

Culture and islands of the Mediterranean

From **26/4/2025**
to **7/5/2025**

Ship: **L'AUSTRAL**

From **Barcelona**
to **Valletta**

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Starting in **Barcelona**, step aboard *L'Austral* for a **12-day cruise** between Spain and the majestic Maltese coast.

Throughout your journey, you will benefit from an excursion included per person per port of call, to choose from a selection offered by PONANT. During this cruise, explore **Alghero and its nuraghi** and learn more about the Spanish influences on this Italian island; discover **Reggio Calabria and the famous Riace bronzes** during a visit to the prestigious national archaeological museum; or meet **Daniel Mauceri, a famous puppeteer** who is keeping the ancient tradition of the Opera dei Pupi alive **from** Syracuse. The diversity of experiences on offer promises you intense and varied moments (to discover the full range of excursions, go to the itinerary tab).

You will begin your journey in the Balearic Islands, on the unspoiled island of Menorca. **Mahon**, the island's capital, will charm you with its age-old history and its exceptional port, which, at 6 kilometres (3.7 miles) long, is the biggest in the Mediterranean!

Then *L'Austral* will make its way to **Sardinia** and the Port of **Alghero**. Discover its rich past reflected in its medieval fortifications, its historic centre, and its majestic cathedral. **Cagliari**, the island's capital, will charm you with its old town featuring shady stairs, small sun-drenched squares, and vestiges illustrating the city's greatness in medieval times.

You will then set a course for **Sicily** and **Trapani**. 750 metres (2,460 feet) up, perched on a high triangular plateau sloping down to the sea, this medieval city is a labyrinth of polished, paved narrow streets and alleyways with superb views over the Aegadian Islands and the valley.

In **Palermo**, the soul of Sicily exudes the perfumes of picturesque markets while history unveils itself. Its 12th-century cathedral and its Teatro Massimo opera house - one of the largest in Europe - make its city centre a real treasure chest with multiple cultural influences.

A little further north, you will discover the Aeolian islands. **Lipari** is the capital of the Aeolian volcanic archipelago and is renowned for its many natural and architectural gems.

Catania is the next port of call on your cruise. Located on the slopes of Mount Etna, the town has been destroyed seven times by the volcano's eruptions! Listed as a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**, it is a town of incomparable cultural richness.

In **Syracuse**, the Sicilian soul unfolds across the **island of Ortygia** - the oldest part of the city -, a maze of small streets dotted with churches, palaces, ancient remnants, sheltering a majestic cathedral in its very heart.

Gozo, an unspoiled island that is home to a megalithic complex **listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site**, is the final stop on your cruise.

Your cruise will come to an end in **Valletta**, capital of the island of Malta and former stronghold of the Knights of the Order of Malta.



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YOUR STOPOVERS :

BARCELONA

Embarkation 26/4/2025 From 4:00 pm to 5:00 pm

Departure 26/4/2025 at 6:00 pm

Located on the seashore between the mountains of Montjuïc and Tibidabo, **Barcelona** offers its many visitors a perfect blend of tradition and modernism. Truly an open-air museum, the “prodigious town” reveals an astonishing range of artistic treasures and museums, combining Roman ruins, medieval districts and a number of avant-garde elements from the 20th Century. Over the years, it has been marked by some of the greatest artists, such as **Picasso, Miró** or **Gaudí**, most of whose work has been listed as World Heritage Sites by UNESCO. Take the time to stroll along **the Ramblas** and enjoy the gentle, typically Mediterranean lifestyle of the capital of Catalonia.

MAHON, BALEARIC ISLANDS

Arrival 27/4/2025 midday

Departure 27/4/2025 late afternoon

You will be welcomed by the colourful houses of **Mahon**, its narrow streets and pretty squares that appear as you stroll around this richly contrasting city. Mahon reveals its different neighbourhoods, alternating between monuments, villas and white buildings. Discover the **Santa Maria church**, a building of neo-gothic inspiration, rebuilt in the 18th Century. It is worth a visit to see its monumental organ with more than 3,000 pipes and four keyboards. Around the Carmen church you will find a **local market**, full of stands selling *avarcas*, typical Menorcan sandals originally made by peasants. Let yourself fall under the spell of this Mediterranean treasure.

ALGHERO, SARDINIA

Arrival 28/4/2025 midday

Departure 28/4/2025 early evening

Located on the north-west coast of Sardinia, **Alghero** offers you traces of Sardinian culture combined with vestiges from a Catalan past. Here, many inhabitants speak the Algherese dialect, a variant of Catalan, as well as Catalan itself. A walk along the well-preserved **medieval ramparts** will give you a panoramic view of the town. The streets in the historical centre bear witness to its rich past, from **Santa Maria Cathedral** to numerous palaces dating from different eras.

CAGLIARI, SARDINIA

Arrival 29/4/2025 early morning

Departure 29/4/2025 late afternoon

The capital of Sardinia, **Cagliari**, like Rome, is built on seven hills. Its Sardinian name means “castle”, in reference to the

citadel, its historic centre, which dominates the city. The old ramparts are now pleasant panoramic terraces bordering picturesque streets. The city hosted the Nuragic, Phoenician, Roman and Byzantine civilisations before the rein of the Spanish Hapsburgs and the House of Savoy. The monuments of Cagliari bear the traces of these successive dominations, such as the Bastion of Saint-Rémy or the **Sainte-Marie Cathedral**. On the sea front, Art Nouveau-style public monuments give way to the Poetto beach, a magnificent stretch of sand that is 8 kilometres long.

TRAPANI, SICILY

Arrival 30/4/2025 midday

Departure 30/4/2025 evening

Bathed in the cobalt waters of the **Tyrrhenian sea**, Trapani is the former port of the Greek city of **Erice**, boasting a privileged natural position in western **Sicily**. As you wander through its little streets, you will discover a secular cultural heritage, bearing witness to the many influences of civilisations that came here: **San Lorenzo Cathedral**, Maria Santissima Annunziata sanctuary, the fountain of Triton. On the shaded restaurant terraces, savour some fresh fish from the morning's catch. Or else you can opt for a seafood couscous, a culinary legacy from their Arab neighbours.

PALERMO, SICILY

Arrival 1/5/2025 early morning

Departure 1/5/2025 late evening

Palermo is the guardian of the Sicilian soul. Many have been attracted to this city, the largest capital of the Italian islands. Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Normans... Palermo is a rich culmination of so many cultural influences as seen in the Moorish designs on the **cathedral**, and the Byzantine mosaics of the **Palatine chapel**, which is itself housed within the precincts of the **Norman palace**. You will fall under the spell of the palaces, **baroque splendours** that grace the town with their obsolete beauty. It is thrilling to stumble upon one of those fabulous markets, high in colour, and headily picturesque.

LIPARI, AEOLIAN ISLANDS

Arrival 2/5/2025 early morning

Departure 2/5/2025 late afternoon

Of the seven **Aeolian islands**, this is the largest and the most populated. Lying off the north coast of **Sicily**, in the Tyrrhenian sea, **Lipari** is one of UNESCO's marvellous World Heritage sites. Its lava stone quarries and obsidian flow of **Rocce Rosse** are indications of its volcanic nature. The town, the largest urban area in the whole archipelago, proudly houses its **citadel** and its **castle**, both rooted in Antiquity. If you head further into the centre, you'll be surprised to come across a Norman cathedral, complete with a magnificent baroque façade.

REGGIO DI CALABRIA

Arrival 3/5/2025 early morning

Departure 3/5/2025 evening

At the southern tip of the Italian boot, **Reggio di Calabria** guards the eastern shore of the Strait of Messina. From the *lungomare*, the sea front promenade, there are magnificent views over Sicily, a little over 3 km away, and Etna. Rebuilt

after the 1908 earthquake, Reggio is set out in a grid pattern and has Art Nouveau and Belle Époque architecture that add to its charm. And the fragrance of bergamot, the citrus fruit that dominates the region's confectionery and perfumery. A visit to the National Archaeological Museum is a must. It is one of the most important in Italy and among its collections are the famous Riace Bronzes, the stunning Greek statues dating from the 5th century BC that were found off the coast in 1972.

CATANIA, SICILY

Arrival 4/5/2025 early morning

Departure 4/5/2025 late evening

Sicily's second city **Catania** is dominated by the majestic silhouette of **Mount Etna**. Nourishing and devastating at the same time, this giant crowned with smoke rings brought about the destruction of the city at the end of the 17th century. Catania was then rebuilt in the late Baroque style, and the many monuments of this epoch have earned its status as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The baroque churches of the harmonious **Via dei Crociferi** perfectly illustrate the riches of this architectural heritage. During your stop, be sure to visit **Saint Agatha Cathedral** with its apses made of lava stones, and its square decorated with a fountain of the Elephant, the animal which allegedly has the power to calm the fury of Mount Etna ...

SYRACUSE, SICILY

Arrival 5/5/2025 early morning

Departure 5/5/2025 evening

Its undulating rocky coastline, the endless sandy beaches, the menacing form of **Mount Etna** which surveys its island like a patriarch, the flowery gardens on the hillside... **Sicily** lays out its varied landscapes like a shopkeeper displays his wares. Described by Cicero as "the most beautiful city in the world", **Syracuse** was one of the most prestigious cities in Sicily and at her height was even a rival for Athens. **A central city of Ancient Greece**, it was home to a succession of civilisations, each of which has left their mark. The blend of Arabic, Roman, Norman, Byzantine and Spanish cultures makes Syracuse a town that is extraordinarily rich in fragrances, colours and flavours.

GOZO

Arrival 6/5/2025 early morning

Departure 6/5/2025 early afternoon

Located to the north of Malta, a lot less urbanised than its larger sibling and protected from mass tourism, the **small island of Gozo** has managed to remain natural and authentic. Lush hills and valleys alternate with a mosaic of cultivated fields. The buildings, some of which are medieval, are built from honey-coloured limestone and blend in perfectly with the surrounding scenery. Gozo also boasts a unique historic site that is now listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site: **the megalithic temples of Ggantija** near the town of Xaghra. An **archaeological museum** adjoining the site presents a number of objects that were found there. Red-sand beaches and a crystal-clear sea add to the calm and serenity of Gozo.

VALLETTA

Arrival 7/5/2025 at night

Disembarkation 7/5/2025 at 7:00 am

The whole of the Maltese capital Valletta is **UNESCO World Heritage** listed and occupies a peninsula in the north-east of the island. From the fountain of Tritons to Saint-Elme fort, there are as many majestic streets as there are narrow staircase vennels to explore. The painted loggia and carved corbels on the tall houses will accompany you in your explorations, and you'll rarely be bothered by traffic. You can visit the Grandmasters palace decorated with coats of arms and frescoes. **Saint-John's cathedral** and the ramparts which have guarded the city since the 16th century are also among the most emblematic sites of the city. Arranged in terraces, the **Barrakka Gardens** will punctuate your promenade with a green and floral experience.



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