

Italy is a country in Southern Europe and is about four times the size of Ireland.

The population of Italy is 58 million people and their official language is Italian.

The country has a Mediterranean climate which means that the summers are hot and dry and the winters are mild and damp.



▲ Gondola



Did You Know?

The city of Venice is built on water. Instead of roads there are canals and people travel by boat instead of car! There are unusual boats called gondolas. They are all painted black because of a law passed in 1562 to stop people from wasting money on paint!



▲ Italian flag

Exercises

1. Name three seas around Italy.
2. Name two Italian islands.
3. Name four countries that border Italy.
4. Name these two countries inside Italy: V_____ C_____ and S_____ M_____.
5. Name six Italian cities.
6. What are Italy's two most well-known rivers?
7. Name two Italian mountain ranges.
8. What Italian lake might remind you of the Irish police force?

• Rome

Rome is the capital of Italy. It is very old and was once the most important city in the world. The ancient Romans had an advanced system of law and government. They built stone roads throughout their empire and some houses even had a type of central heating.

The Romans spoke Latin.

They never ruled Ireland – it seems they did not like our climate! The Roman name for Ireland was Hibernia.

Rome is built on the River Tiber and is sometimes called the Eternal City because of its long history. It is a very beautiful city with wonderful buildings, fountains and squares.

The ancient Romans were pagans. They worshipped gods such as Jupiter, Mars and Venus. Most of the planets are named after Roman gods.

Rome became a Christian city during Emperor Constantine's rule. Vatican City is a state that lies within Rome and is the home of the Pope.

Did You Know?

Rome is said to have been founded by twins, Romulus and Remus, on seven hills: Palatine, Capitoline, Quirinal, Viminal, Esquiline, Caelian, Aventine. Saint Peter's church in the Vatican is the biggest church in the world.

Did You Know?

Cars such as Fiat, Alfa Romeo, Ferrari and Lamborghini are Italian.

The Leaning Tower of Pisa has eight floors. It began to lean when the builders were only as high as the third floor. Instead of starting again, they put five more floors on top!

Italy is the world's biggest exporter of wine.



▲ The Leaning Tower of Pisa

Exercises

1. What is the population of Italy?
2. Which Italian city is built on water?
3. What colour are the gondolas?
4. What city is known as the Eternal City?
5. Name the seven hills of Rome.
6. What was the Latin name for Ireland?
7. Name three gods worshipped by the ancient Romans.
8. What state can be found inside the city of Rome?

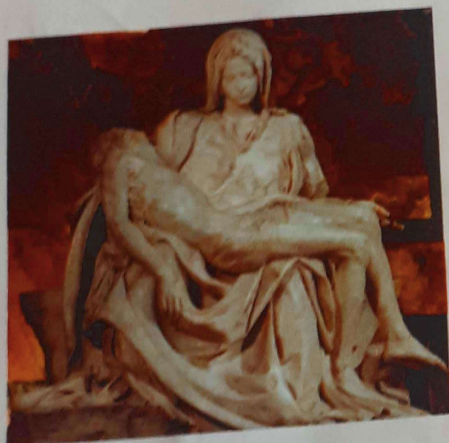
◆ Leonardo da Vinci

Leonardo da Vinci was born in a town called Vinci (the Italian word “da” means “from”) in Italy in the fifteenth century. He made his living from drawing, painting and sculpting. He painted the famous *Mona Lisa*, which hangs in the Louvre art gallery in Paris.

However, Leonardo was also an engineer and scientist. He drew maps and made drawings. He designed canals, a wheel lock, swimming flippers and scissors. He even designed a helicopter and parachute long before it would ever be possible to make such things. Leonardo could write with one hand and draw with the other at the same time!



▲ Leonardo da Vinci



▲ “The Pietà”

◆ Michelangelo

Michelangelo Buonarroti was born in Tuscany, Italy in 1475. He studied art and anatomy and his most famous marble sculpture, the *Pietà*, was completed before he was 25.

Michelangelo's most famous paintings were done on a church ceiling! It took him years to finish. Every day he climbed on scaffolding and painted in the Sistine Chapel in Rome in cramped conditions.

Did You Know?

Michelangelo got so used to spending his time facing the ceiling that he would hold letters up over his head to read them!

The Sistine Chapel is used when cardinals meet to elect a new Pope. Once a day they send up smoke to let the world know how they are getting on. Black smoke means no new Pope has been chosen and white smoke means a new Pope has been elected.

Michelangelo also designed the uniform of the Vatican policemen, the Swiss Guard.

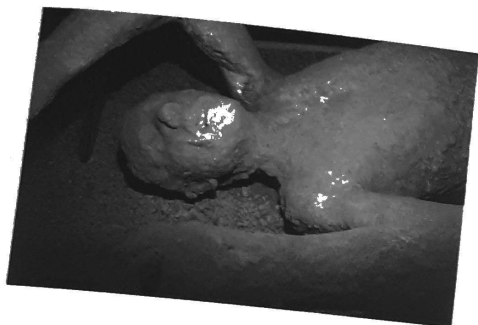
The explorers Christopher Columbus, Marco Polo and Amerigo Vespucci (after whom America is named) are all Italian.



▲ The Sistine Chapel



▲ Pompeii



▲ A body preserved in Vesuvian ash

✿ The Lost Town

The ancient Romans called the area around Vesuvius “The Gateway to the Underworld”. Pompeii was a busy town near Mount Vesuvius, with a population of around 3,000. Mount Vesuvius is a volcano. It often smoked but one morning, in AD 79, Vesuvius seemed to be smoking a little more than usual. Then, the volcano started to rain dust, ashes and cinders on the countryside all around.

Many inhabitants fled the city and headed towards the sea. However, the wind was blowing in the wrong direction and they could not escape by boat.

A roaring avalanche of poisonous gas, ash and rock, travelling at a speed of 100 kph, thundered down the mountain covering everything in its path. Pompeii was buried.



▲ Mount Vesuvius

✿ Preserved Forever

The hot ash that buried people and animals moulded itself around them. When the ash hardened and the bodies decayed, a cavity was left inside the hardened ash. Scientists were able to pour plaster of Paris into these cavities to make exact copies of the dead bodies.

Archaeologists have since uncovered the city and have built up a very accurate picture of what life was like in Pompeii, including the types of houses the people lived in. The ruins of the city of Pompeii can be visited today.

Did You Know?

Vesuvius rises to a height of over 1,000 metres and you can take a cable car ride over the crater. However, you do so at your own risk as Vesuvius shook in 1944 and it could erupt at any time!

Exercises

1. Name five famous Italians.
2. In which chapel do cardinals meet to elect a Pope?
3. How do they send a signal to the world that a new Pope has been chosen?
4. In which year in the first century did Vesuvius erupt?
5. What town was buried by the eruption?
6. What name did the ancient Romans give to the area nearby?
7. Why were archaeologists very interested in the ruins of Pompeii?