ZERO TO TRAVEL

Top 7 Hidden Gem Towns in Italy with Katerina Ferrara

1 Scicli, Sicily

UNESCO Baroque town in southeastern Sicily, in the Val di Noto.

Why it matters

- Rebuilt after the 1693 earthquake in honey-colored Sicilian Baroque architecture.
- Still feels deeply local, very few international tourists.
- Known as one of the filming locations for the Italian TV series Inspector Montalbano.

What makes it special

- Feels like an open-air museum.
- Local market culture, cafés, churches, and daily life.
- Authentic Sicilian small-town atmosphere.

Sights mentioned

- Sant'Ignazio di Loyola
  - Mother church of Scicli.
  - Houses relics of St. William the Hermit.
- Palazzo Spadaro
  - Frescoes, period furnishings, art exhibitions.
- Church of San Matteo
  - Hilltop panoramic views.
  - Deep local story involving the town's identity.
- Church of San Bartolomeo
  - Famous nativity display.

Food / Experiences

- Testa di Turco pastry.
- Local cheese factory (caseificio experience):
  - Ricotta
  - Caciocavallo
  - Sheep and cow milk cheeses

Festival

- Festa della Madonna delle Milizie (last Saturday of May)
  - Medieval costumes
  - Drum groups
  - Warrior Madonna

  - Theatrical reenactment of Norman victory

Bonus angle

- Ferry from Pozzallo to Malta.

2 Noto, Sicily

The "capital of Sicilian Baroque."

Why it matters

- Entire city rebuilt after 1693 earthquake.
- Designed as an urban masterpiece.

Sights mentioned

- Porta Reale
- Noto Cathedral
- Palazzo Ducezio
- Palazzo Nicolaci
- Church of San Carlo Borromeo

Food highlights

Caffè Sicilia

- Almond granita
- Brioche
- Historic pastry café
- Corrado Assenza

Caffè Costanzo

- Cannoli
- Cassatina
- Pistachio gelato

Festival

- Infiorata di Noto (third weekend of May)
  - Flower carpets
  - Via Corrado Nicolaci
  - Themes change yearly

Experiences

- Sicilian cooking class (arancini)
- Pottery classes in Caltagirone

3 Trani, Puglia

Adriatic port city.

Why it matters

- Medieval port town.
- Pilgrim and Crusader history.
- Beautiful waterfront without crowds.

Sights mentioned

- Cathedral of San Nicola Pellegrino
- Castello Svevo
- Harbor promenade

Food / Drink

Bar Europa

- Breakfast and coffee

Stay

San Paolo al Convento

Experiences

- Sailing excursion from harbor
- Olive oil tastings

Festival

- San Nicola Pellegrino festival (late July / early August)

4 Castelli Romani, Lazio

Volcanic hill towns outside Rome.

Castel Gandolfo

- Papal summer residence
- Views over Lake Albano

Sights

- Papal Palace and Gardens
- Piazza della Libertà
- Church of San Tommaso da Villanova

Festival

- Peach Festival (July)

Ariccia

Food town.

Sights

- Piazza di Corte
- Palazzo Chigi

Food

- Porchetta
- Fraschette taverns

Festival

- Sagra della Porchetta (September)

Nemi

Strawberry town overlooking crater lake.

Highlights

- Lake overlook
- Roman history tied to Emperor Caligula

Festival

- Strawberry Festival (June)

5 Treviso, Veneto

Often called "Little Venice."

Why it matters

- Canals
- Medieval walls
- Local food culture

Sights

- Piazza dei Signori
- Buranelli Canal
- Church of San Nicolò

Food

- Birthplace of Tiramisù

Festival

- Festa di San Liberale (April 27)

Experiences

- Prosecco Hills Tour

6 Sirmione, Lake Garda (Lombardy)

Why it matters

- Roman ruins + medieval castle + lake ferries

Sights

- Scaliger Castle
- Grotte di Catullo
- Historic center at dawn

Ferry towns mentioned

- Desenzano del Garda
- Lazise
- Bardolino
- Malcesine
- Riva del Garda

Festival

- Palio delle Bisse del Garda

Stay

Hotel Sirmione

7 Spoleto, Umbria

Why it matters

- One of Umbria's most overlooked towns.
- Roman + medieval + Renaissance layers.

Food stop

Pasticceria Tebro

- Famous maritozzo with cream + custard

Sights

- Spoleto Cathedral
- Rocca Albornoziana
- Ponte delle Torri
- Roman theater

Restaurant

Il Tempio del Gusto

- Strangozzi alla Spoletina