



ACADEMY
TRAVEL

TAILORED
SMALL GROUP
JOURNEYS

SICILY & THE AEOLIAN ISLANDS

JEWELS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

Temple of Concordia,
Agrigento

OVERVIEW

Encounter millennia of human history in a Mediterranean nutshell, on our popular and carefully thought-out tour of Sicily and the Aeolian Islands.

Discover why Goethe called Sicily ‘the clue to everything’, on this 17-day tour with archaeologist Dr Estelle Lazer. A unique fusion of Mediterranean civilisations, Sicily’s conquerors have included the Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Normans and Spanish, and all have left their traces on an unmatched physical setting, from the towering volcano of Mount Etna to the rolling hillsides of the interior and the coast’s rugged limestone cliffs.

Follow a broad historical sequence, commencing with the major Greek cities of Siracusa, Agrigento and Selinunte, before moving to the predominantly Arab and Norman world of Palermo and the north. Survey Montalbano’s baroque world in Noto and Ragusa and the fascinating pre-history and majestic scenery of the Aeolian Islands, before three nights in spectacular Taormina. The experience is rounded out by the fine regional dining for which Sicily is internationally renowned.



TOUR LEADER

Dr Estelle Lazer has led tours to Italy and the Mediterranean for Academy Travel since the company’s inception in 2004. In addition to her archaeological expertise, she particularly enjoys explaining the place of mythology in the landscape.

TOUR DATES

March 21 - April 6, 2025 | 17 Days

TOUR PRICE

\$13,760 per person, twin share

\$2,890 single supplement

TOUR DEPOSIT

A **\$1,000** non-refundable deposit is required per person to confirm your booking on tour.

GROUP SIZE

Maximum number of **16** in group

ITINERARY

Siracusa (4 nights), Agrigento (2 nights), Palermo (4 nights), Lipari (3 nights), Taormina (3 nights)

INCLUSIONS

16 nights’ accommodation in centrally located 4-star hotels. All breakfasts, 1 lunch and 8 dinners. Services of an expert tour leader and an experienced tour manager throughout. All ground transport, entrance fees and tipping.

DETAILED ITINERARY

Start & Finish

The tour starts at 12.00pm on Friday 21 March, at Rome Fiumicino airport, for our group flight to Catania. The tour ends at 4.45pm on Sunday 6 April, at Rome Fiumicino airport, for departing flights home.

Included meals are indicated with B, L, D.

Friday 21 March

Arrive Siracusa

Meet your tour leader at Rome Fiumicino airport at 12.00pm to commence the tour. There is a group flight to Catania, before we transfer by coach to our hotel in Siracusa. The afternoon is at leisure, and you might like to unwind after the day's travels with an aperitif on the hotel's rooftop terrace, overlooking the harbour, or relax under a parasol on the private beach. This evening we meet for a light dinner at a local restaurant. Overnight Siracusa (D)

Saturday 22 March

Ancient Siracusa

This morning we visit the main archaeological sites of the town. Highlights of our visit include the famed theatre of Siracusa, the altar of Hieron II, and the ancient quarries (where thousands of Greek prisoners were held during the Peloponnesian War). In the later afternoon we'll visit the Museo Aretuseo dei Pupi, housing a collection of traditional Sicilian puppets, followed by a performance of traditional puppetry at the adjoining theatre. This evening we have our welcome dinner at a local restaurant. Overnight Siracusa (B, D)

Sunday 23 March

Paolo Orsi Archaeological Museum

This morning we make our way to the excellent Paolo Orsi Regional Archaeological Museum. Extensively renovated in recent years, the Paolo Orsi is one of the most important archaeological museums in southern Italy. Its artefacts, found throughout Sicily, survey the Greek, Roman, and early Christian epochs. In the afternoon we'll visit the Byzantine-era Jewish baths which are over 1,500 years old. Overnight Siracusa (B)

Monday 24 March

Sicilian Baroque in Ragusa and Noto

Today we take a round trip of the south-east tip of Sicily, with a full day excursion to the towns of Ragusa and Noto. These towns are famed for their exuberant 'Sicilian Baroque' architecture, created after a devastating earthquake of 1693 that destroyed the earlier towns. Overnight Siracusa (B)

TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

The world's best-preserved Greek temples

Discover Agrigento's Valley of the Temples, an enthralling archaeological site that is testament to the power and wealth of Greek Sicily in the ancient Mediterranean.

UNESCO World Heritage-listed Byzantine mosaics

Admire medieval Sicily's glittering beauty, from the lavish gold-ground mosaics of Monreale and Cefalù cathedrals to the jewel-like Palatine Chapel of Palermo's Norman Palace.

The splendour of Sicilian Baroque

Encounter Noto and Ragusa, twin baroque towns whose distinctive and exuberant architecture forms a backdrop of honey-coloured stone churches and palazzi.

Islands of fire, wind and sea

Appreciate how Sicily's history is shaped by its landscape, from the fertile slopes of Mount Etna, Europe's largest volcano, to prehistoric trade in the Aeolian Islands.

Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina

Travel into Sicily's interior to explore the richest, largest and most complex collection of Roman mosaics in the world, at a staggering imperial Roman villa.





Ragusa



Palermo

Tuesday 25 March

The Villa Romana

We depart Siracusa this morning, heading westward through the geographic centre of Sicily. Today's highlight is the Villa Romana del Casale at Piazza Armerina, featuring a series of intact floor mosaics from the 4th century CE, created by North African artisans. After a break for lunch, we continue to Agrigento on the south coast of Sicily, arriving in the late afternoon. Dinner tonight is in our hotel. Overnight Agrigento (B, D)

Wednesday 26 March

Agrigento Temples and Museum

Agrigento - ancient 'Akragas' — was founded in the 6th century BCE and enjoyed a reputation as one of the wealthiest colonies of the Greek world. The extensive and well-preserved sacred area is testament to these riches, comprising four wonderfully preserved large temples as well as a number of smaller structures. Today we tour the temple site with a local guide and visit the nearby archaeological museum. The afternoon is free to relax. Tonight, we have dinner in a local restaurant. Overnight Agrigento (B, D)

Thursday 27 March

Romanticism at Selinunte

Our first stop is to see the larger than life-size Dancing Satyr of Mazara del Vallo, a Greek bronze statue that was found by a Sicilian fisherman in 1998 in the waters of the Mediterranean. We continue to Selinunte (ancient Selinus), the last of the important Greek cities on our itinerary. At its peak, Selinus had a population of 25,000 but it was comprehensively sacked and its ruins inspired generations of Romantic poets and artists, such as Goethe. Dinner tonight is in a local restaurant. Overnight Palermo (B, D)

Friday 28 March

Palermo

Palermo is a colourful city, with the atmosphere of North Africa or perhaps Asia rather than of Europe. Its heritage as a meeting point between European civilisation and the Arab and Byzantine worlds is borne out in the splendid medieval buildings of the Norman kingdoms. Today we tour some of the main historic sites of the old city, including the Norman Palace and Palatine Chapel, with its gold mosaics, and the Byzantine-influenced church of La Martorana. After lunch we visit one of the oldest museums in Sicily, the Archaeological museum, which possesses one of the richest collections of Punic and Ancient Greek art in Italy. Overnight Palermo (B)

Saturday 29 March

Glittering Monreale

The cathedral and abbey of Monreale, in the hills overlooking Palermo, were founded by the Norman King William II in the 12th century to demonstrate the power of the Norman Kingdom of Sicily. There are more than 6,000 square metres of mosaics



Segesta



Cefalù

here, using 2,200 kg of real gold. We spend the morning visiting the cathedral and enjoying the surrounding medieval hill town. After returning to Palermo, the afternoon is at leisure. Overnight Palermo (B)

Sunday 30 March Segesta and Mozia

Today we take a ferry to Mozia where, among the salt pans, we explore the ruins of the former Carthaginian settlement. The island also houses a small museum with some unique pieces. We then continue to Segesta, an evocative ruin perched on a hill. The theatre and temple here are truly memorable, and have inspired artists and writers for centuries. In the late afternoon we head back to Palermo. Overnight Palermo (B, L)

Monday 31 March Cefalù and the Aeolian Islands

We depart Palermo this morning, heading along the north coast. We spend the greater part of the day in Cefalù, a fishing town dominated by a splendid Norman cathedral, reputedly built after King Roger II survived a shipwreck near the town. There is also a Greek sanctuary above the town (a steep walk) and an idiosyncratic art gallery with some fine works. These include a wonderful portrait by Antonello da Messina. After lunch we travel to Milazzo where we take a ferry to the island of Lipari, our base on the Aeolian Islands for the next three nights. Dinner is served in our hotel. Overnight Lipari (B, D)

Tuesday 1 April Boat Trip to Panarea and Stromboli

A local guide shows us the main archaeological site of Lipari this morning, an island inhabited since at least 5,000 BCE. Later on, weather permitting, we take an afternoon boat excursion to the islands of Panarea and Stromboli, 20km from Lipari, enjoying the natural beauty and unspoilt traditional lifestyle of these islands. A highlight of the excursion is the chance to view the volcano of Stromboli. We have a light dinner on Stromboli before returning to Lipari in the early evening. (Alternative plans, such as a visit to the nearby island of Vulcano, or to Milazzo, will be made if the weather is too rough for the excursion). Overnight Lipari (B, D)

Wednesday 2 April Lipari

This morning is free to explore the town or relax in the hotel. You may like to visit the fortified acropolis and the Aeolian Archaeological Museum, beautiful in itself and home to neolithic vases, Roman amphorae and an extraordinary collection of theatrical masks and statuettes commissioned by Sophocles and Euripides, among others. Later in the afternoon we take a trip around the island by coach, enjoying the landscape and views to the other islands. This evening there will be a talk in the hotel. Overnight Lipari (B)

HOTELS

Hotels have been selected principally for their central location. All hotels are a comfortable four-star standard.

Siracusa, Grand Hotel Ortigia

(4 nights)

www.grandhotelortigia.it

Agrigento, Hotel Colleverde Park

(2 nights)

www.colleverdehotel.it

Palermo, Eurostars Central Palace

(4 nights)

www.eurostarshotels.it

Lipari, Hotel Tritone

(3 nights)

www.tritonelipari.it

Taormina, Hotel Monte Tauro

(3 nights)

www.eurostarshotels.co.uk

WEATHER

Pleasant weather can be expected throughout the journey. Expect average maximum temperatures of 22 – 28C during the day and minimums of 14 – 18C at night. You should bring a light, waterproof jacket and an umbrella and be prepared for possible windy conditions in the appropriately named Aeolian (or windy) Islands.

FITNESS REQUIREMENTS

Grade Two

This tour is designed for people who lead active lives. You should be able to:

- keep up with the group at all times walk for 5-7 kilometres over the day at a moderate pace
- negotiate challenging historic and archaeological sites, which are often uneven and unstable
- negotiate stairs and bridges
- stand for one to two hours in galleries and museums at a time without a break
- get on and off a coach unassisted

Thursday 3 April

Messina

Returning to the mainland, we travel to the city of Messina to visit the fine Norman cathedral and the Regional Museum of Messina, home to masterpieces by Caravaggio and Antonello da Messina. We then continue on to Taormina on the east coast of Sicily. This gorgeous seaside town is perched on a hilltop and dotted with intimate piazzas and 15-century palazzi. After checking into our hotel, we have a welcome drink on the terrace, enjoying the beautiful views across the Ionian Sea. Overnight Taormina (B)

Friday 4 April

Taormina

Taormina is a memorable final destination for our journey, sitting above the sea with superb views to Mount Etna. The views from the town have inspired visitors for centuries, including DH Lawrence, who lived here between 1920 and 1923. We spend this morning visiting the Graeco-Roman theatre and other highlights of the town. The afternoon and evening are at leisure. Overnight Taormina (B)

Saturday 5 April

With the gods on Mount Etna

Today we join our coach for an excursion to the summit of Mount Etna itself. Europe's largest and most spectacular volcano, Mt Etna is still very active. Assuming conditions are safe we will explore the south side of the volcano, travelling by coach, cable car and finally jeep to a height of 2,900 metres. The landscape and the views are unforgettable. (Please note that the last part of the excursion involves walking over uneven surfaces. It may not be possible for all passengers to undertake this segment.) Returning to Taormina there is time for a stroll around the town before we meet for our farewell dinner at a local restaurant. Overnight Taormina (B, D)

Sunday 6 April

Departure

The morning is at leisure in Taormina, before departing at Midday for our mid-afternoon flight for Rome, arriving in time to meet the late evening departing flights for Australia. (B)



ENQUIRIES & BOOKINGS

For further information or to secure a place, please contact **Sharon Williams** on 9235 0023 (Sydney) or 1800 639 699 (outside Sydney) or email:

sharon@academytravel.com.au

✉ info@academytravel.com.au

🖱 academytravel.com.au