

Italy

Location

Italy is located in Europe and is approximately 116,320 square miles. From north to south it measures 708 miles and 320 miles east to west. Countries that border Italy are France to the west, Switzerland and Austria to the north, and Slovenia to the east. Two independent countries are located within Italy's borders. The small Republic of San Marino is in north central Italy and the Vatican City is located completely within the city of Rome. The boot shaped peninsula is bordered on three sides by water. The seas that it touches within the Mediterranean Sea are the Tyrrhenian Sea to the west, the Ionian Sea to the south, and the Adriatic Sea to the east.

Geography

Italy is mostly a hilly and mountainous country, but is also known for its warm, sandy beaches. It contains two mountain ranges. The Alps run across the northern border of the country, while the Apennines form the backbone that runs nearly the entire peninsula. The Po Valley is located between the Alps and the Apennines, and contains some of Italy's best agricultural land. The boot of Italy is composed of broad plateaus.

Climate

Precipitation and temperatures change in Italy as you go from north to south. In the north moisture is adequate year round. The summers are moderate to warm and the winters are much cooler than the south, with daytime highs reaching 41 degrees. The further south you go the less rainfall there is. In the south the summers are hot and dry, with temperatures

reaching 86 degrees. The winters are mild, about 41 degrees, with moderate rainfall.

Important Dates

Around 200 B.C. the Roman empire arose in central Italy to conquer the ancient world until its fall in 400 A.D. In 1923 Mussolini took control of Italy and ruled as a dictator until 1943. In 1946 Italy began its present form of government; parliamentary democracy. In 1993 Italy helped to form the European Union.

Population

In 1996 Italy had a population of approximately 57,956,000 people. The population density works out to 498 people per square mile, much higher than the U.S. A majority of the people live in urban areas. There is a lower population density in the mountain regions of northern and southern Italy. About 98% of the population are ethnic Italians.

Currency

The official currency of Italy today is the lira. However, in 1992, the countries of the European union established a common currency -- the euro. They also permanently fixed the euro-individual currency exchange rate. In 2002 the new currency will begin circulating and replace the lira. It is hoped this will bring more prosperity to Europe and allow more trading with its current trade partners, mainly the U.S.

Education

All children from ages 6 to 14 must attend elementary school, followed by junior high for three years. Students then have the choice to go several different types of high schools,

such as technical schools, vocational schools, science schools, or teacher training schools. Most of these are a four or five year program. All senior high school graduates may attend a public university. They are generally four to six years in length. Enrollment in universities has been high since the late 1960's.

Language

Italian evolved from Latin. It is the official language of Italy. Regional dialects are still spoken, which differ significantly from each other. In the north there are small pockets which speak French, German, Slovenian (a Slavic language), and Ladin (similar to Swiss). In the south there are a few communities which speak Greek or Albanian.

Trade

Italy does a lot of international trading. Its major trading partners are Germany, France, the United States, and Britain. Italy's main exports include clothing and shoes, motor vehicles, machinery, chemicals, fruits and vegetables. The main imports are machinery, petroleum, motor vehicles, textile yarns, metals, and food. Italy has had an unfavorable balance of trade since the early 1980's, due largely to the importation of fossil fuels, especially petroleum. This is somewhat offset by the large tourism industry.

Food

Food is very important in Italy. Italians take great pride in their cooking. The large meal is traditionally served at noon. Large meals usually start out with antipasto (appetizers). This is followed by a course of pasta. In the north, cream sauce with flat pasta is standard. In the south tomato based sauce with macaroni pasta is preferred. Soups of many different kinds may

substitute for the pasta course. After the pasta course, the main course of meat is served. Veal and pork are the most popular types of meat. Cheese is also a common item on the menu. Wine is served with every meal except breakfast.

Agriculture

About 40% of Italy's land is cultivated. Most of the farms are owned by the farmer, but about 75% of them are less than 12 acres. Most of the farms haven't been modernized, but almost all of the larger farms have been mechanized. Over 95% of the farmers are older than 34. Most farms use almost entirely family labor. Less than 10% of fulltime farmers have off-farm employment. Mountain regions, along with central and southern agriculture, most generally have smaller farms, older farmers, less mechanization, and are less profitable. Most farms produce specialized crops or only a few crops. There are a few farms that practice mixed or general farming. Grapes are the most valuable crop. Most of the grapes are used to make wine. Italian wines are famous for their quality and are exported throughout the world. The second most valuable crop is olives. Many of them are crushed to make olive oil, which is a major export. Grazing by sheep, cattle, and goats is important in the drier regions. However, much of Italy's meat supply is imported, most notably from Argentina. Italy is one of the world leaders in sugar beet production. They also grow over half of the world's artichokes. Some important grain crops are wheat, corn, and rice. Some other important fruit and vegetable crops include oranges, peaches, apples, tomatoes, and potatoes. Per capita consumption of dairy products and potatoes is lower than most other European Union countries. However, per capita consumption of cereal products, vegetables, fruits, and wine is much higher than the EU average.

Landmarks

Italy contains many historic sites and much architecture, dating back from the Renaissance and even to Roman times. Certainly many of the Roman buildings and monuments in Rome are world famous. Paintings, sculptures, monuments, and architecture from the Renaissance remain a major tourist draw. Also included in every tourist's wish list is a trip to Venice, the city built entirely on the water whose streets are plied by canal boats.

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