

# Travel

Cheryl Zehr Walker, *Travel Editor*

## A walk on the wild side

By EDWARD I. PLACIDI  
SPECIAL TO THE EXPRESS-NEWS

From the time of the arrival of the ancient Phoenicians up to annexation to Italy

in 1860, Sicily has been under foreign domination, yet its pride and spirit shone through it all.

Sicilians still see their 9,925-square-mile island, the Mediterranean's largest, as a continent unto itself, and nothing like the rest of Italy.

Sicily has long been thought of as a somewhat lawless, riotous, independent-minded place — a walk on Italy's wild side. The past has not easily relaxed its hold, and probably never will.

Taking a stroll on Italy's wild side is a dramatic, spirited experience — not unlike the island's full-bodied



**CEFALU NESTLES UNDER 'THE ROCK,' A HUGE PROMONTORY**

... northern settlement is both a bus

wine, which has an exceptionally high alcohol content. The potent grapes are a product of Sicily's fierce sun baking the rough-hewn terrain.

In summer, the sirocco, hot winds from North Africa, lash the island and fan the red glow of Europe's largest volcano, Mt. Etna.

Etna is always spewing lava, or at least a pennant of smoke, and erupts full-scale from time to time. The symbol of Sicily itself, its majesty is probably best enjoyed from gentle Taormina, a nearby resort popular with wealthy Europeans, artists, writers and genteel bohemians.

### Etna dominates Taormina

Flowers bedeck Taormina's balconies and tumble over the walls of medieval houses and Renaissance palaces; slices of the shimmering Ionian Sea 800 feet below are visible through narrow alleys. Look up from cobblestone squares and Etna is always there.

Taormina's visitors stroll in rose gardens, explore shops on the Corso Umberto, enjoy fresh strawberries with whipped cream in sidewalk cafes and sample almond pastries in sweet shops.

In the evenings, classical plays, operas and sound and light performances are put on in the romantic 3rd-century Greek theater. Taormina's Greek theater is but one entry on

Sicily's impressive roster of architectural and artistic legacies and spectacular ruins.

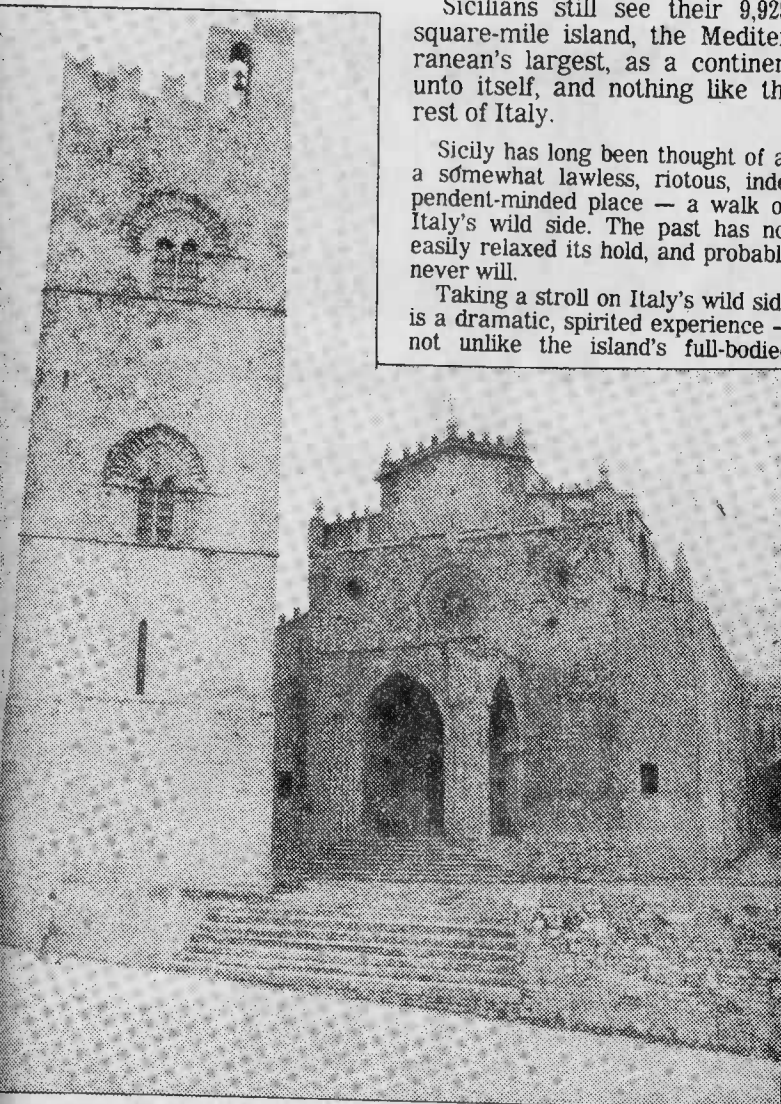
### Erice a medieval village

On Sicily's west coast is what could be called Italy's most intact medieval village, Erice. Built atop a craggy summit, its churches, bell towers and rows of connected houses date mostly from the 13th and 14th centuries. Its cobblestone streets are precisely laid out, like delicate mosaics. If not for television aerials and telephone lines, Erice could have been transported intact from the Middle Ages.

Beginning in the 9th century B.C., Erice was a stronghold of the worshippers of Venus, the goddess of love. Today, a crumbling Greek temple of Venus still clings to one of the precipices outside the village walls — along with Norman and Spanish fortresses, medieval towers and an 18th-century castle.

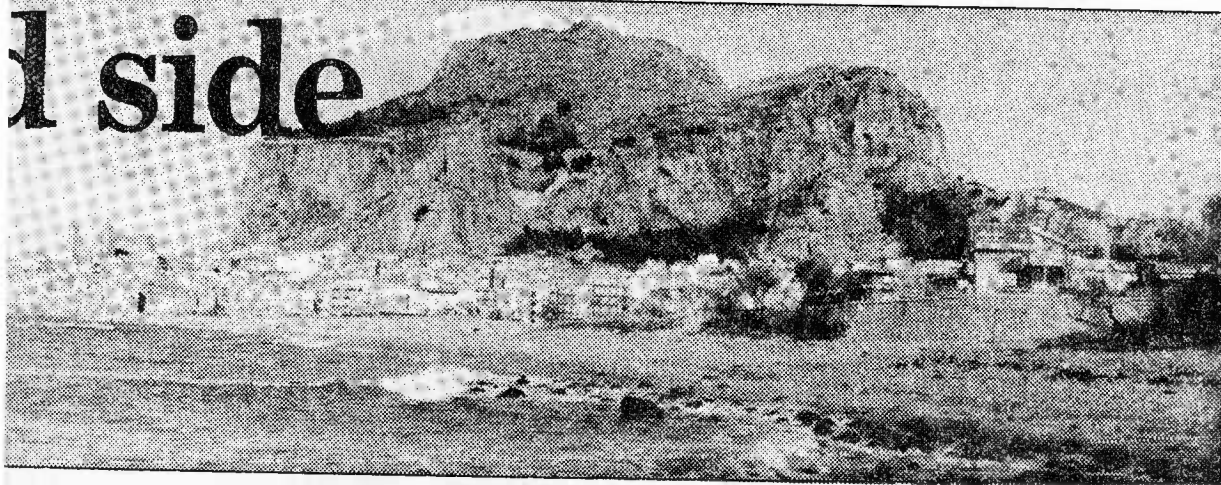
On Sicily's north coast is an ancient site of myth and charm, Cefalu, the city of "The Rock." It sits at the foot of a huge promontory littered with the ruins of many early civilizations, including a temple of Diana. The romantic panorama of Cefalu has inspired numerous writers, artists and poets over the years.

Beyond the 15th-century Spanish center's megalithic ruins and famous Arab-Norman cathedral, Cefalu is



**ERICE'S CHURCHES AND BELL TOWERS DATE FROM THE 1200s**  
... summit village close to a Middle Ages replica

# side



**THE ROCK,' A HUGE PROMONTORY LITTERED WITH THE RUINS OF MANY EARLY CIVILIZATIONS**  
northern settlement is both a bustling summer resort and a fishing village

Sicily's impressive roster of architectural and artistic legacies and spectacular ruins.

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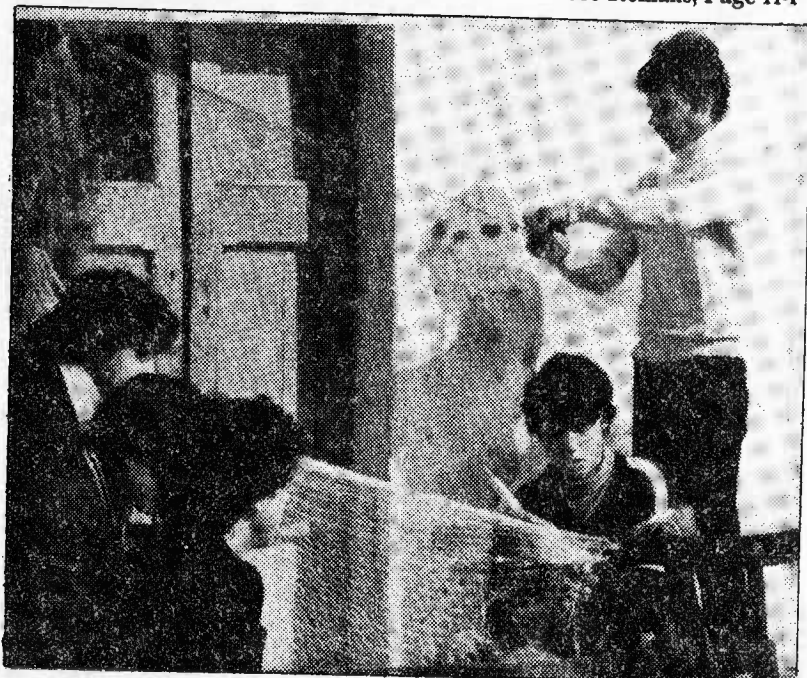
Beyond the 15th-century Spanish center's megalithic ruins and famous Arab-Norman cathedral, Cefalu is

also a bustling resort. Scandinavians as well as Sicilians crowd the beautiful beach, seafront cafes and discotheques in summer.

Sicily's coastline is a succession of beaches and resorts. Off the coast

are several archipelagos — the Pelagic, Egadi and Eolian — reached by ferries and known for their pristine waters and beaches, therapeutic muds, fishing (and fresh fish dishes,

See Sicilians, Page 11-P



Photos by EDWARD I. PLACIDI

**FISHERMEN OF CEFALU MEND THEIR NETS**  
... fresh fish dishes a Sicilian specialty

# Sicilians celebrate folklore through colorful festivals

**FROM 10-P** as is all of Sicily) and striking settings.

For one of Europe's best underwater travel adventures, visit Portopalo, on Sicily's southern tip, "the place where Italy ends." In the crystal-clear waters of this sun-drenched port, you can explore exotic corals, hidden coves and even sunken treasure ships that lie in the bay.

Portopalo is also site of the feast of the Blessed Virgin, protectress of fishermen. After dancing and wine, a statue of the Madonna is sailed through local seas in a flagship, followed by a

maritime procession of every boat in the area.

The exhilaration of Sicily's folklore takes many forms. Frequently, towns and villages erupt in annual festivals of religious joy.

The villagers race plaster saints, sing to the beat of drums and the sounds of Jews' harps, carry altars with burning candles through the streets and cart statues of Christ to the hilltops to be crucified.

Many major festivals occur across the island during Holy Week. Every spring Taormina has a rally of Sicilian carts and costumes. In August in Messina, the "Proces-

sion of the Giants," features 30- to 65-foot-high equestrian figures representing the mythical founders of the city.

At Catania's "Cannelore," 20-foot wooden structures painted with biblical scenes are carried through the streets in a blaze of candles, flowers and pennants.

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*Only Alitalia flies direct from the United States to Sicily — from New York to Palermo — and only in June and July for \$837 round-trip. There are numerous rail and air*

*connections from the Italian mainland.*

*A compact rental car costs about \$144 a week with unlimited mileage. Gas is more than \$3 a gallon. The trains and buses that circle and crisscross the island are good alternatives.*

*Lodgings of virtually every price are available everywhere, beginning with about \$10 double occupancy, including continental breakfast, in small pensions.*

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