

Greetings Sicily Travelers!

This letter will provide some insight into what to pack, what you'll experience on the tour, and little things you should know to enhance your travel to Sicily and Malta.

There's a lot of information here over a wide range of topics. Please read it over as soon as you can.

Airport Check in

Please check in for your flight at least 2 hours prior to flight time. I always recommend an early check in for a trip like this. You'll need to have your passport and confirmation/ticket number for your flight. It's a good time now to verify that your passport has 3 months validity left after your return home. If not, your passport must be renewed.

Remember your passport

Make a couple of photocopies to place in your baggage and another with a friend at home. If lost or stolen, passports are much easier to replace if you have a facsimile copy. Take a picture of the signature page as a backup.

No visas are required for Italy (for US or Canadian Citizens), but your passport must have at least 6 months validity remaining from the date you depart Italy for home.

The Eu has plans to impose a visa for American travelers to Europe. This was to be in effect in 2024 but has been pushed back because of logistical problems. **Check your passport expiration date today.**

Maps

I've scanned a series of maps and attached them to this letter. Cities are Taormina, Siracusa, Agrigento, Palermo, and Valletta.

24-hour clock

Get used to using the 24-hour clock. Most of Europe works this way. 11:30 pm is noted as 23:30. This is especially important when catching any sort of scheduled transportation. Add 12 to PM times to come up with the correct number. Two PM becomes 14:00. Five AM is 05:00.

Weather possibilities

We'll see a range of temperatures on this itinerary. Average temperatures in Taormina and Palermo range from 50 for a low to 67 for a high. Historically, there is a less than 20% chance of rain. Valletta is not much different than Sicily in terms of historical weather. Wind seems to

be a common thing in both places. I would check weather.com or Accuweather.com before packing

Suggested Dress

There is no established dress code for this tour. It's entirely up to you. There are some tasting rooms and restaurants along the route that would expect something a bit dressier than flipflops and cut-offs. Collared shirts, slacks or shorts, sundresses are my suggestions. There is absolutely no reason to pack any formal wear. Be comfortable.

Morning tours may be a bit chilly, with warming as the day goes on. We may also experience some precipitation along the way. Layer up in the morning if it's chilly. Remove layers as the day progresses.

Be certain to bring comfortable walking shoes. Break them in before the trip. Cobble streets and uneven surfaces are the order of the day.

We've got daylight hours to spare during our time in Sicily and Malta with sunrise a little after 6:18 AM and sunset occurring a little before 6:00 PM.

Dining on our tour

We're dining out 8 nights of the tour. Generally, restaurants require that I preselect an entrée or two for the group. I will need to know about allergies, sensitivities, and dislikes in that order. If you are vegan, vegetarian, pescatarian, or carnivorous, I need to know. I won't plan on any entrée that's too exotic. Rest assured, internal organs are not on my menu.

The staff at the villa and restaurants will be made aware of these issues. The servers will be searching for the diners that have special dietary needs. Help them (and me) out by identifying yourself when we gather to dine.

Italiano?

Italian is one of the more fun European languages to test. It becomes easier with each glass of Chianti. Our guide, of course, speaks English and we're traveling to some heavily touristed parts of the country where most of our encounters will be in English. Still, since we're encountering native-speaking Italians during the week, it never hurts to dip your toes into the culture a bit by trying the local tongue.

Hello – Ciao

Good evening – Buonasera

Please – Per favore

You're welcome – Prego

Pardon me – Scusami

Italian Phrases for Tourists

Good morning – Buongiorno

Goodbye – Arrivederci or Addio

Thank you – Grazie

Yes/no – Si/no

I don't speak Italian – Non parlo italiano

I'm sorry – Mi dispiace

Help! – Aiuto!

I love Italy! – Io amo l'Italia!

I'm allergic to ____ – Sono allergico a ____.

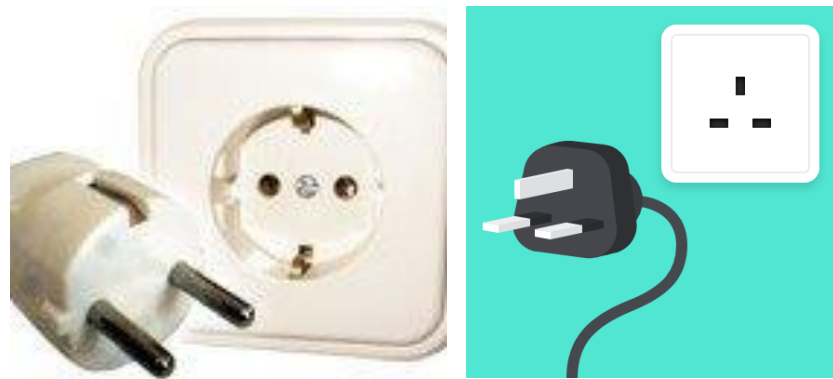
Red/white wine please – Vino/bianco rosso per favore

Maltese is a different language entirely. I have included a short list of greetings and phrases for you to get your feet wet.

Maltese Phrase	Phonetic Pronunciation	English Meaning
Iva	Ee-va	Yes
Le	Lay	No
Merħba	Mer-heba	Welcome
Hello	Hello	Hello
Bongu	Bon-ju	Good morning
Kif int?	Kiff int	How are you?
Jien tajjeb grazzi (M)	Yee-in tai-yeb, grats-ee	I'm fine, thank you
Jiena tajba grazzi (F)	Yee-ina tai-ba, grats-ee	I'm fine, thank you.
X'jismek?	Shee-yis-mek	What is your name?
Jisimni...	Yis-im-nee	My name is...
Għandi pjaċir	Aan-dee pya-cheer	Nice to meet you
Jekk jogħġbok	Yek yoh-jbok	Please
Grazzi ħafna	Grats-ee hawf-na	Thank you very much
Mhux problema	Mush prob-lay-muh	No problem (you're welcome)
Ma nifhimx	Maa ni-fimsh	I don't understand
Titkellem bl-Ingiliz	Tit-kell-em blin-gleez	Do you speak English?
Ċaw	Chaw	Goodbye (informal)
Saħħa!	Sah-ha	Cheers!

Electrical plugs and adaptors

You will need an adaptor and convertor for most US manufactured electrical devices that you take. The convertor changes the voltage, and adaptor allows you to plug it in. US Voltage is 110-120, and Europe runs on 220-240 volts. Battery chargers, curling irons, hair dryers are among these items. You can buy adapter/convertor kits at most drug stores. They come with many adaptors. There is a wide range of plug types. You should bring your plugs identified as “southern Europe” or C plugs. That’s for Sicily. Malta, since it spent so long under British Rule, you’ll need the three-pronged (type G) plug.



Your computer and/or smart phone, if you bring one, should have already come equipped with a transformer/convertor in the cord. Check the voltage requirements on the transformer portion of the power cord. If it comes with a transformer in the cord, you will just need a plug adapter, not a current convertor.

Adaptors/convertors are available at travel stores, Target, Amazon, etc.

Telephones

Call your provider to see what they recommend for phone coverage overseas. Each year it seems that US carriers become more competitive with coverage plans for Europe.

If your current phone isn’t equipped to work in Europe, one of the most affordable options is to buy a simple phone over there with pre-purchased minutes. There are many local phone stores in Europe that will sell inexpensive phones with preloaded minutes if you need to have the means to call home. An inexpensive smartphone preloaded with 300 minutes will probably cost you less than \$100.

Whatsapp

This is the app most widely used to communicate in Europe and elsewhere. It’s sponsored by Meta (Face Book) and is free. It allows you to text for free (wifi) and to make calls the same way, using the app. The calls can be sketchy in terms of quality. It uses a VOIP technology so that you sometimes get some echo.

I would like you all to download this app if you're not already using it. Send a text to me (from the app) at 425 417 3322 (with your name, please) so that I can add you to the Tuscany Whatsapp group. The group will be called Sicily24.

Any changes to schedule during the week will be announced and posted to the whatsapp group. It's a great tool for to get quick information to you.

Currency

The Euro has been the official currency in Italy since 1999. In January 2021 it took \$1.22 USD to buy 1 Euro. In October 2022, the Euro was on par with the dollar. As of today (3/19/24), it will take about \$1.08 to buy a Euro.

Bear in mind that these are the rates at which banks buy from other banks. The Dollar moves up and down a few pegs in a week's time, but has been mostly stable the past month or so.

Spending overseas

The ATM or Bancomat is the best way to obtain cash in Italy. They are easy to find along the route. Plan on a trip to the ATM every other day to withdraw Euro. You get the best exchange rate and won't have to worry about whether a vendor will accept a credit card.

Credit cards give you a fairly good exchange rate and most card offer consumer protection on your purchase. You also have a record of your purchase. Some bank cards charge 1-2% for purchases made in foreign currency, which offsets the beneficial rate somewhat. Chase Bank and a few others offer cards that do not charge the foreign exchange fee. Check with your bank to see about foreign currency fees. Make sure you keep your receipts.

I have found that Visa cards seem to have the widest acceptance, followed by Mastercard. It is sometimes difficult to get a vendor to accept American Express, perhaps because of their fee structure. Most smaller shops will not want to accept your card. They get hit with fees that make cash a much more attractive alternative for them.

Chip and pin cards have become the standard for most European card processing. This works just like the ATM system in that you enter a 4-digit PIN to complete your transaction. This is the system that Europe has been converting to and that the US has been somewhat slow to adopt. The USA has opted for the "chip and sign" program which most vendors across Europe are familiar with. I've found that the chip and sign cards most widely offered by banks in the USA have been perfectly adequate in my overseas travels.

The only place that a non-pin card poses a problem is with automated machines such as highway toll plazas or rail ticket machines. These are virtually impossible to use without a pin.

Bringing US Currency and hoping to exchange notes is a mistake. Banks keep shorter hours. Some don't offer foreign exchange, and many others won't like the condition of the notes you want to change. It certainly couldn't hurt to bring some US Dollars (new bills, \$50 or \$100 denomination) to use as a back up in case your card gets compromised or your banks security department locks it down.

You should be able to order some Euros from your bank if you want to arrive there with some (though really not necessary). There is usually a fee and you have to allow time for your bank to secure the currency. It's easiest just to hit the ATM at the airport or the nearest one to your destination. At each ATM Stop, get enough cash to last you for a couple days. Please note that airport and rail station ATM machines charge a higher fee. The last note related to ATMs is to use one that's associated with a bank. The "stand-alone" machines can charge more.

Traveler's checks are a thing of the past. They are a distant third to Cash (ATM), followed by credit card.

It used to be that your bank wanted to you advise them regarding overseas destinations and dates. Their loss management departments now find it easier to simply shut down your account at the first sign of irregularity than to manage individual travelers. Chase Bank won't even take the information online or over the phone. Be aware that your credit card may be suspended with overseas use. It generally takes a call to your bank to rectify the problem. You should be sure to get the toll-free international number for your bank in the event of an over-reaching security algorithm at your bank.

You should still make an attempt to contact your bank with your schedule and dates. Some banks allow you to make these notifications online. Otherwise get in touch with the customer service section of your bank.

Another Note: I have a wallet that is **RFID protected**. Some credit and debit cards can be read remotely using a portable reader. Add a level of protection by purchasing RFID sleeves for your cards. You can also find RFID wallets online.

Packing your bags

There are a few excellent websites dedicated to the art of packing for a trip. I have reproduced some of that information here, but you may want to visit some of these sites yourself. The links are www.oratory.com/travel, and <https://happytowander.com/suitcase->

[packing-tips/](#). Please do what you can to reduce the size of your bag and remember that laundry is available at the villa.

Make sure you have a bag with wheels. Don't take too much. Leave some room for the wine you'll be taking home.

You are allowed 23kg or about 50 pounds of weight for your overseas flight. However, the domestic flight that we take from Trapani to Valletta limits your bag to 20kg or about 44 pounds. Keep that in mind when you're thinking about that extra pair of shoes.

Laundry

A few of our hotels offer laundry services for a fee. Give them 24 hours to have your items cleaned and returned to you. The NH Hotel in Palermo will have clothes cleaned and back to you by 5:00 PM, provided they are dropped at the desk by 10:00 AM. The Grand Ortigia in Siracusa is the same. The Taormina has an outside laundry service that operates Monday-Friday.

Security/Safety

There is very little violent crime toward tourists in Italy. There is, however, a great deal of pickpocketing and scams in which tourists are a prime target.

Be particularly aware of your belongings and surroundings in crowded places. Markets, churches, restaurants are places where a lack of attention can lead to a snag in your holiday fun.

Take a photo of your passport with your phone. It's also a good idea to photocopy the data page and zip it into a suitcase pocket. Leave a copy with a friend or relative that is able to fax or email that copy should you need it. It's much easier to replace a lost or stolen passport if you have a facsimile to present.

Rick Steves and people that have used them, swear by a money belt. I've always found them to be somewhat uncomfortable, but you may want to give it a try. Please! No wallets in back pockets! Purses and backpacks should always be zipped closed and held in front of you in crowded situations. See the section on RFID protection under Banking.

Buddy up! If you're going out, don't go alone. There is safety in numbers.

Suggested Gratuities

You do not typically tip at restaurants in Italy. There is typically an added service fee on the bill of 1-3 euros.

Taxis are generally offered an extra 1-2 euro in the city. If you get help with your bags and you have an exceptional driver, then 5% is a nice addition.

Hotel porters-generally 1 € per bag.

Our guides are compensated for their time, but work hard for a little extra gratuity at the end of the week. If you enjoyed the service provided by our resident guide and driver, show your appreciation. Guidelines are €3-€5 per person, per day for the guides, and €2-€3 per person, per day for the driver. I'll pass an envelope close to the end of the tour for contributions.

Traveler Name list

I don't usually send guest name lists in advance of travel. When we all get set up on whatsapp, you'll have names and contact details for each traveler. You can leave the contact group after the tour.

Your itinerary is posted separately on another PDF.

Cheers!

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