

EXPLORE!



Ancient Sicily

ITALY, SICILY - TRIP CODE SCS

DISCOVERY

Why book this trip?

Sicily is an ideal destination for anyone interested in ancient history, as there are so many sites to see within such close proximity. Our experiences will be brought to life by local expert Antonio Marretta.

- **Agrigento** - Visit Sicily's most famous Classical remains in the Valley of the Temples with its remarkable Doric architecture
- **Syracusa** - Discover the ancient ruins in the Neapolis Archaeological Park and the attractive lanes and piazza's of Ortygia Island
- **Villa Romana del Casale** - See some of the best preserved and most extensive mosaics left in Europe at this Roman villa.



INCLUDED MEALS
Breakfast: 14



TRIP STAFF
Explore Tour
Leader
Driver(s)
Guest Lecturer
Local Guide(s)



TRANSPORT
Bus
Ferry



ACCOMMODATION
14 nights
comfortable hotel



TRIP PACE:
Moderate



GROUP SIZE:
12 - 18

Itinerary

Itineraries on some departure dates may differ, please select the itinerary that you wish to explore.

DAY 1 - Join trip in Syracuse

Arrive in Syracuse. During the Greek Classical period, this east coast city was the largest in the ancient world - even bigger than Athens. Now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, it is also notable as being the birthplace of antiquity's greatest mathematician, Archimedes.

For those arriving on time our Leader plans to meet you in the hotel reception at 7pm for the welcome meeting and for those that wish, there is the chance to go out for dinner. There are no other activities planned today, so you are free to arrive in Syracuse at any time. If you would like to receive a complimentary airport transfer today, you'll need to arrive into Catania Fontanarossa Airport (CTA), which is about an hours' drive. Should you miss the welcome meeting, your Leader will inform you of any essential information as soon as you catch up.

If your flight arrives earlier in the day, perhaps you might choose to walk into the historic centre of Ortygia Island, which is about 20-30 minutes from our hotel. Artemis Fountain and the Baroque cathedral are lit up beautifully at night.

Tonight will be your first opportunity to sample Sicilian cuisine and wine. According to Greek legend the god Dionysus brought wine to Sicily, whereas it's more likely that wine has been produced here since ancient times due to the island being blessed with plenty of sunshine and reliably moderate rainfall, along with fertile volcanic soils. Nowadays there is a huge variety of both delicious red and white wines to choose from. You might like to try a typically Sicilian dish such as pasta with sardines and wild fennel, aubergine stew or boiled pork in salsa verde and saffron.



ACCOMMODATION:
Jolly Aretusa Palace Hotel (or similar)



Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: NONE

DAY 2 - See Syracuse's historic Neapolis and Ortygia Island

Syracuse, a colony of Corinth, once rivalled Athens as the most important and beautiful city in the Greek world. The sites we intend to visit include the Neapolis Archaeological Zone with its famous Greek theatre hewn out of the hillside in the 5th century BC and where Aeschylus once produced his plays; the fine Roman amphitheatre where gladiators once fought wild beasts; the quarries where the defeated Athenians were imprisoned in 413 BC and the fortification at Euryalus. Finally we'll make the journey to Ortygia Island and its promontory to see its unique Baroque architecture and where you will be free to wander.



ACCOMMODATION:

Jolly Aretusa Palace Hotel (or similar)



Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 3 - Drive via the Baroque city of Noto to Piazza Armerina

We leave Syracuse and drive to Noto, the most beautiful Baroque city in Sicily, completely rebuilt after the earthquake that devastated this part of the island in 1693. The town was built between 1715 and 1780 and still preserves a unified and homogenous architectural style and town plan, little affected by later developments. Its tufa stone has mellowed to a golden brown colour and its unique buildings leave visitors with an impression that is hard to forget. We continue on to Ragusa, another Baroque town whose buildings crown the summits of two adjacent hills. After our visit we'll continue to the medieval town of Piazza Armerina for the next two nights.



**ACCOMMODATION:**

Hotel Villa Romana (or similar)

**Grade: Comfortable Hotel**

SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 4 - Visit Villa Romana del Casale and the excavations at Morgantina

This morning we'll drive to the impressive Villa Romana at Casale, a magnificent country mansion containing some beautiful Roman mosaics. After sightseeing we drive the short distance to the remains of Greek Morgantina, to see the excavations and visit the museum. This large city once controlling an extensive area that now lies deserted in the countryside. The scattered buildings of the site are only partially unearthed. We return to Piazza Armerina later this afternoon.

**ACCOMMODATION:**

Hotel Villa Romana (or similar)

**Grade: Comfortable Hotel**

SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 5 - Drive via Enna to Agrigento and visit the Valley of the Temples

Leaving Piazza Armerina we drive via the virtually impregnable hilltop stronghold of Enna located near Lake Pergusa, then drive on to Agrigento, once one of the most prosperous cities in Sicily. The ancient Acropolis, now a modern city, overlooks the valley where the lower city stood and the southern ridge where the temples still stand. We explore the remarkable complex of 5th century BC Doric temples and the museum. The romantic aura of the ancient site which lines a ridge overlooking the sea is especially evocative, the golden temples encircled by almond trees and gnarled silver-grey olives. The scene provides a perfect setting for the ancient stonework. Pindar was so moved as to say that Agrigento was 'the most beautiful city built by mortal man'. The Valley of the Temples includes the 6th century Temple

of Hercules, the oldest in the complex (nine columns of which were re-erected by Englishman Alexander Hardcastle in the 1920s). The perfectly proportioned Doric columns of the Temple of Concord (circa 430 BC) incorporate optical corrections such as entasis and turn honeygold in the late afternoon sunlight. The Temple of Juno, built at the end of the tufa ridge and probably some twenty years older than the Temple of Concord, was probably burnt by the Carthaginians in 406 BC. The temples are particularly beautiful in the late afternoon light.



ACCOMMODATION:
Hotel Akrabello (or similar)

Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 6 - Visit historic Heraclea Minoa and drive via Selinute to Marsala

This morning we drive to Heraclea Minoa which legends associate with King Minos of Crete. The excavated settlement commands an isolated and magnificent position overlooking the sea. Legend relates that King Minos was killed here when he was in pursuit of the great architect Daedalus, the designer of the Minotaur Labyrinth at Knossos, who had fled from Crete. We then continue to the vast site of Selinunte, where earthquake-tumbled ruins litter the landscape and some temples have been partially re-erected. We'll see the ancient Acropolis, its fortifications and the town within, perched on a plateau overlooking the Mediterranean. Selinunte was the most westerly of the Greek colonies, and despite its poor natural defences it became a powerful and wealthy city. It was constantly under threat from the Carthaginians and was in a state of perpetual warfare with its prosperous rival, the Elymian town of Segesta to the north. An army led by the Carthaginian Hannibal sacked it in 409 BC, slaughtering some 16,000 inhabitants, then, in 250 BC the Carthaginians once again razed the city, demolished the temples and moved the population to nearby Lilybaeum (modern Marsala).

The site was effectively abandoned afterwards. We then continue to our hotel for the evening just outside Marsala.



ACCOMMODATION:
Hotel President (or similar)

Grade: Comfortable Hotel





SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



SWIMMING POOL AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 7 - Ferry to Mozia Island; free afternoon

A short distance north and ferry ride away brings us to the small island of Mozia, which lies off the western coast and was once owned by the Whitaker family of Marsala wine fame. The island is in an ideal location, surrounded by shallow waters that secure a protected and sheltered anchorage. We visit the museum and the site of the old Phoenician town and harbour works. Returning to Marsala we make a brief visit to the Phoenician Ship Museum before you have the rest of the afternoon free to relax and enjoy the town's old quarter.



ACCOMMODATION:
Hotel President (or similar)



Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



SWIMMING POOL AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 8 - Explore beautiful Erice and Segesta en route to Palermo

This morning we head to picturesque Erice, a medieval town perched on a precipitous 750 metre-high mountain. Magnificent views extend over the Egadi Islands. One tradition says that Erice was founded by the legendary Aeneas who stopped here after the fall of Troy (circa 1200 BC). Its original inhabitants were a non-Greek race, though they readily adapted to Greek ways. We then continue to the romantically situated Doric temple at Segesta, one of the best preserved and most beautiful of all. It was probably

started around 426 BC, perhaps to impress Athenian allies, but it was never finished. Its columns were never fluted and many of the bosses used to hoist the stones into position were not chiseled off. After our visit we drive on to Palermo.



ACCOMMODATION:
Ibis Styles Palermo President Hotel (or similar)

Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 9 - Excursion to the ruins at Solunto; afternoon free in Palermo

This morning we drive to the ruins of Solunto, a Roman town abandoned in AD 300. The ancient site was once thought to be Phoenician Solus, but we now know that the Punic settlement was at Cozzo Cannita, some 5 miles away. The excavations are beautifully situated high above the sea on the slopes of Monte Catalano, and give a fine impression of the variety of buildings and layout of a Roman city. The site includes paved streets, houses (some with mosaics), a theatre, a bouleuterion, cisterns and baths. The afternoon is left free for you to explore more of Palermo.



ACCOMMODATION:
Ibis Styles Palermo President Hotel (or similar)

Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 10 - Walking tour of Palermo and visit to Monreale Cathedral

Sicily's capital stands at the foot of Monte Pellegrino with the fertile valley of Conca d'Oro behind. It was

once one of the richest cities in Europe from the 9th to the 12th centuries AD when Islamic culture, Byzantine magnificence and the vigorous world of medieval Europe were merging into a fascinating civilisation. Today the city contains numerous Islamic, Norman and Baroque buildings, together with some noteworthy museums and art galleries. After breakfast we'll visit the Norman palace, a fascinating mixture of styles: Saracenic, Byzantine and Norman influences appear in its architecture and decoration and the nearby San Giovanni degli Eremiti. The rich marble and mosaics in the Cappella Palatina were mostly executed by Byzantine craftsmen. The remaining time before lunch will be spent driving into the hills to the majestic Norman cathedral of Monreale. After lunch we will then go for a walk touring the Gothic Cathedral, founded 1185 by the Englishman Walter of the Mill, and the area around Quattro Canti, the Baroque city centre. Founded in 1174 by William the Good, the cathedral is famous for its extensive mosaics and beautiful cloisters showing both Romanesque and Islamic influences.



ACCOMMODATION:

Ibis Styles Palermo President Hotel (or similar)



Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 11 - Free day in Palermo with the chance to visit Zisa Palace

Palermo has a fascinating market crammed with exotic goods and is a veritable treasure trove of artistic and cultural sites. The day has been left free for you to explore at your own pace.



ACCOMMODATION:

Ibis Styles Palermo President Hotel (or similar)



Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 12 - Drive via the pretty fishing town of Cefalu to Giardini Naxos

Leaving Palermo we drive along the spectacular coastline to the picturesque fishing town of Cefalu. Here we stop to visit the Norman Cathedral, to see the stupendous mosaic of Christ Pantocrator. Next we'll continue along the coast road to the archaeological site of Tindaris. Our journey today ends in Giardini Naxos, near Taormina.



ACCOMMODATION:
Hotel la Riva (or similar)



Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 13 - Option to go up Mount Etna; explore Taormina and its Greek theatre

This morning, you have the opportunity to join a tour to explore the lunar landscape, craters and lava fields of Mount Etna - one of the most active volcanoes in Europe. Taormina, Sicily's most famous resort, is situated 213 m up on the slopes of Monte Tauro and overlooked by Castel Mola. It was a favourite place during the days of the 'Grand Tour' and was frequented by Goethe, Edward Lear, D.H. Lawrence and many others. This afternoon we'll visit the Graeco- Roman theatre for possibly the most famous view in Sicily - that of snow-capped Etna acting as a backdrop to the remarkably preserved columned stage.



ACCOMMODATION:
Hotel la Riva (or similar)



Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 14 - Free day in Giardini Naxos to relax on the coast

Our last day is free to explore Taormina and Giardini Naxos further.



ACCOMMODATION:
Hotel la Riva (or similar)

Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 15 - Trip ends in Giardini Naxos

The trip ends after breakfast at our hotel in Giardini Naxos.

There are no activities planned today, so you are free to depart from Giardini Naxos at any time. If your flight is departing later in the day luggage storage facilities are available at our hotel. If you would like to receive a complimentary airport transfer today, you need to depart from Catania Fontanarossa Airport (CTA), which is about one hours' drive.



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

Trip information

Country information

Italy

Climate

April/May and October/November are pleasantly warm. June/September are the hottest months. Showers are common in Autumn.

Time difference to GMT	Plugs	Religion	Language
+1	2 Pin Round	Roman Catholic	Italian

Sicily

Budgeting and packing

Optional activities

The following excursions and/or activities are usually available and may be arranged locally. Estimated costs are provided below for guidance only, are on a per person basis unless shown otherwise, and may depend on the number of participants. Prices quoted are correct as of the date these tour notes were originally issued but may change at any time due to currency fluctuations. Please note: These activities are booked and paid for direct with the supplier and do not form part of your Explore holiday contract.

A selection of optional activities are listed below to help you budget for your holiday. Whilst the trip price you pay before you travel includes a great selection of highlights, we have also built in free time to allow you the flexibility to choose from a carefully selected range of additional excursions or to take time to relax, the choice is yours. At certain destinations along the way there may be several options to choose from and it may not be possible to fit all the activities in; your Explore Leader will be able to give advice on which are the most suitable for you.

Ortygia Island, Syracuse:

Entrance to Castello Maniace on day 2, €4.00 per person.

Guided tour of the Jewish Baths on day 2, €5.00 per person.

Boat trip along the coast on day 2, €10.00 per person. May not be possible in spring/autumn due to wind conditions.

Erice:

On day 8 entrance for four of the most famous churches €5.00 per person or each individual church €2.00 per person.

Entrance to Castello di Venere on day 8, €5.00 per person.

Palermo:

Entrance to the Botanical Gardens on day 11, €5.00 per person.

Entrance to the catacombs on day 11, €3.00 per person.

Entrance to the cathedral on day 11, free of charge or €1.50 per person to see the Norman tombs.

Tour of the Teatro Massimo on day 11, €8.00 per person.

Puppet theatre performance on day 11, €12.00 per person.

Giardini Naxos:

There are three different options for the Mount Etna tour on day 13:

1. Bus to 1,900 metres €32.00 per person
2. Bus to 1,900 metres plus cable car to 2,500 metres €64.00 per person
3. Bus to 1,900 metres, cable car to 2,500 metres plus four-wheel drive coach up to 2,900 metres €96.00 per person

Due to the volcanic dust and sulphur fumes on Mount Etna, we ask asthma sufferers or customers with heart conditions of any kind to take these factors into consideration when deciding if this optional excursion is right for you.

Due to the colder temperature on Mount Etna it's possible to hire equipment at the top of the cable car: Quilted jackets €3.00 per person and walking boots €3.00 per person.

In windy conditions the cable car might not be running, in which case the four-wheel drive coach normally operates from 1,900 metres up to 2,500 metres.

Entrance to Giardini Naxos Archaeological Zone on day 14, €2.00 per person including museum entrance.

Taormina:

Entrance to the Villa Comunale Gardens on day 13 is free of charge.

Please note that all optional excursions listed above are subject to change and availability and they may not all be possible to offer on every departure date.

Clothing

Throughout most of the year it's best to dress for hot conditions, although light rainwear and a warm fleece/jacket for nights when temperatures can drop is recommended. If you're travelling in March, October or November then the weather can be cooler and rain more frequent, so it's best to pack layers and rainwear just in case.

Anyone intending to visit Mount Etna should bring warm clothing as snow is a common occurrence (even in June). Wind and waterproof garments are therefore suggested for those wishing to visit the volcano.

Women should avoid bare arms and shoulders in churches, so it's best to carry a scarf or shawl. Women should avoid bare arms and shoulders in churches, so it's best to carry a scarf or shawl.

Footwear

It's best to pack comfortable walking shoes for exploring and sandals for relaxing and going to the beach to swim.

You will want warmer shoes and socks if you're going to go up Mount Etna.

Luggage

20kg

Luggage: On tour

One main piece of baggage and daypack. Remember you are expected to carry your own luggage so don't overload yourself.

Equipment

Sicily is located off the southern coast of Italy and the weather is often sunny, so a sunhat and sunscreen are essential. You should also bring a two litre water bottle, torch in case of emergencies, and insect repellent. You may also wish to bring a swimming costume and towel in order to make the most of swimming opportunities off the coastline. At any time of year it can be snowy on top of Mount Etna and considerably colder, so if you plan to travel up the volcano we'd recommend bringing gloves and a woolly hat.

Tipping

Explore leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Explore Leader and specialist guide in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Local crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognised part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. Accordingly, you should allow £35.00 for tipping.

In order to make things easier for you, our Explore Leader may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the trip.

Italy

Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch price	Dinner price	Beer price	Water price
£10.00 - 15.00	£20.00 - 25.00	£2.00 - 4.00	£1.00 - 2.00

Foreign Exchange

Local currency	Recommended Currency For Exchange
Euro.	GBP.

Where To Exchange

We recommend that you change any currency into Euros prior to arrival. Bureau de Change are generally only found in major cities and large airports.

ATM Availability	Credit Card Acceptance
Major towns.	Larger hotels and restaurants.

Travellers Cheques

Only in major towns. Please note, the exchange rate for cash and Travellers Cheques is poor.

Sicily

Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Foreign Exchange

Transport, Accommodation & Meals

Transport Information

Bus, Ferry

Essential Information

FCO Advice

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice [click here](#).

For more information from Explore about travel advice, [click here](#)

Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

Price Guarantee

Once your booking has been confirmed we guarantee the price will not increase, whatever the circumstances. Before booking please ensure you have read our important tour pricing information. [Booking Conditions](#)

Visa and Passport Information

Italy: Visas are not required by UK, E.U Nationals, Australian, New Zealand, US and Canadian citizens. Other nationalities should consult their local embassy or consular office. All visa information is subject to change. You should confirm all visa related questions with the relevant embassy prior to departure.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may be able to apply through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, with the correct validity for your chosen destination.

Booking conditions

Before booking your Explore trip, please ensure that you read both our Essential Information and Booking Conditions.

Transfers

[Find out more about Trip Transfer Terms and Conditions before you book.](#)

Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found below in the dates and prices information.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The complimentary transfers will be arranged from the Explore designated airport or train station to your trips joining point, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. Generally the airport or station that Explore have selected will be the one that is closest to the town or city where the trip starts, or the one nearest to the joining point. It will be either an airport or train station but not both.

The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Polar, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer [click here](#)

Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper

altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. The cost of many of our Polar Voyages will exceed the capped amount covered by standard insurance premiums and you will be required to pay an additional premium to cover the full value of your trip. Please ensure that you are covered for the full amount of your holiday cost, as insufficient cover could invalidate a claim under the policy. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

Read more information about what travel insurance is required.

Flight information

Explore offers a wide range of flexible flying options to make joining and leaving our trips easy. Read more about them here.

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

Ability to swim

No

Italy

Vaccinations

Nothing required. Tetanus recommended. Please check the latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at Explore Travel Health and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed by you before travelling.

Sicily

Additional Information



Why book this trip

This trip is accompanied by a specialist lecturer, Mr Antonio Marretta. With a degree in History and Political Science, a specialisation in Art and Archaeology and 25 years guiding experience, there are not many questions that Antonio does not know the answer to and he delights in sharing his love of Sicily.

Reviews



**AWARD WINNING
EXPLORE LEADERS**



**PRICE GUARANTEE
PROMISE**



**AIRPORT
TRANSFERS**