



Sicily: A Dimension of the Imagination 2026

10 APR – 28 APR 2026

Code: 22606

Tour Leaders **Susannah Fullerton, OAM, FRSN, David Henderson**

Fitness Level 

Level 2 - Intermediate

For people with energetic lifestyles and very good mobility

In the footsteps of great literary figures including Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, Luigi Pirandello, Giovanni Verga, Leonardo Sciascia, Alexandre Dumas, D.H. Lawrence, Oscar Wilde & J.W. von Goethe.

Overview

All of Sicily is a dimension of the imagination. Leonardo Sciascia

- Learn about the riches of Sicilian literature from [Susannah Fullerton](#) and study the great artworks of Sicily from artist [David Henderson](#).
- Follow in the footsteps of Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, to see places connected with his life, his great novel, *The Leopard* and with the memorable movie made from the book. Visits include [Palazzo Lanza Tomasi](#), Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's Sicilian palace, and Palazzo Valguarnera Gangi, where Luchino Visconti filmed the famous ball scene.
- Explore the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Roman Villa of Casale with its 3,500 sq. metres of superb floor mosaics.
- Follow in the footsteps of the beloved Inspector Montalbano, creation of Andrea Cavalleri - see his home in the TV series, dine at his favourite restaurants and see where he finds corpses and solves crimes.
- Visit the literary museums of Giovanni Verga, Salvatore Quasimodo and Luigi Pirandello, and see places associated with Goethe, Dumas, D.H. Lawrence, W.B. Yeats, Mario Puzo and many more great writers.
- Visit UNESCO World Heritage towns, monasteries and Byzantine churches.
- Visit places associated with myths and legends, such as the Arethusa Fountain (beloved of the Romantic Poets) and the Rock of Cyclops.
- Experience great Greek theatres, including the one in Syracuse where plays by Aeschylus were first performed.
- Visit Greek and Roman cities, villas, theatres and religious sites, and major museums with antique collections, including Catania, Syracuse, Agrigento, Selinunte and Taormina.
- View masterpieces by Caravaggio: *The Burial of St Lucy* in Syracuse, *Adoration of the Shepherds* and *Resurrection of Lazarus* in Messina.
- Travel in the footsteps of Alexandre Dumas, Guy de Maupassant, Jules Verne & J.R.R. Tolkien, visiting the Aeolian Islands, with volcanos, prehistoric artefacts and labyrinthine alleyways.
- Visit [Casa Cuseni](#) in Taormina, a historic villa that hosted renowned guests like Picasso and Chanel, now serving as a Museum of Fine Arts and the Grand Tour.

Overnight Syracuse (3 nights) • Ragusa (3 nights) • Agrigento (3 nights) • Palermo (4 nights) • Lipari (3 nights) • Taormina (2 nights).

Introduction

Sicily was inhabited 10,000 years ago. Strategically located in the Mediterranean, it became a crossroads of history, a pawn of conquest and empire, and a melting pot for all who came to its shores. Palermo is said to be the most conquered city on earth! This tour gives you the opportunity to explore this seductively beautiful island from literary, historical and artistic angles. The land of the Cyclops has been praised by poets from Homer to Virgil and there have, over the centuries, been many visiting writers. From Cervantes to Truman Capote, Sicily has lured authors from other lands, and many of them have written evocatively about the ruins, food, rich culture and people. We will follow in the footsteps of many of these literary visitors, from Goethe to D.H. Lawrence, Cicero to Lawrence Durrell, Alexander Dumas to Peter Robb. Shakespeare set two plays on the island, although he never actually visited. View Sicily through the eyes of an intriguing range of great writers.

We will also get to know Sicilian writers - Giovanni Verga, whose short work *Cavalleria rusticana* became an

opera, Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa whose *The Leopard* is a classic of both page and screen, Nobel prize winning authors Luigi Pirandello and Salvatore Quasimodo, anti-fascist Elio Vittorini, fighter of the Mafia Leonardo Sciascia, and the creator of the much-loved Inspector Montalbano books, Andrea Camilleri. We will see museums, birthplaces and other sites associated with these authors and their characters.

Sicily is rich in so many forms of art. This tour will include viewings of three Caravaggio masterpieces, superb stucco work, shimmering mosaics, and fabulous architecture from the varied eras and influences of Sicilian history. Paintings in private palaces, altarpieces in churches and painted backdrops in theatres – there will be a rich range of great art included in the itinerary.

Everywhere in Sicily there are reminders of bygone ages. We will visit ruins, temples and villas, see fountains, rural cottages, Baroque towns, and much more. We will watch a traditional puppet show, learn about the devastating 1693 earthquake and its results, discover the changes wrought on the Aeolian islands, and will get a sense of life for Sicilian aristocrats in their decaying palaces.

Sicily offers a delicious layer-cake of culinary influences. The island has many famed recipes, from tempting cannoli to lemon granita, and we'll be treated to the fabulous fresh local produce as we travel. There'll be a tasting of traditional chocolate, meals in restaurants made famous by films (including one from *The Godfather* and the restaurant where Montalbano is a regular customer), and we will dine with incredible views and sun-drenched lands stretching out before us.

The largest island of the Mediterranean offers so much. This tour will encompass the old and the new, the literary and the artistic, great chunks of fascinating history, glorious scenery, and the chance to get to know the land of Scylla and Charybdis, Demeter and Persephone, the fearsome Cyclops and influences from so many other lands and cultures. According to Arab traveller and geographer Al-Idrisi, Sicily "brings together the best aspects from every other country". Gabriel Garcia Marquez stated that "going to Sicily is better than going to the moon", for Goethe the island was "the clue to everything", for Sigmund Freud it was "a stunning orgy of colours, scents and lights", while for Oscar Wilde it was "entirely perfect". Come and learn about one of the most culturally diverse islands in the world, sink into its rich literary traditions, and discover for yourself that Sicily is, in the words of Leonardo Sciascia "a dimension of the imagination".

<https://youtu.be/LEWRlwLBEQw>

Leaders



Susannah Fullerton, OAM, FRSN

President of the Jane Austen Society of Australia, Susannah has published several books on Jane Austen and has lectured extensively on famous authors, their lives and works both in Australia and overseas.

Susannah Fullerton, OAM, FRSN, majored in English Literature at the University of Auckland. She then completed a postgraduate degree in Victorian fiction and prose at the University of Edinburgh. For over 25 years Susannah has been President of the Jane Austen Society of Australia. She has lectured extensively on Jane Austen in Australia and overseas and has published many articles about Jane Austen's works. She is the co-author of *Jane Austen – Antipodean Views* and published *Jane Austen and Crime* in 2004, and *Brief Encounters: Literary Travellers in Australia* (Picador) in 2009. Susannah's latest books are *A Dance with Jane Austen*, *Happily Ever After: Celebrating Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice* and a memoir *Jane & I: A Tale of Austen Addiction*. Susannah is very well known on the Australian speakers' circuit as a literary lecturer. She gives talks on famous authors, their lives and works, and on history and art, at the Art Gallery of NSW, State Library of NSW, ADFAS, WEA, schools, for a great variety of clubs and societies, and on zoom. Susannah uses her training in drama to delight her audiences with dramatic readings from novels and poems. Her interest in literature is wide ranging. She is a member of the Dylan Thomas Society of Australia, the Australian Brontë Association, the NSW Dickens Society and she is Patron of the Kipling Society of Australia. She has worked on literary prize committees, organised literary conferences and is a most experienced lecturer and group leader.



David Henderson

Award-winning artist & Royal Academy graduate who paints half the year in Italy, David brings an artist's eye & profound knowledge of European art to ASA tours.

After initial studies in architecture in Brisbane, David graduated in painting from London's Royal Academy Schools in 1985. The Royal Academy awarded him a prize for painting, and he was twice selected for their annual summer exhibition. David has held many solo exhibitions of his work in Brisbane, Melbourne and London and has been the recipient of several awards and commendations. David has taught art part-time at various institutions; for many years, he lectured and ran courses in the history of art and design at QUT. David now paints full-time and divides his year between Australia and Italy. Since joining ASA in 1995, David has led over 50 tours to a variety of destinations across Italy (including Sicily), France and the UK. He brings a trained artist's eye to an analysis of painting, sculpture and architecture and takes great pleasure in sharing his knowledge.

Combine this tour with

“Stepping Westward”: Rambles with the Poets in Wales 2026

1 MAY – 8 MAY 2026

Jordan in Depth: Petra, Desert Fortresses, Wadi Rum and the Red Sea 2026

19 MAR – 3 APR 2026



Itinerary

The following itinerary lists a range of site visits which we plan to visit. Many are accessible to the public, but some require special permission. The daily activities described in this itinerary may change or be rotated and/or modified in order to accommodate alterations in opening hours, flight schedules and confirmation of private visits. Participants will receive a final itinerary together with their tour documents. The tour includes breakfast daily, lunches & evening meals indicated in the detailed itinerary where: B=breakfast, L=lunch and D=dinner.

Syracuse – 3 nights

Day 1: Friday 10 April, Catania – Syracuse

- Transfer from Catania Airport to Syracuse for participants taking the ASA 'designated' flight
- Welcome Meeting
- Evening at leisure

Our arrival in Sicily is at Catania airport, but we will set off immediately for magnificent Syracuse. Its layers of history, the labyrinthine streets of its island core, and its superb ruins, make it a place that truly encapsulates Sicily's beauty and historical importance. Syracuse was once the largest city in the ancient world.

We will be staying on Ortygia (the first settlement was founded there by the Corinthians in 734 BC), a mini-peninsula with incredible views. After our welcome meeting at the hotel, you will have time to explore what novelist Lawrence Durrell called "this honeycomb – so full of treasures, a real Ark of the human covenant", the maze of skinny streets lined with palazzi and vibrant cafes, or wander in the fabulous Piazza del Duomo, a masterpiece of Baroque town planning.

Note: Participants travelling on the ASA 'designated' flight are scheduled to arrive at Catania's airport in the late afternoon. Participants not travelling on this flight should meet the group at the [Grand Hotel Ortygia](#) in Syracuse. (Overnight Syracuse)

Day 2: Saturday 11 April, Syracuse – Catania – Acri Trezza – Syracuse

- Monastery of San Nicolò l'Arena
- La Casa Museo di Giovanni Verga, Catania
- Tomb of composer Vincenzo Bellini, Catania Cathedral
- Casa del Nespolo Museum, Acri Trezza: setting of Giovanni Verga's novel *I Malavoglia*
- The Rock of the Cyclops, Acri Trezza
- Welcome Dinner

On arrival in Catania we begin with a visit to the Monastery of San Nicolò l'Arena which is the second largest Benedictine monastery in Europe. Now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, it forms part of the University of Catania.

When he visited in the 1780s, Goethe was not impressed with the city of Catania. Today, however, this city in the shadow of Mt Etna has great energy and spirit, and its historic centre is a UNESCO-listed wonder.

Giovanni Verga, realist writer and playwright (today best remembered for *Cavalleria rusticana*, his play which was turned into a glorious opera by Mascagni) was born in Catania. The Giovanni Verga Museum is in his birthplace, also the home he returned to at the end of his life. The Museum, which we will visit, holds the fabulous 'walnut library' (his collection of beloved European authors), his desk, etchings and manuscripts. D.H. Lawrence was so taken with Verga's work that he translated much of it into English.

The Cathedral is dedicated to St Agatha, patron saint of the city. She was born in Catania in the third century AD and lived a modest and happy life until a Roman governor fell in love with her. When she refused his advances, she was imprisoned and tortured (her breasts were pulled off with pincers, then she was roasted on hot coals). She is said to protect the city when Mt Etna erupts and every year a huge festival is held in her honour. We'll explore the cathedral and also get to see the tomb of Vincenzo Bellini, another citizen of Catania, whose operas are masterpieces of the 'bel canto' era. He died in France, but his remains came home to Catania 41 years later.

Our last visit of the day is to the Casa del Nespolo Museum in Acri Trezza, a magical place where you can 'enter' the pages of Verga's novel *I Malavoglia*. Often translated as *The House by the Medlar-Tree*, this important novel was published in 1881. It tells the story of a family of fishermen, torn by ancient rivalries. The 1948 Visconti film *The Earth Trembles* was based on the book. The museum, located in the heart of the seaside village in a building which is a perfect example of a 19th century fisherman's home, has a room dedicated to the movie and another to the novel.

Acri Trezza, with its lava-stone beach, has the Rocks of Cyclops. According to legend, one-eyed Cyclops Polyphemus, son of the sea god, killed a young shepherd named Aci. The nymph Galatea loved the boy and after his death she asked the gods to transform his body into a river, the one that flows into the bay where the Rocks of Cyclops stand. The jagged rocks are said to be the missiles that the furious Cyclops hurled at fleeing Ulysses after he and his men had escaped his cave by hiding under the bellies of sheep. There will be time to view these legendary rocks before returning to Syracuse.

Sicilian food shows the traces of all the cultures which have entered the island over the centuries. Greek, Spanish, French and Arab influences make it an exciting and vibrant cuisine. Sicilian chef Mithaecus is the earliest cookbook author in any language whose name is known. Tonight we will dine at Regina Lucia and sample some of the traditional foods of the island. (Overnight Syracuse) BD

Day 3: Sunday 12 April, Syracuse

- In the footsteps of Elio Vittorini, author of *Conversation in Sicily*: Temple of Apollo, Casa Natale di Elio Vittorini (exterior) & Cathedral (Temple of Athena)
- Fonte Aretusa
- Galleria Regionale di Palazzo Bellomo
- Greek Theatre & Quarries, Syracuse
- Caravaggio's late masterpiece, *Burial of Saint Lucy*, Church of Santa Lucia al Sepolcro

For author Elio Vittorini, travel was "not just an opportunity to record new sensations, but the means to recover a human dimension or to recover one's own identity". His book *Conversations in Sicily* describes a train journey from northern Sicily to the south (he was the son of a railway worker) and also celebrates his birthplace of Syracuse. The book, published in 1941, got him jailed for its anti-fascist sentiments. The first American edition had a foreword by Ernest Hemingway. This morning we will take a guided walk around Ortygia in the footsteps of Vittorini, seeing his birthplace, the Cathedral, the Ponte Umberto, and much more.

In the 1st century BC Cicero visited Ortygia and praised the 5th-century BC Greek temple that stood there. Only vestiges of that temple now remain. A 7th-century cathedral was built on its ruins and it became a church when the island was evangelised by St Paul. In the Inspector Montalbano novel *Rounding the Mark*, Montalbano goes there as part of his investigation into human trafficking.

The Arethusa Fountain is a spring welling up into a reed-filled basin (it's one of the few places in Europe where papyrus grows). Arethusa was a water nymph who enjoyed bathing at Olympus. The river god Alpheus fell for her, but Arethusa was having none of his lust, and fled. She asked Artemis, protector of women, to aid her, and he turned her into a spring which went underground from the home of the Gods to Ortygia, where she surfaced. Her suitor followed, and his waters now mingle with hers in this sacred fountain. It's a subject designed to appeal to the Romantic poets. Mary Shelley wrote a play about Arethusa, and Percy Bysshe Shelley penned his poem *Arethusa* and imagined the pair sleeping "in the rocking deep / Beneath the Ortigian shore". The place was also admired by Coleridge when he visited in 1804 and was mentioned by Wordsworth in *The Prelude*.

We end the morning with a visit to the Museo Bellomo, an art museum in a 13th-century palace, which includes the *Annunciation* (1474) by Sicily's greatest 15th-century artist, Antonella da Messina.

This afternoon we visit the town's archaeological park which includes a Greek theatre. This 16,000 capacity amphitheatre staged the last tragedies of Aeschylus, including *The Persians*, and he was present to watch his own works being performed. Next to the theatre is the mysterious Latomia del Paradiso, a deep limestone quarry from which stone for the ancient city was extracted. Riddled with catacombs, today the deep chasm is filled with citrus and magnolia trees.

After visiting the park, we enter the Church of Santa Lucia al Sepolcro, home to Caravaggio's stunning painting depicting St Lucia's burial. According to legend, the young woman refused to recant her Christian beliefs, so was sentenced to be dragged to a brothel. Miraculously, nothing could move her from the spot where she stood. She was stabbed in the throat as she stood there and that spot is now her chapel. Caravaggio painted this masterpiece in 1608. He'd just fled to Syracuse from a prison in Malta. St Lucia's remains had been stolen from the church, which was eager to promote her reputation and the authorities thought a good painting might help achieve that. Caravaggio worked to a tight deadline. Was he trying to bury his own torments along with the saint's body? We'll study this mesmerising art work, written about by Australian Peter Robb in *M: The Caravaggio Enigma*. (Overnight Syracuse) B

Ragusa – 3 nights

Day 4: Monday 13 April, Syracuse – Noto – Modica – Ragusa

- In the footsteps of Montalbano including Palazzo Ducezio and Palazzo Nicolaci, Noto
- Tina di Lorenzo Theatre, Noto
- Museo Casa Natale Salvatore Quasimodo, Modica
- Sabadì Chocolate Ageing Cellar, Modica: guided tour and tasting of the chocolates

This morning we head for Noto, a Baroque gem of a town which could be mistaken for a film set, and has indeed often been used as one. Noto is situated on a slight rise, about 10km from the coast. Until 1693 it was in another location altogether, but a devastating earthquake annihilated it. Architect Guiseppe Lanza was commissioned to build a new town, and he decided it should be a work of art. Today Noto is justifiably a UNESCO World Heritage site, a superb snapshot of a single style, the Baroque. Lanza used a honey-coloured stone and the place glows with soft colours. Poet Adam Zagajewski describes Noto as “a baroque town where even the stables and harbours are ornate” and a town “too perfect for its inhabitants”.

This is Inspector Montalbano territory and we will again follow in his footsteps by visiting Palazzo Ducezio and Palazzo Nicolaci. Palazzo Ducezio, now Noto’s Town Hall, was used for the exterior of the Narcotics Headquarters in the Montalbano episode of *The Mud Pyramid*, while Palazzo Nicolaci features in the episode *Artist’s Touch* as the office of a notary who, after drawing up an important will, is found murdered. Montalbano must find out who committed the murder. The palazzos’ arches, ionic columns, richly brocaded walls and wrought-iron balconies all give an idea of the sumptuous lifestyle of Sicilian nobles, as captured so evocatively in Lampedusa’s great novel *The Leopard*.

The petite Tina di Lorenza Theatre was named in honour of the silent-film actress who grew up in Noto. The great Eleanora Duse once acted there, and the theatre continues to offer regular performances.

After lunch we drive to Modica, yet another glorious Baroque town, rebuilt after the 1693 earthquake. It is superbly photogenic, so was of course used in the Montalbano series. It is also associated with Gesualdo Bufalino, novelist and teacher who described the town as being “like a pomegranate cut in two; close to the sea but with an air of the countryside; half of it crammed onto a rocky spur, half spread out at its feet.”

Salvatore Quasimodo, poet and translator, won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1959. He was born in Modica in 1901 and became one of the foremost Italian poets of the 20th century. In 1908 his family moved to Messina, to assist recovery from the devastating earthquake, and the tragedy left a lasting impression on the boy. He moved away from his birthplace as a young man, but Sicily, religion and death remained recurring motifs in his writing. His birthplace is now a museum and we will visit the two rooms and see displays about his life, rare editions of his works, and items that belonged to this influential man of letters.

Modica has the first cellar in the world for ageing chocolate. Sabadì Chocolate, a traditional Sicilian sweet, is made according to a cold-working process, has no added fats and retains all the beneficial properties of the cocoa. It was the Spanish, who ruled the Kingdom of Sicily between 1500 and 1700, who introduced this chocolate into Modica. After a guided tour of the Ageing Cellar, there will be time for tasting!

We drive on to Ragusa, our base for the next three nights. It’s a town with two faces – we can ignore the modern face and focus on Ragusa Ibla, the magnificent historic centre. The central piazza at the steps of the cathedral has appeared in many Montalbano episodes. Vigàta, the town where the novels are based, is a fictional one, but in the film series Ragusa stands in for much of Vigàta, and we will explore some of the fabulous film locations. The Montalbano trail has become a major tourist industry. (Overnight Ragusa) B

Day 5: Tuesday 14 April, Ragusa

- Ragusa: in the footsteps of Inspector Montalbano including: Cathedral of San Giorgio, Church of Maria delle Scale, Palazzo delle Poste and the Cathedral of San Giovanni
- Giardino Ibleo a Ragusa as seen in the Montalbano episode *The Paper Moon*.
- Il Circolo di Conversazione (Caffè dei Cavalieri)

Andrea Camilleri (1925 – 2019) was a poet, screenwriter, and director who tried his hand at many literary forms before turning to the crime novel. In 1994 he published *The Shape of Water*, the first of many books featuring Salvo Montalbano, a fractious detective in the town of Vigàta (based on Camilleri's home town of Porto Empedocle). Millions of copies of the books sold and the TV series, starring Luca Zingaretti, further increased Camilleri's fame.

Today we explore places in Ragusa used as locations in the series. There's the Piazza Duomo, the Cathedral of San Giorgio, and there are the stunning views from the church of Maria delle Scale which set the scene for many episodes. As well as gaining insight into the world of Salvo Montalbano and the popular TV series, we will also delve into Ragusa's history and explore its world heritage buildings.

We also stroll to the Giardino Ibleo, an attractive public garden laid out in the 19th century. Salvo Montalbano waits here for his girlfriend Livia to arrive by bus, and he meets an old thief here to ask for his help.

Our program includes a visit to Il Circolo di Conversazione a Ragusa Ibla, a splendid 1850s building constructed in the neoclassical style. The building appears in several Montalbano episodes – *The Terracotta Dog*, *The Smell of the Night* (when it becomes King Midas' financial agency) and in *The Paper Moon*. The ballroom has a superb frescoed ceiling, with medallions at each corner depicting Michelangelo, Dante, Galileo and Bellini. (Overnight Ragusa) B

Day 6: Wednesday 15 April, Ragusa – Donnalucata – Scicli – Punta Secca – Ragusa

- Castello di Donnafugata housing the Collezione Gabriele Arezzo di Trifiletti
- Seafood lunch in Donnalucata
- Montalbano tour of Scicli including the Vigata Police Station and Montelusa Police Headquarters, Office of the Quaestor of Montelusa, Antica Farmacia Cartia & Palazzo Spadaro
- Stroll along the Donnalucata Promenade in Punta Secca past the Casa di Montalbano and Enzo a Mare Restaurant (Montalbano's favourite restaurant)

Donnafugata Castle, near Ragusa, appears as the home of infamous Mafia boss Balduccio Sinagra in the Montalbano films. It is also where actor Luca Zingaretti celebrated his wedding reception with actress Luisa Ranieri in 2012. This sumptuous aristocratic residence now houses the Collezione Gabriele Arezzo di Trifiletti, an extraordinary collection of fashion and costume. This includes the gorgeous ballgown worn by Claudia Cardinale in Visconti's luscious film of *The Leopard*.

We travel on to the small fishing village of Donnalucata, famous for its freshly fished squid which is prepared following traditional recipes. Lunch will be enjoyed at a local seafood restaurant. We also view the long expanses of sand where Montalbano often finds himself; the beach is amongst the loveliest on this stretch of the Sicilian coastline.

At nearby Scicli the town hall, which in the TV series was used for the exterior of the police station, offers a permanent Montalbano exhibition and the chance to view the office of the most famous police commissioner in Italy, as well as that of his trusted deputy Mimi Augello, and the Quaestor's room. The

historic pharmacy along the road is where the inspector needs a fake bandage applied in *The Smell of the Night*. The Palazzo Spadaro was used in filming to create the Mayor of Vigàta's home, but the building is also an art gallery, showing works by the 'Scicili Group' – Piero Guccione, Franco Sarnari, Franco Polizzi and others.

Next, we travel to Punta Secca. Overlooking the beach of Marinella is the house used as Montalbano's beloved home in the TV series. Today the house is a B & B, and the little square where it's located is Piazza Montalbano, while the Punta Secca lighthouse features in the opening credits of the series. The inspector regularly swims at the beach, or takes walks on Donnalucata Promenade, while nearby Palazzo Mormino Penna was used for some interior shots of the police station where he works. We also pass Enzo a Mare, another of his favourite dining establishments, where he knows he can guarantee fresh and delicious seafood. (Overnight Ragusa) BL

Agrigento – 3 nights

Day 7: Thursday 16 April, Ragusa – Vizzini – Piazza Armerina – Agrigento

- Vizzini: In the footsteps of Giovanni Verga including sites associated with *Mastro-don Gesualdo* & *Cavalleria rusticana* and the Museo dell'Immaginario Verghiano
- [Lunch at Agriturismo Cunziria](#): setting for Giovanni Verga's *Cavalleria rusticana*
- UNESCO World Heritage-listed Roman Villa of Casale, Piazza Armerina
- Dinner at a local restaurant

Giovanni Verga, who lived in Vizzini for a time, used the hilltop town of Vizzini as the setting not only for *Cavalleria rusticana* but also for his last major work, *Mastro-don Gesualdo* (1888). Our guided walk in the morning will take us to places connected with his life and works. We'll see the Palazzo dei Ventimiglia (which burns down in Verga's novel), the Salita Marineo (a staircase decorated with majolica tiles), the Santa Teresa church (where the ritual kiss of the duel-challenge is given) and we'll visit the Museo dell'Immaginario Verghiano, which exhibits Verga's photographs and provides excellent information about the life and works of this important realist writer.

Next we drive to Cunziria, an ancient artisan's village in Vizzini. It's a wonderful example of the agricultural style of 18th century Sicily. Thanks to a local spring, tanning became an important industry and houses were strategically placed so as to increase sun exposure and hasten the drying process. A prickly-pear grove just near the tanning factory was the site of a famous duel between local married lady Lola and her ex-soldier lover Turiddu. Lola's husband Alfio killed Turiddu in the duel and it was this fight which inspired Giovanni Verga to write a short story, which he then turned into a play. His *Cavalleria rusticana* was developed in 1890 into the opera of the same name. It remains one of the most performed operas around the world. Zeffirelli's film version of the opera was shot in Cunziria. When the tanning industry declined, the village was left untouched – we may view (exterior only) the white stone houses and ruins, and call to mind the rustic community and seething passions of lovers and cheated husband in Verga's story and Mascagni's opera. Note: the original *borgo* (village) is currently under renovations; however lunch will be served in one of the traditional farmhouses.

This afternoon we visit the stunning UNESCO World Heritage Roman villa of Casale at Piazza Armerina. The villa, which was probably owned by a senator or member of the imperial family, dates from early 4th century AD and is famed for its superb mosaics. These cover 3,500 sq. metres of floor and are in a remarkable state of preservation (they were covered for centuries by a 12th century landslide). The villa was uncovered in 1929 and work has been going on there ever since. More than sixty rooms are decorated with several hundred million individual tesserae, forming scenes from mythology and history. There's an awesome

menagerie – panthers, tigers, antelope, flamingos, rhinos and snakes. And the mosaic humans bring the ancient world vividly to life, with their detailed sandals, hairstyles, jewellery and fashion accessories. The 'Room of Ten Girls in Bikinis' is a particularly popular attraction within the villa.

We then head for Agrigento, a city which began life in 581 BC, when it was established by Greek colonists. The Greek ruins, known as the Valley of the Temples, have been attracting writers since the classical era. Pindar thought the settlement was "the most beautiful of those inhabited by mortals". Shakespeare praised it in *The Winter's Tale*, Goethe was awed by the temples, and when Guy de Maupassant visited, he felt that "all Olympus" was stretched before him. Quasimodo wrote a poem about the place, Camilleri renamed it Montelusa in his crime series, while Vincent Cronin was captivated by the sight of the local almond trees in blossom. Sadly, today's Agrigento has too much urban sprawl, although the wonderful medieval heart of the city remains.

Dinner will be enjoyed at a local restaurant – the city enjoys both a coastal and a mountain cuisine. (Overnight Agrigento) BLD

Day 8: Friday 17 April, Agrigento

- UNESCO World Heritage-listed Valley of the Temples
- Archaeological Museum, Agrigento
- Church of St Nicholas, inspiration for Pirandello's theatrical drama *The Festival of the Lord of the Ship*
- Lunch at a local restaurant

We spend the morning in the famed Valley of the Temples. As a Greek city, Agrigento prospered only until 406 BC, when it was sacked by the Carthaginians ... then captured by the Romans, then the Saracens, then the Moors, and so on. The various temples are dedicated to different gods. Goethe described the Temple of Jupiter as being "like the disjointed bones of a gigantic skeleton" (though today it is less disjointed than it was, thanks to the restorations of the 1920s). Ezra Pound and his wife Dorothy Shakespear found the row of temples "along a ridge with olive, almond, and the sea a couple of miles away – very romantic and lovely". We will visit the Temple of Zeus (planned to be the world's largest Doric temple, but its construction was interrupted by the Carthaginians), the Temple of Hercules (the oldest of the temples in the valley), the Temple of Concord (model for UNESCO's logo, and a building which has survived almost entirely intact since 430 BC) and the Temple of Hera (with its 500 year-old olive tree and Byzantine tombs). This is a rich walk through history!

The archaeological museum at Agrigento is one of the most important and visited museums in Sicily. The building was constructed in the 1960s on the site of an ancient agora, and shows a perfect blending of restored old remains (the Cloister of St Nicholas) and the modern. The more than 5000 artefacts displayed illustrate, chronologically and topographically, the history of the Agrigentan area, from prehistory to the end of the Graeco-Roman period.

The 12th century church of St Nicholas has a severe façade and an austere simple interior, typical of the Cistercian style. One of the side chapels holds an artistic masterpiece – Gagini's sculpture of the Madonna and Child. In another chapel is the crucifix of 'the Lord of the Ship' and it was this which inspired Nobel Prize winning writer, Luigi Pirandello, to write his play *The Festival of the Lord of the Ship*. (Overnight Agrigento) BL

Day 9: Saturday 18 April, Agrigento – Racalmuto – Palma di Montechiaro – Caos – Porto Empedocle – Agrigento

- Fondazione Leonardo Sciascia & Statue, Racalmuto
- Walking tour of Palma di Montechiaro (The City of the Leopard): Palazzo Ducale dei Tomasi di Lampedusa, Church of Saint Mary of the Rosary, Convent SS. Rosario delle Benedettine
- Lunch at [Azienda Agricola Mandranova](#), Palma di Montechiaro
- Casa Natale di Luigi Pirandello & Tomb, Caos
- Walking tour of Porto Empedocle (Montalbano's fictional town, Vigata)

One of the first Sicilian authors to tackle honestly the dangerous subject of the Mafia was Leonardo Sciascia (1921 – 1989), who was born in Racalmuto. He wrote about the place of his birth in *The Wine Dark Sea*, while in *Salt in the Wound*, a semi-autobiographical work, he renamed it Regalpetra. His best-known work, *The Day of the Owl*, showed how the Mafia had managed to sustain itself in Sicily, and revealed the treachery of alliances and allegiances. Racalmuto has celebrated its novelist, essayist, playwright and politician with a statue, showing him striding down the Via Garibaldi towards the central piazza. But there's another tribute to him as well – a literary foundation which we will visit to learn more of this courageous author.

Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's *The Leopard (Il Gattopardo)* has been voted Italy's most beloved and acclaimed novel, and in 2012 it was named by the *Observer* as "one of the ten best historical novels". Amazingly, it was turned down by several publisher and only appeared in 1958, after Lampedusa's death. In 1963 it was made into an award-winning film. He was the last in a line of Sicilian princes and based his main character, the Prince of Salina, on his own great-grandfather. Today we follow in the footsteps of this remarkable novel and its characters.

The ducal town of Palma di Montechiaro has the Convent of the Holy Ghost, founded by Lampedusa's ancestor in 1637. The convent was host to some of his eccentric forebears, including one who liked to sleep in a coffin. Don Fabrizio, Prince of Salina, enjoys the "faculty of canonical intrusion" which comes from his inherited right to enter the convent. We will enjoy a walking tour of the town, seeing places associated with the novel – the 17th century Ducal palace, the sumptuous Church of St Mary of the Rosary, and the convent (exterior only – unlike the Prince, we do NOT have an inherited right of entry). The nuns sell 'Gattopardo' biscuits, the ones Don Fabrizio so enjoyed.

After visiting Palma di Montechiaro we enjoy lunch at the Azienda Agricola Mandranova, all sourced from the freshest local ingredients.

Luigi Pirandello is best remembered for his play *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, but he also wrote short stories, poems and novels. He was a forerunner of the theatre of the absurd and for his "almost magical power to turn psychological analysis into good theatre" he won the 1934 Nobel Prize. It's appropriate that he was born in an area called 'Caos' ('chaos' in Italian) at Porto Empedocle near Agrigento. His former home, an 18th century rural house, is today an excellent museum, with manuscripts, photographs, paintings and first editions. Pirandello counted Albert Einstein as one of his close friends.

From birth to death, Pirandello did not travel far. His tomb is a short walk through the garden of his birthplace. The town has a dapper statue of him, looking down at the world from his plinth. In the TV episode *Love Salvo Montalbano* watches two elderly actors performing in this special spot. Porto Empedocle also boasts a statue of the inspector, but it does not look like the actor who portrayed him on TV, but is rather an imaginary depiction of the character as he appears in the Camilleri novels. Camilleri based the fictional setting of Vigàta on Porto Empedocle, where he was resident for some years. The books are written in Italian, but with a great use of Sicilian slang and dialect, often with comic effect (this gives translators something of a nightmare). Interestingly, Camilleri, as a boy, met Pirandello – the two men have

done so much to place the town on the world's literary map.

Montalbano treats his palate with huge consideration. You too might wish to "wrap your taste buds in the comforting cuisine of southern Sicily" in your choice of restaurant for the evening. (Overnight Agrigento) BL

Palermo – 4 nights

Day 10: Sunday 19 April, Agrigento – Santa Margherita di Belice – Selinunte – Palermo

- Gardens of Gattopardo Villa, Santa Margherita di Belice
- Palazzo Filangerie Cutò, Santa Margherita di Belice incl. the Museo del Gattopardo
- Temples and City site, Selinunte

This morning will be spent at Santa Margherita di Belice Park. Nearby is the palace of Filangeri Cutò, where Lampedusa spent happy childhood holidays. He wrote of it in his memoir *Childhood Memories* and mentioned the Villa Comunale and the Café House, both to be seen in the gardens today. It was in the Santa Margherita gardens that Don Fabrizio tried to persuade his nephew not to join the forces of Garibaldi. We will visit Filangeri Cutò in the afternoon. Lampedusa immortalised the palace in *The Leopard* as Donnafugata, and today there is also a museum for the novel. It's not often you visit a museum built entirely around one novel. Here you can see pages of manuscript complete with authorial corrections, wax figures representing the characters, and can listen to a recording of Lampedusa's voice.

After lunch we visit the ruins at Selinunte which are amongst the most captivating and impressive archaeological sites in Sicily. The Greeks knew the place at Selinos and made it a powerful city with over 100,000 inhabitants and an extraordinary temple building programme. We will spend the morning exploring this widespread complex. The temples are identified, not by gods, but by letters – for example, the shrine dedicated to Hera is unpoetically known as Temple E. Jorge Luis Borges hated this system and instead classified the buildings according to favourite authors, such as 'C for Conrad', when he visited in 1984. For writer Alejandro Luque, the ruined architecture of Selinunte "still whispers the splendour of its people".

We then head to Palermo, a city on the wide sweeping bay of Conca d'Oro (or Golden Shell). When Goethe caught his first view of the city, he was overcome with delight. Oscar Wilde called it "the most beautifully situated town in the world", and Washington Irving delighted in its alleyways. For millennia, the city has been a crossroads of civilisations – it's a city at the edge of Europe and at the heart of the ancient world. The capital of Sicily will be our base for the next four nights. (Overnight Palermo) BL

Day 11: Monday 20 April, Palermo

- Palazzo dei Normanni: Cappella Palatina and Royal Apartments
- Church La Martorana
- Oratorio San Lorenzo
- Private tour of the Palazzo Valguarnera Gangi, where Luchino Visconti filmed the famous ball scene for his cinematic adaptation of *The Leopard*
- 'Teatro dei Pupi' – traditional Sicilian puppet show

Let's get to know the rich and intriguing city of Palermo! Our day begins with a visit to Palazzo dei Normanni, home to Sicily's regional parliament. It dates back to the 9th century, although owes its current look to a major Norman makeover, when spectacular mosaics were added to the royal apartments and chapel.

Next we visit 'La Martorana' (Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio), a centrally-planned Byzantine church decorated with, arguably, the finest mosaics in Sicily (1140). It was built by Roger I's admiral, George of Antioch, and in 1433 was presented to a monastery founded by Eloisa Martorana, after whom it was later named. In 1588 it gained a Baroque façade. Nearby is the Bellini restaurant, where Lampedusa wrote much of his great novel, *The Leopard*.

After lunch we visit the Oratorio San Lorenzo, built in 1569. It once housed a superb Caravaggio, but that was stolen in 1969 and has never been recovered (a reproduction is displayed). The glorious stucco work by master rococo sculptor Giacomo Serpotta is still there, as is the marble floor and benches with ivory and mother-of-pearl inlays.

Of all the gorgeous scenes in Visconti's film of *The Leopard*, the one that is justifiably the most famous is the ball. It lasts 45 minutes and every detail is perfect. This scene was shot in Palazzo Valguarnera Gangi and we are lucky enough to have a private tour (though I fear none of us will be appropriately dressed for such a splendid venue). The rococo home, built in the 18th century, is still a private residence, and is almost exactly as it was in the age when the novel was set.

In the late afternoon we attend a special puppet show, enacting the wars of Charlemagne and his knights against the Arabs at one of Palermo's few remaining traditional puppet theatres. This lively performance, in which there is much fighting and spilling of puppet (actually marionettes) entrails (in the form of streamers), draws upon theatre traditions of the 19th century which romanticised Sicily's past; it was at this time that literature began to emphasise the island's 'exotic' heritage. The epic cycles told in the puppet shows, however, draw upon more ancient sources. When the art of puppetry was introduced to Sicily in the early 19th century, it fused with the craft of the Sicilian storyteller who entertained people in the streets of the cities, towns and villages. This form of entertainment is thought by some to have its roots in the Norman period. (Overnight Palermo) B

Day 12: Tuesday 21 April, Palermo – Segesta – Monreale – Palermo

- Temple and Theatre, Segesta
- Cathedral and Cloister, Monreale

This morning we visit the Greek site of Segesta. This city, whose well-preserved temple and theatre have few parallels, was founded by the Elymni. Its temple, which remained unfinished, gives a fascinating insight into how Greek temples were built. Its present state probably resulted from Segesta's defeat by Selinus in 416 BC. High above the sacred area of the city stands a 3rd-century theatre, looking out over a vast panorama, a vivid indication of the importance of siting and orientation to Greek cities and shrines.

According to a Sicilian proverb, 'whoever visits Palermo without visiting Monreale arrives a donkey and leaves an ass'. This hillside town is a cultural treasure, one of the greatest examples of Norman architecture in Europe. Its mosaic-encrusted interiors are superb. Travel writer and scholar Vincent Cronin said of entering the cathedral: "To cross the threshold is to throw a golden light forward over the rest of one's life." Irish poet W.B. Yeats referenced Monreale's "hammered gold and gold enamelling" in *Sailing to Byzantium*.

The cathedral, built in the time of William II, is considered the finest example of Norman architecture in Sicily and was completed in 1184 after only ten years' work. Mosaicists from around Europe came to decorate it – their work shimmers still today. You can see Noah's ark perched atop waves, a grumpy looking Eve sitting on a rock while Adam labours in the background, and Christ healing a leper.

To the south of the cathedral is its cloister – a masterful fusion of Islamic form and Norman decoration. The arches of the cloister, like Monreale’s apse, are patterned with inlay. In one corner, a fountain shaped like a palm tree is surrounded by a small arcade; an architectural representation of an oasis. The columns of the cloister, in contrast, are topped with storiated capitals like those of Cluniac monasteries and churches on the pilgrim route to Santiago de Compostela. (Overnight Palermo) B

Day 13: Wednesday 22 April, Palermo

- Private tour, cooking class and lunch at [Palazzo Lanza Tomasi](#), Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa’s Sicilian palace
- Oratorio del Rosario di Santa Cita

Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, Duke of Palma and Prince of Lampedusa, was born in Palermo in 1896 and grew up in the heart of the city. He described its decaying splendours brilliantly in *The Leopard*. His family home was destroyed by a WWII bomb and he never recovered from its loss. In Palermo, Lampedusa led the life of a dilettante, sitting in cafes, talking about books, and reading widely in several languages.

This morning we visit his last home, Palazzo Lanza Tomasi, now owned by his adopted son Duke Gioacchino Lanza Tomasi. Our private tour will allow us to admire the stunning views of Palermo’s seafront from the windows, we will sigh enviously over the well-stocked library, and see the complete original manuscript of *The Leopard*. The Duke is a renowned musicologist, and the Duchess will give us a cooking class, specialising in local ingredients, and lunch. Next door to the palazzo is the former Hotel Trinacria, which is where the Prince dies on the balcony in Lampedusa’s novel – it’s a symbol of the Duke’s declining power that he dies in an impersonal hotel, rather than in one of his estates.

Next we visit the Oratorio del Rosario di Santa Cita, which has artistic panels, and a marvellous altarpiece by Carlo Maratta, depicting Madonna and child. A highlight of the decorative scheme is the representation of the important Battle of Lepanto that covers the rear wall of the room. (Overnight Palermo) BL

Lipari – 3 nights

Day 14: Thursday 23 April, Palermo – Cefalù – Capo d’Orlando – Milazzo – Lipari

- Cefalù Cathedral & Cloister
- Hydrofoil from Milazzo to the Aeolian island of Lipari

This morning we check out of our Palermo hotel and drive to Cefalù, where Roger II built an Arabo-Norman pleasure-palace and his cathedral. The west end of Cefalù Cathedral is a particularly noteworthy fusion of Arab and Norman architectural elements. Whilst its general massing could be called Norman, the twin bell towers which dominate it may be based upon North African minarets. Cefalù’s *Christ Pantocrator* is more ethereal than those of the Cappella Palatina and Monreale. Cefalù’s mystical image is probably of purely Byzantine provenance, whereas the more vivacious and worldly Monreale *Christ Pantocrator* was made by Byzantine-trained Sicilian craftsmen.

The seaside town of Cefalù reminded Lawrence Durrell of “a great whale basking in the blueness”. Its cathedral is a supreme example of Norman-Byzantine church architecture and has glorious mosaics.

From Cefalù we drive east along the north coast of Sicily to Milazzo. From here we take a hydrofoil to Lipari, part of the Aeolian Islands, named for Aeolus, keeper of the winds. The islands are mentioned in Homer’s *Odyssey* – he describes them appearing as if floating on the sea. From Milazzo we take a ferry to Lipari (Guy

de Maupassant arrived there in a rowing boat!), the largest of the islands in this archipelago of volcanic origin. There's a pretty pastel-coloured seafront, but away from the port Lipari has a rugged landscape and dramatic cliffs. (Overnight Lipari) BD

Day 15: Friday 24 April, Aeolian Islands: Lipari – Panarea – Stromboli – Lipari

- Morning at leisure in the town of Lipari
- In the footsteps of Alexandre Dumas, Guy de Maupassant, Jules Verne & J.R.R. Tolkien: Cruise to the islands of Panarea and Stromboli

The morning will be at leisure to explore Lipari. People have been living on Lipari since 5000 BC and its history is colourful – it was briefly a prison where writer and war correspondent Curzio Malaparte was imprisoned. Pumice mining was an important industry on the island, but today the place attracts wealthy people from the film world. Lipari was named for Liparus, father of Aeolus. It can't have been an easy place to live, with eruptions, pirate attacks, and punitive taxes. It's not surprising that huge waves of emigration sent its residents to such places as Australia. Today, however, tourism has revitalised the island. You can spend the evening exploring its labyrinthine alleyways, or climb to the citadel from which Barbarossa once conducted a reign of terror. There's a pretty marina, and a huge choice of bars and restaurants.

Alexandre Dumas was an avid follower of Garibaldi and he wrote about his adventures in *Journey to the Aeolian Islands*. He also wrote a novel set here, *Pascal Bruno*, published in 1837. This afternoon we will follow in Dumas' footsteps, as well as in those of his compatriots, Jules Verne and Guy de Maupassant. An afternoon cruise will take us to Panarea Island, with a stop to see the prehistoric village of Capo Milazzese. Panarea is the smallest of the islands in the group, and is popular with fashionable jet-setters. Then it is on to Stromboli, but whether we can stop there will depend on Mt Stromboli, a volcano which is constantly active. It conforms perfectly to our childhood idea of a volcano, with its symmetrical smoking silhouette rising dramatically from the sea. Jules Verne set the conclusion of his *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* on Stromboli, while J.R.R. Tolkien identified his fictional Mount Doom in Mordor as Mt Stromboli. The 1950 Ingrid Bergman movie *Stromboli* is set on the barren island. Unlike many tourists, we will not have time to climb to the crater and peer over the edge – news that might come as welcome relief? We will enjoy wonderful sunset views of the volcano as we depart. (Overnight Lipari) BD

Day 16: Saturday 25 April, Lipari

- Lipari Archaeological Museum
- Lipari Island Tour

Lipari's Archaeological Museum is a must-see for anyone interested in the history of the Mediterranean. Prehistoric artefacts provide insight into the island's earliest cultures. There are items from the Neolithic and Bronze Ages, and on display is the world's largest collection of Greek theatrical masks. Masks were important in Greek theatre. Their distinctive features made characters instantly recognisable from a distance, they allowed actors to perform more than one role, they enabled men to act female roles, and they provided the opportunity for transformation – an ordinary man could go beyond his real identity and become a mythological hero, a satyr, or a slave. The museum's amazing collection of such masks was found in the tombs of Lipari Necropolis.

In the afternoon we take a tour of the island. Today it is administratively part of Messina, but the island retains its unique character. From prehistoric traders in obsidian, to the stars of the film world who visit today, the island has experienced violent, varied and tremendous history.

Dinner will be eaten in Da Filippino's, a restaurant near the citadel which has been feeding people for more than a century. It offers a tempting array of Sicilian dishes. (Overnight Lipari) BD

Taormina – 2 nights

Day 17: Sunday 26 April, Lipari – Milazzo – Messina – Savoca – Taormina

- Hydrofoil from Lipari to Milazzo
- Regional Museum of Messina (MUME) displaying Caravaggio's *Adoration of the Shepherds* and the *Resurrection of Lazarus*
- Savoca & Bar Vitelli, one of the main settings for *The Godfather*

We will take the hydrofoil back to Milazzo this morning. En route for Taormina, we stop at Messina to visit its Regional Museum, established in an old silk-weaving mill, which has two masterpieces by Caravaggio.

Touchy and violent, Caravaggio led a colourful life and in 1608 found himself in Sicily so worked for a while in Messina. It was his artistic innovations which inspired Baroque painting. In fact, it has even been said that he "started modern painting". His 'Adoration of the Shepherds' was commissioned by the Senate of Messina. In it, the artist interprets the divine characters as humble people, their agricultural tools nearby. The 'Resurrection of Lazarus' shows Caravaggio's masterly use of light, which picks out crucial details such as Lazarus' hands. Did he have a corpse exhumed so that he could paint realistically? We'll never know, but the story attests to his artistic dedication.

Cervantes found himself in Messina in 1571 and set off from there to take part in the Battle of Lepanto. He was lucky to survive it and was brought wounded to a hospital in Messina. Thanks to an injury to his hand, Cervantes was forced to give up soldiering and, eventually, take to writing instead. The world can be grateful!

Lunch will be eaten in a bar made famous by *The Godfather*. Bar Vitelli in the little village of Savoca was mentioned in Mario Puzo's novel and was used as a location in the 1971 Francis Ford Coppola film. The bar's lemon granita with *zibibbo*, served with *zuccarat* biscuits, became world famous as a result. Situated on the ground floor of Palazzo Trimarchi, which dates back to 1731, it's just one of the parts of the building that were used in the movie.

We then transfer to Taormina. French writer Guy de Maupassant adored Taormina: "Were a man to spend only one day in Sicily and ask, 'What must one see?', I would answer him without hesitation, 'Taormina'. It is only a landscape, but a landscape where you find everything on earth that seems made to seduce the eyes, the mind and the imagination." D.H. Lawrence, who lived and wrote in Taormina, knew he would "never be quite free from the nostalgia for it" when he left. The city is spectacularly perched on the side of a mountain and was founded in the 4th century BC. Over the centuries many creative people have sought it out – Goethe, Oscar Wilde, Rabindranath Tagore, Anatole France, John Steinbeck, W.B. Yeats, Ernest Hemingway, Andre Gide, Selma Lagerlöf and Tennessee Williams are just a few of them. (Overnight Taormina) BL

Day 18: Monday 27 April, Taormina

- Graeco-Roman Theatre, Taormina
- Afternoon at leisure. Optional walk to view exterior of Fontana Vecchia where D.H. Lawrence completed *Women in Love* and where Truman Capote finished *The Grass Harp*
- Casa Cuseni, Museum of Fine Arts and Farewell Dinner

Taormina's Graeco-Roman theatre is a perfect horseshoe and seems suspended between sea and sky. Built in the 3rd century BC, it's the most dramatically situated Greek theatre in the world. Goethe found the site so stunning that he could not tear himself away. It is still used for operatic and theatrical performances.

As well as visiting the theatre, we will take a guided tour of Taormina's old town, with its antique shops, lively bars and restaurants. There's a sense that the town is barely clinging to human civilisation in the midst of all-powerful nature – Etna looms portentously, pink and white blossoms creep over the cliffs, and olives grow ever more ancient. This is the Riviera dei Ciclopi, a coast scarred by the wrath of the Cyclops, and myth seems almost as real as reality.

The afternoon will be at leisure. You may like to join me in seeking out the house where D.H. Lawrence wrote *Women in Love* and his brilliant poem *Snake*. Sadly, the Fontana Vecchia is not open to the public, but there's a plaque on the wall and the street has been named after him. Lawrence arrived in Taormina with his wife Frieda in 1920, traumatised by the war. He loved the house, and it was a prolific period for his writing, although his wife's affair with a local mule driver did not please him (and gave him subject matter for a book about an adulterous woman). The poems he wrote in Taormina, such as *Almond Blossom* and others in the volume *Birds, Beats and Flowers*, are rich with a sense of man's more primitive interaction with nature. He celebrates "the ancient southern earth whence the vases were baked", "the open-hearted cylix" and "the steep terraces ledged high up above the sea". In 1921 Lawrence sailed to Sardinia, which resulted in his travel book *Sea and Sardinia*.

Thirty years later Truman Capote became a resident in the same house and there wrote *The Grass Harp*. He lived with his lover Jack Dunphy and wrote many letters to friends praising the charms of the house. He was visited there by Peggy Guggenheim, André Gide and, unfortunately, also by his mother.

We end the day with a visit to Casa Cuseni, the Museum of Fine Arts, located in an English Lord's House. The dining room of the villa, designed by Sir Frank Brangwyn, is a great example of the English Arts & Craft movement. The place was founded as a centre for artists and writers – Picasso, Dali, Ezra Pound, Roald Dahl are some of those who have worked here, and it was in this house that Lord Bertrand Russell conceived his pacifist manifesto against dictatorships.

"Here the past is so much stronger than the present, that one seems remote like the immortals, looking back at the world from their otherworld", wrote D.H. Lawrence. Unfortunately, the real world calls us home and we say goodbye over the farewell dinner of the tour. (Overnight Taormina) BD

Day 19: Tuesday 28 April, Depart Taormina. Tour Ends

- Airport transfer from Taormina to Catania Airport for those taking the ASA 'designated' flight

In the early morning participants travelling on the ASA 'designated' flight will transfer to Catania airport, where our Sicilian pilgrimage began. Alternatively, you may wish to extend your stay in Italy. Please contact ASA if you require further assistance. B

Accommodation

A special feature of this tour is our stay in several heritage hotels. ASA has selected 4-star (5-star hotel in Syracuse), many of which are themselves historical buildings and/or are located in historical centres. All rooms have en suite bathroom.

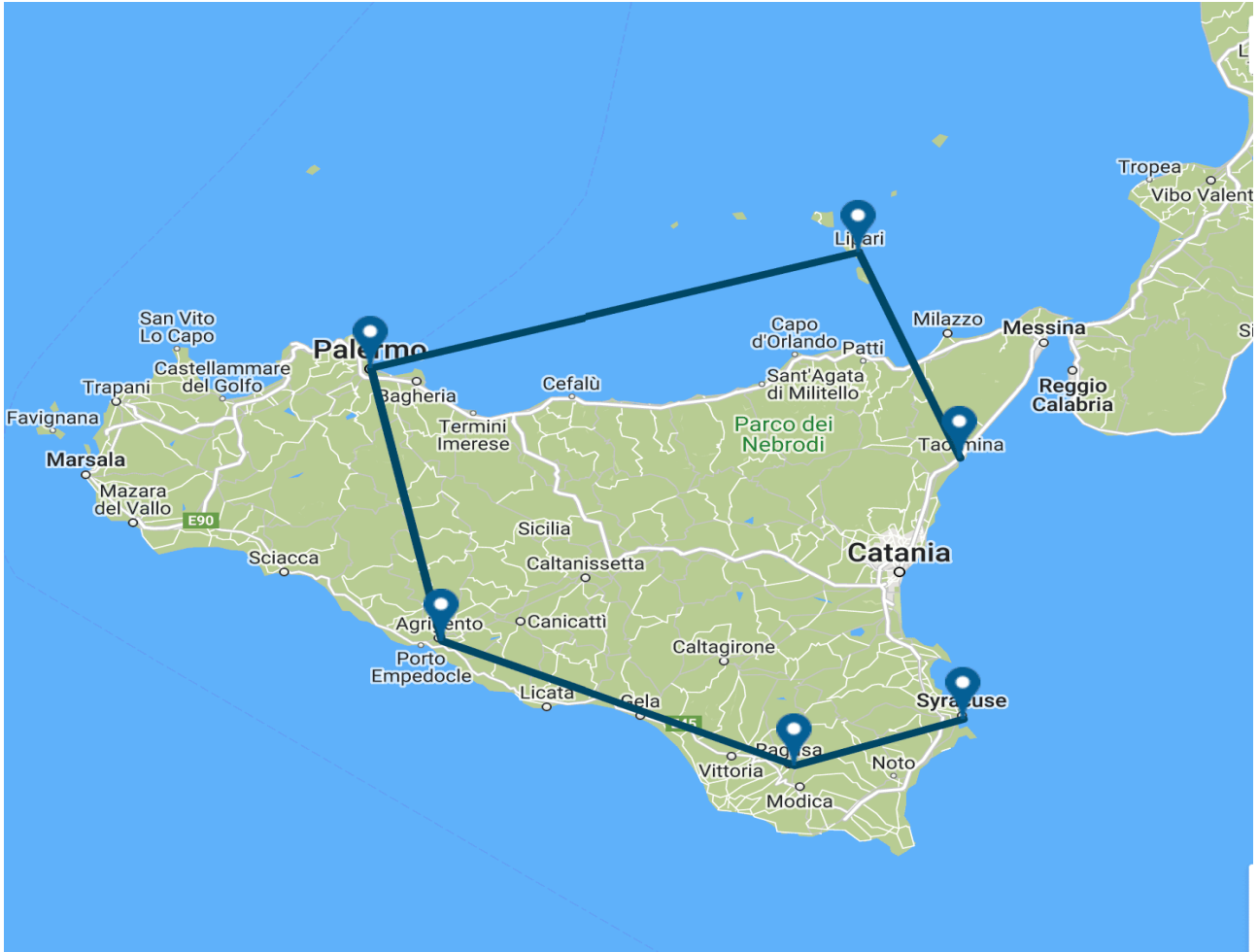
- Syracuse (3 nights): 5-star [Grand Hotel Ortigia](#) – housed in a historic building, located on the island of Ortigia.
- Ragusa (3 nights): 4-star [De Stefano Palace Luxury Hotel](#) – a charming boutique hotel located 800m from the historic centre of Ragusa Ibla.
- Agrigento (3 nights): 4-star [Colleverde Park Hotel](#) – a modern hotel located near the Valley of the Temples.
- Palermo (4 nights): 4-star [Grand Hotel Piazza Borsa](#) – located in the heart of the historic centre, the hotel incorporates 3 adjacent buildings that once formed a grand monastery; it retains a number of historic features including a beautiful interior cloister.
- Lipari (3 nights): 4-star [Hotel Tritone](#) – located close to the town centre, set within a lush garden.
- Taormina (2 nights): 4-star [Excelsior Palace Hotel](#) – located just outside the town walls overlooking the bay of Naxos.

Note: Hotels are subject to change, in which case a hotel of similar standard will be provided.

Single Supplement

Payment of this supplement will ensure accommodation in a single-occupancy room throughout the tour. In all hotels on the tour, this will be a double/twin room for single occupancy. The number of rooms available for single occupancy is extremely limited. People wishing to take this supplement are therefore advised to book well in advance.

Tour Map



Tour Price & Inclusions

AUD \$14,980.00 Land Content Only– Early-Bird Special: Book before 30 June 2025

AUD \$15,980.00 Land Content Only

AUD \$1790.00 Single Supplement

Tour Price (Land Content Only) includes:

- Accommodation in twin-share rooms with private facilities in 4-star hotels (5-star in Syracuse).
- Breakfast daily, lunches & evening meals indicated in the itinerary where: B=breakfast, L=Lunch & D=dinner.
- Drinks at welcome and farewell meals. Other meals may not have drinks included.
- Transportation by air-conditioned coach.
- Transportation by hydrofoil between Sicily and the Aeolian Islands
- Excursion by public boat from Lipari to Panarea and Stromboli (please note: the itinerary may be altered in the event of bad weather or volcanic activity).
- Airport-hotel transfers if travelling on the ASA 'designated' flights.
- Porterage of one piece of luggage per person at hotels (not at airports or ferry terminals).
- Lecture and site visit program.
- Tour handbook.
- Entrance fees to museums, monuments & puppet show.
- Use of audio headsets during site visits.
- Tips for the coach driver, local guides and restaurants for included meals.

Tour Price (Land Content Only) does not include:

- Airfare: Australia-Catania, Catania-Australia
- Personal spending money
- Luggage in excess of 20kg (44lbs)
- Travel insurance



Fitness Criteria & Practical Information

Fitness Level 

Level 2 - Intermediate

For people with energetic lifestyles and very good mobility

You must be able to:

- manage at least five to six hours of physical activity per day with ease.
- walk at a regular to moderate pace up to 5-7kms per day. Many walks include uneven terrain, cobbled streets and steep ascents/descents. Visits to hilltop towns are on foot and involve walks uphill from the coach parking area to the town centre.
- keep up with the group at all times.
- negotiate challenging historic & archaeological sites which may include several flights of stairs and/or rocky terrain. Lifts are not always available at museums.
- stand for one to two hours during visits to galleries and museums without the need to sit.
- board/alight coaches, ferries, hydrofoils and smaller boats with steep steps unassisted.
- cope with a more demanding tour schedule with extensive coach travel that includes winding mountainous and coastal roads, regular early-morning departures (between 8.00-8.30am) and late afternoon arrivals (5.30-6.30pm).
- contend with a shower over a bath; walk-in showers may not be available at all hotels
- manage your own luggage at some hotels and on/off the ferry to Lipari.

Fitness Levels

Please also view the fitness criteria required for our tours, graded from Level 1 to Level 3, at www.asatours.com.au/fitness-level/

All ASA tours are active programs suitable for people with a good level of mental and physical fitness and good mobility. They are not suitable for people who lack stamina, have difficulty walking at the group's

pace or who have mobility issues. An unavoidable aspect of every tour is the need to manage walking, stair-climbing and standing for long periods of time.

It is a condition of travel that all participants agree to accept ASA's directions in relation to their suitability to participate in activities undertaken on the tour, and that ASA retains the sole discretion to direct a tour participant to refrain from a particular activity on part of the tour. Before enrolling on an ASA tour please read the fitness requirements carefully.

Booking Conditions

ASA RESERVATION APPLICATION FORM

Please complete the ASA RESERVATION APPLICATION and send it to Australians Studying Abroad together with your non-refundable deposit of AUD \$1000.00 per person payable to Australians Studying Abroad.



Reservation Application

TOUR NAME _____
TOUR DATES _____

Please complete **one application, per person in block letters and sign**. Parental signature is required for participants under 18 years of age. Please mail this form with the appropriate deposit to: **P.O. Box 8285, ARMADALE, VICTORIA, 3143**. On receipt of this Reservation Application and deposit, ASA will process your booking and if approved, send you a tour confirmation.

Applicant Details (as in passport)

TITLE Mr ☐ Mrs ☐ Ms ☐ Miss ☐ Dr ☐ Other _____
FIRST NAME _____ Preferred FIRST NAME _____
MIDDLE NAME _____ SURNAME _____
POSTAL ADDRESS _____
CITY _____ STATE _____ COUNTRY _____ POSTCODE _____
TEL. (AH) () _____ TEL. (BH) () _____ Mobile Tel: _____
EMAIL address _____
Date of birth / / GENDER Male ☐ Female ☐

Passport Number _____ Expiry date / / Nationality _____
☐ Colour copy of my current valid passport enclosed ☐ I'm renewing my passport ☐ ASA has a colour copy of my current passport

Covid Certificate ☐ A copy of my current international certificate enclosed

Travel Plans

☐ I plan to leave Australia before the tour commences. Planned departure date / /
☐ I will be arranging my airfare independently and taking the Land Content Only option.

Tour Accommodation (rooming preferences)

I/we would like: ☐ a twin-bedded room ☐ a double-bedded room ☐ a room for sole occupancy
I am travelling: ☐ on my own ☐ with a friend/family member Travel Companion _____

Meals

☐ I do not have any specific dietary requests

Please **X** the box if you **CAN NOT** eat any of the following:

☐ fish ☐ poultry ☐ red meat ☐ dairy products
☐ eggs ☐ pork ☐ nuts
☐ Other _____

Allergies: Refer to the Medical Information

Correspondence

Your preferred method of correspondence ☐ Postal Mail ☐ Email Address _____

Emergency Contact Details

Note: this person **MUST** be available by telephone and be present in Australia for the duration of your tour with ASA

Name _____ Relationship to Traveller _____
Address _____
TEL. (AH) () _____ TEL. (BH) () _____ Mobile Tel: _____
EMAIL address _____

The purpose of seeking this information is to assist ASA to determine, where necessary, whether ASA is able to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate your specific needs and whether your health and safety (or that of your fellow travellers) is likely to be compromised given your choice of tour. It will also assist you and ASA if you fall ill or have an accident whilst travelling.

- ASA reserves the right to decline your Reservation Application if this Medical Information section is not completed properly and may reject or cancel your reservation, or terminate your participation on any tour, if ASA subsequently learns that you have failed to make full and proper disclosure.
- ASA is committed to protecting the privacy of your personal information. ASA's privacy policy is available for viewing at www.asatours.com.au
- If ASA has any concerns about the information you have provided, it will contact you to request clarification before considering your Application.
- ASA requires you to consider carefully your limitations in light of ASA's Physical Endurance Star Rating System in ASA's Brochure and Itinerary when choosing your tour.
- If you are not likely to satisfy ASA's Participation Criteria (see below), ASA, in its sole discretion, may reject your Reservation Application.
- It is a condition of your tour that you agree to accept the directions of ASA's Tour Leaders in relation to your suitability to participate in activities planned on tour.
- ASA reserves the right to cancel your participation on a tour if your behaviour is in ASA's opinion causing undue distress or damage to any person or their property.
- If your participation is discontinued during a tour, ASA will assist by arranging your onward travel (if required) at your own cost, but you will not be refunded for forfeited parts of the tour.
- ASA tour groups are not accompanied by a medical practitioner. ASA recommends that you see your doctor for advice about your specific needs while overseas. You may also wish to contact a travel and vaccination clinic for advice. www.traveldoctor.com.au tel: 1300 658 444; www.travelvax.com.au tel: 1300 360 164.
- Travel insurers require you to declare all existing medical conditions.
- Please carry a complete list of medications with you during the ASA tour. Include **generic names** of each medication (consult your local pharmacy for information).

Please mark **X** in the YES or NO box to every question below and provide details where necessary:

Participation Criteria

To participate in an ASA tour, you must be reasonably fit, in good health and able to participate in all activities without assistance from Tour Leaders or other tour members. **You must also be fully vaccinated against Covid-19.** If you require assistance, a fit and able travel companion must undertake to accompany and assist you with all tasks for the duration of the whole tour. The responsibility of the Tour Leader is to ensure that the larger group enjoys a relaxing and informative journey, and he or she cannot be relied upon to provide ongoing individual assistance to any one guest.

- | | YES | NO |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Can you walk and stand unassisted for at least 2-3 hours a day in hot, humid conditions? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 2. Can you walk unassisted on and over uneven surfaces? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 3. Can you climb at least 3 flights of stairs and/or walk up and down steep slopes unassisted? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4. Can you walk at a steady pace and no less than 1km every 15 - 20 minutes unassisted? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 5. Can you organise, manage and carry your own luggage? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 6. Can you follow and remember tour instructions and meet punctually at designated times and places? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 7. Can you administer your own medication? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 8. You do NOT have impaired vision or hearing which may impact your capacity to participate on this tour? | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Mobility and Fitness

As many of ASA's international sites do not provide access to wheelchairs or similar mobility aids, we regret that ASA tours are not suitable for people who require the use of a walking frame, wheeled walker, wheelchair or motorised scooter.

1. Do you suffer from any medical conditions that may compromise your mobility and/or fitness to participate on this program? YES NO ☐ ☐
- If yes, please specify

If yes, how will you manage this on tour?

Allergies and/or Food Intolerances

ASA will make reasonable endeavours to organise meals to suit you, provided that you give ASA adequate notice of your specific dietary requirements or allergies. You may be required to research dietary alternatives, as not all destinations may be able to offer suitable food substitutes.

1. Do you have any food allergies or intolerances? YES NO ☐ ☐
- If yes, please specify

2. Have you ever had an anaphylactic reaction to anything? ☐ ☐
- If yes, please specify

Do you carry an epipen? ☐ ☐

3. Do you have any other allergies or reactions to anything, including medical drugs? ☐ ☐
- If yes, please specify

Existing Medical Conditions

You alone are responsible for managing any existing medical conditions, your medication and any medical equipment that you may need when on your tour. Please plan for contingencies and take extra medication, dietary supplements and/or fully charged batteries for medical equipment if your health and safety depends on these. You should take into consideration that power sources at some destinations may be unavailable, inadequate, inconvenient or unreliable.

1. Have you any significant medical conditions that may impact your capacity to complete this tour? YES NO ☐ ☐
- If yes, please specify

If yes, how will you manage this on tour?

2. Do you require some form of powered medical aid, such as a CPAP machine? ☐ ☐

These machines may not be operable on certain international flights, modes of transport, in remote or other areas with inadequate or unreliable power sources without a fully charged independent long life battery or batteries.

Diabetics: You may be travelling and sightseeing for many hours at a time. Insulin dependent diabetics must carry extra supplies of insulin (as this medication cannot be obtained in some destinations), regulators, applicators, storage and refrigeration equipment, as well as any necessary supplements. Accommodation may not provide refrigerators in rooms.

3. Are you diabetic? ☐ ☐
- Are you insulin dependent? ☐ ☐
4. Do you suffer from travel sickness? ☐ ☐
- Remember to use an appropriate medication while on tour.

Declaration

I declare that: I have read and understood the ASA Tour Itinerary, Reservation Application and Booking Conditions. I am aware of ASA's terms as relating to refunds, cancellations, responsibility and liability. I understand that ASA relies upon this declaration when considering this Application. I accept the inherent dangers, risks and uncertainties in travel and those beyond ASA's control and understand they may occur before or during any tour. I have made full and complete disclosure and have not knowingly withheld any medical information about myself from ASA. I have completed this Reservation Application honestly and accurately. I warrant that I am able to participate independently in all activities described by ASA in the itinerary without assistance from any person.

I will advise ASA in writing if any aspect of my fitness and or health conditions change materially at any time before my departure date. I understand and accept that the itinerary, accommodation and lecturers scheduled for this tour may change.

I agree and consent that ASA may give my personal information in this Reservation Application to tour service providers and relevant authorities as required by law, but only for the purpose of making bookings with and engaging services associated with the tour. I understand that if I do not consent to the use of my personal information for this purpose, ASA will decline my Reservation Application.

In consideration of ASA's acceptance of my Reservation Application, I irrevocably release and indemnify ASA from all claims that I, or any other party, may have against ASA its employees, invitees, agents and contractors, however arising in respect of any loss, damage, injury, death or expense incurred in the course of booking, preparing for, travelling to, on and from or cancelling any tour.

I release and indemnify ASA with respect to:

1. Every general risk to which I or my personal belongings may be exposed in the course of preparing for, travelling to, on or from any ASA tour;
2. Every special risk, in particular medical risks, to which I may be exposed in the course of preparing for, travelling to, on or from any ASA tour arising from, including, but not limited to:
 - a. intermittent power cycles and/or the temporary or permanent loss of power (beware CPAP or any other medical machine users);
 - b. dietary, food or other allergies (ASA cannot guarantee that traces of items to which you are allergic are not present in food or drink you are served, medication you are administered or other substances with which you may come into contact);
 - c. any event or situation that may compromise the administration of necessary medication or my health, safety and wellbeing generally; and
 - d. any event or happening beyond ASA's control
3. All claims arising as a result of my or ASA's cancellation or termination of any tour, part of a tour or of my continued participation on a tour for any reason (subject to ASA's refund conditions below).

Limitation of Liability

ASA is not a carrier, event or tourist attraction host, accommodation or dining service provider. All bookings made and tickets or coupons issued by ASA for transport, event, accommodation, dining and the like are issued as an agent for various service providers and are subject to the terms and conditions and limitations of liability imposed by each service provider. ASA is not responsible for their products, services, terms and conditions. If a service provider cancels or does not deliver the product or service for which you have contracted, and does not give a refund, your remedy lies with the service provider, not ASA.

ASA will not be liable for any claim (e.g. sickness, injury, death, damage or loss) arising from any change, delay, detention, breakdown, border closures, cancellation, failure, accident, act, omission or negligence of any tour service provider or authority however caused (contingencies). You must take out such travel insurance as is available against such contingencies.

ASA's liability in respect of any tour cancelled or changed will be limited to the partial refund of amounts you have paid, less an administration fee of \$500 and other costs and charges of third party service providers. No compensation will be payable to you by ASA where ASA cancels or changes a tour, or any part of a tour.

ASA reserves the sole discretion to cancel any tour or to modify itineraries in any way it considers appropriate and in the best interests of health, safety and wellbeing of tour participants. Tour costs may be revised, subject to unexpected price increases or exchange rate fluctuations.

Booking Conditions

DEPOSITS

A non-refundable deposit of \$1000.00 AUD per person is required to reserve a place on an ASA tour.

CANCELLATION FEES

If you cancel your booking the following charges apply:

More than 75 days before departure: your initial deposit of \$1000.00 is non-refundable.**

75-31 days prior 50% of total amount due

30-0 days prior 100% of total amount due

**\$500.00 of this amount (ie 50% of your deposit) may be credited to another ASA tour departing within 12 months of the original tour you booked. We regret, in this case early-bird discounts will not apply.

We take the day on which you cancel as being that on which we receive written confirmation of cancellation.

UNUSED PORTIONS OF THE TOUR

We regret that refunds will not be given for any unused portions or services of the tour, such as meals, entry fees, accommodation, flights or transfers.

WILL THE TOUR PRICE OR ITINERARY CHANGE?

If the number of participants on a tour is significantly less than budgeted, or if there is a significant change in exchange rates ASA reserves the right to amend the advertised price. We shall, however, do all in our power to maintain the published price. Occasionally circumstances beyond the control of ASA make it necessary to change airline, hotel or to make amendments to itineraries. We will inform you of any changes in due course.

TRAVEL INSURANCE

ASA requires all participants to obtain comprehensive travel insurance. A copy of your travel insurance certificate and the **reverse charge** emergency contact phone number must be received by ASA no later than 75 days prior to the commencement of the tour.

FINAL PAYMENT

The balance of the tour price will be due 75 days prior to the tour commencement date.

PLEASE READ THE ABOVE CAREFULLY, PRINT AND SIGN BELOW

☐ I accept the conditions on this booking form ☐ I have read the information about the physical requirements of the tour in the detailed itinerary and confirm that I am able to meet these requirements

Applicant's Signature

Print Full Name

Dated

Tour / Course Name _____

Name of Traveller 1 _____

Name of Traveller 2 _____

I have enclosed a payment to the value of \$ _____ (including CC or bank fee if applicable) for this tour

The above amount is payable for:

- ☐ Intention to Travel ☐ Tour Deposit
- ☐ Balance of Payment ☐ Upgrade from Intention to Travel to a Deposit
- ☐ Travel Insurance ☐ Other (eg. Airfares, Accommodation) _____

International Payments

Welcome to our international travellers! If you are making a payment and do not have an Australian bank account/credit card, we can only accept payment as follows:

- via credit card with the applicable fee - the credit card company/bank will set the exchange rate
- via bank transfer; please give your surname and tour code (eg. Smith 21705) as a reference and ask your bank to allow for all charges.

Bank cheques or personal cheques will not be accepted.

By Cheque (accept Australian cheques only)

Please make cheques payable to *Australians Studying Abroad*

Direct Deposit or Internet Banking

You will need to:

1. Provide your bank with ASA's bank details (see below) and the amount you wish to transfer OR make a direct deposit through any ANZ branch
2. Include any fees levied by the banks
3. Provide a reference number (Mobile or last name recommended).
4. Complete section below, including confirmation no. (given when transaction completed).

Australians Studying Abroad bank details

Bank ANZ
Branch 420 St Kilda Road, Melbourne Vic
Swift Code ANZBAU3M
BSB 013-423
Account No 3472-32759

Bank confirmation No. _____

Reference used: Mobile or last name recommended
_____Date Money Transferred

Credit Card Payment

Credit card fees apply: Mastercard, Visa & American Express 2%

Please debit my: ☐ Mastercard ☐ Visa ☐ American Express

I authorise ASA to debit my credit card for the amount due plus the applicable fee as above

Credit Card Number _____

Expiry Date _____ Security Code (CVC) _____

Bank the Card is linked to (eg. NAB or ANZ) _____

Cardholders Name _____

Cardholders Billing Address _____

Postcode _____

State _____ Country _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Cardholders Signature _____