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With eco-crimes and waves of refugees, it's a testing time for the Mezzogiorno (land of the midday sun).

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In equal measure proud, rueful, gregarious and suspicious, Italy's *meridionali* (southerners) are as contradictory as they are intriguing and complex.

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## population per sq km



# Southern Italy Today

## Environmental Woes

Southern Italy's predisposition to earthquakes, landslides and volcanic eruptions is not the region's only environmental concern. The Italian government's record on environmental issues has been consistently inconsistent and the Mezzogiorno (land of the midday sun) faces some serious challenges. One of the biggest is Naples' on-again, off-again waste-disposal crisis. After humiliating bouts in 2003, 2006 and 2008, the city's streets were once again submerged in rubbish in early 2011 as authorities struggled to sort out the city's refuse contracts. Faced with a potential public-health crisis, the Italian government deployed 170 troops to help clear the accumulated 2,000 tonnes of litter.

Environmentalists link the problem to Campania's organised-crime syndicate, the Camorra, accused of controlling waste-disposal contracts and using landfill sites and agricultural fields to dump toxic industrial waste. The illegal importation and disposal of refuse from across Europe into southern Italy is a multi-million-euro business. Its effect on people's health is less salubrious. In 2004, the medical journal *Lancet Oncology* dubbed an area northeast of Naples the 'triangle of death' due to its higher-than-average cancer rates. In 2007, Italy's National Research Council found that the mortality rate for people living closest to Campania's illegal dumping sites was between 9% and 12% higher than the norm.

According to the Italian environmental group Legambiente, 45% of Italy's estimated 31,000 annual environmental crimes occur in Campania, Puglia, Calabria and Sicily alone. That all four regions are home to powerful Mafia syndicates is no coincidence. An estimated 290 clans make up Italy's so-called 'Eco-Mafia,' which turns an annual profit of €20 billion from crimes such as illegal construction and the production of fraudulent wind farms.

» Combined population: 174 million (2011)

» Combined size: 83,733 sq km

» Highest point: Mt Etna, Sicily (3330m)

» Number of Unesco World Heritage Sites: 13

» Average cups of coffee per person per year: 600

## Dos & Don'ts

- » Italians are generally chic and quick to judge on appearances, so make an effort
- » Shorts and sleeveless tops are usually banned in religious buildings
- » Splitting the bill is *incivile* (uncivilised). The person who

invites pays, although close friends often go Dutch

» Take official opening hours with a grain of salt

» Focus on the positives. Although locals regularly lament their region's shortcomings, an outsider's jibes can offend

## Top Movies

**Il postino** (The Postman; 1994)  
Michael Radford

**Matrimonio all'italiana**  
(Marriage, Italian-Style; 1964)  
Vittorio De Sica

**Cinema Paradiso** (1988)  
Giuseppe Tornatore