

Cultural Note –

Taking the train in Italy

The main character in our book, Caterina, arrives in Italy at Milan's [Malpensa](#) airport, about 50 km northwest of Milan. She must then make her way into the city. First, she takes a taxi to the near-by town of [Gallarate](#) in order to get onto the local train system, called [Trenitalia](#) (official web site: www.raileurope.com/Trenitalia-Italy). This local railway cannot be accessed directly from the Malpensa airport, but, until recently, was the only way to obtain a train after landing in Malpensa. The final destination on the train route from [Gallarate](#) into Milan is the [Stazione Centrale](#), which is Milan's largest train station. It takes between 40-60 minutes to reach Milan by direct train from [Gallarate](#).

[Gallarate](#) can also be reached by bus from the [Malpensa](#) airport for a small fee, about 1-2 euros, and buses leave regularly from either Terminal 1 or Terminal 2 of the airport all day. Of course, there are also bus routes to many other cities from the Malpensa airport bus terminals, including to Milan itself, for those who prefer to travel by bus.

There is now a newer, separate train system, called the [Malpensa Express](#), which opened in 1999, and leaves directly from [Malpensa](#) airport's Terminal 1, underground floor, every thirty minutes. As the name suggests, this train goes directly into Milan, but it ends at a smaller station, the [Stazione Cordona](#). The [Malpensa Express](#) trains are new trains with only first class seats and luggage areas in-between the compartments. Non-stop trains are available in the mornings and late at night, but during the day there are a few additional stops along the way to Milan for the 40-minute trip. To learn more about the [Malpensa Express](#) trains or to view a train schedule and current ticket prices, go to www.malpensaexpress.it.

The ticket agent in our dialogue very kindly reminded Caterina to validate her train ticket before boarding the local train. In Italy, when using the local train system, it is possible to buy an "open" ticket, which can be used at any time for up to two months. Stamping each ticket with the date and time prior to entry on the train prevents this type of ticket from being used more than once. The name of the machine which is used to stamp the date and time onto the ticket is translated by the makers of the machine as a "ticket canceling machine," or [macchina obliteratrice](#). The older machines are yellow, but the new machines now commonly in place have a green and white face with the [Trenitalia](#) symbol and name along the top. These small machines are usually found attached to the wall at the entrances to the individual train tracks, which are usually at a lower level from where the tickets are purchased. When referring to what the machine actually does, you can use the verb [timbrare](#), which means "to stamp," [convalidare](#), which means "to validate," or the verb which means "to cancel," and comes from the name of the machine, [obliterare](#). In effect, all three verbs apply, since ticket is literally stamped, which makes it both good for travel, and cancelled for further use at the same time. After boarding

the train, the ticket-inspector ([controllore](#)) will come through each car and ask to see each passenger's ticket. If the date and time have not been stamped on the ticket, that passenger will be asked to pay a cash fine before leaving the train. Signs are sometimes posted on the interior doors of the trains warning of the fine to be paid if the ticket has not been "[convalidato](#)," in Italian, with no English translation! Tickets for the [Malpensa Express](#) also need to be validated. So, remember to look for those little green and white machines each time you board a train in Italy and stamp your ticket. It takes only a second but can save a good deal of money!

A word about the other major airports in Italy... Anyone traveling to Milan before the [Malpensa](#) airport opened would have had to land at [Linate](#) airport. [Alitalia](#) flights used to land primarily at [Linate](#), even after [Malpensa](#) opened, but nowadays, most passenger airlines land in [Malpensa](#), which is the second largest international airport in Italy.

Rome's [Leonardo da Vinci](#) airport remains the largest international airport in Italy. It is located 26 km west of Rome, and the nearest city is [Fiumicino](#) (which is the old name the airport used to go by, and is still used for the airport code [FCO](#)). It is very simple to take the train from this airport to downtown Rome. Just follow the signs to the train ticket counter, or buy a ticket at the Alitalia office at track 22, or from an automatic ticket machine. The train leaves from track 24 and after a 30 minute ride ends at [Roma Termini](#), which is Rome's central station.

The [Marco Polo](#) International airport serves the city of Venice and is located on the mainland, near the town of [Mestre](#), just across the lagoon. The major island of Venice ([Venezia](#)) is connected by a bridge to the mainland, and served by a train station, the [Santa Lucia](#), and a large bus station. Unique to Venice is the water taxi system, or [Alilaguna](#), which is also probably the easiest way to travel to and around Venice. The [Linea Blu](#), or blue line, can be taken from the airport and stops at the island of [Murano](#) (famous for their glass blowers), the [Lido](#) (a popular island with hotels on the beach), and [San Marco](#) (the center of Venice). A city bus can be taken directly into Venice from the airport, or to the train station of the nearest town, [Mestre](#). From [Mestre](#), the local train can be taken into Venice, or west into the Italian peninsula.

-Adapted from [Conversational Italian for Travelers](#), Chapter 3 Cultural Note, ©2012, Stella Lucente LLC.

Find more interesting facts and helpful hints about getting around Italy in each chapter of our book, [Conversational Italian for Travelers](#)! Learn how to buy train tickets on line, how to make international and local telephone calls, and how to decipher those Italian coffee names and restaurant menus, all while gaining the basic understanding of Italian that you will need to know to communicate easily and effectively while in Italy.

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Until then, [buon viaggio a tutti!](#)

From the staff at Stella Lucente.