



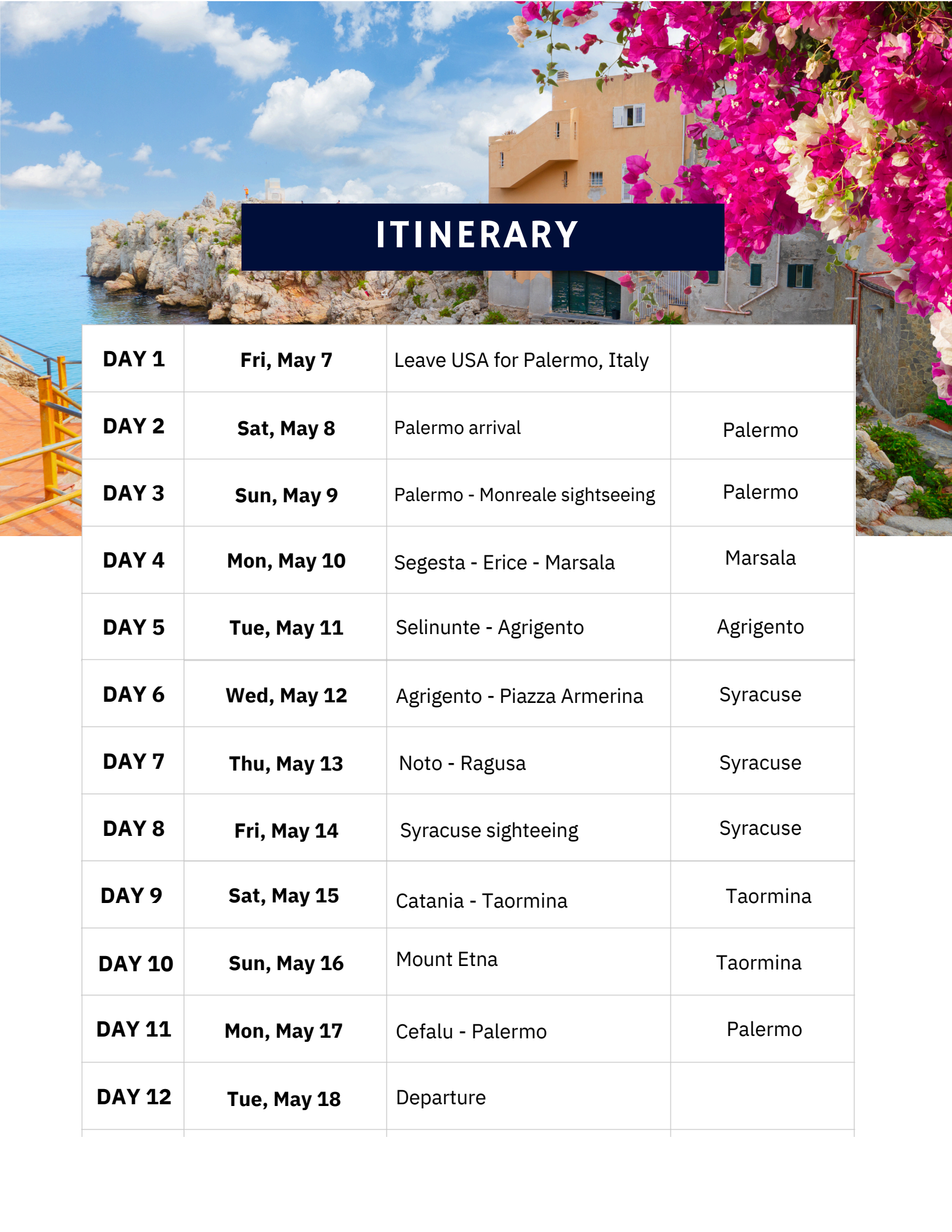
WORLD AFFAIRS COUNCIL
OF GREATER HOUSTON
Global Perspectives, Local Conversations

May 7-18, 2027

SICILY

Beyond Italy

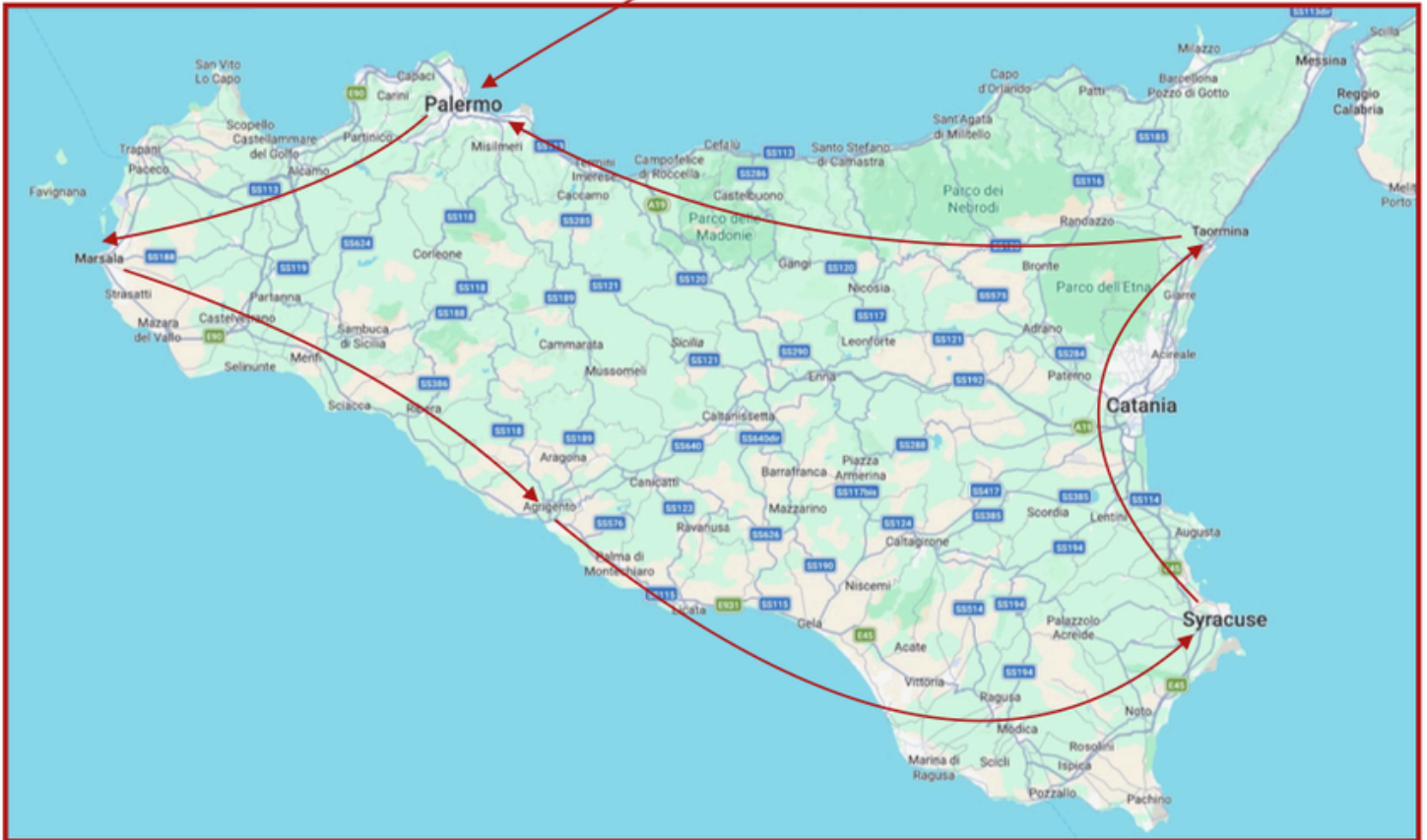




ITINERARY

DAY 1	Fri, May 7	Leave USA for Palermo, Italy	
DAY 2	Sat, May 8	Palermo arrival	Palermo
DAY 3	Sun, May 9	Palermo - Monreale sightseeing	Palermo
DAY 4	Mon, May 10	Segesta - Erice - Marsala	Marsala
DAY 5	Tue, May 11	Selinunte - Agrigento	Agrigento
DAY 6	Wed, May 12	Agrigento - Piazza Armerina	Syracuse
DAY 7	Thu, May 13	Noto - Ragusa	Syracuse
DAY 8	Fri, May 14	Syracuse sightseeing	Syracuse
DAY 9	Sat, May 15	Catania - Taormina	Taormina
DAY 10	Sun, May 16	Mount Etna	Taormina
DAY 11	Mon, May 17	Cefalu - Palermo	Palermo
DAY 12	Tue, May 18	Departure	

MAP TRAJECTORY



HIGHLIGHTS

Discover Sicily Beyond Italy - Explore an island shaped by Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Normans, Spaniards, and Italians over three millennia.

UNESCO World Heritage Treasures - Visit the Valley of the Temples, Monreale Cathedral, Villa Romana del Casale, Siracusa, and the Baroque towns of southeastern Sicily.

Palermo & Monreale - Experience the extraordinary Arab-Norman heritage that makes Sicily unlike anywhere else in Europe.

Ancient Greek Sicily - Explore some of the finest Greek archaeological sites outside Greece, including Segesta, Selinunte, Agrigento, Siracusa, and Taormina.

The Valley of the Temples - Walk among some of the best-preserved Greek temples in the Mediterranean world.

Roman Sicily - Marvel at the spectacular mosaics of Villa Romana del Casale, among the finest surviving Roman artworks anywhere.

The Baroque Cities of Noto & Ragusa - Discover elegant UNESCO-listed towns rebuilt after the devastating earthquake of 1693.

Siracusa & Ortigia - Explore the city that rivaled Athens and the home of Archimedes, one of history's greatest mathematicians.

Mount Etna - Ascend Europe's largest active volcano and experience the landscapes that have shaped Sicilian life for centuries.

Taormina - Enjoy breathtaking views of Mount Etna and the Ionian Sea from Sicily's most celebrated hilltop town.

Marsala Wine Country & Trapani Salt Pans - Learn how wine, salt, and trade connected Sicily to the wider Mediterranean world.

Cefalù's Norman Splendor - Visit one of Sicily's most picturesque coastal towns and its magnificent medieval cathedral.

Mediterranean Cuisine & Wines - Savor the flavors created by centuries of cultural exchange, from Arab-inspired sweets to world-class wines.

A World Affairs Perspective - Understand Sicily's historic role as a strategic crossroads linking Europe, Africa, and the Near East.



INCLUDED

10 Nights hotel accommodation with daily breakfast, in listed hotels.

Lunches and dinners as indicated in the itinerary.

English speaking professional tour guides.

Transportation with AC vehicles & drivers.

One bottle of water per person on the bus on touring days.

Arrival and departure transfers for suggested flights.

All entry fees to places mentioned in the itinerary.

Local taxes.

NOT INCLUDED

International airfare.

Visa fees if applicable.

Drinks with included meals, except tea or coffee for breakfast.

Gratuities for guides & drivers.

Personal expenditures like phone calls, laundry, medical expenses.

Travel insurance.



SUGGESTED FLIGHTS

Suggested flights are on ITA Airways - member of StarAlliance:

07 May AZ 637	Houston to Rome dep: 6:10 pm / arr: 11:50 am on May 8
08 May AZ 1781	Rome to Palermo dep: 1:15 pm / arr: 2:25 pm
18 May AZ 1778	Palermo to Rome dep: 6:10 am / arr: 7:20 am
18 May AZ 614	Rome to Boston dep: 10:25 am / arr: 1:40 pm
18 May AA 4380	Boston to Houston dep: 3:20 pm / arr: 6:52 pm

Economy class: \$1,860

Business class: \$7,950

Fares are per person, including taxes, surcharges and fees as of August 3, 2026.

Fares are non-refundable and may change based on availability.

Preferred Travel Partner

UNITED



May 7-18, 2027
12 Days / 10 Nights

ACCOMMODATIONS

May 7-18, 2027
12 Days / 10 Nights

Hotel Plaza Opera

Palermo

hotelplazaopera.com



Grand Hotel Palace

Marsala

grandhotelpalace.eu/



Hotel della Valle

Agrigento

hoteldellavalleagrigento.it/



ACCOMMODATIONS

May 7-18, 2027
12 Days / 10 Nights

Grand Hotel Villa Politi

Siracusa

villapoliti.com/



Delta hotels by Marriot

Giardini Naxos

marriott.com/en-us/hotels/





PROGRAM DETAILS

Day 1: Fri, May 7

Leave USA

We will leave USA for Palermo, Italy.

Overnight en route

Meals: -

Day 2: Sat, May 8

Arrive in Palermo

Welcome to Sicily, the largest island in the Mediterranean and one of Europe's most fascinating cultural crossroads. Situated between Europe, Africa, and the Near East, Sicily has attracted traders, conquerors, pilgrims, and adventurers for more than three thousand years. Its strategic location made it one of the most sought-after territories in the ancient world, leaving behind an extraordinary blend of cultures that continues to define the island today.

Upon arrival in Palermo, we will transfer to our hotel and have time to relax after our journey. Palermo, Sicily's capital, spreads along a broad bay beneath Monte Pellegrino, a dramatic limestone promontory that Goethe famously described as "the most beautiful headland in the world." Founded by Phoenician merchants in the eighth century BC, the city later flourished under Roman, Byzantine, Arab, Norman, and Spanish rule, each leaving visible traces in its architecture, cuisine, language, and traditions.

Perhaps nowhere else in Europe is the interaction of civilizations so clearly visible. Arab irrigation systems transformed Sicilian agriculture; Norman rulers commissioned churches adorned with Byzantine mosaics; Spanish governors introduced Baroque grandeur. Palermo became one of the medieval world's most cosmopolitan cities, where Latin, Greek, Arabic, and Hebrew cultures coexisted and influenced one another.

This evening, we will gather with our fellow travelers for a welcome dinner and an introduction to the remarkable journey ahead. Over the coming days, we will explore ancient Greek temples, Roman villas, medieval hill towns, Baroque cities, volcanic landscapes, and vibrant local communities, discovering how Sicily became one of the Mediterranean's most important cultural crossroads.

Overnight in Palermo

Meals: D



Day 3: Sun, May 9

Palermo & Monreale

After breakfast, we begin our exploration of Palermo, one of the most historically layered cities in Europe. For centuries, Palermo served as the capital of kingdoms, emirates, and empires, each contributing to the city's distinctive character. Unlike many European cities whose history is dominated by a single culture, Palermo evolved through the interaction of Phoenician traders, Greek colonists, Roman administrators, Arab scholars, Norman kings, and Spanish nobles. The result is a city whose architecture, cuisine, and traditions reveal an extraordinary fusion of civilizations.

Our tour begins at the famous Quattro Canti, the elegant Baroque crossroads that marks the historic center of Palermo. Here, four richly decorated facades symbolize the city's traditional quarters, while nearby Piazza Pretoria showcases one of Sicily's most celebrated fountains. Continuing through the old city, we visit Palermo Cathedral, a remarkable monument that reflects nearly a thousand years of architectural evolution.

Originally built as a Christian church, transformed into a mosque during Arab rule, and later reconstructed as a cathedral by the Normans, it stands today as a visible symbol of Sicily's multicultural past.

We then visit the Palazzo dei Normanni, the former royal palace and one of the oldest royal residences in Europe still in use today. From this seat of power, the Norman kings governed a kingdom that stretched far beyond Sicily and became one of medieval Europe's most sophisticated states. The highlight of the palace is undoubtedly the Cappella Palatina, commissioned by King Roger II in the 12th century. Combining Norman architecture, Byzantine mosaics, and Islamic decorative elements, the chapel is widely regarded as one of the greatest artistic achievements of the Middle Ages. Its shimmering gold mosaics, intricate wooden ceiling, and harmonious blend of cultural influences perfectly embody the spirit of Norman Sicily.

Lunch will be enjoyed in the vicinity of Palermo's lively Capo Market, where the aromas of fresh seafood, citrus fruits, spices, and local delicacies offer a glimpse into everyday Sicilian life. Markets such as these have served as commercial and social centers since Arab times and continue to reflect the island's strong Mediterranean identity. In the afternoon, we travel to nearby Monreale, perched on the hills overlooking Palermo. Here stands one of the most magnificent churches in the Christian world. Constructed by King William II in the late 12th century, Monreale Cathedral was intended to rival the greatest churches of Europe and remains the crowning achievement of Norman Sicily. Its vast interior is covered by more than six thousand square meters of dazzling gold mosaics depicting scenes from the Old and New Testaments. The immense image of Christ Pantocrator dominating the apse is among the most iconic works of medieval religious art.

We will also visit the cathedral's celebrated cloister, considered one of the finest examples of medieval sculpture in Europe. Its graceful arches rest upon 228 uniquely decorated twin columns, many adorned with intricate mosaics and carvings that reveal the artistic influences of Norman, Byzantine, and Islamic traditions. Walking through the cloister offers a peaceful opportunity to appreciate the cultural synthesis that made Sicily one of the most remarkable centers of medieval civilization.

Following our visit, we return to Palermo. This evening we gather for our welcome dinner, enjoying Sicilian cuisine while reflecting on a day that introduced us to the island's extraordinary history and cultural richness.

Overnight in Palermo

Meals: B –L- D

Day 4: Mon, May 10

Palermo – Segesta – Erice – Marsala

After breakfast, we leave Palermo and travel westward through Sicily's rolling countryside toward Segesta, one of the island's most intriguing archaeological sites. Unlike many of Sicily's famous Greek cities, Segesta was founded by the Elymians, an ancient people whose origins remain a subject of debate among historians. Classical writers linked them to refugees from Troy, while modern scholars continue to investigate their place within the complex mosaic of Mediterranean civilizations. Whatever their origins, the Elymians developed a prosperous city that stood at the crossroads of Greek, Phoenician, and indigenous Sicilian cultures.

Our visit centers on Segesta's magnificent Doric Temple, constructed during the fifth century BC. Standing alone amid a landscape of hills and valleys, it is among the best-preserved Greek-style temples anywhere in the Mediterranean. Curiously, the temple appears never to have been completed, adding an element of mystery to its history. Surrounded by peaceful countryside, it offers one of Sicily's most memorable settings and provides an excellent introduction to the ancient civilizations that flourished on the island long before Roman rule.

Continuing west, we ascend to the medieval hilltop town of Erice, perched nearly 2,500 feet above the sea. From its commanding position, the town offers sweeping views across western Sicily, the Egadi Islands, and the coastline below. For thousands of years, this mountaintop settlement was considered a sacred place. Ancient peoples worshipped a fertility goddess here, later identified by the Greeks as Aphrodite and by the Romans as Venus. Pilgrims from across the Mediterranean once journeyed to the sanctuary that stood on this dramatic summit. Today, Erice remains one of the best-preserved medieval towns in Europe, with narrow stone streets, flower-filled courtyards, ancient churches, and breathtaking vistas around every corner.

Following time to explore Erice, we enjoy lunch featuring local specialties and products from the region's celebrated olive groves. Sicilian olive cultivation dates back more than two thousand years, and olive oil remains one of the island's most important agricultural products. The cuisine of western Sicily reflects centuries of cultural exchange, combining Arab influences such as citrus fruits and spices with traditional Italian and Mediterranean ingredients.

In the afternoon, we descend toward the coast and enter one of Sicily's most distinctive landscapes: the historic salt pans of Trapani and Marsala. For centuries, salt was among the Mediterranean's most valuable commodities, essential for preserving food and sustaining maritime trade. The Phoenicians first recognized the area's potential, and generations of Sicilians continued the practice of harvesting sea salt from shallow evaporation ponds. Traditional windmills, many still standing today, helped pump water between the salt basins and became enduring symbols of western Sicily.

We will visit the Stagnone Lagoon and the Museum of Salt, where we learn about the techniques, traditions, and economic importance of salt production throughout the centuries. The lagoon is also an important nature reserve, providing habitat for flamingos, herons, avocets, and numerous migratory birds that travel between Europe and Africa.

Our day concludes in Marsala, a city whose name derives from the Arabic Marsa Allah, meaning "Port of God." Marsala occupies an important place in both Sicilian and Italian history. It was here, in 1860, that Giuseppe Garibaldi landed with his famous Thousand volunteers, launching the campaign that helped unify Italy. The city is equally renowned for its fortified wine, introduced to international markets in the eighteenth century and still one of Sicily's most famous exports.

This evening, we enjoy dinner at a local winery, accompanied by wines produced from the fertile soils of western Sicily. As we sample the flavors of the region, we gain further appreciation for the agricultural traditions and cultural influences that have shaped Sicilian life for centuries.

Overnight in Marsala

Meals: B - L - D

After breakfast, we continue our journey along Sicily's southern coast to Selinunte, one of the most impressive archaeological sites in the Mediterranean. Spread across a vast area overlooking the sea, Selinunte offers visitors an extraordinary opportunity to visualize the scale and ambition of a major Greek colony. Unlike many ancient cities that were continuously occupied and rebuilt over the centuries, Selinunte was largely abandoned after its destruction, allowing much of its original urban layout to remain visible today.

Founded during the seventh century BC by settlers from Megara Hyblaea, Selinunte rapidly grew into one of the wealthiest and most powerful Greek cities in Sicily. Its strategic location enabled it to prosper through agriculture, trade, and maritime commerce. The city's name derives from the wild celery plant (selinon) that flourished in the area and appeared prominently on its coinage. During its height, Selinunte was adorned with monumental temples, public buildings, and defensive walls that reflected both its prosperity and its importance within the Greek world.

As we explore the archaeological park, we encounter the remains of several massive Doric temples, among the largest ever constructed by the Greeks. Standing amid these impressive ruins, it is easy to imagine the grandeur of a city that once rivaled the great centers of the ancient Mediterranean. The dramatic setting, with temples rising above the coastline and the blue waters beyond, makes Selinunte one of Sicily's most memorable archaeological treasures.

The history of Selinunte also illustrates the fierce competition that characterized the ancient Mediterranean. Throughout its existence, the city found itself caught between the expanding influence of the Greek colonies and the ambitions of Carthage, the great Phoenician power centered in present-day Tunisia. In 409 BC, a massive Carthaginian army besieged and destroyed the city, bringing an abrupt end to its golden age. The ruins we see today stand as a powerful reminder of the conflicts that shaped the ancient world and determined the future of Sicily.

Following our visit, we enjoy lunch before continuing eastward through the fertile landscapes of southern Sicily toward Agrigento. Along the way, the countryside reveals another side of Sicily's identity. Olive groves, vineyards, almond orchards, and wheat fields have sustained local communities for centuries and contributed to the island's reputation as one of the breadbaskets of the Mediterranean.

By late afternoon we arrive in Agrigento, known in antiquity as Akragas. Founded around 580 BC by Greek settlers from nearby Gela, Akragas quickly became one of the richest and most influential cities in Magna Graecia. The Greek poet Pindar famously described it as "the most beautiful city of mortals," a testament to its wealth, monumental architecture, and cultural achievements. Over the centuries, the city experienced periods of prosperity under Greek and Roman rule, followed by invasions, conquests, and transformations that mirrored Sicily's broader history.

This evening, we settle into our hotel and enjoy dinner together. Tomorrow we will explore Agrigento's most celebrated treasure, the magnificent Valley of the Temples, one of the greatest archaeological landscapes in the world and a highlight of our Sicilian journey.

Overnight in Agrigento

Meals: B-L-D

Day 6: Wed, May 12

Agrigento – Piazza Armerina – Siracusa

This morning we visit one of the most extraordinary archaeological sites in the Mediterranean: the Valley of the Temples, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the finest surviving examples of ancient Greek civilization outside Greece itself. Set along a ridge overlooking the Sicilian countryside and the distant sea, the valley preserves an impressive collection of Doric temples constructed during the fifth century BC, when Agrigento was among the wealthiest cities of the Greek world.

Walking through the site, we encounter the remarkably preserved Temple of Concordia, widely considered one of the best-preserved Greek temples anywhere in existence. Nearby stand the remains of the Temples of Juno, Hercules, Zeus, and Castor and Pollux, each reflecting the ambition and prosperity of ancient Akragas. The city was renowned throughout the Mediterranean for its wealth, monumental architecture, and cultural sophistication. Ancient writers described its citizens as living as though they would die tomorrow while building as though they would live forever. Standing among these majestic ruins, it is easy to understand why Agrigento remains one of Sicily's most celebrated historical treasures.

We will also visit the excellent Archaeological Museum of Agrigento, whose collections help bring the ancient city to life. Through sculpture, pottery, inscriptions, and architectural fragments, the museum illustrates the development of Greek Sicily and provides valuable context for understanding the temples and the civilization that created them. Together, the archaeological site and museum offer one of the most complete introductions to the Greek heritage of the island.

Following lunch, we continue inland to Piazza Armerina, a charming town nestled among the hills of central Sicily. Unlike many coastal cities that were shaped by maritime trade, Piazza Armerina developed as an important inland settlement with a unique cultural identity. The town itself retains a distinctly medieval atmosphere, with winding streets, elegant churches, and historic buildings reflecting centuries of Norman, Aragonese, and Spanish influence.

Our primary destination is the magnificent Villa Romana del Casale, one of the most important archaeological discoveries in Europe and another UNESCO World Heritage Site. Built during the late Roman Empire, the villa was likely the residence of an exceptionally wealthy aristocrat, possibly connected to the imperial administration. What makes the villa extraordinary is the preservation of its mosaic floors, which cover more than 40,000 square feet and constitute one of the largest and finest collections of Roman mosaics in the world.

As we explore the villa, we encounter vivid scenes depicting mythology, hunting expeditions, athletic competitions, exotic animals, and daily life in the Roman world. Among the most famous mosaics is the so-called “Bikini Girls”, portraying young women participating in athletic activities nearly 1,600 years ago. The remarkable artistry and detail of these mosaics provide an unparalleled glimpse into the tastes, wealth, and sophistication of the Roman elite during the final centuries of the empire. Leaving central Sicily behind, we travel eastward toward the Ionian coast and the historic city of Siracusa. Founded by Greek colonists from Corinth in 733 BC, Siracusa would grow into one of the most powerful and influential cities of the ancient Mediterranean, rivaling Athens itself in wealth, population, and cultural achievement. It was here that the mathematician and inventor Archimedes lived and worked, and where great political and military struggles shaped the history of the Greek world. Upon arrival, we check into our hotel and enjoy dinner together. Over the next two days, we will discover why Siracusa has long been regarded as one of Sicily’s greatest cultural and historical treasures.

Overnight in Siracusa

Meals: B - L - D

Day 7: Thu, May 13

Noto – Ragusa – Siracusa

After breakfast, we depart Siracusa and travel into southeastern Sicily, a region renowned for its magnificent Baroque towns and distinctive cultural identity. Today’s excursion takes us into the heart of the Val di Noto, an area whose cities were almost entirely rebuilt following one of the most devastating natural disasters in European history. On January 11, 1693, a massive earthquake struck eastern Sicily, destroying entire communities and claiming tens of thousands of lives. In the decades that followed, architects, artists, and planners transformed the region into a showcase of late Baroque urban design, creating many of the elegant towns we admire today.

Our first destination is Noto, often described as the jewel of Sicilian Baroque architecture. Rebuilt on a new site after the earthquake, the city was designed according to a coherent urban plan that reflected the ideals of the eighteenth century. Wide avenues, harmonious public spaces, and richly decorated facades create an atmosphere unlike anywhere else in Sicily. The warm local limestone, glowing shades of honey, gold, and soft pink in the sunlight, gives the city an almost theatrical beauty.

As we stroll through Noto’s historic center, we encounter some of its most important landmarks, including San Carlo al Corso, elegant palaces, and beautifully restored churches. Every corner reveals the creativity and optimism of a society rebuilding itself after catastrophe. Art historian Cesare Brandi famously referred to Noto as a “garden of stone,” a phrase that perfectly captures the city’s extraordinary visual harmony. Today, Noto remains one of the finest examples of Baroque urban planning in Europe and is recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The region surrounding Noto is also known for its fertile countryside, vineyards, olive groves, and citrus orchards. Sicily’s long growing season and rich volcanic and limestone soils have made it one of Italy’s most productive agricultural regions. We enjoy a light lunch at a local winery, where we have an opportunity to sample wines produced from indigenous Sicilian grape varieties while learning about the island’s rapidly growing reputation in the international wine world.

In the afternoon, we continue to Ragusa, another of southeastern Sicily's remarkable Baroque cities. Like Noto, Ragusa suffered catastrophic destruction during the earthquake of 1693. However, its reconstruction followed a somewhat different path. The city developed into two distinct sections: Ragusa Superiore, built on higher ground according to newer urban principles, and Ragusa Ibla, rebuilt among the ruins of the medieval town below. This unique arrangement created one of Sicily's most visually dramatic urban landscapes.

Our exploration focuses on the historic district of Ragusa Ibla, where elegant churches, double palaces, and picturesque piazzas seem to cascade down the hillside. We visit the magnificent Duomo di San Giorgio, widely regarded as one of the masterpieces of Sicilian Baroque architecture. Nearby, the peaceful Giardino Ibleo offers beautiful views across the surrounding valleys and countryside. The city has served as a setting for numerous films and television productions, reflecting its timeless atmosphere and architectural beauty. We also visit the Archaeological Museum in Ragusa Superiore, whose collections provide insight into the long history of southeastern Sicily, from prehistoric settlements through the Greek and Roman periods. The exhibits illustrate that while the Baroque cities dominate the modern landscape, the region's history extends back thousands of years and reflects the succession of cultures that shaped the island.

By late afternoon, we return to Siracusa. As we travel through the rolling landscapes of southeastern Sicily, we gain a deeper appreciation for the resilience and creativity of the communities that rebuilt these cities and transformed tragedy into one of Europe's most remarkable architectural achievements.

Overnight in Siracusa

Meals: B - L - D



Today we devote a full day to Siracusa, one of the greatest cities of the ancient Greek world and one of the highlights of our Sicilian journey. Founded by Corinthian settlers in 733 BC, Siracusa grew rapidly into a powerful maritime and commercial center whose influence extended throughout the Mediterranean. At its height, the city rivaled Athens in wealth, population, and cultural prestige. Ancient historians described Siracusa as one of the most beautiful and formidable cities of antiquity, a reputation reflected in the remarkable monuments that survive today.

Our morning begins at the Archaeological Park of Neapolis, home to some of Sicily's most important ancient remains. The centerpiece of the park is the magnificent Greek Theater, carved directly into the limestone hillside during the fifth century BC. Among the largest theaters of the ancient Greek world, it once hosted dramatic performances, civic gatherings, and religious celebrations. The setting remains breathtaking, with sweeping views toward the sea and surrounding countryside. It was here that the works of renowned playwrights such as Aeschylus were performed before audiences numbering in the thousands.

Nearby we visit the famous Latomia del Paradiso, or Paradise Quarry, an ancient stone quarry whose towering rock walls create an atmosphere of extraordinary beauty. Within the quarry lies the celebrated Ear of Dionysius, a cavern whose unusual shape produces remarkable acoustic effects. According to tradition, the tyrant Dionysius used the cave to overhear prisoners' conversations, although the story was first popularized centuries later. Whether legend or fact, the site remains one of Siracusa's most fascinating landmarks. Continuing through the archaeological park, we see the remains of the Roman Amphitheater, one of the largest Roman arenas in Italy. Built during the imperial period, it reflects the city's continued importance after Sicily became Rome's first overseas province. The amphitheater hosted public spectacles, athletic contests, and other events that entertained the population and reinforced Roman authority throughout the region.

We then visit the outstanding Paolo Orsi Archaeological Museum, named after the archaeologist whose pioneering work transformed the study of Sicilian antiquity. Widely regarded as one of Italy's finest archaeological museums, its collections span thousands of years of history, from prehistoric settlements to the Greek and Roman periods. Through sculpture, ceramics, inscriptions, and funerary artifacts, the museum provides a comprehensive understanding of eastern Sicily's cultural development and the civilizations that flourished here.

Following lunch, we cross to the enchanting island of Ortigia, the historic heart of Siracusa and the site of the city's original settlement. Connected to the mainland by a short bridge, Ortigia retains a distinctive atmosphere where Greek foundations, medieval streets, Baroque facades, and lively piazzas blend seamlessly together. Walking through its narrow lanes, one gains a sense of continuity between ancient and modern Sicily.

Our exploration includes the ruins of the Temple of Apollo, one of the oldest Doric temples in Sicily, dating to the sixth century BC. We continue to the elegant Piazza Archimede, named after the city's most famous citizen, the mathematician and inventor whose discoveries influenced science for centuries. Nearby stands the beautiful Fountain of Diana, celebrating myths associated with the ancient city.

A highlight of our afternoon is the magnificent Cathedral of Siracusa, one of the most extraordinary examples of architectural continuity in Europe. The cathedral was constructed around the remains of a fifth-century BC Greek temple dedicated to Athena. Remarkably, many of the original temple columns remain visible within the church walls, creating a unique fusion of pagan and Christian architecture that vividly illustrates Sicily's layered history.

As the day draws to a close, we may pause at the Fountain of Arethusa, a freshwater spring associated with one of the most famous myths of the ancient Greek world. According to legend, the nymph Arethusa was transformed into a spring by the goddess Artemis while fleeing the river god Alpheus. The spring has supplied fresh water to the city for more than two thousand years and remains one of Ortigia's most beloved landmarks. This evening we return to our hotel after a day immersed in the history, mythology, and artistic achievements of one of the Mediterranean's greatest cities.

Overnight in Siracusa

Meals: B - L - D

Day 9: Sat, May 15

Siracusa – Catania – Taormina – Giardini Naxos

After breakfast, we leave Siracusa and travel north along Sicily's eastern coast toward Catania, the island's second-largest city. Dominated by the presence of nearby Mount Etna, Catania has experienced one of the most turbulent histories of any city in Europe. Earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, wars, and invasions have repeatedly devastated the city, yet each time its inhabitants rebuilt it with remarkable determination. Today's elegant Baroque center, recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, largely dates from the ambitious reconstruction that followed the catastrophic earthquake of 1693. Our city tour introduces us to Catania's rich history and distinctive character. Built primarily from dark volcanic stone quarried from Mount Etna, many of the city's buildings possess a unique appearance that sets them apart from other Sicilian towns. We visit the impressive Cathedral of Saint Agatha, dedicated to the city's patron saint, whose story remains deeply woven into local identity. Nearby, elegant piazzas, noble palaces, and bustling streets reveal the prosperity that Catania achieved through commerce, agriculture, and its strategic location on the Ionian coast.

A particularly meaningful visit today is the Historical Museum of the Landing in Sicily 1943, which tells the story of one of the most significant military operations of the Second World War. In July 1943, Allied forces landed on Sicily in Operation Husky, marking the beginning of the campaign that ultimately led to the liberation of Italy from Fascist rule. Through immersive exhibits, photographs, personal testimonies, and historical artifacts, the museum provides insight into the human and strategic dimensions of the conflict. For World Affairs Council travelers, the museum offers an opportunity to reflect on Sicily's role in one of the defining geopolitical events of the twentieth century and the broader consequences of war for Europe and the Mediterranean.

Following lunch, we continue to Taormina, perhaps Sicily's most celebrated resort town. Perched dramatically on a terrace high above the Ionian Sea, Taormina has captivated travelers for centuries. Writers, artists, aristocrats, and intellectuals from across Europe were drawn here during the era of the Grand Tour, enchanted by its mild climate, spectacular scenery, and rich historical heritage. Even today, visitors are greeted by views that rank among the most beautiful in Italy.

By late afternoon, we descend to nearby Giardini Naxos, located on the bay below Taormina. This coastal town occupies the site of the first Greek colony established in Sicily, founded by settlers from the island of Euboea in 734 BC. Although little remains of the original settlement, its importance in Sicilian history cannot be overstated, for it marked the beginning of Greek colonization that would profoundly shape the island's future.

This evening, we enjoy dinner and settle into our hotel overlooking the Ionian coast. Tomorrow we encounter one of Sicily's greatest natural wonders—Mount Etna, Europe's highest and most active volcano.

Overnight in Giardini Naxos

Meals: B - L - D

Day 10: Sun, May 16

Mount Etna – Taormina – Giardini Naxos

Today we explore one of Europe's most extraordinary natural landmarks: Mount Etna, the largest active volcano on the continent and one of the most studied volcanoes in the world. Rising more than 11,000 feet above eastern Sicily, Etna has shaped the island's geography, economy, culture, and mythology for thousands of years. The ancient Greeks believed the mountain was the workshop of Hephaestus, god of fire and metalworking, while later legends associated its fiery eruptions with imprisoned giants struggling beneath the earth.

Following breakfast, we begin our ascent through a landscape that changes dramatically with elevation. The lower slopes are among the most fertile agricultural areas in Sicily, supporting vineyards, citrus groves, olive orchards, pistachio plantations, and small farming communities. Generations of Sicilians have learned to live alongside the volcano, benefiting from the rich volcanic soils while accepting the risks that accompany periodic eruptions. The relationship between the people of Etna and the mountain remains one of the most fascinating examples of human adaptation to a powerful natural environment.

As we climb higher, the lush vegetation gradually gives way to a stark and dramatic volcanic landscape. Vast lava fields, ancient craters, and blackened rock formations reveal the mountain's restless geological history. Along the way, our guide will explain how Etna was formed through the interaction of the African and Eurasian tectonic plates, a process that continues to shape the Mediterranean region today. The volcano has recorded eruptions dating back thousands of years and remains one of the most active volcanic systems on Earth.

Our destination is Rifugio Sapienza, located at approximately 6,200 feet above sea level. Here we can observe the dramatic effects of recent eruptions and view the Silvestri Craters, formed during the eruption of 1892. Depending upon weather conditions and volcanic activity, we will continue higher by cable car and specialized four-wheel-drive vehicles, ascending toward the upper slopes of the volcano. The views become increasingly spectacular as the landscape opens across eastern Sicily, the Ionian coastline, and, on clear days, as far as Calabria on the Italian mainland.

Few places in Europe offer such a vivid opportunity to witness the forces that continue to shape our planet. The contrast between barren lava fields and fertile agricultural valleys below illustrates the paradox of volcanic regions: destruction and creation occurring side by side. Throughout history, Etna's eruptions have periodically threatened nearby communities, yet the same volcanic activity has produced the fertile soils that sustain local agriculture and contribute to the prosperity of the region.

Following our exploration of Mount Etna, we visit one of the area's renowned wineries. In recent years, the Etna wine region has emerged as one of Italy's most highly regarded wine-producing areas. The combination of volcanic soils, high elevations, significant temperature variations, and indigenous grape varieties creates wines with distinctive character and growing international acclaim. During our visit, we learn about the traditions of Sicilian viticulture and enjoy a tasting accompanied by a leisurely lunch featuring regional specialties.

The afternoon is reserved for free time in Taormina, allowing an opportunity to revisit favorite sites, enjoy the atmosphere of the town, browse local shops, or simply relax while admiring the magnificent views of the sea and Mount Etna. Taormina's beauty has inspired generations of artists, writers, and travelers, and many visitors find this time among the most memorable moments of their Sicilian experience.

This evening we gather for our farewell dinner, celebrating the remarkable journey we have shared across Sicily. As we enjoy the island's celebrated cuisine and wines, we reflect upon the civilizations, landscapes, traditions, and stories that have made Sicily one of the Mediterranean's most captivating destinations.

Overnight in Giardini Naxos

Meals: B - L - D





Day 11: Mon, May 17

Giardini Naxos – Cefalù – Palermo

After breakfast, we begin our journey back toward Palermo, traveling along Sicily's northern coastline. The route offers beautiful views of the Tyrrhenian Sea, rugged mountains, and picturesque fishing villages that have long connected the island to the wider Mediterranean world. Our destination this morning is Cefalù, one of Sicily's most charming and photogenic coastal towns.

Nestled between the sea and a towering limestone promontory known as La Rocca, Cefalù possesses a setting that has captivated visitors for centuries. Originally settled in antiquity, the town flourished under Norman rule during the twelfth century, when Sicily emerged as one of the most prosperous and cosmopolitan kingdoms in medieval Europe. Its narrow medieval streets, stone houses, small piazzas, and waterfront promenades preserve much of the atmosphere that made Cefalù an important coastal community for generations.

The highlight of our visit is the magnificent Cathedral of Cefalù, commissioned by King Roger II in 1131. According to tradition, the Norman ruler vowed to build the church after surviving a violent storm at sea. Today, the cathedral stands as one of the masterpieces of Arab-Norman architecture and is part of the UNESCO World Heritage designation recognizing the unique cultural achievements of Norman Sicily. Inside, visitors are greeted by extraordinary Byzantine mosaics, including a majestic image of Christ Pantocrator that ranks among the finest examples of medieval mosaic art anywhere in Europe.

We will also visit the Mandralisca Museum, one of Sicily's most rewarding small museums. Founded through the bequest of Baron Enrico Piraino di Mandralisca, a nineteenth-century scholar and collector, the museum houses an eclectic collection of art, archaeology, manuscripts, coins, and decorative objects. Its most celebrated masterpiece is Portrait of an Unknown Man by the Sicilian Renaissance painter Antonello da Messina. Often considered one of the greatest portraits of the Italian Renaissance, the painting's enigmatic expression has fascinated viewers for centuries.

Beyond its artistic treasures, Cefalù offers a glimpse into traditional Sicilian life. As we stroll through the historic center, we encounter local cafés, artisan shops, and lively squares where residents continue traditions that have endured for generations. The town's seaside setting also reminds us of Sicily's longstanding connection to maritime trade, fishing, and cultural exchange across the Mediterranean.

Following lunch and time to explore, we continue westward to Palermo, returning to the city where our journey began. Along the way, we pass through landscapes that reflect the diversity of Sicily itself—fertile valleys, rugged mountains, ancient settlements, and modern communities shaped by centuries of history.

Upon arrival in Palermo, there may be time for a final walk through the historic center or an opportunity to enjoy the atmosphere of Sicily's vibrant capital one last time. This evening we gather for our final dinner together, celebrating the experiences of the past twelve days. From Greek temples and Roman villas to Norman cathedrals, Baroque cities, volcanic landscapes, and world-renowned cuisine, our journey has revealed the extraordinary cultural richness that makes Sicily one of the Mediterranean's most fascinating destinations.

As we reflect on the civilizations that have shaped this island over three millennia, we gain a deeper appreciation for Sicily's enduring role as a bridge between continents, cultures, and histories—a place where the story of the Mediterranean can still be read in stone, art, tradition, and everyday life.

Overnight in Palermo

Meals: B - L - D

Day 12: Tue, May 18

Palermo - Departure

Early in the morning we will transfer to Palermo Airport for our return flight home. As we depart Sicily, we carry with us memories of magnificent Greek temples, Roman mosaics, Norman cathedrals, Baroque cities, volcanic landscapes, exceptional cuisine, and the remarkable story of an island that has stood at the crossroads of civilizations since antiquity.

Meals: B





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