

BASSI BRUGNATELLI SYMPOSIUM

John Ratledge, Founder and Artistic Director

Annalisa Monticelli, Executive Director

This is the first of several important letters concerning traveling to Italy. (Also can be found on the website: <https://www.bassibrugnatellisymposium.com/copy-of-home>)

Experienced European travelers can just skip to the TRAVEL TO ITALY portion below.

For those who have never traveled to Europe, I offer this information to hopefully eliminate potential frustrations ahead of time.

PASSPORT:

Make several color photocopies of your passport to keep in various places such as your suitcase, backpack, wallet, etc. In the unlikely event that you lose your passport, the photocopy will expedite the acquisition of another one, an arduous process. *You don't want to lose your passport.* Although you will not be asked for your passport often in Italy, sometimes a clerk will ask for “documenti, per favore” when you are making a purchase with a credit card. At that time, you simply show your passport, and the purchase is completed. Carry your passport or a copy of it with you at all times.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION:

It is very helpful to order some **Euros** from your bank before you leave the States so that you can maneuver within the financial system once in Europe (food, train/bus tickets, whatever you need). In Tuscaloosa, it took several days to receive the Euros I ordered. Your city/bank may be different, but you will be glad you took the time to have some valid currency in your pocket. Money can be exchanged at the airport, but the fees are exorbitant, and it is wasteful. With a little planning, you can save! In general, US dollars are not accepted in stores and restaurants, and exchanging money throughout Europe is best done at a bank where you get the “paper rate”, the lowest fee charged for exchanging money. These days, a lot of cash is not needed for travelers with the plethora of credit options now available worldwide. Some stores prefer cash, and products can sometimes be cheaper when paying with cash. But you will need Euros. Just so you know, the US dollar is the highest it has been against the Euro in recent times (as of October 2019). It changes daily.

MasterCard and Visa are accepted everywhere, and more and more, American Express is not. Even though the ticket machines at train stations indicate that a ticket can be

purchased using an American Express credit card, often, the transaction doesn't work.

In the past, it was extremely important to call your credit card companies and alert them that you are traveling overseas, telling them the length of your stay prior to your departure, and the countries to be visited. My credit card companies say that is not necessary any longer, but I do it anyway just to make sure all is well. Make sure you know your pin numbers. All of this is to protect you.

BAGGAGE:

Airlines have gotten very specific as to the size and weight of acceptable luggage. Check your airlines for their regulations. In the USA, 50 pounds is the limit. In Europe, the acceptable weight of luggage is much less. Weigh your empty suitcase, and pack only what you think you will need. Unpack, and remove 25%. Repack and weigh. You will be expected to remove items from your suitcase at the airport if your bag is overweight. LESS IS MORE. Remember, you have to lug that stuff up and down a LOT of stairs, and it is exhausting! (I speak from personal experience.) **Less is more.** Second bags are \$100 each way.

TRAVEL TO ITALY:

As the Symposium occurs during "high season" for traveling in Europe, the prices are much higher than during the rest of the year. Airfare is seasonal, but if you are creative, you can find manageable fares. These fares require flexibility on your part, but you will save money. Just this morning, I found \$837 USD from Atlanta or JFK to Milano. Even if it costs \$300 USD to get to a major hub and back, it can be a huge savings from what you find advertised with no flexibility on departure venues.

Fares will rise as "peak season" approaches (after 1 May), so now is the time to purchase flights. Consider staying longer to see a some of the country. You won't regret it.

Other sites of interest that offer lower fares than those in the USA include:

mormondo.com If you use Google Chrome, the internet pages that are in Italian are translated for you, or simply look for the English icon (British not the American flag) on the site itself. There are deals to be had if you are diligent.

skyscanner.com

google.com/flight

Scott Keyes is a travel blogger endorsed by Clark Howard, and his website has a premium subscription but I only get his FREE emails. Great deals can be found at: <https://scottscheapflights.com>

[JetRadar](#) is a phone APP with great prices. I FOUND \$875 yesterday on this app.

Also, consider flying into Dublin, Ireland and then taking Jet Air or Ryan Air into Milan. There are GREAT deals into Dublin always, but beware of luggage and weight restrictions. They charge a fortune for overweight bags.

TRAVEL IN ITALY:

Although not necessary, **you can purchase your train tickets online before you come to Italy should you wish to do so.** <http://www.malpensaexpress.it/en/> to purchase the **roundtrip** ticket from Malpensa Airport to Milano

- Linate folks should take a taxi to the Porto Garibaldi station (specifics below) http://www.trenitalia.com/?gclid=CJugk_7Ynr4CFQcewwodQ14AJQ for your train tickets to **Paderno-Robbiate** (toward **Bergamo**). *See below for clarification.

GETTING FROM THE AIRPORT TO ROBBIATE:

MALPENSA EXPRESS

Milano is an extremely large metropolitan area, and Malpensa Airport is almost one hour outside the city.

- Take the *Malpensa Express* from the airport to **MILANO PORTA GARIBALDI**. Specific information about Malpensa Airport can be found on the website:

https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/d9ada1_ccf5472d026049eab1aaefd76913a3d9.pdf

You will need a **roundtrip ticket** which costs **€E18** or **€24E** if you buy them separately (which makes no sense). The dates and times are not negotiable, so make sure that you have thought ahead as to how much time you will need at the airport before your return flight. Individual airport requirements can be found online.

THIS INFORMATION APPLIES TO EVERYONE REGARDLESS OF THE ARRIVAL AIRPORT.

Once at the Garibaldi station, you will need to purchase a ticket to **Paderno-Robbiate**. I have attached the listing of available trains from Milano going to **Paderno-Robbiate (toward Carnate and Bergamo)**. SEE THE WEBSITE:

https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/d9ada1_ccf5472d026049eab1aaefd76913a3d9.pdf

The ticket machines are straight forward and easy to use, and the ticket will cost around €4.50. Get a second class ticket, and when you are ready to board the train, look for the large number 2 on the side of the car.

Small towns are *not* listed as destinations on the large marquis that gives individual cities, track numbers (binario), and departure times, so **ROBBIATE WILL NOT BE LISTED**. Robbiate is simply a stop on the way to Bergamo. So look for **BERGAMO**. Binario is the track number that your train leaves from. Most likely, you will have to go down the stairs to locate your specific track portal. Just follow the people, and there will lots of them. Numbers are numbers, so no translation s needed. Once underground, you **ticket** by inserting it into the small machine on the wall at the base of the stairs for each binario. Make sure the ticket is flush left while inserting it. A little hole is punched into the

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ticket giving evidence of validation. One can pay a fine if this step is neglected. Usually, a train conductor will come through the train and check for the validated tickets of the passengers.

Trains leave when they say they are going to leave (in most cases). Just ask someone standing there, "Bergamo?" Someone will say, "Si, si, si!" or "No!" The tracks can be changed quickly with no warning, so always be listening and watching. There is an electronic screen at most binarios announcing the trains, but the sign doesn't always work. The train is clean and reliable. The process is an adventure.

I would suggest that you download "I-Translate" for your I-Phone or other smart device.

***GETTING FROM LINATE AIRPORT TO ROBBIATE:**

This process is different because there is no Metro from Linate to Milano.

The best solution is to **TAKE A TAXI** for €14 to the metro line-Porta Garibaldi. Ask, "Quanta costa alla stazione di Porta Garibaldi?" The taxi driver should say, "Quarttordici Euros." The other solution is just too much work as it requires BOTH the bus and the metro. In addition, you will be carrying your luggage. This choice costs around €15. Why fool with it? But I give you this option for your information.

IMPORTANT: Please send me your travel itinerary once it has been confirmed.

A REMINDER ABOUT HOTEL, BED AND BREAKFASTS/LODGING:

Accommodations for the ten days are based on double occupancy, and if you wish a private room, there is a €400 supplemental charge. I must know this information by 15 May 2020 as only a specified number of rooms have been reserved. We still have flexibility at this time; however, I need to know this **information as soon as possible**.

TRANSPORATION IN ROBBIATE:

Public transportation is extremely limited in Robbiate, and taxi's are expensive. Short distances can cost €10. I am negotiating with a local cab company to offer everyone a reduced fare. Renting a car is an option. If you do, you will need an International Driver's License (~\$20USD), and this can be obtained from any AAA here in the States.

Also, at the time of rental, you will have to determine the pickup time of the car at the airport. Make sure that you arrive at the dealership BEFORE the scheduled time. If you are late and do not call the rental agency, your reservation can be/will be cancelled, and you will not be reimbursed. (I got burned three years ago as I had two train delays. The agency didn't care. I was furious, but there was nothing that I could do but rent another car.) Europeans walk, and walking is a good option.

Should you wish, a BBS representative can pick you up at the train station in Robbiate on Tuesday, 22 June 2020, so please make sure that I know your arrival time.

A BBS representative is available to assist you with your departure to Paderno-Robbiate train station on Friday, 2 July 2020. Make sure that you plan ahead with regards to travel time to your airport destination.

I hope this information is helpful, and I look forward to seeing you in Italy. (Please feel free to call me at any time with questions that you might have.) 706.346.4350.

My best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Ratledge". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

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