

**EPIC FERRY HOPPING: AEOLIAN ISLANDS**  
**STARTING POINT: NAPLES**  
**FINISH: NAPLES**

A beautiful, almost effortless journey across the southern Mediterranean, with wonderful vistas, great food, pleasant beaches, and yes, a volcano that hasn't stopped erupting for over 2000 years. The internet is full of travellers' stories about climbing Mount Stromboli and hopping across the seven islands of this archipelago just off the northern coast of Sicily, so there really is no need to go into too much detail here. But allow me to highlight an excellent article in The Guardian, back when the paper still had a decent travel section. The write-up is from 2008, but still captures all the key facts. The link is: <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2008/mar/30/italy.europe>



The islands are best avoided during the peak summer season, when Italy's rich, beautiful and (maybe even) famous tend to do their strut. But out of season, and in particular when looking for a dose of winter sun, the place can be magical. You might want to start your journey in Naples on the Italian mainland (with an international airport, as well as plenty of ferry, rail, and bus connections). There is a wonderful overnight journey offered by the ferry company Siremar ([www.siremar.it](http://www.siremar.it)), which leaves Naples at 20.00 and arrives at the islands early in the morning. You might want to get off at the southern port of Lipari (at 10.25), as it allows you to stay in bed just that little bit longer and have breakfast on board, while the beautiful maritime scenery unfolds in front of you.



Lipari

Lipari could be your base for the next couple of days. You can hire a scooter and tour around the island, which should take up a couple of hours. The town of the same name is the only sizeable settlement on the islands and has convenient ferry links (check [www.directferries.co.uk](http://www.directferries.co.uk)) to remote Alicudi and Filicudi, both of which form the western fringe of the archipelago with only a limited tourist infrastructure. Lipari is also handy for a short hop over to Vulcano and its stinky delights (you do tend to smell of sulphur for days on end after bathing in the mud puddles).



Salina

Your next base could be Salina; the lushest of the islands and famous as the location for the film 'Il Postino', and another stop where a motor scooter tour would be worthwhile. Another short hop from Salina will take you to Panarea, where you can mingle with a surprisingly large number of posers, frolicking on its small beach and straddling expensive yachts in a conspicuous yet often strangely vacuous display of excessive wealth; But I shouldn't be too facetious. After all, I have some wonderful memories of time spent on Panarea: my honeymoon. Back when Bill Clinton was still in power, my clever, soon-to-be wife, contacted a little known hotel and asked whether we could spend a couple of nights there. The hotel declined stating that they were still closed for pre-season preparations, but when they heard about the reason for her inquiry, they rolled out the red carpet, quite literally. We were the only guests and the cook bashfully asked us whether he could try out some new recipes on us. I have never eaten so well. Today, Hotel Raya is the place to be on these islands, but the lack of crowds and an unpretentious atmosphere that we encountered on that magical occasion are just like my honeymoon: a distant memory.



Stromboli

Your final stop is Stromboli. Given the frequent eruption of the volcano, you most likely have caught a glimpse of it already. There is a reason, why it is called ‘the lighthouse of the Med’. You can scale the volcano on organised hiking treks, which last around 4 hours (for experienced hikers the mountain is but a hill at a height of 924 metres), and leave mid to late afternoon (You might want to take a look at [www.magmatrek.it](http://www.magmatrek.it) which not only provides guides, but also gear such as trekking boots or flashlights).

You can make your way back to the Italian mainland by using yet another Siremar night ferry, leaving Stromboli at 20.30 and arriving in Naples at 8.00. Alternatively, you can also travel onward to Sicily and its port in Milazzo in case you would like to explore that island too. From Lipari, the crossing takes a mere hour and leaves several times (with Siremar, but also on Liberty Lines). In this case, on your journey down from Naples, you might want to get off at Stromboli and do the tour in reverse, with Lipari as your last stop.



Panarea

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