



# Meeting of Worlds!

## Sicily through the Ages with Vassar Alums

Palermo Cathedral

### Dear Vassar Travelers,

It is truly a pleasure to invite you to join a special trip to Sicily. The Mediterranean Island lays at the crossroads of Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. From earliest recorded history it has been a place of mixing, meeting, intermingling, of both violent conquest and peaceful absorption of newly arrived peoples crisscrossing the seas or descending from the north. The Phoenicians landed in the 8th century BCE (Palermo), the Greeks in the centuries following (Messina, Agrigento, Syracuse, Catania), the Romans in the 2nd century BCE, the Byzantines thereafter, then the Muslims in the 9th century, the Normans in the 11th, with the Spaniards (Aragonese) and the French (Bourbons) ruling from the 13th through the 19th centuries. In its mores and monuments, its language and literature, its music, religious traditions, and cuisine, and in the remarkable art and architectural styles in evidence over the centuries, Sicily represents one of the richest and most diverse cultural landscapes anywhere in Europe.

Vassar alums and Loeb supporters will embark on an 11-day, 10-night tour of this endlessly fascinating island. And at the beginning of the itinerary, we'll also be joined by Prof. Liz Lastra and four Vassar students, who will share their research following a six-week course on Art and Exchange in Medieval Sicily. They will help to highlight Palermo's rich history and the ways in which its monuments reflected the ambitions and priorities of various patrons and audiences: from powerful queens and kings to cloistered monks and transitory pilgrims and merchants.

As some of you may already know, I lived and studied in Italy for many years, and I first went to Sicily nearly four decades ago. In recent years, I regularly take Vassar students to Europe to experience firsthand the wonders of the continent, so I would be delighted to share my knowledge and passion for learning with you. This trip features luxury lodging, fine dining, first-rate guides, with plenty of free time for shopping, relaxing, or further sight-seeing, in one of the most beautiful and fascinating—and in many cases, least-visited—parts of the Mediterranean World. I sincerely hope that you will be able to accompany me on this unique journey.

*Bart Thurber*

The Anne Hendricks Bass Director and Lecturer in Art

# Vassar Travel Program



## TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

- Guided tours with private expert guides of top historic sites in Palermo, Syracuse, and elsewhere in Sicily, including the Cappella Palatina, the Cathedrals of Monreale, Cefalù, and Syracuse, the archaeological park of Selinunte, the Villa Romana del Casale, and the Whitaker Museum
- Guided excursions to the town of Cefalù, the island of Mozia, and the town of Noto
- Deluxe accommodations at Grand Hotel Wagner in Palermo, Hotel Baglio Oneto outside Marsala, and Palazzo Artemide in Syracuse
- Sunset cruise in the Syracuse harbor
- Fine dining at some of the best restaurants in Palermo and Syracuse
- Travel by private air-conditioned motorcoach on all excursions
- Plenty of free time to relax, shop and sightsee

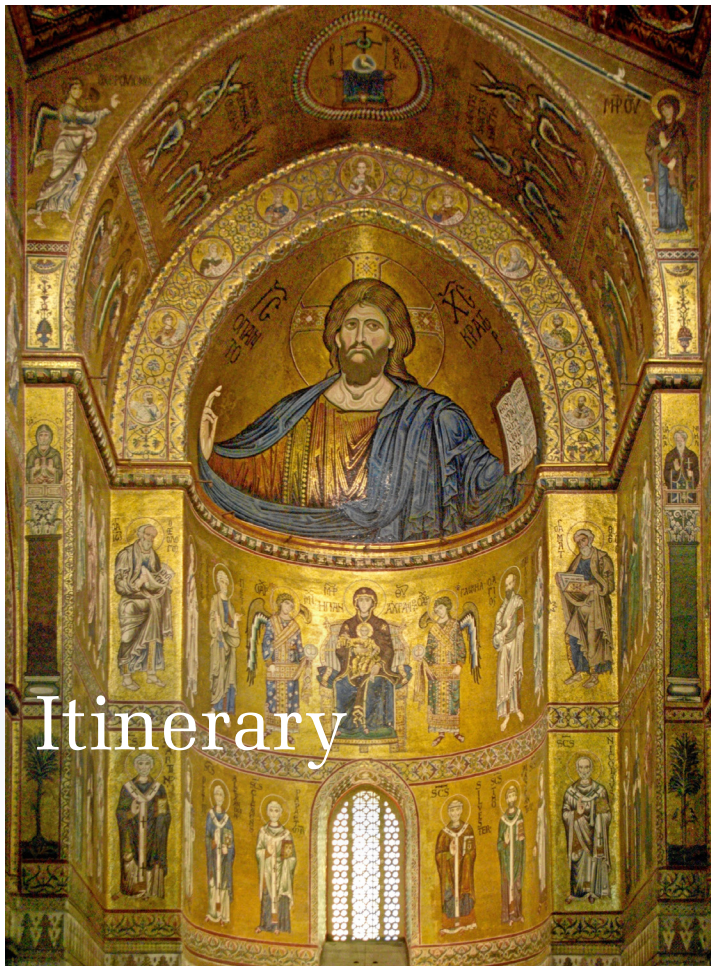
**LIMITED TO  
25 PARTICIPANTS**



Syracuse Ortigia

**October 20–31, 2026\***

\*The tour starts officially on October 21 in Palermo



# Itinerary

Monreale cathedral

## Tuesday, Oct. 20

Flights from the US and arrival the following day.

## Wednesday, Oct. 21 / Palermo

### Benvenuti!

Check in at the elegant Grand Hotel Wagner and meet your fellow travelers and Professor Liz Lastra and her students at a **welcome reception** at the hotel. The **welcome dinner** is nearby.

## Thursday, Oct. 22 / Palermo

### Monreale

The tour begins with a short excursion by private coach to the UNESCO World Heritage site of Monreale, home to one of the most extraordinary medieval cathedrals in Europe, with spectacular mosaics and a beautiful cloister. After our guided visit,

we return to Palermo and **lunch** near the *Quattro Canti*, the intersection, in the heart of the city, of the two lively pedestrian streets Via Maqueda and Corso Vittorio Emanuele, and afterwards stroll down the latter to tour the nearby Cathedral of Palermo.

The evening in Palermo is free. The hotel concierge and TGT staff will be available to advise on dining options in the area.



Villa Romana del Casale

## Friday, Oct. 23 / Palermo

### Norman Architecture and Ancient Markets

Today we tour the stunning Cappella Palatina, the Royal Chapel of the Norman ruler Roger II, whose pastiche of styles, Byzantine, Norman, Fatimid, reflected the political and social realities of 12th century Sicily. After **lunch**, we make our way to two remarkable oratories, the Oratorio del SS Rosario in S. Cita and the Oratorio del SS Rosario di San Domenico, both in the distinctive neighborhood of the Vucciria, Palermo's oldest market—the Palermitan word *vucciria* and the English *butcher* share the same etymology.

The evening in Palermo is free.

## Saturday, Oct. 24 / Palermo

### Duomo di Cefalù

This morning we travel by private coach to the picturesque town of Cefalù, situated on the northern coast of Sicily. Here we'll visit the Duomo di Cefalù, another superb example of Norman architecture (and another UNESCO site) which, with its elaborate Byzantine mosaics and hybrid styles, rivals Monreale in beauty and importance. After the cathedral and before lunch, you'll have time to explore this charming medieval town. Once back in Palermo in the late afternoon, enjoy the rest of the day free.

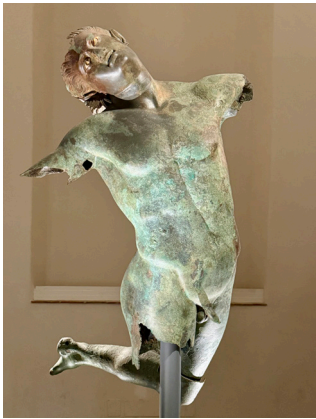
## Sunday, Oct. 25 / Baglio Oneto

### Greek Ruins & Dancing Satyrs

We leave Palermo and head south, through the scenic interior of the island, to the archaeological park of Selinunte on the opposite coast, for a guided morning tour of this remarkably serene and evocative site consisting of the vast remains of fifth century Greek temples, shrines, private residences, and the fortified Acropolis. After **lunch** at a locally popular beach restaurant and a brief visit to the Museum of the Dancing Satyr, we check in to the enchanting Baglio Oneto dei Principi, our base for the next two nights. A private tour of the cellar (wine-tasting included) and dinner await us there in the evening.



Selinunte ruins



Dancing Satyr



Street in Ortigia

### Monday, Oct. 26 / Baglio Oneto

## Mozia

In the morning we take a short ferry ride to the island of Mozia. Once a thriving Phoenician port and only recently excavated, this small island is home to the beautifully curated Whitaker Museum, which houses the exquisite Motya Charioteer. We will have **lunch** on the island and return to Baglio Oneto immediately afterwards. Spend the afternoon relaxing at the resort or take an optional drive to the mountaintop town of Erice, one of the hidden gems of Western Sicily. Enjoy the evening free.

### Tuesday, Oct. 27 / Siracusa

## Roman Villa & Piazza Armerina

Today we cross the length of the island, with a guided visit en route of the late imperial Villa Romana del Casale, home to what are considered the finest and best-preserved mosaics in the Roman World. After a late lunch on your own in the nearby town of Armerina, we arrive in Syracuse in the early evening. Our base there is the boutique five-star Palazzo Artemide, in the very heart of Ortigia, the beautiful, vibrant, mostly pedestrian and very Baroque centro storico. After checking in and time to rest and freshen up, we'll convene for **dinner** nearby.

### Wednesday, Oct. 28 / Siracusa

## Ortigia

We begin our tour of Syracuse with a walk through Ortigia, including a guided visit of the 7th century cathedral, another UNESCO World Heritage site, whose original structure incorporated an ancient Doric temple mentioned by Plato. After **lunch** in the area, we'll tour Castello Maniace, a citadel at the southern tip of Ortigia considered a masterpiece of medieval military architecture and offering breathtaking views of the harbor. The evening in Syracuse is free.



Baglio Oneto dei Principi

### Thursday, Oct. 29 / Siracusa

## Sicilian Baroque

We travel today to the beautiful town of Noto, about 35 minutes southwest of Syracuse. After an earthquake had devastated the town in 1693, Noto was entirely rebuilt in Sicilian Baroque style, one of several towns on the island to suffer the same fate, and experience the same rebirth—think Syracuse, Ragusa, Catania.

After **lunch** in Noto, you'll have free time to explore the town on your own. Once back in Syracuse in the late afternoon, evening will be free.

### Friday, Oct. 30 / Siracusa

## Stolen Caravaggios & Cruising the Harbor

Enjoy much of the day free on this last full day of the tour. We'll come together in the late afternoon for a guided visit of the Basilica di Santa Lucia al Sepolcro, the original site of Caravaggio's *Burial of St. Lucy* of 1608, and conclude the trip with a sunset cruise in Syracuse's picturesque harbor, followed by a **farewell dinner** in Ortigia.

### Saturday, Oct. 31 Arrivederci, Sicilia!

Departure from Catania

*Itinerary subject to change.*

*Meals in **bold** included in the price of the tour.*

## TOUR REGISTRATION

**Tour Cost: \$8,975 per person, ground only, double occupancy.**

**Single supplement: \$1,575**

**Deposit: \$1,000 per person** first come, first served.

**Registration Deadline: Friday, August 21, 2026.**

After that date, call for availability. Tour limited to 25 paying participants, or as hotel space allows.

**To reserve your place**, visit our website and locate the **Vassar Alums Sicily Tour**. Enter the code **VS2026** in the box on the right to access your tour's full itinerary and the registration and payment portal page. Then simply follow the instructions to complete and submit your registration form and deposit payment.

If you prefer to complete your registration manually, please call or email us for a printable PDF of the registration form. If you choose not to pay your deposit through TGT's web portal, please call us with your credit card information, or mail a check to: Vassar Sicily Tour/The Grand Tour, PO Box 274 Peterborough, NH 03458.

**Questions?** Contact The Grand Tour: 800.727.2995 / [info@thegrandtour.com](mailto:info@thegrandtour.com), or Kristy Grimes at Vassar: 845.437.7015 / [kgrimes@vassar.edu](mailto:kgrimes@vassar.edu)

The Sicily tour is an exclusive presentation by the Vassar Travel Program, and is organized by THE GRAND TOUR Travel Company, Peterborough, New Hampshire.



Island of Mozia