

Tips for Travellers – Schools and Scholarships

There are language schools throughout all of Italy. They are a great way to consolidate what you already know and to develop new skills, particularly speaking and listening skills. I have attended seven schools in Italy varying from two to four weeks in length. The first time I had very limited skills and whilst I found it stressful at times, it was probably a turning point for me to come to terms with the language.

Most of the schools work on a similar format. Courses at the schools can be of any length, but are commonly taken by students for either two or four weeks. There are a variety of types of classes. They can be either private 1 on 1 classes or group classes. The ones that I have elected each time have been the group classes that are four hours per day for 5 days a week. On the first day of term, there is a multiple-choice examination followed by a short oral discussion. This is used to place you in to the class of the correct level. I have found these to be quite accurate and each time I have been placed with other students of a similar level. Classes are totally in Italian and there are students there from all around the world.

For the four-hour classes, the day starts at 0900 and the first two hours are didactic grammar. There is then a break for café and a pasta and then there is a less formal two hour session. These sessions can take multiple forms, ranging from playing games, analysing a newspaper article or reviewing a television program. There are all stimuli to get the students thinking and speaking in Italian. They are a lot of fun. Classes are usually 10-12 students.

Most afternoons there are free optional activities. These range from walking tours around the town you are in, train trips to local towns, talks on literature or films or politics or a cooking demonstration. Some schools have optional tours on weekends for a small extra payment. These can be a great (and cheap) way to see some of the major cultural places in Italy.

All of the schools have an accommodation officer who will assist you with accommodation. The range is from hotel rooms, private or shared apartments or full or partial board with families. Whichever option you take, the rates are very cheap. Care needs to be taken though to ensure that the accommodation being offered is not too far from the school, particularly if you are wanting to avail yourself of the afternoon activities.

Most of the schools offer scholarships or discounted fees for Dante students. Keep an eye on this website, the notice board at the Dante School or ask your teacher for details of scholarships that are available. They certainly make it a very cost-effective way of having a holiday in Italy and you will be improving your language skills at the same time.

Many of the other students at Dante have attended language schools in Italy and many of their reviews have been covered in other editions of the Dante Newsletter. Don't hesitate to search them out and ask them for details about the school.

I would recommend bringing an English-Italian dictionary with you, together with some basic grammar books, particularly those concentrating on verb tenses and prepositions. If you have access to the internet, then to help with homework (every day) then some good sites to check the meaning of words and also the conjugation of verbs are:

<http://www.wordreference.com/conj/ITverbs.asp> and
http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Wiktionary:Main_Page and
http://it.wiktionary.org/wiki/Wikizionario:Main_Page

I am more than happy for students to email me with specific questions about any of the schools that I have attended.