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Pantelleria, Italy

Italy's new island destination



Arco dell'Elefante rock formation in Pantelleria, Italy. Alessandra Pezzotta—Alamy

BY JULIA BUCKLEY

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Usually, nothing changes on this sleepy Italian island—a volcanic speck in the Mediterranean between Sicily and Tunisia, buffeted by winds that have whittled its peaks into a rippling green landscape and sculpted its black lava flows into a shape-shifting coastline. People bathe in warm thermal seawater as they have for centuries; live in *dammusi* (North African-inspired white-domed bungalows); and grow the *zibibbo* grape, thought to have been brought over from Egypt by past Arabic residents. Over 80% of the island forms Italy's newest national park, Parco Nazionale dell'Isola di Pantelleria, which opened in 2016. But when the park's first director arrived in 2021, she brought change with her.

The park is gently shifting Pantelleria from a summer seaside destination to a year-round nature idyll, where Mediterranean scrub gives way to orchids and arbutus trees, and warm mist wafts from the mountainsides. In 2023, the park introduced e-bike rentals to help visitors tackle the hilly terrain and bypass summer traffic jams on the cliff roads. Award-winning Sicilian winery Donnafugata has built a 15-minute nature trek, the Khamma Trail, on its Pantelleria estate, winding up the cliffside amid caper plants, *zibibbo* vines and fragrant wild honeysuckle. And trekking guide Peppe D'Aiotti, who takes the island's celebrity clientele into the hills, has created a new route: Stonehenge Mediterranea weaves around the Montagna Grande (Big Mountain) through porcini-filled woodland,



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An exhibit of finds from the Sesi Archeological Park—a Bronze Age burial site—has recently opened in the island's tiny Museo Vulcanologico, and a virtual reality room exploring Mediterranean ecology debuts this summer.

It's an easier journey now too. The 7.5-hour overnight ferry or puddle-jumper plane from Sicily was joined in 2022 by summer flights from Rome and Milan on Italy's new national carrier, ITA Airways, with connections to most Italian cities.

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