



Ionian Coast

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Cutilisci (p177)
- ➔ Trattoria di De Fiore (p176)
- ➔ Locanda Cerami (p176)
- ➔ Me Cumpari Turridu (p177)
- ➔ Al Duomo (p169)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ B&B Crociferi (p262)
- ➔ UNA Hotel Palace (p263)
- ➔ Hotel Villa Belvedere (p261)
- ➔ Isoco Guest House (p261)
- ➔ Il Principe (p262)

Why Go?

The Ionian Coast is dotted with Sicily's superlatives – the island's highest volcano, Mt Etna, is here; the queen of all resorts, Taormina, perches on a cliff-top; and it's home to Sicily's second-largest city, Catania. Catania is the region's centre, a wonderful and shabby city with a great pulse and active street- and nightlife. Its fish market, La Pescheria, is one of Sicily's greatest sights, and the baroque architecture of the city's historic centre is beautiful, if somewhat battered. Halfway up a rocky mountainside, regal Taormina is sophisticated and exclusive, a favourite of holidaying VIPs and day-tripping tourists. Brooding menacingly on the city's doorstep, Mt Etna offers unforgettable hiking, both to the summit craters and around the woods that carpet its lower slopes. Etna is also a wine area and, with a car, it's fun to tour the mountain in search of the perfect vintage.

Road Distances (KM)

Catania	15			
Messina	85	95		
Nicolosi	20	15	100	
Taormina	40	50	50	60
	Acireale	Catania	Messina	Nicolosi

Getting Around

Driving around the Ionian Coast and inland provides for some wonderful scenery. Take the SS114 from Catania down the Riviera dei Ciclopi and wind through the town streets and taking a peak at the beaches, towards Taormina. Several buses take this route from Catania throughout the day. There are decent roads surrounding Etna.

THREE PERFECT DAYS

King of the Ionian Resorts

Wake up in Taormina, where you can admire the stunning setting of the Teatro Greco (p167) and its memorable views to Mt Etna. Spend the rest of the morning exploring the town's medieval streets, browsing among the delis on Corso Umberto I (p167) and thrilling to the verdant delights of Villa Comunale (p168). After lunch head down to Isola Bella (p168) for some seaside fun.

Mount Etna

You'll have seen it looming in the distance and now is the time to explore Mt Etna. You can take a tour from Taormina or Catania or, better still, pick up a car and go it alone. The easiest approach is the southern ascent via Rifugio Sapienza (p185) and a cable car, which takes you up to 2500m. From there you can follow with a guide or venture into the black wilderness on your own. Once back safely, decamp to Nicolosi for a comfortable and convenient overnight stay.

Catania

Head to Catania for a shot of urban energy and gastronomic exercise. Start off by admiring the baroque churches on Via Crociferi (p175) and the grand *palazzi* (palaces or mansions) of Piazza del Duomo (p171) before ducking down to La Pescheria (p174) fish market and an unforgettable seafood lunch at Osteria Antica Marina (p178). Set the rest of the day aside for strolling along Via Etnea (p174) followed by a night out around Piazza Bellini.

Getting Away from It All

- ➔ **Savoca** Hidden away in the hills north of Taormina is this atmospheric village (p165), used as a film location for *The Godfather*.
- ➔ **Santa Maria la Scala** Turn your back on the crowds and head to this tiny fishing hamlet (p181) for a seafood lunch.
- ➔ **Pineta Ragabo** On Mt Etna's quieter northern slopes is a huge wood (p185) that makes a lovely place for a picnic under the pines.

DON'T MISS

Climbing up to Etna's craters and tasting wine and honey that is grown from the soil of the great volcano.

Best Trattorias

- ➔ Trattoria Di De Fiore (p176)
- ➔ Trattoria La Grotta (p182)
- ➔ Antico Orto Dei Limono (p186)
- ➔ Osteria Antica Marina (p178)
- ➔ Le Tre Bocche (p178)

Best Sights

- ➔ Etna's Craters (p183)
- ➔ Teatro Greco (p167)
- ➔ La Pescheria market (p174)
- ➔ Acireale's Historic Centre (p181)
- ➔ Catania's baroque along Via Crociferi (p171)

Resources

- ➔ **Parks.it** (www.parks.it/parco.etna) A good introduction to the Parco dell'Etna and environs.
- ➔ **Comune di Catania** (www.comune.catania.it) Extensive listings, suggested itineraries and transport info.
- ➔ **Taormina Tourist Office** (www.gate2taormina.com) General comprehensive website with historical background and practical details.
- ➔ **Trasporti sullo Stretto** (www.trasporti.sullostretto.it) Up-to-date timetables of Messina ferry crossings.