

The Renaissance of Sicilian villages drives tourism / Many visitors are experiencing rediscovered heritage

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Palermo - Visiting a 'borgo' entails activating a form of immersion with all five of the senses highly aroused: in a village perched on the Madonie Mountains or stretched out comfortably above the sea, one looks, tastes, touches, smells and, above all, one listens: voices from the earth and from water, community tales, ancestral sounds that can come to life in a chalk cave where stories of kings, ladies and ingenious inventors are told.

The five senses, for sure, but one Sicilian village manages to go beyond that, and visitors know it, so much so that an increase in tourism - and not just in the traditional summer months - is tangible, with a rise of over 7 percent last year alone.

It attracts people looking for flowery alleys, a family that sets a table for you with products that taste like home, a 'scattered hotel': a word for everyone, a tradition which is not lost in Sicilian villages: an all-round, 360-degree experience. In recent years, Sicily has confirmed its status as a region with strong growth in village tourism, where the focus is on small towns rich in history, art and authenticity. And the clearest evidence of this is in the Rai Il Borgo dei Borghi contest: this year's winner is the baroque historic hamlet of Militello Val di Catania, with 7,000 inhabitants, 21 churches and UNESCO recognition since 2002 along with the Val di Noto; it is the fifth triumph, since the Borgo dei Borghi crown had previously been taken home by Gangi (2014), Montalbano Elicona (2015), Sambuca di Sicilia (2016) and Petralia Soprana (2018).

The victory has already had a tangible impact - the mayor of Militello, Giovanni Burtone speaks of a growing influx, "a flood of visitors at spring weekends". The Sicilian Region has used this success as a lever for sustainable and culturally aware tourism; but it is the entire Val di Noto - with Modica, Ragusa, Noto, and Caltagirone - that registered a 10 percent increase in overnight stays in extra-hotel facilities (b&b, inns, scattered accommodation) in 2024; and which grew by 15 percent between 2022 and 2025, thanks to demand increasingly oriented to the authentic experience. And there has also been continuous growth (+5%) for Montalbano Elicona (Messina) Borgo dei Borghi winner in 2015; about 40,000 overnight stays in Petralia Soprana (Palermo), which got the award in 2018, while Buccheri (Siracusa), although not winning, received the recognition of "best culinary destination" in 2021 and its agritourism facilities increasing by over 20%.

The villages are not only told by their stones, but also by their flavors: from Bronte pistachio PDO to Monti Iblei oil, PDO cheeses and Pat sweets, each product becomes a spark for an authentic experience. The Borghi dei Tesori network, which unites some 70 small municipalities in all nine Sicilian provinces in a single territorial regeneration project under the aegis of the Vie dei Tesori, one of the largest circuits to promote cultural and landscape heritage, amplifies the link between visits to cultural sites, food and wine tours, and meetings with local communities and artisans each year. The recipe is based in offering a focused but varied product: each itinerary (this year on spring holiday weekends) unfolds with churches, museums, ancient monasteries and traditions, small charming restaurants and artisan workshops. And young people are coming back: both the diverse community of digital nomads who choose places that offer a high quality of life (nature, affordable prices, good food, no metropolitan stress), combined with the possibility of working remotely; and many young people, initially forced to leave the region for study or work, have now decided to play the card of relaunching their family businesses, perhaps with a Third Millennium outlook; driving new investments and boosting local economies, thanks also to regional incentives.

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