



 **DISCOVER SICILY AND MALTA**

Beautiful gardens of the Mediterranean

**DAYS:** 17 **NIGHTS:** 16 **FROM:** CATANIA **TO:** MALTA



**WEB** 

**PHOTO GALLERY** 

**CITIES/PLACES VISITED:**

CATANIA - MOUNT ETNA - TAORMINA  
MESSINA - CEFALÙ - PALERMO - CORLEONE  
AGRIGENTO - PIAZZA ARMERINA - SIRACUSA  
VALLETTA (MALTA)



## DISCOVER SICILY AND MALTA / ITINERARY

### 1<sup>ST</sup> DAY: CATANIA

Early evening arrival in Catania and transfer to your hotel for check-in. A city with the formidable Mount Etna looming over it, Catania has been destroyed nine times in the course of its history, and every time it has been rebuilt on the same spot. This evening join your tour leader and fellow travellers for a welcome reception. **R**

### 2<sup>ND</sup> DAY: CATANIA

Begin your exploration of Catania with an orientation tour taking in the Piazza Duomo with the famous elephant statue, the symbol of the city, and the Cathedral of Saint Agata, built in the unique local Baroque style, with contrasting lava and limestone.

See Piazza Amenano and its famous Fountain with the same name, and Via Etnea where, on a clear day you can see Mt Etna rising at the end of it.

This afternoon visit the Orto Botanico di Catania. Established in 1858, the garden is divided into a general and the Sicilian garden, which is dedicated to the cultivation of indigenous Sicilian species including the cultivation of native mountain plants from Mt Etna. Continue to the Villa Bellini, the city's largest park, from which you can enjoy a beautiful view of Catania and whose major attraction is the Botanical Clock – a date display of flowers, which is updated and replanted daily.

This evening enjoy dinner at a local restaurant. **B D**

### 3<sup>RD</sup> DAY: CATANIA

To the north of the city is Le Stanze di Fiore di Canalicchio. Set in seven acres this garden surrounds a neo-classical country villa built in the 1800s. The project began in 2000 by Rossella Pezzino de Geronimo with the aim of creating a contemporary flower garden combining well-known Mediterranean flower species with rare tropical and subtropical plants. Enjoy a local lunch in the gardens.

Continue to Casa Pennisi. The garden of Villa Pennisi is one of the few Italian gardens that has maintained its original structure and dimension, where it was planted at the end of the XIX Century. Designed by Mariano Falcini, who characterised it with a classical structure, with paths delimited by high box hedges and impressive flower beds. Tropical plants were inserted together with Mediterranean essences creating an incredibly fascinating and attractive ensemble.

Possible optional evening performance (opera, concert) at the Teatro Massimo Bellini (subject to performance schedules, not included in tour cost). **B L**

### 4<sup>TH</sup> DAY: TAORMINA

Leaving Catania head to the hill town of Taormina via the imposing Mt Etna (subject to volcano activity). Mt Etna is one of the world's most active volcanoes and the highest point on the island. The lower slopes of the volcano are extremely fertile with groves of oranges, lemons and other Mediterranean flora and of course vines which produce some of Sicily's best wines.

Located on these slopes is Villa Trinità, an agricultural and farm estate that has been home to the Bonajuto family for at least eight generations. The garden that was born on lava, is full of native and exotic species. Enjoy lunch in the garden.

The drive up the mountain slopes takes you through picturesque villages and an ever changing landscape. During your tour of

Mount Etna visit the Silvestri Craters located at an altitude of 1800m and travel to 3000m by cable car and 4WD.

Continue to Taormina, arriving late afternoon. **B L D**

### 5<sup>TH</sup> DAY: TAORMINA

Dramatically perched on the side of Monte Tauro, with wonderful views of the Mediterranean Sea and Mount Etna, Taormina was first publicised by the German poet, Goethe, in the late 18th century. Since the opening of the first hotel in 1874, it has been one of the world's most favoured and exclusive resort destinations. During a morning tour, see the splendid Greek Theatre, the Roman Naumachiae, the 13th century Cathedral of Saint Nicolò, the 14th century Palazzo Corvaja, the 16th century Palace of the Dukes of Santo Stefano, and the Botanic Gardens also known as the Giardino di Duca di Cesarò.

Continue to Casa Cuseni, a garden built by the British painter Robert Kitson, now an Italian National Monument, B&B and living museum. Suspended in time, a rare Frank Brangwyn mural decorates the dining room, while the living room and library are filled with fascinating curios. Steep pathways lead through the villa's Italianate terraced gardens, which offer views of Mount Etna's perfect cone; they are a remarkable feat of design, filled with exotic trees, fountains, wisteria-draped pergolas and secret nooks. **B L**

### 6<sup>TH</sup> DAY: TAORMINA/PALERMO

Depart Taormina for a full day's journey to Palermo via Messina and Cefalù. Visit the Regional Museum of Messina whose highlights include the Polyptych of San Gregorio (1473) by Antonello da Messina, two late works by Caravaggio, the Adoration of the Shepherds and the Resurrection of Lazarus.

Continue to Cefalù, a small fishing village along the northern coast. Walk down the main street, Corso Ruggero, to the splendid Romanesque cathedral boasting a stunning array of mosaics. Time at leisure for lunch before continuing to Palermo. Palermo is Sicily's capital and lies on the north coast along a bay known as the Conca D'Oro (the golden shell) because of its glittering citrus groves. The Arabs, a people who knew the joy of a green oasis were the ones who introduced gardens to Palermo; the Normans extended the idea by creating parklands and summer palaces to escape the heat. Dinner in a local restaurant. **B D**

### 7<sup>TH</sup> DAY: PALERMO

Morning orientation walk of the historic centre of Palermo. Walk through the colourful Mercato della Vucciria and visit the Palazzo Abatellis, a Spanish-Gothic palace with the Regional Gallery of Sicily which houses Antonello da Messina's Annunciation.

Continue to the Orto Botanico of Palermo, one of the top Italian academic institutions and a centre of scientific research in conservation of the environment. The Neoclassical Gymnasium, the Tepidarium and the Calidarium were designed by the Frenchman Léon Dufoury in 1789. The oldest section of the garden, known as the Linneian section, is a rectangular layout divided into quadrangles, within which the species are categorised according to Carolus Linnaeus' system of classification. After time for lunch visit the extravagant Norman Cathedral, the Palazzo dei Normanni and the Cappella Palatina founded in 1132 by Roger II, and one of the richest Norman monuments in Sicily with a major series of mosaics. **B**



## DISCOVER SICILY AND MALTA / ITINERARY

### 8<sup>TH</sup> DAY: PALERMO

This morning visit the Italian garden of the quirky Palazzina Cinese, before heading to Villa Malfitano. Constructed in 1886 by Joseph Whitaker, the grandson of a famous English wine merchant, who moved to Sicily in 1806 and made a fortune producing Marsala wine.

Whitaker had trees shipped to Palermo from all over the world to plant around his villa, including a rare species of Dragon's Blood – an enormous banyan tree and the only one found in Europe at the time. Afternoon at leisure. This evening wander to the Palazzo Gangi, a 15th century ancestral palace where Wagner composed the opening bars of Parsifal and in 1963, Visconti filmed the magnificent ballroom scene of The Leopard. **B**

### 9<sup>TH</sup> DAY: PALERMO

Morning visit to Monreale, a hilltop town close to Palermo with one of the greatest cathedrals in all of Italy, the Monreale Duomo. Arab-Norman art and architecture reached the pinnacle of beauty in this cathedral, launched by William II in 1174. Afternoon at leisure. Before dinner at a local restaurant, attend the opera dei pupi (marionette theatre) which has a long tradition in Southern Italy. The repertoire usually includes the lives of bandits and saints, historical events and Shakespearean dramas (subject to performance schedules). **B**

### 10<sup>TH</sup> DAY: PALERMO/AGRIGENTO

Depart Palermo and tour across the bare, brown hills of the centre of Sicily to Agrigento, stopping along the way to visit Corleone made famous by the film The Godfather, now the centre of study on the history of the Mafia. On arrival in Agrigento visit the Valley of the Temples, an impressive complex of Greek temples, one of the greatest sights left of the ancient world. **B D**

### 11<sup>TH</sup> DAY: AGRIGENTO/SIRACUSA

This morning visit the Garden of Kolymbethra, abandoned until 1990. Possibly built by the Greeks, it was certainly worked by the Arabs who introduced their irrigation system into this five acre garden where an 800 year old olive tree bears witness to the garden's antiquity.

Depart Agrigento for Syracuse stopping at Piazza Armerina to visit the Villa Romana del Casale. Designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Roman villa built in the first quarter of the 4th century contains the richest, largest and most complex collection of Roman mosaics in the world. Late afternoon arrival in Syracuse. **B D**

### 12<sup>TH</sup> DAY: SIRACUSA

After breakfast walk around the island of Ortigia, the historic centre of Syracuse. Highlights include the famed theatre of Syracuse, the altar of Hieron II, and the ancient quarries. Continue to the Galleria Regionale del Palazzo Bellomo housed in a beautiful 13C palace. The art gallery is home to The Burial of St Lucy by Caravaggio. Afternoon at leisure. **B**

### 13<sup>TH</sup> DAY: SIRACUSA

Spend the day visiting a couple of private gardens. Heading south to the Giardino Il Beviere. Situated on a small lake, the property has a history of Greek legends and Borghese ownership dating

back to 1392. Resurrected from a state of ruin to a truly unique Mediterranean garden with lush palms, blue Jacaranda, old roses and a remarkable collection of succulents.

The tranquil garden has an inviting array of structure, colour and fragrance a perfect place to enjoy lunch in the tranquil setting. Continue to the Estate of San Giuliano at Villa Asmundo. The whole area was cultivated with citrus orchards until 1974 when four hectares were given over to the garden, and the present owner began to plant ornamental trees and shrubs. In the 1990s they created the Giardinetto. The four compositions limited by dry stone walls consist of a fruit garden and use the so called "saie", small traditional irrigation canals of Arab origin, an Arab garden with water basins and water lilies.

Evening at leisure. **B L**

### 14<sup>TH</sup> DAY: SIRACUSA/VALLETTA (MALTA)

Morning at leisure. Early afternoon departure from Syracuse for the nearby town of Noto. The current town was rebuilt after the earthquake of 1693 and is famous for its fine buildings of the early 18th century, considered masterpieces of the richly decorated Sicilian Baroque style. Continue to Pozzallo for dinner before embarking on an evening express ferry for Malta (departure at 09:30pm, arrival at 11:00pm). On arrival in Valletta transfer to your hotel. **B D**

### 15<sup>TH</sup> DAY: VALLETTA (MALTA)

Begin your exploration of Malta with a walking tour of Valletta. Visit the Upper Barracca Gardens, admire the Auberge de Castille and Leon and visit St John's Co-Cathedral, where Caravaggio's masterpiece The Beheading of St John is displayed in the Oratory. Also visit the Church Museum adorned with Flemish tapestries and the Knights Armoury located in the 16th-century Grandmaster's Palace. This afternoon visit the temples of Hagar Qim and Mnajdra which are unique architectural masterpieces, given the limited resources available to their builders.

These temples represent a unique architectural tradition that flourished on the Maltese Islands between 3600 and 2500BC. Dinner in a local restaurant.

This evening (subject to performance schedule) possible performance of the Malta Philharmonic Orchestra. **B D**

### 16<sup>TH</sup> DAY: VALLETTA (MALTA)

This morning enjoy a tour to Rabat and the ancient capital of Mdina.

The Maltese Islanders are among the oldest Christian peoples in the world. St Paul, shipwrecked as a captive on route to Rome in AD 60, brought Christianity to Malta. His steps can be retraced in the shrines, grottos and catacombs of Rabat. Walk into the ancient citadel of Mdina, the former capital Malta. Visit the main cathedral of Malta, dedicated to St Paul, patron Saint of Malta, and walk to the imposing bastions commanding a magnificent.

Following a special farewell lunch at Mdina, visit the 18th century Palazzo Parisio, home of the noble Scicluna and a treasure trove of delightful artefacts in the heart of picturesque Naxxar. Enjoy Afternoon Tea. **B L**

### 17<sup>TH</sup> DAY: VALLETTA (MALTA)

Morning at leisure before a transfer to the airport. **B**

## DISCOVER SICILY AND MALTA / INFO AND CONDITIONS



### HIGHLIGHTS

- Enjoy a comprehensive tour of Sicily with stays in Catania, Taormina, Palermo, Agrigento and Syracuse
- Discover ancient Neolithic, Greek and Roman sites and ruins
- Climb Mt Etna, swim in the Mediterranean and enjoy springtime in Europe
- Marvel at the Baroque cities, art and architecture of both Sicily and Malta
- Visit botanic gardens, private palaces and villas throughout
- Finish with a three-day stay in Malta, with the option to extend

### HOTELS 4/5 STARS or similar

**CATANIA:** Romano House Hotel

**TAORMINA:** Hotel Monte Tauro

**PALERMO:** Grand Hotel et des Palmes

**AGRIGENTO:** Hotel Baia Di Ulisse

**SYRACUSE:** Grand Hotel Des Etrangers & Miramare

**VALLETTA:** Hotel Phoenicia

**NB:** Hotels of a similar standard may be substituted

### RATE INCLUDES

- Accommodation in centrally located four and five star hotels with daily breakfast ( B )
- Meals as per itinerary (L=Lunch, D=Dinner, R=Reception)
- Wine with meals
- Transfers on arrival in Catania and on departure in Malta if travelling on suggested flights (Emirates/QANTAS )
- Transfers and sightseeing with local guides, including entrance fees as per itinerary, in comfortable air-conditioned coaches
- Ferry transportation from Pozzallo – Valletta
- Gratuities for local guides and drivers
- Hotel portorage (one piece per person)

### RATE DOES NOT INCLUDE

- International airfares
- Items of a personal nature, including telephone, laundry, room service etc.
- Travel insurance
- Airport portorage

### CANCELLATION FEES

-100% PENALTY FOR NO SHOW -70% FROM 1 TO 3 DAYS BEFORE THE BEGINNING OF THE TOUR  
-50% FROM 4 TO 7 DAYS BEFORE THE BEGINNING OF THE TOUR -25% FROM 8 TO 14 DAYS BEFORE THE BEGINNING OF THE TOUR

FOR ORGANIZATIONAL REASONS, THE ITINERARY MAY BE REVERSED OR MODIFIED WITHOUT NOTICE.  
IN ANY CASE STS ENSURE THE VISITS AND EXCURSIONS MENTIONED ON THE JOURNEY