



VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS

ITINERARY

**SICILY & MALTA**  
**Aboard the *Sea Cloud***  
**OCTOBER 23–NOVEMBER 2, 2025**

**MALTA PRE-TRIP OPTION I:**  
**BIRDING, SIGHTSEEING, HISTORY & CULTURE**  
**OCTOBER 20–24, 2025**

**MALTA PRE-TRIP OPTION II:**  
**SIGHTSEEING, HISTORY & CULTURE**  
**OCTOBER 21–24, 2025**

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The *Sea Cloud* © Sea Cloud Cruises

Stationed at an ancient crossroads of Mediterranean civilization, lovely Sicily and Malta offer a marvelous travel experience. Picturesque landscapes, vibrant cities, ancient ruins, and hills and plains of olive trees and grass bring to life classical images of southernmost Europe.

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

An exciting itinerary includes a day on Malta and a full 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 southern edge of Sicily before tracing a route clockwise around the entire island. We'll call at many important ports including Porto Empedocle, Trapani, brilliant Palermo, and Syracuse. Land excursions to some of the finest Greco-Roman archaeological sites surviving from antiquity include Agrigento and its golden-brown temples of Juno and Concordia; Segesta, home to a remarkably well-preserved Doric temple and Greek theater; and Syracuse, featuring the Temple of Apollo and the famed Greco-Roman theater. We've dedicated a full day to experiencing the Sicilian capital, Palermo, and its architectural wonders that reflect Christian and Muslim influences, including the incredible Capella Palatina, Martorana church, and the breathtaking Cathedral of Monreale.



Valley of the Temples, Agrigento © Cattani2011

Our program includes excursion options to suit the varied interests of our travelers, with activities ranging from a visit to the medieval village of Erice, to a walking tour of old Ortygia, to a visit to an olive oil farm near Syracuse.

Those more interested in birding will have the opportunity to visit two important nature preserves, each promising an array of waterbirds and landbirds.

Autumn is a lovely time of the year to travel in Sicily and Malta, with shorter days, milder temperatures, and birds on the move. Among the species we'll seek are a range of regional specialties and passage migrants including Common Shelduck, Greater Flamingo, Yelkouan Shearwater, Pied Avocet, Eurasian Oystercatcher, Black-tailed Godwit, Audouin's and Slender-billed gulls, Sardinian Warbler, Spotless Starling, Corn Bunting, and Spanish and Italian sparrows.



Pied Avocets © Andrew Whittaker

Highlighting the 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.

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 Barry Lyon and Rafael Galvez for this special departure are Larry Wolff, the Silver Professor of European



**History at New York University; his wife Perri Klass, professor of pediatrics at NYU, and Peter Zika, a superb field biologist and botanist at the herbarium of the University of Washington.**

**Those who want to maximize their time in Europe are encouraged to join either of our two Malta Pre-trips, one of which is a highlights-style trip focused exclusively on history and culture, while the other is similar but with the addition of birding as a theme.**

**October 23–24, Days 1–2: Departure to Valletta, Malta; arrival and evening welcome.** Flights from the United States bound for Valletta, Malta depart on October 23 and arrive in Europe on the morning of October 24, with connecting to flights to Malta arriving throughout the day. 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 October 24 at 6:00 p.m., at a location in the hotel to be announced, for a trip welcome and introduction, 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 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

**October 25, 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 unique island capital, Valletta, where we will join local guides for a highlights style tour of the fortified city.

**Highlights:**

- **Participate on a guided city tour of historic Valletta**
- **Enjoy a sumptuous lunch followed by free-time for exploring on your own**
- **Embark *Sea Cloud* and cruise out of Grand Harbor in the early evening**

**An overview of Malta and Valletta:**

At a mere 122 miles<sup>2</sup>, 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, capital of Malta © Mandy88**

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. 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 Indies*, made for the room in 1708–1710.



**Beautiful St. John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta © Rhododendrites**

We will reconvene for lunch, after which we'll have free time for exploration of the city on our own. Perhaps a bit more sightseeing is desired or a chance to do a bit of shopping is desired. Others may just want to relax at one of the many streetside cafes and sip a cool beverage.

At some point in the afternoon, 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 and Spanish Sparrow will provide the trip's initial avian interest.

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 lie 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.



**October 26, Day 4: Cruising the Mediterranean Sea: Valletta to Porto Empedocle.** Covering the considerable distance between Valletta and Porto Empedocle, Sicily, requires a full night and day at sea. The entire day will be spent making this voyage of 158 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, those with an interest in birdwatching 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 Scopoli's Shearwater and Yellow-legged Gull, two species that are found in these waters year-round. The other shearwater of the eastern Mediterranean, the Yelkouan Shearwater, also occurs here. This species is a smaller relative of Scopoli's Shearwater and is often seen in large foraging flocks. Common Bottle-nosed Dolphin and Short-beaked Common Dolphin are sometimes sighted as well.



**Scopoli's Shearwater © David Barton**

As October is a prime time for fall bird migration, we could encounter a variety of unexpected species making their way south to the African continent.

#### NIGHT: Aboard *Sea Cloud*

**October 27, Day 5: Morning at Sant'Angelo Muxaro; afternoon at Agrigento.** After cruising through the night, *Sea Cloud* will arrive this morning in Porto Empedocle (situated about halfway along the length of Sicily's south coast). We have some very appealing activities planned for the day, split between a morning walking and tasting tour in the charming village of Sant'Angelo Muxaro, and an afternoon 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 in the late afternoon.

#### Highlights:

- **A morning-long walking/tasting tour in the village of Sant'Angelo Muxaro**
- **An afternoon visit to Agrigento, featuring the famed Valley of Temples**

#### **Sant'Angelo Muxaro**

This morning, we will travel inland about an hour to Sant'Angelo Muxaro, a timeless village nestled in the hills of the Sciani region. This area is rich in charm and history and offers sweeping views over a large part of southern Sicily.

A trip to Sant'Angelo Muxaro offers an immersive experience in the daily life of this small village of only a few hundred families. Coming here makes the big city feel far away. Everything moves slowly, and along the road into the village we will take in panoramic views of valleys, hills, mountains and peaks. The Platani River flows nearby.

Dividing into smaller groups, we will enjoy a walking tour of the village. Over the course of a couple of hours, our explorations will include tastings of local specialty foods while interacting with some of the locals. We will make a stop to taste local cheeses, along with the local specialty *pani cunzato*, a local bread made entirely from local ingredients. We will also taste locally produced almond cookies, honey, local wines, olive oil, and other seasonal artisanal products from the area.

With this excursion, we hope to show you a lesser-known Sicily, one that offers a more authentic "human" experience than is otherwise available in the well-known tourist destinations.

We will return to the ship for lunch.

#### **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 the afternoon touring the Valley of Temples, the centerpiece of the large archaeological and landscape park. We'll view the Temple of Hercules, constructed in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.; the remarkably preserved and magnificent Temple of Concordia; 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 afternoon light.





**Temple of Juno (Hera), Agrigento © Trolvag**

The birders among us will be interested to know that the 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, European 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 and Booted Eagle are resident. A representation of birds seen here includes Eurasian Jackdaw, Eurasian Magpie, Common Raven, Short-toed Treecreeper, European Robin, Eurasian Blackbird, Woodchat Shrike, Spotless Starling and Italian Sparrow.



**Booted Eagle © Brian Gibbons**

We'll reboard *Sea Cloud* in the late afternoon as we begin making our way toward our next destination: Trapani.

NIGHT: Aboard *Sea Cloud*

**October 28, Day 6: Cruising the Mediterranean Sea: Porto Empedocle to Trapani.** Following the activity of the previous day, we'll enjoy a relaxing day at sea today cruising toward Trapani, our next port of call. Trapani lies 133 nautical miles to the west, and our route will take us along half the length of the southern Sicilian coast.

**Highlights:**

- **A relaxing day at sea**
- **Presentations by the *Sea Cloud* and VENT staffs**
- **Seabirding from the viewing decks**

Once again, our time at sea affords a leisurely day in which we'll have options for activities and engagement, or simply catching up on rest and relaxation. There will be opportunities to attend presentations from Larry, Peter, and the *Sea Cloud* staff on various aspects of sailing, history, geography, or botany.

*Sea Cloud's* viewing decks afford ample 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.

Late October can be an interesting time for bird migration and thus a good time to be at sea. Many birds are on the move, relocating from breeding grounds to wintering sites. Consequently, the opportunity to be on the water carries potential for productive seabirding. Among the species for which we'll be on watch are Scopoli's and Yelkouan shearwaters and an excellent diversity of gulls and terns. Among the possibilities are Yellow-legged, Lesser Black-backed, Audouin's, Slender-billed, Black-headed, and Mediterranean gulls, and Sandwich and Common terns. Although less numerous, European Storm-Petrel occurs in these waters and is also possible. Minke Whale, Common Bottle-nosed Dolphin, and Short-beaked Common Dolphin are representative of the marine mammals possible here as well.



**Yelkouan Shearwater © Julien Renoult**

NIGHT: Aboard *Sea Cloud*

**October 29, Day 7: A day at Trapani with activity options.** After cruising through the night, *Sea Cloud* will enter the port of Trapani around 8:00 a.m. We will have a full day in the area, with participants welcome to choose from several activity options in the morning and the afternoon.

**Highlights:**

- **Participate on a morning excursion to Segesta, one of the best-preserved Greek ruins anywhere, or join a birding foray to a nearby World Wildlife Federation site OR**
- **Enjoy a daylong trip to the town of Marsala for a walking tour followed by a visit to local winery with lunch**
- **Join an afternoon trip to the wonderful mountain-top medieval village of Erice, or go birding at a salt pan location south of Trapani**

**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.

To accommodate the varied interests of our guests, we offer two activity options for the morning, in the Trapani area, and a third all-day option to Marsala, for those who don't mind traveling slightly further afield. Two activity options will be offered for the afternoon as well.

**Morning Activity Options**

**Option #1: A morning at 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 rural 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.

Those with an interest in birding 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, Eurasian Jay, Eurasian Jackdaw, Spotless Starling, Sardinian Warbler, Black Redstart, and others.

We'll return to the ship for lunch.





Segesta © Ludvig14

## Option #2: A morning of birding at Reserva Delle Saline

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 better birding areas.

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.



Greater Flamingos © Brian Gibbons

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. Late October is a good time for a visit as fall migration is continuing while winter birds are newly arrived. Among the many possibilities this morning are Common Shelduck, Greater Flamingo, Pied Avocet, Black-winged Stilt, Eurasian Curlew, Common and Spotted redshanks, Curlew Sandpiper, Dunlin, Common Sandpiper, Ruff, Eurasian Spoonbill, Gray Heron, Yellow-legged and Slender-billed gulls, and Sandwich and Common terns. Not to be overlooked, the area supports an interesting array of landbirds including Common Buzzard, Eurasian Kestrel, European Stonechat, Spotless Starling, Crested Lark, European Goldfinch, and European Greenfinch.

We'll return to the ship for lunch.

### **Option #3: A day in Marsala**

Located only forty minutes south of Trapani, Marsala is a charming coastal town on Sicily's west coast. Today we offer a varied excursion option that offers a bit of history, culture, and sightseeing, highlighted by a visit to a winery for lunch and wine tasting. The day will end with a short visit to the remarkably interesting Ettore Infersa, a salt works facility that embodies thousands of years of salt production.

Upon disembarkation, we'll proceed directly to Marsala, whose Arabic name derives from Marsa Ali or Marsa Allah (the port of Ali or God), where some traces of the old Arab town can still be seen in the city's modern urban layout. Marsala is famed for the robust wines which bear its name, which were first exported in the late 18th century by the English Merchant, John Woodhouse. Our time here will start with a visit to the renowned Baglio Anselmi (archaeological museum), which contains a wealth of artifacts from the Phoenician, Carthaginian, and Roman eras. Ancient statuary and pottery are well-represented, but the real prizes here are the mosaic floor remains from the Roman era, and the wreck of a Punic ship dating from the 3rd century BC. This is the only example in the world of a liburna, a fast warship about 35 m long, which would have had a crew of 68 oarsmen. In the same room are exhibits and equipment associated with the ship.

Afterward, we'll proceed to Baglio Donna Franca, a wine estate in the heart of the famed Sicilian wine country. This estate is unlike many others in that the family that developed the estate, in 1893, was a pioneer of wine growing in the south of Sicily. Our program includes a visit to a wine cellar where we'll learn about the wine-making process employed in this corner of the world. After the visit, we'll enjoy a delicious lunch featuring local products, including the long, spiral pasta, the *busiate*, first developed in Trapani. Our menu will also include pasta with Trapanese pesto and Norma-style pasta (with aubergines, rich San Marzano tomatoes, and creamy ricotta), and capped off with local sweets. Our wine-tasting will feature at least three varieties.

In the afternoon we'll proceed to the salt pans, Ettore Infersa, for a short visit to witness the ancient saltworks, including the photogenic windmill used to pump water into the pans for the salt harvesting process.

We'll be back to the ship by 5:30 p.m.

### **Afternoon Activity Options**

#### **Option #1: An afternoon at Erice**

This afternoon we'll visit Erice, renowned for its medieval ambience and magnificent hilltop location high above the sea.

Unlike other sites in Sicily, Erice was never fully under the influence of the Greeks, who colonized Sicily in the first millennium B.C. 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 12<sup>th</sup> 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. Birdwatchers, meanwhile, will be drawn to the garden and the trees and bushes around the castle. Blue Rock-Thrush, Sardinian Warbler, and Rock Bunting may be spotted on the hillsides below the town; European Greenfinch, European Goldfinch, European Linnet, and Eurasian Serin are found in the trees around the castle.



The plains of Trapani, from medieval Erice © Erwin Meier

We'll be back to the ship by 5:00 p.m.

#### **Option #2: An afternoon of birding at Saline di San Teodoro**

This afternoon, we will offer a birding excursion similar to that of the morning birding option. We will visit the Saline di San Teodoro, otherwise known as the salt pans of San Teodoro, outside of Marsala. Shorebirds, wading birds, gulls and terns will all likely be well-represented. The bird species possibilities are similar to those of the morning, but being a new location, we'll likely encounter birds new for the day. Slender-billed and Audouin's gulls are always on our list of priorities while Eleonora's Falcons are occasionally seen hunting over the salt pans.

We will be back to the ship by 5:00 p.m.

NIGHT: Aboard *Sea Cloud*



**October 30, Day 8: Palermo & Monreale.** Our time in Sicily reaches new heights today as we explore the most significant architectural and historical wonders of Palermo and the nearby town of Monreale. We'll disembark the ship after breakfast and will be on shore until the late afternoon.

### **Palermo**

Our day begins immediately after breakfast with a walking and driving tour of Palermo that includes the city's top sites: Cappella Palatina in the Palace of the Normans, Palermo Cathedral, and La Martorana.

Built within the **Palace of the Normans, Capella Palatina** (Palatine Chapel) is considered the finest example of Arab-Norman art and architecture in Palermo. The palace was originally constructed by Arab chieftains in the 9<sup>th</sup> century on a site that formerly served as a Roman fortress. The palace was abandoned with the coming of the Normans but was eventually turned into a lavish residence under the Norman kings. In 1140, the Capella Palatina was completed by Roger II.

The art and architecture of the palace is spectacular. Glittering mosaics cover the walls while the ceiling is covered by a 10<sup>th</sup> century Arab honeycomb stalactite wooden ceiling. Biblical stories blend freely with scenes of Arab life and Norman court showmanship. Outstanding features of the chapel include large oval arches, a mosaic floor, and walls of marble wainscoting. The entrance to the nave is dominated by an enormous Royal Throne covered in mosaics. A carved 12<sup>th</sup> century candelabrum is also not to be missed. Over the nave, a wooden honeycomb stalactite is considered a masterpiece creation by Arab artisans brought to Sicily from North Africa. Throughout the palace and chapel, vivid colors and realistic styles give the site a sense of true splendor.



**The incomparable Capella Palatina, Palermo © Holger Uwe Schmitt**

**Palermo Cathedral** is the cathedral church of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Palermo. The church was erected in the 12<sup>th</sup> century on the site of an earlier Byzantine basilica. Like many houses of worship in Sicily, the cathedral has been greatly altered over the centuries to reflect the differences in style and taste of whoever held power. Most of the cathedral was constructed during the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries and reflects Gothic-style architecture while additions of Baroque and Neo-classical styles were added in following centuries. The Palermo Cathedral is grandiose in many ways and showcases a diversity of attractions including Gothic towers on the façade, arching turrets, a beautifully decorated Sacrament

chapel, and a triple-arcaded portico that serves as the cathedral entrance. Inside the cathedral are the tombs of royal figures from the early second millennium including those of Frederick II and Roger II.

The church of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio, more popularly known as **La Martorana**, is one of the great artistic wonders of Europe. Founded by George of Antioch in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, and reflecting a blend of Arab, Byzantine, and Norman architectural styles, the church is best known not for its exterior but for its extraordinarily decorated interior, namely its exquisite Byzantine mosaics which cover the walls and ceilings throughout. La Martorana takes its name from Eloisa Martorana, who founded a convent of Benedictine nuns on an adjacent property. The church was eventually absorbed by the convent.

After a sumptuous lunch, we'll then travel to Monreale.

### **Monreale**

It is said that no visit to Palermo is complete without a trip to Monreale. This afternoon we will make a 4-mile trip south of Palermo's city center to this famous location. The most obvious reason to visit Monreale is to walk through the famous **Norman Cathedral**. Featuring an amazing blend of Romanesque architecture and Arab, Byzantine, and Norman artistic styles, the cathedral represents the best of 12<sup>th</sup> century art and architecture. The mosaics inside the cathedral are among the world's largest displays of this style of art, covering the structure's vast interior. The cloister of the Benedictine abbey, equally fabulous, features 228 columns, some of which are carved with mosaic inlay. The capital of each column features lavish scenes from Sicily's Norman history.

The cathedral was begun under the Norman king, William, in 1174 and mostly finished under his son, William II, by 1189 when he died at 36.

We will return to the ship late this afternoon.

### NIGHT: Aboard *Sea Cloud*

**October 31, Day 9: At sea: Palermo to Syracuse via the Strait of Messina.** Following our day in Palermo, we'll enjoy a relaxing day at sea today cruising toward Syracuse, our next port of call. Syracuse lies 172 nautical miles to the east and south. A special highlight of the day will be an afternoon transit of the Strait of Messina, the narrow waterway separating the Italian mainland from Sicily.

### **Highlights:**

- **A relaxing day at sea**
- **Presentations by the *Sea Cloud* and VENT staffs**
- **Afternoon transit of the Strait of Messina**
- **Seabirding from the viewing decks**

Today affords another leisurely day at sea in which we'll have options for activities and engagement, or simply catching up on rest and relaxation. There will again be opportunities to attend presentations from Larry, Peter, and the *Sea Cloud* staff.

We'll want to be outside in the afternoon as *Sea Cloud* navigates the legendary Strait of Messina. If we are on schedule, we'll enter the strait around 3:30 p.m. The crossing takes about an hour and a half in its entirety.

At its narrowest point, the distance across the strait is only 1.8 miles, offering visitors fine views of Sicily on the right and the Calabria region of the Italian mainland on the left. Despite the seeming tranquility of the

passage, a natural whirlpool forms in the strait, giving rise to the legend of Scylla and Charybdis. According to Greek mythology, Scylla and Charybdis are two sea monsters that inhabit opposite sides of the strait and terrorize passing ships. Charybdis, in particular, was said to suck massive quantities of water into her gaping mouth, and when expelled, created the powerful whirlpool for which the strait is renowned.

In reality, the whirlpool is a result of natural currents, and these same currents give the strait a unique ecosystem, complete with its own climate patterns. Air currents are stronger here where the strait funnels down to its narrowest point, providing a special route for migrating birds. A huge variety of waterfowl, storks, gulls, terns, birds of prey, and songbirds pour through the straits each spring and fall. Time on the deck may reveal some nice surprises. Around the ship we'll again watch carefully for Scopoli's and Levantine shearwaters, European Storm-Petrel, and Yellow-legged Gull, all of which occur off the coast of Sicily. We also have chances for encountering a wide range of arriving wintering gulls, with Mediterranean, Audouin's, Lesser Black-backed, Black-headed, and Slender-billed gulls all possible.

Perhaps the most special bird of the region is the lovely Eleonora's Falcon, a colonially nesting bird of prey which nests on offshore islands. Sighting an Eleonora's Falcon while passing through the Strait of Messina is a birder's dream come true, and would certainly rank among the trip's most prized avian experiences.



**Strait of Messina; satellite image, looking north**

NIGHT: Aboard *Sea Cloud*

**November 1, Day 10: A day at Syracuse, with activity options.** After cruising through the night, *Sea Cloud* will reach the port of Syracuse (Siracusa in Italian) this morning around breakfast time. There are many ways to entertain ourselves around Syracuse, and instead of offering a set program, our guests may choose from a variety of activity options in both the morning and afternoon.



**Highlights:**

- **Participate on a morning excursion to the famous archaeological park of Syracuse or join a walking tour of historic Ortygia OR**
- **Enjoy a day of birding at Oasi di Vendicari Nature Reserve and the marshes of Longarini and Ciba**
- **Join an afternoon walking tour of Ortygia or visit an active olive oil farm**
- **Captain's Farwell Dinner**

**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 6<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> 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.

Given the varied interests of our guests, we offer two activity options for the morning, in Syracuse, and a third all-day option for those whose primary interest is in birding. Two activity options will be offered for the afternoon as well.

**Morning Activity Options****Option #1: A morning at the Neapolis (Archaeological Park of Syracuse)**

This morning we'll participate on a tour of the city's most famous and important ancient landmarks, the Neapolis of Syracuse. In its Golden Age, Syracuse was one of the most populous and powerful cities in ancient Sicily. Our time in the archaeological park will include visits to the spectacular 15,000-seat Greek theater, the elliptical Roman Amphitheater, and the cavernous limestone quarry and Ear of Dionysius. Lunch will be aboard the ship.

**Option #2: A morning in Ortygia**

**Piazza del Duomo © Mazur Travel**

We will spend the morning together on a walking tour of Syracuse's old quarter, Ortygia. 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 (7<sup>th</sup> 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 13<sup>th</sup> century castle, was restructured in the Gothic style in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Lunch will be aboard the ship.

### **Option #2: Birding (Full day)**

Lying about an hour south of the 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. Early November is a great time to be here as we'll likely encounter a rich mix of resident wading birds, late southbound migrants and arriving winter residents.

Initially, we may work the fields along the entrance road watching for open-country birds such as Common Wood-Pigeon, Common Buzzard, European Stonechat, and a variety of wagtails, larks, pipits, and buntings. Areas of brush and trees may hold European Greenfinch, European Goldfinch, Eurasian Blue and Great tits, and more. Once inside, 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. Areas of exposed mud could reveal an interesting assortment of southbound and wintering shorebirds, gulls, and terns. Species one may hope to encounter in this setting include Pied Avocet, Northern Lapwing, European Golden-Plover, Black-bellied Plover, Kentish Plover, Eurasian Curlew, Black-tailed Godwit, Dunlin, Spotted Redshank, and Common Greenshank.

Larger bodies of water can be exceptionally good for wading birds and waterfowl. Eurasian Spoonbill, Gray Heron, and Great and Little egrets are all typical of the area. Greater Flamingos occur here as wintering birds and we will likely see a number of these stately birds. Among the waterfowl species possible here are Common Shelduck, Eurasian Wigeon, Northern Pintail, Tufted Duck, and Ferruginous Duck.

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

Following lunch, either nearby or in the coastal town of Marzamemi, we'll likely have time for additional birding. A leading option for us is the protected wetlands complex of Pantano Di Cuba and Pantano Di Longarini. The large tract of land containing the wetlands is owned and managed by a private entity called Foundation Pro Biodiversity, the brainchild of a German businessman named Roland Tischbier. Around the lakes, marshes and fields in the area we'll watch for Little, Eared, and Great-crested grebes, Hen Harrier, Western Marsh Harrier, and a range of wagtails, pipits, buntings, and larks.



**European Stonechat © Andrew Whittaker**

## Afternoon Activity Options

### Option #1: An afternoon in Ortygia

Please refer to the description provided for the morning excursion option.

### Option #2: Visit an olive oil farm

Italy is one of the great olive oil producing countries of the world. For this excursion, we offer an opportunity to visit a working olive oil farm, complete with guided tour and olive oil tasting. Participants on this trip will visit a farm with ancient olive trees in the fields, visit a mill, and learn about the machinery integral to the production process.

All groups will return to *Sea Cloud* by 5:00 p.m. prior to starting the return cruise to Valletta.

NIGHT: Aboard *Sea Cloud*

**November 2, Day 11: Arrival in Valletta; disembarkation; departure for home.** 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 flights should not be scheduled prior to 12:00 p.m.



Two pre-trip options to our cruise explores in greater depth the natural, historical, and cultural highlights of the island-nation of Malta. The two options offer similar cultural experiences, the main difference being that pre-trip option I includes a day of birdwatching and more exposure to the island's south side.

## **MALTA PRE-TRIP OPTION I: BIRDING, SIGHTSEEING, HISTORY & CULTURE OCTOBER 20–24, 2025**



Blue Grotto, Malta Barry Lyon

Situated in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, Malta is famous as a crossroads of history's greatest civilizations. Malta is one of Europe's smallest countries, but what it lacks in size is made up for in charm. Prosperous and historic and culturally rich, Malta is a favored getaway for travelers from Europe and the United States.

On this pre-trip option, we'll experience the island-nation of Malta beyond what is offered in the cruise program. We will have three days to explore the island, visiting a variety of important historical, birding, and scenic locations.

Malta's illustrious history is on display everywhere, as evidenced by the fact that it hosts a greater density of UNESCO World Heritage Sites than any country in the world. Our itinerary visits a selection of prominent sites, each of which provides exposure to a slice of Maltese

history and culture. On the first morning we'll enjoy a walking tour of the Three Cities district. We'll journey inland to the remarkable St. Paul's Catacombs, an expansive underground burial chamber used during Phoenician, Punic, Roman, and early-Christian times. On our second day, we'll visit several key birding sites in the north part of the island, seeking a range of resident and migrant species. Last, we'll travel to South Malta for a visit to the Neolithic site of Hagar Qim followed by lunch on the waterfront at Marsaxlokk, famous for its fleet of colorful fishing boats.

Late October is a good time to be in Malta for birding, as this is when the island's resident species are joined by southbound passage migrants and arriving winter residents. Visits to the Buskett Gardens, Ghadira Nature Reserve, and Foresta 2000, the latter two BirdLife Malta sites, afford opportunities to seek a range of migrating shorebirds and landbirds.

Finally, our travels will showcase Malta's scenic beauty, such as the Dingli Cliffs and Blue Grotto, highlighted by rocky uplands, towering limestone cliffs, and dramatic seascapes.

**October 20–21, Days 1–2: Departure to Valletta, Malta; arrival and evening welcome.** Flights from the United States bound for Valletta, Malta depart on October 20 and arrive in Europe on the morning of October 21, with connecting to flights to Malta arriving throughout the day. 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 October 24 at 6:00 p.m. at a location in the hotel to be announced, for a trip welcome and introduction, 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 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

**October 22, Day 3: Central Malta: Three Cities, St. Paul's Catacombs and Mdina.** Today will be the first of three days in which we'll explore a number of important areas across the island. A morning walking tour of the Three Cities district will kick things off followed by a visit inland to the remarkable site of St. Paul's Catacombs. We'll then travel to the wonderful medieval village of Mdina for lunch and a walking tour of the fabled citadel.

While the entire island brims with historic sites and interesting natural features, the area around the capital, Valletta, is an essential first stop. A walled city dating from the mid-1600s, Valletta is the historical, cultural, and administrative heart of a region that hosts most of the island's population. As a tour of the famous city is included in the cruise program, we will spend our time this morning visiting the Three Cities District, situated immediately east of Grand Harbor.

We will travel directly from the hotel to the Three district, where we'll spend the first part of the day on a walking and driving tour of two of the three communities that comprise the district—Birgu and Senglea (the latter also known as L-Isla)—both of which sit on narrow peninsulas that project into Grand Harbor. Birgu was the capital of the Knights of the Order of St. John until the end of the Great Siege in 1565. We will walk through the medieval village exploring its winding stone streets, narrow passages, and Baroque architecture. On the far side of the peninsula, we'll enjoy fine views of Fort Ricasoli that guards the outer harbor. We'll then make the short trip to Senglea on the parallel peninsula. At the tip we'll visit the attractive Safe Haven Garden and take in the sweeping views of Grand Harbor below, Valletta across the way, and restored Fort St. Angelo across Dockyard Creek.

In the late morning we'll head to the village of Rabat in the center of the island for a visit to St. Paul's catacombs, a must-see site featuring rock-hewn burial chambers spanning 1,600 years of history. The earliest of the catacombs were used in Phoenician burial ceremonies while the latest date from the Byzantine period, around 870 A.D. The site offers a modern visitor center and several underground access points where we'll have the opportunity to explore a labyrinthine network of corridors and burial chambers. Of special interest is the fact that the catacombs were first developed as ancient limestone quarries prior to serving as a burial ground. The Maltese government and European Union have invested significant effort and money into developing the catacombs as a first-rate historic site. A visit here provides a thoroughly unique experience.



**The walled city of Mdina © Adwo**

At mid-day or early afternoon, we'll head to nearby Mdina for lunch, followed by time in the city. Mdina is the walled citadel that served for centuries as the island capital until the coming of the Knights of the Order of St. John. It is an amazing place, to be sure. Situated on a hilltop overlooking miles of fertile plains, it is small wonder that the site was so highly valued throughout its history for its strategic advantages. We will spend a part of the afternoon meandering through the medieval village exploring its narrow streets and plazas. From several overlooks atop the eastern bastion, we'll have unlimited views of the surrounding countryside and the distant sea. We'll also have an opportunity to poke our heads into several shops, and



possibly even have time to explore the Palazzo Falson, a historic museum house where centuries-old rugs, furniture, art, and weapons are on display.

The birding around town will be light, although Spanish Sparrows are ubiquitous.

We'll return to the hotel in the late afternoon.

NIGHT: Westin Dragonara Resort, St. Julian's

**October 23, Day 4: Birding in North and Central Malta.** Whereas the previous day was dedicated largely to sightseeing and visits to historical sites, today will be allotted to exploring Malta's birding opportunities. We will spend the duration of the morning in North Malta, about an hour from the hotel, visiting several sites on this, the less developed part of the island. After lunch we'll travel to the Buskett Gardens near the west coast for an hour or two of birding.

Owing to its small size and sparse vegetative cover, Malta does not support a high diversity of breeding birds. On the other hand, given that Malta is an outpost in the midst of the Mediterranean Sea, it happens to be an excellent place to see birds in the fall migration period when many species of waterbirds, birds of prey, and songbirds are flowing south out of Europe bound for African wintering grounds. At this season, a variety of birds representing a multitude of families is possible, including herons, hawks, harriers, shorebirds, shrikes, warblers, finches and more.

We will plan our day so as to visit several birding areas that give us the best chance of encountering a mix of resident and migrant birds alike. BirdLife Malta, an affiliate of the renowned conservation organization, BirdLife International, operates three reserves on Malta and we will visit two of these. We'll also explore a scrub-plateau that offers chances for a variety of species not found elsewhere and that affords lovely views of the sea.



Blue Rock-Thrush © Jesus Giraldo Guterrez

Our first stop will be Foresta 2000 north of the town of Mellieha where the island pinches in to its narrowest point. This, the first of two BirdLife Malta sites we'll visit this morning, is a small woodland of planted native trees attractive to migrant landbirds. The project is interesting from the standpoint that it provides a look into the distant past to a time Malta might have appeared before its native forest was harvested for construction and fuel for fire. Foresta 2000 takes its name from the incipient year of the project. To demonstrate the problems associated with bird conservation in Malta, the forest was partially destroyed a decade ago by vandalism inflicted by bird hunters upset with the growing movement to end the hunting of native birds in Malta. Still, the damage was limited and today the site is considered a success. If the pulse of migration is slow, we may see very little; on the other hand, a good wave of migrating birds could yield Zitting Cisticola, Eurasian Blackcap, Sardinian Warbler, European Robin, Black Redstart, Meadow Pipit, Common Chaffinch, Common Chiffchaff, and Hawfinch.

Next, we'll proceed to the top of the plateau above, a region of rocky limestone uplands and loosely spaced low vegetation. Here, amid the shin-high scrub we have chances to encounter Sardinian Warbler, Blue Rock-Thrush, Black Redstart, European Stonechat, White Wagtail, Meadow Pipit, and Eurasian Skylark. From the edge of the plateau, the panoramic views of the sea are inspiring. To the northwest, the sister island of Gozo looms large against the sea, its white cliffs visible even at a distance.



**Common Chaffinch © Brian Gibbons**

Descending the plateau, we'll next visit Ghadira Nature Reserve. Another BirdLife Malta site, Ghadira is a critical wetland habitat on an island with precious few. In historical times, the site probably began as a coastal lagoon, but later was used as a salt pan by area residents. Thwarted plans to develop the property, or in one case, run a road through it, ultimately led to the preservation of the site in perpetuity. Although small, the actively managed wetland is a draw for migrating shorebirds and wading birds. Exposed mud, shallow water, and salt marsh often teem with birds in the migration period. We never know what a visit will produce; regardless, we likely will not be disappointed. A representation of species we could possibly encounter includes Eurasian Moorhen, Little Grebe, Little Egret, Kentish and Common Ringed plovers,

Common Snipe, Common Sandpiper, Cetti's Warbler, Gray and Western Yellow wagtails, Northern Wheatear, Dunnock, and Eurasian Linnet.

After lunch along the coast, we'll head back to the island's interior before reaching the Buskett Gardens near the west coast of the island. Situated below Verdala Palace, the gardens were designed originally by the Knights of St. John as a private hunting ground for the grand master of the order. Populated by a fine diversity of trees and plants, this location is today one of the most verdant single locations in Malta. Consequently, it is also attractive to migrating birds. We'll spend an hour or two walking the paths and roads that traverse the garden in hope of locating migrant birds. As with other sites we've visited today, what we see depends on the flow of migration. That being said, Buskett Garden supports a plant community in a relatively mature state, meaning that the trees are large enough and dense enough to host resident species found nowhere else in Malta including Eurasian Blackcap, Cetti's Warbler, Common Chaffinch, and European Serin. Eurasian Blackbird and Eurasian Jay also are here. Among the many migrant birds possible are Eurasian Kestrel, Wood Warbler, Common Chiffchaff, Spotted Flycatcher, European Robin, and Dunnock.

NIGHT: Westin Dragonara Resort, St. Julian's

**October 24, Day 5: South Malta: the coast, Hagar Qim, and Marsaxlokk.** Having spent time in North and Central Malta, today we'll explore the southern end of the island, visiting scenic areas along the coast in addition to the Neolithic site of Hagar Qim.

We'll begin the final morning of the pre-trip by heading directly across Malta for a morning trip to the Dingli Cliffs, a limestone escarpment that towers high above the sea on the west coast of the island. There are a number of reasons to visit the Dingli Cliffs: first, they are the highest point in Malta, rising 800 feet over the sea; second, the views from atop the cliffs are sensational; and third, migrating birds use updrafts of air that are especially pronounced here to aid them in their southward journey. The picture takers among us will enjoy the opportunities to photograph the seascape before us while the birders will watch for migrating hawks and other birds. Many people contend that this area is one of the least spoiled on Malta.

From the Dingli Cliffs we'll proceed south a short distance to the Neolithic site of Hagar Qim. Malta has been inhabited for thousands of years, and its Neolithic past is on full display at the archeological site of Hagar Qim and its sister site of Mnajdra. Both sites consist of temple and dwelling complexes that showcase monumental archaeological style and achievement. The oldest parts of the complex have been dated to around 3,600 B.C.

Upon arrival, we'll spend time in the visitor center before making the short walk to the sites. Hagar Qim lies in closest proximity to the visitor center. Here, well-marked paths encircle and bisect the site, offering visitors the chance to view massive hand-hewn rocks mounted upright, square-cut entry ways, and partially collapsed chambers. Considering that the most ancient components of the complex are over five and a half thousand years old, it is remarkable to see them in their current state of preservation. Equally remarkable is that the site (and others on Malta) is believed to be the oldest Neolithic sites on the planet, predating Stonehenge by at least 500 years.





Neolithic temple, Hagar Qim © Diego Delso

In the late morning we'll resume the journey south before stopping at a particularly attractive stretch of coastline to view the Blue Grotto.

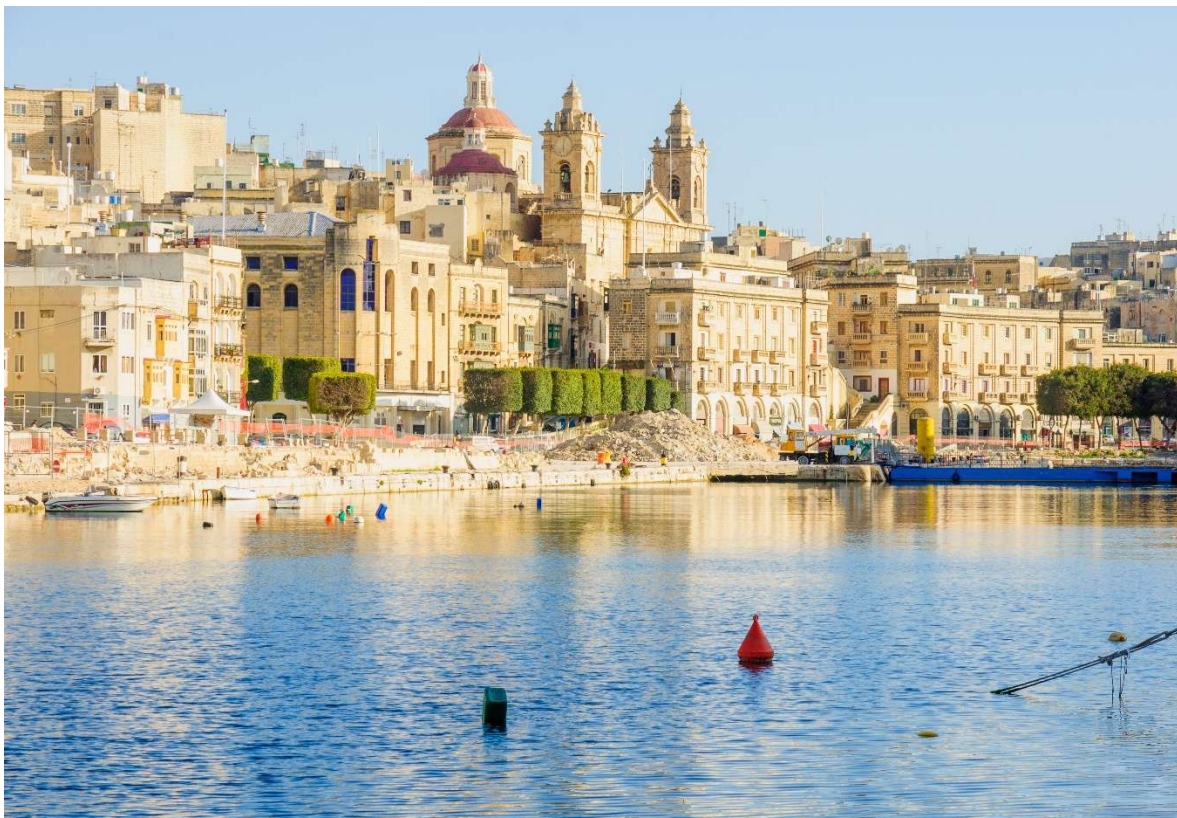
Located on the southwest corner of the island, the Blue Grotto is one of Malta's best-known landmarks. From the parking area we'll walk a short distance down a paved path to where we can look straight down onto the sea. Here, where the inexorable forces of tides and currents have resulted in a deeply sculptured coastline, the Blue Grotto appears as a wave-cut double-arched cave supported by a thick column of rock between the two arches. Depending on the angle of the sun, the incoming water is illuminated a dazzling azure.

For lunch we'll travel to the southernmost point of the island and the community of Marsaxlokk, situated on the eastern side of the bay that bears the same name. Marsaxlokk (pronounced Marsa-lock) is a fishing community best known for its fleet of brightly painted small fishing boats. We will have lunch at one of the waterfront restaurants where we'll enjoy fresh local seafood. Our time here will allow for many opportunities to photograph the famous boats.

We'll head back to the hotel in the mid-afternoon, arriving in time to break for a couple of hours before we join the other cruise passengers at 6:00 p.m. this evening.

NIGHT: Westin Dragonara Resort, St. Julian's

## **MALTA PRE-TRIP OPTION II: SIGHTSEEING, HISTORY & CULTURE OCTOBER 21–24, 2025**



Three Cities region below Valletta © RnDmS

**Situated in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, Malta is famous as a crossroads of history's greatest civilizations. Malta is one of Europe's smallest countries, but what it lacks in size is made up for in charm. Prosperous and historic and culturally rich, Malta is a favored getaway for travelers from Europe and the United States.**

**On this pre-trip option, we'll experience the island-nation of Malta beyond what is offered in the cruise program. We will have two days to explore the island, visiting a number of important historical, birding, and scenic locations.**

**Malta's illustrious history is on display everywhere, as evidenced by the fact that it hosts a greater density of UNESCO World Heritage Sites than any country in the world. Our itinerary visits a selection of prominent sites, each of which provides exposure to a slice of Maltese history and culture. On the first morning we'll enjoy a boat ride on Grand Harbor, featuring inspiring views of the walled capital city, Valletta, followed by a walking tour of the Three Cities district. On our second day we'll travel inland to the remarkable St. Paul's Catacombs, an expansive underground burial chamber used during Phoenician, Punic, Roman, and early-**



**Christian times. We'll then move to South Malta for a visit to the remarkable Neolithic site of Hagar Qim.**

**October 21–22, Days 1–2: Departure to Valletta, Malta; arrival and evening welcome.** Flights from the United States bound for Valletta, Malta depart on October 21 and arrive in Europe on the morning of October 22, with connecting to flights to Malta arriving throughout the day. 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 October 24 at 6:00 p.m. at a location in the hotel to be announced, for a trip welcome and introduction, 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 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

**October 23, Day 3: Central Malta: Grand Harbor and the Three Cities district.** Today will be the first of two days in which we'll explore a number of important areas on the island. A morning cruise on Grand Harbor will start things off followed by a walking tour of the Three Cities district. In the afternoon we'll visit a museum and offer free time for personal exploration.

While the entire island brims with historic sites and interesting natural features, the area around the capital, Valletta, is an essential first stop. A walled city dating from the mid-1600s, Valletta is the historical, cultural, and administrative heart of a region that hosts most of the island's population. As a tour of the famous city is included in the cruise program, we will spend our time this morning visiting a number of important locations in the immediate vicinity, namely Grand Harbor and the Three Cities district.



**Valletta from Grand Harbor © Fokke Baarssen**



No one sight on Malta is more impressive than that of Grand Harbor, which serves as a maritime gateway to Valletta and the island's interior. Featuring multiple peninsulas of land, three fortresses, and unparalleled views of the capital, Grand Harbor offers a dramatic first impression. It is also Malta's deepest port, which explains its considerable value to commercial, military, and tourist interests alike.

Depending on weather and sea conditions, we'll transfer to Grand Harbor by boat, entering through a breakwater that passes directly in front of Fort Elmo. Traveling with local guides, we will enjoy a leisurely hour-long interpretive cruise, taking in all of the famous sights including Valletta, featuring towering walls, defense bastions, and the dome of St. John's Co-Cathedral; forts St. Elmo, Ricasoli, and St. Angelo; and the *gardjola*, a stone sentry box carved with an eye and an ear as reminder to the guardians of the harbor to stay vigilant.

We will disembark in the Three Cities district across the harbor from Valletta and spend the remainder of the morning on a walking and driving tour of two of the three communities that comprise the district—Birgu and Senglea (the latter also known as L-Isla)—both of which sit on narrow peninsulas that project into Grand Harbor. Birgu was the capital of the Knights of the Order of St. John until the end of the Great Siege in 1565. We will walk through the medieval village exploring its winding stone streets, narrow passages, and Baroque architecture. On the far side of the peninsula, we'll enjoy fine views of Fort Ricasoli that guards the outer harbor. We'll then make the short trip to Senglea on the parallel peninsula. At the tip we'll visit the attractive Safe Haven Garden and take in the sweeping views of Grand Harbor below, Valletta across the way, and restored Fort St. Angelo across Dockyard Creek.

After lunch in the Three Cities, take a little time to visit the Malta at War Museum. This museum, located in Birgu, tells the story of Malta during the Axis bombing blitzes of World War II. The museum offers a rich collection of period artifacts and memorabilia, period newsreels and sounds, all of which recount the darkest days of the war and the determination of the Maltese people to survive.

Afterward, we will have personal time to explore the Three Cities on our own for a period of time before returning to the hotel.

NIGHT: Westin Dragonara Resort, St. Julian's

**October 24, Day 4: St. Paul's Catacombs, Mdina, Hagar Qim.** Whereas the previous day was dedicated largely to historical areas along the coast, today will be allotted to exploring important sites in Malta's interior: St. Paul's catacombs, the village of Mdina, and the Neolithic site of Hagar Qim.

We'll start our day with a trip to the village of Rabat in the center of the island for a visit to St. Paul's catacombs, a must-see site featuring rock-hewn burial chambers spanning 1,600 years of history. The earliest of the catacombs were used in Phoenician burial ceremonies while the latest date from the Byzantine period, around 870 A.D. The site offers a modern visitor center and several underground access points where we'll have the opportunity to explore a labyrinthine network of corridors and burial chambers. Of special interest is the fact that the catacombs were first developed as ancient limestone quarries prior to serving as a burial ground. The Maltese government and European Union have invested significant effort and money into developing the catacombs as a first-rate historic site. A visit here provides a thoroughly unique experience.

Later in the morning, we'll head to nearby Mdina for lunch, followed by time in the city. Mdina is the walled citadel that served for centuries as the island capital until the coming of the Knights of the Order of St. John. It is an amazing place, to be sure. Situated on a hilltop overlooking miles of fertile plains, it is small wonder that the site was so highly valued throughout its history for its strategic advantages. We will spend time

meandering through the medieval village exploring its narrow streets and plazas. From several overlooks atop the eastern bastion, we'll have unlimited views of the surrounding countryside and the distant sea. We'll also have an opportunity to poke our heads into several shops, and possibly even have time to explore the Palazzo Falson, a historic museum house where centuries-old rugs, furniture, art, and weapons are on display.



**The walled city of Mdina © Adwo**

In the afternoon we'll proceed to the Neolithic site of Hagar Qim.

Malta has been inhabited for thousands of years, and its Neolithic past is on full display at the archeological site of Hagar Qim and its sister site of Mnajdra. Both sites consist of temple and dwelling complexes that showcase monumental archaeological style and achievement. The oldest parts of the complex have been dated to around 3,600 B.C.

Upon arrival, we'll spend time in the visitor center before making the short walk to the sites. Hagar Qim lies in closest proximity to the visitor center. Here, well-marked paths encircle and bisect the site, offering visitors the chance to view massive hand-hewn rocks mounted upright, square-cut entry ways, and partially collapsed chambers. Considering that the most ancient components of the complex are over five and a half thousand years old, it is remarkable to see them in their current state of preservation. Equally remarkable is that the site (and others on Malta) is believed to be the oldest Neolithic sites on the planet, predating Stonehenge by at least 500 years.

We'll return to the hotel in the late afternoon.



Neolithic temple, Hagar Qim © Diego Delso

**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 participants. Each Malta Pre-trip is limited to 12 participants.

**TOUR LEADERS:** The VENT staff for the cruise are **Barry Lyon, Rafael Galvez, Peter, Zika, Larry Wolff, and Perri Klass**. Malta Pre-trip Option I will be led by **Rafael Galvez** and **Peter Zika**. Malta Pre-trip Option II will be led by **Barry Lyon, Larry Wolff, and Perri Klass**.





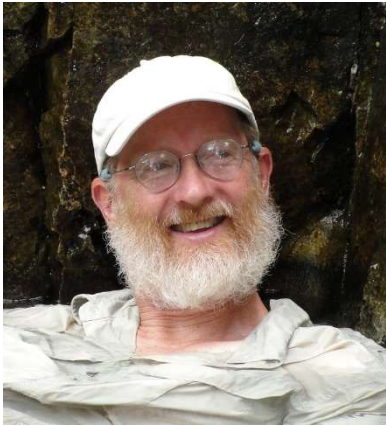
**Barry Lyon's** passion for the outdoors and birding has its roots in his childhood in southern California. During his teenage years, he attended several VENT/ABA youth birding camps, which ultimately led to his future involvement with Victor Emanuel Nature Tours. He holds a B.A. from the University 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 administrative assistant. In 2014 he was named Chief Operating Officer (COO), reflecting his increased experience and responsibilities. In 2023 Barry ascended to the role of Chief Executive

Officer (CEO). Although Barry still leads two or three trips a year, these days his work is geared almost entirely toward business, customer relations, and the management of the company. Barry's background and his knowledge of natural history have provided him with a strong interest in conservation. He is a former board member and past president of Travis Audubon Society, which emphasizes conservation through birding and outdoor education for children. Barry resides in South Austin with his wife, Brooke Smith.



**Rafael Galvez** has been birding and illustrating birds since childhood, a dual passion that developed when his family moved from Peru to South Florida. Always with a sketchpad in hand, he has traveled throughout the U.S., Latin America, and Eurasia in pursuit of birds. He served several years as a board member of the BirdLife International affiliate in the Republic of Georgia, developing educational and conservation programs. He gained knowledge of the Caucasus region while directing a series of records and documentary shorts on the ancient chants of the Georgian nation. During that period he also produced retrospective books and catalogs on the works of Russian realist painters. He has combined his love of art, education, and birds while collaborating in several publications, including a field guide to *Raptors and Owls of Georgia*

(*Caucasus*), which he illustrated and coauthored. After working with raptor research along the Black Sea, he returned to South Florida to spearhead a new phase for the Florida Keys Hawkwatch migration monitoring project, where he has participated as director. As chair of citizen science and IBA monitoring at Tropical Audubon Society in Miami, he has reached out to underserved communities by providing opportunities for the greater appreciation of birds and Florida habitats. Currently, he lives in Homestead, spends much time in the Everglades, serves on the Florida Ornithological Society's Records Committee, and is on the Leica Sport Optics Pro Staff. He loves sharing his passion for birds with audiences of all ages, and has been a guide and teacher for over 15 years. You can find some of his latest sketches and articles about painting in the field at his blog, [GalvezBirds.com](http://GalvezBirds.com).



**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.



**Larry Wolff** is the Silver Professor of European History at New York University, and at NYU he has held the positions of Director of the Center for European and Mediterranean Studies, Director of the Remarque Institute, and Co-director (with Perri Klass) of NYU Florence at Villa La Pietra. 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), *Paolina's Innocence: Child Abuse in Casanova's Venice* (2012), *The Singing Turk: Ottoman Power and Operatic Emotions on the European*

*Stage* (2016), and *Woodrow Wilson and the Reimagining of Eastern Europe* (2020). His newest book is *The Shadow of the Empress: Fairy-Tale Opera and the End of the Habsburg Monarchy* (2023). 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 also writes frequently about opera for the *New York Review of Books* and the *Times Literary Supplement* of London. 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.



**Perri Klass, MD**, is Professor of Journalism and Pediatrics at New York University, where she directs the Minor in Medical Humanities. 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 most recent book is *The Best Medicine: How Science and Public Health Gave Children a Future*, about how the decline in infant and child mortality has changed parenting, pediatrics, and the world; her other nonfiction includes *Treatment Kind and Fair: Letters to a Young Doctor*, *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. She has written regularly about children's issues for *The New York Times* for many years, and her medical journalism has appeared in a wide variety of publications, including *Harper's*, *The Atlantic*, *Smithsonian*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New Yorker*, *The New England Journal of Medicine*, and *Harvard Medicine*. Dr. Klass is the National Medical Director of Reach Out and Read, a program through which pediatricians promote parents reading aloud with young children, providing

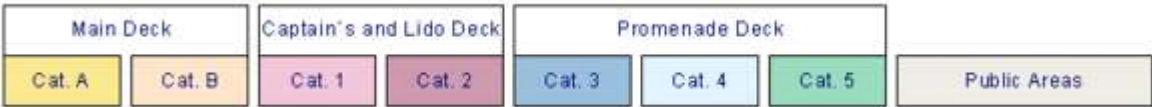
guidance and books to more than 4.4 million children and their families every year. She is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

**CRUISE INFORMATION**

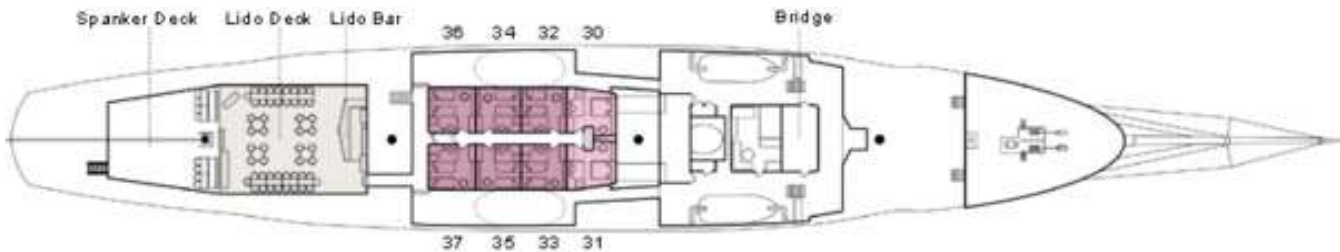
**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS**

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.

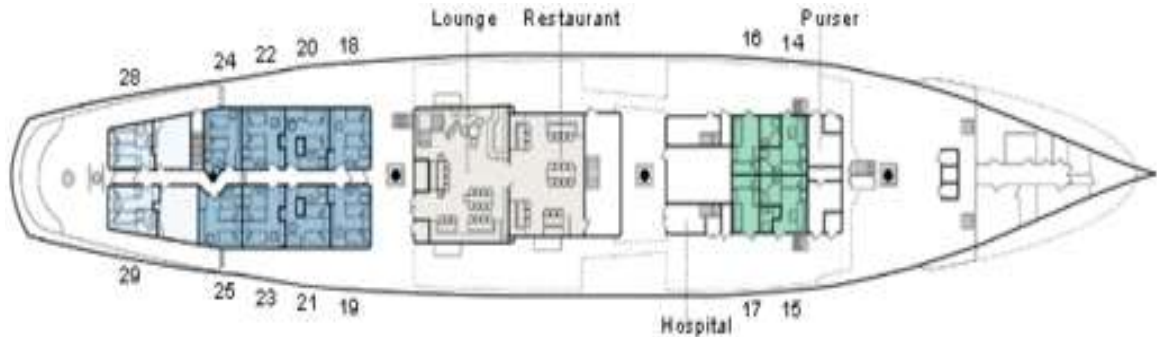
Category A: (Owner’s Suites)	Cabins #1-2	\$19,495
Category B: (Deluxe Original Cabins)	Cabins #3-10	\$17,495
Category 1:	Cabins #30-31	\$14,495
Category 2:	Cabins #32-37	\$13,995
Category 3:	Cabins #18-25	\$12,495
Category 4:	Cabins #28-29	\$ 11,995
Category 5: (Singles)	Cabins #14-17,	\$15,595



**Captain’s and Lido Deck**

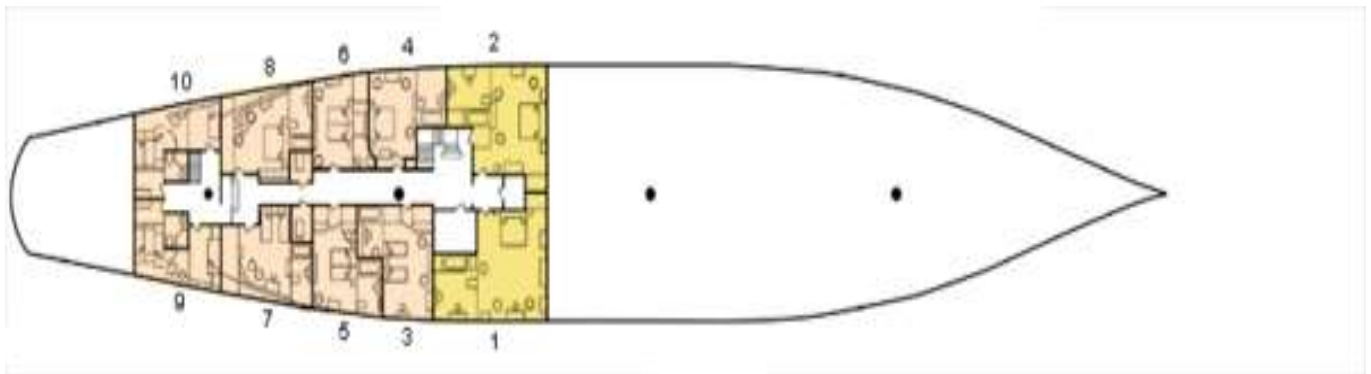


**Promenade Deck**



**Main Deck**





**Included in the cruise program:**

- Land-based accommodations as stated in the itinerary; One night at Hotel in Valletta (Day 2)
- 8 nights (Days 3–10) aboard the *Sea Cloud*
- All shore excursions and tours as described in the itinerary
- Non-ship meals from dinner on Day 2 through lunch on Day 3
- All ship-board meals, including non-alcoholic beverages, from dinner on Day 3 through breakfast on Day 11; select beer and wine at lunch and dinner
- All land transportation including transfers in Valetta 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 10
- Meals prior to dinner on Day 2 and after breakfast on Day 11
- 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)

**REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT:** To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. A deposit of **\$2,000** is required to reserve a space on this cruise. A second deposit of **\$3,000** is due 190 days prior to departure (April 16, 2025). The balance of the fee is due 150 days prior to departure (May 26, 2025).

If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, the deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. If you would like to pay your deposit by check, money order, or bank transfer, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at [www.ventbird.com](http://www.ventbird.com)) should be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

## PRE-TRIP INFORMATION

### **FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:**

#### **Malta Pre-trip Option I**

The fee for this tour is **\$2,895** per person in double occupancy from Valletta. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 2 through lunch on Day 5, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Valletta and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$525**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

#### **Malta Pre-trip Option II**

The fee for this tour is **\$2,095** per person in double occupancy from Valletta. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 2 through lunch on Day 4, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Valletta and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$350**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

**REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT:** To register for either pre-trip option, please contact the VENT office. The initial deposit for both tours is **\$1,000** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposits using a credit card, the deposits must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. If you would like to pay your initial deposit by check, money order, or bank transfer, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. The VENT registration form (available from the VENT office or by download at <https://ventbird.com>) should be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office.

**PAYMENTS:** All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard or Visa), check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial deposits, second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee for Malta Pre-trip Option I is due on 5/23/2025. Full payment of the tour fee for Malta Pre-trip Option II is due on 5/24/2025, 150 days prior to the tour departure dates.

### **CANCELLATION & REFUNDS:**

#### **Cancellation by VENT:**

If VENT cancels a tour prior to departure without cause or good reason, VENT will provide the participant a full refund, which will constitute full settlement to the participant.

If VENT cancels or delays a tour or any portion of a tour as a result of any Force Majeure event, VENT will use its reasonable best efforts to refund any payments on the balance of the tour fee to participant; provided that, VENT will have no obligation to provide a participant with a refund and will not be liable or

responsible to a participant, nor be deemed to have defaulted under or breached any applicable agreement, for any failure or delay in fulfilling or performing any term of such agreement. A “**Force Majeure**” event means any act beyond VENT’s control, including, without limitation, the following: (a) acts of God; (b) flood, fire, earthquake, hurricane, epidemic, pandemic or explosion; (c) war, invasion, hostilities (whether war is declared or not), terrorist threats or acts, riot or other civil unrest; (d) government order, law or actions; (e) embargoes or blockades; (f) national or regional emergency; (g) strikes, labor stoppages, labor slowdowns or other industrial disturbances; (h) shortage of adequate power or transportation facilities; and (i) any other similar events or circumstances beyond the control of VENT.

This VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy does not apply to air tickets purchased through VENT or to any special arrangements, such as additional hotel nights, that fall outside of the services described in the tour itinerary.

### **Cruise Cancellations & Refunds by Participant**

Of the initial deposit, **\$2,000** is non-refundable if cancellation occurs up to 210 days prior to the departure date. For cancellations that occur between 209 and 151 days, both deposits are non-refundable; cancellations within 150 days of the departure date are 100% non-refundable whether previously paid or not. Any refunds will be reduced by applicable airline cancellation penalties. No refunds will be made in the event of “no shows” or cancellations made on the day of sailing.

<u>If you cancel:</u>	<u>Your refund will be:</u>
210 days or more before departure date	Your deposit minus \$2,000
Between 209 and 151 days before departure	No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance will be refunded
Fewer than 150 days before departure date	No refund available

### **Pre-trip Cancellation & Refunds by Participant**

Refunds, if any, for any cancellation by a participant are made according to the following schedule: If participant cancels 180 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$500** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made between 179 and 151 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the tour fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 150 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre- and post-tour extensions. **For participants’ protection, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance that covers trip cancellation/interruption.**

<u>If participant cancels:</u>	<u>Participant’s refund will be:</u>
180 days or more before departure date	Participant’s deposit minus \$500*
179 to 151 days before departure date	No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance of the tour fee will be refunded
150 days or less before departure date	No refund available

\*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person. To qualify, cancellation must



occur 180 days or more before departure date; deposit transfers must be made at the time of cancellation; and one transfer per deposit.

Upon cancellation of the transportation or travel services, where you, the customer, are not at fault and have not cancelled in violation of the terms and conditions of any of the contract for transportation or travel services, all sums paid to VENT for services not received by you will be promptly refunded by VENT to you unless you otherwise advise VENT in writing.

**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.**

**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.**

**MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE/PROTECTION REQUIREMENT:** This tour visits remote locations where immediate access to primary medical care may not be available. **For this reason, travel insurance/travel protection which covers you for emergency evacuation is required for participation on this tour.** This coverage is included in the **Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance™** program. Alternatively, comparable service can be obtained through **Medjet** and its **MedjetAssist** plan. If you choose not to purchase insurance/travel protection through Ripcord or Medjet, you are required to obtain it through another provider. Please refer to the TRAVEL INSURANCE/TRAVEL PROTECTION section for additional information.

**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. Tour 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.

**TRAVEL INSURANCE/TRAVEL PROTECTION:** **To safeguard against losses due to illness, accident, or other unforeseen circumstances, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance as soon as possible after making a deposit.** VENT has partnered with **Redpoint Travel Protection** as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through Redpoint, we recommend its comprehensive **Ripcord** plan, which includes a medical evacuation benefit. With this in mind, it is important to note that medical evacuation is not offered by Redpoint as a stand-alone policy or benefit. For travelers not interested in comprehensive travel insurance, VENT recommends **Medjet** and its **MedjetAssist®** plan. Medjet is not an insurance company, and Medjet Assist is not an insurance product; rather, Medjet is a membership-based air-medical transport company specializing in moving hospitalized travelers from an admitting hospital to a medical

facility of choice. Medjet does not provide medical evacuation service from the point of injury or illness; yet, the MedjetAssist plan offers robust enough travel protection to satisfy the medical evacuation insurance requirement in place for many VENT tours.

### **About Ripcord**

Ripcord is a completely integrated travel insurance program with single contact for emergency services, travel assistance, and insurance claims. Critical benefits include comprehensive travel insurance for trip cancellation/interruption, **medical evacuation from your point of injury or illness to your hospital of choice**; medical expense coverage, death of pet, and much more. Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as evacuation coverage in case of a natural disaster or political or security reasons, waiver for pre-existing medical conditions exclusion, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” benefit. Ripcord is available to U.S. and non-U.S. residents.\*

For a price quote or to purchase travel insurance, please visit:

<https://ripcordtravelprotection.com/ventbird>; or click the **Ripcord** logo on our website (click Help and Trip Insurance); or call +1-415-481-0600. Pricing is based on age, trip cost, trip length, and level of coverage.

\*To be eligible for the pre-existing medical condition exclusion waiver and the optional Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) upgrade, you must purchase your policy within 15 days of making your first trip payment. The CFAR benefit provides reimbursement for 75% of covered costs, and increases the policy premium by approximately 50%. Policies may be purchased either for the full value of the tour fee at the time of deposit or in segments as individual tour payments are made (deposit, second deposit, final balance, additional arrangements, etc.). The “pay as you go” approach reduces up-front expense and ensures that the amount paid toward your full policy premium is in proportion to the amount paid toward the full tour fee. If you choose to “pay as you go,” you must cover each deposit or payment within 15 days, and insure all non-refundable trip costs in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

### **Coronavirus (COVID-19):**

Redpoint considers COVID-19 illness as any other seasonal respiratory illness. Providing only a positive Covid-19 test result will likely not be considered a covered event per the terms and conditions of the company's policy. Redpoint maintains a [Coronavirus FAQ page](#) on its website that addresses questions and concerns travelers may have regarding COVID-19 and Redpoint's policy. We strongly recommend that you visit the page for an overview of relevant topics.

### **About MedjetAssist**

MedjetAssist is a membership program that functions like AAA for motorists. The company's primary service is air medical transport. Critical benefits of MedjetAssist include a staff on call and ready to provide assistance 24 hours a day, 7 days a week; all-expenses-paid air medical transport in the United States and internationally to medical facility of choice, regardless of medical necessity; repatriation of remains; and no exclusions for pre-existing conditions.

For travelers under 75, MedjetAssist may be purchased as Short-Term Memberships of 8, 15, 21, and 30 days, or Regular Annual Memberships from 1 to 5 years. For travelers 75–84, Medjet offers a Diamond Membership that is the same program but with a few additional conditions.

For a price quote or to purchase MedjetAssist, please visit: [Medjet.com/VentBird](https://medjet.com/VentBird) or call 1-800-527-7478. Pricing is based on type and term of membership.

**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.

**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 Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Per person fees apply for each set of travel arrangements: \$50 domestic; \$75 international.\* Many of our travelers choose to make their own air travel arrangements, but we emphasize the benefits to using our services. If you book your air arrangements yourself, Victor Emanuel Travel is unable to provide support in managing any flight delays and/or cancellations that could occur before and during a tour. When you purchase air tickets through Victor Emanuel Travel, our staff has ready access to your air ticket record and can provide assistance as problems arise. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements. **Please be sure to check with the VENT office prior to purchasing your air ticket to confirm that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. VENT cannot be held responsible for any air ticket penalties.**

\*An air ticket will be purchased by Victor Emanuel Travel on behalf of the traveler with the traveler’s consent. A purchase is considered final upon receipt of payment. If a ticket is subsequently reissued at the behest of the traveler (i.e. voluntary change of plans), the same fee rates apply for the reissue process, in addition to any fees that may be charged by the airline.

#### **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 7:00–8:30 a.m., followed by disembarkation of the ship for land transfers to the cultural 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. For afternoon excursions, we will leave the ship at 2:00 p.m. and return by 5:30 p.m. Dinner will be at 7:00 p.m. most nights. The program includes visits to two major natural areas specifically for birding (Days 7 and 10).

**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
- **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 10, 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 10.

**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, 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.

**Malta Pre-trips** – Malta Pre-trip I provides a blend of activities including sightseeing, birding, and visits to historical sites. We emphasize that this pre-trip is not a birding trip exclusively, and participants should strongly consider this point before registering. The physical demands will be easy to moderate, but please bear in mind that our excursions will involve a moderate amount of walking and standing. No one will be subjected to physical demands that exceed their capabilities. All walking will be done at a slow pace. We should expect to travel in buses of varying size.

Malta Pre-trip II is very similar but focuses exclusively on cultural attractions. Grand Harbor is a protected body of water, and our morning boat ride will be an easy affair. The plan is to be picked up from the Westin and transferred to the harbor. This portion of the activity will involve a 10–15 minute transit just offshore on the open sea; therefore, this part of the activity will depend entirely on sea and weather conditions. In unfavorable conditions, we will transfer to Grand Harbor by bus.

**Extra time in Malta** – 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 one of the **Malta Pre-trips**.

**INTERNET SERVICE:** *Sea Cloud* is equipped with Starlink satellite internet. The ship offers WIFI access in the public areas and in the staterooms. You can use your own laptop to access the internet with an access code. Data volume of 10 GB is free of charge; additional data volume can be obtained from the Lido Bar at a charge. Continuous reception cannot be guaranteed; in certain sailing areas or due to the set course, interruptions to network coverage might be experienced. The WIFI connection on a ship is not comparable to the usual reception on land.

**CLIMATE & WEATHER:** Late October and early November is a good time to travel in Malta and Sicily. The long hot days that characterize the summer months have largely passed, and the likelihood of an early cold front is still moderate. Nearly all of our time will be spent along the immediate coast, where daytime temperatures average in the upper 60s/low 70s (°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 low 50s. That said, with global temperatures warming, we should also be prepared for the possibility of unnaturally warm temperatures, in which case temperatures can remain in the 80s, even along the coast. Conversely, the arrival of a cold front could produce cold temperatures, overcast, and rain. In such conditions, we could experience temperatures in the 40s. Although we anticipate a dry trip, significant rainfall is possible.

**BAGGAGE:** The airlines now strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant. 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.
- **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:** Mild weather is expected on this trip, but **a warm jacket or coat is strongly recommended in the event of a cold front or strong wind.**
- **Other cold weather gear:** Temperatures could drop into the low 50s, even 40s, as a result of a cold front. For this reason, we recommend bringing gloves and a knit hat, particularly for the morning hours.

**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**
- **Plug adapters** – See ELECTRICITY below
- **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 8x32, 8x42, 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. You will find that 8x32 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 for entry to Sicily and Malta. Please check the expiration date on your passport. **If it is not valid for at least three 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/](http://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 to disembarkation.

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**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.

**ETIAS (European Travel and Information Authorization System):** Starting in late 2025, Italy and Malta will be one of 30 European countries that require visa-exempt nationals of 60 countries (including the United States and Canada) to obtain special entry authorization known as ETIAS (European Travel and Information Authorization System). ETIAS is essentially a pre-approval check for travelers to most European countries. It is linked to a traveler's passport and is valid for three years from the date of issuance or until the expiration date of the passport, whichever comes first. ETIAS costs approximately \$8 USD. The authorization can be purchased online at [etias.com/etias-application](https://etias.com/etias-application). At the time of writing, travelers under the age of 18 or over the age of 70 are exempt from this requirement.

**CURRENCY & MONEY MATTERS:** Your trip to Malta and Sicily includes all 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 Euros 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.

*Sea Cloud* may be able to exchange U.S. dollars into Euros, however, this is not assured. 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:** The trip starts with Malta and Sicily on Central European Summer Time (CEST) and are 6 hours ahead of Eastern Daylight Time (EDT). On October 26, Daylight Savings Time ends, and the time difference drops to 5 hours.

**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 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:** VENT follows Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for standard travel precautions, which includes vaccination against a variety of preventable diseases. Among these so-called Routine Vaccinations are measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) vaccine, poliovirus vaccine (boosters for adult travelers), and Varicella (Chickenpox). You should also be up-to-date with Hepatitis A 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 tour 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.

**COVID-19:** We continually emphasize that our number one priority is the health and safety of our customers and employees. Although VENT no longer maintains any of its COVID-era prevention protocols, we strongly recommend best practices for protecting yourself and your fellow travelers against COVID-19 illness. These measures include receiving the primary series vaccinations for those eligible, staying “Up to Date” with COVID-19 booster shots, wearing high filtration N-95 or KN-95 masks when in airports and on airplanes, and avoiding risky social settings in the lead-up to your tour. These recommendations are firmly rooted in CDC guidance regarding recommendations for avoiding COVID-19.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, which operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers’ Information Line (800) CDC-INFO (800-232-4636). You can check the CDC website at <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel>. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health.html> (click on Travel Health).

**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.

**SUGGESTED READING:** Our website, [www.ventbird.com](http://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](http://www.amazon.com), and for those out-of-print or hard-to-find titles, [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com) or [www.buteobooks.com](http://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, 2023. Third edition.

This is the most important natural history book for this trip. It is the best all-around field guide to the birds of Europe.

### **History, Philosophy & Culture**

Maltese History hinges on the great sieges of 1565, by the Ottoman Turks, and of the World War II era by the Nazis. *The Great Siege* is a short but gripping treatment of the Ottoman attack on Sicily and of the Maltese struggle to defend its very existence. 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 8<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C. Included here are titles that reflect both approaches.

### **Sicilian History:**

Keahey, John. ***Seeking Sicily: A Cultural Journey through Myth and Reality in the Heart of the Mediterranean.***

A highly regarded and engaging exploration of what lies behind the soul of Sicily's inhabitants, touching on history, food, the Mafia, and politics in understanding Sicily as a distinct culture.

Norwich, John Julius. ***Sicily: An Island at the Crossroads of History.*** Random House: New York, NY. 2015.

This is a superb book that was 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 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.

An older book now, but still something of a timeless classic. This production is less travel writing and more of an eye-opening look at recent Italian history. Australian journalist Robb chronicles the 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 and the making of modern Sicily. A fascinating read.

### **Maltese History:**

Bradford, Ernle. ***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.

### **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 4<sup>th</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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.

**RESPONSIBILITY STATEMENT:** Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc., a Texas corporation, and/or its agents (together, "**VENT**") act only as agents for the participant in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the participant or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in airfare or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, terrorism, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will be borne by the participant, as tour rates only provide for arrangements for the time stated.

VENT reserves the right (i) to substitute hotels of similar category, or the best reasonable substitution available under the circumstances, for those indicated and (ii) to make any changes in the itinerary that are deemed necessary by VENT or which are caused by third party transportation schedules (i.e. railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, etc.).

VENT reserves the right to substitute leaders or guides on any tour. Where VENT, in its sole discretion, determines such substitution is necessary, it will notify tour participants.

VENT reserves the right to cancel any tour prior to departure with or without cause or good reason. See the VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy set forth above.

Tour prices are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on June 14, 2023 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change thereto.

VENT reserves the right to decline any participant's Registration Form and/or refuse to allow any participant to participate in a tour as VENT deems reasonably necessary, in its sole discretion. VENT also

reserves the right to remove any tour participant from any portion of a tour as VENT deems necessary, in its sole discretion, reasons for such removal include but are not limited to, medical needs, injury, illness, inability to meet physical demands of a tour, personality conflict or situations in which such removal is otherwise in the best interest of the tour, the tour group and/or such participant. A participant may also voluntarily depart from a tour. If a participant is removed from a tour or voluntarily departs from a tour, such participant will be responsible for any expenses associated with such removal or departure, including but not limited to, transportation, lodging, airfare and meals, and VENT will have no obligation to refund or reimburse any such removed or departed participant for any tour payments or deposits previously paid by such participant.

Baggage is carried at the participant's risk entirely. No airline company, its employees, agents and/or affiliates (the "**Airline**") is to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time participants are not on board the Airline's aircraft. The participant ticket in use by any Airline, when issued, will constitute the sole contract between the Airline and the purchaser of the tickets and/or the participant. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for VENT tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airlines Reporting Corporation.

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