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Travel Sicily

## Sicily's secret south

The island's untamed southern coast may not be as pretty as its more famous beaches, but it has plenty to recommend it, not least a secluded uber-chic villa overlooking the Med

Lisa Allardice

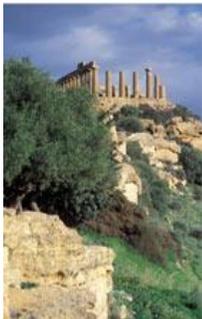
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To infinity, and beyond ... villa Casa d'Eraclea, south-west Sicily



Old as the hills ... the Valle Dei Templi ruins at Agrigento, Sicily.  
Photograph: Laura Ronchi/Getty Images

Eraclea Minoa is a strictly one-street, one-shop, two-trattorias type of town. Arriving on the late flight from Trapani, on the western tip of the island, it was hard to appreciate its sleepy charms. But it does boast one of best beaches in Sicily: a great sweep of forest-edged sand. It's very popular in August, apparently, but in September was almost deserted. Any fellow philistines who, ignoring the cultural pull of Italy's galleries and churches, have driven miles in desperate search of a beach – not a lido, as the Italians, tellingly, like to call it, but a scrap of sand unpolluted by rows of expensive sun-loungers adorned with beautiful-limbed Italians – will know what a rare and joyous find this is. And it's only a 10-minute, pine-scented walk from

the villa. Here, you could enjoy the sort of bucket-and-spade holiday I always thought was too unchic for Italians.

Eating options are limited – there's the Sabbia D'Oro or the Lido Garibaldi, serving, well, pizza or pasta, which might seem so-so to your homegrown Sicilian, but seemed pretty damn good to us. Sabbia D'Oro was the livelier and looked as if it did a brisk trade at the height of summer. You could bring young children without worrying, or have a

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summer. You could bring young children without worrying, or have a romantic (in an unscrubbed-up sort of way) supper for two looking out at the sea.

The hilltop village of Caltabellotta and its nearby caves are absolutely worth a visit – true Godfather territory. Climbing up to the remains of the medieval Norman castle provides views not only down on to the tangle of cobbled lanes of Caltabellotta but 21 other villages, apparently (we couldn't count that many). After an espresso in the square, we headed to the fishing port of Sciacca and spent a happy afternoon wandering its picturesquely dilapidated streets. Here, groups of old men topple over pasta bellies in raucous rounds of boules or sit silently in the shade intent on their cards; good-looking young men share gelatos in the sunshine; women of all ages and sizes gossip in doorways. (It's impossible to resist the cliché of the Mediterranean lifestyle – when I'm an old lady, please God, let me be a Sicilian one.)

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