economist.com-30) [healthcare](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Healthcare_in_Italy%22%20%5Co%20%22Healthcare%20in%20Italy),[[31]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italy#cite_note-31) and education. The country plays a prominent role in regional and global economic, military, cultural and diplomatic affairs; it is both a [regional power](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regional_power%22%20%5Co%20%22)[[32]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italy#cite_note-32)[[33]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italy#cite_note-33) and a [great power](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_power%22%20%5Co%20%22Great%20power),[[34]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italy#cite_note-Canada_Among_Nations-34)[[35]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italy#cite_note-Milena_Sterio-35) and is ranked the world's [eighth most-powerful military](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_Military_Strength_Index%22%20%5Co%20%22List%20of%20countries%20by%20Military%20Strength%20Index). 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%22%20%5Co%20%22Council%20of%20Europe), [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). The country has long been a global centre of [art](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_art), [music](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music_of_Italy), [literature](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_literature%22%20%5Co%20%22Italian%20literature), [philosophy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_philosophy%22%20%5Co%20%22Italian%20philosophy), [science and technology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Science_and_technology_in_Italy), and [fashion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_fashion), and has greatly influenced and contributed to diverse fields including [cinema](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cinema_of_Italy), [cuisine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_cuisine%22%20%5Co%20%22Italian%20cuisine), [sports](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sports_of_Italy%22%20%5Co%20%22Sports%20of%20Italy), jurisprudence, banking and business.[[36]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italy#cite_note-36) As a reflection of [its cultural wealth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture_of_Italy%22%20%5Co%20%22Culture%20of%20Italy), Italy is home to the world's [largest number](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) of [World Heritage Sites](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Heritage_Sites) ([55](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_World_Heritage_Sites_in_Italy)), and is the [fifth-most visited country](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Tourism_rankings%22%20%5Co%20%22World%20Tourism%20rankings).