

Loving Italy: It's Easy as Pizza Pie

Judith Harris (March 02, 2018)



There are hundreds of reasons why an American expat may fall in love with Italy and live there for half a century. Nature, art, food, the people... and national health care!

Let's face it. If I've lived in Italy half a century, there must be a reason. In fact, not one, but hundreds of reasons. First, this is the most beautiful country in the world, from the gifts of mother nature - Alpine slopes, islands, seashores, gently rolling hills - to the creations of mankind. Wherever the gaze falls, one sees beauty, and not only inside the famous museums. There is the country church whose windows reveal its 16th century origin. The user-friendly piazza (no, not a "shopping plaza") where people sit together and converse about the events of the day.

The pub on Rome's outskirts whose construction shows that, before the automobile and the building's recent, thoughtful conversion, it had been an inn with horse stalls, still visible and carefully preserved. On the more obvious aesthetic level, one learns to look: in a bold [Baroque](#)



[2] *divertissement*, the stone window frames of the building next to [Palazzo Montecitorio](#) [3] in Rome were carved to look as if gushing forth waves of mud. Before noticing them I had, unobservant, walked past those windows a hundred times.

But just look, and everywhere historic levels are visible. Tire of the Baroque, like those windows, and go visit ancient Roman ruins: mosaics, temples or statues, like those in the elegant museum at [Ostia Antica](#) [4]. Weary of antiquity? Okay, trot back into the Bronze Age, push forward into the Renaissance or drift back into the Middle Ages—say, in the medieval quarter of [Viterbo](#) [5] in North Lazio.

Speaking of Viterbo, it illustrates how townships are taking it upon themselves to be creative. Horrendous photos of rubbish piled up in the big cities are everywhere. Viterbo, pop. 67,000, has launched a campaign to avoid this. With help from citizens taking photos with cell phones, the city has just issued 375 tickets to individuals caught dumping rubbish onto the streets instead of into the bins provided. These smaller ancient towns, like [Asolo](#) [6], where [Wyatt Rockefeller](#) [7], descendant of the U.S. banking family, just married the Italian-American Julie Fabrizio, remain Italy's great treasure and resource. All over Italy the borghi are a delight to explore—for instance, in the Abruzzo, [Santo Stefano di Sessanio](#) [8], which has an innovative albergo diffuso, or scattered hotel rooms inside the old houses.

Needless to say, Italian foods triumph. In our own little village of [Trevignano Romano](#) [9] a brilliant young chef just served us a compote of pureed potato and fennel, laced with raisins, of all things, baked under a topping of grated cheese and breadcrumbs. I was so taken with this invention that I made it myself for lunch (admittedly less perfectly than his). The wines speak for themselves, as do those popular sommelier courses on offer.

Not least, for those who love family, this is still a country where grandparents remain close to their grandchildren, and where the grown children appreciate and even enjoy their elderly parents and aunts and uncles.

Among the most important elements of Italian life—and this is deeply serious—is its socialized health system. I sometimes suspect the Italians do not appreciate all they have, beginning with this. When I had the misfortune to have a serious infection, I was hospitalized three times and successfully operated by a brilliant, youthful surgeon. Thanks to the national health service, the cost was minimal.

Thank you, Italy—thanks for so much, and I hope I can repay you, if only with words of gratitude.

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Meet Judith

Judith Harris writes primarily about conservation of the Italian cultural heritage. Her most recent book is a biography, *Evelina, A Victorian Heroine in Venice*. She is also the author of *Pompeii Awakened: A Story of Rediscovery* and *The Monster in the Closet*. As a freelance American journalist based in Rome, she has been a regular contributor to ARTnews, Current Archaeology, Time, Wall Street Journal and the online magazine [iitaly.org](http://www.iitaly.org). Born in Cleveland, Ohio, she is a graduate of Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, and is a former diplomat.

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