

# Eating in Italy

Although everyone loves Italian food, figuring out how, where and what to eat in Italy can be an enigma for travellers. Knowing what type of meal or snack you wish to have and considering time limitations, you may like to know which options you have

**Bar:** The place to have espresso and all its variations, rolls and small sandwiches, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks. Pay first and give the receipt to the bartender with the order. It is usual to stand at the bar, as there is a service charge for sitting at a table. Bars in Italy are open from early morning to late night. It is quite usual for Italians to meet up at the bar, in some areas there is a great tradition for “aperitivo” so a sort of happy hour before dinner where you can enjoy cheap drinks and snacks.

**Pasticceria:** if with bar, this fresh pastry shop will be a good option for breakfast. Italians usually have a cappuccino or caffè latte with a fresh pastry for breakfast

**Panineria:** A sandwich bar where you can have simple sandwich.

**Enoteca:** wine bar which often also has a light meal option.

**Pizzeria:** This one doesn't need translation. If you see the words “forno a legna” it is a good sign as that means the pizzeria is using a wood fired oven.

**Trattoria or Osteria:** Less formal than a ristorante, and where local specialties are served. It is not expected that you eat a full meal, so you can get away with just a pasta dish or a main course.

**Ristorante:** The most formal type of place to eat, and where, traditionally, one is not in a hurry. The order of courses is antipasto, pasta or soup, main course, salad, dessert, all accompanied by good wine (in ristoranti you will usually find a good wine list). You can get away with two to three courses per person.

### **Piece of Advice:**

- Water is never served from the tap, so if you wish to have water you ask for it with your food order (acqua minerale) and it comes in version “flat” or “fizzy” (Italian: naturale / frizzante).
- Let's just clear one fact: the olive oil & balsamic vinegar dip is a British/American invention. You will usually only receive olive oil if you order a salad or another dish that requires garnishing with olive oil. It is not Italian use to dip ones bread in olive oil before eating – so if you choose to do it anyway don't be surprised if you get some disapproving looks!
- Italians drink either water or wine (or beer) with their meals. Pops or juices are only in these days served to children in Italy. You will notice that they are often more expensive than a glass of wine. The house wine of the restaurant is usually quite decent and rather cheap. Do be aware that you are not getting a grand wine – the restaurant has the biggest margin profit on the house wine. If the wine comes in a carafe it is not possible to know it's origin. A good idea would be to ask your waiter about the origin of the house wine (in Italy table wine is not regulated and often is of rather low quality).
- Remember that in most eating places where you sit down to enjoy your meal there will be a cover charge (anything from 1 to 5 Euros per person). So don't be worried when you see it on your bill usually expressed as “pane & coperto”, it is perfectly normal.
- Sometimes you will find a service charge of 10% on your bill (this is most usual in the bigger cities where there are lots of tourists). This service charge helps the owner pay the waiters, but remember that waiters don't receive this money directly as in other countries – so it isn't an incentive to good service. Waiters jobs are still some of the badly paying jobs and a little tip will make them give you better service.
- Tipping is optional in Italy, and usually not done by percentages. Only if your experience has pleased you, should you leave a little token of appreciation to the waiter. It is normal to round up the bill – however, remember that tips must be given to waiter in cash – otherwise they never receive it.
- The bill usually doesn't come by itself at the end of the meal – often you have to ask for it. When you book a table at the restaurant, it is usually yours for the rest of the night – unless otherwise announced. It is quite common to receive a complimentary shot-like drink at the end of the meal – either a limoncello, an amaro (bitter) or a grappa.