Tour Code
ML2

ADVENTURESABROAD

MALTA & SOUTHERN ITALY

featuring Sicily, Sorrento & Rome

19 days

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Day 1 Arrival in Malta

Welcome to Malta!

Malta has a greater density of historic sights than any other country. Starting with its unique prehistoric temples, some of the oldest stone buildings in the world, it also has Roman catacombs, medieval towns, and the extraordinary architectural and artistic legacy of the Knights of St John (the Knights of Malta). The British left behind red letter boxes and phone booths, as well as the language, in spite of which Malta (independent since 1964) remains thoroughly Maltese. The country has thankfully shaken off the British culinary legacy and is home to some excellent restaurants specialising in Mediterranean food.

Overnight in Malta.

Included Meal(s): Dinner

Day 2 Valletta: Walking Tour

This morning we set out on foot to explore Valletta, Europe's smallest capital, built by the Knights of St. John as a fortress city following their victory in the Great Siege of 1565.

We begin at the Upper Barakka Gardens, terraced gardens laid out along the bastion walls with sweeping views across the Grand Harbour to the Three Cities beyond, where the Saluting Battery below still fires its noon-day gun. From here we walk to the National Museum of Archaeology, housed in the Knights' Auberge de Provence, where the "Sleeping Lady" and other Neolithic treasures trace Malta's temple-building culture back some 5,000 years.

St. John's Co-Cathedral, the Knights' conventual church, hides a gilded Baroque interior and inlaid marble tombs behind a deceptively plain facade. Its museum holds Caravaggio's largest known painting, The Beheading of St. John the Baptist, completed during the artist's turbulent stay on the island. Nearby, the Grand Master's Palace served as the Order's seat of government for over two centuries; we tour its state rooms, hung with Gobelin tapestries, and the Palace Armoury, its halls lined with knights' swords, breastplates, and ceremonial suits of armour.

We close the day at the Sacra Infermeria, the Knights' 16th-century hospital, for "The Malta Experience," an audiovisual journey through seven millennia of island history, from the temple builders to independence.

Overnight in Valletta.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Valletta Harbour Cruise & Prehistoric Temples

From Valletta we transfer to Sliema, departure point for a cruise around the Grand Harbour and Marsamxett Harbour, the twin anchorages that made Malta indispensable to every power from the Phoenicians to the British navy.

The boat traces a fortified shoreline built by the Knights after their victory in the 1565 Great Siege, when Ottoman forces besieged the island for over three months and were ultimately repelled. We pass beneath bastion walls raised in the siege's aftermath and the historic dockyards of the Three Cities, still active with naval and merchant traffic today.

From Sliema we continue to Marsaxlokk, a fishing village where painted luzzu boats crowd the quay, their bows marked with protective eyes in a tradition tracing back to Phoenician times. Stalls along the harbour sell the morning's catch alongside local lace and produce, and on Sundays the village hosts Malta's largest open-air fish market.

Our final stop is Hagar Qim and Mnajdra, twin temple complexes standing on limestone cliffs above the islet of Filfla. Built between 3600 and

3200 BCE, these are among the oldest free-standing structures on Earth, predating Stonehenge and the pyramids of Giza by well over a thousand years. Hagar Qim's megalithic slabs, some weighing over 20 tonnes, were shaped and raised without metal tools, while Mnajdra's entrance aligns precisely with the sunrise on the solstices and equinoxes.

Overnight in Valletta.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Day Trip to Gozo

The brief ferry crossing to Gozo transports us to an island that feels like Malta's rural cousin. Gozo maintains a distinct cultural identity and dialect, with landscapes and traditions that modern Malta has largely abandoned. The prehistoric temples of Ggantija rank among humanity's oldest religious monuments, dating back to 3600-3200 BCE. Local folklore attributes their construction to giants, and the megaliths' sheer size is awe-inspiring. Victoria, Gozo's capital, clusters around the fortified citadel of Il-Kastell, which has been continuously fortified for over 4,000 years.

Within the citadel, the Cathedral of the Assumption showcases trompe-l'oeil ceiling paintings that create illusory domes. At Dwejra, we witness geological forces at their most dramatic. Two enormous limestone caverns collapsed to create today's Inland Sea, a lagoon connected to the Mediterranean through a 100-metre tunnel. Local fishermen guide us through this natural wonder, past the Blue Hole and Fungus Rock, where Knights of St. John once harvested rare medicinal plants. The cynomorium coccineus growing on Fungus Rock was highly valued for its medicinal properties, reminding us how biological diversity creates economic value across cultures.

Overnight on Malta

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 Mosta, Mdina, Rabat & Dingli Cliffs

This morning we leave Valletta for Mosta, home to the Rotunda, a parish church whose dome ranks as Europe's third-largest unsupported dome at 37 m/122 ft across. In April 1942, a German bomb pierced the roof during Mass and failed to detonate, an escape residents still call the Miracle of Mosta.

From Mosta we continue to Mdina, Malta's fortified hilltop capital for close to a thousand years before the Knights moved the seat of power to Valletta. Its cathedral, quiet lanes, and honey-coloured bastions earned it the nickname "Silent City," a title that still suits its near-empty streets once the day-trip crowds depart; only residents' vehicles are permitted within the walls, and a handful of aristocratic Maltese families still occupy its palazzi.

Just outside the walls, Rabat holds the remains of Roman Melite. We tour the Domus Romana, a 1st-century townhouse whose mosaic floors were uncovered beneath later buildings, then descend into the Catacombs of St. Paul and St. Agatha, extensive underground burial complexes used by Malta's early Christian and Jewish communities from the 3rd century onward.

On the return route, we stop at the Dingli Cliffs, where limestone bluffs drop some 250 m/820 ft to the sea and, on clear days, the uninhabited islet of Filfla is visible offshore.

Overnight in Valletta.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Valetta, Malta - Palermo, Sicily, Italy

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.

* Due to air scheduling considerations, we may elect to fly the group to nearby Catania instead of Palermo and transfer to Palermo from there (+/- 2 hours). For our purposes, Catania often has more convenient departure/arrival times.

Overnight in Palermo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Palermo: City Tour

We begin at the Baroque heart of the old city, where Quattro Canti divides Palermo into four quarters, each corner presided over by a season and a Spanish monarch. Steps away, Piazza Praetoria centres on the great Renaissance fountain whose nude figures so scandalized 16th-century Sicilians that they called it the Fontana della Vergogna—the Fountain of Shame. That Sicily, then deep in Counter-Reformation piety, was ruled by a Spanish viceroy who commissioned such a work tells you something about the contradictions this city has always absorbed with remarkable grace.

At the Martorana Church, those contradictions find their most beautiful expression. Built by a Greek admiral in the service of a Norman king, its interior blazes with Byzantine mosaics laid tile by tile in the 12th century—a fusion of Arab spatial geometry, Norman patronage, and Orthodox iconography that exists nowhere else on earth.

From there we plunge into Il Capo market, one of Palermo's great sensory experiences. Fishmongers display magnificent swordfish and glistening octopus alongside the agricultural wealth of Etna's volcanic hinterland—citrus, olives, almonds—in a market culture that has changed little since the Arab traders who introduced many of these ingredients a thousand years ago.

We then make the short drive up to Monreale—the "Royal Mountain"—where Norman King William II constructed a cathedral in the late 12th century as a declaration of his kingdom's sophistication and his own piety. Its interior is among the greatest achievements of the medieval world: 6,000 square metres of gold mosaic covering walls and apse in a Biblical narrative that moves from Creation to the miracles of Christ, watched over by a monumental Pantocrator of almost unsettling authority.

Our day concludes at the Church and Monastery of Santa Caterina d'Alessandria, where Dominican nuns once perfected the art of Sicilian confectionery in its cloisters. The convent's rooftop terraces offer sweeping views across Palermo's piazzas, while the onsite bakery I Segreti del Chiostro carries those centuries-old traditions forward. As this is a large and rewarding site, we end our formal tour here so you can linger and explore at your own pace before we gather for dinner.

Overnight in Palermo.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Palermo - Segesta - Selinunte - Agrigento

We journey across Sicily's ancient Greek heartland, where colonies once rivalled Athens in wealth and ambition. Sicily was part of Magna Graecia—when mainland Greece grew overcrowded in the 8th century BC, bold settlers sailed west seeking new fortunes. To them, Sicily represented what the Americas would mean to 16th-century Europeans: vast possibilities, untold riches, and considerable dangers.

Our first stop is Segesta, where a perfectly preserved Doric temple stands as testimony to Greek architectural mastery. This powerful city-state waged bitter wars with its rival Selinunte, our next destination. After a break for lunch, we explore Selinunte's magnificent ruins, once home to over 100,000 inhabitants and boasting an unrivalled temple-building program. Lost to history until a Dominican monk rediscovered its location in the 16th century, these temples rank among the ancient world's most impressive monuments.

We continue to Agrigento, where tomorrow we'll witness Sicily's most spectacular Greek legacy.

Overnight in Agrigento

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Agrigento: Site Tour - Piazza Armerina - Enna

We begin among Agrigento's magnificent temples, where five elevated structures create a picture-perfect tribute to ancient paganism's enduring power. Time, earthquakes, Punic Wars, and Christianity's rise have all tested these World Heritage landmarks, yet they remain defiant against Sicily's azure sky.

Next, we travel inland to explore Villa Romana del Casale near Piazza Armerina, a vast 4th-century complex that may have belonged to co-emperor Maximianus. This archaeological treasure houses some of the world's most beautiful Roman mosaics, including detailed hunting scenes, mythological images, and the delightful "bikini girls" performing ancient aerobics—proof that athletic fashion has ancient roots.

We then proceed to Enna, perched high in Sicily's interior. You'll have free time to explore this mountain town, perhaps visiting the Castello di Lombardia or Torre di Federico II for stunning panoramic views; your Tour Leader will point you in the right direction.

Overnight in Enna

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 10 Enna - Siracusa: Archaeological Park

We travel toward Sicily's eastern coast, coming within sight of Mount Etna's imposing slopes. At 3313m (10,866 feet), Etna stands as one of Earth's most active volcanoes—both blessing and curse for local inhabitants. While volcanic soil creates extraordinary fertility, the constant threat of eruption looms; Catania was nearly buried by lava flows in 1669.

We arrive in Siracusa (Syracuse) and tour the Archaeological Park, including the Greek theatre where ancient dramas once echoed, the Monumental Altar of Hieron II, and the Latomia del Paradiso quarry with its famous "Ear of Dionysius." After a break for lunch, we explore Ortygia, old Siracusa's historic heart, wandering narrow streets where we discover the Temple of Apollo, Fountain of Aretusa, the main piazza, and the remarkable Duomo—a former Temple of Athena transformed into a Christian cathedral.

Overnight in Siracusa.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Siracusa - Mount Etna - Taormina

We depart Siracusa and drive up the east coast toward Taormina, with stunning views of Mount Etna dominating our horizon. We'll make a detour and drive up Etna's slopes—have a sweater handy as we'll be approaching 1,800m (6,000 ft)! (Depending on weather, we may explore Mount Etna tomorrow instead.) This is Europe's highest volcano and one of the world's most active; its spectacular eruptions and fiery lava flows have fascinated scientists and visitors for millennia.

We continue to Taormina, arguably Sicily's most beautiful town—an ancient hilltop settlement full of history and culture, perfectly positioned between mountains and sea. Taormina's reputation for welcoming travellers spans centuries, combining incredible heritage in archaeology and architecture with genuine Sicilian hospitality.

Overnight in Taormina.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 12 Taormina: City Touring

We begin with a leisurely walking tour starting at the almost perfectly-preserved Greco-Roman amphitheatre, Taormina's greatest treasure. This 3rd-century cliff-side arena once seated 5,000 spectators, with Mount Etna framed perfectly as a backdrop to the 1,800-year-old stage—a setting that continues to inspire artists and performers today.

We explore the Palazzo Corvaia with its fascinating blend of Arab, Norman, and Catalan elements, where Sicily's first parliament convened in 1410. The charming Corso Umberto I pedestrian street runs the town's length, lined with shops and boutiques leading to Piazza IX Aprile, where lovely views stretch across Naxos harbour to the Italian mainland. Above us rises the medieval fortress, while in Piazza del Duomo, Taormina's 15th-century basilica stands beside a fountain topped by the town's symbol: a female centaur statue.

The afternoon is yours for independent exploration of this enchanting town.

Overnight in Taormina

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 13 Taormina, Sicily - Paestum, Italian Mainland

We take a short ferry ride from Sicily to the Italian mainland and proceed by motor coach to Paestum, where three Doric Greek temples rank among the world's best preserved, rivalling those of Sicily and Athens. Originally built without mortar or cement—simply covered by terra-cotta tile roofs supported by wooden beams—these temples survived even the great earthquake of AD 69 that reduced Pompeii to rubble.

After periods of native Italian control in the 5th and 4th centuries BC, Paestum fell to Rome in 273 BC and was renamed. It remained a Roman town until deforestation of nearby hills turned the area into swampy marshland. Plagued by malaria and pirates, Paestum's ruins lay relatively untouched until rediscovered in the 18th century.

Overnight in Paestum

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 14 Paestum - National Archaeological Museum - Pompeii

We travel to Naples where we see the colourful harbour front and Castel dell'Ovo, a 12th-century fortress built on ancient villa ruins, before visiting the National Archaeological Museum. This impressive facility houses one of the world's most comprehensive collections of Greek and Roman antiquities. Built on Santa Teresa Hill as military barracks, later transformed into a university campus, it was remodelled in 1790 to receive the treasures of Pompeii and Herculaneum.

We then visit ancient Pompeii, dug out from volcanic ash and pumice stone deposited by Mount Vesuvius's eruption in AD 79. This entire area provides a fantastic record of how ordinary Romans lived their daily lives. We explore the House of Vetti, the most elegant of Pompeii's villas, and examine the intriguing House of Mysteries. The nearby House of Faun occupies an entire city block with four different dining parlours and two spacious gardens.

Overnight in Pompeii

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 15 Pompeii: Herculaneum & Amalfi by Sea

This morning we visit Herculaneum, a small town buried by Vesuvius in AD 79 and preserved in remarkable detail. Our tour includes the Suburban Baths and the Casa dei Cervi, an outstanding example of how Rome's aristocracy lived.

The Amalfi Coast is best approached from the water, as the cliff road is too narrow for a full-size coach. We drive to Salerno's harbour and board the ferry to Amalfi, watching terraced lemon groves, pastel villages and sheer cliffs unfold along the coast. Round-trip ferry tickets (Salerno–Amalfi–Salerno) are included.

The rest of the day is yours in Amalfi, once a powerful maritime republic. Its Duomo, with a 13th-century bell tower, and the Cloister of Paradise are well worth a visit, and lunch is yours to enjoy however you choose.

In the afternoon we ferry back to Salerno, where our coach waits to return us to our Pompeii hotel.

NOTE: Ferry operations depend on weather; your Tour Leader will advise of any adjustments.

Overnight in Pompeii.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 16 Pompeii - 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.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 17 Rome: City Tour

We begin at the Colosseum, where 55,000 spectators once roared as gladiators fought for survival above a labyrinthine underground of trapdoors and animal pens. Still dominating the cityscape nearly 2,000 years on, it unsettles as much as it impresses — because it was designed to. We then walk through the Roman Forum, heart of ancient civic life, where the Curia housed the Senate and the Arch of Titus commemorated the sacking of Jerusalem in AD 70. Among weathered columns and temple foundations, we stand at the physical centre of an empire that shaped Western civilisation.

Ascending to Capitoline Hill, we reach the Campidoglio — Rome's original citadel, redesigned by Michelangelo in the 16th century with the kind of harmonious geometry that would have pleased the ancients he admired. It is a fitting place to consider what separates Rome from other great cities: here, the ancient and the Renaissance don't merely coexist — each made the other possible.

We continue to Piazza Navona for lunch, surrounded by Baroque splendour. Bernini's Fountain of the Four Rivers — the Nile, Ganges, Danube, and Plate — asserted papal authority across continents as much as it delighted the eye. From here we walk to the Trevi Fountain, fed by an aqueduct built in 19 BC and still flowing, then proceed to the Pantheon. Its unreinforced concrete dome — wider than St. Peter's — was the largest in the world for thirteen centuries and remains a quiet provocation to everything built since.

NOTE: Due to traffic constraints and the proximity of today's sites, we travel primarily on foot and by Rome's efficient public transit system (tickets included). Any sightseeing not completed today continues tomorrow afternoon.

Overnight in Rome.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 18 Rome: the Vatican Museums & St. Peter's

We travel by metro across the Tiber River to Vatican City, the world's smallest sovereign state. Our guided tour begins in the vast Vatican Museums, where corridors seem to stretch infinitely, lined with humanity's greatest artistic achievements. Here we discover Greek and Roman sculptures that influenced Renaissance masters, Flemish tapestries depicting biblical narratives, and glittering mosaics assembled tile by precious tile. More than three million visitors journey here annually to witness this extraordinary collection.

The museums' crowning glory awaits in the Sistine Chapel, where Michelangelo's frescoes transform ceiling and walls into a theological masterpiece. Created between 1508 and 1512, these paintings revolutionised art history—their anatomical precision and emotional depth

remain unsurpassed. We then enter St. Peter's Basilica, Christendom's largest church, its cavernous interior housing treasures including Michelangelo's tender Pietà, carved when he was just 24 years old. Outside, the elegantly symmetrical Piazza San Pietro embraces visitors in Bernini's colonnade arms.

After a break for lunch, we continue with any sightseeing carried over from yesterday.

NOTE: The timing and order of today's sightseeing may vary depending on seasonality. During lighter periods, we often begin in the morning; busier times may require an afternoon or evening visit to avoid crowds. We may include lunch instead of dinner today to optimise our schedule. Your Tour Leader will advise upon arrival.

Overnight in Rome.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 19 Departure

Departure from Rome.

VIAGGIO BUONO!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast