

A Custom Designed Itinerary to

Sicily

by

IN QUEST OF THE CLASSICS

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DAY 1: TAORMINA. When you arrive at Catania Airport you will be met by an English-speaking driver with a private car who will be holding a sign saying "In Quest of the Classics." You will proceed to your hotel in Taormina, the **Villa Sant' Andrea**, where you will check into a standard room with a sea view for five nights. Overlooking the Bay of Mazzaro, amidst lush, sub-tropical gardens that gently slope down to the private beach, the four star Villa Sant'Andrea, is a charming villa hotel, built in 1830 by an aristocratic British family. The charm of an ancient and noble private residence has been preserved.

http://www.framonhotelgroup.com/en/taormina/hotel_villa_sant_andrea/index.html

DAY 2: TAORMINA. Spend the day relaxing at Villa Sant' Andrea or sightseeing in town. Taormina is a popular tourist destination, with beautiful beaches accessible by an aerial tramway. Taormina's most illustrious relic of the past is the magnificently situated Greek theater rebuilt by the Romans in the 2nd century BC.

The theater, the second largest of its kind in Sicily, is used for operatic and theatrical performances and has fabulous views over the Mediterranean. Taormina is full of lovely gardens such as the Gardens of the Villa Comunale. In the early 1900's Taormina was a colony of expatriate artists, writers, and intellectuals like D. H. Lawrence.



DAY 3: TAORMINA/ SIRACUSA. Enjoy a full day excursion to Siracusa with a private car, driver and local English-speaking guide, who will be meeting you at the historical site.



Once described by Cicero as "the greatest Greek city and the most beautiful of them all", the ancient core of Siracusa is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. *NOTE: This is an 8 hour day with 4 hours allowed for touring the site. NOTE: Entrances for ALL excursions are not included and are payable directly the day of the tour.*

DAY 4: TAORMINA/ LOCAL TOURING. Begin a full day private excursion to Catania City and Palazzo Biscari. The Biscari Palace, composed of seven hundred rooms, is located in the old quarter of Catania overlooking the port. The property is the most magnificent private building in Catania. Construction began in the early 1700's. Prince Ignazio V, who was interested in art, literature and archeology, contributed ideas and built a private theater which he allowed the opera company to use. There are large sea view terraces, columns and deep balconies. The rooms contain collections of vases, medallions, paintings and a natural history collection. The Rococo style grand salon is filled with mirrors, white doors and Neopolitan ceramic tile. There are frescoes, beautiful woodwork, antique marble, porcelain and chinoiserie. Historical treasures in Catania itself include the Cathedral, Via Crociferi, the Teatro Bellini, Piazza Bellini, Piazza Universita', Palazzo degli Elefanti, Via Etna and Castello Ursino.

OR – A full day excursion to **Villa Romana del Casale & Piazza Armerina.** Formerly the hunting lodge of an important Roman official, the villa is decorated with the best-preserved and most extensive mosaics in the world.

You will have the services of a local English-speaking guide for three hours at whichever site you choose.

DAY 5: TAORMINA/ MT. ETNA. Take a trip today to see the most popular site in Sicily, Mt. Etna, about an hour away from Taormina.



Etna is the land of myth and legend. Mount Etna is an active volcano, the highest in Europe. The ancients used to regard the mountain with terror and respect. They called it the name of Vulcan, God of Fire, and of the Cyclops. On the safe part of its hills a famous wine is produced. Your four hour excursion includes the services of a private guide.

DAY 6: TRANSFER TO PALERMO VIA AGRIGENTO. Spend the day getting to Palermo with a detour through Agrigento. The Valle Dei Templi (Valley of Temples) is the most renowned attraction in Agrigento. This large archeological site containing the remains of various Doric temples dating from the 5th century B.C. is classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. There are ruins of numerous temples but also necropoli, houses, streets and many other remnants of an ancient city.

The Temple of Concord, built around 440 BC, is the best-preserved among the Doric temples of the Greek world, and one of the most beautiful in proportion and harmony of form. Illuminated at night, it is a lovely sight to behold. North of the temple is the Paleochristian Byzantine Necropolis, a vast complex of open-air tombs. The Temple of Giunone at the far end of the hill



of temples is identical in dimension to the Temple of Concordia. To the east of this lie sacrificial altars. The Temple of Hercules is the most ancient of Agrigento's temples. The ruins clearly show that the temple was destroyed by an earthquake. The Temple of Olympian Zeus, now only massive ruins, was one of the largest buildings of Greek architecture. Your stop in Agrigento will be for three hours to tour the magnificent temples with a local, English-speaking guide.

Continue on to Palermo to check in to the **Hotel Principe di Villa Franca** for four nights. Not far from Palermo's glitzy shopping district, this four star hotel, a member of Charming Hotels of the World, creates the feeling of a luxurious private home with fine Sicilian antiques, imperial striped silks, creamy marble floors, and vaulted ceilings.

<http://www.principedivillafranca.it/inglese/index2.htm>

DAY 7: PALERMO/ ERICE/ SEGESTA. Today your private car and driver will take you on a very interesting full day's excursion to **Erice and Segesta**. You will explore the medieval town of Erice, an ancient Phoenician and Greek city occupying a unique and beautiful setting, 2,461 feet above the sea. With your private English-speaking guide you will visit the Castle of Venus. Built by the Normans in the 12th to 13th centuries, the castle crowns an isolated rock on Monte Eryx (the name comes from the fact that Erice was once the seat of the cult of the goddess Venus Erycina whose temple stood where the castle is now.) There are magnificent views and on clear days you can see the distant coast of Tunisia. The town is filled with many arts and craft shops and makes an interesting lunch stop. Later you will stop at Segesta, an abandoned ancient city located in the province of Trapani. This large archeological zone, with its magnificent Doric temple, ranks as one of the best-preserved Greek architectural sites to be found anywhere. Here too you will meet a private English-speaking guide for a tour.



DAY 8: PALERMO/ CEFALU & CASTELBUONO. Continue to enjoy Sicily today on your full day, private excursion with a local English-speaking guide to **Cefalu and Castelbuono**.

One of the Mediterranean's undiscovered jewels, Cefalu is a captivating seaside town beneath a steep mountain. Cefalu has a beach, winding, narrow, medieval streets, and delightful restaurants overlooking a rocky coast. All of this is under the ever present gaze of the Norman-Arab-Byzantine cathedral, one of the greatest churches of southern Europe. Nestled between the Madonie Mountains and the sea, Cefalù's mountain boasts the ruins of a large fortress and an ancient Sicanian-Greek temple. The view from the summit is inspiring. Continue on to Castelbuono, a mountain town about 25 kilometers from Cefalù, that boasts a castle once owned by the Ventimiglia family, feudal lords of several towns in the area. Castelbuono is a charming locality in an attractive wooded location. Castelbuono has vestiges of medieval architecture. The private rooms now house a contemporary art museum.

DAY 9: PALERMO. Today's sightseeing stays closer to home. You will have a half day city tour of **Palermo** with a private English-speaking guide. Palermo, settled by the Phoenicians in the 8th century, has been home to the Romans, Arabs and the Normans, and each left their mark on the city. The heart of the town is known as Quattro Canti, four corners that divide Palermo into quadrants. Piazza Pretoria has a spectacular fountain and town hall and Piazza Bellini features the churches of La Martorana and San Cataldo. Massimo Theatre, one of the most famous opera houses in Italy, was built here at the end of the 19th century. The Royal Palace was built by Arab emirs around the ninth century; abandoned and then restored and transformed by the Normans into a sumptuous palace. Frederick II of Hohenstaufen created the 1st Poetic School here but after his death the palace began to decline until three centuries later when the Spanish chose it as their residence. Today it is the seat of the Regional Sicilian Assembly. You may want to visit the Vucheria street market, which is one of the oldest in Palermo. Your senses will be assaulted as you walk through this ancient market filled with stalls of fresh produce, flowers, vegetables and all manner of sea creatures. The chatter, singing and gesturing of the natives can be very entertaining.



After lunch, (not included) you will continue on to **Monreale**, a town dominating the green plain, Conca d'Oro, of Palermo.

It grew around the famous Benedictine Abbey founded in the 12th century by William II. Here you will meet your private English-speaking guide to see the cathedral with its dazzling interior of multicolored marble mosaics from the 12th and 13th centuries and the remarkably detailed Cloisters.

DAY 10: DEPARTURE. A departure transfer to the Palermo Airport in time for your flight home.

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