



Jamie's Great Escape

Jamie in Sicily

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Sicilian street food

When Jamie Oliver started his Italian tour, he was stunned at the quality of the food served in Sicily's street markets. Forget greasy burgers from a dodgy stall – in Sicily shoppers can eat like kings as they buy their weekly groceries. Delicacies like artichoke, fresh salads with olives and ripe tomatoes and fillets of fried fish are just some of the tasty dishes on offer.

The narrow, winding streets and covered market stalls feel more like the traditional souks or bazaars found in African and Middle Eastern cultures than the markets of other regions of Italy. It is thanks to the geographical location of Sicily, just off the southern toe of the Italian boot that it has such fantastic street food.

Arab influence

Jutting out in the Mediterranean ocean, Sicily was in a prime position for invading forces aiming to get a foothold in Europe. In the 9th century the Moors occupied Sicily and stayed for two centuries. Their Arab Islamic culture had a lasting influence, not only in the food but also in the local dialect, as well as the architecture and industry. The large church in Palermo was converted to a mosque and still has an Arabic inscription on one of its columns, and the name of Palermo's Ballarò market is Arabic in origin.

Under the Moors, agriculture became more varied and efficient, with the widespread introduction of rice, sugar cane, cotton and oranges. This, in turn, influenced Sicilian cuisine. The origins of many of the most popular Sicilian foods – which include ingredients like saffron, pomegranates and chickpeas – can be traced back to the Arab period.

Trading flavours

It was not only the Moors who found Sicily's position as a trading post useful. Over the centuries, the island was also invaded by the Normans and the Romans. The most recent influence is the new influx of North African refugees who have settled in Sicily.

The international flavour of Sicilian food is celebrated every year in the tiny village of San Vito Lo Capo, where the annual cous cous festival is held. Chefs from all over the world, including North Africa, the Far East and Europe, compete for the title of best cous cous chef of the year.

<http://www.channel4.com/food/on-tv/jamie-oliver/jamies-great-escape/index.html>

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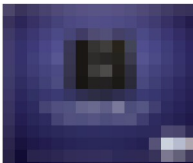
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Jamie in Marretimo

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Islands in the sun

Golden sunshine, blue seas and fantastic views – no wonder Jamie couldn't resist kicking off his shoes and relaxing on the beautiful island of Marretimo. As Jamie says: 'There's something about island life which makes everything go slowly, softly – don't rush, take your time and you get time to think.'

This remote island, one of the Egadi Isles off the coast of Sicily, had clearly worked its magic on the workaholic chef. Staking its claim in ancient history, Marretimo is believed to be the original Ithaca, location of Homer's *Odyssey*.

Away from it all

Today, lucky visitors can relax on the beaches and tiny coves or enjoy diving in the area, which is part of a marine reserve with a wide variety of sea life to discover. If you love walking, head inland to the mountains where you can climb up high for spectacular views over the Mediterranean. For culture fiends there are Roman ruins, a Spanish castle and a small temple which dates back to the 1st century AD.

Many cruises stop off at Marretimo and visit Giovanni's La Scaletti restaurant. But for independent travellers, it takes a little effort to arrive. The best way is on the hydrofoil from Trapani in Sicily, which stops at all the islands four times a day. There are direct flights to Palermo from Stansted. Or if that's too much trouble, you can always charter your own helicopter to get there. But if you fancy an easier way to island life, there are plenty of other beautiful islands off the coast of Italy.

Spoilt for choice

Like Jamie, who started his tour there, you could visit Sicily – home of the Mafia, fantastic street markets and great beaches. For good old-fashioned glamour, why not go to Capri? Some of the scenes in *The Talented Mr Ripley* were filmed there. In the 1950s the island was one of the most exclusive in the world, a playground for the rich and famous. It still retains an air of glamour with many boutique hotels springing up along the rugged coast.

Sardinia is the second largest island in the Mediterranean, known for its clean and uncrowded beaches. It's also one of the most chic. Settle back in a café and enjoy the nightly passeggiata – the ritual stroll through the streets by the locals dressed in their Sunday best.

Elba is best-known as the island where Napoleon was exiled after losing the Battle of Trafalgar 200 years ago. Now 'Tuscany's island' is a quiet place. It has a languid relaxed atmosphere, with fantastic scenery and amazing food with a strong Tuscan influence. There is plenty to do there including walking, mountain biking, snorkelling, kayaking, diving or just kicking off your shoes and relaxing, just like Jamie.

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Jamie's Great Escape

Jamie's Italian cooking tips

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Italian cuisine made simple

Jamie spent six weeks travelling around Italy re-discovering his love of cooking and learning lots about the art of Italian cuisine. Learn to cook wonderful food just like Mama does with these top tips from Jamie's travels.

Tips

- Keep things simple – use the freshest, in season, locally produced ingredients.
- Be bold with your flavours - go for rustic, robust flavours.
- Make the local dishes – Italians like their regional dishes and don't like them being messed about with. Ask the mamas and the nonnas for their family recipes.
- Have fun with your cooking – as seafood chef Giovanni from Marettimo told Jamie.
- It's all about flavour rather than appearance –this is cucina povera or peasant food.
- You don't need lots of time – Italian mums cook quick fantastic food like risotto or pasta – even after a long day at work.
- When buying meat – think about how the animal lived and was killed. Was it humane? If you buy meat at a butchers or at the meat counter of a supermarket you can ask these questions.
- Be adventurous – try out new flavours, new recipes and new ingredients.
- Show your passion for cooking – all Italians are passionate about food from the youngest child to the oldest grandfather.
- Remember what Jamie says; "As long as you care, as long as you've got your family around the table, whether its French, English or Italian – its just cooking and that's what it's all about."

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