

# Business etiquette, language & culture

## Italian society & culture

**Language** Knowledge of English is reasonably extensive in Italian business, but do not rely on being able to communicate in English. As a common courtesy, as a UK business wishing to succeed in Italy you will find that understanding and speaking a little Italian – although possibly not essential – does indicate that you are serious about doing business there, and shows that you are keen to understand and appreciate their local culture.

**Emails** Be careful with emails. Write in Italian whenever possible using good, simple, concise and direct language. Never rely on internet translation sites as they are often inaccurate – always use an Italian or official translator. For more information on translation services visit AST Language Services.

## Etiquette & customs

**Greeting** Shake hands individually with everyone at both introductions and departures, and always greet older people and women first (this may include grasping the arm with the other hand). Be aware it is not unusual for Italians to greet people they know with a warm embrace.

Say "Buongiorno" (good morning) or "Buonasera" (good afternoon/evening). You should use "Signor(e)" (Mr) or "Signora" (Mrs), plus the surname, when introduced, using last names and appropriate titles until specifically invited to use first names.

**Dining** Business is sometimes conducted over a long lunch, which can last a few hours, or often dinner at a restaurant. Do not refuse an invitation as this can be taken as an insult.

At social gatherings it is considered rude to ask someone you have just met about their profession, but typical topics of conversation can include Italian culture, art, food, wine, family etc.

## Business protocol

**Meetings** To arrange a meeting write first (in Italian), and follow-up with a phone call or e-mail. Large businesses usually work from 8.30 or 9am until about 6 or 6.30pm Monday to Friday with an hour or two for lunch, but the best time for meetings is between 10 and 11am or after 3pm. Avoid August, Catholic festivals and national holidays, as many businesses will be closed (see below for list of holidays).

Punctuality is not a priority, but as a courtesy you should be on time. However, be prepared to possibly wait a while for your Italian counterparts to arrive.

Ensure all your hand-outs are well-designed and aesthetically pleasing – appearance is often considered more important than content.

Do not be surprised if during business meetings your Italian colleagues speak at the same time or interrupt one another – this is not unusual and it is common to express open disagreement and constructive conflict. Do not move away or keep your distance as this may be interpreted as unfriendly. Italians prefer very little personal space.

Although negotiations can be slow, do not show impatience as this can appear rude or a sign of weakness.

**Dress code** Dress code is hugely important amongst Italians. How you dress will be perceived as a reflection of your social standing and success in business. A belief in status permeates all aspects of Italian society, with a very great respect for power and age – ideally you should try to find a well-connected person to establish good introductions for you.

Public holidays

## 2016

Date:Weekday:Holiday name:Holiday type:

### 1 January

Friday

New Year's Day

National holiday

### 6 January

Wednesday

Epiphany

National holiday

### 25 March

Friday

Good Friday

Observance

**27 March**

Sunday

Easter Day

National holiday

**28 March**

Monday

Easter Monday

National holiday

**25 April**

Monday

Liberation Day

National holiday

**25 April**

Monday

The Feast of St Mark (Venice)

Local holiday

**1 May**

Sunday

Labour Day / May Day

National holiday

**2 June**

Thursday

Republic Day

National holiday

**24 June**

Friday

The Feast of St. John (Florence, Genoa, Turin)

Local holiday

**29 June**

Wednesday

The Feast of St. Peter and St. Paul (Rome)

Local holiday

**15 August**

Monday

Assumption of Mary / Ferragosto

National holiday

**19 September**

Monday

The Feast of St. Januarius (Naples)

Local holiday

**4 October**

Tuesday

The Feast of St. Petronius (Bologna)

Local holiday

### **1 November**

Tuesday

All Saints' Day

National holiday

### **3 November**

Thursday

The Feast of St. Giusto (Trieste)

Local holiday

### **7 December**

Wednesday

The Feast of St. Ambrose (Milan)

Local holiday

### **8 December**

Thursday

The Feast of the Immaculate Conception

National holiday

### **25 December**

Sunday

Christmas Day

National holiday

### **26 December**

Monday

St. Stephen's Day

National holiday

**31 December**

Saturday

New Year's Eve

Observance

**2017**

Date:Weekday:Holiday name:Holiday type:

**1 January**

Sunday

New Year's Day

National holiday

**6 January**

Friday

Epiphany

National holiday

**14 April**

Friday

Good Friday

Observance

**16 April**

Sunday

Easter Sunday

National holiday

**17 April**

Monday

Easter Monday

National holiday

**25 April**

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International Market Advisor  
IMA House  
41A Spring Gardens  
Buxton  
Derbyshire  
SK17 6BJ  
United Kingdom  
Email: [info@ima.uk.com](mailto:info@ima.uk.com)  
General enquiries switchboard: +44 (0) 1298 79562  
Website: [www.DoingBusinessGuide.co.uk](http://www.DoingBusinessGuide.co.uk)