

# INTERNATIONAL LIVING

SINCE 1979

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

**Better than  
Portugal? Europe's  
Last Undiscovered  
Eden**

PAGE 14

**18 Million  
Americans  
Qualify for Italian  
Citizenship.  
Do You?**

PAGE 6

**The Best Places  
to Buy in Tropical  
Costa Rica**

PAGE 20

**Roasted Barnacles  
and Healing Baths  
in Rural Niigata,  
Japan**

PAGE 28

**Yes, You Can  
(Probably) Afford  
to Take a Private  
Flight**

PAGE 32



## LIVING THE DREAM

**Name:** Jennifer Sontag  
**From:** Missouri  
**Living in:** Terrasini, Italy

It's a dilemma many Americans face: Even a good salary can be tough to live on.

"I used to work crazy hours trying to raise my two children and put them through university. The latter alone cost over \$100,000 per degree," Jennifer Sontag explains. "I'm well educated, had a six-figure salary, and I still could not live."

In 2016, the divisive election made Jennifer feel alienated from her community, and a divorce meant losing access to her husband's health insurance.

"That's when I started thinking," Jennifer says. "What am I doing here? I need to start looking for options."

Jen hired a Florence-based company to trace her Sicilian heritage and apply for an Italian passport. "But come 2021, everything was still in lockdown, so the company told me they could no longer help. That's when I decided to fly to Italy and do the process on my own," says Jen.

Through a combination of extensive research and grit, Jen was approved for her passport in a mere 11 weeks. But it wasn't easy.

"I had to find 120 years' worth of birth, marriage and death certificates, plus the original generation's naturalization papers to the U.S.," she says.

That's because Italy—thanks to its aging population crisis—boasts one of the easiest ancestry citizenships in Europe. Any descendent of an Italian citizen alive in 1861 (when Italy became a nation-state), can apply for an Italian passport.

The key word here is Italian *citizen*.

"We originally thought that my great-grandparents had become American citizens immediately upon arrival to the States," says Jennifer. But thankfully, her great-grandparents didn't renounce their Italian citizenship until *after* having children... meaning Jennifer was eligible for an Italian passport.

### Following Her Grandparents' Footsteps

Another challenge: many Italians, including her great-grandparents, who came to the United States during the first waves of



You can enjoy *la dolce vita* too in Terrasini's Piazza Duomo.

# 18 Million Americans Qualify for Italian Citizenship. Do You?

Natali Lekka

immigration were illiterate in both Italian and English.

"There were a lot of misspellings of names in documents, as well as wrong dates. A lot of times, a birthday was recorded as the date a person was registered in the vital records office, so my grandmother had three different birth dates on three different documents."

The only solution to inaccurate documents, Jennifer says, is to have them legally changed.

"Once you do that you need to put an apostille on them, as part of the Hague convention, and you need to have the documents

translated. Then those translations need to be certified by the Italian courts. It can be a complicated process."

Now, Jennifer lives in the same village her great grandparents once left behind. "My life is very different now," she says. "In the U.S., you have to drive everywhere for everything, whereas here I can walk to my local grocery store, and everything is a lot more relaxed and community-based. The butcher knows your name, the grocer

knows what you like.

"Relationships are a lot more personal, and once you make your first Italian friend, they start introducing you to their other friends too. In the U.S., one of the first things you get asked is, 'What do you do for a living?' Here, I've never been asked that."

### The Italian Citizenship Concierge

Jennifer's success with the passport process motivated her to found the Italian Citizenship Concierge, a company that walks eligible Americans through the passport application process. Her specialty, she says, is in bringing eligible Americans to Italy for the ancestry passport process, as she once did. It's a good niche, given that there are only 10 Italian consulates in the States... and 18 million eligible Americans.

Not all of those eligible, of course, are trying to nab an Italian passport, but the small percentage who are have booked appointments with Italian consulates years out.

"In New York, appointments are fully booked for three years and they have a waiting list of over 7,000 people," says

**"In Italy, my taxes are only 5% of my income."**

Jennifer. “Once you get an appointment, it will take another two years to get recognised by a consulate, so you are looking at four to five years to get recognized as an Italian and be eligible for an Italian passport in the United States.”

Her solution: Move to Italy for the eight to 10 months it takes to get the passport in-country. You won’t even need a visa!

“If you’re eligible, you can come to Italy on your passport. Initially, you can only stay for 90 days, but we help you apply for a *permesso di soggiorno* (permission of stay: 30 days later, you go to an appointment, they take your fingerprints, and you have up to a year to stay.”

But using Jennifer’s process, you can become an Italian citizen well before that time runs out... in fact, in as little as six to eight months.

### La Dolce Vita

Today, Jennifer likes to sip her morning *caffè* from her rooftop terrace in **Terrasini**, a Sicilian beach town 30 minutes from Palermo.

Her view encompasses the crystalline waters of the Tyrrhenian Sea... and the 18th-century palaces and watchtowers along the rugged Italian coastline.

“I have a higher quality of life in Terrasini than I ever did in the U.S.,” she says.

She continues, “I used to rent a modern two-bedroom apartment with a view of the Tyrrhenian Sea—and a five-minute walk to the sea—for €500 (\$540)



per month,” Jennifer says. She recently purchased a two-bed, one-bath apartment with a rooftop terrace, three vast balconies, and parking space for €112,000 (\$120,000). She reports that utilities usually ring in at €75 (\$80) per month, and unlimited 5G high-speed internet at €24 (\$25) per month.

“You can have pasta, vegetables—all fresh, local homemade ingredients—and a bottle of wine for €10 EUR,” she says. “You can get a good bottle of local wine for €4, whereas a glass of wine in the U.S. costs \$8... and up.”

But the most important saving, she asserts, is healthcare. “It’s all included as part of my citizenship and

taxes,” she says.

And those taxes aren’t much to begin with. “I’m self-employed and taxes in Italy for new residents are only 5% of my income for the first 10 years. After that, they’ll rise to 15%,” Jennifer explains.

Jennifer thinks she’ll stick around even then. Though she says her Italian is a work in progress, she’s able to get by thanks to the surprising number of English-speaking locals.

And she’s already adopted the local customs...

“I have late dinners, go out until midnight, and take siestas during the day,” she says. “No more 80 to 90-hour work weeks for me.” ■

**“A view of the Tyrrhenian Sea... for \$540 a month.”**



In Terrasini, the coastline is rugged, the water a vivid blue... and if you squint, you can just make out ancient ruins.