

# Amid nature, archeology and sea

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Day excursions from Modica, across a wild nature, ancient necropolis and greek colonies, natural reserves and old tuna canning plants, with possibility of making trekking itineraries along with natural excursion groups.



Guided excursions:

- **Kalura** [www.kalura.org](http://www.kalura.org)

Based in Ragusa, the association is specialized in eco-trekking all over Sicily, especially in Val di Noto

- **CAI Club Alpino Italiano** [www.cairagusa.org](http://www.cairagusa.org)

National excursionism association

- **Esotourismservice** [www.esotourismservice.com](http://www.esotourismservice.com)

Based in Ragusa, the association provides 4x4 tours all over South-East Sicily, adventure excursions, canyoning, rafting, free climbing, mountain bike, trekking, horsing

## SURROUNDINGS OF MODICA

### Cava d'Ispica and Pozzallo



All the Ibleo upland is marked by wild **canyons**, called "cave", laying orthogonally to the linecoast, created by carsic erosion of limestone and carved with ancient cave dwellings dating back to the Neolithic.

Located about 7km from Modica, the **Cava d'Ispica** is a deep rift 13 km long between Modica and Ispica, dotted by **cave dwellings, small byzantine sanctuaries and pre-greek necropolis**. Trekking across the cave is arranged by excursionism associations and is a beautiful experience of a travel back in time immersing yourself in a majestic nature.

The main places of interest are the catacombs of "Larderia", the christian hypogean of "Camposanto", the tomb canopy of "Larderia", the cave shrine of "Speziera", the cave church of Santa Maria and the so called "Castello", a **fascinating system of bastioned caves between cliffs and peaks**.

In the summer **suggestive night events of music and theatre often** take place among the caves fronting the town of Ispica.  
info: [www.giovis.com/sicilia/cavaispica.htm](http://www.giovis.com/sicilia/cavaispica.htm).

On the coast, connected to Modica by a highway, is the port of **Pozzallo**, the birthplace of the famous italian politician Giorgio La Pira. Its landmark is the massive **square tower** built by the Cabrera family in the XVth century as a defence from the incursions of the pirates, and the near "caricatore", a pier ordered some centuries before by Manfredi Chiamonte to export agricultural goods.

In the surroundings there are many pubs which get very crowded in the summer time, and a **nice beach** delimited by the city promenade.

In 1943 the English Army landed at Pozzallo under the leadership of general Montgomery, to join the americans who had previously landed farther west and had occupied Gela, which was the first european city to be freed by allied forces.

From the port it's possibile to reach **Malta** by catamaran (about 1h30', schedule changes with season, see [www.virtuferries.com](http://www.virtuferries.com)).



## TOWARDS SIRACUSA

### Cava Grande del Cassibile Naturale Reserve and Cassibile Necropolis



Located 15 km north of Avola after the Convent of Avola Vecchia, the entrance to this **magnificent and wild Natural Reserve** is from a belvedere from which a 11 km winding path goes down through the **Cassibile river canyon**, dotted with **small lakes and green water pools** which are perfect for a refreshing bath in summer. Going down and up takes about 3 hours, keep it in mind as the reserve closes before sunset in the summer time.

In the high rocky walls the **ancient traces of cave civilization** are still present: these dwellings, which were dug in the stone and connected each other by stairs and tunnels, were inhabited up to 150 persons during the Xth-lxth century b.C.. The **8500 burial niches** of **Cassibile Necropoli** date back to those times, you can also reach them starting from the village of Cassibile, proceeding after the Villa del Marchese.



## La coast south of Siracusa



The coastline south of Siracusa is worth while a day excursion: from Cassibile, which is also the access point to the Cassibile necropolis, you can have a relaxing bath in the famous **beach of Fontane Bianche**, marked by several fresh water springs which gives the name to this beautiful arch of sand. Be aware that the beach is very crowded in July and August.

Proceeding south **Avola** is famous for its **almond** (don't miss the **granita**) and for its strong red wine, the **Nero d'Avola**.

Just after Lido di Noto beach, the **suggestive ruins**

**of the ancient greek city of Eloro** (Helorus), built at the top of a seafronting hill, date back to the 7th century b.C.. The current excavations have already unearthed some of the ancient wall, a small temple dedicated to Demetra and Kore and a theatre. The site is open during working week and in the morning time only (h 9.00-13.30, free entrance).

The street passes by the **Vendicari Natural Reserve** (see after) and leads to **Marzamemi**, a picturesque fishing village evoking **arabic suggestions** and famous for the **tuna catching**, where to stop in the port warehouses and buy all foodstuff from tuna fish processing. **In the night it's really nice to have dinner here** in one of the typical restaurants near the port. Every year during summer Marzamemi houses the **International Festival of the Borderline Film**.

In the hinterland **Pachino** is a small town famous for its very tasteful small tomatoes called "**cilieгинi**", for its **full-body wine Eloro di Pachino** and for having been the birthplace of the great sicilian writer Vitaliano Brancati.

Finally the street leads to **Porto Palo di Capo Passero**, which is remarkable for its **big fish market** (all nights after sunset at the port) and for the natural surroundings. Just off the coast the small rocky island of **Capo Passero** is **marked by a solitary lighthouse by the ruins of a spanish fortress**. The cape south of the bay of Portopalo is the most south land of Italy and it's **a remote place** called "**Isola delle Correnti**" (e.g. Island of the Streams), referring to the clashing of the two Mediterranean sea and Ionio sea which comes here from opposite directions. Shallow waters (or an isthmus according to the tide) connect the bay to a desert island populated by birds only and guarded by a brave lighthouse.



## Vendicari Natural Reserve

Located between Avola and Porto Palo di Capo Passero about 1 hr from Modica, the Natural Reserve is a **wild oasis of mediterranean vegetation and coastal ponds** where many migrating species of birds stop before heading for the hot african lands, so it is really recommended for the lovers of **birdwatching**.

The visit to the Reserve can be also arranged by LIPU (national association for the protection of birds). The natural paths lead through the so called "pantani" (humid areas) up to the **suggestive old tuna fish catching factory, just behind an ancient watchtower**. Proceed to **Cala Mosche**, a beautiful beach where you can rest and make a wonderful swim.



## Pantalica Necropolis

Just as a beehive of 5000 shrines carved in the steep limestone above the Anapo river, **Pantalica** is the **widest rocky necropolis all over Europe**.

The necropolis is what is left of the ancient kingdom of **Hybla**, which blossomed between 13th and 8th century b.C., before being destroyed by the Greeks from Siracusa. The **rocky oratories** are the evidence that in the middle ages the caves became the refuge of the eastern coast populations from the incursions of the turkish pirates..

For the best visit we recommend you to take a guide and to plan full day excursion, so to have time also to rest in the reseve by having bath in one of the green pools of the Anapo river in the shadow of the wood. You can arrive at Pantalica following S.S.124 and turning to Ferla (from Palazzolo Acreide) or to Sortino (from Siracusa, about 50 km).



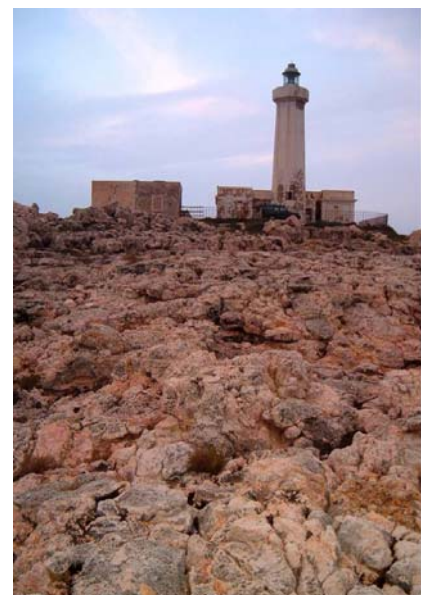
## Ciane River and Peninsula of Maddalena

In the hinterland of Siracusa towards Canicattini, slowly flowing among willows and ash trees, the **Ciane river** is the **only place where papyrus grow spontaneously all over Europe**.

According to the **greek mythology** Ciane (from *cyanos*, azure) was a nymph who was transformed into a spring by God Plutone to punish her for loving Anapo (the river flowing close to Ciane, coming from Pantalica canyon). Located 10 km from Siracusa, the Ciane river creates a natural pool, the **fonte Ciane (Ciane spring)**, which the legend attributes to the weeping of the nimpfh when her mistress Persefone was forced to follow God Ade into the hell.

Walking back along the river from the mouth to the source it's just like **jumping through space and time** to the ancient Egypt, loosing between the reflections and the slender geometries of this precious plant, the stem of which was worked for centuries by skillful craftsmen to obtain the famous **parchment paper**. Even today in Siracusa the working process of papyrus does exist but it is strongly threatened by the increasing salinity of water.

Driving towards the coast you come to the **Peninsula of Maddalena**, dotted with ancient villas and ending in the wild **Murro di Porco** cape, where **the lighthouse and the steep cliffs** sung by the legendary poet **Virgilio** seem to be one thing in front of the transparent waters of the sea.



## TOWARDS RAGUSA

### Irminio River Natural Reserve



Between Marina di Ragusa and Donnalucata the Irminio River Natural Reserve is a beautiful example of mediterranean dune ecosystem, one of the last evidences of how the coast of Ragusa was once upon a time. The visitor centre organizes guided excursions through the reserve, remind that inside it bathing is not permitted.

Along the road less than 1 km out Marina di Ragusa you can stop the car and walk on the western access path of the reserve till the beach, where you'll find a small bathing area with limestone cliffs and shallow water. Remind not to swim beyond the signs and be aware that in august this place can be very crowded.

Surrounded by the sweet smell of mediterranean vegetation take your time and slowly walk to the mouth of the Irminio river along the beach of white pebbles, sand and trunks whitened by the wind and the sea.

### Donnafugata Castle, Randello Natural Reserve and the greek colony of Kamarina



Leaving SS115 and exiting Ragusa Ovest, you can take the old road to Santa Croce Camerina, called strada di Malavita, an asphalted narrow strip bordered by the harmonious ragusan country dotted by "carrubo" trees and ancient "masserie", and chiseled by the intricate embroidery of dry walls.

A junction leads to the Donnafugata Castle, a romantic 19th century building which was erected in neogothic style on the ruins of a 17th century structure. The current shape and the luxurious gardens with ancient Caltagirone jars, the artificial caves and the labyrinth, were all built by the baron Corrado Arezzo, an important politician who lived in the 19th century. In the summer time many concerts and events take place in the suggestive frame fronting the castle.

The coastal road passes by the Randello Natural Reserve, with a nice dune beach, a dense mediterranean vegetation and pic-nic areas. Not far, in a silent natural environment of sea and mediterranean vegetation, you can visit the ancient greek ruins of Kamarina, founded by the

colonies from Siracusa in 598 b.C. and repeatedly destroyed and rebuilt in the following centuries.

The people of Kamarina were devoted to the goddess Atena, to whom they erected a temple 40 x 15 mt large, the few remains of which are being kept in the *Antiquarium* (every day 9-13,15-20). In the museum you can also see many other archeological findings discovered in the sea closeby, such as pieces of boats, coins, amphors and pottery, and a fascinating « arula » (a small altar) with a gorgon.

Walk along the path surrounded by the mediterranean vegetation till a flat area fronting the sea, where the ruins of the ancient « agorà » are still visible (5th-3rd cent. b.C.). The area of the greek city was likely to be extended for 190 ha and was protected by **7 km of walls**, still standing in some parts, and also the foundations of houses, the roads and the borders of the quarters are still recognizable.

Currently the scientific community is carrying out some studies to protect the archeological area from geological dynamic processes which affects the steep cliff, enforced by the violent winter storms. These problems were already known by the greeks, as shown by the recent findings of ancient offshore breakwater barriers, and in 1915 they lead to the breakdown of the watchtower and of the 15th century port facilities.

The archeological area of Kamarina houses **summer events of music and theatre** (ask A.A.P.I.T. of Ragusa).



## La coast of Ragusa from Scoglitti to Sampieri



Driving from West to East along the **coast of Ragusa**, you meet several large beaches and fishing villages reminding of **african kasbah, remote border outposts** which off season become places where to experience silence and meditation: **Scoglitti**, with its bustling fish market (11.00-18.00 mon-sat) and its **octagonal lighthouse** looking like a minaret; **S. Croce Camerina**, founded in the end of 16th century, a real piece of Africa in Italy; **Punta Secca** (from the arab word "Ain Keseb") with its white cilindric tower of Capo Scalambri lighthouse outstanding the small port dedicated to the Virgin of Portosalvo, protector of the boats. This place, like many other ones in the Province of Ragusa, has been the background of the famous tv series of **Commissioner Montalbano**; **Marina di Ragusa**, with its old seafront sided by **ancient houses and trendy pubs**; **Donnalucata** with its fascinating **19th century villas and the jets of fresh water on the beach** (in facts Donnalucata comes from the arab, literally "the spring of the hours"); and **Sampieri**, with its old **kiln of Pisciotto**, a "*laic cathedral by the sea*" as named by the critic Vittorio Sgarbi. After the dreadful fire of 1924, its **suggestive stone skeleton** is still

standing and looks at the large beach where Guccione e and the painters of the group of Scicli still use to walk and take inspiration for their artworks.

