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IL SAN CORRADO DI NOTO

TRAVEL

The luxury guide to Sicily

How to holiday in style on Italy's magical island of character and mystery

BY MARIE-CLAIRE CHAPPET PUBLISHED: 09 FEBRUARY 2024

There is a magic to Sicily that people tell you about. Those who visit seem to leave with it imprinted upon their hearts. They are evangelical about it. *You must*, they say, *go to Sicily*. When you get there yourself, it is easy to see why.

This wild island in the Mediterranean has a charm and a mysticism all if its own. Thanks to thousands of years of conquest and change, Sicily is replete with layer upon layer of history – from Moorish palaces and Gothic marvels to crumbling Greek temples, fading amphitheatres, and Italian villages balancing precariously upon craggy mountain tops as vineyards streak past below in verdant valleys. All the while, turquoise clear waters lap the endless shoreline and Mount Etna hovers eerily in the background, adding a potent sense of danger to this already fiery island.

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Sicily is a destination suited to any and every tourist. Whether you're in search of off-the-beaten track romance and authenticity, or eager for a sleek metropolitan glamour, there is a slice of Sicilia for you. As for how to approach this glittering Italian gem with an eye for luxury, let us be your guide…

For baroque glamour.... 'you gotta go' to Noto

MARIE-CLAIRE CHAPPET

Noto

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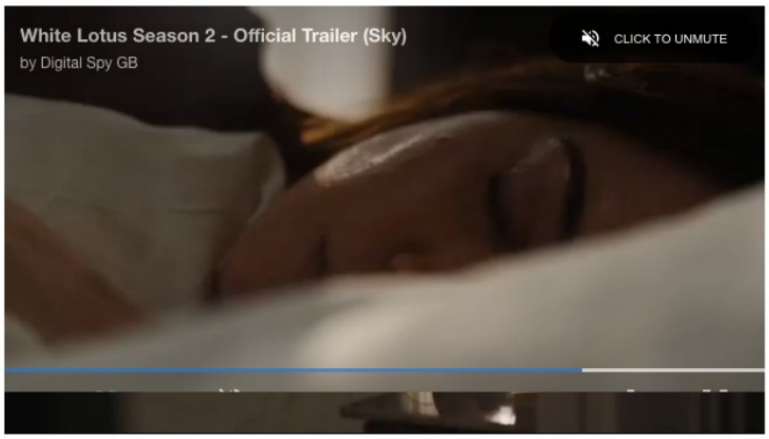

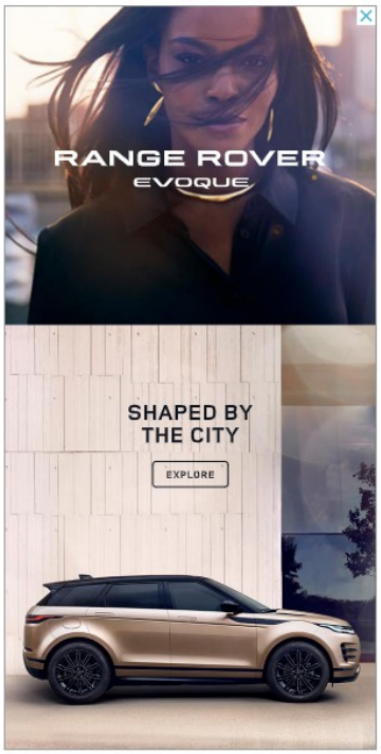

The South-Eastern Sicilian town may never live down its *White Lotus* cameo, but then again, Noto is no stranger to the silver screen. It has provided the setting for countless films, and its central role in Italian cinema is aptly represented by the smattering of large vintage film posters which adorn Noto's honey-gold limestone walls. And, after all, why *wouldn't* you film in Noto? The Baroque town – so designed because the original town was destroyed by a 1693 earthquake – is an architectural marvel, where a splendid façade, ornate statue or carved edifice will shout at you from every corner. Stroll down the main Corso Vittorio Emmanuelle and take in the basilicas, churches and palazzos which seem as though they have conveniently queued up to greet you. By night, rest your sightseeing feet at Anche Gli Angeli; the buzziest spot in Noto for an *aperitivo*, some delicious food and a spot of local live music.

For a five-star paradise... stay at Il San Corrado di Noto

IL SAN CORRADO DI NOTO

Corrado may be Sicily's new kid on the block, but its already made a sizeable impression. Opened in April 2022, this monastery turned winery turned five-star hotel is a luxurious oasis in a sea of vineyards and olive groves in Val di Noto, eastern Sicily. It is inspired by the classics (they have a 100-metre pool which takes its cues from the gymnasiums of antiquity) and builds on its own unique history with limestone cloisters and former monk cells now transformed into luxury rooms. It has a vast scale – set over undulating greenery all around – but a boutique feel, with only 26 rooms and eight private villas. Dotted across the grounds, these are the ultimate indulgence, with private pools and terraces and the feeling of utter seclusion; your only neighbours will be the occasional wild rabbit, hopping beneath the orange trees.

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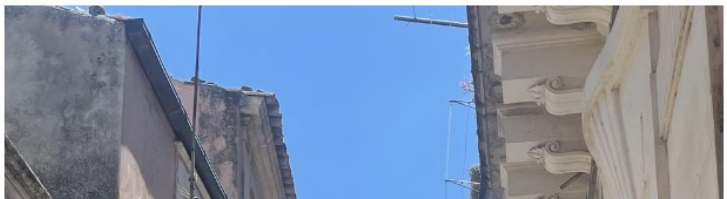
IL SAN CORRADO DI NOTO – BOOK NOW

For quiet charm... visit Ragusa



MARIE-CLAIRE CHAPPET

Ragusa

Perhaps overshadowed by its glitzier neighbour, Noto, Ragusa is arguably a far more impressive, definitely more charming town. It too is a baroque construction, Ragusa having been similarly levelled by the earthquake of 1693 which proved, ironically, the making of both town's architectural identities. Perched on a hillside overlooking the verdant Val di Noto, Ragusa is a puzzling, enrapturing place, full of tiny passageways, stone steps, green gardens and large, impressive domed churches and cathedrals. A stroll through here is a happy place to spend an afternoon, seemingly a world away from the tourists flocking into Noto. Be sure to make the most of the endless craft and food stores and to stop for a Michelin-starred dinner at Locanda Don Serafino, hidden within a series of rocky, atmospheric caves.

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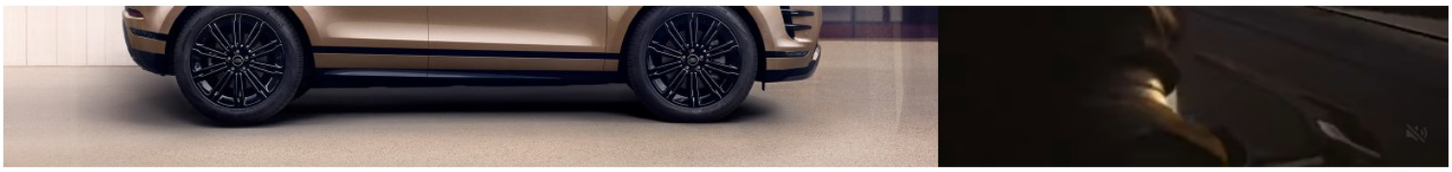


If you want a truly unique Sicilian stay, you should look no further than Fontes Episcopi. This eco farm in the wilds outside Agrigento is a family-run home – with only 11 rooms – which is overflowing with charm. Step inside and you will be greeted by the patriarch (and given home-made soap and shampoo) and his family, who will promptly invite you to dinner, all of it cooked in the vast and beautiful kitchen where pans hang from the ceiling and pasta is made before you, using flour produced on site. After a day relaxing by the pool, take dinner on the terrace, where every dish is a home-cooked surprise, and overlook the beautiful, wild grounds as you listen to the cries of the peacocks and, if you're lucky, play with the farm's kittens. For seclusion, ambience and authenticity, this is luxury redefined.

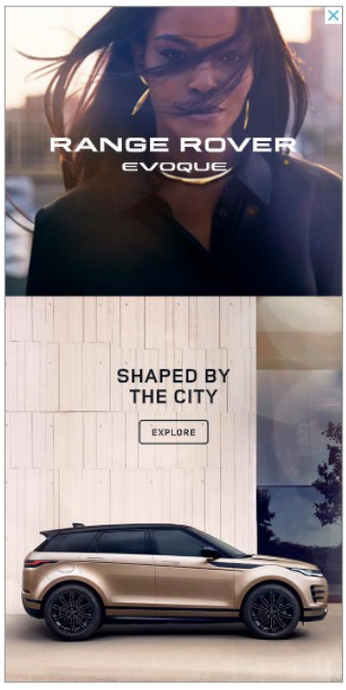
FONTES EPISCOPI – BOOK NOW

For a trip back in time... visit the Valley of the Temples

MARIE-CLAIRE CHAPPET

The Valley of the Temples

On an island replete with layers of history, it's hard to know what to visit first. You are truly spoilt for choice in Sicily. Over millennia, the isle has been everything from a Roman province to a Norman stronghold, and this is reflected in its varied architecture, stunning ruins and holy sites. One of the most famous of these, and the best preserved, is the Valley of the Temples. Situated just north of the diverting town of Agrigento, this smattering of Greco-Roman temples and ruins is actually more of a mount than a valley, which serves as a fascinating immersion into the



world of antiquity – from the temple of Concordia (which lends its likeness to the UNESCO logo) to the majestic fallen pillars of the temple of Juno. Be warned about visiting in the heat of the day, as this exposed outcrop is one scorcher of a sun-trap, but do insist on including this in your itinerary.

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For an active adventure... stay at Verdura Resort

ADRIAN HOUSTON

Verdura Resort

If you're the type of traveller who gets bored lying by the pool then Verdura Resort, a Rocco Forte Hotel, is for you. Set on the beach in the region of Sciacca, on Sicily's southern coast, this resort boasts a whole roster of activities, starting with the bikes you can take across the hotel's vast grounds should you want to add a bit of fun to your beach visit or trip to one of Verdura's many wonderful restaurants. From golf on one of its world-class courses to tennis and water sports, Verdura is an active holidaymaker's dream. But that is not to say that downtime is not expertly catered for, too. Dine on superlative seafood at Amare, recline by the pool, or visit the stunning Irene Forte spa, where you can either undergo one of their numerous treatments or simply sit in the hot tub in the shade of the neighbouring mountains.

VERDURA RESORT – BOOK NOW

For foodie hotspots... explore Catania

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One of Italy's most Eastern towns, in the shadow of the eerie and powerful Mount Etna, is renowned for its distinct character, but also its myriad culinary treats. Be sure to have an *aperitivo* in Vermut; sample the town's best seafood in Osteria Antica Marina; or indulge in the classic grandeur of Mé Cumpari Turridu, one of Catania's most prestigious restaurants. Then there is Sapio, one of the town's most exciting Michelin-starred eateries, which will take you on a gastronomic adventure of Sicily's wild East coast.

For beautiful vistas... visit Taormina

Famously dubbed the most touristy spot in Sicily, it is also one of the most beautiful. An essential spot to visit is the gorgeous garden of Villa Communale – often referred to as Parc Trevelyan – in the grounds of a villa once owned by the English aristocrat Lady Florence Trevelyan. Now a public park, it is a bucolic idyll in which to spend a sunny afternoon after an early morning visit to Taormina's famous amphitheatre, the ancient Greek theatre which perches above the region's impressive landscape. You should, naturally, finish any day in Taormina with an *aperitivo* on the terrace at Bar Timeo or a chilled glass of champagne and dinner at the *White Lotus* itself, the Four Seasons San Domenico Palace.

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For the soul of Sicily... visit Palermo

MARIE-CLAIRE CHAPPET

Palermo

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Dusty, raw, a little dirty, a lot sexy, Palermo is a gem of a city and an essential stop in Sicily. Its de-facto capital has it all: grand theatres and opera houses, majestic cathedrals and imposing palaces, all connected by wide-Haussmannesque boulevards and winding pedestrianised streets cluttered with restaurant tables and buskers. Of the heavy hitters, be sure to check out the main cathedral – a cluster of conflicting Moorish and Norman styles that makes for an eye-opening delight – and climb up to its roof, where you will be rewarded with a sublime vista of the rooftops of Palermo and the bay beyond. The cathedral of Monreale, a little out of town, is also worth the diversion, with its byzantine splendour and impressive views, and the Norman Palace (now used as a seat of government) is an alluring treat, though be sure to visit Friday to Monday to guarantee entry into the royal apartments.

If its distracting history will charm you by day, it is Palermo's nightlife that will steal your heart. There are almost too many bustling bars and restaurants to choose from. Try Locanda del Gusto for the epitome of modern Sicilian cuisine; catch the live jazz in Santamarina Bistrot's hidden square; or have your sundowners overlooking the domes and spires of Palermo on the terrace of Grand Hotel et Des Palmes.

For the ultimate in old-school

glamour... stay at Villa Igeia

VILLA IGIEA

The Grand Dame of Sicilian hotels, Villa Igeia is a classic charmer from the golden age of travel. Its historic rooms have played host to everyone from King Edward VII to Sophia Loren and it wears its esteemed lineage on its gilded sleeve. This is an old-school luxury hotel, but with a clean and contemporary feel. The suites are exquisite and the impressive food is served with a view over the harbour of Palermo. Ideally situated, the hotel offers this glimmering vista, and access to the heart of Sicily's most exciting city, while perching on the quiet edge of it. This means that after a day of sightseeing in the bustling centre it's the perfect place to retreat to for a martini in the Terrazza bar, last seen moonlighting as a date-night restaurant for Jennifer Coolidge in a certain HBO TV show….

VILLA IGEIA – BOOK NOW