



Self-guided walks

The day self-guided walks can be purchased from *Sicilian Experience* the money will go towards helping the village of Sant' Ambrogio.

Alternatively on request I will be happy to advise you on the walks and if possible guide you.

Castle Rock of Cefalù – distance 4.5 km, walking time 2 hours:

Cefalù nestles beneath a majestic limestone headland known as the *Rocca*, towering 250m over the coastline. Frequented for religious purposes in pre-historic times, evidence has been found in the numerous caves which form honeycomb structures in the rock.

The walk entails an easy stroll around town then a rewarding uphill exploration of the *Rocca*, an easy 250m climb with sensational panorama, wildflowers and zooming swallows, and perfect picnic spots.

Sant' Ambrogio circular walk – distance 7.5 km, walking time 3 hours:

This walk begins in the village of Sant' Ambrogio. Initially, we start at 150mts. a.s.l. and go up the old stony mule track, continuing onto forest tracks and through cork oak woods, “Bosco di Guarneri”, reaching 360m. The path contours around the mountain behind Guarneri with views across the Madonie Mountain range. On the way we can stop at the shepherd to taste the freshly made ricotta cheese, before returning on a small path above the coastline back to the village.

Lancenia/Guarneri – c.da Mandrie – Ferla (intersection) circular walk – distance 3.5km/2miles, walking time 1 1/2 hours.

Drive to the beginning of the walk, option of 2 starting points for longer and shorter route. This easy and pleasurable walk takes you through woodlands, where one discovers the secluded houses nestled among the pine woods. The walk is partly on country asphalt road and large wide dirt tracks. At the beginning of the walk one has views towards sea then the walk takes you, round to the back of the mountain where there's wonderful views towards the Madonie Mountains range and the valleys below.

Sanctuary of Gibilmanna to Sant' Ambrogio – distance 10 km/6.2miles, walking time 3 ½ to 4 hours:

The starting point of the walk is at the sanctuary dedicated to the Madonna which is perched high on the Pizzo Sant' Angelo 800m above sea level; said to be the first on the island to be dedicated to the Madonna. From here the walk descends on a wide path, with magnificent sea views across the coastline and the Aeolian Islands.

Passing a shepherd's hut on the way where local cheese *caciocavallo* is made and hung on wooden beams to age. Continuing along country lanes observing the small plots of cultivated olive and citrus groves. Finally descending to the village of Sant' Ambrogio.

Sant' Ambrogio to the vineyard of Santa Anastasia - distance of 8km/5miles, walking time 2 ½ hours (one-way):

Founded in 1100 by Count Roger of Hauteville, The Santa Anastasia Abbey initially run by Benedictine monks became the cultural and working centre of the Madonie area. The monks planted grapes, wheat, olives and various species of fruit trees. In the late 1980s an engineer bought the property with the idea of turning it into an avant-garde winery. Today the Abbey has become a top rate Relais.

It is possible to book wine tasting for your arrival at the vineyard or lunch which is, of course, more enjoyable if you don't decide to return on foot, as the return route is mostly uphill!!!

Monte Macabubbo circular walk – distance 11.5 km/7miles, walking time 3 ½ hours:

Monte Macabubbo's summit is at 1204m from where one can see the coast in the distance, the village of Gratteri below and the whole of the Madonie as far as the Nebrodi mountains are visible in the south and east. The walk begins at 834m on a narrow animal track with a wild and craggy landscape on the right and a beautiful panorama on the left of Monte Sant' Angelo and the Carbonara massif. The narrow track crosses the flower-covered slopes parallel to the rocks, eventually the path goes above a steep valley past a shepherd hut, continues to ascend past some wild pear trees which have lovely white blossom in early Spring, before arriving at the cross on Monte Grotta Grande above Isnello. The walk continues crossing a large alpine meadow before ascending onto Monte Macabubbo.

Sant' Ambrogio to Pollina – distance 14 km /9miles, walking time 4 ½ - 5 hours (one-way) extra 3 hours for the return route:

Pollina is dramatically situated atop a 730-metre rocky spur, its position provides unforgettable views across to the Tyrrhenian sea, and Rocky outcrop, or Rocca, behind Cefalu, as well as to the Madonie and Nebrodi mountain ranges. Pollina's character was forged in the Middle Ages and the maze of narrow streets making up its town centre retain a charming medieval character and which are steeped in Sicilian history.

The walk from Sant' Ambrogio has an initial ascent of 200m then descends through cultivated olive groves, crossing a stream at sea level, where the next ascent begins on a wide track, followed by the last hour on a road before arriving in Pollina to complete the 730m ascent.

Time for lunch, visit the amphitheatre and stroll through the old medieval town. Return on foot or by bus.

Sant’Ambrogio to Castelbuono – distance 12 km / 7.5 miles, walking time 4 hours

The walk begins from the coastline to the town of Castelbuono at the base of Monte Carbone massif 1979m, with its crater-like lunar landscape extending from all sides up to the summit, which is just under 2000m and is the second highest mountain in Sicily.

Lovely walk on tracks through open countryside with extensive views towards the mountains. On arrival in the town of Castelbuono there is time to visit the Castle of the Ventimiglia family, the Chiesa Madre church or taste the local organic products from bars/shops in the historic centre. Enjoy the gastronomic delights of the many restaurants in the town, before returning by bus or taxi.

Castelbuono to Piano Pomo - distance 3.5 km/2 miles, walking time 2 hours:

One of Sicily’s great natural wonders awaits you on Piano Pomo. More than 200 holly trees (*Ilex aquifolium*). The trees, up to 300 years old, have grown into tight-knit clusters and are unique in Italy. From November onwards these evergreen hollies are covered with shiny red berries. The ascent of 325m begins at Piano Sempria and winds through holm oak woods where you will find an ancient 800 year old moss covered oak. Easy walk and enjoyable for all age groups.

Pizzo Carbonara – distance 6 km/4 miles, walking time 3 hours:

Walk to the highest peak (2nd highest in Sicily) of the Madonie Mountains, in a fascinating limestone landscape. The tracks takes you through beach wood, passing lichen-laden maple, arriving at the peak of Pizzo Carbonara (1979m). On a clear day can see the Aeolian Islands and Mt Etna. Moderate – slightly strenuous along forestry tracks, footpaths and limestone terrain. Highly recommend. Ascend of 380 m. Caution do no attempt the walk if visibility is not good.

Monte San Calogero – distance 8 km / 5 miles, walking time 4 hours:

Monte San Calogero, rising almost vertically 1328m from the coastline. Once at the summit, one is rewarded with one of the most beautiful panoramas in all Sicily. The ascent begins at 840m following paths through woodland, before reaching a plateau, where one can stop here and enjoy the spectacular 360° views without climbing to the top. From the plateau the route joins the old pilgrims’ path leading to the ruined chapel of San Calogero.

Worthwhile visiting the small town of Caccamo with its 14thC castle of Chiarmonte which is among the largest, best preserved and most beautiful in Sicily.

Pantalica:

Pantalica and its 5,000 neolithic tombs and honeycomb limestone cliffs was a resting place for the ancient inhabitants of Pantalica, set on a high plateau with its plunging gorges. It is a proposed World Heritage Site.

The route takes you to the more interesting parts of the nature reserve among abundant necropoli and a landscape of incomparable beauty. A footpath follows the course of the river and other steeper trails take you to an overlook with an incredible view of the area.

Cava Grande:

The Cava Grande is the deepest and most impressive gorge of the Monti Iblei. The Cassibile River has cut away more than thirty meters in to the bedrock of the plateau. Ponds, waterfalls and luxuriant vegetation have created one of the loveliest natural areas of eastern Sicily.

Indications of ancient human habitation are visible on the lateral slopes where excavations have found troglodytic dwellings and a necropolis.

Vendicare:

Vendicare is one of the most important migration bases in the Mediterranean, it is a paradise for birdwatchers. More than 200 species of birds and with some luck you will be able to see the flamingos.

More than 8 km of coastline, following the coastal path passing the *pantani* (lagoons), Torre di Vendicare and the Tonnara.

Mt Etna 3,329m:

Europe's highest active volcano dominates the whole of Sicily. The first recorded eruption, and possibly most violent occurred in 475 BC and over the last 30 years there have been several eruptions but luckily no towns have been destroyed by the lava.

I can organise a walk with the volcanologist and experienced English speaking guide and whom will provide you with interesting information on the geology of the volcano. There are several walks around Mt Etna. If you are fit and feeling energetic I suggest walking to the crater *Bocca Nuova* at 3260m with an ascent of 1,500m.

Trek to the top of Etna with a guide:

Groups leave every morning during the summer months at 09.30 am, from Rifugio Sapienza, at Piano Sapienza. Preferable if you bring your own jackets and walking boots, it is possible to hire equipment at Piano Sapienza.

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