

Local Information

Historical notes

Sitting on the Arno River estuary, Pisa was a maritime power between the 9th and 11th centuries. Its ships transported Norman troops to the Holy Land during the First Crusade and, in the process, established trading centers in the east. The treasures its ships brought home were used to build the "Square of Miracles" (Campo dei Miracoli). On the square are three magnificent buildings including a Romanesque cathedral, a like-style Baptistry, and the Leaning Tower. The Tower is over 800 years old, stands 165 feet tall, and inclines 14 feet from the vertical. The cause of the tilt is still debated - perhaps shifting soil below or an architectural fault. It is said that Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) used the tower to conduct his famous experiments in the speed at which objects fall. Galileo is the most famous son of Pisa. During the Guelph (pro-Pope) and Ghibelline (pro-emperor) wars, Pisa was defeated by Genoa (1284). Later, it was conquered by Florence (1406) ending its prosperity.

Places to see in Pisa

By far the best known sight in Pisa is the famous Leaning Tower which is but one of many architecturally and artistically important structures in the city's Campo dei Miracoli or "Field of Miracles", to the north of the old town center. The Campo dei Miracoli is also the site of the beautiful Duomo (the Cathedral), the Baptistry and the Camposanto (the monumental cemetery).

Other interesting sights include:

- Piazza dei Cavalieri, where the Palazzo della Carovana, with its awesome façade designed by Giorgio Vasari may be seen. In the same place is the church of Santo Stefano dei Cavalieri, also by Vasari. It had originally a single nave; two more were added in the 17th century. It houses a bust by Donatello a paintings by Vasari, Jacopo Ligozzi, Alessandro Fei and Jacopo da Empoli.
- The church of S. Francesco, designed by Giovanni di Simone ,, built after 1276. In 1343 new chapels were added and the church was elevated. It has a single nave and a notable belfry, as well as a 15th century cloister. It houses works by Jacopo da Empoli, Taddeo Gaddi and Santi di Tito. In the Gherardesca Chapel are buried Ugolino della Gherardesca and his sons.
- The church of San Frediano, noted for the first time in 1061. It has a basilica interior with three aisles, with a crucifix from the 12th century. The paintings are mostly from the 16th century restoration, with works by Domenico Passignano, Aurelio Lomi and Rutilio Manetti.
- The church of San Nicola, whose existence is known as early as 1097. It was enlarged between 1297 and 1313 by the Augustinians, perhaps by the design of

Giovanni Pisano. The octagonal belfry is from the second half of the 13th century.

- The small church of Santa Maria della Spina, attributed to Giovanni Pisano (1230), is another excellent Gothic building.
- The church of San Paolo a Ripa d'Arno, founded around 952. It was enlarged in the mid-12th century along lines similar to those of the Cathedral. For the pale grey marble decoration ancient Roman marbles were used. The façade was completed in the 14th century by Giovanni Pisano.
- The Borgo Stretto, a neighborhood where one can stroll beneath medieval arcades and the Lungarno, the avenues along the river Arno. It includes the Gothic-Romanesque church of San Michele in Borgo (990). Remarkably, there are at least two other leaning towers in the city, one at the southern end of central Via Santa Maria, the other halfway through the Piagge riverside promenade.
- Palazzo De' Medici, once a possession of the Appiano family, who ruled Pisa in 1392 -1398. In 1400 the Medici acquired it, and Lorenzo de' Medici sojourned here.
- Palazzo Reale ("Royal Palace"), once of the Caetani patrician family. Here Galileo Galilei showed to Grand Duke of Tuscany the planets he had discovered with his telescope. The edifice was erected in 1559 by Baccio Bandinelli for Cosimo I de Medici, and was later enlarged including other palaces.

AC Voltage and Plugs

AC power is 220 Volts, 50Hz. Plugs have three round pins in-line (the central is ground and may be missing sometimes). Schuko (German-style) plugs are also used but somewhat less popular. Most of the power sockets at the conference will be able to accommodate Italian and Schuko plugs. Adapters for UK and US power plugs are available in several electrical supply stores including one in piazza Guerrazzi.

Currency, Language

The local currency is the Euro (the symbol is € ; 1 Euro \approx 1.27 US Dollars, but the rate fluctuates between 1.2 and 1.3). It comes in coins (1-2-5-10-20-50 cents, 1-2 Euros) and notes (5-10-20-50 and, less common, 100-200-500). More info on the notes at the European Central Bank. The local language is of course Italian.

Telephones

Number formats and prefixes

Italian phone numbers have variable length, both in the "prefisso" (prefix, used to be the area code) and in the local part of the number. The prefix must always be included, even for local calls.

A leading "0" denotes area codes for wired phones (e.g. 050 is Pisa, 055 is Florence, 06 is Rome, 02 is Milan). The leading "0" is an integral part of the area code and must be dialed also when calling from abroad.

A leading "1" is normally used for toll services or emergency numbers.

A leading "3" indicates the prefix for cellular phones (eg 347, 340, 338...). They are not related to a specific area, neither, to some degree, to a specific provider.

The "702" prefix is for dialup internet access, with a connection fee of 12c and 1-2c per minute (depending on the time).

Toll free numbers have the "800" prefix (but they are normally free only from landlines), whereas other prefixes starting with "8" are toll services and may be expensive.

Finally, international calls must be prefixed by "00" and the international prefix for the country you are calling (so it is 001 for the US, 0044 for the UK, and so on). The international phone prefix for Italy is +39.

Emergency numbers

113: Polizia (police, general emergency)

118: Pronto soccorso (Emergency medical service)

115: Vigili del fuoco (fire brigade)

Calling from cell phones

Definitely the most convenient and economic way of calling abroad in most cases. Cellular phone coverage (GSM) uses 900 and 1800 MHz frequencies, so if you have a suitable phone you can use your regular subscription to make and receive calls. Roaming charges are very high, 1-2 € per minute are not uncommon.

You can buy prepaid SIM cards (no subscription necessary) for use in your phones in most telephony stores by just showing a picture ID (which will be photocopied as a law requirement to identify users of SIM cards). Apart from special offers, typical entry fees are around 10 € and include 5 € of traffic. Tariffs vary depending on the plan you choose, and they are all exceedingly complex to compare. Incoming calls are always free, outgoing calls normally have a connection fee (up to 20-25c per call) and a per-minute rate which depends on the destination but can easily be

in the 25-30c range or more. The most common cell phone operators are Vodafone, TIM and Tre, the latter more focused on video calls and slightly more expensive.

Calling from hotels

Same as everywhere, charges for phone calls from hotels vary. Some hotels will just apply the tariffs of the telecom operator (normally up to 10-40c connection fee, 10 to 40c per minute for local/western europe/us calls), other might apply a surcharge. We suggest you to check with your hotel.

Calling from public phones

Public phones are rapidly vanishing these days, except in airports and train stations. They might be coin-operated but more often will take a calling card (on sale in some bars and tobacco shops) or sometimes a credit card (squeezing out a fair bit of money from it, as in most places in the world).

Calling centers

Especially in the station area (via Corridoni), where the foreign population is more numerous, there are several call centers with cheap tariffs for international calls.

Calling cards

Until recently, Italy did not have prepaid calling cards that were competitive with landline costs. The advent of VOIP has slightly improved the situation, but only for calls through a fixed, non public phones. One operator that offers this service is e.g. Skypho. There may be others, but they are not easy to find.

Internet Access

Internet points

There is a number of internet points in the central part of the town (via dei Mille, via Carducci) and in the station area (via Corridoni, just behind the Leopolda). Tariffs are from 2 € per hour and above, and normally, you are not allowed to connect your own equipment, but must rely on the machines supplied there.

Public Wireless Access

TIM and Vodafone and a local company called Nettare offer monthly subscriptions for wireless internet access in some areas in town. The coverage is all but widespread, and the fees are generally high and well hidden in the respective websites.

Dialup

Several Italian providers offer "free" dialup internet access, charging only the cost comparable or lower than a local call. The access numbers change with the provider but start with the "702" prefix. In order to get an account you have to register with the provider to supply your identification information (a law requirement) and get

your free account. Among the providers offering the service you can choose Tiscali, Wind, and others.

Hotel Access

The situation varies here as well. Most hotels still have only dialup access (but you need to get the information and an account in advance, e.g. with one of the above providers), with some of the newer ones also offering wireless connectivity (for free or for a daily or hourly fee) in the lobby or possibly also (wired) in the rooms.

Banks, Credit Cards and ATM

Banks are typically open 8.30-13.00 and 15-16.30. Most of them also have ATM machines ("bancomat"), which are open 24/7 and take most credit cards. The closest ATM is in via Moruzzi, there are a few others in the train station area and in the shopping areas.

Eating and Drinking

Food is a complex topic that deserves a page of its own. Please follow this link for food and restaurant information. Sunday many restaurants are closed.

Tipping and Receipts

Being a major deviation from the custom in the US, we would like to point out that tipping is not required nor expected in Italy: the bill ("conto") always includes service. So, in particular in bars, restaurants, taxis, etc., it is perfectly fine to pay exactly the amount on the bill, or possibly round it up by say 2-5% depending on the amount to make the numbers round. Italian law requires businesses to release, spontaneously or at least on demand, a receipt with date, sequence numbers, and identification of the business.

Shopping

Shops are generally open monday to saturday, 9.00-13.00 and 16.00-20.00. Some stores are closed on monday morning. Others (usually electricity, hardware etc.) are closed on saturday afternoon. Supermarkers and department stores usually are open 8.00-20.00 (excluding sunday). The main shopping streets (clothing, jewelery, pottery) are around Borgo Stretto and corso Italia.