

Eastern Sicily: The Complete Guide

I always tell people to treat eastern Sicily as its own trip, not a corner of a bigger island tour. It has its own climate, its own food, its own rhythm — and unlike trying to combine it with Palermo and the west in one go, everything here sits close enough together that you're not losing entire days to driving. This is the region I actually live in, and the one I know down to the bus timetables.

What's actually worth seeing

Six places make up the core of eastern Sicily. You won't fit all of them into two days, and that's fine — the itineraries below tell you exactly what to prioritize depending on how much time you have.



Catania & Mount Etna

Your natural base for the whole trip: a lava-stone old town, a fish market that starts at dawn, and Europe's biggest active volcano close enough for a half-day trip.

(/region/catania-etna/)



Taormina

An ancient Greek theatre with Etna smoking in the background, plus a hilltop old town that gets crowded fast — go early or go late.

(/region/taormina/)



Syracuse & Ortigia

The Neapolis archaeological park in the morning, then Ortigia's baroque island centre for the evening — one of the most complete history days on the island.

(/region/siracusa/)



Noto

The single best-preserved baroque town after the 1693 earthquake rebuild, plus what I'd argue is Sicily's best granita.

(/region/noto/)



Ragusa, Modica & Scicli

Three baroque towns stacked into hills a short drive apart — Modica's chocolate, Ragusa Ibla's staircases, Scicli's quieter piazzas.

(/region/ragusa-modica/)



Messina

Most people just pass through on the ferry from Calabria — worth a few hours for the astronomical clock and the view across the strait.

(/region/messina/)

2 Days in Eastern Sicily

Two days is only enough to do one base properly. Stay in Catania and don't try to move hotels — the time you'd spend packing and switching accommodation is better spent actually seeing things.

Day 1 — Catania & Etna

Morning in Catania's old town: Piazza Duomo, the lava-stone streets, and the fish market while it's still working (it winds down by early afternoon). In the afternoon, head up to Etna — the craters near Rifugio Sapienza if you want a proper hike, or the Circumetnea railway if you'd rather see the volcano from a distance. Full details and a rainy-day backup plan: [all Catania & Etna articles](/region/catania-etna/) (/region/catania-etna/).

Day 2 — Taormina (or Syracuse)

Taormina is the easier day trip from Catania and the more photogenic one — go early, before the tour buses arrive. If you'd rather spend the day on ancient history instead of hilltop views, swap in Syracuse: the Neapolis archaeological park plus Ortigia is a full, satisfying day on its own. Both are realistic without a car, by train or bus from Catania.

7 Days in Eastern Sicily

With a full week you can actually cover the region properly instead of rushing through the highlights. This route works whether you have a car or not — I've noted where a car genuinely makes a difference.

Days 1–2 — Catania & Etna

Same as the 2-day version, but with room to breathe: a proper full day on the volcano instead of a rushed afternoon, and an evening or two to actually sit down for dinner in Catania instead of eating on the move.

Day 3 — Taormina

Day trip from Catania, early start. The ancient theatre, Corso Umberto, and if you have energy left, the walk down to Isola Bella.

Day 4 — Syracuse & Ortigia

Another day trip from Catania (under 1.5 hours by bus or train). Neapolis archaeological park in the morning — it gets hot and crowded by midday — then Ortigia's baroque streets and the seafront in the afternoon and evening.

Day 5 — Noto

Move your base south, or day-trip from Syracuse if you'd rather not repack. Noto's baroque centre is compact enough to see properly in half a day, which leaves time for a granita at [Caffè Sicilia](/blog/caff-sicilia-noto-lohnt-sich-die-granita-wirklich/) (/blog/caff-sicilia-noto-lohnt-sich-die-granita-wirklich/) and, if you have a car, an afternoon at [Vendicari nature reserve](/blog/vendicari-welcher-eingang-welcher-strand-wann-flamingos/) (/blog/vendicari-welcher-eingang-welcher-strand-wann-flamingos/) just south of town.

Day 6 — Ragusa, Modica & Scicli

This is the day a rental car genuinely pays off — public transport between these three baroque towns is thin. Modica for chocolate and the Duomo staircase, Ragusa Ibla for the classic postcard views, and [Scicli](/blog/scicli-besuchen-lohnt-sich-die-dritte-barockstadt/) (/blog/scicli-besuchen-lohnt-sich-die-dritte-barockstadt/) if you want the quieter, less-visited version of the same architecture.

Day 7 — Messina or back to Catania

If you're catching the ferry to Calabria, spend your last few hours in Messina — the astronomical clock at noon is worth timing your visit around. If you're flying out of Catania instead, use the day for whatever you didn't get to, or a slow morning at the beach near Aci Trezza before your flight.

Before you go

- **Getting around:** [public transport basics](/sicily-public-transport/) (/sicily-public-transport/) or, if you're covering all seven days, my honest take on [renting a car](/sicily-car-rental-guide/) (/sicily-car-rental-guide/).
- **Budget:** real numbers in the [trip cost guide](/sicily-trip-cost/) (/sicily-trip-cost/).

- **When to go:** the [seasonal guide](/sicily-seasonal-guide/) (/sicily-seasonal-guide/) covers what each month actually looks like, heat included.
- **What to pack:** the [packing list](/sicily-packing-list/) (/sicily-packing-list/).

This is a starting point, not a checklist. If a place grabs you, stay longer and drop something else — eastern Sicily rewards slowing down more than it rewards ticking off stops.