



# SICILY

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## UMAYYAD ROUTE



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Project  
funded by the  
**EUROPEAN UNION**



*Circuito Castelli e  
Borghi Medioevali*

*Sicily. Umayyad Route*  
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The Umayyad Route is a project funded by the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) and led by the Andalusian Public Foundation El legado andalusí. It gathers a network of partners in seven countries in the Mediterranean region: Spain, Portugal, Italy, Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan.

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# Index

## Introduction

|                        |    |
|------------------------|----|
| Umayyad Project (ENPI) | 5  |
| Sicily                 | 7  |
| Umayyad Route          | 18 |

## Itinerary24

|                         |     |
|-------------------------|-----|
| Palermo                 | 26  |
| Cefalù                  | 48  |
| Calatafimi              | 66  |
| Castellammare del Golfo | 84  |
| Erice                   | 100 |
| Marsala                 | 116 |
| Burgio                  | 130 |
| Agrigento               | 146 |
| Butera-Pietraperzia     | 168 |
| Enna                    | 180 |
| Adrano                  | 194 |
| Taormina                | 208 |
| Syracuse                | 226 |
| Noto                    | 242 |

## Bibliography and websites of interest260



## Umayyad Project (ENPI)

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The Umayyad Route seeks to publicize the profound human, cultural, artistic and scientific relationship between East and West and the way in which the Greco-Roman legacy was passed on to Europe through al-Andalus. This route was the path along which the Arabs came to the Iberian Peninsular and Europe, but it was also a channel for the transfer of knowledge and perfectly illustrates the close collaboration between the two cultures. Of these multiple contacts the most important things that have survived the wear and tear of history are a common cultural and artistic background, a shared history and heritage. This is the *raison d'être* of these routes, which seek to forge links and strengthen the relations between the different peoples they encompass, united by a common past.

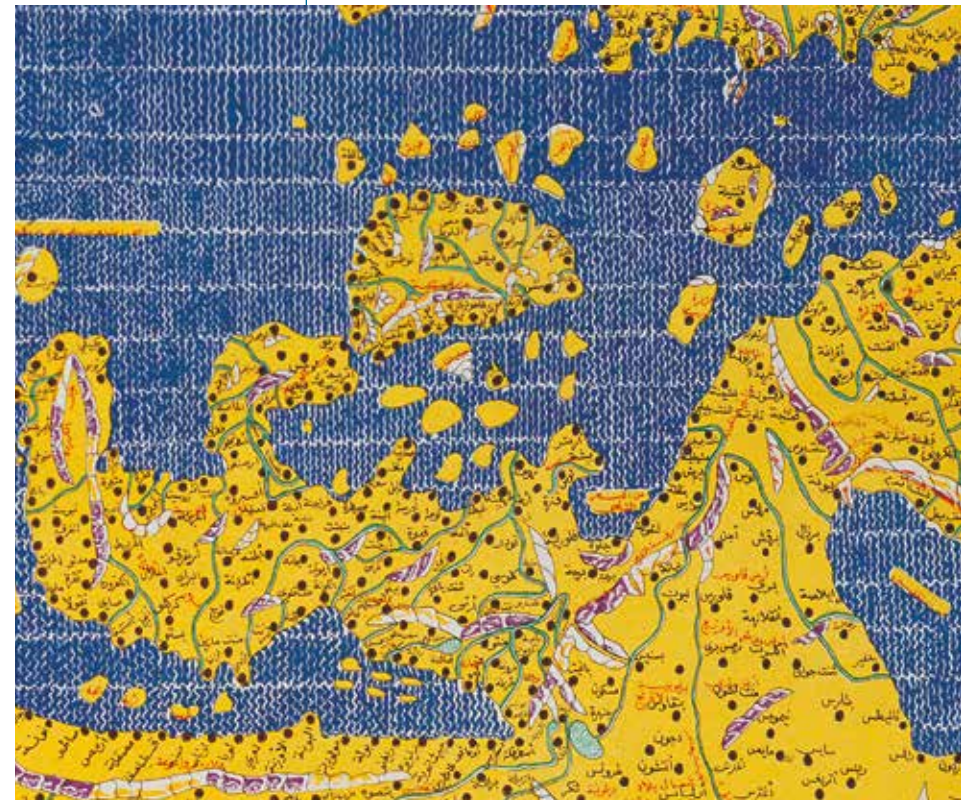
The Umayyad Route retraces part of the journey followed by the dynasty founded by Muawiya ibn Abi Sufian from its capital in Damascus and its subsequent expansion along the southern shores of the Mediterranean to the Iberian Peninsula. The route begins therefore in the Near East before heading off along the Mediterranean across North Africa. It follows the path by which Arab civilization came to Europe and which gave rise to the Caliphate of Cordoba, where the Hispano-Muslim civilization flourished for several centuries. The itinerary starts at its easternmost point in Jordan and Lebanon, passing through Egypt and Tunisia, with a stopover in Sicily, and ends up in the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal).

Solumtum, Phoenician  
settlement in Sicily

## Sicily

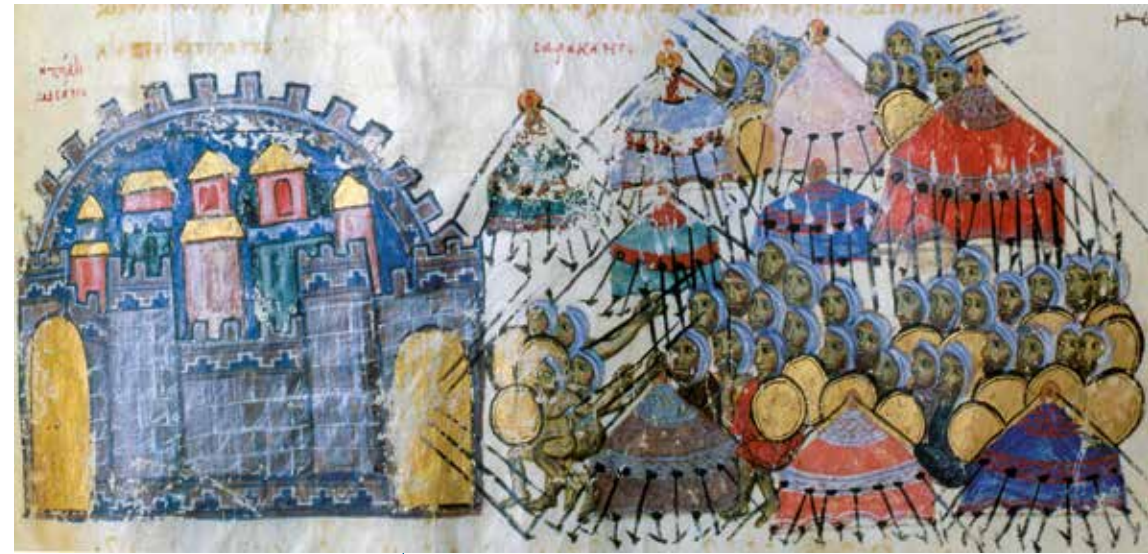
Sicily in the  
Mediterranean region, in  
a map by al-Idrisi, 12<sup>th</sup>  
century

Thanks to its natural wealth and central position in the Mediterranean, Sicily has always been at the crossroads of different cultures, forming a bridge between Europe and Africa. Through the centuries the Greeks, Romans, Arabs and Normans, and at other times the Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Swabians, Angevins, Aragonese and Spanish all made Sicily their home, helping shape its history and leaving behind a mixture of cultures and important architectural remains scattered around a unique island with an attractive mélange of styles and traditions.



Although the first incursions into Sicily by the Arabs date from the Umayyad period, their only real objective was the booty they could seize. The Arabs settled permanently in Sicily in 827 AD when they landed in Mazara on the western part of the island, although it was not finally conquered until the Aghlabids took the city of Taormina in 902. In 910 they were replaced by the Fatimid Dynasty and later, in 947, by the Kalbids, an independent local dynasty, who ruled until 1053. The Arab presence in Sicily brought prosperity and thriving cultural life. The island was divided into three administrative provinces, whose names still exist today:

George Maniakes' troops  
defeat the Arabs in Sicily.  
*Skylitzes Matritensis*  
(Spanish National Library)



Conquest of Messina.  
*Skylitzes Matritensis*  
(Spanish National Library)

Val di Mazara, the largest area covering the western part of the island, with its capital in Palermo, Val di Noto, comprising the central areas and Enna, Catania and Syracuse, and lastly Val Demone which covered, among others, the cities of Messina, Cefalù and the Gulf of Catania. The fall of the Kalbid dynasty brought the fragmentation of the island and civil war, which dogged the last years of their reign. Finally, in 1061, the Great Count Roger launched the Norman conquest of Sicily, which was completed in 1091.

Engraving with Arab  
inscriptions in Palermo,  
by Girault de Prangey





Amphitheatre, Syracuse

following spheres of human activity: traditions and oral history, arts, social customs, rites and feasts; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; traditional craftsmanship. In Sicily for example the Sicilian Puppet Theatre tradition is now on the World Heritage List. At regional and local levels, two registers have been set up, namely the REIS (the Register of Intangible Heritage of Sicily) and REIL (Register of Intangible Heritage of Local Interest) to provide a systematic, permanent strategy for the identification, preservation and enhancement of intangible cultural heritage, by making an inventory of the different ICH in Sicily and promoting them.

### Sicily and the UNESCO World Heritage List

Sicily is among the Italian regions with the highest number of sites on the World Heritage List. These include the Valley of the Temples in Agrigento, the Roman Villa of Casale in Piazza Armerina, the Aeolian Islands, the Baroque Towns in the Val di Noto, the Mount Etna Volcano, Syracuse and the Pantalica Rock Necropolis. What is more, Arab-Norman Palermo and the cathedrals of Cefalù and Monreale have recently been added to the UNESCO World Heritage List as excellent examples of cultural and artistic syncretism between the Arab, Norman and Byzantine cultures.

Since 2003, when the “Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage” was approved, UNESCO has made huge strides to protect the

Valley of Temples,  
Agrigento

The Register of Intangible Heritage of Sicily (REIS-Registro Eredità Immateriali di Sicilia) was set up by the Regional Government in 2005 and claims to be a vehicle for direct application of the UNESCO Convention at a regional level by identifying the cultural heritage of the entire island. The REIS has converted the domains identified by UNESCO into five “books” (Celebrations, Knowledge, Places, Expressions and Living Human Treasures) in which the ICH elements of greatest value are to be inscribed. In order to promote the “bottom up approach” and directly involve local communities in the identification of their own cultural heritage, from 2007 over 120 Sicilian public authorities have been compiling the Register of Intangible Heritage of Local Interest (R.E.I.L.) promoted by the Circuito Castelli e Borghi Medioevali association.

Mount Etna

Norman castle of  
Venus, Erice

Noto



In general the Normans (1061-1194) were tolerant rulers. Muslims were afforded protected status and allowed to retain certain freedoms. This attitude led to a mingling of local cultures and a flowering of what became known as *Arab-Norman culture*. As a result and paradoxically, it was during the Norman period that Arab influence reached its peak and this explains why the 12<sup>th</sup> century is the best documented period of Arab culture in Sicily.

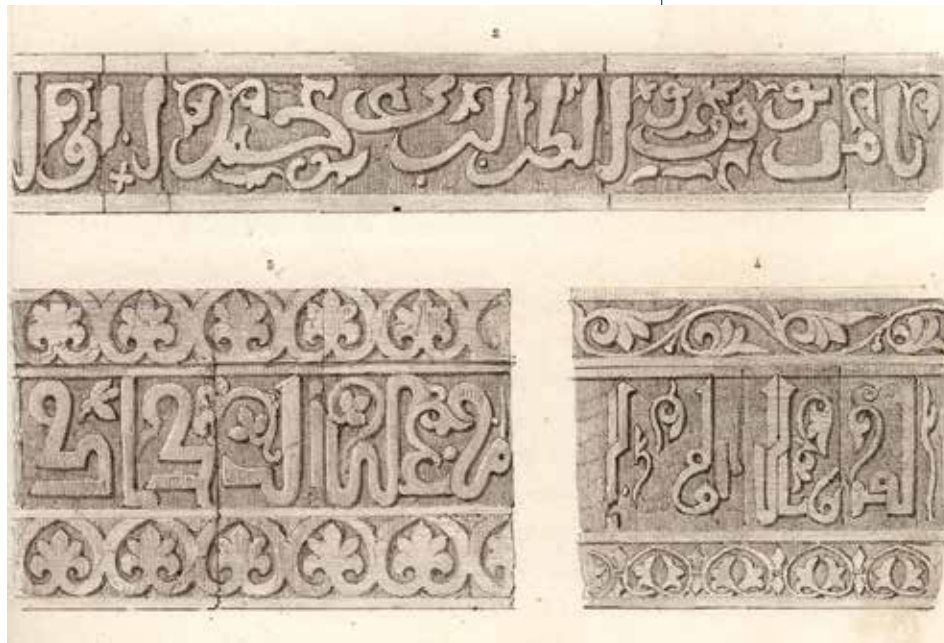
Two distinct themes permeate the story of both the Muslim and Norman civilizations in north-east Sicily: defence, as manifested in the fortresses and castles and water, which inspired the building of numerous bridges and other public works either to protect the purity of the springs or for domestic or agricultural use.



Trilingual inscription (Latin, Greek and Arab) located in the Norman palace of Roger II commemorating the installation of a water clock

Engraving with Arab inscriptions in Palermo, by Girault de Prangey

On this basis, the Umayyad itinerary in Sicily also covers the Sicilian Castles and fortresses which date back to the Arab-Norman period and both inland and coastal areas, focusing particularly on medieval towns, villages and castles.



### Muslims in Norman Sicily. King William II. Account by the Muslim traveller Ibn Djubayr, who visited Sicily in 1184-85

“The attitude of this King [Guglielmo II] is admirable regarding the goodness of his conduct and the use of Muslims. He is served by eunuch officials and all, or most of them, maintaining their faith hidden, continue to follow the Islamic law. He has complete confidence in the Muslims, he entrusts his business and important posts to them, such that the manager of his kitchen is a Muslim man. He has a troop of black Muslim slaves led by a commander who was once one of them. [...] One of the admirable characteristics he is said to have is that he reads and writes Arabic and that as one of his private servants told us, he would often use the expression: ‘God be praised as his praise is required’, and his father would say: ‘God be praised in thanks for his favours’.”

Column decorated with an Arabic inscription in La Martorana Church, in Palermo



### King Roger's interest in natural sciences

“His knowledge of mathematics and applied science was boundless. He was deeply grounded in every aspect of these two disciplines, studied them comprehensively and made himself new discoveries and wonderful inventions, as no prince before him had. These discoveries were well known to many witnesses. We could cite and describe them in full, but they are so well known, and their reputation has spread so far and wide, that there is no need to speak of them in detail.”

Al-Idrisi (12<sup>th</sup> century)

Arabs also brought innovations in irrigation and new crops and fruits which made Sicily bloom and grow in a long period of peace and prosperity. For these reasons, in addition to surnames and place names, Sicilian vocabulary is full of Arabic words covering an entire set of everyday objects and rural customs.



Christ crowning King Roger II. Painting located in La Martorana Church, in Palermo

Saracens' Bridge, in Adrano



Puppets opera, declared as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity



Visits to Arab sites will also include other excursions to nearby sites of interest:

- **Natural areas** such as the Mount Etna Volcano, Nature reserves, natural parks and other picturesque sites.
- **Intangible Cultural Heritage, Unesco sites, other monuments and tourist/cultural attractions:** such as celebrations, typical fairs and festivities, folklore, arts and craft etc.

Feast of Noto, "Infiorata"



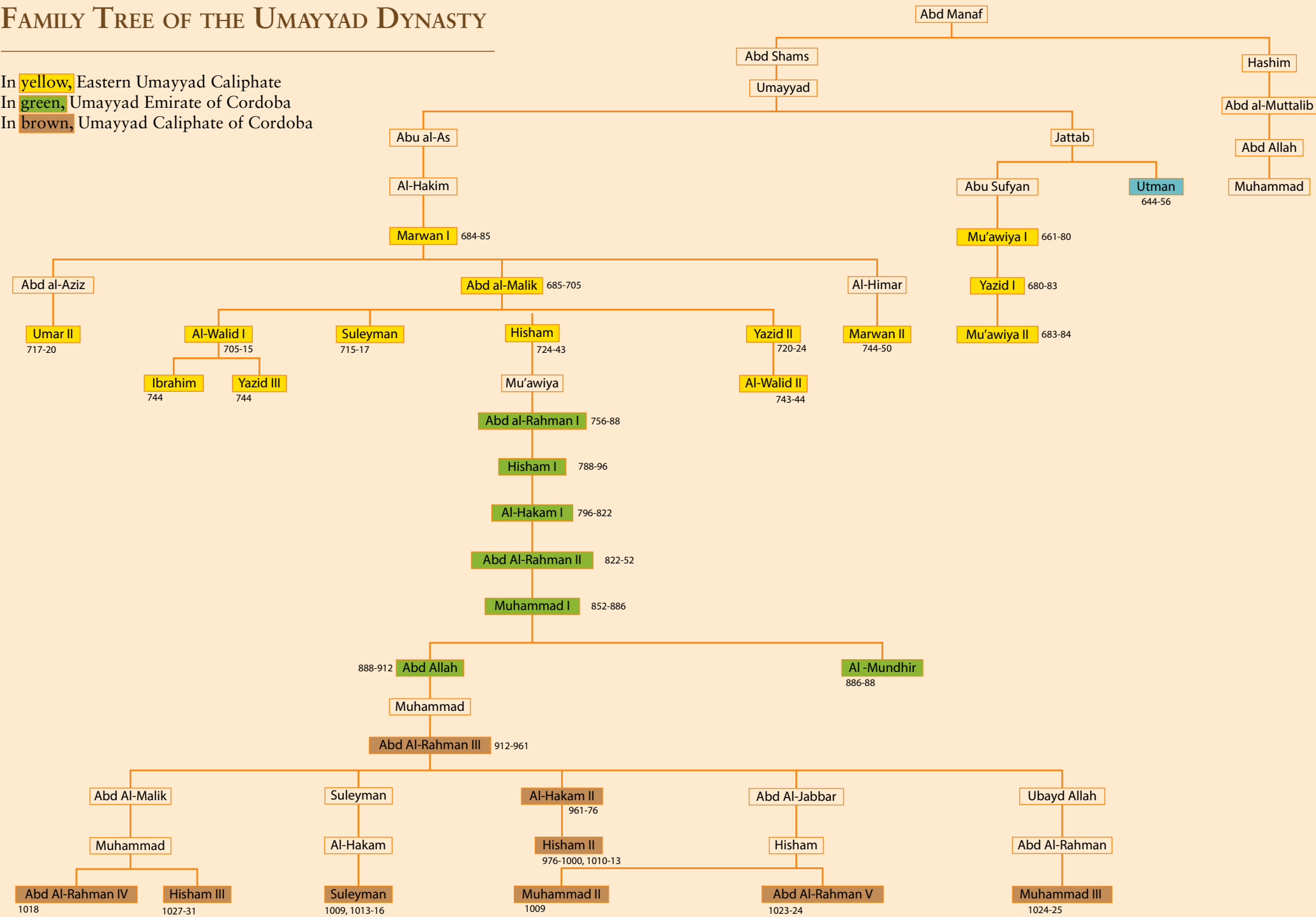
# UMAYYAD ROUTE

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# FAMILY TREE OF THE Umayyad Dynasty

In yellow, Eastern Umayyad Caliphate  
In green, Umayyad Emirate of Cordoba  
In brown, Umayyad Caliphate of Cordoba



# The Umayyad Route in Sicily

*TYRRHENIAN SEA*





ITINERARY

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UMMAYAD ROUTE





Palermo. Engraving  
contained in *Civitates Orbis  
Terrarum*. 16<sup>th</sup> century

both in the representation of the volumetric, square and clear elements and in the decorative components, are admirably combined and fused with Byzantine and Romanesque features. This cultural syncretism combining widely differing elements created a unique artistic and architectural heritage of extraordinary value.

The complex of “Arab-Norman” monuments in Palermo, and in the cathedrals of the nearby cities of Monreale and Cefalù, with a decorative repertoire of mosaics, painting and sculptures, is the finest artistic expression of the Norman Kingdom in southern Italy.



Church of San  
Giovanni degli Eremiti,  
built on the site of a  
former mosque

## Al-Idrisi

Abu ‘Abd Allah Muhammad al-Idrisi was born in Ceuta in 1100 and died possibly in Palermo in 1165 or 1166. He was the most important geographer in medieval times and his work went far beyond providing a written list of places with a description of their most important features. Instead he compiled a complete cartography with an enormous mapamundi which compared to modern maps was the other way up, with the north at the bottom and the south at the top. This map was known as the *Tabula Rogeriana* because it was commissioned by King Roger II of Sicily, at whose court in Palermo al-Idrisi did most of his best-known work.

Al-Idrisi was a man of many talents, as in addition to being a geographer, he was also a botanist and a poet. This wise, observant man lived between al-Andalus and the Norman Court of Sicily, halfway between the Muslim and Christian worlds, in what was a complex and diverse period, in which the Mediterranean region was home to three civilizations: the Byzantine Empire, the Islamic world and the Christian West.

In his description, al-Idrisi talks about countries, regions, towns, mountains, rivers..., providing a global view of the known world that still amazes the reader, especially given the state of knowledge in the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

Al-Idrisi's  
world map





Detail of a capital  
in the Cathedral of  
Monreale



Cathedral of Monreale was conceived to reaffirm and demonstrate the power of William II in his lifetime.

The best artists and craftsmen of the age took part in this great work, in which the syncretism of Muslim and Christian artistic creation reached very high stylistic levels, together with the Cloister, well-known for its small coupled columns, covered with inlaid mosaics.

Located about 8 km south-west of Palermo, **Monreale** sits in a panoramic position overlooking the Conca d'Oro and the capital city. It began to develop during the late Middle Ages, around a monastic cathedral complex, built by order of King William II between 1174 and 1185. In open competition with the Cathedral of Palermo, representing the power of the Bishop, the

Cathedral of  
Monreale



Detail of a capital  
in the Cathedral of  
Monreale



## Visits

The Arab-Norman itinerary includes the following monuments:

### Norman Palace and Palatine Chapel

The Norman Palace, today the seat of the Regional Government, dates back to the period of Arab rule of Sicily in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Only part of the original Arab Palace remains intact, as the Normans restored the building and transformed it into a splendid palace.

Inside, there are several attractions worth seeing: the Palatine Chapel and Roger's Throne Room evoke the glory of the Norman kingdom, decorated with mosaics with hunting scenes enlivened by stylized plants and figures.



Painted ceiling,  
Palatine Chapel



Detail of the Palatine  
Chapel. *Muqarnas*  
decorated with Arabic  
inscriptions

Palatine Chapel. Mosaics  
showing scenes of  
animals facing one  
another



Church of San  
Giovanni degli Eremiti.  
Above, cloister. On the  
right, domes



The Palatine Chapel was built inside the Royal Palace, on the orders of King Roger II after his coronation in 1130 and houses the most splendid Byzantine mosaics. The Islamic tradition is represented by the wooden ceiling with *muqarnas* (stalactites), which was carved and painted by Arab craftsmen, while the glowing mosaics decorating the walls of the chapel are purely Byzantine.

### Church of San Giovanni degli Eremiti

The Church and the Cloister of St. John of the Hermits (San Giovanni degli Eremiti) were built by Roger II between 1130 and 1148. The church is famous for its five red domes, typical of Arab craftsmen. Behind the church there is a small cloister bordered by arches with twin columns and a garden in the centre.



## Palermo as seen by al-Idrisi, 12<sup>th</sup> century

“The first of these towns is Palermo, a city that is both remarkable for its grandeur and most illustrious for its importance, among the most celebrated and prestigious centres of preaching in the world. It is endowed with qualities that confer upon it an unequalled glory and

Palermo. Engraving  
contained in *Civitates Orbis  
Terrarum*. 16<sup>th</sup> century



combine beauty and nobility. The seat of government from ancient times and during the early days of Islam, it is from there that fleets and armies departed on military expeditions, and it is there that they returned, as indeed they still do today.

The city is bestowed with magnificent buildings, which accompany travellers and spread the beauty of their construction, the finery of their work and their marvellous originality.

Palermo has two parts: the part known as Cassaro (*al-Qasr*, “the palace”) and the suburb (*al-Rabad*). The Cassaro is an ancient fortress city (*qasr*) renowned the world over, it is organised around three streets (*simât*). Along the Central Street there are fortified palaces with high and noble walls and many mosques, hostleries, baths and shops of great merchants. As regards the other two streets they also have splendid palaces, tall sumptuous buildings and lots of baths and inns. This is the site of the great Mosque which in the past was a Church and is now once more a Christian place of worship. The building lifts the spirits because of its wonderful workmanship and the originality of the motifs which have been specially designed, chosen and made for the paintings, gilt-work and inscriptions.

As for the suburb, this is another town in itself which surrounds the first on all sides. It has an ancient town that bears the name of Khâlisa (“the Chosen”) where the Sultan and his court resided in times of the Moslems. There is also the Gate of the Sea (*Bâb al-Bahr*) and the yard for the construction of ships.”



### Church of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio (La Martorana)

It remains one of the finest religious buildings in Palermo. It was completed in 1143 and in 1436 was ceded to the nuns from the nearby "Martorana" convent as their chapel, hence its more popular name. It has been enlarged over the centuries, and a Baroque façade replaced the original. The mosaics at the Martorana, like those at Cefalù and the Palace Chapel, were done by a group of artists brought expressly from Constantinople to Palermo, who worked here between 1140 and 1155.

Above and below,  
Church of Santa Maria  
dell'Ammiraglio



### Palermo as described by Ibn Djubayr, 1184-85

"The most beautiful of the cities in Sicily is the seat of its King. The Muslims call it *al-Madina* (the City) and the Christians know it as Palermo. [...] In these islands Palermo is the mother of city life, in which two beauties, wealth and splendour, come together. It has the beauty one could desire for one's inner spirit or to delight one's eyes and to provide one with a full and exuberant life. Ancient, elegant, splendid and gratifying, she emerges with a fascinating appearance; amongst her squares and spaces all of her resembles a garden. Her spacious roads and streets charm the eye because of the beauty of their distinguished appearance; of an admirable nature, it is built in the Cordoban style. [...] A river of fast running water crosses it and four fountains run along its sides. The everyday things of this world have been adorned in her for her King and he has chosen her as the capital of his Frankish kingdom.

[...] Amongst the numerous similarities between this city and Cordoba is that of having an ancient city called *Qasr al-Qadim* (the old palace), which is in the midst of the new city. [...] In this *Qasr al-Qadim* there are buildings that seem like heavenly palaces with balconies stretching up into the air whose beauty amazes the beholders."

Palermo. Views from  
the Norman Palace



## The Zisa Palace

The name of this palace derives from the Arabic “Aziz”, meaning “splendid”. It is considered one of the most magnificent Arab-Norman buildings and has recently been turned into a Museum of Islam with a collection of pieces and information about the Arabs in Sicily.



Zisa  
Palace

## Church of San Cataldo

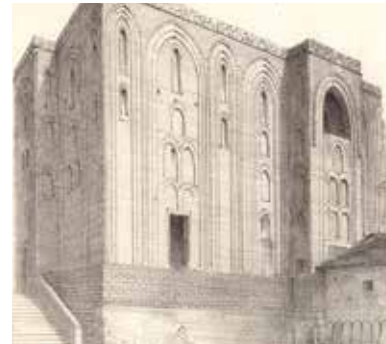
Next door to the Church of Santa Maria dell’Ammiraglio stands the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century church of San Cataldo. It has three red domes in a row, latticed windows and an elegant bare interior.



Church of  
San Cataldo

## The Cuba Palace

This building is a parallelepiped construction on a rectangular floor-plan and was built by William II at the heart of the Genoardo Royal Park.



Above and right,  
Cuba Palace



## Palermo Cathedral

Palermo Cathedral is in the oldest most sacred part of Palermo, where the Phoenicians, the Romans, the Byzantines and the Arabs all erected their own places of worship. The Normans replaced the Muslim mosque with a Christian church. Built in 1184 in the Arab-Norman style, the interior features the tombs of Henry VI, Frederick II and Constance of Aragon, and also a silver urn that contains the relics of St. Rosalia, patron saint of Palermo. On one of the columns at the entrance to the Cathedral there is a verse from the Koran and another column once supported the roof of a Roman temple.

Cathedral





Porta Felice

Palermo has a wealth of history and art, and there are many interesting places to visit. These include the Teatro Massimo in Liberty style, the International Museum Antonio Pasqualino, which has an excellent collection of puppets. Casa Professa, Palazzo Abatellis and Palazzo Chiaramonte-Steri are respectively the seats of the Modern and Medieval Art Gallery and the seat of the University of Palermo, settled in the ancient *Kalsa* quarter. The Arabs established their government in this area and its narrow, winding streets later became a populated residential district. Finally, the fishing village of Mondello with its sandy crystalline beach and Liberty-style seaside villas is also worth a visit.



Teatro Massimo

Pantocrator. Cathedral  
of MonrealeBenedictine  
cloister, Monreale

## Surroundings

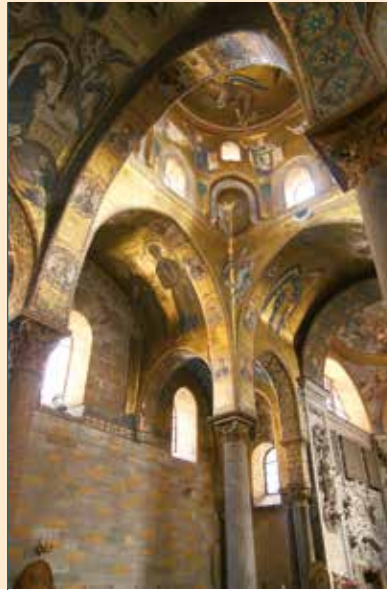
The architecture of **the dome of Monreale with its Benedictine Cloister**, which is famous all over the world, merges different architectural styles from northern Europe with features from the Arabic art tradition.

Externally, it is massive and regular in shape, with a complex series of decorations on the façade. The interior walls are entirely decorated by a splendid series of mosaics which together make up the most complete cycle of mosaics in the Byzantine tradition, culminating in the great apsidal cupola, with the majestic figure of Christ Pantocrator. The Benedictine Cloister is also worth visiting, decorated with small beautifully worked columns supporting elegant pointed arches with a pretty fountain in the middle.



### Description of the Church of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio - La Martorana by Ibn Djubayr, who visited it in 1184-1185

"Its architecture offers us a spectacle that is impossible to describe, such that it is necessary to declare it the most wonderful of the works in this world. Its interior walls are entirely adorned with gold; they also have marble panels in different colours the like of which has never been seen before. They are all decorated with gold mosaics and crowned with green mosaics. The top part is harmoniously aligned with windows with golden glass and brilliant rays that seize our eyes and tempt our souls. [...] This church has a bell-tower that stands upon pillars—marble columns in various colours—; dome upon dome each resting on columns which is why it is called the "Tower of the Columns". It is one of the most marvellous constructions one can see."



**Carini** is located 20 minutes from Palermo and around 32 km far from Falcone-Borsellino International Airport. Situated on the coast, the city is also a tourist area with many beautiful beaches and lively nightlife during the summer season.

Legend has it that Carini was founded by Daedalus, who called it Hyccara in memory of his son Icarus. It was destroyed by the Athenians in 415 BC and subsequently conquered by the Phoenicians, the Romans, the Arabs and the Normans, when it became the seat of one of the most important families on the island.

The built-up area is dominated by the **castle**, erected between 1075 and 1090 during the reign of Roger II. Construction was finally completed by Manfredi di Chiaramonte, while the last touches were given to the castle in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, producing what we see today.

It was the setting of a double murder that has passed down to posterity in a little poem in Sicilian dialect

entitled *The Bitter Case of the Baroness of Carini*—which has consigned the name of this castle to popular legend. In these very rooms, overlooking the Gulf of Carini, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of December 1563, Laura Lanza and her lover Ludovico Vernagallo were slain by her husband and her father, Don Cesare Lanza.

Over the centuries the castle has undergone many alterations. The *Salone delle Derrate* (Provisions Room) on the ground floor was later transformed into a library, which has two fine stone arches (15<sup>th</sup> century) supported by a solid pillar. On the upper floor, the *Salone delle Feste* (Festivity Room), which dates back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, is adorned by a coffered wooden ceiling with typical stalactite decorative patterns in Catalan Gothic style. This room leads on towards the quadrangular tower, which is embellished with a two-light window and topped by decorated corbels.

Castle of Carini



## Gastronomy and handicrafts

Palermo is one of the world's top cities for street food. Among the city's fried delicacies, we recommend *arancini* (fried rice balls stuffed with meat sauce and cheese), *crocchè* (fried potato balls), *panelle* (fried chick peas pancake) and *cardoni* (fried cardoon). A typical Palermitano snack is *panino con la milza*, or spleen sandwiches, available plain or "maritata", meaning with cheese, together with the Sicilian Rotisserie (*Rosticceria*) with varied and numerous, sweet and savoury fried or baked dishes. Main courses include *sfincione* (typical Sicilian tasty pizza made with sauce, cheese, olive oil and anchovies), *anelletti al forno con ragu'* (baked pasta with meat sauce) and *caponata* (cooked salad made with eggplants, capers, tomato sauce and olives). The *confectioners* offer many delicious cakes with ricotta cream (*cannoli*, *cassate*

Marzipan fruits



Panelle

etc.), the delicious marzipan fruits called *frutti di Martorana* and around All Soul's Day, the *pupi a cera*, sugar figures of knights, ladies and others which are given to children during the festivities.

Palermo has a lot of arts and crafts. These include artistic ceramics, Sicilian puppets and carts, copper and tin pieces in *Via Calderai* and chestnut wood, rush basket and wrought-iron articles along *I Lattarini* (next

Via Calderai





Via Calderai

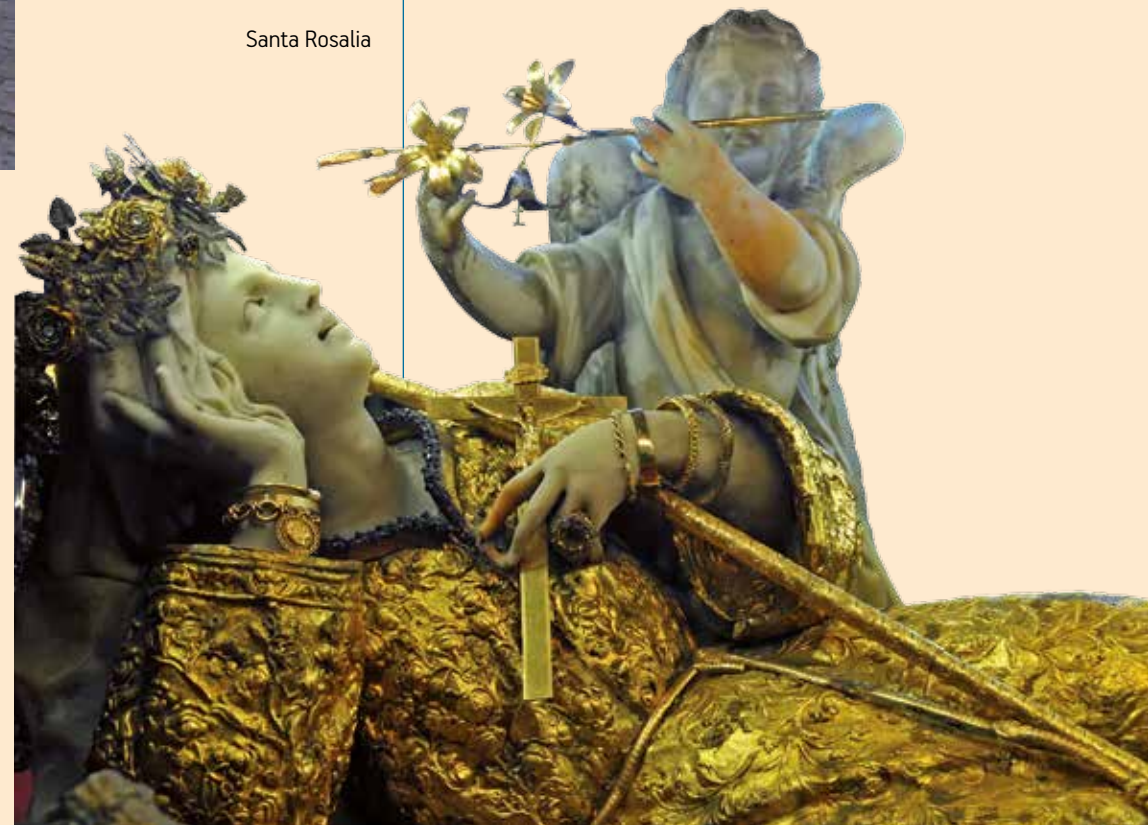
to Borsa Square) and near *the Cala*. A visit to the flea market (*Mercato delle Pulci*) to browse the antiques and knick-knacks old and new is of great interest.

Nowhere is the feel of Arab Sicily more alive than in the **outdoor markets** of Palermo. Many streets have Arabic names and the historic markets –particularly those of Vucciria, Capo, and Ballaro– have all the atmosphere of Arabic *souks* where the visitor can find everything they need (fresh fish, fruit, vegetables, clothes, etc.) and enjoy the picturesque gathering.

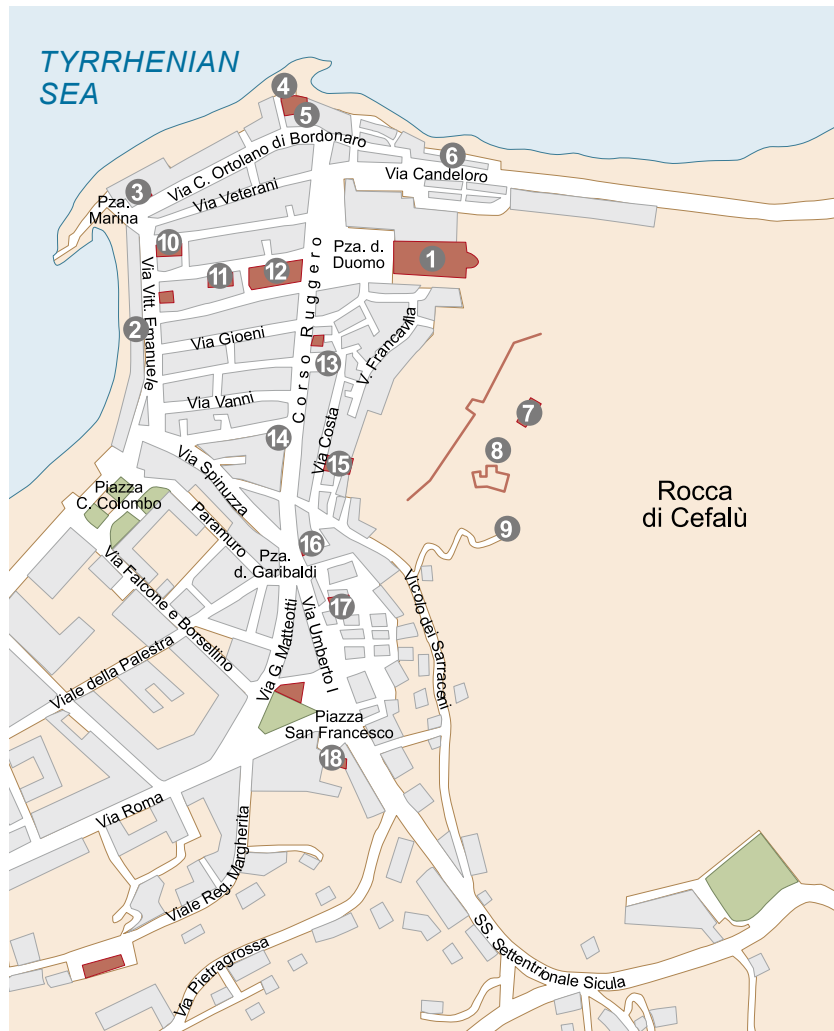
## Feasts

Santa Rosalia is said to have saved Palermo from the plague in 1624 and since then she has been venerated as the city's Patron Saint. Two feasts are celebrated in her honour. The most important is the *Festino*, or Big Feast, which runs from July 13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup>, in which all the townspeople take part. For this occasion a large boat is built to carry the statue of the Saint across the old city. The procession ends with a spectacular firework display at sea. Santa Rosalia is also celebrated with religious rites on September 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> with a traditional pilgrimage to the Sanctuary on Mount Pellegrino, where the relics of the Saint were found.

Santa Rosalia



# Cefalù



- |                                   |   |                                       |
|-----------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Cathedral                      | 8. Church of Sant'Anna                                      | 14. Osterio Magno                     |
| 2. Arab Washing Place             | 9. Rocca di Cefalù (Entry)                                  | 15. Church of Santissima Trinità      |
| 3. Church of San Sebastiano       | 10. Church of San Giorgio and San Leonardo or Della Badiola | 16. Church of Maria SS. dell'Alemania |
| 4. Belvedere (viewpoint)          | 11. Mandralisca Museum                                      | 17. Church of San Giuseppe            |
| 5. S. Maria d'Itria E S. Giovanni | 12. Town Hall   | 18. Church of San Francesco d'Assisi  |
| 6. Archaic Fortifications         | 13. Church of Il Purgatorio                                 | i Tourist information                 |
| 7. Temple of Diana                |   |                                       |



Cefalù is situated on the north coast of Sicily, approximately 70 kilometres away from Palermo. The origins of Cefalù date back to very remote times. The Greeks called it “Cephaloedum” i.e. “head”, because the citadel was located on a head-shaped rock.

Subsequently, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs and Normans left their mark on the town, which still preserves a medieval historic centre with cobblestone lanes. It has a wonderful example of Norman architecture, Cefalù Cathedral, built in 1131 AD under Roger II in the town's main square. The church rises majestically between the high rock that overlooks Cefalù and the sea. The inside is famous for its Byzantine mosaic decoration also





Harbour of Cefalù

dating back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The mosaic in the apse of the basilica with the head of Christ Pantocrator is one of the most beautiful masterpieces, not only in the town, but on the whole island. The Cathedral Church of Cefalù has been on the UNESCO World Heritage List since 2015 together with the Church of Monreale and Arab-Norman Palermo.

Cefalù is also one of the most beautiful fishing villages on the island. In its picturesque small harbour, we can still admire traditional wooden fishing boats painted by the local fishermen. The sea here is crystal-clear and

Beach of Cefalù



### Description of Cefalù by al-Idrisi, 12<sup>th</sup> century

“The fortified village of Cefalù is on the coast; it has everything you would expect in a town, with markets, baths and mills. The mills are in the heart of the town on a cool fresh water stream from which the people drink. Cefalù is overshadowed by a cliff alongside the sea and has a good port where boats arrive from all over. It has a large population and a castle overlooking it at the top of a steep hill that is almost inaccessible because the climb is so arduous.”

### Description of Cefalù by Ibn Djubayr, 1184-85

“This coastal city has abundant farm production and great economic prosperity. It is surrounded by vines and other plantations and its markets are well-stocked. A number of Muslims live there. A huge round crag looms over the town, on which stands a fortress as formidable as has ever been seen.”

there are some beautiful beaches in the areas such as the *Kalura*, *Mazzaformo* and *Settefrati*.

Cefalù is part of the “Madonie” regional natural park, which also includes various mountain villages of medieval origin that still preserve their cultural heritage of living traditions, architectural monuments and local craft products, and are very attractive for visitors. The natural beauty and authenticity of this site, its traditions and culture make Cefalù and Madonie ideal holiday destinations.

## Visits

The **Cathedral** is undoubtedly one of the finest cathedrals in the world, a perfect example of Arab-Norman architecture in Sicily. Latin and Byzantine culture,



Above, painted wooden ceiling. Below, exterior view of the Cathedral



Cathedral of Cefalù.  
Above, interior. On the right, Pantocrator covering the apse



Arabic and Nordic influences all merge in the basilica. According to the legend, King Roger II was travelling by sea to Sicily when he was trapped in a violent storm. He vowed to build a cathedral if he landed safely on the beach of Cefalù.

Externally, we can admire the façade with its two typically Norman square bell-towers and an airy portico, decorated by two interweaving tiers of little false loggias which run from one end to the other. In the interior, the central nave has a painted wooden ceiling and is an important example of Islamic art in Sicily. The apse, the ceiling and the adjacent walls are decorated with mosaics which culminate in a magnificent Christ Pantocrator, a perfect example of Byzantine style and craftsmanship.





*Lavatoio*  
(washing place)

Down the Via Vittorio Emanuele, a staircase leads to the *Lavatoio*, the medieval washing place, entirely carved into the stone and the sole remnant of Arab domination. The town also contains an important museum, the Museo Mandralisca, which has many important works of art and an archaeological collection.

Cefalù is adorned with numerous palaces, churches, monasteries and chapels, some of the most important examples of which are the Church dell'Itria, Santa Maria della Catena, Santo Stefano or the church of Il Purgatorio, the Church of S.S. Salvatore, Archiepiscopal Palace, the *Osterio Magno*, that was the legendary residence of King Roger II and Pirajno Palace.

Church of Il Purgatorio  
or Santo Stefano

Outside the historical centre, the ruins of the medieval castle located on the mountain known simply as “La Rocca” is one of the most fascinating places on the north coast of the Sicily. The fortress has two walls, dating back to different periods in time. Next to it there is an archaeological site of a settlement conquered and inhabited by the Arabs, and then by the Normans in 1063. These include the Temple of Diana, a stone monument that is said to have been built to worship water and was later converted into a Christian church in the Byzantine period.



## The Madonian Mountains

“The Madonian mountains reared stupendous snow-crowned peaks, and when the flurries of snow ceased we discovered all the country-side, and here and there white towns, framed in sombre greens and grays –Collesano, where are the remains of walls of an unguessed age; Caltavuturo, the *Kalat Abi Thaur* of Saracenic times, which Roger II bestowed upon his daughter Matilda; Polizzi “La Generosa”, seated on its pinnacle, more than three thousand feet above sea level, near the springs from which flow the two great rivers of Sicily. We saw also Petralia di Sotto and Petralia di Sopra looking down from their unscalable heights, and Gangi perched two thousand eight hundred feet in mid-air.”

*Picturesque Sicily*, by William A. Paton, 1898.

Madonie Mountains



Isnello, located at one of the gates of Madonie Park



## Surroundings

### The mediaeval towns of Madonie

The Madonie Mountains feature Sicily's highest peaks after Mount Etna. They extend from Cefalù inland and are protected by the Regional Parco delle Madonie. The park is one of the most interesting mountain eco-systems in the Mediterranean basin and offers fascinating sights in terms of landscape, fauna and nature.

Art and nature stand side by side in this area. Besides the rare natural heritage, the towns and village in the Madonie region boast many wonderful castles and churches which, together with local traditions and their intangible heritage, testify to a long eventful history. It has several very ancient towns built upon the remains of Sicanian, Greek and Roman settlements. Many of them were founded by the Arabs around the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The largest of these Muslim towns were Caltavuturo (*Kalat Abi Thaur*) and Petralia, which continued to grow after the Norman conquest.



Castelbuono

**Castelbuono** has an imposing castle, built at the start of the 14<sup>th</sup> century by the seigniors of Geraci county, the Ventimiglia family, on a hill overlooking the hamlet of Ypsigro.

**Polizzi Generosa** is located on the peak of a rock at a height of 917 metres with a pleasant historic centre and a charming view over the two valleys of the river Imera: the north, famous for hazelnut, fruit and olive trees, and the south devoted to wheat and grazing; **Petralia Sottana**, founded by the Normans, is surrounded by an ancient beech forest, and **Petralia Soprana** is the highest town in the Madonie mountains.

**Geraci Siculo** was ruled by the Arabs from 840 to the first years of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The layout of Geraci



Above and below, Gangi

Siculo is typically medieval, with its tortuous, narrow, paved streets, probably the most important traces of an era that saw the power of the Ventimiglia family extend this far up. The castle is certainly one of the most resistant legacies of this distant past, from which today the visitor can easily admire the remains of the building, part of the fortified walls and the Santissima Trinità fountain.

The imposing town of **Gangi**, which was recently proclaimed “the most beautiful village in Italy”, has the best view of all over the Madonie. **Collesano** and **Isnello**, at the gates of Madonie Park are also worth a visit.

Madonie is a park for all seasons: in winter the highest tops are covered with snow and you can enjoy ski-lifts and ski slopes in Petralia Sottana (at the Piano Battaglia resort); in autumn and spring, you can admire the colours of the undergrowth with trekking and hiking



activities; and in the summer, take a relaxing stroll between swims at Cefalù or at other splendid beaches and coves nearby in **Pollina**, **Lascari** or **Campofelice di Roccella**.

Madonie's villages are also a perfect starting point for excursions and sport activities. There is a wide range of options for climbers, bikers, trekkers, on foot or on horseback, or even for fans of rafting, like for example at the Tiberio Gorge, formed from limestone erosion on the Pollina river at **San Mauro Castelverde**.

### The castle of Caccamo

The typical village of Caccamo is about 50 km from Cefalù. It has a magnificent castle built during the Norman period that is perched on a massive rock. The castle has been restructured over the centuries and adorned with battlements and mighty ramparts, creating one of the most ancient, important and best preserved fortresses in Sicily.

Castle of  
Caccamo



Sperlinga

### The castle of Sperlinga

The village of Sperlinga, between Mt. Madonie and Mt. Nebrodi is in the province of Enna, in the centre of Sicily. Historians describe it as the only Sicilian town not to take part in the Sicilian Vespers uprising against the domination of the Angevins. Visitors however remember it because of its extraordinary, mysterious, fascinating castle, the first news of which date from 1132. There is no doubt, however, that its "rooms" were inhabited in prehistory: indeed, the castle was extended by digging into sandstone rock, allowing the crenelated walls and the tower to stand out against the blue sky of Sperlinga.

Castle of  
Sperlinga



## Gastronomy and handicrafts

Because of its excellent natural habitat and remote settlements, the Madonie has a rich and varied gastronomic tradition. First-rate local products include meat, sausages, salami, cheese, olives, mushrooms and fresh seasonal vegetables, and some of Sicily's best wine is produced nearby.

One tradition of particular interest in the Madonie, mainly at Pollina and Castelbuono, is the production of “manna”, a whitish resin that drips from ash trees when the bark is cut. It is often left to flow and creates stalactite forms before being collected. In the past it was thought to have excellent curative properties for stomach problems, but now is generally used to sweeten local delicacies.



Traditional  
*cannoli*

At Polizzi Generosa, typical products include the hazelnut and the “u sfuagghiu”, delicious cakes filled with fresh cheese, chocolate, cinnamon, sugar and other local specialties (pastries and biscuits) and cakes from Castelbuono called “Testa di Turco” (Turkish head) in memories of ancient battles against the Muslim pirates. Special mention is given to the bakery products made by the local pastry chef family Fiasconaro, famous worldwide for its “Panettone”, made with the best ingredients from Sicilian gastronomy.

Meanwhile, in Castellana Sicula and Isnello, the most important business activity is milk production, which in fact is widespread throughout the Madonie region, along with a historical tradition of embroidery and weaving.

Collesano is particularly famous for its valuable ceramics, which are recorded on the regional REIS (Register of Intangible Heritage).

Some foods and wine have a cultural dimension, often linked with the festival calendar and local religious traditions. For example, special ceremonial cheese called “cavadduzzi” and “palummeddi of cascavaddu” is made in Geraci Siculo during the ritual of “Cravaccata” (Shepherds’ Parade) on the third Sunday of July in honour of the Holy Sacrament, along with traditional sweets like “agnidduzzi re Pascua” and “serafineddri”, that are packaged at Christmas time by the Benedictine Monks from the Monastery of St. Catherine in Geraci. Geraci is also well known for its mineral water springs.

In addition to authentic gastronomy and an abundant supply of local agricultural products, all the villages of the Madonie have attractive local handicrafts in wood, wrought iron, ceramics (Polizzi, Caccamo, Collesano), hampers and baskets, embroidery (Isnello) and loom-made rugs (in Isnello, Petralia, Polizzi, Castellana and Collesano).

## Feasts

### Festa SS. Salvatore in Cefalù

Santissimo Salvatore is the Patron Saint of Cefalù and he is commemorated every year from August 2<sup>nd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup>. The festivities begin with the raising of the flag, followed by the “Ntinna a Mari” (a tradition organized by fishermen at sea) before finally concluding with a solemn parade.

### Giostra dei Ventimiglia at Geraci Siculo

Those visiting Geraci Siculo in August must attend the Giostra di Ventimiglia, the medieval commemorations in which locals don period costumes and a variety of cultural events, falconry displays, historic re-enactments and games are organized, involving all the communes (around 30) that once belonged to the prestigious Earldom of Geraci in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

The Dance of *Cordella*,  
in Petralia Soprana



The Ear or Wheat  
Festival, Gangi

### The Ear of Wheat Festival in Gangi

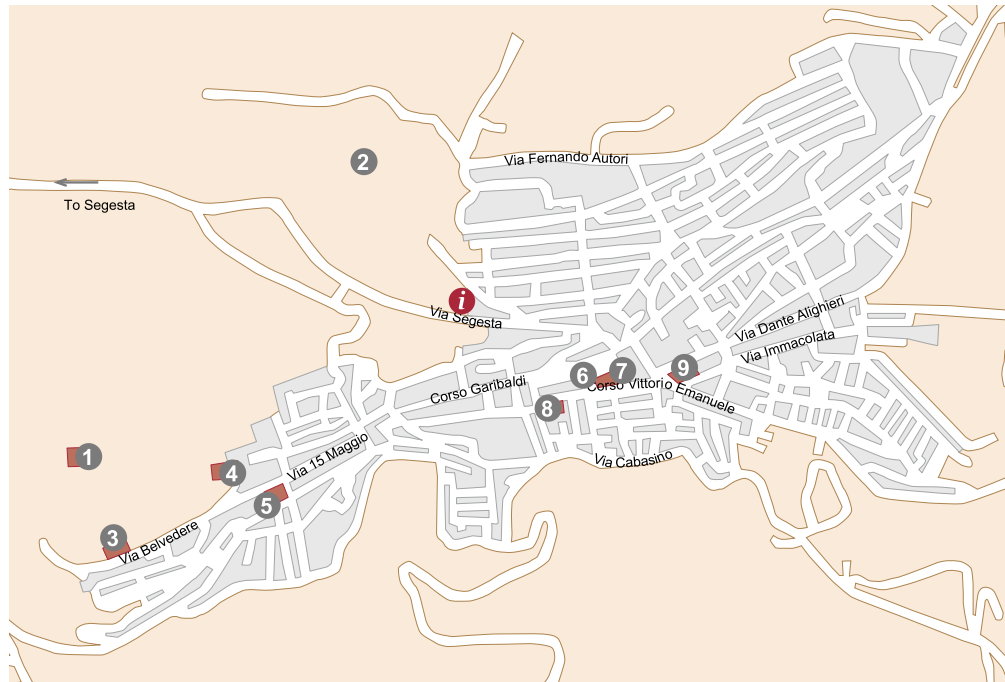
This festival takes place in the second week of August and centres on various events that evoke the customs and traditions of peasant culture, together with the celebration of the Goddess Ceres, the symbol of abundant harvests and the fertility of the land. During this festival the village is adorned with finely woven ears of wheat and liquors, bread and votive cakes are offered, which, along with the sound of drums liven up the village's narrow streets and recall ancient times and mythical harvest rituals.

### The Dance of *Cordella*, Petralia Soprana

The Dance of *Cordella* is a Sicilian dance performed at Petralia Soprana, immediately after the traditional festival known as the “Baronial Wedding” in which locals act out a 17<sup>th</sup>-century aristocratic wedding, with horses, cavaliers, nobles and ladies in period costumes. This takes place in August.

Other traditional festivals in the Madonie include “La Vecchia”, a genuine celebration of New Year's Eve and the “Toccata dei Lupi” every Thursday after the feast of Corpus Christi in Gratteri, in which young villagers perform a ritual which was thought to keep wolves away from the herds. Other interesting rituals include St. Giuseppe and SS. Crocifisso in Lascari and Geraci as well as the Easter processions in Alimena and San Mauro Castelverde.

# Calatafimi



- |                                       |                                    |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Eufemio Castle                     | 6. Town Council                    |
| 2. Museum in Cantiere                 | 7. Church of San Giuliano Martire  |
| 3. Church of Il Santissimo Crocifisso | 8. Church of San Michele Arcangelo |
| 4. Mother Church of San Silvestro     | 9. Church of San Giuliano Agricola |
| 5. Ethno-Anthropological Museum       | 📍 Tourist information              |



Remains of the  
old castle

Calatafimi

Calatafimi Segesta is a town of just over 8,000 inhabitants in a rural area of the province of Trapani. It was founded during the Arab domination of the island around a Byzantine fortification known as *Kalat al-Fimi*, or the Castle of Euphemius, a legendary figure who was said to have led the first Muslim invaders of Sicily in 827 AD. An Islamic cultural centre, the town was one of the first to be occupied by the Aghlabids from Ifriqiya. During the 14<sup>th</sup> century, under Aragonese rule, the town was given a greater strategic role and its castle and defensive walls were reinforced. It became part of the feudal dominions and continued to grow over the following centuries. In 1860 it was the scene of a great victory by Garibaldi's troops over the Bourbons, an important historical event that proved decisive in the struggle for Italian independence.



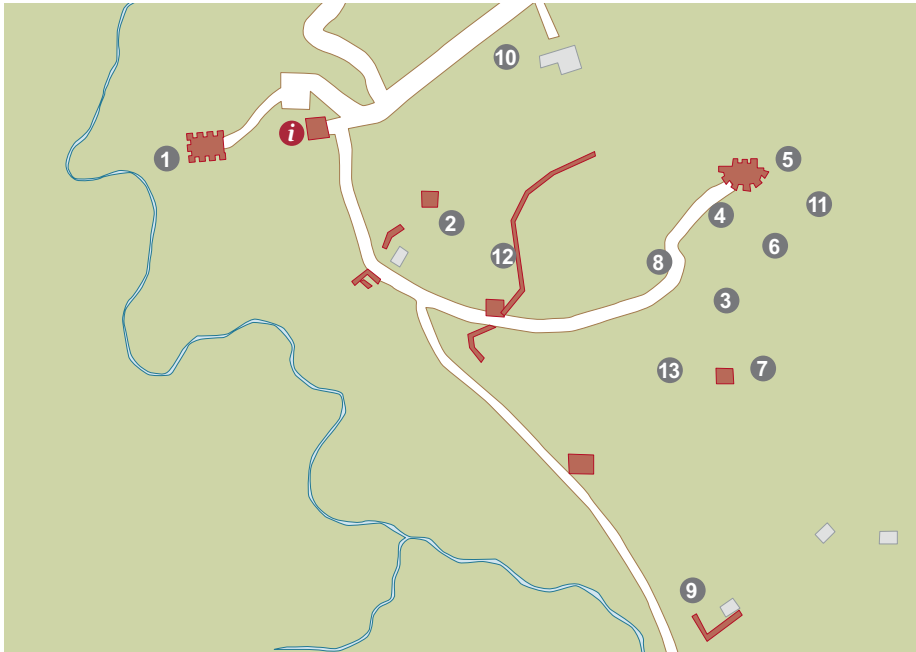
Calatafimi Segesta is also very popular for its natural springs with hot sulphurous water. The water and mud that emanate from these sources are known for their natural healing properties. Legend has it that nymphs made the hot springs spout to heal Heracles when he reached Segesta after crossing Sicily.

Only 4 km far away from Calatafimi, the visitor can admire the archaeological site of **Segesta**, an ancient town founded by the Elimyians and one of the most fascinating places in Sicily, which rises up majestically, making an imposing mark on the landscape with its two archaeological jewels: the Doric style temple (5<sup>th</sup> century BC) and the Greek theatre (3<sup>th</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> century BC). In Segesta, there are also remains of a 12<sup>th</sup>-century necropolis and a mosque.

Landscape in Calatafimi



Segesta



Plan of Segesta Archaeological Site

## The Temple of Segesta by William Agnew Paton

“It’s possibly the most perfectly preserved relic of Greek architecture in Sicily, reminds one of a daintily carved reliquary of ruddy gold placed on a great altar overlaid with cloth of green. Cradled among the hills, lapped round by upland meadows, where the turf grows velvet-soft, the ancient sanctuary sits in magnificence, guarded and watched over by silver-gray and purple mountains, uplifting their domes and spires to the blue vault of heaven that bends over the consecrated spot.

[...] In plan and elevation, in detail, in decoration, the edifice is a perfect specimen of the Doric school, and of that school at its best. Its austere simplicity, its massive construction, the grand effects of faultless perspective, all inspire the imagination with a sense of true beauty and appeal to the intellect as demonstrations of supreme art.”



Church of the  
Santissimo  
Crocifisso, Calatafimi

## Visits

Among the most important architectural monuments of Calatafimi are the Renaissance style Church of San Silvestro, the Church of the Santissimo Crocifisso, considered one of the most beautiful churches in Sicily, in Neoclassical style, the Church of San Michele, the remains of the ancient castle and the Pianto Romano, a monument to the Garibaldi soldiers who died in the Battle of Calatafimi.

The *Museo Etnoantropologico* (Ethno-Anthropological Museum) pays homage to the fertile land and agriculture through detailed reconstructions of rural homes and artisans’ workshops that provide a fascinating overview of daily rural life.

Ethno-Anthropological  
Museum

In the oldest part of the city we can visit the remains of the castle, probably constructed around the 12<sup>th</sup> century over the ruins of an older castle and the original settlement of the town. The castle, built for defensive purposes, was the Governor's residence. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century it was abandoned and began to crumble into its present state, a tower with arch-shaped openings, warehouses, dungeons and an outdoor courtyard. From the other hill the visitor can enjoy a beautiful view.

Until 400 BC **Segesta** was a powerful city that had wiped out its rival, Selinunte. It was protected by outer walls with monumental gates and was situated on the top of a mountain with a natural defensive system of steep rocks.

Nestling in the north acropolis, with a view right down to the sea, is the theatre, founded in the third century on top of Monte Barbaro, and the more recent remains of the town (the castle, the mosque and the 15<sup>th</sup>-century

church) which was ruled at different times in history by the Romans, Arabs and Normans. Outside the walls there is a temple, a sanctuary in the Mango district and a Greek necropolis.

The temple is one of the most perfect, best preserved examples of Doric art. It was built in the fifth century and is a six-column-per-row peripteros temple. It was apparently never finished; there are no grooves in the columns and no trace of a roof or *cella*.

The excavations gradually brought to light the ruins of the Elymian settlement, traces of the Hellenistic-Roman age, remains from Muslim times, including a mosque and an Islamic cemetery, and from the Norman-Swabian and mediaeval periods.

The theatre is used for international performances, above all poetry readings, ballet and ancient tragedies during summer evenings from July to the end of August.

Temple of  
Segesta



Theatre

### The Greek Sicily

“Sicily has shown me Greece; and when I think of that artistic country I picture in my mind tall mountains, with soft classical outlines, and on their summits those stern-looking temples, somewhat heavy perhaps but admirably majestic, which one finds everywhere in this island.”

Guy de Maupassant

Theatre

Mosque of  
Segesta

### Segesta by the geographer al-Idrisi, 12<sup>th</sup> century

“Al-Hâmma (Segesta) is a well-defended fortress that stands high upon a hill, and is considered amongst the best. It lies about three miles from the north coast and its port is defended by the Fortress of *al-Madârij* ‘the degrees’, Castellammare). Boats are continually entering and leaving the port to catch tuna with their nets. The fortress was given the name *Hâmma* (“bains”) because a spring of hot water gushes up from a neighbouring cave where people go to bathe. The water has a warm pleasant temperature and its fresh water has an agreeable taste. Not far away from here streams flow and the water makes the mills turn. There are many orchards, gardens, buildings and parks and fruit is produced in abundance. The land around is vast and fertile. This place is a short journey away from Trapani.”

## Surroundings

The **Belice Valley** is a beautiful rural area of western Sicily between the provinces of Palermo, Trapani and Agrigento and along the river Belice. It has been populated since prehistoric times and is rich in archaeological sites. It was settled by Sicanians, Elymians, Phoenicians and Greeks, a past which has left imposing ruins and all kinds of interesting artefacts. In January 1968, the Belice valley was hit by a deadly earthquake that completely destroyed numerous villages and devastated the whole territory.

The main villages in the Belice Valley are:

**Gibellina**, the country symbol of the Belice area. Its name derives from the Arabic word *Djabal* (mountain). The old town was destroyed by the earthquake and

Cathedral of Salemi



View of Salemi  
with its Norman-  
Swabian Castle

only ruins remain, which have been petrified into a work of art called *Cretto* (Crack) by the artist Alberto Burri, in order to commemorate this catastrophic event. By contrast the new Gibellina, 7 km away from the old one, is a contemporary example of Land art. It has been built as a kind of permanent museum with sculptures and other artworks by international artists scattered around the streets and buildings.

**Salemi** is in the heart of Belice Valley, immersed in a landscape of vineyards and olive groves. Its medieval centre rises around the Norman-Swabian Castle, which has been reconstructed and is now a venue for temporary exhibitions, concerts and cultural events. It is also called the “City of the Loaves” in honour of the votive breads produced to mark religious feasts. The earthquake reduced the Cathedral of Salemi to ruins, which can still be seen today in the picturesque



Abandoned street in Poggioreale

Halicia Square. The Jesuit College houses a museum with numerous artworks rescued after the earthquake.

**Santa Ninfa** is surrounded by a rich landscape of woodland like that of Finestrelle, with numerous cave tombs carved into the hillside, in addition to the marvellous karstic cave in the nature reserve managed by Legambiente. A large part of the town of feudal origin was lost in the earthquake, a disastrous event to which a permanent photography exhibition in the town hall bears witness. Today many highly-prized artworks and monuments are being restored including the Rampinzeri Castle.

**Poggioreale**, whose ancient town centre was almost entirely destroyed during the 1968 earthquake, is today regarded as a “Ghost town” because of its ruins and abandoned streets, and is an attractive location for photography enthusiasts.

### Castelvetrano by al-Idrisi, 12<sup>th</sup> century

“Castelvetrano is a vast agricultural estate which extends far and wide and is surrounded by gardens and cultivated fields. It is protected by a fortress.”



Selinunte

**Partanna** is home to Grifeo castle, rebuilt in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by the Princes of Grifeo on the foundations of an earlier Norman construction. It is now the home of the Belice Prehistoric Museum.

**Castelvetrano** dates back to ancient Sicanian peoples. The “City of Olives and Temples” can thank the Arabs for its urban layout and its central maze of piazzas. Most of the monuments are on the three adjacent squares, Piazza Carlo d’Aragone e Tagliavia, Piazza Umberto I and piazza Principe di Piemonte. The bronze Epeheos (470 BC) is the pride of the *Museo Civico*.

Three kilometres away from the town, you must not miss the Church of the Trinità di Delia, a splendid 12<sup>th</sup>-century Christian chapel mixing European, Arab and Norman styles.

Around 15 kilometres from Castelvetrano is **Selinunte**, an archaeological site of great importance due to the richness and grandeur of its Doric temples. Founded in 628 BC on two hills facing the sea, Selinunte was a powerful Greek city that was initially destroyed by the Carthaginians, the allies of its enemy Segesta, and then by a violent earthquake in the Byzantine era.

Selinunte



### The Temple of Segesta by Guy de Maupassant

“After about two hours on the road, two high mountains suddenly came into view, joined by a gentle slope that curved into a crescent shape from one peak to the other. In the middle of this crescent, we could see the profile of a Greek temple, of one of the most powerful and beautiful monuments that religious people have erected to their Gods.

It is necessary to walk around one of these mountains, taking a long detour, before encountering the temple once again, this time standing opposite you. It seems now to be leaning on the mountain itself, although it is separated from it by a deep ravine; but the mountain unfurls behind it and above it, encloses it, surrounds it, apparently sheltering it, caressing it. With its thirty-six Doric columns it stands out well against the enormous green drapes that serve as a background to this enormous monument, standing alone in this limitless countryside.

One feels, on seeing this magnificent yet simple landscape, that nothing but a Greek temple could have



been placed here, and that this Greek temple could have only been placed here. The master decorators who have taught humanity their art have shown, especially in Sicily, what deep and refined science they brought to bear on the setting and effect of their work. This temple of Segesta seems to have been placed at the foot of the mountain by a man of genius, who appears to have received a revelation as to the exact position it should occupy. It gives life to the wide landscape; it makes it living and divinely beautiful.

At the top of the mountain, whose base we had followed to reach the temple, we came upon the ruins of a theatre.

When one is traveling in a country that the Greeks have inhabited or colonized, it is only necessary to find their theatres to get the finest points of view. If they set their temples just where they could show to the best advantage, where they could best adorn the landscape, they placed their theatres, on the contrary, where the eye would be enraptured by the sight.

That of Segesta, on the crest of a mountain, is the centre of an amphitheatre of hills, whose circumference measures at least 150 to 200 kilometres. There are still more summits in the distance behind these, and through a wide valley in front of us we behold the sea, which is a deep blue in the midst of all these green peaks.”

## Gastronomy and handicrafts

Calatafimi is well-known for its excellent wines and most of them have the “DOC Alcamo” label, a guarantee of quality. The local gastronomy offers biscuits, cheese and dairy products, sauces and condiments, and is also known for its agricultural products like oranges (the Ovaletto di Calatafimi variety), prickly pears (“Bastarduna di Calatafimi”), cereals, legumes, oil, mushrooms and truffles.

The Belice Valley is famous for its food and agricultural production and for olive growing, with the famous olive variety “Nocellara Belice”, Protected Designation of Origin Sicily. It also boasts the most beautiful vineyards in Sicily, a range of wheat-based products and the Belice Valley sheep.

The “Vastedda del Belice” is a fresh cheese made exclusively from the milk of Belice Valley sheep. They use the milk produced during the summer, when the sheep produce less. This milk is rich in the intense aromas and components that give the cheese its typical flavour. Another traditional product of Castelvetro is Black Bread, whose distinctive colour comes from its ingredients and a mixture of two stone-ground flours, Sicilian durum wheat flour and a flour milled from an ancient grain called *tumminia*.

In almost all the communes in the Belice Valley farming is the predominant economic sector; the Castelvetro craft sector centres above all on the manufacture of wooden furniture and ceramic and glass workshops, while in Santa Ninfa and Salemi the most important traditional crafts are embroidery, lace and loom-woven rugs. Other typical products of Salemi include the limestone from the nearby quarries of Cusa called “Pietra Campanella”, sculpted by local craftsmen into external decorations for local houses and monuments.



“Nocellara Belice”  
olive variety

## Feasts

### The Holy Crucifix in Calatafimi

Every five years, at the beginning of May, a procession dedicated to the Holy Crucifix takes place. During the celebration, the craftsmen in their elegant old-fashioned clothes march with a gun on their shoulders. Each different trade has its own float. The *Massari* (farmers) for example parade on a float called “u circu” decorated with traditional bread “cudduri” and vegetable decorations such as ears of wheat, roses and beans that symbolize the abundance of the soil and its rebirth during the spring.

### St. Joseph’s celebration in Salemi

On March 19<sup>th</sup>, St. Joseph’s Day, people prepare the altars in honour of the saint in a feast called “Cene di San Giuseppe”. They are richly decorated with oranges, lemons and bay leaves and above all with typical homemade breads that are genuine works of art.

### Orestiadi Festival in Gibellina

Held from late June to September, this event combines various performing arts, with shows by international artists in the fields of contemporary art and avant-garde theatre and music.

## Castellammare del Golfo



- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. Castle / Museum                       | 9. Convent of PP. Crociferi - Town Hall   |
| 2. Church of Madonna del Rosario         | 10. Church of Maria SS. degli Agonizzanti |
| 3. Cathedral of Santa Maria del Soccorso | 11. Church of Il Crocifisso               |
| 4. Sea Museum                            | 12. Church of San Antonio de Padova       |
| 5. Church of M. SS. Annunziata           | 13. Church of San Giuseppe                |
| 6. Church of Il Purgatorio               | 14. Church of Santa Rita                  |
| 7. Arco Florio                           | <b>i</b> Tourist information              |
| 8. Church of Maria SS. delle Grazie      |   |

Castellammare del Golfo, situated in a bay between Cape Gallo and Cape San Vito, is famous for the beauty of its coastline, coves and cliffs. It was originally the port for the powerful ancient city of Segesta, which lies a few kilometres inland, and was known to the Romans as Emporium Segestanorum. The Swabians later renamed it “Castrum ad mare Gulfo”, from which it takes its current name.

The Arabs fortified the old city, renaming it al-Madarig, or “the steps”, and made it impregnable with the construction of the fortified stronghold in the port. It was later expanded by the Normans and reached its apogee under the Aragonese (1281-1410), when the

View of  
Castellammare



city became an important wheat exporting and trading centre.

Today, Castellammare is a major tourist destination that attracts many visitors every year in search of its heritage and the natural beauty of its coasts and hinterland. Besides being the gateway to the Zingaro Reserve, in the surrounding area you can also visit Scopello, a village that fascinates visitors with its cliffs and ancient tuna fishery. It has a *baglio*, a building around a courtyard, typical of rural Sicily, and outside in the square there is a fountain with a trough from which the animals used to drink.

The coast near Castellammare extends for a long way in both directions, offering wonderful picturesque views. There are sandy beaches like the Plaja, and

Beach of  
Guidaloca, in  
Scopello



Surroundings of  
Castellammare del Golfo

stony ones like the Petrolo beach in Marina Grande and Guidaloca in Scopello.

Speleology enthusiasts should not miss the caves of Mount Inici with their picturesque stalagmites and stalactites.

### Castellammare by al-Idrisi, 12<sup>th</sup> century

“Castellammare is a fortified town with one of the most solid constructions on one of the most inaccessible sites. It is completely surrounded by a circular moat which was cut out of the rock. The only access is via a wooden drawbridge which can be lowered if required on payment of two thousand francs. The town is surrounded by orchards and vineyards, where fruit is grown. It has a narrow port.”





## Visits

The **Castle of Castellammare del Golfo** has remote origins, as it was probably built in the Islamic period around the 10<sup>th</sup> century on the ruins of pre-existing fortifications. It was enlarged by both the Normans and the Swabians, who added walls and towers. The current trapezoidal shape was built by the Aragonese, while the remaining tower, called the “Bulwark”, dates back to 1537. The castle lies on a promontory surrounded by the sea. It was originally connected to the land by a drawbridge, which was later turned into a more permanent stone structure.

Today the castle hosts “The Memory of Mediterranean”, a Museum divided into four sections: the Museum of

View of  
Castellammare

Water and Mills, the “Annalisa Buccellato” Ethno-anthropological Museum, which displays a collection of traditional objects and ancient farming implements, the Archaeological Museum and the Museum of Maritime Activities, which focuses particularly on tuna fishing, a traditional activity in north-western Sicily.





**The Cathedral Church of Santa Maria del Soccorso** in the historic centre of the town was built in the 16<sup>th</sup>-century and renovated during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Inside, the visitor can admire the Baroque influence and the fresco-painted vault and a 16<sup>th</sup>-century majolica statue of the Virgin Mary (1559).

Another interesting church is the Church of the Madonna del Rosario in Via Ponte Castello. Known as “L’agnuni” (the corner), it was built during the Norman

period around 1100. Inside the church, in a corner, there is a black Madonna and Child (the Maronna di l’agnuni). The portal is adorned with a marble bas-relief attributed to Antonello Gagini, depicting the Madonna and Child with the Saints and a Crucifix.

There is a small Sea Museum near the Cala Marina and the old town of “Chiusa dei Crociferi”. It was created and run with great passion by a local fisherman, Antonino Paradiso, a master in all the nautical arts. Other churches and monuments of artistic interest include the Church of the Madonna della Scala, the Church of the Madonna delle Grazie, the Church of San Giuseppe, the Church of San Antonio de Padova and the Palazzo Crociferi, a former convent and currently the Town Hall.

## Surroundings

### The Caves in Monte Inici

From the viewpoint above Castellammare del Golfo visitors can climb the eastern slope of Monte Inici where they will arrive to a large forest clearing called “Fossa del Bue”, the “Stagnone” lagoon, the replanted forest known as the “Fontanelle” and the “Vaccaria” forest. At the top of the Mountain you can see the typical “Nivière”, large artificial cavities in which ice was stored in ancient times. Monte Inici is also interesting from a geological point of view because of its numerous caves.

Among these you can visit the “Abyss dei Cocci - Ramo dei Laghi”, a natural cave which extends horizontally into the mountain and has different levels connected by shafts and ramps. The cave is well-known for its stalactites and stalagmites which offer an amazing variety of shapes and colours.



### Zingaro Nature Reserve

Castellammare is also the main entrance to the Zingaro Nature Reserve: rocky walls that rise up above the sea alternating with magnificent coves, golden beaches, underwater tunnels, archaeological sites and narrow paths; the sea is on one side and the mountains on the other. The fauna and flora are very varied, including the characteristic dwarf palm that was once used in the manufacture of household objects by intertwining its fibres. The reserve, which covers 1,600 hectares, is only accessible by foot, and is crisscrossed by well-signposted paths, offering the visitor three different routes: the main route, which runs along the sea (7 km) and takes two hours on foot, connects Scopello to San Vito lo Capo; the second route (7 km) starts from

Zingaro Natural Reserve

the tuna fishery dell'Uzzo (from San Vito Lo Capo) and goes deep inland while the third, called High Zingaro (10 Km), takes us as far as Mount Speziale. The Nature Reserve is also home to the "Grotta dell'Uzzo" archaeological site, one of the first prehistoric settlements in Sicily, where potsherds, human and animal remains have been found. Finally, its highly varied seabed flora and fauna offer amazing underwater itineraries, snorkelling and diving.

Scopello



## San Vito lo Capo

At the end of the province of Trapani, around 25 km far from Castellammare del Golfo, we come to the fishing village of San Vito lo Capo, which developed around the ancient Arab fortress that overlooks the city, and was later turned into a sanctuary to San Vito in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The region is one of the most popular summer destinations in Sicily, due to its beaches and its excellent tourist and cultural facilities. Apart from its interesting sights such as its lighthouse, the Macari beach and the dock of San Vito, visitors also come for its cuisine, which is based on fish, as well as for its various unmissable festivals and events.

From an archaeological point of view, the remains of ancient shipwrecks discovered on the seabed testify

Chapel of Santa Crescenza, in San Vito lo Capo



Coastline of San Vito lo Capo

to the importance of this stretch of sea as one of the busiest routes in the ancient Mediterranean. In addition to the famous prehistoric dell'Uzzo cave, there are other caves with Upper Paleolithic paintings (between 40,000 and 10,000 years old) including the Cave of the Horses in Cala Mancina, the Cave dei Ciaraveddi and the Cave of Racchio, near the village of Macari.

The Arab style Chapel of Santa Crescenza, with its typical cube form, is an architectural jewel dating from the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The coastline is characterized by many lookout towers (Isulidda, Torrazzo, 'Sceri, Cofano, Uzzo and Impisu).

## Gastronomy and handicrafts

Because of its close relationship with the sea, fish is the basic ingredient of local cuisine, which blends perfectly with the traditional rural dishes enjoyed inland. It is also well-known for a delicacy of Arabic origin: couscous, traditionally prepared with fish, meat or vegetables. Visitors should also try the typical pasta with sardines, tuna cooked in various ways, dried tomatoes and *bruciuluna*, a rolled and stuffed steak, to mention but a few of the dishes in which the flavours of the sea mingle with those from the countryside. A true delicacy for all to taste is *cunzato* (seasoned), a bread from Scopello, made with quality ingredients and seasoned with olive oil, several kinds of cheese, anchovies and tomatoes.

Couscous *alla Trapanese*



As for cakes, these range from fig-stuffed Christmas cakes to *pignolata* with honey, and from *cassatelle di ricotta* to *pecorelle* (Easter lambs made of marzipan), as well as the traditional *cannoli*, sphinxes, sweet fries and the typical *biancomangiare*, a pudding made of milk.

Castellammare also produces excellent wine and olive oil. In fact, it is part of the DOP Valli Trapanesi olive oil production area. The oil is made from olives from the *cerasuola*, *biancolilla* and *nocellara* varieties from the Belice region. Local wine is produced under the DOC Erice label.

Castellammare is also renowned for its high quality woodwork, the quarrying of Rosso di Sicilia marble, and the textile crafts with embroideries of original and traditional designs.

In Castellammare del Golfo and San Vito Lo Capo there are still a few *curinari*, artisans that produce a wide range of objects (baskets, bags, fans, etc.) by weaving the leaves of the dwarf palm, a typical Mediterranean plant.

## Feasts

### Feast of Maria SS. Del Soccorso

Celebrated in honour of the town's Patron Saint, the feast is held from 19<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> August with a traditional procession towards the sea, where they re-enact the naval battle fought out between the Spanish and the English in 1718 just off the coast of Castellammare. It is said that the battle stopped when the statue of the Virgin reached the coast. The historical events of 1718 are played out on July 13<sup>th</sup> every year, with the performance of "Nostra Principalissima Patrona", which depicts the burning



of the castle and the flight of the English. The show concludes at sea with a procession of fishing-boats.

Festivity of San Vito Martire

### Festivity of San Vito Martire in San Vito lo Capo

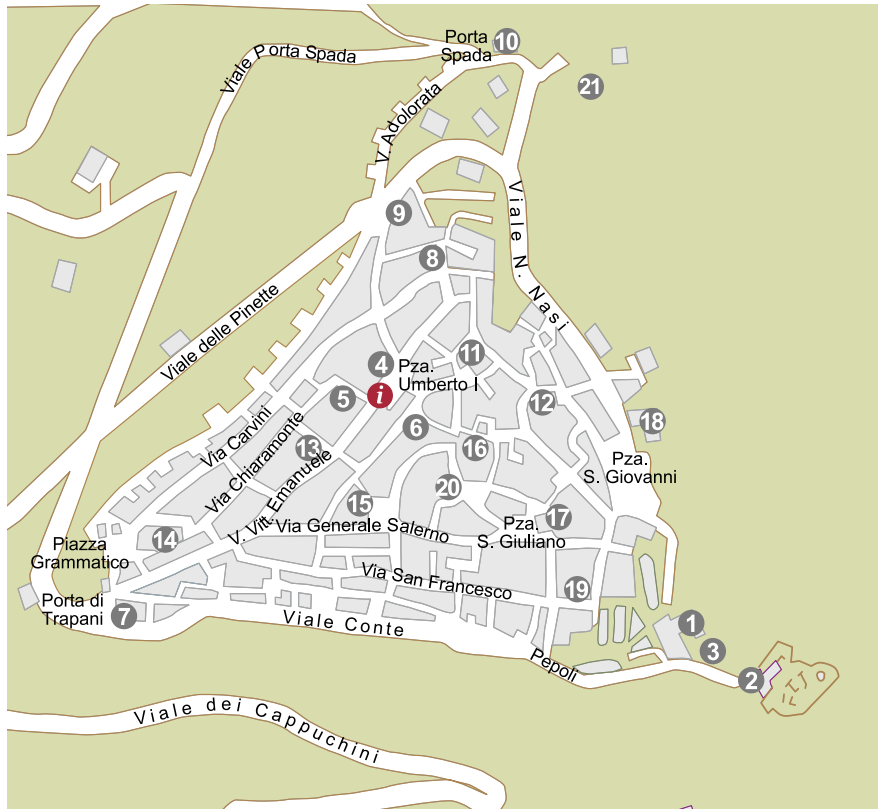
On June 15<sup>th</sup>, the town of San Vito demonstrates its ardent devotion to its Patron Saint, with a series of processions, rituals and games. The ancient ritual began in the Chapel of Santa Crescenzia, on the main road, about two miles from the sea; Pilgrims on horseback and on foot used to throw a stone inside the chapel and walk the road that lead to the shrine without turning their faces, so imitating San Vito (St. Vitus) the Martyr, who had withstood temptation by refusing to look

back. The spiritual atmosphere is particularly intense at sunset, when the city harbour becomes the scene of a colourful procession that heads towards the sea. All the boats line up behind the vessel transporting San Vito, St. Crescenzia and San Modesto so evoking the landing of the Saint.

Both Castellammare del Golfo and San Vito lo Capo organize cultural events, fairs and festivals throughout the year. These include the Summer Jazz Festival in Castellammare del Golfo, and the *Panicunzatu* Fest in Scopello where you can taste local delicacies and listen to traditional music. San Vito lo Capo has become particularly important on the gastronomic calendar because of its “Cous Cous Fest” in September, an international celebration in which all the Mediterranean countries are involved, so making the village a crossroads of peoples, cultures and traditions.



# Erice



- |   |                                     |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| 1. Pepoli Tower   | 12. Church of San Cataldo           |
| 2. Castle of Venus  | 13. Church of Il Salvatore          |
| 3. Balio gardens  | 14. Church of Matrice (Duomo)       |
| 4. Town Hall  | 15. Church of San Martino           |
| 5. Cordici Museum   | 16. Church of San Pietro            |
| 6. "Ettore Majorana" International Centre of Scientific Culture | 17. Church of San Giuliano          |
| 7. Porta Trapani  | 18. Church of San Giovanni Battista |
| 8. Palazzo Militari   | 19. Church of San Francesco         |
| 9. Church of Il Carmine   | 20. Church of San Carlo             |
| 10. Church of Sant'Orsola or Addolorata                         | 21. Church of Spagnolo              |
| 11. Church of San Michele                                       | Tourist information                 |

Erice, a town that has magically maintained much of its medieval charm is perched on the top of Mount St. Giuliano at a height of 751 metres. Encircled by colossal walls with panoramic views over the Saline (salt pans) and the Egadi islands, the town is well-known for its narrow, winding little streets, houses with courtyards inherited from the Arab period and small craft shops with ceramics, high quality carpets and sublime almond pastries.

Ancient historians were unanimous in considering Erice an Elymiad city. Its origins and name can be traced back to "Eryx", the mythological king who established his throne here, before meeting his demise slain by Hercules. During the mediaeval period the city was ruled by the Vandals, the Byzantines and the

Erice with the Cathedral in the foreground



Arabs, who renamed it Jebel Hamed. The Arab rule in this area lasted for about two centuries and enduring effects can be seen in local cuisine, popular culture and customs. After great trials and tribulations, the Normans repopulated the city, bringing to Mount San Giuliano all their architectural wisdom, so enabling us to enjoy the city today exactly as they designed it.

The town has famous historical and mythological origins. Virgil recounts the arrival of Aeneas, who landed on these shores with his father Anchises at death's door, both fleeing from Troy in search of a new home. An alternative foundation story tells that it was Eryx, the son of Venus and Butes, and King of the Elymiad people, who founded the city. He erected a temple on the mount devoted to his mother, the Goddess of Beauty, known by the Phoenicians as Astarte, by the Greeks as Aphrodite and by the Romans as the Venus of Erice, a figure revered by all the Mediterranean peoples. Worship of the Venus of Erice became so popular that it spread throughout the Roman world: the Goddess also protected those who had intercourse



Typical narrow streets in Erice



Above and below, Castle of Venus



with the priestesses who practiced sacred prostitution in exchange for offerings and gifts.

The city is full of interesting sights beginning with the castle, built on the remains of a pagan temple, the mediaeval churches and the 14<sup>th</sup>-century Cathedral, which retains all of its original splendour and is embellished by the bell tower and the tracery of the mullioned windows. The panoramic view from the *balio*, a public garden with a balcony with a sheer drop down to the sea, is absolutely unforgettable.

Today Erice is called the “City of Science” because of the “Ettore Majorana” International Centre of Scientific Culture, located in four restored monasteries, which annually host conferences and debates with well-known professors and scientists.

## Visits

### The Town Walls

The most interesting sights include the **Town Walls** of Elymian origin (8<sup>th</sup> century BC), at whose corner stand the Norman castle, the Spanish quarter, the Mother Church (1314) and the Cordici museum.

The old walls run 700 meters along the north-west side of the town, preserving three almost complete gateways (Porta Spada, Porta Carmine and Porta Trapani). Near Porta Carmine there are various engravings in the Phoenician alphabet.

According to the legend, the **Norman Castle of Venus**, situated on an isolated cliff, was built on the site of an ancient Roman Temple dedicated to Venus, where even earlier people came to worship Astarte, the ancient goddess of fertility. In ancient times the castle



Porta Carmine,  
12-17<sup>th</sup> centuries



Town walls

was connected to the lower floor of the tower by a drawbridge, which was later replaced by steps.

The castle is surrounded by the **Balio gardens**, with their magnificent terrace arrangement and huge variety of plants. The Gardens are named after the Norman governor ("Bajulo"), who lived in the adjacent castle. **The mediaeval towers** are an outpost of the Castle of Venus, to which they were joined by colossal walls. They were partially reconstructed in the middle of the last century at the behest of Count Pepoli, who also built the little Pepoli Tower, a Mannerist construction in a vaguely Moorish style.



## The Cathedral

**The Cathedral**, dedicated to Madonna Assunta, was built on the orders of Frederick II of Aragon in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. It is preceded by an imposing isolated *campanile*, originally a watchtower. The rectangular portico on four ogival arches was added in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and the interior was restored in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in neo-Gothic style. Inside it is possible to admire a statue of the Madonna delle Grazie by Domenico Gagini, and other precious artworks dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Above and below,  
the Cathedral



Cathedral



Church Il Carmine



The church of San Giuliano was built in 1076 right on the central, highest point of the mountain. It was commissioned by Roger I, who wished to thank San Giuliano for his assistance during the siege of the Mount, when it was wrested from the Arabs. Inside, you can admire the Mysteries and the sculptures used in the famous Good Friday procession.

Other sights of interest include the Church of San Francesco (14<sup>th</sup> century), the Church of San Martino, the Church of San Pietro, whose monastery today hosts the Ettore Majorana International Scientific Centre, the Church of Sant'Orsola (15<sup>th</sup> century), the medieval Church of San Giovanni Battista, containing works of art by Antonello and Antonino Gagini, the Cordici Museum, which contains important Punic, Greek and Roman remains, and the Palazzo Chiaramonte.

## Erice by the geographer al-Idrisi, 12<sup>th</sup> century

“The vast Mountain of Jabal Hâmid (Erice) is very tall and imposing, and is well-defended by its escarpment. On the top there is land that can be cultivated, plenty of water and a fort that has been left abandoned.”



Statue of the fountain of Venus in the Balio gardens

## Virgil's account of the Foundation of Segesta by Æneas, in which he builds a temple on Mount Erice to his mother Venus

Æneas with a ploughshare marks the town,  
And, homes allotting, gives each place a name,  
Here Troy, there Ilion. Pleased to wear the crown,  
A forum good Acestes hastes to frame,  
And laws to gathered senators proclaim.  
Rear'd high on Eryx, to the stars ascends  
A temple, to Idalian Venus' fame.  
A priest Anchises' sepulchre attends,  
A grove's far sacred shade his hallowed dust defends.

Virgil, *Aeneid*, Book Five

## Surroundings

### The Egadi Islands: Favignana, Marettimo, Levanzo

From Trapani harbour it is easy to reach the Egadi archipelago, one of the biggest Marine Reserves in Europe. The largest island, Favignana, is only eight nautical miles from Trapani.

The island of **Favignana** has always been in a privileged position on the sea routes between Rome and Africa. A site of important historical events and legends, it is said that a famous naval battle between the Roman and Carthaginian fleets took place just off the coast of the island in the year 241 BC, during the First Punic War. The island is a fascinating microcosm worth discovering both for its beautiful bays, beaches and caves, and for its cultural attractions. The ancient Tonnara Florio for



Favignana island

A view of the Egadi Islands from Erice



example, is an unmissable piece of industrial architecture devoted to the conservation of tuna. There is also the Palazzina Florio and the Santa Caterina fortress, an old Arab observation post rebuilt by the Norman King Roger II and later used as a prison by the Bourbons. Another important feature of the landscape of the island are the ancient open-pit turf quarries, both inland and on the coast.

## Marettimo

Marettimo, the furthest of the islands from the Sicilian coast, appears as a mountain rising up out of the blue sea. As well as being the westernmost, it is also the wildest, most unspoilt of the Egadi Islands. The village of Marettimo is on the east coast, at the foot of the mountain. There are various interesting walks to Monte Falcone, to Punta Troia (with the castle) and to Monte Capraro, where “le Case Romane”, a Roman fortress and a small church dating from the Byzantine period (10<sup>th</sup> century), once stood.

“Case Romane”,  
Marettimo



Punta Troia Castle,  
Marettimo

Punta Troia Castle is one of the oldest monuments on the island. Originally it was an Arab tower. Around 1140, King Roger II of Sicily transformed the tower into a complete castle. With the French Revolution, the castle became a feared prison where political prisoners were held. Recently restored, the castle now houses the Punta Troia Prisons Museum and the monk seal observatory.

A boat trip around the island offers the visitor picturesque views (Cala Cretazzo, Cala Bianca, Punta Libeccio) and the chance to explore some of the island's 400 captivating caves. Among them, the cave of Presepe, Bue Marino and the striking “Grotta del Cammello” (Camel Cave), which has a hidden stony beach inside it where monk seals used to live until 1960's.

In addition to nature trails, the island also boasts an interesting *Museo del Mare* (Museum of the Sea) in the Piazzetta dello Scalo Nuovo, where seafaring activities and traditions are explained.





Museum of the Sea,  
in Marettimo

## Levanzo

**Levanzo**, the smallest of the islands, preserves complete cave paintings dating back 12,000 years, the oldest on any Mediterranean island. These paintings were discovered in the Grotta del Genovese, which is 35 meters long and has a narrow tunnel that also contains Neolithic paintings representing the hunting community and tuna fishing, as well as the tribal imprints of the shamans.

Marettimo



## Gastronomy and handicrafts

In the gastronomic field, the Erice area produces excellent wines (DOC Erice) and a typical green liqueur (Monte Ericino). Equally famous is its confectionery, made according to ancient recipes in convents with almond as the main ingredient. The nuns hand-make various sweets, including *frutta martorana*, *Amaretti*, *Agnelli pasquali*, *genovesi*, *guelfe*...

A special mention goes to the pastry-shop of “Maria Grammatico”, an old woman who spent much of her childhood in the orphanage inside Erice’s San Carlo monastery, learning and later promoting the nuns’ centuries-old recipes for their sweets, pastries and almond biscuits.

The Egadi Islands, and particularly the island of Favignana have a varied gastronomic heritage, closely related to farming and fishing, of which the *Tommara* (net) and *Mattanza* (tuna fishing) are the symbols par excellence.

Favignana tuna is of excellent quality and every part of this generous fish is used for cooking: the dried



Pastry-shop  
of “Maria  
Grammatico”

Marettimo  
typical food





Marettimo  
typical sweets

belly and entrails are roasted, the offal is salted, the giblets are packed in bags with salt and pepper, and the *bottarga* (fish eggs) are sliced or grated.

In addition to the intangible heritage related to fishing (such as the production cycle of tuna in oil and the Guccione Sisters' recipes "Frascatole e altre ricette" that have been registered in the REIL –Record of Intangible Heritage of Local Interest–), it is important to highlight its sculptures in limestone, a highly sought-after stone that is characteristic of the island. Over time both skilled craftsmen and farmers have learnt to carve it into stone sculptures. We should also mention the hypogeum gardens, abandoned quarries transformed into gardens and orchards, which are also registered in the REIL.

Erice has a long craft tradition and local workshops often conceal valuable treasures. Besides the manufacture of **traditional Erice carpets**, made in ancient looms through a complex system of weaving, there are also outstanding ceramics (plates, cups and various objects), produced using the old methods and decorated by hand with flowery or geometric designs in vivid colours (green, yellow, blue and orange).



Erice traditional carpet

## Feasts

The most important Feast day in Erice is that of Maria Santissima di Custonaci, the town's Patron Saint and Protector, which takes place on the last Wednesday of August. The celebrations end with the procession of the portrait of the Madonna along its winding streets. The feast recalls the miracle performed by the Madonna in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, when she saved many sailors from a terrible shipwreck.



Festivity of San  
Giuseppe, in Marettimo

On Good Friday the *Processione dei Misteri* is celebrated. Images representing the Passion and Resurrection of Christ are paraded along the narrow streets. They are accompanied by the band which expresses the suffering of Christ in music. The images, which date from 1600, are carried on the shoulders of the representatives of the different trades, who historically played an important role in the town's social structure. The procession starts at the Church of Sant'Orsola and returns there after parading along the main streets.

Erice has a number of major international events including the Settimana Internazionale di Musica Medievale e Rinascimentale (in September) and the Cronoscalata of Mount Erice, a car race along the long and winding road that connects the village with Valderice.

# Marsala



- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. Insula Romana                        | 10. Church of San Francesco (Museum)                      |
| 2. Baglio Anselmi Archaeological Museum | 11. Church of San Pietro                                  |
| 3. Church of San Giovanni               | 12. Church of San Matteo                                  |
| 4. Porta Nuova                          | 13. Santa Maria della Grotta                              |
| 5. Church of San Giuseppe               | 14. Convent of Carmine<br>(now the Municipal Art Gallery) |
| 6. Cathedral San Tommaso di Canterbury  | 15. Flemish Tapestry Museum                               |
| 7. Palace VII Aprile - Tow Hall         | <b>i</b> Tourist information                              |
| 8. Garibaldi Gate                       |   |
| 9. Sanctuary of L'Addolorata            |   |



Wind mills and salt pans  
in Marsala

The sight of salt fields and windmills along the SS-115 road are a sure sign that you are approaching Marsala, the westernmost point of Sicily, famous, among many other things, for its dessert wine.

The town enjoys a superb view of the Egadi Islands and the nature reserve of Stagnone, Sicily's largest lagoon which is full of salt pans and little islands, including the important Phoenician archaeological site of Motya.

Historians date the origin of Marsala to the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, when the Punic inhabitants of Motya were defeated by Syracuse and moved to the promontory of Cape Boeo, where they founded a town called Lilybaeum, meaning "the town that looks at Libya".

After the conquest by the Romans in 241 BC, it became one of the most important settlements in Sicily, a





Marsala

strategic point for commerce and trade. The Romans were later succeeded by the Vandals and then by the Byzantines. When it fell to the Arabs in 830 AD, they changed the name of the city to “Marsa Allah”, meaning Port of Allah, or more likely to “Marsa Ali” or Big Port. The town prospered considerably in the Middle Ages as an important centre of trade and commerce. The Normans took Marsala in 1072, rebuilt the castle and erected churches and convents.

Cantine Florio,  
MarsalaTraditional saltpans and  
mills in Marsala

### Marsala by the geographer al-Idrisi, 12<sup>th</sup> century

“Marsala is a most ancient city and one of the most illustrious of all Sicily. Destroyed and cast into oblivion, it was later resettled by order of Roger I, who restored it and built a wall around it. Today it is prosperous and well supplied with markets and shops. It covers a vast territory where many people from Tunisia have come to live. Its inhabitants drink fresh water drawn from wells inside their houses and from springs that rise nearby. It has inns and baths and is surrounded by well-tilled fields and orchards.”



Today, the town is best known for being the landing point for Garibaldi's Redshirts during the 1860 Italian Unification campaign and for the dessert wine that shares its name. The success of the wine began in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the Englishman John Woodhouse started exporting it to Britain and it was later promoted by the Florio family.

The historical center of Marsala lies within the perimeter of the medieval city where the visitor can admire the historical monuments and the original street plan. It is almost like being in an open-air museum, with countless vestiges of the various cultures that ruled the city over the centuries.

The seafront is delightfully adorned with a line of palm trees leading directly to the bathing area, where free beaches alternate with private bathing establishments. The 14-kilometre strip of land along the coast is one of the most captivating in Sicily.

Piazza (square)  
of L'Addolorata



Cathedral



Below, Via XI Maggio  
with Porta Nuova (New  
Gate) in the background



## Visits

Entering Garibaldi Gate, you come to the lively fish market and the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish quarter, which today is the site of the town hall and other institutional buildings. The main street, called Via XI Maggio, starts in Piazza Matteotti and ends at the New Gate, one of the old entrances to the city.

The **Cathedral** dedicated to St. Thomas of Canterbury, is in the main square Piazza della Repubblica. It was built by the Normans on the remains of a pre-existing early Christian basilica and subsequently altered in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The interior, with a nave and two aisles, is richly decorated with numerous works by Gagini and his school. Behind the cathedral, the "Flemish Tapestry Museum" (*Museo degli Arazzi Fiamminghi*) houses magnificent huge 16<sup>th</sup>-century tapestries from the Flemish school representing historical episodes and the Jewish War.



Church of Il Purgatorio

Also in Piazza della Repubblica is the 18<sup>th</sup>-century **Palazzo VII Aprile** or **della Loggia**, formerly the seat of the local administration.

The other religious monuments we should mention include the Church of San Giuseppe (17-18<sup>th</sup> century), the Church and Convent of San Pietro, seat of the civic library and the Garibaldi Museum, the Church of Addolorata, the convent of Carmine (nowadays Municipal Art Museum), the Church of San Francesco (18<sup>th</sup> century) and the Church of Santa Maria della Grotta, of Norman origin.

Following the seafront, the **Baglio Anselmi Archaeological Museum**, a last century wine factory, houses lots of prehistoric and Punic remains and a valuable Punic ship, the only surviving example, used during the Battle of the Egadi Islands.

Further along the seafront, we reach the westernmost point of the town, Cape Boeo, the site of the **Greco-Roman Archaeological Park**, in ancient Lilybaeum. It contains the ruins of Roman dwellings and **thermae**, decorated with splendid mosaics from the third and second centuries BC.



Church of San Francesco

Archaeological Museum



The two most important Arab buildings are unfortunately closed to the public. One is a grand Arab mansion, a private property which nowadays houses the barracks of the Carabinieri, and the other is the Church of Saint Matteo, with a magnificent Arab garden full of palm trees, which stands opposite the medieval castle that houses the prison of Marsala.

Following the main SP 21 road towards the Stagnone there are spectacular saltpans and the **Salt Museum of Ettore and Infersa**, a true gem of industrial archaeology. There are three restored and fully operational windmills for grinding salt that are over five hundred years old.

Archaeological Museum



## Surroundings

### Mazara del Vallo

Mazara del Vallo is perched on a strip of Sicily that runs from Capo Feto to Capo Granitola, less than 200 km from the coast of Tunisia. It overlooks the Sicilian Channel facing Africa. The town has strong links with the sea and with fishermen and is a cultural crossroads and a multiethnic hub between the two continents, Europe and Africa.

The town was originally divided into four main areas which, in accordance with ancient Islamic tradition, separated public and private life. The *Rabad*, the popular areas, were separated from the *Shari*, the places where people met, just as present-day Via Bagno links the two main entrances to the town, the River Gate and *Bab al-Balarm*, the Palermo Gate.

*Mazar* is an ancient Phoenician stronghold, characterized by labyrinthine streets. Here we find the Church of



Remains of the Norman castle, Mazara del Vallo

Street in the *kasbah*

Church of St. Nicolò Lo Regale, 12<sup>th</sup> century



Saint Nicolò Lo Regale, considered a tiny jewel of Arab-Norman architecture, together with the Church of the Madonna delle Giummare.

The *kasbah* is the city center and embodies the spirit of the town, retaining Arab architectural influences. The Norman Arch is what today remains of the Norman castle that once stood in the centre of the city.

### Mazara by the geographer al-Idrisi, 12<sup>th</sup> century

“Mazara is a splendid, illustrious, perfect town unparalleled in rank and prestige. The beauty of this town and of its buildings is beyond all praise. It has so many advantages that cannot be found in any other town. It has high, strong walls, beautiful houses, large avenues and many streets. The markets are well supplied with a variety of goods and produce. The baths are well kept, the *khans* are vast, the gardens and orchards are fertile and well cultivated. People come to Mazara from all around to take stock of its wide array of products. Its wide territory covers a large number of beautiful agricultural estates (*manazil*) and farms. At the foot of its walls flows the Mazara (*Wādî al-Majnûn*, ‘the river of the mad man’); it is used for both loading and winter storage of vessels.”

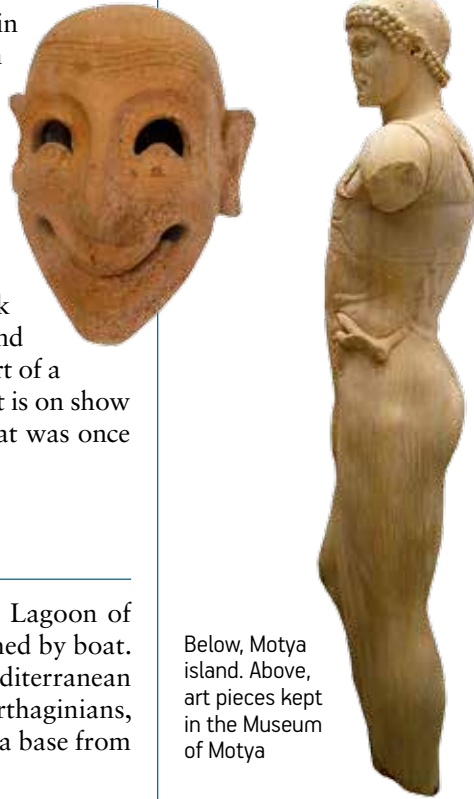


The most remarkable part is the main square called Piazza della Repubblica with important buildings like the Cathedral, the Bishop's palace, the 16<sup>th</sup>-century palace hosting the Episcopal Seminary, and the Diocesan Museum, where the Cathedral's wealth of silverware is on display.

Mazara is also important for the "Dancing Satyr", the emblem of the city. This Greek bronze statue standing 2 metres tall was found in the Sicilian Channel and was probably part of a larger design representing a Dionysian rite. It is on show in a museum in Piazza del Plebiscito, in what was once the Church of San Egidio.

### The island of Motya

Motya is the most important island in the Lagoon of Stagnone Nature Reserve and is easily reached by boat. Because of its strategic position in the Mediterranean Sea, the Phoenicians, and later the Carthaginians, transformed Motya into a trading post and a base from which to control shipping routes.



Below, Motya island. Above, art pieces kept in the Museum of Motya



Archaeological site of Motya

It was destroyed by Dionysius of Syracuse in 398 BC and the survivors moved to the mainland, founding what is now Marsala. Recent archaeological excavations have brought to life some remains of the ancient city of Motya, uncovering ruins of intricate fortifications, docks and other important structures, such as *cothons* and *tophets*, areas once used for religious rites and ceremonies. The extensive collections of archaeological findings are on display in the Whitaker Museum in Motya.



## Gastronomy and handicrafts

The main income of Marsala comes from growing grapes and producing wine, in particular Marsala DOC wine. Other prestigious white and red wines and spirits are also produced.

We suggest visiting the atmospheric wine Museum of Cantine Florio, one of the prettiest wineries in Italy, which combines a tour with wine tasting. Other wineries (Donnafugata, Pellegrino, Rallo, Mavis and Intorcia) in the same area also offer tastings and tours. A traditional craft associated with wine is barrel-making, while salt harvesting and pottery are also important.

Local crops include tomatoes and strawberries, of which the local Marsalina variety is known throughout the world.

As in past times, Mazara del Vallo remains one of the most important sea fishing towns in Italy, and big red lobsters are very popular.

Mazara gastronomy is undoubtedly one of the most varied for its flavours and aromas and reflects the culinary heritage received from the many cultures that have left their mark on the town. Fish has always been the cornerstone of the local cuisine and the main ingredient in recipes like pasta with sardines or couscous, an Arab meat dish adopted by the people of Mazara, who made of fish the main ingredient.

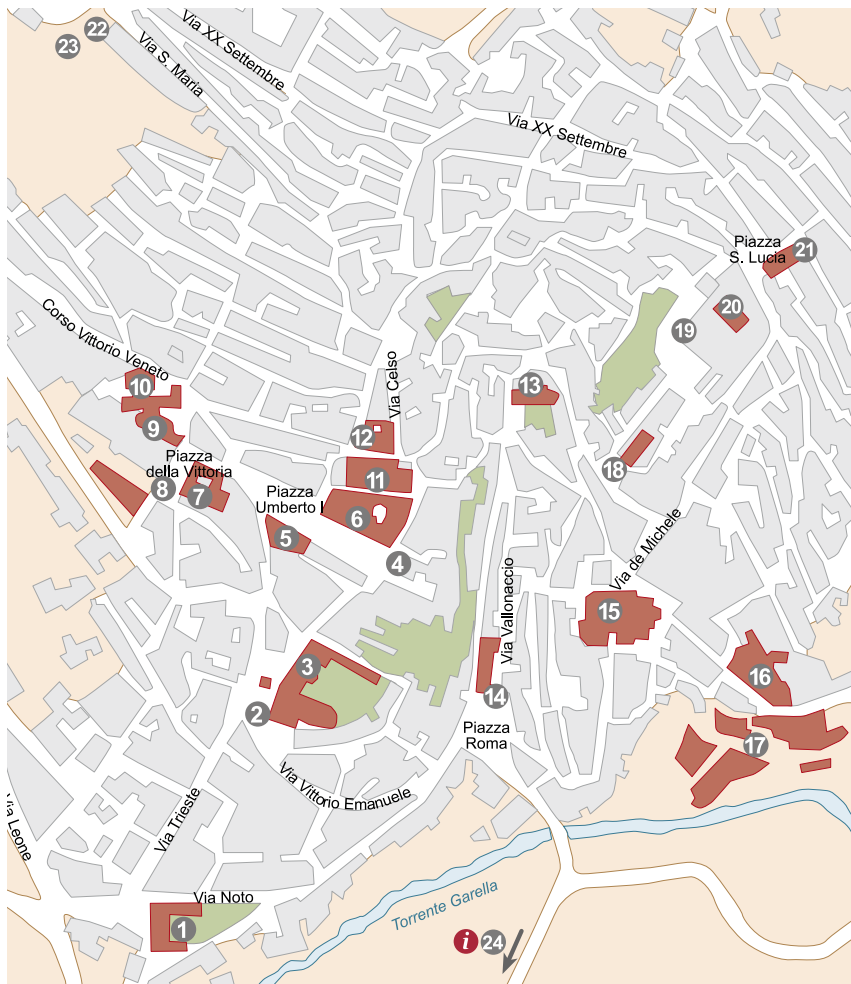
## Feasts


In Marsala there are various special celebrations in honour of the city's patron saints: the Madonna della Cava, on the 19<sup>th</sup> January and San Giovanni, on the 24<sup>th</sup> June. On Holy Thursday, the visitor can enjoy the Misteri, a procession featuring statues of Christ and Living Groups, evoking the events on the Via Crucis.

In Mazara del Vallo, between the second and the last week of August, they celebrate the feast of San Vito in honour of the patron saint. The festival opens with the "Annunzio", a procession in 17<sup>th</sup> century costumes through the streets of the city. Over the following days, parades of floats and a procession with living scenes are held. The festivities end with the statue of the saint being taken out to sea on a fishing boat to impart the Blessing of the Sea, while a laurel wreath is thrown into the water.

Marsala also hosts many wine-related events, such as *Vinoro*, an international show which promotes dessert wines, or *Chalices under the stars*, which offers wine-tasting on the night of San Lorenzo, and the *Marsala DOC Jazz Festival* which combines wine and music. The fabulous *Fishy festival* in Mazara del Vallo is usually held in the third week of August, during which giant frying pans are used to fry fish, prawns and squid, all accompanied with boiled octopus and seafood.

# Burgio



- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| 1. Church of M. SS. del Carmelo  | 10. Church of San Luca                           | 19. Calvario  |
| 2. Church of San Vito  | 11. Palace of Rivoluzionari                      | 20. Saracen Castle  |
| 3. Town Hall (Former convent of the Fratti Minori del Terzo Ordine di San Francesco) | 12. De Michele Palace (19 <sup>th</sup> century) | 21. Church and fountain of Santa Lucia  |
| 4. Church of Santa Rosalia   | 13. Church della Misericordia                    | 22. Convent and Cloister of Santa Maria   |
| 5. Balamonte Palace  | 14. Church of San Giuseppe                       | 23. MUCEB (Pottery museum)  |
| 6. De Michele Palace (18 <sup>th</sup> century)                                      | 15. Church of San Antonio Abate (Mother Church)  | 24. Museum of Mummies   |
| 7. Sortino Palace  | 16. Mannile Palace                               |   |
| 8. Fontana della Badia   | 17. Ancient Potters' quarter                     |   |
| 9. Church and Monastery of Santa Caterina  | 18. Church of Maria SS. Immacolata or Motta      |  Tourist information |

Burgio is a small country town whose name derives from the Arab term *burdj*, meaning “tower”. It was founded by the Arabs, who built a military tower (the Arab Castle) that has recently been rebuilt. The town was conquered by the Normans during the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and later became a feudal burgh of important noble families until 1812, when feudal rights were abolished.

Lying in the heart of Sicily, Burgio is also part of the Sicani Mountains, one of Sicily's wildest and most fascinating nature reserves, full of winding country roads and a huge variety of plants and animals. The range also includes several strongly agricultural villages belonging to the provinces of Palermo and Agrigento. In addition to its natural routes, visitors to these mountain areas can also enjoy the special treat of

Panoramic view of  
Burgio and the Valley of  
Verdura River





View over the River Verdura valley

gastronomic tours, and taste the delicious cheeses and dairy products made in line with ancient techniques that have been passed on from generation to generation.

Burgio has a considerable artistic heritage and is also well-known for its long-established fine quality crafts, most notably in bronze bell manufacturing and its important pottery tradition, both dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Pottery is so important in Burgio that the town is one of 34 members of the AICC (Italian Association of Ceramic-producing Towns). Its attractive craft work in stone, iron and glass is also deserving of mention.

Traditional bronze bell and pottery manufacturing



## Visits

The city is dominated by the castle and the warm colours of the stone used to build it on solid rock foundations. It is surrounded by two streams (Garella and Tina) that once served as a moat separating the castle from the surrounding territory. The castle is a single rectangular block and the façade has slit-like openings in the lower part, and two windows and a double-moulded ogive portal arch on the first floor. This was the only entrance to the castle and was only accessible via a removable ladder. The interior also has two levels, divided into large rooms with barrel vaults and pointed arch ceilings, which are connected to each other by an internal staircase. The upper floor has two uncovered galleries.

Castle





Sanctuary of  
Rifesi

Image of San Vito,  
by Antonello  
Gagini, in the  
church of San Vito

The area around the castle is the highest part of Burgio. It retains a marked Arab influence and is characterized by narrow, winding streets, small houses and arches. From there, on the long stairway leading to the village, we will arrive to the Church of Santa Maria della Motta, considered the castle chapel. The Mother Church, dedicated to San Antonio Abad, exceeds, in terms of size, the rest of the churches of Burgio, and stands out due to its three powerful apses of possible Norman origin. Inside the temple, we find a marble sculpture of the Madonna delle Grazie by Vincenzo Gagini (1566), the image of the Madonna della Consolazione (13<sup>th</sup> century) and the 12<sup>th</sup>-century wooden Crucifix of Rifesi. Popular tradition holds that it was sculpted in part by a shepherd and in part as the result of a miracle.

Next to the Town Hall on the former convent complex of the *Frati Minori del Terzo Ordine di San Francesco*



Madonna delle  
Grazie, by Vincenzo  
Gagini (1566),  
Church of San  
Antonio Abate

we get to the Church of San Vito, where we can admire the statue of the Saint, a precious work by Antonello Gagini dating from 1522. The Church of San Luca has an apparently simple appearance, but it is enriched not only by its 17<sup>th</sup>-century ceramic tiles, but also by a magnificent stone portico built by local craftsmen in 1617. Finally, the Church of San Giuseppe, in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Baroque style, is known for its sumptuous interior covered with frescoes, stucco and renowned works of art. It has one of the most interesting interiors of all the churches in Burgio.

Walking along the narrow streets we will arrive to the medieval heart of Burgio where, taking a look at the old houses, we will be pleasantly surprised by the variety of motifs carved on stone corbels adorning balconies and doorways, an interesting architectural feature of this small town. These works are framed in the tradition



On the left, stone corbels. Above, Church of San Giuseppe

of 19<sup>th</sup>-century local stonemasons. The noble palaces, an expression of refined, perfected artistic achievement, are also worth visiting. Of the hundred existing façades, perhaps the most outstanding is the oldest one, that of the Napoleonic gendarmerie, built in 1814. In addition to the many churches we also recommend a visit to the famous MUCEB pottery museum, and to the Mummy Museum, housed in the restored convent of the Capuchins.

## Surroundings

### Caltabellotta

This village, standing 950 metres above sea level, is also called the “City of Peace” because it was the site of the 1302 peace treaty between Frederick II of Aragon and Charles of Valois that put an end to the Sicilian Vespers. Perhaps built on the remains of Kamikos, the throne of the mythical King Cocalus, Caltabellotta, known to the Romans as Triocala and to the Arabs as Kalat al-Ballut, has more than one medieval wonder to offer. For instance we can admire the Vecchia Terra

### Caltabellotta by the geographer al-Idrisi, 12<sup>th</sup> century

“Caltabellotta, *qal’at al ballut* –fortress of the Oak–, a well-defended, fortified burgh, is perched on a high peak with very difficult access, surrounded by beautiful fertile countryside with magnificent country estates. Here they produce different species of rare fruit. There are springs and rivers to turn the town’s numerous watermills. Once it had a large population, many of whom have now moved to Sciacca. There are now just a few men responsible for her defence. Caltabellotta stands twelve miles from the sea, nine miles from Sciacca and a good day’s travel from Agrigento.”

Caltabellotta





district, in perfect Arab style, and what remains of the imposing Norman castle. From here the visitor can see all the way to the flat coast stretching towards Marsala and the hilly interior, dotted with villages and farms. A flight of steps leads from this excellent viewpoint to the small chapel of San Pellegrino, which was founded in the Norman period, but enlarged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is also possible to visit the cave where the saint is said to have lived. A must is the main church, built at the behest of Roger the Norman in 1090 to thank St. George for granting him victory in a hard battle against the Arabs. The position of the church on the edge of the village is curious, almost confirming the legend that says that the building sprung out of the battlefield. It is also worth visiting the Church of San Salvatore, founded in the Norman period although altered on various occasions since, and the Church of Sant'Agostino with a beautiful 14<sup>th</sup>-century layout.

Above and below, views of Caltabellotta



## Sicani Mountains

For those who love complete immersion in a natural landscape, the Sicani Mountains in the centre of Sicily, which were previously divided into 4 different nature reserves, offer dozens of trails of different degrees of difficulty for hiking, horseback riding or mountain biking, along which you can discover some of the best hidden, least known parts of the island.

Besides the peaks, valleys, vast forests, waterfalls and streams, there are also areas of historical and archaeological importance within the different municipalities of the Sicilian hinterland. Among them we can mention:

Sambuca di Sicilia in the western part of the province of Agrigento, which was founded by the Emir al-Zabut (the Splendid) immediately after the Arab landing in 827. Evidence of its origins can be seen throughout its recently restored Vicoli Saraceni quarter and at the fort (*Mazzallakkar*) on Lake Arancio. Sambuca is a “City of Culture” with its Palazzo and Panitteri (15<sup>th</sup> century) that houses the archaeological museum, the old “P. Caruso” hospital, hosting the Town’s Museum; the local “L’ideA” Theatre (1850) and the Gianbecchina Institute in the Church of St. Calogero, which has a collection of the works of Gianbecchina (Giovanni Becchina), a famous painter born in Sambuca. Sambuca is also a Water Skiing hub. World Championships of Water Skiing, Canoeing and Windsurf have all been held on Lake Arancio.

North of Sambuca is the archaeological site of Adranone, a Greek-Punic settlement (6<sup>th</sup> century BC), with its necropolis and 5 kilometres of fortified walls. It is the highest Punic settlement in the Mediterranean and has a wealth of archaeological remains and other exceptional findings.

Cammarata, San Giovanni Gemini and Santo Stefano di Quisquina are the main gateways to the Monte

Cammarata Nature Reserve, the highest peak in the Sicani Mountains, which is covered by dense forests.

These municipalities are known for the beauty of their landscape and for their dairy, wine and food products. San Giovanni Gemini has a centuries-old tradition in the production of beef, sheep and goats, hence its nickname “the city of cheese”. Cammarata can trace its origins back to Arab times, and its current historical centre was shaped during the Norman period, from which the ruins of a castle and some churches still remain.

Santo Stefano Quisquina is another village with a history marked by the deeds of ancient Arab conquerors, Normans and noble families, one of whose members was Rosalia, the widely revered patron saint of Palermo, who lived for a long time in a cave in the Quisquina woods, where a chapel was built that would later become a traditional place of pilgrimage. Local people gather here to picnic on meat and eggs and drink local wine.

### Cammarata by the geographer al-Idrisi, 12<sup>th</sup> century

“Cammarata is a large agricultural estate of vast extension and numerous different cultures. This estate is overlooked by a high, well-defended castle. One comes across gardens and groves where they produce fruits. The wellbeing of local people is evident.”



## Gastronomy and handicrafts

Burgio is the home of cakes like the “grabuscia” (fried bread dough covered with sugar) and the “tabisca” (a flat cake seasoned with olive oil, salt, pepper and *pecorino*). On December 8<sup>th</sup>, the Feast day of the Immacolata, visitors can enjoy the “muffuletta” (a baked flat cake seasoned with olive oil, salt, pepper, cheese and salted sardines), while at Christmas time locals make “cuddureddi cu i ficu” (sweet pastry with dried figs, almonds and pumpkin), “tetu” and “taralli” (pastry dough biscuits covered with glazed sugar).

The economy in the Sicani Mountains region is based on traditional agriculture and cattle raising, so enhancing the authenticity and goodness of local products: cheeses (from *ricotta* to *caciotta*, from *caciocavallo* to



Traditional pottery  
from Burgio

the many fresh, mixed and aged cheeses such as *fiore Sicano*, *tuma persa*, *pecorino sicano* or *canestrato*), honey, apples, peaches, organic wheat, herbs, almonds, olive oil, wine and confectionery. The livestock sector is well represented, especially in the Cammarata and Santo Stefano Quisquina area, where local farms included within the “Carne dei Monti Sicani” brand produce guaranteed high quality meat.

MUCEB, the  
Pottery Museum



Bell foundry

Excellent wines such as Cellaro, Monte Olimpo or Planeta are produced in Sambuca di Sicilia, which has its own DOC (Controlled Denomination of Origin) label.

In the handicrafts field, there is a deep-running artistic craft tradition that continues to flourish in Burgio today. Craft wares in glass, stone, wrought iron and ceramic are manufactured according to old traditional methods. Burgio's pottery tradition dates from ancient times and the village still has some old workshops where artists old and young work the clay with their hands in order to obtain different utensils that are exported throughout the world.

It is also interesting to visit the bell foundry, which dates back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century and still remains in operation today. The successors of master Virgadamo still work bronze there using secret traditional techniques.

## Feasts

The spring festivals in Burgio are quite interesting and revolve around the “Rigattiate”, ritual dances held between the various guilds associated with different saints. Holy Week is also important, when products such as laurel that symbolize cosmic-seasonal rebirth are consumed along with other traditional dishes. The rites of Holy Week also offer exceptional re-enactments and unique medieval plays, such as Filippo Orioles’ drama *Il Riscatto di Adamo*.

The Cavalcata is a very characteristic form of celebration in some of the festivities in Cammarata. The most famous one is the parade of SS. Crocifisso degli Angeli, held on the last Sunday of May. On this occasion, horses and riders parade between two crowds of people who cheer as they pass through the village

Easter Arches, in  
San Biagio Platani



Easter Arches, in  
San Biagio Platani

streets. The horses, specially adorned with leather harnesses and saddles, parade along the streets of the city up to the nearby church, where a party is held.

In San Giovanni Gemini, the town reaches its peak of excitement during the Feast of Gesù Nazareno, held on the second Sunday in August. On this occasion a monumental, finely decorated float parades through the town, dragged along with ropes by the faithful. The townspeople throw flowers and other offerings onto the float.

The town of San Biagio Platani in the Sicani Mountains is famous for its Easter Arches, one of the oldest and most significant expressions of popular creativity on the island. Along the avenue that runs through the village, rival brotherhoods called “Madunnara” (followers of the Virgin) and “Signurara” (followers of Jesus) construct a series of “Arches” in wood and reeds, and cover them with lemon tree leaves, flowers, rosemary, bay leaves, palm leaves, dates and numerous forms of bread representing sacred objects. The “arches” are preserved over the following weeks, when exhibitions of typical local products are held.



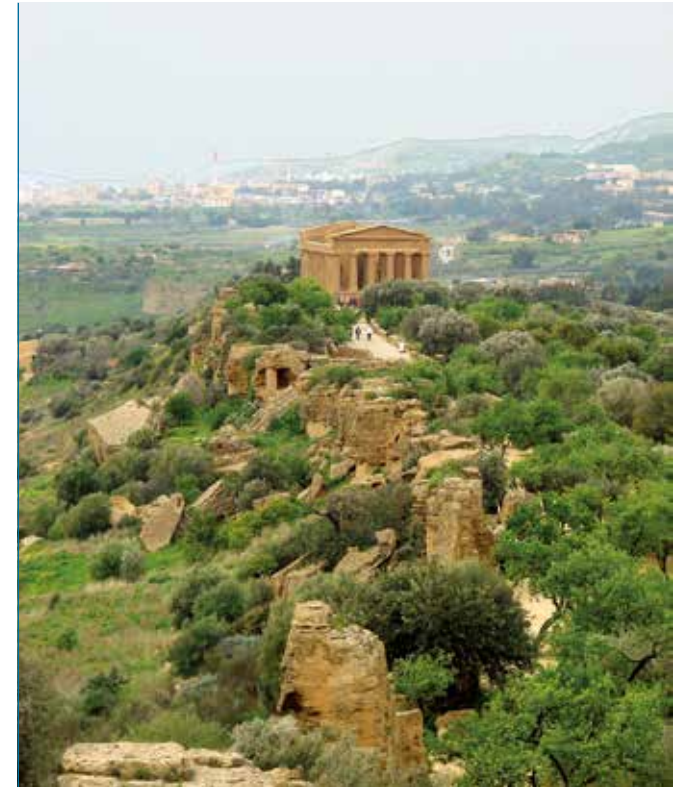
The name of the city has changed several times over the centuries: the Greeks called it “Agrakas”, the Romans “Agrigentum”, the Arabs “Kerkent” and the Normans “Girgenti”. It did not acquire its current name, Agrigento until the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The old town centre is full of remarkable monuments, although the Valley of Temples is the most famous and most highly praised part of the city. The archaeological area was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1997. The Valley of the Temples is the true symbol of the city and a prime example of the magnificence of Magna Graecia, with its spectacular temples dedicated to Juno Lacinia, Concordia, Hercules, Olympian Jupiter and Vulcan, in addition to many other Roman-Hellenistic remains.

Valley of the Temples.  
Temple of Concordia



Piazza Pirandello



Agrigento and  
the Valley of the  
Temples

About four kilometres from the old city and about two from the Valley of the Temples is the birthplace of Luigi Pirandello, a well-known local playwright. The house contains memorabilia, photographs and objects describing his life and work.

### Aeneas' description of Agrigento, as seen from the sea, by Virgil

“And distant towers and lofty walls proclaim  
steep Acragas, once known for generous steeds of  
fame.”

### Agrigento by the geographer al-Idrisi, 12<sup>th</sup> century

“The highly flourishing city of Agrigento must be counted amongst the most illustrious metropolises. It is a lively place with an incessant coming and going of people. It has a high, well fortified castle. The town is pleasant, was founded in ancient times and is renowned throughout the world. It has one of the most impressive fortifications and one of the most splendid towns. People flock there from all over, ships gather there, as do groups of travellers. It has some of the highest buildings and beautiful quarters that seduce the viewer. It is well supplied with markets where one can buy all sorts of produce and goods. It has parks, wonderful gardens and all kinds of fruit. It is an ancient town whose monuments reflect its erstwhile grandeur and power. Such is the abundance of produce that great vessels come here every few days to load up to the brim. The gardens and cornfields of Agrigento are also highly renowned. It is three miles from the sea.”



Valley of the  
Temples. Temple of  
Concordia

### Visits

The **Valley of the Temples** is a large archaeological site of about 450 hectares. It has various important temples (Olympian Jupiter, Hercules, Concordia and Juno), smaller places of worship (the sanctuary of the Chthonic deities, Demeter and Persephone), an archaeological museum and the Garden of Kolymbetra.

The recommended route includes:

#### Temple of Concordia (5<sup>th</sup> century BC)

Erected around 430 BC, the temple of Concordia retains all its Doric splendour. It is a quadrilateral measuring 19.10 x 42.10 meters x 6.75 meters high and features six columns on its shorter sides and thirteen on the larger ones. From the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD onwards, the temple underwent several transformations and was consecrated as a Christian church. Its structure suffered various alterations in which many of the

original decorations on the front tympanum were lost. The three naves of the basilica replaced the classical internal division of the temple in 3 rooms (the complex formed by the *naos*, *pronaos*, *opisthodomos*). The temple regained its original appearance at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Towards the north side of the Valley, between the Temple of Concordia and the Temple of Hercules, we will arrive to the Byzantine Early-Christian necropolis, known as the “Cave of Frangipane”, which is a vast *hypogeum* with burial niches, cisterns and chapels with some original paintings.

### Temple of Hercules (6<sup>th</sup> century BC)

With its eight remaining columns, the oldest temple in the Valley is dedicated to Hercules, the demigod worshipped by both the Greeks (Heracles) and the Romans. Built in archaic Doric structure, it has an elongated rectangular floor-plan.



Temple of Concordia

Temple of Hercules



“Agrigento is forty miles away from Sciacca; the current city is four miles from the sea on the summit of a mountain on which the ancient Greek acropolis once stood. If ever I have deeply felt that delicious feeling that a nice view and a pleasant location can inspire, it was very early in the morning, casting my eyes on the countryside to be seen from the Augustinian convent where I was staying. Imagine [...] a hill that extends for six to seven miles on each side reaching the covered sea of olive trees, vineyards, almond trees, superb grain which ripens fully on the seventh of April and legumes of all sorts. Here are all the produce of the soil: plants alternate with their delicious varieties in fields bordered with aloe hedge and prickly pears. More than a hundred nightingales fill the air with their songs and in the middle of this countryside, whose landscape captivates, stands the beautiful Temple of Juno Lacinia, the Temple of Concordia, which is in excellent condition, and the remains of the colossal temple dedicated to Zeus.”

Johann von Riedesel,  
last third of 18<sup>th</sup> century



Temple of Juno

### Temple of Juno (5<sup>th</sup> century BC)

Set at the edge of the hill of temples, it has the same dimensions as the Temple of Concordia. It is very well-preserved and was restored in Roman times. It still has 30 columns, 16 of them with their full capitals.

### Temple of Jupiter (5<sup>th</sup> century BC)

Once the largest Doric temple in the West, today only ruins remain, including the giant Telamon now on display in the Archaeological Museum.

### Sanctuary of the Chthonic deities

In the western sector of the Hill of Temples there was a vast sacred area devoted to the worship of the Earth goddesses Demeter and Persephone, mother and daughter, protectors of fertility.

### Roman Hellenistic Quarter

This is all that remains of a large human settlement dating back to the Roman and Hellenistic periods.

### The Garden of the Kolymbetra

The garden of the Kolymbetra covers the western end of the Valley of the Temples. It was originally a huge water deposit built in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC during the Greek era, into which a complex network of aqueducts emptied. It has now been transformed into a green oasis, in which native plants and ancient local crops are grown.

Garden of the  
Kolymbetra

## The Archaeological Museum

The Regional Archaeological Museum Pietro Griffo in the district of S. Nicola is situated in front of the Roman Hellenistic Quarter. It contains most of the ancient relics discovered in the Valley of Temples and the Agrigento area, illustrating the history of the territory from prehistory to the end of the Greco-Roman period in its 18 exhibition rooms.



Archaeological Museum

Narrow street in  
Agrigento



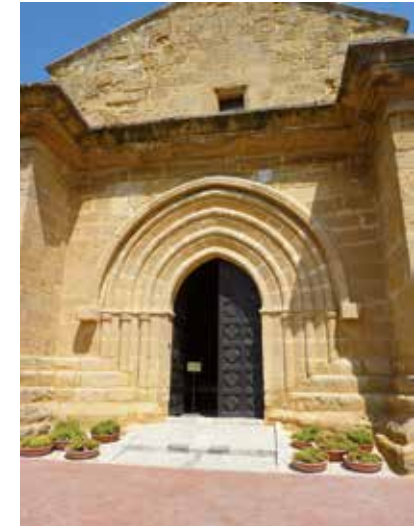
The most impressive monuments **in the city centre** include the 11<sup>th</sup>-century cathedral in the Gothic-Norman style, the Church of Saint Nicholas, dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup>-century and now home to an Archaeological Museum, the Church of the Holy Spirit and the Monastery of the same name, one of the most ancient and best-preserved monuments in Sicily; the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Purgatory Church, together with a well-conserved network of underwater aqueducts, built in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, and the Church of Santa Maria dei Greci, in the oldest part of the medieval town, whose foundations stand on the base of a 5<sup>th</sup>-century Doric temple.

During the Arab period, the city became the capital of the Berbers, who established trade relations with northern Africa. This led to a large increase in its



Above, interior of the  
Church of the Holy  
Spirit. To the right,  
Church of Saint Nicolas

Cathedral of  
Agrigento



population and left a strong mark on its urban layout and street system, characterized by narrow alleyways, courtyards and squares. Some traces of Arab rule still remain in place names such as the Rabato district, the Bibinia gate and the Via Bac Bac in the city centre.





The Valley of the  
Temples in the  
19<sup>th</sup> century



### Agrigento, by Guy de Maupassant

“Girgenti, the Agrigento of yore, which stands like Sélinonte on the south coast of Sicily, offers the most stunning ensemble of temples that one can have the good fortune to behold. On the tip of a long, stretch of rocky coastline that is totally bare and red, a burning red, with no grass, without a single bush, and overlooking the sea, the beach and the port, there are three superb temples highlighting, as seen from below, their great stone silhouettes against the blue sky of hot countries. [...] They, the temples, eternal dwelling-places of the Gods, dead like their brothers, stand atop their wild hill, about half a kilometre away from each other. [...] Seated beside the road that runs at the foot of this surprising coast, one can stop to dream in front of these admirable souvenirs of the greatest of artistic peoples. One seems to be standing before the whole of Olympus, the Olympus of Homer, of Ovid of Virgil, the Olympus of Gods that were charming, carnal, and passionate like us, made like us, who poetically personified all the tenderness of our hearts, all the dreams of our soul and all the instincts of our senses.”

## Surroundings

### Sciacca

Sciacca, at around 60 kilometres from Agrigento, is the oldest spa-town in Sicily. Frequented by the Greeks of Selinunte and later by the Romans, who called it “*Thermae Selinuntinae*”, it was conquered by the Arabs in 840, who gave it its current name (*as-saqqa* = crevice). It thereafter became an important trading and agricultural centre. The Islamic street system is evident even today in the *Rabato* and *Cadda* neighbourhoods, with their courtyards and blind alleys. In Norman times it was surrounded by impressive defensive walls and in the subsequent centuries was embellished with beautiful civil, military and religious monuments that still adorn the old town. The Monte San Calogero Nature Reserve, situated behind the city on Monte Kronio, houses a complex of caves of great natural and archaeological interest.

Surroundings of  
Agrigento



### Sciacca by the geographer al-Idrisi, 12<sup>th</sup> century

“Sciacca is a high joyful town on the sea side. It is prosperous, well equipped with markets and numerous mansions. It is currently the capital of the different districts and territories that surround it. Its port is frequented by numerous ships that arrive there incessantly from Tripoli and Tunisia.”

In the upper northeast corner of the city, on the outer edge of the old walls, lies the *Castello dei Luna*, built in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. It is reputed to be the site of a bloody clash between two noble medieval families known as the “case of Sciacca”. This mighty fortress remained intact until 1740, when it was severely damaged in a devastating earthquake. It is used today as a venue for cultural events. It retains part of the walls, the cylindrical tower and the base of the keep, but the architecture of the Counts’ Palace, the chapel and the central square is hardly visible.



Sciacca



Castello  
Manfredonico  
Chiaromontano, in  
Mussomeli

### Sutera-Mussomeli

The village of **Sutera** (about 38 kilometres from Agrigento) is at the foot of Mount San Paolino and has a medieval town structure with narrow streets made of solid lava and limestone that seem to cling to the side of the rock, shaping the inhabited centre. In prehistoric times it was occupied by indigenous peoples, as evidenced by the numerous caves scattered throughout the territory. The centre was later hellenized by Greeks from Gela and Agrigento, who were moving inland. The village is divided into three districts: *Rabato*, where a famous live nativity play is held at Christmas time (registered in the REIS –Register of Expressions of Intangible Heritage of Sicily–), *Rabatello* and *Giardinello*, which was built during the Norman-Swabian period. The *Rabato*, the oldest district in Sutera, was founded by the Arabs. It is characterized by narrow streets, beams and “ascichi” typical features of Arab civilization. The *Chiesa Madre* (Mother Church) is located in this district.



Castello Manfredonico  
Chiaramontano

style, although the bulky ridges on double rib vaults with Nordic motifs typical of Swabian architecture are also evident. Inside, the great “Hall of the Barons”, 10.4 metres long, communicates on one side with the tiny room where, according to legend, Manfredi locked up his three sisters when he departed for one of the many wars of the time, finding them dead upon his return (this story is adorned with other tales about the ghosts that wander around its rooms). The Hall of Barons is linked to the “Sala del Camino” (fireplace hall). The castle also has a “prison of death”, a small cell that was flooded with water through holes made specifically in the wall for that purpose. Prisoners that had been sentenced to death were thrown into the cell through a trapdoor. The castle also has a chapel with a statue of the Virgin known by local people as the “Madonna della Catena”. In the past, people used to pray to the Virgin for clemency for prisoners.

It is also worth visiting the Church of St. Agatha, the Church of Carmelo, the ruins of the 13<sup>th</sup>-century Palace of the Salomone family, the Museum of Gold, Silver and Sacred Ornaments located in what was once a convent, and the Sanctuary of San Paolino, which nestles on the mountain of the same name.

Il **Castello Manfredonico Chiaramontano** is perched on a high apparently impregnable cliff outside the town of **Mussomeli** (around 45 kilometres from Agrigento) in the Caltanissetta countryside. According to tradition it was Manfredi III Chiaramonte who had it built on a ridge where there was a stronghold dating from the Islamic period (mid-10<sup>th</sup> century). The building blends in with the steep rocky ridge in a striking example of continuity between man’s work and the surrounding natural features. The building is in clear *Chiaramontano*

Castello Manfredonico  
Chiaramontano,  
Mussomeli



## Gastronomy and handicrafts

Agrigento offers a rich and tasty variety of recipes, due both to the influence of the successive civilizations that have inhabited the region, and to the wide variety across the different areas of the province. Dishes typical of the cuisine of this region include the aubergine *caponata*, meat dishes such as *farsu magru* (baked veal stuffed with spices, eggs and carrots), pastries such as *cassatine* or *cannoli* or sweets made with almond dough, and even the truly unique sweet couscous with cocoa and pistachios.

During the traditional festivities in honour of San Calogero you can try *panuzzi*, sausage-stuffed breads sold at the numerous stalls lining the streets of the town. The “a picureddra” (sweet almond dough shaped in the form of a lamb) is also worth mentioning. The *favara*, usually prepared at Easter, and excellent fish dishes can be enjoyed in the towns along the coast (from Sciacca to Licata). In Sciacca it is worth tasting the DOC wines of the area and the typical *tabbisca*, a fermented, baked flatbread seasoned with olive oil, oregano, tomato, onion, cheese and sardines.

Sciacca is famous for its traditional green, yellow and blue ceramics. Along the Corso Vittorio Emanuele there are several shops that sell attractive, colourful majolica plates, tiles and more. Coral jewellery is also very popular, and the coral from Sciacca itself is particularly valuable and highly sought after.



Carnival of Sciacca

## Feasts

One of the most important feasts in Agrigento is that of San Calogero, the “Black Saint”, a Byzantine hermit who lived during the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. In fact, the feast is celebrated throughout the country between June and September, and local people honour the saint with special votive bread called *panuzzi* and *prummisioni*, representing the particular body part of the devotee that has been cured by the Saint. In Agrigento this festivity is celebrated on the first or second Sunday of July.

In Sciacca the feast dedicated to the Madonna del Soccorso is celebrated on 2<sup>nd</sup> February and 15<sup>th</sup> August. During the celebrations, an image of the Madonna is carried through the town by barefoot fishermen, recalling the miraculous event in 1626, when Sciacca was saved from the Plague. Another important feast is “La Sceusa” or Ascension, which takes place on the last Sunday of May. This festivity has rural origins: it is said that on that day farmers used to burn dry branches and old unwanted items. On the same day, they adorn their animals with flowers and coloured bows and parade them around the city. In July, the feast of St. Peter, the patron saint of fishermen takes place in the sea near the port. The statue of St. Peter is carried in a procession of boats, while the harbour becomes a lively venue for stalls, sweets, fish tasting, events and traditional games and competitions.

**The traditional Almond Blossom Festival**, which takes place every year on the first Sunday of February in Agrigento, celebrates the arrival of spring with the flowering of the almond tree. In the marvellous setting of the Valley of the Temples, right in front of the Temple of Concordia, there are performances and exhibitions by folk groups from all over the world in a lively picturesque atmosphere.

The majestic **Carnival of Sciacca**, one of the oldest and most characteristic in Sicily is celebrated during the week before the beginning of Lent (February). The Carnival, characterized by a parade of large floats carrying bizarre figures, is prepared many months in advance and is a time of great amusement for the whole town and for the many visitors it receives.

In Mussomeli, the Holy Week rites are very poignant. Local men sing “lamenti” (laments), ancient forms of choral singing that preserve the historical memory of the village.

In Sutera, the Feast of St. Onofrio, co-patron saint of the city along with San Paolino, is celebrated on the first Sunday of August, when people walk in pilgrimage to the sanctuary on the top of the hill where the ancient relics of the Saint are preserved. At Christmas, in the district of Rabato, one of the most beautiful nativity plays in Sicily is performed. Old crafts, now almost disappeared, and old craft workshops are represented in the play. There are plenty of tastings of typical products, such as ricotta cheese, eggs, spiced bread, chickpeas, beans and local wine.



## Butera-Pietraperzia

### Butera



1. Medieval Castle
2. Casa della Fanciulla C. Cantello (Ex-Convent of Minori Conventuali)
3. Church of San Francesco
4. Church of Maria SS. delle Grazie
5. Church of San Rocco
6. Town Hall
7. Church of San Giuseppe
8. Church of Il Carmine
9. Hospital Salvatore Federico (ex-Convent of Carmelitane)
10. Mother Church of San Tommaso
11. Church of Santa Maria di Gesù

Butera and Pietraperzia are in the provinces of Enna and Caltanissetta and offer a perfect representation of rural Sicily. Visitors can still admire many castles and medieval villages where the early history of Arab and Norman Sicily is intertwined with that of noble families, of the leading actors in many decisive events in the history of the island.

Located in the province of Caltanissetta, **Butera** nestles on a hilly cliff, offering a broad panoramic view of the Erei Mountains, the Madonie Mountains and the Etna Volcano.

Cereal fields, a typical landscape of Butera and Pietraperzia

The etymology of the name Butera remains uncertain. Legend has it that the town was named after Butes, the first Sicilian king, while some scholars believe that





Cathedral of Pietraperzia

the term derives from Arab *Bahut*, meaning “pure water”. Others suggest that Butera could come from the Greek-Byzantine term *Boutherès* meaning “country that provides summer pasture”.

The early history of Butera is lost in the mists of time. The town has probably been inhabited since the Prehistoric Age and was also colonized by the neighbouring Greek city of Gela. Very little remains from the Greek and Roman periods. Centuries later, the town was conquered by the Arabs and then by the Normans under Count Roger, who besieged it for 26 years before defeating the Arabs. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Butera fell under the control of the Santapau family. One of its members, Ambrogio, became the Prince of Butera, the most important feudal title in Sicily until the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Steeped in history, famous for its wine, olive oil and almond trees, Butera also aspires to be a tourist destination, with an array of attractions from religious buildings in the town centre to the Necropolis; from the castle of Falconara to the Marina di Butera, the 8 kilometre stretch of coastline overlooking the Gulf of Gela, with all the necessary hotels and tourist services.

The antiquity of **Pietraperzia** in the province of Enna is also attested by the various ancient settlements (Siculi, Sicani, Greeks, Romans) discovered in different parts of the region. There are many hypotheses about Pietraperzia, especially regarding the origin of the name, although there is no documental evidence for any of them. Michele Amari argued that it was a direct translation of its Arabic name “al-hajar al-matqub”, meaning “hanging stone” or “Pietraperzia” in Italian. The town acquired this name in 865, when it was occupied by the Arabs, who rebuilt the fortress, and retained it until the arrival of the Normans in 1087.

The historical and cultural ties between Butera and Pietraperzia became particularly strong in the 16<sup>th</sup> century with the Barresi-Branciforti family. This was a golden age for Pietraperzia, and the Barresi family rose

### Butera by the geographer al-Idrisi, 12<sup>th</sup> century

“Butera is a well-defended fortress that is renowned far and wide. It is one of the most beautiful of places either rural or urban. In all things it resembles large prosperous cities: the buildings there are beautiful, the constructions are remarkably solid, the dwellings are quite marvellous and the markets are vast and well stocked. It has many mosques for Friday prayers, baths and *khans*. The town is surrounded by one of the largest rivers on the island which waters the neighbouring fields. It produces large amounts of excellent fruit and other gifts from God.”

from being simple barons of Pietraperzia to become marquises, and later princes, under Pietro Barresi (1564). Pietraperzia castle became a small Renaissance court where art, science and politics flourished. Pietro Barresi himself was an expert in astronomy, mathematics and military arts, and played a distinguished part in the war against the Turks, which ended with victory at the Battle of Lepanto (1571).

Today the small town offers a warm, relaxing atmosphere surrounded by a rural landscape and is notable for its ancient churches, noble palaces and castle, now in ruins, which has a breath-taking view over the valley crossed by the River Salso.

## Visits

The Arab Norman **castle of Butera**, built on top of an earlier Byzantine fortress, dates from the 11<sup>th</sup> century and consisted originally of a complex of towers connected to each other by stretches of wall, parts of which survive today, after being incorporated into later buildings. The large courtyard, confined within the walls of the castle, is now a public square. The existing structure currently features a square tower standing 36 metres high, decorated with mullioned windows in Catalan style, with small pilasters and capitals. Inside, the castle displays rich sculptural ornamentation. Recent restoration work has permitted the reconstruction of missing sections and the detection of three large underground water tanks in which fragments of mediaeval pottery were found.

The tour of Butera starts from the Mother Church of San Tommaso, of ancient origins and renowned for the various works of art by the Florentine painter Filippo Paladino and other unknown authors; it continues with a visit to other religious buildings such as the mediaeval Church of San Francesco and the Church of San Rocco, the patron saint of Butera. The neo-gothic Town Hall



Town Hall and Piazza Dante, in Butera


is in Piazza Dante, the main square, and has a valuable round arch portico dating back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

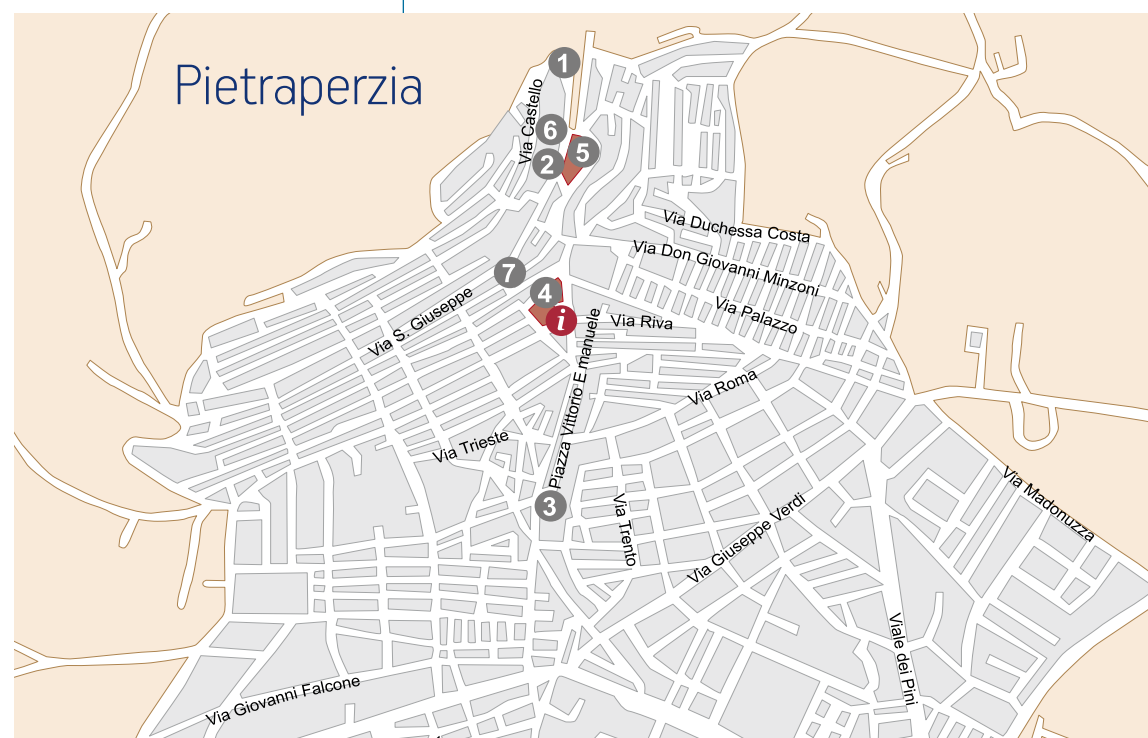
Outside the town, in the area of *Piano della Fiera*, visitors can explore the excavations of the necropolis, in which artefacts dating from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC have been found, and a stone-slab construction called “dolmen cysts”, which is associated with ancient cult practices.

On the coast road stands **Falconara castle**, a typical example of a 15<sup>th</sup>-century medieval fort built on a promontory washed by the sea. Probably built on the remains of a Norman castle, it was enlarged in successive periods. The interior of the castle is open to the public for special occasions and weddings.

Built on limestone on a former Islamic fortification, the **Castello Barresio di Pietraperzia** was remodeled and enlarged by the Normans in later centuries. Inside,

1. Castle
2. Church of La Caterva
3. Parish Church of Santa Maria del Gesù
4. Palazzo Comunale
5. Cathedral of Santa Maria Maggiore
6. Governor Palace
7. Church of San Nicolò

 Tourist Information



Castello di  
Pietraperzia

recent excavations have brought to light drawings with African and Oriental scenes, and gallows and scaffolds. The chapel, located in an old nave, was decorated with frescoes and a painting of the Virgin della Catena. In front of the chapel, there is a portico leading onto a large courtyard, which was once full of ornamental features.

As its name suggests, stone is the main element of the old town of **Pietraperzia**, whose yellow-ochre coloured houses and buildings lend it ancient charm. The town offers visitors many interesting monuments and noble palaces, such as the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Governor's Mansion, the neo-Gothic Tortorici palace and the Town Hall, a former Dominican convent. The town library is equally attractive, housing a rich collection of old works and rare incunabula (early print) editions.

Gate with yellow-ochre  
stones, Pietraperzia

### Pietraperzia by the geographer al-Idrisi, 12<sup>th</sup> century

*"Al-Hajar al-Matqub* ('the pierced stone', Pietraperzia) is a fortified town with good defences. It has broad boundaries, flourishing districts and plenty of water."

Palazzo del Barone,  
Pietraperzia

The various religious buildings worth visiting include the Cathedral, dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century and dedicated to Santa Maria. Inside it boasts works by Paladino, various statues in the Gagini style and the beautiful sarcophagus of Prince Barresi of Pietraperzia; there is also the Church of St. Nicolo, a former mosque converted into a church during the Norman period, the Church of La Caterva, in Greek-Byzantine style, and the Sanctuary of Santa Maria del Gesù, with the adjacent Frati Francescani Convent.

For archaeology lovers, the mountains and surrounding districts (Seggio Balate district, Monte Grande, Tornambé-Fastuchera, Cirummeddi district, etc.) are full of nature and ethnographic trails that lead to prehistoric settlements, while disused mines and plaster ovens are evidence of now extinct mining communities.



Castle of  
Montechiaro

## Surroundings

### Palma di Montechiaro

Literature lovers wishing to retrace the footsteps of the extraordinary novel *Il Gattopardo* by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa should head for Palma di Montechiaro, a small farming town where a large part of the novel is set.

The town of Palma di Montechiaro (55 kilometres from Butera and 30 kilometres from Agrigento) was founded in 1637 by Carlo Tomasi the Prince of Lampedusa. One of his descendants, Giuseppe Tomasi of Lampedusa, was the author of the celebrated 1958 novel *Il Gattopardo*, about the decline of an aristocratic family from Palermo in 1860.

The name Palma di Montechiaro derives from the **Castle of Montechiaro**, which lies 8 km south-west of the town and was built in the 14<sup>th</sup> century on a sheer rocky cliff overlooking the sea. Because of its strategic position, it was a key stronghold in the fight against pirates; inside, the most noteworthy room is the chapel, with its beautiful marble statue of the Madonna di Montechiaro. The local community shows their devotion to the Madonna with a pilgrimage to the castle on the first Sunday after Easter.

Among the most important monuments in the town is the Duke's Palace built in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century by Giulio Tomasi, the Duke of Palma, and the first Prince of Lampedusa, the Scolopi Palace, seat of the Town Hall, the parish church with its beautiful steps, the Benedictine church and convent, the Tower of San Carlo at the bathing beach and the Zubbia archaeological park.

Church of St. Rosalia and  
Cathedral, in Palma di  
Montechiaro



## Gastronomy and handicrafts

The cuisine of the provinces of Caltanissetta and Enna has been influenced by the succession of ancient civilizations. The purely agricultural tradition of both provinces is based on local production of almonds, pistachios, olives, wheat and cattle and sheep rearing, which is reflected in simple authentic traditional dishes. Meat is the most important product, together with homemade pasta and traditional desserts made during Easter and Christmas.

A typical dish exclusive to Butera which the locals like to prepare for the Feast of St Joseph and for Good Friday is the traditional Arab dish “la pasta con il miele” (pasta with honey), a mixture of honey, almonds and toasted crumbs, flavoured with cinnamon and orange peel.

The local handicraft recalls the traditional trades on the island, with mainly wooden, iron and marble craft pieces.

## Feasts

Known throughout the world, the most important folk tradition of Pietraperzia is the religious procession through the streets of the town on Good Friday, called “Lu Signuri di li fasci”, where a crowd holds up an impressive pole, wrapped in kilometres of white cloth.

In Butera there are interesting celebrations during Easter week and during the festival in honour of the patron saint, San Rocco, which takes place on August 16<sup>th</sup>. On that day, devotees adorn the saint’s platform with basil grown specifically for this purpose, which is handed out afterwards to the faithful at the end of the procession.



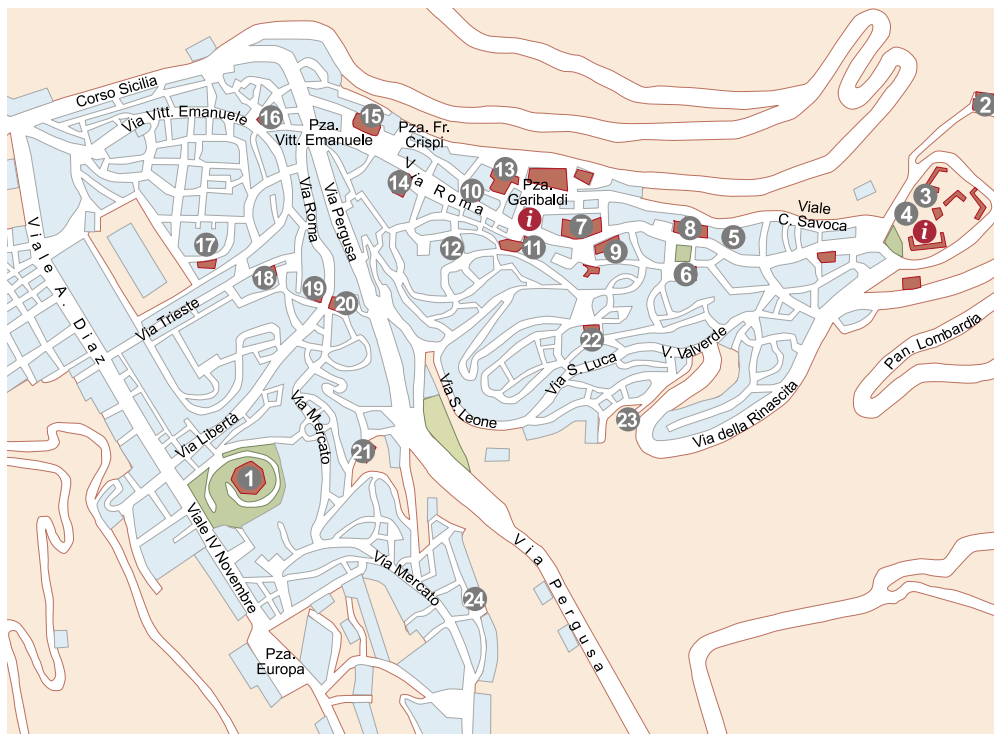
“Lu Signuri di li fasci”, Pietraperzia



The various cultural and wine and food-related events include a celebration of the region’s best produce, which is held every year in Butera between September and October. It is called “Butera a Tavola” (Butera at table) and features wine-tasting, events and exhibition stands. In May, an International Narrative and Poetry Contest is held in honour of the writer Fortunato Pasqualino, who was born in Butera in 1923.

In Pietraperzia, the Feast of Santa Lucia on December 13<sup>th</sup> is commemorated with the *Sagra della Cuccia*, when the townspeople bake a wheat-based dish that is seasoned in various ways.

# Enna



- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. Frederick II's Tower ( <i>Castello Vecchio</i> ) | 14. Church of San Marco                    |
| 2. Rocca di Cerere                                  | 15. Church of San Francesco d'Assisi       |
| 3. Torre Pisana                                     | 16. Church of San Cataldo                  |
| 4. Castle of Lombardia                              | 17. Church of Santa Maria La Madonna Nuova |
| 5. Alessi Museum                                    | 18. Church of Il Carmine                   |
| 6. Regional Archaeological Museum                   | 19. Church of San Tommaso                  |
| 7. Pollicarini Palace                               | 20. Church of Anime Sante                  |
| 8. Cathedral of Maria Santissima della Visitazione  | 21. Church of San Leonardo Abate           |
| 9. Church of Santa Chiara                           | 22. Church of Sant'Agostino                |
| 10. City Hall                                       | 23. Church of Santa Maria di Valverde      |
| 11. Church of San Giuseppe                          | 24. Church of San Bartolomeo               |
| 12. San Giovanni Bell Tower                         | <b>i</b> Tourist information               |
| 13. Church of San Domenico                          |  |

Situated at the centre of the island of Sicily, Enna, known until 1927 as Castrogiovanni, is the highest provincial capital in Italy (at 948 metres above sea level). The Greeks called it the “umbilicus of Sicily” and due to its easily defensible position on the top of a tall hill, it was a key objective for the many invaders that have sought to conquer the island over the centuries.

The city became the focal point of the Arab invasion of Sicily, which began in 827 AD with Palermo falling in 831. Enna however took 30 years to be conquered and after several failed attempts, the Arabs finally managed to get in through the sewer system in 859. Its Roman name *Castrum Ennae* was arabized to “Kasr Yannah”, bringing an end to the Byzantine period in Sicily.

A general view of Enna



The Enna area is a land of myth and legend which appears in the story of the rape of Persephone by Hades. Persephone was the daughter of Zeus and Demeter, and after her abduction on the shore of Lake Pergusa, she became the goddess of the underworld. In her anger at losing her daughter, Demeter, the goddess of the Earth, fertility and the harvest, rendered the land barren. As a result, it was agreed that Persephone would spend various months each year in the underworld during which time Demeter would grieve for her daughter's absence, creating winter. By contrast, her annual return to the earth in spring would be a period of joy in which the meadows would flourish and new grain would suddenly sprout.

Enna's main attraction is the Lombard Castle, built by Frederick II of Swabia in the early part of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. It is situated on the eastern corner of the plain and overlooks the whole city. Historians agree

Aerial view of Enna



Lombard Castle

that the castle was erected on the ruins of an earlier fortification, probably Arab or Byzantine. In ancient times the Fortress of Ceres (Demeter) stood just below the Lombard Castle. This was a temple dedicated to the goddess of fertility in which rites and sacrifices to Demeter and her daughter Persephone were held in the hope of guaranteeing a good harvest.

### The Rape of Persephone

According to classical mythology, Persephone the daughter of Ceres and Jupiter was bathing in Lake Pergusa, near Enna, when she was kidnapped by Hades, who took her to live with him in the underworld. By the time she was released, she had already eaten some pomegranate seeds, the symbol of fidelity in marriage. From then on she lived with her mother Demeter for six months when spring arrived and the land was filled with flowers, and six months with Hera when the land stopped being fertile.



Lombard Castle

## Visits

Generally acknowledged as the symbol of the city, the **Castello di Lombardia** (Lombard Castle) is, according to historians and experts, the biggest and most majestic castle in Sicily with a total area of 23,000 square meters. It was founded by the Sicanians and rebuilt in a triumphalist way by the Arabs, and later by the Swabians. The Lombard Castle is located in the highest point of the city and is surrounded by a cliff which acts as a natural defensive bastion, making the castle the most important point in the city's defence. It was probably named after the Lombard soldiers who came here to defend it. The fortress is sub-divided into three courtyards, each with its own defences, so making it virtually unassailable. The sobriety of the castle's architecture is justified by its purely defensive function. The third courtyard, named "Il piazzale S. Nicola", is where the royal residence is housed and the best-preserved part. It has six surviving towers of the original twenty, including the "Torre Pisana" or "Torre delle Aquile", decorated with Guelph



Above, interior of the Cathedral of SS. Maria della Visitazione. Below, Lombard Castle

merlon battlements, from the top of which there is an excellent panoramic view.

The castle was once the site of the **Rocca di Cerere**, a very famous ancient temple described by Cicero. This temple was built by the Sicanians to worship the Goddess of Harvest, a cult that spread from Enna throughout the Roman Empire. The decision to build the castle on top of the Rocca was a symbol of the military power protecting the cult of Ceres.

**Frederick II's Tower** (a palace of refined architecture which was the king's residence) rises on the slope of the hill opposite the Lombard Castle. It is also named "Castello Vecchio" (Old Castle), given that it was probably the site of an earlier castle, besieged by the Byzantine General Eufemio da Messina, and later destroyed by al-Abbas in the year 858. The tower was 24 metres high, and it is said that from the top ancient astronomers could make out the shape of the whole island and its road networks. The tower has





Lombard Castle

Church of St. Cataldo



a big octagonal base, and its roof is covered by an umbrella vault, illuminated by means of three narrow slits. In line with medieval architectural practice it was equipped with a large water deposit that can still be seen in the centre of the floor. The octagonal shape is typical of *Federiciana* architecture, and is of great symbolic value signifying a square rotating on itself to become a compass rose.

The **Cathedral of SS. Maria della Visitazione** (*Il Duomo*) has been declared a “Monument of peace” by UNESCO and is the biggest artwork in the province of Enna. The *Duomo* (cathedral) was first built in 1307 over the ruins of the Temple of Proserpina, and nowadays presents a baroque style with an imposing façade built with extraordinary skill. There are many important artworks inside too.

Not far from the *Duomo* we come to Piazza Mazzini, where the old Varisano Palace now houses the **Regional Archaeological Museum**. Many archaeological remains and artefacts found in the Enna area are displayed here. The **Garibaldi theatre**, in Neoclassical style, offers a varied theatre and culture programme every year. The building is harmoniously joined to the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Senatorio Palace, which was embellished with the splendour of stucco, lights, velvet and the frescoes on its ceilings.



Lombard Castle

### Description of Enna by Cicero

“Enna is in a high and lofty situation, on top of which is a large level plain, and springs of water which are never dry. And the whole of the plain is cut off and separated, so as to be difficult of approach. Around it are many lakes and groves, and beautiful flowers at every season of the year; so that the place itself appears to testify to that abduction of the virgin which we have heard of from our boyhood. Near it is a cave turned towards the north, of unfathomable depth, where they say that Father Pluto suddenly rose out of the earth in his chariot, and carried the virgin off from that spot, and that on a sudden, at no great distance from Syracuse, he went down beneath the earth, and that immediately a lake sprang up in that place; and there to this day the Syracusans celebrate anniversary festivals with a most numerous assemblage of both sexes.”

## Surroundings

**Lago di Pergusa** is 9 kilometres away from Enna. It is famous for appearing in the legend of “the Rape of Persephone” and also for its motor-racing track which hosts many competitions, including Formula 3000. Some years ago, the lake and its surrounding area were declared a Special Natural Reserve, where many sorts of birds can be seen depending on the season. Nearby, we come to **Cozzo Matrice**, an archaeological site where the remains of a hellenized indigenous settlement (8<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries BC) were found. A long stretch of its ramparts are now visible, as well as some Copper Age huts and various chamber tombs from a rock necropolis.

**Piazza Armerina** (about 30 kilometres south of Enna) is one of the best known and most requested tourist destinations on the island, with its archaeological and cultural attractions being particularly popular.

Monuments, churches, old palaces embellished with Sicilian Baroque... combine to make Piazza Armerina a splendid city of the arts. The stone they used was resistant and difficult to work, which has ensured the superb preservation of the town's entire artistic heritage. This means that as visitors walk through the historic town centre, they experience that splendour of old, immersing themselves in a strong, intense cultural atmosphere.

The town is overlooked by its huge **Cathedral** in elegant Gothic-Aragonese style. It has an important archive and a very fine art gallery, which together with the *Mostra Permanente del Libro Antico* (Permanent exhibition of old books) at the former Collegio dei Gesuiti, the archaeological exhibition *Marmi ritrovati e marmi colorati* (“Retrieved and coloured marbles”), the Garibaldi theatre, the permanent exhibition dedicated to the Lega Zolfatai mining civilization, and the *Casa*



Mosaics, Villa Romana del Casale

*Museo del Contadino* (the Peasant's House Museum) make up the *Sistema Museale di Piazza Armerina* (Simpa -Piazza Armerina Museums System-).

In addition to the Ronza country park, the city is surrounded by numerous natural attractions, such as the archaeological site of Montagna di Marzo and the Rossomanno Grottascura Bellia Nature Reserve.

Since 1997 Piazza Armerina has been linked to the **Villa Romana del Casale** (Casale Roman Villa), a UNESCO World Heritage Site which has one of the best preserved and most extensive set of Roman mosaics in the world. It was built in the third or fourth century AD as a hunting villa for a rich important man. The splendid figurative mosaics adorning the floors of the villa provide a vivid image of Roman life and mythology.

The mosaics cover a surface of about 3,500 square metres, forming large-scale images and various sequences of hunting and dancing scenes, mythological characters and animals, and all sorts of plants and



Left and below,  
mosaics in *Villa  
Romana del Casale*

fruits. The residential complex has various different spaces and blocks of buildings, each used for different social functions, hospitality, privacy etc.

Particular interest arouse the *thermae* and the private changing room, decorated with rich mosaics, the aqueduct which has traces of the original water system; the famous room with the ten female gymnasts in bikinis doing sports and a competition; the public spaces and the apartments belonging to the lord of the villa.



### Castrogiovanni (Enna) by the geographer al-Idrisi, 12<sup>th</sup> century

“Castrogiovanni, perched on top of a high mountain, has a castle that is a massive fortress. It commands a wide spacious territory. The city has well-established markets, houses built to perfection, industries, trade, artisans and goods; it has a very large dependent area and neighbourhoods of considerable size. Its fields are fertile, coveted and highly productive; the air is cool and offers the city a refreshing breeze that comes and goes: in short, because of the position it occupies Castrogiovanni is one of the best fortified towns that God has created and because of its structure is undoubtedly one of the strongest. In addition to the question of its robust strength, the mountainous area where it is located is blessed with running water and arable lands, such that they are not affected by the lack of a plateau. It is a truly magnificent castle, located in an impregnable site against which any fight or challenge would be absurd.”



## Gastronomy and handicrafts

The province of Enna is rightly proud of its dairy products and those related to their cattle farming industry. The gastronomic product par excellence of this area is clearly the “guastedda ennese” (also named “Vastedda cu sammucum”) a focaccia prepared with traditional ingredients, stuffed with salami and little bits of tuna and sprinkled with elderflowers.

The “piacentino ennese” is another popular product of local cuisine; this cheese is still made in the traditional way, mainly with sheep’s milk to which saffron and black pepper are added.

Enna also has a strong culinary tradition in cakes and sweets, and there are many kinds of pastry products, of which the “cassatelle di ricotta” (fried half-moon ravioloni), the almonds and hazelnut nougat typical of Piazza Armerina, and the “infasciateddi” or short pastry cookies stuffed with a preparation of mulled prickly pear wine, all immediately spring to mind.

Enna’s best-known local crafts include wrought ironwork, while in Piazza Armerina many craftsmen reproduce the famous scenes from the mosaics at the Villa Romana del Casale. This local artistic technique is also used for the production of stained glass mosaics and other decorative items such as paintings, frames, furniture, tiles for swimming pools, etc.

## Feasts

**Holy Week** at Enna is without doubt one of the most important Sicilian festivities. Its traditional rituals and songs go back as far as the period of Spanish rule, between the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. These

celebrations reach their peak on **Good Friday**, when the hooded members of the Brotherhoods traverse the main streets of the city in a funeral procession that lasts well into the night.

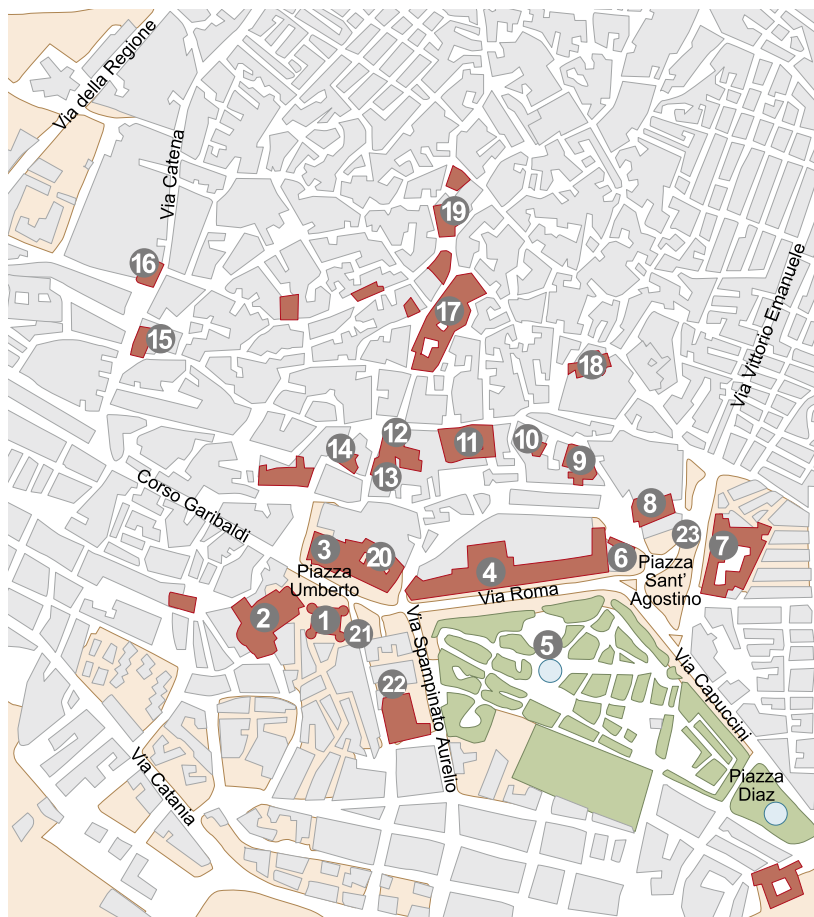
These rites continue on the Second Sunday of Easter with the “a Paci” ceremony, when the statue of Christ resurrected and the Madonna meet triumphantly in the square. Festivities end the following Sunday with the traditional final celebration called “la Spartenza”, in which the brotherhoods bring the two statues back to the churches where they belong.

Enna always congregates thousands of locals and tourists who crowd into the old town for the *Festa della Madonna della Visitazione*, in honour of the city’s Patron Saint, which takes place on 2<sup>nd</sup> July. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, this festivity replaced the pagan cult of the Goddess Ceres.

The *Settimana Europea Federiciana* is a medieval-themed activity that takes place in Enna for a week in May or June. It harks back to the times of Emperor Frederick II of Swabia and offers varied events such as jousting tournaments and other medieval games, and according to the Sicilian tradition, falconry, historic processions, and even food tasting all over the city’s neighbourhoods.

The most important event in Piazza Armerina is the *Palio dei Normanni*, which is celebrated every year from 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> August in honour of the Madonna delle Vittorie, the protector of the medieval city. The event, which includes a carousel with horses in costume, recalls the War of Liberation from the Arabs fought by the Normans under Count Roger of Hauteville from 1061.

# Adrano



- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. Norman Castle  | 12. Church of San Pietro                 |
| 2. Mother Church  | 13. Pisani Ciancio Palace                |
| 3. Bianchi Palace   | 14. Morabito Palace                      |
| 4. Church and Monastery of Santa Lucia                            | 15. Church of Santa Maria della Catena   |
| 5. Gardens of Villa Comunale                                      | 16. Guzzardi Palace                      |
| 6. Church of San Antonio Abate                                    | 17. Ciancio Palace                       |
| 7. Church and Convent of Sant'Agostino                            | 18. Church of Santissimo Salvatore       |
| 8. Bellini Municipal Museum                                       | 19. Church of San Leonardo               |
| 9. Pulia Palace   | 20. Church and Conservatory Gesù e Maria |
| 10. Church of Il Crocifisso                                       | 21. Archaeological Museum                |
| 11. Church of Santa Maria del Rosario and Convent of San Domenico | 22. Town Hall                            |
|   | 23. Church of San Giovanni Evangelista   |

Adrano belongs to the province of Catania and is located in the centre of a very important farming area with large citrus groves, between the Valley of Simeto and the South West slopes of Mount Etna. The city is of huge historic importance as demonstrated by the many archaeological discoveries of ancient settlements and various necropolises.

The city, which stands on what was originally a sanctuary to Adranos, the Sicilian God of War, dates back to the Greek period in 400 BC, when Dionysius the Elder of Syracuse chose it as the site for a new fortress because of its high position. Adranos was also the God of Fire known to the Greeks as Hephaestus. Conquered by the Romans, the city was later abandoned because of Barbarian invasions and continuous looting

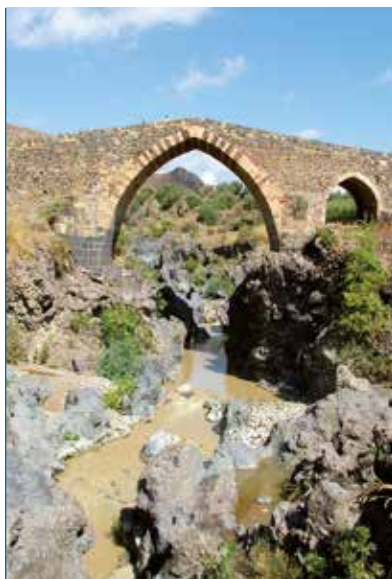
Mount Etna



in Byzantine times. It was occupied by the Arabs in 950, who changed its name from Adranon to Adarnu or Adarna and built a fortress called “Salem” and many houses with beautiful gardens, cultivated fields and vineyards. The city underwent a new phase of expansion in Norman times in the 11<sup>th</sup> century with the construction of the Castello, a massive square tower that still dominates the central Piazza Umberto.

The population was of Greek, Saracen and Norman origin and was made up of skilled farmers and artisans, specializing above all in silk and in leather tanning.

Considered a tourist destination, Adrano today is a modern town with many interesting historical sites. It is one of the most important towns on the foothills of Etna and its municipal area extends right up to the crater of the volcano.



Bridge of the Saracens

Mount Etna

With a business fabric based above all on agriculture and crafts, Adrano offers visitors the chance to relax amongst the greenery of its countryside. It is on the banks of the longest river in Sicily, the Simeto, with its gorges, waterfalls and lava flows. The river winds through orange and lemon groves and has its own important historical monuments such as the *Ponte dei Saraceni* (Bridge of the Saracens) dating from the Roman era, near which there is an archaeological site.

### Adrano by the geographer al-Idrisi, 12<sup>th</sup> century

“Adrano is a pleasant village which is almost like a small town. It stands on the top of a rock and is well equipped with a bath, a beautiful castle and a plentiful supply of water. It is at the foot of Mount Etna in the south.”



## Visits

Adrano retains significant classical, Norman and mediaeval heritage as well as other more recent monuments.

At the centre of the main square stands the **Castle**, built on behalf of Roger I in 1070 on the remains of an earlier fortress erected by the Arabs. The architectural style is typical of the Norman period and the materials are in black and white pumice from nearby Mount Etna. The castle has an impressive austere structure, consisting of a rectangular building with several floors adorned with barrel-vaulted rooms. The Chapel of Countess Adelasio on the second floor preserves some interesting frescoes, columns and arabesque arches with characteristic black and white borders. The castle hosts the Regional Archaeological Museum with interesting findings from the region dating from the Neolithic age to the Byzantine period, the Ethno-Anthropological Museum with craft work by local artisans, and an extensive art gallery on the third floor.

Castle of Adrano



Monastery of  
Santa Lucia

The **Mother Church**, dedicated to the Virgin of the Assumption, has been altered on several occasions such that almost none of its original Norman architecture survives today. Inside there are twelve columns of gray basalt, a very beautiful choir and several chapels full of frescoes and stuccoes.

The **Monastery of Santa Lucia** is a remarkable religious monument that was inhabited by monks until the early 1920s. Part of the monastery is now used as a school. It was erected in 1596 and rebuilt and embellished after the earthquake in 1693. Connected to the Monastery is the **Church of St. Lucia** rebuilt in 1775. The church has an imposing façade on three levels and a fine colonnaded portico. Inside it contains several works of art, church ornaments and gold and silver plates.

Other religious buildings and minor churches dotted around the backstreets of the city are likewise worth visiting, such as the mediaeval Church of Saint John the Evangelist and the churches of San Antonio Abate and Santa Maria del Rosario. The elegant Teatro Bellini was built on the ruins of the ancient church of San Vito in 1779.

## Surroundings

There are a number of interesting archaeological sites and nature spots just a few kilometres from Adrano and the Simeto river valley. Around 10 kilometres northwest of the city is the *Ponte dei Saraceni* (Bridge of the Saracens), a remarkable bridge with a large arch which dates from Roman times. The Arabs saw it as



Indirizo Roman Thermal Baths, Catania

Bridge of the Saracens over River Simeto



Catania, Elephant Fountain

an important strategic bastion for controlling the roads along the River Simeto. It has wonderful views over the Simeto and the amazing surrounding landscape. Another imposing structure is *Biscari's aqueduct bridge*, built in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which is 720 meters long and has 31 arches.

Around 35 kilometers from Adrano we come to **Catania**, which with its 350,000 inhabitants is Sicily's second largest city after Palermo. Mount Etna looms in the background and is also present in the city itself in the dark lava stone that was widely used for decorating the façades of historical buildings.

Although Catania was once full of monuments dating back to its foundation by the Greeks, it was devastated by an eruption of Mount Etna in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and razed to the ground by an earthquake. This was followed by a spectacular reconstruction project in which the city was totally rebuilt in an exceptionally elegant Baroque style. In tribute to this great collective undertaking and in recognition of what was a high-quality architectural and artistic achievement, the city was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2002, together with the seven main towns in south-eastern Sicily: Caltagirone, Militello Val di Catania, Modica, Noto, Palazzolo, Ragusa and Scicli (Unesco WHS Late Baroque Towns of the Val di Noto).

The most important monuments are grouped around the Piazza del Duomo with its Elephant Fountain, symbol of the city. The black lava elephant known as the 'liotru' by the locals, probably dates from the Byzantine era and has an ancient Egyptian obelisk covered with hieroglyphics on its back.

The Duomo dedicated to the town's patron saint Santa Agata, was built in the late 11<sup>th</sup> century at Roger I's behest, and rebuilt after the earthquake in 1693. There are many important historical buildings in the very

### Catania, "town of the elephant"

"This beautiful town is known as the «town of the elephant» (*Balad al-fil*); it is powerful and universally renowned. [...] It is a city of great prosperity, with a vast territory, fertile fields and a well-defended set of walls. The elephant from which the town gets its nickname is a stone talisman. It once stood on top of a building; it was later brought into the town and placed in the church of the monks."

Al-Idrisi, 12<sup>th</sup> century



Cathedral (Duomo)  
of Catania

heart of the city and along stretches of the Via Vittorio Emanuele. These include the remains of the Palazzo Platamone (15<sup>th</sup> century) with its decorative balcony and the Palazzo Biscari, erected after the earthquake in 1693. On the western side, Via Crociferi is regarded as Catania's Baroque street *par excellence*, and Via Etnea is popular for its shops and cafés.

The Ancient Theatre dates back to the Roman Age and stands at the entrance to the Via Vittorio Emanuele II. Next door is the *Odeon*, a more intimate venue for musical shows, galleries and Roman thermal baths.

Castle Ursino is a solid imposing-looking structure constructed on the sea-front by Frederick II of Swabia. It has the typical layout of Swabian castles with a square floor-plan, and circular turrets at each corner. The castle probably derives its name from a Roman family who took refuge here in the Middle Ages and today it houses the Civic Museum, which has art works of extraordinary value.

The coastlines of Catania offer excursions and four protected areas: the “Lachea Isle and Faraglioni of Cyclops” Integrated Nature Reserve, the “Cyclops Islands” Marine Protected Area, the “Complesso Immacolatelle and Micio Conti” Integral Nature Reserve and the nature paths in the Timpa area.

With an altitude of 3,330 metres, **Mount Etna** is the highest active volcano in Europe and was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2013. The almost continuous volcanic activity of Mount Etna is a constant attraction for volcanologists, geophysicists and experts from all over the world. It is an area of immense natural, historical and geological value, with four main craters, 260 volcanic cones, caves, age-old woods, rare flora and fauna, and lava outflows which create an extraordinary geological site adorned with Mediterranean vegetation and prickly pears.

Ursino Castle,  
in Catania



Mount Etna

The area is protected by the **Etna Natural Park**, which covers 59,000 hectares and comprises the 20 municipalities on its slopes, all of which contribute to the fascinating history of the volcano and are full of tourist attractions, hiking paths and other means of discovering the park. Of particular interest is the *Valle del Bove*, an enormous basin on the volcano's eastern slope, where you can visit the “Grotta del Gelo” (the ice cave), which is full of ice and snow even in the summer months.

### The Mount Etna

“As regards the high mountain to be found on the island known as the Mountain of Fire (Etna), its nature is also extraordinary. Indeed, in certain years fire shoots out [...] and everything the fire meets on its path to the sea is reduced to ash; then the fire gallops across the surface of the water spilling copiously all around until it sinks into it.”

Ibn Djubayr, 12<sup>th</sup> century

## Gastronomy and handicrafts

In terms of gastronomy, Adrano is one of the major producers of the Sicilian blood orange, used to prepare rice dishes, cakes, jams and many other culinary specialties. Together with the nearby town of Bronte, Adrano is also a leading producer of pistachio nuts (with their own PDO brand), used mainly in confectionery, ice creams and typical recipes. Local produce also includes citrus fruits, prickly pears, almonds and fruit and vegetables such as olives, broad beans, broccoli, purple cauliflower, fennel and others, all used in local dishes.

Street food is a must-do part of any visit to **Catania**. The varied gastronomic experiences that this destination offers includes the typical Mediterranean markets of the *Pescheria*, a temple to fish, and a *Fera o' luni* (the Monday street market), which offers a fusion of smells, sounds and colours that combine local culture and Sicilian tradition. Due to its proximity to the sea, traditional Catanese dishes are based mainly on fish. However, meat, grains and vegetables are also an essential part of its cuisine. The most typical dish in Catania is *pasta alla Norma*: macaroni seasoned with tomato sauce, fried aubergines, basil leaves and plenty of salted ricotta cheese grated on the top. It takes its name from an opera by Vincenzo Bellini, the famous Catania-born musician.

Thanks to the great diversity of its soil and its microclimates, Mount Etna is the third most important wine-producing area in Italy. Visitors must not miss the extraordinary finesse of Etna DOC wines and distilled liqueurs, produced with the essential oils extracted from citrus fruit peel.

The province of Catania is well-known for the production of embroidery and artistic ceramics, including those from Caltagirone the best-known in all of Sicily, for the



Festivity of Santa Agatha, in Catania



Festivity of Madonna di Ognina, in Catania

quarrying of lava rock, especially in the Etna area and for the amber stone used in jewellery making.

Another symbol of Sicily to be found in Catania is the traditional “Opera dei Pupi” recognized by the UNESCO Convention of 2003 as part of World Intangible Heritage, which survives today in shops in the old city. In Catania they use taller and larger puppets than they do in Palermo. They are equipped with a different mechanical system and have a wider repertoire.

## Feasts

In Adrano we recommend:


- The Holy Week procession with a typical passion play called the “Diavolata” (on Easter Sunday): a unique work symbolizing the eternal fight between Good and Evil.
- The Feast of the Patron Saint Nicolò Politi celebrated on 3<sup>rd</sup> August with the traditional “Volata dell’angelo” in Piazza Umberto.

In Catania the celebrations in honour of the **Patron Saint Agatha** are a very important festival, in which religion and folklore are indissolubly interconnected. Every year from the 2<sup>nd</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> February, the feast draws thousands of visitors from all over Sicily and beyond. During the procession, the bejewelled bust of the saint is followed by decorated golden “candelore” (candlesticks) representing the city’s trades and guilds. The “candelore” are tall, carved wooden columns that are so large that each one must be hauled along on the backs of 10 men, who move swiftly forward with a characteristic gait called “a ‘nnacata”. Other Saint Agatha’s Day customs include the blessing of the bread and a typical family meal.

# Taormina



- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Greek-Roman Theatre                                   | 17. Church of San Domenico                         |
| 2. Palace Ducchi di Santo Stefano                        | 18. Antiquarium                                    |
| 3. Porta Catania   | 19. Byzantine Tomb                                 |
| 4. Archaeological Museum                                 | 20. Belvedere (Viewpoint)                          |
| 5. Castello Sarraceno (Saracen Castle)                   | 21. Church of San Pietro                           |
| 6. Madonna della Rocca                                   | 22. Convent of Cappuccini                          |
| 7. Ciampoli Palace                                       | 23. Church of San Pancrazio                        |
| 8. City Hall   | 24. Naumachie                                      |
| 9. Cathedral   | 25. Sicilian Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions |
| 10. Convent of San Domenico                              | 26. Porta Messina                                  |
| 11. Torre dell'Orologio (Clock Tower) and Porta di Mezzo | 27. Corvaja Palace                                 |
| 12. Ex Church of Sant'Agostino                           | 28. Church of Santa Caterina d'Alessandria         |
| 13. Church of Madonna delle Grazie                       | 29. Church of San Giuseppe                         |
| 14. Roman Odeum  | 30. Gardens of Villa Comunale                      |
| 15. Teatro Comunale (Municipal Museum)                   |  |
| 16. Conference Centre                                    |  |

 Tourist information

Taormina, the celebrated “Pearl of the Ionian”, beloved of the poet Goethe is a bewitching medieval town with picturesque streets, perched 250 metres above the sea.

Taormina was founded in 358 BC by a group of Greeks fleeing from the destroyed colony of Naxos. They called their new home Tauromenion and built an acropolis on the top of Monte Tauro and an agora on what is today the Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II.

Its ancient theatre, constructed by the Greeks and restored during the Roman era, is still one of the most imposing monuments of the ancient world, surrounded by breath-taking panoramic views of the sea and Mount Etna. Later the Romans made Taormina a

Taormina and  
Mount Tauro



monumental city and the Byzantines made it the seat of an Archbishop. In 902 it was conquered by the Arabs, so completing their conquest of Sicily.

The city expanded under the Normans and continued to develop until the 21<sup>st</sup> century, conserving a priceless historical and architectural heritage, together with the natural beauty and typical Mediterranean climate that has made Taormina famous the world over.

The city centre, which is only accessible on foot runs along the whole length of the Corso Umberto I, from which it is possible to reach almost all the main monuments and historic buildings, most of which are in Gothic style with Arab-Norman influences. Many were constructed by combining white stone from Syracuse with black lava stone, so forming geometric patterns and other decorative features such as arches, porticoes and gates.



Porta di Catania

Greek theatre



Isola Bella

Although the city itself is perched on a high promontory, Taormina has amazing beaches below, which extend from Capo Sant'Andrea and Baia di Mazzarò, a small bay full of caves, to Capo Taormina, a nature reserve with the "Isola Bella" Regional Nature Museum, connected to the mainland by just a narrow strip of land.

To the north we come to the longest beaches of Mazzarò, Spisone and Letojanni. To the south we have the beaches of Villagonia and Giardini Naxos, which run all the way to the gorges in the River Alcantara park.



A general view of  
Taormina

## Visits

The **theatre** of Taormina is the second largest classical theatre in Sicily, after that of Syracuse. It was built by the Ancient Greeks, who made the most of the natural slopes of the hill, and then almost completely reconstructed and enlarged by the Romans during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.

The theatre has remarkable acoustics and a magnificent setting with Mount Etna in the background. Today it hosts important cultural and international events, like *Taormina Arte* during the summer months.

Before walking through the city centre on Corso Umberto I, just outside Porta Messina you come to the small 16<sup>th</sup>-century **Church of San Pancrazio**, built on the ruins of the Hellenistic temple dedicated to Jupiter Serapis.



Corvaja Palace



In the centre of the city is Piazza Vittorio Emanuele with the **Palazzo Corvaja**, built in different stages between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, with its original structure dating back to the Arab period. Today it hosts the Sicilian Museum of Folk Arts and Traditions with traditional artefacts, including carts, puppets, folk costumes, ceramics, etc.

Not far from Palazzo Corvaja is the 17<sup>th</sup>-century church dedicated to **Saint Catherine of Alexandria**. This church was built on the ruins of the adjacent **Roman Odeum**, dating from the Imperial Age, which itself was built on the ruins of a Greek temple. Nearby, the **Villa Comunale** (Town Gardens) offers beautiful views of Mount Etna and along the Sicilian coast.

## The theatre of Taormina by Goethe, 1787

“After climbing the steep cliffs near the sea, one reaches two summits connected by a half-circle. Whatever shape it may have had originally, Art has assisted Nature to build this semicircle, which once held the amphitheatre audience. Walls and other structures of brick were added to provide the necessary passages and halls. The proscenium was built in a diagonal at the foot of the tiered half-circle, stretching from cliff to cliff to complete a stupendous work of Art and Nature.

If one sits down where the topmost spectators used to sit, one has to admit that no audience in any other theatre ever beheld such a view. Citadels stand perched on higher cliffs to the right; down below lies the town. Though these buildings are of a much later date, similar ones probably stood in the same places in older days. Straight ahead one sees the long ridge of Etna, to the left the coast line as far as Catania or even Syracuse, and the whole panorama is capped by the huge, fuming, fiery mountain, the look of which, tempered by distance and atmosphere, is, however, more friendly than forbidding.



If from this impressive spectacle one turns one's eyes towards the passageways at the back of the auditorium, one sees all the cliffs to the left, and the road to Messina winding along between them and the sea: rock formations and outcrops even in the sea, and the coast of Calabria in the furthest distance, so that only with great attention can it be distinguished from the clouds gently rising above the sea. To observe how this region, in all its interesting details, sank slowly into the darkness was a spectacle of indescribable beauty.”

## Taormina by Guy de Maupassant, 1885

“Were a man to spend only one day in Sicily and ask, ‘What must one see?’ I would answer him without hesitation, ‘Taormina.’ It is only a landscape, but a landscape where you find everything on earth that seems made to seduce the eyes, the mind and the imagination.

The village rests on a tall mountain, as if it had tumbled down from the top; but we do not stop in it, although it contains some pretty relics of the past, and we reach the Greek temple to see the sunset. I have said, speaking of the theatre of Segesta, that the Greeks, incomparable decorators that they were, knew how to choose the one and only place where theatres, those houses built for the pleasures of our artistic senses, should be erected. This one of Taormina is so marvellously well situated that there cannot be another spot in the world that can compare with it. After entering it, and walking across the stage, the only one that has come down to us in a fair state of preservation, we climb the tumble-down and grass-grown steps that spectators formerly occupied, where 35,000 people could be seated: and we stand here and gaze at it all – at the ruins, which are melancholy though beautiful, at the charming columns, still white and crowned with their capitals; at the sea below us stretching out indefinitely, and at the beach with its enormous rocks, its golden sand, and its small white villages. And, towering above all this, to the right, filling half the sky with its huge mass, is Mount Etna, smoking and covered with snow.”



Above, Clock Tower  
and Church of San  
Giuseppe. Below,  
Church of Santa  
Caterina D'Alessandria



Awash with pavement bars, shops and souvenirs, Piazza IX Aprile is located at the central point of Corso Umberto I, and offers splendid panoramic views overlooking the impressive Mount Etna, Giardini Naxos and the ancient Greek theatre. It is also the site of the former Church of Sant' Agostino (now the Town Library), the Baroque church dedicated to San Giuseppe and the Hotel Palazzo Ciampoli in Gothic-Catalan style. From here, we will go through the Porta di Mezzo into the mediaeval quarter or Borgo. The Clock tower is the gateway to the old town and separates the Classical and Hellenistic parts of Taormina.

The **Cathedral** is in Piazza Duomo. It is dedicated to St. Nicholas and was built in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and altered several times subsequently. The façade has a richly decorated portico, single-light windows and a



Cathedral

small rose window. In front of the church is a Baroque fountain dating from 1635, with a statue of a centaur, the symbol of Taormina. Located nearby is the former Dominican Convent, today one of the most famous deluxe hotels in Italy.

In Via de Spuches on the western side of the city, near Porta Catania, is the **Palace of the Dukes of Santo Stèfano**. It was built over a pre-existing Arab building, and today houses the Giuseppe Mazzullo Foundation, a permanent exhibition of sculpture and drawings.

The by-pass around the city leads to the Badia Vecchia (Old Abbey), a Norman fortification that was altered

Palace of the Dukes of  
Santo Stèfano





Cathedral

in the 14<sup>th</sup> century; from via Circonvallazione you can take the “Salita Castello”, path to the summit of Monte Tauro (298 m) to enjoy the views and the ruins of the mediaeval castle.

“Taormina is a well-defended fortified town in a high-standing location; it is one of the most remarkable and most noble ancient fortress towns. It is built on a mountain overlooking the sea and has a beautiful port where ships arrive from all over to pick up vast loads of grain. It has hostels and markets and is a meeting place for caravans and travellers heading for Messina. [...] One can also see an ancient Roman amphitheatre, the remains of which reflect the superiority of the Empire and its glorious power.”

Al-Idrisi (12<sup>th</sup> century)

## Surroundings

The village of Rodi Milici is almost 100 kilometres from Taormina and is made up of two settlements about three kilometres apart. It is situated on the western end of Monti Peloritani not far from the neighbouring Nebrodi mountains. It has ancient origins and boasts a rich past full of history and illustrious traditions. It was first settled in prehistoric times as testified by the Necropolises of Monte Grassorella in which bronze artefacts and many other interesting objects have been found. Other evidence of early habitation include the remains of the ancient city of Longane on Mount Ciappa, where the remnants of a city wall can still be seen today, the fortress of Pizzo Cocuzzo and the remains of a farmhouse from the Hellenistic era.

The original site of the town of Rodi was in Contrada Chiano, which was devastated when the River Patri burst its banks in 1582, forcing the inhabitants to look for shelter in areas further up the valley, in what are today Rodi and Milici. Excavations in a layer of mud have uncovered the mediaeval church of San Bartolomeo with a reddish-coloured dome and some buildings dating from the Norman period.

Rodi Milici





The Palace of Cavalieri Gerosolimitani in the central square is the symbol of the city, donated by Frederick II of Swabia to the Order of the Knights of Malta, who arrived from the Greek island of Rhodes in 1210. The building still conserves the original stone arch surmounted by the coat of arms of the Order with the cross and the royal eagle of Frederick II of Swabia.

Places to visit: the Church of San Giovanni Battista and of Santa Maria delle Grazie, dating from the Norman-Swabian period; the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Church of San Rocco; the Church of San Bartolomeo (16<sup>th</sup> century); the Church of San Filippo d'Agira; the Church of Idria, with its *cinquecentesco* design; the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Palace Colloca; the Gallery of Contemporary Art and the "Longane" Municipal Library. In the Bernardello area you can visit the remains of the *Torre del Kaid*, a watch-tower dating from the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century which according to popular legend was the residence of an Arab general.

Reddish-coloured dome of the medieval church of San Bartolomeo, in Rodi Milici

Aerial view of Rodi Milici



The **Nebrodi natural park** with an area of 860 square kilometres is the biggest protected area in Sicily and encompasses many of the towns and villages of the provinces of Messina, Catania and Enna. It is regarded as the island's green belt with rich vegetation, fauna and natural environments with unique characteristics.

Of the many villages in the Nebrodi mountains, we should perhaps highlight those that form part of the Union of the Valley dei Nebrodi, namely Tortorici, Galati Mamertino and Castell'Umberto, about 150 kilometres away from Taormina.

Probably founded in Byzantine times by people of Greek origin, and perhaps known as "Mangabah" under Arab rule, the first mentions of the village of **Tortorici** date from the Norman period. In 1300 it expanded with the construction of defensive walls, churches and palaces. Tortorici reached its historical and artistic peak in the 17<sup>th</sup> century when it was embellished with a wealth of priceless works of art. The incomparable beauty of the landscape, the unspoilt nature and the varied vegetation (hazelnuts, chestnuts, oaks and beeches) make Tortorici a very attractive town to visit, and one of the most varied and richest in all the Nebrodi area where

visitors can enjoy the historic monuments, churches and artworks, in a suggestive, elegant medieval town centre, with narrow, cobbled streets, arches, ancient underground passages, courtyards and palaces with stone gates with keystones that were finely crafted by local master masons.

In Piazza Timpanaro there is a monument to bell-making, and it is also the seat of the “Franchina Letizia” Ethnophotographic Museum, and the “Centro di Storia Patria dei Nebrodi S. Franchina” in which there is a collection of precious ancient bells, made and decorated by master craftsmen in bronze, iron and stone, together with numerous items once used by farmers and shepherds, and craftwork from the Nebrodi area. One last very interesting idea would be a visit to the ancient “Trusso” bell foundry.

The town of **Galati Mamertino** emerged in the medieval era and from the start was known for its walls. The name Galati derives from the Arabic word “Qal’at” in reference to the rock on which the village stands, while Mamertino refers to an ancient Sicilian people, who according to tradition, descended from the God Mars.



De Spuches Palace, in  
Galati Mamertino

Galati Mamertino



Catafurco  
waterfall



The Piazza S. Giacomo is overlooked by 17<sup>th</sup>-century noble palaces, De Spuches Palace and the Main Church, dedicated to Santa Maria Assunta. You could then continue along the narrow streets that lead to the town’s different churches, concluding the itinerary with a visit to the ruins of the Arab-Norman castle. It is also possible to visit the Ethno-anthropological Mill and Pasta Factory in a building dating from the early 1900s, where you can see tools, instruments and machinery used in grain production and in rural society in general.

In the heart of the Nebrodi park, the town offers various different nature routes, after which you can visit the *Cascata del Catafurco*, a waterfall almost 30 metres high, at the base of which the water collects in natural pools carved out of the rock known as the *Marmitta dei Giganti* (the Giants’ pot).

The small village of **Castell’Umberto** is located in the Northern Nebrodi just inland from Cefalù and Messina. It is characterized by its fantastic location from which in addition to all the other villages around about and the splendid valleys, the visitor can enjoy views of the Aeolian Islands on one side and Etna on the other.

Laid out as a “Città-giardino”, or “garden town”, with a harmonious alternation of buildings and green spaces, the modern town centre is less than one kilometre away from the old town, the town of Castania, abandoned in 1931 due to numerous landslides affecting the entire territory, in which you can still appreciate the typically medieval urban fabric with its sandstone houses, the ruins of the castle, the surviving churches, the old olive mill and the fountains. To the north of the village there is a picturesque pine forest with a typical Nebrodi landscape with native flora and fauna.

## Gastronomy and handicrafts

The gastronomy of **Taormina** consists of dishes that are rich in flavours and colours, which reflect the cultures of the different people who for centuries have influenced Sicily. The specialties include: pasta with swordfish and squid ink, 'Ncaciata' pasta, swordfish *alla ghiotta* (greedy), "il baccalà alla messinese" (Messina cod), and "frittelle di neonata" (newborn pancakes).

The gastronomy of **Rodi Milici** is based on its local products: olives, citrus fruits, the excellent hard wheat flour with which locals make bread and homemade pasta, and other things like meat, cured meats, sausages and cheeses. The typical dishes are those of rural tradition, like soups made with cereals, legumes and vegetables. A favourite Christmas dish is black rice with toasted ground almonds, and on March 19 (St Joseph's Day) they make "Sfinci di San Giuseppe", cakes fried in batter with cream cheese. Its wines include the particularly interesting Mamertino, a historic wine from the Province of Messina with its own DOC, which is also used in cooking in the recipe for mustard.

In terms of arts and crafts, Rodi Milici boasts a long tradition in the textile sector, especially in the production of carpets and embroidery. Another traditional activity in Milici is the processing of rushes and reeds from which they make the typical baskets and panniers used by farmers in the fields.

We will end with **I Nebrodi**, which in addition to the variety of its natural landscapes, also boasts excellent craftwork and gastronomy: the former, distinguished by tradition, include embroidery, ceramics and copper work. It was also home to master masons and bell makers, whose works can be found in churches all over Sicily. In terms of gastronomy, wheat, olive oil, grapes, chestnuts, acorns and hazelnuts, lamb, horsemeat and pork (the Black Pig of the Nebrodi is famous) are the most representative products of this area. The finest food products are the traditionally made cheeses, such as *canestrato*, *pecorino*, *provolone* and *ricotta*.

## Feasts

**Taormina** celebrates its Patron Saint, San Pancrazio (St. Pancras) martyr and first bishop of the city on 9<sup>th</sup> July every year with a procession in his honour, in which a statue of St. Peter is also carried around the town.

Taormina hosts a number of cultural events during the year, including:

**Taormina Film Festival**, Italy's most important summertime cinema event. The festival, which takes place in June, is a showcase for important film premieres from Hollywood and the rest of the world.

**Taormina Jazz Festival**, Sicilian jazz event held at the beginning of August.

**Taormina Arte**, held in September in the Theatre, in which a series of shows and other great cultural events are staged.

**Taormina Carnival** combines fun-filled games and dancing in the square, with lively performances by musical groups. The procession of floats, which ends with the awarding of a prize for the best one, should not be missed.

In Tortorici, the Feast of the Patron Saint Sebastian is celebrated on 20<sup>th</sup> January with the traditional "Processione dell'Alloro", along the streets of the town with tasting of local food products.

In Galati Mamertino, from 23<sup>rd</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> August they celebrate the "Feast of the Three Saints" in honour of San Rocco, of the Santissimo Crocifisso and of the protector San Giacomo. A huge popular festival with typical dishes and craft products.

In Rodi Milici, on the Sunday of Carnival and Mardi-Gras they hold the "Mesi dell'anno". Part of Sicily's ancient Carnival tradition, this event is a centuries-old carnival representation, which presents in rural dialect a kind of personification of the twelve months of the year, in a satirical humorous style.

In November in Castell'Umberto, they hold the Palio di San Martino, a wine and food event that seeks also to promote the Nebrodi region. At this event you can try a range of local products, while watching a race in which wine barrels are rolled along the street.

# Syracuse



- |  |   |                                       |
|--|---|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Catacombs of Vigna Cassia               | 15. Orecchio di Dionisio (Dioniso's Ear)      | 26. Church of San Pietro al Carmine   |
| 2. Villa Landolina                         | 16. Grotta (grotto) dei Cordari               | 27. Church of San Filippo Neri        |
| 3. Il Sepolcro Chapel                      | 17. Archimedes' Tomb                          | 28. Papyrus Museum                    |
| 4. Church-Monument. Pantheon dei Caduti    | 18. Catacombs of San Giovanni Evangelista     | 29. Cathedral                         |
| 5. Church of San Giovanni Battista         | 19. Paolo Orsi Regional Archaeological Museum | 30. Bellomo Palace-Regional Gallery   |
| 6. Church of Santa Maria dei Miracoli      | 20. Church-College of Santa Maria di Gesù     | 31. Fonte Aretusa                     |
| 7. Church of San Tommaso                   | 21. Church of Santa Madonna delle Lacrime     | 32. Maniace Castle                    |
| 8. Church of the Jesuit College            | 22. Church of Santa Lucia                     | 33. Palace of the Senate              |
| 9. Palace Mergulense-Montalto              | 23. Old Arsenal                               | 34. Civic Gallery of Contemporary Art |
| 10. Church of San Francesco all'Immacolata | 24. Roman Gymnasium                           | 35. Church of San Benedetto           |
| 11. Beneventano Palace                     | 25. Temple of Apollo                          | 36. Church of San Martino             |
| 12. Teatro Greco (Greek Theatre)           |   | 37. Lanza Palace                      |
| 13. Ara di Ierone II                       |   | 38. Bongiovanni Palace                |
| 14. Roman Amphitheatre                     |   | 39. Impellizzeri Palace               |
|  |   | 40. Neapolis Archaeological Park      |
|  |   | 41. Tourist information               |

Declared a Unesco World Heritage site in 2005 and described by Cicero as *maxima et pulcherrima urbium graecorum* (the most beautiful and richest of Greek cities), Syracuse is one of the finest examples of Greek and Roman civilization in Sicily. Plays by the greatest comic playwrights were staged in the Greek theatre in Syracuse from the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC and even today the theatre returns to life every year in May and June, with the performance of classical plays famed throughout the world.

The city was founded in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC when the first colonists arrived from Corinth. They called their new settlement Syrakka and it developed gradually, on the mainland and on the small island of Ortigia, the oldest and most attractive part of Syracuse, which

Greek theatre



has been inhabited since the Bronze Age. This great metropolis of the ancient world was the largest of all Greek cities and a huge boost to its political power was provided by its tyrannical kings. The Archaeological Park of the Neapolis (or new city in Greek) includes the classical monuments of Greek and Roman Syracuse and offers visitors the chance to embark on an exceptional journey into the city's most distant past.

In 212 BC after huge sacrifice and a degree of deceit the Romans conquered the city, which was well-protected behind the impressive defensive structures designed by Archimedes. From the early Middle Ages it fell under Gothic, Byzantine, Arab, Norman, Swabian, Angevin, Aragonese and finally Bourbon domination. The Arab conquest, completed in 878 after a very harsh siege, marked the collapse of the Byzantine Empire and the end of the hegemony of Syracuse on the island. From then on, the legal title of capital city moved to Palermo, which became the most important city on the island, but the history of Syracuse continues to offer a unique vision of the development of Mediterranean civilization over three millennia.



Porto Piccolo (small port) and Palazzo delle Poste

Island of Ortigia



Porta Marina

## Visits

Our visit to Syracuse begins in **Ortigia**, an islet connected to the mainland by two bridges, the site of the first settlement in Syracuse. There are obvious traces of the different historical periods that have characterized the rich past of Syracuse, and a short distance from the dock, in the square called Largo XXV Luglio, are the remains of one of the oldest religious buildings built by the Greeks in Sicily, the 6<sup>th</sup>-century Temple of Apollo, where an inscription on one of the steps linked it with the worship of this God.

Temple of Apollo





Syracuse in a  
mid-19<sup>th</sup> century  
engraving



Syracuse. Engraving by  
J. P. Le Bas. Beginnings  
of 19<sup>th</sup> century



Aretusa spring

### Syracuse by the geographer al-Idrisi, 12<sup>th</sup> century

“Syracuse is one of the most beautiful and most remarkable of cities. Both city and country people flock there and merchants descend on it from all over. It is built next to the sea, which surrounds it on all sides; a single port, to the north, allows vessels to enter and depart. The fame of Syracuse is such that it dispenses us from the need to describe it in any greater detail. Of its two ports, unparalleled throughout the world, the one in the south is wider while the other in the north is better known. Syracuse is also the source of the *Fawwara al-Nbudi*, the Aretusa spring, which rises in a cave situated right next to the sea and is truly extraordinary. One finds there everything one can find in the biggest cities: markets, large roads, *khans*, hostleries, baths, beautiful buildings and vast squares.”

Muslim conquest of the city  
of Syracuse. Chronicle by  
Juan Skylitzes. 12<sup>th</sup> century.  
Spanish National Library,  
Madrid





Piazza Duomo is the city's living-room, where you can admire beautiful Baroque palaces, the Palace of Beneventano del Bosco and the Palace of the Senate; the Church of Santa Lucia: the Church of the Jesuits with its splendid façade; and the Civic Gallery of Contemporary Art in what was once a convent.

The Piazza Duomo is also the home of the Duomo or cathedral of Syracuse. Initially a temple, later a cathedral, then a mosque and finally a triumph of Baroque architecture, the current façade was built from 1728

Above and below,  
Piazza Duomo



Cathedral of  
Syracuse, built  
over the Temple of  
Minerva



to 1753, encompassing the ancient Temple of Minerva, which itself was constructed on top of an even more ancient and very famous Temple of Athena. It is the only example in the world of a Greek temple whose function and usability as a place of worship has been conserved uninterrupted since ancient times.

Our tour continues with a visit to the **Palazzo Bellomo Regional Gallery** (Via Capodieci 16), whose pictures include the Annunciation by Antonello da Messina, and where we can also admire Arabic and Sicilian ceramics, Cretan-Venetian paintings, and a series of sacred and artistic objects, in the **Church of San Benedetto** and the nearby **Early Christian Basilica of San Martino**, which has a Gothic-Catalan portico.



Symbol of the city since ancient times, the **Fonte di Aretusa** is a fresh water spring which rises in a cave a few metres from the sea, in the middle of which there is a bed of papyrus. According to the legend, Aretusa was a nymph who was changed into a spring by the Goddess Artemis, a myth mentioned by Virgil and by Ovid in the *Metamorphosis*. In the vicinity, in Via Pompeo Picherali, we can see the Arabic-Catalan balcony of the Palace Migliaccio. We can also visit: the Palace Mergulense-Montalto, a splendid example of Gothic-Chiaramontana architecture which was built in the 14<sup>th</sup> century; Piazza Archimede, which is home to the Norman-style Lanza Palace in the centre of which we can admire the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Fountain of Artemis; the Church of San Francesco all'Immacolata; the Church of San Filippo Neri, Palace Bongiovanni and Palace Impellizzeri.

“At one end of the island there is a fresh water spring called Aretusa, which is extraordinarily bountiful, brimming over with fish. The spring would be completely covered by the sea, but for the stone.”

Cicero

Fonte di Aretusa



Castello Maniace

Piazza Archimede and the Fountain of Artemis



**Castello Maniace** offers an imposing presence on the Ortigia seafront. It was built by order of Federico II from 1232 to 1240. The castle, which combines military architecture with the elegance of a palace, still preserves the external 13<sup>th</sup>-century structure with a square floor plan with massive towers in the corners. The entrance is decorated with a magnificent Gothic style marble portico.

And then we come to the **Arab quarter**, which is full of narrow alleyways; the Church of San Pietro al Carmine with a Gothic portico, the 12<sup>th</sup>-century Church of San Tommaso; the Temple of Apollo; the Archaeological Park of the Neapolis with the early Christian Church of S. Nicolò ai Cordari; the Greek Theatre; l'Orecchio di Dionisio (Dionysius' Ear), an interesting cave in the Latomia del Paradiso; the Altar of King Hiero II, which is about 200 m long and was built in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC; the Roman Amphitheatre; the Tomb of Archimedes...

Those with a passion for archaeology must not miss the Paolo Orsi regional archaeological museum in



Orecchio di Dionisio  
(Dionysius' ear)

Roman amphitheatre and  
altar of King Hiero II



Pantalica Natural  
Reserve



## Surroundings

The hinterland of Syracuse, on the plateau in the Iblei Mountains, is marked by deep caves and canyons and attractive hills, where history, culture and tradition merge in a perfectly conserved environment. The **Iblei valley** has an exceptional concentration of cultural and natural heritage and encompasses 7 small municipalities: Buccheri, Buscemi, Canicattini Bagni, Cassaro, Ferla, Palazzolo Acreide and Sortino. The 1693 earthquake brought terrible devastation to this area, which required extensive reconstruction work with the addition of many Baroque features.

**Palazzolo Acreide** is one of eight towns in the Val di Noto World Heritage Site, a distinction awarded because of the richness and quality of its late Baroque architecture. Here we can also visit the interesting Antonino Uccello House-Museum, with its exhibition about peasant life and the Cappellani Palace, seat of the Archaeological Museum. It also has an archaeological area with an ancient theatre, which is still used for



Valley of Buccheri

summer performances. The town of **Buccheri**, which lies on the slopes of the wooded Mount Lauro, probably got its name from the Arab “Bukir”, meaning “ox breeding”. It was founded during the Middle Ages around an old Arab fortification that had been turned into a Norman castle. Today, only a tower and some ruins survive. The village is an agricultural centre and, in addition to many interesting churches containing important works of art, it also offers visitors superb landscapes and various interesting natural sites such as Bosco di Santa Maria, Bosco Pisano, Gola della Stritta, a canyon with numerous grottoes formed by erosion by the river and a Theme Park (*Parcallario Adventure Park*) where the family can have lots of fun together.

Buccheri

Church of S. Maria  
Maddalena, in Buccheri

The towns of **Sortino**, **Cassaro** and **Ferla** are the main access points to the important Valle dell’Anapo Nature Reserve and to the rocky Necropolis of Pantalica (12<sup>th</sup> century BC), declared a Unesco World Heritage site in 2005. Immersed in the Iblei Valley, the Anapo River carved a steep gorge through the limestone creating what became Sicily’s largest necropolis. The **Necropolis of Pantalica** contains over 5,000 tombs dug into the steep limestone cliffs by the first inhabitants of the area, most of them dating from the 13<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> centuries BC.

Buccheri



## Gastronomy and handicrafts

The refinement of Syracuse cuisine was renowned throughout Ancient Greece, since the time of the tyrant Dionysius, as made clear by Miteco of Syracuse (IV century BC.) in his “Cuciniere Siciliano”, the first scientific treatise on gastronomy and the art of serving at table in the history of mankind. Cake-making is one of the oldest aspects of Syracuse culture: every sweet tells the story of the region, the traditions and customs of the peasant families who prepared traditional recipes for particular occasions and the painstaking craftsmanship of cloistered nuns. The indelible mark of Arab domination can also still be seen with the use of pistachios, almonds, cinnamon and honey. The rich variety of Sicilian patisserie is evident in the colours, in the opulence of forms, in the textures, in the imagination, in the completeness of flavours. Famous throughout the world is the “Rosticceria del Val di Noto”: serving the inevitable *arancini* to typical richly stuffed *scacce* in a succession of enticing offerings to please all tastes.

The hinterland of the province of Syracuse still maintains the genuine flavours of traditional Sicilian cuisine and has plenty of excellent local products such as “Monti Iblei” D.O.P. olive oil, Sortino honey, local mushrooms, cheese and salami.

As for crafts, the Syracuse area is famous for its ceramics, especially for those made with terracotta. Typical products include the “fischietto di Siracusa” (ceramic whistles), as well as the characteristic “bummuli”, slender amphorae used to keep water cool. The craftsmen of Syracuse were also well-known for working the papyrus plant from which paper is produced according to the ancient Egyptian tradition. The plant was also used for its medicinal properties.

## Feasts

The most important religious celebration in Syracuse is held on 13<sup>th</sup> December, the day of **Santa Lucia**, the city’s patron saint. The city honours the saint with a religious procession, vows, festivities and fireworks. As Santa Lucia is considered the protector of eyesight, the faithful attach eyes made of silver, bronze or wax to her image.

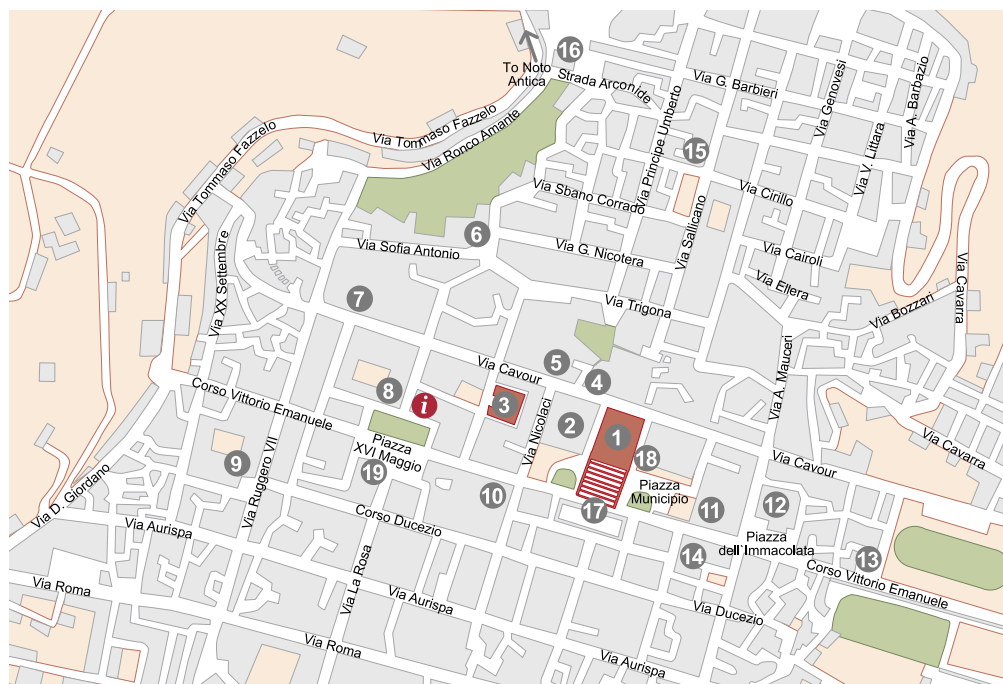
In the Iblei towns there are various important celebrations on the Sicilian Register of Intangible Heritage (REIL). These include the feasts of Saints Peter and Paul, and the feast of St. Sebastian, celebrated respectively on 29<sup>th</sup> June and on 10<sup>th</sup> August in Palazzolo Acreide, consisting of traditional rites and processions accompanied by sprays of coloured paper ribbons.

Many cultural events and typical fairs liven up the province during the year:

In Syracuse and Palazzolo Acreide a season of classical plays are performed at the ancient Greek theatres in May and June. At Buccheri the main events are the *Iblei Gold exhibition* for the promotion of extra virgin olive oil in May, and the *Medfest* Mediaeval Festival a cultural, artistic and wine and food event, which takes place every year in the second half of August.

Canicattini Bagni hosts the International Jazz festival in August and September, while the town of Ferla presents “Lithos”, a celebration of music and popular stories also held in September. On the first Sunday of October in Sortino they hold the Honey Fair, an important event for promoting the main product of the local economy.

# Noto



- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. Cathedral                            | 12. Church of San Francesco                     |
| 2. Palace Landolina de Sant'Alfano      | 13. Porta Reale                                 |
| 3. Palace of the Princes of Villadorata | 14. Santa Chiara and Museo Civico (City Museum) |
| 4. Astuto Palace                        | 15. Church of Il Santissimo Crocifisso          |
| 5. Church of Montevergine               | 16. Ethnographic Museum                         |
| 6. Church of Santa Maria di Gesù        | 17. Ducezio Palace - City Hall                  |
| 7. Castelluccio Palace                  | 18. Palazzo Vescovile (Episcopal Palace)        |
| 8. Church of San Domenico               | 19. Vittorio Emmanuele Municipal Theatre        |
| 9. Church of Il Carmine                 |   |
| 10. Church of San Carlo al Corso        |   |
| 11. Basilica del Santissimo Salvatore   |   |
- i** Tourist information

A UNESCO World heritage city of great architectural and cultural beauty, Noto is the emblem of the wealth and pomp of the Baroque period in Sicily. It is situated in the south-west part of the Province of Syracuse at the foot of the Iblei Mountains and can trace its origins back to the Castelluccio civilization, who inhabited the area prior to the arrival of the Greek colonists. After it fell to Syracuse, Noto assimilated Hellenic customs and worship. Later it was ruled by the Romans, and later still by the Arabs, who turned it into a stronghold, gave it its current name and made it the capital of one of the three valleys (Val di Noto, Val Dènone and Val di Mazara) into which they had divided Sicily. After two centuries of Muslim domination in 1090, Noto surrendered to Count Roger.

Noto





Noto Antica

After the devastating earthquake of 1693 Noto was completely rebuilt further downstream with an innovative town plan with two precisely defined cities: one organized around two large squares with the seats of power and institutions, and the other, laid out in a grid pattern on the high plateau on top of the hill, for the people.

Nearby are the ruins of the ancient city and first sub-colony of Syracuse, Eloro, from which the very ancient Via Elorina takes its name, and of course Noto Antica, where visitors can explore the remains of the old city, still full of historical and architectural remnants of the period prior to the great earthquake, such as the *Villa del Tellaro*.

The Noto region, which includes the villages of Avola, Pachino, Portopalo di Capo Passero and Rosolini, covers quite a large area that runs from the coast to large inland regions whose rural charm remains intact. Characteristic features of the inland landscape include the numerous grottos and caves, deep canyons in the limestone plateaus of enormous natural and landscape value.

### Noto by the geographer al-Idrisi, 12<sup>th</sup> century

“Noto is one of the best defended fortresses and one of the most beautiful cities. It has a vast territory and it is prosperous and has many important features, such as its well organized markets and its elegant, well constructed buildings. It has constantly flowing rivers with water in abundance to turn a large number of watermills. It is eight miles away from the sea. The area it administers is vast and well regarded. Its fields are amongst the best cultivated and the most fertile. Noto, an ancient city with many vestiges of the past, stands eight miles away from the sea.”

A view of Noto  
and the Cathedral  
from the Church of  
Montevergini



## Visits

With its grid layout, the main axis of the city of Noto is in the beautiful Piazza del Municipio, in which its most representative buildings stand: the Cathedral, dedicated to San Nicolò di Mira, was constructed in the early 1700s with a splendid Baroque facade, the Ducezio Palace, the neoclassical town hall, with the famous Hall of Mirrors decorated with gold and stucco, the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Episcopal Palace and the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Landonlina Palace. The nearby Church of San Domenico represents the apogee of the Baroque style in Noto. Opposite the church is the “Vittorio Emanuele” municipal theatre, a splendid example of Liberty architecture from the late 1800s.

Cathedral, dedicated to San Nicolò di Mira



Palazzo Ducezio

In Via Nicolaci we come to the famous *Palazzo dei Principi Di Villadorata*, which today houses the Municipal Library and is noted for its fanciful friezes with corbels with human and animal figures on the six balconies of the façade. Of particular interest too is the Gallery of Contemporary Art on Corso Vittorio Emanuele, which has a collection of portraits, sculptures and medals by the late artist Giuseppe Pirrone.

Palazzo Nicolaci.  
Corbels with animal  
figures





On the left, Church of San Francesco, built in the first half of 18<sup>th</sup> century. Above, Church of Madonna del Carmine

Other religious buildings of merit include the Church of San Francesco, at the top of a monumental Baroque staircase, the Baroque Church of San Carlo al Corso, dedicated to San Carlo Borromeo, on the Corso Vittorio Emanuele, and the Church of the Santissimo Crocifisso, in the heart of High Noto. In the Valle dei Pizzoni, about 5 km away from the city, we get to the Sanctuary of San Corrado, the venerated Patron Saint of Noto.

Ten kilometres away from the city centre immersed in lush vegetation we come to Noto Antica, a city with a long illustrious past, as can be seen in the archaeological park: the Sicilian necropolis (730-650 BC), the Grotto of the Carciofo, catacombs with the typical seven-branched Jewish candelabrum, the Byzantine catacombs known as the Grotta delle Cento Bocche (Cave of a Hundred Mouths), and remains of the city walls, of the megalithic walls and of the Royal Castle,

the Porta della Montagna, part of the structure of the Greek Gymnasium (3<sup>rd</sup> century BC), some remains of fountains and churches of mediaeval, renaissance and baroque origin, and finally the l'Eremo di Santa Maria della Provvidenza dating from 1723, from which there is a fantastic view of the surrounding valleys.

A few kilometres from the coast, where the ancient Greek city of Eloro once stood, we come to the *Villa del Tellaro*, a wealthy suburban mansion, built towards the end of the Roman Empire and discovered by chance about thirty years ago under a farm building. This luxurious mansion (with an area of six thousand square metres) from the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD must have belonged to a rich landed family, judging by the fact that it was paved with extraordinary mosaics in a highly refined style, some of the most significant from that era.

Ruins of the tonnara, in Portopalo





Vendicari Nature Reserve



Moving on to the southern end of the Province of Syracuse, other important sites worth visiting include the Vendicari Nature Reserve, the most important wetland on the south-east coast of Sicily, which is well-known for its wide variety of plant life and for the marshes that serve as a resting-place for migrating birds. You should also pay a visit to the village of *Porto Palo di Capo Passero*, at the extreme tip of Sicily about 50 km below the 37<sup>th</sup> Parallel North (which also passes through Tunisia), and the picturesque fishing town of *Marzamemi*. Here you can admire the ruins of the *Tonnara*, where the bluefin tuna was once processed, an ancient tradition of Arabic origin which has now been abandoned but was once the main source of income for the local economy.

“The dreadful earthquake of the year 1693 was without doubt the greatest and the most damaging of all the many earthquakes that have struck Sicily, and will always remain the most deadly, its painful memory engraved in the annals of the island, both for its duration, and for the ruin it brought to all parts. On Friday 9<sup>th</sup> January at half past four at night the whole of Sicily shook, battered by the terrible earthquake. It was most powerful in the Val di Noto and the Val Demone: a little milder in the Val di Mazara [...]. But on Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> of the same month about 9 o'clock in the evening, the whole of Sicily was struck by another more violent tremor, causing much greater strife and damage than any that took place in the past.”

A. Mongitore, *Istoria cronologica de' terremoti di Sicilia* (1743)

## Surroundings

At only 9 kilometres from Noto, along the old Greek road that crosses the island –the Via Elorina– we come to the town of **Avola**. The antiquity of this place is clear from the presence of a dolmen, a megalithic construction that probably dates from the Neolithic period, located in the Falaride neighbourhood (Borgellusa) near the entrance to the town. Lots of small loculi have been dug out of the rock on top of the dolmen, which may have been used as burial chambers for children.

The town has very interesting cultural and natural heritage for visitors to explore. After the tremendous earthquake of 1693, the town was reconstructed further downhill with an unusual hexagonal layout. Its architectural monuments, built out of white limestone that is quarried nearby, are in late-Baroque and above all Liberty style. The old town of Avola boasts several

18<sup>th</sup>-century churches and civil buildings such as the Palazzo Di Citta', the Garibaldi theatre, a beautiful neoclassical style building, the Palazzo Modica, old 18<sup>th</sup>-century constructions in the Santa Venera district, the Old Market on the Via San Francesco D'Assisi and the Clock Tower erected in 1865 in the Piazza Umberto I.

Just outside the old town is the "Palmento e Frantoio Midolo" Museum, a multimedia exhibition with great ethno-anthropological value that traces the different stages in the processing of grapes and olive oil. This is done in the original building and using the original implements.

In the Marina d'Avola we find the old Tonnara, an example of industrial architecture from the 1930s that was a major hub for the seaborne tuna trade. Constructed around a central loggia, the plant included warehouses and sheds for tuna processing, citrus fruit distilleries and a mill for processing wheat.

Another fascinating historical site is **Avola Antica**, the old town destroyed by the earthquake. Built on top of Mount Aquilone, there are still archaeological

Avola Antica

Cava Grande  
Nature Reserve,  
Avola Antica

remains of both the mediaeval town and a much earlier prehistoric settlement. There are many tombs carved into the rock that were part of the necropolis of the Cassibile, a culture who inhabited the area between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries BC.

Another impressive spectacle at Avola Antica is the Cava Grande nature reserve, one of the largest canyons in Europe. The Cave is divided into three main areas and offers incredible natural sites with grottoes, springs and lush vegetation. Inside this impressive cleavage in the plateau, the river Cassibile has gradually eroded the rock, forming the so-called "marmitte dei giganti" (giants' pots), small, deep emerald lakes reached along paths immersed in typical Mediterranean greenery.

15 kilometres south of Noto lies **Rosolini**, a feudal burgh which developed in a hilly area, surrounded by fields planted above all with citrus, almond, olive and carob trees. The name of the town seems to derive from the Arabic "Rus Salib'ni" a literal translation of

“Grotto of the Cross” (the Arabs colonized the entire area for centuries), in reference to the Byzantine basilica dug out of the rock and which was incorporated into the Castle of the Platamone–Moncada. Little remains of the original settlement because the earthquake of 1693 destroyed the entire feudal village. Of particular architectural importance is the Castello dei Platamone, constructed in 1668, which houses an early Christian basilica from the 5<sup>th</sup> century, and the Mother Church built during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Interesting natural and archaeological sites include: La Cava Grande di Rosolini, Cava d’Ispica and Cava Paradiso, an oasis of flora and fauna of great value which has hitherto been little promoted and through which the River Tellesimo flows. The “Cava Grande di Rosolini” is a small quarry sloping downwards towards the valley, full of karstic caves. The Cava Grande is of archaeological and landscape interest for the section known as Cava Lazzaro, where numerous interesting

Mother Church of San Giuseppe, in Rosolini



Modica

findings have been made in the Bronze Age necropolis of the same name (1800-1400 BC) in which the main attractions are the Orsi Tombs (or Tombs of the Prince), for the rural village of Cozzo Cisterna, for the Canzicina section, and for the Croce Santa section, where they uncovered a primitive hermitage that sheltered hermits and religious communities in the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, and an early Christian necropolis that proves that there were settlements in this area until the Byzantine era. The site conserves traces of four churches carved out of the rock, built in the centuries following the devastation caused by various earthquakes, and in which a series of Byzantine frescoes can still be seen. In the Grotticelli district, in the middle section of the Cava d’Ispica within the territory belonging to Rosolini, they discovered a fascinating prehistoric complex called “Sacello di Sant’Alessandra” and the Grotte della Capraria, cave houses with primitive rooms on five floors.

Situated 38 kilometres away from Noto, **Modica** is without doubt one of the most interesting towns in southern Sicily. Situated in the Province of Ragusa in the southern part of the Iblei Mountains and divided into two original areas: *Modica Alta*, whose buildings seem to scale the rocks of the mountainside and *Modica Bassa*, down in the valley, crossed today by the Corso Umberto, the town’s main street and historic centre.

Art, history, culture, cuisine and traditions are the undoubted stars of the city, reconstructed soon after the earthquake of 1693 that severely devastated the towns in the Noto Valley. “City of a hundred churches and a



Modica Alta

hundred bells”, masterpiece of late Baroque art, Modica has been declared a World Heritage site by UNESCO. The Duomo di San Giorgio (St George’s Cathedral) with its imposing façade and 250-step staircase is the symbol of the city and of Sicilian Baroque for its imposing scenic architecture.

Apart from an impressive array of historic monuments, the city also hosts various interesting museums which illustrate its history and traditions. Of these the Museo Campailla is particularly worth mentioning. It is named after the famous philosopher and scientist from Modica who invented the “botti” (barrels) for curing syphilis, and is registered on the Register of Heritage of Local Interest (REIL).

St. George’s Cathedral,  
ModicaSt. George’s  
cathedral

## Gastronomy and handicrafts

This region boasts a long lavish tradition in food and wine and in products of the highest quality. The artistic and natural heritage in Noto enjoys synergies with the flourishing agricultural sector. In the neighbouring countryside there are three wine appellations (Eloro, Rosso di Noto and Moscato di Noto) and a PDO for the olive oil (Iblei Mountains). There is an infinite variety of cakes based on almonds and on ricotta, and homemade ice-cream and slush. **Avola**, which also has a strong farming sector, has always been associated with world famous agricultural products such as “Pizzuta d’Avola”, its exquisite heirloom variety of almonds, the highly prized “Femminello Siracusano” lemons and the “Nero d’Avola” grape variety. In **Rosolini** the symbol of the town is still the carob, which is used in the making of numerous sweets, liqueurs and in “Vino Cotto” (dense syrup made from carob extract, which is perfect for confectionery and useful for soothing inflamed throats). The food product par excellence in **Modica** is chocolate, an ancient tradition that the town has managed to preserve and promote. Produced by artisanal means, the cocoa seeds are still processed today according to the original Aztec recipes.

The typical crafts centre around the art of embroidery, as well as that of prestigious carpentry workshops and decorators of antique furniture, blacksmiths that make wrought iron products, tin workers and so-called “cannizzari” or reed-basket weavers. The stone carvers and sculptors (“gli scalpellini”) are also famous for working the same stone with which all the major monuments, palaces and churches of these towns are built.

## Feasts

In this area there are many interesting rituals and performances associated with Holy Week. Of particular note are the *Misteri* (Mystery Plays) performed on Good Friday in Rosolini, where they sing traditional songs in Sicilian dialect known as *lamienti*, and the procession of the “Santa Spina” (Holy Thorn) in Noto and Avola. The festivities come to an end on Easter Sunday with various commemorations (in Avola and Capopassero) of “La Pace” in which the statue of the Risen Christ meets that of the Virgin Mary. In Modica, on Easter Sunday, in a feast of Spanish origin dating from the 1600s the statue of the Madonna Vasa Vasa is carried in procession through the main streets of the town.

Other religious festivities worth remembering include: In Noto, the Feast of San Corrado, the city’s patron saint, which takes place on the last Sunday of August and involves a pilgrimage up to a small rural chapel with characteristic processional candles that illustrate the life and works of the Saint. In Avola, in the second Sunday in May they hold the Feast of San Sebastiano, with the traditional “Corsa dei Nudi”, pilgrimage in which the faithful run a barefoot race to the altar of the Saint. In Rosolini, they celebrate St Joseph’s Day (19<sup>th</sup> March) with a “Cavalcata”, a long processional cavalcade of floats decorated with plant motifs and bearing votive offerings to the Saint. In Modica, in



Festivity of Noto infiorata



Noto infiorata

the last week of April, they celebrate the feast of San Giorgio, the town’s Patron Saint in an increasingly festive atmosphere.

Of the many cultural and food and wine-related events in the area, we would like to highlight l’Infiorata di Noto: the majestic Via Nicolaci of the baroque city is the star of the Infiorata, a great festival held every year on the third Sunday of May, an occasion on which floral artists mark the arrival of spring by covering the entire street with paintings made of flower petals. **Carnival** in Avola: the festivities begin on Mardi Gras with a line of allegorical floats and the Carnival King processing through the town’s streets and end on the following Tuesday night with the burning of the Carnival King in the centre of the main square, after an evening of music and shows. **Sagra del mosto**: traditional October event in which visitors can try a vast range of typical local products, a cultural itinerary about the cultivation of the vine and the different stages in the production of wine. **Chocobarocco** in Modica: annual event devoted entirely to Modica chocolate.

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ArcheoClub di Palma di Montechiaro (176, 177)  
AudreyH (Annalisa Henderson) (247 –above–, 256 –below–)  
Benito Roveran (119 –above–, 124, 125)  
Biblioteca Nacional de España (8, 9 –above–, 231)  
Carmen Pozuelo (10, 14 –above–, 15, 16 –above–, 28 –below–, 30, 31 –above–, 32 –below–, 33 –left–, 36 –below–, 37, 38 –below–, 41 –above–, 45, 46, 50 –above–, 52, 53, 54, 70, 75, 79, 104, 107 –below–, 152, 156 –below–, 157 –above–, 188, 189, 190, 213 –right–, 218 –right–, 277, 229 –below–, 233 –above–, 236 –below–, 246, 247 –below–)  
Chris Collins (165, 167)  
Chris Read (118 –below–, 120, 121, 122 –below–, 123 –above–)  
Clara Lo Franco (39 –below–)  
Costagar51 (196, 222, 223)  
Dan Bock (137, 138 –above–)  
Dennis Jarvis (47, 205, 213 –left–, 216 –below–)  
Enrico Cartia (200 –below–)  
Erwin Berbruggen (58)  
Fortunato De Pasquale (219, 220, 221)  
Francesco Piasentin (149–left–, 160, 244, 250, 252, 253)  
Frederique Voisin-Demery (6, 60, 69, 74 –below–, 80, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 92, 93, 95, 96, 103 –below–, 107 –above right–, 109 –below–, 113 –above–, 184, 185 –above–, 187, 245, 248, 249, 255, 256 –above–)  
Fundación Pública Andaluza El legado andalusí (7, 9 –below–, 14 –below–, 28 –above–, 29, 34, 39 –left–, 158, 230, 233 –below–)  
Gianfranco Crimi (43)  
Giuseppe Caruso (65)  
Giusy Vultaggio (98)

Gnuckx (207 –below–)  
Hans Suter (82 –above–)  
Jean-Pierre Dalbéra (33 –below–, 38 –above–, 39 –above–, 40 –below–)  
Jos Dielis (106 –above–, 108)  
Juan Antonio Segal (55, 216 –above–, 232 –above–, 235 –below–)  
Lahiri Cappello (61, 117 –below–, 132 –above–, 138 –below–, 183)  
Leandro Neumann Ciuffo (74 –above–, 76, 77, 85, 99, 102 –below–, 151, 153, 155, 186 –above–, 191, 198, 206 –above–, 211, 228 –above–, 243)  
Luigi Salemi (169, 170, 174, 175, 179)  
Marcuz85 (197)  
Massimo Macagno (144, 145, 161, 162, 163)  
Mat Dome (238, 239)  
Matteo Campanella (62)  
Matthias Sprissler (254)  
Miguel Virkkunen Carvalho (12, 13 –below–)  
Municipality of Calatafimi (71, 72)  
My Past (49 –above–)  
Nosha (82 –below–)  
Pietro Ippoliti (17 –below–, 258, 259)  
Realloc (Dennis) (78)  
Roberto Viel (109 –above–)  
Rocco Scuzzarella (172)  
Rosa Pozuelo (11, 148, 154)  
Rosaria Cascio (132 –below right, 133, 134, 135, 136, 142, 143)  
Sarah Murray (51 –above–, 67, 68, 117 –above–, 118 –above–, 119 –below–, 122 –above–, 156 –middle–, 159, 182, 212)  
Shutterstock (181, 185 –below–, 186 –below–)  
Superdealer 100 (94, 102 –above–, 103 –above–)  
Tommaso Evola (131)  
Verity Cridland (123 –below–, 126, 127, 156 –above–)  
Vito Vaccaro (110, 111, 112, 113 –below–, 114 –above–, 115)  
Wilfried Mehlman (5, 13 –above–, 27 –above–, 31 –below–, 32 –above–, 33 –above–, 36 –above–, 40 –above–, 41 –below–, 42, 73, 81, 101, 105, 106 –below–, 107 –above left–, 147, 149 –right–, 150, 157 –below–, 195, 200 –above–, 201, 202, 203, 204, 210, 214, 215, 217 –left–, 218, 228 –below–, 229 –below–, 232 –below, 234, 235 –above–, 236 –above–)  
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