



Guided walking tour (GSEE)

Volcanoes of Sicily

Etna and the Aeolian Islands

Exploring the dramatic volcanic landscapes of Sicily



TRIP NOTES

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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. The islands of Lipari, Stromboli, Vulcano and Panarea, to name but the most noted, are home to tiny fishermen's villages hiding under tall imposing volcanic cones, some of which are amongst the most active of the world. Here people and forces of nature have co-habited for centuries, often resulting in tremendous loss. But as well in a spectacular landscape, where man & nature have lived together for thousands of years, reason why the area is listed as UNESCO World Heritage. The volcanic earth also rewards with extra-ordinary fertility – testimony are the very good wines produced on the islands!

Moreover, 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 ebony 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.

On 'mainland' Sicily 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. 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!

During the first half 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 'fumaroles' constantly erupting hot gasses, and be able to bath in its thermal springs and sulphuric mud. On Stromboli you will take a guided 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 sea food and locally produced wines.

After transferring to Mount Etna 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. After your stay on the slopes of Mount Etna you will then transfer to the bustling city of Catania where you may end your tour by admiring some of the splendid baroque architecture in the historical heart of the city, or tour the remains of the Greek 'polis'.



Please note: this is a moderately easy tour which is suitable for those who have some experience with 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 (alternative walks will be proposed). Average walking times: approx. 3 to 6 hours each day.



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DAY-TO-DAY PROGRAMME

Day 1 – Arrival in Catania

Arrival in Catania (*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*). You will meet with the rest of the group and your guide at 7 pm at the hotel in Catania, placed in the very heart of the city centre. In case you arrive early you have the possibility to pay a visit to the bustling city of Catania, dominated by the imposing mass of the Etna Volcano. After a short briefing on the trip's programme we'll have dinner together in the heart of town.

Accommodation: Catania - Meals included: 1 dinner

Day 2 – Visit to Vulcano

After breakfast we first transfer to the Milazzo harbour from where we then take the ferry to the island of Vulcano. This island, dominated by the spent crater of Vulcano della Fossa, takes its name from the Roman god 'Vulcanus'. The Roman name for the island has then contributed the word for 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 laid back character during spring and autumn. Our hike on the island will take us to the Vulcano crater where we can admire the 'fumaroles', openings in the earth's crust which emit steam and gases, created when superheated water turns to steam as its pressure drops when it emerges from the ground. After our hike we will have plenty of time to lounge on the beach and visit the thermal springs where we can enjoy bathing in sulphur mud baths. In late afternoon we will then take the hydrofoil to Lipari, the largest of the islands of the Aeolian volcanic archipelago. After dinner you may take another stroll through the Marina, and why not, enjoy a 'gelato' before turning in at the hotel.

Accommodation: Lipari - Meals included: 1 breakfast, 1 dinner

Walking time: 3 h. +/- 390 m.

Day 3 – Visit to Lipari

In the morning we make an easy walk to the southern side of the island to the old Roman spa near San Calogero which offers a wonderful view of the crater of the nearby island of Volcano. In the afternoon you are free to visit the islands natural and cultural treasures at will. You may want to visit the remains of the Greek tombs and the Greek theatre, as well as have a look at the site of a prehistoric village near the castle. Also the interesting Archaeological museum of the little town merits a visit. After freshening up in our hotel you can then wander through the Marina's little streets in the evening and stop for a pre-dinner 'aperitivo'. We will then have dinner all together again.

Accommodation: Lipari - Meals included: 1 breakfast, 1 dinner

Walking time: 3 h. +/- 250 m.

Day 4 – Visit to Stromboli - afternoon walk to the 'Sciara del Fuoco'

In the morning we will take the hydrofoil from Lipari to Stromboli, the most northern 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 having been ejected from the earth by volcanic activity. After checking in at our hotel, you are free to take a short hike around the little village where we will be staying, and possibly relax on the islands volcanic black beaches. In the afternoon we will pay a visit to the 'Sciara del Fuoco', a big horseshoe shaped depression in the summit area offering a wonderful view on the craters. After turning back to our hotel in the evening you are free to explore the little fishermen's hamlet of Stromboli some more, after which we will have a nice pizza dinner together.

Accommodation: Stromboli - Meals included: 1 breakfast, 1 dinner

Walking time: 4 h. +/- 400 m.

Day 5 – Visit to Stromboli - evening walk

Today we will have the time to visit more of the island, including the nice village of San Vincenzo. After lunch we will leave for a walk to the active crater accompanied by certified volcano guides. They will take us



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to the very top of the volcano, 924 m high, from where we will have the opportunity to admire – at night-time! - the usual volcanic activity of the island, including intermittent explosions of ashes and incandescent rock, reaching up to 120 m high. Larger events including the expulsion of large lava streams are observed regularly. Watching an active volcano at work is a dramatic and extremely thrilling experience. You should be aware however, that in case of adverse weather conditions and extra-ordinary volcanic activity due to safety measures the volcano guides may retain it impossible to walk up the volcano. After eating our picnic dinner during the excursion near the Stromboli crater we will return to our hotel.

Accommodation: Stromboli - Meals included: 1 breakfast, 1 dinner

Walking time: 5 h. +/- 924 m.

Day 6 – The many faces of Mount Etna

After breakfast at our hotel you can go out for one last stroll in the Stromboli village, after which we will hop on the hydrofoil to Milazzo again. From the harbour of Milazzo a private transfer takes us to Mount Etna. The 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 the eastern part of Sicily. First we travel to the charming little town of Linguaglossa, where we enjoy lunch, completed with a typical 'granita' or a coffee and a wonderful sweet (almond/pistachio) cake from this area. Then the journey goes up, along the scenic Via 'MareNeve', the road of the sea and snow. We will admire the most recent lava flows, some of which date back only a few years, reminding us of the fact that the Etna is still an active volcano! We make a wonderful walk on one of these recent lava flows, with a visit to some of the spots where the lava burst out. This walk really gives us the feeling of the immense forces still working below us. Then our bus brings us to the Sartorius mountains, a completely different landscape, from where we 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. Then we drive to the southern side of Mount Etna, perhaps the best-known part, again completely different, where we settle in our next base, a charming hotel on the southern slopes, the highest hotel on Mount Etna. We have dinner here and then enjoy a spectacular documentary about this still active volcano. (BLD)

Accommodation: Etna - Meals included: 1 breakfast, 1 dinner

Walking time: around 4 h. Total driving time: around 1,5 h.

Day 7 – To the top of Mount Etna

Today we have a full day to explore the summits and southern slopes of Mount Etna, the highest active volcano in Europe. We first travel up by cable car to about 2500 m. high. From here we will explore the edge of the 'Valle di Bove', the Etna's largest valley, in which many lava flows can be seen, one atop of the other. It is in fact an immense caldera measuring 1000 metres deep and 5000 metres wide resulting from the collapse of an old crater. From here we have an amazing view over the Ionian Coast with the cities of Messina, Catania and Siracusa. During our walk we will discover the line of craters that opened 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. Then we start our downhill walk, passing along a whole series of craters and some marvellous viewpoint through a lunar landscape. Back near our base, we can still go for a short, but again spectacular, round walk over the so-called 'Crateri Silvestri', through the barren landscape formed by the explosion of 1892, and still characterized by regular explosions and eruption of gasses and ash, followed by lava flows that constantly remodel the mountain slopes. In the evening we will eat a hearty dinner based on local specialties at the hotel.

Today it is also possible to take an optional trip with a certified guide to the summit at the central craters (3350 m. high), taking a 4x4 vehicle, until we reach almost 3000 metres in altitude. Then, together with our volcano guide we start the –relatively easy- walk towards the very top, which we will notice, is not just one, but a series of crater peaks. After a short stop for a snack and a drink at the first top we visit the other highest craters here, a unique experience! Please note that in case of adverse weather conditions, we cannot go all the way to the top, but will make a wonderful round walk over one of the most impressive cones, the Montagnola, and along the edge of the Bove Valley. The price for the (optional) trip to the very top is 30 euro per person.

Accommodation: Etna - Meals included: 1 breakfast, 1 dinner

Walking time: 4 h. +/- 200 m. With optional walk: 6 h. +/- 1000 m.



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Day 8 – End of tour

The tour ends in Catania today. After breakfast our private bus picks us up to bring you back down to Catania – either to the airport or downtown (for an extra night there or to enjoy the city during the day and take the overnight boat to Naples). A taxi transfer to other destinations can be arranged on request.

Meals included: 1 breakfast

TOUR DETAILS**ACCOMMODATION & MEALS**

All nights are spent in characteristic hotels and family-run pensions. All rooms have en-suite facilities. Accommodation is on Half Board basis, in all accommodations. On day 4 you will have a pizza dinner, while dinner on day 5 is a picnic during the evening walk.

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 stay.

Night 1: The first night you are staying in comfortable 3-star hotel in the centre of the city of Catania. From the hotel the city's main monuments can be easily reached.

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 in a friendly hotel at Stromboli. The hotel is centrally located, at walking distance from the seashore and the main shops of the village.

Nights 6 & 7: The last two nights you stay in a nice 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.

INCLUDED

- Private English speaking tour leader for 8 days
- Accommodation: 1 night Catania, 2 nights Lipari, 2 nights Stromboli, 2 nights Etna in good *** hotels
- Meals: 7 breakfasts, 6 dinners (1 pizza dinner & 1 picnic dinner)
- All private & public transfers as indicated throughout the entire itinerary
- Entrance fees of all sites along the itinerary
- Special activities as outlined in the day by day itinerary
- Guest experts for special places
- Luggage transport
- All gratuities for baggage, porters & hotel service

NOT INCLUDED

- Departure taxes
- Visas & Travel Insurance
- Drinks and meals not mentioned in the itinerary
- Optional walk on Mount Etna
- Optional additional tours or activities
- Tips & items of a personal nature



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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. Please note that people with respiratory problems may have discomfort in sulphurous areas with fumes.

Luggage: We advise you to bring a day pack (30 litres) in addition to your ordinary luggage. Sometimes you will have to carry your luggage for short distances.

Equipment: good and solid trekking shoes, wind and water proof jacket, hat and gloves, head torch with batteries, bathing suit, sun glasses and sun cream, alpenstock and gaiters for volcanic ash paths

ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE

Arrival: The tour starts in CATANIA, a city with an international airport, served by daily flights from Milan, Rome and Naples. Tours start every day during the trip season with a minimum number of participants of 2.

Departure: The tour ends after breakfast 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.

TOUR VARIATIONS

EXTRA NIGHTS

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 other of the main 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.

UPGRADE

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

Bespoke Adventures

Many of these tours can be turned into Private '[Bespoke Adventures](#)' to accommodate private group travel. We can organise both "off the shelf" itineraries, as well as create custom itineraries to meet your special needs. Book the dates you want, with the family or friends you wish to bring along!

Longer and shorter versions of this tour are also available. Prices on request.

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