

Harvest season in Sicily: The Fertile Island that Nurtured Classical Civilization / October 27 to November 11, 2011

It's hard to miss such a massive island, especially when it sits in the middle of all the major trade routes of the Mediterranean Sea, and if you add to this island the attraction of a bounty of seafood, grazing land, vineyards and olive groves & good weather, you have the perfect set up for its discovery, settlement, and subsequent contests for possession. Early explorers from Phoenicia, Greece and Carthage have been followed by the Romans, the Arabs, the Normans, and shorter periods of control by Spain, France and even Swabia. All of these cultures left their mark on the landscape and culture, but some physical remains of early settlers are more visible than others, while other invaders left more cultural impact. For example the Greek temples in Sicily are often referred to as the best examples of Greek architecture in the Mediterranean. The Normans left many magnificent buildings with extraordinary mosaics (again, some of the best anywhere and with distinct Byzantine & Arabic influences), and during the Baroque period flamboyant cathedrals and churches were built following a catastrophic earthquake in 1690. So unlike some countries where the architecture is predominantly of one style, in Sicily there is a varied mixture which presents the visitor with constant architectural interest.

The modern visitor also benefits from the historical & cultural influences on Sicilian food, which is famous for its seafood but is really more diverse. Artisanal bread and farmhouse cheeses abound, unusual vegetables are always in the markets, there is a panoply of tempting Baroque desserts, Arab influenced seafood couscous, and authentic savory pizzas. Modern tourists visit Sicily in the summer months to enjoy excellent beaches and swimming, and it is because of those visitors that this trip is planned to happen during the late Harvest season. The temperatures in Sicily in the summer are extremely high but by October / November they are down to a comfortable level for touring.

One cannot see everything in Sicily on one visit; the multiple layers of historical sites, scenic villages, fine art, and the fascination that comes from seeing such a remarkable example of cross-cultural evolution are too much to take in. But what you *can* see on one trip are the best choices in all categories, and that was my goal in putting together this itinerary.

Itinerary

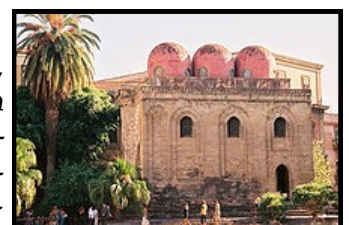
October 27th: (Palermo) Plan to arrive in Palermo today. (See my note at the end of this about easy transfers from the airport to our hotel.) There are no other commitments aside from staying in a nice centrally located hotel, the 4 Star Caribaldi. There are plenty of things for you to do today and on October 28th (Palermo), which is a free day for on your own enjoyment.

Palermo is a busy city, but it is packed with fascinating sights, smells, and tastes. It contains some of the best art on the island; sumptuous interiors with Byzantine mosaics and frescoes, quality paintings by famous artists, sculpture and all the art forms that you would expect from one of the most important cities of the Middle Ages. Some of the important sites: the Palace of the Normans where the Sicilian legislature meets, Baroque churches filled with exquisite paintings and sculpture (too many to list,) the ornate Cathedral, and the Medieval Quarter. There are also Baroque palazzos, the macabre catacombs (Catacombs dei Cappuccini,) the famous Puppet Theatre (Opera dei Pupi,) numerous piazzas, and excellent bakeries that still make pastries in historical & traditional style.



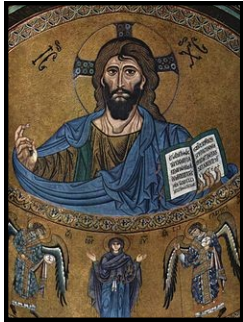
The outstanding archaeological museum contains treasures from excavations in other parts of Sicily (in the same way in which treasures from all over Egypt were brought to Cairo, or those in the UK were taken to the British Museum) so it is a must-see. With such a widely varied palette of things to choose from it makes sense to arrive prior to the 27th if possible (extra nights can be booked at our hotel for a very reasonable price; it is impossible to see everything, and it may you wanting to return.) I plan to arrive 3 days before the 27th to spend time exploring on foot & I welcome company. As mentioned, October 28th is a free day to do some of the things above. (Palermo) Breakfast included.

October 29th: (Palermo) We are met by our guide and go on day trip to two special places, Solunto and Cefalu. Solunto was a Carthaginian city built on the foundation of Phoenician and Hellenistic cities, conquered by the Romans, abandoned and covered up, and re-discovered in 1825. Though the remains are attractive, the nicest aspect is its hillside location overlooking the Mediterranean. Our time in Solunto will be shorter than in Cefalu be-



cause there is so much to see in Cefalu.

Cefalu changed hands several times, including to the Arabs in 857. The primary site is the Norman cathedral built by King Roger II using 16 ancient columns from the Roman Temple of Diana, and there are Arab-Norman arches. The timber roof dates from 1263, and extensive mosaics were done in Byzantine style by artisans imported from Constantinople in about 1148. Later Baroque additions to the cathedral were removed, which returned the Cathedral to its original style, making it one of the best examples of Norman architecture anywhere. The other primary site of Cefalu is the Museo (Museum) Mandralisca, which has unique paintings influenced by the Flemish school, archaeological material, and the collections of a rich man who had varied interests, ranging from reliquaries to arms, and a library. There may be a small charge for entry (optional.)



The town of Cefalu has other interesting sites, including megalithic walls from the 5th century BCE, smaller churches, a medieval wash-house, and charming un-spoilt streets that were used for the filming of *Cinema Paradiso*. We'll make this as long of a day as possible since we will not return to the North coastal region for the rest of the tour. Breakfast included.

October 30th: (Erice) Departure from Palermo to Erice via Monreale and Segesta. To quote from the Blue Guide: "On the slopes of the mountains behind Palermo, overlooking the Conca d'Oror, Monreale is the site of one of the most superb churches in the world, and certainly the most important Norman building in Sicily." (The Norman didn't control Sicily for long, only 160 years, but

their architecture, with its Arab and Byzantine influences, is some of the best in the Western end of the Mediterranean, and it was on their watch that Sicily had its first ever Parliament.) *The mosaics in Monreale contain 2200 kg of pure gold.* In 1182 on completion it was considered one of the wonders of the Middle Ages. Decorated columns and carved capitals contrast with the simple layout with two towers. It's desirable to have a substantial visit there, and we'll do our best.

Our second visit of the day is Segesta, on the route to our destination of Erice. Virgil wrote that Segesta was founded by the Trojan hero Aeneas; it was a center of battle between Roma & Carthage but somehow the 2,400 year old Temple in pure Doric style survived, as did the Greek Theatre, which faces North in order to encompass fabulous sea views. All of the cultures who inhabited Sicily seem to have given some importance to 'the view' because many important sites have excellent vistas. Erice itself offers one of the best views, set at 750 meters on a mountain top and on a clear day you can see Tunisia. Virgil once compared it to Mt Athos for its altitude and spiritual pre-eminence. Erice has a notorious history as a center for the cult of Venus, which I will let our guide explain. Our hotel is made of small stone cottages in the old town, and possibly just as important, Erice is home to Sicily's most famous cake shops, Maria Grammaticos. Breakfast and dinner included



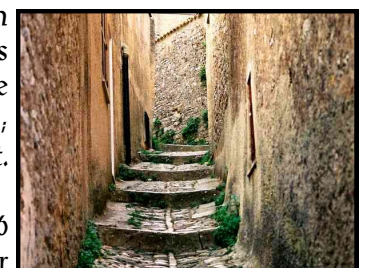
October 31st: (Erice) This morning our guide shows us some of the highlights of Erice, and then nearby Trapani. Trapani is located on a spit of land, and its layout of narrow streets dates from Arab times. There are many excellent restaurants for lunch, and you can explore on your own or with our guide. Overnight again in Erice. Breakfast and dinner included.



November 1st: (Marsala) It's a short drive to Marsala, and en route we begin by visiting the isle of San Pantaleo, the site of ancient Mozia. The area has many salt marshes, and in fact there are numerous salt pans nearby, but the island itself is an

oasis of luxuriant vegetation and a bird sanctuary. Mozia was founded by the Phoenicians in the 8th century BCE and by the mid 6th century it was entirely surrounded by defensive walls. It later came under the control of Carthage. There are several sites on the island; there are short walks on flat surfaces between them. Return to Marsala for overnight. Breakfast and dinner included.

November 2nd: (Marsala) Marsala was Lilybacum, founded by the Carthaginians in 396 BCE near the headland of Capo Boeo. After they lost Mozia, Lilybacum became their strongest point. It was besieged by the Romans for over 10 years during the Punic wars (it was the last place to fall to the Roman armies.) Cicero called it "*civitas splendidissima*." Everyone knows about the fa-



mous Marsala wine, but few people realize what a charming town it is. The streets are full of stately Baroque buildings & graceful piazzas.

Most of the day is free, with the exception of a visit to see the Museum of the "Phoenician" Ship. Found in 1969 - 1979 in several pieces (along with objects found on board,) they were re-constructed to reveal a 35 meter long war ship that would have been manned by 68 rowers. It was actually used in the Punic wars by the Carthaginians; it is the only war-ship of this period to be discovered. The museum itself has other displays including ceramics, terracotta's, gold jewellery, funerary monuments and sculptures, and the Cathedral and town center are worthwhile exploring with excellent options for lunch. Our hotel is located in town which makes evening wandering easy. Breakfast included.

November 3rd: (Agrigento) After breakfast we depart for Selinunte, one of the best Classical sites in Sicily because it was never subsequently developed and the remains were preserved and not modified. The site was re-discovered in the 16th century but excavations didn't begin until 1822. The acropolis, Temples of Juno, Aphrodite, Castor & Pollux, and the sanctuary of Demeter call for our attention so in keeping with my style of planning itineraries, we aim to spend more time here than the typical drive-by tourist groups. We continue to Agrigento for a 2 night stay. (Selinunte temple photos to the right.) Breakfast, lunch and dinner included.

November 4th: (Agrigento) The main attraction is the Valley of the Temples which like Selinunte date from Greek times. The Temples of Concordia, Juno, and Olympian Jove as well as the ancient Quarter, and even the 11th century Cathedral will fill an entire day. (Agrigento Temples below.) Breakfast, lunch and dinner included.



November 5th: (Ragusa) The distance to Ragusa is not far but what you see when you arrive there from Agrigento is quite a contrast. The hill towns of Ragusa province were almost completely destroyed by an earthquake in 1693. Some survivors of the 1693 earthquake (which killed 5,000 inhabitants in Ragusa city alone) chose a new spot they considered more suitable and built one of the best Baroque cities in Italy (Ragusa *Superiore*). Other people remained in the old city (Ragusa *Ibla*), which is a finely carved old town of local gold colored stone. Both portions of the city have cathedrals, and were encouraged by the clergy to build a large number of beautiful churches; statistics are quoted that in 1644 there were 41 churches for a population of 15,000. Later they argued about which cathedral should be considered *the* cathedral for the city. The end result for the tourist is a plethora of Baroque



art in a unique setting. The guide can suggest some choices since it's not possible to see them all. Tonight we stay in the Sicilian countryside about 5 km from Ragusa. There is a Michelin rated restaurant at the hotel, or the option to have dinner in the old city using our coach for transportation. Breakfast included.



November 6th: (Siracusa) So far the tour route has only stuck to well known classic sites, but today we explore less visited sites in a mountainous setting. We're headed to the town of Palazzolo Acreide, a Baroque town built on the edge of ancient ruins of the Greek city Akrai. A small Greek theatre in Akrai survives and is used by locals for stage productions, and the town of Palazzolo Acreide has good views from a higher elevation, but in general the journey is the main feature today. We end in Siracusa, where we stay for 3 nights. Breakfast and dinner included.

November 7th: (Siracusa) The city was founded on Ortygia, an island so close to the mainland that it was later joined by a short causeway. In antiquity people recognized the excellent large, protected harbor, so Siracusa was populated early and fought over often. In it's Greek period, poets such as Pindar and Aeschylus lived at the court of the tyrant, though eventually a democracy was established. It fought off an Athenian invasion fleet in the Peloponnesian Wars, which led to the re-building of walls to make the city invulnerable. Siracusa fought 4 wars against Carthage and was a major power in Sicily and Southern Italy.

Siracusa should be a pilgrimage site for mathematicians because it was the home of Archimedes (287-212 BCE), who is credited with discovering the cogged wheel (hence the winch,) the relationship between the circumference and diameter

of a circle, the lever, the displacement of liquid method for ascertaining the composition of metals (which he famously discovered while in his bath,) and the calculation of the volume of sphere contained in a cylinder. In 240 BCE he designed a luxurious cruise ship for the ruler, Hieron. It weighed 4,000 tons and was not practical for many ports, so eventually Hieron sent it to King Ptolemy in Egypt as a gesture of friendship during a famine. Siracusa remained an important shipping port and was a seat of power for the Romans and Byzantines. The apostle Paul spend 3 days there on his way to Rome.



The old city is rich with interest, so today we have a guided tour of the old city, which is flat and easy to walk in; infact the area is best explored on foot, and we're staying in a central part of the Ortygia. Breakfast included, there are may great choices available for dinner. Photos: Siracusa and Archimedes



November 8th: (Siracusa) A day trip to 3 places: the old towns of Noto and Modica, where again there are old towns of



sun-burnished stone and Baroque period new towns. These towns are chosen for the itinerary because of their charm and beautiful architecture. The six ancient districts / neighborhoods of Modica retain their unique identity, and



by our 3rd site, the Cava D'Ispica. Breakfast included. Photos: Modica left; Noto right

November 9th: (Taormina) To Taormina, which has a famous location perched on the side of Mount Taurus with a celebrated view of Mt. Etna. It's popular with beach seeking tourists during the summer months but in the off season they are gone so the charms of small streets and the varied sights are more enjoyable. There are gorgeous medieval churches, a stunning Greek Theatre, lush public gardens, and options for hikes to even better views. We have a walking tour of the historic center on arrival, and we're staying at a 4 star hotel directly below the ancient Greek Theatre. Many rooms have balconies and the restaurant is highly rated so we have dinner here both nights. Excursions to the top of Mount Etna can be booked for tomorrow, which is a free day. Breakfast and dinner included.

November 10th: (Taormina) For those who don't want to take an Optional journey to the top of Mt. Etna, this is an opportunity for last minute shopping, enjoying medieval churches, and soaking in the view. Our last group dinner is tonight at the hotel. It is possible to add extra nights at our hotel if you want to stay and enjoy more walking on Mt. Etna. Photo: Mount Etna from the Greek Theatre. Breakfast and dinner included.



November 11th: (Departure morning.) There will be one group shuttle to the Catania Airport (timing to be based on transporting the maximum number of participants.) It's also possible to get a reasonable priced taxi to share with others which can be booked through our hotel. Breakfast included.

Finis

Because you may want to arrive early or stay late, here is information about getting to and from the airport involved:
Easy Transfer from Palermo Airport to town: *Prestia e Comandè* runs a shuttle every half hour from 0500 -11:00 pm dropping people off at Teatro Politeama Garibaldi, which is one block from our hotel. It costs 6 Euro and takes from 35 - 50 minutes depending on traffic from the airport.

Easy transfer from Catania (city) to the airport: AMT Alibus 457 runs from the train station to the airport every 20 minutes and costs 2 Euros. A taxi for 4 people plus luggage costs about 28 Euro.

Also from Catania there are ferries to Naples and Rome (Civitavecchia.) Check www.grimaldi-ferries.com, and

Note on the itinerary: The city where we will stay overnight is in parentheses after each date, for example: November 3rd: (Agrigento) Included meals are listed at the end of each day,

About our Guide: Giorgio M. Calò received his First Degree in Cultural Tourism in 2005, from University of Palermo, based in Cefalù, carrying on his personal studies in Phoenician-Punic, Classical, Christian and Medieval Archaeology, as well as Sicilian Art and History. Since 2000 he has been guiding and escorting groups and individuals, mainly from USA, UK, Australia, both in Sicily and in the rest of Italy or Europe. Nowadays he collaborates with several tour operators in Palermo, working with incoming groups, creating itineraries for the discovery of Sicily and its treasures. In addition to Mr. Calò there may be other local guides at different locations to provide more detailed information.

Details about Costs/ Inclusions/ Terms and Conditions/ and General Information

The tour cost of \$2775 includes the following: travel in a private first class bus for all of the excursions from October 29 in Palermo until November 9th in Taormina (November 10th is a free day and the driver must finish that day by law); transfer to Catania Airport on November 11th; hotels that are 3 and 4 star rated; daily buffet breakfast; 8 dinners as noted in the itinerary; 2 lunches as noted in the itinerary. Local taxes, and admission costs for sites not listed as Optional in the itinerary.

The tour cost does not include: Flights, meals and drinks not specified, personal expenses such as laundry, internet access, telephone calls and optional excursions. The only meals not included are 12 lunches.

Single supplement: You may have your own room throughout for \$445 additional. If you are a single traveller and would prefer to share a twin I would be happy to match you with another single traveller, however I cannot guarantee that there will be someone else for you to share with.

Extra nights at our hotels in Palermo and Taormina: I expect to have our tour company book extra nights for you at our hotel in Palermo (the Hotel Caribaldi) before the trip and in Taormina afterwards (the Ariston Hotel.) They will not book any other hotels, but you can do that on line if you prefer.

Cancellation, deposit and refund policy: A deposit of \$1300 is due upon confirmation of space. Final payment is due on September 16, 2012. Payments are non-refundable but they are transferable to another Ken McFarland trip in the event that you have to cancel, so long as there is an identical replacement for you (single for a single, couple for a couple.) Once final payment is made both payments become non-refundable. Our agreement is that we both act in good faith and that you keep me apprised about any potential problems with your participation in a timely manner.

Tips: A tip to the driver is expected, and to our Guide, Mr. Calò. Typically that is the equivalent of \$3 per day per person for the driver (11 days) to be paid in Euros, and in the range of \$7 - \$10 per day for the Guide (11 days) to be paid in Euros. Tips to restaurant and hotel staff are included except in cases such as room service or some other situation where someone provides you with a personal service.

Group size: This group is limited to 21 people including Ken McFarland and there are substantial preliminary bookings. The remaining space is available on a first come basis. To confirm space please email ken_mcfarland@earthlink.net. When you are confirmed please download a Trip Registration Form from my web page and send it with your deposit check. Web page: www.reeljig.com/mcfarland/

Deposits and payments must be made by check. The trip cost is based on an exchange rate of US dollars to the Euro of 1.45, which is the current rate. If there are any substantial changes to that rate an adjustment might be required after the final transfer of funds to Sicily. This rate is a good estimate based on constant observation, but I have no control over international monetary rates and I am unable to subsidize the tour cost should there be a dramatic change.

Trip Insurance: If you are going to purchase Trip Insurance, do so within 10 days of the date of your deposit check so that any pre-existing conditions will be covered. There is a list of on-line Trip Insurance Companies on my web page which I supply as a convenient source of information. Trip Insurance has been well used by some travellers in the past, but it has some limitations on coverage so it may not be the right choice for you. The key issue, in my opinion, is this: Trip Insurance is used in the event that something happens to *you*, not if something happens in the *world*. For example if *you* loose your job, have a serious injury or health related problem, death in your immediate family, insurance typically protects you. It does not typically protect you from the impact of natural disasters (such as the recent volcano activity,) revolutions and political unrest, or any other unpredictable *world* events which are usually covered by the phrase Acts of God in the policies. (I'll let you try and define that one.)

Documents: A valid passport with 6 months validity left from your date of entrance into Italy is required of US citizens No visa is required, nor are any inoculations suggested.

Physical condition: The important sites are mostly on level ground but there are some instances of sloping ground. These

are not steep but it's always wise to bring a collapsible walking stick if you have any doubts. If you have doubts, questions or conditions I would like you to check with me so that there are no surprises for either of us.

Special diets and allergies: There are vegetarian options for all the meals. The breakfasts are all good buffets with lots of options. The Sicilian diet typically includes lots of fresh seafood, pasta, and other classic Mediterranean food components such as olives, cucumbers, tomatoes and vino. Meat dishes are available for those with seafood allergies or who prefer it, or vegetarian. People with food allergies must discuss those with me when booking a space on the tour so that I can see if that particular diet is possible. Most lunches are not included, and there is free time for you to choose your own restaurant for those.

Smoking: Too many people are allergic to smoke to allow smokers to travel in the group. Unfortunately I have had bad experiences with smokers who said they wouldn't smoke on the tour (but did), so I no longer accept smokers even if they promise not to smoke. There are plenty of tours available that accept smokers. Unfortunately many people in Europe do smoke, and even though I have requested non smoking rooms and eating areas for the group, it is possible that participants may be exposed to smoking occasionally when it is out of my control.

Plays well with others: Please plan to be considerate and courteous to others, and be thoughtful in your behavior. Patience is a virtue which we are all learning in this life; be patient when service providers are not as efficient as you would like them to be. (I am probably the worst culprit about patience so allow me to do your fretting about services.) Move around on the coach and share the forward seats, and make friends with people at meals by sitting with someone you don't know. Remember why you travel: not because you want everything to be the same as it is at home, but because you want to have new experiences, see beautiful and interesting new places, and try new food.

My Goal for all trips is for you to have a good time and enjoy what you see, and to get you good value for your money. I advocate on your behalf and do my best to keep things running as smoothly as possible, and I spend as much time as necessary to work out logistical issues should they arise (unless something simply cannot be solved.)

Mailing address and contact information: Please use email to contact me because I travel at least 4 months per year and therefore I am often not available by telephone. My email address is ken_mcfarland@earthlink.net. I will send all communication to you by email so you should make sure to give me a working email address and keep me updated if you change your email address. Mailing address: Make all checks payable to Ken McFarland or Farland's McTravel and mail them to 3875 Geist Road #E323, Fairbanks, AK 99709. You may also fax me at (907) 456-7558 however it's best to verify that I am here to receive it before faxing anything.

A note on Airfares: If you find that airfares from your airport are high, consider buying a ticket from London to Sicily which is only \$264 round trip, and dovetailing that with a ticket to London from your home town. This may save you a substantial amount of money. Another cost saving approach (and a way to enhance your vacation) is to fly to Rome or Naples to spend a few days then travel to Sicily from there.

Questions? Please contact me at the email address provided above.