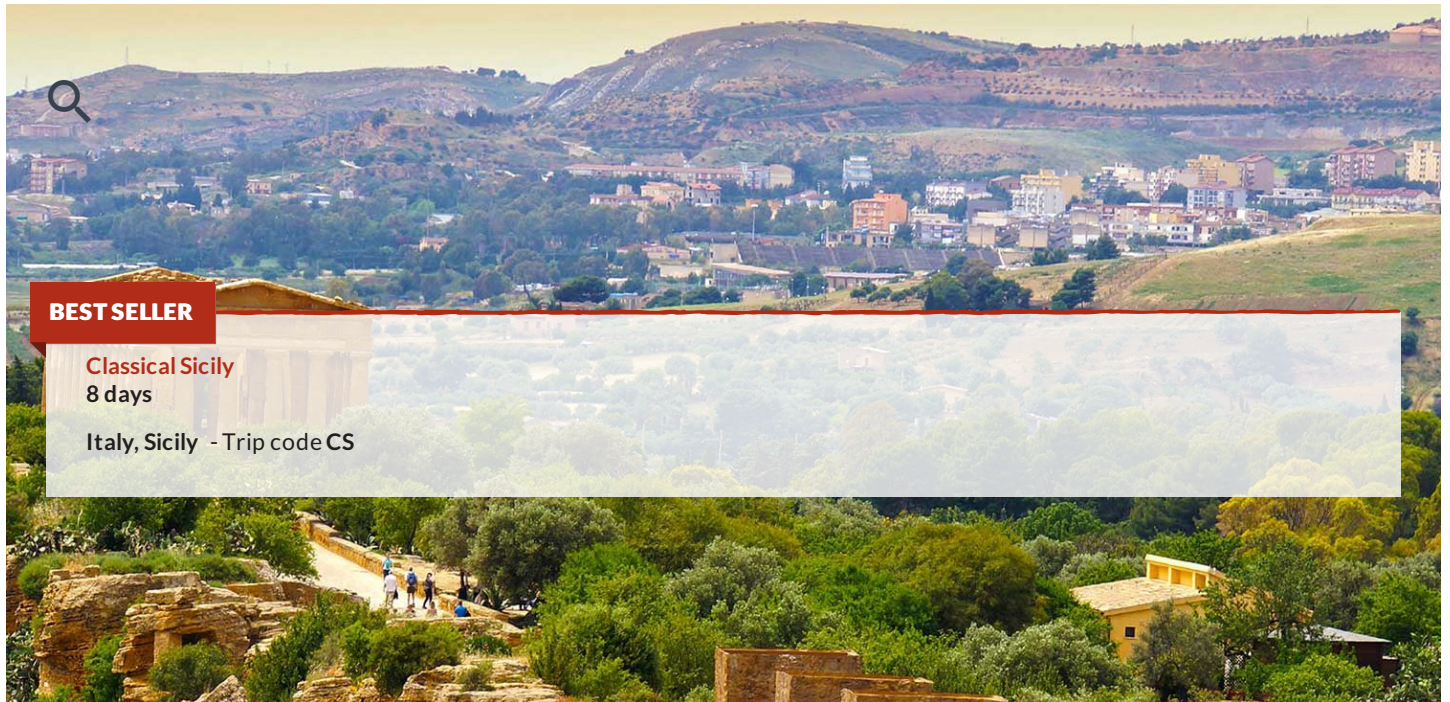


# EXPLORE!



## Classical Sicily

Sicily is the largest of the Mediterranean islands and has been a favourite destination for travellers since ancient times with the Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Elymians, Romans and Greeks all having left their mark. As well as the wealth of historical sights, Sicily is home to Europe's tallest active volcano, Mount Etna, along with rolling hills and dramatic rocky coastlines. No visit to Sicily is complete without trying the islands renowned fresh seafood, mouth-watering cheeses and fine wines. This all-encompassing one-week trip takes in these highlights of Sicily.

## Trip highlights

- ★ **Syracusa** - Discover the ancient ruins in the Neapolis Archaeological Park and the attractive lanes and piazza's of Ortygia Island
- ★ **Agrigento** - Visit Sicily's most famous Classical remains in the Valley of the Temples with its remarkable Doric architecture
- ★ **Palermo** - Explore the cultural melting pot of Sicily's capital and visit the majestic Norman cathedral at nearby Monreale
- ★ **Taormina** - Soak up the atmosphere of this popular coastal resort and visit its famed Greek theatre, with its postcard views of Mount Etna
- ★ **Erice** - This walled hilltop town feels very medieval with its maze of narrow winding cobbled streets and quaint shops
- ★ **Villa Romana del Casale** - This Roman villa is home to some of the best preserved and most extensive mosaics from this time period that are left in Europe

#### ACCOMMODATION GRADE:

##### Standard

Our standard, mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service, often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en suite facilities.

#### TRIP PACE:

##### Full on

Full on paced trips are for travellers who like their holidays packed with activities and experiences, moving on quickly from place to place with lots of early starts and long, busy days. Some may find them tiring, but others get a buzz from packing their precious holiday-time as chock-a-block full of new experiences as possible!

#### GROUP SIZE:

##### 12 - 18

Maximum group size ranges from between 6 to 20 people, depending on the type of trip, the transport and accommodation used and activities included. We rarely have groups that are smaller than five or six people and the average is 12 people plus an Explore leader.

## Itinerary

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

### DAY 1 - Join trip in Syracuse

We begin our trip in Syracuse, which is about an hours' drive from Catania Airport. 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.

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.

Our hotel is about 20-30 minutes walk from the historic centre of Ortygia Island which you might choose to take a stroll to this evening. Artemis Fountain and the Baroque cathedral are lit up beautifully at night.



**Accommodation: Jolly Aretusa Palace Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

## DAY 2 - Discover Syracuse's historic Neapolis and Ortygia Island

We start today by driving the short distance to the city's Neapolis Archaeological Park, where a local guide will show us its famous Greek theatre hewn out of the hillside and the fine Roman amphitheatre where gladiators once fought.

We then drive over to Ortygia Island, where we have free time to have lunch and explore. This small island is the historical centre of the city and home to many landmarks such as the Fonte of Aretusa, Temple of Apollo ruins, Maniace Castle, and the narrow streets of the Jewish Quarter with its old baths found under the Residenza Alla Giudecca Hotel. Alternatively you could take a short boat trip along the rocky cave-strewn coastline. Ortygia Island is also a great place to go to a local cafe or restaurant and sit and watch the world go by. Its limestone buildings and pretty harbour front make it an ideal place to sip coffee and enjoy a cake. Perhaps try cannolo, a traditional Sicilian dessert, a crisp shell filled with sweet ricotta and chocolate chips topped with candied fruits. If you prefer a savoury snack then arancini is a rice ball stuffed with a range of fillings such as beef ragu and gooey cheese - it's simply delicious.

Leaving Syracuse this afternoon we drive for a couple of hours inland to Piazza Amerina, a charming market town set amid rolling countryside, which will be our base for the night. This isn't a town on the tourist trail and tonight you have the opportunity to dine in one of the delightful family run restaurants. As you stroll along through the peaceful streets and picturesque squares you can see the local men gathering to discuss the events of the day and to put the world to rights, like they will have done for generations.



**Accommodation: Park Hotel Paradiso** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 3 - See the mosaics at Villa Romana del Casale and the Valley of the Temples

Today we will visit two of Sicily's most important historic sites. We will start at the Villa Romana del Casale, which is just a short hop from our hotel and this should mean that we get to look around before the crowds arrive. A local guide will show us the ruins of this magnificent country mansion that contains some incredibly well-preserved and beautiful Roman mosaics, such as the famed bikini girls, fishing cupids and hunting scenes featuring exotic wildlife like tigers, rhinos and elephants. The mosaics are UNESCO-Listed and spread over a remarkable 3,500 square metres.

We drive on to Agrigento, which was once one of the most prosperous cities in Sicily. The ancient acropolis, now the modern city, overlooks a southern ridge, misleadingly named the Valley of the Temples. Visiting these temples with a local guide, we will walk around the ruins of the largest Doric temple ever constructed - the Temple of Zeus. Standing next to this monumental structure you are only as tall as the first few entry steps and so you tend to feel very small staring up at the gigantic pillars above you. We will also explore the perfectly-proportioned Doric columns of the Temple of Concord, as well as the oldest temple in the complex, honouring Hercules.

Later this afternoon, we will drive for a couple of hours north along the spectacular coastline to tonight's hotel in Marsala. Our hotel this evening is about 25 minutes walk from the centre of town. We will go into the centre to the Porta Garibaldi from where our local guide will take us on a short walk through the old town. After time for dinner we'll return to our hotel.



**Accommodation: Hotel President** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 4 - Explore Erice and the Greek ruins of Segesta en route to Palermo

This morning we drive up the twisty mountain roads to one of Sicily's best kept secrets, the delightful medieval hilltop walled town of Erice. Here we'll have the morning free to soak up the atmosphere and get lost among the maze of cobbled narrow streets. At 750 metres above sea level, we hope to have impressive views over the valley and sea below (cloud permitting). The town is home to a number of churches that you may choose to visit and perhaps you'd like to go into the courtyard of the Norman fortress, Castello di Venere or the nearby Garden of Balio, which offers excellent views. It is also worth noting that Erice is home to Sicily's most famous cake shop - Maria Grammatic.

Early afternoon will see us travelling on to Segesta - one of the best-preserved ancient sites. Once home to the Elymians, who it's believed descended from the Trojans. The two most famous monuments found here are the Doric temple and the amphitheatre that sit on the slopes of Mount Barbaro in a stunning natural setting - no modern day structures mar our appreciation of the site. Along the old entrance roads to the city is the Sanctuary of Contrada Mango and the Agora - the central meeting place of the city. Near to the amphitheatre you can see the more recent remains dating from around 1442 of a castle, mosque and church. If you visit in springtime then on a walk around the site you can spot colourful wildflowers and giant fennel. The site is large and hilly, so there is a complimentary bus service that operates in the archaeological site, which we can make use of.

On leaving magnificent Segesta, we drive for around an hour along the north coast to our hotel in Sicily's capital, Palermo where we have the evening free.



**Accommodation: Cristal Palace Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 5 - Visit to the Palatine Chapel and Monreale Cathedral; free time in Palermo

This morning we will get to experience some of Sicily's Norman history. In Palermo we will visit the Palatine Chapel with a local guide. This is the royal chapel of the Norman kings of Sicily and is packed with spectacular Byzantine mosaics.

Driving into the hills just a short distance out of the capital, we will go with our guide to visit the majestic Norman Cathedral of Monreale. Founded in 1174 by William the Good, the cathedral is also famous for its extensive mosaics, as well as its beautiful cloisters showing both Romanesque and Islamic influences.

Returning to Sicily's capital, the afternoon is free to enjoy Palermo. The city stands at the foot of Monte Pellegrino, with the fertile valley of Concha d'Oro behind. It was one of the richest cities in Europe from the 9th to the 12th centuries AD when Islamic culture, Byzantine magnificence and medieval Europe were merging into a fascinating civilisation. Today, the city maintains a sense of

cultural diversity and is famous for its art, music and food.

You might like to visit Palermo's cathedral with its ornate facade, the grand Teatro Massimo opera house, the natural beauty of the Botanical Gardens or the extensive catacombs under the city, to name just a few of the attractions on offer.

If you fancy a snack whilst exploring then you could try panelle, which is a popular street food. It's a fritter made from chickpeas eaten in a roll like a hot sandwich. If you fancy something sweet then cassata is Sicily's most famous cake, which is normally covered in marzipan and green icing over a moist fruity sponge layered with ricotta.



**Accommodation: Cristal Palace Hotel** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 6 - Drive along the coast with a stop in Cefalu en route to Giardini Naxos

Leaving Palermo this morning we drive along the spectacular northern coastline to the picturesque fishing village of Cefalu. Here we stop to explore the town and have the opportunity to go for a swim. You might like to visit the Norman Cathedral, with its stupendous mosaic of Christ Pantocrator. Alternatively if you're feeling active then you can walk up the steps passed the Temple of Diana ruins to the Castle on the Rock (the ascent is 278 metres) and from here the sea views are incredible, and make the climb to get there worthwhile.

From Cefalu we'll continue our drive along the coast and make a brief stop in Messina, where you have the chance to visit to the Messina Museum or the cathedral. After stretching our legs we'll drive on to the small coastal town of Giardini Naxos, which will be our base for the next two nights. This sweet little fishing town sits in the shadow of Mount Etna and is the spot of the oldest Greek settlement in Sicily back in 735 BC. It's a great spot for relaxing beside the sea and tucking into fresh fish and gelato. Sicily has some of the creamiest and most tasty gelato in Italy, so it's definitely worth sampling.

Please note, on our 12 May, 15 September and 6 October 2018 departures we will be staying in Taormina instead of Giardini Naxos on days 6 and 7. The towns are only a short distance apart along the coast. The itinerary inclusions will remain the same and you'll still have the opportunity to visit Mount Etna, the only difference is that you won't be visiting Giardini Naxos and your free time on day 7 will be spent in Taormina instead. If you still want to visit Giardini Naxos then it's easily accessible on the hop-on public bus from Taormina.



**Accommodation: Hotel la Riva** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 7 - Chance to travel to Mount Etna; afternoon in Taormina

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. You drive from our hotel to the cable car base at Rifugio Sapienza, which is on the south side of Etna and 1,900 metres above sea level. Here there are several cafes and gift shops and you can also see the old Silvestri Craters. From here you can board the cable car up to 2,500 metres where there's another cafe and gift shop and you can have a walk around on the mountainside. From here you have the option of boarding a four-wheel drive coach up to 2,900 metres to take a short walk (around 45 minutes) with a mountain guide to view the craters formed in the 2002/3 eruptions and the fumaroles at around 3,000 metres, which is as close to the summit as we're currently permitted to go. You then return down the mountain the same way.

Alternatively, you might prefer to enjoy a more sedate morning enjoying the coastal location of Giardini Naxos. Here there is an archaeological zone that doesn't feature a huge number of ruins but it does offer a very pleasant walk through the citrus groves. There is also a small museum here with some interesting findings from different historical periods.

This afternoon, we will all meet back up and travel the short distance to Taormina, Sicily's most famous resort. Once a favourite haven for the likes of D. H Lawrence and Oscar Wilde, Taormina is still today a popular tourist destination. After a walk around this chic and beautiful town, with its pretty medieval churches and charming streets, it's easy to understand why. With a local guide we'll visit the Greek Theatre. The snow-capped Mount Etna acts as a spectacular backdrop to the remarkably preserved columned stage and it's easy to see why this is possibly the most famous view in all of Sicily and it makes for a superb photograph. We'll also visit the Roman Odeon before having the rest of the afternoon free to explore before returning to Giardini Naxos in the early evening.

You might choose to visit the Villa Comunale Gardens which offer a peaceful escape from Taormina's bustling main street. Here you can walk amidst magnolia, hibiscus and bougainvillea trees. If you'd like to enjoy a drink and a snack then we'd recommend taking a stroll down one of Taormina's side streets where you'll find a variety of less-busy bars and restaurants than in the very centre of town.



**Accommodation: Hotel la Riva** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 8 - Trip ends in Giardini Naxos

Our trip ends after breakfast at our hotel in Giardini Naxos, which is about one hours' drive from Catania Airport.



Meals Provided: Breakfast



## What's included?



### Included meals

Breakfast: 7



### Transport

Bus



### Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader  
Driver(s)  
Local Guide(s)



### Accommodation

7 nights standard hotel

## 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

+1

##### Plugs

2 Pin Round

##### Religion

Roman Catholic

##### Language

Italian

#### Sicily

### 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 4 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 4, €5.00 per person.

Palermo:

Entrance to the Botanical Gardens on day 5, €5.00 per person.

Entrance to the catacombs on day 5, €3.00 per person.

Entrance to the cathedral on day 5, free of charge or €1.50 per person to see the Norman tombs.

Tour of the Teatro Massimo on day 5, €8.00 per person.

Messina:

Entrance to the Regional Museum on day 6, €8.00 per person.

Entrance to the Cathedral Museum on day 6, €3.50 per person plus €4.00 per person to climb the campanile.

Giardini Naxos:

There are three different options for the Mount Etna tour on day 7:

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 7, €2.00 per person including museum entrance.

Taormina:

Entrance to the Villa Comunale Gardens on day 7 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 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 £20.00 for tipping.

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

## Country Information

### 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

£5.00 - 10.00

##### Dinner price

£15.00 - 20.00

##### Beer price

£2.00 - 4.00

##### Water price

£1.00 - 2.00

#### Foreign Exchange

##### Local currency

Euro.

##### Recommended Currency For Exchange

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

Major towns.

##### Credit Card Acceptance

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

## **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 consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See [www.travcour.com](http://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 transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. 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.

## Non refundable permits

### 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.

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### Sicily

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