

'Now it's continuous noise': Italy's Crusoe adjusts to life off his island

Level: Intermediate

1 Warmer

- Listen carefully to your surroundings for one minute. Make a note of all the sounds you hear.
- After one minute, talk about the sounds you heard. How did each sound make you feel: happy, sad, annoyed, relaxed, angry, etc.?
- Do you prefer to have sounds (e.g., the radio, colleagues, cars outside) around you when you work, or do you prefer to work in silence?

2 Key words

- Find words in the article that match the definitions below. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

- a place where people are protected from bad weather or from danger
_____ (para 1)
- getting used to a new situation by changing your ideas or the way you do things
_____ (para 2)
- stops you from concentrating on something else _____ (para 3)
- made to do something that you don't want to do _____ (para 4)
- the state of being completely alone, especially when this is pleasant or relaxing
_____ (para 5)
- the belief that it is good if people buy and use a lot of goods and services
_____ (para 7)
- with no people living there _____ (para 8)
- someone whose job is to look after a large building or other place
_____ (para 9)
- looking very clean, tidy or new _____ (para 9)
- damaged by people walking on it in a heavy, uncaring way _____
(two words, para 13)

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b. Use some of the key words above to complete these sentences.

1. The children loved getting up early and making footprints in the _____ snow.
2. The _____ unlocks the school gates every morning at seven.
3. The video game machine in the hall _____ the students from their studying.
4. We built a temporary _____ out of tree branches.
5. The farmer was _____ to sell off his land.

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Angela Giuffrida

3 August, 2021

- 1 Every morning for 32 years, Mauro Morandi woke up and saw a sea view and was surrounded by nature and wildlife. His home was a former Second World War shelter on Budelli, the tiny Mediterranean island where he lived alone.
- 2 Now the 82-year-old is adjusting to life in a one-bedroom flat next to a shop, surrounded by neighbours. He can just see a tiny bit of the ocean in between the buildings opposite his flat. He now lives on La Maddalena, the largest of an archipelago of seven islands off the north coast of Sardinia, Italy.
- 3 Morandi said: "I became so used to the silence. Now it's continuous noise ... music, motor scooters, people ... it distracts you so much that you don't have time to think."
- 4 In April 2021, Morandi, a former sports teacher from the northern Italian city of Modena, was forced to leave Budelli, where he knew every rock, tree and animal species.
- 5 People from around the world send him messages. One read: "Mauro, the master of solitude." Journalists call him for quotes or because they hope to write a book or make a film about him.
- 6 "I thought that after I left Budelli, nobody would talk about me anymore," he said. "Instead, journalists keep calling."
- 7 Morandi had always dreamt of living on an island. In 1989, he decided to sail to Polynesia to get away from consumerism, politics and other aspects of society. But soon after leaving mainland Italy, a technical problem with his boat forced him to stop in La Maddalena.
- 8 He decided to work on the island to pay for the boat repairs. But when he saw the nearby uninhabited island of Budelli, Morandi realized his paradise was much closer to home.
- 9 He heard that the island's caretaker was about to retire, and so Morandi sold his boat and took over the job. He guarded Budelli, cleared its paths, kept its beaches pristine and taught summer day-trippers about its ecosystem.
- 10 Tourists cannot stay on the island overnight, and they may not walk on the island's pink beach from where sand was often stolen, but they are allowed to walk along a path behind the beach. They were often surprised to come across the sole inhabitant, nicknamed Robinson Crusoe after the castaway in Daniel Defoe's novel.
- 11 His food arrived by boat from La Maddalena, and he had a homemade solar system for his lights, fridge and internet connection. During winter, when there are no visitors, he spent his days collecting firewood, reading and sleeping.
- 12 Morandi's life continued in this way until the private company that owned the island went bankrupt.
- 13 Budelli is now managed by La Maddalena National Park authorities. There is no caretaker, only CCTV cameras. Morandi recently went back there to collect some belongings. "It was a disaster," he said. "The beaches were trampled on. I knew this would happen. There is nobody there any more to educate the tourists."
- 14 Morandi is sad but accepts that it was time for him to leave Budelli. "Last winter was very hard. It rained a lot, there was hardly any sun to power the electricity ... for three months, I ate out of tins. I'm 82 and life there became more of a challenge. I have a bad leg and it was difficult to walk – if I had fallen on one of the rocks, there would have been nobody there to help me."
- 15 Now he has a new hobby – he takes photos of the architecture on La Maddalena – and he wants to see his three daughters, who live in Modena. "I'll never regret the choice I made to live on Budelli, but it wasn't an easy one," he said. "My daughters were adults when I went to live on Budelli and I thought they accepted it ... later I realized they hadn't. One daughter didn't speak to me for four years. We only recently started talking again."

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3 Comprehension check

a. Choose the best option, a, b or c, to answer the questions.

1. How long did Mauro Morandi live by himself on the island of Budelli?
 - a. all his life until April 2021
 - b. more than 30 years
 - c. three months

2. Why did he leave his job and home in Modena?
 - a. He wanted to get a new job as a sports teacher.
 - b. He wanted to live nearer to his daughters.
 - c. He wanted to get away from the lifestyle of the people around him.

3. Where did he plan to go and how did he want to get there?
 - a. He planned to go to Sardinia by train and boat.
 - b. He hoped to walk to the beach with pink sand.
 - c. He wanted to sail in his boat to a quiet island very far away.

4. What did Morandi do in his job as caretaker of Budelli?
 - a. keep the island clean and educate tourists
 - b. run a small hotel for eco-tourists
 - c. use his boat to take day-trippers to the island

5. Where did Morandi live in Budelli?
 - a. in a one-bedroom flat
 - b. in a simple house without electricity
 - c. on his boat

6. Why was he forced to leave the island?
 - a. There was no electricity.
 - b. The company that employed him went bankrupt.
 - c. He started to find it difficult to walk.

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7. Who or what looks after Budelli now?
 - a. There is a new, much younger caretaker.
 - b. The national park authorities fly drones over the beaches.
 - c. There are cameras that watch what tourists are doing.

8. What does Morandi plan to do now?
 - a. sail to Polynesia
 - b. visit his daughters in Modena
 - c. write a book or a film

4 Language – the third conditional

- a. **Find and underline this sentence in the article.**
if I had fallen on one of the rocks, there would have been nobody there to help me.

- b. **Put a tick in the box next to the correct explanation.**
This grammatical structure tells us about ...
 - something that happened.
 - something that could still happen.
 - something that might have happened in the past, but didn't.

- c. **Think of other ways to continue the first part of the sentence.**
If Morandi had fallen on one of the rocks, ...

5 Discussion

- a. **Discuss the questions.**
 - Why do you think Morandi has been called 'the Master of solitude'?
 - For how long do you think you would like to live completely alone on an uninhabited island like Budelli?
 - How have the noise levels changed where you live and work in the last five, ten or 20 years?
 - What noises would you prefer *not* to hear your daily life?
 - What would you like to do when you retire?

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6 In your own words

- a. Plan and hold a group presentation about the seven islands of the La Maddalena archipelago. Divide the islands up between pairs or small groups so that everyone has something to say. To help you plan your presentation, fill in the box.

Name of the island	
Where it is exactly	
Its size	
What natural features it has	
Who lives there	
How you get there	
Can tourists visit it and stay there	
What types of animals and plants live there	
What makes this island different to its neighbours	

7 Further reading

- a. Read and discuss this second article from the *Guardian* about the sand on Sardinia, the archipelago and Budelli in particular.

Sardinia's seasonal crimewave of sand thieves by Angela Giuffrida, The Guardian,
<https://www.theguardian.com/uk>