Addendum to the Vademecum

1.1 Avoid bringing US Electrical Devices (other than PC’s and phones)

Italian electrical wall outlets, like most of the world, are for 220v appliances, whereas the US uses 110v at the outlet. **If you plug in a “run of the mill” American electrical device (such as you would buy in the US at places like Wall Mart) it is likely to blow up or burn out and it may be a fire hazard.** Therefore, unless absolutely necessary, we recommend that you do not bring US electrical devices that need to be plugged into an outlet, such as electric alarm clocks, or blow dryers. Some devices (like travel hair driers) have a switch that allows them to be used at 220v and many electronic devices (digital) come with “universal” power supplies that will automatically adapt to the different voltages. Unless you are absolutely sure that your device will operate safely at 220v, we recommend that you leave it at home. If you really need it, and it is designed to work at 110v, you will need to obtain a “transformer” to convert the Italian line voltage to the American one, and you will plug the device into the transformer and not directly into an Italian outlet. You can get transformers both in the US and in Italy, but it may be easier and cheaper to get this in the US.

Laptops typically have so-called universal power supplies that will work in Italy and can be directly plugged into the wall outlet. Other electronic devices, like digital camera and phone charges may also be “universal”. Electronic devices internally operate with “direct current” (DC), so they typically will already come with a transformer from AC to DC. The black box between your wall plug and your laptop plug is the where the magical transformation occurs. Other electronic devices will have a bulky plug that houses the transformer. To make sure that your electronic power supply is “universal” look for something like “110-240v AC Input” somewhere on the bulky black plug or in the back of the black laptop power supply box. If it does not give a range of voltages but only shows 110V, it is not a universal power supply and you’ll need a (220-to-110v) transformer to plug the device into before plugging said transformer into an Italian outlet.

Regardless of the voltage issue, the physical prongs on Italian plugs are different from US ones. Italian plugs have 2 or 3 round prongs instead of the flat prongs (+ round ground prong) on US plugs. You can get US-Italian plug “adaptors” either in the US or in Italy. Typically, these are cheaper to get in Italy (they only cost a couple of bucks each). These adaptors do NOTHING to the voltages and currents that go through them, they simply allow US plugs to be plugged into Italian outlets. Just getting a plug adaptor will NOT guarantee that you will not blow out your appliance/device. The above issues about voltages – and the need for a transformer – still apply even if you have a correct plug adaptor. In short adaptors are NOT transformers. Plug adaptors are light and cheap, transformers typically are heavier and bulkier and cost a lot more, so that’s one way to tell the difference.

When in doubt about all this DO NOT PLUG YOUR DEVICE INTO AN ITALIAN OUTLET!