



It's Italy in a nutshell. Here are some things you may not know and some that you might know about Italy. It's a little of this and a little of that.



This is the fifth of the "Italy in a Nutshell" messages. This one is about People/Culture and Inventions.

- Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) was an Italian-born scientist. When he argued that the Earth revolved around the Sun, the Catholic Church imprisoned him in his own house. Galileo, we're sure, was delighted to hear that the Church issued a formal apology in 1992, 350 years later.
- Galileo's tooth, thumb, and finger are on display in Florence, Italy. They were cut from his corpse during a burial ceremony 95 years after his death. Why? Here's how the story goes: When he died, the pope argued that as a heretic, he shouldn't be buried anywhere significant so he was stuck in a small room next to a novice's chapel. And there he remained for 95 years. But reverence for him grew, so a new monument was built, and his body was moved. Well, most of it was moved. Francesco Gori, a lover of ancient Rome, got a few pals together and dug into the body. Galileo was put into his new tomb minus three fingers, a tooth, and a vertebra. (We don't understand the choice of body parts.) The vertebra was given to the University of Padua; one finger to his Museum in Florence. The tooth and the other two fingers went to a marquis and most believed these items were lost. In 2009 the marquis' heirs were surprised to find they had a tooth and two fingers. Who did they belong to? One of the heirs decided the macabre artifacts had to go and put them up for auction. It didn't take long to put two and two together. The fingers and tooth rejoined the other parts at the museum.



- Almost 70% of young Italians live with their parents! "Kids" ages 18 to 34 still live at home. (Hey, Italian mothers cook for them, wash their clothes, don't charge rent, etc. Those "kids" know a good deal!)
- One out of 10 Italians lives on an island. There are a lot of islands in Italy: around 450. Two main islands of the country are regions themselves: Sardinia and Sicily. In total, islands represent 16% of the total land.



- The pre-dinner evening stroll or 'passeggiata' is an essential part of Italian culture. It remains among the most longstanding leisure activities in Italy where locals stroll along the streets to 'see and be seen.'

The pre-dinner stroll tradition

- The Italian population is the second oldest in the world, right after Japan. A little over 22% of the total Italian population is 65 or older, vs 28.2% for Japan. This is closely linked to Sardinia; they have the highest rate of centenarians in the world: 22 people aged 100 years or older per 100,000 inhabitants. (Let's move there!) And speaking of Sardinia, the local 'witches' brew health potions and remedies for the locals. These women communicate in a secret language that they pass onto their daughters. Maybe the potions are the reason people live so long there!
- The Italian town of Acciaroli has a very high number of centenarians in its population of about 2,000 people. The town is famous for its low rates of heart disease and Alzheimer's. The residents of the town eat a diet heavy in fish and olive oil, which could be one of the reasons for their good health in old age. (Are you paying attention?) If you want to see some of these old timers, who actually look pretty good, and hear the Doctor's report, [click here](#).
- You will see older members of the family being taken care of by their sons or daughters. Respect for the institution of the family is one of the core Italian values that has remained a part of the Italian identity. The family provides both emotional and financial support to its members.
- Here's a tradition to remember: always take a small amount at first so you can be cajoled into accepting a second helping. If offered a cookie, for example, decline--even if you want it. When pressed a second time to take one, decline again; you can take it on the third invitation. Italians live by tradition and this is one of the more odd ones.

- Ah, the "Bella Figura." Appearances matter in Italy--a lot! The way you dress can indicate your social status, your family's background, and your education level.



Nothing is ever "slapped on" at the last minute



Always thought out

▪ Bella Figura doesn't just apply to clothes and how you look but also to your style, confidence, how one comports oneself, how one makes the best possible impression in all things. It is a concept that's hardwired into an Italian. Beauty is revered in Italy, expressed even by the perfect cut of a suit. Bella figura also is defined by behavior: knowing how to properly and graciously interact with others in any social or public situation. Exhibiting good manners, tact, and gentility is an essential component of "cutting a beautiful figure." Here's how designer Berardi describes it. [Click here.](#)



Inventions

- Pretzels were actually first made in Italy in 610 by an Italian monk who gave them to children who learned their prayers.
- The first ice cream cone was created by an Italian immigrant who settled in New York City.
- And the telephone? Alexander Graham Bell? Nope. Antonio Meucci. He was the first to patent the invention but when he was unable to afford the patent renewal, Alexander Graham Bell bought the patent in 1876 and that's why the invention of the telephone is credited to him.
- What other things did Italians invent? Here's a short list: the piano, carbon paper, pizza, jeans, automatic rifle, banks, stock exchange, eyeglasses, calculator, concrete, dentures, espresso machine (oh boy, coffee!), microscope, gelato (thank goodness!), light bulb, thermometer, newspaper, parachute, motor boat (Leonardo di Vinci), radio, public toilets (we're all happy about this one), ballet, helicopter, and the list goes on.

The next Nutshells involve Food. Stand by.

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