

KEEP TALKING  
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SPECIAL  
POINTS OF  
INTEREST:

- Plan your Easter days out! A special report on the beautiful parks and gardens of Italy
- Your views on the best and worst of Italy, past and present
- The prizewinning article!
- An alternative Italian-English phrasebook
- The usual crossword puzzle to test your wits

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# The Definite Article

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## Happy 150<sup>th</sup> Birthday Italy!

*What makes so many people love Italy? Here are some quotes from English speaking writers about the charm and mystique of the 'beautiful country'.*

"A man who has not been in Italy, is always conscious of an inferiority, from his not having seen what it is expected a man should see." **Samuel Johnson**

"The Creator made Italy from designs by Michaelangelo." **Mark Twain**



Let's be honest, the more united people can be, the better. We only need to look at what's happening today in Ivory Coast and Libya to understand where tribalism can lead. The United Kingdom has a longer history than a united Italy but it doesn't mean we are all the same. Quite the op-

"Traveling is the ruin of all happiness! There's no looking at a building after seeing Italy." **Fanny Burney**

"Italy, and the spring and first love all together should suffice to make the gloomiest person happy."

**Bertrand Russell**

"Venice is like eating an entire box of chocolate liqueurs in one go." **Truman Capote**

"Report of fashions in proud Italy, Whose manners still our tardy-aping nation, Limp after in base imitation."

**William Shakespeare**

"What is the fatal charm of



Italy? What do we find there that can be found nowhere else? I believe it is a certain permission to be human, which other places, other countries, lost long ago." **Erica Jong**

"Open my heart and you will see graved inside of it, Italy."

**Robert Browning**

## Kip Talking

posite: ask the people of Britain what their nationality is and most would answer 'Welsh', 'Scottish' or 'English' rather than 'British'. But that doesn't mean that we don't function as a united country. And surely the same is true of Italy - if you talk about food, design, culture and sport, people immediately

understand what it means to be 'Italian'. Blame the economic problems of southern Italy on politicians and institutions, not on the people. So, happy Birthday, Italy! All of us at Keep Talking are very happy to be living in Italy (and in Friuli, too, of course!)

## The Modern Italian Heroes by Gianluca Pace



Garibaldi in the quiet countryside of Caprera

### Poor old Italy...

Perhaps today is not the best moment to choose for celebrating your birthday, with a war coming up only a few kilometres away. Come on, you are a boot... You can go anywhere you want! You only have to wear the right feet.

**But I'm sure you wouldn't** just up and leave - you are so proud of your position, almost surrounded by the warm Mediterranean Sea...

Once, someone believed that you could become a united nation, rising above the ashes of the former kingdoms that were sharing out your lands. Obviously you know who we are talking about: your friend Beppe! Do you remember him? A real hero, **wasn't he? History knows him as "The Hero of Two Worlds"...**

Is there anyone that you would define as a hero today? Of course you have to select only people that

live on your coasts or shadowed by the Alps... An Italian hero?

Well, yes - everyone who shares that same **old dream of Garibaldi's**, all the guys and all the girls who believe that Italy is first of all a nation, made up of real people, and not only a geographical expression...

*THESE* are the *REAL* Italian heroes!



Prize Article!!

**"Is there any other country that can boast as many famous and important names in every field of art as Italy?"**

## The Best and Worst of Italy

by Luigina Caporlingua

**I'm Italian. I love my country.** And so, although it is quite easy for me to pinpoint what I think is the worst thing about Italy, it is difficult for me to see only one bright side of **"my" Italy.**

**Anyway, let's start with the worst thing.** In my opinion, the worst thing about Italy is a particular aspect of some **Italian people's behaviour.** **It's that behaviour that makes Italian people say, "Ok, we're not supposed to do this, but..." Or "You shouldn't do this, but I think we can do it anyway." Or the opposite: "We're supposed to do**

this, but we can avoid doing it or do it in a different way". **It's good to be flexible, but that shouldn't mean not having rules, or knowing that although there is a rule you can get away with not following it.** The worst thing is that this is probably what people in other countries think about the Italians. They probably see this as one of our typical features, and, alas, some Italian politicians who represent us, **don't help to make people think otherwise.** This kind of behaviour is not particularly serious in trivial, everyday situations when **you don't break the law,** but when it becomes a general way of thinking, it can constitute the basis for being open to bribery.

**Ok, now let's move on to the best thing about Italy.** I think its best feature is its



culture. Italy is a very important country for history and art. The history of Italy starts with the Roman Empire and it seems to me that throughout the Western world, culture is based on Greco-Roman philosophy.

**About art, there's no doubt that the world has had a lot of important contributions from**

continued on p. 3



**"It is difficult for me to see only one bright side of 'my' Italy."**

# Curiosities of Italy in 1861 by Maddalena Sacilotto



**Massimo D'Azeglio**

Today, everyone speaks Italian, but in 1861 this was not the case. Massimo D'Azeglio, writer and politician, said the famous phrase **"We have made Italy, now we must make Italians"**.

150 years ago the population of Italy was 26 million, but only 600,000 knew Italian and 75% of them could neither read nor write.

On 27 January 1861, there were the first elections to elect the first Italian parlia-

ment, but only 2% of the population had the right to vote. Out of a total of 419,000, only 240,000 voted, and just 169,000 votes were deemed valid.

The Italian people liked the idea of a united Italy. There were many things to fix. The country was poor, lacking in resources, raw materials and infrastructure. Suffice it to say that in Italy there were only 2,400 km of railways against 9,000 in France, 11,000 in Germany and 14,600 in England. There were no national roads (we had only four). In fact, for a long time the sea was the cheapest and fastest way to connect central and southern Italy.

Of the working population, who were mostly farmers and manual workers, 70% were engaged in agriculture and 18% in industry. At the end of 1863 monetary union was established, whereas before the unification of Italy there were

268 different metal currencies.

**Children didn't go to school** but to work in the fields to help the family. There were only 1,133,000 pupils attending primary schools, 16,000 attending middle schools, and only 6,500 went to university. The diet was rich in carbohydrates and low in protein. We ate mainly barley, rye and cereals, and legumes were our **'meat', our main source of protein**. Because of this diet, people developed several kinds of malnutrition. 28% of the men who enrolled in the army, were turned away due to problems such as rickets or hunched backs.

A curiosity regarding salaries - an errand-boy could earn about 800 lire, compared to the 1,200 lire earned by white-collar workers, while a director general of the state earned more than 8,000 lire.

**"150 years ago the population of Italy was 26 million, but only 600,000 knew Italian and 75% of them could neither read nor write."**

## ...The Best and Worst of Italy

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painters, sculptors, poets, architects, scientists and musicians from everywhere. We can quote names like: Picasso, Monet, Renoir, Shakespeare, Goethe, Einstein, Newton, Mozart, Bach, and so on. But, is there any other country that can boast as many famous and important names in every field of art as Italy? Italy has Giotto, Titian, Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Dante, Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Galileo, Rossini, Verdi, Puccini, to quote just a few for each field

of art. Moreover, art and history are clearly visible in a lot of beautiful Italian cities like Rome, Venice, Florence and Siena, which are constantly visited by thousands and thousands of tourists.

Ok, I should finish here, but I **can't resist. How can I avoid** just touching on Italian food, the so varied Italian landscapes **and Italian friendliness? That's** all.

Try them. You can judge for yourself.

### SEPARATED AT BIRTH?



ITALY

A BOOT



# Happy Birthday Italy? By Sara Morettin



**“The enjoyment of being with friends.”**

A few days ago, on the 17th of March, Italy celebrated its birth. This date was chosen as an important step in the union of the country because 150 years ago, in 1861, Vittorio Emanuele II was declared first king of Italy. This event was just the beginning - at that time, for example, Rome wasn't yet the capital, but things changed later.

Although 150 years have passed, nowadays the debate about the real unity of Italy is constantly rekindled by all the differences that haven't yet been eradicated. One of these is undoubtedly the north/south divide. This problem is as old as Italy's history because it has never been solved. However, it is not one of the main reasons why Italy is famous all over the world. Obviously there

are the well-known Italian foods and the much-followed fashion, yet there's more.

The English writer Paul Ginsborg, who has recently received Italian nationality, suggests that Italy's strength is its organization into small towns - what we know as *comuni*. These are not just the places where Italian people can express the best of themselves, such as their enjoyment of being with friends and their feelings of solidarity, but also where citizens can use the facilities that contribute to their wellbeing.

I agree with Paul Ginsborg, but sometimes it happens

that the sense of belonging to the country as a whole is lacking, in particular when one Region needs another's help. Just remember all the discussions about the waste in Naples a few months ago.

On the other hand, a strong sense of patriotism was well shown after the Italian victory at the World Cup in 2006 when a huge number of Italian flags waved out of our windows. This is what we should promote in our country and keep alive every day.

**“a strong sense of patriotism, was well shown after the Italian victory at the World Cup in 2006”**



# 150 Years of Unity by Patrizia Cosolo

Italy is celebrating 150 years since its unification. This event has created controversy among our politicians making daily headlines in the newspapers. Moreover, the decision of the Northern League not to give relevance to this event has rekindled a furious debate just a few days before the 17<sup>th</sup> of March. Furthermore, the costs which the

celebration involves have caused public concern because of our disastrous economic situation. There are also our Prime Minister's scandals which have aroused the interest of the whole world and have provoked much fiercer disagreement among the parties. So, the image that Italy is showing these days is anything but unified!

What I really hope is that looking back on this important event in our history will allow us to find the strength to change this gloomy situation. Most of all we have to focus on the feelings which inspired Garibaldi and his men - enthusiasm, love of their country and a real desire for a unified Italy.

**“The image that Italy is showing these days is anything but unified!”**



# A Nation of Artists by Gino Bianchini



***“The Italian nation is well represented by a beautiful lady dressed in green, white and red”***

Italy is a nation of artists. In fact, the Italian territory is full of architectural beauties and many great Italian artists have created great works of literature, painting, sculpture, architecture, music and other artistic expressions. This artistic and aesthetic sense, typical of Italian people, probably comes from the culture of the ancient Romans, who developed a great civilization and a language, Latin,

which is the base of different modern languages. The Romans developed art, architecture and sculpture, but also roads, politics and law in a truly incredible way for the means at their disposal. The aesthetic sense, the creativity and imagination of Italians are their strengths and are also noticeable in Italian cuisine, Italian fashion and the Italian lifestyle. I think that Italian women had and still have an important role in the development of this creativity and in transmitting it from one generation to the next. **What’s more, it is mainly Italian women who prepare food for their children, teach them to pray and how to behave, dress them, take care of them and encourage them to express their creativity through drawing and playing.** Hence, the Italian nation is well represented by a beautiful

lady dressed in green, white and red, as it is often portrayed. On the other hand, because Italian mums are essential in the education and upbringing of Italian children, they thus also determine the defects of Italian society. They are often overprotective towards their children, to whom they leave little autonomy. Therefore, Italian adults often act in society in a babyish and individualistic way and are more likely to compete than to cooperate. A striking example of this is the behaviour of Italian politicians.



*An example of the individualistic behaviour of Italian politicians!*

# Vive la Difference! By Miranda Fabbro

On the 17th of March 1861 Italy was united. In those years the territory was historically and culturally disparate, and in fact we still find a great deal of contrast between the regions today. Thanks to the opportunity I have had to travel around over the last few years, I have been able to see that there are many differences between the

north and the south of Italy. We have, for example, a different sense of family, alternative priorities in life and different ways of getting to know new people. Nowadays, it seems to me that, not only do we have to put aside our criticisms of the differences that characterize the various parts of Italy, but we also have to learn to ap-

preciate them and to see the value of our variety in a positive light. In my view, if we do that, we will be able to develop new businesses, to improve our culture and to become a leader in the world.



***“We have to put aside our criticisms of the differences that characterize the various parts of Italy and learn to appreciate them .”***

# A Joyous and Passionate Tour Around the...



*The Royal Castle of Racconigi*

There are a range of gardens from the north to the south of the Italian Peninsula. What really amazes me about a garden is the variety of plants, herbs and fruit which are cultivated with extraordinary care or laid out for pleasure. With warmer weather and the first signs of spring, now it is the perfect time to explore the great outdoors and enjoy nature.

Some of the best spring displays are here. So, find your perfect **“daycation” with me even if the weather is dull and grey** because there are plenty of colours to see.

The Royal Castle of Racconigi is a palace and landscape park in Racconigi, Cuneo. It is one of the residences of the Royal House of Savoy and since 1997 it has been on the UNESCO World Heritage Sites List, as well as winning the **“Italy’s Best Park” competition in 2010**. It houses a magnificent large park in the French style, as well as an English landscape garden.

The gardens of Villa Taranto, by Lake Maggiore in Piedmont, were created with the ambition of creating a botanical complex of international standing. The 16 hectares were

transformed into a real heaven, rich in evocative scenery. Flower-beds, little ponds, parterres, woods, fountains and alternate lawns form the gardens, which are open to the public from April to October. I visited during a unusual event called **“The Feast of the Tulip” (every year from the 25th of April to the 1st of May)** where visitors can receive a free plant or flower cultivated in the garden.

The Cervara is situated on a sheer cliff between Santa Margherita and Portofino. The monumental Italian garden is on two levels connected by pergolas and steps. On the lower part box-tree hedges are shaped in geometric designs such as cones and graded cones. Among the numerous species we can find citrus plants, oleanders, Aleppo pines, a centuries-old pepper tree and rare pink capers. On the east side of the lower garden the pergola is covered with a huge purple wisteria that is more than a hundred years old.



Rising behind the Pitti Palace in Florence are the beautiful Boboli Gardens. They were originally designed for the Medici family and are one of the earliest examples of the Italian garden which later inspired those of many European courts. The gardens extend over a vast area forming an open-air museum with antique and Renaissance statues, grottoes and large fountains. Villa d’Este in Tivoli, Rome, is also on the UNESCO World

**“Italy united by its wonderful array of parks and gardens, from the north to the south of the peninsular.”**

Heritage List and won the **“Italy’s Best Park” competition** in 2006. It is a masterpiece among Italian gardens, with its impressive concentration of fountains, lily ponds, grottoes, water features and water music. The imposing buildings and terraces are reminiscent of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, while the water, feeding through an aqueduct and a tunnel under the city, recall the engineering wisdom of the Romans. After a long period of abandonment and deterioration the villa arose again when it became the property of the Republic of Italy.

La Mortella is the wonderful garden on the island of Ischia, in the Bay of Naples. The garden hosts a collection of plants from different parts of the world, such as tree ferns, from Australia and New Zealand, proteas (exotic flowers) and aloes from South Africa, yuccas and agaves from Mexico and also magnolias, camellias, bahuinias (ferns), palm trees and cycads (neither palm nor fern!) Everything in the garden is rosy. It is divided into two parts: a lower garden in the valley and an upper garden on the hill with verti-



*Rhododendrons in the gardens of Villa Taranto*



*The Boboli Gardens in Florence*



*Box-tree hedges at the Cervara*

# ...Most Beautiful Italian Gardens by Paola Gasparini



*The beautiful Philipino jade vine at La Mortella*

lower garden in the valley and an upper garden on the hill with vertical terraces cut directly into the rock. The whole garden has a landscape with water features, fountains, pools and rills displaying a collection of water plants. The extremely rare tropical creeper, the so-called jade vine from the Philippines, also grows here and lavishes its unrivalled hanging trusses of jade green flowers.

The name of La Cutura in **Lecce, Puglia, comes from “Licuti” which means rocks.** Actually in this area the ground is full of rocks and stones. It has been recently transformed into a botanical garden which has the best collection of cacti in the whole of Italy. There are two thousand specimens in the collection. There is a Rocky garden with fifty agaves and eighty prickly pears from America and Mexico. Furthermore, a beautiful greenhouse houses almost every cactus from all over the world. It is the best collection of them in Italy.

The Garden of Kolymbetra, has returned to its former glory after decades of neglect. **It's the true jewel of the Valley** of the Temples in Agrigento, Sicily. It grows in the heart of the archaeological and monumental park in a small valley

surrounded by walls of tufa, which form the natural boundary. Throughout the valley there are poplars, willows and tamarisks. On the ample terraces between the charming and high limestone walls, there is an old citrus grove, full of many rare species and varieties which are now cultivated according to the techniques of the Arabic tradition. It has been on the UNESCO World Heritage List since 1997.

Spring has arrived, so **it's time to plan your visit.** Visiting these gardens is time well spent!



*Part of the amazing cactus collection at La Cutura in Lecce.*

## About Italy Quiz - How well do you know your country?



*Can you identify where these tourist snaps were taken?  
(answers on page 8)*



# An Alternative English—Italian Phrasebook!

Francis of Assisi



Dov'è lo zoo?  
Where is the zoo?

Sandro Botticelli



Mi scusi: c'è qualcosa di strano  
nella mia ostrica.  
Excuse me waiter, there is something  
strange in my oyster.

Umberto Eco



Rifletto un attimino.  
Let me think about that for a moment.

Leonardo da Vinci



Buona sera. Vorrei prenotare una tavolo  
per tredici per cena.  
Good evening. I would like to book a table  
for 13 for supper.

Silvio Berlusconi



Avete una camera doppia con letto  
matrimoniale? Quanto costa per una  
notte? Siamo in tre.  
Do you have a double room? How much is  
it per night? There are three of us.

Gina Lollobrigida



Sto cercando L'Hotel Paradiso.  
I am looking for the Hotel Paradiso.

by Ruth Levy and Sarah Vine, from *The Times*

Answers to About Italy Quiz: (clockwise from top left) Piazza Duomo in L'Aquila; Santuario della Madonna della Grotta, Praia a Mare, Calabria; entrance to Porta Marina, Pompeii; Piazza di Spagna in Rome; Piazza della Loggia in Brescia; Umberto I Bridge in Turin; Lake Maggiore; Mount Etna; Ponte Vecchio (the Old Bridge) in Florence; the Duomo in Milan; Piazza de Ferrari in Genoa; the Duomo in Ravenna.

## A Good Present for Italy

by Alessandro Facciola

I think that this year, for its birthday, Italy has to work hard to promote its excellence.

The two best qualities that Italy has, and which we should use to attract more tourists, are culture and food.

Unfortunately, very often we hear that foreign countries are talking about Italy only regarding its negative aspects. This is largely because the politicians have reached the lowest levels in years. In fact, in my opinion, all of them — right and left — are completely unable to in-

crease the value of our country.

A very good present for Italy's 150th birthday would be to try to replace the old political class with a new and motivated one.



*I think that this year, for its birthday, Italy has to work hard to promote its excellence."*