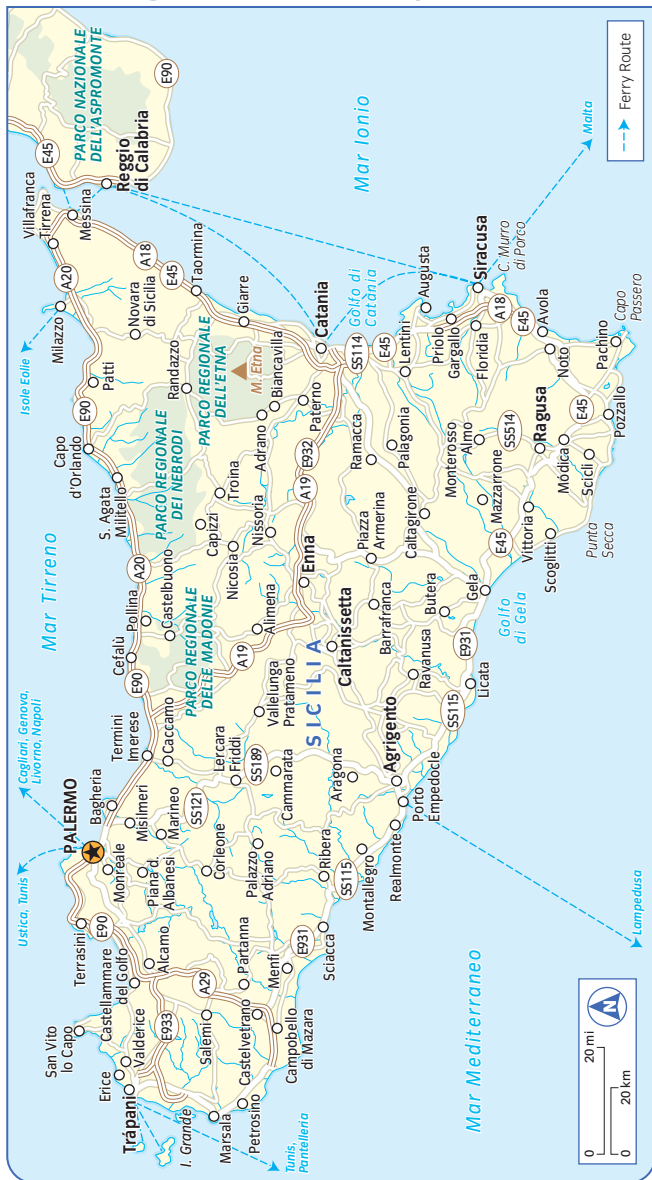


# 1

## Strategies for Seeing Sicily



# Strategies for Seeing Sicily



**A**way from the cut and thrust of the cities, rural life in Sicily tends to be enjoyed in the slow lane. There are so many sights worthy of attention that you could be forgiven for trying to visit them all. But by adopting a relatively relaxed timetable you should be able to get to the essence of the island. Here are some suggested strategies to maximize your enjoyment.

### **Rule #1: Have an itinerary—and an open mind**

Sicily is a huge island and you may be tempted to adopt the lean-and-mean approach in an attempt to see everything. Instead, take the time to enjoy leisurely lunches and savor the scenery, and be prepared to go off the beaten track to discover your own treasured experiences. Try to limit yourself to one particular region and then explore it to your heart's content. So often, less can be more.

### **Rule #2: Overestimate distances**

Sicily is the largest island in the Mediterranean, 177km (110 miles) north to south and 281km (175 miles) wide. Many of the loveliest parts are

far from the main cities and train stations, and so it's a good idea to hire a car or, if you're feeling adventurous, a motorbike or scooter. Away from the *autostrada*, (highway), roads tend to be single-lane and, in more remote areas, can turn into little more than mule tracks where you may well find goats and sheep sharing the route with you. On these provincial roads sign-posting is often lacking, and so factor in extra time for finding your route; make sure that you carry a detailed road map—those supplied by car rental firms are not adequate. The best large-scale map devoted to Sicily is published by the Touring Club Italiano, available at good bookshops and, usually, at the airport. See p 163 for essential driving tips.

*Explore the great outdoors.*





*Sicilian seafood.*

### Rule #3: Time it right

The best months to travel in Sicily are from April to June and mid-September to October: the weather is usually fine and not too hot, and the crowds are less bothersome. Spring can be a spectacular time to visit, when temperatures are mild and everywhere is carpeted with wild flowers. July and August is peak tourist season as well as being sizzlingly hot. Remember, too, that many Sicilians take their holidays in the last two weeks of August, which means many shops, restaurants and bars are closed—apart from on the beaches and islands. Out of high season, there are spectacular festivals, such as I Misteri in Trápani at Easter—see p 159 for a calendar of events.

### Rule #4: To pack or not to pack

Even if you're packing in a lot of traveling, you can save time by basing yourself in one place and exploring the region from there, rather than hotel-flitting and having to constantly pack and unpack. Taormina and Catania are well-placed for trips around the northeast and from Palermo you can reach all the top sights quite easily. If you're visiting

the interior though, you should expect to stay in different places.

### Rule #5: Plan trips around lunch

When traveling from town to town, it's a good idea to arrive before lunch. Most restaurants serve from 12:30pm and, if you want to make your own picnic and stock up on supplies, bear in mind that most shops close from 1pm till 4pm for the *riposo* (mid-afternoon closing).

### Rule #6: Plot your entry point and transport

The quickest, most time-efficient way of seeing much of the island is to fly into Catania, hire a car at the airport, and travel west, ending your trip in Palermo and flying back from there. Conversely, you could fly into Palermo and end your itinerary in Catania. There is also now an international airport in Trápani on the western side of the island that has regular scheduled flights to Europe, including London. There are no direct flights from Canada and the US to Sicily, but there are regular connections from the mainland in Rome or Milan: usual flight time is 1½ hours. ●