



OPEN YOUR EYES TO SICILY

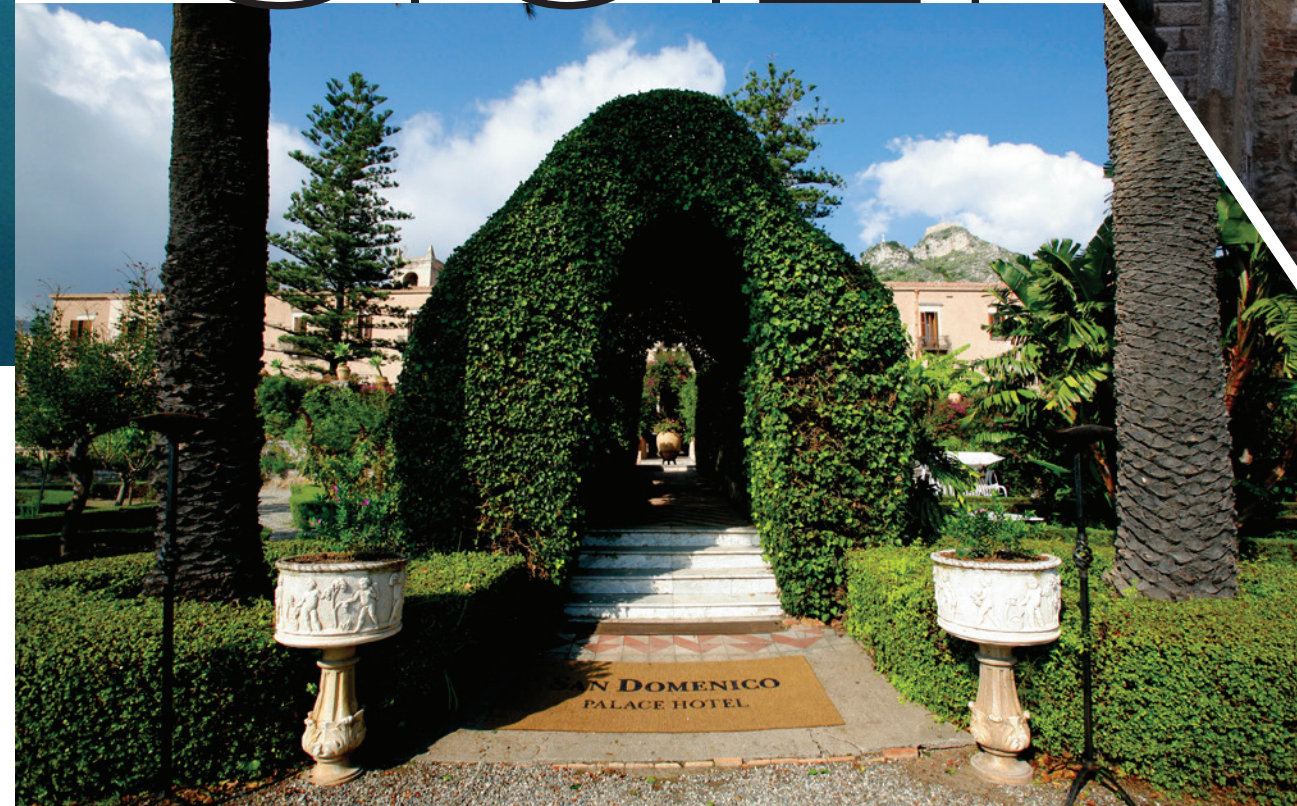


BY MICHELLE WILLIAMS

If you think Sicily is Italy, then you have not actually been to Sicily. This historic European treasure has a long standing history as an autonomous state. It has its own nationalism, its own state-of-mind, and its own culture. However, like Italy, this enigmatic island is a fantastic travel destination for those who enjoy a Mediterranean climate, beaches, mountains, fresh and delicious foods and some of the world's best wines. Pack your bags, next stop Sicily!

Located just off the "toe" of Italy, Sicily is the largest island in the Mediterranean. The bustling capital city of Palermo is a tapestry of colors and aromas that dazzle the senses. Fresh seafood, lemon and orange trees, and sea salt electrify the nostrils while white, cream, and beige terra cotta buildings alert the mind that Sicily is more Greco than Roman.

Though it feels western-European its array of period architecture ranging from Arab-Norman style domes and public structures, through Byzantine and Baroque designed churches, and a Neo-classical theatre. To take in the full vibrancy of the city, visit the Mercato del Capo market. It is one of the largest outdoor markets in Palermo and offers a true taste of the city. It is here the Arabic influence is



evident in the Sicilian culture. Spice offerings range from fresh oregano, to curries, and saffron. The variety and size of the fresh produce, including a wide selection of Asian and middle-eastern peppers is impressive, to say the least. Seafood caught right off the Palermo coast is available, along with ricotta so fresh, it will forever change the way you view (and taste) the soft cheese. Don't forget the olives; Sicily produces some of the world's best. Stroll through and sample the savory options as you meander through this epicurean extravaganza.

Just a short drive from Palermo is the city of Marsala; here you will find the iconic Donnafugata Winery. Wine lovers cannot miss out on visiting Sicily's most iconic winery, featuring all the flavors, colors and sounds of this

ancient land. Donnafugata's Sicilian heritage dates back to 1851. In the 1970's Gabriella Rallo, a school teacher, inherited the winery and the vineyards. Gabriella and her husband Giacomo are pioneers in Sicilian viticulture, leading the charge followed by Sicilian wineries in a commitment to sustainably, farming the highest quality indigenous wines. At their historic cellar in Marsala, Donnafugata welcomes visitors throughout the year to introduce their wines with a sartorial savoir-faire approach. Donnafugata exemplifies the vibrancy of Italy through their wines, hospitality, labels, and music. A visit to the winery will not only bring the intimacy and hospitality of Sicily to you, it will capture your heart through all five of your senses. ▶





Don't leave Marsala without visiting the Stagnone Nature Reserve Lagoon. As the largest lagoon in all of Italy, this designated marine nature reserve covers 2,000 hectares, and is home to a wide variety of wildlife. However, the reason so many visit this region is to experience the salt pans. This unique landscape is dotted with windmills that date back to medieval times, some still working to pump water through the gates into and out of the salt basins. To add an additional level of adventure to your Sicilian vacation, take a 20-minute plane ride to the exotic island of Pantelleria. Located between Sicily and North Africa (and actually closer to Tunisia than Sicily), this scenic volcanic island with rocky coasts has no beaches, but is an oasis of stunning shorelines, caper farms and olive trees all of which are picture-perfect. No filter needed.

When you're done exploring and ready for a little rest and relaxation, nowhere is better than the San Domenico Palace Hotel in Taormina. Perched on a rocky hillside, this hotel is housed in a former 14th-century monastery



and retains its classic façade and soaring ceilings. Many of the guestrooms come with private terraces—some even with private dipping pools and views of the neighboring ancient Greek Amphitheater and towering Mt. Etna in the distance.

One final tip before your dynamic and relaxing Sicilian vacation concludes; before flying out, schedule a day filled with delicacies at Ravida Azienda Agricola. Take a tasting tour through an array of delicious high quality olive oils and sea salts in Natalia Ravida's home. Learn how high quality olive oils are made and why "one size" does not fit all when it comes to the Mediterranean's most famous cooking elixir. Then join prize winning chef and cook book writer Natalia in the kitchen as she takes you on a gastronomical journey to delight all your senses.

Sicily is a wonderful vacation destination with something to offer all tastes and vacation styles. If you are a beachcomber, site-seer, foodie, wine lover, history buff, or explorer Sicily has something for you. [CL](#)

