

I Traveled to Italy on Neos' New Flight Route From NYC — Here's What It Was Like

Here's how to spend a perfect week in Venice and Sicily right now.

BY KWIN MOSBY | OCTOBER 02, 2021



CREDIT: COURTESY OF NEOS AIR

International travel has been complicated amid the COVID-19 pandemic, to say the least. On Sept. 1, 2021, the [EU removed the U.S. from its list of safe countries](#), but stricter entry requirements haven't stopped American travelers from taking advantage of a [vacation in Italy](#).

Italy lost an estimated [\\$140 billion](#) over the course of 2020, due to the pandemic and travel and tourism restrictions, according to the World Travel & Tourism Council. This may be one of several reasons why the country continues to welcome U.S. tourists.

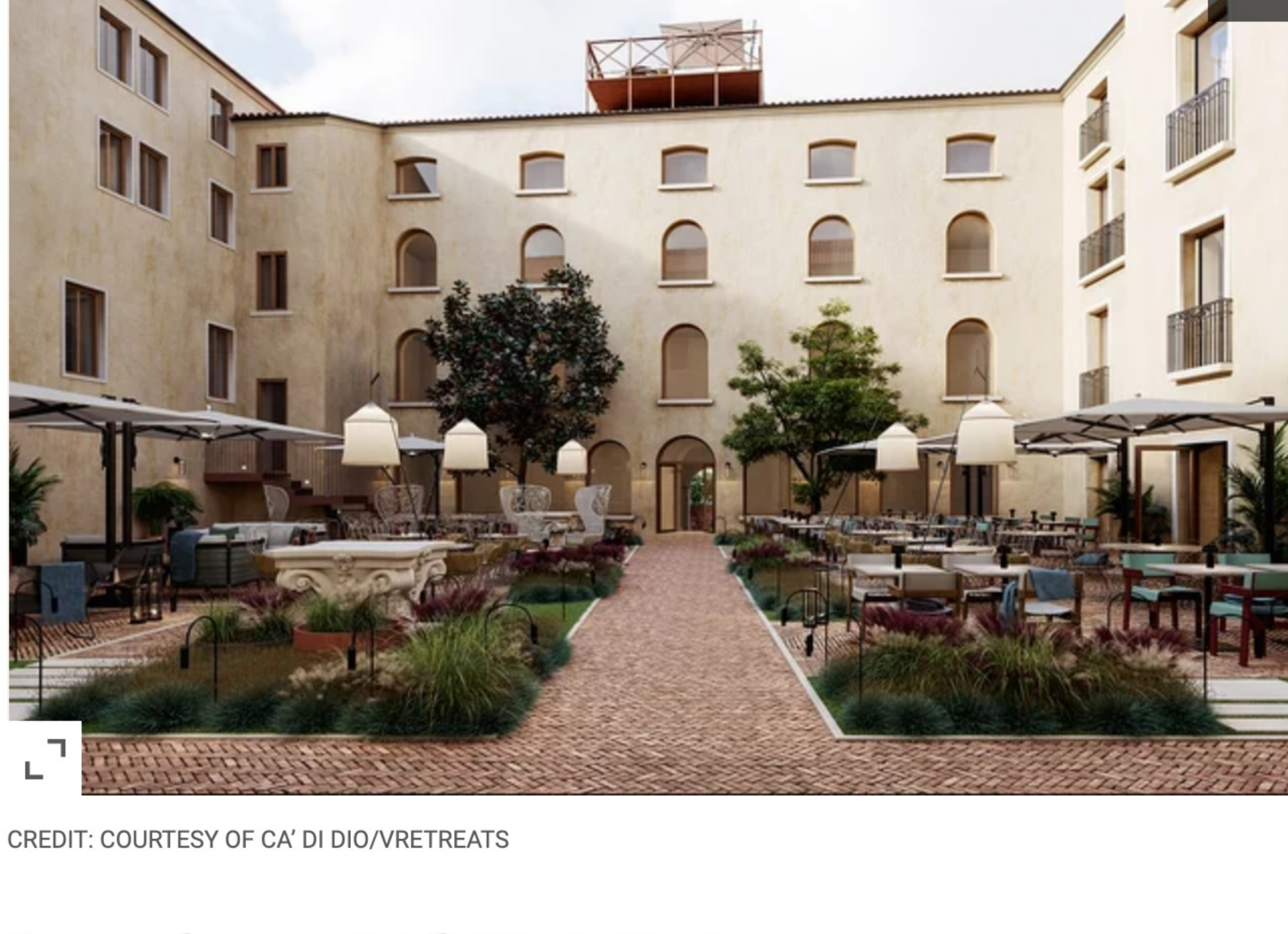
If you're considering a trip to Venice or Sicily right now, here's how to plan the perfect getaway.



Fly direct from NYC to Milan on Neos' new flight route.

Although tourists are traveling to Italy, the summer crowds have thinned out, creating more elbow room. If you're looking for a direct flight option, [Neos Air](#) — Italy's second-largest airline — has a new route between John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFK) and Milan Malpensa Airport. The flights depart from New York at 5:50 p.m. and arrive in Milan at 7:20 a.m. the next day. Departures from Milan leave at 12:20 p.m. and arrive in New York at 2:50 p.m. the same day. Europe's youngest airline fleet has six new Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner planes with several new features, including innovative HEPA filters that guarantee a continuous air change every two minutes, eliminating virus and bacteria particles.

The new direct Neos flight to Milan serves as a gateway for visitors — solo travelers, honeymooners, and groups — to experience Italy as a multi-city vacation destination.



CREDIT: COURTESY OF CA' DI DIO/VRETREATS

Stay at the new Ca' di Dio in Venice.

From Milano Centrale, take a train to Venice Santa Lucia, where you can arrange for a private water taxi to [Ca' Di Dio](#), the newest luxury hotel located a 10-minute walk from the busy St. Mark's Square. The property is an ideal home base with plenty of tourist attractions within walking distance, and at night, guests can escape the throngs and rest after a nightcap made with one of the hotel's signature gins: Rosa, Blue Tea, and Sál.

The concierge can arrange a walking tour with a local archeologist and tour guide to explore the city's history, local haunts, iconic sights. Take a break and relax with a glass of wine at Osteria Al Squero, which offers a vantage point across the canal so you can watch skilled craftsmen create exquisite gondolas that will eventually set the mood for a couple's romantic date night.

Spend more than a day or two immersing yourself in Venetian culture, which should include dining out. For lunch, head to [Bacarando in Corte dell'Orso](#) for Italian staples like fresh calamari and lasagna made with homemade pasta. Avoid the wait and walk to the back of the restaurant where limited outdoor seating may be available. For dinner, Ca di Dio's Vero Restaurant serves innovative Italian dishes, including linguine with Busara-style sauce, morel mushrooms, and smoked provolone cheese essence. For another fine-dining option, check out George Clooney's favorite, [Ristorante Da Ivo](#), where the food is well worth the high price tag.



Kwin standing on the Ponte dell'Accademia, one of only four bridges to span the Grand Canal in Venice | CREDIT: COURTESY OF KWIN MOSBY

In addition to [Venice](#), it's worth exploring a few nearby islands, like Lido. The Ca' Di Dio concierge can also arrange a day trip to Murano to tour the local glass factory, [Vetzeria Artistica Colleoni](#). Here, you can watch world-class glassblowers craft magnificent works of art right before your eyes. Stroll through a massive gallery of exquisite chandeliers, glassware, jewelry, and even a bed frame made from Murano glass.

Only a 15-minute boat ride away, [Burano](#) is home to several local lacemakers, including [Dalla Lidia Merletti d'Arte](#), a family lacemaking business that's been around for more than 50 years, with a gallery in the back of the shop to prove it. You can't leave Burano without seeing the area's colorful houses.

When you're ready, head back to the hotel via a private, 20-minute water taxi ride or 45-minute public ferry trip. After a long day of sightseeing, reward yourself with a cone or bowl of gelato from Gelatoteca Suso, a local favorite, or watch the sunset while eating your sweet treat at Gelateria Nico.

Related: [12 of the Best Small Towns in Italy](#)



Immerse yourself in the rich history and modern vibe of Taormina.

For beach lovers, relaxing in the small town of Taormina on the coast of [Sicily](#) is a must.

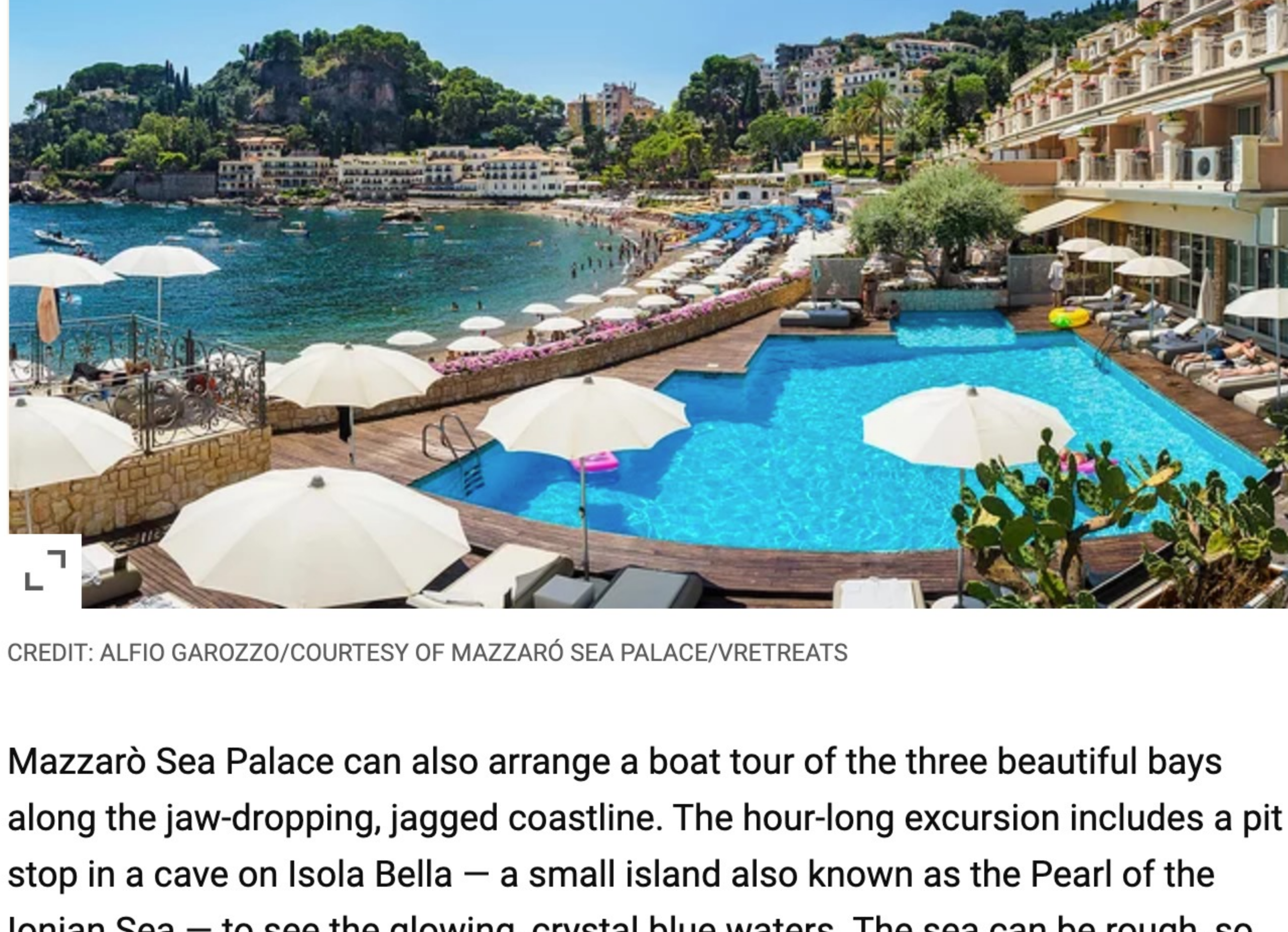
The panoramic views of the Ionian Sea from the suites at the [Grand Hotel Mazarò Sea Palace](#) are worth a here trip alone. Watch the sunrise as golden rays blanket the colorful umbrellas and resorts along the bay's coastline.

Taormina has nearly 11,000 residents, and before COVID, it attracted millions of tourists every year. In the 1960s and 1970s, celebrities and other creatives souls such as Gina Lollobrigida, Truman Capote, Greta Garbo, Tennessee Williams, Elizabeth Taylor, and Gregory Peck traveled frequently to Taormina. Movie fans can take a 30- to 40-minute drive to Savoca and Forza d'Agro, two famous filming locations featured in Francis Ford Coppola's *Godfather* series.

Immerse yourself in the coastal town's history and have the concierge at the Mazarò Sea Palace arrange a private walking tour. You'll learn how 75% of the town was destroyed during World War II and why the Star of David etched on the side of the town hall building is the only thing that remains from what was once a large Jewish community.

The town is steeped in history, but it's also a source of contemporary culture. For example, the Teatro Antico di Taormina — where the Greeks carved the theater out of stone and the Romans revised it with brick and cement — has now become a public concert hall.

Related: [The Best and Worst Times to Visit Italy](#)



CREDIT: ALFIO GAROZZO/COURTESY OF MAZZARÒ SEA PALACE/VRETREATS

Mazarò Sea Palace can also arrange a boat tour of the three beautiful bays along the jaw-dropping, jagged coastline. The hour-long excursion includes a pit stop in a cove on Isola Bella — a small island also known as the Pearl of the Ionian Sea — to see the glowing, crystal blue waters. The sea can be rough, so this is not recommended for travelers prone to seasickness.

Back at the hotel, guests can sunbathe at the pool or on the private beach, where adrenaline junkies also go cliff diving into the sea.

At night, indulge in the culinary creations of chef Riccardo Fazio at Il Gattopardo restaurant. Tip: Go for the tasting menu. Along with wine pairings, the food includes tuna with sesame, parsnip, and citrus teriyaki; cuttlefish carpaccio with whipped almond and red shrimp; and fresh pasta ravioli alla Norma. End the meal with a platter of bite-sized specialty desserts representing different Sicilian cities and towns.

You could easily accomplish this trip in a week, though if you have time, consider extending your stay and exploring even more of Sicily, [Puglia](#), the [Amalfi Coast](#), [Tuscany](#), and Italy's other diverse regions. Venice and Taormina are two warm, welcoming destinations with distinctly different vibes. And both are worth a trip to Italy.