

## An 'Italian Sabbatical' in Grottole

Maria Klein (June 06, 2019)



The small Italian village of Grottole, is getting ready to host five volunteers selected by Airbnb to become temporary residents as part of its "Italian Sabbatical." This initiative is to revitalize the village that is at risk of disappearing.

The Mayor of Grottole Francesco De Giacomo called the project a "one-of-a-kind opportunity," for his town of only 300 residents. [Airbnb](#) [2] together with [Wonder Grottole](#) [3] have been hard at work in attempting to save the village.

This southern Italian town is suffering greatly from depopulation. Today there have been counted more than 600 empty homes within the village. Many inhabitants have left and continue to do so putting the place in great risk of becoming a ghost town.

Unfortunately this problem is not just affecting Grottole, research conducted by [Legambiente](#). [4] Italy's institution that tracks the state of the national environment, shows that over half of the country's smallest villages are in danger of disappearing within the decades to come. 2.430 places,



today home to 3 million Italians, destined to vanish, because no one will be living in them anymore.

Grottole, however, is not going to sit back and watch this happen, with the aid of Airbnb and Wonder Grottole the town is setting into action a new project going by the name of, the "Italian Sabbatical."

To participate you only need to be at least 18-years-old and willing to live in Grottole for three months, from June to August 2019. The chosen candidates will enjoy an all-expenses-paid stay in the village, where they will become part of the fabric of the community and, therefore, be responsible for helping revitalise the town.

"Our dream is to repopulate the historic centre of Grottole," said Silvio Donadio, a founder of Wonder Grottole. "Within 10 years we'd like to see the village full of people from different cultures, perfectly integrated with the local community."

News of the Italian Sabbatical project travelled the world, and over 280,000 people applied to be selected for the project. Locals have already prepared homes to host the five volunteers who were chosen, and the volunteers will have a full schedule of activities involving the entire village.

"Even if I had had 100,000 euros to invest in marketing, I never could have gotten the same results in terms of visibility," De Giacomo said. "I hope the trend of depopulation, which is afflicting many small Italian villages, can be slowed. And I hope the can-do spirit I see today among the people in my community also stays," he said. Enza, an inhabitant of Grottole says "I've always lived here, and I'll never leave."

The project offers to the volunteers the opportunity of learning about craftsmanship, agriculture, language, culture, and food from people who grew up mastering these professions.

Rocco Filomeno, a local beekeeper, said: "People who arrive here from big cities will find an ancient village surrounded by woods and meadows. We'll encourage them to leave behind their old lives and to connect with our way of life."

Through the "Italian Sabbatical," Grottole is hoping to provide their guests with an opportunity of a lifetime. They will be able to engage in a lifestyle that functions on a slower, less stressful pace while learning life skills at the same time. The ambition of the project is to revitalize the beautiful village of Grottole and everything it has to offer.

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### Links

[1] <http://newsite.iitaly.org/files/grottolejpg>

[2] <https://www.airbnb.com/>

[3] <http://www.wondergrottole.it/index.html>

[4] <https://www.legambiente.it/>