To say that Sicily isn’t [Italy](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/) is trite but true – only 3km of water separate the island of Sicily from the Italian mainland, but the historical and cultural gulf is far wider, and locals see themselves as Sicilians first and Italians second. Strategically located at the heart of the Mediterranean, the island’s history is distinct from that of peninsular Italy, and some of the western world’s greatest civilizations have left their mark, from ancient Greek temples and Arabic street plans to stunning Norman mosaicked cathedrals and flamboyant Spanish Baroque palaces. Sicilian dialects thrive, while many place names are derived from the Arabic that was once in wide use across the island. Markets brim with produce that speaks firmly of the south – oranges, lemons, olives, rice, almonds and peppers – and ice cream can still be found flavoured with rose and jasmine petals, a sure sign of the island’s North African roots. Continue reading to find out more about... Best time to go to Sicily Getting to Sicily Getting around Sicily Top things to do in Sicily Sicily cultural attractions Where to stay in Sicily Where to eat out in Sicily Best places to drink in Sicily Places to visit in Sicily Discover everything you need to know before your trip with our Sicily Travel Guide. **Best time to go to Sicily** If you’re looking for the best time to visit Sicily, we recommend avoiding at the height of summer, when the dusty scirocco winds blow in from North Africa. In July and August, you’ll roast – and you’ll be jostling for space on the beaches, in restaurants and at the archaeological sites when Sicily’s tourism is at its heaviest. Hotel availability is much reduced and prices will often be higher. If you want the heat but not the crowds, go in May, June or September – swimming is possible right into November. Spring is really the best time to travel to Sicily, and it arrives early: the almond blossom flowers at the start of February, and there are fresh strawberries in April. Easter is a major celebration and a good time to see traditional festivals like the events at Trapani, Erice, Scicli and Piana degli Albanesi, though again they’ll all be oversubscribed with visitors. Winter is mild by northern European standards and is a nice time for Sicily travel, at least on the coast, where the skies stay clear and life continues to be lived largely outdoors. On the other hand, the interior – especially around Enna – is very liable to get snowed under, providing skiing opportunities in the Monti Madonie or on Mount Etna, while anywhere else in the interior can be subject to blasts of wind and torrential downpours of rain. **Getting to Sicily** Sicily has two main airports, at [Palermo](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/sicily/palermo-around/) in the west and [Catania](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/sicily/catania/) in the east, two smaller airports at Comiso and Trapani, and tiny domestic airports on the islands of Pantelleria and Lampedusa. There are direct flights daily to Palermo and Catania from the UK, and seasonal flights to Comiso. Catania and Palermo are well connected with many mainland Italian cities and major European hubs; Trapani and Comiso also have flights to several Italian and European destinations. There are regular flights to Lampedusa and Pantelleria from Palermo, Trapani and many Italian mainland airports. If you are travelling from the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, you will need to change flights at [Milan](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/lombardy-lakes/milan/), [Rome](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/rome-lazio/) or elsewhere in Europe. **Entry requirements** EU citizens can visit Sicily and stay as long as they like on production of a valid passport. Citizens of the [United States](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/north-america/usa/), [Canada](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/north-america/canada/), [Australia](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/australasia/australia/) and [New Zealand](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/australasia/new-zealand/) don’t need a visa, but are limited to stays of three months. Most other nationals will have to apply for a visa from an Italian embassy or consulate. Post-Brexit, UK citizens should check for any new regulations. **Italian Embassies Abroad** [Australia](https://ambcanberra.esteri.it/ambasciata_canberra/it/) [Canada](https://ambottawa.esteri.it/ambasciata_ottawa/it/) [Republic of Ireland](http://www.ambdublino.esteri.it) [New Zealand](https://ambwellington.esteri.it/ambasciata_wellington/it/) [UK](https://amblondra.esteri.it/ambasciata_londra/it/) [USA](https://ambwashingtondc.esteri.it/ambasciata_washington/it) **Flights from the UK and Ireland** There are several direct flights daily from London airports to Palermo and Catania. [BA](https://www.britishairways.com/) flies direct to Palermo from Heathrow at least twice a week year-round and to Catania from Gatwick during the summer, [Alitalia](https://www.alitalia.com/en_us) routes via [Rome](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/rome-lazio/) or [Milan](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/lombardy-lakes/milan/). From Ireland, [Ryanair](https://www.ryanair.com/en) offers a direct flight from Dublin to Palermo once or twice a week depending on the time of year. Prices on all routes can fluctuate enormously – as usual, it’s best to book well in advance for the cheapest flights, especially if you’re travelling in peak seasons or during UK school holidays. **Flights from the US and Canada** [Alitalia](https://www.alitalia.com/en_us) flies direct every day between the [US](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/north-america/usa/) or [Canada](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/north-america/canada/) and [Italy](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/), and their great advantage is the ease of making the connecting flight to Sicily with the same airline. But several other airlines – including [Delta](https://www.delta.com/) and [Air Canada](https://www.aircanada.com/us/en/aco/home.html) – fly to Rome or Milan, and can arrange an onward connection for you. Or you can fly to Italy with airlines like [British Airways](https://www.britishairways.com/), [Air France](https://www.airfrance.com/), [Lufthansa](https://www.lufthansa.com/) and [Iberia](https://www.iberia.com/), which travel via their respective European hubs. The easiest way to research the best available deals is price-comparison sites such as [Skyscanner](https://www.skyscanner.com/) or [Kayak](https://www.kayak.com/). **Getting around Sicily** You don’t have to rent a car to see Sicily’s major towns and sights, but getting around by public transport is not always easy. The rail system is slow, few buses run on Sundays and route information can be frustratingly difficult to extract, even from the bus and train stations themselves. On the positive side, public transport prices are reasonable so travel around Sicily shouldn’t break the bank. **By train** Italian State Railways, [Ferrovie dello Stato](https://www.fsitaliane.it/" \t "_blank) (FS), operates the trains in Sicily though a private railway, the [Ferrovia Circumetnea](https://www.circumetnea.it/" \t "_blank), operates a route around the base of [Mount Etna](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/sicily/mount-etna/). The FS website [trenitalia.com](https://www.trenitalia.com/) has a useful English-language version, where you can view timetables and book tickets. Trains connect all the major Sicilian towns, but are more prevalent in the east of the island than the west. You can buy tickets and make reservations at any major train station, or buy online on the [FS website](https://www.trenitalia.com/) (both regional and Intercity services) and print your own tickets. Find out more about [getting around Italy](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/getting-around/). **By bus** Almost anywhere you want to go will have some kind of regional bus (*autobus* or *pullman*) service, usually quicker than the train (especially between the major towns and cities), and generally about the same price. Between them, four main companies – [SAIS Trasporti](https://www.saistrasporti.it/), [SAIS Autolinee](https://www.saisautolinee.it/), [AST](http://www.aziendasicilianatrasporti.it/) and [Interbus](http://www.interbus.it/Orarietariffe.aspx" \t "_blank) – cover most of the island. Other companies stick to local routes. Many routes are linked to school/market requirements, which can mean a frighteningly early start, last departures in the early afternoon, and occasionally no services during school holidays, while nearly everywhere services are drastically reduced, or non-existent, on Sundays. City buses usually charge a flat fare of around €1.50, and the tickets are often valid for ninety minutes, allowing you to change services for free within that time. Invariably, you need a ticket before you get on, though in major cities you can often buy them from the driver for a supplement of 50 cents. Buy them in tabacchi, or from the kiosks at bus stops, and then validate them in the machine in the bus. Checks are frequently made by inspectors, though if you don’t have a ticket you’ll usually get off with an earful of Sicilian and be made to buy one; some inspectors might hold out for the spot fine. **By car** Driving in Sicily is almost a competitive sport, and although the Sicilians aren’t the world’s worst drivers they don’t win any safety prizes either. However, with a car you’ll be able to see a lot of the island quickly, and reach the more isolated coastal and inland areas. **Rules of the road** Rules of the road are straightforward: drive on the right; at junctions, where there’s any ambiguity, give precedence to vehicles coming from the right; observe the speed limits (50km/h in built-up areas, 110km/h on country roads, 130km/h on autostradas); and don’t drink and drive. Speed cameras and traffic-calming humps are becoming more evident, but this doesn’t seem to deter Sicilians from travelling at any speed they choose. To drive in Sicily, you need a valid driving licence and, if you are a non-EU licence holder, an international driving permit. It’s compulsory to carry your car documents and passport while you’re driving, and you’ll be required to present them if you’re stopped by the police – not an uncommon occurrence. You are also required to carry a triangular danger sign, which will be provided with rental cars. Many car insurance policies cover taking your own car to Italy; check with your insurer when planning your trip (you’ll need an international green card of insurance). You’d also be advised to take out extra cover for motoring assistance in case you break down, and motoring organisations like the [RAC](https://www.rac.co.uk/) or the [AA](https://www.theaa.com/) can help. Alternatively, by dialling 116 you can get 24-hour assistance from the [Automobile Club d’Italia](http://www.aci.it/). **Car rental** Car rental in Sicily can cost as little as €80 per week for a three-door Fiat Punto, with unlimited mileage. It’s inevitably cheaper arranged in advance through an online broker (though watch out for hidden extras). Otherwise, rental agencies – including local companies like [Maggiore](https://www.maggiore.it/en/) – are found in the major cities and at Palermo, Catania, Trapani and Comiso airports. It’s essential to check that you have adequate insurance cover for a rental car. Going by the dents and scratches on almost every car on the road, you want to make sure that your liability is limited as far as possible. Ensure that all visible damage on a car is duly marked on the rental sheet. It’s worth paying the extra charge to reduce the “excess” payment levied for any damage, and most rental companies these days offer a zero-excess option for an extra charge. A really brilliant way of avoiding excess charges and other mind-games the rental outfits will play as you pick up your car is to take out an annual insurance policy with an outfit such as [insurance4carhire.com](https://www.insurance4carhire.com/), which also covers windscreen and tyre damage. **Taxis** There are plenty of honest, reliable taxi drivers in Sicily, but as ever there are a few sharks; to be on the safe side, always establish a price before you set off. Although meters are supposed to be used by law, both passengers and drivers usually prefer to settle on a fee before setting out. Fares for long-distance journeys are published by each city – for example, the official rate from Siracusa to Catania airport is €70, though you may be able to negotiate. A day-tour by taxi, say taking in Siracusa, Piazza Armerina and the temples of Agrigento will cost around €250. **By ferry and hydrofoil** There are ferries (*traghetti*) and hydrofoils (*aliscafi*) to the Aeolians, the Egadi and Pelagie islands, and Pantelleria and Ustica, and there’s also a summer hydrofoil service from Palermo to the Aeolians. The main operators are [Liberty Lines](https://www.libertylines.it/), [Caronte e Tourist](https://carontetourist.it/it" \t "_blank), [SNAV](https://www.snav.it/en/) and [NGI](http://www.ngi-spa.it/). Timetables are also available online, pinned up at the dockside or available from the ferry offices and tourist offices. You can island-hop year-round in the Aeolians and Egadis. Services are busy in summer, making early booking advisable, though you should always be able to get on a ferry if you just turn up. Both passenger and car-ferry services operate, though non-resident vehicles are banned on several islands during the summer. In fact, it’s debatable how much you’ll need a car on any of the islands – only Lipari, Pantelleria and Lampedusa are of any size, and in any case you can rent a vehicle there if you need to. **Top things to do in Sicily Explore the Aeolian Islands** Go island-hopping, Sicilian- style – each of the seven Aeolians has a distinct flavour of its own. **Unwind on Sampieri** A tremendous sandy beach perfect for long strolls or swims. **Catch a performance at Teatro Greco** Fantastically located in Taormina, this ancient theatre is still in use and offers panoramic views towards Etna and down to the sea. **Relax in Siracusa** As well as the ruins of a magnificent ancient Greek city, Siracusa has a Baroque centre with plenty of places to sit and relax. **Marvel at Monreale’s Cathedral** The Duomo’s delicate cloister columns are immaculate examples of medieval craftsmanship. **Scale Mount Etna** Climbing Europe’s greatest volcano – still very active – is the ultimate Sicilian adventure trip. **Lose yourself on Linosa** Get away from it all at this remote and tiny island. **Sicily cultural attractions** Visit Sicily to experience our pick of the best cultural attractions the island has to offer. **Unspoiled beaches** Head for the wild sands of the nature reserves at Vendicari, Marinello or Zingaro, or to the long dune-fringed strands at Sampieri and Torre Salsa. **Ancient places** When the Greeks ruled Sicily it was the most powerful centre in the Mediterranean. Outstanding among relics from this time are the Valley of the Temples at Agrigento, the temples of Segesta and Selinunte, and the theatres of Siracusa, Palazzolo Acreide, Tyndaris and [Taormina](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/sicily/taormina/). **Volcanic exploring** Sicily is crossed by a fault line, and has three active volcanoes – [Etna](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/sicily/mount-etna/), Stromboli and Vulcano. As well as visible eruptions – most reliably and regularly on Stromboli – there are other volcanological phenomena too, from the steaming mud baths of Vulcano to emissions of underwater gases off the island of Panarea. **Baroque and roll** Sicilian Baroque reaches heights of exuberance not seen elsewhere in Italy, from the lava-stone and limestone facades of [Catania](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/sicily/catania/) and the palaces of Ortigia to the flamboyant towns of Noto, Modica, Scicli and Ragusa. **Isolated islands** Come to Sicily out of season – late autumn, winter or spring – and head to the Egadi, [Aeolian](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/sicily/aeolian-islands/) or Pelagie islands for guaranteed solitude. Or find peace inland, exploring the Madonie or Nebrodi mountains or the Pantalica gorge. **Where to stay in Sicily** On the whole, accommodation in Sicily is slightly cheaper than in the rest of Italy, starting at around €60 a night for a basic double or twin room (though prices can double in summer). The only accommodation cheaper than this comes in the form of the very few youth hostels and the many campsites across the island. Hotels run across the entire range, from crumbling townhouses to five-star palaces, and restored country villas to resort hotels. There’s also a large number of “bed and breakfast” places and “*agriturismo*” rural properties, where the attraction is mixing with your hosts and experiencing something of Sicilian life. Find the best place to stay in Sicily with our travel guide. **Hotels** Sicilian hotels are graded with one to five stars, although with the rise in B&Bs and boutique hotels this system has become almost irrelevant, and is not by any means always displayed. Four-star hotels, plus hotels in resorts and on the islands, can charge pretty much what they like, especially in August when room prices can top €300, while the dozen or so five-star hotels on the island charge international rates. There are plenty of bargains around on the accommodation broker sites, especially when demand is low. **Private rooms and B&Bs** Private rooms (*camere*, *affittacamere*) for rent are common in beach resorts and on the Aeolian and Egadi Islands. Facilities vary, but the best are clean and modern, with private bathroom and often with a kitchenette. Prices start at about €50, with variations depending on the season and location – in August in Taormina and on the Aeolians you might pay as much as €100 a night for a room. Breakfast isn’t usually included, but is sometimes available for an extra charge. Recent years have seen a huge growth in the number of “bed and breakfasts”. Many are actually little different from private rooms, with the owners either not living on the premises or not always available throughout the day – often, you have to call a mobile phone number to summon attendance. Prices start at around €30 per person per night, usually for an en-suite room in a nicely maintained building where you’ll get a flavour of Sicilian home life. Some B&Bs are truly magnificent, based in remarkable Baroque palazzi or elegant country houses, and you can pay as much as €90 per person. **Self-catering villas and apartments** Private holiday apartments and villas are available in places like [Taormina](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/sicily/taormina/), Cefalù, Siracusa and [the Aeolians](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/sicily/aeolian-islands/), and are generally rented for anything from a couple of nights to a month. Although these can be very expensive in the peak summer season – when Italian families come on holiday – real bargains can be found in May or late September, and during the winter. Good websites are [homelidays.it](https://www.homelidays.it/), [casa.it](https://www.casa.it/) and [casavacanze.it](https://www.casevacanza.it/). Tour operators and villa companies also have self-catering villas, farmhouses and apartments located right across the island, usually in beautiful locations, often with swimming pools. Rates vary wildly, from €600 a week, to thousands for a place suitable for a house party. For an idea of what’s available, contact companies like [Think Sicily](https://www.thethinkingtraveller.com/thinksicily/), [Sicily Luxury Villas](https://www.sicilyluxuryvillas.com/), and, of course, [Airbnb](https://www.airbnb.com/). **Rural accommodation** Agriturismi are among the best places to stay in Sicily if you are looking for a traditional and authentic experience. Rural tourism has expanded significantly in Sicily in recent years, and every region now holds a choice of interesting places to stay, from working farms and wine estates to restored palaces and architect-designed homes. Accommodation is in private rooms or apartments, and many establishments also offer activities such as cooking courses, horse riding, mountain biking, walks and excursions. Hosts often speak English or French, and sometimes offer meals. Many places fall within various umbrella schemes like [Agriturist](http://www.agriturist.it/en/" \t "_blank) and [Agriturismo](https://www.agriturismo.it/en/" \t "_blank), whose websites have sections on Sicily, with links to the properties. Double rooms usually cost €80–120 in high season, depending on the establishment, and note that some places require a minimum stay of three nights. **Hostels, campsites and mountain huts** Hostels are rare in Sicily. Dorm beds cost €16–20 a night, depending on the season, and all have some kind of self-catering facility available. Some are official [IYHF](https://www.hihostels.com/) hostels, others are independent backpackers’, but the official ones, at least, are detailed on the [Hostelling International website](https://www.hihostels.com/), and if you aren’t already a member of your home hostelling organization you can join upon arrival at any hostel. There are approximately ninety officially graded campsites dotted around the island’s coasts, on the outlying islands, and around [Mount Etna](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/sicily/mount-etna/). Few are open year-round; indeed, campsites generally open or close whenever they want, depending on business, but there are more details on the comprehensive website [camping.it](https://www.camping.it/). Many of the sites are large, family-oriented affairs, often complete with pools, bars, shops and sports facilities. Staffed mountain huts (rifugio, plural rifugi) are available in certain magnificent locations, particularly in the Madonie and Nebrodi ranges and on Mount Etna. They’re used mainly by hikers and outdoor enthusiasts, and operated by the [Club Alpino Italiano](https://www.cai.it/) – non-members can use them for around €20 a night, but advance reservations are essential. **Where to eat out in Sicily** There’s a case for visiting Sicily just for the eating and drinking. Often, even the most out-of-the-way village will boast somewhere you can get a good lunch, while places like [Catania](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/sicily/catania/), [Palermo](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/sicily/palermo-around/), Ragusa, Trapani and Siracusa can keep a serious eater happy for days. And it’s not ruinously expensive either, certainly compared to prices in the rest of mainland Italy. Discover the local specialities and where to find them in our Sicily Travel Guide. **Breakfast, snacks and markets** For most Sicilians, breakfast (*prima colazione*) is an espresso or cappuccino, and the ubiquitous cornetto – a jam-, custard- or chocolate-filled croissant. Most bars and patisseries (*pasticceria*) also offer *cannoli* (deep-fried pastry tubes filled with sweet ricotta cheese and candied fruit). The traditional summer breakfast is a *granita* (preferably almond or coffee) with a *brioche*. Look out also for almond milk, and freshly squeezed orange and pomegranate juices. There are sandwich (panini) bars in the bigger towns, though alternatively, in most places, you can simply go into an alimentari (grocer’s shop) and ask them to make you a sandwich from whatever they’ve got. Bakeries sometimes sell *panini* or *pane cunzato*, crusty bread rolls filled with pungent combinations such as tuna, tomato, anchovies and capers. Look out also for *impanata* or *scacce*, bread turnovers filled with combinations of potato, onion, fennel-seed and chilli sausage, broccoli and wild greens. You’ll get most of the things already mentioned, plus small pizzas, ready-prepared pasta and deep-fried, breadcrumbed balls of rice known as *arancini* (usually either ragù, with Bolognese sauce, peas and cheese, or al burro, with cheese and ham) and full hot meals in a *tavola calda*, a sort of stand-up snack bar. In the larger cities, you’ll occasionally come across an old-fashioned *focacceria* – takeaway establishments selling *focaccia* and other bread-based snacks. Or there’s the ubiquitous *rosticceria* in every Sicilian town, a takeaway grill-house where the speciality is spit-roast chicken (*pollo allo spiedo*). Grocers’ shops (*alimentari*) and markets are the best places for fruit, veg and picnic food, and you’ll usually be able to jazz up your picnic lunch with sweet peppers, olives, seafood salad and pickled vegetables. Some markets also sell traditional takeaway food, loved by Sicilians, though perhaps a challenge for some visitors – usually things like boiled artichokes, cooked octopus, raw sea urchins and mussels, and fried offal sandwiches. **Restaurant meals** For a full meal, you’ll have to go either to a *trattoria* or a *ristorante*. A *trattoria* is usually the cheaper, more basic choice, offering good home cooking, while a *ristorante* is often more upmarket. In small towns and villages, the local trattoria is often open only at lunchtime, there may not be a menu, and the waiter will simply reel off a list of what’s available. Traditionally, lunch (*pranzo*) or dinner (*cena*) starts with an *antipasto*, at its best when you circle around a table and help yourself to a cold buffet selection. This is followed by soup or pasta, *il primo*, and moves on to *il secondo*, the meat or fish dish. The second course is generally served unadorned, except for a wedge of lemon or tomato – *contorni* (vegetables and salads) are ordered and served separately, and often there won’t be much choice beyond chips and salad. Dessert (*dolci*) is almost always fresh fruit, fruit salad or ice cream, though restaurants may also have a choice of cakes, tarts and puddings – unfortunately, though, many of these are mass-produced, and a restaurant *tiramisù* or *cassata*, say, can be a poor substitute for the real thing. **Vegetarian and vegan options** In recent years, vegetarian and vegan options started appearing in the main cities and more touristy areas, and are now taking Sicily by storm. Gluten-free pizzas and dairy-free/vegan options (including some very yummy ice creams) are also becoming more and more common. It is not just that there is increased awareness of food allergies and intolerances, but the impact of meat and dairy on the planet is being taken to heart especially among younger Sicilians. **Service charge**Nearly everywhere, you’ll pay a small cover charge per person for the bread (*pane e coperto*); service (*servizio*) will be added as well in many restaurants – it’s usually ten percent, though fifteen or even twenty percent isn’t unheard of. If service isn’t charged, leaving ten percent would do, though most pizzerias and trattorias won’t expect it. **Best places to drink in Sicily** In most town and village bars, it’s cheapest to drink standing up at the counter, in which case you pay first at the cash desk, present your receipt (*scontrino*) to the bar person and give your order. It’s more expensive to sit down inside than stand up and it costs up to twice the basic price if you sit at tables outside (*terrazza*). Although bars have no set licensing hours, outside the cities it’s often difficult to find a bar open much after 9pm. Children are allowed in, and bars, like restaurants, are smoke-free, though if you’re drinking or eating outside it’s fine to smoke. Most Sicilians tend to drink when they eat, and young people especially don’t make a night out of getting wasted. In recent years the *aperitivo* scene has taken Sicily by storm. Bars advertising *aperitivo* will provide a buffet or table-served nibbles to accompany a spritz, cocktail, or a glass of wine. When young Sicilians do go out on the town, it’s to a *birreria* (literally “beer shop”) or something calling itself a “pub”, which is actually a bar open at night. **Tea and coffee** One of the most distinctive smells in a Sicilian street is that of fresh coffee. The basic choice is either an *espresso* (or just *caffè*), a *cappuccino* or a *latte macchiato*. Milky coffees are considered a breakfast drink – no Italian would order a *cappuccino* or *latte macchiato* after a meal. Sicilians tend to drink their *cappuccino* or latte macchiato lukewarm – if you want yours hot, ask for it to be “*ben caldo”* or even “*caldissimo*”. A longer *espresso* is a *caffè lungo*, a shorter one a *caffè ristretto*, and with a drop of milk it’s *caffè macchiato*, while coffee with a shot of alcohol is *caffè corretto*. In summer, you might want your coffee cold (*caffè freddo*), or try a *granita di caffè*– cold coffee with crushed ice that’s usually topped with whipped cream. Tea, too, can be drunk iced (*tè freddo*), usually mixed with lemon. Hot tea (*tè caldo*) comes with lemon (*con limone*) unless you ask for milk (*con latte*). **Soft drinks** For a fresh fruit juice (usually orange, but pomegranate is becoming more widespread), squeezed at the bar, ask for a *spremuta*, while a *succo di frutta* is a bottled fruit juice. As an alternative to Coke try the home-grown Chinotto (Coke-like, but not so sweet). Also look out for the huge range of Sicilian fizzy drinks currently enjoying a renaissance – flavours like pomegranate, lemon and ginger, and green mandarin are all worth trying. Tap water (*acqua normale*) should not be drunk, but mineral water (*acqua minerale*) is cheap, either still (*senza gas, lisce or naturale*) or fizzy (*con gas, gassata or frizzante*). **Beer** Beer (*birra*) – generally lager in Sicily – usually comes in 33cl (*piccolo*) or 66cl (*grande*) bottles. The Sicilian brand Messina, and the Italian Peroni and Dreher, are widely available – ask for *birra nazionale*, otherwise you’ll be given a more expensive imported beer, and note that draught beer (*birra alla spina*) is usually more expensive than the bottled variety. So-called “dark beers” (*birra nera, birra rossa or birra scura*) are also available, which have a slightly maltier taste. **Wine** Local wine (*vino locale*) is often served straight from the barrel in jugs. Bottled wine is more expensive, usually starting at around €10 in a modest restaurant, and from under €4 in a supermarket. The most popular *aperitivo* drinks are Campari and Aperol, served as spritzes, with prosecco and soda, or their non-alcoholic equivalents, Crodino (which is orange) and San Bitter (which come in red or white versions). The most famous Sicilian dessert wine is marsala, made in the western town of the same name. If you’re heading to the offshore islands, watch out for malvasia (from the Aeolians) and moscato (from Pantelleria), while around Taormina the local speciality is *vino alla mandorla*, almond wine served ice-cold. **Spirits** Spirits are known mostly by their generic names, except brandy which you should call cognac or ask for by name – for cheaper Italian brands, ask for *nazionale*. Look out as well for artisan gins, which are enjoying the same kind of popularity as in the UK. At some stage you should also try an *amaro*, an after-dinner drink supposed to aid digestion. The classic brand is Averna (from Caltanissetta) but there are dozens of different kinds – including the very hip and gorgeously bottled Nepéta, made with Sicilian wild mint, or Amara Rossa made with blood orange peel. Look out, too, for rosoli, alcohol-infused with herbs or spices such as bay leaves, wild fennel, rose petal or cinnamon. **Places to visit in Sicily Palermo** [Palermo](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/sicily/palermo-around/), Sicily’s capital, is filthy, frenetic, noisy and at times exciting – the sort of place you either love or hate. Assailed by the roar of traffic ricocheting off every wall, and the stranglehold of endless shabby concrete apartment blocks, it is not immediately evident that Palermo actually has the largest *centro storico* in Italy, a typically Sicilian fusion of foreign art, architecture, culture and lifestyle. Elegant Baroque and Norman monuments exist cheek by jowl with Arabic cupolas in narrow labyrinthine streets, while exuberant markets swamp the medieval warrens, and chic little shops are squeezed between Renaissance churches and Spanish palazzi. But this ancient core is grimy and unkempt; palaces, bombed in World War II, still await reconstruction; and world-class museums remain closed for decades for reasons that no one is willing to disclose. **The Aeolian Islands** [The Aeolian Islands](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/sicily/aeolian-islands/), or Isole Eolie, are a mysterious apparition when glimpsed from Sicily’s northern coast. Sometimes it’s clear enough to pick out the individual white houses on their rocky shores; at other times they’re murky, misty and only half-visible. The sleepy calm that seems to envelop this archipelago masks a more dramatic existence: two of the islands are still volcanically active, and all are buffeted alternately by ferocious storms in winter and a deluge of tourists in summer. But their unique charm has survived more or less intact, fuelled by the myths associated with their elemental and unpredictable power. **Messina** If you’re coming from Italy’s mainland, [Messina](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/sicily/ionian-coast/messina/) may be your first taste of Sicily. The city has had suffered heavily from earthquakes and second world war bombings, so doesn’t make for much of a spectacle up close, but the area down by the harbour is atmospheric. **Taormina** [Taormina](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/sicily/taormina/), dominating two grand, sweeping bays from high on Monte Tauro, is Sicily’s best-known and classiest resort. Although it has no beach of its own – they are all sited quite a way below town – the outstanding remains of the classical Teatro Greco and the sheer beauty of the town’s site, framed by a distant Etna, amply compensate. Beloved of writers, artists and celebrities across the decades, it’s an expensive place, but the air of exclusivity at least is only skin-deep – at heart, what was once a small hill-village still can’t seem to believe its good luck. Much of its late medieval character remains intact, with the one main traffic-free street presenting an unbroken line of aged palazzi, flower-decked alleys and intimate piazzas. **Mount Etna** One of the largest volcanoes in the world, [Mount Etna](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/sicily/mount-etna/) dominates much of Sicily’s eastern landscape, its smoking summit an omnipresent feature for travellers in the area. The main crater is gradually becoming more explosive and more dangerous, with recent eruptions far eclipsing those of the preceding decade. Despite the risk, the volcano remains a remarkable draw, though the unpredictability of eruptions – they may be expected, but cannot be pinpointed to a precise time – means that it’s often impossible to get close to the main crater. **Catania** Bang in the middle of the Ionian coast, with Mount Etna looming high above it, [Catania](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/sicily/catania/) is Sicily’s second-largest city, a major airport, port and transport hub and a thriving commercial centre. Within the periphery of shabby apartment blocks and edgy urban wasteland is a vibrant city, its small historic centre full of jaunty Baroque buildings of black lava and creamy white limestone built in the wake of the 1693 earthquake that wrecked the whole region. There’s an iconic fish market, plenty of restaurants, an easy-going drinking and nightlife scene, and just enough historical sights to pique your interest without being overwhelming. **The Tyrrhenian coast** From Palermo, the whole of the rugged Tyrrhenian coast is hugged by rail, road and motorway, and for the most part, pretty built up. The first attraction is Cefalù, a beach resort and cathedral town. Beyond Cefalù, there are several resorts tucked along the narrow strip of land between the Nebrodi mountains and the sea, most of them not worth going out of your way for. Most people tend to head straight for the port of Milazzo – Sicily’s second-largest port – the main departure point for ferries and hydrofoils to the seven fascinating islands of the Aeolian archipelago. **Cefalù** Despite being one of Sicily’s busiest international beach resorts, Celafù has a parallel life as a small-scale fishing port, tucked onto every available inch of a shelf of land beneath a fearsome crag, La Rocca. Roger II founded a mighty cathedral here in 1131 and his church dominates the skyline, the great twin towers of the facade rearing up above the flat roofs of the medieval quarter. Naturally, the fine curving sands are the major attraction but Cefalù is a pleasant town, and nothing like as developed as Sicily’s other package resort, Taormina. **The Ionian coast** Sicily’s eastern Ionian coast draws the largest number of visitors, attracted by Taormina, most chic of the island’s resorts and famed for its remarkable Greco-Roman theatre, and Mount Etna, Europe’s highest volcano. Further south, out of the lee of Etna, Siracusa was formerly the most important and beautiful city in the Hellenistic world, its enchanting *centro storico* surrounded by water. **Siracusa** Under ancient Greek rule, Siracusa was the most important city in the Western world. Today it is one of Sicily’s main draws, thanks to its extensive archaeological park, a Greek theatre where plays are still performed and a charming historic centre occupying an offshore island where Greek, Roman, medieval and Baroque buildings of mellow golden limestone tangle along a labyrinth of cobbled streets. In between the two, is modern Siracusa, a busy and functional city of undistinguished apartment-lined boulevards. **Riserva Naturale di Vendicari** A line of small-town resorts stretches from Siracusa to Vittoria, and in between there are several sweeps of pristine sands: most notably at the [Riserva Naturale di Vendicari](http://www.vendicari.net/" \t "_blank), 10km south of Noto, a lovely coastal nature reserve. Paths lead to unspoilt beaches of white-gold sand and salt lakes, that, between October and March, attract flamingoes, herons, cranes, black storks and pelicans. **The southern coast and the interior** The southern coast and hinterland mark a welcome break from the volcanic fixation of the blacker lands to the north: here the towns are largely spacious and bright, strung across a gentler, unscarred landscape that rolls down to endless long sandy beaches and the sea. Sicily’s southeastern bulge was devastated by a calamitous seventeenth-century earthquake and the inland rebuilding, over the next century, was almost entirely Baroque in concept and execution. Noto, closest to Siracusa, is the undisputed gem, but there are Baroque treasures aplenty both at Modica and Ragusa. The coast, too, has some jewels: 10km south of Noto is the magical Riserva Naturale di Vendicari, and though certain stretches of the coast are marred by industrial development and pollution, there are some magnificent sands further west. Further west still, is Agrigento, sitting on a rise overlooking the sea above its famed series of Greek temples. Slow cross-country trains and limited-exit motorways do little to encourage stopping in the island’s interior, but it’s only here that you really begin to get off the tourist trail. Much of the land is burned dry during the long summer months, sometimes a dreary picture, but in compensation the region boasts some of Sicily’s most curious towns. Enna is the obvious target, as central as you can get, the blustery mountain town a pace apart from the dry hills below. There are easy trips to be made from here, north into the hills and south to Piazza Armerina and the fabulous Roman mosaics. **Enna** From a bulging V-shaped ridge almost 1000m up, ENNA lords it over the surrounding hills of central Sicily. One of the most ancient towns on the island, Enna has only ever had one function: Livy described it as “inexpugnabilis”, and, for obvious strategic reasons, the town was a magnet for successive hostile armies, who in turn besieged and fortified it. The Arabs, for example, spent twenty years trying to gain entrance to Enna before eventually, in 859, resorting to crawling in through the sewers. The approach to this doughty mountain stronghold is still formidable, the road climbing slowly out of the valley and looping across the solid crag to the summit and the town. Enna remains a medieval hill-town at heart, with a tightly packed centre of narrow streets, small squares and hemmed-in churches, where occasional gaps through the buildings reveal swirling drops down into the valleys below. Most of Enna’s churches – even the ones in use – have cracked facades and weeds growing out of improbable places, but there are some that catch the eye, like fourteenth- century San Giovanni (behind the much larger San Giuseppe, on Piazza Coppola), which has a Catalan-Gothic facade and a tower crowned by a little cupola. When all is said and done, apart from the castle, the all-encompassing views, and the usual desultory pleasures of provincial town life (like the little street market on Piazza Coppola), there’s little to keep you here more than a night. However, that night is very definitely worth it – with some stupendous vantage points from which to watch the sun set, summer evenings here must count among the most enjoyable in Sicily. Come in winter and you should expect snow, the wind blowing hard through the streets, and the white slopes beyond blending with the anaemic stone buildings. **The Baroque towns** The earthquake of 1693, which destroyed utterly the towns and villages of southeastern Sicily, had one positive and lasting effect. Where there were ruins, a new generation of confident architects raised new planned towns in an opulent Baroque style. All were harmonious creations, and in 2001 eight of them were selected by [UNESCO](https://www.riservazingaro.it/) as World Heritage Sites. Funding has poured into the area, and in recent years there has been an explosion of new hotels and B&Bs. Noto, recently restored to perfection, is the most eagerly promoted by the tourist board, while Ragusa Ibla, a Baroque town built on a medieval plan, has become a destination for the stylish international set, with a handful of bijou B&Bs and a couple of Michelin-starred restaurants. Liveliest of the lot is Modica, a vibrant town famous for the production of chocolate. **Agrigento** Though handsome, well sited and awash with medieval atmosphere, Agrigento is rarely visited for the town itself. The interest instead focuses on the substantial remains of Pindar’s “most beautiful city of mortals”, a couple of kilometres below. Here, strung out along a ridge facing the sea, is a series of Doric temples – the most captivating of Sicilian Greek remains and a grouping unique outside Greece. In 581 BC colonists from nearby Gela and from Rhodes founded the city of Akragas between the rivers of Hypsas and Akragas. They surrounded it with a mighty wall, formed in part by a higher ridge on which stood the acropolis (today occupied by the modern town). The southern limit of the ancient city was a second, lower ridge and it was here, in the “Valle dei Templi”, that the city architects erected their sacred buildings during the fifth century BC. A road winds down from the modern city to the Valle dei Templi, which is divided into two zones. The more spectacular remains are in the eastern zone – to avoid crowds come in the early morning or (in summer) for the night openings. The western zone may be less architecturally impressive, but gives more of a sense of discovery – and holds the lovely gardens of Kolymbetra. **Trapani** Out on a limb, and with more than a little North African atmosphere about it, Trapani is an attractive old port town, rediscovering its charms after years of neglect. Halfway point between Europe and Tunis, it was a rich trading centre throughout the early Middle Ages, then flourished again in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a stronghold of the tuna-canning industry. After that, it went into decline, and became a salty old port with a crumbling, sun-scorched historic centre high on atmosphere, but with few creature comforts. Then, it was selected to host the 2004 Americas Cup and received a massive injection of cash – buildings were restored, streets in the historic centre pedestrianized – giving the town and its people a new confidence. These days Trapani is a thoroughly pleasant and authentic place to hang out for a couple of days. Adding to its reviving fortunes, the nearby airport of Birgi is undergoing a renaissance too, and on the way to becoming Sicily’s main low-cost airport. Trapani’s Easter celebrations are justly famous, involving dramatic processions around town, particularly poignant on Good Friday. **Western Sicily** The west of Sicily is a land apart. Skirting around the coast from Trapani – the provincial capital – the cubic whitewashed houses, palm trees, active fishing harbours and sunburned lowlands seem more akin to Africa than Europe, and historically, the west of the island has always looked south. Also worth seeing are the three islands of the Egadi archipelago, and the stunning stretch of coastline protected by the [Riserva Naturale dello Zingaro](https://www.riservazingaro.it/). **Riserva Naturale dello Zingaro** The [Riserva Naturale dello Zingaro](https://www.riservazingaro.it/" \t "_blank), Sicily’s first nature reserve, comprises a completely unspoiled 7km stretch of coastline backed by steep mountains. At the entrance, there’s an information hut, where you can pick up a plan showing the trails through the reserve. It’s less than twenty minutes to the first beach, Punta della Capreria, and 3km to the successive coves of Disa, Berretta and Marinella, which should be a little more secluded.