

# Perillo Reimagines Sicily

**PERILLO CUSTOM VACATIONS  
PAIRS LEGACY EXPERTISE  
WITH HIGHLY PERSONALIZED  
ITINERARIES**

*By Kenneth Shapiro*



Sicily surged back into the spotlight after San Domenico Palace, Taormina, a Four Seasons Hotel, appeared in season two of HBO's hit show "The White Lotus." But the island's appeal extends far beyond its on-screen moment. Sicily's rich history — shaped by Greeks, Romans, Arabs and Normans, as well as its association with the Mafia's origins — contrasts with its modern, jet-set appeal that's now drawing renewed attention.

For more than 80 years, Perillo Tours — along with its custom arm, Perillo Custom Vacations — has built a reputation as a go-to operator for Italy. During a recent press trip, I was interested to see how that legacy translates into a more tailored Sicilian experience.

My tour was a variation of the Sparkles of Sicily itinerary offered by Perillo Custom Vacations (formerly ItalyVacations), which provides fully customizable itineraries to Italy for independent travelers. Perillo Custom Vacations specializes in designing personalized travel experiences tailored to a variety of trip lengths and budgets. Travelers can choose from suggested itineraries or work with a destination expert to build a trip from scratch. Bookable services include flights, rail, car rentals, chauffeur services and a portfolio of contracted hotels, villas, tours and experiences.

◀ One stop on Perillo Custom Vacations' Sicily itinerary is the 12th-century Palermo Cathedral.

▼ The mountaintop medieval town of Erice provides astonishing views of the Mediterranean coastline.



## → TOURING PALERMO

The tour started in Sicily's main city, Palermo, where we stayed at the historic Grand Hotel Wagner, which was built in the early 20th century. Throughout its colorful history, the hotel has served as an Allied air raid shelter during World War II and as the costume house for the nearby Teatro Massimo.

Our group explored on foot and via vintage tuk-tuks as part of Perillo Custom Vacations' Private Tour – Palermo Highlights by Ape Calessino. Stops included Palermo Cathedral, Teatro Massimo (featured in the film “The Godfather Part III”) and the Monastery of Saint Catherine of Alexandria. Travel advisors should suggest that clients check out the city views from the top of the monastery, as well as try the exceptional cannoli from the building's pastry shop (a business once operated by nuns). We also explored the restaurants and lively nightlife around the piazzas in the Centro Storico (Old Town).

From Palermo, we took a day trip to nearby Erice and Marsala. Erice, a medieval town located on a mountaintop, provided unbeatable views of the Mediterranean coastline. In Marsala, we enjoyed a tasting at local winery Curatolo Arini, where we were joined by one of the owners, who shared stories of her family and her life growing up at the estate.

Throughout our tour, Perillo excelled at curating moments that brought local history to life through the stories of longtime Sicilian residents. This continued the following day when we met chef Antonio of Domus Kitchen at the 1,000-year-old, open-air Mercato di Ballaro in Palermo. Chef Antonio shared endless stories of his life in Sicily and working at restaurants around the world. After shopping with him at the market, we took our purchases back to his house, where we met his family and he helped us prepare an authentic Sicilian meal.

## → VISITING TAORMINA AND MOUNT ETNA

After several days immersed in Palermo's history and street life, the journey shifted along Sicily's coast as we drove to Taormina, stopping along the

way for lunch and a tour of the seaside town of Cefalu.

The main historic attraction in Taormina is the well-preserved ruin of an ancient Greek theater. While our tour guide shared the history of the site, it was hard not to get distracted by the views of the coastline, the town's lights at sunset and the soft glow from the top of nearby volcanic Mount Etna.

We stayed at the modern NH Collection Taormina, where — beyond its comfortable rooms, many of which feature ocean or Mount Etna views — the hotel's location is the star. Taormina's historic center is pedestrian-only, but the property sits just outside the walking-only zone, making it close to shopping and restaurants while still convenient for transportation and motor tours.

No Sicily itinerary is complete without a visit to Mount Etna. Our group signed

up for Perillo Custom Vacations' Private Tour – Scenic Etna Drive With Lunch (an excursion from Taormina). Joined by local experts, we toured the mountain and stopped along the way to check out past lava flows, descend into lava tunnels and even visit a ski resort (open in winter).

During dinner on our final night — after a cocktail in the bar at the Four Seasons, an important setting in “The White Lotus” — our group reflected on the highlights of our visit. Unlike some trips, our thoughts were not only about the amazing sights we saw, but also about the unforgettable people who shared their stories with us.

It's one thing to visit a destination's attractions, but Perillo Custom Vacations reminded us that meeting local residents and discovering what they love about their home is the true joy of travel. •

▼ Palermo's Teatro Massimo — the largest opera house in Italy — was featured in the film “The Godfather Part III.”

