

The Culture of Food in Sicily

With Odette Williams



The moment I was old enough to travel, I packed my backpack and took off for Italy. The food and culture left a lasting impression. The minestrone in Florence, carbonara in Rome, and tortellini in Bologna. The emphasis on the quality of the produce and the simplicity of preparation became a north star for my own cooking. In 2021, I returned to shoot my New York Times Best Selling Cookbook, *Simple Pasta*, in Sicily. I became obsessed with this southern island. Eager to explore and learn more from local purveyors and food and wine experts, I'm thrilled to be hosting this tour in September. And I'd love for you to join me!

During this 6-day tour, curated by food writer Elizabeth Minchilli, we'll have the time to truly explore one of the most beautiful corners of this large island from a completely food-centric point of view. From breakfast through dinner, we'll wander in small towns and the countryside (and around volcanoes!), tasting, drinking, eating, cooking, learning, and having fun.

We'll be based in the magical town of Ortigia. The days will be full, with adventures but don't worry, you'll also have some downtime to head off on your own to explore.

When: September 15-21, 2024

Where: Ortigia (Siracusa), Sicily

Sunday

Arrival and Introductions



Hotel

We will be based in one of Sicily's most beautiful cities: Ortigia, the small ancient island off of Siracusa. Our home for the week is the Hotel Gutkowski, a small family-run, simple, but very charming boutique hotel located near the sea. 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 canvas tote bag to carry any goodies you may pick up during the week, and a personal guide to Ortigia with Elizabeth Minchilli's favorite places to eat and shop to help you plan your free time.

You'll also have already received a copy of Elizabeth's book, *Eating My Way Through Italy*.

Drinks and introductions

We will meet for a drink to start our week. If weather permits, we will be on the panoramic rooftop of the hotel or else the cozy *salone* on the ground floor. You'll meet Odette and Salvatore, a licensed tour guide of Sicily who will be with us the entire week.

Dinner

We then make our way to our welcome dinner at a modern bistro just down the road that puts a fresh spin on seasonal and traditional dishes.

Monday

Market and Cooking



Market walk, cooking class, and lunch

It's our first day in Sicily, and we will spend the day discovering our 'home' for the next week. After breakfast in our hotel, we'll meet our friend Alessia for a walk through the alleys to the famous vegetable and fish market. We will stop by several stands at the market, including a famous salumeria, for a tasting of local prosciutti, cheeses, and a glass of wine! We will also pick up some fresh produce to take back to our cooking class. We'll have a hands-on lesson, making a few dishes for our lunch.

Tour of Ortigia

This afternoon we'll meet with another friend, Alessandro, one of the best guides in Sicily. He will take us on a *passaggiata* through the town, stopping by a few of the more significant churches as well as exploring the Jewish heritage of this town. This walk will help orient you for the rest of the week and provide important context.

Aperitivo

We will end our walk at one of our favorite bars, where we will enjoy an aperitivo and snacks.

Tuesday

Architecture and Almonds



Noto

Today we are heading south to visit one of the most beautiful towns in Sicily: Noto. We'll meet up with our guide who will tell us about the history. After being destroyed by an Earthquake in 1693, the entire town was completely rebuilt in a style of baroque unique to this part of Sicily. Made from a local honey-colored stone, the entire town looks a bit like a wedding cake. We'll have a leisurely walk, and some free time to try a pastry from a famous Noto cafe.

Almond farm

At the end of the morning, we will head south to an area that is world re-known for its almond cultivation, the Val di Noto. We will spend the afternoon at a farm, learning all about their traditions.

After being welcomed with almond milk and salted almonds, we will walk through the almond grove, where they grow the Romana and Pizzuto varieties of almonds.

Lunch

We will then have lunch featuring almonds in everything from pasta to dessert. We may also get a chance to taste their more modern crop: organic avocados, one of the few growers in Italy.

Dinner

After a full day out (and lots of eating!), you are free this evening.

Wednesday

Volcano and Wine



Etna

After an early breakfast, we head north and spend the day beneath the volcano of Etna. We will explore with our friend Ben Spencer, the author of *The New Wines of Mount Etna*. With Ben as our guide, we will learn what makes the wines of Etna so special. During the course of the next few hours, we will visit a winery, learn about the varietals, see how the lava-enriched soil and special climate affect the grapes and wines, and see how the wine is made. We will have a vineyard walk, winery visit, and tasting.

We then take a drive along vineyards in the shadow of Etna, driving past historical lava fields that define this sometimes hostile, yet fertile, landscape.



Randazzo

We'll then head to the medieval town of Randazzo, where we will have a walk through this town built in dark lava stone.

Lunch

For lunch we are going to Ben's favorite trattoria, where we'll pair the wines we learned about with local dishes. Afterward, a short walk for a coffee and one of the best granitas in town.

Evening

After a long day, you are free this evening.

Thursday

Farm Visit



Late morning

Today we head into the countryside. We will spend the day with our friend Giuseppe and his family at his farm in the Hyblaean Mountains west of Ortigia.

As we make our way to the farm we will drive through a landscape that dramatically frames the livelihood of this area: agriculture of cereals, and farming of cattle and sheep.

Giuseppe's unique farm celebrates biodiversity, creativity, and sustainability in one of the most beautiful and remote areas of the island. We will meet his family, learn about the ancient grains that he grows, and see how they are used in making local pasta and bread.

We'll take a tour of this glorious property to meet his herds of cows (and horses, dogs, and cats). We will then have a wonderful feast, featuring all local products from the farm as well as paired wines from some of the most interesting wine producers in Sicily.

Evening

After this long day, you are on your own for dinner, or to just digest and sleep.

Friday

Ruins and Olive Oil



Neapolis

After breakfast in our hotel we visit one of the most important archeological sites in Italy: the Neapolis park just outside of Siracusa. Our guide will take us on a tour of the Greek and Roman amphitheaters, as well as the other sites dating back to the 5th century BC.

Lunch

We then get on our bus to visit a farm just a half hour away. The owner, Dario, will show us around his estate and introduce us to the world of Hyblaeon olive oil. We will see the olive grove, and he will explain what makes the land so unique, its cultivars (Tonda Iblea, Nocellara, Biancolilla, and Ogliarola), and the harvesting techniques.

In the tasting room, we'll enjoy a guided professional tasting of the three different olive oils produced by the farm. We then join the family for lunch, which is entirely prepared by Mamma Lucia.

Afternoon and farewell dinner

You have some free time on your own this afternoon before we meet for a final dinner at our favorite seafood restaurant in Ortigia.

Saturday

Departure



Check-out

Our tour is officially over, and after one last breakfast, you will be checking out of the Hotel Gutkowski.

You may check-out between 7 am and 12 pm.

We are happy to help arrange your transfer to the next stop on your trip.

About This Tour

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. If you are a vegetarian or lactose or gluten 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

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 week. Someone who is not fully engaged will not be happy on this tour.

Details

Dates and Fee



Dates: September 15-21, 2024

Nearest airport: Catania, Italy

Price:

Double occupancy room (2 people in 1 room):
€5100 per person

Single occupancy room (1 person in 1 room):
€6000 per person

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

The fee includes:

- 6 nights in Hotel Gutkowski *
- Buffet breakfast in hotel
- Snacks in your room
- All of the meals, activities and transportation outlined above
- Coupon for dinner at Gutkowskino (restaurant in our hotel)
- A copy of Elizabeth Minchilli's book *Eating My Way Through Italy*

Not included:

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

* We love this quirky family-run hotel. It is comfortable, cozy, and stylish, but not luxurious.

About Us

Your guides for the week

Odette Williams

Odette is an Australian cook and writer. In 2006, Odette packed up her life on Bondi Beach to move to New York for love after meeting her now husband Nick in a Sydney bookstore. She pressed pause on her acting career and had two children, Opal and Ned. Cooking often with her kids, she realized she couldn't find a keepsake apron set for them, so she designed one then launched her eponymous brand that worked with leading brands like Goop, Anthropologie, and Le Bon Marche.

Odette then wrote her first cookbook, *Simple Cake*, named one of the Best Cookbooks of 2019 by the New York Times and an Amazon Bestseller. She followed it up with another New York Times Best Cookbook, *Simple Pasta*. Odette has contributed to major national magazines and appeared on the Food Network. She currently has a regular column in the Wall Street Journal, Party Trick, where she shares simple recipes and tricks for hosting.

Salvatore Equizzi

Although Salvatore's formal training is as an art historian, he worked for years as an actor and ran a program of cultural events for an independent bookshop. His passion for sharing cultural events through social context led him naturally into his current career as a guide. He brings deep knowledge to his work and helps his guests immerse themselves in the historical and cultural atmosphere of the places they explore together. As a native Sicilian, he aims to help visitors feel, taste, and understand this island's complex and rugged beauty.

Alessandro Rustico

Alessandro is the founder of Uncovered Sicily. He has a degree in archeology but has expanded his knowledge to food, wine, and the culture of Sicily. We will be spending time with Alessandro in Ortigia. He is considered by many to be the best guide in Sicily.

Benjamin Spencer

Ben will be taking us around Etna. He is the director of Etna Wine School and author of the award-winning *The New Wines of Mount Etna*. He holds a diploma from the London-based Wine & Spirit Education Trust. Ben is a journalist, wine judge, and professional winemaker with two decades of experience working with artisan and internationally traded wines.

Alessia Liistro

Alessia is a chef, teacher, and tour guide and will share her passion for the food of her home through the market walk and cooking class we will take with her in Ortigia. She is a powerhouse and one of the most spirited and optimistic people we know.

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.