TOUR CODE

IT3

ADVENTURESABROAD

SOUTH & NORTH ITALY

Sicily, Southern Mainland, Rome & Tuscany

18 days

Updated 01/11/2013

Day 1 ***Arrive in Palermo***

Today we arrive in Palermo. Transfer to our hotel.

PLEASE NOTE: Starting from our July 2014 departure, this itinerary will be re-designed. The trip will become 2 days longer and begin 2 days earlier than indicated. Once our Spring 2014 tour departs, this itinerary will change and dates will be adjusted. Current pricing DOES reflect the price of the tour with 2 days added. For a brief synopsis of the changes, please visit our website and refer to the tour "Highlights" section of tours IT6, IT3, and IT2.

Overnight in Palermo. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 ***Palermo: City Tour - Segesta - Erice***

We begin our day with a walk through the narrow streets of the Vucceria outdoor market. Here we feel the very pulse of the city's daily life, passing stalls where fishmongers display whole sword fish and tuna, and several varieties of squid and octopus. Sicily is agriculturally rich and here some of the island's excellent produce is displayed: apples from the slopes of Mount Etna; oranges and lemons, introduced to Sicily by the Arabs; cactus pears, fresh figs and grapes, fat olives, fresh capers, zucchini blossoms, fresh ricotta and pungent pecorino cheese.

A short walk brings us to the Piazza Praetoria with its voluptuous 16th century Florentine fountain, decked with renaissance nudes and animal heads. At its unveiling, centuries ago, locales named it "the fountain of shame". Nearby is the baroque Quattro Canti, the 17th century crossroads that divides the old city into four, and the Municipio, a 15th century palazzo that is Palermo's city hall.

On the Piazza Bellini, we step inside the Martorana Church; a 12th century building that is a jewel of Arab-Norman architecture, and its interior encrusted with byzantine mosaics. And no visit to Sicily would be complete without a stop at Monreale, the Royal Mountain. It was here, at the end of the 12th century, that the Norman king, William II had a great cathedral built to reflect the sophistication and wealth of his kingdom. Byzantine and Greek artisans were employed to cover almost every surface of its interior with costly golden mosaics depicting Christ the Pantocrator, the apostles, and cycles form the Old and New Testaments. Next door, we walk through the cloister of the Benedictine abbey. Here, no two of the exquisite capitals on over 200 twin column are the same.

En route to Erice we stop at Segesta to see the picturesque Doric temple. Sicily was part of ancient Magna Graecia. In the 8th century BC, with population rising dramatically in mainland Greece, land became expensive and resources scarce. This led to an exodus of Greeks in search of new lands. Sicily and southern Italy were to Ancient Greece what the Americas were to 16th century European explorers: the great unknown; a land of possibilities, riches and great dangers. Segesta was a successful colony, which fought with its rival Selinunte, to the south.

We continue the short distance to Erice, our final destination today.

Overnight in Erice. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *Erice: Walking Tour - Selinunte - Agrigento*

Erice sits dramatically on a promontory at over 600m (2,000 feet) above the sea. The ancients considered it a sacred place; the Arabs called it Jebel Hamid, or Blessed Mountain. The city was widely respected as the centre of worship for the goddess Astarte, and later Aphrodite whom the Romans knew as Venus. It is claimed that Erice was built by descendents of the Trojans.

This morning we take a walking tour through this picturesque town, which reminds one of a northern Italian hill town with its cobbled, narrow streets. We enter the Carthginian Porta Trapani, passing the Chiesa Matrice, a beautiful Normanesque Gothic church built in the 15th century. Near the main square you might like to sample some Sicilian sweets at a local shop where they are made to order. The Arabs are credited with the introduction of the local fondness of desserts, including gelato for which Sicily is famous.

Farther along we come to the site where once the temple of Venus Erycina stood. From the Norman Castle, now standing in its place, the views out to sea are splendid. On a clear day, we might even see the coast of Tunisia, 145km distant. Erice is home today to an important scientific institute where international conferences and symposiums are held year round, giving Erice the sobriquet, "City of Science".

We depart Erice for Agrigento via the town of Marsala, a Arabic name meaning "Harbour of God". Here, in 1860, Garibaldi landed with his army of a thousand redshirts to take Sicily from the Spanish Bourbon rulers. In the previous century an Englishman named John Woodhouse saw the potential for a lucrative export, fortified wine, which became all the rage, especially after Admiral Nelson supplied it to his sailors instead of rum. You may like to sample some Marsala, this sweet dessert wine, at one of the local cantinas.

In the setting of a vaulted 19th century winery, there is a museum housing a remarkable find: a Carthaginian galley. This warship, manned by 68 stores, was rammed and sunk off shore near Marsala in a sea battle in the 3rd century BC during the second Punic War. With the Roman victory over the Carthaginians at the end of this war, Sicily became Rome's first overseas province in 210 BC.

Further along the southern coast we stop at Selinunte where a series of Greek temples stand. One of these was one of the largest of the ancient world. Today its colossal ruins remind one that civilization can so easily be toppled by conquest and earthquakes, humbled by the events of time and history.

We continue our journey through the highly productive agricultural lands of southern Sicily, passing olive groves and vineyards, arriving in Agrigento later this afternoon.

Overnight in Agrigento. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Agrigento - Magna Graecia - Syracuse*

Our journey through the lands of Magna Graecia takes us this morning to the magnificent series of temples at Agrigento. The five elevated temples are a picture-perfect tribute to the indomitability of paganism. Time, earthquakes, vicious Punic Wars, and the rise of Christianity have taken their toll, and the temples have been named official World Heritage landmarks.

Leaving behind the ancient Greek world, we drive inland across the island. Near the town of Piazza Armerina we explore the remarkable ruins of a Roman villa. Built at the end of the 4th century AD, this vast complex which includes extensive baths, reception rooms, and private apartments may have been an imperial villa of Diocletian's co-emperor, Maximianus. The villa contains some of the most beautiful and extensive Roman mosaics to be found anywhere,

including detailed and colourful hunting scenes, images from mythology, and a charming sequence of bikini-clad ladies doing aerobics!

After lunch we drive onward towards the eastern side of the island, coming within sight of the slopes of Mount Etna. At 3313 m (10,866 feet), Etna is one of the earth's most active volcanoes--both a blessing and a curse for the local people. The surrounding lands are extremely fertile, but there looms the constant possibility of an eruption. The nearby city of Catania was almost completely buried by lava flows in 1669.

We arrive at Syracuse later this afternoon.

Overnight in Syracuse. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Syracuse: City Tour - Taormina: Walking Tour - Giardini-Naxos*

This morning we tour Syracuse.

The city was founded in 735 BC by settlers from Corinth, Greece, who took over from the native Sikels. In time it grew to become the largest city on Sicily, so important that Athens grew jealous and sent an invasion force in 415 BC. Syracuse became Roman; Rome declined, the Vandals and the Osrogoths took over. Belisarius of Byzantium conquered the city and from 878 to 1038 it was the Saracens who ruled Sicily. Then came the turn of the Normans, and in 1105 Count Roger incorporated Arab Sicily in his county.

We continue to Taormina and on arrival have a leisurely walking tour of the town, starting with the almost perfectly preserved Greco-Roman amphitheatre, Taormina's greatest treasure. In ancient days, the 3rd-century cliffside arena seated 5,000 spectators, with Mount Etna framed perfectly as a backdrop to the 1800 year old stage.

We see also the Palazzo Corvaia with its blend of Arab, Norman, and Catalan elements where, in 1410, Sicily's first parliament was convened. The Corso Umberto I is a charming pedestrian street that runs the length of town. There are many shops and boutiques along the way and at the Piazza IX Aprile, there are lovely views of Naxos harbour and the Italian mainland across the straits. Perched on a peak above the town is the medieval fortress. In the Piazza del Duomo where Taormina's 15th century basilica/cathedral stands, there is a fountain topped by the symbol of the town: the statue of a female centaur.

We spend the night 10 minutes away in Giardini-Naxos. The name of this pretty seaside town derives from Sicilian "Giardini" meaning "citrus orchards". The addition "Naxos" derives from the name of the first Greek colony in Sicily.

Overnight in Giardini-Naxos. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Giardini-Naxos (Sicily) - Paestum (Italian mainland)*

This morning we take a short ferry ride from Sicily to the Italian mainland and then proceed by motor coach to Paestum.

The three Doric Greek temples of Paestum are among the best preserved in the world, even rivaling those of Sicily and Athens. Originally built without any mortar or cement (they were simply covered by roofs of terra-cotta tiles supported by wooden beams) the temples remained standing even after the great earthquake of AD 69 reduced Pompeii's streets to a pile of rubble. After a period of native Italian control in the 5th and 4th centuries BC, it fell to the Romans in 273 BC and was renamed Paestum, remaining a Roman town until the deforestation of nearby hills turned the town into a swampy mush. Plagued by malaria and syphilitic pirates, Paestum's ruins lay relatively untouched until they were rediscovered in the 18th century.

Overnight in Paestum. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Paestum - Pompeii & Herculaneum - Sorrento*

Today we travel from Paestum to Sorrento.

En route we make an excursion to Pompeii, dug out from the inundation of volcanic ash and pumice stone that covered it by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79. The entire area is a fantastic record of how ordinary Romans lived their lives. We will see the House of Vetti, the most elegant of the Pompeii villas and we also look at the House of Mysteries. The nearby House of Faun takes up a city block and has four different dining parlours and two spacious gardens.

Nearby Herculaneum was a small town that was buried under Vesuvius' lava. Our tour here will include the baths, which were built during the reign of Agustus. An outstanding example of how the aristocracy lived is provided at the Casa dei Cervi.

We continue to Sorrento, the place where the Greeks placed the legendary abode of the Sirens, those wicked mermaids who lured seamen to their deaths with their sweet songs. The Sorrento Peninsula, a finger of land curling around the Bay of Naples, is beautiful with its soaring mountains and colourful flora.

Overnight in Sorrento. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Sorrento - the Amalfi Coast & National Archaeological Museum - Sorrento*

Today we drive along the famous Amalfi Coast on a winding road carved out of the rock in the mid-19th century. This scenic and unforgettable drive takes us to Amalfi, a resort town on the peninsula of the same name where we take a walking tour of the city. We will see the beautiful Duomo cathedral with its 13th century bell tower, the main square of the town, and the Cloister of Paradise.

Continuing to Naples, we pass by the 14th-century Duomo, the colourful harbour front, and the Castel dell'Ovo, a 12th-century fortress built on the ruins of an ancient villa, before our visit to the National Archaeological Museum. This impressive facility houses one of the world's most comprehensive collections of Greek and Roman antiquities. The museum stands on top of Santa Teresa Hill and was originally built as a military barrack later transformed into a university campus. It was remodeled in 1790 to receive the treasures of Pompeii and Herculaneum.

Return to Sorrento.

Overnight in Sorrento. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Sorrento - Monte Cassino - Rome*

Today's journey takes us to north to Rome via Monte Cassino. During the Roman Empire, the abbey located here was one of the great European centres of Christendom and one of the largest repositories of ancient learning. In 1944, Monte Cassino was destroyed by the Allied forces who suspected that it was occupied by German troops. The military cemetery on the nearby hill contains the graves of 1,100 Polish soldiers who lost their lives in the final assault.

Later we continue to Rome.

Overnight in Rome. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Rome: City Tour*

We begin our guided tour* of Rome at the 2,000 year old colosseum. Built to seat 55,000 spectators, this arena staged Rome's most brutal gladitorial combats. Next we walk through the Roman Forum where we will see the Curia, the Rostra, the Temple of Vesta, the Basilica of Constantine, and the Arch of Titus. Continuing onwards and upwards we reach the Campidoglio (Capitoline Hill), seat of the Roman Senate since the 12th century and the original citadel of the city. This beautiful square was redesigned by Michelangelo in the 16th century.

We arrive at Piazza Navona where we can break for lunch at one of the many restaurants and cafes on or near the square. In the square itself we can admire the impressive Fountain of the Four Rivers, with detailed figures representing the Nile, Ganges, Danube and Palata rivers.

We continue to the famous Trevi Fountain, designed by Nicholas Salvi in 1732. It's water was supplied by one of Rome's earliest aquaducts. Throwing a coin into the fountain is said to ensure your safe return to Rome. We also visit the temple-turned church called the Pantheon, and have the opportunity to admire its perfect proportions on our way to the Spanish steps, where we finish our day's tour. Balance of the day at leisure.

* NOTE: Due to traffic problems and the fact that today's sites are reasonably close to each other, much of today's tour will occur on foot and with Rome's efficient public transit system (cost of tickets included).

Overnight in Rome. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Rome: the Vatican Museums & St. Peter's*

Today we begin our visit to Vatican City with a guided tour through the immense Vatican Museums.* This amazing collection houses some of the most important Greek and Roman sculptures, Renaissance paintings, Flemish tapestries and mosaics in the world. Understandably this collection is visited by more than 3 million people a year. We also visit Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel to take in its breathtaking frescoes. Heading into the cavernous interior of St. Peter's Basilica, we can appreciate it's many treasures, including Michelangelo's Pieta. At the end of the tour we visit the elegantly symmetrical Piazza St. Pietro.

* NOTE: The timing of today's sightseeing can vary depending on seasonality. Early spring and late fall tours can often begin in the morning due to lighter crowds at these times of year. Busier times often dictate an afternoon visit in order to avoid morning crowds. Weather may also be a consideration. Your Tour Leader will advise further upon your arrival in Rome.

Overnight in Rome. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 *Rome - Assisi - Siena*

This morning we drive from Rome to Siena, a region famous for its wines.

Our first stop will be Assisi. Despite the millions of tourists and pilgrims it attracts every year, the hometown of St Francis remains a beautiful and tranquil refuge. St Francis was born here in 1182 and his spirit hovers over every aspect of the city's life. He renounced his father's wealth in his late teens to pursue a life of chastity and poverty, founding the order of mendicant friars known as the Order of Minors (the Franciscans after his death) which attracted a huge

following in Europe.

St Francis' Basilica is the city's, and possibly Umbria's, primary attraction. Unfortunately, this peaceful town was hit by a strong earthquake on the morning of the September 26, 1997. During the initial shock, the Basilica of the upper church was damaged. An aftershock later that day brought the cupola down. The community of Assisi with assistance from individuals and organisations worldwide is now trying to save and restore as much of Assisi's priceless masterpieces as possible.

After a guided tour of the Assisi Basilica, we depart for Siena, arriving later in the afternoon.

Overnight in Siena. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *Siena & San Gimignano*

Siena is best seen on foot. In fact, the city council was Europe's first to ban motor traffic from the city centre. Siena today seems frozen in time. The town has traditionally been Florence's rival as the centre of art and architecture in Tuscany. While Florence is known for its Renaissance art and buildings, Siena takes us straight back to the Middle Ages. Perhaps by preserving its original character more than any other city in Italy, Siena is a showcase of the Italian Gothic style. The walled city of Siena occupies three hill tops and contains a rich artistic heritage.

Included on our guided walking tour of Siena's charming medieval streets and squares is a visit to the Palazzo Pubblico (Town Hall), a famous example of Italian medieval architecture with Gothic influences. Also famous for its frescoes, the best-known are a secular series on government in the Hall of the Nine (also known as Sala della Pace), by Ambrogio Lorenzetti. These frescoes are collectively known as "Allegory and Effects of Good and Bad Government."

Our next stop is the Duomo. This huge cathedral, built in bands of black and white marble, dates from the 12th century. Built in the Romanesque and Italian Gothic styles, it has a dramatically painted façade -- partly designed by Giovanni Pisano -- and a soaring black and white bell tower. The inlaid marble floor depicts different Biblical scenes and the cathedral contains a glass-enclosed box with an arm. Tradition maintains that the arm is that of John the Baptist and was used to baptise Christ.

This afternoon we drive to San Gimignano, called the Manhattan of Tuscany. The medieval town preserves 13 of its noble brick towers, which give it a skyscraper skyline. Today its fortress-like severity is softened by the subtlety of its quiet, harmonious squares, and many of its places and churches are enhanced by Renaissance frescoes.

Our drive this afternoon back to Siena takes us through the wine growing region of Chianti.

Overnight in Siena. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 14 *Siena - Volterra - Pisa - Lerici*

This morning we drive through beautiful and quintessential Tuscan rolling countryside to Volterra.

Situated like many Etruscan cities on a high plateau, Volterra offers uninterrupted views over the surrounding hills. In many places the town's ancient Etruscan walls still stand. The exact origins of the Etruscans and when they arrived in Italy, are unknown. Their civilisation was centred in the area between present-day Rome and Florence, and had its Golden Age from the eighth until the sixth century BC. After this period the Etruscan empire was gradually superseded by the rising power of Rome, although in the process, the Romans incorporated many aspects of Etruscan culture into their own society and beliefs. Although the Etruscans had their own language and alphabet, nothing of their literature

has survived. What we know of their civilisation comes mainly from their highly decorated tombs which were stocked with everything the deceased would need in the afterlife -- food, drink, clothes, weapons and furniture.

We visit Volterra's famous Museo Guarnacci, which contains one of Italy's best collections of Etruscan artifacts. Pride of place in the museum goes to the collection of 600 Etruscan funerary urns, depicting many aspects of Etruscan customs and beliefs.

We also visit the city walls and the Etruscan Gate with its basalt heads of Etruscan gods dating back to the sixth century BC. Before leaving Volterra we view the Roman amphitheatre, dating to the first century BC. This is one of the best preserved Roman theatres in Italy and enough of the original structure has survived to allow an almost complete reconstruction.

Our next stop is Pisa, where we will spend most of our time concentrating on the town's principal monuments -- the Duomo, the Baptistery, and the most famous structure in Pisa, the gravity-defying "Leaning Tower." We will take ample time to view and photograph the tower from the outside (to climb the tower requires advance reservations and a considerable amount of time to queue for entry; time constraints make this impractical for our tour).

We continue to Lerici, set dramatically on a beautiful bay on the Ligurian coast.

Overnight in Lerici. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 15 *Lerici - Cinque Terre - Florence*

Today we leave behind Lerici and travel (weather depending) by boat along the Ligurian coast to village of Riomaggiore in the Cinque Terre. Here we begin our easy-paced walk between the coastal villages. This spectacular section of the Italian Riviera is considered to rival the Amalfi Coast near Naples for its stunning views and gorgeous sunsets. From Riomaggiore we take an easy half hour walk on the Via D'Amore (lover's Walk) to Manarola. The next section (about 1 hour) takes us to Corniglia.

Those not wishing to continue with the next two more difficult sections may walk up to Corniglia centre to sample the delightful town with its wonderful panoramic views. It is also possible to take a local train to the nearby town of Vernazza to enjoy this jewel of a village. Those wishing to continue may start on the 2-hour hike to Vernazza. The hills of the rugged coast are covered in vineyards which grow the grapes for the local Morasca, Chiaretto del Faro and Sciacchetra wines.

We continue by train to Monterosso Al Mare, thus named for the red color of the area. Here we find a large statue carved into the cliffs and a lovely beach.

PLEASE NOTE: Due to the flooding that occurred in the region in late 2011, our day may need to be adjusted depending on what trails are open or under repair, and any repairs or re-construction occuring in the impacted villages.

Tonight we arrive in Florence.

Overnight in Florence. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 16 *Florence: Walking Tour*

Florence is a city steeped in history and art. Our walking tour today begins with a guided tour of the Accademia, which was Europe's first Academy of drawing and today houses a superb art collection, including Michelangelo's David,

probably the most famous statue in the world. We then proceed to the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore (Duomo), complete with its magnificent red dome. Upon its completion in 1436, the dome was hailed as the greatest architectural achievement of its day, equaling, perhaps even surpassing, the monuments of antiquity. The cupola's diameter is greater than that of St Peter's in Rome and the nave is the third largest in Christendom. Even today its brilliant engineering is not fully understood.

We continue along the pedestrian mall to the Ponte Vecchio, the oldest bridge in Florence and the only one in the city to survive World War II. The Ponte Vecchio was built in 1345 and used to be lined with butchers' shops which have now been replaced by rows of gold and silver shops on both sides. At the Piazza Santa Croce, we stop to admire the facade of the Franciscan church of the same name. Inside we see the tombs of Michelangelo and Galileo Galilei and chapels covered in frescoes by Giotto.

Balance of the day at leisure.

Overnight in Florence. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 17 *Florence: Uffizi Gallery*

This morning we visit the Uffizi Gallery, Giorgio Vasari's extraordinary administrative buildings which he designed for Cosimo I Medici in the mid-sixteenth century. The galleries here contain the greatest collection of Italian artworks, including hundreds of paintings by such great artists as Botticelli, Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, Michelangelo, Titian and Caravaggio. The galleries also contain one of the most famous paintings in the world -- Botticelli's 'Birth of Venus.'

The afternoon is free to take in the atmosphere of this sophisticated city.

Overnight in Florence. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 18 *Departure*

Departure from Florence.

BUON VIAGGIO! Meal plan: Breakfast.