

Whittier College Alumni Tour, May 2025

Let's start by introducing ourselves. We are David Hunt, professor of philosophy, and Wendy Furman-Adams, professor of English. We both began teaching at Whittier College in 1981 and retired from full-time teaching a couple of years ago. Prof. Hunt, who taught Classical Philosophy at the College, is an alumnus of both the American Academy in Rome and the American School of Classical Studies in Athens—he would have been just as happy in archeology as in philosophy. Prof. Furman-Adams taught classes on the Bible, as well as Classical, Medieval and Renaissance literature; she did graduate work in Renaissance and Baroque Italian art, and her scholarship focuses on the intersections between art and literature. Most importantly, we're both experienced leaders of study abroad tours—approximately 500 Whittier alums (maybe you're one of them?) traveled with us to Italy and Greece as students! And we *love* Italy!!

So we're going to Italy on this tour. Want to know more? Keep reading.

WHERE WE'LL BE GOING AND WHAT WE'LL BE DOING

Why Italy? Of all the many answers that can be given to this question, here's the one we'd like to lead off with. The UN organization UNESCO maintains a list of sites around the world with a cultural or natural heritage "considered to be of outstanding value to humanity." Italy has more sites on the UNESCO World Heritage list than any other country in the world, and on this trip we'll be visiting as many as we can get to. If, like David, you like keeping checklists, a trip to Italy should allow you to check some very exciting boxes!



For this new alumni trip, we've decided to look beyond the usual suspects (Rome, Florence, Venice) and focus on a region of Italy that is fast becoming one of the hottest tourist destinations in Europe: Sicily. Here are just a few of the things we plan to do during this tour, highlighting sites and activities that few tours include:

- A walking tour of the Centro Storico (historic center) of Rome, from the Campo de' Fiori to the Capitoline Hill (with its magnificent view of the Roman Forum), followed by a Vespers service at the magnificent Santa Maria in Trastevere, dating from the 4th century. We'll be spending two nights in Rome before beginning our Sicily adventure. It's a Jubilee Year in 2025, Rome will be filled with pilgrims, and there will be an excited buzz in the air. It's our favorite city in the world, and we hope that the small taste we'll be able to provide you during our brief visit will encourage some of you to return and spend a few days there on your own at the end of the tour. If so, we're happy to offer suggestions! But now we're off to Sicily, where we'll be experiencing . . .



- Palermo, capital city of Sicily, a fascinating blend of every culture that has held sway there: Carthaginian, Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Arab, Norman, French, Spanish, and finally Italian.

- A day trip to Cefalu, a dramatic seaside town an hour from Palermo, where you can



wander the streets of the old city, sip an Aperol spritz in the piazza in front of the cathedral, hike up the dramatic La Rocca overlooking the town, or spend your afternoon on the beach, where the beach scenes for the second season of *White Lotus* were shot.

- The stunning Norman-Byzantine churches of Palermo, Monreale, and Cefalu.
- The Norman-Arab palace of La Zisa, used as a hunting lodge by the Norman king, William II.
- The Capuchin Crypt, the macabre repository of thousands of deceased Palermitan monks and ordinary citizens, including the corpse of the 2-year-old Rosalia Lombardo, “the world’s most beautiful mummy.”

- A performance of the Teatro di Pupi (puppet theater), inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list of intangible cultural practices.



- The Teatro Massimo, the largest opera house in Italy, used in the last scene of *Godfather III*. The 2025 schedule isn’t out yet, but when it is, we’ll try to organize an opera night for anyone who might be interested.
- The Valley of the Temples archeological park in Agrigento, the largest and best-preserved ensemble of ancient Greek architecture in the world.
- The Baroque towns of Ragusa, Modica (whose chocolate, unique in Europe, follows the Aztec method brought back from the New World), and Noto (another *White Lotus 2* location, famous for its gelato).

- The Villa Romana del Casale, a the 4th century AD, renowned for including one depicting female bikinis.



palatial Roman villa from its well-preserved mosaics, athletes wearing ancient

- Four nights in Syracuse, greatest city of the Classical Greek world, larger even than



Athens. It was Athens’ disastrous attempt to conquer Syracuse, an ally of Sparta, that hastened Athens’ defeat in the Peloponnesian War. Two centuries later Rome succeeded where Athens had failed, despite the ingenious defensive machines invented by Syracuse’s native son, Archimedes.

- A Sicilian cooking class with lunch and wine pairings.
- The Cathedral of Syracuse, on our favorite square in Sicily, was constructed in the 7th century AD, built into the ruins of a 6th-century BC Temple of Athena, converted to a mosque in the 9th century after the Arab conquest of Sicily, and converted back into a church by the Normans in the 11th century.



- An optional hike at Pantalica, a nature reserve with 5,000 Bronze Age tombs cut into the cliff.

- Two nights in the dramatic cliffside town of Taormina, topped by its Graeco-Roman theater, Ionian Sea. Domenico second \$2000 per



with views of Mt. Etna and the We *won't* be staying at the San Palace Hotel, the setting for the season of *White Lotus*, where it's night for the cheap rooms. But we *do* have reservations at the dazzling Eurostars Monte Tauro—check it out!

- An up-close and personal visit to Mt. Etna, with an ascent by cable car and 4x4 vehicle to the lava fields and steaming vents near the summit.
- Lunch at a winery on the slopes of Etna.

WHAT THE TOUR PRICE COVERS

The company and guidance of two Whittier College professors. We will be your guides in Rome, just as we've been for so many Whittier College students over the last 25 years. We will be with you on all itinerary activities, providing you with information (and stories!) about what you're seeing and experiencing; we'll also be happy to offer advice on restaurants and things you might want to do with your free time. In Sicily, we will share guiding duties with the local guide who will be with us from the beginning to the end of the Sicily tour.

Accommodations. All your accommodations during the tours are covered, including city taxes paid at check-out. We're especially excited about the hotels we've confirmed so far:

- During our 2 nights in Rome the group will be divided between the Albergo Smeraldo and the Hotel Ponte Sisto. (Alumni of our Rome tours will remember the Smeraldo, where we've stayed with students since 1998!) Both hotels are right in the historical center of Rome, a 5-minute walk from the Tiber River and the Campo de' Fiori, halfway between St. Peter's to the west and the Forum and Colosseum to the east. Location, location, location! For photos, click on <https://www.hotelpontesisto.it/en/gallery/> and <https://www.smeraldoroma.com/en/gallery/>.
- During our 4 nights in Syracuse, we'll be staying at the 5-star Grand Hotel Ortygia, with buffet breakfast on a terrace overlooking the harbor. The hotel is located on the island of Ortygia, just across the bridge to the mainland, in the historical heart of ancient

Syracuse, just a 5-minute walk from the Temple of Apollo, 10 minutes from the Piazza Duomo, and 15 minutes from the Fountain of Arethusa. Here are some photos: <https://www.booking.com/hotel/it/grand-ortigia.html?activeTab=photosGallery>.

- And in Taormina we've snagged the 4-star Eurostars Monte Tauro, which occupies a truly dramatic setting, spilling down the hillside toward the sea, as you can see in this photo gallery: <https://www.eurostarshotels.co.uk/eurostars-monte-tauro.html#Gallery>.

Meals. You will be responsible for most of your meals during the tour, with the exception of the following, which are included in the tour price:

- lavish buffet breakfasts every morning at our hotels
- six group meals, including welcome and farewell dinners in Rome and Taormina and two luncheons at Sicilian wineries

Transportation. The tour price covers all transportation costs during the tours.* This includes

- transfer by private bus from our Rome hotels to the airport, the flight from Rome to Palermo, Sicily, and transfer by private bus from the airport to our hotel in Palermo.
- air-conditioned private bus, with guide and driver, providing the main means of transport for our entire tour of Sicily
- transfer by private bus from our Taormina hotel to the airport in Catania

*The fine print:

The tour begins when you check in at your hotel in Rome on May 11. That means that you are responsible for your own flights to and from Rome. This is better than arranging a group flight and adding the cost to the tour price, for a number of reasons: group flights (as we found the one time we booked a group flight for a Whittier College travel course) aren't necessarily cheaper, and they don't work for people who are flying from multiple departure cities, want to extend their travel by flying over earlier or returning later, or would prefer to fly on a favored airline or alliance so they can use or collect frequent flyer miles. We're always happy to offer advice on flights that would connect well with the beginning and end of the tours.

The tour ends when you check out of our hotel in Taormina on May 24. That means that you are now responsible for your own transportation costs. The main reason for ending the tour at this point is again flexibility. Some people may wish to head home straightaway, but others may want to stay in Europe a while longer. Catania's is the largest airport in Sicily, and there are multiple flights every day to Rome and other destinations. Anyone wishing to return immediately to the U.S. can arrange an early flight out of Catania, arriving in Rome in time to connect with their flight home. But anyone who wants to stay away longer, perhaps returning to Rome for a few days or heading off to another destination, can take a later flight. Maybe some of you won't even be flying out on May 24, because you want to spend more time in Sicily! We're happy to offer travel advice for all these scenarios. As noted above, there will be a private bus, covered by your tour fee, making the one-hour trip from our Taormina hotel to the Catania airport on May 24, but it won't depart super early so that people have to miss breakfast! If you're leaving Sicily on the 24th and want to take advantage of the pre-paid airport bus, it's best to book an afternoon flight.

Admission fees. Admission fees for all the activities on the itinerary—museums, palaces, archeological sites, performances, etc.—are completely covered.

Gratuities. Gratuities paid on behalf of the group—for example, to bus drivers and hotel staff, or for tips at restaurants where we’re having a group meal—will be taken care of for you. The only time we’ll ask you to contribute is when we collect a special gratuity for the driver and guide at the end of the Sicily tour.

In sum, from the moment you check in to our hotel in Rome at the beginning of the tour, to the moment you’re dropped off at the airport in Catania, Sicily, at the end of the tour, the only things you’ll need to pay for, that aren’t already covered by the tour fee, are your lunches and dinners (with the exception of the group meals mentioned above), and a contribution to the gratuity for our guide and driver in Sicily. Souvenir purchases are on you!

If you have any questions at all about the information covered (or not covered) in this document, we encourage you to send those questions to your professor-guides, David Hunt (dhunt@whittier.edu) and Wendy Furman-Adams (wfurman@whittier.edu). We hope to see you in Italy!