



Blitz Tour of Sicily - 6 days

5 nights/6 days Private Tour. A gateway to the traditional flavors between wine, street food and off the beaten routes to explore a nice showcase of Sicily



Location

Agrigento



Days

6



Duration

6 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

Blitz Sicily Tour: 6 days/5 nights | Palermo (3 night) Taormina (2 night)

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

Day 2 – Palermo and Monreale

Day 3 – Palermo/Marsala Winery, Salt Pans, Salt Way Road and Erice/Palermo

Day 4 – Palermo/Agrigento and Piazza Armerina/Taormina

Day 5 – Taormina at leisure

Day 6 – Taormina/LEAVE: Catania airport (CTA: Fontanarossa International Airport)

Recommended Licensed Local Guide:

-Palermo and Monreale: already included

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

TOUR CODE: BLITZ6

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 and Monreale

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

English Speaking Driver Escort Disposal: NO

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

Palermo and Monreale, English Speaking Local Guide included, full day from h 8.30AM

Our tour starts with a short drive to 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 splendid mosaics in the interior of Monreale Cathedral are its principal artistic attraction. Their subtle beauty creates an atmosphere of solemn tranquility and perhaps even awe. The mosaics cover practically all the surfaces of the cathedral's walls, except for the ground level, up to a height of two meters, where the walls are finished in white marble bordered with polychrome inlay decoration. All of the cathedral's mosaic figures (many are icons) are placed upon a background of gold mosaic "tesserae" (tiles). The interior of the church is about 100 meters long by 40 meters wide. There are a total of 130 individual mosaic scenes depicting biblical and other religious events. The Old Testament is depicted on the walls of the central nave, starting from the Creation and ending with Jacob's Fight with the Angel.

The mosaics on the side aisles illustrate the major events of the life of Jesus, from birth to crucifixion, and include a cycle illustrating the miracles worked. Many of the mosaics are accompanied by inscriptions in Latin or Greek. Dominating everything is the imposing mosaic of Christ Pantocrator ("Ruler of All") located on the central apse over the main altar. The entire image is thirteen meters across and seven meters high. Beneath the stupendous portrait of Jesus is a mosaic of the Theotokos (Mother of God) enthroned with the Christ child on her lap. This depiction is flanked by mosaics of the angels and various saints and apostles. There are mosaics of numerous other saints and scenes from the Gospels all about

the transept area, including the previously-mentioned icon of Saint Thomas Becket. Two noteworthy mosaics are located on the sides of the presbytery, over the royal and episcopal thrones. The one above the royal throne shows Christ crowning William II. It is patterned on the icon in the Martorana (in Palermo) showing Roger II crowned by Christ. The mosaic over the episcopal throne shows William II offering Monreale cathedral to the Virgin. In the West it was rare for living monarchs to be represented in a Heavenly setting in this manner. We then return to Palermo. Upon arrival we visit 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. Later, a short drive takes us to the Cathedral (Admission fee: 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.

This afternoon 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 sculpture Francesco Camiliani for a Tuscan villa owned by the Viceroy Pedro de Toledo. His son, on inheriting the villa in 1574, thought it a little too risqué 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". Behind the City Hall, there is another square, Piazza Bellini where you can see two of Palermo's most interesting churches: the Church of Santa Maria dell'Amiraglio (Admission fee: not included) --more commonly known as La Martorana -- and the Church of San Cataldo, instantly recognizable thanks to its trio of red domes. La Martorana was commissioned in 1143 by George of Antioch, a famous Admiral (a word of Arabic origin) of the fleet of King Roger II. Initially the church was dedicated to the celebration of Greek Orthodox rites but this changed in the 13th century when it became part of the Catholic Church. Several parts of the structure were unfortunately changed during the 17th century and many of the original mosaics were discarded to make way for Baroque frescoes. However, the surviving mosaics are amongst the most impressive ever to have been created in Sicily. Indeed, the craftsmen who were brought from Byzantium by King Roger II to work on the Norman Palace and the Duomo at Cefalù, also contributed their art to this church. The wonderful bell tower outside is the apogee of Norman-Arab architecture.



Day 3

Palermo/Marsala Winery, Salt Way Road and Erice/Palermo

Approximately Travel Time and Unit: Full Day - 170 Miles (270 Kilometers)

Important: Marsala winery is closed on Sunday, Bank Holidays and Summer Week (middle of August)

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

Today departure for Marsala. Upon arrival we visit the Cantine Florio Winery (Cantine Florio Winery:

subject to availability) to taste the Marsala wines. Marsala is a wine, dry or sweet. While the city's natives sometimes drink "vintage" Marsala, the wine produced for export is universally fortified similar to Port, Madeira and Sherry. Originally, this addition of alcohol was to ensure that it would last on long ocean voyages, but now it is made that way because of its popularity in foreign markets. Then a few minutes driving takes us to the Saline (Salt pans) 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 salt pans, 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 salt pans 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. We then travel from Marsala to Trapani to enjoy an amazing route under the name of Via del Sale (Salt Way Road). This is the best way to travel to join Erice uptown.

This afternoon we then continue onto Erice, 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. Later return to Palermo.



Day 4

Palermo/Agrigento and Piazza Armerina/Taormina

Approximately Travel Time and Unit: Full Day - 250 Miles (390 Kilometers)

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

Agrigento, English Speaking Local Guide NOT included

Piazza Armerina, English Speaking Local Guide NOT included

Today departure for Agrigento. to 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 Hephaestos, 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 this afternoon onto 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".

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



Day 5

Taormina

Approximately Travel Time and Unit: -

Private Vehicle and English Speaking Driver Escort Disposal: NO

Taormina, English Speaking Local Guide NOT included

Today 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.



Day 6

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
- ✓ English speaking Driver
- ✓ Italian speaking Driver
- ✓ VAT
- ✓ Vehicle with air conditioning
- ✓ Visit as per itinerary

NOT INCLUDED

- ✗ Admission fees
- ✗ Beverage and meal not specified
- ✗ City taxes
- ✗ Gratuities and tips
- ✗ Hotel accommodation
- ✗ Intercontinental/Local Flights
- ✗ Porterage at airport
- ✗ Travel Insurance