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► **Details** Seven nights' B&B at the Mezzatorre from £1,760pp, including flights, transfers and ferry (expressionsholidays.co.uk)

## 4 Panarea

The phrase *dolce far niente* — sweet idleness — might have been invented for Panarea: there is nothing to do here but indulge yourself. Where once the jet set headed for Capri, they now get their skippers to set a course north of Sicily for this, the smallest of the Aeolian Islands. Exclusive, and expensive, it has transformed itself from a hardscrabble fishing outpost into high-end party central. Eat at the Hotel Raya, where, if you haven't parked your yacht in the port, you can also stay in spartan elegance.

**Details** B&B doubles from £130 (hotelraya.it). Fly to Palermo then take the hydrofoil from Milazzo

## 5 Monte Isola

Italy's islands aren't all sand between the toes. Low-key Monte Isola, at the south end of Lago d'Iseo, is Europe's largest lake isle — and a feast for epicureans. Follow the Strada del Vino Franciacorta to sample the nation's finest sparkling wine, eat stuffed lake trout by the water at La Foresta, then hike the trail up from Cure to the shrine of Madonna della Ceriola, at 1,969ft the island's highest spot. Monte Isola's raw charm is a world away from overcrowded Como and Bellagio. Stay at the family-run Hotel Rosa for top-notch home cooking.

**Details** Three nights' B&B from £489pp, including flights (ingham.co.uk)

## 6 Ponza

Escapees from Rome have sought sanctuary in the Pontines for centuries — even Odysseus stopped off on his way home from Troy. Now it's stuck somewhere in the 1970s — and who's complaining? Low on glitz and high on charm, the buzzy port is stacked with ice-cream-bright houses. Hire a boat and head for the restaurant-with-beach Da Enzo al Frontone — perfect for lazy days and exceptional fritto misto. For the full Roman blowout, rent Casa Fontana, the island's most stylish villa.

**Details** Seven nights' self-catering for eight from £6,500 (bellinitravel.com). Fly to Rome or Naples then take the ferry

## 7 Pantelleria

With its rough, sun-bleached landscape and black lava cliffs, Sicily's largest satellite, just 40 miles off the coast of Tunisia, feels like another planet — albeit one whose summer inhabitants include Giorgio Armani. But that's the appeal: everything about this volcanic island is beautiful and strange, including the rough-hewn stone *dammusi* houses converted by two big-city escapees into the elegant Parco dei Sesi resort, in the wilds of the archaeological park. The island produces one of the finest dessert wines in Italy too: Donnafugata's Ben Ryé Passito.

**Details** B&B doubles from £112 (parcodeisesi.com). Fly to Trapani then take the hydrofoil

## 12 Caprera in the Maddalena archipelago



## 8 Lipari

If boisterous bambini are your priority, try a week on Lipari. The largest of the Aeolians has pristine black-sand beaches edging shallow coves (try Acquacalda for its warm springs), cycle trails through forests to volcanic craters (get ebikes from Bike Rental Lipari), endless options for watersports, and a fairytale castello, complete with archaeological museum. Lava-lovers can take the boat to Stromboli for guided sunset hikes up this active volcano. Stay at the friendly Mea Lipari hotel, with its two pools and bumper breakfasts.

**Details** Seven nights' B&B from £1,099pp, including flights, transfers and ferry (italia.com)

## 9 Torcello

The Byzantine beauty of the Basilica di Santa Maria Assunta is just one reason

to decamp to sleepy Torcello — the most magical of the 118 islands that make up the floating city of Venice — and stay put. Pay your £2.50 entry to help restore the marvellous mosaics within. Then book into one of the five bedrooms at Ernest Hemingway's favourite, Locanda Cipriani, owned by the Harry's Bar family since 1934. Dine on *sarde saor* — sardines with raisins and pine nuts — under a pergola of vines.

**Details** B&B doubles from £120 (locandacipriani.com). Fly to Venice then take the vaporetto

## 10 Marettimo

The five spiky Egadis off the western coast of Sicily guard their privacy fiercely. But that doesn't mean you won't get the warmest welcome on off-the-beaten-track Marettimo — winter population, 150; total number of hotels, one — where steep hiking trails weave through pine woods in the mountainous interior. What to do here? Nothing — heaven for the high-speed Palermitani who make up the majority of visitors. La Scaletta, a quirky bar-gelateria, serves the catch of the day for dinner; Marettimo Residence has sweet apartments.

## 11 Portoferraio on Elba



**Details** Seven nights' self-catering for two from £311 (marettimoresidence.it). Fly to Trapani, then take the hydrofoil

## 11 Elba

It's Tuscany, chaps, but not as we know it. Elba is famed as Napoleon's first island prison — though, unlike most visitors, he spent nine months trying to escape — but this lush, green island is now a favourite weekend spot for

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San Giulio Island in Lake Orta