

# The Volcano Road

SICILY'S MOUNT ETNA IS ON FIRE. WITH STUNNING SEASIDE VIEWS AND A LOCAL WINEMAKING SCENE THAT KEEPS GETTING HOTTER, THE TIME TO VISIT IS NOW.

BY ANTHONY GIGLIO

Stop at the Cottanera vineyards near Catania, Sicily, for their luscious wines—and timbale for lunch.

**I**S IT POSSIBLE TO TAME an active volcano? Of course not. But that hasn't stopped grape growers from planting vines on Mount Etna, despite belches and blasts of ash from on high. Here on the coast of Sicily, at altitudes of nearly 11,000 feet, an ever-increasing number of winemakers have been experimenting with native Nerello grapes in black volcanic soil, making wines that draw comparisons to Barolo, Barbaresco, and Burgundy. With the gorgeous resort town of Taormina as your base, you can drive to and from the vineyards in an hour or two.

PHOTOGRAPHY: ALFIO GAROZZO



# DAY 1



WHERE TO TASTE



WHERE TO EAT AND DRINK



WHERE TO EXPLORE



8:15 A.M.

## BUONGIORNO!

You've got a volcano to climb, so fortify yourself accordingly at Licchio's Bar. Indulge in cream-filled cannoli and cornetti (Italian croissants). Nab some arancini (crispy rice balls stuffed with mozzarella and meat sauce) for the road. [www.licchios.it](http://www.licchios.it)



9 A.M.

## OVER THE LAVA AND THROUGH THE WOODS

Head to the Porta Messina, one of two ancient Roman archways that bookend Taormina's Corso Umberto, to meet your private driver (he'll be the guy with terrific sunglasses; book in advance at [authenticitaly.com](http://authenticitaly.com)). If you're feeling ambitious, on the way up Etna, jump-start your appetite with a hike before hitting the vineyards.



10:30 A.M.

## OLIO AND VINO

First stop: Tenuta Tascante, an estate owned by Tasca d'Almerita, one of Sicily's most innovative (and historic) winemaking families. Reserve in advance for a tasting of olive oil and wines grown in the volcanic soil. Among them will be Tascante's fabulous, mineraly, peach-scented white, Buonora, made with the Carricante grape. The name means "good times." Enough said. [tascadalmerita.it](http://tascadalmerita.it)



1 P.M.

## SOUTHERN COMFORT

A short drive brings you to the medieval town of Castiglione di Sicilia and to Cottanera for a tasting of their velvety Etna Bianco and succulent Etna Rosso Riserva Zottorinoto. Winemaker Enzo Cambria runs the estate with his late brother's children, who will offer you lunch, possibly featuring a gorgeous timbale of ring-shaped anellini pasta encased in a golden shell of fried eggplant. [cottanera.it](http://cottanera.it)



5 P.M.

## REFRESH AND RECHARGE

The Ashbee Hotel has chef Heinz Beck (who holds three Michelin stars at La Pergola in Rome) consulting for its St. George Restaurant on dishes like wheat pasta tossed with red prawns, smoked eggplant coulis, and breadcrumbs. From the rooftop, check out the spectacular views of Calabria, just three miles across the Strait of Messina. [theashbeehotel.com](http://theashbeehotel.com)



8:45 P.M.

## EASY BREEZY

The understated dining room at Kisté in the 15th-century Casa Cipolla is chic yet informal, with two giant Roman cisterns (*kisté* translates to "cistern" in Ancient Greek). Chef Pietro D'Agostino not only writes the menu here—he makes wine, too, including a tasty Grillo, the 2017 Capinera Vieto d'Agostino Piana della Ghirlanda Bianco. [www.kiste.it](http://www.kiste.it)

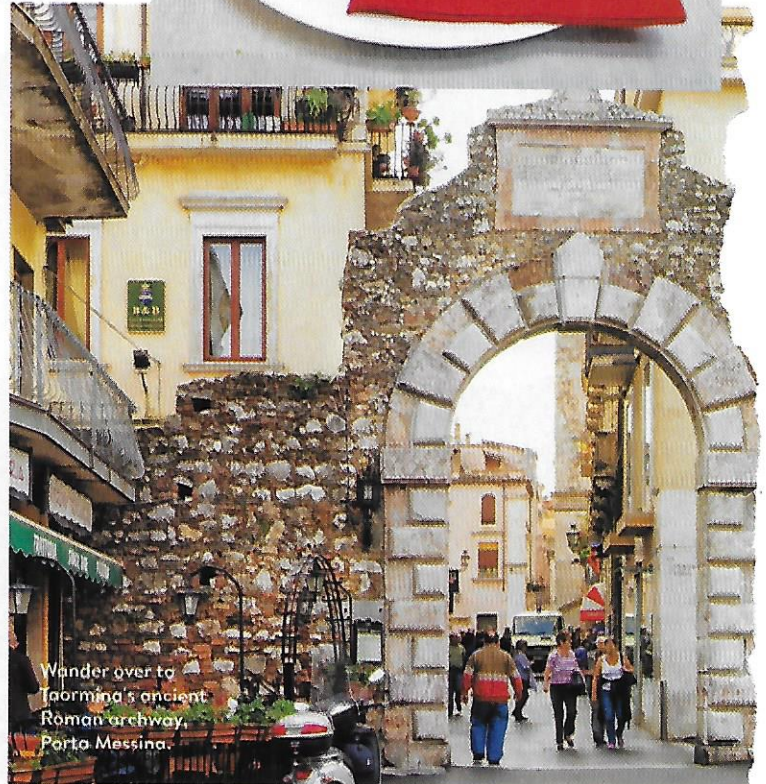


11:45 P.M.

## LAST DANCE

As you wind your way back to your hotel, pop into Morgana Lounge Bar for a quick nightcap. The bartenders know how to make a proper Negroni (no cheap, sweet vermouth here), the scene on the cliffside terrace is lively, and the views are out of this world. [www.morganataormina.it](http://www.morganataormina.it)

Cannoli at Licchio's Bar in Taormina are handmade by chef-owner Angelo Longo.



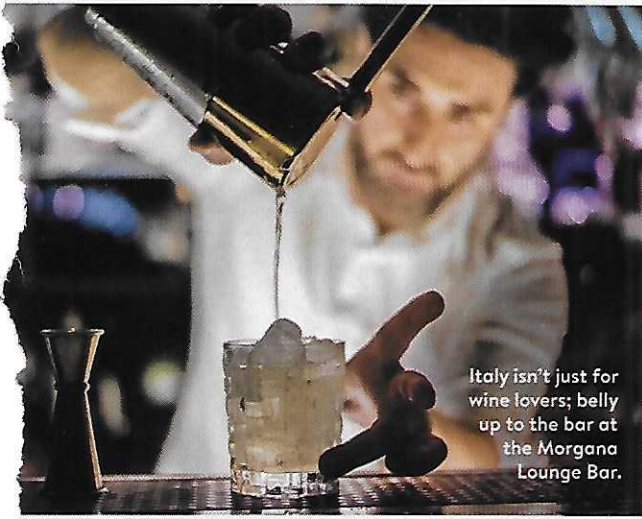
Wander over to Taormina's ancient Roman archway, Porto Messina.

Taormina has many alluring hotels, but the views from the Ashbee can't be beat.





# DAY 2



Italy isn't just for wine lovers; belly up to the bar at the Morgana Lounge Bar.

**9 A.M.**  
**SCENE AND BE SEEN**

At the chic, bustling Caffè Wunderbar on Taormina's Piazza IX Aprile, theatrical waiters in starched white jackets play to the crowd as if it were still the *La Dolce Vita*-era 1960s, when Tennessee Williams and Elizabeth Taylor used to lounge here. Score an outside table and order a cappuccino and a slice of the fabulous cassata Siciliana: sponge cake bathed in alchermes liqueur, layered with ricotta, frosted, and decorated with candied fruit. [wunderbarcaffe.com](http://wunderbarcaffe.com)

**10:15 A.M.** 0.....  
**SOUTHERN EXPOSURE**

Jump onto the Autostrada A18 toward Etna's southern side. Along the 45-minute drive to the Benanti winery, stop at the Autogrill in Acì Sant'Antonio to stock up on a couple of bags of Italy's best potato chips, San Carlo. Make a beeline for their *più gusto* ("more flavor") line, which includes peperoncino and mint or lime and pink peppercorns.

**NOON**  
**WALK ON THE WILD SIDE**

At Benanti, resident sommelier Valentina Donvito will welcome you with a refresher of just-pressed fruits from their orchard, which includes lemons, limes, blood oranges, or, if you're lucky, fichi d'india (cactus pears). Then she'll lead you on a brisk hike up Mount Etna into the estate's vineyards. Afterward, taste through the family's wines in their magnificent art gallery. Not to be missed are the minerally Etna Bianco Superiore Pietramarina and the Nerello-based Etna Rosso Serra della Contessa. [benanti.it](http://benanti.it)

**5:15 P.M.**  
**CHILL OUT**

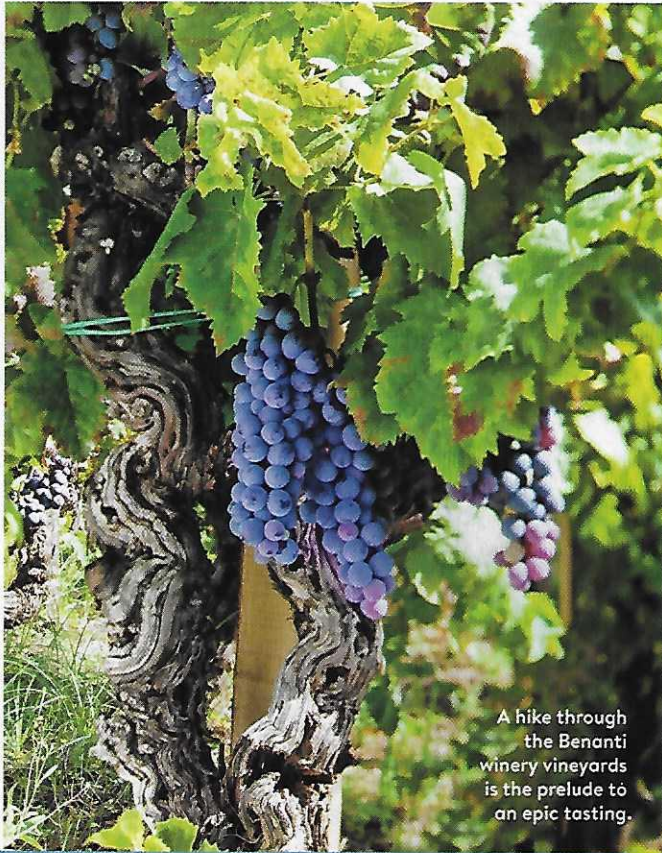
Sicily's granita di caffè, or coffee granita, is the refreshment of choice practically any day of the year. You'll find a perfect example back in Taormina at Bam Bar, where the menu lists 24 different granitas by seasonal availability. *Via Giovanni di Giovanni, 45.*

**6 P.M.**  
**TERRACE TIME**

Just next to the richly ornamented Teatro Greco, an amphitheater built around the third century B.C., is the spectacular Belmond Grand Hotel Timeo. Have a drink on the terrace, which overlooks the sea. Do as the locals do and order a Campari with one large ice cube and a half-wheel of lemon. Try not to overdo it on the local almonds and olives served gratis—you want to have dinner later, right? [belmond.com](http://belmond.com)

**8:30 P.M.**  
**WINE AND DINE**

Osteria Rosso DiVino is a hip, casual restaurant where chef Fabio Scordo's menu invokes the Arab-Sicilian mash-up that exemplifies the island's cooking. Order something just reeled in, like merluzzo (cod) or seppia (cuttlefish), then pair it with a white from vintner Marco de Grazia's Tenuta delle Terre Nere. Relax, and try not to stare at the volcano too long—otherwise, just when you thought you were leaving tomorrow, you may find yourself headed back up for another hike. [osteria-rosso-divino.com](http://osteria-rosso-divino.com)



A hike through the Benanti winery vineyards is the prelude to an epic tasting.

PHOTOGRAPHY: (OPPOSITE, TOP TO BOTTOM) COURTESY OF LICCHIO'S BAR, IKONYA/SHUTTERSTOCK, COURTESY OF THE ASHBEE HOTEL PHOTOGRAPHY; (THIS PAGE, TOP TO BOTTOM) GRECO GIULIO, COURTESY OF BENANTI, COURTESY OF BELMOND



Spend a very happy hour at the Belmond Grand Hotel Timeo.