



CATANIA SICILY ITALY

Sicily is located at the toe of the Italian boot, where the waters of the Mediterranean, Ionian and Tyrrhenian Seas meet. The island has been inhabited for tens of thousands of years; thousands of years before the first Phoenician and Greek traders and colonizers came ashore. Over the millennia the island has been a virtual crossroads of conquest.

On the east coast of Sicily, between Messina, to the north and Syracuse, to the south, lies the beautiful city of Catania. Though it is not as well-known as other Sicilian cities, Catania, with a population around 300,000, is the 2nd largest metropolitan area on the island, following Palermo.

Looking out over the Ionian Sea, Catania is actually a city upon a city, upon another and another. Combine the sands of time with repeated conquest, add powerful earthquakes, tons of Mt. Etna's smoldering ash falling from the sky, as well as rivers of molten lava, and you have a city which has been rebuilt time and again on the ruins of the last one.

The Catania of today is a very nice city. Along the wide boulevards and narrow streets, visitors will find churches and cathedrals, museums and markets, palaces and piazzas. Many of these structures were designed in the Baroque style of the 1700s and built using a combination of white limestone and black lava rock from Mt. Etna – the same volcano that has tried to destroy Catania. From throughout the city you can look up and see Mt. Etna.

The people of Catania are hardworking and devout. They contribute a great deal to the economy of the island. Though the university dates to 1434 the young students help to keep Catania alive, vibrant and looking to the future.



HISTORY

The island of Sicily has been inhabited since as far back as 10,000 BC. Understandably, it appears that the first settlers came across the water from the nearby Italian mainland. In general terms, three main tribes eventually divided the island. In the west were the Sicanians. In the north were the Elymians. And in the east, the region of Catania became home to the Sicels. The island of Sicily gets its name from this tribe.

Phoenician merchants and colonists reached Sicily around 800 BC. They were soon followed by Greeks who had the same desire of expanding a trading empire throughout the Mediterranean. The historic records are not exact but it seems Catania may have been founded around 730 BC. From that time forward the list of powers who invaded Sicily is longer than the list of those who did not.

By 240 BC the Roman Empire defeated the Carthaginians in what is known as the 1st Punic War. As part of the spoils Rome gained control of Sicily but the large Greek population remained predominate. The fields of Sicily soon provided so much wheat to Rome that the island became the Empire's breadbasket.

The history of Catania and Sicily followed the events which unfolded across Italy and southern Europe over the next 2000 years. It was not that Sicily was a primary target as much as the island just happened to be strategically placed. When the Roman Empire fell to the Goths and Vandals, Sicily was swept up in the chaos. Later the Byzantines drove out the "barbarians" and were followed by the Muslims who eventually conquered Sicily by 900 AD.

The Normans, Lombards, France, Spain, the Holy Roman Empire, the Austrian Hapsburgs, various popes, Italian fascists and the Nazis of the German Wehrmacht all took their turns invading or occupying Sicily.



There are a number of interesting sites around the general area of central Catania. This makes the city easy to explore on foot and there are cafés everywhere when you want to take time to relax and refresh.

1 The **Roman Amphitheater** is nearly hidden by buildings which date to the 1800s. Though it is very interesting it is not nearly as grand as many Roman theaters that can be seen today. This theater held over 15,000 and was the site of gladiatorial contests, plays and mock sea battles.

2 The **Bellini Museum** is in the childhood home of this great Italian opera composer. A true child prodigy, Vincenzo Bellini (1801-35) wrote a number of very popular operas but passed away at an early age. The city continues to honor their son. If you appreciate opera, especially Italian opera, you may be interested in making a visit.

3 **Palazzo Bruca** dates to the 1800s. It has a beautiful walled court with a fountain. Once a private home, today there is a Toy Museum inside. In terms of beautiful architecture this is one of Catania's loveliest.

4 The **Fontana dell' Elefante** (Fountain of the Elephant) is a popular city landmark. It combines a Roman Byzantine

base, an elephant carved from lava, an ancient Egyptian obelisk and a cross representing the city's patron, Saint Agatha. Needless to say, the fountain is one of a kind.

5 The **Duomo** is the city cathedral. It dates back to 1070 and the reign of King Roger. The foundation of the church dates to Roman times. Many of the stones used for the church, as was common practice, were taken from ancient Roman buildings and monuments. Following the disastrous earthquake of 1669 the church, like much of the town, underwent extensive repair and renovation.

6 **Castello Ursino** was built on the foundation of a Greek and Roman fortification. Construction on the fortification began in 1239 on the order of Emperor Frederick II. When completed, the castle looked directly out over the harbor. Lava flows from Mt. Etna added land so that today the castle is further from the waterfront. Inside the castle visitors will find a museum and gallery containing art and artifacts.

Beyond Catania

Taormina is a beautiful town perched on high cliffs midway between Catania and Messina. The town has a medieval atmosphere despite its Greek and Roman past. The buildings, dating mostly from the Middle Ages, have great charm as they look out over the bay and rugged coastline. Rediscovered by tourists in the 18th century, Taormina has become a popular resort town.

Syracuse is a few miles south of Catania. It is a beautiful city with amazing Greek and Roman ruins. Visitors will also find buildings from the Middle Ages and the Baroque period. Syracuse truly is a wonderful city to explore.

Mount Etna is an active volcano 10,902 feet high. Thanks to the rich volcanic soil, the lower slopes bear an abundance of fruit. At higher elevations there are forests and beyond that are the remnants of lava streams. Sometimes hot gases, smoke and bubbling lava can be seen venting from the crater.

SHORE EXCURSIONS

To make the most of your visit to Catania and the surrounding island we suggest you take one of our organized Shore Excursions. For information concerning tour content and pricing, consult your Shore Excursion Brochure or contact the Shore Excursion Desk. When going ashore, be advised to take only necessary items and secure any valuables onboard.

LOCAL CUSTOMS

Attire: If you are planning to visit any of the local churches please keep in mind, modest attire is required. Ladies are requested to wear dresses and gentlemen are requested to wear pants.

Bargaining: In shops and boutiques prices are usually set. Vendors in the open markets might bargain with visitors.

Tiping: A 10% tip is standard for taxis, restaurants and cafés.

LOCAL CUISINE AND DRINK SPECIALTIES

The cuisine of Sicily can vary from region to region but the basic rule is to use fresh ingredients and keep it simple. Seafood, pasta, goat, rabbit, eggplant, tomatoes, olives, parmesan and ricotta cheese...is there anything about Sicilian food that is not delicious? In fact, if you simply combine fried eggplant with tomato sauce over the pasta, fresh basil and a sprinkle of ricotta you have Pasta alla Norma; a Catania favorite. Here are some other popular Sicilian dishes: Filetto al Forno is a fish fillet. It is often served with a light sauce which combines sun-dried tomatoes, basil, onions and local white wine. Pasta con Sarde combines homemade pasta and fresh sardines. Polpo is fresh octopus. It can be boiled, grilled or sautéed. Calamari all'insalata is a boiled squid salad which combines lemon juice, olive oil, pepper, fresh garlic and parsley. Zucchini alla Siciliana is sliced fresh zucchini with chopped onions and potatoes, drizzled with olive oil, sprinkled with salt and pepper, Romano cheese and bread crumbs then baked till golden brown. Cannoli Siciliani is a small pastry tube which has been fried to a delicate crunch. It is then filled with a mix-

ture of chocolate and fresh ricotta cheese.

Vineyards have been tended and wine has been produced in Sicily for thousands of years. Many grapes are grown on the fertile lower slopes of the Mt. Etna. Marsala is a well-known dessert wine produced on the island. In fact, most of Sicily's grape harvest goes into the production of desert wines. Some other local wines include Etna Rosso and Etna Bianco. Today Sicily is proud of the fact they produce some of the best wines in all of Italy.

SHOPPING

The Vecchia Dogana is an imposing and elegant building built at the end of the 19th century, situated inside the port of Catania. It has been recently renovated and features restaurants of high quality Italian and international cuisine as well as elegant shops with hand-painted Sicilian ceramics and souvenirs.

In town the main streets for shopping are Via Etna, the finest Corso Italia & Via Umberto.

CURRENCY

The local currency is the Euro (€ - EUR). Major credit cards may be accepted. Some smaller establishments may accept cash only.

TOURIST INFORMATION

"Vecchia Dogana" is the new maritime station for cruise ship guests arriving in Catania. There is a Tourist Information Office located here.

TRANSPORTATION

Taxis are generally available on the pier. It is important to negotiate a fare prior to departing.

USEFUL WORDS AND PHRASES

The language of Sicily is Italian. There are various dialects spoken throughout the island.

Yes - Sì

No - No

Good Day - Buon Giorno

Good-bye - Ciao

Thank-you - Grazie

You're Welcome - Prego

