



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 Nutshell is all about--what else--Food. But this one is in two parts. We're covering the "normal" things in Part 1. The odd and unusual will be covered in Part 2. Don't forget to check out the Wine Fountain at the end!

Food--Part 1

- The first Italian cookbook was written in 1474 by Bartolomeo Sicci.
- There are currently more than 500 different types of pasta eaten in Italy today.
- Salad is not an appetizer in Italy; Italians eat salad after the meal as the roughage aids in digestion. Salad "dressing" is a very simple affair in Italy; extra virgin olive oil and vinegar. Period.
- Three items are always on an Italian dinner table: wine, bread and bottled water. (Don't even try to go near a tap with a glass; you'll get told not to and you'll get a scowly face, too.)
- The fork was popularized in Italy; it was not a popular eating utensil until the Italians started using it; after all, pasta is easily twirled with it. It made sense to the Italians to use it. Eventually, the rest of Europe followed.
- In Italy walking while eating is considered disrespectful. Someone spent time and effort creating food for you to eat and enjoy and you can't do that while walking. The Italian approach to food is to slow down, sit down, laugh with friends and family, enjoy the food, and relax! Do you ever see a photo of an Italian in a restaurant or café wolfing down food?

McDonald's was not easily welcomed in Rome. When the first franchise in the city opened in 1986, protesters outside gave away free spaghetti as a reminder of their culinary heritage for their fellow countrymen.

Want to see what they serve at McDonald's in Italy. [Click here](#) to see the chicken sandwich and Parmesan cube snack.

Eating raw fish is an ancient tradition in Puglia, and raw octopus is considered a delicious specialty. Fishermen pound it against a rock in order to make it tender. If it's not made tender, it's the equivalent of chewing on a old rubber tire.



We've got a recipe for an octopus salad on our website in La Cucina (and it's tender). Octopus is becoming more popular in restaurants. Why? Because it's really tasty. By the way, our recipe uses cooked--not raw--octopus. Go to the website and click on La Cucina at the top. Under "Salads" look for Giuseppe's Octopus Salad.

If you'd like to see how raw fish is prepared in Puglia, [click here](#)

- An Italian eats an average of 51 pounds of pasta per year. Americans eat an average of 17 pounds per year.
- Marco Polo was thought to have brought pasta back from his travels to China. But, in fact, there is evidence that Italians were eating pasta in the 12th century, one century before the merchant travelled to the Far East.



Spaghetti was originally known as maccheroni. Before the invention of pasta factories, homemade spaghetti would be hung outside to dry. It looked like string, which led to the pasta being called spaghetti, or strings.

Pasta drying in a bathtub!

- Italians eat many things uncommonly found in American kitchens. These include hedgehog, guinea pig, rabbit and hare, sparrows, peacock, donkey, pigeon and horse.
- A dog named Rocco discovered a massive truffle that sold for \$333,000.

- There are over 450 varieties of Italian cheese. Here is a really fun video of some cheesemakers making a variety of cheeses. Need a mozzarella pig? Watch them make one. [Click here](#) for the demo.
- The pizza was invented in Naples during the 18th century. Originally, it was a dry, flat bread intended for poor people. Now they cost \$15!
- The national Italian Food Day is February 13.



Cheese, cheese, cheese..



The Wine Fountain

In Ortona, Abruzzo, there's a wine fountain that flows red wine all day around the clock, every single day. The fountain was installed by the Dora Sarchese Vineyard and The Way of Saint Thomas, a non-profit organization. It's at the end of a pilgrimage trail named Cammino di San Tommaso and to reward pilgrims after the walk from Rome. It's a continuous flow and it's free. The location was picked carefully, as the fountain lies on an ancient pathway named for St. Thomas. The trail connected Rome to Ortona where St. Thomas himself was buried.

Spiritually-minded individuals have traversed the path for years, and the concept of having a wine fountain along the trail is an incentive for those wanting to take on a pilgrimage (or simply take a visit to this beautiful location in Italy). Want to see how the fountain works? [Click here to fill your cup.](#)