

THE GRAND TOUR Travel Company  
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## **SICILY: HISTORY, ART & CUISINE**

A glorious Mediterranean island of intense contrasts, Sicily has a remarkable history. From its occupation by Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Normans and Spanish, the island features superb archeological remains, fascinating churches with outstanding mosaics, and many beautiful buildings. All is set amidst stunning natural beauty: lush sub-tropical vegetation runs around the coast and there is wonderful mountain scenery in the interior.

This exceptional deluxe tour of Sicily is led by Paul Blanchard, art historian, photographer, and author of many major guide books, including the *Blue Guides to Northern Italy* and *Southern Italy*. From three luxury hotels in Palermo, Syracuse and Taormina, participants will set out on a unique voyage of discovery to visit the Greek ruins of Segesta, Agrigento, Syracuse and Taormina; the splendid Arab Norman cathedrals of Monreale and Cefalù; the charming towns of Erice and Noto, the Roman ruins of Piazza Armerina, and much more. In addition we will sample the delicacies of Sicilian cuisine in the best of local restaurants as well as in special private meals in the palaces and villas of some of Sicily's oldest families.

### **HIGHLIGHTS OF THE TOUR**

- Private tours of many of the major cultural sites of Sicily in Palermo, Syracuse and Taormina, as well as the temples at Segesta and Agrigento; the cathedrals of Monreale and Cefalu, the Baroque towns in the southeast of the island, the Roman ruins of Piazza Armerina
- Guide services of Paul Blanchard, noted author, art historian and popular tour leader
- Local guides steeped in the art, architecture and history of the island
- Deluxe lodging in four and five-star hotels in Palermo, Syracuse and Taormina
- Five lunches and four dinners in the best of local restaurants and private homes
- Private air-conditioned motor coach throughout the tour
- Private boat trip down the River Cyane
- Optional visit to the slopes of the active volcano, Mt. Etna

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### ITINERARY

**Day 1 (Palermo)** Arrival & check in Hotel Central Palace, an old-world luxury hotel that will be our home for the next three nights — Orientation — *Welcome Dinner* (TGT)

**Day 2 (Palermo)** Tour of the city: **Royal Palace**, one of the island's more splendid Norman-Saracenic buildings, the Cappella Palatina and the Sala di Re Ruggiero — **San Giovanni degli Eremiti** and **La Martorana**, two of the cities most charming little churches — Lunch (TGT) — **Galleria Regionale della Sicilia**, with its beautifully arranged collections of Sicilian sculpture and painting and its garden courtyard renovated by the celebrated Italian Modern architect Carlo Scarpa — Evening free

**Day 3 (Palermo)** Morning coach to **Monreale**, with its the splendid cathedral built by William II around 1174, the last and most majestic of the Norman churches in Sicily and one of the architectural wonders of the Middle Ages — On to **Segesta**, an indescribably romantic site rising in glorious isolation amid the rolling countryside of Western Sicily. Known for its theater, set high up on a hill and commanding stunning views out to sea, and for its windswept Doric temple, it has been admired by travelers for centuries — Lunch in **Erice** (TGT), and time to explore this beautifully preserved medieval town at the extreme tip of western Sicily — Return to Palermo in the late afternoon — Evening free

**Day 4 (Palermo)** Excursion to **Cefalù**, an attractive beachside town with an Byzantine, Arab, and Norman past, and another great Norman cathedral, erected in 1131 — Afternoon free — Special buffet dinner (TGT) offered **Nicoletta and Gioacchino Lanza Tomasi** at their palatial home, where Gioacchino's grandfather, Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, wrote the famous novel, *The Leopard*

**Day 5 (Agrigento-Siracusa)** Departure from Palermo through the lonely countryside of Sicily's vast interior — Visit to **Agrigento**, one of Italy's chief archaeological wonders and walk through the famous Valley of the Temples—stopping at the temples of Hera, Concord, and Herakles — with a visit to the magnificent Archaeological Museum — On to **Syracuse** and check-in at the country estate of Baron Pietro Beneventano del Bosco, a founding member of the Italian Environmental Fund — Dinner at the inn (TGT)

**Day 6 (Siracusa)** Tour of the historic islet of Ortygia and its major archaeological sites, including the famous **Greek theater** and the ancient stone quarries, now planted as public gardens; the **Archaeological Museum**, with statuary, coins, and antiquities from the excavations of the Graeco-Roman city and from prehistoric and classical sites of eastern Sicily; the **cathedral**, which incorporates remains of an ancient Greek temple — Lunch on your own — Afternoon at the **Galleria Regionale di Arte Medievale e Moderna**, home to Caravaggio's 1609 masterpiece, *The Burial of St Lucy* — Evening free

**Day 7 (Siracusa)** Excursion to the beautiful baroque towns of **Modica**, **Scicli**, and **Noto**. Called a 'garden of stone, a city of gold, a theatrical city, a Baroque city' by the author Leonardo Sciascia, Noto is a singular demonstration of civic pride: destroyed by earthquake in 1693, a new town was built, a few miles away, in accordance with the period's most advanced ideas in city planning, truly unique for the uniformity of its architectural heritage—most buildings having been built at the same time, in the same style (by the master of Sicilian Baroque, Rosario Gagliardi, and his followers), and using the same wonderful golden-brown stone — Lunch (TGT) — Evening free

**Day 8 (Siracusa)** Morning excursion to **Piazza Armerina**, the Sicily's finest Roman site and one of the island's foremost attractions. This luxurious country mansion was built in the third or fourth century of the common era as a summer retreat for a member of the imperial family, famous chiefly for

its mosaic pavements, which cover almost the entire floor space (35,000 sq. ft.) and are considered unique for the range of their subjects and the variety of their colors — Special buffet luncheon (TGT) at the country estate of Giuseppe and Clara Prato, who will show us around their fortified manor house, or *baglio*, a construction typical of the Sicilian interior — Return to Syracuse via **Caltagirone**, famous since Arab times for its brilliantly colored ceramics, and the traditional use of majolica in the decoration of churches and secular buildings, a feature which makes it one of the most striking towns in Sicily — Evening free

**Day 9 (Taormina)** Excursion along the little **River Cyane**, from its source which lies in a grove of eucalyptus and cypress trees overgrown with reeds and thick clumps of Egyptian papyrus, an exotic plant, which grows wild nowhere else outside North Africa, ending on the Isle of Ortygia — On to Taormina, stopping for a view of the magnificent cactus gardens of Princess Michi Borghese, near Carlentini, and lunch (TGT). Michi also grows organic citrus fruit as well as the most astounding collection of cacti in Europe — Check in at the superb Villa Fabbiano in Taormina — Evening free

**Day 10 (Taormina)** **Taormina**, spectacularly located on a terrace of Monte Tauro, dominating the sea and with views westward to Ætna and beyond, is easily Sicily's most picturesque town. It is also one of the island's oldest and best-loved resorts, known for its luxuriant vegetation, old-time charm and breathtaking vistas. Morning exploration of old Taormina, including the famous Graeco-Roman theater — Lunch on your own — Optional excursion to **Mt Ætna**, Europe's largest live volcano and one of world's most active. A favorite trip by many on The Grand Tour, today the unpredictability of the volcano's activity makes it unsafe for visitors to climb to the craters. However, the tall forests and eerie lava flows on Ætna's slopes may be explored without peril — *Farewell Dinner* at Maffei, in an atmosphere of incomparable charm

**Day 11** Departure from Catania or Palermo

## TOUR GUIDES

Principal guide for *Sicily* is Paul Blanchard. An art historian, he has taught at the Italian study centers of several American universities, has shown his own artwork (which includes a large body of landscape photographs) in Europe and the United States, and has lectured on both continents. He has published widely in North America, Great Britain, France, and Italy, and is author of the *Blue Guide to Northern Italy*, *Blue Guide to Southern Italy*, *Blue Guide to Yugoslavia*, and *Passport's Regional Guide to Sicily*. He managed the international edition of *Flash Art* magazine from 1980 to 1985, and he has produced exhibition catalogues for museums in Italy, Switzerland and France. Paul holds a Bachelor of Arts in English from Hamilton College, and a Master of Arts in Art History from Syracuse University. At Syracuse he appointed to the prestigious Florence Fellowship Program, an invitational masters degree fellowship program that allows four outstanding scholars to study in Florence, Italy with the Director of the Uffizi Gallery and the Superintendent of Fine Arts. He will be joined by local guides, expert in local art, architecture and history