

Cultural Fact Sheet

ITALIAN

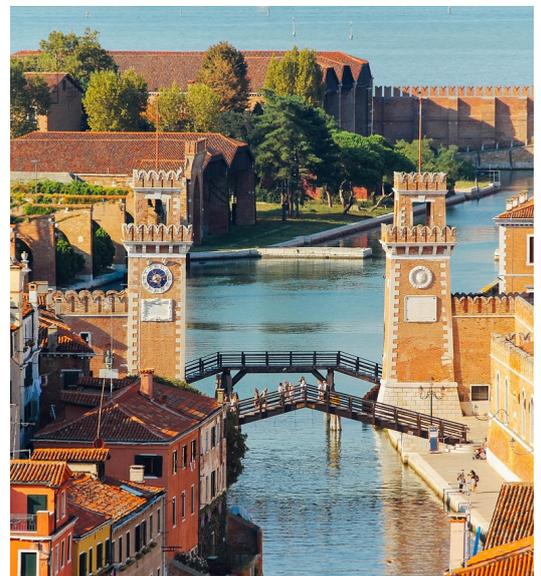
Background / Statistics

- The majority of Italians in Australia are well established and have been citizens or permanent residents for decades.
- According to the 2016 Census, almost 87% of Australia's Italian-born population arrived prior to 1971. Therefore, those who have been settled for years and acculturated to Australia may not culturally resemble the contemporary native Italians of today.
- As of 2016, only 1.4% of Australian residents born in Italy were under 25 years of age, and the median age was 68.



Migration

- The first wave of Italian migration to Australia commenced in the late 19th century with the arrival of a group of 217 Italians in 1882 to “New Italy” near Woodburn in northern NSW, who came to work on the sugar canefields and clearing forest areas for farmland.
- Mass migration from Italy to Australia began occurring post World War 2 from the early 1950s to the late 1960s, with another wave occurring in the early 1970s. The peak was reached in the decade 1951-1961 and a smaller trickle in the 1980s. Currently, Italians rarely migrate to Australia.



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Language & Communication

- Italy's official language is standard Italian
- Many older Italians only speak a regional or local dialect
- Many Italian seniors who have lived in Australia for a long time may speak poor English.
- Italians can be highly expressive

Gestures

- The Italian culture has upwards of 200 hand gestures to supplement the language.
- Gestures evolved as an alternative way of communicating.

Customs

- Italian greetings are usually warm, but can be rather formal.
- It is common for Italians friends and family members to kiss on the cheek when they meet, irrespective of gender.
- Always address an older Italian person by their title and last name, (e.g. Mr. Rossi) and continue to do so until invited to move on to a first-name basis.
- The most common informal verbal greeting is "Ciao" (Ciao means both hello and goodbye). Ciao is considered quite familiar and casual.
- People may also say "Buongiorno" (Good day) or "Buonasera" (Good evening) in a more formal setting
- Younger people may stand out of respect when an older person enters the room and will usually open doors for seniors
- It is considered bad manners to open umbrellas indoors, to not remove hats when indoors or to remove one's shoes in front of others.



Hospitality

- It is common for Italians to visit family and friends, especially on Sundays and holidays.
- In Italian culture, generally, the hosts fully look after the guests, and then the guests will reciprocate when hosting another in time. Therefore, common Australian practices of bringing food to eat as part of the meal or helping to clean up is considered somewhat rude – it's as if you are implying that the host is doing a poor job and needs help.
- Compliments about the host's home and/or provided food are essential. Italians usually take great pride in their hospitality and in the appearance of their homes.
- Guests are not expected to help the hosts clean up after a meal. In fact it can be considered a slight insult to their ability to be good hosts.

Eating

- Food is at the centre of every Italian celebration and good food is significant on a daily cultural basis to Italians.
- Guests are invited to start eating by the host (or guest of honour) saying Buon appetito (wishing all a good appetite).
- Resting one's elbows on the table, or yawning while at the table is considered bad manners
- Breakfast is not a big meal in Italian culture and is often simply a coffee and biscuits.
- Lunch is traditionally the biggest meal of the day
- Dinner is generally quite a light meal.
- Traditionally, Italians eat Sunday lunch with family. However, this is not always practised in busy modern life.
- Outdoor (al fresco) dining is very popular in the summer.
- Some traditional dishes or customs related to food are synonymous with religious celebrations such as Easter and Christmas, e.g. fasting during Lent, eating fish on Good Friday, frittelle after Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve. These traditions are culturally significant and common, especially among older Italian-Australians.

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Health & Habits

- Most older Italians don't eat breakfast, only coffee.
- Many older Italians will wake and rise very early, due to decades of work habit, even when retired and able to sleep in.
- They may begin their day by catching up with the news, cleaning, reading, watching TV or tending their gardens.
- The main meal of the day (pranzo) is often consumed at lunchtime, with dinner (cena) often being quite a light meal, sometimes featuring leftovers from lunch, e.g. salad and a frittata using vegetables or pasta leftover from lunch)
- Generally, alcohol is consumed in moderation and with food, not by itself.
- It is common to have water on the table and to drink water when drinking coffee or wine
- Italians will often go for a walk after a meal; this is considered good for one's health and helpful to digestion.
- Italian seniors tend to be devout Catholics and will attend Mass regularly.



Wellbeing

- Older Italians typically love to garden and to have a neat and productive garden, with flowers, herbs, vegetables, and fruit trees.
- They are generally very social and enjoy hosting gatherings and attending Italian clubs or seniors' social groups where women tend to cook or craft together and men to play bocce (a type of bowls), or chess.
- Both genders enjoy music and card games. Some enjoy going to clubs for a meal and some light gambling e.g. Keno or poker machines.
- Many Italians enjoy music, newspapers, and TV and radio programs in Italian.



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Religion

- The main religion practiced in Italy is Catholic
- Religious and cultural festivals are often observed in Italy to this day
- Saint days are also traditional celebrations in rural Italy and therefore many older Italian-Australians celebrate their saint's name day or "Onomastico" as a more significant celebration than their birthday.
- Some Italian-Australians abide by certain religious and cultural customs, for example, not eating meat on Fridays or abstaining from eating certain foods during Lent before Easter.
- Catholics believe in the doctrine of God as being the Holy Trinity, consisting of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
- Church services are known as "Mass" which is performed by a priest.
- For the typical Catholic, life is marked by Holy Sacraments which mark seminal Catholic moments, such as Baptism, First Communion, Confirmation, Marriage and Last Rites.
- The annual calendar has various holy days such as Easter, Palm Sunday, Christmas and saints' days.



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Attitudes to illness, medical care and disability

- Italians are typically quick to see a doctor if unwell.
- Some older Italians may have a belief in herbal or folk remedies for minor ailments
- Italian-Australians are generally self-reliant and proud.
- To rely on an external service for aged or disability care can be perceived as an admission of weakness, or failure on the part of the family unit to take care of their own.
- There tends to be a cultural expectation that adult children will care for elderly relatives.
- Many older Italian-Australians believe aged care services and disability services (and especially residential care facilities) are a last resort. They are reluctant to accept assistance until they absolutely need it.
- Residential care is usually avoided unless the family has no other option. Even then, residential care facilities are often viewed negatively and elderly Italians may resist being placed in them

End of Life and palliative care

- There are several rituals necessary for Catholics at end of life, including the administration of the Last Rites by a priest, bedside recital of the Rosary, usually by family, and a funeral Mass. The Last Rites may also be administered while the person is dying or shortly after death.
- Funerals tend to be highly traditional with a church funeral, Catholic Mass and cemetery burial (not cremation).
- Friends and family will wear of black or muted colours to the funeral.
- Some close family members may continue to wear black for an extended period of time, traditionally for a year.
- Thirty days after the funeral, it is common to commemorate the passing of a loved one with a Catholic Mass specifically dedicated to them, followed by a Memorial Mass for the first anniversary.

