



THIS COVERS A VISIT TO SOME OF THE ISLAND'S MAJOR ATTRACTIONS. INCLUDES, TAORMINA, GODFATHER COUNTRY, MOUNT ETNA, PALERMO, SYRACUSE, TRAPANI SALT FLATS AND A TRIP TO THE ERUPTING VOLCANO ON STROMBOLI

Welcome To Sicily

Jewel of the Mediterranean

Introduction

Everyone should visit Sicily at some time. From its rich history, dazzling landscapes to its volcanic excitement and glorious food. It offers much as Giovanni promised and the trip to Stromboli to see the lava eruptions was just one of its highlights. The best times to visit are April to June or September to October. We unlocked just a few of its treasures but you will find many more and although the mafia might still be alive and kicking they won't get in the way of your enjoyment!

TOUCH DOWN

As we neared Taormina with its breath taking coastal scenery our eyes glanced to the mountains. Mount Etna was easy to spot but nearer to us houses clung like limpets to other lofty pinnacles. Fancy living up there we mused. The sat nav directed us away from the coast and onward to our first location. We knew Castelmola was set above the town but we did not expect the narrow twisting road to finally

arrive at that group of houses set high on that mountain top.

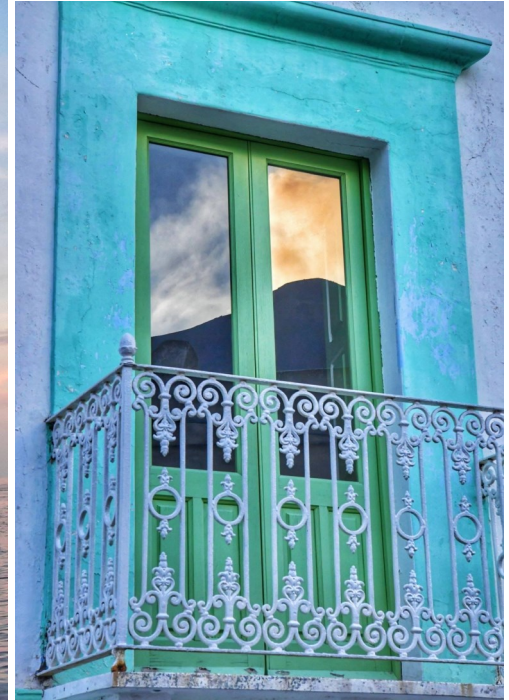
The views from here were breath-taking. From the apartment balcony Mount Etna peeped between the houses opposite and as we dined outside at a local restaurant later that evening Taormina twinkled far below us in a clear night sky. We seemed so high that I doubt whether it would have appeared any different had we still been airborne!

Saline di Trapani

Boats on one of the Aeolian Islands

Street in Syracuse

Stromboli



ERUPTING STROMBOLI

Nothing quite prepares you for witnessing a real magma eruption from an active volcano and when we rounded the Aeolian island of Stromboli in the early evening the following day to witness the brilliant scarlet lava tossed into the air in the dark sky we were delighted.

The day started early with an hour's drive to Messina, followed by an hours boat trip to our first stop on the island of Panarea with its white buildings clustered around a black sandy beach. Here colourful fishing boats were drawn on shore after the early morning catch. Bars, restaurants and cafes offered plenty of refreshment and time to sit and soak up the awesome view. We opted to take the opportunity to explore the island with the aid of a golf cart and driver- around 30 euros.

After another hour back on board we reached Stromboli. We stopped off shore to witness the bubbles from under water eruptions and smelt the sulphur before we cruised between giant islands of basalt thrust up during activity many years ago. We spent an hour ashore and then as dusk fell we boarded the boat again to sail round the island to witness the pulsating pyrotechnic display that Stromboli offers its visitors.

GODFATHER COUNTRY

For many Sicily is synonymous with the Godfather trilogy created by Francis Ford Coppola and his movies are immortalised in the places where filming took place. Savoca and the surrounding countryside being the number one 'shrine' to their memory.

There are many tours on offer but we hired a car to explore the Godfather trilogy



Strombolicchio

Stromboli reflected in a window above one of the shops

Eruption seen at night

Pizza



Bar Vitelli and Godfather country

ourselves. At the Bar Vitelli we sat and drank a lemon Granita. It was the location where Michael Corleone (Al Pacino) meet Mr. Vitelli (the bar owner) and ask his permission to court his daughter Apollonia. It was also the location for the official engagement and for the party after the wedding ceremony. Some of the interior was stuffed with memorabilia and images and opposite the view showed the Church of Santa Lucia where the wedding be-

tween Michael Corleone and Apollonia took place. Next stop was Forza D'Agrò then back to Taormina where we met our host for our Sicilian gourmet food and wine tour.

FOOD GLORIOUS FOOD

Here our host was Alfredo. He was a great character. He had lived on Sicily all his life and from him we learnt so much about Sicily. Diners spilled out onto the pavements, musicians played and friendly cats

greeted us as we enjoyed countless regional dishes which included cold meats and cheeses, swordfish, blue sardines, gratin mussels and seafood risotto. We topped it off with five desserts and plenty of fine wines. I must admit I was a little worried about the waist line!

It is difficult to separate Sicily from its abundance of glorious food. Whether it was the fish and chips in Ortygia where the 'fish' came as a gourmet assortment in a small wooden

box to freshly made pizza cooked in traditional ovens. Every meal seemed to extol local ingredients and highlight one of the reasons why we love Italian cuisine so much. When visiting local restaurants where the menu was in Italian we found a phone app which proved invaluable as it translated the text when held above it. Should I venture into the realm of booze, the wine tastings and my enjoyment would fill a book, but when a good local wine is cheaper than a lemon soda and

when one suitcase on our return was filled with bottles...I say no more!

MOUNT ETNA

This is the largest active volcano in Europe and one of the world's most frequently erupting volcanoes. It is 10,900 feet (3,329 meters) tall with a base circumference of about 93 miles (150 kilometres). On the southern side cruise boats gorge thousands of visitors into a vast over commercialised area to 'experience' Etna. A cable car and a specialised vehicle take you towards the main crater but I am sure these visitors miss so much. We explored on our own due partly to bad visibility at a higher level. The landscape is eerie. Black dust is everywhere and the giant black lava flows from past eruptions abound.

CONNECTING WITH HISTORY

We left Taormina for Syracuse taking the coastal road which took us through Catarina. Our location here was very central with views over the city. Its old mellow baroque architecture is shabby chic but inside sophisticated and elegant. It echoes with the feel of ancient civilizations- the Romans and Byzantines, Arabs and Normans, Swabians and Aragonese have all left their mark.



The finest area today is Ortygia – Greek for "quail" – the tiny island on which the first Corinthians settled in 733 BC. It is an absolute gem, dense with a gorgeously crumbly feel but also beautifully restored Baroque buildings, boutique shops and super restaurants,

The following day it rained but luckily we were able to tour the great archaeological Park Neapolis before the heavens opened. The Roman Amphitheatre was enormous and the Orecchio di Dionisio - a lime stone cave shaped like a human ear into which we wandered was also great. It twists like the inner ear and the further we went the darker it became.

BUZZING PALERMO

A long early morning drive ensured we were on the steps of the opera house in Palermo for 10.30 where several tour groups were acting out a scene from the

Village above Taormina

Mount Etna

Our host Alfonso

Outside one of Sicily's many bars





Palermo Fish Market: Opera House : Church: Cathedral : Interior of one of the churches: Catacombs:

God father trilogy and dogs lay sleeping- they had seen it all before!

You may have seen Marco with Rick Stein or Paul Hollywood if you watch

too many cookery programmes. He was our guide on a five hour street tour of Palermo. It is the best way to get a real feel for a place.

We walked through old narrow walkways where washing hung out to dry overhead and where the bread boy delivered loaves by placing them in baskets

so that the women could haul them up to their balconies. Men pushed carts with chimneys in which they roasted chestnuts and the 'lottery man' sold tickets for a box of fresh fish

All the while we stopped to try Palermo's street food- Entrails in buns, veal lungs in bread, fried chick pea paste, potato balls etc. It sounds a little off putting but it was all served by Sicilians passionate about their food and an experience not to be missed. The stop for masala wine was most welcome and I enjoyed the fact that the tour included several of Palermo's major sights.

THE CATACOMBS

After our day with Marco and an early morning visit to the city's famous catacombs we opted for the less crowded road to Masala and Trapani. An early morning start meant that we were at the catacombs before the full lighting was switched on! Very spooky, very interesting with hundreds of dead bodies. No make that 8,000 dead bodies. Within a short space of time the lighting was fully switched on but it still remained an eerie place. Arranged in categories the bodies were surprisingly interesting.

SALT FLATS AND FLAMINGOES AT TRAPANI

The bright light reflected by the vast salt pans create a feeling of space and a kind of serene quietness. The sun shone and the crystals sparkled in the sun light. Standing proud from the flat white landscape old windmills and mountains of salt reared up. We climbed one of these windmills to get another perspective. In the afternoon we took a boat out onto the shallow lagoon to visit the ancient remains on a number of off shore islands. There were flamingos, spoonbills and black heron. A great way to relax before our journey home.

The salt flats at Trapani

Wine tasting





Impressive collection of ancient Roman and Greek ruins, at Syracuse

Old Sicilian cart in museum



Contacts

Stromboli boat tour: Giovanni Fichera www.satexcursions.it

Palermo Street Food Tour: Marco: www.streatpalermo@gmail.com

Gourmet Food and Wine Tour: Alfredo: www.sicilyactivities.com

Top Ten food tours: www.viator.com/Sicily-tours/Food-Tours

Useful Information for the disabled

We found the Sicilians great at adapting activities to meet the needs of the disabled and they made us feel that we had no handicap at all. A phone call ahead was all that was needed to ensure our needs were taken care of. Many activities may seem beyond limits but as Giovanni proved on our trip to Stromboli everything is within your grasp.



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