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Academic Traveler Program Offering Sicilian Culinary Adventure

UM faculty member will lead Sicily culture and cuisine excursion this spring

DECEMBER 6, 2017 BY **PAM STARLING**

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Participants in the **UM Academic Traveler** culinary tour of Sicily will explore many fascinating locales, including the picturesque main square of Noto. Registration for the trip is open through Feb. 1. Photo by Getty Images

OXFORD, Miss. – The University of Mississippi's **Academic Traveler** program is offering a unique gift idea this holiday season that will send participants off to bask in the Mediterranean sun while enjoying delightful cuisine and historic beauty.

Candis Varnell, a lecturer in hospitality management, will lead the "Sicilian Culture and Cuisine" tour, set for May 14-21, 2018 in and around Syracuse, Sicily. The Academic Traveler program is a unique way to travel and discover with a seasoned **Ole Miss** instructor.

"Sicily is under the radar," Varnell said. "Many people travel throughout Italy, but the arts, culture, food, wine – everything can be found right there on this historic island."

The trip will feature cuisine teeming with the fruits of local gardens and vineyards. From private vineyard tours and behind-the-scenes chocolate-making demonstrations, the program aims to relate the history, beauty and culture of the Sicilian island to participants.

"Travel changes everything," Varnell said. "It's an eye-opening experience that lets you see how other cultures live life."

Varnell, a world traveler herself, has lived in Jordan and journeyed extensively throughout Europe and the Mediterranean region. She teaches service and event management courses and serves as the internship director in the Ole Miss **hospitality management** department.

Founded by ancient Greeks, Syracuse was often described as "the greatest Greek city and the most beautiful of them all." The 2,700-year-old seaside city sits on the southeastern coast of Sicily.

Ancient Greek structures and ruins are found throughout the city and the surrounding regions.

"It's almost frozen in time," Varnell said. "There is so much to see with historical significance. It truly transports you to another world."

The group will arrive in Syracuse on May 14, a Monday, and enjoy a guided tour through the historic city center and Ortygia Island before enjoying a welcome dinner with their fellow guests.

The next day, the group heads to the Syracuse Market to take in local flavor while sampling homegrown vegetables, nuts, fruits and cheeses.

"Italians take pride in local produce," Varnell said. "They cook with only what is in season. They love their olive oil, wines and cheeses."

"Americans usually get these super-fresh ingredients when we go to a fine-dining restaurant, but this is how the Sicilian people eat every day."

After the market tour, the group will continue to the Syracuse archeological museum and the Greek Theatre that was originally constructed in the fifth century B.C.

The group will travel to the pink villages lining the sea on Wednesday, with excursions to Noto and Marzamemi. They will enjoy lunch by the sea in one of Marzamemi's open-air restaurants.

On Thursday, participants will get their turn in the kitchen for a special Sicilian cuisine cooking class taught by area chefs. The group will cook and enjoy a light lunch with local flavor.

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Campus Briefs

Students Learn 'Real Politics' in Washington, D.C., Winter Session

OXFORD, Miss. – Eleven University of Mississippi students spent their winter break learning about the people who work behind the scenes of the American government in Washington, D.C. Lead by Jonathan Klingler, assistant professor of political science, the students of Pol 391: Applied Politics met not with candidates, but with the people who make candidates'

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Young Alumna Gives Back to School of Accountancy

OXFORD, Miss. – Stephanie Jennings Teague, of Chicago, sees her commitment of \$100,000 to the Patterson School of Accountancy's new building at the University of Mississippi as a means of saying "thank you." "It is a way to show a small token of my appreciation to Ole Miss, the faculty and staff, and the accounting

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Reuters: Keep an Eye on the Money Supply

U.S. inflation roller coaster prompts fresh look at long-ignored money supply By Michael S. Derby NEW YORK – The amount of money sloshing around the U.S. economy shrank last year for the first time on record, a development that some economists believe bolsters the case for U.S. inflation pressures continuing to abate. The Federal Reserve's

That afternoon, the tour continues around the city with a local instructor from Syracuse Academy. The discussion will touch on the origins of the Mafia and how the "Cosa Nostra" began out of Sicily's farming communities in the early 1800s and later traveled to America, and the declining state of the crime organization today.

Participants will take in the beautiful architecture dripping from the baroque towns of Ragusa and Modica on Friday. Participants will have opportunities to see the world-renowned jutting cornices, gargoyles, scrolls and any number of decorative embellishments that have given Sicily a unique identity.

The tour continues as group members experience the secrets of making Modica's world-famous chocolate delicacies.

On Saturday, an excursion to Italy's largest volcano, Mount Etna, will include a vineyard tour and group lunch while learning about the mountain that has shaped the history of Sicily.

The final day in Italy, May 20, includes an olive oil tasting tour around the city. The evening farewell dinner will be hosted during a boat tour around Syracuse Bay.

Group members will depart from Sicily on May 21.

"If you are looking for an exceptional Christmas or graduation gift, this is it," said Mary Leach, director of noncredit programs and Academic Traveler organizer. "This will truly be a once-in-a-lifetime experience."

The deadline to register for the trip is Feb. 1, 2018, but participants who sign up by Dec. 20 will get a special gift certificate that would be great for placing under the tree.

For more information on the trip and to see the full itinerary, visit <http://www.outreach.olemiss.edu/toursicily>.

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