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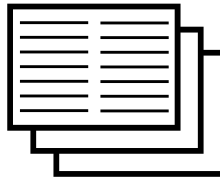
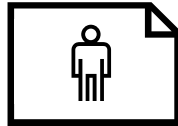
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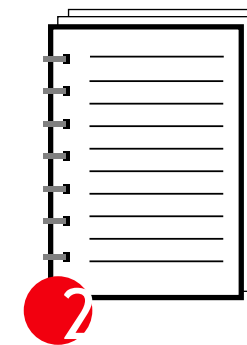
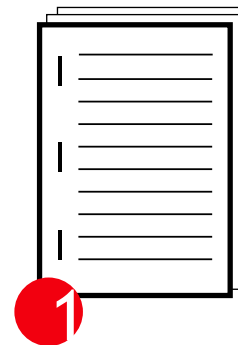
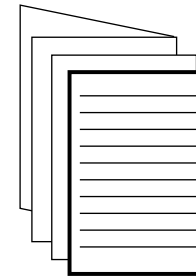
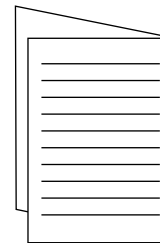
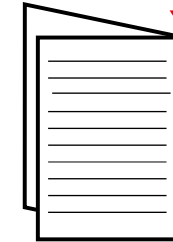
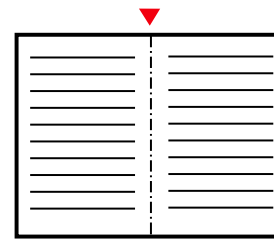
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THE CATANIA CITY GUIDE



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Summary



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History and culture



Catania: Piazza Duomo

Katane was founded by the **Calcidesi** people in 729 B.C. in a fertile plain at the foot of **Etna**. In 476 B.C. the city was conquered by Gerone, the fierce Siracusa tyrant who threw out the inhabitants replacing them with people from Siracusa, and it was renamed Aitna. The Calcidesi reclaimed the city after the tyrant was defeated, and gave it back its original name. However, this period of autonomy was short-lived: in 403 B.C. another Siracusa tyrant conquered Katane and sold the city's inhabitants as slaves. The city remained under Siracusa rule until the beginning of the 3rd century. Rome took over from Siracusa in 263 B.C. During the **first Punic war**, they invaded the city and stayed there for about seven centuries, a period in which Katane developed its culture and economy greatly.

After the fall of the Empire, the ex-Roman colony was conquered by Belisarius (535 A.D.) and was ruled by the **Byzantine Empire** for about three centuries.

The **Arabs** landed in Sicily in 827 A.D., and

later the **Normans** took over from them in 1071 and entered the city of Catania guided by Count Ruggero. The city lost its autonomy under the Normans, that in part it had managed to keep in spite of the continuous changes in rulers, and it became a feudal city to all effects.

In 1169, the city was destroyed by a terrible **earthquake** that struck the whole of Eastern Sicily.

Thirty years later, while the city was still working on reconstruction, Catania supported the Altavilla against Henry VI, the son of Barbarossa: the imperial reaction was very violent, culminating in a fire that destroyed part of the city, including the Cathedral.

Under Frederick II (1240), Catania was finally freed from its feudal condition: it was recognized as a Borough and became quite independent. There is little remaining evidence of this medieval period, however.

The **Spanish** were extremely important for the economic, cultural and demographic growth of Catania.

Frederick III of Aragon was crowned King of Sicily and set up some important political seats in Catania.

The cultural growth that took place in the city is symbolized by the founding of the University (1434), the first in Sicily.

The **second half of 1600** was an extremely tragic period in Catania's history: in 1669 there was a **violent eruption of Etna** and it covered everything with lava. Less than thirty years later (1693), when the city was still nursing its wounds, an **earthquake** destroyed anything that was still left.

Catania managed to react to these natural calamities, and started a huge building project that foresaw wide use of **black lava** and **light-colored limestone**. The city was one **huge, busy building site** for decades and slowly the Baroque aspect that still characterizes the city began to form.

During the **Risorgimento period**, Catania rebelled against the Bourbons in 1837 and in 1848, freeing itself permanently in 1860, when the **Thousand** conquered Palermo. Catania was annexed to the **Kingdom of Italy**.

The town and industrial growth of the city of Catania continued at a fast rate, only slowing down during the Second World War. In the last few decades, Catania has become a center for the technology sector, earning itself the name of **European Silicon Valley**.

Churches and Museums



Catania: Church of San Giuliano

A selection of the city's most important Churches.

Cathedral (Duomo) - the Chapel of Sant'Agata

Catania's Cathedral was built in the 12th century, and was then entirely rebuilt in 1600 after the earthquake and the volcano eruption destroyed most of the city. The Chapel of Sant'Agata, the city's patron saint is inside the Cathedral, where precious treasures are kept.

Church of San Giuliano

This is thought to be one of the Catania's most beautiful churches. It has a splendid dome enclosed in a polygonal open gallery and its interior is full of marble decoration and a golden-bronze altar. The church was built in the first half of the eighteenth century by Vaccarini.

Church of San Nicola

This majestic church was first built in 1687, but work was interrupted by the earthquake

(1693) that destroyed most of the city's buildings. Building began again and the church was finished. The spaces inside the church are noteworthy: the aisle and two naves inside are 105 meters long and the dome is 62 meters wide.

Benedictine Monastery

The Benedictine Monastery, one of the largest in Europe, is more like a palace than a religious building, an aspect that is probably due to close links with the Benedictine monks and the Catania nobility. In the eighteenth century it was one of the most important cultural centers in the whole of Sicily, attracting many visitors who were amazed by the luxury and the pomp of the building. It is now the Faculty of Literature and Philosophy for the University of Catania.

Basilica of San Nicolò l'Arena

This imposing religious building, next to the Monastery, dates back to the end of the seventeenth century and is still partly unfinished. San Nicolò l'Arena was built modeled on the basilicas in Rome, following the wishes of the Benedictine monks. The interior of the church is almost totally bare. The museums houses in Catania that are dedicated to the famous personalities who were born in this city.

Emilio Greco Museum

This museum, opened in 1994, contains about 1500 graphic works by the Catania artist: engravings, lithographs and etchings, including the famous "Commiati".

Giovanni Verga's House Museum

This eighteenth-century palace, that is in Via Sant'Anna, was the home of Giovanni Verga during the last twenty years of his life. Inside the house there are many objects that belonged to the famous veristic writer. The library that contains almost 3000 volumes by various authors such Deledda, Tolstoy, Gorky, Flaubert and Dumas is extremely valuable.

Bellini Civic Museum

This is the house where the famous composer lived before he moved to Naples. The museum is spread over a route that shows the private and artistic life of Vincenzo Bellini. There are also some very interesting, original musical manuscripts signed by the artist inside the museum.

Biscari Museum

The wonderful Palazzo Biscari, which is one of the most beautiful buildings in the city, was the residence of Prince Biscari. Inside there are halls full of frescoes, galleries, archaeological finds, statues, marble and other artistic wonders.

Historical buildings and monuments



Catania: Castel Ursino

Botanic gardens

These beautiful gardens spread over a surface area of 16,000 square meters where there are also some neoclassical buildings. Inside these buildings that are used as greenhouses, there are many rare, exotic, aquatic and Sicilian plants.

Bellini Gardens

This is the Catania inhabitants' famous place for relaxing, going for a walk and admiring the wonderful view that spreads from the city to Mount Etna. The Villa Bellini Gardens spread over about 70,000 square meters where there are avenues, squares, bridges, borders and fountains. There are statues representing the seven arts at the main entrance to the gardens.

Via dei Crociferi

This Avenue is a true triumph of eighteenth-century Baroque style, one of the most charming in Catania, where there is a never-ending, opulent line of religious buildings such as the Church of San Benedetto, the

Church of the Jesuits and the Church of San Giuliano.

Piazza Duomo

This is the heart of Catania, with the city's symbol monument: the fountain with the Elephant. The city's cathedral with the Chapel of Sant'Agata looks out onto this square, where precious treasures are kept. There is also Palazzo degli Elefanti which is the City Hall. One of Catania's most interesting roads starts from Piazza Duomo - Via Etnea, where there are splendid Baroque buildings with lava dust façades and a multitude of shops and confectioners.

The Elephant

The Elephant, symbol of the city of Catania since 1200, is located in the center of Piazza Duomo. This is a lava-stone statue that dates back to the Roman era, mounted on a more modern structure by Vaccarini from the eighteenth century. Legend goes that this animal became the city symbol because in ancient times pigmy elephants lived in this place, that protected the city's inhabitants by chasing away fierce animals.

Castel Ursino

This fortress is the only medieval building that survived the destruction that nature wreaked upon the city and is still almost intact today. It was built around 1240 to protect the city from the sea, and was used as a royal residence and as a prison. It has been the home of the Civic Museum since 1934 and it houses paintings, sculptures, bronzes and ceramics from various eras.

Bellini Theater

This impressive theater was opened in 1890 with the staging of Bellini's famous opera the "Norma". The Theater style reminds one of the Opera House in Paris: there is a lot of wrought iron in the portico, a large theater with four tiers and a gallery, corridors, and frescoed ceilings.

Eating and Drinking



Catania: cannoli di ricotta

The tasty Catania cuisine offers a range of typical local delicacies that are often found throughout Sicily. Our journey can begin by discovering the Catania tastes with a famous dish: **Pasta alla Norma**. This is a pasta first course, usually with tomato sauce, fried eggplant, basil and lots of salty ricotta cheese. The name given to this recipe was in honor of the composer Vincenzo Bellini, who came from Catania and who wrote the opera "Norma", which opened the Massimo Bellini Theater in 1890.

There are also **arancini di riso**, (rice balls) one of the most common recipes used in delicatessens, fried food shops and food shops that offer them in a thousand varieties, mostly enriched with minced meat, and sometimes with mushrooms and pistachio nuts. Catania's "arancini" are different to the ones made in other Sicilian cities as they are long, cone-shaped and not round.

Another snack that you can always find in the fried food shops, and also in many restaurants in Catania, are **crespelle**: soft fritters full of ricotta cheese or anchovies.

"Scacciate" are another local recipe. These are bread-dough pies, filled with local cheeses such as "tuma", anchovies and different type of vegetables.

The kiosks spread out around the city offer special local drinks such as lemon seltzer, made with squeezed lemon, seltzer and salt, and tamarind with lemon and bicarbonate of soda, that is a real aid for the digestion.

Fish-based recipes include **marinated "mascolini"**, fresh anchovies marinated for at least 24 hours in extra-virgin olive oil and lemon juice, and **"pasta con i mascolini"**, pasta with fried anchovies, onion, peas and wild fennel.

Cakes and desserts, one of the strong points of Sicilian cuisine are also a high point in Catania, where you can find the best **cannoli di ricotta**, made with crunchy pastry filled with ricotta cheese and chocolate flakes or candied fruit.

Olivette di Sant'Agata, cakes with green almond paste made for the traditional festival of Sant'Agata are another Catania delicacy. These little cakes are linked to an ancient legend that tells the story of the city's patron saint, pursued by Roman soldiers, who stopped running to tie her shoe and just at that moment, a huge wild olive tree grew in front of her that hid her from her pursuers, and offered her olives to eat. There are also the famous granitas in Catania, crushed ice drinks flavored with almonds, lemon, coffee, or chocolate, and served with hand-whipped cream. Local wines include the **DOC red wines** that come from the foot of Mount Etna.

Shopping



Catania: "pupi"

In Via Reitano, near to Castel Ursino there is a craft shop belonging to the Napoli family, the historical **Catania puppet-making** family that has made the famous Sicilian "pupi" for centuries and that has given shows at the Theater Opera dei Pupi. The famous Catania "pupi" are made differently from the Palermo ones: they are 135 centimeters tall and can weigh from 15 to 30 kilograms!

The craft objects made from **lava stone** following traditional techniques and the famous **painted pottery** mostly made in nearby Caltagirone, but which can be found in any souvenir shop in Catania, are extremely characteristic.

Another typical craft product that you can find in Catania are **candelabras**: unique pieces often in Baroque style that are made by hand, mostly in wood, and are carved, decorated and then painted.

If you want to dedicate yourself to **food and drink produce shopping**, travelplan.it recommends you go to one of the markets in Catania, so that you can experience the true atmosphere of everyday Catania life.

The ideal place for such an experience is the picturesque **Pescheria**, the historical market that spreads out around Piazza Pardo (near the Cathedral). There are fresh fish stalls (though fish is a little difficult to take home as a souvenir, no matter how good it is), and also dried fruit, bottles of extra virgin olive oil and red wine made on the foothills of Mount Etna, bags of dried pulses for tasty, local recipe soups and lots more too.

For those of you interested in shopping for famous names, **Corso Italia** is full of all the boutiques of the most famous Italian and international designers.

Hotels and lodgings



Catania: the Elephant

Catania offers several possibilities for accommodation, depending on your needs and the budget you have for your holiday.

If you want accommodation that offers a city center location plus all facilities and top service, the best thing to do is to choose one of the several hotels in Catania, that range from five-stars to family-run, one stars hotels, Bed & Breakfast establishments or guesthouses. Catania is an attractive city, due to its artistic and cultural sights and its picturesque daily life that oozes from its truly authentic soul. It is a spirit that stands out in the morning, if you go to one of the four city markets, and in the evening, in the squares, streets and staircases in the city. Anyone who wants to capture the true essence of this city should rent an apartment in Catania: this way you can stay in Catania for a medium-long period. In this way you will have the possibility of spending more time on going on trips outside the city! The area near to Catania has a lot to offer: from Caltagirone to Acireale and a trip to Etna. If instead you prefer to make your base outside the chaotic

city, in a quiet place in the middle of nature, travelplan.it suggests you choose one of the rural farmhouses in Catania or nearby at the foot of Mount Etna

Events



Catania: Festival of Sant'Agata

If you intend to organize a **holiday in Catania** in when one of these events takes place, especially during the Festival of Sant'Agata, we recommend you book your hotel in Catania well in advance.

Festival of Sant'Agata - February

Catania celebrates **Sant'Agata**, the city's patron saint, each year with three days of festivities: 3, 4 and 5 February. The first day is dedicated to the offering of candles, each confraternity offers a huge "candelora" that is carried in the procession with difficulty due to its weight: some "candelore" weigh up to 1200 kilograms each! This first day ends with a fireworks display in Piazza del Duomo. On the second day, Catania's inhabitants wear long white tunics to remember the historical night of 1126 when the Catania people of the time left their houses in their nightshirts to meet two citizens who had come back from Constantinople with the Saint's relics. The festival continues with a procession carrying the statue of Sant'Agata, decorated with all the wonderful treasures that are kept in the

Chapel that carries the saint's name. The procession lasts all days and passes by all the places in the city that are linked to the saint's martyrdom. It ends late at night, when the procession statue (called the fercolo) returns to the Cathedral. On the last day, white carnations replace the red ones used on the previous day, that symbolize the saint's martyrdom. The most emotion-filled moment is when the procession passes along Via di San Giuliano: this steep road is considered to be a trial of courage for the Saint's followers. Once this procession has finished and the "fercolo" is returned to the Cathedral, the festival ends with a fireworks display, that leaves the Catania people exhausted but happy for having celebrated their patron saint.

Cantica - The Sicilian event of Ethnic music and contamination - November/ December

This recent event started up in 2000, due to the initiative of a Catania cultural association called Darshan, under the patronage of the Sicilian Regional Administration and the Province of Catania. It is a festival that is entirely dedicated to music, from blues to ethnic music, including Sicilian folk music, and attracts international guests and young Sicilian artists.

Theaters

The Catania theater tradition has ancient roots and is part and parcel of the city's culture: there are about 25 active theaters in the city, each one specialized in a particular type of show, the puppet theater, the opera, ballet, Greek tragedy, classical theater and experimental theater. The most famous theater is the Bellini Theater, which was opened in 1890 with the famous opera the "Norma" by Bellini. There are also the Metropolitan, the Verga, the Musco, the "Teatro Club", the "Piccolo Teatro", the "Nuovo Teatro", the "Teatro della Città", the "Piscator", the "Teatro degli Specchi", the "Teatro Stabile dell'Opera dei Pupi" and many other theaters.

La Dolce Vita



Catania: Catania by night

Catania is famous for its legendary nightlife, and not just in Sicily. Legendary to the extent that it has the right to speak about its "movida". Even if it isn't quite normal here to have dinner after midnight like it is in Madrid, this Sicilian city has just as many clubs and places to enjoy oneself as the Spanish capital. One of the most popular meeting places is the **Scalinata Alessi**, a staircase in the center of the university area of the city, just a short walk from Via Crociferi, where there are lots of clubs. One of the most famous clubs is **Nievski**, the first pub that opened up in the city. Now there are about 120 of them, that are always crowded and lively. Catania is a university city that attracts students from all over the south of Italy, and they and the city's "viveur" inhabitants make Catania's nightlife so interesting that it seems natural to stay out until dawn. The choice of fun things to do is never-ending: there are **25 theaters** and an endless variety of clubs. You can choose between Arabic-like, hi-tech, kitsch or minimal Japanese atmospheres. The more sophisticated wine bars, that attract

the Catania middle classes, are a bit further out of the old city center, in **Corso Italia**, in the stretch between Piazza Europa up to the crossroads with Via Monfalcone, a modern, exclusive city area that goes as far as the seafront.

If you get hungry after walking, talking and dancing there is always the **Etoile d'oro** that was the first bar to stay open 24 hours a day in 1977 and that now makes 1000 arancini per days, offered in a thousand different varieties.

A special day



Catania: Villa Bellini park

A specially-planned route for those of you who have little free time on their hands but who want to get to know this wonderful city. Our itinerary also includes a night in a hotel in Catania that you can choose according to your needs: in this way, you can enjoy the Catania nightlife without worrying about having to leave.

Morning

We begin our tour from Piazza Duomo, the center of the historical city center of Catania, where you can see the unique Elephant Fountain.

The Cathedral, with the Chapel of Sant'Agata inside containing the saint's treasures, and City Hall, Palazzo degli Elefanti, are also in this square.

From Piazza Duomo you can walk to the nearby **Via Crociferi**, one of the most charming streets in Catania, where you can see some wonderful examples of eighteenth-century Baroque buildings, one after the other: the Jesuits' Church, the Church of San Giuliani and the Benedictine Monastery,

where Giovanni Verga, who was from Catania, based his book "Storia di una capinera". After walking along this street, we advise you to go to the Ex Benedictine Convent, which is now the home of the Faculty of Literature and Philosophy. This important building, which looks like a palace, is near to Via Crociferi: if you are not too tired, you can walk along Via A. di Sangiuliano (a road that crosses Via Crociferi) that then becomes Via G. Clementi, or you can go by taxi or bus. After visiting the Monastery, it will probably be lunchtime. Choose one of the restaurants in Catania nearby and try out some of the delicious Catania food. Why not start off with an arancino di riso, in one of its thousand varieties, and with a delicious "crespella alle acciughe". As a first course you have to try Pasta alla Norma a classic dish in Catania, that has become one of Sicily's symbolic recipes. For your second course, choose a fish-based dish: the restaurants in Catania are famous for their fresh fish prepared in several different ways, depending on the chef's imagination, but that are in keeping with traditional Sicilian cuisine. After a good coffee, you will be ready to continue with your itinerary.

Afternoon

Go to **Via Etnea**, an elegant street lined with Baroque-style buildings and shops that crosses the city from Piazza Duomo to **Piazza Stesicoro**, where you can see the **Vincenzo Bellini Monument**, the imposing **Roman Amphitheater**, one of the few remains from the Roman era that survived the volcano eruption and the earthquakes and the Church of Sant'Agata alla Fornace, one of the eight churches in Catania that are dedicated to the city's patron saint. Once you have reached this point, you will be able to dedicate the rest of the afternoon to a relaxing, charming walk in the splendid Villa Bellini, one of the most popular places for the Catania people. 70000 square meters of squares, bridges, borders and fountains.

Evening

After a day spent looking at places so full of art and culture, the time has come to dedicate a bit of time to enjoyment: Catania leaves you with no end of choice. Go to one of the bars or clubs along the crowded Scalinata Alessi for your aperitif, one of the most popular meeting points in the city. Carry on the evening as you please: Catania has clubs for all tastes: from live music to the DJ set, from ethno-rock to electronic music, from the most exclusive wine bars to social centers.

Caltagirone: the pottery city



Catania: Regional Pottery Museum in Caltagirone

Another place that you just cannot miss is **Caltagirone**, a town 68 kilometers from Catania at 600 meters above sea level. This charming town is world-famous for its craft production of **pottery**, a job that still employs many craftsmen. This ancient art, which was begun in the Arab period, has developed over the centuries, but has maintained practically the same decorations and colors so typical of Caltagirone pottery.

The pottery is everywhere here, in the palaces, the churches, the monuments, the gardens and the squares. The **splendid Scala di Santa Maria del Monte**, is a unique staircase worldwide, totally covered in painted pottery tiles. This breathtaking staircase with 142 steps, that connects the high part of the city to the low part, is the center of many cultural events in Caltagirone. If you get the chance, plan a trip to Caltagirone in the springtime: you will see an unforgettable scene. Between the month of May and June, the town celebrates its **Scala Infiorita** festival: Scala di Santa Maria del Monte is completely covered with flowers, which create a beautiful series

of geometric patterns that climb up the staircase. Another festival to be seen in the **Luminaria**, that is celebrated on the nights of July 24th and 25th in honor of San Giacomo, the town patron saint: thousands of lanterns are used to decorate the staircase, that create an even more spectacular effect.

Not to be missed:

- A visit to the **Regional Pottery Museum** to see the origins of the craftwork that produces this pottery.
- A walk in the splendid Liberty-style garden, **Villa Comunale**, designed by Giovanni Battista Basile.
- A few pottery items to take home as presents or to keep yourself.
- A jar of honey made in Caltagirone, to take home and taste so you remember the flavors of this area when you are a long way away.

Mount Etna and nearby area



Catania: Mount Etna

Etna is the most imposing volcano in Europe: 3330 meters high, 210 km of perimeter with an overall surface area of 1600 square kilometers. A live giant that sometimes explodes unexpectedly and violently, creating terror for those nearby.

The most disastrous eruption dates back to **1669**, when the lava destroyed villages and harvests, people and animals, and traveled as far as **Catania**. In 1900, Etna woke up several times, threatening and sometimes destroying the area. In the 1970s and 1980s, Milo, Sant'Alfio and Randazzo were saved at the last minute. Finally, during the eruption in 1983, the lava was diverted into an artificial canal. Etna never sleeps and it is continuously active: lava comes out of its craters regularly, all along the sides of the volcano.

The last eruption was at the end of 2002, when a violent eruption threatened the **Rifugio Sapienza**, a refuge at the foot of the volcano. Climbing up Etna is a unique, exciting experience. You don't need to be an athlete to explore the Sicilian giant: there are several types of excursions, from trekking

to tourist trips on the Circumetnea train, the **food and drink itinerary** and mountain bike trips over the rough paths.

The visit to the top craters is the best trip of all. Once you get to the top, you can see a large part of Sicily from the Aeolian Islands to the Gulf of Augusta. The tour on the old **Circumetnea** train that takes you to the villages around the foot of the volcano is also extremely worthwhile. One of these villages is **Randazzo**, that has beautiful medieval architecture and **Linguaglossa**, with its characteristic buildings in lava and sand stone.

If you go to Linguaglossa, we recommend you visit the **Ethnographic Museum of the Etna** people and the wonderful **Etna Park**, that is a splendid green oasis that stretches out over 58,000 hectares.

The luxuriant vegetation that grows at the foot of Etna changes depending on the altitude, Mediterranean scrub, chestnut woods, oak trees, pine trees, beech trees and birch trees, and higher up there are green meadows that lead to the permanently snow-capped peak of the volcano. A love of nature is not the only reason for a trip to Etna: this area is so fertile and rich that many types of Sicilian produce are grown here, that can be tried out in the several restaurants and inns that you find nearby.

The whole area of Etna is famous for its wine production, especially near Randazzo and Castiglione di Sicilia: **Etna DOC** is a strong wine, that is just right for tasty food such as "zuzzu", a king of gelatinous sausage made from the cartilage of pork and beef meat, that is usually served cut into cubes. Another typical dish is "maccheruni", homemade pasta with various types of sauce. A good second course may be lamb or kid meat.

Finally, the town of **Bronte** is famous for its **pistachio** production, nuts that are especially fine and popular in Italy and abroad. Around 1800, the growing of these nuts was the area's most important activity.

Pistachio harvesting is still a long, tiring job:

the plants only produce their fruit once every two years and it is not possible to gather the fruit mechanically. It must be done by hand. There are many characteristic recipes prepared in Bronte and nearby that use the pistachio nuts as an ingredient: pasta dishes made with pistachio sauces and many types of cakes that use the nuts, either as a paste or crushed.



Catania web sites

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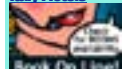
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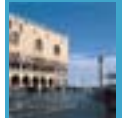
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