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About 75% of Italy is mountainous or hilly, and roughly 20% of the country is forested. There are narrow strips of low-lying land along the Adriatic coast and parts of the Tyrrhenian coast. In addition to Rome, other important cities include [Milan](#), [Naples](#), [Turin](#), [Genoa](#), [Palermo](#), [Bologna](#), [Florence](#), [Catania](#), [Venice](#), [Bari](#), [Trieste](#), [Messina](#), [Verona](#), [Padua](#), [Cagliari](#), [Taranto](#), [Brescia](#), and [Livorno](#).

Northern Italy, made up largely of a vast plain that is contained by the Alps in the north and drained by the Po River and its tributaries, comprises the regions of [Liguria](#), [Piedmont](#), Valle d'Aosta (see [Aosta, Valle d'](#)), [Lombardy](#), [Trentino–Alto Adige](#), [Venetia](#), [Friuli–Venezia Giulia](#), and part of [Emilia-Romagna](#) (which extends into central Italy). It is the richest part of the country, with the best farmland, the chief port (Genoa), and the largest industrial centers. Northern Italy also has a flourishing tourist trade on the Italian Riviera, in the Alps (including the Dolomites), on the shores of its beautiful lakes (Lago Maggiore, Lake Como, and Lake Garda), and in Venice. Gran Paradiso (13,323 ft/4,061 m), the highest peak wholly situated within Italy, rises in Valle d'Aosta.

The Italian peninsula, bootlike in shape and traversed in its entire length by the Apennines (which continue on into Sicily), comprises central Italy ([Marche](#), [Tuscany](#), [Umbria](#), and [Latium](#) regions) and southern Italy ([Campania](#), [Basilicata](#), [Abruzzi](#), [Molise](#), [Calabria](#), and [Apulia](#) regions). Central Italy contains great historic and cultural centers such as Rome, Florence, [Pisa](#), [Siena](#), [Perugia](#), [Assisi](#), [Urbino](#), Bologna, [Ravenna](#), [Rimini](#), [Ferrara](#), and [Parma](#). The major cities of S Italy, generally the poorest and least developed part of the country, include Naples, Bari, [Brindisi](#), [Foggia](#), and Taranto.

Except for the Po and Adige, Italy has only short rivers, among which the Arno and the Tiber are the best known. Most of Italy enjoys a Mediterranean climate; however, that of Sicily is subtropical, and in the Alps there are long and severe winters. The country has great scenic beauty—the majestic Alps in the north, the soft and undulating hills of Umbria and Tuscany, and the romantically rugged landscape of the S Apennines. The Bay of Naples, dominated by Mt. Vesuvius, is one of the world's most famous sights.

The great majority of the population speaks Italian (including several dialects); there are small German-, French-, and Slavic-speaking minorities. Nearly all Italians are Roman Catholic. There are numerous universities in Italy, including ones at Bari, Bologna, Genoa, Milan, Naples, Turin, Padua, Palermo, and Rome.


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