

## THE ITALIAN ISLES

### Sardinia, Sicily & the Aeolian Islands

**22 days**

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#### Day 1 Arrival in Cagliari

Arrival in Cagliari - Welcome to Sardinia!

Cagliari was the capital of the Kingdom of Sardinia from 1324 to 1848 when Turin became the formal capital of the kingdom (which in 1861 became the Kingdom of Italy). Today the city is a regional cultural, educational, political, and artistic centre known for its diverse Art Nouveau architecture and monuments.

Sardinia is part of Italy - and yet it is not. Such a proud and ancient culture that have inhabited this island for millennia, it stands apart as a unique Mediterranean location that is distinctive and unusual. Over the next week we'll uncover what makes this island special - fiercely independent, wonderful natural environments, unique historical sites, and a cuisine that is specifically 'sarda.'

Overnight in Cagliari.

Included Meal(s): Dinner, if required.

#### Day 2 Cagliari City Touring

This morning we begin our explorations at the San Benedetto markets, the key point for the trade of all types of fresh food for the city. In these markets you see how the locals shop, what they buy, what is fresh, and what is caught in this part of the Mediterranean sea. Indeed the ground floor fish market is the biggest attraction; it offers a huge variety of seafood: gilthead, soles, mullets, crabs, oysters, octopus, tuna, swordfish, clams and many more.

We'll then walk through all the key points of central Cagliari, learning the reasons for the curious layout of this city. We focus on the Castello area, the oldest part of the city, located within the 14th century fortified walls and hemmed in by cliffs on either side. The history of invaders here, through the millennia, makes it understandable that people would live in this tightly packed district up on the hill.

We go to the Saint Remy Bastion and enjoy the view over Cagliari. The bastion is a magnificent archway into the city and the best views of this area to be had from a vantage point in the 'Piazza Costituzione'. From here we'll visit the Cathedral di Santa Maria, built in the XIII century in Roman style by the Pisans. Few traces of the medieval structure remain: the steeple, the two Romanesque side doors and the so-called Pisan Chapel. During the 17th century, the building underwent its first major reconstruction work; the inside and the façade were changed, following the Baroque fashion of the time.

We finish our tour with a stop at the Anfiteatro Romano di Cagliari, the most important and majestic public building of Roman Sardinia - an architectural masterpiece that held ten thousand spectators, and the cultural and social centre of ancient Carales.

The balance of the day is free for independent exploration. You might consider a visit to the National Archaeological Museum of Cagliari, a great introduction to the island's ancient past.

Overnight in Cagliari.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

#### Day 3 Cagliari - Fortress of Su Nuraxi - Tharros - Oristano

This morning we depart by road northward to Barumini. En route we'll enjoy spectacular sights of Sardinian countryside. Sardinia is a land of shepherds: their flocks, constantly on the move, are visible almost everywhere. Sardinia has a unique, wild, barren landscape -- DH Lawrence summed it up in 'Sea and Sardinia': "A savage, dark-bushed, sky-exposed land, forsaken to the sea and the sun... with no life in sight, even no ships on the pale blue sea." If there is one characteristic that dominates the history and geography of Sardinia -- its isolation. In fact Sardinia is closer to North Africa than mainland Italy, and has hence developed its own unique culture which dates back before Roman times.

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At Barumini we'll discover one of the most beautiful prehistoric sites of the Mediterranean, dating back to ancient times (3,800 years ago): the Fortress of Su Nuraxi, a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site. The dwellings left by the prehistoric Nuragic Civilization at Barumini are among the most fascinating archaeological sites in Sardinia, but interpreting these enigmatic ruins can be a challenge. Our visit will provide insights into Su Nuraxi and the people who built it millennia ago as we explore the impressive stone structures and collection of ancient artifacts in the adjacent Casa Zapata Archaeological Museum. Just a few minutes away, an endemic species of small stature horses, the so-called "cavallini della giara" living in freedom as their ancestors used to ages ago.

We then continue toward the Sinis Peninsula, continuing to discover the different aspects of this ancient and varied region, travelling by the panoramic coastal road to the northern promontory of the Gulf of Oristano, where we find the ruins of Tharros, a Carthaginian and Roman port originally built by the Phoenicians in the Middle Ages.

From the parking area it's a 15-minute walk along the beach to the excavations of Tharros, where we'll have an hour-long visit. Depending on our timing thus far, we may break for lunch in one of the kiosks along the beach before OR after our visit.

We then continue toward the ancient Carthaginian stronghold of Oristano, built on reclaimed marshland and capital of the newest province and centre of Sardinian rice cultivation. We'll have a relaxed walking tour of the city centre, visiting the church of San Francesco, the cathedral and stroll its charming, colourful streets.

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Overnight in Oristano.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

#### Day 4 Oristano - Nuraghe Sant'Antine - Tinnura - Bosa

In the countryside of Oristano, we have an opportunity this morning to experience the love and passion around the production of extra virgin olive oil. A portal from the 1700s, a dilapidated farmhouse, an ancient well, and a stone mill provide a fitting backdrop for this glimpse into the nature and traditions of Sardinia. Centenary olive trees tell a story that fascinates -- only indigenous crops from which oils are born will be tasted through a sensory journey.

We continue to the Carthaginian town of Bosa, situated on the River Temo and dominated by the ruins of the Castle Serravalle, with rows of coloured buildings lining the waterfront and small fishing boats moored in the inlet. We leave you some free time in Bosa to wander through the lanes, or to simply relax and enjoy the pleasant ambiance.

While in the vicinity of Bosa, we'll visit the megalithic tower and village at Nuraghe Sant'Antine. Nearby we'll go to Tinnura, a village famous for its wine (Malvasia di Bosa), artistic weaving and, most of all, as an outdoor Art and Modern Architecture Museum, abounding with murals and various statues by important Sardinia artists.

Overnight in Bosa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

#### Day 5 Bosa - Castle of Malaspina - Castelsardo & Doria Castle

Before leaving Bosa we'll pay a visit to the Castle of Malaspina, which has been watching over Bosa since 1112. Today, only the fortified walls and the towers belonging to the original structure still stand unspoiled, but the amazing view on the river Temo and the beauty of the artistic heritage jealously kept inside, make this one of the most suggestive castles of Sardinia. While here, we'll visit the Cappella Palatina and the Church of Sos Regnos Altos, with its frescoes dating back to the 4th century AD.

Our destination today is Castelsardo, located on the height of a narrow promontory. Renowned across the island for its beauty, the town was once described by a Sardinian poet as, "a flower of light that smiles from the top of a sharp promontory upon the glimmering sea."

While in Castelsardo we'll visit Doria Castle, which gives the village its name and still watches over the town after a thousand years. Here we'll include one of the most-visited museums in Sardinia, the Museo dell'Intreccio Mediterraneo, where traditionally-woven baskets and other artifacts are on display.

For your free time here, we recommend a casual stroll in the city centre so that you can feel fully-immersed in this beautiful place's atmosphere: as you walk, you will see the traditional baskets hanging outside the houses as a popular decoration all around Sardinia. You will

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also admire the city's old fortifications and the 17 watchtowers built by the Aragonese to keep Castelsardo (back then called Castel Aragonese) safe.

Overnight in Castelsardo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 6 Castelsardo - Sella & Mosca Wine Cellar - Alghero via Sassari

We depart Castelsardo and travel to Alghero via Sassari, Sardinia's second largest city.

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In Sassari we visit the Museo Giovanni Antonio Sanna, which has a lovely rose garden in front and houses Nuraghi models, Sardinian paintings, skulls with holes drilled into them, and petrified tree stumps. We will also see Sassari's duomo, Cattedrale di San Nicolo. This 15th-century Gothic Catalan-style structure has a Baroque facade; renovations have uncovered early frescoes.

Our last stop is Sella & Mosca, one of the oldest and biggest wine estates in Sardinia, with beautifully maintained grounds and a surprisingly good museum. As one of the best ways of getting to know Sella e Mosca winery, we'll have a tour of its vineyards and facilities, which will also include wine tasting.

Overnight in Alghero.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 7 Alghero Area Touring

Today we enjoy a walking tour around this fascinating city. Alghero has a culture that is distinctly different from the rest of Sardinia. The key influences here are Spanish, following the conquering of the city by the Aragonese in the 14th century. Indeed, the local dialect is closely related to Catalan. The old town has a superb seaside location, and much to discover.

A leisurely walk through Alghero's centro storico reveals tiny alleyways, half-hidden churches, and the ancient town walls. We see Alghero's Chiesa di San Francesco and the heavy 14th-century Neoclassical facade of this church, concealing a graceful Gothic presbytery. Alghero's duomo was begun in 1552 and took 178 years to construct, resulting in a motley Gothic-Catalan-Renaissance facade. Rebuilt in the 19th century, the cathedral has Gothic choirs and a mosaic of John the Baptist.

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Balance of the day at leisure.

Overnight in Alghero.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 8 Alghero - Fly to Palermo, Sicily

Today we fly to Palermo.\*

Palermo is the capital of both the autonomous region of Sicily and the Metropolitan City of Palermo. The city is noted for its history, culture, architecture and gastronomy, playing an important role throughout much of its existence; it is over 2,700 years old. To gain an initial understanding of the city's unique culture, start by wandering the streets of the old city. The mix of architectural styles points to the wave upon wave of invaders who have claimed the city as their own, as does the look of the locals.

\* This flight usually occurs around midday, so we'll likely have a leisurely morning and some free time after check-in in Palermo (subject to change).

Overnight in Palermo.

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Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 9 Palermo: City Tour

We begin our day with a walk through the narrow streets of the Il Capo 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.

We finish our day at the superlative Church and Monastery of Santa Caterina d'Alessandria, built as a hospice in the early 14th century and transformed into a Dominican convent the following century. This monastic complex wows with its magnificent maiolica cloister, surrounded by unique balconied cells and punctuated by an 18th-century fountain by Sicilian sculptor Ignazio Marabitti. The convent's rooftop terraces offer spectacular views of the surrounding piazzas and city, while the church's baroque interior harbours works by prolific artists. While the last nuns moved out in 2014, their tradition of baking lives on at the convent's onsite bakery I Segreti del Chiostro, which specialises in the traditional sweets made for centuries in Sicilian convents. As this is a large site, we end today's formal tour here so you can choose to linger and explore on your own before gathering for dinner this evening.

Overnight in Palermo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 10 Palermo - Segesta - Selinunte - Agrigento

Today our route to Agrigento takes us first to 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, our next stop.

After a break for lunch, we visit the the ruins of Selinunte, some of the most impressive of the ancient Greek world and one of the most captivating sites in Sicily. Selinos (as it was known to the Greeks) was once one of the richest and most powerful cities in the world, with over 100,000 inhabitants and an unrivalled temple-building program. The city was forgotten until the middle of the 16th century, when a Dominican monk identified its location. Excavations began in 1823, courtesy of two English archaeologists.

We continue to Agrigento for dinner and overnight.

Overnight in Agrigento.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 11 Agrigento: Site Tour - Piazza Armerina - Enna

This morning we tour the magnificent series of temples of Agrigento. The five elevated temples are a picture-perfect tribute to the indomitably of paganism. Time, earthquakes, vicious Punic Wars, and the rise of Christianity have taken their toll, and the temples have been

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named official World Heritage landmarks.

Then, leaving behind the ancient Greek world behind, we drive inland across the island where, 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!

We continue to Enna where you will have some free time to explore the town. See the Castello di Lombardia or Torre di Federico II for stunning views; your Tour Leader will point you in the right direction.

Overnight in Enna.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 12 Enna - Siracusa: Archaeological Park

Today we drive toward 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 Siracusa (Syracuse) and tour of the Archaeological Park, including the Greek theatre, Monumental Altar of Hieron II, and the Latomia del Paradiso (quarry with the Ear of Dionysius). After a break for lunch we have a walking tour of Ortygia (old Siracusa), wandering the narrow streets of the old city where we see the Temple of Apollo, Fountain of Aretusa, the main piazza, and the Duomo, a former Temple of Athena.

Overnight in Siracusa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 13 Siracusa - Mount Etna - Taormina

We depart Siracusa and drive up the east coast to Taormina, with stunning views of Mount Etna. We'll make a detour and drive up the side of Etna -- have a sweater handy as we'll be approaching 1800m / 6,000 ft! (depending on weather, we may explore Mount Etna tomorrow instead). This is the highest volcano in Europe and one of most active of the world; its spectacular eruptions and its fiery lava flows have always aroused the interest of scientists, along with the curiosity of visitors from all over the world.

We continue to Taormina, arguably the most beautiful town in Sicily, an old hilltop town full of history and culture and by the sea. Taormina is also famous for incredible heritage in history, archaeology and architecture, as well as for its reputation in welcoming travellers.

Overnight in Taormina.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 14 Taormina: City Touring

Today we'll 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 cliff-side arena seated 5,000 spectators, with Mount Etna framed perfectly as a backdrop to the 1,800 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

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symbol of the town: the statue of a female centaur.

The afternoon is yours for independent exploration.

Overnight in Taormina.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 15 Taormina - Milazzo - Ferry to Lipari

Today we have a short drive north (about 1.5 hours) to catch the ferry from Sicily's town of Milazzo to Lipari (about 2 hours), the largest of the Aeolian Islands in the Tyrrhenian Sea and the name of the island's main town. Lipari is the largest of a chain of islands in a volcanic archipelago that straddles the gap between Vesuvius and Etna.

NOTE: Our program for the Aeolian Islands may evolve between the time of conception and actual execution. The next couple of days may vary depending on such things as hotel availability (limited) and ferry schedules (changeable).

Overnight on Lipari.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 16 Lipari Tour

Lipari is a charming town that boasts a largely reconstructed Norman-era church and a fine archeological museum and archeological. The oldest part of the castle was built in Greek times, but the thirteenth-century walls that dominate the structure are naturally more evident. Following the assault of the Turks, the larger walls were built, and these constitute the fortress's present appearance.

We'll have a walking tour of the citadel and visit the Archaeological Museum (Classic section). Afterwards we will enjoy a stroll along the main street Corso Vittorio Emauele.

After lunch we set out from Lipari Citta in the direction of Canneto, to the north. We stop at the viewpoint of Quattrocchi, Porticello and Campo Bianco with the magnificent huge white cliffs of pumice. In Canneto we can enjoy a refreshing "granita" before driving back to Lipari Città.

Overnight in Lipari.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 17 Lipari: Panarea & Stromboli

Today we have a day-trip by boat to the island Stromboli with a stop on the island of Panarea.\*

Each of the seven Aeolian Islands has its own character and Panarea is no exception to that.

This is an island that has a glitzy "VIP" feel to it and is a favourite summertime spot for the rich and famous who come here to party, sunbathe, and shop.

Stromboli, along with Vulcano, is probably the most famous of these islands. Far from the other islands and dominated by a single large volcano, Stromboli is quite impressive from a distance. Stromboli is a fully-active volcano that is in a constant state of mild activity, punctuated by occasional larger and more violent eruptions. The most recent violent eruption was a brief event in March 2007, though the "normal" small eruptions of lava are not dangerous.

We'll have time to experience Stromboli's small village. Due to the size of the island and lacking streets, neither cars nor buses or trains exist. The only available means of transport are "ape-cars", small motorbikes and boats. The only other way to move around the island is by walking.

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\* This will likely be a FULL day out with an evening arrival back in Lipari. Please also note that our activities and timing can be weather-dependent. Due to the length of our day, we may include lunch instead of dinner today.

Return to Lipari.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Lunch

### Day 18 Lipari: Boat Excursion to Salina

Today's boat excursion takes us to Salina, the greenest of the Aeolian Islands. We will reach the town of S. Marina for a free-form visit of about an hour during which you can explore on your own. Our tour continues with a stop in the beautiful Bay of Pollara at the foot of Monte dei Porri, scenery featured in the film "Il Postino" by Troisi.

We will then stop at Lingua, a small fishing village that houses a salt pond from which salt was once extracted and from which the name Salina derives. Here you will have free time to visit the small ethnographic museum and the archaeological museum.

We return to Lipari.

Overnight in Lipari.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 19 Lipari - Boat to Vulcano

Today we travel by boat to nearby Vulcano. The highest points of the island are Mount Aria (501 meters) and Mount Saraceno, almost as high. The last major eruption of Vulcano was in 1890. Ancient Greek mythology places the forge of Hephaestus, the god of fire who worked as a blacksmith with the assistance of the Cyclops, on Vulcano.

Upon arrival, we begin a walking tour of the village and the mud pool of Acqua di Bagno on the beach fed by hot springs, near the Faraglione, a rock with alum quarries. If conditions allow, we may be able to have a boat trip that allows us to view Vulcano's eruptions from the sea after dark.

Overnight on Vulcano.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 20 Vulcano Sightseeing

One of the main attractions of Vulcano is to climb up the main volcano of this island.\* Following a well-marked sandy path, we start climbing to the most "dangerous" crater of the archipelago that awaits us with an incredible lunar landscape: smoking holes, sulphur, and volcanic "bombs." Here is easy to understand why the powerful beauty of this island impressed so many writers and poets.

You can also enjoy the Black Sand Beach, an attractive stretch of land comprising of volcanic sand. Nearby as well are the mud baths where you can soak your face and body in the mud and rinse it off after it forms a mask. There are hot springs nearby with warm and bubbly water.

\* To achieve the summit is for the fit! You are, of course, welcome to go just as far as you like, enjoy the views, and return to the base on your own. By this point of the trip, your Tour Leader will be familiar with your abilities and will be able to offer advice re your suitability.

Overnight on Vulcano.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

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### Day 21 Ferry Vulcano - Milazzo - Drive to Catania

Today we ferry back to the Sicilian mainland and continue by road to Catania, the location of the main international airport on this side of Sicily.

Catania, standing in the ominous shadow of Mount Etna, is called the city of "black and white" -- white plaster and marble plus black lava form major parts of its architectural adornment.

Tonight we enjoy a farewell dinner.

Overnight in Catania.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

### Day 22 Departure

Departure from Catania.

VIAGGIO BUONO!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast