

Guided Walking Tour of Sicily: 2018

(14 days / 13 nights) - \$6,690 AUD per person

The challenge in organising a walking tour to Sicily lies in what to leave out rather than what to include but after a decade of taking walking tours around Sicily, we feel we've got the balance right.

This relaxed fourteen day tour will take you off the beaten track and give you real insight into Sicily's diversity and the legacy of the civilisations that have taken root in its fertile soils since the dawn of time: the Siculi and the Phoenicians, the Greeks and Romans, the Moors and the Normans, the Spanish and the French.

The walks:

The tour has a variety of walks including easy coastal strolls, longer mountain walks following unsealed country roads as well as more challenging ones such as the walk to the top of Vulcano in the Aeolian Islands. You'll need a reasonable level of fitness to enjoy them all although there is always the possibility to opt out of any of the walks and rejoin the group for lunch. Details of each walk are on the itinerary. Going in May means that we'll be able to enjoy the island's idyllic spring weather and abundant wildflowers as well as avoid the crowds of the busier seasons.

The accommodation:

Accommodation is in very good, centrally located boutique hotels: in a grand 4-star hotel in the heart of Palermo; a recently restored patrician palazzo in the heart of our sleepy village in the mountains; overlooking the old port in Lipari and below the Greek theatre in Taormina, with spectacular views and a large swimming pool. All rooms have en suite bathrooms and air conditioning.

The food:

One of the highlights of the tour is the exploration of the island's diverse and wondrous cuisine (some would say the finest in Italy): the rich 'cucina povera' of Palermo; the fine country cooking of the interior; the excellent seafood of the Aeolian Islands and Taormina - all the ingredients rigorously seasonal and local. We'll eat in fine restaurants, small trattoria's, enjoy picnic lunches, all exalting the best of Sicilian cooking. Wine is included with all meals.

Tour Dates	18 May to 30 May 2018
Tour Size	7 to 15 people
Tour Cost	\$6,690 AUD per person (two people sharing a double room) (single supplement for a double room for single use \$750 AUD)

Tour Inclusions	13 nights' accommodation (see the itinerary for details) in 4-star boutique hotels All breakfast, and all lunches and dinners listed in the itinerary All land and sea transfers during the tours All taxes and service charges at the hotels and restaurants All paid admissions during the tour 7 guided walks Services of a full-time professional tour guide
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Sicily Walking Tour Itinerary

Day 1

The Sicily walking tour starts in Palermo, the capital of Sicily, which is pressed between mountains and the sea, a striking setting for what must be one of the most exotic cities in Europe. Its architecture and culture reflect the extraordinarily rich fabric of its past. Our accommodation for the first two nights is in an elegant 4-star hotel in the lively commercial centre of Palermo. After pre-dinner drinks in the hotel, we'll have a light dinner in a neighboring restaurant. (Dinner)

Day 2

Early morning walking tour of the hidden treasures in the centre of Palermo before exploring the winding lanes of Palermo's celebrated markets, with lunch in a traditional osteria. In the afternoon we finish our tour with a visit to the famous Norman Palace and its spectacular mosaics (3 hrs). The evening is free. (Lunch)

Day 3

From the bustle and intensity of Sicily's largest city, we drive into the mountainous interior to the green tranquillity of the island's second largest national park. On the way we will visit the dazzling medieval cathedral of Monreale, perched high above Palermo and the lovely seaside resort of Cefalu. Our base for the next four nights will be in a restored patrician palazzo with all the mod-cons tucked away in the centre of probably the most interesting and best preserved village of the area, in the shadow of the national park. Dinner will be at a nearby restaurant. (Dinner)

Day 4

The first walk of the tour (10 kms, 3.5 hrs) takes you into the heart of the Madonie National Park for a beautiful high mountain walk (13 kms, 3.5 hrs) finishing in at a small fortified town, perched on the edge of the park, that was the original seat of the area's feudal lords. After a light lunch, we'll explore this beautifully sited town before returning to our base. (Lunch/dinner).

Day 5

An early start to visit Piazza Armerina, the extraordinary villa at Casale, the most important relic of the Roman era in Sicily, unique for both its size and the richness of the polychrome floor mosaics. On the way back we will visit Enna, an ancient city spectacularly sited on a plug of rock high above the surrounding plains. After exploring the site and having a picnic lunch we'll drive back to our base. (Lunch/dinner)

Day 6

Today we walk through rolling green hills covered with wildflowers and dotted with farm houses and hamlets, up to a tiny hilltop village, dominated by an awesome medieval Norman castle, where we'll have a picnic lunch before visiting the castle (12 kms, 4 hrs). In the afternoon we'll drive back to our accommodation, stopping to visit the possibly the most spectacularly sited town in the area, which has a great little museum, breath-taking views and a very good gelateria. (Lunch/dinner)

Day 7

After breakfast, we drive through the Nebrodie Mountains to the coast, where we take a hydrofoil one hour north to the Aeolian Islands, to the island of Lipari, where we'll stay for the next four nights in the best hotel of the islands, a 4-star hotel above the picturesque old port. Later in the afternoon you'll be taken on a walking tour of this fascinating town, including a visit to the Archaeological Museum, in a palazzo on the ancient citadel, considered one of the finest in Europe. Dinner will be in one of the town's best seafood restaurant: a family-run trattoria with family-supplied seafood, fresh every morning. (Dinner)

Day 8

This morning we go for a walk, starting at the furthest tip of the Lipari, where, with views over neighbouring islands, we take an ancient path that dips down to follow cliffs along the coast before climbing up to thermal springs scattered with Roman and Greek ruins, then continue on along a paved stretch of Roman road to lunch

(14kms, 4 hours). Afterwards, the willing can continue the walk down to Lipari town (1 hour), while the others can take the bus back. The afternoon and evening is free. (Lunch)

Day 9

This morning you will be taken by private boat (a very comfortable converted fishing boat) to explore the smallest and most picturesque island of the archipelago. We go for a walk (5 kms 1.5 hrs) to visit a spectacularly positioned pre-historic site before returning to the port for lunch. After lunch we get back on the boat and continue our exploration of the island, having a swim in the blue Mediterranean Sea before returning to Lipari. The evening is free. (Lunch)

Day 10

Today we will again take the private boat for a visit to another neighbouring island, a short boat ride from Lipari, for the one hour (5 kms) climb up to the smoking crater of one the Mediterranean's most famous seismic phenomena, believed by the ancients to be the gates to hell (although you may choose to skip this and spend the morning in the islands port or visiting its bubbling hot mud pools). On the way back to Lipari we'll explore the coast with the chance for another swim before returning to Lipari where the afternoon is free. In the evening we have dinner at an elegant restaurant on the waterfront, which specialises in seafood and local cuisine. (Dinner)

Day 11

In the morning, we take the hydrofoil back to the mainland and drive around the north-eastern tip of Sicily to the marvelous town of Taormina. Probably Sicily's most picturesque and elegant town, Taormina is perched high above the sea, with views westward to Mount Etna. On arriving at our lovely hotel on the edge of the old town (beautifully located with cascading gardens and a swimming pool) you will be free to unpack and relax. The afternoon is free. In the evening we will meet again to visit Taormina's famous Greek theatre, which dates from the 3rd century BC.

Day 12

Today we drive around the northern side of Mt Etna and then up into the Etna National Park, taking a beautiful walk through forests of oak, beech and birch trees, crossing countryside modeled by centuries of lava flows with the peak of snow-capped Mount Etna looming above. At the end of the walk, we drive down the mountain for a wine tasting and lunch at a small family-run vineyard that has been operating since 1788. After a stroll around the vineyard, we'll drive back to Taormina where the evening is free.

Day 13

Today is a free day. You'll have the chance relax and enjoy the romance of Taormina spending the morning by the hotel's pool or down by the sea, which will leave you plenty of time for shopping and exploring the town in the afternoon. If you'd like a bit more excitement, day trips are available to take you up the southern side of Mt Etna to see one of the island's most extraordinary sights: the extraordinary lunar landscape and lava of active crater at the top of the mountain. Alternately, you may choose to do a day trip to Syracuse, an hour and half's drive south. In the evening we'll regroup and have our farewell dinner at one of Taormina's finest restaurants, a small trattoria just outside the town walls.

Day 14

After breakfast, leaving at 8.00am, you will be taken to Catania, which has an international airport and rail connections to the mainland and to the rest of Europe. If required, we can also organise transfers back to Palermo.