Italian culture is steeped in the arts, family, architecture, music and food. Home of the Roman Empire and a major center of the Renaissance, culture on the Italian peninsula has flourished for centuries.

Italy has given rise to a number of architectural styles, including classical Roman, Renaissance, Baroque and Neoclassical. Italy is home to some of the most famous structures in the world, including Colosseum and the Leaning Tower of Pisa.

Opera has its roots in Italy and many famous operas — including "Aida" and "La Traviata," both by Giuseppe Verdi, and "Pagliacci" by Ruggero Leoncavallo — were written in Italian and are still performed in the native language. More recently, Italian tenor Luciano Pavarotti made opera more accessible to the masses as part of the Three Tenors.

Italian literature has its roots in Roman and Greek literature. Until about the thirteenth century Italian literature was written in Latin. Dante is one of Italy’s most famous writers. He lived in the XIII century and his greatest work was La Divina Commedia.

The early twentieth century has witnessed a number of different styles. Gabriele D’Annunzio, who began writing in the previous century, had great influence in the twentieth century. Benedetto Croce and others carried on the work of modern thought in Italy. Luigi Pirandello, a 1934 Nobel Prize winner, was an innovator in style and thought.

Fascism threatened to destroy Italian literature, and many of its great writers went abroad but after the end of World War II Italian literature blossomed again. A simple listing of major figures is sufficient to suggest the importance of modern Italian literature. In poetry, there are Giuseppe Ungaretti, Eugenio Montale, and Salvatore Quasimodo. In fiction, there are Carlo Levi, Elia Vittorini, Vasco Pratolini, Mario Doldati, Cesare Pavese, Vitaliano Brancati, Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, Alberto Moravia, Giorgio Bassani, Dino Buzzati, Elsa Morante, Natalia Levi Ginzburg, Primo Levi, and Umberto Ecco. Tabucchi is also a very important name. This writer was passionate about Portugal and Portuguese culture.

Italy is also home to a number of world-renowned fashion houses, including Armani, Gucci, Benetton, Versace and Prada.

The ART of PAINTING

Florence, Venice and Rome are home to many museums, but art can be viewed in churches and public buildings. Most notable is the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel of the Vatican, painted by Michelangelo sometime between 1508 and 1512. The Mona Lisa (or “La Gioconda”) is Leonardo da Vinci’s “best known painting, often referred to as “the most visited, the most written about, the most sung about, the most parodied work of art in the world”.