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On the trail of the Mafia

See Sicily's most notorious criminal haunts and stay in homes confiscated from the Cosa Nostra – all without funding the Mafia.

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Addiopizzo

'A Mafia Tour of Sicily' may bring to mind images of tourists eagerly snapping away at Godfather movie locations – but the motivation behind the island's latest tourism venture is far more sobering.

The Mafia, or Cosa Nostra as it is known, isn't confined to movie legend – the violent criminal organisation which preys on ordinary Sicilians through protection racketeering is very much alive today.

"Around 80% of the island's businesses, notably those related to tourism, pay 'pizzo' or protection money to the Mob," says Edoardo Zaffuto, who co-founded the anti-Mafia movement Addiopizzo in 2004.

While many locals live in fear, a growing number of people like Edoardo have been fighting back over the last decade – and finding strength in unity.

Addiopizzo (which means 'goodbye pizzo') has encouraged more than 800 businesses, including restaurants, bars and hotels, to sign up to an anti-extortion charter – each proudly displaying a 'Goodbye Pizzo' sticker in their window.

"It sends a clear message that we won't be intimidated – and visitors to the island can eat, shop and sleep safe in the knowledge that their euros won't end up in the pockets of the Mob," says Edoardo.

As well as encouraging local businesses to stand up to racketeering, Edoardo has recently launched Addiopizzo Travel – which offers tours celebrating the natural and cultural wonders of Sicily, while also giving an insight into its darker underworld.



Addiopizzo

Laying your head in Corleone

Sign up to a tour with Addiopizzo Travel and you may well find yourself visiting Corleone – not to see locations in the Godfather (filming actually took place on the east of the island, in Savoca) – but to lunch at a property once owned by the Mafia.

State law has confiscated around 8,000 properties from members of the criminal organisation (1,235 acres of land have been reassigned in Sicily this way), many of which are now run by anti-Mafia groups such as vineyards, farms and guest houses.



Agriturismo Terre di Corleone

One such establishment is Agriturismo Terre di Corleone, a rustic farm complex situated among Cyprus tree-lined hills, just a short drive from Corleone.

The town, made famous by the movie, was previously home to two Mafia bosses: Bernardo Provenzano, the last undisputed 'boss of bosses', who was captured locally in 2006, and Salvatore 'Totò' Riina, a powerful Mob boss arrested in 1993, who was responsible for the most violent strategy in the history of Cosa Nostra between the 80s and early 90s.

It is now run by the anti-Mafia co-operative Libera Terra, and visitors can stay in simple but charming rooms converted from a stable where Riina – nicknamed 'The Beast' – once kept his animals.

Should you fear waking up with a horse's head in your bed, you'll be pleased to hear that Riina, who is believed to have personally murdered 40 people and ordered the deaths of several hundreds more, is currently behind bars serving multiple life sentences.



Libera Terra

Living from the land

While we can't guarantee you'll have sweet dreams, a stay at the agriturismo offers the opportunity to enjoy the gloriously secluded Sicilian countryside, along with the promise of delicious regional dishes, such as polpettine in agrodolce (meatballs in sweet and sour sauce) and spicy aubergine caponata (stew) made with organic products from lands confiscated from the Mafia.

The wine may taste delicious but it comes with an aftertaste. Gruesome history surrounds you in this part of the world. Take, for instance, the nearby vineyard used to produce the co-operative's wine label 'Centopassi', which was once owned by Mafia boss Giovanni Brusca.

Nicknamed 'The Swine', Brusca once said that he had committed between 100 and 200 murders but was unable to remember the exact number. The most sickening has to be the kidnapping and murder of an 11-year-old boy.

Brusca had Giuseppe Di Matteo, the son of an informant, kidnapped in 1993. According to the confession of one of the kidnappers, they tricked the boy by wearing police uniforms and saying he was being taken to see his father, who was being kept under police protection at the time.

Instead they held him for 26 months, during which time they tortured him and sent grisly photos to his father in an attempt to force him to retract his testimony. In the end, they strangled the boy and dissolved his body in a vat of acid.

The island's history has been undeniably dark – and there have been several acts of Mafia intimidation in recent times too – but there is now at least hope for ordinary citizens.

"On the one hand, Sicily wants to play down its negative associations with the Mafia, but at the same time, opening up the secrets of this criminal organisation to the world and taking a stand is the only way to stop their stranglehold," says Edoardo.

Addiopizzo launched with the slogan: "A whole people who pay the pizzo is a people without dignity." A decade on, it is good to see things are beginning to change.

More information

Getting there: EasyJet flies from Gatwick to Palermo and Catania; Ryanair flies from Luton to Trapani or Stansted to Palermo. British Airways flies from Gatwick to Catania; Thomson Airways flies from Manchester to Catania.

Tours: Addiopizzo Travel offers various itineraries including a Palermo walking tour and a Corleone tour, with lunch at Agriturismo Terre di Corleone, from €30 each.

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