

## Sailing Sicily - Aeolian Islands

Overview: there is only one place on the planet where you can enjoy a spectacular dinner of swordfish rolls and stuffed calamari, sipping perfect chardonnay and having a midnight swim in crystal waters under the herculean fireworks of an active volcano. And this place is Stromboli.



**The top places to visit:** Stromboli, Panarea, Salina, Filicudi, Lipari, Vulcano

**Our rating:**

Wind and Sea: medium

Kids friendly: no

Lifestyle: fashionable

Gourmet: excellent

**Mileage** (approx) :100

**Cruise length:** at least 10 days

**When to go:** year round

**Harbours and marinas:** very limited

**Gourmet and restaurants:** amazing and surprising

**Our top 3 SAILPRO anchorages**

1. Cala Giunco - Panarea
2. Cala Milazzese - Panarea
3. Pollara - Salina

**Our Sailing notes**

Sail at night under the Stromboli volcano, where hell meets paradise, with a bottle of Chardonnay and a dish of swordfish rolls, and you'll forget all the troubles you went through to sail here. The Sicilian dreadful logistics, the bottomless anchorages, the missing harbours and the lack of water will disappear in the face of the powerful, bewitching magic of the Aeolian islands. But it must be like that, beauty, pure and distilled beauty is hard to achieve and must be deserved. It's like the Sea, this perfect archipelago: magical, pure and indifferent of human ways.

Then you can enjoy amazing cocktails at the 'Barbablù' restaurant, share Ingrid Bergman's feelings when she fell in love, here and then, on the set of Rossellini's masterpiece 'Stromboli, the Land of God', or again stroll along the paths where Philippe Noiret played Pablo Neruda in the movie 'Il Postino - The Mailman'. But it's not over yet: spectacular capers, amazingly deep blue waters and fishermen who has not sold their soul for an ocean trawler. And while in most cosy Mediterranean villages you find crappy painters who idolized the local alleys, here it was the other way round, and they built their houses out of dreams.

Again about heaven and hell, sailing in these waters is hellish in the central weeks of august, and paradise for the other 48 weeks of the year.

**Weather and anchorages:** the British pilot would state that anchorage around these

islands must be prompted by necessity and without any hope of tranquillity. Luckily enough, in summer there are only two dangers: westerlies (easy to forecast, and channel 68 is kind of reliable) and thunderstorms: one moment you are sipping Martinis on a terrace with a delightful lady in a warm August night, then before you reach the olive it might be blowing 40 knots and your boat is having fun twisting the chains of the two anchors you let go because *'you never know'*. Thunderstorms are not always predicted but easy to spot on the horizon. Needless to say the skipper are recommended to keep a good watch at all times.

In westerlies, the best anchorages are Salina E side S of harbour and Panarea Milazzese (best overall anchorage to combine holding ground, landscape and shelter). Stromboli provided some shallower patches in the NE corner, and if one is really desperate it's also possible to let go S of the dock and lay out a line ashore. It is surprisingly very calm, but you might wake up in the morning and discover that you are on the beach with a jump. In Stromboli both NW and SW tend to come more from W. In thunderstorm you might just have to switch side of any island for a couple of hours. Lipari is never a good anchorage for the endless ferry traffic. Vulcano E side is nearly bottomless, while the western harbour, a very good anchorage, is unfortunately ugly. Filicudi nice in good weather. Forget Alicudi altogether. Nice small anchorages if you can get into, some bays on the W side of Vulcano and Lipari. Watch for foul anchor in rocks in Ginostra, Cala Nave and Basiluzzo. Day anchorages for swimming, not to be missed: Panarea: Basiluzzo-NE corner, Lisca Bianca, and Cala Nave (NW corner of Panarea). Filicudi: rocks W of the island and cave. Salina: Pollara (W side, where they filmed 'The Mailman'). W sides of Vulcano and Lipari. Breezes: thermals from NE in calm days between 1 and 5. Good for sailing. Dangers: apart from the rocks, easy to spot but not at night, SE of Panarea and W of Filicudi, none whatsoever. You just need a long anchor chain, and possibly a delta-cqr

**Harbours and services:** a very good example of how to scare tourists away. Salina is the only harbour worthy of this name, but it's overcrowded in summer, and do not expect a warm welcome. To fuel up: Salina, Stromboli and Lipari. Water: the island are now in deep water shortage, and to get water will not be easy, but I spent two months without a harbour last year, and it can be done. The deck will suffer a little but I explained the clients about the water shortages. Milazzo: a commercial harbour. No diesel (too shallow) and water at the marina if they are in a good mood.

**Galley:** the prudent cook shops on the mainland, like at Milazzo for example, where there is a local fish market that can bring tears to sensitive eyes. Some tuna and swordfish they chop up deserve a calendar, like the prawns, mussels, clams and basically all you can hope to keep fresh aboard. There are also several supermarkets and wine stores. Butchers are plenty. Very good the one in Salina and in Lipari. Do not miss Messina rolls (Involtini messinesi), a kebab of breaded rolled slices of chicken, cheese and ham, with numberless variations. Other fishmongers in Lipari and Salina. Other products you cannot leave port without are local capers, pachino tomatoes, olives and Tropea onions. Conveniently enough, just fry (or poach if you are on a diet) anything in these four ingredients and you'll feel Jamie Oliver. Also worth mentioning are eggplants, aged ricotta, Ustica lentil, Nebrodi provola cheese, Modicana cows, Minuta olives, Magghia Masculina fish, local tuna and swordfish (Pesce Spada) and Vastedda del Belice Cheese.

You won't have shortage of surprises when you sit down at the table in this area. The locals like their suppers long and substantial, and you might experience a slight sensation of overfilling. When you eat around here, you understand the full value of a siesta and stop wondering why the locals close their businesses between 12 and 4...

**Wine:** Sicilian wines are worth serious research. Planeta produces our favourites, but there are many excellent brands. Salina has its own wine, with two companies producing probably a little too much if compared to the surface of the vineyards. But these miracles tend to happen nowadays, don't they? Consider also Alcamo, Contea di Sclafani, Contessa Entellina, Delia Nivolelli, Etna, Faro, Malvasia delle Lipari, Moscato di Noto and Moscato/Passito di Pantelleria, .

### **Natural beauty, seascapes and landscapes**

The seven islands forming the archipelago are all volcanic, with Salina boasting two twin cones reaching 3,000 feet. Stromboli, itself over 3,000 feet, is very active and

Vulcano mildly so. The 5-hour return night hike on top of Stromboli is something you'll never forget. The landscape is one of strong contrasts, black sands, small but very high islets with vertical walls and crystal clear waters, red lava forming small coves and deep caves, pillars of frozen rock jumping out of the sea. Each island has its own features and peculiarities, but all of them can embrace the voyager with that magic spell that made this area our favourite in the world, hands down.

#### Local insight

Life on the islands of the archipelago is very peculiar out of the busy months of July and August. The local population is somewhat odd, to say the least... You might meet local fishermen that could star as Robinson Crusoe, Australian expats with an artistic touch for gardening, restless travellers who got charmed and cannot leave again, German wine producers who forgot their homeland altogether, Dolce & Gabbana, I mean themselves in person, the Princess of Belgium, Sicilian butchers with Swiss butcheries, a refined gay set, fishmongers with a Pavarotti talent, the Italian President and a very rude, but still powerful for his firm hold on the Ginostra transport monopoly, donkey man. Just get lost in the alleys and by sunset you'll be sipping with the locals.

#### Restaurants:

Puntazzo in Ginostra (Stromboli)

Barbablu - Stromboli

Pina - Panarea

L'avvocato, Pecorini a Mare - Filicudi

#### Highlights

**Stromboli:** it's impossible to overestimate the subtle charm and violent beauty of this unique island. With its continuous volcanic fireworks, the fiery furnaces of hell are closer to the sky than the tolling of the church bells. Sometimes, with westerly winds, a violent thunder remind the bar-going visitors that indeed one is standing on an open scar on the Earth's crust. The pyrotechnic show can be either leisurely enjoyed sailing at night under the Sciara of the W side, or deservedly admired from the top after a 3-hour hike. The main village is a continuous surprise of tiny alleys, shouting fishmongers, perfect whitewashed houses, small squares, tiny shops and trendy bars. The tiny village of Ginostra, on the SW corner, is a magical place. All this, alas, comes at a price: there is no safe anchorage to speak of. Staying here during a gale is a serious affair and requires a perfect mastering of anchorage techniques with lines ashore and a constant lookout. Reserve for Stromboli your calmest days. Foodwise the supermarket is rather depressing, but the butcher behind the port can raise the spirits of any good trencherman. Fish can be purchased from a supremely voice-gifted chap who goes around shouting 'Fresco pesce' (fish fresh) around noon in the main square.

**Panarea:** the trendiest destination in the archipelago, Panarea flies high in the central days of August and rapidly falls into a quiet somnolence for the rest of the year. The good anchorage of Milazzese allows tranquil stays in westerlies, and a good starting point to walk around the alleys of the island. Restaurants here use the regrettable technique to compensate the lack of quality with high prices, so do the shops. Not a place where to stock up, but certainly Panarea offers the best swimming spots in the area at Basiluzzo, Lisca Bianca, Cala Nave and Cala Giunco.

**Salina:** this double-cone island offers good shelter just S of the Santa Marina harbour. The town of Santa Marina lives around the main street, running between old Sicilian houses, stylish balconies, nice shops and big churches. The fishmonger right at the harbour is among the best in the islands, so is the butcher in the main street. Try a fresh cannolo at Matarazzo, right behind the terminal. Another interesting destination is Pollara, the vilage on the W end where the movie 'The Mailman' was filmed. The bay at the bottom of the cliff is spectacular, its waters crystal clear.

**Filicudi,** try if you can lay out a line to the dock in the village to the S side, otherwise the anchorages are just off the beach at the SE end, or, in mirror calms, in the shallow areas west of the islands close to the caves. The restaurants at Pecorini a mare, basically a dock on the S side of the islands, collected many references and are worth a try.

**Lipari:** my relationship with Lipari was not love at first sight, mainly because the ferry and hydrofoil captains should be put behind bars when they arrive well over the speed limit. Pignataro is a sheltered harbour but too far from downtown, while the very nice havens by the old citadel are too small to be of any use. Still, the town is definitely worth a visit, and there are a couple of coves on the west side of the island excellent for a quick swim.

**Volcano** has two main bays, one bottomless and the other ugly, and both stink of sulphur. In case of easterlies and calm weather enjoy a spectacular sunset at Cala Mastro Minico, or the smaller cove just south of it, along the west coast.