

**Friday November 27th, 2009 (NOTO)**

Arrival in Catania at 3:00 PM on MS 447

Beginning of the tour

**from Catania Airport to Siracusa 1h.00** ibla

4.30 PM arrival in Siracusa at Hotel des Etrangers (the bus cannot arrive exactly at the Hotel so we have to arrange for the transfer from the parking - Molo St. Antonio to the hotel)

9.00 PM dinner in a restaurant Restaurant of the Hotel

**Saturday, November 28th 2009 (NOTO - RAGUSA - MODICA)**

9.00 AM depart from the hotel

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visit Noto (Cathedral and old town)

**Visit to Noto**

*Although a town called Noto, or Netum, existed in this area for centuries, the town as it is now is a "New Town", conceived as a triumphant symbol of renewal. Noto was raised to the ground by an earthquake on January 11 1693 and its rebuilding was entrusted the following week to Sicilian-Spanish aristocrat Giuseppe Lanza, the Duke of Camastra. Although the inhabitants were initially reluctant, Lanza was motivated by his prestigious visions and began refurbishing the area's defenses with the help of Flemish military engineer Carlos de Grunemburg. A revolutionary new plan was devised. The town was to be composed of two distinct sections- one for the political and religious establishments, and one for the people. They were to be almost completely separated from one another, and the best architects, Vincenzo Sinatra, Paolo Labisi, and master craftsman Rosario Gagliardi, were to be employed. Their collaboration was so complete that it is still difficult to ascribe some buildings to any one person. Within a remarkably short time, the work was completed. Noto had become a new city, planned with a focus on symmetry and visual harmony, from its simple street plan to the gracious curves of its buildings. This century has seen a deterioration of the town, mainly due to the traffic that thunders through it. The local Ibean stone, highly workable and suitable for delicate carving, is also quite fragile; but it was not until 1987 that belated and much-needed restoration work was begun.*

Coffee break at Cafè Dolceria Costanzo where you can taste Cannoli and other Sicilian Pastry

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depart to Ragusa - lunch an visit Ibla and Barocco - Modica

### **Visit to Ragusa Ibla**

*Set on a wide hill in the middle of two deep valleys (called Quarries of San Leonardo and Santa Domenica), Ragusa is divided in two distinct areas: Ragusa Ibla (lower side) and Ragusa (upper side). Ragusa Ibla was founded on the original territory of the ancient Sicilian town of Hibla Herea, of which many tokens remain, such as rectangular-shaped burial niches in the Gonfalone's valley, along the road to Modica. Some of these were reconstructed inside the archaeological museum of Ragusa. The Greek culture was greatly absorbed following their invasion a few centuries later. From the 3rd century B.C. to the 2nd century A.D. almost all of Sicily, including Ragusa, fell under the rule of the Roman Empire. After the fall of the empire, the Byzantines took over from the Romans and maintained rule for about five centuries. During Byzantine rule, Ragusa was almost completely fortified to defend itself from the continuous Barbarian attacks, although few architectural findings remain intact from that period. Between the 8th and the 13th centuries, the area was run by Arabs. This was a particularly prosperous period for Ragusa and Sicily, economically, culturally and socially. The Normans landed in Sicily in 1081, and reached Ragusa about 10 years later. After a short period under Swabian rule, Ragusa then fell to the French. After the Sicilian Vespers revolt (1282), Ragusa and Modica freed themselves of the French Anjous and fell under the Spanish Aragon dynasty. In 1286, the two counties joined together and became the County of Modica that was run for almost a century by the powerful Chiaramonte family, with a certain degree of autonomy. Around 1400, another dynasty took over, this time the Cabrera family, who represented a violent and aggressive expansionist policy. A few years before, Ragusa and most of Eastern Sicily had been hit by an even more tragic event: a devastating earthquake struck the area in 1693, destroying everything. Ragusa recovered from the trauma, and immediately began large-scale rebuilding. The city soon became a wonderful monument to Sicilian Baroque style.*

6.00 PM - return to the Hotel  
8.00 PM - dinner in a restaurant  
Overnight at Hotel des Etrangers

### **Sunday, November 29th 2009 (SIRACUSA)**

9.00 AM           depart from the hotel  
9.30. AM         Visit to the Archeological Area and Teatro Greco (specialized guide

on the site)

### **Visit to the Archeological Area and Teatro Greco**

*The Greek Theatre is the most celebrated of all the ruins in Syracuse and one of the largest Greek theatres known (138 m. in diameter). Archaeological evidence confirms the existence in this location of a wooden theatre as early as the sixth century BC, and it was here that Epicharmus (540-450 BC) worked as a comic poet. The existing cavea, with 42 rows of seats in nine wedges, is almost entirely hewn out of the rock. Around the gangway runs a very worn frieze bearing, in large Greek characters, the names of royalty, as well as Zeus Olympius, which served to distinguish the rows of seats. The foundations of the scene remain, although later alterations make it difficult to identify their function, except for the deep recess for the curtain. The trapezoidal shape of the earlier theatre can be clearly seen as a deep trough in the orchestra. The view from the upper seats was especially good in the early morning, which was in fact the hour at which Greek drama was performed*

**12.00 AM**

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### **Private visit to Palazzo Beneventano**

*The Palazzo Beneventano del Bosco, situated in the main piazza of antique Ortygia, in Syracuse, is “one of the most complete Baroque constructions in Syracuse” (A. Blunt), also thanks to the brilliant reconstruction carried out following the earthquake that destroyed*

*Eastern Sicily. Actually, the first part of the palace was constructed during the Middle Ages. During the 17th century, the palace hosted the Commenda of the Knights of Jerusalem, and was the order’s last Italian residence before its definitive transfer to Malta. In 1778, it was finally acquired by the Beneventano del Bosco family, to whom it still belongs. In 1779, the family entrusted the reconstruction of the palace to Luciano Ali, whose work here is a masterpiece. He modified the façade, raising the attic, and added balconies and the great convex portal. With methods unheard of in Sicily, but inspired by certain contemporary Neapolitan styles, he constructed ex novo the monumental staircase, which is “without a doubt, the most elegant external staircase in all of Sicily.”*

*1.45 Lunch in the Tavern (light lunch in the Tavern (tasting of sicilian typical products: smoked seafood, patè of olives, tuna roe, local cheese, etc. with DOC local wines and Moscato di Siracusa with local pastry (all coming directly from the Case del Feudo Agriturismo production)*

**3.30 PM**

**Visit to Duomo - CARAVAGGIO**

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*The Piazza del Duomo, an elongated square built in the Baroque style is among the most impressive architectural structures in Ortygia. Although it has a Baroque façade, the Cathedral itself was originally a Greek temple dedicated to Athena. The frame of the ancient temple is still prevalent in the muted interior. The aisles are formed by the massive Doric columns, while the cella walls were partially destroyed to allow for the creation of the present arched nave. Remains of the temple can also be detected in the apse at the end of the north aisle, where the columnar end of the cella wall can be seen. The apse, the one Byzantine element in the building, houses a beautiful statue, Madonna of the Snow, by the Renaissance artist Antonello Gagini. The Duomo's south aisle shows more characteristic Baroque effusion in the series of richly ornate chapels; though the first one (the baptistery) dates to an earlier age. Enlivened by twelfth-century arabesque mosaics, the baptistery contains a Norman font that was cut from a block still marked with Greek inscriptions and is supported by seven bronze lions.*

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#### **6.00 PM Visit to Castello Maniace**

*Situated in the Southern part of the island of Ortygia, the castle was built on order of Frederick II of Swabia in the first half of the XIII century. Used both as a residence and as a defence bastion, the castle once hosted king Peter of Aragon when he passed through Syracuse in 1288. In the XVI century part of it was modified by the Spanish who in that period were strongly fortifying the whole city. It suffered damage both in 1693 due to an earthquake, and in 1704 following a sudden gunpowder explosion. The castle, which was originally surrounded by a moat, had a square plan structure, with a tower on each corner, of which only one still remains.*

return to the hotel

8.30 PM Dinner in a restaurant - Restaurant La Nottola - special sicilian menus (fish)

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#### **Monday, November 30th (AGRIGENTO)**

Depart from Siracusa to Palermo

**- from Siracusa to Agrigento 3 hours**

8.30 AM depart to Agrigento

11.30AM Visit to Agrigento (valle dei Templi and Zeus Park) specialized guide on the site

### **Visit to Agrigento**

*Located on a plateau overlooking Sicily's southern coast, Agrigento was founded as Akragas around 582 BC by a group of colonists from Gela, who themselves were the immediate descendants of Greeks from Rhodes and Crete*

*The town lies on three hills- Girgenti, Rupe Atenea, and the "Hill of the Temples"- which form a natural stronghold*

*The most impressive and renowned vestiges, the city's wonderful temples, lie on the "Hill of the Temples" on the south side, overlooking the sea. Their names are unsubstantiated attributions spawned by the vivid imagination of Renaissance scholars, with the exception of the Olympieion.*

*The Temple of Hercules is one of the most ancient- end of the sixth century, or possibly after 480 BC. The two best-preserved ones are the Temple of Juno Lacinia (built around 450 BC) and especially the Temple of Concordia (built around 440 BC). The latter, although it was renovated to become an Early Christian basilica, is regarded as one of the most important classical temples in the world for its preservation and sheer beauty. At the bottom of the hill, at the southwest corner of the walls, are the breathtaking ruins of one of the most colossal temples of the Greek world, the Olympieion, an opus infinitum that must have begun after 480 BC and was cut short, as Diodorus Siculus tells us, by the Carthaginian conquest of 406 BC.*

### **Visit to Cefalà Diana**

*Cefalà Diana is famous for two important architectural: Diana Castle built probably around the middle of the '300, and the Arab Baths, built on the site of an ancient thermal spring, located on a short distance from the city, a rare and valuable witness to the Arab domination in Sicily.*

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1.30 PM lunch in a restaurant Akropolis -

3.30 PM depart to Palermo  
**- from Agrigento to Palermo 2h.30**

6.00 PM Arrival in Palermo at Grand Hotel at des Palmes

9.00 PM Dinner in a restaurant - in the old town

### **Tuesday, December 1st (PALERMO - Marsala - Erice)**

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9.00 AM depart from the Hotel

11.00 AM visit ERICE - lunch

2.30 PM depart to Saline - visit Saline and Mothia (TBD)  
4.30 PM MARSALA  
6.30 PM return to Palermo  
8.30 PM LUNCH IN RESTAURANT - Tonnara Bordonaro

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### **Wednesday, December 2nd (Palermo)**

9.00 AM depart from the hotel - Visit of the Martorana and the Church of San Cataldo, la Cuba and la Cubola, La Zisa AND OTHERS ISLAMIC BUILDINGS

#### **Visit to la Cuba and la Cubola**

*The Cuba is a Norman palace built by William II in imitation of the Zisa. The name comes from the Arab, kubbeh, meaning dome. The building is now roofless and a few trees grow inside the walls. It was once surrounded by water, today replaced by a little garden. In one part are the remains of a hall with miniature stalactite vaults and delicate reliefs, and a small cupola decorated with stuccoes. The famous writer Giovanni Boccaccio used this palace as a setting for one of the short stories of his masterpiece, the Decameron:*

*As the Zisa and the Cuba, the Cubola, built by William I, was an elegant pavillion used to decorate the royal park that once covered the entire area around Palermo.*

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#### **Visit to La Zisa**

*The name of this palace comes from the Arab, el aziz (or magnificent) and it is the most important secular monument of Arab-Norman architecture surviving in Sicily, purely Islamic in inspiration. La Zisa was one of a group of palaces built by the Norman kings in their private park of Genoardo, used as a hunting reserve, on the outskirts of Palermo. It was begun by William I during the second half of the twelfth century and completed by his son. The palace is known to have been used by Frederick II, but it was already in disrepair in the late thirteenth century. It was fortified by the Chiaramonte family and drastically reconstructed by the Spanish Sandoval family who owned it from 1635 to 1806. The fine exterior has a symmetrical design, with a sandstone façade once decorated with red and white plaster. In the*

*beautiful interior the splendid central hall, used for entertainment's, has niches with stalactite vaults derived from Islamic architecture. The Norman mosaics, which recall those in the Sala di re Ruggero in the Palazzo Reale, show Byzantine and Islamic influences.*

- 1.30 PM          Lunch in a typical restaurant in the center of Palermo
- Afternoon      free time - shopping - markets
- 5.00 PM          depart from the hotel
- 6.00 PM          Private visit to Palazzo Gangi - guided visit by the owners

**Private visit Palazzo Gangi**

*This palace, still belonging to the Principi di San Vincenzo, is among the largest mansions of Italy. The palace, begun by Pietro Valguarner a in the middle of XVIII Century, is actually a combination of several older buildings. It is Located in*

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*the celebrated area of Palermo called Kalsa, where several aristocratic families built their palaces. In fact, after the earthquake of 1751, Palermo was the center of extremely important architectural renovation. The palace subsequently passed on to the Alliata di Villafranca., and then to the Mantegna families, the name later unfortunately died out when the last daughter married the Prince of San Vincenzo of the Vanni Calvello family.*

*Extended toward "Piazza dei Vespri" by Antonio Gigante after 1757, the edifice was restructured and given a lavish decoration executed by the best artists of this time, including Gaspare Serenarior..The "piano nobile" houses the celebrated "galleria degli specchi", a masterwork of Sicilian baroque in the superb setting of the original furnishings. The apartments contains very precious collections of porcelains, and the best examples of Sicilian decorative arts The family recently restored the palace, according to the original 18th century splendors.*

- 8.30 PM          Dinner at restaurant Kalesa
- 10.30 PM        return to the hotel

**Thursday, December 3rd (PALERMO)**

- 9.00 AM          Depart from the hotel

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10.00 AM Visit of the Cathedral

**Visit of the Cathedral**

*The present Cathedral, on the site of an older basilica that had been a mosque in the 9th century, was founded in 1185 by Walter, Archbishop of Palermo. Building continued for many centuries and in the 15th century much of the exterior acquired a Catalan Gothic style. Ferdinando Fuga added the incongruous dome in 1781-1801. The tympanum of the great south porch (the usual entrance) houses a delicate relief. The painted intarsia decoration above the three arches depicts the Tree of Life, while the twelve tondi are decorated with a variety of symbolic animals, fruit, flowers, and human figures. Baroque and neo-classical elements predominate in the interior. The chapels in the south aisle contain several royal tombs, including the sarcophagi of Roger II, who was the first King of Sicily, his daughter Constance, Henry VI, who was Emperor of Germany and son of Frederick Barbarossa, Frederick II, who was Emperor of Germany and King of Sicily, Duke William, son of Frederick II of Aragon, and Peter II, King of Sicily. The reliquary urns of the saints of Palermo and the tomb slab of St. Cosma can be found in the other chapels. In the south transept, there is an altarpiece by Giuseppe Velasquez and, above the altar, a bas-relief of the Dormition of the Virgin by Antonello Gagini.*

11.00 PM Visit of the Palazzo dei Normanni, including the Stanze di Re Ruggero

**Visit of the Palazzo dei Normanni, including the Stanze di Re Ruggero**

*Palazzo dei Normanni, or Palazzo Reale, stands on the highest part of the old city. It was built by the Saracens, enlarged by the Normans, and later restored by the Spaniards who added the principal façade. It has always been the palace of the rulers of the island, and here the splendid courts of Roger II and Frederick II, stupor mundi, held sway over Europe. Since 1947 it has been the seat of the Regional Assembly. The long façade hides the apse of the famous Cappella Palatina; at the right end is the massive Torre Pisana, part of the Norman palace. The staircase, with red marble rises, leads up to the top floor of the palace and the former Royal Apartments, mostly decorated in the 19th century. The most interesting room is the so-called Sala di Re Ruggero with delightful mosaics of 1140, including hunting scenes,*

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*birds, palm trees, lions and tigers. In the vault are heraldic beasts. The lower parts of the walls with marble and mosaics decorations, and the floor all survive intact.*

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12.00 PM          Private visit of the Cappella Palatina including the treasury  
**Private visit of the Cappella Palatina including the treasury – (to be confirmed)**  
*A jewel of Norman-Saracenic art, the Cappella Palatina is famous for its wonderful mosaics. Following the plan of a small basilica, with a raised choir and a cupola crowning the central bay, it demonstrates the level of perfection reached by this style of architecture. The ten antique columns of the nave are made from granite and cipollino. The ceiling is a splendid Saracenic work, while the ambo and the paschal candlestick are excellent examples of the richest Norman decoration. The pavement and lower part of the walls are made of white marble inlaid with red, green, and gold patterns, which complement the colors and designs of the mosaics above. Intended to celebrate the monarchy of Roger II, the subjects for the mosaics seem to have been chosen with particular reference to the Holy Spirit and the theology of light. The earliest and finest mosaics are in the eastern part of the chapel and are thought to be the work of Byzantine Greeks (c.1140-50). The mosaics in the nave, probably the most recent (1150-1171), were executed in the Roman style and illustrate scenes from the Book of Genesis; while the scenes along the aisles depict episodes from the Lives of St. Peter and St. Paul. The original narthex, now the baptistery, has two beautifully carved mosaic doorways with bronze doors.*

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1.00 PM          Lunch at Focacceria San Francesco

3.30 PM          Visit to Palazzo Abatellis

**Visit to Palazzo Abatellis**

*Palazzo Abatellis was designed in 1488-95 by Matteo Carnelivari for Francesco Abatellis, who was appointed admiral of Sicily by the Spaniards. Its style combines elements of the Renaissance with late Catalan Gothic. Much was altered internally during the occupation of the palace by Dominican nuns from 1526 until 1943 when it was damaged by bombs. The palace was freely restored in 1954 as the home of the Galleria Regionale della Sicilia, with a fine collection of Sicilian artworks. The ground floor houses sculptures, while the first floor is devoted to Sicilian painting. The former chapel is dominated by a famous large fresco of the Triumph of Death, detached from the Palazzo Sclafani; it was executed around the year 1449 by an unknown artist. Death is portrayed as an archer on horseback, piercing a wealthy and contended crowd, while the unhappy and aged pray in vain for release. Among*

*the important sculptures are the works by Francesco Laurana, principally his masterpiece- the Bust of Elenora of Aragon, and the pieces by the Gagini. The extraordinary painting collection includes a series of unique "Coronations of the Virgin» by the same unknown master, as well as the masterpiece of Antonello da Messina, Virgin Annunciate.*

4.30 PM Visit to Kanak - Stanza dello Scirocco (Palazzo Marchesi is closed)  
7.00 PM return to the hotel

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8.15 PM depart from the hotel

8.30 PM Dinner at Palazzo Lanza Tomasi

**Dinner at Palazzo Lanza Tomasi**

*Palazzo Lanza Tomasi, facing the waterfront of Palermo, was built on the remains of the sixteenth century city-walls during the second half of the 1600's. In 1768, the palace was acquired by Giuseppe Amato, Prince of Galati, who made the appearance of the waterfront façade more uniform, in the style of the architect Vanvitelli. The Palazzo was then bought by Giulio Fabrizio Tomasi Prince of Lampedusa, with the money received as compensation by the King for the expropriation of the island of Lampedusa. Giulio Fabrizio, amateur astronomer, was the model for the protagonist of "The Leopard", the novel written by his great-grandson Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa. In 1862, the De Pace family, shipbuilders related to the Florio family, acquired the palace and changed it according to the fashion of the day. In 1948, Giuseppe Tomasi Lampedusa, who lost another family palace during the bombing on April 23, 1943, repurchased the property from the De Pace family and lived there until his death. His adopted son Gioacchino Lanza Tomasi reunified the entire estate and fully restored the building. The principal charm of the palace rests in its position, and the interior play of light. The ballroom and the library are largely furnished with antiques from the destroyed Palazzo Lampedusa, while other pieces come from the Palazzo Lanza di Mazzarino. The furnishings, representative of the great patrician homes of Palermo, present a collection of the very best Sicilian cabinetwork.*

10.30 PM return to the hotel

**Friday, December 4th (CATANIA)**

Depart from Palermo to Catania  
- from Palermo to Catania 2h.30

8.00 AM Depart from the hotel

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11.30 AM Private visit to Palazzo Biscari in Catania

**Private visit to Palazzo Biscari**

*Palazzo Biscari was built after the earthquake of 1693. It was constructed over the remnants of the city walls, which had been built by King Charles V of Spain. The first phase of construction was commissioned by the Fourth Prince of Biscari, Vincenzo Paternò Castello, but it was completed by Ignazio Paternò Castello, the Sixth Prince of Biscari. Thanks to him, the palace acquired fame as a cultural attraction with fabulous works of art. In 1758, the Prince opened a museum inside the palace to display his art collections and precious archeological findings. Palazzo Biscari became a must for well-educated Europeans touring Sicily. Goethe was one of these European visitors, and he devoted several pages of his book "Travels in Italy" to Palazzo Biscari. This splendid Baroque palace was designed by the architect Francesco Battaglia, whose technical experience and fondness for fantasy is clearly visible in the palace's large rococo octagonal ballroom. You can also see the influence of the architect combined with the creative ideas of the Prince in some of the other unique designs, such as the Musician's Loggia. A ceiling terrace opens onto the center of the main ballroom. It features a dome decorated with frescoes by Sebastiano Lo Monaco, representing a counsel of mythological gods for the celebration of the triumph of the Prince of Biscari's dynasty. Near the ballroom one finds a small staircase which was decorated by Maestro Antonio Pepe. The façade on the external balcony is richly embellished with sculptures of the allegories: Abundance, Prosperity, Fertility, and Wisdom.*

12.30 PM Lunch in a restaurant - fiaschetteria Biscari (in Palazzo Biscari)

**Departure from Catania at 15.45 on MS 446**

**Bon Voyage**