



## 8 Things to See in Taormina, Sicily

### Porta Catania and Porta Messina

Taormina is arguably the most beautiful town in Sicily and has been nicknamed "The Pearl of the Ionian Sea". The city is perched high on Mount Tauro overlooking the Ionian Sea and feels like it belongs in a fairytale.

As you approach the town from the south, you will be greeted by Porta Catania. This is one of two city gates located on either end of Corso Umberto, the main thoroughfare through town.

Porta Catania was built into the city's fortification wall in 1440 allowing visitors access to the heart of Taormina.

Walking through the gate, it felt like we had been transported back in time. I couldn't get over just how charming the city is!

Even before entering the gate, there is a beautiful viewpoint from the top of the parking garage that you don't want to miss.

As you walk to the end of Corso Umberto, you will reach Porta Messina, the second city gate. This gate was built later in the 1800s and was originally named Porta Ferdinanda after Ferdinanda IV of Bourbon.

### Corso Umberto I

Corso Umberto is the main pedestrian-friendly promenade that runs through the heart of Taormina and features an eclectic mix of Greek, Roman, Spanish, French, and modern influences.

Corso Umberto traces its origins back to the medieval period when it was part of the ancient Valeria street that served as a vital road connecting Catania and Messina.

Today, the charming cobblestone street is lined with a vibrant mix of boutiques, local shops, cafes, and vendor carts. You'll find everything from a Prada store to mom-and-pop shops.

A few recommendations include Bottega d'Arte Carmelo Bongiovanni for handcrafted ceramics and pottery. La Piazzetta Market is great for local products, and Boutique Caira is known for its curated collection of Italian clothing and accessories.

## Piazza Duomo

As you walk along Corso Umberto, the first city square you'll visit is Piazza Duomo, also known as Cathedral Square. It is the home of Duomo di Taormina, or the Cathedral of Taormina, which was dedicated to St. Nicholas.

This medieval stone cathedral has undergone several renovations since it was first constructed around 1400 AD. The church is open for visitors who would like to step inside and admire the Romanesque-Gothic architecture.

While you are in the church, keep an eye out for the "non hand-made" Madonna. This oil painting decorated with silver and semi-precious stones was found hidden in a well to preserve it from pillagers during one of the many invasions.

Piazza Duomo is also where you'll find Fontana di Piazza Duomo, a Baroque fountain dating back to 1635. The fountain is made of Taormina marble and features a sculpted crowned centaur that stands as a symbol of Taormina.

## San Domenico Palace Hotel

The San Domenico Palace was once a Dominican monastery dating back to the early 1400s. In 1896, the monastery was transformed into a hotel and today it is a luxury Four Seasons resort.

The hotel boasts magnificent views and maintains a few original features like the cloister and gardens.

The San Domenico Palace is a favorite celebrity retreat and has hosted the likes of Oscar Wilde, Elizabeth Taylor, Madonna, and Audrey Hepburn, to name a few. It is also the filming location for the resort on HBO's *White Lotus*.

It will cost you a pretty penny to spend the night at the hotel, but the grounds are free to explore and you can also dine at one of the on-site restaurants.

## Piazza IX Aprile

Piazza IX Aprile is a bustling town square in the heart of Taormina. Over the centuries, it has hosted countless social gatherings and cultural events.

The picturesque town square has a terrace that overlooks the turquoise sea and is surrounded by cafes, shops, and chapels. It is the perfect spot to relax and take in the stunning views of the Ionian Sea and Mount Etna.

If you want a bite to eat, Restaurant Metropole offers breathtaking views from its outdoor patio.

The square was named for April 9, 1860, when it was falsely announced that Giuseppe Garibaldi had landed in Sicily to liberate the island during the unification of Italy. He actually arrived a month later, but it still marked a significant turning point in the history of Taormina.

Several historical landmarks also line the square, including the Baroque-style Church of San Giuseppe, which dates back to the 17th century. The Church of Varo can also be found here and was built in the late 18th century.

However, the oldest chapel that can be found at Piazza IX Aprile is the Church of Saint Augustine. It was built in 1448 and is now used as a public library.

One of the most prominent features of the square is the ancient clock tower known as Torre dell'Orologio. It was built in the 1100s and destroyed in 1676 during the French invasion. It was rebuilt again in 1679 and the bells still ring during special events in the city.

You'll also find Porta di Mezzo, a passageway by the clock tower that signifies the transition from the Greek-Roman part of town to the Medieval quarter.

## Tavola Calda

If you come to Sicily, you have to try authentic Sicilian food! Tavola Calda is a small corner shop adjacent to Piazza IX Aprile that sells pizza, cannolis, gelato, arancini, and other baked goods.

We ordered one of each to share and everything was delicious! My son claimed that it was the best pizza he's ever had.

We had never tried arancini, but it was so good that we ordered a second one. Arancini is an Italian rice ball stuffed with different fillings then coated with bread crumbs and deep fried. Our favorite was the cheesy rice and beans.

The Sicilian cannolis are also divine. The deep-fried crisp pastry shell is filled with cream that literally melts in your mouth! I would also recommend getting a scoop of gelato, the limoncello was our favorite.

The cafe offers walk-up ordering and then you can find a spot to sit and enjoy your meal at the piazza.

If you're looking for more places to eat along Corso Umberto, try Antica Dolceria dell'Etna. This renowned pastry shop offers a delectable array of Sicilian sweets, including cannolis, almond pastries, and gelato.

Ristorante La Griglia specializes in fresh seafood and Sicilian cuisine with a scenic terrace overlooking the town.

Al Saraceno offers dishes with a creative blend of Mediterranean and Sicilian flavors served in a warm and inviting ambiance.

Ristorante Al Giardino is a cozy eatery nestled in a picturesque garden setting that offers a seasonal menu featuring local ingredients.

## Hidden Alleyways

One of my favorite things about visiting Taormina is exploring all the hidden alleys and narrow passages.

Corso Umberto is often crowded, especially on days when cruise ships are at port. If you want to escape the crowds, venture off the main thoroughfare and explore the maze of alleyways full of intrigue and hidden gems.

You'll find alleys barely wide enough to walk through, and alleys with steps leading up to a hidden neighborhood of colorful villas.

You can even find a narrow alleyway that takes you to Vicolo Stretto, a delightful Sicilian restaurant with a rooftop terrace.

My favorite little alley is Vicolo Melivia which can be found on the left just past Piazza IX Aprile.

## Greek Theater or Taormina

Just before reaching the end of Corso Umberto and Porta Messina, take a right on Via Del Teatro Greco. This will take you to the Greek Theater of Taormina, a remarkably preserved amphitheater with breathtaking views of the Ionian Sea and Mount Etna.

These ancient ruins date back to the 3rd century BC and are the crowning jewel of Taormina. The theater was carved directly into the slope of Mount Tauro by the Greek settlers who founded the city of Taormina, then known as Tauromenion.

The theater was primarily used for theatrical performances, including plays, dramas, and musical productions. It also served as a venue for civic gatherings, religious ceremonies, and political discussions.

During the 600-year Roman occupation, the theater underwent multiple modifications and expansions until not much of the original Greek theater remains. It was transformed from a Greek theater, to a Roman theater, to a Gladiator arena.

It is a remarkable archaeological site to visit and imagine what it was like to be here thousands of years ago. However, I was equally impressed by the view from the top of the theater!

It's no wonder they chose this spot to construct the theater. The panoramic backdrop offers breathtaking views of the Ionian Sea, Mount Etna, and the surrounding village creating a dramatic and picturesque setting for performances.

If you climb the steps to the very top of the theater, you'll have views of the Ionian Coast on both sides of the peninsula. You can even spot Isola Bella, a tiny Island just off the coast that you can walk to at low tide.

From the top of the theater, continue to the right until you reach an observation deck. This is my favorite view in the entire city as it overlooks the sea and the terraced village of colorful buildings. It reminds me of Positano on the Amalfi Coast.

Today, the theater continues to host cultural events, including concerts, theatrical productions, and festivals. Tours of the theater are self-guided and admission is 14 euros. Click the link for [visitor information](#) and a calendar of events.