



Sicily

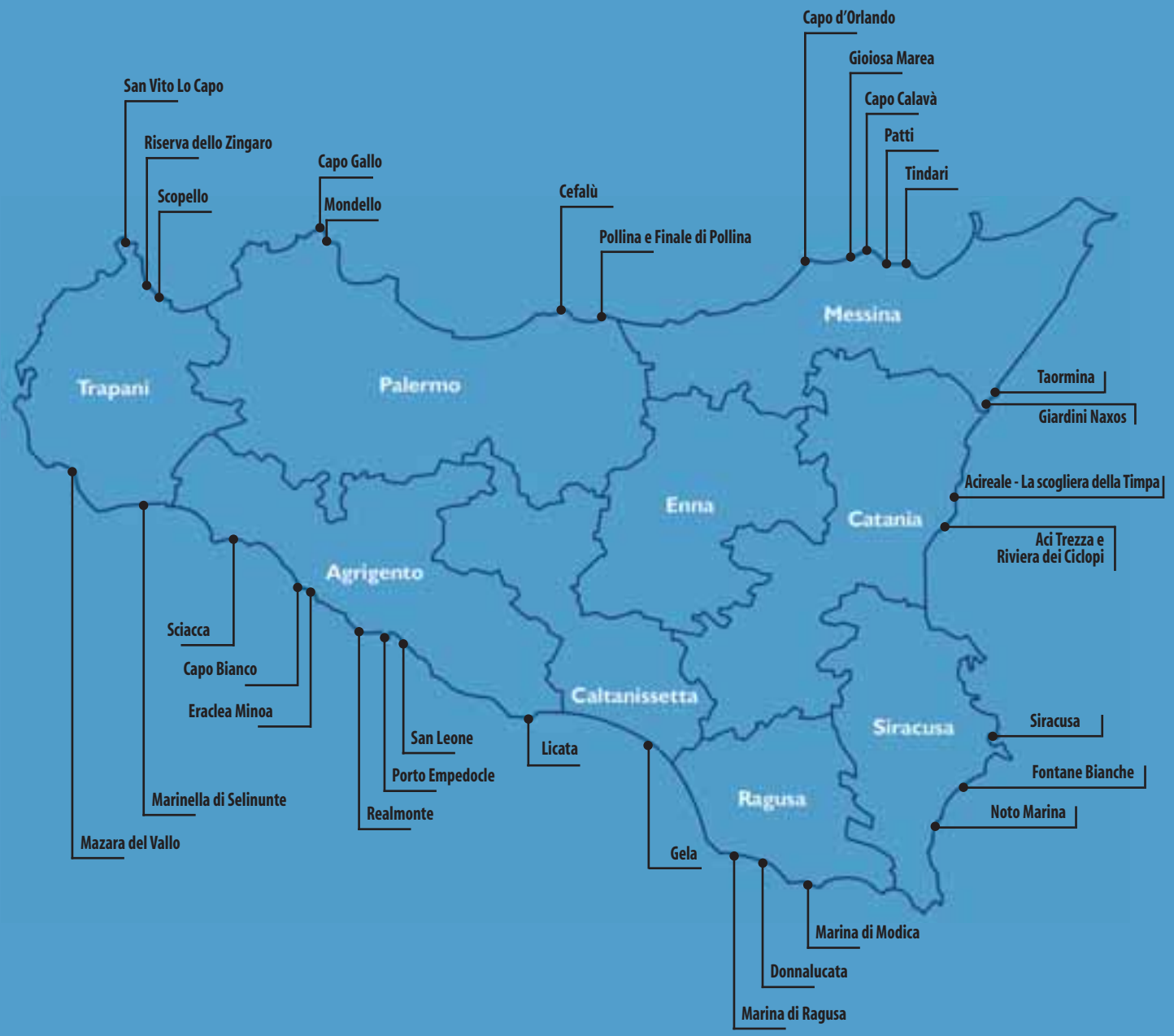
1000

tourism

culture

events

Km of coast to be experienced



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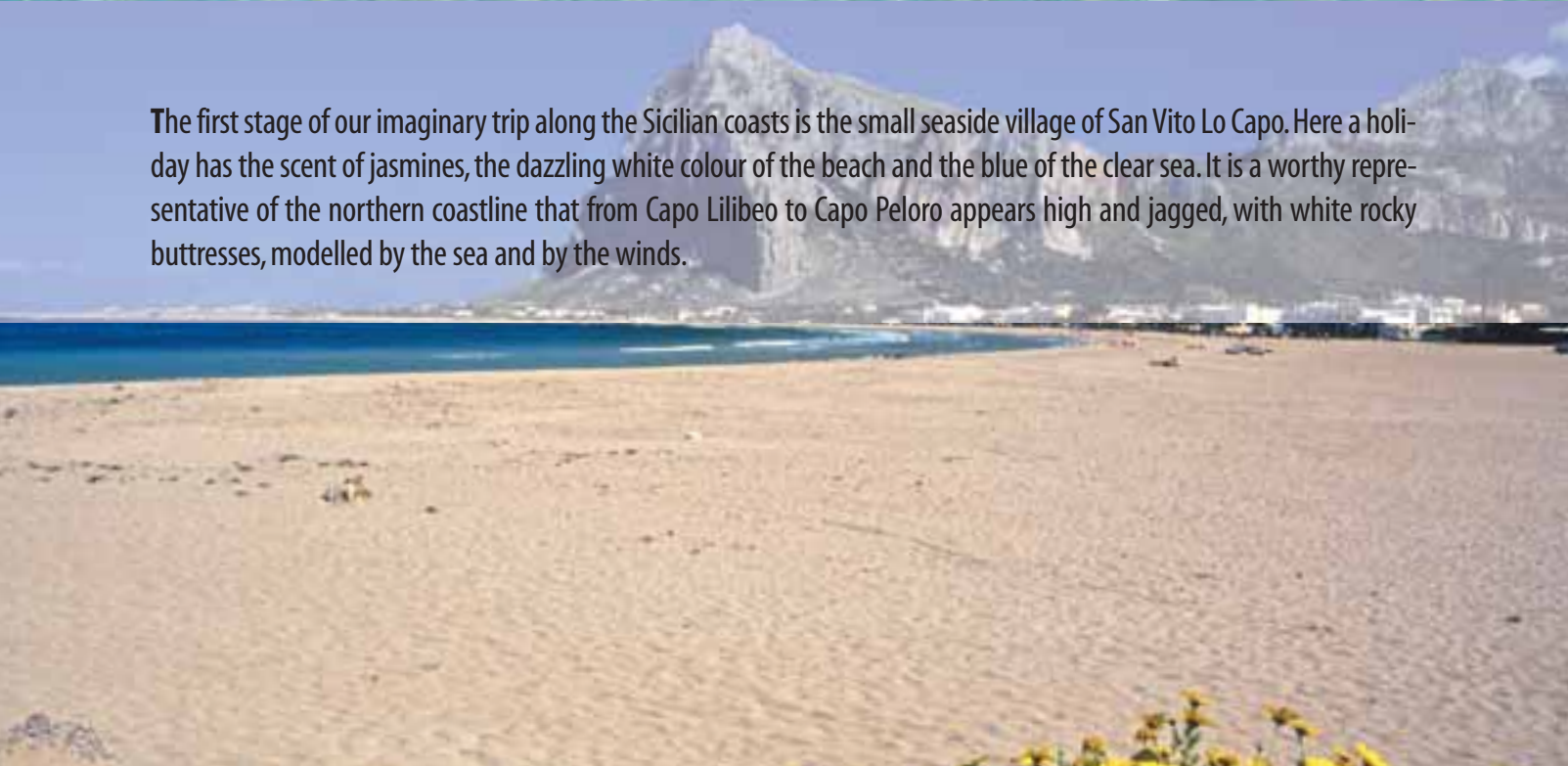
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The order of the beaches is that of a hypothetical itinerary starting from the province of Trapani (San Vito Lo Capo) and, going eastwards, returning to the province of Trapani (Mazara del Vallo) after having crossed, in order, the provinces of Palermo, Messina, Catania, Syracuse, Ragusa and Agrigento.

San Vito Lo Capo (TP)



The first stage of our imaginary trip along the Sicilian coasts is the small seaside village of San Vito Lo Capo. Here a holiday has the scent of jasmynes, the dazzling white colour of the beach and the blue of the clear sea. It is a worthy representative of the northern coastline that from Capo Lilibeo to Capo Peloro appears high and jagged, with white rocky buttresses, modelled by the sea and by the winds.



The village, one with a maritime tradition and a little over 3,000 inhabitants, developed around an old Saracen fort, subsequently turned into a sanctuary devoted to San Vito. Today the main activity is tourism. Its flower-adorned lanes, the fresh fish, the intense scents and its Caribbean panoramas will give you an unforgettable holiday just like its cuisine, with couscous as a first course and the original caldofreddo dessert.

Yes! For those who come to San Vito do it above all for its sea and its beach: almost three kilometres of gilded sand, beautiful enough to arouse envy in the most famous paradises in the South Seas. As you arrive in the village along the only access route, you see the sea even before passing the first houses. Another kilometre and you find yourself going straight towards a crystalline sea which you get to across a carpet of clean sand. Recommending a particular stretch of beach to swimmers is impossible, as one is as good as the other, and all are enchanting. The seabed softly slopes down towards the open sea, and currents do not affect this area at all, so that it is also particularly suitable for people who are not experienced swimmers and for the youngest. Those who instead prefer rocks to sand have almost too much to choose between: to

the east (the Secco tuna station is splendid) as to the west the opportunities to have marvellous swims and at the same time to enjoy a splendid landscape are countless. The waterfront makes it possible to walk a few metres from the foreshore, as does the road that leads to the very high lighthouse - with a height of 40 metres and a radius of over twenty miles - after going past the two docks in the harbour. A panoramic road crosses the plateau, affording a splendid view of the village and its gulf.

Then those who love rides on horseback or trekking only have to choose among the endless series of maneges and experienced guides that ensure relaxing rides in countryside invaded by sunshine and daisies, while the slopes of the mountains and the paths that take you up onto Monte Monaco are also good occasions for foot excursions accessible to those who do not have an athlete's physique and lungs. A climb up Monte Monaco (532 metres) is an interesting experience for the opportunity to encounter plenty of exemplars of endemic flora and, finally, to enjoy a very beautiful landscape with the gaze roaming over the gulfs of Cofano, San Vito and Castellammare and on the clearest days even taking in the island of Ustica.



How to get:

A29 Palermo-Mazara del Vallo motorway. Castellammare del Golfo exit - Going along the SS 187 Palermo-Trapani road as far as the junction for San Vito Lo Capo-Custonaci. From Palermo about 115 km, from Trapani about 40 km.

Zingaro Nature Reserve and Scopello (TP)



Small paths drawn on the precipices, which end in the sea or climb up on the mountains, allow you to cross one of the most intact environments in the Mediterranean: the Zingaro Special Nature Reserve. The Reserve has one of the most enchanting coastal strips in Italy, formed by a rocky coast and enlivened by numerous little bays and sheers cliffs that quickly take you to a crystalline sea.



Zingaro enchants one with its rugged beauty, its intense colours in every season, the white little bays set in a turquoise sea, the omnipresent dwarf palms and the luxuriant Mediterranean maquis, the tenacious wild olive trees and the majestic carobs from which one makes out the harmonious forms of the rural houses. And yet this beauty is intimately linked to the sea, which is not only the geographical confine but the constant backdrop to the landscape and the essential complement to its natural aspects.

The pebbly little beaches seen from the sea look like clearer niches cut out on the sides of the dolomitic walls that entering from the south, on the Scopello side, and going northward, take on the name Cala della Capreria, Cala del Varo (attainable from the sea), Cala della Disa or Zingaro, Cala Beretta, Cala Marinella and Cala Torre dell'Uzzo, whose calcareous substratum exalts the transparency of the water. Then red algae, madrepora, anemones and sea roses make the seabeds a real rich sea garden of fishes with coloured liveries reminiscent of an environment with a tropical flavour.

In the area of the Reserve about ten species of birds nest, including the peregrine falcon, Bonelli's eagle, buzzards, windhovers, red kites and other birds on the way to extinction, in an environment rich in endemic and rare plants that make the Reserve a true oasis of biodiversity. But Zingaro holds in store another gift for travellers that visit it: Scopello. For many years this has been a destination for tourists coming from all over Europe due to the superlative beauty of its rocky shores and its seabeds. From the little seaside village of Scopello, which develops around the courtyard of a bailey from the 8th century, it is possible to begin a variegated itinerary, including a visit to the old tuna station and the shops of craftsmen that do ceramics, and the splendid rock-stacks, "... obelisks of rock that wind and sea have patiently moulded, taking care to sculpt mysterious cavities pullulating with marine life." But for enthusiasts the true treasure is above all its sea and its beaches. Rugged rocks, mitigated by small tongues of pebbles and sand, will be an ideal setting for enjoying the spectacle of a sea with colours changing from cobalt blue to intense turquoise, a spectacle that will make a stay in this precious area of Sicily unforgettable.



How to get:

A29 Palermo-Mazara del Vallo motorway. Castellammare del Golfo exit – Going along the SS 187 Palermo-Trapani road as far as the junction for the Zingaro Nature Reserve-Scopello. From Palermo about 80 km, from Trapani about 40 km.

Mondello and Capo Gallo (PA)



The intense blue sky, with a few clouds embroidered here and there, is reflected on a calm and inviting sea that with docile waves caresses a beach of white and pink sand. The sun interweaves its rays with the small crests of water that are lost on the foreshore the whole day. In the background, the bare head of Monte Pellegrino (an ideal place for enjoyable free climbing) and Utveggio Castle. This is Mondello . . . and Palermo is just a short way off.



Yes, it really is so. Because after all Mondello is the beach par excellence of Palermo people: noisy and vital, coloured, worldly, snobbish, popular, and so much else. It is a beach that reflects the contrasts of the city to which it belongs, and that extols its most fascinating aspects and that is able to tell its most recent history even if it succeeds very quickly in making us forget that we are just a short way from a city with almost a million inhabitants.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Palermo enjoyed a moment of great economic prosperity. Art nouveau began and at the same time there began the reclaiming of the swamp of Mondello and its transformation from a small fishermen's village to a bathing resort. Many small villas and the bathing establishment were built. Mondello thus entered the circuit of elite holiday places. The beach, today – both the free part and the one partly occupied by rows of colourful huts and the imposing art nouveau structure of the bathing establishment – still preserves its own charm, blending magnificent scenery with almost tropical characteristics with a sporting vocation testified by the great international successes achieved in windsurfing by some local athletes who at this beach have learned the art of taming the wind.

At the different beaches in the area of Valdesi (east of Mondello) it is possible to practise almost all sea sports.

Then in the village it is possible to taste Palermitan street cuisine, from panelle to sfincione, without forgetting the more “vain” pasta with sardines.

In comparison to Mondello - the comparison is almost inevitable seeing the contiguity of the two coasts - Capo Gallo is certainly a quieter place, more secluded and, above all, a privileged destination for those that prefer rocks to fine sand: a natural corollary to a blue, deep and extraordinarily clean sea. Those who love the sea will find all along the coast many crags disseminated here and there: a lot of rocks, but also stretches of pebbles, sandier spots and tens and tens of small caves, mostly semi-submerged, primarily in the tide zone along the Mazzone coast, containing marine fauna and flora that elsewhere you only find at a greater depth. Because of natural and landscape characteristics, Capo Gallo is a special natural reserve and a protected sea area just outside the biggest city in Sicily: the ideal place for unforgettable dives.



How to get:

In the city of Palermo, go to Piazza Leoni and then enter the Royal Favorita Park, going along Viale Diana, which after 7-8 km takes you directly to Mondello. From the city centre about 10 km.

From Palermo Falcone-Borsellino airport, A29 Mazara del Vallo-Palermo motorway, heading for the city centre; take the Mondello exit. From the airport about 25 km.

Cefalù (PA)



Obviously every bathing resort would deserve a more detailed mention for truly valorising its peculiarities and arousing the curiosity of interested or still doubtful tourists on how to spend their holidays. And this is even truer when one intends to speak of Cefalù: an Arab-Norman pearl that is mirrored in a sea coloured with history.



In this journey of ours, however, more because of the theme than its undisputed importance, we will leave in the background, serving as a guard, the history and art of this magnificent town that we deem to be a further departure point (and certainly not a final destination) for many trips leading to the discovery of the beaches and the over one thousand kilometres of Sicilian coasts.

The delightful town of Cefalù is judged by many, because of its long beach of fine golden sand, the intense blue of the sea, the typically Mediterranean atmosphere with a smack of Arabia about it, to be among the most enchanting seaside resorts in Sicily. Thousands of tourists every year come to Cefalù attracted by the warm sunny colours and the splendid coast landscape, made up of small bays, inlets and little beaches, rocks sheer over the sea, and cultivations of olives and citrus fruits. The intense scent of orange blossom that drenches the air and the tall mountains covered with woods, inside the regional Madonie Park, close off the spectacular scenario. The Park will offer you endless opportunities for excursions and nature walks with breathtaking views ranging from the peak of Etna to the Aeolian Islands. Here you will discover tens of small villages that,

nested on the tops and on the ridges of the mountains, dominate a landscape with timeless charm.

And then as a frame to what has generously been created by nature there are the works of men. Among the many architectural jewels that are dotted around in Cefalù, special mention must undoubtedly be made of the imposing Arab-Norman Cathedral that stands in the highest part of the town, against the background of a steep cliff, opposite the vast blue expanse of the sea. Completed in 1240, inside it preserves the sparkling mosaic of Christ Pantocrator that benignly welcomes the believer or the simple visitor. Alongside these treasures there is the medieval washing place, where until a few decades ago the women of Cefalù went down to rinse their cloths and to tell each other the life of the town; and the enigmatic smile of the Unknown Sailor by Antonello from Messina (kept at the Mandralisca Museum), one of the most innovative Sicilian Renaissance artists, who introduced the oil technique learned from the Flemish masters. So it is precisely this perfect and harmonious blend of nature and art that makes Cefalù a really unique place, worthy not only of being visited but also lived in.



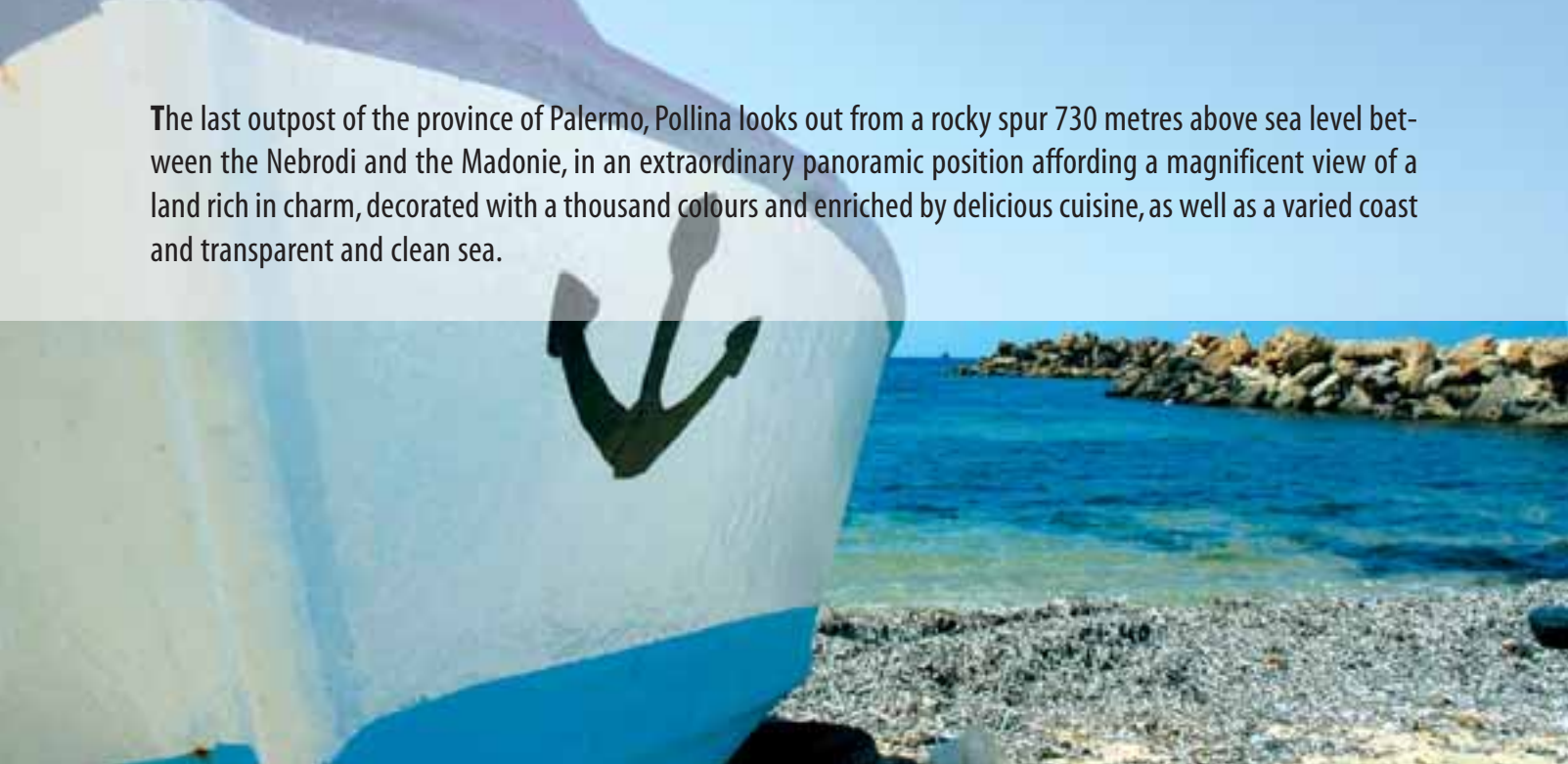
How to get:

A20 Palermo-Messina motorway, Cefalù exit. From Palermo about 65 km, from Messina about 170 km.

Pollina and Finale di Pollina (PA)



The last outpost of the province of Palermo, Pollina looks out from a rocky spur 730 metres above sea level between the Nebrodi and the Madonie, in an extraordinary panoramic position affording a magnificent view of a land rich in charm, decorated with a thousand colours and enriched by delicious cuisine, as well as a varied coast and transparent and clean sea.



According to a charming legend, the name would originate from Donna Polina, a Norman princess forced to undertake the classical fuitina (elopement) to crown her love, opposed by her brothers, for an Arabic vizier. After long wandering, the two chose this place as the abode of their love. So it was a love nest on a coast bathed by a kaleidoscopic sea.

Legend apart, the origins of Pollina are certainly very ancient, probably dating from the period of Greek colonization; perhaps on the site of the present-day village the Greek Apollonia stood. The small place, which has gone through history quietly and uneventfully, since 1970 has undergone significant development: first with the construction of a tourist village on the coast, then with the construction of an open-air theatre hewn out of a dolomitic rock made charming by the colour of the stones that are half pink and half white, causing it to be called "Pink Stone." Then from the vantage point the splendid mountains of the Nebrodi and the Madonie can be admired, as well as many surrounding villages and, when the sky is clear, the peak of Etna. The historic area still preserves all the charm of the

medieval past with tortuous and steep stone-paved alleys, and arches and houses built on the rocks, which every now and then appear from the walls and appear proudly to the tourist. We also recommend a visit to the nearby "Tiberio Gorges": gorges hewn out by the river Pollina with a really charming landscape and big nature interest.

Nearby Finale (from the Latin Finalis Statio) developed as a commercial outlet of the marquisate of the Ventimiglias, with the deposit area behind the lookout tower, the noble residence and the small residences set between these two poles. One of the most beautiful historical testimonies at Finale is the Saracen Tower on the cliff from which there stands out the so-called "Big rock." Around the Tower there is a terrace over the sea affording a charming panorama that ranges from Cefalù to Capo d'Orlando. So, making use of good accommodation, here you can relax, devoting yourself to fishing from rocks chiselled by a sea that you can furrow with small boats and motorboats for waterskiing; a perfect "pitch" for lovers of wind-surfing.



How to get:

A20 Palermo-Messina motorway, Castelbuono exit. Get on state highway SS 113; take the Pollina or Finale exit. From Palermo about 90 km, from Messina about 165 km.

Capo d'Orlando and the Saracen coast (ME)



The ancient Agatirno, founded as legend has it by the son of Aeolus, for centuries stuck out bold and beautiful towards the Tyrrhenian, welcoming knights, Saracen pirates and merchants of spice and silvers. More than three thousand years of history and legend, which left their impress on a territory where Mediterranean maquis, bluffs and unusual rock-stacks trace out the contours of one of the most important tourist resorts in Sicily.



The sea is the common denominator that at Capo d'Orlando joins together the patrician realities of the Villa of Bagnoli, the finds at the Mercadante gullies, what emerges from the recoveries along Via Libertà of kilns and deposits, down to the Dionysiac cults and the legends, handed down through the songs of fishermen evoking the Saracen raids passing through the epic of Tomasi of Lampedusa. A charming itinerary eternally present in the increasing tourist activity of the village. An uncontaminated sea, rich in small treasures, able to give, amid dassies, sea bass and scallops, remains of ancient vestiges. It is a sea that embraces and that lets itself be loved, like the people of these places that evoke the charm of past times but demand respect.

And in effect, Capo d'Orlando is a "traveller-sized" town. For it knows how to offer the joys of an uncontaminated sea and a luxuriant landscape, the promptings of a series of dates with culture, sport and shows, and interest in customs and traditions rooted in remote times. And, of course, because it allows those who make it their holiday destination to enjoy cordial and impeccable hospitality.

Hospitality that you will find going all along this stretch of coast in Messina province that, precisely starting from the San Giorgio Bay (and going as far as Capo Calavà) takes the evocative name of Saracen Coast: the realm of old tuna stations, of natural beauties and of art. So anyone who wants to enjoy a Sicily that appears in all its majesty, without foregoing the comforts of a wholly relaxing holiday, will find along the Saracen Coast, under the complicit gaze of the Aeolian Islands standing out on the horizon, immense beaches and cliffs a stone's throw from the greenery of the Nebrodi beech woods, a world rich in folklore and traditions, but also in good hotels, tourist villages, camping sites, conference structures, discos, business centres, sports centres... practically everything!

And finally a curiosity. At Capo d'Orlando anyone will tell you the story of a young Genoese, with glasses with showy black frames and a placid voice, who wrote a song entitled «A taste of salt»: not only a song but a hymn to love for a woman or perhaps really for this sea that remains on your skin and stays on your lips when you go out of the water to stretch out in the sun.



How to get:

A20 Palermo-Messina motorway, Brolo exit. Get on SS 113, which goes to Capo d'Orlando. From Palermo about 140 km, from Messina about 90 km.

Gioiosa Marea and Capo Calavà (ME)



Leaving behind us Capo d'Orlando, our coastal trip takes us to Gioiosa Marea. Another fine spot on the Tyrrhenian coast whose morphology is rugged, with hills with steep sides. There are few flat areas: small strips immediately give way to steep slopes and steep cliffs sheer over the sea.



For the ancient Roman colonizers of the island, Gioiosa Marea was simply Joiusa. The present name of this cheerful town, bathed by the blue flow and eddy of the waters of the sea, dates from just two centuries ago, following the last exodus of the population of farmers from the peak of Monte di Guardia down toward the coast. Indeed, old Gioiosa was on a high plateau 800 metres above sea level from which (now as in the past) there is a very broad vista: opposite, there superbly stand out the islands of Vulcano and Lipari and the ridges of the windy peaks of the other Aeolian Islands; then, on both sides of the coastal front, Capo d'Orlando (to the left) and Capo Milazzo (to the right); behind, one has no difficulty in making out the crests of the Nebrodi and the imperious peak of Etna. Today's Gioiosa Marea, instead, which lies in the coastal area that is flat and has soft slopes going down towards the sea, arose towards the end of the eighteenth century. In effect, though, amid the whiteness of the various buildings in the nineteenth-century style scattered around here and there (and the efficient rationality of the most recent architectures) it has grey, earthy walls corroded in the structure of stones and mortar, with arcades of the Mediterranean type in bossed stone in which there is the impress of the previous settlements.

Gathered up in itself, and quietly free of amazing historical upsets, the beautiful Gioiosa had three roads going into it from the hinterland: the Scaletta in the direction of Marina di Patti; the one known as Mali Passi towards Randazzo; and lastly the Calavà Royal Road, which led to Capo Calavà. It is a pretty promontory that dips in among clear seabeds and that invites anyone, like a perfect host, to bathe in the waters of her sea. And it really is the charming shade of Capo Calavà that, greeting visitors, superbly closes off the Saracen Coast.

But before abandoning this stretch of coast, possibly before restoring yourself with tasty *pisci stoccu a' missinisi*, dried cod cooked with capers, olives, celery and tomatoes, or more simply after refreshing yourself with a magnificent granita, you can linger one can still linger a while to make a very charming visit to the Gioiosa Marea cave: you can explore it in its entirety, and it is formed by three chambers connected to one another by corridors and tunnels that are a grey colour that here and there fades into reddish tones. The abundant stalactites that decorate the upper walls of the cave encounter concretions in the strangest and most grotesque forms that, though small, complete this natural beauty.



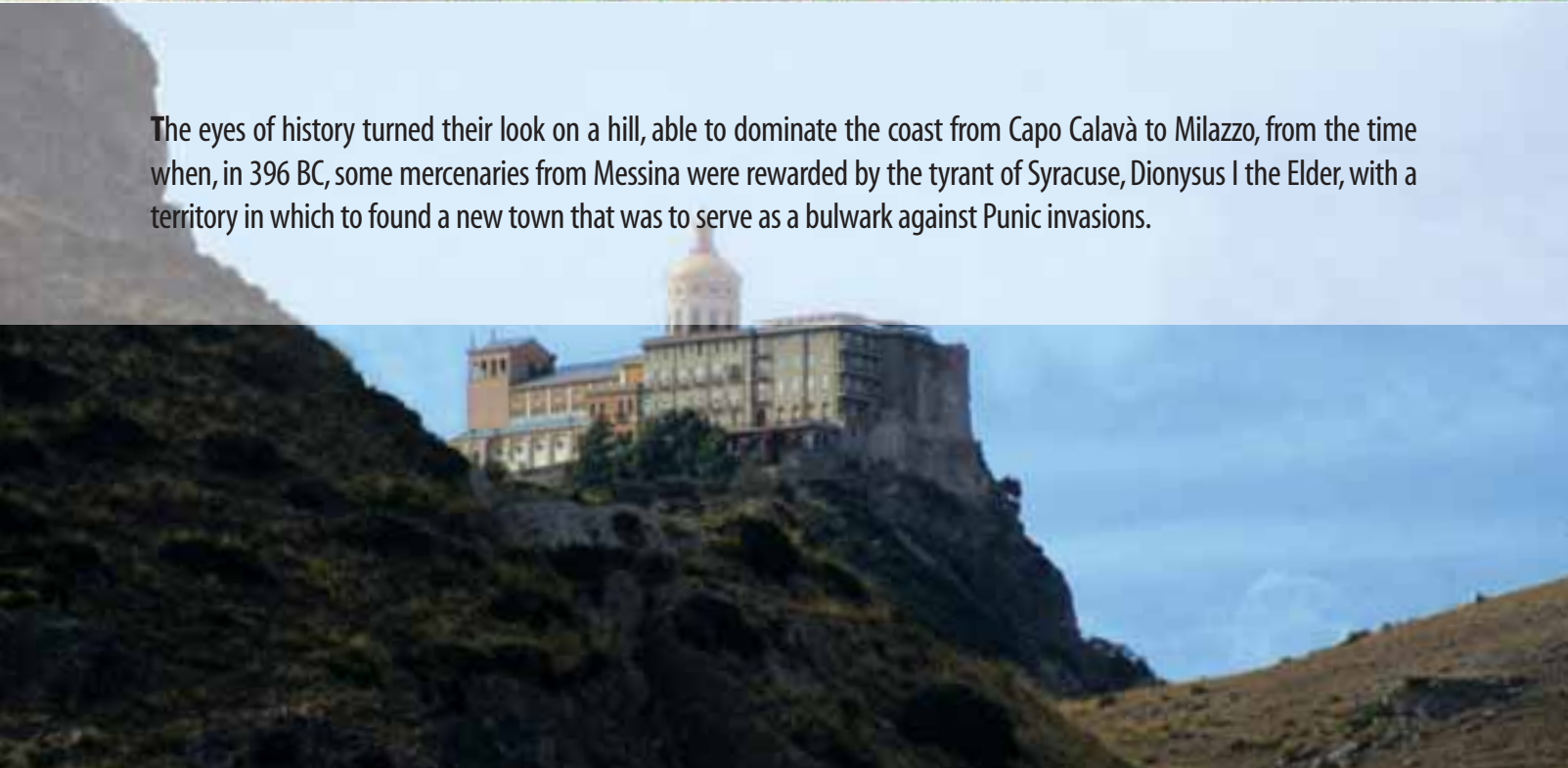
How to get:

A20 Palermo-Messina motorway, Brolo exit from Palermo, Patti exit from Messina. Get on SS 113, which goes to Gioiosa Marea. From Palermo about 150 km, from Messina about 75 km.

Tindari and Patti (ME)



The eyes of history turned their look on a hill, able to dominate the coast from Capo Calavà to Milazzo, from the time when, in 396 BC, some mercenaries from Messina were rewarded by the tyrant of Syracuse, Dionysus I the Elder, with a territory in which to found a new town that was to serve as a bulwark against Punic invasions.



The town, which rose at the highest point on the hill, was called Tyndaris in honour of Tyndareus, a mythical Messene king and the father of the Dioscuri, Castor and Pollux, and from its foundation it participated in all the historical events that involved Sicily, becoming one of the strongest and richest towns there. Because of a cataclysm that caused a part of the settlement to fall into the sea, and definitive destruction by the Arabs, many of the inhabitants of Tindari had to leave their homes and migrate down into the valley, on the slopes of a low hillock beyond the Timeto, thus giving rise to the first community of the future Epi Actèn, i.e. "on the tall bank", later contracted to Patti.

The town of Patti officially arose with the construction of a Benedictine convent in 1094 at the behest of the Norman Count Roger de Hauteville. There are major historical and cultural elements in the town, but we will choose to dwell above all on the maritime aspects of the area, for instance on Capo Tindari and on the Tyrrhenian coast that embraces the city. This area allows you to enjoy beautiful sea landscapes as you proceed towards the town, coastal landscapes that encompass the area from Calavà to the Milazzo peninsula and

also afford a view of the Aeolian Islands. We must also mention Patti Marina, known to many because of the presence of a Roman Villa. Then if you are not satisfied and still want to admire some truly unique coastal panoramas, behind the promontory you will find Marinello: a series of strange and inviting little pools (with clear waters, where the sea is perpetually calm and the sand of the beaches is soft and velvety), which the dynamism of the sea changes continuously, especially when heavy seas beat violently on the beach.

A legend says that "A rich lady, who came from a far country with a little girl to adore the Virgin in the Sanctuary at Tindari, was disappointed when she saw that the effigy had the dark face of an Ethiopian. Having unwillingly fulfilled her vow, she went out on the terrace where she expressed her scorn. As soon as she had uttered the disrespectful invective, the child that she had in her arms fell in the void but at that very instant the sea withdrew, allowing a brief line of sandy beach to appear on the surface, on which the child was found safe and sound.

And from that day on the sea never again covered the place where the miracle took place.



How to get:

A20 Palermo-Messina motorway, Patti exit. From Palermo about 180 km, from Messina about 70 km.

Taormina and Giardini Naxos (ME)



Coming from Messina, after Letojanni, a town with splendid beaches frequented by a lot of tourists, you get to one of the most beautiful and famous coastal areas in the world. Here is Taormina Mare with Spisone, Mazzarò, Capo Sant'Andrea and Capo Taormina. Rock, gravel and sand are framed by the typical Mediterranean vegetation, while big inlets follow one another, drawing curves that model the coast.



In the sea, a throbbing liquid crystal of blue and dark green, Isolabella, almost in front of Mazzarò, a clot of rock densely cloaked in vegetation, increases the charm of the Taormina coast. At Capo Sant'Andrea by boat you can get to very beautiful sea caves. Those who love underwater activity can visit the caves and cracks in the Taormina coast, which is rich in Gorgonias and polychaete worms. We must particularly mention the Zi' Gennaro rock in front of Capo Sant'Andrea, which is a true spectacle: here the seabed does not go down to below 10 metres, but towards the open sea it suddenly falls to 45 metres.

Leaving the blue sea off Taormina, with our eyes still full of the colours and dreamy atmospheres of this place, we get ready to dip into the sea of Giardini Naxos. To an ear that is not Sicilian, the term "Giardini" immediately evokes a green place cultivated with flowers, but the name of the village derives rather from the Sicilian iardini, meaning citrus orchards, which the area is rich in, while "Naxos" derives from the name of the first Greek colony in Sicily, in whose territory today's village rose. Naxos was founded in 735 BC near the bay of Schisò,

by Chalcidians that were struck by the enchanting landscape, situated amid sea, fertile hills and the sacred snow-covered mountain (Etna), the forge of the god Hephaestus. Right from the start the settlement enjoyed religious prominence over the other colonies on the island since here there was the altar of Apollo Archegétes, the god protecting Greek colonization in Sicily. With these premises, it is inevitable, for anyone coming to Giardini Naxos, to make a visit to the big archaeological area, where it is possible to admire the remains of a temple from the 5th century BC and some graves from the Bronze Age, at the nearby museum. Among the many monuments we will also mention Schisò castle and the Vignazza tower, both from the medieval epoch, and the fascinating remains of a fort from the 17th-18th century, inside which some archaeological items of undeniable interest are preserved.

A little south of Giardini Naxos, nature lovers will be happy to venture along the river environment of the **Alcantara Gorges**, which are characterized by Mediterranean maquis and in which there are numerous spontaneous flowers, among which you can observe numerous splendid orchids.



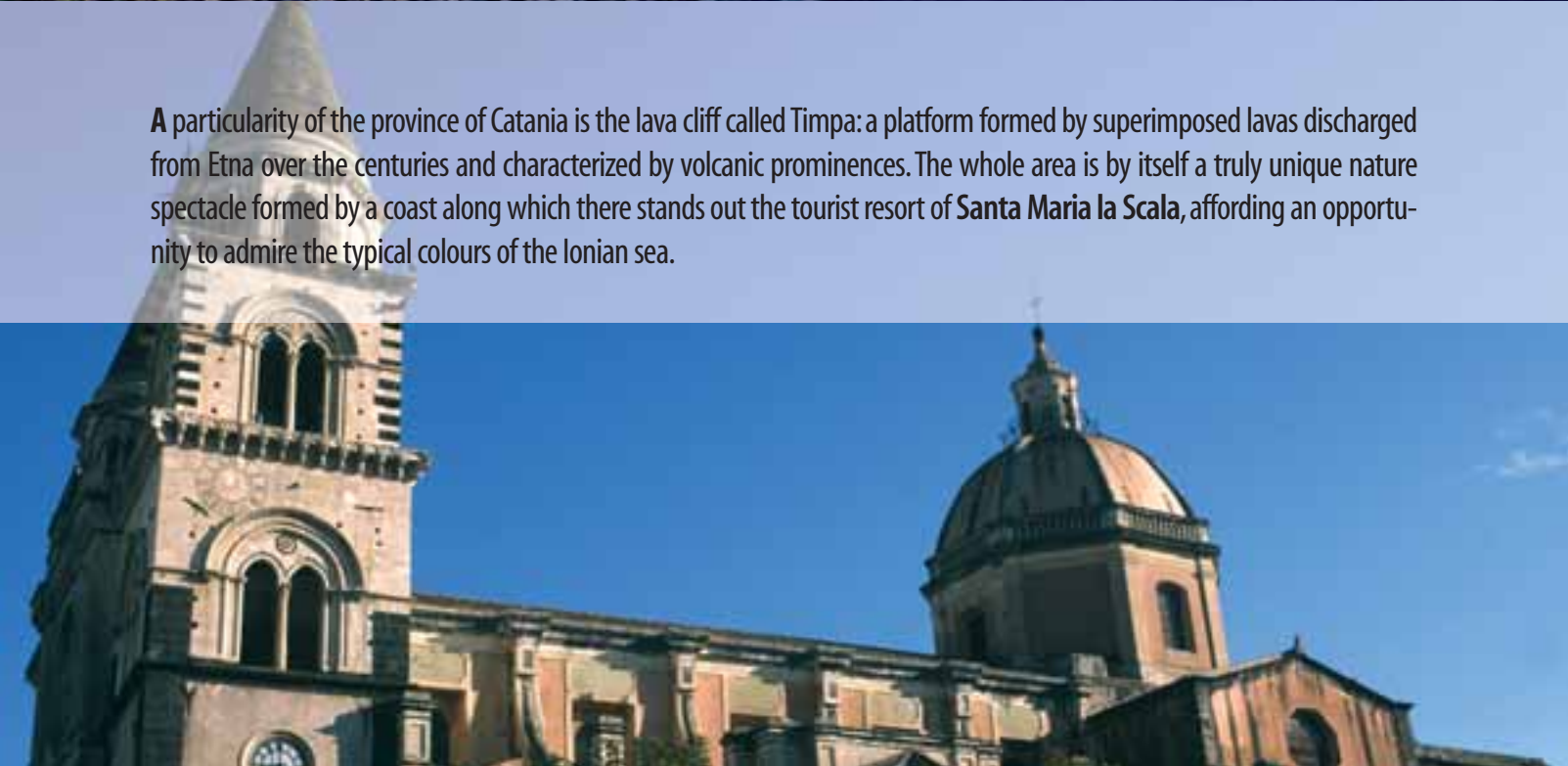
How to get:

A18 Messina-Catania motorway, Taormina and Giardini Naxos exits. From Catania about 43 km for Giardini Naxos and about 51 km for Taormina. From Messina about 56 km for Giardini Naxos and 53 km for Taormina.

The Timpa cliff and Acireale (CT)



A particularity of the province of Catania is the lava cliff called Timpa: a platform formed by superimposed lavas discharged from Etna over the centuries and characterized by volcanic prominences. The whole area is by itself a truly unique nature spectacle formed by a coast along which there stands out the tourist resort of **Santa Maria la Scala**, affording an opportunity to admire the typical colours of the Ionian sea.



The Timpa rises to over 100 metres and can also be admired by going in a canoe along its charming coast. One of the characteristic spots on the Timpa is without doubt the village of Santa Caterina, a hamlet of Acireale mainly known for its lookout point on the sea and for its splendid and solitary little beach. But the Timpa is only one of the stretches of the Ionian coast lying below Acireale, a town that enjoys the blue of the sea to the east and a superb vista of Etna with the north-western peak permanently snow-capped; it is a town that has a lot to show and to tell anyone visiting it in any period of the year.

In antiquity, the town of Aci was already known for its thermal baths. Indeed, with the term xiphonie the Greeks referred to the first thermal constructions for the exploitation of the sulphurous waters from Etna. Subsequently the Romans built in the Santa Venera al Pozzo locality a thermal plant still to be seen today. It was frequented throughout the Middle Ages and in the ensuing centuries, and in 1987 the Santa Caterina thermal complex began working, endowed with modern equipment and nice fittings that (in addition to the architectural patrimony, which reaches the highest expressions, not only in the sumptuous nineteenth-century palazzos but also in

the splendid Baroque of the churches) make this town a capital of wellbeing. Also the capital... of granita!

The dessert based on ice and various essences, which here reaches "sublime" perfection, at Acireale is a rite to be performed calmly. And if granita cannot be a souvenir, as a sweet memory of Acireale you can stock up with its almonds.

And if "laughter is the best medicine", also the fun offered by the Aci Carnival will bring wellbeing. Here the carnival boasts a very old tradition, going back to the end of the sixteenth century, when it was already a very popular occasion and almost everyone took part in it. One century later in the territory of "Jaci" (Aci) it was already in fashion to organize real battles with throwing of citrus fruits, and this game, if you can call it that, continued for long years before the local Criminal Court forbade it. The centuries passed and the Aci carnival was enriched with masks that satirically mocked notable citizens and the authorities; alongside these there were placed (in the nineteenth century) the landaus: noblemen that with their decorated carriages participated in the parades among the crowd throwing out sugared almonds. We can see in these noble parades the prodromes of the Parade of Floats in one of the most beautiful carnivals in Sicily.



How to get:

A18 Messina-Catania motorway, Acireale exit. From Catania about 17 km. From Messina about 86 km. As an alternative from Catania go along SS 114, which follows the coast. After about 20 Km you find Acireale.

Aci Trezza and the Ciclopi seaside (CT)



From the incipit of «Day-dream» of Giovanni Verga we learn that “... on the dark green sea, gathered up like a caress on that little group of little houses that slept almost huddling on the shore, while atop the rock, on the transparent and deep sky...” the scarce clouds give shade to the small maritime village of Aci Trezza. There, a few kilometres from Catania, almost halfway along the Ionian coast.



Having fallen in love with the splendid area not too far from Catania, in 1672 Don Stefano of the Reggio House, Prince of Campofiorito, purchased a feud that extended from the Acì wood to the little beach off which there are the rock-stacks. The prince set about building a village in this enchanting place. And today that nucleus of fishermen, unchanged in its charm, which bewitched that noble gentleman more than three hundred years ago, is right here. It is a place that every year attracts many tourists from Europe, because of the wild little beaches with rocks, big sand and pebbles that blend with a clean and crystalline sea that plays with the endless tones of green and the most intense blue more, in a continuous carousel of refractions and calls to the surrounding nature.

The old maritime village of Acì Trezza is also more charmingly known as the Coast of the Cyclopes. The name refers to the episode narrated in the Odyssey in which Ulysses, captured by Polyphemus, succeeds in escaping after having blinded him. Polyphemus, now blind, hurls at the ship of the Greek hero three rocks, the ones that Verga in *I Malavoglia* calls Faraglioni, also known as the Rocks of

the Cyclopes. Today the whole area constitutes a beautiful special natural reserve and a protected marine area in there is the abode of various species, some of them endemic (Lacerta) and only present on the biggest rock-stack, called Lachea Island. In addition to Lachea, we can mention Longa, the Faraglione Grande, the Faraglione di Mezzo and the Faraglione Piccolo and, like crumbs between these two, the Rocks du Zu' lanu (i.e. Rocks of Uncle Iano) respectively called Zu' lanu di terra and Zu' lanu di fora (outside), called this way because of where at the beginning of the last century one Sebastiano Greco started fishing with his small boat.

Today, crowded with young people, at night Acì Trezza turns into a big merry-go-round of colours, lights, music and so much delicious food. There are eating places for all tastes, from panino bars and beer houses to cafes, restaurants, trattorias and disco pubs, from ice-cream parlours and pizza houses to plenty of other places. After a full and amusing Acì Trezza night, for those that still feel like lingering out, the fish market is the last spectacle before going to bed, except for seeing the sun rise from behind the fascinating rock-stacks: a spectacle that is unique in the world.



How to get:

A18 Messina-Catania motorway, Acireale exit. From Catania about 13 km. From Messina about 91 km. As an alternative from Catania go along SS 114, which follows the coast. At about 10 km you find Acì Trezza.

Fontane Bianche and Siracusa (SR)



A long beach of very fine white sand is the ideal place to rediscover the pleasure of walking on the seashore. The lack of pollution and the absence of big towns nearby make the sea really clean. Indeed, 25 kilometres from Syracuse, among wild rocks and beaches bathed by a cobalt sea, there is Fontane Bianche, which gets its name from the numerous natural freshwater fountains.



Fontane Bianche-Cassibile, which today represents the ideal place for a restful vacation in which you get back your own natural rhythms away from the chaotic reality of everyday life, has big cliffs to dive in from in order to discover the submarine world, and splendid free beaches where you can play or sunbathe, or wait until late for a fascinating midnight swim. And after a succession of little inlets, beaches with very fine sand and high cliffs, our trip continues toward the nearby Cava Grande del Cassibile: a natural canyon that runs from the Iblei to the coast. The gully, thanks to its particular beauty and the big number of various caves, in some of which there are freshwater springs, today constitutes a nature reserve rich in wholly natural charm.

But proximity to Syracuse means that one must not miss a visit to the city, which has had and has a major role in the Mediterranean, also, indeed above all, through the recovery and valorisation of the signs of the past. This means not only Magna Graecia, but also Swabian and Baroque, art nouveau and modern architectures. A ferment of rebirth runs through Ortygia, the oldest part of the town, a

place where prehistoric peoples settled well before the Greeks. On the islet one walks along slowly, looking up to admire the stone volutes and the balconies in wrought iron of the baroque buildings, but also allowing the gaze to roam towards the sea, which appears every now and then, sparkling like a mirror. One can visit Maniace castle and the Jewish miqwe (tubs for purification baths), the oldest in Europe, and halt at the spring of Arethusa, which according to legend is a nymph turned into a spring to escape from too fiery a suitor. One can also bathe, taking advantage of the little steps that go down from the bastions to the surface of the sea, and sunbathe, comfortably lying on the solariums that stretch out into the sea. From Ortygia you can set out in small wooden fishing boats to go to visit the caves along the Maddalena peninsula, whose extremity for some time has been part of the Plemmirio marine protected area, where you can do scuba diving and snorkelling to discover splendid seabeds. A short way outside the walls of Ortygia there is the Neapolis, with an imposing Greek theatre used every year for classical plays, festivals and music and dance shows, the altar of Hieron, and the latomias with the famous "Ear of Dionisius."



How to get:

From Catania get on the Catania bypass in the direction of Syracuse as far as the exit for SS 114. Go along SS 114 as far as Syracuse. From there get on SS 115 in the direction of Noto, as far as Fontane Bianche-Cassibile. From Catania about 80 km.

From Syracuse go along SS 115 in the direction of Noto, as far as the Fontane Bianche-Cassibile. From Syracuse about 25 km.

Noto and Noto Marina (SR)



Just 6 km from Noto, the “Capital of the Baroque”, this enchanting seaside place has a beach with very fine sand, broad and clean, rocks for those that love fishing and transparent sea with light inclinations without any danger for those who are not expert swimmers. Founded in 1928, Noto Marina now has a lot of bathing establishments and numerous little villas and tourist infrastructures distributed around the big piazza and on the long avenue.



The shore, studded with pleasant beaches, is at the centre of an area rich in history and natural beauties including the area of the Eloro, Colonna Pizzuta, the Villa of the Tellaro, the Citadel of the Maccari and the Vendicari and Cava Grande natural oases.

But before lying down in the sun and letting ourselves be cradled by the sweet sound of the waves, an artistic interval: the Sicilian Baroque. In this connection, Anthony Blunt in his book on the "Sicilian Baroque" (1968) divides Sicilian Baroque architecture into three big phases: the first one, characterized by the presence of buildings in a rustic style marked by great liberty and imagination; the second, with a more elaborate style and, lastly, the third phase in which we assist at the maturation of a specifically Sicilian architectural and decorative language: it breaks away from the models and there is worked out the magic of a wholly Sicilian late Baroque culminating in the works that still today embellish the delightful town of Noto.

For everybody, but above all for those who love feasts and folklore events, Noto is a must. Every year, indeed, since 1980, in the third week of May the historic area of Noto has become the stage of one

of the most charming folklore representations in Sicily: the Infiorata. This event sees the "Garden of Stone" (the definition is Cesare Brandi's), turning into a real garden of flowers for three or four days, thus creating an intense scenographic and captivating effect, in which the role of protagonists is played by the floral creations of real artists able "to draw" religious and mythological subjects and delightful ones taken from folk culture.

But Noto is worth more than a visit! Indeed, on the basis of the relationship between environmental integrity, cleanness of the sea, cultural offer and quality of services for tourists, the esteemed Press Sicilia press agency writes as follows: "A conquest, an Oscar to the Noto beaches, which deserve the five sails". A recognition for a stretch of coast among the most beautiful and most intact in Sicily; a recognition that is placed side by side with the one already pronounced by UNESCO, making Noto World Heritage. Hence a double opportunity for anyone who decides to go to this town: allowing oneself to be fascinated by the imposing Baroque of the Cathedral and enjoying splendid marine nature, perfectly served, like that of nearby Noto Marina.



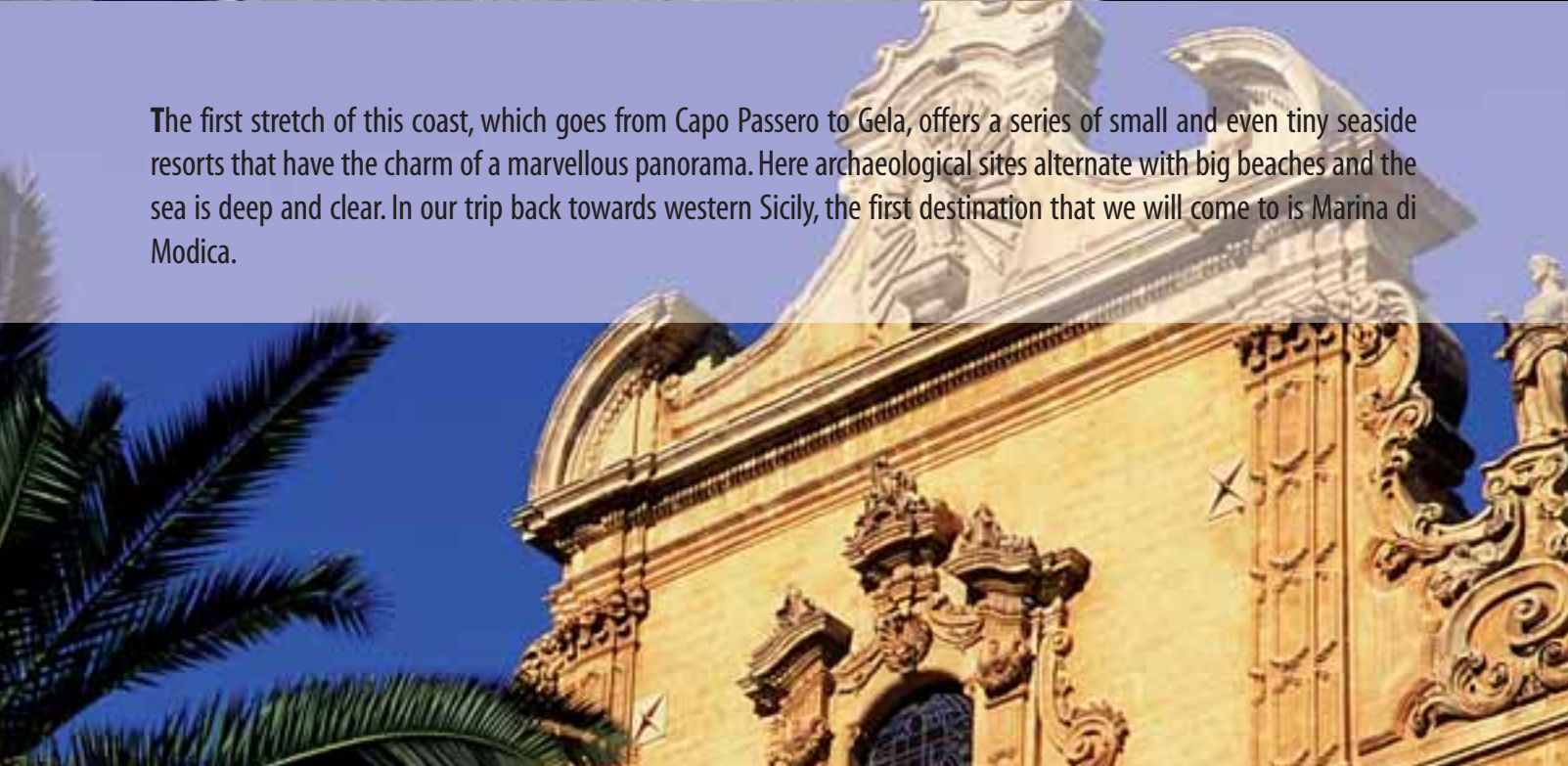
How to get:

From Syracuse go along SS 115 as far as Noto, and there follow the signs for Noto beach. From Syracuse about 36 km.

Modica and its coast (RG)



The first stretch of this coast, which goes from Capo Passero to Gela, offers a series of small and even tiny seaside resorts that have the charm of a marvellous panorama. Here archaeological sites alternate with big beaches and the sea is deep and clear. In our trip back towards western Sicily, the first destination that we will come to is Marina di Modica.



For those who do not love the excessive crowds of mass tourism, Marina di Modica is also an ideal place in winter to spend your holidays or days away from the city chaos, taking the opportunity to visit the nearby town of Modica: a triumph of the Baroque recognized by UNESCO, together with seven other places in the Val di Noto, which are World Heritage. Rich in churches that open up on picturesque alleys and little streets, alongside old shops, hovels or noble palazzos, the town also boasts of one of the most important Sicilian ethnographic museums, in which numerous work environments in rural Sicily in the last century have been carefully and faithfully reconstructed.

Modica is also known today for a gastronomic peculiarity. The fact is that here people continue to hand down the Aztec recipe for chocolate, a sweetmeat to which every spring an international festival is dedicated.

As for the churches, the people of Modica have long had a particular bond with religious festivities, which still today survive rather well.

The feasts of the two patron saints of the town - St. George and St. Peter - are important and worth taking part in. The first festivity is characterized by the attachment of the so-called "Sangiorgiari" to the simulacrum of the saint, which people traditionally carry on their shoulders through the streets of Modica in a festive climate. Also sce-

nographic is the feast in honour of St. Peter, with a large number of stands. In the last three days of the month of June, indeed, a lot of variegated stands invade the historic area of the town, attracting with their lights, their tastes and their unmistakable odours hundreds and hundreds of visitors.

On the theme of saints, the feast of the Madonna of the Graces is also very popular and characterized by the traditional *iuoch' i fuocu*, the fireworks that in the late evening tinge the sky over Modica with arabesques of light and colours. Then there is Easter, which in Modica means participating in the ever-present procession of the Madonna Vasa Vasa (i.e. kisses kisses) in which one can assist at the traditional midday kiss between the Madonna and Risen Christ. Something that is peculiar to Modica is what characterizes the movement of the simulacrum of the Madonna: with Christ looking on, the Madonna opens and closes her arms as a sign of joy, freeing herself of the black cloak to show the classical light-blue one.

Modica and its Marina are happy places and ones full of charm, places that know how to welcome you and to enchant you with the colours of the fireworks, the illuminations, the decorations of churches and the ever-present and splendid nature that surrounds everything here.



How to get:

From Ragusa get on SS 115 and follow the signs for Modica. From there get on SS 194 and continue for Pozzallo (Malta ferry port). From Pozzallo follow the signs referring to Marina di Modica-Sampieri. From Ragusa about 30 km.

Marina di Ragusa and Donnalucata (RG)



Coming under the administrative territory of Ragusa (like nearby Donnalucata), Marina di Ragusa is the best equipped and most famous among the bathing resorts in the province and resorts in south-eastern Sicily. It is a resort that in the last few years has seen major development of its accommodation and urban extension, which now makes it a small town, but with all the charm of an old seaside village.



With his comfortable temperature, the small bay of Marina di Ragusa is considered by many a little paradise for surfers and windsurfers, local or not, enjoying, thanks to its special exposure, favourable wind conditions. A popular place for holidays and relaxation, which in the high season it welcomes over 60,000 holidaymakers coming from all over south-eastern Sicily. It entertains Italian tourists and foreigners that more and more discover and appreciate its beaches of fine golden sand. Its coast are full of places for evening entertainment, pubs, restaurants and shops, in a context of serene and orderly sociality, desired and protected by its mild people, jealous of their "quality of life"; thanks to whom it always affords new opportunities of meetings and friendships. Also, from Marina di Ragusa in a day you can reach all Sicilian places below the line that connects Messina to Agrigento: among them there are Taormina, Syracuse, Catania, Piazza Armerina, Enna, Caltagirone, Noto and the other towns of the Sicilian Baroque, and obviously the small and delightful locality of Donnalucata, just 8

kilometres to the east. Donnalucata is a village with very ancient origins. Its name derives from the Arabic Ayn al-Awqat (i.e. the source of prayers), the name by which the Arabs called it because of small springs near the sea from which Muslims were wont to pray, as we are also told by the geographer al-Idrîsi. It is a breath-taking place that will bewitch you with authentic traditions, simple tastes, unmistakably Mediterranean smells and the colours of the sea and the beaches that, like enamels laid out by the skilful hands of experienced craftsmen, will make you enjoy every instant that you choose to spend on this stretch of coast.

A little further on we find Donnafugata, famous for a castle that has no fewer than 122 rooms rich in trompe-l'oeil and statues; built between the middle of the 17th century and the beginning of the 20th, the result is a summa of styles going from the Venetian Gothic, to the late Renaissance visible in the massive towers.



How to get:

From Ragusa get on the fast road, SP 25, for Marina di Ragusa. From here follow the signs to reach Marina di Ragusa. From Ragusa about 26 km.

Gela and Butera (CL)



"On the straw-coloured sand of Gela I lay down as a child on the shore of the ancient sea of Greece with many dreams in my fists clutched to my breast"

(Salvatore Quasimodo)

Thirty kilometres of beach with very fine sand and hills looking out on the Gulf of Gela, unique offshoots of Caltanissetta province on a clear sea, blue, rich in life and archaeological finds.



A coast that evokes great events of history: from the Sican and Siculo populations of the Bronze Age to the Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Arab and Norman colonisations down to the Swabian one of the emperor Frederick. Memories of naval battles between Greeks and Carthaginians, between Berber pirates and Spanish down to the Allied landing in 1943.

A beach of mobile dunes that also host fragrant white broom and splendid sea lilies. Little bays, at times only accessible from the sea, and stretches of open beach alluding to exotic places with sea the same turquoise colour. The hillocks that lie between Gela and Falconara looking out on the sea go steeply down onto the beach, while to the north they slope softly down towards a fertile lowland – the “*gelo* fields” mentioned by Virgil – which is the second largest on the island, girt by soft knolls and sinuous valleys.

In many of the coastal and lowland areas there were ancient settlements lost in the mists of time that left big vestiges making this offshoot of the province on the sea one of the most important archaeological areas in Sicily.

A little to the east of Gela there is the Biviere, a residual coastal lake of about 120 hectares, the only one in the province of Caltanissetta and one of the four coastal wetlands on the island: an area of great natural and scientific interest, it is a marine nature reserve because of its ecological importance, especially for the study of the avifauna.

About 15 kilometres from Gela, in the territory of Butera, near state highway SS 115 for Licata on a rock spur bathed by the sea and surrounded by dense vegetation there stands Falconara Castle; built in about 1400, probably on the remains of a Norman structure, and enlarged in subsequent epochs, it is a typical example of a medieval fort with moats, drawbridges, several levels of walls with battlements, bastions, corner towers and advanced towers, sloping terraces and at the centre the keep that the seigniors of the day used for raising falcons, from which the name of the castle derives. In its richly furnished and decorated interior, in addition to numerous hunting trophies, period furnishings and decorations, there is a rich collection of ceramics and a collection of paintings by Flemish artists.



How to get:

From Ragusa take state highway SS 115 in direction of Gela. From Palermo, Caltanissetta and Enna from A19 take SS117bis.

Licata (AG)



Licata is on the southern coast of Sicily, in a barycentric position with respect to the biggest tourist sites on the island (Agrigento - Piazza Armerina - Ragusa). It boasts of an interesting territory from numerous points of view, ranging from the beauty of its beaches to its history, from the archaeological riches to the architectural ones, and other things too.



The fact is that Licata has succeeded in preserving much of its artistic, monumental and natural patrimony, representing its greatest resource today. And it is precisely the beauty of its urban centre, and its clean sea, fine archaeological museum and fascinating history that make it an ideal stage in every valid tourist itinerary in Sicily.

The coast, extending for around 20 kilometres, is very varied, going from long sandy stretches east of the town, to the fascinating bluffs of the Montagna and Mollarella Poliscia to the west. In the first stretch west of the town, the slopes of the Montagna present big clayey outcrops, modelled by peculiar erosion furrows, below which for some kilometres there winds – before giving way to the rock-cliffs – the Marianello beach. The beach has no facilities, but the beauty of the area and the ease of access and parking may well induce one to spend a few hours of calm relaxation there.

After the stretch of rock in the Lavanghe and Caduta area, the sandy coast reappears in the gulf of Mollarella, a semicircular inlet closed off to the west by the little peninsula of the same name that stret-

ches out into the sea with a peculiar rock-cliff, joined to the dry land by a strip of sand.

In a rapid alternation of rock-cliffs and sand and small inlets you reach the San Nicola islet, on whose low seabeds you may be lucky enough to encounter some of the numerous wrecks identified in the last few years in underwater archaeological searches.

After San Nicola, the coast continues to be sandy, always easily accessible as far as the Gaffe Tower and beyond.

The mild climate most of the year, the traditions and the good geographical position, make Licata a popular destination for different tourism than that of summer holidaymakers.

First of all there is the sea, which can be experienced from May to October; then there are the traditional feasts, which become a unique opportunity to experience Sicilian-ness: for instance, Christmas at Licata is also an opportunity to observe the extraordinary vitality of the musical tradition. Easter Week, between winter and spring, represents another exceptional occasion for visiting Licata.



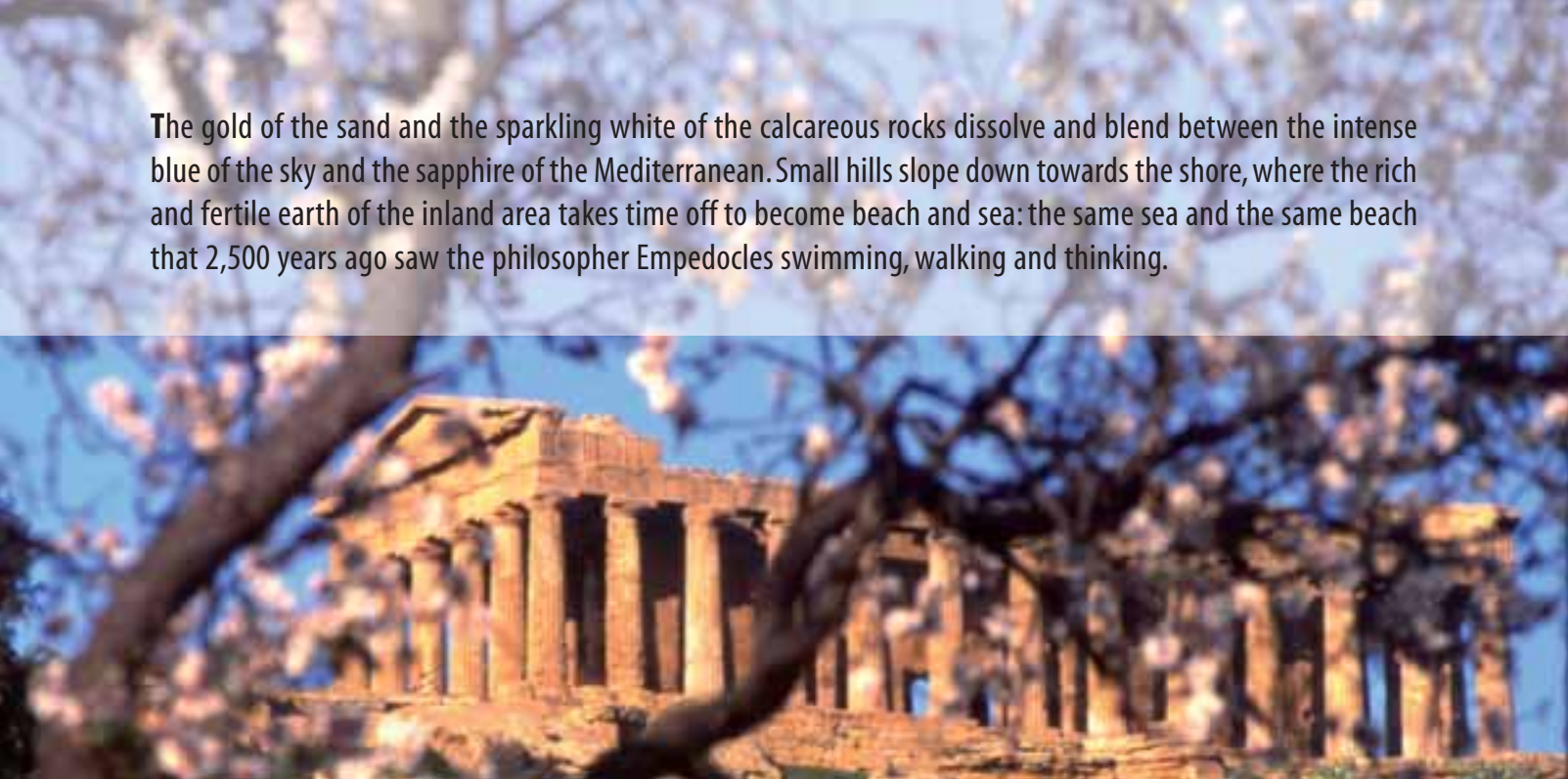
How to get:

From Porto Empedocle take state highway SS 115 in the direction of Licata.

Porto Empedocle and San Leone (AG)



The gold of the sand and the sparkling white of the calcareous rocks dissolve and blend between the intense blue of the sky and the sapphire of the Mediterranean. Small hills slope down towards the shore, where the rich and fertile earth of the inland area takes time off to become beach and sea: the same sea and the same beach that 2,500 years ago saw the philosopher Empedocles swimming, walking and thinking.



We are at Porto Empedocle, in the province in Agrigento, a landscape in which there alternate, in a rhythmical dance, beaches and chalky hills. The original name of the village was Marina di Girgenti, since from the 15th century on it was the place of arrival of all the cereal production of the area of Agrigento, a function that was also much appreciated in the ensuing centuries. In 1853 the village was given a new name: "Dock of Girgenti" precisely to underline the prosperous port activity that influenced the development of the place. Subsequently the village was called Porto Empedocle in memory of the famous philosopher from Agrigento Empedocles.

A remarkable port area in south-western Sicily, Porto Empedocle is distinguished by beautiful beaches and the interest provoked by the so-called "Vulcanelli di Macalube", which can be observed in the vicinity: these are cones that send forth methane gas and brackish mud creating all around a lunar scenario of unquestionable charm; but we must also mention that it is the birthplace of Andrea Camilleri, who created Commissioner Montalbano, and of a winner of the Nobel Prize for literature Luigi Pirandello, who was born a little further on, in a

house in the locality called Caos, now a museum and visitable, as is the pine tree under which the ashes of the writer are buried.

But the most famous and popular bathing beach near Agrigento is without doubt that of San Leone, which becomes the destination of numerous holidaymakers for the whole summer period, both Italian and foreign, who here find kilometres of free beaches and very fine sand, on which a relaxing walk among the tall palm trees of the waterfront is made still more fascinating, especially in the last hours of daylight. At San Leone young people find places for evening entertainment where they can dance until the morning or chat in a friendly way sitting at the tables of the kiosks on the seashore, but adults too find opportunities for relaxation with the piano cafes and the concert cafes. Then in the summer period the youngest can find near the beach no fewer than two funfairs (one of these is also open in winter) to satisfy all of their desire to play. In the area, besides, various hotels or pensions and three international camping sites can be found a few hundred metres from the beaches. The beach also has a new tourist harbour in which small and medium boats can moor.



How to get:

From the city of Agrigento follow the relevant road signs.

From Palermo get on SS 121 and then take SS 189 for Agrigento. From there follow the relevant road signs.

From Palermo about 125 km.

Realmonte and Scala dei Turchi (AG)



A shining coast with enchanting beaches crossed by white rocks like the Scala dei Turchi one, linked to ancient legends, on which the wind and the rain have dug out a natural staircase. Its white colour, made even brighter by the light of the sun, is inserted between the blue of the sky and the blue of the sea, creating a true paradise for the eyes.



Realmonte is an attractive little agricultural place in a lowland touching a shining coast with enchanting beaches crossed by white rocks like the Scala dei Turchi one, linked to ancient legends, on which the wind and the rain have dug out a natural staircase. Its white colour is made even brighter by the light of the sun gets in between the blue of the sky and the blue transparency of the waters below. An old local legend narrates that Saracen pirates, having moored their ships in the calm, clear and protected waters of the Scala, climbed up those natural "steps", reaching the top of the cliff, and so were able to raid the villages around. It is not very likely that the Saracens came as far as here, but the popular story ended up prevailing over history . . . and being fascinating like this small and charming spot in Sicily.

Such is the beauty of the site that in 2007 the commune of Realmonte asked for it to be made World Heritage.

For it is not only this white rock spur that is enchanting, but all the beaches that lie to the side of it, from Giallonardo to Pergola, Pietre Cadute, Lido Rossello (the closest to Realmonte, attainable on foot too), to Punta Grande, at the confine of the territory of Porto Empedocle.

If Scala dei Turchi is a wonder of nature, also well worth visiting are other fascinating sites, like the Golden Villa, a luxurious residence dating from the 1st century AD, and the necropolis near Vallone Forte.



How to get:

From Agrigento go along SS 115 in the direction of Sciacca. Go off at Realmonte following the relevant road signs.
From Agrigento about 15 km.

Capo Bianco and Eraclea Minoa (AG)



The white rocks of Capo Bianco, sheer over the sea, between Agrigento and Sciacca, form an enchanting cliff bathed by intense turquoise sea. On top of the splendid promontory there are the Greek ruins of Eraclea Minoa and the remains of a beautiful theatre. Along the western slope of Capo Bianco there is the special nature reserve of the river Platani, which debouches on the immense beach below the rock spur.



Placed at the start of Capo Bianco, the remains of the Greek town of Eraclea Minoa occupy a magnificent place on the edge of a solitary hill over the sea. At its foot, the coast opens up into the long and white beach of Capo Bianco, crowned by a beautiful pine wood.

Minoa was founded in the 5th century BC by Greek farmers from Selinunte. However, the name was only completed with "Eraclea" in the Greek age. The town was repeatedly mentioned by Herodotus as a colony of Selinunte, on the subject of the Spartan expedition of Dorieus in Sicily, after whose failure Eurileon occupied the town towards the end of the 5th century BC. In that period there was also the success of Agrigento over Minoa, which had to surrender its power to Akragas (Agrigento) for the whole 5th century BC. Between 488 and 473 BC, Theron, the tyrant of Syracuse, is said to have found the grave of the Cretan king Minos here. However, the tyrant immediately returned his bones to the Cretans. From 465 to 473 the town was occupied by Syracusan mercenaries and subsequently freed by the people of Agrigento and by the people of Syracuse themselves. In the 5th century BC the war between the Carthaginians and Greeks in Sicily broke out, and Minoa was taken

by the Carthaginians, who set up a military base, before the definitive fall of Akragas in 406 BC. In 277 it was wrested from the Carthaginians by Pyrrhus and subsequently conquered by the Romans in the 3rd century BC. In the 1st century AD the town, now a theatre of wars, was completely uninhabited. Excavations only began in 1950, immediately bringing to light the remains of ancient residences built with unbaked bricks, still covered today by fragments of mosaic. Of particular importance is the theatre, in a hollow on the hillock, though it is in a bad state of conservation because it was built with very friable stone. A small antiquarium collects objects mostly from the necropolis. In a good state, by contrast, are the circular tower and the quadrangular one, to which there is linked a line of surrounding walls in the north-eastern area.

Before reaching the excavations, you will meet the white dunes of marl (a mixture of clay and limestone cleaned by erosion phenomena) modelled by the wind, which embroider the wall closing off the cape to the east and also emerging from a sea that is rich in the beds too: an unspoiled habitat for a lot of species of molluscs and small fish that happily swim in immense expanses of oceanic Posidonia.



How to get:

From Agrigento go along SS 115 in the direction of Sciacca. Go off at Montallegro. From there follow the signs for Eraclea Minoa. From Agrigento about 36 km

Sciacca (AG)



The sea and the shore surely represent one of the biggest attractions of Sciacca: here you can swim in clear waters, or go surfing or canoeing, or go out in a motorboat and practise any type of water sport, also thanks to very well equipped beaches conceived for more and more demanding tourists that in Sciacca can blend bathing fun with a healthy thermal session at the Stufe di San Calogero.



White and lying on the side of the Kronio mountain, sheer over the sea, Sciacca has an almost Arab look. Indeed, in 840 it was conquered by the Arabs and by them turned into an important agricultural centre. Arab, we were saying, and indeed its name is of Arabic origin, deriving from as-Saqah, meaning “crack”, because of the caves in the nearby Monte Kronio, from which warm vapours gush out, which helped, and still today help, to make these places famous thermal stations.

However, Sciacca is a sea place! And in Sciacca all roads lead to the sea. Any entrance along the main streets that branch out from the town centre take you to the sea, a harbour or a charming little bay. If we head eastwards, near the town, accessible also on foot, the first beach that we meet is Stazzone, characterized by a sandy beach and by sea studded with rocks. A little further on, we come to the Tonnara and Foggia beaches with splendid sandy seabeds. Following the old road for Menfi we come to the San Marco, Renella and Maragani localities, zones characterized by small and big inlets, sandy and rocky, considered paradises for swimmers and scuba

divers. Here the sea is full of fish, whether you want to go down with flippers, rifles and goggles, or you choose to let the waves rock you as you doze in a boat. Equally clear and rich in fauna is the sea that bathes the beaches of Sovareto, San Giorgio, Timpi Russi and Macauda to the west.

Then if you also love diving in in winter, we recommend dipping into the magnificent carnival at Sciacca: from its birth, it was a festive occasion during which everyone took on different roles from the usual ones, while alongside beautiful allegorical floats through the streets there flowed rivers of wine and typical dishes. Today, this carnival has recovered its old tradition and with it has associated the use of modern technologies: the wagons hauled by animals have been replaced by imposing self-propelling and animated structures. Political and social satire mix together here in a girandole of sounds and colours culminating in the mask of Peppinappa. This is a feast that has nothing to envy the other events that in the same period are held in other parts of Italy, and the people of Sciacca are jealous and proud of it.



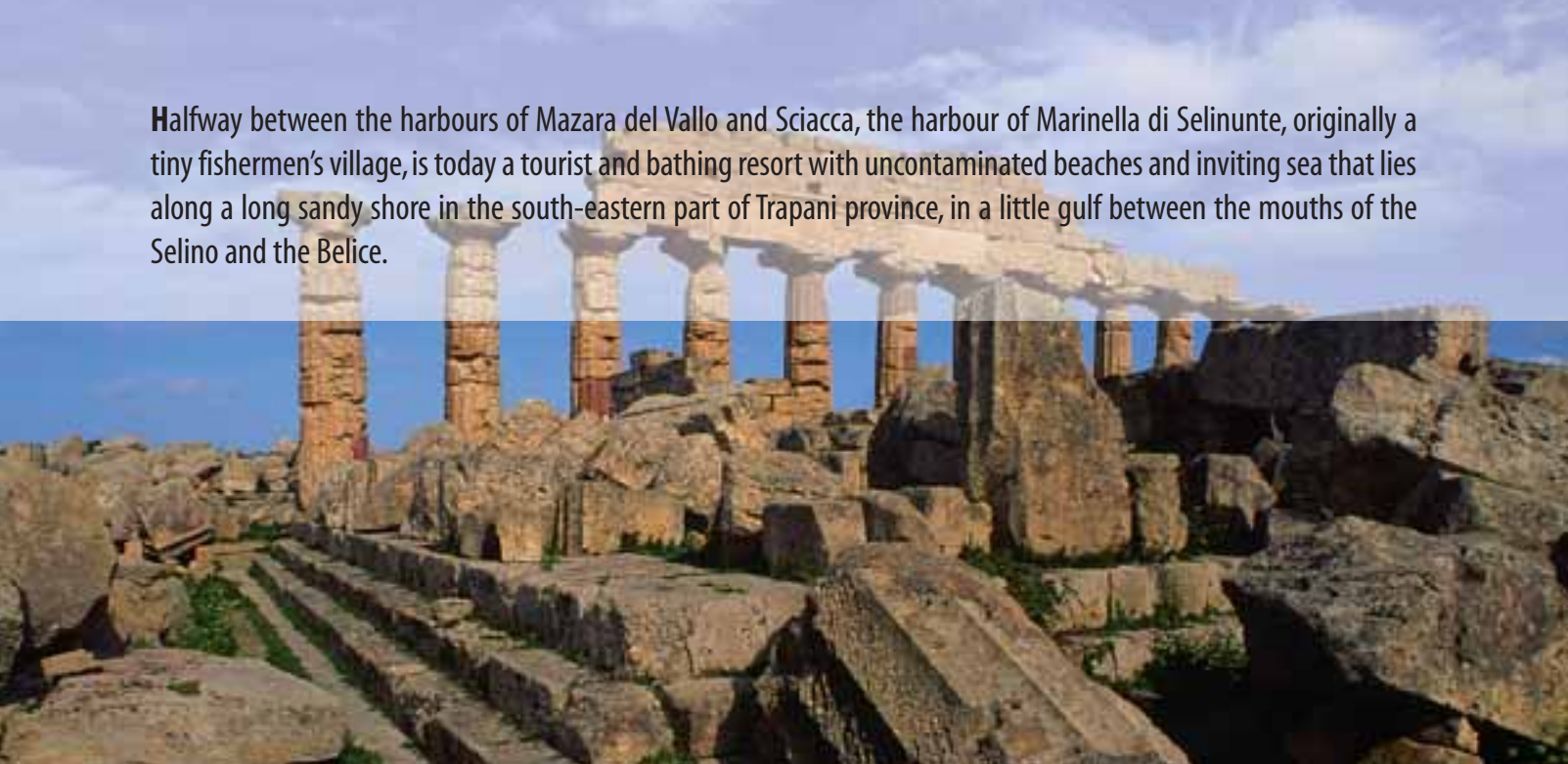
How to get:

From Agrigento (about 60 km), go along SS 115 as far as Sciacca.
From Palermo (about 100 km), go along SS 624 as far as Sciacca.

Marinella di Selinunte (TP)



Halfway between the harbours of Mazara del Vallo and Sciacca, the harbour of Marinella di Selinunte, originally a tiny fishermen's village, is today a tourist and bathing resort with uncontaminated beaches and inviting sea that lies along a long sandy shore in the south-eastern part of Trapani province, in a little gulf between the mouths of the Selino and the Belice.



The beaches of the small village are in dream positions: the archaeological park of Selinunte, one of the most beautiful archaeological sites and one of the biggest in the world, absorbed in the big natural oasis of the Reserve of the River Belice.

The Selinunte archaeological itinerary first of all contemplates a visit to the grandiose Temple G, on the eastern hill; built beginning from the 5th century BC, this temple shows the remains of its enormous proportions. Temple G is probably of a sacral nature (dedicated to the god Apollo), like the other two, E and F, in the Doric style, consecrated respectively to Hera and to Athena and Dionysus. On the western hill, known as Gaggera, there is another complex: the Malophoros sanctuary, and temple M. The acropolis contains six smaller temples: the "little temple with small metopes" (7th-6th centuries BC), temple C, decorated with floral ornaments, and temple D, also in the Doric style. The acropolis and the town of Selinunte were surrounded by walls, whose remains still show the circular and

square towers and the main gate. To complete a visit to this splendid park, we recommend going along SS 115, past Campobello di Mazara: you come to the Cusa quarries, from which there certainly originated the stone material used by the Greeks to build the grandiose temples at Selinunte. The Cusa quarries, together with the marble ones at Miletus (in Turkey), constitute a complex that is unique in the world. Known in ancient times as the Ramuxaras quarries, they got their present name from Baron Cusa, once the owner of the whole area.

And now, before evening comes, with the sun behind us creating long shadows with an ancient look, we go down from the acropolis, we allow those stones and those forms to rest in our eyes that were history, as if they were, instead, old memories of a personal past of ours. We return to the coast, which awaits us, and to the sea that will grant us another bath if we still want it. Or we will more simply go to eat something that likewise has the flavour of the places visited.



How to get:

From Trapani (about 85 km), go along SS 115 towards Mazara del Vallo. From there get on the A29 motorway in the direction of Palermo as far as the Castelvetrano exit. From Castelvetrano go along SS 115 as far as Marinella.

From Palermo (about 130 km), go along the A29 motorway in the direction of Mazara del Vallo as far as the Castelvetrano exit. From Castelvetrano go along SS 115 as far as Marinella.

Mazara del Vallo (TP)



As you will already have realised, anyone who is looking for sea sites in Sicily has almost too much to choose between, considering that the island really has a very long and diversified coast able to satisfy everybody. We set out from San Vito Lo Capo to return to Trapani province, now walking on a low beach of soft sand, absolutely Mediterranean, that of Mazara del Vallo.



Mazara del Vallo, an ancient Phoenician site that also knew the Greeks, the Arabs and the Normans, is on the Channel of Sicily and must be included in this itinerary because it is a worthy representative of Sicilian seaside places, important thanks to being very near to the Mediterranean and to the river Mazaro, which determined the birth of a flourishing harbour-channel, very important above all for fishing.

In addition to its cultural patrimony, well represented by the Cathedral, from the Norman epoch, the town is remembered above all for its famous Dancing Satyr, a beautiful statue in bronze dating from between the 4th and the 3rd centuries BC.

Speaking of beaches, however, we have to speak of the Mazzini waterfront. For it is undoubtedly the sea that for a long time has played an imposing economic role for the town, considering that tuna fishing was an important activity in the past. Nevertheless, the sea could play a negative role in the past because it offered a way in for possible hostile attacks. So in this area too there are lookout towers, the Sorello Tower and the Granitola Tower: today ruins that enrich with charm the already scenographic Mazara coast.

The beauty of the natural landscape, the mildness of the climate, the richness of the vegetation together with good accommodation, now fully developed, indeed make a holiday at Mazara a unique occasion. But the seaside town was already fully appreciated by the Arabs both for its strategic position, which made it possible to effect commercial exchanges with other Mediterranean countries, and for its extremely fertile hinterland, wisely exploited with new crops like sugar cane, pistachios and carobs, as well as the beauty of the sea, an icon of life and passions, of legends and metaphors, with its colours, the charm of the coasts and the bathing places that, now as in the past, add further charm to the beauty of this part of Sicily. The two coastal places of Torre Granitola and Tre Fontane further increase the attraction of the zone of influence of Mazara, being popular holiday places that in the summer months are an irresistible attraction for tourists seeking rest and crystalline sea.

At Mazara del Vallo our notes on a trip a thousand kilometres long, in which we have met towns big and small, areas and small seaside villages and the sea of Sicily, come to an end.



How to get:

From Trapani go along SS 115 towards Marsala. From there continue on SS 115 as far as Mazara del Vallo. From Mazara follow the signs for Torre Granitola and Tre Fontane. From Trapani about 70 km.

From Palermo A29 motorway in the direction of Mazara del Vallo as far as Mazara del Vallo. For Torre Granitola and Tre Fontane, Campobello di Mazara exit. Then follow the signs for Torre Granitola and Tre Fontane. From Palermo about 130 km.

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