



Modica, for the Chocoholic

If chocolate is your weakness a visit to Modica is a must. If only just to go pick up stuff from the local Antica Dolceria Bonajuto and to understand how this dolceria has preserved the ancient art of making 100% genuine chocolate from pure cocoa with no additives at all, except sugar and spice. Keep in mind that this shop was established



in 1880 and continues to stand in the exact, same spot for all the passing years, 133 to be exact, and has become a huge tourist attraction.

The entrance is charming, and the shop fairly small. The front being the store and the back, the chocolate kitchen.

After we tasted pure, raw chocolate chips all marked with the country of origin, an angelic looking chocolate-maker took us through the dark, molten and fascinating journey of their unique chocolate-making company, even as the Sicilian proprietor stood by, smiling, gesticulating that he did not know a word of English.

Apparently the association of this dolceria winds down historically to the Aztecs civilisation (the ancient inhabitants of Mexico) when the Aztecs made

'xocolatl' from cocoa seeds, a concoction held in high regard because it conferred strength and vigour and was considered a sign of wealth.

The Aztecs made the xocolatl using a special rolling pin made of stone, grinding the cocoa seeds on a tool called a metate, a curved stone placed on two transversal base stones. The cocoa flour produced was then mixed with spices, and the mixture was rubbed on the metate until it hardened. During their domination in Sicily, the Spaniards introduced the method of making chocolate that they had learned from the Aztecs, which Antica Dolceria Bonajuto follows to this day.

Explains the chocolate-maker. "Our production technique used to make our chocolate is very similar to that used by the Aztecs at the time of the discovery of the New World. We begin with a mass of semi-ground cocoa that still contains its cocoa butter. The mass is heated to make it fluid, and at a precise temperature, it is mixed with castor sugar and spices (cinnamon or vanilla). The mixing is done with a 'refiner', a modern-day replacement of the metate. Indeed, the scent of our chocolate is believed to be beneficial in cases of bronchitis or general respiratory problems."

Wow, now that is something I did not know – chocolate has curative powers. Wish all medicine tasted as good!

