

Italy: Sicily

Tour-Only Itinerary

One minute, you're walking through a field of wildflowers to one of Sicily's finest preserved temple at Segesta, the next you're making dessert with a Sicilian chef. Delizioso! A Slow Food maven, Daniela shares the finer points of zesting lemons, whisking ricotta, and chopping almonds as she teaches you to make a perfect cassata. Day after day, Sicily's mix of history, scenery, and outstanding cuisine keeps catching you off guard. A day after watching flamingos from a trailside bird blind, you're spying Bronze Age cliff tombs in Pantalica's limestone gorges, or discussing Aeschylus with your historian guide at Syracuse's ancient theater. From Byzantine mosaics to Greek temples, Etna's snowy summit to Planeta's sunny vineyards, this walking tour in Sicily never ceases to amaze.



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, forests, and overtop a hardened lava flow.
- Discover one of the world's richest and most varied collection of Roman mosaics at the Villa Romana del Casale, a UNESCO World Heritage site.
- Trace a coastal trail through the Oasi Vendicari Nature Reserve, home to 40 types of birds, and the perfect place for a refreshing dip in the sea.
- Stay vineyard-side at the Planeta Estate, savoring fine cuisine made from family recipes and

sampling celebrated vintages of the estate's own wine.

On all Guided Adventures you can count on ...



Expert local guides to introduce you to the best of your destination.



Gracious accommodations that are a clean, comfortable home away from home.



Off-the-beaten-path places you'd never find on your own.



Experts to handle all the details.



A maximum of 18 fun-loving fellow travelers to share the journey.



Flight + Tour Combos include plane tickets, airport car service, and pre- and post-tour accommodations.



Delicious, authentic multi-course meals—virtually all are included.

Activity Level

This tour is one of our Guided Walking Adventures, rated easy to moderate, with an average of 3 to 6 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 days on this tour are quite full to allow for the inclusion of diverse regions of cultural and historical importance.

DAY 1

Join your Italy: Sicily tour. Mt. Etna

Sentiero Natura Monte Nero degli Zappini; 3 miles, easy to moderate, 500-ft. elevation gain and loss

Your guides meet you in the lobby of the UNA Hotel Palace at 9:00 a.m. They will be wearing Country Walkers shirts. 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 a 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 the alpine station, you have panoramic views over the southern promontory of Etna and the basin of Catania, as well as the main summit of the mother volcano of Etna. You can also see Monti Silvestri, Monti Calcarazzi, and Montagnola—three side craters that are a 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 travel 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, then gather for a welcome aperitivo poolside, followed by a delicious dinner featuring the best of Sicilian cuisine.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 2

Mt. Etna's eastern slope

Milo to Zafferana Etnea; 5 miles, moderate to challenging, 500-ft. elevation gain and 1,900-ft. elevation loss

Following a delicious breakfast, begin your day with a drive to Mt. Etna's quiet, picturesque northern slopes. Walk options today are again weather- and volcano-dependent and may include adventurous climbs to the 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-dried 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. Midafternoon 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 cellars in the Etna region. The location affords excellent views of the vineyards on one side and the volcano on the other.

You return to your country house hotel for an independent evening of dining. Complimentary transportation will be provided to nearby Riposto, for anyone wishing to step out in town, with restaurant recommendations provided by your guides.

DAY 3

Oasi Nature Reserve at Vendicari. Independent exploration of Syracuse

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

Your day begins with a (2.5 hour) drive to one of the most beautiful spots in southeastern Sicily—the Oasi Nature Reserve at Vendicari, a complex of coastal marshes with 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 to Syracuse. At one time this city rivaled Athens as the most powerful city 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, historical 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 of its kind, it still hosts Greek plays in the summer months. Nearby, is the 2nd-century Anfiteatro Romano, the largest Roman amphitheater in Sicily and third-largest in Italy. 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 historical heart of Syracuse and your home for the night. Upon settling into your room, you 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. Ringed by exquisite baroque buildings constructed after the 1693 earthquake, the plaza's 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.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 4

Necropolis of Pantalica

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

Start today with an elaborate breakfast of fruit, yogurt, fresh-pressed juices, omelets, cured meats and cheeses, and Sicilian pastries with pistachio cream enjoyed on the hotel's panoramic rooftop terrace. Then, 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, the

necropolis 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.

Near midday, a short drive 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 midafternoon, 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 into 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.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 5

Mount Ganzaria and Villa Romana del Casale

4- or 7-mile options, easy to moderate, 650-ft. elevation gain and 600-ft. elevation loss; 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 passes a Byzantine necropolis and takes you through vegetation of cork oaks, eucalyptus, walnut groves, dwarf fan palms, and orchids. Along the way, you may see foxes, porcupines, and weasels. Broad views on one side look over the Catania plain and, on the other, southern Sicily.

Returning on foot to the masseria (farmhouse) for a light lunch, you then take your leave and travel 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, is a UNESCO World Heritage site that was built around the 3rd and 4th centuries (AD). It is known for its extraordinary collection of mosaics in various stages of restoration. Walkways take you through some of its 40 rooms carpeted with 4,200 square yards of

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

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 6

Riserva Naturale Bosco della Ficuzza. Travel to Menfi

5 miles, easy to moderate, 550-ft. elevation gain and 650-ft. elevation loss

This morning, drive westward (2.5 hours) to the Bosco della Ficuzza, a vast nature reserve home to a 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 southwest with a 90-minute drive 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 excellent cuisine served in the hotel's dining room—accompanied, of course, by the estate's renowned vintages.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 7

Selinunte Archaeological Site

3-5 miles, easy

After a delicious breakfast of eggs, local cheeses and cured meats, fresh seasonal fruits, yogurt, pastries and bread, and of course a cappuccino (or espresso), served 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 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.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 8

Segesta. Your Italy: Sicily tour concludes

2-3 miles, easy to moderate

After savoring breakfast at your hotel, depart for Palermo with a stop en route (after an hour-drive) at another magnificent archaeological site, Segesta, which features a marvelous Doric temple. Dating to 430 BC and situated alone in a field amongst Mediterranean *macchia* (shrubbery) and wildflowers, 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.

Discover the area on foot, taking in the atmosphere of this spectacular setting, before continuing on to a farm estate managed by our friend, Daniela, a graduate of the University of Gastronomic Sciences by Slow Food in Piedmont. She returned home to dedicate herself to the family business of olive oil production. Begin this memorable 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 continue to nearby Palermo (arriving to the Grand Hotel Piazza Borsa by 4:00 p.m.), where you can conveniently explore this historic city on your own or make flight or rail connections for onward travels.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

What's Included

Tour Only

Exceptional boutique accommodations	✓
20 on-tour meals: 7 breakfasts, 8 lunches, 5 dinners	✓
Local guides with you throughout tour	✓
Local wine and/or beer with dinner	✓
Entrance fees and special events as noted in the itinerary	✓
Travel assistance available 24/7 provided by Allianz Global Assistance	✓
Telescopic walking sticks provided on tour	✓