

A large, dark stone sculpture of an elephant's head and trunk, set against a clear blue sky. The elephant's trunk is raised and curved, and its tusk is visible. The sculpture is positioned on the right side of the image, partially obscured by the text.

# Study Italian in Catania

## The City of the Elephant

**introducing Catania**



Italian courses  
International House  
Catania



The horizon from Catania water front

# about Catania



Catania is the first economic and industrial hub of Sicily.

The city is famous for its **entrepreneurial attitude**.

The Metropolitan area of Catania includes the comune of Catania (about 350.000 inhabitants) and 26 surrounding comuni around the urban belt with a total population of 800.000+ inhabitants in the **Metropolitan Area**.

Catania is an **old historical town**. Originally, it was **founded in the 8th century BC** by the Chalcidian Greeks

The history of the town then follows the history of Sicily and therefore many are the traces in town of the different dominations in Sicily: a **Greek Theatre**, a **Roman Amphitheater** and three **Roman baths**, a **Middle-ages castle** (Castello Ursino) built by Frederick II.

The historical center is a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** because of its **Sicilian Baroque** uniform style, due to the Spaniard reconstruction after the 1669 earthquake.

After the II World War, the town expanded in a much larger industrial and commercial area.





# about Catania

Catania has a **commercial seaport**, an **International airport**, several **railway stations** (Catania Centrale is the main one) and it is the main node of the Sicilian motorway system.

The motorways serving Catania are the A18 Messina-Catania and the A19 Palermo-Catania; and the prosecution of the A18 going from Catania to Syracuse and to Gela.

The **Circumetnea** is a narrow-gauge railway that runs for 110 km (68 mi) from Catania around the base of Mount Etna. It attains an elevation of 976 m (3,202.10 ft) above sea level before descending to rejoin the coast.

In the late 1990s, the first line of an **underground** railway (Metropolitana di Catania) was built. The underground service started in 1999 and it is currently active on a route of 8.8 km (5.5 mi). The line is planned to be extended from the satellite city of Paternò to Fontanarossa Airport.







The Cathedral in Piazza Duomo

# The symbols of the City: the rosso-azzurro and the Elephant



The colors rosso-azzurro (red and azure) are the colors that represent Catania. They refer to the nature that characterizes Catania: on one side the red of the lava of the Vulcano Etna, the highest volcano in Europe and today's UNESCO World Heritage Site too; on the other side the azure of its blue sky (346 hours of sunshine per month on average) and of its sea, a long and beautiful sandy beach southward of the harbor, and a lava stone rocky beach north of the harbor.

The symbol of the town is a lava stone elephant placed in the middle of Piazza Duomo, the hearth of Catania. The sculpture is most likely a prehistoric sculpture that was reforged during the Byzantine Era, prized as a protective talisman against enemies, both human, natural or geologic. Because of it, around the X century, when Catania was part of the emirate of Sicily, it was known in Arabic as Madīnat al-fīl (مدينة الفيل), meaning "the City of the Elephant"

The presence of an elephant in the history of Catania is surely connected to both zooarcheology and popular creeds. In fact, the prehistoric fauna of Sicily from the Upper Paleolithic included dwarf elephants. The Catania Museum of Mineralogy, Paleontology and Vulcanology holds the integral unburied skeleton of an *Elephas falconeri* in an excellent state of conservation. The first inhabitants of Etna molded such lavic artifacts to idolize the mythical proboscidian.







The sandy beach "La Playa"



# What to see in town

The **Cathedral** and **Piazza Duomo**, the city's beautiful square with 'O Liotru', the elephant

**Via Etnea**, the main historical street spans 3 km

**A' Piscaria**, the noisy old morning fish market

**Ursino Castle**, founded by Frederick II

The **Greek Theatre**, nestled among the city's Baroque palaces

The **Roman Amphitheater**, the remains of the “Black Colosseum”

**Via dei Crociferi**, the apotheosis of the Baroque style in town

**Palazzo Biscari**, a precious palace in the most beautiful Sicilian Baroque

The **Opera Theatre**, titled to Vincenzo Bellini, the composer of Norma and Puritani, the “swan” of Catania!

The **Villa Bellini gardens**, the oldest garden in town

A stroll along **La Scogliera**, the town waterfront with its lava stone rocky beaches

A walk at **La Playa**, the long sandy beach where all “catanesi” spend their summers

The suburbs of **Acitrezza** and **Acicastello**, the picturesque suburbs home of mythology, literature and cinema

And the Volcano **Etna**, you can't leave without a visit to the top of the volcano.







TEATRO  
BELLINI

The Opera Teather "Vincenzo Bellini"



# Educational institutions



Established in 1434, the **University of Catania** is **the oldest university in Sicily**.

Its academic nicknames are Siculorum Gymnasium and Siciliae Studium Generale. It hosts **17 faculties** and over **62,000 students**; it offers undergraduate and postgraduate programs.

Catania hosts the **Scuola Superiore di Catania**, linked to the University of Catania, aimed at excellence in education; they offer undergraduate and postgraduate programs for teachers.

Catania is home to the prestigious **Istituto Musicale Vincenzo Bellini** an advanced institute of musical studies (**Conservatory**) and the **Accademia di Belle Arti** an advanced institute of artistic studies. Both institutions offer programs at the university level for musical and artistic education.







A view from Catania roofs and the harbour



# Theatres and movie theatres

There is a **long love story between Catania and Cinema**. In the early decades of the 20th century, between 1913 and 1916, not only were silent 'colossal' movies shot in Catania, but also several film companies were founded, such as Etna Film, Katana Film, Sicula Film, and Jonio Film. Moreover, Catania hosted among the most famous movie shots in the history of the Italian Cinema

The Catanese Ugo Saitta was the creator of Italy's first animated short film Teste di Legno (Wooden Heads) in 1939, renamed Pisicchio and Melisenda, which was presented at the 7th International Venice Film Festival in 1939.

Nowadays, there are **18 cinemas** in town with a total of **57 screens**.

Catania is also the city with the **highest theatre density in Sicily** with about 8 theatres

The city's most important theatre is the **Opera Theatre "Vincenzo Bellini"**, inaugurated in 1890. It is a traditional opera house, boasts a symphony orchestra and a stable choir, and is home to an **opera and concert** season. Teatro Stabile, Teatro Metropolitan, Piccolo Teatro and Ambasciatori are also very active theatres.





The Benedictine Monasteryi



# Museum and libraries

Catania is home to numerous museums, seven of which are permanent establishments:

- the **Ursino Castle Civic Museum**
- the **Regional Antiquarium of the Roman Theatre**
- the **Emilio Greco Museum**
- the **Diocesan Museum**
- the **Botanical Garden Museum**
- the **Museum of Zoology**
- the **Bellini Civic Museum** (at the home of Vincenzo Bellini)
- and the **Giovanni Verga House Museum**

There are also three private museums:

- the **Federiciana Academy Palaeontological Museum**
- the **Valenziano Santangelo Museum**
- the **Museo Arte Contemporanea Sicilia (MACS)**



# Museum and libraries

At the **Le Ciminiere Exhibition Centre**, a completely renovated disused industrial area, regular events and exhibitions are held. Two new museums have been created within Le Ciminiere:

- the **Historical Museum of the Landing in Sicily** - 1943 which also contains a large collection of objects and uniforms, weapons of the time and virtual reconstructions of the landing.
- the **Cinema Museum** contains many relics and reconstructions of famous film scenes, with a section entirely dedicated to Catania as a film set.

Since 2015, the **City of Science** has been active, albeit on an experimental basis, the only one in Italy after the fire that destroyed Naples' City of Science

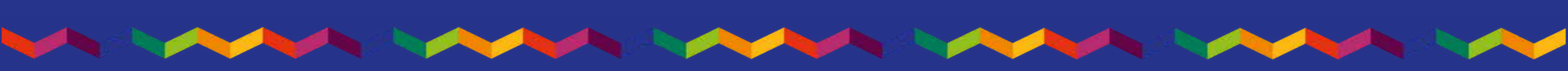


# Museum and libraries

The historical libraries of Catania are:

- the **Ventimilliana Library**, opened to the public in **1755**
- the library of the **Gioenia Academy of Natural Sciences**;
- the library of the Catania section of the **Deputazione di Storia Patria per la Sicilia**;
- the combined **Civic and A. Ursino Recupero libraries** (1931);
- the **Agatina library (1572)** of the Archiepiscopal Seminary of the Clerics;
- the library of the **University Palace (since 1875** it has held the collection of Bishop Salvatore Ventimiglia).

These have been joined over time by various other libraries, such as the '**Vincenzo Bellini**' **central library** (1950), the **Library of the Metropolitan City of Catania** (2004) or the numerous school and university libraries.







A view above Catania roofs and Etna



# Culture

The “Swan”, the Opera composer Vincenzo Bellini is probably the most world-wide known catanese. He was born in Palazzo Gravina-Cruyllas in the city center, the palace now houses a museum about him. The Teatro Massimo Vincenzo Bellini, which opened in 1890, presents a variety of works through a season, which runs from December to May, including the works of its namesake.

Catania has been a source of inspiration for numerous writers and poets over the centuries. This 'vibrant' and fascinating city has seen the birth of a multitude of talented authors from Catania, each of whom has enriched Italian culture and literature with their own unique voice. There have been many uniquely talented ones, and Sicily's literary tradition shows no signs of waning. From classics such as Giovanni Verga and Vincenzo Consolo to contemporaries, every Catanese novelist has left an indelible mark on Italian literature.

Giovanni Verga was born in Catania in 1840. He became the greatest writer of Verismo, an Italian literary movement akin to Naturalism. But many other Catanesi writers have enriched the Italian culture and literature: Luigi Capuana, Vitaliano Brancati, Vincenzo Consolo, Nino Martoglio, Domenico Tempio, Ettore Patti, and the contemporary writers Pippo Fava and Elvira Seminara.



# Culture

Moreover, all year round, Catania hosts many concerts both in winter time, in its theatre and music halls, and in summer in its open spaces like the Giardino Bellini and Piazza Duomo.

The cultural scene in Catania also hosts Etna Comics, a successful comic book convention and the Catania Book Festival, a young but famous literary festival with many events and book presentations.

The city is also home to the Catania Jazz Festival, which typically runs for several winter months with concerts in different locations.

In the late 1980s and during the 1990s Catania had an energetic and unique popular music scene. Indie pop and indie rock bands, local radio stations, and dynamic independent music record labels sprung up as a result. As a result, in those years the city experienced a vital and effervescent cultural period. Artists like Franco Battiato, Carmen Consoli, and Mario Venuti, and internationally known indie rock bands like Uzeda, Fleurs du Mal, Boppin' Kids came out of this cultural milieu. Still today, the city center bars and clubs host new and emergent bands, contributing to well-known movida Catanese, the well-known Catanese nightlife.







Piazza Duomo during St. Agata celebration



# Festa di Sant'Agata

From 3 to 5 February, Catania dedicates a great feast to Saint Agatha, the city's patron saint, a festival that attracts **tens of thousands of believers and tourists from all over the world.**

A silver ferculum 'a vara', with a bust containing the saint's relics, is tirelessly followed in procession by hundreds of “**devoti**” (devout' citizens,) dressed in the traditional '**sacco**' (a white tunic tightened by a cord, a black cap, a kerchief and white gloves), clinging to two cords of over 100 meters. The vara is followed by eleven '**cerei**' or '**cannalori**', tall wooden columns representing the city's guilds of arts and crafts. Over all the unanimous cry of devotion "**Cittadini, cittadini, semu tutti devoti tutti?**", “**Sì, sì, sì!!!**” (“Citizens, citizen, are we all devout?”, “Yes, yes, yes!”)

The Feast of Saint Agatha is **certainly something unique**, something grandiose, something spectacular.  
**An event not to be missed!**







The Greek Theatre



# Food

**Food is an important part of Catania's culture and way of life.**

Local cuisine emphasizes several traits of Sicilian cuisine, whilst developing some of its own character.

“Street food” (“rosticceria” or “tavola calda”) is one of the best ways to experience traditional dishes. **Arancini** are perhaps the city's most iconic: they are stuffed rice balls coated in bread-crumbs and deep fried; in Catania, they are **shaped like a cone to remind of Mount Etna**.

Typical specialties from the city include **cipollina** (puff pastry with onion, tomato, and prosciutto filling), **bolognese** (a small pizza topped with tomato, mozzarella, prosciutto, and boiled egg, and covered in puff pastry), **crispelle** (deep fried dough balls with ricotta or anchovies filling).

Apart from street food, typical dishes from Catania are: **pasta alla Norma** (pasta with fried aubergine, tomato sauce and ricotta salata cheese), named after the famous opera by Vincenzo Bellini; **pasta cco niuru** (pasta in cuttlefish ink), **maccu** (fava beans purée), **bastaddi affucati** or **broccoli affucati** (stewed cauliflower or broccoli), **caponata** (sautéed vegetables) and **scacciata** (a pie filled with tuma cheese) which is traditional during Christmas time.





# Food

Catania is also famous for its **pasticceria** (pastries and cakes). Pastries vary according to season and to seasonal events: during the Festival of Saint Agatha, patron saint of the city, there are the **cassatelle** (small cassatas) and **olivette** (olive shaped almond paste).

In Easter, there are **aceddi ccu l'ovu** (boiled eggs covered in biscuit). In summer, you can't miss a nice glass of **granita**. During the Festa dei morti (traditional celebrations in All Souls' Day) there are biscuits called **ossa di mortu, rame di Napoli** and **nsuddi**.

**Drink kiosks** are everywhere in town and serve soft drinks. **Traditional soft drinks** are made by mixing fruit syrups with soda and other flavors such as anisette, mandarine syrup, lemon and salt, etc.







**sunset at I Faraglioni in the suburbs of Acitrezza**



# Sports

Catania is home to many sports clubs covering a wide range of disciplines.

The most famous club is the **Calcio Catania football team**, followed by approximately half a million supporters.

Another club standing out from the rest is **Orizzonte Catania**, which is the leading women's **water polo club** in Italy, with 23 National Championship titles (15 in a row from 1992 to 2006), and also in Europe, with 8 European Champions Cup titles.

From 1960 to 2011 Catania held an International event named **Trofeo Sant'Agata**, a **road running competition** which took place in the streets of the city center, every year on the 3rd of February (the day the Festival of Saint Agatha begins).

