

# **American Students' Thoughts on Italy**

**Sponsored by The Italy-USA Foundation**

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According to a 2012 survey given to 800 American students by the Italy-USA Foundation, 56.36% of the students have been to Italy at least once. U.S. News and World Report found that 81% of Loyola University of Maryland's 2010 graduates had studied abroad, which ranked them third in the nation out of the 383 American universities that had provided data on study abroad; Goucher College and Soka University of America tied for first. During the same study, which was done in the 2009-2010 year, 270,604 American students studied abroad, which was a noticeable increase from previous years. The Institute of International Education claims that 30,670 American students studied in Italy during 2007-2008, 36% of which were in their junior year.

So what compels an American student to come to Italy? Out of the 800 students who completed the Italy-USA Foundation's survey 25.7% thought that food attracts students to Italy, more than the cultural diversity (22.5%) or the desire for change (12.9%). Tourism has always had an immense presence in Italy, conceivably due to Italy's historical significance, Italy's celebrated sights, or the cuisine that Italy has to offer. When asked what has affected American tourism in Italy in recent years, 30.59% students responded that they thought the American economic crisis was the biggest factor that affected tourism followed by the European economic crisis (19.07%), currency exchange (13.46%) and American interest in other countries (11.13%).

The Americans in the Italy-USA Foundation's study were asked if they recalled the case of Amanda Knox, an American from the University of Seattle who was studying at the University of Perugia in Italy in 2007. Miss Knox was accused of

murdering her British roommate, Meredith Kercher, and was kept in an Italian prison for four years while her trial was in process. She was finally acquitted in October 2011 and sent back home. Of those who completed the Foundation's survey, 87.98% marked that the Amanda Knox case had no effect on their decision to study abroad in Italy.

The Italian nation was affected by the European economic crisis of 2008 that followed the decline of the euro value. The total unemployment rate in Italy in 2009 had risen to 7.8% compared to 6.2% in 2007. Total unemployment in the U.S. also saw an increase: 9.3% Americans were unemployed in 2009 compared to only 4.6% in 2007. As of March 2012 the average exchange rate between USD and euro was 1.3201. Without doubt the two economies affect one another.

For many years these two great countries have been collaborating in trade, but trade was affected by the European economic crisis of 2008. Italy's primary exports to the U.S. are railway transportation equipment, fuel and oil, non-ferrous metals, and nickel and their primary imports from the USA are organic chemicals, aircraft parts, agricultural products, medicinal equipment, and precious metals. While the 2006 report by the American Industrial Marketplace showed that total value of imports to Italy was \$12.6 billion and the total value of exports to the U.S. was \$32.7 billion, their 2008 report showed that total imports was \$9.2 billion and total exports was \$22.26 billion; a noticeable decrease of 73% in imports and 68% in exports.

In 2009 Fiat proposed a full company merger with Chrysler, which would take effect by 2014. The benefits of this merger would aid in company protection

during times of economic crisis, especially as Fiat bailed out Chrysler in 2009 and has since helped manage the American carmaker. The full company merger could also potentially create a stronger overseas relationship between Italy and the U.S. In total, Fiat and Chrysler sold \$4.2 million cars in 2011. Of the American students who took the Italy-USA Foundation's survey, 74.16% thought the merger would benefit the American economy and 87.93% thought it would benefit the Italian economy. A total of 79.27% believed the merger would strengthen the relationship between Italy and the U.S.

An important issue regarding talks of merging the two automakers involves the decision of the Fiat-Chrysler headquarters location. Currently, the headquarters of Fiat is located in Turin while that of Chrysler is located in Detroit, Michigan. 71.71% of the American students in the Italy-USA Foundation's survey thought that the new headquarters should be located in the U.S. According to an interview done between the New York Times and Fiat and Chrysler's chief executive Sergio Marchionne, "The location would depend on two things: (1) access to capital markets and (2) the integrated company's relationship with VEBA"—a trust fund that provides health care for the United Auto Workers union retirees in exchange for 41.5% of its shares in Chrysler. One of the most important pawns in the merger depends on VEBA's continuation as a shareholder, and it is not willing to lose all of its shares; however, Fiat, which currently owns 58.5% of Chrysler, hopes to increase its shares to 100% with the integration of the two companies. As the merger talks continue Fiat and VEBA will need to come to an agreement.

The Italy-USA Foundation was interested in knowing the affects that Italian culture has on Americans. Unfortunately there was not a survey given to Italians on their opinions; however, there were many interesting responses received from the American students regarding their cliché view of Italians. For instance, the most typical desert item was marked as gelato by a majority vote of 89.49%. Espresso was also given a majority vote (72.75%) as the most typical caffeinated drink in Italy. When asked about the most popular sport in Italy it was not surprising that soccer gained a majority vote of 87.31%. Leather boots had a leading vote of 44.15% with respect to the most commonly worn shoe. Regarding the question about the location of the “fashion capitol of the world,” Milan received the highest vote at 45.58% immediately followed by Paris with 38.6% compared to only 10.93% that voted New York. One noteworthy response came from a student who thought Paris is the fashion capitol for women and Milan is the fashion capitol for men. It would be interesting, and perhaps relevant, to question Italian students on their cliché view of Americans.

Italy is a nation renowned for its excellent food and high quality wine. According to the National Pasta Association, the average American consumes 15.5 lbs of pasta annually while the average Italian consumes 51 lbs annually. Italy produces 2.75 million lbs of pasta annually compared to 1.9 million lbs produced in the USA. Of the American students who responded to the Italy-USA Foundation’s survey, 36.73% thought that spaghetti was the most popular food item in Italy, followed by pizza at 33.89% and gnocchi at 26.78%.

Italy produced over 212 million cases of wine in 2009 showing an increase of 31% from previous years and making it the leading volume exporter of wine, as claimed by The Drinks Report. On the other hand, France had the leading revenue from exported wine. 51.16% of the American students who responded to the Italy-USA Foundation's survey thought that Italy was the country that produces the best wine, followed by 27.78% who thought that France produces the best wine. While this is a matter of personal taste, we can look at the international market to get a sense of the world's most popular wine. The Accademia Europea Di Firenze claims that Italy has 18% of the international wine market second only to France with 35%, and the U.S. is Italy's biggest market consumer. The Italian Wine and Food Institute states that the majority of wine imported to the U.S. comes from Italy, followed by wine from Australia. The USDA Foreign Agricultural Service found that in 2009 the U.S. imported 2,196 hectoliters of wine from Italy at a value of \$939 million. The Wine Curmudgeon, a blog by fanatic wine connoisseur Jeff Siegel, argues that not even 2% of wineries in the U.S. accounts for all wine production, the biggest American winery producing only 5 million cases a year.

The U.S. and Italy have had relations since Italy's unification in 1861 with a break during WWII as the two countries as a whole were fighting on different sides, although arguably it was a fight between liberal America and fascist Mussolini. Since the foundation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949, Italy and the U.S. have been members. Both have similar foreign policies and have collaborated in promoting democratic ideals by working to maintain security and peace throughout the diverse world. When Taliban extremists attacked the U.S. on

11 September 2011, America's War on Terrorism was ignited. Italy showed its support by deploying troops to Iraq to aid in stabilizing the Iraqi government. After the U.S. declared Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), Italy further showed its support by deploying Italian troops to Afghanistan to fight the Taliban.

However, perhaps not every American realizes the assistance Italy has given the U.S. When asked if Italy and the U.S. have a close relationship in the Italy-USA Foundation's survey, 34.73% thought they did and 30.29% thought they did not while 34.99% had no opinion. These results show that almost as many American students who are aware of Italy-American ties are not aware. Furthermore, 59.84% of the students thought Italy does not do enough to promote its image within the U.S. However, 56.7% were aware of Italian campaigns within the USA promoting itself as a tourist destination or study abroad location. Therefore, while Italy is not seen as having a strong relationship with the U.S., it is seen as a country with a lot of culture, specifically fashion, food, wine, and soccer.

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