The Apostle Paul's Journey to Rome

12 days / 10 nights

And the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou has testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome (The Acts 23:11). Far more than just experiencing a new land or seeing new sights, as our Christian tour to Italy takes us through the spiritually rich and beautiful countryside of Italy, we will reflect, come closer to God, and gratefully consider the sacrifices and dedication of those who have gone before. As we follow in the footsteps of Paul, experiencing some of the same sights and sounds and feelings he would have experienced, and as we behold holy shrines and timeless works of art regarded as the most awe-inspiring and important of the world – we will renew our commitment to the roots of our Christian faith. The worship services and meditations we celebrate along the way will draw us together as a community. They will remind us of our blessings and the call to stewardship as followers of Jesus Christ.

Day 1 – Departure from the USA

Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another (Paul in Romans 14:19).

Our Christian tour begins with an overnight flight to Palermo, Italy.

Day 2 – Arrival

He that regardeth the day regardeth it unto the Lord (Paul in Romans 14:6).

Welcome to Italy! After arriving at our hotel, a little rest and relaxation might be in order. Or, for the more adventurous and energetic, suggested sights and walking trails can be provided upon request.

Day 3 – Palermo & Monreale

The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light (Paul in Romans 13:12).

Palermo, Sicily’s cultural capital and an important hub throughout its history, is a city rich in history, spirit, art and diversity. Our tour this morning will include San Giovanni degli Eremiti (St. John of the Hermits Church), notable for its brilliant red domes which are clearly reminiscent of 12th century Arab influences, and its bell tower which displays a Gothic flavor. Serving as one of the first major examples of town planning in Europe, Quattro Canti (officially known as Piazza Vigliena), is a must-see Baroque square replete with fountains and statues. We will visit the magnificent Palatine Chapel where we’ll notice the presence of different architectural styles due to its long history of additions, alterations and restorations. The Cathedral has a heliometer (or solar observatory), one of a number built in Italy in the 17th and 18th centuries, which is quite simply a tiny hole in one of the minor domes that projects the image of the sun onto the floor to mark the seasons. After lunch, we’ll drive to the small town of Monreale whose name means Royal Mountain. There we’ll explore the Benedictine Abbey with its splendid mosaic pictures arranged in tiers and divided by horizontal and vertical bands to depict scenes from both the Old and New Testaments. We’ll return to Palermo for dinner and another overnight stay.

Day 4 – Valley of the Temples in Agrigento

But glory, honor, and peace, to every man that worketh good… for there is no respect of persons with God. (Paul in Romans 2: 10, 11).

The new day finds us heading for Agrigento, an ancient city on the southern coast of Sicily and capital of the province of Agrigento. Here we visit the wondrous Valle dei
Templi ("Valley of the Temples"), a large sacred area on the south side of the ancient city where seven monumental Greek temples in the Doric style were constructed during the 5th and 6th centuries BC. Some are remarkably intact because of their subsequent use as Christian churches; the surrounding area was also used by early Christians as a catacomb. Before leaving the region, we’ll see the largest Doric temple in the world, the Temple of Jupiter. Toward day’s end, we’ll explore the Santa Maria della Catena which was built in 1490-1520 and named for a chain (catena) on one of the walls which closed the Cala port. As with much of the architecture of Sicily, we’ll notice the presence of a multitude of styles, Renaissance and Gothic to name a few. The interior of the Santa Maria della Catena is late-Gothic and includes a cavanas of Nativity with Adoration of the Shephers (17th century) from an unknown master. We’ll enjoy dinner and an overnight stay in Agrigento.

Day 5 – Apostle Paul in Sicily

And landing at Syracuse, we tarried there three days (The Acts 28:12).

We travel east roughly 150 miles along the breathtakingly beautiful Mediterranean coast to Syracuse (Siracusa) located in the southeast corner of the island of Sicily. Syracuse, a 2,700 year-old city, played a key role in ancient times when it was one of the major powers of the Mediterranean world and the place where Paul entered Sicily en route to Rome. We’ll visit the Cathedral, built by bishop Zosimo in the 7th century over the great Temple of Athens (5th century BC) which houses a statue of the Madonna della Neve ("Madonna of the Snow") sculpted by Antonello Gagini in 1512. We will also see the Roman Amphitheatere with the famous Ear of Dionysius and continue our visit with the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Tears (Santuario della Madonna delle Lacrime) constructed in 1954 wherein we find a drawing of the Virgin once owned by the Lannuso family from which real tears began to flow out of the eyes and heart in approximately 1953. After circumnavigating the base of Mt. Etna, Europe’s largest active volcano, we make our way to Taormina, a small town perched on a cliff overlooking the Ionian Sea, where we will have leisure time to explore the old town with its eclectic shops. We will enjoy dinner and an overnight stay in this lovely city.

Day 6 – Taormina

O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Paul in Romans 24, 25).

After breakfast, we begin the day by visiting the most remarkable monument remaining at Taormina and one of the chief glories of Sicily, the ancient Greek Theatre (Teatro Greco). It is built for the most part of brick, and is therefore probably of Roman date, though the plan and arrangement speak of Greek times. From the still existing fragments of architectural decorations, we learn that this theatre (still frequently used for operatic and theatrical performances and for concerts) was of the Corinthian order and richly ornamented. Besides the ancient Greek theatre, Taormina has many allures: sunny beaches, shops, old churches and piazzas to name a few, which all invite our exploration during an afternoon at leisure. We will enjoy a second night’s stay in this coastal city after our evening meal.

Day 7 – Paestum

Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love (Paul in Romans 12:10).

We leave our hotel in the early morning to take a ferry across a narrow passage between the eastern tip of Sicily and the southern tip of Calabria called the Strait of Messina. We stop for a visit of Paestum known as the “Lost city” perhaps because it is renowned for
its painted tombs and Greek Temples which are in the Doric style and date from the first half of the 6th century BC. We make our way to Salerno, a small city located on the Tyrrenian Sea, which became a great center of learning, culture and the arts in the 16th century before suffering several catastrophic earthquakes. During World War II, Salerno was the site of the Allied invasion of Italy in the fall of 1943. Little by little, after the war, this beautiful city emerged to become a vibrant European hub. We resume our day’s travel until we arrive in Sorrento, a town overlooking the Bay of Naples, where we will enjoy dinner and an overnight stay.

Day 8 – Pompeii

For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which against nature (Romans 1:26).

This morning we travel to Pompeii to witness the ruins of one of the most devastating volcanic eruptions in the history of the region. The eruption of Vesuvius in the year 79 A.D. covered the city of Pompeii with ash. What is left of this ancient city, including some beautiful frescoes and mosaic floors, will give us a glimpse into that era and an idea of what was going on in the lives of Pompeii’s inhabitants’ moments before that catastrophic eruption. Walking the streets of this ‘frozen city’ also helps us experience what Paul must have experienced as he walked through similar streets in his time. Our visit wouldn’t be complete without visiting houses, shops, and temples, as well the “Lupanare” (house of prostitutes) and the “Subarbane Therm” with their lurid frescoes. It is worth noting that such erotic imagery and items indicate that the sexual mores of the ancient Roman culture were much more liberal than most present-day cultures, although much of what might seem to us to be erotic imagery was in fact fertility-imagery. Still, we can understand Paul’s anger and loud chastisement regarding the corruption and perdition of the ancient Romans. After our visit to the excavations we’ll travel back to Sorrento for dinner and another overnight stay.

Day 9 – Apostle Paul’s Journey to Rome

And after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli. And so we went toward Rome. And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and The three taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage (The Acts 28: 13-15).

After breakfast, we head north past the city of Naples to Pozzuoli, also known as Puteoli meaning ‘little wells’, where Paul stayed for seven days before making his way to Rome via the Appian Way (nicknamed by the Romans “Queen of the Road”; it is probably the most famous Roman road which still remains). After contemplating that we are in the exact location where Paul landed, we will see the seaport of Puteoli which was a great emporium for ships all over the Roman world. We continue north past the city of Gaeta to visit Minturno, which also sits along the Appian Way and which sports some well preserved Roman ruins including an amphitheatre and a very fine aqueduct, the quoins of which are of various colors and arranged in decorative patterns. Some of us might remember that Minturno suffered heavy bombings during the Second World War. As we pass the Foro Appio and the Tres Tabernae (Three Taverns), located in the same spot as an ancient Roman posta (a place where travelers could rest and change their horses), it is worth reminding ourselves that Paul would have taken this same route to Rome. We might also wonder if the old inn, which maintains its original usage and has its ancient architectural structure still intact, is the place where Paul penned the Sacred Writings regarding his meeting with the Christian communities: To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord
Jesus Christ (Romans 1:7). The day’s final destination is Rome where we will enjoy dinner and an overnight stay. Welcome to Rome! “Roma, Roma, non basta una vita!” (Rome, Rome, one lifetime is not enough!)

**Day 10 – Vatican & early Christian Churches**

*Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee (Peter in Acts 3:6).*

We greet the new day in a city nicknamed *Caput Mundi* (Capital of the World) and *The Eternal City*, not only because Rome has always been the hub of art, education, high culture and politics in the western world, but because it is also a spiritual capital and a powerful center of Christian Tours. We will first visit Vatican City to visit the Vatican Museum which houses what can be described as the most important collections of art in the world. The history and awe surrounding the galleries and all the treasures they contain will truly transfix us. Highlights include The Tapestry Gallery, The Raphael Rooms, and The Sistine Chapel where we will gaze on Michelangelo’s incredible masterpiece. We will also enter St. Peter’s Basilica which has the largest interior of any Christian church in the world and which has been described as the reason Rome is still the center of the civilized world. Also marvel at Bernini’s beautiful bronze canopy and Michelangelo’s *Pieta*. This afternoon visit two of the most important churches of Rome – St. John Lateran and the Holy Cross of Jerusalem. At St. John Lateran we will also see the Santa Scala or the Holy Steps which reputedly are the steps that Christ climb to meet Pontius Pilate. Time permitting; we will have an opportunity before dinner for individual exploration. Some might want to sit quietly at an outside café to take it all in while others will want to shop and savor the flavor of the “Eternal City.”

**Day 11 – Ancient Rome**

*Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever (Romans 1: 25).*

Today we behold what is left of ancient Rome’s glorious past and see all about us remnants of its pridelful emperors, like the main inscription of The Arch of Constantine whose translated Latin reads: To the Emperor Caesar Flavius Constantinus, the greatest, pious, and blessed Augustus… by the greatness of his mind, has delivered the state from the tyrant (We may thus begin to understand the kind of hubris that Paul preached against). Still, the history of this place will likely enthrall us. We will see Trajan’s Column with its artistic description of the epic wars between the Romans and Dacians, travel the *Via dei Fori Imperiali* (this street crosses over parts of the splendid Forums of Trajan, Augustus and Nerva) and visit Capitoline Hill, yet the seat of the Municipality and now surrounded by Museums and the magnificent Piazza del Campidoglio designed by Michelangelo. The Roman Forum is the centralized area around which the ancient Roman civilization developed. Here is where we see the oldest and most important structures of the ancient city including the complex of the Vestal Virgins, and Rome’s earliest shrines and temples. We will visit the Palatine Hill, centermost of the Seven Hills of Rome and site of its earliest history including its famous legend about Romulus and Remus, twin brothers raised by a shepherd. In a violent argument about building their own cities, Romulus was said to have killed Remus; hence Rome’s name derived from "Romulus." We see the ruins of the Imperial Palaces and the Arch of Constantine, then cap our incredible experience with ancient Rome by seeing the magnificent Roman Colosseum. This structure, completed in 80 AD under Titus, had the capacity to seat 50,000 spectators and was used for gladiatorial contests, public spectacles, executions, re-enactments of famous battles, and dramas based on classical mythology. The Colosseum has long been considered sacred because of its legendary association with
early Christian martyrs. Although in the 21st century it stays partially ruined because of damage caused by devastating earthquakes and stone-robbers, we can’t argue that it is still the ultimate iconic symbol of Imperial Rome.

**Day 12 – Return to the USA**

We will let the power of the holy places and priceless relics settle over us, along with the profound example and words of the Apostle Paul; then like other pilgrims of other times, go back to our lives with renewed faith and readiness.

We leave our hotel and head for the airport to return to the US.

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