

Nada's Italy

CHECKLIST FOR THE SMART TRAVELER!

Here's some information I put together so you can be prepared and have a totally stress-free vacation! – Nada.

✿ ESSENTIALS FOR TRAVEL

Are you ready for your Italian vacation? Just take a few minutes to go over the information below to make sure you don't forget anything and to avoid unpleasant surprises when you get there. Also remember that Italian standards are different from American standards, it is a foreign country after all!! And that's also what we love about it! Please be respectful of Italian customs, keep in mind that you are a representative of your country when abroad, and you'll be on your way to the vacation of a lifetime!

✿ DON'T LEAVE WITHOUT CHECKING THESE OFF

- I have a valid Passport & extra ID to carry around with me if I leave my passport at hotel.
- I have Insurance Information
- I have my plane ticket
- I have valid Credit Cards. I have notified the banks about my trip so my cards don't get blocked.
- I have about 300 Euros in cash with me (recommended in case you don't find an ATM right away and for your basic necessities as you get off the plane such as bottled water, paying for a taxi cab, etc.)
- I have enough U.S. Cash, just in case I need it at the US airports or for emergency.
- I have photocopied important documents, passport, as well as credit cards with phone numbers. I have notified my bank about my trip (banks may block your cards, if they are suspecting fraud). I know my PIN code for international ATM access.
- Int'l Driver's License (Only if you are renting a vehicle in Italy. It is also an extra form of ID)
- Student ID / Senior Cards / Discount Cards
- I have made a card with the essential information on myself (emergency contact, allergies to food and/or medications, blood type, medications that I'm taking) that I will keep with me at all times.
- I have given my itinerary, hotel & contact information to family.
- I've written my full name, as well as addresses both in the U.S. and abroad on the bright orange Nada's Italy luggage tags, so my bags will be immediately identifiable at the baggage claim area. Using these tags will also keep uniformity with the rest of the group's luggage when transported from one hotel to the other.

PACKING TIP! If you have a back-pack as your carry-on (not a purse), you will actually be able to get into St. Mark's Church (in Venice) without waiting in line! Yes, that's right! If you are on the Venetian Splendors tour, make sure to bring a back-pack, which you will need to check-in at a security storage desk (for free) before entering the church. The great thing about this is that you will not need to wait in line once you've checked in your back-pack!

✱ NOTES ON MONEY

ATMs are the best way to take cash out, but the daily limit is 250 Euros (banks do that to prevent fraudulent transactions), so make sure you have enough cash before you leave. Banks have very strange hours, so it'll be hard to find one open while we're out. DO NOT take Traveler's Checks, they are VERY hard to change, many banks don't at all, so avoid the whole trouble by not taking any. Some stores take credit cards, but not the majority. Also, stores are more willing to come down on price if you pay cash.

✱ WAYS TO GET THE MOST 'BANG' OUT OF YOUR EURO

If you are in an independent store (NOT a department store, or anything that has a brand name like Gucci, Prada, etc.) and you know you're dealing with the owner or another person in charge, you can ask for a "piccolo sconto", small discount, and they will likely give it to you. Obviously it also depends on how much you are spending, I would say that if it were at least 100 Euros, I would definitely ask for a piccolo sconto. You can expect to get about 10%, but again, the more you spend, the more you're likely to get the discount.

REMEMBER THIS! Another way to save money is to fill out a "Tax Free Form", which you can ask for in many retail shops around Italy. Unfortunately not all stores provide this service, but it's worth looking for those that do. The 20% SALES TAX (VAT) is already INCLUDED in the merchandise that you are purchasing, so if an item is 10 Euros, that is what you'll be paying at the register (tax is not added at time of payment). The Italian government encourages foreigners to spend by refunding about 13% of the sales tax, but there is a minimum purchase necessary for this, about 150 Euros (as a total purchase in one single store). By filling out the form and keeping the original receipt, you can present it at the airport of departure on your way back (at the **information desk**), and you will get roughly **13% refund** of the tax you've paid while shopping. Believe me, it adds up!! The refund is given as either cash or by crediting your credit card.

NOTE: This service IS NOT available for food, beverage, restaurants or other purchases that are not considered 'retail gift items'.

✱ TIPPING IN ITALY

This can be a confusing topic for many traveling to Italy. I will try to make it as simple as possible. Your tour leader (myself or someone else) will ask each person to leave either a €1 or €2 tip at the table at the end of each meal. That goes to the waiters, who always give my groups special attention. So, if you calculate a total of 10 (lunches & dinners) that we have out (i.e. not at the villa), you should calculate approx. US\$35 in tips for the restaurants for your entire stay.

When you are in Florence on your own time and eat in a restaurant, on the bill you may see an item named 'Servizio' (translation=service). THAT IS NOT A TIP!! That just goes to the restaurant, NOT the waiters. You will also see a charge named 'Coperto' (translation=cover) which is not a tip either, but rather a cover charge which 'covers' the expenses for your bread, olive oil, silverware, etc. These things are very deceiving for travelers, especially if you assume that you are paying a tip.

So, if you do want to leave a tip, just leave it in cash on the table, or give it directly to your server.

HOW MUCH? In Italy leaving a tip is strictly a sign of 'thank you' and appreciation towards your server if you think he/she deserves it, but it is not obligatory. Anywhere between 5-10% max. of your bill will make your server happy. If you pay by credit card, you won't see any line on the slip that says 'tip', so you won't be able to include your tip on your credit card bill.

If you'd like to leave tips for the staff at the villa, the total usually is at the most €60 (approx. \$87) per person for the entire stay (that includes all the tips for the drivers, maids, other service personnel at the villa, cooks). I personally do not take tips from my groups, but if there is another guide leading the tour, than her tip will be included in the €60 that will be shared with the others.

🌸 HEALTH & PERSONAL HYGIENE

- ___ Anti-bacterial wipes/ tissues/ sanitizing lotion. You'll need these because Italian restrooms are often in very poor sanitary conditions and you'll end up having to touch things that you'd rather not. You can use these for wiping door handles in public places as well as your hands before eating.
- ___ Toothbrush & Toothpaste (you can also buy these in Italy if you need to)
- ___ Shampoo & Conditioner (some hotels may not replenish these on a daily basis. However, you can also buy these in Italy if necessary)
- ___ Prescription medication (make sure you have enough for your entire trip), Birth Control, etc.
- ___ Band Aids (mostly for blisters if you don't have comfortable shoes...)
- ___ Antibiotic Cream, Insect Repellent lotion, etc. (there are a lot of mosquitos in the Summer)
- ___ Sunscreen, skincare lotion, etc... (you can also buy these in Italy)
- ___ Washcloths, facial wipes, make-up removing cloths, etc. (Italians don't use wash-cloths).
- ___ Scissors, other tools. (just make sure you pack them in your checked-in suitcase, NOT your carry-on because they will take them away!!)
- ___ Aspirin, Antihistamine, Headache Tablets (you can also buy these in Italy)
- ___ Motion sickness tablets (if you will be driving down windy roads)
- ___ Antacid, Laxative, Diarrhea Medicine (you can also buy these in Italy)
- ___ Tampons/Pads, Tissues (you can also buy these in Italy)
- ___ Ear plugs if you are sensitive to noise (on the plane).

🌸 PHARMACEUTICAL NEEDS

Pharmacies have regular store hours, which means, they are NOT open 24 hours. So, make sure you get EVERYTHING you need from a pharmacy before you leave. Some medications that are over-the-counter in the USA actually need a prescription for in Italy. Another reason not to take a chance.

🌸 NOTES ON RESTROOMS IN ITALY

Unfortunately the 'bathroom situation' isn't so rosy in Italy.. Many bathrooms are tiny, dark, dirty, and unisex. If you need 'to go', my recommendation is to go into a "Bar" (snack bar/ coffee house) or "Pasticceria" (pastry shop) and use THEIR restroom and then buy something from the store (it doesn't matter if it's a pack of gum, coffee, juice, etc. as long as you buy something out of courtesy for using their restroom). Public bathrooms are sometimes hard to find. The free ones are usually small and often don't have soap, toilet paper, etc., whereas the ones that charge a fee are usually quite nice. Always bring with you extra tissue and perhaps sanitizing wipes or lotion.

🌸 YOU DO NOT NEED TO BRING

- ___ Bed sheets, covers, pillows, etc.
- ___ Towels (except for wash-cloths, if you want to use these you need to bring your own because there aren't any in Italy.)
- ___ Kitchen stuff (flatware, dishes, etc.)
- ___ Food, unless you have particular dietary needs and need specific supplements

- ___ Water (bottled water will be provided during meals).
- ___ Washing machine detergent. Most hotels provide laundry service for an extra fee.
- ___ Things you wish you had left behind...

PACKING TIP! Don't bother taking your hair-dryer. Most likely, it's not going to work, even if you get a converter, so you should just buy a cheap one in a pharmacy once you get to Italy. Most hotel rooms include a hair-dryer in the bathrooms anyway. To check if a certain hotel includes a hair-dryer, don't hesitate to contact us.

PACK SMARTLY

There are 2 types of travelers: those who pack light, and those who wish they packed light. You're always in time to buy things you may need in Italy. Chances are you'll be flying back with a lot more than you came with, so make sure you leave room to pack it in! Also, some rooms in the hotels are on upper levels with no elevator, therefore you will need to haul your luggage upstairs: one more reason to travel light!

Be considerate to others in your group, space on the van is very limited. Also, you will be shopping (even you non-shoppers out there!!), so you will end up with a lot more than you came with. Shipping things to the US from Europe is very expensive and not recommended for wine and fragile items.

Several of the vineyards and other shops we visit are able to ship heavy items such as pottery, as well as wine for you to the States.

With new Airport Security regulations, bringing any kind of liquid on board is not permitted. So make sure you have a sturdy enough suitcase in the event that you want to pack olive oil or wine bottles in it to check-in. You will also be able to pack aged cheeses in your checked-in luggage, as long as they are vacuum-packed. **No cured hams or meats are allowed by US Customs.**

AIRLINE LUGGAGE RESTRICTIONS

Please check with your airline company what the **luggage restrictions** are. Each airline has its own regulations regarding allowed luggage, but most of them allow **one carry-on item plus a personal item** (such as a purse, laptop, briefcase, small backpack, etc.), and **two** bags to be checked-in free of charge.

The 2 carry-on items cannot exceed a total combined weight of 40 pounds. Each checked-in suitcase cannot exceed a maximum of 50 pounds per piece. If you have more than 2 suitcases to check in, or if they exceed the weight limit, you will be charged a fee by the airline. These are general guidelines, but with the security measures that keep changing, it is best to contact your airline company for updated regulations.

PACKING TIP! If you wish to bring olive oil and wine back in your suitcase, it will be necessary for you to check the suitcase (cannot bring ANY liquids on board the plane), so a HARD-SHELL suitcase is advised to prevent any damage. **Note:** Keep in mind that thieves may target new or expensive luggage, especially when returning to the US (thieves know you'll be making purchases on your vacation!).

CLOTHING

Think lightweight, comfortable, casual, quick drying, soft and nothing that will feel tight or not let your skin breathe. Bring things you can wear in layers for both hot and cool weather. Style is mostly casual, perhaps 1 or 2 evening outfits for a night on the town!

___ Swimwear (if the weather's nice and warm, you may want to hang out by the pool, beach, or for Riviera Tours, by the hot springs).

___ **FOR RIVIERA TOURS ONLY:** Bring jellies (plastic shoes to wear on pebbly beaches).

- ___ Comfortable footwear - suitable for walking on cobbled stone or uneven streets.
- ___ Comfortable Shorts / Skirts (2-3 pairs)
- ___ Long Pants (2-3 pairs). Black pants always make a perfect outfit: dress up by wearing an evening top or dress down with a comfy shirt or tank top. Either way, blank pants are extremely versatile.
- ___ Shirts (3-4 short/long sleeve tees, something "dressy" if you want for your nights in larger cities such as Venice, Rome, Florence)

PACKING TIP! Shorts above the knee, mini skirts and bare shoulders are not allowed in bigger churches, so bring a light sweater or scarf to cover your shoulders, just in case.

✱ SAFETY & SECURITY

Make sure you carry your cash/wallet/documents in your front pocket, in a fanny pack or money belt (if you're a man), or in a closable purse that you can hold tightly in front of you (if you're a woman) for when you're in highly crowded areas like buses and other public transportation.

Pickpockets take advantage of distractions like sudden noises or particular activities, so please always be aware of your surroundings and your belongings. Backpacks are not recommended, because they offer an easy access from the back.

Some pickpockets are easy to spot, they may be looking shabby and unclean, some of them are "gypsies", kids and adults who beg for money and steal your cash as you pull out your wallet!! Some others instead wear a suit and tie and you can never tell. So to be safe, never pull out your wallet unless you're purchasing something in a store. And if you want to give some money in charity, give it to street performers, artists, and musicians, who won't steal your wallet. Don't sign petitions or anything that seems a bit sketchy! Pick-pockets are on public transportation, so you want to hold on to your purse while on the bus/subway. A zipper purse is fine, as long as you always keep the zipper opening in front of you. For the record, a money belt is something that only tourists use...so being smart and aware of who's around you will be sufficient.

✱ DON'T FORGET TO PACK LIGHT!!!

Because you'll be checking in and out of hotels, as well as perhaps getting on and off trains, I HIGHLY recommend packing light. Whether you're a shopper or not, guess what? YOU WILL BE SHOPPING! You'll see things that you'll want to bring home, like wine, olive oil, limoncello, biscotti, shoes, hand-painted pottery, whatever.. And you'll kick yourself in the head if you could've fit just one more extra wine bottle instead of carrying that extra pair of shoes you brought "just in case".

PACKING TIP! Squeeze a duffle bag inside your suitcase on your way to Italy. If you need extra space or go over the weight-limit, you can quickly fill the extra bag and check it in on your way back. For an easier switch if needed, pack your heavier items ON TOP so they are easy to remove if you go over the airline's weight limit.

✿ OTHER USEFUL ITEMS

- ___ Travel book on your destination.
- ___ Phrase book for basic travel language needs.
- ___ Bubble-wrap! You'd be surprised how useful bubble wrap can be when you're trying to pack glass wine bottles and olive oil in your suitcase!
- ___ Zip lock plastic bags (pack liquid items, to prevent spills or messes in luggage)
- ___ Trash bags (separate dirty laundry from other clothes inside your suitcase)

- ___ Journal (keep a record of your travels)
- ___ Pocket calculator (for calculating exchange rates when shopping)
- ___ Camera, film, batteries/battery charger.
- ___ Travel-size umbrella/ poncho.
- ___ Fanny-pack. The 80's may be long gone, but a fanny pack is a great travel tool, especially for men. Keep your documents readily available, tickets, money, credit cards, and other travel essentials in it.
- ___ Binoculars, if you wish to see more detailed views of the countryside's villas and castles.
- ___ Cell phone, cell phone charger (check first with your service provider for coverage over-seas!)
- ___ Electric razor, electric toothbrush, etc. (make sure you have the appropriate adaptor for it)
- ___ Alarm clock (hotels offer a wake-up call service, but may not have alarm clocks in the room.)
- ___ Washcloths. Italians don't use washcloths, so if needed, bring either this or facial wipes.
- ___ Pair of flip-flops or socks to wear at night, there often is no carpet in hotels and floors can be chilly.

PACKING TIP! If you bring any electrical appliances (hair dryer, etc), you will need a converter (Italy has 2 pin plugs), which you can get at Best Buy, Circuit City, Radio Shack, etc. The electricity supply is 220 volts. Most computers, camera and cell-phone chargers have a built-in converter, so all you need is an *adaptor*.

Internet cafés can be found in some cities we visit, where you can use a computer on an hourly basis, and you'll also be able to check your email in some of the hotels where we stay. Some hotels do not charge guests for internet access, while others do for a small fee.