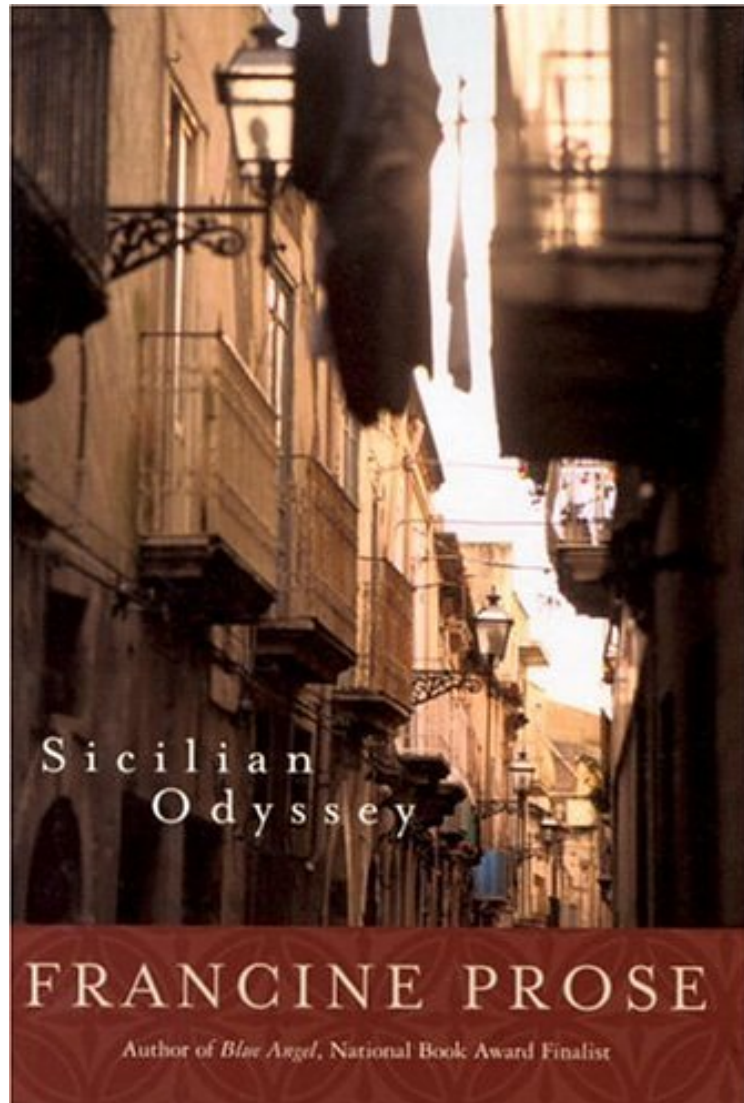


(Download free ebook) Sicilian Odyssey (National Geographic Directions)

Sicilian Odyssey (National Geographic Directions)

Francine Prose

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Francine Prose : Sicilian Odyssey (National Geographic Directions) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Sicilian Odyssey (National Geographic Directions):

16 of 18 people found the following review helpful. A concise and insightful view of Sicily By Stephen O. Murray
Novelist Francine Prose's slim but not slight book is filled with insights and evocative appreciation of the often-invaded island of Sicily and its hybrid art and cuisine. Her book provides a good introduction to Sicily, and also provides many interesting reflections for those who have visited the island and are familiar with the literature about it. Sicilian Odyssey lacks the familiarity based on long-time residence underlying Peter Robb's involuted and near-

despairing *Midnight in Sicily*, Daphne Phelps's *The Most Beautiful House in Sicily*, or Mary Taylor Simeti's *On Persephone's Island*. Prose's travel book is, however, much better informed than Lawrence Durrell's entertaining *Sicilian Carousel*, but there are not any characters as vivid in Prose's book as some of those in the other books I've mentioned. I think that Prose's book is a useful introduction to Sicily that also contains much of interest to those with previous experience of Sicily and the writings about it in English. She writes acutely about food (rightly summing up that "if freshness [of ingredients] is the hallmark of Sicilian cuisine, subtlety is not") and art and architecture, with insightful bits of appreciation of Sicilian writers and photographers and of what Caravaggio did while on Sicily. Also, her photographs (reproduced in black-and-white) are sharp and well illustrate some of the points in her text. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A good introduction to Sicily By John Keahey A good overview to the good and the not-so-good on this magnificent island. Sicilians are different in many ways from Italians. Prose hints at that in this brief examination of the people and their culture. 0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. save your time By John Mcalpine She must have written this in the middle of a torrid love affair, as the 4 can be no other excuse to send such a disjointed product to be published,

A blending of art and cultural criticism, travel writing, and personal narrative, *Sicilian Odyssey* is Francine Prose's imaginative consideration of the diverse cultural legacies found juxtaposed and entangled on the Mediterranean island of Sicily. She writes of the intensity of Sicily, the "commitment to the extreme," where the history is more colorful, the sun hotter, the cooking earthier, the violence more horrific, the carnival more raucous, the politics more Byzantine than other places on Earth, and how much the island can teach us about the triumph of beauty over violence and life over death. Prose examines architectural sites and objects and looks at the ways in which myth and actuality converge. Exploring the intact and beautiful Greek amphitheaters at Siracusa and Taormina, the cathedral at Monreale, the Roman mosaics at Piazza Armerina, and some of the masterpieces of the Baroque scattered throughout the island, Prose focuses her keen insight to imagine them in their own time, to examine the evolution and decline of the cultures that produced them, and to deconstruct powerful responses each evokes in her. Illuminated by the author's own photographs, *Sicilian Odyssey* brings exotic and enigmatic Sicily to life through the prism of its past.

.com Francine Prose might well find herself on one of those lists of oddly appropriate congruency between name and occupation. Indeed the prolific writer has demonstrated an enviable versatility in her witty fictional works and journalistic forays. Yet at her best, her voice is far from prosaic, conveying the distilled, sympathetic wisdom of the unfaltering observer. That characteristic pervades her treasureably evocative, literary travel memoir *Sicilian Odyssey*--part of the ongoing National Geographic Directions Series. A few months after the trauma of 9-11, Prose embarked with her husband on a trip to Sicily "partly to discover what this island has learned and can teach us about the triumph of beauty over violence, of life over death." She colorfully invokes the profuse legends and myths linked with Sicily (Homer's "Island of the Sun" where Odysseus washed ashore) as a classical backdrop to her own odyssey, which at times in fact assumes the character of a trip back to a timeless, pre-modern way of life. Prose is especially effective at threading into her narrative fascinating items of reference--artistic, historical, and sociopolitical--without appearing didactic. She packs an extraordinary amount of information into her account: art historical observations (including a trenchant interpretation of Caravaggio's disturbing "The Burial of St. Lucy"), the spectacle of religious ecstasies, accounts of culinary traditions, political intrigue, and memorable character sketches of people engaged in everyday habits, with the novelist's touch for the telling detail. Throughout, Prose is keen to capture Sicily's vacillating moods--its cheerful colors as well as its melancholy strain--as a place that "has seen countless cycles of violence and peace, of poverty and prosperity, of horror and beauty"--and yet embodies humanity's will to survive. As the ultimate travel guide, her prose conveys the sights, sounds, smells, and sense of the place with vicarious finesse. --Thomas May From Publishers Weekly If asked to pick the "one quality that seems dependable, immutable, endlessly available" in Sicily, novelist and essayist Prose would choose intensity. It is difficult, she admits, to resist the superlative when describing such a place--an inclination that often gets the better of her as she recounts her month-long sojourn on the island. Thankfully, her descriptive excesses are eclipsed by the overall strength of this absorbing travelogue, which melds observation, anecdote, history and myth--the last a subject that formed the framework of Prose's previous work, *The Lives of the Muses*. The author and her companion traveled to Sicily in February 2002, partly to experience its pleasures but also, as a *New Yorker* in the wake of the September 11 attacks, "to discover what this island has learned and can teach us about the triumph of beauty over violence, of life over death." Prose's fatalism is well suited to an island that has lived with death--at the hands of foreign invasions and internal brutality--for centuries without forgetting how to celebrate life. Driving through Sicily, Prose explores both its beauty and ugliness; facing the grief that so often underlies Sicilian gaiety allows her to come to terms with her newly fragile world. This process enriches Prose's varied, engaging musings on subjects ranging from the simple wonders of Sicilian cooking to the craziness of *Carnivale* in a culture that can party with the best of them. Her slim but dense volume is a perfect traveling companion for those planning to visit Sicily and an excellent surrogate for those staying at home. Bw photos by author. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist Prose is so taken with Sicily, the beauty of its landscapes and art,

the complexities of its mythology and history, the earthiness of its food, the intensity of its people, she thinks this "singular island" is where she "would love to be reborn--preferably as a big, handsome, life-loving, prosperous Sicilian guy." This empathic fancy is indicative of her receptivity to the spirit of this ancient land. A penetrating and quick-witted novelist and critic, Prose proves to be an agile, philosophical, and entrancing travel writer as she explores the narrow streets of medieval mountaintop towns, mosaic-adorned churches, and the noisy streets of Palermo and embarks on an equally compelling inner journey as she contemplates the waves of violence and destruction that have assailed this legendary place and the surges in creativity and life-affirming celebration that counter them. Cogent and provocative observations of architecture, paintings, and carnivals, as well as thoughtful assessments of Sicilian literature and the valiant work of contemporary photographer Letizia Battaglia, all revolve around Prose's fascination with the interleaving of the past and present and the "essence" of Sicilian life, the ability "to transmute the horrors of history into something extraordinary and profoundly alive." Donna Seaman Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved