Sicily's sustainable soul revealed through slow travel / Earthquake sites, climb to Erice among many out-of-the-ordinary proposals

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Palermo -

Sicily is not just sea and resorts.

Those who want to relax can do so with a vacation made up of long walks (or bike rides) travelling between yesterday and today, the sea and the mountains, community and isolation.

In a world where everything is a rush,today it is possible to enjoy slow, more sustainable tourism, which does not distort the social and cultural fabric of the area, on the island.

The Belìce Valley - the stress is on the "i" - is one of the areas of Sicily where the landscape cannot be separated from history. On the night of January 14-15, 1968, a series of quakes struck this area between the provinces of Trapani, Agrigento and Palermo. Towns such as Gibellina, Salaparuta, Poggioreale and Montevago were destroyed or rendered uninhabitable by the earthquake. There were hundreds of victims and tens of thousands displaced, and that date was followed by a long, complex reconstruction that changed the face of the valley forever.

New towns sprang up in different locations from the original cluster and, even today, the abandoned historic centers are skeletons suspended in time. Gibellina-which will be the Capital of Contemporary Art in 2026-is a symbol of this piece of history: Alberto Burri's Cretto, a white concrete casting that covers the old urban layout, leaving the paths of the streets to emerge as if they were fissures, stands on the ruins. Aside from historic places, which are not limited to the Cretto, the Belìce Valley also has a natural heritage that is often underestimated. The Belìce River and its tributaries run through countryside, forests and hilly areas that are ideal for bicycle routes and multi-day treks.

Moving into the heart of Sicily, the Rocca di Cerere Unesco Global Geopark encompasses a complex territory where geological history, human history and the contemporary landscape meet. It is a 1,279-square-kilometer area in the province of Enna, whose name - Rocca di Cerere - recalls the ancient cult of Demeter, goddess of fertility, and the cycles of agriculture, which are such key features of these areas. And the relationship between the land, its productivity and the communities that inhabited it is one of the common threads that emerge as you cross the geopark.

In just a few dozen kilometers, one goes from wet environments such as Pergusa Lake to holm oak and downy oak forests, and scenic cliffs, such as those of Mount Altesina, the highest peak in the Erei Mountains. This natural setting includes places of major historical and cultural importance, such as the Floristella-Grottacalda mining area, and several archaeological sites, going from Morgantina to the Villa Romana del Casale.

For those who prefer to ride a bicycle, one of the options for sustainable travel in Sicily is the Ciclovia dei Parchi, which leads from the Alcantara River Park to the Madonie Park via the parks of Mount Etna and Nebrodi. The route passes through inland villages, contrade, secondary roads and mountain towns that rarely feature on the itineraries of traditional tourism. Places such as Petralia Soprana and Petralia Sottana, in the heart of the Madonie Mountains, are emblematic of this approach: these are towns where stopping is not a constructed experience, it is an encounter with the daily life of bars frequented by the local inhabitants, slow rhythms and essential services.

Moving westward, among the countless Sicilian routes linked to religious traditions, is the path of Sant'Anna, which allows you to climb up to Erice, on an itinerary that passes by the Sanctuary of Sant'Anna, dating back to the early 17th century. Once in the town, one cannot fail to visit its monuments: from the Cathedral to the Castle of Venus via the Pepoli Tower. And, after more than 5 kilometers of walking uphill, 'Genovesi', a typical local sweet made of short pastry and cream, is an excellent way to 'recharge'. This is also part of discovering culture on a 'slow' journey.

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