

The Best of Sicily

The largest island in the Mediterranean Sea, Sicily is a land of beauty, mystery, and world-class monuments. It's an exotic mix of bloodlines and architecture from medieval Normandy, Aragonese Spain, Moorish North Africa, ancient Greece, Phoenicia, and Rome. Much of the island's raw, primitive nature has faded in modern times, as thousands of newfangled cars clog the narrow lanes of its biggest city, **Palermo**. Poverty remains widespread, yet the age-old stranglehold of the Mafia seems less certain thanks to the increasingly vocal protests of an outraged public. On the eastern edge of the island is **Mount Etna**, the highest active volcano in Europe. Many of Sicily's larger urban areas (**Trapani**, **Catania**, and **Messina**) are relatively unattractive, but areas of ravishing beauty and eerie historical interest are found in the cities of **Syracuse**, **Taormina**, **Agrigento**, and **Selinunte**. Sicily's ancient ruins are rivaled only by those of Rome itself. Agrigento's **Valley of the Temples**, for example, is worth the trip alone.

1 The Best Travel Experiences

- **Walking Among the Dead:** Outside Palermo, the Catacombe dei Cappuccini amazingly preserve the lifelike corpses of some 8,000 Palermitans entombed here from the late 16th century until 1920, when the last victim, a 2-year-old *bambina*, was laid to rest. In dimly lit, murky, subterranean corridors, you can wander among these mummies. It's a gory sight, but it's absolutely fascinating. See p. 91.
- **Wandering Palermo's La Kalsa:** The ancient quarter of La Kalsa, created during the city's Arab domination, is as close as Sicily comes to having a casbah typical of the North African cities to the south. This densely populated district of narrow streets and markets provides a view of local Sicilian life unlike anywhere else on the island. To make your experience more authentic, purchase some *babbaluci* from one of the many vendors. (These are marinated baby snails sold in paper cornets for devouring on the spot.) Head for Piazza della Kalsa, the heart of the quarter, and the day is yours. See p. 91.
- **Encountering the Sicilian Apennines:** The island isn't all coastline, even though most visitors rarely dip into the hinterlands. For a close-up view of life as lived in the "Sicilian Alps," head inland to explore Sicily's greatest national park, Parco Naturale Regionale delle Madonie, sprawling across 39,679 hectares (98,007 acres). Castles dotting the park's lofty villages evoke the Middle Ages; the town of Cefalù makes the best base. This area is the breadbasket of Sicily, so you'll pass through pretty farms and vineyards. Fields ideal for a summertime picnic give way to downhill skiers in winter. See p. 151.
- **Climbing the Volcano:** Follow in the footsteps of the "disgraced"

Ingrid Bergman, who came here in 1949 with her lover and director, Roberto Rossellini, to make the ill-fated film *Stromboli*. On the Aeolian island of Stromboli, the most spectacular of its archipelago, you can witness showers of flaring rock and sparks from its volcano. For the most dramatic viewings, visit at night, when you can witness up close the channels from which the lava flows toward the sea along *sciara del fuoco*, or “trails of fire.” At the top, you’ll be treated to fiery explosions, a great show that’s gone on for centuries. Just wear something over your coiffure so that you, too, don’t light up the night. See p. 171.

- **Cooling Off in Gole dell’Alcantara:** Often visited from Taormina en route to Mount Etna, the Alcantara lava gorges are the best place to experience almost freezing waters when the temperatures in eastern Sicily soar from May to September. These gorges were carved by a river of the same name into rock-hard basalt, the creation

of one of Mount Etna’s ancient eruptions. You can rent thigh-length boots, but many prefer to take along a bathing suit. This wonderland is the place to be a kid again: There’s nothing quite like splashing around in these cooling waters. See p. 182.

- **Visiting Medieval Erice:** This once heavily fortified and walled mountain town, left over from the Middle Ages, is suspended 755m (2,478 ft.) above sea level. Ancients called the city Eryx, and a glorious golden temple dedicated to Aphrodite at the pinnacle of the town was like a gleaming lighthouse for ancient mariners. You can wander its cobblestone streets and peer into flower-filled courtyards along twisting lanes. Nothing seems as foreboding as a walk down a *vanelle*, an alley so narrow that only one person can pass at a time. Many Sicilian men journey here looking for a wife, as the women of Erice have been considered the most beautiful in Sicily for centuries. See p. 290.

2 The Most Romantic Getaways

- **Atelier Sul Mare** (Castel di Tusa; ☎ 0921-334295): Far off the beaten path is the most iconoclastic hotel on the island, created by an artist who has anointed himself the “Ambassador to Beauty.” Some of the rooms are the creative statements of renowned artists who lived on the premises for months and made their rooms works of art. See p. 153.
- **Palazzo San Domenico** (Taormina; ☎ 0942-613111): No other hotel in Sicily offers the sweeping majesty of this time-tested icon whose rooms were installed in a 15th-century monastery. Grand comfort on a deluxe level goes hand-in-hand with such charming ecclesiastical touches as Madonnas

in wall niches and centuries-old depictions of saints praying in ecstasy. See p. 185.

- **Hotel Villa Sonia** (Castelmola; ☎ 0942-28082): High above the resort of Taormina, this 1974 old-style villa is a true retreat for escapists. It’s a cozy, tranquil nest, with beautiful public areas and rooms opening onto spectacular views. Its restaurant is so excellent, you won’t want to leave the premises at night. See p. 189.
- **Villa del Bosco** (Catania; ☎ 095-7335100): Few island hotels evoke the stately aristocratic life of the 19th century as does this estate, 5km (3 miles) south of the center of Catania. Once a private home, it has been successfully converted

into a first-class hotel that often attracts celebrities. Its on-site restaurant is another reason to stay here. See p. 208.

- **Eremo della Giubiliana** (Ragusa; ☎ 0932-669119): A stone-built estate in sunny isolation, this is a baronial compound of refinement and grace. A stay here is like a visit to the grand country estate of some Sicilian *don* of the non-Mafia type. All the luxuries of the 21st century

are found here, as well as fine dining, but the aura is definitely Old World. See p. 266.

- **Foresteria Baglio della Luna** (Agrigento; ☎ 0922-511061): This is one of the grandest country inns of Sicily, meticulously restored by an antiques dealer and turned into a glamorous oasis of style, comfort, and elegance. Agrigento never had such a stylish place to stay. See p. 279.

3 The Best Museums

- **Galleria Regionale della Sicilia** (Palermo; ☎ 091-6230011): This is the most magnificent collection of regional art in all of Sicily—in fact, the gallery is one of the finest in Italy. Housed in the Catalán-Gothic Palazzo Abatellis, its superb collections trace Sicilian painting and sculpture from the 13th to the 18th century. Some of its paintings, such as *Triumph of Death* from 1449, are among the most impressive masterpieces in the south of Italy. See p. 87.
- **Museo Archeologico Regionale** (Palermo; ☎ 091-6116805): One of the greatest archaeological museums in Italy is filled with a virtual “British Museum” collection of rare finds that is particularly rich in artifacts from the Greek and Roman colonizations of the island. The metopes dug up from the city of Selinunte alone are worth a visit. See p. 90.
- **Museo Mandralisca** (Cefalù; ☎ 0921-421547): Come here for no other reason than to gaze in wonder at Antonello da Messina’s *Portrait of an Unknown Man*, painted in 1465. It is the masterpiece of this great Sicilian artist. While here, check out the other art treasures of this regional museum, including everything from a Chinese puzzle in ivory to a vase from the 4th century B.C. See p. 147.
- **Museo Regionale** (Messina; ☎ 090-361292): A former silk mill has been successfully converted into one of the island’s most impressive regional museums, one that contains Sicily’s greatest collection of art from the 15th to the 17th century. See p. 140.
- **Museo Civico** (Termini Imerese; ☎ 091-8128279): Housed in a 14th-century *palazzo* (palace) is one of the finest regional museums in Sicily, devoted to art and archaeology. The Hellenistic and Roman pottery are among its greatest treasures; the museum is also rich in medieval and Renaissance art. See p. 155.
- **Museo Archeologico Eoliano** (Lipari; ☎ 090-9880174): One of the great archaeological museums of Italy lies hidden away on the volcanic Aeolian island of Lipari. Among its many celebrated exhibits are a stunning collection of ancient vases, many from the 4th century B.C., and a magnificent trove of theatrical masks unearthed from tombs of the same era. See p. 162.
- **Museo Civico Belliniano** (Catania; ☎ 095-7150535): This museum pays homage to the composer Vincenzo Bellini, who was born here in 1801. The rather drab five-room apartment evokes old Catania and is filled with Bellini memorabilia, including

original folios of his operas, his death mask, and even the coffin in which his body was transferred from Paris. See p. 217.

- **Museo Archeologico Regionale Paolo Orsi** (Syracuse; ☎ 0931-464022): This is a showcase for some of the most important archaeological finds of southern Italy. Especially intriguing are the showrooms devoted to the Greek colonization of Sicily, including the

celebrated *Landolina Venus*. See p. 240.

- **Museo Regionale di Arte Medioevale e Moderna** (Syracuse; ☎ 0931-69511): One of Sicily's greatest art collections is housed in the 13th-century Palazzo Belomo. The collections are finest in the painting and decorative arts of southeastern Sicily and include such masterpieces as *The Burial of St. Lucia*, by Caravaggio. See p. 245.

4 The Best Cathedrals & Churches

- **Chiesa di Santa Cita/Oratorio del Rosario di Santa Cita** (Palermo): The church of Santa Cita, bombed in World War II, is visited mainly for its stunning oratory, representing the crowning architectural achievement of sculptor Giacomo Serpotta, who labored on it between 1686 and 1718. His cherubs and angels are a real romp. See p. 92.
- **Oratorio del Rosario di San Domenico** (Palermo): This 16th-century oratory is the stunning achievement of sculptor and baroque decorator extraordinaire Giacomo Serpotta. To many, it is the equal of the also glorious Santa Cita oratory (see below). Serpotta's stucco designs are among the greatest in southern Italy. See p. 93.
- **Oratorio di San Lorenzo** (Palermo): This is yet another great oratory that shows the magnificent decoration of master sculptor Giacomo Serpotta, who created this masterpiece between 1698 and 1710. See p. 93.
- **Monreale Duomo** (Monreale): This grand cathedral represents

the pinnacle of the glory of Arabo-Norman art and architecture. Launched in 1174 by William II, the Duomo is the most stunning of the Norman churches of Sicily, the mosaics in its interior rivaling those of the celebrated Cappella Palatina in Palermo. See p. 122.

- **Duomo** (Cefalù): One of Sicily's most magnificent Norman cathedrals, built by Roger II, stands in this charming little north-coast town. The cathedral is known for its grand array of Byzantine-Norman mosaics, completed in 1148. They are a virtual tour de force of this type of painstaking art. See p. 147.
- **Duomo** (Catania): Dedicated to the martyred St. Agatha, this cathedral was built on the orders of Roger I, the Norman king, and was largely destroyed in the earthquake that devastated Catania in 1693. What was left was redesigned with parts that survived the catastrophe. The great opera composer Bellini is buried here, as are several Aragonese kings. See p. 216.

5 The Best & Most Evocative Ruins

- **Tyndaris** (Capo Tindari): Tyndaris was a bustling place at its founding by Dionysius the Elder

in 396 B.C. Later destroyed by pillaging conquerors, Tyndaris has now been unearthed, and the

ruins of everything from a basilica to a Roman theater can be seen. The view of the sea is reason enough to visit. See p. 154.

- **Teatro Greco** (Taormina): Opening onto a view of Mount Etna in the background, this Greek amphitheater was hewn out of a rocky slope on Mount Tauro. What you see today is what's left after destruction by the Arabs in the 10th century. See p. 180.
- **Ortygia Island** (Syracuse): Famous in Greek mythology, this island is filled with ancient ruins such as the Tempio di Apollo, the Greek temple dedicated to Apollo that dates from the 6th century B.C. and the oldest peripteral (having a single row of columns) Doric temple still left in the world. See p. 244.
- **Parco Archeologico della Neapolis** (Syracuse): Two of the greatest attractions of Sicily—both from the world of the ancients—lie in this city in southeastern Sicily. The Greek Theater is one of the great theaters of the classical period still remaining. The other attraction is the Latomia del Paradiso, or the “Ear of Dionysius,” the most famous of the ancient quarries of Syracuse. See p. 238.
- **Villa Romana del Casale** (Piazza Armerina): This is one of the grandest of all Roman villas to have survived from the classical era. It contains a total of 40 rooms “carpeted” with the most magnificent mosaics in western Europe. Its most reproduced mosaics are those of 10 young women dressed in strapless two-piece bikinis that would not be out of style today. See p. 270.
- **Valle dei Templi** (Agrigento): Containing the largest and greatest collection of ancient Greek ruins in the world, the “Valley of the Temples,” outside the city of Agrigento, opens onto the southern coast of Sicily. The temples are especially stunning at night, when they're floodlit. The most impressive ones are those dedicated to Juno and to Concord. The latter is the most magnificent of all, with 13 wind-eroded columns still standing. See p. 274.
- **Selinunte's Archaeological Garden** (Selinunte, west of Agrigento): Guy de Maupassant called these ruins an “immense heap of fallen columns,” and so they are, but they are also the remains of one of the greatest colonies of ancient Greece. The temples date from the 6th century to the 5th century B.C. See p. 286.
- **Tempio di Segesta** (Segesta): One of the world's most perfectly preserved monuments from antiquity, Tempio di Segesta was constructed in the 5th century B.C. Amazingly, 36 of its Doric columns still stand. A visit to this remote site in western Sicily also gives you a chance to see a large Greek theater in ruins. See p. 289.

6 The Best Beaches

- **Mondello Lido** (Mondello): This is where the citizens of Palermo flock on summer days to escape the stifling heat of the capital city. In Sicily, Mondello Lido is out-classed in fashion only by the beaches at the foot of Taormina. Its wide, sandy beaches extend for 2km (1½ miles) from Monte Pellegrino to Monte Gallo. See p. 124.
- **Mortelle**: The best sands in northeast Sicily are found at the resort of Mortelle, which is where the Messinese themselves go to escape the scalding heat in their capital. The resort lies 12km (7½

miles) north of Messina at the northeast tip of the island. The area is filled with good sandy beaches, so you can take your pick. The best-accessorized strip is Lido dei Tirreno. See p. 144.

- **Spiaggia Sabbie Nere** (Vulcano): Completely off the beaten trail, “Black Sands Beach” is the finest in the Aeolian archipelago—that is, once you get over the fact that its sands are black and not powdery white. Beaching it here is something to tell the folks back home. See p. 168.
- **Lido Mazzarò** (Taormina): The best-equipped beach in Sicily, Lido Mazzarò is also one of the finest, a favorite sea-bordering strip of sand and gravel once frequented by the stars of Hollywood’s Golden Age and still as interesting as ever. A 15-minute cable-car ride down from the medieval town of Taormina, the beach is a hot spot from April

to October. Bars and restaurants border the sands. See p. 180.

- **Giardini-Naxos**: Situated on the waterfront near Taormina, Giardini-Naxos is one of the most sophisticated seaside resorts of Sicily. The sandy beach, one of the island’s best, lies between Capo Taormina in the northwest and Capo Schisò in the south. It may lack Taormina’s medieval charm, but it’s filled with good hotels, fine swimming, and excellent restaurants. See p. 196.
- **Marina di Ragusa**: Southeastern Sicily has a number of beaches, some of them quite tacky, but Marina di Ragusa is the best of the lot. This is quite an appealing area, and if Ragusa is too hot in summer, you might drop anchor at a hotel here and visit the ancient city on a day trip. The resort also has the best ice-cream bars, pubs, and watersports in the area. See p. 263.

7 The Best Walks

- **Old Palermo**: In the heart of this ancient city, you can take a walk into history that in 3 hours will bring you by some of the Sicilian capital’s most fabled monuments and into some of its most charming squares, such as Piazza Pretoria. You’ll marvel that so much of the antique still remains, yet at the same time enjoy watching the locals go about their daily lives past monuments that in some cases were left over by the Arabs or the Normans. See p. 104.
- **Ustica**: In just 3 to 4 hours, you can circumnavigate the small island of Ustica, which rises out of the waters of the Tyrrhenian Sea 57km (36 miles) northwest of Palermo (reached by boat). The best hike on this volcanic island is the coastal path north of the main settlement. The local tourist office will provide a map. You’ll pass

along steep cliffs, part of a Marine Reserve, and be rewarded with some of the most stunning sea views in this part of the world. At some point, you can strip down and cool off from your walk by going swimming. See p. 128.

- **Parco Naturale Regionale delle Madonie**: This park, which begins 6km (3½ miles) south of the coastal town of Cefalù, is too vast to explore by foot unless you have days. It comprises 39,679 hectares (8,007 acres) in all. But you can take a full-day excursion to walk through what has been called a “botanic paradise,” containing more than half the species known on the island. Our favorite part of the walk centers around the village of Santuario di Gibilmanna, from whose belvederes you’ll have the most panoramic views of the island. From here,

you can walk all the way to the idyllic town of Castelbuno, coming to a rest at its historic Piazza Margherita. See p. 151.

- **Vulcano:** This is the most visited of the offshore Aeolian Islands. In ancient times, it was known as Thermessa and was believed to be the home of the god Vulcan, but also the gateway to Hades. Its big attraction is the Gran Cratere, which hasn't erupted since 1890. The walk to reach the peak of this crater is one of the most heavily trod in the islands. Allow about 3 hours for the trek there and back. For your effort, you'll be rewarded with the greatest of all views, not only of Vulcano, but of the other Aeolian Islands as well. See p. 167.
- **Old Catania:** Overshadowed by Mount Etna, Catania is the second-largest and one of the most historic cities of Sicily. A walk through the heart of Catania is the best way to explore its monuments. But it's not all history:

You'll also get to take in the sights of the bustling outdoor market in the historic core. It will take about 4½ hours, however, to cover just the highlights of the monuments, including the "Fountain of 10 Rivers" and the ancient Duomo which was built after the great earthquake of 1902. See p. 222.

- **Valley of the Temples:** Our favorite walk in all of Sicily is along the Valley of the Temples, in the city of Agrigento. This is one of the most memorable and evocative sights of the ancient world. You won't find such impressive Greek ruins even in Greece itself. We prefer to walk among these ruins either at dawn or sunset. Naturally, their mysterious aura is heightened even more in springtime, when all the wildflowers are bursting into bloom. The highlight of your walk will be the Tempio della Concordia (Concord), the best preserved Greek ruins in the world. See p. 274.

8 The Best Luxury Hotels

- **Villa Igia Grand Hotel** (Palermo; ☎ 091-6312111): This old villa, built at the turn of the 20th century in the Art Nouveau style, is the grandest address in Palermo. Surrounded by a park overlooking the sea, it provides an old-world atmosphere but has all the modern comforts. See p. 68.
- **Grand Hotel Liberty** (Messina; ☎ 090-6409436): This is one of the grandest hotels on the eastern coast of Sicily. It was transformed in the mid-1990s into a bastion of comfort and tranquillity, with some of the island's best and plushiest bedrooms. A stay here is a beautiful way to visit "messy" Messina. See p. 141.
- **Villa Melignis** (Lipari; ☎ 090-9812426): This hotel is as good as it gets in the volcanic Aeolian

islands. A restored cluster of 17th-century fishermen's cottages forms the nucleus of the compound. All modern conveniences in this remote outpost have been added. See p. 164.

- **Grand Hotel Timeo** (Taormina; ☎ 0942-23801): Liz Taylor and Richard Burton have long vamoosed, but this deluxe hotel still attracts the rich and famous who want to enjoy the stately comfort of a 19th-century neoclassical villa near Taormina's Greek theater. It's lighthearted and baronial at the same time. See p. 185.
- **Excelsior Grand Hotel** (Catania; ☎ 095-7476111): This is the leading hotel of Sicily's second city, a monument to the modernism of *la dolce vita* days of the 1950s. The city may be in decay,

but the hotel is completely up-to-date, housing its guests in luxury and comfort. See p. 208.

- **Grand Hotel** (Syracuse; ☎ 0931-464600): This turn-of-the-20th-century hotel is so old, it's new again, following a major upgrade

and renovation in the 1990s. Its stately, old-fashioned charm has been preserved, but its comforts are definitely 21st century. It's the best place to stay if you plan to visit the archaeological gardens of Syracuse. See p. 246.

9 The Best Moderately Priced Hotels

- **Palazzo Excelsior** (Palermo; ☎ 091-6256176): With its faded 19th-century nostalgia, this is a very appealing choice lying on the most prestigious street of Palermo, but in an isolated spot. Much of the interior is appealingly dowdy. It's not for everyone, but it attracts those discerning guests who like staying in a living museum. See p. 73.
- **Hotel Grotta Azzurra** (Ustica; ☎ 091-8449396): This remote island off the northern coast of Sicily is home to a lush, resort-style Mediterranean retreat, set on a wide plateau above the ocean. The prices are most affordable. See p. 132.
- **Villa Fabbiano** (Taormina; ☎ 0942-626058): Romantically positioned in a hilltop village, this affordable hotel is a little gem. You're in a beautiful setting amid good furnishings, but you'll pay only a fraction of the price

charged by nearby competitors such as the deluxe Grand Hotel Timeo. See p. 188.

- **Villa Mora** (Giardini-Naxos; ☎ 0942-51839): With even its bedrooms opening onto views of the Ionian Sea, this is the ultimate beachfront retreat for those who prefer to be right on the water and not anchored in the hilltop village of Taormina above. This small hotel is an oasis of charm and tranquility, with good rooms and pleasantly aromatic Sicilian cuisine. See p. 198.
- **Hotel Moderno** (Erice; ☎ 0923-869300): In spite of its dull and misleading name, this is quite a good hotel in Sicily's most enchanting medieval town. Rooms are located in an attractively decorated main building or in a newer annex. All units have hints of 19th-century styling and open onto private balconies or terraces with views in all directions. See p. 293.

10 The Best Restaurants

- **Il Mulinazzo** (Palermo; ☎ 091-8724870): Serious foodies make the trek 45 minutes from the center of Palermo, as Il Mulinazzo is currently hailed by Italian food critics as the best restaurant on the island. Its meticulously crafted Sicilian haute cuisine is a pleasure to both the palate and the eye. From the service to the market-fresh ingredients, everything about this place is top-notch. See p. 77.

- **I Ristorantino** (Palermo; ☎ 091-512861): This newcomer is hailed by some Italian critics for its classic and authentic Sicilian and Mediterranean cuisine. Francesco Inzerillo presents a creative menu that uses his imagination, yet also keeps alive his favorite old-time recipes. See p. 78.
- **La Scuderia** (Palermo; ☎ 091-520323): Set at the foot of Monte Pellegrino, 5km (3 miles) north of

the city, this is Palermo's grandest restaurant, with superb international and Italian cuisine. Talented chefs turn out a tempting array of dishes prepared with market-fresh ingredients and served on the town's prettiest terrace. See p. 78.

- **Charleston Le Terrazze** (Mondello; ☎ 091-450171): Located in Palermo's fashionable beach resort, this restaurant serves a better cuisine than that found in the capital city itself. It's housed in a building from 1913. The chefs use the finest ingredients in preparing the Sicilian and international cuisine. See p. 128.
- **Osteria del Duomo** (Cefalù; ☎ 0921-421838): Its location across from the town's most famous cathedral is touristy, but this first-rate restaurant is anything but. It's a bastion of some of the north coast's grandest cuisine, specializing in sophisticated Sicilian fare along with a discreet offering of international dishes that have attracted world celebrities. See p. 150.
- **Casa Grugno** (Taormina; ☎ 0942-21208): Taormina has never had such a temple of gastronomy. One of the most exciting restaurants in Sicily is the culinary showcase for Andrea Zangerl, an Austria-born chef. His modern takes on Sicilian cuisine and sublime international dishes draw the world to his doorstep. See p. 190.
- **Le Zagare** (Catania; ☎ 095-7476111): There is no finer Grand Hotel-style dining on the eastern coast of Sicily than at this citadel of haute cuisine, serving the best of island dishes along with a well-chosen sampling of Continental recipes. The baroque city around it may be in decay, but the good life still holds forth here. See p. 213.
- **Osteria I Tre Bicchieri** (Catania; ☎ 095-7153540): Upon opening in 2002, this quickly became Catania's finest restaurant. Naples-born *Wunderkind* and chef Laquingelo Carmine has won immediate acceptance with his succulent Continental cuisine. He's known especially for his preparation of Mediterranean fish. See p. 214.
- **Il Barocco** (Noto; ☎ 0931-835999): Your finest dining in this ancient but decaying town west of Syracuse is at this restaurant, housed in a building that was converted from an 18th-century stable block for a historic palace nearby. Today, it's the setting for excellent Sicilian dishes, especially seafood from the Ionian Sea. See p. 267.
- **Locanda Don Serafino** (Ragusa; ☎ 0932-248778): One of the finest restaurants in southern Sicily is set inside the cellars of a 17th-century palace. The Sicilian cuisine, based on market-fresh products, is elegantly presented here—dishes are designed to appeal to the most discerning of tastes. See p. 268.
- **Ristorante Il Dehor** (Agrigento; ☎ 0922-511061): In a grand villa of a hotel, Foresteria Baglio della Luna, this is one of the best restaurants in all of Sicily, serving refined Sicilian and international cuisine. Winning rave reviews from the press in Europe, this place will tempt you with an array of fixed-price menus from its very talented chef. See p. 284.

11 The Best Down-Home Trattorie

- **Lo Scudiero** (Palermo; ☎ 091-581628): The capital's finest moderately priced *trattoria* is set across from the landmark Politeamo Theater. Honest, straightforward

Sicilian food is served here at very affordable prices. See p. 79.

- **Bye Bye Blues** (Mondello; ☎ 091-6841415): Though the name doesn't sound very Sicilian, this is

one of the best places to go for true island cooking. A casual, relaxed place outside Palermo, this trattoria is run by a husband-and-wife team who are passionate about feeding you well from the island's bounty. See p. 127.

- **E Pulera** (Lipari; ☎ 090-9811158): For some of the best Aeolian cooking, head here for time-tested recipes and some of the best fish specialties in the island chain, including a delectable fishermen's soup. No one makes a better swordfish ragout than these folks. See p. 165.
- **Granduca** (Taormina; ☎ 0942-24983): The most atmospheric choice in this chic resort looks like an antiques store with potted plants. It also contains an alluring terrace with panoramic views. But most people come here for the excellent food and repertoire of Sicilian and Italian specialties. See p. 192.
- **La Grotta di Carmelo** (Acireale; ☎ 095-7648153): The setting

looks touristy and gimmicky, as you dine in a cave carved into a rock-face wall. Forget that it's constructed of black-lava rock from Mount Etna; the restaurant serves really good food, both seafood and typical Sicilian fare. Much of the fish is brought in daily from the Ionian Sea. See p. 233.

- **Don Camillo** (Syracuse; ☎ 0931-67133): One of the city's finest and most affordable dining rooms was constructed on the foundation of a 15th-century monastery. The cuisine of seafood and Sicilian recipes is among the most creative in town. It's a charmer. See p. 252.
- **Monte San Giuliano** (Erice; ☎ 0923-869595): In the medieval hilltop village of Erice, the most spectacular in Sicily, you can dine at this undiscovered garden hideaway after making your way through narrow, labyrinthine streets. Most of the foodstuffs are plucked from the sea. Some of the dishes, such as a seafood couscous, are inspired by North Africa. See p. 293.