

JEWELS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN – AUGUST 2017

OVERVIEW

Tour Date: 28 August 2017 – 23 September 2017

Duration: 27 days

Tour Cost (\$AUD): \$17,750

Single Supplement (\$AUD): \$3,550

Jewels of the Mediterranean is a magnificent 27-day journey to Malta and some of the less-visited Mediterranean islands – Sicily, Sardinia and Corsica. Steeped in history, these islands are home to ancient Greek and Roman sites, rugged limestone cliffs and caves, volcanic landscapes, forests and mountains, and some of the most spectacular coastlines of the Mediterranean.

Beginning in magnificent Malta, our four-day stay will reveal the secrets of the island's ancient past that have helped shape the Mediterranean 'jewel' we know today. We then cross by ferry to Sicily, where our first stop is the mountain town of Taormina with its ancient Greco-Roman amphitheatre from where we have extraordinary views of one of the world's most active volcanoes, Mount Etna. On Sicily's south we visit what was once one of the greatest cities of the Mediterranean world – Agrigento. The location and exceptionally well-preserved temples that date back to the 6th century BC are simply breathtaking. Next stop is the island of Sardinia, with its wild interior where ancient bronze-age towers and settlements – nuraghi – can be found. We travel the whole length of the island before making the small hop to Corsica and the medieval cliff-top town of Bonifacio. Wonderfully enigmatic, Corsica has an astounding mix of rugged cliffs, mountains, forests, half-moon bays and ancient villages. Finally, we farewell the *Jewels of the Mediterranean* and take our final ferry journey to mainland France and the city of Nice.

Tour Fitness Level: Active

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TOUR ITINERARY

28/08/2017 Australia – Dubai

Check-in at your chosen Australian airport for the flight to Dubai with Emirates.

29/08/2017 Dubai – Malta (D)

Depart Dubai Emirates Airlines EK 107, 07.55

Arrive Malta 14.10

On arrival in Malta we transfer to our hotel. First settled around 5200 BC, the strategic importance of Malta was recognised by the Phoenicians who occupied it, as did, in turn, the Greeks, Carthaginians, and Romans. The island is steeped in history, and this afternoon is at leisure to explore the beautiful district of Sliema.

Victoria Hotel

Malta

30/08/2017 Malta (BLD)

After breakfast we begin to explore the island of Malta and its 7,000-year history. We start in the capital, Valletta, and visit the beautiful Barraca Gardens for superb panoramic views of the Grand Harbour. We also visit the Grand Master's Palace, which is the seat of government and the private residence of the President of Malta. After lunch we head south to the cities of Vittoriosa, Cospicua and Senglea. Here we discover the narrow shady streets that make this historic area unique.

31/08/2017 Malta (BLD)

An early start this morning as we board a ferry for the 20 minute journey to Malta's sister island of Gozo. This is a place where time has stood still and where traditions and customs form part of the daily life of the islanders. The pace of life is slow and most of the population still follows their forefathers' trades of farming and fishing.

01/09/2017 Malta (BLD)

After breakfast we visit Mdina, the old capital of Malta located in the central part of the island. This ancient walled settlement has spectacular views of the countryside from its bastions. After lunch we visit Rabat, a village next to Mdina, where we enjoy a short walk around the narrow winding roads leading to St Paul's catacombs and the grotto. After exploring the catacombs we return to our hotel.

02/09/2017 Malta – Pozzallo – Taormina (LD)

Early this morning we leave Malta on an early morning ferry to the Sicilian port of Pozzallo.

Depart Malta 05.00

Arrive Pozzallo 06.45

On arrival in Sicily we begin our journey to Taormina arriving around midday. This afternoon we explore Sicily's most picturesque town, located on the terrace of Mount Tauro. Since the end of the 19th century, Taormina has been a world-famous international resort where visitors are captivated by its charming atmosphere, ancient history and unspoilt beauty.

Monte Tauro Hotel

Taormina

03/09/2017 Taormina – Mt Etna – Taormina (BLD)

This morning we board 4WD vehicles to drive to the base of Mount Etna. To the ancient Greeks, Mount Etna was the realm of Vulcan, the God of Fire. At 3,350m

high, it is one of the world's most active volcanoes. Eruptions throughout the 20th century occurred frequently from the four active craters at the summit and on its slopes. Etna is monitored by 115 seismic-activity centres spread around the mountain and is under constant satellite surveillance.

04/09/2017 Taormina – Agrigento (BLD)

Leaving Taormina and drive to the town of Piazza Amerina. However, it is not the town that most people come to see, but the famous Villa Romana del Casale, which is nearby. Built in the middle of the 4th Century AD as a hunting lodge by a Roman patrician, the Villa is home to some of the best-preserved and extensive examples of Roman mosaics in the world. Almost completely covered by a landslide in the 12th Century, the Villa was not excavated until the 20th Century. Only then did the magnitude and magnificence of Villa Romana del Casale come to light. It is now a UNESCO World Heritage site. After lunch we continue south to Agrigento.

Baia di Ulisse Hotel

Agrigento

05/09/2017 Agrigento (BLD)

Sicily's oldest historic site, the Valley of the Temples, was once one of the leading cities of the Mediterranean region. One of the greatest legacies of ancient Greece, this World Heritage-listed complex of well-preserved Doric temples, dates back to the fifth and sixth centuries BC and is what remains of the Greek city of Akragas. Today we set out to explore this archaeological treasure.

06/09/2017 Agrigento – Palermo (BLD)

This morning we drive along the west coast of Sicily to Marsala, the famous wine-growing region of Sicily. After lunch at the famous Donafugarta winery we head north to Trapani. Here we take a short cable car ride to the magnificent town of Erice. Perched atop Mount Erice, the town boasts one of the most dramatic settings in the world. We then make the short journey to the bustling Sicilian capital of Palermo.

La Grand Borsa Hotel

Palermo

07/09/2017 Palermo (BLD)

Palermo boasts architectural and cultural influences from North Africa, Italy, Spain and Greece and its historic district is unique, having survived many invasions over the years. At the heart of Palermo is a cluster of imposing churches and buildings that surround the ornate Fontana Pretoria. This huge fountain fills the piazza with its tiered basins and sculptures. The city bought the fountain in 1573 and local churchgoers dubbed it the Fountain of Shame, due to the flagrant nudity of the provocative nymphs!

08/09/2017 Palermo (BLD)

Ten kilometres from Palermo lies the historic hill-side town of Monreale, famous for its great Norman cathedral. The Cathedral façade is impressive but gives few hints as to the magnificence that lies inside. It was built between 1174 and 1185 by William II, the Norman ruler of Sicily, who wished to showcase the magnificence of his kingdom. The project employed both Sicilian and Byzantine craftsmen, resulting in a magnificent fusion of eastern and western influences.

09/09/2017 Palermo – Cagliari (Sardinia) (BL)

Today we continue our city tour of fascinating Palermo, and late afternoon we board our ferry for the overnight journey to Sardinia.

Depart Palermo MV Dimonios 19.30

10/09/2017 Cagliari (BLD)

Arrive Cagliari 07.30

The ancient island of Sardinia has been inhabited since the Palaeolithic period. The island has produced flourishing diversified cultures including Phoenician, Roman, Vandal and Byzantine, which have left their traces in numerous monuments and hand-crafted artefacts. This incredible history has also left its mark on Cagliari, with archaeological remains, superb churches and several fine museums. The city centre is a medieval square with many taverns and restaurants dotting the cobbled piazzas.

Hotel Regina Margherita

Cagliari

11/09/2017 Cagliari (BLD)

As well as its crystal-clear seawater and one of the most beautiful and longest beaches in the Mediterranean, Cagliari is an unspoiled natural environment consisting of lagoons, bird sanctuaries and wildlife reserves that are unique in Europe. This lagoon area, a few minutes from the city centre, is home to a vast flamingo colony. These are the only flamingos in the world that never migrate from Cagliari! Today we continue our exploration of the town.

12/09/2017 Cagliari – Alghero (BLD)

Leaving Cagliari, we head north to the small village of Barumini. At this UNESCO site we discover the largest Nuraghe on the island. This amazing structure once stood more than three storeys high. Built nearly 3,500 years ago, it is surrounded by the ruins of an extensive village with interlocking buildings covering the hillside. The site was rediscovered only in 1949. We continue into the Sardinian heartland to the town of Orgosolo, where the mountains are covered in beautiful forests and wild boar roam freely. This is the land of Sardinian shepherds and we have an amazing lunch of roasted boar on a spit. After lunch we continue to Alghero.

Hotel Catalunya

Alghero

13/09/2017 Alghero – Capo Caccia – Alghero (BLD)

Although it has been part of Italy for generations, Alghero was once part of the kingdom of Aragon from the Spanish region of Catalonia and the residents still speak Catalan. Easily the most picturesque of Sardinia's medieval cities, Alghero is also famous for its unique blood-red coral which is often fashioned into magnificent jewellery. We also visit the wonderful and rugged Capo Caccia which is situated on the southern point of a huge limestone triangle that juts out into the sea. There are impressive 300m high cliffs on its west side, but it is the underground labyrinth of mysterious caves for which Capo Caccia is most renowned. We take a boat to one of the most famous caves, Grotta di Nettuno, which is 2,500 metres long. Capo Caccia is one of the wildest and most beautiful places in Sardinia.

14/09/2017 Alghero – Palau (BLD)

This morning we leave Alghero and head to the most northern point of the island. Here, at the small port village of Palau, we board a boat that will take us to the island of Maddalena. Famous for its pink sand, La Maddalena is the centre island in a wonderful archipelago. Its cobbled piazzas and food markets contribute to an atmosphere of perpetual holiday.

Hotel Vecchia Fonte

Palau

15/09/2017 Palau – Bonifacio (Corsica) (BLD)

After breakfast we make the short journey to Santa Teresa to board the ferry to Corsica and the town of Bonifacio.

Depart Santa Teresa 10.00

Arrive Bonifacio 11.00

Visitors from all over the world come to Bonifacio to see its medieval houses teetering precariously on the edge of the imposing limestone cliffs. Bonifacio's Old Town, with a labyrinth of narrow streets and historic buildings, was built by the Genoese and is a fascinating place to explore. It has a wonderful natural harbour dotted with unspoiled Corsican beaches and is surrounded by staggeringly beautiful mountains.

Solemare Hotel

Bonifacio

16/09/2017 Bonifacio (BLD)

Today we explore the Alta Rocca mountain range, the backbone of Corsica. This magnificent area is home to the spectacular mountain village of Sainte Lucie de Tallano and the intriguing ancient settlements of Sartene and Pianu de Levie. Deep inside these verdant mountains beats the heart of ancient Corsica with its archaeological treasures and Bronze Age settlements.

17/09/2017 Bonifacio – Ajaccio (BLD)

This morning we drive to Ajaccio, capital of Corsica and the island's largest city. Its modern history is dominated by the figure of Napoleon, who was born in the city. As we commence our walking tour we venture down delightful narrow streets that contain lovely and varied architecture, until we arrive at Napoleon's house which is now a fascinating museum. The city also has a beautiful harbour area with numerous boats and yachts, arriving from French ports such as Marseille, Nice and Toulon.

Hotel San Carlu

Ajaccio

18/09/2017 Ajaccio – Gulf of Porto – Ajaccio (BLD)

In an island of such extraordinary natural beauty as Corsica, it is difficult to suggest one area which contains the most sublime scenery on the island. Yet the Gulf of Porto lays claim to this title. Here stacked slabs of red granite, towering pinnacles and gnarled, claw-like outcrops of rock were formed by volcanic eruptions 250 million years ago and subsequent erosion has fashioned spectacular shapes in the rock. The colours are remarkable and vary from charcoal-grey to incandescent reds and rusty purples which strike a vivid contrast with the deep green maquis and the cobalt-blue sea. The headland and its surrounding waters were declared a nature reserve in 1975 and dolphins and seals thrive here.

19/09/2017 Ajaccio – Bastia (BLD)

Our drive today takes us through some of the most breathtaking scenery on the island. After leaving Ajaccio we arrive in Corte and enjoy a tour of the town before continuing on to Bastia. En-route we see lush forests, plunging gorges and the amazing Vecchio Viaduct. The viaduct was engineered by none other than Gustav Eiffel, better known for his tower! As we continue towards Bastia we see a panorama of dazzling white granite, obelisks and truncated columns of rock rising savagely against the skyline. On arrival in Bastia we transfer to our hotel.

Hotel Alivi

Bastia

20/09/2017 Bastia (BLD)

Today we depart for Cape Corse, a finger of land that juts from the northern tip of Corsica where we see some of the island's most dramatic scenery. We also explore rugged peaks, olive orchards, vineyards, remote bays and quaint fishing villages that feature the historic 'Genoese' towers.

21/09/2017 Bastia – Nice (BD)

After breakfast we leave Bastia by ferry for Nice and the French mainland.

Depart Bastia 11.00

Arrive Nice 18.15

On arrival on the French mainland we will transfer by coach to our hotel.

Beau Rivage Hotel

Nice

22/09/2017 Nice – Dubai (B)

This morning is at leisure in Nice. Early afternoon we transfer to the airport for our flight to Dubai.

Depart Nice Emirates EK 78, 15.55

23/09/2017 Dubai – Australia

Arrive Dubai 00.10

In Dubai we connect with the flight to our chosen Australian city.

JEWELS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

Why is the Tour Fitness Level rated as 'Active'?

This tour involves a reasonable amount of walking, climbing steps and stairs and getting on and off boats and ferries. Some of the towns on the islands are perched on hills and clifftops with narrow cobbled streets and steps, and some of the terrain at the historic sites can be uneven.

How long is the flight from Australia to Malta?

Total flying time to Dubai is between 11 and 15 hours, depending on your Australian capital city of departure. Flight time from Dubai to Malta is 5 hours.

If I travel alone, do I have to pay the single supplement?

If you do not want to share a hotel room with another person in the group, you will have to pay the single supplement. However, if you are willing to share we will team you up with another passenger of the same sex and similar age in the hotels. If a match-up is not possible, we will upgrade you at our expense.

What are the average temperatures along the route?

The weather in the Mediterranean is very pleasant in September. Temperatures generally range from a low of 15 to a high of 28.

What is the best currency to take on this journey?

The best currency is Euros, in small denominations. i.e. 100s, 50s, 20s, 10s.

How much spending money do I need for the entire trip?

Because almost everything is included, we would suggest an amount of 800 Euros per person as being ample for the whole 25-day journey.

Are credit cards acceptable?

Credit cards are widely accepted throughout the journey and ATMs are available along the entire route. However it is not recommended to rely on these as your main source of funds.

Do I need vaccinations for this journey?

No vaccinations are mandatory on this route but we would recommend you seek advice from your doctor. Tetanus should certainly be up to date.

Can I extend my stay in Nice at the end of the tour?

Yes, it is possible to stay on in Nice after the group departs. Our consultants will be happy to make the arrangements for you. If you wish to take up this option, all arrangements must be confirmed before leaving Australia.

Do I need any visas for this tour?

No, visas are not required on this tour.

A lot of companies have many expensive optional extras on their tours. Do you?

We don't believe in a lot of expensive 'optional tours'. Our itineraries are designed to make the best possible use of time and to include all the must-see sights, plus additional surprises. Therefore practically everything is included in the tour cost.

Is the water safe to drink en-route and what is the general standard of hygiene?

We err on the side of caution on all of our tours and advise travellers to drink only bottled water. This is easy to obtain everywhere. The standard of hygiene is high along the entire route.

What is the standard of the hotels?

The hotels are generally 4-star quality, comfortable, clean and all with en-suites.

Are there internet facilities en-route?

Most of the hotels we use have internet facilities. There are also many internet cafes in the near vicinity of the hotels offering even cheaper access.

Do mobile telephones work?

Telstra and Optus mobiles work throughout the entire journey. You will need to ensure you have global roaming. Contact your service provider for further details.

How much should we tip the guides and porters?

There is no need to tip guides or porters as all tips and gratuities are included in the tour cost.