



Sicily

POPULATION: 5 MILLION

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Best Places to Eat

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- » Il Gallo e l'Innamorata (p200)
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Best Places to Stay

- » Isoco Guest House (p175)
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- » Villa Athena (p197)
- » Villa Quartarella (p192)

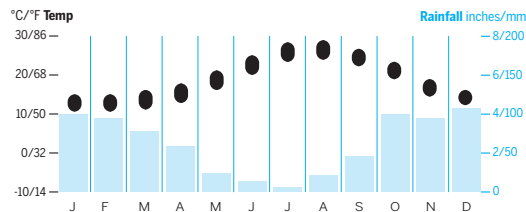
Why Go?

More of a sugar-spiked espresso than a milky cappuccino, Sicily rewards visitors with an intense bittersweet experience rather than anything lightweight and frothy. Here it seems the sun shines brighter, the shadows are darker, and life is lived full-on and for the moment. Overloaded with art treasures and natural beauty, undersupplied with infrastructure and continuously struggling against Mafia-driven corruption, Sicily's complexities sometimes seem unfathomable. To really appreciate this place, come with an open mind - and a healthy appetite. Despite the island's contradictions one factor remains constant: the uncompromising quality of the cuisine.

After 25 centuries of foreign domination, Sicilians are heirs to an impressive cultural legacy, from the refined architecture of Magna Graecia to the Byzantine splendour and Arab craftsmanship of the island's Norman cathedrals and palaces. This cultural richness is matched by a startlingly diverse landscape that includes bucolic farmland, smouldering volcanoes and kilometres of island-studded aquamarine coastline.

When to Go

Palermo



Feb Almond blossoms flower during Agrigento's Sagra del Mandorlo.

Easter Sicily's most colourful season.

May Spring weather, wildflowers and fewer crowds: a dreamy time for coastal walking.

History

Sicily's most deeply ingrained cultural influences originate from its first inhabitants – the Sicani from North Africa, the Siculi from Latium (Italy) and the Elymni from Greece. The subsequent colonisation of the island by

the Carthaginians (also from North Africa) and the Greeks, in the 8th and 6th centuries BC respectively, compounded this cultural divide through decades of war when powerful opposing cities, such as Palermo and Catania, struggled to dominate the island.



Sicily Highlights

- 1 Join the ranks of impeccably dressed opera-goers at elegant **Teatro Massimo** (p159) in Palermo
- 2 Bargain with the fish vendors at dawn, climb Europe's most active volcano in the afternoon and enjoy Sicily's best nightlife in constantly buzzing **Catania** (p177)
- 3 Marvel at the majesty of **Segesta** (p205),

whose Greek temple and amphitheatre sit in splendid isolation on a windswept hillside

- 4 Shop till you drop in **Taormina** (p172), or ply the turquoise waters in the sparkling coves below
- 5 Soak up the sun, watch Stromboli's volcanic fireworks and hike to your heart's content on the

stunningly scenic **Aeolian Islands** (p164)

- 6 Wander aimlessly in Ortigia's atmospheric alleys before settling in for an evening of classical drama at the fabled Greek theatre in **Syracuse** (p187)
- 7 Hike the rugged, undeveloped coastline and scan the sky for eagles at **Riserva Naturale dello Zingaro** (p205)