Ancient History of Southern Italy & Sicily group tours

Reading List

The Italians
by John Hooper

Sublime and maddening, fascinating yet baffling, Italy is a country of endless paradox and seemingly unanswerable riddles.

John Hooper's marvellously entertaining and perceptive new book is the ideal companion for anyone seeking to understand contemporary Italy and the unique character of the Italians. Looking at the facts that lie behind - and often belie - the stereotypes, his revealing book sheds new light on many aspects of Italian life: football and Freemasonry, sex, symbolism and the reason why Italian has twelve words for a coat hanger, yet none for a hangover.

The Pursuit of Italy: A History of a Land, its Regions and their Peoples
by David Gilmour

Visiting a villa built by Lorenzo de Medici outside Pisa, David Gilmour fell into conversation about the unification of Italy with a distinguished former minister: "'You know, Davide," he said in a low conspiratorial voice, as if uttering a heresy, "Garibaldi did Italy a great disservice. If he had not invaded Sicily and Naples, we in the north would have the richest and most civilized state in Europe." After looking cautiously round the room he added in an even lower voice, "Of course to the south we would have a neighbour like Egypt."'

Was the elderly Italian right? Was the unification of Italy a mistake? The Pursuit of Italy traces the whole history of the Italian peninsula in a wonderfully readable style, full of well-chosen stories and observations from personal experience, and peopled by many of the great figures of the Italian past, from Cicero and Virgil to Dante and the Medici, from Cavour and Verdi to the controversial political figures of the twentieth century. The book gives a clear-eyed view of the Risorgimento, the pivotal event in modern Italian history, debunking the influential myths which have grown up around it.

Gilmour shows that the glory of Italy has always lain in its regions, with their distinctive art, civic cultures, identities and cuisine. The regions produced the medieval communes and the Renaissance, the Venetian Republic and the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, two of the most civilized states of European history. Their inhabitants identified themselves not as Italians, but as Tuscans and Venetians,

Sicilians and Lombards, Neapolitans and Genoese. This is where the strength and culture of Italy still comes from, rather than from misconceived and mishandled concepts of nationalism and unity.

This wise and enormously engaging book explains the course of Italian history in a manner and with a coherence which no one with an interest in the country could fail to enjoy.

The Popes: A History
by John Julius Norwich

John Julius Norwich examines the oldest continuing institution in the world, tracing the papal line down the centuries from St Peter (traditionally - but by no means historically - the first Pope) to the present. Of the 280-odd holders of the supreme office, some have unquestionably been saints; others have wallowed in unspeakable iniquity.

One was said to have been a woman, her sex being revealed only when she improvidently gave birth to a baby during a papal procession. Almost as shocking was Formosus whose murdered corpse was exhumed, clothed in pontifical vestments, propped up on a throne and subjected to trial.

From the glories of Byzantium to the decay of Rome, from the Albigensian Heresy to controversy within the Church today, The Popes is superbly written, witty and revealing.

The Land Where Lemons Grow: The Story of Italy and its Citrus Fruit
by Helena Attlee

Travellers have always been thrilled by the sight of citrus in Italy, where dark leaves and bright fruit seem to charge the landscape, making the trees symbols of a sun-soaked, poetic vision of the country. Citrus also holds a special place in the Italian imagination, and in The Land Where Lemons Grow, Helena Attlee sets out to explore its curious past and its enduring resonance in Italian culture. The Land Where Lemons Grow is a heady mixture of travel writing, history, horticulture and art; a unique journey through Italy's cultural, culinary and political past. Helena Attlee is the author of four books about Italian gardens, and others on the cultural history of gardens around the world. Helena is a Fellow of the Royal Literary Fund and has worked in Italy for nearly 30 years.

Sicily: A Short History, from the Greeks to Cosa Nostra
by John Julius Norwich

Sicily is the key to everything' Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

The author of the classic book on Venice turns his sights to Sicily in this beautiful book full of maps and colour photographs.

'I discovered Sicily almost by mistake . . .We drove as far as Naples, then put the car on the night ferry to Palermo. There was a degree of excitement in the early hours when we passed Stromboli, emitting a rich glow every half-minute or so like an ogre puffing on an immense cigar; and a few hours later, in the early morning sunshine, we sailed into the *Conca d'Oro,* the Golden Shell, in which the city lies. Apart from the beauty of the setting, I remember being instantly struck by a change in atmosphere. The Strait of Messina is only a couple of miles across and the island is politically part of Italy; yet somehow one feels that one has entered a different world . . . This book is, among other things, an attempt to analyse why this should be.'

The stepping stone between Europe and Africa, the gateway between the East and the West, at once a stronghold, clearing-house and observation post, Sicily has been invaded and fought over by Phoenicians and Greeks, Carthaginians and Romans, Goths and Byzantines, Arabs and Normans, Germans, Spaniards and the French for thousands of years. It has belonged to them all - and yet has properly been part of none.

John Julius Norwich was inspired to become a writer by his first visit in 1961 and this book is the result of a fascination that has lasted over half a century. In tracing its dark story, he attempts to explain the enigma that lies at the heart of the Mediterranean's largest island.

This vivid short history covers everything from erupting volcanoes to the assassination of Byzantine emperors, from Nelson's affair with Emma Hamilton to Garibaldi and the rise of the Mafia. Taking in the key buildings and towns, and packed with fascinating stories and unforgettable characters, *Sicily* is the book he was born to write.

Midnight in Sicily
by Robb Peter

A journey into the heart of Sicily, using art, food, history and literature to shed light on southern Italy's legacy of political corruption and violent crime. The book takes as its starting point the ongoing trial of seven-times Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti.