

Q & A: Italian Cooking School, Cook in Sicily

Written by Leslie K. Hughes



An idyllic escape from the constant rush of today's world, [Cook in Sicily](#) is a cooking school tucked away in the gorgeous rolling hills of Sicily. Here, you can learn the secrets of cooking traditional Sicilian cuisine, while fully embracing the relaxed Sicilian lifestyle full of breathtaking views, incredible food, tasty wine, swims at dusk and much more. Cook in Sicily takes you far beyond the food to the culture of Sicily and what makes this the perfect place to refresh your body, soul and mind. This Q&A with Cook in Sicily co-founder Tawney Hughes takes a deeper look at all Cook in Sicily has to offer.



Tell us a bit about the Cook in Sicily experience.

TH: Cook in Sicily is about sharing a piece of the true Sicilian countryside. We bring you into our villa 'San Giovanni Vecchio' and show you a glimpse of what it means to live, breathe, and eat like a Sicilian. We want it to feel like coming home -- to simpler times, to simpler food, and a simpler life.

A typical day at Cook in Sicily starts off with a slow morning, enjoying your coffee, tea, and breakfast on the terrace overlooking the rose garden and the olive orchard. We leave you to enjoy the mornings and afternoons as you please, perhaps hiking the hills above the villa for views of the Mediterranean, a swim in the pool, a trip to the beach, or the nearby Temple of Segesta. We begin cooking classes around 3 pm, which are a true family affair. We bring recipes from our ancestors, who inhabited this land several decades ago. We cook with only local, seasonal, and fresh produce, and we keep it simple. We want you to bring these recipes, these techniques, and this lifestyle back to your own corner of the globe. We want you to come get your taste of Sicily, to enjoy days filled with beautiful sites, delicious food, and long slow meals, with good conversation.

How did Cook in Sicily come to be? What was the "aha" moment when you realized you must share this beautiful place with other travelers?

TH: I had visited Sicily first when I was 20 years old and fell in love with the spirit of the people, the food, the land -- everything about Sicily had an air of magic. I kept going back, and visiting the Mollica family as often as possible. I realized that over every meal, I was picking up so many tips and tricks about cooking -- and learning so much about the family, the traditions, and the Sicilian history. The Sicilian way of life is intoxicating -- the scent, the people, the language -- it all envelopes you. From picking olives during the harvest, to wandering the orto and picking pomegranates, I wanted to share the pieces of Sicily that made me feel so connected to the land and the people.

It appears that you have worked to curate the perfect Italian cooking experience. Which part of the Cook in Sicily is your favorite? What would Paolo say is his favorite?

TH: As a westerner living and working in the Silicon Valley, my favorite part of Cook in Sicily is the immediate feeling of relief as soon as I step foot into the villa. It's impossible not to disconnect and marvel at your surroundings -- it's like hitting the 'reset' button in my life every time I visit.

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For Paolo, it's evident that his favorite part is sharing his home and his food with his guests (and practicing his near-perfect English!) Every recipe has a story, and every story reveals a hidden part of Sicily for those who are willing to hunt for the truffle mushrooms, forage for wild asparagus, pick olives from the trees, or crank the pasta maker for fresh ravioli.

Tell us about some of the surrounding areas that guests can enjoy in addition to the Cook in Sicily offerings?

TH: Sicily is one of the most diverse and historically significant places in Europe. It's an incredible blend of Africa, the Middle East, and Europe - incorporating influences of every culture in its cuisine, architecture, music, and values. For this reason, Sicily has something to offer every type of visitor. Cook in Sicily is located on the central Western part of the island, an hour's drive from the cultural capital of Palermo, thirty minutes to the Mediterranean and [Tyrrenian Seas](#), a stone's throw from the Greek temple of Segesta, and a short drive to the historic village of Calatafimi. Depending on your interests, the Mollica family can recommend the best parts of Sicily, from hiking, to beaches, to island snorkeling, to sailing, to culinary tours, to art museums and everything in between.

What do you hope guests will take away from the Cook in Sicily experience?

TH: We want our guests to be able to take back a piece of Sicily with them - and to embed some new traditions into their life from our beloved Mediterranean island. We want you to be able to cook every recipe we teach you back in your own home kitchen, no matter where you live. Our goal is to make Sicily more accessible to our guests through simple everyday actions. Perhaps you'll start baking your own homemade rustic bread each Sunday, impress your friends with pasta trapanese, or maybe you'll just fondly think of Sicily as you drizzle olive oil on your salad.

Would you say Cook in Sicily is an adventure people could experience multiple times and gain something new each time?

TH: Every time I visit Sicily, I get something so different and so rich. Each season brings with it a whole new menu of recipes to try, test, and experiment with, different places to explore, and different senses in the air. Because we're so focused on a seasonal experience, every time of the year features new recipes, with a different ingredient taking center stage.