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Your Grand Circle Travel Planning Guide



Sicily & Malta: Cultural Crossroads of the Mediterranean

2026

Grand Circle Travel®

347 Congress Street, Boston, MA 02210

Dear Traveler,

I am thrilled that you are considering exploring the world with Grand Circle Travel. There are so many wonderful destinations to discover, and the itinerary described inside is a perfect way to fulfill a travel dream.

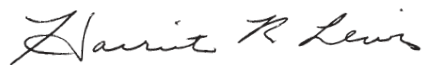
When you travel with us, you will enjoy a thoughtfully designed itinerary that balances unforgettable included discoveries with time for independent explorations. Your experience will be enriched by the company of like-minded American travelers and an **expert, local Program Director**. Assigned to a group of 30 travelers on average, these passionate leaders are ready and eager to share their homeland and insights as only a local can. Whether it is recommending their favorite restaurant, connecting travelers with people and culture, or providing the best regional maps to enhance your leisure time, your Program Director will be available to take care of all the details and ensure that you have a fun and carefree travel experience. You can also rely on the seasoned team at our regional office, who are ready to help 24/7 in case any unexpected circumstances arise.

Throughout your explorations, you will experience Exclusive Discovery Series events designed to connect you with local people and culture. From sharing traditional fare and lively conversation during Home-Hosted Visits, to discussing Controversial Topics impacting everyday life, you'll gain an intimate understanding of your destination, not just a superficial view. And if you choose to travel solo, you will enjoy all these cultural experiences at an unmatched value, with our FREE or low-cost Single Supplements—just one of the reasons we continue to be the leader in solo travel.

Plus, you can put your own personal stamp on your trip, like the **87% of our travelers who customize their experience**. Perhaps you will choose to see more of your destination by adding an optional trip extension to your itinerary. You can also arrive a few days early to explore independently and get acclimated, customize your air itinerary, and more.

I hope you find this Travel Planning Guide helpful. If you have any further questions, do not hesitate to contact one of our Travel Counselors at **1-800-221-2610**.

Warm regards,



Harriet R. Lewis
Chair
Grand Circle Travel

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Valletta, Malta

New! Sicily & Malta: Cultural Crossroads of the Mediterranean

Sicily: Palermo, Agrigento, Acireale | **Malta:** Valletta

16 days starting from \$5,095

including airfare

Single Supplement: **FREE**

For departure dates & prices, visit

www.gct.com/sml2026pricing

Immerse yourself in the rich heritage that distinguishes Sicily from mainland Italy as you uncover a rich tapestry of Mediterranean cultures in Palermo, discover the magnificent Greek temples of Agrigento, and travel to Acireale at the foot of mighty Mount Etna. Then explore the Maltese capital of Valletta, and travel into the countryside to discover the ruins of civilizations that flourished since before the dawn of history.

IT'S INCLUDED

- Choose to purchase **Grand Circle's airfare**, and your airport transfers, government taxes, fees, and airline fuel surcharges are included. Or, make your own air arrangements
- **14 nights accommodation**
- **27 meals:** 14 breakfasts, 7 lunches, and 6 dinners (including 1 Home-Hosted Lunch)
- **15 included features:** 11 guided tours and 4 exclusive Discovery Series events: *Corleone's Past & Present* conversation • Mount Etna conversation • Home-Hosted Lunch • Government corruption in Malta conversation
- Exclusive services of a local Grand Circle Program Director (assigned to no more than 42 travelers)
- **Gratuities** on your main trip for local guides and motorcoach drivers
- **Personal headset** for all included and optional tours on your main trip
- Private motorcoach land travel
- Baggage handling for 1 piece of luggage per person, including tips
- **5% Frequent Traveler Credit** toward your next trip

Prices are accurate as of the date of this publishing and are subject to change.

Sicily & Malta: Cultural Crossroads of the Mediterranean



ITINERARY SUMMARY

1 • Depart U.S.

2-4 • Palermo, Sicily

Included Tours Palermo, Monreale

5-6 • Agrigento

Included Tours Corleone, Valley of the Temples

7-9 • Acireale

Included Tours Villa Romana del Casale, Acireale, Mount Etna

10-15 • Valletta, Malta

Included Tours Valletta, Palazzo Parisio, Blue Grotto, Hagar Qim & the Three Cities

16 • Return to U.S.

WHAT TO EXPECT

① ② ③ ④ ⑤ Moderately Easy

Group Size

- A maximum of 42 travelers, led by a local Grand Circle Program Director

Pacing

- 4 locations in 15 days

Physical Requirements

- Walk 2-3 miles unassisted and participate in 3-5 hours of physical activities daily, including stairs
- Not accessible for travelers using wheelchairs or scooters
- Travelers using walkers, crutches, or other mobility aids must travel with a companion who can assist them
- We reserve the right for Program Directors to restrict participation, or in some circumstances send

travelers home, if their limitations impact the group's experience

Terrain & Transportation

- Uneven walking surfaces, unpaved paths, steep hills, stairs, and cobblestones
- Travel by 45-seat coach

Climate

- Daytime temperatures range from 50-92°F during touring season
- Temperatures on Mount Etna (altitude: 11,000 feet) range from 32-85°F
- June-August are the warmest months
- March and December weather can be unpredictable and change quickly

MAXIMIZE YOUR DISCOVERIES & VALUE

OPTIONAL EXTENSIONS

all with FREE Single Supplements

Tunisia: Tunis, Kairouan & Ancient Carthage

PRE-TRIP: 7 nights from **\$1,495**

New! Rome's Ancient Relics & Renaissance Art

POST-TRIP: 4 nights from **\$1,795**

Sicily & Malta: Cultural Crossroads of the Mediterranean

YOUR DETAILED ITINERARY

BEGIN YOUR TRIP WITH AN OPTIONAL PRE-TRIP EXTENSION

7 nights in *Tunisia: Tunis, Kairouan & Ancient Carthage*

Day 1 Depart U.S.

Day 2 Arrive Tunis, Tunisia

Day 3 Explore Tunis

Day 4 Discover Oudhna

Day 5 Overland to Kairouan •
Explore Hammamet

Day 6 Explore Kairouan

Day 7 Optional El Djem tour

Day 8 Overland to Sidi Bou Said • Visit
North Africa American Cemetery •
Explore ancient Carthage

Day 9 Fly to Palermo, Sicily •
Begin main trip

Day 1 Depart U.S.

Depart today on your flight to Palermo.

Day 2 Arrive Palermo, Sicily

- Destination: Palermo
- Accommodations: Best Western Ai Cavalieri Hotel or similar

Morning/Afternoon: You'll be met at the airport and assisted with your transfer to your hotel. Check in and meet your fellow travelers—including those who took our *Tunisia: Tunis, Kairouan & Ancient Carthage* pre-trip extension—and your local Grand Circle Program Director. Depending on your arrival time, your Program Director may lead you on an orientation walk around your neighborhood today.

Dinner/Evening: The evening is yours to relax or explore independently, with dinner on your own. Ask your Program Director for restaurant recommendations.

Day 3 Explore Palermo • Visit Monreale

- Destination: Palermo
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Best Western Ai Cavalieri Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: The day begins with a Welcome Briefing at the hotel, where your Program Director will formally introduce themselves, and provide an overview of the discoveries you can expect over the coming days, as well as any changes to your planned itinerary that may need to occur.

Then, set off to explore Palermo on an included tour. The city's strategic position in the middle of the Mediterranean has led to a past filled with a regular succession of invaders, from Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Greeks, and Romans, to Normans, Swabians, French and Spanish Bourbons, and more. This helps to explain the city's eclectic mix of architectural styles—although the 17th- and 18th-century Baroque period has left the most visible mark on Palermo's civic and religious structures. Intense rebuilding after heavy bombing during World War II has also contributed to the city's chaotic beauty.

During your tour, you'll admire some of the city's most impressive highlights, including the city's cathedral, *Teatro Massimo Vittorio Emanuele* (a prominent opera house), and the colorful Capo Market. Sicilian open-air street markets bear a striking similarity to Arab *souks*, and they are a tradition dating back to the ninth century, when Saracens ruled the island.

You'll also discover the *Quattro Canti di Citta'* (the Four Corners of the City), and Palermo's extravagant Baroque crossroad, which is the junction of the two main streets of the city—the ancient *cardus* and *decumanus* of the original Roman implant. The crossroad is ringed by four buildings with Baroque sculptures that depict the Four Seasons, Spanish kings, and the patron saints of Palermo's four old quarters. Your tour will also take you to *Piazza Pretoria*, where you might learn why its 16th-century fountain is referred to as the “Fountain of Shame,” and *Piazza Bellini*, a square in the heart of the city flanked by two historic churches and a theater.

Lunch: On your own. Perhaps you'll return to the stalls of Capo Market to sample some Sicilian street food, such as such as *arancini* (fried rice balls) or *granita* (a sugary frozen dessert).

Afternoon: You'll have a few hours to explore Palermo independently before departing for a tour of Monreale, a town perched on hills overlooking Palermo and the lush valley known as La Conca d'Oro (the Golden Shell). Monreale is famed for its twelfth-century Arab-Norman cathedral, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, known for its illustrious nave, where nearly every surface is covered with intricately-detailed Byzantine mosaics depicting biblical scenes in rich colors and gold filigree.

You'll spend some time exploring Monreale on an included tour with a local guide, followed by some free time for independent discovery before returning to Palermo in time for dinner.

Dinner: Enjoy an included Welcome Dinner with your fellow travelers at a local restaurant tonight.

Evening: Free to rest or explore Palermo independently.

Day 4 Palermo • Optional Cefalù tour

- Destination: Palermo
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Best Western Ai Cavalieri Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Free for your own discoveries in Palermo—ask your Program Director for recommendations. You could visit the Archaeological Museum, featuring a noteworthy Etruscan collection and artifacts from the Hellenic temples at Selinunte. Tour the Abatellis Palace, admiring its gallery of Renaissance paintings. Visit the Mercato delle Pulci, a flea market well known for its antiques. Or take a stroll through the shopping area.

Or, set off for an optional excursion to Cefalù, an enchanting fishing village and summertime resort that sits on a rocky outcrop in the center of Sicily's northern coast. The Greeks thought the rocky outcrop, the Rocca, resembled a head—*kephalos* in Greek—thus, the name of the town. Cefalù lies in a scenic locale between the massive peak and a long, sweeping beach. Take in the highlights of the village during a morning tour—including its picturesque harbor and splendid cathedral—and enjoy a chance to chat with local people as they go about their day to day lives. You'll also have a free hour to explore independently.

Lunch: Travelers on our optional tour will enjoy a light lunch in a local restaurant, included in the cost of your tour. Otherwise, lunch is on your own—your Program Director can recommend a restaurant.

Afternoon: Today's optional tour continues with an afternoon stop in the town of Bagheria, where you'll meet a local family and sample homemade *cannoli*. Then, return to Palermo, where the rest of the day is yours to do as you please. Your Program Director will be happy to recommend free time activities.

Dinner: Enjoy an included dinner at a local restaurant this evening.

Evening: Continue making independent discoveries this evening, with dinner on your own. Ask your Program Director for restaurant recommendations.

Day 5 Overland to Agrigento • Visit Corleone • Conversation about *Corleone's Past & Present*

- Destination: Agrigento
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Colleverde Park Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: You'll begin your private motorcoach transfer to Agrigento today, stopping on the way at the historic hilltop town of Corleone, whose name is synonymous with the novel and film, *The Godfather*. Although the eponymous Corleone crime family is a work of fiction, Corleone's historic ties to the Sicilian mafia are all too real. You'll get an intimate view of this issue after your discovery walk in the town, as you visit Sant'Agostino Church and join a local expert for an **Exclusive Discovery Series** *Corleone's Past & Present* conversation about the Italian crime organization's roots in this area, and the effect that it still has over local life today.

Lunch: Enjoy an included lunch at a local restaurant.

Afternoon: After lunch, you'll continue on your way to Agrigento, arriving at your hotel in the late afternoon. The balance of the afternoon is free for your own discoveries—ask your Program Director for recommendations.

Dinner/Evening: Continue making independent discoveries this evening, with dinner on your own. Ask your Program Director for restaurant recommendations.

Day 6 Discover the Valley of the Temples

- Destination: Agrigento
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Colleverde Park Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Visit the extraordinary Valley of the Temples, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, on an included tour. These are among the greatest Greek ruins in the world, and the splendor of the temples—seven in the Doric style, built during the fifth and sixth centuries BC—rivals those in Athens.

Here you'll see the Temple of Juno, with its excellent views of the entire valley, and the Temple of Concordia, beautifully preserved. The oldest ruin is traditionally named the Temple of Hercules, which includes the remnant of a large altar. In addition to the ancient ruins and honey-colored architecture, the area provides sweeping views of the neighboring hillsides, where homes and agricultural plots form a patchwork display of green, brown, and white.

After your tour, you'll return to Agrigento.

Lunch: On your own in Agrigento. Your Program Director can suggest a café or restaurant.

Afternoon: Enjoy some free time in Agrigento this afternoon to explore independently before dinner. This evening, gather in the lobby to ride by bus into the city's Upper Town where our restaurant is located.

Dinner: Included at a local restaurant.

Evening: Return to your hotel, where the rest of the night is yours to spend as you'd like.

Day 7 Overland to Acireale • Discover Villa Romana del Casale

- Destination: Acireale
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Grande Albergo Maugeri or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Check out of your hotel and begin your motorcoach transfer to Acireale today, stopping along the way in the town of Piazza Armerina for a guided tour of the ruins of Villa Romana del Casale. Constructed in the middle of the fourth century AD as a hunting lodge, the villa was covered by a landslide in the twelfth century. Nearly 800 years later, 20th-century excavations began to reveal some of the

finest examples of Roman mosaics in all of Europe—scenes range from Homeric escapades to insightful depictions of daily life. The villa is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

After your tour of the villa, you'll continue your motorcoach transfer to Acireale.

Lunch: Included at a local restaurant en route to Acireale.

Afternoon: Arrive at your hotel in Acireale in the mid-afternoon, and check in to your room. After you've settled in, your Program Director will lead you on an orientation walk of the neighborhood, and you'll have the rest of the day free to spend as you wish.

Dinner/Evening: Continue making independent discoveries this evening, with dinner on your own. Ask your Program Director for restaurant recommendations.

Day 8 Explore Acireale • Optional Taormina tour

- Destination: Acireale
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Grande Albergo Maugeri or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Begin the day by exploring Acireale on an included walking tour with a local guide. This historic city is located on Sicily's eastern coast, between Mount Etna and the Ionian Sea, offering scenic vistas in any direction that a visitor might care to look. Acireale features many examples of Sicilian Baroque architecture, including the cathedral, town hall, and basilica in the Piazza Duomo (Acireale's city center), as well as Sicily's oldest art academy, which has inspired many works of art throughout the city and the world at large throughout the ages.

Your local guide will lead you on a tour of the city, which will feature a stop at the Carnival Museum, where you'll learn more about this famous annual celebration. Carnival events take place throughout Sicily, and Acireale's is considered to be one of the island's most spectacular, featuring a parade of exuberantly-costumed locals and elaborate papier-mâché floats depicting religious allegories, satirical scenes, and other figures. You'll see a few examples of prior years' floats at the museum, and gain historical and cultural insights into this beloved tradition.

After our tour, you'll have the rest of the morning free to explore independently.

Lunch: We'll enjoy an early *aperilunch* (an Italian cultural tradition featuring drinks and light refreshment) together at a local restaurant.

Afternoon: You may spend the rest of the day exploring independently, or join our optional half-day tour of Taormina, Sicily's most famous resort town. Dating from the third and fourth centuries BC, Taormina is perched dramatically high on a rocky promontory overlooking the Ionian Sea. It's a charming medieval town with typical cobblestone streets leading into spacious squares graced by lovely 15th-century *palazzi*.

You'll tour the upper town's historic center, including a visit to the classical Greco-Roman theater. This is Taormina's most-visited site, offering a view of rare beauty: Mount Etna and the seacoast. In the third century BC, the Greeks carved this theater on the slopes of Mount Tauro out of rock, and even today, the superb acoustics of the theater allow listeners in the last rows to hear a whisper on stage.

After your walking tour, you'll have about an hour free to spend as you wish before dinner.

Dinner: Dinner is on your own for travelers who chose to remain in Acireale today. Travelers on today's optional tour will enjoy dinner at a local restaurant (included in the cost of the tour), featuring a demonstration of how to make *arancini*, stuffed and fried rice balls that are a staple of Sicilian cuisine. Then, you'll be able to roll up your sleeves and try your hand at making *arancini* yourself.

Evening: Travelers on our optional tour will return to the hotel after dinner. The evening is free to rest or explore independently.

Day 9 Discover Mount Etna • Home-Hosted Lunch • Mount Etna conversation

- Destination: Acireale
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Grande Albergo Maugeri or similar

Activity Note: Today's tour involves activity at altitudes of 7,000 feet; travelers may choose not to participate if they would prefer.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Visit magnificent Mount Etna, Europe's largest active volcano. The peak has changed in size over the years, but is presently listed around 10,000 feet. Etna has been active in modern times, destroying the village of Mascali in 1928, and erupting again in 1971, 1992, 2001, and 2002.

It was beneath this mountain that Zeus is said to have crushed the multi-headed, hundred-handed, snake-infested dragon Typhoeus, thus attaining dominion over Olympus. Zeus forever banned the dragon to the infernal regions of Tartarus under Mount Etna. The Greeks warned that whenever Typhoeus tried to break out of his confinement, lava would spill forth and earthquakes would crack open the land.

Your included tour goes up to the 7,000-foot mark to view evidence of the volcano's activity during a guided walk at Silvestri Crater, which is now inactive. As you walk along the volcanic soil, your Program Director can offer insights into the geological drama happening beneath your feet, and how locals have learned to live with such a volatile neighbor.

After exploring Mount Etna, you'll drive back to Acireale, where you'll visit the home of a local family for a memorable lunch.

Lunch: Split into smaller groups and travel to the homes of local families for a Home-Hosted Lunch. This **Exclusive Discovery Series** event is an opportunity for unfiltered interactions with the local people who live in the region you're visiting as you enjoy an afternoon of shared home-cooked cuisine and friendly conversation about daily life in Sicily.

Afternoon: Return to your hotel, where you'll have some time to explore independently before joining a local expert for an **Exclusive Discovery Series** conversation about Mount Etna, and how this active volcano looms large over daily Sicilian life.

Dinner/Evening: Continue making independent discoveries this evening, with dinner on your own. Ask your Program Director for restaurant recommendations.

Day 10 Fly to Valletta, Malta

- Destination: Sliema
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Land's End Boutique Hotel or similar

Early morning: Check out of your hotel at around 5:30am this morning for your flight to Malta.

Breakfast: Boxed breakfasts will be provided by our hotel for us to enjoy during our early morning airport transfer.

Morning: Arrive in Valletta later this morning, and transfer to your hotel, located in Sliema, just across the harbor to the north. We'll drop off our baggage, then join our Program Director for a discovery walk in Sliema, including a stop for local refreshments.

Lunch: Included at a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Return to the hotel after lunch, and check in to your room. The rest of the day is free to rest after your early morning departure, or to explore the city independently.

Dinner/Evening: Continue making independent discoveries this evening, with dinner on your own. Ask your Program Director for restaurant recommendations.

Day 11 Explore Valletta • Conversation about government corruption in Malta

- Destination: Sliema
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Land's End Boutique Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Drive to Valletta, and discover its historic city center with a local guide on a walking tour of this UNESCO World Heritage Site.

You'll discover the Upper Barracca Gardens, taking in the breathtaking panorama of the Grand Harbor and the Three Cities, the three fortified towns of Vittoriosa, Cospicua, and Senglea located across the harbor. Continue through the city of Valletta with a visit to the priceless art at St. John's Cathedral with its

elaborately ornate interior, and Caravaggio's masterpiece, *The Beheading of St. John*, hanging in the Oratory.

Then, take a stroll through Strait Street, a one-time nightlife hot spot for British and American soldiers during World War II, followed by a visit to the market, where a variety of crafts and treats beckon from the many stalls.

Lunch: On your own in Valletta. Your Program Director can recommend a restaurant.

Afternoon: Enjoy a free afternoon to explore independently. A local ferry is ready to return you across the harbor to Sliema at your own pace—your Program Director will provide you with a ticket and advise you about the ferry's schedule.

Later, regroup at your hotel where you'll meet a local expert for an **Exclusive Discovery Series** conversation about a controversial topic: government corruption in Malta, and the story of Daphne Caruana, the activist reporter who lost her life fighting to expose it. To provide an inside perspective into Daphne's story, you'll meet an individual who knew her personally, and can offer a firsthand account of what she accomplished.

Over her 30-year career, Daphne's bombshell reporting exposed the lawlessness of Maltese politicians and other powerful figures, earning her a description as a "one-woman WikiLeaks" from Politico, who named her as one of "28 people who are shaping, shaking and stirring Europe." Ultimately, in 2017, Daphne was killed by a car bomb in front of her home in Bidnija. At the time of her death, she was fighting 48 libel suits. Although three men have since been arrested, the case remains open.

You'll spend about an hour learning about this fascinating story and its impact on the world, including time to ask Daphne's confidant questions of your own to further your understanding of this complicated subject.

Dinner: At a local restaurant.

Evening: The rest of the night is free to rest or explore independently.

Day 12 Optional Mdina & Rabat tour

- Destination: Sliema
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Land's End Boutique Hotel or similar

Activity Note: Today's optional tour to Mdina and Rabat must be purchased prior to your departure date.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Enjoy a full day free to explore independently. Or, you can choose to travel back in time to Malta's ancient roots on optional tour to Mdina and Rabat.

First, you'll ride by private motorcoach to Mdina, the former capital of Malta. This medieval city is surrounded by thick, imposing walls, and the limited access allowed to traffic gives Mdina its nickname—the "Silent City." Stroll along the peaceful winding streets, admire palaces now serving as private homes, and see Mdina's Baroque cathedral anchoring a large square.

Explore Mdina on a guided tour, then walk to the adjacent town of Rabat, home to the renowned Wignacourt Collegiate Museum. In addition to exhibiting fine art and artifacts, the museum also includes numerous underground features such as St. Paul's Grotto, Punic, Roman, and Early Christian catacombs, and a complex of World War II-era air raid shelters.

You'll explore Rabat with a local guide, and get to know its people a little better when you stop at a bakery to mingle with locals and savor *pastizzi* (a traditional Maltese pastry).

Lunch: Travelers on today's optional tour will enjoy lunch in a local restaurant in Rabat. Otherwise, lunch is on your own. Your Program Director can recommend restaurant options.

Afternoon: Travelers on our optional tour will have a few hours to continue exploring Mdina and Rabat independently before returning to the hotel via private motorcoach. Whether you decided to join the tour, or to spend the day pursuing your own activities, your Program Director can recommend ways to make the most of your free time.

Dinner: Enjoy an included light dinner at a local restaurant.

Evening: Continue making independent discoveries this evening.

Day 13 Discover Palazzo Parisio • Boat ride to the Blue Grotto

- Destination: Sliema
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Land's End Boutique Hotel or similar

Activity Note: The boat tour of the Blue Grotto is weather-dependent. If the boat ride is unavailable, an alternate activity will be arranged.

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Gather in the lobby and ride by motorcoach with your Program Director to the village of Naxxar, where you'll discover the resplendent Palazzo Parisio. Originally built in 1773, it was renovated to its current glory in 1898. Described as a miniature Versailles, the palace is an incredible

showcase of 19th-century Maltese and Italian craftsmanship, featuring lavishly decorated ceilings, murals and frescoes, fine stucco work, antique furnishings, rare paintings, and exquisite gilding. You'll also have time to stroll Palazzo Parisio's charming walled gardens, considered among the finest in Malta.

After your tour, you'll get back onboard the motorcoach and drive to the waterfront, where you'll board a boat for a close-up look at the Blue Grotto, one of Malta's most iconic natural wonders. This oft-photographed landmark consists of a 100-foot-tall limestone arch which gives shelter to a number of shady sea caves carved into the coastline. On bright days, the sun's reflection off the grotto's white-sand beaches lights the caves up with a brilliant blue hue. The kaleidoscopic colors of these illuminated caves, contrasting with the turquoise waters and orange limestone cliffs combines into unforgettable coastal scenery.

Lunch: After your boat tour, enjoy an included lunch at a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Return to your hotel in Sliema via private motorcoach, and enjoy the rest of the day free to pursue your own discoveries. Perhaps you'll visit the Lascaris War Room, where Maltese military leaders planned their defense of the island during World War II.

Dinner/Evening: Continue making independent discoveries this evening, with dinner on your own. Ask your Program Director for restaurant recommendations.

Day 14 Optional Island of Gozo tour

- Destination: Sliema
- Included Meals: Breakfast
- Accommodations: Land's End Boutique Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Enjoy a day to explore independently. Or, join us on an optional half-day excursion to the island of Gozo. After breakfast, ride a bus to the pier for your ferry ride to Gozo, a small fishing and farming island with cultivated hills, rugged cliffs, and beautiful beaches.

On arrival, you'll enjoy a taste traditional Maltese bread. Then, ride by bus to Victoria, Gozo's main town, for a tour of the hilltop Cittadella, or citadel, the fortified town center which was designed to keep Gozo's people safe from marauding raiders and pirates. While this practical purpose has long since become obsolete, the Cittadella has been preserved as Gozo's crown jewel, and serves as Victoria's historic heart and administrative center. The town square contains many significant buildings, including Gozo's baroque cathedral, judicial courts, and Bishop's Palace, as you'll see during an included tour here.

Lunch: Today's optional tour includes lunch in a local restaurant. Otherwise, lunch is on your own today.

Afternoon: After lunch, travelers on today's optional tour will ride to Gozo's pier, and return to Valletta via ferry, where the rest of the day is free to explore independently. Your Program Director will be happy to recommend free time activities.

Dinner/Evening: Continue making independent discoveries this evening, with dinner on your own. Ask your Program Director for restaurant recommendations.

Day 15 Hagar Qim & the Three Cities

- Destination: Sliema
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
- Accommodations: Land's End Boutique Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Set out for a tour of one of Malta's best-known prehistoric temples, Hagar Qim, which means "free-standing boulders." This megalithic temple complex was constructed more than 5,200 years ago. The large stone complex contains rooms formerly devoted to animal sacrifices, burnt offerings, and ritual oracles, making it one of the oldest religious sites on Earth.

Next, explore the area Napoleon dubbed "The Three Cities," settled as early as the time of the Phoenicians. A trio of historic fortified towns—Cospicua, Senglea, and Vittoriosa—ring the Grand Harbor.

Vittoriosa, also known as Birgu, was settled by the Knights of St. John in 1530 when King Charles V of Spain granted them the territory of Malta. After resisting an Ottoman siege in 1565, in which a force of 700 knights overcame 40,000 Turkish soldiers, the knights ushered in Malta's Golden Age. Cospicua, the largest of the three, is a double-fortified harbor city known for its majestic bastions, built by the Knights of Malta. Today the city is also dominated by its old dockyard, one of the features that endured the terrible bombing campaigns of World War II. And Senglea, set atop a narrow promontory extending into the Grand Harbor with an area of just over half a square mile, is Malta's smallest locality but also its most densely populated.

After your tour, you'll have some free time to explore independently before lunch.

Lunch: At a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Continue exploring the Three Cities independently before returning to the hotel via motorcoach. The rest of the afternoon is free spend as you choose.

Dinner: Join your fellow travelers for an included Farewell Dinner and share your favorite memories from your journey.

Evening: The rest of the evening is free to rest or explore independently.

Day 16 Return to U.S.

- Included Meals: Breakfast

Breakfast: At the hotel. Boxed meals will be provided for travelers with early departures.

Morning: Transfer to the Palermo airport for your flight home. Or, extend your Mediterranean vacation with our optional post-trip extension to discover *Rome's Ancient Relics & Renaissance Art*.

END YOUR TRIP WITH AN OPTIONAL POST-TRIP EXTENSION

4 nights in *Rome's Ancient Relics & Renaissance Art*

Day 1 Fly to Rome, Italy

Day 2 Explore Rome • Optional Roman Ghetto & Trastevere tour

Day 3 Optional Castel Sant'Angelo tour

Day 4 Visit the Doria Pamphilj Gallery

Day 5 Return to U.S.

OPTIONAL TOURS

During your trip you will be able to book optional tours directly with your Program Director. He or she will ask you to confirm the payment for these tours by filling out a payment form. Optional tours can only be purchased with a credit or debit card. We accept Visa, MasterCard, and Discover credit cards. We also accept Visa and MasterCard debit cards, but it must be a debit card that allows you to sign for purchases. We do not accept American Express.

In order to correctly process these charges, there can be a delay of 2–3 months from the date of your return for the charges to be posted to your account. Therefore we ask that you use a card that will not expire in the 2–3 months following your return.

Please note: Optional tour prices include gratuities for local guides and motorcoach drivers, are listed in U.S. dollar estimates determined at the time of publication, and are subject to change. Optional tours may vary.

Cefalù

(Day 4 \$105 per person)

Set off for an optional excursion to Cefalù, an enchanting fishing village and summertime resort that sits on a rocky outcrop in the center of Sicily's northern coast. The Greeks thought the rocky outcrop, the Rocca, resembled a head—*kephalos* in Greek—thus, the name of the town. Cefalù lies in a scenic locale between the massive peak and a long, sweeping beach.

On an included morning tour with your Program Director, you'll take in the highlights of the village—including its picturesque harbor and splendid cathedral—and enjoy a chance to chat with local people as they go about their day to day lives. You'll then have some free time to explore before a light lunch at a local restaurant (included in the cost of the optional tour).

As you return to Palermo, you'll stop in the nearby town of Bagheria, where you'll meet a local family and enjoy a taste of homemade *cannoli*, the iconic Italian pastry.

Taormina

(Day 8 \$145 per person)

Dating from the third and fourth centuries BC, Taormina is perched dramatically high on a rocky promontory overlooking the Ionian Sea. It's a charming medieval town with typical cobblestone streets leading into spacious squares graced by lovely 15th-century *palazzi*.

On this half-day optional tour, you'll explore the upper town's historic center, including a visit to the classical Greco-Roman theater. This is Taormina's most-visited site, offering a view of rare beauty: Mount Etna and the seacoast. In the third century BC, the Greeks carved this theater on the slopes of Mount Tauro out of rock, and even today, the superb acoustics of the theater allow listeners in the last rows to hear a whisper on stage.

Then, enjoy dinner at a local restaurant (included in the cost of the tour), featuring a demonstration of how to make *arancini*, stuffed and fried rice balls that are a staple of Sicilian cuisine. You'll even have a chance to roll up your sleeves and try your hand at making *arancini* yourself.

Mdina & Rabat

(Day 12 \$95 per person)

Travel back in time with a full-day optional excursion to Mdina and Rabat. Begin with a walking tour of Malta's ancient capital of Mdina, also known as "The Silent City." Surrounded by thick imposing walls, and limited access allowed to traffic, this medieval city abounds with peaceful winding streets. Continue to nearby Rabat, home to the Wignacourt Collegiate Museum, which, in addition to exhibiting fine art and artifacts, also includes numerous underground features such as St. Paul's Grotto, Punic, Roman, and Early Christian catacombs, and a complex of World War II-era air raid shelters. You'll tour the historic town, plus stop at a bakery to mingle with locals and savor *pastizzi* (a traditional Maltese pastry).

After your guided tour, you'll have some free time to explore independently, followed by lunch at a local restaurant before returning to your hotel.

Please note: *This optional tour must be purchased prior to your departure date.*

Island of Gozo

(Day 14 \$170 per person)

Join us on an optional half-day excursion. After breakfast, ride a bus to the pier for your ferry ride to Gozo, a small fishing and farming island with green, flat-topped cultivated hills, rugged cliffs, and beautiful inlets and beaches that has been recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

First, visit a bakery for a taste of traditional Maltese bread. Then, ride by bus to Victoria, Gozo's main town, for a tour of the hilltop Cittadella, or citadel, the fortified town center which was designed to keep Gozo's people safe

from marauding raiders and pirates. While this practical purpose has long since become obsolete, the Cittadella has been preserved as Gozo's crown jewel, and serves as Victoria's historic heart and administrative center.

After lunch (included in the cost of your optional tour), you'll return to Malta via ferry.

PRE-TRIP

Tunisia: Tunis, Kairouan & Ancient Carthage

INCLUDED IN YOUR PRICE

- » **7 nights accommodation**
- » **13 meals:** 7 breakfasts, 3 lunches, and 3 dinners
- » **6 included tours:** Tunis, Oudhna, Hammamet, Kairouan, North Africa American Cemetery, Ancient Carthage
- » Exclusive services of a local Grand Circle Program Director
- » **Gratuities** for local guides and motorcoach drivers on your extension and all optional tours
- » All transfers

PRE-TRIP EXTENSION ITINERARY

Day 1 Depart U.S.

Depart the U.S. today on your flight to Tunisia.

Day 2 Arrive Tunis, Tunisia

- Destination: Tunis
- Included Meals: Dinner
- Accommodations: Hotel Belvedere Fourati or similar

Morning/Afternoon: Arrive in Tunis, Tunisia, today, where you'll greet your Grand Circle Program Director. Transfer to your hotel and enjoy an orientation walk to acquaint yourself with the neighborhood surrounding your hotel.

Dinner: Included at the hotel.

Evening: The evening is yours to relax or explore independently. Ask your Program Director for recommendations.

Day 3 Explore Tunis

- Destination: Tunis
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Hotel Belvedere Fourati or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Begin the day with a Welcome Briefing at your hotel, in which your Program Director will deliver a preview of the discoveries that await you over the coming days.

Then, we'll begin our discoveries with an included walking tour of Tunisia's bustling capital. Tunis was one of the greatest cities in the world during the reign of the Almohad and Hafsid dynasties from the twelfth to the 16th centuries. Today, it boasts a diversity of distinct cultures and rich, complex history shaped by ages of colonization.

You'll experience this diversity when you venture to the city's *medina*—a UNESCO World Heritage Site—to witness the hundreds of palaces, mosques, and fountains situated here on a discovery walk with your Program

Director. Meet some of the vendors who sell their handicrafts at various *souks* (markets), and learn about local traditions like the *chachia*, a flexible hat worn by men that originated in Tunisia and Libya. The *chachia* is typically made from wool that has been crushed with hot water and soap, then dyed, and shaped. You're sure to see some men donning this typical headpiece as we walk through the *medina*.

Lunch: After your tour, you'll have a few hours free in the *medina* to seek lunch on your own and explore independently. Your Program Director can offer activity and restaurant suggestions.

Afternoon: You can choose to continue exploring the *medina* with your Program Director on an elective walk, or return to the hotel via private motorcoach this afternoon. Your Program Director can suggest activities to make the most of your free time. Perhaps you'll wander to Tunis' Central Market, where an array of local produce and spices await you, as well as opportunities to connect with locals as they go about their daily business.

Dinner: Gather with your fellow travelers tonight for an included Welcome Dinner at a local restaurant.

Evening: The evening is yours to relax or explore independently. Ask your Program Director for recommendations.

Day 4 Discover Oudhna

- Destination: Tunis
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Hotel Belvedere Fourati or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Drive by private motorcoach to the archaeological site of Oudhna today, where you'll enjoy an included tour with your Program Director.

Oudhna (also known as Oudna, or by its Roman name, Uthina), was founded as a colony in the first century BC by soldiers of the 13th Roman legion. The city flourished for centuries, and today is one of the largest and most significant archaeological sites in all of Tunisia. Excavations of the site began in the 19th century, and resumed again after a pause in the late 20th century. Much of the site remains unearthed, but you'll see a few examples of the ancient ruins that have been excavated on today's included tour.

You'll witness the three-story capitol building, whose first story houses the city's main temple, a trio of shrines dedicated to the deities of the Roman Capitoline Triad: Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva. Another of Oudhna's ancient treasures is the Roman amphitheater, a 16,000-seat arena which was likely the third-largest in Roman Africa.

After a guided tour of the site, we'll drive to La Goulette, the port district of Tunis, for lunch.

Lunch: Included at a local restaurant.

Afternoon: After lunch, you'll have about an hour free to explore La Goulette independently; you might also choose to join your Program Director on a short walk. Then, we'll drive back to our hotel where the rest of the day is free to spend as you wish. Your Program Director can offer discovery suggestions.

Dinner/Evening: Continue making independent discoveries this evening, with dinner on your own. Ask your Program Director for restaurant recommendations.

Day 5 Overland to Kairouan •

Explore Hammamet

- Destination: Kairouan
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: La Kasbah Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: You'll begin your day-long transfer to Kairouan today, stopping along the way for an included tour of Hammamet.

Surrounded by its original 15th-century walls, the restaurant scene and warm, colorful beaches make the town a popular vacation spot for locals and tourists alike. Your Program Director will take you on a discovery walk of the town, including the impressive *medina* which features an abundant display of traditional Tunisian architecture. As you stroll the winding streets, peer up at the centuries-old white houses with their baby-blue painted doors, with verdant vines often cascading down the front walls.

After your tour, you'll have around two hours to explore independently and enjoy lunch on your own.

Lunch: On your own in Hammamet. Your Program Director can recommend a café or restaurant.

Afternoon: Bid Hammamet goodbye and board your motorcoach once more to ride the final stretch to Kairouan. Later this afternoon, arrive at your hotel and check in. After a little time to unpack and freshen up, your Program Director will lead an orientation walk of the surrounding area before dinner.

Dinner: Included at the hotel.

Evening: The evening is free to relax or explore independently.

Day 6 Explore Kairouan

- Destination: Kairouan
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: La Kasbah Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Discover a few of Kairouan's most significant sites on an included city tour this morning. First, we'll visit the Great Mosque. The oldest Muslim place of worship in Africa, Kairouan's Great Mosque was founded in the year 670 and shows influences of pre-Islamic, Roman, and Byzantine architecture.

Then, discover the Aghlabid Basins, a cistern constructed in the ninth century by the Aghlabid dynasty to serve as a source of potable water for the people living in this arid, drought-prone region. The basins were an engineering marvel of their day, and are still impressive now, as you'll see during your included tour.

Next, explore the mausoleum of Abou Zamaa al-Balawi, one of Kairouan's most revered religious locales. Here lie the remains of Abou Zamaa al-Balawi, one of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad, who died in a battle against the native Berber people of this region, and is said to have been buried with three hairs from the Prophet's beard. The burial took place prior to the founding of the city, and in the 17th century, an elaborate mausoleum was constructed over the site to honor his life, death, and deeds.

Lunch: Included at a local restaurant.

Afternoon: Return back to the hotel in Kairouan this afternoon, where the rest of the day is free to explore independently. Your Program Director will be happy to recommend options for discovery.

Dinner/Evening: Continue making independent discoveries this evening, with dinner on your own. Ask your Program Director for restaurant recommendations.

Day 7 Optional El Djem tour

- Destination: Kairouan
- Included Meals: Breakfast
- Accommodations: La Kasbah Hotel or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: You are free to spend a full day exploring Kairouan independently. Or, join our full-day optional tour of historic El Djem. First established as the old Roman city of Thysdrus, El Djem (also known as El Jem) is famed for its Roman ruins, some of the best-preserved in all of Africa. Perhaps most iconic are the ruins of the amphitheater, which once held up to 35,000 people. The colosseum stands tall and incongruous among the more modern buildings that surround it—a UNESCO World Heritage Site that perfectly illustrates the grandeur and archaeological prowess of this period.

You'll explore the amphitheater on a guided tour, followed by a visit to its archaeological museum, where informative exhibits can put the artifacts and long history of this site into context.

Lunch: Travelers on our optional tour will enjoy lunch at a local restaurant (included in the cost of the optional tour). Otherwise, lunch is on your own in Kairouan today.

Afternoon: Today's optional tour continues at a local craft center, where we'll get a closer look at some handmade mosaics, and learn about the skill and artistry that goes into creating them.

Return to the hotel in the mid-afternoon where the rest of the day is free to explore independently.

Dinner/Evening: Continue making independent discoveries this evening, with dinner on your own. Ask your Program Director for restaurant recommendations.

Day 8 Overland to Sidi Bou Said • Visit North Africa American Cemetery • Explore ancient Carthage

- Destination: Sidi Bou Said
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Hotel Dar Said or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Check out of the hotel and begin your motorcoach transfer to Sidi Bou Said, with a few stops along the way.

First, we'll pay our respects to the American soldiers who liberated Tunisia during World War II with a visit to the North Africa American Cemetery and Memorial. This 27-acre memorial is the final resting place of 2,841 American military members who died during the war, and also honors 3,700 soldiers whose remains were never found.

Lunch: Included at a local restaurant in the nearby coastal town of La Marsa.

Afternoon: Your discoveries continue as you set off to explore the site of ancient Carthage, which evokes the romance and tragedy of the legendary era of Queen Dido and Aeneas chronicled in Virgil's Aeneid. Scattered ruins help us envision where the mighty city of antiquity once stood, sending its fleets for trade and warfare across the Mediterranean, including Hannibal's famous but doomed campaign against Rome in the Second Punic War.

After Carthage was conquered, the Romans destroyed the old city, allegedly plowing it flat and salting the earth to ensure its old enemy would never grow again. This account,

however, is likely embellished, as Rome established a new settlement of their own on Carthage's site, which stood for almost another 500 years. The remaining ruins have been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Continue on your way to Sidi Bou Said after your Carthage tour, arriving in the mid-afternoon and checking in to your hotel. Your Program Director will lead you on a short orientation walk, and then the rest of the day is free to spend as you please.

Dinner/Evening: Continue making independent discoveries this evening, with dinner on your own. Ask your Program Director for restaurant recommendations.

Day 9 Fly to Palermo, Sicily •

Begin main trip

- Included Meals: Breakfast

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Transfer to the airport this morning for your flight to Palermo, where you'll begin your *Sicily & Malta: Cultural Crossroads of the Mediterranean* itinerary.

OPTIONAL TOUR

El Djem

(Day 7 \$90 per person)

This optional tour takes us to El Djem, home to the third-largest ancient Roman amphitheater in the world, which soars impressively above the low-rise buildings of the town's *medina*. Built in the third century AD, this impressive stadium could seat 30,000 spectators. After an included lunch at a local restaurant, we visit a handcrafts center to learn about mosaics.

POST-TRIP

Rome's Ancient Relics & Renaissance Art

INCLUDED IN YOUR PRICE

- » **Accommodations** for 4 nights
- » **7 meals:** 4 breakfasts, 1 lunch, and 2 dinners
- » **2 included tours:** Rome, Doria Pamphilj Gallery
- » **Gratuities** for local guides and motorcoach drivers on your extension and all optional tours
- » Exclusive services of a local Grand Circle Program Director
- » All transfers

POST-TRIP EXTENSION ITINERARY

End your journey with four nights in Rome, where you'll immerse yourself in ancient Roman history, witness legendary Renaissance art and architecture, and enjoy more opportunities for decadent Italian cuisine. In addition to included tours of city gems and lesser-known galleries, you can round out your experience with optional tours to learn more about Rome's Jewish heritage, and wander the halls of Castel Sant'Angelo.

Day 1 Fly to Rome, Italy

- Destination: Rome
- Included Meals: Dinner
- Accommodations: Hotel Memphis or similar

Morning: Check out of your hotel this morning and drive to Palermo's airport, where you'll board your flight to Rome.

Lunch: On your own. Your Program Director can offer suggestions.

Afternoon: After you arrive in Rome, you'll be assisted with the transfer to your hotel, where you'll check in and enjoy a discovery walk with your Program Director to acquaint yourself with your new surroundings. You'll then have some free time to settle in or explore independently until dinner.

Dinner: At the hotel.

Evening: The evening is free to spend as you please.

Day 2 Explore Rome • Optional Roman Ghetto & Trastevere tour

- Destination: Rome
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch
- Accommodations: Hotel Memphis or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Discover the city of Rome, whose historic center is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and museum *en plein air*, on a walking tour with a local guide. First you'll trace back one of the oldest families tied to the Papacy through its gardens, and see how popes changed the layout of the city in the 15th and 16th centuries—from Piazza del Popolo to the Spanish Steps.

Admire the glamour of the world's best fashion designers as you stroll Via Condotti and Via Frattina, then conclude at the Piazza Navona where you will experience quintessential Baroque artists. Once the stadium of Emperor Domitian, Piazza Navona was where Romans came to watch *agones* (games).

Today, it is common to see street performers here, providing entertainment for the many visitors from around the world. The piazza is one of Rome's most impressive Baroque squares, featuring architecture by Borromini and sculptures by Bernini, including the impressive Fountain of the Four Rivers.

After your tour, you'll have some time to continue exploring independently before lunch.

Lunch: A light lunch is included at a local restaurant.

Afternoon: The rest of the day is free for your own discoveries—ask your Program Director for recommendations. You may wish to toss a coin in *Fontana di Trevi* (the Trevi Fountain) to ensure you return to the Eternal City someday.

Or, join our optional tour of the Roman Ghetto and Trastevere to see another side of Italy's resplendent capital. First, join a local guide for a tour of the Roman Ghetto, a Jewish ghetto established in 1555 by Papal bull. The Jewish Roman community has lived in this area for almost 2,000 years, and a strong sense of pride, solidarity, and cultural tradition is evident throughout the neighborhood.

During your tour, you'll stop for a taste of *pizza ebraica*, also known as "Jewish Pizza." This local specialty can only be found in this neighborhood of Rome, and is a far cry from a typical savory pizza pie. Instead, *pizza ebraica* is a bar cookie served as a dessert, made with sweet ingredients such as caramelized sugar, raisins, nuts, and candied citrus.

After your walking tour, you'll have some free time to wander the ghetto independently before walking over the Tiber River into Trastevere, a charming neighborhood favored by modern-day and ancient artists alike.

Dinner: For travelers on today's optional tour, dinner is included in a local restaurant in Trastevere. Otherwise, dinner is on your own. Your Program Director can offer restaurant suggestions.

Evening: The evening is free to spend according to your own agenda.

Day 3 Optional Castel Sant'Angelo tour

- Destination: Rome
- Included Meals: Breakfast
- Accommodations: Hotel Memphis or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: Today you may spend a full day exploring Rome independently.

Or, join us on an optional tour to Castel Sant'Angelo, the iconic rotunda fortress standing watch over the right bank of the Tiber River. The castle was originally constructed as a mausoleum for the Roman Emperor Hadrian, and later became a military building owing to its strategic position. In the year 590, Castel Sant'Angelo earned its current name (Castle of the Holy Angel) when Pope Gregory I claimed to have witnessed the Archangel Saint Michael sheathing a sword atop the castle, heralding the end of a plague that had been ravaging the region. A statue of the angel in such a pose crowns the building today, paying homage to the holy miracle.

You'll enjoy a guided tour of the castle on this optional tour, beginning with a walk along the Ponte Sant'Angelo (Bridge of Angels), an ancient bridge leading to the gates, flanked by the statues of ten angels. Dating back to

the second century AD, and still intact today, Ponte Sant'Angelo is one of Europe's oldest standing bridges.

Inside the castle, you'll admire the opulence of the interior, which served as a papal refuge during the various wars and sieges that Rome has endured over the centuries. In 1722, a tunnel was built connecting the castle to the Vatican so that the pope (and the Church's expensive treasures) could be hidden away in an emergency. As you tour the castle, you'll see some of the historical treasures and artifacts that have been stored and displayed here over the ages (just don't waste time looking for the remains of poor Emperor Hadrian; his tomb was plundered in the sack of Rome in the year 410).

The castle also boasts some of the most breathtaking views of the city, which you'll have the chance to admire for yourself as we ascend to the Angel Terrace. From here, you can enjoy panoramic vistas of the Eternal City as the bronze statue of the archangel Michael watches over from above.

After your tour of the castle, you'll walk to a nearby restaurant for lunch.

Lunch: Travelers on today's optional tour will enjoy an included lunch in a local restaurant. Otherwise, your Program Director can recommend a restaurant for you to enjoy lunch on your own.

Afternoon: Return to the hotel after the conclusion of your optional tour, where the rest of the day is free to explore independently. You might consider a stroll through the Tridente, one of Rome's most lively and picturesque neighborhoods. You can also explore one of Rome's most impressive squares, Piazza del Popolo, the plaza centered by the 120-foot-tall obelisk brought by Augustus from ancient Egypt.

Dinner: On your own. Your Program Director can recommend a restaurant.

Evening: The evening is free to explore independently.

Day 4 Visit the Doria Pamphilj Gallery

- Destination: Rome
- Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner
- Accommodations: Hotel Memphis or similar

Breakfast: At the hotel.

Morning: This morning, you'll join your Program Director for a walk to the Doria Pamphilj Gallery, a private art collection assembled by several wealthy families from the 16th century to the modern day. Housed in an opulent palace off the Via del Corso, the gallery is one of Rome's lesser-known art museums, and you'll get a close look at its dazzling treasures on an included tour.

The gallery's owners intended for the collection of oil paintings, sculptures, frescoes, and other works to overwhelm and awe visitors, and to impress upon them a sense of the noble family's wealth and status. As you tour the gilded halls and browse the pieces on display, you can decide for yourself if they've achieved the desired effect.

After exploring the gallery, you'll join your Program Director for a stroll along the Via dei Fori Imperiali, the grand boulevard running through the center of Rome's historic core, from the Piazza Venezia to the Colosseum. As you wander, you'll catch a glimpse of the legendary Roman Forum, once the political and commercial heart of the ancient western world.

Lunch: On your own. Your Program Director can recommend a café or restaurant.

Afternoon: Enjoy a free afternoon to explore Rome independently. Your Program Director can recommend activities to make the most of your last afternoon in the city. Animal lovers might want to visit Largo di Torre Argentina, a collection of ancient ruins that is also home to a thriving stray cat population. An animal sanctuary is set up on the location to help provide medical care for the area's friendly felines, as well as homes for cats who deign to be adopted (though many of the furry creatures seem content to stay where they are). The ruins also boast a long history, housing the remains of four ancient temples, as well as the Curia of Pompey, where Julius Caesar was murdered long ago.

Dinner: Toast to your discoveries during an included Farewell Dinner at a local restaurant.

Evening: Spend a final free evening in Rome exploring independently.

Day 5 Return to U.S.

- Destination: Rome
- Included Meals: Breakfast

Breakfast: At the hotel. Boxed breakfasts will be available for travelers with early morning flights.

Morning: Transfer to the airport for your flight home.

OPTIONAL TOURS

Roman Ghetto & Trastevere

(Day 2 \$130 per person)

Spend half a day exploring two Roman neighborhoods this afternoon: the Roman Ghetto, a Jewish ghetto established in 1555 by Papal bull, and Trastevere. First, join a local guide for a walking tour of the Roman Ghetto, where a Jewish Roman community has lived for almost 2,000 years, and a strong sense of pride, solidarity, and cultural tradition is evident throughout. While here, you'll enjoy a taste of *pizza ebraica*, locally known as "Jewish Pizza;" a dessert cookie made with sweet ingredients such as caramelized sugar, raisins, nuts, and candied citrus.

Then head across the Tiber River to discover Trastevere—a charming artistic neighborhood with narrow cobbled streets. Here, enjoy dinner at a local restaurant—included as part of your optional tour.

Castel Sant'Angelo

(Day 3 \$130 per person)

Discover Castel Sant'Angelo, the iconic rotunda fortress standing watch over the right bank of the Tiber River. Walk along the Ponte Sant'Angelo (Bridge of Angels), an ancient bridge leading to the gates, flanked by the statues of ten angels. Dating back to the second century AD, and still intact today, Ponte Sant'Angelo is one of Europe's oldest standing bridges.

Inside the castle, you'll admire the opulence of the interior, which served as a papal refuge during the various wars and sieges that Rome has endured over the centuries. In 1722, a tunnel was built connecting the castle to the Vatican so that the pope (and the Church's expensive treasures) could be hidden away in an emergency. As you tour the castle, you'll see some of the historical treasures and artifacts that have been stored and displayed here over the ages.

Finally, ascend to the Angel Terrace for breathtaking views of the city, under the watchful gaze of the bronze statue of the archangel Michael that crowns the castle.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS & ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

Your Passport

- Must be in good condition
- Must be valid for at least 6 months after your scheduled return to the U.S.
- Must have the required number of blank pages (details below)
- The blank pages must be labeled “Visas” at the top. Pages labeled “Amendments and Endorsements” are not acceptable

Need to Renew Your Passport?

Contact the National Passport Information Center (NPIC) at **1-877-487-2778**, or visit the U.S. Department of State’s official website at **www.travel.state.gov** for information on obtaining a new passport or renewing your existing passport. The U.S. Department of State allows for passport renewal by mail or, for applicable citizens, renewal online. We advise you review the process and requirements for online passport renewal on the official website.

You may also contact our recommended visa service company, PVS International, at **1-800-556-9990** for help with your passport.

Recommended Blank Pages

Please confirm that your passport has enough blank pages for this adventure.

- **Main trip only:** If you are taking only the main trip, you will need 2 blank passport pages.
- **Pre-trip extension to Tunisia:** You will need an additional passport page.
- **Post-trip extension to Italy:** No additional pages needed.

No Visas Required

Travelers with a U.S. passport do not need any visas for this vacation, including the optional trip extensions.

Traveling Without a U.S. Passport?

If you are not a U.S. citizen, or if your passport is from any country other than the U.S., it is your responsibility to check with your local consulate, embassy, or a visa services company about visa requirements. We recommend the services of PVS International, a national visa service located in Washington D.C.; they can be reached at **1-800-556-9990** or **www.pvsinternational.org**.

Traveling With a Minor?

Traveling with a minor may require certain documentation for border crossings. For further detail on the required documentation, please contact the local embassy or state government.

Emergency Photocopies of Key Documents

We recommend you carry color photocopies of key documents including the photo page of your passport plus any applicable visas, air itinerary, credit cards (front and back), and an alternative form of ID. Add emergency phone numbers like your credit card company and the number for your travel protection plan. Store copies separate from the originals.

If you plan to email this information to yourself, please keep in mind that email is not always secure; consider using password protection or encryption. Also email is not always available worldwide. As an alternative, you could load these documents onto a flash drive instead, which can do double-duty as a place to backup photos during your trip.

Overseas Taxes & Fees

This tour may have taxes and fees that cannot be included in your airline ticket price because you are required to pay them in person onsite. All taxes are subject to change without notice and can be paid in cash (either U.S. or local currency).

RIGORS, VACCINES & GENERAL HEALTH

Keep Your Abilities In Mind

Please review the information below prior to departing on this trip. We reserve the right for our Program Directors to modify participation, or in some circumstances send travelers home if their limitations are impacting the group's experience.

GROUP SIZE

- A maximum of 42 travelers, led by a local Grand Circle Program Director

PACING

- 4 locations in 15 days

PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS

- Walk 2-3 miles unassisted and participate in 3-5 hours of physical activities daily, including stairs
- Not accessible for travelers using wheelchairs or scooters
- Travelers using walkers, crutches, or other mobility aids must travel with a companion who can assist them
- We reserve the right for Program Directors to restrict participation, or in some circumstances send travelers home, if their limitations impact the group's experience

TERRAIN & TRANSPORTATION

- Uneven walking surfaces, unpaved paths, steep hills, stairs, and cobblestones
- Travel by 45-seat coach

CLIMATE

- Daytime temperatures range from 50-92°F during touring season
- Temperatures on Mount Etna (altitude: 11,000 feet) range from 32-85°F
- June-August are the warmest months
- March and December weather can be unpredictable and change quickly

Health Check

Feeling healthy and confident of your mobility is essential to fully enjoy your trip. If you have ongoing medical conditions or concerns about your health, we highly recommend that you schedule a checkup with your personal physician at least six weeks in advance of your departure date.

- Discuss with your doctor any aspects of your itinerary that may affect your health and be guided by his or her advice. (You can use the “Keep Your Abilities in Mind” on the previous page as a guideline to discuss with him or her.)
- You may want to have a dental exam before your trip. A loose filling or developing cavity would be difficult to remedy while you are traveling.
- If you have a condition that requires special equipment or treatment, you must bring and be responsible for all necessary items related to your condition.

No Vaccines Required

Recommended Vaccines

At the time of writing there were no required vaccines for this trip. The CDC recommends that all travelers be up to date on their routine vaccinations and on basic travel vaccines like Hepatitis A and Typhoid, but these are suggestions only. However, this could change in future so we encourage you to check with the CDC yourself before meeting with your doctor.

Traveling with Medications

- **Pack medications in your carry-on bag** to avoid loss and to have them handy.
- **Keep medicines in their original, labeled containers** for a quicker security screen at the airport and a better experience if you get stopped by customs while overseas.
- **Bring copies of your prescriptions**, written using the generic drug name rather than a brand name to be prepared for any unforeseen loss of your medications.

We recommend checking with the State Department for medication restrictions by country: travel.state.gov (Select “Find International Travel Information” then select “Country Information”; if you don’t see any medications specifically mentioned under the “Your Health Abroad” section, then you can presume major U.S. brands should be OK).

Staying Healthy on Your Trip

Jet Lag Tips

- Start your trip well-rested.
- Begin a gradual transition to your new time zone before you leave or switch to your destination time zone when you get on the plane.
- Attempt to sleep and eat according to the new schedule.
- Avoid heavy eating and drinking caffeine or alcoholic beverages right before—and during—your flight.
- Drink plenty of water and/or fruit juice while flying

- Stretch your legs, neck, and back periodically while seated on the plane.
- After arrival, avoid the temptation to nap.
- Don't push yourself to see a lot on your first day.
- Try to stay awake your first day until after dinner.

Allergies

If you have any serious allergies or dietary restrictions, we advise you to notify us at least 30 days prior to your departure. Please call our Travel Counselors at **1-800-321-2835**, and we will communicate them to our regional office. Every effort will be made to accommodate you.

Water

- Water in Sicily and Malta is considered safe, but as an added safety precaution against possible stomach upsets, we recommend you drink bottled water as much as possible.
- If you're out of bottled water, hotel tap water is okay to drink in Malta and Sicily, but it may taste unpleasant because of heavy chlorination.
- Tap water is not safe to drink in Tunisia. We suggest that you use hand sanitizer after washing your hands in tap water.
- Bottled water is usually for sale in hotels, food shops, and restaurants.

MONEY MATTERS: LOCAL CURRENCY & TIPPING GUIDELINES

Top Three Tips

- **Carry a mix of different types of payments**, such as local currency, an ATM card, and a credit card.
- **Traveler's checks are not recommended.** They can be difficult to exchange and the commission fee for cashing them is quite high. It's more practical to view them as a last resort in the event of a special situation.
- **You will not be able to pay with U.S. dollars on this trip;** you will need local currency instead.

Local Currency

For current exchange rates, please refer to an online converter tool like www.xe.com/currencyconverter, your bank, or the financial section of your newspaper.

Euro Countries: European Euro (€)

Tunisia: Tunisian Dinar (TND)

How to Exchange Money

If you want to exchange money before your trip, you can usually do so through your bank or at an exchange office. Your departure airport in the U.S., a travel agent, or an AAA office are also possible outlets. Or you can wait and change money on the trip instead—but it might be helpful to arrive with some local currency in case you run into a bank holiday or an “out of order” ATM.

On your trip, the easiest way to obtain local currency is to withdraw funds from a local ATM. The ATM will give you local money and your bank at home will convert that into U.S. dollars.

You may be able to exchange cash at some hotels, large post offices, and money exchange offices, however they do not typically offer good exchange rates and can be difficult to find. To exchange cash, you'll usually need your passport and bills in good condition (not worn, torn, or dirty). New bills (post 2014) are best.

Please note that many banks will only exchange money for their own customers. Never exchange money on the street. All exchange methods involve fees, which may be built into the conversion rate; ask beforehand.

ATMs

When using the ATM, keep in mind that it may only accept cards from local banks, and may not allow cash advances on credit cards; you might need to try more than one ATM or more than one card. Many banks will charge a set fee or a percentage fee each time you use a foreign ATM. We

recommend that you check with your bank before you depart. Don't forget to memorize the actual digits of your card's PIN number (many keypads at foreign ATMs do not include letters on their keys—they only display numbers.)

In most countries, ATMs are widely available in major cities. If you are in a rural location, it will likely be harder to find an ATM. If you are visiting a country that has different expectation for ATMs, they will be listed below.

Tunisia: ATMs are typically available in larger cities and towns, but may not be available in more rural areas.

Credit & Debit Cards

While traveling, most countries and major cities will accept credit cards. We suggest that you bring one or two, especially if you are planning a large purchase (artwork, jewelry). We also suggest that you bring more than one brand of card (i.e. Visa, MasterCard, American Express) if possible, as not all are accepted around the world. If you are visiting a country that does not commonly accept credit cards, they will be listed below.

Malta: Credit and debit cards are widely accepted in Malta, though some smaller shops may still require cash.

Tunisia: Credit cards are accepted in some stores and restaurants, particularly in larger cities. We suggest that you bring alternative options (such as cash) for establishments that do not accept credit cards.

Italy: Credit and debit cards are widely accepted in Italy. Occasionally a small “Mom and Pop” restaurant will be cash only, and street vendors or taxis usually are cash only, but most other businesses will take cards.

Chip Cards

Many countries have adopted credit cards that have an embedded computer chip. These cards are inserted into the reader instead of swiped. The card owner then authorizes the purchase using a PIN instead of signing.

Though this technology is common in the U.S., occasionally there are machines in other countries that can't read U.S. cards, or the machine can read the card, but asks for a PIN. This doesn't happen often, and is nothing to worry about. You can usually resolve the situation by asking the cashier to let you sign. (If you don't speak the language, just mime signing on your hand.) If you are not able to sign for a purchase, such as at an automated ticket booth, you can use another form of payment, such as a debit card that has a PIN.

Notify Card Providers of Upcoming Travel

Many credit card companies and banks have fraud alert departments that will freeze your card if they see suspicious charges—such as charges or withdrawals from another country. To avoid an accidental security block, it is a good idea to notify your credit card company and/or bank you will be using your cards abroad. You can do this by calling their customer service number a week or two before your departure. Some banks or credit card companies will also let you do this online.

You should also double-check what phone number you could call if you have a problem with a card while you are abroad. Don't assume you can use the 1-800 number printed on the back of your card—most 1 800 numbers don't work outside of the U.S.!

Tipping Guidelines

Of course, whether you tip, and how much, is always at your own discretion. But for those of you who have asked for tipping suggestions, we offer these guidelines. To make it easy for you to budget, we have quoted the amounts in U.S. dollars; tips can be converted and paid in local currency or in U.S. dollars.

- **Grand Circle Program Director:** It is customary to express a personal “thank you” to your GCT Program Director at the end of your trip. As a guideline, many travelers give \$7–\$10 per traveler for each day their Program Director is with them. *Please note that tips for your Program Director can only be in the form of cash. If you are taking any of the optional extensions, your Program Director during the extension(s) may not be the same as the one on your main trip.*
- **Hotel Housekeeping:** We recommend \$1–\$2 per traveler, per day for the hotel housekeeping staff.
- **Included in Your Trip Price:** Gratuities are included for local guides and motorcoach drivers on your main trip, extensions, and all optional tours.

Time at Leisure

When you are exploring on your own, it's useful to know when to tip and how much, because local customs often differ from the U.S. Here are a few helpful guidelines for the most common services a traveler might use:

- **Taxis:** In Italy, tipping is not customary, but many locals will round up the fare and let the driver keep the change. But a 10% tip for helping you with heavy luggage is appreciated.
- **Restaurants, cafes, and bars:** In Italy you may see *servizio incluso* and *coperto* on the bill which refers to a cover charge for use of the table, not an included tip for the server. It is customary to leave a tip of 5% to 10% for the server, depending on the quality of service. A tip of 5% can be appropriate in a café or a family-run trattoria, while 10% is more suitable at a restaurant. In Malta, a tip of about 10% is customary.

- **Public Restrooms:** Most public restrooms in Europe have attendants that take care of cleaning and supplies. It is customary to leave a small tip for them in local currency—so hold on to those coins! Some restrooms are pay-toilets; you pay the staff at the entrance to the restroom or drop the appropriate coin into the slot on the stall door. Many restaurants, cafes, and shops offer only pay-toilets or reserve their restrooms for patrons only.

AIR, OPTIONAL TOURS & STAYING IN TOUCH

Land Only Travelers & Customized Air

Quick Definitions

- **Land Only:** You will be booking your own international flights. Airport transfers are not included.
- **Air-Inclusive:** You booked international air with us. Airport transfers are included as long as you didn't customize your trip's dates (see next bullet).
- **Customized Air:** You booked international air with us, and have customized it in some way. If you have customized your trip's dates to arrive early, stay longer, or stop on your own in a connecting city, airport transfers will NOT be included. You must also arrange your own accommodations for any additional nights. For your convenience, a preliminary list of your included hotels is available on your My Planner at www.gct.com/myplanner under "My Reservations".

Air Inclusive Travelers

If you have purchased air with Grand Circle Travel, there are some points that may be helpful for you to know.

- **Arrival:** Once you arrive, you'll need to collect your luggage and clear customs. A Grand Circle Representative will meet you outside of customs and assist you with your transfer to the hotel or ship. Important note on porters: Airport porters are NOT allowed in the baggage claim area. On arrival, you must take your luggage off the baggage carousel and load it onto a cart, which you will then move through customs. When you exit customs, you'll handle your cart until reaching your transfer vehicle. Your driver will load your luggage into the transfer vehicle.
- **Flight Delays:** Grand Circle Travel is not responsible for flight delays or cancellations. In the unfortunate circumstance that your flight is delayed or changed, please try to reach the regional Grand Circle office (their number will be in your Final Documents) in order to make new arrangements for your transfer. Due to airline regulations our staff is not notified of flight rerouting, and our local representative won't necessarily be aware of your new arrival time. In these cases you will need to arrange your transfer by taxi to your hotel.
- **Flying with a Travel Companion:** If you're traveling with a companion from a different household, and both of you are beginning and ending your trip at the same airport on the same dates, let us know you'd like to travel together and we'll make every effort to arrange this (please note, however, that this is not always possible). If you request any changes to your flights, please be sure that both you and your companion tell us that you still want to fly together.

- **Selecting Your Seats:** If your airline allows pre-assigned seats, you will be able to select and view them directly from the airline's website after booking. Some airlines will not allow seat confirmation until your reservation is ticketed 45–30 days prior to departure, and/or they may charge a nominal fee. You may locate your itinerary on an airline's website utilizing the Record Locator Number found on the Air Itinerary in your My Planner.

Airport Transfers Can Be Purchased

For eligible flights, airport transfers may be purchased separately as an optional add-on, subject to availability. To be eligible, your flight(s) must meet the following requirements:

- You must fly into or fly home from the same airport as GCT travelers who purchased included airfare.
- Your flight(s) must arrive/depart on the same day that the group arrives or departs.

Airport transfers can be purchased up to 45 days prior to your departure; they are not available for purchase onsite. To learn more, or purchase airport transfers, please call our Travel Counselors at **1-800-321-2835**.

If you don't meet the requirements above, you'll need to make your own transfer arrangements. We suggest the Rome to Rio website as a handy resource: **www.rome2rio.com**

Optional Tours

Optional tours are additional add-on tours that allow you to personalize your vacation by tailoring it to your tastes and needs. And if you decide not to join an optional tour? Then you'll have free time to relax or explore on your own—it's about options, not obligations.

What You Need to Know

- All optional tours are subject to change and availability.
- Optional tours that are reserved with your Program Director can be paid for using credit/debit cards only. We accept MasterCard, Visa, and Discover credit cards; we can also take MasterCard or Visa debit cards as long as the card allows you to sign for purchases. (You won't be able to enter a PIN.)
- To ensure that you are charged in U.S. dollars, your payment will be processed by our U.S. headquarters in Boston. This process can take up to three months, so we ask that you only use a card that will still be valid three months after your trip is over. The charge may appear on your credit card statement as being from Boston, MA or may be labeled as "OPT Boston".
- Your Program Director will give you details on the optional tours while you're on the trip. But if you'd like to look over descriptions of them earlier, you can do so at any time by referring to your Day-to-Day Itinerary (available online by signing into My Planner at **www.gct.com/myplanner**).

Reserve Before You Go

We strongly recommend that you reserve the following optional tours in advance. Unless otherwise noted, the deadline to do so is 45 days prior to your departure. Occasionally, space will be available for booking onsite, but this not guaranteed.

Mdina & Rabat

Travel back in time with a full-day optional excursion to Mdina and Rabat. Begin with a walking tour of Malta's ancient capital of Mdina, also known as "The Silent City." Surrounded by thick imposing walls, and limited access allowed to traffic, this medieval city abounds with peaceful winding streets. Continue to nearby Rabat, home to the Wignacourt Collegiate Museum, which, in addition to exhibiting fine art and artifacts, also includes numerous underground features such as St. Paul's Grotto, Punic, Roman, and Early Christian catacombs, and a complex of World War II-era air raid shelters. You'll tour the historic town, plus stop at a bakery to mingle with locals and savor *pastizzi* (a traditional Maltese pastry).

After your guided tour, you'll have some free time to explore independently, followed by lunch at a local restaurant before returning to your hotel.

Please note: *This optional tour must be purchased prior to your departure date.*

This optional tour is offered during the main trip. The cost is \$95 per person.

Communicating with Home from Abroad

Cell Phones

If you want to use your cell phone on the trip, check with your phone provider to see if your phone and service will work outside of the U.S. It may turn out to be cheaper to rent an international phone or buy a SIM card onsite. If you want to use a local SIM, just make certain your phone can accept one.

Calling Apps

Another option is to use a smartphone app like Skype, FaceTime, or WhatsApp. We recommend you use WhatsApp to communicate with home while abroad and with your Trip Experience Leader while onsite. You will need a Wi-Fi connection if you do not have international coverage. Other calling options include smartphone apps such as Skype or FaceTime. You will need a Wi-Fi connection for these apps and the calls may count towards your phone plan's data allowance. Many smartphones—and some tablets or laptops—come with one of these apps pre-installed or you can download them for free from the appropriate apps store.

Calling Cards and 1-800 Numbers

When calling the U.S. from a foreign country, a prepaid calling card can be useful because it circumvents unexpected charges from the hotel. Calling cards purchased locally are typically the best (less expensive, more likely to work with the local phones, etc.).

One reminder: Do not call U.S. 1-800 numbers outside the continental United States. This can result in costly long distance fees, since 1-800 numbers do not work outside the country.

Internet

Most hotels have Internet services available, some for free, some for an hourly charge. Sometimes the charge depends on your location—for example, there may be complimentary WiFi service in a common area, like the lobby or reception, but the WiFi in the guest rooms is a paid service. Most hotels will also offer a limited number of computers in the lobby or business center for guests to use. So you can either bring your own device during the trip and use WiFi where it is available, or leave your device at home and rely on hotel computers.

How to Call Overseas

When calling overseas from the U.S., dial 011 for international exchange, then the country code (indicated by a plus sign: +), and then the number. Note that foreign phone numbers may not have the same number of digits as U.S. numbers; even within a country the number of digits can vary depending on the city and if the phone is a land line or cell phone.

Sicily: +39

Tunisia: +216

Malta: +356

Italy: +39

PACKING: WHAT TO BRING & LUGGAGE LIMITS

Luggage Limits

MAIN TRIP LIMITS	
Pieces per person	One checked bag and one carry-on per person.
Weight restrictions	Varies by airline. The current standard is 50 lbs for checked bags and 15 lbs for carry-ons .
Size Restrictions	Varies by airline. Measured in linear inches (<i>length+width+depth</i>). Generally, 62 linear inches is the checked bag limit; carry-on limit is 45 linear inches .
Luggage Type	A sturdy, fabric-sided suitcase with built-in wheels and lockable zippers is recommended.
TRIP EXTENSION(S) LIMITS	
Same as the main trip.	
REMARKS/SUGGESTIONS	
<p>One suitcase and one carry-on bag per person: Due to the space limitations on bus transfers, you'll be restricted to one suitcase and one carry-on bag per person. This is to ensure that we have room for everyone's luggage during bus transfers. We ask that you abide by this limit to avoid inconveniencing your fellow travelers and to avoid additional fees from the airlines. Most airlines are now charging fees to check more than one suitcase per person, even for flights to Europe or on other international flights.</p> <p>Luggage rules: Luggage rules and limits are set by governmental and airline policy. Enforcement of the rules may include spot checks or may be inconsistent. However one thing is the same across the board: If you are found to have oversized or overweight luggage, you will be subject to additional fees, to be assessed by—and paid to—the airline in question.</p>	

Don't Forget:

- **These luggage limits may change.** If the airline(s) notify us of any changes, we will include an update in your Final Documents booklet.
- It's a good idea to reconfirm baggage restrictions and fees directly with the airline a week or so prior to departure. For your convenience, we maintain a list of the toll-free numbers for the most common airlines on our website in the FAQ section.

- **Baggage fees are not included in your trip price;** they are payable directly to the airlines.

Your Luggage

- **Checked Luggage:** Consider a duffel bag or soft-sided suitcase. Look for one with heavy nylon fabric, wrap-around handles, built-in wheels, and a heavy duty lockable zipper. Due to space limitations on our motorcoaches, you are allowed one piece of checked luggage per person. Porterage at airports and hotels is provided for **one** bag per person. All bags should have luggage tags.
- **Carry-on Bag:** You are allowed one carry-on bag per person. We suggest a tote or small backpack that can be used as both a carry-on bag for your flight and to carry your daily necessities—water bottle, camera, etc—during your daily activities.
- **Locks:** For flights that originate in the U.S., you can either use a TSA-approved lock or leave your luggage unlocked. Outside of the U.S. we strongly recommend locking your luggage as a theft-prevention measure.

Clothing Suggestions: Functional Tips

As you will experience a wide range of temperatures and weather conditions, we suggest several layers of clothing. If you like to hand-wash your clothes, look for fabrics that will dry out overnight. You can buy clothing designed especially for travel, with features like wrinkle-resistant fabric or built-in sun protection.

- **Travel light:** A good rule of thumb is to gather together everything you want to bring; then take half of that. To have a varied travel wardrobe, yet keep your luggage light, we recommend you select a color scheme and pack color-coordinated clothing items that can be mixed to create different outfits.
- **Consider clothing designed for travel, sports, or camping:** With modern fabrics, lightweight packing for comfort and protection through a wide range of weather is easy.
- **Light rain gear:** Regardless of your month of travel, rainfall is certainly a possibility. We suggest you bring a folding umbrella and waterproof shell. Water-resistant walking shoes are advantageous in case heavy downpours pass through.
- **Good walking shoes are critical.** This program features many included tours that follow steep, unpaved or cobbled routes; and even an average day of light sightseeing or shopping can put great demands on your feet. If you prefer more ankle support, take light hiking boots. In case you get caught in the rain, we suggest you bring an extra pair of walking shoes, and rain boots or galoshes.
- **Layers are key.** We suggest wearing layers, so you can adjust to warmer and cooler conditions as needed.

Style Hints: Sicily and Malta

- **Dress on our trip is functional and casual.** You might want to bring one slightly dressier outfit for dining on your own at a nice restaurant, or for the Welcome and Farewell Dinners, but that is totally up to you.
- **Proper attire in churches:** To satisfy dress codes for Italian churches, men and women are requested to cover their arms and legs. No shorts above the knees or sleeveless garments please. Women wearing sleeveless blouses can cover their bare arms with a scarf. It's no longer necessary for women to cover their heads. Pantsuits are now acceptable in churches.

Style Hints: Tunisia

Tunisia is a majority Muslim nation, therefore your dress should be modest and conservative, in respect of Tunisia's traditional Islamic culture. This means:

- **Covered shoulders and no low-cut necklines.** Local men tend to wear collared shirts or polo shirts rather than T-shirts. For women consider a loose, billowy top that covers you from the sun. Or bring a large scarf or shawl that you can drape over your bare shoulders when needed.
- **Shorts or skirts to the knee or below.** You should usually not wear shorts, and never when visiting a mosque. Women will get a better reception if they wear a mid-length travel skirt or mid-calf or capri pants are a popular choice.
- **Context matters.** Generally in places of worship or in someone's home it is better to cover up your shoulders and legs. When touring in large cities or enjoying outdoors activities, you can relax the rules a bit.
- **Women don't need to cover their hair**, except *perhaps* in a mosque, where it is considered a sign of respect. Each mosque has different rules, so if one requires it, your Trip Experience Leader will warn you beforehand. Mosques that require headscarves will have extras to lend or rent, so you don't need to bring one with you.

What to Bring

We have included suggestions from Program Directors and former travelers to help you pack. These packing lists are only jumping-off points—they offer recommendations based on experience, but not requirements. We recommend using www.weather.com and consulting the "Climate" chapter of this handbook.

Your accommodations will supply soap, body wash, and shampoo/conditioner. If you prefer a certain brand you may want to bring your own, but otherwise you can rely on what they provide. **And don't forget a reusable water bottle**—you'll need it to take advantage of any refills we offer as we are working to eliminate single-use plastic bottles on all of our trips.

Recommended Clothing

- ☐ Shirts: A mixture of short and long-sleeved shirts in a breathable fabric, like cotton or cotton-blend. Polo shirts are more versatile than T-shirts.
- ☐ Trousers, jeans, or skirts
- ☐ Comfortable walking shoes with arch support are suggested
- ☐ Socks and underwear
- ☐ Sleepwear
- ☐ Light rain jacket/windbreaker with hood
- ☐ Wide-brim sun hat
- ☐ Swimsuit for hotel pools
- ☐ For winter departures: Warm pants and socks, long-sleeved tops, a fleece or a wool sweater, and an outer jacket

Essential Items

- ☐ Daily essentials: toothbrush, toothpaste, floss, hairbrush or comb, shaving items, deodorant, shampoo/conditioner, shower cap, body soap, etc.
- ☐ Spare eyeglasses/contact lenses and your prescription
- ☐ Sunglasses with a neck strap
- ☐ Sunscreen, SPF 15 or stronger
- ☐ Compact umbrella
- ☐ Wide-brim sun hat or visor
- ☐ Pocket-size tissues
- ☐ Photocopies of passport, air ticket, credit cards
- ☐ Rubber or waterproof shoes
- ☐ Camera gear with extra batteries or battery charger
- ☐ Electrical transformer and plug adapter—see “Regional Electricity” section.

- ☐ Travel-size hair dryer: Many hotels will provide hair dryers, but not all. If a hair dryer is essential to you consider a travel-size version.
- ☐ Wash cloths

Medicines

- ☐ Your own prescription medicines
- ☐ Vitamins
- ☐ Cold remedies: Sudafed/Dristan
- ☐ Pain relievers: Ibuprofen/naproxen/aspirin
- ☐ Laxatives: Senokot/Ex-Lax
- ☐ Stomach upset: Pepto-Bismol/Mylanta
- ☐ Anti-diarrheal: Imodium
- ☐ Band-Aids, Moleskin foot pads
- ☐ Antibiotics: Neosporin/Bacitracin

Home-Hosted Visits

It is customary, though not necessary, to return your hosts' generosity with a small gift. If you do bring a gift, we recommend that you bring something the whole family can enjoy, or something that represents your region, state, or hometown. Get creative and keep it small—peach jelly from Georgia, maple sugar candy from New England, orange blossom soap from California; something that can be used or used up is best. When choosing a gift, be certain to consider the local culture as well. For example, we do not recommend alcohol in Muslim countries because it is forbidden in Islam, and your hosts may be religious. Not all Grand Circle vacations include a home-hosted visit; please check your final itinerary before you depart.

Electricity

When traveling overseas, the voltage is usually different and the plugs might not be the same shape.

Voltage

Electricity at hotels in Sicily, Malta, and Tunisia is 220–240 volts. In the U.S. it is 110 volts. Most of the things a traveler will want to plug in—battery chargers, smartphones, tablets or computers—can run off both 110 and 220–240. But you should check the item or the owner's guide first to confirm this before you plug it in. Plugging a 110V U.S. appliance into 220/240V 50/60Hz service

will ruin the motor. If you have something that needs 110 volts—like a shaver or a hairdryer—you can bring a transformer to change the current. (But transformers tend to burn out, so it might be better to leave whatever it is at home.)

Plugs

The shape of plugs will vary from country to country, and sometimes even within a country depending on when that building was built. To plug something from the U.S. into a local socket you'll need an adapter that fits between the plug and the socket. Although you are only traveling in one country on this trip, it may be easier to purchase an all-in-one, universal adapter/converter combo. Versatile and lightweight, these can usually be found at your local electronics goods or hardware stores. Sometimes you can buy them at large retailers too, like Target or Walmart. If you forget to bring an adapter, you might also find them for sale at the airport when you arrive at your destination.

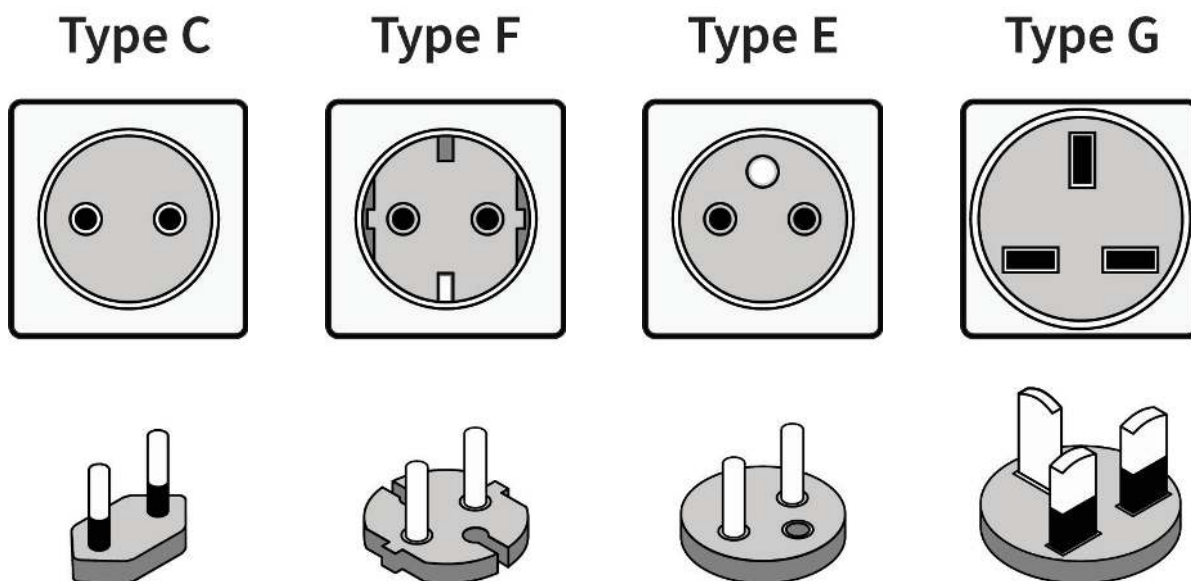
Different plug shapes are named by letters of the alphabet. Standard U.S. plugs are Type A and Type B. Here is the list of plugs for the countries on this trip:

Sicily: C or F

Malta: G

Tunisia: C and E

Italy: C, L, or F



Availability

Barring the occasional and unpredictable power outage, electricity is as readily available on this adventure as it is in the U.S.

CLIMATE & AVERAGE TEMPERATURES

Malta: Situated midway between Sicily and North Africa, the Maltese islands have a distinctly Mediterranean climate, similar to that found in southern Italy or southern Greece. The warmth of summer lingers well into the fall, and the mild winter days have sufficient rain to produce grassy patches across the rocky landscape. Wild flowers, too, abound in autumn, winter, and spring—with more than 600 varieties carpeting the valleys, ravines, and ridges of the island with a blaze of color. Malta has a very sunny climate with an average of seven to eight hours of sunshine a day in midwinter and over twelve hours a day in summer. Erratic showers are common in the late fall and winter.

Malta can be windy. Most gusts come from the northwest (this wind is known as the majjistral in winter, when it blows strongest), but the northeasterly grigal and northerly tramuntana can stir up an occasional storm from late summer onwards. Better known is the sirocco or xlokk, the hot southeasterly wind that blows off the Sahara that sometimes roughens up the sea along the southern shores.

Sicily: Sicily's varied topography includes mountains in the north and east (where Mt. Etna's snow-capped peak dominates), a vast central plateau with near desert-like conditions, and a fertile coastline dotted with sea-level resort towns. Consequently, the island has an array of weather patterns, depending on where you are—down by the sea, up in the mountains, or inland. In coastal cities and towns—like Palermo and Catania—the year-round weather is relatively mild. Winter temperatures average in the 50s and often reach into the 60s. Occasional rains are followed by long periods of sunny weather. Spring comes early and ushers in even warmer temperatures, mostly in the 70s, though the weather can still be somewhat unpredictable. Summer has settled, sunny weather, and high temperatures can range from 75 to 100 in July–August. In contrast, near the mountains weather can be very unpredictable: chilly, mild, sunny, or wet. Night temperatures always drop due to the higher altitude. Inland weather tends to be dry and sometimes windy.

Tunisia: Tunisia consists of two climatic belts, with Mediterranean influences in the north and Saharan in the south. Temperatures are moderate along the coast, with an average annual reading of 64°. In the Mediterranean north the summer season (from May through September) is hot and dry; the winter, (from October to April) is mild and characterized by frequent rains. In the Sahara and the south, the summer can get very hot and the winter surprisingly cold. Temperatures at Tunis range from an average minimum of 43° and maximum of 57° in January, to an average minimum of 70° and maximum of 91° in August. Precipitation in the northern region reaches a high of 59 inches annually, while rainfall in the extreme south averages less than 8 inches a year.

Rome, Italy: The city of Rome has a climate similar to that of Tuscany, with temperatures averaging in the 40s and 50s during peak winter months, and the 60s and 70s in spring and autumn. Winter rains can be heavy, but periods of sunshine are also common. Summer can be very hot and humid with average temperatures ranging from 65–110 degrees, but potentially reaching into the 90s, especially during July–August.

Winter Departures: If you are traveling during the winter, please be aware that the weather in Sicily can be somewhat volatile at this time of year, though it's still relatively mild compared to that of the rest of the world. Moreover, while “off-season” travel may involve stints of inclement weather, it rewards you with the chance to explore Sicily's museums, piazzas, and ruin sites at a time when they are wonderfully free of the summer tourist crowds.

Climate Averages & Online Forecast

The following charts reflect the **average** climate as opposed to exact weather conditions. This means they serve only as general indicators of what can reasonably be expected. An extreme heat wave or cold snap could fall outside these ranges. As your departure approaches, we encourage you to use www.weather.com for a more accurate forecast of the locations you visit.

Average Daily High/Low Temperatures (°F), Humidity & Monthly Rainfall

MONTH	VALLETTA, MALTA			PALERMO, SICILY		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Average # of Days with Rainfall	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)
JAN	60 to 49	80	17	59 to 50	77 to 72	2.8
FEB	59 to 49	80	13	59 to 50	77 to 71	2.6
MAR	88 to 66	80	11	61 to 52	78 to 71	2.3
APR	88 to 71	75	10	65 to 55	77 to 71	1.7
MAY	95 to 75	75	6	71 to 61	80 to 73	1.0
JUN	98 to 85	70	3	77 to 68	77 to 71	0.5
JUL	112 to 90	65	1	83 to 73	76 to 70	0.2
AUG	112 to 90	70	3	84 to 75	77 to 71	0.5
SEP	98 to 85	75	8	80 to 71	76 to 69	1.6
OCT	76 to 64	80	11	73 to 64	76 to 68	3.9
NOV	69 to 57	80	15	67 to 58	75 to 68	3.7
DEC	62 to 52	80	19	61 to 53	76 to 71	3.1

MONTH	TUNIS, TUNISIA			ROME, ITALY		
	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity (am-pm)	Monthly Rainfall (inches)	Temp. High-Low	% Relative Humidity	Average # of Days with Rainfall
JAN	60 to 46	86 to 68	2.4	69 to 38	76	7
FEB	61 to 46	87 to 65	2.1	73 to 38	72	7
MAR	64 to 48	87 to 63	1.8	80 to 43	71	7
APR	68 to 51	84 to 59	1.5	86 to 48	70	7
MAY	76 to 57	82 to 55	0.9	94 to 55	70	6
JUN	84 to 64	76 to 48	0.4	103 to 62	65	3
JUL	90 to 69	75 to 45	0.1	110 to 80	63	2
AUG	90 to 71	79 to 49	0.3	110 to 80	64	2
SEP	85 to 67	85 to 56	1.3	104 to 61	70	6
OCT	78 to 61	87 to 62	2.2	90 to 54	74	7
NOV	68 to 53	86 to 67	2.1	80 to 47	78	9
DEC	62 to 48	86 to 68	2.5	70 to 41	77	9

ABOUT YOUR DESTINATIONS: CULTURE, ETIQUETTE & MORE

Your Program Director

During your exclusive Grand Circle vacation, you'll have reliable assistance available at all times from an on-site Grand Circle Travel Program Director. Your Program Director is fluent in English and can give you an inside perspective on your destinations. He or she is supported along the way by local tour guides, who guide you expertly through particular sites and cities.

Many Grand Circle Program Directors are graduates of professional education programs for travel guides. In addition, they receive specialized training directly from Grand Circle, training that is based on what we've learned from thousands of past travelers about how to make the trip most enjoyable. Your Program Director offers both a deep knowledge of the region and a commitment to make this a very pleasant, informative, and rewarding travel experience for you.

Your Program Director will provide sightseeing trips, handle all travel details, reserve optional tours you choose to take, oversee your Discovery Series events, and provide any other assistance you may need. You will be in the company of a Program Director throughout your vacation.

Sicilian Culture

When you consider that Italy did not even exist as a unified nation until 1861, it makes perfect sense why Sicilians consider themselves Sicilian first, Italian second. Theirs is an ancient and complicated society whose earliest known tribes date as far back as 8,000 BC. By 750 BC, the island hosted Greek and Phoenician colonies, which were soon followed by waves of Carthaginians, Romans, Ostrogoths, Vandals, Arabs, Normans and a host of European kingdoms. The Greeks and Arabs had an especially profound influence—more so than in the rest of Italy—and it is alive and well in the Sicilian cuisine, architecture, agriculture, civil society, and language.

Speaking of language, you might be surprised to know that *Sicilianuor Siculu* is not a dialect of Italian, but a distinct language in and of itself that is recognized as such by UNESCO. Like Italian, it is a Romance language, meaning it has Latin roots. But Sicilian is much older than Italian and has many elements of Greek, Punic, Phoenician, Arabic, French, Catalan, and Spanish. With the inception of public-school education in 1900, Italian became the national tongue and is spoken by nearly everyone. But even mainland Italians sometimes have trouble understanding the local pronunciations. English is also increasingly spoken in Sicily, especially among young people and in the cities, though not as widely as elsewhere in Italy.

Sicily sits in a region of extreme seismic and volcanic activity, pocked by rugged mountains, buffeted by harsh Aeolian winds and baked in near-constant sunlight. Sitting smack in the middle of the sea routes of myriad invaders, it has been dominated by distant rulers for most of its history. As such, it is no wonder that its language has no future tense, and that its character has been formed by a certain tension. Sicilians are fatalistic, skeptical, conservative, and pragmatic—but also deeply passionate, gregarious, loyal, and possessed of a wickedly dark sense of humor. That they embrace life so fully is the real wonder of their story.

The influence of religion is even more pronounced in Sicily than in the rest of Italy. Perhaps this stems from St. Paul stopping here first when he left Antioch (in modern-day Turkey) on his way to Rome. The island then played a pivotal role in the spread of Christianity in the Mediterranean. Whatever the case, almost all Sicilians are Roman Catholic and attend church regularly. Devotion to Mary is particularly strong, and most people also pray to various individual saints, asking them to intervene in their affairs. Almost every town in Sicily also has their own patron saint. On feast day (*festa*), an image of the town's sacred figure—Joseph, Agatha, Anthony, Lucy, Rosalia, or any number of others—is taken out of the church and carried through the streets, an important symbol of the town's identity. There is also a small but growing Muslim population in Sicily, primarily consisting of a small Muslim community in Palermo and a larger Tunisian Muslim community in Mazara del Vallo.

Family is the bedrock of Sicilian society, and how your family appears to the outside world is a matter of considerable importance. People are expected to dress well, behave modestly and perform their familial and social duties. Even today, if they do this with too much showiness, they may be accused of *spagnolismo*, a demeaning reference to the perceived ostentation of the Spanish (*spagnuolo*) overlords who were forced out of Sicily in 1861. (Sicilians don't easily let go of grudges.)

While men reign as the traditional heads of each family, Sicilian women work hard to keep the household wheels turning. They lag behind their sisters in other modern European nations in terms of political, social, and economic equality, but this is beginning to change. For now, the Sicilian woman exerts a powerful influence as the family's moral and spiritual compass.

Visiting Churches

Many churches run special services that you are welcome to attend—even if you are not Catholic. Otherwise, you are welcome to visit outside of services. Most churches in Sicily have a dress code, whether overtly stated or not. Typically, they request that you cover your shoulders and that shorts or skirts reach the knee. It is rare nowadays for churches to require women to cover their heads. If you'll be traveling during warm weather and want to go sleeveless or wear a tank top, then we suggest that you throw a light sweater or cover-up into your daypack.

Hotel Courtesy in Sicily

Italian hotels do not allow food and beverages to be taken from their breakfast rooms, nor is it courteous to eat or drink food or beverages purchased elsewhere in hotel common rooms. In conformity with municipal laws to promote urban decorum, hotels do not allow hanging laundry on room balconies. Travel clotheslines, used in your bathroom, are a more private and effective solution.

Hotel Courtesy in Italy

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Sicilian Cuisine

The cuisine of Sicily is markedly different than on the Italian mainland—just like Sicilians themselves. One reason is geography. Sicily is blessed with abundant sunshine, fertile volcanic soil, and mild Mediterranean winters that allow for year-round agriculture. The freshness and quality of the ingredients make even the simplest Sicilian dishes pop with intense flavor. Another reason is the culinary legacy of the invaders who came to Sicily. The Greeks brought capers, grapes, pomegranates, figs, olives and hazelnuts. The Romans cleared forests to plant wheat, and we all know what Sicilians do with wheat: they make what is arguably the best pasta and bread in Italy. Later, French and Spanish chefs introduced New World items like tomatoes, turkey and potatoes. Popular dishes include:

- **Caponata:** A stew of fried eggplant, celery, onion and tomatoes flavored with capers, raisins and pine nuts.
- **Maccu:** A creamy soup based on fava beans and fennel.
- **Farsumagru:** Beef roulades stuffed with sausage, eggs, bacon and cheese, is Sicily's premier meat dish, contributed by the chefs of the Bourbon court.
- **Sfincione:** Pizza with caciocavallo cheese, onions and bread crumbs
- **Pani câ meusa:** A soft sesame roll filled with cheese and fried cow's lung and spleen.
- **Pasta con le sarde:** Bucatini pasta with sardines, fennel, pine nuts, raisins and saffron.
- **Involtini di pesce spada:** Swordfish rolled with capers, basil and olives, then breaded and fried.
- **Cannoli:** Tubes of fried dough filled with creamy ricotta, pistachios, chocolate and more.

Maltese Cuisine

Malta's mixed cultural heritage (with the influences of the Levant, North Africa, Greece, Italy, Britain, Turkey, and France), plus a steady influx of visitors from around the world, means that you will never lack for dining options here. But when it comes to traditional Maltese fare, here are some classics.

- **Stuffatt tal-fenek:** The national dish of Malta. It is a rabbit stew cooked with red wine, tomatoes, olive oil, onions, and bay leaves.

- **Torta tal-lampuka:** A Mediterranean fish pie with tomatoes, cauliflower, onions, garlic and parsley.
- **Bragioli:** The Maltese version of Italian braciole, thin, rolled beef steaks filled with ground meat, bacon, bread crumbs, and herbs.
- **Soppa tal-armla:** Widow's soup—made with fresh vegetables and garnished with **ġbejna**, a sheep's milk cheese.
- **Kapunata:** A stew similar to ratatouille with eggplant, zucchini, capers, and peppers.
- **Pastizzi:** A diamond-shaped pastry filled with ricotta cheese and perhaps a choice of peas, spinach, tuna, rabbit, or (around Easter) spinach and anchovy.
- **Imqaret:** A rectangular-shaped sweet made with pastry and date filing.

Tunisian Cuisine

Tunisian cuisine is within the Northern African tradition: *couscous* and *marqa* stews forming the backbone of most meals. Local cuisine is distinguished by the fiery *harissa* chili sauce, and the heavy use of the locally abundant tiny olives. Lamb forms the basis of most meat dishes, as does fish—particularly along the coast where local seafood is plentiful. Popular dishes include:

- **Chakchouka:** Assorted veggies (usually peppers and chickpeas, sometimes onions) are pan fried in a tomato sauce and served with a poached egg on top.
- **Tajine:** Unlike the Moroccan-style *tajine*, the Tunisian variety is a dish of beaten eggs, grated cheese, meat and various vegetable fillings—like a quiche, but without the crust.
- **Tunisian Salad:** A mixture of diced cucumber, peppers, tomatoes, and onions seasoned with olive oil. Sometimes this comes with a protein too, like tuna or hard boiled eggs.
- **Merguez:** Small sausages made with lamb, beef, or a mixture of both. Redolent of cumin, harissa, sumac, fennel, and garlic they smell divine and have a spicy heat.
- **Guenaoia:** A slow-cooked lamb or beef stew with okra, chillies, and spices.
- **Possion Complete:** A whole fish, grilled or fried to perfection and served with potato chips and a spicy pepper-based sauce.
- **Bread:** In Tunisia, it's not a meal if you don't have bread—French-style baguettes are served with *everything*.
- **Makroudh:** They may look like Fig Newtons, but they taste so much better. These small cakes are made with semolina flour wrapped around a filling of dates or almonds flavored with cinnamon and orange peel.

Italian Cuisine

Italy may have been unified as a nation in 1861, but its cuisine is another story—and a glorious one at that. Here, gastronomy has always been a matter of regionalism and seasonality. The country is divided up into 20 distinct regions, each with its own specialties. The good news is that there is certainly culinary overlap, and since Italians are famously passionate about food, you can enjoy many beloved regional dishes all over Italy.

The structure of a typical Italian meal is designed to stimulate your appetite, and promote moderation—along with variety. So it will begin with dishes like the following:

- **Aperitivo:** A glass of sparkling prosecco or spumante white wine.
- **Antipasto all'Italiana:** Raw vegetables served with various cheeses and salami
- **Fritto Misto:** A lightly fried seafood mix, usually with calamari, shrimp, and fish such as sardines or anchovies.
- **Crostini:** Chicken liver pate or fresh cut tomatoes served on a thin piece of toasted bread
- **Caprese Salad:** Thick slices of tomato and mozzarella flavored with fresh basil leaves, olive oil.

The first course, called Primo, comes next. Here is where you may enjoy your carbohydrates with a small dish such as:

- **Tagliatelle al Tartufo:** Long ribbons of delicate tagliatelle pasta, swirled with warm melted butter, garlic, and decadently topped with black truffle shavings and parmesan cheese
- **Ribollita:** A bean and kale soup served with toasted bread. On the second day, the soup is cooked again in a pan with olive oil, hence the meaning “boiled twice”.
- **Gnocchi alla Sorrentina:** Potato gnocchi baked in a rich and delicious tomato sauce with bubbling mozzarella cheese and fresh basil.

The main course is called Il secondo. This is usually a small, simply prepared dish of chicken, meat, or fish including:

- **Bistecca alla Fiorentina:** A T-Bone steak from a local breed of cow, the Chianina cattle
- **Lampredotto:** A panino stuffed with the fourth stomach of a cow and soaked in broth, with salsa Verde and black pepper from Florence
- **Polpette:** Savory and seasoned Italian meatballs.

Your meal will conclude with a Dolce (sweet) such as:

- **Tiramisu:** A layered confection of sponge cake, mascarpone cheese, coffee and liqueur.
- **Delizia al Limone:** Sponge cakes filled and coated with lemon custard from Amalfi Coast

- **Buccellato:** A dessert made of a sweet and soft pasty with lots of raisins and aniseed. It can be shaped like a donut or oval, per the original recipe from Lucca

Dolci may be served with coffee or an alcoholic digestivo such as herbal amaro or limoncello. It is meant to aid your digestion of a memorable meal, one that will certainly have been toast-worthy

Malta in Brief

City Layout and Details

Situated between St Julian's and Valletta, Sliema is part of Malta's main coastal resort area. It's a residential area, having developed from beginnings as a small fishing port into a summer resort for wealthy residents of Valletta. You'll find their villas and town houses on the quiet inner streets, creating a quiet charm. More recently, it has become a major commercial and residential area with several of Malta's burgeoning hotel developments.

Sliema (with St. Julian's) is a center for the island's shopping, dining, and café life. Tower Road, the seaside promenade that runs north to St. Julian's offers shops, restaurants, Internet cafes, and day cruise boats – as well as plenty of seats and lovely views over the open sea. The coastline is studded with two towers: a 17th century watch tower and a British built neo-gothic tower from the 1880s.

Both St. Julian's (you can walk there via the promenade) and Valletta (by bus) are easily explored from Sliema.

Entertainment & Recreational Activities

Golf: There is a par-68 course at the Royal Malta Golf Club, spread across 5,567 yards of ground.

Tennis, squash, mini-golf, billiards, and swimming in a freshwater pool are offered at the extensive Marsa Sports Club complex. Visitors may obtain weekly or daily memberships.

Tenpin bowling: Available at the computerized Eden Super Bowl in St George's Bay.

Trotting: Trotting is Malta's most popular spectator sport and regularly attracts crowds of up to 4,000. Often the races are held on Sunday afternoons at Marsa Race Track. The circuit has been there since 1869. Immediately outside the arena, some of the 700 trotters registered with the Malta Racing Club are stabled. Races are usually held from October through March.

Local Transportation

Taxis: Traveling by taxi is not cheap, and fares increase sharply after midnight. Taxis are white (usually Mercedes) with distinctive red number plates. The taxis have no meters but operate on fixed prices; therefore, we suggest you agree on the fare in advance. Taxis are readily available in the main resort areas, but note that they do not cruise the streets in the hope of picking up a fare. They are available at taxi stands and on request at hotels.

Buses: Malta's new bus lines have standardized, modernized travel on the island – while making the charming old yellow buses a thing of the past. The buses operate more frequently, with more routes and stops than before and is inexpensive. A 24 hour pass costs about \$3.25 and a full week pass about \$15. Buses run along the seafront on either side of Sliema. Routes radiate from the Sliema and Valletta bus terminals to nearly every town, village, and sandy beach on the island.

Karrozzin: The Maltese horse-drawn victoria—the Karrozzin—was introduced in 1856 and is still in use in the larger towns. It is advisable to negotiate the cost before the ride starts. Horse cabs can be found in Sliema on the Promenade.

Shopping: What to Buy, Customs, Shipping & More

There may be scheduled visits to local shops during your vacation. There is no requirement to make a purchase during these stops, and any purchase made is a direct transaction with the shop in question, subject to the vendor's terms of purchase. Grand Circle is not responsible for purchases you make on your trip or for the shipment of your purchases.

Returns

If you discover an issue with an item, you should contact the vendor directly. If the shop is outside the country, you should expect that any resolution will take longer than it would in the U.S. We recommend that you keep a copy of all your receipts, invoices, or contracts, along with the shop's contact information. Keep in mind, local practice may vary from the standards you are used to, so don't assume that you have a certain number of days after the purchase to speak up or that you are guaranteed a refund.

Crafts & Souvenirs

Sicily

Among the most popular Sicilian crafts and gift items are ceramics, wine and food. You can find wonderful items in the street markets and groceries of Palermo, Catania, Syracuse and Taormina—capers, pistachios, olive oil, Marsala wine, Etna honey, and candied fruits and marzipan in a myriad of shapes and colors. Other popular souvenirs include brightly colored Caltagirone pottery, handmade jewelry and decorative items made from lava stone, old-fashioned lace, or hand-painted miniature Sicilian carts and puppets. Sicily is not a high-fashion destination like Italy, though you will find some designer shops in Palermo and Taormina. A more iconic clothing item would be the traditional flat *coppola*, a hat similar to what we call a newsboy cap that is simple—but very stylish.

Value Added Tax: In Italy, a Value Added Tax is levied on most articles, services, and meals, and ranges from 4% to 22%. Depending on how much you spend on certain goods in specially marked Tax Free Shopping stores, you may be eligible for a partial refund of this tax. Ask the shopkeeper, salesperson, or our local staff for details. Be sure to save all receipts and the special Global Tax Refund forms for Customs, as receipts alone are not enough.

Malta

Maltese shops range from small, family-run businesses and quaint boutiques to large shopping complexes and chain stores. In nearby Valletta, Republic Street is a major shopping thoroughfare, and Valletta's Sunday market, held below St James Bastion, is one of Malta's top attractions. Among the best Maltese buys are Mdina decorative glass, which has earned a reputation for good workmanship and attractive colors, finely worked filigree jewelry, and delicate lace, which has been the traditional craft for generations of the women of Gozo, who work in their own homes.

Tunisia

Many travelers are surprised by the variety of goods for which Tunisia is known. Copper ware is formed into trays and engraved and olive wood is sculpted into carvings. You'll find leather wallets and handbags, clothing that varies from the colorful to the simple, intricate ceramics, cherubic dolls in local dress, decorative embroidery, and finely polished silverware and jewelry. But the most valuable commodity you'll find here are Tunisian carpets, either woven (non-pile) or knotted (pile). The National Handicrafts Office oversees the quality of Tunisia's carpets, so imitations are rare.

If you plan a major purchase, we strongly recommend that you research the prices and quality available at home before your trip. Just one visit to an import shop or gold dealer will put you way ahead when you go shopping. This is the only way to know if you are getting a good price. You must use your best judgment when deciding whether an item is worth the price being asked.

Bargaining

Tunisians enjoy negotiating over prices, and they expect it of their customers. When looking at large items, you'll often be invited to sit down and drink a cup of tea with the merchants. If this is your first experience at bargaining, don't worry—you'll quickly find your own style. Your opening offer should be well under the asking price. The only rule is that, if you make an offer, you should be prepared to buy at that price. And remember, whatever price you pay is okay, as long as the item is worth that price to you.

Italy

Popular souvenirs include leather goods, silk ties, knitwear, gold jewelry, ceramics, straw goods and other handicrafts, small cabinets, and jewelry boxes. Each region in Italy has its specialties. You'll also see many different items made from olive wood or Carrara marble; just remember that any marble items you purchase should be put into your checked luggage for the flight home. (If you put them in your carry-on, they may be confiscated by security as "weapons".) In Italy, a Value Added Tax is levied on most articles, services, and meals, and ranges from 4% to 22%. Depending on how much you spend on certain goods in specially marked Tax Free Shopping stores, you may be eligible for a partial refund of this tax. Ask the shopkeeper, salesperson, or our local staff for details. Be sure to save all receipts and the special Global Tax Refund forms for Customs, as receipts alone are not enough.

U.S. Customs Regulations & Shipping Charges

For all things related to U.S. Customs, the ultimate authority is the U.S. Bureau of Customs & Border Protection. Their website, **www.cbp.gov** has the answers to the most frequently asked questions. Or you can call them at **1-877-227-5511**.

The top three points to know are:

- At time of writing, your personal duty-free allowance is \$800 for items brought with you. Items totaling more than \$800 are subject to duty fees.
- **Items shipped home are always subject to duty when received in the U.S.** Even when the shop has offered to include shipping and duties in the price, this typically means shipping to the nearest customs facility and payment of the export duties—not door-to-door shipping or payment of the import duties. All additional duties or shipping charges would be your responsibility. Unless an item is small enough to send by parcel service (like FedEx), chances are you will need to arrange shipping or pick-up once the item is in the U.S. and will need to pay customs duties.
- It is illegal to import products made from endangered animal species. U.S. Customs & Border Protection will seize these items, as well as most furs, coral, tortoise shell, reptile skins, feathers, plants, and items made from animal skins.

Tunisia Customs:

The import of foreign currency is free. If the amount of foreign currency is equal to or greater than the equivalent of **25,000 Tunisian dinars** you are required to declare it to Customs at the entrance. If you are a non-resident and intend to re-export a balance of foreign currencies equal to or greater than the equivalent of **5,000 Tunisian dinars**, you are required to declare it to Customs. The currency declaration must be made on the “Foreign Currency Import Declaration” form before leaving the zone under Customs.

DEMOGRAPHICS & HISTORY

Sicily

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 9,927 square miles
- **Capital:** Palermo
- **Languages:** Most people in Sicily speak both Italian (the official language) and Sicilian, a distinct historical Romance language.
- **Ethnicity:** Mostly Italian, with smaller groups of Romanians, Tunisians, and Moroccans
- **Location:** Italy is bordered by France, Slovenia, Austria, Switzerland and the Ligurian, Tyrrhenian, Ionian, Adriatic and Mediterranean seas.
- **Geography:** Sicily is the largest island in the Mediterranean Sea, located just off the “toe” of Italy. Sicily enjoys mountains in the north and east, a vast central plateau, and a fertile coastline dotted with sea-level resort towns.
- **Population:** 4,969,147 (estimate)
- **Religions:** Christian 80% (overwhelming Roman Catholic), Atheists and Agnostics 20%, Muslims estimated at less than 2%
- **Time Zone:** Italy is on Central European Time, six hours ahead of U.S. EST. When it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is noon in Rome. Daylight Saving Time begins the last weekend in March and ends the last weekend in October.

National Holidays: Sicily

In addition to the holidays listed below, Italy celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar, such as Easter. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit **www.timeanddate.com/holidays**.

01/01 New Year's Day

01/06 Epiphany

04/25 Liberation Day

05/01 Labor Day

06/02 Republic Day

08/15 Assumption of Mary

11/01 All Saints' Day

12/08 Feast of the Immaculate Conception

12/25 Christmas Day

12/26 St. Stephen's Day

Sicily: A Brief History

Sicily sits like a giant rock at the toe of Italy's boot, and indeed, it has been kicked around quite a bit during its 8,000-year history. But the Italians were not the first to tread on this storied island.

There is evidence of Paleolithic settlement in the caves of northwest Sicily. But by 5,000 BC, the earliest tribes to live here were immigrants: the Sicani from North Africa, the Siculi from Latium (Italy) and the Elymni from Troy. By 900 BC the Phoenicians arrived, and their Carthaginian heirs founded Palermo. Today, the Phoenician legacy lives on in the enigmatic ruins of Mothya.

Attracted by the island's strategic location, the Greeks arrived in 750 BC and established colonies in Syracuse, Agrigento, Segesta, Selinute and beyond. Hellenic culture thrived, but the island became a battleground as the Carthaginians rose against the Greek interlopers. Beaten but not broken, the Carthaginians remained until the Romans drove them out in 211 BC. Rome made Sicily its first province, but never realized its dream of making it Rome's granary, as the empire was increasingly beset by corruption and war. In 965 AD, the Arabs arrived, bringing advances in agriculture, irrigation, art, architecture and land reform. Palermo was made the capital, boasting more than 100 mosques.

The Arabs' success attracted the Normans, who conquered Sicily in 1071. But the Normans were outnumbered by their vanquished foes, and had to accept and integrate Arab administrative and judicial systems. It was not a hard pill to swallow, for the Norman King Roger I was entranced by the lavishness of Arab culture. He employed many Arabic craftsmen and architects, and promoted a tolerant society where Muslims, Jews and Christians lived in peace. The legacy of the Norman golden age lives on in Palermo's opulent palaces and churches.

In 1194, the kingdom fell to the Hohenstaufens, who ruled until 1266 when the House of Aragon took over. The Crusades swept through the island, sowing the seeds for more conflict. Sicily fell to French, Spanish and Austrian rule in succession before the Spanish Bourbons united the island with Naples in 1734. They redistributed many lands, an act that resulted in many minor legal disputes among ordinary Sicilians. Tired of being governed by generations of absentee rulers, the people turned to influential local "godfathers" who understood *la cosa nostra*, "our thing," and could dispense a quick form of justice. The Sicilian Mafia was born.

Sicily joined a unified Italy in 1861, but the Rome-based government was still disconnected from Sicilian life. By the end of the century, poverty drove thousands of Sicilians to America. Italy joined the Allies in World War I; then in the 1920s, Mussolini and his Fascist Party ushered in one of the darkest periods in Italy's history. Viewing the mafia as a threat to his power, he sent Cesare Mori to fix "the Sicilian problem," largely crippling the Mafia. When Mori's campaign ended in 1929, the Sicilian crime families had been all but broken up. Many Mafioso fled to the U.S. and Canada.

During World War II, with Mussolini allied with Hitler, Sicilians who had emigrated to America worked with Allied intelligence to identify Nazi sympathizers in Sicily. Some of these informants were Mafiosi, and in exchange for their help they struck deals that let them to regain a foothold in Sicily—*See below for details on how and why the Sicilian Mafia played such a significant role in the Allied victory during World War II.*

The murders of state officials continued until 1995, when newly empowered leader Bernardo Provenzano ushered in a relatively peaceful era known as a Pax Mafiosa. He also put an end to the murders of informants and their families. After 43 years on the run, Provenzano was arrested in 2006.

Today, the Mafia still exists in Sicily, with ties to the United States. While they have undeniable influence over politics and certain businesses, they tend to keep a low profile due to scrutiny from law enforcement. While many Sicilians would prefer not to discuss this aspect of their culture with visitors, we have an open conversation during our adventure with a Mafia expert and the son of a former crime boss. (For more on the Sicilian mafia, you'll find a wealth of information on Wikipedia.)

Today, Sicilians are the proud custodians of a vast repository of historic treasures. Though many were left by onetime oppressors, their preservation reflects the endurance of the Sicilian spirit.

Events that Shaped the 20th Century

Unlikely Allies—How the Sicilian Mafia Helped the Allies Win World War II

Italy fought with the Allies during the First World War, so why did they switch sides in World War II? When World War I broke out, Italy took a position of neutrality. In 1915, however, lured by expectations of territorial gains for the winning side (and a secret treaty they had signed), Italy's leaders joined the Allies against the Central Powers. The decision to go to war was highly unpopular with Italians, especially since most of Italy's troops were peasants forced to fight for a cause they didn't even understand. And with some 600,000 killed and almost a million wounded, they paid dearly. To make matters worse, any spoils of victory Italy assumed would be coming its way never materialized. During the peace settlement at Versailles, in fact, the Italian delegation was all but ignored by the "Big Three" (U.S., Britain, and France).

Adding insult to injury, postwar Italy's economy was already in shambles. Now with a war to pay for, it gets much worse. Along with bread riots, strikes, massive inflation, and political instability, there were no jobs for Italy's returning soldiers. This all sets the stage for the rise of Benito Mussolini. Ever the opportunist, the war veteran and former Socialist seizes the moment. In 1919, he gathers a ragtag group of disgruntled ex-soldiers in Milan and starts the Fascist party, promising to restore order, return Italy's sense of national pride, and bring back the glory of the Roman Empire. The party gathers momentum and within three years Mussolini is appointed prime minister. And in 1925, "Il Duce" assumes full dictatorial powers.

Build-Up to War—And Shut-Down of Sicilian Mafia

Most Italians willingly submitted to the Mussolini dictatorship into the 1930s. It seemed a small price to pay for the restored order, increased prosperity, and other successes of Fascist Italy's early years. Efficient new power and steel industries helped Italy weather the Great Depression better than other countries, and a massive public works program provided jobs for thousands of unemployed Italians. In fact, Mussolini became widely admired on the world stage for his success in transforming his divided and demoralized nation. But while northern Italians embraced Fascism, it was a different story in the south—especially Sicily. With their longstanding anti-government and anti-police sentiments, Sicilians had a strong distrust of the new dictatorial regime—or any central government. They felt the Mafia already gave the island the order and stability that had never been provided to them by the state.

Mussolini had already been lukewarm about the Mafia, stemming from a 1924 visit to Sicily when he felt he wasn't shown the proper respect. Now he felt they posed an existential threat to Fascism itself. In Mussolini's mind, the Mafia was the sole barrier to his dream of national unity under a Fascist Italy. While it would have made more sense to introduce true economic and social reform to the island, he decided to suppress the Mafia instead. He sent his tough law enforcer Cesare Mori to Sicily where he was tasked with subduing and humiliating *mafiosi* and their families. Some 11,000 Sicilians (including many with no Mafia ties) were arrested or simply machine-gunned to death in a series of savage purges. Many others fled the island to the U.S. and Canada; among them Carlo Gambino and Joe Bonnano, who made it to New York City and would eventually start their own Mafia families in America.

Mussolini's support began to wane in 1935, with Italy's invasion of the East African nation of Ethiopia. Since Italy had been denied territorial gains after the "betrayal by the Allies" at Versailles (like Germany's "stab in the back," Italians called it a "mutilated victory"), now he would just take it. Mussolini's support took another hit when he provided aid to fascist forces in Spain's civil war. As other European leaders abandoned him, Mussolini drew closer to another rising dictator, Adolf Hitler. And in 1939, Italy and Germany signed the Pact of Steel, an alliance that precipitated Italy's disastrous involvement in World War II. Mussolini thought his power and dreams of "empire building" would be strengthened by an alliance with Nazi Germany. Meanwhile, it was the Mafia in the United States—who still retained their strong ties to Sicily—who were the ones gaining power.

The Enemy of My Enemy is My Friend—U.S. Gets in Bed with Lucky Luciano

At the outbreak of World War II, the U.S. government was aware of the shared hatred between Mussolini and the Mafia. And it didn't take them long to use it to their advantage. While the government would deny it for almost 40 years, a collaboration between the U.S. Office of Naval Intelligence and the Mafia—code-named Operation Underworld—began shortly after the SS *Normandie*, a captured French liner being retrofitted in New York's harbor for U.S. troop deployment, caught fire and capsized in early February 1942. Nazi sabotage was suspected.

Since German U-boats operating off the coast had already sunk more than a hundred U.S. merchant ships, Naval intelligence grew increasingly concerned that enemy spies were working along New York's waterfront. Their initial investigation went nowhere, as the tight-lipped longshoremen of the mob-controlled waterfront simply ignored them. So, the navy contacted Joseph "Socks" Lanza, someone with Mafia ties who ran the Fulton Fish Market. They wanted to know if he could help them ferret out Nazi spies or point out any Mussolini supporters among the mostly Italian-American fishermen and dockworkers.

The mob/navy collaboration started off well, but New York's waterfront covers a wide swath, and Lanza didn't control it all. "Socks" informed the navy there was only one man capable of "snapping the whip in the entire underworld"—the imprisoned "boss of bosses" Charles "Lucky" Luciano. Even after six years behind bars, Sicilian-born Luciano still wielded absolute power on the docks. Using Meyer Lansky as an intermediary, the Navy contacted Luciano and

they struck a deal—Luciano guaranteed the full cooperation of his organization in providing intelligence to the Navy for the duration of the war, and in return, the State of New York would commute Luciano’s sentence.

The public might have recoiled at the Navy’s secret arrangement with the country’s most vicious criminals, but under the Mafia’s watch, not a single act of sabotage, dock strike, or suspicious fire took place in New York for the rest of the war.

The Godfather Part II—Lucky Luciano Recalled for Allied Invasion of Sicily

By January of 1943, the Allies were on the offensive in the Mediterranean. Having defeated the Germans and Italians in North Africa, they were now ready to open a second European front—but where? After much debate, it was decided to invade Mussolini’s Italy—Churchill referred to it as “the soft underbelly of Nazi Europe.” To do this, they would first have to attack Sicily, in an amphibious invasion code-named “Operation Husky.”

Planning is critical for a difficult operation like an amphibious landing, so U.S. Naval Intelligence once again turned to Lucky Luciano. From his jail cell, Luciano used his Sicilian contacts to see that the navy was provided with maps of the island’s harbors, photographs of the coastline, and the names of trusted contacts in the Sicilian Mafia—who wanted nothing more than to see Mussolini crushed. Luciano even asked if he could personally join the fight in Sicily—his request for this potential public relations nightmare was quickly denied.

It is difficult to know what impact—if any—Luciano and his Sicilian connections had on Operation Husky. But it’s interesting to note that after American and British landing craft crashed through the waves to land on beaches of Sicily on the night of July 9, 1943, the two forces split. Montgomery’s British Eighth Army advanced north along Sicily’s eastern coast. They encountered stiff resistance, got bogged down constantly, and lost many lives. Patton’s Seventh Army had a much easier go of it as they cut across the western half of Sicily and took Palermo—and their casualties were just a fraction of those suffered by the British. Many think it wasn’t just a coincidence.

The War’s Aftermath—Death of Fascism and Rebirth of Sicilian Mafia

While Allied operations in Sicily were mopping up, on the Italian mainland Mussolini was placed under arrest. Italy’s new Prime Minister, Marshal Badoglio, immediately switched sides to the Allies, ending Fascism. The war would drag on for two more years, but Hitler’s “Fortress Europe” had been penetrated. Sicily, the first piece of the Axis homeland to fall to Allied forces, all but assured Germany’s defeat in World War II. In terms of the size of the landing area and number of troops put ashore on the first day, Operation Husky was bigger than Operation Overlord, the Allied invasion of Normandy that would overshadow the invasion of Sicily the following year.

The U.S. government, sympathetic to the plight of Sicilians, encouraged the new Italian government to grant the island the autonomy they had long desired, which they did in 1945. As thanks for their help in the liberation of Sicily—and as a bulwark against any future communist

leanings in Sicily—the U.S. army appointed local *mafiosi* mayors throughout the island and provided them with financial and other assistance. The Sicilian Mafia was soon restored to power in the post-Mussolini Italian Republic. They also kept their promise to Lucky Luciano.

After serving 9 1/2 years, Luciano's sentence was commuted on January 4, 1946—with the condition that he be immediately deported back to his native Italy (ironically, the person who got Luciano out of jail, New York Governor and former prosecutor Thomas E. Dewey, was the one who *put* Luciano in jail). He left in style, though. Luciano was in custody aboard the freighter *Laura Keene*, and the night before it sailed to Italy, all of New York's top gangsters came aboard with an Italian feast and champagne to bid him farewell—including Meyer Lansky, Frank Costello, Albert Anastasia, Bugsy Siegel, William Moretti, Tommy Lucchese, Joe Adonis, Stefano Magaddino—and three showgirls from the Copacabana Club.

Malta

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 121 square miles
- **Capital:** Valletta
- **Languages:** Maltese and English are the official languages.
- **Location:** Malta is an archipelago surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea.
- **Geography:** Located about 60 miles south of the Italian island of Sicily across the Malta Channel, Malta's three largest islands—Malta, Gozo, and Comino—are the only ones inhabited. Numerous bays along the indented coastline of the islands make excellent harbors. The islands' landscape consists of low hills with terraced fields. The highest point in Malta is Ta' Dmejrek, at 253 m (830 ft). Although there are some small rivers at times of high rainfall, there are no permanent rivers or lakes on Malta.
- **Population:** 502,653 (estimate)
- **Religion:** Roman Catholic 98%, Other 2%
- **Time Zone:** Malta is on Central European Time, six hours ahead of U.S. EST. When it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is noon in Valetta.

National Holidays: Malta

In addition to the holidays listed below, Malta celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar, such as Easter. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit www.timeanddate.com/holidays.

01/01 New Year's Day

02/10 Feast of St. Paul's Shipwreck

03/31 Freedom Day

05/01 Labor Day / May Day

06/07 Sette Giugno

08/15 Assumption Day

09/21 Independence Day

12/08 Feast of the Immaculate Conception

12/13 Republic Day

12/25 Christmas Day

Malta: A Brief History

Maltese history dates back more than 8,000 years to Neolithic times. Around 5200 B.C., farmers arrived from Sicily. During the Megalithic era they built great temples from 3600 B.C. to 2500 B.C., many of which still stand. During the Bronze Age, another group arrived from Sicily and their villages, temples, and other structures differed greatly from those of the original settlers.

In the 8th century B.C., Phoenicians occupied Malta. Mdina is thought to be one of their main urban centers based on the discovery of Phoenician tombs there. During the 6th century B.C., Malta was annexed by the Carthaginian Empire, becoming an important trading post between Italy and North Africa. It fell to Rome in 255 B.C. Malta thrived under Rome. A close relationship was formed with Sicily, Latin became the official language, and Roman religion was introduced.

The island continued to prosper until the 6th century A.D., when it was incorporated into the Byzantine Empire. The Byzantines fortified Malta's defenses due to Muslim conquests in the region. But by 870 A.D., Muslims from North Africa invaded and after a weeks-long siege, they killed all the inhabitants of the Byzantine city of Melite. The Muslims who settled here during the mid-11th century rebuilt much of the city. Under Arab rule, new irrigation techniques were introduced, locals were allowed to practice non-Muslim faiths (by paying a tax), the gastronomy expanded, and Arabic words entered the lexicon. The Arabic influence left a lasting impact.

In the late 11th century, Normans drove the Arabs from Malta and ruled the island as part of the Kingdom of Sicily. During this period, many people from southern Italy and Sicily migrated to Malta. After being bought and sold multiple times, Malta was joined with Spain. As the Ottoman Empire continued its expansion in the early 16th century, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (of Spain) feared a Turkish takeover of Europe. As a bulwark against this, he gave Malta to the Knights of St. John. During their 400-year reign, the Knights made Italian the official language and developed the island by building palaces, churches, and fortifications. They repelled the Turks in the epic Siege of Malta in 1565, despite being severely outnumbered. Following the Great Siege, the Knights founded Valletta, which remains the capital of Malta to this day.

With the Ottoman threat removed, the Knights grew powerful and rich, using their military skill to expand into surrounding areas, often using outright piracy. The Knights controlled Malta until 1798, when Napoleon kicked them out. But the French were quickly defeated by Britain, who invited the Knights back in 1802. In 1814, Malta became a British colony.

In 1921, the British granted Malta legislative control over local affairs, but held control over foreign and military issues. In the early days of World War II, Britain underestimated the strategic importance of Malta and left it undefended until June 11, 1940, when Italian bombers attacked Grand Harbour. With only three biplanes, Malta mounted a heroic defense. Soon, the island became “Fortress Malta,” a major haven for Allied aircraft and submarines. The Maltese people showed great courage and earned Malta the George Cross of Britain for heroism.

Malta finally gained independence in 1964 and in 1974, Malta became a republic. Malta was under the power of the Nationalist Party from 1962 to 1971, at which time the Labour Party took control of the government. The government has gone back and forth between the two parties and in 2004, Malta was accepted into the European Union. Malta’s economy expanded rapidly when Malta became part of the Eurozone in 2008.

Labour’s Joseph Muscat became Prime Minister in 2012, but his government was rocked by scandals including money laundering and a citizenship-for-investment scheme. It was reported by journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia. After her 2017 assassination, members of Muscat’s government were arrested and Muscat resigned. A January 2020 special election elected Robert Abela Prime Minister.

Tunisia

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 63,170 square miles
- **Capital:** Tunis
- **Languages:** Arabic (official); French and Berber are also spoken.
- **Location:** Tunisia is located in northern Africa, bordered by Algeria to the west, Libya to the southeast, and the Mediterranean Sea to the north and northeast.
- **Geography:** The Tunisian coast is rather jagged and irregular, which makes for many fine bays, coves, and harbors. It’s most notable ports are Bizerte, Qabis, Safaqis, and Susah. The Atlas Mountains run through the north, though the Tunisian peaks are mostly below 4,000 feet tall. To the south, the Chott Djerid, a massive salt lake, acts as an eerie prelude to the Sahara Desert, which stretches to the Algerian and Libyan borders.
- **Population:** 11,516,189 (Estimate)
- **Religions:** Muslim 99%, Other 1%

- **Time zone:** Tunisia is on Central European Time, six hours ahead of U.S. EST. When it is 5am in Washington D.C., it is 10am in Tunis. Tunisia does not observe Daylight Savings, therefore Tunisia is only 5 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time when Daylight Savings is in effect.

National Holidays: Tunisia

In addition to the holidays listed below, Tunisia celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar, such as Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit www.timeanddate.com/holidays.

01/01 New Year's Day

01/14 Revolution and Youth Day

03/20 Independence Day

04/09 Martyrs' Day

05/01 Labour Day

07/25 Republic Day

10/15 Evacuation Day

Tunisia: A Brief History

Tunisia's history is long and complex, which makes it one of the most fascinating countries in the world to visit. Over three millennia, it has been coveted, conquered, and re-conquered by tribes and countries seeking its fertile northern lands, a rare commodity in the Sahara region. Others sought its valuable position as a strategic power center. With Sicily so close to its north, the maritime passage and trade between the two countries and into the eastern Mediterranean could be controlled.

Phoenicians from today's Lebanon were the first on record to settle on the coast—3,000 years ago in the tenth century, B.C. Four hundred years later, their city of Carthage grew into a major metropolis, second in size only to Alexandria, Egypt, and dominated the western Mediterranean. As Rome looked to expand their empire, Carthage became an obstacle. And over a period of 120 years (264 to 146 B.C.), the three Punic Wars, during which Hannibal's army made its now famous Alps crossing on elephants, revealed Rome as the victor. Carthage was relegated as a granary for the empire.

In the fifth century, the East Germanic Vandal tribe took over Tunisia from the west. Byzantine rule followed in the sixth century, and Arab in the seventh. During Arab rule, many Berbers were converted to Islam. Those who resisted conversion grew into a frequent source of rebellion against subsequent dynasties. Other takeovers followed: the Aghlabids and Zurids in the ninth and tenth centuries; Fatimid caliphs in the tenth and eleventh centuries, who went on to found the city of Cairo; and Sicilian Normans and Moroccan Almohad caliphs in the twelfth century. This was followed by a long rule (1230–1574) by the Berber Hafsid, during which Tunisia prospered. As the Hafsids' power weakened, Spain exerted control over some of Tunisia's coastal cities, until the Ottoman Turks claimed the region for Islam in 1574. The Turkish beys, or governors, declared independence for Tunisia. This was around the time that pirates roamed the north African coast, pillaging unfortunate ships and earning these waters the name of "Barbary Coast," a reference that some attribute to the barbarism of their actions and others to Berber tribes. Turkish rule lasted until 1957.

But Turkish Tunisia was not financially stable, and the bey turned to France for support. By the mid 1800s, the French had cause for concern as debts increased with no sign of repayment. They wrested control of the African nation's finances, with support from the British and Italians, in 1869. France eventually called Tunisia their own with the treaties of Bardo and Mersa in the 1880s, which put France in charge under a protectorate arrangement with a French general. Tunisian nationalists emerged and in 1920 the Destour, or Constitutional, party was formed with an eye toward liberation from France. Meanwhile, Habib Bourguiba formed the Neo-Destour party, a more extreme group that claimed to be more in touch with the desires of the majority.

France fell to the Germans in June 1940, and Tunisia fell under Vichy rule. Tunisians couldn't know that their country would become a stage for the most dramatic conflict of the North Africa campaign against the Nazis. This was the site of the Allies' first major operation in the war.

Post-war nationalist fervor grew, with Bourguiba driving for independence at the helm. But the still-ruling French resisted major reforms and talks of independence fizzled. In 1952, Bourguiba was imprisoned, leading to a wave of unrest. But three years later, Tunisia was granted complete self-government, followed by full independence in 1956. Habib Bourguiba was made Prime Minister. The newly placed assembly deposed the bey, Sidi Lamine, and a republic was declared in 1957. Bourguiba's focus was on modernization and economic growth for his largely agricultural country.

In 1987, General Zine El Abidine Ben Ali became president. Ben Ali's regime repaired Libyan relations and opened trade with Algeria, Mauritania, and Morocco. Socially, Ben Ali at first took a liberal stance, but reneged after Islamic activists dominated the 1989 elections—and in fact he took strong measures against their rise. In the 1994 elections, Ben Ali forbade the Islamic party Al Nahda from taking part, even arresting some of its dissidents. The result was 100% support by all legal opposition parties—and 100% of the vote.

Over the next decade, Ben Ali continued to maintain his position as president. And while his economic reforms strengthened Tunisia's economy, the ever-increasing discontent over high unemployment, police and political corruption, and a lack of freedom of speech outweighed the economic gains. In December 2010 a widespread series of protests and strikes inspired by these issues and other political concerns forced Ben Ali to resign and his party (the RCD) to dissolve.

With Ben Ali's departure to Saudi Arabia, a state of emergency was declared and a caretaker government put into place to give the country enough time to organize elections. But as many of the ministers had strong ties to the now-defunct RCD, there continued to be a reshuffling in top positions. Eventually Beji Caid Essebsi took over as Prime Minister and announced that elections to a Constitutional Assembly would be held on June 24, 2011; Mohamed Moncef Marzouki was sworn in as the 5th President of Tunisia in December 2011.

In January 2021, Kais Saied, the 8th President of Tunisia, was faced with national protests against police brutality, the economy, and the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. In response, Saied dismissed the Prime Minister, Hichem Mechichi, and dissolved the Parliament. Saied's actions were protested by human rights organizations as a self-coup. Amidst the backlash, Saied announced he would rule by decree and instated Najla Bouden as Prime Minister, the first woman to have such a position in the Arab world.

Saied implemented a constitutional referendum vote in July 2022, after having suspended the Supreme Judicial Council. Saied won the referendum with a majority 90% of voters voting for Saied (of a 30.5% turnout).

Italy

Facts, Figures & National Holidays

- **Area:** 116,348 square miles
- **Capital:** Rome
- **Languages:** Italian is the official language; German, French, and Slovene are also spoken in towns near the borders of Austria, France, and Slovenia.
- **Ethnicity:** Italian, with small clusters of German-, French-, and Slovene-Italians in the north and Albanian- and Greek-Italians in the south
- **Location:** Italy is bordered by France, Slovenia, Austria, Switzerland, the Ligurian Sea, the Tyrrhenian Sea, the Ionian Sea, the Adriatic Sea, and the Mediterranean Sea.
- **Geography:** Italy lies in southern Europe and includes the Mediterranean islands of Sicily, Sardinia, and several other small islands. The region of Tuscany is a blend of rugged hills, fertile valleys, and long stretches of sandy beaches that curve along the west coast of central Italy and fringe the pine-forested coastal plain of the Maremma. Sicily enjoys mountains in the north and east, a vast central plateau, and a fertile coastline dotted with sea-level resort towns.
- **Population:** 58,853,482 (estimate)
- **Religions:** Christian 80% (overwhelming Roman Catholic), Atheists and Agnostics 20%, Muslims estimated at less than 2%
- **Time Zone:** Italy is on Central European Time, six hours ahead of U.S. EST. When it is 6am in Washington D.C., it is noon in Rome. Daylight Saving Time begins the last weekend in March and ends the last weekend in October.

National Holidays: Italy

In addition to the holidays listed below, Italy celebrates a number of national holidays that follow a lunar calendar, such as Easter. To find out if you will be traveling during these holidays, please visit www.timeanddate.com/holidays.

01/01 New Year's Day

01/06 Epiphany

04/25 Liberation Day

05/01 Labor Day

06/02 Republic Day

08/15 Assumption of Mary

11/01 All Saints' Day

12/08 Feast of the Immaculate Conception

12/25 Christmas Day

12/26 St. Stephen's Day

Italy: A Brief History

Italy proudly wears the mantle of Rome, the polity from which so much of Italy's historical, cultural, and religious heritage has derived. But even though the Romans were the first to unify the peninsula, they were not the first to dominate it. That honor goes to the Etruscans, whose empire, Etruria, reached its zenith in the 7th century BC. It was centered between the Arno and Tiber rivers, mostly in Tuscany. The Etruscans were farmers, miners, seafarers and warriors, but they were riven by factionalism and in 509 BC, their last king was tossed out by Ligurian-Latin nobles in the small town of Rome. Tired of monarchs, they created the first Roman Republic.

Etruscan culture disappeared by the 2nd century AD, but the Romans were quick to appropriate many aspects of the Greek culture that had taken root in southern Italy and Sicily, where there were Hellenic colonies called "Magna Graecia." As the colonies were absorbed, so were Greek religion, architecture, and the basic tenets of democracy. During the 1st century BC, Julius Caesar defeated Gaul, making Rome the ruler of the entire Mediterranean world. After Caesar's assassination in 44 B.C., his nephew Octavian, later called Augustus, became Rome's first official emperor. The capital became an architectural showcase, and new territories stretched across Europe into Asia Minor, existing under a "Pax Romana" that brought prosperity and stability.

Pax Romana declined in the 3rd century A.D. thanks to inept and corrupt emperors, and attacks by outside barbarians. Rome eventually embraced Christianity in 313 under Constantine I, who established an eastern capital in Constantinople. But splitting the Rome into western (Roman) and eastern (Byzantine) halves did not halt the empire's demise. The eastern Roman empire fell in 476, and though the Byzantine half survived, it never regained the full might of Rome. In 800, Italy was briefly reunited under Charlemagne, but soon disintegrated into squabbling kingdoms.

Italian culture peaked during the 15th and 16th-century Renaissance. The independent city-states formed a delicate balance of power, with ruling families (such as the Sforzas, Borgias, and the Medicis) funding a golden age of art, invention, and intellectual activity that produced some of the greatest figures of Western civilization—Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Dante Alighieri, Brunelleschi, Galileo, and others. It did not, however, stop the rival families from fighting.

By the 19th century, many Italians believed that they could function as a single nation, a belief spearheaded by the general Giuseppe Garibaldi. Independence was declared in 1861, and by 1870, the nation was consolidated under King Victor Emmanuel II. Italy was ruled as a monarchy and joined the Allies in World War I. But the 1920s ushered in a dark era as Benito Mussolini organized discontented Italians into the Fascist Party to “rescue Italy from Bolshevism.” What he delivered was a totalitarian state. Mussolini joined with Hitler and fought the Allies during World War II, during which 400,000 people were killed, hundreds of thousands were left homeless, and the economy was ruined. In 1945, Mussolini was captured and killed by partisans.

Italy was again declared a republic in 1946, but remained seriously divided during the postwar era by political extremes. Governments rose and fell, and in the 1970s, a series of terrorist acts by the left-wing Red Brigades threatened stability. By the early 1980s, the terrorists had been suppressed, but public discontent spilled into the 1990s as inflation and ongoing scandals involving public officials and the Mafia altered Italian politics. Parties dissolved, new ones formed, and new alliances emerged. This led to the election of media mogul Silvio Berlusconi as Prime Minister in 1994. But within a year, Berlusconi was forced to resign. He ran again in 2001 and was reelected, setting up a pattern that repeated for more than a decade: Berlusconi has been Prime Minister three separate times between 1994–2011, and continues to remain a political force despite having been convicted of tax fraud.

The previous Prime Minister, independent Giuseppe Conte, was elected in 2018 and heads up a populist coalition. Among his accomplishments have been the introduction of a national guaranteed minimum income, the nationalization of several companies, stricter immigration policies, and the western world’s first national lockdown in response to COVID-19. The current Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, Italy’s first female Prime Minister, was sworn in on October 22nd, 2022. Meloni is a member of the right-wing, national-conservative party, Brothers of Italy, a party that is considered to be the most right-wing party in power in Italy since World War II.

RESOURCES

Suggested Reading

Sicily

The Florios of Sicily by Stefania Auci (2020, Historical Fiction) This sweeping epic is based on an entrepreneurial dynasty that dominated Sicily for more than a century. In 1799, after a devastating earthquake forces them to flee Catania, the Florios arrive in Palermo with nothing, and then grow their small spice shop into an international shipping juggernaut. Auci casts a shrewd eye on the lives of the Florio women, who unapologetically demand their place alongside their husbands, fathers, sons and lovers despite the rigid constrictions of class and gender.

Sicily: A Short History, from the Greeks to Cosa Nostra by Julius Norwich (2016, History) A well written introduction to the history of Sicily by a knowledgeable expert who has been studying it since 1961. Norwich says that “The Strait of Messina is only a couple of miles across and the island is politically part of Italy; yet somehow one feels that one has entered a different world,” and then explains why this is so.

Sicily: A Literary Guide for Travellers by Andrew and Suzanne Edwards (2014, History) Part guidebook, part history, and wholly enjoyable, this literary journey begins in Palermo and works its way counter-clockwise around Sicily, village by village. The authors trace the Sicilian paths of famous writers from Pindar to Puzo, sharing passages from their work, practical tips, and anecdotes about illustrious visitors like Oscar Wilde, Cary Grant, Winston Churchill, Truman Capote, Marlene Dietrich and more kings and queens than you can shake a scepter at.

On Persephone’s Island: A Sicilian Journal by Mary Taylor Simeti (1995, Memoir) An American expert on Sicilian medieval and culinary history describes her life as an expatriate who splits her time between Palermo and managing her family’s working farm in the Sicilian countryside. The book is filled with insights into Sicilian food, cooking, and customs; the corrosive influence of the Mafia; and the titular Greek goddess whose dual existence parallels Simeti’s own life, and that of Sicily itself.

Sicilian Carousel by Lawrence Durrell (1977, Travel Writing) The esteemed author departs from his usual style of writing (and traveling) in this tale about his bus tour around Sicily with a mixed bag of companions. Along the way he shares his growing understanding of Sicilian (and Mediterranean) culture, hilarious anecdotes, previously unpublished poems, and a selection of evocative engravings. Sicily comes alive with wit and affection.

Malta

Return to Malta by Anne Fiorentino Pflug (2018, Travel Memoir) The author, a native Maltese, visits several locations that prompt personal memories, as well as the fresh impressions of foreign friends who are discovering her home for the first time.

The Knights Hospitaller: A Military History of the Knights of St John by John Car (2017, History) Traces the roots of this powerful and prestigious order from its humble origins as innkeepers and health caregivers for pilgrims to the Holy Land; to its consolidation as one of the wealthiest Christian military orders; to its present disintegration into numerous chivalric and charitable groups.

Empires of the Sea: The Siege of Malta, the Battle of Lepanto, and the Contest for the Center of the World by Roger Crowley (2008, History) In this New York Times bestseller, the author explores important moments in the decades-long battle between Christendom and Islam in Malta and the surrounding areas of Europe. Crowley, a respected narrative historian, delivers a gripping account of the brutal struggle for supremacy in the Mediterranean that reads more like a page-turning thriller.

The Religion by Tim Willocks (2007, Historical Fiction) This sprawling epic based on the Siege of Malta in 1565 vividly brings to life the clash between Islam and Christianity with Suleiman the Magnificent pitted against the Knights of Saint John the Baptist in their Christian stronghold on the island of Malta. Packed with graphic violence, intrigue, and romance, the book holds its own in the pantheon of great historical fiction.

Death in Malta by Rosanne Dingli (2005, Mystery) This story follows a novelist as he flees to Malta to avoid his crumbling marriage and seek inspiration for his next novel. He finds it when he discovers that a child has gone missing from his new village.

Tunisia

Tunisian Mosaics, Treasures from Roman Africa by Aicha Ben Abed (2006, Art) Aicha Ben Abed introduces the history of Roman Africa and the rise of Mediterranean mosaics, the art of private citizens rather than the imperial Roman court. Lots of glorious illustrations, plus updates on current methods of preservation.

A History of Modern Tunisia by Kenneth Perkins (2004, History) A more in-depth look at Tunisian history than the Traveller's History listed above. Perkins explores the history of Tunisia from the mid-19th century to the present, with an examination of French colonial rule from 1881 to 1956, when the Tunisians achieved independence, and the subsequent process of state-building.

Behind Closed Doors: Women's Oral Narratives in Tunis by Monia Hejaiej (1996, Fiction) This book presents 47 tales told by three Beldi women—members of a historic society—in Tunis. The Arabic language and customs of Islam are firmly rooted in this community. Tale-telling is important to all Beldi women, and these three women tell stories which echo their life experience and have deep meanings for them. Their tales reflect accepted moral codes, and yet many depict attitudes, relationships, and practices that contradict established norms. These contradictory visions offer a kaleidoscopic view of the position of women in the rich life of a historic North African city.

Hannibal and Scipio by Ross Leckie (1995, Historical Fiction) The first two books of the Punic War Trilogy by a classicist who draws on historical sources and presents the stories as personal memoirs, first of Hannibal and then of his rival Scipio Africanus. A third book entitled *Carthage* was also released in 2010.

The Pillar of Salt by Albert Memmi (1955, History) This semi-autobiographical novel follows a young boy growing up in French-colonized Tunisia. In order to gain access to the privileges of French society, he must assimilate and reject many aspects of his identity—his religion, culture, and family. On the brink of World War II, he confronts anti-Semitism in Tunis and the Nazi occupation of Tunisia.

Italy

Princes of the Renaissance by Mary Hollingsworth (2021, History) An exploration of the lives and times of the aristocratic elite whose patronage sparked the art and architecture of the Renaissance in fifteenth and sixteenth century Italy.

Absolute Monarchs: A History of the Papacy by John Julius Norwich (2011, History) A deeper look into the most significant popes in history and what they meant politically, culturally, and socially to Rome and the rest of the world.

La Bella Figura: A Field Guide to the Italian Mind by Beppe Severgnini (2007, Nonfiction/Humor) An Italian columnist and best-selling author journeys through his homeland while providing hilarious observations at the beautiful face Italy shows to the world, and the chaotic, garrulous, and often contradictory impulses that lie behind it.

The Monster of Florence by Douglas Preston and Mario Spezi (2008, Non Fiction) A remarkable true story by best-selling author Douglas Preston who, with Italian investigative journalist Mario Spezi, try to track down the identity of a serial killer known as the Monster of Florence.

History by Elsa Morante (1974, Fiction) A half-Jewish, Roman mother tries to survive in WWII Rome with her two sons. Though the main characters are fictional, each chapter opens with an factual account of real events that happened when the action takes place.

Suggested Films & Videos

Sicily

The Mafia Kills Only in the Summer (2013, Comedy/Drama). Aspiring journalist, Arturo Giammarresi, grows up in Palermo during the rise of the Antimafia movement in the 1970s to the 1990s. Arturo watches life around him change as the long-hidden mafia falls into the public eye while also vying for the attention of his long-time crush, Flora.

Cinema Paradiso (1989, Drama/Comedy) The Oscar-winning Best Foreign Film of 1989. A famous director flashes back to his childhood in Sicily upon the death of his mentor, a projectionist at the local cinema who inspired his love of film and gave him the courage to leave home to follow

his dream. The film was shot in several Sicilian locales, including Cefalù and the hometown of director Giuseppe Tornatore, Bagheria. A sentimental and funny coming of age story that beautifully evokes the charm of Sicilian village life. Italian with English subtitles.

L'Avventura (1976, Drama) If you want to take a cinematic road trip through Sicily, this moody classic (directed by Michelangelo Antonioni) will transport you to Palermo, Messina, Syracuse, the Aeolian Islands, Mount Etna and beyond. Along the way, you'll be engrossed in the mystery of Anna, a young woman who disappears during a Mediterranean yacht cruise. Her wealthy lover and her best friend set out to solve the mystery and begin their own liaison—which is not exactly a romance, but an attempt to dispel the ennui of their lives. Italian with English subtitles.

The Godfather Trilogy (1972, 1974, 1990) All three parts of Francis Ford Coppola's masterwork had substantial scenes set in Sicily, where key events in the fictional Corleone family's life unfold—including the saga's grandly operatic climax filmed on the steps of Palermo's Teatro Massimo. The actual village of Corleone was too modern to evoke the 1940s feel Coppola was after, so Forza d'Agro, just outside Taormina, was used as a stand-in. Other scenes were filmed in Taormina, Messina, and Fiumefreddo in Catania.

The Leopard (*Il Gattopardo*) (1963, Drama) Based on the bestselling novel of the same name by Giuseppe di Lampedusa, this early Luchino Visconti film is a poignant and powerful meditation on change, loyalty and love set in 1860 Sicily. Burt Lancaster stars as the aging Sicilian prince Salina, who struggles to preserve his family's dignity and wellbeing as Garibaldi's republican troops press to unify Italy and change Sicilian life forever. The all-star cast includes Alain Delon, Terence Hill, and a stunning Claudia Cardinale in her debut role. Italian with English subtitles.

Malta

Simshar (2013, Drama) based on true events, this story follows parallel plot lines about a Maltese family on a boating vacation, and would-be North African migrants caught in the political crossfire between Italy and Malta as to who will take them in. Both parties become stranded at sea, with heartbreaking results. An Oscar nominee for Best Foreign Film.

The Battle for Malta (2013, Documentary) This highly acclaimed 60-minute documentary presented by British historian James Holland for BBC Two depicts the horrors Malta faced during WWII when more bombs were dropped on the tiny island than all of Britain during the Blitz. Available on YouTube

The Malta Story (1953, War/Romance). Pretty decent British war flick detailing the story of Malta coming under siege during the Second World War when both Allied and Axis forces realize how vital the island is to their supply lines—with RAF reconnaissance pilot (played by Alec Guinness) playing a crucial role in defending it from the advancing enemy forces.

The Maltese Falcon (1941, Mystery). We know that this great Humphrey Bogart mystery drama was entirely shot in America and doesn't have much to do with Malta, but it never gets old. Watch it again and consider its whole premise—a hunt for the jewel-encrusted Golden Falcon given to Charles V of Spain by the Knight Templars of Malta as a tribute for the islands.

Tunisia

Gladiator (2000, Action) Although this historical drama of a Roman general forced to become a gladiator to survive is largely centered around Rome, the scenes set in Roman North Africa could easily be in Classical-era Tunisia.

Star Wars (1977–2019, Science Fiction) This popular science fiction saga entered the cinematic stage in 1977 to tell the story of a rebel alliance fighting against the tyranny of an evil empire. Four movies in the saga (Episodes I–IV) feature scenes filmed in Tunisia, including that of the desert planet Tatooine. *Episode IV: A New Hope* introduces the hero of the original trilogy on his home planet with stunning views of the sandy vistas.

Desert Fox: The Story of Rommel (1951, Drama) Desert Fox portrays the life of German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel at the end of WWII. It tracks Rommel's career beginning with a failed campaign in North Africa and ending with his eventual decision to join in a conspiracy against Hitler.

Italy

The Life Ahead (2020, Drama) At 86, Sophia Loren makes her first screen appearance in ten years in this Netflix original, filmed in Puglia. And it's a stunner. She plays Madame Rosa, a Holocaust survivor who takes in the children of local sex workers. A neighbor asks her to care for Momo, a Senegalese refugee whose delinquency may be too much for Rosa, whose own tormented past is catching up to her.

The Tourist (2010, Thriller) Beautiful Elise (Angelina Jolie) has a mysterious off-screen lover, Pearce, who has fled England and is wanted by both Scotland Yard and the mob. He tells Elise to entrap an unwitting tourist (Johnny Depp), who will be mistaken for Pearce (who is rumored to have altered his appearance), and arrested in his place. This convoluted caper plays out beautifully in Venice's mysterious alleys, romantic canals, and opulent palaces.

Rome (2005–07, Television Series) This multiple Emmy-winner from HBO deftly weaves the stories of fictional and real characters (Julius Caesar, Octavian, Marc Antony, Cleopatra, etc.) during Rome's 1st century BC transition from a republic to an empire. Outstanding production values and a stellar cast.

The Merchant of Venice (2004, Drama) Al Pacino gives us one of the most masterful portrayals on stage or screen of Shakespeare's tragic moneylender, Shylock. He receives strong support from Jeremy Irons and Joseph Fiennes, and Venice itself, where much of the production was filmed. The city looks so enticing, it's a wonder that Pacino did not chew up the scenery.

Life Is Beautiful (1997) Roberto Benigni is the lead actor and director of this heart-wrenching comedy/drama about a Jewish Italian bookshop owner in Mussolini's Italy who tries to shield his son from the horrors of a Nazi concentration camp. Italian with English subtitles.

Useful Websites

Grand Circle Forum (tips from previous travelers)

www.gct.com/forum

Grand Circle Frequently Asked Questions

www.gct.com/faq

**International Health Information/CDC
(Centers for Disease Control)**

www.cdc.gov/travel

Electricity & Plugs

[www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/
plugs-and-sockets](http://www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/plugs-and-sockets)

Foreign Exchange Rates

www.xe.com/currencyconverter
www.oanda.com/converter/classic

ATM Locators

www.mastercard.com/atm
www.visa.com/atmlocator

World Weather

www.intellicast.com
www.weather.com
www.wunderground.com

Basic Travel Phrases (80 languages)

www.travlang.com/languages

Packing Tips

www.travelite.org

U.S. Customs & Border Protection

www.cbp.gov/travel

Transportation Security

Administration (TSA)

www.tsa.gov

National Passport Information Center

www.travel.state.gov

Holidays Worldwide

www.timeanddate.com/holidays

Useful Apps

Flight Stats

Track departures, arrivals, and flight status

LoungeBuddy

Get access to premium airport lounges around the world

Timeshifter

Personalized tips for avoiding jetlag, based on neuroscience and your own data

GoogleMaps or Maps.me

Maps and directions anywhere in the world

Triposo

City guides, walking maps, and more – and it works offline

Rome2rio

Where to go, what to see, and what to do in more than 160 countries

Flush or Sit or Squat

Find a clean toilet anywhere

Uber or Bolt or Grab

Ride sharing around the world

Visa Plus and Mastercard Cirrus

ATM locations

Shows the location of the nearest ATM in your network

TunnelBear

Provides a secure VPN (virtual private network) that will encrypt your browsing data when you use a public WiFi network

What's App or Skype or Signal

WiFi calling anywhere in the world

Duolingo, FLuentU, or Babbel

Learn dozens of foreign languages

Google Translate

Fast and simple translations

XE

Currency conversions

SizeGuide

Clothing and shoe sizes in all countries

Best Units Converter

Converts currency, mileage, weights, and many other units of measurement

Happy Cow

Locate vegan and vegetarian eateries in 195 countries

Eatwith

Dine with locals all over the world

Meetup

Connects you with locals who share your interests

Skyview

Identifies constellations and heavenly bodies

Travello

Find travel friends on the road

TripWhistle

Maps your location and provides emergency numbers for police, medics, and more

GeoSure

Safely navigate neighborhoods around the world

Tourlina

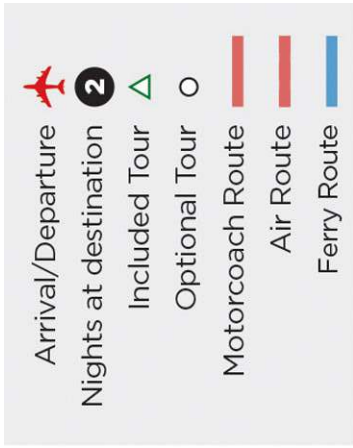
For women only, it connects you with other female travelers

ALIX for One

Created by and for women, it identifies solo-friendly dining spots in major international cities

Chirpey

For women only, connect with other women, find out what's safe, meet up, and more



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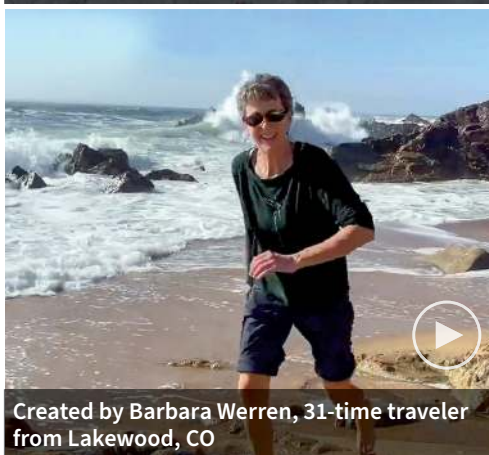
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