

Article Index ~ Italy Index ~

## Overseas with a Toddler:

### Traveling in Italy

By Maura Madigan

**My husband and I and our two-year-old daughter spent July traveling in Italy.** We wanted maximum enjoyment with minimum hassles, so we began planning six months in advance. Most of the arrangements were made through the internet, which left me the slightest bit uneasy until we arrived.

Happily, we had few surprises.

Everything promised on the websites was accurate and, in some cases, exceeded our expectations. Securing the major necessities—plane tickets, accommodations, car rental—beforehand allowed us to relax and enjoy making the smaller decisions of where and when to eat and what sites to visit.

#### [Campo de Fiori Giubbonari](http://www.residenzagiubbonari.com) www.residenzagiubbonari.com

5 charming apartments for rental in the historic center of Rome

#### [Apartment rental in Italy](http://www.SummerInItaly.com) www.SummerInItaly.com

Weekly rental apartments in Italy. Amalfi, Sorrento, Tuscany, Cilento.

#### [Teach English in Italy](http://www.OxfordSeminars.com) www.OxfordSeminars.com

TESOL/TEFL courses across the US including job placement & guarantee

#### [Villa in Tuscany, Italy](http://VillaBaldasseroni.com) VillaBaldasseroni.com

Group Accommodations. Private Pool. Spacious Family Apts.

#### Getting There and Getting Around

##### Flying

We booked our flights in February, choosing Alitalia because it was the least expensive airline with the most direct flights. This was not necessarily a wise choice. Alitalia's planes are older without individual TV screens. This made it difficult for my daughter to watch the movies (**there was at least one Disney movie shown on each flight**) and anyone who's flown more than a few hours with a child knows how crucial entertainment can be. I came prepared, though, with several new small toys, books, stickers, crayons, playdoh and chocolate.

I brought cheap toys that could be left behind (**or under the seat**) without worry. The airports in Rome and Milan had a good selection of inexpensive toys. Letting my daughter spend our leftover lire in the gift shops was a great time-killer. I've flown several times—usually on very long flights—with my daughter and I always expect and plan for the worst. When everything goes smoothly, it's a nice surprise.

# Wanted!

## Professionals & Executives Seeking \$80,000 to \$500,000+



Ads by Google

With Alitalia we had some unpleasant in-flight experiences, but the Dubai office was very apologetic and assured us that our experiences were unusual. They reimbursed us for our troubles and gave us a voucher toward future travel with Alitalia.

##### Driving

**We spent our first week in Rome**, then rented a car to drive to Tuscany. Car-rental-italy.com contracts with Sixt Car Rental, sending you a voucher which you present in Italy. You arrange the insurance fees directly with Sixt when picking up the car. Sixt rented us a new Renault Scenic with a car-seat for my daughter.

The car was wonderful, a real necessity in Tuscany. We had some problems with both Sixt and car-rental-italy that are still pending. The car-rental-italy.com (**a subsidiary of visititalytours.com**)

#### [Charming Italian Villas](http://www.LeTerra.com) www.LeTerra.com

Explore Rome, Florence, Hill Towns, Etruscan Land & Renaissance Gardens

#### [San Francisco Coupons](http://www.Groupon.com/San-Francisco) www.Groupon.com/San-Francisco

1 ridiculously huge coupon a day. It's like doing The Bay at 90% off!

#### [business travel florence](http://www.tomabuoni1.com) www.tomabuoni1.com

Antica Torre Tornabuoni 1 Book online at the Official Site

#### [Tour Beautiful Italy](http://www.GoAheadTours.com) www.GoAheadTours.com

\$2199: 9-Day Tours Across Italy Including Air, Hotels & More!



Ads by Google

#### Offshore Resources Gallery



##### Instant Desktop Translations

Instant Translations from your Desktop - Translates whole Word documents, email, and more



##### Second Passport Now

Enjoy all of the benefits that go with having a passport from a nation that respects your privacy, your dignity, and your freedom to make individual choices.

representative claimed that our experience was unique and that thousands of former clients have been pleased. However, the representative only responded to me after I said I was writing this article.

##### Taxis

**Taxis were not too expensive in Rome, usually around \$4-6.** If you have a small child or more than one child, I would definitely recommend taxis over public transportation. We tried buses and trolleys our first day but quickly decided it wasn't worth the hassle.

**The taxi system can be hard to figure out at first.** Most drivers won't stop if you try to hail them. You need to find a taxi stand (**most piazzas and busy streets have them**) but don't stand under the sign. This is where the drivers park to take a break. You need to stand about 20 meters down from the sign toward the middle of the street. It helps if you're close to the curb and looking out for a taxi. Since it's sometimes difficult to figure out exactly where to stand, people may try to cut in front of you.

### **This especially happens in the evening when taxis can be scarce.**

Twice we had older Italian women try to cut in front of us. This wouldn't have been a big deal if we hadn't been waiting with a tired, hungry toddler who kept trying to dart into the street. Just tell the driver that you are prima (**first**).

Getting to/from the airport can be expensive since taxis have mandatory surcharges for airport service, Sundays, and baggage (**even if they never touch the bags**). There are direct trains to the airport that might be worthwhile if you have the time and energy.

**Taxis in Florence were more expensive than in Rome.** We used them sparingly. The most useful time was when we were lost with our rental car in the maze of Florence's one-way streets and alleys. We paid a taxi driver to lead us to our apartment.

### **Offshore Resources Gallery**



**Live in Italy**

You want to live in Italy? Everyone wants to live in Italy... Can you live in Italy? Yes, you can live in Italy.



"Early retirement is a lifestyle, not a vacation." Billy and Akaisha Kaderli 'retired' at the age of 38 and have never looked back with regret.

### **Walking**

We tried to walk as much as possible. In Rome some of the sites—the Forum, Colosseum, and the Palazzo del Museo Capitolino—are within easy walking distance of each other. Florence, a smaller city where most sites are concentrated in one area, is even more conducive to walking. Since we decided not to bring a stroller, we either walked slowly while holding our daughter's hand or carried her. When this got tiring, we stopped at one of the numerous cafes. Luckily my daughter is both a good walker and light enough to carry. This might not work for everyone. A stroller, however, might not be a very safe option in Italian cities. Many streets—especially in older sections—are cobblestoned and drivers show little concern for pedestrians. A front- or backpack might be a better option.

### **Trains**

We only took one train, the Eurostar from Florence to Rome, but I was impressed by the experience. Trains, especially between major cities, tend to be inexpensive, convenient and clean. As with most things in Italy children under 4 years are free.

### **The Living Part**

#### **Accommodations**

**After a quick search I realized that it would be impossible to find a nice hotel that offered suites in our price range.** When you're staying somewhere for a month, it adds up. Then a friend suggested renting apartments, something I'd never considered. It turned out to be a wonderful tip. There are hundreds of websites listing apartments and houses in every price range. Most are on a weekly basis, but some offer daily rentals. We paid \$110-235/night, while the moderately priced hotel suites were at least \$250/night. The cost was only one benefit, though. We could cook, entertain friends and, best of all, we felt like we were actually living in Italy, not just visiting.

**Most places in Italy don't have AC, fans or even screens in the windows.** Thinking of mosquito-ridden summers in the US, I was afraid we'd be miserable but it wasn't a problem. It was very hot in Rome, so we had to sleep with the windows open, but the other apartments were cool enough to sleep with the windows and shutters closed. The shutters keep rooms dark and quiet in the morning and encourage an afternoon siesta.

**In Rome we stayed in a wonderful neighborhood just outside Vatican City on Via dei Gracchi.** It isn't too touristy, but there are lots of restaurants and shops in the area. I shopped at the local mercato—indoor market with separate stall for meats, fruits, and other essentials—every day and found that the shop owners remembered me by the week's end. The few key Italian phrases I had memorized really helped me there. The rental agent, Mauro ([www.omtour.it](http://www.omtour.it)), was terrific. He picked us up from the airport (**included in the rental price**), gave us a tour of the neighborhood, gave us a mobile phone to use during our stay (**included in the rental price**), drove us out to the Porta Portese market on our first day, and drove us to the rental car agency.

**We spent two weeks in Tuscany at Castello di Montalto ([www.montalto.it](http://www.montalto.it)), a castle about 20 km. from Siena in the Chianti region.** The castle has one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments and cottages that are rented on a weekly basis. The castle is secluded (**3 km. down a dirt road**), peaceful, and well-restored. They have a swimming pool (**and baby pool**), sandbox, tennis courts, and bocce court. The owners, Giovanni and Diana Nunziante, have lived in the castle for over 30 years. They, like all of the staff, are available but not intrusive. The castle library is stocked with up-to-date tourist guides and maps as well as other helpful information about regional festivals, wineries, and places of interest. The castle was a great base for day trips around Tuscany and a great source of playmates for my daughter. There were several Danish families with young children whose stay overlapped ours. They, like many visitors, were return guests. We quickly felt at home and my daughter enjoyed playing with the dog, cats and chickens. It was great to stay in one place for two weeks. We were able to relax, enjoy the countryside and each other. It felt like a vacation within a vacation, with no pressure to "**see this**" or "**do that.**" The castle would make a great setting for a family reunion.

**In Florence we stayed four nights at the Erta Canina Guesthouse ([www.ertacanina.com](http://www.ertacanina.com)).** This was the most expensive apartment, but definitely worth the price. It's in an excellent location—within walking distance of the major sites, but in a residential neighborhood—and beautifully decorated. The owner, Francesca, speaks perfect English and was very helpful. She led us to an American-style supermarket and loaned us Disney videos. The apartment is well-equipped with a TV/VCR, CD player, computer with internet access, telephone and treadmill. There's a lovely, child-friendly garden and Francesca let my daughter use her children's outdoor toys. Everything was perfect, except for the family renting the basement apartment whose noisy children and television kept us up a few nights. There's a connecting doorway (**that can be locked**) between the two apartments making it ideal for two families traveling together.

For our last night in Italy we stayed in a hotel near the airport, The Cancelli Rossi in Fiumicino, which was a big mistake. Neither the hotel nor the town had much to offer.

### **The Eating In and Out Part**

**Most grocery stores close from Saturday afternoon until Monday morning, so stock up.** You can often get milk and juice at Bars for takeaway. Look for a sign saying Latteria. Diapers, formula and sometimes baby food can be found in Farmacias (**pharmacies**). Fresh fruit, vegetables, bread, pasta, cheese and meat are abundant and inexpensive in Italy. You can buy excellent (**and cheap**) wine and beer everywhere.

**Peanut butter, cheddar (or any orange) cheese and raisins are another story.** So if your child is a picky eater, you may want to bring a supply with you. Since we couldn't find four of my daughter's "**staple**" foods and she doesn't eat pasta, we had to get creative. Luckily most restaurants served Macedonia di Frutta Fresca (**fresh fruit salad**), pizza, and of course gelato. These were sure bets when dining out.

**Dining out is a highlight of most vacations and a real pleasure in Italy.** Most Italians love children and welcome them in restaurants. We never received annoyed looks from other diners or waiters, even when my daughter was noisy or wandered among the tables. On our first night there, an Italian woman at the next table offered my daughter part of her focaccia appetizer. Although many restaurants don't have high chairs or baby-changing areas in restrooms, the staff is usually very accommodating. At one restaurant, the waiter, concerned for my daughter's comfort, piled several cushions on her chair.

**Although most restaurants tend to serve dinner late by American standards (around 7:30 pm), bars, cafes and pizzerias often open earlier.** Also, restaurants in tourist areas usually open earlier for dinner, but I'd avoid them. A few experiences we had in restaurants near tourist sites were unpleasant. They tended to be fairly expensive, often with poor service and mediocre food. Look for places off the main streets. We found a superb trattoria in an alley near the Trevi Fountain. If possible, eat where the Italians eat.

### **The Sight Seeing and Other Forms of Entertainment Part**

**Let's face it, the sites that draw visitors to Italy—the churches, museums, fountains, and ruins—aren't as interesting for little ones.** We tried to focus on one site each morning, followed by lunch out and naptime. There's only a two-hour time difference between where we live (**Dubai**) and Rome, so we got our daughter on an Italian schedule before vacation. This worked out well because she slept during the midday siesta hours when many things are closed, and was able to stay up for a later dinner out.

In museums and churches we held our daughter up (**horizontally in the Sistine Chapel**) and talked to her about the paintings or sculpture. This helped keep her interest longer and gave me a new way to experience art. It was exciting to share this with her.

### **In and Around Rome**

**Porta Portese** This outdoor market in Trastevere was our first stop. It's hot, crowded and not really worthwhile, except for the cheap toys. We picked up a baby stroller and doll for my daughter that kept her occupied for much of the vacation.

**The Forum** This is free, with no line, and lots of open space and places to climb.

**The Colosseum** We missed this one because the huge line didn't seem to budge. You can pay extra for a tour at the green kiosk across the street, and you don't have to wait in line. Tours leave at 10:30, 11:30, and 12:30. Buy your ticket early because they sell a limited number.

**Pantheon** This is free and walking distance from Piazza Navona.

**Trevi Fountain** Also free and a big tourist spot.

**Vatican City** Museum/Sistine Chapel The line can be two blocks long on weekends, especially Sundays. We went around 9:00 am on a Monday and had no wait. The museum is hot and crowded. They move everyone through small corridors with areas roped off, so it takes a long time to get through. The Sistine Chapel—everyone's destination—is at the very end.

**Piazza San Pietro** We didn't make it to the Basilica because we went on a Wednesday morning when the Pope has his outdoor address and the Basilica is closed.

**Castel Sant'Angelo** This is right on the river with a great playground/grassy area in the moat. It's well-maintained and popular with Italians. Good for a soccer game. There's a museum in the castle and a lovely bridge over the river. They had a literature festival with stalls selling books, food, drinks and trinkets. Summer is a popular time for outdoor festivals—often free—but many start later in the evenings.

**Tuscany** The towns in Tuscany were wonderful, but they all started to look alike after a while. Most had a few piazzas, one or two museums, lots of shops (**especially ceramics**), places to eat, and narrow cobblestone streets, often on a hill. We visited Siena (**very hilly, but worthwhile**), Cortona (**great views**), Arezzo (**great shopping**), Castelnuovo Berardenga (**nice playground**), and San Gusme (**best restaurant, La Porta del Chianti**).

**Florence** The Uffizi Like most sites in Florence, there were really long lines to get in. You can avoid this by going the day before and buying a reserved ticket for a bit more. It's not a particularly child-friendly museum with much of the art inaccessible—too high or grouped too closely. My daughter set off the alarm in one gallery by trying to walk behind one of the metal barriers. I ended up leaving with Annie after thirty minutes when she had a toddler meltdown, but my husband stayed since it was his first visit.

**Piazzale Michelangelo** This is a long hike up hundreds of stairs if you start at the bottom by the river. Our apartment was about one-third of the way up and still we had to stop to catch our breath. You get a beautiful view of Florence and there are a couple of cafes to rest in before the trek down.

**The Duomo** This was another site seen only from the outside because of long lines.

**Santa Maria Novella** This was the loveliest church I saw in Italy. It's cool and peaceful, with no line.

Traveling with small children for a month can be difficult; this is true whether you visit a different city or a different country. It's not Disneyland, but with a bit of effort, Italy can be as enjoyable for children as for adults. **It's the chance to experience life, not prefabricated kiddie fun.**

**We used this vacation as a preview to life in Italy.** We'd decided to move to Rome in a couple of years, and our month in Italy reaffirmed this desire. The reasons Italy attracts so many visitors—the food, wine, culture—are among the things that draw us as well. The main attraction, however, is the people and their approach to life. Each day is like a vacation, to be enjoyed and savored.

[Article Index](#) ~ [Italy Index](#) ~

---

[Contact](#) ~ [Advertise With Us](#) ~ [Send This Webpage To A Friend](#) ~ [Report Dead Links On This Page](#) ~ [Escape From America Magazine Index](#)  
[Asset Protection](#) ~ [International Real Estate Marketplace](#) ~ [Find A New Country](#) ~ [Yacht Broker](#) - [Boats Barges & Yachts Buy & Sell](#) ~ [Terms Of Service](#)

---

© Copyright 1996 - November 14, 2010 EscapeArtist.com Inc. All Rights Reserved