

# Understand Southern Italy

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# Southern Italy Today

Singing about his native Naples in the song *Napule è*, the late 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 and natural splendour, southern Italy is also one of the European Union's problem children. In the face of soaring unemployment and suffocating corruption, an ever-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) Bitter-sweet 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.

**The Silent Duchess** (Dacia Maraini; 1992) A feminist-flavoured historical novel set in 18th-century Palermo.

## Wanted: Work

Italy's economic headache continues to pound strongest in the south. While the national unemployment rate hovered at just over 12% in 2015, the rate was closer to 22% in Campania, 21% in Puglia and 23% in Calabria and Sicily. The figures are especially grim for the young. Calabria and Puglia are two of the 10 worst areas for youth unemployment in Europe according to the European Union's bureau of statistics (Eurostat), with an unemployment rate of almost 60% in both regions.

The toxic cocktail of high unemployment and taxes, low salaries and rampant cronyism has become intolerable for a growing number of Italians. A staggering 94,000 of them moved abroad in 2013, close to double the number for 2007. And this is just the official figure, accounting only for those who officially registered a new address. The actual figure is estimated to be two to three times higher.

The increase has been especially sharp among 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 leaving behind a rapidly ageing population increasingly in need of a young, capable workforce.

## Seeking Asylum

As more Italians head for the departure gates, an ever-growing number of asylum seekers are piling onto boats in North Africa, bound for Europe. Roughly 62,000 migrants arrived in Italy by sea in the first half of 2015, with an estimated 1800 dying en route. Most are fleeing war, persecution and abject poverty in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, placing their lives in the hands of unscrupulous smugglers who cram them onto unsea-