

# Tyrrhenian Coast



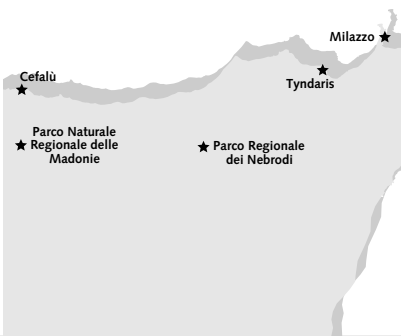
This is holiday central. The coastal stretch between Palermo and Milazzo, which takes in the small town of Termini Imerese and gorgeous Cefalù, is a constant succession of resorts, beaches and towns that live and breathe for the Italian tourist industry. During August, when the whole of Italy goes on holiday (and prices jump sky-high), the beaches and hotels here are tightly packed with vociferous families and youngsters. One of the most attractive spots for a day or two is the beautiful town of Cefalù, despite the summer crowds – though it advertises itself as a traditional fishing village, its popularity as a holiday destination is second only to Taormina.

But it's not all sun, sea and stentorian voices: move away from the coast and you'll discover an intriguing and less tourist-inundated interior that encompasses two massive natural parks dotted with tiny mountain villages with a quiet and old-fashioned air. Stretching across the Madonie and Nebrodi mountains, and taking their names from the ranges, the parks are a haven if you love walking and bird-watching. Add to this the slightly cooler temperatures and rustic accommodation options that offer locally produced food, and you might just forget about the beach altogether.

If the pull of the surf is too strong, however, head east of Cefalù for the coast's best beaches, which are clean, unpolluted and relatively uncrowded (except in August), especially around Capo d'Orlando and Capo Tindari, the location of the gorgeously sited ruins of Tyndaris. At the end of this stretch of coast is Milazzo, with its apocalyptic power station and its port for the Aeolian Islands; while it's often overlooked by tourists, it has some lovely unspoilt coastline on its narrow peninsula.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Discover enchanting **Cefalù** (p134): swim at its long sandy beach, admire its beautiful medieval town and sigh over the magnificent mosaics in the Duomo
- Go walking in the **Parco Naturale Regionale delle Madonie** (p139)
- Lose yourself in the huge **Parco Regionale dei Nebrodi** (p142)
- Explore the isthmus, fine castle and very good waterfront restaurants at **Milazzo** (p146)
- Take the pilgrimage trail to **Tyndaris** (p145) and enjoy the best views on this coast



## PALERMO TO CEFALÙ

A part of greater Palermo, this stretch of coastline shares the city's deep history and is the site of ancient Phoenician settlements – Solunto, Termini Imerese and Caccamo – and the ruins of Greek Himera. East of Palermo, beyond ancient Solunto (see p100), is the beautiful Capo Zafferano, the first stretch of the Tyrrhenian Coast. It's a bit of a mess both visually and conceptually, ending up as an unhappy mix that's part resort, part industrial zone. Yet the grotty edge is softened with the dramatic backdrop of Monte Calogero (1326m) and the brilliant waters that lap the very foot of this intense urbanisation.

### TERMINI IMERESE

pop 26,800

The town dates from prehistoric times, though its name is derived from the two neighbouring Greek settlements of Thermae and Himera. The latter was destroyed by the Carthaginians in 409 BC and its inhabitants moved to Thermae, which was then renamed Thermae Himerensis. The town flourished for another 150 years, ruled for a time by local boy Agathocles, who went on to bigger and better things as the first tyrant of Syracuse. It was then taken by the Romans in 252 BC and became a famous Roman spa. Until the 19th century, Termini Imerese was enclosed within a set of protective walls but it has since spilled out into the outlying countryside. The largely industrial growth has somewhat spoil the town's appearance and, unless you want to immerse yourself in the therapeutic waters for a few days, you may not want to spend much time here once you've seen the sights.

### Orientation & Information

Like so many of Sicily's older settlements, Termini Imerese has an upper and lower town. The upper half is where you'll find all of the sights of interest, while the lower half is home to the town's hotels and day-to-day activity. The train station is southeast of the town centre along the coast; all buses arrive and depart just in front of the train station.

The **tourist office** (☎ 091 812 82 53; Piazza del Duomo; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3.30-6pm Mon-Fri) is in the town hall on the main square.

### Sights

At the heart of the upper town is **Piazza del Duomo**, the original Roman forum, dominated by the 17th-century **cathedral** (admission free; ☎ 9am-7pm). The façade was designed to display four 16th-century-saint statues, and although the statues that now adorn it are copies, you'll be able to find the originals inside in the third chapel, on the north side. This chapel also contains sculptures from the Gagini school. In the fourth (southern) chapel there is a wonderful relief by Ignazio Marabitti, *Madonna del ponte* (Madonna of the Bridge).

Opposite the cathedral is the **Museo Civico** (☎ 091 812 82 79; Via del Museo; admission free; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3.30-5.30pm Tue-Sun), established in 1873. It has different sections devoted to archaeology, art and natural history.

Backed up against the museum is the **Chiesa di Santa Maria della Misericordia** (Church of Our Lady of Mercy). The entrance is off Via Mazzini, which heads west from Piazza del Duomo. Inside is a marvellous triptych of the *Madonna con Santi Giovanni e Michele* (Madonna with Saints John and Michael; 1453), attributed to Gaspare da Pesaro.

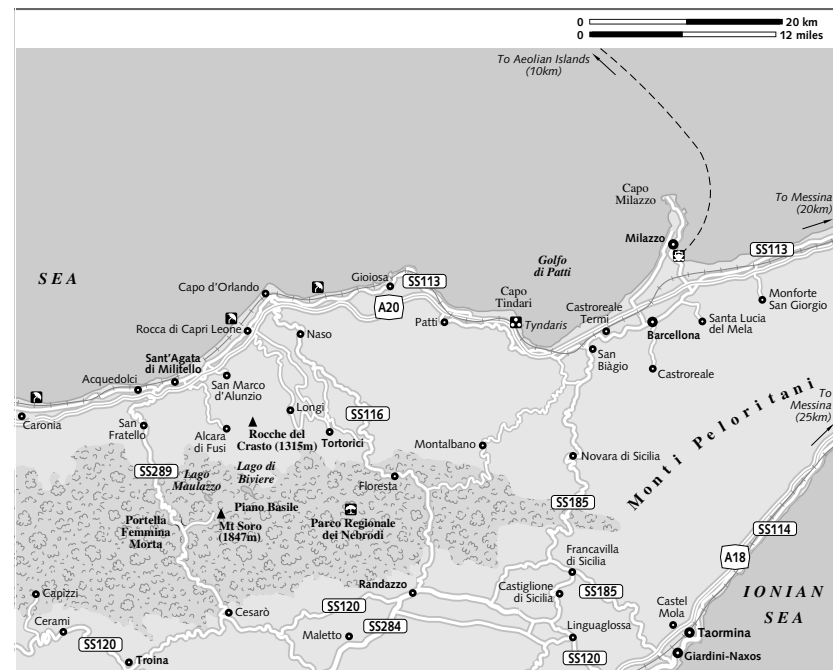
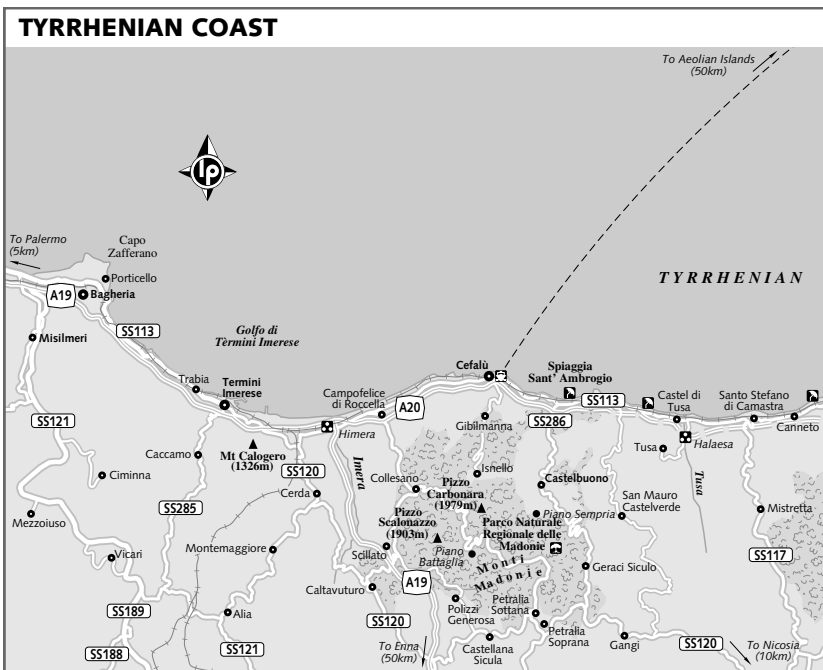
Northwest of the cathedral, down Via Ianelli, is the **Chiesa di Santa Caterina**, home to a very good fresco of the *La Vita della Santa Caterina d'Alessandria* (Life of St Catherine of Alexandria) by Giacomo Graffeo. The church keeps very irregular hours; check at the tourist office or at the church itself. From here there are some lovely views of the citrus groves and the sea beyond; there are also good views off Via Belvedere, north of the cathedral.

Just beyond the Chiesa di Santa Caterina are the public gardens of **Villa Palmieri**, laid out in 1845. Inside are the remains of a public building known as the Curia, which was built sometime during the 2nd century AD, and the faint traces of the town's Roman amphitheatre.

To see something of Termini's famous mineral baths, check into the Grande Hotel delle Terme (p132).

### Festivals & Events

Termini Imerese celebrates **Carnevale**, Sicily's oldest festival, in February. Decorated floats and enormous papier-mâché figures parade the streets.



## Sleeping & Eating

**Hotel Il Gabbiano** (☎ 091 811 32 62; www.hotelgabbiano.it; Via Libertà 221; s €62-75, d €88-110; (P) ♿) Only 90m south of the train station, the Gabbiano has recently had a timely face-lift, resulting in a modern little hotel. The rooms are well decorated, each with its own balcony, simple but tasteful furniture, writing desks, and facilities such as wi-fi access and satellite TV.

**Grand Hotel delle Terme** (☎ 091 811 35 57; www.hotelbenessere.it; Piazza Terme; s €83-130, d €130-220; (P) ♿) This lovely Art Nouveau building nestled in a pine wood houses the remaining marble baths of the Roman spa, as well as a gym and a pool. Enjoy the plush rooms and take to the waters with recuperating Italians.

The selection of restaurants in Termini Imerese is surprisingly poor for a resort town. However, two fair options are the fish restaurant **La Petite Marseilles** (Via Porta Erulea; meals €25), above the Grand Hotel delle Terme, and **Da Giovanni** (Via Nogara 4; meals €25), a friendly trattoria (informal restaurant) in the lower city.

## Getting There & Away

**SAIS Autolinee** (☎ 091 617 11 41) runs buses Monday to Saturday between Termini Imerese and Palermo (€2, 30 minutes, six daily) and Cefalù (€3, 30 minutes, four daily).

The best way to get here is by train. The town is a stop on the Palermo–Messina and Palermo–Agrigento lines; there are departures every 20 minutes from Palermo station (€2.65, 30 minutes).

## CACCAMO

pop 8500 / elev 521m

Lorded over by its imposing **castle** (admission free; ☎ 9am–noon & 3–5.30pm), the hilltop town of Caccamo is a popular day trip from Termini Imerese or Cefalù. A Carthaginian stronghold that served as a constant thorn in Himera's side, the town wasn't officially founded until 1093, when the Normans began building the castle on a rocky spur overlooking a cliff. The castle was enlarged by the Chiaramontes in the 14th century and is now one of Italy's largest. The best parts are the walls and original fortifications, which included some ingenious traps for any intruder who might have breached the

outer perimeter. Unsurprisingly, there are fabulous views of the surrounding countryside.

Since the 1950s, the town has lost almost half of its inhabitants to emigration, but you'd never know it wandering through the traffic-filled streets. The attractive 11th-century **cathedral** was remodelled twice, in 1477 and 1614. Inside, the sacristy has some lovely carvings of the *Madonna con bambino e angeli* (Madonna with Child and Angels) and *Santi Pietro e Paolo* (Saints Peter and Paul), both by Francesco Laurana.

On the left-hand side of the cathedral is the **Chiesa dell'Anime del Purgatorio** (Church of the Souls of Purgatory), featuring some fine stuccowork in the eastern end and an 18th-century organ. A local tour guide is almost always on hand to explain the history of the church and guide you downstairs to the musty catacombs.

A great place for lunch is **La Castellana** (☎ 091 814 86 67; Piazza del Monumento 4; meals €25), located in the grain stores of the castle. It has a great atmosphere and an inexpensive menu, dishing up local favourites such as pasta with fennel. It also does pizzas in the evening.

To get to Caccamo, take the bus from in front of the train station in Termini Imerese (€2.80, 30 minutes, 14 daily Monday to Saturday).

## HIMERA

Founded in 648 BC by Greeks from Zankle (now Messina), **Himera** (admission free; ☎ 9am–6pm) was named after the river Imera, which flows nearby. It was the first Greek settlement on this part of the island and was a strategic outpost on the border of the Carthaginian-controlled west. In 480 BC the town was the scene of a decisive battle, with the combined armies of Theron of Agrigento and Gelon of Syracuse defeating a sizable Carthaginian army led by Hamilcar, who threw himself on the funeral pyre of the Carthaginian dead in a heroic act of self-immolation. The Carthaginians had intended to take Himera and then wrest control of the island from Greek hands, but the Greek victory put an end to all that. As for Himera, in 409 BC it paid the price for Carthage's defeat, when Hamilcar's nephew Hannibal destroyed the town in revenge for his uncle's death.

Compared with other Greek sites around the island, the remains here are disappointing. The only recognisable ruin is the **Tempio della Vittoria** (Temple of Victory), a Doric structure supposedly built to commemorate the defeat of the Carthaginians. Whatever its origin, Hannibal did a good job of destroying it. To the south of the temple is the town's necropolis, currently under excavation.

Some artefacts recovered from the site are kept in the small **antiquarium** (☎ 091 814 01 28; admission €2; 🕒 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun), about 100m west of the site's entrance (it's up a small lane off the other side of the main road). Although the more impressive pieces are in Palermo's Museo Archeologico Regionale (p85), you can see well-sculpted lion-head spouts that were used to drain water off the temple's roof.

Buses (€1.60, 15 minutes, four daily Monday to Saturday) run from in front of the train station in Termini Imerese, 8km to the west of Himerà.

## CEFALÙ

pop 13,800

If you've seen Giuseppe Tornatore's *Cinema Paradiso*, one of the classics of Italian cinema, you'll remember the charming town it was filmed in – yep, it was Cefalù. The town is so pretty and picturesque it'll knock your socks off, though you won't be alone in admiring its beautiful squares, streets and churches, for every year Cefalù becomes more like its competitor resort town, Taormina, with hundreds of tour buses emptying onto the streets for a day of photo snapping and ooh-aahing.

It's no wonder that crowds descend upon the town, especially considering that, as well as its unspoilt medieval streets and historic sights, Cefalù has a fantastic sandy beach running almost the entire length of the town. Add to that the fact that it is just over an hour by train or bus from Palermo, and you get what is now the top spot on the Tyrrhenian Coast. But despite the crowds, the town's fantastic location, backed up against the towering mass of a crag known simply as La Rocca (the Rock), gorgeous architecture and atmospheric streets make it a lovely spot for a few days of swimming, sunbathing and strolling.

## ORIENTATION

The focus of all activity in historic Cefalù is Corso Ruggero and the alleys that branch off it. The working port, which is also the dock for hydrofoils, is on the eastern side of La Rocca.

From the train station take any of the opposite roads (north) down to Via Roma, then turn right to reach Via Matteotti, which heads directly into the old town centre. If you are heading for the beach, turn left from the station and walk along Via Gramsci, then take a right down Via N Martoglio and Via Vazzano, which will bring you to the western end of the *lungomare* (seafront promenade).

## INFORMATION

### Bookshops

**Antica Cartoleria del Corso** (☎ 0921 42 30 96; Corso Ruggero 98) A large newsagent on the main drag that sells foreign-language newspapers, books about Cefalù and maps.

### Emergency

**Ambulance** (☎ 0921 42 45 44)

**Police** (questura; ☎ 0921 92 60 11; Via Roma 15)

### Internet Access

Internet access is sorely lacking in Cefalù. You'll have to wait a while before you get access to a computer.

**Bacco on Line** (☎ 0921 42 17 53; Corso Ruggero 38; per 30min €3) Only one computer; it's also a very nice deli and wine shop.

**Vodafone** (☎ 0921 92 39 70; 122 Corso Ruggero 122; per 30min €3) One computer, long waits but, eventually, fast connection.

### Medical Services

**Farmacia Battaglia** (☎ 0921 42 17 89; Via Roma 13; 🕒 8am-1pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat)

**First Aid** (☎ 0921 42 36 23; Via Mazzini 8)

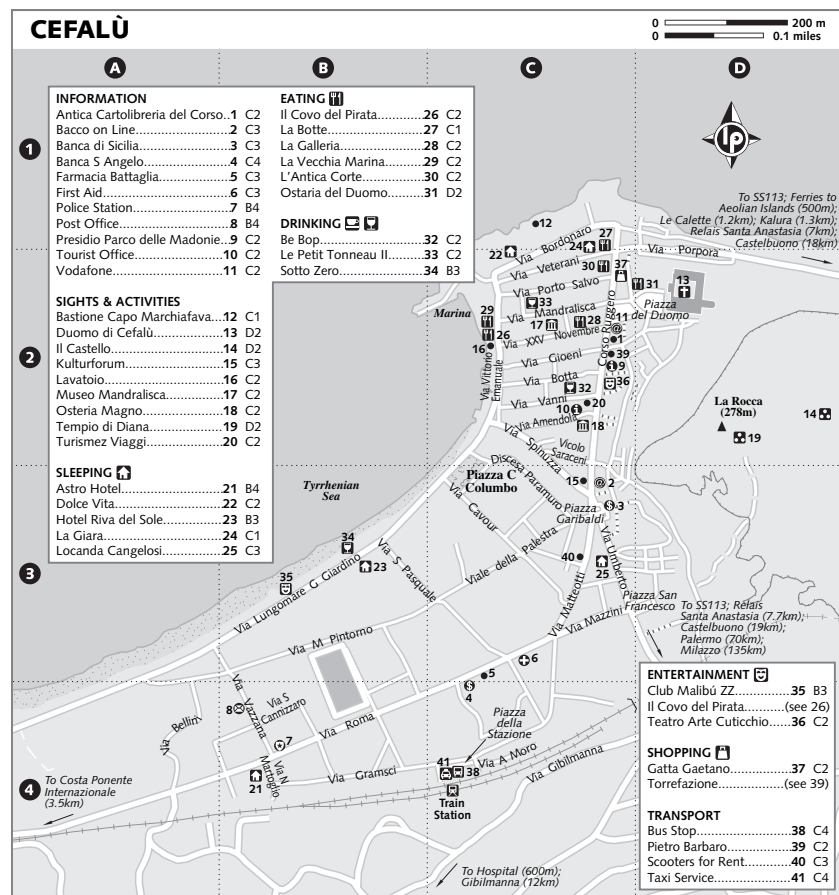
**Hospital** (☎ 0921 92 01 11; Contrada da Pietra Pietrapollastra) On the main road out of town in the direction of Palermo.

### Money

There are plenty of ATMs in town along Corso Ruggero and one in Piazza del Duomo. It's not a good idea to exchange money at any of the *cambio* (exchange) booths around town as they generally charge higher commissions than banks. The post office changes money, and the rates are pretty good.

**Banca di Sicilia** (Piazza Garibaldi 2)

**Banca S Angelo** (Via Roma) Has an exchange office.



## Post

**Post office** (Via Vazzana 2; 🕒 8.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-12.30pm Sat)

## Tourist Information

**Presidio Parco delle Madonie** (☎ 0921 92 33 27; www.parcodellemadonie.it in Italian; Corso Ruggero 116; 🕒 8.30am-1.30pm & 4.30-7.30pm Mon-Sat) The official office for the Madonie park. It has leaflets on walking and driving tours, and you can buy the 1:50,000 *Madonie/Carta dei Sentieri e del Paesaggio* map (€1).

**Tourist office** (☎ 0921 42 10 50; www.cefalu-tour.pa.it; Corso Ruggero 77; 🕒 8am-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1.30pm Sun) English-speaking staff, lots of leaflets and good maps.

## SIGHTS

Most of Cefalù's sights are within the picturesque old town, and though you'll have to walk a little to get to La Rocca, it is worth it for the fabulous views.

### Duomo di Cefalù

Along with the Cappella Palatina and the Cattedrale di Monreale, this is the final jewel in the Arab-Norman crown. Legend has it that the **duomo** (☎ 0921 92 20 21; Piazza del Duomo; donations appreciated; 🕒 8am-noon & 3.30-7pm) was built by Roger II in the 12th century to fulfil a vow to God after his fleet was saved during a violent storm off Cefalù; however, it is more likely the result of Roger's tempestuous relationship with the Palermitan archbishopric. Eager to

curb the growing influence of the papacy in Sicily (with whom the Palermo archbishopric had close ties), Roger thought that building a mighty church so far from Palermo would prove an effective smack in the chops. Hardly surprising then that, from the outside, the cathedral looks more like a massive fortress.

Inside, in the central apse, a towering figure of Christ All Powerful is the focal point of the elaborate Byzantine mosaics. In his hand he holds an open Bible bearing a Latin and Greek inscription from John 8:12: 'I am the light of the world; he who follows me shall not walk in darkness.' It is easily the best mosaic depiction of Christ in Sicily, and the artist has captured a truly human expression on Christ's face – no mean achievement considering that these mosaics, dating between 1150 and 1160, were completed some 20 to 30 years before the mosaics of Monreale.

You can enjoy the view of the cathedral's soaring twin pyramid towers, framed by La Rocca, over a morning coffee or evening aperitif in the Piazza del Duomo.

### La Rocca

Looming over the town **La Rocca** (278m) appears a suitable home for the giants that are said to have been the first inhabitants of Sicily. It was here that the Arabs had their citadel until 1063, when the Norman conquest brought the people down from the mountain to the port below. The combination of this dramatic backdrop and the narrow Moorish streets of the town has made Cefalù a popular film set, most notably for *Cinema Paradiso*. An enormous staircase, the **Salita Saraceno**, winds up through three tiers of city walls in a 30-minute climb to the summit. From here you have wonderful views of the town below, whilst nearby the 4th-century **Tempio di Diana** (☎ 24hr) provides a romantic getaway for young lovers. Apart from a few loose rocks there is nothing left of the **Il Castello**, a Norman castle that once crowned the rock's peak, or the Arab citadel.

The steps are to the right of the Banco di Sicilia on Piazza Garibaldi. From here the way is clearly signposted.

### Other Sights

Off the Piazza del Duomo is the private **Museo Mandalisca** (☎ 0921 42 15 47; www.museomandalisca.it; Via Mandalisca 13; admission €6; ☎ 9am–8pm). Its collection of Greek ceramics and Arab pottery

is rather faded, with the notable exception of the *Ritratto di un uomo ignoto* (Portrait of an Unknown Man; 1465), Antonello da Messina's earliest known portrait. His smirk is almost as enigmatic and thought provoking as the Mona Lisa's – but without the attendant hype.

Turn left outside the museum and walk down Via Mandalisca towards the sea. On Via Vittorio Emanuele is the **lavatoio**, a 16th-century wash house built over a spring that was well known in antiquity.

The town's other main sight is the **Osteria Magno**, on the corner of Corso Ruggero and Via Amendola. This imposing 14th-century mansion has been heavily renovated over the centuries and today is only open for temporary art exhibitions. If you want to get a look inside at other times, ask for the keys at the tourist office.

For great sea views, head to **Bastione Capo Marchiafava**, off Via Bordenaro.

### ACTIVITIES

Cefalù's crescent-shaped beach is one of the most popular along the whole coast. In summer it is packed so be sure to get down early to get a good spot. You can rent a beach umbrella (€3) from the bar on the beach; deck chairs (€5) are also available. Some sections of the beach require a ticket, but the area closest to the old town is public.

The town is a splendid place for a walk. The lovely little port is lined with narrow fishing boats, and you might find the occasional fisherman mending his nets. The boardwalk along the beach is very popular for the evening  *Passeggiata* (stroll); in summer the cafés and restaurants that line it are almost always full.

### COURSES

Cefalù is well known for its language courses. **Kulturforum** (☎ 0921 92 39 98; www.kulturforum.it; Corso Ruggero 55) runs Italian courses of one to four weeks, plus French and German courses; a one- to two-week Italian course costs €160 to €280. Private lessons can also be arranged.

### TOURS

From Cefalù port, **Turismez Viaggi** (☎ 0921 42 12 64; Corso Ruggero 83; adult/child half day €20/10, full day €50/25; ☎ half day 9.30am–1.30pm & 2.30–6.30pm, full day 7.30am–7.30pm) runs personalised tours and excursions along the coast; the full-day tour includes lunch on the boat.

### SLEEPING

Between June and August cheap accommodation is like gold dust and there is no such thing as value for money. It is essential to book ahead at this time.

The good news is that out of season (between October and April) the hotels that remain open drop their rates substantially, some even by half. Unless otherwise indicated, the accommodation listed following is open year-round.

**Costa Ponente Internazionale** (☎ 0921 42 00 85; Località Contrada Ogliastrillo; camp sites per tent/person €5/8; ☎ ☎) Situated 4km west of the town, this camping ground is one of the best-maintained sites in Sicily. It has a tennis court and a swimming pool, and is in a shady spot. To reach it, take the bus from the train station heading for La Spisa, or follow the SS113 if you are in a car. Note: the train tracks run directly behind the camping ground.

**Locanda Cangelosi** (☎ 0921 42 15 91; www.locanda.cangelosi.it; Via Umberto I 26; s with shared bathroom €25, d with shared bathroom €35–40) This private house is the cheapest place in town – and with only four rooms, you will have to book in advance. If the owners run out of rooms in the house, they have a couple of apartments nearby. Rooms are clean and simple, and there is a shared TV room.

**Dolce Vita** (☎ 0921 92 31 51; www.dolcevita.it; Via Bordenaro 8; s €25–50, d €45–110; ☎ ☎) A lovely little B&B that has to be booked in advance during the summer months, the Dolce Vita has only five rooms, all of which are airy and light, with nice, comfy beds. You can have your breakfast on the roof terrace and enjoy the sweeping sea views. There's the added bonus of internet access too.

**La Giarra** (☎ 0921 42 15 62; fax 0921 42 25 18; www.hotel-laggiara.it; Via Veterani 40; s €47–90, d €55–130; ☎) This small place, set on top of an old house off Corso Ruggero, has a perfect location – it's within spitting distance of Piazza del Duomo. It is fairly comfortable, and the reception is efficient and friendly. Better value out of season.

**Astro Hotel** (☎ 0921 42 16 39; www.astrohotel.it; Via Roma 105; s €60–100, d €80–200; ☎ ☎) This three-star hotel is convenient for the train station and only 100m from the *lungomare*, but its rooms could do with a face-lift sometime soon. The hotel has its own private beach, which can help justify the high-season prices.

**Kalura** (☎ 0921 42 13 54; www.hotel-kalura.com; Via Vincenzo Cavallaro 13, Località Caldura; s €70–140, d €80–270; ☎ ☎ ☎) This small resort-style hotel has been managed by the same family for over 30 years. Situated on a rocky outcrop, it has its own private beach and most rooms have good views. It is a good choice for families, with tons of activities – mountain bikes, canoes and pedalos, scuba diving and riding – and a large pool.

**Hotel Riva del Sole** (☎ 0921 42 12 30; www.rivadelsole.com; Via Lungomare G Giardino 25; s €90–150, d €145–170; ☎ ☎ ☎) Situated right on the beachfront next to a string of restaurants, this ugly modern hotel has fair rooms and great views. There is also a garden and a swinging disco.

**Le Calette** (☎ 0921 42 41 44; www.lecalette.it; Via Vincenzo Cavallaro 12, Località Caldura; r per person incl half board €95–150; ☎ ☎ ☎) On the eastern side of the headland, about 2km out of town, Le Calette is set in its own grounds above a pebbly beach, and is a very good-looking place. It offers a number of different excursions and has promotional offers for families.

A beautiful option only 7km from Cefalù is the Relais Santa Anastasia (see p140 for details).

### EATING

Although the town is packed with restaurants, the food can be surprisingly mundane. Still, there are a few spots that stay ahead of the crowd. The restaurants overlooking the sea (on Via Vittorio Emanuele) have sea-view terraces on the rocks for outdoor dining. Most restaurants fill up between 8.30pm and 10pm, so book your table in advance (a few hours' notice is sufficient).

**Il Covo del Pirata** (Via Vittorio Emanuele 59; sandwiches & snacks €4–6) A cheap spot for a quick lunch. Il Covo serves sandwiches, a limited number of pasta dishes and filling salads. Ask for a seat on the tiny terrace overlooking the port. At night it turns into a club (p138).

**L'Antica Corte** (☎ 0921 42 32 28; Corso Ruggero 193; tourist menu €11.90; ☎ closed Thu) Housed in a lovely old *cortile* (courtyard), this is one of the better restaurants in town but it can get very busy.

#### EATING ON THE CHEAP

A cheap alternative to restaurant eating is to grab some supplies and eat at Bastione Capo Marchiafava (opposite).

Go for a plate of traditional Sicilian pasta or a simple pizza.

**La Vecchia Marina** (☎ 0921 42 03 88; Via Vittorio Emanuele; tourist menu €18; 📞 closed Tue & Nov) Overlooking the cute little fishermen's beach, this is the best fish restaurant in town. It serves an array of freshly caught beauties, which you can enjoy with a delightful view.

**La Botte** (☎ 0921 42 43 15; Via Veterani 6; pasta €20; 📞 closed Mon) Although it doesn't have a sexy beachfront location, this eatery just off Corso Ruggero continues to send out good food. It has excellent antipasti and pasta dishes, and its house special, *casarecce alla botte* (short pasta with a meat sauce), is good if you fancy a change from fish.

**Ostaria del Duomo** (☎ 0921 42 18 38; Via Seminario 5; mains €25; 📞 closed Mon) Right on Piazza del Duomo, with outdoor tables facing the cathedral, Ostaria del Duomo seems as if it would be the most overpriced restaurant of them all. But this tavern serves up beautifully prepared food at very reasonable prices, and there's live piano music for that extraromantic touch. Simple, tasty, fresh ingredients and an excellent wine list.

**our pick La Galleria** (☎ 0921 42 02 11; Via XXV Novembre 22-24; meals €25-30) A new restaurant, café, gallery and bookshop, La Galleria is a lovely space with a big, elegant garden and excellent cuisine. Try its antipasto of marinated fish, and for starters go for the risotto with asparagus or the fresh tagliatelle with prawns, cherry tomatoes and crushed pistachio. The mains, which usually consist of grilled fresh fish, are palate-bendingly good. We recommend a glass of sweet Marsala for an ending with style.

## DRINKING

Cefalù has a number of pretty good bars that are popular in summer.

**Le Petit Tonneau II** (☎ 0921 42 14 47; Via Mandralisca 66; 📞 closed Tue Oct-Mar) Just down from the Museo Mandralisca is this French-owned bistro (the name means 'Little Tuna') that's fun for a late-night drink.

**Be Bop** (☎ 0921 92 39 72; Via Botta 4; 📞 11am-4am, closed Mon Oct-Mar) An English-style pub with live rock and pop music on summer weekends.

**Sotto Zero** (Via Lungomare G Giardino) A very cool bar at the beginning of the *lungomare*. Its Buddha Bar-inspired décor is dreamy: seating on low cushions, stairs covered in soft carpets and candles, and the sound of the sea lapping

below. A great place for aperitivi, cocktails and chatting till late. During the day, the stairs lead to the beach beneath.

## ENTERTAINMENT

### Nightclubs

**Club Malibù ZZ** (☎ 3470405132; www.zetazetaitalia.it; Via Lungomare G Giardino; entry €10, free for women before 1am; 📞 10pm-3am Aug, 10pm-3am Wed-Sun Sep-Jul) Cefalù's hottest club and the place where Palermitans often flock in the summer, Malibù is full of youngsters keen on big nights out. With lots of decent DJs and plenty of cocktail swigging, the party really gets heaving in August. The best place to go if you're after a good night's dancing.

**Il Covo del Pirata** (Via Vittorio Emanuele 59) This is the town's version of an 'alternative' club, with soul, hip-hop and beats played by DJs nightly throughout the summer (music from 10.30pm).

### Puppet Theatre

**Teatro Arte Cuticchio** (☎/fax 0921 42 22 30; www.teatroarte-cuticchio.com; Corso Ruggero 92; tickets €5.50; 📞 performances 6.30pm Wed, Sat & Sun) Cefalù's *opera dei pupi* (puppet theatre) is run by the Cuticchios of Palermo (see p95). There is also a small puppet museum (admission €2.60; open 9am to 1pm and 4pm to 10pm).

## SHOPPING

Like Taormina, Cefalù is something of a shopping snare. The medieval streets are lined with jewellery boutiques and some very good delis where you can stock up on wine and oil – but beware, as much of it is overpriced.

One very good place is **Torrefazione** (☎ 0921 92 23 48; Corso Ruggero 120), which stocks olive oil, freshly ground coffee, preserves, wine, liqueurs and a good range of locally made biscuits and nougat. Very different is **Gatta Gaetano** (☎ 0921 42 31 56; Corso Ruggero 152), a tiny cubbyhole of a shop full of strong-smelling Madonie cheese and some extraordinary gourmet pastas.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses run from outside the train station Monday to Saturday. **SAIS Autolinee** (☎ 091 617 11 41) buses service Palermo (€4.50, one hour, two daily) and Termini Imerese (€3, 30 minutes, three daily).

The best way of getting to and from Cefalù is by train, which links Cefalù with

Palermo (€4, one hour, half-hourly) and virtually every other town on the coast.

You can also get a hydrofoil from Cefalù to the Aeolian Islands between 1 June and 16 September. **Ustica Lines** (www.usticalines.it) has hydrofoils that depart Cefalù for Alicudi at 8.10am (€14.50, one hour, one daily), then serves all the other islands. During the same period, Ustica Lines runs hydrofoils to/from Palermo (€12.60, one hour, one daily). You can buy tickets at **Pietro Barbaro** (☎ 0921 42 15 95; Corso Ruggero 82).

## GETTING AROUND

Cefalù is small enough to walk around. If you find yourself heading further afield, a **taxi service** (☎ 0921 42 25 54) operates out of Piazza della Stazione, next to the train station. Rates depend on where you want to go, but a 5km trip, for instance, should cost no more than €5. Be sure to fix the rate before you leave.

If you are driving, parking can be a problem. You should be able to find somewhere on the roads that run parallel to the long beach southwest of the town centre.

**Scooters for Rent** (☎ 0921 42 04 96; www.scootersforrent.it; Via Matteotti 13b; per day/week 50cc Vespa €25/175, mountain bikes €10/45) rents out bikes as well as scooters.

## PARCO NATURALE REGIONALE DELLE MADONIE

This 40,000-hectare nature reserve, between Palermo and Cefalù, incorporates the Madonie mountain range and some of the highest mountains in Sicily after Mt Etna (the highest peak in the Madonie is Pizzo Carbonara at 1979m). Established in 1989 by the Regione Sicilia, the park also takes in numerous small towns and villages, and plenty of farms and vineyards. It is an area where people live, rather than simply a nature reserve, so you can combine walking with visits to some of its more interesting towns, such as Castelbuono and lovely Petralia Soprana. Also worth exploring is the small town of Gibilmanna, where there are some good walking trails.

In summer, the Madonie is a popular destination for Palermitans armed with picnic baskets, who tend to make a day of wandering or driving through the expanse of the park. In winter it is the only place in Sicily, other than Etna, where you can go skiing.

## Orientation & Information

From Termini Imerese head east for 22km along the coastal SS113 to Campofelice di Roccella and then turn off for Collesano, 13km inland. From Cefalù it is even easier: just follow the directions for the Santuario di Gibilmanna (Sanctuary of Gibilmanna), 14km to the south.

The body responsible for the park is **Ente Parco delle Madonie** (☎ 0921 68 40 11; www.parcodelle.madonie.it in Italian; Corso Paolo Agliata 16, Petralia Sottana; 📞 8.30am-1.30pm & 4.30-7.30pm Mon-Sat), which has its headquarters (the Presidio) in Petralia Sottana and a branch office, **Presidio Parco delle Madonie** (☎ 0921 92 33 27; Corso Ruggero 116; 📞 8.30am-1.30pm & 4.30-7.30pm Mon-Sat) in Cefalù. The offices have details about the park and several one-day walks, as well as information about transport and accommodation. They also stock the 1:50,000 *Madonie/Carta dei Sentieri e del Paesaggio* map, which highlights the region's walking trails.

## Getting There & Away

Getting around the Madonie by bus can be a time-consuming business, but **SAIS** (☎ 091 616 60 28) does run services from Palermo to Cefalù and from Cefalù to most of the mountain towns, including Castelbuono, Geraci Siculo, Gangi, Isnello and Gibilmanna. The most frequent services run to the larger town of Castelbuono (€1.80, 45 minutes, seven daily Monday to Saturday, two Sunday) and the popular Gibilmanna (€1.20, 20 minutes, three Monday to Saturday, morning only).

If you are planning on travelling in the Madonie consider renting a car for a couple of days from Cefalù or Palermo – this will give you the freedom to enjoy the scenery and walking more freely.

## GIBILMANNA

The main reason most people visit Gibilmanna is to appreciate the wonderful view from the belvedere in front of the 17th-century **church**. You can see the superb spread of the Madonie and the peak of Pizzo Carbonara. While you're in town, you will probably meet a few visitors

who have come on a pilgrimage to pray at the elaborately decorated baroque **Santuario di Gibilmanna**, a shrine to the Virgin Mary. During the shrine's coronation on 17 August 1760 (a day which also marked the official consecration of the church), the Virgin is supposed to have shown signs of life, namely restoring sight to two blind worshippers and speech to a mute. The miracle was later confirmed by the Vatican and consequently, the church is one of Sicily's most important shrines.

## CASTELBUONO

pop 9600 / elev 423m

Castelbuono is the capital of the Madonie and has a lovely setting amid ancient manna ash and chestnut forests. It is known as the town of the Ventimiglias, a powerful noble family who ruled the town between the 14th and 16th centuries.

Castelbuono is serviced by a helpful **tourist office** (☎ 0921 67 11 24; www.comune.castelbuono.pa.it in Italian; Via Umberto).

In 1316, Francesco I Ventimiglia built the absolutely enormous **castle** (☎ 0921 67 12 11; Piazza Castello; admission €2; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4-8pm Tue-Sun) that gave the town its name (from *castrum boni*), and which soars above the golden patchwork of houses. The castle is divided into areas that cover archaeology, and the castle's and Castelbuono's history (with religious artefacts and jewellery), and several rooms are dedicated to modern and contemporary art exhibitions; sadly, none of the paintings is marked or explained.

The castle is supposed to be haunted by Queen Constance Chiamonte, who it is said runs along the corridors, regular as clockwork, every first Tuesday of the month. Right in the heart of the castle is the extraordinary **Cappella di Sant'Anna** (Chapel of St Anne), containing some of the greatest stuccowork of Giacomo and Giuseppe Serpotta.

The other excellent sight in Castelbuono is the **Museo di Mina Palumbo** (☎ 0921 67 65 96; Via Roma 52; adult/concession €6/3; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm), named after the naturalist Francesco Minà Palumbo. His collection gives an exhaustive insight into the Madonie mountains, and their botany, natural history, minerals and archaeology.

**Relais Santa Anastasia** (☎ 0921 67 22 33; www.santa-anastasia-relais.it; Contrada Santa Anastasia, Castelbuono; d/ste €200/350; P ☎) is a simply gorgeous 12th-century abbey – superlatives are not enough to describe it. Set among working vineyards, and

with an ancient cobbled courtyard straight out of a storybook, the abbey boasts beautiful rooms, exquisite attention to detail, and fabulous food and wine from the vineyards. It is 9km from Castelbuono in the direction of Cefalù.

**our pick** **Nangalarruni** (☎ 0921 67 14 28; Via Alberghi delle Confraternite 5; meals €35; ☎ closed Wed) is famous throughout Sicily for its exquisite mountain dishes of mushrooms and roast meats, including wild boar. Try its mushroom-and-warm-polenta cake for starters, then move onto a light plate of pasta with pistachios, cherry tomatoes, basil, mint and garlic. Your main should definitely be the wild boar and potatoes with porcini mushroom sauce. The wine list is excellent – you're in for a real treat.

Also recommended is **Romitaggio** (☎ 0921 67 13 23; Contrada da San Guglielmo, Castelbuono; meals €25-30; ☎ closed Wed), located in an ancient Benedictine monastery 4km from Castelbuono on the San Guglielmo road.

Two of the best delis in Castelbuono are **Fiasconaro** (www.fiasconaro.com; Piazza Margherita 10; cakes & snacks from €1.50), home of *mannetto* (manna cake), a local speciality, and **Antica Gelateria del Corso** (Corso Umberto 46; cakes & snacks from €1.50), maker of *testa di Turco* (Turk's head; blanchmange with puff pastry in the middle), chocolate-covered almonds and tasty ice cream. All products are handmade and delicious.

## PIANO BATTAGLIA

More Swiss than Sicilian, the little ski resort at Piano Battaglia (near Pizzo Carbonara) is dotted with chalets that play host to an ever growing number of Sicilian downhill skiers in winter.

The Mufara (northern slopes) skiing complex goes up to heights of 1856m and serves 3.5km of runs, while the Mufaretta (southwest slopes) reaches 1657m, with a run about 500m long. There are two ski lifts up to the ski runs. You can also do cross-country and alpine skiing.

With the advent of spring and summer Piano Battaglia becomes an equally good walking area, with plenty of signposted paths. One such walk starts at the Rifugio Ostella della Gioventù Piero Merlino (opposite) in Piano Battaglia and heads north-northwest taking in Pizzo Scalonazzo (1903m) and Pizzo Carbonara to end in an area of oak

woodland at Piano Sempria (1300m). All the hostels listed here can help you with itineraries and guides.

**Luigi Orestano** (☎ /fax 0921 66 21 59; www.rifugio.orestano.com/orestano; Località Piano Zucchi; r per person incl breakfast/full board €28/45), approximately halfway between Piano Battaglia and Cefalù, is run by the friendly Mogavero family and is open year round. Its guides can help you with trails and itineraries, and the website is a good source of information on the mountains.

Closed for refurbishment at the time of research, **Rifugio Giuliano Marini** (☎ 0921 64 99 94; www.palermoweb.com/caipalermo/cai\_rifugio.html in Italian; Località Piano Battaglia; r per person incl half/full board €23.50/28.50) is right at Pizzo Carbonara, with chalet-style rooms and good facilities. It also rents out ski equipment (skis and boots per day €26).

**Rifugio Ostello della Gioventù Piero Merlino** (☎ 0921 64 99 95; www.rifugiopieromerlino.it; Località Piano Battaglia-Mandria Marcate; r per person €30, incl full board €50) is an alpine chalet with wood-panelled rooms and classic mountain décor. It's not quite a youth hostel in the proper sense, because it caters to all visitors. It also has eating and drinking areas, and lots of info on cycling and walking.

## PETRALIA SOPRANA

pop 3650 / elev 1147m

Beautifully positioned at the top of a hill above a tree line of pines, Petralia Soprana (from the Italian word *sopra*, meaning 'on' or 'above') is one of the best-preserved little towns in north-central Sicily, with rough stone houses and curling wrought-iron balconies brimming with geraniums. It is also the highest village in the Madonie. At the heart of the main square is Piazza del Popolo, a WWI memorial built by Antonio Ugo in 1929. The most beautiful church in town is the 18th-century **Chiesa di Santa Maria di Loreto**, at the end of Via Loreto, off the main square. Inside is an altarpiece by Gagini and a *Madonna* by Giacomo Mancini. To the right of the church through an arch is the town's belvedere. The **cathedral**, off Piazza dei Quattro Cannoli, was consecrated in 1497 and has an elegant 18th-century portico.

## PETRALIA SOTTANA

pop 3310 / elev 1000m

Below Petralia Soprana, the town of Petralia Sottana (from the Italian *sotto*, meaning

'under') is the gateway to the Madonie and the headquarters of the **Ente Parco delle Madonie** (☎ 0921 68 40 11; www.parcodellemadonie.it in Italian; Corso Paolo Agliata 16; ☎ 8.30am-1.30pm & 4.30-7.30pm Mon-Sat), which supplies maps and walking itineraries in the park. It is another quiet country town with a clutch of churches, including the **Chiesa Matrice**, which towers above the town.

Rustic and welcoming, **Albergo Il Castello** (☎ 0921 64 12 50; www.il-castello.net in Italian; Via Generale di Maria 27; s/d €40/65; ☎) is a sweet stone-built hotel with shuttered windows and simple but comfortable rooms.

The tiny, traditional **Trattoria-Pizzeria 'da Salvatore'** (☎ 0921 68 01 69; Piazza San Michele 3; pasta & pizza €6-8; ☎ closed Tue) has an open wood-fire pizza oven and bags of semolina propped up around the place. There is no menu at lunchtime, but the generous antipasto of grilled vegetables, pungent cheeses and olives is delicious. Pizzas are an evening-only affair, and a very popular one at that.

## POLIZZI GENEROSA

pop 4080 / elev 917m

At the start of the Imera valley, Polizzi Generosa is a charming town that was given the nomenclature *generosa* (generous) by Frederick II in the 1230s. The town is a trekking base for the Madonie, and is riddled with churches that are often shrouded in mist. One sight worth visiting is the **Chiesa Madre**, with a Flemish depiction of the *Madonna and Child with Angels* from the early 16th century, and a *Madonna of the Rosary* by Guiseppe Salerno.

It's a good idea to pick up some pastries from **L'Orlando** (Via Rampolla 1; pastries from €1) and satisfy your sweet tooth while you stroll.

## CEFALÙ TO MILAZZO

The 83km stretch of coastline between Cefalù and Capo d'Orlando to the east is dotted with little coves, clean beaches and a couple of resorts that are quite popular, including the ceramics centre of Santo Stefano di Camastra and Sant'Agata di Militello. Beyond Capo d'Orlando the coast becomes more developed and industrialised the closer you get to Milazzo, the main point of departure for the Aeolian Islands. Inland lies the rugged, wooded 85,000-hectare Parco Regionale dei



Nebrodi, the largest and most inaccessible of Sicily's surviving forest communities.

## CASTEL DI TUSA

pop 3400 / elev 600m

About 25km east of Cefalù, just inside the province of Messina, is this little resort village. Just above the town (at 600m) are the ruins of the **castle** that gave the resort its name. A small road (9km) leads inland to the parent village of **Tusa**. Between the coastal resort and the village you'll see a signpost for **Halaesa**, a Greek city founded in the 5th century BC. Beautifully positioned on a hill, it commands fine views of the surrounding countryside and – on a clear day – the Aeolian Islands. The most conspicuous remains are those of its agora (marketplace) and its massive, rusticated walls. Just down the hill are the barely recognisable remains of a small theatre. The site was first excavated in the 1950s and again in 1972, but nothing has been done since then.

**Atelier sul Mare** (☎ 0921 33 42 95; www.ateliersulmare.it; Via C Battisti 4; s €50-65, d €70-100, art room €70-105) was designed by local artists who some years ago caused village controversy with their Fiumara d'Arte (Art in the River) project, which saw large, provocative sculptures embedded in the river – and you too can be part of the living art by staying in this hotel. Each 'art room' is an artistic installation, and you can stay in a different room each night if the hotel isn't full. Thankfully the artists don't play with your food like they do with your mind – the restaurant is very good.

The town is served by frequent trains from Palermo (€6.45, 1¼ hours), Cefalù (€2.15, 20 minutes) and Messina (€7.10, 2½ to three hours).

## SANTO STEFANO DI CAMASTRA

pop 4600

About 8km east of Castel di Tusa, Santo Stefano di Camastra is a popular bus-tour stop on account of its bustling ceramics industry, which grew up as a result of numerous clay quarries in the hills above the town. Until 1693 the town was further up the hill and was called Santo Stefano di Mistretta; it was destroyed by a landslide in 1692 and a new town was built closer to the coast.

If you're interested in the process of manufacturing ceramics, you can pop your head into the **Museo Civico delle Ceramiche** (Civic Museum of

Ceramics; Palazzo Trabia, Via Palazzo; admission free; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4-8pm) stationed towards the sea.

## SANT'AGATA DI MILITELLO

pop 12,900

This relatively new town (founded in the 18th century), 30km east of Santo Stefano di Camastra, is a popular resort and a gateway for the Parco Regionale dei Nebrodi. In summer it's usually crammed with Italian holiday-makers eager to make the most of the nice long stretch of beach. The only sight really worth mentioning is the **Chiesa del Carmelo**, in the centre of town, which has a handsome 18th-century gable. If you're heading into Nebrodi, you may want to visit the **Museo Etno-Antropologico dei Nebrodi** (☎ 0941 72 23 08; Via Cosenz 70; admission free; ☎ 9am-noon Mon-Fri), which has some information on the area, including maps.

There are only two hotels in town, **Hotel Parimar** (☎ 0941 70 18 88; Via Medici 1; s/d €35/55) and **Roma Palace Hotel** (☎ 0941 70 35 16; hotelroma@tiscalinet.it; Via Medici 443; s/d €36/67), both of which offer reasonable, if unexceptional, accommodation.

You can get here by frequent trains from Milazzo (€6.85, 1¼ hours). There is also an ISEA bus from Catania (€10.55, 2½ hours, one daily Monday to Saturday).

## PARCO REGIONALE DEI NEBRODI

The Nebrodi park was established in 1993 and constitutes the single largest forested area in Sicily. In fact, this is Sicilian author Gesualdo Bufalino's real 'island within an island', so long cut off from the outside world that Nebrodi villagers still retain something of their French-Lombard dialect.

The forest ranges in altitude from 1200m to 1500m, and is an undulating landscape of beech, oak, elm, ash, cork, maple and yew trees that hide the remnants of Sicily's wildlife: porcupines, San Fratello horses and wildcats, as well as a healthy population of birds of prey such as golden eagles, lanner and peregrine falcons and griffon vultures (recently reintroduced into the park). The high pastures have always been home to hard-working agricultural communities that harvest delicious mushrooms, churn out creamy ricotta, and graze cows, sheep, horses, goats and pigs.

The highest peak in the park is Monte Soro (1847m), and the Lago di Biviere is a lovely natural lake supporting herons and stilts. The

few villages in the park each have something to offer and represent an authentic insight into traditional Sicilian life.

## Information

Finding information on this park is very difficult. Few, if any, general tourist offices keep any information on the area, while the park's visitors centres are relatively inaccessible to anyone relying on public transport. The most useful centre for information is the **park office** (☎ 095 69 60 08; Strada Nazionale) in Cesarò, which stocks publications on the park and maps, including the Touring Club Italiano *Parco dei Nebrodi* map. There is a second **information office** (☎ 0941 79 39 04; Via Ugo Foscolo 1) in Alcara di Fusi. For more information, see www.parks.it /parco.nebrodi or www.parcodinebrodi.it (in Italian).

## Sights & Activities

If you take the enchanting SS289 from Sant'Agata di Militello you will arrive at

**San Fratello** after about 18km. This typical Nebrodi town was originally founded by Roger I's third wife, Adelaide di Monferrato, for her Lombard cousins (thus the strange local dialect). The church she founded in the 12th century, **Santuario del SS Fratelli**, still survives. The town is renowned for its esoteric **Festa dei Giudei** (Feast of the Jews), which takes place on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. Continuing on the SS289 you will pass Monte Soro (1847m) on your left-hand side and eventually arrive at Cesarò and the park office.

Another route through the park heads east from Sant'Agata di Militello on the road to Capo d'Orlando, then takes the first turn-off inland, towards **San Marco d'Alunzio**. San Marco was founded by the Greeks in the 5th century BC and was later occupied by the Romans, who named it Aluntium. At the town's entrance is the spectacularly situated **Tempio di Ercole** (Temple of Hercules), which has terrific views over

### THE LAKE CIRCUIT WALK *Emily Coles*

Take the SS289 to Portella Femmina Morta (the ISEA bus from Catania and Sant'Agata di Militello stops at Villa Miraglia, just 300m to the south). Just before the pass (on the northern side) take the forest track that heads east. The track winds through wood and meadow, with tantalising glimpses of Mt Etna in the distance, climbing gently to meet the main road at Portella Calacudera (1562m), a little more than 1km later.

Here the route divides: the left fork goes to Lago Maulazzo and the right is signposted 'Monte Soro'. Take the right-hand fork and continue along a sealed road that climbs up through a hunting reserve. Higher up are views to Troina and Enna.

About 1km before the summit, just as the road begins a tight curve to the south, turn off to the left and head along a leafy track. After 50m the track passes through a wooden gate, then a second, as it descends north then east through a thicket of beech trees. Stay on the main track and cross two streams, then head through a third gate. The trail starts to head north again as the wood opens out into a small meadow, then swings back east to cross another stream with a paved crossing. Shortly afterwards the trail forks. Take the left, descending track, which opens out onto another magnificent view of Mt Etna. Five minutes later you will reach the meadow of Piano Basile, where on a fine day you can see the outline of Rocche del Crasto to the north.

Continue to the end of the meadow, where there is a T-intersection with a north-south cart track. Follow this track left (north), descending steeply through more woodland for 2km to the shores of Lago di Biviere. As it nears the lake the trail opens out onto a grassy slope and swings left to meet a track running parallel to the shore's edge. Go left to pass a small tile-roofed building, then turn almost immediately right onto a track that leads to the lake's edge. This is a perfect spot to kick off your shoes and have a sandwich. You can walk around the lake on a track that heads southeast (20 minutes).

To return to the walk's starting point, head for the western end of the lake, cross the fence next to the lake track and walk across the small field to a cart track that follows the northern edge of Lago di Biviere. Turn left (west) here for Lago Maulazzo (5km, one hour); when you reach Lago Maulazzo a sign will direct you around the western edge of the lake back to Portella Femmina Morta.

the sea. A Norman church, now roofless, was subsequently built on the temple's red marble base. Virtually all of San Marco d'Alunzio's older buildings and its 22 churches were made using this locally quarried marble. The best of the churches is the **Chiesa di Santa Maria delle Grazie**, where you can find a beautiful Gagini statue of the *Madonna con bambino e San Giovanni* (Madonna with Child and St John). At the top of the hill are the scant remains of the **castle** built by Robert Guiscard in 1061; it was the first castle built by the Normans in Sicily.

A short distance south of San Marco by the Chiesa di San Teodoro is the **Museum of Byzantine & Norman Cultures** (☎ 0941 79 77 19; Badia Nica, Via Ferraloro; admission free; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3.30-7pm), which contains a number of lovely frescoes from the town's churches.

Southeast of San Marco is the trekking base, **Longi**, and southwest is **Alcara di Fusi**, a small village where there is an **information office** (☎ 0941 79 39 04; Via Ugo Foscolo 1). Alcara is situated beneath the impressive **Rocche del Crasto** (1315m), a nesting site of the golden eagle.

The third route through the park follows the SS116, which heads south from Capo d'Orlando. This is a fabulous (and tiring) driving road that takes you up to **Floresta** (1275m), the highest village in the park. From there you make a spectacular descent to Randazzo, with unforgettable views of Mt Etna.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Villa Nicetta** (☎ 0941 72 61 42; www.villanicetta.it; Contrada Nicetta, Acquedolci; r per person incl half/full board €50/60) Located just before Sant'Agata di Militello, inland from Acquedolci, is this lovely rural retreat, which is actually a fortified farmhouse with its very own church. You can get involved with farm activities or take one of the trekking, mountain bike or horseback excursions.

**Villa Miraglia** (☎ 095 773 21 33; www.villamiraglia.it; SS289, Cesarò; r per person incl half/full board €50/62) This lovely stone *albergo* (hotel), once a hunting lodge, is situated just beneath Portella Femmina Morta. It is a refuge in the true sense of the word: warm, welcoming and stuffed full of knick-knacks (ceramics, cart panels and the like). It also serves up hearty, simple food (meals €25

to €30). You will need to book ahead on weekends and in summer.

**Casali di Margello** (☎ 0941 48 62 25; www.casalidimargello.it; Km9, SP155; s €40-55, d €80-110; P) This huge farm that's actually more like a hamlet has restored cottages that sleep two to four people. You can help with the farm work, pick mushrooms, make ricotta or take any number of excursions in the park; it's a wonderful environment to get lost in. It's on the road to San Salvatore di Fitalia; check out the website for good directions.

### Getting There & Away

As a rule, you'll need your own transport to get around the park. The SS116 connects Capo d'Orlando with Randazzo, while the SS117 connects Santo Stefano di Camastra with Nicosia. Cutting through the heart of the park is the SS289, which links Sant'Agata di Militello with Cesarò in the interior.

The only public transport is the once-daily **ISEA** (☎ 095 53 68 94) bus between Catania and Sant'Agata di Militello. It makes a stop in the middle of the park near the Portella Femmina Morta, from where you can embark on the lake circuit walk (see p143 for more details). The bus departs Sant'Agata di Militello at 5am and Catania at 2pm.

### CAPO D'ORLANDO

pop 12,700

The busiest resort town on the coast after Cefalù, Capo d'Orlando was founded – at least according to legend – when one of Charlemagne's generals, a chap called Orlando, stood on the headland and declared it a fine place to build a castle. The ruins of the castle are still visible. In 1299 Frederick II of Aragon was defeated here by the rebellious baron Roger of Lauria, backed up by the joint forces of Catalonia and Anjou. Recent rebels include the town's shopkeepers and traders, who made a name for themselves in the 1990s with their stand against the Mafia's demands for *pizzo* (protection money) – sadly, an all-too-rare bit of resistance.

Visitors come here for the beaches, both sandy and rocky, that are on either side of town. The best swimming is to the east. It's also the best option for accommodation if

you don't wish to make the trip to Cefalù or Milazzo.

There is a **tourist office** (☎ 0941 91 27 84; www.aastcapodorlando.it in Italian; Via Piave; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat).

### Sleeping & Eating

There is no shortage of hotels or restaurants in Capo d'Orlando.

**Il Mulino** (☎ 0941 90 24 31; www.hotelilmulino.it; Via A Doria 46; s €55-70, d €85-110; ☎) A popular hotel in the centre of town, with modern and comfortable rooms. There's a nice public beach with deck chairs just opposite.

**La Tartaruga** (☎ 0941 95 50 12/13/14; www.hotel tartaruga.it; Lido San Gregorio; s €70-80, d €120-135; ☎ closed Nov-Feb; ☎) This is a largish resort hotel with good, comfortable rooms and a nice swimming pool. It is situated to the east of town, overlooking a wide, sandy beach. The hotel's restaurant is highly regarded (meals €25 to €30).

Apart from the restaurant at La Tartaruga, a couple of other places are worth a visit.

**A Uletta** (☎ 0941 91 17 00; Piazza Duca degli Abruzzi 21; meals €20-25; ☎ closed Mon) has an ample buffet and a range of fish and meat dishes – you'll dine well here, even if you're on a tight budget.

**Da Enzo** (☎ 0941 90 17 00; Via Lo Sardo; pizza €6-8) is a good pizzeria with a fine selection of pasta dishes.

### Getting There & Away

The best way to get here is by train from Palermo (€9.70, two hours, hourly) or Milazzo (€3.45, one hour, hourly).

### PATTI

pop 13,000 / elev 157m

After a landslide in the 1st century AD the refugees of Tyndaris established a new town at Patti. Here you'll find the 18th-century **Cattedrale di San Bartolomeo**, built on the site of Roger II's Norman church, which he founded to house the remains of his mother Adelasia (Adelaide), who died here in 1118. Her remains were later transferred to a fine Renaissance sarcophagus, which you can see in the right transept.

However, most people come to Patti to visit the remains of the **Roman villa** (☎ 0941 36 15 93; admission €2; ☎ 9am-1hr before sunset), which is located on the eastern outskirts of town beneath the motorway viaduct. Built in the 4th century AD, it was destroyed by an earthquake 100 years later. It was only uncovered in 1973 when the Palermo–Messina motorway was being built. Sadly, the site is badly positioned, although an ugly plastic roof has been erected to protect the polychrome mosaics from the scorching sun and the fumes emanating from the motorway overhead. The mosaics are very faded and explanations of the site are pretty much nonexistent. A small room near the

### DETOUR: TYNDARIS

To visit the beautiful ruins at Capo Tindari, turn off the autostrada at the sign for Oliveri, from where brown signs will direct you to the **Santuario della Madonna** (Sanctuary of the Madonna) via scenic hairpin bends. If you're coming from the west, it is 6km from Patti on the SS113.

You can see the enormous church from miles around: it sits right on the cape, its dome glistening in the sun. A sanctuary has been here since the 16th century, when a boat carrying the sacred relic of the Madonna Nera (Black Madonna), thought to have come from Asia Minor, docked here. Legend has it that the boat would go no further until the icon was unloaded. The inscription underneath the icon reads *Nigra sum, sed hermosa*, which means 'I am black, but I am beautiful'.

From the sanctuary, a path leads to the entrance of a more ancient holy place, **Tyndaris** (☎ 0941 36 90 23; admission €2; ☎ 9am-1hr before sunset), one of the most beautiful and peaceful archaeological sites on the island. The ruins (a basilica, Roman house and theatre) are actually very small, but are set on the cliff edge amid prickly pears, olives and cypress trees in perfect seclusion. In summer you can clearly see the Aeolian Islands and the lovely Oliveri lagoon in the bay below.

At the far end of the town's main street is the **theatre**, originally a Greek structure but substantially modified by the Romans. From July to September it hosts a festival of Greek drama, ballet and music. For information ask at the **ticket office** (☎ 0941 36 91 84; Via Teatro Greco 15) at the entrance to the site or visit [www.pattietindari.it](http://www.pattietindari.it).

There are buses to Tyndaris from Patti (€1.55, four daily, morning only).



ticket office houses some artefacts (labelled in Italian) found during renovations.

There is a **tourist office** (☎ 0941 24 11 36; Piazza Marconi 11; 🕒 9am-1pm Mon-Sat) in the town centre.

To get to Piazza Marconi from the train station, take a bus (€0.85) or walk uphill for about 20 minutes (signposted).

## MILAZZO

pop 32,100

Hardly Sicily's prettiest town, Milazzo is hemmed in on its eastern perimeter by industrial development that can make even the most determined visitor run for the nearest hydrofoil. Indeed, the prime reason for setting foot in this town is to get to the Aeolian Islands. But, away from the refineries and busy dock, Milazzo has a very pretty Spanish quarter, while the isthmus that juts out to the north is an area of great natural beauty dotted with rocky coves.

## Orientation

Everything of interest is within walking distance of the ferry and hydrofoil port. The train station is on Piazza Marconi, about 3km south of the port along the seafront. Orange AST buses run between the station and the quayside; see p148 for details.

## Information

**Banco di Sicilia** (Via dei Mille) Opposite the hydrofoil dock; has an ATM.

**First Aid** (☎ 090 928 11 58)

**Mail Boxes** (☎ 090 922 47 17; Via dei Mille 7; per 30min €3) Internet access; one miserable computer.

**Pharmacy** (Via Luigi Rizzo; 🕒 24hr)

**Police** (questura; ☎ 090 928 17 20)

**Tabacchi Edicola** (Via dei Mille) Excellent newsagent selling good foreign-language books on the Aeolians; it also has a useful map.

**Tourist Office** (☎ 090 922 28 65; Piazza C Duilio 10; 🕒 8am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm Sat) Behind Via Crispi; limited information.

## Sights & Activities

The strategic position of Milazzo is obvious from the enormous **castle**, built by Frederick II in 1239 and added to by Charles V Aragon. It constitutes the nucleus of the old town and was originally the site of a Greek acropolis, then that of an Arab-Norman citadel. At one time the whole of Milazzo fitted within its huge walls, which command great views of

the bay and the Aeolians. The castle contains the city's **Duomo Vecchio** (old cathedral) and the ruins of the **Palazzo dei Giurati** (the old town hall). It is a lovely site to clamber around, full of flowers and crumbling structures. To reach the castle climb the **Salita Castello**, which rises up through the atmospheric Spanish quarter.

If you have a car and a bit more time, take a drive along the **Strada Panoramica** around **Capo Milazzo**; the rugged coastline is beautifully unspoilt. Alternatively you can arrange a boat trip (ask at the tourist office) around the rocky cape to **Baia del Tonno** on the western side of the isthmus. Right at the end of the isthmus is the lighthouse, from where you can make a short walk down to the **Santuario Rupestre di San Antonio da Padova** (signposted from the car park), situated beside the crystal-clear waters.

There's good swimming to be had at Capo Milazzo, but the most easily accessible spot is the long stretch of pebbled **beach** that can be reached at the end of Via Colombo; follow the signs to Baia del Tonno from the end of Via Colombo, then pass the ugly stadium.

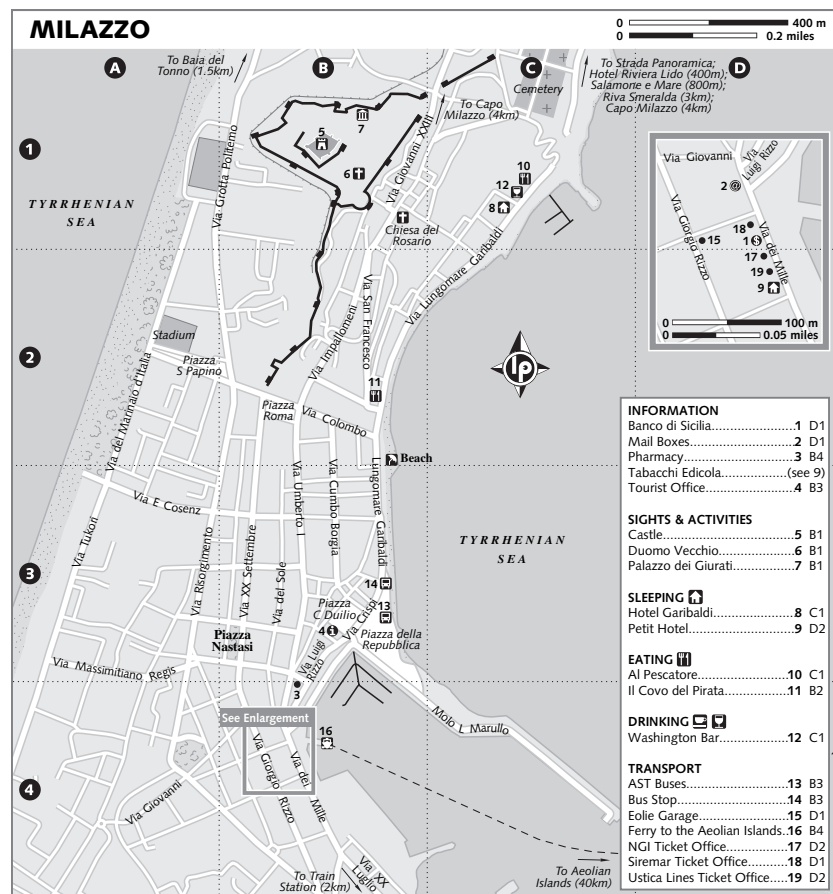
## Sleeping

**Riva Smeralda** (☎ 090 928 29 80; www.rivasmeralda.it; Strada Panoramica; tents €2.50-4.50, camp sites per person €5-10, 2-bedroom bungalows €30; 🕒 Apr-Oct) A well-equipped camping ground with a seafront location and its own beach, Riva Smeralda is situated a mere 3km north of Milazzo. Take the bus from Piazza della Repubblica and ask the bus driver to drop you off.

**Hotel Garibaldi** (☎ 090 924 01 89; www.hotelgaribaldi.net; Via Lungomare Garibaldi 160; s €65-85, d €90-130; 📞) Situated on the edge of the historic town, the Garibaldi has tons of character, very swish rooms and its own private beach. There is a residence next door with self-catering apartments. It's probably more convenient if you have a car.

**Hotel Riviera Lido** (☎ 090 928 34 56; www.hotelriviera.lido.it; Strada Panoramica; s €70-80, d €100-130; 📞) This modern hotel has a lovely position with its own private beach, plus balconied sea-view rooms. Staff can help arrange water sports and boat trips. It's located on Strada Panoramica heading north out of Milazzo.

**Petit Hotel** (☎ 090 928 67 84; www.petithotel.it; Via dei Mille; s €70-90, d €100-145; 📞) The hotel of choice in Milazzo is right opposite the



hydrofoil dock. The hotel is obsessively ecofriendly, using renewable energy sources, latex mattresses and serving a delicious homemade breakfast. It has very friendly staff, and you can leave your luggage and car here (€10 per day) while you visit the islands.

## Eating & Drinking

For something to eat, head for Lungomare Garibaldi, which runs along the seafront.

**Il Covo del Pirata** (☎ 090 928 44 37; Via San Francesco 1; mains €20-25; 🕒 closed Wed) This is one of Milazzo's best restaurants. The ground-floor section is a very popular pizzeria at night, and the service is as smooth as silk. Reservations are advised.

**Al Pescatore** (☎ 090 928 65 95; Lungomare Garibaldi 176; mains €25; 🕒 closed Tue) The seafood here is definitely recommended, as is the efficient service (staff members are used to dealing with hordes about to catch boats to the Aeolian Islands). The *involtini di pesce spada* (swordfish roulade stuffed with breadcrumbs; €8.25) is delicious.

**Salomone e Mare** (☎ 090 928 12 33; Strada Panoramica; mains €30-35; 🕒 closed Mon) A wonderful restaurant north along the isthmus. Its terrace juts out over the water, giving it attractive views, which are accompanied by a delicious array of seafood, including a lobster speciality.

**Washington Bar** (☎ 090 922 38 13; Via Marina Garibaldi 94) This very pleasant bar is a great spot to unwind with a drink while you watch

the *passaggiata* go by. The excellent nibbles that accompany drinks only add to the charm. You can also get great gelato here.

### Getting There & Around

Milazzo is easy to reach by bus or train from Palermo and Messina. **Giuntabus** (☎ 090673782) runs an hourly service to/from Messina (€3.70, 50 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday from 6.30am to 8pm, one Sunday). All intercity buses run from Piazza della Repubblica.

Trains are more frequent, with two departures and arrivals hourly from/to Palermo (€9.20, 2½ to three hours), and around 10 daily to Messina (€2.65, 45 minutes).

The main ferry and hydrofoil operators, Siremar, Ustica Lines and NGI, all have ticket offices along Via dei Mille opposite the port. See p151 for details of ferry travel to and from the island.

AST buses run between the station and the quayside. They depart every 30 minutes or so between 5.30am and 8.40pm. Tickets (€0.85, valid for two hours) can be bought inside the train station or at the shop opposite the quayside bus stop with the AST sign.

If you want to leave your car here while you island-hop, you can park long term at the **Eolie Garage** (Via Giorgio Rizzo; per day €10), next to Hotel Capitol.