



### **It's a Mover and Shaker!**

Mount Etna is the highest and most active volcano in Europe. On the island of Sicily, it has been growing for about 500,000 years and has had violent explosions and voluminous lava flows. More than 25% of Sicily's population lives on Etna's slopes, and it is the main source of income for the island, both from agriculture (due to its rich volcanic soil) and tourism. Despite the scary aspects of living in the shadow of a real volcano that's constantly "rumbling" beneath your feet, the area offers a variety of activities. You can hike up to the crater (almost!) in the summertime, and you can ski on its slopes in the wintertime—all with the blue sea in view.

#### **But Watch Out!**

Mount Etna has been active for around 2.6 million years. The volcano appears in Greek myth and legend and there was a major eruption in 475 B.C. But the worst eruption was in 1669, when a dozen nearby villages were destroyed by lava flows. There was a major eruption in 2001 and

several smaller eruptions in the years since. It's the second-most active volcano on earth, outdone only by Hawaii's Kilauea. Even so, it's possible to view the volcano safely, as many visitors do every year (we think).

Mt. Etna is a National Park and has a variety of activities for a visitor. From a distance, you may think this volcano is not very big. But get up closer and your jaw will drop! It's so large, in fact, that it's visible from more than half of Sicily on a clear day. The height usually tops out around 10,900 feet and the mountain itself spans roughly 600 square miles.

Here's a video to give you an idea of what it's like. The video also shows some of the surrounding areas and how much people depend on the volcano in different ways. **Mt. Etna & Its People**

**Think you might visit some day?** Here's what you can do if you make the trip.

Make your way to the **lava flow caves** (with a guide, of course). The best cave is the Grotta del Gelo (the Ice Cave), the most famous. Imagine a cave of ice all year round inside a boiling hot volcano. Old time stories say that gelato was available in Sicily in the summertime because of the ice from Mt. Etna--probably from this cave although it requires a lot of stamina and good hiking skills to get to it at an altitude of 2100 feet.



*Grotta del Gelo*



### **Ride the Etna Wine Train.**

The Circumetnea train ride was described as "...the most beautiful circular trip that can be done in seven hours on the face of the Earth." The railway was established in 1895 and two Fiat coaches known as Littorine survived.

They're used in the summer for special rides around Etna.

The train has a single car that goes on a route around the base of the volcano thru fertile lands and petrified lava. It goes through scenery that changes from lunar landscapes to pistachio filled plantations and citrus groves.

### **Visit some wineries.**

The Etna Wine Route is an area that extends from the north and continues south to Viagrande. The whole area is full of cozy wine cellars where you can taste the wines with typical local products. The rich volcanic soil around Mount Etna is just about perfect for growing grapes, making it one of Sicily's great wine-producing regions. The port city of Catania, famous for its nightlife and seafood, sits on the southern slope of Mount Etna within a 30-minute drive of some of the area's best wineries.



*The Hundred Horse Chestnut Tree*

### **The Legend of the Hundred Horse Chestnut Tree (Castagnu di Centu Cavaddi in Sicilian)**

Only 5 miles from Etna's crater is this famous chestnut tree. It is the largest and oldest chestnut tree in the world, between 2,000 and 4,000 years old. It sits in Sant'Alfio, a little hamlet near the Eastern

slope of the Mount Etna. It also boasts the greatest tree girth ever at 190 feet in circumference. At one time, a house was built in the center of the tree. Legend says that under its huge branches Queen Joanna of Aragon and her company of one hundred knights found shelter during a severe thunderstorm.

*So that's the story of the volcano. If you go, be careful and don't come home as a crispy critter; it's hot up there!*

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