

Understand Sardinia

SARDINIA TODAY 218

Find out how Sardinia is weathering the economic storm and why an increase in tourism numbers signals a bright future.

HISTORY 220

Prehistoric civilisations, Romans, Pisans and 19th-century bandits – all have made their mark on this island and their history makes gripping reading.

THE SARDINIAN WAY OF LIFE 232

Discover what makes a Sardinian tick and why the island has one of the world's largest populations of centenarians.

THE ARTS 235

From male harmony singing to poetry duels, folk dance to handicrafts – traditional arts are alive and well in Sardinia.

THE SARDINIAN KITCHEN 239

Eat at rustic *agriturismi*, visit local wineries and loosen a belt notch for a feast of home-grown seasonal fare.

Sardinia Today

High unemployment, coal miner protests and a devastating cyclone have dented Sardinia's confidence and budget in recent times. In spite of the hardships it has faced, however, things are slowly looking up for the island, with a new ferry service providing much needed competition, tourist numbers climbing steadily, and Francesco Pigliaru bringing a breath of fresh air to Sardinian politics.

Best on Film

Padre Padrone (Father and Master; 1977) The true story of Gavino Ledda's harsh life as a shepherd.

Ballu a Tre Passi (Three-Step Dance; 2003) Four snapshots of life in Sardinia, with some beautiful shots of the Costa del Sud.

La Destinazione (The Destination; 2003) The story of a young Italian *carabinieri* (police officer) sent to a remote Sardinian village in Barbagia to investigate the murder of a shepherd.

Etiquette

Hospitality Accept offers of a glass of wine, beer or *mirto* when offered.

Culture Win the affection of locals by finding out about Sardinia, for instance that Grazia Deledda was a Nobel Prize winner and that ex-Chelsea-manager Gianfranco Zola is Sard.

Dress Don't go around dressed scantily for the beach in mountain areas where people can be quite conservative.

Language Remember that Sardo is not a dialect of Italian; it's a separate language.

Greetings Shake hands and say *buongiorno* (good day) or *buona sera* (good evening) to strangers; kiss both cheeks and say *come stai* (how are you) to friends.

Economic Woes & Natural Disasters

Sardinia felt the brunt of the Italian economic crisis in 2011 and 2012. Heavy industry such as the Alcoa aluminium smelter in Sulcis and many small businesses closed. The number of Italian tourists fell 20% to 30% year-on-year in 2011 and 2012 due to the combination of ferry price rises and the economic crises.

Unemployment remains incredibly high in Sardinia. Recent statistics show unemployment on the island hovering at 17.5%, which is considerably higher than the national rate of 12.6%. Particularly worrying, however, is youth unemployment (15- to 24-year-olds) at 42.4%, with prospects for young people entering the labour market looking dismal.

In August 2012, 100 miners barricaded themselves in the Carbosulcis coal mine in Iglesias to protest its closure, making headlines when 49-year-old Stefano Meletti slashed his wrists on live television, saying: 'If someone here has decided to the kill miners' families, ladies and gentlemen, we'll cut ourselves, we'll cut ourselves.' Despite the protests, closure of the loss-making mine remains imminent.

In a bid to boost flagging public morale, a hard-hat wearing Pope Francis paid a visit to Cagliari in September 2013, denouncing the idolatry of money, speaking of the devastation caused by unemployment and imploring the jobless to have hope for the future.

But further strains were put on the island when it was severely hit by Cyclone Cleopatra in November of the same year. Described by the BBC as 'apocalyptic', the cyclone's high winds and torrential rain left 18 dead and hundreds homeless. A swift clean-up operation, however, has left almost no visible traces of the cyclone and resorts have been completely rebuilt.