

## An offer he couldn't refuse!

Posted On 09 Apr 2019 By : [Roger Wheeler](#) Tag: [Giarre](#), [Mount Etna](#), [Palermo](#), [Sicily](#), [Syracuse](#), [Taormina](#), [Travel review Roger Wheeler](#)

### Roger Wheeler visits Sicily, the birthplace of the mafia, taking in Giarre, Syracuse, Palermo, Taormina and a trip up Mount Etna.



**DON Vito Corleone's** famous quote from the *Godfather* followed us around Sicily. Mario Puzo the author of the book may well have been an American but he knew a lot about Sicily, its mafia the *Cosa Nostra* and *La Camorra*. You will see the technically fictitious name Corleone everywhere.

Principe di Corleone is the local wine company, nice wine but beware the serious men in suits in 30 degree heat, walking in to restaurants, sitting, smoking, being served something without question, nodding at some folk who almost bow at their feet, then leave again.



Roger and Mike on Mount Etna

Sicily is stunning, dominated by the brooding presence of Mount Etna, technically a long dormant volcano until December 2018 that is. It is the largest Mediterranean island with a population of over 5 million and the same number of visitors each year.

There is an enormous variety of ancient ruins; the Greeks left lots as did the Norman French but strangely the Romans didn't seem to be too bothered. Coming from the UK we weren't too concerned about very old ruins but it seemed to be all the American tourists wanted to see.

Flying into Catania we drove the short distance to Giarre to find our hotel. Giarre is the original small Sicilian town, not particularly attractive, a main road with some shops and of course a very large church. Although it is almost on the coast, its seaside neighbour Riposto is equally uninspiring, just a large yacht harbour, some nice restaurants and a beach. Our hotel, in Giarre, originally named Hotel Etna, was very nice indeed and we would recommend a few nights there but not the 14 days that BA Holidays thought we should have.



Mount Etna

Staying in Sicily you have to take a trip to Mount Etna as it is an unforgettable experience. Being taken in a very rugged 4×4 across lava fields and off-road through ancient forests was eventually worth it, the scenery was breathtaking. Walking across this desolate landscape we felt the awe-inspiring power of the volcano beneath our feet, very memorable.

You need a car, a few days in Giarre was enough so we set off to visit Palermo the capital city. The drive across the island was great, the mountains and vast rolling plains were a surprise and beautiful. Palermo is a fantastic Mediterranean city, shops, restaurants, great hotels, museums and churches definitely worth a couple of days of anyone's time.

We chose what was reputed to be the best hotel on the island – Grand Hotel Villa Igia – it's part of the Accor group. We got a very great deal on a very nice room although it can cost up to 1,000 euros per night if you want to spend that sort of money.



Taormina

Along with everything else, Sicily boasts some 'must see' places – one of these is Taormina, a beautiful little town high on the cliffs above the Ionian sea. It's been a tourist destination for over two hundred years, with its famous Greco-Roman amphitheatre which is still in use; It is very attractive, lots of little lanes, shops and cafes with great views over the bay.





Ancient Theatre of Taormina

Being tourists we shouldn't complain about other tourists but we still do. Taormina was uncomfortably packed and it wasn't even high season. It draws thousands of tourists all year, we went, stayed half an hour had a coffee, bought the tee-shirt and left.

Escaping from Taormina we went to see one of the most spectacular sights on the island. The Alcantara Gorge, in the Gole Alcantara Botanical Park, this is one of the 'must see' places, very popular with families and therefore children but it should be seen. Beware of the gentlemen offering to 'help' you park, for money, its free.



The Alcantara Gorge

It is very easy to get away from the tourists on the island; there are lots of very quiet small roads winding around the hills, through some fascinating small villages. Driving south along the coast there are some beautiful calm little fishing villages, appearing never to have seen a tourist.

We end in Syracuse, once the largest city in the ancient world, founded in 734 BC it's awash with Greek ruins, lovely squares, a stunning waterside with all the usual cafes and restaurants and of course all the obligatory designer boutiques.



Syracuse

History surrounds you in Syracuse, it's a UNESCO World Heritage site; it is quite expectedly a beautiful city. If there is a 'next time' in Sicily then we would certainly stay here for a couple of days. Quick warning, anyone 'helping' you to park is to be avoided. We took this advice and probably saved ourselves literally hundreds of euros.

Eating well on Sicily is easy; there are so many excellent restaurants, the choice is difficult and naturally pizza is everywhere, but these are distant cousins to those we have at home. Some are so large it was impossible to finish, almost unrecognisable as a pizza, we even had one that had a topping of chips, maybe not the best idea but interesting and we ate it! In almost every restaurant we wondered what that gentleman in his three-piece suit was doing, he certainly wasn't eating, we shouldn't say any more!

Sicily is almost perfect, the climate, the history, the scenery, the towns and villages, the food, the wine and the people. Once is not enough!

<http://www.visitsicily.info/>

<https://www.visitsicily.travel/en/nature/regional-parks/the-gorges-of-alcantara/>

<https://www.etnahotel.it>

<https://villa-igiea.com/en/>

[http://www.visitsicily.info/en/10cosea/taormina\\_10/](http://www.visitsicily.info/en/10cosea/taormina_10/)