



Exclusive interview

Charles Spencer

My shocking childhood abuse

Magazine



I still want sex but I don't need marriage

Marie Helvin at 71

Magazine



Church 'playing race card'

Ex-equality tsar criticises CofE's slavery fund and says Britain is less divided than 40 years ago

Alice Thomson, James Beal
Kaya Burgess
Religious Affairs Correspondent

The Church of England's £1 billion slavery reparation fund is "almost like bribery", the government's former race tsar said, as he defended Britain as much less racist than 40 years ago.

Lord Sewell of Sanderstead, chairman of Boris Johnson's Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, claimed that the church had made a "political

decision to start the fund and was doing it "for show".

In January last year the Church of England announced a £100 million fund to give grants to and invest in projects to benefit black communities. It came after a report found that a significant proportion of the church's wealth of £10.3 billion could be traced to investments in the 18th-century slave trade.

An independent panel set up to design the fund said last month that £100 million would be "insufficient" to address

the "enduring harms from enslavement". It recommended that the church seek contributions from wealthy families and pension or sovereign wealth funds to boost the value to £1 billion.

The church initially resisted calls to describe the fund as "reparations", but has since accepted that the term can be used to refer to funding for projects designed to tackle racial inequalities that can be traced to the slave trade.

In an interview with The Times on the release this week of his book, *Black*

Success: the Surprising Truth, published under his name, Tony Sewell, the Tory peer said the Archbishop of Canterbury and senior clergy should instead focus on getting people back into church.

"We need to have a conversation with the Archbishop [of Canterbury] and ask what he is doing," he said. "It would be so much better to focus on bringing people back to a time when the church was packed.

"They need to repair their base but Continued on page 2

SCRUM



Mission impossible?

England's Six Nations finale

NEWS

Our Week by the royal press office

According to Hugo Rifkind

MAGAZINE



The Gen Z baroness

who wants to abolish the Lords



Russian voters under Putin's watchful eye

CCTV coverage of polling booths is monitored at Russia's Central Election Commission headquarters as voting begins in the three-day general election. With President Putin virtually guaranteed victory, some expressed their opposition by throwing petrol bombs at polling stations or pouring ink inside ballot boxes Sabotage blights Putin's rubber-stamp elections, pages 36-37; Stalin's heir, leading article, page 25



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'The design details are joyous, from the yellow-striped shirts of the bartenders to the art'

Sarah Turner at a hotel putting Savannah on the map

GETTY IMAGES, ALAMY

Isola Bella, Taormina



25 great escapes to Sicily

Gorgeous villas in the hills, culture in Taormina, nightlife in Palermo, wine tasting and more. **Sean Newsom** knows where to go

Last April I drove 650 miles around Sicily, the whole island flushed green with spring, and I'm still pinching myself in disbelief. The sun shone. Thunderclouds rumbled over the mountains. Rain poured intermittently — and on every day the island served up another slice of wonder that was every bit as varied as the weather.

Doric temples, towering sea cliffs, black-soiled vineyards, baroque piazzas, luxurious hotels, gritty suburbs, fresh snow on Mount Etna: did I really see them all on a single island? Or have I conflated every memory I have of Italy and squished them into a single week? Either way it's an experience I'll be

feeding on for years to come — digging ever deeper into the island's layer cake of history, landscape, food and sunlight.

And now it's spring once more and I'm not the only one hearing Sicily's siren call. Freed from its mafia reputation the island is hot property these days — and a wave of farmhouse conversions, new-build villas and designer hotels has swept over its hilltops and along its coastlines, ready to make our holidays comfortable and indulgent as well as captivating. Never mind the hype that built last year around the Four Seasons hotel in Taormina, the star of the *White Lotus* TV series. Beyond its hallowed portals, one



Saline dello Stagnone nature reserve, Marsala

of Sicily's most welcome trends is the rebirth of its *baglios* — the hilltop farming complexes that are now wineries and olive oil presses as well as atmospheric, richly textured hotels. By no means are all of them expensive.

Alongside those you'll find agriturismo B&Bs and reconconditioned farmhouses, as well as gorgeous villas, big and small. Add in all the escorted and self-guided tours on offer this year, and it seems the holiday scene is almost as multifarious as the island itself. Here, I've collected

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► some of its most tempting elements. But please bear one thing in mind if you're hatching a Sicilian plan. High season here can be fearsomely hot. Last July temperatures peaked at almost 47C and wildfires raged around the capital, Palermo. So if extreme heat isn't your thing, and if you plan to be active in either thought or deed, make this an April-June or September-October destination. There are wondrous things to be seen. You don't want to miss them sheltering indoors with the air con on.

Rustic cottage for two near Cefalu

There may be other villas dotted around on this stretch of the north coast near Mazzaferno, and not far from Cefalu, but at Villa La Giarra 2 you'll think you have the sea to yourselves. This rustic cottage perches on a low rocky promontory, looking straight down onto the beach, while a thick belt of macchia bushes provides shelter from both the sun and nosy neighbours. The terrace is cobbled and the interior colourfully tiled, while the sighing of the waves is an ever-present invitation to go for a swim. **Details** Seven nights' self-catering for two from £1,030 (emmvillas.com). Fly to Palermo

Luxury estate hotel near Mount Etna

Coaxed back to life over the course of five years, the 62-acre Relais & Châteaux property Monaci delle Terre Nere is a lovely example of the island's new breed of luxury estates. Around its 18th-century country-mansion hotel are a kitchen garden, 15 acres of vineyards, and barns and stables that have become chic villas. Expect knobbly walks and 21st-century furniture, as well as a mineral tang to the wine — a product of Etna's volcanic soils. Taormina and Siracusa are within an hour's drive. **Details** Seven nights' B&B from £1,900pp, including flights (expedia.com)

Tour of ancient sites and agrotourism

Slow Sicily is the theme of this new self-guided tour from Palermo, which wisely gives you 11 days to wiggle through the island, with plenty of time to put your feet up in wine estates and country hotels in between the driving. En route, you'll get a dazzling sense of the island's diversity — snacking through Palermo's street markets (the arancini are non-negotiable), swimming off the Egadi Islands, exploring Selinunte's temples and wandering baroque Ragusa. It'll take weeks to unpack all the memories. **Details** Ten nights' B&B from £2,260pp, including flights and car hire (originaltravel.co.uk)

Converted abbey in the Madonie mountains

Relais Santa Anastasia, a former abbey in Castelbuono on the edge of the Madonie mountains, offers a taste of Sicily's grandeur and tranquillity without the usual price tag. Yes, the bedrooms could do with an update, but long hours of slack-jawed gazing await from the poolside terrace, interspersed with cookery classes and tastings in the abbey's winery. Here, you're within sight of the sparkling Tyrrhenian Sea. Wind down the mountain roads to see Cefalù's tightly packed coastal streets. **Details** Five nights' B&B from £837pp, including flights and transfers (italia.com)

Photography course near Marsala

Towering sea cliffs, azure horizons, teeming markets. Sicily is full of eye-catching subjects, and on this one-week course from April 27 the photographers Andreea Elle Vas and Matt Arnold will help you to capture them. Talks and workshops will cover both people and places, while one-on-one tutorials will give guests the chance to discuss their work and tackle technical or thematic issues. Throughout, the small Casameo villa complex near Marsala will be your base, with Palermo and Trapani on the day-tripping menu. **Details** Seven nights' full board from £2,900pp (responsibletavel.com). Fly to Trapani

Off-season solos tours

Feasts await on canny Snapshot of Western Sicily tours for single travellers, which stick to the quieter side of the island and avoid the scorching heat of high summer (there are departures in April, September and October). Options to choose from as you sortie from your seaside base at the Tonnara Di Bonagia resort include cheese-tasting near the Doric temple at Segesta, a culinary walking tour of Palermo and a visit to a Marsala winery. Expect a mix of guiding, socialising and time on your own — with no single supplements. **Details** Seven nights' B&B from £1,645pp, including flights (newmarketholidays.co.uk)

Volcano walking tour to Stromboli and Etna

Never mind the wine or the history or the Mediterranean; Sicily's mind-bending sense of otherness rests on the vast, looming cones of its volcanoes. This self-guided Volcanoes of Sicily walking holiday knits together three of them, with hydrofoils and taxi transfers bridging the considerable gaps in between. You'll fly into Catania, before being whisked to the magnificent Aeolian islands of Stromboli, Lipari and Vulcano, and then back to Mount Etna. Expect friendly and characterful three-star hotels, and a shuddering sense of what lies boiling beneath us. **Details** Seven nights' B&B from £1,859pp, including flights (theadwater.com)

Apartment in Siracusa

Could there be a cooler self-catering perch than this high-ceilinged apartment that has been stripped back to its plaster



Palazzo Previtara, Linguaglossa



Castello Di Venere, Trapani

walls? When you open the French windows at Casa Ortigia you can look straight down on Siracusa's open-air food market and decide what fruit you fancy for breakfast. It's the perfect overture to a day wandering this ancient city — clenched tight as a fist on its little island and brimming with history. Sieges, tyrants, Archimedes, Caravaggio — in the past 2,750 years it's seen them all, as well as stunning sunsets almost every night across the Porto Grande. **Details** Three nights' self-catering for our from £664 (welcomeyond.com). Fly to Catania

Spa resort on the southwest coast

On a blissfully underdeveloped stretch of coast, southeast of Sciacca on the western side, the Adler Spa Resort offers a green-tinted modernist aesthetic that's rare in Sicily. Here, many of the low-slung bedrooms are built into the bluffs, Mediterranean plants sprout on restaurant roofs and unbaked clay walls help to regulate room temperatures. The emphasis throughout is on healthy living. So don't spend too long gazing out to sea from one of the infinity pools. You'll miss out on all the yoga, mountain biking and sea kayaking. Or maybe a hot-stone massage in the high-tech spa. **Details** Seven nights' B&B from £2,089pp, including flights (expedia.co.uk)

Chef-led food tour to Catania and beyond

If you're wondering why the slopes of Mount Etna have become a gastronomic hotspot, let the British restaurateur and food writer Ben Tish enlighten you. From May 23, the author of *Sicily: A Love Letter to the Food of Sicily* is leading a five-day workshop that will include a guided chef's tour of Catania's food markets, as well as vineyard and farm visits, olive oil tastings and foraging walks. Accommodation will be in the Palazzo Previtara in Linguaglossa, a town on the north side of Etna, inland from Taormina. Painstakingly restored, it blazes with

unexpected colour and eye-catching contemporary art. **Details** Four nights' full board from £2,950pp, including workshop and tours (emotionsicily.com). Fly to Catania

Rustic villa for six in Montalbano

As the name suggests, the countryside escape, Villa Montalbano, sits in the region popularised by everyone's favourite Sicilian policeman — BBC's *Inspector Montalbano*. Here in the deep south, life moves at an unhurried pace, as will you, after a couple of days' lounging by the pool and stretching your alfresco dinners long into the night. The interiors mix exposed stone walls with big, slouchy sofas and a modern kitchen. But you won't be spending much time indoors. The nearest sandy beach is only four miles away. The baroque town of Scicli, in a canyon, is close too. **Details** Seven nights' self-catering for six from £1,837 (theluxurytravelbook.com). Fly to Catania

Slick hotel in Noto

Sicily's country-estate hotels come in many forms. Il San Corrado di Noto is as sleek as an ocean-going liner and twice as luxurious. All the accommodation is in suites and villas and even the entry-level rooms are palatial. Think gleaming marble bathrooms, walk-in closets and a private terrace that leads inexorably to the soothing water of the pool. Banana

trees, palms and cypresses provide plenty of shade and the baroque streets of Noto nearby offer a magnificent even a private beach club, served by the hotel's shuttle bus. **Details** Five nights' B&B from £2,375pp, including flights and car hire (scotttdunn.com)

Culture and nightlife in Palermo

Central Palermo has become a wonder of the modern Mediterranean. At night,

its long pedestrianised streets seethe with sauntering Sicilians — who seem as dazzled by the nightlife as the tourists are, piling into piazzas to drink beer and Aperols. Then, during the day, its street markets, churches and museums encourage yet more walking. What a relief then, to be able to cool your feet in the plunge pool at the Bastione Spasimo. The cute, richly textured hotel occupies a former 15th-century bastion in the fashionable district of Kalsa — and is handy for the wonderful, tiny bars of the Via Alessandro Paternostro. It's so busy down there



Cycle to Portopalo di Capo Passero, the island's southernmost tip

after dark, that everyone ends up sitting on the kerb. **Details** Three nights' room-only from £434pp, including flights (expedia.com)

Cycling the Val di Noto

Starting in the baroque town of Palazzolo Acreide and finishing on Siracusa's ravishing island of Ortigia, this easygoing cycle tour loops down to the Isola delle Correnti at Sicily's southern tip. The terrain is undemanding and the longest leg is only 36 miles, with plenty of opportunities to wander baroque towns and swim in the sea. But even so, you won't want to be cycling in the heat of high summer. April or May are best, when the island is still flushed with its spring greenery. **Details** Six nights' B&B from £935pp (maccasventure.com). Fly to Catania

Sporty seaside resort in the southwest

Yes, this is one of Sicily's swankiest seaside resorts, complete with supersized bedrooms, a giant spa and four restaurants, near Sciacca in the south west's Agrigento province. But what's most exciting about Verdura Resort's 570-acre spread are its sports facilities and the teachers they attract. Over Easter Erik Galloni will be leading hip-hop dance classes. In August the Olympic gold medalist Elisa Di Francisca can teach you how to fence. And in between, young footballers can hone their skills on a Juventus-designed training programme while mum and dad improve their golf swing and tennis. **Details** Seven nights' B&B from £1,182, including flights (britishairways.com)

Rural tour of the south

To get a proper sense of Sicily's splendour, you need to do some touring. This rural, self-drive circuit comes from an island specialist and knits together three pretty small hotels. They're all well clear of the tourist honeypots, but close enough to make day-tripping a cinch. The chic Relais San Giuliano is handy for Etna's vineyards; at the Masseria Agnello you'll find an atmospheric mix of rough stone walls and country-house furnishings ten miles from the Valley of the Temples; and the Hotel Borgo Pantano puts Siracusa on your doorstep. **Details** Seven nights' B&B from £1,010pp, including flights and car hire (justsicily.co.uk)

Villa for four with a cinema near Cassibile

The small but sleek Villa Val di Noto has a video projection screen, so your terrace can become an outdoor cinema after dark. And just south of the villa lie the waterfalls and archaeological remains at the Cavagrande del Cassibile nature reserve, while the wild beach at Marchesa di Cassibile, at the end of the canyon, is one of the best in the area. Back at base, you can take a final swim in the villa's pool before cooking pizzas and making the day's biggest call: which movie shall we watch tonight? **Details** Seven nights' self-catering for four from £1,099 (sawdays.co.uk). Fly to Catania

Dramatically set hotel near Taormina

You don't have to be an American gazillionaire to enjoy Taormina.

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