

PICCOLINA ADVENTURES

Photography & Easy Biking In Sicily



Sicily brings magic to mind. Nestled at a crossroads between Africa, the Middle East & Europe, and steeped in millennia of history, the island bursts with a medley of cultures, flavors, landscapes and traditions - from Aztec chocolate, to Baroque cathedrals, sparkling blue seas, to a rustic tradition of handmade farm-fresh cooking, Sicily presents a luscious cacophony of passion for life.

Traveling by bicycle puts you directly in touch with Sicily's heart. Our routes are designed to get you into the thick of it, but not to wear you out. And gelato has never tasted this good!

We'll have both a cycling guide and photography guide along to teach you about Sicily's sites and offer photo tips & techniques.

HIGHLIGHTS

- * Ride Noto's Wine Route - a spectacular path meandering through vineyards, lush lemon & almond orchards
- * Taste Aztec chocolate in Modica
- * Refreshing swims in sparkling waters near Vendicari Reserve
- * Relax over a glass of Nero d'Avola wine after a winery tour and comprehensive tasting
- * Stroll through lovely Baroque Ragusa rich with 18 UNESCO heritage monuments including churches, palaces & gardens
- * Enjoy cocktails at the hippest beach in Marina di Ragusa
- * Ride through Pantalica Canyon's Necropolis with over 5000 prehistoric cave tombs from the 13th - 7th centuries BC

TOUR DATES:

June 23rd – 30th, 2012

LENGTH:

8 days, 7 nights

DIFFICULTY:

Easy - 15 to 20 miles a day over flat to gentle grades; terrain is mixed asphalt, dirt roads & grassy paths

ARRIVING/DEPARTING:

Catania

PRICE:

\$2245

SINGLE SUPPLEMENT:

\$270

ACCOMMODATIONS:

Double room in family-run Bed & Breakfasts and farm guesthouses (agriturismi)

INCLUDES:

- * 7 nights lodging;
- * Airport pickup & dropoff;
- * High quality touring bicycles & equipment;
- * Activities including wine tasting, chocolate tasting, cheese tasting;
- * Luggage transport;
- * English-speaking local guides & photographer;
- * Transport throughout trip;
- * Daily light Italian breakfasts & welcome wine reception

PICCOLINA ADVENTURES

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DAY 1: ARRIVAL & NOTO

Transfer: 1hr 25min

Afternoon Visit: Noto's Historical Center

Welcome to Sicily! We'll meet you at the Catania Fontanarossa Airport - please schedule your flight to arrive by 2:30pm. We'll be waiting for you in the arrivals lounge, and then transfer to Noto. Capital of Sicilian Baroque, Noto is a living art gallery. It's historical center is rich with churches, aristocratic palaces, stately piazzas and beautiful streets, both grand and small which wind harmoniously about one another. Noto, along with every other city in the area, was completely razed by a devastating earthquake in 1693, after which the noble aristocracy decided to rebuild the city stone-for-stone, 3km from its original site! They invited the most renowned architects of the Sicilian Baroque, the result is a strikingly harmonious city and street-plan. The beauty of its sumptuous facades gave the city its nickname "The Stone Garden." After we get settled in our apartment, we'll meet for a welcome wine reception and our first taste of Sicily's artisan cheeses, salamis, spicy tomato crostini and salads. Then go out and enjoy the city! Accommodations: *Bed & Breakfast in Noto*



DAY 2: NOTO'S "WINE ROUTE"

15 miles, climbing 350 feet

Terrain: mixed dirt paths, paved road, sand dunes and rock



Today we ride the valley's "Wine Route" which snakes gently through Noto's rich countryside. We take an old mule path and service roads through the beautiful almond orchards, plots of olive & lemon trees, and lush vineyards that characterize the Noto Valley. Those who wish may stop to visit the Roman Villa Tellaro, a 4th century partially-excavated palace boasting magnificent floor mosaics - they tell stories of Roman life with scenes of hunting, erotic dances, Illiad tales, and unusual geometric designs. Then we head toward the

sandy beaches, lagoons and African bushes of the Vendicari Nature Reserve, famous for its aquamarine water, bird-life and diverse vegetation. After a refreshing swim and long break, it's time for vino! Vineyard-lined roads take us toward the Pachino area - which derived from ancient Greek means "plenty of wine"! And it's true. You're in the cradle of the Nero d'Avola, Sicily's most famous grape variety. All around, wine cellars appear - ruined *palmentos* (traditional wine-making houses),

PICCOLINA ADVENTURES

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and modern, organic wineries. We stop to visit Giacomo at his winery. He is passionate about all things wine and loves to share his passion with those who come to visit. He'll describe the Nero d'Avola and his wine-making process, as we enjoy tasting it! We'll return to Noto in the evening. *Accommodations: Bed & Breakfast in Noto • Optional Activities: Visit to Roman Villa Tellaro, entrance €6*

DAY 3: FISHING TOWNS & THE AFRICAN PLATE

19 miles, climbing 330 feet

Terrain: mixed dirt paths, paved road, sand and flat rock

We'll hop the train this morning for a short ride to Pozzallo. From the train window we watch the countryside slowly change. We're right atop the border of the Eurasian and African continental plates. From the Ionian coast, marked by olive trees and scrub, we cross toward the coast that directly faces Africa. Here a deep blue sea, agave cactus and carob trees reign. In Pozzallo, we stop for the ultimate Sicilian refresher: the granita. Like the freshest, most delicate fruit slushee you've ever had, granita are an exclusive Sicilian delight. Fortunately, they're also served all day long from breakfast (yes - Sicilians eat their granita for breakfast!) until midnight. So now fully sugar-charged, we'll hop on our bikes and follow a patchwork of roads winding through old fishing towns, chic resorts, across a rocky cliff and sandy beach! We arrive in a Marina di Ragusa this afternoon, a lively beach-town hopping with chalets, restaurants and shops. Find your own favorite spot and make sure to sit down, look out over the white sandy beach, and enjoy a cocktail as the sun sets over the sea. *Accommodations: Bed & Breakfast in Marina di Ragusa*

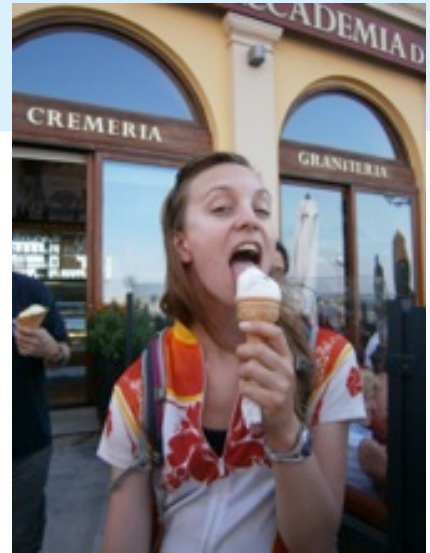
DAY 4: TOWARD RAGUSA

21 miles, climbing 1650 feet

Terrain: paved, gravel and grassy roads



After a luxurious morning by the water, we'll ride up into the Iblean plateau. Our scenery changes again, and we'll pass through richly cultivated fields of grain where cows graze freely, gently rolling hills dotted by old stone farmhouses, small vineyards, and the colorful country villas of Ragusan nobles, all framed by the lovely dry stone walls. We have some uphill riding today, but the panorama is totally worth it! We arrive in the magnificent Baroque city of Ragusa in the afternoon. With 18 UNESCO heritage monuments, the entire



PICCOLINA ADVENTURES

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historical center is a fun and fascinating maze of archways, exquisite Baroque churches, staircases, and stately palaces. You'll have the afternoon to explore on your own, or take a 4-hour walking tour with Barbara, a certified Ragusan tour guide. Visit the public gardens, the Cathedral of San Giorgio, or just relax with a chocolate granita. For dinner, choose from many wonderful restaurants, from hole-in-the-wall trattorias (we'll give you some suggestions) to Slow Food and Michelin-starred restaurants. *Accommodations: Bed & Breakfast in Historic Ragusa Ibla • Optional Activities: Walking tour of Ragusa, €18/ person, minimum 6 people*



DAY 5: RAGUSA IBLA

0-15 miles, climbing up to 1800 feet

Terrain: paved and gravel roads

You have a day free in Ragusa! You can visit the Archeological Museum, housing artifacts from the Neolithic until late ancient time; visit the Bronze-age necropolis dug into the southern cliffs, or shop, dine and relax. Those who want to ride can head on a hilly, but short ride to visit Modica, the city of chocolate. Another exquisite Baroque city, Modica also produces a historical oddity: Aztec chocolate. The tradition was brought over by Sicily's Spanish rulers in the early 1500's, who'd just acquired chocolate-preparation techniques from the South-American natives in the new world. Though both Spain and South America have long since modernized their chocolate production techniques, Modica has preserved and employs the traditional methods of Aztec chocolate, a delicious prize. You can enjoy a chocolate tasting in the city center and lunch at any of the lovely cafes. We'll all return to Ragusa for the evening. *Accommodations: Bed & Breakfast in Historic Ragusa Ibla*



DAY 6: WINE, CHEESE & OLIVE OIL

16 miles, climbing 820 feet

Terrain: paved and dirt roads

Today we'll ride through the classic Iblean countryside toward the hillier *altopiano* mesa. We pass more small farms, fields of grain and Baroque fortified noble villas. This countryside is the thriving stronghold of Sicilian cuisine – the shepherds maintain a fierce tradition *caciocavallo*, *provola* and *ricotta* cheeses, produced in small-batches from their carefully watched herds; just as

PICCOLINA ADVENTURES

Photography & Easy Biking In Sicily

they've done for centuries. We'll stop for lunch by an old farmhouse, restored from the 1800's, where our friends Francesco and Maria are waiting for us – ready to share their home-made cheeses, olive oils, homegrown vegetables and wine with you! As the afternoon cools, we'll head toward Palazzolo

Acreide, a lively town with a fascinating visual history. Founded by the ancient Greeks in 664 BC, you can pick out layers of history as you walk the streets: a Norman castle, a Medieval street-plan, Baroque church facades, a Greek amphitheater. As the sun sets, we'll head toward our farmhouse lodgings on an organic farm nearby. *Accommodations: Agriturismo near Palazzolo Acreide*



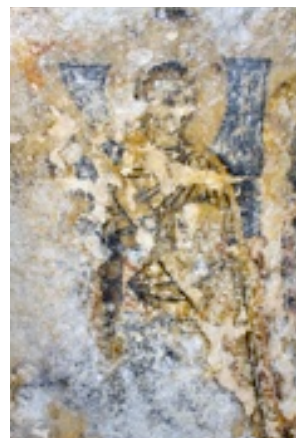
DAY 7: PANTALICA CANYON

15 miles , descending

Terrain: paved and dirt roads

Today we ride through Pantalica Canyon, a wild and eerie mountain once home to pre-historic cave-dwelling populations from the 13th to the 7th centuries BC. Fleeing invaders from Ancient Greece, they dug houses and over 5,000 tombs out of the rock. In the early Middle Ages, the area was again invaded by pirates and barbarians, and the local Byzantine population fled to the caves to live, pray and work. Traces of their frescoed cave-churches still remain. Our route follows the tracks of an old railway, offering a continuous gentle downhill, until the Reserve's exit, where we find ourselves at our final evening's accommodation, the "Sacred Stones" Farm dedicated to preserving the canyon's environment. Enjoy your final dinner of Sicilian caponata, olives, sun-dried tomatoes, handmade pastas, and grilled meats and, of course, the indispensable

nero d'avola wine. *Accommodations: Agriturismo near Sortino*



DAY 8: DEPARTURE / SYRACUSE

Transfer to Syracuse/Catania

After a leisurely farm breakfast, we'll depart by shuttle to Syracuse and the Catania Airport. We'll arrive in Syracuse around 10am and the Catania Airport around 11am. If you are continuing to a different destination, or have particular time constraints, just let us know and we'll help you connect. Say your final goodbyes to the vineyards, lemon and olive orchards, and the sparkling Mediterranean sea. Sicily somehow gets into you. Maybe it's the granita, maybe it's the sun, maybe it's the rich

PICCOLINA ADVENTURES

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legacy of millennia of human history - you've gotten a taste, now, but know that you'll be welcomed back at any time!

POST-TRIP ROMP THROUGH SYRACUSE

A picture-perfect blend of history, beauty, seaside fun and culinary delights, Syracuse, is one of Sicily's most important and visited cities.

It has fantastic ruins - including one of the world's largest intact Greek theaters; a lovely Baroque old quarter; one of Italy's finest archaeological museums; and the only stands of papyrus that grow in Europe (gifted by the Egyptian ruler Ptolemy II).

Syracuse has a long and illustrious history. It gave birth to Archimedes (who invented calculus, engineered remarkable military devices, and discovered the laws of floatation!); it dominated Mediterranean trading routes in the ancient days, and walloped powerful Athens in battle in 415 BC.

With it's Baroque, Greek, Roman and modern buildings, set in a lovely seaside location, with a strong culture in producing delectable eats, Syracuse is the perfect synthesis of the beauty, history and lifestyles we've discovered throughout the region.



DAY 8: THE FUN JUST DOESN'T STOP!

Transfer: 1 - 1.5 hours

Do we really have to go home now? Nope!

Those who wish can continue on to Syracuse, one of the most important cities in the Ancient world, a thriving, lively city even today. Baroque, Greek, Byzantine, Italian the city offers a dense mix of sights, experiences and flavors. We'll arrive on Ortygia, part of the ancient city center, and meet our guide who'll take us on a walking tour and tell us of the city's complex history. In the evening we'll indulge in a parallel culinary exploration of Syracuse's unique cuisine. Go for fried pasta balls, handmade gnocchi with cherry tomatoes, fresh ravioli, or smoked river trout, then maybe a *feminella* lemon granita for dessert. Accommodations: B&B in the Syracuse Historical City Center

PICCOLINA ADVENTURES

Photography & Easy Biking In Sicily

DAY 9: THE ANCIENT SIDE

Today we'll visit the Archeological Gardens just outside Ortygia. Put your walking shoes on, as we'll cover 2 km to get there. Ancient Syracuse was about three times the size of the contemporary city and covered both the tiny island of Ortygia and much of the mainland. During the Medieval and Baroque ages the city shrank to occupy just the easily defensible island, while the mainland has only been redeveloped only in the last century. Thus some of the best Greek sites are actually on the mainland - and there is an expensive archeological garden with the Greek theater and a fascinating archeology museum. In the evening we'll return to Ortygia for dinner and a final night on the town.

Accommodations: B&B in the Syracuse Historical City Center



DAY 10: FAREWELL!

Transfer to Catania Airport: 1 hour

After breakfast we'll shuttle to the Catania Airport to arrive by approximately 9am. Please schedule your flights accordingly. If you are continuing on to another destination in Sicily, we can alternatively drop you at the Syracuse central train station.

SYRACUSE EXTENSION DETAILS

DATES:

June 30 – July 2nd, 2012

LENGTH:

extra 2 days, 2 nights

PRICE:

\$300

Single supplement (\$70)

ARRIVING:

Shuttle to Syracuse
(included)

DEPARTING:

Catania Airport or
Central Station

INCLUDES:

- * 2 nights lodging in historic Syracuse on Ortygia Island;
- * Professionally-guided private walking tour
- * English & Italian-speaking trip director
- * Awesome full-course farewell dinner of local specialties, wine & the works
- * Shuttle to Syracuse
- * Dropoff at Catania Airport

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We make every effort to accurately present and adhere to the itinerary detailed here. However, factors beyond our control and the needs of the moment may necessitate some alteration.