

CATANIA, SICILY TRAVEL GUIDE

Attractions in Catania

Worth seeing are the historical centre with its baroque buildings and churches and the cathedral with its square, hosting an elephant made of volcanic stone, which is the symbol of Catania. The old part of the city is centred around Via Etnea, a long and straight street, which leads from the sea, near the harbour, to a park called Parco Goieni, and from which it is possible to see the Etna. Alongside Via Etnea there are Parco Bellini, dedicated to Massimo Bellini a romantic composer born in Catania, the Roman theatre, partially covered by lava, and a lot of shops and bars.



Other attractions in the centre of Catania include the Greek theatre and the Teatro Massimo Bellini, a masterpiece among theatres of the 1800s. Also, do not miss La Pescheria (fish market) located between the harbour and the beginning of Via Etnea. In the fish market they also have a section selling meat and vegetables, and this is a very typically Sicilian open market with stalls and stallholders who shout in Sicilian, in order to attract the customers' attention and advertise the freshness of their product.

Catania has a long coastline. The northern half is rocky, with black volcanic stone and it goes from the harbour up to Lungomare Ognina (a boardwalk by the sea in the new and chic part of Catania) and nearby villages such as Acitrezza and Acicastello. The locals prefer this part of the coast as the water is deep and it is easier to swim. The southern part of the coast, from the harbour down to the Simeto plain (Simeto is a river in the southern part of Catania's territory) is occupied by a long and large sandy beach, called La Playa. Along La Playa there are several bathing establishments offering bars, changing facilities, deck chairs and umbrellas. The trendiest at the moment are 'Le Capannine' and 'La Cucaracha'. At the southern extreme of La Playa there is also a camping site.

Food and drinks

Sicilian cuisine is very tasty and colourful and it will not be difficult to find restaurants of any price range walking around the city centre or driving in the surrounding areas. Beware though, that restaurants in Italy, except in the touristy cities such as Florence and Rome, are only open between about 12 noon and 14.30 for lunch and 20.00 and 1.00am for supper.

People in Catania, if they are hungry outside these hours, stop in one of the many bar/pasticceria/tavola calda for an ice-cream or one of the typical savoury Sicilian snacks, such as arancini, pyramids made of rice filled with meat sauce and then fried.

There are many typical dishes in Catania, but the most famous is la 'pasta alla Norma', named after an opera by the composer Massimo Bellini. It is pasta in tomato sauce, with basil, fried aubergines and grated ricotta salata, a hard cheese made of sheep milk.



Sicilian wines, especially the ones made from grapes grown on the Etna, are very alcoholic because of the strong sun and fertile soil. Sicilian people like drinking wine during meals but they do not drink much alcohol. There are, however, a lot of Irish and Italian pubs in the city centre. Typical drinks from Catania are non-alcoholic drinks made of fruit syrups and carbonated water and sold in kiosks around the city. These drinks are refreshing and perfect during a hot summer day. Some of these kiosks are open all night long, and young people at the end of a night out gather around them to chat and get some refreshing drinks.

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