

Eternal Sicily, between history, myths, and traditions / The most authentic heart of the island, from Polyphemus to Carnival

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- Tradition, history and myth are mingled in Sicily as in few other places in the world.
- This can already be seen in the Strait of Messina, where feluccas, very special boats still used for traditional swordfish fishing, travel between Scylla and Charybdis.
- From here, a journey into the most authentic island begins, where culture is alive and does not stop at the museum.

Something that is already evident in the cities' stone archives, which tell the thousand-year history of a very ancient territory. It can be seen in the Necropolis of Pantalica, for example. But it is perhaps the Valley of the Temples that is the most recognizable emblem of this region's relevance in antiquity. The complex is not only a legacy of Greek colonization, but evidence of the political, religious and commercial centrality the island had in the Mediterranean. And the domination of different civilizations followed one another over time, as one discovers by following the Arab-Norman route in Palermo and its province, but one can also read about it in the Sicilian Baroque of the Val di Noto towns, with their concave facades, wrought-iron balustrades and grotesque masks.

History, however, is as if it has no charm without a bit of legend. And in Sicily there is plenty of the latter to spare: Mount Etna, for example, puffs fire because down there is Typhon, the rebel giant imprisoned by Zeus whose movements cause earthquakes and blowing eruptions. In the main crater, however, is the forge of Hephaestus, the blacksmith god. While along the coast of Aci Trezza, the faraglioni are those boulders thrown by Polyphemus at Ulysses after being deceived by him. And on Lake Pergusa, near Enna, according to some, the Rape of Proserpine took place. The daughter of Ceres was abducted by Pluto while picking flowers on the shore, and was taken by him to the underworld. Her mother managed to get to see her again, but only six months of the year: hence the seasons were born.

When taking a trip to the most authentic Sicily, however, one cannot fail to consider traditional handicrafts. Sicilian puppets, for example, are both the product of centuries of techniques handed down from master to pupil and a theatrical device capable of telling stories that still entertain today. And coral working, such as that of the Trapani area, also has ancient roots. Over the centuries, coral sculptures and jewelry produced in this area reached such levels of refinement that they were exported all over the world. So, too, were the celebrated ceramics of Caltagirone, which today decorate stairways, churches and palaces throughout the island. Without, of course, forgetting the religious festival carts. On them lies the synthesis of Sicilian identity, with its colors, style of painting, carving, and epic narrative. The charm of tradition expressed through the effort of a community, however, is unsurpassed. Among the most heartfelt religious events is the feast of St. Agatha in Catania (Feb. 3 to 5), while in Palermo, Santa Rosalia is celebrated both in mid-July-with a procession, shows and fires-and between Sept. 3 and 4, when the faithful climb Mount Pellegrino during the famous 'Acchianata. In Messina, in Ferragosto there is the Vara, a massive processional machine dragged by thousands of barefoot faithful.

Alongside the religious festivals, there is a cycle of festivals of which it is impossible to provide an exhaustive list. The Ottobrata in Zafferana, for example, celebrates the flavors of Mount Etna, while in San Vito Lo Capo, the Cous Cous Fest is a veritable "festival of cultural integration" that celebrates mixing and dialogue in the Mediterranean. Also in a pagan vein, Agrigento has the Almond Blossom Festival, which hosts folk groups from around the world, and the Acireale and Sciacca Carnivals, with their floats, are also well known.

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