

Getting an Italian Visa for your Spouse A Guide for Students of the SAIS-Bologna Program

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Abstract

Getting a visa so that your spouse may accompany you to Bologna is difficult but not impossible. The extended stay visa (“Residenza Elettiva”) is the easiest visa to acquire, and involves providing proof that your spouse can be sustained economically without working. The tourist visa allows you no more than three months at a time, and the family stay visa requires you to send for your spouse once you arrive there alone. Start the process early and be prepared.

1 Disclaimer

This is by no means an authoritative or comprehensive source of information on the subject and is not an official publication of SAIS. While this document will hopefully provide good background and useful advice on the subject matter, it is no substitute for your own research. This document was last updated on 16 April 2004. The latest version can be obtained at: <http://www.therandymon.com/papers/visa.pdf>. Contact me at rsw22@cornell.edu.

2 Background

The average age of incoming students to the SAIS masters program is 27, so it is reasonable to assume that a fair number of incoming students will be married at the time they begin classes. Married students who are accepted to the Bologna program are presented with the additional challenge of securing a visa for their spouse. In 2003 SAIS took no responsibility for this process — I don’t know about now — so it is up to the student to do so. The task is complicated by conflicting information from Italian embassies and consulates, and SAIS itself. It is in your best interest to research the situation well and make good decisions, but more importantly to begin the process as early as possible, as long delays can be expected.

3 What Kinds of Visas are Available?

The Italian government offers several kinds of visas: for military personnel, transiting airline personnel, tourist visas, etc. From the SAIS Bologna student perspective, there are essentially four options available:

- Family Visa
- Tourist Visa
- Business Visa
- Extended Stay Visa

3.1 Family Visa

At first glance, the most obvious choice, the Family Visa enables family members to join their spouse currently employed or studying in Italy, or stationed there for military purposes. Note there are two types of Family visas – there is one for military personnel stationed in Italy and one for non-military personnel.

Family visas have the following requirements:

- visa application form
- passport valid for at least 3 months beyond the length of time of the visa.
- one 2”x2” passport photo (full face front view, color)
- proof of residence in the US, i.e. greencard
- you must have your own visa before you can apply for a Family Visa for your spouse

However, the family visa has several limitations. Primary among them is the requirement for a "nulla osta," which is a letter from the Bologna police commissioner granting permission for you to send for your family members. It generally requires your being in Italy first and acquiring your Residency permit ("permesso di soggiorno"), and subsequently sending for your family, all of which takes a lot of time. Another disadvantage is the fact that you must have your own visa in hand before the Italian government will provide you with a family visa for your spouse. A third, but possibly superable, limitation is that your own visa must be for more than twelve months in Italy before they will grant a Family visa to any family members. Because the Bologna program is only nine months, your student visa will only be granted for nine months (no matter how hard you argue), and thus the family visa is unattainable to all but those who for some reason will be in Bologna longer than the typical school year. This is probably not your best option.

3.2 Tourist Visa

The tourist visa is of little use to students who intend for their spouses to accompany them the entire time they are in Italy. Tourist visas are granted with very little trouble to citizens of many nationalities (most countries, actually), but with the following limitation: they are granted for three months at a time. They are non-renewable while in-country. After three months, the tourist must pass another three months outside of Italy before a new tourist visa will be granted (so the idea of just popping over the border to Switzerland for a weekend and returning for a new three month period won't work).

3.3 Business Visa

- one passport size photograph
- original passport or re-entry permit, valid for at least six months after your travel dates for a single entry visa or if you are applying for a multiple entries visa. The travel document must be valid at least nine months from your entry in Italy
- Green Card (if you are not a U.S. citizen)
- Driver's License and/or State I.D. (originals or notarized photocopies)
- a letter from an Italian company explaining the purpose of your stay, your position, and the frequency and length of your stay
- letters of invitation from the Italian companies you will be visiting; a "good standing" certificate of your company issued by the Department of State of the State where the company is based

3.4 Extended Stay Visa (Non-Immigrant Visa)(Visa Elletiva)

In light of the reasons described above, the extended stay visa is the easiest method of obtaining a visa for your spouse. It can be granted for the entire time you will be in Italy, and you can acquire it before you leave the country. The requirements for an extended stay visa are as follows:

- application form: get it from the website (see below).
- your original passport, valid for at least six months after your travel dates
- your Green Card (if you are not a U.S. citizen) and your Certificate of Domicile and/or Driver's License and/or State I.D. (originals or notarized photocopies)
- police record for your spouse issued by your local Police office.
- letter or statements from your bank showing the account's transactions over at least the last three months.

- proof of dwelling availability in Italy. You can get this from SAIS Bologna, which will provide a letter showing you will be provided housing by the university.
- any other evidence proving your spouse's ability to support yourself without working Italy
- medical certificate stating that the applicant is in good health and there is no evidence of contagious illness or disease
- statement from your insurance company indicating that you will be covered by medical insurance for the entire period of studies in Italy. You can get a letter from the university stating you have student insurance.
- your spouse's green card, if she/he is a resident in the United States.

This is the visa I successfully applied for on behalf of my spouse. The most difficult part is proving he/she has the financial means to support him/herself while in Italy. We did so with a combination of documents showing our financial status, including student loan information, and bank statements. Financial support from parents can also be used, if available. In this case you'll need to provide at least your parents' most recent bank statement and a letter from them agreeing to provide financial support while you're in Italy.

3.5 Rules that Apply to All Visas

You'll almost certainly have to apply in person for your visa. In the United States, Italian consulates can be found in Washington DC, Chicago, Detroit, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, New York, Newark, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Boston. See appendix A of this document for a website listing their addresses. In 2003 it seemed like the Miami consulate was much more lenient/forgiving than the New York consulate was. In fact, more than one spouse was flat-out denied a visa in 2003 by the New York consulate. Make it easier on yourself by looking professional when you go to the consulate.

The Italian government makes it clear that processing your visa may take some time, and there is absolutely no rush service. That is because they either send some documents to Rome for approval, or wait for authorization from Rome. In our case, once we applied for the visa we only had to wait 11 days, but it could take as long as 3-4 weeks depending on your case. Start early, and remember some of the documents may take time to acquire.

4 How We Went About Getting the Extended Stay Visa

We got letters from the local police department and our doctors early on. Because we wanted to apply for the visas in time to have our passports back and travel during the summer, we were unable to use SAIS's visa service, which would have dealt with my student visa too late for us to be able to travel during the summer. We went about

getting visas ourselves, instead. The Italian consulates will only review your visa application within three months of your intended date of departure, which meant we could apply as early as May 19th for a departure on August 15th.

Basically we needed four things: proof that my wife and I had funding, proof that we had housing, proof that we had insurance, and proof that I really was a student. To provide proof that I was a student, we wrote the International Student and Scholar Service at SAIS Washington (you should have received a name and email address somewhere in your acceptance packet), which provided us with a letter stating I had been accepted into the Bologna program. You should get proof of insurance from that same office, I believe (it was a bit different in 2003). We got proof of funding via a combination of bank statements, and a letter from the student aid office which indicated my tuition would be paid by means of student loans. To prove that we would have housing, Ms. Hannalore Aragno, the registrar in Bologna (email: haragno@jhuc.it) provided a letter in Italian indicating my wife's housing (and mine) would be provided by SAIS-Bologna. Ms. Aragno will be glad to indicate in her letter that you have been accepted to SAIS Bologna as well, allowing you to kill two birds with one stone.

At the same time, we got together all the information we needed for my student visa. We applied for both visas at the same time, in person at the Miami consulate, to make painfully obvious why my wife needed a visa and for what reason she was accompanying me. Though it was not requested in the literature provided by the embassy, we provided a copy of our marriage license. Apparently it strengthened our case, because they took the license and included it with Ericka's visa application. Just to be on the safe side, I also acquired the police report and letter from the doctor in support of my student visa. Neither document was necessary, however (better safe than sorry).

We were lucky, perhaps: the Miami consulate looked everything over and told us they'd call us in a few weeks when our visas were ready. We got that call around ten days later. Your experience may vary or even just depend on the mood of the clerk you deal with at the consulate. Good luck!

A Web Resources

The chart below show some web resources that may be useful to you.

Italian Embassy web page	http://www.italyemb.org/Familyvisa.htm
List of Italian Consulates	http://www.italyemb.org/consolati.htm