

In focus

This month BABILONIA in Sicily, Italy falls under the In focus spotlight. Director and founder Alessandro Adorno give us an insight into the school while their overseas agents tell us what they think.

Information pack

Year established: **1992**

Type of school: **year-round**

School location: **Taormina in Sicily**

Max. student capacity: **96**

Total no. of classrooms: **six**

Max. class size: **eight**

Total number of qualified language teachers: **10**

Top student nationalities at Babilonia in April: **German, 22%; Austrian, 15%; Japanese, 8%; Swiss, 6%; French, 4%; and Spanish, 4%**

Min. age of students: **17 years**

Min. length of course: **one week**

Facilities located at Babilonia include: **student lounge; library; computer; roof-top terrace**

Does the school have any other branches? **No**

Type of accommodation: **host family; shared student apartment; private apartment; bed & breakfast; hotel**

Maximum number of students placed in same host family: **one**

Max. travel time from accommodation to school: **15-20 minute walk**

For what activities is your region well known? **Sightseeing; archaeology; walking and hiking; traditional food; wine growing; the beach**

No. of activities/excursions organised per week: **(min) three**

Any excursions included in the course price? **No**

Length of time to travel from nearest international airport: **45 minutes**

Two weeks Italian tuition and shared apartment (self-catering): **30,000 lira**

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Q Why did you set up Babilonia?

A After a number of years in Florence at ABC Centro di Lingua e Cultura Italiana, it became obvious to me that many students were fascinated by Sicily and wanted the opportunity to study there. Being Sicilian, I knew my home had a lot to offer in terms of natural, historical and cultural diversity. In 1992, I opened my school in Taormina with the encouragement of my colleagues at ABC and, since then, Babilonia has doubled enrolments each year.

Q What is the philosophy behind your language school?

A We believe that language is real and alive and, as such, should be presented through the use of authentic materials. Our programme of study is designed upon three objectives: to make the language as accessible as possible; to speed up the process of acquisition as much as possible; and to maintain the authenticity and meaning of the language presented in the classroom. We also believe that using language outside the classroom is the key to a rewarding study abroad programme. With this in mind, we offer a full extra-curricular activities schedule with films, seminars, games, dinners and other organised activities.

Q What is the most rewarding moment in the school's history?

A A rewarding moment in the school's history came at the end of our July session, when one of our students, a teacher herself, wrote us a letter. She had felt guilty about not dedicating more time to the survey we ask students to complete at the end of each course. In her letter, she wrote directly to each of the people who had contributed to her experience at Babilonia. When I read her letter I felt proud of my staff and of my school. And I thought, "This is exactly what I started Babilonia for."

Q Give an example of a student problem you have encountered and tell us how you dealt with it?

A Two summers ago, we had a student who was not satisfied with the method of teaching. She said that she had not come to play games and get to know fellow students. Having studied the "old fashioned" way myself, I understood this student's discomfort with our methods. So, I told her that I would

Agent viewpoint

Martha Lugar, Oekista, Austria

We have been sending clients to Babilonia since 1995, and they always come back with very positive impressions of the school and Taormina itself. They generally say that it has a friendly atmosphere and very good teachers. They also enjoy the small friendly town, seaside and climate.

Anette Herzog, Fee-Sprachreisen, Germany

When we have special requests about certain courses, questions concerning accommodation or any other queries, we always receive a very quick answer – within a few hours – with the detailed requested information. The school has shown a high grade of professionalism with its language programme.

Martha de Wolff, Italia Viva, The Netherlands

In 1996 I sent four students to Babilonia, but have not sent them any recently. All the students who go there come back with very positive impressions. The staff at Babilonia are very kind and have always responded to our requests immediately.

Mariella Romagnoli-Schmitt, European Language Schools & Travel Agency, Germany

Our students are very satisfied with the school. They like the library and the study centre with video and TV, and the terrace with the wonderful panorama. They also like the small groups – of eight students – and the professionalism of the Director, Mr Adorno. We like working with Babilonia very much because they always meet the needs of the students in their lessons, for accommodation and the social programme.

supply her with plenty of materials proposing the exact type of activities she desired and would be happy to meet with her after class to go over them. A few weeks later, we received a long letter from her agency, indicating that the student had complained. Fortunately, the agency also operates a school and understood every word of my 27-page response, and our good working relationship continues today.

Q How do you see your school developing in the future?

A I see us expanding into other markets, especially the UK and the USA. To this end, US university credits are now available to our students. We are also planning a business executive course, Italian cooking, and possible, archaeology and nature study tours. There are so many possibilities in Sicily!