

Destination Sicily

There's a rich history behind Sicily's complex character. Nearly 25 centuries of foreign domination have had a massive impact on the island's cultural output: the Greeks built elegant classical structures, while a unique mix of Byzantine artistry and Norman severity endowed Sicily with some of the most unusual and beautiful buildings in Europe; in later centuries the Spanish topped off this exotic composition with a flourish of baroque. Sicily also has a natural beauty that's astounding: grapevines stretch from the slopes of brooding Mt Etna to the parched landscapes of the west, and the aquamarine waters off the 1000km coastline are splashed with volcanic islands.

The island has often been in the headlines recently, with the explosive violence between rival football fans of Catania and Palermo in February 2007, and the spate of wildfires that scorched the island throughout the summer months of the same year. Etna erupted again in September 2007, and Stromboli barked but had no bite (though we could easily eat our words on this one). Further afield, the immigration crisis continued on the southern island of Lampedusa.

It's also been a busy few years on the anti-Mafia front. The arrest of the big Mafia boss Bernardo Provenzano in April 2006 made ordinary Sicilians and politicians across Italy believe what many previously thought was impossible – that the end of the Mafia might be in sight. Three further anti-Mafia sweeps in December 2007 saw more arrests, including the imprisonment of 37 members of the Catania branch of the organisation. Not only are these events a major step towards the implementation of law and order in Sicily, but many see them as a sign that the Mafia's infrastructure is finally weakening. Experts, however, warn that optimism should be diluted with caution, and that the path to defeating the dreaded organisation is still long and hard.

But these turbulent events will seem like a small cloud on a sunny day as you admire the beautifully restored Noto cathedral and newly scrubbed-up historic centre in Catania.

Aside from history, architecture and natural beauties, one of Sicily's greatest attractions is its food. Every village, town and city has a raucous, sense-exploding food market – all you need to do is walk through Palermo's Mercato della Vucciria or Catania's La Pescheria to work up an appetite. Traditional recipes are wonderfully preserved, and the restaurants that flirt with modern cuisine – such as Catania's Metrò or Palermo's Osteria dei Vespri – do so with utter respect for traditional ingredients and methods. The Sicilian attitude towards food is much like its character – a lot of tradition with just a sprinkling of modernity.

Sicily ticks all the right boxes for any visitor: history, architecture, culture, food, beaches, volcanoes – it's all there. But still this island has more. Its special allure is within its people, whose loyalty to tradition keeps their culture aflame.

FAST FACTS

Population: 4.97 million

Area: 25,708 sq km

GDP per head: €15,227

GDP growth: 1.4%

Inflation: 2.6%

Unemployment rate: 20%

Estimated Mafia profits in 2004: €123 billion

Annual pasta consumption per person: 42kg

Getting Started

There are several ways to organise a trip around Sicily besides simply touring the main towns and cities. If you fancy a sea-and-sun holiday, there are plenty of beach resorts and nearby islands. For history and culture it helps to organise travel around a theme – Greek ruins, baroque architecture or volcanoes. An option that is becoming increasingly popular involves renting a house in the countryside. The network of buses is efficient, extensive and cheap. Similarly, hydrofoil and ferry services to the nearby islands are very convenient (and child-friendly) in summer, although their frequency drops off dramatically in winter. In some cases you may be able to cover more ground in Sicily if you rent your own vehicle, although there are also ecofriendly alternatives (see p18 for details).

WHEN TO GO

Sicily is blessed with a sunny climate, with coastal temperatures rarely dipping below 15°C. Beaches and nearby islands warm up relatively early, usually around mid-April, and stay hot well into October.

Inland, in the mountains, temperatures can fall to freezing in winter, but the weather remains gorgeously fresh during the summer months of July and August when coastal temperatures exceed a stifling 30°C. The ideal time for walking in the Madonie and Nebrodi mountains is between April and June, when an explosion of spring flowers covers the mountainsides.

The best times to visit Sicily are between April and June, or September and October, when the weather is usually good, prices are lower and there are fewer tourists. Late July and August are the peak of the high season: the sun broils, prices are inflated and the island's top attractions are awash with a tide of holiday-makers. Most of Italy goes on holiday in this period (known as *Ferragosto*, literally 'the August holiday'), and a significant chunk of the population chooses Sicily as its preferred destination.

You may prefer to organise your trip to coincide with one of the many festivals that fill the Sicilian calendar – Easter is a particular highlight. For more details see p285.

COSTS & MONEY

Sicily isn't as cheap as many travellers assume, but it is one of the few destinations in Italy where the budget-minded can have a comfortable time. A key factor to consider is the huge difference in costs between the high season – usually Easter and from July to September, with the highest prices in August – and the rest of the year. Even the most popular tourist spots, such as Cefalù, the Aeolian Islands and Taormina drop their prices dramatically during the low season. The less visited areas of the island – the west and parts of the interior – generally offer cheaper accommodation and eating options throughout the year.

Admission fees to all the major archaeological sites and museums run by the Regione Siciliana (the Sicilian regional government) are set at the same price, which at the time of research was €6. Most places offer a discount to EU students (€3), while seniors and children go free. You may have to produce some ID (passport or driving licence with a photo) at the more popular sites like the Cappella Palatina in Palermo.

At the bottom end of the price bracket you will pay €15 to €20 per night in youth hostels. The cheapest *pensione* (small hotel) is unlikely to cost

See p283 for more information on when to visit Sicily.

much less than €25/50 for a basic single/double. However, you will be able to find comfortable rooms with en suite showers starting from around €55/70 for singles/doubles. Midrange hotels in cities such as Palermo, Syracuse, Agrigento and Taormina can easily cost from €60/80 to €130/180 for singles/doubles.

Eating out is just as variable, depending on the location. In Taormina, Palermo and on the Aeolian Islands you will find the most expensive restaurants; elsewhere food is generally cheaper. You can pay from as little as €20 for a meal of *primo* (first course), *secondo* (second course) and dessert in a little trattoria to more than €40 for the equivalent in an upmarket restaurant, plus wine. Set tourist menus start at around €10, but the food quality on these menus can vary.

A very prudent backpacker might scrape by on €60 per day but only by staying in youth hostels, eating out for only one simple meal per day, keeping transport costs down and minimising visits to museums. Realistically, a traveller wanting to stay in comfortable midrange hotels, eat out for two square meals per day, and not feel restricted to one museum per day should reckon on a minimum daily average of €100 to €120 per person based on two people sharing a room at €80, plus car hire.

Public transport is very reasonably priced, but car hire is expensive (as is petrol) and is probably worth organising before you leave home (see p301). On trains it is cheaper to travel on the *regionale* (slow local train) and *diretto* (slow direct train) rather than the faster Intercity (IC).

HOW MUCH?

Cup of coffee €1

10-minute taxi ride €5-10

Bowl of pasta €8-10

Night in a hostel €25

Night in a 3-star hotel
€90-110

See also the Lonely
Planet Index, inside
front cover.

TRAVELLING RESPONSIBLY

In the grand scale of things, the environmental impact of a single trip might not seem particularly significant, but consider tourism's worldwide context and a different picture emerges: each year there are some 700 million holidays, a figure which is expected to grow to 1 billion by 2010.

Most Mediterranean countries suffer from the overdevelopment of tourism infrastructure to some degree, especially in coastal areas, and Sicily is no exception. The island's main problem is general water shortages, exacerbated by high tourist demands. You can lessen your impact on Sicily's environment and increase the beneficial effects of tourism for the local economy by choosing ecofriendly places to stay, and making use of locally run tours, markets and courses. These are all good ways of engaging with the country and are recommended throughout this guide.

For more on Sicily's environmental issues, see p68.

Fly Less, Stay Longer

While the introduction of cheap flights to Sicily has meant an increase in tourism and a boost to the region's economy, air travel is the fastest growing contributor to climate change. Mile for mile, the amount of carbon dioxide emitted for one person driving a car is about as much as that for one passenger on a plane; the problem with flying, however, is not only the carbon emitted (and other greenhouse gases, such as water vapour), but the fact that at high altitude these gasses have a greater effect on climate change. Offsetting schemes enable you to calculate your emissions so that you can invest in renewable energy schemes and reforestation projects that will reduce the emission of, or remove from the atmosphere an equivalent amount of carbon dioxide.

So what can you do to limit your environmental footprint once you get to Sicily? For a start you might consider a low-emission form of transport once you land. Train travel in Sicily is easy and affordable. Likewise, there

is a comprehensive network of coaches running the length and breadth of the island and in many cases this is the preferred mode of transport for Sicilians.

Getting around on a local level is generally fairly easy in Sicily. Most of the towns and cities are easily walkable, meaning zero emissions! Local transport in Palermo is efficient and good value, although blaring horns and peak-time traffic jams are sometimes maddening. The same goes for Catania, Sicily's second biggest city. Syracuse, on the other hand, has had its historic part, namely the island of Ortygia, more or less closed to traffic, making parking possible only for residents – free electric buses circulate around town. This has made Ortygia a great deal more pleasant and has noticeably reduced pollution, so one can only hope that other towns will follow this example.

Madly buzzing scooters remain a firm fixture of Sicilian life and, although scooters don't have a particularly high carbon footprint when compared with most cars, their numbers and the noise they produce do contribute to urban pollution. They are also obviously a lot less environmentally friendly than riding a bicycle. Increasing awareness of ecoissues in Sicily has also prompted a greater number of hotels to offer guests the use of bicycles during their stay.

For more information on ecofriendly travel see p300.

Accommodation

An increasing number of tourism businesses in Sicily are now looking to cash in on the buoyant green euro, so it can be difficult to identify genuinely green options. The eco-labelling scheme Legambiente Turismo has certified nearly 200 hotels, judging each hotel on their use of water and energy resources, reductions in waste production, and the availability of good local cuisine and organic breakfasts. The number of family-run B&Bs is increasing, as are the options for *agriturismo* (accommodation on working farms).

Slow Food

One of the best ways to contribute to local economies is to shop locally. In Italy (including Sicily), this isn't difficult: it is the home of the **Slow Food Movement** (www.slowfood.com), there are many excellent local markets, farm restaurants, and most of the cuisine uses seasonal, organic food. Unlike for the northern areas of Italy, the benefit of visiting (and eating in) Sicily is that the region obstinately retains its culinary traditions. The guidebook *Osterie d'Italia* (published by Slow Food) is an excellent source of information and recommendations on this subject.

Responsible Travel Schemes

Agriturismi (www.agriturismi.it) An online guide to farm accommodation.

Fondo per l'Ambiente Italiano (www.fondoambiente.it) The Italian equivalent of the National Trust (in the UK, US and Australia), which restores historic houses and gardens and opens them up to the public.

Legambiente Turismo (www.legambienteturismo.it) Look for their 'Green Swan' eco-label that flags genuinely ecofriendly places to stay.

Parks.it (www.parks.it) The place to look for essential information on all of Sicily's national and regional parks, and other protected areas.

Travel Foundation (www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk) This UK-based sustainable tourism charity provides tips on how to travel more responsibly.

World-Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (www.wwoof.it) Learn about biodynamic and organic living and farming techniques in return for a few hours' work.

'One of the best ways to contribute to local economies is to shop locally'

TOP 10



OUR FAVOURITE FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The Sicilians celebrate their festivals with fervour and great theatrics. Elaborate costumes, profound solemnity, hysterical worship and pagan partying are all par for the course. The following list is our Top 10, but for a comprehensive listing of festivals throughout the island see p285.

- 1 Festa di Sant'Agata (February); Catania (p201)
- 2 Sagra del Mandorlo in Fiore (February); Agrigento (p265)
- 3 I Misteri (March/April); Trapani (p108)
- 4 Infiorata (May); Noto (p230)
- 5 La Mattanza (May/June); Favignana (p114)
- 6 Festival of Greek Classical Drama (May/June); Syracuse (p222)
- 7 Festino di Santa Rosalia (July); Palermo (p91)
- 8 Festa di Maria Santissima della Visitazione (July); Enna (p244)
- 9 Taormina Arte (July/August); Taormina (p193)
- 10 Festa di Santa Lucia (December); Syracuse (p223)

TOP READS

Grasp a greater sense of people and place by immersing yourself in the following books by some of Sicily's finest writers. See p61 for more information.

- 1 *Il Malavoglia* (The Malavoglia Family; 1881) by Giovanni Verga
- 2 *Sei personaggi in ricerca di un autore* (Six Characters in Search of an Author; 1921) by Luigi Pirandello
- 3 *Conversazione in Sicilia* (Conversations in Sicily; 1941) by Elio Vittorini
- 4 *Il gattopardo* (The Leopard; 1957) by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa
- 5 *Report from Palermo* (1959) by Danilo Dolci
- 6 *Il giorno della civetta* (The Day of the Owl; 1961) by Leonardo Sciascia
- 7 *La diceria dell'untore* (The Plague Sower; 1981) by Gesualdo Bufalino
- 8 *Men of Honour* (1993) by Giovanni Falcone
- 9 *La luna di carta* (The Paper Moon; 2005) by Andrea Camilleri
- 10 *A Photographer in Sicily* (1996) by Enzo Sellerio

MUST-SEE MOVIES

Although notably lacking home-grown directors, Sicily has inspired a catalogue of great films heavy on sexual tension, drama and death. See p62 for more details.

- 1 *La terra trema* (The Earth Trembles; 1948) directed by Luchino Visconti
- 2 *Stromboli* (1950) directed by Roberto Rossellini
- 3 *Il gattopardo* (The Leopard; 1963) directed by Luchino Visconti
- 4 *The Godfather I, II and III* (1972, 1974 and 1990) directed by Francis Ford Coppola
- 5 *Cento giorni a Palermo* (One Hundred Days in Palermo; 1984) directed by Giuseppe Ferrara
- 6 *Kaos* (Chaos; 1984) directed by Paolo and Vittorio Taviani
- 7 *Nuovo cinema paradiso* (Cinema Paradiso; 1988) directed by Giuseppe Tornatore
- 8 *Il postino* (The Postman; 1994) directed by Michael Radford
- 9 *Respiro* (2002) directed by Emanuele Crialese
- 10 *Nuovomondo* (The Golden Door; 2006) directed by Emanuele Crialese

TRAVEL LITERATURE

Sicily's complex character, poetic beauty and ancient history have given authors much to write about over the years. The following recommendations will enhance any traveller's understanding of this extraordinary island.

Beautiful Angiola (Laura Gonzenbach; introduction by Jack Zipes) A 19th-century collection of neglected fairy tales gathered from the Sicilian peasantry and translated into English for the first time. This book is full of delightful escapades, sorcery and surprise in the same style as the Brothers Grimm.

The Golden Honeycomb (Vincent Cronin) Considered one of the classic travel accounts of Sicily. The story, essentially a traveller's sojourn on the island in the 1950s, is constructed around the myth of the golden honeycomb, a gift from Daedalus to the goddess Aphrodite at Erice.

In Sicily (Norman Lewis) A slim volume executed in Lewis' typically effortless style. He introduces the reader to a cast of old friends sharing memories and glasses of wine between chasing interviews with councillors and Mafia henchmen. In the end you just don't want him to get back on that plane.

Italian Journey 1786–88 (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe) A weighty tome that presaged the deluge of tourists to Italian shores. It contains the letters and diaries that Goethe wrote during his travels, covering an exhaustive range of interests from art history to politics, painting and personal encounters.

Midnight in Sicily (Peter Robb) A gripping documentary about the Mafia and the 1995 trial of Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti. The skilful narrative weaves political commentary with excellent travel writing and loads of great asides on food, art and culture.

The Normans in Sicily (John Julius Norwich) A magnificent historical account of the Norman conquest of Sicily. Weighty, scholarly and fired with enthusiasm, Norwich's tome skilfully recounts the epic story of the House of Hauteville and one of Europe's greatest adventurers, Robert Guiscard.

On Persephone's Island (Mary Taylor Simeti) An honest and evocative portrait of Sicily's conflicted and complex culture. Simeti's intelligent observations (from a US-expat perspective), scholarly titbits, and in-depth descriptions of people and landscapes bring the island to life.

Sicily: Three Thousand Years of Human History (Sandra Benjamin) An interesting account of immigration to Sicily through the centuries and how the various ethnic groups influenced the island's culture, architecture, cuisine and general character.

INTERNET RESOURCES

The Lonely Planet website (lonelyplanet.com) has information on Sicily, as well as travel news and links to other travel resources. You may also find these sites useful:

Best of Sicily (www.bestofsicily.com) This detailed site has loads of useful links and tips for travelling throughout Sicily.

CTS Village (www.cts.it; in Italian) This site provides useful information from the Centro Turistico Studentesco e Giovanile (CTS; Centre for Student and Youth Tourists), Italy's leading student-travel organisation.

Regione Sicilia (www.regione.sicilia.it/turismo/web_turismo) The rather poetic website of the regional tourist board has useful transport links and suggested itineraries. You can also inquire about accommodation and guides through the site.

Trenitalia (www.trenitalia.it) The official site of the Italian railways provides fare and timetable information.

For top stories on Sicily, check out *Italy Mag* at www.italymag.co.uk /italy_regions/sicily.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

WORLD HERITAGE SITES One to Two Weeks / Catania to Aeolian Islands

Southeast Sicily has a harmonious blend of classical and baroque styles so unique and coherent as to represent the majority of Sicily's World Heritage sites.

In **Catania** (p196), the chiaroscuro baroque of Giovanni Vaccarini combines black lava with white limestone, in complete contrast to the buttery baroque of the Val di Noto towns, including **Caltagirone** (p255), **Palazzolo Acreide** (p227), **Noto** (p228), **Modica** (p233), **Scicli** (p234) and **Ragusa** (p235) – all an extraordinary architectural and artistic achievement of swirling stone sculpture. Although not recognised as a World Heritage site itself, head northeast to civilised **Syracuse** (p214) and visit the **Museo Archeologico Paolo Orsi** (p220), which houses the island's most comprehensive archaeological collection. Then head northwest for **Piazza Armerina** (p249) to enjoy the artistic verve of the mosaics at the **Villa Romana del Casale** (p252), continuing on to Agrigento's famous **Valley of the Temples** (p261).

If you have more time on your hands, take another week to explore Sicily's other notable World Heritage site, the **Aeolian Islands** (p149).

This route will take you through Sicily's World Heritage sites. It is a good week or two of rich sites and short distances that are best enjoyed if you have your own transport.



WILD ABOUT THE WEST 10 Days to Two Weeks / Palermo to Selinunte

Imbued with a profound sense of the past, the west of the island is the most Arabian in attitude, atmosphere and flavour and offers a wonderful 10-day itinerary of sights and activities that are particularly suited to families.

Leave raucous **Palermo** (p75) and head directly west along the A29 to tiny **Scopello** (p104) on the edge of the **Riserva Naturale dello Zingaro** (p104), which has wonderful walking trails and diving. Visit the splendidly sited temple at **Segesta** (p113) on your way to the fishing town of **Trapani** (p105). From Trapani you can do any number of day trips. Be sure to stay overnight in medieval **Erice** (p110), at its best when the day-trippers have deserted the quaint cobbled streets, and visit the chief Phoenician site of **Mozia** (p119).

Alternatively, take to the water and explore the child-friendly **Egadi Islands** (p113) on bicycles and in boats. The more ambitious may take the overnight ferry to **Pantelleria** (p117).

From Trapani the coastal road wends its way to genteel **Marsala** (p120). Don't miss the Carthaginian warship in the **Museo Archeologico Regionale Baglio Anselmi** (p121), then sample some of the town's eponymous wines at the **Cantine Florio** (p123). Push on to scruffy **Mazara del Vallo** (p124) and enjoy the town's treasures in the **Museo del Satiro** (p125). End with the fabulous ruins of **Selinunte** (p126), perched above one of the island's best beaches, then take the fast route back to Palermo along the A29 autostrada (motorway).



This neat circular route is best managed by car, although it is possible to do it by bus and train. With your own car you can stay in some of the excellent *agriturismi* (farm stays) and enjoy the countryside.

MAGICAL MOUNTAINS**Two Weeks / Cefalù to Catania**

Away from the hot beaches and classical ruins that ring the coastline, the mountainous interior is more representative of traditional Sicilian life than any other area of the island. And its wild, rugged beauty lies well beyond the conventional tourist trail.

Fly into **Palermo** (p75) and head straight for picture-postcard **Cefalù** (p134) with its Arab-Norman **Duomo di Cefalù** (p135) and busy beaches. Take the wonderful day walk to the **Santuario di Gibilmanna** (p139), from where you can view the entire range of the Madonie.

From Cefalù head straight into the heart of **Parco Naturale Regionale delle Madonie** (p139). A landscape of idyllic wooded countryside, the park is full of well-marked walking trails. Then head to the superquaint hilltop town of **Petralia Soprana** (p141), which is a great base for walking.

Head east through **Gangi** (p248) and **Sperlinga** (p248), with its troglodytic caves, to the sun-scorched centre at **Enna** (p241). Delight in its perfectly preserved medieval centre and walk along the heavy fortified walls of the **Castello di Lombardia** (p242). Alternatively, take a short bus ride to the 4th-century **Villa Romana del Casale** (p252) near Piazza Armerina, which has a unique collection of mosaics.

Finish up in **Catania** (p196) and make the long hike up to the main craters of **Mt Etna** (p208) main craters for the most spectacular views on the island.

This 245km route is fairly straightforward but you will need a car if you don't want to hang around at rural bus stops. Plus, with your own car you can freewheel around the beautiful mountain scenery and make heaps of pit stops to take photographs.

**WORSHIPPING IN SICILY****One Week to 10 Days / Palermo to Ragusa or Agrigento**

Sicily has some of the world's most spectacular churches, which will inspire awe even in the most irreligious of people.

The most impressive of all is the dazzlingly beautiful **Monreale Cathedral** (p99), situated just above Palermo. Right inside the city itself is its smaller rival, the **Capella Palatina** (p81), another Norman creation that reflects Arab artisanship and Byzantine aesthetics. The gorgeous **Martorana** (p81) is one of Palermo's favourites, with shimmering mosaics and an intimate atmosphere.

Cefalù's duomo (p135) gleams with Norman-era mosaics, and the dramatic cliff-face backdrop frames it beautifully. Syracuse's **Santa Lucia church** (p218) is seated on top of an ancient Greek temple and its baroque façade is gorgeous. **Noto's San Nicolò cathedral** (p229), recently restored to its original glory, has a stunning exterior and glorious stairs leading up to it. Nearby Ragusa's **Cattedrale di San Giorgio** (p236) hosts many a wedding, its baroque style complementing the celebratory mood.

Agrigento's **Chiesa di San Nicola** (p264), with its 13th-century Gothic exterior, is seated inside the Valley of the Temples.



This is an easy route from Palermo to the southeastern side of the island via Cefalù. It's easily done by public transport, though if you decide to head for Agrigento, your own transport may be a better choice.

TAILORED TRIPS

ISLANDS & VOLCANOES

There is no better place to start this itinerary than in **Catania** (p196), a city built of lava. From here frequent buses make the tortuous ascent of Sicily's most famous sight, **Mt Etna** (p208), climbing through its lush national park. From Etna's lofty heights the Cyclops hurled his stones at the fleeing Odysseus, and you can still see their jagged forms along the dramatic **Riviera dei Ciclopi** (p206). Swap Gore-Tex and trekking boots for glad rags in

Taormina (p190), Sicily's foremost international resort, before continuing to **Messina** (p184). If you have small children don't miss the world's largest astronomical clock in the campanile of the attractive **cathedral** (p185).

Another week should allow you to island-hop at your leisure. Start from **Lipari** (p156) to arrange boating and diving activities. Nature lovers should head for **Salina** (p170), while volcano enthusiasts should climb the **Fossa di Vulcano** (p168) and experience the exciting night hike up **Stromboli** (p177). Beach bums will be content to remain idle on the terrace of Hotel Raya on **Panarea** (p175) and those seeking peace and quiet should head for remote **Alicudi** (p181) and **Filicudi** (p180).

To return to Catania via a different route, take the hydrofoil or ferry to Milazzo and make your way back through the **Parco Regionale dei Nebrodi** (p142).



BEACH HOPPING

You'll probably want to start off as near to Palermo as possible, so where better to head than to **Mondello** (p99), a mere 15-minute journey from the capital. Heading further west, you'll reach the **Golfo di Castellamare** (p103) where the **Riserva Naturale dello Zingaro** (p104) hides some pebbly sickle-shaped beaches and **Scopello** (p104) offers a chance to swim surrounded by rusting anchors and dramatic rocks. Nearby **San Vito lo Capo** (p105) is Sicily's most popular beach. Going around the province of Trapani, you'll reach

Selinunte (p126), a stunning archaeological site with a beach to match. Next up is **Eraclea Minoa** (p269), another place made up of the twin attractions of a fabulous beach and an archaeological site. Just southeast further down is the stunning **Scala dei Turchi** (p268).

Going east of Palermo, the first excellent beach is in **Cefalù** (p134). Taormina's **Isola Bella** (p192) is so pretty, it's incredible. Scenic swimming is to be had at **Aci Castello** (p208), where the moody castle broods over the blue waters. Next up is the big sandy stretch of **Fontane Bianche** (p222), just outside Syracuse. Isolation and tranquillity are features of the beaches of the **Riserva Naturale di Vendicari** (p232).



On the Road



VESNA MARIC Coordinating Author

I'm applying a mud mask to my face at Eraclea Minoa beach (p269), feeling the mud drying and making facial movement impossible. Soon after, I noticed the local children cry and run away in horror. Seeing this picture explained why.

MY SICILY

Sicily is an extraordinary place, and the best place to dive in for me is Palermo (p75). I always dedicate a few days to Salina (p170) and Stromboli (p176) and, if I can, I sneak a visit to Trapani (p105) and Marsala (p120) for some of that fantastic food and wine. Most of all, I love relaxing around Syracuse (p214), Ragusa (p235) and Modica (p233).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vesna has been savouring Sicilian food for many years, and enjoys the region's culture, architecture and atmosphere immensely. Her love of Mediterranean and island life grows with every visit to Sicily. Vesna has travelled up and down Italy, but she's glad there's plenty still to discover.

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