

Travel news

■ **St Lucia** - Book by today for a deal on a British Airways Holidays offering seven nights at the four-star Blu St Lucia (B&B) from £649pp (two sharing). Includes flights from Gatwick. Travel from September 1-September 30. See ba.com/stlucia for details.

■ **Turkey** - Holiday Lettings (holidaylettings.co.uk) offers seven nights at Ovacic Apartment (Home ID 5379334) in Ovacic from £266 per week (three bedrooms) - saving £114 (30pc). Book by this Wednesday for travel until September 15.

■ **Greece** - Simpson Travel (www.simpsontravel.com; 0208 003 6557) offers seven nights at Eagle's Nest, Paxos (self-catering) from £1,675pp (two sharing) - saving £600pp. Includes car hire and flights with BA from Heathrow on August 23.

■ **Antigua** - Original Travel (www.originaltravel.co.uk; 020 3582 4990) offers seven nights at Carlisle Bay (B&B) from £2,925pp (two sharing). Includes transfers and flights from London. Book by August 17 for



travel until August 21.

■ **Hungary** - lowcost holidays (www.lowcostholidays.com; 0800 1116271) offers two nights at the four-star Boutique Hotel (B&B) in Budapest from £162pp (two sharing). Includes flights from Luton on September 3.

■ **Turkey** - Simpson Travel (0208 003 6557; www.simpsontravel.com) offers seven nights at Villa Papatya (self-catering) in Islamlar from £998pp (two sharing) - saving up to £111pp. Includes car hire and flights with BA from Heathrow August 23.

■ **USA** - Titan (0800 988 5873; www.titantravel.co.uk) offers the 16-day 'California and the Golden West' escorted tour from £1,999pp (two sharing) - saving up to £450pp. Includes flights, 14 nights in hotels, 13 excursions including Yosemite and the Grand Canyon and Titan's VIP Home Departure Service. Departures on April 28 and September 29 2016.

Local offers

■ Latest holiday offers from flights from Norwich. Telephone Travel Norwich Airport on 01603 428700, email enquiries@travelnorwichairport.co.uk or www.travelnorwich.com.

■ **Bulgaria** - August 30, seven nights in a 4* Named Hotel in Sunny Beach, All Inclusive from £395 per person.

■ **Bulgaria** - August 30, 14 nights in a 4* named hotel in Sunny Beach, All Inclusive from £509 per person.

■ **Gran Canaria** - August 20, 14 nights in 5T Platinum Named Hotel in Maspalomas, Half Board, from £925 per person, saving £568 per couple.

■ **Gran Canaria** - September 3, seven nights in 5T Platinum Named Hotel in Maspalomas, Half Board from £629 per person, saving £132 per couple.

■ **Majorca** - October 16, seven nights in 4T Gold Hotel in Cala D'or, Half Board from £419 per person, saving £442 per couple.

■ **Tenerife** - November 22, 14 nights in 3* Named Hotel in Las Caletillas, All Inclusive from £529 per person.

■ Prices are correct at time of going to print, all subject to availability and based on maximum occupancy. Prices excludes £10/adult Norwich Airport Development Fee payable at the Airport.

SABAH MEDDINGS

visits a corner of Italy which simply oozes character, history, beauty... and great food.

It's no surprise why producers chose the honey-coloured late baroque cities of southeast Sicily for the setting of cult crime-series Montalbano.

Broadcast on BBC Four in the UK, the programme has brought with it a curiosity for its culture, striking architecture and slower pace of life.

But the region is also dripping in history, authentic food and unexpectedly, what must be some of the finest chocolate around.

Andrea Camilleri's crime novel is set in the fictional city of Vigata which is filmed in cities in the Ragusa province - the setting of our three-day trip.

For fans of the show, your tour guide can show you Commissario Montalbano's office, police station and his favourite lunch destination - Trattoria San Calogero.

Ragusa is the smallest of Sicily's nine provinces, which has its capital in the town of Ragusa Ibla, and the equally beautiful Modica and Scicli formed part of our visit.

I'm informed the southeast is the 'real Sicily' - yet to experience mass tourism on a scale similar to the northern cities of Palermo and Catania.

For now it is more food, culture and relaxation than a party destination, however for travellers who want a taste of the nightlife, the nearby Marina de Ragusa has enough bars to keep any party lover happy on Friday and Saturday nights. And as is common in Mediterranean towns and cities, evenings are a family event, with prams and toddlers mixing with good natured revellers.

It is already known for its fine golf courses (the Sicilian Open was held there in 2011) but with a little airport built two years ago in Comiso, it surely won't be long before more holidaymakers catch on.

Different from Sicily's more European cities of the north, the southeast is on the same latitude as the north African coast, which the climate reflects.

In the beginning of June temperatures already climb to 29 degrees during the day, although it is cooler at night.

I tour three of the region's late Baroque cities on my visit, but I imagine it's the kind of place where you could dig in for a month and still leave craving more.

Two hours away is Mount

■ Tables set for the evening at Il Carrubo restaurant at Donnafugata Golf Resort and Spa. Picture: Hotel Photography



Tee off in home

Etna, and Catania is about an hour and a half's drive.

And Ragusa is a region where it pays to have a tour guide.

While anyone can enjoy the unspoilt beauty and stunning architecture, our guide Nicoletta Blundo from Eracle Travels reveals the secrets behind ghoulish gargoyles hanging off buildings, and the stories behind the historic churches.

We even clamber into one of the many stunning palaces - Palazzo Arezzo di Trifiletti - which tell of the riches of some of the families who lived here, owned by her friend Domenico's parents.

Our first trip is to Scicli - pronounced sheekli - and Modica, both UNESCO world heritage sites.

■ Sabah Meddings with golf professional Davide Terrinoni



“ For fans of Montalbano you can see his office, the police station and his favourite lunch haunt - Trattoria San Calogero ”

Montalbano's police station is, in real life, Scicli's town hall in the central Via Penna.

Next is Modica, where our guide tells us the tale of the rival churches, St Peter and St George, which battle each other in grandeur from either sides of the wall which once divided the city.

It was aimed to keep the middle and upper classes apart, but has long since been dismantled.

As we walk up to the grand church of St George, a bride appears from the doors with her new husband, to the applause of guests waiting outside in the evening sun.

Sicilian weddings are typically a large and vibrant affair - with hundreds more guests than is common in the UK.

On our way to Modica we stop at a striking vantage point, where a line of tiny Fiat cars are parked.

About seven Americans have piled in to one of the vintage vehicles for a photograph - the site is another of the region's charms, and reminds us of hit film The Italian Job.

Tours with a local Fiat club are easily arranged, and something we would have loved to experience on a longer break.



■ A beautiful church in Ragusa, below, Fiat cars lining the streets above Modica. Pictures: Sabah Meddings



of TV's Montalbano



■ Donnafugata Golf Resort and Spa, the perfect base and where South African legend Gary Player has designed one of its two 18-hole courses.

We ate at Osteria de Saporì Perduì, a family-run restaurant with a quirky interior but stunning traditional food.

A favourite from the region is arancini – fried rice balls filled with meat or cheese.

Flavours in other dishes are striking, cabonata – aubergine, tomato, peppers and olives – is a local delicacy, and is delicious.

A trip to Modica is not complete without a visit to Antica Dolceria Bonajuta – the oldest chocolate shop in Sicily – where 18 flavours include orange, vanilla, and, strangely, marjoram.

And while in the region a short drive winding through the countryside can take you for wine tasting and lunch at the family-owned Valle Dell'Acate winery.

Our base was the five-star Donnafugata Golf Resort and Spa, just 15 minutes from the airport, and a short drive from the sandy beach.

Nothing is too much for the staff at the resort – on a tour of the site we're told "anything is possible" and it has earned its five stars.

Bathroom sinks are cast from the lava of Mount Etna, and many of the rooms

and suites have stunning views, stretching out across the leafy grounds.

For golf lovers, South African legend Gary Player designed one of its two 18-hole courses.

If, like me, you are a novice, the resort's resident professional Davide Terrinoni can take you through the paces in the driving range, a Darren Clarke Centre of Excellence.

Having never played before, I was left hooked, and plan to take it up at home.

While there's golf, an idyllic spa and shuttle bus to the resort's sandy beach during the day, the restaurants take over in the morning and evening.

After drifting down to breakfast you are greeted with a vast selection of hot, cold, sweet and savoury Sicilian food, and granita – a traditional half-frozen drink – in Fico d'India. It's eaten with sweet bread, and comes in different flavours – lemon was a favourite.

For lunch and light suppers there is 19th Hole, where golfers can grab a quick sandwich or, if like us, take advantage of the extensive buffet and barbecue and relax with cold drinks for the afternoon.

For our final night it was the private

dining room at the resort's flagship restaurant of Il Carrubo, which offers a delicate fusion between traditional and modern cuisine.

We ate baby cannoli pasta with ricotta cheese, walnut and clams and then delicious red mullet in thyme and saffron.

It was my birthday just days after, and the staff surprised us with a cake, candles and song after the meal. A lovely – if surprising – extra touch.

Travel facts

■ Sabah Meddings flew with Ryanair from Stansted to Comiso airport in Sicily. Transfer to Donnafugata Golf Resort and Spa takes about 15 minutes and flights go on Monday and Friday.

■ The Diamond Spa package, which includes breakfast and spa treatments, is £645 per person for a week's stay.

■ Other packages and shorter stays are available. Visit www.donnafugatagolfresort.com for more information.

■ The resort also features an extensive conference centre which is available for hire.

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