Italy: Sicily

Tour-Only Itinerary

The largest island in the Mediterranean, Sicily is an undeniable natural beauty that boasts a diverse blend of history and culture. Each town of this Italian island conveys a unique identity and character. Syracuse is a landscape of important Greek and Roman monuments, while in Monreale, you'll discover Norman-French, Byzantine, and Arab influences. Trek the slopes of Mt. Etna, through fragrant forests and across corridors of hardened lava. Stay in sophisticated estates with lush gardens, ideal for a relaxing stroll. Fuel your walking tour of Sicily with Mediterranean meals, savoring the flavors of local olives, artichokes, nuts, and fruits. Join Country Walkers on one of best guided tours of Sicily and discover this land of long summers, ancient culture, and amazing cuisine.



Highlights

Stroll amid the ancient walls and columns of the Syracuse Archaeological Park with an expert historian, visiting the park's famed Roman amphitheater along the way

Adventure across the slopes of Mt. Etna – Europe's largest active volcano – hiking trails through wildflowers, and overtop a hardened lava flow

Stay vineyard-side at the Planeta Estate, savoring fine cuisine made from family recipes and sampling celebrated vintages of the estate's own wine

Discover one of Sicily's greatest cultural treasures, the Cathedral of Monreale, perched on the slope of Monte Caputo



Activity Level

This tour is one of our Fully-Guided Walking Adventures, rated easy to moderate, with an average of 4 to 8 miles per day. Maximum elevation gains and losses during the walks range from 500 to 1,000 feet. The highest altitude on the tour is 9,514 feet and is reached via a *funivia* (gondola) ride on Mt. Etna. There are daily ascents and descents that can be steep in sections and challenging due to uneven footing. The terrain is varied—along cobbled streets, dirt roads, well-maintained trails, sandy or rocky coastal paths, and lava flows. The pace on this tour is leisurely, allowing for stops en route to explore villages, natural areas, and cultural and historical sites.

DAY 1

Join your *Italy: Sicily* tour

Mt. Etna; 2-4 miles, moderate to challenging, 800-ft. (maximum) elevation gain and loss*

Your guide(s) meet you at the UNA Hotel Palace at 9:00 a.m. in the lobby. Your guide(s) will be wearing a Country Walkers shirt. Please be dressed for walking.

You depart Catania for Mt. Etna, whose majestic cone is the highest mountain in Sicily and one of the largest active volcanoes in Europe—over 11,000 feet high and occupying an area larger than metropolitan New York—the mountain presents a fascinating alpine environment with its combination of nature and the uncontrollable essence of fire. Your first destination is the Rifugio Sapienza (at 6,348 feet) on Etna's southern slope. A range of walking routes (with a maximum elevation gain/loss of 800 feet) are weather- and volcano-dependent and may include a funivia (gondola) ride to the alpine station (at 9,514 feet) from where you have panoramic views over the southern promontory of Etna and the basin of Catania, as well as a view to the main summit of the mother volcano of Etna and Monti Silvestri, Monti Calcarazzi, and Montagnola—three side craters that are testament to the volcano's activity. Alternatively, you may embark on an adventurous climb through pine forest, crossing a corridor of hardened lava flow. A simple lunch of Sicilian specialties is provided at the nearby rifugio (alpine refuge).

This afternoon you transfer to your nearby home-away-from-home for the next two nights: a family-owned country boutique hotel set amid grapevines and citrus groves. Settle in, and then gather for a welcome *aperitivo* poolside, followed by a delicious dinner that features the best of Sicilian cuisine.

Accommodation: Zash Country Boutique Hotel & Spa, Archi/Riposto

DAY 2

Mt. Etna's northern slope

4-6 miles, moderate to challenging, 500-1,000-ft. (maximum) elevation gain and loss

Following a delicious breakfast, begin your day with a drive to Mt. Etna's quieter and more picturesque

northern slopes. Walk options today are again weather- and volcano-dependent and may include adventurous climbs to the fairly recently formed craters of Monte Nero and the Bottoniera, or through Linguaglossa pine forest, crossing a corridor of lava flow. (Maximum altitude for the walk options is approximately 7,000 feet.) Weather permitting, you are treated to a Sicilian-style picnic lunch of crusty bread, sun-soaked tomatoes, fruit, cured meats, and local cheeses.

Almost constant activity from this volcano has gifted its slopes with fertile soils for agriculture, orchards, and vineyards. Mid afternoon finds you at one of the many emerging wineries on Etna's slopes, where you're treated to a tour and tasting at one of the most successful and recognizable cellars in the Etna region. The location affords excellent views of the vineyards on one side and of the volcano on the other.

You return to your country house hotel to refresh before reconvening for a simple evening meal at one of our favorite local trattorias and the opportunity to savor a flavorful pasta or pizza, topped off with a *gelato* of your choice.

Accommodation: Zash Country Boutique Hotel & Spa, Archi (Riposto)

DAY 3

Oasi Nature Reserve at Vendicari

4-7 miles, easy to moderate. Syracuse Archaeological Park; 1-2 hours, easy

Your day begins with a (two-and-a-half-hour) drive to one of the most beautiful spots in southeastern Sicily: the Oasi Nature Reserve at Vendicari, a complex of coastal marshes and a serene sandy beach. Depending on the season and time of day, the beach provides a protected home for large populations of migratory birds such as ducks, white egrets, black storks, and even European flamingos. Footpaths lead through the salt fields of the Pantano Grande to an abandoned tonnara (tuna factory) and the ruins of a Norman tower known as the Torre di Vendicari. From here, the view embraces the entire reserve, from the splendid isle of Vendicari to Capo Passero in the distance. Depending on the weather, you may be enticed to take a swim! Arriving on foot at a family-owned agriturismo (agricultural farm estate), you enjoy a meal of regional specialties, including grilled vegetables; local Sicilian provola, pecorino, and tuma cheeses; and freshly made pasta.

Following lunch, you continue on to Syracuse. At one time rivaling Athens as the most important and powerful city of the ancient world of Greater Greece, known as Magna Graecia, modern-day Syracuse is a UNESCO World Heritage site and the cultural and administrative capital of southeastern Sicily—an area known for its extravagant baroque architecture, historic ruins, gastronomic delights, beautiful landscapes, and beaches. Your first stop is the Parco Archeologico della Neapolis, where you enjoy a guided tour with a local expert. Syracuse's Archaeological Park is a treasure trove of important Greek and Roman monuments, including the spectacular 5th-century BC Greek Theater, one of the finest and largest of its kind, still hosting Greek plays in the summer months. Nearby is the 2nd-century Anfiteatro Romano, the largest Roman amphitheater in Sicily and third-largest in Italy after the Colosseum in Rome and the amphitheater in Verona. Unlike the Greek Theater, the Roman Amphitheater bore witness to gruesome events, such as gladiator fights and slave punishments.

Late afternoon, you reach Ortigia, the historic heart of Syracuse and your home for the night. Upon settling into your room, set out for an evening of independent strolling and dining. You may wish to wander through the Piazza del Duomo, acclaimed as one of Italy's most beautiful squares. At one time the acropolis of ancient Greek Syracuse, this elegant piazza is ringed by exquisite baroque buildings, constructed after the 1693 earthquake. Its centerpiece is the Duomo (cathedral), the city's best example of the successions of evolving architectural styles that have shaped it over the centuries. The cathedral's baroque facade disguises the 5th-century BC temple of Athena; however, 26 of the temple's Doric columns remain intact and are visible both inside and outside.

Accommodation: Ortea Palace Luxury Hotel, Syracuse

DAY 4

Necropolis of Pantalica

4-7 miles, moderate, 1,000-ft. elevation loss

After an elaborate breakfast buffet of fruit, yogurt, fresh pressed juices, omelets, a variety of cured meats and cheeses, and distinctive Sicilian pastries like croissants with pistachio cream, you depart for one of Sicily's most fascinating nature reserves and archaeological sites, the Necropolis of Pantalica. A plateau rising between the canyons of the Anapo and Calcinara rivers, it was inhabited from prehistoric times to the Middle Ages. The burial grounds carved in its steep rock walls comprise the largest complex of its kind

in Sicily, with more than 5,000 tombs dating as far back as the second millennium BC. You walk through a dramatic river-carved landscape of limestone formations, luxuriant in colorful, fragrant Mediterranean vegetation.

Nearing midday, a short transfer delivers you to another traditional Sicilian lunch at a nearby family-owned restaurant and agriturismo. Dishes are derived from locally-sourced, seasonal ingredients and reflect the ancient traditions of the Anapo Valley. By mid-afternoon, you continue on a two-hour drive to the outskirts of Caltagirone, where you find your home away from home—a simple yet beautifully renovated Sicilian stone farmhouse located in the open countryside amid towering palms, olive trees, and neighboring forest. Following time to settle in to your room or relax by the outdoor pool, a feast of traditional specialties, perfectly paired with local Nero d'Avola red wine, is served in the warm, wood-beamed dining room.

Accommodation: Agriturismo Vecchia Masseria, Caltagirone

DAY 5

Mount Ganzaria and Villa Romana del Casale

4 or 7 mile options, easy; 1-3 miles, easy

After awakening in the peaceful countryside and eating breakfast, you have the option of enjoying your inn's facilities (including the Jacuzzi) or setting off on foot to neighboring Mount Ganzaria on one of two walks of varying distances. The mountain derives its name from the Arabic word for wild boar, yhanzaria, because of boars' abundance on the mountain in ancient times. This area has been settled from the prehistoric age until the present. Your route includes a Byzantine necropolis and takes you through vegetation of cork oaks, eucalyptus, walnut groves, dwarf fan palms, and orchids, inhabited by foxes, porcupines, and weasels. Broad views on one side look over the Catanian plain and, on the other, toward southern Sicily.

Returning on foot to the masseria (farmhouse) for a light lunch, you then take leave of it and transfer a few miles to the magnificent Villa Romana del Casale, considered the most important Roman archaeological site in Sicily. This Roman villa or hunting lodge, now a UNESCO World Heritage site, was built around the 3rd and 4th centuries (AD) and is known for its extraordinary collection of mosaics, in various stages of restoration. Walkways take you through some of its 40 rooms that are carpeted with 4,200 square yards of

magnificent mosaics depicting vivid scenes from mythology, hunting and fishing, and various aspects of everyday Roman life. Concluding your visit, you return to the estate for a relaxing evening and another delicious dinner.

Accommodation: Agriturismo Vecchia Masseria, Caltagirone

DAY 6

Riserva Naturale Bosco della Ficuzza. Transfer to Trapani

5 miles, easy to moderate

This morning transfer westward (two-and-a-half hours) to the Bosco della Ficuzza, a vast nature reserve with Royal Palace, commissioned by King Ferdinand I of Naples during his exile. Enjoy a scenic walk and picnic lunch as you traverse woodlands, home to hare, wild boar, and birds of prey. Continue on (two-hour drive) to the seaside town of Trapani. Named Drépanon, or “sickle,” by the Elymians for the curve of its harbor, Trapani claims a strategic position on Sicily’s west coast—which has made this major trading port a frequent site of conquest. Beyond the city, salt plains studded with windmills show lingering traces of its ancient salt trade, and Trapani also has a heritage of coral and tuna fishing. Today, Trapani province is a major source of wine, producing more even than the region of Tuscany. Settle into your hotel in the town’s historic center, then step out for dinner, perhaps savoring cuscus (couscous) and fresh-caught fish (reflecting the city’s North African influences) in a nearby favorite restaurant.

Accommodation: Badia Nuova Residence or La Gancia Residence, Trapani

DAY 7

Riserva Naturale dello Zingaro

5 miles, moderate

Departing Trapani, a 55-minute transfer delivers you to today’s walk in the Riserva Naturale dello Zingaro, Sicily’s first nature reserve, established in 1981 after a successful protest halted a road construction project. The reserve features well-maintained paths, panoramic sea views, and a large variety of rare and

endemic plants and rich fauna including eagles, peregrine falcons, and lizards. The area is also home to the spectacular Uzzo Grotto, one of the first prehistoric settlements in Sicily. The walk is along an out-and-back coastal trail involving minimal elevation gain and loss but with some rocky sections (so the mileage can be adjusted accordingly).

Finishing up the walk, a 15-minute drive brings you to a nearby farm estate managed by Daniela Adamo, a graduate of the University of Gastronomic Sciences by Slow Food in Piedmont, who returned home to dedicate herself to the family business of olive oil production. Begin this special experience with an aperitivo on the terrace, followed by a lunch featuring ingredients from the organic garden and local producers. After the meal, enjoy an espresso (or macchiato) while you learn how to prepare typical almond pastries or cassata, another Sicilian specialty.

You return to Trapani for an evening of independent exploration and dining, with restaurant suggestions from your guides.

Accommodation: Badia Nuova Residence or La Gancia Residence, Trapani

DAY 8

Walking tour of Erice and Segesta

1 mile, easy and 1-3 miles, easy to moderate

This morning, you visit one of Italy's most spectacular hill towns: Erice, set atop the legendary Mt. Eryx at 2,460 feet. On a clear day, there are panoramic views across the plains of Trapani, down the west coast of Sicily, and even to Cape Bon in Tunisia. Originally settled by the ancient Elymians, the town boasts a fascinating history and is an important historical site associated with fertility goddesses—the Carthaginians' Astarte, Greeks' Aphrodite, and Romans' Venus. Arriving through a maze of medieval streets, tiny piazzas, churches, and baroque flowering balconies to Erice's enchanting historic core, you set off on a walking tour of the medieval town and some of its important sites: the hilltop Norman Castello di Venere (Castle of Venus), which offers spectacular views, and the 14th-century main town church of Chiesa Madre and bell tower, constructed from stones from the ancient Temple of Venus on the same site. The majestic Norman castle was a massive fortification and the power seat of these 11th-century conquerors in western Sicily. Afterward, enjoy lunch at an agriturismo before reaching Segesta, which

features a marvelous Doric temple. Dating to 430 BC and situated alone in a field, it is one of Italy's best-preserved ancient temples. Founded by the Elymians, a mysterious ancient people, the city of Segesta was fought over for centuries before eventually being conquered by the Romans.

Another hour's transfer brings you south to the countryside of Menfi and your home for the next two nights at a vineyard-side resort. The individually decorated guest rooms open onto private terraces with views over herb and flower gardens and vineyards. Following a welcome aperitivo, you proceed to a dinner of superlative cuisine served at a large communal table in the hotel's dining room—accompanied, of course, by the estate's renowned vintages.

Accommodation: Planeta Estate - La Foresteria, Menfi

DAY 9

Selinunte Archaeological Site

3-5 miles, easy

After breakfast in your tranquil resort, you drive about 30 minutes to Selinunte, an ancient city that is now one of Sicily's most dramatically sited Greek ruin complexes. This city, whose name is derived from the Greek word for celery, selinus, was one of ancient Greece's most prosperous colonies as early as the 7th century BC, and hence the object of centuries of battles.

Following lunch, a leisurely afternoon at the hotel offers time to pack, relax, and perhaps swim in the hotel's panoramic outdoor swimming pool. This evening, you gather for a special dinner paired with wines from the Planeta estate—perfect for toasting your discoveries of enchanting Sicily.

Accommodation: Planeta Estate - La Foresteria, Menfi

DAY 10

Your *Italy: Sicily* tour concludes

After enjoying breakfast, you transfer (90 minutes) to Monreale, situated on the slopes of Monte Caputo,

amid picturesque groves of almond, orange, and olive trees. The town's crowning glory is its cathedral, considered one of the finest examples of Norman architecture in the world. Built between 1170 and 1189 by William II (in competition with a royal church then being built in Palermo), the cathedral today is one of nine Norman structures in Sicily inscribed together on the UNESCO World Heritage list and a National Monument in its own right. Craftsmen from Constantinople were enlisted to assist in crafting the more than 64,500 square feet of magnificent, solid-gold, Byzantine mosaics for which the cathedral is renowned. As you explore this architectural masterpiece, consider how the mosaics, carvings, inlays, and pointed arches demonstrate a harmonious blend of Norman-French, Byzantine, and Arab cultures. You continue on to nearby Palermo (arriving by 1:30 p.m.), where you can conveniently explore this historic city on your own or make flight or rail connections for onward travels.

What's Included

	Tour Only
Exceptional boutique accommodations	✓
All on-tour meals except 2 dinners	✓
Local guides with you throughout tour	✓
Local wine and/or beer with dinner	✓
Entrance fees and special events as noted in the itinerary	✓
Emergency travel assistance hotline available 24/7	✓