



**BELMOND**  
**VILLA SANT'ANDREA**  
TAORMINA MARE



**PRESS KIT**

Belmond Villa Sant'Andrea introduced by Fiona Sims

OVERVIEW

Belmond Villa Sant'Andrea first made its name as a playground for film stars in the 1950s. And it's not hard to see why. It's got that special something – a measure of sophistication, a sprinkle of glamour and a cool beach vibe. Sister hotel to Belmond Grand Hotel Timeo set just up the hill, it offers a tranquil beachside escape on one of the most beautiful coastlines in Italy, picturesque Taormina Mare.

Once a private villa, it is set in lush, sub-tropical gardens on a stretch of pebble beach on Sicily's sparkling Mazarò bay, a coastline dotted with magical caves, mystical islands and crystal clear waters.

There are 68 elegant rooms and suites, decorated in a style best summed up as Sicilian luxe, the majority of which look out over the beach and pristine waters of the bay. Most of the rooms have flower-filled balconies, where guests can while away the hours watching the waves lap and the boats bob.

As well as the quiet beach, complete with sun-loungers for guests' exclusive use, there is a heated swimming pool, plus a private stretch of beach boasting six luxury cabanas – a personal sanctuary by the sea.

Each cabana accommodates up to four people and all are stylishly furnished with plump sofas, well-stocked mini-bars, tented verandas and sun-loungers. Each has its own dedicated waiter, who is on hand to arrange anything from relaxing massages to a fresh fish lunch, prepared with passion by the hotel's chef, Aniello Razzano.

Chef Aniello oversees the hotel's Oliviero restaurant, which focuses on the Mediterranean's finest seasonal produce, with a particular emphasis on Sicilian specialities. A highlight is fish plucked straight from the bay and grilled to perfection—especially when preceded by a cool aperitivo at the adjacent terrace bar.

There's also a Fitness Centre, complete with hammam, and The Wellness Centre, with its array of treatments using products from Sothys and Les Senses de Marrakech, scented with orange flowers, amber, sandalwood and jasmine.

Or for those seeking something a little more demanding, Belmond Villa Sant'Andrea can arrange an array of activities, from watersports to wine tasting. Plus there are complimentary boat tours, stopping at Isola Bella, once home to a friend of Queen Victoria and now a nature reserve, with its stunning Grotta Azzurra. The tour also offers the chance to snorkel among the kaleidoscope of fish, before sailing over to the north side of the bay to Capo Sant'Alessio, with its breathtaking views over Castelmola and its picturesque ruins. The hotel's action-

packed Kid's Club offers plenty of other family-friendly activities, from sailing lessons to horse riding.

## HISTORY

American playwright and author Tennessee Williams once described Taormina as "stupendously and overwhelmingly beautiful". He may well have been recalling the translucent light that bounces off the craggy hillsides and tumbles down into the deep blue Ionian Sea.

Long before Williams, a trail of celebrated 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>- century writers and artists felt the same. Taormina famously inspired British novelist D.H. Lawrence, who wrote part of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* while staying at sister hotel Belmond Grand Hotel Timeo, the story reputedly based on an upper class English lady's dalliance with a Sicilian farmer amongst the olive groves.

But Taormina's attraction goes back further still – to the Sicilians who founded the town, and to the long line of conquerors who followed, from the Greeks to the Romans, and then the Normans, Spanish and French, all of whom reinforced its standing as an important centre of art and trade.

More recently, but of significance for visitors to Taormina Mare today, English civil engineer Robert Trehwella was also drawn to the town. Engaged by the Italian government to work on the construction of Italy's railways, he directed the building of the Circumetnea Line that skirts Mount Etna.

While in Sicily, Trehwella met and married an Englishwoman and built the beachfront Villa Sant'Andrea as their summer home. In the 1950s, Robert's son Alfred transformed the villa into a hotel. Orient-Express Hotels, later renamed Belmond, acquired Trehwella's beachside idyll in 2010.

## PEOPLE

### **Giovanni Nastasi, General Manager**

Tell us about yourself

"I was born in a small fishing village near Messina in Sicily. I studied law at Messina University and during the summer holidays I worked in hotels on the Aeolian Islands to pay off my student debts. But instead I fell in love with the job. I started out in a hotel on the island of Vulcano and I've worked in Sicily ever since. I joined Belmond Villa Sant'Andrea 15 years ago, and oversaw its recent refurbishment. I think it's brilliant how the hotel has been completely refreshed, yet has retained the atmosphere and charm of a private house. We're very proud of this, and the fact that the majority of our staff is Sicilian."

Best aspects of the job?

"I love to welcome guests with a glass of latte di mandorla (almond milk) and then chat to them during their stay. I learn about their culture while making them feel at home - it's an opportunity for me to travel while remaining in Taormina."

Your favourite part of the hotel?

"It's unusual to find a property at the water's edge with a large Mediterranean garden, so this is a key point for me. But I must admit that I'm addicted to the sea. We host everything from barbecues to romantic dinners for two out on the beach. And we can even arrange for you to dine with your loved one on a boat, surrounded by other boats with musicians – it's quite magical. You can understand why we have so many honeymooners staying here. Sicily is becoming a really hot destination for both Italians and for guests from further afield, and that makes me feel very proud. Sicily has everything, from incredible archeological sites to amazing food and wine."

Perfect day out?

"A trip to the Aeolian islands. My favourite is Salina. It's the wildest of all the islands, makes great wines and produces fabulous capers. It's also the location of one of my all-time favourite movies, *Il Postino*. Many of our guests are movie buffs, keen to visit film locations. Ragusa is a current favourite because of the TV show *Montalbano*. And *The Godfather*, of course, is always a big draw."

Insider tip?

“Get away from the pedestrian area in Taormina and get lost in the narrow tangle of streets that weave their way down to the sea. You’ll see Sicilian life unfolding – it’s very authentic.”

#### **Daniele Gulizia, Restaurant Manager**

“I have an elephant in my heart,” declares Daniele Gulizia, restaurant manager at Belmond Villa Sant’Andrea. This proud citizen of Catania explains: “The elephant is a symbol of my town and it’s a local saying - it means we never forget.” Gulizia urges visitors to Sicily to explore his city. “If you only do one thing in Catania, go to the fish market. It’s quite incredible, a feast for the eyes, the nose – every one of your senses,” he enthuses.

This is Gulizia’s second year as restaurant manager at the hotel. Before that, he was maître d’ at Belmond Grand Hotel Timeo, which followed five years working in London and a lifetime in the restaurant industry. “I love to make a difference,” he says. “Our guests’ time is precious and it’s up to us to make sure that they enjoy every minute. If I can contribute to that by advising them on the best dishes, with wines to match, I feel very happy.”

Does he have a favourite food and wine pairing? “I love our carpaccio of sea bass - it’s so light and fresh. Chef serves it with a simple apple, celery and asparagus salad. To match, I would choose an Etna white. This region is making the most exciting wine in Sicily right now. I might pick, say, Benanti’s Pietramarina - it’s made from 100% Carricante, which is grown only on Etna and has lovely citrus, floral and almond flavours. But my current favourite wine producer on Etna is Frank Cornelissen – he makes crazy, beautiful wines with rich, fragrant, ripe fruit. Though they’re not for everyone, you understand. I’m careful who I recommend these wines to,” he says, with a grin.

So what makes a great restaurant manager? “Well, obviously you need to know a lot about food and wine, and you have to greet each customer with a smile, but I’d say the most important attribute is listening to your customers. All too often in life we forget to listen to each other properly.”

## EXPERIENCES

#### **Visit to the Aeolian Islands**

With smouldering volcanoes, bubbling mud baths and steaming fumaroles, these tiny islands just north of Sicily are a truly hot destination, and a favourite Belmond Villa Sant’Andrea recommendation. Astonishingly beautiful and remarkably varied, the Aeolian archipelago’s seven islands, surrounded by uninhabited islets, are a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

From the spartan, conical Alicudi, where donkeys remain the main form of transport, to the international jet-set playground of Panarea, these Mediterranean gems are best viewed by boat. Guests can choose between a 15-metre sailing boat, boasting the latest technology and carbon sails and a plush, sleek, motorboat. Plus one can choose a craft offering the opportunity for an overnight stay.

Tours can be tailor-made to each guest’s requirements; highlights might include a visit to the Cavallo Grotto on Vulcano and relaxing hours on twin-peaked Salina for a sip of Malvasia wine, lunch at the beautiful Hotel Signum, a fig granita at the legendary gelateria, Alfredo’s, and a dip at Spaggia Pollara, the finest beach and the best spot to watch the sunset. There’s also an extra option to go whale and dolphin watching from the island.

A trip ashore the island of Stromboli is another must-do. Belmond Villa Sant’Andrea offers a three-hour trek to the summit to enjoy a memorable picnic supper at sunset, with jaw-dropping views over the fumaroles, followed by a magical overnight stay on board the boat.

#### **A tour of baroque Modica and Noto**

Like other towns in Sicily’s rugged Val di Noto, Modica was all but flattened during the earthquake of 1693. Like other towns in the area it was rebuilt in the flamboyant architectural style of the time, known as Sicilian Baroque. Belmond Villa Sant’Andrea offers a lively and informed tour of these two beautifully restored cities, which offer some of the best examples of the period.

Burnished a dusty gold in the late afternoon light, Modica can feel more like Africa than the Mediterranean, and yet it is uniquely Sicilian - enigmatic and even wild. The tour starts here, with an ascent of the sweeping staircase of the restored baroque Cathedral San Giorgio with its long-reaching views over the city. Afterwards, guests enjoy a stroll along the main shopping

street, following their noses as the aromas of Modica's famous chocolate, rich with vanilla and cinnamon, scent the air.

When chocolate was discovered in the New World in the 16th century it was brought to Sicily by the Spanish. But forget the northern European taste for a creamier style; this is made in the Aztec way - grainy with sugar, with a rich lingering finish.

The tour heads to Modica's most famous chocolate shop, the delightfully creaky Antica Dolceria Bonajuto. Here guests can see it being made, sample it, and even try their hand at making it, before buying a few bars to take home.

Afterwards they can stroll along Corso Vittorio Emanuele in Noto, approaching the cathedral up the wide, graceful flight of steps, as beautifully maintained as the town's many other fine baroque buildings.

There's an option to finish the day on the unspoiled beach at the Vendicari nature reserve, with a cooling dip in the azure waters. The surrounding salt marsh is a bird-lover's paradise, framed by a picturesque ruined castle.

### **Etna, from land to sky**

Mount Etna is the world's most active stratovolcano, so seeing it from the sky is a remarkable experience. Belmond Villa Sant'Andrea offers a unique tour in a single- or twin-engine plane that soars over the volcano and the town of Taormina on a flight that lasts for one thrilling hour.

Why is Mount Etna still so active, puffing smoke almost continuously? Because it's young in volcano terms, with an eruptive history dating back only 500,000 years. This has made the site a prime destination for researchers (and for thrill-seeking visitors) and why UNESCO has made it a World Heritage Site.

From their bird's eye view, guests can stare down into the ruptured skin of planet Earth, rimmed with black ash and swirling with gases, and play spot-the-volcanologist working away at the crater's edge.

They will also see other kinds of expert working away on the slopes – ones with green fingers. Etna might keep Sicilians awake at night with its regular pyrotechnics, but this mighty volcano has a giving side too. Thanks to its rich soils and plentiful snowmelt its flanks produce intense pistachios, aromatic honeys, and sweet, crunchy apples. Its jewel, though, is Etna's wine - elegant, minerally reds and taut, tangy whites.

Belmond Villa Sant'Andrea continues the tour of Mount Etna on four wheels, driving off the beaten track on the wild north side of Etna, to visit several food producers and notable winemakers.

Wines are so good here that sommeliers from around the world are beating a path to its cellar doors – attracted by the traditional wineries made of black lava stone that dot the landscape, and its trademark old bush vines heavy with a tough little indigenous red grape called Nerello Mascalese.

Included is a visit to the nearby craters of Sartorius, a result of the 1865 eruption, viewed after a peaceful two-hour trek through a beech forest, with far-reaching views across the Nebrodi Mountains and the Tyrrhenian Sea beyond.

## CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY & ENVIRONMENT

The teams of Belmond Grand Hotel Timeo and Belmond Villa Sant'Andrea have joined forces on a number of joint projects to support the local community and environment.

Every year the staff takes part in environmental days, for example joining schoolchildren on the Isola Bella Ecological Project. Together, they clean up the area surrounding the island near Belmond Villa Sant'Andrea, tidying the seabed and removing debris brought in by the winter storms.

The hotels also arrange activities to help guests understand Sicilian culture and the challenges it faces. For example, traditional ceramics are under threat as young people move away from family businesses into other industries. The hotel organised The Festival of Caltagirone Ceramics to show support for this local craft and its skilled practitioners. Ceramicists Marco

and Alessandro Iudici were invited to the hotel to explain the stories behind their creations, and to offer guests the opportunity to make their own ceramics.

There are also a number of energy and water saving measures in place, including energy-saving light bulbs fitted throughout both hotels, and new hot-water-on-demand and air-conditioning systems that have reduced exhaust gas emissions by 60%. Plus the installation of large rainwater collection tanks has resulted in a 30% reduction in water consumption. The water collected is mainly used to irrigate the gardens, to wash outdoor furniture and to clean terraces and balconies. Not forgetting the purchase of electric scooters, which staff at both hotels can use instead of cars for small jobs around town.

As part of its commitment to food sustainability, Belmond Grand Hotel Timeo has created a Chef's Garden packed with herbs, spices, fruits and vegetables to supply its kitchens. Belmond Villa Sant'Andrea has a small kitchen garden that children at its adjacent Smile Club can tend.

Both hotels are committed to sourcing local produce, with an emphasis on organic fruit and vegetables. The hotels' breakfast buffets showcase a wide range of local honeys, cheese, fruit, jam and bread made from Sicilian grains. Other regional produce includes olive oil, sustainably sourced Mediterranean fish and vegetables.

The hotels are restocking all paper supplies with environmentally friendly and recycled paper, and have installed recycling bins for waste of different types throughout the premises.