



La Dolce Vita ~ Books Set in Italy



Below is a sampling of fiction that captures the unique flavor of Italy.

Summer in Tuscany – Elizabeth Adler

A romance with misadventures and plenty of Italian charm and flavor. A physician vacations in Tuscany when her mother inherits a villa. Wacky hijinks ensue.

The Almond Picker – Simonetta Agnello Hornby

This novel exploring issues of identity in modern Sicily presents the complicated life of Maria Rosalia Inzerillo, a woman born into poverty in Sicily, who becomes the invaluable servant of a wealthy family.

The Marriage of the Sea – Jane Alison

Lovers part, strangers meet and fall in love, ambitions turn to desperation, hopes are betrayed, promises sundered, and in two cities slowly sinking into the sea, Venice and New Orleans, new beginnings blossom.

I'm Not Scared – Niccolò Ammaniti

“During a piercingly hot summer, a few kilometres from a bone-dry hamlet in rural Tuscany, a shy, nervy, nine-year-old boy called Michele explores a derelict house and discovers, under moldering leaves, a horrifying secret.” ~ *The New Yorker*

A Very Private Gentleman – Martin Booth

This creepy psychological suspense novel follows a so-called "shadow-dweller" (a technical weapons expert who creates and supplies the tools for high-level assassins) to a rural village in southern Italy where he poses as a quiet artist. The lazy, languid setting is an eerily effective backdrop for the fresh and beguiling murder intrigue.

Angels and Demons – Dan Brown

Is it any surprise that the man who wrote *The DaVinci Code* also wrote this novel that combines an ancient secret brotherhood, a papal conclave, mysterious ambigrams, a plot against the Vatican, a mad scientist in a wheelchair, particles of antimatter, jets that can travel 15,000 miles per hour, crafty assassins, a beautiful Italian physicist, and a Harvard professor of religious iconology?

A Mapmaker's Dream – James Cowan

A novel in the form of a 16th-century Venetian monk's journal. Fra Mauro, a cartographer, is working on a map of the world based on the oral reports of merchants, travelers and ambassadors who visit him in his cell.

The Leopard – Tomasi di Lampedusa

“Lampedusa weaves a colorful and detailed portrayal of Sicilian royalty in the years during and after the Risorgimento. His artistry, and its seemingly effortless English transformation leave the reader feeling transported directly onto the grounds and into the drawing rooms of the Salina villa in 19th century Sicily.” ~ Arthur C. Sgalia

The Birth of Venus – Sarah Dunant

“In this arresting tale of art, love and betrayal in 15th-century Florence, the daughter of a wealthy cloth merchant seeks the freedom of marriage in order to paint, but finds that she may have bought her liberty at the cost of love and true fulfillment.” ~ *Publishers Weekly*

In the Company of the Courtesan – Sarah Dunant

After narrowly escaping the sacking of Rome, a beautiful courtesan with the aid of her loyal servant, a resourceful dwarf, reinvents herself in Renaissance Venice.

Sacred Hearts – Sarah Dunant

Set in 16th century Italy during the Counter-Reformation, this multi-faceted historical novel is a fascinating portrayal of cloistered life and an exploration of the lives of women in an age when they had limited options.

Name of the Rose – Umberto Eco

“Although the novel stands on its own as a murder mystery, it is more accurately seen as a questioning of "truth" from theological, philosophical, scholarly, and historical perspectives. The story centers on William of Baskerville, a monk who is sent to investigate a death at a Benedictine monastery.” ~ Amazon.com

Bianca – Robert Elegant

“Sweeping through Medici palaces in Florence and Capello palazzos in Venice, Elegant imagines the years between 1564 and 1587 in Italy as a vivid swirl of events surrounding Lady Bianca Capello, a Venetian noblewoman who as a teenager boldly refuses to be sold into marriage by her spendthrift merchant father.” ~ *Publisher's Weekly*

Romola – George Elliot

Set in late 15th-century Italy, in the Renaissance Florence of Machiavelli and the Medicis, "Romola" is an exotic and adventurous novel that reconstructs a turning point in the intellectual history of Europe by charting the career and martyrdom of the charismatic religious leader Savonarola.

The Duchess of Milan – Michael Ennis

Set in the late 1400s this novel explores the machinations of two ambitious women, offering a fascinating depiction of the power wielded by women in positions of influence at a time when it was supposedly reserved for men.

Leonardo's Swans – Karen Essex

Born into wealth amid the political and artistic foment of the Italian Renaissance, worldly and ambitious Isabella and naïve Beatrice d'Este, sisters and rivals, compete for the attentions of Ludovico Sforza, the Duke of Milan.

Lucrezia Borgia – John Faunce

History has written Lucrezia Borgia as a heartless plotter, a debauched woman and the illegitimate daughter of Pope Alexander VI. But in this novel, Lucrezia tells her side of the story.

Where Angels Fear to Tread – E.M. Forester

Room With A View – Forester

Romances that take place in Italy and are set in the Victorian era; in both, the heart rules above the head.

The House of Scorta – by Laurent Gaudé

Follows five generations of a family in a small village in southern Italy through infamous crimes, forsaken loves, and lifelong secrets.

Vaporetto 13 – Robert Girardi

Romance, horror, mystery, Venice, with some Italian history thrown in.

The Scarlet City: A Novel of the 16th Century – Hella S. Haasse

Set against the turbulent backdrop of the Italian Wars (1494-1559) this novel traces the lives and struggles of some of Italy's most famous citizens--Michelangelo Buonarroti, Niccolo Machiavelli, Vittoria Colonna-- in chapters interspersed with the diary of a soldier/adventurer Giovanni Borgia.

Pompeii A Novel – Robert Harris

In the year 79 C.E., the resort town of Pompeii is home to more than 20,000 people. Rumors of isolated tremors and vaporous gases on the mountain circulate, but only one man sees cause for concern: Attilus, newly arrived from Rome to take charge of the massive aqueduct that supplies water to all the towns along the Bay of Naples.

The Sixteen Pleasures – Robert Hellenga

Part mystery, part romance, part guidebook concerning a young American book conservator and her introduction to the sensuous, sometimes dangerous life of Florence.

The Talented Mr. Ripley – Patricia Highsmith

One of the great crime novels of the 20th century. Tom Ripley is hired to retrieve Dickie Greenleaf from his overlong Italian vacation. But once in Italy, Ripley becomes overly enamored of Dickie's lifestyle there and determines to become Dickie – at any cost.

Wings of the Dove – Henry James

A beautiful love story of deceit and social standings with a cast of Americans and Brits and set in Venice.

Serenissima: A Novel of Venice – Erica Jong

An actress wills herself back in time to become Shakespeare's lover. It could only happen in the city of Venice.

Alibi – Joseph Kanon

This historical thriller set in the Venice of 1946 centers around U.S. Army war crimes investigator who falls in love with a Venetian Jewish woman scarred by her experiences in the war.

The Floating Book – Michelle Lovric

“A mix of fact and fiction juxtaposes the brief life of Roman poet Catullus with the sensation caused by the first printed edition of his highly charged poetry in 15th-century Venice. The novel is rich in sensual descriptions of the city and its citizenry. Maddeningly over the top and self-important, but as seductive as Venice.” ~ *Kirkus Review*

Mirror, Mirror – Gregory Maguire

A dark and vivid retelling of Snow White transposed to the 17th century Tuscany of the Borgias. Lucrezia is the evil stepmother and five-year-old Bianca de Nevada grows into the role of Snow White.

Death in Venice – Thomas Mann

Twelve stories spanning Mann's long career. From 1896 to 1912 these are tales about love, beauty, creativity, longing and sex.

Casa Rossa – Francesca Marciano

The lives of three generations of Puglia women: the grandmother who left her husband and fled to Nazi Germany; the mother who lived a happy life in Rome; and the daughters who slowly grow apart. This novel captures Southern Italy and family politics.

Loredana --- Lauro Martines

This riveting tale encompasses love, politics, and religion in sixteenth-century Renaissance Italy.

Then and Now – W. Somerset Maugham

This historical novel recreates a trip taken by Niccolò Machiavelli, representing his native city of Florence, to negotiate with Cesare Borgia. It shows the intrigue, deception and treachery as practiced among the powerful, in the Italy of the city states.

Miracle at St. Anna – James McBride

Based on an actual World War II event, *Miracle at St. Anna* recounts a horrific massacre in a village in Tuscany. A quartet of African-American soldiers, a band of partisans, and an Italian boy interact in an extreme situation.

The Apprentice Lover – Jay Parini

A coming of age novel populated by literary figures and set on the island of Capri.

The Secret Book of Grazia dei Rossi – Jacqueline Park

The fictional Grazia dei Rossi ... relates the story of her turbulent life ... explicating in striking detail such topics as medicine, mysticism and the complex interaction between Jewish bankers and the Christian nobleman they serve. ~ Lauren Belfer

La Cucina: A Novel of Rapture – Lily Priot

Rosa is the only girl from a rural Sicilian family. After losing her true love at a young age, she moves to the big city and loses her love of food and of life. Years later, a mysterious man reawakens her to both.

Venetian Stories and *Across the Bridge: More Venetian Stories* – Jane Turner Rylands

“Rylands, an American who has been living in Venice for the last three decades, has evidently had ample time to absorb the city's atmosphere and to turn an observant eye on its inhabitants, be they artisan or aristocrat; permanent or transient; Venetian-born or "foreign," a category that in Venice covers not only people from England and America but also those from other parts of Italy.” ~ *Los Angeles Times*

Tourmaline – Joanna Scott

“When the four Murdoch boys were little, their parents, Murray and Claire, fled Connecticut after a series of financial setbacks and took them off to a villa on Elba, the island of exile. More than forty years later, one of the sons tries to reconstruct what happened: to the girl, to his father, now dead, and to his mother, who is growing vague.” ~ *The New Yorker*

The Miracles of Santo Fico – D. L. Smith

A small, declining Italian hill town, Santo Fico only attracts tourists when local boys change the road signs. But there is a hidden treasure in the town's old church--a perfectly preserved fresco that looks exactly like the work of Giotto. When a local man tempts God by trying to profit from it, he must come up with a few miracles to save the town.

Sometimes the Soul: Two Novellas of Sicily – Gioia Timpanelli

“Two rich, witty novella-length fables feature women struggling to develop their artistic and intellectual voices against the colorfully rendered backdrop of traditional Sicilian households.” ~ *Publisher's Weekly*

Miss Garnet's Angel – Salley Vickers

Do you know that you are lonely if you've spent your whole life alone? A spinster takes a journey from England to Venice where she discovers beauty, trust and companionship.

The Passion of Artemesia – Susan Vreeland

Delving into the world of painting, Vreeland touches on the themes of art, history and the lives of women. Narrated in the first-person voice of Italian painter Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1653), the novel tells the story of Gentileschi's life and career in Renaissance Italy.

Mysteries

The Terra-Cotta Dog and others – Andrea Camilleri

Sicilian Inspector Salvo Montalbano has an eye for beautiful women and a taste for fine food and literature. *The New York Times* has called him “totally endearing”.

A Body in the Bathhouse and others – Lindsey Davis

These historical mysteries set in 1st century Rome feature Marcus Didius Falco, plebian private eye and staunch republican. “Roman history and culture are nice accessories for the more durable tool that Davis employs – hilariously good writing,” said the *Washington Post Book World*.

Dead Lagoon and others – Michael Dibdin

Policeman Aurelio Zen, a member of the elite Italian Criminalpol squad stationed in Rome, is the quintessential European hard-boiled hero, intelligent, weary, urbane, and pensive.

Thief of Venice – Jane Langton

Homer Kelly, ex-cop turned Harvard professor, and his wife travel to Venice for a rare book conference, but their getaway soon turns into a life and death adventure.

Doctored Evidence and others – Donna Leon

Set in contemporary Venice, this series features Commissario Guido Brunetti, a man always examining the moral issues he confronts in the line of duty. The sites and food of Venice play prominently in these award-winning mysteries.

Some Bitter Taste and others - Magdalen Nabb

The “likable, slow-moving and on occasion taciturn” Marshall Salvatore Guarnaccia of Florence's carabinieri is the protagonist in these mysteries, which capture the secret city of Florence and the surrounding Tuscan countryside.

Death in the Palazzo and others - Edward Sklepowich

This series features Urbino Macintyre, American expatriate and biographer living in Venice.

Science Fiction

Shadow of the Lion – Mercedes Lackey **SF**

In 1537, the great lion statue of St. Mark's watches over a Venice filled with mercenaries, thieves, monks, knights and demons.