

MACMILLAN CULTURAL READERS

PRE-INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

COLEEN DEGNAN-VENESS

# Italy



MACMILLAN

# 1 Geography, Climate<sup>13</sup> and Environment



## The Dolomite Mountains

### Geography

Italy is a peninsula in the Mediterranean Sea in southern Europe. A peninsula is land with water on three sides. The Italian peninsula is about 1,130 kilometres long. It is the shape of a boot that is kicking a ball. The 'ball' is the Italian island of Sicily. Sicily is the largest island in the Mediterranean Sea. Sardinia is Italy's second largest island and Elba is the third. Seventy smaller islands in the Mediterranean Sea belong to Italy, too.

**i** 'Mediterranean' is a Latin word meaning 'in the middle of the Earth'. The Mediterranean Sea sits between Africa, Asia and Europe, with twenty-two countries along its coast.



## Mountains

The Alps, mountains in the north, divide Italy from the rest of Europe. The northern regions of Piedmont, Valle d'Aosta, Lombardy, Trentino-Alto Adige and Friuli-Venezia Giulia share borders<sup>14</sup> with France, Switzerland, Austria and Slovenia. In these regions, there are groups of French-Italians, German-Italians and Slovene-Italians.

In the lower eastern part of the Alps are the beautiful Dolomite Mountains. The Dolomites are very different in shape and colour from the rest of the Alps. In the foothills at the bottom of the mountains there are many beautiful lakes. These include the five largest lakes: Garda, Maggiore, Como (one of the deepest lakes in Europe at 400 metres), Iseo and Lugano. Around these lakes are olive groves<sup>15</sup> and lemon and orange groves. Just south of the Dolomite Mountains is the Po Valley. Here farmers grow potatoes, rice<sup>16</sup> and wheat. Wheat is used for making bread.

The Apennine Mountains run 1,130 kilometres from the Cadibona Pass in the north, to Calabria in the south. This divides the country into east and west. These mountains continue on to the island of Sicily, making the mountains about 1,500 kilometres long. In the Central Apennines, east of Rome, is the highest part at 2,912 metres. This is called the 'Great Rock'<sup>17</sup> of Italy.

The western Alps are the highest mountains –

**Mont Blanc:** 4,807 m

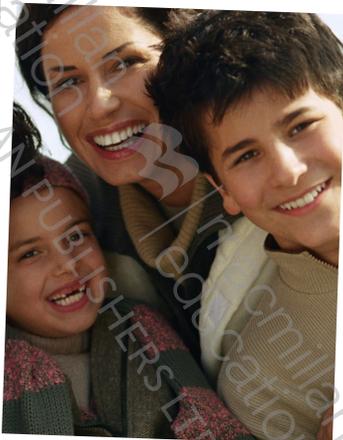
**Monte Rosa:** 4,634 m

**The Matterhorn:** 4,478 m

**Grand Paradiso:** 4,061 m

'I'm from England but I've lived in Italy with my Italian husband and children for twelve years. We live in Florence, in Tuscany, so we enjoy the city's culture and the region's beautiful countryside. In summer, we enjoy a walking holiday in the mountains. I think Italy is the best place to live in the world!'

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## Coast

Italy has nearly eight thousand kilometres of beautiful coast along the Mediterranean Sea. The Mediterranean Sea is divided into a number of smaller seas. The Adriatic Sea is between Italy and Eastern Europe, the Ionian Sea is to the south of Italy, the Tyrrhenian Sea is to the west and the Ligurian Sea is between Italy and the south of France.

Italy has beautiful sandy<sup>18</sup> beaches mixed with rocky coasts. The famous Italian Riviera is on the coast between south-east France and Tuscany on the Ligurian Sea. There visitors find lovely little villages, like Portofino. The west coast, from Tuscany to Campania, has long, sandy beaches. The coasts of Basilicata and Calabria on the Tyrrhenian Sea are rocky with some short beaches of white sand. Most of the Adriatic coast is flat and sandy so the beaches are very busy in summer. The coast between Trieste and Croatian Istria is rocky. Some of the most beautiful beaches are on the islands in the south.



## Volcanoes

Between the Italian peninsula and Sicily is the Strait of Messina. From there visitors can see Italy's famous volcano Mount Etna. Etna is the highest active volcano in Europe at about 3,350 metres. South of Naples is the famous volcano Mount Vesuvius. Vesuvius buried<sup>19</sup> the towns of Pompeii and Herculaneum in AD 79 when it erupted. Stromboli is another volcano and one of the seven Aeolian Islands off Sicily. Stromboli is one of the most active volcanoes in Europe.

The word 'volcano' comes from the Aeolian Island Vulcano. This island gets its name from the Roman god Vulcan – the god of fire.



Mount Etna erupting



## Climate

Most of Italy has a warm Mediterranean climate with hot, dry summers and wet winters that do not get very cold. But the summers in the mountains are short and not very hot. The winters in the mountains are long and very cold with snow. This is great for skiers. The Alps protect<sup>20</sup> Lombardy and Liguria from northern Europe's very cold winters, so winters in northern Italy are rainy but not cold.

In winter, the south stays warm because the sea brings warm air. Sometimes cold air from northern Europe travels south and brings snow to southern Italy's mountains. But people can continue to enjoy relaxing on the beach because the temperature is comfortable, at about 13°C in the daytime. Sicily gets about 2,500 hours of sun per year.

In summer, central Italy gets winds from Africa called Sirocco. This brings hot weather. In northern Italy the temperature can rise as high as 34°C in summer. In the south summers are even longer, hotter and drier with the temperature rising as high as 40°C.

Sicily has become drier and drier over the centuries because people have cut down trees in Sicily's central and south-western forests. Now there are only three forests in northern Sicily. This has resulted in less rain and dry rivers.

Inside the Italian borders are two enclaves. An enclave is a nation inside a larger nation. The first of these is San Marino on the north-east side of the Apennine Mountains between the regions of Emilia-Romagna and Marche, and the other is Vatican City in Rome.



## Environment

Italy has made many positive environmental changes in the twenty-first century. It is working to make mountains safer for wildlife, the seas safer for sea life and the air in cities cleaner for everybody.

### National parks

Italy's twenty-four national parks cover five per cent of the country. Here special laws protect the land and the wildlife. In the twentieth century, fourteen species<sup>21</sup> of animal in Italy became extinct – the animals were killed and the species no longer exists.



Stelvio National Park is the largest park in the Alps. It is in the regions of Lombardy and Trentino-Alto Adige. The park is home to many species of animal including red foxes, wild boar, chamois, ibexes and marmots, and to hundreds of species of bird including golden eagles. Over one hundred and fifty species of flora – plants and flowers – are found here, too. With glaciers and more than one hundred lakes, it is a wonderful place for walking, climbing and skiing. Cyclists in the *Giro d'Italia* cycling race<sup>22</sup> often prepare for it here. It is hard work cycling up Europe's highest mountain road – up 2,758 metres!



A glacier



# Geography, Climate and Environment

An Apennine wolf



A Marsican brown bear



A chamois



A golden eagle



An ibex



A wild boar



A red fox



A marmot



The Grand Paradise National Park was Italy's first park in 1922. It is in the Piedmont and Valle d'Aosta regions. It is full of high mountains, which were made by glaciers. The highest mountain is 4,061 metres. High in these mountains lives the ibex. The ibex was almost extinct in Europe so is now protected. Chamois, marmots and golden eagles are protected here, too. Visitors enjoy skiing in winter and walking here in summer.

In the centre of Italy is the National Park of Abruzzo. Here visitors can see mountains, rivers, lakes and forests. The park is home to sixty species of animal including the Apennine wolf and the Marsican brown bear. These animals were almost extinct but are now safe in the national park.

### Environmental problems

Italians love their cars. This has made the air in cities unclean. In Milan in 2008, a new law made drivers pay to drive into the city centre. People who do not want to pay use buses or trains to get into the centre. Cities like Milan and Rome have bikes that people can hire to travel round the city. These things have helped to make the air cleaner.

### Earthquakes<sup>23</sup>

Laws have helped to protect animals, plants and people but they cannot protect anyone or anything from earthquakes. Unfortunately, Italy has small earthquakes several times a year. In 2009 a big earthquake in Abruzzo killed 308 people. One of the worst earthquakes, in 1908, was in Messina and Reggio di Calabria. Over 72,000 people died. Fortunately, very dangerous earthquakes do not happen very often, and the small possibility of one does not keep tourists away.

Every year over forty million tourists visit Italy, and find a wide choice of geography to explore. And in the cities they find some of the world's most important treasures – architecture, art and history!

As well as the National Parks, there are:



- 152 Regional Parks
- 147 National Nature Reserves
- 418 Regional Nature Reserves
- 30 Marine Protected Areas (places in the Mediterranean Sea where laws protect the sea and the sea life)

