

Hidden Italy Sicily 1 self-guided walk

7 days/6 nights:

This wonderful tour takes you through the heart of Sicily, an area untouched by tourism where the daily life, traditions and hospitality of the island are alive and well. Following mostly unsealed country lanes you'll pass through some of the most spectacular countryside on Sicily: rolling farmlands covered in wheat fields overlooked by jagged mountains with the forested peaks of the Madonie National Park in the distance. On a clear day, the conical form of Mt Etna, Europe's largest and most-active volcano, smoking on the horizon. Along the way you visit some of Italy's most unspoilt villages, two of which have been winners of 'Italy's Most Beautiful Village', one in 2014 (Day 4) and other in 2018 (Day 6).

To start the tour, a private driver will pick you up from either Palermo or Catania and take you to Nicosia, a bussling farming centre, where you spend the first night. Five days later, the tour finishes at Petralia Soprana. From here you will be driven by private transfer back to either Catania or Palermo. The Sicily 1 walk is a wonderful opportunity to get local, enjoy the famous Sicilian hospitality, its delicious seasonal cuisine as well as enjoying some long country rambles.

The walks:

This is a continuous walk. There are no shuttles or buses! Just pull on your boots each morning and set out - we'll look after the rest. The walks range from 3 to 4 hours, covering between 12 to 15 kilometres. They generally follow unsealed country lanes passing through rolling farmlands. There are also some short sections following smaller trails with uneven footing. The trails are unmarked but are straight-forward to follow - there is always a farmhouse in sight.

The accommodation:

You will stay in a variety of accommodation, themselves often part of the area's history, which are always comfortable and welcoming: two family-run 'agriturismos' (one of which was once a baronial residence); a private apartment; a converted 13th century monastery; a 15th century convent (hosted by nuns) and finishing in a restored noble residence in the heart of an ancient village.

The food:

Food is one of the highlights of a visit to this prosperous area, all based on delicious seasonal vegetables and fruits and fresh farm produce, including cheeses like fresh ricotta and cacciacavallo; cured hams and salami; an amazing variety of breads; olives, eggplants and wild greens and, of course, those wonderful Sicilian pastries..... Breakfasts and dinners are included in this tour.

What's included in the tour?

- six night's accommodation
- all breakfasts and dinners
- reading lists and historical and cultural notes
- detailed maps and walking instructions
- pick up and drop off in either Catania or Palermo
- daily transfers of baggage between hotels
- 24 hour backup from local manager

Hidden Italy walking tours: PO Box 1091, Surry Hills NSW 2010, Australia
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The Sicily self-guided walk itinerary

Day 1:

Private pick up in either Catania or Palermo and a 2 hour transfer to Nicosia in central Sicily. A strategic point on the mountain road that linked eastern Sicily with Palermo, Nicosia grew up around a 7th century Byzantine castle and flourished under Norman rule in the 12th century. Today is a bustling agricultural town – pure Sicily!

Day 2:

Your first walk is an easy hike across the valley to a tiny village that grew up around a rock outcrop riddled with prehistoric cave dwellings. Mt Etna, 100 kms to the east, is visible from the village's impregnable castle. The village's dialect still has traces of the French invaders who were garrisoned here in the 13th century. (12 kms, 3 hrs)

Day 3:

Today you have a long but gentle walk through rolling valleys with vast views of the mountains and farmlands around you, finishing at a family-run agriturismo in a restored medieval abbey which has been in the family since the end of the 18th century. (15 kms, 4 hrs).

Day 4:

An easy day, today you climb up to a nearby town which must be one of the most unusual towns in Sicily, a jumble of houses and lanes that tumble down the side of a spherical hill with a very good local museum. Your accommodation is in a family run '*agriturismo*' in the valley below the town. You will have the option in the afternoon of doing a loop walk up to visit the town. (14 kms, 4.5 hrs)

Day 5:

The walk today takes you through the valley and then up to a small town that was founded by the ancient Greeks and was the seat of the medieval counts who ruled central Sicily from here in the 14th and 15th centuries, the gateway to the Madonie National Park. Your accommodation tonight is in a small convent just off the central piazza. (12 kms, 4 hrs)

Day 6:

Today's walk takes you sharply up from the town to a wide path that wraps around the side of a mountain, taking you through pine forests and pastures with spectacular views back east across the valleys and mountains, with Mt Etna as a backdrop, before descending to your final destination, an extraordinary town that was founded by the Romans, one of the most interesting and beautiful towns of the region. Your accommodation is in a recently restored villa in the heart of the town. (13 kms, 4 hrs)

Day 7:

Your visit finishes this morning with a transfer to either Catania or Palermo, a two hour drive away.