

ESSENTIAL SICILY: 3,000 YEARS OF CIVILIZATION

with Dr Kathryn Welch

Survey Sicily's breathtaking heritage and culture with extended stays in two principal cities, exploring Greek temples, glittering medieval mosaics, exuberant baroque architecture and magnificent landscapes

HIGHLIGHTS

- Enjoy extended stays in Siracusa and Palermo, exploring the island's history and culture in detail
- Investigate Sicily's remarkable classical heritage, visiting Greek, Carthaginian and Roman sites, and learning about the ancient civilizations that populated the island
- Travel to the elegant towns of the south-east, including Noto and Ragusa, famed for their baroque architecture
- Visit remote sites in the island's centre, such as the World Heritage-listed Roman villa at Piazza Armerina
- Discover monuments of Norman Sicily in and around Palermo, including the Palatine Chapel and Monreale
- Sample Sicily's food and wine culture, from the mountains to the sea

IN A NUTSHELL

DATES: 27 Oct – 10 Nov 2024

ITINERARY:

Siracusa – 5 nights

Catania – 2 nights

Caltagirone – 2 nights

Palermo – 5 nights

PRICE: \$10,950pp twinshare

SINGLE SUPPLEMENT: \$1,950
for sole use of a double room

FITNESS: Above moderate

GROUP SIZE: max. 20 places



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OVERVIEW

No place in the Mediterranean rivals Sicily as a 'crossroads of civilization'. This 15-day tour has been carefully planned to showcase the very best of Sicily's 3,000-year heritage, while providing long stays in two remarkable cities.

We begin with five nights in Siracusa (Syracuse), the largest city in the ancient Greek world after Athens. Siracusa is an excellent base for exploring Sicily's south-east. Two nights in Catania help us get to know a different side of Sicily and to visit nearby Taormina, while staying in an *agriturismo* near Caltagirone in the centre of the island permits exploration of some remote sites. The last five nights of the tour are in vibrant Palermo, with its historical sites, cobbled streets and great restaurants.

The tour takes place during 'St Martin's summer' – the end of October and the first weeks of November. This is an ideal time to travel as the peak tourist season is over and sites are uncrowded, yet the weather remains mild.

TOUR LEADER

Dr Kathryn Welch has a PhD in Roman history from the University of Queensland, in addition to degrees in Education and Latin Language. For 30 years she taught Roman and Greek history at the University of Sydney, and she is well known as an engaging public speaker to students of all ages.

Since her retirement in 2021, Kathryn has continued to pursue her academic research into the political and social history of Rome in the first century BCE. This has taken her from investigations into the role of formidable Roman women, to the interplay of history, invention and reinvention that continue to make the Roman world such a fascinating place to explore.

Kathryn has a strong interest in art, architecture and music, and in Italian history, culture and language. Together with Dr Estelle Lazer, she is co-director of the Pompeii Cast Project. Kathryn has led tours to Italy since 1999.



From top: World Heritage-listed mosaics from the fourth century CE at Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina; the Arab-Norman style of Monreale's cathedral cloister, outside Palermo.

Below, tour leader Dr Kathryn Welch.



ALMOST GREEK: THE TEMPLE AT SEGESTA

BY ROBERT VEEL

One of the most memorable sites in Sicily is the sublimely sited temple at Segesta in western Sicily, midway between Palermo and the port city Marsala. Built in the late fifth century BCE, it has inspired generations of travellers. That towering figure of German letters, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, waxed lyrical in his 1788 *Italian Journey*.

“The position of the temple is amazing: at the top of a wide and long valley, at the top of an isolated hill and yet surrounded by cliffs, it dominates a vast prospect of lands.”

Most travellers, knowing a little of Sicily’s history and of classical architecture, would pigeonhole Segesta as a Greek temple. After all, it has all the hallmarks of a Greek temple – siting, architectural refinement, and plenty of evidence for its religious function. Yet it is not a Greek temple, and that is precisely what makes it interesting.

Segesta was a principal city of the Elymians, a people who occupied strategic locations in western Sicily before either the Greeks or their rivals the Carthaginians arrived and began their centuries-long struggle for domination of Sicily. Like other groups moving about the Mediterranean at the time, they were traders, receptive to other cultures and ready to adopt and adapt whatever they saw and liked. It seems they were favourably impressed by aspects of Greek culture and their civilization became ‘Hellenised’.

But just because Segesta looks like a Greek site, it doesn’t mean that the Elymians always got along with the Greeks. In fact in Sicily’s ancient history the Elymians are a byword for treachery, having changed sides repeatedly as the Greeks and Carthaginians waged war. This culminated in 307 BCE when the Greek tyrant of Syracuse, Agathocles, reportedly disposed of 8,000 Elymian boys and men by hurling them off the ravine just behind the temple, a punishment for having sided with the Carthaginians a year earlier.

Segesta’s “Greek” temple (photo: Ludvig14, Wikimedia Commons)



DETAILED ITINERARY

SUNDAY 27 OCTOBER – ARRIVAL (D)

A transfer from Catania airport is included for all group members: contact us for more information. You can also make your own way to our centrally-located hotel in Siracusa (Syracuse) by 6.00pm. This evening we gather for drinks in the hotel, followed by a light dinner in a nearby restaurant. Overnight Siracusa.

MONDAY 28 OCTOBER – ORTYGIA, ISLAND OF THE QUAIL (B, L)

This morning we explore the island of Ortygia, the site of the original Greek colony at Siracusa. At first one is aware of the medieval street plan and the exuberant Sicilian baroque architectural detail. But as we scratch the surface the ancient city soon emerges: the papyrus-fringed **Spring of Arethusa**, which provided fresh water to the Corinthians who came here in 733 BCE, the ruins of the **Temple of Apollo** and, most spectacularly, the **cathedral** built from the fifth-century BCE temple of Athena. After a welcome lunch, there is time at leisure to enjoy Ortygia further. In the early evening we meet to visit a medieval **Jewish ritual bath**, today in a basement, followed by a talk by your tour leader providing an overview of Sicilian history. Overnight Siracusa.

TUESDAY 29 OCTOBER – NOTO AND NERO D'ÀVOLA (B)

South-east Sicily was struck by a devastating earthquake in 1693. In the decades that followed, Sicily's Spanish and Bourbon rulers directed significant resources to the reconstruction and enhancement of the cities and towns affected. Today this has given us a string of beautiful cities and towns to enjoy, whose baroque architecture is quirkier and has more local characteristics than the better-known Roman Baroque. Today's excursion takes us first to **Noto**, where the Sicilian Baroque is on full display in the city's layout, its public buildings, churches and private palaces. The region is also known for the red wine produced around the town of Avola, so intense it is named 'nero'. We visit a highly regarded local **wine producer**, where we'll learn more about local viniculture while sampling the production. Overnight Siracusa.

WEDNESDAY 30 OCTOBER – RAGUSA & SCICLI (B)

Today we take a day trip into Sicily's south-east. Our circuit takes in UNESCO World Heritage-listed **Ragusa** and **Scicli**, remote and characterful baroque towns that were built after the devastating seventeenth-century earthquake, and later functioned as open-air sets for the popular *Montalbano* television series. After visiting Scicli, we have a break for lunch in Ragusa after which we have time to explore this beautiful mountainside town with its panoramic views. Returning to Siracusa, the evening is at leisure. Overnight Siracusa.



THURSDAY 31 OCTOBER – ANCIENT SIRACUSA (B)

Most of the day is spent exploring Siracusa's rich archaeological heritage. After a morning talk on Greek colonisation in Sicily, we tour the **archaeological park** on the mainland, with its famous theatre, sacrificial altars and quarries. A specialist guide then shows us the highlights of Siracusa's **archaeological museum**. The museum, universally regarded as Sicily's best, displays finds from the paleolithic period to the Middle Ages, but with a particular focus on the Greek and Roman periods. In the mid-afternoon, we visit **Caravaggio's *Burial of St Lucy***, an exceptional late masterpiece which is now shown in the church for which it was painted. Returning to Ortygia, the evening is at leisure. Overnight Siracusa.

FRIDAY 1 NOVEMBER – TAORMINA (B)

Taormina, with its theatre and other remains of its ancient past, is spectacularly situated at the end of a high ridge overlooking the Ionian Sea. Today we leave Siracusa and travel by coach to **Taormina**, where we take a walking tour of the city and explore its Greek, Roman, Arab and Norman past. After a break for lunch and time to enjoy Taormina independently, we make our way to Catania. In the evening there is a lecture in the hotel, followed by time at leisure. Overnight Catania

SATURDAY 2 NOVEMBER – CATANIA (B)

Catania, at the foot of Mount Etna, is Sicily's bustling second city, and while its history extends back to the Greek period, much of the city was rebuilt in the Sicilian Baroque style following a major earthquake in 1693. Today we take a walking tour of central Catania, taking in many of the city's most important buildings and monuments along **Via Etnea**, including Roman ruins, the baroque cathedral and the lively outdoor market. After a break for lunch, we visit the **Palazzo Biscari**, Catania's most important private palace, where we enjoy the seventeenth-century interiors and hear about this noble family's complex past. In the early evening, there is a talk in the hotel followed by an evening at leisure. Overnight Catania.

SUNDAY 3 NOVEMBER – MORGANTINA & AIDONE (B, D)

Today we leave the coast for Sicily's rugged interior. Our first stop is **Morgantina**, an ancient hilltop city with a fascinating history, from its pre-Greek foundations to its roles in the Punic and Slave Wars. The city was abandoned in the ancient period, and remained relatively untouched until excavations began in the nineteenth century. After a guided tour of the archaeological site, we continue to **Aidone** where we have a break for lunch, followed by a visit to the archaeological museum. In the mid-afternoon, we continue to Vecchia Masseria, a beautiful and remote *agriturismo* in the Sicilian countryside. In the evening, there is a lecture followed by dinner together. Overnight Vecchia Masseria, near Caltagirone.



MONDAY 4 NOVEMBER – THE ROMAN VILLA AT CASALE, CALTAGIRONE (B, D)

The vast **Roman farm villa at Piazza Armerina** is justly famous for its spectacular mosaics, depicting mythological subjects, hunting, exotic African animals and people. We spend the morning at the villa to gain an in-depth understanding. This afternoon we visit the nearby town of **Caltagirone**, famous since the Middle Ages for its ceramics, which reflect Arab and Spanish heritage. Dinner is back in our farm-hotel, preceded by a talk. Overnight Vecchia Masseria, near Caltagirone.

TUESDAY 5 NOVEMBER – AGRIGENTO AND ON TO PALERMO (B, L)

The **archaeological park at Agrigento** is Sicily's most spectacular, with a line of Greek temples stretched out along a ridge, overlooking the valleys and the coast. We walk along the ridge, learning about the history of this famous site from a local specialist. After a break for lunch we visit the excellent **archaeological museum**, whose treasures include the giant anthropomorphic 'Telamones' which supported the enormous Temple of Zeus, now in ruins. We then head to Palermo, our base for the next five nights. Your tour leader is at hand to help with suggestions and reservations for dinner at leisure. Overnight Palermo.

WEDNESDAY 6 NOVEMBER – NORMAN PALERMO (B)

At the same time that they were invading England, groups of French-speaking Normans arrived in southern Italy. Within decades they had carved out a kingdom for themselves, choosing the old Arab capital Palermo as their seat. We start the day with a highlight of our tour, Palermo's **Norman Palace**, with its glittering, mosaic-filled **Palatine Chapel**. Its decorations are unparalleled in medieval art, and it is now protected by a UNESCO World Heritage listing. After a break for lunch at the nearby markets, we continue exploring this historic neighbourhood, including the magnificent mosaics of **La Martorana**, a small UNESCO-listed church commissioned by the Muslim-born, Greek-speaking admiral of the Norman Navy. We conclude the day with a visit to a private museum dedicated to Sicily's distinctive majolica. Overnight Palermo.

THURSDAY 7 NOVEMBER – LA KALSA (B)

Palermo is a world unto itself, strikingly different from the rest of Sicily, with the Arab and Norman coming to the fore. This morning we explore the neighbourhood of **La Kalsa**, which gets its name from the Arabic 'al-Khalisa', or private ground of the Emir of Arabic Palermo. Once in a dilapidated condition, it has undergone considerable urban renewal and is now a delightful precinct of historic buildings, museums, cafés and restaurants. Our walking tour takes in medieval and baroque architecture, striking contemporary murals, and Sicily's excellent regional art gallery in the **Palazzo Abatellis**, whose highlights include the large medieval fresco



depicting the *Triumph of Death* and Antonello da Messina's *Virgin Annunziata*. After a break for lunch, we visit **Palermo's archaeology museum**, one of the finest in Sicily, and the nearby **Santa Cita oratory**, with its world-renowned and unique stucco decorations by the eminent Serpotta workshop. Evening at leisure. Overnight Palermo.

FRIDAY 8 NOVEMBER – CARTHAGINIANS AND ELYMIANS (B, L)

The territories to the west of Palermo have longstanding connections with north Africa, just a short distance away. We begin by travelling to **Mozia**, a fascinating island and one of Carthage's most important colonies and the scene of fierce competition with Greek and Roman combatants, as we discover. After a guided tour of the site, which includes time to admire a superlative work of sculpture, and a simple lunch, we return to Palermo. We call in on our way back at the fifth-century BCE **temple at Segesta**. Built by the local Elymian population in the Doric style, it is Sicily's most beautifully situated ancient structure. Overnight Palermo.

SATURDAY 9 NOVEMBER – MONREALE (B, D)

This morning we travel by coach to Monreale, with its stunning views across Palermo and its the exceptional **cathedral** built by the Norman kings. It contains over 7,000 square metres of mosaics and, together with its **beautiful cloister**, is unforgettable, as we discover on our guided tour. After time at leisure in Monreale to stroll and enjoy lunch, we return to Palermo. The later afternoon is at leisure before we share a farewell meal in one of Palermo's leading restaurants. Overnight Palermo.

SUNDAY 10 NOVEMBER – DEPARTURE (B)

Our tour arrangements conclude after breakfast in our hotel. Our travel partner, Mary Rossi Travel, will be pleased to assist with any onward travel arrangements, including flights, private transfers, and additional accommodation. Contact us for more information.



INCLUSIONS

- 14 nights' accommodation at 4* hotels
- All breakfasts and 7 lunches or dinners
- All ground transport, guided tours and entrance fees to sites as mentioned in the itinerary, and tipping
- Commentary and lectures by, as well as expertise of, an Australian tour leader throughout
- Services of an Italian-speaking tour manager

HOTELS

Hotel Roma 4* Siracusa (Syracuse), 4 nights

<https://www.hotelromasiracusa.it/en/>

Hotel UNA Palace 4* Catania, 2 nights

<https://www.gruppouna.it/esperienze/palace-catania>

Vecchia Masseria 4* Caltagirone, 2 nights

<https://www.vecchiamasseria.com/en/>

Hotel Porta Felice 4* Palermo, 5 nights

<https://hotelportafelice.it/en/>

NB: hotels of a similar standard may be substituted.

TOUR DETAILS

DATES

27 October – 10 November
2024

TOUR LEADER

Dr Kathryn Welch

ITINERARY

Siracusa – 5 nights

Catania – 2 nights

Vecchia Masseria (Caltagirone)
– 2 nights

Palermo – 5 nights

PRICE

\$10,950pp twinshare

SINGLE SUPPLEMENT

\$1,950 for sole use of a double
room

FITNESS

Above moderate: longer coach
trips, archaeological sites

GROUP SIZE

Maximum 20 places

DEPOSIT

\$1,500pp at the time of booking

FINAL PAYMENT DUE

13 August 2024

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

By booking on this tour, you
accept our terms and
conditions, which can be found
on our website:

<https://www.limelight-arts-travel.com.au/terms-and-conditions-tours>

