

Route 7

- **Tour:** Archimede
- **Starting point:** Etna
- **Arrival:** Val di Noto
- **Points of interest:** Catania - Siracusa
- Val di Noto
- **Km:** 132



Moto tours are a relaxing way of travelling and discovering the history of a country. Leave Catania to travel south and discover the antiquities of Syracuse and the beautiful Ortigia, small island and old center of the town, and visit the Val di Noto.

■ **History and traditions:**

Catania

In the Roman age Catania was a flourishing city with the second largest amphitheatre after the Coliseum. But above all Catania can be considered a symbol of revival, many times destroyed by the forces of nature - the Volcano and earthquakes - and by conquerors. Catania was more than once ransacked and plundered to the limit.

Syracuse

Syracuse was founded 2740 years ago by Greek settlers from Corinth, who called it Sirako ("swamp"). The settlers found the land to be fertile and the native tribes to be reasonably well-disposed to their presence. The city grew and prospered, and for some time was the most powerful Greek city of the Mediterranean.

Since the 5th century BC Syracuse was ruled by tyrants until 211 BC, with some interruptions. In the late 5th century, Syracuse was engaged in a war with Athens, which sought more resources to fight the Peloponnesian War.

Perhaps the most famous citizen of Syracuse was the natural philosopher Archimedes. Among his many inventions were various military engines including the so-called "claw of Archimedes", used to resist a Roman siege.

Val di Noto

In the south east of Sicily, it is dominated by the limestone Iblean plateau. In 1693 the entire area was decimated by an enormous earthquake. The town area was rebuilt in what came to be known as the Sicilian baroque style; most notable the town of Noto itself, which is now a tourist attraction on account of its fine Baroque architecture. Other towns in the Val di Noto include Modica, Ragusa and Scicli. Many towns in the area were declared World Heritage by UNESCO in June 2002.

Modica

The city is situated in the Iblean mountains and was founded by the Sykels circa the 7th century B.C

Over the centuries, as the city developed, it gradually became divided into “Modica Alta” (Upper Modica) and “Modica Bassa” (Lower Modica). During the last century the city has extended and developed new suburbs which include Modica Sorda, Monserrato, Idria, these are often referred to as Modern Modica; both old and modern quarters of the city are today joined by Europe’s highest bridge (300m).

Modica was the birth place of Salvatore Quasimodo, writer and 1959’s Nobel Prize, and also of Tommaso Campailla, the 18th century scientist and philosopher.

■ Food and wine:

Typical dishes are: Pasta alla Norma, maccu, “le Minne di Sant’Agata” (St. Agata’s tits), the Sicilian “cassata”, “cannoli”, the hazelnut granita and “arancini” (fried rice balls with bolognese sauce, peas and carrot)... don’t miss it!

■ Sightseeing and Landscape:

Catania

Catania is the second largest city in Sicily. It is also the Italian city with the highest number of theatres per square kilometre, with numerous professional and amateur theatre companies based there.

In the late 1980’s and 1990’s Catania boasted a youth culture in which indie pop and indie rock from lesser known international bands like The Violent Femmes, Robert Gordon, The Mexican Spitfires, Ben Vaughan, Dirty Looks, Alan Vega, Camper Van Beethoven, Pylon, Pixies and the Human Beinz were popular and received regular airplay.

Over the last decade, Catania has seen an explosion in its nightlife. In 1992 the city streets were almost deserted from 8pm until 8am but ten years later, thanks to more permissive licensing, restaurants, cafe’s and bars are open and the streets and squares are lively until 3 and 4 in the morning

Syracuse

Syracuse is one of the oldest cities in Italy. Important centre of the “Magna Grecia”, it was actually built as a Greek city. The island of Ortigia is a pleasant place for walks and sightseeing, with its three bridges and the old area, full of bars and nice restaurants where to stop for a meal.

Ragusa

In Ragusa you can find Palazzo Zacco, one of the most notable Baroque buildings of the city. Its Corinthian columns supporting balconies of amazing wrought iron work, while supports of grotesques mock, shock or amuse the passerby.

The building has two street façades, each with six wide balconies bearing the coat of arms of the Melfi family, a frame of acanthus leaves from which a puttino leans. The balconies, a feature of the palazzo, are notable for the differing corbels which support them, ranging from putti to musicians and grotesques. The focal points of the principal façade are the three central balconies, divided by columns with Corinthian capitals. Here the balconies are supported by images of musicians with grotesque faces.

The Cathedral of San Giovanni Battista in Ragusa Superiore was built between 1718 and 1778. Its principal façade is pure Baroque, containing fine carvings and sculptures. The cathedral has a high Sicilian belfry in the

same style. The ornate Baroque interior is separated into three colonnaded aisles.
