

32

AEOLIAN ISLANDS

“The crater of Stromboli is shaped like a huge funnel, at the bottom and in the middle of which there is an opening through which a man could just enter, and which communicates with the inner hearth of the mountain. It is this opening which, like the mouth of a cannon, launches a cloud of bullets which, falling back into the crater, drag behind with them, stones, ash and lava which, rolling towards the bottom, block the funnel.”

Le capitaine Aréna, Alexandre Dumas

Each island in the archipelago of the Aeolian Islands has a strong and deeply-rooted personality of its own: each of them stands out from the others by its nature, history and landscape which lets visitors discover a new and different world each time, yet belonging to a unique universe, united by the common denominator of beauty. From the explosions of Stromboli, to the fumaroles of Vulcano, from the liveliness of Lipari to the lush nature of Salina, from the magical silence of Alicudi to the jet set on Panarea to the idyllic sunsets on Filicudi, each island can offer unforgettable emotions and mementos which remain engraved in the memory of visitors. Most travellers go to the Aeolian Islands attracted by the turquoise sea and the picturesque beaches, but this archipelago, as well as being a huge and unequalled manual of archaeology which covers all the phases of human evolution from the Neolithic to the present day, is an authentic paradise for excursionists.



NATURAL HERITAGE
UNESCO DOSSIER: 908
PLACE OF INSCRIPTION: CAIRNS, AUSTRALIA
DATE OF INSCRIPTION: 2000

CRITERIA FOR SELECTION: The volcanic forms of the site represent classic elements in the continuous study of volcanology all over the world. Studied scientifically at least since the 18th century, the islands have provided two types of eruptions (Vulcanian and Strombolian) for textbooks on volcanology and have played key roles in training all geologists for over 200 years. To this day they still continue to provide a rich field of volcanology studies on the geological processes underway in the development of the forms of the land.





*“How do you become a poet?”
“Walk around the bay slowly
and look around you.”*

As Pablo Neruda suggests in the film *The postman*, you only have to look around you to discover the poetry of Salina. Dominated by the unmistakable profiles of Mount dei Porri and of Mount Fossa delle Felci, two extinct volcanoes covered by thick vegetation, this silent and lush island, with a very blue sea that bathes its rocky beaches, is the ideal place for those who prefer the peace of a wild and fascinating nature to the hustle and bustle of the high life.

The colour to which you must tune your frequencies, when you arrive at **1 Santa Maria di Salina**, is green: of the seven islands of the archipelago, this one stands out the most for its exuberant nature, which clads the slopes of the ancient volcanoes forming its profile, and for the vineyards which produce superb wines which give the palate scents of sea air and days of sunshine. Before plunging into nature, take the time to discover the central road in the village and the small alleys that reveal corners of rare beauty: white houses dotted with the brightly coloured flowers of bougainvillea, terraces that almost brush the sky, restaurants that serve delicious dishes and bars where you can enjoy an aperitif accompanied by the sea breeze. Leave the centre and go for a walk

to **2 Lingua**, a typical village which will remain in your heart, to admire the lighthouse that is mirrored in the waters of the ancient saltmarsh, where with the right light you can even see the reflection of Lipari. Abandon civilisation and go towards **3 Malfa**, where you will find directions to **4 Valdichiesa**, a small village in the centre of the island, the starting point of paths which lead to the summit of **5 Mount Fossa delle Felci** and **6 Mount dei Porri**: in both cases they are simple excursions, but not to be underestimated, especially in hot weather. Take the time to admire the views that open up behind every bend in the path: the higher you go, the greater the marvels that will be revealed to your eyes, until you reach the rim of the ancient craters, today blanketed

in ferns and trees. Once you have returned to the point where you started from, there are two more unmissable places to get to know the soul of this island: **7 Rinella**, with its characteristic beach of black pebbles, and **8 Pollara**, with its rock walls with iridescent colours that plunge into the sea. Made famous by the Oscar-winning film *The Postman*, with Massimo Troisi and Philippe Noiret, this village resting on the collapsed crater of an ancient volcano is one of the most poetic places on Salina. Sit on the rocks and wait for sunset, when the rocks light up with warm colours and the spectacle of the sun setting behind the profiles of Alicudi and Filicudi takes place.



THE MAGIC OF ALICUDI

“Arcudi was above all the kingdom of heather and its lovely shade of violet. Capers, broom, olive trees, vines and wild herbs all grew wild. The clean air regenerated the body and mind. And the whimsical and aggressive sea ruled over everything but it could also become vicious, and surprised me with its changing colours, according to the wind. I had been sucked in by the fascination of that place, most of which was uninhabited.”

Amuri, Catena Fiorello Galeano

A few dozen people live there permanently, in isolated houses which are connected not by roads but by steps, there is only one shop which sells essentials and only a sporadic hovercraft connects it to the other islands: Alicudi is a place for those who love nature and solitude. Known in antiquity as Erikoussa due to the large number of heather plants which covered its surface, this island can touch the soul in its most intimate part. The silence which stretches from the sea to the Filo dell'Arpa, the highest summit, can offer peace and tranquillity. Here everything travels on donkey-back, along narrow stone steps, and the addresses are found by counting the steps: at no. 357, in a spot suspended between the sky and the sea, there is a library containing the 7000 books (Italian and foreign fiction, history, travel and poetry) donated by Mascia Musy, the wife of Franco Scaglia, to Alicudi, where the writer often retreated to work.



“With the rest of the island it is like Hell with Paradise: the sea brimming over with boiling fumaroles: rocks and cliffs, all stones of sulphur, of a crude and dazzling yellow which reflects the sun all around from the walls. Like colossal mirrors, towards the sea and towards the conical black mountain; lastly, the shore, as dangerous and impracticable as the sea, dotted with sulphur hearths fuming with unbreathable vapours.”

The smell of sulphur, fumaroles, rocks tinged yellow, black beaches and boiling seas: in the novel *Horcynus Orca* by Stefano D’Arrigo, this is how Vulcano is described, an island which instils both fascination and fear, and which at times is like the set of a science-fiction film.

The strong smell of sulphur will be the first thing that strikes you when you reach **1 Vulcano**: you will only have to look around to see the yellow veins which wind between the rocks, and when you look up towards the **2 Great Crater of the Fossa**, which dominates the village from above, you will see the fumaroles which twirl around in the sky.

You can immediately satisfy your curiosity and set off on a walk or organise an excursion at dawn or at dusk, when the sun offers a dream-like backdrop. To reach the crater, go to the path’s starting point which is clearly indicated but be careful

because there are some rules to follow: there must be at least two of you and you can go up only when the light which is at the point of departure is green. The volcano, with its smoking crater of some 500 m in diameter and 386 m in height is characterised by an intense and spectacular activity of fumaroles which leads to the discharge of sulphurous gases and steam, at a temperature of 400°C. However the crater is not the only spectacular thing you can see on this island: not far from the centre of the village, there is the **3 Black Sand Beach**, a long stretch of very black sand in the Bay of Ponente, and on the opposite side

of the isthmus which connects the island to Vulcanello, **4 Le Fumarole Beach** which gets its name from the sulphurous underground sources that heat the water and create a pleasant hydromassage effect on **5 Mount Saraceno**. Here you can enjoy a magnificent view over the whole of the archipelago and reach **6 Gelso**, a corner of peace perched on the opposite slope, where you can relax on the black sand of the **Donkey’s Beach** and take a table on the veranda of the **Trattoria da Pina** to enjoy fantastic fish dishes with an unrivalled view over the sea, the abandoned lighthouse and the pier with the fishermen’s boats.



LUIGI AND MADELEINE

“As soon as I disembarked from the boat, I noticed a great abundance of shards of obsidian in all the fields bordering the little road that from the pier climbs up between the few homes [...]. In the wide plains that extend upstream from the road to the foot of a steep rocky slope of the Natoli hill, the fields, recently harvested, were black with shards of obsidian.”

Meligunis Lipára, III, Luigi Bernabò Brea

When Luigi Bernabò Brea landed in the Aeolian Islands in 1948, he was working for the Eastern Sicily Heritage Department and had devoted his last years to restoring the archaeological heritage after the World War. During his career, Bernabò Brea followed many excavation campaigns both in Greece and in Sicily, but when in 1973 the time came for him to retire, he chose to make his home in the Aeolian islands. Together with archaeologist Madeleine Cavalier, he opened an excavation on the plateau of the Castle on Lipari, where he identified an intact stratigraphic sequence which told the story of the Aeolian Islands from the middle Neolithic to modern times; the historical succession was confirmed by the excavations on the other islands in the archipelago. His materials are in Lipari’s Archaeological Museum, one of Italy’s finest, and the 12 volumes of *Meligunis Lipára* contain the accounts of the excavations.



"AND WHEN I SPAKE TO HIM OF GOING THENCE AND PRAYED HIM TO DISMISS ME, HE COMPLIED, AND HELPED TO MAKE US READY FOR THE SEA. THE BLADDER OF A BULLOCK NINE YEARS OLD HE GAVE, IN WHICH HE HAD COMPRESSED AND BOUND THE STORMY WINDS OF AIR. FOR SATURN'S SON HAD GIVEN HIM EMPIRE O'ER THE WINDS, WITH POWER TO CALM THEM OR TO ROUSE THEM AT HIS WILL. THIS IN

OUR ROOMY GALLEY HE MADE FAST WITH A BRIGHT CHAIN OF SILVER, THAT NO BREATH OF RUDER AIR MIGHT BLOW, HE ONLY LEFT THE WEST WIND FREE TO WAFT OUR SHIPS AND US UPON OUR WAY."

In these verses from the *Odyssey* (X, 1-25), Ulysses and his companions stop at Aeolia, the guests of Aeolus, the god of the wind. When the time came to return to Ithaca, Aeolus gave the Greek hero a sack holding all the winds that were dangerous for sailing. Aeolus released only the mild Zephyr,

so that it could guide the ship home. But things did not go as planned and Ulysses had to wander for many more years before being able to return to his homeland again. The mythical Aeolian Islands are a paradise, perhaps not for very small children, but definitely for adventure-loving youngsters. Choose **Stromboli**. Go into the lanes that from the port climb up towards the centre of the village: you will find a beautiful viewing point. Then book a guided excursion to the observation point of the **1 Sciara del Fuoco** with one of the guide agencies and await the departure time enjoying a granite with cream. The climb is not very difficult and you should arrive at the panoramic balcony at dusk: here wait for darkness to better observe the "Strombolian eruptions" which colour the sky with spectacular fireworks: pyroclastic waste, magma and incandescent material regularly come out of the three volcanic craters, with explosions that follow one another every few minutes, producing spectacular sprays of burning fragments of lava and waste that reach a height of 150 metres. Depending on the activity of the volcano, the altitude that can be reached in the excursion may vary. The panoramic balcony is the point closest to the crater that can be reached, because the path that goes up to the summit is closed for the time being: in July 2019 a paroxysmic explosion (far more powerful than the ordinary ones) shook the archipelago, causing excursions to be stopped. On this island, the volcano is not the only attraction: you can organise an excursion by boat to swim in **2 Strombolicchio**, a tiny island crowned by a lighthouse that is clearly visible from the coast, surrounded by marvellous seabeds, or to go to **3 Ginostra**, a tiny village perched on the slopes of the volcano, accessible only by sea, with fewer than 30 inhabitants. Without public lighting, it is a place for contemplation and long swims.



KIDS



THE AEOLIAN ISLANDS in books

Reading suggestions to get to know the Aeolian Islands better.

• **Le capitaine Aréna**, Alexandre Dumas (1854). The story of a journey by the great French novelist, who visited the Aeolian Islands by boat.

• **Meligunìs Lipàra**, Luigi Bernabò Brea, Madeleine Cavalier (1960-2003). Accounts, in 12 volumes, of the excavations by the two archaeologists on the Aeolian Islands.

• **Horcynus Orca**, Stefano D'Arrigo (1975). The odyssey of a young Sicilian who, a veteran of the Second World War, takes on a journey from Naples to Cariddi, through the Strait of Messina, to return to Sicily.

• **La danza delle streghe. Cunti e credenze dell'arcipelago eoliano**, Marilena Maffei Macrina (2008). A book which traces the identity of the Aeolian Islands through the mysterious figure of the Aeolian "majare", witches linked to the clouds and the wind, told in the documents of oral tradition and rediscovered thanks to the author's painstaking research.

• **Edda Ciano e il comunista**, Marcello Sorgi (2009). In September 1945, the favourite daughter of Mussolini was exiled to Lipari: ill, depressed,

exhausted by grief and loneliness, she would not have survived without the help and affection of Leonida Bongiorno, the head of the local branch of the Italian Communist Party, a resistance fighter and heir of a solid anti-fascist tradition. The novel tells the story of an intimate and passionate story, which will bind the two main characters forever, beyond their different political belongings.

• **Il mare di pietra**, Francesco Longo (2009). For each of the seven islands, the author chooses a colour and a means of transport to visit them and enriches the text with plenty of literary and film suggestions that are connected with the Aeolian Islands, but not only them, showing how the islands have always been meeting points of very long stories.

• **A Stromboli**, Lidia Ravera (2010). An autobiographical novel in which the author talks of her relationship with the island of Stromboli: remote, inaccessible, an anchoring place and point of escape.

• **Curzio Malaparte alle isole Eolie. Vita al confino, amori e opere**, Giuseppe La Greca (2012). The book collects the works and poetry written by Malaparte in the period when he was exiled to Lipari, from October 1934 to June 1935.

• **Amuri**, Catena Fiorello Galeano (2021). After 25 years, Isabella returns to Alicudi to try and find herself and

save her marriage. On that island where everything is ardour, wild nature and silence, between boat trips, walks towards the plateaux of the ancient volcanoes and breathtakingly beautiful sunsets, everything takes on an unexpected turn and the main character goes on an introspective "journey", discovering that real love, even when lost, can do good.

• **Una voce dal profondo**, Paolo Rumiz (2023). The journey of the author to the foundations of Italy, amid craters, subterranean fumes, seabeds and mines, also passes through the Aeolian Islands, to relate the Mediterranean world that trembles, erupts, blows and is divided into a thousand underground tunnels.

Children's books:

• **Le isole Eolie viste da una bimba**, Ettore Giulio Resta (2012). A carefree and witty fable to discover the Aeolian Islands.

• **Le isole Eolie e il vento bambino**, Marcella Di Benedetto (2015). A naughty wind accompanies young readers to visit the marvels of the archipelago.

• **Il vulcano gatto**, Gaia Marra (2019). Dedicated to Stromboli and its cats, the book tells the story of the birth of the volcano with all the changes that it entails, including eruptions, and the spaces it needs.