

10 Essential Things Travelers Need to Know about Sicily

Popular because of the Mafia, Sicily has more to offer thanks to its mummified citizens in catacombs of Palermo, desserts, a volcano you can ski on and beautiful black and white sandy beaches. Hundreds of shops, restaurants and lodges run by Sicilians also dot the city.

1. Sicily Isn't All That Italian

Though they identify with Italy, a state that came into existence only around 150 years ago, many people still retain strong regional identity. The Tuscans, Apulians and the Calabrians are strongly affiliated to their home regions. And Sicily being an island enhances this feeling even more.



From the popular Sicilian dialect to the lasting notorious criminal underworld, the island displays the perfect example of a sense of separateness. Compared to mainland Italians, Sicilians have darker complexion with sharp facial features mostly due to the influence of Arab and Phoenician ancestry among the island's population.

2. If You Meet the Mafia, You Won't Know It

Members of the Italian Mafia are hard to notice. Don't expect the Sicilian Cosa Nostra mob to dress the same way like in movies. Besides, the anti-mafia movement uses the coppola wearing it at a different angle as a symbol of resistance. Still the Mafia exists in Sicily collecting protection money from shops, hotels and restaurants. This added to periodic killings and the corrupt climate has kept investors away leaving Sicily considerably poor compared to other regions in Italy.

However, tourists are hardly affected by mob violence that only happens in the poorest parts of Sicily held by the Mafioso. Still visitors can follow the map of Palermo City showing businesses that oppose Mafia, including lodges, shopping and eating establishments under the anti-extortion charter and even visit confiscated homes of the former Mafia bosses.

3. The Bikini Is Very Old News Here

The Romans contributed a lot to sports, but little is said about skimpy women's sportswear. Evidence in

form of artistically preserved mosaic in Sicily shows that from as early as 4th century female Roman gymnasts were strutting around in clothing similar to modern bikinis. At the Roman Villa in Piazza Armerina town, there are celebrated mosaics of these muscular women who ran, threw discus and even lifted weights. Within the UNESCO World Heritage site, there are also heathenish mosaics depicting bare breasted of Queen of Sheba, nude women dancing and crashing chariots.



4. Sicily Rivals Greece for Ancient Greek Architecture

During Graeco–Roman times, Sicily was known as Greater Greece and today the Valley of the Temples in the City of Agrigeto to the south brings this ancient world to life. A modern version of Los Angeles, the ancient Akragas rivaled the great Athens in all its splendor. Even Pindar the ancient poet longingly referred to the city as eternal. What is left within the Valley are the remains of the Doric Temples which have become a world heritage site and is now the largest and the most preserved of all ancient Greek buildings.

5. Desserts Will Satisfy the Sweetest Tooth

Thanks to the early Arab presence in Sicily, the Sicilian cuisine is spiced with cloying sweets, citrus fruits, cassata cake filled with ricotta cream and decorated with almond paste and sugary fruit. The Marzipan concoctions made by inexperienced nuns are also as just as vivid as described and embarrassing to eat too. Some Marzipans around the island are also sculpted into shapes of oranges, prickly pears and peaches and in the town of Modica, you will find sweet pastries which are a combination of meat and chocolate.

6. Manners Remain Very Formal

Contrary to popular belief, Sicilians are not as carefree as people usually make southern Italians to be. They can be sullen, mysterious, appear determined at first and generally personal loyalty matters to them most. But that hardness can still melt away revealing their sweet nature.



7. You Can Ski on a Volcano

In Sicily, there is one of the most active volcanoes in Europe. Surprisingly still there are 2 ski resorts on the flanks of Mount Etna, the Rifugio Sapienza and Piano Provenzano. Here you can ski on the northern face of the mountain jumping over lava bumps.

8. Mummies Are a Weird Attraction

Sicilians generally care about their dead and mummified rites were therefore very common in the island until 1881. Corpses of clergy men, women, children, lawyers, doctors and even aristocrats were preserved with Capuchin friars, quicklime and arsenic baths and then laid in Palermo's Catacombe dei Cappuccini of which there are now 8000 mummified Sicilians on public display in the underground vaults.

9. The Beaches Are Black and White

A reminder of volcanic activity in the island, the midnight beaches are black especially around the tiny Aeolian Islands to the north of Sicily. Silvery-grey stony beaches also characterize Lipari the largest of the islands while the most clean and white sandy beaches are found on the mainland around Ragusa City to the south.

10. The Wine Is No Longer All Swill

Julius Caesar once considered Sicilian wine to be the best but though it dates back to Greek and Phoenician times, modern consumers view it rather negatively. Revival of wine factories may however turn things around with wine resorts propping up everywhere. Wine is grown on Mt. Etna and on the Marquess de Gregorio's estate close to Alcamo you can taste organic wines as you learn to prepare Sicilian dishes. Floral whites are now being produced to the north around Alcamo City and in the west, the elegant Marsala looks to rival top sherries.

Date: 2014-11-24

Article link:

<http://www.tourism-review.com/travel-tourism-magazine-sicily-essential-things-to-know-before-visiting-the-island-article2537>