

Understand Sicily

SICILY TODAY 262

Europe's economic crisis and an upsurge in immigration have created new challenges for Sicily.

HISTORY 264

Sicily's history is as epic as they come. Our summary will help you to understand the island's complex multicultural heritage.

SICILIAN TABLE 274

Sample the street snacks, seafood and sweet treats that are the hallmarks of Sicily's addictively delicious cuisine.

SICILIAN WAY OF LIFE 281

Defining themselves as Sicilian first, Italian second, Sicily's people are characterised by their devotion to family, tradition and religious ritual.

SICILY ON PAGE & SCREEN 285

Settle into some serious pre-trip research by immersing yourself in Sicily's dramatic body of literature and films.

THE MAFIA 288

Long the dominating force in Sicilian life, the Mafia's grip has begun to loosen in recent years.

ARTS & ARCHITECTURE 292

Sicily's staggering collection of aesthetic treasures spans more than 10 millennia, from prehistoric cave paintings to art nouveau.

Sicily Today

Desperate asylum seekers, unscrupulous *mafiosi* (Mafia), and soaring unemployment: Sicily is not short of challenges. The island is now the main stage for Europe's asylum-seeker crisis, its ports awash with mainly Africans seeking refuge. Lurking in the shadows is Sicily's Cosa Nostra, ready to exploit and profiteer. Meanwhile, job shortages continue to stifle the aspirations of many ordinary Sicilians. Thankfully, it's not all bad news, with innovative Sicilians transforming towns and vines into headline-worthy role models.

Best on Film

Nuovo Cinema Paradiso (Cinema Paradiso, 1988) Semi-autobiographical tale of small-town life from Sicilian director Giuseppe Tornatore.

Il Postino (The Postman, 1994) On the gorgeous island of Salina, Pablo Neruda philosophises with a humble Sicilian postman.

Stromboli, Terra di Dio (Stromboli, Land of God, 1950) Bergman and Rossellini's explosive tale of romance, with Stromboli's volcanic fireworks as a backdrop.

Best in Print

The Leopard (Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, 1958) Sicily's greatest novel, examining the Risorgimento's impact on Sicilian culture through the eyes of an ageing aristocrat.

Sicily: A Short History, from the Greeks to Cosa Nostra (John Julius Norwich, 2015) A deeply engaging journey through Sicilian history and culture through the eyes of one of Sicily's greatest fans.

Seeking Sicily (John Keahey, 2011) Engaging Sicilian travelogue, touching on many aspects of the island's culture and history, by a veteran American journalist.

Sea of Desperation

Ongoing political turmoil in Africa and the Middle East is driving a surge in the number of asylum seekers reaching Sicily from North Africa. According to the United Nations' refugee agency (UNHCR), more than 48,500 asylum seekers arrived in Italy by boat in the first half of 2016. Of these, almost 90% landed in Sicily. Thousands drown at sea each year, trapped on overcrowded boats.

People-smuggling is big business, with smugglers charging up to €5200 per person for the dangerous sea crossing. Among those cashing in is the Sicilian Mafia, which promises many asylum seekers support and onward travel north once in Italy. In reality, government funds set aside for the welfare of refugees are often pocketed and some refugees are ushered into prostitution and drug-dealing.

Italy's high unemployment provides challenges of its own for the refugees allowed to stay. The situation is frustrating a growing number of Sicilians, who argue that the refugees add further strain on Sicily's already inadequate job market, housing and infrastructure. The murder in August 2015 of two Sicilian pensioners by an 18-year-old Ivorian living in Sicily's Mineo refugee centre was quickly seized upon by right-wing political groups, one of which directly blamed the government and its 'lax' approach to immigration. The brutal crime also provoked a revenge attack, with two innocent refugees assaulted and robbed near Catania.

Economic Woes & Innovation

Sicilian unemployment for the first quarter of 2016 was around 24%, compared to 11.7% nationally. Among youth, the figure exceeded 70% in some parts of the island. GDP (Gross Domestic Product) figures paint an equally asymmetrical picture: €17,000 per capita in Sicily compared to Italy's €26,500. The phrase *Non ci*