

# Azorcan Italy Guide

## FOOD AND RESTAURANTS

### ORDERING IN A RESTAURANT

#### For the uninitiated, here's a guide to meals in Italy

Traditional Italian menus have five sections. A full meal usually consists of an appetizer, first course and a second course with a side dish. It's not necessary to order from every course, but usually people order at least two courses. Traditional meals may last one or two hours or even longer.



#### Antipasto

*Antipasti* come before the main meal. One choice will usually be a plate of the local cold cuts and there will probably be some regional specialties. Sometimes you can order an *antipasto misto* and get a variety of dishes. This is usually fun and can be more food than you'd expect for the price!

Appetizer Examples: salami, cheese, crostini (toasted bread with different toppings), bruschetta, carpaccio (sliced cold cuts)

#### Primo piatto

The first course is pasta, soup, or *risotto* (rice dishes, especially found in the north). Usually there are several pasta choices. Italian pasta dishes may have less sauce than Americans are usually used to. In Italy, the type of pasta is often more important than the sauce. Some risotto dishes may serve a minimum of 2 persons.

First Course Examples: pasta, risotto, lasagne, Pici (handmade pasta), tagliatelle, spaghetti, and so on...

#### Secondo piatto

The second course is usually meat, poultry, or fish. It doesn't usually include any potato or vegetable. There are sometimes one or two vegetarian offerings, although if they are not on the menu you can usually ask for a vegetarian dish.

Second/Main Course Examples: usually meat or fish with a *contorno* (side dish), *insalata* (salad) or *patatine fritte* (french fries) or *arroste* (roasted potatoes) ...

#### Contorni (side dishes)

Usually you will want to order a side dish with your main course if it's not included. This could be a vegetable (*verdura*), potato, or *insalata* (salad). I sometimes order only a salad instead of the meat course.

#### Dolce

At the end of your meal, you will be offered *dolce*. Sometimes there may be a choice of fruit (often whole fruit served in a bowl for you to select what you want) or cheese. After dessert, you will be offered *café* or a *digestivo* (after dinner drink).

Dessert Examples: tiramisù, torta della nonna (cream and pine nut cake), millefoglie (puff pastry layers alternated with cream) and many, many more!

#### Drinks

Most Italians drink wine, *vino*, and mineral water, *acqua minerale*, with their meal. Often the waiter will take the drink order before your food order. There may be a house wine

that can be ordered by the quarter, half, or full liter and will not cost much. Coffee is not served until after the meal

**Caffè** - (Coffee):...that could be "Macchiato", "Corto", "Lungo", "Corretto"...

**Ammazzacaffè** - (After Coffee - literally "kill the coffee"): limoncello, Grappa (Italian brandy), Amaro (cinnamon-flavored liqueur)...

### **Paying for your meal**

The waiter will almost never bring the bill until you ask for it. You may be the last people in the restaurant but the bill still doesn't come. When you are ready for the bill, simply ask for *il conto*. The bill will include a small bread and cover charge but the prices listed on the menu include tax and usually service. You may leave a small tip (5-10%) if you want to. Not all restaurants accept credit cards so be prepared with cash.

### **Where to Eat?**

If you just want a sandwich, you can go to a bar. A bar in Italy is not just a place for drinking alcohol and there are no age restrictions. People go to the bar for their morning coffee and pastry, to grab a sandwich, and even to buy ice cream. Some bars also serve a few pasta or salad selections so if you just want one course, that's a good choice. A *tavolo caldo* serves already prepared food. These will be fairly fast.

More formal dining establishments include:

*osteria* - this used to be a very casual eating place but now there are some more formal ones.

*trattoria* - also a more casual eating place but may be the same as a restaurant.

*ristorante* – restaurant

### **Meal times in Italy**

In the summer, Italians usually eat fairly late meals. Lunch will not start before 1:00 and dinner not before 8:00. In the north and in winter, meal times may be half an hour earlier while in the far south in summer you may eat even later. Restaurants close between lunch and dinner. In large tourist areas, you may find restaurants open all afternoon.





## ORDERING A COFFEE

For the uninitiated, here's a guide to coffee in Italy

**Caffè** (*kah-FE*) - We might call it espresso; a small cup of very strong coffee, topped with a caramel-colored foam called "crema", a very important element in the best examples.

**Caffè Hag** is a decaffeinated version. You can order a "decaffinato" as well; Hag is the name of the largest producer of Italian decaf coffee and that's the way you'll see it on many bar menu boards.

**Caffè lungo** (*Kah-FE LOON-go*) - a long coffee. They'll let the water pour from the machine until the coffee becomes weak and bitter. Also called a *Caffè Americano* or American Coffee, which is also expressed as *acqua sporca*, or "dirty water" by Italians.

**Caffè ristretto** (*kah-FE ri-STRE-to*) - a "restricted coffee" or one in which the stream of coffee is stopped before the normal amount. The essence of coffee, concentrated but should not be bitter.

**Caffè con panna** - espresso with sweet whipped cream

**Caffè corretto** (*kah-FE ko-RE-to*) - coffee "corrected" with a drizzle of liquor. I like sambuca, but most prefer conac or grappa.

**Caffè macchiato** (*kah-FE mahk-YAH-to*) - coffee "stained" with milk, usually just a bit of foam on top of the espresso.

**Caffè latte** (*kah-FE LAH-te*) - Espresso with hot milk, a cappuccino without the foam usually served in a glass. This is what you might call a "latte" in the US. In Italy, outside of tourist joints, you run the risk of getting what you asked for - milk, or worse yet, steamed milk.

**Latte macchiato** (*Lah-te mahk-YAH-to*) - Steamed milk "stained" with espresso, served in a glass.

**Cappuccino** (pronounced *kah-pu-CHEE-no*) - a shot of espresso in a large(er) cup with steamed milk and foam. Not ordered by Italians after 11 in the morning

## TYPES OF RESTAURANTS

The differences between different eating places (Ristorante, Trattoria, Osteria) used to be much greater in the past. Nowadays it is up to the owner to choose the appropriate name based on his/her judgment and the kind of clientele he/she wishes to attract.

**Ristorante**: restaurant (can be fancy and expensive, make sure you see the menu before sitting down)

**Trattoria** : family run restaurant, home-style cooking, moderately priced. Usually more casual compared to a Ristorante.

**Tavola calda** : cafeteria-style restaurant, moderately priced

**Osteria**: informal and rustic wine bar that serves regional food, appetizers, tastings. Usually moderately priced, but some new osterias can be trendy and more upscale.

**Taverna** : rustic wine bar with local specialties. This used to be a very casual eating place but now there are some more formal ones.

**Pizzeria**: pizza restaurant, usually wood-fired oven. Sometimes sold "al taglio" (by the slice) or boxed and sold for take-out. As the most popular type of eatery in Italy, the pizzeria no longer confines choices to pizza, but often provides other dishes (mostly pasta) usually at lower prices than a ristorante.

**Bar**: serves coffee and snacks, sometimes first courses. If you just want a sandwich, you can go to a bar. A bar in Italy is not just a place for drinking alcohol and there are no age restrictions. People go to the bar for their morning coffee and pastry, to grab a sandwich, and even to buy ice cream. This is a great place where you can easily walk in, purchase something (anything.. pack of gum, orange juice, coffee) and use the restroom so you can avoid going to a public one that may be dirtier and unsupplied. Many bars and cafes will have a stand up bar where you can order food or drinks. TIP: keep in mind that if you sit down, the price for what you are ordering is usually HIGHER than if you were to eat/drink at the bar, standing up. Sometimes bars will have two distinct "sit-down" and a "stand up" price lists, this is because once you sit down, there is usually a waiter that comes to take your order. Make sure you ask before sitting down if the prices are the same or different.

**Pasticceria** : A cafe' that has its own bakery, serving fresh pastries, cakes, and sandwiches. A great place to have your "colazione" (breakfast) with a fresh pastry and a cappuccino, Italian-style! When ordering to eat at a busy bar or pasticceria, you usually have to pay for what you want at the register (cassa) first, then take the receipt and repeat your order to the barman. If the bar is quiet and you are known there the barman may take your order and you pay before leaving. There is no set rule on what to do – watch what the locals are doing.

## MEALS AND TIMES IN ITALY

### **Breakfast (8.00 – 11.00) or 'Colazione'**

For an Italian, this is always a light meal. May consist of a cappuccino or coffee & a pastry at a bar or pasticceria (often standing up) or at home dipping cookies in caffelatte (coffee and milk). The pastry (typically a croissant) can be plain (vuota), filled with jam (con marmellata) or creamy custard (con crema), even occasionally with chocolate (con cioccolato). Italians usually do not have a big breakfast as Americans do. Sometimes they will have some cereal, fruit, perhaps a poached egg, but you won't catch an Italian eating scrambled eggs or ham in the morning. Breakfast is considered a "sweet" ingredient meal, not savory. If you stay in a hotel, you will most likely be served a

continental breakfast, including eggs, ham, cheese, and other more "American style" items.

Note: For Italians cappuccino is a breakfast drink and most do not drink it after 11 am. During the day Italians drink several espressos, especially to get that "kick" after a heavy meal. Anyone who consumes a cappuccino after 11am (especially after a meal) is considered "un turista" (a tourist). Still, if you cannot resist the urge, just go for it! You are on vacation anyway, so who cares what people think, right?!

### **Lunch (1:00pm - 2:00pm) or 'Pranzo'**

As times have changed, it is more rare for Italian families to gather at the table during lunch and have a full home-made meal. Italy's economical situation has caused many mothers to take on full-time jobs, therefore children are in school until mid-afternoon and less people have time to go home at lunch time. Typically speaking, people working in offices have a 1-hour break, while retail stores still do close down for a longer period of time (usually from 1:30pm to 3:30 or 4pm). Lunch in Italy is not the main meal, but it is common for Italians to have a glass of wine with an entree before going back to work. There are a variety of options for places to eat. A bar or pasticceria offer foods to go, such as fresh made sandwiches that you can select from a case, prepared salads, or thick square slices of pizza or stuffed focaccia. A trattoria, Ristorante, and tavola calda offer a sit down experience with hot dishes or pizza. If you feel quite confident with your Italian, you can consider walking into a deli (gastronomia, paninoteca) and ordering a sandwich. Keep in mind that Italian sandwiches aren't "as loaded" as American-style sandwiches. Often you will find a simple focaccia bread with a few lean slices of prosciutto, and if you are lucky, some sliced tomatoes with mozzarella or pecorino cheese. Make sure you don't delay in grabbing something to eat, as most restaurants will stop serving after 2pm, and often close until they re-open for dinner service, which is usually around 7:30pm. On Sundays, many families will have a large, 2-3 hour lunch out, so make sure to reserve as restaurants are very busy at this time.

### **Happy Hour (6:30pm - 7:30pm) or 'Aperitivo'**

Rather than an actual meal, this is more a snacking and socializing opportunity for Italians after a hard-day's work. It has been a tradition in Northern Italy for many years, but more recently it has spread to the rest of the peninsula. A Bar will host this event as a pre-dinner social with a free buffet of both hot and cold dishes that people are welcome to as long as they purchase a drink, which does not necessarily need to be alcoholic. Whether you get a cocktail or a coke, rest assured that you will be well over-charged for it to make up for the 'all-you-can-eat buffet'. Still, the Aperitivo is a hip and trendy way to start your evening out.

### **Dinner (7:30pm - 10:00pm) or 'Cena'**

Restaurants typically don't start serving until 7:30pm at the absolute earliest and don't become busy until after 9:30pm. Dinner is the main meal of an Italian's day and usually this is when they go all-out. Consider that most items on a menu are a' la carte, which means an entree usually does not include a side, so what you order is what you get. You'll notice that menu items are much more simplified than in American menus. For instance, an item that you would find on an American menu such as "Home-made Egg Pappardelle Tossed with Braised Rabbit marinated in balsamic vinegar and Italian parsley, freshly cut imported Roma Tomatoes, roasted Garlic and Parmesan cheese", in Italy would appear more similar to this: "Rabbit Pappardelle". So if you need to inquire more about what's actually in a particular dish, make sure to learn some specific phrases and keywords. It is common for Italians to have an Antipasto (appetizer), Primo (pasta, soup, or rice dish), Secondo (meat, poultry or fish course), a Contorno (side item such as a mixed salad or grilled vegetables) and a Dolce (dessert) all for dinner. Obviously you don't have to order all of that, if you are not very hungry you can just have an appetizer and/or one entree, just as you would in the States. As a general rule, salads

are served at the end of the meal and the dressing is very simple: oil, vinegar, salt & pepper. Guess what? There is no such thing as "Italian dressing" in Italy!!! Also, at the end of such a big meal, Italians will often have an espresso, sometimes paired with a "digestivo" (a digestive liqueur such as GRAPPA or SANBUCA) or "amaro" (bitter, herbal liqueur such as FERNET or AVERNA).

## **BEVERAGES**

Most Italians drink wine and bottled water with their meal. Often the waiter will take the drink order before your food order, just like in the States. There is no particular reason why Italians drink bottled water, the tap is just as good, but they will look at you 'funny' if you do not order bottled water. 'Acqua Minerale Naturale' is the terminology for ordering bottled water. There may be a house wine that can be ordered by the quarter, half, or full liter and will not cost much, sometimes less than the bottled water. This is what most Italians will drink with their meal. TIP: So many Italians drink sparkling water, so often the waiter assumes that is what you want. To make sure they do NOT bring you sparkling, make sure you say "NON GASSATA" (not sparkling). Italians are not big beer drinkers. They prefer red wine. There are a few popular Italian beers that generally taste like a light beer in the States, such as "Peroni", "Nastro Azzurro" and "Moretti". If you plan to have a beer, you can also order 'birra alla spina' (beer on tap) and choose among PICCOLA (small) and MEDIA (medium). For some reason Italians don't typically have a "large" size for beer. You can also say CHIARA (light), ROSSA (ale, double malt), or SCURA (dark, pilsner).

## **ITALIAN FOOD FACTS**

### **FLORENTINE STEAK**

The famous Florentine Steak recipe is exclusively for those who like their meat rare: a Florentine steak which is well cooked is not just a waste, it is a total heresy. The inside of the steak must be tender and succulent, while the outside must be crisp and have a well-grilled appearance. The steaks should be about five centimetres thick, tender and of the very best quality.

### **BOLOGNESE SAUCE**

Did you know that the famous Bolognese sauce, which is traditionally served throughout the world on spaghetti (another internationally celebrated Italian specialty) is served in Bologna exclusively with tagliatelle (egg noodles) or as a stuffing for lasagna made with green (spinach) pasta? Never dare to order "Spaghetti alla Bolognese" in Bologna! You risk a long detention period in the city jail, fed only with true bolognese specialties....



## Practical phrases regarding eating, drinking, and ordering.

**Vorrei:** I would like....

**Per favore:** Please

**Grazie:** Thank you

**Prego:** You're welcome

**Quale e' la specialita' della casa?:** What's the house specialty?

**Cosa consiglia?:** What would you recommend?

**Un tavolo per una persona/ due persone/ tre persone/ quattro persone:**  
A table for 1/2/3/4 people.

**Acqua:** water

**Bicchiere:** glass

**Carne/Pesce:** Meat/ Fish.

**Un bicchiere di Acqua, per favore.:** A glass of water, please.

**Acqua Gassata/ Non Gassata:** Sparkling/ Non-sparkling water.

**Vino:** wine

**Vorrei il vino della casa:** I would like some house wine.

**Un litro:** One litre

**Mezzo litro:** Half a litre

**Una bottiglia:** a bottle

**Vorrei un'altra bottiglia, per favore:** I would like another bottle, please.

**Bibita:** soft drink

**Birra:** beer

**Non ho ordinato questo. :** I didn't order this!

**Mi scusi! :** Excuse me!

**Il conto, per favore.:** Check, please.

**Ancora un po' di .... :** Some more ....

**Posso avere un altro coltello / cucchiaino / forchetta / piatto?:**  
May I have another knife / spoon / fork / plate?

**Sono vegetariano. -** I am vegetarian.

**Sono allergico a.. :** I am allergic to..

**Non mangio –** I don't eat...

