

Modica: if your plans hadn't foreseen a visit, change them!



In **1693**, the region known as Val di Noto, was struck by a terrible **earthquake**.

The architects who breathed new life into this area were masters of the Sicilian Baroque. In the words of UNESCO, their work “represent the culmination and final flowering of Baroque art in Europe”.



Modica, not far from the sea, is divided into two parts which are connected by numerous flights of steps. Palazzi and houses, magnificent churches, with their inspiring domes, bell towers and intricate facades, punctuate the red-tiled roofs.

The centrepiece is undoubtedly the beautiful *Church of San Giorgio*.

Modica has a long and varied **history**. It reached the height of its splendour in the Aragon Dynasty (14th to 18th centuries) and came to real prominence in 1296, when Frederick II of Aragon formed the “County of Modica”, a kind of “state within a state”. The Spanish brought with them customs and secrets, acquired fresh from the adventures of the conquistadors: the most important was the unique recipe, learned by the Aztecs, for **chocolate**.



Even now, this recipe remains unchanged. Walk around Modica, and you will see the many chocolatiers who produce a product that tastes and feels unique on the palate. Its recipe is also simple. Cocoa paste obtained from ground beans is melted in a copper vessel. A water bath rather than direct heat ensures that

the temperature doesn't go above 45 degrees Centigrade, sugar and spices, traditionally vanilla, cinnamon or chilli powder, are then mixed in. This chocolate feels rough and grainy, due to its sugar crystals, which are left intact. It is crumbly and tastes pleasantly bitter.



Deep amidst these baroque wonders, you will find a fascinating series of **canyons** among which the most important is Cava Ispica, a 13 km natural canyon in South East Sicily. This area is a very important naturalistic site and represents an important historic site from prehistoric age to middle age: here you can find prehistoric settlements, Paleolithic tombs, catacombs and Byzantine churches. These archaeological treasures are adorned by ancient farms, olive groves and carob

trees evocative of the region.