



INTREPID ITALIAN

ABITARE VS. VIVERE



Ciao ciao!

Grazie! Thank you for downloading this cheat-sheet. This guide features essential grammar and lots of example sentences. Want more? Crack the code and master Italian tenses with **my Intrepid Italian 30-Day Tenses Challenge**. For more details, visit <https://bit.ly/tenses-challenge> or go to IntrepidItalian.com

Got a trip to Italy coming up? Remember, you don't need to be fluent in Italian to have meaningful interactions with the locals and create memories that will last a lifetime, but you can be **fluent enough for travel**.

Learning to use just a few words can do wonders for enhancing your travel experiences. Plus, it's a great way to show respect and make a good first impression. This is why I not only write detailed destination guides and create informative videos, I also created a [free travel phrase guide](#) and [online language courses](#) to help smart and savvy travellers like you get the most out of their travel experiences through the power of language.



Hi! I'm Michele, an Australian travel blogger and language educator and 'guide' behind [The Intrepid Guide](#). I help my readers and students enrich their travels with beautiful and [detailed destinations guides](#), [free travel phrase guides](#), and effective [online language courses](#) that follow my 80/20 method so they can enjoy meaningful interactions with the locals and avoid being

treated like a tourist. Over the past few years, I've travelled the world and learned several foreign languages using my unique building-block method which is the basis of all my language courses. Keep in touch with me via Instagram [@intrepiditalian](#) where I share daily Italian lessons.

Abitare vs Vivere. What's the Difference?

How to use “abitare” in Italian

The verb **abitare** means "to live", but more specifically, in the sense of "to reside" or "to stay somewhere"—like when you're talking about your home or place of residence.

From a grammatical perspective, **abitare** is a regular verb, meaning it follows the standard conjugation patterns of verbs that end in *-are*. It can be used both transitively (with a direct object) and intransitively (without a direct object). However, regardless of how it's used, it always requires the auxiliary verb **avere** (to have) when forming compound tenses, such as the passato prossimo.

Here are the 3 main contexts in which you'll use **abitare** in Italian:

1. To talk about where you live

In this case, **abitare** is used without a direct object. Instead, you use a preposition to say where someone lives, typically **a** (at) for cities and specific places and **in** (in) for countries, regions, and specific addresses. Examples:

- **Mia sorella abita a Trieste** – My sister lives in Trieste
- **Marco si è trasferito, ora abita in Spagna** – Marco has moved, now he lives in Spain
- **I miei nonni hanno abitato in questa casa per oltre 60 anni** – My grandparents lived in this house for over 60 years.

2. To talk about populations, animals, or other living beings living in a certain area.

In this case, **abitare** is used transitively, for instance:

- **Molte tribù nomadi abitavano questa regione prima dell'arrivo dei romani** – Many nomadic tribes inhabited in this region before the Romans arrived.
- **Questi uccelli abitano zone umide** – These birds inhabit humid areas.

3. **Abitare** can also take on a metaphorical meaning. Instead of referring to a physical place, it refers to something more abstract, like emotions or memories "living" inside a person:

- **Un grande tormenti abita in lui** – A great torment lives within him.
- **Il loro ricordo abita nei nostri cuori** – Their memory lives in our hearts.

Common phrases and idioms with “abitare”

There are some common expressions with **abitare** that it's worth memorize since they are used a lot in everyday Italian:



Phrases and idioms with “abitare” in Italian	
Italian	English
Abitare a casa del diavolo	To live in a place that’s extremely far away (lit. To live at the devil's house)
Abitare a casa di Dio	Similarly, to live in a very remote location (lit. To live at God’s house)
Meglio abitare in terra deserta, che con una moglie rissosa e stizzosa	Better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and irritable wife (one of those <u>nuggets of Italian wisdom</u> !)

How to use “vivere” in Italian

Vivere also means "to live," but in a much broader sense than **abitare**. While **abitare** refers specifically to living *in a place*, **vivere** covers the entirety of *life* — your experiences, emotions, and the way you approach life itself.

Because of its broader meaning, **vivere** is one of the most important verbs in Italian. It’s used a lot, even in song titles and TV shows. Want some examples? It’s the title of a famous song by Vasco Rossi and also the name of an Italian soap opera set in Lake Como that was very popular in the 2000s!

In terms of grammar, **vivere** follows the standard conjugation of -ere verbs, except for the past participle which is irregular: **vissuto** (not *vivuto*, as one might think). In compound tenses, it requires:

- The auxiliary **avere** (to have) when used transitively, as in **Ho vissuto un periodo difficile** (I went through a difficult period).
- The auxiliary **essere** (to be) when used intransitively, though in daily speech it’s common to hear people use *avere* instead of *essere*. For example: **Sara è vissuta/ha vissuto a lungo in Francia** (Sara lived in France for a long time).

Now let’s explore the 7 main ways **vivere** is used in Italian.

1. To live in a place, with an emphasis on what it *feels* like rather than just residing there:

- **Amo vivere a Firenze** – I love living in Florence.
- **Vivere con le mie amiche è bellissimo** – Living with my friends is wonderful.



2. To talk about deep emotions or intense life experiences:

- **Sto vivendo un sogno, non riesco a credere che sia successo davvero!** – I'm living a dream, I can't believe it really happened!
- **Vivo in uno stato di perenne ansia** – I live in a state of constant anxiety.

3. To refer to someone's life during a specific time period:

- **Leopardi visse all'inizio dell'800** – Leopardi lived at the beginning of the 1800s.
- **Gli artisti che vissero nella Firenze dei Medici** – The artists who lived in the Medici's Florence.

4. To describe something that persists over time, like memories or legacies, similar to "to live on" in English:

- **Il loro ricordo vivrà attraverso le storie che racconteremo** – Their memory will live on through the stories we will tell.
- **L'eredità di Anna vive grazie alla fondazione che ha creato** – Anna's legacy lives on thanks to the foundation she created.

5. To talk about how someone makes a living, either literally (financially) or figuratively:

- **La loro famiglia ha sempre vissuto di piccoli furti** – Their family has always lived off small theft
- **Dopo tanti sacrifici, finalmente riesco a vivere della mia arte** – After many sacrifices, I finally manage to live off my art.

6. To talk about being alive (as opposed to dying):

- **Mio nonno ha vissuto fino a 90 anni** – My grandfather lived until he was 90 years old.
- **I dottori hanno detto che gli resta poco da vivere** – The doctors said he has little time left to live.

7. When used as a masculine noun (**il vivere**), it means "way of life":

- **Con tutte queste preoccupazioni e stress, non è certo un bel vivere** – With all this worry and stress, it's certainly not a pleasant way to live.
- **Il libro esplora le sfide del vivere quotidiano** – The book explores the challenges of daily life.

Common phrases and idioms with “vivere”

Abitare and **Vivere** are such simple, basic verbs used in everyday life that they've inspired many interesting idioms and expressions (in truth, **vivere** more than **abitare**). Here are some examples:



Phrases and idioms with “vivere” in Italian	
Italian	English
Vivere alla giornata	To live day to day
Vivere alle spalle di qualcuno	To live off someone
Vivere di rendita	To live off passive income
Vivere di aria	To have no apparent resources or means of support (lit. To live of air)
Vivere nella bambagia	To be overly protected or sheltered from difficulties (lit. To live in cotton wool)
Vivere sulla luna	To be out of touch with reality. (lit. to live on the moon)
Avere di che vivere	To have enough resources, especially money, to cover the basic necessities of life
E vissero felici e contenti	They lived happily ever after (the classic ending of Italian fairy tales, like Pinocchio or Little Red Riding Hood)
Mangiare per vivere e non vivere per mangiare	Food should be a way to sustain life, not the main purpose (lit. eat to live and not live to eat)
Per il quieto vivere	For the sake of peaceful living
Saper vivere	To know how to get by in this world
Stare sul chi vive	To be alert, often because of potential danger or uncertainty



Vivi e lascia vivere	Live and let live
----------------------	-------------------

And then, there's the famous quote from Dante's Divine Comedy – **Fatti non foste a viver come bruti, ma per seguir virtute e conoscenza** (lit. You were not made to live like brutes, but to follow virtue and knowledge) – which Italians sometimes like to reference when talking about the importance of things like education and self-improvement.

Abitare vs Vivere: When they mean the same thing

In some cases, **abitare** and **vivere** can be used interchangeably. This happens when talking about the physical act of living somewhere. Here are some examples:

- **Abito/Vivo in Australia** – I live in Australia
- **Abito/Vivo a Palermo** – I live in Palermo
- **Abitano/Vivono nella casa dei nonni** – They live in their grandparents' house
- **Abitano/Vivono insieme da un anno** – They have been living together for a year

Quick tip: When in doubt between **abitare** vs **vivere**, remember this: you can always use *vivere* instead of *abitare*, but you can't always replace *vivere* with *abitare*. For instance, in the sentence **Come si fa a vivere senza lavatrice?** (How can one live without a washing machine?), *vivere* can't be replaced with *abitare* because this isn't about living somewhere, but rather experiencing life in a certain way.



Grazie!

I hope you enjoyed this cheat-sheet and learned something new. Remember, don't worry about not being able to remember it all, you're learning more than most other people do so you should be very proud of yourself. I know I am!

Want more language resources? Check out my guide on top-rated [languages tools, courses, and apps here](#). If you enjoyed this compact language guide and you want to discover how I can help you boost your language skills, [check out my popular language courses here](#).

If you have any feedback on this guide or want to share any suggestions for future material you'd love me to create, feel free to get in touch at michele@theintrepidguide.com

*As a thank you for downloading this guide, I'm proud to offer you a **special reader discount**. Simply use the code **TRAVEL20** at checkout to **GET 20% OFF** any purchase of my online travel language courses. [Check out my language courses here](#) or visit intrepiditalian.com.

Please do keep in touch and follow me on:

My website: [The Intrepid Guide](#)

Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/theintrepidguide/>

YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/theintrepidguide>

Italian YouTube channel: <https://youtube.com/intrepiditalianwithmichele>

Twitter account: <https://twitter.com/intrepidguide>

Instagram: [@intrepidguide](#) | Instagram: [@intrepiditalian](#) (For daily Italian lessons)

With all the encouragement in the world, I wish you success!

Happy learning!

Michele

