



Syracuse & the Southeast

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Why Go?

Home to Magna Graecia's most magnificent ancient city and some of Italy's most glorious baroque towns, Sicily's south-east is the island's top draw.

The temptation is to stay in Syracuse, sipping *granite* (flavoured ice) in cinematic piazzas and sunning yourself on the seafront, but drag yourself away and you'll be falling head over heels for Sicily's most beautiful towns. Top billing goes to Noto, Modica and Ragusa, each one a feast of architectural flourishes and gastronomic delights – ice cream in Noto, chocolate in Modica and one of Sicily's finest restaurants in Ragusa. All three towns rose from the rubble of an earthquake in 1693 to become luminous examples of Sicilian baroque, a style that lends the region a cohesive aesthetic appeal.

Then there is the region's countryside, a sun-bleached canvas of sleepy backroads lined with carob trees, epic rocky ravines studded with prehistoric tombs, and tranquil, sandy beaches backed by bird-rich greenery.

Road Distances (km)

Noto	40			
Pachino	40	25		
Ragusa	15	50	55	
Syracuse	75	40	55	85
	Modica	Noto	Pachino	Ragusa

SYRACUSE & AROUND

Syracuse

📍 0931 / POP 122,500

More than any other city, Syracuse encapsulates Sicily's timeless beauty. Ancient Greek ruins rise out of lush citrus orchards, cafe tables spill onto dazzling baroque piazzas, and honey-hued medieval lanes lead down to the sparkling blue sea. It's difficult to imagine now but in its heyday this was the largest city in the ancient world, bigger even than Athens and Corinth. Its 'Once upon a Time' begins in 734 BC, when Corinthian colonists landed on the island of Ortygia and founded the settlement, setting up the mainland city four years later. Almost three millennia later, the ruins of that then-new city constitute the Parco Archeologico della Neapolis, one of Sicily's greatest archaeological sites. Across the water from the mainland, Ortygia remains the city's most beautiful corner, a casually chic, eclectic marvel with an ever-growing legion of fans.

👁 Sights

👁 Ortygia

A labyrinth of atmospheric alleyways and refined piazzas, Ortygia is really what Syracuse is all about. Skinny lanes are lined with attractive *palazzi*, vibrant eateries and cafes, and the central square, Piazza del Duomo, is one of Sicily's most spectacular. The entire mini-peninsula is framed by beautiful houses and walls that look out onto the sea; there is swimming off the rocks in the summer months and incredible views all year round. Get away from the tourist crowds and explore the mesmerising maze of la Giudecca, Ortygia's old Jewish Quarter. The area, accessed by way of Ponte Nuovo, is best explored on foot.

★ Piazza del Duomo

PIAZZA

(Map p188) Syracuse's showpiece square is a masterpiece of baroque town planning. A long, rectangular piazza flanked by flamboyant *palazzi*, it sits on what was once Syracuse's ancient acropolis (fortified citadel). Little remains of the original Greek building but if you look along the side of the Duomo, you'll see a number of thick Doric columns incorporated into the cathedral's structure.

To the north of the Duomo, over Via Minerva, **Palazzo Municipale** (Map p188;

Palazzo Senatoriale) is home to Syracuse city council. Built in 1629 by the Spaniard Juan Vermexio, it is nicknamed 'Il Lucertolone' (the Lizard) after the architect's signature – a small lizard carved into a stone on the left corner of the cornice. On the other side of the Duomo, the elegant, 17th-century **Palazzo Arcivescovile** (Archbishop's Palace; Map p188; Piazza del Duomo) is home to the **Biblioteca Alagoniana** and some rare 13th-century manuscripts.

Over the square, in the northwestern corner, is the **Palazzo Beneventano del Bosco** (Map p188), which sports a pretty 18th-century facade, while at its southern end is the **Chiesa di Santa Lucia alla Badia** (Map p188; 📍 0931 6 53 28; Via Santa Lucia alla Badia 2; by donation; ☀ 11am-4pm Tue-Sun), home to Caravaggio's arresting masterpiece, *Il seppellimento di Santa Lucia* (Burial of St Lucy), painted in Syracuse between 1608 and 1609.

★ Duomo

CATHEDRAL

(Map p188; Piazza del Duomo; adult/reduced €2/1; ☀ 9am-6.30pm Mon-Sat Apr-Oct, to 5.30pm Nov-Mar) Built on the skeleton of a 5th-century BC Greek temple to Athena (note the Doric columns still visible inside and out), Syracuse's cathedral became a church when the island was evangelised by St Paul. Its most striking feature is the columned baroque facade (1728–53) added by Andrea Palma after the 1693 earthquake. A statue of the Virgin Mary crowns the rooftop, in the same spot where a golden statue of Athena once served as a beacon to homecoming Greek sailors.

The original temple was renowned throughout the Mediterranean, in no small part thanks to Cicero, who visited Ortygia in the 1st century BC. Note the interesting baptismal font to the right as you enter; it consists of an ancient Greek *krater* (large vase) adorned by seven 13th-century bronze lions.

Castello Maniace

CASTLE

(Map p188; Piazza Federico di Svevia; adult/reduced €4/2; ☀ 9am-1.30pm) Guarding the island's southern tip, Ortygia's 13th-century castle is a lovely place to wander, gaze out over the water and contemplate Syracuse's past glories. The castle grounds house two exhibitions, one shedding light on the fortress' evolution through the centuries, the other displaying archaeological objects from the site, including Norman-era ceramics and some curious-looking ceramic hand grenades