

TIPS AND TIDBITS

A fact sheet about your

Sicily: Jewel of the Mediterranean Adventure

Walking Adventures International plans and guides walking adventures that combine international travel with walking. Our itineraries blend historic, cultural, and scenic highlights of the regions we're traveling through with walks in the area. Our trips are fast-paced; they are designed as overview tours to expose travelers to as much of the region's significant highlights as we can manage, and still maintain a reasonable daily schedule. Even though most walkers find it easy and natural to enjoy our style of travel, we want to ensure that we've afforded every opportunity for travelers to know what to expect, in advance! Listed below are a series of questions and answers to help you develop accurate expectations of this Adventure and make plans to maximize your enjoyment. Please feel free to call us with any additional questions you have.

Questions & Answers

Q: Do you have more detailed information than is available in the Adventure brochure?

- A: About four weeks before departure, a final packet will be mailed to each participant. This packet will include:
- * Hotel listing (including address and phone information of all hotels)
 - * Traveler List
 - * Daily schedule
 - * Adventure t-shirt & nametag
 - * Adventure map
 - * Reusable luggage tags for first-time travelers

Q: Do I need a passport, visa, or shots?

A: **The only thing needed to enter the regions we'll be traveling through is a valid passport. Be advised that Italy requires that your passport be valid for at least three months beyond the time of your visit and have at least 1 empty page. Be sure that your passport meets this requirement.**

Passports can usually be obtained by applying at your town's main post office. They normally take six weeks to process, but may take longer now due to new passport regulations over travel between Canada and Mexico. No visa's are required and no shots are recommended.

IMPORTANT: Please make a copy of your passport and birth certificate and keep them in your luggage separate from where you keep your passport. In case your passport gets lost, having these copies really speeds up the replacement process.

Q: Do you have any suggestions to help with flights to Italy?

A: **We have an arrangement with Debbi Custer, a travel agent who is familiar with the Sicily Adventure. Debbi would be happy to help you make your flight arrangements. She has all of the details for this travel program and would be happy to help you find the best schedule and fare from your hometown into Rome and home from Palermo (or roundtrip to Palermo if participating in the main tour only).**

Other options include using your own travel agent, or AAA if you are a member. If you have access to the Internet, we've discovered several web sites that may be

helpful in finding the best fares. To start your planning, www.travelocity.com is a good site on which to find flights that are available on the days of travel. For the best fares, we've found it's better to go to the web site of the specific airline serving your home and destination. Often you can leave your e-mail address, and they'll contact you when they have specials flying to cities that interest you most. There are also sites that offer tour planning services and claim to find all the sales and specials. Sites to check out include:

Airline sites:

www.continental.com
www.southwest.com
www.united.com
www.aa.com (American)
www.alaskaair.com
www.usairways.com
www.delta.com

Planning sites:

www.kayak.com
www.travelocity.com
www.expedia.com
www.orbitz.com
www.onetravel.com
www.bestfares.com
www.priceline.com
www.qix.com

MERITS OF DEPARTING EARLY: We encourage you to consider departing for Italy a day early (arriving Rome on April 17 for the pre-tour or Palermo on April 21 for the main tour). **Airline on-time reliability has been questionable at best over the past several months.** Starting a trip a day late and without luggage is not the kind of "Adventure" we are promoting. Departing one day early 1) gives you a hedge against missed connections—more time to get to Italy, 2) gives any lost luggage issues an extra day to be resolved before we depart for our next hotel, and 3) gives your system an extra day to recover from jet lag before we begin our action-packed schedule! WAI can help you book the extra night in Rome or Palermo if you give us advance notice.

A word (or two) on jet lag: Much has been theorized about the best way to fight jet lag. One small booklet we've added to our library is *Jet Smart* by Diana Fairechild. An oversimplified summary of her book would suggest that you:

1. eat as little as possible while in transit and eat high carbohydrate foods if you must eat,
2. get up and walk around the plane when you can,
3. do isometric exercises (flex and relax your muscles) occasionally,
4. adjust your sleep schedule to the local time as soon as possible (we'll help you with that).

NOTE: Some information is generally true for most of our Adventures. Text in bold represents information that is specific to this Adventure only.

We particularly recommend no.'s 2 and 3. Over the years, we've had several travelers who have experienced circulation problems during the tour after long flights.

Q: What type of hotels will we be in?

A: We use good quality, superior tourist-class accommodations. In Europe, double rooms generally have two twin beds placed side by side; double or queen-sized beds are generally not available. In addition, single rooms are generally smaller than double rooms. The single supplement entitles single travelers to their own room but not to a double-sized room.

Though we attempt to work with hotels in good locations, it's not always possible to predict how quiet a given hotel will be. European hotels often have lively restaurants and/or bars which provide a good percentage of their income. If you're a light sleeper, we recommend a supply of earplugs to help you get a full night's sleep in those situations.

When making reservations, we request non-smoking rooms. Because the non-smoking mentality is still catching on in Europe, non-smoking rooms are often not available, but due to high standards of cleanliness, we have seldom had complaints in this regard from prior travelers.

Some of our hotels are old world vintage. As a result, it is not uncommon for rooms within the same hotel to differ widely in spaciousness, décor, and view. It is not practical or even possible for us to anticipate these differences and fairly assign rooms throughout the tour. Room assignment is entirely at the discretion of the hotels, so we can take neither the credit for a great room you were assigned nor the blame for the mediocre room you received on the night your neighbors have more interesting rooms. Hopefully, things will balance themselves and you will enjoy the variety of hotels we have selected.

Q: What are walks like in Italy?

A: **A few walks will be guided events, with a representative from the local club to walk with us. Most of the walks were planned by your WAI guide and will be led by your WAI guide and a professional local guide. Several walks will be less than 10 kilometers (6.2 miles), or will be done in two parts. For a standard 10 km walk, we try to allow a minimum of three hours, but timing depends upon the group and other activities for the day. We will do our utmost to ensure that you do not feel rushed. In order to feel comfortable with our pace, however, we recommend that travelers be able to walk a fairly level 10 km walk in 2½ hours or less.**

Walk themes will highlight the scenery and historic sites of the regions we are visiting. In some cases, information will be given verbally during the walk by our local guide; in other cases, you'll be free to walk at your own pace.

Of course, none of the walks are mandatory and we encourage travelers to pace themselves. Take a day off or do a partial walk as necessary. Just let the guide know your needs, and we'll help you make adjustments.

Using the AVA's difficulty rating system of 1 to 5, with 1 representing flat, smooth walk routes and 5 representing difficult hikes, these walks fit mostly in the 1 to 2 range. Here is the description of ratings used by the AVA:

1. An easy walk on pavement or well-maintained trail with no significant hills. Probably suitable for wheelchairs and strollers.
2. A moderately easy walk, may be on pavement or on trails. No significant difficulty with hills. May not be suitable for wheelchairs and strollers.
3. A moderate walk in any setting with some difficult terrain, one or two substantial hills and/or steps. Strollers and wheelchairs questionable.
4. A more difficult walk. Most likely in a natural setting with poorly maintained paths and steeper or hilly inclines. Not likely to be wheelchair or stroller accessible. Participants with certain health problems should take caution.
5. A very difficult walk. All in rough fields or woods. Many steep hills or high altitude trails, or very rough uneven terrain, steep or unstable inclines. Not suitable for any person who is not in good health

If you are walking for IVV credit, you may use the same event and distance books in Europe that you use here in the States.

Carrying a water bottle on the walks is highly recommended. If you often use a walking stick at home, we would advise that you also make plans to have your walking stick with you in Italy.

Q: Will the walks be sanctioned volkswalks?

A: **We have requested sanctioning from our walking friends in Italy and expect to receive stamps for these walks. We look forward to reuniting with a friendly club outside of Rome with whom we have shared the trail on several past occasions, and meeting with new walking friends on the island of Sicily!**

Q: What is a volkswalk?

A: Volkssport is a club activity that began in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland in 1968. There are four primary activities: walking, biking, swimming, and cross country skiing. Walking is, by far, the most popular and well developed. A volkswalk is a steady walk through a scenic and/or historic area over a pre-marked route (usually 10 km, which is 6.2 miles). It is noncompetitive and aims to involve people of all ages. Everyone who participates is declared a WINNER! Presently, there are walks in all 50 states and more than 30 countries worldwide.

Q: What type of footwear should I bring?

A: Two pairs of walking shoes or boots are recommended. The first pair may get wet or muddy and need a day off. Plan to pack an extra pair of socks with your extra shoes in a plastic bag (good for wet gear), and have a spot for them right on the bus with you. The increase in the number of light-weight hiking boots is making them the preferred footwear for travelers. We do have a couple of walks on natural surfaces, and cobblestones are hard on feet protected only by tennis or walking shoes. We believe a quality pair of lightweight hiking boots is a good investment for a traveling walker and can even eliminate the need for a 2nd pair of walking shoes if waterproof.

Q: Is the water drinkable in the regions we're visiting? Are there any health precautions I should take?

A: Technically, water from the tap is safe to drink in all the places we'll be traveling, and we have not experienced any illness or ill effects during prior trips that can be tied to drinking water. However, it is also true that Europeans do not generally use tap water as a source of drinking water. And if a traveler is trying to give their system one less difference to adjust to, drinking bottled water is an easy way to accomplish this.

One of the realities of group travel is that we share a lot of things — including germs. As a result, cold nasties can quickly travel through the bus looking for weak immune systems to attack. There are several supplements and behaviors that can make a significant difference in your ability to resist these bugs and preserve a healthy Adventure, including the following:

- * Use Vitamin C, Echinacea, or grapefruit seed extract beginning a week before the tour and during the tour to boost your immune system (check with your doctor for possible allergies to Echinacea).
- * Maintain the use of a good multi-vitamin both before and during the tour.
- * Wash your hands thoroughly and frequently (carrying a waterless hand cleaner is highly recommended).
- * If/when you cough, cover your mouth as completely as possible to avoid the spread of germs in consideration of fellow travelers.
- * Avoid touching your face and rubbing your eyes.
- * Be sensitive to your health and particularly your need for rest. Guard against fatigue by monitoring your participation in tour activities and allowing yourself necessary "down time."

Prescriptions:

Though we have not had problems with prescription drugs at customs before, we recommend that you bring a note from your doctor verifying your need for any prescription drugs you will bring on the tour.

Q: How many people do you accept on a tour?

A: **Generally, we close the tour at no more than 30 people. Lately, our groups have been averaging 25 travelers, and this group is shaping up to be a bit smaller than average.**

Q: What is the average age of your groups?

A: Most of our travelers fall between 50 and 70 years of age. This seems to be the age bracket that has the time and means to travel. However, we always have travelers that fall outside that range, from the 20's up into the 80's. Walkers are characteristically great traveling companions — positive, cheerful, and appreciative of the opportunity to see the world.

Q: What is the split between men and women?

A: One of the realities of life is that there are more women on the planet than men. Another is that they tend to outlive their spouses. As a result, we do have more women on the trips than men. The percentage of women on the trip can run anywhere from 60 to 80%. We have quite a few couples, a lot of women traveling together or singly, and the occasional single male

traveler. We like to see this ratio as even as possible and are always looking for a few more good men!

Q: What if I don't have a roommate?

A: It's always best to register for the trip with your own roommate, but we do offer to help match travelers up with others needing roommates. We provide contact information for potential roommates and allow travelers to contact each other and make their own decisions.

Q: What will the motorcoach be like?

A: **We are committed to using quality buses and drivers. For a full-size group we use the standard European motorcoaches that carry 46 to 50 people. Due to our group size, we may be using a smaller coach, but plan to keep at least a few seats empty. We employ a seat rotation system to assure everyone equal time in the best seats and a chance to get acquainted with all their fellow travelers. Rest stops are spaced every 1½ to 2 hours; the toilet is therefore limited to emergency use as finding dumping stations is difficult to impossible.**

Q: How much money should I take along?

A: **The currency used in Italy is the EURO. The rate of exchange at the time of this printing is \$1.35 to 1 EURO.**

Italy is a modern country with modern banking systems and a wide network of ATM's (automatic teller machines). Credit and debit cards are widely accepted. Debit cards and ATM's have become the most practical way to manage cash needs when traveling in most parts of the world. This applies in Italy as well. Most banks have protections on lost and stolen cards that limit your losses to a nominal amount should your card be lost or stolen. Ask your bank about their policy.

If hesitant, consider AAA's (Automobile Association of America) credit/debit card designed for travelers. You can load the card with a specific amount of cash in advance, further limiting your losses should the card get lost or stolen. Log on to www.aaa.com/prepaidcards or call your local AAA branch for more information. We're coming out pretty strong in favor of using debit cards at ATM's. If you don't have one, consider getting one from your bank now. If you prefer not to use one, that's okay too; but you'll need to plan your cash needs more carefully and be willing to carry more cash on your person.

AAA is also a good source of foreign currency (cash). Other sources include your own bank, Thomas Cook, or internet outlets like www.travelex.com or www.oanda.com.

We do not recommend traveler's checks for this type of travel. Though they are sometimes available in foreign currencies from AAA or a bank, you can expect to pay significant fees for having them cashed. In addition, it is sometimes difficult to find a bank when you need to convert them, and you cannot count on using them like cash as you can in the USA.

For most travelers, the most practical formula for managing money needs when traveling is a combination of foreign currency (cash!) and credit or debit cards. We

therefore suggest that you buy at least some EUROS here at your bank (\$50 or \$100), get a money belt, and carry your money underneath your clothes. A *minimum* per person amount which should cover only your lunches and dinners not included, as well as beverages at included dinners is:

- * **220 Euros for Sicily only**
- * **300 Euros for Sicily and the Pompeii, Amalfi, & Capri Pre-tour**

Remember, this recommended amount is only the minimum, no-frills amount you would need if you intended to do no shopping. Many travelers take double or triple this amount.

Recommended Strategy: Obtain a starter amount of Euros here in the US (\$50 or \$100 worth). Then use your debit card en route to restock as the need arises. Take along about \$200 US in \$10's and \$20's as backup in case you can't find an ATM when needed and need to exchange dollars for Euros. **Make sure you contact your bank in advance to inform them that you will be in Europe and verify that your ATM card works there (most do).**

Alternative Strategy: If you just can't bring yourself to use an ATM, your situation will be a little more complicated. We suggest that you purchase all your Euros in the US before departure. Another option is to purchase a starter amount of Euros and be prepared to exchange currency at the airport in Rome or Palermo, but airport rates are normally less than favorable. **We do not recommend that you arrive in Europe with no Euros.**

In all cases, we strongly recommend that you use a money belt, and carry your foreign currency underneath your clothes.

Be sure to make photocopies of all the credit/debit cards you intend to take. These photocopies should, of course, be kept separate from the cards themselves.

If you are having trouble getting cooperation from your local bank, try Thomas Cook, AAA, or some of the new internet outlets (www.travellex.com). A last resort would be to buy some in the airport on the day of departure, but airport rates are usually less than favorable.

The rate is generally 2-3% less favorable for selling the foreign currency back to the bank when you get home than for buying it. All things being equal, it's better to spend the money overseas than to bring it home and exchange it back into dollars.

Another little tip about cash in Europe. Our European friends have taken the saying about "no free lunch" and applied it to public bathrooms. It's a good idea to keep a supply of spare change in the local currency on your person. Otherwise, you may find out the hard way that WC's (restrooms) often have an admission charge.

Q: What type of clothing is appropriate?

A: Europeans tend to dress more formally than Americans. Fortunately, tourists are given plenty of latitude in this area. While on tour, there is no need to feel obligated to dress like the locals; tourist attire is acceptable almost

universally in Europe. Most of the time, we are dressed in our walking clothes. You may wish to bring along a set of casual non-walking clothes for the odd occasion when you feel like dressing just a bit more formally. If you would like to look a little less like a tourist when out wandering on your own, we suggest that you wear long pants as opposed to shorts and something besides a t-shirt for a top. Also, dark shoes or sandals will be less conspicuous than white walking shoes. And it goes without saying that wearing patriotic clothing overseas is a luxury of the past. Be proudly, but inconspicuously American!

Weather:

Average low temperatures in the parts of Italy we are visiting are in the low to mid 50's. Average highs are in the upper 60's. Though rain is not a common occurrence, we are traveling during the late spring when weather can be variable, and compact rain gear is always recommended.

Other Important Information

SHOPPING:

Most European countries will charge you a value-added tax (VAT) on all purchases. Since foreign governments generally want to encourage tourism, most provide a way to get the tax refunded when you leave the country, provided the total purchase from a single merchant is greater than a predetermined amount (usually about \$75). It is necessary to ask for a Tax Free Cheque from the shop owner at the time of purchase. There are over 3,000 refund points throughout Europe where you can present the validated cheque, including some border crossings and most major airports. Some refund points require that the cheque be stamped by customs when you leave the country where the purchase was made, though rules on refunds seem to change each year. It is important for you to keep all receipts; and be prepared to show the receipts and the merchandise at the point of refund. If you spend a significant amount of money (over \$800), you may also need to show your receipts when you clear U.S. customs as you return home.

MEALS:

All breakfasts and most dinners are included in the tour price (except for the beverage for the evening meal). Since we are not always in a convenient location for extended lunch stops at noon, we suggest you maintain a supply of fruit and snacks as you have opportunities to visit grocery stores. Please understand that we are not encouraging you to take extra food from the breakfast buffet; this can damage our efforts to maintain good relations with our hotels.

CALLING/MAILING HOME:

Calling home from overseas can be expensive. It is usually less expensive to give a copy of our itinerary to your friends and relatives and have them call you. Travelers have also had good luck with pre-paid phone cards purchased here in the States or overseas; if you use these, remember to bring along the list of in-country toll-free access phone numbers issued with the card. BE ADVISED that hotel charges for use of the phone in your room can be expensive. You are likely to incur charges even when using a toll free phone card number.

LAUNDRY:

Europe generally doesn't use our self-serve laundromat concept. As a result, having laundry done is very costly. We recommend one of two approaches: 1) pack a few feet of clothes line and do your laundry in your room, or 2) pack tightly and bring enough essentials so that you don't need to do laundry until you return home.

Be advised that foreign hotels usually do not provide washcloths (the locals don't use 'em), so take your own if this is something you would miss.

ELECTRICITY:

Household current in Europe is 220 volts. Travel transformers for the current and adapters for the plugs will be necessary to convert the current for your shaver, hair dryers, etc. These can be obtained from most AAA offices or anywhere travel accessories are sold.

GRATUITIES:

Gratuities for meals and lodging are included in the cost of the tour. In addition, the tour price also includes the tip for the driver and any local guides that serve us.

LUGGAGE:

As you will notice in the General Tour Conditions, we request that you limit your luggage to one suitcase per person plus carry-on type luggage. We recommend that you pack a collapsible piece of hand luggage to relieve you of having to carry your main suitcase to your hotel room every night. In some cases, we may require that all luggage be removed from the bus at night for security purposes, or because we will be using a different coach the following day. But often you can pack your hand luggage for a following night and leave your suitcase in the storage compartment of the bus.

Hotels in Europe often have undersized elevators incapable of transporting no more than 2 undersized walkers with 2 undersized suitcases. Porterage is not provided, but we do have a system of getting everyone quickly to their room in such cases. Though we want to be certain it is clear that your luggage is your responsibility, we will not abandon you to a long set of stairs or a long line at the elevator.

Checking luggage at airports: Is it a good idea to check luggage through to your final destination to avoid all the hassles of herding your bags through the airport(s)? It all depends. On the return trip home, we almost always recommend checking through to your final destination. Even if the luggage doesn't arrive home when you do, at least you are home and have all the comforts therein. On the outbound trip, the answer is not clear cut. If you decide to check through to Rome or Palermo, consider these factors:

- 1) Beware of checking through if you have a layover within the USA/Canada en route to Rome or Palermo; the more layovers, the more chances of the luggage getting lost;
- 2) More red flags go up if your itinerary includes multiple airlines to Rome or Palermo;
- 3) It is NOT recommended to claim your bags during a stopover in a foreign airport en route to Rome or Palermo; you must check through to your final destination from the last USA/Canadian airport, and;
- 4) Pack a day or two of necessities in your carry-on if you decide to check through.

TRAVEL INSURANCE:

Walking Adventures International strongly recommends travel insurance. Many years of helping travelers deal with unexpected circumstances that require cancellation of their travel plans, or expensive special flight arrangements to return home have made us believers in the benefits of this form of insurance. WAI now offers Preferred Benefits™ through USI Travel Insurance Services as part of the Adventure registration process.

There are two primary reasons we recommend travel insurance:

- 1) trip cancellation coverage which reimburses travelers for the cost of the tour if they are unable to participate due to a "covered reason" (e.g. their illness or the that of a close family member) before or during a tour, and
- 2) medical expense and evacuation. Many medical insurance policies cover travelers overseas. Not many, however, will cover medical evacuation, which can be extremely expensive even for non life-threatening injuries which require first class or business class seats for a flight back to the USA.

Please call our office if you have questions on how to purchase travel insurance.

TRAVELER'S PERSPECTIVE:

As with most things in life, the benefit you receive from this experience will depend to a large degree on the frame of mind you have at the outset. If you've not traveled outside the U.S. before, here are a few things to be aware of:

- Though we attempt to eliminate it as much as possible, travel always contains an element of uncertainty. Being ready to adjust will enhance your travel experience.
- Hotels, food, and local customs and standards differ from country to country. This can be both uncomfortable and exciting, depending upon your perspective.
- Though we continue to look for ways to slow the pace of our Adventures, we still believe in providing a full day of travel opportunities for our travelers. On some days, we will spend a significant amount of time en route from one activity or location to another.
- Group travel, by its nature, involves relinquishing a certain degree of individual convenience. Though we continue to look for ways to add flexibility for the individual, much of the time we all need to be "*headed in the same direction.*"

We hope we've covered your questions. If not, feel free to contact us and we'll be glad to fill in the gaps. We look forward to walking Sicily with you!



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Adventure Checklist

Though by no means intended to be comprehensive, following is a list of things you should probably consider bringing with you on this walking adventure. We've left a few blank lines for you to add your own "necessities" as you think of them.

- airline tickets
- passport
- rain gear
- walking stick
- sun screen
- sense of adventure
- earplugs
- foreign currency
- clothing that can be layered
- two pairs of walking shoes (or boots)
- sunglasses
- sense of humor
- electrical transformer
- adapter for wall outlet
- camera (with extra batteries)
- extra film or storage cards for digital cameras
- travel binoculars
- road maps (to follow our progress)
- handi-wipes or waterless hand cleaner (for quick cleanup on bus or trail)
- highlighter for marking road/walking maps
- hat or visor
- volkssport walking credit books
- copy of passport & birth certificate
- photocopies of credit/debit cards
- mini-flashlight
- insect repellent
- WAI Walking Journal from prior trips
- swim suit (some hotels have swimming pools)
- NO knives, scissors, sharp objects in carry-ons at airports
- sheet protector for walk/map directions in rain
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