American

How a team member discovered his long-lost family through flight privileges

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Raymond DiBiasi, a flight attendant based in Philadelphia, always knew Sicilian heritage was in his blood, but he never knew it would become a living part of his story. His grandfather emigrated to the U.S. more than a century ago, and family lore suggested no relatives remained in Sicily. But in 2015, his genealogy research revealed a thrilling truth: family members were still in Pozzallo, a picturesque seaside town in southeastern Sicily.

For years, Raymond built online relationships with his newfound relatives. In 2023, he finally planned his trip to Sicily, booking a discounted ticket with American to Rome, with a connection to Catania. Then, Mt. Etna erupted.

"That volcano sure kept me on my toes," he explained with a chuckle.

Flights were grounded, but Raymond remained undeterred. He rebooked to a different airport, rented a car and drove several hours to Pozzallo. The journey was challenging, but the reunion made it all worthwhile.

"They just looked like family," he recalls. "It was surreal, but I just knew; this is my family."
His relatives embraced him, eager to share stories and show him his heritage. Walking the same streets his ancestors once did and paging through old photos, Raymond said felt deeply connected to his roots. One unexpected surprise: his mother's family was well-known in Pozzallo. As he strolled through town, he'd sometimes meet more relatives.

"While walking down the street with one cousin, we'd run into another cousin who I'd meet for the first time," Raymond explained. "I just wish my mom was still here; this is her side of the family, and she never even knew about them."

The trip was more than a reunion — it was a series of discoveries that deepened his identity. The Sicilian names on his family tree became real people, now known by Raymond and part of his life. And while Mt. Etna's eruption complicated his journey, nothing compared to the seismic shift he felt in his heart.