



Gold Tour - 10 days

9 nights/10 days Private Tour of Sicily with vehicle and local English speaking driver escort, land package only, visiting the most important local highlights, winery, olive oil farmhouse, history and archaeology



Location

Agrigento



Days

10



Duration

10 Days



Category

Multi Days



Season

All Year



Tour Type

Private

TOUR OVERVIEW

Route:

Land: Palermo airport (PMO – Falcone Borsellino International Airport), West Side

Leave: Catania airport (CTA – Fontanarossa International Airport), East Side

Day 1 – LAND: Palermo airport (PMO: Falcone Borsellino International Airport)/Town

Day 2 – Palermo (visit: Best Highlights)

Day 3 – Palermo/Cefalù (visit: Lavatory and Cathedral) and Monreale (visit: Dome)/Palermo

Day 4 – Palermo/Erice (visit: Medieval Village and Marzipan Shop), Olive Oil and Salt Way Road/Agrigento

Day 5 – Agrigento (visit: Valley of the Temple) and Piazza Armerina (visit: Roman Villa)/Syracuse

Day 6 – Peoples of Syracuse (visit: Best Highlights)

Day 7 – Syracuse/Modica (visit: Baroque Village and Chocolate Shop) and Ragusa (visit: Ibla)/Taormina

Day 8 – Taormina/Etna Volcano and Winery/Taormina

Day 9 – Taormina and Cooking Class

Day 10 – Taormina/LEAVE: Catania airport (CTA: Fontanarossa International Airport)

Recommended Licensed Local Guide:

- Palermo: already included
- Monreale: to visit the Dome
- Agrigento: to visit the Temples Valley
- Piazza Armerina: to visit the Roman Villa of Casale
- Syracuse: already included
- Taormina: Half Day Walking Tour: 9AM-12PM or 2PM-5PM

TOUR CODE: GOLD10

TOUR ITINERARY



Day 1

Palermo airport (PMO)/town

Approximately Travel Time and Unit: 39 Minutes - 20 Miles (31 Kilometers)

Private Vehicle and Italian Speaking Driver Disposal: transfer-in only

Welcome to the warm, beautiful and pleasant island of Sicily! Upon arrival at Palermo Falcone-Borsellino Airport (PMO | Your Arrival by TBA) please proceed through Passport Control and collect your luggage inside the customs area. Then transfer in town



Day 2

Palermo Highlights

Approximately Travel Time and Unit: Full Day - 40 Miles (60 Kilometers)

Italian Speaking Driver Disposal: full day from h 9AM

Palermo, English Speaking Local Guide included full day from h 9AM

Today is dedicated to Palermo and the most important highlights which represents the essence of the Peoples of Palermo. Our tour will starts with the visit to the Zisa Castle (Admission fee: not included) a 12th century palace constructed towards the end of the Norman reign when the Norman-Arab style of architecture had reached the peak of its development and sophistication. The name "Zisa" is the Sicilian for the Arabic "Al-Azizah," meaning "The Splendid." (The phrase survives in the Sicilian phrase "azzizatu," meaning "well-dressed"). This beautiful Norman Palace certainly merits its name.

Later onto the Palatine Chapel (Admission fee: not included) located within the Palazzo dei Normanni (Norman Palace). The chapel is the finest example of Arab-Norman art in Palermo. Built by Roger II from 1130 to 1140, the chapel is adorned with extraordinary Norman-Byzantine mosaics. Together the palace and its chapel are the greatest attractions of Palermo and the only must-see sight for visitors with limited time. After the Normans left, the palace fell into serious decay until it was discovered by Spanish viceroys. In 1555, they began to restore it and it became a royal residence once again. Today, the Palazzo dei Normanni is the seat of Sicily's semi-autonomous regional government.

Our tour continues this afternoon with a stop to the Cathedral (Tips: not included) erected in 1185 by Walter Ophamil (or Walter of the Mill), the Anglo-Norman archbishop of Palermo and King William II's minister, on the area of an earlier Byzantine basilica. By all accounts this earlier church was founded by St. Gregory and was later turned into a mosque by the Saracens after their conquest of the city in the 9th century. Ophamil is buried in a sarcophagus in the church's crypt. The medieval edifice had a basilica plan with three apses, of which only some minor architectural elements survive today. We then continue onto the Four Corners which is the junction in Palermo. Effectively, it is the centre point of the four areas of the old town centre. You will almost inevitably pass through it and it is worth stopping for five minutes to have a look at its sculptures which were commissioned by the Spanish Viceroy in 1611. The sculptures on each of the four corners depict a variety of themes, including the four seasons, four Spanish kings and the four patron saints of the old town areas. Going south-east down Via Maqueda you will come across Piazza Pretoria which is home not only to a splendid fountain but several other impressive buildings including, on the right, the City Hall. The fountain, known for generations as the "Fountain of Shame", has an interesting history. It was originally built in 1555 by the Florentine sculptor Francesco Camilliani for a Tuscan villa owned by the Viceroy Pedro de Toledo. His son, on inheriting the villa in 1574, thought it a little too risky for his tastes and sold it to the City of Palermo who erected it where it now stands. The large central fountain is the focal point for sixteen nude statues of nymphs, humans, mermaids and satyrs. If you imagine this being erected during the Inquisition, it is quite easy to imagine why it received its epithet, the "Fountain of Shame". The last but not the least is our stop at the Ballarò Open Air Market a place overflowing with beautiful fresh fish, and local vegetables and cheeses. Originating from the era when Sicily was occupied by the moors, this 1000 year old market has run much in the same manner for centuries. It has strong Arab influences, resembling an eastern souk, and these influences are also evident in the merchandise itself. Next to mounds of ricotta and caciocavallo cheeses, barrels of olives and fat slabs of swordfish sit saffron and other spices, as well as sacks of beans and gorgeous indigenous fruits and local vegetables. Here you will have the opportunity to taste a typical palermitano dish, such as the famous Panelle (a thin paste of crushed ceci/garbanzo beans rolled into sheets, fried and served in pizza-like slices).



Day 3

Palermo/Cefalù and Monreale/Palermo

Approximately Travel Time and Unit: Full Day - 155 Miles (250 Kilometers)

English Speaking Driver Escort Disposal: full day from 8.30AM

Monreale, English Speaking Local Guide NOT included

Just one hour's drive east of Palermo, sitting serenely between its natural bay and the towering rocky granite mass of La Rocca, is Cefalù. For a small town, Cefalù offers a great deal, including sandy beaches, winding Mediaeval streets flanked with all manner of shops, excellent restaurants serving the freshest of fish and last but probably first, its unique Norman Cathedral. While Cefalù's origins go back to at least Greek times (the name derives from the ancient Greek word for "Cape"), the town we now know and love was built at the behest of the Norman King, Roger II. Construction of the Cathedral began in 1131 and is an exquisite example of what has been termed "Sicilian Romanesque". Thanks to the splendid mosaic of Christ Pantocrator above the altar, it is twinned with the Palatine Chapel in Palermo and the Duomo in Monreale. Seeing all three on a trip to Sicily is strongly recommended. Also of interest is the Mediaeval wash house - lavatoio - which is fed by a natural spring and the Osterio Magno which, according to tradition was King Roger's very own residence. It now houses art exhibitions.

This afternoon we then continue onto Monreale, to see where Arab-Norman art and architecture reached its pinnacle in the Duomo (Admission fee: not included), launched in 1174 by William II. It represents scenes from the Old and New Testaments all in golden mosaics. The story of how this splendid cathedral came into being starts when the Arabs took control of Palermo in 831. They transformed the cathedral into a mosque and banished the Bishop of Palermo from town. Not wishing to venture too far from his

beloved cathedral, the Bishop settled in a small village in the hills overlooking Palermo, the site of modern-day Monreale. There, he built a modest church to keep the flame of local Christian worship alive. Some 240 years later, in 1072, the Normans drove the Arabs from Sicily, establishing Palermo as their capital and re-consecrating the Cathedral. In 1174, in an act of piety, thanksgiving and commemoration of the exiled Bishop, King William II ordered the construction of a new church in Monreale, dedicated to the Virgin Mary (one of the mosaics depicts King William II presenting the church to the Madonna). On its completion in 1182, Pope Lucius III elevated the splendid church to the status of metropolitan Cathedral. Enlightened, tolerant and appreciative of many aspects of North African and middle-eastern culture and art, William II employed the very best Arabic and Byzantine (as well as Norman) craftsmen to work on the cathedral. The result is a fabulous and fascinating fusion of architectural styles, artistic traditions and religious symbolism. In 2015, Arab-Norman Palermo and the cathedrals of Monreale and Cefalù were granted status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. We then return to Palermo.



Day 4

Palermo/Erice, Olive Oil and Salt Way Road/Agrigento

Approximately Travel Time and Unit: Full Day - 180 Miles (290 Kilometers)

Private Vehicle and English Speaking Driver Escort Disposal: full day from h 8.30AM

Today departure for Erice uptown, which was an important religious site associated with the goddess Venus. Wander through its ancient streets and visit some of the famous homemade pastry shops—world-famous for marzipan candies and other delicacies like almond and pistachio pastries. Towering over the west of Sicily at 751m above sea level and often covered in its own personal cloud, Erice is a wonderfully preserved Mediaeval town offering the most breathtaking views and a palpable sense of history. Originally an Elymian city (the Elymians were around before the Greeks ever set foot in Sicily) Erice, or Eryx as it was first called, was a town of no little importance and renown and is said to have attracted the likes Hercules and Aeneas. Like so many Sicilian towns, it passed from one invader to another as all the usual suspects came and went, leaving their architectural calling cards and their cultural footprints. The name changed from Eryx, to Erice to Gebel Hamed and Monte San Giuliano but its essential character remained, obstinately repelling any attempt to change its real identity. Amongst the most visited sites are the two castles, Pepoli Castle and Venus Castle. The former was built by the Arabs while the latter was a Norman construction with imposing towers that derived its name from the fact that it was built on the site of the ancient Temple of Venus, allegedly founded by Aeneas.

Lunch in an olive oil farmhouse to taste genuine dishes and enjoy the olive oil tastings

This afternoon we then travel from Trapani to Marsala to enjoy an amazing route under the name of Via del Sale (Salt Way Road). Upon arrival our first stop is to the Saline (Saltpans) which is also a Nature Reserve, a place of extraordinary beauty, where alongside the exceptional natural landscapes we can appreciate the typical windmills of Marsala-Trapani coast, original examples of still fully functional industrial archeology. Saline della Laguna are located inside the Reserve. The landscape around is still strongly identified with its iconic saltpans, now far fewer in number than in the past but still retaining the distinction of being the oldest and last remaining in Sicily. Dating as far back as the Phoenicians around 2,700 years ago when salt was fundamental for preserving food, the salt pans were at their most prosperous under Aragonese rule and numbered around forty at the end of the 1800's when over 100,000 tonnes of salt were produced each year. Today there are some ten saltpans with two main areas of production, at Nubia and at the 'Stagnone', the largest lagoon in Italy to the north of Marsala. The flavour of the salt is exceptional: completely natural and untreated, the salt has a higher concentration of potassium and magnesium but less sodium chloride than common salts and is available in many specialist food shops. Visit the salt pans for the dramatic landscape, punctuated by windmills, and the views across to the Egadi Islands.

Later we then continue to Agrigento. (L)



Day 5

Agrigento and Piazza Armerina/Syracuse

Approximately Travel Time and Unit: Full Day - 240 Miles (380 Kilometers)

Private Vehicle and English Speaking Driver Escort Disposal: full day from h 8AM

Agrigento, English Speaking Local Guide NOT included

Piazza Armerina, English Speaking Local Guide NOT included

Today we visit the finest of all ancient Greek sites—the complete Doric Temples (Admission fee: not included), one of Sicily's most famous historical attractions. This is one of the most outstanding examples of Greater Greece art and architecture, and is one of the main attractions of Sicily as well as a national monument of Italy. The area was included in the UNESCO Heritage Site list in 1997. Founded as a Greek colony in the 6th century B.C., Agrigento became one of the leading cities in the Mediterranean world. Its supremacy and pride are demonstrated by the remains of the magnificent Doric temples that dominate the ancient town, much of which still lies intact under today's fields and orchards. This splendid archaeological park consists of eight temples (and various other remains) built between about 510 BC and 430 BC: the Temple of Hera, the Temple of Concordia, the Temple of Heracles, the Temple of Olympian Zeus, the Temple of Castor and Pollux, the Temple of Hephaestus, the Temple of Demeter, and the Temple of Asclepius (the God of Medicine). Apart from this latter, which is to be found on the banks of the Akragas river, all are situated in the same area on rocky crests south of modern day Agrigento (not really in a Valley at all!).

Later departure for Piazza Armerina situated deep in the Sicilian hinterland, at 721 metres above sea level, one of Sicily's most frequented tourist spots. However, it is not the town that most people come to see, but the famous Villa Romana del Casale (Admission fee: not included). Built in the middle of the 4th Century AD as a hunting lodge by a Roman patrician (it is not known for sure who the owner was) the Villa is home to some of the best preserved and extensive examples of Roman mosaics spread over around 3500mt. The villa is one of the most luxurious of its kind. It is especially noteworthy for the richness and quality of the mosaics which decorate almost every room; they are the finest mosaics in situ anywhere in the Roman world. These extraordinarily vivid mosaics, probably produced by North African artisans, deal with numerous subjects, ranging from Homeric escapades and mythological scenes to portrayals of daily life, including the famous tableau of girls exercising in their "bikinis".

This afternoon onto Syracuse.



Day 6

Peoples of Syracuse

Approximately Travel Time and Unit: -

Private Vehicle and English Speaking Driver Escort Disposal: NO

Taxi Service Disposal: round trip transfers to the Archaeological Park

Syracuse, English Speaking Local Guide included, Full Day from h 9AM

Today we visit Syracuse to visit to the Archaeological Park (Admission fee: not included) highlights of which are the Greek Theatre, the Roman Amphitheatre and the Paradise Quarry. The resulting park contains some of the most extraordinary monuments that classical antiquity has left us and, given their degree of interest and importance, has few equals elsewhere in Italy. Even a quick stay in Syracuse must include a visit to this archaeological site. Then stroll through the streets of Ortygia Island, the heart of the city center, to visit the Dome. This delightful pedestrian square is home to the wonderful Cathedral built on the site of an ancient Temple of Athena as can clearly be seen from the original Doric columns that were incorporated into the building's main structure. Also on this square is the beautifully symmetrical Baroque Palazzo Beneventano and the church of Santa Lucia, the town's patron saint. Later to the colourful daily Street Market, which sells a fantastic array of fruit, vegetables, fish and meat.

From here, this afternoon, wandering around the eastern limits of Syracuse you will find a maze of streets

that eventually open out at the southern extreme of the island and the inaccessible Castello Maniace, a true bastion built by Frederick II in 1239. Later onto the Byzantine Miqwe (Admission fee: not included), located, at 18 meters of depth and is considered the biggest and oldest Jewish ritual bath in Europe.



Day 7

Syracuse/Modica and Ragusa/Taormina

Approximately Travel Time and Unit: Full Day - 160 Miles (250 Kilometers)

Private Vehicle and English Speaking Driver Escort Disposal: full day from h 8.30AM

Today departure for Modica. Like the other towns in the Val di Noto, was badly damaged in the 1693 earthquake and largely rebuilt in Sicilian Baroque style. It is divided into two parts, "higher" Modica and "lower" Modica, which are connected by numerous flights of steps. Palazzi and houses rise from the bottom of the gorge seemingly stacked one on top of the other. Magnificent churches, with their inspiring domes, bell towers and intricate facades, punctuate the red-tiled roofs and one is struck by the uniform beauty of the whole. Modica has a long and varied history, complete with the usual toing and froing of successions of invaders. It came to real prominence in 1296, when Frederick II of Aragon (not to be confused with Frederick II "Stupor Mundi") formed the "County of Modica", a kind of "state within a state" that was initially governed by Manfredi I Chiaramonte. Modica is custodian of a 400 year tradition of Sicilian chocolate-making. Being part of the Spanish kingdom for so many years meant that Sicily was often one of the first recipients of the new foodstuffs being brought back from South America. Cacao was one of these and today Modica still specialises in making granulous chocolate, often flavoured with chilli pepper, cinnamon or vanilla, that is based on Aztec methods and recipes. Chocolate shops abound and, for the real chocoholic, it is sometimes possible to watch the "chocolatiers" at work. Tasting of Modica chocolate is a must.

Later onto Ragusa to visit one of the most fascinating towns in Sicily, Ragusa has caused many a visitor's jaw to drop as they first set eyes on the lower part of the town. Essentially Baroque, the Ragusa you will see today dates almost entirely from 1693. Indeed, it was in this year that Ragusa, along with its neighbours, Noto, Modica, Scicli and Catania, was razed to the ground by a terrible earthquake that hit most of the eastern side of Sicily. Public opinion on where to rebuild the town was divided, and so a compromise was made. The wealthier, more aristocratic citizens built a new town in a different site, now Ragusa "Superiore", while the other half of the population decided to rebuild on the original site, on a ridge at the bottom of a gorge, now Ragusa Ibla. The two towns remained separated until 1926 when they were merged to become the chief town of the province, taking the place of Modica. While the upper part has its fair share of architectural delights, it is the smaller Ragusa Ibla down below that really draws visitors. Whether you approach it from Modica to the south or from Ragusa Superiore, the sight of the jumble of houses, churches and civic palazzi piled on top of each other, clinging to the walls of the gorge, is really quite breathtaking. Although seemingly Mediaeval from a distance, once you enter the town's heart, the Baroque logic of its plan becomes more obvious.

Later continue to Taormina, the world famous resort town of Sicily.



Day 8

Taormina/Etna Volcano Off Road Experience and Farmhouse/Taormina

Approximately Travel Time and Unit: Full Day - 40 Miles (70 Kilometers)

Season: this excursion is doable from June to October. From November to May we will provide a different route which does not involve the summit of the volcano and arrives only up to 1.500 mt.

Dress Code (June-October): use sturdy shoes, wind jacket and do not forget sun screen

Private Jeep (WD4X4, Land Rover) and English Speaking Driver Disposal: full day from h 8.30AM

Today meet the off-road's driver and transfer to Etna Volcano. Our first stop is the the 2002 lava flow reachable by jeep through a winding dirt road surrounded by chestnut and oak forests. The 2002

eruption lasted from October 27th to January 29th 2003 and it is considered one of the most explosive eruptions of the past one hundred years. Continuing our excursion we will reach the Ragabo pine forest where hidden among pines and brooms, we will discover the cave of Corruccio (1350 meters above sea level) a cave formed by flowing lava. Later, driving up along the Mareneve road we will reach Piano Provenzana (1800 meters above sea level), a ski resort, theater of the great eruption of 2002. After enjoying an excellent espresso, we will take a short walk to visit the ruins of the hotel Le Betulle destroyed by a molten lava flow.

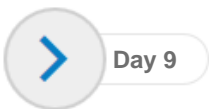
Summit Craters

From Piano Provenzana possibility to join a collective tour (weather and volcanic conditions permitting). This tour begins at "Piano Provenzana" and follows a mountain trail at an altitude of 2900 meters. Traveling by large, off road vehicle, we will reach a high mountain slope framed by magnificent views of lava and volcanic sand along the rift created in the 2002 eruption. At the foot of the mountain one can admire the beautiful Peloritani, Nebrodi and Madonie mountain ranges; all surrounded by the picturesque Tyrrhenian and Ionian coast, from Siracusa to Calabria, from Taormina to the Aeolian islands. Here, one can take in the most impressive views in the world ... the multiple fumaroles and seemingly lunar landscapes created by multiple eruptions between 1923 and 2002. At an altitude of 2900 meters the North-East crater (where the volcano observatory is located), dominates the area. In clear weather, one can see both the "Lion" and the "Bove" valleys from this point.

Later we travel through one of the most beautiful Wine Roads of Sicily and crossing large expanses of vineyards (Etna D.O.C.), we will stop at a local farmhouse. This is the ideal place to enjoy relaxing moments surrounded by nature while sampling local cuisine and excellent wines. In fact the wines are complemented by uniquely local delicacies.

Light lunch in a local farmhouse with wine.

This afternoon we then return to Taormina (L)



Taormina and Cooking Class

Approximately Travel Time and Unit: -

English Speaking Chef Disposal, half day from h 9AM – Meeting Point: TBA

Private Vehicle and English Speaking Driver Escort Disposal: NO

Taormina, English Speaking Local Guide NOT included

This morning meet the Chef in Taormina uptown (Meeting Point: TBA). A brief walk takes us to an open air market where we'll purchase fresh fruit, vegetables and all the ingredients necessary for the cooking course. Then onto a local restaurant to start our cooking class. At the end of the course, we will enjoy our scrumptious creations with the perfect complement, a beautifully paired Sicilian wine. Dessert follows accompanied by a typical local Dessert wine. Buon Pranzo!

This afternoon is at leisure: enjoy a drink at the tables of Caffè Wunderbar (or similar) in Piazza IX Aprile may set you back a few euros, but you'll be basking where Tennessee Williams and Elizabeth Taylor basked before you. As well as the famed Greek-Roman Theatre (Admission fee: not included), there are several minor sites to be discovered around Taormina. The attractive principal thoroughfare, Corso Umberto is pedestrian and ideal for strolling and window-shopping. Picturesque lanes above and below the Corso are interesting to explore, while if you want to stretch your legs further there are attractive walks up into the hills, or down to the sea. Given its compact size, Taormina has a huge range of bars, cafes and restaurants where you can while away pleasant hours while admiring the views. (L)

Taormina/Catania airport

Approximately Travel Time and Unit: 50 Minutes - 45 Miles (70 Kilometers)

Private Vehicle and Italian Speaking Driver Disposal: transfer out only

Today departure for Fontanarossa Catania airport (CTA | Your Departure by TBA)

TOUR MAP



WHAT IS INCLUDED?

- ✓ Airport transfers
- ✓ Cooking class
- ✓ English speaking Driver
- ✓ Italian speaking Driver
- ✓ VAT
- ✓ Vehicle with air conditioning

NOT INCLUDED

- ✗ Admission fees
- ✗ Beverages and meals
- ✗ City taxes
- ✗ Gratuities and tips
- ✗ Hotel accommodation
- ✗ Intercontinental/Local Flights
- ✗ Licensed Tourist Guide
- ✗ Travel Insurance