

The Amalfi, Sicily and Malta: The Godfather

Rome, Italy, Europe Valletta, Malta, Europe

Day 1 Rome, Italy

Welcome to Rome. On arrival at Rome airport, make your way to the Arrivals Hall, to meet our representative, followed by a transfer to our group hotel. At the hotel, visit our hospitality desk in the lobby to meet our team who will provide you with useful information regarding pre-embarkation procedures and about your time in Rome. You will also receive cabin tags for your luggage. Please clearly label the tags with your name and your cabin number on the ship. This evening enjoy dinner at one of the local trattorias (own expense), with time to relax in preparation for our day tomorrow. Accommodation: Rome Hotel



Day 2 Rome

An intriguing tale of historical drama and legendary myths make Rome every trivia buff's dream. Scandalous and sanguine, Roman lifestyle swung from democratic to autocratic, slavery to liberation, paganism to Christianity. The Roman empire's public relations machine flaunted its sovereignty with triumphant arches and fluted columns, monolithic mausoleums, statue-ridden stairways and masterfully engineered temples. Enhanced by the wealth of the Catholic Church, the city added to its opulence and grandeur with baroque fountains, obelisk-centred piazzas and Christendom's domed cathedrals. The story of ancient Rome's insurmountable empire, its dramatic demise and the rise of the powerful Catholic Church is one of Europe's most compelling stories. A tour of

Rome is a highlight of any visit to Italy, especially for those of us whose homeland is anything other than ancient. Imperial relics rekindle the era when Rome's population of one million surpassed any other city worldwide. Our local guides merge the city's past and present through their stories on every street corner, along every alley and in every piazza. Choose a shorter, comprehensive tour to see a slice of Roman life, or lace up your walking shoes and experience Rome from street level on a locally guided walking tour. In the afternoon, enjoy some time for independent exploration before we gather this evening for a Welcome Event, Roman style. Personalise your exploration with our included 'Your Choice' experiences.

Option 1 - Morning experience: Highlights of Rome – Walking and Driving Tour

Rome tells its tale as we tour its major sights on this morning experience. We encounter the Colosseum, the Roman Forum and the Circus Maximus, viewing them from a nearby terrace while our guide inspires us with stories of Rome's past. Gifted to the people of Rome as a museum to house the generous number of sculptures and statues left scattered throughout the city, the Capitoline Museum was the brainchild of Pope Sixtus IV. We visit the museum with our art historian guides to piece together the city's past through its numerous artworks before our journey continues with a drive to our drop off point near the Spanish Steps. We walk to the Trevi fountain to ensure you have the chance return to Rome (do not forget your coin) before strolling to the obelisk centred Piazza Popolo, where we reboard our vehicle and return to the hotel for an afternoon at leisure.

Option 2 – Half day plus experience: Roaming Rome walking tour

Lace up your walking shoes, slip on a hat and slap on sunscreen to join this comprehensive locally guided tour. Established in an era when few Romans owned transportation, the centre of historical Rome is perfect for walking. With every square foot offering a fascinating fact, the list of sites we experience is limitless. Architectural highlights include the chariot stadium of Circus Maximus, and ancient sites such as the Colosseum, the Forum, Trajan's column, and the engineering marvel; the Pantheon. Artistic gems and political enigmas include the Trevi Fountain, the Piazza Venezia, Vittoria Emanuele II Monument and the Piazza Navona. Each site tells a story as we take time to witness its place in the past with our expert guides telling tales of the emperors, gladiators and plebs, Renaissance men, Popes and militia who made Rome their home. (Please note that some sights on this tour may be viewed only from the vehicle, depending on the weather conditions on the day.)

Accommodation: Rome Hotel

Meals: Breakfast, Welcome Event canapés

Day 3 Vatican City – Embark Porto Santo Stefano

After breakfast, enjoy free time to explore the city independently, return to your favourite sites, or join us for a morning at Vatican City.

Option 1 – Morning experience: Vatican City. We feel the lure of the Catholic church when we tour St Peter's Basilica and the Vatican Museums and Sistine Chapel, this morning on this locally guided tour, before transferring to the coast at Porto Santo Stefano to board the ship.

A former circus where Nero's barbaric spectacles entertained the masses, the Vatican hill became consecrated ground when Rome's first Christian emperor, Constantine declared the land to be 'the hill of the martyrs'. This sovereign state, gifted independence from Italy in 1929, encapsulates St Peter's Cathedral, the Vatican museums and a labyrinth of corridors, apartments and gardens housing the Pope and the Vatican staff.

Christendom's largest church, St Peter's Basilica, is another Michelangelo masterpiece. At 72 he designed the cupola to cover the sky above the bones of the first apostle, St Peter, and his successors – the Popes. Next door, the 55 galleries that make up the Vatican Museum, house the Catholic world's greatest artistic treasure chest. Ranging from the Vatican library with its 65,000 manuscripts including the original love letter from Henry VIII to Anne Boleyn, to the sarcophagus of Saint Helen, Constantine's mother. It is capped off by Michelangelo's masterful frescoes of the Sistine Chapel. When viewed in real life, The Sistine Chapel will take your breath away. (Time slots may be dictated by the Vatican City without warning. Should this occur, we may be required to amend the sequence of activities during our time in Rome).

A two-hour drive transfers us to Porto Santo Stefano to board the Douglas Mawson. Porto Santo Stefano, originally named Domiziana by its wealthy Roman inhabitants, is a marina-fronting town that rebuilt many of its colourful terraced homes after 95 per cent of the town was destroyed by Allied forces' heavy bombing in World War II. Today, the gentle waters of the Mediterranean lap at a popular promenade and a harbour of leisure craft, providing a calmer atmosphere. We board late afternoon. This evening, after an important safety briefing, we enjoy a 'Welcome Aboard' dinner where we meet our Aurora Expedition team and crew.

Day 4 Gaeta (Port: Gaeta)

Jutting into the Gulf of Gaeta, the town of the same name has a rich history featuring everyone from the Romans to Saracens, emperors to pirates and popes to kings. This authentic medieval town, dominated by its fortress castle and framed by a protected marina, can be explored independently. Our 'Your Choice' experiences provide a morning to reflect on the bravery of

those who fought at Monte Cassino, or to explore an extraordinary Roman achievement at nearby Formia. You will have the afternoon at leisure to enjoy Gaeta before we set sail south to the Bay of Naples. Personalise your exploration with our included 'Your Choice' experience.

Option 1 - Morning experience: The Battle for Monte Cassino This morning, we pause to honour the soldiers and innocent residents who were deeply affected by the tragedy at Monte Cassino: lest we forget. Amidst fields of white crosses, each one a poignant reminder of a life lost, the Monte Cassino region and its historic Benedictine monastery now attract visitors seeking to pay their respects. Each year, thousands come to remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice while pushing north towards Rome in June 1944. Perched high on its rugged hilltop, the monastery—filled with priceless artworks—was tragically misidentified as an ammunition depot by the Allied forces. The area, fortified with cannons, minefields, and machine gun nests, saw fierce combat, resulting in the loss of entire divisions as they bravely attempted to scale its slopes. Reduced to ruins in one of the most controversial actions of World War II, the rebuilt monastery now stands as a moving tribute to the 70,000 troops who gave their lives at Monte Cassino, striving to break through the Gustav Line and open the road to Rome.

Option 2 - Morning experience: What Did the Romans Ever Do for Us.. If you enjoyed Rome, you'll be equally captivated by Formia, an unassuming coastal town that holds some impressive relics of the Roman Empire. We go underground to explore the Cisternone, a 1st-century cistern that was once the largest urban water reservoir in the world. This colossal structure, with its expansive 7,000-cubic-meter capacity and intricate network of 53 pillars, was vital in supplying water to the Roman fleet, which was instrumental in Rome's conquest of Europe. One of Rome's gifts to the world, Rome's highly engineered water systems remain the basis of those we use today. Also, captivating is Formia's archaeological museum, housed in the 18th-century Town Hall. It boasts a rich collection of Roman artifacts, including statues of notable figures and deities, as well as intricate architectural and burial items. Both sites provide a compelling glimpse into Formia's significant role in Rome's ancient legacy.

Day 5 Naples (Port: Naples)

Shrouded by the shadow of a brooding Mount Vesuvius, Naples' 'underworld' reputation has mellowed in recent years providing the perfect culmination of our explorations. Survivors of successive imperial invasions, outbreaks of plagues and infamous natural disasters Neapolitans are well-known for their dramatic personalities. A dedication to family and their ancestral roots makes them natural storytellers, with a passion to share

their stoic city and its intrinsic tales with all they encounter. Visit the magnificent Palace of Caserta, hear tales from the city's dubious past on a locally guided historical walking tour, or if you prefer to 'stay above ground', join a guide for a 'foodie' tour in the home of Neapolitan pizza, Sfogliatella and Polpette. There's always plenty to enthral us in Naples.

Option 1 - Morning experience: Naples; Yesterday - Today. A city of complex themes, and one of the bedrocks of Italian culture, Naples' immense history plays out amongst the winding alleys of its old town, and what lies beneath. We begin with a stroll through these lively streets that still follow the decumani, or ancient Roman roads, originally laid out 2,000 years ago. Underneath the Gothic church of San Lorenzo Maggiore where the city of Neapolis' forum once lay, we encounter its main street – Decumanus Maximus. Here we see traces of the former city, as we descend underground and explore this archaeological complex, which has both Greek and Roman roots. We learn the role of the Greek Agora and the subsequent Roman Forum, in civic and commercial life during antiquity, before skipping to the 20th century. Naples was Italy's most bombed city during World War II, and these tunnels are thought to have saved the lives of more than 200,000 people who used the tunnels as bomb shelters. Back above ground we explore the city's political and social history, from its Greek origins as Neapolis (the new city) to modern times. We find the Castel Nuovo, the previous political centre of the city, the Palazzo Reale, which served as the royal palace during the reign of the Spanish Bourbon Kings and the stoic buildings of the city's medieval period. With the Bay of Naples as a backdrop, Naples reveals the twists and turns in her story throughout our quest into her past.

Option 2 – Morning experience: Napoli on a Plate Embark on a journey through time as you delve into the rich tapestry of Italy's culinary heritage. Join us on a gastronomic expedition through Naples where the timeless traditions of the beloved pizza originated.

Experience the artistry of centuries-old culinary practices as you savour two distinct varieties of pizza, immersing yourself in the gastronomic culture of Naples. Soak up the authentic charm of a local pizzeria, and indulge in one of Naples' iconic pastries, a sweet finale to a morning steeped in the flavours of history and tradition. Our time in Naples ends as we reboard the Douglas Mawson and enjoy lunch as we sail the Bay of Naples to the legendary island of Capri. Rising from the Bay of Naples, the rocky island of Capri has attracted tourists since ancient times. Rome's notorious emperors built no less than 12 villas here, declaring it by edict to be an imperial retreat. On arrival, we tender ashore and board our transfer vehicles that zigzag their way up the slopes of Capri to the island's capital of Anacapri. This 'hip' town offers dramatic clifftop views of the Amalfi Coast and the Mediterranean Sea, with modern-day celebrities flocking to its trendy restaurants and luxury hotels. We enjoy a sunset for which the island

is famous, before literally sailing off into the sunset as we reboard our ship and set sail for the stunning Amalfi Coast.

Option 3 – Morning experience:
The Palace of Caserta. You are forgiven if you have never heard of the Palace of Caserta, but once you have visited it you may never stop talking about it. A masterpiece of Baroque architecture, Caserta sprawls over five floors, 1,200 rooms, 11 acres of gardens, pools, fountains and cascades, and almost 300 acres of parklands. Designed according to the wishes of Charles of Bourbon III, by Luigi Vanvitelli, one of the greatest Italian architects of the 18th century, Caserta was a palace ahead of its time. Respect for nature became the palace's calling card, drawing from trends spreading across Europe at the time. Hundreds of rare and precious plants from around the world were brought to Caserta, and still grown there today. Grand, excessive and opulent, a visit to Caserta will fill your diary with superlatives.

Day 6 Salerno (Port: Salerno)

The historic city of Salerno acts as a gateway to one of Europe's most famous coastlines: the Amalfi Coast. A magnet to both ancient and modern visitors, its interspersed villages appear to almost grow from the rockface on which they are built. The dramatic cliffs and natural harbours of the Amalfi Coast have hosted holiday homes of the rich and revered throughout time. Our excursions offer a hint of the coast's abundant past and present as we view the excavations of luxurious villas, theatres, and bathhouses at Pompeii, or search the beachfront villages of the Amalfi for tantalising tales at the heart of Amalfi life. Personalise your exploration with our included 'Your Choice' experiences.

Option 1 – Morning experience: Pompeii and Mount Vesuvius. Known to the Neapolitans simply as 'him', Mount Vesuvius towers over the surrounding fertile plains at 4,200 metres. He has been quiet of late, but it was a different story in 79 BCE, when lava and ash vomited forth, engulfing the city of Pompeii. Albeit a tragedy, the excavation of these extensive sites reveals treasure for travellers. Physical evidence of the city's final dramatic moments, preserved forever amongst the volcanic ash, speak louder than words. Each tells a tale of intrigue, returned to life by the ruins and remains of these Roman cities. Our guided tour of Pompeii's buried city is amongst one of the most intriguing in world history. Returning to the ship for lunch, there is time to explore Castellammare di Stabia, before we set sail in the early evening.

Option 2 – Morning experience: The Amalfi Coast Drive. Driving the Amalfi Coast is like navigating through a real-life postcard, with a delightful twist. The famously winding road twists around hairpin turns and clings to cliff edges, offering breathtaking drops and stunning views of the turquoise Tyrrhenian Sea.

Begin your adventure in Castellammare di Stabia and hold on tight as you wind your way through charming coastal villages. Make a stop in Amalfi, the town that gives the coast its name. Explore its narrow streets, medieval architecture, and vibrant piazzas, which are perfect for a leisurely stroll and a gelato break. As you continue, the road curves around the rugged coastline, leading to Positano, where colourful buildings cascade down the hillside to a sun-umbrellaed sandy beach. This drive is filled with twists, turns, and spectacular vistas, making it an unforgettable journey along one of Italy's most scenic driving routes. (Please note that this route and the towns visited may be adjusted due to traffic conditions, which can be heavy on this stretch of road.)

Option 3 - Half day experience: The Amalfi Coast and the Lemon Walk. A magnet for 'privileged' visitors, the Amalfi coast is a modern-day mecca for the rich and famous. We search for signs of previous imperial guests and conquering entrepreneurs, both private and political, on the drive to the iconic town of Sorrento. Driving its coastal roads, we cannot help but wonder about its acres of steep terraced lemon groves. This much maligned fruit has for centuries been at the centre of all things in towns like Ravello, Sorrento, and Positano. We join a local expert as they tell the 'sweet' story of the lemon and its place in every Italian's heart. Sipped as an aperitif, sales of Limoncello are second only to Campari in Italy. Our guide entertains us with mythical legends and tales of intrigue and of course, our stroll through the lemon groves is rewarded with a tasting of Limoncello, making this the perfect Amalfi experience. (This tour has been amended to a half day experience due to new traffic regulations in the region.)

Day 7 Messina, Sicily (Port: Messina)

We follow the coastline to the 'boot' of Italy, arriving around midday at the gateway to the island of Sicily: Messina. The city of Messina guards the mouth of the straits of the same name – a mere 15-minute ferry crossing from the Italian mainland. The recipient of more than its fair share of disasters, Messina has faced many invasions. However, it is the city's notorious bad luck - two major earthquakes and a tsunami, that destroyed the entire town. Famous as the finish line for Monty and Eisenhower on their wager as to who would reach Messina first, this stoic city acts today as our gateway to Europe's highest active volcano and its surrounding coastal gems. Our experiences this afternoon offer a variety of activities. Scale Mt. Etna, take a seat at an ancient Roman Amphitheatre for one of the best views in Sicily, or follow Francis Ford Coppola's iconic trilogy on a 'Godfather' tour. As always it is Your Choice. Personalise your exploration

with our included 'Your Choice' experiences

Option 1 —Afternoon experience: Taormina Topped by an ancient Greco-Roman theatre, with spectacular views of Mt Etna, the hilltop enclave of Taormina is at the top of the list when it comes to visiting Sicily. Once a holiday resort for Greeks and Romans, it attracted numerous foes, however today it fights a different form of invasion with the town performing solidly on the Hollywood A-listers bucket list. Its luxurious hotels, restaurants and tile-terraced piazzas appear on the front page of Vogue, and with views across the Mediterranean, no wonder it is a 'must see' for all travellers to Italy

Option 2 – Afternoon experience: .The Godfather. Follow the footsteps of Marlin Brando and Al Pacino on the guided tour of 'Godfather' proportions. Our first stop is the charming village of Savoca, one of the picturesque seafront towns immortalised in Francis Ford Coppola's iconic trilogy. In Savoca, we visit the renowned Bar Vitelli, which houses a rich collection of film memorabilia. A leisurely stroll through Savoca leads us to the Catacombs and the Capuchin Convent, both steeped in history and mystery. Our journey continues to the hilltop village of Forza D'Agro, perched at an impressive 365 metres. This picturesque setting served as the backdrop for numerous scenes in the trilogy. As you wander the narrow lanes and historic churches, you'll be transported to a world where the real and cinematic past intertwine, creating a truly immersive experience. The region was chosen for the film shoots due to its timeless Sicilian atmosphere. The rustic charm and historic architecture provided an ideal backdrop for the dramatic narrative of 'The Godfather'. While Sicily, including Savoca and Forza D'Agro, has a complex history with the Mafia, today it is celebrated more for its cultural heritage and cinematic connections

Option 3 - Afternoon experience: Mt. Etna At 3,369 metres Mt Etna is the highest active volcano in Europe. Her constant state of irritation is monitored by vulcanologists worldwide, yet it is the people who live in her shadow who know her best. We join a local guide to scale her slopes in a 4 x4 WD. We will drive through charming villages imbued with history and tradition before finding the winding dirt roads which take us along the edge of extinct craters where we experience the life cycle of an eruption, while we view Etna in all her glory with a deeper understanding of her eruptive power.

Day 8 Palermo (Port: Palermo)

Once infamous as the centre of the Sicilian Mafia, Sicily's capital, Palermo, now proudly claims to be 'a clean city,' offering travellers the chance to enjoy its ancient sites, colourful markets, and vibrant Sicilian lifestyle once more. Steeped in history, culture and Mediterranean charm, Palermo was founded by the Phoenicians as early as the 8th century BCE. Its strategic

location at the crossroads of civilisations has seen it influenced by Greek, Roman, Arab, Norman and Spanish cultures, making it a fascinating city to explore. Its diverse cultural heritage is reflected in its architecture, from ancient ruins and Norman palaces to baroque churches and Arab-Norman art, while the city's famous street markets, such as the bustling Ballarò Market offer a glimpse into Sicily's famous culinary traditions. Palermo's recent history includes a challenging period with the Sicilian Mafia or Cosa Nostra, most notably, the courageous actions of two anti-Mafia judges, Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, who dedicated their lives to combating organised crime, and subsequently, became symbols of resistance to Mafia influence. Tragically, both judges were assassinated in 1992, but their legacy spurred significant anti-Mafia efforts, which have transformed Palermo's social and political landscape. Beyond its historical and architectural treasures, Palermo is known for its lively atmosphere, with bustling piazzas, a vibrant street food scene, and sun-soaked beaches. The city's resilience, rich history, and diverse cultural mix, make Palermo a captivating destination for travellers seeking to explore Sicilian heritage.

Personalise your exploration with our included 'Your Choice' experiences

Option 1 – Morning experience: The 'Real' Godfathers of Palermo

Exploring the Mafia in Palermo involves delving into a topic far more nuanced than the stereotypes presented in mainstream cinema and TV. Known locally as Cosa Nostra, the Mafia is a profound social and economic phenomenon that has significantly shaped Sicily's history over the past two centuries. From its roots in the aristocracy to its transformation into a political and entrepreneurial powerhouse in the 20th century, Cosa Nostra's impact is immense. Key events include the sack of Palermo, the violent confrontations of the 1970s and 80s, and the subsequent state crackdown, marked by the assassinations of many institutional figures. The 'pizzo' phenomenon, where businesses are extorted for protection money, underscores the Mafia's all-pervasive reach. Yet, Palermo's collective response has led to a remarkable resurgence in the city's confidence. This guided tour offers a unique perspective on Palermo, revealing sites and events tied to Cosa Nostra's history. Each stop provides insight into the city's fight against organised crime, while your local guide shares personal stories, offering a genuine understanding of Palermo's true essence.

Option 2 – Morning experience: Palermo's Private Palaces

On this locally guided walking tour, you'll discover how Palermo's oratories and their stunning stucco art reveal the city's intricate social and political fabric. In the 17th and 18th centuries, powerful families vied to showcase their influence by building magnificent oratories. These religious spaces were not just places of worship, but also symbols of their congregation's (known as a confraternity) wealth and status. Each confraternity sought to surpass the others by creating more elaborate

architecture and lavish decor. Giacomo Serpotta, a master of late baroque stucco art, was commissioned to craft intricate decorations that underscored their prestige. His masterpieces adorn key sites across the city, including the Oratory of San Lorenzo and oratories in the Loggia neighbourhood. These opulent buildings became focal points for both religious and civic life, reinforcing the authority of their patrons and solidifying their control over Palermo's social and political landscape. This tour will guide you through these monumental sites, revealing the profound impact of Palermo's ruling elite and its cultural legacy.

Option 3 – Morning experience: The Ancient City of Segesta

A one-hour drive takes us west to the well-preserved ruins of Segesta, an ancient city that reveals much about life in antiquity. Founded by the Elymians, Segesta was later influenced by various empires, each leaving its mark on the city. The Doric temple, dedicated to an unknown deity, was built in the 5th century BCE and is notable for its imposing columns and alignment towards the Acropolis, reflecting the city's religious and cultural priorities. The ancient theatre, dating back to the 3rd century BCE, is perched on a hillside and offers expansive views of the valley. It reflects the city's past social and entertainment life, hosting performances and gatherings that were central to community life.

Walking through Segesta with your expert local guide, you'll see how the city's layout and architecture provide clues to ancient daily life. The remains of houses, public spaces, and fortifications indicate a well-organised urban centre with a blend of local and external influences. This visit offers a glimpse into the lives of its inhabitants and the historical layers that shaped this ancient city. Returning to the ship for lunch allows an afternoon to explore Palermo independently, as we sail early evening.

Day 9 Agrigento (Port: Porto Empedocles)

Sailing around the western tip of Sicily, we arrive at Porto Empedocles around midday and enjoy lunch onboard. Our 'Your Choice' experiences offer a choice of two engaging options this afternoon. Choose to join a guided tour of the Valley of the Temples, where you will explore the rich history and fascinating lifestyles of Sicily's ancient residents. Alternatively, head inland to a family-owned winery to discover the centuries-old significance of wine production on the island and enjoy a tasting of local wines. If you prefer a more relaxed pace, you can spend time exploring Porto Empedocles independently, soaking in the local charm and attractions at your own leisure.

Personalise your exploration with our included 'Your Choice' experiences

Option 1: Afternoon experience: Agrigento – The Valley of the Temples

A highlight of any visit to Sicily, Agrigento, or the Valley of the Temples as it is known, is an archaeological

gem. The site brings to life the stories of the people who lived, loved and died here, dating as far back as the 6th century BCE. "One of the wealthiest colonies in Greece", the city thrived around 2,500 years ago, with an economy based on produce from the rich surrounding land and the trade routes from Greece. Its impressive remains attract travellers from around the world.

Option 2: Afternoon experience: Sicilian Wine Tasting

The southern Sicilian countryside is scattered with wineries owned and operated by families. Inland from Port Empedocles, surrounded by lush olive and almond groves with wheat fields stretching around them, each winery benefits from Sicily's unique soil, which is enriched by volcanic ash and Mediterranean minerals. Wine has long been a cornerstone of Sicily's economy, dating back to ancient times when the island was a major wine producer for the Roman Empire. During your visit, you will tour the winery and learn about traditional winemaking methods that have evolved over centuries. Following the tour, enjoy a tasting session that features wines paired with local snacks that highlight regional flavours. This experience offers a genuine taste of Sicily's vinous heritage and provides insight into the island's deep-rooted winemaking culture, all while soaking in the natural beauty of the region.

Option 3: Afternoon experience - Operation Husky

Winston Churchill may have referred to Italy as the "soft underbelly of Europe," but for the young men of Operation Husky, the Road to Rome was fraught with danger. On July 10, 1943, 160,000 Allied soldiers landed on Sicily's southern coast, liberating the island from the Nazi-Fascist regime. Licata, the first city in Europe to be freed, marked the beginning of the end of WWII in Europe. Our locally guided tour brings these historic events to life through the stories of elderly locals of Licata who were children at the time. We visit three museums displaying relics, photographs, and films from that era, as well as explore an Air Raid Shelter and coastal bunkers, offering a poignant glimpse into the hardships faced by both the island's residents and the soldiers who fought for the island's freedom.

Day 10 Syracuse (Port: Syracuse)

Syracuse's delightful jumble of Greek, Roman, medieval and baroque layers make every street corner and every ancient site a story unto itself. Greek ruins rise from citrus orchards, baroque churches stand stoic and medieval streets lead down to the sea. They meet, a plethora of stories waiting to be heard. Our 'Your Choice' experiences offer a morning and full day option today. For those visiting the sights of Syracuse this morning, you may wish to stroll from the port to the island of Ortigia. The small Baroque

Island of Ortigia, the historic heart of Syracuse, has been inhabited for over 3,000 years and is celebrated for its Greek heritage. As a UNESCO landmark, Ortigia features stunning church facades, vibrant outdoor restaurants, and elegant piazzas. Surrounded by sea, it offers a pleasant afternoon visit, blending historical charm with a coastal vibe.

Personalise your exploration with our included 'Your Choice' experiences

Option 1 - Morning experience: Syracuse and the Parco Archeologico della Neapolis

Once a rival to Athens, Syracuse is home to one of Sicily's greatest archaeological sites – the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Parco Archeologico della Neapolis. Our local guides tell tales of past realms as we view the 16,000 capacity Greek Theatre, and the 2nd-century Anfiteatro Romano, originally used for gladiatorial combats and horse races, before standing at the foot of the monolithic Altar to Hieron II where up to 400 oxen would be sacrificed in one ritual. Beside the theatre, and just as fascinating, we find the limestone quarries that supplied stone for the ancient city. Honeycombed with catacombs below, and citrus trees above, it is also where the 7,000 survivors of the 5th-century war between Syracuse and Athens were imprisoned.

Option 2 – Full day experience: The Medieval Towns of Noto and Ragusa

An example of architectural elegance, Noto and Ragusa are two of Italy's most picturesque towns. Completely destroyed by the 1693 earthquake, they were rebuilt on a new site under the scrutiny of Guiseppe Lanza, the Duke of Camastra, whose passion for all things baroque is evident at every turn. Flanked by baroque palazzi and churches, the main squares of Noto and Ragusa became the symbol of the Risorgimento, the Italian unification movement of the 1800s. The 17th century Ragusa Ibla is a magical mass of tangled alleys lined with grey-stoned houses, and handsome squares surrounded by baroque palaces, all leading to Ragusa's classic central square – Piazza Duomo. As Allied forces invaded Sicily during Operation Husky in World War II, British and US forces linked up in Ragusa. The local population welcomed them with "unbridled enthusiasm", as Ragusa became one of the first towns in Italy to be liberated.

Day 11 Disembark Valletta, Malta (Port: Valletta)

As a matter of Mediterranean real estate, Malta has location, location, location. For fun in the sun and an island lifestyle that may be ideal, but when it comes to defence from invasion it is not. A convivial, family orientated people, the Maltese have fought hard to defend their country against everyone from the Greeks to Napoleon. Their bravery in World War

It was during the second siege of Malta that King George VI awarded the nation the George Cross which appears in form on the Maltese flag and coat of arms. Our day is spent in Malta's convivial capital, Valletta, which remains a historical city with streets of fascinating sites telling more than their fair share of stories. We join a local guide this morning for a browse through Valletta's essential sights. We spend time at the Barrakka Gardens to gain a perspective of the city's harbour from a naval point of view before exploring the Grand Masters Palace and Armoury, where we uncover an impressive collection gathered by The Knights Hospitaller of St John, while the multimedia show, Malta Experience, places thousands of years of Malta into perspective. This afternoon you will have time to explore further independently, before transferring to our overnight hotel. This evening, we gather for a Farewell Event where we honour the bravery of the people of this famed island nation, when we hear World War II tales of courage against seemingly insurmountable odds, from a local expert. Accommodation: Valletta Hotel. Meals: Breakfast, Farewell Event canapés.

Day 12 Depart Valletta

After breakfast, check-out of your hotel and say farewell to your fellow travellers as you transfer to the airport for your onward flight. Meals: Breakfast.