

100th Giro d'Italia: Sicily Stages Summary & Detailed Itinerary

Tour category: Guided getaway - Private van support - Luggage transferred –7 days/ 6 nights

2017 Tour dates: May 5-11

Tour Price: TBD—based on number of participants

Meet/Departure: Airport in *Catania* **Tour Accommodations:** Three & Four-star

Overview & mileages cycled

Day 1: Meet Catania airport/transfer to Siracusa/set up bikes Ride: optional 60k/37mi —we know many and we can decide based on arrival times. Meet at Catania airport and transfer to **Siracusa**, home of Archimedes and one of the most important cities of Sicily since the days of antiquity— Set up bikes ...if you arrive early enough we can ride out to Antico Noto a city that Hercules once passed through. The city was later destroyed by the 1693 earthquake giving birth to the transformation of the entire region's architecture. If not we can set up a private city tour or you can explore on your own as this is a vibrant fun place to be with many ancient treasures.

Day 2: Ride 110km/2000m (65 miles/6500')—**Highlights:** Bike into the Canyon Valle d'Anapo/Pantalica- A Unesco World Heritage and considered an archeological and naturalistic masterpiece. Then we continue on to Caltagirone, the ceramics center of Sicily.

Day 3: Options: Up to 140k/2400m (87miles/7800') **Highlights:** Bike to where Giro teams will be arriving. We ride or transfer to nearby Villa Casale, another UNESCO site. This Roman hunting lodge that was uncovered in the early 19th C. is an archeological wonder worth visiting. We continue the ride to Cefalu where the 4th stage of the Giro will begin.

Day 4: Ride 83k/2300m (50mi/7500') Ride with Giro team TBD--or challenging loop within Madonie Nature reserve. Day TBD-Depending on what tour riders are doing this day. Typically they do a ride and I am sure Charles will get the low down on how you can arrange it. **Highlights:** Stunning vast distant views of Sicilian coast & Islands & medieval Cefalu

Day 5: Ride 93km/2300m (57miles/7500') **Highlights:** Mt Etna & stage finish ...speaks for itself-- many ways to approach it. Our idea is to get our ahead of the peleton early so you are able to climb Etna with enough time to be at the top before they arrive. We will have the van up there waiting with your gear as it gets cold at this elevation. There are plenty of restaurants and places to eat and stay warm, but it is sure to be crowded.

Day 6: Ride 77km/1500m (48miles/4900') **Highlights:** Stage 5 & Taormina-- Again we will get out in front of the peleton early and ride to Taormina, which is one of the most visited cities in Sicily and thus very toursity, yet still a must see and the history is fascinating. The stage is fairly flat except for some early short climbs with the highest being up to Fornazzo which is 40k into the stage. If you like we can situate up here and nearby there is a great winery (Gambino winery) that we could go to for lunch before continuing the ride to Cefalu.

Day 7: Departure day This is Thursday and your departure day. However, if you would like to add a day it would go like this→ **Ride 70k/1800 (44mi/5900')** or **88/2300m (55mi/7500')** **Options:** Morning transfer to cross Straights of Messina to see stage start leaving Reggio di Calabria then enjoy a great ride up to *Aspromonte National Park* or skip Giro and do a loop ride out of Taormina that takes in the nearby Alcantara Gorges then up a pass with time to enjoy one last day here before packing up your bike.

Day 8: Optional Departure Day



Sicily: Island Myth & Beauty

“To have seen Italy without seeing Sicily is not to have seen Italy at all, for Sicily is the clue to everything.” –Goethe



May 5/Day 1- Siracusa

Ride TBD: Build bikes and explore Siracusa or go for spin~60 km/37 miles

Our journey starts when we meet in Catania at the airport. A short transfer along the Ionian Sea takes us into *Siracusa*. According to legend, Greek settlers from Corinth founded Siracusa in 734 BC. It was here where Archimedes used an array of mirrors to set a Roman fleet on fire.

The day will be dependent on what time you arrive. We will set up the bikes and you have the choice to explore Siracusa or we can take you on a loop either nearby or out to Noto depending on your arrival.

Before the age of the Roman Empire Siracusa was the most powerful & spectacular city in Sicily and remained so for centuries. Today it is a pleasant mix of late-Baroque and ancient classical architecture. If desired can arrange for a private walking tour of the city that loops through the pleasant labyrinth of alleyways & past treasures from BC to the 18th century. If time allows we can ride into the hills for a great warm up ride into the *Val di Noto*, an area that managed to turn disaster into one of its era's greatest achievements. The entire region was devastated by the massive earthquake of 1693 and the eight major cities of the region were in complete ruin. The reaction was a considerable collective undertaking that successfully resulted in an architectural and artistic achievement that is revered to this day; earning it UNESCO heritage status. Our route through the rural countryside offers continual vast views over a rolling landscape and into the fascinating ruinous city of *Antica Noto*. In its time it was so prominent that it's said that Hercules stopped here on his return from completing his seven tasks as did other notable figures of these times.



May 6/Day 2 –Caltagirone “Queen of the Mountain” 110 km/ 65 miles and 2000m/6500’ of ascent



We leave Siracusa and continue along a beautiful route that glides along a crest of flower-carpeted hills that lead us to the Canyon *Valle d’Anapo/Pantalica*- A Unesco World Heritage site, Pantalica is a marvel of Sicily, and considered an archeological and naturalistic masterpiece. It is a vast, vast canyon with unique characteristics giving testimony from the prehistoric to the Byzantine ages; on the steep limestone cliffs there are about 5000 cave tombs carved in the rock; and at the base, a river flowing through lush Mediterranean vegetation. The views expand over fields covered with yellow scotch broom, cactus fruit, and endless hill towns spilling from the mountainsides. Our destination is one more of the towns rebuilt from the 1693 earthquake, *Caltagirone*, also referred as “Queen of the Mountain”.

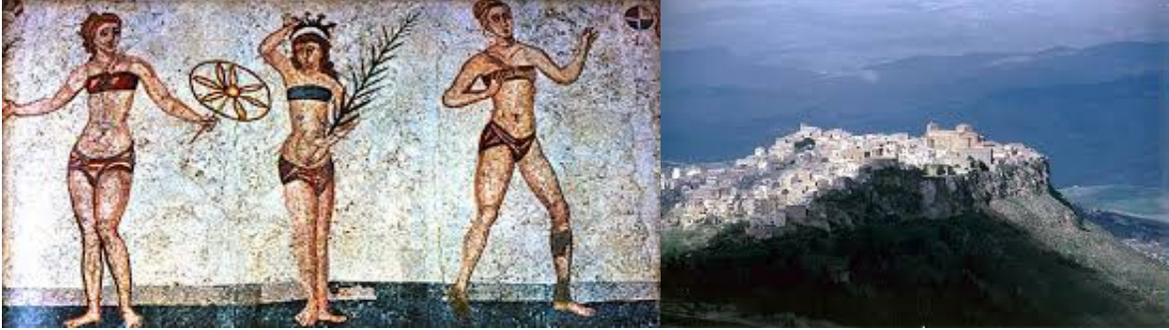
Caltagirone, occupied since prehistoric times, reached prominence during the Arabic dominance when it derived its name meaning “Castle of Pottery Jars” a name that attests to the antiquity of the pottery works which is still thriving. The facades of palaces and churches are tastefully decorated with colorful tiles and the splendor of the many Villas and churches line the streets of this Arab, Muslim and Norman influenced town which never ceases to be impressive. We arrive with enough time to tour some of the town’s artisan studios where artists proudly display their wares. We then enjoy the serene evening atmosphere at the base of the 142 ceramic steps leading to the Santa Maria del Monte Cathedral. Here, each evening hundreds of little old men huddle to discuss the latest local happenings and wait in anticipation for mama to allow them to return home for the evening meal; truly a wonderful experience.

Lodgings: 1 night in comfortable 4***** hotel located outside the old town



May 7/Day 3 – Villa Casale & on to Cefalu

Option of up to 140k/87 miles (2400m/7800')



We glide down from the ceramic laden slopes of *Caltagirone* into a wild, rural countryside of abundant wild flowers and herds of sheep that are sure to block our way from time to time. This open, stunning landscape soon provides our first distant glimpse of the dominant Mt Etna and one soon realizes why Pindar once described it as “the column which supports the sky”.

Our first stop is only 20 miles into the ride, is the fascinating *Villa Casale, a worthwhile delay and optional of course.*

Discovered in the late 19th century by archeologists who had uncovered a country estate that Roman Emperors used from as early as 286 AD and others continued to use until a 12th century mudslide covered it up and swallowed it from memory. The main feature of this 50 room estate is the superbly preserved quality mosaic floors that give one a glimpse of life in Roman times; the hunting scene & the women athletes in bikinis are two well-documented favorites of everyone who comes to visit.

It should be noted that from where we are situated, nearby Enna is almost in the exact center of the island; whence the Roman writer Cicero called it *Mediterranea maxime*, reporting that it was within a day's journey of the nearest point on all the three coasts. The peculiar situation of Enna is indeed one of the most remarkable in Sicily and you will see it often in the distance during your ride. This ancient city was placed on the level summit of a gigantic hill, surrounded on all sides with precipitous cliffs almost wholly inaccessible, except in a very few spots which are easily defended, abundantly supplied with water which gushes from the face of the rocks on all sides, and having a fine plain or table land of about 5 km in circumference on the summit, it forms one of the most remarkable natural fortresses in the world....on to Cefalu.



May 8/Day 4 – Giro Team Day in Cefalu

Option TBD-Our Typical Ride: 83k/2300m (50mi/7500')



For movie fans, Cefalu is one of the two towns for the film *Cinema Paradiso*. Today it is the 4th stage host for the 100th Giro d'Italia. The peleton will have arrived from Sardinia and the day will be planned accordingly. Ben says typically on off days the teams go out for a ride so we will base the day on what ever you like...

Cefalù is noted for its beautiful sunsets and unpretentious charm. As we explore town you are sure to admire the picturesque harbor, alleys and medieval buildings. Our hotel is not far from the medieval district, and one of Cefalù's great tourist attractions, the town's *Duomo*, a handsome and imposing two-towered Norman cathedral. Begun in 1131, this mighty church dominates the rooftops of the *centro storico*. Towering above the Duomo and the town center is the massive crag called the *Rocca*.

The closest and best riding in the area is through the nearby *Madonie Nature Reserve*, which takes you high above town and into the magnificence of this great island then ends with a long swooping downhill back to the coast and Cefalu. Another nearby coastal attraction is a ride to nearby ceramics center of *Santo Stefano di Camastra*. The hills around this town are a source of excellent clay which has made Santo Stefano the 2nd most important ceramics center of Sicily after Caltagirone. Unlike Caltagirone the styles tend to be more modern. Here the main streets are lined with merchants displaying all manner of beautiful and useful ceramic objects.



Profile of a ride we have done several times into the Madonie Nature reserve. Situated above Cefalu it starts off with an 13k/8 mile with a 5% average grade then has 2 more similar sustained climbs with one briefly hitting 8 to 10%.



May 9/Day 5 – Giro Stage 4- Mt. Etna
Option TBD-based on Giro ETA up Etna: 93k/2300m (57mi/7500')



Today it is the *4th stage of the Giro* and we will organize the day so that we are able to ride the same ascent up Mt Etna as the peloton, and be there early enough to see the stage finish & maybe stay in same town if possible. This will require a transfer unless you wish to rise very early to get out in front. The top is fairly cold and luckily there is more than one way to the top so we should be able to position a van at the top for your arrival. There are plenty of restaurants and place to get warm. If we arrive early enough I suggest we go to the top to tour the crater. The volcano is the most active in Europe if not the world and changes from year to year. Typically we board the cable tram to a point where the trucks take us near the upper most crater. Of course this all depends on the volcanic activity. There are several craters to explore and much to learn about this fascinating phenomenon thus we will embark on a guided tour that takes us to the edge of one of the lower craters with an option to go higher depending on the conditions. A guide explains the subtle nature of volcanoes as we walk along a trail within a moon-like landscape and leads us from one significant site to another as he shows us many of Etna's fascinating features such as the different types of lava and effects of the most recent eruption.

Mt Etna has created centuries of amazingly fertile soil for the community so it only figures that wine growers have exploited its value. We will stop at the Gambino winery on our way to Taormina. Here you will have a chance to sample the byproduct of this amazing Volcano and enjoy a wonderful lunch while gazing over the Ionian Sea. We can either bike down the Volcano or drive to the winery before our shuttle into Taormina.



May 10/Day 6 – Giro Stage & Taormina

77km/1500m (48miles/4900')



Today is the last day the Giro will be on the island of Sicily and we again leave early to be out in front of the peloton to position ourselves along the route. Depending on the stage start we may see them pass through the incomparable **Taormina** where we stay (and the last short climb of the day or situate ourselves atop the longest climb of the day, which is 40k into the stage, then we follow their route into Taormina along the fertile lava laden country side formed by Mt Etna over the centuries.

Taormina is said to be the most beautiful city of Sicily where legend tells of how Neptune sunk a ship of Greek sailors. Only one man survived and because he could not believe how beautiful it was here, he decided to stay and founded the town of Taormina...

Worth a visit is the impressive archeological site where the Greek Theater is set on the edge of town above the Sea and Mt Etna serves as a backdrop. It was almost completely remodeled by the Romans, and you will see the differences between the two archeological styles. You may opt to explore the small streets and stairways past houses boasting flower-filled balconies (there is a contest each year on who best decorates the façade with flowers), and the many Romanesque and Gothic treasures. Or you may prefer to cable down to the beach & swim in the clear, warm turquoise, Ionian Sea where legend tells of how Neptune sunk a ship of Greek sailors.

Before sunset we gather on the panoramic terrace of a cliff high above the Sea for a five star view and a toast to the great week we spent together before we had off for another great dinner.



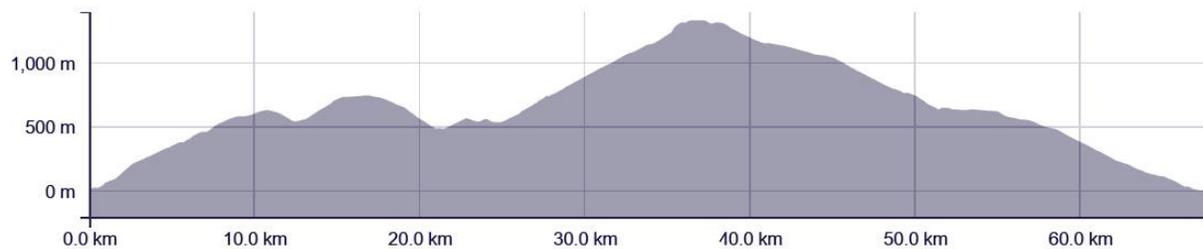
May 11/Day 7 – Departure Day or see Another Stage

Or optional Ride: 70k/1800 (44mi/5900') or 88/2300m (55mi/7500')



Transfers as needed...1 hour to Catania airport Day 7 or 8 if you like...

Or optional: See another stage start with a morning transfer to cross the Straights of Messina & see stage start leaving Reggio di Calabria before a great ride up to *Aspromonte National Park*. This natural wonder is of granite-crystalline and resembles a giant pyramid. It is characterized by numerous wildlife species such as the Wolf, Peregrine, Eagle Owl, Goshawk and the rare Bonelli's Eagle.



Or skip Giro and do a loop ride out of Taormina that takes in the nearby *Alcantara Gorges* that are considered a must see. The gorges are real canyons made of black lava walls up to 50 meters high, in the typical shape of a prism that the rocks have taken during the cooling process. Within the grooves, the toning and crystal clear waters of the river Alcantara run by an unspoiled landscape. The purity of the natural habitat has been facilitated by its hidden position, which has preserved its existence; until the fifties in fact this site was completely unknown. The Alcantara Gorges have by now become a famous attraction even beyond national borders, and it is considered one of the most beautiful and natural sites in Italy.

Then up a pass and return with time to enjoy one last day here before packing up your bike.

