



TRAVEL BY CAR AND MOTORCYCLE

There are two basic ways: buy a car or rent one. Car rentals cost more in Italy than in the US, although perhaps not by the ratio that held a few decades back. Gasoline costs about \$6 a gallon, which makes driving expensive, but serves to give a different perspective to American SUV drivers complaining about the exorbitant US prices surging over \$2. Costs can be held down by weekend specials and unlimited mileage rentals. Then too, distances in Italy aren't all that great. The whole country is 4/5 the size of California, or about the size of Georgia and Florida combined. Driving in Italian cities can be difficult if you don't know your way around, and access to the city centers is often restricted. However, driving is still probably the most comfortable way to travel, offering the chance to wander wherever you like through the country on your own schedule, and for three to five people it may even be economical, since train fares have risen significantly in recent years.

Car rental agencies in Rome with some of their locations"

1. Hertz- via Sallustiana 28
2. Avis- via Sardegna 38a
3. Europcar- via Lombardia 7 (corner of via Veneto)
4. Maggiore- Piazza della Repubblica 57/58
5. Jolly- Jolly Hotel basement
6. Ital American Viale Liegi 62/a

Europcar and Maggiore are European chains. Europcar is affiliated with National Car Rental in the US. The last two are small local agencies. Rates are lower but they don't have the big support organizations and you may run into problems of language. However, they're not bad for short rentals in and around Rome. Jolly also rents some exotic cars such as Jaguar and Rolls Royce with or without drivers. It's affiliated with Autorent, a small Italian chain with its own location at via Sicilia 9.

Whatever the rates you find, a tax of about 20% is added. You pay for all gasoline. Liability, fire and theft coverage is usually included but complete collision insurance is more. There are age minimums for car rentals. The last time we checked they were 23 for Avis and 21 for Europcar and Maggiore. These three allow one-way rentals throughout continental Europe, usually without extra charge if rental is for two weeks or more. You will definitely get a better deal by arranging the rental before you leave home, unless you deal with one of the small local agencies.

You can also rent a motorbike or motorcycle in Rome from the following:

- Scoot-a-long- via Cavour 302 (near Colosseum)
- Scooters for Rent- via della Purificazione (near Piazza Barberini)

They rent mopeds, Vespas, 350cc and 500cc motorcycles.

Car Purchase

If you've been thinking of buying a new car and also plan an extended trip to Europe, by all means consider picking up a new European car, at the factory, using it, and taking it home. This sort of traffic isn't as common or convenient as it once was, since most Italian and French manufacturers have dropped out of the US market, but picking up a Mercedes, BMW or Audi is still a viable option. Arrangements should be made before you leave home. As a foreigner, you avoid the sales tax (which ranges from 15 to 35%) and the same is probably true in Germany. As mentioned, Italian cars for export are now limited to a few models of Alfa Romeo, and most models of Ferrari and Maserati. There used to be large agencies in the US that arranged overseas car purchases and return shipment, but they seem to have faded away. I suggest you contact dealers of the make you favor, and see if they can make the arrangements.

Tips on Driving in Italy

- Stay alert and concentrate on driving. Most Italians are good drivers but very aggressive, especially in Rome. Outside of Rome, their reflexes seem a little slower but they still go fast.
- Don't drink excessively when driving. Wide American roads, with their low speed limits, may be easy to negotiate as long as you can still crawl to your car, but conditions are different here. You need your reflexes unimpaired.
- Leave your righteous indignation at home. You'll see maneuvers you don't believe, but if someone comes up the wrong way on a one way street or goes through a red light, don't get angry or upset, just try not to hit him. The same goes for pedestrians crossing the street where they shouldn't be.
- Don't drive in the center of Rome. Many streets are closed to weekday traffic, others are one way (always the wrong way), parking is difficult, and taxis are relatively cheap. The historic center is mostly closed to non-traffic except Sundays. There are cars and buses circulating, but the cars are mostly taxis, zone residents, doctors or politicians. Police used to physically close off the streets and turn you away. Not any more. Now there are signs saying you cannot enter, and there are cameras catching the plate numbers of violators. You may think you've made it safely in and out of the prohibited areas, but a big fine will arrive in the mail. If it's a rental car the fine will show up on your credit card statement.
- On the autostrade, keep to the right except to pass and when passing indicate your change of lanes with the directional signals.

- The autostrade are good roads, often masterpieces of engineering. However, their illumination and lane markings leave something to be desired. We therefore suggest you avoid extensive night driving. Besides, most of Italy is too beautiful to miss.
- For winter driving, make sure you have chains if you plan to venture into mountainous areas. Except for the Po Valley, most of Italy is either mountainous or hilly.
- A few years ago the speed limit on the autostrade was reduced from 140 to 130 kph. In 2002 it was increased to 150 kph (on certain upgraded stretches only) and you must now have your headlights on at all times on the autostrade and on all major roads outside the city. The speed limit is 90 kph on normal country roads and 110 kph on "superstrada", i.e. major limited access, non-toll roads. Unfortunately, the limits are rarely indicated; you're just supposed to know. There are little signs with temporary limits in areas of curves, etc. but we assume them to be more in the nature of friendly advice than rules. We also have always assumed that they refer to MPH rather than KPH. Although speed limits are not extensively enforced, we suggest that you stick to them since fines for violations can run to hundreds of dollars. After all, 150 kph is about 93 mph and no tourist needs to be in more of a hurry than that.
- Don't be put off by any of the above. Italy is one of the few places where it's still fun to drive, some of the time anyway. Heavy traffic, dumber young drivers in bigger, faster cars, really dumb and arrogant drivers in SUVs, and Italy's insane reliance on trailer trucks for 80% of all transport of goods, have combined to make it somewhat less fun than it used to be.
