

(135–132 B.C. and 104–100 B.C.) were cruelly suppressed. Roman's corrupt rule reached a peak under governor Caius Verres (73–71 B.C.). And during the reign of Octavian (63 B.C.-A.D. 14), Roman immigration was on the increase. Many veterans of the Roman-Sicilian wars thought of Sicily as their Florida and decided to buy land on the island. Thus the Latinization of Sicily, which gradually displaced the island's Hellenistic culture.

After the fall of Rome, Sicily passed from the Vandals (mid-5th cent. A.D.) to the Goths (493) and then to the Byzantines (535), when Byzantine general Belisarius occupied Sicily at the start of hostilities with the Ostrogoths in Italy. Sicily remained under Byzantine rule for more than 400 years. During two of those four centuries the island was being raided by Muslim Arabs from North Africa. In 965 the island finally fell to that group, which, in its defense, did promote agriculture, commerce, and the arts and sciences. The Arab influence on Sicily's dialect and music can be sensed even today. And it was probably the Arabs who introduced not only the gelsi (mulberry trees) but the lemon and orange trees which, to this day, are among Sicily's greatest prizes.

In 1060 the Arabs were driven out by the Normans, which were led by Roger of Altavilla (known as Roger I). In 1130 his successor, Roger II, became the first king of Sicily, in a coronation held in the Duomo of Palermo. Nine years later he confronted Pope Innocent II, who had claimed suzerainty over the island. The Pope gave Roger II Sicily as well as the Norman holdings in Southern Italy. (These holdings would become Kingdom of Naples, while Sicily would be known as the Kingdom of Sicily. One could regard this as the embryo of the term "Kingdom of the Two Sicilies" which was to be coined many centuries later.) The court of Roger II was a brilliant one. He was widely admired for his "wisdom, liberality, and valor." Roger II was, succeeded by William I ("The Bad"), who was succeeded by William II, "The Good" and Sicily's, last Norman king. Crowned in 1171 when only 18 years old, William II wasted no time in instigating the groundbreaking of Sicily's architectural crown jewel, the hitherto mentioned Duomo di Monreale.

Monreale is about a half-hour bus ride from Palermo. A visit to this Duomo is a prerequisite for anyone who makes the otherwise false claim that he or she has seen the most beautiful cathedrals in Europe. Imagine a large cathedral, 345 feet long by 131 feet wide (larger than a football field). Now imagine that the entire ceiling and walls are covered with over 68,000 square

feet (!) of gilded mosaics (not gold paint -- real gold!), depicting the history of the life of Christ in 130 scenes! Considering the richness of the different cultures which were melded into this edifice (Romanesque, Byzantine, Arabic, and of course Norman -- with Greek and Latin inscriptions throughout), the Duomo of Monreale would make a good candidate for the icon of Sicily, just as David is the icon of Florence or the Colosseum that of Rome. Monreale is about a half-hour bus ride from Palermo. A visit to this Duomo is a prerequisite for anyone who makes the otherwise false claim that he or she has seen the most beautiful cathedrals in Europe. Imagine a large cathedral, 345 feet long by 131 feet wide (larger than a football field). Now imagine that the entire ceiling and walls are covered with over 68,000 square feet of gilded mosaics (not gold paint -- real gold!), depicting the history of the life of Christ in 130 scenes! Considering the richness of the different cultures which were melded into this edifice (Romanesque, Byzantine, Arabic, and of course Norman -- with Greek and Latin inscriptions throughout), the Duomo of Monreale would make a good candidate for the icon of Sicily, just as David is the icon of Florence or the Colosseum that of Rome.

William II's only heir, Roger II's last direct descendant, was Constance. Constance married Holy Roman Emperor Henry VI, son of Frederick I Hohenstaufen (aka Barbarossa or "Redbeard"). Henry and Constance's son was Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II. The legendary Frederick II was King of Sicily for 53 years, from 1197 (when he was three years old!) to his death in 1250 at age 56.

Like his ancestor Roger II, Frederick II held brilliant court and introduced many positive reforms to the island. Frederick didn't hide the fact that he liked Sicily much better than he liked the other lands of the Holy Roman Empire. When Frederick visited the Holy Land (with which he was unimpressed), Salimbene quoted him as having said, "If the God of the Jews had seen his land of Terra di Lavoro, Calabria, Sicily, and Apulia, then He would not so have commended the land which He promised to the Jews."

Meanwhile, during this era the island gradually was becoming Latinized, for the second time in its history.

This Norman era, especially the reign of Frederick II, saw Sicily at its most prosperous, most artistic, and most peaceful. Many great Norman churches and palaces remind us, to this day, of this glorious era in Sicily's history.



"Travel Tips"

Re-Building the Airlines

VENUS TRAVEL

By John Conenna

Where have all the airlines gone? It must make all of us wonder. When the world of passenger travel started, right after WW II, it was actually the start of a booming business. As the 1950's and 1960's went by, travel and the aviation industry was at its best. There were more airlines in the 1960's, 70's and 80's. Since the 1980's, fewer airlines are in business due to mismanagement, rising fuel cost and deregulation.

As you can see, we have lost so many choices; we are now subjected to what is there. Without a doubt, deregulation of the past, and the internet, have been responsible for the decline of fewer airlines that we see today. The airlines need to rebuild from within. These changes are necessary if they are going to survive.

I also feel that big government and companies relying on bailouts have caused our current economical situation.

A new decade is around the corner. 2010 will be here before we know it. If this is the era of change, than it is also time for change in the airline industry. We need to improve our everyday out look in order to strive ahead for a better future. Let's face it; air travel is here to stay so let's keep trying to improve it. Let us recapture the magic of the past and bring it into the future what was good then, could be even better today.

Travel agencies have come and gone, as did the airlines. The ones that stay in business are those with experience the knowledge to plan each trip. This depends on a variety of things, choices of where you are going, and in this economical era we are in, the budget that the traveler has to work with is of course foremost! When planning a trip with a travel agency, it is very easy to realize if they have the experience to suit your needs, in all categories of your trip.

Your first inquiry with a travel agency should be a fulfilling experience for your traveling arrangements, the traveler should feel comfortable with his agent, if the agent listens to all your needs, without interruption, you can be assured, that this is the first sign of an experienced travel agent. judge how well the agent listens to you and how comfortable they make you feel.

A travel agency such as VENUS TRAVEL with their 40 years of experience will first, ask where you're going and why, is it business or pleasure? and then how you would prefer to travel, the length of your stay, and what your travel budget is?

VENUS TRAVEL, INC. In Chicago, IL John F. Conenna President when it comes to traveling John, can answer any or all of your questions, Tel 773-637-1110.

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