



Sicily in Depth

Crossroads of the Mediterranean...the “toe” in Italy’s boot... “God’s Kitchen” ...Sicily is all this and much more, as we see on our stellar small group journey around this Italian island. It’s lively cities and ancient ruins, temples of man and of nature, hospitable people and delectable cuisine...a feast for all the senses.

Itinerary

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Day-by-Day Itinerary

DAY 1: Depart U.S. for Palermo, Italy

DAY 2: Arrive Palermo

We arrive today in Palermo, the capital of Italy's autonomous region of Sicily. This evening we gather at our hotel for a briefing on the journey ahead, followed by a welcome dinner.

Meals: Dinner

DAY 3: Palermo

On this morning's walking tour, we discover 2,700-year-old Palermo's twin claims to fame: impressive architecture and world-class street food. Highlights include Palermo Cathedral and Palazzo Reale, both a part of Arab-Norman Palermo, which is a UNESCO site comprising nine civil and religious structures dating to Norman rule in Sicily (c. 12th century). We also see the Church of San Cataldo, another of Palermo's Arab-Norman treasures. Along the way, we pass through vibrant markets selling *arancini*, *cannoli*, and other Sicilian specialties – which, of course, we stop to sample. The remainder of the day is free for independent exploration. With dinner on our own tonight, perhaps a culinary adventure is in order – and thanks to Sicily's strategic Mediterranean location that lured many invaders, Sicilian food incorporates Italian, Arabic, and African influences into a singular and delicious cuisine.

Meals: Breakfast

DAY 4: Palermo/Erice/Trapani

A full day of touring takes us first to the medieval walled town of Erice. Perched atop a mountain nearly 2,500 feet above sea level, Erice offers panoramic views of the valley below, the port town of Trapani, and the Tyrrhenian Sea beyond. We continue to Trapani, where we visit the region's famed salt pans. Though the area is a designated nature reserve, Sicilians still harvest salt here using centuries-old methods; indeed, the oldest of the area's 60 working windmills dates to the island's Arabic regime. We tour the museum here and then enjoy lunch at a local restaurant before returning to Palermo.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 5: Palermo/Monreale/Agrigento

En route to Agrigento today, we stop in nearby Monreale. Sitting on the slopes of Monte Caputo, Monreale overlooks *La Conca d'Oro* (or “the Golden Shell”), a richly fertile valley studded with groves of orange, olive, and almond trees. Here we visit the city’s celebrated cathedral, another gem of Arab-Norman Palermo and one of the finest examples of Norman architecture still in existence. The imposing main façade and ornate outer cloister serve to prepare us for the cathedral’s breathtaking main sanctuary, where every inch of wall and ceiling space is covered with painstakingly detailed mosaics. Crafted by artisans from Constantinople (now Istanbul), the dazzling mosaics contain some 4,850 pounds of pure gold. Our journey then continues as we visit a family-owned winery, followed by a wine tasting and lunch at a nearby country house. Late this afternoon we reach Agrigento and our hotel, where we dine together tonight.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 6: Agrigento

This morning we visit the Valley of the Temples, a UNESCO site and archaeological zone whose ruins of fallen Doric temples and sanctuaries date to Greek rule in the 5th century BCE. Known in its heyday as the “most beautiful city of mortals,” Agrigento was one of the leading cities during the Golden Age of ancient Greece. Our tour features both the eastern zone, where we see the beautifully preserved Temple of Concordia (c. 430 BCE), and the western zone, with the massive temple of Olympian Zeus, believed to be the largest Doric temple ever built. Moving away from the outdoor sites, we enter Agrigento’s archaeological museum with its exhibits and artifacts that tell the story of this outpost of classical Greece. Then we have lunch at a local restaurant and an afternoon at leisure. This evening, we visit an organic working farm for a cooking demonstration and dinner.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 7: Agrigento/Piazza Armerina/Syracuse

We travel across Sicily’s southern reaches today to Syracuse (Siracusa), stopping along the way in Piazza Armerina to visit Villa Romana del Casale, an elaborate 4th-century CE villa and UNESCO site boasting one of the richest and largest collections of mosaics in the Roman world. Thanks to having been buried by landslides, the villa, its vivid frescoes, and the more than 3,200 square feet of mosaics survived the millennia in remarkably good shape. Following our tour here, we continue on to Syracuse, arriving late this afternoon. Once the largest city in the ancient world, Syracuse today is an alluring spot known for its superb archaeological sites and the relaxed seaside ambience of its Baroque old town.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 8: Syracuse

Today we discover what this city is best known for: the Archaeological Park of Neapolis, a UNESCO site that comprises a range of ancient monuments. We begin our explorations at the 5th-century BCE Greek theater, the 16,000-seat amphitheater where the tragedies of Aeschylus were staged – in his presence – and is still in use today. Next: Latomia del Paradiso (Paradise Quarry), the now overgrown shaft from which the white limestone used to build Syracuse was cut. Because it has excellent acoustics, the quarry also is known as the Ear of Dionysius. We continue on to the Roman amphitheater, the 1st-century BCE arena that once held gladiator spectacles; today it hosts musicals on its ancient stones. Then we take a walking tour of Ortigia, the “white pearl” of Sicily, historical center of Syracuse, and a UNESCO site.

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 9: Syracuse

This morning we embark on a cruise along Sicily’s Ionian coast, dotted with tiny islands and caves. We see the Spanish Wall, 13th-century Castello Maniace which served as a bulwark against invaders in the Middle Ages, and historic Ortigia Island. We disembark at Ortigia, where we’re free to explore and enjoy lunch on our own. Late this afternoon we return to our hotel, where we dine tonight.

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 10: Syracuse/Mt. Etna/Taormina

We depart Syracuse this morning and make our way up the coast to Mt. Etna, one of Europe’s largest active volcanoes. The ancients believed conical snow-topped Etna to be the forge of Vulcan, god of fire; today, Sicilians have a very personal relationship with the volcano, which frequently erupts but is seldom destructive. Descending from the volcano, we stop at a private farm set amidst acres of lemon and kiwi groves, where we enjoy a small group highlight: a homemade lunch prepared by the family who lives here. To accompany our meal, we sample some excellent Sicilian wines. Then we resume our journey to Taormina, arriving late this afternoon. This evening is at leisure, with dinner tonight on our own.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 11: Taormina

This morning we embark on a walking tour of this delightful medieval town set on a rocky terrace overlooking the Ionian Sea. Highlights include the 3rd-century BCE Greek theater, where gladiators once battled; the 13th-century fortress-like *Duomo*; and grand Piazza Vittorio Emanuele, site of the ancient *agora* and today an inviting plaza. This afternoon is at leisure to enjoy Taormina as we wish; tonight we celebrate our Sicily adventure over a farewell dinner at our hotel.

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 12: Depart for U.S.

We transfer today to the Catania airport for our return flight to the U.S.

Meals: Breakfast

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