



SOUTHERN PASSION' - Malta & Italy !

CHECKLIST, PACKING INFORMATION & TRAVEL TIPS

NAME BADGE & LUGGAGE TAG

We will forward to you in mid-April or before:

- A Name Badge – Please wear this throughout the tour, esp at airports or when out doing things together
- Some green ribbon to tie on your case to identify our group's luggage on the airport carousels
- A luggage tag for your main suitcase. Please secure to the TOP handle (ie when your case is standing vertically, ready to wheel). This makes it easy for porters to quickly match rooms to names.
- A document wallet for your plane ticket and insurance details etc
- Your airline tickets (ie your printed 'e tickets') We will have emailed these to you also.
- A Printed Itinerary

MAIN SUITCASE

On our tour 20kg is the maximum for your main suitcase. (Try to leave home with your case weighing under 15kg ...You will buy things for sure!) Emirates allow 30kg but coach drivers and porters will balk if yours is over 20kgs. (sometimes they must carry your luggage up stairs!) There is a limit of one suitcase per person for portage at the hotels. Your hand-luggage/ day pack is your responsibility to carry everywhere! (make it compact and light!)

Try a 'practice pack' then leave your case for a couple of days.. and unpack it. Do you REALLY need everything you've put in there?! 'Prune' and re-pack.

Buy one of the kits of little travel bottles and fill with shampoo etc if you must take your favourites...or recycle your own small containers. Even take a few small containers and discard as you go! If you're not fussy about particular toiletries, use the nice hotel ones supplied. In our 4-5-star standard of hotel, they are always lovely (and plentiful if you need more.)

CARRY-ON BAG/ HAND LUGGAGE

- You can take onboard the plane one carry-on bag which can weigh 7kg, but try to make it 3 to 4 kg and preferably choose a soft bag or small back-pack which doubles as your day-pack during the tour. (We like small day packs, ie small backpacks or shoulder bags, rather than a second small suitcase. These small suitcases on wheels can end up a pain for you and your travelling companions. Hand-luggage is your responsibility to take on and off the coach and keep with you. Cases usually don't fit in coach overhead compartments and further, when they are standing unattended in a hotel foyer, they can be accidentally scooped up by porters, causing confusion. If you can't easily carry your hand-luggage onto the coach, (with comfort!) pop it on your lap or on the seat beside you..it's really not what you want on this sort of tour. Of course, we can't ban small 'hand- luggage' cases but it will be great if you heed our request!

TRAVEL LIGHT - This is our overall advice. There *are* shops where we are going !

Ladies (in fact men too) are allowed a hand-bag on the plane, in addition to their hand-luggage but it's

better to pack a small handbag for evenings out and to leave this in your main luggage so you've only one bag (your small day bag), to worry about. Carry a light jacket onto the plane too, in case it gets really cold.

**** A Tip from Stewart !!**

INSIDE your carry-on bag for the plane, have a simple plastic shopping bag (from a clothing or similar shop). Into this, place the few essentials you'd like at your seat....A pen, moisturiser, a book/ crossword, pills, passport details noted in a little notepad (for completing arrival cards although few places require these now...) If you have the things you might need in your plastic bag you will avoid the need to jump up and down rummaging in over-head lockers mid-flight!

Similarly a 'soft' shopping bag can be useful on the Coach, to keep small 'over flow' items together eg Drink bottle, camera, sunscreen, spare face mask, which you may not need with you at every stop.

CABIN LUGGAGE RULES

- **LIQUIDS:** International Airlines are very strict regarding liquids in your carry-on luggage. ALL liquids, even lipstick/perfume/make-up carried in your cabin bag or handbag, must be contained in clear plastic, zip-seal bags that you can hold up for inspection when asked. *(The plastic bags are freely available at the airport as you approach Security should you forget.)* Airport staff will ask to see your liquids in their bags and may even ask to inspect the contents. *(We recommend to put all non-essential toiletries into your main luggage. If you put the bottles or tubes into plastic zip bags and into your case there should be no leaks! We always do this.)*
- Containers which can hold 100ml or more are NOT allowed, *(even if clearly half empty!)*
- Exception: If you have essential liquid medicines, these are allowed in your cabin bag but you will need to present an appropriate means of verifying the nature of what you are carrying ie a medical prescription and / or letter from your doctor. *(If you take regular medication, whether in liquid or tablet form, always keep with you enough supply to last a few days...just in case your main luggage goes astray. Carry a spare script too!)*

OTHER NO-NOS

- NO aerosol cans in hand luggage. (It is permissible to have these in your main luggage, again, safely in a zip seal bag.) Where possible, take pump or roll on products as a preference.
- No sharp objects...metal scissors or nail files etc in hand luggage. They will be taken from you.
- No spare loose batteries. The ones inside your phone/camera/laptop/Ipod are OK.

TOILETRIES / MEDICINES TO TAKE

- Vitamins and medicines should be in their original containers. Prescription medicines should, ideally, have a copy of your prescription with them. Bring enough medication to last the trip.
- a simple first-aid kit (band-aids, headache pills, cream, for sore backs and shoulders etc) Jennifer highly recommends ZEN pain relief gel in a tube. It's magic and has an applicator on the tube. 'easy!
- sun screen (roll on is good)
- toiletries bag (Those that hang on a hook/ door knob are great space savers, esp. if sharing)
- a sewing kit if you wish but hotels do have the little cards with various cottons and a needle
- insect repellent (roll on) 'only if you feel you are a target..
- sea-sick tablets and /or pressure point wrist bands, if you have a tendency to motion sickness
- Gastrolyte (ie glucose electrolyte tablets for dehydration) - a small container of 10 ?
- Pills to stop diarrhea. eg Lomotil. You can get these over the counter at the chemist. *We recommend Gastrostop PLUS...They are a mint flavoured tablet and you can just bite off half or a little bit if that's all you may need. They have an ingredient to stop the 'butterflies' too*
- Some washing liquid or powder (ie from your own laundry decanted into a small container.) Hotel laundry services are expensive and often a quick dip and hang in the shower overnight will freshen things sufficiently. Irons have to be requested from house-keeping!

CLOTHING - GENERAL

For most of the time, dress will be casual and comfortable. You want to be able to walk around easily and

enjoy the sights. Stewart loves his light cargo pants and cargo shorts because of the pockets on the leg where you can secrete things pretty securely. A light jacket is always essential and something water-proof too. Aside from not packing too many things which need ironing, a good tip is to 'vestirsi alla cipolla' as the Italians say... (literally...dress like an onion ...in layers!!)

GUIDELINES FOR CLOTHING TO PACK

- 4 or 5 pairs / sets of socks and underwear (fast drying is best). You can use expensive hotel laundry services or the more cost effective 'quick wash and hang in your bathroom' technique.
- 4 or 5 shirts / tops, in a mix of sleeve lengths and weights.... Layers remember!
- a multi-purpose light jumper which is quite 'smart' or a nice 'wind-cheater'
- 2 - 3 pairs of pants or skirts and 1 pair of long shorts /'pedal-pushers' for everyday wear
- One or two nice pairs of pants/skirts for wearing to performances or to a special dinner.
- If ladies prefer dresses and skirts that's fine, just make sure they are easy to move about in.
- Swimsuit (ladies) / Ditto men...if you enjoy a swim.
- 2 pyjamas/nighties (You will have dressing gowns/robes in the hotels.)
- a light rain jacket that is easy to crunch up into your day-pack) OR a plastic poncho if you can suffer the fashion 'faux pas' !
- a nice jacket (men) for special occasions/smarter dinners. It's good to pack a tie also. Something comparable for the ladies. (*Jennifer says she always takes black pants (in a fabric that doesn't crush) and a couple of dressier tops...to which you can add a jacket.)*
- A small hand-bag or clutch bag for going to the theatre/ or to dinner
- A sensible hat to put in your day bag. Don't worry about fashion statements...just shade!
- Long pants around our lovely hotels please and on the plane please.

SHOES (The most important item!!)

- Bring sensible, comfortable 'jogger- style' walking shoes for everyday wear. Some days you will be on your feet a lot. Make sure they have good grip & support for walking on old cobbles and uneven surfaces. (*Jennifer finally took Stewart's advice and went to a sports store for a proper fitting. She has suffered not one sore knee, back or ankle since!!)*
- A pair of solid walking sandals or similar is a great addition if you're happy for a break from covered shoes. Good quality ones can be as comfy as, and almost as solid as, joggers.
- Most of our hotels will supply scuffs/slippers for around the room...or going to the pool (*supplied with your bath robes*) so don't bring them unless they are a necessity for you.
- 1 dressier pair of flat shoes for wearing somewhere nice. HOWEVER, you must be able to safely walk 15 to 20 mins in them. This is no time for strappy sandals or stilettos !

MONEY MATTERS

- **MONEY BELT** We advise using one. If you lose everything, except your cards and some cash, you can go to the shops, replace it all and claim on your insurance. The reverse is not so easy! Wear your money belt tucked inside your clothing and keep a small amount of cash in your day pack or a pocket that is not easily-accessed. This is for smaller purchases on the go.
- Try to bring both a Cash Card (*like the Commonwealth Travel Money Card*) and a Credit Card that won't charge you big fees each time you withdraw money. Keep one of these in your money belt, in case you see something irresistible or need to re-stock your cash reserve.
- Use your room safe or the hotel safe to store passports, reserve cash and a 'backup' card, ie Credit or Cash Card when not in use. You should have two cards in case one is lost or stops working!
- Try to ascertain the overseas 'help' line for your card and bring this with you.

MONEY TO TAKE WITH YOU

We will use EURO throughout the tour. You can order some from your bank or from currency exchange outlets like Travelex or Crown Currency which are at the big shopping centres. (shop around and check rates and charges) Bank rates are generally the same as the agencies! 200 - 300 EURO pp would be a

good amount to leave home with so you are not looking to change money too early in your trip. (Malta will be a very easy place to get money if you want to top up before Sicily.)

**** AN IMPORTANT TIP** - When purchasing something in a foreign country and using a Credit Card, ask that your card be charged in the **LOCAL currency**. Very often you will be charmingly offered the charge processed in AUD...This means you pay an unregulated exchange rate...and you have no right of redress later. It's far better to let official banks and official rates on the day, take care of currency exchanges, rather than a shop! Remember this tip and if asked....just reply '**charge in Euro please!**'

TOURIST TAX

Most will be aware that in much of Italy and Europe a tax per night spent in a city is payable by each of us. The daily rate varies and the amount is an indication of the value of the treasures within the city and the cost to maintain them for posterity and for we visitors to enjoy.

Tourist tax is the responsibility of each individual, payable at checkout. Please plan ahead for this. We will put the amount of tax payable beside each hotel on your itinerary. Always ensure you are given a receipt, especially if paying cash.

SUNDRIES WE HIGHLY RECOMMEND

- **A small notepad (and pen!) is essential...** to record changed meeting or departure times or places, addresses, breakfast times, 'bags-out' times, etc Keep one with you at all times so you can record any little changes or new pieces of information as we go along!
Noting each hotel's address and phone number in your book or phone is essential too...just in case you become lost. Even without speaking the language, you can always point to the hotel address, and the person you are asking can, in turn, point you in the right direction.
- Be sure to note the mobile number for Giorgio, our Tour Director in Sicily, in case there is an emergency while you are out on your own. Note Stewart's number also as back-up but always call Giorgio first.
- Your small back-pack/day bag, to hold water, jacket, camera etc when you're out and about.
- Cables for your phone and other electrical devices if you have them
- Adapter plug for the above (In Europe it's generally a two pin plug for 220-240 volts. A multi-purpose plug never goes astray either.
NOTE: Some of the newer Korjo plugs may have pins which are too wide/thick for some European power-points...Have a good look and compare when buying....Go for thinner pins if there is a choice!
- A Camera and 2 or 3 memory cards (*don't keep everything on one card — rotate them*) or your trusty phone if you're happy to use that for snaps.
- A Travel alarm clock. You will need it, especially until you adjust to local time. (You can use hotel 'wake up' call services too, but these are not faultless. Sometimes they simply forget to call!)
- Earplugs. These are useful anywhere. Eye shades are good too if you like darkness to sleep. You'll get these on the plane going over.
- Some find Inflatable or floppy neck cushions are good on long flights but floppy ones are bulky. Emirates issues you a little pillow, a blanket, and a 'comfort pack' - toothbrush, sleeping socks and the A 380s are about as comfortable as you can get.
- PERHAPS : a pair of in-ear (not cheap!) or even the larger noise reduction head-phones to cut out noise and 'hum' on planes. (*Stewart likes them....Jennifer likes to hear what's going on!*) Aldi has them sometimes and they are good value. (about \$40). Keep an eye out!
- Eyeglasses / sunglasses / contacts lenses if you use them. Never wear contacts on the plane!!
- a mini torch and a folding travel umbrella
- A small travel jug/kettle is handy if you can't live without a cuppa before bed. Room service is mostly slow and costly. Pack some tea/coffee and some little long-life milk capsules and you're set! Italian hotels rarely supply tea/coffee making facilities. In fact...they don't really drink tea, unless it's herbal! This is changing slowly as tourists demand such things.
- Our lovely hotels will all have hair dryers so no need to bring yours from home. Mind you, Jennifer says some are like a baby's breath so if it's important to you, pop in a small travel one.
- There is free Wi-Fi in all of our hotels. You will be given a password/ access code at check in (*another use for your little note pad !!*) or it will be supplied along with your room key.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS/ ESSENTIALS

- Keep photocopies of your passport photo page hidden in an inside pocket of your suitcase and leave one with the family member/friend who is your emergency contact at home in Australia.
- Keep a copy in your day pack too to avail yourself of any discounted 'seniors' entry to museums etc
- Also keep well hidden in your suitcase, details of your credit/cash cards (not the pin numbers!) If you are likely to forget pins, disguise them within a fake phone number in your notebook!
- Keep your Travel Insurance details & the emergency phone number secure in your main luggage. Again, why not note the details on your small note pad just as back up !
- Take a variety of sizes of plastic 'mini-grip' / zip seal bags. These are handy for damp 'smalls' or swimmers that didn't dry overnight! ...also for holding small accessories like plugs/chargers, loose coins, memorabilia you collect along the way... They have a variety of uses. (You can grab a couple at the airport as you go through Security if you forget!)
- addresses for postcards and/or emails home
- a few small, cheap gifts from home for when you meet folk worthy of a little thank you. Even the little kangaroos/koalas etc from 'trashy' souvenir shops can bring a smile and people are chuffed to receive them! We sometimes leave them for room cleaning staff on departure.

WHAT WILL THE WEATHER BE LIKE?

The Weather? Who can guarantee or even accurately predict the weather these days. Based on past weather patterns, we *should* have average temperatures between 12 and 25 C during our springtime tour and perhaps a day or two of rain. We do, of course, have a weather guarantee on our tours and this usually produces fair skies and mild temperatures. *We're aiming to keep this going!*

SAFETY PRECAUTIONS:

You will have heard horror stories about pick-pockets and drive-by motor-cyclists who grab bags and ride off. These things do happen in major cities around the world but if you take reasonable precautions you will be fine. Big cities like Palermo are the only places we'd expect to encounter pick-pockets so just take care in markets and on the street. Stay alert and aware of who is next to you in crowded places. Never leave your bag hanging loosely or carry money or cards in easily accessible pockets. If you are carrying a bag over your shoulder, keep your arm over its opening in busy places. Similarly, if you have a small backpack, carry it on the front of your body in crowded places, rather than on your back. If you make it difficult, the pick-pockets/opportunists will go to the next 'easy' target!

Watch your step!

Footpaths are old and generally not what they are here in Australia. Aside from cobbles, you may find gaping gutters, bits of pathway missing, cracks and uneven surfaces. Be ever aware of where you are putting your feet! Take care when it's crowded and you can't see ahead or when admiring a fantastic spectacle you've suddenly spotted. It's so easy to forget to look where you are stepping and nursing a grazed knee or twisted ankle is no fun! Remember too when crossing roads, that cars are driving on the opposite side to ours! Think and look both ways before you step out!

A FEW TIPS IF YOU HAVEN'T BEEN TO ITALY / SICILY ..or YOU HAVEN'T BEEN FOR A WHILE.

Familiarise yourself with the Euro notes and always have some idea of what, for example, your lunch is going to cost and how much change you expect.

In restaurants these days paying your bill with either cash or card is done at your table so should your waiter ask for your card to take it to the cash register, ask him to bring the mobile Eftpos machine to you...or go with him up to the register. *(We've never had any problems though.)*

We never add on a tip if paying by credit card. We just say if asked, that we prefer to leave a tip in cash. If warranted, we do just that. If service has been awful, (this is rare...) we respond in kind!

When having a coffee, a snack or drink in a bar, it will generally be cheaper to have it 'al banco' ie standing at the bar. In smaller towns, just ask if the price is the same if you sit down. Often it is...or perhaps it's just an extra Euro or two...'well worth it if it's a nice spot and you're tired.

One good thing though is that you never feel rushed to leave your table. If it takes you an hour to sip your one drink...that's fine! Something we love and so wish would be introduced in Australia, is the Italian courtesy of always providing a small snack if you order a drink....some crisps, olives, peanuts... something! So civilised!!

THE LANGUAGE

In Malta everyone will speak English in Sicily many will also. Never-the-less try to remember a few words of Italian and give it a go in Sicily where a lot of people speak Italian as well as their native Sicilian....'quite different! Addressing someone in their language is so appreciated.

Never just blurt out English..always politely ask 'parla Inglese?' (in-GLEH-zeh) If 'Yes', then ask or say what you wish...if the answer was 'No!' ...add some gestures to your English! You'll get by. Hopefully you have all printed up Stewart's helpful list of Italian words and stuck it somewhere so you see it daily and start to memorise some. Of course, this list is very short so go ahead and 'google' words which you want to use and add to it. eg *Vino rosso* - red wine! or *bianco* white!

A great tip is that In Italian, an upward inflection is sufficient to turn a word or a couple of words into a question. eg *un bancomat?* accompanied by a questioning sort of expression or gesture...instantly becomes... Is there an ATM near here? *Magic!* or *il conto?* May I have the bill please?

The big, big thing to remember is that thank you is *Grazie* (grah-zee-eh) and that it has eh on the end. Don't say *Grazi*...!! You'll sound like an American cruise boat tourist! (no offence!!)

Italians are very polite and every *buon giorno*, *grazie*, *buonissimo* will be appreciated!

ALSO: *Freddo* means cold and *caldo* means hot. Remember when using the taps in your hotels!!

NOW...MOST IMPORTANTLY.....

Be Prepared for Enjoyment, Enrichment and Expansion! (*..of mind AND waistline!*)

If you do even most of the above, we are certain you will return in good shape, with cherished memories of our tour and of our fun-loving and considerate travelling companions! Those of you sharing a room with a new friend will be a little apprehensive but we know that anyone attracted to our special tours will be a kind and giving soul. Respecting the needs of others as well as your own is the key to happy room-sharing and in fact, to successful group travel !

Even with a partner or close friend, be ready to make an extra effort when you feel tired and 'frazzled' and try not to let it impact on others. Rest if your body tells you it has the need. We want you all to stay well! You should now be out walking daily, including hills, so that getting about is not a shock to your body. Try to drop a couple of kilos before we go too! It's Italy....and the food is too tempting!! Finally, please do your best to ensure we all have a wonderful time away. Show consideration, care and a smiling face to those in our group and to those we meet along the way. Such simple graces are mostly appreciated and where they are not, smile all the more!!!