



Sardinia. Sea, Culture, Traditions, Unique Way of Life

Letizia Airos Soria (April 28, 2008)



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Ms. Depau spoke with particular efficacy, to an audience of tourism insiders, about a destination that is still mostly unknown to Americans.

From her first words she painted a picture of a Sardinia where nature, traditions and even its variegated linguistic heritage remain largely unspoiled. This ancient and rare integrity is definitely an attractive element for the American tourist, ever more attentive to the cultural and historical heritage when visiting a European country.

The ancestral traditions of Sardinia, the charm of its ancient traditions, the extraordinary beauty of its nature and its monuments, the effortlessness of its cuisine, seem to come to life in a very inviting video. At the end the councillor commented: "the only thing this video is missing is the smells.". Sardinia is in fact a real concerto of colors, images, sounds, but also of aromas and scents.

After the screening of the video Ms. Depau again spoke of the rare historical heritage of her region. Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Romans, Arabs, Byzantines and Spaniards all landed on this splendid island. The Sardinian population has known how to enrich their culture with these influxes and create a real cultural treasure.

Assimilating and revising different influences that weren't hidden or superimposed on one another but were instead integrated. It is an island that holds many secrets, one of which is longevity. For this reason the Sardinians have been the focus of international research.

In Sardinia we find ourselves on the line between a sense of eternity and the knowledge of being

able to touch in

the present the same past, witness to the future. The millenary 'nuraghi' seem to be



sentinels between sea rocks, beaches, the woods, churches, museums, archeological trails.

The Minister for Tourism, Luisa Anna Depau, shared with us in a short interview the promotional activities of Sardinia in the US, without glossing over the difficulties.

"One of the problems that an American tourist is sure to find when he decides to come to Sardinia, is the absence of a direct flight. We are working on getting that. We are in talks with Eurofly - together with Meridiana which is based in Olbia. It's important that we have already been able to achieve a New York - Rome - Cagliari or Olbia for example, where you only have to go through check-in once, even though there is a connecting flight.

We are working hard to get direct flights from various European cities. In four years, we have been able to go from five to twenty-six European cities. We are also actively working on improving the infrastructures, especially the rail system".

Who is the prototypical tourist for a region like Sardinia?

"The American market is tremendously vast. I think our island first of all, is quality destination, made for high-end travel. And fortunately this is a sector that hasn't felt the repercussions of the falling dollar. Starting from the very famous Costa Smeralda, Sardinia is known as a destination for elite tourism. There are prestigious five-star and many four-star hotels on all of its coasts."



But Sardinia is also a beautiful island in the interior. How do you introduce that? In Europe, as a tourist destination it is compared to a Caribbean island in the Mediterranean. Can its interior, together with its history and culture, be a further element of attraction for Americans who have the Caribbean so close?

"Yes it's true. We are known first of all for the sea. The tourism economy is based on this. But now we are focusing on promoting the rest of the island as well. The real wealth of Sardinia is its culture, its traditions, its unique way of life. I think we have to aim at having year-round tourism, with well-distributed fluxes."

What have you done and what will you continue to do to present Sardinia to the US?

"We started this very important operation last year. It had been fourteen years since the region had last reached out to this market."

And in September we were the main sponsor of the New York Film Festival, with a series of events. Next September we will sponsor it again and we will organize 'Sardinia week' with cultural events together with Columbia University.

In the meantime we are putting our tourism workers in touch with American tour operators. Thanks to ENIT twenty of them will come to Sardinia at the end of April.

We are looking for specific possibilities, like for example the New York Festival, for promotional events. We are looking for connections to introduce other aspects of our regions, like our books, film, music, folklore, art. Few people know for example two Sardinian artists that were very famous in the US, Costantino Nivola (1911-1988) and Albino Manca (1898-1976)."



And how important is the presence of the Sardinian community in the US?

"I am particularly saddened by the passing of the President of the Shardana club, the Sardinina association here. Bruno Orrù was a very special person. It was a huge loss for us. But we are counting a lot on what he was able to build. The Sardinian presence in the US is a huge support for our projects. Last year they helped us a lot."

Also this week in New York, the Councillor presented in the New York offices of the Istituto Nazionale per il Commercio con l'Estero (National Institute for Foreign Commerce) an event on artisanal work that will take place in the month of October in Cagliari



i. It is a fair with 200 artisanal businesses from the Mediterranean basin.

"The concept is that Sardinia has a rich artisanal tradition, but a lot of this work is not justly compensated. The idea is that of passing the skills into the industries of design, fashion and other sectors. Using these old techniques for new goals, we are inviting architects, artists, designers, interior decorators."

The next stop for the Minister in her North American tour to promote Sardinia is Toronto.



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