

An aerial photograph of a Sicilian coastline. In the foreground, a green, hilly landscape with a dirt path leads down to a sandy spit that juts into the sea. The water is a vibrant turquoise blue, with a bright reflection of the sun on the right side. In the distance, the sea meets a clear blue sky, with some low mountains visible on the horizon.

# Sicily

*authentic emotion*



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7<sup>th</sup>, 17; 18; 23; 24; 26: 4<sup>th</sup>; 28: top left; 29: 5<sup>th</sup>)

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Cover:  
Tindari (Messina). Photo by Alfio Garozzo



**T**he largest island in the Mediterranean, and one of the most beautiful in the world, Sicily has inspired many myths and legends of classical antiquity and attracted numerous peoples to its shores, as well as illustrious personages and travellers throughout the ages. This is an island with thousands of years of history: rugged like its rocks, weathered like the faces of the men who have sailed its seas, ancient like the traces of its past... Yet the sensation it conveys is one of eternal youth, continual movement, a place where there's always something bubbling beneath the surface.

Perhaps it's the volcano that never ceases to shape and model the landscape? Or the gentle climate that fosters an invigorating, revitalising engagement with the beauty of Nature all year round? Or the character of the islanders, bursting with pride in their land, yet with a curious gaze beyond it?

Whatever the reason, Sicily is an extraordinary place, brimming with life: enchanting and entertaining, spellbinding and magnetic, attracting and enamouring. The island really does offer something to guarantee every visitor the holiday of their dreams: sunshine, sea, and a handful of magical islands just off its coasts; mountains, woodlands and lakes; extraordinary

monuments from the Classical era, the Arab and Norman periods; striking Baroque architecture, castles and exquisite artworks; bustling modern cities and ancient villages where silence reigns; the delicious food the island is renowned for, made from the unrivalled local farm produce...

And then there's the people: stop a Sicilian for directions and they'll drop everything to accompany you. Generous, welcoming and sociable, the islanders are always ready to open up their homes and their hearts to the visitor.

Left: a welcome blessing from the Madonna della Lettera to visitors coming ashore in the port of Messina, the main entrance to the island.

Bottom: the prickly pear, one of the symbols of Sicily.

Opposite page: tourists hiking on Mount Etna.

Next page: Castelbuono (Palermo), Ventimiglia Castle, Sant'Anna Chapel, decorated throughout with magnificent 'soft' stucco figures sculpted on a gold background, attributed to the Serpotta brothers.

Following page: Realmonte (Agrigento), the famous Scala dei Turchi beach.







beautiful



Guy de Maupassant: “The most stupendous religious jewel cherished by human thought”

Top: Palermo, Palazzo dei Normanni, Cappella Palatina. The basilica is part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site that comprises Arab-Norman Palermo and the cathedrals of Cefalù and Monreale. It contains a hundred and sixty-two mosaic scenes, and is considered one of the most beautiful sacred buildings in the world.

Opposite: Palermo, the Cathedral. A symbol of the city, the cathedral effectively embodies and illustrates the historical and cultural changes Palermo has witnessed over the centuries, taking the visitor on a thrilling journey through the ages. The building features a mix of overlapping Arab, Norman and Gothic-Catalan elements.



Jean Houël: “The most complete, most refined monument of its kind”



Top left: Monreale (Palermo), Benedictine abbey complex, detail of the marble columns in the Cloister.

Top right: Cefalù (Palermo), interior of the Cathedral. The splendid depiction of Christ Pantocrator (meaning “almighty”), an iconographic model typical of the Byzantine and Orthodox tradition, housed in the central apse. The figure is richly symbolic. Inside the halo of the Saviour is a cross, to distinguish Him from the saints.

Opposite: The Cathedral of Monreale (Palermo), a masterpiece of human endeavour inextricably linked to the magnificence and perfection of its surroundings. It is impossible not to imagine that the hands that shaped such miraculous beauty were guided by God.



**6,340 m<sup>2</sup> of mosaics on a gold background, the second largest in the world**



A few delightful Sicilian delicacies: the “Baroque” *cassata* dessert; delicious *granita*, a water ice generally accompanied by the distinctively shaped *brioscia col tupper*; a crisp *cannolo* filled with a velvety-smooth ricotta cream; *arancine* (or *arancini*, as they are called in Catania), the famous fried rice balls; the world-famous *Pasta alla Norma*, and lastly, the island’s street food par excellence: a bread roll filled with *panelle* (chickpea fritters) and potato croquettes. Sicily is a generous, fertile land, with a farming tradition stretching back thousands of years. From the island’s soil spring delicious, fragrant fruit and plants, some of them truly unique and unrivalled, such as those that grow in the volcanic soil of Mount Etna, making for a cuisine that could not fail to be extraordinarily rich, varied and appetizing. Sicilian food not only tastes delicious; it also looks spectacular, with vivid, vibrant colours and appealing, sophisticated shapes that reflect the rich tones and marvellous beauty of this fortunate, sun-kissed island.

Next page: top left, Island of Ustica (Palermo). The divine hand sprinkled the seas around Sicily with a handful of islands, offering a haven of peace and quiet amid enchanting gems and unspoiled beauty. Ustica is indeed known as the “black pearl of the Mediterranean”, and also as a “diver’s paradise”; bottom left, the island of Marettimo (Aegadian archipelago, Trapani). The Egadi Islands Marine Protected Area is the largest in Europe; on the right, a man at work in the typical salt pans of Trapani: a series of evenly sized pools dotted with pyramid-shaped heaps of salt covered with tiles.



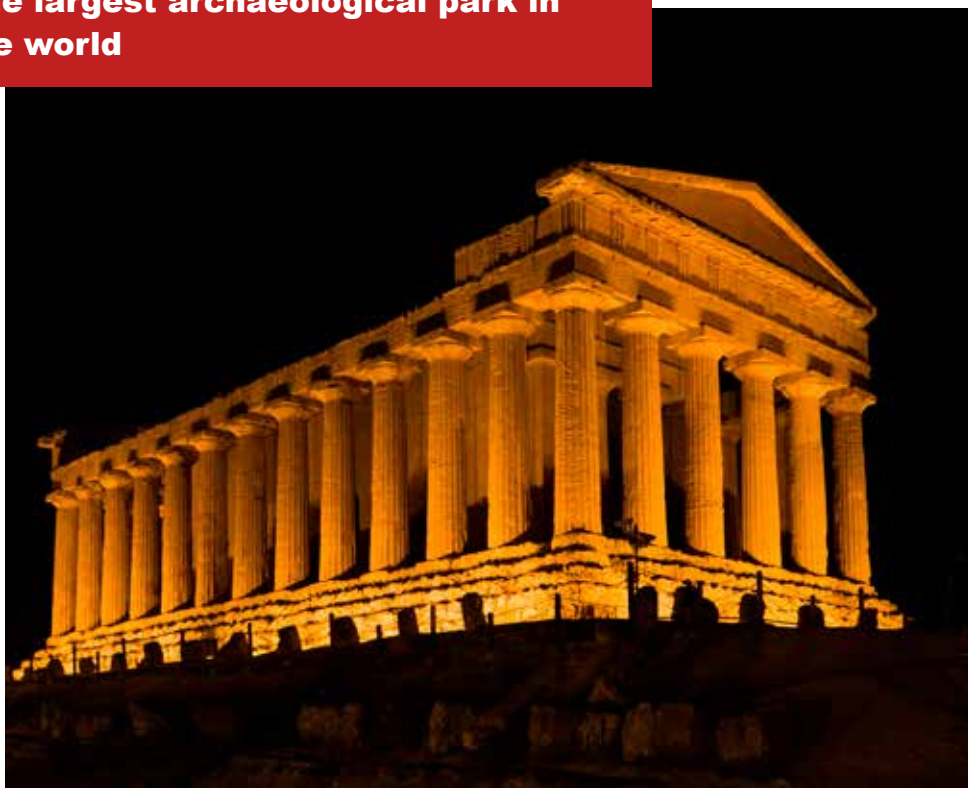


*salty*

**The largest marine protected area  
in Europe**

**The largest archaeological park in  
the world**

*ancient*





Marguerite Yourcenar:  
"Sublime in their ingenuousness"

Sicilian *Opera dei Pupi* marionettes. A fascinating re-elaboration of the narrative material provided by the *Chanson de Roland* or *Orlando Furioso*, following the oral tradition of puppetry, *Opera dei Pupi* represents the first Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity proclaimed by UNESCO in Italy.

Opposite page: at the top, Valley of the Temples (Agrigento), Temple of Concordia. Built in AD 430, it is one of the best preserved temples in the world. The site is one of the finest expressions of the Greek genius; spread over 1300 hectares, it is the world's largest archaeological park. The exclusive view of the Doric constructions, "untainted" by modern surroundings and indeed embellished by magnificent olive and almond trees, makes this place truly unique; bottom left, detail of the Dancing Satyr (Mazara del Vallo, Trapani), a mythological figure depicted in the throes of the orgiastic ecstasy linked to the rite of wine-making and drunkenness; on the right, the Valley of the Temples, remains of an ancient building.

intense





Top: Biviere Lake (Messina), in the Nebrodi Regional Natural Park, the largest protected area in Sicily, and in the running to become a UNESCO geopark. The Park comprises 24 municipalities of the provinces of Catania, Enna and Messina. It contains half of the island's woodlands, making it the green lung of Sicily. It winds its way along the Tyrrhenian coastline, embracing huge green areas of woodland and forests that to this day are home to ancient traditions passed down through generations of shepherds, charcoal burners, horse breeders and potters. The Park contains elements of historical, architectural and natural interest, as well as a number of areas equipped for visitors.



Bottom: Isnello (Palermo), small village in the Madonie Regional Natural Park, which represents a UNESCO Geopark involving fifteen municipalities within the territory of the Metropolitan City of Palermo. The Park offers many attractions, including equipped areas for visitors, bridle paths and museums and contains the ski resort of Piano Battaglia. It also offers plenty of opportunities to practise sports. Besides its great geological and geomorphological interest, the Madonie Regional Natural Park has a unique characteristic: although its surface represents only 2% of the Sicilian territory, it hosts over 50% of the most highly evolved plant species, about 2600, as many as Egypt, Tunisia and Algeria combined.

**Trip Advisor: the world's most beautiful beach**



Top: Isola dei Conigli, Lampedusa (Pelagie Archipelago, Agrigento). Named by Trip Advisor as the world's most beautiful beach in 2013, and the most beautiful beach in Europe in 2014, 2015 and 2019. This says it all, really.

Opposite: The island of Pantelleria, a National Park, considerably closer to Africa than Sicily. The third largest of the Italian minor islands, it is set amid one of the most beautiful parts of the Mediterranean sea, and its numerous natural attractions include a natural lake, fed by rainfall and by thermal springs below the surface: the fabulous, brilliant blue Lago di Venere.

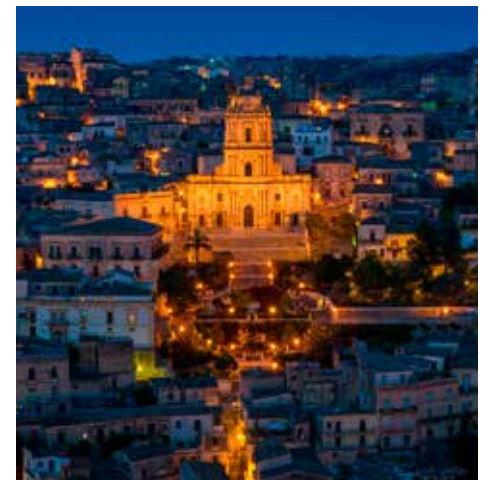


*profound*



Sicily is home to an impressive twentyfour of the small villages listed by the national association *Borghi più belli d'Italia*. In these places, the visitor will come face to face with some of the most ancient, genuine features of the island, with the largely unspoilt surroundings offering the opportunity to revel in the local history, culture and tradition. Life here continues to move along at the leisurely, relaxing pace of yesteryear, for a spiritual experience the visitor can savour and take away with them forever. Shown on this page are, from the left, the villages of: Caccamo and Castelbuono (Palermo), Marzamemi (Siracusa), Sambuca di Sicilia and Sciacca (Agrigento), San Marco d'Alunzio (Messina), and Modica (Ragusa).

On the page opposite: at the top, an aerial view of Erice (Trapani). An ancient medieval village perched on top of the mountain of the same name, at an altitude of around 750 m a.s.l., Erice offers incredible views that embrace Trapani and the Aegadian Islands. On a clear day, you can even see as far as Ustica, Pantelleria and Capo Bon in Tunisia; at the bottom, an aerial view of the Aeolian Islands (Messina).





*magical*

characteristic



On this page and on the page opposite: some typical Sicilian products. A plant of “Pistacchio verde di Bronte” (Catania), known as “green gold” for its extraordinary flavour and high market value. A PDO-label product unrivalled worldwide, these pistachios are grown exclusively on soil of volcanic origin. The fruit of the caper bush, which bears spectacular flowers, is another outstanding Sicilian product; particularly sought after are the capers of the Aeolian Islands and Pantelleria, which have earned PDO and IGP quality labels respectively.

Sicily also boasts a flourishing, ever-growing wine sector, and indeed food and wine tourism attracts large numbers of visitors to the island.

The breed of native donkeys that developed in Sicily is unfortunately now classed as endangered. Worth noting is the dry-stone wall the donkeys are pictured behind: an example of an art featured on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list.

Almonds are widely grown on the island, with the blossom from the trees covering the rural landscape in an immaculate white blanket that heralds the spring.



**Dry-stone walls: UNESCO Intangible Heritage**

Maupassant: "A walking rebus"



The island is also renowned for its olives, and visitors to Sicily can admire some marvellous olive trees, some of them centuries old, as well as sampling a number of local PDO-label olive oils. An expression of a popular art involving a number of talented artisans, with the process culminating in elaborate, decorative patterns painted by exquisitely skilled hands, Sicilian carts have transported goods and people along the streets of the island for many years. An incredible variety of subjects are depicted in improbably garish shades on the body of the carts: from religious scenes to episodes from history, legend and fairy tales, as well as musical scenes and realistic works inspired by *verismo*. With an age-old tradition mostly located in the heart of the towns and cities, Sicily's historical street markets offer a vibrant, typical spectacle. The experience is unquestionably heightened by the market stall owners and their custom of extolling the virtues of their produce in a booming voice, in the local vernacular. The island also offers an abundance of native ancient wheat varieties. Orange blossom is something of a symbol of the island's wild plant life, spreading its marvellous fragrance all over the countryside. Sicily boasts a flourishing tradition of artistic ceramics. Especially famous worldwide are the age-old traditional ceramics of Caltagirone (Catania) and Santo Stefano di Camastra (Messina). The impressive variety of typical cuisine found on the island has gradually been enriched and enhanced over the centuries by the different peoples who came to live in Sicily. The art of pasta making has been handed down for generations from mother to daughter, while the local cheese-making tradition has given rise to a number of quality PDO-label varieties.

generous



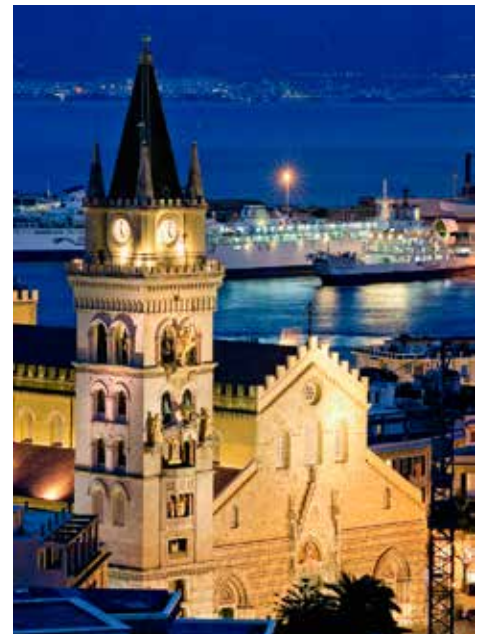
**Saint Agatha: the religious festival with the third-largest attendance in the world**

Opposite: at the top, Etna (Catania), nocturnal view of a volcanic eruption. For some two and a half million years, the volcano has been altering and shaping the landscape with the most creative of natural events. Its spectacular column of lava, smoke and gas can reach over 5 km in height. Bottom left: devotees of Saint Agatha in Catania, wearing the traditional *sacchi*, a white votive costume. The celebrations, which run from 3 to 6 February, are truly spectacular, attracting massive crowds who come both to worship the saint and to enjoy the fascinating folklore of the event.

Above: The solemn Holy Week celebrations in Enna, during which the religious confraternities established in the Late Middle Ages parade through the streets of the city.

Opposite: Palermo, the exterior of the Teatro Massimo Vittorio Emanuele, officially opened in 1897. This magnificent work by Basile is the largest opera house in Italy, and the third largest in Europe.

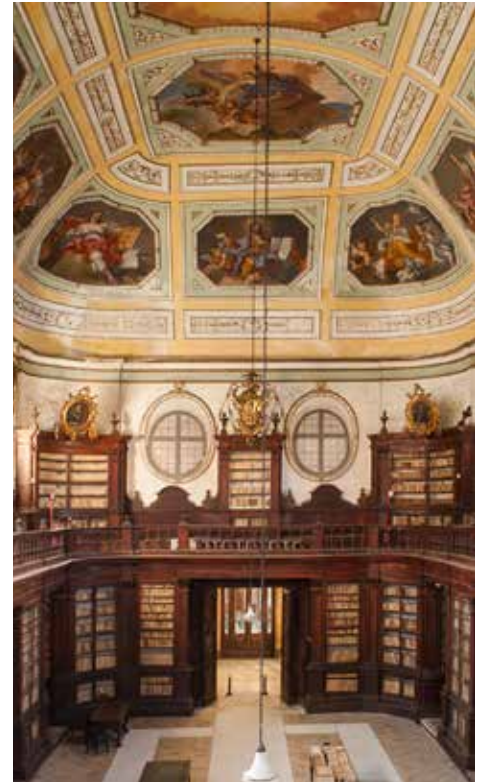
Bottom left: interior of the Teatro Massimo Vincenzo Bellini opera house, named after the great local-born composer. Built in an eclectic Neo-Baroque style on a design by the architect Carlo Sada, the theatre was opened in 1890. Bottom right: a beautiful shot of Messina Cathedral, with a view over the Strait. The bell tower hosts an astounding mechanical and astronomical clock, the largest and most complex in the world. Inaugurated in 1933, it remains the main attraction of the city. At noon, an elaborate system of levers and counterweights moves the statues that embellish the façade.



*artistic*



# elegant



Top left: Catania, Cathedral of Sant'Agata, originally built around 1094. The Cathedral stands in Piazza Duomo, the city's main meeting place. This refined, elegant square appears painted in black and white, with its buildings constructed in Siracusa limestone and Etna basalt stone; on the right Catania, interior of the "Civica e Ursino Recupero" library complex comprising five rooms containing around 270,000 volumes, including rare and prestigious books. One of the gems of the library is a Bible illuminated in gold by Pietro Cavallini, dating to around 1300 and considered one of the most beautiful in the world.

Opposite: Catania, Piazza Università. The beautiful building that is home to the city's university, founded in 1434.



learned



Top left: Catania, view of the church of San Biagio seen from the Roman amphitheatre, an imposing construction only partially visible, because it was covered by a flow of lava in the 17th century; top right, the Greek Theatre in Siracusa. In ancient times, it was a prestigious location for the performance of Greek tragedies. Aeschylus is believed to have staged two of his own works here. Since 1914, the theatre has once again been hosting the great tragedies of the past; this renewed tradition continues to be an important cultural and artistic attraction to this day.

Bottom: Selinunte (Trapani), Temple of Hera. Note the blocks of stone scattered on the ground, a tangible sign of the catastrophic events that have marked the history of this town with a glorious past.

**The largest archaeological park in Europe**

Opposite: Ragusa, The Cathedral of San Giovanni Battista.

Bottom left: Noto (Siracusa), a chimera with a fearsome sneer, from an ornate bracket supporting a balcony, a typical feature of Sicilian Baroque architecture, the value of which has been acknowledged by UNESCO. “The eight towns in south-eastern Sicily, Caltagirone, Militello Val di Catania, Catania, Modica, Noto, Palazzolo, Ragusa and Scicli, were all rebuilt after 1693 on or beside towns existing at the time of the earthquake which took place in that year. They represent a considerable collective undertaking, successfully carried out at a high level of architectural and artistic achievement”. Bottom right: Palazzolo Acreide (Siracusa), Annunziata Church, the main entrance, featuring paired spiral columns.

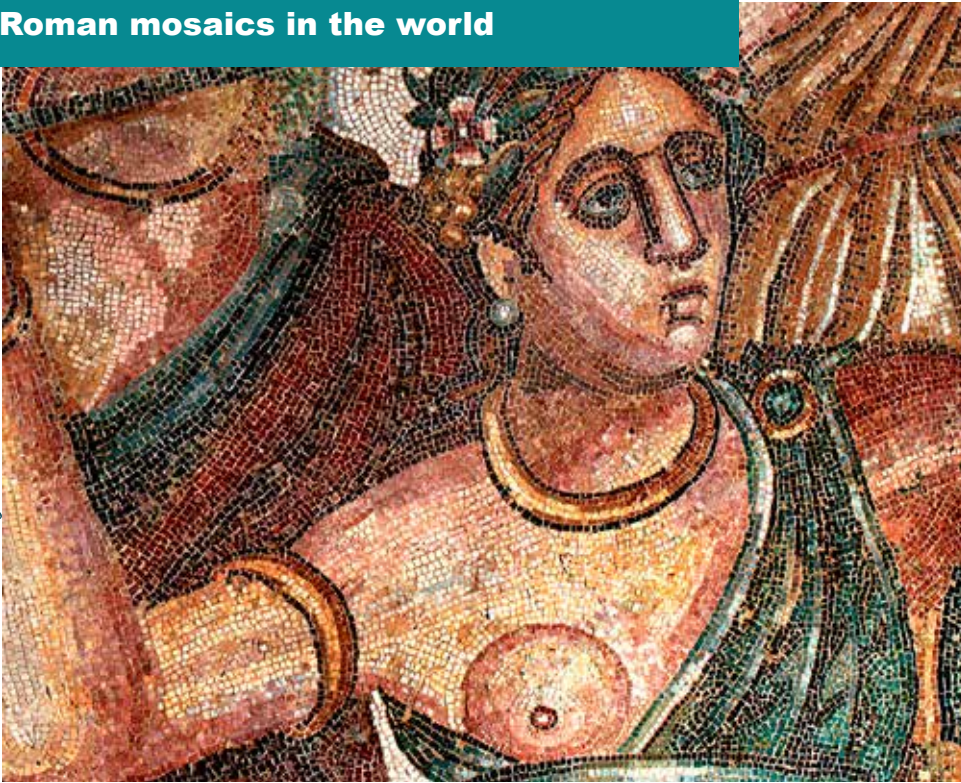


*baroque*

**The Late Baroque towns of the Val di Noto:  
a UNESCO World Heritage Site**

## The largest and most elaborate collection of Roman mosaics in the world

legendary



Top left: Piazza Armerina (Enna), mosaic from the magnificent Villa Romana del Casale, considered one of the most significant Roman monuments in existence, and particularly renowned for its floors, featuring one of the largest and most elaborate collections of Roman mosaics in the world (3,500 m<sup>2</sup>). The Villa has undergone complex restoration work, most recently in the period from 2007 to 2012. Top right: Morgantina (Aidone, Enna), Goddess of Morgantina. The statue is 2.24 m tall, and is believed to have been sculpted between 425 BC and 400 BC. This marvellous monument has a rich, eventful history, replete with mystery and adventure.

Opposite: Morgantina (Aidone, Enna), acroliths of the goddesses Demetra and



Kore. The fragments of these splendid sculptures from the archaic period include two heads, hands and feet, and they belong to two statues slightly larger than life-size. An ancient land, a crossroads of numerous peoples and cultures since the remotest of times, Sicily has always had a particularly intense relationship with words, stories and legends. Gods, demi-gods, nymphs, heroes and monsters, featured in allegorical tales or legends shaped by the fervid imagination of writers and philosophers, have filled the island's homes, streets, theatres, and above all the minds of the islanders. Examples would be too numerous to mention, but it is sufficient to note that these tales and legends are such a deeply rooted, integral part of the island that they



have left traces in many Sicilian place names: Peloro, Bronte, Aretusa, Adrano, Megara, Eolo, Liparo, Hyblaea, Erix, Minosse are just some of the many figures of widespread renown that have become inextricably linked with the island's locations and its culture.

Opposite: aerial view of the area of Donnalucata, whose pearly white sands dip right into the breathtakingly blue sea.

Bottom left: Caltanissetta's spectacular Piazza Garibaldi, surrounded by the city's most important monuments, and with the Fontana del Tritone in the centre. The square is bustling with crowds admiring the vare, groups of sculptures linked to the Easter celebrations under way.

Bottom right: Caltanissetta, interior of the Cathedral. Divine light seems to flood in from the dome of this magnificent place of worship.

*divine*



Leonardo Sciascia: "All of Sicily is a dimension of imagination"



On this page, from the left: Enna, the splendid Belvedere, the panoramic viewpoint in the city centre that looks right across the surroundings.

Enna, a delightful winter shot of the bell tower of the Church of San Francesco dei Conventuali.

Enna, Castello di Lombardia. A symbol of Enna, and one of the three largest mediaeval castles in Italy, the castle stands on the highest point of the city. It was built over a fortress of Sicanian origin, like the city it looks down onto, known in ancient times as Henna.



Sicily is home to more than two hundred castles, each of which bears traces of its glorious past. Strolling through the streets and coming upon these imposing fortresses, whose lofty towers once reached up to the sky, takes the visitor on a thrilling trip back through time, offering an enchanting, mysterious vision of the island.

Followed by: the castles of Aci Castello (Catania), Mazzarino (Caltanissetta), Milazzo (Messina), and Ursino (Catania).





Opposite: at the top, the Island of Stromboli (Aeolian Archipelago, Messina), offering both relaxation and a vibrant social life, as well as the unforgettable spectacle of the volcano erupting burning stones down the Sciara del Fuoco into the sea below; at the bottom, an aerial view of Isola Bella, near Taormina (Messina). The splendid little island of Isola Bella is a dream for beach lovers, hugely popular with both locals and foreign visitors.

Above: Gole dell'Alcantara (Catania and Messina). A place of enchanting, unspoilt beauty, the Gorges are deep clefts in the basalt rock, through which dash the icy waters of the Alcantara River.

*surprising*

relaxing



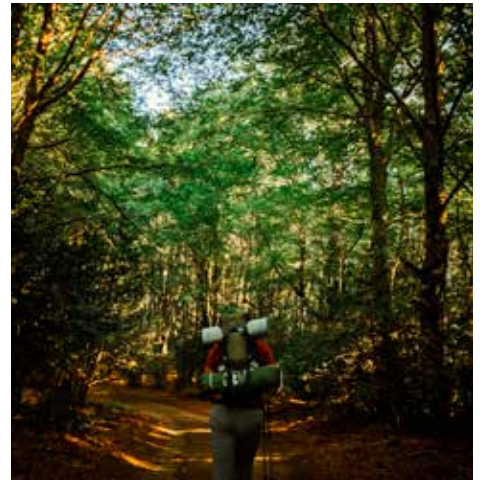
The poetry of the Sicilian landscape. The island boasts a wealth of places where Nature reigns undisturbed and offers a succession of marvellous views that seem to have sprung from an artist's brush; timeless landscapes painted in warm, enveloping tones, solitary and motionless but for grazing herds and the occasional bird soaring through the air. This is the other side of Sicily, replacing the black of the lava, the white, beige and ochre of the rocks and the deepest blue of the sea with the golden yellow of the wheat, the pastel shades of the vegetation, and the red and yellow of the hillsides in bloom.

Opposite page: ...Sicily is not, however, just a destination for relaxing, and the island offers plenty of opportunities to practise sports, even those able to satisfy the most free-spirited visitor.

Next and following page: Lipari (Aeolian Archipelago, Messina); Taormina (Messina), Greek theatre.



*exciting*



*adventurous*



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