

# MEDITERRANEAN

SIGGY AND HEATHER | TRIP AROUND THE MEDITERRANEAN | FRID-SAT 24-25 MAY 2013

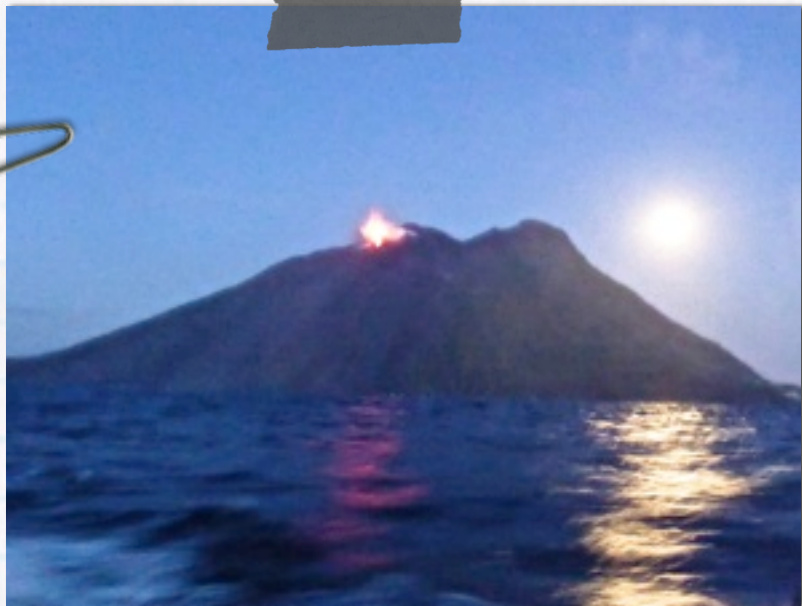
## Aeolian Islands

We knew from the start that the 4 days we had allowed for Sicily was very tight. But that was an underestimation of the problem of trying to do justice to this island. The facts of geography and weather have contributed to us having to stay in the north-east corner of Sicily in order to go on our trip out to the Aeolian Islands. Seeing the volcanic islands close up was a priority for us. It simply meant that we would see far less of the rest of the island.

Yesterday morning at 11.30 am, after depositing our van safely in a secured parking area (where we were able to return later that night and sleep!), we boarded the boat for our 12 hour journey out to the volcanic islands.

By the time we got started, the boat was full to over-flowing. The bad weather of the last few days had meant many ferry cancellations. Thus everyone and sundry was on this boat to be dropped off at their particular islands. Our first stop was Lipari Island. It had a very attractive harbour with some quaint old buildings lining the small cove. The island, like all of those that we saw, rose steeply out of the water. Our next stop was Panarea - one of the most northerly of the group. We were dropped off for two hours to do what we wished. Actually, by the time they got us onto the dock it was more like one and a half hours. Because of the very choppy seas, each of us was helped across the gang plank and had to jump from the end to the wharf. Everyone got cheered as each person safely made it to terra-firma.

We decided to have a meal at a swanky restaurant. It had been given the thumbs up by the Lonely Planet. The location was very pleasant and it was tastefully decorated. The food too was excellent - we choose the house specialty of octopus and egg plant - certainly something we had never tried before.



## Cefalu

Including today, we only have 2 days left on Sicily. We have a ferry booked for midnight tomorrow. We reluctantly decided to pare down our itinerary to give us a more leisurely time. Thus we decided to visit only one place today - Cefalu. It is on the north coast and on our way to Trapani - the port from which we depart for Sardinia. It turned out to be a great decision.

We also made a fortuitous decision to park out of town and ride in. The traffic congestion going in to the town was very heavy but we were able to zip about easily on our bikes.

Cefalu is named as one of the most beautiful villages in Italy. Located on the gorgeous aqua-blue Tirreno Sea, with the towering backdrop of an enormous outcrop of rock, Cefalu took us by surprise. We loved it.

Not having a map of the town we ambled around randomly and simply "discovered" the magnificent Cathedral (begun in 1131 by the

Normans), countless frescoed churches and seminaries, the old town "cleansing and drainage" centre (water cascading from taps where people did their washing), and, like everywhere in this part of the world, the narrow streets. Restaurants and souvenir shops were everywhere. Scooters and bambino cars whizzed by, barely fitting through the narrow alleys. Washing was hanging on the lines above. The place was busy. We finally came to the shoreline and were surprised at the number of people sun baking and swimming. There was even a man raking up the seaweed. Evidently the population swells three fold in peak season.

After an ice cream and a sit down, we started to ride back to the van only to prop for a few minutes to watch competitors in the national show-jumping competition. The arena was squeezed into what we think was a car park.

It made Heather's day.



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## OBSERVATIONS

**MAFIA** We pulled up at the petrol station and the attendant started to whistle the tune from "The Godfather". Heather whispered to me - "should you be giving him your credit card?"

**CONTRADICTIONS** The police the authorities and even the parking officials (and signage) all appear to be really officious (snappy uniform and high handed manner) yet they all seem to turn a blind eye to law breakers - especially vehicle drivers.

**GIVE WAY SIGN** I realize what this sign actually means - it means give way to ME. Another interpretation could be - "only Give Way if you HAVE TO".

### UNFINISHED HOUSES

Apparently property attracts a tax. So one Sicilian trick is to leave the property unfinished on the outside but put a luxury finish on the inside!

### PEDESTRIANS ARE KING

Walking across the road very slowly or opening a car door into on-coming traffic is so common here. Pedestrians feel they have a god given right to go at their own pace. People are manic in their rush when driving their cars but turn into snails as soon as their feet hit the ground.

# Seeing an active volcano - one more tick on our bucket list.

Having hurried away after our short meal we only had limited time to look over the island. The black beaches were a novelty.

The nicest thing about the island was that you could see some of the other volcanic islands off shore - Stromboli in particular. We had earlier passed Volcano. We did not know that there is a volcano, called "Volcano". Obviously, it is the namesake of all volcanoes.

We continued our journey across to Stromboli. The seas continued to be very choppy. It gave half of us an exciting ride and the other half terrible sea-sickness. Luckily, we were both in the former category.

We had two hours on Stromboli. To be honest it was rather boring. Apart from the church at the centre of town, the inhabited area was not particularly endearing. However we had time to fill, so we did a bit of walking - in fact a lot of walking. The lane ways were, as usual, extremely narrow.

People get around the town on mopeds, three wheeled trucks and golf carts. All have only two gears - fast and really, really, ridiculously fast. No seat belts either.

Looking at (and listening to) the massive peak above us, was the most interesting part of the time. It was constantly sending up small plumes of smoke - sometimes white and sometimes black. We kept looking up at the mountain whenever we could.

There is something foreboding about it yet the inhabitants seemed oblivious to its presence - until it goes up I guess (which it has over time).

To our great excitement it exploded four times whilst we were there. The ground shook and made us feel very puny.

Eventually we made our way to the dock and tried to get a bit of shut-eye on the hard concrete benches. We were stuffed. Stromboli kept doing its thing in the background.

After reboarding, we were given our meal - supposedly a typical Aeolian dish. It was spaghetti in a very thin sauce of olives and tomatoes. When you add the spastic plates and cutlery and the cask wine, I'm sure you will understand our impression of their "typical" meal.

Anyway, one-third of the group later perked it up and another third at least thought about doing so.

But the best was left till last. The evening show that Stromboli is noted for was the dessert. It is not called the "light house of the Mediterranean" for nothing.

At night time, and from some distance, it is easier to see the show. Stromboli did it's act for us and threw up ash AND lava. The lava display only happened once, but gee was it great to see.

I stood at the back of the boat for most of the time watching intently for Stromboli to continue doing its thing but gradually the island disappeared into the night.

Our vessel was leaping over the waves in a crazy way. At home, no passengers would have been allowed out there. It was really thrilling however - I don't know where my sea sickness gene has gone, but I really now seem to have my sea legs.

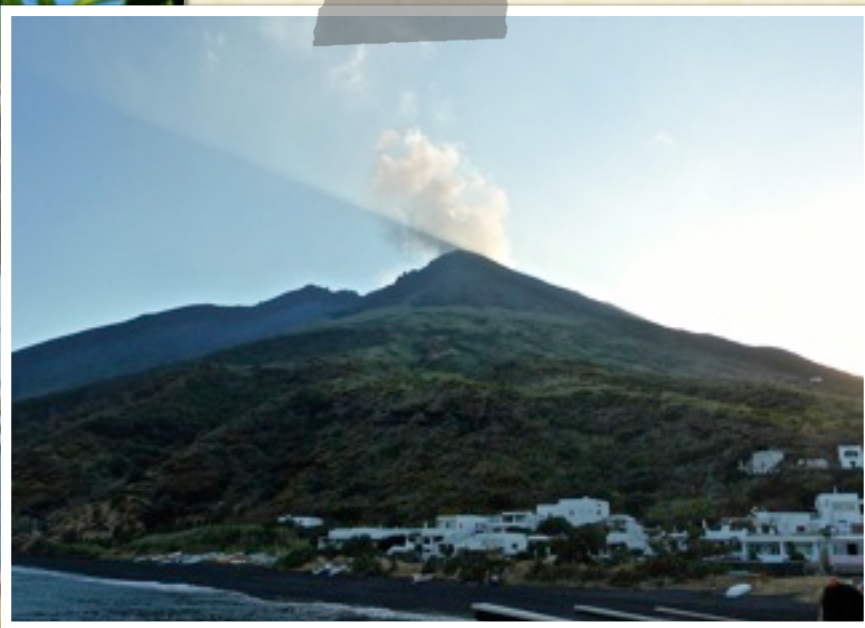
Heather accompanied me for a while and then went in and got some sleep.

The buffeting meant that most people could not walk around. Those that were not feeling sick were trying to get some shut eye. It was good to get back to our van for the night.





# PHOTOS



Cefalu Cathedral



THE SEASIDE ACROSS FROM OUR CARAVAN PARK HAS WHITE SAND AND GLORIOUS WAVES. CROWDING THE SAND ARE NUMEROUS BRIGHTLY COLOURED BEACH CABANAS OR BATHING BOXES. THEY LOOK GREAT AGAINST THE AQUA OF THE MEDITERRANEAN. WOULD WE SWIM HERE? NOT ON YOUR LIFE!! THE RUBBISH ON THE SAND AND IN THE WATER MADE US TURN AROUND AND RIDE BACK TO OUR VAN. YUK!!



Cefalu Cathedral

Cefalu



Holding up the traffic

