

Tour of Sicily May 26- June 6 2008 (or around those dates)

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Dear interested parties:

I am working in putting together a tour of Sicily for about 10-12 days (to be decided) around May 26-June 6 or 7, 2008. The goal of this tour is to acquaint you with the landscape, art, history, culture and cuisine of Sicily. At the same time, those of you who have an understanding of spoken Italian will profit from a linguistic immersion.

➤ **Air fare:**

I have looked into some airlines, British Airways, Alitalia to have a sense about the cost of the air traveling and it looks around from a low of \$1,200 for British Airlines (but with having to stay overnight in London to take the connection to Catania or Palermo), to around \$1,800 with Alitalia Chicago-Catania or Palermo. I have worked in the past with David Steinberg of Educational Travel and will see what he can find, but probably no much better.

➤ **Accommodations/Lodging:**

My idea is to select about 3 to 4 places in different parts of Sicily, where we will stay approximately 2-3 days and from these places to take day trips to nearby sites.

I am looking into Agriturismo accommodation, which is country homes or villas where one can savor the products of the land and some relative quietness. Almost every place we will stay will be a few kilometers from the seashores and beaches. One or two, in the city of Palermo could be a B&B.

Estimate cost of lodging: The cost for a double room accommodation (two people per room) is about \$60- 70 per day per person, breakfast included)

➤ **Transportation within the island:**

A small bus or van – I am still expecting estimates –this cost will be divided by the number of participants

➤ **Meals:**

Agriturismo accommodations are usually reasonable and desirable in terms of quality and taste.

➤ **Tickets for the Play:**

Greek theater in Siracusa go around 46-50 euros (\$ approx. \$75.00)

➤ **Sicily at a Glance:**

Sicily is not a huge Island, but it is the largest Island of the Mediterranean. There are more than 5 millions of people living in the island. The names of the sites contemplated in this tour may not suggest much to you until you read about them. The island was settled by a number of civilizations, each living its own imprint, which can still be seen and experienced as a stratification of architectural forms, tastes in food and cuisine, mores and customs, language inflections, physiognomy, mannerism, etc. The majority of the sites we will visit are Unesco World Heritage monuments.

There are prehistoric settlements all around the island, but the first accounted are by the Phoenicians/Cathagenians in the VII centuries B.C. (Mozia) in the western part of the island. The major settlement was by the Greek around the V century who conquered most of the island and called it the Magna Grecia. Splendid cities such as Siracusa, Agrigento, Segesta were founded and prospered with immense temples and amphitheatres still standing and preserved and used for open-air performances. The Roman followed and blended into the Greek style. In the VIII century A.D. the Mores from the Middle East occupied gradually the Island at the same time that they also occupied Spain. They built cities, castles and fortresses all around the inland and the coastal areas; they brought citrus, almonds, and other exotic fruits and spices still cultivated in Sicily. Aromas and ingredients that are a legacy of this civilization affect Sicilian cuisine, especially in the Palermo area. In the 11th centuries, the Normans from the French Normandy dispelled the Arabs and built their own Christian cathedral and palaces using Arab artists and artisans. The following colonization and occupations are by French and Spanish, this last one lasted up to the unification of Italy as a nation state in 1861.

Unlike the rest of Italy, Sicily offers a multitude of different forms of art, spanning from Phoenicians to Baroque, and this can be even found in the same place at times. To this it needed to be added the particular location of the island in the southern most part of Europe, basically across from North Africa by a mere 150 kilometers (from Tunisi); its climate, dry and fully Mediterranean; its elevated landscape, mostly hills and mountains offering constant panoramic views. Sicily used to be called in Roman times the “granary of the Empire,” but now is perhaps the “citrus and fruit garden” of Europe; almost all fruits that are cultivated in California grow in Sicily. At the time of our touring, we shall taste strawberries, the first plums, cherries, all in season, maybe even “fichidindia,” prickly pears from cactus, and maybe still late harvest oranges.

To be continued with detailed information about the points of the itinerary, a little bibliography and web links for your preparation.

Here is the draft of the itinerary, with some refinements and changes still to come.

➤ **Tentative Itinerary:** Starting from East>South>West >North

Monday, May 26: Departure from O'Hare Airport, Chicago

Tuesday, May 27: Arrival in Catania, Sicily – transfer to Taormina

Wednesday, May 28: tour Taormina with possibility of climbing Mount Etna, a volcano

Thursday, May 29: Visit to Siracusa - Unesco World Heritage -*evening: attendance of a performance (Greek tragedy, *Agamemnon*) in the Greek amphitheater in Siracusa

[optional]

Friday, May 30: Val di Noto –Unesco World Heritage: Noto and Modica

Saturday, May 31: Ragusa, Caltagirone

Sunday June 1: Piazza Armerina, Agrigento

Monday June 2: Italian National Holiday, Agrigento/Castelvetrano-Selinunte, Unesco World Heritage

Tuesday, June: Selinunte, **Mozia

Wednesday, June 4: Segesta, Palermo

Thursday, June 5: Palermo, Monreale

Friday, June 6: Departure from Palermo

* Friday, June 6: Palermo & Monreale

Saturday, June 7: Departure for Chicago from Palermo

**Mozia (small island in front of Marsala, settled by the Phoenecians)