



Volcanoes of Sicily

Etna & the Aeolian Islands

Exploring the dramatic volcanic landscapes of Sicily



TRIP NOTES 2019

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INTRODUCTION

The archipelago of the Aeolian Islands, situated off the northern coast of Sicily, is a place of overwhelming natural beauty, made all the more special by its particular volcanic nature. The islands of Lipari, Stromboli, Vulcano and Panarea, to name just the most famous, are home to tiny fishing villages hiding under tall imposing volcanic cones, some of which are amongst the most active in the world. Here people and forces of nature have co-habited for centuries, often resulting in tremendous loss. But it is also a spectacular landscape, where man and nature have lived together for thousands of years, which is one of the reasons why the area is listed as UNESCO World Heritage. The volcanic earth also provides the reward of extraordinary fertility – as testified by the very good wines produced on these islands!

Moreover, the development of a responsible and ecological 'volcanic' tourism recently has seen an increase in the presence of 'walking tourists' from all over the world, always in utmost respect of the natural resources of the area. When you visit the Aeolian Islands you will discover vast ebony beaches contrasting with light-coloured shores, where inaccessible and winding rocky coasts alternate with beautiful beaches and large barren areas lie alongside beautiful lush gardens.

On 'mainland' Sicily you'll discover Europe's tallest still-active volcano, Mount Etna. With its imposing mass over 3350 metres tall, it dominates the baroque city of Catania, and the whole of eastern Sicily. The obsidian flows of lava and the vast plains of black sand at its peak make the luxurious vegetation on its lower slopes all the more surprising. The summit crater area of the volcano is constantly reshaped by explosive activity and massive lava flows, erupting into incandescent fountains of ash and glowing rocks. Walking in the midst of these impressive forces of nature, observing the gases erupting and the lava flowing down the slopes, makes you feel like you are experiencing a sense of true exploration, delivered in abundance by this tour!

During the first part of your tour you will stay on the islands of Lipari (and Stromboli), exploring the archipelago's wild nature and ever-changing geological aspects. You will hike the black beaches and slopes of Vulcano, observing its 'fumaroles' constantly erupting hot gases, and can bathe in its thermal springs and sulphuric mud. On Stromboli you can take a walk up the volcano proper to experience its brute force. You will also have plenty of time to discover the tiny villages stretched out along the coast, where time seems to have stood still and the friendly locals will always greet you with a smile. Meanwhile you will have the opportunity to sample genuine Italian cuisine, based on seafood and locally produced wines.

On Mount Etna you will have the opportunity to walk on the slopes of Europe's tallest volcano, witnessing the scars left by its many eruptions and watching the construction of a new landscape as it happens. You'll have the opportunity to hike up to the very summit of the volcano for an unforgettable experience while watching eruptions and lava flows mould the earth into shape. After your stay on the slopes of Mount Etna you will then transfer to the bustling city of Catania where you can indulge in the vibrant city life and the splendid baroque architecture in the historical heart of the city.



Please note: this is a moderately easy tour which is suitable for those who have some experience of walking and a good general physical condition. Most of the walks are on good paths, sometimes on steep terrain. People with respiratory problems may have discomfort in sulphurous areas with fumes. Average walking times: approx. 3 to 6 hours each day.



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DAY-TO-DAY PROGRAMME

Day 0 Catania: Arrival in Catania in case you arrive earlier. Catania International Airport can be easily reached with daily flights from many cities in Europe and other cities in Italy, like Milan, Rome and Naples. Several hotels can be booked in town, according to your wishes (either 'downtown' centrally located, or near the harbour or train station, ranging from 3- to 5-star).

Day 1 Arrival – From Catania to Milazzo

After arriving at Catania Airport you will be brought by private transfer to the harbour town of Milazzo on Sicily's northern coast. After settling in at your evening's B&B, you will have time to explore the town's historical centre, dominated by the enormous medieval castle. In the evening you can stroll through the little alleys of the town, finding a suitable place for a hearty dinner.

N.B. In case your flight arrives late you can also opt to spend a first night in Catania.

Hotel **/ Milazzo. Meals included: 1 breakfast**

Day 2 From Milazzo to Lipari

This morning you will take the hydrofoil from Milazzo to Lipari (1h), the largest of the Aeolian Islands volcanic archipelago. You will check in at a small family-run hotel near the marvellously situated port of Marina Corta, dominated by the local 'castello'. From here you will then hike to the old Roman spa near San Calogero which offers a wonderful view of the crater on the nearby island of Vulcano. On your way back to your hotel you may want to visit the remains of the Greek tombs and Greek theatre, as well as have a look at the site of a prehistoric village near the castle. After freshening up at your hotel you can wander through the Marina's little streets in the evening and stop for a pre-dinner 'aperitivo'. You are free to choose your own evening meal tonight – there is the choice of several small restaurants, many of which offer genuine fresh seafood.

Hotel **/ Lipari. Meals included: 1 breakfast**

Walking time : 3 hours, Altitude gain: +250 m, -250 m



Day 3 Visit to Vulcano

After breakfast you take the hydrofoil from Lipari to Vulcano (10 min.). This island, dominated by the extinguished crater of Vulcano della Fossa, takes its name from the Roman god 'Vulcanus'. The Roman name for the island has since come to mean what we now know as a volcano in most modern European languages. Famous



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for its black beaches and thermal springs, the island is an important tourist destination during high season, while retaining its quiet and laidback character during spring and autumn. Your hike on the island will take you to the Vulcano crater where you can admire the 'fumarole', openings in the earth's crust which emit steam and gas, created when superheated water turns to steam as its pressure drops on emerging from the ground. After your hike you will have plenty of time to lounge on the beach and visit the thermal springs where you can enjoy bathing in sulphur mud baths. In the evening you take the hydrofoil back to Lipari. After dinner you can take another stroll through the marina, and why not enjoy a 'gelato' before turning at the hotel.

Hotel **/ Lipari. Meals included: 1 breakfast**

Walking time : 3 hours, Altitude gain: +390 m, -390 m

Day 4 From Lipari to Stromboli

In the morning you take the hydrofoil from Lipari to Stromboli (1h), the northernmost of the Aeolian Islands and one of the world's most active volcanoes. It was here that the heroes of Jules Verne's '*A Journey to the Centre of the Earth*' find themselves after being ejected from the earth by volcanic activity.

After checking in at your hotel, you can take a short hike around the lovely village of San Vincenzo, soaking up the unique island atmosphere and perhaps relax on the island's volcanic black beaches. In the afternoon you can pay a visit to the '*Sciara del Fuoco*', a large horseshoe-shaped depression in the summit area offering a wonderful view of the craters. After turning back to your hotel in the evening you are free to explore the little fishing hamlet of Stromboli some more, and find a nice spot for dinner.

Hotel **/ Stromboli - Meals included: 1 breakfast**

Walking time : 4 hours, Altitude gain: +400 m, -400 m

Day 5 Visit to Stromboli

Today you will have the time to visit some more of the island. After lunch you will leave for a walk to the active crater accompanied by certified volcano guides. They will take you up to the very top of the volcano, 924m high, where you will have the opportunity to admire the ordinary, daily volcanic activity of the island, including intermittent explosions of ash and incandescent rock, reaching up to 120m high. Larger events, including the expulsion of large lava streams, are observed regularly, most recently in 2002-03 and 2007. Watching an active volcano at work is a dramatic and extremely thrilling experience. You should, however, be aware that in case of adverse weather conditions and extraordinary volcanic activity the volcano guides may deem it impossible to walk up the volcano, according to safety measures. After your visit to the Stromboli crater you will return to your hotel where you can freshen up and relax before going out to find a nice spot for dinner.

But most will opt for the hike to the top. This hike to the still active crater must be accompanied by certified volcano guides. They will take you up to the edge of the crater, over 900 m. high, where you will have the opportunity to admire the ordinary, daily volcanic activity of the island, including intermittent explosions of ash and incandescent rock, reaching up to 120m high. Larger events, including the expulsion of large lava streams, are observed regularly, most recently in 2002-03 and 2007. Watching an active volcano at work is a dramatic and extremely thrilling experience. You should, however, be aware that in case of adverse weather conditions and extraordinary volcanic activity the volcano guides may deem it impossible to walk up the volcano, according to safety measures. Therefore you can also take the boat back from Stromboli to Lipari, where you can freshen up and relax before going out to find a nice spot for dinner.

Hotel **/ Stromboli (or Lipari) - Meals included: 1 breakfast**

Walking time : 6 hours, Altitude gain: +924 m, -924 m



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Day 6 From Stromboli to the Sicilian mainland and Mount Etna

After breakfast at your hotel you can go out for one last stroll in the Stromboli village, after which you will hop on the hydrofoil to Milazzo again (2h). From Milazzo harbour a private transfer takes you to the mountain hotel – located at no less than 1900 m.a.s.l. - on the southern slopes of Mount Etna. Etna reaches up to over 3300 m.a.s.l. and has a diameter of around 45 km, making it the largest and tallest active volcano in Europe, dominating most of the eastern half of Sicily. After your arrival at the hotel you will have time for a short walk over the so-called 'Crateri Silvestri' track for a first approach to the Etna activity, characterised by regular explosions and eruptions of gas and ash, followed by lava flows that constantly remodel the mountain slopes. Some of the main eruptions in the last 10 years have even caused Catania Airport to close temporarily. In the evening you will eat a hearty dinner based on local specialties at the hotel.

Hotel **/ Etina - Meals included: 1 breakfast, 1 dinner**

Walking time : 1,5 hours, Altitude gain: +100 m, -100 m

Day 7 Visit to Mount Etna

Today you will visit the main body of the Etna volcano, arriving at an altitude of 2900 m.a.s.l., which is the upper limit people are allowed to walk at without a certified guide. Here you will discover the line of craters that opened up during the eruptions of 2002 and 2003. These events were among the most explosive of the last 100 years, erupting up to 160 million cubic metres of volcanic ash and lava. From here you have an amazing view over the Ionian Coast with the cities of Messina, Catania and Syracuse. On your return to the hotel you will pass along the edge of the 'Valle del Bove', a caldera measuring 1000 metres deep and 5000 metres wide, the result of a collapse of an old crater. Today it is also possible to take an optional guided trip to the summit of the central craters (3350 m.a.s.l.), reaching 2900 m.a.s.l. by cable car and 4WD and then trekking to the top. From the summit you then walk back to the hotel. Please note that the price for this optional trip is 60 euros per person. After returning to the hotel, a private transfer will take you to your evening's hotel at Catania where, after your arrival, you have plenty of time to explore this bustling city. You can visit some of the Greek remains or choose to admire the many baroque 'palazzi' and churches located in the heart of the city centre.

Hotel **/ Catania - Meals included: 1 breakfast**

Walking time : 6 hours, Altitude gain: +1000 m, -1000 m

Day 8 End of tour

The tour ends today after breakfast in Catania. You can easily reach the airport by bus. A taxi transfer to other destinations can be arranged on request.



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TOUR DETAILS

ACCOMMODATION & MEALS

All nights are spent in characteristic hotels and family-run guesthouses. All rooms have en-suite facilities.

Almost all accommodations are on **B&B** basis. Dinners are not included, except on the 6th night when you will be staying on Mount Etna. On the other nights you are free to choose from the wide choice of restaurants in the towns and villages where you'll be 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'll be staying.

Night 1: The first night you stay in a nice hotel near the historical centre of Milazzo. The town centre and main monuments are all within easy reach.

Nights 2 & 3: These nights are spent on Lipari, the largest of the Aeolian Islands. Your cosy family-run hotel is located near the small harbour of Marina Corta.

Nights 4 & 5: These two nights you stay at a friendly hotel on Stromboli. The hotel is centrally located, at walking distance from the seashore and the main shops in the village. *In alternative you can also stay on Lipari.*

Night 6: Tonight you stay in a mountain hotel located at 1900 m.a.s.l. on the slopes of Mount Etna. You will have a hearty dinner based on local dishes in the hotel.

Night 7: Your final night is spent at a comfortable hotel in the city centre of Catania. From the hotel the city's main monuments are all easily reached.

UPGRADE/CHANGES IN ACCOMMODATION

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

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

Moderately easy (2/3): Mostly easy to moderate walks, with some walking uphill, especially on days 5 and 7.

Fitness: High standard of fitness is not necessary but you should be able to walk for up to 5/6 hours a day in hot sun on dusty or stony tracks.

FOOTPATHS & WAYMARKING

Most paths are relatively well maintained, but during the season some paths can get overgrown (*we are in continuous contact with local authorities to keep the paths clean – please help us by providing your feedback on the quality of the paths*).

Waymarking: Only a small part of the route is waymarked (partly by us); elsewhere it is necessary to follow the route descriptions provided together with the maps. With these it is always possible to find your route. In case you don't feel confident a local guide can be provided for some trails.



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INCLUDED

- Accommodation: 1 night Milazzo, 2 nights Lipari, 2 nights Stromboli, 1 night Mt. Etna, 1 night Catania; all nights in good **/** hotels and family-run guesthouses.
- Meals: 7 breakfasts, 1 dinner
- Extensive route notes, with description of the route & tourist information
- Maps at 1 : 25.000 scale (or better)
- Certified volcano guide at Stromboli
- 24/7 Assistance
- Luggage transport
- Private transfers as specified

NOT INCLUDED

- Departure taxes & Visas
- Travel Insurance
- Drinks and meals not mentioned in the itinerary
- Optional additional tours or activities
- Hydrofoil and boat transfers to/ from Aeolian Islands (estimated cost: €70,00 - €80,00 per person)
- Hotel to airport transfer on day 8
- Items of personal nature

ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE

Arrival: The tour starts in CATANIA, a city with an international airport, served by daily flights from Milan, Rome and Naples, as well as a number of cities across Europe. Tours start every day during the trip season with a minimum of two participants.

Departure: The tour ends after breakfast in CATANIA on day 8. A frequent bus service or a taxi can bring you to the airport. Taxi transfers to other destinations are available on simple request.



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TOUR VARIATIONS

It is possible to divide this tour into two parts: Mount Etna and Aeolian Islands, which gives you the opportunity to do some more 'in-depth' explorations.

Early in the season (until the end of April) and later in the season (from October on) the slopes of Mount Etna are often covered in snow and therefore many of the hikes are not possible. In these cases we recommend to book our 'Mythical Volcanoes of Sicily' tour, which gives you the possibility to explore the Aeolian Islands more 'in-depth' and spend a few nights in Catania – with a day trip to Mount Etna.

Check out: www.genius-loci.it/tour/italy_coasts_islands/vulcano-stromboli-lipari-aeolian-hiking-sicily



This tour of the Aeolian Islands can easily be combine with a 'Drive & Hike' tour, which includes the best parts of [South-eastern Sicily – including Mt. Etna](#).

It is possible to include extra nights at the beginning or the end of the tour. The tour can easily be extended with a few days in Catania or any of the other major Sicilian towns (Syracuse, Taormina, Palermo) as well as several other destinations on the island. Several good accommodations are available, ranging from 2- to 5-star). Details and prices on request.

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