

# HARVARD

ALUMNI TRAVELS



## SOUTHERN ITALY & SICILY

OCTOBER 1–15, 2025

### PROGRAM SCHEDULE

Delight in a special exploration of Italy's southern climes, from striking Sicily and the breathtaking Amalfi Coast to unheralded Apulia, the alluring "boot heel" where a vivid history, unique architecture, and bountiful plains join the sun and sea in creating a prized (and crowd-free) region. Add Italian hospitality, outstanding cuisine, and notable lodgings for la dolce vita, small-group style.

## SCHEDULE BY DAY

*B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, R=Reception, D=Dinner*

### WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 1 DEPART U.S. FOR TAORMINA, SICILY

This evening, depart the U.S. for Europe with a connecting flight to Catania.

### THURSDAY, OCTOBER 2 ARRIVE TAORMINA

Arrive today in Catania on Italy's autonomous island of Sicily, then transfer by motorcoach to Taormina and your hotel overlooking the Ionian Sea.

In the evening, gather for a welcome dinner at a local restaurant.

Overnight: *Eurostars Monte Tauro (D)*

### FRIDAY, OCTOBER 3 TAORMINA

Embark on a walking tour of this charming Sicilian town and learn about its ancient origins.

A popular resort since the 19th century, Taormina attracted a Bohemian crowd of intellectuals in the early 20th century, with artists and such literary lights as D. H. Lawrence, Evelyn Waugh, and Truman Capote visiting here.

Your tour includes the 3rd-century BCE Greek theater, where gladiators and animals fought to the death; the 13th-century Duomo, an interesting fortress-like structure; and the grand Piazza Vittorio

Emanuele, site of the ancient agora and later the seat of the Roman Forum.

The afternoon is free to enjoy as you wish; options include visiting one of the lovely beaches near town or taking a leisurely stroll down the Corso Umberto, Taormina's main street lined with shops, restaurants, and cafés. Next to Taormina's centrally located tourist office sits a Roman ruin with a restored 12th-century tower that offers marvelous views of Mount Etna and surroundings.

With lunch and dinner today on your own, perhaps a culinary adventure (or two) is in order, and thanks to Sicily's strategic location and legacy of hosting numerous invading armies over the millennia, Sicilian food incorporates Italian, Arabic, and African influences into a singular, and delicious, cuisine. Seafood reigns supreme and gelato is said to have derived from locals flavoring snow found on Mount Etna.

Overnight: *Eurostars Monte Tauro (B)*

### SATURDAY, OCTOBER 4 TAORMINA / AGRIGENTO

A day-long excursion takes you to the "Valley of the Temples" at Agrigento, an important and impressive archaeological zone (and UNESCO site) whose ruined Doric temples and sanctuaries date to Greek rule in the 5th century BCE. A leading urban spot during the Golden Age of ancient Greece, Agrigento was called "the most beautiful city of mortals" during its heyday—and though much of it now is in ruins, you can still see why.

The valley's eastern zone contains the ruins of several sanctuaries, including the Temple of Ercole,

among the oldest of the temples (nearby see the deep ruts from ancient carriages), and the beautifully preserved Temple of Concordia, built in 430 BCE and converted to a Christian church two centuries later—thus accounting for its surprising state of preservation.

In Agrigento's western zone lie the remains of the massive Temple of Olympian Zeus, the largest known Doric temple to have ever been built. A visit to Agrigento's archaeological museum with its regional exhibits lends context to your exploration.

Return to your hotel late this afternoon and dine there tonight.

Overnight: *Eurostars Monte Tauro* (B, L, D)

## **SUNDAY, OCTOBER 5** TAORMINA / MOUNT ETNA

In the morning, visit one of Europe's largest active volcanoes: Mount Etna. The ancients believed Etna to be the forge of Vulcan, god of fire; today, modern-day Sicilians still have a very personal relationship with the volcano, which frequently erupts but is seldom destructive—more than six centuries have passed since the lava actually reached the sea. Still, the sight of the dried lava is enough to give pause—great mounds of it lie in massive folds, looking almost alive; depending on its age, the lava is red, gray, or black.

Next, stop at a private farm set amidst acres of lemon and kiwi groves where the fertile soil has been enriched by centuries of lava flows. Surrounded by the aromas of fresh fruit, enjoy a hearty lunch prepared by the family who lives here. Along with lunch, sample some excellent Sicilian wines made from grapes grown in conditions similar to those at California's best vineyards: warm temperatures; rich, hilly terrain; and soft sea breezes.

Return to Taormina mid-afternoon with the remainder of the afternoon and evening at leisure.

Dinner tonight is on your own.

Overnight: *Eurostars Monte Tauro* (B, L)

## **MONDAY, OCTOBER 6** TAORMINA / MATERA

Depart Sicily early this morning for the mainland region of Basilicata; the full-day transfer includes a

ferry ride from Sicily to Calabria followed by a stop with time for lunch on your own.

Later this afternoon, reach the Basilicata region and Matera, whose old town, lined with troglodyte churches and dwellings (Sassi) carved into the porous chalky rock, has been designated a UNESCO site. The cave-like dwellings were once occupied by citizens, but in the 1950s, the Italian government forcefully relocated most of the residents to more modern parts of the city due to extreme poverty and unhealthy living conditions that bred illness, primarily malaria. The area has since been repopulated by artists, entrepreneurs, and restaurateurs in recent years. Matera's long history (it is one of the world's oldest inhabited cities) and world-renowned Sassi aided its winning bid for the 2019 European Capital of Culture contest, which sheds light on the diversity of fascinating cultures in Europe.

Check in at your hotel, a renovated cave dwelling in the city's historic district, followed by dinner together at a local restaurant.

Overnight: *Locanda di San Martino* (B, D)

## **TUESDAY, OCTOBER 7** MATERA

Today explore this city of art and folklore, with its unique ancient urban structure still intact. Home to more than 100 rock churches (some merely caves with a cross, others with complex underground chambers), Matera resembles Jerusalem of Biblical times and has been used by international film directors as a stand-in for the holy city. The Sassi are among the oldest human settlements in Italy; evidence suggests that people were living here as early as 7000 BCE. During a guided walking tour, visit a reconstructed cave dwelling with period fittings to see how life was once lived here.

The remainder of the day is at leisure to explore independently.

Lunch today is on your own; dine as a group tonight at a local restaurant.

Overnight: *Locanda di San Martino* (B, D)

## **WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 8** MATERA / ALBEROBELLO / LECCE

Departing Matera this morning, stop in Alberobello, whose 400 or so trulli—historic houses that are white-washed and conical with grey-stone roofs—rank as a UNESCO World Heritage site. The town’s name literally translates to “beautiful tree,” and the dense congregations of trulli here resemble a tightly packed forest grove.

Take a walking tour along the pristine cobblestone alleys lined with trulli, some of which are private homes, others artisan workshops. Step inside one of these historic homes to get a closeup view of how people in this area lived and worked.

Enjoy some free time to explore on your own, then have lunch together at a local restaurant.

Continue to Lecce, capital of Apulia’s Lecce province in the southern part of Italy’s boot heel. Arrive early this evening in time for dinner at your hotel.

Overnight: *Chiostro dei Domenicani (B, L, D)*

## **THURSDAY, OCTOBER 9**

### **LECCE**

Set out this morning to discover Lecce, a 2,000-year-old city with a strong Greek heritage that today is known as the “Florence of the South” for its unique decorative style. Called barocco leccese, it features ornate and intricate carvings in a variety of forms, from cherubs and monsters to fruits and flowers, and adorns local buildings from top to bottom. It is the locally quarried “Lecce stone,” a malleable, pink-tinged limestone well suited for carving, that gave the town its artistic identity. Thanks to the competitive spirit of 17th-century merchants, religious orders, and noblemen who tried to outdo each other by building ever-grander palazzos you can today experience a delightful sensory overload.

This walking tour of architectural exuberance includes Palazzo Vescovile (circa 1632); the lavishly decorated church of Santa Croce, begun in 1353 and not finished until 1695; and the Duomo di Lecce (Lecce Cathedral), one of Italy’s most important cathedrals, with its lovely piazza—one of Italy’s prettiest public squares.

The remainder of the day is free to explore this town of more than 100 churches and palaces on your own.

Tonight, enjoy dinner in the gardens of a Lecce palazzo.

Overnight: *Chiostro dei Domenicani (B, D)*

## **FRIDAY, OCTOBER 10**

### **LECCE / OTRANTO**

Today’s excursion takes you along Italy’s unheralded yet beautiful Adriatic coastline—along the sea that separates Italy’s boot heel from the Balkan Peninsula.

Your first stop is in the beautiful walled town of Otranto, a historic meeting spot for various Mediterranean peoples over the millennia. If the day is especially clear, you may be able to see Albania across the water.

On a walking tour of Otranto’s old town, see the imposing 15th-century Aragonese castle with its traditional moat; and the Romanesque cathedral with an impressive wall-to-wall mosaic floor created in 1166 depicting Noah’s Ark, Alexander the Great, and other religious, mythical, and pagan figures.

Continue to a local winery to sample its offerings and enjoy lunch together.

Return to Lecce mid-afternoon, with the remainder of the afternoon and evening at leisure.

Dinner this evening is on your own.

Overnight: *Chiostro dei Domenicani (B, L)*

## **SATURDAY, OCTOBER 11**

### **LECCE / POLIGNANO A MARE / SORRENTO**

Have a full day of scenic travel ahead as you journey from the Apulia region to Campania, a district boasting historical treasures (including famed Pompeii), the spectacular Amalfi coast, and the resort isle of Capri.

Early this morning, depart by coach for Polignano a Mare, where you enjoy lunch together at a traditional trattoria in this historic coastal town set on limestone cliffs above the Adriatic.

Continue to lively, seaside Sorrento, a popular resort town and your base for exploring Campania, arriving early this evening.

Dinner tonight is on your own.

Overnight: *Hotel Antiche Mura (B, L)*

## **SUNDAY, OCTOBER 12**

### **SORRENTO / POMPEII**

Today's excursion takes you to the evocative UNESCO site of Pompeii, the wonderfully preserved Roman town that tells a tale both tragic and fascinating. Just before Mt. Vesuvius erupted in 79 CE, many citizens of Pompeii heeded the warning signs and fled the town. However, some 2,000 unlucky people remained to be caught in the eruption's wake, becoming engulfed in volcanic ash. The ash literally "froze" the town in time, leaving exquisite ruins that show us how these ancient Romans lived through vivid frescoes, a Forum, and one of the largest surviving Roman amphitheaters in existence.

After a guided walking tour and exploration of this incredible site, return to Sorrento early this afternoon. Lunch is on your own.

In the late afternoon, journey outside the city to a working farm to partake in a hands-on demonstration of Neapolitan cooking. Enjoy the fruits of our labors for dinner.

Overnight: *Hotel Antiche Mura (B, D)*

## **MONDAY, OCTOBER 13** SORRENTO / CAPRI

Today travel by hydrofoil to the storied Isle of Capri, a popular resort on the Tyrrhenian Sea since ancient Roman times.

Walk through cozy Capri town and visit the terraced Gardens of Augustus, rich with Mediterranean flora, coastal pines, and stunning views of the azure sea.

Have free time to explore and to enjoy lunch on your own—Capri boasts a wide selection of restaurants, simple trattorias, and pizzerias from which to choose, and an abundance of the freshest seafood.

Return to Sorrento early this afternoon, where you are free for the remainder of the day.

After dinner at leisure, be sure to sample the local specialty limoncello, a digestif made from the rinds of Sorrento's fragrant lemons (along with alcohol, water, and sugar).

Overnight: *Hotel Antiche Mura (B)*

## **TUESDAY, OCTOBER 14** SORRENTO / AMALFI COAST

This morning, embark on a breathtaking drive along the rugged Amalfi Coast. This stretch of winding, terraced coastline from Sorrento to Amalfi has

inspired movies, music, and books; indeed, it is one of the most glorious drives in the world.

During this leisurely excursion, make several photo stops along the spectacular, hair-raising coastline, with the dazzling Mediterranean a sheer 500-foot drop below.

Return to your hotel midday; lunch is on your own and the remainder of the afternoon is at leisure.

Tonight, bid "arrivederci" to Italy and your fellow travelers at a farewell dinner.

Overnight: *Hotel Antiche Mura (B, D)*

## **WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 15** DEPART FOR U.S.

This morning, depart for the Naples airport for your return flight to the U.S. (B)

## **OPTIONAL EXTENSION: ROME—ON YOUR OWN** OCTOBER 15–18, 2025

## **WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 15** SORRENTO / ROME

Mid-morning, depart via private car for Rome.

Upon arrival, transfer to your well-located hotel, your base for exploring this wondrous city as you wish for the next three days.

Overnight: *Monti Palace Hotel (B)*

## **THURSDAY–FRIDAY, OCTOBER 16-17** ROME

You are on your own in the Eternal City, Italy's capital and largest city, and an important center of religion and pilgrimage. With a history spanning more than 2,500 years—and a vibrant contemporary scene—a multitude of options abound.

In addition to Rome's "must see" attractions, be sure to take some time just to absorb the city's atmosphere: linger over an espresso at an outdoor café . . . enjoy a long lunch of cucina Romana at a trattoria in the Trastevere neighborhood . . . people watch in Piazza Navona—it's all part of la dolce vita in Rome.

Perhaps you'll begin your explorations in the heart of the city: ancient Rome, a UNESCO World Heritage site and home of the 60,000-seat Colosseum (ca. 70–80 CE), Roman Forum, pastoral Palatine Hill, and the Pantheon, among other attractions.

Move on to Vatican City, with monumental St. Peter's Basilica, one of Christendom's holiest sites and home of Michelangelo's sublime Pieta; the Sistine Chapel, where Michelangelo's restored masterpiece—renovated over 20 years with restoration work completed in 1999—adorns the ceiling; and vast St. Peter's Square, so familiar from countless television broadcasts and movie scenes.

Then, in no specific order: Borghese Gardens, a green refuge from the bustle of the city; Borghese Gallery, the small museum housing treasures from the 15th to 18th centuries, including several breathtaking Bernini sculptures and works by Caravaggio (reservations required; these are easily obtained on-line); the grand art and archaeological museums of the Capitolini, housed in three palazzi surrounding a unique trapezoid-shaped piazza by Michelangelo; the ancient Jewish Ghetto by the Tiber, with the Jewish Museum and historic Great Synagogue; the grand boulevard of Via Veneto, home to designer boutiques; charming Trastevere, with its narrow streets, medieval buildings, and excellent restaurants; Trevi Fountain (throw in a coin to ensure your return to Rome); the open-air market at Campo de Fiori; grand Piazza Navona with Bernini's Four Rivers fountain . . . the list truly is endless.

Overnight: *Monti Palace Hotel (B, Daily)*

## **SATURDAY, OCTOBER 18**

### **RETURN TO U.S.**

This morning you transfer to the Rome airport and board your return flight to the United States. *(B)*