



VERDURA GOLF AND SPA RESORT

Bartholomew into one of the loveliest and most luxe small hotels in Europe. Hedone has a riad-style pool and a grassed rooftop where a wonderful Sicilian dinner, overlooked by a dramatic cliff-top convent reminiscent of Pressburger and Powell's *Black Narcissus*, begins with a bottle of prosecco opened with the swipe of a sword.

Scicli's tiny costume museum gives an insight into Sicily's last golden era, with an archive of 19th-century fashion, including finely beaded black gowns and mantillas from a time when local women would change outfits five times a day – just to stay at home. The grand streets of Scicli, and nearby Ragusa and Modica, ache for these opulent gowns; although this part of the world is an inexhaustible well of inspiration for high fashion, the truly chic (like the Countess) only shop for clothes on weekend trips to Rome or Paris, and there's nowhere else the length or breadth of the boot that demonstrates just how wrong Italians can get it. On seaside piazzas, button-down shirts are paired with Chanel-red Speedos that would make

a priapic go-go dancer on steroids baulk, while women go to town with home-bleaching, denim patches, crystal appliqué and metallic shoes. But it's all part of the gaudy, gutsy charm: in a reversal of England's North/South snobbery, northern Italians mock everyone south of them – while the Sicilians, as far south as you can get, don't give a monkey's.

Sicily's most glamorous region is the coastline around the town of Taormina, home to the ancient Teatro Greco, site of the annual June film festival, and where convertible Lamborghinis pull up outside some of the grandest hotels in the world. The beachfront Villa Sant'Andrea and the Hotel Timeo were recently taken over by the extremely high-end hotel group Orient-Express, and a cocktail on the terrace of the Timeo at sundown, gazing at Mount Etna, is as romantic as waking up in one of its lush suites to the peals of bells from the nearby church.

The south west of the island is becoming the new Taormina. The Kempinski Hotel Giardino di Costanza is pristinely landscaped, classic and deeply plush,



Left and above right: the futuristic Verdura Golf and Spa Resort on Sicily's south coast



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SICILY



DOLCE & GABBANA S/S 2011

PHOTOGRAPHS ALAMY, ANTHEA SIMMS, DAVID LYONS/ALAMY, MARK O'FLAHERTY, MATT LEVER, ROBERT PATTL, SILVIA OLSEN AT ANTHEA SIMMS, SIMONE GIOVANNI/A CORNERS



SICILY



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Right: Sicily mixes traditional beauty with sleek and contemporary villas for a romantic setting



SICILY



ANTONIO BERARDI S/S 2011

with a pianist serenading diners beside a sweeping water feature, while Rocco Forte's Verdura Golf and Spa Resort looks more like a Palm Springs futuristic collection of fall-out bunkers, but in a delightful way: sleek lines frame trees near its dazzling infinity pool. It's so perfect that sitting with a cocktail on the terrace makes you feel like a tiny model in an architect's rendering.

While Berardi takes time out at Verdura from Milan, Giorgio Armani heads further south for the whole of August, offshore to the wild and rugged black rock of Pantelleria. He doesn't stay in

where no one bothers him. Pantelleria is a beautiful, but extreme, refuge – during the daily siesta it seems like no one, apart from a few curious men with mullet hairdos in the sushi bar in Tracino, is on the island. And like so much of the south, it's a reluctant beauty.

Driving through its hills, navigating via sun-cracked, barely visible road signs, a hairpin turn reveals the tropical-blue, breathtaking Lake of the Mirror of the Venus, where locals (like Armani) and visitors (including Madonna) swim and daub themselves with volcanic mud before drying out on the white sand. Beauty therapy aside, it's primal and sexy. And if you can't make it to Pantelleria, you can still buy the Crema Nera beauty creams that Armani created in tribute.

Palazzo Hedone Via Loreto 51, Scicli. Enq palazzoledone.it. Doubles from £108, room only. Verdura Golf & Spa Resort Contrada Verdura, Sciacca. Enq verduraresort.com. Doubles from £270, room only. Villa Sant'Andrea Via Nazionale 137, Taormina. Enq hotelvilla.santandrea.com. Doubles from £280, B&B. Palazzo Conte Federico Via dei Biscottari 4, Palermo. Enq contefederico.com. Doubles from £125, B&B. Easyjet flies from London Gatwick to Palermo from £40 one way. Enq easyjet.com. British Airways flies from London Gatwick to Catania from £60 one way. Enq britishairways.com. Ustica Lines sails from Mazara del Vallo to Pantelleria from £30 one way. Enq usticalines.it. Tirrenia sails from Trapani to Cagliari from £30 one way. Enq tirrenia.it ■

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BEST SHOPPING

1. Rossella Carrara (*Piazza Bagnasco 5; rossellacarrara.com*) Pick up boho fashion in this Palermo store.
2. Vallone (*Via Calascibetta 22*) One-off handbags designed by local artists.
3. Confeetteria Veniero (*Piazza Cassa di Risparmio 14; veniero.it*). The most delicious sweets ever.



SICILY

NEED TO KNOW

WHEN TO GO Sicily is warm all year around, although tends to be stormy from November to February. The summer months can be roasting, so spring and autumn are recommended. Many of the Taormina resorts close over the winter until March or April.

HOW TO GET AROUND

Coaches between the main cities are fast and frequent; trains less so. For the quirkiest way to see the coastline around Taormina and Catania, hire a dinky, orange vintage 1960s Fiat 500 for the weekend, from £245 (enq.500vintagetour.com; 100 39 3491 7234906).

For inter-city driving, rent a car with Holiday Autos, from £255 for 10 days (enq.holidayautos.co.uk; 0871 472 5229).



VILLA SANT'ANDREA



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