



Palermo Revealed

Art, archaeology, architecture and gastronomy

31 October–5 November 2023 (MJ 996)

6 days • £2,890

Lecturer: Dr Luca Leoncini

A captivating city, richly encrusted with the art and architecture of many periods.

Exclusive visits: meals at two private *palazzi* and drinks at another; see the outstanding Palatine Chapel outside public opening hours.

Includes an excursion to see the spectacular mosaics at Monreale.

Sicily's heritage of art, architecture and archaeological remains is exceptionally rich and varied, and Palermo is by far the most interesting of the island's cities. Staying here for all six days, the tour also has excursions to some of the best of the area's patrimony just outside the city.

In the ninth century AD, when Byzantine rule was supplanted by that of Muslim Arabs, Palermo became the leading city on the island and famous throughout Europe for the beauty of its hillside position, its tradition of craftsmanship and its enlightened administration. In the eleventh century Arab rule was swept aside by conquering Normans. By succumbing to the luxuriant sophistication of their predecessors they distanced themselves as far as is imaginable from their rugged northern roots. From a Palermo-based cosmopolitan court they ruled an affluent and cultured nation with efficiency and tolerance.

The unique artistic blend of this golden age survives in Romanesque churches with details of Norman, Saracenic, Levantine and classical origin. Byzantine mosaicists were extensively employed, and more wall and vault mosaics survive here than in all of Byzantium. The tour includes not only the Norman buildings in Palermo but also the cathedral at Monreale.

The prosperity and power of Sicily began to wane from the later Middle Ages, but pockets of wealth and creativity remained, as Gothic and Renaissance creations demonstrate. Artistically, however, a final flourish was reached in the Age of Baroque when churches and palaces were erected in Palermo and throughout the island which are as splendid and exuberant as anywhere in Europe.

Always a seething, vibrant city, an enlightened local government has made Palermo cleaner, safer, and altogether more enjoyable in recent years.



Palermo, cathedral, steel engraving c. 1850

Itinerary

Day 1. Fly at c. 6.45am from London Heathrow via Milan to Palermo (ITA Airways). Overnight Palermo where all five nights are spent.

Day 2: Palermo. A morning walk through the old centre includes a visit to several oratories. The afternoon is spent at the Galleria Regionale della Sicilia (Palazzo Abatellis), which has an excellent collection of 15th-century pictures, and at La Martorana and S. Cataldo, two outstanding Norman buildings. Dinner at a private *palazzo*.

Day 3: Monreale, Palermo. Monreale dominates a verdant valley southwest of Palermo, and its cathedral is one of the finest Norman churches with the largest scheme of mosaic direction to survive from the Middle Ages. Free afternoon before a private evening visit to the Palatine Chapel.

Day 4: Palermo. Visit the Chiesa del Gesù, an extraordinary example of Palermitan Baroque with a profusion of marble inlay, stucco and sculpture. S. Giovanni degli Eremiti is a Norman church with five cupolas and a charming garden. The cathedral, a building of many periods, has grand royal and imperial tombs. Free afternoon. In the evening, there is a visit and reception by special arrangement to an otherwise inaccessible *palazzo*, with

astonishing Rococo interiors and many original furnishings (used as a set in Visconti's film of *The Leopard*).

Day 5: Palermo. Spend most of the day with the Duchess of Palma in an 18th-century *palazzo* facing the Bay of Palermo. The palace is the former residence of Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, author of *The Leopard*, now the home of his adoptive son. Visit the city's best market with the Duchess herself to select fresh seasonal produce, before returning to the *palazzo* for a cooking class, lunch in the grand dining room and a tour with the Duke and Duchess.

Day 6: Palermo. Visit the Castello della Zisa, an Arab-Norman palace. Fly from Palermo via Milan to London Heathrow, arriving c. 6.00pm.

Lecturer

Dr Luca Leoncini. Art historian specialising in 15th-century Italian painting. His first degree and PhD were from Rome University, followed by research at the Warburg Institute in London. He has published articles on the classical tradition in Italian art of the 15th century and contributed to the *Macmillan Dictionary of Art*. He has also written on Mantegna and Renaissance drawings.

Palermo Revealed
continued

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £2,890 or £2,690 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £3,380 or £3,180 without flights.

Included: flights (economy) with ITA Airways (Airbus 319); travel by private coach; hotel accommodation; breakfasts; 1 lunch & 4 dinners with wine, water, coffee; a cooking class with the Duchess of Palma; a drinks reception at a private palace; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer.

Accommodation. Grand Hotel Piazza Borsa, Palermo (piaz zaborsa.it): a centrally located 4-star hotel housed in an assortment of historical buildings. *Single rooms are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? There is a lot of walking on this tour, and it would not be suitable for anyone who has difficulties with everyday walking or stair-climbing. Fitness and sure-footedness are essential. Average distance by coach per day: 10 miles.

Flights: We opt to travel to and from Sicily with ITA Airways in November because the only direct flights to the island in this period are with low-cost airlines, with whom it is not currently viable for us to make a group booking. British Airways only flies directly from London Heathrow to Palermo from late March to early October.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.