

*Fly & Drive, Walk & Discover*

# The Real Spirit of Sicily

*Walking across a mythical island, between Mount Etna, ancient civilizations,  
Greek, Roman and baroque treasures*

*9/11-day Fly & Drive Tour with 5/6 different bases in beautiful hotels and agriturismo's*



## Spring & Autumn 2011

**Local Organizer:** Genius Loci Travel – Salerno (Italy)

**Level:** 2, easy to moderate (reasonable fitness required, no technical difficulties)

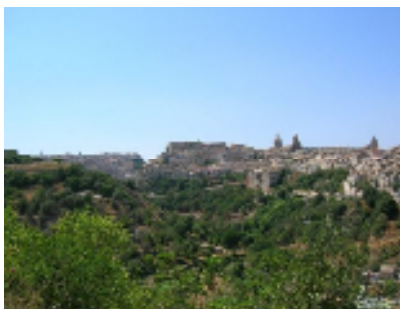
**\*\*\* GENIUS LOCI TRAVEL- The real spirit of Italy \*\*\***  
[www.genius-loci.it](http://www.genius-loci.it)

## Introduction

*Everybody knows Sicily. And most can also mention a few famous places such as Taormina, Etna, and Syracuse. But this tour will also show you life in Sicily as the real Sicilians live it. Discover the inland villages, yet undiscovered by mass tourism. Sit in the shade of the orange trees and have a good country lunch with local specialties. Have a delicious almond or strawberry 'granita' for breakfast. Swim in the small ponds of the wonderful Pantalica Gorge and handpick some fresh oranges. And of course, wander through the small places and perhaps chat with some locals. This journey will not only show you some of the cultural highlights of the biggest Mediterranean island, but also some natural wonders and of course let you taste the flavours of the real southern Italian life!*

*You start the tour from the charming village of Sortino, where we'll see part of the different civilizations that have chosen Sicily as their base. In the Anapo Canyon you'll make a beautiful walk along prehistoric caves, Byzantine churches and baroque buildings, discovering the necropolis of Pantalica. Then you travel to the south-eastern part of Sicily, home to the 8 baroque cities, listed by UNESCO as 'world heritage sites'. Both Noto and Ragusa are a must! You will have time to visit the most interesting parts and of course make a few nice walks, to explore the amazing landscape of the Iblei Mountains. Then you settle in Syracuse, once the most powerful Greek city in the world. Visit its amazing Greek 'Neapolis' and explore this intriguing city carefully. Of course you have to dedicate some time to the most famous wine of the area, the Nero d'Avola! If in Sicily, you cannot miss Mount Etna, Europe's most active volcano. Here you will walk some unbeaten tracks, away from the crowds. Discover its most recent lava flows, its forests, its barren landscape and many volcanic cones. Your journey then takes you inland to explore the unique Alcantara Valley, with its canyons and natural swimming pools.*

*If you want you can spend some extra days in the wonderful resort of Taormina, halfway between the Mediterranean Sea and the impressive Mount Etna, one of Italy's most scenic locations, which boasts one of the most spectacular Greek theatres in the world and a very charming old town centre. Views from your hotel on Mount Etna are unforgettable!*



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*During this tour you can decide independently the skill level of your excursions. Walks follow easy routes without any real technical difficulties and are feasible for all with some walking experience and in a good physical condition. Walking times: approx. 2 to 5 hours a day.*

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## DAY-TO-DAY PROGRAMME

### Day 1 Arrival at Catania – Transfer to Sortino

Arrival in Catania. At the airport or train station you pick up your car. Driving south under the shadow of Mount Etna you arrive shortly at the charming baroque town of Sortino, dominating the valley of the river Anapo, one of the most intriguing places in Sicily. In the evening you find a nice restaurant for a hearty dinner.

B&B in Sortino - BB

### Day 2 Round walk at Sortino

Today you have two options: to make it yourself easier you can drive down to the entrance of the Anapo Valley, otherwise you start your walk directly from your B&B. The valley has been inhabited since prehistoric times, and all civilizations have left their traces here. You make a wonderful round walk through the canyon, first through the higher parts, along the various prehistoric burial sites, the so-called necropolis of Pantalica, the biggest necropolis of the Mediterranean, and its most impressive monument, the 'Palace of the Prince'. But we encounter also small chapels, Byzantine villages, and at the edge of the canyon we find beautiful baroque churches. You can enjoy your picnic lunch on a nice spot in the canyon. After lunch you continue your walk through the canyon, now following the course of an old railway, and therefore almost level. Along the river there are several good spots for a rest and perhaps a swim in one of the wonderful small lakes. A short climb, at the end of the walk, brings you back to your starting point. Now take some time as well to stroll through the quaint village of Sortino, and perhaps enjoy already a 'granita' in one of the typical Sicilian bars. *Total walking time: around 3,5 hours + sightseeing time (4,5 hours with extra option).*

B&B in Sortino - BB

### Day 3 Akrai and Ragusa

From Sortino you drive in south-eastern direction today, through the beautiful landscape of the Iblei Mountains, made of ancient farm houses, stone walls, olive groves and pistachios. Your first stop is in the beautiful town of Palazzolo Acreide, one of the eight baroque cities granted the title of 'World Heritage Site' by the UNESCO. Of utmost interest is the archaeological site of the ancient Greek Akrai. Then travel on to Ragusa, with its older 'twin city' Ibla, perhaps the most scenic of all Sicilian towns. The 'new' baroque city of Ragusa, was completely rebuilt after the devastating earthquake of 1693. Both parts of town deserve a visit. Settle in your hotel in the old town centre and start exploring! In the late afternoon, if you still feel fit, you can go for a short walk into the canyon of the Misericordia, directly from your hotel. Through an archway you descend into the valley of the Leonardo River, and then through olive groves and in between dry stone walls you'll walk up a first hill, with wonderful views on the city behind you. From here you will see how much the old city of Ragusa-Ibla is part of the surrounding landscape. Then you return to Ragusa-Ibla and through its old centre you walk back to your hotel. Here you will see that the much of its charm lies in wandering down the narrow medieval lanes, past romantically crumbling baroque and medieval palaces and churches. *Total walking time: around 2,5 hours + sightseeing time (shorter option: about 1 hour walking).*

Hotel in Ragusa-Ibla - BB

## Day 4 Modica and Noto

Today you travel in eastern direction towards one of the most remarkable towns of Sicily, the baroque city of Noto. This is maybe the most famous of the baroque cities of southern Sicily. But on your way you will have ample time as well to stroll through a less known, but perhaps even more beautiful city of Modica, also famous for its delicious chocolate. After Modica you travel towards the South Coast and you have the possibility to visit two of the highlights here. You can make the short walk to the 'Isola delle Correnti', Europe's most southern point and take your time for a stroll and maybe a swim in the nature reserve of Vendicari. Here you'll find one of the last stretches of pristine coast in Sicily. You can make a round walk along the nature trails put in place by the park, through a landscape of sand dunes, lagoons and stretches of rocky shore. Bird life is abundant, and of course, as in any place in Sicily also the cultural heritage is very interesting. On your walk to the Byzantine settlement of Maccari, where the necropolis and church can still be visited, you come across a medieval watchtower, and an old 'tonnara', where tuna fish was processed in early days. An extra walk can bring you to the ancient settlement of Eoro. After the walk you can relax on the beach, or have a swim, before travelling on to Noto. *Total walking time: around 1 hour (Isola Correnti) + 3,5 hours (Vendicari) + sightseeing time.*

B&B in Noto - BB

## Day 5 Noto

After breakfast you travel a few kilometres to the north and go for a beautiful walk to the fantastic ruins of the old Noto, once an impregnable fortress, completely destroyed by the earthquake in 1693. Here you'll find remains of Sicilian, Greek, Roman and Spanish ruins, in the unique setting of the Iblei Mountains. You have the option for a longer or a shorter walk. It's recommended to take your picnic stuff with you, there are many remarkable places for a relaxed lunch. In the afternoon there is the possibility to travel on from Noto Antica and make a walk in the 'grand canyon' of the river Cassibile, the largest canyon of the island, with some nice small lakes where you can perhaps have a swim. Otherwise you return to Noto and now take your time to visit the town centre. The 'new' Noto is one of the best examples of a rationally planned town, completely rebuilt in the baroque style, which then was fashionable. Some of its abundant decorations are unique! Visit its impressive cathedral and other monuments and perhaps have a drink or savour an almond 'granita' in one of the lively bars. You will walk past many an open door some of which will give you a glimpse of an ornate secret courtyard, others open right onto someone's dining room where potatoes are being peeled. Don't forget to do some wine tasting of one of the most famous wines of the island, the Nero d'Avola, produced in this area. *Total walking time: around 1,5 / 3 h (Noto Antica) + 3,5 hours (Cassibile) + sightseeing time.*

B&B in Noto - BB

## Day 6 Peninsula of Maddalena and Syracuse

Today you make a short drive to Syracuse, an ancient town on the sea, which was of immense importance as Greek Syracuse. You drive past the wonderful beach at Fontane Bianche and the Peninsula of the Maddalena, where you can make a nice walk towards Cape Murro di Porco. Also at the nearby river Ciane, the only river in Europe where papyrus plants grown naturally, you can make a walk along its banks. Syracuse itself is full of monuments, vast excavations, and countless churches. Syracuse has a superb archaeological zone, definitely worth a visit, but also the old city, located on the island of Ortigia is unforgettable with its crumbling façades with their fat-bellied balconies, supported for centuries by a host of stone lions, tigers, bears, dragons, Moors, satyrs, devils, angels, kings, paupers, wenches and cherubs. Limestone-paved streets overhung with drying laundry and ancient scaffolding, narrow alleyways that lead you around a bend and suddenly, breathtakingly, into one of the most expansive 'piazze' Italy has to offer. This living history book is yours to explore. Another option is to do a boat ride to visit the marine reserve from the sea, with the possibility to admire its sea grotto's. *Total walking time: around 3,5 hours + sightseeing time.*

B&B in Syracuse - BB

## Day 7 The Alcantara Canyon and Francavilla

Today we travel north. The target is the protected nature area of the spectacular Alcantara Canyon, a unique canyon cut through an ancient lava flow of Mount Etna. You'll first reach the narrowest part of the canyon, where, according to the water levels you can make a spectacular, but easy walk through this part of the canyon (partly through the water – equipment can be supplied), and then have a look around in the botanical garden. Then you travel on, towards the charming historical village of Francavilla. Here you can already settle in your centrally located B&B, have a coffee and buy your picnic supplies. Then you walk down into the least known part of the canyon of the Alcantara River. The walk leads through a pleasant terraced landscape of orchards and fruit trees, irrigated by a complex system of basins and canals, dating back to the times of the Arab domination of Sicily. At the river you have the possibility to dive into one of the 'gurne', natural 'swimming pools', cut out by the river in the black lava stone. The walk continues along the river bank, passing a few hamlets built of lava stone and many strange lava formations, all sculpted by the Alcantara River. Back in Francavilla, you have the time to stroll through its old streets, with the possibility to climb up to the castle, with nice views over the river and of course on Mount Etna. *Total walking time: around 3 hours + sightseeing time.*

B&B in Francavilla - BB

## Day 8 Mount Etna

After breakfast you leave your base for a full day visit to Mount Etna. First you drive to the charming little town of Linguaglossa, where you can have a coffee and enjoy one of the typical sweet cakes from this area. Then the journey goes up, along the 'MareNeve' road, the road of the sea and snow. Along the road you can admire the most recent lava flows, some of which date back only a few years, reminding you of the fact that the Etna is still an active volcano! You make a wonderful walk on one of the most recent lava flows, with a visit to some of the spots where the lava burst out. This walk really gives you the feeling of the immense forces still working below you. Then your bus brings you to the Sartorius mountains, from where you make a nice walk, partly through the forest, partly over older lava flows, ending at a mountain hut with spectacular views over the Strait of Messina,. Here you can have lunch, before driving on to the southern side of Mount Etna. Here you have the possibility to either take the cable car to the top, or to make a spectacular round walk along the Monti Silvestri, through the barren landscape formed by the explosion of 1892. After a short stop for a drink you then return to your base in Francavilla, perhaps driving around Mount Etna on the western side. *Total walking time: around 4 hours. Total driving time today: around 2.5 hours.*

B&B in Francavilla - BB

## Day 9 Return to Catania

After breakfast you return to Catania.

## POSSIBLE EXTENSION TAORMINA

It is possible to extend your stay in Sicily with two more days in the charming little town of Taormina.

### Day 9 Taormina

After breakfast you travel along the Alcantara River towards the stunning hilltop town of Taormina. Breath taking views of the coastline and glorious Etna await us on arrival. After settling in your hotel, there is plenty of time for a walking tour through the streets of town, its gardens and to the ancient theatre and the cathedral. The Greek influence is noticeable in the architecture and wandering the back streets is a great way to transport you back in time to the days when this part of Italy remained a stronghold for their Aegean neighbours. With picturesque ruins and the backdrop of Etna, views are grand to say the least. Your walk takes you along the so-called Saracen castle into the old town, where the 'duomo' and other historical buildings are worth a visit. Along the panoramic Corso Umberto you can then walk to the other side of town, where both the wonderful public gardens and the amazing Greek theatre have to be seen! *Total walking time: around 2,5 hours + sightseeing time (3,5 hours with extra option).*

Hotel in Taormina - BB

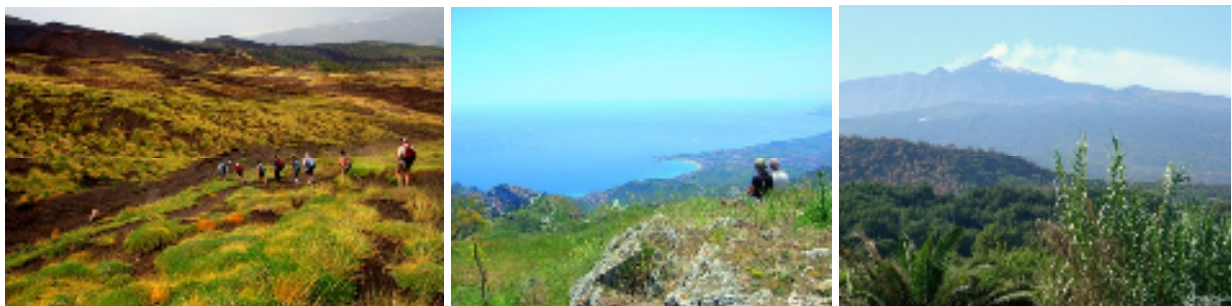
### Day 10 Castelmola and Mount Venere

By local bus you travel to the small fortified city of Castelmola (also possible to walk), from where you can enjoy even more stunning views over the surrounding area. From here you can make a stunning walk up to Mount Venere, from where views are grand to say the least. Descend back down to Castelmola. After a stroll through its medieval streets, a visit to the castle and maybe a drink on one of the terraces, you walk down to Taormina again, along a beautiful panoramic footpath. Alternatively you may stay in Taormina and perhaps take the cable car down to the beach for good views, relaxing and soaking up the Mediterranean sun. *Total walking time: around 3,5 hours + sightseeing time .*

Hotel in Taormina - BB

### Day 11 Return to Catania

First you drive down to the coast, where you take the highway in southern direction. In about 1 hour you are back in Catania.



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# TOUR DETAILS

## ACCOMMODATION & MEALS

All nights are spent in beautiful hotels and B&B's (generally 3-star). All rooms have en-suite facilities.

Dinners are not included in the tour price. In the evenings you have an ample choice of good typical restaurants in the towns where you are staying.

No picnic lunches are included in the tour price, but these can be prepared for you by the accommodation holders, or materials for picnics can be purchased in the villages where you will be passing through.

**Nights 1 & 2:** The first two nights are spent in a cosy B&B in the baroque village of Sortino.

**Night 3:** This night is spent in a nice hotel in the old town centre of the panoramic town of Ragusa-Ibla.

**Nights 4 & 5:** The next two nights are spent in a charming B&B in Noto, the best known of the Sicilian baroque cities.

**Night 6:** Tonight you stay in a nice B&B in the town of Syracuse.

**Nights 7 & 8:** The last two nights are spent in a small B&B in the beautiful town of Francavilla, at the foot of Mount Etna.

**Nights 9 & 10:** In case you choose to extend your trip, the last two nights you stay in a charming family run hotel in Taormina, with view of the sea, and of Mount Etna.

## ON THIS INDIVIDUAL FLY & DRIVE TOUR WE PROVIDE YOU WITH:

- Accommodation: 2 nights Sortino, 1 night Ragusa-Ibla, 2 nights Noto, 1 night Syracuse, 2 nights Francavilla (possibly 2 nights Taormina); all nights in good 3-star hotels or equivalent B&B's.
- Meals: 8 (10) breakfasts
- Extensive route notes, with description of the route & tourist information
- Maps at 1 : 25.000 scale (or better)
- 24/24 h local assistance

## Not Included

- Departure taxes & Visas
- Travel Insurance
- Drinks and meals not mentioned in the itinerary
- Optional additional tours or activities
- Tips
- Items of personal nature
- Car rental

## LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

**Easy/moderate (2/3):** Easy to moderate walks without any real technical difficulties. Remember you decide yourself the level of difficulty of your excursions. Also in early spring and late autumn temperatures can be quite high during the central hours of the day.

**Fitness:** All walks are feasible for all with some walking experience and in a good physical condition. You should be able to walk for some hours a day also in hot dry weather conditions.

## ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE

**Arrival:** The tour starts in CATANIA. The town is served by an international airport with daily flights from Milan, Roma and Naples.

**Departure:** The tour ends after breakfast on day 9 in FRANCAVILLA (with extension on day 11 in Taormina).

## TOUR VARIATIONS

### EXTRA NIGHTS

In addition to the extension at Taormina, it is possible to extend your tour also with a few days at Catania or another town on the island (e.g. Palermo). Details and prices on request.

### UPGRADE

It is possible to book an upgrade in some of the places en route. Details and prices on request.

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