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**Italy** officially the **Italian Republic**  is a country consisting of a [peninsula](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_Peninsula" \o "Italian Peninsula) delimited by the [Alps](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alps" \o "Alps) and surrounded by [several islands](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_islands_of_Italy" \o "List of islands of Italy). Italy is located in [south-central Europe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South-Central_Europe" \o "South-Central Europe) 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" \o "Unitary state) [parliamentary republic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parliamentary_republic" \o "Parliamentary republic) 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" \o "List of countries and territories by land borders) with France, Switzerland, Austria, Slovenia, and the [enclaved](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enclave_and_exclave" \o "Enclave and exclave) 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" \o "List of European Union member states by population).

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" \o "List of ancient peoples of Italy) 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" \o "Italic peoples) who gave the peninsula its name, beginning from the [classical](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_antiquity" \o "Classical antiquity) era, [Phoenicians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phoenicians" \o "Phoenicians) and [Carthaginians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Carthage" \o "Ancient Carthage) founded colonies mostly in [insular Italy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Insular_Italy" \o "Insular Italy),[[18]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italy#cite_note-WaldmanMason2006-18) [Greeks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Greece" \o "Ancient Greece) 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" \o "Etruscans) and [Celts](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Celts" \o "Celts) inhabited [central](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Italy" \o "Central Italy) and [northern](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Italy" \o "Northern Italy) Italy respectively. An Italic tribe known as the [Latins](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latins_(Italic_tribe)" \o "Latins (Italic tribe)) 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" \o "Roman Republic) with a government of the [Senate and the People](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SPQR" \o "SPQR). The Roman Republic initially [conquered](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_conquest_of_Italy" \o "Roman conquest of Italy) and [assimilated](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romanization_(cultural)" \o "Romanization (cultural)) its neighbours on the Italian peninsula, eventually [expanding and conquering](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rise_of_Rome" \o "Rise of Rome) 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" \o "Mediterranean Basin) and became a [leading cultural, political and religious](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legacy_of_the_Roman_Empire" \o "Legacy of the Roman Empire) [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" \o "Roman technology), [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" \o "Latin literature) developed. Italy remained the [homeland of the Romans](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Italy" \o "Roman Italy) and the [metropole](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metropole" \o "Metropole) of the empire, whose [legacy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legacy_of_the_Roman_Empire" \o "Legacy of the Roman Empire) can also be observed in the global distribution of culture, governments, [Christianity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity" \o "Christianity) and the [Latin script](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latin_script).

During the [Early Middle Ages](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Early_Middle_Ages" \o "Early Middle Ages), Italy endured the [fall of the Western Roman Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_the_Western_Roman_Empire" \o "Fall of the Western Roman Empire) and [barbarian invasions](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barbarian_invasions" \o "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" \o "Maritime republics), 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" \o "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" \o "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" \o "Theocratic) [Papal States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Papal_States" \o "Papal States), 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" \o "Byzantine Empire), [Arab](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Islam_in_southern_Italy" \o "History of Islam in southern Italy), [Norman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norman_conquest_of_southern_Italy), [Angevin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capetian_House_of_Anjou" \o "Capetian House of Anjou), [Aragonese](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crown_of_Aragon) and other foreign conquests of the region. The [Renaissance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renaissance" \o "Renaissance) began in Italy and spread to the rest of Europe, bringing a renewed interest in [humanism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renaissance_humanism" \o "Renaissance humanism), [science](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renaissance_science), [exploration](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renaissance_exploration" \o "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" \o "Polymaths). 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" \o "Italian Wars) 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" \o "Italian nationalism) 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" \o "Great power).[[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" \o "Italian Empire), 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" \l "North%E2%80%93South_divide" \o "Economy of Italy), 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_(World_War_I)" \o "The Big Four (World War I)), 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" \o "Italian Fascism) 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" \o "Axis powers) side ended in military defeat, economic destruction and the [Italian Civil War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_Civil_War" \o "Italian Civil War). Following the liberation of Italy the country abolished their [monarchy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monarchy_of_Italy" \o "Monarchy of Italy), established a democratic Republic and enjoyed a prolonged [economic boom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_economic_miracle" \o "Italian economic miracle), becoming a highly [developed country](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Developed_country" \o "Developed country).

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_(nominal)) by nominal GDP (third in the [European Union](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Union" \o "European Union)), sixth-largest [national wealth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_wealth" \o "National wealth) and third-largest central bank [gold reserve](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gold_reserve" \o "Gold reserve). 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" \o "Healthcare in Italy),[[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" \o ")[[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" \o "Great power),[[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" \o "List of countries by Military Strength Index). Italy is a [founding](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inner_Six" \o "Inner Six) and [leading](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_Four_(Western_Europe)" \o "Big Four (Western Europe)) member of the [European Union](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Union" \o "European Union) 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" \o "Council of Europe), [Uniting for Consensus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uniting_for_Consensus" \o "Uniting for Consensus), the [Schengen Area](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schengen_Area) and [many more](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foreign_relations_of_Italy" \l "International_institutions" \o "Foreign relations of Italy). 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" \o "Italian literature), [philosophy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_philosophy" \o "Italian philosophy), [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" \o "Italian cuisine), [sports](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sports_of_Italy" \o "Sports of Italy), 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" \o "Culture of Italy), Italy is home to the world's [largest number](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Heritage_Sites_by_country" \l "Countries_with_major_concentrations_of_World_Heritage_Sites" \o "World Heritage Sites by country) 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" \o "World Tourism rankings).