



RIDE WORLD WIDE

ITALY

SICILY 2024

RIDE INFORMATION

These rides take place in north-east Sicily, from stables on the edge of the Madonie National Park about 1 ½ hours drive east of Palermo and 1 ½ hours north-west of Catania. Perhaps most widely known for its coastline and historic monuments, you may be surprised to discover that Sicily also has vast stretches of magnificent, unspoiled countryside. Its five natural parks include the white limestone Madonie mountains, the “Dolomites of Sicily” which rise to an altitude of 1,979 metres at Pizzo Carbonara, second highest mountain on the island. Water, collecting as snow on the mountains, feeds a network of underground springs that provide moisture for woodland that is amongst the most varied in the Mediterranean - beech, elm, holm oak, cork oak and even holly are found at heights of up to 1500m. The woodland and mountains are home to deer, wild boar and wildcats; golden eagles nest on rocky outcrops and in spring and summer there are numerous wild flowers, including over 200 species of orchid, on the grassy slopes. The pastures of the Madonie have been used as grazing for sheep and goats for centuries and the area has many ancient towns, villages, churches and castles. Some, founded by the Arabs and Normans to defend the hinterland and now virtually abandoned by a population seeking greater prosperity, have changed little over time.



Peasant farmers still farm sheep and goats on the hills; skilled artisans use local wood to make wooden barrels, staircases and baskets and in between the mountains, olives are cultivated for oil and fruit and grapes for wine and liqueurs. Rides are organised by an excellent local team lead by Paolo Cricchio and his assistant Selene Moratto. Paolo was brought up in this part of Sicily and is an experienced horseman and guide. He is very genial company and although his English is limited, his local knowledge is a tremendous asset. He is also a trained chef and loves to cook when he has the opportunity! Selene is a fluent English speaker, an experienced horsewoman with several years' experience in equestrian tourism behind her. Together they are great hosts with whom to discover this fascinating island.

DATES

Rides are run from set dates between February and November with several different itineraries available. Transiciliana Rides (7 nights) follow a linear route through the Madonie and Nebrodi National Parks to Mount Etna. A shorter Etna Ride (4 nights) follows a route similar to the last 3 days of the Transiciliana Ride. Madonie Rides explore the Madonie National Park with itineraries that vary a little according to the weather and time of year - winter rides are progressive, changing accommodation every night or two; in summer rides use one base. In September the Cannella Pilgrimage Ride (6 nights) is a one-off exciting program timed to coincide with an annual pilgrimage which many locals make by horse. Please see dates overleaf and contact us to check availability.

HORSES

Sicily has a great tradition of horses and there are estimated to be some 30,000 on the island. Historically, its rich natural resources attracted many settlers and pioneering armies who brought with them horses that gave rise to the three main Sicilian breeds of today. The first horses came with the Greeks from Persian origins; these were followed by Berber Arabs brought by the Romans, Andalucians and mixed Arabs brought by the Moors and heavier battle horses brought by the Normans. The horses used on these rides are owned by Paulo and Selene, who have a team of about 24. They are mainly geldings of around 14.2hh to 16hh and mainly crosses of the 'Sicilian Indigenous' breed developed when the island's heavier black Sanfratinallo horses were crossed with lighter Andalucians and Arabs. They are all calm, kind and relaxed to handle, having been trained by Paulo using a gentle horsemanship technique and are responsive and well- schooled to ride. They are also sure footed, at home in the mountains and used to travelling together as a team.



TACK

Tack is good quality and uniform - mainly snaffle bridles and comfortable specially made trekking saddles with cruppers and breastplates for the mountains. Guides carry first aid kits for both horses and riders and seat savers and saddlebags are provided.

RIDING

The Transiciliana Ride includes riding on 6 days with about 6 hours in the saddle on 5 days and one shorter day with around 4 hours. Short Etna Rides include 3 days riding of around 6 hours. Riding hours are a little more flexible on Madonie Rides; these usually include about 5 hours a day, although this may be adjusted according to ability and weather. Rides are run for a minimum of 4 and maximum 10 riding guests, except for Madonie Rides which are confirmed for a minimum of 2 (other rides may be run for less than 4 at a supplement). Groups are led by a main riding guide, with another team member driving the back-up vehicle to move luggage. Paulo, who is the main lead guide, does not speak fluent English and although he understands and communicates pretty well, this means that occasionally, riding groups are not with a fluent English speaker. Selene's English is excellent. Horses are looked after by the guides and back up team, but riders are asked to help with their horse at lunch stops and help grooming and settling horses at the end of the day is always appreciated. You will be **required** to wear a hard hat when riding - please take your own to ensure a good secure fit.



WEIGHT LIMIT

The usual rider weight limit is 90kg (14 stone) - please contact us if you are close to this to check suitable horses are available.

PACE

The rides are at a moderate pace overall, with routes through forest and up and down mountain tracks as well as across open pasture. The Transiciliana & Etna Rides offer a livelier pace and generally opportunities to trot and canter each day, as well as some wide forest tracks where long, energetic canters are possible. There are also some days (especially at the beginning) on these rides when the pace is slow, almost all at a walk on narrow tracks. Madonie Rides have occasional places to trot and for short canters but are at a slower pace overall, mostly a walk, although riding can be a little more 'technical' - when you are high in the mountains there are some tricky narrow passes, as well as mountain grassland strewn with boulders. There is some road work each day (some on tar roads, occasionally on cobbles) on all rides in the vicinity of local villages, but roads are generally quiet.



RIDING EXPERIENCE

All rides are aimed at reasonably competent, confident riders who are comfortable and in control on a well-schooled horse at all paces. To participate you should be secure and well-balanced in the saddle at a walk, trot and canter, used to riding with a group of horses in open country and over varied, sometimes tricky, mountainous or rough terrain. Riding fitness is also important: Transiciliana and Etna Rides follow a route that is fairly 'set' in terms of distance, meaning quite long riding hours on consecutive days and (if weather allows) some quite long energetic canters. These are for riders who are confident in their ability and riding fit. Madonie Rides are more flexible. The going on these can be steep or quite rough, particularly in winter, but the route and riding hours can be tailored to suit if necessary, making them the better choice for anyone not sure of ability or fitness - although for any itinerary, if you do not ride regularly, we strongly recommend concentrated practice in the months before you go to get used to the hours in the saddle. The horses are used to a relaxed rein and go best with a relaxed contact with the mouth - there will be a short demonstration of the riding and handling technique used (based on Ed Dabney's 'six keys of harmony') on your first day.



TERRAIN

The terrain and landscape you ride through is tremendously varied with open mountain pasture, narrow rocky tracks, thick woodland, dry scrub and lava flows as well as orchards of almonds, olives and fields of wheat. The Madonie mountains are high, sharp and rocky; between them and the Nebrodi National Park is typical Sicilian countryside, fields of corn, crops or stubble, orchards and olive groves. The slopes of the sedimentary Nebrodi Mountains are gentler, rounded with numerous lakes and rivers and then there are the thick forests of Nebrodi and finally the ancient crusts, ridges, lava flows and craters of Etna volcano.

ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation is in a combination of small, simple hotels and guesthouses with most nights in reasonable quality village or country 'agritourism' style guesthouses chosen as far as possible for their welcome, authenticity and / or food. They are roughly local 2* standard with bedrooms with private loo and shower room. Some of the hotels have a small swimming pool for summer use - always a treat after riding. Two nights on the Transiciliana ride are at a comfortable, more modern style 3* hotel with fantastic views to Mount Etna. On Madonie Rides one night is sometimes spent in a mountain refuge type hostel (the only available accommodation) or 'sleeping rough' in a shepherds refuge, high in the Madonie National Park.



This refuge, a traditional base for working Sicilian shepherds to milk their stock and make cheese, has been renovated to some extent for guest use – it is a great opportunity to see rural traditions 'in action' - but you will sleep in a shared room, using camp beds and sleeping bags; there are no showers and very limited facilities. Prices for all rides are based on twin shared rooms although singles (except in the refuge when everyone sleeps in one room) are usually possible on request for a supplement. The supplement is charged in Sicily as single rooms usually **cannot** be guaranteed ahead of time.



MEALS

Meals are carefully chosen with an emphasis on good local ingredients and specialities. Breakfast, at your hotel or guesthouse, will be simple in the Italian style - coffee, fruit juice, bread, croissant or sometimes a sweet cake (with eggs, cheese and ham on request). Lunch is a picnic out riding – where access is possible the back-up car meets the group with table and fold up chairs and you might have a BBQ with meat cooked over an open fire, salads or local cheeses, salamis, bread, olives and sun-drenched tomatoes. On other days, where vehicles cannot get to the lunch spot, a simple lunch is carried in saddlebags - a freshly made sandwich or perhaps a rice or pasta salad and fruit. Dinner is at your hotel or in a local restaurant and is usually a typically Sicilian four courses - antipasto, pasta, a meat course and finally pudding. Carafes of local red wine, mineral water and some soft drinks are included with lunch and dinner, you may be offered an Italian cocktail or liqueur before or after dinner and after dinner coffee is also included if you wish. Other drinks (beer, spirits, premium (labelled) wines) are available at extra charge. Vegetarian or other diets can be well catered for with notice - please advise when booking.



WEATHER

Rides are possible February to November as Sicily has a very pleasant Mediterranean climate. Average daytime temperatures are roughly 11°C in January & February, 12°C in March, 15°C April, 18°C May; 22°C June; 25°C July; 28°C August; 23°C September; 19°C October, 16°C November and 12°C in December - though it may be up to about 5 degrees hotter at midday and 5 degrees colder at night. Most rain falls in winter months but rain is possible at any time and you always need to be prepared.



WHAT TO BRING

We will send you a list when you book.



ITINERARIES

The Transiciliana and Etna Rides follow 'progressive' routes, stopping at different accommodation each night. The Madonie Rides are circuit rides in winter, staying at different accommodation; in summer, all nights are usually at agriturismo Masseria Rocca di Gonato, with the possibility of one night at a shepherds' hut high in the Madonie Mountains - always a highlight. The following is an example itinerary for the Transiciliana Ride but **please note** it is only an example and day by day arrangements, route and riding hours may be varied by your guides in their absolute discretion if weather or other local conditions require. Please contact us for other itineraries.

Transiciliana Ride - Example itinerary.

Day 1 - Met at Catania airport at about 14.00 and driven a little over an hour to 'Il Castello' (or similar) a small, typical B&B guesthouse in the town of Petralia Sottano. Settle in and time to meet your guide before an introductory briefing. Dinner at your accommodation or at a restaurant in the village. Night at Il Castello (or similar). (D)

Day 2 - Breakfast before being collected and driven to meet the horses. A short introduction to the horses and riding technique, then mount up for the first day's ride. The route heads out along the river, through woods until you hit an old Roman road that takes you to the ancient village of Petralia Soprana. Riding on along an old "trazzera" - a dirt road dating back to the time of Sicily's rule by the Spanish when animals were moved during the transhumance - you reach a picnic place where tables are set up and the vehicle is waiting with lunch. Picnic and a siesta before heading on in the afternoon, following shepherds' trails through the last of the Madonie hills. A water stop for the horses, crossing fields and a section of tarmac road before finally arriving at a country guesthouse, Villa Raino close to the town of Gangi, which was once a Mafia stronghold. Villa Raino has a pool (unheated) so a chance to swim if the weather is good. Dinner and night Villa Raino (about 5 hours riding in all, approx. 2km on tar road). (B,L,D)



Day 3 - Breakfast and set off riding, first following a dry river bed (flowing water only in winter), where there should be chances to canter. Then a short way along a tarmac road that crosses a wind turbine park where the horses can stop to drink. After this, perhaps a long canter along the mountain track before reaching the Sambuchetti - Campanito Natural Reserve and riding through forest in the shade of oak trees. Meet the back up for a picnic lunch on the far side of the Reserve, then in the afternoon continue on the remains of an ancient trail across typical Sicilian countryside to reach Agriturismo Monte Soprano, where the night is spent (pool open in summer). Dinner and night Monte Soprano (about 6 hours riding, approx. 2km on tar road). (B,L,D)

Day 4 - Breakfast and ride to Capizzi, an ancient village at the gates of Nebrodi Park. There may be time for a short break in the town before continuing the climb along the "Dorsale dei Nebrodi" a path that winds through beech forests and is the basis of the route for the next two days. After reaching the ridge, the path follows the water divide through thick shaded woodland. Stop for a sandwich picnic lunch (the vehicle cannot reach you today) and in the afternoon ride on to the pass of Femmina Morta (the 'dead lady') and to hotel Villa Miraglia in the Nebrodi National Park. A delicious dinner and the night at Villa Miraglia (about 5-6 hours riding, approx. 2 km on tar road). (B,L,D)

TRANSICILIANA ITINERARY cont.

Day 5 - Breakfast at the guesthouse then mount up to head off across some incredible mountain terrain. One by one there are views of the four lakes of Maulazzo, Biviere, Cartolari and Tre Arie, to the south the mass of Etna Volcano dominates the landscape and to the north you can see the Eolian island archipelago and the Tyrrhenian Sea. En-route today you might meet “Sanfratellano’s horses” and see “Little black pigs of Nebrodi”, which roam free in the high pastures. Stop for a picnic lunch (the vehicle cannot access this area) and in the late afternoon reach a forest guard hut, Tre Arie Refuge, where the horses will spend the night. Leaving the horses, you will be driven about 30 minutes to the Fucina del Vulcano Hotel, a comfortable modern style hotel with views towards Etna, where the next two nights are spent. Dinner and night at the hotel (about 5 hours riding, ¼ km on tar road). (B,L,D)



Day 6 - Breakfast before a drive of about ½ an hour to meet the horses. Mount up to set off on a slightly shorter riding day, heading down to the valley between Nebrodi and Etna, through the Gurrída Lake Reserve. Lake Gurrída is a seasonal swamp, created as flow of the Flascio river water is blocked by ancient lava fields and features of the Reserve, for which special permits are required, include banks of pumice and lava fields full of volcanic bubbles. After the Reserve, the route follows an ancient track across the “Circum Etnea railway” before a long climb through the mixed forests that cover the northern lowest part of the volcano. After meeting the back up for a picnic lunch, leave the horses in a paddock and transfer back to hotel Fucina del Vulcano for dinner and second night (about 4 hours riding, ½ km on tar road). (B,L,D)



TRANSICILIANA ITINERARY cont.

Day 7 - Breakfast and the final riding day follows the winding dirt road that circumnavigates Etna. As you ride you will see how the lava flows are becoming colonised by different plants, many of them endemic, all struggling to gain a foothold. After Mt Spagnolo crater (covered by forest) the route is cut by a more recent lava flow, formed during a 3 month eruption in 1981 that almost collided with the town of Randazzo, only diverting to one side at the last minute. Stop for a rest and picnic (again a sandwich in saddle bags as vehicles are not allowed on the mountain) before setting off again. The exact route will depend on visibility and conditions but if the weather is favourable, you might climb high up onto the dust-covered volcanic slopes, riding along the narrow ridges of black ash and perhaps going as high as the Observatory before heading back down in the late afternoon to meet up with the horse lorry. Goodbye to the horses who will head home and a short drive to a small mountain chalet-style guesthouse, Rifugio Ragabo where the last night is spent. A celebratory drink with your guides before they leave to take the horses home. Final dinner and night at Rifugio Ragabo (about 5 hours riding, 0km on tar road). (B,L,D)

Day 8 - Breakfast and group minibus transfer (about 1 ½ hours) to Catania airport (in time for earliest flight in the group - to be confirmed when there; if you prefer a private transfer can be arranged at an extra cost).



DATES & RATES 2024

Please note that due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, ride rates are now quoted in Euros. The sterling price will be the equivalent sterling rate using the euro/sterling exchange rate in force when you book/pay.

Transiciliana Ride (7 nights) - 2250 Euros per person

30th March to 6th April	25th May to 1st June	5th to 12th October
13th to 20th April	9th to 16th June	19th to 26th October
27th April to 4th May	7th to 14th September	2nd to 9th November
11th to 18th May	21st to 28th September	9th to 16th November

Short Etna Ride (4 nights) - 1875 Euros per person

8th to 12th April	19th to 23rd May	29th September to 3rd October
21st to 25th April	3rd to 7th June	14th to 18th October
6th to 10th May	16th to 20th September	27th to 31st October

Short Madonie (4 nights) - 1375 Euros per person

Dates as Short Etna (above) - will be run if requested by first, or if less than 4 bookings for Short Etna .

Cannella Pilgrimage Ride (6 nights) - 1750 Euros per person

1st to 7th September

Madonie Rides (7 nights) - 1750 Euros per person

3rd to 10th February	2nd to 9th March
17th to 24th February	16th to 23rd March
Summer Madonie Rides (using one base) - on request during July.	

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DATES & RATES 2024 cont.

Transiciliana, Etna and the Cannella Pilgrimage Rides are confirmed for a minimum of 4 riders - if less than this, rides may follow a Madonie itinerary; or riders can opt to pay a small group supplement to confirm the original itinerary. Please contact us for further details. Madonie Rides are confirmed for a minimum of 2 riders.

Rates **INCLUDE** 7 nights twin accommodation (4 nights on Short Etna / Madonie; 6 on Cannella Pilgrimage), all riding, guiding and equipment, meals (dinner first day to breakfast last day), local red wine and mineral water with lunch and dinner and return group transfers from / to Palermo or Catania (depending on the ride) on the first and last day at set times.

Rates **EXCLUDE** international flights / travel to Sicily and taxes, 'premium' (label) wines, spirits, beer and extra drinks whilst riding, personal medical / travel insurance (which all riders must have), supplements for a single room, private transfers outside set times and between central Catania / Palermo and the respective airports if required, any visa fees and any tips you may wish to leave.

Single supplement No supplement charged for single travellers who are happy to share a room with another rider. To book / guarantee a single room (possible on some but NOT all nights) there is an extra charge of 25 - 35 Euros per night (varies with hotel - usually 200 Euros if single is available for the whole week on Transiciliana Ride), payable locally in cash. Although we will request single rooms in advance if asked, these usually **cannot** be guaranteed and some flexibility / willingness to share on some nights is always required ((you will always need to share in the mountain refuge which is used on some Madonie Rides).



FLIGHTS & TRAVEL INFORMATION

The meeting point for the Transiciliana Ride, Etna Ride and the Cannella Pilgrimage Ride is Catania airport. The usual meeting point for the Madonie Rides is Palermo airport. In all cases pick up is usually early afternoon (before 14.00) with **one** group transfer included in the ride price. To make use of the group transfer, you should aim to arrive at the respective airport (as above) **before about 13.30** on the first day. If **all** guests arrive earlier, the transfer will be brought forward but the exact time will be confirmed on your final itinerary.

On the last day **one** group transfer is included, arranged to arrive back at the respective airport in time for the first flight of the group (usually mid-morning) - the exact time of the transfer will be confirmed on final itineraries. If possible please book return flights to depart later than 11.00 (and before about 15.00) - although please also be aware that some flights to European destinations leave quite early in the day and as the transfer is shared, if departing on a late flight to London, you will have a wait.

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FLIGHTS & TRAVEL INFORMATION cont.

Transfers outside the set times (or to / from a different airport) can be arranged for an extra charge (please contact us for details) or you can make your own arrangements to spend the day looking around the relevant city (Catania or Palermo) before an evening flight out.

Various airlines fly to Sicily from the UK, although departures tend to vary seasonally. British Airways and Easy Jet have direct flights to Catania from London Gatwick and from some regional airports. Easy Jet has direct flights to Palermo from London Gatwick and Ryan Air has direct flights to Palermo from London Stansted. For further information, travel advice and help booking flights please contact us - we can book British Airways scheduled flights for you. Our ATOL number for flight bookings is 6213.

GENERAL VISA & HEALTH INFORMATION

NB this is a brief outline - further information will be sent to you if you make a confirmed booking.

Visas If you hold a full British passport you do not need a visa for visits to Italy.

Health No vaccinations are required by UK residents to enter Italy. If you have a particular condition requiring special medical treatment, in case of emergencies you should carry a letter from your own doctor translated into Italian describing your condition and the medicine / treatment required. Chemists in Italy ('farmacia') will be qualified to give advice on minor ailments and to dispense prescriptions.

(DRAFT 11/10/2023)

