



# CULTURA ITALIANA

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## Welcome speech

Dear guests,

Welcome to Bologna, and welcome to the Cultura Italiana school of Italian for foreigners. My name is Massimo Maracci and I'm Cultura Italiana's director. Cultura Italiana has three locations: Bologna, Manciano - an idyllic medieval village on top of a hill near the sea in Maremma, in southern Tuscany - and finally Arezzo, a beautiful city between Florence, Perugia and Rome.

My colleagues Adriana, Alessandro, Roberta, Nazzarena, Elisa, Stefania, Paolo, Elena, Lucrezia, Francesco, Barbara, and other teachers will take good care of you and your classes. Each person in our school has a specific role and function. We all share the management: everyone is directly responsible for your experience in Bologna and works to ensure that you can get the maximum benefit in learning this language. First of all your teachers, who are your primary contacts, follow your learning speed adjusting the way they teach to the needs of class and of single person. You're here in Bologna to learn how to **communicate** like Italians. Communicating means expressing oneself and understand others with the appropriate language, which is different from literal translation from your language. The typical factors of Italian communication are, for instance, facial expressions, gestures, a casual attitude even when talking about serious things, cheerfulness of the speech and jokes. We Italians talk a lot, talking for us is a natural and fluid action; our words fly. For instance now I'm declaring one thing, in five minutes I could declare the opposite, because in Italian, in our language's logic, this is permitted: the situation has already changed.

This is very difficult to accept for a person speaking English, German or, for instance, Japanese. Italian, finally, isn't a referential language. It doesn't communicate "things". It communicates concepts.

For this reason 2 pages in English can become 4 or 5 when translated in Italian. To communicate effectively in Italian a foreigner not only has to speak Italian, but also has to understand the significance of Italian speech. For instance if an Italian talks with you about his private life it doesn't mean you're 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!

Bologna can be seen today with a medieval town's structure. In the centre there are two towers - the height of which expressed the prestige of the families that owned them. 12 streets radiate from the centre (like the spokes of a bicycle wheel) and run toward the outside, each corresponding to one of the 12 city gates, some of which have survived the city walls' destruction in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

There are 42 kilometers of arcades (proposed to become part of UNESCO heritage of humanity). The arcades were used in the Middle Ages as a way to have a bigger house without having to pay more taxes, because the arcades were public. Today they're very useful, allowing us to walk and chat in an intimate atmosphere, or to have a look at the shops while protected from rain and traffic. Beware of the traffic! Italians don't respect red traffic lights, and they don't even respect pedestrian crossings.

Scooters and motorbikes are very dangerous, because they have no rules! Be careful!

The city is of Etruscan origin, but later on became a Roman city. You can still see traces of the Etruscan origins: the original structure was built based on the intersection of 2 main streets, one going from North to South, the other from East to West, oriented by Etruscans according to the movements of the sun.

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Bologna today is a city with 420.000 citizens (900.000 including the suburbs). Bologna is a very rich city because it has a lot of small flexible hi-tech industries that came out during 5 centuries of industrial history: they started with textiles machines, much in advance on the first industrial revolution.

60 % of bolognese house-holds consist of "single, one person families", therefore, there are relatively few children, but many nightclubs instead, because usually single people don't stay home after work, preferring instead to go out. For this reason sociologists call the area between Bologna, Rimini and Venice "the triangle of pleasures". It is one of the areas in the world with the most demand (and therefore supply) of clubs, bars and restaurants, but luckily cinemas, theatres and museums as well. It is also for this reason that survey statistics indicate that Bologna is the city in Italy in which the majority of Italians would prefer to live. Here the standard of living is very high, thanks to the friendliness of people and urban services that rival those of other European cities, whereas many other important Italian cities have insufficient transportation systems, hospitals and infrastructures.

Bologna is not a touristic city. Tourists usually go to Florence, Venice or Rome. The ones that come to Bologna are those select tourists who want to experience the real Italy, which is different from the one presented to the masses of tourists. In restaurants, bars and clubs in Bologna you can meet Italians, not tourists, and the city is preserved as it was.

Bologna is beautiful, but hers is a hidden beauty, like that of all medieval cities. Of course Florence is amazing, its beauty apparent, because it's 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.

But Bologna is known all over the world for 2 things: its university and its food.

Bologna's 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 for knowing how to "rule". In fact in that time Bologna was a free commune. People that had the ability to rule a city usually were popes, emperors, kings and princes. To rule the commune, young representatives of the rich and powerful families of Europe came here to study "Justinian's law".

Students used to pay their professor directly, and often he also rented out the books and the room. Books were very expensive and heavy, so often students had a servant to carry them for them. Today the University of Bologna has 112.000 students. Their presence makes Bologna even livelier for culture and fun. At night the city is full of people: men and women walk alone or in small groups moving from bar to bar. Bologna's cooking can be found in good restaurants within the city. Bologna is quite an expensive city, but good restaurants are relatively inexpensive. For instance a restaurant where you pay 30-40 euros for a full 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, and it used to be prepared in the families for important days like Christmas. But beware that in Bologna "spaghetti Bolognese" doesn't exist: instead there is "tagliatelle Bolognese".

We 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 stimulated to communicate like Italians do. Communicating in Italian is different from speaking and understanding Italian as you can learn in your country. Only here in Italy you do have the opportunity to get into real Italian conversations. This is especially true outside the school.

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Your external relationships don't depend directly on the school, but rather on luck. If you're lucky enough you'll meet Italians with whom you can communicate.

Lessons take place in the morning for beginners and lower intermediate levels, and in the afternoon for upper intermediate and high levels. There are 4 hours of 50 minutes each, from 9.00 to 12.40 or from 13.00 to 16.40, with a 20 minutes' break.

If there are less than 6 people in the class, your lessons' length will be reduced to 3 hours instead of 4, because the lesson will be more intense and you'll learn more. If you happen to be in a class of 4 students instead of 10 you're lucky, but that happens rarely in Bologna.

In the first part of the lesson you'll learn how to use language's structures and in the second part, with a different teacher, you'll learn how to express yourself as Italians do, that is to communicate in Italian.

Classes are divided into 10 different levels, and they're different for composition. After two weeks each group will change, because students are different and have different learning speeds. For instance, a spanish speaking person will be at a different level than an english speaking person after two weeks. The fact that group changes after two weeks doesn't mean that one person is better than another, it's just that situations change. For instance, a spanish speaking person might be in a higher-level class for communication but in a lower-level for use of grammar class.

In the classroom there has to be a relaxed environment. You have to be calm and 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 meaning procedures coming from another language. This language you're speaking is called "interlingua": that means a language "between" Italian and your own native language. "Interlingua" must change little by little through continued efforts at expressing yourself, and in this process mistakes are just like steps on a ladder that leads you to speak Italian language.

Every class is different from the others, not only because of the level. There are 10 different levels, but isn't always the ability level that determines the quality of a class. It depends a lot on the group's composition. That's why, if you don't feel comfortable in a group, you have to talk to your teacher or to the managing teacher (Nazzarena, Elisa, Stefania or Roberta) who are responsible for your class. The school will find a solution for you because, to be able to speak Italian, you need to feel comfortable and be happy. In any event, there's always a little bit of frustration. That's necessary because every day you have to speak and understand more and more. Every student has the feeling that other students are better than him/her. That's not true!

"La vita è dura al centro di cultura", Italian isn't an easy language. If you go to 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 should answer "No, it isn't difficult at all" that teacher would be wrong to contradict you, because Italian is truly difficult for you, Cultura Italiana's teachers know it perfectly, and for this reason they are at your side to support you. They know, for instance, that every student, after his/her first week of the course, is going to go through 2 or 3 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 it isn't permitted to suspend or to shorten your course when you meet difficulties. The school doesn't allow any suspension or any changes in the length or type of the course that you have booked. That's not possible for organizational reasons.

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If you should have any problems, please talk to your teacher or to course's managers. They will look for the best solution together with you, so that you can learn Italian.

There will be 4 hours of daily lessons, from monday to friday, and two hours of homework and practice every day, including Saturday. Special homework and practice sessions (at wich a tescher/tutor will be present) will be held at school on tuesdays and thursdays from 17.00 to 19.00, while you are supposed to do homework at your own place in the other days.

The tutor that will be there on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons will be available to you to help you and to deal with any problem, even problems not connected with your lessons. This teacher also speaks japanese. It's possible, in fact, that a student feels sad being far away from his/her own country, if no one is looking after him/her personally. We know that people in a foreign country, far away from home, need to be comforted. You can get this attention from your teacher in the class, in the administration office for practical problems, from course managers and especially on tuesdays and thursdays from 17.00 to 19.00 from the homework tutor.

On the first floor, next to the secretary's office, there's a room with 3 internet stations available for your use.

To learn about italian life, history and art - not as a tourist but as an Italian - there will be 2 or 3 meetings per week for activities outside the school. Every night you can also follow the school's suggestion for a night out, to go to a bar, cinema or theatre, together with other students. In these situations you can meet Italians and find occasions to communicate with them.

If you decide to take part to these nights out, please write your name on the list posted on the activities' board next to the main entrance, because if there will be more than 10 people a teacher will come with you too.

Cultura Italiana teaches Italian and also does research on teaching methods. For this reason it relies on University of Bologna. We know that, to speak a language, you don't need only your head, but on the contrary your own language's control over your italian becomes an obstacle. It's better to speak freely, following your feelings, that's why your teachers are finding ways to "impress" you and surprise you, so that you'll be captiveted by the language.

Have a nice stay with us and enjoy your work.