



Independent walking tour (SIC3)

Volcanoes of Sicily

Etna & the Aeolian Islands

Exploring the dramatic volcanic landscapes of Sicily



TRIP NOTES 2024

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****GENIUS LOCI TRAVEL - The Real Spirit of Italy****



INTRODUCTION

The archipelago of the Aeolian Islands, situated in front of the north coast of Sicily, is a place of overwhelming natural beauty, made all the more special by its particular volcanic nature. Its volcanoes are still 'alive', amongst the most active of the world. Man & nature have lived together here for thousands of years, creating an extra-ordinary landscape, which now for a good reason is listed as UNESCO World Heritage.

The small island of Lipari is the most inhabited of the islands, with a few villages, agricultural landscapes and a well developed road system, while Stromboli and Vulcano are only home to tiny fishermen's villages hiding under imposing volcanic cones. The volcanic nature, although often destructive, has also brought an extra-ordinary fertility to these islands— which you can taste in some of the very good wines produced on the islands! The development of a responsible and ecological 'volcanic' tourism, recently has seen an increment of the presence of 'walking tourists' from all over the world on the islands, always in utmost respect of the natural resources of the area. When visiting the Aeolian Islands, you will discover vast black beaches contrasting with light coloured shorelines, where inaccessible and winding rocky coasts alternate with beautiful beaches and large barren areas lay alongside beautiful lush gardens.

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 on the black beaches and ebony slopes of Vulcano, observing its 'fumarole' constantly erupting hot gas, and be able to bath in its thermal springs and sulphuric mud. On Stromboli you will take a guided walk up the volcano 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 sea food and locally produced wines. After your stay on in this little paradise, you'll travel to 'mainland' Sicily. Here you'll discover Europe's tallest still active volcano, Mount Etna. With its imposing mass over 3350 metres high, it dominates the baroque city of Catania, and the whole of eastern Sicily. The black flows of lava and the vast plains of black sand on its top 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 ashes and glowing rocks.

You will have the opportunity to walk on the slopes of Europe's tallest volcano, witnessing the scars left by its past eruptions and watching the actual making of a new landscape. You will have the opportunity to hike up to the very summit of the volcano with a certified volcano guide for an unforgettable experience while watching eruptions and lava flows mould the earth into shape. Walking in the midst of these impressive forces of nature, observing the gasses erupting and the lava flowing down the slopes, makes one experience a sense of true exploration, delivered in abundance by this tour! 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. **People with respiratory problems may have discomfort in sulphurous areas with fumes.** Most of the walks are on good paths, sometimes on steep terrain, with loose rocks. 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 travel by shuttle bus (private transfer on request) to the harbour town of Milazzo on Sicily's northern coast. After settling in at your accommodation, 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.

Accommodation: Milazzo - Hotel ***

Day 2 – From Milazzo to Lipari

This morning you will take the hydrofoil from Milazzo to Lipari, the largest of the Aeolian Islands, and the 'Heart' of this volcanic archipelago (about 1 hour). You can check in at your centrally located hotel, and make a first stroll through the centre, dominated by the local 'Castello', which actually is a fortified citadel, including houses, churches and a complete theatre. Just below the castle you'll reach marvellously situated port of Marina Corta, which has retained its authentic island charm. From here you can then walk to the southern side of the island, along the 'Route of the Capers', which offers a wonderful views on the crater on the nearby island of Vulcano. The hike continues along the west side of the island, one of the wildest, and spectacular parts. There are several options for longer or shorter walks. 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.

Accommodation: Lipari - Hotel **/**

Approx. walking time: 3 h. Ascent & descent: +/- 250 m.



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Day 3 – Visit to Vulcano

After breakfast you take the hydrofoil boat from Lipari to the nearby island of Vulcano, a journey of only 10 minutes. This island, dominated by the extinguished crater of Vulcano della Fossa, takes its name from the Roman god 'Vulcanus', and gives its name to our word 'volcano', as the Roman name for the island has come to mean what we now know as a 'volcano' in most modern European languages. Famous 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 from the small harbour 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 back down you have several options: you will have plenty of time to relax on one of the beaches and can perhaps visit the thermal springs where you can enjoy bathing in sulphur mud baths. Also is there the possibility to go for an extra hike. In the late afternoon 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.

Accommodation: Lipari - Hotel **/**

Approx. walking time: 3 h. Ascent & descent: +/- 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. You notice the continuous small explosive (strombolian-type) eruptions. 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.

N.B. You can also opt for the hike to the top at night, a unique experience!

Accommodation: Stromboli - Hotel **/**

Approx. walking time : 4 h. Ascent & descent: +/- 400 m.

Day 5 – Visit to Stromboli

Today you will have the time to visit some more of the island. Of course most hikers will opt for the hike to the top (in case you did not do this yesterday night already). 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, small explosive (strombolian type) eruptions of ash and incandescent rock, reaching up to 120m high., typically every 20-30 mins. On average 2-5 times per year there are also larger explosions. 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. In this case – or if you have opted for the night walk, you can also take the boat back from Stromboli to Lipari or Milazzo already, where you can freshen up and relax before going out to find a nice spot for dinner.

Accommodation: Stromboli (or Lipari/Milazzo) - Hotel **/**

Approx. walking time: 6 h. Ascent & descent: +/- 924 m.



N.B. In case you have opted for the evening hike up to the volcano, you can also opt to travel back to Lipari or Milazzo already this afternoon.

Day 6 – Back to the Sicilian mainland and up 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 – a journey of about 2 hours. From Milazzo harbour a private transfer takes you directly to the mountain hotel on the southern slopes of Mount Etna – located at over 1900 m. above sea level. Mt. Etna reaches up to over 3300 m. and has a diameter of around 45 km., making it the largest and tallest active volcano in Europe, dominating the eastern part of Sicily. On your way to the top you can make a few stops, for example in Linguaglossa, or make a short walk at the Sartorius Mountains. After your arrival at the hotel you will have time for a short walk over the so-called 'Crateri Silvestri', 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.

Accommodation: Etna - Hotel **/**

Approx. walking time: 1,5 h. Ascent & descent: +/- 100 m.

Day 7 – Visit to Mount Etna

Today you will have a full day to visit the main tops of Mt. Etna volcano. By cable car you'll arrive at an altitude of 1000 m., after which a 4WD jeep will bring you up to 2900 m. Here you'll make a short roundwalk with a certified guide. 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. You can opt to return by jeep, but you can also make the walk down, passing 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. From there you then walk back to the cable car station, or you can even opt to walk the whole way back to the hotel. *N.B. It is also possible to take an optional guided trip to the summit of the central craters (3350 m. above sea level), reaching 2900 m. by cable car and 4WD and then trekking to the top.* After returning to the hotel you pick up your luggage and travel down to Catania (optional private transfer straight to your hotel). In Catania you settle in your hotel and you have 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, before going for a great meal in town.

Accommodation: Catania - Hotel **/**

Approx. walking time: 6 h. Ascent & descent: + 100 m/- 1000 m.

N.B. It is also possible to spend another night on Mount Etna – and return to Catania the next day. Or you can opt for a few days in the elegant city of Taormina, to end your journey. You can spend a few days in this beautifully located charming small town, with some of the world's most splendid ancient monuments, including the stunning amphitheatre.

Day 8 – End of tour

The tour ends today after breakfast in Catania. You can easily reach the airport by bus or taxi.



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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.

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.
- Extensive route notes, with description of the route & tourist information
- Maps at 1 : 25.000 scale (or better)
- 24/7 Assistance
- Luggage transport
- Private transfers as specified

NOT INCLUDED

- Departure taxes & Visas
- Travel Insurance
- Hydrofoil and boat transfers to/ from Aeolian Islands (estimated cost: €70,00 - €80,00 per person)
- Volcano guide at Stromboli / Mt. Etna
- Drinks and meals not mentioned in the itinerary
- Optional additional tours or activities
- Items of personal nature

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

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

Fitness: A good standard of fitness is necessary, you should be able to walk for up to 5/6 hours a day in hot sun on dusty or stony tracks.

FOOTPATHS & WAYMARKING

Footpaths: 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: Part of the trails are waymarked; 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 – this is recommended in case you will want to see more of Mt. Etna.



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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. From here you can travel to Milazzo.

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



Recommendations

In case you arrive late in Catania we recommend to start the tour with a night there.

Please note that 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 then spend a few nights in Catania – with either a day trip to Mount Etna or one overnight stay there.



TOUR VARIATIONS

BECAUSE OF THE HIGH TRANSPORT COSTS FOR INDIVIDUAL TRAVELLERS, WE RECOMMEND THIS TOUR FOR SMALL GROUPS OF AT LEAST 4 TRAVELLERS.

FOR INDIVIDUAL TRAVELLERS WE RECOMMEND OUR SHORT 'DRIVE & HIKE' TOUR AROUND MT. ETNA & TAORMINA - IN COMBINATION WITH THE AEOLIAN ISLANDS WALKING TOUR.

This way you can take in the best parts of both the Aeolian Islands , as well as Mount Etna – giving you a great idea of the 'Volcanoes of Sicily' and the opportunity to do some more 'in-depth' explorations.

Stromboli can also be visited as a day trip from Lipari, so you could spend 3 nights in Lipari, rather than 2 in Lipari and 2 on Stromboli. And of course there are other islands to visit too, like beautiful Salina.

Our '**Mythical Volcanoes of Sicily**' tour, which gives you the possibility to explore the Aeolian Islands more 'in-depth' and then spend a few nights in Catania – with either a day trip to Mount Etna or one overnight stay there.

This tour of the Aeolian Islands can also easily be combined 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 Taormina, or any of the other major Sicilian towns (Syracuse, Ragusa, 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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