

Discovering the Heart of Italy

Patrick Tunno Writes from Experience

When Patrick Joseph Tunno was twelve years old and living in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, he went on a family vacation with his grandfather to Poggio di Roio, a small village near L'Aquila, the capital city of the Abruzzo region of Italy from which his grandfather had emigrated during World War II.

It changed his life.

“For a 12-year-old it was full of adventure,” said Tunno. “It was a picturesque village, a thousand years old, built on a hillside. Crowing roosters woke us up. There were chickens in the streets. Massive family meals were full of talking, laughing and singing. There were large cities, Vespas driving by, ancient beautiful buildings, a variety of markets ... the people were so friendly! It was like having an experience with what life was like in the past with my relatives. They treated me like royalty. My identity from that point on was squarely Italian-American.”



After his return to America he worked on learning the Italian language from cassette tapes. “I wanted to get back there. I wanted to embrace that side of my heritage,” he said.

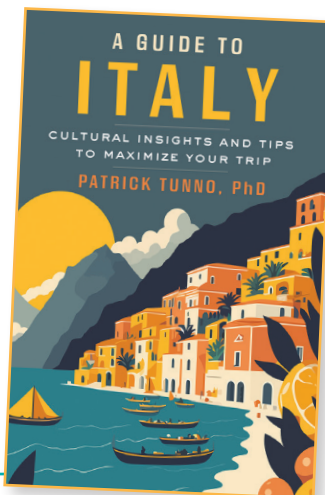
He went on to earn a bachelor of science in management degree and a bachelor of arts in Italian language and literature from Pennsylvania State University in State College, Pennsylvania. As part of his undergraduate studies, he studied in Milan, and returned to Milan to get a master’s degree in business administration at SDA Bocconi University. He then earned a PhD from Penn State in Workforce Education and Development and focused on the development of global competencies and the impact of intercultural experiences, a subject on which he speaks often at conferences and events.

Currently a professor of Italian at Penn State, he was a leader in establishing the award-winning Global Engineering Program for international students to pursue a one-year master’s degree, and initiated a new interdisciplinary faculty-led study abroad programs.

He wanted his students to understand Italy from an insider’s perspective. “Italy is a real place where people live, so much better than what you imagine,” he said. The outsider’s perspective comes from the movies, where Italian people are portrayed as ‘caricatures.’”

In his new book, *A Guide to Italy: Cultural Insights and Tips to Maximize Your Trip*, Tunno guides travelers toward connecting with Italy in a way that includes understanding the cultural and historical aspects of the country.

“It creates a different perspective about life, a greater appreciation for how people live,” he said. “It’s really important to understand the country and how things work. You can go anywhere, have meaningful experiences and be received really well.”



A Guide to Italy: Cultural Insights and Tips to Maximize Your Trip can be found online at Amazon.com or BarnesandNoble.com!

Some quick Italian Travel Tips from Patrick?

Do: Leave preconceived notions at home; don’t assume your notion of culture will be the same there, and be very polite and respectful as Italians really respond well to that!

Don’t: Overpack! Your suitcase will double in size when you get there!

by Robin Ferruggia

For example, “there are hundreds of different varieties of cheeses in Italy,” he said, “and each tells a different story about

that region and the people there.” When you walk into a market, you can learn about local products, and you can learn about the history of Italy and the culture as well. “The way Parmesan cheese is made on small farms is very scientific, but the farmers use similar techniques that monks used to preserve milk and create Parmesan cheese.”

A lot of products made in Italy come from small farms, not just from factories. When you learn about them and how they are made, you also learn about the relationship between Italians and the land, how they care for the land, and how they care for their livestock. Cows, for example, are only milked twice a day and are fed organic fodder.



Cheeses are kept in warehouses and rotated by hand twice a day. Thus, batches of cheese from family-run farms are limited, but the way they are made preserves the Italian farmer’s heritage and provides jobs for local people. “Try a local cheese,” he said, “something maybe you have never heard of, learn something new, and maybe make a friend in the process.”

Italians enjoy talking with tourists. “They’re very proud of their culture. They want you to experience what they’re proud of,” he said. “They’re more connected to their roots than we are. Their roots are ancient.”

There is a difference between looking at things, like the Leaning Tower of Pisa or the many works of art, and truly *experiencing* Italy and its people. “Take time, allow yourself to get off the beaten path,” he said. “Wander off. You don’t have to have everything scripted.”

Don’t just look at the Leaning Tower of Pisa and move on. “Learn about the history of the tower, why it was built, who built it, how it was built.” You often also discover that who created something also made other things that may not be as popular, and may not be in the travel guides, but you can find them if you look for them.

“Italy has hidden artworks, treasures everywhere. They’re not all in museums. Some are in little churches, where you can have a more intimate experience without tourists around you.”

Getting to know the Italian people can also be a rich experience. “Italians have a zest for life that shows in everything,” he said. “They’re very relationship oriented. They would rather work with people than computers to figure things out. They’re creative people and have an interesting way to look at things. The food is really good. They’re charismatic – they make you feel like you’re the center of the universe.”

“If you create meaningful experiences while you are there, it will invite a little bit of Italy into your heart for the rest of your life.” ■

All photos provided courtesy of Patrick Tunno.

