

Gardens & Villas of Sicily

9 – 17 September 2024

From £2,195 per person *(based on min 20 paying guests)*

Itinerary

Day 1 – Monday 9 September 2024

Flights under own arrangement.

On arrival in Catania, we shall be met by our local coach and transfer to our hotel in **Taormina** area. The remainder of the day will be free to relax.

A welcome drink, followed by dinner will be served this evening.

Day 2 – Tuesday 10 September 2024

Following breakfast we visit **Villa Trinità**, an elegant garden born from lava, which thrives on the slopes of Etna. Its design features both native and exotic species – picture gangly cacti peering above vibrant citrus trees.

After lunch here (included), we travel to the volcano proper, in an afternoon excursion to **Mount Etna**, Europe's highest active volcano and greatest natural wonder, where we will venture as far as we can take our coach up the winding roads. Depending on the weather we should reach 2000 metres (7000ft.) where we will see the 'Silvestri' craters dating from 1986, and some of the latest lava flows from 2002/2003, in an amazing lunar landscape of black rock and steam. The views across the island are truly breathtaking, but please remember that Etna is a highly active volcano so things may have changed by the time this holiday happens!

We will later stop to enjoy some **wine-tasting** at one of the nearby local wineries.

Dinner will be served in the evening.

Day 3 – Wednesday 11 September 2024

Following breakfast, today is ours to explore Taormina and its many highlights. We begin with a trip to the private garden of **Casa Cuseni**, which boasts spectacular views across the city and the sea. Created by Robert Kitson, a British painter of the early 20th century, its house and exuberant plantings demonstrate clear links with the Arts and Crafts movement.



Following this is a guided walking tour of old Taormina, featuring the **Greco-Roman ruins**, winding streets, and a host of medieval architecture. It's easy to see why the town is Sicily's most popular tourist destination. We will enjoy some free time in Taormina to explore at leisure and make use of the lunch facilities (not included).

Dinner will be served back at the hotel in the evening.

Day 4 – Thursday 12 September 2024

This morning following breakfast we will visit two **private gardens**. Our first garden is situated in the small village of Valverde and is owned by Lady Giulia, the secretary of Etna Garden Club of Catania. The garden began taking shape in the nineties with the help of the unforgettable Sicilian landscapist Ettore Paternò del Toscano (1919-2009). Today you can see Cycas, Iris, Aloe, Euphorbia, Lantana on the walls and among the trees you will find bitter oranges and tangerines. We will also enjoy a lunch here (included).

Our next visit is to Lady Valeria's garden, the founder of Catania Garden Club. The garden is approx. 2 hectares one of which is full of orange and olive crops, the rest is an informal ornamental garden with a good collection of Mediterranean plants some of which are very rare. (Refreshments included).

We return to the hotel in time for dinner.

Day 5 – Friday 13 September 2024

We check out of our hotel this morning and head south, stopping for a visit to the **gardens of Princess Maria Carla Borghese**, which were created out of barren ground almost fifty years ago. Evocative scents of jasmine and rose intermingle with the fragrance of a Roman-style stone pine avenue.

Following lunch some free time in local town for lunch (not included), we continue to **San Giuliano** estate in Villasmundo, where we will enjoy getting an insight into Sicilian gardening. As part of our tour, we observe the estate's traditional Arabic irrigation channels in action, as well as the 15th century farmhouse's distinctive "gardenette".



We then continue to our accommodation in **Ragusa**.

Dinner is served in the evening.

Day 6 – Saturday 14 September 2024

This morning is free to enjoy **Ragusa** at your own leisure. You may wish to discover the old town which is home to a wide array of Baroque architecture, including several stunning palaces and churches or you may prefer to have a wander around the tranquil public garden **Giardini Iblei** which offer fantastic views. (Entrances not included).



We later depart for **Gli AROMI** where on arrival we discover an extensive collection of herbs and spices with a multisensory tour. We will explore varieties both native to Sicily and imported to the island by the garden's passionate owners – one of whom will be our highly informative guide. Lunch here makes for today's biggest highlight: a home-made feast prepared with an abundance of fresh herbs and devotion (included).

Following this we will visit a **private garden** in Modica.

We return to our hotel, where dinner is served in the evening.

Day 7 – Sunday 15 September 2024

This morning, we check out of our Ragusa hotel and travel to one of the truly spectacular wonders of the ancient world the “**Valley of the Temples**”, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the greatest legacies of ancient Greece. There are nine temples altogether and they dominate the landscape for miles giving a view, it is said, fit only for the gods. The most famous temple, Concordia, is not unlike the great Parthenon in Athens with its Doric columns and it is practically intact, apart from its missing roof - not bad for a building that was constructed around 582 B.C. We will have a good look around the site and visit the excellent museum.



Following our visit, we head to our hotel in Palermo where dinner is served in the evening.

Day 8 – Monday 16 September 2024

This morning following breakfast we visit the crowning glory of **Monreale village**: it's amazing Cathedral and Abbey, complete with 70,000 square feet of mosaics in gold leaf and colourful glass. This astounding display echoes the opulence of the Alhambra, and is a sight not to be missed.



We return to Palermo which was once known as Sicily's "garden city" to visit the local **Botanical Gardens**, one of the oldest and most significant centres of plant research in the Mediterranean. The public garden of Villa Giulia sits next door, its beautiful trees and flowers a lasting testament to the 18th century viceroy's wife after whom it was named.

We end the day, and our trip, on a high, with a full guided tour of Palermo that features the impressive **Norman Palace**, an architectural gem encapsulating both Norman and Arabic influences and the **Cattedrale di Palermo**.



We return to the hotel, where dinner is served in the evening.

Day 9 – Tuesday 17 September 2024

This morning, after breakfast, we check out of the hotel. At an agreed time, we travel to Palermo airport where the group will make their onward connections or join the post tour extension tour to Rome (please see further details below).

Included in the price

- 8 nights' dinner, bed and breakfast - 4 nights at the 4-star Hotel Naxos Beach Sicilia; 2 nights at the 4-star Hotel Poggio del Sole, Ragusa and 2 nights at the 4-star Hotel Piazza Borsa in Palermo (all hotels or similar). All rooms have private facilities
- Three lunches
- Comfortable coaching in Sicily
- Visits to the Villa Trinità, Mount Etna, Casa Cuseni, two private gardens near Catania, San Giuliano, Gli AROMI, Princess Maria Carla Borghese gardens, a private garden in Modica and Palermo Botanic Gardens
- Guided walking tour of Taormina included entrance to the Greek Theatre; visit to Monreale Village including Cathedral and Abbey; guided tour of Palermo including Norman Palace and Cattedrale di Palermo
- Services of Trevor Edwards as Brightwater Holidays Tour Manager

Not included (per person)

- Single room supplement £595.00
All lunches except the 3 included above
Gratuities for hotel and restaurant service
Air travel and Personal expenses

Please note a good degree of mobility is required for the tour due to some of the places we are visiting having many steps to climb and distances to walk.