



TAORMINA

SICILY

The ancient Greeks called Sicily “Trinacria” because of its triangular shape, but historians believe that an old tribe called Sicilii left the long-lasting name upon this area. The largest island in the Mediterranean, it is 150 miles wide and 200 miles long, situated off the toe of the Italian ‘boot’ and separated from the mainland by the Strait of Messina. With a population of over 5 million, it is one of the most densely populated areas of Italy. A mountainous and rugged island, the highest point on Sicily is Mount Etna, an active volcano which dominates the eastern coast at a height of 10,902 feet. Sicily is mainly an agricultural land with citrus fruits, olives, vegetables and grapes as the main crops. However, some industry has developed, mainly in the form of oil refineries and chemical plants while fishing is still important, accounting for 25% of Italy’s annual seafood catch.

Taormina is one of the main reasons for visiting Sicily. Founded in 358 B.C., it is a beautiful town perched on high cliffs midway between Catania and Messina. The town has a medieval atmosphere despite its Greek and Roman past. The buildings, dating mostly from the Middle Ages, have great charm and spectacular position overlooking the bay and rugged coastline below. Rediscovered by tourists in the 18th century, Taormina has become a popular resort town.

HISTORY

Though inhabited by the original Sicilians for at least 15,000 years, Greek settlers first came ashore to establish a trading village just south of modern day Taormina around 750 BC. Eventually, seeking a location that could be easier to fortify and defended, around 400 BC the Greeks climbed a small coastal mountain and began to build the village that would become Taormina.

By the 1st century BC the Roman Empire was in control of Sicily but the large Greek population remained predominate. Growing great fields of grain Rome would turn Sicily into the empire’s breadbasket. Due to oppressive conditions a massive slave revolt broke out on the island and threatened to spread to other parts of the empire. The slaves took Taormina but could not withstand the assault of the Roman legions who laid siege to the town. The retribution and revenge of Rome that was brought down upon the rebellious slaves in Taormina was swift and brutal. Most of the free Greek townspeople would eventually be forced to abandon their homes and leave the city. Emperor Octavian decided to populate Taormina with Roman families so he gave the town as a reward to his soldier. The town prospered for many years as a beautiful and quiet backwater of the Empire.

At the fall of the Roman Empire there were many Christians living in Taormina. When the barbaric Vandals and Goths invaded Sicily the Christians were subjected to serious persecution.

Though they had been attacking Sicily for many years in 827 AD a 10,000 Saracen Muslim army came ashore. The complete conquest of the island would be long, difficult and bloody. Taormina held out valiantly yet fell to the Muslims in 902. The town was looted, burned and completely destroyed. The few citizens of Taormina that did survive were sold in the slave markets of Islamic North Africa. The name of the town was changed to Almoezia. The Muslims ruled Taormina and Sicily with surprising benevolence for the next 250 years.

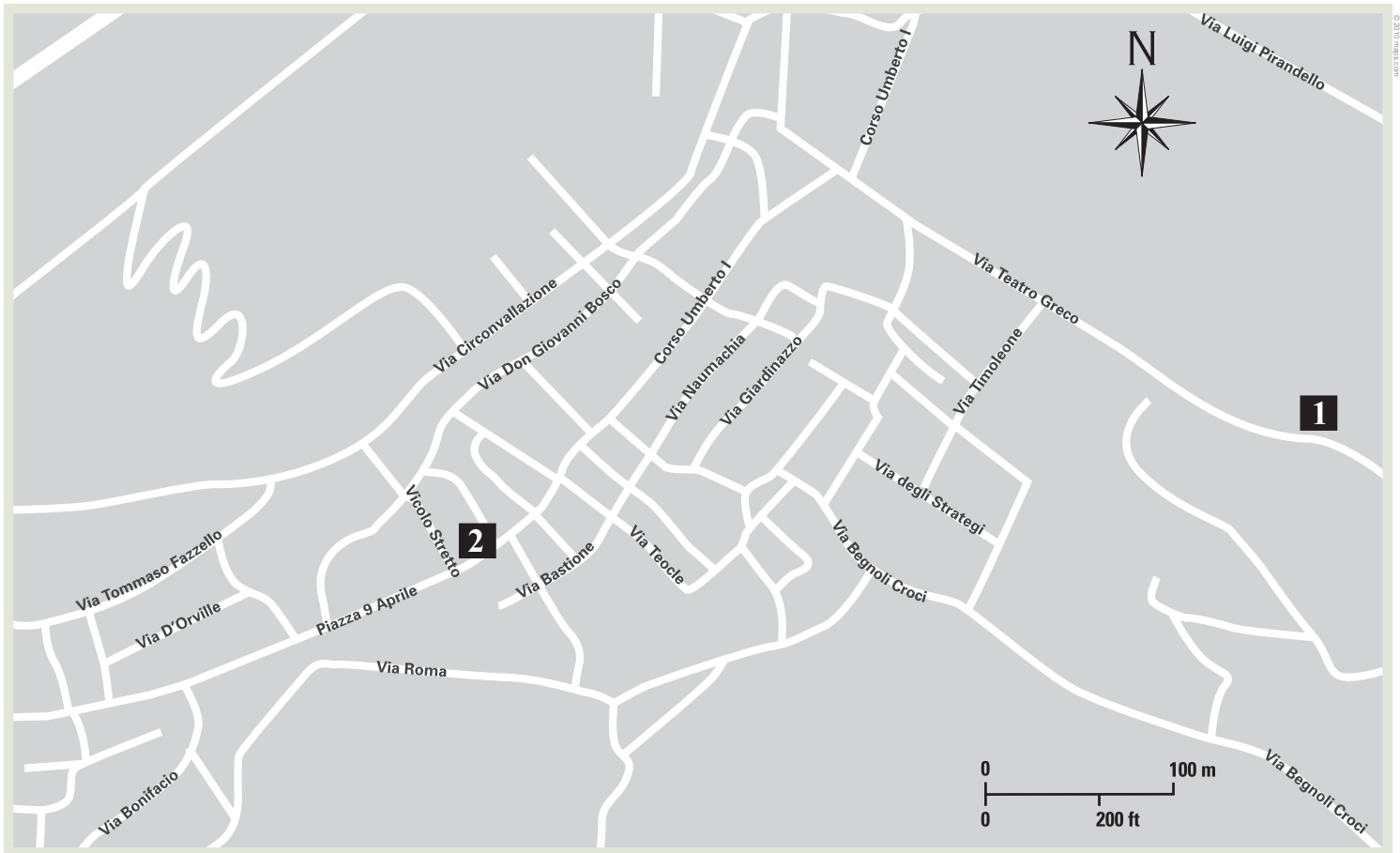
In 1061 the Normans invaded Muslim held Sicily. Eventually, in 1079, the Normans laid siege to Taormina. Their conquest of the entire island was finally



completed in 1091. It had taken 30 years. After the Norman conquest the German Lombards took control of Sicily. In 1250 Pope Innocent IV (who was French) decided that Sicily was his for the giving so he gave it to King Louis IX of France. Taormina and many other Sicilian cities were outraged but quickly suppressed. In 1282, in a bloody action that would later be known as the Sicilian Vespers, the people took out their revenge upon 8,000 French. This would eventually lead to Sicily coming under the rule of the Spanish House of Aragon in 1302. In 1347 the bubonic plague swept Sicily. Some es-

timates of the number of islanders to succumb to the “Black Death” reach as high as 75%. For the next five centuries the island of Sicily would be fought over by the Spanish, French, English, Holy Roman Emperors, the Austrian Hapsburg Dynasty and the Popes themselves.

As allies, in 1943, soldiers, sailors and airmen of the British Empire and the United States of America came ashore in the name of liberation. Peace and freedom would finally come to the island ... and the people of Sicily.



TAORMINA POINTS OF INTEREST

1 Greco-Roman Theater, located on the edge of the older part of Taormina, was built by the Greeks in the 3rd century B.C. and redesigned by the Romans in the 2nd century A.D. Renowned for its acoustics, it is still used for modern productions of Greek tragedy as well as summer festivals. Considered as one of the most dramatic settings for a theater in the World, it stands on a perfect site, facing the sea on a hill 702 feet high, with the bay far below and the dominant peak of Mount Etna in the distance. On a clear day the view is truly breathtaking.

2 Taormina Cathedral, located at the far end of the Old Town, is thought to have been founded in the 13th century and is a small building, much restored.

Beyond Taormina

Tindari is an oasis of peace and tranquility perched high above the sea on a cliff in the northwestern section of Messina Province. Founded in 396 B.C., it was once a colony of the ancient Greek civilization. Today it is famous for its sanctuary dedicated to the Black Madonna and is a place of pilgrimage for people of the Catholic faith.

Mount Etna is an active volcano 10,902 feet high. Thanks to the rich volcanic soil, the lower slopes bear a lush crop of citrus fruits, while higher up are found forests, and beyond that are the remnants of lava streams and the crater from which hot gases, smoke and bubbling lava can sometimes be seen.

MEDITERRANEAN CUISINE

What is often referred to as “Mediterranean Cuisine” is usually separated into three groups; eastern Mediterranean, North African and southern European. Over thousands of years the styles have evolved and changed a great deal from the days of the classical period. Many of the ingredients that are considered basic to the cuisine today were late in coming to the table. In the classical age rice had yet to arrive from Asia, coffee was still in East Africa and tomatoes would not be introduced until after the voyage of Columbus to the New World. Upon arrival tomatoes were banned by a 16th century Pope, but that is another story. The point is; can you imagine Mediterranean cuisine without the tomato?

Today, recognized as a wonderfully healthy cuisine, dishes from around the Mediterranean, though varying widely from country to country and region to region, do share a common foundation. To begin with they are usually simple creations lacking in fancy sauces or drowning in butter. Freshness is a key especially when it comes to vegetables like cucumbers and eggplants and the ubiquitous tomatoes. A wide variety of beans are used such as fava and chickpeas. Roasted or stewed lamb and goat are the primary meats with beef rarely if ever served. North Africa and its use of spices differs from southern Europe and their herbs such as parsley, fennel, rosemary and oregano, to name a just a few. Depending on availability, sea food is extremely popular. Honey, fresh cheese and yogurt are staples. The most fundamental ingredient in Mediterranean cuisine has been cultivated for over 5,000 years. It has been discovered in ancient tombs of Pharos, used as payment to soldiers, a centerpiece of pagan religious ritual, an unchallenged symbol of victorious conquest and peace ... and it goes great on a fresh salad ... olive oil. It is not too much of a stretch to say that without the humble Mediterranean olive ... history would not be history and more importantly dinner would not be dinner as we know it.

SHORE EXCURSIONS

To make the most of your visit to Taormina and surrounding areas we suggest you take one of the organized Shore Excursions. For Information concerning tour content and pricing, consult azamarclubcruises.com or contact the onboard Shore Excursion Desk. When going ashore, guests are advised to take with them only the items they need and to secure any valuables.

LOCAL CUSTOMS

Bargaining: There are limited opportunities for bargaining in some of the tourist stores.

Tippling: If service is not included, 10% is a good guideline.

LOCAL CUISINE AND DRINK SPECIALTIES

Pasta con Sarde is popular among the locals, fresh sardines served with pasta, alternatively try Macaroni Sicilian style with tomato, eggplant and parmesan cheese. There is a wide range of fresh seafood available as well as; goat (kid) which is often served roasted, and rabbit which is also quite common. For dessert try a gelato (ice cream), for which the Italians are particularly well-known.

The local wines are Etna Rosso and Etna Bianco. Grapes are grown on the fertile lower slopes of the volcano and produce good quality wines. Marsala is a well-known dessert wine produced in Sicily. Bottled water is recommended.

SHOPPING

Shops are generally open from 9:00am – 1:00pm and 4:00pm – 8:00pm Monday through Saturday. Many shops are closed on Monday morning. In Taormina the main shopping street is Corso Umberto. The most popular purchases are hand-craft items including; embroidery, ceramics, wrought-iron and jewelry, especially coral and obsidian (a black glass of volcanic origin). Most tourist orientated stores accept major credit cards.

Value added Tax (VAT), is added to most purchases. Visitors who spend over a certain amount may be entitled to re-claim some or all of the tax paid, however, regulations and conditions governing the refund of VAT are subject to change and RCCL cannot guarantee the cooperation of local authorities.

LOCAL CURRENCY

The unit of currency in this port is the euro. There are 8 euro coins with a common face. On the reverse, each member state contributes a design. There are 7 euro notes. All euro coins and notes are legal tender in member states. Most major credit cards are widely accepted.

POST OFFICE AND TELEPHONE FACILITIES

There is a Post Office at 1 Piazza Bucini, Porta Catania (#1 Bucini Plaza at the Catania Gate, the entrance to the town).

Public phones accept coins or phone cards from Telefoni di Stato, Post Offices or Tobacconists. A coin or telephone card may be required to dial these access numbers:

AT&T: 800.172.444

MCI: 800.90.5825

TRANSPORTATION

Taxis are generally available on the Pier. It is important to negotiate a fare prior to departing. The Taormina–Giardini Train Station (so named because it serves both towns) is on the sea front, 1 mile south down the hill from the center of town.

TOURIST INFORMATION

There is a tourist office located on the first floor of the Palazzo Corvaja (Corvaja Palace) next to the Piazza Vittorio Emanuele (Vittorio Emanuele Plaza).

There is an additional office located at the Taormina – Giardini Train Station, approximately 1 mile down the hill from the center of town.

