

Sardinia in New York. A Way to Discover the Ideal Destination for Vacations

Marina Melchionda (October 08, 2008)



i-Italy interviews Luisanna Depau, Sardinia's Tourism Assessor. In a week full of events Ms. Depau, together with her significant delegation, has spread in New York and in the United States the beauties and traditions of this unique Italian region.

For the second consecutive year, Sardinia is sponsoring the New York Film Festival. How has your relationship with the city changed compared to last year?

In an effort to create a wider and more coordinated presence this year, we have organized a full week of events. Besides the [New York Film Festival](#) [2] we have also sponsored the Condé Nast Building where the most important issues of [Condé Nast Traveler](#) [3] magazine – which many Americans consult when planning their trips – are collected.

We have devoted a great deal of attention to promoting our region's cuisine by preparing typical Sardinian dishes, and our land and natural resources by presenting rare photographs and documentaries dedicated to our region's beauty.

This week we had the opportunity to present the movie *Sonetaula* by Salvatore Mereu, which I think above all, testifies to the uniqueness of our culture. Set in 1938, the characters – all played by non-professional actors – communicate in the Sardinian dialect while the audience can follow the plot with the help of English subtitles. More than 850 people attended the screening and at least half of them stayed for the discussion that followed.

We also presented the movie *Sonos e Memoria*. It was shot about 20 years ago and still remains, in



my opinion, one of the most beautiful expressions of Sardinian culture. It can be described as a collection of black and white archive images from the [Istituto Luce](#) [4]. They date back to the 1930s and 1950s and show ordinary, hard-working people such as farmers, sailors, and housewives who wash laundry on the river's edge and embroider.

They are testimonies to a past that is still part of Sardinia's present....

Yes, these scenes are still part of our daily life. Our costumes, our traditions are intact. This is why we are glad that the American people welcomed the movie so warmly. The screening was also enriched by a live soundtrack performed by famous Sardinian artists: Paolo Fresu, a world-renown jazz musician and Luigi Lai, a 76 year-old man who is responsible for reviving interest in the *launeddas*, a traditional Sardinian woodwind instrument, by teaching it to younger generations. Thanks to the school he founded, you can now hear its music from coast to coast. Finally, Elena Ledda – a major proponent of traditional Sardinian music – provided her voice for the soundtrack along with other well-known singers.

Most importantly, our week in New York has us allowed to present traditional Sardinian handicrafts to the American public. This initiative will culminate with an event that will take place in Cagliari in March, 2009. It will involve more than 200 artisans coming from several Mediterranean countries.

Only artisans?

Yes, because we are trying to enhance the interaction between artisans and the architecture, construction, and fashion industries. We want to find a way for these ancient craft techniques can be used in contemporary production.

Will American companies be involved?

Yes, this is why we chose to launch an exhibit dedicated to Sardinian handicraft here in New York. This way it would be easier to attract American architects and designers. For example, the work of Sardinian embroiderers could be utilized, at least in part, by the fashion industry. This is part of a larger project to promote Sardinian culture internationally.

So how we should view Sardinia? Is it a tourist destination or a land of culture?

I think that we should think of tourism as a container: you can decide to take a trip to relax on the beach or to explore a new place. While Italians and Germans see Sardinia mostly as a sea destination, those who fly for nine hours to get there might want to know more about its land, history, and traditions. Americans who just want to get a suntan usually go to Hawaii or the Caribbean. And although Sardinia is called the "Caribbean Island of the Mediterranean Sea," we want to give tourists much more. We want to share with them the "real" Sardinia and make their vacation more of a cultural experience. People must have a strong motivation to cross the ocean and come here. I think that we are the perfect destination for the American people: being isolated from the rest of the world for the longest time, Sardinians have kept and preserved their own language, their own recipes and cooking traditions.... This can be really exciting to explore....

How do you introduce Sardinian cuisine to America? Do you present it as a part of Italian cuisine or do you promote it independently, as a distinct regional tradition?

We are presenting and offering typical products from our region. However, we do it in collaboration with the [Italian Tourism Board](#) [5] which represents the entire nation. Italian cuisine, in effect, is built on a number of local cooking traditions. Even if Americans do not distinguish them, we want to introduce them to the taste of Sardinian products.

What kind of relationship do you have with the Sardinian community in New York? It is a strong group, but it is also very small....

Yes, it is very small. I must admit that with the loss of Bruno Orrù, the community's former official representative, our relationship has weakened. However, his successor has been great and little by



little we are building new bridges between us.

During this week, the Carta Foundation organized an event to celebrate the anniversary of Maria Carta's death. She has spread your traditional music throughout the world while enhancing communication between Sardinian emigrants and their homeland.

Yes, music really keeps our culture alive wherever we go. The Carta Foundation is a bridge between our island and the community that settled in New York. We share the same mission: to promote and preserve Sardinian culture. The events, however, are organized in partnership with local New York groups while ours are a collaboration with ENIT.

So what is your response to these nine days in New York City?

I am glad because I feel that the American public finally got to know a little bit more about Sardinia. We do not have a large representation here in New York but I am sure that although there are only a few Sardinians here, they still manage to do the job of thousands of people. I want people to talk about us. I want to attract tour operators and introduce them to our millenary culture so that they can encourage tourists to explore the richness of our island with an open mind. Moreover, our current artistic production is significant. Our leaders, our writers are doing great things. And our entrepreneurs, I must say, are helping to build the image of a modern Sardinia but one that still continues to look back on its past.

Are you coming back in 2009?

I hope so, but nothing has been decided yet.

(Edited by Giulia Prestia)

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- [3] <http://www.cntraveler.com>
- [4] <http://www.nmis.isti.cnr.it/echo/partners/ILmain.html>
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