



Moving To Italy For Love, The Stories of Three Male Expats

Chiara Basso (February 12, 2019)



Living the Italian Dream: Part 3. How is Italy treating male Americans who decide to relocate? Three men share their takes on la dolce vita: Rick decided to move back to the US when he became a father, John could move to Italy only after he retired and Bruce never left after having arrived by chance as a student. But behind their decisions, there is always a form of love...

Rick Zullo and l'arte di arrangiarsi "until you become a father"

Rick Zullo lived for four years in Italy, mainly in Rome, where he first moved by himself "with two suitcases full of ugly American clothes, a few books, a laptop computer...and some dreams. I moved to Italy for love, both for Italy and an Italian. As to what I did, I tried to scramble together an income anyway that I could -- l'arte d'arrangiarsi. I mostly taught English, and eventually did some freelance writing." He decided to move back to Florida after his half Italian daughter was born.



Eventually, he says, "I moved back because while transitioning from a single guy with just a suitcase to father full of responsibilities, I panicked." Besides being back in West Palm Beach, Florida, Rick Zullo, who is now the marketing manager for Palm Beach Opera, keeps updating his website about Italy (www.rickzullo.com) as he goes back fairly often to visit, and he also keeps in touch with friends in Italy on a regular basis: "It's not easy, but it helps me feel connected."

Here are his suggestions for other wannabe expats: "We move for the romanticized lifestyle; la dolce vita. But in short, do NOT move to Italy in hopes of advancing your career. Highly-qualified Italians have a hard time finding a job, so why should they give a job to a foreigner who barely speaks the language? And there are deeper, systemic problems with the Italian economy that affect everyone. But again, I wouldn't let that be your determining factor. Come for the lifestyle, not the economic opportunity. Unless you're soccer star or supermodel."

"Just know that moving to Italy is rarely easy, but usually doable if you're willing to be incredibly stubborn, persistent, and patient. If you're older, retired, and fairly well-off, the obstacles are less. And perhaps if you're quite young (under 25) you can ignore the obstacles and just wing it. However, for most people, it requires a great deal of effort to get the needed paperwork, find affordable housing, and get a job. And that only gets your foot in the door. After the romance wears off (and it does, but hopefully not entirely), then you're faced with the task of figuring out almost every detail of daily life, as if you're entering adulthood for the first time, regardless of your age. A new language, new ways of doing things, and maybe the most challenging thing to re-learn, the accepted cultural norms. But on this last point, it's great fun!"

John Henderson waited 11 years before being reunited with his great love, Rome

John Henderson, a former sportswriter for The Denver Post, moved to Italy five years ago after he had dreamt about it for many years. "I lived in Rome on a year's sabbatical from 2001-03. I fell in love with the place and my newspaper in Denver gave me two extensions to 16 months. Once you fall in love with Rome it's like having the greatest weekend in the world with the most beautiful woman in the world and you spend your whole life trying to find her again. It took me 11 years but I finally found her. I had to return to live here full time." He now writes about his adventures in travel and food in his blog [Dog-Eared Passport](#). [2]

John came to Italy by himself, but he now has an Italian partner, Marina, and many Italian friends. We asked him the best ways to socialize in Italy: "I've been to 100 countries and the Italians are the nicest I've ever met. It's not just in Rome. It's from Sicily to the Alps. Romans love to go out and socialize but you don't meet people as you do in the U.S. You don't go to bars here. You go out in groups and meet other groups or meet friends of friends in your group. Internet dating isn't nearly as popular here as in the U.S. It's frustrating for a lot of expat men as they actually have to meet people face to face here. Many Italians join Meetup groups which meet regularly for similar interests. I belong to Expats Living in Rome, Internations, Rome Food and Wine Lovers, Language Exchange. I could go out every night of the week if I wanted."

According to John, expats must leave their value system back home. "It's different here. Free time is more valued than work. Also, be patient. Everything doesn't work as smoothly as in the States which, has the most efficient public services in the world. Waiting in line for 30 minutes to pay an electric bill is part of the charm of Italy."



John thinks that Italians have the right priorities: spare time, food, family and friends take precedence over work. “Now that does label them as somewhat less ambitious as in other countries, a criticism I'd probably confirm, but their stress level is so much lower than Americans'.”

Yet, Rome has a lot of problems, he admits. “The three main ones: first, terrible public services. The post office is the worst in the world. Internet service is right out of 16th century Persia. The public transportation is the worst in Europe. However, you don't need a car in Rome. You just need patience; two, it's the filthiest capital in Europe. It's not because Romans don't throw garbage in the bins. It's because the bins are usually packed; three, the local government is rife with corruption problems. The roads remain potholed although those are beginning to get repaired. However, I don't miss much about my previous home in Denver. I miss college football and my Jacuzzi. Soccer has replaced football. I make sure I frequent spas in Italy. So I've managed.”

Bruce Edelstein, in Florence by destiny

Bruce Edelstein, Coordinator for Graduate Programs and Advanced Research at New York University Florence, has been living in Italy for almost 24 years. He first arrived as an undergraduate student and at that time he would have never imagined that he could have lived permanently in Florence. “I loved it but felt that had exhausted that experience at the end of that year”. But when he was a graduate student and had to write his dissertation he kept going back to Florentine topics. Then, he met many Americans who end up choosing to live in Italy and “eventually I met my Italian partner who is now my husband.”

Among the things that Bruce loves about Italy, there is the fact of living in a country that knows history and respect culture. “As a historian, what impressed me when I moved here, it was not only the amazing cultural patrimony but also a defuse respect for that cultural patrimony by part of a significant percentage of the Italian population. I had a strong sense that my peers in Italy had a greater sense of history than my peers in America, even of American history. The education system here has invested enormously in teaching history and ensuring that even Italians who don't reach a university level of education have a great understanding and respect of history.”

His biggest advice is about job search and language: “If you come for work, you need to study the situation very well and find an employer before you arrive. Many friends who tried to find a job here ultimately had given up. Also, learn the language. In a city like Florence, you can get by without speaking Italian but you will lose part of the experience without interacting with many locals, understanding the sense of humor, making long-lasting friendships, or travel more out of the beaten paths.”

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