Simply Sicily: The Sun and Sea of Southern Italy

Taormina, Castelmola, Siracusa, the Aeolian Islands (Lipari, Vulcano, Panarea and Stromboli), Cefalu’, Palermo, Monreale, Valguarnera, Agrigento and Piazza Armerina

A THIRTEEN DAY ITALIAN JOURNEY

May 17th – May 29th, 2021

KEYROW TOURS

60 Georgia Road Trumansburg, New York 14886 Tel: 315.491.3711
Day#1: Departure for Sicily

Monday: May 17th, 2021

In conjunction with AAA Travel (Ithaca, NY), Keyrow Tours is pleased to make all flight arrangements, including primary flights originating anywhere in the United States and international flights.

We will depart from a major international airport located on the east coast of the United States [usually JFK (NY) or Philadelphia (PA)] and fly into Catania, Sicily with one international layover.

Transportation to and from your primary airport of departure is each person’s responsibility.

“What is the fatal charm of Italy? What do we find there that can be found nowhere else? I believe it is a certain permission to be human, which other places, other countries, lost long ago.”
~ Erica Jong
Day #2: “Welcome to Taormina”

Tuesday: May 18th, 2021

Arrival at Catania’s Fontanrossa International Airport
After collecting our luggage, private minivans will carry us to our first fabulous Sicilian destination: Taormina! The 40-minute drive is a scenic orientation to the North East coast of Sicily.

Taormina
Taormina is a charming town on the east coast of Sicily in the Province of Messina, about midway between Messina and Catania. This breathtaking destination overlooks the turquoise blue waters of the Ionian Sea. The area around Taormina was inhabited by a group of people called the “Siculi” even before the Greeks arrived on the Sicilian coast in 734 BC. Many centuries later after the fall of the Western Roman Empire, Taormina was under Muslim rule from 902 AD-1078 AD. It was subsequently captured by the Normans, and then later by the French. Mama mia, what a complex history! During the early 20th century the town became a colony of expatriate artists, writers, and intellectuals including D. H. Lawrence who stayed here from 1920 to 1922, and Truman Capote from 1950-1951.

A.) The Corso Umberto I

B.) The Church of San Domenico

C.) The Ancient Theatre of Taormina
The “Teatro antico di Taormina” is an ancient Greek theatre that was built in the seventh century BC. One of the most celebrated ruins in Sicily, it has a diameter of 120 metres and therefore stands as the second largest of its kind in Sicily after that of Syracuse. Today the theatre is still frequently used for operatic and theatrical performances, and for concerts.

Back to hotel
Day’s recap
Cena! (dinner… Sicilian style!)

“For us to go to Italy
and to penetrate into Italy
is like a most fascinating act of self-discovery—
back, back down the old ways of time.
Strange and wonderful chords awake in us,
and vibrate again after many hundreds of years
of complete forgetfulness.”

~ D.H. Lawrence

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60 Georgia Road  Trumansburg, New York  14886  Tel: 315.491.3711
Day #3: “Pulling your strings Siracusa!”

Wednesday: May 19th, 2021

European breakfast on the hotel’s terrace with view of Mount Etna!

Morning Departure for Siracusa

A.)  The Duomo Cathedral
The cathedral (Italian: Duomo) was built by bishop Zosimo in the 7th century over the great Temple of Athena (5th century BC), on Ortygia island.

B.)  The Church of Saint Lucy
Santa Lucia alla Badia, has a Baroque edifice and was built after the earthquake of 1693. It houses the famous painting of “The Burial of St. Lucy” by Caravaggio.

C.)  Outdoor market and Temple of Apollo with lunch
The market in Ortigia is a small, relaxed farm and fish market with a sense of humor as vendors compete for customers by calling out their wares. Via Benedictus comes to life every morning except Sunday. Different types of fish, all freshly caught that morning, are featured. Lemons and tomatoes are arranged amongst the mussels… tuna is expertly cut into steaks… and sea urchins make a colorful display. There are local fruits and vegetables, fabulous cheeses, meats, bread and wine. Next to the market is the Temple of Apollo, a Greek Temple dating back to the 6th century BC.

Pranzo! (Lunch included)

D.)  Traditional puppet show: late afternoon
Have you ever noticed how the logo for Francis Ford Coppola's 1972 movie “The Godfather” has a hand holding puppet strings? Some say that it symbolizes the Godfather's power, like that of a puppeteer controlling his minion of puppets. Puppet plays in Sicily date back to the 15th century as a popular form of entertainment for all classes of people. The subject matter of the “Opera dei Pupi” is derived from Sicilian history, literature, folklore and comedy. Opera dei Pupi features: swordfights, jousts and battles with monsters or sorceresses. When a hero slashes with his sword, limbs may fall from the villain. In some performances the wounds actually bleed (blood is traditionally made from beet juice). Sicily's history has been turbulent and over the centuries the ferocity has imprinted itself in this most traditional form of entertainment. Popcorn not included…

Evening return to Taormina
Day’s recap
Cena! (dinner on your own)

“Traveling is almost like talking with men of other centuries.”
~ Rene Descartes

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Day#4: “Timelessness in Taormina”

Thursday: May 20th, 2021

European Breakfast

Morning departure for Castelmola
Castelmola is a beautiful village perched high above Taormina. This lovely hamlet is considered one of the most beautiful villages in all of Sicily. Warm, friendly people and spectacular panoramas characterize the village. Castelmola is a kind of “balcony” over Taormina and the bay of Giardini Naxos, framed by the mysterious and beautiful active volcano, Mount Etna. Its narrow winding streets and old world charm make Castelmola a destination for anyone wishing to experience the enchanting beauty of Sicily. Don’t forget to enjoy a glass of Vino di Mandorla (sweet almond wine) at Bar Turrisi and be delighted by this bar’s unique décor and friendly staff.

Free Day from 11:00

Option #1: Life is a Beach!

Take Taormina’s cable car down its beautiful panoramic seaside cliff to Mazzarò and Isola Bella.

The small beach of Mazzarò is set in a bay to the north of Isola Bella, and is one of the most popular in the area. Its pebble shore is dotted by sun umbrellas and beach beds available for rent. There are also free beach areas. Within walking distance is the Isola Bella... perhaps Taormina’s most beautiful beach. It is also a pebble beach, set at the foot of the town, and linked to the mainland by a narrow strip of beach that is covered by water at high tide.

Pranzo! (Lunch on your own!)

Day’s recap and COOKING CLASS with Cena! (Dinner!)

“Sicily is an island lying outside time, where past events endure in an external present, a beach on which the tides of successive civilizations have heaped in disorder their assorted treasure.” ~ Vincent Cronin, The Golden Honeycomb

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60 Georgia Road    Trumansburg, New York    14886    Tel: 315.491.3711
Day #5: “Welcome to Lipari”

Friday: May 21st, 2021

European Breakfast

Morning departure for Melazzo Ferry Boat

Midday arrival to Lipari

Lipari is the largest of the Aeolian Islands. We will enjoy a relaxing introduction to island life with plenty of time for personal exploring.

The liveliest street is the Corso Vittorio Emanuele, a cheerful thoroughfare lined with bars, cafes, restaurants and delis. In the evening the street becomes pedestrian, as the locals take their passeggiata or evening stroll.

After hotel check-in we will enjoy lunch (on your own at hotel) and a 2-3 hour guided tour of the island.

Back to the hotel
Day’s recap
Cena (Group dinner)
Day #6: “The Aeolian Archipelago of Islands”

Saturday: May 22nd, 2021

European Breakfast

9:00 AM – 8:00 PM: Private boat experience to the islands of Vulcano, Panarea and Stromboli

VULCANO: Our private chartered boat will first take in the views of the island of Vulcano. Its visibly smoking crater (and sulfuric aromas) made the ancient Romans believe it to be the chimney of the fire god Vulcan’s workshop!

PANAREA: Our boat then makes the journey to Panarea, the smallest of the inhabited Aeolian Islands. Despite its size, this is the archipelago’s “VIP island”, where many of Europe’s elite own hideaways and simple pleasures reign supreme. Let’s do lunch on the island!

STROMBOLI: The island of Stromboli is a volcanic “Old Faithful”, which has been erupting continuously every 15 to 20 minutes for the past 1000 years. Each small explosion shoots bursts of magma into the sky and sends lava into the sea.

Enjoy scenic island vistas surrounded by the turquoise waters of the Tyrrhenian Sea.

Day’s recap and cena dinner on the boat

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~ Vincent Cronin, The Golden Honeycomb

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60 Georgia Road  Trumansburg, New York  14886  Tel: 315.491.3711
Day #7: “Treasures of Cefalù”

Sunday: May 23rd, 2021

Italian Breakfast

Ferryboat ride back to Milazzo on Sicily’s main land

Private minivan departure for Cefalù

Cefalù
Dating back to the 5th century BC, the town of Cefalu’ contains elements of Arab, Norman, Roman and Greek civilizations. Cefalù is located on the northern coast of Sicily, on the Tyrrenian Sea. The name “Cefalù” first appears in historical accounts from 396 BC. In 858 it was conquered by the Arabs, and for centuries it was part of the Emirate of Sicily. In 1063 the Normans captured the town and built a beautiful cathedral.

A.) The Cathedral
Construction of the Cathedral was begun in 1131, in the style of Norman Architecture. The exterior is well preserved, and is largely decorated with interlacing pointed arches. On each side of the façade is a massive tower. The interior of the cathedral includes fine specimens of the Byzantine art (1148). Most noteworthy is the figure of the Pantocrator (“Christ the Teacher”): like a Norman Viking, Christ appears with blond hair and blue eyes… Hmm!

B.) The “Lavatoio” Wash House
The Saracen wash-house, called the Lavatoio, is a sight worth seeing. Located in the center of town, this is a precursor to the modern public laundromat. Far below the city, a little river called the Cefalino runs beneath the town’s houses and buildings and empties into the sea. An ancient Greek myth says that the water is actually the tears of a river nymph who is still crying for the death of her beloved husband. An elegant lava staircase leads to basins carved in the rocks where the water flows through 22 vents, 15 of which have the form of lion heads. The Lavatoio was used by women until recent times, who knelt to wash their clothes by hand on the stone scrubbers. Need to do your laundry? This is an economical way to go!

C.) Free time in Cefalu’
Cefalu’s is a scenic fishing village that is perfect for easy walking, shopping, and people watching…

Day’s recap

Cena! (Group dinner)

“Thou paradise of exiles, Italy!” ~ Percy Shelley

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Day #8: “Inspired by Cefalù”

Monday: May 24th, 2021

Continental breakfast

A.) Optional morning hike to “La Rocca”

La Rocca is a real mix of natural and ancient history. “The Rock” was known by the ancient Phoenicians as the Fortress of Hercules. It is a massive 900 foot high crag of stone, and the ancient Greek inhabitants thought it resembled a gigantic head: In the local dialect, “Cefalù” means "head" … hence the town's name.

The remains of the Cefalù Castle, dating back to the 13th-14th centuries, sit atop La Rocca. Near the ruins are the remnants of the Temple of Diana, a megalithic building which dates back to the 9th century BC. It is believed to have originally had a sacred function connected with local water worship; there is a cistern well which also dates back to the 9th Century BC.

B.) Personal time for shopping, beach time and exploring

Day’s recap
Cena! (Group dinner)

“Travel does what good novelists also do to the life of the everyday, placing it like a picture in a frame or a gem in its setting, so that the intrinsic qualities are made more clear. Travel does this with the very stuff that everyday life is made of, giving to it the sharp contour and meaning of art.”

~ Freya Stark

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Day#9: “Promises in Palermo”

Tuesday: May 25th, 2021

Continental breakfast

Morning departure for Palermo

A.) The Ballaro’ Street Market
Wake up your senses with the smells of Africa, and beyond! Palermo’s street market is an absolute treat as sellers yell their wares to each passerby, hoping for a new customer. With beautiful displays of fresh seafood, meats, cheese, vegetables and traditional foods such as flour and chickpea fritters… the market is an authentic experience of Sicily, and a memory maker!

B.) Palermo’s Cathedral
Dedicated to the Assumption of Mary, this church was built in the year 1185. It was turned into a Muslim mosque for a time period, and then back to a Catholic church. As the final resting places of the Emperor Henry VI, his son Fredrick II and wife Constance of Aragon… this is a real architectural treat!

C.) Time to personally explore

Pranzo! (Group lunch)

D.) Departure for Monreale
Monreale is a historic hill town, just outside of Palermo. This picturesque place is most famous for its fine gold mosaics in the town’s great Norman cathedral. The cathedral and cloisters at Monreale are frequently cited as the island’s greatest Norman buildings, and date to the twelfth century. Monreale is a great place to get views of the Conca d’Oro, the fertile valley in which Palermo grew. On a clear day you can see the Aeolian Islands...

E.) Tour of Monreale’s Arab-flavored cathedral

Back to Cefalu’

Day’s recap

Cena! (Dinner on you own)

“Her gaze dims as her nostalgia for Palermo overcomes her. Those smells of seaweed dried by the sun, of capers, of ripe figs, she will never find them anywhere else; those burnt and scented shores, those waves slowly breaking, jasmine petals flaking in the sun.”
— Dacia Maraini, The Silent Duchess

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60 Georgia Road  Trumansburg, New York  14886  Tel: 315.491.3711
Day #10: “Masseria Mandrascate

Wednesday: May 26th, 2021

European Breakfast

Free morning in Cefalu’

Pranzo! (Lunch on your own)

Departure for Valguarnera and Masseria Mandrascate

Welcome to your new home for our last 4 nights! Mandrascate is a fortified farm from the 17th century, and we have rented the entire place just for our group! This is a typical example of old Sicilian architecture. A member of the Association of Italian Historical Mansions, this farm is located in the heart of Sicily, an area which cultivates wheat, olive trees and vineyards. The guest rooms are decorated in a traditional Sicilian style, complete with antique family furniture. Take a refreshing swim in the pool surrounded by aromatic plants and fig trees. Stroll through the Italian garden, complete with fish pond. We might run into a few geese and chickens which run loose in the courtyard…

Day’s recap

COOKING CLASS with Dinner

“Traveling forces you to lose sight of all the familiar comforts of home. Nothing is yours except the essential things – air, sleep, dreams, the sea, the sky – all things tending towards the eternal or what we imagine of it.”

~ Cesare Pavese

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Day #11: Time Travel in Agrigento

Thursday: May 27th, 2021

European breakfast

Late morning departure for Agrigento and the Valley of the Temples

Agrigento is a city on the southern coast of Sicily, a pleasant 2 hours drive. Once the site of the ancient Greek city of Akragas, this was one of the leading cities of Magna Graecia during the golden age of Ancient Greece. Agrigento was founded on a plateau overlooking the sea. It was established around 580 BC and became one of the richest and most famous of all the Greek colonies.

We will visit the best-preserved ancient Greek temples that Sicily has to offer, all dating back to the years 400-500 BC. These include:

The Temple of Concordia (440-430 BC)

The Temple of Juno (450-440 BC)

The Temple of Hercules (500 BC)

The Temple of Olympian Zeus (480 BC)

Return to Mandrascate

Day’s recap and Cena (Dinner)

“I love the language, that soft bastard Latin,
Which melts like kisses from a female mouth,
And sounds as if it should be writ on satin
With syllables which breathe of the sweet South.”
~ George Gordon Noel Byron

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Day #12: “Piazza Armerina and Life on the Farm”

Friday: May 28th, 2021

Continental breakfast

Piazza Armerina and the Villa Romana

The Villa Romana del Casale is a Roman villa built in the first quarter of the 4th century and located about 3 km outside the town of Piazza Armerina in southern Sicily. Containing the richest, largest and most complex collection of Roman mosaics in the world, it is one of 44 UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Italy. The villa was constructed as the center of a vast agricultural estate that covered the surrounding area. The owner was probably a member of senatorial class if not of the imperial family itself, i.e., the absolute upper class of the Roman Empire. In part the villa is believed to have been used as a hunting lodge. Many of the mosaics portray hunting scenes from around the world, and the gathering of wild beasts were to be shipped back to the Coliseum of ancient Rome. Besides fabulous hunting scenes, visit the "Chamber of the Ten Maidens," informally called the room of "the bikini girls". These maidens appear in the villa’s mosaic artwork as performing sports that include weight-lifting, discus throwing, running and various ball-games. Bravissima!!

Pranzo! (Optional light lunch with local wine and olive oil tasting)

Return to Mandrascate for free time and Cooking Class

Day’s recap

Cena! (Closing Banquet)

“Traveling is almost like talking with men of other centuries.”
~ Rene Descartes

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60 Georgia Road  Trumansburg, New York  14886  Tel: 315.491.3711
Day #13: “Arrivederci Italia!”

Saturday: May 29th 2021

TBA…. A.) Morning departure for the Catania Airport

TBA …. B.) Departure for U.S.A. (with international layover)

Open my heart and you will see,
Graved inside of it, “Italy.”

~ Robert Browning
Italy in 2021

“WHAT IS INCLUDED”

Centrally Located Hotels
Double or Triple room occupancy in our historic hotels in Taormina, Lipari, Cefalu’ and Valguarnera are centrally located with private baths. 3 nights in Taormina, 2 night on the Aeolian Islands, 3 nights in Cefalu’ and 3 nights in Valguarnera.

Meals
Daily Italian breakfast
Daily exquisite traditional main meal with local wine (lunch or supper)
Two light meals (lunch or supper)
Plus “The Last Supper”…A closing banquet-extravaganza!

All Ground Transportation
Round trip Minivan Transportation throughout the trip
Private Boat ride in the Aeolian Islands

All Entrance Tickets
Taormina: Greek Amphitheatre
Cefalu: Cathedral and “La Rocca” hike
Agrigento: Valley of the Temples
Piazza Armerina: The Roman Villa

Keyrow’s Services
Paolo will serve as your personal full time director. Together with his team local expert-guides, he will offer daily walking tours and share in his knowledge of the places and things that we will experience together.

Please make known any special needs well in advance of the trip.

The Creator made the universe with designs by Michelangelo.
~ Mark Twain

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