



# Cultural & Natural Highlights of Sicily

*A complete sightseeing, walking & discovery tour across the  
world's most beautiful island*



## TRIP NOTES 2023

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## INTRODUCTION

*You start your Sicily tour from the region's capital, Palermo, an intriguing city full of contradictions, life and art. Unlike other Italian 'art cities', Palermo is still a living vibrant city, where the amazing amount of artistic treasures blends with colourful street life & markets. From Palermo you make a daytrip to the wonderful Monreale, a place where a number of European cultures have intermingled, from the Normans to the Arabs. Its amazing cathedral is worth the journey itself.*

*During the next few days you discover the western part of Sicily, an incredible mix of beautiful nature & amazing culture, ranging from the town of Trapani, to the Greek temples of Segesta and, of course, the great Zingaro and Monte Cofano nature reserves, Sicily's first and foremost nature protection areas with abundant Mediterranean vegetation and some spectacular little isolated beaches.*

*Then you travel along the northern coast to the beautiful little town of Cefalù, with its glorious Arab-Norman cathedral. You make a short walk onto its impressive fortified 'Rocca', a wonderful walk between ruins and the abundant nature, overlooking the Madonie Mountains. Further to the east lies the intriguing Greek city of Tyndaris, where you make a beautiful afternoon walk down to the coast, with the chance for a swim at one of Sicily's most amazing beaches.*

*Your next base is a hidden pearl: the beautiful, yet relatively unknown town of Montalbano Elicona, halfway between the Mediterranean Sea and the impressive Mount Etna, still undiscovered by mass tourism. A visit to its amazing castle and a walk through its beautiful forests are worth the visit! You also discover the strange rock formations of the Malabotta Forest.*

*Through the unique Alcantara valley, with its spectacular canyons and natural swimming pools cut deep into the ancient lava flows, you then travel to your final base. This will be the world-famous resort of Taormina, one of Italy's most scenic locations, which boasts one of the most spectacular Greek theatres in the world. During a final easy walking day you'll explore the charming city and its surroundings, ending your walk on the beach at Isola Bella – what's in a name*



*Please note: this is a moderately easy tour which is suitable for those who have some experience of walking and a good general physical condition. Most of the walks are on good paths, parts of them waymarked. Average walking times: approx. 5 hours each day.*



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## DAY-TO-DAY PROGRAMME

### Day 0 – Arrival in Palermo

The starting point of your tour is the beautiful city of Palermo, which can easily be reached by plane (Palermo or Trapani Airport), by boat (e.g. from Naples) and by train. You can arrive here on the starting day of the tour, but you can also book an extra night hereof course, to allow some extra time for some sightseeing in this beautiful Mediterranean city, full of all kinds of cultures and civilisations, ranging from Greek, to Arab and Norman, and of course Italian !

### Day 1 – Arrival in Palermo (or Trapani)

Today you arrive in the bustling city of Palermo. After settling in at your beautiful, recently restored hotel in the heart of the historical centre, you could go for a short stroll through the colourful streets, soaking up its atmosphere, or visit a museum. Towards the end of the afternoon you meet your tour leader and the rest of the group for a welcome cocktail. After a brief introduction of the tour, you will go for a short roundwalk through the heart of Palermo, covering some of the 'highlights' of course, but also through unknown, lively (but safe!) neighbourhoods, with their unbelievable history, where you can find Greek, Roman and medieval buildings in a few square metres. The walk also brings you through quiet parks and along the seashore, to relax from the hectic street life. In the evening you dine in a very nice restaurant close to the hotel.

**Accommodation: Palermo - Hotel \*\*\*\***

### Day 2 – Monreale & Palermo

Directly from the hotel you start an amazing roundwalk through the old heart of Palermo, admiring some of its main monuments, like the cathedral, a wonderful mix of styles, and the so-called 'Quattro Canti'. But you will also stroll through authentic neighbourhoods, like the Kalsa, and enjoy some of its colourful markets, like its famous 'Vucciria' fish market and the 'Ballarò' market. Of course you pay a visit to the 'Norman Palace', with its stunning mosaics in the Palatine Chapel. You can have your lunch in a nice place in the historical centre. Then, halfway through the afternoon, our private minibus picks you up and brings you to nearby Monreale, perhaps after an optional visit to 'La Cuba', one of Sicily's most intriguing monuments. Monreale is situated in a panoramic position above Palermo, with good views over the city and the sea. Here you take your time to visit its stunning cathedral, considered 'one of the wonders of the medieval world', and climb onto its rooftop. Then you have some time for a stroll and a drink in the village itself, before returning to Palermo. In the evening you are free to choose from a large choice of restaurants, ranging from simple pizzerias to exclusive restaurants.

**Accommodation: Palermo - Hotel \*\*\*\***

*Total walking distance 8 km. Approximate walking time: 4 h. (Sightseeing walks in Palermo and Monreale / about 1,5 h. + 1 h. + 1,5 h.). Total driving time today: around 1 h.*

### Day 3 – The Greek temples of Segesta, Scopello & the 'Zingaro' Nature Reserve

After all the culture of the last few days, today you make a relaxed walk through one of Sicily's oldest nature reserves, the wonderful *Riserva dello Zingaro*. First you travel to the charming little village of Scopello, at the entrance of the nature reserve, where you can drink a coffee or enjoy a local cake. Then you make a great day walk, first through the pristine Mediterranean landscape of the higher hills, overlooking the Mediterranean, and then down to the coast. You have a picnic lunch with local specialties somewhere on a nice beach, and perhaps go for a swim. Then you follow the beautiful coastal path back to Scopello, past several small inlets and some great viewpoints. After some relaxation and perhaps a final swim, you visit the beautiful 'Tonmara', an ancient fishing harbour, featured in many movies. From there you either walk back to Scopello, where you can enjoy an 'aperitivo', or you can do this in the nearby, very picturesque Castellammare del Golfo. After a drink here towards the end of the afternoon, you visit the Greek temples of Segesta, considered to be the 'most romantic' of all Greek temples. A roundwalk here in the late afternoon is certainly a beautiful experience. From the great Greek theatre of Segesta you can already spot our next accommodation, a beautiful 'agriturismo' at the foot of the mountain of Segesta, where you'll stay for the next two nights.

**Accommodation: Segesta - Agriturismo**

*Total walking time: around 4 h. Total driving time today: around 2,5 h.*



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### Day 4 – Western Sicily: Monte Cofano, Trapani & Erice

Today you discover a bit more of the western part of Sicily, the closest to North Africa and, therefore, full of exotic influences. You first make a great walk around the headland of Monte Cofano. First you visit the small town of Custonaci, whose church has been a major pilgrimage destination for many centuries. Here you are welcomed by the president of the local 'Pro Loco', who will guide you during the day. From Custonaci you then walk down through the marble quarries to the famous Grotto of Mangiapane, where a 'Living Nativity' is set up each year, and where the centuries-old rural history is kept alive. Then you make a great coastal walk around the headland, and are picked up again on the shore. You then have a great lunch in a local restaurant, based on local specialties and travel to the nice town of Trapani (optional short visit). From Trapani you travel by cable car up to the amazing town of Erice, with some stunning views over the Mediterranean and the islands in front of Trapani. In Erice you make a beautiful roundwalk. Towards the end of the afternoon your private bus picks you up from Erice to bring you back to your beautiful 'agriturismo', where you will have yet another great meal tonight.

**Accommodation: Segesta - Agriturismo**

*Total walking time: around 3-4 h. Total driving time today: around 2 h.*

### Day 5 – Cefalù & the Madonie Regional Park, Tyndaris & Montalbano Elicona

Today you leave the western part of Sicily and travel along the northern coast, to the beautiful little town of Cefalù, one of the pearls of northern Sicily. Here you are left at its 'Rocca', the mountain top with the ruins of its castle and medieval fortifications, high above the old city centre. Here you can make a wonderful short roundwalk, past some amazing viewpoints. Then you walk back down into the old town, and discover its charming narrow alleys, as well as the imposing Norman cathedral. After lunch – maybe some time for a swim – you continue your trip along the northern coast and stop at Tindari. Here you can pay a short visit to the sanctuary, one of the most important places of worship in Sicily, before making a visit to the intriguing ruins of the Greek city of Tyndaris, where you make a wonderful afternoon walk in the middle of the ruins, overlooking the Mediterranean. Perhaps you can continue the walk down to the coast. You walk past spectacular sand formations and turquoise lakes, before returning to the bus. Then you head inland to the charming medieval town of Montalbano, dominated by its impressive castle, listed as one of the hundred most beautiful little towns in Italy. You settle in at your hotel, overlooking the coast and the Aeolian Islands.

**Accommodation: Montalbano - Hotel \*\*\*\***

*Total walking distance: 7,5 km. Approx. walking time: around 2,5 h. Total driving time: around 3 h.*



### Day 6 – The many faces of Mount Etna: the Alcantara canyon, recent lava flows, old craters & wine

After breakfast a private minibus picks you up from your base for a full day visit to Mount Etna. First you drive into the valley of the Alcantara River, irrigated by a complex system of basins and canals, dating back to the period of Arab rule in Sicily. You make a first stop at the unique canyon cut through an ancient lava flow of Mount Etna. Here you have a short & easy walk through a pleasant terraced landscape of orchards and fruit trees, with many strange lava formations sculpted by the Alcantara River, and perhaps have the chance to dive into one of the 'gurne', or 'natural pools'. Then you travel to the charming little town of Linguaglossa, where you can enjoy a typical 'granita' or a wonderful local almond/pistachio cake. Then your journey goes up



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along the scenic Via 'Mare Neve', the road of the sea and snow. You will admire the most recent lava flows, some of which date back only a few years, reminding you of the fact that Etna is still an active volcano!

You make a short walk on one of these recent lava flows, with a visit to some of the spots where the lava burst out. This walk really gives you the feeling of the immense forces still working below. You walk on to the Sartorius Mountains, a completely different landscape, where you make a nice walk, partly through the forest, partly over older lava flows, ending at a mountain hut with spectacular views over the Strait of Messina. Here your bus picks you up again and you drive back down, stopping at one of the best-known wine estates on the slopes of Mt. Etna. You take the opportunity to taste a few wines, accompanied by some local specialties. Then, towards the end of the afternoon, you travel on to your next base, the wonderful resort town of Taormina, situated in one of the most dramatic spots of the whole Mediterranean.

**Accommodation: Taormina - Hotel \*\*\*/\*\*\***

*Total walking distance: 7,5 km. Approx. walking time: around 3 h. Total driving time: around 2,5 h.*

### Day 7 – Taormina – Castelmola & Isola Bella

After breakfast this morning, you can first visit the charming hilltop town of Castelmola, a small fortified settlement, where you enjoy more stunning views over the surrounding area, the city of Taormina, Mount Etna and the Mediterranean Sea. After a stroll through its medieval streets, an optional visit to the castle, and maybe a drink on one of the terraces, you walk on down to Taormina, along a beautiful panoramic footpath. You reach the charming Taormina, not without reason one of Italy's foremost resort towns, through a pleasant agricultural landscape with breathtaking views of the coastline and glorious Etna.

The Greek influence is noticeable in the architecture, and wandering the back streets is a great way to transport you back in time to the days when this part of Italy remained a strong hold for its Aegean neighbours. With picturesque ruins and the backdrop of Etna, views are grand to say the least. Here you make a short walk through the charming little town streets, the gardens and of course you visit the world-famous Greek/Roman theatre and cathedral. You have the afternoon free, so there's plenty of time for another stroll along Taormina's main boulevard, with its many beautiful shops, or to have a drink in the shade of an oleander tree, or to return to the hotel and enjoy its panoramic swimming pool.

Those who feel like it can go for a walk down to the sea, which you reach in front of the beautiful Isola Bella (what's in a name!). Here you have time to swim, relax at the beach and have a drink under the Mediterranean sun. In the late afternoon you take the cable car back up to town.

**Accommodation: Taormina - Hotel \*\*\*/\*\*\***

*Total walking distance: 9-11 km. Approx. walking time: 3,5-4,5 h.*

### Day 8 – Departure

This morning after breakfast, your journey ends. You can opt to spend some more time in Taormina, or take part in a journey to the spectacular south-eastern part of Sicily.

There are (shuttle) buses to Catania (airport) at walking distance from the hotel. A transfer back to either Palermo (or to Catania/airport) can be arranged at any time.



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## TOUR DETAILS

### ACCOMMODATION & MEALS

All nights are spent in beautiful, characteristic hotels, mostly historical buildings (generally 3/4-star; 4/5-star on some departure dates). All rooms have en-suite facilities.

All accommodations have breakfast included. Most evening meals are included, for which we have selected the best available restaurants. On two nights you are free to choose from the wide choice of restaurants in the area. Your guide can give you good tips.

Also some (picnic) lunches on walking days are included in the tour price. On other days you are free to have your own lunch. Here you have the option of having your lunch in a nice restaurant, or purchasing your supplies for a picnic lunch.

**Nights 1 & 2:** The first two nights are spent in Palermo. Your accommodation is a 4-star hotel in an amazing historical palace, recently renovated, in the heart of the historical centre.

**Nights 3 & 4:** These two nights you stay in a beautiful agriturismo near the temples of Segesta, a carefully restored 16<sup>th</sup>-century *masseria*, where you can indulge in local, often home-made specialties.

**Night 5:** For one night you stay in a great 4-star hotel near Montalbano, with great views over the Aeolian Islands, a wellness centre and a great restaurant.

**Nights 6 & 7:** The last two nights are spent at Taormina. Your very good, welcoming hotel is located in a central position, right in the historical heart of the city.

### UPGRADE/CHANGES IN ACCOMMODATION

*On some dates we run an upgraded version of this tour, staying in luxurious 4-star hotels. Look for the 'Premiere Inns' signs.*

### INCLUDED

- Private English speaking tour leader for 8 days
- Accommodation: 2 nights Palermo, 2 nights Taormina, 1 night Montalbano in good 4\*\*\*\* hotels; 2 nights Segesta in a beautiful *agriturismo*
- Meals: 7 breakfasts, 5 dinners (good restaurants!), 1 warm lunch, 1 picnic lunch, 1 wine tasting
- All private & public transfers as indicated throughout the entire itinerary
- Entrance fees of all sites along the itinerary
- Special activities as outlined in the day by day itinerary
- Guest experts for special places
- 24/7 assistance
- Luggage transport
- All gratuities for baggage, porters & hotel service



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## NOT INCLUDED

- Departure taxes
- Visas
- Travel Insurance
- Drinks and meals not mentioned in the itinerary
- Optional additional tours or activities
- Tips
- Items of a personal nature

## LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

**Easy (2):** Mostly easy walks, though some include walking uphill, sometimes on paths with rough surfaces. On most days shortcuts are possible (as well as occasional extensions).

**Fitness:** High standard of fitness is not necessary but you should be able to walk for up to 4 hours a day in hot sun on dusty or stony tracks.

## ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE

**Arrival:** The tour starts in PALERMO, a city with an international airport.

A taxi pick-up service can be arranged either from PALERMO airport, harbour or train station.

**Departure:** The tour ends in TAORMINA. A frequent bus service can bring you from here to either Catania (airport & harbour), Taormina train station or Messina (harbour). Several taxi services are available to bring you directly to your next destination (within Sicily).



## TOUR VARIATIONS

**It is possible to include some extra nights before or after your tour.**

For those who have never been to Palermo an extra day here is strongly recommended.

The tour can easily be extended with a few days here. Also in Trapani (a nice city and a good base for visiting the western part of Sicily), or Erice several good accommodations are available. Details and prices on request.

Longer and shorter versions of this tour are also available. Prices on request. Have a look at our other SICILY tours as well!

## BESPOKE ADVENTURES

Many of these tours can be turned into Private '[Bespoke Adventures](#)' to accommodate private group travel.

We can organise both "off the shelf" itineraries, as well as create custom itineraries to meet your special needs. Book the dates you want, with the family or friends you wish to bring along!

Longer and shorter versions of this tour are also available. Prices on request.



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