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## PALERMO & MONREALE

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Palermo is the main Sicilian city. It was founded by the Phoenicians on the shores of a bay along the northern coast of the island. Today it counts about 700.000 inhabitants. Every ruler of the Mediterranean settled here, from the Romans to the Moors, from the Normans to the Spaniards, and each of them left some trace in the city. The half day tour comprises the visit to the most important monuments, such as the Cathedral, the Norman Palace with the Palatine Chapel, the Pretoria Fountain and the nearby Quattro Canti square.

Then you proceed to Monreale, a little town perched on the side of a mountain overlooking the breathtaking view of Palermo. Here you'll visit the cathedral and its cloister, representing the largest concentration of Norman, Arab and Byzantine art in one place. The cathedral was built by the Norman king William II in the 12th century, together with the attached monastery and king's residence. Despite add ons, the cathedral has come down to our days substantially intact in its splendour, with its marvellous sequin gold mosaics covering a surface of more

than 6000 sqm. Together with the Arab-Norman buildings in Palermo, this is a Unesco site. The cloister is the only intact part of the Benedictine convent. This is a charming place, with tiny twinned columns embracing a little garden.

This tour can be extended to full day. In this case it comprises other visits in Palermo: to the Martorana church with its Byzantine mosaics, the beautiful 19th century theatres, the area around the old harbour and the enchanting Piazza Marina surrounded by elegant old palazzi. You will have some time to go shopping in the elegant stores of via Libertà and Via Ruggero Settimo and to stop for an espresso, a cappuccino or a tasty Sicilian ice cream in the charming pedestrian area Via Belmonte. Palermo also boasts interesting museums such as the Abatellis Picture Gallery and the GAM Museum of Modern Art. It is also possible to visit some of the noble palaces. The Palazzo Mirto, for instance, is open to public. It features original furniture and decorations, recalling the residences of Sicilian Leopards.

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