# Sicily: the dive center in the depths of the Almadrabas

That you're on an island, you know right away from the light, and even if this is a big island, the sea is always telling you where it is. You see it appear in a flash of intense blue among the palm trees, the bougainvilleas, at the bottom of a steep embankment, or in the sudden glimmer of an unhinged front door. You sense it in that portion of sky that recalls so strongly the ocean and the deserts. Every single thing, in Sicily, seems to possess a pattern of gold and shade. In Palermo, unexpected groves on the seashore and Villa Giulia weave a strange conspiracy with the shadows, almost as if trying to mystify the presence of the sea.

The sea, this deep blue presence, has nourished the island in every possible way, with sustenance and legends. It still does, now as then, in spite of the fishing crisis, thanks to the efforts of many scuba diving professionals, who are trying to transform these shorelines, now packed with tuna trap museums, into a magnificent playground for lovers of the sea and its creatures. They are succeeding by giving scuba diving gear, know-how, and safety standards to the enthusiasts coming from many different parts of the world. Nowadays, eco-tourism and scuba diving have a lot to give, but it takes courage. These are hard times for tourism and the Italian diving industry, which for years now has gone through a kind of crisis, yet in Sicily there are those who still have faith. In Milazzo, in front of the world-renowned Aeolian Islands, three young marine biologists have placed their Blunauta Diving, determined to show the world the beauties of this stretch of sea.

Continuing on with our pickup truck towards Isola delle Femmine, we meet the guys from ASD Jaques Cousteau; they are scuba diving instructors, passionate naturalists, and also marine biologists, equipped with full-face masks to be able to communicate with the schoolchildren on the surface, and speak live about the value and meaning of the underwater world to those who cannot dive. But it's not an easy life. They're up against old traditions, legendary but nowadays damaging. Even if there is an established MPA, Area Marina Protetta di Capo Gallo Isola delle Femmine, the fish market, right on the dock, is always abundant with the daily catch. The sea becomes depleted because there are still fishermen who fish illegally. They would have once been Ulysses, or Santiago, praised heroes of bygone times. Now, they look like they've broken out of mythology with their faces and hands baked in the sun, their smiles of leather, and their blue eyes. They don't want to surrender to the end of an era.

In Santa Flavia a sign on the country road points to the boat club. We pass under an archway and start descending following steep curves. The two worst ones force our hefty pickup truck to make a couple of maneuvers. I barely have time to catch a glimpse further down, towards the sea where a bay opens up, calm and flooded with light, slightly rippled offshore by the fresh breeze. We park. The light and the silence are typical of warm places, thick with the scent of myrtle and rosemary; the sea close-by. A long line of anchors was placed tidily on the lawn. The large hooked shapes find their place between the eye of the beholder and the line of the horizon, solemn like a platoon of aligned statues. We are in the old tuna trap of Santa Flavia, where the anchors are all that remain to remind us of an ancient ritual, in a place almost sacred.

Here, at the Blue Aura Diving Club, among the remnants of an ancient tuna trap, dozens of scuba divers are gathering. It is a time of great excitement, meeting old friends and new buddies. We're all here for the event that is about to begin.