INVITATION TO SICILY: the never ending journey

Sicily... a plural reality: one, no one or a hundred thousand?

As white as salt, as yellow as sulphur, as green as carob tree, as blue as sea, as dark as the lava...
Aristocratic and composed in Palermo, bourgeois and frantic in Catania, terricolous and reflective in the province...
At one time sleepy and traditional, dynamic and creative.
Age old like Tholos of Montalbano Elicona and brand-new like the cyclopean sculptures of Fiumara d’Arte.

How many Sicilies actually exist? Ten, a hundred, one thousand or, in a Pirandello way, no one? Gesualdo Bufalino devises a possible definition: “the island in the plural”, capable of portraying Sicily of diversity, of dichotomy, of extremity.

It is here that much of ancient history, perhaps history world, occurred. Here in the heart of Mediterranean is where flourishing but ephemeral civilisations crossed and clashed.

Our invitation to Sicily is to discover the many faces of the island-of-the-islands or the island-not island, or the island-nation or finally the island-universe.

Therefore, our invitation is to discover ....

... 1000 kilometres of coastline: now very white and dazzling cliffs, such as the “Scala dei Turchi”, then intimate coves, sometimes refuges for turtles, such as Calamosche; now black cliffs, such as those at the foot of Mount Etna, then sandy beaches such as beaches of Ragusa, S. Vito, Catania or Portorosa

... volcanoes, those hyperactive such as Mount Etna and Stromboli and the dormant ones, such as Vulcano and so many others

... an endless archaeological heritage, at least 100 sites: 40% of national heritage and 10% of mondial heritage

... extraordinary historic city centres of the baroque cities, largely UNESCO sites, such as Catania, Noto, Ortigia, Ibla, Trapani and many others, often animated by a lively nightlife

... the parks of Etna, of the Madonie, of the Nebrodi and the many nature reserves such as the Simeto, Pantalica, Vendicari, Zingaro, Ciane or Anapo ones.

...the diversified gastronomic tradition, true culmination of the various dominations which followed one another

... the wineries, awesome examples of excellence, industrial efficiency and rural archaeology, along wine road: from Belice area to Mount Etna and Hyblean country

... and then the romantic saltworks such as those of Trapani, cathedral-mines such as the Realmonte one, the thermal baths, as suggestive and rural like in Montevago, as traditional like in Termini, and finally the rites, both sacred and secular, such as the Holy Week in Trapani or S. Agata in Catania, which are considered to be the most significant religious and anthropological events in Europe

... and, in order to conclude, the small islands, fourteen islands all very different from one another: from Stromboli, with its “Sciara di fuoco” (flow of lava), to the suggestive Salina, from Levanzo island to the white sandy beaches of Lampedusa and to the sophisticated Pantelleria
There are many reasoned criteria to visit Sicily...

The geographic itinerary from Catania to Catania

Among the historic, archaeological, artistic, naturalistic, anthropological and geographic itinerary, we suggest this last one for reasons of practicality, exhaustiveness and time optimisation. Moreover, this is also a way to discover the diversity and the multiplicity in each location.

We start from Catania that, long before being one of the capitals of the Sicilian Baroque, was point of arrival of men of Bronze Age, then of Greek colonist and thinkers, of mythical Mycenae, furthermore of roman pragmatists and builders and subsequently of many others: Arabs, Normans, French people and Spaniards. Catania will amaze the traveller not only for the unexpected Baroque old town, but also for its cultural fervour and its mythical surroundings.

From Catania, you can reach the Akrai territories (Palazzolo Acreide), with the sacred way where propitiatory sacrifices took place, and the nearby Pantalica, the valley of the civilisation and of the death, with its 500 mountain sepultures and its simple Byzantine churches, disseminated throughout ridges, small lakes and forests: overwhelming and bottomless place, borderline between history-life and oblivion-death: start-end-start of the perpetual circular motion.

So, overlooking minor sites, you will take the Mediterranean Baroque road of Val di Noto, classified world heritage of UNESCO: Ortigia (the island-baroque city of Syracuse), Noto (the stone garden of Sicily), Modica (the crib-city, lying on hills and consisting of alleyways, stairways, rich churches and scenic squares, Scicli (providing surprising baroque glimpses and continuous set of television series of Inspector Montalbano) up to the noble Ibla, where you can wander through the romantic alleyways and scenic squares.

But these magnificent towns provide further suggestions to the travellers. So, Syracuse: the Archaeological Park and the many vestiges revealing the permanent metaphor of Sicily, place of triumph of Christianity and paganism, of Archimede’s talent and cruelty of tyrants, of farsighted strategists and short-sighted administrators; Noto: right away the Ciane river, then the magnificent beaches an natural reserves, such as Vendicari e Marzamemi, where the pink flamingos winter; so Ibla, presenting the best restaurants of Sicily and the charming Castello di Donnafugata and its maze where you can wander through; so Modica: the well-known Modica chocolate and the olive oil mills of the best extra-virgin olive oil of Sicily in the nearby countryside; so Scicli: a lively nightlife and secret vegetable gardens with medicinal plants.

Further south, moving along the last African dunes of Europe, you will reach Agrigento, nowadays Agrigento, with its magnificent Valley of the Temples, considered one of the most important archaeological site in the world and place of everlasting thinking of poets, sophist, artists, philosophers from Empedocle to Pirandello. Near: the archeological park of Eraclea Minoa, and the beach Scala dei Turchi.

From Agrigento you will pass through the Belice Valley crossing the maritime town Sciacca, the villages of Caltabellotta e di Sambuca (village of the year 2016), the wine route, with the most prestigious Sicilian wine cellars, proposing in autumn the night grape harvest ritual, the romantic, charming and not to be missed rural SPA Acqua Pia of Montevago, with small waterfalls and outdoor natural pools with thermal waters flowing out at a temperature of 40°, Selinunte, with its huge archaeological park, perhaps the most populated city of antiquity, the Arab town Mazara and the sophisticated Marsala, which is also the location of the cellar Florio, the most important historic winery in Italy. Now, let’s go to the medieval town of Erice. Along the route it is possible to see the magnificent and kilometric salt-pans of Trapani, to do a tour on a boat between the Stagnone Islands and to land to the island-museum of the Phoenician Mozia. And, as in ancient times, you have to make a stopover in Erice, place of the Temple of Venus, goddess that quenches every passion of the senses, composed by picturesque small squares and romantic narrow streets, where you can taste the typical pastrymade, admire the spectacular panoramas, wander through the maze of alleyways.

From here you can reach Trapani, with its original coral museum and its magnificent recently well-restored historical centre, place of a nice movida night and of the famous Misteri Procession taking place on Good Friday and Easter Saturday; Segesta, the other Phoenician town and its famous solitary temple; the characteristic and panoramic rural village of Scopello, where it is possible to stop also for a swim in the beach of the ancient “tornara”. Hence S. Vito lo Capo, well-known for the stunning beaches and for the Sicilian-Arabian cooking. Having a bit of time, you can take a day trip to the Egadi islands and in particular Levanzo, the real island.

Palermo, the city of merchants coming from Tiro, it is not far from here. Palermo: Punic, Phoenician, Greek, Latin, Byzantine, Arabian, Angevin, Aragonese, French, Spanish. Real point of arrival and of synthesis of all civilisations at all times, Palermo will never cease to amaze, thanks to its art treasures, its history, its charm (from Lo Spasimo to Liberty neighbourhoods, from the botanical garden to the art galleries, from theatre to trendy bars, from colourful working-class districts loved by Guttuso to the exclusive restaurants which offer a noble and popular cuisine, with French and Spanish legacy), its surroundings (for example Monreale and Cefalù, both presenting a magnificent Norman Cathedral, Bagheria with its famous Villas...)

Returning to the Eastern lands where you came from, you will see the romantic and solitary vestiges of Solunto, then the lively medieval town of Castelbuono, in the centre of the Madonie Park, known for its ancient castle and its cathedral, as for its gastronomic temptations, and at last the “brand new” Sicily of the Fiumara d’arte: giantivities work of contemporary art placed in the territory (given as “presents” to it, beautiful tribute to the beauty of the places) with the art hotel Atelier sul Mare at the centre, which is a permanent laboratory for art and culture and joint of cosmopolitan humanity.
where it is a “needed” and unique privilege to sleep in one of its 22 art rooms (“experiencing” so the art and the beauty…), or even Gibellina, Favara and many other places offering street arts. So, you’ll reach the medieval town of Enna, but especially the ruins of Morgantina (Aidone) and the Villa romana del Casale, a sort of Pompeii of Sicily (Piazza Armerina), adorned with extraordinary mosaics, place of idleness and pleasure of wealthy and privileged Romans.

Moving along the green ridges of Sicily, of the Madonie Park, the Nebrodi and lastly of Etna you will run into surprising villages (such as Pollina, S. Marco d’Alunzio and Montalbano, included in “the most beautiful villages of Italy” since 2015 ), mountain art towns (such as Randazzo and Castiglione), forests of century-old trees and Mediterranean animal life, and Mount Etna, of course, which will provide unique emotions with its recent and ancient lava flows, volcanic caves, awful valleys (such as the huge one of the Bove) but also with its vegetable gardens, earthy cooking, Byzantine and Normans churches, wines of excellence and golf & Spa resort offering relaxation.

Before arriving at Catania, it is a must stop Taormina, always been a favourite international tourism destination and always magnificent and sensual; then enjoy a walk along the Baroque main street of Acireale and the promenade of the legendary town of Aciretza. And again, you can come back in Catania. In time for a nocturnal walk in the baroque “centro storico” to participate in the rituals of nightlife in Catania, for a convivial dinner at a typical trattoria or for a pause in one of the pub of the historic centre to taste citrus syrups, almond granita and cannoli filled with ricotta in popular bars or secluded locals or “only” for experiencing the grandeur offered by the baroque palaces, streets and squares.

And the journey to Sicily never ends...

Even after having travelled for almost 2.000 km, visited dozens of sites, villages, cities of art, parks and tasted many different cuisines, you’ll have the sensations of not having seen everything, having missed known and lesser-known locations, such as the so-called “minor” Sicily and the 14 small islands surrounding like a magic circle. But above all, you’ll feel you didn’t have time to “live”, experiencing, the Isle of the islands, and not only to see it.

So, as J. Saramago said, “... we need to come back to see what we haven’t seen, to see again and through new eyes what we have seen, to see in spring what we saw in summer, to see by day what we saw by night, with the sun where the first time it rained, to see the stone that has changed place, the shadow that wasn’t there. We must start again the journey”.

We propose our way to visit Sicily

So, it’s not for insincere eccentricity but to welcome and interpret great travellers’ needs, tastes, curiosities, and desire to get excited that we do our typical proposal: reserved essential services (to avoid waste of time and unsuitable experiences), customised itinerary (in line with the interests of the guest with whom, where possible, the journey plan will be agreed and shared in advance), charming hotels (an original relaxation or boutique hotel) / B&B are better than a dormitory hotel, reasoned wine and food itinerary, estimated time available (for individual curiosity, relaxation, ritual of shopping), local guides where needed, assistance of our local advisor to optimise the journey, surprise plus (a wellness itinerary, a convivial dinner in a tavern, a night walk, an unexpected tasting…), some gastronomic delicacy...

What to visit, among relaxation and culture…:
Beaches of Taormina, Vendicari, Marzamemi, Scala dei Turchi (Agrigento), Selinunte, Scopello, S. Vito lo Capo, Cefalù, Marinello, Capo Calavà and of the 14 smaller islands.
Golf & wellness: resorts with superb golf courses especially on Mount Etna (Castiglione), Marina di Ragusa, Sciacca
Cities of art: the baroque towns of Acireale, Catania, Siracusa, Noto, Ibla, Modica, Scicli, Caltagirone and the fascinating towns of Palermo, Trapani, Marsala, Sciacca... The archaeological sites (Unesco) of: Siracusa, Palazzolo Akreide, Pantalica, Piazza Armerina, Morgantina, Agrigento Temples Valley, Selinunte, Segesta, Solunto, Eraclea mino...
Curiosities, rural archaeology: the cellars of Etna, Valle del Belice, Marsala, Ragusa area, the “brand new” Sicily of art park of Fiumara d’arte of Tusa, Gibellina and Favara, the Villas of Bagheria, the widespread signs of street art... The gastronomic excellences served in restaurants at the top national level in Licata, Ragusa, Palermo but also in Modica, Scicli, Caltagirone, Piazza Armerina, Trapani, Capri Leone, Sciacca...