



# **7 Things No One Tells You Before Buying a House in Sicily**

A practical guide for foreign buyers.  
No fluff. Just what you need to know.

From the team at Italian Dolce Vita

Property consultancy and relocation for foreign buyers in Sicily

[italiandolcevita.com](https://italiandolcevita.com)

# What You Think It Costs vs. What It Actually Costs

The price on the listing is just the beginning. Here's what most buyers don't budget for:

Cost Item	Typical Range	On a 200k property
Registration Tax (Imposta di Registro)	9% of cadastral value	4,500 - 9,000
Notary fees	1.5% - 2.5%	2,500 - 4,500
Agency commission (buyer side)	3% + VAT	7,320
Sworn interpreter at deed	Required by law	300 - 600*
Technical due diligence (geometra)	Highly recommended	800 - 2,500
Cadastral + mortgage reg. taxes	Fixed fees	100
<b>TOTAL ADDITIONAL COSTS</b>	<b>8% - 12% of price</b>	<b>15,500 - 24,000</b>

\*Interpreter presence at the deed only; document translation costs are additional. All amounts in euros. Registration tax calculated on cadastral value (typically lower than market price). First-home buyers may qualify for reduced rates (2% instead of 9%) under specific conditions.

Most buyers discover these costs after they've already fallen in love with a property. By then, it's hard to walk away - even if the numbers don't add up.



# 7 Things No One Tells You

## 1. Nearly half of Sicilian homes have building irregularities

According to ISTAT/CRESME data, Sicily has approximately 48 unauthorised buildings for every 100 legal ones - one of the highest rates in Italy. These aren't just rural shacks: they include enclosed balconies, converted garages, and undeclared extensions in otherwise normal-looking properties.

If you buy a property with unresolved building violations, you inherit the problem - including potential demolition orders. The notary deed can be voided entirely.

## 2. The cadastral map must match reality - or the sale is invalid

Italian law requires that the floorplan registered at the Land Registry (catasto) matches the actual property. If someone added a bathroom or moved a wall without updating the records, the notary can refuse to complete the sale.

Updating cadastral records costs 500-1,500 euros and takes weeks. Discover this the day before your planned signing, and your entire timeline collapses.

## 3. You need a sworn interpreter at the deed - and you pay for it

If you don't speak Italian, the notary is legally required to have a sworn interpreter present (Legge Notarile, art. 54). The interpreter must be officially registered with the court. The notary arranges this, but the cost falls on the buyer.

In rural areas, finding a qualified court-registered interpreter on short notice can delay the signing. Plan ahead.

## 4. You're liable for the previous owner's unpaid condo fees

Under Italian law, the buyer is jointly responsible for unpaid condominium fees from the current year and the year before. This applies even if you had no idea the seller was behind on payments.

Without a certificate of good standing from the building administrator before signing, you could inherit thousands in debt - with no recourse against the seller.



## 5. Rural properties often have hidden access rights (servitu)

Servitu di passaggio (rights of way) are common in Sicily's countryside. Your neighbour might have the legal right to cross your land to reach their property. In some areas, ancient 'usi civici' (collective use rights) still apply, allowing locals to use land for traditional purposes.

These rights are registered at the Conservatoria dei Registri Immobiliari - but many buyers never check. The dream farmhouse with the private olive grove may not be as private as it looks.

## 6. Getting planning permission in Sicily takes 3-6 months (if you're lucky)

If you're planning to renovate, you'll need either a SCIA (simpler works) or a full Permesso di Costruire (structural changes). Response times vary wildly by municipality. In some small Sicilian towns, the technical office is open only two mornings per week.

Buyers who budget three months between purchase and renovation start often discover they're still waiting for paperwork at month six. Meanwhile, the house sits empty and the carrying costs pile up.

## 7. The 'Energy Certificate' isn't just paperwork - it affects resale value

Every property sold in Italy must have an APE (Attestato di Prestazione Energetica). Class G - the lowest - means the building consumes over 160 kWh per square metre per year. Most older Sicilian properties without recent upgrades fall into this category.

EU energy efficiency regulations are evolving (Direttiva Casa Green / EPBD recast). A Class G property today may face additional requirements in the coming years - something worth factoring into your long-term planning and purchase price negotiations.

These aren't edge cases. They're the standard reality of buying property in Sicily. The question isn't whether you'll encounter some of them - it's how prepared you'll be when you do.



# The Real Timeline

Most buyers expect to find a house and complete the purchase in 2-3 months. Here's what actually happens:

Phase	What happens	Realistic time
Pre-requisites	Italian tax code + bank account	1-4 weeks
Search	Finding properties, visits, shortlisting	1-4 months
Offer to Preliminary	Negotiation, due diligence, compromesso	2-6 weeks
Preliminary to Deed	Final checks, mortgage (if any), notary prep	4-12 weeks
<b>Total (no renovation)</b>	Search to keys	<b>3-7 months</b>

## If you're planning to renovate:

Planning permits	SCIA or Permesso di Costruire	1-6 months
Renovation works	Depends on scope	6-18 months
<b>Total with renovation</b>	Search to move-in ready	<b>12-30 months</b>

The biggest delays come from things you can't control: slow municipal offices, documents that need to be corrected, contractors with full schedules. Buyers who plan for the realistic timeline avoid the stress of missed deadlines and rushed decisions.



# 10 Questions to Ask Before Making an Offer

Before you commit to any property, make sure you can answer these:

1. Does the cadastral floor plan match the actual property?
2. Are there any building violations (abusi edilizi) - even minor ones?
3. Is the property free of rights of way (servitu) and collective use rights (usi civici)?
4. What is the energy class (APE), and what would it cost to improve it?
5. Are there any outstanding condominium fees or special assessments?
6. Who will be responsible for arranging a sworn interpreter at the deed?
7. What permits will be needed for the work you're planning to do?
8. What's the realistic timeline for those permits in this specific municipality?
9. Have you budgeted an additional 10-12% for taxes, notary, and professional fees?
10. Do you have a local professional (geometra) who has verified all the above?

If you can't confidently answer all ten, you're not ready to make an offer.

## Need help navigating the process?

Italian Dolce Vita helps foreign buyers purchase property in Sicily - from the first search to moving day. We handle the due diligence, coordinate the professionals, translate the documents, and make sure nothing falls through the cracks.

**Book a free introductory call - no commitment, no sales pressure.**

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