

INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT ITALY

Land & People

The name "Italy" comes from Greek "italos", which means calf. It was originally given to the region of Calabria by Greek settlers in the 8th century BCE, and was extended to the whole peninsula under Roman emperor Augustus.

Italy was the cradle of Etruscan then Roman civilisations, and the center of the first and largest empire in Europe, North Africa and the Near East.

The city of Syracuse in Sicily was once the largest Ancient Greek city in the world.

The world's largest Christian edifice is the Basilica of Saint Peter in Rome.

Europe's only three active volcanoes, the Etna, the Stromboli and the Vesuvius, are all in the South of Italy. Mount Etna also happens to be the world's most active volcano. It has been in quasi uninterrupted eruption for the past 3500 years, and spewing lava on a daily basis since 1999.

Two of Europe's smallest countries, San Marino and the Vatican, are enclaved within Italy.

Italy is the fourth most visited country in the world, with some 40 million foreign visitors annually.

Italy did not become a unified country until 1861.

Italy now has one of the lowest birthrate and fertility rate in the world.

There are 15 minority languages officially recognised in Italy, including native languages such as Sardinian and Friulian, and neighbouring countries' languages (Catalan, Occitan, French, Slovenian, Croatian, Albanian and Greek)

A 2007 UNICEF report on child well-being in rich countries ranked Italy as the best country for family and peer relationships.

Gastronomy

There is evidence that some sort of pasta and pizza were already eaten in Ancient Rome. The world's first true pizzeria, Antica Pizzeria Port'Alba, opened in Naples in 1830.

There are over 140 types of pasta (see list), and even more names. Some pasta varieties are only produced regionally, while others are known under a different name in various regions.

Each Italian consumes in average 25kg of pasta each year.

There are thousands of traditional and regional Italian desserts. However, the most famous one abroad, the tiramisù, was only invented in the 1970's. The name literally means "pick-me-up" (metaphorically, "make me happy"), due to two of its ingredients : coffee and cocoa.

Culture, History & Sciences

The European Renaissance started in Northern Italy in the 14th century.

The oldest European university in continuous operation is the University of Bologna, founded in 1088. 13 other Italian universities are over 500 years old.

Europe's first modern banks appeared in Genoa in the 12th century. The first recorded public bond (1150) and the earliest known foreign exchange contract (1156) are both from Genoa. The world's oldest bank still in business is the Banca Monte dei Paschi di Siena, operating since 1472.

Many of the world's most famous artists were Italian, with such names as Botticelli, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Donatello, Fra Angelico, Tintoretto, Caravaggio, Bernini, Titian and Raphael, among many others.

The Italians invented the viol, violin, cello and piano, and were the greatest representative of Baroque music (Vivaldi, Corelli, Monteverdi, Albinoni...).

The mechanical clock, the barometer, the thermometer, optical glasses and the telephone are all Italian inventions.

The Romans love cats so much that they are considered a bio-cultural asset of the city. A new law condemns any person killing a cat to a 10,000 euro fine, and up to 3 years in jail. There is an estimated 300,000 cats in Rome, and they are the only inhabitants allowed on the ruins.

In 1994, Italian gynecologist and embryologist Severino Antinori (1945-) assisted the oldest women in history to give birth.

Venice Film Festival is the oldest film festival in the world, beginning in 1932.

Construction & Heritage

St Peter's Basilica in Rome is the largest Christian church in the world. Its construction took 120 years (1506-1626).

The Colosseum in Rome is the largest ancient building dedicated to entertainment. The second and third largest Roman amphitheatres in Italy are respectively those of Capua and Verona.

The catacombs of Rome are 13km long and contain some 40,000 tombs. They are located 7 to meter underground and house the oldest image of the Virgin Mary on earth (early 2nd century).

Economy & Technology

It is estimated that Italy has the biggest "black economy" in Western Europe.

Italy has more famous fashion designers than any other country, including Gucci, Prada, Versace, Dolce & Gabbana, Giorgio Armani, Ermenegildo Zegna, Gianfranco Ferré, Salvatore Ferragamo, Roberto Cavalli, Fendi, Valentino, Trussardi, Benetton...

Many of the world's most prestigious sports cars are Italian, such as Ferrari,

Lamborghini, Maserati, Bugatti or De Tomaso.

The Scuderia Ferrari is the oldest and most successful team left in the Formula One championship. As of 2006, it had won 14 Constructors' Championships and 14 Drivers' Championships since its start in F1 in 1948.

According to the World Bank's "World Trade Indicators 2008", Italy is the most diversified exporter in the world. Its top five export products amount to only 12.9% of all exports.

Italians around the world

Southern Italy has long been a land of emigration. There are now as many Italians living outside Italy as in Italy (about 60 million each). Italian immigrants to Western Europe, North and South America and Australia have generally adapted with great success.

In addition to spreading Italian cuisine around the world, quite a few have become celebrities or managed to reach high positions in government, in the corporate world. Here are a few examples :

- Rudolph Valentino (USA) : Hollywood's first sex symbol and the first "Latin Lover"
- Frank Sinatra (USA) : singer and actor
- Al Pacino (USA) : Hollywood actor
- Robert De Niro (USA) : Hollywood actor
- Sylvester Stallone (USA) : Hollywood actor
- John Travolta (USA) : Hollywood actor
- Leonardo DiCaprio (USA) : Hollywood actor
- Madonna (USA) : singer & actress
- Salvatore Adamo (Belgium) : singer
- Natalie Imbruglia (Australia) : singer & actress
- Lara Fabian (Belgium) : singer
- Quentin Tarantino (USA) : screenwriter, film director and actor
- Francis Ford Coppola (USA) : movie director
- Rudolph Giuliani (USA) : former mayor of New York City
- Elio Di Rupo (Belgium) : Minister-President of Wallonia and president of the Francophone Socialist Party.
- Sam Palmisano (USA) : chairman and CEO of IBM
- Carly Fiorina (USA) : former chairman and CEO of Hewlett-Packard
- Richard Grasso (USA) : former chairman and CEO of the New York Stock Exchange
- Lee Iacocca (USA) : former chairman of the Chrysler Corporation
- Patricia Russo (USA) : CEO of Alcatel-Lucent
- Tommy Mottola (USA) : former head of Sony Music Entertainment
- Mario Draghi (USA) : Former Vice Chairman of Goldman Sachs International
- Amadeo P. Giannini (USA) : founder in 1904 of Bank of Italy which later became Bank of America, the largest bank in the United States.
- Bob Guccione (USA) : founder and former publisher of Penthouse Magazine

- Leonard Riggio (USA) : owner of Barnes & Noble, the largest book retailer in the world
- The Jacuzzi family. (USA) : inventors of the whirlpool bath of the same name.
- Dennis Tito (USA) : the world's first space tourist
- Ayrton Senna (Brazil) : formula one champion
- Rubens Barrichello (Brazil) : formula 1 pilot