

# TERRADICOLORI

ART NATURE AND CULTURE  
IN THE PROVINCE OF CATANIA



PROVINCIA REGIONALE  
DI CATANIA



## CATANIA AND ITS PROVINCE

This guide is aimed at providing visitors with some quick, brief information regarding the Province of Catania. It makes no claims to be comprehensive, much more space would be necessary, it is simply an initial introduction to a very varied area and its main features. Normally, visitors who arrive here have already heard of Mount Etna and are fascinated by the idea of the highest active volcano in Europe. They may also have also heard something about the beauty of the coastline and the larger cities, like Catania. However, few have a complete idea of what a visit to the Province can offer. Its 3,552 square kilometres reveal totally different landscapes ranging from the sea to the mountain, from sun-baked plains to narrow, shady river gorges.

**The Coast:** from the southern edge on the border with the Province of Syracuse to the Port of Catania, the coastline consists of a 15 km-long beach of fine, golden sand called the Playa, which in summer is entirely given over to lidos (except for the stretch around the mouth of the River Simeto which is a Nature Reserve). Moving northwards from the Port of Catania to Pozzillo (a quarter of Acireale) the coastline is formed of dark, jagged lava rocks which create picturesque bays and continue down for tens of metres below sea level. Below Acireale, the cliff is more than 100 metres high and forms the inaccessible, six kilometre-long 'Timpa' with its rich vegetation (a Nature Reserve since 1999). Finally from Pozzillo to the mouth of the River Alcantara which marks the boundary with the Province of Messina, the coastline is once again formed by a 20 kilometre-long beach part pebbles and part sand of volcanic origin. The River Fiumefreddo Nature Reserve provides a wonderful example of unspoilt nature along this stretch of the coast.

**Etna:** it is difficult for people travelling even tens of kilometres away in the Sicilian interior to tear their eyes away from the profile of the mountain. At 3,323 metres it is without doubt the most famous attraction in the Province. Now a National Park, with protected flora and fauna, it is a tourist destination that offers visitors unique, spectacular views. On its intensely cultivated and inhabited lower slopes the vegetation is luxuriant, higher up the scenery changes to holm oak, pine, chestnut and poplar woods and also beeches and birches that are rarely found at this latitude and finally, on the highest slopes, the vegetation-less desert zones of volcanic sand that in winter are almost always covered by a thick blanket of snow, with the sensational, enormous, still-active craters.

**The other Mountains and River Valleys:** to complete the mountainous landscape of the Province; to the north of Etna lie the Nebrodi mountains thickly covered in vegetation while to the south there are the Erei

mountains, not very high and for the most part uncultivated. Still further south are the Iblei mountains of volcanic origin, furrowed by streams with large wooded areas. The two main rivers in the Province rise in the Nebrodi mountains: the Alcantara which flows to the north of Etna and the Simeto which flows to the south. The frequent eruptions of Etna have many times forced these rivers to change course, creating picturesque gorges.

**The Plain:** the 'Piana' covers about 430 square kilometres to the south of Catania. Of alluvial origin it is crossed by the River Simeto and some of its tributaries. It is intensely cultivated, the main crops being citrus fruits and wheat.

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CATANIA





## HISTORY

According to Tucidide, Catania was founded by the Calcidians of Naxos around 729 B.C.. This information is confirmed by excavations carried out by the staff of the Catania Cultural Heritage Department around Ursino Castle in an area which, in Greek times, was near the coast. Greek architectural structures and materials have been brought to light there dating from the end of the 8 C and the beginning of the 7 C B.C.. Moreover, at the site of the ancient acropolis in Piazza Dante, archaeologists have found materials that confirm the arrival of the Greeks in Catania during the 8 C B.C.. In 476 B.C. Katane, as it was then called, was conquered by the tyrant of Syracuse, Gerone who changed its name to Aitna, drove out the Calcidian inhabitants and repopulated it with a large number of people from Syracuse and Peloponnesians. When Gerone fell the Calcidians regained possession of the city and it became Katane once more.

From the beginning of the 5 C B.C. Catania was again dominated by Syracuse after being conquered by Dionysius I. This event is confirmed by small votive statues of Kore carrying a torch which were found in Piazza San Francesco, this being the cult favoured by Gerone, priest of Demeter. The Romans arrived and conquered Catania in 263 B.C. which marked the beginning of a very long, favourable period for the city lasting seven centuries. In 21 B.C. Augustus raised it to the rank of Roman colony which brought about an increase in population but, above all, a considerable extension of its territory with the acquisition of the fertile plain to the south of the River Simeto. The first great architectural works that transformed Catania into a Roman colony date from the Augustan period; an area was found for the forum and at the same time the street layout was reorganised. Over the course of the centuries that saw the splendour of the Roman Empire, Catania acquired a circus which was still visible until the end of the 16 C, a theatre and an Odeon, an amphitheatre and numerous Roman Baths. When the Roman Empire fell, Catania was damaged by barbarian invasions, followed by periods when the principal monuments were totally abandoned, which culminated in the concession granted by Theodoric, Lord of Sicily between 491 and 526, to dismantle the amphitheatre and use the lava stone blocks for private buildings. When Belisarius conquered Catania in 535 during the Greek-Gothic war, it became part of the Byzantine Empire for three centuries. However, although the Arabs conquered Sicily in 827 there are practically no traces left of their presence in Catania.

With the arrival of the Normans, the building of the Cathedral began, creating a heart to the city around which the main square was shaped. One of the most devastating of all the seismic events to hit Catania occurred in 1169, causing serious damage to the whole urban area. Between 1239 and 1250 Frederick II commissioned the architect Riccardo da Lentini to build Ursino Castle which became the Kings' favourite residence during the Aragonese period..

Instead, the Cathedral became their burial place. During the reign of King Alphonse the Magnanimous the first University in Sicily was founded (1434). The 15 C was



*Cathedral - detail*

a golden age for Catania. In 1494 the Spanish Crown ordered the expulsion from Sicily of all Jews, who emigrated to the Ottoman Empire and to the Kingdom of Naples. In the middle of the 16 C fortifications were built which can still be seen along via Dusmet, below the Archbishop's Palace and Palazzo Biscari. The city preserved its medieval town layout until the 17 C, with houses and streets contained within the fortified walls.

In 1669 Catania was invaded by lava from Etna. A violent eruption provoked a long lava flow which after having brushed Castle Ursino spilled into the sea extending the coastline. The devastating earthquake in 1693 provoked further, serious damage not only to Catania but also to the whole area around Etna. The period following the earthquake is architecturally identified as one of 'rebuilding'. The concept of space was reinterpreted and the most important architectural personality was the architect Giovan Battista Vaccarini who managed to adapt the Baroque style to what the earthquake had left standing, often introducing Greek and Roman elements into the new buildings.

One example of this can be seen in the façade of the Cathedral where Vaccarini inserted some granite columns which were possibly found among the ruins of the Roman theatre. Another architect, Stefano Ittar worked in Catania in the mid-1700s and gave a neoclassical cast

to the city's buildings, even if the Baroque influence remains evident. The 19 C brought a considerable growth in the population, many middle class families chose via Etnea as the place to build their homes. The port was enlarged and in May, 1890 the Bellini Theatre was inaugurated. In the fields of art and literature, besides the composer Vincenzo Bellini, other famous names associated with the city are the writers Giovanni Verga and Luigi Capuana.

Widespread urban expansion took place in the 20th century which, in some cases, caused great damage to the original urban layout, one example being the building of the present-day Corso Sicilia which necessitated the demolition of the old San Berillo quarter in the heart of the old town. There are numerous Liberty style villas between Piazza Santa Maria di Gesù and Piazza Roma, in via Androne and along Corso Italia.



*Teatro Massimo - detail*



*Ursino castle*



## ART & MONUMENTS

### Castello Ursino

Ursino Castle was built for Frederick II of Swabia by Riccardo da Lentini between 1239 and 1250. At that time the site of the castle was very different from the way it appears today. Indeed it seems that its name derived from *Castrum Sinus*, or Gulf Castle, because it was originally situated on a rocky promontory overlooking the sea, joined to the city and the city walls only by a narrow strip of land. In April 1669 the most famous lava flow in the history of the city began from a low altitude eruption, just above the town of Nicolosi, and touched the western outskirts of the city and the Castle before reaching the sea. The lava surrounded the castle to the point of filling the moat and covering the ramparts and distanced it from the new coastline by some hundreds of metres. Ursino Castle was the royal residence of Sicilian sovereigns from the royal house of Aragon. Over the course of the centuries the Castle lost its defensive, military role and, after having been used as the residence of the Viceroy, part of it was used as a prison. It was only in the 1930s that large-scale restoration works began when the Commune of Catania decided to transform it into a museum.

### Palazzo Platamone

Now the Palace of Culture, Palazzo Platamone belonged to the rich, illustrious Platamone family, well-known in the field of commerce but also important figures who excelled in both the political and ecclesiastical spheres. In the 15 C the Platamone family donated the building to an order of Benedictine nuns who transformed it into a convent. The interior courtyard contains a loggia dating from the second half of the 1400s which is the only example of Late-Medieval architecture in the city to have survived the 1693 earthquake.

### Palazzo Biscari

The Paternò Castello family, Princes of Biscari, hired the most famous Baroque reconstruction architects to build their principal city residence. The most famous and cultured of its owners was Ignazio V, Prince of Biscari, an enlightened art, music and archaeology expert. He had a theatre built in the southern frontage of the Palace towards via Dusmet, as well as setting up a museum full of archaeological finds that he had collected during his research which was visited by well-known intellectuals of the time like Wolfgang Goethe.

### Palazzo dell'Università

The University of Catania has ancient origins. Founded in 1432 by the Aragonese sovereigns it was the first university in Sicily. Little is known about its original site, all that is known is that there was a building which occupied an area to the north of the Platea Magna (see Piazza Duomo). Building works began for a palace on the present site in 1684. After little more than a decade this building collapsed, probably as a result of damage caused by the 1693 earthquake, and the present building was erected around 1720.



*Benedictine Monastery - detail*

### Palazzo degli Elefanti

In 1353 the Aragonese sovereigns wanted to build a civic loggia opposite the Norman Cathedral, symbol of the great power of the Bishopric. In 1944 during a popular revolt, the building was set on fire and part of the furnishings and the archives were destroyed, a great loss for any historical reconstruction of the city. The three-storey building has a rectangular floor plan. In the main entrance there are two 18 C carriages, one of which is known as the Senate carriage, which are paraded every year on the 3rd February during the celebrations for Sant'Agata.

**Former Seminary** (Seminario dei Chierici). The Seminary was instituted by Bishop Faragone in 1572. In 1614, Secusio, Bishop of Catania, established his offices there opposite the Senate loggia. In 1687 the building was enlarged to make space for the novices but a few years later the 1693 earthquake caused great damage and a large part of the structure collapsed. It occupied a strategic position in the Platea Magna, following the course of the Norman walls and forming part of the Diocesan complex that includes the Cathedral and the Archbishop's Palace. The interior has been greatly defaced over the years due to its having been used for unsuitable purposes. However, the asymmetry of the buildings that face onto the interior courtyard reveal an originality of design that can be attributed to Alonzo di Benedetto, one of the best architects involved in its reconstruction.

### Villa Cerami

Villa Cerami is one of the most prestigious historical buildings in Catania. Built a few years after the terrible earthquake in January 1693, the villa has

18 C buildings which were reworked in the 19 C. 'The Swimmer' a work in bronze by Emilio Greco stands in the courtyard. Now the building houses the Law Faculty of the University of Catania.

### **The Fish Market** (La Pescheria)

This is a typical Mediterranean market, a blend of smells, sounds and colours that combines local culture and Sicilian tradition. It is located between Piazza Pardo and Piazza Di Benedetto and includes various examples of 16 C, 17 C and 18 C architecture. From Piazza Duomo a short stairway leads to Piazza Pardo, where there is the Fountain of the Seven Channels (Fontana dei Sette Canali) fed by the River Amenano. A covered passageway leads to the Porta dei Canali, part of the city's system of defences dating from the time of Charles V (1553), which survived the 1693 earthquake.

### **Piazza Università**

Four bronze candelabra, by the artist Domenico Maria Lazzaro, were erected in Piazza Università in 1957. They synthetically and subtly narrate four of the most important of Catania's legends: the Pii brothers, Gammazita, Colapesce and the Uzeda Paladin.

### **Piazza Duomo** – Platea Magna

Located in the same area as the present-day Piazza Duomo, though not as large, the medieval Platea Magna was so-called due to the fact that it was larger than any of the other squares that existed at the time of Count Roger (11 C). The Platea Magna was the economic, social and religious centre of Catania. Enlarged in the middle of the 16 C when some old buildings on the north side were demolished, the Platea was further enlarged on the south side at the beginning of the 17 C and inaugurated at the Feast of Sant'Agata in 1622.

### **The Elephant Fountain** (La Fontana dell'Elefante)

The fountain was assembled from pieces dating from different periods: the Roman lava stone elephant called 'liotru' by the people of the town, was a symbol of the Byzantine sorcerer Diodoro Siculo, while the

Egyptian obelisk in Sienna Granite with hieroglyphics deriving from the cult of Isis perhaps formed part of the city's Roman Circus. This eclectic mix was created by the architect Giovan Battista Vaccarini in 1736, and he gave the emblem of Catania the most central position in the city. The elephant had much earlier origins. It was mentioned in the life of San Leone, a third century Bishop of Catania, who ordered the execution of the necromancer Eliodoro. Since then, the symbol has continually appeared in the history of the city.

### **Piazza Mazzini**

The ancient Piazza San Filippo, today Piazza Mazzini, was conceived as a market and therefore featured a series of shops opening onto four arcades, very similar to other squares to be found in eastern Sicily and in Spanish colonies. Indeed, the structure of the square is partly inspired by Spanish town-planning. It is enclosed by four corner buildings with arcades supported by 32 ancient columns, possibly salvaged from Roman buildings brought to light near the Convent of Sant'Agostino.

### **Cappella Bonajuto**

The 18 C palace of the Bonajuto family, from which the road takes its name, is sited in the Civita quarter, near Piazza Cutelli. The building incorporates the small Byzantine church (trichora) of the Salvatorello, otherwise known as Cappella Bonajuto.

### **Teatro Massimo Bellini**

The Massimo 'V. Bellini' Theatre was planned and designed by Carlo Sada, an architect from Milan, and Andrea Scala and was inaugurated on 31<sup>st</sup> May, 1890 to the notes of Vincenzo Bellini's



*The Fish Market*



Norma Symphony. Its spectacular exterior architecture is repeated and amplified inside the building. From the covered entrance porch where carriages stopped, a number of rooms converge in a foyer leading to the concert hall and the first tier of boxes. Above the porch and the lobby is the splendid foyer used for dances and concerts. The stage curtain which portrays a legendary 'Victory of Catania over Libya' was painted by Giuseppe Sciuti in 1883. There are 105 musicians in the resident orchestra of the 'Bellini'; 84 members of the choir and a group of stage technicians and scenographers.

### **Porta Uzeda**

Uzeda Gate scenically closes the southern part of via Etnea and connects the former Seminary to the west with the Archbishop's Palace to the east. In 1695 Don Giuseppe Lanza, Duke of Calastra, ordered the two buildings to be linked by an arch which thus gave origin to a gate at first called Porta della Marina. The name was soon changed in honour of the Viceroy Don Francesco Paceco, Duke of Uzeda, who arrived in Catania in 1693. Bishop Mons. Salvatore Ventimiglia had the upper floors built above the arch at a later date and a splendid gable was erected on top with a central niche containing a bust of Saint Agatha to guard and protect the city, together with a marble inscription *D.O.M. Sapientiae et bonis artibus – 1780* (To God Most High, to knowledge and to his fine arts). Passing under the gate towards the sea, visitors can admire a stretch of the 16 C city wall and bastions built by Emperor Charles V to protect the city.

### **Agatha's Fountain** (La Fontana di Agata)

The fountain, dating back to 1621, is situated in via Dusmet near Porta Uzeda, set into part of the ancient city wall between two of the ancient gates respectively called the Porta dei Canali (or Charles V's Gate) and the Porta Saracena (or Small Port Gate). Local legend connects the fountain to the abduction of the body of Sant'Agata at the hands of the Byzantine general, Maniace. When he stole the relics, intending to offer them to the Emperor of Constantinople, a violent storm blew up which prevented the ships from sailing. The body of Sant'Agata was put ashore and laid in Saint Georges Chapel (la Cappella di San Giorgio) on the ruins of which the Cathedral was later built. The place where the relics rested is very near the site of the fountain.

### **Villa Bellini**

In the 18 C, in place of the present public gardens dedicated to Vincenzo Bellini, there was a Labyrinth, a private garden surrounding a small mansion belonging to Prince Ignazio Paternò Castello di Biscari. This was acquired by the town in 1854 together with other land bordering the ancient Labyrinth. Work began in 1877 to unify and harmonize the new area and the resulting elegant garden was inaugurated on 6th January, 1883. It quickly became popular with the local middle class who met there to listen to the bands that filled the long, sultry summer days with music.

### **Villa Pacini**

Large-scale drainage works of a swampy area were carried out in 1861, uniting the channels of the River Amenano so as to avoid flooding and the result was Villa Pacini. Its original name was Villetta della Marina to emphasize its links with the sea. Although it is small, it immediately became an important meeting point for the whole of the population, in particular for the middle



*Benedictine Monastery*

class. There were numerous musical events which made the small garden one of the most popular places in the city.

### **The Cathedral** (Duomo)

Built in the heart of the ancient city, the Cathedral was one of the first churches built in Sicily by the Normans between 1092 and 1094, as part of their plan to return the island to Christianity. The church dominated the city for people arriving by sea and defended the safety of the population after decades of subjection to the Moslems, lords of the Mediterranean. The building was seriously damaged in the 1118 earthquake while that of 1693 led to changes in the Romanesque structure of the Cathedral, only the form of the apse remaining intact. Saint Agatha's Chapel (Cappella di Sant'Agata), where relics of the Saint and part of her Treasure are preserved, is of great interest. Giovan Battista Vaccarini designed the three orders of the façade which dominates the square, providing a backdrop to a hypothetical stage which, if one follows via Garibaldi (the ancient via San Filippo and then Ferdinandea) extends as far as the Garibaldi Gate (Porta Garibaldi).

### **Basilica della Collegiata Santa Maria dell'Elemosina**

The origins of the Basilica are very old. The medieval building was almost completely destroyed by the earthquake in January, 1693. The 1818 earthquake also caused some damage but decidedly less serious than the 17 C one. The paintings and frescoes preserved in the Basilica form a small but important collection by artists working in Sicily between 1700 and 1800.

### **Church of San Biagio in Sant'Agata la Fornace**

The present holy building, commonly called the Church of Saint Agatha in the Furnace because it was erected on the site where Saint Agatha was tortured with burning coals, was built after the 1693 earthquake. The single nave interior with barrel vaults boasts elegant plaster decorations on the walls and chapel arches. The vault is decorated with an 18 C fresco representing the façade of a church with columns, festoons and female figures. To the right is the Chapel of Saint Agatha where the remains of the furnace on which the Martyr was forced to roll are conserved in the altar. A solemn procession of Bishops and members of the local authorities parades from the church to the Cathedral every 3rd February to offer a candle to Saint Agatha, the patron saint of the city.

### **Church of Sant'Agata al Carcere**

The church is located in a small square, Piazza del Santo Carcere, and was built in the 1700s inside one of the bastions that formed the 16 C city walls, also incorporating part of the ancient Roman praetorium. It features a superimposition of architectural and decorative elements from different epochs and it is possible to find traces of Roman, Swabian, 16 C and Baroque structures. The present-day church was built after the 1693 earthquake, close to one of the sloping bastions of the city wall which had been built to protect the city in 1556. This in turn had incorporated the Roman building which contained the prison where Saint Agatha was held during her trial, where she was taken after her breasts had been cut off (to be later healed by Saint Peter) and where, finally, she died on 5th February, 251 AD. The 1693 earthquake destroyed all of the building except for the Roman prison which was protected by the massive defensive wall. The Church of the Holy Prison was built on the site of the former Norman chapel.

### **Church of Sant'Agata La Vetere**

In 264, thirteen years after the death of Saint Agatha, Bishop Saint Everio, the fourth in the diocese, erected a small shrine in the place where the virgin martyr's breasts were cut off. Almost totally destroyed by the 1693 earthquake, except for the underground crypt, the church was rebuilt in 1722.

### **Benedictine Monastery (Monastero dei Benedettini)**

The Benedictine monks moved to Catania in the 16 C from their previous residence on Etna, and obtained permission to build a new monastery on two sites within the city walls, called at the time 'della Cipriana' and 'del Parco'. In 1558, building works began under the Viceroy of Sicily, Juan de la Cerda, Duke of Medinaceli and in 1578 the monks occupied the monastery before it was fully complete. The complex was seriously damaged by the devastating eruption of Etna in 1669, while on 11th January, 1693, the earthquake that almost entirely destroyed the city of Catania caused it to collapse. Reconstruction works began in 1702. The task was entrusted to Antonino Amato from Messina who created an even more monumental structure than the previous one. Over the following twenty years two architects, Francesco Battaglia and Giovan Battista Vaccarini, expanded and rebuilt the structure. Around 1840, an engineer, Mario Musumeci, was given the task of completing the cloisters, the last important architectural works to be carried out before the whole complex was confiscated by the state in 1866. Laws regarding the suppression of religious corporations were applied to

the Monastery of San Nicolò l'Arena and the monks were forced to leave. In the years that followed it was used for a variety of purposes and was divided into different parts. After being damaged by bombs during WW2 the whole complex, excluding the Church of San Nicolò which was returned to the Benedictines, was ceded to the University of Catania which immediately began vast restoration and development works under the guidance of Giancarlo De Carlo, professor and architect. As a result of this project the ancient monastic complex was restructured and became the site of the Humanities and Foreign Language and Literature Faculties.

### **Via Crociferi**

The 'street of the cross-bearers' was built in the 18 C. The road begins in Piazza San Francesco d'Assisi, passing under the arch of San Benedetto. Lined with churches and monasteries, with few private houses, the road is a magnificent example of Baroque architecture. In only 200 metres there are four churches. The first is the church of San Benedetto connected to the Benedictine Nuns' Convent by the arch over the beginning of the street which also connects the Little Abbey to the Great Abbey. Access is gained by way of a staircase and the entrance is surrounded by wrought iron railings. Further along the street is the church of San Francesco Borgia, access to which is by way of two great staircases. Next comes the Jesuit College, which used to house the Art Institute, with a beautiful interior cloister whose arches are supported by columns and arcades. The church of San Giuliano is located opposite the College and is considered by many to be one of the best examples of Baroque architecture in Catania. Attributed to the architect, Giovan Battista Vaccarini, the building



*Via Crociferi*

has a convex façade with clean, elegant lines. Continuing on the other side of via Antonino di San Giuliano, visitors come to the Convento dei Crociferi and the church of San Camillo. Villa Cerami, which houses the Law Faculty of the University of Catania is situated at the end of the street.



## ARCHAEOLOGY

### Roman Amphitheatre

Catania's Roman Amphitheatre, a small section of which can be seen in Piazza Stesicoro, was built on the northern borders of the ancient city close to the Montevegine hill which, at the time, constituted the town centre. Now the area forms part of the old town centre but in the past was the site of an ancient necropolis. The amphitheatre was built in the 2 C, although the precise date is uncertain. However, the type of architecture argues in favour of the period between the Emperors Hadrian and Antonino Pio. It was touched by lava in 252-253 but not destroyed. In the 5 C, Theodoric, King of the Ostrogoths, used it as a quarry for building materials and later, in the 11 C, Roger II of Sicily extracted further materials for the construction of the Cathedral of Sant'Agata. Legend narrates that in the 13 C the entrances (vomitoria) were used by the Angevins to gain access to the city during the so-called Vespri Wars. The entrances were walled up at some time during the following century and the ruins were incorporated into the Aragonese fortification system (1302). The building was elliptical and the arena measured 70 metres by about 50 metres. The external diameters were 125 x 105 metres while the external circumference measured 309 metres and the arena 192 metres. It has been calculated that it had seating space for 15,000 and almost double that figure when wooden platforms were erected for standing spectators. The cavea had 14 steps and was built of marble covered lava stone with thirty-two seating levels. When the arena was filled with water from the ancient aqueduct, Naumachia (staged naval battles) also took place with ships and combatants. The amphitheatre in Catania is structurally the most complex of the Sicilian amphitheatres and is also the largest in Sicily.

### Terme della Rotonda

The Terme della Rotonda are Roman Baths not far from the Odeon in the Roman archeological area in the city centre. They are the remains of the ancient 2 C and 3 C baths. They were circular and covered by a dome which rested on thick walls. Eight marble basins were built into the walls. The water channels used to fill the baths or to run off the water can still be seen, as can a calidarium and a frigidarium. In the 6 C the Byzantines built a church on the site of the baths called Santa Maria della Rotonda, which continued in use until WW2. It was one of the few buildings not to be destroyed by the catastrophic earthquake which razed Catania in 1693.

### Teatro Antico

The Roman theatre, possibly one of the most important Roman monuments in the city and probably built on top of an earlier Greek theatre, was built up against the southern slopes of Montevegine, on top of which stood the Acropolis of the ancient city.



*The Roman theatre*

The theatre occupies a large area between via Teatro Greco to the north, via Vittorio Emanuele to the south, Piazza San Francesco to the east and via Tineo to the west. The area also included a smaller theatre, the Odeon, used for auditions and rehearsals for the shows taking place in the main theatre. Building was carried out in various phases. The hypothesis that the Greek phase took place around 1930 B.C., based on the finding of a wall built of limestone blocks engraved with the letters KAT, has been confirmed by the most recent findings that have come to light. Experts are also certain about the Julio-Claudian (1 C A.D.) and the Severian (3 C A.D.) phases, when the cavea was enlarged and a new wall (pulpitum) was built to widen the stage. In 1770 the Prince of Biscari discovered an epitaph, placed in the theatre in 330 AD by Facundus Porphirius Mynatidius, Consul of the Province of Sicily, which confirmed that restoration works took place in the 4 C A.D.. After that date, earthquakes and barbarian invasions brought about the gradual decay of the building until it was totally abandoned in the 7 C A.D.. The object of numerous archaeological surveys begun in the 1700s by the Prince of Biscari and still in course today, the theatre has been considerably modified over the course of the years by the development of Catania and the natural events that have affected its evolution.

### Odeon

The Odeon is located next to the Teatro Antico, at the crossroads between the modern via Teatro Greco and via Rotonda. Used for concerts and rehearsals in ancient times, it was then covered over by houses and only came to light again when the houses began to be demolished in the 1930s. The Odeon had an open, south-east facing

cavea with seating and dividing stairways covered with lava stone slabs. The floor of the orchestra was paved in coloured marbles and the walls, as in the Theatre, were built of a strong internal core of quick-setting cement mixed with stone (opus coementicium) covered with regular blocks of lava stone separated by rows of bricks. The cavea was supported by seventeen trapezoidal rooms with vaulted ceilings which were open only on the exterior side (possibly workshops or shops, then used in more modern times as houses). Only the central room opened into the cavea to provide access to spectators. The whole of the Odeon is on view and is accessible via the Theatre. Column drums, capital fragments and other architectural elements discovered in the area of the two monuments can be seen.

### **Terme Achilliane**

The precise date of the foundation of these Roman Baths is still subject to discussion but it is thought possible that they already existed in the 4 C, during the Constantine era. This hypothesis is made on the basis of the fact that a group of capitals dating from that period were reused inside the Cathedral. The Prince of Biscari was the first person to uncover the remains that had been buried by the earthquakes of 4th February, 1169 and 11th January, 1693. In 1856, during works on the tunnel under the Seminary (where the present day Fish Market is situated) remains were found, possibly coming from a caldarium, given that there were traces of an under-floor hypocaust system. The structure must have extended as far as via Garibaldi. The Baths were reopened to the public when repaving works to the Cathedral square were completed in 2006.

### **Le Terme dell'Indirizzo**

The remains of these 2 C Roman Baths are to be found in the 18 C part of the city. The building contained a caldarium and a frigidarium besides the furnaces for heating water and air and the channels for supplying and running off water. The foundations of other rooms have also been found.



*The Roman theatre*



## EVENTS & FESTIVITIES

### Sant'Agata

Although the festivities in honour of Sant'Agata take up a good part of the month of January, the most important days are the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> February. The whole city comes to a standstill and people fill the streets all day and all night, enlivening one of the most important religious festivals in the world in which religion and folklore are indissolubly interwoven. The religious festival begins on 3<sup>rd</sup> February when a candle is offered to the saint. A procession leaves from the church of Sant'Agata alla Fornace in Piazza Stesicoro, which was built on the ancient furnace where the saint was martyred and arrives at the Cathedral in Piazza Duomo. The procession is led by the eleven 'candelore' or 'cannolori', tall wooden columns, richly carved and decorated, that contain candles, and which represent the city's arts and crafts corporations. Given their great weight, the 'candelore' are carried on the shoulders of anything from 4 to 12 bearers, who proceed with a characteristic gait called 'a 'nacata'. Next in the procession come all the civil and religious authorities of the city. The Senate Carriage leaves from the Town Hall (Palazzo degli Elefanti). In effect, there are two 18<sup>th</sup> century carriages which belonged to the old city Senate and which transport the Mayor and other members of the Town Council to the church of San Biagio carrying the keys of the city to the religious authorities. To conclude the festivities of the first day, a concert of songs dedicated to the Saint takes place in the evening (in dialect 'a sira 'o tri') in a crowded Piazza Duomo, accompanied by an unparalleled spectacular fireworks display in which the fireworks follow the rhythm of the music.

On the 4<sup>th</sup>, the festivities begin with a religious service, a dawn mass (la messa dell'aurora) in the Cathedral in Piazza Duomo. Before the service the reliquary bust which represents Sant'Agata is brought out of the small room where it is kept for the rest of the year. Special keys kept by three different people are used to open the heavy gate of the room. This is the moment when the inhabitants meet the 'Santuzza' again after one year. The cries of the devout as they greet her are moving and irrepresible, calling all those present to venerate

her while waving white handkerchiefs. The precious bust containing the relics of Sant'Agata is placed on the 'fercolo', a heavy carriage, and taken to the main altar at which point the mass begins. At the end of the service a silver casket, which also contains relics of the saint, is added to the 'fercolo' and the carriage then begins the 'external circuit' of the city, a long procession which continues until dawn on the 5<sup>th</sup> passing the places connected with the 'Santuzza' and her martyrdom. The most spectacular moment of the second day is certainly the 'a cchianata de' Cappuccini', the moment when the devotees pull the carriage at the run to the church of San Domenico at the top of the Capuchin hill. Another important moment is the 'a calata da marina', the ancient descent towards the sea which, up until the end of the 19 C, arrived as far as the arches that now divide the city from the port. This is the symbolic place where the relics of the saint left the town on their way to Constantinople. The circuit of the 4<sup>th</sup> finishes at dawn when another spectacular fireworks display greets the Saint on her arrival back at the Cathedral. In the morning on the 5<sup>th</sup>, the Archbishop celebrates the pontifical mass attended by the city authorities. The internal circuit begins at about 5 p.m. When the relics come out of the Cathedral the bells ring and fireworks explode. The circuit of the city, accompanied by an enormous crowd, finishes the following morning to the almost desperate cries of the devotees who accompany the reliquary right up to the end.



*Feast of St. Agatha*

# PARKS AND RESERVES





## THE SIMETO OASIS

The Simeto Oasis lies on the border between the provinces of Catania and Syracuse. It was set up in 1984 (at the same time as the Fiumefreddo Nature Reserve) to curb building in the area, provide wintering for migratory birds and preserve the original halophilic (salt water) and Mediterranean flora. It is managed by the Province of Catania Regional Authority. The reserve includes the final stretch of the River Simeto which was straightened and embanked between the 1950s and 60s. These works separated a wide bend in the river, just before its mouth, from the new course. However, the bend is fed by springs and still survives. About one kilometre from its mouth the Jungetto canal, an old drainage canal which currently drains waste from the Catania purification plant, and the Buttaceto stream converge. Their waters normally feed the old bend only when they flood. Flooding from the Buttaceto stream does not alter to any great degree the salinity of the area at the mouth of the old Simeto bend, in that the addition of freshwater only lasts a short time. However, the quality, quantity and duration of the artificial waters of the Jungetto are changing the present hydro-biological balance. Between the old branch of the Simeto and the Buttaceto there is a vast cane thicket which provides shelter for thousands of birds. To the north of the old bend there are some brackish ponds behind the dunes, commonly called 'salatelle', where the delicate ecological balance is being threatened, and in part has already been changed, by flooding from the Jungetto canal. To the south of the river mouth there is a large brackish pond called Lake Gornalunga, nowadays fed by the Benante Canal, which used to be the mouth of the River Gornalunga which, instead, now flows into the Simeto. This pond hosts a considerable number of birds in all seasons, with marsh samphire growing over a vast area around the banks. During winter, numerous



*Convulacea*

seasonal marshes form in various parts of the reserve and marsh samphire grows extensively also in these areas and around brackish swamps. The last remains of the coastal sandy dunes add to the natural interest of the reserve. This is a very particular environment due to the presence of strips, parallel to the shore, characterised by species that have adapted to the particular, severe environmental conditions. Nowadays, the Simeto Mouth is an ideal wetland area for permanent birdlife but also for migratory species travelling between northern and southern Europe. A long footpath follows the river. In the marshes behind the dunes visitors should approach with care so as not to disturb the birds (marsh harriers, mallards, woodcocks, black terns, a few herons, stilt plovers and kingfishers, to mention only a few) or the fauna. In the water there are grey mullet and freshwater fish. There is a thick vegetation of tamarisks, rushes, willows, sea lavender and marsh samphire. Mastic plants, sea lilies and cornflowers grow along the banks and foxes and weasels can be seen.



*Moorhen*

# HINTERLAND





# CAMPOROTONDO



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania  
Car: S.S. 121 direction Paternò  
Bus: AST



## HISTORY

Camporotondo (4,500 inhabitants) is situated in a hilly area at an altitude of 450 m.s.l. Its position, on the eastern Ionian slopes at the foot of Mount Etna, very near the alluvial plain of Catania and the River Simeto makes it a very fertile area. The first historical information regarding the town, called Camporotondo due to the round form of the site, dates back to the 16 C. At that time it was one of a large number of small, rural villages, scattered over the territory. In 1648 Camporotondo was sold to Giovanni Andra Massa by the Viceroy who needed money for the wars in Spain. In 1654 it passed to Diego Reitano. More important to the new acquirers than the scanty arable land, few houses and small number of inhabitants, was the prestigious title of Marquis. It was destroyed by lava during the 1669 eruption and once it had been rebuilt it was owned first by the Prince of Paternò and then came under the jurisdiction of the commune of Catania. From 1730 it belonged to Marquis Francesco, the son of Giuseppa Reitano and then to Pietro Napoli son of the Prince of Sperlinga. It remained the property of this noble family until the 19 C when feudal rights were abolished and Camporotondo became an independent commune.



## ART & MONUMENTS

The characteristic feature of the old town centre is its circular layout. A walk through the town streets allows visitors to admire the interesting Baroque architecture of the Mother Church dedicated to Sant'Antonio Abate and some historical buildings such as Palazzo Signorello and Palazzo Natali.



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

January  
17 - Feast of the patron S. Antonio Abate



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

Excellent wine is produced from the grapes that thrive in vineyards bounded by black lava stone walls. The area also produces a remarkable olive oil although not in any great quantity. Figs, prickly pears and citrus fruit are cultivated on the more volcanic lands of the zone.



Mother Church

# GRAVINA DI CATANIA



## HISTORY

The commune of Gravina di Catania (30,000 inhabitants) sits on a hilly promontory on the slopes of Etna, at 340 m.s.l. The first name of the town was 'Li Plachi', which meant territory 'of the plain' a vernacular derivation of 'Piakos'. Bronze coins in the British Museum in London testify to the existence of an ancient settlement of this name near Catania. Piakos must have been a wonderful place, with good hunting, olive groves and streams, which still flow under the lava on which Gravina is built. Over the centuries the area has remained rural despite numerous upsets caused by violent volcanic eruptions. The present name of the town derives from Prince Girolamo Gravina who, after having bought the 'Di Placa' land from the state in 1646, changed its name to Gravina. In 1862 'di Catania' was added to distinguish it from a town of the same name in the province of Bari (Gravina di Puglia). The boom in urban development which began in the Sixties, accelerated by a migration of residents from Catania towards the outskirts, contributed to the almost total disappearance of its fields and woods which were given over to construction works.



## ART & MONUMENTS

The most interesting monument in Gravina from an architectural point of view is the Mother Church, dedicated to Sant'Antonio da Padova, which is built in Baroque style enriched with a magnificent belfry. The interior has beautiful 17 C frescoes. The present-day town



Mother Church



Park

extends along via Antonio Gramsci, rising towards Etna between two fully-built-up, rocky areas of volcanic origin. The town boasts a Public Park, a library, the Old Town Hall and three other parks full of ornamental plants.



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*June*

13 - Feast of the patron S. Antonio da Padova

*Summer*

Cultural, sporting and charitable events



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

Gravina makes good use of its fertile volcanic soil to produce citrus fruits, almonds, olives and grapes.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania

Car: RA15 Catania by-pass – exit Gravina di Catania

Bus: AST

# MASCALUCIA



## HISTORY

Mascalucia (28,643 inhabitants), a large town to the north-east of Catania along the main route up to Etna, lies on hills that form the southern slopes of the volcano, between 420 and 520 m.s.l. The area was inhabited in Roman times as demonstrated by numerous archaeological finds. Ancient sources narrate that in 324 A.D. the Emperor Constantine presented the Holy See with many Sicilian territories including Mascalucia, indicated with the name Massalargia (from the Latin, village – gift). Over the course of the centuries these lands were confiscated from the Papal authorities at different times in order to augment Crown lands. Finally, in 1645 the ancient lands of Mascalucia with all its quarters were sold to Giovanni Andrea Massa and then later to Placido Branciforte, Prince of Leonforte and Butera. Philip I of Spain awarded the already powerful owner the further noble title of Duke of Mascalucia, which brought with it many privileges and advantages. Unfortunately, the 1669 and 1693 earthquakes crippled the town's fragile economy.



## ART & MONUMENTS

The old town centre of Mascalucia dates back to the 18 C and is centred on via Etna. The street contains various churches including the church of the patron saint, San Vito with valuable paintings by Michele Rapisardi, Sozzi and Tuccari, the Mother Church dedicated to Maria SS della Consolazione, with paintings by Consoli, Novelli



Mother Church

and Rapisardi and the deconsecrated church of San Nicola, now the Public Auditorium. Some noble mansions like Palazzo Rapisardi and Palazzo Cirelli have interesting facades. In the surrounding streets visitors can find other ancient portals built in black lava stone. Finally, nature lovers will enjoy a visit to the 17 hectares of Monte Ciraulo to see the characteristic flora that forms the typical undergrowth on Etna.



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*Easter*  
• Holy Week Procession

*June*  
**15 and 1st Sunday in August** – Feast of the patron San Vito

*July*  
• Etna Blues Festival – one of the main events in Sicily, forming part of the international Blues Foundation circuit.

• 'Sete Sóis Sete Luas' Festival International Festival dedicated to contemporary popular music and figurative arts, with the participation of well-known personalities from the worlds of Mediterranean and Portuguese culture.



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

The local cake shops are well-known for the great variety of Sicilian sweets that they make and sell. The pride of the food and wine industry is undoubtedly 'Ombrà', a wine produced from grapes grown in the Ombrà quarter, which has a distinctive red colour and a high alcohol content.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania  
Car: RA15 Catania bypass – exit Gravina di Catania direction Mascalucia  
Bus: AST

# MISTERBIANCO



## HISTORY

Misterbianco (48,953 inhabitants) lies on the outskirts of Catania, at 213 m.s.l. on the southern side of Etna. Its name comes from the Latin 'Monasterium Album', from a monastery probably belonging to Benedictine Cistercian monks who wore white habits, which was sited in an old village belonging to Catania. In 1642, the Spanish Court authorised the separation of the 'Monasterium Album' village from Catania so that it could be sold to Giovanni Andrea Massa, who in his turn resold it to Baron Vespasiano Trigona who became Duke of Misterbianco. In March 1669 the new commune was completely destroyed by lava and was then rebuilt three kilometres to the south where the town centre lies nowadays. The reconstruction works on the new site followed as closely as was possible the layout of the previous town. Piazza dei Quattro Canti, the four noble palaces – Santonocito, Scuderi, Anfuso and Santagati – and a large number of the monuments were rebuilt. Until the mid-1950s Misterbianco was only a large agricultural town producing wheat, oranges and grapes. Then over the years, an industrial sector developed, although this is now in decline, followed by a considerable commercial and tertiary sector in the 1990s.



## ART & MONUMENTS

Misterbianco offers visitors an interesting itinerary. The Mother Church is of particular architectural relevance having a sturdy Romanesque style façade built in Priolo stone. The interior preserves some excellent works of art, among which a 16 C statue representing the Madonna delle Grazie. The church of San Nicolò contains precious 17 C paintings and a 16 C altar piece of the Madonna del Rosario. In the church of the Madonna degli Ammalati frescoes and period paintings can be admired. Also worthy of note are the Ducal Palace, the Senate Palace and the remains of the ancient Roman Baths in Piazza della Resistenza. Misterbianco also has an interesting archaeological site where different finds from the Neolithic Age have come to light. The Greek-Roman and Byzantine settlements uncovered in the Erbe Bianche quarter and the Greek-Roman aqueduct that crosses the town are also worthy of mention. The remains of the old Mother Church, dedicated to Santa Maria de Monasterio Albo, can be seen in the quarter of that name, as well as a wood of centuries-old oak trees. All that remains of the original construction, before the building was destroyed during the 1669 eruption, is part of the old belltower.



Senate Palace



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*Carnival*

• 'Carnival of the best costumes in Sicily' a procession of allegorical floats, masks and costumes, accompanied by musical events and local culinary specialities.

*August*

**1<sup>st</sup> Sunday** (every three years)  
'Great Festival' or 'Festival of Fire' in honour of the patron S. Antonio Abate

*September*

**2nd week** – Feast of the Madonna degli Ammalati

• 'Misterfest' – a series of theatrical and musical events



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

Rice and chestnut cakes, 'impanata' (a kind of covered pizza), Mustazzoli (biscuits filled with dried fruits), prickly pear jam and wine.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania  
Car: S.S. 121 direction Paternò  
Train: Circumetnea Railway  
Bust: AST

# MOTTA SANT'ANASTASIA



## HISTORY

Motta Sant'Anastasia (11,000 inhabitants) is a town on the southern side of Etna at an altitude of 275 m.s.l. which covers a basalt crag called the Neck, formed during the Ice Age. There are a number of hypotheses regarding the origin of the name. According to some scholars, Motta (pre-Roman name) and Anastasia (Greek-Byzantine name) have similar meanings and indicate the typical relief of the territory. The two names were joined at some time between the 12 C and 14 C and the residents were devoted to the cult of Sant'Anastasia, the patron saint of the town. Like other towns in the Simeto Valley, Motta has ancient origins. Archaeological finds dating back to the 5 C- 4 C B.C. and the discovery of some tombs, testify to Greek settlement of the area, while the discovery of a mosaic which formed part of a villa is witness to the later Roman settlement. From the time of Dionysius, the tyrant of Syracuse (5 C- 4 C B.C.) the area has always had a very important strategic role so much so that around 1074 Count Roger I of Altavilla built an imposing military tower, probably on top of a former Arab construction. The Castrum of Motta, designed for both defensive and offensive purposes, had a surrounding wall, battlemented tower, small turrets, embrasures and a double entrance door. In 1526, the territory became part of the Moncada fief and the family managed it for about four centuries during which time the castle was used mainly as a prison. During the second half of the 18 C, the town began to develop on more certain lines, new quarters were built and the number of inhabitants slowly increased. On 1st January, 1820 the court of Catania set up the commune of Motta Sant'Anastasia.



## ART & MONUMENTS

The main feature of the town centre is its medieval village, a tangle of alleyways with many houses that still preserve the architectural structure of that time. There visitors will find the Norman Tower built by Count Roger of Altavilla which now houses a Medieval museum, and also the oldest churches. The oldest, the church of the Immacolata dates back to more than one thousand years ago. The present building, with its 17 C façade, contains 17 C paintings of great artistic worth, in particular a priceless, 17 C, Andalusian-style simulacrum of the Immaculate Conception hanging above the main altar. The Mother Church, dedicated to the Madonna del Rosario, is also in the medieval quarter near the Tower. Built in the 13 C and then enlarged from the 15 C, it contains an excellent altar piece and some paintings belonging to the school of Antonello da Messina, among which that of the Madonna del Rosario.



Norman Castle



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

August

**2nd half** – Medieval Festival – an evocative historical re-enactment with themed events, flag waving and tossing demonstrations and music.

**22 / 25** - Feast of the patron S. Anastasia



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

A great variety of agricultural produce is grown in the area including corn, grapes, olives, citrus fruits, vegetables and peaches.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania

Car: S.S. 121 direction Motta Sant'Anastasia

Bus: AST

# SAN GIOVANNI LA PUNTA



## HISTORY

The commune of San Giovanni La Punta (20,000 inhabitants) lies at an altitude of 350 m.s.l. in a hilly zone on the slopes of Etna. The name San Giovanni was given to the town in honour of its patron saint. 'La Punta' was later added when a lava flow created a 'point' in one part of the town. Although the first historical information regarding the town is imprecise and very vague, nevertheless it is fairly certain that the area was first settled shortly after the year 1000. The village of 'Massa Trapea', now Trappeto, and San Giovanni La Punta were composed of large rural estates. Later the two were merged under one name. In 1647 the town, like many others, was sold by Philip IV of Spain to raise money for the Spanish Court and the people of Catania were so indignant at the sale that they rioted in May of that year. Immediately after, the towns of San Giovanni La Punta and San Gregorio were bought by Giovanni Andrea Massa, Duke of Aci Castello remaining in the family until feudal rights were abolished. In line with the 1818 law regarding communes, San Giovanni La Punta became a commune and Trappeto became a quarter. Over the last twenty years the town has become an important centre for commerce and is currently a focal point for the towns on Etna due to the large number of shops concentrated along viale della Regione, the two-kilometre-long main road.



## ART & MONUMENTS

Although it does not have an old town centre, San Giovanni La Punta does have some monuments that are worthy of note. The Mother Church, dedicated to San Giovanni Battista has a Baroque-style façade. It was built around 1410 and became the Parish Church in 1418. In the side chapel dedicated to San Giovanni Evangelista, created around 1758, there is a painting of the Saint which is believed to be by a Flemish artist. The lava stone external portal of the Brotherhood of the Sacrament (Confraternità del Sacramento) is stupendous. At the point where San Giovanni La Punta borders the communes of Tremestieri Etneo and Sant'Agata Li Battiati, there is the church of the Ravanusa that preserves a picture of Maria Santissima Assunta called the 'Ravanusa'. There are also a number of splendid mansions built around 1800 and Castle Carcaci which was the residence of the Princes of Paternò. In Trappeto, there is the Church of San Rocco, built between 1602 and 1605 by people who survived the plague that raged in the area between 1575 and 1578.



Mother Church



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

December

27 - Feast of the patron S. Giovanni Evangelista



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania

Car: RA15 Catania bypass, exit Paese Etnei

Bus: AST - Interbus

# S.GREGORIO DI CATANIA



## HISTORY

The commune of San Gregorio (11,230 inhabitants) is situated in a hilly area at 321 m.s.l. The name of San Gregorio was given to the town in honour of Pope Gregorio whose mother was of Sicilian origin. The first settlement was one of the thirteen so-called 'villages of Catania'. In the 17 C it belonged to the noble Massa family, the Dukes of Paternò. In 1812 when feudalism and the baronage were abolished, the former ruling 'Giurati' were replaced by the 'Decurionato', a group of ten men elected by the population and approved by the King. In 1860 when Italy was united, the 'Decurionato' was also abolished and the current administrative system established. It became an independent commune in 1856.



## ART & MONUMENTS

There are some interesting religious buildings in San Gregorio. The Baroque style Mother Church, dedicated to Santa Maria degli Ammalati, was built in 1620, destroyed by the earthquake in 1693 and returned to its original splendour, after extensive reconstruction works in 1711. The Church of the Immacolata is a striking example of 18 C architecture. Building began in 1769 and was completed in 1800 when the bell-tower stairs were finished. The architecture of the Church of San Filippo d'Agira built in 1500 is also of interest being superior to that normally found in this period. The bell tower and portal are enriched by finely worked lava stone elements.



Mother Church



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*Easter*

**Holy Week and Easter Monday** – Holy Week processions and Feast of the patron S. Gregorio Magno

*August*

• Flower Festival



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania

Car: RA15 Catania bypass – exit Paesi Etnei

Bus: AMT (244 route) - AST

# S.AGATA LI BATTIATI



## HISTORY

Sant'Agata Li Battiati (9,784 inhabitants) lies on a hilly slope to the north of Catania, at 263 m.s.l. Given its nearness to Catania, Sant'Agata Li Battiati has shared in many of the city's historical events. Information regarding the town, both history and legend, has been handed down from generation to generation and included in many books on the history of Catania. In 1444, an impressive lava flow which had begun a year before, threatened to destroy most of the south-eastern part of Etna. The lava, erupting out from between Monte Arso and Montepeloso, had divided into two branches, one of which stopped near Bonaccorsi while the other, flowing down between Tremestieri and San Giovanni La Punta, seemed likely to reach Catania where the worried population and civic authorities, besides the residents of the villages involved, asked the Bishop Giovanni De Pescibus to organize a procession with the Veil of Sant'Agata. The lava slowed its destructive force and finally stopped in front of the Veil. A small church was built on the site, then called the Valenti quarter, to commemorate the miraculous event. In 1635, Lorenzo D'Arcangelo, a judge from Catania who owned the land, allowed a larger church to be built and also gave his permission for it to be used by the inhabitants of the three neighbouring quarters of Valenti, Battiato and Murabito. Towards the middle of the 1680s an even bigger church was built about 300 metres south of the Chapel of the Veil, which was dedicated to Maria S.S. Annunziata. Given the importance of this new church, the area around it became the centre of a small town. In 1645 the 'Land of Saint Agatha', as Sant'Agata Li Battiati was then called, was bought, like many of the other Catania villages, by Duke Giovanni Andrea Massa. In the second half of the 1700s, many noble families moved out of the city to spend the hot summer months there.



## ART & MONUMENTS

From an architectural point of view one of the most interesting monuments is the Mother Church, dedicated to Maria S.S. Annunziata. It has a Romanesque façade with a lava stone stairway leading to the porch where there is a beautiful portal again in lava stone, expertly worked by local craftsman. Above the portal is a decorative window which, since 1969, has contained the bust of Sant'Agata which was previously kept in the church of Sant'Agata al Velo. There are some beautiful artefacts in the church including a wooden cross and a painting of San Lorenzo, patron saint of the town. The painting is a copy of the 'Martyrdom of San Lorenzo' by Tiziano, the original belonging to the Jesuit Church in Venice. Above the main altar there is a beautiful painting of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary, dating back to the end of



Sant'Agata al Velo Church

the 1600s. Another church worthy of note is that of Sant'Agata al Velo, built before 1634, which has the typical features of a rural chapel. The church of San Michele Arcangelo had the same characteristics until a series of reworkings changed the façade. There are some 17 C frescoes in the interior.



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

August  
10 - Feast of the patron S. Lorenzo

October  
• Grape and Wine Festival



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania  
Car: RA15 Catania bypass – exit Paesi Etnei  
Bus: AMT (route 258) - AST





## HISTORY

Paternò (49,604 inhabitants) is situated in a hilly area, at 250 m.s.l.. The site was inhabited more than 3,500 years before the birth of Christ, when the first inhabitants settled in the small prehistoric volcano that overlooks the town. The town that grew up was of Sicilian origin. During the Greek and Roman periods it was quite important but in the three centuries before the year 1000 most of its population disappeared. Under Saracen rule the village was called Batarnù. After the Norman conquest the name changed to Paternionis and a period of great civic and economic splendour began, so much so that Kings and Queens sat there. In fact, the territory of Paternò formed part of the so-called Queen's Chamber, instituted by Frederick III of Anjou as a wedding present for his wife Eleonora of Anjou which was then inherited by all successive Queens until the Chamber was finally abolished. This magnificent period lasted until the 15 C, when the city became enfeoffed and a slow, inexorable decline began which continued until the abolition of feudal rights. There was a great deal of urban development between 1960 and 1970 and the town expanded still further in the decades that followed. On 9th February, 1983 it received the title of City by Presidential decree.



## ART & MONUMENTS

Paternò has several medieval buildings of great architectural interest, in particular those on the 'historical hill'. One of these is the Mother Church, built in Norman times with revisions in 1342, dedicated to S. Maria dell'Alto, which was greatly modified at the beginning of the 18 C, in which period the entrance was changed and the interior was decorated in the Baroque style that was so popular then. The striking Scalinata della Matrice was built in the 18 C and connects the porch of the Mother Church to the Porta del Borgo, the old main entrance in the medieval city walls, located halfway down the hill. Just outside the Porta del Borgo is Palazzo Moncada which belonged to the powerful family of Spanish origin who were the liege lords of the town for a long period. The Church and Convent of S. Francesco, dating from 1346 are also very interesting, including a beautiful 11 C church with markedly Gothic architectural features. Not far away, is the church of Cristo al Monte, modified in Rococo style in the 18 C. On the slopes of the hill there is also the church of St. Maria della Valle di Iosaphat, or della Gancia, built by the Countess Adelasia in 1092 which boasts a splendid Gothic portal. The most important monument in the area is undoubtedly the Norman Castle built by



Paternò hill



Norman Castle

Count Roger in 1072 and modified by restoration works many times thereafter. The first of these were carried out at the beginning of the 14 C, then again in 1900 and finally in 1958. The interior is still in good condition and on the ground floor there is an elegant frescoed chapel with a number of paintings. Climbing the sturdy stairway cut into the wall visitors can climb up as far as the upper terrace. The Arms Room is on the first floor and on the second floor an elegant gallery. Once at the top, from the upper terrace there is a magnificent view of Etna, the plain of Catania and the Simeto river valley. In the lower part of the city, which started to grow at the base of the hill in the 16 C, there are other important monuments among which the outstanding former Santissima Annunziata monastery. The splendid Madonna dell'Itria oil on panel work by the famous 16 C painter, Sofonisba Anguissola, is conserved there and there are also the churches of Santa Barbara and Santa Caterina d'Alessandria. In the newer part of the town to the north east, the modern church of San Francesco all'Annunziata dei Cappuccini (1987) is worth a visit to see the precious Tessei bronzes and the splendid Canticle of the Creatures mosaic (1989) by the great artist Ugolino da Belluno.



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*Summer*

• Roccanormanna Festival

*December*

3 / 5 - Feast of the patron S. Barbara



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

The local clay, lava stone, wrought iron, wood-working and engraving crafts are still practised.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania

Car: S.S. 121 direction Paternò

Train: Circumetnea railway

Bus: Interbus - I.S.E.A. Autolinee

# S.PIETRO CLARENZA



## HISTORY

The commune of San Pietro Clarenza (6,000 inhabitants) is situated on a hill at an altitude of 463 m.s.l. on the southern side of Etna. Its origins date back to the first century of the Middle Ages, when Moslems arrived from North Africa. The first historical documents date from 1646 when Philip IV of Spain ordered the Viceroy to 'give up his privileges and rights' to the Etna villages. Duke Giovanni Andrea Massa sold the village of San Pietro, to Antonio Reitano who became Prince of San Pietro in 1648. An act of sale dated 1779 demonstrates that the village of San Pietro was bought by Giuseppe Mario Clarenza, a nobleman from Catania, who added his own surname to that of the village, which from that time has been called San Pietro Clarenza. Like many of the other villages on Etna, it was affected by the 1669 eruption, which destroyed fifteen villages and part of Catania. This catastrophic event involved the whole Sant'Antonio quarter, destroying the Great Church which Carlo Mancino described as 'large and beautiful'.



## ART & MONUMENTS

The town centre in San Pietro Clarenza is characterised by low lava stone buildings with contrasting white-plastered windowsills. The most important monument is the Mother Church, built in the 18 C and dedicated to Santa Caterina, with a spectacular exterior stairway and works by local artists inside. Some of the 18 C, Late Baroque-style noble mansions are also of interest. Mention should be made of Caseggiato Mannino, the oldest building in the town, which overlooks Piazza della Vittoria. It is a good-sized building dating back to the beginning of the 1700s with 14 rooms, a large reception room and a courtyard featuring a cistern. Recently restored it now houses the Public Library.



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*July*

2 - Feast of the Madonna delle Grazie

*November*

25 - Feast of the patron S. Caterina

*Carnival*

• Carnival events



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania

Car: RA15 Catania bypass – exit Gravina di Catania direction Mascalucia

Bus: AMT (route 556) - AST



Mother Church - detail

# TREMESTIERI ETNEO



## HISTORY

The commune of Tremestieri Etneo (21,568 inhabitants) is situated in a hilly area dominated by the volcano, at about 400 m.s.l. The territory of Tremestieri, given its favourable environmental conditions and its central position between Etna and Catania, has been settled since ancient times. This is confirmed by the few, but important, archaeological finds that have fortuitously come to light in the area, including terracotta grave fragments, lamps, pots, coins and small metal and stone utensils, most of which date back to the Roman or Byzantine eras. Numerous earthquakes and eruptions have upset and destroyed the territory and settlements in Tremestieri since prehistoric times. The growth and importance of the commune is indirectly proven by a papal bull issued in 1446 by Pope Eugenio IV, which elevated its church to the position of Parish Church. At the beginning of the 17 C the town had a population of over 1,200 people and boasted seven churches. In 1641 the 'village' of Tremestieri, having been sold to the rich Genoa merchant Giovanni Andrea Massa, was removed from the state jurisdiction of Catania, to which it had belonged since the Aragonese period, and acquired administrative autonomy, albeit conditioned by the anachronistic feudal-type system of government of the time. In 1817, as a result of the administrative reforms introduced in Sicily by the restored Bourbon monarchy, the feudal system was abolished and Tremestieri became a commune. Overcoming many difficulties, particularly of a financial nature, the first local administration managed to set up a modest programme of public works aimed, among other things, at improving links with neighbouring towns and building a cemetery. The name Tremestieri seems to derive from a corruption of the Latin 'Tria Monasteria'. In 1874 the adjective 'Etneo' was added to distinguish it from a town with the same name in the province of Messina.



## ART & MONUMENTS

The centre of the town is still crossed by the old via Etnea that leads from Catania to the volcano. Traces can still be seen of the suburban buildings that were erected between the end of the 19 C and beginning of the 20 C. The Mother Church, of Norman origin but rebuilt after the 1693 earthquake, is dedicated to the patron S. Maria della Pace. The façade is divided into three by paired pilasters. The interior is subdivided into three naves with three apses and visitors can admire the 17 C wooden statues representing the Madonna della Pace and Santa Barbara. Adjoining the church is a massive belfry and a parish hall. The church of Santa Maria delle Grazie is also very interesting, built in different colours with light blue belfry and pink walls. Inside there is a porphyry baptismal font.



Mother Church

Not to be missed is the unusual private collection of Sicilian carts to be seen in the Piano quarter and also the surviving 'palmenti' (buildings where grapes were pressed) the area having once been noted for its wine-growing and producing.



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

**1st Sunday after Easter**

Feast of the patron S. Maria della Pace

*December*

4 - Feast of the joint patron S. Barbara



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

Typical local agricultural products are citrus fruits, olives and must grapes while craftwork takes the form of embroidery and lava stone objects.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania

Car: RA15 Catania bypass – exit Paesi Etnei

Bus: AST

# PARKS AND RESERVES





## IMMACOLATELLE COMPLEX AND MICIO CONTI RESERVE

The 'Complesso Immacolatelle e Micio Conti' Nature Reserve is located on the slopes of Etna between the communes of San Gregorio di Catania and Aci Castello. It was set up in 1998 with the aim of "preserving and safeguarding the important complex of lava caves colonised by subterranean fauna having troglophile elements connected to the guano of the bat colony". The reserve features a large number of lava caves (Micio Conti, Cantarella, Tedeschi, Immacolatella I, II, III and IV and del Fico) concentrated in a relatively small area.

The only other site on Etna with such a high density of lava caves is the Passo dei Dammusi zone, inside the protected area of the Etna Nature Park. Some of the caves in the reserve are among the longest on Etna. Other lava caves have been found a short distance away outside the reserve. However, the natural interest of the reserve is not limited only to the presence of the volcanic caves because the protected area also contains oak woods on its edges and typical Mediterranean scrub formations of great natural and scenic interest.

This interest increases when one considers that this is one of the last wooded areas to be found on the lower slopes of Etna, all the others having been destroyed by the rampant urbanisation that has taken place on the southern side of the volcano. It is also particularly important to protect the vertebrate and invertebrate fauna of this area. Among the wildlife using the underground caves particular mention should be made of the *Miniopterus* and *Myotis* bat colonies that inhabit some of them.

The reserve contains much evidence of traditional agricultural activities (stone houses, dry-stone walls, terracing, etc). Of particular note is the 'Cantarella' guardhouse, an old Spanish sentry post which overlooks



*Oak woods*

the reserve. Some of the caves are also of archaeological interest having revealed finds dating back to the Early Bronze Age.



*"Grotta dei Tedeschi"*

# THE COAST





## HISTORY

Acireale (52,490 inhabitants) lies 161 m.s.l. on the Timpa, a six- km long, stepped fault of great geological and volcanological interest. Along the coast there are seaside villages of ancient origin. The name Acireale came into use around the second half of the 17 C. Previously the town was called Aquilia or Aci Aquilia sometimes with the addition of 'Nova' to distinguish it from 'Old' Aquilia which, in the 14 C, was an unimportant hamlet about 3 km from the present-day city. The origins of Aquilia Nova are, therefore, relatively recent. At the beginning of the 1400s there were only a few houses, but by the end of the century it had become a town and during the 16 C became the most important in the area. Its demographic, economic and political development continued throughout the 1500s despite frequent famines and plagues. In 1528 Emperor Charles V sold the rights to repurchase the Aci lands to the Mastrantonio family who had bought them in 1466. Aquilia, which was the only one of the feudal hamlets undergoing a period of growth, did everything possible to liberate itself, finally succeeding, with the help of conspicuous donations, to free itself from baronial rule and return to the Crown in 1531.

In the meanwhile, there were continual contrasts between the town of Aci Aquilia and the other villages which led to a separation in 1628 which, after a momentary precarious appeasement, became permanent in 1640. The other villages became baronial lands but Aci Aquilia remained Crown property with the denomination 'Reale' (Royal) and the loss of the name 'Aquilia'. During the 17 C the layout of the town began to take on a more structured appearance with a road system radiating out from its central Piazza Duomo. The terrible earthquake on 11th January, 1693 destroyed many of the town's monuments, but extensive rebuilding works took place and new palaces and churches replaced them. The old streets were widened and new ones built. Acireale acquired its eighteenth-century, Late Baroque appearance thanks to the work of distinguished craftsmen like the painter, Pietro Paolo Vasta and the architect, Paolo Amico. Since then the town has grown considerably, both in demographic and economic terms, and has gradually become more administratively and politically important. Acireale has expanded considerably since WW2 with an increase in the number of businesses involved in citrus-fruit cultivation and tourism. It was awarded the title of City in 2005.



*Basilica of SS Pietro e Paolo*



## ART & MONUMENTS

Acireale is marked by a wealth of secular, public and private buildings in Baroque style. Baroque motifs are to be seen everywhere in the old town, particularly on the balconies and doorways of noble mansions.

Piazza Duomo, in the centre of Acireale, is surrounded by some of the city's most important buildings among which the Cathedral, the Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul, the Town Hall (Palazzo del Comune) and Palazzo Modò. The square was recently repaved in lava stone and white Comiso marble. There is an engraving of the new coat of arms of the city in the centre. The Cathedral dedicated to SS Madonna Annunziata already existed as an oratory in the 14 C. Worthy of note are its Baroque-style marble portal, constructed by Placido Blandamonte between 1668 and 1672, and the frescoes in the transept painted between 1736 and 1737 by Pietro Paolo Vasta. The Cathedral houses the engraved silver 'fercolo' with the statue of Santa Venera, the patron saint of Acireale. The Basilica of SS Pietro e Paolo was built in 1550 and rebuilt in 1608. It has a Baroque façade designed by Vasta in 1741 while the belfry dates from the 19 C. There are paintings by Vasta and Giacinto Platania and a statue of Christ at the Column by an unknown artist which is greatly revered in the city and is traditionally carried in procession once every 70 years. The Town Hall, or Loggia Giuratoria, is an excellent example of non-secular Baroque architecture, begun in 1659 and twice restored after earthquakes





## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

### *Carnival*

• Of ancient origin it assumed its present form in 1929 and has been called 'the best Carnival in Sicily'. The main features are a procession of allegorical, grotesque floats created by expert local craftsman using papier maché and highly spectacular flower floats

### *Summer*

• Ionian Fair (Fiera dello Ionio) – promotes local crafts and commerce

### *June*

26 - Feast of the patron S. Venera Vergine e Martire

### *August*

**Last Sunday** – Fish Festival in Santa Maria La Scala

**1st Saturday and Sunday** – "Acireale, art and folklore: the best Carnival in Sicily summer edition"

### *December/January*

• "Il Natale accende la città": Christmas events



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

It is possible to buy typical locally-made products such as model Sicilian carts, puppets and various articles made from lava stone, wrought iron and ceramics.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania

Car: A18 ME-CT – exit Acireale – S.S 114 Catania – Messina

Train: Catania Central Station

Bus: AST – Interbus – Autolinee Buda Autolinee Zappalà & Torrisi

in 1693 and 1818. The masks, the brackets supporting the balconies, the wrought-iron work and the corner balcony are particularly admirable. The interior houses an exhibition of old military uniforms. Palazzo Modò is slightly set back from Piazza Duomo. All that remains of the original structure are two balconies with their Baroque-like supports, a few masks and the name Teatro Eldorado. The building became a theatre in 1909 and was used as such until after WW1. Other buildings, churches and monuments of great interest can be found in the old town including the Basilica of S. Sebastiano, which is a national monument and considered the most important church in Acireale. Begun in the 18 C, it has a façade with different orders separated by a balustrade, while inside there are frescoes by Vasta. The oldest church in the city is the church of Sant'Antonio da Padova, possibly the only one dating back to the time of Aquilia Nova. Reworked over the centuries, due to earthquake damage and other problems, it conserves a beautiful gothic-style portal. Inside, frescoes and paintings by Alessandro and Pietro Paolo Vasta can be admired. The art collections and ancient texts of the Zalantea Library and Art Gallery, founded in the 17 C, are today housed in a nineteenth-century neo-classical palace built by the engineer, Mariano Panebianco. Other very interesting noble palaces are to be found along Corso Umberto I, where the locals like to stroll. Acireale is also renowned for its thermal baths with their sulphurous waters, which have been used since Greek and Roman times. The most famous are the Saint Venera baths on the southern outskirts of the city, built in neo-classical style and surrounded by an English-style garden. The Santa Caterina thermal baths, located in the village of the same name, are of more recent construction. Along the road leading to Santa Tecla there is the church of the Presepe, also called the church of Santa Maria della Neve, where it is possible to admire a 'presepe' (Nativity scene) built in a lava grotto in 1752. Another feature of the area is the ancient zigzag footpath, the 'chiazzette', which leads down to the sea at Santa Maria La Scala. On the way down there is the 17th C Tocco Fort. The ancient Puppet Opera Theatre and Regional exhibition of puppets and Sicilian theatre scenery is in via Alessi. The nearby seaside villages of Santa Maria La Scala, Stazzo, Santa Tecla and Pozzillo are very picturesque.



*The Timpa - Santa Maria La Scala*

# ACI CASTELLO



## HISTORY

Along the coast northwards, at little more than 10 kilometres from Catania, lies Acì Castello (18,200 inhabitants), an ancient seaside village 15 metres above sea level. The name Acì Castello comes from its castle built in 1076 by the Normans on a lava stone outcrop. The first castle on the site was built in the 7 C B.C. by the Byzantines on a pre-existing Roman fortification called *Castrum Jacis* built around 38 B.C. to protect the local population from incursions. In Medieval times it was the focal point of development in the surrounding areas. During the Norman period the first village was founded at the feet of the castle which Count Ruggero then gave to the bishops of Catania. The village was completely destroyed by a terrible earthquake in 1170 and was only rebuilt and inhabited again in 1530, when the nearby villages of Ficarazzi and Acì Trezza were annexed. In the 17 C under Spanish rule, the considerable economic development of nearby Aquilia Nova (Acireale) created rivalry and clashes with the other Acì villages, who demanded administrative autonomy and obtained it when the various villages were separated. Acì Castello, which then also included Acì Trezza, became autonomous in 1647. It was owned by the noble Massa family until feudalism was abolished. Although it still conserves its ancient origins, over the years it has become a prestigious seaside resort, attracting large numbers of tourists.



## ART & MONUMENTS

The town's most striking feature is without doubt the Norman Castle which dominates the main square, with a long balcony that gives wonderful views over the sea below and the attractive Riviera dei Ciclopi. Built in lava stone from Mount Etna the castle stands on a lava stone promontory which rises sheer from the sea. It can only be entered from the square by means of a stone stairway, which at one time also had a wooden drawbridge. The central part of the fort is a square keep, the 'donjon', the heart of the manor. Only a small part of the original structure remains: the entrance with what is left of the drawbridge mechanism; the courtyard which contains a small botanical garden; a few rooms including one that houses the museum, a chapel probably dating from the Byzantine period and a wide terrace with wonderful views over the bay. The museum is divided into three sections: mineralogy, paleontology and archaeology. The parish church is of particular architectural interest with remarkable frescoes by Pietro Vasta (1697-1760). Visitors will find the small fishing village of Acì Trezza, a fraction of the commune of Acì Castello, extremely interesting and well worth a visit. A fishing town since ancient times, it is dominated by the



*Norman Castle*

'Fraglioni dei Ciclopi', eight picturesque sharp basalt rocks which, according to legend were thrown by Polyphemus to try to prevent Ulysses from escaping. A walk around the town itself reveals some interesting monuments. The vault of the church of S. Giovanni Battista in Piazza Giovanni Verga is decorated with frescoes by the painter Vincenzo Sciuto from Acì S. Antonio, which represent the martyrdom of Saint John the Baptist. Going past the flight of steps which leads down to the harbour, visitors come to the entrance to the Casa del Nespolo (see *I Malavoglia* by G. Verga) which contains the Trezzoto museum. This is a typical mid-19 C Sicilian structure. The courtyard contains a small kitchen garden and the main entrance which features a rounded arch in lava stone. There are only two rooms inside. The first room called "La terra trema" (the earth shakes) contains a collection of photographs, posters and other articles regarding Luchino Visconti's film masterpiece of the same name which was shot in Acitrezza in 1947 with a cast of actors selected exclusively from the local inhabitants. The second room "La Stanza dei Malavoglia" (the Malavoglia room), holds a collection of old tools and everyday objects that illustrate the life of the local fishing community in the 19 C. Of great interest are the photos taken by Giovanni Verga in person and a collection of letters sent to his brother Pietro.



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*January*

15 - Feast of the patron S. Mauro Abate

*June*

24 - Feast of S. Giovanni Battista (Aci Trezza) characterised by "U pisci a mari" (the fish in the sea) a traditional, spectacular pantomime performed by local fishermen, a parody of fishing for sword fish. This is one of the most important popular events in Sicily. The simple performance transmits the depth of the relationship that exists between man and the sea, the fisherman and his prey, from Verga to Hemingway.



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

Tasty, aromatic and colourful, the kitchens of the many renowned restaurants in Aci Castello and Aci Trezza offer a great variety of delicious meals. The local fish, seafood and shellfish are particularly flavoursome due to the lava stone seabed.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania

Car: A18 ME-CT exit Acireale direction  
Acicastello

Bus: AMT (route 534) - AST



Acitrezza - Port



Acitrezza - Cyclops Stacks

# CALATABIANO



## HISTORY

The commune of Calatabiano (5351 inhabitants) is bordered to the north by the River Alcantara Park and to the south by the River Fiumefreddo Reserve and has ancient origins. The first inhabitants were the Siculans during the first millennium B.C.. The first colonizers from Calceide arrived from Greece in 725 B.C.. In 902 A.D. the Arabs conquered the area, settling in the fort on top of the hill, which had probably been built around 425 B.C.. Under Arab domination the village around the castle expanded to become a very important agricultural town. It was in this period that the castle took the name of Kalata-bian, from Kalata – castle and Bian – the name of the officer who occupied the fort. The area and its castle remained under Arab domination for about two centuries. In 1079 the castle was conquered by the Normans who rebuilt it in the form that has been almost completely preserved up to the present day. In 1272 Calatabiano fell to the Angevins and then later to the Aragonese. Terrible earthquakes in 1669 and 1693 put the inhabitants of the castle to flight and the town was rebuilt at the foot of the hill. In 1813 Calatabiano became an autonomous commune.



## ART & MONUMENTS

The Castle of Calatabiano which rises from the hill that overlooks the town is certainly a symbolic monument, but the town also offers architectural delights such as the church of SS. Crocifisso (1484) and the church of Maria SS Annunziato (1740) which is decorated with splendid frescoes, precious paintings and excellent works of art such as the Baroque-style altar, the 18 C



Arab-Norman castle

wooden pulpit and presbytery and the 16 C wooden Crucifix painted by Giovanni Salvo d'Antonio, nephew of Antonello di Messina. In Piazza V. Emanuele stands the majestic 17 C statue of Saint Catherine and a short distance away the splendid lava stone portal of the privately-owned Palazzo Gravina, built by the Gravina family at the end of the 17 C. The same family also constructed another historical building, again privately-owned, Saint Mark's Castle (Castello San Marco) with the church of Sant'Antonio da Padova (1697) next door. The church of Gesù e Maria, in the quarter of the same name, dates from 1695 and contains four valuable paintings, recently restored to their original splendour, and a very interesting majolica floor. On the coast, the greatest tourist attraction is undoubtedly the beautiful 3-kilometre-long Calatabiano beach.



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

May  
2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday - Medlar Festival  
3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday- Feast of the patron  
S. Filippo



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

The area around Calatabiano provides the perfect habitat for the medlar, a typical crop, which thrives here. The Calatabiano medlar is a very particular, specific niche product.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania  
Car: A18 ME-CT exit Fiumefreddo  
Train: Catania Central Station  
Bus: Autolinee Buda

# FIUMEFREDDO



## HISTORY

Fiumefreddo di Sicilia (10,000 inhabitants) is located along the SS 114 main road and has its own motorway exit and a railway station. It takes its name from the river that rises nearby and flows towards the long beach and the sea at Marina di Cottone. Until 1296 it was part of the fiefdom of Calatabiano but then, in 1592, Don Giovanni Pietro Cottone, the Lord of Fiumefreddo sold the fiefdom to the noble Gravina family. In 1600, what is now the Castello quarter began to develop with a small nucleus of dwellings, the beginnings of the future commune. In the second half of the 18 C, along what is now the main road linking Catania to Messina, some houses and shops were built that were managed in the interests of the Prince of Palagonia. This new group of buildings was called Putieddi (Botteghelle – small shops) and the heart of the present town began to grow up around this core. In 1801 it became the commune of Fiumefreddo.



## ART & MONUMENTS

There are several interesting places to visit among which the Slaves' Castle (Castello degli Schiavi), a remarkable example of Baroque architecture which was built as a country residence in the second half of the 18 C. The adjoining small church is also of interest with a painting of the Madonna and Child, probably the work of Pietro Paolo Vasta. The Slaves' Castle owes its fame to having been used as a set for a number of films among which 'The Godfather'. Palazzo Corvaia is located on a small square in the Diana quarter and is an elegant example of the kind of villa-farmhouse that was built in the 18 C as a noble residence. The Red Tower (Torre Rosso), at



The Slave's Castle

a short distance from the main town of Fiumefreddo, dates back to Roman times and is a sepulchral monument. The tower takes its name from the colour of the exterior wall made of terracotta bricks. The Fiumefreddo Nature Reserve is worthy of special mention and has its own section in the guide.



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*March*

19 - Feast of the patron S. Giuseppe

*August*

• Summer shows and events on the sandy beach starring famous Italian artists, in particular during the week around the 15<sup>th</sup> August (Ferragosto)



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

Today Fiumefreddo is an important citrus-fruit producing and trading area and most of its agricultural land is given over to these crops.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania

Car: A18 ME-CT exit Fiumefreddo

Train: Catania Central Station

Bus: Interbus



## HISTORY

The commune of Giarre (27,621 inhabitants) lies on the east coast of Sicily between Etna and the Ionian Sea. It is situated at an altitude of 81 m.s.l. from where it slopes down towards the sea, cooled by sea-breezes and enjoying spectacular views. The most credible hypothesis regarding the origin of its name derives from the fact that Giare began life as a storage place, a warehouse, and the 'giare' were the containers that were used to hold goods like wine, oil, cereals and pulses in the coaching stations but also, more generally, in warehouses. Giare has a relatively recent history, in that it is only two centuries since it was administratively recognised. Nevertheless, the first urban settlements date back to the time when the area belonged to the County of Mascali, which in turn belonged to the Bishops of Catania. In 1815 the Sicilian parliament conceded Giare administrative autonomy from Mascali, together with the villages of Riposto and Torre Archirafi. In 1841 Riposto and Torre Archirafi separated from Giare. During the Fascist period (1939) Giare and Riposto were reunified under the name of "Ionia" but in 1945 they were officially divided once more and resumed their old names.



## ART & MONUMENTS

Along the main street, via Callipoli, the visitor can admire a number of mansions built between the 19 C and 20 C. The most worthy of note are Palazzo Bonaventura decorated in Liberty style and Palazzo Quattrocchi in Moorish style. Other examples of Liberty architecture are Palazzo Macherione and Palazzo Bonanno. The imposing neo-classical Mother Church of S. Isodoro Agricola, the patron saint of the town, lies in a splendid square of the same name as does the church of the Convent by Agostiniani Scalzi, one of the oldest churches in the



"Piazza Duomo"

town dating back to the second half of the 18 C, which owes its name to the fact that the Convent of the Agostiniani Scalzi Fathers of Valverde used to stand next to it. The building is now used as the Palace of Culture while the church has been deconsecrated for a long time. In the Santa Maria la Strada quarter there is a sanctuary of the same name, which was built in 1081 on the orders of Count Roger to thank the Madonna for his victory over the Saracens. Other interesting monuments are the Neptune Fountain, the War Memorial and Roger's Norman Well. There are also several museums including the Local Customs of Etna Museum (Museo Usi e Costumi della Gente dell'Etna), the Sicilian Puppets Theatre and Museum (Teatro-Musei dei Pupi Siciliane), the Nativity Scene Museum (Il Museo del Presepio), the Etna Migration Museum (Il Museo Etneo delle migrazioni) and the Mediterranean Aquarium.



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

May

10 - Feast of the patron S. Isidoro  
Cherry and Rose Festivals

September

• Citrus fruit, horticultural and agricultural technology fair

• Sicilian Crafts Exhibition and Market



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

The flourishing agriculture of the area means visitors can try the delicious local pears, apples, peaches, citrus fruits and different qualities of grape.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania  
Car A18 ME-CT exit Giarre  
Train: Catania Central Station  
Circumetnea Railway  
Bus: Autolinee Buda - Interbus  
Autolinee Zappalà & Torrisi

# MASCALI



## HISTORY

Modern day Mascali (13,653 inhabitants) was built on the slopes of Etna near the Ionian Sea, after the old town was buried by lava in 1928. The only remaining traces of the old town are to be seen in the Sant'Antonino quarter which was then a suburb. The name Mascali comes from Byzantine times and means 'branchy' an obvious reference to the woods that were once a feature of the area. Ancient Mascali, high up on the mountain and visible from the sea, went through different phases of development beginning as a rural hamlet, acquiring a 'villa' and eventually becoming a town. Under Norman rule, the area was given to the Bishops of Catania. Under their control it became the 'County of Mascali' after the investiture of the new Bishop of Catania Nicolo Maria Caracciolo by the Emperor Charles V. In the second half of the 18 C control of the County passed to the Bourbons. After the 1928 earthquake Mascali was rebuilt nearer the sea. A particular feature of the new town is its orthogonal street plan and the imposing Fascist style buildings some of which were the work of the Sicilian engineer, Camillo Autore.



## ART & MONUMENTS

Summer is the tourist season in Mascali given the strategic position of its ten quarters, set in a beautiful landscape that ranges from the hills of the Etna Park to the Ionian Sea, only 30 km from Catania and 15 km from Taormina. Fondachello and S. Anna are seaside quarters with pebble beaches. Just behind the beach there is the extraordinary, protected natural environment of Gurna, a wet zone that extends from the mouth of the River



Mascali - view

Simeto to Messina. Carrubba lies inland with its ancient aqueduct behind the main square. Sant'Antonio, Tagliaborse, Porto Salvo and Santa Venera are situated higher up, while Nunziata, with its Byzantine church the 'Nunziatella' and what remains of its frescoes, lies on the hillside. The highest quarters are Montargano and Puntalazzo, from where there are spectacular views over orchards and vineyards and the whole length of the Ionian coastline.



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*August*

**10** - the Night of San Lorenzo (Saint Laurence), music and fireworks

**19** Feast of Madonna Maria SS Della Pietà (Fondachello)

*November*

**1** - Feast of the patron S. Leonardo Abate



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

'Nerello Mascalese' wine is without doubt the most famous local product.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania

Car: A18 ME-CT, exit Giarre

Train: Catania Central Station

Circumetnea Railway

Bus: Autolinee Buda

# RIPOSTO



## HISTORY

Riposto lies on a plain only 7 m.s.l. on the coast between Catania and Messina. The history of Riposto is closely linked to that of Giarre and Mascali, in that it formed part of the same County. Its name derives from the Sicilian 'u ripostu', 'closet' or 'cellar', because enormous quantities of wine and agricultural produce from the nearby towns were stored there. In 1815 Riposto and Giarre, gained independence from Mascali, but local merchants soon demanded the separation of the two towns and this took place in 1841. Thanks to a Royal Decree issued by Ferdinand I of Bourbon in 1820, one of the first state schools in Sicily was built in Riposto and in 1906 work began on the port. At the end of the 19 C there was an economic boom, but first the colonial expansion into Libya which took place under the Giolitti government in 1911-12, and then WW1, led to the closing down of its import-export markets thus impoverishing the local economy. In 1939 Riposto was once again amalgamated with the commune of Giarre, under the name Giarre-Riposto, until 1942 when a new commune was created with the name Jonia. The two communes were separated again in 1945 and reassumed their previous names.



## ART & MONUMENTS

Architecturally speaking there are some extremely interesting buildings in Riposto. The Mother Church dates back to the period between the end of the 18 C and the beginning of the 19 C and is dedicated to San Pietro, the patron saint of fishermen. The façade was inspired by the Basilica of San Giovanni in Laterano in Rome. The main altar with late 18 C high-backed wooden chairs is worthy of note. The church of La Madonna della Lettera was the first church in Riposto: inside there is a painting by Giuseppe Zacco depicting Our Lady of the Letter, which replaces a Byzantine icon no longer in existence. One of the most important marine institutions in the town is the 'Luigi Rizzo' Nautical Institute. This is housed in a building dating from 1820 and has one of the most interesting and important planetariums in Sicily which attracts a lot of visitors. The Institute also boasts a well-stocked library with some fascinating technical drawings of antique vessels on panels. The unique Kenzia Park covers an area of 9,000 sq.m within the town boundaries. Finally, the port of Riposto, also called the Port of Etna or the Marina, is a modern complex consisting in a marina and a commercial fishing port.



Port



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

June

29 - Feast of the patron S. Pietro

July

2nd Sunday - Palio delle Botti di Eustachio (Barrel race)

August

15 - Feast of La Madonna della Lettera

July/September

• 'Progetto Estate': cultural and musical events

December

• Christmas events



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

Being an agricultural town, Riposto is proud of its wine grapes, citrus fruits and olives.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania

Car: A18 ME-CT, exit Giarre

Train: Catania Central Station

Circumetnea Railway

Bus: Interbus - Autolinee

Zappalà & Torrisi



# PARKS AND RESERVES





## THE LACHEA ISLAND AND CYCLOPS STACKS NATURE RESERVE

The Lachea Island and Cyclops Stacks Nature Reserve (Isola Lachea and Faraglioni dei Ciclopi) was set up in 1989 to 'preserve and protect the seaweeds and wildlife of the coastal area, as well as to protect the *Podarcis sicula ciclopica* lizard which is unique to the area. The Reserve which forms part of the commune of Acicastello, includes Lachea island, a large stack and a series of smaller rocks, all of volcanic origin which formed during the initial eruptions of Mount Etna. Besides the part that emerges from the sea, the protected area also includes the strip of sea that extends between the islands and the coast. Lachea Island, formed mainly of basalt rocks, is the largest of the Cyclopean islands and is of volcanic origin deriving from the first underwater eruptions which occurred in the gulf of Acitrezza around 500,000 years ago. The Cyclopean archipelago is also a site of great archaeological and natural interest, given that signs of a prehistoric human presence have been found on Lachea Island. In 1896 Senator Luigi Gravina ceded the right to use the island and the six nearby rocks to the Rector of Catania University for scientific studies and experiments. This led to the development of a small, but important, Marine museum while the Nature Reserve was created in 1998. The numerous species of fish and invertebrates that inhabit the seabed around the rocks create a rich fauna. At a depth of only a few metres it is possible to see blennies, boghes and grey mullet, while colonies of hydrozoans, red sea squirts, bearded fire worms and the silver flash of sea bream can be distinguished between the rocks on the sea floor. Yellow Gorgonians are common at depths of around 15-20 metres. There are also admirable treelike colonies of polyps which sometimes grow to more than a metre but the most unusual and beautiful of all is the Berried anemone (*Alicia Mirabilis*), the largest actinia in the Mediterranean. In the sea around the Cyclops rocks and on the lava rock seabed, a large part of the Mediterranean marine fauna can be found: multi-colour sponges and large starfish, sea pike, sea bream and groupers. It is possible to discover colonies of the highly-coloured *Astroides calycularis* coral, the treelike growth of the *Eunicella cavolinii* gorgonian or silvery Mediterranean amberjacks. Nor is it unusual to come across sea horses and rays. The sandy floor is the realm of the pearly



*Cyclops Stacks*

razorfish, while at great depths it is possible to admire the beautiful red fans of the *Paramuricea gorgonian*, tree-like growths of more than one metre, and lobsters waving their long feelers. Turbot are also frequently seen. Lachea island has a varied fauna with groups of animals that resist the adverse environmental conditions. Among the numerous invertebrates to be found are the native Sicilian *Zelotes messinai* and *Urozelotes mysticus* spiders, the latter being found only on this island. There are some rodents and a few lizards, in particular the native *Podarcis sicula ciclopica* which is unique to the island. There is a larger number of bird species which can occasionally be seen on the island such as the rare marsh hawk, peregrine falcons and even some waders. Few species use the island for nesting but among those that do are the Spanish sparrow and the yellow wagtail. The island also offers shelter to the Mediterranean gull, the black-headed gull and the cormorant. The flora of the island consists mainly in plants introduced by man in the past or that can survive on a substrate that is rich in salts due to its closeness to the sea. Some native plants found in Sicily and Southern Italy flourish there, such as the Oxford ragwort (*Senecio squalidus*), the *bocconeii* variety of *Heliotrope* and *Carlina hispanica* ssp. *globosa*. On the island it is possible to visit the small natural history museum with historical finds, exhibits coming from the Marine Biology Laboratory and others regarding the local marine life.



*Rare Podarcis Sicula Ciclopica lizard*



## FIUMEFREDDO NATURE RESERVE

The River Fiumefreddo Nature Reserve is located near the mouth of the river.

It was officially instituted in May 1981 with the aim of preserving the aquatic flora of the zone and reintroducing Mediterranean vegetation along the banks of the river. The designated territory, lying on the narrow plain between the communes of Fiumefreddo di Sicilia and Calatabiano, is divided between the reserve (Zone A) consisting in about 10 hectares of land and a larger area around it (Zone B) which covers about 70 hectares. Zone A comprises principally the river and its bed, fed by the 'Testa dell'acqua' spring to the north and the 'Quadare' spring to the east. Instead, Zone B includes the typical agricultural lands of this part of the coast with citrus fruit orchards and vegetable garden crops. There are also a variety of typical rural buildings, among which the Belfiore farmhouse and the Slaves' Castle (Castello degli Schiavi) which are excellent examples of 18 C rural Sicilian Baroque workmanship.

This protected area is made so important by the particular ecological conditions created by the cold, slow-flowing water of the River Fiumefreddo which guarantees the presence of aquatic plants of rare beauty, pondweeds (*Potamogeton* spp.) and water buttercups (*Ranunculus penicillatus*, *R. tricophyllus*) in particular. This type of environment which is commonly found in central Europe and on the Atlantic coast, is instead unique in central-southern Italy. In the shallower parts of the river where the current is weak, water celery, watercress, veronica commonly known as speedwell, and water mint can be found. Near the river mouth there are patches of 'Sparganio' a fairly rare species which in Sicily is normally found only at an altitude of 1,000m in the Nebrodi mountains. The banks of the river are thick with the more or less predominant thin marsh reeds (*Cannuccia di palude*) mixed with the rarer presence of the poligono seghettato variety of knotweed. Near the Quadare spring there are papyrus plants which are not native to the area and have certainly been introduced recently. Behind the reed beds the vegetation consists in a remarkable



*Aquatic vegetation*

marsh flora including common purple loosestrife, water iris and other species. Along the banks the common nettle, angelica, bindweed and water hemp are frequently found. Near the Quadare spring there are also the remnants of an old, white willow wood. Overall, besides preserving some extremely interesting floral and vegetational aspects of the zone, the Reserve is also a refuge for different species of sedentary and migratory birds that winter and nest there, because it is the only remaining wetland, together with the neighbouring marshy area 'La Gurna', along the Ionian coast from the mouth of the Simeto to



*The Slave's Castle*



*Water buttercup*

Messina. 'La Gurna', is the only remaining patch of an ancient swamp that used to form part of the Mascali lake which extended right the way along the coast from Riposto to Fiumefreddo until the end of the 19th century.



## ACIREALE TIMPA RESERVE

The Timpa Nature Reserve which runs along the coast from Catania to Riposto forms part of the commune of Acireale. Declared a Reserve in 1999 and managed by the State Regional Forestry Authority, the Timpa is a seven-kilometre-long ridge which extends below Acireale. In parts it is more than one hundred metres high and falls sheer into the sea, covered with ivy, euphorbia and carob trees. Like Lachea Island, the Timpa is a natural, open-air laboratory where the geo-volcanic history of Sicily is

preserved. Some stretches near to the coastline are particularly important, where high basalt stacks, similar to those in the Alcantara Gorges, show how the lava crystallised when it met the sea. This is the case of the Cave of the Columns (Grotta delle Colonne) which can only be reached from the sea. Different species of birds of prey nest in the reserve and the dense, luxuriant vegetation is fed by numerous springs that spill into the Ionian. In the Santa Caterina quarter there is a splendid viewpoint. The Chiazze, a tortuous, stone footpath, forms part of the Timpa and can be reached from the SS 114 in Acireale. Dating from the 17 C, it winds down to Santa Maria La Scala a quiet, picturesque fishing village. Along the zigzag path there is the Tocco fort, which was built to defend Acireale in the 17 C. During the period of Spanish rule, a cannon was fired from here to warn of danger. The path is lined with carob trees, broom, wild olive trees, mastic trees and sea lavender.



*"La Timpa"*

# IN AND AROUND CALTAGIRONE



# CALTAGIRONE



## HISTORY

Caltagirone (39,000 inhabitants) is located at an altitude of 611 m.s.l. on an outcrop of the Erei Mountains which extend out from the centre of Sicily in a south-east direction merging with the Iblei Mountains at this point. The city lies on the south-facing slopes of the high ground having gradually occupied the hill of St. George to the east and then the neighbouring hill of St. Francis of Assisi, to which it was connected in the 16 C by a spectacular bridge. It has very ancient origins as witnessed by numerous finds and documents regarding coins and art works, which show it to have been one of the numerous towns populated by the Sicani, Siculan and Greek-Siculan peoples. The Rocca, Montagna, Salvatorello and Pille prehistoric necropolis, as well as the Siculan-Greek inhabitants of S. Mauro, Altobrando, Piano Casazze and other places, testify to human presence here in ancient times.

However, findings that testify Roman, Byzantine and Saracen rule are much rarer. The town was temporarily liberated from the Saracens by the Genoese in 1030. Having returned to Moslem domination, Caltagirone was definitively freed by the Norman Count Roger on 25th July, 1090. After the Normans the town was ruled by the Swabians and the Angevins who were driven from the island after the Sicilian Vespers. In the centuries that followed, illustrious visitors to the town and the concessions and privileges it obtained were proof of its prosperity. James I of Aragon visited twice, Frederick III came in 1299 and 1458, while John of Castile was crowned King of Sicily in the castle that stood on top of the main hill and in gratitude for the help he received in various undertakings returned to declare Caltagirone

a state town. John of Aragon and Ferdinand the Catholic conceded and confirmed further privileges among which that of 'mero e misto imperio'. The period between the 16 C and 18 C was the golden age for Caltagirone which was enriched with churches, institutes, colleges and convents. Throughout these centuries the population remained constant at about 20,000 inhabitants, of which about one thousand were potters. The catastrophic earthquake in 1693 totally destroyed the town, which was rebuilt in the space of ten years in the Baroque style that can still be seen.



## ART & MONUMENTS

Caltagirone is one of the most important tourist destinations in Sicily thanks to its artistic and ceramic heritage and the beauty of its views and monuments. The main road of the town is the long via Roma which cuts the city in two and leads to the famous S. Maria del Monte stairway. The stairway forms the connection between the old town, the seat of religious power in the 16 C, and the new part where the civil buildings were constructed. On the two sides of the stairway there are the two old quarters of S. Giorgio and S. Giacomo whose intricate narrow streets contain beautiful religious buildings. The 142 lava stone steps are decorated with splendid polychrome majolica tiles with alternating geometric, floral, animal and decorative motifs. At the top of the monumental stairway is the Mother Church of S. Maria del Monte. Above the main altar there is a 13 C panel painting of the Madonna of Conadomini. At the foot of the stairway stands the Senate Palace with the Capitaniale Court behind it, a beautiful example of public building by Gagini dating from 1601. On the right a stairway takes visitors up to the church of Gesù with a Deposition from the Cross by Filippo Paladini. Behind this building is the church of S. Chiara, whose elegant façade is attributed to Rosario Gagliardi. Some of the most interesting buildings are to be found along via Roma, with many examples of majolica decorations. At the beginning of the street, there is the beautiful 'Villa comunale' – the Town Park – with its small theatre. The park was



Church of S. Maria del Monte

planned as a landscape garden towards the middle of the last century by Basile. The side that faces via Roma is bordered by a balustrade embellished with vases decorated with ominous, diabolic faces, alternating with intensely green pine cones and lamps with majolica supports. Inside there are a series of paths that lead to wider spaces, the most eye-catching of which is without doubt the clearing that contains the delightful, Arab-style bandstand, with majolica decorations. The unusual, small 17 C theatre also decorated with majolica is an elegant, scenic belvedere overlooking the city, by means of which access is gained to the Ceramics Museum where the history of the local ceramic work is traced from prehistoric times up to the beginning of the 20 C. Passing the semicircular, stone and brick recess of the Tondo Vecchio the visitor comes to the imposing façade of the church of S. Francesci d'Assisi. A bridge of the same name leads to the heart of the town. Beyond the small church of S. Agata, headquarters of the majolica-makers brotherhood, lies the recently restored Bourbon Prison, a square, sandstone building of imposing dimensions. It was planned at the end of the 18 C by the Sicilian architect Natale Bonajuto and used as a prison for about one hundred years. At present it contains a small civic Museum which allows visitors to explore its massive interior structure. In Piazza Umberto I there is the Cathedral of S. Giuliano, a Baroque building that has undergone considerable change, the most important being the substitution of the façade at the beginning of the 20 C. A walk through the characteristic quarters that lie behind the central streets can lead to some pleasant surprises, like the neo-gothic façade of the church of S. Pietro with its majolica decorations. On the eastern edges of the town is the church of the Capuchins which conserves a beautiful altar piece by Filippo Paladini representing the transportation of the Madonna dell' Odigitria from the East to the West. Next to the church is the Art Gallery which contains a collection of art ranging from the 1500s to the present day. From here it is possible to enter the crypt which houses a very unusual nativity scene bringing together the various moments of Jesus' life which are illuminated one after the other and accompanied by phrases from the Gospels. The statues were made in the 1990s by different local artists. The Sicilian Puppet Theatre in via Verdumai is also worth a visit where, besides the theatre, there is also an exhibition of Sicilian puppets belonging to the Gesualdo Pepe collection and a display of posters and historic books.



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

The centuries-old art of pottery-making has been part of the history of Caltagirone since ancient times and has made it famous all over the world. Generations of craftsmen and artists have followed on from one another each interpreting in their own original way the ability of the potter to create shape and colour. The area also produces a large variety of agricultural produce, cheeses and other hand-made delicacies.



*S. Maria del Monte staircase*



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*July*

25 - Feast of the patron S. Giacomo

**Evenings of 14/15 and 24/25** - the Illuminated Stairway - the Santa Maria del Monte staircase is illuminated with oil candles in different coloured glass holders which are positioned on the one hundred and forty-two steps so as to form a pattern

*December/January*

• 'Natale e Presepe' (Christmas and the Nativity Scene) exhibition - the beauty of the terracotta figures is famous all over Sicily. During the exhibition visitors can see the latest creations of the local craftsmen as well as historical pieces normally kept in the town museum



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania

Car: S.S. 417 exit Caltagirone

Train: Catania Central Station

Bus: Interbus - AST

# CASTEL DI IUDICA



## HISTORY

Castel di Iudica (4,694 inhabitants) rises on a hill at an altitude of 475 m.s.l. forming a long crest running east to west. The commune is not a single entity having a peculiar layout with Castel di Iudica in the centre and then the four quarters of Carrubbo, Giumarra, Cinquegrani and Franchetto spreading across the Plain of Catania. Mention is first made of this area in the first half of the 12 C when Abù Abd Allah Muhammad All-Idris, the Arab geographer, who lived at the court of Roger II described it as a flourishing agricultural village. Between 1816 and 1819 it became a quarter of the commune of Ramacca with the name of Giardinelli (little garden) due to the large number of citrus fruit orchards in the area. In 1934 when it became a commune, the town took the name Castel di Iudica from the nearby mountain.



## ART & MONUMENTS

There are a number of churches to visit in the different quarters: the Mother Church Santa Maria delle Grazie in Castel di Iudica, the church of S. Maria del Rosario in Giumarra, the church of S. Giuseppe in Carrubbo, the church of the Sacro Cuore in Cinquegrani and the church of S. Francesco in Franchetto. There are also two extremely interesting archaeological sites. The first, on Mount Iudica is famous for its Hellenized indigenous settlement, as shown by the finding of an indigenous chamber tomb and a 'Capuchin type' tomb dating

back to the 6 C -5 C B.C. The second, on Mount Turcisi, has a Phourion, a Greek military outpost of the 6 C – 4 C B.C. The archaeological finds from this residential unit, from the necropolis on Mount Iudica and the surrounding area are on display in the Archaeological section of the 'Prospero Grasso' Museum. The Hermitage of the church of S. Michele Arcangelo and the farm on Mount Iudica are also interesting. Mount Iudica is a striking geological limestone outcrop from the Meso-Cenozoic period, 180 million years ago.



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*April*  
24/25 - Pecorino Cheese Festival

*August*  
2nd Sunday - Feast of the Madonna Santa Maria Delle Grazie

*September*  
• Festival of Traditional Flavours



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

Castel di Iudica is an agricultural town and produces cereal, citrus fruit and olive crops. Animal breeding (sheep, goats and cows) is a flourishing activity and as a result the local dairy products are excellent.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania  
Car: A19 CT-PA exit Gerbini – S.S. 192  
direction Castel di Iudica  
Bus: AST



Remains of the Church of San Michele Arcangelo



# GRAMMICHELE



## HISTORY

The commune of Grammichele (15,000 inhabitants) lies on the slopes of the Iblei Mountains at an altitude of 520 m.s.l. It was founded by the Prince of Butera, Carlo Maria Marafa, three months after the catastrophic earthquake of 18th April, 1693 which devastated the towns in the Val di Noto. After the quake, the more superstitious abandoned the old village of Occhiolà, now an archaeological park, and moved to the new hamlet. The peculiarity of Grammichele is the perfectly hexagonal layout of its town centre, which has so interested scholars from all over the world that a plaster copy of the slate slab on which the town plan is engraved was exhibited at the Universal Forum of Culture in Barcellona in 2004 in the 'Cities-Corners' section.



## ART & MONUMENTS

There are a number of churches of great architectural interest around the hexagonal square of Grammichele, including the churches of the Spirito Santo, Sant'Anna and San Leonardo. Particular mention should be made of the Mother Church, occupying one side of Carlo Maria Carafa square which, with its typically Baroque sandstone façade, contrasts enormously with the northern-style Town Hall, built at the end of the 19th century by the architect Carlo Sada, which occupies another corner of the square. Inside the Town Hall it is possible to see material from the excavations carried out at the Occhiolà archaeological site. Another feature of Grammichele is the number of sundials that decorate the various squares in homage to the city founder, a lover of science and politics, who created the large

sundial in the centre of the main square which was removed at the beginning of the 1800s. The Occhiolà Archaeological Park is also of considerable interest. It covers an area of 30 hectares and contains archaeological finds dating back to various eras, from the Bronze Age through to the 17 C.



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*April*

**18** - Anniversary of the foundation of the town

*May*

**8** - Feast of the patron saints Michele Arcangelo and S. Caterina d'Alessandria

*September*

**6 / 7** - Sausages and traditional flavours from Terravecchia

**8** - Feast of the Madonna del Piano, with typical local dishes



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

The economy of Grammichele is particularly active and is based not only on agriculture but also crafts such as stone, marble and wood working. All year round visitors can enjoy the culinary delights of the area including 'cassatelle di ricotta' which are fried or baked ricotta cakes.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania

Car: S.S. RG-CT 514 exit Grammichele

Bus: AST



"Piazza Carlo Maria Carafa"

# LICODIA EUBEA



## HISTORY

Licodia Eubea lies between the provinces of Catania and Ragusa. Situated between two hills, it overlooks the valley of the River Dirillo. People lived here in Greek and Roman times. According to some historians, the 'Euboia' colony, founded by Calcidese from Lentini in 650 BC, was sited here. Excavations have brought to light numerous archaeological finds and a few necropolis. During the period of Saracen rule in Sicily, Mount Licodia became a strategically important fortified garrison, later transformed in Norman times into Castello di Licodia, the existence of which is historically dated back to 1272. During the Middle Ages, the fiefdom belonged to the Filangeri, Santapau and Ruffo families and so many nobles lived there that it was called 'little Palermo'. The place name Licodia was adopted at this time, according to some deriving from the Greek 'Lukos' (wolf- given the large number of wolves in the area), according to others from the Arab 'al-Kudia' (crag). Later the place name Eubea was added, in memory of the Calcidese. The devastating earthquake which occurred in the Val di Noto in 1693, almost completely destroyed the castle leaving only the ruins that are still standing. When feudalism was abolished, the town became an autonomous commune in 1844, freeing itself from nearby Vizzini.



## ART & MONUMENTS

The main monuments are to be found along Corso Umberto, the main street, and testify to the town's noble past history. At the feet of the crag in Piazza V. Emanuele



Licodia Castle

there is the Mother Church dedicated to Santa Margherita, the patron saint of Licodia with a Late Baroque façade and majestic bell tower that was mentioned by Verga in his stories. Further along the same street there is Palazzo Vassallo with its beautiful Baroque façade. In Piazza Garibaldi visitors can see the Town Hall, once a Dominican monastery, and the 18 C church of the Rosary. All that remains of the castle is part of the cylindrical tower, the walls and the dungeons.



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*Easter*

• Holy Week procession characterised by laments and hymns from 1500-1600

*September*

• Grape Festival

*December*

• Local produce Fair



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

The main income for Licodia comes from table grapes, guaranteed by an I.G. P. quality mark. Another typical product is 'patacò', a flour obtained from milling grass pea pulses.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania

Car: S.S. 194 CT-RG exit Vizzini

Bus: AST

# MAZZARRONE



## HISTORY

Situated on the borders of the province of Catania (3,903 inhabitants) at about 300 m.s.l. Mazzarone became an autonomous local authority on 7th May, 1976 when the Piano Chiesa, Botteghelle, Cucchi, Leva and Grassura quarters, previously belonging to Caltagirone, and the Botteghelle-Sciri Sottano area, belonging to Licodia Eubea, were united to form the single commune of Mazzarone. The individual quarters developed as rural communities around 1870, gradually increasing their populations and developing a rich, prosperous economy based on wine growing. Despite being a new commune, Mazzarone has remote origins as testified by archaeological finds that go back to Greek and Roman times. The most accepted theory as regards the origin of the name is that it comes from the Greek 'Maz', ear (of corn) and 'aron' or 'arun' corn, that is a land rich in corn. The part of the area ceded by the commune of Caltagirone, consists in the former fief of Mazzarone, while the part ceded by the commune of Licodia Eubea formed part of the former fief of Sciri. These fiefs belonged to different owners from a number of families. As regards Mazzarone: Giovanni de Laumia (1296), Federico de Carnoa, Antonio de Timera from Lentini, Attardo Landolina, the Caramanno family (who in 1513 gave part to the monastery of the Nuns of SS. Salvatore di Noto), the Platamone, Gravina, Requisenz and lacona families and finally, from 1866 (under a 'subversive' law which expropriated ecclesiastical properties) the noble Gravina, Chiarandà and Leva families. Sciri, instead, belonged for a long time to the Santapace family. When autonomy was granted and the Commune formed, the population's desire for an independent administrative existence was finally satisfied.



## ART & MONUMENTS

The town has three parish churches, the church of S. Giuseppe in the Poggio di Mezzo quarter, the church of Santa Maria del Rosario in the Cucchi quarter and the church of the Sacro Cuore in the Botteghelle quarter. The first church of S. Giuseppe was built around 1894, while the present day church a short distance away in the same square was built by the residents around 1910. The bell tower adjoining the church has four bells among which the historic Caltagirone Senate bell which was recast after the 1693 earthquake and the bell dedicated to San Michele (1741) coming from the rural Gabella church.



Grapes



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*March*

**19** - Feast of the patron S. Giuseppe

*August*

**2nd Sunday** - International table grape (IGP) festival



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

The productive potential of the commune is centred on wine-growing, in particular table grapes (since 1930) with an IGP quality guarantee.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania

Car: S.S. 194 CT-RG exit Mazzarone

Bus: AST

# MILITELLO VAL DI CATANIA



## HISTORY

Militello in Val di Catania (7,953 inhabitants), formerly Val di Noto, is an agricultural town situated on the north-eastern foothills of the Iblei mountains at an altitude of 422 m.s.l. It would appear that the first settlement developed here in Byzantine times, in the valley of the River Lèmbasi to the south of the present town, as witnessed by the fact that the prehistoric necropolis were transformed into dwellings and Christian places of worship. The area of Militello is strewn not only with prehistoric sites but also necropolis dating from between the 5 C and 2 C B.C.. After a period of Arab rule, historical documentation of the site begins in the Middle Ages when it was an important fortified town. It remained feudal until the end of the 18 C, its lords being the Barresi (1308-1567) and Branciforte (1567 – 1812) families. Over the centuries Militello became an important religious and cultural town, full of churches, monasteries and palaces, reaching its cultural and artistic peak in the first twenty years of the 1600s when it was ruled by Lord Francesco Branciforte and Lady Giovanna d'Austria, daughter of the victor of the Battle of Lepanto. Destroyed by the 1693 earthquake, Militello was rebuilt following the lines of its 17 C expansion and new monuments were erected.



## ART & MONUMENTS

Militello is full of churches and palaces, principally in Baroque style, which make it one of the most important towns in the former Val di Noto. Among the churches and monasteries that escaped the earthquake there is the Abbey of S. Benedetto (17 C) and the oratory of the Madonna della Catena (16 C). A different fate awaited the church of the Madonna della Stella la Vetere and the Mother Church of S. Nicolò which were destroyed in 1693 and rebuilt in the 18 C in a more northerly position. The Late Baroque style of these two churches led to Militello being recognised by UNESCO in 2002. The heritage of vestments and altar pieces coming from these churches was so considerable as to lead to the setting up of the Museo di Arte Sacra 'San Nicolò' e del Tesoro di 'S. Maria' (Sacred Art and Treasures Museum). The 'S. Guzzone' Museum and the 'Antonio Cannata' Modern Art Museum are also worth a visit.



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*Easter*  
• Holy Week Procession



*Militello Val di Catania - view*

### *March*

**19** - Feast of San. Giuseppe

### *July*

**10/11** - Feast of San Benedetto

### *August*

**17/18** - Feast of the joint patron  
SS. Salvatore

### *September*

**8** - Feast of the patron Maria  
SS Della Stella

### *October*

**2nd week** - Prickly Pear and Mostarda  
Festival



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

The area produces a large number of prickly pears which are used to make 'mostarda', a kind of sweet, sticky fruit jelly.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania  
Car: S.S. 194 direction Ragusa S.S. 385  
direction Caltagirone  
Bus: Interbus



## HISTORY

The commune of Mineo (5,973 inhabitants) lies at an altitude of 511 m.s.l. and its spindle-shaped layout perches on the summit of two hills on the north-western edge of the Iblei mountains. The Mineo area is one of the richest archaeological districts in the Province, with remains that go from Paleolithic times to the Middle Ages. It was founded in 459 B.C. by the leader Ducezio on what had been a Hellenized Siculan settlement called Menai. Under the Romans, Menai was called Mene and became an important grain producing area. In 828, when it was conquered by the Arabs, its name changed from Menae to Qualat Minam and it became an important fortress. The Arabs introduced citrus fruit cultivation to Mineo. During the Norman period, the Ducezio Castle was built and, according to historians, was formed of twelve battlemented towers around a triple atrium with a keep in the centre. In the 14 C it was subject to Giovanni d'Aragona, nominated Count of Mineo by Frederick III. In 1693 the town was destroyed by an earthquake and only the 16 C Jesuit College remained standing.



## ART & MONUMENTS

Mineo has a number of churches where visitors can admire beautiful works of art. The church of Sant'Agrippina preserves magnificent stucco works, attributed to Serpotta and frescoes by Sebastiano Monaco showing scenes from the life of Sant'Agrippina. The church of S. Maria Maggiore conserves a large number of artistic 'jewels' among which: the stone baptismal font, the 16 C classical-style marble lavabo, an alabaster statue of the Queen of the Angels, donated by Count Roger in 1072 and the 16 C ivory crucifix above the altar dedicated to San Sebastiano. The church of S. Pietro has a 17 C polychrome wooden statue of Christ at the Column, a monumental 18 C gable-ended choir loft and organ in inlaid wood with pure gold gilding and a walnut carved chancel. The interior of the church of S. Tommaso has lovely 18 C stuccoes and a wooden crucifix with a splendid reliquary of the Martyred Saints. The archaeological sites are also very important, among which the Antiquarium of Rocchicella-Palikè which lies along the River Margi where the oldest proof of human settlement in the Mineo district was found, dating back to the Paleolithic era. The Carratabia caves date back to the time of Ducezio in the 5 C B.C.. They consist in two funeral chambers which open onto the side of a plateau to the south east of Mineo. On the walls of the chambers visitors can still see what remains of decorations carved with a fine point representing groups of horses, some led by horsemen, wild boar and deer. The larger room



*Santa Agrippina – apse*

represents a boar hunting scene, a theme that was common in Greek art and also associated with funerals.



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*Easter*  
• Holy Week Procession

*August*  
**Last two Sundays** – Feast of the patron S. Agrippina

*November*  
• 'Luigi Capuana' literary award

*December/January*  
**1 Dec – 6 Jan** - 'Natale nei vicoli' (Christmas in the lanes) competition: an event dedicated to live artistic nativity scenes.



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

Mineo is famous for its blood oranges: Tarocchi, Sanguinelle and Moro. Local growers also use refined cultivation and milling techniques to produce an excellent Extra Virgin D.O.P. olive oil.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania  
Car: S.S. 417 exit Mineo  
Bus: AST

# MIRABELLA IMBACCARI



## HISTORY

Mirabella Imbaccari (5,766 inhabitants) lies in the extreme southern foothills of the Erei mountains on the borders of the provinces of Catania and Enna. The town was founded by Don Giuseppe Paternò, Baron of Raddusa when the interior of Sicily was being colonised. He obtained a 'Licentia populandi' from King Philip III of Spain on 11th September, 1610 which authorised him to build a town in his fief and call it by his wife's name, Mirabella. The town, built in the Baldo fief, did not have much fortune due to its unhealthy climate and malaria. It therefore proved necessary to move the settlement to the Imbaccari hillock. The town was called Mirabella until 1862 when, after a resolution by the Municipal Council, Vittorio Emanuele II, King of Italy declared that the town should be called Mirabella Imbaccari. The commune includes the former fiefs of Upper and Lower Baldo and half the former fief of Imbaccari, the part called Lower Imbaccari. The town is divided into quarters: Forche, Palazzo, Ospizio, Zaccaria, Cozzo or Fieravecchia, Fossaneve or Tedesco, Maiorche-Paradiso, Zotta di Zecche and Rotonda.



## ART & MONUMENTS

Mirabella Imbaccari has some interesting monuments among which the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie with a three-level elevation in Sicilian Baroque style, decorated with a large, artistic portal having a frieze and gable. There is also the church of the Sacro Cuore di Gesù which was temporarily created from a warehouse by the Politini family in December 1908 after an attempt to build a second church in Mirabella failed in 1904. The interior is divided into three naves and is decorated with a huge wooden crucifix by Vincenzo Moroder (1953) and the original marble main altar, decorated with a wooden statue of the Sacred Heart by Luigi Santifaller. The 17 C Palazzo Biscari is of considerable interest, built on a plateau that overlooks the town. In local Baroque style with curved iron balconies, the porch, door posts and wide interior stairway are in carved stone. There is also an inner courtyard and it is surrounded by gardens. The coat of arms of the noble Biscari family appears on the external frontispiece while in the centre of the entrance hall there is a large rainwater cistern with two wrought iron columns.



Church of the Sacro Cuore di Gesù



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*March*

**19** - Feast of San Giuseppe

*April*

• Ricotta and Cheese Festival

*July/August*

• Estate Mirabellese – cultural and recreational events

*August*

**4th Sunday** - Feast of the patron Maria SS. Delle Grazie

*December*

**12** - Cuccia' Festival – cuccia' is an Arab dish made of boiled wheat grains dressed with oil



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

Mirabella Imbaccari is famous for embroidery lace made using the traditional cushion and bobbins.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania  
Car: S.S. 417 direction Mirabella Imbaccari  
Bus: AST

# PALAGONIA



## HISTORY

Situated on the southern edge of the plain of Catania, the commune of Palagonia (16,568 inhabitants) lies at an altitude of about 200 m.s.l. Although the most certain documentation of its origins dates back to the Norman period, remains exist which suggest that the area was settled in prehistoric times. There are a number of archaeological sites a few kilometres from the town that testify to Upper Paleolithic and Mesolithic settlements and other finds dating back to the Greek and Byzantine eras. Not far from Palagonia there are the two small Naftia lakes which are linked to Sicilian history at the time of the Siculan King Ducezio (460-440 BC). During the Middle Ages the area came under Norman rule and the fief and territory was ceded to the Bishop of Syracuse by Count Roger. In 1407 Giacomo Gravina became the Lord of the fiefdom. From that time on the affairs of the town were linked to the Gravina-Cryullas noble family until the death of Francesco Paolo Gravina, the eighth and last Prince of Palagonia, in 1854. Having died without children the Prince left all his estate to the poor of Palermo. At this point the local farmers began fighting for the land that they had always worked. The first contracts of sale were signed in 1923 but their battle for land continued through until the 1950s when local people and farmers from Mineo and Grammichele occupied the Naftia feudal lands belonging to Prince Grimaldi.



## ART & MONUMENTS

The centre of Palagonia has some neoclassical and liberty-style mansions of considerable architectural prestige, built between the end of the 19 C and the beginning of the 20 C. The most outstanding are Palazzo Ponte in via Umberto, Palazzo Blandini overlooking Piazza Garibaldi, recently restored to house a small local museum and Palazzo Politini in via Duca degli Abruzzi. The main monument in the town is the Oratory of Santa Febronia, the patron saint, located in the Coste quarter and dating back to the 6 C – 7 C A.D.. It is a small, almost square church carved entirely out of the rock with two altars, one of which is located in a niche cut into the wall frescoed with a Christ Pantocrator surrounded by a later Annunciation. Another place of note is the Early Christian Basilica of San Giovanni, an unusual building which still conserves the apse and some columns dating back to the 7 C A.D.. The Blandini Well (Pozzo Blandini) is also interesting. It is a six-metre high structure which dominates the surrounding plain, built around one of the many wells dug to find water for the citrus fruit orchards. There is also an important archaeological site a few kilometres from the town centre. The highland

in the Rocchicella quarter was settled in ancient times and is mentioned by classical Greek and Latin authors as being the site of the famous sanctuary of the Palici and also the ancient city of Paliké. The remains of the Estaterion and the Archaeological Museum, containing finds from the site, are worth a visit.



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*Easter*  
• Holy Week Procession

*June*  
24 / 25 - Feast of the patron Santa Febronia



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

As in all the surrounding area the typical produce of the area is blood oranges.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania  
Car: S.S. 417 exit Palagonia  
Bus: AST



Early Christian Basilica of San Giovanni

# RADDUSA



## HISTORY

The commune of Raddusa lies inland at an altitude of 350 m.s.l. on the hills that border the plain of Catania and the Erei mountains. The origin of the name Raddusa probably derives from an Arab root meaning to 'break stones' and is, therefore, probably a reference to the nature of the land and the stone quarry. The first information regarding the fief of Raddusa goes back to 1300, indicating that it was situated in the Val di Noto in the territory of Aidone and belonged to Pietro Fessima. In 1330, King Frederick III of Aragon conveyed the privilege of a fiefdom onto Pietro's son Enrico and his descendants. In 1530 the fief passed to the Paternò family after the marriage of Gianfrancesco Paternò, Knight of the Holy Roman Empire to Vincenzina Fessima. The first hamlet, formed by conscripted peasants was set up in Canne, a quarter to the south of the present-day town, lapped by the waters of the River Secco. In 1810 the Marquis Francesco Maria Paternò, who wanted to attract as many people as possible to his fief in order to acquire a workforce for his uncultivated lands and the numerous sulphur mines in the area, obtained from Ferdinand III, King of Sicily, the right to found a village. Thus it was that the village of Raddusa grew up and, to make settlement easier, the Marquis conceded plots of land to those who decided to move to his estate. In 1820 the new community was administratively aggregated to the commune of Ramacca. However, as time passed, thanks above all to its flourishing sulphur industry, the small village developed and the population grew considerably, so much so as to consider that the time was right to demand administrative autonomy. The battle for autonomy was not easy and lasted more than ten years because Ramacca did not want to separate from such a rich commune. However, in January 1860, Raddusa became autonomous.



## ART & MONUMENTS

There are a number of buildings of architectural interest in Raddusa, among which the Mother Church, dedicated to the Immaculate Conception which was built in 1850 to the plans of the architect Giuseppe Maggiore, with splendid Corinthian style stuccoes. Standing on a rock at about 10 km from the town is the Torre del Feudo, built around 1700. Its brickwork is intact and it has an irregular octagonal layout. Nearer to the town, on a highland, are the picturesque remains of Gresti Castle. The fort was constructed on a spur of rock overhanging the valley of the Gresti stream. Totally isolated, the ruins blend perfectly into their surroundings forming an almost perfect union between history and environment, a very uncommon sight in Sicily. The core of the castle is made up both of rooms cut directly into the natural rock and



Wheat Festival

later brick-built structures. Although no real evidence exists, these rooms are thought to date back to the Byzantine epoch, if not to the Imperial Roman age. Nature lovers will appreciate a visit to the Ogliaastro Dam, a protected nature reserve, which hosts more than 2,000 birds from 60 different species.



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

September

19 - Feast of the patron S. Giuseppe

- Wheat Festival, which remembers the ancient phases of the threshing process



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

The 'pasta di San Giuseppe', a soup of pulses with homemade pasta, is the local speciality, made from the wheat that is the typical local produce, par excellence.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania  
Car: A19 CT-PA, exit Agira  
Bus: Interbus





## HISTORY

The commune of Ramacca (10,744 inhabitants) is sited inland at 266 m.s.l., on the first heights that rise to the west of the plain of Catania. Although inhabited since Greek times, the town of Ramacca only developed between 1710 and 1712. A fief bearing the same name, of which Sancio Gravina was Lord, had been elevated to a Principedom on 7th October, 1688 on condition that it was inhabited and cultivated within ten years. However, the death of the Prince created a set back in the building works to which his son Ottavio dedicated time and energy, in order not to lose the title, requesting permission to populate the fief in May 1707. Once he had received the 'licentia populandi' Ottavio Gravina set about collecting people in order to give life to the new village. He was aided in this by the disastrous earthquake of 1693, which totally or partly destroyed many villages and towns on the east coast, and an earlier eruption which had covered numerous towns on the west side of Etna with lava. These calamities had enormously increased the numbers of homeless and destitute people, many of whom accepted Gravina's invitation to populate the new site. The first settlement was probably of no more than 200 families. Since then, due to its extensive, fertile lands Ramacca has been characterised by a large flow of immigrants from all the Sicilian provinces. However, although all these different cultures live peacefully together, they have never fused to create a single local culture with particular traditions. Neither have they preserved the cultural heritage of their original ethnic origins.



## ART & MONUMENTS

Ramacca offers a few buildings of architectural interest. Next to the central town square is the Mother Church, dedicated to the Natività di Maria SS. It was built in 1700 with simple architectural lines of no particular style, decorated with stuccoes, a stone chip and concrete floor and a polychromatic marble altar. The church of the Immaculate Conception has a neo-classic façade and a single nave, decorated with stuccoes, altars and oil paintings. The apse was rebuilt in 1977 and still conserves the end niche with a wooden statue of Our Lady by an unknown artist, while there is an inlaid wooden tabernacle dating from the 1800s on the altar. Adjoining the church of the Immaculate Conception is the 18 C Capuchin convent which hosts the Parish of S. Giuseppe. There is also an interesting archaeological Museum which displays finds from the explorations and excavations that have been carried out in the surrounding areas since the 1970s. There are numerous archaeological sites in the area, among which the Montagna zone, where the remains of the necropolis



Albospino Tower

of an ancient Greek town have been brought to light, the Castellito zone, where there is a Roman villa with a splendid mosaic floor and the Torricella zone, site of a Bronze Age village and necropolis.



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

March

19 - Feast of the patron S. Giuseppe

April

• Artichoke Festival



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

Large parts of this area are dedicated to the cultivation of artichokes and citrus-fruits, in particular blood oranges.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania  
Car S.S. 417, exit Ramacca  
Bus: Interbus - AST

# SAN CONO



## HISTORY

The commune of San Cono (2,903 inhabitants) lies on inland hills, at 525 m.s.l., on the far western side of the province.

The town was founded in 1785 by the Marquis Ottavio Trigona Bellotti and takes its name from St. Cono, who lived between 1139 and 1236. The reasons for this name are not clear and are usually attributed to local legend. Although the Marquis was employed in the administration of Piazza Armerina he did not neglect the fief of San Cono. He paid for the building of a church and 60 houses, where he welcomed people from all over Sicily who were attracted by the promise of a house and a plot of land to cultivate. This encouraged many men to respond to the Marquis's proclamation in order to make a new life for themselves. Ottavio Trigona soon requested and received the 'licentia populandi' and shortly after built the church of San Cono. In 1883 Duke Trigonia divided the territory and rented it out to the local inhabitants.



## ART & MONUMENTS

In the old town centre visitors can admire some interesting monuments. The Mother Church, the main church in San Cono, is located in Piazza Umberto I. It is in a variety of styles with hints of Doric, Corinthian, Byzantine and Greek-Roman and has a single wide nave. The main altar is made of marble and was built before 1868, there is a second basilica-style marble altar erected in 1977. There are also four secondary marble altars dating from 1969. Behind Piazza dello Spirito Santo there is a church of the same name, commonly known as the 'Church of San Cono' because it was the first Mother Church of the town and, above all, because there is a wooden statue of the saint, of uncertain date, on the altar. It is the oldest church, dating presumably from around the middle of the 1700s before the village was founded. It is in local Baroque-style with a single nave and end altar which has the Trigona family coat of arms, an eagle, engraved on the two lower sides. Palazzo Trigona adjoins the church of the Spirito Santo. The family had it built at the centre of the fief with the houses of the estate managers and the procurer attached. Now the Palace is divided between a number of private citizens and has been greatly modified. In the northern part of the town, on the slopes of Mount San Marco, there is the church of the Crucifix, built at the beginning of the 1900s. Inside there is a central altar dominated by a large papier machè Crucifix while to the sides there are two altars, dedicated to San Calofero, with a wooden statue of the saint and to Our Lady of Sorrows.



Prickly pears



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

May  
2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday - Feast of the patron  
S. Cono Abate

October  
• Prickly Pear Festival



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

San Cono is noted for its fruit, artichokes, grapes, cereals and, in particular, its prickly pears (which are also used to produce an excellent local ice-cream).



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania  
Car S.S. 417, exit Caltagirone, S.S. 124  
direction S. Michele di Ganzaria  
Bus: Interbus

# SAN MICHELE DI GANZARIA



## HISTORY

San Michele di Ganzaria (3,779 inhabitants) is located in a hilly inland area, at 490 m.s.l. The settlement was founded in 1000 by the Arabs. People continued to live there even after the expulsion of the Arabs and the settlement expanded greatly during the Angevin period. The oldest document so far discovered that speaks of the fief of Ganzaria is a deed dated 1276 attesting to the possession of the estate by Guglielmo De Padula. He was succeeded by Attardo De Padula, who was followed in his turn by his son-in-law, Guglielmotto de La Timonia. After taking part in the Caltagirone rebellion in 1394 against King Martin, the estate was confiscated and, probably around 1395, conceded to Ranieri Morana. It then passed into the hands of the powerful Modica family from Caltagirone and then to Antonio Gravina, a captain in Charles V's army. At the end of the 15 C the hamlet was destroyed by fire and the village was reconstructed by Antonio Gravina who, in 1534, ceded it to a colony of Greek-Albanian refugees expelled by the Turkish occupation of their country. The village, then denominated 'of the Greeks', consolidated into a town, belonging to the Gravina family until 1812 when feudalism was abolished and it became a commune.



## ART & MONUMENTS

The old town centre has some historically and architecturally interesting monuments, above all the 16 C ducal Castle of the Gravina family some remains of which can still be seen overlooking Piazza Umberto I. Of the original brick battlements, balconies and windows, all that remains today is part of the perimeter wall, in particular the northern side where the remains of an upper floor balcony can be seen and the eastern side where part of the battlements and a stretch of the guard's walkway remain. The church of the Rosary is in via Roma. Built in the second half of the 16 C but then modified in the 18 C, it has a simple façade, an arched entrance and a belfry that was added in the 19 C. Inside the single nave, apart from the precious marble High Altar, there are some excellent statues and oil paintings, as well as 18 C stuccoes and frescoes. Crossing via dei Greci visitors arrive at the Mother Church, the ancient 'French Temple' or 'Fanum Gallorum'. Built by the Angevins in the 13 C, the church was originally small but was later enlarged and rebuilt on a number of occasions. Dedicated to the patron San Michele Arcangelo, the building now has a Gothic-Cistercian style façade, the only example in Sicily. The upper part is decorated with entwined arches, with a tower standing on either side. The Latin cross interior has three naves and an apse richly decorated with frescoes and stuccoes and preserves some holy relics besides a large number of art treasures among which a life-size wooden crucifix

donated to the town in 1336 by William the Blessed and a beautiful 17th C baptismal font made from pitch stone.



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*September*

**1st Sunday** - Feast of the patron San Michele Arcangelo

*November*

• Wine and Oil festival

*December*

• 'Cuccia' festival – a soup made from chick peas and cereals



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

Typical local sweets are 'purciddati', biscuits filled with honey or mulled wine (a Christmas speciality), 'curriulli', fritters with wild cardoons and 'mostarda', made from cooked wine must to which almonds are added.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania

Car: S.S. 417 exit Caltagirone - S.S. 124 direction S. Michele di Ganzaria  
Bus: AST - Interbus



Mother Church



## HISTORY

The commune of Scordia (17,334 inhabitants) is situated inland in a hilly zone at 150 m.s.l. The area has been continually inhabited by successive populations since ancient times, traces of which are still highly visible today. The numerous artificial caves in the area testify to the presence of man in prehistoric times. Archaeological finds, in particular coins and funeral vases, testify to the later presence of Greek, Roman, Byzantine and Arab populations. The oldest documents using the name Scordia go back to 1131 and 1151. These are two diplomas sanctioning the donation of lands to the Knights Templar by the Norman Lords of the estate. More than one hundred years later in 1255 a papal bull issued by Pope Alexander IV indicates that the hamlet of Scordia Suttana was donated by the Pope to the noble Guelph Niccolò di Sanducia from Catania. In 1621 the estate passed to Antonio Branciforte who, after being nominated the first Prince of Scordia, obtained a 'licentia populandi' from Philip IV of Spain in 1628. He managed to attract a large number of destitute peasants to the village, attracted by the possibility of obtaining lands on lease from the Scordia estate and building a house within the urban area. This measure gave a considerable boost to the agricultural economy, favouring commercial development and an increase in the population. The Branciforte family ruled until 1812 when feudalism was abolished and Scordia became an autonomous commune.



## ART & MONUMENTS

The old town centre preserves a number of architecturally interesting monuments. The Mother Church, dedicated to the patron San Rocco, is located in Piazza Umberto I. It contains some important frescoes and excellent paintings. The square is graced by some 19 C mansions such as Palazzo Paoli-Migliore and Palazzo Modica. The main historical palace in the town is undoubtedly Palazzo Branciforte, dating back to 1628. The main entrance is through a tunnel surmounted by the central loggia. In 1644 building work began on the church of S. Antonio di Padova in Piazza San Francesco, with the adjoining former Convent of the Frati Riformati di San Francesco. The façade of the church is characterised by a simple Baroque style. Inside there are some excellent sculptures and paintings including an 18 C statue of Christ at the Column which is carried in procession on Wednesday in Holy Week. The cloister is an architectural jewel that contains 18 C frescoes which narrate episodes from the life of martyrs of the Franciscan Order. The 17 C church of Purgatory (or S. Gregorio Magno) preserves some wooden statues of the Passion Group as well as some quite interesting paintings. Of particular interest is the engraving of 'The



Church of San Rocco

Triumph of the Faith' based on designs by Titian which can be seen in the sacristy.



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*Easter*

• Holy Week procession

*August*

16 - Feast of the patron San Rocco

*March*

19 - Feast of San Giuseppe

*December/January*

16 Dec /6 Jan - Christmas events



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

Blood oranges are the most important crop in the area.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania

Car: S.S. 385 direction Scordia

Train: Catania Central Station

Bus: Interbus



## HISTORY

Vizzini lies at about 600 m.s.l. near the source of the Dirillo and Acate rivers on the Castello, Maddalena and Calvario hills which form part of the Iblei Mountains. It is one of the oldest towns in Sicily. The first information about it dates back to the late Bronze Age as witnessed by finds in the 'Three Channels' quarter which can now be seen in the P.Orsi Museum in Syracuse. After the Greeks and Romans, it was ruled by the Byzantines and then the Arabs. In the Middle Ages the town was limited to the peak of the 'Castello' hill and was surrounded by a high defensive wall. An important moment in its history came in 1252 when Emperor Conrad IV of Swabia conceded the privilege of 'perpetual state property'. However, this became void on his death in 1254 and Vizzini passed under feudal jurisdiction. In 1282 the town took part in the Vespers revolt. After the Caltabellotta Peace in 1302, having passed under Aragonese rule it was taken by Manfredi Alagona and Ughetto Santapau, Baron of Licodia. It only regained its freedom in 1403.

At the beginning of the 15 C, the town layout was modified by expansion outside the medieval walls. In 1536 after the accession of Charles V of Hapsburg the town, both to protect itself against the dangers posed by the nearby Barons and also to thank the government, began to buy, at a high price, a series of 'privileges' and 'titles' such as 'perpetual state property', 'pure and mixed empire' and 'very obedient city', as well as obtaining the possibility to elect a Town Council. Until the first half of the 17 C Vizzini continued to expand, reaching a total of 16,000 inhabitants. Nevertheless, although it had become an increasingly influential town its medieval history of constant strife with the liege lord to whom it had been 'sold' continued. This occurred in 1648 when it was given in fief to Nicolò Squitini from Genoa. It



"Cunziria" (old tannery)

was only in 1679 that it managed to regain its freedom. In 1693 it suffered the devastating consequences of the terrible earthquake that demolished many towns in the Val di Noto. After this event the town underwent wide-scale rebuilding, not only at a social level, but also artistically and culturally speaking. The numerous religious and civil monuments that went up in this period, some of very fine workmanship, bear witness to the fact. Throughout the 18 C the town, like many others in Sicily, experienced the rule of different governments, from the Hapsburgs to the House of Savoy, from the Austrians to the Bourbons. The great Sicilian author Giovanni Verga, who was born into a family originating from the town, based many of his works in Vizzini.



## ART & MONUMENTS

Vizzini's particular charm comes from the fact that its old town centre remains unchanged. Palazzo Verga and the Town Hall overlook the central Piazza Umberto I, with next to them the Salita Marineo, a long stairway whose risers are decorated with geometric and floral patterned tiles with views of palaces in Vizzini at the centre of each medallion. The Mother Church, dedicated to San Gregorio, still conserves part of the original construction, a Gothic-Norman portal, which survived the 1693 earthquake. The building is in a mixture of styles. The interior is divided into three naves, with an octagonal layout and ogive arches. Visitors can admire two splendid paintings by Filippo Paladini dating from the beginning of the 1600s which represent the Martyrdom of San Lorenzo and the Madonna della Mercede. Near the Mother Church is the Basilica of San Vito under the title of the Spirito Santo. The church is in Late Baroque style with Renaissance reminders and offers the visitor a carved wooden Crucifix, a chapel richly decorated with neoclassical style stuccoes and a reliquary. The church of S. Agata, built around the 14 C, was rebuilt in the 18 C. It was originally dedicated to San Pietro. Inside there is an altar piece of the Martyrdom of S. Agata and a Baroque Chapel dedicated to the Sacrament. The 'Immaginario Verghiano' Museum is hosted in an 18 C palace in the town centre. The heart of the Museum is the permanent

exhibition of photographs of Giovanni Verga, enriched by a series of heirlooms many of which connected with the photographic equipment that the writer used. There is also a section dedicated to a collection of photos of the film sets inspired by Verga's works, while the section entitled 'Archives of the Memory' collects interesting photographic material regarding places and people in Verga's world, from the 1920s through to the second half of the 20 C. The remains of the 'Cunziri' (tannery) houses and factories where Verga set his 'Cavalleria Rusticana' can be seen in the Masera quarter.



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

Vizzini's typical product par excellence is its fresh ricotta. Over the course of the years the area has specialised in the breeding of dairy animals and producing many types of cheese, ranging from fresh cheeses through to very mature.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania  
Car: E45 exit Vizzini/Monterosso, S.S. 194  
direction Vizzini  
Train: Catania Central Station  
Bus: Interbus - AST



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*Easter*

• Holy Week Procession

*April*

**23/24/25** - Ricotta and Cheese Festival, with cultural and folk events.

**29** - Feast of S. Giuseppe

*June*

**1** - Aromas and Flavours Festival – a chance to taste typical local products.

*July/August*

• Verga Events – theatrical representations of the works of the famous writer from Vizzini

*August*

**27/28/29** - Feast of S. Giovanni Battista

*October/November*

**30/31/1** - Traditional 'Fiera dei Morti'

*September*

**1/2/3** - Feast of the patron S. Gregorio Magno

*December*

• Christmas celebrations with live Nativity Scenes



Church of San Giovanni Battista

# PARKS AND RESERVES





## SAINT PETER'S WOOD NATURE RESERVE

The Saint Peter's Wood Nature Reserve covers a large sandy upland furrowed by deep valleys, near Santo Pietro, a small hamlet about twenty kilometres from Caltagirone. It is a splendid woody area covering more than 2,500 hectares and is the second largest in Sicily after the Ficuzza Wood near Palermo. Already subject to a bond order in 1991, the Reserve was fully instituted in 1999 and is managed by the Sicilian Region State Forestry Authority.

The creation of the Reserve was necessary to stop degradation and to protect the enormous variety of flora and fauna in what still remains of the once extensive, ancient Sicilian cork woods. There is a great variety of vegetation including splendid giant cork trees, old oaks, holm oaks and pines.

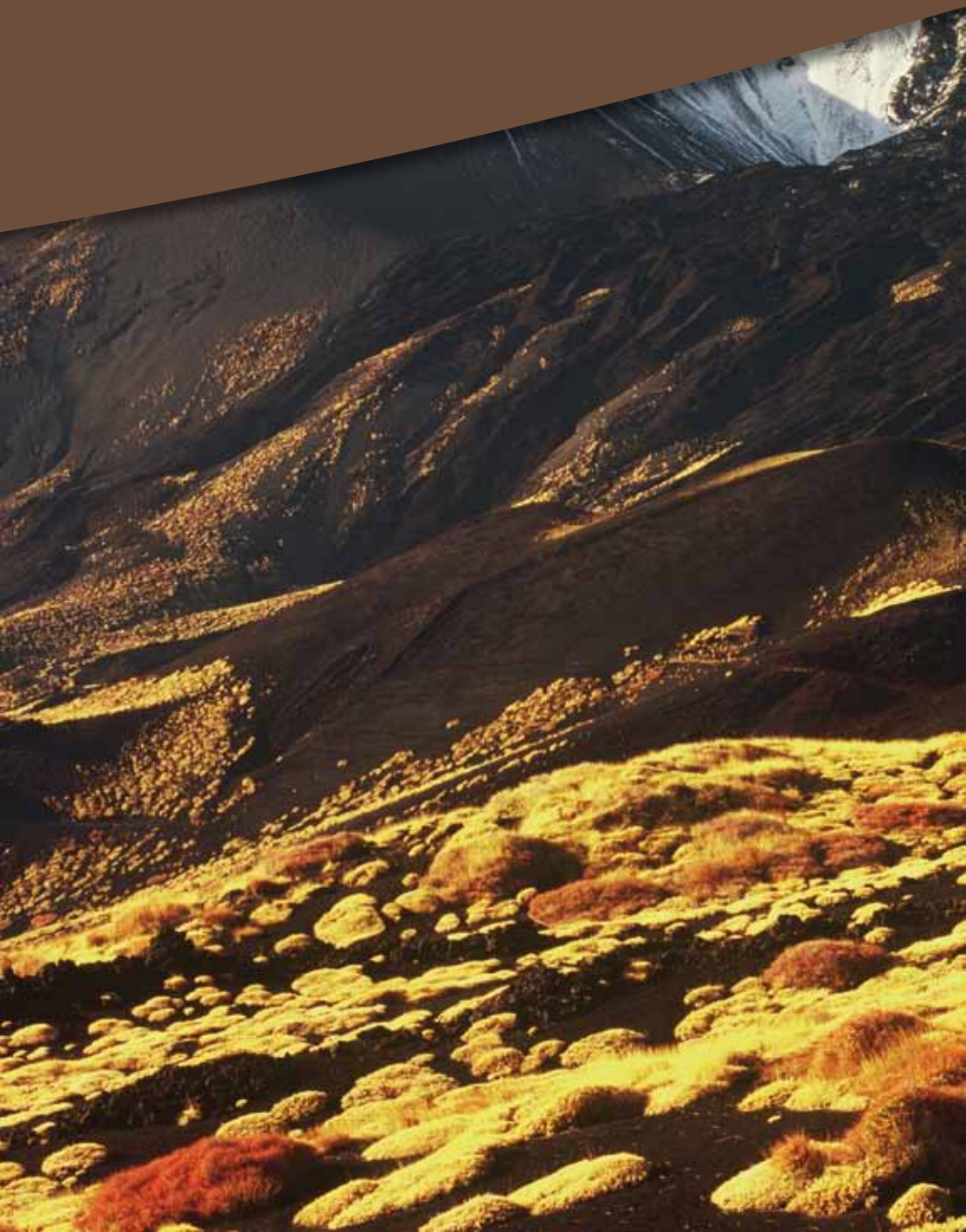
The undergrowth consists in wild olive, hawthorn, heather, arbutus and myrtle which provide shelter for a large number of small mammals. Saint Peter's Wood also hosts a number of rare birds, among which some predators such as buzzards and kestrels. Poplars and willows line the streams that feed the reserve and provide the ideal refuge for grey herons, egrets and kingfishers. In the La Grazia quarter of the interior there is a Wildlife Rescue Centre which specialises in saving tortoises.



Cork



# FOOTHILLS OF ETNA



# ACI BONACCORSI



## HISTORY

The commune (3,106 inhabitants) is sited on one of the hills that form a coastal plateau at the feet of Mount Etna at a height of 362 m.s.l.. Aci Bonaccorsi has a mild climate, typical of hilly areas, making it a pleasant, tranquil residential town. Historically, it originated from one of the primitive settlements scattered throughout the legendary Jaci Wood. Around the 12 C, these hamlets became quarters of the unique, historical City of Jaci, each one assuming as the first part of its name the prefix 'Aci'. After the terrible eruption of 1408 when lava covered the area, the ancient quarters of Sciaralavina, Battiati and Pauloti merged under the name of Bonaccorsi, with reference to the fame of a socially prominent member of the Bonaccorso family, and Aci Bonaccorsi began to develop into a village. Until the 17 C when it became administratively autonomous its history was tied to that of the other villages in the Aci territories.



## ART & MONUMENTS

The buildings of greatest historical and architectural interest are the churches, one of which was built in each original quarter. In the 'Battiati' quarter there is the church dedicated to S. Lucia, while the one in 'Pauloti' is dedicated to the Madonna delle Grazie. In 'Sciaralavina' the church is dedicated to Maria SS and lastly in the 'Piazza' quarter there is the Mother Church and the church of Sant'Antonio Abate e della Consolazione, the oldest of all the churches. Opposite the Mother Church there is the Recupero-Cutore Palace, which now houses the Town Hall. The joint use of black Etna lava stone and

white stone from Syracuse creates an interesting, elegant façade.



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*May*  
**Every Sunday** - Spring Festival

*August*  
**2/3** - National Fireworks Festival  
**3** - Feast of the patron S. Stefano



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

The typically volcanic soils of the area have favoured wine production and the cultivation of verdello lemons.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania  
Car: Catania Bypass RA 15 exit Paesi Etnei  
Bus: AST



Mother Church of S. Maria dell'Indirizzo

# ACI CATENA



## HISTORY

Acicatena (28,5660 inhabitants) takes its name from the old Catena (chains) quarter where the Sanctuary of Maria SS. della Catena is located. One of the ancient Acici villages, it separated from Aquilia (Acireale) in 1639 becoming the heart of the town of Acici Sant' Antonio and S. Filippo. Its heyday was between 1672 and 1790 when the fiefdom was governed by the Riggio family, Princes of Campofiorito, who rebuilt the town after the earthquake in January, 1693. The quarters began to separate on 21 September, 1826 the process concluding on 15th September 1828 when the Trezza and Ficarazzi quarters were detached. Now the territory includes the Acici S. Filippo and S. Nicolò quarters and the new settlements of Vampolieri, Torre Casalotto and Marchesana.



## ART & MONUMENTS

Acicatenas has many particularly interesting churches, which contain precious works of art. The largest is the Mother Church, Maria SS della Catena. Inside a painting of 'Rebecca at the Well' by Pietro Paolo Vasta can be seen. There are more of Vasta's works in the Baroque church of S. Lucia which has many frescoes and features a wooden roof. The monumental church of San Giuseppe is also worth a visit to see its extremely particular Arab-Byzantine façade, as well as the Minor Basilica of Acici S. Filippo and the church of S. Antonio da Padova the latter containing a crucifix by Fra'Umile from Petralia Soprana and a large painting by Vasta representing the Franciscan Family. The convent next to the church is now used as the Town Hall. Other interesting monuments are the Hermitage of S. Anna which dominates the Acici valley and the 18 C Prince's Palace belonging to the Riggio family, which will soon be returned to the town as a cultural centre when restoration works are complete. The historic value of the remains of the Roman Bath that can be seen in the Santa Venera al Pozzo quarter has only recently been appreciated. The healthy sulphurous water that wells up there is the same that feeds the Regional Spa in Acireale. An exhibition of the numerous finds coming from the excavations in the St. Venera at the Well archaeological area can be seen in the Antiquarium, equipped with technological and audiovisual aids.



Church of San Giuseppe



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

July

• 'Cinostrom' – film festival, which every year is dedicated to a different cinema personality

August

15 - Feast of the patron Maria SS della Catena



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

Famed as the 'Town of the Verdello lemon', it produces one of the most appreciated varieties of lemon in Sicily.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania  
Car: A18 ME-CT exit Acireale – SS 114  
Bus: AST

# ACI SANT'ANTONIO



## HISTORY

In the heart of the Etna foothills between Etna and the sea, lies Aci Sant'Antonio (17,348 inhabitants). The volcano has had a great influence on the history of the town over the centuries, the fate of its citizens and its layout have been changed by numerous eruptions. After a huge eruption in 1169 the inhabitants of the original hamlet left the coast and retreated to where the town lies today, an area then full of woods and providing abundant timber. When the 1408 eruption stopped at only a short distance from the village it changed its name from Casalotto to Aci Sant'Antonio. Infighting with nearby Aquilia induced the inhabitants to ask the Viceroy in Palermo to separate the hamlet from Aquilia Vetere, but it was only in 1639 that Aquilia separated into Acireale (Lower Aci) and Aci Sant'Antonio and S. Filippo (Upper Aci). Aci Sant'Antonio included a number of communities, enough to merit the title 'totius Acis mater et caput'. In 1826 a Royal Decree issued by King Ferdinand II of the Two Sicilies separated Aci Sant'Antonio from Aci S. Filippo and Aci Catena, proclaiming it the main town of the district even if its period of greatest splendour only came in the 18 C. In the 1800s the rich, landowning middle classes consolidated their hold and businesses developed. One of the main activities was the making of handcars which were richly decorated by skilful master carters. Thus began a great tradition which has continued up to the present day and which has led to Aci Sant'Antonio being defined as the 'Town of the Sicilian Cart'.



## ART & MONUMENTS

Walking through the streets of Aci Sant'Antonio visitors can admire fine monuments such as the church of S. Antonio Abate, those of S. Biagio and S. Michele Arcangelo and the Reggio Carcaci, Puglisi and Gagliani Palaces. The churches still contain delightful works of art by P. Vasta, A Vasta and M. Panebianco. It is also worth visiting the local workshops where traditional Sicilian carts are still made, to admire the skilful, spectacular art of the carters, sculptors, smiths and master painters of international renown. The sides of the carts are decorated with scenes taken from stories of chivalry (Orlando, Charlemagne) and personalities such as S. Alfio and his brothers, S. Agata and S. Rosalia. The Catania Regional authorities are in the process of setting up a Sicilian Cart Museum and are also working to safeguard the important Aci Wood (Bosco di Aci) site.



Mother Church of Sant'Antonio Abate



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

### January

17 - Feast of the patron Sant'Antonio Abate

### August

• Great Feast of St. Anthony Abbot (biennial) Gran Prix Kart championship  
• "Gran Premio Karting"

### December

• Christmas Market



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

The town's economy is based principally on craft works (decorative ceramics, lava stone work, wrought iron, puppet making and, in particular, Sicilian cart making) but more recently there has been an expansion of the food industry with the production of organic jams, chocolate and other foodstuffs.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania

Car: ME-CT A18 exit Acireale; PA-CT exit S. Gregorio, Paesi Etnai

Bus: AST

# ADRANO



## HISTORY

The commune of Adrano (36,681 inhabitants) lies on the western slopes of Etna at an average height of 550 m.s.l.. The area where the town is sited has been touched by the numerous dominations that have marked the history of Sicily. Its origins can be traced back to Neolithic times as witnessed by the large number of archaeological finds in the area. Around the 10 C B.C. the Siculans settled here founding the 'town of Mendolito' one of the most important towns on the whole island, while under the Greeks around 400 B.C., the town of Adranon took its name from the Siculan god Adranos. Domination by the Romans, Byzantines and Saracens followed. The town flourished under the influence of skilful Arab farmers and craftsmen, continuing to do so under the Normans who allowed the Saracens to continue those activities which were profitable for the inhabitants. However, Swabian political persecution of the Arabs ruined the economy, nor were things any better under the Angevins (who probably turned the Latin-Medieval name of the town, Adernio, into the more French-sounding Adernò which remained until 1929) or the Aragonese.



## ART & MONUMENTS

All the different rulers left their mark on the town. The old town centre offer a wealth of fine monuments: the majestic Norman Castle which contains the Regional Archaeological Museum, the Monastery of Santa Lucia, the Mother Church, the church of Sant'Antonio Abate, the church of Santa Chiara, the church of San Pietro, the church of Santa Maria del Rosario, the church of the Salvatore, the church of San Sebastiano, the Victory Gardens (Giardini della Vittoria) and the Liberty-style Bellini Theatre (Teatro Bellini) built around 1800. Soon it will also be possible to enjoy the Archaeological Walk (Passeggiata Archeologica) along the Dionysian walls (Mura Dionigiiane) when restoration works have been completed. At about 5 kilometres from the old town, 'Mendolito' the original settlement of the Siculan people, the wonderful Saracen Bridge (Ponte dei Saraceni) which provides a spectacular view over the surrounding countryside, the Biscari Aqueduct (Acquedotto Biscari) and the pine woods (Pineta comunale) are certainly worth a visit.



Norman Tower



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

### Easter

• Holy Week procession with a characteristic drama, the 'Diavolata' (Easter Sunday): a unique sacred work symbolising the eternal fight between Good and Evil

### August

1/5 - Feast of the patron S. Nicolò Politi



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

Marzipan cakes, almond cakes, pistachio cakes, prickly pear jam, 'mastazzoli', 'cannoli' and 'cassata' are typical local sweets, the recipes handed down from the rural past, which can be enjoyed in the numerous cake shops and bakeries. Local produce includes citrus fruits, prickly pears, pistachio nuts, almonds and fruit and vegetables such as olives, broad beans, broccoli, purple cauliflower, fennel and others all used in local dishes.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania

Car: S.S. 121 direction Paternò – S.S. 284

Train: Circumetnea railway

# BELPASSO



## HISTORY

Bordering on the territory of the Commune of Catania, most of the area controlled by the Commune of Belpasso (24,469 inhabitants) extends over the slopes of Etna. The town has decidedly ancient origins, as witnessed by the presence of prehistoric settlements. The remains of Roman aqueducts and bridges can be seen in the Valcorrente, Sciarone Castello and Masseria Pezzagrande areas while the remaining lava stone arcades from a castle and a small pointed arch in the church of S. Maria La Scala, in the Monastery of the same name, date from the medieval period. The original name of the town was Malpasso, 'Malupassu' in dialect, and probably derived from one particular feature of the area: in fact, 'passu' means a zone of frequent passage while 'malu' could refer to a dangerous, uncomfortable place. The history of the period between the 12 C and 13 C is linked to that of Frederick II of Aragon and his wife Eleonora D'Anjou who, on the death of her husband, moved to a house in Malpasso where she died in 1343. On the 7th March, 1669 a terrible eruption forced the inhabitants to abandon the town and to rebuild elsewhere, at about six kilometres from the original town now buried under the lava. The new site was called Fenicia Moncada. In 1693 a violent earthquake destroyed Fenicia Moncada and the town was again rebuilt in an area nearer to the site of Stella Aragona. This new site was given the auspicious name of Belpasso and the new urban street plan was characterised by a 'chessboard' layout.



## ART & MONUMENTS

Belpasso is the only town in the area to feature this chessboard street plan. One of the most important churches is the Mother Church of Santa Maria Immacolata in the 'Matrice' quarter, where Santa Lucia is also worshipped. In the Bell Tower the great bell of S. Lucia, cast in 1815, is the biggest in Sicily and one of the biggest in Italy. Another interesting church is Sant'Antonio di Padova which forms part of the former convent of the Frati Zoccolanti di San Francesco. The Queen's water butt, part of the residence where Queen Eleonora D'Anjou lived, is to be found to the north-east of the town. Of the original building only one room and a structure with a small altar, originally frescoed, have survived numerous lava flows, although numerous walks belonging to the original garden can still be seen, converging on a terrace with stone seats. The round, open water butt of the villa must have collected rain water from the various terraces, but is now partially filled with volcanic material.



Mother Church of Santa Lucia



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

July/August

• Etna International Motorbike Rally

December

13 - Feast of the patron S. Lucia



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

The main local craft is the processing of lava rock, used both in building and for furnishings. Although less important now, the local wrought-iron work and carved wood products are remarkable.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania

Car: S.S. 121 exit Piano Tavola direction Belpasso

Train: Circumetnea railway

Bus: AST

# BIANCAVILLA



## HISTORY

Biancavilla (23,000 inhabitants) rises on a mountain terrace at 515 m.s.l.. Most of its territory is hilly with small volcanoes that have given rise to extremely interesting natural grottoes. The foundation of Biancavilla dates back to 1488 when a number of families of Albanian origin, led by Cesare Masi, obtained the permission of Count Moncada to found a city near the ancient Adernò. The colony settled in an area called, at that time, Callicari. It would appear that the present name was given to the town in honour of Queen Blanche of Navarre on her marriage to Martin the Younger who received these lands as part of her dowry. Spared by the earthquake in 1693 and by the lava when Etna erupted in 1669 it underwent a rapid demographic growth as people flooded in from nearby towns. The Albanian group disappeared during this period and all traces of the town's origins were lost. In the first half of the nineteenth century there was a significant cultural movement in the town thanks to the work of Salvatore Portal, who founded a Botanical Garden in his own house. The years between the 19 C and 20 C were marked by the figure of the Mayor, Alfio Bruno, who created many public works among which theatres and waterworks. Carlo Sada, an architect from Milan, worked in Biancavilla in the same period and the Futurist poet Antonio Bruno (1891-1932), author of numerous works, was born in the town.



## ART & MONUMENTS

The most important monument in the town, the Mother Church, dedicated to S. Maria dell'Elemosina, is in Piazza Roma in the town centre. Of 17 C origin, its ancient façade harmonises perfectly with the more modern one planned by Carlo Sada. The church has three naves and one of its chapels holds the Byzantine icon of Our Lady of the Alms which according to legend was brought by the Albanian refugees. At the end of the left-hand nave there is the chapel of San Placido richly decorated by the artist Giuseppe Tamo da Brescia (1726). The large painting of Our Lady of the Alms with the Saints is the work of the same artist. The church of the Rosary is also in Piazza Roma. It has a Baroque-style façade by the architect Carlo Sada. Other interesting churches are those of the Annunciation, which contains a work by Giuseppe Tamo da Brescia and a large oil painting on canvas of Sant'Antonio Abate attributed to Bernardinus Niger Graecus, and the church of the Mercede where a series of dry frescoes by Giuseppe Tamo tell the story of the Order of Mercy. There are a number of very elegant noble houses in the town such as Palazzo Ciarlo and Palazzo Bruno, while Villa delle Favare, the 18 C residence of the Counts of Moncada, is on the outskirts of the old town.. It was enlarged at the beginning of the 19 C by



Church of Santa Maria Annunziata

the new owner, the Marquis of Favara. It now hosts a multi-cultural centre with a library, conference room and exhibition hall.



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*Easter*

- Holy Week Procession

*October*

**1/ 10** - Feast of the patrons S. Maria dell'Elemosina, S. Zeno and S. Placido and a procession with the Byzantine icon of S. Maria dell'Elemosina.



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

The area boasts a great variety of agricultural products (citrus fruits, prickly pears, olive, grapes) and sweets: 'schiumone' a typical ice-cream made from chocolate and egg yolk, almond cakes and pastries.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania  
Car: S.S. 121 direction Paternò  
Train: Circumetnea railway  
Bus: I.S.E.A.

# BRONTE



## HISTORY

The Comune of Bronte (about 20,000 inhabitants) is one of the most extensive in the province of Catania covering an area of 24,990 hectares that extends from 380 metres to 3,112 m.s.l Although legends affirm that the Cyclops, Bronte, son of Neptune was the founder and King of the town, in effect its historical origins date from the Siculans who were the first inhabitants of the area around the 7 C B.C.. They were followed by numerous other rulers among whom the Arabs who introduced pistachios to the area. The Act establishing the Commune of Bronte dates from 1535, when Charles V united 24 existing hamlets into a single University that he called 'Bronte' (Fidelissima Brontis Universitas) so as to make tax collection and the administration of justice in the area more efficient. On the 10th October 1799, Ferdinand IV, King of Naples, presented the Maniace Abbey and its lands to the English Admiral, Horatio Nelson, appointing him 'Duke of Bronte', in return for the help he provided in repressing the Neapolitan Republic. At the beginning of August, in 1860, during Garibaldi's expedition in Sicily, social tensions exploded in the sadly famous massacre called the 'Fatti di Bronte', when a riot broke out which ended in the slaughter of the 'cappelli' – the better-off residents of the town. When the riot had been suppressed Bixio called the war commission to intervene for a quick trial of the leaders of the revolt who were shot in front of the whole population on 9th August, 1860, in the square in front of the church of San Vito.



Capizzi College



## ART & MONUMENTS

As a result of all the historical events that have taken place there Bronte has a rich cultural heritage of monuments and works of art and, above all, churches, although many have been lost due to earthquake damage or neglect: the church of S. Blandano, the church of the Sacro Cuore, Casa Radice and Capizzi College, one of the most important cultural centres in the whole island. Nelson's Castle, 13 kilometres from the town, became communal property in 1981. The building complex has recently been renovated, part of it is now a museum and part a study and congress centre.



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*February*

**3** - Feast of the patron S. Biagio

*Easter*

• Holy Week Procession

*August*

**1/10** Feast of the Madonna Annunziata

*October*

• Pistachio Festival



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

Bronte is universally known as the town of the pistachio. First planted in this difficult, volcanic soil by the Arabs, the plant almost miraculously draws nourishment from the lava stone and, fertilised by the ash that the volcano continually erupts, produces the best quality pistachio.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania

Car: A18 ME-CT exit Fiumefreddo

Train: Circumetnea railway

Bus: I.S.E.A.



# CASTIGLIONE DI SICILIA



## HISTORY

Castiglione di Sicilia (3,700 inhabitants) has great charm, a rich history and covers one of the most extensive territories in the province lying within the Etna and Alcantara Gorge Nature Parks. Its history is implicit in its name which derives from 'Castel Leone', an ancient fortification the remains of which are still visible, that dominated the Alcantara Valley. This strategic position attracted the attention of the Greeks in 403 B.C.. Over the course of the centuries they were followed by the Romans who built bridges, the Arabs who revolutionised the irrigation system and even bred crocodiles in the River Alcantara, Normans and Swabians who made Castiglione into a royal city and Ruggero di Lauria, the last feudal lord. Castiglione developed and prospered under all these peoples: the castle defences were expanded and churches and palaces were built thanks to the wealth coming from the land, hazelnut growing and flax processing.



## ART & MONUMENTS

The old town centre has a number of monuments that bear witness to past epochs under different rulers. Many of the churches and noble palaces are richly decorated. The church of Sant'Antonio Abate, in one of the oldest quarters, has marble inlay work, a Baroque façade and a Gothic-Byzantine belfry. The church of San Pietro e Paolo is notable for its bell tower dating from 1105 and the Basilica of La Madonna della Catena for its monumental Baroque façade. Near the Alcantara



Castiglione di Sicilia - view

River stands the Byzantine Cube (Cuba Bizantina) or church of Santa Domenica, dating back to between the 7 C and 9 C A.D. which is considered one of the most precious, important monuments in the area. Also worth a visit is the 12 C Lauria Castle (Castello di Lauria). Apart from its historical monuments Castiglione is also proud of its two landscape monuments, the Alcantara Gorge and Etna which provide visitors with a variety of different trips and excursions.



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*May*

**1st Sunday** - Feast of the patron La Madonna della Catena

*August*

• 'Castiglione e i suoi sapori' (The flavours of Castiglione) an event dedicated to local produce and craftworks.

**10 - Calici di Stelle'** (goblets of stars) a chance to taste fine wines



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

The area's long history of wine production is its 'plus factor': the large number of companies producing DOC Etna wines that are exported all over the world attract a constant flow of visitors who are also interested in discovering the typical dishes offered by local restaurants and farms. Castiglione is also the realm of the hazelnut, used in typical local pastries which are just waiting to be discovered and tasted.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania  
Car A18 ME-CT exit Fiumefreddo di Sicilia, S.S. 120  
Train: Circumetnea railway



## HISTORY

Linguaglossa (5,361 inhabitants) lies on the north-east slope of Etna at a height of 550 m.s.l.. It is one of the communes lying within the Etna Nature Park and the area under its control extends up to the summit of the volcano, including the enormous Ragabo pine forest. There are different opinions regarding the origin of its name. It is most commonly believed to derive from 'Linguarossa' (red tongue) or rather a large tongue of lava which reached as far as the buildings of the ancient hamlet. The old town grew up close to the 'royal road' which used to be an important route leading to the inland areas of the island. Timber and resin from the pine forest were carried along the road to the ports on the Ionian coast. The first hamlet dates back to 1145 during the period of Norman rule. In 1282, after the Vespers, the Aragonese assigned these lands to Ruggero di Lauria, an admiral of the Sicilian-Aragonese fleet, in gratitude for his military exploits against the Angevins. Linguaglossa used to supply the navy dockyards in Messina with timber and pitch. For a period of time it was a fief of the Filangieri family before King Martin conceded it on a long-term basis to the Crisafi family, members of which held public positions in Messina. It later became the Barony of Cottone (1568), Patti (1579) and finally Bonnano and Gioeni, becoming a Principality in 1626. In 1634, in the middle of the Thirty Years War, Philip IV of Spain, after receiving payment of a considerable sum, declared Linguaglossa a free city. Today the town is a summer and winter resort of international renown.



## ART & MONUMENTS

The old town is well preserved with numerous narrow streets where visitors can discover ancient doorways, Baroque buildings and admire the contrast between lava stone from Etna used for bases, windows and masks and sandstone and tuff from nearby highlands. The most important feature of the town, however, are the small late-nineteenth century and Liberty-style palaces that give onto the main street and the squares, such as the Town Hall, the work of Pietro Grassi (1907) with its elegant, mired, mullioned windows. The Mother Church was built in 1613 and contains a wooden choir dating from 1728 and many fine paintings. The church of S. Edigio, patron saint of the town, was built under Angevin rule and has a splendid Gothic portal with the town's coat of arms. It is sited in the middle of the oldest medieval quarter. The 17 C church of SS. Vito e Antonio with its lava stone portal and the 16 C church of S. Francesco di Paola with a famous marble statue of the Madonna dell'Oretta by Gagini (1478-1536) are of considerable architectural interest. The church of Gesù e Maria, built in 1600 has been closed to worship for the last twenty-five years. It is extremely simple having



Linguaglossa - view

a single nave with a barrel roof, but it is made interesting by a statue of the Madonna with Child who is showing the sacred heart, a very rare demonstration by the Christ Child. For nature lovers, Linguaglossa means above all Mount Etna. The pine forests of Linguaglossa and the ski resort in Piano Provenzana are a meeting point for skiing enthusiasts (alpine skiing, cross-country skiing and ski mountaineering are available), who can also enjoy views of a horizon that extends from Taormina to the coast of Calabria. In summer, it is possible to leave from Piano Provenzano and reach the summit areas of the mountain, discovering its numerous, strikingly beautiful, nature trails.



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*April*  
25 - Etna Sound Festival, an alternative rock music festival

*August*  
16 - Feast of S. Rocco

*September*  
1 - Feast of the patron S. Egidio Abate



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania  
Car: A18 ME-CT exit Fiumefreddo  
S.S. 120 direction Randazzo  
Train: Circumetnea railway  
Bus: Etnatransport

# MALETTO



## HISTORY

Maletto (4,073 inhabitants) lies on the northern slopes of Etna at about 1,000 m.s.l.. It is the highest commune in the province of Catania, situated in an attractive natural setting dominated by Etna with the Nebrodi mountains in the background. People have lived in the surrounding area since Neolithic times but the origins of Maletto date from the 13 C when in 1263, under Swabian rule, Manfredi Maletta, Count of Mineo, built an observation and communication tower, called the Fano Tower, on a rocky outcrop. Since then the town has been called Maletto. The fortified tower became the Castle and the first houses sprang up around it. In the middle of the 14 C the Castle and fief of Maletto passed to the Spadafora family who built up the town over the course of the 15 C. The population consolidated, but at the beginning of the 17 C, Maletto became a Principality and a variety of incentives led to an influx of new residents. Feudalism was abolished in 1812 and Maletto became an independent commune.



## ART & MONUMENTS

The old town centre, with its narrow, silent streets paved in basalt lava stone and 17 C and 18 C houses, is dominated by the Castle stronghold. Among the most important monuments in the town there is the Mother Church which has an impressive façade and spectacular entrance stairway decorated with lava stone pilasters and the churches of S. Michele Arcangelo (16 C) with its 17 C paintings and Sant'Antonio da Padova (18 C) where visitors can admire two wooden statues by Bagnasco. Visitors who enjoy nature trails will find the Pizzo-Filicia Park, the Palmento del Campiere and Maletto wood extremely enjoyable.



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*June*

**1st week** - Strawberry Festival

*September*

**2nd Sunday** - Feast of the patron Sant'Antonio da Padova

**3rd Sunday** - Feast of S. Vincenzo Ferreri

*December*

• Festival of the 'Ciamarella' (an old musical instrument similar to bagpipes)



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

Maletto is famous for its strawberries, but all the fruit produced in the area is of excellent quality as are the wine and dairy produce. Many restaurants offer typical local food and wine, in particular Ferla mushrooms.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania

Car: S.S. 121 direction Paternò – S.S. 284 direction Adrano

Train: Circumetnea railway



Maletto - view



## HISTORY

Maniace (3,543 inhabitants) is a mountain commune situated at 787 m.s.l. which borders the province of Messina. Although the commune can boast an ancient history it did not actually form until the twentieth century and became autonomous only in April, 1981. The Arabs gave it the name Ghira àd Daquiq, but it acquired and kept its present name after the victory of the Byzantine General, Giorgio Maniace, over the Arabs in 1040. The presence of the Benedictine Abbey 'Sancta Maria Maniacensis' and its vast estate lent the area considerable splendour during the Norman period. After this, no more was heard of this flourishing centre. The Maniace area seemed deserted and for centuries it was crossed only by shepherds during their seasonal migrations with their flocks. In 1945, agitation by farmers on the Nelson estate, pressing for the application of the law regarding a fairer division of produce and the allocation of uncultivated lands, brought about the rebirth of the commune.



## ART & MONUMENTS

Nelson's Castle, built on the estate of the ancient Benedictine Abbey of S. Maria, is undoubtedly the best known monument in Maletto. Nowadays, the castle belongs to the Commune of Bronte. There is a small English cemetery next door where the Dukes of Bronte and the Scottish poet William Sharp, who also wrote under the pseudonym of Fiona Macleod, are buried. The cemetery which still belongs to the Nelson family, has been conceded to the Commune of Maniace. Inside the Castle there is a small church, an interesting example of late Norman architecture, with a beautiful marble Gothic portal and capitals representing the deadly sins. The wooden ceiling dates from Norman times. There is a 13 C polyptych of the Sicilian school featuring the Madonna on the throne with S. Biagio, S. Antonio Abate and S. Lucia and under it a Byzantine-style panel painting of the Madonna and Child which is said to have been brought from Greece by Giorgio Maniace.



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*January*

**19/20** - Feast of the patron S. Sebastiano

*August*

**1<sup>st</sup> Saturday and Sunday** - Peach and Pear Festival



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

Peaches and pears are the most important local produce, but dairy products are also important, in particular cows' and sheep's milk and cheese, especially the provola and ricotta of the Nebrodi mountains.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania

Car: S.S. 121 direction Paternò – S.S. 284 direction Adrano

Bus: Interbus



Nelson's Castle



## HISTORY

Of all the towns on the Ionian slopes, the commune of Milo (1,050 inhabitants), thanks to its altitude of 750 m.s.l., is the one which enjoys the widest view over the sea. This enviable position has attracted visitors to the area since ancient times. The first historical information regarding Milo dates back to Medieval times when barons, bishops and the Sicilian mighty often rode up to the waters of Milu, the place where John of Aragon, Duke of Randazzo, spent his summers and had built a church dedicated to S. Andrea, assigning it a fief. While the Duke was alive, Milo became the political centre of Sicily in summer, acquiring great importance and a growing population. Later, Bishop Simone del Pozzo gave the Church and the fief to the Carthusians who built a convent which then passed to the Santa Maria di Nuova Luce Monastery and then, in 1391, to Simone di Necroponte from Randazzo. Legally Milo formed part of the County of Mascali until 1815 when it was annexed to the village of Giare. In the years that followed Milo was often threatened and damaged by flows of lava, the last of which, in 1950, destroyed a great deal of land and forced the population to take refuge in nearby towns. It was during those terrible months that the idea of becoming an independent commune began to be considered and this finally took place in January 1955.



Mother Church

- 'Angelo Musco Prize': theatrical and literary performances dedicated to Angelo Musco

### September

- 'ViniMilo': an important national annual event, eagerly awaited by all those in the wine-making sector

### November

**First two weeks** - "San Martino e il vulcano" (Fornazzo). Local produce fair, conventions and music



## ART & MONUMENTS

Visitors to Milo must visit Piazza Belvedere on the edge of the town which, as its name suggests, offers a wonderful view of the Ionian coastline and over the inland communes that shelve away down to the coast. The Mother Church built in lava stone from Etna and dedicated to the patron S. Andrea stands behind the square. The area around Milo is ideal for people who love the open air, there are numerous natural paths for rambling, hiking and hill walking.



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

The boast of the town is its superior Etna white wine.



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

### July

**1<sup>st</sup> Sunday**- Feast of the Sacro Cuore (Fornazzo)

**Last Sunday** - Feast of the patron S. Andrea

### August

- 'ArteCulturaEventi' - cultural shows and events

- 'Venere di Milo' - beauty contest

- "MusicaMilo": musical events



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania

Car: A18 ME-CT exit Giarre

Bus: AST



## HISTORY

Nicolosi (7,092 inhabitants) is situated on the southern slopes of Etna on one of the main access routes to the volcano. It covers an area that falls within the Etna Nature Park, rising from the town at 700 m.s.l. to the central crater and the peak of Etna. The original town of Nicolosi grew up around the Benedictine monastery of S. Nicola l'Arena, at the beginning of the 12 C, but over the course of the centuries it was frequently destroyed by lava. Nevertheless, Queen Eleonora, wife of Frederick II of Aragon and later Queen Bianca of Navarre, wife of King Martin often visited the place. Following the courageous example of Queen Bianca during the eruption of 1408 the inhabitants did not abandon the town. The importance of Nicolosi increased in those years to the point that it became a fief of the Prince of Paternò in 1447. However, the terrible eruption of 1669 destroyed Nicolosi. The eruption stopped on 11th July having created the Monte Rossi on the edge of the town, the largest lateral cones on Etna. In 1671 reconstruction works began. In the 19 C the most important event was without doubt the laying of what is now called Via Etnea, at that time Via Ferdinandea, which established the future development of the town around the direct route up to the mountain. The aim of Don Alvaro Paternò Castello, Prince of Manganeli, who ordered its building, was to make Etna more accessible. In the original plans the road went well beyond Nicolosi but this did not happen until one century later.



## ART & MONUMENTS

Nicolosi has an interesting artistic heritage. Vaccarini drew up plans for the Mother Church, in Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II in the first half of the 18 C. It has a 19 C style façade and an adjoining belfry in lava stone. Work on the church of S. Giuseppe was completed in 1886. The simple façade is decorated with a lava stone portal. The churches of S. Maria delle Grazie, S. Maria del Carmelo and S. Francesco are also worthy of note. Outside the town there is the ancient Benedictine Monastery of S. Nicolò l'Arena. The area is also dotted with small altars and shrines dedicated to the Patron Saints. Of particular interest are the 'Three Altars' built in the 18 C at the point where the lava stopped in 1776. There are a number of museums including the Rural Life Museum (Casa Museo della Civiltà Contadina) and the Volcano Museum (Museo Vulcanologico) which has an interesting display of lava materials from Etna. The 'Nicolosi Nord' ski resort has more than 20 km of slopes and offers skiers and snowboarders a view that takes in the whole of the Gulf of Catania and the Simeio valley.



"Nicolosi Nord" ski resort



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*January*

**17<sup>th</sup> (and 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in July)** Feast of Sant'Antonio Abate

*March*

**19** - Feast of S. Giuseppe

*June*

**13<sup>th</sup> (and 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in August)** Feast of the patron Sant'Antonio da Padova

*July/August*

• "Stelle e Lapilli" – summer events

*September*

• 'Pane e Pizza' – bread and pizza festival

*November*

• 'Etna Frutta' – Etna fruit festival

*December/January*

• 'Neve e Lapilli' – Christmas events



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

A gastronomic tour to taste the typical local products including wine, fruit, mushrooms and local cheeses is highly recommended. Local craftsmen work in lava stone, wrought iron and wood as well as making baskets and visitors can watch them at work.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania

Car: S.S. 121 CT-PA – S.S. 284 direction Randazzo

Bus: AST



## HISTORY

Pedara lies at 610 m.s.l. on the slopes of Etna. Its history began with the arrival of the Normans. In 1388, the Bishop authorised the inhabitants to build the first parish church, which led to the development of one of the first Christian communities in the area. During the 15 C however, after two catastrophic eruptions, the local population began slowly to move downhill from the present site of the town. The town's most florid period lasted for about 50 years. It became a Barony and was an important economic and social centre, the richest and best organised on Etna until two earthquakes in 1669 and 1693 put an end to its growth. It was rebuilt by Don Diego Pappalardo of the Jerusalem Order of Malta. The last years of the 18 C saw the emergence of the new landed middle class. The abolition of feudalism in Sicily in 1812 marked the beginning of a transformation in Pedara. In 1817 King Ferdinand IV issued a decree from Naples, making the town an independent commune which revived the community. The 19 C and 20 C were characterised, above all, by large-scale urban growth.



## ART & MONUMENTS

Pedara's old town centre is fascinating. The Basilica of S. Caterina in Piazza Don Diego is one of the most visited and studied in the Province. The whole building is held to be a splendid example of 'Etna church'. Inside the visitor can admire frescoes by Giovanni Lo Cocco and a number of paintings including one by Mattia Preti, while outside there is an impressive bell tower and a rare sundial. A wide, spectacular flight of steps leads up to the church of S. Antonio Abate. Inside the unusual two-nave layout is enriched by paintings, sculptures and gilding. The Sanctuary of Maria S.S. Annunziata has a late 16 C main body but the rest of the building was completed between the 19 C and 20 C with the addition of two lateral naves. The church of Santa Maria della Stella, built in 1735, has an octagonal layout and contains an antique 18 C fresco. The palace of Don Diego Pappalardo is in Piazza Don Diego. Externally an imposing arch and lateral flights of steps can still be admired. Behind the Basilica there is the palace of Don Diego Pappalardo's descendants, which is a wonderful example of the typical architecture of 18 C noble residences.



*Basilica of Santa Caterina*



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*January*

**17th and following Sunday** - Feast of S. Antonio Abate

*March*

**25th** - Feast of the patron SS Maria Annunziata

*Easter*

• Holy Week Processions

*May*

**1st** - Traditional pilgrimage to the Madonna di Tre Monti

*July/August*

• 'Estate Pedarese' – sporting, theatrical and musical events

*August*

• Summer Fair – local crafts and produce

*September*

**2nd weekend** - End of summer Feast of SS Maria Annunziata

*October*

• Mushroom festival

*November*

**25th** - Feast of S. Caterina d'Alessandria



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania

Car: Catania bypass RA15 – exit Paesi Etnei

Bus: AST

# PIEDIMONTE ETNEO



## HISTORY

Piedimonte Etneo (3,857 inhabitants) covers an area of about 2,646 hectares on the eastern slopes of Etna, about 794 of which lie within the Etna Nature Park. The origins of the town go back to the beginning of the 17 C when it was the property of the Gravina Cruillas family, Barons of Francofonte and Princes of Palagonia. Ignazio Sebastiano Gravina Amato obtained building permission from the Tribunal of the Royal Patrimony on 30th August, 1687 which marked the beginnings of the new town. Even though the name requested from the Royal Curia was 'Piemonte', most of the inhabitants continued to use the original name, Bevedere, which originated from the beauty of the panorama. The name Piedimonte later prevailed with the addition of Etneo in 1862. The founder did no more than build one small church, dedicated to S. Ignazio, a dozen or so 'casuncole terrane' (very simple dwellings), a few ovens and a small house for himself. His descendants enlarged the town, in particular Ferdinand Francis, the fourth Lord of Piedimonte, who was responsible for the considerable expansion that took place in the 18 C and the layout that still characterises the town thanks to the construction of unusually wide streets. Important public works were undertaken including the building of an aqueduct and the Porta S. Fratello. Piedimonte continued to grow throughout the 18 C, with new roads and palaces erected along the main street and the Mother Church in the large, nearby square. The town remained under the control of the Gravina family until feudal rights were abolished and then became a commune in 1812.



## ART & MONUMENTS

Among its principal monuments is the Mother Church erected in the 18 C and dedicated to the Madonna del Rosario which dominates Piazza Madre Chiesa. Of vast dimensions, it is the only church of its kind in Piedimonte, being a basilica with three naves supported by massive arches that converge towards a wide apse containing the main altar. In the side naves there is a double series of precious marble altars decorated with large paintings and a 17 C polychrome wooden statue. The façade is a mixture of classical and vernacular architectural styles. The painting of the Madonna delle Grazie is very interesting due to the fact that it depicts, in their original position, many of the old town monuments that have since disappeared including the bell tower of the church of S. Michele, the crenellated mass of the prison and the first church of S. Ignazio, the Prince's Palace and the old fountain of the Mother Church. Leaving the Mother Church and crossing the main road visitors arrive at the Convent of the Capuchin Fathers and the adjoining church of the Immacolata in



"Corso Vittorio Emanuele II"

Piazza Umberto. The vestments of the latter are among the most precious in Piedimonte. The tribune of the main altar which incorporates a splendid minutely-carved wooden ciborium is of great value. There are two paintings which represent S. Antonio di Padova and S. Francesco and there is a splendid Nativity on the central altar.



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

July

31 - Feast of the patron S. Ignazio da Loyola

September

26/27/28 - Grape Harvest Festival



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

Piedimonte contributes to the production of D.O.C. Etna wines with its excellent Etna red wine.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania

Car: A18 motorway ME-CT exit

Fiumefreddo

Bus: Etnatrasporti



# RAGALNA



## HISTORY

The commune of Ragalna (3,150 inhabitants) lies on the south-western slopes of Etna, at 830 m.s.l.. The first signs of its origins date back to Norman times, to a document dated 1136 containing the old name of the town, Rachalena, which refers to a donation made to the Monastery of S. Nicola in Pannacchio by the son-in-law of Count Roger I for giving him his daughter Flandrina in marriage. In 1400 Ragalna became the property of the Moncada family from Paternò. In 1780 the village of Ragalna, much of it belonging to landowners from Paternò, was threatened by lava which stopped near the Eredità quarter after a procession was held from the church of Paternò carrying the relics of St. Barbara. During WW2 many families from Paternò fled there to escape Allied bombing. Ragalna remained a hamlet of Paternò until 29 April 1985 when it became an independent commune.



## ART & MONUMENTS

Also known as the 'terrace of Etna', Ragalna offers visitors the delightful sight of Piazza Cisterna, set on many levels connected by elegant steps. The name comes from the presence of the old cistern for collecting rainwater originally built to make up for the town's lack of springs. There are many cisterns in the town but this is the best preserved. The square also contains the Mother Church, dedicated to the Madonna del Carmelo dating from the 19 C. In a narrow street there are the remains of the Church of the Canfarella, probably the first church to be built in the town. It is now deconsecrated but some frescoes can still be seen on the walls. It has been private property for a long time and forms part of a complex of rural buildings. In Piazza S. Barbara there is a church of the same name. Building work began on this in the 1920s with the help of many churchgoers who after services went to a nearby quarry and returned with a load of stone. The Serra La Nave Astrophysical Observatory research centre is situated at 1,700 m.s.l. Walkers will be interested in the numerous lava grottoes to be seen such as the 'Grotte del Catanese', which is one of the most beautiful on Etna, consisting in a single gallery, just over 20 metres long with a characteristic ogival form.



Church of Santa Barbara



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*September*

**Last Sunday** - Feast of the patron Maria SS del Carmelo

*November*

• Sausage, 'Caliceddi' (wild green vegetable) and Wine Festival



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

The soil and climate are suitable for the traditional agriculture of Etna. The local olive oil, a high quality DOP oil recognised by the Sicilian Region, is particularly well known and in great demand. Local crafts include a special way of working lava stone based on a fusion of ceramics with lava basalt.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania

Car: S.S. 121 direction Paternò – S.S. 284 exit S. M. di Licodia-Ragalna

Train: Catania Central Station

Bus: Autolinee Zappalà & Torrisi



## HISTORY

The commune of Randazzo (11,740 inhabitants) at 754 m.s.l. on the northern slope of Etna, lies between the Rivers Alcantara and Simeto. Of medieval origin, it is situated in an area where a succession of civilizations followed on from one another, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Normans and Aragonese, all leaving traces in the form of documents or artwork. Archaeological finds from the S. Anastasia and Mischi quarters have proved that there were human settlements in this area as far back as the 6 C B.C.. Further excavations have demonstrated that there continued to be a settlement here throughout the following centuries until, with the Arabs ruling the island, Randazzo assumed a highly strategic role which it maintained during the Norman period when the garrison and walls were built. Around 1282, King Peter I of Aragon transformed it into a military base for his war against the Angevins. In 1305 it belonged to Frederick II of Aragon who made it his fixed abode and took the title of Duke of Randazzo in 1332. It was due to its strategic position along the inland route leading from Palermo to Nicosia, with branches off to Catania or Messina, that Randazzo became Crown property and thus escaped enfeoffment. In fact, in 1233 Randazzo became a state town in the Vallo di Demone and Frederick II gave it the title 'Plaena' in the Parliament of Messina. Until the 16 C Randazzo was divided into three quarters which spoke three different languages, given that the town had been formed by three different ethnic groups: Greek in the S. Nicola quarter, Latin in the Santa Maria quarter and Lombard in the San Martino quarter. Even though it is the nearest commune to the central crater of Etna (about 15 km) it has never suffered damage and has, therefore, almost completely conserved its medieval aspect.



## ART & MONUMENTS

This medieval aspect makes Randazzo a place of great charm. Visitors walking its lava stone streets and alleyways can admire monuments of considerable architectural worth. The Swabian church of S. Maria in Piazza Basilica is one of these. The façade with its cuspidate bell tower was rebuilt between 1852-1863. It has 13 C apses in the form of battlemented towers, on the right side there is an attractive Catalan-Gothic portal and it has a whole repertory of single, double and triple mullioned windows. Inside there are frescoes, paintings and carved marble from various epochs, among which a panel painting on the right side door, attributed to Girolamo Alibrandi. The church of S. Nicolò, built in the 1300s, the largest in Randazzo, was rebuilt in 1583. It has a Latin cross layout and there are a number of works by Gagini, among which a statue of St. Nicholas seated and a Gothic style baptismal font. The Swabian church of San Martino has a splendid 14 C bell tower while inside there are works from the Gagini school and a polyptych attributed to Antonello de Saliba. Also to be seen are the 14 C Spitaleri House (Casa Spitaleri), the ruins of the medieval wall with St. Martin's Gate (Porta S. Martino) built in 1753 and the Swabian Castle, many times reworked, which now hosts the 'Paolo Vagliasindi' Archaeological Museum, with exhibits that range from Neolithic times to the Siculan-Greek epoch. A short distance from the town lies the Benedictine Abbey of Maniace, founded in 1174 by Margaret of Blois, mother of William II and presented to Admiral Nelson in 1799 with the dukedom of Bronte.



"Via degli Archi"



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*January*

17 - Feast of S. Antonio Abate

*Easter*

• Holy Week processions

*March*

19 - Feast of the patron S.Giuseppe with a traditional torchlight parade

*April*

• Sicilian sweet exhibition

*July*

• Medieval festival – historical parade, local food and wine, performing minstrels, flag throwers and music

• Randazzo Art – painting, sculpture and photography competition. Over the three days of the competition there is also music and an arts and crafts market.

*August*

• Feast of the co-patron Maria SS Assunta



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

Wine grapes, hazelnuts, olives, almonds and chestnuts are the main produce of the area. The tasty local 'Ferra' (pleurotus ferulae) mushrooms are the main ingredient of the best local dishes. Local craftsmen make beautiful objects from lava stone, copper, wood, wrought iron, terracotta and glass.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania

Car: A18 CT-ME – exit Fiumefreddo

Train: Circumetnea railway

Bus: Etnatrasporti



Church of San Martino

# S. MARIA DI LICODIA



## HISTORY

S. Maria di Licodia (6,757 inhabitants) is situated on a hilly site at 443 m.s.l. The town takes its name from the Benedictine Abbey of Santa Maria. Its ancient origins are witnessed by numerous archaeological finds that testify to Siculan, Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Arab and Norman settlements. Present-day S. Maria di Licodia began in August 1143, the year in which Simone del Vasto, Count of Policastro and Lord of Paternò and Countess Tommasa, entrusted the cenoby and church dedicated to the Virgin Mary of Licodia to Geremia, a Benedictine monk of the church of Sant'Agata. The Count gave the monk the freedom to establish a hamlet, under the jurisdiction of the Prior of the Licodia Monastery. Its enfeoffment was confirmed by William II, King of Sicily in 1168. The monastery was elevated to Abbey status in 1205 by Ruggero Oco, Bishop of Catania, who named Friar Pietro Celio as the first Abbot of Santa Maria di Licodia, also giving him the power to pass on to his successors the pastoral and pontifical insignia. The Abbey had a library where the 'Benedictine Constitutions' were written in Sicilian in the 14 C. Under the institutional reform of 1816 and the beginning of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, the town lost its ancient monastic rule and was annexed to Paternò. It regained administrative autonomy in 1840 after a decree passed by Ferdinand II.



## ART & MONUMENTS

One of the most important monuments in the town is the Bell Tower (Torre Campanaria) built by the Normans on older Arab foundations and incorporated into the Benedictine monastery. The monastery buildings testify to the historical importance of the town. They are grouped around a square cloister which conveys the exact idea of how the village and its people gravitated around the monastery. Only the bell tower and part of the building, now the Town Hall, escaped the destruction of the monastery which took place in 1929 to make room for the school. There are also a number of interesting historical palaces. Palazzo Ardigzone is one of the oldest noble buildings in the town. Its oldest wing dates back to the end of the 17 C. During the 18 C the second wing was built, but its 'Umbertino' style façade in white stone was only completed at the end of the 19 C. Palazzo Bruno is a mansion, built between the end of the 18 C and beginning of the 19 C. The main doorway in lava stone bears an interesting grotesque mask. The particular feature of the mansion is its tower, built in the 19 C along the lines of the Norman tower. Inside the building there is the ancient 'fercolo' of San Giuseppe, dating back to the 1600s which was used to carry the Patron Saint during processions. The direct



*Cherub's Fountain*

heir of the ancient Benedictine Abbey is the Mother Church of Santa Maria di Licodia. The most important works that it contains are the wooden statues of Santa Gertrude la Grande, San Benedetto Abate and San Giuseppe, a late-medieval, polychrome wooden cross of the Sicilian school, a wooden statue of San Luigi and paintings by M. Desiderato and G. Rapisarda.



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*Easter*

- Holy Week processions

*August*

**Last Saturday/Sunday/Monday**  
Feast of the patron S. Giuseppe

*September*

- Etna Fair – local crafts fair and musical events

*December*

- Christmas events



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania  
Car: S.S. 121 PA-CT, S.S. 284 direction Randazzo – S.S. 575 direction Troina  
Train: Circumetnea railway  
Bus: I.S.E.A.

# SANTA VENERINA



## HISTORY

Santa Venerina (7,692 inhabitants) lies in a hilly zone near the coast at 337 m.s.l. In ancient times the area was characterised by a thick wood and a small plain and hill inhabited by the Siculans. Later, it came under Greek, Roman and Byzantine rule as testified by the remains of the baths and an ancient oratory dating back to that period. After the period of Arab rule when the Normans arrived and Christianity returned, Benedictine monks arrived in the area and were conceded the whole of the Aci zone by Count Roger. Until the 1700s the history of Santa Venerina was one with that of the fief of Acireale. In 1735 the representatives of the Chapel of Santa Venerina of Acireale, forced to find new revenues in order to meet their commitments with regard to building a 'fercole' for Santa Venera, set up a free fair in the Bongiaro quarter of the town, along the main road leading from Messina to Catania. The investment must have paid off because in the years that followed many of the representatives, as well as other townspeople and middle-class people from Aci, bought lands in this area that had been revitalised by the free fair, thus giving rise to a progressive peopling of the zone. Shortly after, in 1747, the same representatives built a church dedicated to Santa Venera, patron saint of Aci. The new church constituted the central building around which a village with 600 inhabitants grew up, most of them farmers and animal breeders. There is no doubt that the name Santa Venerina derives from Santa Venera. Around 1850 the town enjoyed a demographic and economic boom. Numerous distilleries opened and with its wine production and expert craftsmen the town flourished and developed both economically and socially. It became an autonomous commune in 1936.



## ART & MONUMENTS

Among the numerous churches in Santa Venerina, the most important is undoubtedly the Mother Church, dedicated to the patron S. Venera. Built in neoclassical style in the 18 C it contains numerous frescoes by local artists. Another interesting classical style church is that of the Sacro Cuore which has a majestic façade topped by a beautiful dome. It has fifteen altars in precious marble and stucco work. Santa Venerina is characterised by its old distilleries, witness to the rich wine production of the 19 C. In one quarter of Santa Venerina there is a Early Christian temple with frescoed internal walls dating from the 5 C B.C.. In the southern part of the town, bordering on Guardia, there is the Millstone Museum (Museo del Palmento) with an adjoining ceramic oven. The Museum, housed in a manor dating from 1850, is subdivided into sectors and the various rooms provide information about rural life.



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*January*

**Last Sunday** - Feast of San Sebastiano

*July*

**26** - Feast of the patron S. Venera

*Novembre*

**13/14/15** - 'Enoetna' - Etna wine fair with typical foodstuffs and craftwork

•'Maria Grazia Cutuli' International Prize for Journalism



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

The local distilleries offer excellent alcoholic beverages such as limoncello (lemon liqueur), fragolino (strawberry liqueur) and arancello (orange liqueur).



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania:

Car: A18 ME-CT exit Giarre

Bus: Autolinee Zappalà and Torrisi



*Santa Venerina - view*

# SANT'ALFIO



## HISTORY

Sant'Alfio (1,674 inhabitants) lies on a splendid hill that rises up from the Ionian Sea towards Etna. It covers an area that ranges from 400 to 3,300 m.s.l. offering visitors, in the space of a few kilometres, a panorama that ranges from Mediterranean vegetation to lava desert.

The origin of the name is linked to a religious legend according to which three brothers, Alfio, Filadelfio and Cirino were deported to Sicily in 253 A.D. to be martyred. In the 1600s Sant'Alfio was one of the seven 'towers' of the County of Mascali. Colonisation of the area began in this same century when the Bishop of Catania granted long leaseholds on large areas of the south-eastern slopes of Etna to property owners from Acireale and Catania, who began building the first scattered houses and setting up their small farms. At the beginning of the 17 C the first town in the County of Mascali was established. In the 19 C the area passed to the new commune of Giarre. During this century, thanks to the centuries-old occupation of grape-growing, Sant'Alfio became one of the most important wine producing and exporting communities on Etna, enjoying a period of extraordinary economic well-being which led to a rapid increase in the size of the town and its population. It became independent from Giarre in 1926.



## ART & MONUMENTS

The town centre of the small town of Sant'Alfio is practically unchanged, the principal palaces and monuments being located in cramped, narrow streets. From the magnificent Belvedere in Piazza Duomo, there is a wonderful view of the Ionian coastline from Taormina to the gulf of Augusta. The square is dominated by the rough lava stone façade and bell tower of the Mother Church, dedicated to the three martyrs, Alfio, Filadelfio and Cirino. Inside there are marble altars enriched by precious altar pieces, among which one featuring the three Patron Saints and a monumental organ of great artistic value. Another important monument is the late 19 C church of Calvary which rises on top of a hill of exceptional scenic interest. Access is by way of an imposing flight of lava stone stairs and inside there is a series of wooden altars which testify to the fine art of the craftsmen of the time. In the Nucifori quarter the small church of Nucifori contains a bust of the Madonna of Tindari to which the local residents are particularly devoted. The church of Magazzeni about 6 km from the town, was built in 1958 near the place where, thirty years before, the lava that was threatening Sant'Alfio stopped in front of the relics of the Saints carried there in procession.



*Mother Church*



## NATURE

With its territory that extends from 400 to 3,300 m.s.l. there are a great variety of natural landscapes and routes that nature lovers can follow to discover the Etna Nature Park. At an altitude of 1,540 m, in the Piano delle Donne zone, visitors can explore the Grotta dei Ladri, a curious cavity of surprising shape. The presence of the white Etna Birch (*Betulla Aetnensis*) in the area near Rifugio Citelli and the Monti Sartorius is of great natural interest. This is typically a northern tree which only arrived in this latitude after a remote period of glaciation. Another recommended excursion is to the Bosco della Cerrita (Turkey Oak Wood) near the 1865 lava flow, so-called because it is composed mainly of Turkey oaks, a particular kind of oak only to be found on this part of Etna. At the end of the 1990s the Vine and Wine Museum (Museo della Vite e del Vino) was opened in Piazza Duomo. On the first floor of the museum there is a permanent exhibition of photographs depicting the grape harvest at the beginning of the 20 C while on the second floor there is a collection of tools, from private donors, that were once used in the wine-making process and other rural activities. At a short distance from the village, along the

road leading to Linguaglossa, there is the famous One Hundred Horse Chestnut (Castagno dei Cento Cavalli) estimated to be anything from 2,000 to 4,000 years old, which attracts a lot of visitors. It is thought to be the oldest and largest tree in Europe. Its name is linked to a legend, according to which Queen Joan of Aragon and her retinue of one hundred horses found shelter under its huge crown during a storm. Described and praised by numerous travellers and scholars in the 18 C and 19 C and immortalised in a famous painting by J. Houel to be found in the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia, visitors come from all over the world to see the Chestnut and it is still studied by botanists. It has been included in a 'Protection of the Natural and Cultural Heritage' project and was recognised by UNESCO as a 'Message of World Peace Monument' on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2008.



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*May*

**1<sup>st</sup> Sunday** - Feast of the patrons S. Alfio, S. Filadelfio and S. Cirino

**18** - Anniversary celebrations for UNESCO's recognition of the One Hundred Horse Chestnut as a 'Message of World Peace Monument'.

*July/August*

• Summer in Sant'Alfio with important events including: 'Cherries – the jewels of Etna', Vinpizza (wine and pizza) and the One Hundred Horse Chestnut Silver Plate Award ceremony.

*October - November*

• Etna Vini - one week of craft fairs and food and wine tasting

*November*

**3** - Pilgrimage to the church of the Magazzeni



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

Sant'Alfio has a great variety of local specialities but particular mention must be made of its almond, pistachio, hazelnut, walnut and honey cakes. Its reasonably high quality wine and Etna apples make it one of the most important productive areas on the volcano.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania

Car: A18 ME-CT, exit Giarre

Train: Giarre-Riposto Central Station

Bus: AST



*Hundred Horse Chestnut*

# TRECASTAGNI



## HISTORY

Trecastagni (9,769 inhabitants) lies at an altitude of 568 m.s.l. on the slopes of Etna. This is a hilly area and the town is surrounded by a number of small volcanic cones of different sizes, dating from different periods. Until 1640 the territory of Trecastagni came under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Catania but then it was sold, together with Viagrande, Pedara and the title of Prince of Trecastagni, to Domenico Di Giovanni from Messina. In 1667, the Mother Church of San Nicola di Bari became a parish with an archpriest and a population of about 5,000 inhabitants. After the devastating earthquake of 1693 there was a dramatic fall in the population. In 1710 Anna Maria di Giovanni, the last of the lineage, married Don Giuseppe Alliata, Prince of Villafranca and the title passed to the Alliata line. In 1818 when feudalism was abolished, Trecastagni became a commune and chief town for electoral and judicial purposes, being entitled to one seat in the Sicilian General Parliament. Different hypotheses have been put forward with regard to the origin of the name Trecastagni. The most reliable and historically documented refers to the existence of three large chestnut trees, although knowledge of the original site has now been lost. Other theories range from Tria Castra to Tres Casti Agni with reference to the three martyred brothers, Alfio, Filadelfio and Cirino, co-patron saints of the town, which has religious origins going back to the 17 C after the three brothers stopped there on their journey from Messina to Lentini where they were martyred.



## ART & MONUMENTS

Trecastagni has some important historical monuments and there are many charming corners for visitors to discover. One of the most notable of the noble mansions is Palazzo dei Di Giovanni which still preserves traces of the original murals. The Mother Church dedicated to San Nicola di Bari is of great architectural interest. It is built on a hill which offers exceptional views and can be reached by way of a monumental flight of steps. The 16 C interior features Etna lava stone columns that contrast with the white walls. There are carved marble altars, the stucco decorated chapels of the Sacrament and the Crucifix, a monumental organ dating from 1824 and 18 C wooden statues. The oldest church in the town is the church of the Misericordia more commonly known as the church of the Bianchi, which stands in a square bearing the same name. Its largest bell is dated 1302 although the present building was only constructed in 1734. On the main altar there is an eighteenth century gilded wooden group depicting Mercy. The façade alternates plasterwork with openings framed in carved, sculpted lava stone. The church of Sant'Alfio, now a Sanctuary, has a harmonious façade with openings framed in worked lava stone, topped by an octagonal belfry. The



Trecastagni - view

Convent of the Padri Minori Riformati dates back to 1660 and has a beautiful square cloister with squared stone pillars and an enormous cistern in the centre of the courtyard. Next to the cloister is the church of Sant'Antonio which has a monumental central altar in carved walnut.



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*May*

**10** - Feast of S. Alfio and the Martyrs S. Alfio, S. Cirino and S. Filadelfio and a parade of typical Sicilian carts

*October*

• 'Festa del Castagno' (Chestnut Festival)  
Market with typical local produce and craftwork

*November/December*

• Christmas Market

*December*

**6** - Feast of the patron S. Nicola



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania

Car: Catania bypass RA15, exit Paesi Etnei  
Bus: AST



# VALVERDE



## HISTORY

Valverde (7,246 inhabitants) lies in a hilly area on the lower south-eastern part of Etna at an altitude of 305 m.s.l. The history of Valverde forms part of the history of the ancient University of Aci. The first document to mention Valverde as a town dates back to 1389. It began to develop at the end of the Medieval period, most probably as a result of people leaving the coastal area to escape raids by Moslem pirates. These people settled near to a shrine of Our Lady erected along one of the few, unsafe roads that crossed the Aci wood. Devotion to Our Lady has always marked the history of the town which, according to legend owes its origins to a miraculous happening which induced the residents to build a church, which then became the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Belverde, around which the town grew up. Over the course of the centuries Valverde shared the fate of the Aci area. It belonged to Charles II who ceded it together with Aci S. Antonio and S. Filippo to Luigi Riggio under whose rule, and that of his descendants, it remained for more than a century. The continual fighting between Aci S. Antonio and Aci S. Filippo finally led to the creation of two communes, as confirmed by a decree issued by Francis I, King of the Two Sicilies on 21 September, 1826. Valverde then became a quarter of the commune of Aci S. Antonio. After the Unity of Italy the new political situation led the people of Valverde to immediately ask the government to separate them from Aci. S. Antonio. At that time their wishes were not granted because the new commune would not have had the necessary means, but Valverde finally achieved autonomy and became a commune on 14<sup>th</sup> April, 1951.



## ART & MONUMENTS

The most important monument is certainly the Sanctuary of Maria SS. di Valverde in the centre of the town, which is of medieval origin even if it was reworked over the following centuries. Along the central nave, illuminated by ten stained glass windows, on the left visitors can see the altars to the Madonna del Rosario and the Madonna del Carmine, an elegant late 18 C wooden door and the altar dedicated to S. Nicola da Tolentino with an anonymous painting dated 1706. To one side of the main nave is the altar to the Madonna di Valverde, built in finely inlaid polychrome marble with an artistic balustrade. At the centre of the altar, protected by a small door in embossed silver, is the icon of the Madonna. The Convent of the Barefooted Augustinians can to all effects be considered as forming part of the Sanctuary. The building, whose main prospect faces the Sanctuary square, like the church, forms a square with a large interior courtyard. The oldest part of the building



Valverde – main square

dates back to the beginning of the 18 C while the wing attached to the church presbytery was only finished in 1955. Another monument worthy of mention is Palazzo Riggio later renamed Palazzo Carcasi.



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

August

**Last Sunday** - Feast of the patron S. Maria di Valverde

September

• Beer Festival



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

The town is noted for its excellent cold meats, cheeses and apples, including the Frascona, Rostaiola and Renetta varieties. Thanks to its altitude, climate and type of terrain truffles have always been collected in the commune.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania

Car: Catania bypass RA15 exit Paesi Etnei

Bus: AST

# VIAGRANDE



## HISTORY

The commune of Viagrande (8,008 inhabitants) rises in a hilly area at 410 m.s.l. The first mention of Villalori and Vilarid, the two hamlets that then occupied the site of modern day Viagrande, (today Viscalori and Velardi) refers to 1124, the year in which the first small church was built in the area. From the 12 C the two separate hamlets, inhabited by people from Catania and Acireale showed signs of slow but constant growth despite this being dramatically interrupted by the 1408 eruption which severely damaged the rural economy. More than a century later the two hamlets merged at the crossroads between via Regia, the old road connecting Catania to Messina, and an important mule track leading to the sea by way of Aci Sant'Antonio, Aci Catena and Acireale. The Mother Church of Viagrande had already been built near this crossroads by 1574 and dedicated to the Madonna dell'Idria. However, it was totally destroyed by the terrible earthquake of 1693. Rebuilding started immediately but was soon interrupted by discussions about where it should be built. In the end the new church was built where it can now be seen in Piazza San Mauro. By the end of the 16 C, Viagrande was a well-defined settlement conserving its role of small agricultural town for the following two centuries. From 1641 power lay in the hands of the nobles when Philip IV of Spain gave Domenico Di Giovanni the title of Prince and the lands of Viagrande. In the 1800s when revolutionary risings shook Europe, Viagrande won its own small place in Renaissance history, suffering police persecution when the Bourbons returned to power, while in 1860 a group of young men from Viagrande actively helped to free Catania and were officially thanked by Garibaldi.



## ART & MONUMENTS

The particular feature of the old town centre is the quantity of lava stone that was used to build the roads as well as the houses. There are a number of Baroque palaces and numerous noble villas which sprang up between the 18 C and 19C. The Mother Church, dedicated to the Madonna dell'Idria and built at the beginning of the 1700s, is of great interest. This imposing structure dominates Piazza San Mauro in the town centre. The main façade is divided into three sections defined by four lava stone pilasters, each section containing a portal leading to the three naves of the basilica-like interior. The interior is decorated with stucco work and has beautiful altars. The church of S. Biagio is to be found in the square of the same name in the Viscalori quarter. It dates back to the 16 C and was rebuilt at the end of the 1700s after being damaged in the 1693 earthquake. It has an oval layout

with an apsidal presbytery and rises above a wide stairway. The church of S. Caterina, in via Garibaldi, was built in the 18 C although a church dedicated to S. Caterina already existed in 1633. The present church has a rectangular layout and semicircular apse.



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*January*

15 - Feast of the patron S. Mauro

*June*

11 - Feast of S. Antonio da Padova

• "Viscalori, music, art, flowers, colours": fair and exhibition of typical local products and crafts.

*July*

• Monte Serra cycling trophy



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania

Car: Catania bypass RA15 exit Paesi Etnei

Bus: AST



Church of Santa Maria dell'Idria

# ZAFFERANA ETNEA



## HISTORY

Zafferana Etnea (9,150 inhabitants) lies at 600 m.s.l. on the eastern slopes of the volcano. It originated with the foundation of the Priory of San Giacomo, a Benedictine monastery built in the Middle Ages, the first mention of which is found in a document dated 1387 signed by the Bishop of Catania, Simone del Pozzo. A papal bull of 1443 mentions an adjoining sacramental, parish church dedicated to San Giacomo which suggests that it was used by the first inhabitants of the hamlet that grew up around the monastery. Monastic life in the Priory ended in 1464 when it merged with that of Sant'Agata La Vetere, but the church was used until at least 1677, probably being destroyed, together with the rest of the building, by the terrible earthquake in 1693. The Priory stood above the modern town, where the Valle San Giacomo widens out. The first place-name to be found in the history of Zafferana is 'Cella' which indicated the San Giacomo area where the Priory was situated. Instead, a document dated 1694 refers for the first time to the place-name 'Zafarana' which was then given to the town. Until 1826 the Zafarana area was administratively divided between the communes of Trecastagni, Viagrande and Aci Sant'Antonio, while from a religious point of view the village church, the church of the Madonna della Provvidenza built at the beginning of the 18 C, was bound to the Archpriest of the S.Nicola di Bari parish in Trecastagni until its own parish was constituted in 1753. On 21<sup>st</sup> September, 1826 Francis I signed a decree which separated the quarters of Zafarana Etnea, Sarro, Rocca d'Api, Bongiaro and Pisano from the communes of Trecastagni, Viagrande and Aci S. Antonio and S. Filippo and established a new commune of the name Zafarana Etnea, which later became Zafferana Etnea.



## ART & MONUMENTS

Also called 'the Pearl of Etna', Zafferana Etnea is popular with visitors who are attracted by the spectacular views that it offers and by its artistic, monumental and cultural heritage. The most important church is the Mother Church, dedicated to the Madonna della Provvidenza which was built in different phases. Its Baroque-style façade is made of white Syracuse stone with three portals and is enhanced by twin bell towers. It rises above an imposing, curved black stone stairway that contrasts with the white façade. Inside there is an altar piece representing St. Joseph with the Child. A short distance from the Mother Church is the church of the Madonna delle Grazie with its pleasant exterior architecture and Liberty-style façade which has a niche containing a statue of the Madonna delle Grazie. The Town Hall (Palazzo Municipio) stands in Piazza Umberto I in the town centre and is a good example of Liberty style with a crenellated cornice, floral inserts at the centre of the main elevation above the balcony of honour and a stuccowork inspired by the town's coat of arms with an eagle holding two bunches of grapes in its talons positioned above a medallion that depicts Etna erupting. Access is by means of a spectacular, curved, double flight of stairs with Liberty lamps. Villa Manganeli is of considerable architectural interest. It is the most stately building in the town,



Etna Nature Park

and once belonged to the noble Paternò – Manganelli family from Catania. It was built between the end of the 19 C and the beginning of the 20 C in the Sarro quarter. Access is by way of a monumental entrance on the SP9 road, then along a tree-lined avenue through a luxuriant park. The building has three floors. Recent restoration works have returned the interior to its original splendour. The pavements are in Liberty style while the ceilings are frescoed with garlands and festoons interspaced by geometrical motifs, a masterly work by the architect, Joseph Maria Olbrich. The villa lies in a splendid park of chestnut groves and other trees interspersed by lava outcrops. At the present time, Villa Manganelli belongs to the Etna Nature Park while decisions are made regarding its future use. Villa Anna has also been well-restored and transformed into the Town Park. It is a typical example of a romantic garden with a rich collection of rare camellias and tall trees. Inside the park there is a small Liberty-style bourgeois house in line with the typical style of park architecture used on Etna, modelled on 18 C gardens which contained rustic elements such as arbours, fruit trees, terracotta jars, balustrades, old statues, columns, benches and gazebos. The building today holds some municipal offices and the library.



## LOCAL SPECIALITIES

The typical local product 'par excellence' is honey. Beekeeping is one of the most thriving occupations and has made the town one of the main national producers of honey. Quality wines are also very important many of them meriting a D.O.C. quality mark. Between November and May delicious mushrooms are picked in the woods of Zafferana. In the rotisseries ask for the local speciality, 'Pizza siciliana', a half-circle closed pizza filled with 'tuma' cheese, anchovies and pepper and then fried.



## HOW TO GET THERE

From Catania  
Car: A18 ME-CT exit Giarre, direction Zafferana Etnea  
Bus: AST



## EVENTS & FESTIVALS

*July/August*

• 'Etna in scena': cinema, dance, cabaret, theatrical and musical events

*August*

**Saturday / Sunday / Monday of the 2<sup>nd</sup> week**

Feast of the patron, the Madonna della Provvidenza

*September*

• "Brancati Literary Prize Meeting"

*October*

**Every Sunday** - 'Ottobrata': the largest fair and exhibition of Etna produce and old crafts, which has now become a great event.



Mother Church

# PARKS AND RESERVES





## ETNA, THE HISTORY OF A VOLCANO

Etna, at 3,320 metres, is the highest volcano in Europe. It is a complex volcanic system produced by two tectonic plates, the African to the south and the Eurasian to the north, rubbing against one another. Etna first became active about 600,000 years ago in the Early Pleistocene epoch. Volcanic activity took place under the sea not on land, thus producing basalts with a low alkaline content (tholeiitic magma).

At the beginning there was no central crater and the magma erupted from different points. As one lava flow superimposed another a cone began to emerge from the sea and the magma began to form a conduit and differentiate the type of material produced, so the rocks marking this phase are more alkaline. Eruptions at this time were of an explosive nature as proved by the alternation between reasonably fluid and more viscous lava.

After this initial marine phase, the remains of which can still be seen in the cliff at Aci Castello, eruptions began to take place on land.

A classic example of this can be seen in the 'Timpa' at Acireale, a steep escarpment caused by a fault formed of superimposed lava flows dating back to about 200,000 years ago. This demonstrates how the volcano advanced towards its present position. In fact, moving in a north-westerly direction we come to Monte Calanna which was formed 120,000 years ago.

During the same period, enormous quantities of lava emerged from other points as can be seen in Motta S. Anastasia which rises on an imposing crag, the 'Neck' (200,000 years old). To the north are the Rocca Capra craters, dating back to 100,000 years ago, which are just one of the many relics of volcanic activity to be found in the Valle del Bove. About 60,000 years ago the Trifoglietto began to form. This was one of the most important volcanoes and remains of it can still be seen along the southern wall of the Valle del Bove. It reached a height of 2,500 m.s.l. and was followed by two further cones: the Salifizio (south) and the Serra Giannicola Grande (north). A third eruptive cone then developed, the Cuvighiuni, which had a crater at 2,700 m.s.l. The eruptive axis, therefore, moved in a north-west direction.

About 34,000 years ago the lava from these cones created an enormous volcano which probably reached a height of more than 3,700 m.s.l. but a catastrophic eruption about 15,000 years ago caused this cone to collapse reducing it to about only 800 metres. The collapse of the volcano and the rapid emptying of the magma chamber created a caldera where previously the imposing cone had stood. Nowadays, the elliptical form of the cone before its collapse can still be observed at Pizzi Deneri, to the west, where the CNR has an observatory. Volcanic activity continued in the caldera and the superimposition of the magma created the present-day 3,323 metre-high Mongibello.

Etna can now be considered to be a 'good' volcano. It continues to evolve, most of its explosive activity taking place at the summit where there are four craters,

the Central, Bocca Nuova (New Mouth), North-East and South-East, while new mouths opening up at lower altitudes give rise to mainly effusive eruptions.





## ETNA NATURE PARK

The park was set up on the 17<sup>th</sup> March, 1987 and comprises 59,000 hectares. Its main purpose is to protect the unique natural environment and extraordinary landscape that surrounds the highest active volcano in Europe.

The area is divided into four zones. Zone A is under the maximum protection and the objective is to let nature follow its course here keeping human intervention to the minimum possible; Zone B, the general reserve, consists in part of small agricultural plots and features some splendid old farmhouses; the more external zones C and D comprise 14,000 hectares in all, and some tourist facilities and resorts are permitted in these areas although they must respect and protect the landscape and wildlife. At the centre of the Park's ecosystem is Mount Etna. The external boundary of its rocks measures 250 km, while it is 3,320 m high and has a surface area of about 1,260 square kilometres. The Park contains twenty communes (Adrano, Belpasso, Biancavilla, Bronte, Castiglione di Sicilia, Giarre, Linguaglossa, Maletto, Mascali, Milo, Nicolosi, Pedara, Piedimonte Etneo, Ragalna, Randazzo, Santa Maria di Licodia, Sant'Alfio, Trecastagni, Viagrande and Zafferana Etnea), with a total population of more than two hundred thousand inhabitants. The Park has created some wonderful itineraries which help visitors to understand its features and biodiversity: Monte Nero degli Zappini, Pietracannone-Cubania, Monti Sartorius, Piano dei Grilli, Cisternazza and Monte Spagnolo to name but a few. The Park contains a rich, varied flora and never remains the same, being subject to constant, sudden change. On the lower highlands, there are vineyards, hazelnut groves, pistachio groves, oak and chestnut woods and apple orchards. Higher up, especially on the eastern side, the visitor comes to thickets of oak while larch pines form beautiful pinewoods like those of Linguaglossa and Castiglione di Sicilia. Above 2,000 m.s.l. beech and birch trees predominate. One of the characteristic species on the mountain is the Etna broom, one of the main plants colonizing the lava, while in higher regions, above the tree line, the landscape features cushiony clumps of spiny vetch (*Astragalus siculus*) that provide shelter for other typical plants such as groundsel, Sicilian soapwort, violets



and chickweed. Porcupines, foxes, wild cats, martens, rabbits, hares and smaller animals including weasels, hedgehogs, dormice and different varieties of mice and bats still live on the mountain. There are also a large number of bird species: diurnal birds of prey include hawks, buzzards, kestrels, peregrine falcons and golden eagles while barn-owls, horned owls, tawny owls and the long-eared owl are nocturnal hunters. Near Lake Gurridda, the only stretch of water on Etna, herons, ducks and other aquatic birds can be seen. The Park also promotes traditional mountain crafts and produce: mushrooms from Nicolosi, apples from Pedara, honey from Zafferana Etnea, sausages from Linguaglossa, strawberries from Maletto, pistachios from Bronte, lettuce from Adrano, nougat from Belpasso, oil from Ragalna. Then there are fine wines from the splendid vineyards of Milo, Sant'Alfio, Viagrande, Castiglione di Sicilia, Linguaglossa, Piedimonte Etneo and Randazzo, all favoured by the extraordinary fertility of the lava soil. Nor should the lava itself be forgotten, which is used to create true works of art and which characterises much of the splendid architecture in many of the towns in the Park. The former Benedictine Monastery of San Nicolò L'arena, which since the spring of 2005 has housed the new headquarters of the Etna Nature Park, is also worth a visit. The town of Nicolosi grew up around this ancient building of great historical and architectural value, which nowadays is dedicated to culture, nature and the promotion of local products.



## SUGGESTED WALKS

### Nature Trail

#### Monte Nero degli Zappini

Distance: about 4 kilometres

Gradient: 200 metres

Walking time: about 2 ½ hours

Difficulty: Easy

Start/finish: Mount Vetore plateau, Etna south

This was the first nature trail created in Sicily (in 1991) and is probably the most frequently used path in the Etna Nature Park. The trail, which is not particularly difficult, lies at a height of 1,740 m.s.l.. It begins from the plateau to the west of Monte Vetore, a short distance from the Grande Albergo dell'Etna and winds for about 4 kilometres through ancient and more recent lava fields, lava caves, hornitos, woods and exceptionally beautiful tall pines to the Nuova Gussonea Botanic Garden, one of the most extensive and important in existence. From here, following a stretch of asphalted road the circle is completed and returns to the starting point. The whole of the trail lies on state-owned land and along the way there are eleven observation points which offer visitors a very significant insight into the natural environment of Etna.

### Nature Trail

#### Monti Sartorius

Distance: about 4 kilometres

Gradient: 100 metres

Walking time: about 2 hours

Difficulty: Easy

Start/finish: Forestry gate near Rifugio Citelli, Etna north-east.

The trail is of great geological and botanic interest and forms a circular route of about 4 kilometres which starts at the forestry gate at a height of 1,660 m.s.l. There are 6 observation points along the route as well as clearings full of endemic species, enormous volcanic 'bombs' and a predominance of birch woods (*Betula aetnensis*). The great geological interest of the area is provided by the impressive lava flow of 1865 which gave rise to the Monti Sartorius (in honour and memory of the scholar, Sartorius von Walterhausen, who was one of the first to map the most important eruptions) characterised by the typical 'row of buttons' alignment of the eruptive cones. The majestic lava flow is about eight kilometres long with an average depth of more than 12 metres. Sharp lava and clinker blocks make the surface very uneven so great care is needed when walking.

### Etna high-mountain track

Length: about 42 kilometres

Gradient: about 300 metres

Walking time: about 3 days. Excellent conditions for hiking and cycling.

Difficulty: Average - Difficult

Start: Feliciusa Milia Regional Forestry Gate (1685 m.s.l.)

Finish: Caserma Pitarrone, Pineta Linguaglossa (1421 m.s.l.)

Together with the classic ascent to the summit of the mountain, the High Mountain Trail excursion – basically walking around Etna on foot – will remain impressed in the memory of visitors to the Park as a unique

experience, bringing them into contact with this extraordinary environment that offers a whole variety of stupendous landscapes. The circular trail, all on state-owned land, goes round the western and northern flanks of the mountain, offering the hiker (who can also decide to stop in the numerous mountain huts along the trail) a fascinating insight into the nature and biodiversity of the plants in the Etna Park, the woods, the ancient and more recent lava flows and its most impressive panoramas. It can be used in all seasons except winter, when, with the snow and fog, it can be tackled only by people with the correct expertise and equipment.



## HOW TO GET THERE

The proximity of the Park to Catania and the A18 Messina-Catania motorway make it easy to reach for visitors arriving by plane or by car. The numerous towns and villages that encircle the protected area can also be easily reached thanks to the extensive road network linking them to Catania and to each other.



## USEFUL INFORMATION

Etna Nature Park, Regional Park Authority  
phone 095 821111, fax 095914738  
email : [ufficiostampa@parcoetna.it](mailto:ufficiostampa@parcoetna.it)  
Internet: [www.parcoetna.it](http://www.parcoetna.it);  
[www.parks.it/parcoetna](http://www.parks.it/parcoetna)





## NEBRODI NATURE PARK

The Nebrodi nature park with its surface area of 860 square kilometres, is the largest protected area in Sicily and includes twenty-three communes of which eighteen belong to the province of Messina, three to the province of Catania and two to that of Enna. With its 70 kilometres of mountains and 50% of the total woods in Sicily it really is the 'green lung' of the island. Some of its extremely interesting natural environments are unique in Sicily. The Nebrodi mountains are a strong mass with gentle slopes and rounded peaks, covered in rich vegetation due to the presence of banks of clay and sandstone rocks. There are also extensive terraces overlooking wide valleys containing the many rivers that flow into the Tyrrhenian Sea. The main feature of the Park is its vast expanse of natural woods that host a variety of wildlife that disappeared from other places long ago. The number, variety and state of conservation of its wetlands, springs, rivers, ponds and bogs, are extremely interesting. The extensive woods have a considerable effect on the climate of the area which has long, harsh winters and hot summers. Average temperatures are around 10-12°C but the frequent rains, snow and fog create the humidity that is so necessary for the survival of some of the woods. Vegetation varies according to the altitude. The predominant vegetation of the Park is Mediterranean evergreen scrub. To discover species like the deciduous oak, durmast oak and Turkey oak it is necessary to climb up to between 1,200 and 1,400 metres. As a result of the particular climate beech trees are found in the mountain areas, which, thanks to their oval leaves can retain water, very useful for surviving long periods of drought, while the thick undergrowth contains many species including holly, butcher's broom and hawthorn. There is also a reasonable variety of wildlife, even if the intensive poaching that took place during the 19 C led to the disappearance of some important species including deer, fallow deer, wolves, roe deer, and eagle owls.. Despite this



*Nebrodi mountains*

depletion the area is still one of the richest and most complex as regards wildlife. Walking in the park it is easy to come across a variety of mammals, including varieties of dormouse, but also reptiles like the marsh turtle and a multitude of birds; about one hundred and fifty different species have been documented. Among the numerous animal species there are fawns, fallow deer, amphibians and reptiles, nesting and migratory birds (herons and stilt plovers). Birds of prey such as buzzards, kestrels, peregrine falcons and kites nest on the edge of the woods, while the rocky areas are havens for the golden eagle. Coots, kingfishers



*Maulazzo lake*

and little grebe are found near the rivers while the Sicilian rock partridge, raven and hoopoe can be seen in the green meadows. However, the Nebrodi mountains are not just flora and fauna. In the numerous towns lying within the boundaries of the Park visitors can discover the peasant crafts which enriched the area; basket making, embroidery and wooden agricultural equipment or the numerous food products especially delicious cheeses and cold meats. Particular mention must be made of the canestrato, pecorino, provola and ricotta cheeses and salami made from the meat of the local black pigs.



## ALCANTARA GORGE NATURE PARK

The Alcantara river park is situated on the north side of Etna and includes those parts of the provinces of Messina and Catania that form the Alcantara river basin. The Park was established in 2001 to protect, manage, preserve and defend the landscape and natural environment of the valley and 'to allow better living conditions as regards development of the economy and correct use of the territory, for residents' recreational and cultural use and social and public use of the assets, as well as for scientific purposes'. The River Alcantara rises from a series of small springs in the Nebrodi mountains near Floresta at an altitude of about 1,500 metres then, after having flowed 50 kilometres through the valley, meets and merges into the Ionian Sea near the ruins of the ancient city of Naxos. The river, flowing and eroding the hard volcanic basalt rocks has created, in certain stretches, vertical gorges exposing the heart of the lava stone. Visitors can admire the spectacular prismatic forms of the basalt columns, unique natural sculptures that resemble lines of organ pipes, elegant fans and tidy woodpiles. The natural environment of the Alcantara, one of the main rivers in Sicily, is of great natural and scenic interest. However, the River Park was set up in an area originally



Maulazzo lake

designated to become the River Alcantara Nature Reserve, included in the 1991 Regional Plan for nature reserves. The boundary of the nature reserve, which forms the present boundary of the River Park, is completely inadequate to protect the natural aquatic environment and shelter offered by the area because it is limited to only a narrow strip along the river and does not even include the main river tributaries. Although a plan of the perimeter has been ready for some years the protected area still does not have a suitable boundary, which means that building works and other human interventions are taking place in areas right near the river.



Alcantara river

# USEFUL INFORMATION

## REGIONAL PROVINCE OF CATANIA INFORMATION POINTS

Via Etnea, 63/65 - Catania - 095 4014070

"V. Bellini" International Airport Fontanarossa Catania  
095 0937023

Ufficio Turismo Provincia Regionale di Catania  
turismo@provincia.ct.it

Informazioni sull'ospitalità nella Provincia di Catania  
<http://turismo.provincia.ct.it/ospitalit/>

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## MUSEUMS

Archivio di Stato - Via V. Emanuele, 156 - Catania  
095 7159860

Archivio Storico Comunale - Via S. Agata, 2 - Catania  
095 7422771

Biblioteche Riunite "Civica e A. Ursino Recupero"  
Via Biblioteca, 13 - Catania - 095 316883

Casa - Museo Regionale Giovanni Verga  
Via Sant'Anna, 8 - 095 7150598

Castello Ursino - P.zza Federico di Svevia - Catania  
095 345830

Chiesa San Francesco Borgia - Via Crociferi, 17 - Catania  
095 310762

Centro Culturale "Le Ciminiere" - Piazzale Asia - Catania  
Museo Storico dello Sbarco in Sicilia - 095 4011929  
Museo del Cinema - Museo del Giocattolo - Galleria  
d'Arte Moderna - Teatro Stabile Opera dei Pupi  
095 4011928-30  
Museo della Radio - 095 4013058  
Mostra delle carte geografiche antiche della Sicilia  
095 4013072

Orto Botanico - Via Etnea, 397 - Catania - 095 430901

Museo Civico Belliniano - P.zza S. Francesco, 3- Catania  
095 7150535

Museo Civico del Castello Ursino - P.zza Federico di  
Svevia Catania - 095 345830

Museo Vulcanologico - Via Cesare Battisti, 28 - Nicolosi  
095 7914589

Museo di Zoologia - Casa delle Farfalle - Via Lago di  
Nico, 38 - Catania - 095 382529 - 095 372606

Museo Diocesano - Via Etnea, 8 - Catania - 095 281635

Museo Emilio Greco - P.zza S. Francesco  
d'Assisi, 3 - Catania - 095 317654

Museo Paleontologico "Accademia  
Federiciana" - Via Borgo, 12 - Catania  
095 438531

Palazzo Biscari - Via Museo Biscari, 10  
Catania - 095 7152508

Palazzo Platamone (Palazzo della Cultura)  
Via Vittorio Emanuele, 121 - Catania  
095 7428038 - 095 7428034

Palazzo Valle - Via V. Emanuele, 122  
Fondazione Puglisi Cosentino - Catania  
095 7152118

Pinacoteca Provinciale - Ex Chiesa di San  
Michele Minore - P.zza Manganelli  
Catania - 095 327122

Museo Regionale della Ceramica  
Via Giardino Pubblico - Caltagirone  
093 358418

Biblioteca Pinacoteca Zelantea - Via  
Sangiuliano, 17 - Acireale - 095 7634516

Museo Vulcanologico - Via Cesare  
Battisti, 28 - Nicolosi - 095 7914589

Museo Regionale di Adrano  
P.zza Umberto, 1 - Adrano - 095 7692661

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## ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

Ipogeo Romano - Via G. Sanfilippo  
Catania - 095 530127- 095 7472268

Foro Romano - Cortile S. Pantaleone  
Catania - 095 7472277

Anfiteatro Romano - P.zza Stesicoro  
Catania - 095 7472268

Teatro Romano e Odeon  
Via V. Emanuele, 266 - Catania  
095 7150508

Terme Achilliane - P.zza Duomo - Catania  
095 281635 (Museo Diocesano)

Terme della Rotonda - Via della Mecca  
Catania - 095 7150951

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## NATURAL PROTECTED AREAS

Parco dell'Etna - Via del Convento, 45  
Nicolosi - 095 821111  
[www.parcoetna.ct.it](http://www.parcoetna.ct.it)

Riserva naturale orientata "Oasi del Simeto" Ufficio gestione riserve naturali della Provincia Regionale di Catania - 095 4012485 - 095 4012432  
www.provincia.ct.it - riserve.naturali@provincia.ct.it

Riserva naturale orientata "Fiume Fiumefreddo" Ufficio gestione riserve naturali della Provincia Regionale di Catania - 095 641860 - 095 4012485  
www.provincia.ct.it - riserve.naturali@provincia.ct.it

Riserva naturale integrale "Complesso Immacolatelle e Micio Conti" CUTGANA - Via Terzora, 8 - San Gregorio di Catania - 095 7215769 - www.cutgana.it

Riserva naturale integrale "Isola Lachea e faraglioni dei Ciclopi" CUTGANA - Via Terzora, 8 - San Gregorio di Catania - 095 7215769 - www.cutgana.it

Parco dei Nebrodi - P.zza Duomo - Sant'Agata di Militello (ME) - 0941 702524 - www.parcodeinebrodi.it

Area marina protetta "Isole Ciclopi" - Via Provinciale, 5/D - Acicastello - 095 7117322 - www.isoleciclopi.it  
amp@isoleciclopi.it

Riserva naturale orientata "La Timpa" (Acireale) Dipartimento Regionale Azienda Foreste Demaniali Via Libertà, 97- Palermo - 091 7906801

Riserva naturale orientata "Bosco di Santo Pietro" (Caltagirone) Dipartimento Regionale Azienda Foreste Demaniali - Via Libertà, 97- Palermo - 091 7906801

Parco FluViale dell'Alcantara Ente Parco FluViale dell'Alcantara - Via dei Mulini - Francavilla di Sicilia (ME) 0942 989911

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## TAXIS

Cooperativa Social Taxi Catania  
Prenotazioni 24h: 095 330966

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## CATANIA CITY BUSES

A.M.T. Azienda Municipale Trasporti  
Via del plebiscito, 747 - Catania - 095 509570  
Numero verde 800 018696

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## SUBURBAN BUSES

A.S.T.  
Via Luigi Sturzo, 230 - Catania - 095 7461096  
Numero verde 840000323

Buda  
Via Scipioni, 11 - Giarre (CT)  
095 931905

Etna Trasporti e interbus  
Via d'Amico, 181 - Catania - 095 532716  
Informazioni 095 530396

FCE Circumetnea servizio bus  
Via Caronda, 352 - Catania - 095 534323  
Informazioni 095 541250

I.S.E.A.  
Via Strada Pilata, 4 - Misterbianco (CT) - 095 464101

Romano  
Via Umberto, 104 - Centuripe (EN) 0935 73114

Sais Autolinee  
Via d'Amico, 181 - Catania  
(per chiamate dai cellulari) 199 244141  
Numero verde 800 211020

Scionti  
Via Bartoli, 9 - Catania - 095 354708

Zappalà e Torrisi  
Via Scionti, 10 - Acireale (CT)  
095 7647139

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## TRAINS

Trenitalia FS  
Stazione Centrale Catania  
P.zza Papa Giovanni XXIII - 095 532719  
www.trenitalia.com

FCE - FerroVia Cirumetnea  
Via Caronda, 352 - Catania  
095 534323 - 095 54125

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## UNDERGROUND - FCE Catania

FerroVia Circumetnea - 095 541250

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## "V. BELLINI" INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT FONTANAROSSA CATANIA

SAC Airport Services SAC  
095 7239111  
www.aeroporto.catania.it

Call Center 800 605656

Flight information  
095 340505

Baggage handling  
095 7233180

Tickets  
095 7239320

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## CAR RENTAL

Alfa Service  
Via Toselli, 25 - Catania - 095 536024

AutoVia  
Via Raffineria, 13 - Catania  
095 537108

Avis  
Aeroporto Fontanarossa  
199 100133 - 095340500

Car Service Duemila  
Via Francesco Riso, 12 - Catania  
095 7169072

Europ Rent a Car  
Aeroporto Fontanarossa - 095 7231232

Europ Car  
Aeroporto Fontanarossa - 095 348125

Hertz Italia  
Via Brucoli, 21 - Catania - 095 7231744  
Aeroporto Fontanarossa - 095 341595

Holiday Car Rental  
Aeroporto Fontanarossa - 095 346769

Hollywood Rent a Car  
Via Luigi Sturzo, 238 - Catania  
095 530594 - 095 281161 (Aeroporto Fontanarossa)

Maggiore  
Aeroporto Fontanarossa  
199 151120 - 095 340594

Ma.Gi. Rent a Car  
Via Francesco Riso, 6 - Catania  
095 7167154

Sixt  
Aeroporto Fontanarossa  
199 100666 - 095 340389

Targa Rent  
Aeroporto Fontanarossa - 095 281891

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#### **BOAT RENTAL**

Portofranco  
Via Marittima, 2 - Catania - 095 491312

Way Point Yachting  
P.zza Duca di Genova - Catania - 095 7465184

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