

TERRADICOLORI

ART NATURE AND CULTURE
OF THE CATANIA PROVINCE



REGIONAL PROVINCE OF CATANIA



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This Guide is intended to be an agile tool to allow the tourist to quickly get some information on the territory of the Province of Catania. It does not pretend to be exhaustive - much more space would be needed - but is simply a first approach to a reality that is extremely varied and rich in peculiarities. In general, those who come here already know of Etna by reputation, are attracted by the charm of Europe's highest active volcano; perhaps they have heard of the beauty of our coastline, of a great city like Catania. Few, unfortunately, have a more complete idea of what a stay in our province can offer. On its 3,552 square kilometres, incredibly diverse scenery unfolds, from the sea to the high mountains, from the sun-drenched plains to the shady, narrow river gorges.

The Coast: Starting from the south, from the border with the province of Syracuse to the port of Catania, it consists of a 15-kilometre-long beach of fine golden sand, the Playa, which in summer is entirely occupied by bathing beaches (apart from the stretch at the mouth of the Simeto river, which is a nature reserve); Continuing northwards, from the port of Catania to Pozzillo (a hamlet of Acireale), the coastline is formed by a rugged, jagged lava cliff that forms striking inlets and continues for several dozen metres below sea level. Below Acireale, the cliff becomes very high, over one hundred metres, and forms the inaccessible 'Timpa', rich in vegetation that extends for about six kilometres (since 1999 it has become a Nature Reserve). Finally, from Pozzillo to the mouth of the Alcantara river, which also marks the border with the Province of Messina, the coastline returns to being a very long beach (20 kilometres) of pebbles and sand of volcanic origin. This stretch of coastline is also home to a beautiful example of uncontaminated nature, the Riserva Naturale Orientata del 'Fiumefreddo' (Oriented Natural Reserve of the 'Fiumefreddo River').

L'Etna: It is without doubt the most famous attraction of our province, with its 3,323 metres of altitude. Now a National Park, with protected flora and fauna, it is a constant excursion destination, offering tourists a unique heritage of spectacular views: the lush vegetation of the lower, intensely cultivated and inhabited belt; higher up, the forests of holm oaks, pines, chestnuts, poplars and even beeches and birches, so rare at this latitude; and, finally, in the highest part, the desert area of volcanic sands, devoid of vegetation, where the large, still active craters open up.

The other reliefs and river valleys: to complete the orographic heritage of our province,

with large wooded areas. The two main rivers in the province of Catania originate from the Nebrodi: the Alcantara, which flows north of Etna, and the Simeto, which turns south. Etna, with its eruptions, has repeatedly forced the waters of these rivers to change their course, giving rise to the formation of picturesque gorges.

The Plain: the 'Piana' extends for about 430 square kilometres south of Catania. Of alluvial origin, it is crossed by the Simeto river and some of its tributaries. It is intensively cultivated, especially with citrus fruits and wheat.

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CATANIA





HISTORY

According to Thucydides, Catania (295,591 inhabitants) was founded by the Chalcidians of Naxos around 729 BC. Confirmation of the correctness of this information comes from the excavations carried out by the Superintendence for Cultural Heritage of Catania inside the Ursino Castle in an area that, at the time of Greek colonisation, was close to the coast; here, Greek architectural structures and materials were found that can be dated between the late 8th and early 7th century. Also in Piazza Dante, at the site of the ancient acropolis, scholars have found materials that confirm the arrival of the Greeks in Catania during the 8th century BC. In 476 BC, Katane, as it was then called, was conquered by the Syracusan tyrant Hieron, who changed the name to Aitna, expelled the Chalcidian inhabitants and repopulated it with a large number of Syracusans and Peloponnesians. At the fall of the Syracusan tyranny, the Chalcidians regained possession of the city and its ancient name.

From the beginning of the 5th century B.C. Catania returned to the Syracusan orbit with the conquest of Dionysius I; confirmation of this comes from the discovery, in Piazza San Francesco, of votive statuettes of Kore with a torch, whose cult was favoured by Hieron, priest of Demeter. The Romans arrived and conquered Catania in 263 B.C., beginning a very long period, very favourable for the city, which lasted about seven centuries; in 21 B.C. Augustus raised it to the rank of a Roman colony, which led to an increase in population for the city, but above all to a considerable expansion of its territory, with the acquisition of the fertile plain south of the Simeto. To the Augustan period date back the first major architectural undertakings aimed at transforming Catania into a Roman colony; an area for the forum was created and, at the same time, a decisive reorganisation of the road network was undertaken.

During the centuries that saw the splendour of the Roman empire, Catania was enriched with a circus still present at the end of the 16th century, a theatre and an odeon, an amphitheatre and numerous thermal buildings. After the fall of the Roman Empire, Catania suffered damage from barbarian incursions, followed by periods of complete abandonment of the main ancient monuments, culminating in the concession made by Theodoric, lord of Sicily between 491 and 526, which allowed the amphitheatre to be dismantled and the use of lava stone blocks for private buildings. Catania's membership of the Byzantine Empire, which lasted three centuries, began with Belisarius' conquest in 535, during the Greek-Gothic War. The Arab presence in Catania, in the aftermath of the conquest of Sicily in 827, left almost no traces in the city.

With the advent of the Normans, the construction of the cathedral began in Catania, which created a sort of heart of the city centre around which the main square was modelled. To 1169 dates one of the most devastating of the seismic events that struck Catania, which had very serious effects on the entire urban fabric. Between 1239 and 1250, at the behest of Frederick II and designed by architect Riccardo da Lentini, the Ursino Castle was built, which became, in the Aragonese period

the sovereigns' favourite residence. The Duomo, on the other hand, became the burial place. At the time of the reign of



Catania Cathedral - detail

Alfonso the Magnanimous was founded (1434) the island's first university.

The 15th century was a golden century for Catania. In 1494 even in Sicily, subject to the Spanish Crown, the expulsion of the Jews was decreed, who emigrated to the Ottoman Levant and the kingdom of Naples. Catania's fortifications, visible today along Via Dusmet, at the foot of the Archbishopric and Palazzo Biscari, date back to the mid-16th century. Even in the 17th century, the city retained a medieval urban layout, with houses and streets enclosed by bastioned walls.

In 1669, Catania was hit by lava from Mount Etna. A violent eruption caused a long lava flow that after lapping the Ursino castle poured into the sea, effectively extending the coastline. The 1693 earthquake caused further considerable damage not only in Catania but in the entire province of Etna. The period following the earthquake is identified, from an architectural point of view, as that of 'reconstruction'. The concept of space was reinterpreted and the most important figure in the field of architecture was the architect Giovan Battista Vaccarini, who managed to reconcile the Baroque style with what the earthquake had left standing, often introducing elements from the Greek and Roman periods into the new buildings.

On the façade of the cathedral, for example, Vaccarini inserted some granite columns

possibly found in the ruins of the Roman theatre. In the mid 1700s architect Stefano Ittar worked in Catania, who gave a neoclassical imprint to his buildings, although the Baroque influence remains evident. The 19th century saw a notable demographic expansion of the city: many middle-class families chose Via Etna as the place to build their residences. The port was enlarged and in May 1890 the Bellini Theatre was inaugurated.

In the artistic and literary field, in addition to the musician Vincenzo Bellini, the writers Giovanni Verga and Luigi Capuana are to be remembered.

The 20th century saw great urban expansion in Catania that, in some cases, seriously damaged the urban fabric itself, as demonstrated by the case of the demolition of the old San Berillo district, in the historic centre, to make way for what is now Corso Sicilia.

Art Nouveau is evidenced by the construction of villas between Piazza Santa Maria di Gesù and Piazza Roma, in Via Androne and along Corso Italia, among others.



Massimo Theatre - detail



Ursino Castle



ART & MONUMENTS

The Ursino Castle

Ursino Castle was built between 1239 and 1250 by Frederick II of Swabia, who entrusted Riccardo da Lentini with the realisation of the project. The place where the Castle stood was very different from what it is today. In fact, it seems that its name derives from *Castrum Sinus*, or Castle of the Gulf, since it stood on a rocky promontory on the sea, connected by a strip of land to the city and the city walls. In April 1669, the most famous lava flow in history, which started from a low altitude above Nicolosi, after lapping the city, reached the Castle, surrounded it until it filled the moat, covered the ramparts and even moved several hundred metres away from the coastline. The Ursino Castle was the royal residence of the kings of the House of Aragon of Sicily.

Over the centuries, the castle lost its role as a military defence and, after being used as a residence by the Viceroy, was partly used as a prison. It was only in the 1930s that major restoration work began, following the decision of the Catania City Council to turn it into a museum.

Palazzo Platamone

Now the Palazzo della Cultura, the Palazzo Platamone belonged to the illustrious and wealthy Platamone family, which distinguished itself in the commercial field but also had important exponents who excelled in political and ecclesiastical circles. In the 15th century the Platamone family donated the palace to the Benedictine nuns, who turned it into a monastery. Inside the courtyard, the loggia of Palazzo Platamone, dating back to the second half of the 15th century, is the only evidence of the late medieval city that survived the 1693 earthquake.

Biscari Palace

For the construction of their main city residence, the Paternò Castello family of the princes of Biscari called in the best-known architects of Baroque reconstruction. The best known and most cultured of the owners was Ignazio V, Prince of Biscari, an enlightened connoisseur of art of music, archaeology and painting. In his palace, he dedicated himself to building a theatre on the south front towards Via Dusmet and a museum full of the archaeological finds he had collected during his research, which was later visited by well-known intellectuals of the time such as Wolfgang Goethe.

University Palace

The University of Catania has very ancient origins: founded in 1432 by the Aragonese sovereigns, it was the first university in Sicily. Information on an original seat is fragmentary; it is only known that a building predating the current one occupied an area north of the Platea Magna. In 1684, construction of the building was begun on the present site. Just over a decade later, due to the collapse caused by the 1693 earthquake, the present building was erected, probably around 1720.



Bendettini Monastery Detail

Palace of the Elephants

In 1353, the Aragonese rulers wanted to build the civic loggia in front of the Norman cathedral, a symbol of the bishop's strong power. In 1944, during a popular uprising, the palace was set on fire and lost its archives, a very serious damage to the historical reconstruction of the city, and part of its furnishings. The palace is built on a rectangular plan on three levels. In the main vestibule are the two 18th-century carriages, one of which is called the Senate, that parade during the Agatine celebration on 3 February.

Former Clerics' Seminary

The seminary was established by Bishop Faragone in 1572. In 1614, Secusio, then Bishop of Catania, built its seat opposite the senatorial loggia. In 1687, it was enlarged to make room for novices, but a few years later, the earthquake of 1693 caused such severe damage that much of the structure collapsed. It has a strategic position within the Platea Magna and follows the route of the Norman walls, continuing the diocesan complex consisting of the Cathedral and the Archbishop's Palace. The interior has been much disfigured over the years due to inappropriate use; nevertheless, the asymmetries of the bodies facing the inner courtyard reveal an architectural originality that derives from the idea of one of the best architects of the reconstruction, Alonzo di Benedetto.

Villa Cerami

Villa Cerami is one of the most prestigious in Catania. Built a few years after the terrible earthquake of January 1693, the villa is composed of reworked 18th-century bodies

in the 19th century. In the courtyard is the Great Bather, a bronze work by Emilio Greco. Today, the building houses the Faculty of Law of the University of Catania.

The Fish Market

This is a typical Mediterranean market in which the smells, sounds and colours of popular culture and Sicilian traditions come together.

It is located between Piazza Pardo and Piazza Di Benedetto and includes within it various architectural testimonies of 16th, 17th and 18th-century Catania. From Piazza Duomo, a short flight of steps leads to Piazza Pardo, where the Fontana dei Sette Canali (Fountain of the Seven Canals) fed by the Amenano River is located. Walking along a covered passageway leads to the Porta dei Canali, evidence of the city's defensive system dating from the time of Charles V (1553), which survived the 1693 earthquake.

University Square

In 1957, four bronze candelabra made by the artist Domenico Maria Lazzaro were placed in Piazza Università. They narrate, with extreme synthesis and expressive finesse, the most significant Catanese legends: the Pii brothers, Gammazita, Colapesce and the Paladin Uzeta.

Piazza Duomo - Platea Magna

Located in the area of today's Piazza Duomo, although less extensive than this one, the medieval Platea Magna was so called because it was larger than the other squares and already existed at the time of Count Ruggero (11th century). The Platea Magna was the economic, social and religious centre of Catania. Enlarged in the mid-1500s with the destruction of the old buildings on the northern side, the Platea was further enlarged on the southern side in the early 1600s and inaugurated in 1622 on the feast of Saint Agatha.

The Elephant Fountain

The fountain is an assemblage of works from different periods: the lava stone elephant from Roman times, the 'liotru' of the Catanese, symbol of the Byzantine magician Diodorus

Siculus, and the Egyptian obelisk in granite from Siena, with hieroglyphics related to the cult of Isis, which may have been located in the city's Roman Circus. It was the architect Giovan Battista Vaccarini who created this eclectic ensemble in 1736, giving Catania's emblem its most central place in the city. The elephant had much older origins. In fact, it is said to have already been mentioned in the life of St Leo, the 3rd century bishop of Catania, who is said to have had the necromancer Heliodorus executed.

the necromancer Heliodorus. Since then, the symbol has constantly appeared in the city's history.

Piazza Mazzini

The ancient Piazza San Filippo, now Piazza Mazzini, was destined to host the market and was therefore characterised by a sequence of shops facing four porticoes, following the example of certain squares widespread in eastern Sicily and in Spanish colonies across the sea.

The square has a structure partly inspired by Spanish town planning. It is enclosed within four angular porticoed bodies, supported by 32 ancient columns, possibly recovered from Roman buildings found near the Convent of St Augustine.

Bonajuto Chapel

In the Civita district, near Piazza Cutelli, stands the 18th-century palace of the Bonajuto family, from which the street takes its name. Incorporated within the palace is the small Byzantine church (trichora) of the Salvatorello, also known as the Bonajuto Chapel.

Massimo Bellini Opera Theatre

The Teatro Massimo 'V. Bellini' was built to a design by the Milanese architect



Fish Market

Carlo Sada, to designs by Andrea Scala, and inaugurated on 31 May 1890 to the notes of the symphony of Vincenzo Bellini's *Norma*. The scenographic character of the exterior architecture is replicated and amplified inside the building: the entrance portico, covered for the carriages to stop, leads into a sequence of rooms converging in a vestibule, which introduces the hall and the first tier of boxes. Above the portico and vestibule is the splendid foyer used for dance parties and concerts. The curtain, depicting a legendary 'Victory of the Catanese over the Libyans', was painted in 1883 by Giuseppe Sciuti. The 'Bellini' has a 105-piece orchestra, an 84-piece choir, and a team of stage technicians and stage workshops.

Uzeda Gate

Porta Uzeda scenographically closes Via Etna to the south, connecting the former Seminario dei Chierici to the west and the Bishop's Palace to the east. It was precisely to unite these two buildings that in 1695, at the behest of the Duke of Calastra, Don Giuseppe Lanza, a flyover was built, giving rise to a gate that was called Porta della Marina. But it soon changed its name in homage to Viceroy Don Francesco Paceco, Duke of Uzeda, who arrived in Catania in 1693. Later, above that arch, on the initiative of Bishop Salvatore Ventimiglia, the upper floors were built, and at the top was erected

a sumptuous pediment with a central niche enclosing a bust of St Agatha, who watches over and protects the city, and a marble inscription: D.O.M. Sapientiae et bonis artibus - 1780 (To God the Great, to Wisdom and her Fine Arts). From the sea façade of Porta Uzeda, it is possible to admire a section of the 16th-century walls and bastions built by Emperor Charles V to fortify Catania.

The Agata Fountain

It is located in Via Dusmet, near Porta Uzeda, embedded in the ancient curtain wall between the two ancient gates, named respectively Porta dei Canali or Porta di Carlo V and Porta Saracena or Porta del Porticello, and dates back to 1621. It is to this fountain that the Catanese relate the 'abduction' of the body of Saint Agatha by the Byzantine general Maniace. When he stole the relics to take them as a gift to the emperor of Constantinople, a violent storm arose that prevented the ships from setting sail. Agatha's body was landed and placed in the chapel of St George, on whose ruins the cathedral was built. The place where the relics were laid to rest was right next to the spot where the fountain stands.

Villa Bellini

In place of the present public garden named after Vincenzo Bellini, there was, in the 18th century, the Labyrinth, a private garden set around a small stately building belonging to Prince Ignazio Paternò Castello di Biscari. Other land adjacent to the old Labirinto was added to this original nucleus, acquired by the Catania municipality in 1854. Work on the unification and harmonisation of the new areas began in 1877. The elegant garden was inaugurated on 6 January 1883 and became a meeting place for Catania's bourgeoisie, who would gather here to listen to the bands, whose performances filled the long, sultry days of the Catania summer.



Benedictine Monastery

Villa Pacini

Villa Pacini was created following the extensive reclamation of a marshy area, carried out in 1861 by channelling the canals of the Amenano river, to prevent it from overflowing during floods. Before being called Villa Pacini, it was called Villetta della Marina, to emphasise the privileged relationship that bound it to the sea. Although small, it immediately became an important meeting point for the entire citizenry, particularly for the Catanese bourgeoisie. There were frequent musical events that transformed the small villa into one of the most sought-after and beloved venues in the city.

The Cathedral

Built in the heart of the ancient civitas, the Cathedral was among the first churches built in Sicily by the Normans between 1092 and 1094 to implement their plan to return the island to Christianity. The church dominated the city for those coming from the sea and defended the safety of the Catanese, who had emerged from decades of subjection to the Muslims, lords of the Mediterranean Sea. The building suffered serious damage in the 1118 earthquake and the 1693 earthquake caused changes in the Romanesque structure of the cathedral, which only the layout of the apse remains intact. Inside, the Chapel of Saint Agatha, which houses the Saint's relics and part of the Treasury, is of great interest. The façade, divided into three orders and executed to a design by Giovan Battista Vaccarini, dominates the entire square and forms the backdrop to a hypothetical scenic space that on its opposite side, following the axis of Via Garibaldi (ancient Via San Filippo and then Ferdinanda), closes with Porta Garibaldi.

Basilica of the Collegiate Church of Santa Maria dell'Elemosina

The origins of the Collegiate Church are very ancient. The mediaeval building was almost completely destroyed in the earthquake of January 1693 and the 1818 earthquake also caused some damage to the church, but to a much lesser extent than the seventeenth-century one. The Collegiate Church, with its paintings and frescoes, is a small but significant gallery of painters working in Sicily between 1700 and 1800.

Church of San Biagio in Sant'Agata la Fornace The present sacred building, commonly known as the Church of Sant'Agata alla Fornace because it stands on the spot where Saint Agata suffered her extreme torture amidst burning coals, was built after the 1693 earthquake. The interior, with a single nave covered with lunette barrel vaults, has elegant plaster decorations on the walls and on the arches of the chapels; the vault has an 18th-century fresco depicting the façade of a church with columns, festoons and female figures. To the right is the Chapel of St Agatha, which houses, inside an altar, the remains of what would have been the furnace over which the martyr Agatha was forced to roll. From the Church of San Biagio on 3 February each year, the solemn procession of bishops and representatives of the city government begins, who go to the Cathedral to offer wax to the city's patron saint, Agatha.

Church of Sant'Agata al Carcere

Built in the 18th century inside one of the bastions that formed the 16th-century city walls, the church incorporates some rooms of the ancient Roman praetorium. Located in the small Piazza del Santo Carcere, it presents a superimposition of architectural and decorative structures from different eras: Roman, Swabian, 16th century and Baroque structures can be traced. The present church was built after the 1693 earthquake, close to one of the 'escarpment bastions' of the city walls erected to protect the city in 1556, which, in turn, had incorporated the Roman-era rooms where the prison was located, where St Agatha was allegedly imprisoned during her trial, taken after her martyrdom to the breasts, healed by St Peter and where she finally expired on 5 February 251 AD. The earthquake of 1693 caused the destruction of the complex, with the exception of the Roman prison rooms, which were protected by the mighty structures of the defensive walls. On the site of the aforementioned chapel of Norman origin, the Church of the Holy Prison was built.

Church of Sant'Agata La Vetere

Its foundation dates back to the year 264, when Bishop St. Everio, the fourth of the diocese, erected, thirteen years after his death, a modest votive aedicule on the site where the virgin Agatha suffered the martyrdom of having her breasts cut off. Almost totally destroyed by the 1693 earthquake, except for the underground crypt, it was rebuilt in 1722.

Benedictine Monastery

The Benedictine monks, who moved to Catania in the 16th century, obtained permission to build the new monastery within the city walls, in the current locations, then known as 'della Cipriana' and 'del Parco'. Construction began in 1558 in the presence of the Viceroy of Sicily Juan de la Cerda, Duke of Medinaceli, and the monastery was occupied, still incomplete, by the monks in 1578.

Following a devastating eruption of Mount Etna in 1669, the district suffered considerable damage. On 11 January 1693, the earthquake that destroyed almost entirely the city of Catania also caused the collapse of the Benedictine monastery. In 1702, reconstruction began on the surviving structures. The project was entrusted to Antonino Amato from Messina, who designed an even more monumental layout than the previous one. Over the next twenty years, there were several extensions and renovations by architects Francesco Battaglia and Giovanbattista Vaccarini. Around 1840, engineer Mario Musumeci was commissioned to complete the cloisters, the last major architectural interventions before the entire complex was forfeited to the state in 1866. The Monastery of San Nicolò l'Arena was affected by the laws for the suppression of religious corporations and the monks were forced to leave the building. In the following years, it was put to various uses and divided into several parts. Damaged by bombing during the Second World War, the entire complex, except for the Church of San Nicolò, which was returned to the Benedictines, was finally handed over to the University of Catania, which immediately launched a vast project of recovery and restoration led by professor and architect Giancarlo De Carlo. This project made it possible to adapt the ancient monastery complex to house the Faculties of Literature and Philosophy and Foreign Languages and Literature of the University of Catania.

Via Crociferi

Via dei Crociferi is a street area in Catania built in the 18th century. It begins in Piazza San Francesco d'Assisi and is accessed by passing under the archway



Crociferi Street

Of St. Benedict. The street, surrounded by churches, monasteries and a few civil dwellings, is an example of the unity of Baroque architecture. In the short space of about 200 meters there are as many as four churches among which the first is the Church of St. Benedict, connected to the Benedictine nunnery by the arch of the same name that overlaps the street and connects the Badia grande to the Badia piccola.

It is accessed by means of a flight of steps and is surrounded by a wrought-iron gate. Continuing on, one encounters the Church of San Francesco Borgia, which is accessed by means of two large staircases.

Next comes the Jesuit College, former site of the Art Institute, with a beautiful cloister inside with arcades on columns and arches. Opposite the College is located the Church of San Giuliano, considered one of the finest examples of Catanese Baroque. The building, attributed to architect Giovan Battista Vaccarini, has a convex elevation and clean, elegant lines. Continuing on and crossing Via Antonino di San Giuliano, one can admire the Convento dei Crociferi and then the Church of San Camillo. At the end of the street is Villa Cerami, which is home to the Faculty of Law of the University of Catania.



ARCHEOLOGY

Roman Amphitheatre

Roman Amphitheater Catania's Roman Amphitheater, a small section of which can be seen today in Piazza Stesicoro, was built on the northern edge of the ancient city, close to the Montevergine hill that housed the main nucleus of the settlement. The area, now part of the city's historic center, was formerly that of the ancient necropolis. The monument was built in the 2nd century, the precise date is uncertain, but the type of architecture points to the period between the emperors Hadrian and Antoninus Pius.

It was reached by the lava of 252-253 but not destroyed. In the 5th century Theodoric, king of the Ostrogoths, used it as a quarry for building materials for the construction of masonry buildings, and later, in the 11th century, Roger II of Sicily also drew from it additional structures and materials for the construction of the Cathedral of St. Agatha. In the 13th century, according to tradition, its vomitoria (entrances) were used by the Angevins to gain access to the city during the so-called War of the Vespers. In the following century the entrances were walled up and the ruin was incorporated into the Aragonese network of fortifications (1302). The building had an elliptical plan, and the arena measured a major diameter of 70 meters and a minor diameter of about 50. The external diameters were 125 x 105 meters, while the external circumference was 309 meters and the circumference of the arena 192 meters. It was estimated that it could hold 15,000 seated spectators and almost double that figure with the addition of wooden scaffolding for standing spectators. The cavea featured 14 tiers. It was built with lava stone from Etna covered with marble, with thirty-two tiers of seats. Naumachiae, real naval battles with ships and fighters, were also held there, after it was filled with water through the ancient aqueduct. The Amphitheater of Catania is structurally the most complex of the Sicilian amphitheaters and the largest in Sicily.



Greek Roman Theater

The Baths of the Rotonda

The Terme della Rotonda are Roman baths not far from the Odeon and are located in the Roman archaeological zone in the center of the city of Catania. They are the remnant of the ancient baths of the 2nd-3rd centuries. The baths had a circular base and were topped by a dome-shaped roof that rested on the thick walls. Embedded in the thickness of the walls are eight marble basins that formed a part of the baths. Canals for water adduction and drainage are still visible as are a calidarium and a frigidarium. In the 6th century, the Byzantines built a church on the plan of the baths, which was named Santa Maria della Rotonda and served its function until World War II. It was among the few city buildings that were not destroyed by the catastrophic earthquake that razed Catania to the ground in 1693.

Ancient Theater

Catania's Ancient Theater, one of the city's most important Roman monuments, whose layout probably overlaps that of a Greek-era theater building, was leaning against to the southern slope of the hill of Montevergine, on top of which stood the acropolis of the ancient city. The theater occupied a large area between Greek Theater Street to the north, Vittorio Emanuele Street to the south, St. Francis Square to the east and Tineo Street to the west. The area of the theater included another smaller theater, the Odeon, which was used for musical auditions and rehearsals for the performances that took place in the larger theater. The building had several construction phases. The Greek phase, hypothesized around 1930 by the discovery of a limestone block wall with the letters KAT engraved on it, seems confirmed by the very recent findings that have come to light.

The Julio-Claudian age phase also appears certain (1st century A.D.) and that of the Severan age (3rd century A.D.), in which the cavea was enlarged and a new wall (pulpitum) was built to enlarge the stage. In the 4th century AD, the building underwent the restorations described by an epigraph, found in 1770 by the Prince of Biscari, placed in the theatre in 330 AD by Facundus Porphyrius Mynatidius, consul of the province of Sicily.

Earthquakes and barbarian invasions after the 4th century led to the decay of the building until its total abandonment around the 7th century AD.

The subject of numerous archaeological digs begun in the second half of the 18th century by the Prince of Biscari and still underway today, the theatre has undergone over the years, in relation to the urban transformations of the city and the natural events that have determined the evolution of Catania itself.

Odeon

Adjacent to the Ancient Theatre stands the Odeon, which extends in the area at the crossroads between modern Via Teatro Greco and Via Rotonda. Used in antiquity for concerts and rehearsals of the plays that were performed in the theatre, it was later covered entirely by residential houses that were demolished only in the 1930s, exposing its structure. The Odeon had a cavea open towards the south-east with seats and dividing steps covered with lava stone slabs. The orchestra was paved with coloured marbles and the walls, as in the theatre, consisted of a mighty inner core of cement mixture and stones (opus coementicium), covered with regular blocks of lava stone alternating with rows of bricks. The cavea was supported by seventeen trapezoidal chambers covered with barrel vaults and open only on the outer side (perhaps they were workshops, later used as modern dwellings). Only the central chamber is open towards the cavea to allow spectators access to the interior of the monument. Accessible from the theatre, the Odeon can be visited in its entirety; on the outside are column ruins, fragments of capitals and other architectural elements found over time in the area of the two monuments.

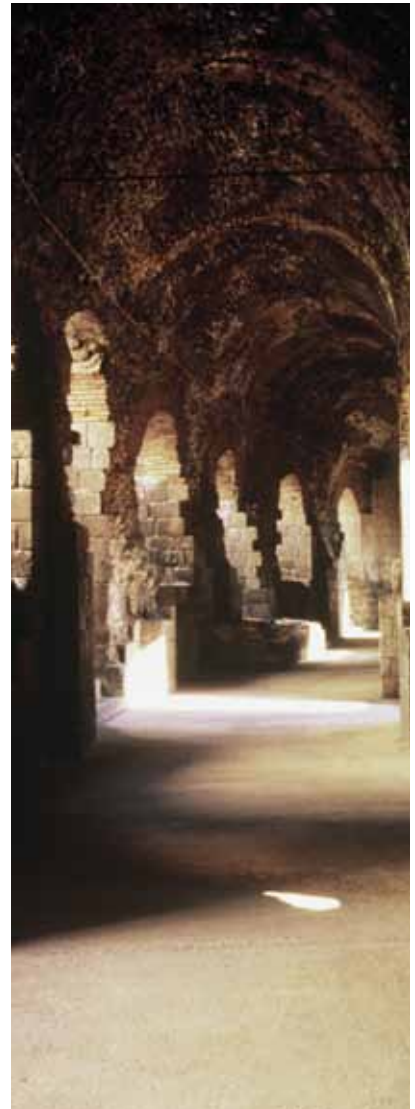
Achilles Baths

The time of the building's foundation is still debated, but it is considered probable that it existed as early as the 4th century: the existence of the building in Constantinian times is assumed on the basis of the reuse within the cathedral of a group of capitals from the period, which may have come from the same building. Buried by the earthquakes of 4 February 1169 and 11 January 1693, the remains (already known in the past) were first liberated by the Prince of Biscari. In 1856, during the construction of the tunnel passing under the Seminario dei Chierici (now the Pescheria), ruins were found that were attributed to the same building, possibly belonging to a caldarium, as there were traces of a hypocaust floor. The structure must have extended as far as Via Garibaldi. After the paving of the cathedral square (2004-2006), the thermal building was reopened to the public.

The Baths of the Address

The Terme dell'Indirizzo are located in the 18th-century part of the city of Catania. It consists of the remains of a Roman thermal complex dating back to the 2nd century.

The complex contains a caldarium and a frigidarium, as well as furnaces for heating water and air, and all water supply and drainage ducts. Other ancillary rooms are highlighted at foundation level.



Greek Roman Theatre



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

Saint Agatha

Although the festivities dedicated to Saint Agatha take up a good part of the month of January, the highlights are certainly 3, 4 and 5 February. The whole city stops and pours day and night into the streets, giving life to one of the most important religious festivals in the world, where religion and folklore are inextricably intertwined. The religious celebrations begin on 3 February with the evocative procession of the offering of wax to the Saint, starting from the Church of Sant'Agata alla Fornace in Piazza Stesicoro, built on the ancient furnace where the Saint was martyred, to reach the Cathedral in Piazza Duomo. The procession is opened by the procession of the 11 candelore or 'cannalori', tall wooden columns, richly sculpted and decorated, containing wax candles representing the city's guilds of arts and crafts. Because they are so heavy, the candelore are carried on the shoulders of 4-12 men, the bearers, who make them proceed with a characteristic gait known as 'a 'nnacata'.

The procession is followed by all the civil and religious authorities of the city. The 'Carrozza del Senato' (Senate Carriage) emerges from Palazzo degli Elefanti, the seat of the City Hall. These are in fact two 18th-century carriages that belonged to the city's ancient Senate, on board of which the mayor and some members of the Council go to the Church of San Biagio to take the keys of the city to the religious authorities. This first day ends in the evening, 'a sira 'o tri', in a crowded Piazza Duomo, with a concert of songs dedicated to the Saint along with a grandiose and unique fireworks display in which the fireworks follow the rhythm of the music.

The celebrations continue on day four with a religious function, 'the dawn mass', in the Cathedral in Piazza Duomo. Before the service, the reliquary bust depicting Saint Agatha is taken out of the 'little chamber' in which it is kept. Three keys, guarded by three different people, are used to open the heavy gate of the small chamber where it is kept.

This is the moment when the townspeople meet again, after a year, with the 'Santuzza'. Exciting and irrepresible is the cry of the devotees who greet her with the cry

calling all citizens present to venerate her, while waving a white handkerchief. The precious half-bust containing Agata's relics is loaded onto the ferulum, 'a vara', and carried to the high altar: thus begins the religious service. Immediately after the mass, the fercolo, loaded with the silver casket also containing the relics of the saint, is carried in procession. The 'outer tour' of the city begins, a long one that will end at first light on the 5th, passing through the places of the martyrdom and the places of the "Santuzza". The most evocative and spectacular moment of this second day is undoubtedly "a cchianata de' Cappuccini", when the fercolo is hauled by devotees up to the top of a slope known as the Cappuccini, arriving in front of the Church of San Domenico. Another important stage of this tour is also 'a calata da marina', the ancient descent to the sea that, until the end of the 19th century, reached where the so-called 'archi della marina' now stand. This is the symbolic place of the departure of the Saint's relics for Constantinople. The tour on the 4th ends at first light on the 5th when, having arrived back at the cathedral, the Saint is greeted by a spectacular firework display. The morning of the 5th is marked by the Pontifical celebrated by the Archbishop, attended by the city's highest authorities. The inner tour begins at around 5 p.m.: as the reliquary bust leaves, the bells ring and fireworks reverberate. The city tour, accompanied by a huge crowd, ends the next morning amidst the almost desperate cries of the devotees accompanying the reliquary to its end.



Feast of Saint Agatha - ferulum

PARKS AND RESERVES





SIMETO OASIS

The Simeto Oasis stretches between the provinces of Catania and Siracusa. It was established in 1984 (at the same time as the Fiumefreddo reserve) to stem the cementing work of man, to allow migratory birds to winter and to recover the original halophilous and Mediterranean plant population. It is managed by the Regional Province of Catania. The reserve includes the final stretch of the Simeto river, which between the 1950s and 1960s was rectified and embanked. The aforementioned works separated from the new course a wide meander that the river formed immediately before the mouth. This meander has survived, however, being fed by emergences of the water table. Approximately one kilometre from the mouth of the old bend, two watercourses converge: the Jungetto canal, an ancient drainage canal, and the Buttaceto stream, whose waters reach the old bend essentially during flood events.

The overflows due to the floods of the Buttaceto stream do not significantly alter the salinity parameters of the mouth area of the old Simeto bend, since the freshwater supply is of limited duration, while those of an artificial nature due to the Jungetto in terms of quality, quantity and duration are altering the existing hydro-biological balance. Between the old branch of the Simeto and the Buttaceto stream is a vast reed thicket where thousands of birds find refuge. To the north of the old meander are a number of brackish water backdune ponds, commonly known as 'salatelle', whose delicate ecological balance is threatened by the overflowing of the Jungetto canal. South of the mouth of the Simeto there is an extensive brackish pond called Lake Gornalunga, now fed by the Benante canal, which once formed the mouth of the Gornalunga river, now a tributary of the Simeto. This pond hosts a considerable number of birds during



Pollo Sultano



Convulacea

all seasons and has an extensive salt marsh around its banks. In various parts of the reserve, numerous seasonal marshes form in the winter; in these areas and around the salt marshes, extensive salt marshes are found. The naturalistic interest of the reserve is enhanced by the last remnants of coastal sand dunes: this is a very peculiar environment due to the presence of strips parallel to the shore characterised by biocoenosis, adapted to the particular and severe environmental conditions. The Foco del Simeto today represents an ideal wetland area for resident birds, but also for those migratory species moving along the north-south axis of Europe.

A long path winds alongside the watercourse. In the marshes behind the dunes, it is best to approach discreetly so as not to disturb the birds (marsh harrier, mallard, woodcock, glossy ibis, the occasional heron, black-winged stilts and kingfisher, to name but a few) and fauna. Mullet and freshwater fish are present in the water. The vegetation is rich in tamarisk, rushes, willows, as well as limonium and glasswort. Along the banks, mastic trees, beach lilies and cornflowers. Foxes and weasels are present.

HINTERLAND



CAMPOROTONDO



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: S.S. 121 dir. Paternò
bus: AST



HISTORY

The territory of Camporotondo (4,266 inhabitants) lies in a hilly area at 450 metres above sea level. Its fortunate location, on the eastern Ionic slope at the foot of Mount Etna, not far from the Catanese alluvial plain and the Simeto river, makes it a very fertile area. The first historical information on the existence of Camporotondo, named after the round shape of the site, dates back to the 16th century. At that time, it constituted one of the numerous small rural agglomerations, known as casali, scattered throughout the Catanese territory. In 1648, Camporotondo was sold to Giovanni Andrea Massa by the viceroy, who was always looking for money for the wars in Spain. In 1654 it passed to Diego Reitano. More than the scarce arable land, the few houses and the small number of inhabitants, the new owners thus acquired the prestigious title of marquis. Destroyed by the lava flow of 1669, after its reconstruction it first belonged to the Prince of Paternò and then came under the jurisdiction of the municipality of Catania. From 1730 it belonged to Marquis Francesco, son of Giuseppa Reitano, and then to Pietro Napoli, in turn son of the Prince of Sperlinga. It remained in the possession of this noble family until the 19th century, when feudal rights were abolished and Camporotondo became an autonomous municipality.



ART & MONUMENTS

Camporotondo has a fairly characteristic historical centre due to its circular shape. A stroll through the town's streets allows visitors to admire the Mother Church dedicated to Sant'Antonio Abate, with its interesting Baroque architecture, and several historical palazzi such as Palazzo Signorello and Palazzo Natali.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

January

17 - Feast of the Patron Saint Anthony Abbot



PRODUCTS

In agriculture, grape production is flourishing, in vineyards surrounded by walls of black lava rock, from which excellent wine is produced. The oil from the olive groves is also of remarkable quality, although not in large quantities. Figs, prickly pears and citrus fruits are also harvested in the mostly 'scarce' Camporotondo soils.



Mother Church

GRAVINA DI CATANIA



HISTORY

The municipality of Gravina di Catania (27,433 inhabitants) is located on a hilly promontory at the foot of Mount Etna, 340 metres above sea level. Gravina's first toponym was 'Li Plachi', or territory 'of the plain', a vernacular derivative of 'Piakos'. And indeed, the existence in antiquity of a settlement near Catania, called Piakos, is proven by a bronze coin held by the British Museum in London. Piakos at the time must have been a delightful place for hunting, for olive groves and for the waters, which still flow under the Gravina lavas. The purely rural vocation of the area has been maintained through the centuries despite the site being ravaged by violent volcanic eruptions over time. The current name is due to Prince 'Girolamo Gravina' who, after purchasing the 'Terra Demaniale di Placa' in 1646, succeeded in changing its name to Gravina. In 1862, 'di Catania' was added to distinguish it from the town of the same name in the province of Bari (Gravina in Puglia). Since the 1960s, heavy urbanisation, accelerated by a migratory flow of 'Catanese' towards the suburbs, has contributed to the near disappearance of cultivated areas and woods, almost everywhere uprooted to make way for buildings of various kinds.



ART & MONUMENTS

Among Gravina's monuments, the Mother Church dedicated to Saint Anthony of Padua is of considerable architectural interest: built in typical Baroque style, enriched by a majestic bell tower, it contains beautiful 17th-century frescoes inside. The current urban layout of the



Mother Church



Communal Garden

territory, which stretches along today's Via Antonio Gramsci, rising towards Etna between two rocky installations of volcanic origin, now entirely built-up, is embellished by the Villa Comunale, the Library, the Old Town Hall and three parks full of luxuriant ornamental plants.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

June

13 - Feast of the Patron Saint Anthony of Padua

Summer

• Cultural, sports and solidarity events.



PRODUCTS

With its fertile volcanic soil, Gravina could not fail to lend itself to agricultural activity. Typical products include citrus fruits, almonds, olives and grapes.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: Catania ring road RA15,
exit Gravina di Catania
bus: AST

MASCALUCIA



HISTORY

Mascalucia (28,643 inhabitants), a large urban centre located north-east of the Etnean capital, along the route to Etna, lies on the hills that form the southern flanks of the volcano, between 420 and 520 metres above sea level.

a.s.l. Already in Roman times, the territory where Mascalucia stands today was inhabited, as evidenced by the discovery of numerous archaeological finds. From ancient sources it is said that as early as 324 A.D. the Emperor Constantine granted many Sicilian lands to the Holy See, including the territory of Mascalucia, giving it the name Massalargia (from the Latin, village-gift). Over the centuries, these territories were confiscated several times from the Papal authority to be united with the lands of the Crown. Finally, in 1645, the ancient lands of Mascalucia with all its districts were sold to Giovanni Andrea Massa and later to Placido Branciforte, Prince of Leonforte and Butera. It was Philip IV of Spain who assigned the noble title of Duke of Mascalucia to the powerful owner. The earthquakes of 1669 and 1693 brought the already fragile economy of the time to its knees.



ART & MONUMENTS

The historical centre of Mascalucia runs along Via Etna and dates back to the 18th century. On the road are 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 and Rapisardi, and the Church of San Nicola, long since deconsecrated,



Mother Church

today the Municipal Auditorium. There are some notable façades of noble palazzos such as Palazzo Rapisardi and Palazzo Cirelli. Ancient portals built with Etna's black lava stone can also be seen in the surrounding streets. Finally, the 'Monte Ciraulo', covering some 17 hectares, where the uncontaminated flora of Etna's undergrowth can still be found, is interesting.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

Easter

• Holy Week Processions

June

15 and the 1st Sunday in August
Feast of the Patron Saint Vitus

July

- 'Etna blues festival': among the main events in Sicily, it has rightfully entered the circuit of the Blues Foundation, a network of festivals at international level.

- 'Festival Sete Sóis Sete Luas': International festival dedicated to contemporary popular music and figurative arts, with the participation of major figures from Mediterranean culture and the Lusophone world.



PRODUCTS

There is a great variety of Sicilian sweets made by the many local pastry shops. The jewel in the food and wine crown is certainly the 'Ombra' wine produced from the fertile vineyards in the district of the same name, whose characteristic is its high alcohol content and distinctive red colour.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania

car: Tangenziale Catania RA15, exit
Gravina di Catania dir Mascalucia

bus: AST

MISTERBIANCO



HISTORY

Misterbianco (48,969 inhabitants) rises on the outskirts of the capital, 213 metres above sea level, on the southern slope of Etna. Its name comes from the Latin 'Monasterium Album', from a monastery, possibly of Cistercian Benedictines who wore the white habit, that stood in the ancient hamlet that belonged to Catania. In 1642, the casale of 'Monasterium Album' was authorised by the Spanish court to detach itself from the capital to be sold to Giovanni Andrea Massa, who sold it back to Baron Vespasiano Trigona, later Duke of Misterbianco. In March 1669, the new municipality was completely destroyed by lava from Mount Etna to be rebuilt, three kilometres further south, where the old centre stands today. The reconstruction on the new site was carried out as faithfully as possible to the previous town structure. The Piazza dei Quattro Canti, the four noble palaces - Santonocito, Scuderi, Anfuso and Santagati - and most of the monuments were rebuilt. Until the mid-1950s, Misterbianco was only a large agricultural centre producing wheat, oranges and grapes. Over the years, an industrial sector, now in decline, developed and, since the 1990s, so did a significant commercial and tertiary sector.



ART & MONUMENTS

Misterbianco offers its visitors an interesting tourist itinerary. Of particular architectural importance is the Mother Church with a mighty Romanesque façade, built using the characteristic Priolo stone. Inside are valuable works of art, including a 16th-century statue representing the Madonna delle Grazie. The Church of San Nicolò contains valuable 17th-century paintings and a 16th-century altarpiece depicting the Madonna del Rosario. Frescoes and period paintings can be admired at the Church of the Madonna degli Ammalati. Also noteworthy are the Ducal Palace, the Senate Palace and the remains of the ancient Roman Baths in Piazza della Resistenza. Misterbianco also has some interesting archaeological areas where several finds dating back to the Neolithic Age have been unearthed. Also worth mentioning are the Greco-Roman and Byzantine settlements found in Contrada Erbe Bianche and the presence of an ancient Greco-Roman aqueduct that crosses the city. Other historical vestiges in the town include the remains of the ancient town's Mother Church, dedicated to Santa Maria de Monasterio Albo, located in the contrada of the same name, which includes a forest of centuries-old oaks. After the eruption of 1669, only part of the ancient bell tower remains of the original building.



Senate Building



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

Carnival

• 'Carnival of Sicily's most beautiful costumes': a parade of allegorical floats, masks and costumes, accompanied by musical performances and tastings of local specialities.

August

1st Sunday (triennial)
'Festa grande' or 'Festa del fuoco' in honour of the Patron Saint Anthony Abbot.

September

2nd week - Feast of Our Lady of the Sick

• "Misterfest" - playbill of theatrical and musical performances.



PRODUCTS

Specialities: chestnut and rice cake, 'Impanata', Mustazzoli, Mostarda di Fichidindia and Wine.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: S.S. 121 dir. Paternò
train: F.C.E. Ferrovia Circumetnea
bus: AST

MOTTA SANT'ANASTASIA



HISTORY

Motta S. Anastasia (11,638 inhabitants) is a town located on the southern slope of Mount Etna, 275 metres above sea level, and is built on a cliff of basaltic origin, formed in glacial times, the Nek. There are several hypotheses on the origin of the name. According to some scholars, Motta (a pre-Roman name) and Anastasia (a Greek-Byzantine name) have similar meanings and indicate the typical relief of the area. Later, in the 12th-14th centuries, the two names were combined and the townspeople became associated in the devotion and worship of Saint Anastasia, the town's patron saint. Like other towns in the Simeto valley, Motta has ancient origins. Archaeological finds, dating back to the 5th-4th centuries B.C., as well as the discovery of some tombs, attest to the Greek presence in the area. Finally, the discovery of a mosaic, part of a villa, testifies to the later Roman settlement.

Since the period of Dionysius, tyrant of Syracuse (5th-4th century B.C.), the Mottese territory has always played a role of considerable strategic importance, so much so that around 1074 the Norman Count Roger I of Altavilla had an imposing military tower built, probably on a pre-existing Arab construction. The Castrum of Motta, conceived for both defensive and offensive purposes, was equipped with walls, a crenellated tower, small turrets, loopholes and a double entrance gate. From 1526, the Motta territory became a fief of the Moncadas, who administered it for about four centuries, during which time the castle was essentially used as a prison. Between the second half of 1700 and 1800, the structure of the town began to take shape better, with the birth of new districts, such as Croce, Pozzo and Sciddichenti, and the number of inhabitants gradually increased. On 1 January 1820, the court of Catania established the municipality of Motta Sant'Anastasia.



ART & MONUMENTS

The urban characteristic of the centre of Motta S. Anastasia is its medieval hamlet, a tangle of narrow streets where many dwellings still retain the same architectural structure as in the past. Inside the ancient village, it is possible to admire the Norman Tower commissioned by Ruggero d'Altavilla, inside which a medieval didactic museum has been set up, and the oldest churches. The oldest in the area, the whose construction dates back more than a thousand years, is the Church of the Immaculate Conception. The current building, whose façade dates back to the 17th century, houses paintings of considerable artistic value: in particular, above the main altar is the Andalusian-style simulacrum of the Immaculate Conception, a 17th-century work of inestimable value. The Mother Church, dedicated to S.M. del Rosario, is also located in the village, near the Tower. Built in the 13th century and enlarged with subsequent alterations from the



Norman Castle

15th century, it houses a valuable altarpiece and several paintings belonging to the school of Antonello da Messina, including the Madonna of the Rosario.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

August
2nd half - Medieval Festival, evocative historical re-enactment with themed performances, also enriched by flag-wavers and musicians.
22 / 25 - Feast of the Patron Saint Anastasia



PRODUCTS

Great variety of agricultural products such as wheat, grapes, olives, citrus fruits, vegetables, peaches.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: S.S. 121 dir Motta S. Anastasia
bus: AST

SAN GIOVANNI LA PUNTA



HISTORY

The municipality of San Giovanni La Punta (22,276 inhabitants) is located at the foot of Mount Etna, in a hilly area, at 350 metres above sea level. The name San Giovanni was given to the town in honour of the homonymous saint, the town's patron saint. 'La Punta' was added later because of a part of its territory that is 'pointed', formed by a lava flow. Although the earliest historical information on its birth is somewhat imprecise and very vague, it is believed with certainty that the first urban centralisation of the area occurred in the first centuries after the year 1000. The village of 'Massa Trappea', today Trappeto, and that of San Giovanni La Punta comprised vast rural estates. Later, the two hamlets were united under a single name. The hamlet of San Giovanni La Punta, like so many others, was sold by Philip IV of Spain to meet the economic needs of the Spanish Court. The sale of the casali outraged the Catanese, who revolted in May 1647. Subsequently, the hamlets of San Giovanni La Punta and S. Gregorio were bought by Giovanni Andrea Massa, Duke of Aci Castello, and remained in his family until the abolition of feudal rights. Later, under the Communes Act of 1818, the Casale of San Giovanni La Punta was elevated to a municipality and Trappeto was aggregated to it as a hamlet. For the last 20 years or so, S. Giovanni La Punta has become an important and expanding commercial pole and is currently a nerve centre among the towns of Etna for its intense commercial activities, mainly concentrated on the road axis called Viale della Regione .



Mother Church



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

December

27 - Feast of the Patron Saint John the Evangelist



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: Catania ring road RA15, exit Paesi Etnei
bus: AST - Interbus



ART & MONUMENTS

Although it does not have an ancient historical centre, San Giovanni La Punta offers some noteworthy monuments. The Mother Church, dedicated to St John the Baptist, built around 1410 and elevated to the status of parish church in 1418, has a Baroque façade. Inside we can admire, in the side chapel of St John the Evangelist, set up around 1758, a painting of the saint painted, it seems, by a Flemish painter. The external portal of the Confraternity of the Sacrament, executed in lava stone, is stupendous. At the beginning of San Giovanni La Punta, coming from Catania, on the border with the territory of the municipalities of Tremestieri Etneo and Sant'Agata li Battiati, there is the Church of Ravanusa in which an image of Maria Santissima Assunta, known as the Ravanusa image, is preserved. Also of interest are the numerous splendid palaces built in the 1800s and the Carcaci Castle, once the residence of the princes of Paternò. In Trappeto, a hamlet of San Giovanni La Punta, is the Church of S. Rocco, built from 1602 to 1605 by survivors of the plague that raged in the area from 1575 to 1578.

S.GREGORIO DI CATANIA



HISTORY

The municipality of San Gregorio (11,468 inhabitants) is located in a hilly area, 321 metres above sea level. The name San Gregorio was given to the town in honour of the Pope of the same name, whose mother was of Sicilian origin and the first settlement was one of the thirteen so-called 'Casali di Catania'. In the 17th century, it belonged to the noble Massa family, the Dukes of Paternò. In 1812, with the abolition of feudalism and baronage, the 'Giurati' were succeeded by the 'Decurionato', a group of ten men elected by the people and approved by the king. With the unification of Italy in 1861, the 'Decurionate' was also abolished and the current administrative system took over. It became an autonomous municipality in 1856.



ART & MONUMENTS

San Gregorio has some sacred buildings worthy of interest. The Mother Church, dedicated to Santa Maria degli Ammalati, is in Baroque style. Built in 1620, it was destroyed by the 1693 earthquake and, after a long reconstruction period, was restored to its former splendour in 1711. A remarkable example of 18th century architecture is the Church of the Immaculate Conception, whose construction began in 1769 and ended in 1800, with the completion of the bell tower staircase. Also of interest is the Church of San Filippo d'Agira, built in 1500, which presents, for that era, a superior form of architecture with its bell tower and portal rich in perfectly worked lava stone elements.



Mother Church



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

Easter

Holy Week and Easter Monday Holy Week procession and feast of the Patron Saint Gregory the Great.

August

• Flower Festival



CONNECTIONS

From Catania

car: Tangenziale Catania RA15 - exit Paesi Etnei

bus: AMT (line 244) - AST

S.AGATA LI BATTIATI



HISTORY

Sant'Agata Li Battiati (9,408 inhabitants) rises on the hillside north of the Etnean capital, 263 metres above sea level. Given its proximity to the city of Catania, S. Agata Li Battiati has shared its historical events. The news of its birth, between history and legend, has been passed down over time from one generation to the next and also reported in many Catania history books. It is said that in 1444 a massive lava flow, which had started a year earlier, threatened to destroy much of the south-eastern area of Etna. The lava, flowing out between Monte Arso and Montepeloso, split into two arms, one of which stopped near Bonaccorsi and the other, flowing down between Tremestieri and S. Giovanni la Punta, seriously threatened to proceed towards Catania, where both the population, who were extremely worried, and the civic authorities, as well as the inhabitants of the hamlets concerned, asked Bishop Giovanni De Pescibus to hold a procession with the Veil of Saint Agatha. In front of the Veil, the lava slowed its destructive force to a halt, so that people cried out for a miracle. On that site, then called 'quartiere (or wrinkle) dei Valenti', a small church was initially erected in memory of the prodigious event. Later, in 1635, the owner of that land, the Catanese judge Lorenzo D'Arcangelo, allowed the construction of a larger church, which was later granted by him to the inhabitants of the three neighbouring districts: the Valenti, the Battiato and the Murabito. In the mid-1780s, an even larger church dedicated to Maria SS. Annunziata was built about 300 metres south of the Chapel of the Veil.

Given the importance of this new religious building the area around it became the centre of the small village.

In 1645, like other Catania hamlets, the 'Terra di Sant'Agata', as Sant'Agata li Battiati was then also called, was purchased by Duke Giovanni Andrea Massa. In the second half of the 18th century it became 'Terra Gentilizia', as many noble families spent their holidays there.



ART & MONUMENTS

Among the monuments of greatest architectural interest is the Mother Church dedicated to Maria SS. Dell'Annunziata. It has a Romanesque-style façade, with a flight of steps in lava stone leading to the churchyard on which stands the beautiful portal, also in lava stone, skilfully worked by local craftsmen. Above this portal is a window adorned with decorations, which since 1969 has housed the bust of Saint Agatha, previously kept in the Church of Sant'Agata al Velo. Inside the temple are valuable works of art, including a wooden crucifix and a painting commemorating St Lawrence, the town's patron saint. This



Church of Sant'Agata al Velo

painting is a copy of Titian's 'Martyrdom of St Lawrence', which can be found in the Jesuit Church in Venice. Above the high altar is a beautiful painting depicting the Annunciation to Mary, dating back to the late 17th century. Another noteworthy religious building is the Church of Sant'Agata al Velo. The church, which already existed in 1634, presents the typical characteristics of a rural chapel. Such characteristics were also present in the Church of San Michele Arcangelo before the various alterations that changed its façade. Inside, 17th-century frescoes are preserved.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

August

10 - Feast of the Patron Saint Lawrence

October

• Grape and Wine Festival



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: Catania ring road RA15
exit Paesi Etnei
bus: AMT (line 258) - AST



ART & MONUMENTS



HISTORY

The city of Paternò (49,604 inhabitants) is located in a hilly area, 250 metres above sea level.

The site of Paternò was occupied over 3500 years before the birth of Christ, when the first inhabitants settled in the prehistoric volcano above the city. The town that arose there was of Sican origin. A town of medium importance during the Greek and Roman periods, it was almost completely depopulated in the three centuries before the year 1000. During the period of Saracen domination, the town was called Batarnù. Following the Norman conquest, the site was named Paternionis and there began a period of great civic and economic splendour, as the town was chosen as the seat of kings and queens. The territories of Paternò, in fact, were included in the so-called Camera Reginale, constituted by Frederick III of Aragon as a wedding gift to his consort Eleanor of Anjou, which was then inherited by successive Queens until its abolition.

Paternò's period of magnificence lasted until the 15th century, when the city was enfeoffed and a slow but unstoppable decline began. A slow but unstoppable decline, which continued until the abolition of feudal rights. The city underwent a remarkable urban development between 1960 and 1970, expanding further in the following decades, then receiving the title of City by Presidential Decree of 9 February 1983.

Paternò has several buildings of notable architectural interest dating back to the medieval period, particularly those on the Historic Hill. Among these is the Mother Church, erected in the Norman period and remodelled in 1342, dedicated to S. Maria dell'Alto, which was profoundly modified in the early 18th century, a period in which the orientation of the entrance was also changed and the interior was adapted to the Baroque style of the time. Of great scenic impact is the Scalinata della Matrice (Stairway of the Mother Church), built in the 18th century, which connects the parvis of the Mother Church with the Porta del Borgo, located in the median part of the Historical Hill, the ancient main entrance to the medieval walls. Just outside the Porta del Borgo is the Palazzo Moncada, which belonged to the powerful family of Spanish origin that was the feudal lord of the city for a long time. Also very interesting is the San Francesco alla Collina complex, dating back to 1346, with its remarkable 11th-century church with markedly Gothic architectural features. Not far away is the Church of Cristo al Monte, modified in the 18th century in the Rococo style. On the slopes of the hill is the Church of S. Maria della Valle di Iosaphat, della Gancia, built in 1092 by Countess Adelasia, with a



Hill of Paternò



Norman Castle

splendid Gothic portal. The most important monument in the entire area is certainly the Norman Castle, built in 1072 by Count Roger and subsequently remodelled several times.

Over the course of time, the Castle underwent several restoration works. The first of these was carried out in the early 14th century, then in 1900 and finally in 1958. The interior is still in a good state of preservation, and on the ground floor one can admire an elegant frescoed chapel with several paintings. Then, via the mighty stairs carved into the walls, one can visit the entire castle structure up to the upper terrace. On the first floor is the hall of arms while on the second floor you can admire an elegant gallery. Finally arriving at the top of the stairs, you reach the upper terrace, from where you can see the impressive panorama including Etna, the Piana of Catania and the Simeto Valley. In the lower town, which developed from the 16th century onwards at the base of the hill, other important monuments stand out, including the complex of the former Monastery of the Santissima Annunziata, which houses the splendid oil on panel painting of the Madonna dell'Itria, a 16th-century work by the famous painter Sofonisba Anguissola, the Church of Santa Barbara and the Church of Santa Caterina d'Alessandria. In the area of new expansion, north-east of the town, it is worth visiting the modern Church of San Francesco all'Annunziata dei Cappuccini (1987), with its precious bronzes by Tesei and the splendid mosaic of the Cantico delle Creature (1989) by the great artist Ugolino da Belluno.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

Summer

• Festival Rocca Normanna

December

From 3 to 5 - Feast of Patron Saint Barbara



PRODUCTS

Handicrafts are one of the sectors that preserve ancient traditions in Paternò. It includes working with clay, lava stone and carving, wrought iron and wood.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: S.S. 121 dir. Paternò train:
F.C.E. Ferrovia Circumetnea bus:
Interbus - I.S.E.A. Autolinee

S.PIETRO CLARENZA



HISTORY

The municipality of San Pietro Clarenza (6,996 inhabitants) is located in the hills at an altitude of 463 metres above sea level, on the southern slope of Etna. The origins of San Pietro Clarenza can be traced back to the first centuries of the Middle Ages, coinciding with the arrival of Muslims from North Africa. The first historical documents date back to 1646, when Philip IV of Spain ordered the viceroy to "renounce his privileges and rights" over the hamlets of Etna.

The Casale di San Pietro, through Duke Giovanni Andrea Massa, was resold to Antonio Rejtano, who became Prince of San Pietro in 1648. From a deed of sale dated 1779, it is known that the Casale di San Pietro was purchased by Giuseppe Mario Clarenza, a nobleman from Catania who added his surname to that of the casale, which from then on assumed the name of San Pietro Clarenza. San Pietro Clarenza, like other centres on the southern slope of Etna, was also affected by the eruption of 1669, which destroyed fifteen hamlets and part of Catania. The catastrophic event affected the entire district of Sant'Antonio to the point of destroying the Chiesa Maggiore, defined by Carlo Mancino as "large and beautiful."



ART & MONUMENTS

The historical centre of San Pietro Clarenza is characterised by low houses built of lava stone with white-plastered windowsills. The most important monument

of the village is the Mother Church, erected in the 18th century and dedicated to Saint Catherine, with a scenic staircase outside and works by local artists inside. There are also some interesting mansions, built in the 18th century, with late Baroque architectural features. The Caseggiato Mannino, the oldest building in the town, overlooking the Piazza della Vittoria, is worth mentioning. It is a spacious building from the early 18th century, comprising 14 rooms, a large hall and a courtyard with a characteristic cistern. Recently restored, it now houses the Municipal Library.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

Carnival

- Carnival celebrations

July

- 2 - Feast of Our Lady of Grace

November

- 25 - Feast of the Patron Saint Catherine



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: Tangenziale Catania RA15 - exit
Gravina di Catania dir. Mascalucia
bus: AMT (line 556) - AST



Mother Church detail

TREMESTIERI ETNEO



HISTORY

The municipality of Tremestieri Etneo (21,490 inhabitants) rises in a hilly area, dominated by the volcano, about 400 metres above sea level. The current territory of Tremestieri, for its favourable environmental conditions and the centrality of its geographical position, located between Mount Etna and the city of Catania, has been the site of settlements since ancient times. This is confirmed by the few but significant archaeological artefacts casually found in the area, consisting of fragments of terracotta tombs, oil lamps, pottery, coins and small metal or stone tools, mostly from the Roman and Byzantine periods. Frequent were the earthquakes and lava flows that, since prehistoric times, have devastated and destroyed the territory and the town of Tremestieri. The growth and importance assumed by the Tremestieri community is indirectly proven by the papal 'bull', issued in 1446 by Pope Eugene IV, by which its church was elevated to parish dignity. In the early 17th century, the village had a population of over 1,200 people and no less than seven churches. In 1641, the 'casale' of Tremestieri, having been sold to the wealthy Genoese merchant Giovanni Andrea Massa, was detached from the state jurisdiction of Catania, to which it had belonged since the Aragonese period, and acquired its own administrative autonomy, albeit conditioned by an anachronistic feudal system of government. In 1817, due to the administrative reform introduced in Sicily by the restored Bourbon monarchy, the feudal system was abolished and Tremestieri became a municipality. The first municipal administrations, overcoming many difficulties, especially of a financial financial order, succeeded in carrying out a modest programme of public works aimed, among other things, at improving connections with neighbouring towns and building the cemetery. In 1874, the adjective 'Etnean' was added to the place name Tremestieri, whose etymology seems to derive from the corruption of the Latin 'Tria Monasteria'. 'Etneo', to distinguish it from a locality of the same name near the city of Messina.



ART & MONUMENTS

The centre of the town is still crossed by the ancient Via Etnea that climbs from Catania to reach the volcano. It still retains traits of the suburban building constructed between the late 1800s and early 1900s. The Mother Church, built by the Normans but rebuilt after the 1693 earthquake, is dedicated to the patron saint, S. Maria della Pace, and features a façade with a triple division, thanks to the presence of several coupled pilasters. The interior is divided into three naves with the presence of three apses and the 17th-century wooden statues representing Our Lady of Peace and St. Barbara can be admired. The church is flanked by a massive bell tower and the parish hall.



Mother Church

Also interesting is the Church of Santa Maria delle Grazie, built in different colours, from the blue of the bell tower to the pink of the wall. A porphyry baptismal font can be admired inside. Worth visiting is the unique private collection of Sicilian carts in the hamlet of Piano, as well as the surviving 'palmenti' (wine presses), of which the area was rich for its ancient wine production.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

1st Sunday after Easter
Feast of the Patron Saint Mary of Peace

December
4 - Feast of the Co-Patron Saint Barbara



PRODUCTS

Typical local production consists mainly of agricultural products such as citrus fruits, olives and wine grapes, and handicrafts consisting of embroidery and lava stone products.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: Catania ring road RA15 exit Paesi Etnei
bus: AST

PARKS AND RESERVES





NATURE RESERVE IMMACOLATELLE COMPLEX AND MICIO CONTI

The 'Immacolatelle and Micio Conti Complex' Integral Nature Reserve lies on the slopes of Etna and falls within the territory of the municipalities of San Gregorio di Catania and Aci Castello. It was established in 1998 in order to "preserve and protect the important complex of lava flow caves colonised by cave fauna with troglomorphic elements linked to the guano of bat colonies".

The reserve is characterised by the presence of numerous lava flow caves (Micio Conti, Cantarella, Tedeschi, Immacolatella I, Immacolatella II, Immacolatella III, Immacolatella IV, del Fico) in a relatively small area.

On Etna, such a high density of lava flow caves can only be found in the of lava flow only in the area of Passo dei Dammusi, within the protected area of the Etna Park. Some of the caves in the reserve are among the longest in the Etnean territory. Other volcanic caves, outside the reserve, have been found not far from it. The naturalistic interest of the reserve is not limited only to the presence of the volcanic caves, as the territory of the protected area encloses oak woodlands and Mediterranean scrub vegetation formations of great natural and scenic interest.

This interest is increased by the consideration that this is one of the last areas covered by Etna's low-lying forests, which have disappeared elsewhere due to the rampant urbanisation of the volcano's southern slope. The preservation of these environments is also particularly important for the fauna of both vertebrates and invertebrates. Among the fauna linked to the existence of underground cavities, of note is the presence, in some of the caves, of colonies of bats of the genera *Miniopterus* and *Myotis*.

The territory of the reserve is rich in evidence of traditional agricultural activity (stone houses, saie,



Oak grove

rasole, dry stone walls, terracing, etc.). Of particular note is the 'Guardiola Cantarella', an ancient Spanish watchtower overlooking the reserve. Some of the caves are also of archaeological interest, as numerous artefacts from the Lower Bronze Age have been found in them.



Germans' Cave

COASTAL AREA





HISTORY

Acireale (52,881 inhabitants) is located 161 metres above sea level, on the Timpa, a stepped fault of great interest geo-volcanological interest, which has an extension of about 6 km. Along the coastline are the seaside hamlets, settlements of ancient origin. Acireale began to be called this way only in the second half of the 17th century; previously it had been called Aquilia or Aci Aquilia, a name to which the adjective 'New' was sometimes added to distinguish it from Aquilia 'Old', which, in the 14th century, was a village of very little importance about 3 km from the present city. The origins of Aquilia Nuova are relatively recent. At the beginning of the 15th century, it was no more than a cluster of a few houses, but by the end of the century it was already acquiring the physiognomy of a city, becoming the most important centre in the whole Acese during the 16th century. Aquilia's demographic, economic and political growth throughout the 16th century was unabated, despite the frequent occurrence of famine and pestilence. When, in 1528, Emperor Charles V also sold the right to buy back the land of Aci to the Mastrantonio family, who had bought it in 1466, Aquilia, which among the seized Acian hamlets was the one in an emerging phase, worked firmly for its own redemption, succeeding in 1531, with conspicuous donations, to emancipate itself from baronial rule and return to the royal domain. In the meantime, disputes continually arose between the town of Aci Aquilia and the remaining 'casali', leading to an initial separation in 1628. After a momentary and very precarious pacification, the final separation came in 1640. However, while the other hamlets became baronial lands, Aci Aquilia remained state-owned, soon assuming the name 'Reale' with the simultaneous loss of the noun 'Aquila'. During the 17th century, the town's urban layout became more precise, with the centrality of Piazza Duomo, which became the pivot of a radial road system. The terrible earthquake of 11 January 1693 destroyed many of the city's monuments. The destruction, however, gave way to extensive reconstruction work. New palaces and churches were built in place of those that had been demolished. Old streets were widened and new ones laid out. The painter Pietro Paolo Vasta and the architect Paolo Amico were the most illustrious interpreters of the revival that gave Acireale its eighteenth-century late Baroque face. Since then the city experienced considerable demographic and economic growth, gradually increasing its administrative and political importance to the present day. After World War II, Acireale grew considerably, increasing its activities related to citrus growing and tourism. In 2005 it obtained the title of City.



Sts. Peter and Paul Basilica



ART & MONUMENTS

Acireale is characterised by the richness of its ecclesiastical, public and private buildings in the Baroque style. Baroque motifs can be seen in the streets of the historic centre, and in particular in the balconies and portals of noble palazzi. The centre of Acireale is the Piazza del Duomo, overlooked by some of the city's most important buildings, including the Cathedral, the Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul, the Palazzo del Comune and the Palazzo Modò. The paving of the square has recently been renovated, using lava stone and white marble stone from Comiso. An engraving depicting the city's new coat of arms has been placed in the centre of the square. The Cathedral, already existing as an oratory in the 14th century, is dedicated to the Holy Virgin Annunziata. The marble portal in Baroque style, executed in the years 1668-1672 by Placido Blandamonte, and the frescoes in the nave, executed in the years 1736-1737 by Pietro Paolo Vasta, are valuable. It houses the chiselled silver ferculum with the statue of Santa Venera, patron saint of Acireale. The Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul was built in 1550 and rebuilt in 1608. It has a Baroque façade, designed by Vasta in 1741. The bell tower is from the 19th century. There are paintings by Vasta, Giacinto Platania and a statue of Christ at the Column, by an unknown author, much venerated in the town and traditionally carried in procession every 70 years. The Town Hall, or Loggia Giuratoria, constitutes a

fine example of Baroque architecture in civil construction. Begun in 1659, it was restored both after the 1693 earthquake and after the 1818 earthquake. Admire the masks, the corbels supporting the balconies, the wrought iron works and the corner balcony. Inside there is an exhibition of period military uniforms. A little further away from Piazza Duomo stands Palazzo Modò. All that remains of the original structure are two balconies with Baroque brackets, masks and the name of the Eldorado Theatre, built inside in 1909 and active until after the First World War. Continuing through the historical centre, you can admire other palaces, churches and monuments of great interest. First of all, the Basilica Collegiata di San Sebastiano, considered the most important church in Acireale and declared a national monument. Built starting in the 18th century, it has a façade with several orders, preceded by a balustrade. The interior is rich in frescoes by Paolo Vasta. The Church of St Anthony of Padua is instead the oldest church in the city, perhaps the only one that dates back to the Aquilia Nuova period. Remodelled over the centuries, also due to earthquakes, it retains a beautiful Gothic portal. Inside, frescoes and paintings by Alessandro and Pietro Paolo Vasta can be admired. The Library and Pinacoteca Zelantea is a 17th-century institution housed in a neoclassical palace built in the 19th century by the engineer Mariano Panebianco, which contains several collections of art and ancient texts. Other notable noble palaces can be found along Corso Umberto I, the city's promenade. Acireale is also renowned for its healthy sulphurous water spas, already used by the Greeks and Romans. The most famous are the Terme di Santa Venera, on the southern outskirts of the city. Built in the neoclassical style, they stand within the English garden. More recently built are the Terme di Santa Caterina, located in the hamlet of the same name. In the provincial road to Santa Tecla is the Church of the Crib (also known as the Church of Santa Maria della Neve), where you can admire a crib of the 18th century, built in the cavern of a lava cave in 1752. Another characteristic place is the 'chiazette', an ancient path that zig-zags its way to the sea at Santa Maria la Scala. Along the way, one encounters the 17th-century Fortezza del Tocco. In Via Alessi is the ancient Teatro dell'Opera dei Pupi (puppet theatre), where you can admire the regional exhibition of puppets and stage equipment.



La Timpa - Santa Maria La Scala

of Sicilian theatres. The seaside villages of Santa Maria La Scala, Stazzo, Santa Tecla and Pozzillo are of great scenic interest.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

Carnival

• It has been described as 'the most beautiful carnival in Sicily': of ancient origin, it took on its current configuration in 1929, becoming a large and consolidated event, characterised by the parades of allegorical-grotesque floats designed and created by the Acese masters, papier-mâché artisans, and by the spectacular flowered floats.

Summer

• 'Fiera dello Jonio', promotion of craft and commercial activities in the area.

June

26 - Feast of the Patron Saint Venera Virgin and Martyr

August

Last Sunday - Fish Festival

(Santa Maria La Scala)

1st Saturday and Sunday - 'Acireale, art and folklore: Sicily's most beautiful summer carnival'.

December/January

• 'Christmas lights up the city' Christmas events



PRODUCTS

L'artigianato di Acireale offre la possibilità di acquistare prodotti veramente tipici quali carretti Siciliani, pupi, manufatti di lava, di ferro battuto e ceramiche.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania

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

train: Stazione Centrale F.S. - CT bus: AST - Interbus - Autolinee Buda Autolinee Zappalà&Torrìsi

ACI CASTELLO



HISTORY

Just over 10 kilometres from Catania, along the seafront northwards, lies Aci Castello (18,196 inhabitants), an ancient fishing village located 15 metres above sea level. The name Aci Castello derives from the castle of the same name built in 1076 by the Normans on a nearby hill of lava stone. Historically, a first castle was built in the 7th century A.D. by the Byzantines on a pre-existing fortification from the Roman period, possibly dating back to 38 A.D., called *Castrum Jacis* and aimed at defending the population from raids. In the Middle Ages, it was the focus of development in the surrounding area.

In the Norman period, the first village was founded around the castle, which was then ceded by Count Roger to the bishops of Catania. Around 1170, the village was completely destroyed by a terrible earthquake and only in 1530 was it rebuilt and repopulated with the annexation of the nearby towns of Ficarazzi and Aci Trezza. Under Spanish rule, in the 17th century, the considerable economic development of Aquilia Nuova (Acireale) caused conflict and rivalry with the other hamlets, which demanded administrative autonomy, which they finally obtained with the separation of the various hamlets of Aci. Aci Castello, then also including Aci Trezza, obtained it in 1647. From then on it belonged to the noble Massa family until the abolition of the feudal regime. Over the years, while maintaining its ancient origins, it has gradually transformed into a prestigious seaside resort, a destination for destination for numerous tourists.



ART & MONUMENTS

The most characteristic element of Aci Castello is undoubtedly the Norman Castle that dominates the town's main square, bordered by a long balcony from which it is possible to admire the sea below and the picturesque Riviera dei Ciclopi. The castle, built with lava stone from Mount Etna, stands on a promontory of lava rock overlooking the sea. The castle can only be accessed from the square, via a masonry staircase. The wooden drawbridge, which no longer exists, occupied part of the entrance staircase. At the centre of the fortress is the 'donjon', the quadrangular tower, the centrepiece of the manor. Only a few surviving structures remain: the entrance, which preserves the remains of the drawbridge; the courtyard where there is a small botanical garden; a few rooms, including those housing the museum; a chapel, probably dating from the Byzantine era; and a large terrace with a panoramic view of the gulf in front. It currently houses a civic museum divided into three sections: mineralogy, palaeontology and archaeology. Of particular architectural interest is the Mother Church, with remarkable frescoes by Pietro Vasta (1697-1760). Aci Trezza, hamlet of the municipality of Aci Castello



Norman Castle

is a small fishing village that deserves to be mentioned as an area of considerable tourist interest. A fishing centre of ancient tradition, Aci Trezza boasts a charming landscape dominated by the Faraglioni dei Ciclopi: eight picturesque pointed basaltic rocks that, according to legend, were thrown by Polyphemus at Ulysses during his escape. A tour around the village also allows you to admire some interesting monuments. In Piazza Giovanni Verga stands the Church of St. John the Baptist, whose vaulted ceiling features frescoes by the artist Vincenzo Sciuto of Aci S. Antonio, depicting the martyrdom of St. John the Baptist. The pulpit is characteristic, the chancel and the organ. In the left aisle we find the wooden statue of Our Lady of Good News and that of St Joseph. Past the stairs in the central street, one finds oneself facing the entrance to the Casa del Nespolo dei Malavoglia, where the Trezzoto Museum is located. The architectural structure is typically Sicilian from the mid-19th century: a courtyard, a small kitchen garden and the entrance, characterised by a rounded lava stone arch. The interior is divided into two rooms: the first, the 'La terra trema' room, houses photographs, playbills and various testimonies of Luchino Visconti's film masterpiece of the same name, filmed in Aci Trezza in 1947, with a cast of actors chosen entirely from among the inhabitants of the small seaside village; the second, the 'Malavoglia Room',

houses evidence of the world of the Trezzo fishermen in the mid-19th century, with a collection of old work tools and furnishings from daily life. There are interesting photos taken personally by Giovanni Verga and a collection of letters to his brother Pietro.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

January

15 - Feast of the Patron Saint Maurus Abbot

June

24 - Feast of St John the Baptist (Aci Trezza), characterised by the traditional and spectacular pantomime '**U pisci a mari**', performed by local fishermen: a true propitiatory rite, it is a parody of swordfish fishing. This festival is considered one of the most important popular events in Sicily. In the simplicity of the representation is present all the depth of the relationship between man and the sea, the fisherman and the prey, from Verga to Hemingway.



PRODUCTS

Rich in odours, flavours and colours, the cuisine of the many renowned restaurants in Aci Castello and Aci Trezza offers a wide variety of delicious dishes. Fish, molluscs and crustaceans are particularly tasty in this area because they live in a special habitat created by the lava rock seabed.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania

car: A18 ME-CT exit Acireale dir. Aci Castello

bus: AMT (line 534) - AST



Acitrezza - Port



Acitrezza - Faraglioni

CALATABIANO



HISTORY

The municipality of Calatabiano (5,465 inhabitants) extends on a territory bordered to the north by the Alcantara River Park and to the south by the Fiumefreddo Oriented Reserve. Its origins are ancient. Its territory was already inhabited in the first millennium B.C. by the Siculians. The first colonisers were the Chalcidians, who arrived from Greece in 725 BC. In 902 the Arabs conquered the territory of Calatabiano, settling in the fortress on the top of the hill, which probably already existed since 425 BC. Under Arab rule, the village surrounding the castle grew in size, becoming an agricultural centre of great importance. It was during this period that the castle took the name Kalata-bian, from Kalata, castle, and Bian, the name of the official who occupied the fortress. The territory and the castle remained under Arab rule for about two centuries. In 1079 the castle was conquered by the Normans, who rebuilt it as it has been preserved, almost entirely, until today. In 1272 Calatabiano fell under the domination of the Angevins and later the Aragonese. The terrible earthquakes of 1669 and 1693 put the castle inhabitants to flight and they rebuilt the settlement at the foot of the hill. In 1813, Calatabiano became an autonomous municipality.



ART & MONUMENTS

The Castle of Calatabiano, which stands on the hills that dominate the town, is undoubtedly the landmark monument, but the town also offers notable architectural beauties such as the Church of the SS. Crocifisso (1484) and the Church of Maria SS. Annunziata (1740), which is adorned with splendid frescoes and precious paintings and valuable works of art such as the Baroque altar, the 18th-century



Arab-Norman Castle

wooden pulpit, the 19th-century presbytery and the 16th-century wooden Crucifix, painted by Giovanni Salvo d'Antonio, nephew of Antonello di Messina. In Piazza V. Emanuele, the 17th-century statue of Santa Caterina rises majestically, while not far away one can admire the sumptuous lava stone portal of Palazzo Gravina, built by the family of the same name at the end of the 17th century and now privately owned. The same family was responsible for the construction of another historic building, also privately owned, the San Marco Castle, next to which stands the Church of St. Anthony of Padua (1697). The Church of Jesus and Mary dates back to 1695. It overlooks the district of the same name and its walls hold four precious paintings recently restored to their former glory and an interesting majolica floor. Descending towards the sea, the biggest tourist attraction is certainly the beautiful beach of Calatabiano, which stretches for 3 kilometres.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

May

2nd Sunday - Medlar Festival

3rd Saturday - Feast of the Patron Saint Philip



PRODUCTS

A typical crop of the municipality of Calatabiano is the medlar, which in this area in fact finds the ideal and exclusive habitat to grow luxuriant, strong and productive. The Calatabiano medlar is characterised by the fact that it is a very specific and particular niche product.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania

car: A18 ME-CT exit Fiumefreddo train:

Stazione Centrale F.S. - CT bus:

Autolinee Buda

FIUMEFREDDO



HISTORY

Fiumefreddo (9,784 inhabitants) di Sicilia lies along the SS 114 and has its own junction on the A18 motorway and a railway station. It takes its name from the river of the same name, which has its source in the same municipal territory and flows towards the long beach and sea of Marina di Cottone. Included until 1296 in the large fief of Calatabiano, it began to be mentioned in 1592, when the lord of Fiumefreddo, Don Giovanni Pietro Cottone, sold the fief to the Gravina nobles. In 1600, dwellings began to rise in today's contrada Castello, forming a small nucleus, a prelude to the future municipality. In the second half of the 18th century, along what is now the state road linking the two cities of Catania and Messina, a number of houses and workshops were built in the interests of the Prince of Palagonia. The new group of dwellings was then called Putieddi (Botteghelle) and the nucleus that is still the heart of the town developed around it. In 1801, it became a municipality with the name of Fiumefreddo.



ART & MONUMENTS

There are several interesting places to visit, including the Castello degli Schiavi, built in the second half of the 18th century as a country residence, which is a remarkable example of Baroque architecture. Also interesting is the small adjoining church, inside which there is a painting of the Madonna and Child, probably the work of Pietro Paolo Vasta. The Castello degli Schiavi owes its fame to the fact that it was used as a location for several films, including 'The Godfather'. On the small square in the Diana district stands Palazzo Corvaia, an elegant example of a villa-farm built in the 18th century.



The castle of the Slaves

century as a noble residence. A short distance from Fiumefreddo is the Torre Rossa (Red Tower), an example of funerary architecture with a monumental character dating back to Roman times. The construction has the shape of a parallelepiped block and derives its name from the interesting wall perimeter in terracotta bricks. The Riserva Naturale Orientata del Fiumefreddo (Fiumefreddo Oriented Nature Reserve) deserves a separate section in this Guide.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

March

19 - Feast of the Patron Saint Joseph

August

- Summer shows and events,
- particularly during the week of August bank holiday, on the beach with nationally renowned artists.



PRODUCTS

Today, Fiumefreddo is an important centre for the production and trade of citrus fruits, the cultivation of which covers a large part of the cultivated area.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: A18 ME-CT exit Fiumefreddo train:
Central Station - CT
bus: Interbus



HISTORY

The municipality of Giarre (27,62 inhabitants) is located on the eastern coast of Sicily between Mount Etna and the Ionian Sea, sloping down towards the sea, at an altitude of 81 metres above sea level, in a breezy and panoramic position. The toponym, according to the most accredited hypothesis, derives from the fact that Giarre was born as a *fondaco*, or a place for the collection of goods: the 'giare' were precisely the containers, located in the post office but generally in warehouses, that served to contain wine, oil, cereals and legumes. Giarre has a relatively recent history, just under two centuries having passed since its foundation as an administrative unit. However, the first urban settlements date back to the time when the territory belonged to the County of Mascali, owned by the Bishops of Catania. In 1815, the Sicilian Parliament granted the town administrative autonomy from Mascali, along with the villages of Riposto and Torre Archirafi. In 1841 Riposto and Torre broke away from Giarre. In the Fascist period (1939) Giarre and Riposto were again unified under the name of 'Ionia' and in 1945, by a Lieutenantcy decree, they were again divided and regained their old names.



ART & MONUMENTS

Walking along Via Callipoli, the main street, one can admire the stately residences built between the 19th and 20th centuries. Noteworthy among them are the Palazzetto Bonaventura in Art Nouveau style and the Palazzo Quattrocchi with Moorish-style decorations. Also in Art Nouveau style are Palazzo Macherione and Palazzo Bonanno. Churches include the Mother Church, dedicated to St Isidoro Agricola, the city's patron saint, which stands in the splendid square of the same name, an imposing neoclassical building; the Church of the Convent of the Scalzi Augustinians, one of the oldest sacred buildings in the



Cathedral Square

city, which dates back to the second half of the 18th century, and which owes its name to the fact that, next to it, stood the convent of the Scalzi Augustinian fathers of Valverde, modified over the centuries and now the Palazzo delle Culture. The church has long been closed for worship. In the district of Santa Maria La Strada stands the Sanctuary of the same name, built in 1081 at the behest of Count Roger, who thus wished to thank the Madonna for his victory over the Saracens. Other monuments worthy of interest are the Neptune Fountain, the War Memorial and the Well of Roger the Norman. There are several museums in the city, including the Museo Usi e Costumi delle Genti dell'Etna, the Teatro-Museo dei Pupi Siciliani, the Museo del Presepio, the Museo Etneo delle Migrazioni and the Acquario Mediterraneo.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

May

10 - Feast of the Patron Saint Isidore
Cherry and Rose Festival

September

- Fair of citrus fruit growing, fruit and vegetable growing and agricultural industrialisation.
- Sicilian Handicrafts Market-Exhibition



PRODUCTS

The area's flourishing agriculture offers the opportunity to enjoy tasty pears, apples, peaches, citrus fruits, wine and table grapes.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: A18 ME-CT exit Giarre
train: Stazione Centrale F.S. - CT - F.C.E.
Ferrovie Circumetnea
bus: Autolinee Buda - Interbus
Autolinee Zappalà&Torrìsi

MASCALI



HISTORY

Today's Mascali (13,653 inhabitants) grew up close to the Ionian Sea, on the slopes of Mount Etna, after the lava flow of 1928, which buried the old town and of which only a trace remains today in the then peripheral district of Sant'Antonino, now a hamlet. The place-name of Mascali dates back to Byzantine times and means 'coppery', due to the woods that have long characterised the Mascali territory. The ancient Mascali, high on the mountain and visible from the sea, went through various stages of development: from 'casale' to 'villa', until it became a city proper. Under Norman rule, the Mascali territory was donated to the Bishop of Catania. During the period of ecclesiastical control, this area became the 'County of Mascali' following an investiture by Emperor Charles V in favour of the new Bishop of Catania, Nicola Maria Caracciolo. The County passed under Bourbon rule in the second half of the 18th century. Following the 1928 earthquake, Mascali was rebuilt towards the sea. The appearance of the new centre of Mascali is characterised by orthogonal streets and imposing Fascist-style buildings, some of which are the work of Sicilian engineer Camillo Autore.



ART & MONUMENTS

Mascali enjoys mainly summer tourism thanks to the strategic position occupied by its ten hamlets, all set in a landscape of considerable value, ranging from the hills of Etna Park to the Ionian Sea, and places them only 30 km from Catania and 15 km from Taormina. These include Fondachello and S. Anna, seaside hamlets with beaches characterised by 'cutulisci' (pebbles). Close to the sea is an extraordinary



Mascali - view

natural environment: the Gurna, a wetland area between the mouth of the Simeto and the city of Messina, protected by landscape restrictions. Inland is Carrubba, which has an ancient aqueduct behind its central square. Upstream we find Sant'Antonino, Tagliaborse, Porto Salvo, Santa Venera, while on the hillside is Nunziata, where you can admire a monument of value, the 'Nunziatella', a Byzantine church with remains of frescoes. The highest-altitude hamlets are Montargano and Puntalazzo, with spectacular views over the Ionian Sea coastline, rich in citrus groves, fruit trees and vineyards.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

August

10 - Night of San Lorenzo, music and fireworks.

19 - Feast of Our Lady of Mercy (Fondachello).

November

1 - Feast of the Patron Saint Leonard Abbot



PRODUCTS

The most famous product is undoubtedly the 'Nerello Mascalese' wine.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania

car: A18 ME-CT, exit Giarre

train: Stazione Centrale F.S. Piazza -

CT F.C.E. Ferrovia Circumetnea

bus: Autolinee Buda

RIPOSTO



HISTORY

Riposto (15,079 inhabitants) stands on a flat area 7 metres above sea level on the coast from Catania to Messina. Riposto's history is closely linked to that of Giarre and Mascali, of whose county it was part. Its name derives from the Sicilian 'u ripostu', meaning the storeroom or cellar, since the large quantities of wine and agricultural products collected in the nearby towns were stored there. In 1815, the city obtained, together with neighbouring Giarre, autonomy from Mascali, but the ripostesi merchants soon demanded the secession of the two cities, which happened in 1841. In 1820, thanks to a royal decree by Ferdinand I of Bourbon, one of the very first public schools in Sicily was built in Riposto and in 1906 the construction of the port was begun. Riposto's economic boom occurred at the end of the 19th century, but colonial expansion towards Libya under Giolitti's government in 1911-1912 first, and the World War later, impoverished its economy as a result of the closure of its export-import markets. In 1939 Riposto was reunited with the municipality of Giarre under the name of Giarre-Riposto until 1942, when a new municipality was created from the fusion of the two neighbouring centres, which took the name the name of Jonia. In 1945, the two municipalities were again separated, taking back their respective names.



ART & MONUMENTS

A Riposto è possibile ammirare alcuni monumenti interessanti dal punto di vista architettonico. La Chiesa Madre di Riposto risale al periodo tra la fine del XVIII ed il XIX secolo ed è dedicata al santo protettore dei marinai, San Pietro. La facciata è ispirata alla Basilica di San Giovanni in Laterano. Di particolare pregio è l'altare maggiore con gli scranni in legno di fine '700. La Chiesa della Madonna della Lettera è stata la prima chiesa di Riposto: al suo interno sono custoditi un dipinto di Giuseppe Zacco raffigurante la Madonna della Lettera, che sostituisce un'icona bizantina ormai perduta. Una delle fondazioni più prestigiose della marineria ripostese è l'Istituto tecnico nautico "Luigi Rizzo". La sede dell'istituto, risalente al 1820, è tutt'ora funzionante e ospita un interessante planetario fra i più importanti in Sicilia, oggetto di molte visite. Inoltre l'Istituto è dotato di una biblioteca molto fornita, dove è possibile trovare delle interessantissime tavole di disegni tecnici che raffigurano i vascelli dell'epoca. All'interno del territorio urbano, si estende per un'area di 9000 metri quadrati il Parco delle Kenzie che costituiscono un ambiente unico nel territorio regionale. Infine il porto di Riposto, detto anche Porto dell'Etna



Port of Etna

o Marina di Riposto, is a modern and complex port structure consisting of a tourist port and a commercial and fishing port.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

June

29 - Feast of the Patron Saint Peter

July

2nd Sunday - Palio delle Botti di Eustacchio

August

15 - Feast of Our Lady of the Letter

July/September

• - Summer Project' - cultural and musical events.

December

• - Christmas Events



PRODUCTS

A large agricultural centre, it boasts a rich production of must grapes, citrus fruits and olives.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: A18 ME-CT exit Giarre
train: Central Station F.S. - CT
F.C.E. Circumetnea Railway
bus: Interbus - Autolinee Zappalà&Torrìsi

PARKS AND RESERVES





LACHEA ISLAND AND CYCLOPS STACKS NATURE RESERVE

The 'Isola Lachea e Faraglioni dei Ciclopi' integral nature reserve was established in 1989 in order to 'conserve and protect the algal vegetation and fauna of the planes from the supralittoral to the infralittoral, as well as to safeguard the endemic lizard *Podarcis sicula cyclopica*'. The reserve, which falls within the municipality of Acicastello, includes the Lachea island, the Faraglione grande and a series of smaller rocks, all of volcanic origin, formed by the early activity of Etna volcano. In addition to the emerged portion of the islands, the protected area includes the strip of sea from the supralittoral to the infralittoral.

The island of Lachea, consisting mainly of basaltic rocks, is the largest of the Isole dei Ciclopi and is of volcanic origin, linked to the first submarine eruptions in the Gulf of Acitrezza, dating back some 500,000 years. The Ciclopi archipelago is a site of great natural and archaeological interest, since evidence of human presence dating back to prehistoric times has been found on Lachea Island. In 1896 the Senator of the Kingdom, Luigi Gravina, granted the right of use over the island and the seven adjacent rocks for scientific and experimental studies to the Rector of the University of Catania. Thus a small, but valuable, fish museum was created and in 1998 the Integral Nature Reserve managed by the C.u.t.g.a. was established. The richness of the fauna on the seabed of the Ciclopi is given by the presence of numerous fish and all groups of invertebrates: already at a depth of a few metres it is possible to admire *Bavose*, *Salpe* and *Mullet*, while among the rocks of the seabed it is easy to distinguish colonies of *Hydrozoa*, *Red Ascidians*, the *Dog Worm* and the silvery whale of *Saragus*. Around 15 to 20 metres, yellow *Gorgonia* is common. Beyond that, it is possible to admire arborescent colonies of polyps that can even exceed one metre in height, but among them the one that stands out for its uniqueness and beauty is the *Alicia mirabilis*, the largest actinia in the Mediterranean. In the sea of the Cyclopes and its lava rock seabed, much of the Mediterranean fish fauna finds its place and shelter: multicoloured sponges and large red stars, sea pikes, bream, groupers. It is possible to discover the colourful colonies of *Astroïdes calycularis*, the arborescent *Eunicella*



Faraglione

cavolinii, or collide with silvery specimens of *Seriola dumerili*. But close encounters with seahorses and torpedoes cannot be ruled out. The sandy seabed is the kingdom of comb fish. In the depths, it is easy to admire the beautiful fans of the paramuricea, red arborescent colonies exceeding one metre in height, and the lobsters with their long antennae. On the other hand, among the Vertebrates, it is common to see the Turbot. The fauna of Lachea Island is quite varied and includes animal groups that tolerate the adverse environmental conditions well. Among the numerous invertebrates are the *Zelotes messinai*, a spider endemic to Sicily, and the *Urozelotes mysticus* known only on Lachea Island. Vertebrates are represented by a few rodent mammals and a few saurian reptiles; the latter include the exclusive presence of the endemic lizard *Podarcis sicula cyclopica*. More numerous are the bird species that can occasionally be encountered on the island, such as the marsh harrier, peregrine falcon and even waders and waders. A few species use these places as nesting sites, among them the Sardinian flounder and the yellow wagtail. Lachea Island also offers refuge to the Mediterranean herring gull, the common gull and the cormorant. The flora on Lachea Island is essentially made up of plants that have either been selected by the past presence of man or are bound to a substratum rich in salts due to the proximity of the sea. Significant is the presence of some endemic species distributed in Sicily and southern Italy, such as *Senecio squalidus*, *Heliotropium bocconeii*, *Carlina hispanica ssp. globosa*. On the island, it is also possible to explore the small nature museum, rich in historical artefacts and local fish fauna, and the Marine Biology Laboratory.



Endemic lizard Podarcis sicula cyclopica



FIUMEFREDDO NATURAL RESERVE

The Fiume Fiumefreddo nature reserve is located near the mouth of the river of the same name. It was established following Regional Law No. 98 of May 1981. Typologically identified as an 'Oriented Nature Reserve', the protected area was formalised to allow the conservation of aquatic flora and the restoration, along the banks of the river of the same name, of Mediterranean vegetation. The areas designated as reserve (zone A) and pre-reserve (zone B), specifically delimited and falling within the narrow plain downstream of the municipalities of Fiumefreddo di Sicilia and Calatabiano, extend approximately 10 hectares and 70 hectares respectively. Zone A of the reserve is substantially characterised by the formation of the riverbed, which is fed thanks to the presence of the 'Testa dell'acqua' spring in the northern part and the 'Quadare' spring in the eastern part. On the other hand, the territory of zone B is characterised by the typical agrarian landscape of the Etnean coastline, given by the presence of citrus and vegetable cultivations. In the pre-reserve there are several typical rural constructions, including the Masseria Belfiore and the Castello degli Schiavi, an excellent 18th-century Sicilian rural baroque building. The considerable importance of the protected area is linked to the special ecological conditions created by the cold, slowly flowing waters of the Fiumefreddo, which guarantee the presence of aquatic vegetation of rare beauty, characterised in particular by the Braches (*Potamogeton* spp.) and *Water Ranunculus* (*Ranunculus penicillatus*, *R. tricophyllus*). These waters, typical in central and Atlantic Europe, represent unique survey stations for the whole of central and southern Italy. In the shallower areas of the river characterised by weak currents, one can find 'Water Celery', 'Water Cress', 'Veronica' and 'Water Mint'. Near the mouth, there are also patches of "Sparganio", a fairly rare species and, in Sicily, found only on the Nebrodi, at an altitude of 1,000 metres. The banks of the river are characterised by the presence of almost monolithic stands of "Marsh Reed", mixed



Hydrophytic vegetation

with a few rare occurrences of 'serrated polygon'. Near the spring "Quadare" one finds *Papyrus* plants, certainly not native to the area and of recent introduction. The strip of vegetation above the cane thicket is home to an excellent marsh flora consisting of the 'Salcerella comune', the 'Water Iris', the 'Zigolo comune' and other species. Along the banks, 'Common nettle', 'Angelica', 'Vilucchione' and 'Aquatic hemp' can be found with some frequency. The presence of fragments of "White Willow" lowland forest near the springs should also be noted. Overall, the reserve, in addition to



Castello degli Schiavi



Water buttercup

maintains floristic-vegetational aspects of considerable interest and is a place of refuge, wintering and nesting for various species of resident and migratory birds, being, together with the neighbouring marsh area called "La Gurna", the only remaining wetland along the Ionian coast from the mouth of the Simeto to Messina. 'La Gurna' represents the last strip of the ancient quagmire of the same name, which in turn was part of the Mascali Lake that extended, until the 19th century, along the entire coastline from Riposto to Fiumefreddo.



TIMPA NATURAL RESERVE

The Timpa Nature Reserve is located in the municipality of Acireale, along the coast from Catania to Riposto. Declared a Reserve in 1999 and entrusted to the Azienda Regionale Foreste Demaniali, the Timpa lies at the foot of

of Acireale and consists of a long lava ridge that for almost 7 km descends sheer to the sea, even more than a hundred metres high, covered of ivy, euphorbia and carob trees. Together with the Lachea Island, the Timpa constitutes an open-air natural laboratory in which the geo-volcanic history of Sicily is written. Of particular importance are certain stretches close to the coastal strip, where high basaltic colonnades, similar to those found in the Alcantara Gorges, represent the crystallisation path of lavas in contact with water. This is the case of the Grotta delle Colonne, which can only be reached by sea. Various birds of prey nest in the reserve area and dense vegetation develops undisturbed, luxuriant thanks to the springs that flow into the Ionian Sea, as in the case of the hamlet of Santa Caterina, characterised by a splendid belvedere. Part of the Timpa is the path of the Chiazzette, an evocative, winding stone walkway that can be reached from State Road 114 in Acireale. It is a seventeenth-century path that winds down to Santa Maria La Scala, a picturesque and peaceful seaside village. Along the zigzag path, you will come across the Tocco fortress, a fortress defending Acireale dating back to the 17th century. During the Spanish domination, a cannon shot was fired from here to warn of possible danger. Along the walk one comes across vegetation rich in carob, broom, wild olive, lentisk and limonium.



La Timpa

CALATINO





HISTORY

Caltagirone (39,610 inhabitants) rises at an altitude of 611 metres above sea level, on a relief of the Monti Erei which, from the centre of Sicily, develop towards the south-east, merging here with the Iblei. The city extends on the slopes to the south of this elevation, having over time incorporated the hill of San Giorgio to the east and then the adjacent hill of S. Francesco d'Assisi, to which it was connected in the 16th century by a grandiose bridge. Its origin is very ancient, as testified by numismatic and artistic finds and documents, which reveal it to be one of the many Sicilian, Sicilian or Greek-Sicilian cities. Important evidence of the ancient human presence in the area are the prehistoric necropolises of the Rocca, the Montagna, the Salvatorello, the Pille (and the Siculo-Greek inhabitants of S. Mauro, Altobrando, Piano Casazze and others). Much rarer, however, are the finds attesting to Roman, Byzantine and Saracen domination.

From the latter, the town was temporarily freed in 1030 by the Genoese. Back under Muslim rule, Caltagirone was definitively liberated by the Great Count Roger the Norman on 25 July 1090. After the Normans, the city suffered the domination of the Swabians and then the Angevins, who were driven from the island following the Sicilian Vespers. In the following centuries, Caltagirone's prosperous condition was revealed through illustrious visits, concessions and privileges obtained. The Infante James I of Aragon visited it twice, Frederick III went there in 1299; in 1458, John of Castile was crowned king of Sicily in the castle on the top of the main hill, and in gratitude for the help received

in his various enterprises, he went back to declaring Caltagirone a demanial city. John of Aragon and Ferdinand the Catholic also granted and confirmed other privileges, including that of 'mero e misto imperio'. The 15th-17th centuries were the golden age for the city of Caltagirone, which was enriched with churches, institutes, colleges and convents. During those centuries, the city's population always hovered around 20,000 inhabitants, of whom a thousand were ceramists. The catastrophic earthquake of 1693 razed the city to the ground, which within ten years rose again with a baroque face, the one that it still substantially retains today.



ART & MONUMENTS

Caltagirone is one of Sicily's most important tourist destinations, thanks to its artistic and majolica heritage and the beauty of its sights and monuments. The main axis of the city is the long Via Roma, which cuts the city in two and reaches the foot of the famous S. Maria del Monte staircase. The staircase is the connecting point between the old town, seat of religious power in the 17th century, and the new part, where the civil buildings were built. On either side are the two old quarters of S. Giorgio and S. Giacomo, which enclose beautiful religious buildings in their intricate alleyways. The 142 lava steps of the staircase are decorated with beautiful polychrome majolica tiles that alternate geometric, floral, decorative and animal-inspired motifs. At the end of the monumental staircase stands the Chiesa matrice di S. Maria del Monte, the ancient seat of religious power. Above the main altar of the latter is a 13th-century panel depicting the Madonna of Conadomini. At the foot of the staircase, on the other hand, stands the Palazzo Senatorio with the Corte Capitaniale behind it, a fine example of a civil building dating from 1601, the work of Gagini. To the right, a flight of steps leads to the Chiesa del Gesù with a Deposition by Filippo Paladini inside. Behind the building is the Church of S. Chiara, whose elegant façade is attributed to Rosario Gagliardi. Along along Via Roma are some of the most interesting buildings, with numerous examples of majolica decorations. In the initial stretch you can admire the beautiful



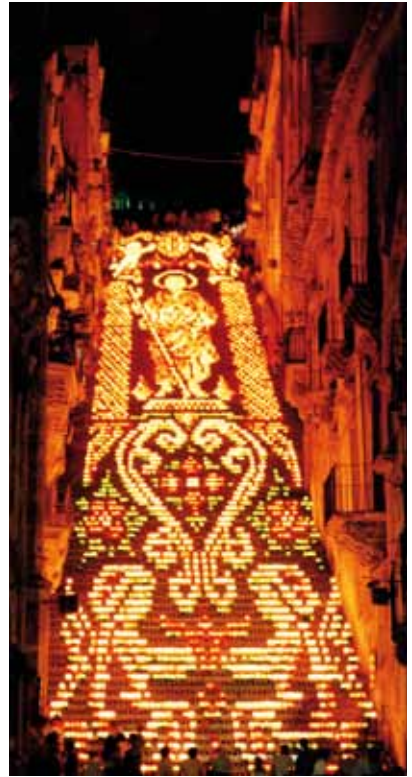
Church S. Maria del Monte

enclosure of the Municipal Villa with the Theatre. It is a true urban park, designed towards the middle of the last century by Basile and inspired by English gardens. The side facing Via Roma is bordered by a balustrade adorned with vases with disturbing devilish faces, alternating with deep green pine cones and small lamps with majolica supports. Inside, a series of paths lead to larger spaces, the most conspicuous of which is undoubtedly the open space with a delightful arabesque-shaped music box at its centre, adorned with majolica tiles. The Teatrino, a singular 18th-century building adorned with majolica tiles, is an elegant and scenic belvedere over the city, through which one enters the Museo della Ceramica where the history of local ceramics from prehistoric times to the beginning of the 20th century is retraced. Past the Tondo Vecchio, a stone and brick exedra, we come across the Church of St Francis of Assisi with its imposing façade. The tiled bridge that follows it leads into the very heart of the town. Beyond the little church of S. Agata, seat of the confraternity of majolica workers, is the Bourbon Prison, an imposing, square, sandstone building, recently restored. It was designed at the end of the 18th century by the Sicilian architect Natale Bonajuto and used as a prison for about a century. It currently houses a small Museo Civico that allows visitors to discover its massive interior structures. Piazza Umberto I is overlooked by the Cathedral of S. Giuliano, a Baroque building that has undergone considerable remodelling, among the most notable being the replacement of the façade in the early 20th century. A stroll through the characteristic quarters that hide behind the streets of the centre may hold pleasant surprises, such as the neo-Gothic façade of St. Peter's Church, also decorated with majolica tiles. At the eastern edge of the town stands the Church of the Capuchins, whose altarpiece by Filippo Paladini depicts the transport of the Madonna of the Odigitria from the East to the West. Adjacent to the church is the Art Gallery, which houses paintings from the 500 to the present day. From here one has access to the crypt where there is a unique nativity scene that brings together the various moments in the life of Jesus, which are then illuminated and accompanied by evangelical phrases. The statuettes were made in the 1990s and are the work of various Caltagirone artists. The Teatro-Museo dei Pupi Siciliani (Theatre-Museum of Sicilian Puppets) in Via Verdumai is also worth a visit. In addition to the performance hall, it now houses an exhibition of Sicilian puppets from Gesualdo Pepe's collection and an exhibition of posters and historical books.



PRODUCTS

The Art of Ceramics is a millenary tradition, deeply rooted in the history of Caltagirone since the earliest times and making it famous all over the world. From time immemorial, generations of craftsmen and artists have followed one another in this city, interpreting in original ways the capacity of ceramics to create shapes and colours. Among the local products, it is also fair to mention the great variety of agricultural products, cheeses and other delicacies made by hand.



Steps of S. Maria del Monte



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

July

25 - Feast of the Patron Saint James
14/15 and 24/25 evening - La Scala
Illuminata, illumination of the steps of
Santa Maria del Monte with oil lamps
inserted in cups of different colours,
arranged to form a design along the one
hundred and forty-two steps.
December/January

- Christmas and Cribs' exhibition famous throughout Sicily for the beauty of the characters made of terracotta. During the exhibition, it is possible to appreciate both the latest productions of Caltagirone craftsmen and the historical pieces, of extraordinary workmanship, normally kept at the city museum.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: S.S.417 exit Caltagirone train:
Stazione Centrale F.S. - Catania bus:
Interbus - AST

CASTEL DI IUDICA



HISTORY

Castel di Iudica (4,722 inhabitants) stands on a hill 475 metres above sea level, forming a long ridge arranged in an east-west direction. Its territory does not constitute a unitary urban agglomeration but has its own peculiar urban configuration formed by Castel di Iudica in the centre and by the four hamlets, Carrubbo, Giumarra, Cinquegrani and Franchetto, stretching out on the Catania Plain. We begin to talk about this territory in the first half of the 12th century, in the description of the Arab geographer Abù Abd Allah Muhammad Al-Idris, who lived at the court of Roger II, who speaks of it as a flourishing agricultural village. Between 1816 and 1819, it became a hamlet of the municipality of Ramacca with the name Giardinelli, i.e. 'small gardens', since there were numerous citrus groves throughout the territory. In 1934, when Castel di Iudica was elevated to a municipality, the town took on the name 'Castel di Iudica' due to its proximity to the mountain of the same name.



ART & MONUMENTS

Several churches can be visited in the hamlets: the Mother Church Santa Maria delle Grazie in Castel di Iudica, the Church S. Maria del Rosario in the hamlet of Giumarra, the Church S. Giuseppe in the hamlet of Carrubbo, the Church Sacro Cuore in the hamlet of Cinquegrani, the Church San Francesco in the hamlet of Franchetto. Also of great importance are two valuable archaeological sites. The first, on Monte Iudica, is known for the presence of an indigenous Hellenised settlement, as evidenced by the discovery of chamber tombs of the indigenous type and tombs of the 'alla



Remains of the Church of St Michael Archangel

Capuchin', dating from the 6th-5th centuries BC. C. The second, on Mount Turcisi, for its Phourion, a Greek military outpost from the 6th-4th century BC. C. The archaeological artefacts found in the dwellings and necropolis of Monte Iudica and in the territory are displayed in the Archaeological section of the 'Prospero Grasso' Civic Museum. Also of interest are the Hermitage of the Church of San Michele Arcangelo and the Masseria on Monte Iudica. Monte Iudica represents a remarkable geological emergence of Meso-Cenozoic limestone dating back 180 million years.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

April
24/25 - Sicilian Pecorino Pepato Festival

August
2nd Sunday - Feast of Our Lady of Graces

September
• Festival of Ancient Flavours



PRODUCTS

Castel di Iudica is an agricultural centre and boasts a rich cultivation of cereals, citrus fruits and olives. Sheep, goat and cattle breeding is flourishing and, consequently, there is an excellent production of dairy products.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: A19 CT-PA exit Gerbini - S.S. 192
dir. Castel di Iudica
bus: AST

GRAMMICHELE



HISTORY

The municipality of Grammichele (13,460 inhabitants) rises on the slopes of the Iblei Mountains, 520 metres above sea level. It was founded by the prince of Butera, Carlo Maria Carafa, three months after the catastrophic earthquake of 18 April 1693 that devastated the towns of the Val di Noto. Because of the earthquake, the survivors abandoned the ancient Occhiolà, now the Archaeological Park, and moved to the new village.

The peculiarity of Grammichele is the urban layout of the historic centre, perfectly hexagonal, which has been the object of interest of scholars from all over the world, so much so that the plaster copy of the slate slab in which the plan of the city is engraved was presented at the 2004 Barcelona Forum, 'City-Corners'.



ART & MONUMENTS

Around Grammichele's hexagonal square are several architecturally interesting churches, such as those of the Spirito Santo, Sant'Anna, San Leonardo and, of course, the Chiesa Madre, positioned on one of the sides of the Piazza Carlo Maria Carafa, whose typically baroque sandstone façade contrasts sharply with the northern style of the Palazzo Municipale, also positioned in one of the corners of the square and built at the end of the 19th century by Arch. Carlo Sada. On display inside the Town Hall are materials from the excavations conducted at the Occhiolà archaeological site. Grammichele is also characterised by the various sundials, or sundials, that decorate the various squares and that are intended as a tribute to the town's founder, a lover of science and politics, creator of the large sundial placed



Carlo Maria Carafa Square

at the centre of the square, later removed in the early 19th century. Of great interest is the Archaeological Park of Occhiolà, which extends over thirty hectares and includes clear archaeological evidence from various periods, from the Bronze Age to the 17th century.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

Aprile

18 - Ricorrenza della fondazione della città.

Maggio

8 - Feast of the Patron Saints St Michael Archangel and St Catherine of Alexandria.

September

6 / 7 - Sausage and flavours of Terravecchia

8 - Feast of the Madonna del Piano, during which typical local dishes can be enjoyed.



PRODUCTS

Grammichele is a particularly active centre that bases its economy not only on agriculture but also on flourishing handicrafts, especially stone, marble and woodworking. Throughout the year, the city offers the visitor an outstanding food and wine culture: the fried and baked 'cassatelle di ricotta' are an example.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania

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

bus: AST

LICODIA EUBEA



HISTORY

Licodia Eubea lies (3,054 inhabitants) between the provinces of Catania and that of Ragusa. Lying on two hills, it overlooks the Dirillo river valley. The territory of Licodia was inhabited by Greeks and Romans. According to various historians, the colony of 'Eufoia', founded by the Chalcidians of Lentini in 650 BC, was located here. Excavation campaigns have brought to light various archaeological finds and some necropolises. During the Saracen domination in Sicily, Monte di Licodia became a strategically important military garrison, equipped with fortifications, later transformed, in the Norman era, into the Castle of Licodia, whose existence is historically attested from 1272. During the Middle Ages, the fief belonged to the Filangeri, the Santapau and the Ruffo families, and so many of those nobles resided in the town that it was called 'little Palermo'. It was during this period that the toponym 'Licodia', according to some deriving from the Greek 'Lukos' (wolf, due to the presence of wolves in the area at one time), according to others from the Arabic 'al-Kudia' (cliff). Later, the toponym Euboea was added to it, in memory of the Chalcidians. The terrible and devastating Val di Noto earthquake in 1693 almost completely destroyed the castle, reducing it to its current ruins. Following the feudal suppression, the village became an autonomous municipality in 1844, freeing itself from neighbouring Vizzini.



ART & MONUMENTS

Along the town's main street, Corso Umberto, are the main monuments, witnesses to a noble past. It begins in Piazza V. Emanuele, at the foot of the cliff,



Licodia Castle

embellished by the presence of the Mother Church. The church, dedicated to Santa Margherita, Licodia's patron saint, has a late Baroque façade and a majestic bell tower, also mentioned by Verga in his stories. Continuing on, one encounters the valuable Palazzo Vassallo with its fine Baroque façade. In Piazza Garibaldi is the Town Hall, once a monastery of the Dominican friars, and the 18th-century Church of the Rosary. Of the historic castle, only part of the cylindrical tower, walls and dungeon remain today.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

Easter

- Holy Week procession, characteristic for its lamentations and religious songs dating back to 1500-1600.

September

- Grape Festival

December

- Festival of typical local products



PRODUCTS

Licodia's main source of income is the production of table grapes, guaranteed by the I. G. P. MARK. Another typical product is patacò, a flour obtained by grinding the leguminous chickling plant.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: S.S. 194 CT-RG, exit Vizzini
bus: AST

MAZZARRONE



HISTORY

Situated at the extreme limits of the province of Catania, (3,903 inhabitants) at about 300 metres above sea level, Mazzarrone assumed the dignity of an autonomous local authority with the regional law of 7 May 1976, which united in a single autonomous municipality the localities of Piano Chiesa, Botteghelle, Cucchi, Leva and Grassura, constituting the hamlet of Mazzarrone and belonging to the territory of Caltagirone, and the locality of Botteghelle-Sciri Sottano, in the territory of Licodia Eubea. These villages arose around 1870, with a purely rural connotation, gradually becoming more and more populated until they became a municipality, which developed a rich and prosperous economy thanks to viticulture. Despite the municipality's young age, the territory of Mazzarrone has roots in the remote past, as evidenced by archaeological finds dating back to Greek and Roman times. The most accredited etymology of the name is that of Greek origin: Maz, ear, and aron or arun, wheat, i.e., land rich in of wheat. The part of the territory ceded by the municipality of Caltagirone, historically, was the former Mazzarrone fief, while the part ceded by Licodia Eubea was a portion of the former Sciri fief. Various owners belonging to different families took turns in these fiefs. For Mazzarrone: Giovanni de Laumia (1296), Federico de Cardona, Antonio de Timera da Lentini, Attardo Landolina, the Caramanno family (who in 1513 donated part of it to the monastery of the SS. Salvatore di Noto nuns), the Platamone, Gravina, Requisenz, and Iacona families; and finally, since 1866 (with the 'subversive' law that expropriated ecclesiastical property), the noble Gravina, Chiarandà and Leva families. As for Sciri, possession was held, for a very long time, by the Santapace family. By obtaining autonomy and being established as a municipality, the population of Mazzarrone finally saw their legitimate aspiration for an autonomous administrative life fulfilled.



ART & MONUMENTS

Three parish churches gravitate in the town, the Church of St Joseph in the 'Poggio di Mezzo' district, the Church of St Mary of the Rosary in the Cucchi district and the Church of the Sacred Heart in the Botteghelle district.

The birth of the first Church of St Joseph dates back to 1894, while the current one, which stands a few metres away on the same square, was built at the behest of the population from 1910 onwards. On the bell tower attached to the church are four bells, including the historic bell of the Caltagirone civic senate, recast after the disastrous earthquake of 1693, and the one dedicated to San Michele (1741), from the parial church of Gabella.



Uve



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

March

19 - Feast of the Patron Saint Joseph

August

2nd Sunday - International PGI Table Grape Festival



PRODUCTS

The municipality is distinguished by its production vocations centred on viticulture, in particular table grapes (experimented since 1930), with the PGI label.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania

car: S.S. 194 CT-RG exit Mazzarrone

bus: AST

MILITELLO VAL DI CATANIA



HISTORY

Militello in Val di Catania (7,927 inhabitants), formerly in Val of Noto, is an agricultural centre in the province of Etna. It rises on the north-eastern foothills of the Iblei Mountains at an altitude of 422 metres. It seems that the first urban centre arose in the Byzantine age, in the valley of the Lèmbasi river, south of the present town, as evidenced by the transformation of prehistoric necropolises into dwellings and places of Christian worship. The territory of Militello is in fact dotted not only with prehistoric sites but also with necropolises dating from between the 5th and 2nd centuries B.C.. After the Arab domination, the documented history of the town began, which already in the Middle Ages became important as a fortified centre. Militello remained feudal until the 18th century and had the Barresi (1308-1567) and the Branciforte (1567-1812) as lords. Over the centuries, Militello became an important religious and cultural centre, enriching itself with churches, monasteries, palaces, and reaching the peak of its cultural and artistic flourishing in the first two decades of the 17th century, when it was ruled by Don Francesco Branciforte and Donna Giovanna of Austria, daughter of the victor of Lepanto. Destroyed by an earthquake in 1693, Militello was rebuilt by developing the guidelines of 17th-century expansion, enriching itself with new monumental works.



ART & MONUMENTS

Militello is rich in churches and palaces, especially baroque ones, making it one of the most important centres of the former Val di Noto. Among the churches and monasteries that escaped the earthquake are the Abbey of 'S. Benedetto' (17th century) and the Oratory of the 'Madonna della Catena' (16th century). Quite a different fate befell the church of 'Madonna della Stella la Vetere' and the Matrix of 'S. Nicolò', destroyed in 1693 and rebuilt in the 18th century further north of the old settlement. The late Baroque style of these two churches earned Militello inscription in the 2002 UNESCO list. The patrimony of sacred furnishings, vestments and altarpieces from these churches is also notable, so much so as to promote the setting up of the 'San Nicolò' Museum of Sacred Art and the 'S. Maria' Treasury. Also worth mentioning are the 'S. Guzzone' Civic Museum and the 'Antonio Cannata' House Museum of Contemporary Art. "Antonio Cannata".



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

Easter
• Holy Week Procession



Militello Val di Catania - view

March

19 - Feast of St Joseph

July

10 / 11 - Feast of St Benedict

August

17/18 - Feast of the Compatron Saint Saviour

September

8 - Feast of the Patron Saint Mary of the Star

October

2nd week - Mostarda and Prickly Pear Festival



PRODUCTS

Notable is the production of prickly pears, the fruit from which the typical mustard is made.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: S.S.194 to Ragusa S.S. 385 dir.
Caltagirone
bus: Interbus



HISTORY

The municipality of Mineo (5,348 inhabitants) rises 511 metres above sea level, perched in a fusiform shape on the summit of two hills, on the north-western edge of the Iblei mountains. The Mineo territory is one of the richest archaeological areas in the province: it preserves remains ranging from the Palaeolithic to the Middle Ages. It was founded in 459 B.C. by Chief Ducezio, on what had been a Sicilian centre, later Hellenised, with the ancient name Menae. Under Roman rule Menai was called Mene and became an important wheat-producing centre. In 828, conquered by the Arabs, it changed its name from Menae to Qualat Minam and became an important fortress. The Arabs introduced citrus fruit cultivation to Mineo. During the Norman period, the Ducezio castle was rebuilt. According to historians, it consisted of twelve crenellated towers, arranged around a triple atrium, with the main tower in the centre. In the 14th century, it was subject to Giovanni d'Aragona, who was appointed Count of Mineo under Frederick III. In 1693, the town was destroyed by an earthquake and only the 16th-century Jesuit College remained standing.



ART & MONUMENTS

Mineo has several churches where valuable works of art can be admired. The Church of Sant'Agrippina preserves magnificent stuccoes, attributable to Serpotta, and frescoes by Sebastiano Monaco, depicting scenes from the life of Saint Agrippina. The Church of S. Maria Maggiore houses numerous artistic 'jewels' including: the baptismal font made entirely of stone, the 16th-century marble basin in classical style, the alabaster statue of the Queen of Angels, donated by Count Roger in 1072, the 16th-century ivory crucifix above the altar dedicated to St Sebastian. The Church of St. Peter preserves the 17th-century statue of Christ at the Column in polychrome wood, the monumental 18th-century organ chancel in carved wood and pure gold gilding, and the choir carved in walnut. The Church of St Thomas features good 18th-century stucco work and a wooden crucifix inside, with the grandiose relic of the Holy Martyrs. The archaeological sites are also very important, including the Antiquarium of Rocchicella-Palikè located along the Margi river, where the oldest human remains in the Mineo territory, dating back to the Palaeolithic age, have been found. To the 5th century BC. B.C., the age of Ducezio, date the 'caves' of Carratabia, two burial chambers that open on the side of a hill to the south-east of the town of Mineo. On the walls of the chambers are the remains of a fine-tipped graffiti decoration representing groups of horses, some led by horsemen, wild boar and deer.



Abside di Santa Agrippina

The main chamber depicts a boar hunting scene, a common theme in Greek art and also attested in funerary contexts.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

Easter

- Holy Week Procession

August

Last two Sundays - Feast of Patron Saint Agrippina

November

- Luigi Capuana' Literary Prize

December/January

1 Dec / 6 Jan - 'Christmas in the lanes' competition event dedicated to artistic and living nativity scenes.



PRODUCTS

Mineo is famous for the production of red oranges: Tarocchi, Sanguinelle and Moro oranges. In addition, refined cultivation and milling techniques result in the fine D.O.P. extra virgin olive oil.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: S.S. 417 exit Mineo
bus: AST

MIRABELLA IMBACCARI



HISTORY

Mirabella Imbaccari (5,548 inhabitants) stands on the extreme southern foothills of the Erei mountains, on the border of the provinces of Catania and Enna. The town proper was founded by Don Giuseppe Paternò, Baron of Raddusa, as part of the internal colonisation of Sicily. In fact, on 11 September 1610, he obtained from King Philip III of Spain the 'Licentia populandi', i.e. the authorisation to build a village in his fiefdom and name it after his wife, Mirabella. The village, built in the Baldo fief, did not have a good fortune due to the unhealthy climate and malaria. It was therefore necessary to move the building to the Imbaccari hillock. The town was called Mirabella until 1862, the year in which, following a resolution of the Municipal Council, Victor Emmanuel II King of Italy decreed that the town be called Mirabella Imbaccari.

The municipality of Mirabella Imbaccari includes in its territory the former fief Baldo, soprano and sottano, and half of the former fief Imbaccari, the one called Imbaccari Sottano. The town is divided into districts or quarters: Quartiere Forche, Quartiere Palazzo, Quartiere Ospizio, Quartiere Zaccaria, Quartiere Cozzo or Fieravecchia, Quartiere Fossaneve or Quartiere Tedesco, Quartiere Maiorche-Paradiso, Quartiere Zotta di Zecche, Quartiere della Rotonda.



ART & MONUMENTS

Among the monuments of interest offered by Mirabella Imbaccari are: the Church of Santa Maria delle Grazie with a façade of three architectural orders, in Sicilian Baroque style, adorned with a large and artistic portal with frieze and tympanum; the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which was provisionally obtained, in December 1908, from the Politini family's warehouses, after a failed attempt to complete the construction of a second church in Mirabella in 1904. The three-nave interior is decorated with a large wooden crucifix by Vincenzo Moroder from 1953 and the original marble high altar, adorned with a wooden statue of the Sacred Heart by Luigi Santifaller. Of particular interest is the 17th-century Palazzo Biscari, built on a rise guarding the town. In local Baroque architecture and with domed iron balconies, it has a portico, jambs and a wide internal staircase of carved stone, as well as an inner courtyard and a small garden around it. The outer frontispiece bears the coat of arms of the noble Biscari house. In the centre of the entrance hall is a large cistern with two wrought-iron columns, fed by rainwater.



Sacro Cuore di Gesù church



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

March

19 - Feast of St Joseph

April

• Ricotta and Cheese Festival

July/August

• Mirabellese summer, cultural and recreational events.

August

4th Sunday - Feast of Patron Saint Mary of Grace

December

12 - Festival of the 'Cuccia' - an Arab dish based on boiled wheat seasoned with oil.



PRODUCTS

Mirabella Imbaccari is famous for its lace embroideries made with the characteristic 'tombolo a fuselli'.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: S.S. 417, dir Mirabella Imbaccari
bus: AST

PALAGONIA



HISTORY

Located on the southern edge of the Catania plain, the municipality of Palagonia (16,568 inhabitants) is about 200 metres above sea level. Although the most certain information on its origins dates back to the Norman period, vestiges are preserved that document how the territory has been inhabited since the earliest prehistory. Several sites, stretching a few kilometres from the town, that bear witness to settlements dating back to the Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic periods, as well as finds dating back to the Greek and Byzantine periods. Not far from Palagonia are two small lakes of Naftia to which Sicilian history is linked between 460-440 B.C., at the time of the Sicilian king Ducezio. During the Middle Ages, the site fell under Norman rule after which, at the behest of Count Roger, the fiefdom and territory were ceded to the bishop of Syracuse. In 1407, Giacomo Gravina became lord of the fiefdom. From then on, the vicissitudes of the city were linked to the noble lineage of the Gravina-Cruyllas, until the death of Francesco Paolo Gravina, the eighth and last Prince of Palagonia, in 1854. Having died childless, the prince left all his possessions to the poor of Palermo. From this moment on, the peasants of Palagonia began the struggle to obtain the land they had always worked. It was a long struggle that continued until the first deeds of sale were signed in 1923. The struggle for land continued in the 1950s when the Palagonesi, together with the peasants of Mineo and Grammichele, occupied the lands of the Naftia fief of Prince Grimaldi.



ART & MONUMENTS

The centre of Palagonia preserves several palaces of notable architectural merit in neoclassical and Art Nouveau, built between the late 19th and early 20th century. These include: Palazzo Ponte in Via Umberto; Palazzo Blandini, overlooking Piazza Garibaldi, recently restored to house a small municipal museum; and Palazzo Politini in Via Duca degli Abruzzi. The city's main monument is the Oratory of Santa Febronia, the city's patron saint, a rock basilica dating from the 6th-7th centuries AD, located in Contrada Coste. It is a small church entirely excavated in the rock, with an almost square plan and two altars: one of them is set in a niche in the wall frescoed with a Christ Pantocrator, surrounded by a later Annunciation. Another place worth mentioning is the Early Christian Basilica of San Giovanni, an unusual construction of which the apse and some columns are preserved, dating back to the 7th century AD. Also of interest is the Pozzo Blandini, a six-metre-high structure dominating the surrounding plain, built around one of the many wells dug to find water for

the citrus groves. Palagonia offers the his visitor a site of important archaeological interest: just over a kilometre from the town centre rises the Rocchicella district, the site of human settlements since ancient times. The site is mentioned by classical Greek and Latin authors as the site of both the famous sanctuary of the Palici and the ancient city of Paliké. Visit the remains of the Estaterion and the Museum of archaeological finds from the site.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

Easter
• Holy Week Procession

June
24 / 25 - Feast of Patron Saint Febronia



PRODUCTS

As in the entire surrounding area, the most typical product is the blood orange.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: S.S. 417 exit Palagonia bus: AST



Early Christian Basilica of St John

RADDUSA



HISTORY

The municipality of Raddusa (inhabitants 3,281) rises on an inland hilly area, 350 metres above sea level, on the hills bordering the Catania plain and the Monti Erei. The etymology of the name Raddusa probably relates to an Arabic root 'to split stones' and, therefore, by extension to Cava di Pietra, perhaps referring to the nature of the terrain. The first news about the fief of Raddusa dates back to 1300: located in the Val di Noto, in the territory of Aidone, it belonged to Pietro Fessima. In 1330, his son Enrico obtained from King Frederick III of Aragon the privilege of enfeoffment for himself and his descendants. In 1530 the fief passed to the Paternò family, following the marriage between Gianfrancesco Paternò, Knight of the Holy Roman Empire, and Vincenzina Fessima. The first inhabited nucleus of the fief, made up of ascriptitii peasants, resided in the fondaco delle Canne, a district south of the present town, washed by the waters of the Secco river. In 1810, Marquis Francesco Maria Paternò, in order to attract as many people as possible to his fiefs, to be used as labourers in his uncultivated lands and in the sulphur mines in which the territory was rich, obtained from the King of Sicily, Ferdinand III, the right to found a village. Thus the village of Raddusa was founded and the marquis, in order to facilitate colonisation, granted some plots of land to those who decided to move to his estates. In 1820, the new community was administratively attached to the municipality of Ramacca. As the years passed, however, the modest village, thanks mainly to its flourishing sulphur industry, began to develop and to increase its population considerably, so much so that many felt that the time had come to claim autonomous administration. The battle to obtain autonomy was not easy and lasted more than a decade, because Ramacca no longer wanted to separate itself from a municipality that had become very prosperous. But, from January 1860, it was elevated to an autonomous municipality.



ART & MONUMENTS

Among the architecturally interesting buildings in Raddusa is the Mother Church, dedicated to the Immaculate Conception, which was erected in 1850, following the design of architect Giuseppe Maggiore and features splendid Corinthian-style stucco work. About 10 km from the town is the Feudo Tower, built around 1700 on a rock. It has still intact wall structures and an irregular octagonal plan. Close to the village are the scenic remains of Gresti Castle on a rise. The fortress stood on a spur of rock overlooking the valley of the Gresti stream. Completely isolated, the ruins blend in perfectly with their surroundings, forming an almost perfect combination of history and environment, a suggestion almost unique in the whole of Sicily.



Wheat Festival

The core of the castle is formed by the rooms carved into the natural rock, which house the later masonry structures. Although there is no concrete evidence, it is believed that these rooms date back to Byzantine, if not Roman-imperial times. Nature lovers should pay a visit to the Ogliaastro Dam, a protected natural oasis with more than 2,000 birds belonging to 60 species.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

September

- 19 - Feast of the Patron Saint Joseph
- Wheat Festival, re-enactment of the ancient stages of 'pisatura' (threshing)



PRODUCTS

The pasta di San Giuseppe, a legume-based soup with home-made pasta, is the typical dish of Raddusa, and is made from wheat, its typical product par excellence.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: A19 CT-PA, exit Agira
bus: Interbus



HISTORY

The municipality of Ramacca (10,802 inhabitants) is located in an inland hilly area, on the first hills that rise west of the Catania Plain, 266 metres above sea level. Although already inhabited in Greek times, the town of Ramacca proper arose between 1710 and 1712. The feud of the same name, of which Sancho Gravina was lord, had been elevated to Principality on 7 October 1688 on condition that it be inhabited and cultivated within the decade. But the death of the prince prevented the work from being completed, so his son Ottavio, in order not to lose the title of prince, dedicated himself to the construction of the village and in May 1707 requested a licence to populate the fief. Having obtained the 'licentia populandi', Ottavio Gravina 'set about gathering people' to build the new town. He was given the opportunity by the disastrous earthquake of 1693, which had totally or partially destroyed many towns and cities on the eastern coast, and the previous lava flow, which had submerged numerous towns on the western slope of Etna: calamities that had caused an excessive increase in the number of homeless and destitute people, many of whom accepted Gravina's invitation to populate the new site. The first nucleus of inhabitants was not much more than 200. Since then, because of its extensive and fertile territory, Ramacca has always been characterised by strong immigration from all the Sicilian provinces. But all these different cultures, although coexisting peacefully, have never merged into a single local culture, resulting in peculiar traditions. Such must have been the conditions "original 'ethnic' conditions that did not allow the preservation of the indigenous cultural heritage.



ART & MONUMENTS

Ramacca offers some architecturally interesting buildings. Next to the town's central square is the Mother Church, dedicated to the Nativity of Mary. Built in the 1700s, it is simple in its architectural lines and without a well-defined style, decorated with stucco, a scaglietta and cement floor and a polychrome marble altar. The Church of the Immaculate Conception has a neo-classical façade and a single nave, decorated with stuccoes, altars and oil paintings. The apse, renovated in 1977, still retains the niche at the back with the wooden statue of the Madonna, also by an unknown author; on the altar an inlaid wooden tabernacle from the 19th century can be admired. Attached to the Church of the Immaculate Conception stands the 18th-century Convent of the Capuchins, which houses the Parish Church of St Joseph. The Archaeological Museum is also interesting, exhibiting finds from explorations or excavations conducted in the municipality from the 1970s onwards. Numerous



Albospino Tower

archaeological sites throughout the territory, including the Montagna area, where the remains of the necropolis of the ancient Greek city have been found, the Castellito area, where a Roman villa with splendid mosaic floors is located, and the Torricella area, site of a Bronze Age village and necropolis.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

March

19 - Feast of the Patron Saint Joseph

April

• Artichoke Festival



PRODUCTS

Large areas of this area are used for the production of citrus fruits, particularly blood oranges, and artichokes.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: S.S. 417, exit Ramacca
bus: Interbus - AST

SAN CONO



HISTORY

The municipality of San Cono (2,912 inhabitants) is located in an inland hilly area, 525 metres above sea level, at the western end of the province.

The town was founded in 1785 by Marquis Ottavio Trigona Bellotti and is named after the homonymous saint, who lived from 1139 to 1236. The reasons of this name are not entirely clear and are commonly entrusted to a popular legend. Although the marquis was engaged in the administration of Piazza Armerina, he never neglected the interests of the fief of San Cono. He had a church and 60 houses built there at his own expense, where he welcomed people from all parts of Sicily attracted by the promise of a house and a piece of land to cultivate. This prompted many men to respond to the marquis' proclamation in order to make a new life for themselves. Soon, Ottavio Trigona asked for and obtained the 'licentia populandi' and, shortly afterwards, provided for the construction of the Church of San Cono. In 1883, Duke Trigona divided the territory into parts and leased it to the locals.



ART & MONUMENTS

In the historical centre of the town, you can admire monuments of considerable interest. In Piazza Umberto I stands the Chiesa Matrice, the main church of San Cono. With a single wide nave, it is of mixed style, with Doric, Corinthian, Byzantine and Greco-Roman hints. The central altar is in marble, built before 1868; there is a second marble altar in basilica style dating from 1977. There are four other secondary marble altars, dating from 1969. Close to the Piazza dello Spirito Santo is the church of the same name, popularly known as the 'Church of San Cono' because it was the first Mother Church of the town and, above all, because a wooden statue of the saint, from an unspecified period, is displayed on the altar. It is the oldest church, presumably dating from around the mid-1700s, before the village was founded. The church is in baroque-dialectal style, with a single-nave plan and the altar at the back, on the two lower sides of which is carved the coat of arms of the Trigona house, the eagle. Adjoining the Church of the Holy Spirit is Palazzo Trigona, which was built by the Trigona family in the centre of the fiefdom, and to which the homes of the farmers and the procurator were attached. Today, the Palazzo Trigona is divided among several private citizens and has undergone extensive alterations. In the northern part of the village, on the slopes of Mount San Marco, is the Church of the Crucifix, built in the early 1900s. Inside, there is a central altar dominated by a large papier-mâché crucifix; on the sides are two other altars, dedicated to San Calogero, of whom there is a wooden statue, and to Our Lady of Sorrows.



Prickly pears



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

May

2nd and 3rd Sundays - Feast of the Patron Saint Cone Abbot

October

• Prickly Pear Festival



PRODUCTS

San Cono is distinguished by its rich production of fruit, artichokes, grapes, cereals and excellent prickly pears (also used in the production of an excellent homemade ice cream).



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: S.S.417 exit Caltagirone, S.S.124
dir. S. Michele di Ganzaria
bus: Interbus

SAN MICHELE DI GANZARIA



HISTORY

San Michele di Ganzaria (3,649 inhabitants) is located in an inland hilly area, 490 metres above sea level. The foundation of the town dates back to the year 1000 and was carried out by the Arabs. The hamlet continued to be inhabited after the expulsion of the Arabs and had its greatest development during the Angevin domination. The oldest document known so far concerning the fief of Ganzaria is a deed dated 1276 that attests to Guglielmo De Padula's possession of the fief. He was succeeded by Attardo De Padula and his son-in-law Guglielmotto de La Timonia. Having participated in the Caltagirone rebellion of 1394 against King Martin, the fief was confiscated and granted, presumably around 1395, to Ranieri Morana. It later passed into the hands of the powerful Modica family of Caltagirone and then to Antonio Gravina, a captain in the armies of Charles V. At the end of the 15th century, the hamlet was destroyed by fire and the village was rebuilt by Antonio Gravina, who in 1534 ceded it to a colony of Greek-Albanian exiles driven out by the Turkish occupation. The hamlet, since then known as 'dei Greci' (of the Greeks), was thus consolidated as a village, remaining Gravina's until 1812, the year feudalism was abolished and it was elevated to a municipality.



ART & MONUMENTS

The historical centre of the town features interesting monuments from a historical and architectural point of view. First of all, the 16th-century ducal Castle of the Gravina family, of which some ruins remain today. What remains of the castle overlooks today's Piazza Umberto I. Of the castle, originally with masonry battlements and balconies and windows, today part of the perimeter walls remain, preserved especially on the north side, where the remains of an upper floor balcony can be seen, and on the east side, which still shows a battlements and a section of the patrol walkway. On Via Roma is the Church of the Rosary. Built in the second half of the 16th century but rebuilt in the 18th century, it has a simple façade, an arched entrance portal and a bell tower added in the 19th century. Inside, with a single nave and a precious marble high altar, there are valuable statues and oil paintings, as well as 18th-century stuccoes and frescoes. Via dei Greci leads to the Mother Church, the ancient 'Temple of the French' or 'Fanum Gallorum'. Built by the Angevins in the 13th century, the church, originally small in size, was later enlarged and renovated on several occasions. Dedicated to the patron Saint Michael Archangel, the building today features a Gothic-Cistercian style façade, the only example in Sicily. At the top, it is adorned with interlaced arches, while towers rise on the two sides. The interior is in the shape of a Latin cross with three

naves and an apse, is richly decorated with frescoes and stuccoes and houses sacred relics, as well as a large number of art treasures, including a life-size wooden crucifix, donated to the town in 1336 by the Blessed Guglielmo, and a beautiful 17th-century baptismal font made of pitchstone.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

September

1st Sunday - Feast of the Patron Saint Michael Archangel

November

• Wine and Oil Festival

December

• Feast of the 'Cuccia' - chickpea and cereal soup.



PRODUCTS

Typical sweets are 'purciddati', biscuits filled with honey or vino cotto (typical of the Christmas period), 'curriulli', fritters with wild thistles, and 'mostarda' made of cooked must to which almonds are added.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: S.S. 417 exit Caltagirone, S.S. 124
dir. S. Michele di Ganzaria
bus: AST - Interbus



Mother Church



HISTORY

The municipality of Scordia (17,290 inhabitants) is located in an inland hilly area, 150 metres above sea level. In its territory there have been human settlements since ancient times, some traces of which are still visible today. The numerous artificial caves attest, in fact, to the presence of human settlements in prehistoric times. The subsequent presence of Greeks, Romans, Byzantines and Arabs in the area would be proven by the discovery of archaeological finds, especially coins and vases that were part of grave goods. To date, the oldest documents mentioning the place name Scordia date back to 1131 and 1151. These are two diplomas sanctioning the donation of certain possessions to the Templars by the Norman lords. More than a hundred years later, in 1255 to be exact, a bull issued by Pope Alexander IV states that the Casale of Scordia Suttana was donated by the pontiff to the Guelph nobleman from Catania, Niccolò di Sanducia. In 1621, the Casale passed to Antonio Branciforte who, after being appointed first prince of Scordia, obtained the licentia populandi from Philip IV of Spain in 1628. He succeeded in attracting from the neighbouring towns a large number of penniless peasants, driven by the possibility of obtaining land in emphyteusis in the fief of Scordia and building a dwelling within the urban core. This measure gave a considerable boost to the agricultural economy, favouring the development of trade and population growth. The Branciforte family ruled until 1812, the year in which feudalism was abolished and Scordia obtained municipal autonomy.



ART & MONUMENTS

The historical centre of Scordia preserves several monuments of notable architectural interest. In Piazza Umberto I stands the Mother Church, dedicated to the patron saint San Rocco, where significant frescoes and fine paintings are preserved. The square is embellished by 19th century palaces, such as Palazzo Paoli-Migliore and Palazzo Modica. The city's main historical palace is undoubtedly Palazzo Branciforte, dating back to 1628, whose main entrance is a gallery-door surmounted by a central loggia. In Piazza San Francesco is the Church of St Anthony of Padua, with the former Convent of the Reformed Friars of St Francis attached, the construction of which began in 1644. The church façade is characterised by a simple Baroque style. Inside, valuable works of sculpture and painting are preserved. Of particular value is the 18th-century statue of Christ at the Column, carried in procession on Holy Wednesday. Significant are the 18th-century frescoes in the cloister, a real jewel of architecture, narrating episodes from the lives of martyrs of the Franciscan Order.



Church of San Rocco

The 17th-century Church of the Purgatory of St. Gregory the Great) houses inside, as well as paintings of some interest, the wooden statues that make up the Passion Group. Of particular interest is the burin print 'Il Trionfo della Fede' (The Triumph of Faith), made to a drawing by Titian and exhibited in the sacristy.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

March

19 - Feast of St Joseph

Easter

• Holy Week Procession

August

16 - Feast of the Patron Saint Rocco

December/January

16 Dec/ 6 Jan - Christmas events



PRODUCTS

The most important product of this area is certainly the red-fleshed orange.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: S.S. 385 dir. Scordia
train: Stazione Centrale F.S. -
CT bus: Interbus



HISTORY

Vizzini (6,755 inhabitants) is located at almost 600 metres above sea level, near the source of the Dirillo or Acate River and on three hills within the Iblei Mountains, namely Colle Castello, Colle Maddalena and Colle Calvario. It is one of the oldest towns in Sicily. The first certain information dates back to the late Bronze Age, as testified by the finds discovered in the Contrada 'Tre Canali', today kept at the P. Orsi Museum in Syracuse. After the Greeks and Romans, it was dominated by the Byzantines and then the Arabs. In the Middle Ages, the settlement was confined only to the top of the hill known as 'Castello' and was surrounded by high defensive walls. An important historical moment was when, in 1252, Emperor Conrad IV of Swabia granted the town the privilege of 'perpetual statehood', which, however, became null and void upon the emperor's death in 1254, so Vizzini fell under feudal jurisdiction. In 1282, the town participated in the revolt of the Vespers. After the peace of Caltabellotta in 1302, having come under Aragonese rule, it was taken by Manfredi Alagona and the baron of Licodia, Ughetto Santapau. Only in 1403 did Vizzini regain its freedom. In the early 15th century, the town changed its urban structure, expanding beyond the medieval walls. In 1536, after the advent of Charles V of Habsburg, the city, both to stem the ever-present threat from neighbouring barons and to ingratiate itself with the government, began to acquire at great expense a series of 'privileges' and 'titles', such as 'Perpetual Statehood', 'Mero e Misto Impero', 'Città Obbedientissima', as well as obtaining the possibility of electing a proper Municipal Council. Until the first half of the 17th century, Vizzini had a continuous expansion, reaching a population of 16,000 inhabitants. However, even though it became an increasingly influential centre, the ups and downs of the medieval period never came to an end, which saw it always fighting with

some feudal lord to whom it was given 'for sale'. This was the case in 1648, when it was given as a fief to the Genoese Nicolò Squittini. It was only in 1679 that it managed to regain its freedom. In 1693, Vizzini also suffered the devastating consequences of the terrible earthquake that razed many towns in the Val di Noto to the ground. After the terrible event, the town underwent major reconstruction, not only on a social level but also on an artistic and cultural one. Evidence of this is provided by the numerous religious and civil monuments that sprung up during this period, some of which are of exquisite workmanship. Throughout the 18th century, the town followed the fate of almost all the other towns in Sicily, passing under various dominations: from the Habsburgs to the Savoy, from the Austrians to the Bourbons. Vizzini was the privileged setting for many novellas and novels by the great Sicilian writer Giovanni Verga, who came from a family of Vizzini origins.



ART & MONUMENTS

Vizzini still preserves the original constitution of its historical centre, which gives it a particular charm. Around the central Piazza Umberto I stand the Palazzo Verga and the Palazzo Municipale, next to which stands the Salita Marineo, a long flight of steps decorated, on the risers, with majolica tiles with geometric and floral motifs, with a medallion in the centre of each with glimpses of Vizzini buildings. The Mother Church, dedicated to St Gregory, preserves a Gothic-Norman portal from its original construction, which survived the 1693 earthquake. The building is a mixture of styles. The interior is divided into three naves and has an octagonal structure and pointed arches. Two splendid paintings by the artist Filippo Paladino in the early 1600s can be admired here, the first depicting the Martyrdom of San Lorenzo and the second the Madonna della Mercede. Near the Mother Church is the Basilica of San Vito under the title of Spirito Santo. The church is in late Baroque style with Renaissance reminiscences and offers the opportunity to admire a carved wooden Crucifix, a chapel richly decorated with tasteful stuccoes



"Cunziria" (ancient tannery)

neoclassical building and a reliquary. The Church of St Agatha, built around the 14th century, was rebuilt in the 18th century and originally dedicated to St Peter. Inside, we can admire an altarpiece depicting the Martyrdom of St Agatha and the Baroque chapel dedicated to the Sacrament. Inside an 18th-century palace in the historical centre, it is possible to visit the 'Immaginario Verghiano' Museum. The heart of the museum is the permanent exhibition of Giovanni Verga's photographs, enriched by a series of memorabilia, many related to the photographic equipment the writer used. There is also a section devoted to a collection of photos of film sets of films inspired by Verga's works, while the section entitled "Archives of memory" collects interesting photographic material made up of images of the places and people of Verga's world from the 1920s to the second half of the 20th century. 1920s up to the second half of the 20th century. In contrada Masera are the remains of a complex of houses and factories called 'Cunziria' (tannery), made famous by Verga who set 'Cavalleria Rusticana' there.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

Easter

- Holy Week Procession

April

23/24/25 - Ricotta and Cheese Festival, enriched by cultural and folklore events.

29 - Feast of St. Joseph

June

1 - 'Feast of Fragrances and Flavours' - tasting of traditional local cuisine.

July/August

- 'Manifestazioni Verghiane' - theatrical performances based on the novellas of the famous Vizzinese writer.

August

27/28/29 - Feast of St John the Baptist

October/November

30/31/1 - Traditional 'Fair of the Dead

September

1/2/3 - Feast of the Patron Saint Gregory the Great

December

- Christmas Celebrations with a Living Crib



PRODUCTS

The typical product par excellence of Vizzini is fresh ricotta.

Over the years, there has been a strong specialisation in the breeding of dairy animals and the production of various types of cheese, from fresh to those requiring a short, medium or long ripening period.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania

car: E45 exit Vizzini/Monterosso, S.S. 194 dir. Vizzini

train: Stazione Centrale F.S. - CT

bus: Interbus - AST



Church of St John the Baptist

PARKS AND RESERVES





THE WOOD OF SAINT PETERS

The Bosco di Santo Pietro nature reserve extends over a large sandy plateau furrowed by valleys, near Santo Pietro, a small village twenty kilometres from Caltagirone. It is a splendid wooded area covering more than two thousand five hundred hectares: the second largest nature reserve, after the Ficuzza forest in the Palermo area.

Already subject to a decree of constraint in 1991, the Reserve was fully established in 1999 and is managed by the Azienda delle Foreste Demaniali of the Region of Sicily. The institution became necessary in order to stem its degradation and to protect the enormous floro-faunal variety of this remnant of the ancient Sicilian forest system composed of ancient cork oaks. In fact, it presents a great variety of plant species. The giant cork oaks are splendid, but also relevant are the old oaks, downy oaks, holm oaks and pines.

The undergrowth consists of wild olive, hawthorn, heather, strawberry trees, myrtle, in which numerous small mammals find refuge. As for the avifauna, the Bosco di Santo Pietro has numerous valuable birds, including some birds of prey such as buzzards and kestrels. Along the watercourse that feeds the reserve are poplars and willows, an ideal refuge for grey herons, egrets and kingfishers. Within the reserve, in contrada La Grazia, there is a wildlife recovery centre specialising in the recovery of tortoises.



Cork

PEDEMONTANA AREA



ACI BONACCORSI



HISTORY

A municipality (3,099 inhabitants) perched on one of the hills that form a coastal plateau at the foot of Mount Etna, 362 metres above sea level, Aci Bonaccorsi offers a mild climate, typically hilly, that makes it a quiet and enjoyable residential location. Its historical origins can be traced back to the presence of primitive settlements scattered around the mythical Bosco di Jaci, the original Casali, which around the 12th century became 'Quartieri' of the historical and very special City of Jaci, each taking the prefix 'Aci' as the first element of its name. It certainly began to constitute itself as a village after 1408, the year of the terrible lava flow that swept through that territory, uniting the archaic districts of Sciara-Lavina, Battiati and Pauloti, which eventually took the name Bonaccorsi, in reference to the notoriety of some socially prominent members of the Bonaccorso family. Its history was practically shared until the 17th century, when it achieved its administrative autonomy with that of the other hamlets in the Aci territory.



ART & MONUMENTS

The buildings of historical-architectural interest are in particular the churches, originally built one in each district: in the 'Battiati' district is the church dedicated to St Lucia; in 'Pauloti' the one dedicated to the Madonna delle Grazie. In 'Sciara-Lavina', the church dedicated to the Holy Virgin Mary. Finally, in the 'Piazza' district, the Chiesa Matrice and the Church of Sant'Antonio Abate e della Consolazione, the oldest of all.

Opposite the Mother Church is the Palazzo Recupero-Cutore, now the Town Hall, which features an elegant façade, interesting for its combined use of Etna lava stone and white Syracuse stone.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

May
Every Sunday Spring Festival

August
2/3 - National Fireworks Festival
3 - Feast of the Patron Saint Stephen



PRODUCTS

The volcanic soils have favoured the development of viticulture and the production of the green lemon.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car:Tangenziale Catania RA15 exit
Paesi Etnei
bus: AST



Mother Church S. Maria dell'Indirizzo

ACI CATENA



HISTORY

Acicatena (28,691 inhabitants) takes its name from the ancient Catena district, where the Sanctuary of Maria SS. della Catena is located. An ancient hamlet in the territory of Acì, it was separated from Aquilia (Acireale) in 1639 and became the heart of the city of Acì SS. It experienced its golden age from 1672 to 1790: in those years the fief was governed by the Riggio Princes of Campofiorito, protagonists in the reconstruction of the city after the earthquake of January 1693. From 21 September 1826, the separation of the districts began, culminating, on 15 September 1828, with the detachment of the districts of Trezza and Ficcarazzi. The current territory includes the hamlets of Acì S. Filippo and S. Nicolò and the new settlements of Vampolieri, Torre Casalotto and Marchesana.



ART & MONUMENTS

Acicatena is rich in churches of considerable interest, which hold valuable works of art. The largest church is the Matrice, the Church of S. Maria della Catena. Inside, you can admire the painting of Rebecca at the Well by Pietro Paolo Vasta. Paintings by Vasta can also be found in the Baroque church of Santa Lucia, rich in frescoes and featuring a wooden roof. The monumental Church of San Giuseppe is also worth a visit for its distinctive Arab-Byzantine façade. There is also the Minor Basilica of Acì S. Filippo and the Church of S. Antonio da Padova, which houses a crucifix by Fra' Umile da Petralia Soprana and a large canvas by Vasta depicting the Franciscan Family. Attached to the church is the convent, now the town hall. Other interesting monuments are the Hermitage of S. Anna, overlooking the Acì valley, and the 18th-century residence of the Riggio family, the Prince's Palace, which, recently restored, will be handed over to the citizens to become a cultural container.

In the district of Santa Venera al Pozzo are the remains of the Roman baths, recently re-evaluated. The healthy sulphurous water that flows there feeds the Regional Baths of Acireale. In the Antiquarium, which also offers visitors interesting computer and audiovisual aids, it is possible to admire a rich display of materials found during the excavations conducted in the archaeological area of S. Venera al Pozzo.



Church of St Joseph



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

July

"CineNostrum" - a film festival dedicated each year to a great protagonist of the celluloid world.

August

15 - Feast of the Patron Saint Mary of the Chain



PRODUCTS

Famous as the 'City of the Green Lemon', it produces one of Sicily's most prized varieties of lemons.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: A18 ME-CT exit Acireale - SS 114
bus: AST

ACI SANT'ANTONIO



HISTORY

In the heart of the Etnean territory, between Etna and the sea, lies Acì Sant'Antonio (17,464 inhabitants). The history of Acì Sant'Antonio has been strongly influenced by the volcano that, over the centuries, following several eruptions, has changed the fortunes of the populations and the layout of the area. It was precisely after the strong eruption of 1169 that the original inhabitants left the coastal area and withdrew to the present territory, rich in forests and abundant timber. Here they gave life to the small village of Casalotto, which changed its name to Acì Sant'Antonio after the eruption of 1408, which stopped not far from the small hamlet. Internal struggles with neighbouring Aquilia led the inhabitants of Casalotto to ask the viceroy of Palermo for separation from Aquilia Vetere. Only in 1639 did the large Aquilia separate into Acì Inferiore (Acireale) and Acì Superiore (Acì Sant'Antonio and Filippo). Acì Sant'Antonio incorporated various communities, so much so that it earned the appellation 'totius Acis mater et caput'. It was only in 1826 that a Royal Decree by King Ferdinand II of the Two Sicilies separated Acì Sant'Antonio from Acì San Filippo and Acì Catena, conferring on Acì Sant'Antonio the investiture of head of the district. But the real period of rebirth and great splendour occurred in the 18th century. The 19th century saw the consolidation of the rich landed bourgeoisie and the development of commercial activity. Extensive use in this commercial activity was made of the cart, which was richly decorated by skilful master cart-makers, initiating a great tradition that continues to this day and which makes Acì Sant'Antonio the 'City of the Sicilian Cart'.



ART & MONUMENTS

A stroll through the streets of Acì Sant'Antonio gives one the chance to admire such fine works as the Church of S. Antonio Abate, those of S. Biagio and S. Michele Arcangelo, the Reggio Carcaci palace, the Puglisi palace and the Gagliani palace. Inside the churches are still preserved small jewels of great pictorial value signed by P. Vasta, A. Vasta and M. Panebianco. Also worth a visit are the workshops, where traditional Sicilian carts are still made today, to admire the skilful and spectacular art of the 'carradori', sculptors, blacksmiths and master painters of international standing. On the sides of the carts are depicted the now famous scenes from the chivalric tradition (Orlando, Charlemagne) and characters such as Saint Alfio and his brothers, Saint Agata and Saint Rosalia. The Museum of the Sicilian Cart is being set up by the Regional Province of Catania. The same organisation is in the process of restoring the Bosco di Acì (Acì Wood), a site of great importance for the Region of Sicily.



Mother Church Sant'Antonio Abate



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

January

17 - Feast of the Patron Saint Anthony Abbot

August

- Great Feast of St. Anthony the Abbot (every two years)

- Karting Grand Prix

December

• Christmas at the Fair



PRODUCTS

The town's economy is essentially based on craft activities (working with decorative ceramics, lava stone, wrought iron, puppets and Sicilian carts in particular), but in recent years the agri-food industry has developed strongly with the production of organic jams, chocolate production, etc.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: ME-CT A18, Acireale exit;
PA-CT S. Gregorio exit, Paesi
Etnei
bus: AST

ADRANO



HISTORY

The municipality of Adrano (36,681 inhabitants) developed on the western slopes of Mount Etna at an average altitude of 550 metres. The territory occupied by the city has seen a succession of different dominations over the centuries that have marked the history of Sicily. Its origins can be traced back to the Neolithic period, as evidenced by the large number of artefacts found in the area. Around the 10th century B.C., the Siculs settled in these areas, founding the 'city of Mendolito', one of the most important centres on the entire island. Under Greek domination, around 400 B.C., the city of Adranon was founded, named after the Sicilian deity Adranos. Roman, Byzantine and later Saracen rule followed. Under the domination of the Arabs, skilful farmers and artisans, a remarkable progress began for the centre, which remained flourishing even under the Normans, who allowed the Saracens to continue those activities that were profitable for the inhabitants. Not so did the Swabians, whose policy of persecuting the Arabs proved ruinous for the local economy. Better times did not come even under the rule of the Angevins, (who probably Frenchified the medieval Latin name of the city, Adernio, into Adernò, which was retained until 1929), nor with the Aragoneses.



ART & MONUMENTS

The different dominations have left many marks on the town. The historical centre offers the possibility of discovering valuable monuments: the majestic Norman Castle, which houses 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 Saviour, the Church of San Sebastiano, the Victory Garden, the Bellini Theatre, built in the early 18th century in Art Nouveau style. Soon it will be possible to admire the Archaeological Walk (Mura Dionigiane), a site under restoration. About 5 kilometres from the historical centre, the Sicilian town of 'Mendolito' is definitely worth a visit, the fabulous 'Saracen Bridge', from which there is a spectacular view of the Adrano territory, the Biscari Aqueduct and the Pineta Comunale.



Norman Tower



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

Easter

- Holy Week procession, with the characteristic theatrical drama of the 'DIAVOLATA' (Easter Sunday): a unique sacred representation symbolising the eternal struggle between Good and Evil.

August

1/5 - Feast in honour of the Patron Saint Nicholas Politi



PRODUCTS

The typical sweets, handed down from the peasant civilisation, can be tasted in the various pastry shops and craft workshops: 'pasta reale', almond pastries, pistachio pastries, prickly pear mostarda, 'mastazzoli', 'cannoli' and the 'cassata'. The Adrano area produces citrus fruits, prickly pears, pistachios, almonds and fruit and vegetables such as olives, broad beans, black broccoli, purple cauliflower, fennel, etc., all widely used in the local cuisine.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: S.S. 121 dir. Paternò - S.S. 284
train: Circumetnea railway
bus: I.S.E.A.

BELPASSO



HISTORY

The territory of the municipality of Belpasso (24,817 inhabitants) borders that of nearby Catania and extends largely on the slopes of Mount Etna. The origins of the town are certainly ancient, as evidenced by the presence of areas of frequentation in prehistoric times. The remains of aqueducts and bridges in the area of Valcorrente, Sciarone Castello and Masseria Pezzagrande date back to Roman times, while the remains of lava stone colonnades of a castle and a small pointed arch of the S. Maria La Scala Church in the monastery of the same name date back to the Middle Ages. The original name of the village was Malpasso, 'Malupassu', and was most probably derived from the characteristics of the area: passu indicates, in fact, an area with frequent passage, while malu, could refer to a dangerous and uncomfortable place. The history of the period between the 12th and 13th centuries is linked to that of Frederick II of Aragon and his wife Eleanor of Anjou who, on the death of her husband, moved permanently to a house in Malpasso, where she died in 1343. On 7 March 1669, a terrible eruption forced the inhabitants to abandon the village and rebuild it elsewhere, about six kilometres from the site buried by lava. The new site was named Fenicia Moncada. In 1693, another violent earthquake destroyed Fenicia Moncada, which was rebuilt at a location closer to the site of Stella Aragona. The new site was called by the augural toponym of 'Belpasso'.



ART & MONUMENTS

The town is characterised by its original chessboard street layout, which is unique among the surrounding towns.

Among the most important churches is the Mother Church of Santa Maria Immacolata, located in the district 'Matrice', in which Santa Lucia is also venerated. On the bell tower is the large bell of Santa Lucia, made in 1815, which ranks among the largest bells in Italy and first in Sicily. Another interesting church is the one dedicated to St Anthony of Padua, part of the religious complex of the former convent of the Zoccolanti Friars of St Francis. Situated north-east of the town is the 'Cisterna della Regina', part of the residence where Queen Eleanor of Anjou lived. Of the original building, after several lava flows, only one room and a structure with a small altar, originally frescoed, while in the area one can see a series of avenues, pertaining to the garden, converging on a terrace with masonry seats.

The villa's cistern, circular and uncovered, must have collected rainwater from the various terraces and is partially filled with materials from the eruption.



Mother Church Santa Lucia



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

July/August

• Etna International Motorcycle Rally

December

13 - Feast of Patron Saint Lucia



PRODUCTS

Craftsmanship is mainly based on the working of lava stone, used both in construction and in furnishing components. The production of wrought iron and carved wood artefacts is notable, although now marginal.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: S.S. 121 exit Piano Tavola dir.
Belpasso
train: Circumetnea railway
bus: AST

BIANCAVILLA



HISTORY

Biancavilla (23,787 inhabitants) stands on a terrace of a mountain, 515 metres above sea level. Much of its territory is hilly, with the presence of small volcanoes that have given rise to caves of considerable natural interest. The foundation of the town of Biancavilla dates back to 1488, when some families of Albanian origin, led by Cesare Masi, obtained permission from Count Moncada to found a town in the vicinity of ancient Adernò. The colony was settled in the area then called Callicari. Apparently, the present name was given to the city in honour of Queen Bianca of Navarra, who married Martin the Younger, obtaining this territory as a dowry. Spared by the earthquake of 1693 and the lava from Etna in the eruption of 1669, it underwent a great demographic boost due to the influx of populations from neighbouring countries. During this period, the Albanian group disappeared for good, so that all traces of its origins were lost. In the first half of the 19th century, the town experienced a remarkable cultural ferment thanks to the work of Salvatore Portal, founder of a Botanical Garden in his own home. The years between the 19th and 20th centuries were marked by the political figure of Mayor Alfio Bruno, who carried out numerous public works, including theatres and aqueducts. During the same period, the Milanese architect Carlo Sada worked in Biancavilla. The futurist poet Antonio Bruno (1891-1932), the sensitive author of numerous works, was born in Biancavilla.



ART & MONUMENTS

In the historical centre, on Piazza Roma, stands the city's most important monument, the Mother Church, dedicated to S. Maria dell'Elemosina. Dating back to the 17th century, it features an ancient façade happily harmonised with the more modern one designed by the Milanese architect Carlo Sada. The church, with three naves, houses in a chapel the Byzantine icon of Our Lady of the Alms, brought, according to tradition, by Albanian refugees. At the end of the left aisle is the chapel of San Placido, richly painted by the painter Giuseppe Tamo da Brescia (1726). By the same author is the large canvas of the Madonna dell'Elemosina with Saints. Also on Piazza Roma is the Church of the Rosary, with a Baroque façade by architect Carlo Sada. Other interesting churches are the Church of the Annunziata, inside which one can admire paintings by Giuseppe Tamo da Brescia and a large oil painting on canvas of St. Anthony the Abbot, a work attributed to Bernardinus Niger Graecus, and the Church of the Mercede, in which a cycle of dry paintings by Giuseppe Tamo depicting the history of the Order of Mercede is preserved. In the town, there are very elegant mansions such as Palazzo Ciarlo and Palazzo Bruno.



Church of Santa Maria Annunziata

On the edge of the historical centre stands Villa delle Favare, an 18th-century residence of the Moncada counts, enlarged in the early 19th century by the new owners, the Marquises of Favare. Today, it houses a multi-purpose cultural centre with a library, conference room, exhibition hall and displays.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

Easter
• Holy Week Procession

October
1/10 - Feast of Patron Saints (Our Lady of the Alms, St. Zeno and St. Placido) and procession of the Byzantine icon of Our Lady of the Alms.



PRODUCTS

Large variety of agricultural products (citrus fruits, prickly pears, olives, grapes) and confectionery (schiumone, typical chocolate and egg yolk ice cream), almond pastries and confectionery products.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: S.S. 121 dir. Paternò
train: Circumetnea railway
bus: I.S.E.A.

BRONTE



HISTORY

The municipality of Bronte, (19,408 inhabitants) with its territory of 24,990 hectares extending from a minimum altitude of 380 metres to a maximum of 3,112 metres, is among the largest in the province of Catania. Although myth has it that the Cyclops Bronte, son of Neptune, was the founder and king of the city of the same name, its historical origins actually date back to the Sicilians who were the first inhabitants of the area, around the 8th century BC. Several dominations have followed, including that of the Arabs, who transplanted the pistachio tree in this area. The act of constitution of the Municipality of Bronte is dated 1535, when Charles V, to make tax collection and the administration of justice more effective in our area, united the 24 pre-existing hamlets into a single university, which he called 'Bronte' (Fidelissima Brontis Universitas). On 10 October 1799, the King of Naples Ferdinand IV donated Maniace Abbey, with its annexed territory, to the English admiral Horatio Nelson, naming him "Duke of Bronte", as a reward for his help in repressing the Parthenopean Republic. In 1860, during Garibaldi's expedition to Sicily, a series of social tensions were created that led to the sadly famous 'Fatti di Bronte' (Bronte events): a riot broke out in early August, which ended with the massacre of the 'cappelli' (the people of Bronte of more affluent economic status). Once the riots had been quelled, Bixio had the mixed war commission intervene in Bronte to hold a quick and expeditious trial against those considered to be the leaders of the revolt, who were shot in the presence of the entire population on 9 August 1860, in the small square in front of the church of San Vito.



Collegio Capizzi



ART & MONUMENTS

The various historical episodes that occurred in its territory make Bronte a city rich in cultural, monumental and artistic heritage, especially churches, although many have been lost due to earthquakes or neglect: the Church of S. Blandano, the Church of the Sacro Cuore, Casa Radice and Collegio Capizzi, one of the most important cultural centres on the entire island. 13 km from Bronte is the 'Castello of Nelson', a building complex that has been owned by the municipality since 1981. Recently renovated, part has been used as a museum and part as a study and conference centre.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

February

3 - *Feast of the Patron Saint Blaise Easter*

- Holy Week Procession

August

1/10 (every three years) - *Feast of Our Lady of the Annunciation*

October

- Pistachio Festival



PRODUCTS

Bronte is universally recognised as the city of pistachios. Already transplanted by the Arabs in the hostile sciaroso soil, the plant draws nourishment almost miraculously from the lava rock and, fertilised by the ash continually ejected by the volcano, produces the finest quality pistachio.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania

car: A18 ME-CT exit Fiumefreddo

train: Circumetnea railway

bus: I.S.E.A.

CASTIGLIONE DI SICILIA



HISTORY

Castiglione di Sicilia (3,382 inhabitants) is a centre rich in history and charm, with one of the largest territories in the province, inside the Etna Park and the Alcantara Park. Its history is already inherent in its name, which derives from Castel Leone, an ancient fortification that dominated the Alcantara valley, the remains of which can still be visited. A strategic position that attracted the interest of the Greeks as early as 403 BC. Over the centuries came the Romans, who built bridges, the Arabs, who revolutionised the irrigation systems and even managed to breed crocodiles in the Alcantara river, the Normans and Swabians, under whom Castiglione became a royal city. Ruggero di Lauria was its last feudal lord. Under all the dominations Castiglione developed and prospered: the castle continued to fortify itself and churches and palaces were built thanks to the wealth from the cultivation and processing of flax and hazelnuts.



ART & MONUMENTS

The historical centre of Castiglione is rich in numerous monuments bearing witness to different eras and dominations. Numerous churches and aristocratic palaces are embellished with decorations. In one of the oldest quarters stands the church of Sant'Antonio Abate with its marble inlays, Baroque façade and the Gothic-Byzantine bell tower. Other churches worth mentioning are St. Peter and Paul's, with its bell-tower dating back to 1105, and the basilica of the Madonna



Castiglione di Sicilia - view

della Catena with its monumental Baroque façade. Near the Alcantara river stands the Byzantine Cuba or Church of Santa Domenica, dated between the 7th and 9th centuries AD, considered the most valuable and significant architectural asset of the area. The 12th century Lauria Castle is also worth a visit. Besides the historical monuments, Castiglione is proud to possess two true landscape monuments, the Alcantara Gorge and Mount Etna, which can offer tourists various itineraries and excursion possibilities.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

May

1st Sunday - Feast of Patroness Maria SS. della Catena

August

• "Castiglione e i suoi sapori" (Castiglione and its flavours) event dedicated to typical products and local crafts.

10 - 'Goblets of Stars' - tasting of fine wines.



PRODUCTS

The added value of this territory is its historical wine-growing vocation: the numerous companies that now produce and market Etna's DOC wines, also attracting substantial flows of wine tourists, who also wish to rediscover the local gastronomy offered by the typical restaurants and many agritourisms. Castiglione is also the realm of hazelnuts used in the local pastries, which boast a noble tradition to be discovered and savoured.



CONNECTIONS

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



HISTORY

Linguaglossa (5,470 inhabitants) is located on the north-eastern slope of Etna, 550 metres above sea level. It is one of the municipalities of the Etna Park and its territory extends to the summit of the volcano, including the vast Ragabo pine forest. There are several hypotheses on the place name Linguaglossa. The most common one makes it derive from the ancient name 'Linguarossa', meaning 'red' as in 'big', referring to a 'big tongue of lava' that went as far as the places where the ancient village was built. The historic core developed close to the 'reggia trazzera', once an important route to the interior of the island. Timber and resin from the Pineta used to pass through here on their way to the Ionian ports. The first settlement dates back to 1145, during the Norman era. In 1282, after the Vespers, the Aragonese assigned these lands to Ruggero di Lauria, admiral of the Siculo-Aragonese fleet, for his military exploits against the Angevins. Linguaglossa long supplied timber and pitch for the Messina Arsenal. For a time it was a fief of the Filangieri family and was then given by King Martin in long concession to the Crisafi family, whose members already held public office in Messina. It then passed as a barony to the Cottone (1568), the Patti (1579), and finally to the Bonanno and Gioieni, obtaining the title of principality in 1626. In 1634, at the height of the Thirty Years' War, Philip IV of Spain, after a considerable outlay of money, declared Linguaglossa a beloved and free city. Today, Linguaglossa is an internationally renowned summer and winter tourist resort.



ART & MONUMENTS

Linguaglossa is characterised by a well-preserved historical centre with numerous alleys where you can admire ancient portals, a few Baroque buildings and the alternation of lava stone from Etna (basements, windows, masks) and sandstone and tuff from the nearby heights. But what characterises the centre are the late 19th-century and Art Nouveau palazzetti overlooking the main street and squares. Such as the Town Hall, designed by Pietro Grassi (1907), with elegant mitered mullioned windows with two lights. In the monumental sector, the Mother Church, erected in 1613, which preserves a wooden choir dating from 1728 and is rich in paintings, and the Church of S. Egidio, patron saint of the town, built under the Angevin dynasty, which features a splendid Gothic portal with the town's coat of arms, are important. Around the Church of S. Egidio, it is possible to visit the oldest medieval village. The Church of SS. Vito and Antonio, from the 17th century, with a portal in lava stone, and the Church of S. Francesco di Paola from the 16th century, which preserves a distinguished marble statue of the Madonna dell'Oretta, by Gagini (1478-1536), are also of great architectural interest. Also of interest is the Church of Jesus and



Linguaglossa - view

Maria, built in 1600 and for the past 25 years closed for worship. A single nave with a barrel-vaulted roof, simple in style, it is interesting for a statue of the Madonna and Child showing the sacred heart, a rare manifestation in the baby Jesus. For nature lovers, Linguaglossa is above all the mountain: Mount Etna. The pine forests of Linguaglossa and the ski resort of Piano Provenzana are a meeting point for fans of alpine skiing, cross-country skiing and ski mountaineering, who can also enjoy a horizon that stretches from Taormina to the coast of Calabria. In summer, from Piano Provenzana one can reach the summit areas of the volcano and discover nature trails of rare beauty.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

April

25 - Etna Sound Festival - alternative rock music event.

August

16 - Feast of St Roch

September

1 - Feast of the Patron Saint Aegidius Abbot



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: A18 ME-CT, exit Fiumefreddo S.S.
120 dir. Randazzo
train: Circumetnea railway
bus: Etnatrasporti

MALETTO



HISTORY

Maletto (4,073 inhabitants) is located on the northern slopes of Mount Etna, about 1,000 metres above sea level. It is the highest municipality in the province of Catania, set in a suggestive naturalistic context dominated by Mount Etna, with the Nebrodi Mountains in the background. The surrounding area has been populated since the Neolithic period, but the origin of Maletto dates back to the 13th century when, in 1263, under Swabian rule, Manfredi Maletta, Count of Mineo, built a watchtower on a rocky spur called the 'Torre Fano and communication tower known as the 'Torre del Fano'. From then on, the place was called Maletto. The fortified tower became 'Castello' and the first dwellings were built around it. In the mid-14th century, the castle and the fiefdom of Maletto passed to the Spadafora family. During the 15th century, the Spadafora family built the urban centre, gathering a population that was consolidated at the beginning of the 17th century, when Maletto was granted the title of Principality, which favoured the influx of new inhabitants driven by various benefits. It became an autonomous municipality in 1812 with the abolition of feudalism.



ART & MONUMENTS

The historical centre of Maletto, with its small, quiet, lava paved streets and 17th and 18th century houses, is dominated by the fortress of the Castle. Along the streets of the centre, among the most significant monuments to visit are the Mother Church, with an imposing façade and a scenic access staircase decorated with lava stone pilasters, and the churches of S. Michele Arcangelo (16th cent.), which houses 17th-century paintings, and S. Antonio di Padova (18th cent.), where two wooden statues by Bagnasco can be admired. For lovers of nature trails,

of interest are the Pizzo-Filicia suburban park, the Palmento del Campiere, and the Maletto forest.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

June

1st week - Strawberry Festival

September

2nd Sunday - Feast of the Patron

S. Anthony of Padua

3rd Sunday - Feast of St. Vincent Ferreri

December

• 'Ciaramella' Festival



PRODUCTS

The agricultural product for which Maletto is famous is the strawberry, but all the fruit produced and the wine and dairy products are excellent. Catering is flourishing with typical food and wine products, in particular ferla mushrooms.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania

car: S.S. 121 dir. Paternò - S.S. 284

dir. Adrano

train: Circumetnea railway



Maletto - view



HISTORY

Maniace (3,670 inhabitants) is a mountain municipality at 787 metres above sea level that borders the province of Messina. Although the municipality has an ancient history, it was formed during the 20th century and only achieved municipal autonomy in April 1981. Known during the Arab domination as Ghiran àd Daquiq, it took and kept its present name following the victory over the Arabs by the Byzantine general Giorgio Maniace in 1040. The presence of the Benedictine Abbey of 'Sancta Maria Maniacensis', due to the vastness of its territorial possessions, gave it considerable splendour during the Norman period. Thereafter, there was no more news of this flourishing centre. The soil of Maniace took on the appearance of a deserted heath and for centuries was traversed mainly by shepherds on transhumance. From 1945, the peasant movement began in the Nelson fief for the application of laws concerning a fairer distribution of the produce and the allocation of uncultivated land, which favoured the rebirth of the municipality.



ART & MONUMENTS

One of the monuments in the Maniace area is the Nelson Castle, which stands in the territory of the ancient Benedictine Abbey of S. Maria. The castle is now owned by the municipality of Bronte. Attached to it is a small English cemetery where the Dukes of Bronte and the Scottish poet William Sharp, who also wrote under the pseudonym Fiona Macleod, are buried. The cemetery, still owned by the Nelson family, has been given to the municipality of Maniace. Inside the castle is a small church, an interesting example of late-Norman architecture, with a beautiful ogival marble portal and capitals depicting the deadly sins. The wooden ceiling is from the Norman period. Inside is a polyptych of the 13th-century Sicilian school, depicting the Madonna Enthroned with Saints Blaise, Anthony Abbot and Lucy; below is a Byzantine panel with the Madonna and Child, said to be the one brought by George Maniace from Greece.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

January

19/20 - Feast of the Patron Saint Sebastian

August

1st Saturday and Sunday - Peach and pear festival.



PRODUCTS

In particular, the products of these lands are pears and peaches, but also important is the production of cow and sheep cheeses, the ricotta and provola of the Nebrodi.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: S.S. 121 dir. Paternò - S.S. 284
dir. Adrano
bus: Interbus



Nelson Castle



HISTORY

Of all the towns on the Ionian slope, the municipality of Milo (1,063 inhabitants), thanks to its height of 750 metres is the one that enjoys the widest view of the sea. An enviable position that has always been an indication of its tourist vocation since ancient times. The first historical information about Milo dates back to the Middle Ages, when barons, bishops and the powerful of Sicily often climbed up to the water of Milu on horseback, a place where John of Aragon, Duke of Randazzo, spent his summers and had a church built dedicated to S. Andrew and assigned a fiefdom there. During the life of the duke, Milo, which had become the summer political centre of Sicily, acquired great importance and grew in population. Subsequently, Bishop Simone del Pozzo granted the church and fiefdom to the Carthusian monks, who built a convent there. built a convent there, which later passed to the Monastery of Santa Maria di Nuova Luce and then, in 1391, to Simone di Necroponte da Randazzo. Juridically, the territory of Milo was part of the county of Mascali until 1815 when it was annexed to the village of Giarre. In the following years, Milo was often threatened and damaged by lava flows, the last of which, in 1950, destroyed much of the territory, forcing the population to take refuge in neighbouring municipalities. It was during those terrible months that the idea of municipal autonomy began to mature, which was achieved in January 1955.



ART & MONUMENTS

For those arriving in Milo, a visit to the Piazza Belvedere, at the entrance to the town, is a must. As its name suggests, it offers a marvellous view of the Ionian coast and the inland municipalities sloping down to the sea. Behind the square stands the Mother Church, dedicated to the patron saint Saint Andrew and built with lava stone from Etna. For those who love open-air tourism, the Milo area offers numerous nature trails and many possibilities for trekking, walking and hiking.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

July
1st Sunday - Feast of the Sacred Heart (Fornazzo)
Last Sunday - Feast of the Patron Saint Andrew

August

- "ArteCulturaEventi"- culture and entertainment review
- "Venus of Milo"- historical beauty contest



Mother church

- "MusicaMilo"- music review
- "Premio Angelo Musco"- theatrical and literary review dedicated to Angelo Musco.

September

- "ViniMilo" - a nationwide event eagerly awaited every year by all those involved in the wine industry.

November

First two weeks - 'San Martino e il Vulcano' (Fornazzo), an event featuring typical products, conferences and music.



PRODUCTS

The town's pride and joy is its Etna Bianco superiore wine.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: A18 ME-CT exit Giarre
bus: AST



HISTORY

Nicolosi (7,092 inhabitants) is located on the southern slope of Etna, the gateway to the volcano. Its territory extends within the 'Etna Park', from the 700 metres of the town centre to the 3,350 metres of the summit of Etna's central crater. The original nucleus of Nicolosi was built around the Benedictine monastery of S. Nicola l'Arena, at the beginning of the 12th century, but was destroyed several times over the centuries by imposing lava flows. Nevertheless, frequent visits were made to the site by Queen Eleanor, wife of Frederick II of Aragon and, later, Queen Blanche of Navarre, wife of King Martin. Thanks to the courage of Queen Bianca, the inhabitants did not abandon the village during the eruption of 1408. In those years, the village of Nicolosi grew in importance to the point that, in 1447, it became a fief of the Prince of Paternò. The terrible eruption of 1669 destroyed Nicolosi. The eruption ceased on 11 July and created near Nicolosi the Monti Rossi (Red Mountains), the largest of Etna's lateral cones. In 1671, reconstruction began in the town. In the 19th century the most important event for Nicolosi was, without a doubt, the cutting of the axis of what we now call Via Etna, then Via Ferdinanda, as it brought about a rotation in the development of the town on the direct line to Etna. The road, desired by Don Alvaro Paternò Castello, prince of Manganelli, had the noble purpose of making Etna more accessible. In the original plan, the route was to go well beyond Nicolosi, which did not happen until a century later.



ART & MONUMENTS

Nicolosi offers an interesting artistic heritage. In Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II is the Mother Church, built to a design by Vaccarini in the first half of the 18th century. It has a 19th-century style façade with a lava stone bell tower. Continuing on we come to the Church of S. Giuseppe, whose works were completed in 1886. The simple façade is adorned with a lava stone portal. Also worthy of note are the churches of S. Maria delle Grazie, S. Maria del Carmelo and S. Francesco. Outside the town is the ancient Benedictine monastery of S. Nicolò l'Arena. The area is also dotted with 'altars' and votive chapels dedicated to the Patron Saints: of particular interest is the one known as the 'Three Altars', built in the 18th century at the point where the lava flow stopped in 1776. Museums include the 'House Museum of Peasant Civilisation' and the 'Volcanological Museum', which collects the remains of lava material from Etna. The Nicolosi area is home to the 'Nicolosi Nord' ski resort that, in addition to 20 kilometres of slopes, offers skiers and snowboarders a view of the entire Gulf of Catania and the Simeto valley.



Nicolosi Nord Ski Resort



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

January
17 and 1st Sunday in July - Feast of St. Anthony Abbot

March
19 - Feast of St. Joseph

June
13th and 2nd Sundays in August - Feast of the Patron Saint Anthony of Padua

July/August

- Stars & Lapilli' - summer events

September
• "Bread and Pizza

November
• "Etna Fruits"

December/January
• "Snow and Lapilli' - Christmas events



PRODUCTS

There is an interesting eno-gastronomic tour of typical local products such as wine, tasty hillside fruit, mushrooms and local cheeses. Handicrafts, in addition to working with lava stone, offer the possibility of observing basket weavers and wrought iron and woodworking.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: S.S. 121 CT-PA , S.S. 284
dir. Randazzo
bus: AST



HISTORY

The municipality of Pedara (12,753 inhabitants) is located at the foot of Mount Etna, 610 metres above sea level. Pedara's history begins after the arrival of the Normans. In 1388, the bishop authorised the inhabitants to build the first parish church and this constituted the birth of one of the first Christian communities in the area. During the 15th century, however, following two catastrophic eruptions, the Pedaresi gradually moved further down the valley to the present site. For about 50 years, the town experienced the most prosperous period of its history. Becoming a barony, it was an important centre of economic and social activity and the richest and most organised in Etna, but the two earthquakes of 1669 and 1693 irreparably halted its development. The town was rebuilt thanks to Don Diego Pappalardo of the Hospitaller Order of Malta. The last part of the 18th century saw the rise of the landed bourgeoisie. The abolition of Sicilian feudal jurisdiction in 1812 meant the beginning of a new transformation for Pedara. In 1817, thanks to a decree issued in Naples by King Ferdinand IV, the town became an autonomous municipality and this allowed the community to recover. The 19th and 20th centuries were characterised above all by considerable urban and building development.



ART & MONUMENTS

Pedara has a charming historic centre. In Piazza Don Diego stands the Basilica di S. Caterina, one of the most visited and studied churches in the province. The entire architectural complex is considered a splendid example of Etna's 'black church'. Inside, one can admire frescoes by Giovanni Lo Coco and numerous canvases including a painting by Mattia Preti. Outside, one can admire the bell tower and a rare example of a sundial. A wide and scenic staircase leads to the church of S. Antonio Abate. The interior, with its unusual two-nave plan, is enriched with paintings, sculptures and gilding. The Sanctuary of Maria SS. Annunziata has a main body dating from the end of the 16th century, while the rest of the building was completed between the 19th and 20th centuries with the addition of two side aisles. The Church of Santa Maria della Stella, built in 1735, has an octagonal floor plan inside which there is an ancient fresco from the 18th century. In Piazza Don Diego stands the palace of Don Diego Pappalardo. On the outside, one can still admire the imposing arch with side steps. Behind the Basilica is the palace of don Diego Pappalardo's descendants, a beautiful example of the typical architecture of Etna's aristocratic residences of the 18th century.



St Catherine's Basilica



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

January

17 and following Sunday - Feast of St. Anthony Abbot

March

25 - Feast of the Patron Saint Mary of the Annunciation

Easter

• Holy Week Procession

May

1 - Traditional pilgrimage to Our Lady of Three Mountains.

July/August

• 'Estate Pedarese' - sporting, theatrical and musical events.

August

• 'Summer Fair' - handicrafts and typical products.

September

2nd weekend - End of summer festival of Maria SS. Annunziata.

October

• Mushroom Festival

November

25 - Feast of St. Catherine of Alexandria



CONNECTIONS

From Catania

car: Catania ring road RA15 - exit Paesi Etnei

bus: AST

PIEDIMONTE ETNEO



HISTORY

The territory of Piedimonte Etneo (4,052 inhabitants) extends on the eastern slope of Etna for about 2646 hectares, of which 794 fall within the territory of the Etna Park. Its origins date back to the dawn of the 17th century, when the territory was part of the possessions of the Gravina Cruillas, barons of Francofonte and Princes of Palagonia. It was Ignazio Sebastiano Gravina Amato who, on 30 August 1687, obtained the 'populandi' licence from the Tribunal del Real Patrimonio, which started the birth of the new town. Although the name requested from the Royal Curia was 'Piedimont', most of the inhabitants continued to call it by its original name of Belvedere, due to the beauty of its views. Later the name Piedimonte prevailed, to which Etneo was added in 1862. The founder had not gone beyond the building of a small church, dedicated to St Ignatius, a dozen 'casuncole terrane', a few ovens and a small lodging for his service. His descendants enlarged the village and, in particular, Ferdinando Francesco, the fourth lord of Piedimonte, was the promoter of the considerable 18th-century expansion of the village and of the urbanistic imprint that still characterises it today, thanks to the opening of streets of unusual width. Important buildings were constructed, including the aqueduct and the 'Porta S. Fratello'. Piedimonte continued to grow during the 18th century, with the opening of new roads, the construction of palaces along the main street and the Mother Church with its large adjacent square. Piedimonte remained under the rule of the Gravina family until the abolition of feudal rights. In 1812, it was elevated to a municipality.



ART & MONUMENTS

Piedimonte's monuments include the 18th-century Mother Church, dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary, which dominates Piazza Madre Chiesa. Of vast dimensions, the 'matrix' presents, unique in Piedimonte, a basilical layout with three naves supported by massive arches converging towards the wide apse, in which the high altar is located. Inside, in the aisles, there is a double series of valuable marble altars adorned with large canvases and a 17th-century polychrome wooden statue. The façade mixes classical and vernacular architectural elements. The painting of Our Lady of Graces is interesting because in it we see reproduced in their original location many of the ancient monuments of the town that have now disappeared: the lily-shaped bell tower of St. Michael's Church, the massive crenellated volume of the prison and the first church of St. Ignatius, the Prince's palace and the old fountain on the floor of the Matrice. From the Mother Church, cross the main street to Piazza Umberto where



Vittorio Emanuele II Street

the Convent of the Capuchin Fathers with the adjoining Church of the Immaculate Conception. The sacred furnishings of the Church of the Immacolata are among the most precious preserved in Piedimonte. Of great value is the tribune of the high altar that incorporates a grandiose wooden ciborium with minute carvings. Among the paintings are the two canvases depicting St. Anthony of Padua and S. Francis, while a splendid Nativity of Jesus can be admired on the central altar.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

July

31 - Feast of the Patron Saint Ignatius of Loyola

September

26/27/28 - Grape Harvest Festival



PRODUCTS

Piedimonte is part of the Etna D.O.C. wine production belt with its excellent Etna Rosso wine.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: Highway A18 ME-CT, exit Fiumefreddo
bus: Etna Trasporti

RAGALNA



HISTORY

The municipality of Ragalna (3,580 inhabitants) is located on the south-western slope of Etna, 830 metres above sea level. The earliest evidence of its origins dates back to Norman times: in fact, a document from 1136 records an ancient name for the town, Rachalena, referring to the donation made by Count Roger I's son-in-law to the monastery of San Nicola in Pannacchio for marrying his daughter Flandrina. In 1400 Ragalna became the property of the Moncada family of Paternò.

In 1780, the village of Ragalna, which was rich in land belonging to Paternò landowners, was threatened by a lava flow that, after a procession of the relics of Saint Barbara, brought from the Church of Paternò, came to a halt near the contrada Eredità. During the Second World War, it was a shelter for many Paternò families who thus escaped the bombing of Paternò by the allied troops. And it remained a district of this city until 29 April 1985, when it became an autonomous municipality.



ART & MONUMENTS

Ragalna, also known as 'Etna's terrace', offers its visitors a view of the delightful Piazza Cisterna, interesting for its unevenness filled with elegant steps. The name is due to the presence of an ancient cistern, a rainwater collection tank, once built to make up for the lack of springs. Of the many cisterns in the town, it is the best preserved. In the square stands the Mother Church, dedicated to Our Lady of Carmel, dating back to the 19th century. In a narrow alley you can admire the remains of the Church of Canfarella, probably the first to be built in the village. The church, now deconsecrated, has some frescoes still visible on the walls. It has long belonged to private owners and is incorporated into a rural complex. In Piazza S. Barbara stands the church of the same name. The Church of S. Barbara was built from the 1920s onwards with the concrete contribution of the many faithful who, at the end of services, would reach a nearby quarry and return with a load of stones to be used to enlarge and complete it. In the territory of Ragalna, at 1700 metres above sea level, is the Serra La Nave Astrophysical Observatory, a qualified research centre. For those who love nature trails, there are several caves excavated by lava, such as the 'Grotte del Catanese', among the most beautiful on Etna, which consist of a single tunnel just over 20 metres long with a characteristic pointed arch shape.



St Barbara Church



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

September

Last Sunday - Feast of the Patron Saint Mary of Mount Carmel

November

• Festival of sausage, 'Caliceddi' (wild vegetables) and wine.



PRODUCTS

This area lends itself well to the traditional agricultural activities of the Etean territory: of particular importance is the Ragalna oil, highly renowned and sought after by consumers; it is a PDO oil recognised by the Region of Sicily, of very high quality. Handicrafts, on the other hand, offer the special working of lava stone, the 'ceramization of lava stone', with creations created by fusing ceramics with lava basalt.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: S.S. 121 dir Paternò - S.S. 284 exit
S. M. di Licodia-Ragalna
train: Stazione Centrale F.S. Catania
bus: Autolinee Zappalà&Torrìsi



HISTORY

The municipality of Randazzo (11,160 inhabitants), on the northern slope of Mount Etna, 754 metres above sea level, is located in an intermediate zone between the Alcantara and Simeto rivers. Of medieval origin, Randazzo lies on a territory where the most disparate civilisations have met: Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Normans and Aragonese have succeeded one another, leaving traces of high documentary and artistic value. The presence of human settlements in the territory of present-day Randazzo from the 6th century B.C. seems to have been ascertained, as evidenced by the numerous archaeological finds dating back to that period, discovered in the S. Anastasia and Mischi districts. The results of further excavation campaigns would attest to the persistence of inhabited agglomerations in later periods up to the time of the Arab domination of the island, during which Randazzo seems to have assumed an important strategic role, maintained later during the Norman period, to which the construction of the fortified garrison and the city walls dates back. Around 1282, King Peter I of Aragon turned it into a military base for the war against the Angevins. In 1305 it was a possession of Frederick II of Aragon, who made it his permanent residence and obtained the title of Duke of Randazzo in 1332. And it was due to its particular strategic position on the itinerary that led from the interior of the island from Palermo to Nicosia, and then branching off in the two directions of Catania and Messina, that Randazzo owed its configuration as a city owned by the royal domain and, for this reason, escaped the infeudations. In fact, in the year 1233, Randazzo became a demesne town of the Vallo di Demone and was given the appellation 'Plaena' by Frederick II, in the Parliament of Messina. Until the 16th century, the town was divided into three quarters in which three different languages were spoken: Greek in the San Nicola quarter, Latin in the Santa Maria quarter and Lombard in the San Martino quarter, as the town was formed from the union of three different ethnic groups. Randazzo has almost entirely preserved its medieval appearance, having always been spared by the volcano despite being the municipality closest to Etna's central crater (about 15 km).

Having maintained its medieval appearance intact, Randazzo retains a strong charm. The visitor who walks through its streets and alleyways made of lava stone can admire monuments of considerable architectural merit. Worthy of note is the Swabian-founded church of S. Maria, located on Piazza Basilica. The façade with cusped bell tower was rebuilt in 1852-1863. It has 13th-century apses in the form of crenellated towers, on the right side there is a striking Catalan Gothic portal and it is completed by a repertoire of three-mullioned, mullioned and single-lancet windows. The interior contains frescoes, canvases and inlaid marble from various periods, including a panel painting on the right side door attributed to Girolamo Alibrandi.

The Church of San Nicolò, built in the 14th century, the largest in Randazzo, was rebuilt in 1583. The Latin-cross interior preserves numerous works by Gagini, including a statue of St Nicholas in the Chair and a Gothic-style baptismal font. The Church of San Martino, of Swabian foundation, has a splendid 14th century bell tower. Inside are works of the Gagesque school and a polyptych attributed to Antonello de Saliba. Also characteristic are the 14th century Casa Spitaleri, the ruins of the mediaeval walls with the 1753 Porta di S. Martino (St. Martin's Gate) and the Swabian Castle, which has been remodelled several times and now houses the 'Paolo Vagliasindi' Archaeological Museum, with exhibits ranging from the Neolithic to the Siculo-Greek period. A short distance from the town is the Benedictine Abbey of Maniace, founded in 1174 by Margaret, mother of William II, and in 1799 donated to Admiral Nelson with the Duchy of Bronte.



Via degli Archi street



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

January

17 - Feast of St. Anthony Abbot

Easter

• - Holy Week Procession

March

19 - Feast of the Patron Saint Joseph, with the traditional torchlight procession

April

• - Sicilian dessert exhibition

July

- "Relive the Middle Ages" - historical procession, wine and food, jester performances, flag-wavers and musicians.

- 'Randazzo Arte' - painting, sculpture and photography competition. Over the three days also music and an arts and crafts fair.

August

• Feast of the Co-Patron Saint Mary of the Assumption



Church of St Martin



PRODUCTS

Wine grapes, hazelnuts, olives, almonds and chestnuts are the main agricultural products. The 'fungi di ferra' (a tasty local mushroom whose scientific name is *pleurotus ferulae*) are the characteristic ingredient of the best local cuisine. Handicrafts, on the other hand, offer objects in lava stone, copper, wood, wrought iron, terracotta and artistic glass.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: A18 CT/ME - exit Fiumefreddo
train: Circumetnea railway
bus: Etnatrasporti

S. MARIA DI LICODIA



HISTORY

S. Maria di Licodia (7,013 inhabitants) stands in a hilly area, 443 metres above sea level. The town derives its name from the Benedictine Abbey of Santa Maria and boasts very ancient origins. Evidence of this is provided by the numerous archaeological finds discovered in the area, attributed to Sicilian, Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Arab and Norman settlements. Today's S. Maria di Licodia was founded in August 1143, the year in which Simone del Vasto, Count of Policastro and Lord of Paternò, together with Countess Tommasa, entrusted the coenoby and the church dedicated to the Virgin Mary of Licodia to Geremia, a Benedictine monk from the church of Sant'Agata. The count gave the monks the authority to found a hamlet, subject only to the jurisdiction of the prior of the monastery of Licodia. The diploma of enfeoffment was confirmed by William II, King of Sicily, in 1168. The monastery was elevated to the status of abbey in 1205 by the Catanese bishop Ruggero Oco, who appointed Fra' Pietro Celio as the first perpetual abbot of Santa Maria di Licodia, also giving him the authority to extend the pontifical and pastoral insignia to his successors. The abbey possessed a library where, in the 14th century, 'the Benedictine Constitutions' were written in Sicilian. With the institutional reform of 1816, and the birth of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, the town lost its ancient monastic lordship, being aggregated to Paternò. It regained administrative autonomy in 1840 with a decree issued by Ferdinand II.



ART & MONUMENTS

One of the city's most significant monuments is the Bell Tower, built by the Normans on older Arab foundations and incorporated into the body of the Benedictine monastery. This monastic complex is exemplary testimony to the historical importance that the site held. The complex, gathered around the quadrangular cloister, gave the exact dimension of how the village and its people gravitated around it. Today, only the Bell Tower and part of the building, which is now used as the Town Hall, escaped the destruction of the monastery complex in 1929 to make way for the current school building. The historical buildings are also interesting, including Palazzo Ardizzone, one of the oldest noble buildings in the city. The ancient wing dates back to the late 17th century. During the 18th century, the second wing was built, whose façade, in white stone and 'Umbertino' style, was completed at the end of the 19th century. Palazzo Bruno is a stately home built between the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th. The main portal, in lava stone, features an interesting grotesque mask. A characteristic element of the palace is the tower, created on the model of the Norman tower during the 19th century. Inside the building



Fontana del cherubino

there is the ancient ferculum of St Joseph, dating back to the 17th century, with which the patron saint was carried in procession. Among the ecclesiastical buildings, mention must be made of the Mother Church of Santa Maria di Licodia, direct heir to the ancient Benedictine abbey. Among the most significant works in it are the wooden statues of St. Gertrude the Great, St. Benedict the Abbot and St. Joseph, a late-medieval polychrome wooden crucifix of the Sicilian school, a wooden statue of St. Louis and paintings by M. Desiderato and G. Rapisarda.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

Easter

- Holy Week Procession

August

Last Sat/Sun/Mon - Feast of the Patron Saint Joseph

September

- August
- Last Sat/Sun/Mon - Feast of the Patron Saint Joseph

December

- Christmas Events



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: S.S.121 PA-CT, S.S. 284 dir.
Randazzo, S.S. 575 dir. Troina
train: Circumetnea railway
bus: I.S.E.A.

SANTA VENERINA



HISTORY

Santa Venerina (8,379 inhabitants) is located in a hilly coastal area, 337 metres above sea level. The present territory in antiquity was largely characterised by dense woodland and small plains and hills inhabited by the Sicilians. It was later subject to Greek, Roman and Byzantine domination, as attested by the remains of baths and an ancient oratory dating from that period. After the period of Arab domination, with the advent of the Normans and the Christian reconquest, Benedictine monks arrived in the area, to whom the Grand Count Roger granted the entire area of Aci. Until the 18th century, the history of the territory of Santa Venerina was one with that of the fief of Acireale. In 1735, the deputies of the Cappella of Santa Venera di Acireale, forced to find new revenue to meet their commitments for the construction of the ferculum of Santa Venera, set up a free fair in contrada Bongiaro, along the royal road from Messina to Catania. The investment must have been worthwhile, since in the years that followed, the same deputies and many fellow citizens and burghers of Aci purchased land in the areas vitalised by the free fair, beginning the process of populating the area. Shortly afterwards, in 1747, the same deputies built a small church in the area that was dedicated to Santa Venera, the patron saint of Aci. The new church constituted the nucleus around which a veritable hamlet developed with over 600 residents, dedicated to agriculture and livestock breeding. There is no doubt that the name Santa Venerina derives from Santa Venera. Around 1850, there was a real demographic and economic development of the village. The numerous distilleries that sprang up in the area and the rich wine production, together with a highly skilled craftsmanship, made it a flourishing, economically and socially developed town. The constitution of Santa Venerina as an autonomous municipality took place in 1936.



ART & MONUMENTS

Of the numerous churches in the town of Santa Venerina, the most important is undoubtedly the Mother Church, dedicated to the patron saint, Santa Venera. Erected in the 18th century in neoclassical style, it contains numerous frescoes by local artists. Another interesting church in the Classical style is the Church of the Sacred Heart, which has a majestic façade with a beautiful dome. The interior is adorned with no less than fifteen altars made of precious marble and stucco. The Temple of St Stephen, a small Byzantine church dating back to the 6th-9th century AD, which has only survived in the form of a ruin, deserves special attention. Also worth mentioning are the remains of the façade of the 'Tenutella' Church, dating from the 16th century. Santa Venerina is also characterised by the presence of ancient distillers, evidence of the rich production

wine production in the 19th century. In one of the hamlets of Santa Venerina, there is an early Christian temple from the 5th century B.C. with frescoed interiors. In the southern part of the town, on the border with Guardia, it is possible to visit the Palmento Museum with an adjoining kiln for working ceramics. The museum is housed in a manor house dating back to 1850, and is divided into sectors: the various rooms of the museum document rural life.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

January
Last Sunday - Feast of St Sebastian

July
26 - Feast of Patron Saint Venera

November
13/14/15 - 'Enoetna' - market exhibition of Etna wines, typical food products and handicrafts.
• "Maria Grazia Cutuli International Prize for Journalism".



PRODUCTS

Local distilleries offer fine alcoholic beverages such as limoncello, fragolino and arancello.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: A18 ME-CT exit Giarre bus:
Autolinee Zappalà&Torrìsi



Santa Venerina - view

SANT'ALFIO



HISTORY

Sant'Alfio (1,667 inhabitants) lies on a beautiful hill that rises from the Ionian Sea towards Mount Etna. Its territory stretches from 400 to 3,300 metres above sea level, offering the visitor, in the space of a few kilometres, the vision of Mediterranean scrub and lava desert. The origin of the town's name is linked to the religious tradition according to which the three brothers, Alfio, Delfio and Cirino were, in 253 A.D., deported to Sicily to be martyred. In the 17th century, Sant'Alfio represented one of the seven 'towers' of the County of Mascali. During this century, the colonisation of the Sant'Alfio area began, when Acese and Catania owners obtained from the Bishop of Catania the emphyteusis concession of large plots of land on the south-eastern slope of Etna and began to build the first scattered farmhouses and to establish their small agricultural holdings. At the beginning of the 17th century, a first urban core was established in the territory of the Contea di Mascali. In the 19th century, the territory passed to the new municipality of Giarre. During this century, thanks to the secular cultivation of vines, S. Alfio became one of the most important wine producers and exporters in the Etna area, experiencing exceptional economic prosperity that quickly increased its size and population. It obtained administrative autonomy from Giarre in 1926.



ART & MONUMENTS

The town of S. Alfio retains an almost unaltered historic centre with narrow, narrow streets on which the main buildings and monuments stand. In the central Piazza Duomo, from the magnificent Belvedere, it is possible to enjoy a beautiful panorama of the Ionian coast from Taormina to the Gulf of Augusta. The square is dominated by the Mother Church, named after the martyred brothers Alfio, Filadelfo and Cirino, with its rough, lava-stone façade topped by a bell tower. Inside are preserved the marble altars enriched with precious altarpieces, including one depicting the three Patron Saints, and a monumental organ of great artistic value. Another important monument is the Calvario Church, dating from the end of the 19th century, which stands at the top of a hill of great scenic interest. It is accessed via an imposing lava stone staircase and inside it features a series of wooden altars, testimony to the fine art of the craftsmen of the time. In the Nucifori district stands the small Church of Nucifori in which a bust of the Madonna of Tindari, to whom the inhabitants are particularly devoted, is preserved. The Church of Magazzeni, located about 6 km from the town, was built in 1958 near the place where, thirty years earlier, an imposing lava flow that was about to hit Sant'Alfio



Mother Church

stopped in front of the relics of the saints carried in procession.



NATURE

With its territory extending between 400 and 3300 metres above sea level, Sant'Alfio offers nature lovers numerous natural and scenic itineraries to explore and discover within the Etna Park. At an altitude of 1540 metres, in the locality of Piano delle Donne, it is possible to admire the Grotta dei Ladri, a curious cavity with a surprising morphology. Of great natural interest in the area surrounding the Citelli Refuge and the Sartorius Mountains is the presence of the Etna white birch (*Betulla Aetnensis*), a typically Nordic plant present at this latitude following a remote glaciation. Another recommended excursion is the one that leads to the Bosco della Cerrita, near the 1865 lava flow, so called because it is essentially made up of turkey oaks, a particular oak that on Etna only in this area becomes woodland. At the end of the 1990s, the Museo 'Della Vite e del Vino' (Museum of Vine and Wine) was set up in the central Piazza Duomo. The museum, structured on two levels, houses on the first floor a permanent photographic exhibition of the 'Vendemmia' to the

beginning of the 20th century, to the second the equipment from private donations that were once used for wine production and those related to rural productivity. Not far from the inhabited centre, along the provincial road leading to Linguaglossa, it is possible to admire the famous 'Castagno dei Cento Cavalli' (Hundred Horses Chestnut), the great naturalistic attraction of the Sant'Alfio area, whose age is estimated at between 2000 and 4000 years. It is considered the oldest and largest tree in Europe. Its name is linked to the tradition that Queen Joanna of Aragon and her retinue of a hundred knights found shelter under its enormous foliage during a storm. Sung about and described by numerous travellers and scholars of the 18th and 19th centuries, and immortalised in the famous painting by J. Houel in the Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg, Russia, the chestnut tree is now a destination for visitors from all over the world, as well as for botanists for whom it is an interesting object of study. It is currently included in a project for the preservation of Cultural and Natural Heritage. A natural monument, the 'Castagno dei Cento Cavalli' was recognised on 18 May 2008 by UNESCO as a "as a 'Monument Messenger of Peace in the World'.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

May

1st Sunday - Feast of the Patron Saints Alfio, Filadelfo and Cirino

18 - Celebration of the Anniversary of the UNESCO recognition of the Castagno dei Cento Cavalli in 2008 as a 'Peace Messenger Monument

July/August

• Summer in Sant'Alfio - with important events such as 'Ciliegia...gioiello dell'Etna', 'Vinpizza', Targa d'argento 'Castagno dei Cento Cavalli'.

October-November

• "Etna Vini" - Handicraft and Food & Wine Week

November

3 - Pilgrimage to the Church of Magazzeni



PRODUCTS

Sant'Alfio offers a wide variety of gastronomic specialities, among which almond pastries, pistachio pastries, hazelnut pastries, walnut pastries and honey deserve a prominent place. Of medium to high quality are the wine and Etna apples that make the town one of the most important production stations on the volcano.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: A18 ME- CT, exit Giarre
train: Stazione Centrale F.S.
Giarre-Riposto
bus: AST



Hundred Horses Chestnut

TRECASTAGNI



HISTORY

Trecastagni (10,262 inhabitants) rises on the slopes of Etna at 568 metres above sea level. The territory is hilly and is surrounded by several volcanic cones of different age and size. Until 1640 the territory of Trecastagni was under the jurisdiction of the bishop of Catania, 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 the title of Archpriesthood and a population of around 5,000 inhabitants. After the devastating earthquake of 1693, the population collapsed drastically. In 1710, Anna Maria di Giovanni, the last heir of the family, married Don Giuseppe Alliata, Prince of Villafranca, and the title passed to the Alliata family. In 1818, with the abolition of feudalism, Trecastagni was constituted a municipality and the capital of a judicial and electoral district, with the reservation of a seat in the General Parliament of Sicily. Several hypotheses have been formulated to explain the name TRECASAGNI: the most reliable and historically documented is the one that traces it back to the existence of three large chestnut trees on the site, the memory of which has now been lost. Other readings range from Tria castra to Tres Casti Agni, with reference to the three martyred brothers, Alfio, Filadelfo and Cirino, co-patrons of the town. This reading originated in the religious sphere from the 17th century onwards, following the three brothers' stopover at the site during their journey from Messina to Lentini, the site of their martyrdom.



ART & MONUMENTS

Trecastagni preserves significant monuments of its historical past. Many are the corners, the glimpses, the particular environments that the town offers the visitor. Among the aristocratic palaces, it is possible to admire the prestigious Palazzo dei Di Giovanni, which preserves traces of wall paintings. Among the religious buildings, of notable architectural interest is the Mother Church, dedicated to St Nicholas of Bari. It stands on an extraordinarily panoramic hill that can be accessed via a monumental staircase. The interior, built in the 16th century, is characterised by lava stone columns from Etna that contrast with the white surfaces of the walls. There are inlaid marble altars; the Sacrament and Crucifix chapels decorated with stuccoes; a monumental organ from 1824; and 18th-century wooden statues. The Church of Mercy, commonly known as the Church of the Whites or Chiesa dei Bianchi, stands in the square of the same name and is the oldest. Its main bell bears the date 1302. The present construction dates back to 1734. On the high altar is a gilded wooden group depicting the Misericordia, of 18th-century workmanship. The façade alternates between mortar plaster and openings surrounded by carved and sculpted lava stone. The Church



Trecastagni - view

of Sant'Alfio, now a Sanctuary, has a harmonious façade with openings surrounded by carved lava stone, surmounted by a bell tower with an octagonal base. The Convent of the Minor Reformed Fathers dates back to 1660 and contains a beautiful quadrangular cloister with square stone pillars and a large cistern in the centre of the courtyard. The cloister is flanked by the Church of St. Anthony, which houses a monumental central altar made of carved and sculpted walnut wood.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

May

10 - Feast of St. Alfio, and of the Holy Brother Martyrs Alfio, Cirino and Filadelfo, and parade of typical Sicilian Carretti.

October

• "Chestnut Festival" - exhibition of typical products and local crafts.

November/December

• Christmas Market

December

6 - Feast of the Patron Saint Nicholas



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: Catania ring road RA15
exit Paesi Etnei
bus: AST



HISTORY

Valverde (7,678 inhabitants) is located in a hilly area on the lower southeastern slope of Etna, 305 metres above sea level. The history of Valverde is part of the history of the ancient University of Aci. The first document that mentions Valverde as a town dates back to 1389. Its birth took place towards the end of the Middle Ages, most probably by the population of Aci, who left the coast at that time to save themselves from the raids of Muslim piracy. These people gathered around a shrine of the Madonna erected along one of the few and insecure roads that crossed the forest of Aci. The devotion to the Madonna has always characterised the history of the village, which, according to legend, owes its origin to a miraculous event that led the local residents to build a church, later to become the Sanctuary of the Madonna di Belverde, around which the village developed. Over the centuries, Valverde shared the fate of the territory of Aci. It was at one time owned by Charles II, who ceded it, together with Aci S. Antonio and Filippo, to Luigi Riggio, under whose domination it would remain for more than a century. The continuous renewal of internal quarrels between Aci S. Antonio and Aci S. Filippo eventually led to the constitution of two municipalities, confirmed by Francis I, King of the Two Sicilies, by decree of 21 September 1826. Valverde thus became a district of the municipality of Aci S. Antonio. After the unification of Italy, the changed political situation led the people of Valverde to immediately ask the government for separation from the municipality of Aci S. Antonio. Their wish in that circumstance was not fulfilled, since the new municipality would have lacked the necessary means for its autonomous administration. Its autonomous administration. Valverde finally became a municipality following the regional law of 14 April 1951.



ART & MONUMENTS

The town's most important monument is undoubtedly the Sanctuary of Maria SS. di Valverde, which is located in the town centre and is certainly medieval in origin, although it was remodelled in later periods. Inside, along the main nave, enriched by 10 artistic stained-glass windows, we find on the left the altar of Our Lady of the Rosary, the altar of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, an elegant wooden door from the end of the 18th century, and the altar dedicated to St Nicholas of Tolentino with a painting by an unknown artist from 1706. Decentralised from the main nave is the altar of the Madonna of Valverde, made of finely inlaid polychrome marble, which is preceded by an artistic balustrade. In the centre of the altar, protected by a small embossed silver door, is the icon of the Madonna. The Convent of the Discalced Augustinians can to all intents and purposes be considered



Valverde - Main square

an appendix to the sanctuary. The building, whose main façade overlooks the sanctuary square, forms together with the church a large quadrilateral with a large courtyard inside. The oldest part of the building dates back to the early 18th century, while the wing attached to the presbytery of the church was completed in 1955. Other monuments include the Palazzo Riggio, which later became Palazzo Carcasi.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

August

Last Sunday - Feast of the Patron Saint Mary of Valverde

September

• Beer Festival



PRODUCTS

Excellent cured meats, cheeses and apples including the traditional 'Frascona, Rostaiola, Renetta'. Truffle picking has also always been a popular activity in the municipality, favoured by the altitude, climate and type of terrain.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: Catania ring road RA15
exit Paesi Etnei
bus: AST

VIAGRANDE



HISTORY

The municipality of Viagrande (7,946 inhabitants) rises in a hilly area 410 metres above sea level. The earliest information on Villalori and Vilardi, the two hamlets that then occupied the territory of present-day Viagrande, (today Viscalori and Velardi), refers to 1124, the year in which a first small church was built in that area. In that area a first small church was built. From the 12th century onwards, the development of the two hamlets, separated from each other and inhabited by the people of Catania and Acireale, seems to have followed a slow but steady course, despite the dramatic interlude caused by the eruption of 1408, which caused serious damage to the agricultural economy of the area. More than a century after that event, the two hamlets were united along the crossroads between the Via Regia, an ancient road connecting Catania and Messina, and an important trazzera that led to the sea, passing through the towns of Aci Sant'Antonio, Aci Catena and Acireale. Near that crossroads, already in the year 1574, there is news of the presence of the Mother Church of Viagrande, dedicated to the Madonna dell'Idria, which was completely destroyed in the terrible earthquake of 1693. Reconstruction work, which began immediately, was soon interrupted by the debate that arose over where to build it. The new church was eventually erected precisely where it can still be seen today, in Piazza San Mauro. Around the end of the 16th century, Viagrande became a well-defined town, maintaining its role as a small agricultural centre for the next two centuries. Power was exercised by the nobility since since 1641, when Philip IV of Spain invested Domenico Di Giovanni with the title of prince, giving him the lands of Viagrande. When the great revolutionary uprisings shook Europe in the 19th century, Viagrande won its small place in Risorgimento history, suffering the police persecution that followed the restoration of Bourbon power. Garibaldi's feat of 1860 saw a group of young men from Viagrande take an active part in the liberation of Catania, so much so that they earned Garibaldi's official thanks.



ART & MONUMENTS

The historical centre of Viagrande is characterised by the rich use of lava stone, both in the construction of streets and houses. Several baroque palaces and numerous noble villas built between the 18th and 19th centuries can be admired here. A religious building of considerable interest is the Mother Church, dedicated to the Madonna dell'Idria, built in the early 18th century. The imposing structure dominates the central Piazza San Mauro. The main façade is divided into three large sectors, defined by four lava stone pilasters, in each of which a portal traces the three-nave, basilica-type interior structure. The interior is decorated with stucco work and features valuable altars. The Church of San

Biagio stands on the square of the same name in the Viscalori district. Its origins date back to the 16th century. Certainly damaged by the 1693 earthquake, it was rebuilt at the end of the 18th century. It has an ovoid plan, with an apsidal presbytery and rises on a wide flight of steps. In the central Via Garibaldi stands the Church of Santa Caterina. There was already a church dedicated to St Catherine in 1633, but the present building dates back to the 18th century. It has a rectangular plan and semicircular apse.



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

January

15 - Feast of the Patron Saint Maurus

June

11 - Feast of St. Anthony of Padua

• 'Viscalori, music, art, flowers, colours' market exhibition of typical products and local crafts.

July

• Monte Serra Cycling Trophy



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: Catania ring road RA15 exit Paesi Etnei
bus: AST



Church of Santa Maria dell'Idria



HISTORY

Zafferana Etnea (9,286 inhabitants) rises 600 metres above sea level on the eastern slopes of the volcano. The history of the present town originates with the foundation of the Priory of San Giacomo, a Benedictine monastery built in the Middle Ages, of which we have certain information from 1387, in a document signed by the Bishop of Catania Simone del Pozzo. From a papal bull of 1443, we learn of the existence of an annexed church dedicated to St James, sacramental and parochial, which suggests that it was attended by an initial nucleus of inhabitants that grew up around the monastery. Monastic life in the Priory ended in 1464, when it was united with that of Sant'Agata La Vetere, but the church remained open for worship until at least 1677, probably being destroyed, together with the entire complex, by the terrible earthquake of 1693. The Priory was located at the beginning of the flaring of the San Giacomo Valley, upstream of the present-day town. The first toponym to be found in the history of Zafferana is 'Cella', which indicated the same territory of San Giacomo, where the priory was located. In a document of 1694, however, the toponym 'Zafarana' appears for the first time, which would later give its name to the town. The lands of the Zafarana district were administratively dependent on the municipalities of Trecastagni, Viagrande and Aci Sant'Antonio until 1826, while from a religious point of view, the village church, the Church of the Madonna della Provvidenza, built at the beginning of the 18th century, was bound to the Parish Archpriesthood "S. Nicola di Bari" of Trecastagni until the establishment of the parish in 1753. On 21 September 1826, a decree issued by Francis I ordered that the districts of Zafarana Etnea, Sarro, Rocca d'Api, Bongiardo and Pisano form a new municipality under the name of Zafarana Etnea, later Zafferana Etnea, by detaching themselves from the municipalities of Trecastagni, Viagrande and Aci SS. Antonio and Filippo.



ART & MONUMENTS

Zafferana Etnea, also called 'the Pearl of Etna', is a destination for tourists, attracted by the spectacular views it offers and by its artistic, monumental and cultural heritage.

The most important church is the Mother Church, dedicated to the Madonna della Provvidenza and built in several stages. In Baroque style, it has a façade in white Syracuse stone with three portals. Two twin bell towers enrich the façade. It stands on an imposing curved black stone staircase that contrasts with the white stone façade. Inside, the church contains an altarpiece depicting 'St Joseph with Child'. A short distance from the Mother Church is the church dedicated to the Madonna delle Grazie, with a pleasant exterior architecture featuring an Art Nouveau façade and a niche housing a statue of the Madonna delle Grazie. Overlooking the central Piazza Umberto I is the Town Hall, an example of Art Nouveau style, with a crenellated cornice, floral inserts on the main façade and, in the centre, above the balcony of honour, a stucco depicting the municipal coat of arms, with an eagle holding two bunches of grapes in its talons, placed above a medallion on which Etna in eruption is painted. It is accessed via a choreographic curved double flight of steps, also with Art Nouveau street lamps. The Villa Manganelli is of considerable architectural merit, the most majestic in the municipality, which belonged to the noble Catanese Paternò - Manganelli family.



Etna Park

It was built between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century in the Sarro district. It is accessed through a monumental entrance on the SP9, along a tree-lined avenue surrounded by a flourishing park. The building rises three storeys high. The interior, following a recent conservative restoration, has regained its splendour. The floors are in Art Nouveau style and the ceilings are frescoed with festoons and garlands, interspersed with geometric motifs, the masterful work of architect Joseph Maria Olbrich. Surrounding the villa is a splendid park composed of ski and chestnut groves and a variety of trees. Currently, Villa Manganelli is owned by the Ente Parco dell'Etna, pending its next use. The recovery of Villa Anna, transformed into a Municipal Park, a typical example of a romantic garden with a rich collection of fine camellias and tall trees, was worthy of note. Inside the park is an Art Nouveau building with the typical architecture of Etna's parks, which are built according to the traditions of 18th-century gardens, with the inclusion of rustic elements such as pergolas, fruit trees, jars, balustrades, old statues, colonnades, seats and gazebos. The Art Nouveau building in the Municipal Park now houses several municipal offices, including the library.



PRODUCTS

Typical product par excellence is honey. Beekeeping is in fact the most flourishing activity and has made the town one of the largest honey producers in the country. The quality wines produced in the vineyards of Zafferana, many of them with the D.O.C. label, have an important place. The mushrooms harvested in the Zafferana woods, available from November to May, are prized. The typical rotisserie speciality is the 'pizza siciliana', a crescent-shaped fried calzone stuffed with tuma cheese, anchovies and pepper.



CONNECTIONS

From Catania
car: A18 ME-CT exit Giarre, dir.
Zafferana Etna
bus: AST



EVENTS & FESTIVALS

July/August

• "Etna in scena" - cinema, dance, cabaret, theatre and music review.

August

Saturday/Sunday/Monday of the 2nd week Feast of Our Lady of Providence Patroness

September

• "XL Brancati Literary Prize Conference

October

Every Sunday - 'Ottobrata' the most important market exhibition of typical Etna products and ancient crafts, which has now become a major event.



Mother Church

PARKS AND RESERVES





ETNA, HISTORY OF A VOLCANO

At 3,320 m, Etna is the highest volcano in Europe. It is actually a complex volcanic system produced by the collision of two continental plates, the African plate to the south and the Eurasian plate to the north.

Etna's earliest phases of activity, which began about 600,000 years ago in the Lower Pleistocene, did not occur in the Earth's atmosphere, but rather in the marine environment, giving rise to low alkaline basalts (tholeiitic magma).

Initially, the magma emerged from several points, as there was no central crater yet. When the superposition of lavas began to delineate a structure above sea level, the magma began to form a conduit and to differentiate the types of material produced, so that the rocks marking this transition were richer in alkalis. Volcanic activity was characterised by alternating fairly fluid and viscous lavas, evidence of explosive activity.

After the first phases in a marine environment, the remains of which are still visible in the cliffs of Aci Castello, eruptive activity began in a continental environment.

A classic example is 'La Timpa di Acireale', a steep escarpment (caused by a fault) formed by superimpositions of lavas dating back some 200,000 years, which represents the advancement towards the present building. Continuing in a north-westerly direction, we find Monte Calanna, formed 120,000 years ago.

During the same period, considerable quantities of lava flowed from other points, as we can see at Motta S. Anastasia, which rises above an imposing Neck (200,000 years ago). In a northerly direction we find the 100,000-year-old eruptive centres of Rocca Capra, which today constitute one of the many relicts of the eruptive apparatuses located in the Valle del Bove. Approximately 60,000 years ago, the Trifoglietto, one of the most important eruptive centres, began to form, the remains of which can be found today along the southern walls of the Bove Valley. It reached 2,500 metres above sea level. It was succeeded by two other apparatuses: the Salifizio (south) and the Serra Giannicola Grande (north). These were succeeded by a third eruptive apparatus, the Cuvigghiuni, whose craters were positioned at 2,700 metres above sea level. The eruptive axis, therefore, moved in a north-westerly direction.

From the lavas emitted 34,000 years ago from the last eruptive centres, a dominant building was formed, whose height probably exceeded 3,700 metres above sea level, but a catastrophic eruptive event about 15,000 years ago caused the new building to collapse, reducing its height by about 800 metres.

So where the majestic cone once stood, there is now a caldera formed by the collapse of the volcanic edifice and the rapid emptying of the magma chamber. Today it is possible to admire in the westernmost part (Pizzi Deneri, where the CNR volcanological observatory is located) the elliptical shape that the cone had assumed before the collapse. From inside the caldera, volcanic activity continued, which, by superimposing eruptive material, gave rise to the present-day Mongibello that

reaches 3,323 m a.s.l. Today, Etna can be considered a 'good' volcano, characterised "characterised, that is, by continuously evolving explosive activity, concentrated in the summit area, where we currently recognise four craters: Centrale, Bocca Nuova, Northeast Crater and Southeast Crater, and by other effusive activity mainly at lower altitudes with openings of new mouths.





ETNA PARK

Etna Park, established on 17 March 1987, with its 59,000 hectares, has the primary task of protecting the unique natural environment and extraordinary landscape surrounding Europe's highest active volcano.

The territory has been divided into four zones. In zone A, the highest protection zone, the aim of the park is to allow nature to take its course, limiting human intervention to a minimum; zone B, the general reserve zone is partly made up of small agricultural plots and is marked by splendid examples of old farmhouses; in the pre-park area, with the 14,000 hectares of zones C and D, possible tourist settlements are also permitted, always with due regard for the protection of the landscape and nature. At the centre of the park's ecosystem is the volcano Etna, with its 250 km lithological boundary, a height of about 3350 m and a surface area of about 1260 square kilometres. Twenty municipalities (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, Zafferana Etnea), with a population of over two hundred thousand inhabitants, fall within the Park's territory. Within this extraordinary territory, the Park has created evocative routes to make its characteristics and biodiversity better known: Monte Nero degli Zappini, Pietracannone-Cubania, Monti Sartorius, Piano dei Grilli, Cisternazza, Monte Spagnolo. The Park's flora is extremely rich and varied and offers continuous and sudden changes. On the lower altitudinal levels, there are vineyards, hazelnut groves, pistachio groves and oak, pine and chestnut forests. Continuing on, especially on the eastern slopes, there are thickets of downy oaks, turkey oaks and laricio pines, forming beautiful pine forests, such as those at Linguaglossa and Castiglione di Sicilia. Above 2000 metres, beech and birch. Among the characteristic species of the Etnean landscape, mention must be made of the Etna broom, one of the main colonising plants of the lavas, while beyond the woody vegetation, the landscape is characterised by pulviniform formations of the holy thorn (*astragalus*), which provide shelter for other Etnean mountain plants such as the senecio, *saponaria sicula*, *viola* and *cerastio*. On the volcano live



porcupine, fox, wild cat, marten, rabbit, hare and, among the smaller animals, the weasel, hedgehog the dormouse, the quercino and various types of mice and bats. There are many birds of prey: among the diurnal birds of prey are the sparrow hawk, buzzard, kestrel, peregrine falcon and golden eagle; among the nocturnal ones are the barn owl, tawny owl, tawny owl and the long-eared owl. In Lake Gurridda, the only expanse of water in the Etna mountain area, herons, ducks and other aquatic birds can be observed. The park also promotes the handicrafts and traditional typical products of this mountain area: the mushrooms of Nicolosi, the apples of Pedara the honey of Zafferana Etnea, the sausages of Linguaglossa, the strawberries of Maletto the pistachio of Bronte, the salads of Adrano, the torroncini of Belpasso, the oil of Ragalna. And then quality wine from the splendid vineyards of Milo, Sant'Alfio, Viagrande, Castiglione di Sicilia, Linguaglossa. Piedimonte Etneo, Randazzo, favoured in their growth by the extraordinary fertility of the lava soil. And, of course, lava, with which true works of art are created. Lava stone also characterises the splendid architecture of many of the Park's villages. Also worth a visit is the former Benedictine Monastery of San Nicolò L'Arena, which has housed the new headquarters of the Ente Parco dell'Etna since spring 2005. This is an ancient and prestigious building of great historical and architectural value, around which the community of Nicolosi was born and developed, and which today has become a space reclaimed for culture, nature and the promotion of typical products.



ITINERARIES

Nature Trail

Monte Nero degli Zappini

Length: approx. 4 kilometres

Height difference: 200 metres

Walking time: approx. 2.30 hours

Difficulty: easy

Departure and arrival point: Monte Vetore plateau, South Etna

This was the first nature trail created in Sicily (in mid-1991) and to this day it is probably the most popular trail in the Etna Park area. The path, which is not particularly difficult, is located at an altitude of 1740 metres above sea level. It starts from the plateau to the west of Monte Vetore, a short distance from the Grande Albergo dell'Etna, and winds for about four kilometres through ancient and more recent lava fields, lava flow caves, hornitos, woodland formations, and imposing pines of exceptional beauty, reaching the Giardino Botanico Nuova Gussonea, one of the largest and most important known and most important known. From here, following a stretch of asphalted road, you reach the starting point, thus completing the circular route.

The path, which runs entirely in the area of the forest domain, has 11 observation points and manages in practice to offer the visitor a very significant cross-section of Etna's natural environment.

Nature Trail

Sartorius Mountains (Monti Sartorius)

Length of the trail: approximately 4 kilometres.

Height difference: 100 metres.

Walking time: approximately 2 hours.

Difficulty: easy

Starting and arrival point: forestry barrier at Rifugio Citelli, north-east Etna.

The path, which is of exceptional interest from both a geological and botanical point of view, winds in a loop for about four kilometres, starting from the forestry barrier at an altitude of 1660 metres above sea level. Along the path, which has six observation points, one encounters clearings rich in endemic species, volcanic 'bombs' of considerable size and forest formations dominated by birch trees (*Betula aetnensis*).

The area's great geological interest is represented by the imposing lava flow of 1865, which gave rise to the Sartorius Mountains (in honour and in memory of the scholar Sartorius von Walterhausen, who was among the first to map Etna's most important eruptions), characterised by the typical 'buttonhole' alignment of the eruptive cones.

The majestic flow extends for about eight kilometres, with an average lava thickness of over 12 metres; the surface morphology is very rugged due to the presence of lavas and sharp-edged scoriaceous blocks to which one should pay particular attention when walking.

Etna's high mountain track (pista alto-montana)

Length: about 42 kilometres

Height difference: approximately 300 metres

Walking time: about 3 days Excellent route for trekking and cycling.

Difficulty: medium-high

Starting point: Feliciusa Milia Regional Forestry Gate (m.1685/ asl)

Arrival point: Caserma Pitarrone, Pineta Linguaglossa area (1421 metres above sea level)

Together with the classic ascent to the summit areas, the excursion along the Pista Altomontana - essentially the tour of Etna on foot - will remain etched in the Park visitor's memory as a unique experience, in contact with an extraordinary environment that offers an astonishing variety of landscapes. The ring of the Track, which develops within the State Forestry Complex, circumvents the western and northern slopes of the volcano, offering the hiker (who may also decide to stop at the numerous refuges located along the route) a fascinating insight into the nature and plant biodiversity of Etna Park, its woods, the volcano's ancient and recent lavas, and its most suggestive views. It can be walked in all seasons of the year, except in winter: with snow and fog, the track should only be tackled by experienced and adequately equipped people.



CONNECTIONS

The proximity to the city of Catania and to the A18 Messina-Catania motorway allows easy connections to the park both for those who use aeroplanes and for those who like to travel by car. The numerous inhabited centres that encircle the protected area are easy to reach thanks to the dense road network that connects them to Catania and to each other.



USEFUL INFORMATION

Ente Parco dell'Etna, Parco Regionale
phone: 095 821111, fax 095914738
email : ufficiostampa@parcoetna.it
website: www.parcoetna.it;
www.parks.it/parcoetna



THE NEBRODI PARK

The Nebrodi Park, with a surface area of over 860 square kilometres, is the largest protected area in Sicily, involving no less than twenty-three municipalities, eighteen in the province of Messina alone, three in the province of Catania and two in that of Enna. With its 70 km of mountain chain and 50% of Sicily's forests, it truly represents the island's green lung. It contains natural environments of extreme natural interest, many of which are unique in Sicily. The Nebrodi appear as a robust mass, with gentle slopes and rounded peaks, rich of vegetation due to the presence of banks of clay and arenaceous rocks. There are also extensive terraces that open out into wide valleys where many torrents flow into the Tyrrhenian Sea. The main characteristic of the park is the vast expanse of woodland in a natural state that is home to fauna that has long since disappeared elsewhere. Of extreme interest, in terms of number, variety and state of conservation, are the wetlands: springs, streams, ponds and marshes. The woodland complexes have a considerable impact on the area's climate, which is characterised by long, harsh winters and hot summers. Temperatures generally stay around 10 to 12 °C, while rain is frequent, snow and fog that create the humidity necessary for the existence of certain types of forest. The vegetation varies depending on the altitude. Mostly within the park one encounters evergreen Mediterranean scrub vegetation, while to discover species such as deciduous oak, oak and turkey oak one needs to climb between 1,200 and 1,400 metres above sea level. In the mountain area, thanks to the particular climate, there is the beech tree, which, thanks to its oval leaves, is able to retain water, which is useful for overcoming long periods of drought, while the lush undergrowth has a variety of species including holly, butcher's broom and hawthorn. The fauna is also quite rich although, due to poaching, intense during the 19th century, some important species



Nebrodi

such as the deer, fallow deer, wolf, roe deer and eagle owl became extinct. Despite the environmental impoverishment, this area still remains one of the richest and most and complex. Walking through the park, it will not be difficult to encounter different types of mammals, including the dormouse and the hazel dormouse, but also reptiles such as the marsh tortoise, and a multitude of birds, among which there are around one hundred and fifty species. Among the multitude of animal species are fawns, fallow deer, amphibians and reptiles, nesting and migratory birds (herons and black-winged stilts). At the edge of the



Maulazzo Lake

The woods are home to birds of prey such as buzzards, kestrels, peregrine falcons and red kites; the rocky areas are home to golden eagles, coots, little grebes and kingfishers; the green pastures are home to Sicilian rock partridges, ravens and hoopoes. But the Nebrodi are not only flora and fauna. In the municipalities that are part of it, it is possible to come into contact with the peasant civilisation that has made the cultural wealth of these places through the handicraft production of baskets, embroideries and objects of agricultural use made of wood and ferla, or with the many food products that find their maximum expression in dairy products and cured meats. Of particular prestige are the canestrato, pecorino, provola and ricotta cheeses, and the cured meats produced from the meat of the typical Nebrodi black swine.



Lake Maulazzo



ALCANTARA RIVER PARK

The Alcantara River Park is located on the northern slope of Etna and includes that part of the territory in the provinces of Messina and Catania that forms the Alcantara river basin, north side of Mount Etna and includes that part of the territory in the provinces of Messina and Catania that forms the river basin of the Alcantara river. It was established in 2001 with the aim of safeguarding, managing, conserving and defending the landscape and natural environment of the valley of the river of the same name and "to allow better conditions of habitability, in the context of the development of the economy and a correct organisation of the territories concerned, for the recreation and culture of the citizens and the social and public use of the assets themselves, as well as for scientific purposes". The Alcantara river springs from a series of small springs in the Nebrodi mountains, near Floresta, at an altitude of about 1,500 metres and, after crossing the valley for about 50 km, it flows into the sea, mixing with the Ionian Sea near the ruins of the ancient city of Naxos. The river, flowing and eroding the hard volcanic basalt, has created, in some places, vertical walls known as 'gorges', bringing to light the heart of the lava flows. One can admire the spectacular prismatic morphologies of the columnar basalts, singular natural sculptures that resemble aligned organ pipes,

elegant fans and neat piles of wood. The Alcantara is one of Sicily's main watercourses, with natural environments of great natural and scenic interest. The river park, however, was established in the area originally planned for the 'Fiume Alcantara' nature reserve included in the 1991 Regional Plan of Nature Reserves.

The perimeter of the nature reserve, which is therefore the current perimeter of the River Park, is completely insufficient to protect natural aquatic environments and shelters, as it is limited to a narrow strip along the river. The river's main tributaries are also not protected by the River Park. Despite the fact that a plan for the perimeter of the park was drawn up a few years ago, the protected area still does not have an adequate perimeter, which is allowing building structures and other man-made interventions in areas close to the watercourse.



Alcantara River

USEFUL INFORMATION

INFORMATION POINTS OF THE REGIONAL PROVINCE OF CATANIA

Via Etnea, 63/65 - Catania - 095 4014070

Aeroporto Internazionale "V. Bellini"
Fontanarossa Catania
095 0937023

Tourism Office Regional Province of Catania
turismo@provincia.ct.it

Information on hospitality in the Province of Catania
<http://turismo.provincia.ct.it/ospitalit/>

MUSEUMS

Via V. Emanuele, 156 - Catania
095 7159860

Municipal Historical Archives - Via S. Agata, 2 -
Catania 095 7422771

Civic and A. Ursino Recupero" Reunited Libraries
Via Biblioteca, 13 - Catania - 095 316883

House - Regional Museum Giovanni Verga
Via Sant'Anna, 8 - 095 7150598

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

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

Le Ciminiere" Cultural Centre - Piazzale Asia - Catania
Historical Museum of the Landing in Sicily - 095
4011929 Museum of Cinema - Toy Museum - Gallery
of Modern Art - Stable Theatre Puppet Opera
095 4011928-30
Radio Museum - 095 4013058
Exhibition of ancient maps of Sicily 095 4013072

Botanical Garden - Via Etnea, 397 - Catania - 095
430901

Belliniano Civic Museum - P.zza S. Francesco, 3-
Catania 095 7150535

Ursino Castle Civic Museum - P.zza Federico di Svevia
Catania - 095 345830

Volcanological Museum - Via Cesare Battisti, 28 -
Nicolosi 095 7914589

Museum of Zoology - House of Butterflies - Via Lago
di Nicito, 38 - Catania - 095 382529 - 095 372606

Diocesan Museum - Via Etnea, 8 - Catania - 095
281635

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

Paleontological Museum "Accademia
Federiciana" - Via Borgo, 12 - Catania
095 438531

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

Palazzo Platamone (Palace of Culture)
Via Vittorio Emanuele, 121 - Catania
095 7428038 - 095 7428034

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

Pinacoteca Provinciale - Former Church
of San Michele Minore - P.zza
Manganelli Catania - 095 327122

Regional Museum of Ceramics
Via Giardino Pubblico - Caltagirone
093 358418

Zelantea Picture Library - Via
Sangiuliano, 17 - Acireale - 095 7634516

Volcanological Museum - Via Cesare
Battisti, 28 - Nicolosi - 095 7914589

Regional Museum of Adrano
P.zza Umberto, 1 - Adrano - 095
7692661

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

Roman Hypogeum - Via G. Sanfilippo
Catania - 095 530127- 095 7472268

Roman Forum - Cortile S. Pantaleone
Catania - 095 7472277

Roman Amphitheatre - P.zza Stesicoro
Catania - 095 7472268

Roman Theatre and Odeon
Via V. Emanuele, 266 - Catania
095 7150508

Terme Achilliane - P.zza Duomo -
Catania 095 281635 (Diocesan
Museum)

Terme della Rotonda - Via della Mecca
Catania - 095 7150951

PROTECTED NATURAL AREAS

Etna Park - Via del Convento, 45
Nicolosi - 095 821111
www.parcoetna.ct.it

Oasi del Simeto Oriented Nature Reserve
Nature Reserve Management Office of the Regional
Province of Catania - 095 4012485 - 095 4012432
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Fiume Fiumefreddo Oriented Nature Reserve
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Integral nature reserve "Complesso Immacolatelle e
Micio Conti" CUTGANA - Via Terzora, 8 - San Gregorio di
Catania - 095 7215769 - www.cutgana.it

Integral nature reserve "Isola Lachea e faraglioni dei
Cicli" CUTGANA - Via Terzora, 8 - San Gregorio
di Catania - 095 7215769 - www.cutgana.it

Nebrodi Park - P.zza Duomo - Sant'Agata di Militello (ME)
- 0941 702524 - www.parcodinebrodi.it

Marine protected area "Isole Cicli" - Via Provinciale,
5/D Acicastello - 095 7117322 - www.isolecicli.it
amp@isolecicli.it

Oriented nature reserve "La Timpa" (Acireale)
Dipartimento Regionale Azienda Foreste Demaniali Via
Libertà, 97- Palermo - 091 7906801

Oriented nature reserve "Bosco di Santo Pietro"
(Caltagirone) Dipartimento Regionale Azienda Foreste
Demaniali - Via Libertà, 97- Palermo - 091 7906801

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

TAXI

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095 931905

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Information 095 530396

FCE Circumetnea servizio bus
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Information 095 541250

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

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

Sais Autolinee
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(per chiamate dai cellulari) 199 244141
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Scionti
Via Bartoli, 9 - Catania - 095 354708

Zappalà e Torrisi
Via Scionti, 10 - Acireale (CT)
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532719 www.trenitalia.com

FCE - Ferrovia Circumetnea
Via Caronda, 352 - Catania
095 534323 - 095 54125

UNDERGROUND - FCE Catania
Ferrovia Circumetnea - 095
541250

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Via Luigi Sturzo, 238 - Catania
095 530594 - 095 281161 (Aeroporto Fontanarossa)

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