

# The Culture of Food in Sicily

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With Shereen Pavlides



My trip to Italy last year was the best of my life. I got to work directly with farmers and food producers in one-on-one learning experiences. Understanding how the food is produced gave me a connection and understanding of Italy that I could never have gained from simply reading a book or watching a video. I fell in love with the process and became an even better cook because of it.

I'm heading back, this time to Sicily, and I'm thrilled to invite you to come along so we can share this experience together. During this tour, curated by food writer Elizabeth Minchilli, we'll spend six glorious days in Sicily, where we'll dive deep into the culture of food. I am so excited to explore this region and all the food it has to offer. From lemons and olives to cannoli and ricotta, we will discover the culture of Sicily directly from

the people who are growing, producing, and cooking the food. We are invited into private homes, estates, and farms to discover a side of Sicily that is not usually available to visitors. I can't tell you how excited I am! I hope you can join me.

**When:** March 9-15, 2025

**Where:** Palermo, Sicily

**Nearest airport:** Palermo, Sicily

# Sunday

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## Arrival & Introductions



### Hotel

We will be based in one of Sicily's - and Italy's - most vibrant cities: Palermo. Our home for the week is the luxurious Grand Hotel et des Palmes. This historic hotel has recently undergone a 2-year renovation, which makes it the best hotel in Palermo. You will have a chance to settle in before we meet later that evening.

In your room, you'll find a copy of your schedule for the week, a branded canvas tote bag to carry any goodies you may pick up during the week, and a personal guide to Palermo with Elizabeth Minchilli's favorite places to eat and shop to help you plan your free time.

### Introductions

At 6 pm, we will meet in the hotel's salone for a glass of prosecco to start our week. We'll introduce ourselves and go over what we'll be doing this week. You will also meet Gianluca, our licensed tour leader for the week.

### Dinner

Our first dinner is a short walk away to one of the most beautiful private palaces in Palermo. The owners of this palazzo have invited us into their home for a tour and dinner.

# Monday

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## Making Cheese & Orientation



### Farm visit

After breakfast at the hotel, we are heading out of town to the Jato Valley. This verdant landscape, a short drive from Palermo, is home to a rich tradition of agriculture. We will spend the day at a historic farm in Piana degli Albanesi, where we will see ricotta and caciocavallo cheese being made by the owner. We then sit down for lunch in their home, which will include the farm's cheeses, seasonal vegetables from the family garden, and the traditional bread "furr me dru." We will also learn about the local culture, founded by Albanians centuries ago, and learn some words of the Arbëreshë language.

### Walk around Palermo

After lunch, we will return to Palermo and Gianluca will lead us on an orientation and historical passeggiata through town. We'll stop by a few of the more significant sites so you can get your bearings and learn some of the rich historical context of this complex city.

### Light dinner

Since we'll have had a big lunch, we will be having a lighter dinner. We'll stop at one of the best food stores in town, and will take over one of the tables they set up at dinner time for a drink and a dinner of cheeses, cured meats and salad.

# Tuesday

## Market & Puppets



### Market and cooking class

After breakfast, we will head to the market. The colorful and noisy markets of Palermo are world-famous, and we will meet our friend Michael, who runs one of the best cooking schools in the city. We'll have a walk around, choose our ingredients and then head back to his kitchen. There we will cook a full meal, learning how to cook some Palermitano dishes before sitting down to lunch.

### Puppet theater

After lunch, you have a bit of free time before we meet up to learn all about the Opera dei Pupi. Recognized by UNESCO, this 'opera of puppets' is a theatrical presentation that dates back to the early 19th century and is one of Sicily's most important expressions of history and culture.

After a visit to the workshop where the marionettes are crafted, we will attend a private performance in the tiny theater.

### Evening

Tonight you are on your own for dinner. We are happy to help you make plans.

# Wednesday

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## Salt, Couscous, & Pastries



### Salt pans

Today we head out of Palermo to the western coast. We will spend the morning at the salt pans near Marsala, where the process of salt harvesting has been going on for thousands of years. We visit the learning center of SEI, where we will see how windmills still run the local process, and have a tasting of the salt itself, learning how to use the different varieties of this ‘white gold.’

### Lunch

Our next stop is Erice. This small medieval town is located 2460 feet above sea level overlooking Trapani. We will make the dramatic drive up, enjoying the amazing view out over the coast. Before we get to tour the charming town, it’s time to learn about one of the specialties of this part of Sicily: couscous. Nowhere is the intersection of Italian and North African culture more evident

- or delicious - than this traditional dish. We will have a demonstration of how couscous is made before sitting down to lunch.

### Dessert

Erice is known for its pastries. Home to an orphanage that housed young girls, the orphans were taught trades, including the art of pastry making. Maria learned her baking skills there and now owns and runs one of the most famous bakeries in Sicily. We will visit the shop, first winding our way along the cobbled streets of this charming town. Then Maria will teach us how to make *genovesi*. And have a tasting, of course!

### Dinner

After a long day out, you are on your own for dinner. We are happy to help you make plans.

# Thursday

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## Ancient Temples & Olive Oil



### Segesta

After breakfast, we head way back in time, visiting one of the great archeological sites that dates back to when the Greeks ruled this part of the world. With Gianluca as our guide, we will explore the dramatic site of Segesta, visiting the dramatic Doric temple and acropolis.

### Lunch

For lunch, we head to our friend Daniela's *baglio*. A *baglio* is the Sicilian word for estate farm, and we will be spending the afternoon at her home, learning about olive oil, which Daniela produces. We will also be invited into the family kitchen for a cooking demonstration, before sitting down to lunch in the family dining room.



### Dinner

After a long day out, you are on your own for dinner. We are happy to help you make plans.

# Friday

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## Artisans & Street Food



### Ceramics and hats

This morning we will focus on the handmade artisanal traditions of Sicily. Our first stop is the beautifully quirky Museo della Majolica. The small ceramics museum is located on the third floor of a private palace. The collection focuses on hand-painted tiles from the 15th to the 20th century and contains over 5000 examples.

The Sicilian Coppola is the hat you see on almost every Sicilian man of a certain age. We will visit one of the last remaining artisans who still crafts these newly stylish hats by hand.

### Lunch

Palermo is known for its vibrant street food scene. Small stands and shops supply hungry Palermitani with things like arancini (rice balls); sfincione (focaccia); pannelle (chickpea flour fritters); and the famous Pani Ca Meusa (spleen

sandwich). We'll take a stroll to try some of these as we make our way to our next destination.

### Dessert and coffee

Santa Caterina d'Alessandria is a gorgeous convent located in the heart of Palermo. We will be visiting the dazzlingly decorated church and the rooftop, which includes a view of all of Palermo. Then we will head to the cloister to visit the nun's private rooms before heading to the brightly tiled cloister to try some of the pastries traditionally made by nuns.

### Dinner

You will have some free time on your own this afternoon before we meet for our final dinner at one of the best restaurants in Palermo for a final fishy feast before saying goodbye.

# Saturday

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## Departure



### Check-out

Our tour is officially over, and after one last breakfast, you will be checking out of the Grand Hotel et des Palmes. You may check-out by 12 pm.



# About This Tour

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## Important information: please read



### The culture of food

Our tours are about exploring places through the culture of food. This means that almost all of our activities are food related. You can expect big meals and often snacks in between. If you do not have a big appetite, have food intolerances, or are squeamish or a picky eater then this is not the tour for you.

### Food intolerances

Since we are in southern Italy, the cuisine is focused on the Mediterranean Diet, so there will be plenty of vegetables. That said, many of our group meals revolve around local food traditions and may include fish or meat and almost always cheese and gluten-filled bread, pasta and pastries.. If you are a vegetarian or gluten or lactose intolerant, you will not go hungry, but you will also not be experiencing the full range of the food culture we will be exploring.

### Activity level

This is a walking tour. Each day we will be exploring a new town or village. We often get up early, and the days are long and will involve walking up to an hour or more. While the level is never overly strenuous, you must be able to keep up with the rest of the group.

### Travel companions

Many of our clients find out about us through social media and know what to expect: days spent exploring the culture of food through visits to farms, markets, and more. If you are thinking of bringing along a traveling companion (friend, spouse, relative, partner), please make sure they are aware of the types of things we will be doing. If they are not interested in food, visiting farms, eating in rustic settings, etc., they won't enjoy this tour. Someone who is not fully engaged will not be happy on this tour.

# Details

## Dates and Price



### Dates:

March 9-15, 2025

### Price:

Double occupancy (2 people in 1 room):

€5000 per person

Single occupancy (1 person in 1 room):

€5900 per person

[Click here to convert to US \\$](#)

Since our tours are based on small family-run businesses, we reserve the right to vary the specifics of the itinerary. We may switch days, add/change activities, or substitute locations. We send out an updated itinerary within 30 days prior to the start date.

Each tour is limited to 12 participants + host, tour guide, and assistant.

### The fee includes:

- 6 nights in Grand Hotel et des Palmes
- Buffet breakfast in hotel
- All of the meals, activities and transportation outlined above
- A copy of Shereen's book *Cooking with Shereen From Scratch*
- A copy of Elizabeth Minchilli's book *Eating My Way Through Italy*

### Not included:

- Transportation to and from Italy
- Transportation to and from hotel

For more information and to book this tour, email [minchillitours@gmail.com](mailto:minchillitours@gmail.com) and PLEASE specify 'Sicily with Shereen.'

# About Us

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## Your guides for the week

### **Shereen Pavlides**

Shereen, the host for this tour, is the beloved professionally-trained chef and creator of the viral sensation and hit social media platform, Cooking with Shereen. She is the bestselling author of [Cooking with Shereen from Scratch: Because You Can!](#) and [RockStar Dinners](#). She has appeared on Good Morning America, Live! with Kelly and Ryan, The Today Show, Access Daily, The Doctors and The Tamron Hall show. She is a recurring guest chef on Live! with Kelly and Mark. Her work has also been featured in People, Teen Vogue, and BuzzFeed Tasty. Follow her on [Instagram](#), [TikTok](#), [Facebook](#), and [YouTube](#).

### **Elizabeth Minchilli**

Although not joining the tour, [Elizabeth](#) has carefully curated this week. She has been writing about the joys of Italian life for the last 30 years and is the author of 9 [books](#) on Italy. Her popular [blog](#) and [newsletter](#) is where she shares her passion for Italian food, writing about recipes, meals and restaurants. She has been creating food tours since 2011 and today runs her [business](#) along with her two daughters, Sophie and Emma.

### **Gianluca D'Alia**

Gianluca is our tour leader and will be with us the entire trip. Gianluca is a licensed tour and nature guide of Sicily and a travel consultant specialized in rural tourism. He has studied politics and Sicilian history in Palermo and Amsterdam and is passionate about Sicilian food, wines, history, archaeology and culture. He is proudly a member of ONAF, the Italian organization of cheese tasters. He loves planning new itineraries and leading guests to experience the most authentic and beautiful Sicily.