

The Italian Job

Proof that knowledge of the Italian language can help you get ahead

By Beatrice Santacroce



NAME: Leilani C. Latimer

AGE: 46

OCCUPATION: Director of Sustainability Initiatives
for Sabre Holdings

CURRENT CITY: San Francisco, California

Though Leilani Latimer was born in the United States and does not have a drop of Italian blood, she lived in Italy for 15 years and speaks the language fluently. Her job with Sabre Holdings—which owns several travel-related companies including Travelocity.com and has offices in Italy—requires her to rely on her Italian language skills. Latimer is now based in San Francisco, where she lives with her Sicilian husband and children, but she worked in the company's Italian office for many years.

You might wonder, what inspired someone without any Italian background to pick up and move to Italy? Latimer admits her story is a rather unusual one. “I was fluent in French, and after graduating from college, I visited Italy for summer vacation. I knew instantly that I had spent my life studying the wrong language and that I was truly meant to speak Italian.” She decided to live in Italy for three months

to learn the language, but was fortunate to be offered a job working for an Italian sportswear company. She stayed for three years, working and living in the northeastern Triveneto region. After a job offer from her current company, she moved to Rome, where Latimer says the cultural differences between the two areas of Italy were so vast, she felt as though she had stumbled upon a different world entirely.

“This experience from north to south gave me access to many different accents, dialects, slangs and expressions...the language is a showcase for the vast and diverse history of each region, and the more I learned about the history and evolution of the language, the more my love for the language grew,” Latimer gushes.

Through her work, Latimer was able to become a naturalized Italian citizen, and it was after she became a citizen that she met her husband, who hails from Sicily. With her husband's business plans and the inspiration to embark on something new together, they moved to San Francisco, where they have established a tightly knit circle of Italian friends and colleagues. Latimer is strict about speaking Italian at home and she has always communicated with her husband solely that way; now that love of language has also been instilled in their children, so that they, too, can carry that spark for Italian that first enchanted Latimer many years ago.



Seth Snider, right, with Richard Branson of Virgin Galactic.

After graduating from James Madison University in 1997 with a degree in English literature, Seth Snider wanted to stave off adult responsibility for as long as possible. So, the Annapolis, Maryland, native traveled to Europe with friends.

After a chance opportunity for Snider to teach English at a language school in Salerno, Italy, turned into a two-year commitment, he realized that people in the relatively small, seaside Italian city spoke very little English. "I was forced to observe, gesticulate and speak erratically in order to communicate," Snider explains. "Making a conscious decision to stay in Italy and test my luck as an entrepreneur resulted in an adaptation to the culture....leading to fluency in Italian and a conscious understanding of the culture."

Snider's luck held—in 2005, he started his own luxury travel company, Your Private Italy (YPI). He

NAME: Seth Snider

AGE: 34

OCCUPATION: Founder/Owner of Your Private Italy

CURRENT CITY: Salerno, Italy, New York City and Annapolis, Maryland

started as a consultant for five-star hotels as a "middle man" for high-powered clients who were left hanging in their travel plans until they arrived at their hotel. He acquired a small database of repeat clients, and from there took it to the larger market for a luxury travel specialist.

Today, YPI has expanded to include exclusive private villa rentals, the Ferrari Experience (winner of four Five-Star Diamond Awards from the American Academy of Hospitality & Sciences), wedding planning services and, most recently, has become the exclusive Italian agent for Virgin Galactic, should Italians wish to take a trip into outer space.

"I use my Italian daily in conversations and negotiations with Italian suppliers and staff," Snider says. "It has allowed me to build a successful business and create personal contacts."

Seth Snider was able to build a successful career around the country with which he fell in love as a tourist. It was his determination to stay in the beautiful city of Salerno that drove him to learn and adapt to a language and culture that was completely foreign to him. ▲

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