

Route 8

- **Tour:** Kore
- **Starting point:** Etna
- **Arrival:** Parco naturale delle Madonie
- **Points of interest:** Etna - Ennese e Villa del Casale - Parco naturale delle Madonie
- **Km:** 238



Descend from the top of the volcano in order to cross diagonally Sicily and reach the center of the island visiting the beautiful park of the Madonie.

■ **History and traditions:**

Etna

Etna was known in Roman times as Aetna, that possibly comes from the Greek word aitho ("to burn").

The Arabs called the mountain Gibel Utlamat ("the mountain of fire"); this name was later changed into Mons Gibel and subsequently Etna's current local name Mongibello.

The mountain's regular and often dramatic eruptions made it a major subject of interest for Classical mythologists and their later successors, who sought to explain its behaviour in terms of the various gods and giants that populated Roman and Greek legends. Aeolus, the king of the winds, was said to have imprisoned the winds in caves below Etna. The giant Typhon was confined under Etna, according to the poet Aeschylus, and was the cause of the mountain's eruptions. Another giant, Enceladus, rebelled against the gods, was killed and was buried under Etna.

Hephaestus or Vulcan, the god of fire and forge, was said to have had his forge under Etna and drove the fire-demon Adranus out from the mountain. The Greek underworld, Tartarus, was supposed to be situated beneath Etna.

Villa del Casale

Villa del Casale is an old Roman Residence of Hunting. It was built between the late 3rd century BC and the early 4th century AD. The most remarkable feature of the villa is the floor, mainly consisting of mosaics which fortunately endured in excellent condition.

In 1997, Villa Romana del Casale was declared from Unesco inalienable heritage of Mankind, not only because it is an extraordinary and important Roman remain, dated at the end of the Roman Empire, but also because it represents the complex system of economic, social and cultural relations of the Mediterranean basin. It includes 48 rooms. Almost in every room it is possible to see the splendid mosaics made almost certainly by north African workers. Surely the best known picture is the one of the girls wearing Bikinis. It is situated in one of the rooms to the South of the peristyle.

Villa Romana del Casale

Open Everyday from 8.00 to 17.30 (winter)

from 8.00 to 18.30 (summer)

Admission 2 Euros From 18

to 25 years old 4 Euros From 26

Madonie

The naturalistic, historical, and artistic heritage of the area is of considerable importance. In a context characterized by harsh mountains facing the Sicilian sea, the human signs still represent the evidence of a millenary presence (Prehistory) which in some cases has been handed down in current activities. The territory is scattered with several religious buildings, monasteries, hermitages and churches, often isolated on the top of the mountains. Along the watercourses you will find abandoned mills which, together with the old farmsteads (the so-called "masserie") often built on the more ancient ruins of Roman farmhouses, witness the ability of a culture to live in symbiosis with nature. In the Madonie there are the most ancient rocks of Sicily, dating back to the Triassic period. The several fossils of lamellibranchs, algae, and sponges found in the calcareous areas of the mountain chain are an evidence of it.

■ Food and wine:

The Madonie's gastronomic tradition is second to none, relying as it does on local produce for prime ingredients. Meat, sausages, salami, cheese, olives, mushrooms, and fresh seasonal vegetables are all excellent while some of Sicily's best wine is produced nearby. In these lands a millenary peasant tradition offers the taste of local cheese and the warmth of Sicilian hospitality. Basilisk mushrooms become precious ingredients for the preparation of first meal courses. Sausages and lamb chops cheer up endless grills. Local pastry chefs turn loose in creating more and more refined pastries, "sfoglio", "testa di turco", and "amaretti" (macaroons). Wine-making is an almost sacred activity.

Finally, you cannot certainly miss a good lemon, strawberry, and wild berries "granita".

■ Sightseeing and Landscape:

Etna

Mount Etna is an active volcano on the east coast of Sicily, close to Catania. It is the largest volcano in Europe, currently standing about 3,320 m (10,900 ft) high. It is the highest mountain in Italy south of the Alps. Etna covers an area of 460 square miles (1190 km²) with a basal circumference of 140 km.

It is one of the most active volcanoes in the world and is in an almost constant state of eruption. Although it can occasionally be very destructive, it is not generally regarded as being particularly dangerous, and thousands of people live on its slopes and in the surrounding areas.

Etna is an isolated peak about 18 miles (29 km) from Catania which dominates the eastern side of Sicily. Its shape is that of a truncated cone with a ragged top, which is actually a complex of large volcanic cones hosting four summit craters. At the top of the mountain is a volcanic wasteland, dominated by old lava flows, screes and volcanic ash. Few plants grow there and it is covered by snow for much of the year.

Madonie

Situated south of Cefalu', was the second natural reserve to be established in Sicily. The area of the Madonie

with its geomorphological and climatic features leads to the identification of three different areas: the coastal strip of the northern slope, protected by the African winds and covered by thick woods, centuries-old olive groves, cork tree woods, chestnut tree woods, ash trees, oak woods made of Downy oak and the holly nuclei of Piano Pomo. On the contrary, the large mountain chain preserves the woods of ilex and beech trees, and is characterized by several endemic species, among which the *Abies Nebrodensis*, a relict of ancient glaciation. The southern and sunny slope, bare or luxuriant and mild in the changing succession of the seasons is "The aspect of real Sicily; however, it is also a gentle series of mountain and hilly slopes cultivated with wheat and barley.
