

- Comprehensive overview of Sicily's major treasures
- Wonderful Greek Temples
- The famous Roman Villa Piazza Armerina with its magnificent mosaics
- Major Norman churches & palaces with their Byzantine mosaics
- Private visits to remarkable Baroque palaces in Palermo, Syracuse & Catania



Piazza Armerina, A detail of the mosaic decoration from the Roman Villa

OVERVIEW

Sitting in the centre of the Mediterranean, Sicily has always been a strategic resource fought over for millennia. The original settlers were overcome by the Phoenicians from Carthage, followed by the Greeks, both sets of invaders attracted by its natural resources; then the Romans arrived and overran the island. During the so-called 'Dark Ages', Sicily continued to prosper, particularly during its period as part of the Byzantine Empire. Subsequently, from the ninth century onwards Arabic or 'Moorish' culture added to this heady mix.

The arrival of the Normans initiated a further period of great wealth and sophistication, a golden age when the cultures of east and west fused. This heritage is reflected in the fine mosaic cycles made for the Normans after Byzantine traditions. Thereafter, Sicily saw a succession of French, Austrian and Spanish dynasties rule the island with sublime indifference. However, their resident aristocracies have given the island a rich heritage of Baroque, Rococo and Neo-classical monuments of great power and beauty – all waiting to be discovered.

We shall spend four nights in Palermo at the **Grand Hotel Piazza Borsa**, two nights in Agrigento at the **Dioscuri Bay Palace Hotel** and three nights in old Syracuse on the 'island' of Ortygia at the comfortable **Hotel des Etrangers**. All three Sicilian hotels are decent, locally rated 4* hotels and that on Ortygia is of architectural interest with many rooms enjoying inner harbour views.

ITINERARY OUTLINE

Day 1: Tuesday 3 October – We fly from Gatwick directly to Palermo, arriving mid-morning. We drive to **Monreale** to visit the famous **Cathedral**, with magnificent medieval mosaic cycles, after which there will be time for an early lunch (not included). We continue into **Palermo** to our hotel, the **4* Grand Hotel Piazza Borsa**, for a four-night stay. After some time to rest there will be an early group dinner in **Piazza dei Vespri**. Wine, water and coffee are included with all group lunches and dinners.

Day 2: Wednesday 4 October – The tiny island of **Motya** lies just off the south-west coast of Sicily and is one of the most exciting archaeological sites in the Mediterranean. Founded as a staging port by Phoenician merchants and then taken over by their Carthaginian successors, recent excavations have revealed much about this hidden phase of Sicily's history. We shall spend the morning on the island after which we lunch at a local restaurant. En route back to Palermo we stop at the isolated site of **Segesta**, where there is a monumental, still unfinished, Greek Doric temple and a dramatically sited theatre looking out to sea. The evening will be free.

Day 3: Thursday 5 October – **Palermo's** earliest monuments are from the Arab and Norman periods. The great **Norman Palace** was rebuilt in the eleventh century under Roger II, to whom we owe great thanks for initiating a series of sophisticated mural decorations, in his case the great mosaic decorations in the **Cappella Palatina**. Other highlights include the **Cathedral** with its royal tombs, and the lovely church of the **Martorana**. After some free time for lunch, not included, we visit two of Palermo's most important **Oratories**, private devotional chapels renowned for the fine stucco decorations by the Serpotta family. The day ends in spectacular fashion when we visit privately **Palazzo Gangi**, containing the finest suite of eighteenth century interiors in the city, used for the film of Lampedusa's novel *The Leopard*, followed by dinner in a local restaurant.

Day 4: Friday 6 October – We make a leisurely start and travel by coach the short distance to the Kalsa district of the city to visit the **Regional Picture Gallery** at **Palazzo Albertis**. It contains a number of interesting objects and paintings including works by Antonello da Messina. After a coffee break we shall take in the Oratory of San Lorenzo to view a remarkable and recently installed copy of an altar painting by Caravaggio, famously looted in 1969, probably by the Mafia. Lunch is not included today and the afternoon will be free for private explorations. In the evening we shall enjoy a private visit and dinner at **Palazzo Alliata di Pietratagliata**, with its historic interiors of great style.

Day 5: Saturday 7 October – We spend a gentle day driving through central Sicily en route to Agrigento. First, we follow the coast to **Cefalù** to visit this small fishing port, dominated by the great **Norman Cathedral**. This has possibly the finest of all the Sicilian mosaic depictions of Christ *Pantocrator*. After some free time for lunch, not included, we continue to Agrigento and check into our hotel, the **4* Dioscuro Bay Palace Hotel**, for a two-night stay. We shall have a group dinner in our hotel.

Day 6: Sunday 8 October – Sicily, together with the coastline of southern Italy, was called *Magna Graeca* or Greater Greece. Founded as trading outposts by the major Greek cities, these ‘daughter’ settlements soon came to rival (and in some cases surpass) the fame and wealth of their founding cities back home. **Agrigento** is such an example and it preserves a remarkable number of temples and other buildings and we spend the day exploring the site and its archaeological museum. There will be time for a simple, snack lunch (not included) and our dinner will be in a good local restaurant overlooking the Valley of the Temples

Day 7: Monday 9 October – In the centre of Sicily, the great Imperial Roman villa at **Piazza Armerina** is justly renowned as home to mosaic decorations, the equal of any found in and around Rome and Pompeii. The visit is a morning one and will be followed by lunch in one of the island’s best restaurants. We continue on to Syracuse for a three-night stay at the **4* Hotel des Etrangers**. The evening will be free.

Day 8: Tuesday 10 October – **Syracuse** was one of the greatest cities of *Magna Graeca* and this morning we explore its ancient heritage. The **Archaeological Park** is home to some of the city’s major monuments, particularly a splendid Theatre. **Ortygia** is the town’s ‘island’ with splendid palaces and churches including the **Cathedral** (fashioned from a Doric temple!) and **St Lucy’s** (with a well known Caravaggio). Our group lunch will be in a famous fish restaurant after which the remainder of the afternoon and evening will be free.

Day 9: Wednesday 11 October – Like so much in this part of Sicily, **Catania** was devastated by earthquakes and the eruption of Mount Etna and almost the entire city was subsequently rebuilt. This morning we shall visit Catania’s **Cathedral** and enjoy a private visit to **Palazzo Biscari**, one of the city’s most important palaces. After lunch, not included, we drive to **Noto**, deservedly the most famous of all Baroque cities on the island. At last, its great **Cathedral** has reopened after a very long restoration. Later in the evening we shall enjoy a private visit and our final group dinner in **Palazzo Beneventano**, the finest Baroque palace in Syracuse.

Day 10: Thursday 12 October – We travel the short distance to the airport for our late morning flight to London.

PRACTICALITIES

Price £3130 **Without Flights** £2970 **Deposit** £375 **Single Supplement** £265 (Double for Sole Use)

Optional Supplement £170 for a Sea View for 2 nights in the Dioscuro Bay Palace Hotel, Agrigento and an Inner Harbour View for 3 nights in Hotel des Etrangers, Syracuse (Subject to availability, rate inclusive of both hotels)

Hotels 1 night at the Premier Inn London Gatwick North Terminal pre departure on the 2 October (*Room Only*)
4 nights at the 4* Grand Hotel Piazza Borsa in Palermo; 2 nights at the 4* Dioscuro Bay Palace Hotel, Agrigento; 3 nights at the 4* Hotel des Etrangers in Syracuse (*All Italian accommodation on a Bed & Breakfast Basis*)

Flights Easyjet Flights to include: Speedy boarding, allocated seats & 20kg of hold baggage

Outbound **EZY5243** Departure London Gatwick (North Terminal) **0550** arrive Palermo **0940**

Inbound **EZY8568** Departure Catania **1100** arrive London Gatwick (North Terminal) **1315**

Price includes 4 dinners & 4 lunches with wine, water & coffee, all local transfers, entry fees & gratuities, City tax, services of Tom Duncan & our local tour manager, James Hill

Not included Travel to/from Gatwick, 5 dinners & 5 lunches



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