

Cultural Daily

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13 Observations While Traveling in Italy

Adam Leipzig · Wednesday, July 9th, 2014

I recently spent a week traveling in Italy in the Cinque Terra, the rugged northwest Ligurian coast that's sometimes called the Italian Riviera. Travel lets you look at culture through others' eyes—and watch them looking back.

Here are 13 observations from traveling in Italy.

1. Everybody speaks English. The Chinese speak English, the French speak English, the Germans speak English. The Italians don't speak Chinese or French or German, but they speak English, so everyone speaks English to each other.
2. Non-scientific analysis of where the tourists in this region are from, starting with the largest group: Italy, China, America, England, France.
3. "The Chinese are the new Americans," a shopkeeper told me. "They're loud, they have a lot of money, and they feel entitled to everything."
4. Because everyone speaks English, you can have more interesting conversations with people from Shanghai here than anywhere else (except, of course, in Shanghai).
5. Don't take trains on the weekend. They don't run on time, and they are ridiculously crowded. On the other hand, if your only time to travel is on the weekend, get on the train.
6. You can tell if someone is really able to speak Italian by the way they use their hands.
7. If you walk around a typical town in the afternoon, it will seem like nothing is there. That's because the metal doors are closed for lunch. Come back around 4 pm, and you'll find shops where they didn't exist before. Around 8 pm, restaurants will magically appear.
8. Italians love children. Always have, always will.
9. It will rain. Don't let that stop you. It doesn't stop the Italians.
10. If you are lucky enough to find a farmer who has raised a hog and butchered it, stuffed it with herbs from his field, slowly roasted it in a wood oven for hours until it is dripping and tender, slices it thinly and with love, then places the slices on rolls his family has made, rolls that are cross-hatched every centimeter so when you take a bite of the sandwich it is easy, and this farmer will sell you the *panino di porchetta* for four euros, you will immediately produce four euros,

thank him profusely, and consider yourself blessed.



Franco and his wood-roasted *porchetta*, Liguria, Italy

11. Order the house wine, white or red. It will arrive in a carafe, and cost a few euros. It'll be pretty good.

12. No matter where you are, there will be a *gelateria* nearby.

13. It's humid, and you will sweat, but the Italians won't. It's a mystery, and you will never know their secret.

Top photo: Train station in La Spezia, Italy, on a Sunday afternoon. Photos by Adam Leipzig

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