

Route 9

- **Tour:** Nero d'Avola
- **Starting point:** Etna
- **Arrival:** Val di Noto
- **Points of interest:** Etna - Ennese e Villa del Casale - Caltagirone
- **Km:** 250



Descend the mount Etna, head towards piazza Armerina and visit the ancient Villa del Casale. Drive south passing by Caltagirone in order to reach the south-east edge of the island.

■ **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.

■ 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.

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.