

IDENTITIES ABROAD: ITALY*



IDENTITIES ABROAD

As you prepare for your education abroad program, you may be considering how your own identities may or may not interact with the host culture in similar or different ways than they do at home. Below you will find country-specific information on potential challenges for students who are from backgrounds traditionally underrepresented in education abroad programs. This information, adapted from the Diversity Network's Country Diversity Notes (via [Diversity Abroad](#)), is intended to assist you in exploring how you might be received abroad based on your race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, religion, or ability.

The information below features a country overview for Italy as well as information pertinent to the socio-cultural climate that U.S. students of diverse backgrounds can reasonably expect while living in the country. It also offers bulleted information noting facts that may directly relate to student experiences in the country. Links with additional information resources on the various topics are also offered.

The below information provides a bird's-eye view of diversity matters in the country as they pertain to U.S. students. IEGI understands the below information is not exhaustive or inclusive of all possible student identities and experiences. We encourage you to conduct further research and chat with relevant points of contact including your program advisor, faculty leader, or peers who have traveled to Italy, to gain a greater understanding of your host country and/or city.

If you would like to speak with us about any questions pertaining to diversity and inclusivity abroad, please contact us at study.abroad@purchase.edu and we will answer your inquiry to the best of our ability and/or refer you to others with the expertise that you need. Additionally, if you are interested in discussing other geographical locations, please don't hesitate to contact us.

COUNTRY OVERVIEW

FAST FACTS:

Capital: Rome

Population: 62,402,659 (July 2020 est.)

Language(s): Italian (official), German (parts of Trentino-Alto Adige region are predominantly German speaking), French (small French-speaking minority in Valle d'Aosta region), Slovene (Slovene-speaking minority in the Trieste-Gorizia area)

Religions: Christian 83.3% (overwhelmingly Roman Catholic with very small groups of Jehovah's Witnesses and Protestants), Muslim 3.7%, unaffiliated 12.4%, other 0.6% (2010 est.)

Ethnic groups: Italian (includes small clusters of German-, French-, and Slovene-Italians in the north and Albanian-Italians and Greek-Italians in the south)



**Special thanks to the SUNY Binghamton International Education and Global Initiatives Office (IEGI) for adapting this document and for sharing it with the Purchase Office for Global Education (OGE).*

Italy became a nation-state in 1861 under the rule of King Victor Emmanuel II. After Benito Mussolini's Fascist dictatorship allied the country with Germany in World War II, the country rebuilt as a democratic republic and became both a member of NATO and the European Union. Italy has more [UNESCO World Heritage sites](#) than any other country. Tourists flock to this country for its landmarks, art, landscapes, and food.

Italy is currently experiencing a population crisis, as fewer Italians are born. In 2019, Italy experienced [the lowest number of births](#) in recorded history. Italians are also leaving Italy in startling numbers, which is becoming an economic and demographic burden for the country. Meanwhile, many refugees and undocumented migrants arrive in Italy each year. An estimated [192,000 people](#) have sought asylum in Italy since 2017.

Although Italy is generally considered a welcoming country, it is also somewhat conservative, often more so in the north. The majority of Italians consider themselves Catholic, leading to conservative laws regarding homosexuality. Additionally, with the large increase in North African immigration into Italy, tensions between Italians and immigrant groups have heightened. Roma are also the target of discrimination.

The University of Bologna was founded in 1088, making it the [oldest university in Europe](#). Ten Italian institutions are included in the top 400 of the [QS World University Rankings 2020](#), with three in the global top 200: Politecnico di Milano, Sant'Anna - Scuola Universitaria Superiore Pisa, and Alma Mater Studiorum - University of Bologna. Italy's institutions of higher education are reputable and offer a variety of options for students across disciplines, depending on the particular study abroad program. Although Italian is the national language, there is a robust infrastructure for accommodating international visitors to Italy, so U.S. students even with low levels of proficiency in Italian are usually able to navigate life as a student in Italy.

According to the [Institute of International Education's Open Doors report](#), 36,945 U.S. students studied abroad in Italy in the 2017-18 academic year, a 4.5% increase from the year prior. Italy is the second most popular study abroad destination for students from U.S. institutions. 11.5% of students who studied abroad in academic year 2017-18 studied abroad in Italy. U.S. students are attracted to study abroad programs in Italy for a variety of reasons, including the study of its language, art history, and society. As with other visitors, students tend to find the social life of the Piazza, the cultural heritage sites, and the country's natural beauty appealing too. Recognized as a [World Bank High-Income Country](#), the average [Numbeo Cost of Living](#) in Italy is 5.01% lower than in the United States (aggregate data for all cities, rent is not taken into account). Rent in Italy is 46.67% lower than in the United States (average data for all cities).

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Review current travel risks for Italy:

- [U.S. Department of State Travel Risks](#)
- [CDC Traveler's Health](#)
- [Safe Travel to Italy](#)

ETHNIC MINORITIES IN ITALY

POTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR STUDENTS OF COLOR:

Southern Italy, where Sicily is located, is considered more traditional and provincial than other parts of Italy. It also has a higher proportion of African immigrants than other parts of the country, as the agricultural sector is a dominant one in Southern Italy. Across Italy, there are tensions over increasing North African and Asian immigration. Most feel that the antiimmigrant sentiment is more nationalistic than racist in nature. And discrimination against and attacks on Roma in Italy, as elsewhere in Europe, remains a concern. U.S. students of color should not feel overly concerned about experiencing racial discrimination or hostility in Italy, but may experience staring and comments from locals.

NOTES:

- Students of color may be one of the few minority members within their program and thus work and live with individuals who have no understanding of African-American cultures and cannot provide adequate support.
- Students may have difficulty finding certain ethnic beauty products found in the United States.
- Melanzana (Moolie) - Italian for 'eggplant' to reference a very dark black person.

ADDITIONAL LINKS:

- [Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 in Italy](#), (see Section 6: Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons; National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities) U.S. Department of State
- [My Very Personal Taste of Racism Abroad](#), The New York Times
- [Studying Abroad As a Female African American](#), ISEP
- [Italy's intelligence agency warns of rise in racist attacks](#), The Guardian
- [On Being An Asian Living In Italy](#), The Odyssey

SEXUAL ORIENTATION IN ITALY

POTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER OR QUEER STUDENTS:

While there is widespread tolerance of homosexuality in Italy, the prominence of Catholicism in Italy has meant that homosexuality is treated as civil, but not criminal, deviance. Students will find that residents of cities are more tolerant of LGBTQ individuals than people living in rural areas. Additionally, northern cities are generally more accepting than southern cities. Students living in host families may find that levels of acceptance vary from family to family, and they should speak with program staff if they have concerns. Public displays of affection between same-sex couples [may garner glances or comments](#).

Same-sex marriage is not legal, but Italy legalized same-sex unions in 2016. In 2015 Italy's Court of Cassation ruled that transgender individuals do not need to undergo a sex change operation in order to legally change their gender. Despite the strength of conservative parties at the parliamentary level, Italy is billed as one of the top gay travel destinations in the world.

NOTES:

- Homosexual relationships are legal and anti-bias laws protect discrimination against individuals who identify as LGBTQ.
- Many establishments exist to serve visiting and local gay communities across Italy.

ADDITIONAL LINKS:

- [Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 in Italy](#), (see Section 6: Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons; Acts of Violence, Discrimination, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity) U.S. Department of State
- [LGBT Travel Information](#), U.S. Passports & International Travel (see Local Laws & Special Circumstances)
- [Italy LGBT+ Business Climate Score](#), Out Leadership
- [Gay.It!](#) - Italian LGBT media group
- [Arcigay Roma](#), Associazione LGBTI+ Italiana
- [LGBTQ+ Guide to Rome](#), Queer Europe
- [Gay Center Italy](#)
- [Tips for Gay and Lesbian Travelers in Italy](#), Frommer's
- [LGBT Rights in Italy](#), Equaldex

PHYSICAL DISABILITY IN ITALY

POTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES:

Italy is known for its old world layout and architecture, which may increase the challenge level for students with physical disabilities. Italian law requires that all government buildings and public transportation be accessible, but there are still many physical barriers. Sidewalks may not have cutouts for wheelchairs, cobble streets may pose mobility issues, and many hotels and attractions do not have accessible facilities, including accessible bathrooms. The law prevents discrimination against people with disabilities.

Before selecting a study abroad program option, it is a good idea for the student to inquire with the program itself as to whether the destination offers amenities and services specific to the needs of the individual student.

NOTES:

- Churches may have accessible side entrances, but they can be difficult to find. It is recommended to inquire prior to arrival.

- Many sites offer free or reduced entry to people with disabilities. European identity cards include information about disabilities, but foreign travelers in wheelchairs or scooters will most likely still be able to receive the fee reduction. A companion may also be able to enter at free or reduced entry at some sites. Visitors without visible disabilities may not be able to benefit from this reduction.
- Italy does not quarantine cats and dogs from the United States, but they must have an ISO 11784/11785 compliant 15 digit pet microchip and proof of a recent rabies vaccine ([Pet Travel](#)). All requirements also apply to [service and emotional support animals when traveling abroad](#).
- Although you can purchase many prescription and non-prescription medications at pharmacies, some common U.S. medications may not be available and thus it is recommended by the [U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs](#) that travelers carry prescription medication in original packaging, along with a doctor's prescription. As a precaution, travelers should check with the [U.S. Embassy website](#) to find a list of medical facilities.
- Travelers should check with their health insurance policy to see if they are covered abroad. If not, it is advised that travelers acquire supplemental insurance or travel insurance because they could be responsible for all medical costs. U.S. Medicare does not cover travelers overseas. Local healthcare facilities might demand on-the-spot cash payment if your insurance doesn't cover the cost of treatment.
- If students are hearing impaired, or traveling with someone who has a hearing impairment, they should check with potential hosts to determine whether they have: visual adaptation aids for telephone ringers, smoke alarms, fire alarms, doorbell, audio loop systems, amplification on telephone handsets and televisions with teletext.
- For travelers with visual impairment, it is important to check whether accommodations welcome their guide dog, as well as: having markings denoting changes in floor space and height, braille instructions for appliances and controls and use of large print.
- Contact [Binghamton's Services for Students with Disabilities](#) about any accommodation(s) that you may need while abroad.

ADDITIONAL LINKS:

- [Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019 in Italy](#), (see Section 6: Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons; Persons with Disabilities) U.S. Department of State
- [Resources for Americans Traveling Abroad with Disabilities](#), Mobility International
- [Traveling with Disabilities and Medications](#), Transportation Security Administration
- [Tips for Travelers with Disabilities in Italy](#), Frommer's (Use this site to also search by city)
- [Accessible Travel in Italy](#), Sage Traveling
- [Centro Documentazione Handicap](#)
- [Tips for Travelers In Italy With Disabilities](#), Italy Magazine
- [Disability in Italy](#), F Come (Blog post on treatment of invisible disabilities and mental health in Italy)
- [What to do and where to go? A doctor's advice for students abroad](#), IAMAT
- [My wheelchair travel in Apulia, Italy: Terra di Bari and Itria Valley](#), I Wheel Travel

RELIGION IN ITALY

POTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS STUDENTS:

The [major religion in Italy](#) is Roman Catholicism. This is not surprising, as Vatican City, located in the heart of Rome, is the hub of Roman Catholicism and where the Pope resides. Roman Catholics and other Christians make up 80 percent of the population, though only one-third of those are practicing Catholics. The country also has a growing Muslim immigrant community, according to the University of Michigan. Muslim, agnostic and atheist make up the other 20 percent of the population, according to the [Central Intelligence Agency](#).

NOTES:

- Christian students can find many Catholic and some Protestant churches across Italy.
- [Synagogues](#) are more common in northern Italy.

- There are a total of [eight mosques in Italy](#). While Italy is home to the fourth largest Muslim population in Europe, the number of mosques is minute in comparison to other European countries.

ADDITIONAL LINKS:

- [2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Italy](#), U.S. Department of State
- [Faith Based Travel Information](#), U.S. Department of State- Bureau of Consular Affairs
- [Religious Freedom in Italy](#), The Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA)

WOMEN IN ITALY

POTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR FEMALE STUDENTS:

In general, discrimination is not a major issue for women in Italy. The majority of Italian girls excel in secondary and tertiary education and go on to receive college degrees. After graduation, Italian women have access to many of the same career opportunities as men. However, this access has not removed the glass ceiling entirely.

NOTES:

- Sexual harassment or “cat calling” is common, especially towards foreign women. Foreign women are encouraged to ignore cat callers.
- Discrimination against women is illegal.
- Italy ranked 70th (out of 149 countries) on the 2018 Global Gender Gap Index conducted by the [World Economic Forum](#).

ADDITIONAL LINKS:

- [Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2019](#) in Italy, (see Section 6: Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons; Women) US Department of State
- [Information for Women Travelers](#), U.S. Department of State
- [Almost half of Italian women report suffering sexual harassment](#), The Local
- [12 statistics that show the state of gender equality in Italy](#), The Local
- [Solo Female Travel in Italy -- Is it Safe?](#), Adventurous Kate
- [What Every Solo Woman Should Know About Travel to Italy](#), Women on the Road
- [Women Travelers](#), Lonely Planet

REFERENCES

Maps, flag and country facts are from the [CIA World Factbook 2019](#) Online
[CIA World Factbook](#) | [IIE Open Doors Report](#) | [Lonely Planet Italy](#)

Please note: The content within the resources provided were last reviewed in July 2020 and as such could have changed. Views expressed in links provided or in sub-links within the document do not necessarily reflect the views of the Purchase Office for Global Education.