



Sicily in 7 Days

From the snowy peak of Mount Etna to sandy beaches framed by azure waters and rolling farmland, Sicily is a land of contrasts—Italy to the nth degree. Jennifer V. Cole offers a food lover's guide to the Mediterranean's largest island.

IN SICILY, the sun shines brighter, the flavors are more robust, the traffic more chaotic, and the people infinitely more inviting. This is a place that has been conquered by virtually everyone—Phoenicians, Normans, Vikings, Arabs, Moors, Persians, Greeks, Romans—and the result is a country within a country, its centuries of external influences having been distilled into a distinctive culture driven by the seasons and defined by the food. Here is our ideal itinerary for a week along the eastern coast.

DAY 1: SALINA

With its steeply sloping Malvasia vineyards, caper bushes, chestnut trees, rugged shoreline, mountainous interior and small-town vibe, Salina is easily the star of the eight Aeolian Islands, all mere spits of land off “mainland” Sicily's north-eastern shore. Just ten square miles and divided among three townships (Santa Marina, Leni and Malfa), it can be reached by ferry or hydrofoil from Messina or Milazzo. Get the lay of the land with a boat excursion from Santa Marina, taking swimming breaks along the way. Afterward, stop at **Da Alfredo**, on the water's edge in the town of Lingua, to refuel with

pane cunzato, a sandwich overflowing with tomatoes, anchovies, capers, black olives, basil and cheese. Top your meal off with the restaurant's famous granita, served in flavors ranging from almond or chocolate to lemon, peach or watermelon. Next, make your way to **Pollara**, a sublimely rugged village on the westernmost edge of the island. *Il Postino* was filmed here, and it's the perfect perch from which to watch the sun set over the Mediterranean. For dinner, head back to Malfa to secure an outside table at **La Pinnata del Monsu'** and immerse yourself in such Sicilian specialties as caponata, *busiate* pasta with squid and wild fennel, and fish and shrimp from local waters.

DAY 2: TAORMINA

Wend your way down the coast to the hilltop town of Taormina, which lured the wealthy elite during the 19th century as part of the Grand Tour and later attracted the Hollywood glitterati. The glam factor is on full display on the main thoroughfare **Corso Umberto**, which is illuminated by fairy lights and whose ancient edifices are anchored by street-level shops. Slip into handcrafted leather sandals, the unofficial footwear of southern Italy,

DETAILS

BEST TIME TO VISIT:

MAY-OCTOBER

BEST FOR:

**ART LOVERS
FAMILIES
FOODIES
ROMANTICS**

COMBINE WITH:

**ROME
AMALFI COAST
CAPRI**



at **Il Sandalo Caprese**, or pick up one of the handwoven Coffa bags carried by women across the island. Visit the adjacent **Teatro Greco**, dating to 3 B.C., whose well-maintained stage perfectly frames Mount Etna and the sea. For lunch, descend to sea level to the restaurant **Pizzichella**, on the shore of the bay containing the lovely Isola Bella, where the fish comes right off the boat. Walk along the narrow path leading from the mainland to the islet to explore its grottoes and claim a spot on the beach for the afternoon. For dinner, reserve a table at **Osteria Nero D'Avola**, whose pastas and succulent seafood are matched only by the stories of chef Turi Siligato, an ambassador for Sicily's Slow Food movement. Finish at **Morgana Lounge Bar** for modern riffs on classics, like a cucumber Negroni.

DAY 3: ETNA WINE TOUR

Nothing dominates the Sicilian landscape like Mount Etna. The 10,912-foot-high volcano towers over the eastern coast and occupies more than 400 square miles. Its mineral-rich soil produces some of the best wines in the world. Begin your wine tour at **Benanti Viticoltori**, in Viagrande, a heritage estate run by young Sicilian twin brothers who speak perfect English. You won't find better guides to the Nerello Mascalese, Nerello Cappuccio and Carricante grapes. Continue on to the **Barone di Villagrande** vineyard, in its tenth generation of family ownership, near Milo. Eat on its tree-shaded terrace with views of the sea, or head north to **Terra Mia**, in Solicchiata, for a feast of local delicacies: foraged wild fennel folded into an almond-studded spaghetti, tomatoes from just down the road, sweetened ricotta topped with

chestnut honey and pistachios, all from Etna. After lunch, head to Rovitello to visit **Fischetti**, a family-run winery that produces four excellent wines. Dine in nearby Linguaglossa at **Cucina Dai Pennisi**, a butcher-shop-restaurant where exquisitely marbled beef fills the display cases and you order by pointing. Or go back down the mountain to Viagrande for *pizza siciliana* at **Gran Caffè Urna dal 1885**. This hyper-regional specialty is a flaky, fried calzone stuffed with local *tuma* cheese and anchovies.

DAY 4: CATANIA DOWNTOWN AND ENVIRONS

Begin your day on the water, exploring coves by boat, watching pods of dolphins and soaking up local lore. Back in the port, dive into all

the seafood you can handle at **Il Porticciolo**. The catch sits on ice at the entrance of the restaurant, where you can pick your fish or watch as the staff cracks open spiny sea urchins. Don't miss the sweet and creamy *gamberi rossi*, local red shrimp best eaten raw with a squeeze of lemon. After lunch, stroll along Catania's **Via Etnea**, a grand boulevard that leads from the sea to the volcano. Explore **Villa Bellini** and its surrounding gardens. At the **Piazza del Duomo**, look inside the **Cattedrale di Sant'Agata**, named for the town's patron saint, a martyr who cut off her own breasts. Everywhere, you'll find *minne di Sant'Agata*, a dessert of glazed ricotta shaped like a bosom in her honor. For an *aperitivo* and prime people watching, take an outside table at **Savia**, purveyor of fabulous *arancini*—opt for a filling of *ragù* or pistachios. Dine



The terrace at the Belmond Grand Hotel Timeo. Opposite: An afternoon in Palermo.



at **Ristorante Mè Cumpari Turiddu**, whose chef makes local standards shine, thanks to his obsession with sourcing and refinement.

DAY 5: SIRACUSA

Before heading out of Catania, have breakfast downtown at **Caffè Europe**, and visit the town's open-air fish market, a wild west of deal making and seafood ogling that's open until noon. Then get on the road to Siracusa. Upon arrival go straight to **Ortigia**, a small island, and its historic city center. Have a seat on the sidewalk terrace at **Fratelli Burgio**. Here, a squad of impossibly charming young Sicilians will help you compose an exquisite *salumi* board. After lunch, wander the nearby market and the old town, stopping into **Ortigia**



Sicilia, which sells perfume, candles and soaps that incorporate extracts of locally grown almonds, pomegranates, bitter oranges, limes and lavender. At **Biblios Café**, Paula, the English-speaking owner, will steer you through her book collection or pour you a cup of tea. Save room for a true Sicilian *cannolo*—an ice-cream-cone-shaped pastry shell filled with sweetened fresh ricotta—at **Cannoli del Re**. For dinner, head into Siracusa proper and grab a table at **Sicilia in Tavola**, whose plates of fresh artisan pasta highlight such local delicacies as bottarga, squid ink, swordfish and pistachio pesto.

DAY 6: NOTO AND MODICA

After morning coffee, go back to Ortigia to pick up the most perfect

Trip Tip:

Don't expect to find anything in Sicily open during lunch (roughly 2 p.m. to 4 p.m.) except restaurants. To get around, you'll want to rent a car—the last stop for reliable bus and train service is Calabria, on the mainland. Efficiency is not a Sicilian priority—embrace the *confusione*.

sandwiches at **Caseificio Borderi** before hitting the road. The father-son duo who hold court outside the shop turn sandwich-making into performance art, piling meats, cheeses and marinated vegetables onto hollowed out loaves of bread while singing and flirting charmingly with every woman in sight. Now you're ready to drive 20 miles south to Noto, one of the best examples of Sicilian Baroque urban planning and architecture, most notably its pale yellow 18th-century limestone cathedral. At **Caffè Sicilia**, Corrado Assenza (subject of the Netflix series *Chef's Table*), produces spectacular gelato in wide-ranging flavors like pistachio, saffron and bay leaf. Back in the car, it's on to the city of Modica, built into the hillside. Stop at **Antica Dolceria Bonajuto**, a chocolate shop with the feel of an ancient pharmacy,



Where to Stay

Taormina Belmond Grand Hotel Timeo

The most pampering hotel in all of Sicily, Belmond Grand Hotel Timeo is housed in an 1873 mansion and surrounded by six acres of subtropical gardens. It has 71 massive guest rooms and suites, many with private sun terraces. The perfect way to start your day: enjoy a morning cappuccino at Timeo's sister property, Belmond Sant'Andrea, which is located right on the water's edge.

Etna Monaci delle Terre Nere

At Monaci delle Terre Nere, a luxurious country hotel with vineyards and gardens on Etna's southeastern slope, you'll feel as if you're summering at your wealthy Italian uncle's villa. Located on a 40-acre farm, the property, which has 13 rooms in its main house as well as villas, is an authentic Sicilian escape, with charming décor, friendly service and an atmosphere that encourages lazy days by the pool.

Noto and Modica Casa Talia

Casa Talia, perched on a hill above Modica, has picture-perfect views that get better with every shift of the light. The passion project of two designers from Milan, the seven-room home away from home combines such raw design elements as exposed wooden beams with modern furnishings. There is no restaurant, but it's more fun to pop into local eateries around the hotel, anyways.



Clockwise from left: The entryway of the Belmond Grand Hotel Timeo in Taormina; the living room of Casa Talia in Modica; the pool at Monaci delle Terre Nere in Etna.



Driving through Sicily's compact streets.
Right: The beach in Taormina.

Trip Tip:

Throughout the summer, the **Festival of the Greek Theater of Siracusa**, run by the Istituto Nazionale del Dramma Antico (INDO), presents nightly live performances of Greek tragedies in the city's historic theater, built in 5 B.C. Wind down the night at **BOATS** (Based on a True Story), one of the best cocktail bars in Italy.



to sample its delicious local flavors. For supper, try **Taverna Migliore**, a fine-dining homage to *modicana* cuisine, or **La Contea**, for wood-fired pizza. After, go to **Caffè Adamo** for gelato—because gelato twice in a day is exactly how you should live your best Sicilian life.

DAY 7: POZZALLO AND CALTAGIRONE

In the morning, drive south for beach time at Pozzallo. This small town, known for its sandy shores and conservation efforts, has been Sicily's most important port for nearly 700 years because of its proximity to Malta, just 56 miles to the south.

It's also one of the best places on the planet for windsurfing, thanks to the fierce *sirocco* blowing from the Sahara into southern Europe. For your daily gelato fix, go to **Gelateria L'Artigianale**, the brainchild of Stefano Baglieri, a tattooed young Sicilian who uses only the best ingredients, from Bronte pistachios to sheep's milk ricotta from Ragusa. For a late lunch, drive along the coast to **Scoglitti**, a port town about an hour away. The beachfront **Viri Ku C'e** serves the freshest catch the fishermen offer. The no-frills dining room upstairs has glass windows that open to the sea air. There is no menu—your waiter will simply bring antipasti consisting of every sea creature you can imagine,

pastas and whole roasted fish until you tell him to stop. Begin the journey back to Catania by swinging through the interior town of **Caltagirone**, home to the 142-step, tiled **Staircase of Santa Maria del Monte**. The town name derives from the Arabic *Qal'at Ghiran*, meaning “castle of jars,” and this is the place to find hand-painted plates and vases, including pieces by some 80 workshops and artists, such as **Ernesto Boria** and **Agatino Caruso**—perfect souvenirs. ■

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