

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

Level: Advanced

1 Warmer

- Listen carefully to your surroundings for one minute. Make a note of all the sounds you hear.
- After one minute, compare your notes and talk about what you heard. Which of the noises were pleasant, which were reassuring, which were slightly annoying, etc.?
- Do you prefer to be surrounded by sounds when you work, or do you prefer to work in silence?

2 Key words

- Write the correct word(s) from the wordpool next to the definitions below. Then find and highlight them in the article to read them in context.

delegate	distract	entwined	eviction	exasperated
harsh	hitch	pester	pilfered	pristine
scuppered	trample	tussle	uninterrupted	wane

- not hidden/obscured by anything so you can see a long way _____
- get your attention and prevent you from concentrating on something else

- become weaker or less important _____
- keep annoying someone, especially by asking them for something or asking them to do something

- give a task to someone else to do for you _____
- extremely annoyed and impatient because things are not happening in the way that you want

- when someone's plans or hopes of success are ruined or spoilt

- a problem that does not seem very serious or big _____
- something that looks very clean, tidy, or new _____
- stolen, especially from a place where you work _____
- caught up in something; deeply involved in something _____
- a disagreement between two people who are both trying to get or to achieve something

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13. the process of forcing someone to leave the place they are living in

14. put your feet down on something in a heavy way that causes damage

15. a word that describes conditions that are unpleasant and difficult to live in

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

1. The bike was still in _____ condition when he sold it.

2. If the plans go ahead, over 300 families will be facing _____.

3. The video game machines in the hall _____ the students preparing for their exams.

4. 'Why don't you ever listen to me?', she asked in an _____ voice.

5. Apparently the last of the printer ink had been _____ months ago.

6. The kids _____ me all the time to take them to the pool.

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In late April 2021, Mauro Morandi left Budelli after living alone there for 32 years

Angela Giuffrida

3 August, 2021

- 1 Every morning, Mauro Morandi woke up to an uninterrupted sea view. Immersed in nature, he was intimately in tune with the dawn sounds and habits of the wildlife that surrounded his home, a former Second World War shelter on Budelli, the tiny Mediterranean island where he had lived alone for more than 30 years.
- 2 Now the 82-year-old is adjusting to life in a one-bedroom flat next to a shop, surrounded by neighbours and with only a glimpse of the ocean in between the gaps separating the buildings opposite on nearby La Maddalena, the largest of an archipelago of seven islands off the north coast of Sardinia, Italy.
- 3 Speaking from his new home, Morandi said, "I became so used to the silence. Now it's continuous noise ... music, motor scooters, people ... it distracts you so much you don't have time to think."
- 4 More than three months have passed since Morandi, a former PE teacher from the northern Italian city of Modena, was forced to leave Budelli, where he had come to know every rock, tree and animal species.
- 5 He had expected the public's fascination in his life to wane after his departure; instead, it has grown. Fans from around the world continue to send him messages. A recent one read: "Mauro, the master of solitude." Journalists still call him for quotes or in anticipation of writing a book or making a film.
- 6 "I thought that after leaving Budelli, nobody would talk about me any more," he said. "Instead, you journalists keep pestering."
- 7 Asked why he thinks the intrigue in him is so intense, Morandi replied: "It's as if people delegated me to do something they would never have the courage to do."
- 8 Morandi had always dreamt of living on an island. Exasperated by consumerism, politics and other aspects of society, in 1989 he decided to set sail for Polynesia in search of his idyll. But his journey to the South Pacific was scuppered soon after leaving mainland Italy due to a technical hitch on his catamaran, forcing him to anchor in La Maddalena.
- 9 He decided to work for some time on the island to pay off the cost of the boat and fund the rest of the trip. But then, after clapping eyes on the nearby uninhabited Budelli, Morandi realized his paradise was much closer to home.
- 10 In a twist of fate, the island's caretaker was about to retire, and so Morandi abandoned the trip to Polynesia, sold the boat and took over the role.
- 11 For the next two decades, he guarded Budelli without trouble, clearing its paths, keeping its beaches pristine and teaching summer day-trippers about its ecosystem.
- 12 Tourists have been banned from walking on the island's pink beach, from where sand was often pilfered, and swimming in the sea since the 1990s, but can visit during the day via boat and are permitted 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.
- 13 Food was delivered to him by boat from La Maddalena, and a homemade solar system powered his lights, fridge and internet connection. During winter, when there are no visitors, he spent his days collecting firewood, reading and sleeping.
- 14 Morandi's life continued in much the same rhythm until the private company that owned the island went bankrupt. In 2016, a Sardinian judge ruled the island be put back into public hands.
- 15 Until his departure in late April, Morandi was entwined in a lengthy tussle with La Maddalena National Park authorities, which now manage Budelli, as he fought eviction.
- 16 Budelli is now guarded by 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."

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- 17 Still, as he reflects over his life, Morandi accepts that maybe it was time to leave Budelli. "Last winter was very harsh. 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 a struggle to walk – if I had fallen on one of the rocks, there would have been nobody there to help me."
- 18 The last few months have given him time to nurture a new hobby – he takes photos of the architecture on La Maddalena – as well as to repair relations with his three daughters, who live in Modena. "I'll never regret the choice I made 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 ... it was only later that I realized they hadn't. One daughter didn't speak to me for four years. We only recently started talking again."
- 19 The day after our meeting, Morandi left for Modena to visit his family. "The experience of Budelli is over," he said.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions in detail with information from the article.

1. How long did Mauro Morandi live by himself on the island of Budelli?
2. Where had he originally planned to go to and why didn't he get there?
3. What coincidence enabled him to stay on Budelli for so long?
4. What were Morandi's tasks and responsibilities as caretaker of Budelli?
5. Where did Morandi live in Budelli, and how did he cook?
6. Why did he find his last winter on the island difficult?
7. What has happened on Budelli since Morandi left?
8. What does Morandi plan to do in his retirement?

4 Key language

a. Find the following phrases from the article. The paragraph numbers will help you.

1. when you spend most of your time doing it or thinking about something (2 words, para 1)
2. at one with something (3 words, para 1)
3. seeing something for the first time (3 words, para 9)
4. when something interesting, strange or coincidental happens by chance (4 words, para 10)
5. return something that was privately owned to the state to be publically owned (5 words, para 14)
6. caught up in a long battle or argument (5 words, para 15)

b. Now use the phrases to talk about the article.

c. Finally, choose the ones you would most like to learn to use well and write one or two example sentences for each.

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

- In general, do you prefer to live and work by yourself or amongst many people? Why?
- How much more do you find yourself wanting peace and quiet than you did five, ten, or 20 years ago? How have the noise levels changed where you live and work in this time?
- What noises would you like to eliminate from your daily life?
- What would you like to do when you retire?

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6 In your own words

a. Follow the steps to create a group presentation about the seven islands of the Maddalena.

1. First, decide as a group what the general content of your presentation should be.
2. Then decide who will research and present which elements by dividing up the topics between pairs or small groups. Your aim is to hold a 30–40-minute group presentation of the islands and area featured in this article.
3. Write a general overview so that each pair or small group knows where in the whole class presentation their part will be.
4. Decide how long each pair or group will speak for in the presentation.
5. Research and create your part of the group presentation.
6. Finally, hold (and record if possible) your group presentation.

Make sure everyone knows exactly how many minutes they have in the final presentation, e.g., five minutes per pair or group x seven groups = a 35-minute group presentation.

7 Further reading

a. Read and discuss this second article from the *Guardian*, which focuses on the archipelago and Budelli in particular.

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