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Enjoy a Mafia-free trip to Sicily

How to support cafés and shops whose owners have taken a stand against the Mob



Palermo is fighting back against the Mafia corruption

Catherine Nixey

A family-run pizzeria in Sicily. Pretty cloths cover the tables. Salsa music on the radio. As I finish my food, Giovanni Impastato, the rotund and bright-eyed owner, sits at my table. But he hasn't come to talk about the pizza. He has come to talk about how his uncle and his brother were murdered by the Mafia.

"I was playing in the road when my uncle was killed by the car bomb," he says. "I was metres away. I remember the 'boom'."

The onomatopoeic word feels embarrassingly childish in the context. "I did nothing then. But then they killed my brother, Peppino." He pauses. "From that moment on I put fear aside."

I am in Palermo, Sicily's capital, on an anti-Mafia holiday, to meet Impastato and others who have "put fear aside" to defy the Mob. I will eat, drink and sleep only in Mafia-free establishments.

I had thought of the Mafia largely as bogeymen from a bygone era, Tinseltown terrors from a time when men wore spats and homburgs. So it was with a sense of adding some pleasingly safe spice to my bourgeois life that I booked the trip, run by the anti-Mafia movement Addiopizzo Travel.

Addiopizzo is an ethical collective that in the past few years has persuaded Sicilian businesses not to pay the *pizzo*, the protection money demanded by the Mafia. The name means "farewell, *pizzo*". Their tour takes in places and people who, like Peppino, have resisted the Mob.

Before I leave, I read a little about the Sicilian Mafia and my enthusiasm wanes. I learn that in the international corruption rankings, Italy ties with Saudi Arabia in 63rd place, a few places ahead of Colombia. In the early Nineties Palermo was so dangerous that it was under nightly curfew. I learn that the first man who publicly refused to pay the *pizzo* was shot dead.

On the flight, my fellow travellers (all bronzed businessmen) do little to allay my fears. I have seen *The Godfather*. I know that tans with ties are not good news. I take consolation from my anonymity: even if they are all mobsters, they won't know that I am a mole in their midst.

As I land, Edoardo Zaffuto, a founding member of Addiopizzo and my guide, phones. "I'm waiting at the barrier for you," he says. "I'm wearing an Addiopizzo T-shirt." Excellent.

Pleasingly, I am not executed on arrival and we drive to Palermo, where my trip begins with a tour. Zaffuto points out the house of a Mafia boss and the site where a judge was killed by a car bomb. But in the windows of many shops are signs of hope with the stickers of Addiopizzo.

The movement began with these stickers five years ago. "My friends were thinking of opening a bar," Zaffuto says. "As they drew up the accounts, they realised that, as well as paying electricity and gas, they would have to pay the *pizzo*."

The friends decided to act. One night they covered Palermo in sloganed stickers. "We were scared," Zaffuto says. "In a city like this, all eyes are Mafia eyes. We went out at 3am, in balaclavas, to stick them up." They weren't caught and the city awoke to read the phrase: "A whole people who pays the *pizzo* is a people without dignity."

People reacted with support. "Everyone was talking about it," Zaffuto says. Over the following nights the friends stuck more stickers and won more allies.

Businesses started to refuse to pay. The friends uncovered their faces and Addiopizzo was born. Now there are hundreds of *pizzo*-free businesses from which to choose. Best of all, the Addiopizzo shops — antique focacceria, chocolatiers and wine bars — are all extremely stylish.

I ask Zaffuto if he is ever frightened. "I was at first," he says. "We all were. But now we have support and that, I think, protects us. Things can change very quickly, though. All it takes is one bomb; one killing, and people will be scared," he says. "But we have hope."

As we leave I notice an Addiopizzo sign. And I think that the Sicilians have more than hope — they now have dignity.

? *Alitalia* (08714 241424, *alitalia*) flies to Catania and Palermo, from £177 return. Addiopizzo (addiopizzotravel.it/eng) will find you a *pizzo*-free hotel, B&B or agriturismo property. The Addaura Hotel (addaura.it/engl) has B&B doubles from €89.

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