

# Italy From The Inside

“The Definitive Survival Guide for Travelers”



A native Italian reveals the secrets of traveling in Italy

**Francesca Tosolini**

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**Author's Note:**

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I encourage you to verify any critical information with the relevant authorities before you travel.

## About Francesca



I was born in Trieste, Italy, where I spent most of my life until 1996 when I moved to Seattle, WA.

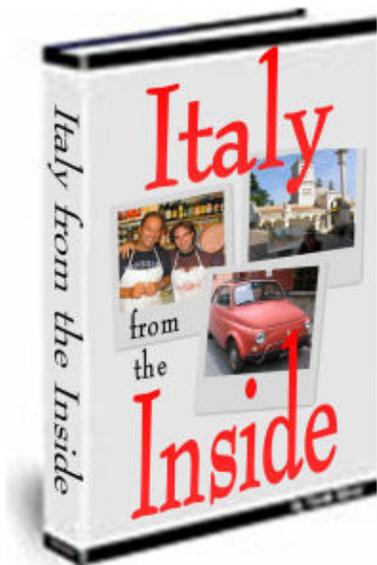
After working for a vacation rental agency and owning my own Italy travel business, I decided to stay home with my two kids.

Living in US has made me realize how many people are in love with Italy and how many would like to know more about my country.

This is what inspired me to write this unique eBook, filled with useful, practical information and tips that most of the time you won't find in a typical travel guide.

## About this eBook

You are reading a **sample chapter** of the eBook **Italy From The Inside**. The full eBook contains **350+ tips** and **190+ photos** that offer an educational yet entertaining insight into Italy and its culture.



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## TRAINS & STATIONS

The Italian train system is very efficient and convenient if you have to cover long distances. In Italy trains are very popular in everyday life. They are a common means of transportation for commuters, students, business men, etc. Taking the train in Italy can definitely get you closer to the Italian culture. Let's see how it works:

### TRAIN TICKET

1. A train ticket can be purchased at several locations:
  - a. The train station ticket office (*biglietteria*). It is very important that you have a clear idea of the kind of ticket (*biglietto*) you want to buy (*comprare*). It may be a good idea to write the trip plan on a piece of paper (*pezzo di carta*) to show to the clerk, in case the language barrier makes the process too difficult. Keep in mind that most clerks speak only very basic English, so a note showing information such as the city or town of departure, the city or town of arrival, the date (*data*) and the time (*ora*) of departure, and the number of people traveling in your party would be helpful. Another good idea is to have a map showing where you have to go and just pointing to the locations you want to travel to. Credit cards are accepted.



Train station ticket office

#### Did you know?

The ticket office is usually open from 6am to 9pm (in the major train stations), so buy your ticket the day before in case you have to catch an early train (and in case you wonder, yes, you can find many people waiting in line even at 6am...).

Ticket office hours are listed on [Trenitalia's website](http://www.trenitalia.com).

If you are in a hurry, look for the Fast Ticket Window (*Sportello Veloce*). This is an option that may be very useful if you are just about to catch your train, but you still haven't purchased your ticket. The *Sportello Veloce* ticket window is reserved for passengers whose train leaves within 15 minutes. Last January I was one of those passengers. My adrenaline was already going up when I saw this ticket window and literally ran to it. Thank God there were only two people in front of me. It wouldn't have been my dream to spend two hours waiting at the Naples train station... Right now this service is available only in major train stations.

- b. Self-service ticket machines (*distributori di biglietti automatici*). These are big yellow (or blue) machines, and they are very easy to use. They accept credit cards, ATM cards and sometimes cash (*contanti*). The machine will lead you through a series of detailed questions (which are available also in English) about your ticket: the origin of your trip and final destination, date, time, and so on. Ticket machines are a great way to avoid lines (*file*) at the ticket counter, even though sometimes lines form in front of the machines as well....



Self-service ticket machine

- c. Travel agencies (*agenzie di viaggio*). This is a good solution if you want to avoid language barriers, as travel agents are usually more familiar with English than the clerks at the train stations. At the same time, they are less familiar with the train system and its travel options. If you choose a travel agency to purchase your ticket, make sure that it shows the *Trenitalia* logo on the window or door, since not all travel agencies sell train tickets.



[Trenitalia's website](#) shows a list of agencies (organized by region) where it is possible to purchase train tickets.

- d. News stands (*giornalai*) and cigarette stores called tobacconists (*tabaccai*) also sell train tickets, but only for short distance trips (usually up to 250 km = 155 miles).
- e. On the Internet: <http://www.trenitalia.com/en/index.html>. You need to be a registered user to be able to purchase tickets through the Internet. It's very easy to become a registered user: just fill out the online form with your first name, last name and email address. Tickets purchased on the Internet used to have the same price as those purchased at the train station. However, since January 1st 2008, the prices of the premium tickets (such as Eurostar) have been increased by 15%, but if you buy them either online, or by calling the Call Center at 892 021, or from travel agencies with the ticketless procedure you get a 5% discount. I encourage you to visit the Trenitalia website for more details about online purchases. Although it seems to me that for a tourist the easiest way to buy a train ticket is by dealing with a human being...
- f. The Call Center (this service has limited English support). By calling the number 892 021 you have access to:

- The Information Service for train schedules and fares, etc;
- Assistance on the Trenitalia.com website
- Buy or change booking (except for regional trains)
- Other useful services.

Warning!! From landlines, calling rates are €0.30 per unit answer and €0.54 per minute, which means that a 10 minute call may cost you almost \$9. Think twice before making that call... From cell phones rates vary depending on the provider.

2. Purchasing a ticket gives you the right to travel on the train, but it doesn't necessarily give you a seat (*posto*) unless you make a specific seat reservation (*prenotazione*). Sometimes tickets are sold even if no seats are available, in which case you'll have to ride the train standing up until a non-reserved seat frees up.
3. You can start reserving a seat from two months in advance until the departure itself. But if you plan to travel between June 1<sup>st</sup> and September 30<sup>th</sup> you can reserve your ticket three months in advance for the outward trip and 4 months in advance for the return trip. Of course, if you are planning to travel during high season or holidays it is advisable to reserve your seats as far in advance as possible, otherwise a couple of days before is usually enough (NB: by high season I mean Christmas, Easter and summer time).
4. Open tickets are valid for two months (*mesi*) from the date of issue. They can be used on any day during this two-month period. Tickets for trains that require a mandatory reservation are valid only on the day and time specified. The distance-validity tickets do not have any time limit (see bullet d.).
5. Some trains require an additional fee on top of the regular price. This is almost always the case for night trains (couchettes and sleeper trains), but

sometimes also for what would seem like a regular train (many Intercity trains require a supplement). This information is displayed on the timetable, which you should always check prior to purchasing a ticket.

6. After you have purchased your ticket (*biglietto*), always remember to validate it at the yellow punch machines usually located at the beginning of the train tracks (*binario*) and throughout the station.



Ticket punch machine

**Did you know?**

For some inexplicable reason in some train stations the ticket punch machines are not located on the platform along the train tracks, but only at the start of them. This means that if you are already on the train and suddenly remember that you haven't punched your ticket, you have to get off the train and go back to the beginning of the track to validate it. It doesn't seem like a big deal, unless the train is half a mile long...

This is very important because during the trip (*viaggio*) the ticket conductor (*controllore*) will check your ticket. If you forget to validate it, you may risk getting a €200 fine (*multa*) plus the cost of the ticket. Should you forget to do it, inform the ticket conductor right away.



Ticket conductor

**Did you know?**

Since October 2004 it is not possible to buy tickets on the train anymore.

Travelers without a ticket are subject to a fine of €200, plus the full fare ticket. If you pay the fine within 15 days then the amount is going to be reduced to €100, if you pay on the spot or at the final destination it is reduced to €50

The main exceptions to this rule apply when the ticket office is closed (like in smaller train stations), or the ticket machines are out of order.

7. Tickets are given in two or more portions: one shows the itinerary, the total cost and the total length of the trip (marked in kilometers); the other (or others) is the actual ticket for each train you have to take, therefore it shows the date and time of departure, the seat number (in case you made a reservation), the city of origin and the destination (which corresponds to the city where your trip ends or the one where you have to change trains), the class, etc.
8. Tickets are only good for 6 hours after validation for distances of 200 km or less, and for 24 hours on distances of 200 km or more (200 km=124 miles). This means that you are allowed to get off (*scendere*) the train if you want to make a short visit to one or two towns along the way, as long as you don't exceed the maximum time allowed to get to your final destination. So if you decide to get off the train before your final destination, make sure to evaluate the train timetables to be sure you can catch another train before your ticket validation time runs out.
9. Seat reservations are usually not mandatory (*obbligatorio*) on most trains, however, if you plan to take the train for a long trip, you probably should reserve a seat, especially if departing from very crowded train stations (such

as Milan or Rome). Sometimes the train gets so crowded that you have to stand for a long time before you can find a seat to rest your poor bones, and this can be a matter of hours in many cases. Fortunately, some trains allow you to upgrade your ticket to first class (most trains in Italy have a first and a second class) just by paying the difference plus a fee (usually around €8). These pictures show the difference between first and second class on new trains:



First class

**Did you know?**

Older trains have cabins, accessible from a lateral corridor, with two facing rows of seats. The seats can be flattened down to form a bed, which may become a lifesaver for night trips.



Second class

10. Children (*bambini*) up to 4 years old travel free (*gratis*) in both first and second class, but don't have the right to occupy a seat.

Children 5 to 12 years old can obtain a 50% (or 30% for sleeping-car trips) reduction on the ticket price.

Groups of at least 10 people can receive a discount on tickets for first and second class: 10% if they travel on Friday and Sunday, 20% if they travel during the other days of the week.

If you plan to use the train often during your vacation, don't forget that a variety of train passes are available. Some of them can be even purchased in your own country from authorized travel agencies or online at [www.raileurope.com](http://www.raileurope.com).

## NIGHT TRAVELING

11. Traveling by night on a train can be a thrilling experience. Besides the traditional and cheaper couchettes carriages with room for 4 or 6 people, there are several sleeper carriages offering cabins with one, two or three (bunk) beds. A washbasin with warm and cold water, reading lamp, electrical plugs and other basic amenities are provided in the Classic and Tourist class sleeper carriages.



### Did you know?

If you are a woman travelling solo, keep in mind that some compartments on the train can be reserved for ladies only.

Couchette for 4 people (we slept here on our way to Naples, our couchette-mate snored all the way to our destination...)

For those who want to experience a more luxurious trip there are the Excelsior sleeper carriages which provide air conditioning, toilet with shower, electronic panels showing the train itinerary, intercom service and other fancy amenities.

Recently, a new service has been added to some night trains: you can rent a portable DVD player and a movie for €7; if you want to watch 2 movies then the cost is €10. [Trenitalia's website](#) even shows you on which itineraries the DVD service is provided.

For more information and details about night trains visit the [Trenitalia website](#).

## TYPES OF TRAINS

12. There are different types of trains; the main ones are:

- The **Eurostar** (also known as **ETR** or *Pendolino*) is the fastest train, and a good alternative to the airplane. It offers connections between the major cities on the west-east routes (for example, it runs between Milan and Venice in 2½ hours), or north-south (for example, it covers the distance between Venice and Rome in 4½ hours). A reservation on this train is mandatory. You can now take a virtual tour of a Eurostar train on [Trenitalia's website](#).
- The **Intercity** (IC) is a train that covers the entire territory, connecting also minor cities. Reservation is not mandatory and costs €3. You can take a virtual tour of an Intercity by visiting [Trenitalia's website](#).
- The **Intercity Plus** is the improved version of the traditional Intercity and it offers new interiors and amenities. Reservation is mandatory and costs €1 for trips up to 300 km, €2 for longer trips.
- The **Interregional** is a fast train connecting places in different regions.
- The **Direct** train connects cities within one or two regions. It stops at fewer train stations.

- The **Regional** and **Local** trains are the slowest and are mainly used by commuters. They travel within one region and stop at almost every station. They offer second-class service only.

As a rule there isn't much luggage space in the train aisles, so larger bags need to be placed in the appropriate area near the door. If you do travel with bulky luggage, try to get a seat near the door so you can keep an eye on your belongings.

## GENERAL TRAIN & STATION INFORMATION

- Whether you are planning to buy a ticket at the train station or not, always try to get there at least 20 or 30 minutes (*minuti*) before the train departs. This will give you the time to absorb the shock of unexpected long lines at the ticket office desk while buying a ticket, and find the right platform (*binario*). You may also want to buy drinks (*bibite*) or snacks to take on the train (as not all trains provide food service), which will also add to your pre-boarding time. Train tap water (*acqua*) is absolutely not drinkable. Make sure to buy some bottled water before getting on the train, especially if it is going to be a long trip!



Train platform

### Did you know?

As you probably already know, *Venezia* is the Italian name for Venice. What about that “S.L.”? That stands for “Santa Lucia,” which is the name of the train station in Venice.

Now, if you look under the “S.L.” you can read “Reg. 1a, 2a cl. 17.47”: this means that this is a Regional train offering 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> class seats and it is departing at 5:47pm.

- Bicycles can be boarded on certain trains only. Usually a bicycle icon is displayed on the official schedule and on the train carriage.
- The train timetable can be found on billboards (*orari dei treni*) which are yellow for departures (*partenze*) and white for arrivals (*arrivi*).



Arrivals



Departures

**Did you know?**

Taking the train may be more convenient since a second-class ticket is usually less expensive than the combined cost of freeway tolls and gas to the same destination.

For example, at the time of this writing, a second class one way ticket from Milan to Rome ranges from €32 to €67 depending on the type of train. The freeway toll from Milan to Rome is €31. Gas cost averages around €80.

In other words it's about €67 max to go by train versus around €110 for the same trip by car.

16. The platform from which the train leaves is indicated on the train schedule. Also, check the electronic boards for departure and arrivals, which are updated every few minutes. Sometimes last minute changes occur, and it is always better to double-check if the train leaves from the advertised platform.

PARTENZE						ARRIVI					
DESTINAZIONE	INDIC.SUSS.	CAT.	ORARIO	RET.	BIN.	PROVENIENZA	INDIC.SUSS.	CAT.	ORARIO	RET.	BIN.
VENEZIA S. L.	REG <sup>1</sup>	REG <sup>1</sup>	15.47		3	UDINE	REG <sup>1</sup>	REG <sup>1</sup>	15.48		8
UDINE	REG <sup>1</sup>	REG <sup>1</sup>	17.07		7	VENEZIA S. L.	REG <sup>1</sup>	REG <sup>1</sup>	16.13		3
UDINE	REG <sup>1</sup>	REG <sup>1</sup>	16.32		6	VE-UDINE	IR <sup>1</sup>	IR <sup>1</sup>	16.53		4
VENEZIA S. L.	REG <sup>1</sup>	REG <sup>1</sup>	16.47		2	VENEZIA S. L.	REG <sup>1</sup>	REG <sup>1</sup>	17.15		6
UDINE-VE S. L.	IR <sup>1</sup>	IR <sup>1</sup>	17.07		5	UDINE	REG <sup>1</sup>	REG <sup>1</sup>	17.27		5
2		0									

Departures and arrivals electronic board

17. Most train stations offer a baggage storage service (*deposito bagagli*) where you can deposit your luggage for a few hours (*ore*) or even days (*giorni*). Usually the fees are based on the number of bags. An ID (*documento d'identita'*) is required at the time of deposit and pick up; your passport should suffice. Also, remember to check the office hours to avoid the inconvenience of finding the office closed (*chiuso*) when you are ready to leave.



Baggage storage

#### Did you know?

Smoking is prohibited on all trains since March 2004. Better later than never! Besides, trust me, even smokers didn't like the smoking trains.

Many times I saw smoker passengers traveling in a non-smoking car, but then enjoying their cigarette in the smoking car. And guess where I was traveling? In the smoking car of course, since I couldn't find a spot in the non-smoking car, which was occupied by many of these "cheaters"...

18. In some train stations there is a fee to pay if you want to use the restroom, so it's a good idea to always have some coins with you. If no fee is requested, usually there is an attendant who expects to be tipped. A little curiosity to add

to your travels is that you may find the toilet itself different from the one you are used to. The picture below should nicely explain what I mean, so get ready to meet the *gabinetto alla turca*:



Gabinetto alla turca

**Did you know?**

A friend of mine once told me that when she went to Italy she couldn't figure out how to flush the toilet.

First let me tell you this: there are many types of flushing systems, and one of them, which is the one my friend encountered, is a little button on the wall that needs to be pressed very firmly in order to activate the flushing.

There you go, another *important* secret revealed ☺...

19. If you use the train a lot and prefer to have the train schedule at hand, then buy the *Pozzorario* which is the official Italian train timetable issued twice a year and available at train station newsstands.



Pozzorario

20. And now a little curiosity about some Italian train stations: some of them (as well as some airports) have chapels (*cappelle*). Mass is not provided, but some people like to use them for prayer or a moment of peace.

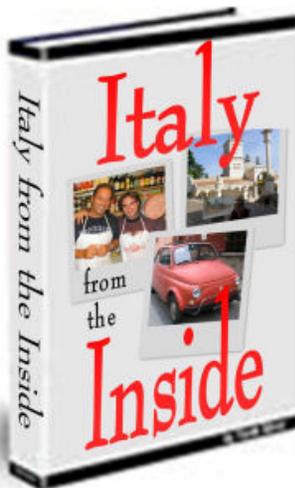


Train station chapel

**Did you know?**

Strikes by train workers are pretty common in Italy. By law, strikes must be announced at least ten days in advance and can never happen during vacation exoduses which are: from Dec. 17<sup>th</sup> to Jan. 7<sup>th</sup>, June 27<sup>th</sup> to July 4<sup>th</sup>, July 28<sup>th</sup> to August 3<sup>rd</sup>, Aug. 10<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup>, Aug. 28<sup>th</sup> to Sep. 5<sup>th</sup> and from October 30<sup>th</sup> to November 5<sup>th</sup>.

Also the 5 days preceding and following Easter, and the three days before and after an election day (which varies depending on when it is scheduled) must always be strike free. When strikes are in progress a limited train service must always be provided.



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James L., Tennessee, USA

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*Italy from the Inside is a practical, clearly written, well-illustrated and charming guide to the nitty-gritty of Italian everyday life. If only I had it on my first trip to the supermarket – armloads of groceries because I couldn't figure out how to get a shopping cart.*

*Francesca explains what we all take for granted at home but may be unsure about when we leave for parts unknown: ordering in a restaurant, road signs, shopping, parking, tipping, using ATMs, bidets, and gassing up. Italy from the Inside is unique - there are no other publications on the market like it.*

*Downloading was a snap and I appreciated the free up-date. It would make a great gift for novice, experienced and arm chair travelers to Italy.  
Complimenti e grazie mille,*

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*It's a **must read** to anyone traveling in Italy. It's witty, easy to read and quite informative with a ton of great tips.*

Dina A., Washington, USA

*Francesca's book is **wonderfully helpful** and has a delightful style which makes it fun to read as well as educational.*

*The information is exactly what I need as I plan my family's trip to Italy. Thank you!*

Irene B., Bellevue, WA

*Some weeks ago I received your wonderful eBook "Italy from the Inside". I have spent many, many hours reading and enjoying this informative and easy to understand guide book. I love the format with great photographs which have explained my many questions about public transportation on buses and trains.*

*Your book puts my mind at ease about what to expect and how to enjoy my travel because of a clearer understanding of how things operate in Italy. I have collected so much valuable information through your website and your book. You provide a unique presentation which is so friendly and easy to follow.*

***Reading your book was like having good friends** sit down with me and walk me through exactly what I need to do. Your book is so user friendly with clear photos on how to use a telephone, buy groceries, go to the pharmacy for particular emergencies, buy train tickets and on and on, so much more than I could have imagined.*

*I absolutely am so happy to have discovered your book and heartily recommend this to everyone that wants to visit Italy with a feeling of comfort and ease and to discover and understand the country on a much more intimate level.*

*I have bought other guide books as well but feel **your book is uniquely different** and such a good complement to my other travel guides. Italy from the Inside is unique in its presentation.*

*Thank you so much.*

Barbara C, California, USA

*After moving from the U.S. to Italy a few short months ago, I discovered “Italy from the Inside”. I couldn't have found it at a better time!*

*I can't even put into words how this book has helped our entire family. It has all the **inside information** no other book about Italy has. It has made our life here so much easier. I feel it has given me more confidence in daily life.*

*I was very nervous about driving in Italy but after reading the sections about driving in Italy and highway information it answered all the questions I had about road signs and driving on the highway (you can't find that in any other book)!*

*The information in this book is a **must have** for anyone traveling to, or living in Italy. I plan on carrying it with me in the car anywhere we go (you never know when you might need it)!*

*Thank you Francesca and Paolo for creating such a one of a kind book!  
Your loyal reader*

Courtney R., Avigliana, Italy

*I am absolutely enjoying the book! My husband and I will be visiting Italy and the book has already become **an invaluable resource** after one day.*

Deidre B., South Carolina, USA

*It isn't until you read Italy from the Inside that you realize these are all the things you wanted to know. Should I get a car, what about kid seats, train travel, reading signs, what if I need a pharmacy or hospital, food suggestions and more.*

*I can't imagine a better resource for planning a trip to an unknown destination and having all the information I need.*

Thomas L., Washington , USA

*As a student traveling to Torino for the first time, this eBook was **extremely helpful** in adjusting to life in Italy. The information was up-to-date and accurate, making my trip that much more enjoyable.*

Chad S., Nevada, USA

*It is by far **the best resource we've seen about traveling in Italy**. The info in it will absolutely make our trip more enjoyable.*

Mike C., California, USA

*Your website & eBook is **without doubt the best guide for any first time traveller to Italy**. No other book prepares a traveller to face the situations that he/she might faces on a typical day in Italy, like the way your eBook does.*

Arun B., India

*Thank you for writing this eBook. My husband and I were in Italy three years ago and were confused, lost and stressed most of the time. I truly wish I had read your book prior to my first visit.*

*My sister and I are going in October and I have booked our entire trip - accommodations and travel myself online. I am now **much more prepared and less stressed** with this awesome information in my hands.*

***I highly recommend this eBook!***

Deb A., Canada

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<http://www.ItalyFromTheInside.com/ebook>