

Living in Italy

Maria Rita Latto (September 30, 2007)



Whats' life like for American expatriates who live in the Bel Paese? The current sterotype would suggest that it's a Dolce Vita all day long. But we found a website that tells a different story...

A note from the editors: How do American expatriates find living in Italy? Do they really enjoy la dolce vita there? And, if we ask them, how can we be sure their answer is sincere?

Our contributing writer Maria Rita Latto, from Rome, found an answer on the web. She went on "spying" on Americans who live in Italy and are chatting about their problems on a web site... The picture that emerges is very distant from the ideal one you can find in many books and movies about living in Italy. It seems that American families, especially those having teenage children, are having a hard time. Read the piece, find out why, and if your experience has been similar or totally different, or if you just don't agree and want to replay, please do. Actually it would be very



interesting f one of our readers tried the opposite experiment: “spying” on a website of Italians living in USA. It could help us to find out what kind of problems Italians living in America are encountering. But first, Let’s start with this...

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Living in Italy is becoming more and more of a challenge for Italians, having to deal with daily absurdities like bureaucracy or the behaviors of those governing the country, just to mention the main causes of chronic nervous gastritis in most people.

But... how is it for expatriates living in the land of La Dolce Vita, who are mainly Americans, who relocate to the Belpaese for different reasons? The answer can easily be found by browsing the Internet for the various groups of expatriates in Italy, such as <http://groups.msn.com/expatsinItaly>. There is help for anyone in need of support, advice, and bureaucratic information, to organizing groups to share the same language and habits. It is really surprising and often unpleasant to learn how these expatriates in Italy see the Italians. Take Marco for example, a 30-year-old, living in Scotland but with a dream to make the move to Italy. His words are full of enthusiasm, “it’s a dream I have had all my life (my grandmother is Sicilian) and try to build a life and career in Italy, but most importantly, bring my children up with the Italian culture, and good Italian weather, rather than in soggy, stinking boozy Britain!!”

This idyllic picture is immediately torn into pieces by the replies of other expats already living the Italian experience. Tonia left the U.S.A. to open a Mexican fast food restaurant in Italy. Her words have the effect of a cold shower, “in my opinion the only way to find satisfying work in Italy is to open something on your own but I must warn you that you would be entering into another world of what it means to do business. Nothing is black and white here and you have to learn the system, which basically is built on the fact that the Italian government is ‘furbo’ and therefore expects that the rest of the population is too, and so sets its laws, taxes and regulations based on that assumption. I wish you luck.”

Hors rider, a stockbroker from the United States who relocated to Italy, tried to suggest a good place to live in Italy. “The South is far more appealing and welcoming...i.e. Calabria, Sicilia, Puglia. People strive to maintain the culture...the flavor of what it used to be. The North is FAR too Americanized!! I love the South..in some of the villages one can still find people riding donkeys...it is charming and if I could, I’d lose myself forever in one of those villages and never leave. I lived there for two years.”

Here is Anne’s story. “We lived in Italy for almost three years, my husband is half Italian and thought it would be wonderful, but we both agree that it was a mistake. Yes, the country is beautiful, the food is...hmm...well, the food is good but very boring - three years of pizza and pasta takes its toll on you!!!!” Her analysis starts with food but also goes deeper. “I have two children and I wouldn’t have wanted to bring them up in such a closed community. While we were there we didn’t make a single Italian friend because all the women seem to do is cook and clean for their men, it really is a strange culture for a modern one. We now live in Portugal. We have been here for about three months and it’s everything I hoped Italy would be (and more). The weather and food are fantastic; the people are friendly and very helpful. It really is nice.”

Tony gives an opinion on the economic issue that is rather severe. “Italy is more like a second world country but the cost of living here has gotten much worse - even exceeding several of the other G-8 countries.”

Sarah focuses on the possibility to find a job in Italy for an expat. “Unless you speak fluent Italian your only options are teaching English (the worst job on the planet) or working as a guide, maybe some low level pub job as well.” Then she makes a portrait of the Italians making it sound like some



sort of verdict. "Italians don't really have a culture of goals. They are all about finding a contract job where they don't have to work much and get lots of holidays." Then, having married an Italian man she gives her personal experience. "My husband's mother is always trying to get him to get some lame government job so he doesn't really have to work. Italians are lazy." Sarah's opinion on school is low too. "Life is okay here, but I would NEVER put my children in an Italian school. The girls are total sluts, and the boys are no better. 12 years olds wear t-shirts with inappropriate sayings on them, like 'F*#! me.' Young people here have no morals. The age of sex is very young, and if you want your children to remain children, don't put them in a state school here. I guess it starts at home, since Italians watch so much TV and have little culture in their brains, though the most culture in the world...strange...they have nothing to do but sit around and have sex on their Vespas or in cars. There is really no motivation for young people here to do any good for themselves - to develop their minds. School here is all about regurgitating facts, not actually using reason, logic, critical thinking, or artistic skills. If you do come, I suggest private schools for your children.

Another Sarah gave her opinion on the intellectual level of Italians who "do not spend their days discussing cultural ideals. They watch more TV than any other nation in Europe and it's awful - game shows, topless women on TV all the time. If any of your children are female, I would certainly not bring them up in Italy where they are taught to be the servants of men basically - wash for them, cook for them and are often ignored and pigeon-holed. They are overly fashion-conscious and spend all their money on clothes and mobile phones with which they are obsessed. They really don't look to their own history and culture and borrow from English and US culture for all new ideas." Her analysis of the Italian way of life ends with a sociological conclusion regarding the impossibility to visit national parks; "there are condoms all over the place from these idiots who will never leave their mother's home and therefore the only option is to have sex outdoors polluting all the natural beauty of Italy."

A brilliant suggestion for those intellectuals who analyze the daily Italian reality but had never reached such a simple and yet unexpected explanation...

Cheri, an American teacher living in Rome, agrees with the other expats, saying that in Italy it is a difficult life. Though, at the end of her statement, there is a little ray of consoling light, not much, indeed, the Italians reading all the expats' opinions and painfully agreeing with the best part of them. "Of course, there are the absolutely wonderful days and the joy still of passing the Coliseum on the way to work each day and walking along the river in the evenings..."

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