



SICILIAN SPLENDOR: Rebuilt after a devastating earthquake in 1693, the old town of Ragusa Ibla features in the Inspector Montalbano series

The REAL star of TV's Montalbano

Bridget McGrouther discovers Sicily: more rugged and charismatic than the...



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...paddling close to an abandoned tuna fishery – again recognisable from Montalbano. The morning in picture-perfect Modica is memorable for a private tour and tasting at the famous Bonajuto chocolate kitchens. Afterwards, a few brave souls in our party even climb to the hilltop cathedral and pretty Palazzo Polaro.

There's more fun in Scicli, where the town hall doubles as Montalbano's police station and we get an informative tour of the interior film set, posing for pictures behind his desk.

The most popular pilgrimage site for fans is Montalbano's seaside home at Punta Secca, known as Marinella in the stories. The fishing village has familiar landmarks such as its lighthouse and the bright blue and yellow Enzo a Mare sea-front restaurant that is another of the inspector's favourites.

Near the main square, recently renamed Piazza Montalbano and close to a bust of author Camilleri, who died last year aged 93, we discover Montalbano's home, a beachfront villa with its familiar green shutters and sweeping balustrade balcony. The place is now a B&B (lacasadamontalbano.com) and the location is sublime.

Set on a sandy cove, the property is just as idyllic as it is on the screen. And how easy to imagine the charismatic Montalbano returning home for a refreshing dip after a tough day's work.

SICILY may be awash with Unesco World Heritage Sites (seven, including Mount Etna) but the unspoilt south-eastern shores of this Mediterranean island have a more contemporary appeal thanks to the success of fictional detective Inspector Montalbano.

Jumping from the pages of Sicilian author Andrea Camilleri's best-selling novels and inspired by his homeland, the TV adaptation has millions of fans around the world, including Britain.

Italian actor Luca Zingaretti, who plays Montalbano, is undeniably as charismatic as Sicily's bronzed, untamed and rugged landscape, yet it's the latter that is proving the real star of the show as the backdrop to his enviable lifestyle.

Who wouldn't fancy a stroll on the beautiful beach just below your own terrace? Or regularly dine at waterfront restaurants on fresh seafood, washed down with good wine? No matter how gruesome a case may be, it never seems to put Montalbano off his food.

An escorted easy walking tour is a brilliant way to work up an appetite and explore Montalbano's Sicily. I joined about 20 British travellers aged 50-plus, including solo guests, couples and friends, as we left the Hotel Il Barocco in Ragusa, led at a gentle pace by our Adagio tour leader.

The baroque city of Ragusa, our impressive home for the week, is simply breathtaking. Rebuilt after a devastating 1693 earthquake, this sprawling city is now divided into two parts – the old town of Ragusa Ibla, which clings to the gorge below the more modern Ragusa Superiore, with its panoramic views. No wonder this extraordinary region stars as the fictional Vigata in the drama.

Montalbano and his girlfriend Livia's first date began at a bus stop in Ragusa Ibla, so it seems apt that our tour starts by catching the bus to the hilltop Ragusa Superiore. We stand in awe of the views, above terracotta tile roofs, church spires and bright blue domes.

AS WE slowly make our way down through hidden alleyways, historic gems are pointed out as well as areas that feature in the Montalbano stories. From the palm-lined park avenue of Giardini Iblei, where the inspector meets a former thief; the neo-classical Circolo di Conversazione, where Montalbano interrupts coroner Dr Pasquano's card games; and the captivating Piazza Duomo, with its outstanding baroque cathedral – the Duomo of San Giorgio, a backdrop for many episodes.

Relaxing in the square, enjoy a coffee as the inspector works is idyllic. At lunch we see Montalbano's favourite such

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