Dear Friends of Meredith Travel,

I just spent a most enjoyable morning. In preparation for writing this letter about our September 25-October 7, 2018, tour of Sicily, I reviewed my photographs from the trip I made there this past summer. I simply can’t wait to go back! Betty describes southern Italy as Italy to the 3rd power—older, grander, and more richly complex. Sicily, we agree, is Italy to the 10th power, at least.

It was, by far, the most exotic version of our favorite country that I have yet to encounter, made so by its location and history, which includes a dizzying mix of cultures. It was Greek far longer than it has been Italian. It was Arab. Norman. Swabian. Aragonese. Austrian. Even Bourbon French! All left their mark. And finally, and relatively recently (1860), the Risorgimento fought it into being part of unified Italy.

The food, the architecture, and customs can best be understood by experiencing them all firsthand, so without further ado, I would like to summarize our itinerary for you. Join me now as we vicariously tour Sicily together.

**Day 1: Sept. 25 (Tues) Departure.** We depart the U.S. to arrive the next day in Palermo, the capital of the autonomous region of Sicily.

**Day 2: Sept. 26 (Wed) Palermo.** Palermo is a city of 700,000, by far the largest on the island, with an ancient historic city center with structures representing the panorama of its past. After a quick driving tour to orient us to the city, we stop, drop bags at the hotel, and head out to see perhaps the most perfect medieval buildings in the world, the Norman Palace and Palatine Chapel, the latter known for its extraordinary mosaics designed in such a way that the aesthetics of the Arab, Jewish, and Norman artisans are all incorporated. Our welcome dinner this evening will be at a restaurant on the coast. Sicily is an island, after all, so we will never be far from the sea, with gorgeous views and the freshest seafood for those seafood lovers among us.

**Day 3: Sept. 27 (Thu) Palermo.** After guided sightseeing throughout the city, including a visit to the Cathedral, we will drive approximately 30 minutes inland and upland from the coast to the panoramic views found in Monreale, where the mosaics in the Norman cathedral will dazzle us. Then, for a change of pace, it’s off to the countryside to visit a cheesemaker and enjoy a dinner of local specialties and wine.

**Day 4: Sept. 28 (Fri) Palermo—Enna—Agrigento.** Our first stop in the Province of Enna is the Castello di Lombardia, whose six massive remaining Norman towers hint at what an amazing structure it must have been when it had 20. Then, for cultural contrast, we’ll visit an important Greek settlement, the excavations of the ancient city of Morgantina. Our final stop is Casale, with its ancient Roman Villa, a UNESCO World Heritage site. We end the day in Agrigento, a charming town with excellent small restaurants and shops.

**Day 5: Sept. 29 (Sat) Agrigento.** When you see the Valley of the Temples, site of a superb Greek settlement and ceremonial site, you will understand why it is the only historic stop on the itinerary for the day. Following in the footsteps of the Greeks is thirsty work, so stopping at a local winery for a tasting of area wines is the only logical thing to do following our tour.

**Day 6: Sept. 30 (Sun) Agrigento—Caltagirone—Ragusa—Syracusa.** Caltagirone, in the center of Sicily, is, as it stands today, relatively new compared to the ruins at Agrigento. What is ancient, however, is the rich ceramics tradition that goes back as long as people have inhabited the region. With a giant’s majolica tile-encrusted staircase of 142 steps at its center, and ceramic shops at every turn, this UNESCO World Heritage site is pottery paradise. After a lunch stop in Scicli, in the province of Ragusa, we arrive once more at the coast and the cosmopolitan city of Syracusa for the night.
Day 7: Oct. 1 (Mon) Syracusa. Excursion to Ortigia. Syracusa, yet another ancient Greek and then Roman city, still has ample evidence of its past, sometimes both at one site, like Neapolis, a UNESCO World Heritage site, where the 5th Century BC Greek Theatre is just down the street from the Roman Amphitheatre. Next, our “excursion” to Ortigia—which means we will simply cross the bridge that connects the mainland to this island. After strolling through the center of Ortigia, you may be tempted by the upscale shopping. My personal favorite is a little gallery, Fish House Art, featuring fish sculptures of every price made from imaginative combinations of materials.

Day 8: Oct. 2 (Tues) Syracusa. Excursion to Noto and Modica. Today’s excursions truly are trips out of town as we visit UNESCO World Heritage site, Noto, known for its refined 18th Century buildings, including a palace, which we will tour. Is Baroque not to your taste? Then how about chocolate? Modica, our next stop, is another UNESCO site—have you gotten the idea that nearly everywhere we’re going has been declared of world-wide cultural significance?

Day 9: Oct. 3 (Wed) Syracusa—Taormina. When we journey from Syracusa to Taormina, it will be for the spectacular view of the sea, Greek ruins, and Mount Etna.

Day 10: Oct. 4 (Thu) Taormina. Excursion to Mount Etna. After a rather relaxed morning enjoying the streets of beautiful Taormina, we will travel through the rich volcanic-enriched agricultural countryside to Mount Etna, two and a half times taller than Mt. Vesuviu. Obviously, if it’s too active, we will view it from greater distance!

Day 11: Oct. 5 (Fri) Taormina—Catania. Today we visit Catania, famous for its Baroque architecture and Roman Amphitheatre, both of which have survived despite Etna’s spluttering. After seeing the doors that guarded St. Agatha’s treasure and visiting a fort built by the Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick II, you have free time to explore the famous fish market and quaint shops. Be sure to save room for dinner tonight featuring Sicilian specialties and wine. A surprise local dessert awaits you!

Day 12: Oct. 6 (Sat) Catania—Cefalu—Palermo. Midway between Catania and Palermo is lovely Cefalu, still a fishing village, but also a tourist destination with popular public beaches. The Cefalu Duomo is decorated with 12th century Byzantine mosaics. After lunch—yes!—seafood will be available—we continue on to Palermo for our last night.

Day 13: Oct. 7 (Sun) Palermo, departure for US. We’ll say farewell to Sicily, but not each other, as we will surely meet—and perhaps travel together—again.

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