

A WINNING CONCEPT

The Italian cooperative La Tramontana has invented a brand new business sector, the so-called ichthyotourism, which is more than a mere agritourism based on seafood tasting, as it actually involves a number of cultural and recreational activities. Massimo Miato reports.



La Tramontana is an Italian cooperative located right in the middle of the beautiful historical centre of Trapani, very close to the Mediterranean Sea. Apart from the extremely favourable position, what makes La Tramontana particularly interesting is that it has actually invented a brand new kind of cultural and food tourism business – the so-called ichthyotourism – which involves seafood tourism as well as cultural and recreational activities, including of course fishing and discovering the natural beauty of the local area.

Mr Natale Amoroso, president of the cooperative society, explains: “The suc-

cess of our innovative business idea is based on our ability to exploit the exclusive competences and experiences we had previously developed throughout our years of hard work. Our cooperative was only founded in 2006, but all of our people have long-term experience in both the seafood and fishing sectors. This means that, when we talk about our business, we highlight the fact that it is essentially based on fishing and related activities. These activities include a deep knowledge of the beautiful Mediterranean Sea, as well as a certain attention to local food and local cookery, which are both highly appreciated by our customers.”

Positive reviews

The cooperative society’s choice to promote the cultural side of Italian sea cuisine has proven to be a wise one. According to Mr Amoroso, “Our activity has already gained international praise. For example, early this year we’ll appear in the renowned and prestigious Italian food magazine ‘La Cucina Italiana’, with an issue describing one of our most successful dishes made entirely from local fish. Also, we’re glad to announce that La Tramontana was praised by Romanian, German and French food specialists, and that we currently appear on the well-known Michelin guide to hotels and restaurants. We have even received positive reviews from Japanese food journalists, which shows how investing in quality is as important for us as our development of the innovative idea of ichthyotourism.”

The cooperative provides its customers with a number of exclusive services, including tasting and selling local seafood and agricultural products, and organising▷





activities that mix cultural and recreational issues. A good example of such activities is the so-called 'fishing tour', which involves living a day in the life of a fisherman, and exploring the natural beauties of the Trapani coast. Mr Amoroso says: "The services we provide our customers are definitely unique, owing in part to the close connection between our fishing activities and the food we put on our tables. Our customers can try varieties of fish that it would be very difficult to find elsewhere. It is important to us that our cuisine is based on local, traditional dishes, since we think that getting to know a territory should involve becoming familiar with its history, and food is definitely an important part of the traditions of Sicily."

Culture

The goal of the cooperative society is to spread the culture of sea fishing by putting visitors in contact with traditional fishing habits, including using hand-made nets and

fishing tools currently stored in the firm's museum. But the attention to traditional methods does not prevent la Tramontana investing in technologically advanced solutions. Mr Amoroso states: "Our boat is currently equipped with cutting-edge fishing technologies which allow us to protect the environment at the same time. Also, our ichthyotourism is equipped with the most advanced systems for ensuring top level cleanliness and health. For example, our cooperative only operates according to the 2004 Reg (CE) 852 e 853 parameters for cleanliness, as well as to the 2002 Reg. (CE) 178 traceability standards and the HACCP food safety principles."

Sustainability is also important for the Italian firm. The president states: "We are aware that the correct use of seafood resources is one of the most crucial issues of the Mediterranean Sea, and that, as an ichthyotourism company, it is our duty to protect those resources whilst also pro-

viding our customers with top quality food. That's why we've invested a lot in sustainable development; we think that the sea is our most important resource, and that it is the quality, rather than quantity, of fish we catch that is important."

What next?

The next step in the development of the cooperative will see it increase the range of services it has on offer. Mr Amoroso explains: "We are planning to introduce bedrooms in our offer, so as to increase the range of services we provide our customers. We've managed to become a point of reference in the agritourism sector because we have introduced a very strict bond of quality between food production and food distribution. We are confident of our future because we've seen that more and more people are interested in our activity. The local tourist offices are supporting us, since we are a perfect example of revolutionary business achieved through traditional customs." □

