

**SICILY & MALTA:
HISTORY, CULTURE & NATURE**
Aboard the Sea Cloud
MAY 2-11, 2017

MALTA PRE-TRIP*
APRIL 29-MAY 3, 2017

SICILY EXTENSION*
MAY 11-18, 2017

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***Information about the pre- and post-cruise extensions are available in a separate itinerary.**

Stationed at an ancient crossroads of Mediterranean civilization, lovely Sicily and Malta offer a marvelous travel experience. Beautiful scenery, vibrant cities, ancient ruins, and verdant pastoral landscapes bring to life classical images of southernmost Europe.

*In May 2017, VENT will return to the Mediterranean for a cruise to Sicily and Malta, two of Europe's most fascinating and historic locations. For this voyage, we have chartered the peerless *Sea Cloud*, a four-masted barque widely regarded as the world's most beautiful sailing vessel, for a trip that combines the rich history of Sicily and Malta with emphasis on the region's natural history attributes, particularly birds and botany.*



An exciting itinerary includes a day on Malta and a partial circumnavigation of Sicily. Our voyage begins in beautiful Valletta, the mainly Baroque capital of Malta and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. From Valletta, we'll cruise to the western edge of Sicily before tracing a route along the south coast en route to Syracuse on the eastern side of the island. We'll call at several important ports including Trapani, Marsala, Porto Empedocle, and Syracuse. Land excursions to some of the finest Greco-Roman archaeological sites surviving from antiquity include Segesta, home to a remarkably well-preserved Doric temple and Greek theater; Selinunte and its stately Temple of Hera; Agrigento and its golden-brown temples of Juno and Concordia; and Syracuse, featuring the Temple of Apollo and the famed Greco-Roman theater. Visits to two important nature preserves promise an array of waterbirds and landbirds.

Highlighting this trip's allure is the opportunity to travel aboard Sea Cloud. Ornate in her all-wood construction, resplendent under sail, and owner of a vivid history, this majestic ship sets a standard by which all other ships are measured. All cabins are immaculately appointed and contain private facilities. Public areas include a lounge, viewing deck, lido deck, and bar. High quality cuisine is served in an elegant dining room.

Sicily and Malta are wonderful destinations, and we are sure that this program's multi-themed approach makes an ideal choice both for travelers whose primary interest lies in history, culture, and sightseeing, and for birders and naturalists who possess an interest in history. We emphasize that all aspects of this trip are entirely optional. Typically only about half of our participants are birders and naturalists.

Early May is a lovely time of the year to travel in Sicily and Malta, particularly for the naturalist-inclined among us, with mild temperatures, wildflowers in bloom, and birds on the move. Among the species we'll seek are a range of regional specialties and passage migrants including Levantine Shearwater, Purple Heron, Pied Avocet, Black-tailed Godwit, Audouin's and Slender-billed gulls, European Bee-eater, European Roller, Sardinian Warbler, Woodchat Shrike, Spotless Starling, Italian Sparrow, and Corn Bunting in addition to other resident birds.

With historical and natural history interpretation throughout the trip, there simply is no better way to experience the charm of Sicily and Malta. Joining VENT leaders Victor Emanuel and Barry Lyon for this special departure are Larry Wolff, Silver Professor of European History at New York University and Director of the NYU Center for European and Mediterranean Studies; and Peter Zika, a superb field biologist and botanist at the herbarium of the University of Washington. Professor Wolff will be accompanied by his wife, Perri Klass, an honored Professor of Journalism and Pediatrics at New York University.

For those who want to experience more of Malta and Sicily, land-based Birds & History tours will be offered as optional pre- and post-cruise extensions. Our Malta Pre-trip combines birding and sightseeing in a variety of island-wide locations including the Three Cities region on Grand Harbor, the medieval fortress of Mdina, the Neolithic site of Hagar Qim, and, the wetlands of Ghadira Nature Reserve. Our Sicily Extension will spend time in the island capital of Palermo, travel to the beautiful cliff-side town of Taormina, and go birding on the volcanic slopes of Mt. Etna, Europe's highest volcano. Information about the pre- and post-cruise extensions are available in a separate itinerary.

May 2-3, Days 1-2: Departure to Valletta, Malta; arrival and evening welcome. Flights from the United States bound for Valletta, Malta depart on May 2 and arrive in Europe on the morning of May 3, connecting to flights to Malta arriving throughout the day depending on your European gateway city. Upon arrival at the Malta International Airport (airport code MLA) you will be met outside the baggage claim by a representative of our ground agent and transferred to the **Westin Dragonara Resort** where a room has been reserved in your name. After check-in you will have the remainder of the afternoon to yourself, where options include relaxing in the privacy of your room or exploring the expansive hotel grounds or nearby resort town of St. Julians. We will gather as a group on May 3 at 6:00 p.m. on the large patio of Palio's Restaurant for a trip introduction and welcome, followed by dinner.

The **Westin Dragonara Resort** is one of Malta's finest hotels, offering accommodations, amenities, and services that provides a nice complement to our stay aboard the *Sea Cloud*. Situated about 15 minutes north of Valletta on a short narrow peninsula in the seaside resort town of St. Julian's, the Dragonara offers plenty of privacy amid

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beautiful surroundings. A spacious outdoor terrace affords fine sea views while a beautifully designed swimming pool will appeal to those who like the idea of a cool dip. The hotel operates three restaurants, all accessed from the south side of the hotel, each offering outdoor dining with sea views.

NIGHT: Westin Dragonara Resort, St. Julians, Malta

May 4, Day 3: Highlights of Valletta; embark *Sea Cloud*. As we do not board the *Sea Cloud* until late in the afternoon, we'll spend most of the day on Malta before transferring to the dock. Specifically, we will spend all of our time touring the marvelous island capital, Valletta, where we will join local guides for a "highlights" style tour of the fortified city.

Highlights:

- **Approach Valletta via a boat transfer through Grand Harbor**
- **Take a guided city tour of historic Valletta**
- **Enjoy an outdoor lunch atop a historic building**
- **Embark *Sea Cloud* and cruise out of Grand Harbor in the early evening**

An overview of Malta and Valletta:

At a mere 122 miles², the island-nation of Malta is one of Europe's smallest countries. Situated in the Mediterranean Sea about 155 miles due south of Sicily, Malta, because of its central location, has figured prominently in the cross-currents of European history. Often referred to as a "crossroads of civilizations" Malta has been inhabited since Neolithic times and has seen the coming and going of history's greatest powers including the Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Romans, Arabs, Christians, French, and British. Geographically, Malta is a land of rocky uplands, fertile plains, and a rugged coastline. Towering limestone cliffs afford Malta a well-deserved reputation for scenic splendor, where different points on the island offer dramatic seascapes. The island's population hovers around 450,000 with most of its residents centered around the capital of Valletta and the surrounding small cities, most of which have grown together.

Travelers to Malta will find that history is everywhere around them, as evidenced by the fact that a greater density of UNESCO World Heritage Sites are found here than any place in the world. Although this history is long and occasionally dramatic, Malta is most famous for withstanding two great sieges: that of the Turks in 1565, which immortalized the Roman-Catholic Order of the Knights of St. John, who led a successful defense of the island in the face of a ferocious Turkish assault; and that of the Nazis and Italians in World War II whose relentless bombing campaigns (1940-1942) failed to subdue the people or reverse Allied control of the island.

Valletta is named for Jean de Valette, grand master of the Order of the Knights of St. John at the time of the Turkish defeat during the Great Siege of 1565. The city is essentially a walled fortress, built in the aftermath of the siege that occupies the distal end of the Sciberras Peninsula, bordered by Grand Harbor on one side and flanked on the other by the smaller Marsamxett Harbor. Inside the walls, Valletta is a charming place of narrow streets, plazas, and dramatic buildings designed mainly in the elegant Baroque style.

City tour of Valletta:

Our plan for the day is a city tour of the Maltese capital, Valletta. If weather and sea conditions allow, we'll transfer from the hotel to Valletta by boat, dramatically entering the city via Grand Harbor. We will be joined by licensed guides who will lead us on an interpretive walking tour of the city. Our itinerary includes visits to Valletta's most important sites including:

- **Upper Barrakka Garden:** An arcaded public garden located at the high point of the city offers commanding views of Grand Harbor, the bastions that form an integral part of the city's defensive layout, and Fort St. Angelo and the Three Cities region across Grand Harbor. The gardens themselves contain attractive beds of perennial plants and seasonal blooms.
- **St. John's Co-Cathedral:** Essential for any first-time visitor to Valletta, a trip to St. John's Co-Cathedral reveals the ultimate in Baroque architectural style and artistic achievement. Completed in 1577, St. John's

was the place of worship for the Order of the Knights of St. John. Highlights include a lavishly painted six-segmented barrel-vaulted ceiling and every inch of the cathedral's interior adorned in marble, paint, or gold.

- Grandmaster's Palace: From the 1570s–1798, this palace served as the official residence of the grand master of the Knights of the Order of St. John and the center of government of Malta for about 400 years. Of special interest is a lengthy painted gallery featuring suits of armor and portraits of a succession of grand masters, and the Tapestry Room displaying the French Gobelin tapestries, *Tentures des Indes*, made for the room in 1708–1710.
- The Malta Experience: Our final activity is set in the confines of a cool darkened theater. “The Malta Experience” is a 45-minute wide-screen presentation that enlightens the visitor to Malta's illustrious history. Rich in imagery and dramatically portrayed, the film gives ample attention to the harrowing accounts of the Great Siege of 1565 and the Axis attempt to conquer the island in WWII.

Weather permitting, we'll have lunch at an outdoor restaurant atop a historic hotel in Castile Square. Following “The Malta Experience” we'll transfer directly to the dock for a late afternoon embarkation of *Sea Cloud*.

Bird diversity is predictably low in a long-developed location like Valletta; nevertheless, Rock Pigeon, Common Swift, Common House-Martin, and Italian Sparrow will provide the trip's initial avian highlights.

After a welcome beverage and time to settle into our cabins, we'll want to be on deck as *Sea Cloud* departs Grand Harbor. The late afternoon-early evening period is a beautiful time to be on the water. Exiting the harbor with the sun at the stern, we'll likely be treated to splendid views of Valletta with its giant fortress walls and dome of St. John's Co-Cathedral easily visible. Perpendicular to the south, the short peninsulas of the Three Cities district lies close at hand, with forts St. Angelo and Ricasoli dominating the skyline.

As we exit the breakwater, *Sea Cloud* will turn to the north, passing just beyond the walls and bastions of Fort St. Elmo, ever-ready to again come to the island's defense.

NIGHT: Aboard *Sea Cloud*

May 5, Day 4: Cruising the Mediterranean Sea (Valletta to Trapani). Covering the considerable distance between Valletta and Trapani (our first port of call) requires a full-day transit at sea. The entire day will be spent making this voyage of 175 nautical miles, which takes us in a west-by-northwest direction past the north side of Malta and into the open Mediterranean Sea, out of sight of land for most of the day.

Highlights:

- **A relaxing full first day at sea**
- **Presentations by the *Sea Cloud* and VENT staffs**
- **Seabirding from the viewing decks**
- **Captain's Welcome Dinner**

Our time at sea offers a leisurely day in which we'll have options for activities and engagement. Some may prefer to relax in the comfortable confines of their cabins or in the passenger lounge while others may repair to the spanker deck to enjoy the sun and water. Or perhaps reading a book and sipping a cool drink in the shade of the lido deck will suit one's fancy. There will also be opportunities to attend presentations from the VENT and *Sea Cloud* staffs on various aspects of sailing, history, geography, or botany to prepare us for the days ahead.

Sea Cloud's viewing decks afford superb views of the surrounding sea. With good visibility and room to maneuver, the birders will be well positioned to pick out anything that comes our way. Overall, we anticipate a fairly light day of birding as we will be relatively far from land; nevertheless, we are within the ranges of Cory's Shearwater (regional “Scopoli's” subspecies) and Yellow-legged Gull, two species that forage in these waters away from their island nesting colonies. The other shearwater of the eastern Mediterranean, the Levantine Shearwater, also occurs here. This species is a smaller relative of the Cory's Shearwater. In addition to size differences, it is separated from the former species in sporting a more boldly patterned black and white plumage

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and a faster flight style. They also breed in colonies around the Mediterranean and occasionally form large feeding flocks. Common Bottle-nosed Dolphin and Short-beaked Common Dolphin are sometimes sighted as well.

As May is a prime time for northward bird migration, we could encounter a variety of unexpected species making their way to the European continent.

NIGHT: Aboard *Sea Cloud*

May 6, Day 5: Morning at Segesta; afternoon at Erice. After cruising through the night, *Sea Cloud* will enter the port of Trapani around 7:00 a.m. We'll disembark the ship for a morning at the beautiful Greek ruins of Segesta before returning for lunch. In the afternoon we'll travel a short distance to the medieval mountaintop settlement of Erice.

Highlights:

- **A morning at a Segesta, one of the best preserved Greek ruins anywhere**
- **Enjoy a gondola ride to the wonderful mountain-top medieval village of Erice**
- **Spend the afternoon touring Erice, with opportunities for sightseeing and birding**

An Overview of Trapani:

The city of Trapani is an attractive settlement at the western end of Sicily. It is the capital of the province of the same name and is an important economic center for this part of the island. Trapani is known for its scenic coastline and access to rich fishing grounds, but also contains a number of important historical sites dating from Baroque and early-Modern periods. Located far from the more populous northern and eastern sides of Sicily, Trapani traditionally has existed as a more bucolic and quieter part of the island—some might even say neglected—however, the city is undergoing a revitalization of sorts with wonderful automobile-free pedestrian zones located in close proximity to the port where a casual stroll offers access to an array of restaurants, bars, shops and centuries-old cathedrals.

Segesta:

Once we've received clearance to disembark, we'll board a bus and make the 45-minute ride into the Sicilian interior in advance of our visit to Segesta. Unlike other destinations we'll visit during the cruise, Segesta sits well inland amid a pastoral setting of rolling hills, shallow valleys, and fertile agricultural lands. The chief attractions here are the Greek temple and nearby amphitheater.

Begun in 424 B.C. the temple is one of the grandest surviving Doric monuments anywhere. Among its remarkable characteristics, it is 190 feet long and built upon 4-steps, with a total of 36 Doric columns supporting the structure's stone roof-frame. Aside from the sheer size of the temple, the allure of Segesta is largely derived from the splendor of its natural surroundings. Situated in open countryside and surrounded by trees and wildflowers, Segesta sits in majestic solitude with no other buildings around. The other main monument, the amphitheater, sits on a nearby hillside nearly 400 feet above sea level. Together, these structures form what many consider to be the most beautiful complex of ruins in all of Sicily.

Birders likely will be pleased as the natural area surrounding the ruins may hold a variety of birds. Among the species possible here are Common Buzzard, Common Swift, Eurasian Jay, Eurasian Jackdaw, Spotless Starling, Woodchat Shrike, Sardinian and Subalpine warblers, Black Redstart, and others.

Erice:

This afternoon we'll visit Erice, renowned for its medieval ambience and magnificent hilltop location high above the sea. Rather than driving to the site, we'll have the opportunity to take a gondola ride from Trapani to the town's entrance gate atop the mountain. Magnificent views are available in all directions as the cable car sweeps up the south flank of the mountain, revealing views of Trapani and the sea beyond and wildflower-studded slopes directly below.

Unlike the other sites we'll visit on our route, Erice was never fully under the influence of the Greeks. In fact, the city was conquered in succession by the Phoenicians, Carthaginians, and finally the Romans. We'll journey to the hilltop castles of Pepoli and Venus, built by the Normans in the 12th century on top of foundations dating from Saracen (a Middle Eastern people) times. We'll walk with local guides through the village, taking in the most important sites and visiting the best overlooks. Old stone streets and medieval churches are highlights, while a verdant park surrounding the castles adds a dose of tranquility to the setting. The highest lookout points offer breathtaking views of the plains of Trapani far below.

With personal time built into the afternoon program, we'll be free to explore the town on our own. The photographers among us will find Erice rife with photogenic subjects. The birders, meanwhile, will be drawn to the garden and the trees and bushes around the castle. Common Swifts may be seen coursing overhead; Common House-Martins nest under the eaves of buildings around town; Blue Rock-Thrush, Sardinian Warbler, and Spotted Flycatcher may be seen on the hillsides below the town; European Greenfinch, European Goldfinch, European Linnet, and Eurasian Serin are found in the trees around the castle. During this time in migration, almost anything is possible including a variety of migrating warblers and flycatchers.

With the captain's permission, it may be possible after dinner this evening to wander into Trapani and explore the pedestrian thoroughfares or perhaps enjoy a late coffee or drink.

NIGHT: Aboard *Sea Cloud*

May 7, Day 6: Morning birding at Reserva Delle Saline or sightseeing in Trapani; cruising to Marsala; afternoon at Selinunte. This morning we will offer a birding outing to the nearby salt pans of Trapani, or Reserva Delle Saline, a World Wildlife Fund site and one of Sicily's very best birding areas, before departing Trapani for the short cruise to Marsala. Those not as interested in birding may join a local guide for a short walking tour of Trapani. In the afternoon we'll take a bus ride to the ancient Greek ruins of Selinunte.

Highlights:

- **Enjoy superb birding at Reserva Delle Saline in Trapani OR**
- **Take a walking tour of Trapani on a quiet Sunday morning**
- **Cruise to Marsala with lunch at sea**
- **Join an afternoon field trip to the ruins of Selinunte**

Reserva Delle Saline

The featured activity of the morning is a trip to the World Wildlife Fund site of Reserva Delle Saline, located only minutes away from the Port of Trapani.

While fishing traditionally has underpinned the local economy, Trapani also has a long history of industrial salt production. Expansive lowlands lying in close proximity to the sea, together with high evaporation rates, are key factors in local salt production customs that date to the Roman era. In recent times, active salt harvesting has tailed off, yet the pans remain. Recognizing that salt pans provide important habitat for migrating waterbirds, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) in 1995 acquired approximately 400 acres of defunct salt pans, spread between two separate areas, in and around Trapani and nearby Paceco. As in times past, the drying pans are inundated with sea water from the Mediterranean using traditional techniques; the difference however is that water levels are tightly regulated to produce the best possible conditions for birds at the most important times of the year. Today, many birds utilize the reserve for feeding and staging while some species remain to nest.

This area unquestionably is one of Sicily's premier birding sites. We will have approximately three hours to visit as many areas as we are able. We will be joined by a local expert and WWF staff person who will provide interpretation about the history of the site and its role in bird conservation. Early May is an excellent time for a visit as the pulse of migration is still strong and the species diversity is potentially high. Among the many possibilities are Common Shelduck, Greater Flamingo, Eurasian Spoonbill, Purple and Gray herons, Pied Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, Eurasian Curlew, Common and Spotted redshanks, Curlew Sandpiper, Ruff, Little Stint,

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Yellow-legged and Slender-billed gulls, and Little Tern. Not to be overlooked the area supports an interesting array of landbirds including such sought-after types as Pallid Swift, Zitting Cisticola, and Spotless Starling.

Trapani

For those who prefer a relaxed morning and a bit of sightseeing, we'll offer an easy interpretive walk through Trapani. Our route will lead directly away from the ship as we explore the architectural highlights of the buildings that line the pedestrian-only streets of Via Torrearsa, Corso Vittorio Emanuele, and Via Garibaldi. Our visit to Trapani will occur on a Sunday morning, which means many places may not yet be open to visitors, although a visit is still worthwhile as the exteriors of many of the buildings are adorned with exquisite carvings and statuary. Among the sites on the itinerary will be a selection of plazas and cathedrals such as Fontana del Saturno, Palazzo Senatorio, Chiesa del Collegio Gesuiti, and Cattedrale San Lorenzo. One of the local coffee shops will almost certainly be open for business, and it's often fun to sit in the shade and sip a morning beverage!

We'll be back on board *Sea Cloud* for the three-hour transit south to Marsala. We'll enjoy a leisurely cruise en route and a delicious outdoor lunch aboard the ship.

Selinunte

In the afternoon we'll board a bus for the hour-long trip to Selinunte to visit the ruins of the ancient Greek temples. Selinunte's Golden Age lasted for about 200 years, from the 7th century to the late 5th century B.C., when it was considered one of the most advanced Greek cities in Sicily. The city was destroyed for good by the Carthaginians in 409 B.C. The actual city, or acropolis, sits on a hill east of the ruins.

We'll take time to tour the site, paying special attention to the three large temples that define the ruin. Temple E, in particular, is interesting for its massive size. Though never finished it is thought to be the fourth largest temple ever built in the Greek Hellenic period.

Our visit to Selinunte will occur at the warmest time of the day, but birds should be apparent nonetheless. Walking among the temples, we're bound to encounter a variety of species, where possibilities include Eurasian Collared-Dove, Eurasian Jackdaw, Northern Wheatear, Sardinian and Cetti's warblers, Spotless Starling, Italian Sparrow, and Cirl Bunting.

Away from the ruins, Selinunte provides an appealing pastoral setting of open fields peppered with clusters of wildflowers—good habitat for open country birds such as European Stonechat, Whinchat, and Crested Lark.

NIGHT: Aboard *Sea Cloud*

May 8, Day 7: Morning at Agrigento; afternoon at sea. After cruising through the night, *Sea Cloud* will arrive in Porto Empedocle (situated about halfway along the length of Sicily's south coast) this morning in time for an excursion to the beautiful Greek ruins of Agrigento. Here, we'll enjoy an interpretive walking tour of the archaeological site before returning to the ship for lunch. We'll spend the afternoon at sea en route to our next destination.

Highlights:

- **A tour of Agrigento including the famed Valley of Temples**
- **Birding among the ruins complex**
- **A full afternoon cruising at sea**
- **Presentation by the VENT staff**

Agrigento

Set on a ridge facing the sea, Agrigento's series of superb Doric temples are among Sicily's most captivating Greek ruins. We'll spend a full morning touring the Valley of Temples, the centerpiece of the large Archaeological and Landscape Park. We'll view the Temple of Hercules, constructed in the 6th century B.C.; the remarkably preserved and magnificent Temple of Concord; and the Temple of Juno (Hera), noted for its graceful proportions.

Especially interesting is the fact that the temples are constructed not of the gleaming white marble that feed classic imagery of ancient Greece, but rather of a sandstone the color of brown sugar. The effect is aesthetically pleasing as the columns and pediments of the various temples glow golden in the morning light.

Groves of Olive and Almond trees around the archaeological park create a rich pastoral backdrop to the ruins and actually provide good habitat for birds. Common Wood-Pigeon, Eurasian Kestrel, Blue Tit, Great Tit, Eurasian Serin, and European Goldfinch are common around the ruins. Perched atop a plateau overlooking the coast, we may find ourselves picking out migrating hawks and landbirds. Common Buzzard, Eurasian Honey-buzzard, and, perhaps, Booted Eagle are species for which we'll keep an eye out. Woodchat Shrike and Cirl Bunting occasionally pop up on trees along the hillsides beneath the ruins while Spotless Starlings perch atop bare snags. We'll reboard *Sea Cloud* in time for lunch. The remainder of the afternoon will be spent at leisure as we cruise along Sicily's south coast toward Syracuse. Our time at sea will allow for post-lunch down time followed by the next presentation in our lecture series. The birders will want to be on the watch for both shearwater species while a variety of migrant birds are also possible, even at sea.

NIGHT: Aboard *Sea Cloud*

May 9, Day 8: Morning at sea; afternoon at Syracuse. The transit from Porto Empedocle to Syracuse, or Siracusa, (situated on Sicily's east coast) is lengthy and will require 24 hours to complete. After cruising through the night we'll spend the first half of the day at sea before arriving in the port of Syracuse in the early afternoon. We'll disembark the ship for a tour of the Greek ruins complex that will occupy the remainder of the day.

Highlights:

- **A relaxing morning at sea with presentation from the VENT staff**
- **Birding from the viewing decks**
- **A full afternoon touring the archaeological park at Syracuse**

Our voyage to Syracuse will trace a route along the Sicilian coastline that will take us on a southeast trajectory before we round the island off Cape Passero and cruise north to Syracuse on the east coast. As with the previous afternoon, we'll be watching for seabirds from the ship's viewing decks among other activities that include taking in a presentation by the VENT staff or simply relaxing with a cool drink.

Syracuse

Founded by Corinthians in 734 B.C., Syracuse became one of the largest and most important cities in the ancient Greek world. During its Golden Age, in the 6th–5th centuries B.C., Syracuse held a population of 400,000 and was the home of Archimedes, Pindar, and Aeschylus. The city is perhaps best remembered as the site where its pro-Spartan armies dealt the Athenians their final defeat following an ill-fated invasion of Sicily.

This afternoon we'll participate on a tour of the city's most famous and important ancient landmarks, with planned visits to the spectacular 15,000-seat Greek theater, the elliptical Roman Amphitheater, and the cavernous limestone quarry and Ear of Dionysius.

Sea Cloud will remain in port tonight in advance of a full morning on shore.

NIGHT: Aboard *Sea Cloud*

May 10, Day 9: Morning sightseeing in Ortygia or birding at Vendicari Preserve; afternoon at sea. We will have a final half day ashore before embarking on the return trip to Valletta. Participants may choose from two activity options: a walking tour of Ortygia, the historic old quarter of Syracuse, or join an early departure for the Oasi de Vendicari Nature Reserve, located about an hour south of Syracuse.

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Highlights:

- **Participate on a walking tour of Ortygia and visit the archaeological museum of Syracuse OR**
- **Enjoy superb birding at Oasi di Vendicari Nature Reserve**
- **Cruise to Valletta with lunch at sea**
- **Take in a final presentation from the VENT staff**
- **Captain's Farwell Dinner**

Option #1:

We will spend our final morning together on a walking tour of Syracuse's old quarter, Ortygia, followed by a visit to the archaeological museum of Syracuse. We will make the most of our time here and will visit as many of the most important sites as time allows. Ortygia is known for its ancient structures as well as its medieval treasures. The remains of the Temple of Apollo represent the oldest Greek temple in Sicily (7th century B.C.) while the Athenaion and a part of the Temple of Minerva provide rare examples (in Sicily) of ancient Greek temples being turned into churches. In the Piazza San Lucia sits a Byzantine church, originally constructed in 304 A.D., that was later restructured by the Normans. Saint John's Abbey, though destroyed by an earthquake in 1693, still retains its façade and cloister. And the Bellomo Palace, originally a 13th century castle, was restructured in the Gothic style in the 15th century. We'll finish with a visit to the outstanding archaeological museum of Syracuse where many artifacts from the ruins site are housed. Chief among the attractions are glorious statues and ceramic pieces that offer an intimate look at Syracuse of the 5th and 6th centuries B.C.

Option #2:

Lying about an hour south of port, Oasi di Vendicari Nature Reserve is perhaps Sicily's greatest wildlife refuge. Boasting a vast collection of fields, marshes, lakes, mudflats, and brackish lagoons, the reserve offers tremendous birding possibilities all year long. The second week of May is a particularly great time to be here as we'll likely encounter a rich mix of resident wading birds, seasonal songbirds, and flashy northbound migrants.

Initially, we may work the fields along the entrance road watching for open-country birds like European Bee-eater, European Roller, and Woodchat Shrike. We'll walk the network of paths that give access to different portions of the refuge, taking our time to identify any birds we see. The large reeds ringing the marshes may host a variety of warblers including Cetti's, Eurasian Reed, and Great Reed warblers. Areas of exposed mud could reveal Common Shelducks and an interesting assortment of northbound shorebirds, gulls, and terns. Species one may typically encounter in this setting include Kentish Plover, Common Ringed Plover, Little Ringed Plover, Little Stint, Dunlin, Curlew Sandpiper, Common Redshank, Common Greenshank, and Little Tern. All the while, we'll stay vigilant for the appearance of less common gull species such as Slender-billed and Audouin's gulls.

Larger bodies of water can be exceptionally good for wading birds. Eurasian Spoonbill, Gray Heron, and Great and Little egrets are all typical of the area. Greater Flamingos occur here as passage migrants and, with a little luck, we see a lingering individual or two.

Oasi di Vendicari is an outstanding place to bird, and a few hours here will undoubtedly produce excellent results.

Both groups will return to *Sea Cloud* in time for lunch prior to starting the return cruise to Valletta.

The afternoon will be a time to relax aboard ship, settle shipboard accounts, and take in a final lecture from the VENT staff.

NIGHT: Aboard *Sea Cloud*

May 11, Day 10: Arrival in Valletta; disembarkation; departure for home or begin extension. This morning marks the conclusion of our trip. All participants departing Valletta today will be transferred to the international airport with plenty of time to check in for departing flights. Departing flight should not be scheduled prior to 12:00 noon. Those continuing on the **Sicily Extension** will find information about the trip published in a separate itinerary.

EXTRA ARRANGEMENTS: Should you wish to make arrangements to arrive early or extend your stay, please contact the VENT office at least three months prior to your departure date. We can very easily make hotel arrangements and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.

MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE REQUIREMENT: All participants are **required** to purchase a medical evacuation policy for this tour and will be asked to sign and return to the VENT office a document stating that this has been done. Such a policy is available from any insurance company which provides trip cancellation coverage (see Trip Cancellation Insurance below).

TOUR SIZE: We have chartered the *Sea Cloud* exclusively for VENT travelers; the cruise is limited to 54 tour participants.

TOUR LEADERS: **Victor Emanuel, Barry Lyon, Larry Wolff, and Peter Zika.** Larry Wolff will be accompanied by his wife, **Perri Klass.**

Victor Emanuel started birding in Texas 68 years ago at the age of eight. His travels have taken him to all the continents, with his areas of concentration being Texas, Arizona, Mexico, Panama, and Peru. He is the founder and compiler for 50 years of the record-breaking Freeport Christmas Bird Count, and served a term as president of the Texas Ornithological Society. Birds and natural history have been a major focus throughout his life. He derives great pleasure from seeing and hearing birds, and sharing with others these avian sights and sounds, both the common ones and the more unusual ones. He initiated the first birding camps for young people, and considers that one of his greatest achievements. Victor holds a B.A. in zoology and botany from the University of Texas and an M.A. in government from Harvard. In 1993, he was the recipient of the Roger Tory Peterson Excellence in Birding Award, given by the Houston Audubon Society in recognition of a lifetime of dedication to careful observation, education, and addition to the body of avian knowledge. In 2004, he received the Roger Tory Peterson Award from the American Birding Association, and the Arthur A. Allen Award from the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. He is a past board member of the Nature Conservancy of Texas, the National Audubon Society, and the American Bird Conservancy.

Barry Lyon's passion for the outdoors and birding has its roots in his childhood where he grew up in southern California. He attended several VENT/ABA youth birding camps in his teenage years, which ultimately led to his future involvement with Victor Emanuel Nature Tours. He holds a B.A. from the University of Arizona at Tucson where he studied history and political science, with an emphasis on environment and development politics. Barry joined the VENT team as a tour leader in 1995, and embarked on a travel-based career that has taken him to an array of worldwide destinations. He has lived in Austin, Texas since 2004 when he joined our office staff as an assistant to company president Victor Emanuel. In 2014 he was named Chief Operating Officer (C.O.O.), reflecting his increased experience and responsibilities. These days, his work is geared more toward the company's business side and management, although he will continue to lead a few tours annually. Barry's background and his knowledge of natural history have provided him with a strong interest in conservation. He currently sits on the board of directors of Travis Audubon Society, which emphasizes conservation through birding and youth outdoor education for urban children.

Larry Wolff is the Silver Professor of European History at New York University and Director of the Center for European and Mediterranean Studies at NYU. He received his B.A. from Harvard and his Ph.D. from Stanford. With particular interests in Eastern Europe and Mediterranean Europe, his books, which have been widely translated into foreign languages, include *Inventing Eastern Europe* (1994), *Venice and the Slavs: The Discovery of Dalmatia in the Age of Enlightenment* (2001), and *Paolina's Innocence: Child Abuse in Casanova's Venice* (2012). His newest book is *The Singing Turk: Ottoman Power and Operatic Emotions on the European Stage from the Siege of Vienna to the Age of Napoleon* (2016). Larry is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and has traveled as a lecturer with cruises in the Adriatic and around the Mediterranean. He lived for many years in Boston and now lives in New York City with his wife, Perri Klass, the well-known doctor and writer.

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Peter Zika is a field biologist from Seattle, investigating and describing new species of plants from western North America. Working at the herbarium of the University of Washington, he is writing several chapters for new books on the plants of California, the Pacific Northwest, and the flora of North America, as well as conducting biological inventories of National Parks and Nature Conservancy preserves, studying interactions between noxious weeds and native wildlife, and researching the diet of fruit-eating birds. His interests in ecology have led him across the Tropics and into Polar Regions for the last 25 years. In addition to teaching wetland plant identification, he serves as a ship's naturalist on all oceans and continents. Peter has published more than 100 scientific notes, articles, and books, as well as occasional photographs, cards, and reviews in the popular press.

Perri Klass, MD, is Professor of Journalism and Pediatrics at New York University, where she is Director of the Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute. She attended Harvard Medical School and completed her residency in pediatrics at Children's Hospital, Boston. Dr. Klass has written extensively about medicine, children, literacy, and knitting. Her nonfiction includes *Every Mother is a Daughter: the Neverending Quest for Success, Inner Peace, and a Really Clean Kitchen*, which she coauthored with her mother, and *Quirky Kids: Understanding and Helping Your Child Who Doesn't Fit In*, which she coauthored with Eileen Costello, M.D. Her most recent books are *Treatment Kind and Fair: Letters to a Young Doctor*, and *The Mercy Rule*, a novel. She writes the regular column, "The Checkup," for *The New York Times*. Dr. Klass is the National Medical Director of Reach Out and Read, a program through which pediatricians promote parents reading aloud to young children, providing guidance and books to more than 4.5 million children and their families every year.

TOUR REGISTRATION & PAYMENTS:

Cruise: A non refundable deposit of **\$1,000** per person is required to reserve a space on this cruise. A second installment of **\$4,000** per person (**\$6,000** per person for cabins in categories A & B) is due November 3, 2016. The balance of the fee is due January 2, 2017.

PAYMENTS: Initial tour deposits may be made by MasterCard, Visa, American Express, check, money order, or bank transfer. All other tour payments, including second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc., must be made by check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information).

If you prefer to pay your deposit by check, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard, Visa or American Express at the time of registration. The VENT registration form should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

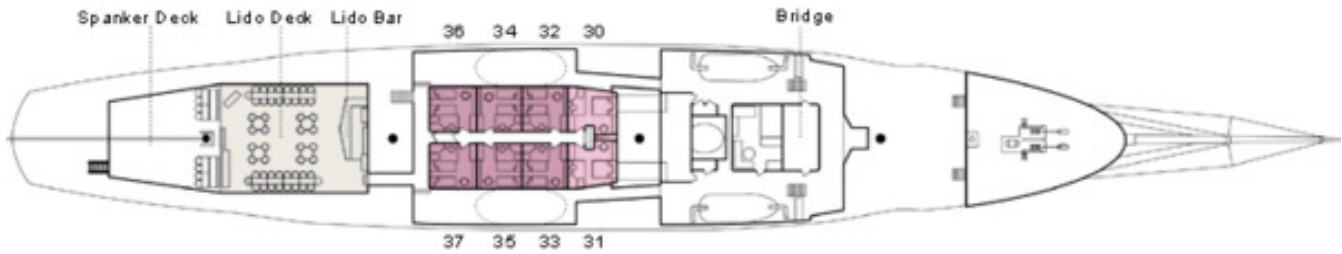
FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Cabin prices quoted are per person based on double occupancy and include port taxes. Cabins will be reserved on a first-come, first-served basis. A limited number of single cabins are available as quoted below. Once these are taken, single accommodation will be 1.6 times the double rate.

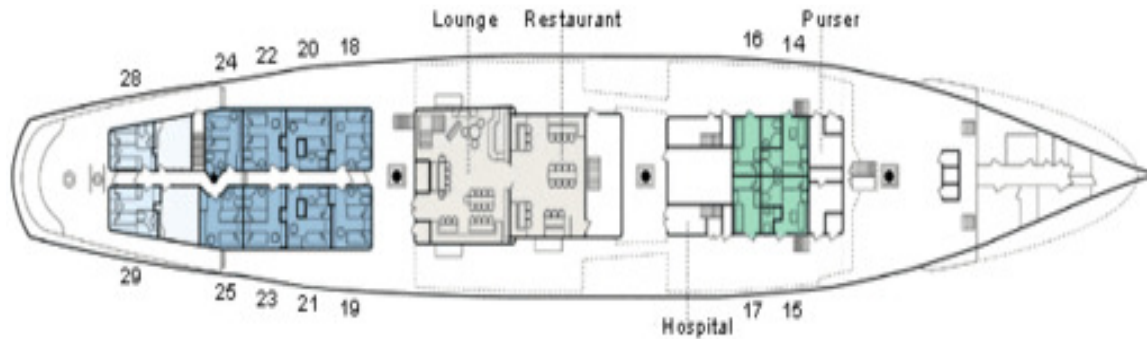
Category A: (Owner's Suites)	Cabins #1-2	\$13,495
Category B: (Deluxe Original Cabins)	Cabins #3-10	\$12,395
Category 1:	Cabins #30-31	\$10,995
Category 2:	Cabins #32-37	\$10,395
Category 3:	Cabins #18-25	\$ 9,295
Category 4:	Cabins #28-29	\$ 8,995
Category 5: (Singles)	Cabins #14-17,	\$ 9,995



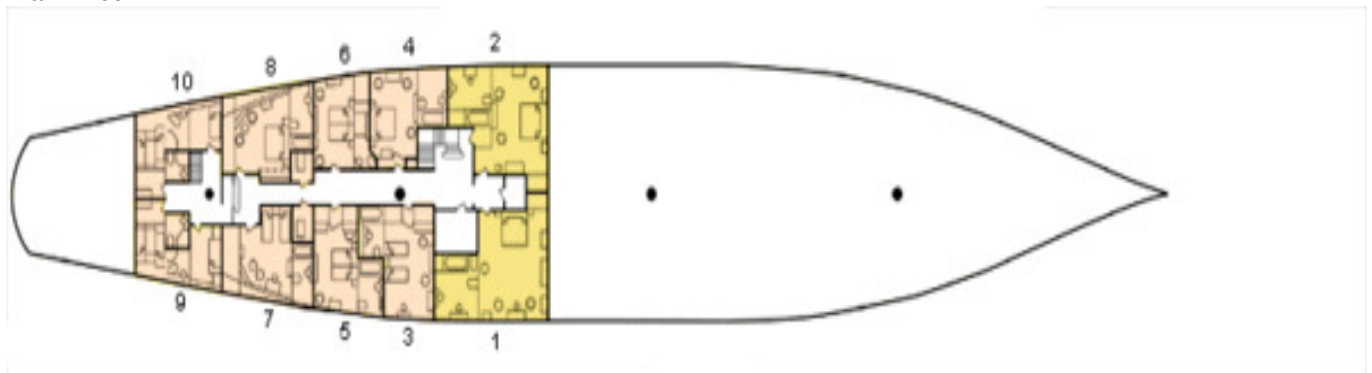
Captain's and Lido Deck



Promenade Deck



Main Deck



Included in the cruise program:

- Land-based accommodations as stated in the itinerary; 1 night at Hotel in Valletta (Day 2)
- 7 nights (Days 3-9) aboard the *Sea Cloud*
- All shore excursions and tours as described in the itinerary
- Non-ship meals from dinner in Valletta (Day 2) through lunch the next day (Day 3)
- All ship-board meals, including non-alcoholic beverages, from dinner on Day 3 through breakfast on Day 10; select beer and wine at lunch and dinner
- All land transportation including transfers in Valletta between airport to group hotel upon arrival, from the dock to the airport upon disembarkation, and transfers for all shore excursions during the cruise
- Services of VENT leaders and local guides
- Entrance fees to archaeological sites and museums
- Gratuities to the local guides, drivers, ship staff and crew
- Baggage handling

Not included in the cruise program:

- All air travel
- Passport fees
- Hotel accommodations prior to Day 2 and after Day 9
- Meals prior to dinner on Day 2 and after breakfast on Day 10

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- Alcoholic beverages except for select beers and wines available during lunch and dinner
- Laundry, postage, telephone calls, internet usage, or other items of a personal nature
- Travel insurance
- Fuel or exchange rate surcharges
- Excess baggage charges
- Visa charges
- Airport departure taxes (if applicable)
- Gratuities to VENT leaders (optional)

CANCELLATION AND REFUNDS: All cancellations prior to November 3, 2016 for any reason must be received in writing and require forfeiture of your \$1,000 deposit. Cancellations received between November 4, 2016 and January 2, 2017 will be subject to a 60 percent (60%) cancellation fee of total trip cost per tour participant. Cancellations occurring after January 3, 2017 will result in forfeiture of the entire cost of the trip whether previously paid or not. No refunds will be made in the event of “no shows” or cancellations made on the day of sailing. No refunds will be made for any part of the program in which you choose not to participate. Service fees may apply to deviations and are non-refundable. For your protection we strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance and/or travel insurance.

Due to the nature of the expedition, weather conditions or government regulations may require changes to be made to the itinerary and/or the cancellation of certain shore excursions. Every attempt will be made to adhere to the itinerary described within the limits of safety and time. In the event of changes, passengers have no right to any refund or other compensation. Expedition fees are based on group participation. Should you choose not to take part in any activity or make use of services provided, no refund will be made.

FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES: In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES: In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Our prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

TRIP CANCELLATION INSURANCE: We strongly recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance as soon as possible to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. VENT recommends *Travel Insured International* as our preferred insurance provider. Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available; however, stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering.** Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as work-related cancellation, medical upgrade, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” clause among others. **Contact *Travel Insured International* prior to registration for details.** Not all insurance providers provide the same levels of coverage. If you purchase insurance through a company other than *Travel Insured International*, please be advised that rules and stipulations may be different.

IMPORTANT: Travel insurance which covers you for emergency medical evacuation/repatriation is required for participation in this program. This coverage is included in the Worldwide Trip Protector plan offered by *Travel Insured International*. If you do not choose to purchase the insurance through *Travel Insured International*, you will need to do so through another insurance provider. A good website for information and acquisition of emergency evacuation/repatriation insurance is: www.insuremytrip.com.

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.

AIR INFORMATION: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of VENT. Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to assist you in making air arrangements. Airline tickets carry restrictions due to the airfare used. You may find that your ticket cannot be reissued or exchanged for another air carrier or routing. Cancellation penalties and change fees may be assessed for any changes to the ticket. These charges are solely your responsibility. First and business class travel may be available on some flights. **All requests for travel assistance or extra arrangements must be received no later than 60 days prior to departure date. Requests made within 60 days cannot be guaranteed.**

CONDITIONS:

The program – Your trip to Malta and Sicily will be a relaxing but full travel experience in which birding and natural history activities are offered in tandem with visits to famous archaeological sites, guided tours, and cruising the Mediterranean Sea. This trip offers an abundance of cultural, historical, and anthropological experiences in addition to being a birding trip, and participants should strongly consider this point before registering.

Because we intend for this program to appeal to anyone, we emphasize that the birding portions of the trip are optional. Participants whose main interest is the history and culture do not need to be birders to enjoy this trip or to participate in the birding portions of the itinerary. Similarly, birding options will be available as alternatives to the sightseeing options on several days during the cruise.

Our time off the ship includes walking tours and visits to major historical sites and birding areas. Physical demands will be easy to moderate, but please bear in mind that our land excursions may involve a moderate amount of walking and standing. We emphasize that no one will be subjected to physical demands that exceed their capabilities. All walking will be done at a slow pace.

Our routine for most days will involve breakfast on board between 6:00-7:00 a.m., followed by disembarkation of the ship for land transfers to the archaeological and birding sites. For morning excursions we want to arrive at the sites at the time of opening, typically 9:00 a.m., to beat the crowds and the warmest daytime temperatures. We will tour the sites and associated museums for several hours before returning to the ship for lunch. Exceptions include our visits to Selinunte (Day 6) and Syracuse (Day 8), which will be afternoon outings. Dinner will be at 7:00 p.m. most nights. Birding opportunities are often good around the archaeological sites and we will mix our guided interpretation with bird observation. The program includes visits to two major natural areas specifically for birding (Days 6 and 9).

The ship – Considered a masterpiece of shipbuilding, the four-masted *Sea Cloud* is widely regarded as the world's most beautiful sailing vessel. Her towering masts, full rigging, and polished wooden decks are testament to her unparalleled beauty. *Sea Cloud* offers 32 cabins that host a maximum of 64 passengers. All cabins are immaculately appointed, elegantly designed, and contain private facilities, telephones, and a small safe. Below decks, cabins 1-10 date from the ship's original construction; each features individual design and decoration, ornate furniture, walk-in closets, expanded bathroom areas, and large windows. Public areas include a formal restaurant, expansive spanker (viewing) deck, lido deck (with canopy), and lido bar. Other amenities include a gift boutique and a passenger communications system comprised of direct-dial satellite telephone, GSM cellular phone service, fax, email, and internet access.

Technical Information:

- **Built:** 1931
- **Length:** 360 feet; **Beam:** 50 feet; **Draft:** 17 feet
- **Gross Tonnage:** 2,532
- **Engines:** 2 SKL Diesel engines

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- **Total Sail Area:** 32,000 sq. ft.
- **Number of Sails:** 30
- **Speed:** 10 knots
- **Crew:** 60
- **Flag:** Malta

Dining – Sea Cloud’s restaurant offers a relaxed atmosphere amid handsome surroundings. Carefully crafted and finely styled, the dining room’s decoration includes natural wood adornment, a fire place, wall paper, and chandelier lighting. The sizeable double dining room comfortably seats all passengers in single seating for all meals, with tables unassigned. The chefs can prepare food according to special dietary needs, provided we receive sufficient notice. **Please advise the VENT office of any special needs at the time of registration.** Breakfast consists of a full buffet and an option to order from the menu; several meal options are available every day for lunch and dinner, including a vegetarian plate. All meals are served with complimentary coffee, tea, bottled water, juice, soft drinks, and select beers and wines.

While at sea – While cruising at sea, you’ll have options to join your leaders on the viewing decks for sea watching or remain inside and relax in the passenger lounge or your cabin. Except for Days 4 and 9 we will not be far from shore most of the time, and therefore expect smooth, easy seas throughout. Wind is an unpredictable variable. The mornings are typically calmer and the afternoons breezy to windy. If we are cruising into the wind, participants should be prepared for rougher seas than what is expected, particularly for the longer crossings on Days 4 and 9.

While on land – Walking conditions on land are generally not difficult, yet it is important to pay close attention to footing and terrain. While in Valletta, and for shore excursions during the cruise, we’ll visit several of the most important archaeological/historical sites in Malta and Sicily including Valletta, Segesta, Erice, Selinunte, Agrigento, Syracuse, and Ortygia. All of these sites are well-developed with roads, streets, established paths, and walkways. Birding outings around Trapani and at the Vendicari Preserve south of Syracuse involve light walking over easy terrain. Participants should take into consideration that walking and standing are aspects of visits to archaeological sites and museums and will be required at all of the places we visit.

Extra time in Malta and Sicily – On Malta, Valletta is a sizeable and deeply historic city that serves as the jumping off point for other parts of the island-country and even other countries in southern Europe. Our cruise program includes a morning-long “highlights” tour of Valletta prior to embarkation that provides exposure to some of the most important archaeological and historical sites in the city. Because there is so much to see and experience in the Maltese capital and in other parts of the island, participants with an interest in enjoying other activities outside the stated program should consider these options: 1) Come early or stay after the cruise ends, on their own, or 2) Join the **Malta Pre-trip**.

On Sicily, our program includes visits to most of the island’s famous historical sites and a couple of the best birding areas. However, our itinerary does not include the island capital of Palermo or the famed seaside town of Taormina on the northeast coast. Participants with an interest in gaining the “full” Sicily experience should consider joining our **Sicily Extension**. Conversely, participants may opt to spend additional time in Sicily on their own, before or after the cruise.

Information on the pre- and post-cruise extensions are available in a separate itinerary.

COMMUNICATIONS / INTERNET SERVICE:

Phone/Fax: The vessel is equipped with both a Satcom B satellite system and a GSM cellular system, either of which can access outgoing calls from your stateroom. Incoming calls and faxes are received via the satellite system due to the inherent range limitations of the GSM system.

Phone #: +871 – 3 256 084 10
Fax #: +871 – 3 256 084 11

GSM cellular costs approximately 3 Euros per minute, and is available in European waters and near French islands in the Caribbean. Satellite communication costs approximately 5 Euros per minute, and is available in all cruising areas.

Internet/Email: The ship provides a laptop computer station available for passenger use. The vessel can be reached via on-board email address at Seacloud@seacloud.com. Please advise your friends and family to send “text only” messages (no photos or HTML) when sending email to the ship’s address. Also, cabin number and name should be used as reference. Please note that messages sent to the vessel are generally limited to 50 KB for each message and could possibly be rejected automatically by the system if the message exceeds this file size. For outgoing email, messages up to a file size of 50 KB are free of charge. The cost of sending messages that exceed 50 KB will be charged to your shipboard account. For incoming email, messages up to a file size of 50 KB are free of charge. The cost of receiving messages that exceed 50KB, are applicable and will be charged to your shipboard account. Internet access is available at an extra charge.

CLIMATE & WEATHER: May is one of the better months to travel in Malta and Sicily. The long hot days that characterize the summer months are not as likely to have arrived yet and the likelihood of a late cold front diminishes by the day. Nearly all of our time will be spent along the immediate coast, where daytime temperatures average in the upper 70s/low 80s (°F). Seabreezes have a cooling effect and keep the coast about 10 degrees cooler than in the interior of the islands. Night and morning temperatures may fall to the mid-60s. That said, we should also be prepared for the possibility of an early heat wave, in which case temperatures can soar into the 90s, even along the coast. Significant rainfall is not expected, but late cold fronts occasionally affect the region all the way through the end of May.

BAGGAGE: The airlines now strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant. **Please consult your pre-departure materials and airline to find out specific weight restrictions.**

As a precaution against lost luggage, we suggest that you pack a change of clothes, essential toiletries, medications, a change of clothing, important travel documents, optics, and any other essential items in your carry-on bag. Due to ever-changing circumstances in the government’s attempts to improve airport security we recommend that you check the website of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) for the most updated information: <http://www.tsa.gov/>

CLOTHING: As this trip combines birding with interpretive walking tours and leisure cruising, you will want to pack a mix of clothing that prepares you for all activities. The following items are recommended:

- **Pants and Shorts:** A couple pairs of pants and shorts each are recommended. Many people prefer lightweight pants made of cotton or other material, but denim, though not as comfortable, is certainly acceptable. Shorts will be desirable for warmer times of day and when cruising.
- **Field Clothing:** Outdoor stores such as Cabela’s and REI carry field clothing that many birders find appealing. Pants and shirts made of lightweight, yet durable materials with multiple pockets and ventilated seams are popular and more reasonably priced than in the past.
- **Shirts:** Several t-shirts, (long and short-sleeved), in addition to other comfortable styles suitable for warm weather.
- **Bathing Suit**
- **Hat:** For protection from the sun is essential.
- **Evening Wear:** The atmosphere aboard *Sea Cloud* is casual, but women and men should strongly consider packing some Smart Casual attire for evenings and dressier occasions, such as the Captain’s Welcome and Farewell cocktail receptions. For women this includes casual dresses or skirt/slacks ensembles. For men this includes khakis/slacks and open-collared shirts. Men may choose to wear a sports jacket and tie for dressier evenings. The degree of dress is also in accordance with your personal preference.
- **Sweaters and Coats:** Warm weather will be the rule on this trip, but a sweater or light coat or jacket will come in handy some mornings and evenings.

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FOOTWEAR: A lightweight hiking boot or trail shoe is recommended for birding outings and when walking in archaeological sites; you may also prefer sandals and/or tennis shoes for walking tours and time on board the ship; dress shoes will be appropriate for some evenings.

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Laundry service is provided by the ship staff for an extra charge. Please check with the staff upon embarkation for procedures and turnaround time.

EQUIPMENT: One of the most important aspects of having an enjoyable travel experience is being prepared with proper equipment. The following items will come in handy during your trip:

- **Backpack** – Good for carrying extra clothing, field guides, supplies, and optical equipment during all land excursions
- **Notebooks and pens**
- **Travel alarm clock**
- **Polarized sunglasses with good UV protection**
- **Sunscreen, lip balm, skin lotions**
- **Personal toiletries**
- **Cameras, lenses, film, memory cards, and extra batteries**
- **Collapsible walking stick** – A highly recommended item for those who have trouble walking
- **Tissue packs**

BINOCULARS & SPOTTING SCOPES:

Binoculars – We strongly recommend good binoculars of at least 7x35, 8x42, 10x40, or 10x42 magnification. We recommend that you do NOT bring mini-binoculars of any kind. Some people like them because they are small and lightweight; but they have an extremely small field of view and very poor light gathering power. Trying to find a bird in your binoculars using minis is like trying to read a book through a keyhole. You will be very frustrated, and even if you do manage to get the bird in your binoculars before it flies, you will have a poor view. You will find that 7x35 or 8x42 binoculars are compact and light enough.

Spotting Scopes – Given the ship-based nature of the program and that most of our land-birding will take place around the archaeological sites, it is not necessary for you to bring a spotting scope. Your tour leaders will have scopes available for group use throughout the trip.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS:

PASSPORTS - A valid passport is required. Please check the expiration date on your passport. **If it is not valid for at least six months after your trip return date, you will need to get it renewed.** You will also want to make sure that you have at least two blank pages in your passport for stamps.

If you need a passport, you should get it well in advance of your trip departure date. For additional fees, a passport can be issued on an expedited basis. In the United States this can be done at the nearest passport office, most post offices, or the county clerk's office. You may also visit www.state.gov/travel/ for information on how to get or renew a passport.

As a safety measure, photocopy the first two pages of your passport. Keep the photocopies in a safe place, so if your passport is lost you will have proof of identification. Your passport should be signed and easily available at all times. You will need it for check-in at the airport on your first day of departure, so **do not pack it in your checked luggage.**

On board ship, it is customary for the purser to hold all passports for clearance with port authorities. Your passport will be collected upon embarkation, and returned prior disembarkation.

VISAS - Citizens of the United States and Canada do not need to obtain a tourist visa to enter Malta or Italy. Rules and regulations pertaining to non-U.S. and Canadian citizens may vary; please check with the Maltese and Italian consulates or embassies.

CURRENCY & MONEY MATTERS: Your trip to Malta and Sicily includes most necessary expenses, including all meals aboard *Sea Cloud*. While U.S. dollars might be accepted in large cities and shops, it is always convenient to have a supply of local currency for such items as taxi rides, gifts, non-meal-time and off-ship refreshments, laundry tips, meals on your own, optional gratuities for the ship's staff and crew, and any personal items.

Upon embarkation, a shipboard account will be opened for your convenience. The Euro is the official currency on board. Credit cards, including Visa, MasterCard, and American Express, are accepted for expenses on board that may be paid/settled at the end of the cruise. Traveler's checks are accepted/exchanged at their official exchange rate. Note that it may not always be possible to make change for travelers' checks or cash in large denominations; the purser would appreciate the use of Euros, if paying by cash, in smaller denominations for settlement of your shipboard account.

There is no facility on board for exchanging U.S. dollars into Euros. It is best to acquire this currency either before leaving the U.S. or at the airport or a bank in Malta. Small denominations of cash are always best as it is easier for individuals and businesses to provide change. Should you extend your vacation in Malta or Sicily beyond what is offered in the cruise program, you should strongly consider obtaining Euros. ATM machines can be found in large cities and in some towns; you shouldn't have any problems using major cards in hotels, restaurants, and shops. Please check with your bank and credit card issuer for more information regarding banking and the use of ATM and credit cards overseas.

The official currency of Malta and Italy is the Euro (EUR). You can check the latest currency conversion rate by visiting "XE-The World's Favorite Currency Site" at: <http://www.xe.com/>.

ELECTRICITY: Power on board the *Sea Cloud* is 220V, with the recessed outlets of the round, two-pronged European type. If you plan to use American standard 110V equipment with the flat-pronged plugs, you will need to bring an all purpose transformer to convert the current for 110V use, in addition to a round European-type adapter plug. Power in Malta is 240V. Electrical outlets conform to the Type G ("British") electrical plug with a three-pin rectangular blade formation.

LANGUAGE: Maltese and English are the official languages of Malta, although Italian is widely spoken as well. English is the primary language spoken on board *Sea Cloud* and throughout our tour. Italian is the primary language of Sicily.

TIME: Malta and Sicily are on Central European Summer Time (CEST) and are 6 hours ahead of Eastern Daylight Time (EDT).

MEDICAL SERVICES: A qualified physician is in attendance on *Sea Cloud*, but must be made aware of any potential medical problems that might arise because of any medical condition, disability, or illness of any passenger on board. **Please return your medical information form in a timely manner.** The doctor is available 24 hours a day in case of emergency. The ship's pharmacy has a limited supply of general medicines and seasickness medications. In case of emergency, the ship is equipped with excellent radio and marine and satellite telephone facilities, and is never more than a few miles from shore so that aid in an emergency can be called.

Passengers' who are not fit for a cruise, including those with physical disabilities that affect mobility and balance, heart or immune deficiencies, or other conditions associated with poor health, are advised not to join the cruise. A serious health emergency may result in an air evacuation, which will come at considerable expense to you. **Comprehensive optional insurance, including coverage for medical evacuation (REQUIRED), is available through *Travel Insured International* and can be purchased with your trip cancellation policy. Please consult**

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your insurance agent or existing policy, if in effect, for the terms and limitations of your existing coverage. Please refer to the section on Trip Cancellation Insurance.

HEALTH: As of this writing (July 2016), no major shots or inoculations are required for entry into Malta or Sicily; however, The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends vaccination against a variety of preventable diseases, including the so-called **Routine Vaccinations** (if you are not up-to-date), which are measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine; diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) vaccine; and poliovirus vaccine (boosters for adult travelers who have received a primary series with either inactivated poliovirus vaccine (IPV) or oral polio vaccine (OPV); they should receive another dose of IPV before departure). You should also be up-to-date with your **Hepatitis A** or Immune Globulin (IG) and **Hepatitis B** vaccinations.

If you are taking personal medication, prescription or over-the-counter, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the expedition safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

Motion Sickness – The Mediterranean Sea is known for occasional wind-generated turbulence. Although we expect mild sea conditions, passengers should be prepared for the possibility of rougher seas on our lengthier crossings, such as the transit from Valletta to Trapani and from Syracuse to Valletta. *Sea Cloud* may carry a limited supply of anti-motion sickness medication for general availability to passengers, but we recommend that you consult your physician on an appropriate medication.

Sun Exposure – The sun's ultraviolet rays are dangerous under prolonged exposure (sometimes only a matter of minutes). Anytime you are outdoors you will want to protect your skin, including your lips, eyes, nose, and ears. A severe sunburn is potentially very painful and will affect your level of enjoyment. Always protect yourself when outdoors and be sure to bring an ample supply of high SPF sunscreen and lip balm. We strongly recommend the use of ultra-violet blocking, polarized sunglasses.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta Georgia. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line at 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636) or you can check their website at www.cdc.gov/travel. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-spac.gc.ca/new_e.html (click on travel health).

SUGGESTED READING: Our website, www.ventbird.com offers an affiliated online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers, including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from this store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You may also visit such other online stores such as www.amazon.com, and for those out-of-print or hard-to-find titles, www.abebooks.com or www.buteobooks.com which specializes in ornithology books.

Birds

Mullarney, Killian and Lars Svensson and Dan Zetterstrom. ***Birds of Europe***. Princeton Field Guides. Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, 2010 (second edition). This is the most important natural history book for this trip. It is probably the best all around field guide to the birds of Europe.

History, Philosophy & Culture

Sicilian history can be approached from several angles: one being a holistic view that explores the history of human habitation on the island from its earliest beginnings to the present; the other being a more concentrated approach that focuses on a specific period. On this program we will view Sicily from both perspectives. At the center of a cross-roads of civilizations, Sicily has been heavily visited by people far and wide since time immemorial and thus deserves a broader look; on the other hand, the historical sites we'll visit speak most clearly to the island's ancient Greek past, to a time when Sicily was the object of colonization by Greek city-states during the 8th-5th centuries B.C. Included here are titles that reflect both approaches.

Sicilian History:

Norwich, John Julius. *Sicily: An Island at the Crossroads of History*. Random House: New York, NY. 2015. This is a superb book that has been well-received by reviewers. The author's use of wit and personal opinion further enlivens an already well-constructed book. Highly recommended for anyone who seeks to gain a grasp of what is a very complex history.

Robb, Peter. *Midnight in Sicily: On Art, Food, History, Travel, and La Cosa Nostra*. London: Faber and Faber, Ltd. 1998

This production is less travel writing and more of an eye-opening look at modern Italian history. Specifically, Robb chronicles then ongoing efforts to prosecute seven-time Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti for a variety of terrible crimes stemming from his links to organized crime. Throughout the book the reader is presented with beautiful images of art, food, and travel in Sicily, while digesting stories of crime and corruption. A fascinating read.

Maltese History:

Bradford, Ernie. *The Great Siege: Malta 1565*. Open Road Media: New York, NY, 2014. The blow-by-blow account of the epic Turkish siege of Malta in 1565 is told in thrilling, page-turning fashion.

History, Culture & Philosophy:

Cahill, Thomas. *Sailing the Wine Dark Sea: Why the Greeks Matter*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group: New York, NY, 2004. An outstanding book that chronicles the contributions of the ancient Greeks to the development of modern politics, thought, warfare, and civilization.

Novels:

All three novels are in the category of Historical Fiction and are presented here not in traditional bibliographer order, but according to chronological order in which the stories takes place. All are highly recommended.

Renault, Mary. *Mask of Apollo: A Novel*. Vintage Books: New York, NY, 1988. Set in 4th century B.C. Greece, the story is narrated by a tragic actor who carries with him a theater mask of Apollo that takes on a life of its own. Much of the story also takes place in Syracuse where the narrator's friend is trying to convince the ruler, Dionysius the Younger to accept the rule of law.

Di Lampedusa, Giuseppe Di, *The Leopard*. Pantheon: New York, NY, 2007 (a recent edition). Set in 19th century Sicily, Di Lampedusa tells an engaging story of a dying Sicilian ruling class threatened by a coming revolution.

Sciascia, Leonardo. *The Day of the Owl*. Set in 20th century Sicily, this is a story about organized crime that showcases the complexity of unraveling a murder mystery in which the mafia is involved.

Films:

“*Cinema Paradiso*” 1988. Starring Antonella Attili and Enzo Cannavale

“*Divorce Italian Style*” 1962. A great comedy film about Sicily starring Marcello Mastroianni.

“*The Godfather*” 1972. Frances Ford Coppola's epic saga of a Sicilian clan's rise to power in America features an all-star cast.

“*The Leopard*” 1963. The novel by Di Lampedusa was also made into a famous Italian film by Luchino Visconti starring Burt Lancaster as the Sicilian prince.

“*Mafioso*” 1962. Starring Alberto Sordi.

TIPPING: All tipping (restaurants, porters, drivers, local guides, and ship's crew) is included. If you feel one or all of your VENT leaders, or any local guide has provided exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are not expected and are entirely optional.

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