MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY
ALUMNI ASSOCIATION
Traveling Bulldogs



Duration
10 days

Activity Level
Active Travel

Journey Type
Land

Malta & Sicily

September 24 – October 4, 2027

Islands of the Ancient Mediterranean | Starting from $5,745/pp

Join an enriching, nine-night journey that reveals the remarkable history of Malta and Sicily! Shaped by a marvelous mosaic of cultures, these beautiful islands between Europe and northern Africa abound with impressive treasures. In Malta, take in Hagar Qim and Ggantija , fascinating Neolithic temples older than the Great Pyramids and Stonehenge. In Sicily, appreciate the glorious Greek ruins of Agrigento and Syracuse and some of the world's most spectacular Roman mosaics. You'll also delight in baroque gems tucked within Valletta, Malta's intimate capital, and savor the breathtaking scenery of Taormina , Sicily's chic resort town!





Day-by-Day Itinerary

Malta & Sicily: Islands of the Ancient Mediterranean

Air Program: 11 days/10 nights (includes 1 air night)

Land Program: 10 days/9 nights

Breakfasts: 9 | Lunches: 6 | Receptions: 2 | Dinners: 4

B | L | D denotes included breakfasts, lunches, receptions and dinners.

A special note about air: If you have purchased only the Land Program, please book flights that arrive on Day 2, the first day of the Land Program. The date is listed at the top of your Reservation Confirmation.

This itinerary is subject to change due to operational conditions.

This ACTIVE program is designed for people who are in good health and can comfortably participate in a demanding daily schedule of physical activities. The itinerary may feature full days of ongoing activities. Excursions on this program require:

- walking on cobblestones, unpaved paths and/or uneven surfaces
- getting on and off motor coaches and ferries
- walking on steep inclines/declines and up and down stairs

Depending on the excursion, more leisurely alternatives may be available.

Day 1 | Depart gateway city

AHI FlexAir passengers depart for Valletta, Malta. Please check your luggage from your gateway city to your arrival city. Your claim checks should have the following airport code: MLA.

Day 2 | Valletta, Malta | Sliema

AX The Palace

R | D

Arrive at Malta International Airport. Proceed through immigration to the baggage claim area and retrieve your luggage. After completing customs, AHI FlexAir passengers traveling on flights that qualify for the group arrival transfer and Land Program passengers who have purchased seats on the group transfer should exit the baggage claim area and proceed to the designated meeting spot, where an AHI Travel representative will meet you. The meeting location will be provided with your final documents.

Transfer to the AX The Palace in Sliema. Please note, if you arrive before check-in time, your room may not be immediately available.

After getting settled, meet your fellow travelers during a Welcome Reception at the hotel. The festivities continue at a Welcome Dinner at a restaurant.

Day 3 | Mdina | Rabat | Hagar Qim

AX The Palace

B | L

Begin each morning with a hearty breakfast buffet at the hotel before your daily excursions.

Enrichment: History of Malta. Malta's intriguing history spans almost 8,000 years, beginning with the arrival of settlers from Sicily in 5200 B.C. It was ruled by the Phoenicians, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Normans, the Order of St. John and the British, among others, before becoming independent in 1964 and joining the European Union in 2004. A local expert delves into the complex story of this small archipelago situated advantageously in the middle of the Mediterranean between Europe and Africa.

Mdina & Rabat. Journey inland this morning to enchanting Mdina, Malta's walled ancient capital, first settled by the Phoenicians in the eighth century B.C. During the 11th century, a Muslim community developed here, and the city's name, layout and architecture reflect this Arab influence. It remained the island's administrative center through the Middle Ages until the Order of St. John moved the capital to Birgu in 1530. With this shift, Mdina became a ghost town in many people's eyes, earning it the nickname, "The Silent City." Today, Mdina leans into this reputation for quiet with largely car-free streets and signs requesting silence. It creates a wonderfully tranquil atmosphere to savor the lovely baroque architecture along Mdina's narrow lanes, including the regal city gate, St. Paul's Cathedral by Maltese architect Lorenzo Gafà, and the handsome homes of Malta's noble families.

Afterward, travel to the adjacent town of Rabat. During the Roman era, this area was the site of Melite, the island's capital. According to religious tradition, Christianity was introduced to Malta by Saint Paul after he and his fellow missionaries sought refuge here in A.D. 60 following a shipwreck off the island while sailing from Crete to Rome. During your guided walk around Rabat, visit the Domus Romana, a museum on the site of a Roman house, and see its intricate mosaics and artifacts.

Chat about what you've seen with your fellow travelers over lunch at a restaurant in the area.

Hagar Qim Temples. The island country of Malta possesses some of the world's oldest free-standing stone buildings, a group of extraordinary megalithic temples designated together as a UNESCO World Heritage site. Dating from the Ggantija Phase (3600-3200 B.C.) and older than the pyramids of Egypt, these architectural wonders are even more astounding given that they were built before the advent of metal tools and the introduction of the wheel. On Malta's southern coast, explore the striking Hagar Qim temple-complex, laid out in a clover-leaf shape with a forecourt and interior chambers known as apses. On a guided tour, learn about the construction and history of these temples, which researchers believe may have been used by a fertility cult for ceremonies.

Free Time: Return to the hotel and pursue your own interests for the remainder of the day.

Day 4 | Valletta

AX The Palace

B | L

Valletta. Compact and intimate, Malta's captivating capital owes much of its character to the Order of St. John, or more formally, the Sovereign Order of St. John of Jerusalem, Knights Hospitaller. Founded in 1048 in Jerusalem, this Christian order initially focused on charitable aid to the poor and sick before evolving into a potent military force during the Crusades. In 1530, the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, gave the islands of Malta to the Order in a move to protect European lands from the encroaching Ottoman Empire. Thirty-five years later, the significantly outnumbered Knights of St. John and a troop of armed citizens would defeat Ottoman forces led by Suleiman the Magnificent during the Great Siege of 1565.

The next year, the Knights of St. John launched bold plans for a new fortified city on a hilly peninsula between two impressive natural harbors. Named after Jean de Valette, the commander who led them to victory, Valletta would eventually boast a splendid ensemble of palaces, churches and buildings erected between the 16th and 18th centuries within its defensive walls. Begin your guided walk within this UNESCO World Heritage site at the Upper Barrakka Gardens. From this vantage point, take in stunning views over the Grand Harbor, much like the Italian knights of the Order of St. John once did when this garden was built for them.

Continue to Valletta's crown jewel, the St. John's Co-Cathedral. Its relatively plain exterior belies the breathtaking beauty that awaits inside. Designed in 1578 by Maltese architect Gironimo Cassar as the main church of the Knights of St. John, it was lavishly redone in the baroque style in the 17th century. Gilded, arched columns extend upward from a dazzling floor of ornately inlaid marble tombstones and lead the eye to the vaulted ceiling adorned with paintings by Italian artist Mattia Preti. In the Oratory, view Caravaggio's masterpiece, "The Beheading of John the Baptist," as well as "St. Jerome Writing," both of which the artist painted while living briefly in Malta.

Then, walk over to stately Casa Rocca Piccola, one of Valletta's first noble houses and the private residence of the descendants of the original aristocratic owner. Delight in the elegant, lived-in and much-loved rooms brimming with colorful artwork, fine furnishings and treasured mementos that offer insights into Malta's history and traditions. In the garden, see the underground tunnels that provided shelter during devastating World War II bombing raids. In 1942 alone, Malta endured the heaviest sustained attack of the entire war, roughly 154 days and nights under constant bombardment. In recognition of their heroism, the citizens of Malta were awarded the George's Cross, Britain's highest civilian honor for bravery, by King George VI in 1942.

Finish with lunch together at a restaurant in the neighborhood.

Free Time: The rest of your day is at leisure. For sightseeing, shopping and dining recommendations, please consult your Travel Director. Art lovers might want to check out the collections of the National Museum of Art, or MUZA.

Day 5 | Ggantija | Victoria | Xwejni Bay

AX The Palace

B | L

Island of Gozo. Today, board a ferry from the northern port of Cirkewwa to this picturesque island, one of the three major islands in the Maltese archipelago. More rural than the main island, Gozo is known for its sweeping countryside landscapes. Your first stop is the Ggantija temple-complex, another of Malta's UNESCO World Heritage-listed megalithic temples and more than 5,500 years old. Its name alludes to the Gozitan legend of a female giant named Sansuna who carried immense stones on her shoulders, along with her baby, to build the temples. With your guide, ponder the weathered limestone monoliths of these remarkable structures where worshippers may have once made offerings to an Earth Mother goddess.

Next, travel to Gozo's capital, Victoria, often called Rabat by residents. Head up to the imposing, fortified Cittadella that looms dramatically over the city. First inhabited during the Bronze Age, this hilltop served as a sanctuary for the Gozitan people from invading forces over the centuries. On a guided stroll through the Cittadella's winding alleyways, see the massive stone walls reconstructed by the Order of St. John in the early 1600s, religious landmarks and the expansive views over Victoria.

After your visit, enjoy lunch with your group at a restaurant.

Later, in Xwejni Bay, learn about the centuries-old livelihood of sea salt farming, a tradition practiced since Phoenician and Roman times. Take in the patchwork pattern of rock-cut salt pans that stretches along the water's edge, and discover how a local family collects, dries and stores the sea salt.

Depart for your ferry to Malta and return to the hotel in Sliema.

Free Time: Craft your own agenda this evening.

Day 6 | Embark ferry | Pozzallo, Italy | Piazza Armerina | Caltagirone

Colle San Mauro

B | L | D

Early this morning, check out of the hotel and depart for the ferry to Pozzallo, your port of arrival in Sicily. Once you disembark, enjoy a panoramic drive by motor coach to Piazza Armerina, where you'll enjoy lunch before your visit to Villa Romana del Casale.

Sicily's Mosaic Masterpieces. Marvel at some of the most superb Roman mosaics in the world on a guided tour of Villa Romana del Casale, recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage site. Constructed by a prominent Roman aristocrat between the third and fourth centuries, this large countryside villa represented the height of luxury. Within the remains of the original rooms are more than 40 impeccably crafted mosaic floors featuring different themes. Marvelously preserved, the villa's vast collection reveals colorful scenes of mythological heroes, wild animals, hunting, circus games, female athletes, domestic life and more. Study their fine details with interesting commentary provided by your guide.

Then, set off for Caltagirone, part of a historic group of baroque towns in the Val di Noto region, and check in to the Colle San Mauro.

Before dinner at the hotel this evening, enjoy a special performance of the traditional Sicilian puppet theater known as Opera dei Pupi, recognized by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The puppet shows are based on tales from medieval literature and feature marionettes of knights, saints and other characters.

Day 7 | Agrigento

Colle San Mauro

B | L | D

After breakfast, travel to Agrigento on Sicily's southwest coast.

Agrigento's Valley of the Temples. One of the Mediterranean's most spectacular archaeological sites, the Valley of the Temples contains some of the finest and most well-preserved Greek temples in the world. Founded by Greek colonists in the sixth century B.C., ancient Agrigento would flourish during the fifth century, the golden age in which these resplendent Doric temples were built. Walk with your guide through this scenic and historic valley that has been named a UNESCO World Heritage site. Admire the Temple of Concordia, renowned as the most complete in existence; the Temple of Juno set regally on a hilltop; and the oldest temple, which was built to honor Hercules, among others. Pause for lunch after your excursion.

Return to Caltagirone later this afternoon and enjoy dinner at the hotel.

Day 8 | Syracuse | Taormina

Splendid Hotel Taormina

B

Check out of the hotel this morning and depart for Syracuse.

Syracuse. Founded by Greeks from Corinth in 734 B.C., Syracuse became one of the wealthiest and most influential cities in Sicily, rivaling Athens in its cultural splendor and might. After it was conquered by the Romans in 212 B.C., it served as their provincial capital. Today's excursion takes you to the Neapolis Archaeological Park, where you'll see its great classical monuments on a guided tour. Carved out of the rocky hillside, the Teatro Greco is one of the largest and best-preserved Greek theaters in Sicily. Dating from the fifth century B.C. and rebuilt in the third century B.C., it could hold an audience of 15,000 for the tragedies and comedies staged here. Next, take in the Roman amphitheater from the second century A.D., where spectators cheered during gladiator contests. Learn about the site's historical significance as you meander through Latomia del Paradiso, a former limestone quarry now filled with citrus trees, and stand before the Ear of Dionysius, a tall, deep cave famed for its acoustics.

Next, step inside the Basilica of Saint Lucia al Sepolcro to see Caravaggio's "The Burial of St. Lucy." Caravaggio came to Syracuse in 1608 after escaping from the prison in Fort Saint Angelo in Malta. He painted "The Burial of St. Lucy" that same year.

Then, make your way to Syracuse's old town on the delightful island of Ortygia, designated a UNESCO World Heritage site together with the Archaeological Park's ancient ruins. Enjoy some free time for lunch on your own before regrouping for a walking tour. Admire the grand, lively Piazza del Duomo dominated by the Cathedral of Syracuse with its beautiful baroque façade. Go inside this house of worship that reflects Sicily's rich history at the crossroads of the Mediterranean. From its origins as a Greek temple to Athena in the fifth century B.C., it later became a Byzantine church, a mosque, a Norman church and then a Roman Catholic cathedral. See its interior decorations including the temple's original Doric columns that have been incorporated into the building. Walk along Ortygia's tiny lanes brimming with baroque and medieval architecture, and see landmarks like the Fonte Aretusa, a seaside fountain fed by a fresh-water spring.

Continue to Taormina and check in to the Splendid Hotel Taormina.

Free Time: Your evening in Taormina is at leisure.

Day 9 | Taormina

Splendid Hotel Taormina

B | L

Taormina. Some of the earliest inhabitants of eastern Sicily were the Sicels, a Bronze Age tribe that would give the island its name. Over the subsequent centuries, an influx of settlers arrived from Greece, bringing their cultural influences and eventually establishing powerful city-states such as Syracuse and Agrigento. In the fourth century B.C., after one of these Greek cities, Naxos, was destroyed, many of its exiles moved to a settlement on Mount Taurus that had been founded by the Sicels. The new city that would grow up along the hillside became known as Tauromenium.

As you explore Taormina today on a guided walk, visit its famous Greek theater, built in the third century B.C. and reconstructed under Roman rule in the second century A.D. Still in use today, it is acclaimed for its dramatic location that offers stunning coastal views of the Ionian Sea and majestic Mount Etna in the distance. Continue along Taormina's atmospheric medieval streets and learn about its fascinating Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Arab and Norman chapters. After word of Taormina's beauty spread internationally in the 18th and 19th centuries, it transformed into a popular resort town celebrated for its alluring grandeur.

AHI Connects | Pizza Cooking Demo. Learn the secrets for preparing authentic Sicilian pizza during a demonstration at a family-owned restaurant. Then, dig in and savor this fresh, flavorful specialty for lunch!

Free Time: Enjoy some leisure time this afternoon.

Enrichment: Sicilian Culture & Traditions. With its fertile farmland and strategic location in the Mediterranean Sea, the island of Sicily was sought after and conquered by civilization after civilization from antiquity. Throughout its tumultuous past, a long list of rulers collectively influenced its culture, including the Greeks and Romans, the Arabs and Normans in the Middle Ages, the Spanish and the Bourbons of France, and the Italians in the 19th century. The island's separation from mainland Italy also fostered a distinctive identity. Join a local expert who will discuss the unique traditions and customs of Sicilian life.

Day 10 | Taormina

Splendid Hotel Taormina

B | R | D

Free Time: Choose to take part in today's Elective Activity or explore more of Taormina today. If you'd like to venture further afield, consider a trip south to the vibrant city of Catania or north to Messina with its many charming fountains and churches.

Elective Activity | Mount Etna. Relish an up-close perspective of Europe's largest active volcano! Begin your winding ascent along the lower slopes of the volcano to the Silvestri craters. Watch as the scenery changes from orchids, woods and vineyards to a landscape of hardened lava fields. As you walk around the craters and gaze at remnants of past eruptions, learn about the geology and history of this UNESCO World Heritage site. Enjoy a light lunch with your group before returning to Taormina. Available at an additional cost.

Gather with your fellow travelers for a Farewell Reception and Dinner in celebration of your incredible journey.

Day 11 | Depart for gateway city

B

After breakfast, AHI FlexAir passengers traveling on flights that qualify for a group transfer and Land Program passengers who have purchased seats on the group transfer depart for Catania–Fontanarossa Airport for your return flights home. Your Travel Director will provide the details.





What's Included

Program Overview

- Small group: Sized just right at 28 guests.
- 4 nights in Sliema, Malta, at the first-class AX The Palace.
- 2 nights in Caltagirone, Italy, at the first-class Colle San Mauro.
- 3 nights in Taormina, Italy, at the first-class Splendid Hotel Taormina.
- AHI Connects: Local immersion.
- AHI Sustainability Promise: We strive to make a positive, purposeful impact in the communities we visit.
- Complimentary travel mementos.

Meal Program

- 9 breakfasts, 6 lunches and 4 dinners
- Welcome and Farewell Receptions and Dinners to mingle with fellow travelers.
- Tea or coffee with all meals, plus wine with dinner.

On-site Features

- Ferries and deluxe motor coach transfers during the Land Program with baggage handling.
- Enrichment by expert speakers enhances your insight into the region.
- Engaging excursions showcase the local culture, heritage and history.
- Elective activities to pursue your individual interests.
- Free time to pursue your individual interests.
- Tipping of guides and drivers.
- A personal VOX headset to hear your English-speaking guide clearly.





FlexAir Travel Program

Need assistance booking your travel arrangements? Our experts are here to help. Our air program offers the following benefits.

Trip Transportation

- Assistance in the event of schedule changes or delays
- Arrival and departure transfers on group dates

Price Guarantee

- Price guarantee to protect you from fuel surcharge increases after ticket purchase

Travel and Hotel Accommodations

Colle San Mauro

Experience the Sicilian heartland while staying at Colle San Mauro in Caltagirone. A wonderful combination of farm and countryside retreat, Colle San Mauro introduces you to the island's rural charm. Relax at the spa, take a walk through the orchards, try your hand at bocce and more. Savor the fresh flavors of local ingredients in the expertly prepared cuisine.



Tripadvisor

AX The Palace

Conveniently located in the heart of Sliema, AX The Palace is just a short walk from the bustling waterfront promenade and its shops, restaurants and lively bars. The hotel offers stylish, well-equipped guestrooms, a variety of tantalizing dining options and a rooftop infinity pool with views of the shimmering Mediterranean Sea. Wi-Fi is complimentary.



Tripadvisor

Splendid Hotel Taormina

A delightful stay awaits at this hillside boutique hotel, favored for its stunning views overlooking the Ionian Sea and the warm, attentive hospitality of its staff. Ideally located within easy walking distance of all the action in the center of Taormina, the Splendid Hotel Taormina features a scenic rooftop pool and bar where you can savor the beautiful scenery and comfy rooms outfitted with thoughtful amenities including complimentary Wi-Fi. Head up to the Kairos rooftop restaurant for flavorful, traditional Sicilian cuisine, top-notch service and sunset views over the bay of Taormina.

Pricing

$500 Full Payment Discount expires April 27, 2027
$250 Special Savings expires February 23, 2027

Trip Price (USD)

Base Price	**$5,745**
Special Savings (Expires February 23, 2027)	**-$250**
Full Payment Discount *	**-$500**
Special Price	**$4,995**
You Pay	**$4,995 per person**

Package rates are per person based on Double occupancy from Land Only. Prices include all service charges; port charges when applicable; U.S. government taxes and fees. The minimum deposit is $1000.00 per person. To view Program Terms and conditions please click here. Some airlines may impose additional charges if you choose to check any baggage. Please contact your airline or refer to its website for detailed information regarding your airline's checked baggage policies.

*Full Payment Discounts are only available at the time of booking with initial payment 150+ days prior to departure. This offer only applies to full payment at the time of reservation. Details on how to qualify for this savings will be included when your reservation request is confirmed.


ITALY
Taormina
SICILY
Mount Etna
Catania
Agrigento
Piazza Armerina
Caltagirone
Syracuse
Pozzallo
Ferry
Elective
GOZO
Ggantija
Victoria
MALTA
Sliema
Mdina
Valletta
Rabat
MALTA
Hagar Qim



