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 30th December 2024

22 days

Duration

Italy

Destination

Level 2 - Moderate

Activity

Ancient History of Southern Italy & Sicily group tours

Sep 23 2024 to Oct 14 2024

Ancient History of Southern Italy & Sicily: small group tour for seniors

Join Odyssey Traveller on this escorted small group tour for senior and mature travellers to the South of Italy, limited to 16 people this educational tour appeals to like minded couples and solo travellers. Enjoy as a senior traveller this Southern Italy tour as we traverse the lesser known islands and southern regions of the country. When you ask people about the must-see sights for tours of Italy, more often than not one of the first places they mention is the capital city, Rome, the



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submerged streets of Venice, or the sights of Florence, birthplace of the Renaissance. But there is more to Italy than its northern region. Head south from Rome and you'll find that the crowds begin to thin and life starts to move at a slower pace. Here you will see the cave dwellings of Matera; the ruins of Pompeii; Mount Vesuvius, the only active volcano in mainland Europe; and the gorgeous Amalfi Coast.

We go beyond the typical Southern Italy itinerary on our trip. During our educational tour, you will witness the dramatic, rugged countryside of the lower part of Italy's "boot" as we explore the ancient ruins, unique treasures, and diversity of Southern Italy. We learn about the influence of the early Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Saracens, Normans, Angevins and Aragonese while we search for evidence of their colonisation. We will also enjoy wine-tasting and a sampling of Southern Italian cuisine.

For the medieval traveller, religious houses provided a safe and convenient refuge. This tradition still exists in Italy and, as travellers, participants in this tour will sometimes stay in the modern-day version of these ancient religious houses.

Southern Italy Tour Itinerary

After arriving in Bari, we explore this picturesque port city, shaped by an almost continuous stream of invasion and conquest. The tour also includes Calabria, its brooding mountainous terrain stretching southwards between the Ionian and Tyrrhenian Seas; Sicily, the Mediterranean's largest island, home to a multi-ethnic culture reflecting successive waves of colonisation; and the Aeolian Islands, steeped in antiquity and scattered like a string of pearls in the Tyrrhenian Sea.

Over the course of the tour we pass through several lesser-known Italian regions:

Apulia:

The heel of Italy's boot, the region of Apulia (Italian: *Puglia*) is slowly taking its place among Italy's major destinations, offering a combination



of historic towns, beautiful scenery, and a slower pace of life than Northern Italy. Apulia was a major thoroughfare between the ancient Greek and Roman worlds and has been subjected to constant colonisation and invasion. This heritage has resulted in a rich mixture of historic architectural styles. Our tour begins in Bari, the capital of Apulia, an economic centre and university town with a striking historic centre. We then base ourselves in Alberobello, UNESCO World Heritage Listed for the famous fairy-tale like *trulli*, whitewashed stone houses with conical limestone roofs. Though some trulli have now become shops and accommodation for tourists, many Apulians continue to live in them today. Our tour also visits Lecce, known as ‘the Florence of the South’, due to the abundance of Baroque architecture in its historic centre; Martina Franca, a picturesque town home to stunning Baroque and Rococo architecture; and the white-painted hilltop town of Ostuni, with history dating back to the Stone Age.

Basilicata:

Also known by the ancient name Lucania, this small and mountainous region is one of Italy’s hidden gems. The city of Matera is one of the world’s oldest continuously inhabited cities, a place of stark and severe beauty, where people have lived in cave dwellings or *sassi* from antiquity. Long a place of poverty that was considered to be Italy’s ‘national shame’, the *sassi* were forcefully closed by the Italian government in the 1950s; but have been revitalised since the 1980s, as the caves have opened up to tourists. Matera has since been awarded UNESCO World Heritage Status and was the 2019 European City of Culture. Our tour also visits the town of Metaponto, home to an extensive archaeological site marking the Greek city of Metapontum. Once a thriving city, Metapontum was home to tens of thousands of people, including Pythagoras, who discovered his famous theorem in exile here in the sixth century BC.

Calabria:

If Apulia is Italy’s heel, Calabria is the toes: a rugged peninsula with an over 800 kilometre (500 mile) stretch of Ionian and Tyrrhenian coastline. Colonised by the Greeks in the in the 8th century BC, who formed a city at what is today Reggio Calabria, the province has seen successive waves of conquest: Roman, Byzantine, Norman, Swabian, Aragonese



and Bourbon. But the dominant influence is still Greek, as Greek words remain in the dialect, and ancient ruins dot the landscape. Our tour takes you to Stilo, one of Italy's most charming small towns and the home of the first Byzantine structure in Calabria; Gerace, with a stunning Norman cathedral and perfectly preserved medieval centre; and Tropea, a pretty seaside town.

Sicily:

The autonomous island of Sicily is a world apart. Much like the rest of Southern Italy, it was shaped by successive waves of colonisation: Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Arab, Norman, German and Spanish Bourbon. The power of the 'Magna Graecia' (Greater Greece) is still manifest in the ruins of Agrigento's 'Valley of the Temples', while Palermo, Sicily's bustling capital, is home to magnificent architecture fusing Norman, Arabic, and Byzantine elements. Our tour also takes you to Syracuse (Siracusa), where Greek dramas are still performed in an ancient theatre, and Taormina, with Greek ruins overlooking Mt. Etna. We also get away from it all on a day tour from Messina to the Aeolian Islands, a beautiful archipelago in the midst of the Tyrrhenian Sea.

Campania:

Home to Naples, southern Italy's biggest city (and Italy's third biggest), Campania is a land of contrasts, from bustling Naples to the exclusive results of the Amalfi Coast. Much like the rest of Southern Italy, Campania was first inhabited by the Ancient Greeks, and then became an exclusive resort for the rich and famous of Ancient Rome. Naples grew and prospered in the early modern period – in 1600, with a population of 300,000, it was Europe's biggest city. Today, Naples is a treasure trove of history, art, and architecture, from Pompeian frescoes to Caravaggio masterpieces to the Baroque grandeur of the Centro Storico. The ancient and haunting ruins of Pompeii more than live up to the hype. And Campania is home to some of Italy's best and most iconic beaches, from the world-famous Amalfi Coast, to the hidden gems of the Sorrento peninsula and the off-shore islands of exclusive Capri and down-to-earth Ischia. While our trip concludes with a day tour of Naples, we encourage you to stay on and uncover the many delights of



Campania.

You can learn more about [Italy](#) with our country profile which also lists all other tour departures. **For more details, click the 'Top 5' or 'Itinerary' buttons above!** If you're keen to experience this tour, [please call or send an email](#). Or, to book, simply fill in the form on the right hand side of this page.

Articles about Southern Italy published by Odyssey Traveller:

- [Southern Italy: History and Must-See Sights](#)
- [Mediterranean Islands: Malta, Sicily, Sardinia and Corsica](#)
- [About Malta, Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica](#)
- [The Sicilian people and their kings](#)
- [Piecing together the life of Caravaggio](#)
- [Learning About Caravaggio's Paintings](#)

For all the articles Odyssey Traveller has published for mature aged and senior travellers, click through [on this link](#).

External articles to assist you on your visit to Southern Italy:

- [The best of Puglia – the ultimate guide](#)
- [Puglia Travel Guide](#)
- [Holiday guide to Puglia, southern Italy: the best towns, restaurants and hotels](#)
- [A guide to Italy's newest hotspot Puglia](#)
- [The miracle of Matera: from city of poverty and squalor to hip hub for cave-dwellers](#)

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- A Cave with a View

Highlights

1. Visit the rock dwellings and “Sassi” of Matera.
2. Discover the culture and countryside of Sicily from the ancient citadel of Lipari on the Aeolian Islands to the superlative Greek remains.
3. Marvel at 12th century mosaics in the cathedral of Monreale and the Norman Capella Palatina in Palermo, with its Byzantine artistry.
4. Calabria in the 'toe' of Italy with cliff-hugging Tropea and Byzantine Gerace.
5. Explore Apulia with its peculiar conical-roofed, stone trulli church and houses.

Itinerary

Day 1

Locations: Bari

Overview:

On arrival in [Bari](#), you will make your own way to the hotel. Having had time to unpack and settle in, you will get the chance to meet the tour leader and the rest of the group during an introductory meeting, followed by dinner at the hotel.

Accommodation:

Hotel Adria or similar.



Day 2

Locations: Alberobello, Apulia

Overview:

In the morning we enjoy a guided tour of Bari. Bari is a port city on the Adriatic Sea, and the capital of southern Italy's [Puglia](#) (Apulia) region. Its maze-like old town, Bari Vecchia, is on a headland next to the port. Urban Bari offers a lively atmosphere full of culture and tradition; Trattorias line the streets, and the Basilica di San Nicola is said to house the bones of St Nicholas.

In the afternoon we travel southwards to Alberobello, which will be our base for the next five days. Located in the heel of Italy's boot, the strategic significance of the region over several millennia has left behind a rich and varied history. It was a major thoroughfare between the ancient Greek and Roman worlds and has been subjected to constant colonisation and invasion since, which has resulted in a remarkable range of architectural styles and ruins. The region has a distinct feel from the Northern Italian hot-spots that many tourists are accustomed to, and was only integrated into what we recognise as modern Italy towards the end of the 19th century.

We will conclude our day with dinner at a local restaurant.

Accommodation:

5 nights at Hotel Lanzilotta or similar.

Day 3

Locations: Alberobello – Locorotondo – Martina Franca - Alberobello

Overview:

Our destination today is [Matera](#), located approximately one and a half hours from Alberobello. Matera is a striking and atmospheric town located in the remote southern region of Basilicata (also called Lucania). It's famous for its extensive cave-dwelling districts, the *sassi*. The old town is a UNESCO heritage site, and we will have a guided tour to really make the most of its fascinating past. We visit the Chiesa San Pietro Barisano, Matera's largest rupestrian church dating back to the 12th century. We learn about the district and its history at the Casa Noha

Museum, and visit the distinctive Aragonese-style Castello Tramontano. Later in the day we will explore the Palombaro Lungo, the underground cistern, and the Museo Nazionale a'Arte Medievale e Moderna della Basilicata. We will then drive back to the hotel, where we will have a group dinner.

Accommodation:

Hotel Lanzilotta or similar.

Day 4

Locations: Alberobello – Matera – Alberobello

Overview:

Today we will meet our local guide for a full day tour of the area including a visit to the towns of Locorotondo and Martina Franca. Locorotondo is known as one of the most beautiful villages of Italy, with its whitewashed cone-roofed trulli houses as well as its wines, the historic centre is on a hill with lovely views over the Valle d' Intria. Martina Franca is another picturesque town with winding alleys, whitewashed houses in its old quarter but also features lovely baroque and rococo buildings and airy piazzas. Here, we view the Basilica of San Martino and visit Acropoli di Puglia – a traditional olive store.

Accommodation:

Hotel Lanzilotta or similar.

Day 5

Locations: Alberobello – Lecce - Alberobello

Overview:

After breakfast we travel to Lecce, also known as “The Florence of the South” due to the rich baroque architecture of the city. We enjoy a guided tour of the main sights, including the Roman Ampitheatre and Basilica di Santa Croce, followed by some free time to explore before returning to Alberobello.

Accommodation:

Hotel Lanzilotta or similar.

Day 6

Locations: Alberobello – Ostuni - Alberobello

Overview:

Ostuni, another small hilltop town is perhaps one of the most well-known in the region. The area has been inhabited since the Stone age, destroyed during the Punic Wars, and later rebuilt by the Greeks, who named it Ostuni, from the Greek Astu neon (“new town”). We have plenty of time to explore the town before returning to our hotel.

Accommodation:

Hotel Lanzilotta or similar.

Day 7

Locations: Alberobello – Metaponto

Overview:

Today we depart Apulia region and travel southwest to the town of Metaponto, in the Basilicata region. The town is located by the Ionian Coast and is composed of the main village and Metaponto Lido, the beach area. Between them lie the ruins of Metapontum, an ancient Greek Achaean colony.

Accommodation:

Borgo Ritrovato or similar.

Day 8

Locations: Metaponto – Cosenza - Briatico

Overview:

En route to Briatico we pause at Cosenza, where we visit Sila National Park on a guided tour. Calabria, the “toe” of Italy, was occupied by the Greeks. Ever since those living in this part of Italy supported the cause against the Romans, the region has been dominated by foreign powers: Romans, Saracens, Normans, Swabians, Aragonese and Spanish. This has given rise to a proud and independent culture reflected in the magnificence of the environment. From this rugged and dramatic land of

rural villages and mountainous terrain, many Italian emigrants brought to the Antipodes their traditional culture that has helped shape the persona of their new home.

Accommodation:

2 nights at Popilia Resort or similar.

Day 9

Locations: Briatico – Stilo – Gerace – Briatico

Overview:

In the morning we transfer to Stilo, a small town that has been named one of the most beautiful hamlets of Italy. The local economy is based on the agriculture, mainly the production of wine, cheese, olive oil and cereals. Here, we visit the main sights and then continue to Gerace, a town that stands on a hill formed of clusters of 60-million-year-old sea fossils. The main attractions of Gerace are the remains of the old Norman Castle and the perfectly preserved medieval town. Later, we return to Briatico.

Accommodation:

Popilia Resort or similar.

Day 10

Locations: Briatico – Troea – Reggio Calabria – Messina - Milazzo

Overview:

After breakfast we depart Calabria and head to [Sicily](#). On the way we stop at Tropea, a lovely seaside town. The most famous view of Tropea is the large rock outcrop jutting into the sea opposite the centre of town. We continue to Reggio Calabria where we visit the Museo Nazionale Della Magna Grecia. Later we make our way to the port to board our ferry to [Messina](#), Sicily.

The Mediterranean's largest island suffered, like Calabria, from its strategic position near "the middle of the world". Its history recounts stories of constant invasion and colonisation and its cultural heritage has been shaped by the many different peoples who have occupied it over centuries. Its natural features range from the lofty, smouldering

Mount Etna to the tiny volcanic Aeolian Islands where we discover many examples of former civilizations: from Phoenician and Carthaginian cities to Greek temples, Roman relics, Byzantine mosaics, Saracen domes and Norman castles and churches.

We stay in Milazzo tonight.

Accommodation:

Eolian Milazzo Hotel or similar.

Day 11

Locations: Milazzo – Aeolian Island - Acireale

Overview:

We start our day by travelling by ferry to the [Aeolian Islands](#): seven small inhabited islands off the northern shore of Sicily. The archipelago was formed by volcanic activity and two of the islands still have active volcanoes. We visit the Vulcano Porto, as well as the city of Lipari, before transferring to Acireale.

Accommodation:

4 nights at Santa Caterina Hotel or similar.

Day 12

Locations: Acireale - Catania - Acireale

Overview:

Today we explore Siracusa, located approximately one-hour drive south of Acireale. Siracusa is a large town including island and mainland districts. Many of its attractions are archaeological and historical. It was home to Archimedes and its Greek theatre still stands, with classic dramas performed there each year. We visit the main sights with our local guide and also explore the island of Ortygia, the historical heart of Siracusa.

Accommodation:

Santa Caterina Hotel or similar.

Day 13

Locations: Acireale - Catania - Acireale

Overview:

Our local guide will spend the day with us visiting the Etna area and Taormina, with its famous Greek theatre high above the sea and facing Etna.

Accommodation:

Santa Caterina Hotel or similar.

Day 14

Locations: Acireale – Etna area – Taormina - Acireale

Overview:

After breakfast we enjoy a city tour of Catania, the birthplace of composer Vincenzo Bellini. The town is situated between the Ionian Sea and Mount Etna. Here we visit the ruins from the ancient city and see the wealth of fine baroque architecture. There will be some free time to discover the city at your leisure before we return to our hotel in Acireale.

Accommodation:

Santa Caterina Hotel or similar.

Day 15

Locations: Acireale – Caltagirone - Agrigento

Overview:

Today we depart for [Agrigento](#) via Caltagirone, where we visit the town's main sights including the Roman Villa of Piazza Amerina. We also visit the Museo Regionale della Ceramica, before continuing on our way.

Accommodation:

2 nights at Hotel Agrigento or similar.

Day 16

Locations: Agrigento

Overview:

In the morning we visit the UNESCO World Heritage site of Valle dei Templi (Valley of the Temples), one of the greatest legacies of ancient Greece. The ruins are what remains of the ancient Greek city of Akragas. The town's archaeological museum is also on our list of places to explore today; it holds a wide range of exhibits from the area. The afternoon is free for your leisure.

Accommodation:

Hotel Agrigento or similar.

Day 17

Locations: Agrigento – Selinunte – Erice - Palermo

Overview:

Today we depart for [Palermo](#). En route, we stop for a guided tour of Selinunte, home of one of Sicily's great Greek archaeological sites. The archaeological park encompasses temples, ancient town walls, ruins of residential and commercial buildings as well as zones not yet excavated. As it's set next to the sea in the south-western corner of Sicily, it also offers stunning views. We continue on to Erice for a short visit before arriving at Palermo: our base for the next four nights.

Accommodation:

3 nights at Hotel ibis Styles Palermo or similar.

Day 18

Locations: Palermo – Cefalu - Palermo

Overview:

Our travels take us to Cefalu today; a charming historic seaside town where we take a guided tour. The remainder of the day is free to enjoy

at your leisure here, and then back in Palermo.

Accommodation:

Hotel ibis Styles Palermo or similar.

Day 19

Locations: Palermo – Segesta – Alcamo - Palermo

Overview:

Today we travel west to the town of Segesta, originally founded by the Elyman people – one of the three indigenous peoples of Sicily – and later integrated with the Greeks. The archaeological complex is set up high in the mountains, where we visit the Doric Temples and Hellenic Theatre. Later we drive back via Alcamo where we have the opportunity to visit a local wine producer and sample their drop.

Accommodation:

Hotel ibis Styles Palermo or similar.

Day 20

Locations: Palermo – Monreale - Naples

Overview:

On our last day in Sicily we explore Palermo on a full day tour of Sicily's cultural, economic and touristic capital. We also take a short trip to Monreale, a town just outside Palermo and famous for its mosaic-adorned Norman cathedral. Later, we transfer to the port for our overnight ferry to Naples.

Accommodation:

Overnight cabin on the ferry.

Day 21

Locations: Naples

Overview:

On arrival, we are picked up at the port and taken out for breakfast in a local café. This is followed by a half-day tour of Naples. The afternoon is free to relax and, in the evening, we gather for the last time as a group for our farewell dinner.

Accommodation:

Naples Hotel or similar.

Day 22

Locations: Naples

Overview:

Our tour concludes today after breakfast at the hotel.

Inclusions / Exclusions

What's included in our Tour

- 20 nights hotel accommodation
- 1 night on board overnight ferry from Palermo to Naples (Single cabins may not be available)
- 20 Typical local breakfasts at hotels.
- 13 dinners at the hotel or local restaurants.
- Touring by comfortable and modern coach.
- Transport, lectures and field trips as indicated.
- Applicable entry fees and services of local guides.
- Services of a Tour Leader.
- Service Charges and Gratuities.

- Detailed Tour Information Booklet.

What's not included in our Tour

- International airfares and taxes
- Airport transfers
- Meals not included in the itinerary
- Comprehensive travel insurance
- Items of personal nature like laundry, phone calls, etc

Level 2 - Moderate

Participants must be able to carry their own luggage, climb and descend stairs, be in good health, mobile and able to participate in 3-5 hours of physical activity per day, the equivalent of walking/hiking up to 8 kilometres on uneven ground.

Please do not hesitate to contact us with any requests for further information about this tour or any others offered by Odyssey Travel.