SOUTHERN ITALY TODAY

Record unemployment, migrant inequality and pervasive mafiosi: it's a testing time for the Mezzogiorno.

HISTORY

Courted, betrayed, loved and abused: southern Italy’s biography reads like that of a stunning, tragic diva.

THE SOUTHERN WAY OF LIFE

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

THE MAFIA

Drugs, rackets and bloody vendettas: welcome to the sunny south’s dark side.

THE SOUTHERN TABLE

Southern Italy is a gastronomic fantasy. Loosen your belt and prepare for the feed of your life.

ART & ARCHITECTURE

From pagan temples and holy frescoes to tongue-in-cheek contemporary installations, the south is a seasoned culture vulture.
Southern Italy Today

Singing about his native city in his song ‘Napule è, musician Pino Daniele muses: ‘Napule è nu sole amaro’ (Naples is a bitter sun). This irony could easily encompass the whole of Italy’s Mezzogiorno (land of the midday sun). A region justifiably famous for its cultural cachet, celebrity-graced coastlines and gregarious locals, southern Italy is also one of the European Union’s ‘problem children’. In the face of soaring unemployment and suffocating corruption, a growing number of meridionali (southern Italians) are questioning their region’s future.

Best on Film

Il Postino (The Postman; Michael Radford; 1994) Exiled poet Pablo Neruda brings poetry and passion to a drowsy southern Italian isle and a misfit postman.

Matrimonio all’italiana (Marriage, Italian-Style; Vittorio De Sica; 1964) Sophia Loren and Marcello Mastroianni join forces in this comedy about a cynical businessman and his shrewd Neapolitan mistress.

Cinema Paradiso (Giuseppe Tornatore; 1988) A bittersweet tale about a director who returns to Sicily and rediscovers his true loves: the girl next door and the movies.

Best in Print

The Italians (Luigi Barzini; 1964) A revealing look at Italian culture beyond the well-worn clichés.

Christ Stopped at Eboli (Carlo Levi; 1945) Bittersweet recollections from a writer exiled by Fascists to a mountain village in Basilicata.

Midnight in Sicily (Peter Robb; 1996) A disturbing yet fascinating portrait of postwar Sicily.


Wanted: Work

While Italy’s economic woes continue to fuel anxiety throughout the country, it’s a headache that pounds strongest in the south. National unemployment may have reached a record high of 12.2% in mid-2013 but in southern Italy the rate was a significantly higher 20.1%. The number of jobless youth in Italy’s south is more than double that of the country’s wealthier north. And while the rate of NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) youths aged between 15 and 29 currently exceeds 20% nationwide, it peaks at a staggering 45% in the southern regions.

For a growing number of locals, the toxic cocktail of high unemployment and taxes, red tape and rampant cronyism is proving too much to take. Between 2011 and 2012 alone, the number of Italians emigrating to greener economic pastures rose 30%, from 60,000 to 79,000. The increase has been especially sharp for those aged between 20 and 40, desperate to forge careers in the more robust economies of northern Europe, Britain and beyond. Dubbed the ‘lost generation’, they are part of the so-called ‘brain drain’ – an exodus of highly qualified Italian graduates and professionals bidding the bel paese (beautiful country) a bitter-sweet arrivederci.

Migrant Challenges

While Italy’s unemployment crisis may be weighing heavily on the Italians, it’s an even greater burden for the country’s immigrants. Figures released by the Consiglio Nazionale dell’Economia e del Lavoro (CNE; National Council of Economy and Labour) showed the number of unemployed foreigners in Italy increased from 220,000 in 2008 to 385,000 in 2013. By mid-2013, the overall jobless rate for immigrants had reached 14.1%. According to the CNE, it’s a situation expected only to worsen as the number of job seekers grows.