

U3A visit to Sicily 15/10/12 - 21/10/12

We flew from Gatwick to Catania on the Eastern side of the Island and stayed at Acireale for the first three nights.



The next morning we set off for an excursion to Mount Etna, the highest volcano in Europe, and to Taormina. After a brief stop at a local winery we drove on, stopping for lunch on the slopes of Mount Etna. We saw evidence of numerous eruptions, with black volcanic rock lining the road on either side, and the roof of what was once a two storey house protruding from the rock. As the altitude increased the landscape took on a desert character, and we walked round the Sylvestri crater, one of the craters surrounding the central cone. At Taormina we visited the stunning Greco-Roman

Amphitheatre, which was situated on a hilltop overlooking the Ionian coast and with Etna as a backdrop.



Walking round Sylvestri crater



Taormina

Next was Syracuse, a World Heritage site, and in ancient times the most powerful town in Sicily. It's famous for one of the largest theatres of the ancient Greek Empire, with seats for 15,000 spectators. The site also includes ancient cave dwellings, and stone quarries, one of which is called "The Ear of Dionysios" because of its acoustics.



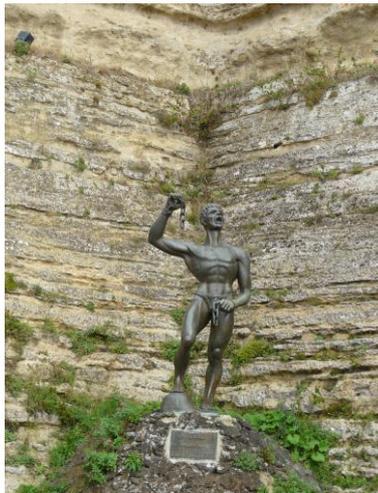
The ear of Dionysios

Our next trip was to another World heritage site, the Villa Romana del Casale at Piazza Armerina. Dating from the 3rd and 4th centuries AD, the villa had been buried by mud and rock and when it was excavated in the 1950s some 3,500 sq metres of intact colourful mosaic flooring were revealed, showing scenes of daily life, mythology and hunting scenes.



Villa Romana del Casale mosaic

We then visited Enna a fortified hill town with a statue of Eunus, who led a revolt of the slaves against the Romans in 135BC. On a lighter note we found a cheese seller who sold some of us some very pungent homemade cheese made from sheep's milk.



Statue of Eunus



Cheese seller

We spent the next three nights in Palermo. A guided walking tour showed us the highlights of the City, including the Cathedral, the Theatre, the Opera House, the Quattro Canti, a Baroque Square, and several beautiful churches. We also saw the Pretoria Fountain the work of Florentine sculptor Francesco Camilliani with nude figures galore, which caused outrage when it was first unveiled. With free time afterwards many explored the interior of the Palatine Chapel with its beautiful mosaics.



Palermo Cathedral

On our last day we visited Monreale and its cathedral lined with stunning Byzantine mosaics, followed by a trip to Segesta to see one of the most complete Doric temples in Sicily, set on an isolated hillside amidst beautiful countryside.



Mosaics in Monreale Cathedral



Doric temple at Segesta

We left Palermo with lots of good memories from a truly fascinating holiday with the added benefit of wall to wall sunshine. Our thanks go to John Dean for his excellent organisational skills and all the hard work he put into making it such a success.



Palermo Harbour