

Discovering Modica

A cultural and gastronomic walking tour in 1-2 days, for a slow discover of the refined architectures of noble palaces and baroque churches, museums, lanes and views, stopping in the famous chocolate artisan shops and tasting the ancient baron receipts.



Guided tours:

- **cooperativa Etnos** www.etnosmodica.it
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Baroque symphonies

Modica can praise ancient origins and was crossroad of peoples and different cultures. After being a settlement of ancient "siculi" people, the town was occupied by the Phoenicians and the Greeks, who named it "Motyka", and after by the Romans and the Byzantines. Under the two centuries of Arabian rule, with the name of "Mohac", the town became a buxom rural and commercial centre. Since the arrival of the Normans in 1091 and throughout 700 years, Modica was a powerful county-shire, first under the family of the Aragonese e the Chiaramonte, who built churches and palaces in a magnificent gothic style that was just called "chiaramontano". They were followed by several spanish families such as the Cabrera, to whom the legend relates the introduction of the famous chocolate receipt, which Spain had imported into Europe from the New World. From the dreadful earthquake in 1693, which destroyed most of Val di Noto and cancelled the medieval monuments almost entirely, came out the baroque Modica that may be admired in all its splendour till today.



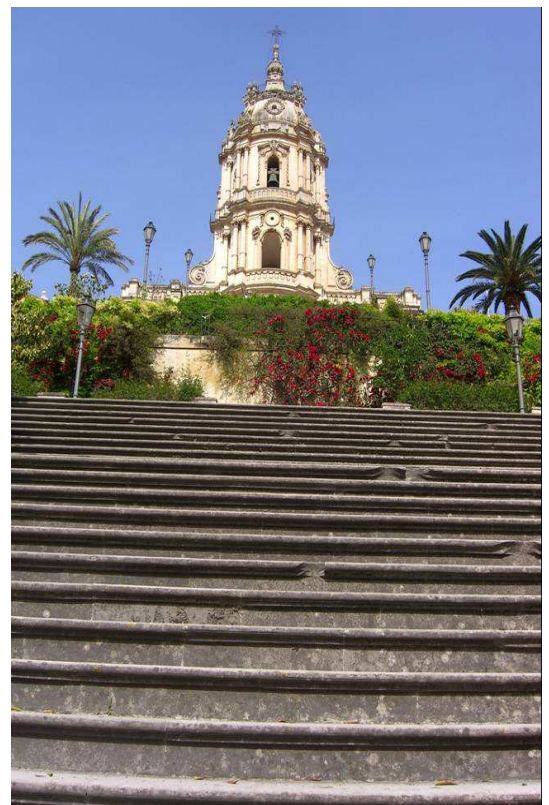
(klik on the map to enlarge)

The itinerary may start from the **marvellous cathedral of S. Giorgio**, just 5 min. walk from AnimeaSud, proceeding after to **Modica Bassa**. The church, a masterpiece by architect Gagliardi, stands out on the top of a **scenografic flight of 250 steps** offering a wonderful view over the town. Close to the church is **Palazzo Polara**, valuable example of noble palace. Going up along the right side of S. Giorgio to via Crispi, you can reach the ruins of the **Castle of the Counts** and the **clock tower**, vertically on a rocky wall outstanding the historical centre.

After crossing picturesque narrow streets you can stop and visit the **Salvatore Quasimodo's birth house**, where documents, photos and everyday things of the famous poet who was awarded the Noble Prize for Literature.

The "Salvatore Quasimodo" Cultural Association (www.quasimodo.it) periodically organizes the so called "**sentimental tours**" in summer nights, to let you discover the magic of Modica by means of **poetry**.

Through lanes and stairs the itinerary goes down to the hidden, small **rocky church of S. Niccolò Inferiore**, only recently discovered in 1987, containing **beautiful frescos dating back to XIV-XVth cent.**



Finally you reach Modica Bassa just near the **Cathedral of S. Pietro**, standing out corso Umberto I on a superb flight of steps marked by statues of the Apostles.



The most remarkable noble and public palaces face on **Corso Umberto I**, showing their rich balconies and baroque facades, such as the **Palace of Culture**, housing the **Municipal Museum** and the **Tourist Office**, and the **Grimaldi Palace**, housing the **Picture-Gallery**.

Once the valley bottom on which Modica lays was crossed by two torrents, the Pozzo dei Pruni e the Iannu Mauru, flowing into the so called "fiumara" of Modica, which thus looked very different from current aspect, having bridges and channels. After the dreadful flood of 1902, where 101 people died, the torrents were covered by Corso Umberto I and via Marchese Tedeschi. A sign on the wall of **Santa Maria in Betlem** reminds you the level of the water on that day. Take advantage of visiting the inside of the church, with the famous **cappella del Sacramento** (XVth-XVIth cent.), **a precious blend of arab-norman, gothic-catalan and renaissance elements**.

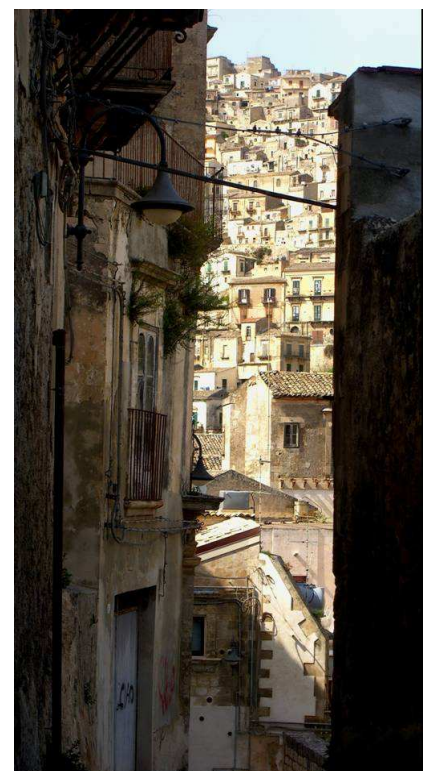
Walking along the lanes behind the Convitto of San Domenico, now Municipal Palace, the itinerary reaches the ancient **chiesa del Carmine** (1390), the portal and the rose-window of which are the only remains of the medieval architecture: don't go away without admiring the beautiful **Annunciazione by Gagini** inside the church.

Near you can visit the **museum "Tommaso Campailla"**, devoted to the famous scientist and philosopher from Modica, who in 1698 invented the "botti" (barrels) to treat the syphilis. If you like you can proceed up to the **Sanctuary of Madonna delle Grazie**, with its convent (**Palazzo dei Mercenari**) housing the **Ethnographic Museum**.

Just loose yourself **among the narrow streets and the stairs of the old jewish quarter of Cartellone**, passing the church of SS. Salvatore, rising up to the Monastery of S. Anna (Public Artchive) and the Convent of Benedettine, where you can enjoy a marvellous view of the town. After passing close to **old artisan shops, small gardens, arches and secret caves** you will walk down back to Corso Umberto I just near **Teatro Garibaldi**.

Then, proceeding behind the **Palazzo degli Studi** and the **Chiesa of S. Maria del Soccorso** you will finally reach the cathedral of S. Giorgio again, after passing in front of the old label signing the boundary between the two "matrici" (mother churches) of S. Pietro and S. Giorgio.

After spending enough time to buy the **famous chocolate and pastries of Modica**, don't loose **Modica Alta**, the most ancient part of the town, housing the **University**, which you can easily reach in few minutes from



AnimeaSud. After passing in front of the refined baroque palaces facing on the main Corso Regina Margherita, such as **Palazzo Minardo**, **Palazzo Salonia**, **Palazzo Florida**, **Palazzo Turlà**, its' worth walking up to the beautiful **chiesa di S. Giovanni Evangelista**, dating back to XII century and rebuilt after the earthquake of 1693. Make the stairs flanking the church on the left and go up to the view point called "**Pizzo**", the highest part of the town where you can have an **outstanding view over the roofs, the churches and the valley**. After walking down to the ancient small church of **S. Lucia** you finally end the itinerary at AnimeaSud again.

Relax in the secluded small terrace of AnimeaSud at twilight, **looking at the thousands of lights turning on throughout the town**, to keep the best memory of these days in Modica.



The secret of the chocolate of Modica



Walking along corso Umberto I and the near lanes, you will run into many **artisan shops** producing and selling the famous **chocolate of Modica**, they are places where you have to stop absolutely to taste the delicious receipts (cinnamon, orange, « carruba », red pepper, vanilla, cardamomo, ...).

Here are some references: **Bottega Equa Quetzal**, **Casa Don Puglisi**, **Dolceria Rizza**, **antica dolceria Bonajuto**, **Caffè dell'Arte**.

The **legend of the chocolate** is to be related to the **spanish rule** on the County of Modica.

They say that at the time of the Conquistadores, the brave aztec king Montezuma, as a sign of friendship to the spanish leader Cortez, had offered him a drink coming

from a plant yet unknow in Europe, the cacao. The taste of that drink, obtained by mincing the cacao seeds and adding water, corn flour, chili, cinnamon and anise seeds, was likely to be too bitter for the spanish, who imported the cacao along with gold and silver of the aztecs slightly changing the receipt with addiction of cane sugar.

Afterwards, the receipt of the **Xocoatl** became synonymous of **refinement and nobility** in every european court and finally came to the County of Modica, where it just kept the original receipt, being handed down up to nowadays: from cacao seeds, minced on a bent stone (the aztec *metatl*) by means of a special stone tool, came out a very bitter dough, which was then mixed with cane sugar, spices (mostly cinnamon and vanilla) and other essences.

Today this **pure chocolate** is still produced by artisan shops, along with **delicious pastries** including almond and "carruba" sweets and biscuits, and the famous '*mpanatigghie*', the most typical biscuits in Modica (coming from the southamerican *empanadas*, imported by the spanish too), made of a particular and energetic blend of chocolate and meat, which was required in past times by wayfarers during their long journeys.