



BELMOND
GRAND HOTEL TIMEO
TAORMINA



PRESS KIT

Belmond Grand Hotel Timeo introduced by Fiona Sims

OVERVIEW

The small Sicilian town of Taormina has grown accustomed to hosting some of the biggest names in art, literature and film. Since the 18th century Goethe, Picasso, D.H. Lawrence and many more have come under its spell, seduced by its hilltop setting in the shadow of brooding Mount Etna, Europe's most active volcano.

At the heart of Taormina's mystique lies Belmond Grand Hotel Timeo, an elegant, classical villa built into the craggy cliffs next to the Greek Theatre, with stupendous views that have been charming and inspiring guests since 1873.

Belmond Grand Hotel Timeo offers 71 suites and bedrooms split between the main building and the adjacent Villa Flora. Most come with that amazing view - over the clustered terracotta rooftops of medieval Taormina, past the coves and headlands of the rugged coastline, and across to Mount Etna's violet slopes and puffing peak.

The gardens at Belmond Grand Hotel Timeo are something else. A lush, sub-tropical park dotted with palm trees that spreads over five acres, including a kitchen garden that supplies the hotel's restaurant.

The Restaurant offers a satisfying blend of Sicilian and Mediterranean cooking under executive chef Roberto Toro, making the most of local ingredients, such as Pachino cherry tomatoes, Bronte pistachios, Salina capers, Interdonato lemons and Mozia salt.

Before dinner, guests can enjoy an aperitivo on the famous Literary Terrace. Its view is one of the reasons why American playwright and author Truman Capote stayed at the hotel for two years. Couple that with an Etna Spritz made with local speciality drink, Amara Rossa, and the ultimate Taormina experience is complete.

If the leafy panorama stretching across and beyond the garden is not sufficient to induce peace and calm, then guests can head to the Wellness Centre for a signature massage. Called Sicilian Sensations, it features handmade soap made with the island's extra virgin olive oil, a lava ash exfoliation, a local pumice stone footbath and a massage with oils scented with orange flowers and almonds.

There is fun to be had for young folk, too, with plenty of family trips on offer, from an excursion out on the water with a Sicilian fisherman, who reveals the tricks of his trade, to swimming in the dramatic Alcantara Gorge at the foot of Mount Etna.

At sister hotel Belmond Villa Sant'Andrea, there's always the beach. Guests can take a short complimentary shuttle trip, or thrilling funicular ride, down the hill to Mazzarò Bay at

Taormina Mare to this 19th-century former private residence. With its mystical islets, coves and even personal cabanas, all the family will love its private stretch of pebbles.

HISTORY & BACKGROUND

It was back in 1863 when a Prussian baron first put Belmond Grand Hotel Timeo on the map with Europe's elite. Otto Geleng had travelled to Taormina to paint, renting a room from one Don Francesco La Floresta at his home, Timeo.

Named after the son of the Greek founder of Taormina, Timeo became a source of inspiration for Geleng, who recorded the breathtaking views from its rooms and terrace in a series of watercolours. His work created a stir back in Berlin and Paris and more artists followed. The house was developed into a smart hotel.

Taormina became part of the Grand Tour, the cultural rite of passage of wealthy young men and women travelling through Europe to soak up its antiquities and architecture. Luminaries such as Klimt, Klee and Wagner beat a path to Belmond Grand Hotel Timeo's door.

In 1920, D.H. Lawrence set up camp on the hotel's terrace to write *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, the erotic masterpiece that shocked the world. He was inspired, so the story goes, by an upper class Englishwoman's tales of seduction amongst the nearby olive groves. By the 1940s and 50s, the hotel's guest list read like a *Who's Who* of Hollywood, among them Cary Grant, Elizabeth Taylor, Audrey Hepburn and Sophia Loren.

After more than 100 years at the helm, the Floresta family sold to a local businessman who set about modernising and refurbishing the property, before selling it on to the Franza family of Messina, who continued to enhance its reputation.

In 2010, the Franzas sold both the hotel and its sister property, Villa Sant'Andrea, to Belmond (formerly Orient-Express Hotels).

FEATURES

From Grape to Glass – A guided tour of Etna's vineyards

Etna wine is highly sought after by a growing number of the world's top sommeliers and wine collectors. Why? Because the volcano's slopes offer extreme winemaking in a unique microclimate, producing thrilling wines made from indigenous grapes.

With its lunar landscapes and wildly unpredictable weather, Etna is a challenge for even the best winemakers. Nowhere else in Europe are the harvests this late, or at this elevation, with vines that average 100 years of age or more. Belmond Grand Hotel Timeo offers an exclusive tour through its vineyards and wineries so guests can discover what all the fuss is about.

The tour visits Planeta's newest estate on the slopes of the Mount Etna, Feudo di Mezzo, which opened in 2012. Planeta is one of the most forward-thinking producers in Sicily. It wins many awards and has long been a fan of Etna's characterful wines.

The winery itself is an impressive example of contemporary Sicilian architecture and blends harmoniously with the volcanic landscape, paying homage to the palmenti, the traditional wineries made of black lava stone.

Etna was actually the birthplace of wine in Sicily and formerly the island's biggest grape growing region. Nerello Mascalese is the big grape here, where it produces elegant, mineral reds. Of the whites, Carricante is the standard-bearer, with its taut, tangy fruit and lemon-zesty bite.

Belmond Grand Hotel Timeo can arrange exclusive tastings of these wines, and a stroll through the vineyards to reveal why grapes thrive here. The visits can also be coordinated with special events often held at the wineries, from art exhibitions to jazz concerts.

A morning with Chef Roberto Toro

Food is a key ingredient of travel, so Belmond Grand Hotel Timeo offers guests the opportunity to spend a morning with executive chef, Roberto Toro, to discover Sicily's produce and dishes hands-on, before lunch on the hotel's terrace.

Sicily has a rich culinary tradition that owes much to geography and history. Thanks to the tastes and techniques of past invaders and traders that include Ancient Greeks, Arabs, Normans and North Africans, Sicilian cuisine is one of the most exciting in the Mediterranean. Combine that with a sea teeming with fish and fertile land and the result is an extraordinary gastronomic repertoire.

The morning starts with a tour of the kitchen garden, when guests pick vegetables and herbs under the watchful eye of the hotel's gardener, before taking them back to the kitchen for a cookery class.

Other local produce is also introduced. Aubergines are a popular, elegant substitute for meat and can be given an additional punch from ingredients such as capers, raisins, herbs and garlic. Beans and pulses are big in Sicily, as are Mount Etna's Bronte pistachios and citrus fruits – Sicily grows most of Europe's blood oranges.

Among other foodie highlights are fish and seafood, especially tuna, swordfish, sardines, clams, anchovies and prawns. There is excellent spring lamb and pork from pigs raised in the nearby Madonie Mountains—also a source of ricotta, caciocavallo and other fine sheep cheeses.

Sweet and sour dishes rule in Sicily – caponata is a favourite (slow-cooked vegetables with olives, raisins and pine nuts). The Sicilians also claim to have invented ice cream, originally made from snow found year-round on Mount Etna.

The Arabs, meanwhile, influenced dishes such as Sicilian classic cassata, with its sweetened ricotta, almond paste and candied fruits. They undoubtedly had a hand in what is probably Sicily's most popular dish, pasta con sarde (pasta with sardines, wild fennel, raisins, saffron and pine nuts).

Dishes to try at the hotel include carnaroli rice with seafood, roast fillet of suckling pig with Marsala and fillet of tuna with a quinoa crust, zucchini and orange sauce. Not forgetting another hugely popular Sicilian dish, pasta alla Norma, made from aubergines, salted ricotta and tomatoes. It was named in honour of the opera Norma by Vincenzo Bellini, who was born in Catania.

Touring Sicily in a vintage Fiat 500

Combine the best of Sicily with one of Italy's most iconic cars in two spectacular driving tours. What is it about the Fiat 500 that makes everyone smile? The cult Italian car is not only cute beyond belief, but it also conjures up images of 1950s fun, sun and holidays. Most of all, the diminutive icon, which was manufactured in Turin between 1957 and 1975, epitomises the dolce vita. In fact, following the revival of the model in 2007, a luxurious version with that very moniker was created in 2010.

But as with so many things, the original is often the best, and the head-turning vintage Fiat 500 is the perfect vehicle in which to explore Sicily's most thrilling sights, from picturesque baroque towns to ancient Greek ruins, but also to head off the beaten track into Sicily's wild interior.

The themes of the tours, offered by both Belmond Grand Hotel Timeo and Belmond Villa Sant'Andrea, are the Mount Etna Wine Road and The Godfather Tour. The concierge will make all arrangements for guests, but they can also tailor the tours to their own interests. Both tours depart from Taormina and guests can choose to follow a tour leader car or guide themselves.

Guests can retrace Michael Corleone's steps while enjoying magnificent panoramas of the island. The tour includes a stop in Savoca where Bar Vitelli from the film is still serving drinks today. Guests also visit the church at Forza d'Agrò, which appears in the scene when Vito escapes to America hidden in a donkey.

PEOPLE

Stefano Gagnacorsi, General Manager

Tell us about yourself

I'm relatively new to Belmond, as I joined in 2014. I'm actually from Rome, although I was already familiar with Sicily as I used to come here for work and on holiday. It's so full of culture, and it has such good food and wine. It's more relaxed than Rome - Taormina feels like a small village in comparison.

What makes the hotel so special?

The walls of the hotel butt right up to the beautiful Greek-Roman theatre, one of Taormina's main attractions, which is very special. You really feel the history of the place staying here. The views are unchanged since it became a hotel in 1873. The terraced garden is incredible. It's filled with some very special plants and dotted with palm trees, and we have a beautiful vegetable garden for the kitchen – and you can see the sea from wherever you are. Another favourite spot is the bar and restaurant terrace – it overlooks the Bay of Naxos and the sunsets are unforgettable. You can see Mount Etna, too, in all its glory. Yes, it erupts every now and again but it never worries us – it's not that kind of volcano. Everyone gets a spectacular free light show.

Favourite part of your day?

When the bar is in full swing and everyone is sipping cocktails. I love the buzz. It's also the perfect place to enjoy an Etna Spritz. We make it with an ingredient that you can only find here on Etna, a drink called Amara Rossa (the name of the blood orange that grows here).

A perfect day off?

I love to explore the island. I'm particularly drawn to Ortigia, the historic centre of Siracusa, and the baroque towns of Noto and Ragusa. Whenever I can, I hike on Mount Etna – not right to the top, but around the slopes. Food is always part of my perfect day off - I'm a big fish eater and particularly enjoy tuna and swordfish, served simply grilled.

Favourite Sicilian dish?

Pasta alla Norma - sautéed aubergine tossed in a rich tomato sauce topped with a salty ricotta cheese. You can't beat it. I love Sicilian wine, too – especially from the Mount Etna area. I particularly love the wines from Cusumano, a family-run producer.

Share an insider thing to do here

I always recommend people to visit the fish market in Catania's beautiful city centre - it's quite something. There's a little restaurant here in Taormina called Malvasia run by a Sicilian family where the mother is in the kitchen and the rest of the family run front of house. They make great fresh pasta. Then I suggest a visit to a gelato shop for pistachio ice-cream. The pistachios are grown on the slopes of Mount Etna around a town called Bronte. I'm a regular visitor to a gelateria called Gelatomania on the main road into Taormina.

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 staff take 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 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 Ludici 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 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.

Belmond Grand Hotel Timeo is the first hotel in Taormina to have created its own compost system, producing compost that is used throughout its own gardens.