



Cultura Italiana
Italian Language School

Welcome Speech

Dear friends! Welcome to Bologna and welcome to Cultura Italiana, prestigious Italian language school.

My name is Massimo Maracci and I'm the director.

My colleagues and teachers Roberta, Silvia, Arianna and Federica and the teachers Adriana, Alessandro, Nazzarena, Stefania, Maria, Francesco, Marina and Beatrice will look after you and your classes. Each of us has a specific role. Everyone is responsible for your experience in Bologna and works to ensure that you get the maximum benefit from learning the language. Your teachers, who are your primary contacts, follow your learning speed and adjust the way they teach to the needs of the class and the individual. You are here in Bologna to learn how to communicate like Italians. Communicating means expressing yourself and responding with the appropriate language, which is different from a literal translation from your own language. Typical characteristics of Italian communication are facial expressions, gestures, a relaxed attitude even when talking about serious things, a lively way of speaking, and jokes. We Italians talk a lot; talking for us is natural, our words fly.

This is very difficult to accept for a person who speaks English, German or Japanese, for instance. Italian isn't a referential language: it doesn't communicate "things", it communicates concepts. So, two pages of English can become four or five when translated into Italian. To communicate effectively in Italian a foreigner not only has to speak Italian, but also has to understand the significance of spoken Italian. For instance, if an Italian person talks to you about his private life it doesn't mean you are friends. Or, if two people hug each other, it doesn't mean they're lovers. Italians *"talk a lot, but they don't say much"*. Take me, for example!

You can still see Bologna's medieval structure today. The city is of Etruscan origin, but later became a Roman city. You can still see traces of the original Etruscan structure, based on the intersection of two main streets, one going from north to south, the other from east to west, and oriented by the Etruscans in relation to the movement of the sun. In the centre there are two towers - the height of which expressed the prestige of the families who owned them. Twelve streets radiate from the centre (like the spokes of a bicycle wheel) and run outwards, towards the twelve city gates, some of which survive today despite the destruction of the city walls in the 19th century. There are 42 kilometres of arcades (there is a proposal that they become part of UNESCO's World Heritage). In the Middle Ages, because the arcades were public, they were used as a way of increasing the size of a house without having to pay more tax. Today they are very useful and mean we can walk and chat in an intimate atmosphere, or window-shop, while protected from the rain and the traffic. Beware of the traffic! Italians don't respect red traffic lights; they don't even respect pedestrian crossings! Scooters and motorbikes are very dangerous, because they don't obey any rules! Be careful!

Bologna today is a city with a population of 420.000 (900.000 including the suburbs). It is a very rich city because it has a lot of small flexible hi-tech industries that have evolved over five centuries of industrial history, starting with textile machinery, long before the first industrial revolution. 60% of Bolognese households in the centre consist of "single, one person families". As a result, there are relatively few children, but a lot of nightclubs - single people don't usually stay at home after work, they prefer to go out instead. This is why sociologists call the area between Bologna, Rimini and Venice "the triangle of pleasure". It is one of the areas in the world with the most demand for (and therefore supply of) clubs, bars and restaurants - but fortunately also cinemas, theatres and museums. It is also why surveys show that Bologna is the city where most Italians would prefer to live. People are friendly, the standard of living is very high, and services rival those of other European cities. Many other important Italian cities have inadequate infrastructure, transport systems and hospitals.

Bologna is not a tourist city. Tourists usually go to Florence, Venice or Rome. Those who come to Bologna are the ones who want to experience the real Italy, which is different from the one experienced by most tourists. You can still meet Italians, not tourists, in the city's restaurants, bars and clubs, and the city itself is preserved as it was. In the last 5 years the presence of tourist increased a bit, some of them move permanently to Bologna! Bologna is beautiful but, like all medieval cities, it is a hidden beauty. Of course, Florence is amazing and its beauty is self-evident, because it is a Renaissance city. We say that Bologna's beauty is like that of a wife (or husband), while Florence's beauty is like that of a movie star.

Bologna is known all over the world for two things: its university and its food. Bologna University is the oldest in Europe. It was founded in 1088, when students from all over Europe came here to study Roman law. Studying law was necessary to know how to "rule". In fact, in those times Bologna was a free *commune*. People with the ability to rule a *commune* were usually popes, emperors, kings and princes. To learn how to rule, young representatives of the rich and powerful families of Europe came here to study "Justinian Law". A professor would be paid directly by the students and they would often rent books and classrooms from him. Books were very expensive and heavy, so often students had a servant to carry them. Today the University of Bologna has 112.000 students. Their presence makes the culture and entertainment in Bologna even livelier.

Bologna is nowadays very famous of the industry, too, above all mechanics: Maserati, Lamborghini, Ducati, Ferrari.

At night, the city is full of people: men and women walk alone or in small groups, moving from bar to bar. Bolognese cuisine can be found in good restaurants. Bologna is quite an expensive city, but good restaurants are relatively inexpensive. For instance, a restaurant where you pay 30-40 euros for a 3-course meal with good wine is a high-quality restaurant.

The prince of Bolognese cuisine is the tortellino, a square of pasta rolled into the shape of a belly button. It is filled with meat and parmesan cheese. It used to be prepared at home for important days like Christmas. But beware: in Bologna, "spaghetti bolognese" doesn't exist; instead, there is "tagliatelle bolognese".

I have spoken a lot about the city because the context outside the school is important for learning how to communicate with Italians. Inside the school, you will learn how to speak, understand, read and write, and you'll be encouraged to communicate like Italians.

Real communication in Italian is different from speaking and understanding the Italian you learn in your country. Only here in Italy do you have the opportunity to get into real Italian conversations. This is especially true outside the school where your

relationships don't depend directly on the school, but rather on luck. If you're lucky, you'll meet Italians who you can talk to.

Lessons take place in the morning for beginners and lower intermediate levels, and in the afternoon for upper intermediate and higher levels. There are 4 lessons of 50 minutes each, from 9.00 to 12.40 or from 13.00 to 16.40, with a 20-minute break. If you are 4 or 5 people in a class, the length of your lessons will be reduced to 3 hours, because the lesson will be more intense and you'll learn more. If you are 2 or 3 in a class, the length of your lessons will be reduced to 2½ hours. If there is 1 person, to 1¾ hours. In the first part of the lesson you'll learn how to use the structures of the language and in the second part, with a different teacher, you'll learn how to express yourself like an Italian.

Classes are divided into 8 different levels. Each group changes after two weeks, because all students are different and have different learning speeds. For instance, a Spanish-speaking person will be at a different level from an English-speaking person after two weeks. The fact that a group changes after two weeks doesn't mean that one person is better than another. For instance, a Spanish-speaking person might be in a higher-level class for communication but in a lower-level for the grammar usage class.

There has to be a relaxed environment in the classroom. The teacher ensures that the atmosphere is relaxed and you mustn't be afraid of making mistakes. At this stage in fact you're not speaking Italian, but rather a language which is similar to Italian with structures that come from another language. The language you're speaking is called "interlingua": that means a language "between" Italian and your

own native language. "Interlingua" will gradually change by continually trying to express yourself, and in this process mistakes are just like steps on a ladder that lead you towards speaking real Italian.

Every class is different, not only because of the level. There are 8 different levels, but it is not always the ability level that determines the quality of a class. It depends a lot on the composition of the group. That's why, if you don't feel comfortable in a group, you must talk to your teacher or to the managing teacher responsible for your class (Roberta or Silvia). The school will find a solution for you because you need to feel comfortable and happy to be able to speak Italian. In any event, there's always a little bit of frustration. That's necessary because every day you have to speak more and understand more. Every student has the feeling that other students are better than they are. That's not true! "La vita è dura al centro di cultura". Italian isn't an easy language. If you go and talk to your teacher and say "Mamma mia, this is too difficult for me", you're right. You're going through difficult times and you need to feel reassured. But if the teacher answers "No, it isn't difficult at all", that teacher would be wrong to contradict you, because Italian is truly difficult for you. The teachers at Cultura Italiana know this very well, and that's why they are on your side. They know, for instance, that every student, after his/her first week, is going to go through two or three days of crisis during the second week. You feel tired, you feel like you can't speak or understand anything anymore, you feel confused! Don't worry, this crisis will pass. It's a natural step, and the teachers will support you by reminding you that this crisis is necessary in order to improve.

For this reason, you are not allowed to suspend, shorten or change your course when you encounter difficulties. This is not possible for organizational reasons. If you should have any problems, please talk to your teacher or the course manager. You will then be able to find the best solution together.

On the first floor, next to the student office, there are computers available for your use. There is also a free wifi connection, the password is culturaitaliana.

To learn about Italian life, history and art - not as a tourist, but as an Italian - there will be two or three activities a week outside the school. Every night you can also follow the school's suggestion for a night out and go to a bar, or a cinema or theatre with other students. In these situations, you will be able to meet Italians and find opportunities to communicate with them. If you decide to take part in these nights out, please write your name on the list posted on the activities board next to the main entrance. If there are more than 10 people, a teacher will come with you too.

Cultura Italiana teaches Italian and also does research into teaching methods. For this it relies on the University of Bologna. We know that to speak a language you don't only need your head, but also that the control of your own language over your Italian is an obstacle. It's better to speak freely and follow your feelings. That's why your teachers try to find ways to "impress" you and surprise you, so that you'll be captivated by the language.

Please find here our phone numbers: ++39 051 22 8003 and mobile +39 335 21 7893.

Have a nice stay with us and enjoy your study!