From wines to pistachios, a journey through the flavors of Sicily / Autumn arrives, with harvests and festivals at which to taste products

Wednesday 15 October, 2025

Palermo -

A journey through the flavor and taste of Sicily.

In the chestnut woods on Mount Etna. Among the sapling vines that are the fruit of heroic agriculture on Pantelleria. Or under trees full of quinces, the main ingredient of quince. These are all walks that can be taken in Sicily, where culinary tradition intersects with the cultivation of very special products, some of which are are rare. Fall is the perfect time to taste many of these: it is harvest time all over the island (as well as on its smaller islands) and the perfect time to turn a trip into a food and wine experience.

Sicilian grapes and wines.

Sicily is known for being home to many sweet wines and it can boast having 23 recognized DOC varieties, one DOCG (Cerasuolo di Vittoria) and 7 IGTs. There is the Pantelleria DOC, which includes the moscato wines (Passito and Moscato) produced from peculiar sapling vines in basins that are 20 centimeters deep to protect the grapes from the wind that blows across the island. The DOCs also include Malvasia delle Lipari, Mamertino di Milazzo, Marsala, Sambuca di Sicilia, Alcamo and even Etna. Let's not forget the IGTs, going from Avola to Salina, Terre Siciliane and Valle del Belìce.

DOP Aeolian caper: **how good is the pasta from the Aeolian Islands.**

Moving on to good food, one has to start with another protected-origin product: the DOP Aeolian caper. Indeed, its harvest ended at the end of summer, making this the time to start tasting the fruit. Visiting the archipelago (or even just the Messina area) one can find capers far and wide, as well as many recipes with which to enjoy them in a different way. In a sauce, for example, combining capers with tuna and mint to season pasta. Or they can be simply eaten desalted and, then, 'cunzati' (seasoned, ed.) with two cloves of garlic, a little fresh chili, oil, oregano and vinegar. Here you can also find cucunci, which are the fruits of the caper (which is a bud). They are larger and can be cut up to put in fragrant salads.

The “special” oil also in Sicily. The six PDO varieties.

Fall is also a time for olives. Among the best known are Biancolilla, Cerasuola, Moresca, Nocellara del Belìce, Nocellara Etnea, Ogliarola Messina, Santagatese and Tonda Iblea. They are eaten in many different ways, often crushed and seasoned. But they also produce six PDO varieties of extra virgin olive oil: Monti Iblei (in Ragusano), Valli Trapanesi, Val di Mazara (in western Sicily), Monte Etna, Valle del Belìce (between Agrigento, Palermo and Trapani) and Valdemone (Messina area).

Odd year, therefore new Bronte pistachio.

Far more unusual is the rhythm of the Bronte pistachio. It is harvested biennially in odd-numbered years, such as 2025, between late August and early September. From pesto to a dizzying production of sweets, there are many ways to eat it, but it must be pointed out that there is the risk of imitations. To recognize the real Sicilian product, you have to look at the shape: the shell is elongated, loosely compressed and the size of an olive, while the seed is emerald green with a ruby film.

Between “Ottobrata” and food festivals, the discovery through the streets of the villages.

Where can you taste Sicilian delights once you arrive on the island? Beyond restaurants and pastry shops, one of the best ways is to go to a local festival and meet the producers directly. In October one of the best known in all of Sicily is held: the Ottobrata di Zafferana Etnea. Here you can discover delicacies of all kinds, from honeys to liqueurs and, again, chestnuts and apples from Etna, almonds from Avola, local mushrooms and quince.

There are other opportunities around Sicily this season, including festivals dedicated to pistachios, mushrooms, grape harvests, walnuts, prickly pears and Nebrodi truffles. Not everyone likes to eat amid crowds though. Each product can also be found in the increasingly rare Sicilian 'putìe' (stores). Having done the shopping, then, like Camilleri's Commissioner Montalbano one can sit at the table and enjoy in

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silence. Because, in some cases, distraction is a crime.

PRESS CONTACT:

Ms. Daniela Lo Cascio - Head of the Department of Tourism, Sport and Entertainment of the Region of Sicily

Phone number: +39 095 7470254

E-mail: daniela.locascio@regione.sicilia.it

Website: https://www.visitsicily.info/

Company Contact:

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