

FREE DOWNLOAD

Buying a House in Sicily: The Checklist

The practical checklist from someone who bought an abandoned villa in Sicily

The villa near Mazara del Vallo when I found it

I bought an abandoned villa in western Sicily for €21,500, and I learned most of this the hard way. This is the checklist I wish I had printed before my first viewing: every stage from setting the budget to collecting the keys, with the questions to ask and the documents to ask for.

By Jonathan Smith, Operation Sicily®

HOW TO USE IT

Tick each point as you go. Print a copy for every house you view, and fill in the cost worksheet before you make an offer.

1 Before you start looking

The price is one line of the budget. Getting the plan clear first saves months of looking at the wrong houses.

- [ ] Set a total budget: purchase price, buying costs, works, travel and running costs, not just the asking price.
- [ ] Allow for buying costs on top of the price: they typically add 10 to 15%.
- [ ] Add a contingency of 10 to 20% to any renovation budget, plus somewhere to stay while the work is done.
- [ ] Decide what you want: a project or a house ready to live in, remote or close to a town, for your own use or to rent out.
- [ ] Get your codice fiscale early, and keep the official certificate with your passport. Do not rely on online number generators.
- [ ] If your money is not in euros, plan how and when you will exchange it: a 5% move on €150,000 is €7,500.
- [ ] Remember that owning a house and the right to live in Italy are separate questions. Check the visa side if you plan to stay long term.

FROM MY OWN PURCHASE

The purchase was the starting point of Operation Sicily, not the whole budget. Tool transport, vehicle hire and moving materials added thousands I had not seen coming.

2 Searching and choosing an agent

The same house is often listed by several agents at once, sometimes at different prices.

- [ ] Search Idealista and Immobiliare.it, and talk to local agents in the area you want: some houses never reach the portals.
- [ ] Ask each agent for their Camera di Commercio registration number before you work with them.
- [ ] Agree the agent's commission in writing before you view. In Italy the buyer usually pays the agent too.
- [ ] Treat pressure to decide quickly as a warning sign, and so is any agent who discourages independent checks.
- [ ] Keep the original Italian wording of every listing and message alongside any translation.



The day I first opened the gates



The dining room, exactly as it was left

3 At the viewing

Visit before you commit, ideally in more than one season. Look beyond the house to the road, the services and the winter.

- [ ] How long has the house been empty, and who exactly is selling it? Are there several owners or heirs?
- [ ] Is the access road public, or a registered right of way? A track across a neighbour's land without one is a serious problem.
- [ ] Are mains water and electricity connected, and legally? If there is a well or cistern, what is its status?
- [ ] Were any rooms or outbuildings added later? When, and with a permit or under a building amnesty?
- [ ] Where are the boundaries, and do the fences follow them?
- [ ] Look closely at the roof, damp, cracks and lintels, and photograph everything.
- [ ] Check the drive to shops, a hospital and the airport, the mobile signal and the internet.
- [ ] Take the printable checklist with you and write your notes on it for each house.

4 Documents to ask for before any offer

A registered agent should be able to provide or obtain these. Missing paperwork is a reason to ask more questions.

- [ ] The cadastral plan (planimetria catastale) and the land registry extract (visura).
- [ ] The energy performance certificate (APE).
- [ ] The building amnesty certificate (condono), where one applies.
- [ ] The planning history held by the comune.
- [ ] Recent utility bills and the property tax statements.
- [ ] Proof of title, and the names of everyone who owns a share.

> **FROM MY OWN PURCHASE**
>
> Buying without a pre-purchase survey by your own technician is one of the most consistently expensive mistakes buyers make. A seller who genuinely wants to sell will wait a week for it.

5 The professional checks

The notary and your technician do different jobs. Neither replaces the other.

- [ ] Appoint your own technician (a geometra, and an architect or engineer where needed) and ask for written findings.
- [ ] Have them compare the building with the cadastral and comune records, including extensions and boundaries.
- [ ] Check the amnesty position: the national amnesties were in 1985, 1994 and 2003, and there is no current one.
- [ ] Confirm the work you plan is actually possible, before you buy rather than after.
- [ ] Choose the notary yourself, early, and check their registration with the Consiglio Nazionale del Notariato.
- [ ] Ask the notary about title, the seller's authority to sell, mortgages and other charges.
- [ ] Consider your own lawyer as well for inheritance, an unusual history or a large sum: the notary is neutral.

6 The offer and the compromesso

An accepted written proposal can already be binding. Take advice before you sign or pay anything.

- [ ] Make any check, mortgage or approval still outstanding a written condition of the offer, with its deadline.
- [ ] Know that the compromesso is legally binding: walk away without contractual cause and you lose the deposit, typically 10 to 20% of the price.
- [ ] Read the whole agreement with your own adviser and a proper translation, not a machine one.
- [ ] Check the property description, the completion date, what the deposit is called and what each side must still do.
- [ ] If money is paid well before completion, ask about having the agreement authenticated and transcribed in the land register.
- [ ] Keep a signed copy, and a record of every payment.

7 Completion at the notary (the rogito)

A straightforward purchase typically takes two to four months from offer to completion; inheritance or planning problems can stretch it to a year.

- [ ] Tell the notary early if you cannot follow legal Italian, and agree a bilingual deed or an interpreter before the date is booked.
- [ ] Ask the notary for the full calculation of taxes and fees for your purchase, and how the price will be paid.
- [ ] Confirm when possession and the keys pass to you.
- [ ] Leave with the registered copy of the deed and receipts for everything you paid.

8 After you buy

If you bought a project, the order of the work matters as much as the budget.

- [ ] Transfer or connect the utilities, and register for the waste tax (TARI).
- [ ] Diary the annual municipal property tax (IMU) if the house is a second home.
- [ ] Brief your technician on the works and start the permit process early.
- [ ] Work in the right order: paperwork and permits, then structure and weatherproofing, then services, then finishes.
- [ ] Keep every document, permit and receipt together in one place.

> **FROM MY OWN PURCHASE**
>
> Look beyond the house. The route in, winter access and the distance to shops and professionals shape daily life far more than the view from the terrace.

What will it really cost?

Purchase price	€
Buying costs (typically 10 to 15% on top)	€
Agent's commission	€
Technician's survey and reports	€
Translation and interpreting	€
Renovation works	€
Contingency (10 to 20% of the works)	€
Travel and somewhere to stay during the works	€
First year of running costs	€
Total for the whole project	**€**

Watch what happens next

Every week I film the renovation as it happens, the setbacks included. Over 73,000 people follow along.

▶ youtube.com/@OperationSicily

General information from my own purchase and guides, not legal or financial advice. Check every point for your own property with your notary, technician and lawyer. More guides, free tools and the weekly renovation videos: operationsicily.com

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