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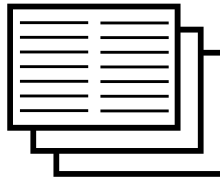
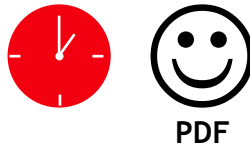
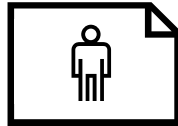
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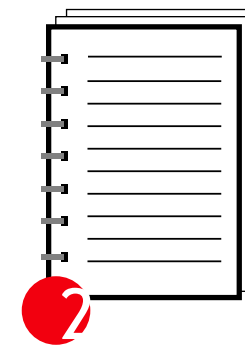
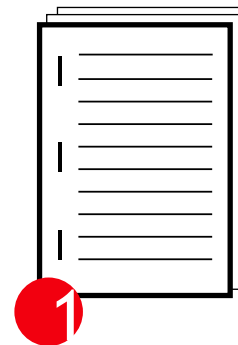
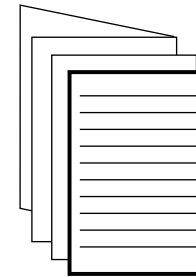
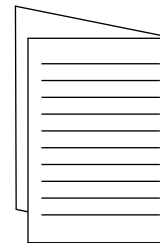
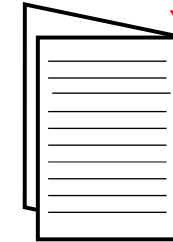
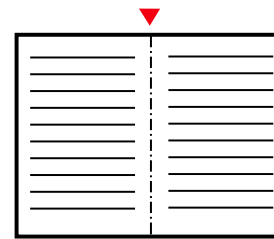
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# THE SIRACUSA CITY GUIDE





# Summary



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## History and culture



Siracusa: Greek Theater

Siracusa was founded by **Greek colonies** in 734 B.C. The city grew at a rapid rate, giving life to a series of internal conflicts and creating the ideal atmosphere for tyranny. In 485 B.C. **Gerone**, the first tyrant of Siracusa came to power. Through his policy of conquests and victories, the importance of Siracusa grew, making the city strong and famous as a ruling power. In spite of these conquests, however, the Siracusa people rebelled against tyranny and drove out his successor, the tyrant **Gerone**, and then set up a democracy (466 B.C.).

After fighting and beating the **Athens fleet** (413 B.C.), Siracusa then had to defend itself against the expansionist ambitions of another city, the powerful **Carthage**. The city placed itself under the protection of the tyrant **Dionysius** in order to survive and he then began a plan to fortify the city, which was completed by his successors.

Under the reign of **Ierone II** (269-215 B.C.) Siracusa enjoyed a period of peace and splendor, that was the last before the city

lost its independence and liberty after it was conquered by the **Roman Empire**. Siracusa fell under Roman rule in 212 B.C., in spite of the strong contribution made to their battles by the war inventions created by the famous **Archimedes**. This was the beginning of the city's decline.

When the Roman Empire fell in 476 A.D., the city was at the mercy of other populations: in 493 was sacked by the Goths and then in 535 A.D. it was conquered by Belisarius and annexed to the **Byzantine Empire**.

In 878 the **Arabs** took over a large part of Eastern Sicily including Siracusa, and the city stayed in their hands for about 2 centuries.

The **Byzantines** took over from the Arabs for a brief period (1038) but they were soon replaced by the **Normans** (1081), who managed to hold onto power for more than a century.

In 1209 the **Swabians** ruled by Frederick II took over the city. After the Swabians it was the turn of the **Spanish** who occupied the city in the 14th century and built several fortresses and defense walls around the city.

A tremendous **earthquake** shook the East of Sicily in 1693, including Siracusa and the other cities in the Val di Noto area. The city was completely rebuilt in the early decades of the eighteenth century and thus became one of the best examples of the **Sicilian Baroque** style together with the nearby Noto.

Between 1800 and 1900, Siracusa enjoyed a period of economic, urban and cultural expansion, greatly helped by the fact that it was annexed to the **Kingdom of Italy** (1870).

## Churches and Museums



Siracusa: Duomo

Baroque masterpieces that stand on the remains of ancient temples and churches.

### The "Duomo" (Cathedral)

The cathedral in Siracusa was built in Ortigia on top of the remains of a Doric temple that dated back to the 5th century B.C. The building contains influences from various cultures within its wall: Greek, Byzantine, Arabic and Norman. The main façade was rebuilt in Baroque style after the earthquake in 1693.

### Church of Santa Lucia

This church stands on the sight where, so the legend goes, Siracusa's patron saint was martyred. The church was built in the Byzantine period (6th century A.D.) but the Church underwent several changes, especially after the earthquake. It is possible to admire the wooden ceiling with painted beams inside the building.

### Church of San Giovanni

This church was built in the 6th century and

was the Cathedral of Siracusa for a long period. Only the remains of the columns now remain from the original building. The church underwent several changes over the centuries and the main façade was completely rebuilt in Baroque style after the 1693 earthquake. It is possible to enter the San Giovanni Catacombs from the church.

The most interesting museums for discovering this city's history and culture.

### Papyrus Museum

The area of Siracusa is the only one in Italy where papyrus grows and for this reason there just has to be a museum dedicated to this rare plant in the city. The museum contains ancient papyruses, some of them dating back to the 15th century B.C. It is also possible to see many objects made from this plant, and a collection of materials that were once used by the Egyptian scribes.

### Bellomo Regional Museum

This museum is situated in the heart of Ortigia, in Palazzo Bellomo, and houses several works of medieval and modern art including the famous painting by Caravaggio entitled "Seppellimento di Santa Lucia".

### Regional Archeological Museum

This important museum houses some interesting archeological finds and various works of art including pottery, theater masks, marble and other decorations, that bear witness to the pre-history and proto-history of Sicily. The most ancient objects date back to the Paleolithic, Neolithic and Bronze ages.

## Historical buildings and monuments



Siracusa: Castello di Eurialo

Manmade and natural wonders that have survived to bear witness to such a glorious past

### Greek Theater

This wonderful theater was hewn into the rock of Colle Temenite around the 5th century B.C. It is the largest in Sicily and is still one of the main hubs of cultural life in Siracusa: each year several famous Greek Tragedies are played out in this magical place so full of history.

### Roman Amphitheater

This amphitheater was built during the Augustan period and was recently rediscovered just a short distance from the Greek Theater. It is the third largest amphitheater in Italy after the ones in Rome and Verona. The elliptical-shaped amphitheater is almost entirely hewn into the rock and was built to hold gladiator contests, fierce animal fights and simulations of naval battles.

### Orecchio di Dioniso

This is a deep cave about 65 meters deep, 11 meters wide and 23 meters high. It is famous for its special acoustics, which are due to the acute angle-shape of the ceiling that is similar in shape to the outer ear, hence its name "Orecchio" which means "Ear". It has unbelievable acoustic powers: a sound produced inside the cave is amplified up to 16 times.

### Grotta dei Cordari

This grotto is called in this manner as this was the place where the "cordari" (rope makers) carried out their work for centuries, making use of the humid atmosphere so they could twist the ropes more easily. This grotto is extremely pretty and is covered with musk and ferns inside.

### Castello Maniace

This castle was built by Frederick II of Swabia. Its imposing structure stands on a far point of Ortigia overlooking the sea and owes its name to the Byzantine general who conquered Syracuse around 1000.

### Castello di Eurialo

This fortress was built on the Elisoli plateau around 400 B.C. by Dionysius the Old to defend the city from the Carthaginians. There is a complex network of tunnels underneath the castle that allowed the soldiers to move around in the event of an attack.

## Places and charm



Siracusa: Fountain of Diana

All the most charming places in Siracusa to discover as you walk around the city.

### Isle of Ortigia

This is the oldest part of Siracusa, a charming place to discover by walking round its typical lanes and where most of the museums and historical buildings can be found:

### Via delle Maestranze

This road crosses right through the Isle of Ortigia, starting from Piazza Archimede and going as far as the sea. It is lined with wonderful palaces that once belonged to the Siracusa aristocracy;

### Piazza Archimede

Is surrounded by palaces that tell the city's history, from the middle ages up to the present day. The fountain of Diana can be admired in the center of the square, a fountain that tells the legend of the nymph Aretusa.

### Aretusa Fountain

This is one of the city's greatest tourist attractions. Over the centuries it inspired poets and writers such as Virgil and Ovid, André Gide and Gabriele D'Annunzio, fascinated by the legend that is linked to this place. The story goes that Alpheus, son of Oceanus, fell madly in love with the nymph Aretusa, the Goddess Artemides' handmaid. The nymph did not share his feelings. To save her, Artemides turned her into a water source but Zeus also turned Alpheus into a river, allowing him to meet up with Aretusa.

### Neapolis Archeological Park

This park covers about 240,000 square meters of land and has a large number of Greek and Roman monuments inside it. These include the Roman amphitheater, the Greek Theater, the Ara di Ierone and the Latomia del Paradiso.

## Eating and drinking



Siracusa: Nero d'Avola

There are several delicacies to try in Siracusa that are made with local produce. **Fresh tuna** is for example, the basic ingredient of several Siracusa recipes, such as, for example **"purpetti"**, tuna-fish rissoles with eggs and Pecorino cheese, flavored with *chiodi di garofano*. Other dishes containing this tasty fish are **salsiccia di tonno** (tuna sausage) and tuna stew with onions and peppers. **Fried porpoise fish in vinegar**, **grouper fish steaks cooked alla "matalotta"** and **polipo bollito** (boiled octopus) are also typical of this area. First courses include many pasta recipes with fresh tuna and other types of fish, or maccheroni pasta with nuts, pine-nuts, olives and breadcrumbs, browned in the frying pan. Sauces for accompanying pasta are all based on the tasty Pachino cherry tomatoes.

**Honey** and **almonds** are the main ingredients for sweets in Siracusa, especially the **"giuggiulena"**, which is a delicious nougat flavored with sesame seeds. "Cassata siracusana" is also much appreciated. It is different from the Cassata made in the rest of Sicily as it has no icing topping and is made

up of sponge, chocolate and ricotta cheese layers. There are many types of biscuits made by the confectioners for religious festivals: **"biscotti dei morti"** for All Saints' Day, **"quaresimali"** (Lent biscuits) which are made with toasted almonds and pistachio nuts, and **"cuccia"**, a dessert that is made for the Santa Lucia festival from wheat-germ, milk, ricotta cheese, zuccata and candied fruit. **Almond milk** or a **Granita** made with almonds are alternative sweets, both made with the almonds that are grown in Avola.

It is possible to try an excellent **Nero d'Avola** wine in all the restaurants in Siracusa. This wine is made from the top-quality grapes that come from Pachino, a town near Noto. An excellent dessert wine, especially for accompanying almond-flavored desserts, is **Moscato di Siracusa**, the oldest wine in Italy as it was the direct successor to "Pollio", which dated back to the 7th century B.C.

## Shopping



Ragusa: local pottery

One of the most popular craft products in Siracusa is **papyrus paper**: the area around the Ciane River is the only one in Italy where this rare, valuable plant grows.

Paper is still made from papyrus today, following ancient methods that were invented many centuries ago by the Egyptians. The paper can be bought plain, or painted, with subjects that are mostly of Greek or Egyptian inspiration. It is possible to follow the processing of papyrus paper in some shops, starting from the stalks of the plant and finishing with the paper.

Other typical objects that can be found in Siracusa's shops are gold or other less precious metal copies of ancient **Siracusa coins** that were used in the era when the city was compared to Athens and Carthage for its size and power.

The local pottery, sold in the characteristic laboratories-workshops so frequent in this part of Sicily is also worth looking at.

If you prefer to take home some food and drink as a souvenir, for yourself or for some relatives and friends, we recommend a bottle

of **Nero d'Avola** or **Moscato di Siracusa**, or a jar of the famous **"fish preserves"** that are made in the Siracusa area: choice fillets of tuna fish or mackerel in oil, packaged in glass jars.

## Hotels and lodgings



Siracusa: Isle of Ortigia

If you are planning a trip to Siracusa, you can choose the one most suitable for your needs from several types of accommodation available. Would you prefer to have all the most interesting artistic and cultural places close to hand? You can choose one of the several hotels in Siracusa in the old city center, that cover all categories, from one-star to five-star. If your budget is a bit more restricted, but you don't want to go without the comfort of staying in the center, choose a bed & breakfast. In Siracusa you also have the possibility of renting an apartment if you are planning to stay mid-long term that you can use as a base for excursions into the wonderful area around the city. If you prefer to stay outside the city, you can also choose to stay in one of the rural country guesthouses in Siracusa or nearby.

For those of you with a truly tight budget, the ideal solution is to stay in a campsite: there are several to choose from in the Siracusa province that is mostly located on the beautiful, sunny coast.

## Events



Siracusa: Biennale of the ancient theater

Siracusa is increasingly making a name for itself in Sicily and in Italy, as an active cultural center: the international events that are regularly organized in the city attract many visitors.

The Festival of Santa Lucia, the city's patron saint, which is held on December 13th with an attractive religious procession, is very charming to see.

If you decide to visit the city at the same time as one of these events is being held, we advise you to book the hotel in Siracusa that you have chosen well in advance.

### Festival of Santa Lucia - 13 December

Siracusa celebrates its patron saint each year with a procession during which the solid silver statue of Santa Lucia is carried from the Cathedral to the **Basilica del Sepolcro**, where it remains on shown for 8 days. It takes 60 believers to carry the heavy statue, which was made by the goldsmith Pietro Rizzo in the 16th century. Unlike other cities, Siracusa does not keep the remains of its patron saint: in 1204, when Constantinople fell under the

crusades, the saint's remains were moved to Venice on the orders of the Doge.

### Theatrical season at the Greek Theater - from May to July

The Italian National Institute for Ancient Drama has been promoting classical theater in Siracusa since 1913 by organizing a Festival which was at first held every two years and since 2002, each year that is totally dedicated to ancient theater. From May to July dramas by famous authors such as Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides are staged in the wonderful surroundings of the Greek Theater in Siracusa. Tragedies that first appeared centuries ago in this very theater, the oldest in Sicily.

### Ortigia Festival - July

This is an artistic and cultural gathering that is full of international events, held in the Isle of Ortigia (and in the Neapolis archeological area). The shows include plays, ballets, concerts, poetry readings and lots more too.



## La Dolce Vita



Siracusa: Piazza Archimede

In recent years, Siracusa is becoming known for its lively events: artistic and cultural events liven up this beautiful Sicilian city and attract an international audience. The **Theatrical Season at the Greek Theater** has become a very popular cultural event, due to the top quality of the plays and to the spectacular and charming open-air "stage". Night life in Siracusa has also benefited from this new popularity of events: the **Isle of Ortigia**, the oldest part of the city, has become a meeting place for young people who love to walk around these history-filled places in the day-time, sitting at the many open-air coffee-shops and flocking to the many clubs that are concentrated in the area that spreads out between Piazza Archimede, Piazza Duomo, the Aretusa Fountain and the Alfeo Promenade at night. There are many night clubs along the coastline on the Alfeo Promenade to carry one your night of enjoyment. Some of these clubs have dance floors on the beach so that you can dance under the moonlight.

## A special day



Siracusa: Fonte Aretusa

Our guide to Siracusa suggests a day dedicated to discovering the true heart of Siracusa: the Isle of Ortigia that is connected to the rest of the city by the Umbertino Bridge, where most of the museums, monuments and... restaurants in Siracusa are concentrated. This itinerary, which includes a visit to two museums, can easily be completed on foot. We suggest you book at least one night in the hotel in Siracusa that you have chosen, so that you can have a full day to spend in this city bursting with art and history.

### Morning

Our itinerary begins in the charming **Piazza Archimede**, where all the cities main streets join up: Via Roma, Corso Matteotti and the wonderful **Via delle Maestranze**. The Square is surrounded by imposing Baroque buildings: Palazzo Platamone, which also includes elements of Catalan architecture, Palazzo Lanza, with its charming double lancet windows and Palazzo Gargallo. The splendid **Artemide Fountain** stands in the center of the square, a fountain that portrays the

metamorphosis of the nymph Aretusa into a water source. You can have a coffee in the open-air for breakfast and then carry on exploring the island. We suggest you try an almond-based cake or a glass of fresh almond milk. The nuts are grown on the hills around Siracusa and are still processed according to ancient traditions. From Piazza Archimede walk down Via Malfitania until it meets up with Via Cavour. Turn right at the crossroads and carry on until you get to **Piazza Duomo**, that is located in the highest part of Ortigia, and where you can see the wonderful Cathedral, that was built on top of the remains of a Doric Temple dating back to the 5th century B.C. A short walk away there is also the Church of Santa Lucia, which is only opened to the public during the celebrations for the city's patron saint (December 13th). Now head towards the sea to discover one of the city's most fascinating places: the Fonte Aretusa, a fresh water source that is surrounded in myth and which has been the symbol of Siracusa since ancient times. Stop and get a taste of this place surrounded by nature, the large papyrus plants blowing in the wind and the fish that dash around the font. Talking of fish, it should be lunchtime by now! Choose one of the restaurants in Siracusa that is nearest to you and take a little time to enjoy a meal.

### Afternoon

After your tasty meal and a good cup of coffee to perk you up, you can carry on with your itinerary, walking along the characteristic **Alfeo Promenade**. At some point you will find yourself at the far end of Ortigia where the majestic Castello Maniace towers over you facing out to sea, surrounded by its high stone fortifications. After visiting the Castle, head towards the center once more, walking along the Levant Promenade until you get to Palazzo Bellomo, home to the interesting Regional Art Museum. At this point, after visiting the museum, we suggest you walk along the splendid Via delle Maestranze,

where you can admire the wonderful Baroque palaces. To get to Via delle Maestranze from Palazzo Bellemo you must walk down the whole length of Via Roma as far as Piazza Archimede, where it meets up with Via delle Maestranze.

### Evening

A romantic, relaxing walk at dusk, an aperitif in one of the clubs in Ortigia, including the open-air ones in Piazza Archimede or in Piazza Duomo. It is up to you how to continue your evening: you can choose one of the several restaurants in Siracusa nearby and try out the city's most typical dishes. We recommend an antipasto with polipo bollito (boiled octopus), a first course of spaghetti with fresh tuna fish and Pachino cherry tomatoes and then a second course of fresh tuna stewed with vegetables. You can carry on your evening in a club, perhaps one of those on the coast. Nights in Siracusa are to be discovered!

## Trip outside the city: Noto



Siracusa: Church of San Domenico in Noto

The area around Siracusa offers several occasions for interesting trips outside the city to discover both culture and nature.

After the terrible earthquake that shook Eastern Sicily in **1693**, many cities were rebuilt and became even more beautiful and attractive than before. This was the case of the cities in the **Val di Noto** area, that are considered to be the top of Sicilian Baroque style and which for this reason have been included by **UNESCO** in their prestigious, coveted **World Heritage List**.

We have chosen an excursion for you that you must not miss, due to the extreme beauty of the place and its high artistic value: **Noto**, the pearl of Sicilian Baroque style. This wonderful city is about **32 km from Siracusa**, standing high on a rocky area about 160 meters above sea level. Noto strikes you immediately due to the extraordinary homogeneity of its town-planning: it was built to an octagonal plan and is crossed through by the main streets. This "**stone garden**", as it is commonly called, contains a never-ending number

of Baroque monuments that appear on the streets and squares. The material most commonly used is limestone, which creates an extremely spectacular effect at sunset, when the sunlight brings out a pinkish hue from the majestic façades. The center of the town is **Piazza Municipio**, with its wonderful staircase that takes you up to the **Cathedral of San Giorgio**, surrounded by imposing Baroque buildings such as Palazzo Vescovile, Palazzo Ducezio and Palazzo Landolina di Sant'Alfano.

The most interesting event that is organized in the town is without a doubt the **Infiolata**. During the last week of May, Noto is literally covered in flowers: the roads, squares and courtyards are covered in pictures made from colored petals that form various subjects and patterns.

### Not to be missed:

- The flowering of almond trees that dominate the landscape from January to February, providing a wonderful, romantic sight;
- A walk along **Corso Vittorio Emanuele** and **Via Cavour** to admire the masterpieces of the late Baroque period;
- Lunch in one of the pretty **restaurants in Noto**, trying out "u macco" (broad bean rissoles), rabbit in "a stimpirata" style (cooked with vinegar, mint, olives and chili pepper) and Moscato di Noto with your dessert;
- A coffee outside in **Piazza del**

## The Vendicari reserve



Siracusa: Vendicari Reserve

If you have a few extra days to spend discovering the area around Siracusa, we recommend a visit to the Vendicari Reserve, a wonderful natural oasis in the Siracusa province, halfway between Noto and Pachino.

This place, reminiscent of far-off times is a refuge for thousands of migratory birds, herons, swans, flamingos, cormorants and lots of others who come here to nest each year in the Reserve's brackish swamps. Other species use the Reserve as a kind of hotel for the winter period: a relaxing break, to get their energy back before heading for the warm African coastal areas.

There is one of the wildest, uncontaminated **beaches** on the whole island inside the Vendicari Reserve: a thin strip of golden sand bordered on one side by the colorful Mediterranean scrub and on the other side by crystal clear waters. The salt-marshes, the **Torre Sveva** tower and the ruins of the old tuna-fish factory are next to the beach.

A network of paths was set up in 1989 to allow visitors to reach the Reserve's most

interesting areas. We recommend you leave Ragusa in the early morning to reach the Reserve at a suitable time: you will be able to see the greatest number of bird species! Remember to bring binoculars and a swimming costume with you.

Visiting the Vendicari Reserve can be a good opportunity to discover **Noto**, one of the most significant **Sicilian Baroque-style** towns. The ideal thing to do would be to spend the whole day at the Reserve and then go on to Noto at sunset, just in time to see the play of light and shadows on the Baroque facades of churches and palaces and to try a few of the typical local dishes in a characteristic restaurant. If you stay in one of the several hotels in Noto, you will be able to spend the next day visiting this beautiful, fascinating town.



### Siracusa web sites

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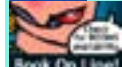
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- Siracusa
- Sorrento & Amalfi
- Taormina
- Terme & Colli Euganeie
- Trento
- Treviso
- Turin
- Val di Fassa
- Val di Fiemme
- Venice
- Verona
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