

Route 3

- **Tour:** Barocco
- **Starting point:** Agrigento
- **Arrival:** Val di Noto
- **Points of interest:** Valle dei Templi
- Caltagirone - Val di Noto e il barocco siciliano
- **Km:** 234



Leave Agrigento and discover Sicily driving towards Caltagirone and its beautiful stair of ceramic tiles called "maioliche". Continue driving between curves and hairpin curves to discover the famous Val di Noto with its architectonic beauties.

■ **History and traditions:**

Agrigento

The Valley of the Temples rises southernmost, on the traces of the old town and includes many temples built in the 5th century BC.

Walking along the path you can find:

- The temple of Concorde; the only temple still standing in its whole.
- The temple of Castor and Pollux; tributed to Leda and Zeus's twins.
- The temple of Olympian Zeus
- was built in the 5th century BC and dedicated to Zeus
- The temple of Heracles; was built to commemorate the soldiers died during the Second Punic War.
- The temple of Hera Lacinia (Giunone)

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.

■ Sightseeing and Landscape:

Agrigento

Its origins are very ancient and notably Agrigento still offers the enchanting view of a presumably sacred area built when Greeks landed there to start the civilisation of Magna Graecia.

The remains include some temples, in strategic position on the peak of several hills around the town, dominating the valley (famous as the Valle dei Templi “Valley of temples”). The valley is known for the pervasive yet pleasant scent of orange flowers (locally called zagare) that bloom in spring.

In a poor village close to Agrigento, the Contrada Xaos (which means Chaos), was born perhaps the most famous Italian dramatist, Luigi Pirandello.

Caltagirone

Caltagirone is located on three hills at about 600m above sea level in the interior of Sicily about 70km SW of Catania. The city has been long famous for the production of pottery and terra-cotta wares. Nowadays the production is more and more oriented to artistic production of ceramics and terra-cotta sculptures. Other activities are mainly related to agriculture. The city was almost completely destroyed by the severe earthquake of 1693. Many public and private buildings were rebuilt in Baroque style. Primarily for this reason, the city has been included, together with the surrounding territory, in an area protected by the UNESCO World Heritage program. The main landmark of the city is a 142-step monumental staircase in the old part of the town. The peculiarity is that each step is decorated with different hand-painted ceramic tiles presenting figures derived from the millennial tradition of pottery making. Every year on 25 July, during the celebration of the Saint of the City (Saint James), the staircase is illuminated with candles of different colours for several tens of meters.

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.
