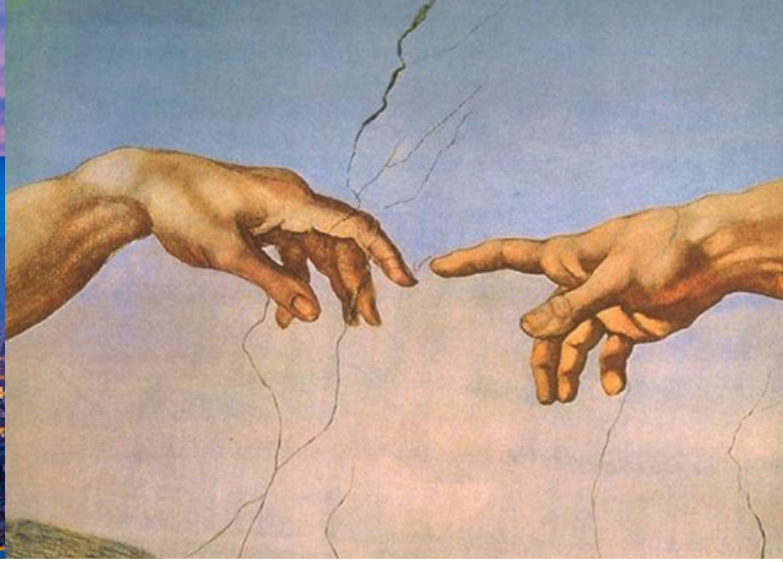




VITORITALY®
Italy with Italians

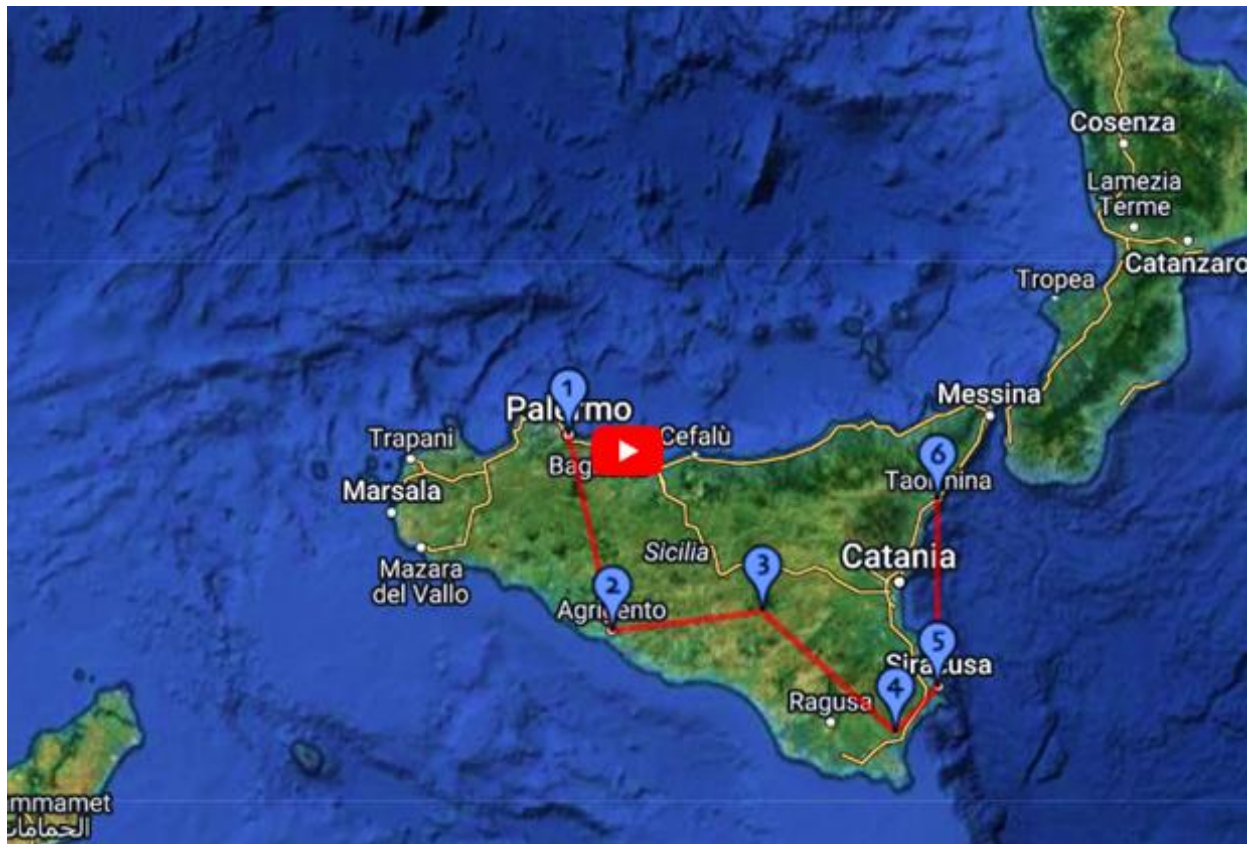
ARCHIMEDE TOUR

Palermo, Agrigento, Noto, Siracusa &
Taormina in 7 days

DAY-BY-DAY ITINERARY



Around Sicily, the cradle of Italian civilization, discovering the culture and spirit of this wonderful island.



TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

- Palermo, Greeks, Arabs and Normans mix in a unique style
- Agrigento, walking in the footsteps of ancient Greeks
- Piazza Armerina, the home of Roman patricians
- Siracusa, encapsulating Sicily's timeless beauty
- Val di Noto, the triumph of the Baroque
- Taormina, a patch of paradise

ITINERARY SUMMARY

DAY	ACTIVITIES INCLUDED IN THE PROGRAM
Day 1 Palermo	- Full-day private walking tour of Palermo city centre <u>with an Authorised Tourist Guide</u> - Admission to the Cathedral of Monreale and Cappella Palatina <i>Overnight in Palermo city centre</i>
Day 2 Western Sicily	- Full-day excursion with an <u>Authorised Tourist Guide</u> of Western Sicily: Erice, Trapani and the Salt Mines <i>Overnight in Palermo city centre</i>
Day 3 Agrigento	- Transfer to your accommodation in Agrigento area - 2-hour private tour of the Valley of the Temples Archeological Park with an <u>Authorised Tourist Guide</u> - Visit of a wine cellar in Agrigento area with tasting <i>Overnight in Agrigento area</i>
Day 4 Piazza Armerina	- Transfer to your accommodation in Siracusa – Stopover in Piazza Armerina - 1.5-hour private walking tour of Villa Romana del Casale Archeological Area with an <u>Authorised Tourist Guide</u> <i>Overnight in Siracusa city centre</i>
Day 5 Val di Noto	- Full-day excursion of Val di Noto area with an <u>Authorised Tourist Guide</u>: Noto, Ragusa Ibla, Modica – Free time <i>Overnight in Siracusa city centre</i>
Day 6 Siracusa	- 3-hour private walking tour of Siracusa city centre with an <u>Authorised Tourist Guide</u> - Transfer to your accommodation in Taormina <i>Overnight in Taormina city centre</i>
Day 7 Taormina	- Free time in Taormina - Admission to the Greek Theatre in Taormina - Free time – Optional 2-hour Sicilian Cooking Class in Taormina area <i>Overnight in Taormina city centre</i>

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- **Accommodations in Double Room with Continental Breakfast (*):**

- Days 1 & 2: 3* to 5* Hotel in Palermo city centre
- Day 3: 3* to 5* Hotel in Agrigento area
- Days 4 & 5: 3* to 5* Hotel in Siracusa city centre
- Days 6 & 7: 3* to 5* Hotel in Taormina city centre

(*) The Hotel list is available upon request

- **Transfers (**):**

- Day 3: Transfer to your accommodation in Agrigento area
- Day 4: Transfer to your accommodation in Siracusa city centre – Stopover in Piazza Armerina
- Day 6: Transfer to your accommodation in Taormina city centre

(**) All transfers by private car (2 pax)/ minivan (3 to 6 pax)/ minibus (7 to 15 pax)

- **Private Guided Visits / Tours (***) / Activities:**

- Day 1: Full-day private walking tour of Palermo city centre with an Authorised Tourist Guide
- Day 2: Full-day excursion with an Authorised Tourist Guide of Western Sicily: Erice, Trapani and the Salt Mines
- Day 3: 2-hour private walking tour of the Valley of the Temples Archeological Park with an Authorised Tourist Guide - Visit of a wine cellar in Agrigento area with tasting
- Day 4: 1.5-hour private visit of Villa Romana del Casale Archeological Area with an Authorised Tourist Guide
- Day 5: Full-day excursion of Val di Noto area with an Authorised Tourist Guide: Noto, Ragusa Ibla, Modica
- Day 6: 3-hour private walking tour of Siracusa city centre with an Authorised Tourist Guide

(***) All tours by private car (2 pax)/ minivan (3 to 6 pax)/ minibus (7 to 15 pax)

- **Admission Tickets to:**

- Cathedral of Monreale in Palermo
- Cappella Palatina in Palermo

- Greek Theatre in Taormina
- Valley of the Temples Archeological Area in Agrigento
- Villa Romana del Casale Archeological Area in Piazza Armerina
- **Full emergency assistance 24 hours/day by our Back Office**
- **List of recommended restaurants along the itinerary**
- **All taxes**

NOT INCLUDED IN THE PRICE

- All transfers and other services not specifically mentioned in the above program
- Meals, wine and beverages
- Porterage fees at every accommodation
- Camera or Video fees
- Tipping for local guides and drivers
- Laundry, telephone calls and other expenditures of personal nature
- Travel / Vacation insurance

OPTIONS

- Pick up at Airports/Railway Station at the start of the tour
- Accommodation in Palermo the night before the start of the tour
- Day 7: 2-hour Sicilian cooking class in Taormina area
- Drop off at Airport/Railway Station at the end of the tour
- Other options upon request

TOUR MAIN FEATURES

PALERMO

Benvenuti in Italia, welcome to Palermo!

First, it was a Greek and Roman city, then a capital of the Arab world, and later, it was conquered by both the Normans and the Swabians – this is Palermo. In this place, preciousities left by the Arab and Norman rules coexist along with the Baroque and Art Nouveau styles of the buildings and monuments, the city streets and markets, gardens and theatres. The influence of Palermo's enormously multi-ethnic past is visible in its Cathedral, a majestic work begun in the 12th Century and rehashed several times.

Founded on top of a preexisting basilica, the **Cathedral** was transformed into a mosque by the Moors and subsequently returned to its Christian designation by the Normans. Now supporting the 17th-century dome and featuring a Medieval bell tower, it is adorned with Gothic decorations and holds the relics of Santa Rosalia, the city's Patron Saint. The tombs of Emperors Roger II and Frederick II are also located here.

Nearby, the **Norman Palace** stands: originally an Arab structure, it has always been the seat of power. It contains the Palatine Chapel, rich in Byzantine-inspired mosaics, and the **Martorana** – the Church of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio – is a true and proper masterpiece. With its high, arcaded bell tower, the elegant Martorana dates



back to the Norman epoch; meanwhile, the monumental Pretoria fountain that inhabits the neighbouring homonymous piazza is Baroque. The road to the Martorana Cathedral crosses Piazza Vigliena, also called the Quattro Canti or "Four Songs," an intersection embellished by statues and fountains from the 17th Century. On **Piazza della Pretoria** lies the 17th-Century Palace of the Municipio, with its splendid fountain from the 1500s, composed of 644 marble groups. This district's streets carry Italian, Arabic, and

Hebrew names. Moreover, one can move toward the sea, passing by the **Vucciria**, the oldest and most animated market in the entire city; it is located in **Piazza San Domenico**, home to the same-named Church, among the most attractive Baroque structures in Palermo. Another building that dates back to the Norman era is the deconsecrated **Church of San Giovanni degli Eremiti**, built on the foundations of an old Mosque and boasting red domes in oriental style.

In the city's ancient centre stands an imposing 14th-century construction called the **Steri** (from the Latin "hosterium", meaning fortified palace); once a prison and tribunal, today it is the seat of the university rectorate. Nearby are the **Church of Santa Maria degli Angeli** and **Palazzo Abatellis**, which houses the Regional Gallery, with paintings and artworks from the Middle Ages to the 1700s.

The more modern section of the city lies closer to the sea. From the neoclassical **Teatro Massimo** – a temple for opera-goers – visitors will glimpse the city's other important theatre, the Politeama Garibaldi. Erected in the mid-1800s, this Theatre is in the Pompeian style. Not to be left out, the **Teatro dei Pupi** (a marionette theatre) is just as characteristic and puts on performances featuring Charles the Great and his paladins or courtiers. The street, Via Libertà, covered by shady trees, carries into a district where 19th-Century and Art Nouveau architecture reign, with the symbolic and splendid square-grid streets that bustle with activity. The **Botanical Garden**, founded in 1789, is famous for its exemplary species from all over the world. Further away from the centre are the "**Zisa**" (in, where else, Piazza Zisa) and the "**Cuba**" (Corso Calatafimi), both constructions in the oriental style, built during the reign of William II.

Palermo's surroundings are just as enchanting as the city itself. In particular, **Mondello Beach** is beloved for its crystal-clear sea, but not only that; it also features a particular type of food vendor not found everywhere: octopus vendors or "polipar", who sell this delicious seafood to the delight of beach-goers.

Food in Sicily is important, and Palermo is no exception; one instance is the markets at **Vucciria** and **Ballarò**, with panoplies of street food to satisfy all palates and preferences. Those less interested in gastronomy and more interested in antiques, for example, should check out Palermo's Papireto Quarter.

Just a few miles from Palermo, you should not miss **Monreale**, located in a panoramic position on the Conca D'Oro. Monreale is one of Sicily's and Italy's most renowned touristic spots for its artistic legacy, represented by the Cathedral of Santa Maria la Nuova. The undisputed highlight of Monreale Cathedral is its richly mosaiced interior. From the 12th and 13th centuries, the golden mosaics completely cover the walls of the nave, aisles, transept and apse - amounting to 68,220 square feet in total. The mosaic cycle is second only to the Hagia Sofia in size and much better preserved. Some of the mosaics were created by artisans brought from Venice.

MARSALA AND ERICE

The road running along the west coast of Sicily, with its many salt marshes, which have given rise to one of the oldest salt-extracting industries in the world, is famous as "**The Salt Road**". Between Trapani and Marsala, the marshes are now protected partly because of the interesting birdlife and as important sites of industrial archaeology.

A natural and cultural landscape where the salt draws a fine line joining the land to the sea. A calm sea, closed by islands in a kind of lagoon inhabited by the Phoenicians and the Greeks. The first striking thing is the colours: the yellow of the stones, the blue of the sea, the green of the Mediterranean bush and the white of salt.

Along the way, you may stop at "**Stagnone di Marsala**", Marsala's Pond, which includes several salt mines, Isola Lunga and an archipelago of small islets, including the nice Mozia. Many salt mines are decommissioned, while in others, they still work. The whole salt mines complex, a natural reserve, is a magical place to take photographs. The best time is just before sunset when the flats take on amazing colours.

At 750 meters on sea level, with a historic centre of just 512 inhabitants, **Erice** is one of the most beautiful villages in Sicily. Known in antiquity as a city of one hundred churches and a hundred convents, it is dominated by the Norman castle, the Castle of Venus, which looks towards Mount Cofano.



AGRIGENTO

In the Valley of the Temples (a UNESCO World Heritage Site), the fascination of ancient history blends with the beauty of nature. The sea on one side, the old city hill on the other, the majestic Doric-style temples rising in the centre of it all, and the tones of the tufo with which they are constructed create a picture-perfect setting.



The **Temple of Concordia** is the most well-preserved of the temples, having been transformed into a church. The **Temple of Juno** still boasts 25 of its original 34 columns to support its structure. Then, the **Temple of the Dioscuri** is considered the most symbolic, while the **Temple of Hercules** is the oldest. Together with the Temple of Zeus, these five giants dominate the Valley.

Leaving the Valley and heading towards the city, you will come across the remains of the **Hellenistic-Roman Quarter**, with its houses decorated in beautiful mosaics. The ancient shops, wells, cisterns and sewer system lend a

relatively clear idea of how the old city looked. Evidence abounds from the Greek era: be sure to see the fascinating objects at the **Regional Archaeological Museum**; they originate from the ancient area of Akragas.

Through the **Porta di Ponte**, you will enter the ancient quarter of Agrigento, still conveying the image of a Medieval village, with its narrow roads and steep, winding alleys all converging towards the main road. Stroll through the ancient city and wander to the Cathedral, where a grand stairway leads to the churchyard and bell tower, the construction of which has never been completed.

PIAZZA ARMERINA

In Piazza Armerina, you will visit one of the most remarkable examples of Roman art in the whole Mediterranean area: **Villa Romana del Casale**.

Originally the property of a powerful Roman family, this majestic Imperial villa is a magnificent rural abode, fascinating for its exquisite mosaics, considered the most beautiful and best-preserved of their kind. The fruits of meticulous labour, these precise yet moving images make for a significant adornment to what remains of this luxurious residence – made a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1997.

Dated back to 320-350 A.D., the villa most likely belonged to a member of Rome's senatorial class, probably a governor of the Eternal City itself (Praefectus Urbi). However, some scholars would maintain that the villa was built and eventually expanded upon the official commission of an Imperial functionary of a high order; they have identified this person as Maximian, a Tetrarch (one of four co-Emperors) of Diocletian.

Archaeologists undertook an important excavation project in the mid-18th Century, bringing to light 37,674 sq ft of mosaic flooring – figurative and geometric – along with wall mosaics, columns, statues, capitals and coins. The theme of the mosaics is the celebration of the homeowner. Moreover, much of the house exhibits a definite influence from North African art styles, leading diggers and academics to believe that some construction workers were from the African Continent. The viewer can detect varying styles and narrative cycles in the mosaics: one is dedicated to mythology and Homeric poems, while another refers to nature and scenes from the Roman aristocracy's quotidian life.



Today, visitors will find many different sections of the villa open for observation: the spa complex; the porticoed entryway courtyard and honorary arch; the Vestibule and central, peristyled courtyard; the servants' quarters that include the Piccola Caccia room, the Grande Caccia corridor (spaces that contain small and large hunting scenes, respectively) and the Palestrite room; the northern central apartments with a mosaic of Ulysses and Polyphemus and the chamber of Amore and Psiche; the main southern apartments with a mosaic of the myth of Arion and the room of Eros and Pan; the Triclinium (formal Roman dining room) and portico; and the Basilica.

NOTO

In southeastern Sicily, **Val di Noto** (the Noto Valley) – with its eight gorgeous late-Baroque cities – became one of the Italian UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 2002. The eight, Caltagirone, Militello Val di Catania, Catania, Modica, Noto, Palazzolo, Ragusa and Scicli, already existed during the Medieval Age. Still, they were rebuilt (in part or entirely) after the catastrophic earthquake of 1693. Following the stylistic model predominant during the era, the cities' architecture, urban plan and decorations constitute the culmination of one of the last periods of Baroque's flourishing in Europe.

Known in antiquity as Ibla, **Ragusa** features two somewhat different city centres, one reconstructed from the ground up in the new style after the events of 1693 and the other according to its original Medieval look. An itinerary



through the Baroque in Ragusa winds among nine principal churches (e.g. San Giovanni Battista, San Giorgio, Santa Maria dei Miracoli) and seven palazzi (including the Cancelleria, Bertini, and Cosentini).

Palazzolo and **Modica** also have two urban centres. In Palazzolo, the old city was rebuilt after the earthquake around the old Medieval centre, and the new town subsequently developed around

the old one. The Churches of San Sebastiano and Saints Peter and Paul are particularly important. Of rare beauty, Modica and its old Castle stand high on one hill in the Iblei Mountains. Among the spectacular urban monuments, the Cathedral of San Giorgio and the Church of St. Peter (the "Duomo" of the lower city) are certainly worth a visit.

The city of **Noto** has been rehashed in an entirely new area, which is also divided into two levels. The more recent section, on an incline, provides a spectacular composition of streets and buildings in the Baroque, from noble palaces such as Palazzo Ducezio to religious complexes - the Cathedral of San Nicolò, for example.

Finally, the last pearl on the string of the Noto Valley's cities is magnificent **Scicli**, where churches and patrician villas make for a visibly striking urban panorama. Specifically, Palazzo Beneventano (especially its glorious facade) is an architectonic and artistic masterpiece.

SIRACUSA

Cicero defined Syracuse as “the most beautiful city in Magna Graecia.” He was right, of course. Still today, the echoes of its ancient grandeur reverberate from the streets, churches and monuments, corroborating its religious and cultural importance: Syracuse is a destination no traveller should pass up and, with Sicily’s Mediterranean climate, can be visited in any season.

Made a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2005, the city conserves ancient vestiges in every niche and corner, from Classical testimonies to Baroque splendours, all within a landscape of enchanting beauty. The UNESCO Site actually includes two different places: the cave necropolis of Pantalica and the historical centre of Syracuse. Both evidence the development and progression of ancient civilizations.

Thanks to its enviable geographic position, Syracuse was a crucial crossroads of commercial exchange since the Greeks settled it. Today, it is a living artefact that connotes the customs and traditions of the many Mediterranean populations that passed through and dominated it, from the Byzantines, Bourbons, and Arabs to the Normans and Aragonese. Sùraka, as Syracuse is known in Sicilian dialect (meaning an abundance of water), was one of the principal settlements in Magna Grecia, a place of artistic brilliance and commercial power. It was also one of the most important centres of Christianity during the Middle Ages, and it later saw its Baroque golden age after the earthquake of 1693. However, the oldest urban nucleus resides on the little island of **Ortygia**, where we find the Temple of Apollo, the most ancient in Sicily. The remains from the Temple of Athena (5th Century B.C.) were later converted into the Cathedral, while the Temple of Zeus “rui culonne” (two columns) because what is left of the entire structure consists of just two columns.



In the 4th Century B.C., Syracuse expanded via the residential quarters of Tyche and (the monumental) Neapolis (Ortygia, Acradina and Epipoli already existed). Traces left by the Roman conquest include the beloved Amphitheatre, while just as magnificent is the Castello di Maniace, a Byzantine citadel commissioned by Frederick II of Swabia.

The **Cave Necropolis of Pantalica** is not far from Syracuse. Pantalica became a refuge on the plateau of the Iblei Mountains for the coastal inhabitants fleeing the Sicels and other Italic populations that landed here in the first half of the 8th Century B.C. (the period to which these scenographic necropolises date). The complex consists of approximately 5,000 tombs dug into the rock, and the Anaktoron (Prince’s Palace) positioned at the top of a hill, a reminder of the majestic Mycenaean palaces.

TAORMINA

Taormina, the “Pearl of the Mediterranean”, sits on a natural terrace above the sea. The **Greek Theatre** is one of the most suggestive spots, sited in a fantastic position and dipped into the blooming nature of this land. The view goes across the sea and reaches the Calabria coasts, the town of Siracusa and Etna's peak. Undoubtedly, today and at that time, the audience is fascinated by this beautiful view.

A walk in the **Villa Comunale**, offering typical Mediterranean maquis vegetation with a nice view sheer above the sea, is not to be missed.

The coast offers charming sandy beaches lapped by crystal-clear water: the ones of **Giardini Naxos** and **Mazzarò** are the most frequented. In front of Capo Sant' Andrea, the coast of **Isola Bella** is today a protected natural oasis.



After spending the day at the beach, you can shop in the workshops on the main street, where you can find everything – from pottery to jewels, from clothes to souvenirs. Or you can rest, drinking a lemon slush served with a hot brioche or a typical cassata siciliana.

The main food is, of course, fish: sardines, swordfish according to the best Sicilian tradition, but also eggplants, ricotta, olives and any good product that grows under the sun of this land.

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Ciao da Vitor



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