



Culinary Jewels of the Mediterranean Sicily & Malta

October 21st – November 1st, 2018

Malta and Sicily (Jewels of the Med) although quite close in proximity and share many cultural and historical similarities, however they are very quite distinct in architecture and linguistics. Malta has been fought over for thousands of years, has temples that pre-date the pyramids at Giza and Stonehenge, has some of the clearest waters in the world, and boasts a capital city that is a baroque masterpiece. The Ionian Riviera, running up the east coast of Sicily from the bustling lava-stone city of Catania through a series of charming fishing villages and beaches to the enchanting town of Taormina. The entire coastline is dominated by the magnificence of Mount Etna, whose presence has shaped the entire area both geologically and historically from time immemorial. Both Maltese Islands & Sicily, offers travelers a rare opportunity to see experience a well preserved history and exciting present day culture.



DAY 1 – SUNDAY, OCTOBER 21 - Departure Day

Depart from your home airport for your overnight flight to Sicily with a connection in Europe.

DAY 2 – MONDAY, OCTOBER 22 - Arrive in Sicily (D)

Arrive at Catania Fontanarossa Airport and be transferred to your host hotel in Taormina, the 4 Star Villa Diodoro. Villa Diodoro is centrally located within bustling and picturesque Taormina - offering ease of access for self exploration during your free time. Our rooms are sea-view, offering the most sought after post-card views of the beautiful coastline.

Settled on a hill of the Monte Tauro, Taormina dominates two grand, sweeping bays below and on the southern side, the top of Mount Etna, Europe's highest active volcano. Taormina was born as a tourist resort since past times, when ancient people like the Sicels, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Saracens, Arabs, Normans and Spaniards chose it as their residential hub thanks to its favourable position, mild climate and magical atmosphere. Enjoy dinner this evening at a restaurant near the hotel.

Accommodations: Villa Diodoro, for 3 nights

DAY 3 – TUESDAY, OCTOBER 23 – Walking Tour of Taormina and Cooking Class (B, D)

Buongiorno Taormina. This morning enjoy breakfast at the hotel and then meet your local guide for a walking tour of Taormina. We will learn about its history and present day culture through sites such as the Greek Theatre, the Roman "Naumachiae", the 10th century Palazzo Corvaja, the public gardens, the "Badia Vecchia" (Ancient Abbey) and many others. After the tour, enjoy some free time and lunch on own. Over the course of your stay, you'll want to check out the several painting exhibitions held in local palazzi and churches, fine elegant shopping along the famous "Corso Umberto" with its classical music cafès and pastry shops as well as optional activities such as naturalistic walks, enjoying the beaches and more.

This evening we'll head out for our first culinary experience at a local cooking school by foot since Taormina is very walk-able. This cooking school is surrounded by Sicilian gardens in a quiet position with views over the sea and the city. The building itself hosts an ancient Roman soldier tomb in its garden and is neighbor to where D.H. Lawrence and Truman Capote lived. Louisa, our host, will guide us through 3 different Sicilian dishes using only the finest local ingredients.

Each dish is prepared from scratch with the aim to express simplicity yet drawn in each dish's' history while enjoying their explosive flavors. Enjoy finger foods as you navigate the day coupled with an aperitivo, followed ultimately by dinner on the terrace and accompanied by DOC Sicilian wines, homemade mandarinetto and tea/coffee.



DAY 4 - WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 24 – Mount Etna Day Trip (B,L)

After breakfast, it's time to get a little bit adventurous with a day out at Mount Etna. As a recap, Mount Etna is Europe's highest and most active volcano - towering above the city of Catania. It has been growing for about 500,000 years and is in the midst of a series of eruptions that began in 2001. We will be joining our local guide for a drive up to the Silvestri Crater area, where we will stop at the viewpoint to take it all in. Who knows, we might even witness a tiny (and safe) eruption. On the drive up we've included some delicacy tastings of products famous from the Etna region.

Our afternoon will have us arriving at a local winery for an exploration of their vineyards, wine and food. Throughout the past century, this winery has won many medals for its wine however the company had experienced a decline following World War II. The owners however decided to resurrect the family business in 1999 with a unwavering goal to produce high quality wines. Our visit will include a tour of the vineyard followed by lunch to include a selection of antipasti, grilled meatballs in lemon leaves, grilled vegetables and a green bean and tomato salad followed fresh fruit and pasta mandorla. And of course, our lunch will be paired with 3 of their finest wines. We will return to Taormina late afternoon for free time and dinner on own.

DAY 5 - THURSDAY, OCTOBER 25 – Catania Food Adventure Day Trip - Siracusa (B,L,D)

Check out of the hotel and transfer to the train station for Catania, arriving late morning. Catania is a wonderful combination of ancient and modern. Her history and character is inextricably linked to the formidable form of Mount Etna, who looms over the city like a maternal menace - its nickname however is the "good volcano". Etna has been a vital source of the construction of the city, as much of the black volcanic rock which characterizes Catania's beautiful Baroque architecture was spewed from the heart of Etna. Though occupied and invaded over the centuries with the rest of Sicily, Catania has a reputation for being a resilient city. Our walking tour will offer us a historical overview of the city, of the alleys and the squares of the old town, while offering us the chance to sample some of its culinary delights. The tour starts at Piazza Duomo, a jewel of Sicilian baroque architecture and UNESCO heritage site, where we will visit the Cathedral. From here you will head to the quaint fish market, better known as "la pescheria" followed by many other stops along the way. We don't want to give too much away so let's leave it there. Just know that it's going to be a lot of fun.

Enjoy some free time before gathering once again just after sunset to enjoy some cocktails and explore a very neat area of Catania. They say that in order to know the history of Catania you need to take a look at one of its historic neighbourhoods, San Berillo. In the centre of Catania, San Berillo shows its visitors many faces and facets with its Baroque and Fascist buildings, some unfinished and some destroyed by bombardments or other events, and with its simple houses. It's a very cool thing to do.

We will top off our experience in Catania with a "relatively" early dinner at a restaurant close by before departing for Siracusa.

Accommodations: Grand Hotel Ortigia, Siracusa for 2 nights



DAY 6 - FRIDAY, OCTOBER 26 - Ragusa Countryside with Cooking Class (B,L)

Today we head out to the countryside of Ragusa for spectacular vistas and amazing food experiences. We will be welcomed at an agriturismo by Nella, the owner and cooking instructor, who has the deep conviction that you cannot understand an area if you do not know its food. For her, food is not 'just food'; it is culture, art, history and territory. Our class will begin mid to late morning and include different Sicilian traditions, starting from appetizers to dessert. This will be all hands on with historical context communicated throughout. The menu is likely to include (subject to change): Caponata vegetables as the main appetizer, followed by ravioli, pork and sausage and then finally dessert. Throughout the course, you'll be nibbling on cheese, olives and more as well as enjoying local wine.

Our day won't quite yet be complete in the countryside after participating in the cooking class. As an added bonus, we'll be travelling just down the road to a remote location to discover what the next part of the day has in store for us.

Return to Siracusa for your final night.

DAY 7 – SATURDAY, OCTOBER 27 – Siracusa and Ortigia – Malta (B,D)

Depart by foot from the hotel for a walking tour of Ortigia. Ortigia is a small island which is the historical centre of Siracusa. The island, also known as Città Vecchia (Old City), contains many historical landmarks. The name originates from the Ancient Greek which means "Quail". We will have a pleasant stroll through tight-knit lanes to see lovingly-restored Baroque palaces and churches. Sites seen this morning include the Duomo and the Fonte Aretusa. The Duomo is one of the town's most celebrated sights and highlights the many ages of the town. Once it was the Greek Temple of Athena, with a giant gold statue of the goddess on its roof. The massive Doric columns of the temple are still visible. Later, after the great earthquake of 1693 the impressive Baroque façade was added. The Fonte Aretusa is an old Greek fresh-water spring and according to mythology, the spring is an embodiment of the nymph Arethusa.

We will depart by 12pm for the Catania Airport for our afternoon flight to Malta. Upon arrival in Malta, check into your host accommodations and enjoy an included dinner.

Accommodations: The Palace Hotel in Sliema for 5 nights

DAY 8 - SUNDAY, OCTOBER 28 - Prehistoric Malta and Malta's Old Capital, Mdina (B,L)

Step back in time – specifically over 5000 years ago, with a visit to a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The temple builders have left their significant mark on the island with a multitude of temple sites. The site we will be visiting this morning is the Hagar Qim and Mnajdra temple sites. First excavated in 1839, the remains suggest a date between 3600 – 3200 BC, a period known as the Ġgantija phase in Maltese prehistory. Hagar Qim was in fact never completely buried as the tallest stones, remained exposed and featured in 18th and 19th century paintings.



We venture to the majestic cliffs of Dingli for some amazing views. Make sure your camera is fully charged for the magnificent views. The village lies on a plateau some 250 meters above sea level, which is one of the highest points of Malta. The area provides not only open sea views over the tiny, uninhabited isle of Filfla, but is also a good vantage point over Malta.

Our afternoon will have us visiting Rabat and Mdina (the Silent City). The Arabs, during their 200 years of rule, divided the old Roman City of Melita into two: the citadel became known as Mdina and the rest of the area as Rabat. Enjoy a stroll through Rabat while enjoying some snacking of the local delicacies. In Mdina, the Noble and Silent City, you will be amazed with its winding roads, gorgeous palaces and the view! We'll have some free time here for shopping and exploring.

Our last stop of the day is at a palace in the village of Naxxar. The magnificent walled gardens of the Palazzo Parisio, rank among the finest in Malta and are the only privately-owned gardens open to the public. Here you will find a diamond in the rough – the ideal spot to while away the hours in tranquil contemplation. We will first tour the palace and then bask in an afternoon High Tea experience – a testament to the British food culture in Malta.

Arrive back to the hotel by late afternoon to enjoy some free time and dinner on own.

DAY 9 - MONDAY, OCTOBER 29 - Valletta, the Capital City (B,L,D)

Enjoy breakfast at the hotel followed by transportation to Valletta where we will learn about the landmark city that the Knights of St. John built. Most of the touring today will be by foot, so be prepared with comfortable walking shoes and appropriate clothing. Enter the majestic gates of Malta as we learn about its unbelievable history beginning in 1567. We will see former Auberges of the Knights, gorgeous gardens and many historical attractions. In order to set the appropriate tone for today's touring, we will watch the high definition production of the Malta Experience. Just across from the Malta Experience was the Infirmary of the Knights. Built in 1574, it provided about 900 beds for patients who included knights, soldiers, sailors and foreigners. Being Hospitallers, the original functions of the Knights was to care for the poor, sick or injured pilgrims to the Holy Land.

Lunch is served in an old bakery that has been converted to a restaurant. Every Mediterranean country has its unique shape and form of bread. They also have their own fillings. The Maltese opt for vegetarian or fish fillings and the bread is a disc-shaped semi flat bread that has a glorious texture. The restaurant we will be dining in has brought back many of the traditional flavours of Malta under one roof but the best part is that we will ultimately be engaging in the cooking experience.

Our grand finale of the day will be a tour of the unassuming St. John's Co-Cathedral – the Church of the Knights of Malta. Inside we will discover a treasure trove of magnificent art and the opulence of the vaulted ceilings and tombstone flooring. It is here that perhaps the most famous work of art of famed artist Caravaggio is displayed - "The Beheading of St. John the Baptist" – which is his only signed piece in



the world. From here, we gather to venture back to the hotel to relax and freshen up for dinner with wine at a special restaurant on the outskirts of Rabat.

DAY 10 - TUESDAY, OCTOBER 30 - Central and Western Malta (B,L,D)

After breakfast, we will travel across the centre of Malta to arrive in the village of Mosta where we discover the Church of the Assumption of Our Lady and its significant connection with World War II. It is here that a German bomb dropped through the rotunda unexploded as parishioners prayed. Based on the Pantheon in Rome, the rotunda or dome is the 3rd largest unsupported dome in Europe and the 9th largest in the world.

Our lunch experience will bring us to the hilltop village of Wardija. Known for its noble estates and hunting lodges, Wardija also has a connection to olive cultivation and the production of olive oil. We will visit with a man, known as the Father of Maltese Olives, to learn about olive growing in Malta in general and the Maltese olive in particular. Typically families and farmers will bring their own crates of olives to be pressed - only distinguished by a family name that appears atop the crate. A wonderful farmer's lunch will be prepared on site including wine.

Arrive back at our host hotel to enjoy the afternoon on own. We will gather in the hotel lobby later on in the day to depart for a restaurant that has no menus. You'll be tasting the freshest of fresh foods cooked under minimal heat and enjoyed family style. The owner puts it best: "Mother Nature is the chef; we're just the cooks!"

DAY 11 - WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 31 - Gozo Island (B,L,D)

Today after breakfast, we depart for Malta's sister Island - Gozo. A short 25 minute ferry connects the two islands yet its differences are numerous as we will learn from our local guide. Upon arrival to Gozo, we will be visiting a site where local sea salt harvesting takes place. We'll get up close and personal to salt-pans that have been manmade but also those that have been naturally made by the wind. It's pretty spectacular. We will continue with a visit to a dairy farm to meet the owner to understand the process of Gozitan cheese making. Next visit the capital of Victoria for a walk through its back streets and to visit the Citadel. The Citadel or Citadella of Victoria is an area known to have been first fortified during the Bronze Age and later developed by the Phoenicians with continued development until, by Roman times, it had become a complex Acropolis. Up until the 18th Century, it was the only fortified refuge against attack for the inhabitants of the island.

Our lunch will be enjoyed at a restaurant owned by the dairy farmer who we visited in the morning. We'll have a taste of his mouth watering ravioli and enjoy a traditional Gozitan platter or soup with wine and dessert. We will cap our day off in Gozo with some exercise at a local "club". See the locals engage in a popular past-time while we train to be experts by competing in teams.



Arrive back in Malta at our host hotel to pack and relax. We will enjoy a light dinner at the hotel this evening.

DAY 12 - THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 1 - Depart for Home (B)

Depart early morning for our flight back home. Surely, the memories (and recipes) that we keep from our culinary adventure will last as long as we continue to enjoy food and all that it teaches us.

Inclusions:

- Airport transfers in Italy & Malta
- 3 Night accommodation at Villa Diodoro in Taormina
- 2 Night accommodation at Grand Hotel Ortigia in Siracusa
- 5 nights in Malta at The Palace Hotel in Sliema
- 10 breakfasts, 7 lunches and 7 dinners included
- 2 formal cooking classes in Sicily with cooking demos and experiences in Malta
- Winery tour & lunch, Sicily
- Olive oil producer tour & tasting, Malta
- Ferry or air from Sicily to Malta is included
- All taxes, meal gratuities and gratuities for local guides and coach driver
- All guided tours with a local, English-speaking guides
- Your host for the duration of the tour is Natalina Bombino Campagnolo, accomplished Italian-Canadian cooking instructor and owner of La Cucina di Natalina Italian Cooking School, who is fluent in Italian and has great experience in both these countries.

Exclusions:

- Transfers to and Return International Air from your main departure airport in North America (Note: Maxima Tours will work with you to coordinate the best flight schedule at the best possible rate)
- Optional medical or cancellation insurance
- Meals and attractions not included in the itinerary

Emergency Contact:

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Natalina Campagnolo -