

On board and at school with Frederick

The reasons why an increasing number of people from other countries decide to study the Italian language are not only professional ones. Often it is due to personal or perhaps cultural interest, frequently owing to a deep desire, almost an unconscious attraction, filtered in some cases by numerous memorable characters first in literature, then in the cinema, that that lie dormant in the memories of so many people.

In response to numerous requests from all over the world, a broad network of schools, reporting to the Italian Ministry of Universities and Research, have organised an equally broad variety of opportunities to learn Italian. For those who wish to start or continue learning Italian or to perfect their knowledge of the language, the automatic choice is undoubtedly Tuscany, the birthplace of the Italian language and significantly, home to the University for Foreigners in Siena.

Tuscany, however, is not the only option. The Laboratorio Linguistico in Milazzo, Sicily, offers a fun alternative. This certified language school, which was founded in 1994, is officially recognised by various institutions, including the ministry. The peculiar-



SUN, BLUE SKIES AND CLEAR WATERS. A COURSE IN ITALIAN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE SET AGAINST THE SPLENDID BACKDROP OF THE AEOLIAN ISLANDS, WHILST TRAVELLING THE SEAS IN LUXURIOUS SAILBOATS. STUDYING ITALIAN IN THE PLACE OF ITS BIRTH, AT THE COURT OF A PRINCE THAT THE WORLD MARVELLED AT FOR HIS GREATNESS

ity of the school is the circumstances in which the lessons are given. During the autumn, courses are held in a farm residence on the slopes of the Nebrodi mountains. Casa Migliaca is an old restored oil mill, which is cared for in grand style by the current owners Teresa Maria and Sebastiano. In the spring, lessons are transferred to the archipelago of the Aeolian islands. In the summer months however, the setting for the classes becomes the sea, on board a sailboat. The idea came to Francesco Zadda and Francesco Di Santi, the current head of the school and course coordinator, as they thought about the philosophers of ancient Greece, who gave their lessons in the open air, completely immersed in nature. The only difference is that instead of strolling around at the gates of Athens, in this case, students travel between Alicudi, Stromboli, Filicudi, Salina, Lipari, Vulcano and Panarea in luxurious sailboats. The course, which never involves more than 4-6 people at a time, includes 15 hours of lessons per week and takes place both on board the boat and on dry land. Each lesson lasts 45 minutes, fol-

lowing a timetable that is decided when the trip begins. The teacher is present at all times, on and off the boat, for the entire duration of the trip. The presence of the teacher makes it easier to continue practice outside of lessons, while preparing food in the galley, on a stop during an outing, or whilst basking in the sun on the splendid beaches.

At the end of the week's sailing, the learning experience can be integrated, before or after, with another module of the course, to be studied at the school itself. In order to combine linguistic learning with cultural background, students can attend seminars on art, history, cinema, music, traditions and cookery. All the accommodation reserved for students at the Laboratorio Linguistico is located in the city centre or the upper town of Milazzo. Students may choose to share a house with schoolmates or enjoy impeccable Sicilian hospitality by deciding to stay with a family.

Why choose Sicily as the place to learn Italian? Not everyone knows that it was the Sicilian School that took the first steps in bringing order to Vulgar Latin. The setting for this important linguistic evolution was the incredible court of Frederick II, Duke of Swabia, who was described as stupor mundi or "wonder of the world", due to his spiritual greatness. In the 13th century, men of letters and scholars from throughout the Mediterranean region gathered around the great prince and experimented with the idea of an Italian language, which was later picked up again by the Tuscan School.

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