

Touring holidays of Italy

Expressions



Splendid Sicily: Fly-drive luxury touring holiday of Sicily



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01392 441275

Splendid Sicily

12 NIGHTS / 13 DAYS

Catania

Taormina

Siracusa

Ragusa

Agrigento

Palermo



From culinary specialities and wine, to one of the most important historical sites in the world, this luxury fly-drive tour of Sicily is one of thrilling diversity. Explore the Greek, Baroque, and modern-day influences on this island, uncovering its many layers of rich history, hidden amidst the inviting charm of the picturesque streets and ethereal beauty of the varied landscape.

Begin this luxury fly-drive tour of Sicily in Catania, under the imposing glare of Mount Etna, and drive the short distance north to Taormina. A beautiful small town overlooking the bay of Naxos, Taormina is the perfect introduction to the wealth of Greek and Roman heritage that you will come across on this tour. Begin with the Greco-Roman amphitheatre, and then move on to the Arab-Norman palaces and the verdant gardens. Another nearby highlight is the Alcantara Gorges formed of lava caves, waterfalls and gently flowing creeks. After three nights, drive back south to Ortigia, the original old town of Syracuse. Let these ancient winding streets, lined with crumbling Baroque palaces and quaint churches, lead you to the elegant Fontana di Artemide, the ruined Temple of Apollo and the Duomo, built on the site of the Temple of Athena. For something a little more unusual, head to the tunnels of the Ipogei di Piazza Duomo. The tunnels were used as refuges in World War Two, but are believed to date back much further than this. Your next stop is slightly west, in the divided town of Ragusa. On a high plateau sits Ragusa Superiore, the newest half of Ragusa, while on a hilltop sits Ragusa Ibla, the redeveloped remains of the original town that was half-destroyed in the 1693 earthquake. The grandest and most detailed of the town's Baroque buildings is Ibla's Duomo di San Giorgio, which contains some of Ragusa's most revered artworks. For those interested in history, a visit to the Museo Archeologico, which houses important relics found in nearby Greek tombs, is a must. Perhaps the cultural highlight of this tour, your next hotel looks across to the Valley of the Temples, near Agrigento, recognised to be one of the world's most important historic sites. The sharp pillars of the seven temples punctuate the horizon and invite your exploration. Within the town of Agrigento lies the historical cathedral that was built on the site of the original Acropolis, and therefore maintains its unparalleled and dramatic positioning within the town. Finally, spend two nights in Palermo, on the northern coast of Sicily. Spend your days making the most of the excellent street food, and seeking out the famous Sicilian wines. Drink in the view from the roof of the eclectic cathedral and seek out the red Arabic domes, intricate mosaics and lavish gold interiors in Palermo's many churches. Spend your final nights at the boutique Principe di Villafranca in the city centre.

PRICES

From £2,460 per person

Based on two people sharing a double or twin room.

Alternative hotel options can be offered in most locations as well as room upgrade supplements.

DATES

This holiday can be arranged throughout the year, however some hotels may close during the winter season.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

Accommodation on bed and breakfast as below:

- 3 nights in Taormina
- 2 nights in Ortigia
- 2 nights near Ragusa
- 2 nights in Agrigento
- 3 nights in Palermo

Scheduled flights from London to Catania and from Palermo to London

Group B car hire during stays in Ortigia, Ragusa and Agrigento

Transfers between airports and hotels

WHAT'S NOT INCLUDED

Early check-in or late check-out at any hotels (though we can arrange this on request at additional cost).

Any other services not mentioned above, such as transfers and meals except breakfast at hotels.

DAYS ONE TO THREE: Arrive into Catania and drive north to Taormina, where you spend three nights

Your flight from Gatwick brings you into Catania airport, at the foot of Mt Etna. You may wish to revisit Catania on one of your days in Taormina, or on the way to Ortigia, to see the grand Piazza del Duomo with the flamboyant Fontana dell-Ellefante at its centre, and the ornately decorated Catania Cathedral at its side. La Pescheria is a bustling weekday market that takes place in the square, selling the fresh fish caught on the coast, later to be served in one of the seafood restaurants that line the square. From the airport, a private car takes you north to Taormina, which overlooks the Bay of Naxos. Taormina is primarily known for its rich and extensive history; its Teatro Antico di Taormina is the second largest amphitheatre in Sicily, harking back to Taormina's origins as a Greek 'polis,' and therefore well worth a few hours' visit. The Botanic Gardens of Villa Comunale are just a short walk from the hotel, and offer a number of exotic and shady pathways for an afternoon stroll, as well as several intriguing structures that make up the villa complex. In the nearby Alcantara River Park, more such opportunities exist for you to delve deeper into the Sicilian landscape and climate. It is the Alcantara Gorges, however, that really give this Park its character, formed as they are of lava caves, waterfalls, and gently flowing creeks. Back in Taormina, trace the story of the town's history through its eclectic architecture. The Gothic Badia Vecchia is the town's former abbey, and its design has been heavily influenced by Arabian and Norman art, much like the Palazzo Duca di Sant Stefano. The Palazzo Corvaja was part of the town's reinforced defences, and was built in the style of Abraham's first temple in God's name. Alternatively, the Palazzo Ciampoli exemplifies the town's medieval history. For those searching for the perfect souvenir, we recommend using the Corso Umberto as a centre-point. The pedestrian-only town centre is lined with shops selling hand-made ceramics, fine leather, Sicilian wines, and wrought iron and wooden products. To visit Sicily and neglect the sea seems impossible; local businesses along the coast offer sports and activities such as wind-surfing, fishing, scuba-diving, snorkelling, canoeing, and sailing. After two busy days exploring historic Taormina, dine in one of the seafood restaurants in the central square.



Villa Belvedere, Taormina

DAYS FOUR TO FIVE: Drive back south to Ortigia, where you spend two nights

Collect your hire car from Taormina this morning and head south past Catania into Syracuse. Your next hotel, the Grand Hotel Ortigia is situated across the three bridges, and in the heart of Syracuse's original old town, Ortigia. This island holds all the many charms of Sicily and Syracuse condensed within its winding narrow streets. Its streets are lined with crumbling Baroque palaces and quaint churches, as well as small local businesses selling traditional hand-made wares. At the very centre of Ortigia is the simplistic, but elegant, Fontana di Artemide, decorated with carvings of the myth of the nymph of Aretusa. This is the ideal spot from which to begin. Bask in the majesty and scale of the ruined Temple of Apollo, or admire the mosaic of the picturesque Chiesa di San Martino. View the intriguing sculpted faces that line the rooftop of the Palazzo Impellizzeri. Ortigia's Duomo was once the Greek Temple of Athena, adorned by a gold-plated statue of Athena on its roof, but now retains only the chipped and bending Doric columns of the temples' exterior. Inside, more of its original structure can be seen, along with displays of Saint's bones in the chapel and a small shrine to Santa Lucia, the patron saint of Syracuse. In May and December, the statue of Santa Lucia is placed in front of the main altar in preparation for the two festivals in her name. The traditional evening passeggiata links the Fontana and the Duomo with the 13th

century Castello Maniace on the southern tip of the island. Its gloomy archways and tunnels are open to public, and its menacing battlements offer exceptional views across the sea, into which its hulking form stretches out. To break up your day of exploration, have a light lunch or snack in the elliptical Piazza Duomo, or view the artworks displayed at the Galleria Regionale di Palazzo Bellomo. These works range from Byzantine columns and Norman marble, to wax sculptures and Sicilian painting. For something a little more unusual, head back to the Piazza Duomo and into the tunnels of the Ipogei di Piazza Duomo. These tunnels were used as refuges in World War Two, but are believed to date back much further than this. Their exit takes you out onto the waterfront, where you might choose to take a boat ride to see Ortigia from the sea. Also hidden under the peaceful streets are the Jewish Ritual baths, still with fresh spring water coursing through them. A market on Via de Benedictis sells a range of Sicilian specialities, from almonds and pistachios, cheeses and snails, to lemons and oranges. The market outskirts sell a range of locally made clothes and crafts, but for wine, we would recommend the Via Cavour.



Ragusa

DAYS SIX TO SEVEN: From Ortigia, begin the journey west and spend two nights at Ragusa

Still on the southern-most part of island, the next stop on this touring holiday is Ragusa. As you drive closer, the landscape begins to be scored by ravines. On a high plateau, sits Ragusa Superiore, the newest half of Ragusa, while on a hilltop, sits Ragusa Ibla, the redeveloped remains of the original town that was half-destroyed in the 1693 earthquake. This divide came about through the dedication of some residents to their idyllic original Ibla, while others built the newer half; both have thus been built or rebuilt in the Baroque style. The grandest and most detailed of these Baroque buildings is Ibla's Duomo di San Giorgio. In addition to its remarkable exterior, so reverently embellished, this building contains some of the town's most revered artworks. The Museo del Duomo pays testament to the beauty of the Ibla that existed before the earthquake, and displays a series of carvings, architectural drawings, and religious paintings that were part of the original cathedral and churches. Take a stroll in the beautifully maintained Giardino Ibleo, observing the relaxed and family-oriented Sicilian lifestyle as it unfolds before you. After exploring the old town, cross over at the Piazza della Repubblica into Ragusa Superiore. This newer part of town also has its own cathedral, the Cattedrale di San Giovanni Battista, also built in the Baroque style in the 18th century. For those looking to really get to grips with the extensive history

of the surrounding area, it is essential to visit the Museo Archeologico. Though this museum may prove a little difficult to find, it houses important relics found in nearby Greek tombs, among other interesting artefacts. In July and September, Ragusa Superiore plays host to the Estate Iblea, a vibrant festival of music, while in October, the streets come alive with the festival of street entertainment. To see more of the dynamic landscape around Ragusa, drive out to the Castello di Donnafugata. This grand pseudo-Gothic-Venetian villa acts as the centre-point for a series of country trails that wind their way over the rise and fall of the surrounding hills. As well as being a particularly beautiful building to behold, with its pink-hued walls and exotic arched windows, it has a number of fragrant gardens around which visitors can walk while admiring the scenic backdrop. Perhaps head out to Modica to the east to try the famous chocolate, or navigate the Cava d'Ispica, a verdant valley with tombs carved into the rocky sides.

DAYS EIGHT TO NINE: Head along the south coast to Agrigento, where you spend two nights

The town of Agrigento is famous for the breadth of its history. Originally named Akragas by the Greeks, the Agrigento of today began as one of the richest colonies of Magna Graecia. Roman rule renamed it Agrigentum, and after a short Arabic rule, its name was Italianised by Mussolini in 1927. The most popular attraction of the area is

the Valley of the Temples, one of the world's most important archaeological sites. The valley is punctuated by seven breath-taking temples. The Temple of Concordia is believed to be one of the most perfect temples in the world and still stands in its entirety. The other temples have suffered more harshly under the hand of time. The Temple of the Olympian Zeus, for example, despite being the largest of the known Doric temples, was dealt a great deal of damage during an earthquake. Its design was unusual due to the 38 huge statues of Atlas that stood atop a wall that joined the bases of the columns together. One of these statues can be seen in the Museo Archeologico Regionale, along with pottery from Athens, artefacts from the necropolis at Montelusa, and more remains excavated from nearby temples. The Temple of Hercules, named thus by the Romans as its original name was lost, is circular, and stairways once existed taking visitors up into the roof to view the frieze depicting the myth of Hercules. Within the town of Agrigento, however, a great deal of its important heritage still remains. The cathedral was built on the site of the original Acropolis, and therefore maintains its unparalleled and dramatic positioning within Agrigento. Recent renovations attempted to return the Baroque building back to its medieval roots, but, within, the wooden ceiling dating back to 1518 remains. A tour of this cathedral will also reveal a small gothic chapel containing a silver shrine, and the ornate balcony that opens out of the bell tower. The 12th century Church of San Biagio was built next to the oldest place of worship in Agrigento: the rock shrines of Demeter and Persephone. These shrines are believed to date back as far as the 7th century BC, long before the Greeks established Akragas. You may also wish to visit the Santo Spirito Monastery, or view the golden façade of the 18th century Church of San Lorenzo, with its twisting columns and white doorway. Inside, the church displays some original 17th century stuccoes carved by Giacomo Serpotta. The diverse landscape of Sicily really comes into its own at the Scala dei Turchi. These white cliffs are dramatically stepped, due to their being formed of sedimentary rocks, and these ethereal landforms were once a great advantage to Turkish invaders.

DAYS TEN TO TWELVE: Drive north to Palermo, where you spend your final two nights in Sicily

Drop off your hire car at the port on arrival in Palermo. As Sicily's regional capital, Palermo's charms extend worldwide. Famed, in part, for its street-food, these last few days in Sicily are the perfect opportunity to sample the best of Sicilian cuisine. The evening stalls that line many of the streets offer specialities such as pane e panelle, a chickpea based fritter, and the traditional arancini. For the best selection of street food in a marvellous location, head to the Antica Focacceria San Francesco. If the Sicilian wine has thus far escaped your grasp, visit one of Palermo's many wineries. Look out for famous wines such as Marsala, either amber, golden, or ruby in hue, the strong Zibibbo wine with Medieval origins, the amber Malvasia white wine particularly prominent on the Aeolian Islands, and Nero d'Avola, Sicily's more popular non-fortified red wine. Most of the famous Sicilian wines are fortified, making them very well-suited as a dessert wine or aperitif. As the theme for this tour has focused upon the history of this beautiful island, it is important to take the time to see that which Palermo has to offer. The Arab-Norman cathedral is exceptionally eclectic in design, built originally in the 12th century, but gaining a portico in the 15th century and a dome in the 18th century. The finished building, therefore, is one of many secrets and delights. Its Neoclassical interior is subsequently a

surprise. The crypt, tombs, treasury and roof can be visited only by paying a small fee, but the views over the town and of the building's architecture from the roof are well worth the price. The Palazzo dei Normanni offers a valuable insight into the Norman influence on Palermo's architecture, and contains a series of beautiful Byzantine mosaics. The Piazza Bellini is a good point from which to begin tracking down Palermo's many churches, two of which are on this square. Look out for red Arabic domes, intricate mosaics, and lavish gold interiors on your travels, and ensure that, if you visit no other church, you see the La Martorana. A more macabre side to Palermo is captured in the Convento dei Cappuccini. Not for the feint-hearted, the walls of these catacombs are lined with elegantly dressed corpses, made available for the relatives to visit their deceased.

DAY THIRTEEN: Return to the UK on a flight from Palermo

Remain in Palermo for as long as possible before being collected from your hotel by a private car which takes you to the airport. Here, catch your return flight to the UK.

DRIVING TIMES

Catania Airport to Villa Belvedere: 1 hour
 Villa Belvedere to the Grand Hotel Ortigia: 1 hour 35 minutes
 The Grand Hotel Ortigia to Eremo della Giubiliana: 1 hour 40 minutes
 Eremo della Giubiliana to Villa Athena: 2 hours 35 minutes
 Villa Athena to Principe di Villafranca: 2 hours 20 minutes
 Principe di Villafranca to Palermo airport: 30 minutes

OPTIONAL

It is possible to add extra nights in any of these locations. Please contact one of our Personal Travel Specialists for recommendations of additional stops.



Valley of the Temples, Agrigento

HOTELS

Below are some details about the elegant hotels that are featured in this touring holiday. Alternative hotels are available in some destinations – please contact us for full details.

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Eremo della Giubiliana

TAORMINA

Hotel Villa Belvedere 4 star

The Hotel Villa Belvedere is a 4-star hotel located centrally near the botanical gardens of Taormina, perched on a hill-side affording beautiful views of the coast and the countryside towards Mount Etna. Occupying an historic Sicilian villa, the Villa Belvedere offers comfortable accommodation in reasonably good sized bedrooms, some of which have a balcony with tables and chairs. The bedrooms are simply but pleasingly equipped with wi-fi throughout. There is a small, prettily furnished lounge with paintings and comfortable chairs, a cosy bar area nearby and on a floor below, a breakfast room. Outside there is a sun terrace and swimming pool reached through terraced luxuriant gardens of tropical plants and bougainvillea, above which tower immense palm trees. On the terrace by the pool, tasty light lunches are served. The Hotel Villa Belvedere can also arrange for you to join local excursions to all the major sites and places of interest.



Villa Belvedere

SIRACUSA

Grand Hotel Ortigia 5 star

The fine Grand Hotel Ortigia is marvellously situated right by the seafront in Ortigia, which is the historic centre of Siracusa, where some of the best examples of Sicilian baroque architecture can be found. The cool, spacious interiors of the Grand Hotel Ortigia are decorated in Liberty style and an atmosphere of calm elegance pervades. Floors are of pale marble and furnishings are in serene pastel shades. In the original cellar, where the bar is now situated, original Greek remains have been discovered and carefully preserved. The restaurant, which provides an excellent standard of regional and Mediterranean cuisine, is on the top floor of the Grand Hotel Ortigia and commands wonderful views of Ortigia's harbour and sea front (the 'parfait' is the speciality dessert of the house and well worth tasting). The attractive bedrooms, which have wooden floors and soft furnishings in fresh, crisp colours, have been equipped with the latest in modern comforts and some have views out to sea (available at a supplement). For guests wishing to relax between



Eremo della Giubiliana

sightseeing visits, the Grand Hotel Ortigia also offers a boat service to and from its own private sandy beach nearby.

RAGUSA

Eremo della Giubiliana 5 star

The unique guest house of Eremo della Giubiliana lies on the fertile plains between the historic town of Ragusa Ibla and the seaside resort of Marina di Ragusa (ten and seven kilometres away respectively). The architect Sr Nifosi, whose family inherited the property, converted it from a 15th Century convent with great respect for the original structure and opened it to guests in 1997. Heirlooms such as portraits and antique furniture, which have been passed down from generation to generation, feature in both the bedrooms and the public rooms. Even the original kitchen of the convent, with its ancient hearth and cooking utensils, has been preserved for display purposes. The thick stone walls, which were once used to protect the property from pirates, now create a cool and tranquil atmosphere. The Eremo della Giubiliana hotel's restaurant specialises in local cuisine and many of the herbs and vegetables which are used as ingredients for the generous meals are to be found growing in the grounds surrounding the Eremo. The menu changes daily. A bountiful selection of fresh local produce also features in the full buffet breakfast. In the Eremo della Giubiliana's cellar, which was the crypt of the original convent, there is an impressive collection of Sicilian wines, and visitors will find a bottle in their room on arrival. The bedrooms, converted from monks' cells, are simple but very comfortable and have beautifully elaborate wrought iron beds, fresh white walls and tiled floors. Guests also have access to a swimming pool in the private garden of the Nifosi family. The Eremo della Giubiliana hotel also offers a selection of excursions in its own light aircraft, by mountain bike, Land Rover or on foot and suggested itineraries are available. Eremo della Giubiliana in Ragusa provides a wonderfully homely base, ideal for short stays as part of a tour of southern Sicily.



Grand Hotel Ortigia

AGRIGENTO

Baglio della Luna 4 star

Hotel Baglio della Luna, based around a distinctive 13th Century tower in Agrigento, has been beautifully converted to accommodate 24 guest rooms. On entering the hotel, you are greeted by a charming courtyard where pots of flowers add splashes of colour and a gazebo offers a shady corner, ideal for relaxing with a drink. The Hotel Baglio della Luna is situated in a secluded and peaceful position just a mile from the Valley of the Temples. From its well tended gardens and from the terrace of its popular restaurant specialising in Sicilian cuisine, one can enjoy marvellous views over the Valley and of the sea beyond. The original tower houses several suites and here a spiral staircase leads up to the lovely rooftop sun terrace. The other bedrooms, situated in a separate adjacent wing, are decorated in summery patterned fabrics and have furniture of rich wood, many items of which are antique. Interesting antique pieces are also to be found in the cosy public rooms of the Baglio della Luna, such as the lounge, bar and restaurant where the atmosphere of a traditional Sicilian home has been skilfully created. After an intensive day's sightseeing guests may wish to take a cooling dip in the sea which is just 300 metres from the hotel.



Baglio della Luna

in the modern and stylish breakfast room, but guests can also enjoy coffee and other drinks in the cosy Lounge Bar. The Principe di Villafranca offers an effortless blend of traditional and contemporary features, in a setting that is both stylish and historic.

PALERMO

Principe di Villafranca 4 star

The Principe di Villafranca is a modern four-star hotel located at the centre of one of Palermo's most prosperous areas. Just minutes from the pretty marina and many designer shops, it is the perfect base from which to explore Sicily's largest city. As you enter the hotel guests are greeted with an array of traditional Sicilian features, such as antique furniture and arches and a cosy fireplace, above which sits a coat of arms. These characterful features are blended seamlessly with the more contemporary decoration of the 32 rooms which use a neutral palette, coupled with splashes of rich colours to create a sophisticated yet comfortable ambience. Breakfast is served



Baglio della Luna



Principe di Villafranca



Eremo della Glubiliana

MAP OF SPLENDID SICILY TOUR

The map below illustrates the route outlined in this touring itinerary, with overnight stops and places of interest highlighted.



GENERAL INFORMATION

This tailor-made touring holiday is one of several suggested touring holidays we can offer you exactly as it is but also with any alterations you might want including extra nights in one or more places or adding in extra places. All our tours can be extended so that you can include a longer stay in one mountain or lake resort too, perhaps at the end of the itinerary. Do call to discuss the options with our travel consultants.

OUR TOURS

Our tailor-made touring holidays are suggested itineraries which can be adapted in numerous ways. They can be fly-drive (with flight and hire-car included), self-drive (with ferry or Eurotunnel included with your own car) or rail and hire-car.

FLEXIBLE ARRANGEMENTS

Our arrangements are very flexible in that you choose to travel on any day you want, subject to availability of your chosen transport and hotels. As mentioned above, additional nights can be added at any point.

OUR PRICES

The sample prices mentioned in this leaflet are generally a 'from' price based on the cheapest season of travel. However, train fares and hotel rates can change (up and down depending on offers), so we give you an accurate price for your holiday when we provide you with a quotation. Our sample prices should be used as an indication of how much a particular combination will cost and to show the differences on average between the hotel categories on offer.

PRICE INFORMATION IN MORE DETAIL

Prices from **£2,460 per person** based on two people sharing a double or twin room.

What's included?

Accommodation on bed and breakfast as below:

- 3 nights in a Double room with French balcony and sea view at the Villa Belvedere in Taormina
- 2 nights in a Double room at the Grand Hotel Ortigia in Siracusa
- 2 nights in a Classic room at the Eremo della Giubiliana near Ragusa
- 2 nights in a Classic room at the Hotel Baglio della Luna near Agrigento
- 3 nights in a Superior room at the Principe di Villafranca in Palermo

Flights with British Airways Gatwick to Catania and Palermo to Heathrow, or Easyjet Gatwick to Catania and Palermo to Gatwick (Palermo flights are not daily)

Group B car hire during stays in Ortigia, Ragusa and Agrigento

Transfers between Catania airport and Villa Belvedere, between Principe di Villafranca and Palermo airport

What's not included?

Early check-in or late check-out at any hotels (though we can arrange this on request at additional cost).

Any other services not mentioned above, such as transfers and meals except breakfast at hotels.

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BOOKING CONDITIONS

Our booking conditions apply to all holidays. A copy can be found on our website and a copy is also sent to you with a written quotation and when you make a booking.

FINANCIAL PROTECTION

Expressions Holidays offers full financial protection for all holidays you book with us. If your holiday includes a flight, the ATOL (3076) covers the costs of the holiday. If the holiday does not include a flight, it is the ABTOT bond that protects the cost of the holiday. We are also members of AITO (the Association of Independent Tour Operators) and ABTA.



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HOW TO BOOK

To make a booking, just phone us on

01392 441275

and we can take you through the details we need and start the booking process. A deposit is required to confirm the arrangements and this can be paid by debit or credit card over the phone. The level of the deposit will be confirmed at the point of booking and will depend on the ticketing deadlines of the rail tickets involved in your booking.