

How to keep in touch while studying in Italy

A comprehensive guide to saving money on broadband deals and mobile phone costs while you're studying abroad.

Researched and compiled by Ofcom accredited broadband, TV and phone comparison site www.cable.co.uk

Italy is a country of dramatic regional difference, which can affect your accessibility to broadband and mobile, especially if you are spending time on one of its two largest islands, Sicily and Sardinia. So what are your options to get online or stay in touch with friends and family at home? Our guide to studying and living in Italy has the answers.

Broadband providers in Italy

You'll find two familiar names among the six leading broadband providers in Italy: Vodafone and Tiscali sit alongside Telecom Italia, Infostrada, Fastweb and TeleTu as your leading choices.

All offer basic ADSL broadband with speeds of around 6Mbps (the national average is around 4.9Mbps). If it's superfast downloads you're after, your options are pretty limited: only Fastweb, Infostrada and Vodafone offer up to 100Mbps fibre in Italy. Yet with only 3.5% of connections reaching 10Mbps or higher, it's easy to see why Italy only ranks as the 48th fastest country in the world for downloads.

Mobile providers in Italy

If you're a 3 Mobile or Vodafone customer here in the UK, you'll be pleased to know that both also operate in Italy. The pair join TIM (Telecom Italia Mobile) and Wind as your four main choices when looking for an Italian mobile deal.

Both 2G, 3G and, to a lesser extent, 4G networks are available, with the latter mainly found around major cities like Rome, Milan, Turin, Florence and Venice. Of Italy's two largest islands, Sicily fares better than Sardinia for mobile coverage generally, but neither have extensive 4G coverage.

Getting a broadband or phone contract in Italy

As a visitor to Italy, you're only entitled to take out a non-resident bank account (conto estero) – but this should still be sufficient to help you get a mobile or broadband contract while you're in the country. To get an account, you'll need show your passport, a Tax number (Codice Fiscale), proof of address and documentation detailing your status as a student in Italy.

International roaming: what you need to know

You'll soon be able to use your mobile phone throughout the EU for the same price as at home, thanks to a move scrapping roaming charges within the European Union.

In the meantime, most UK providers offer international roaming bolt-ons, which offer reduced costs for calls, texts and data.

Consumer rights in Italy

In 2005, the country combined all EU consumer legislation into one consolidated Act called the "Codice del Consumo" or Consumer Code. The Act, which features around 170 individual articles, offers protection for the consumer at each stage of the buying cycle.

Although a lengthy and complicated piece of legislation, the Codice del Consumo provides comprehensive protection that's directly comparable with wider EU and UK consumer law. This means misleading or inaccurate sales information, poor quality service or hidden prices will give you a strong position to complain and get your money back should things go wrong. The Italian Association for Consumer Protection and Environment (Associazione Italiana Difesa Consumatori e Ambiente ADICONSUM) is the best place to take any formal complaint you have.

Slow broadband – but trying to be quicker

The Italian government aims to provide ultrafast broadband to 50% of the population within three years thanks to a new Next Generation Network (NGN) being rolled out country-wide.

Although basic broadband coverage currently reaches around 98% of the Italian population, around two million connections are provided by wireless broadband – with a connection that's far slower than fibre optic. The government aims to make the improvements after reports found the country has some of the slowest average broadband speeds in Europe.

Local information

Here's some useful Italian terms, acronyms and general information to help you keep in touch while away from home.

00 44: The prefix for calling the UK from Italy. Replaces the first zero of any UK number called (for example, to call the University of Leeds from Italy, dial 00 44 113 243 1751)

Autorità per le Garanzie nelle Comunicazioni (AGCOM): Telecoms regulator the Authority for Communications Guarantees

Banda Larga: The Italian for 'broadband'

Codice del Consumo: The Consumer Code – a collection of 170 laws that protect consumers

Telefono Cellulare: The Italian for 'mobile phone'

Manage your data

It's easy to run up large data bills while you're overseas. Here's some steps to avoid this:

Wi-Fi hotspots

You're more likely to find Wi-Fi hotspots in major population centres than in remote parts of the country. You may be asked to provide photo ID before being issued with a Wi-Fi password – even in some internet cafes or libraries, due in part to historical anti-terrorism laws.

Do your downloading before you travel

Think ahead and try to anticipate what apps, downloads or files you're going to need on your laptop, smartphone or tablet. By grabbing them before you leave the country, you'll avoid potentially expensive data bills while you're overseas.

Check your email settings

Some email clients regularly connect to the internet to check for new messages,. Turn these options off to avoid high data bills.

Stop roaming data

The default settings of many mobile apps see them frequently connecting to the internet to check for updates. When you're on an international network, data bills can quickly add up – so turn these settings off.

Know what it's costing you

Currency exchange rates can fluctuate during any journey and it's important that you know what you are spending. Use a reputable currency exchange service to check the latest rates. Popular exchange rate services include Oanda, Reuters, XE.

Useful Links

Reuters: <http://www.reuters.com/finance/currencies>

XE: <http://www.xe.com>

Oanda: <http://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/>

Cable.co.uk is a provider of impartial information to increase public awareness in matters of broadband, TV, landline and mobile.