

# WESTERN SICILY



## ITINERARY:

Our **9 days/8 nights Western Sicily** trip covers the island's West: bustling Arab and Norman Palermo; the classic sites of Segesta, Selinunte and Erice; and ends in 'wine country' with a stay at Baglio Soria, near Trapani, Firriato's main estate producing some of Sicily's best quality wines. Lovely accommodation and some of Sicily's great culinary and winemaking traditions are highlights of the trip and we are accompanied throughout by an excellent local guide.

### Day 1

We meet at Palazzo Natoli, our Palermo boutique hotel (3 nights). It is located in the pedestrianised central downtown, on Corso Vittorio Emanuele. If there is time we shall take an afternoon stroll to visit the area of Porta Marina, where the founding Carthaginians first landed and settled.

### Day 2

Today we explore Palermo's historical centre on foot. We shall show you some well known sights but also surprisingly little-visited gems from the Moorish, Norman, and Medieval periods. We shall punctuate our cultural itinerary with a stroll and lunch in a lively food market and will make the obligatory stops for coffee and pastries. In the afternoon we visit the Teatro Massimo, Palermo's main opera house.

### Day 3

This morning we continue exploring central Palermo. Once the capital of the fabulously rich Moorish and Norman kingdoms, the city is full of treasures such as the Palazzo dei Normanni with its Palatine Chapel. A brief drive takes us to lunch and the Benedictine Medieval monastic complex of Monreale, one of the grandest and best preserved in the world. The interior of the cathedral is covered in late C12th mosaics, the largest single expanse of Christian mosaics in the world!

### Day 4

Departure for the port city of Marsala. On the way we stop to visit Segesta's extensive archeological site. This surprisingly isolated UNESCO WHS has one of Sicily's best known but incomplete classical temples and a hill top theatre offering unrivalled views of the surrounding country. We lunch on the way at an historical 'Baglio' (Traditional fortified farmstead) once belonging to Florio, until WWII Sicily's wealthiest family.



Later in the afternoon we proceed to Marsala.

This coastal city, whose name is derived from the Arabic for 'The Port of Allah', has Carthaginian origins tracing back to 397 BC, when it was known as Lilybaeum. Nowadays the Baroque port city is associated with the start of Garibaldi's Italian unification campaign and with fortified wine. On arrival we visit and do a Marsala wine tasting at the historical Cantine Florio.

Hotel Viacolvento, a restored Palazzo in the walled city, is our home for 2 nights.

### Day 5

A day dedicated to exploring the coast around Marsala. First stop is Baglio Anselmi Archeological Museum, which houses the only example of a Punic warship; excavated from the sea bottom by the British marine archeologist Honor Frost. There are also many other finds from local Punic and Roman sites and wrecks. We then board a boat to visit the 'Stagnone', a shallow lagoon to the west of Marsala with ancient salt pans and the Island of St Pantaleo, site of the archeological remains of Carthaginian Motya. Sea salt from here was exported to Norway to salt the cod that in turn allowed Portuguese sailors to hugely increase their navigational range and thus to initiate the Age of Exploration.

In late afternoon we stroll through the centre of Marsala. Its Norman cathedral is the first church to have been dedicated to St Thomas Becket (His family obtained refuge in Sicily during his exile from England). The British connection does not end here as it was the Englishman John Woodhouse who started the first fortified wine (Marsala) business here in 1796.

### Day 6

We depart for Trapani, by way of the wonderfully rural Selinunte, where we spend the morning wondering this extensive classical site (Greek and later Carthaginian) on foot.

After lunch we continue through the heart of Sicily's 'wine country' to Firriato's Baglio Soria (3nights). Our accommodation is immersed in vineyards and olive groves. Firriato Wines is among Sicily's best known producers of high quality wines.

### Day 7

We spend the day in Erice, the ancient Eryx, associated with both Aeneas and Heracles. At 750m above sea level this fortified Medieval town offers unrivalled views of the NW point of Sicily. In antiquity Elymians, Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Greeks, and Romans conquered it, with the city becoming an important cult centre for seafarers who worshipped at the great temple dedicated first to the Punic goddess Astarte and later to Venus. Erice is also justly renowned for its almond pastries.

### Day 8

Exploration of Trapani, the main port city in western Sicily, with a crescent-shaped coastline and a distinctively Moorish feel. At the tip, offering views as far as the Aegadi Islands, is the 17th-century Torre di Ligny watchtower. North of the harbor, the Chiesa del Purgatorio church holds wooden sculptures that are paraded around the city during Easter's Processione dei Misteri. Despite its ancient history in the C18th Trapani's lovely historical centre was filled with grand Baroque palazzi and offers stunning sea views from the Spanish ramparts. We lunch in a well known restaurant before returning to Baglio Soria.

### Day 9

A group transfer takes us back to Palermo Airport and flights back home.

