

LOCATION

Country: Italy

Town: Poggio

Base: Deployable Air Command and Control Centre (NATO)

Other info to consider:

- Family (non-dependents) can visit and stay 90 days **without a visa** (Schengen Area)

POPULATION

Size: 791 people (as of 2017). The larger city is Ferrara (13 km away).

Ethnicity: Mostly Italian nationals. 10% of the population are foreigners (Romania, Pakistan, Morocco and Albania).

Religion: 80% Christian, Vatican City is located in the heart of Rome, Italy.

LANGUAGE(S)

Official language: Italian

Prevalence of French or English speaking: English or French as a second language sometimes.

- Unlike other parts of Italy and Europe, very little English is spoken in Poggio.

COST OF LIVING

Exchange rate to consider: Euro

- Poggio is considered affordable.
- Vehicle insurance is astronomical compared to Canada.
- Petrol is expensive, but taxes are refunded at some locations with a special card offered to all family members. (Forax card)

QUALITY OF LIFE

Climate and potential for severe weather, natural disasters:

- The climate is humid (more hot and humid than other parts of Italy). Winters tend to be mild and very foggy.
- Snow does occur, but does not last long.
- Poggio-Renatico is located 25 km from the Po River. The proximity to the largest Italian river has been a constant concern in the history of Ferrara, which has been affected by recurrent, disastrous floods, the latest occurring as recently as 1951.
- Roads can flood in heavy storms making driving quite treacherous.

Laws and culture:

- You may drive for up to one year with a valid Canadian driver's licence and an international driving permit, or an official translation by a recognized translator of the Canadian licence.
- Penalties for driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs are severe. The legal blood alcohol limit is 0.05%. Convicted offenders can expect heavy fines, their driver's licence may be confiscated immediately and they could face imprisonment.
- Penalties for possession, use or trafficking of illegal drugs are severe. Convicted offenders can expect jail sentences or heavy fines.
- Buying counterfeit merchandise, such as sunglasses or purses, is illegal. Local authorities may impose heavy fines on tourists caught buying counterfeit merchandise.
- It is illegal to photograph government buildings and military installations without permission from local authorities.
- Authorities may require you to present identification at any time.
- Italians are very family oriented and love children. Canadians may find it difficult to adapt to the Italian rhythm. Home repairs, appointments and deliveries are often postponed to "domani" which can be tomorrow...or in two weeks. Those who thrive in highly organized and structured environments will find Poggio challenging.

Safety and security:

- Petty crimes such as pickpocketing and purse snatching occur. Foreigners are targeted.

- The threat of terrorism is a reality in Europe. Terrorists have carried out attacks in several European cities and further attacks are likely. Italy's terror level at the moment is lower than in other European countries but radicalization is on the rise.

Level of isolation:

- Language challenges can cause a high level of isolation, particularly among spouses.
- The inability to easily converse with neighbours and community members can contribute to feelings of isolation. Routine errands can become very arduous.
- Poggio is considered a remote and isolated posting, which may mean social isolation as opportunities to socialize with other Canadian or English-speaking families will be few.
- There are nine Canadian families in Poggio.

HOUSING

- Most Canadians, and much of the NATO community, live in the area surrounding Ferrara.
- Houses in Italy are not built to Canadian standards.
- Although the houses may look spectacular with marble flooring and large in-ground swimming pools, families need to keep an eye out for things like mould or inadequate power supply.
- Your sponsors and the housing agency will help you make an informed decision.

EMPLOYMENT

Are there employment opportunities for spouses? Due to tax and legal implications, spousal employment in Italy is not a realistic option.

- There are very limited employment opportunities available through CFMWS, so families should plan to be a single-income family for the duration of the posting.

Op tempo: The op tempo will vary greatly depending on the position. TD is possible. Most positions in Poggio are deployable and TD is frequent.

HEALTH CARE

Access: Italy's healthcare system is routinely ranked among the best in the world.

- Private on the economy.
- Individuals with serious medical issues should not be considered for this posting, as accessing regular medical care may be extremely limited.
- Difficulty receiving medications/vaccinations.
- Poggio Renatico is considered a remote posting and as such, Canadian NATO members and their families must find doctors and dentists in Ferrara, as we do not have medical or dental privileges at the US base in Vicenza, Italy (Camp Ederle).
- The language barrier and the bedside manner are not what Canadians are accustomed to.
- The Canadian Medical Clinic in Geilenkirchen is responsible for the healthcare of all Canadian military members in Europe and can be accessed.
- All bills associated with the care of dependents are the member's personal responsibility and are to be claimed through PSHCP

Special needs:

- Resources and services are limited and language barriers could pose serious challenges.
- If a family member has special medical needs it is highly advised that they consult with MFS(E), and/or the Canadian Element to ensure that the required services are readily available in either English or French before accepting a posting to this location.

Consideration for pregnancy/birthing:

- Private available.
- Birthing classes in English/French are hard to find

Dental:

- Dental care can be accessed in town. You are required to pay upfront, and you can then claim your expenses
- It is easy to access, however; providers do not always speak English or French.

SCHOOLING

- There are no secondary school options in Poggio. The K-gr8 English-language option in Poggio is reported to be inconsistent in terms of English-language content and rigour of curricular expectations.

- The K-12 school is located in Bologna and requires a significant daily commute. Most families with high school-aged dependents opt for a boarding school for grades 9-12.
- There are limited boarding school options available in Italy (grades 9-12), Switzerland (grade 12) and Canada (grades 9-12); family resilience to withstand separation is a consideration with all boarding options.

Curriculum vs. Canadian curriculum:

- Curriculum varies depending on the choice of school.
- Canadian history or geography is not available.

Resources for special needs children:

- Resources for special needs children are extremely limited.
- Should it be determined that a child requires special needs due to developmental or mental health concerns while posted OUTCAN, this could pose a serious risk to the posting and the family may be considered for repatriation.
- Students with IPE had no problem getting services in Bologna.

CHILDCARE

- The only options available for daycare for preschool-aged children are Italian daycares, which are a lot less structured than what Canadian parents are accustomed to, or a nanny that would need to be personally screened by the parents.
- The availability of Canadian babysitters is limited. Parents should be prepared that they may need to engage and personally screen Italian childcare providers.
- Local childcare available (an estimated €8 to €10 a day) but typically in Italian with little English (no French).

TRANSPORTATION

- Airports: Bologna Guglielmo Marconi Airport (BLQ), 30 km, Forlì Airport (FRL), 80 km, Verona Villafranca Airport (VRN), 85 km.
- Driving in Italy can be challenging at first, as the style may be more aggressive than in Canada, and the road regulations may not always be respected.
- A car is strongly recommended. Roads are narrow and often not maintained. Local roads may not be suitable for big North American cars.
- Imported vehicles might be expensive to maintain, and parts might be expensive or imported at high cost and delay.

RESOURCES AND AMENITIES

Is there a Military Family Services centre available in that location?

- No, but remote services are available from MFS(E) Naples in Naples, Italy.

Psychosocial/mental health resources:

- Not at the post, and the MFS(E) SW is for dependents only. The CAF SW/Mental Health Team for members and families is located in Geilenkirchen, Germany. The chaplain is located in Naples, Italy.

Communications (e.g. quality of Internet connection):

- Internet connection quality and availability vary widely depending on the location. In general, it is unreliable.
- Cellular phone plans and internet are reasonably priced.
- Some areas of the city have fibre optic internet. Outside the city centre, this may not be available.
- A cloudy or windy day may affect the signal.

ACTIVITIES

Access to sports or other leisure activities:

- There is a small gym with limited hours on base, available for military members' use only.
- There are two main recreational and gym facilities in the city of Ferrara

Availability of playgrounds:

- Parents need to be aware that there is very little 'green space' available for outdoor recreation.
- The facilities that are available may require significant commuting time.
- Facilities exist at the US support site and JFC bases and a paid membership for access to Carney Park is an option.
- Most homes have small tiled outdoor spaces and are fenced between neighbours. The "parco" layout is usually unsafe for unsupervised play.

RESTRICTIONS TO CONSIDER

Are common-law relationships recognized? Yes

Are same-sex couples recognized? Yes, and there are some anti-homophobia laws to protect same-sex couples, although Italy is one of the worst Western countries when it comes to the status of LGBT rights.

Medications that are illegal in the country:

- Cannabis is illegal in Italy.
- For some medicines - like sleeping pills, medication for ADHD and strong painkillers - you need a medical certificate.
- Syringe kits, opiates and psychotropic medication also require a letter from your medical practitioner on official letterhead.

Other considerations:

- The language might be an issue.
- Medication that is sold over the counter in Canada (cold and flu medication, antihistamines, etc.) is available locally. A pharmacist can be the first resource to diagnose before doctors.
- Banned dog breeds: American Bulldog, Yugoslavian Shepherd Dog, Anatolian Shepherd Dog, Central Asian Shepherd Dog, Caucasian Shepherd Dog, Portuguese Sheepdog, Fila Brasileiro (Brazilian Mastiff), Dogo Argentino, Perro de ganado mayorero, Dogo Canario, Pitbull and all its variants, Portuguese Mastiff, Rottweiler, and Tosa Inu.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

- European Commission Country Reports (2022)
https://commission.europa.eu/publications/2022-european-semester-country-reports_en
- Canadian Travel Advisories
<https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/advisories>
- CIA World Factbooks (One pager from the US)
<https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/italy/>
- Living Abroad (from Gov.UK)
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/living-in-italy>
- Consumer Price Index (CPI)
<https://data.imf.org/?sk=4FFB52B2-3653-409A-B471-D47B46D904B5>

For more comprehensive information, please feel free to reach out to the resources below:

- MFS(E) Social Worker: Andrea Liss at liss.andrea@cfmws.com
- CAF Social Worker: GKMedicalClinic@forces.gc.ca
- MFS(E) Naples: +39 081 509 6663, MFSE.Naples@cfmws.com
- MFS(E) Regional Office: +49 (0) 2451 717 173, MFS.Europe@cfmws.com