

# SOCIAL HABITS

## IN ITALY

BY YLENIA, MOUNIA, JESSICA AND CLARITA 2015

# GREETINGS

- ◉ When you introduced to an Italian, you should say 'Piacere' and shake hands (a single pump is enough). 'Hello' (*ciao*) is used among close friends and young people, but it isn't considered polite when addressing strangers unless they use it first. Women may find that some men kiss their hand, although this is very old fashion.
- ◉ When being introduced to someone in a formal situation, it's common to say 'Piacere di conoscerla'. When saying goodbye, you should shake hands again. It's also customary to say 'Buongiorno' or 'buonasera' on entering a small shop, waiting room or lift, and 'arrivederci' on leaving (friends say *ciao*).
- ◉ *Buongiorno* becomes *buonasera* any time after the lunch break (around 1pm). 'Buonanotte' is used when going to bed or leaving a house in the evening.

# KISSING

- Italian families and friends usually kiss when they meet. If a woman expects you to kiss her, she offers her cheek. Between members of the opposite sex the 'kiss' is deposited high up on the cheek, never on the mouth (except between lovers!) and it isn't usually really a kiss, more a delicate brushing of the cheeks accompanied by kissing noises.
- There are usually two kisses – first on the right cheek, then on the left.
- It's also common for male relatives and close male friends to embrace.

# TITLES

- Titles should generally be used when addressing or writing to people, particularly when you address to elderly. *Dottore* is usually used when addressing anyone with a university degree ( *dottoressa* if it's a woman) and employees may refer to their boss as director or *presidente*. Professionals should be addressed by their titles such as professor, doctor, engineer, lawyer and architect.
- If you don't know someone's title, you can use *signore* (for a man) or *signora* (woman); a young woman may be addressed as *signorina*, although nowadays all women tend to be addressed as *signora*.

# LEI & TU

- ◉ When talking to a stranger, particularly older Italians, you should use the formal form of "LEI". Don't use the familiar form ( *tu* ) or call someone by their Christian name until you're invited to do so. Generally the older or (in a business context) senior person invites the other to use the familiar ' *tu* ' form of addressing using his/her first name too.
- ◉ The familiar form "TU" is used with children and pets, but almost never with your elders or work superiors. However, Italians are becoming less formal and younger people often use ' *TU* ' and first names with colleagues. It's customary to use ' *LEI* ' in conversations with shopkeepers, business associates and figures of authority (the local mayor) or those with whom you have a business relationship.

# INVITATIONS

- ◉ If you're invited to dinner by an Italian family, you should take along a small present of flowers, pastries or chocolates. Gifts of foreign food or drink aren't generally well received unless they're highly prized in Italy such as single malt whisky. Some people say you must never take wine, although this obviously depends on your hosts and how well you know them. If you do bring wine, it's unlikely to be served with the meal, as the wine will have already been chosen.
- ◉ Flowers can be tricky, as some people associate them with certain things, but a florist will be able to advise you.
- ◉ We say 'Buon appetito' before starting a meal. If you're offered a glass of wine, wait until your host has made a toast before drinking. If you aren't offered another drink, it's time to go home. It's common in Italy to invite people to come after dinner, for example from 9.30pm, for dessert and wine.

# DRESS CODE

- ◉ We are said to dress well and have an inborn sense of elegance and style. Presentation and impression are all-important to us, we refer to this attitude as '*bella figura*'. It is important to dress well and appropriately, according to the situation.
- ◉ We tend to make our opinion on people by their dress, the style and quality being as important as the appropriateness for the occasion. Italians consider bathing costumes, skimpy tops and flip-flops or sandals with no socks strictly for the beach or swimming pool, not suitable to walk in the street, go to restaurants or shops.
- ◉ "*Bella figura*" refers not only to the way you look, but also to the way you act and what you say.

# GESTURES

- The most important element of Italian communication are said to be the gestures: the way we move our hands, hold our heads, move our shoulders, our facial expressions, as well as the way we use our eyes and mouths to make ourselves understood. We simply cannot talk without our hands. If our hands are busy doing something else, we start moving shoulders or other parts of the body for emphasis.
- We tend to speak very loudly in public whether on the bus, in the street or on the phone. Don't worry, we are not all deaf. A lot of foreigners think we are fighting when we talk that way but it's just the way we are.

# DRIVING

- ◉ Italian cities are characterized by a chaotic traffic. When an Italian gets into his car he is convinced to be the only one to have the dominium of the road; he thinks he has always the priority, often arguing with other drivers using words/expressions which are not particularly nice, and he may use eloquent gestures.
- ◉ If you are a pedestrian or a cyclist, do not expect too much kindness by Italian drivers, even if drivers have improved and are more likely to respect pedestrians at a pedestrian crossing, but you'd better be careful.



# OTHER HABITS

- We are thought to have a siesta after lunch for the closing time of shops, but actually siesta is not Italian. Of course in summer the hot weather suggest to be in. Anyway, it isn't recommended to phone between 2 and 4pm, when many people may have a rest. If you must call between 2 and 4 p.m., it's polite to apologise for disturbing the household.
- If you have a business appointment with an Italian, he will expect you to be on time. If you're going to be more than five minutes late, it's wise to phone and inform.
- Italian businessmen usually exchange business cards on business and social occasions.