



# RAIL WONDERS OF SICILY



14 to 22 April

Sicily is the largest island in the Mediterranean Sea and has a population of approximately five million.

Our visit will be in the spring to take advantage of the good temperatures at that time of year (any later and it would be too hot).

Sicily received a variety of different cultures, including the original Italic people, the Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Saracens, Normans, and Spaniards, each contributing to the island's culture, particularly in the areas of cuisine and architecture.

Our tour of Sicily travels over every railway line on the island, both standard and narrow gauge and including the new tramway system. We will visit engine sheds, workshops and railway museum.

We have also prepared a cultural programme to be led by Angelina Pons.

**Saturday 14 April** Our flight leave London Gatwick at 16.05 for our 3 hour flight to Palermo. Coach transfer to Palermo where we stay in the 4 stars Hotel Astoria.

**Sunday 15 April** (B, D) This morning we use our coach to cross Sicily from the Tyrrhenian sea to the Ionian sea through the mountainous interior of the island, so we have the chance to visit on the way the Railway and Folk Museum in Villarosa. In Catania we stay for the next three nights in the 4 stars Hotel Nettuno, on the sea front.

In the afternoon we have the opportunity for a guided visit of Catania. Catania is located on the east coast of the island, at the foot of the active Etna Volcano. Catania has had a long and eventful history, having been founded in the 8th century BC. In the 14th century and the Renaissance, Catania was one of Italy's most important and flourishing cultural, artistic and political centres, including the opening in 1434 of the first university in Sicily. Today, Catania is one of the main economic, tourist and educational centres in the island, being an important hub of the technological industry, thus gaining the nickname of the "European Silicon Valley".

**Monday 16 April** (B, PL, D) Today we visit the FCE Catania depot before to board our FCE special train with the 1937 Fiat railcar Aln 56 from Catania to Riposto. A packed lunch will be provided. The Ferrovia Circumetnea (FCE) is a 950 mm (3 ft 1 in) narrow-gauge railway line constructed between 1889 and 1895 and now is the only remaining of the narrow gauge network. As the name suggests, the line (110 km in length) follows a route which almost encircles the Etna Volcano. From its terminal in Catania the line starts off in a westward direction and loops around Etna in a clockwise manner, eventually reaching its other terminal at the seaside town of Riposto, approximately 28 km to the North-East of Catania. The original terminal was at Catania Porto, although Catania Central (the mainline station) was the last stop for the trains. Recently the section from there to Catania Borgo (4 km in length) was converted to standard gauge and moved underground for most of its length for use as a new metro line. In Riposto we take a FS (Trenitalia) service train to Messina, the line has beautiful views of the sea. Messina is located near the northeast corner of Sicily, at the Strait of Messina, just opposite Villa San Giovanni on the Mainland. Its harbor is the ferry terminal for the Mainland. Messina has a light rail system that was opened on 2003, the line is 7.7 kms. long.

*Cultural option:* from Riposto we take a charter bus to Taormina for a guided visit of the city and the famous Greek theater. By charter bus we return to Catania.

**Tuesday 17 April** (B, D) Today there are two different programmes:

*Rail enthusiasts* visit the Catania FS depot before taking a service train to Caltanissetta Centrale and return. In the afternoon we have a FS special train Catania – Caltagirone – Catania. *The line Catania – Gela is interrupted between Caltagirone and Gela for the collapse of a bridge and no one knows when it will be reopened.*

*Cultural option* take a charter bus for a whole day guided visit of Siracusa. Siracusa is located in the southeast corner of the island of Sicily on the Ionian Sea. The city is notable for its rich Greek history, amphitheatres, architecture and as the birthplace of the preeminent mathematician and engineer Archimedes. This 2,700-year-old city played a key role in ancient times, when it was one of the major powers of the Mediterranean world.



## Holiday information

**Wednesday 18 April** (B, D) Today we return to Palermo but with two different options:

*Rail enthusiasts* take some FS services train on the long route Catania – Siracusa – Gela – Caltanissetta Centrale – Caltanissetta Xirbi – Palermo

*Cultural option* travel by charter bus from Catania to Palermo visiting on the way the Roman Villa del Casale in Piazza Armerina, famous for its splendid mosaics.

In Palermo we are again in the 4 star Hotel Astoria for the next four nights.

**Thursday 19 April** (B, D) Today the whole group takes a FS service train from Palermo to Agrigento. The Valley of the Temples in Agrigento is one of the most outstanding examples of Greater Greece art and architecture, and is one of the main attractions of Sicily as well as a national monument of Italy. The area was included in the Unesco Heritage Site list in 1997. The Valley includes remains of seven temples, all in Doric style; we will have a guided visit.

From Agrigento rail enthusiasts board a FS special train on the branch Agrigento Centrale – Porto Empedocle (no regular passenger service) – Agrigento Bassa – Canicatti – Aragona Caldare.

With FS service train the whole group return to Palermo.

**Friday 20 April** (B, D) Again there are two different programmes to choose from:

*Rail enthusiasts* visit the Palermo FS depot before taking a service train to Messina doing the old line via Falcone. In Messina the visit of the FS depot has been arranged. By service train we return to Palermo doing the new direct line. In Palermo they are building two tramway lines, but at the moment it's too early to know what we'll see.

*Cultural option* board a charter bus for a guided visit of Palermo in the morning and Monreale in the afternoon. Palermo millenary history has given it a great artistic and architectural heritage ranging from the remains of the Punic walls to the Art Nouveau villas, moving from residences in Arab-Norman style, with Baroque churches and Neoclassical theaters. The Cathedral of Monreale, dedicated to Santa Maria Nuova, was built in 1174 and it's sided by the cloister of the Benedictine monastery, built at the end of the XII century and a wonderful example of Byzantine architecture.

**Saturday 21 April** (B, D)

Today we have the opportunity to explore the western side of Sicily. We travel by FS service train to Trapani along the Castelvetrano line. Trapani sits on a low-lying promontory jutting out into the Mediterranean Sea in front of the Egadi Islands. Much of Trapani's economy still depends on the sea, fishing and canning are the main local industries, with fishermen using the mattanza technique to catch tuna. Coral is also an important export, with salt and Marsala wine. The nearby coast is lined with numerous salt-pans. From Trapani we return to Palermo along a different line via Milo.

**Sunday 22 April** (B)

Coach transfer to Palermo Airport from where we take the 11.20 the Easyjet flight back to London Gatwick.

### Holiday Prices (per person)

9 day holiday from London Gatwick

£1,599

Own travel to/from Sicily: £1,399

### Options

- Single room supplement: add £180

### Deposit

£400 (with flights) or £250 (if making own flight arrangements)

### Price includes

- Travel and activities as outlined in the itinerary
- Good quality en-suite accommodation with breakfast and dinner
- Services of our Tour Managers (tour is fully escorted from London)

### Recommended Flights

EZY5245 16.05 Gatwick to Palermo  
EZY5244 11.20 Palermo to Gatwick