

## Eat like an Italian: meal times

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Usually Italians have breakfast between 7 a.m. and 9.30 a.m., lunch between 12.30 p.m. and 2 p.m., and dinner between 7.30 p.m. and 9.30 p.m.. The majority of Italian restaurants/pizzerias, etc., respect these hours and, therefore, will stop serving food after 2.30/3 p.m. and again after 11.30 p.m. Supermarkets and local food stores are generally open from 8/9 a.m. to 8 p.m.. Some of them close during lunch break and Sundays. Take-away shops (pizza, gourmet sandwiches, kebab, etc.) are usually open from 12.30 p.m. to 8 p.m.. *Bars* (sandwiches, snacks, potato chips, etc.) open at 6.30/7 a.m and usually close in the late afternoon.

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## Eat like an Italian: meal times

Italians have very clear in mind that there are **three main meals throughout the day.**

### Colazione (“breakfast”)

Usually we have breakfast **between 7 a.m. and 9.30 a.m.** However, considering that people wake up at different hours, it is absolutely normal to find people having (their first or second) breakfast in *bars* at anytime during morning hours. **n1** Click [here](#) to know how **Italians like to eat their breakfast!!**

### Pranzo (“lunch”)

Generally Italians have a lunch break, at home or at a *bar*/restaurant etc., **between 12.30 p.m. and 2 p.m.** Depending on what time we have breakfast and on the region

(North/South of Italy), these hours can vary. After lunch a *caffè* (espresso coffee, not a cappuccino that we drink only at breakfast!!) is a must!**n2**

## Cena (“supper/dinner”)

For many Italians the last meal of the day is also the most important, especially during the week. In many cases this is the only meal when the family gathers or for which we have more time. Remember that Italians consider their meals a family matter!! Depending on many factors, such as working hours, traditions, regions, etc., dinner hours generally go **from 7.30 p.m. to 9.30 p.m.** Usually this is the meal that lasts the longest. This is why it's normal to sit at a table of a restaurant at 9.30 p.m. and not leave it until 11.30 p.m. or later (Italians are the best at sitting at the table to eat, drink, and talk for hours!!). It's very common to drink a liquor, a *caffè*, eat a dessert, fruit, or pastries, etc. after dinner.

## Restaurants

It's useful to know that **the majority of Italian restaurants/pizzerias etc., respect the above mentioned meal times.** This means that – except for some eateries generally located in the center of the cities with the most tourists like Rome, Florence, Venice, etc. – **generally they close their kitchens at 2.30/3 p.m. and again at 11.30 p.m. and, therefore, will not serve food after these hours.**

There are restaurants that serve food all day long but they are not many, they are tourist-oriented, and may not serve the best food, considering that, as said above, **Italians don't usually eat a plate of pasta or (the classic Italian round) pizza or meat for example at 11.30 a.m. or 5 p.m.. However, if you feel hungry you can go to a take-away shop to have a small sandwich or a slice of pizza for a mid-morning snack, while in the afternoon an ice cream is always an excellent choice.**

## Supermarkets

**If you want to buy something to eat for your lunch or supper, you should know that supermarkets are generally open from 8/9 a.m. to 8 p.m.. Many of them are closed on Sundays or opened only in the morning. It's very rare to find supermarkets open 24/7 even in major Italian cities.** In fact, only one or two large chains have started opening a few of their stores 24/7 in major cities.

## Local food stores, bars, and take-away shops

As for **local food stores** (gastronomia, forno, alimentari, etc.), where, for example, you can buy a homemade sandwich or cooked pasta/meat/vegetables, etc. to take home, they are **usually open from 8 a.m. to 7.30/8 p.m.** However, **in some cities they close during lunch break.** They also **close on Sundays.**

**Bars** that, besides breakfast food, sell sandwiches, toasts, snacks, potato chips, etc. **open very early in the morning, around 6.30/7 a.m., and usually close in the late afternoon.** **Take-away shops** that sell, for example, **pizza, sandwiches, kebab, etc., are usually open from 12.30 p.m. to 8 p.m.**

**n1** In Italy a “bar” is a place where you go to have breakfast, a caffè during the day, eat a sandwich, drink a fruit juice, Coca-cola, or a cola, get a bottle of water, cold tea, beer, wine (not always), or sometimes have an “aperitivo” (aperitif) before supper/dinner, buy *snack-bars* or an ice cream, or something similar. They open very early in the morning and usually close in the late afternoon or at supper time (some even later). Therefore, an Italian *bar* is different from, for example, what Americans would call a “bar”.

**n2** Italians drink *cappuccino* only in the morning and usually only for their (first) breakfast!!! Even if we really love it, we don’t drink a *cappuccino* after lunch, or during a break in the afternoon, or after supper, or in any other moment. In Italy we say that whenever you see someone drinking a cappuccino after breakfast...it’s a foreign tourist!! It’s unusual for an Italian to drink American coffee (very long coffee usually served in a mug). Nowadays, some places will provide American coffee when asked, but don’t expect what you drink at home. It’s likely to be a watered-down version of *caffè espresso*!!



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