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# 8 Fa Sicily TO SEE NOW

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**Catherine Sabino** Contributor ⓘ

Travel



Ragusa Ibla. GETTY

As more travelers see Sicily as an integral part of an Italian holiday and look for places beyond Palermo, Taormina and the Aeolian Islands to visit, the beautiful cities and towns of the Val di Noto are turning up on a greater number of itineraries and enjoying a new buzz. Although they have been luring visitors since the days of the Grand Tour, these destinations offer the kinds of attractions in high demand today—authenticity, stellar artistic treasures and many foodie delights—without mobs of tourists (although things can get busy during peak summer weeks). “A vacation in Val di Noto provides a great balance for experiencing a bit of city life, historic architecture, seaside relaxation and Italian tradition all in one,” says Cassandra Santoro, founder and owner of [Travel Italian Style](#), which specializes in custom travel planning in Italy. “Of course, throughout

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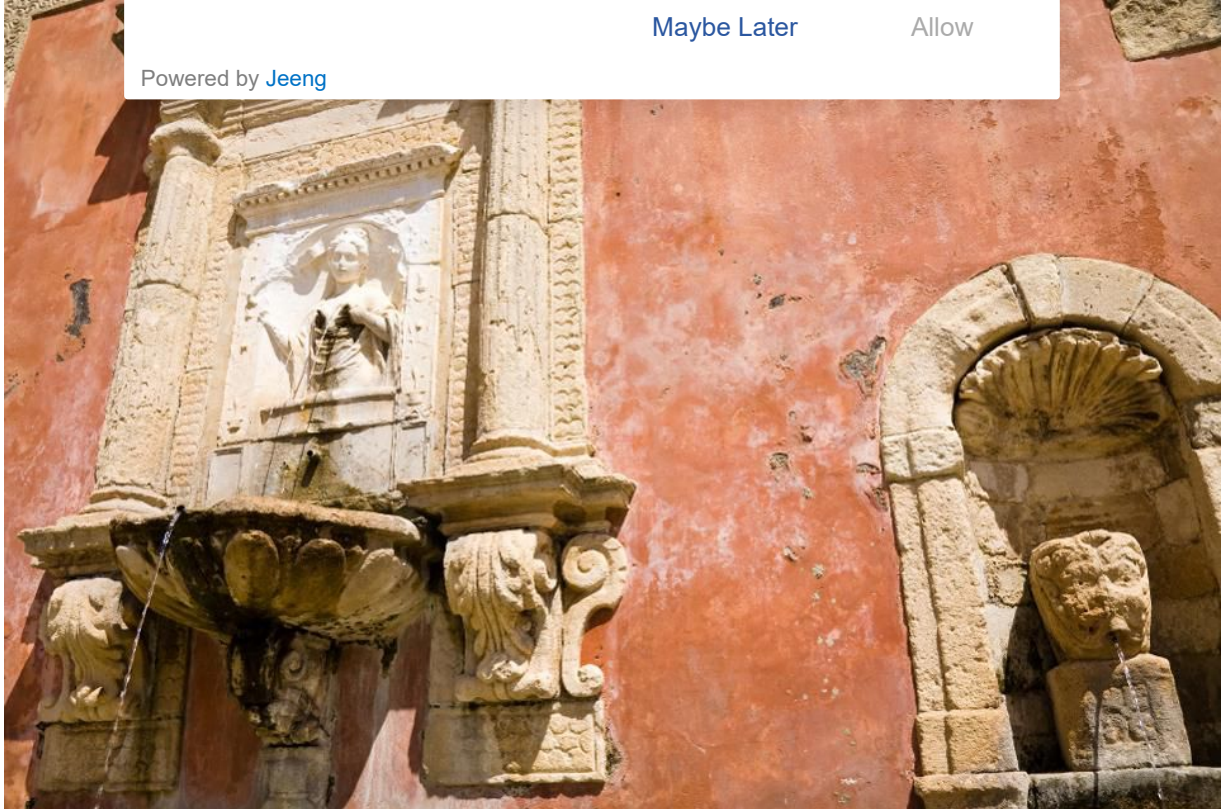
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The historic Nympha Zizza fountain in the town of Militello in Val di Catania. GETTY

**Where Val di Noto is:** Southeast Sicily. There are eight beautiful cities and towns, designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2002, decked out in full Baroque splendor: Caltagirone, Catania, Militello Val di Catania, Modica, Noto, Palazzolo, Ragusa and Scicli.

**Why it's special:** The Sicilian version of Baroque takes it to the max with plenty of ruffles and flourishes—or rather statues, putti, masks, shells and other ornamentation; lavish pediments, fanciful balconies, curved walls and a rich mix of marbles and lava stone. The cities and towns of the Val di Noto were rebuilt in exuberant fashion after the catastrophic earthquake of 1693; they have long been admired for their histories of brilliant [resilience](#) in the face of overwhelming devastation.



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A beach near Catania. GETTY

**What to eat:** “Besides the classic fish dishes, try the fresh cavati pasta with pork and tomato sauce,” says Santoro. “You may also see it on menus as *cavati e ravioli alla ragusana con sugo di maiale*. This is a combination of cavati pasta and ravioli stuffed with ricotta in a pork and tomato sauce. Don’t miss the arancini; in Catania these rice balls have a different shape than the ones you find in Palermo. A special dessert (when available) is the *Minne di Sant’Agata* [made with chocolate, ricotta and candied citron], created to honor the patron saint of Catania. The chocolate in Modica is also a must. If you are adventurous try the *'mpanatigghi* (or *impanatigli*). These are cookie-like desserts filled with chocolate and veal. Stop by the famous Antica Dolceria Bonajuto in Modica for freshly made samples. And, of course, have some cannoli.”

**And drink:** “A cocktail to try when visiting the area is the Etna Spritz, a special aperitif that’s a twist on the classic Aperol drink. Dedicated to the famous volcano, it includes Sicily’s Amara Amaro d’Arancia Rossa.”

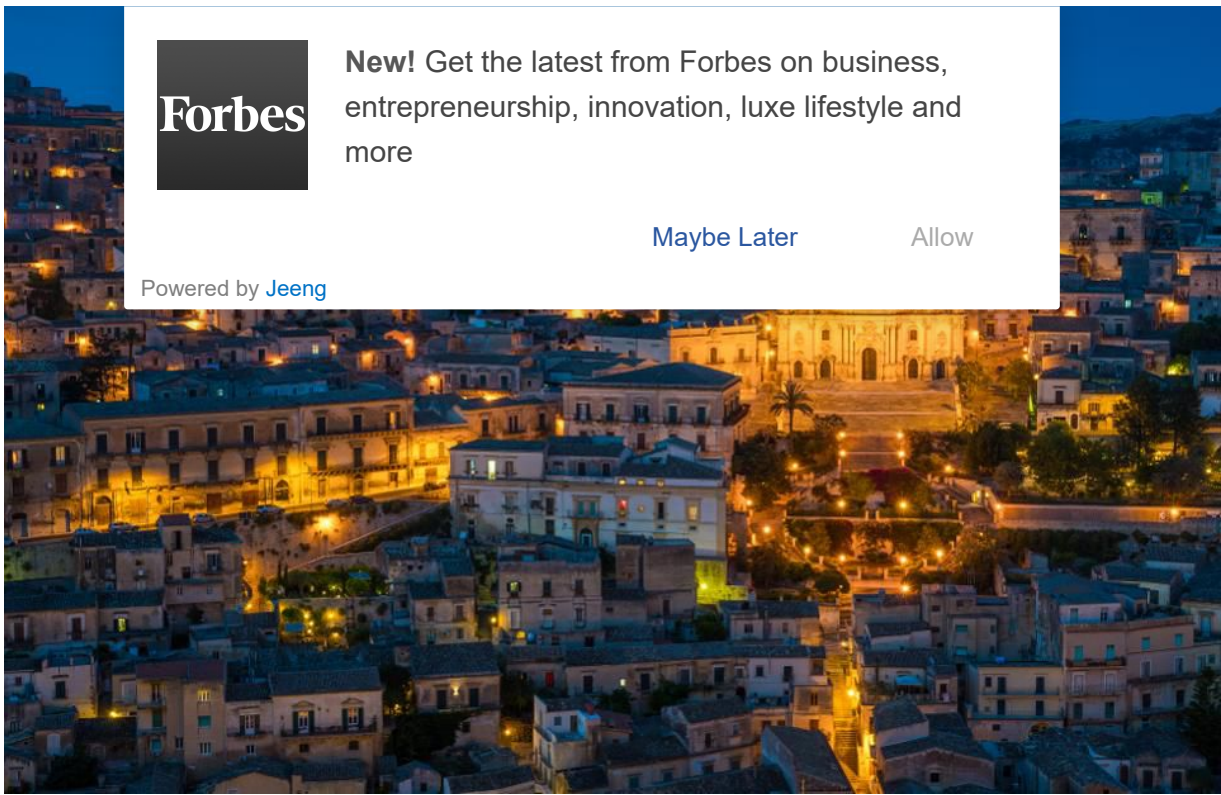
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Modica. GETTY



Modica chocolate. GETTY

**Modica.** The Duomo di San Giorgio, among the 100 or so churches here, is regarded as one of the finest examples of Sicilian Baroque architecture. The city is also known for its unique chocolate, produced with methods dating to Aztec times that have been in use from when the city was under Spanish rule.