

Malta and Sicily, the jewels of the Mediterranean

Malta and Sicily, the jewels of the Mediterranean. An amazing 10 days private tour of the most important local highlights in the bigger islands of Mediterranean

Location	Days	Duration	Category	Season	Tour Type
Palermo	**10**	**ND**		**Year Round**	**Private**

TOUR OVERVIEW

Malta and Sicily Tour
A 10-day Malta and Sicily tour blends ancient history, Baroque architecture, and stunning Mediterranean scenery, typically covering Valletta, Mdina, and Gozo in Malta, then crossing to Sicily to explore Siracusa, Agrigento's Temples, Mt. Etna, and Taormina, often including food tastings and scenic coastal drives, focusing on UNESCO sites and unique cultural influences from Greek to Norman.

Season: all year available on request
9 nights/10 days
Malta (3 nights) Siracusa (3 nights) Palermo (3 nights)

Hotel Package: not included but available on request
Airline Tickets: not purchased by us

LAND: Malta airport MLA
FERRY Malta to Sicily: Pozzallo port
LEAVE: Palermo airport PMO

1st day – Malta airport > Town
2nd day - The Best of Malta (visit: Valletta, Fishing Village and Mdina)
3rd day - Malta > Gozo Island > Malta
4th day - Malta > AM Hydrofoil to Pozzallo port > Ragusa Ibla and Modica (visit: Baroque village) > Siracusa
5th day - Siracusa AM (visit: Archaeological Park and Ortigia). PM relax in Siracusa
6th day - Siracusa > Etna Volcano and Taormina > Siracusa
7th day - Siracusa > Agrigento (visit: Valley of the Temples) > Palermo
8th day - Palatine and Monreale
9th day - Palermo > Olive Oil, Salt and Wine Experience > Palermo
10th day - Palermo > Palermo airport

TOUR ITINERARY

Day 1

Malta airport > Town

Private vehicle and Maltese speaking chauffeur disposal: transfer in only

Welcome to the warm, beautiful and pleasant island of Malta! Upon arrival at Malta Airport please proceed through the Passport Control and collect your luggage inside the customs area. Then meet the driver showing a sign with your name and a short drive takes you to the town.

Day 2

The Best of Malta

The best of Malta is a tour that includes the visit to Valletta City Highlights (Barrakka Gardens. Merchants/Republic Streets, St. John's Co. Cathedral), Hagar Qim Temples & Visitors Centre, Blue Grotto (belvedere), Marsaxlokk Fishing Village & Mdina Medieval City.

This is by far the more popular tour due to the diverse itinerary which includes three periods of Malta's golden history, culture and some great scenery…all in one day.

Our first visit during our tour is the capital Valletta which was built by the Knights of St. John in 1566. Here we include the Barrakka Gardens which offer stunning views of the Grand Harbour and magnificent fortifications, and a walk down Triq Repubblika where you can admire numerous historical buildings: the Auberges, the Grand Master's Palace and the St. John's Co. Cathedral, the Church of the Order and also home to Caravaggio's masterpiece "Beheading of St. John" amongst other treasures.

After our tour of the capital we will then visit the south west of the island where the ancient Hagar Qim Temple site stands. Before entering the temples we start at the visitors centre and new 5D short movie which will help you understand how these magnificent temples where built over 5000 years ago! Set in a rural area this ancient temple is particularly interesting as it has the largest and heaviest megaliths out of all the temple sites around the Maltese Islands, some slabs weighing a staggering 20 tons. This temple dates back to 3300BC, an era dominated by Neolithic man.

Shortly after leaving the temples we should have time for a quick photo stop of the Blue Grotto Arch from the belvedere view point. We then continue to our next stop and an opportunity to experience a little local culture when visiting the pretty traditional fishing village of Marsaxlokk. Marsaxlokk, is a quaint fishing village and is characterized by low lying buildings and the colourful traditional fishing boats known as the 'luzzu'. A small market lines the seafront and if you would like to sample fresh Mediterranean fish there are numerous local restaurants to choose from (other cuisine is available).

Our final stop during the tour is the ancient city of Mdina, built on a plateau in the centre of the island. Mdina, once the capital of Malta, had many names including Melite (Roman occupation), Medina (Arabic occupation), Citta Notabile (Knights of St. John) and Citta Vecchia (after Valletta was built). Today it is also referred to as the Silent City since it inspires tranquillity at any time of the day or night. The city's old Baroque buildings, Cathedral and magnificent bastion walls dominate the rural skyline. Mdina was once the capital of Malta. The only way to really experience and enjoy this city is on foot: explore the quaint alleys, narrow streets, ancient buildings and magnificent far reaching views from the high bastion walls.

Day 3

Gozo Island Full Day from Malta

Visit Gozo Island and the main highlights: Ggantija Temples, Calypso's Cave, Dwejra Bay, Victoria and The Citadel. Sample local delicacies.

Start our tour to Gozo Island with a pleasant 25 minutes ferry crossing from Malta.

The charm of Gozo is apparent the moment you arrive there: greener, rustic, more rural and smaller than Malta.

Our tour is a combination of scenic spots, historical sites and local culture. We feature most of the main highlights during our tour including the oldest free standing megalithic structures in the world known as Ggantija Temples. Pass through quaint sleepy villages that characterise Gozo's unique charm and visit stunning sites such as Calypso's Cave which offers magnificent views over the red sands of Ramla Bay.

Just before lunch stop at the Fontana Cottage where you can sample local delicacies such as sun dried tomatoes, olive pate, local cheeslets, wines and liquors. You will also have some time for a spot of shopping for popular buys such as lace. Free time for lunch will be at the pretty bay of Xlendi.

After lunch we continue our tour with visits to one of the most photographed sites in Gozo Island, Dwejra Bay. Here you can take an optional boat trip (the boat trip is not included in the overall price as it operates subject to weather conditions, €7 paid on the day) from the land locked sea.

Our final stop before we head back to the ferry for Malta includes a visit to the main town on Gozo Island, Victoria and The Citadel. The Citadel is a small fortified city that dominates the heights above Victoria. The history of The Citadel dates back to an early period when Gozo was under Roman and Arab occupation. Enjoy the views from its fortified walls that offer panoramas of the whole island. Our tour comes to an end and we make our way back to the ferry terminal for our return to the main island.

Day 4

Malta > Sicily: Ragusa Ibla and Modica > Syracusa

Today on board on the hydrofoil to join the island of Sicily.

Upon arrival in Sicily meet the driver and start the drive to Ragusa Ibla, one of the most picturesque towns in Sicily. The view from the upper town over Ragusa Ibla on its own separate hilltop is quite breathtaking. One of the UNESCO-listed Baroque towns of south-eastern Sicily, Ragusa is also one of the principal filming locations for the Sicilian Detective Saga Il Commissario Montalbano (Montalbano Inspector), a series which has done wonders for publicising the beauty of this area.

This afternoon departure for Modica. Like the other towns in the Val di Noto, was badly damaged in the 1693 earthquake and largely rebuilt in Sicilian Baroque style.

Modica is custodian of a 400 year tradition of Sicilian chocolate-making.

Being part of the Spanish kingdom for so many years meant that Sicily was often one of the first recipients of the new foodstuffs being brought back from South America. Cacao was one of these and today Modica still specialises in making granulous chocolate, often flavoured with chilli pepper, cinnamon or vanilla, that is based on Aztec methods and recipes. Chocolate shops abound and, for the real chocoholic, it is sometimes possible to watch the "chocolatiers" at work. Tasting of Modica chocolate is a must.

Later we drive onto Syracusa.

Day 5

Half Day Syracusa

Today meet the local guide at hotel and catch on a taxi to move to the Archaeological Park (Admission fee: not included), highlights of which are the Greek Theatre, the Roman Amphitheatre and the Paradise Quarry. Then back to Ortigia, the heart of the city center. This delightful pedestrian small island, connected with Syracusa by the Umbertino Bridge, is home to the wonderful Cathedral built on the site of an ancient Temple of Athena as can clearly be seen from the original Doric columns that were incorporated into the building's main structure. Also on this square is the beautifully symmetrical Baroque Palazzo Beneventano and the church of Santa Lucia, the town's patron saint. Later to the colourful daily Street Market, which sells a fantastic array of fruit, vegetables, fish and meat.

This afternoon is at leisure

Day 6

Etna Volcano and Taormina

Begin the day with a visit to the lava-crusted slopes of Mt. Etna, which dominates the scenery and is the most active volcano in Europe! Ascend via cable car and jeep to reach the altitude of 9,000 feet; step carefully on the varied layers of lava which have solidified over the centuries.

Learn about Etna's impact on the surrounding area and its unique geology.

Stop to sample some typical street food for lunch before heading toward Taormina, where you will take a walk on the main Corso Umberto, followed by free time to enjoy the city. Visit the massive Greek Roman Theater, from where you can admire the remarkable panoramas of the city and countryside

Day 7

Syracusa > Piazza Armerina and Agrigento > Palermo

Today we travel to Piazza Armerina to view the intricate examples of Roman mosaics at the famous Roman Villa del Casale, designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site. These extraordinarily vivid mosaics deal with numerous subjects, ranging from Homeric escapades and mythological scenes to portrayals of daily life. The villa itself was rediscovered in the 19th century after being almost completely covered by a landslide.

This afternoon we discover Agrigento's celebrated Valley of the Temples, the largest and best preserved temple ruins outside of mainland Greece. Tour this magnificent archaeological park, built between 430 and 510 B.C. and majestically positioned on rocky crests south of modern day Agrigento.

Continue onto Palermo, the capital of Sicily

Day 8

Palatine Chapel, Palermo City Tour and Monreale

Start your tour of Palermo with a walking tour beginning at the Palermo Opera House and continue to the the Four Corners which is the junction in Palermo. Effectively, it is the centre point of the four areas of the old town centre. You will almost inevitably pass through it and it is worth stopping for five minutes to have

a look at its sculptures which were commissioned by the Spanish Viceroy in 1611. The sculptures on each of the four corners depict a variety of themes, including the four seasons, four Spanish kings and the four patron saints of the old town areas. Going south-east down Via Maqueda you will come across Piazza Pretoria which is home not only to a splendid fountain but several other impressive buildings including, on the right, the City Hall. The fountain, known for generations as the “Fountain of Shame”, has an interesting history. The large central fountain is the focal point for sixteen nude statues of nymphs, humans, mermaids and satyrs. If you imagine this being erected during the Inquisition, it is quite easy to imagine why it received its epithet, the “Fountain of Shame”.

Later to the Palatine Chapel, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, located inside the complex of Royal Palace. Its glittering gold mosaics, complemented by inlaid marble floors and wooden ceilings, reflect Arab-Norman Sicily's cultural complexity. Built by Roger II from 1130 to 1140, the chapel is adorned with extraordinary Norman-Byzantine mosaics.

This afternoon a short drive takes us to Monreale to see where Arab-Norman art and architecture reached its pinnacle in the Duomo, launched in 1174 by William II. It represents scenes from the Old and New Testaments all in golden mosaics designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Day 9

Olive Oil, Salt and Wine Experience

Today you will experience colors and flavors of the Western coast of Sicily, a region renowned for producing Marsala wines, salt and extra-virgin olive oil.

We travel along the Salt Way Road and through the Nature Reserve of the Stagnone (that literally means large pool). Since this large lagoon has shallow and very salty water, it is the ideal place for saltworks. While travelling you will be fascinated by this unusual landscape: panels of mirror-like water, held by thin strips of earth and white windmills. Beyond the saltworks stand out some islands – including Mothia, once joined to the mainland by a paved road – while Isola Longa (Long Island) encloses the lagoon.

The sea salt, in the tradition of this part of Sicily, is obtained by the evaporation of the sea water, through a simple but functional method of “handmade fractional distillation”, that allows to highlight the positive qualities and at the same time eliminate unwanted compounds such as calcium sulphate or gypsum. In Summer now as then in some areas between Trapani and Marsala it is possible to admire piles of salt just harvested.

The region of Marsala was always known for its fine grapes, but it was the Englishman John Woodhouse who introduced the fortified wine business here in 1796, having already developed a similar product (Port wine) in Portugal. This experience encouraged other firms to follow Woodhouse’s example. Ingham, Good and Whitaker had soon founded wine businesses of their own. The Florio family set up a firm in 1831 and after Florio other firms started to produce Marsala wine.

Marsala can be dry or sweet. While the city’s natives sometimes drink “vintage” Marsala, the wine produced for export is universally fortified similar to Port, Madeira and Sherry. Originally, this addition of alcohol was to ensure that it would last on long ocean voyages, but now it is made that way because of its popularity in foreign markets.

We visit a local winery and enjoy a wine and olive oil tasting and light lunch.

Later return to Palermo.

Day 10

Palermo > Palermo airport

Today transfer to Palermo airport.

Arrivederci!

TOUR MAP



WHAT IS INCLUDED?

- All sightseeing, tasting and excursions as specified in the itinerary
- Booking Fee
- English speaking Driver
- VAT

NOT INCLUDED

- Admission fees
- Beverage and meal not specified
- Gratuities and tips
- Hotel accommodation
- Intercontinental/Local Flights
- Optional Excursions
- Travel Insurance