

## Italy: Sicily

### Tour-Only Itinerary

You have veered off the hiking trails into an artisan studio that keeps the craft of Sicily's brightly painted horse carts alive. These wagons with their delicately rendered pastoral scenes seduce you, much like the lava fields, vineyards, boutique hotel, and Michelin-starred restaurant on Mt. Etna's slopes. Like the Baroque magnificence of Ragusa's hillside Old Town. And like the ancient quarry pathway along the Cave of Mercy. There's more to follow – more mouthwatering meals and local wines at welcoming *agriturismi*. More glimpses into a rich past in Syracuse, once a cultural capital of Magna Graecia, and at the haunting necropolis of Pantalica. More breathtaking nature preserves and their profusion of birdlife. Indeed, this walking tour of Sicily is painting an altogether new and sublime canvas for you.



## Highlights

- Venture across the slopes of Mt. Etna – Europe's largest active volcano–hiking trails through wildflowers, forests, and over a hardened lava flow.
- Dine on Michelin-starred Sicilian fare accompanied by local wines at your boutique hotel and spa on the slopes of Etna.
- Learn about the cherished tradition of the Carretti Siciliani, the island's vibrant horse carts, while exploring Ragusa Ibla.
- Follow scenic pathways through the Oasi Vendicari Nature Reserve, home to 40 types of birds and the perfect place for a refreshing dip in the sea.
- 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.

## 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 approximately 500 to 1,000 feet. The highest potential 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's northern slope

*3-4 miles, easy to moderate, 500-ft. elevation gain and loss*

Your guides meet you in the lobby of Hotel Monte Tauro in Taormina at 9:00 a.m. They will be wearing Country Walkers shirts. Please be dressed for hiking (with appropriate footwear and backpack).

Departing Taormina, a short drive delivers you to your first trailhead on Mt. Etna's quiet, picturesque northern slopes. 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 that combines the beauty of nature and the uncontrollable essence of fire. Hiking options on the volcano's quiet, picturesque northern slopes today are weather- and volcano-dependent and may include an adventurous climb 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 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 enjoyed trailside or at a *rifugio* (alpine hut).

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 poolside for a

welcome aperitivo, followed by a delicious dinner in the hotel's Michelin-starred restaurant featuring elegant, refined Sicilian fare, paired with a glass (or two) of wine from the nearby fertile slopes.

**Included Meals:** 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 picturesque eastern slopes. Hiking options today are again weather- and volcano-dependent and may include a trail along the Sentiero delle Ginestre (or the Broom Route) from the village of Milo to Zafferana Etnea, trekking through an area of chestnut forest and passing old shepherd settlements, the famous giant broom trees, and even a live oak that is over 700 years old. A sustained descent brings you to Zafferana Etnea, an important Roman-era crossroads that connected Catania with Taormina.

Almost constant activity from this volcano has blessed its slopes with fertile soils for agriculture, orchards, and vineyards. Midday, you arrive at one of the many emerging wineries on Etna's slopes, where you're treated to a light lunch and tasting. Its location affords excellent views of the vineyards on one side and the volcano on the other. You return to your country house hotel with time to relax and refresh prior to stepping out for another dinner that reflects the bounty of the region.

**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## DAY 3

### Val di Catania: Militello to Cascade dell'Oxena. Travel to Ragusa

*3-4 mile options, easy to moderate, 500-ft. elevation gain and loss*

Awaken at your tranquil resort to a delicious breakfast of eggs, local cheeses and cured meats, fresh seasonal fruits, yogurt, pastries and bread, and of course a cappuccino (or espresso). Then travel about 60 minutes to your trailhead outside Militello in the Val di Catania. Along with seven other nearby towns, Militello was gorgeously rebuilt in stunning Late Baroque style after a devastating 1693 earthquake, earning much of the Val di Noto status as a UNESCO World Heritage site for its architectural splendor.

Today, Militello is celebrated for its fragrant orange groves, traditional mulled wine, and prickly pear cakes. From here, you set out on a scenic trail to the spectacular Cascade dell'Oxena, or Oxena River Waterfalls. Your pathway follows the canyon-like course of the river along basalt rocks formed by ancient volcanic eruptions. Luxuriant stands of olivastri, elms, ash trees, oaks, prickly pears, carob trees, tamarisks and oleanders mark your progress and you'll have opportunities to take a refreshing dip in the river's natural pools.

Refuel over a simple lunch of Sicilian specialties, like *arancine*—or seasoned rice balls with meat, fish, or eggplant, mushrooms and spinach—before continuing to your next destination. Following lunch, travel (approximately 75 minutes) to the valley of Noto, where the town of Ragusa is perched on a limestone hill. Ragusa Ibla, the Old Town, shared in the remarkable Baroque building boom at the turn of the 18th century, and you'll have time to explore it up close tomorrow. Your accommodations in a former palace put you close to the spectacular Old Town. Providing an elegant mix of modernity and tradition, the hotel was skillfully refurbished to preserve its historic character while melding harmoniously with modern design. You have time to settle in and refresh before reuniting with your fellow travelers and guides for a feast of traditional specialties at a restaurant steeped in local character. A leisurely stroll back to your hotel provides the perfect closure to your day.

**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## DAY 4

### Cava della Misericordia and Ragusa Ibla

*3-5 miles, easy to moderate (with challenging sections), 600-900-ft. maximum elevation gain and loss, and 1-2 miles, easy*

After savoring a breakfast of traditional local products, head out for a hike along scenic pathways along the Cava della Misericordia, the Cave of Mercy. Your trail through pine, poplar, and oak forest leads you along an ancient quarry where evidence of human settlement has been left behind. Pass the Church of St. Elia, dedicated to the saint who many believed brought droughts to an end. Pause at an old Ibleo Byzantine cemetery, where some 3,000 souls were laid to rest. See the ruins of old mills and houses.

Continue to Ragusa Ibla, and explore this jewel with your guides. Stroll among its magnificent architecture—part of the final blossoming of European Baroque. Take time to enjoy lunch on your own at

one of the many trattorias, and then reunite with your fellow travelers for a visit to an artisan studio to learn about the tradition of the Carretti Siciliani, the famed Sicilian horse carts adorned with elaborate paintings that depicted the local ideals of chivalry, faith, honor, and justice.

Continue exploring on your own, or maybe return to the hotel and treat yourself to time in the wellness center. Indulge in a massage, Turkish bath with aromatic oils, indoor saltwater pool, and more. You may also enjoy the garden and outdoor pool at the nearby sister property. Enjoy dinner on your own this evening with recommendations from your guides.

**Included Meals:** Breakfast

## DAY 5

### Oasi Nature Reserve at Vendicari and travel to Syracuse

*5 miles, easy to moderate*

After enjoying a leisurely breakfast, you bid Ragusa farewell and set off for one of the most beautiful spots in southeastern Sicily—the Oasi Nature Reserve at Vendicari, a marvelous ecosystem 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. Your footpath leads 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 takes in the entire reserve, from the splendid isle of Vendicari to Capo Passero in the distance. You may be enticed to take a swim! Your trail delivers you to a family-owned *agriturismo*, where you enjoy a meal of regional specialties, including grilled vegetables, local Sicilian provola, pecorino and tuma cheeses, and freshly made pasta.

Afterward, travel to Syracuse, a UNESCO World Heritage site. When the island was ruled by Magna Graecia (ancient Greece), it rivaled Athens as the most powerful city in the empire. Here, a local expert leads you on a guided tour of the Parco Archeologico della Neapolis. Syracuse's Archaeological Park is a treasure trove of important Greek and Roman monuments, including the spectacular 5th-century BCE Greek Theater. One of the finest of its kind, it still hosts Greek plays in the summer months. Nearby, the 2nd-century Anfiteatro Romano is 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.

Continue to modern-day Syracuse. The cultural and administrative capital of southeastern Sicily, the city is renowned for its extravagant Baroque architecture, historical ruins, gastronomic delights, beautiful landscapes, and stunning beaches. Your home for two nights is in Ortigia, the historical heart of Syracuse. 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. Ringed by exquisite Baroque buildings constructed after the 1693 earthquake, the plaza's centerpiece is the Duomo (cathedral), a remarkable amalgam of evolving architectural styles that have shaped it over the centuries. The cathedral's Baroque façade disguises the 5th-century BCE temple of Athena; however, 26 of the temple's Doric columns remain intact and are visible both inside and outside. All roads from this piazza lead to dinner, and as always suggestions for venues to accommodate your preferences are provided by your guides.

**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch

## DAY 6

### Necropolis of Pantalica and Independent exploration of Syracuse

*4-7-mile options, moderate, 700-1,000-ft. elevation gain and loss*

Start today on the hotel's panoramic rooftop terrace with an elaborate breakfast of fruit, yogurt, fresh-pressed juices, omelets, cured meats and cheeses, and Sicilian pastries with pistachio cream. 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, Pantalica 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 BCE. Your walking options range from 2 to 3 hours in length and lead through a dramatic river-carved landscape of limestone formations luxuriant in colorful, fragrant Mediterranean vegetation.

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.

After lunch, travel back to Ortigia. Take time to relax and refresh before gathering this evening for a memorable farewell meal of fresh local seafood and crisp white wine to toast the week's discoveries.

**Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

## **DAY 7**

### **Your *Italy: Sicily* tour concludes**

After savoring breakfast at your hotel, bid farewell to your tour guides and travel companions, and make flight or rail connections for onward travels. The hotel can assist with any transportation required to Catania or beyond. (Check out time is 11:00 a.m.).

**Included Meals:** Breakfast



## What's Included

### Tour Only

Exceptional boutique accommodations	✓
16 on-tour meals: 6 breakfasts, 4 lunches, 4 dinners	✓
Local guides with you throughout tour	✓
Local wine and/or beer with dinner	✓
Entrance fees and special events as noted in the itinerary	✓
Telescopic walking sticks provided on tour	✓