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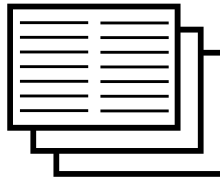
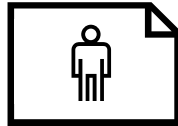
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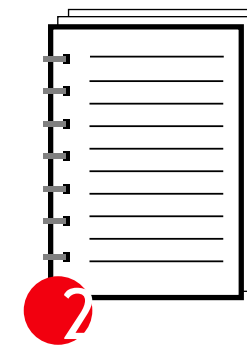
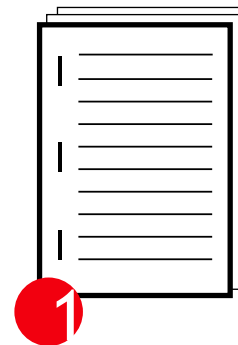
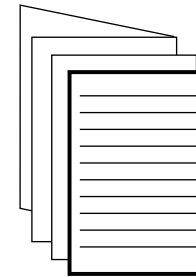
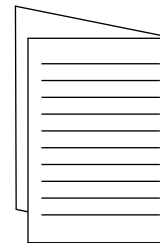
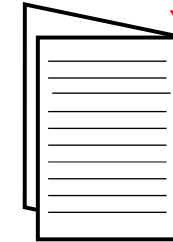
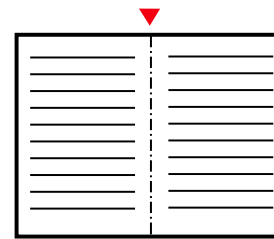
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assembling the guide



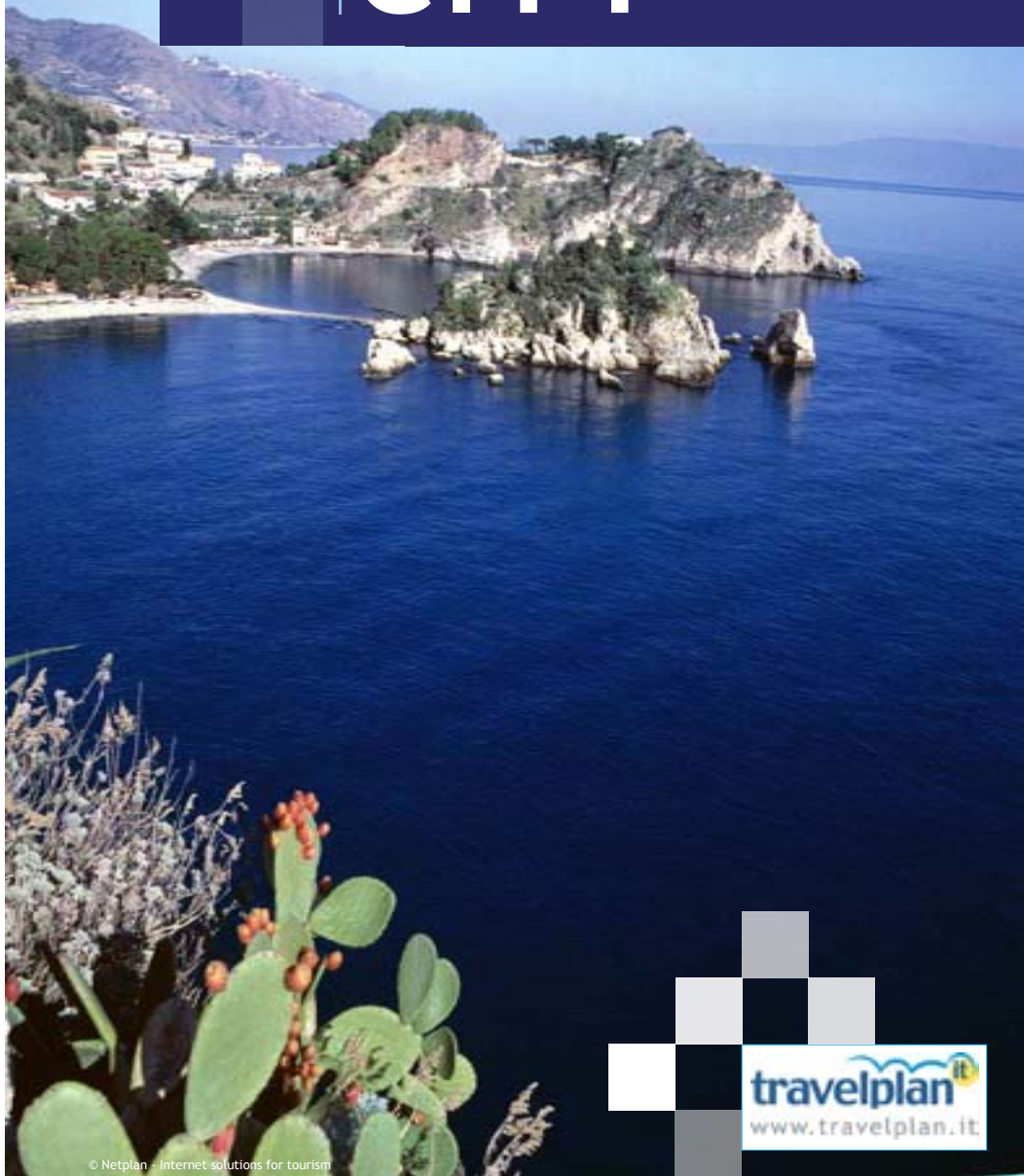
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THE TAORMINA CITY GUIDE





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History and culture



Taormina: Palazzo Corvaja, inside

The first contacts between Taormina and Greece were in 735 B.C. Later Dionysius the Old, the tyrant ruler of Syracuse, besieged the area surrounding Monte Tauro as he wanted to conquer the plains. The inhabitants of this area managed to resist this brute force but not bureaucracy: in 392 B.C., thanks to an agreement with the Carthaginians, Dionysius managed to come into possession of the Mount. He sent Andromachus to govern the area, who then founded the city of **Tauromenium**.

To avoid any potential attacks, the city surrendered to the powerful **Rome** in 212 B.C. and became one of its colonies, a holiday resort for consuls and patricians who built many luxurious villas in this area, and which was a "cow to be milked" for the Empire. The Romans demanded heavier and heavier taxes from the city, and thus blocked the economic development of the territory.

With the fall of the Roman Empire (476 A.D.), the **Byzantines** began the slow, difficult

conversion to Christianity, and Tauromenium became a bishop's seat (and remained so until 1082).

After the fall of the Empire, Muslims and Christians alternated in ruling the city until 962, when the **Arabs** finally conquered Tauromenium and renamed it **Almoezia**. During this period of Arab rule, the city enjoyed a period of splendor: important progress was made in agriculture (growing of oranges and lemons, irrigation systems), in philosophy, medicine and mathematics.

In 1078, the **Norman** Ruggero d'Altavilla, supported by the Pope, conquered Almoezia, returning it to Christian rule (even though Christians had been left quite free during Arab rule) and gave it back its original name. Norman rule also had a positive effect on the city, architecturally and culturally.

After the Normans, the **Swabians** arrived. During Frederick II's rule (1194-1250) Taormina enjoyed a short but intense period of prosperity.

However, the Pope (a Frenchman) did not approve of the Swabians or Swabian rule and crowned his fellow Frenchman **Charles of Anjou** as King of Sicily.

Taormina, together with other towns on the island, refused to acknowledge Charles of Anjou as their new monarch, and continued to support the Swabians, although they were unsuccessful. The hostility felt towards the French broke out into the revolt of the **Sicilian Vespers** in 1282.

After almost a century of conflict, Sicily passed into the hand of the Spanish and **Palazzo Corvaja** in Taormina became the seat of the **Sicilian Parliament**.

There was then a period of stability that lasted for several centuries, in spite of the heavy taxation imposed by the Spanish.

Later, from 1713 onwards, Sicily fell under the rule of the **Savoia dynasty**, the Austrians and the under the **Spanish** once more.

This latter period helped to develop Taormina, and important works were completed, such as

the roads that connected the city of Messina to Catania and the one that joined the city to the sea. Spanish dominion lasted until August 3rd 1860 when the "Thousand" reached Taormina under the leadership of Nino Bixio.

Churches and Museums



Taormina: Church of San Nicola

The most charming Churches in Taormina: in Gothic style and with Arabic influence:

Duomo-Cathedral (Church of San Nicola)
this was built around 1400 on the ruins of an ancient church. The Gothic style makes the Cathedral look similar to a fortress. The structure is a Latin cross with a nave and two aisles. The ceiling has wooden beams that are carved in Arabic style.

Church of San Pancrazio

This church stands on the ruins of a Greek temple. The Church of San Pancrazio (patron saint of Taormina) was built around the middle of the sixteenth century. The interior is filled with multi-colored marble and Taormina stone, and contains a fantastic fresco depicting the martyrdom of San Pancrazio. This beautiful church is often closed to the public.

The most interesting museums to visit to learn about the cultural traditions that are linked to this area:

Regional Archaeological Museum

This museum is housed in the Badia Vecchia, and contains some archaeological findings that were found extremely recently, between 1984 and 1998. The exhibition route is divided between two floors and includes objects such as sculptures, ceramics, artifacts from the Ancient Theater, earthenware, an alabaster urn and a Byzantine sword found on the sea bed near Isola Bella.

Antiquarium

This is a small exhibition area kept in the house of the ancient theater's custodian. There are not many archaeological findings kept in the Antiquarium as most of the objects found during the digs were transferred to museums in Naples, Syracuse and Messina. Some of the most notable objects are some marble statue bases with ancient inscriptions, carved pillars and a marble sarcophagus.

Sicilian Museum of art and folk traditions

Housed in Palazzo Corvaja, this Museum exhibits some figurative art and some examples of Sicilian craftsmen's art created in the period from the 16th to the 20th century. The exhibits included wooden sculptures, ceramics, **Sicilian carts**, and posters of **puppet shows**.

Historical buildings and monuments



Taormina: Palazzo del Duca Santo Stefano

The historical buildings and most attractive monuments in Taormina.

Ancient fortresses and aristocratic palaces:

Badia vecchia

An antique abbey, Badia Vecchia is a building that was built in the fourteenth century in Gothic style and which was recently recovered by the Taormina municipal council. Like Palazzo del Duca di Santo Stefano, the Badia looks like a fortress, an aspect that is even more accentuated by the battlements built on top of the building.

Palazzo del Duca Santo Stefano

A fourteenth century building in Gothic-Sicilian style with Arabic-Norman influences. The building, which looks much like a fortress, has three floors that are all decorated with splendid mullioned windows with two lights: the ground floor that is reached through an archway, the first floor, with its system of drawbridges and the second floor. It is now the headquarters of the Fondazione

Mazzullo and has many Sicilian works of art housed inside it.

Palazzo Corvaja

The first part of this wonderful medieval palace was built by the Arabs during their period of rule. It was a cube-shaped tower that was used for defending the town. Later, Palazzo Corvaja, the seat of the Sicilian Parliament was added to the tower, that was extended over the years and after a period in which it was abandoned after the Second World War, the building was renovated and recovered, maintaining the characteristic mix of styles: Arabic (the tower), Norman (the fifteenth-century hall where the Parliamentary meeting were held), and Gothic (the shape of the façade windows).

Villa Comunale

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, this was the private garden of the English aristocrat Florence Trevelyan, a woman who was a botany and ornithology lover. The property was donated to the Taormina Municipal Council in the nineteenth twenties, and Villa Comunale still has some rare plants and eccentric constructions known as "Victorian follies" that are similar to Chinese Pagodas, built according to the creative, original ideas of this aristocratic woman, in the garden.

The most interesting monuments, proof of the ancient cultures:

Ancient Theater

From this site, which is extremely valuable in architectural terms, there is a wonderful view of all the beautiful places surrounding Taormina: **Etna**, the Bay of Naxos, the crystal clear sea and **Castelmola**. The Theater, which is probably of Greek origin, was renovated and extended by the Romans: today it is one of the largest theaters in Sicily, second only to the one in Syracuse. This wonderful monument is now the seat of **Taormina Arte**,

the International Film, Theater and Dance Festival.

Odeon

This was built by the Emperor Octavian and was only discovered at the end of the nineteenth century. It is a small theater built with clay bricks.

Naumachie

After the Ancient Theater, this is the oldest building in the city. This imposing wall, that dates back to the first century B.C., is about 130 meters long and has several niches that once held statues of the gods.

Food and drink



Taormina: pasta con le sarde

Taormina, this heavenly, holiday place, makes you want to "take it easy", slowly taking in the beauties of the city and the intense flavors of the place.

Your breakfast will begin with a tasty, energizing **granita al caffè con panna** (iced coffee with whipped cream), and a typically Sicilian sweetmeat if you want, filled with **ricotta cheese**.

Going for a meal in one of the restaurants in Taormina is a real pleasure, due to the taste of the Sicilian food and the surroundings you will find yourself in. Many restaurants in fact have a garden with citrus fruit trees, and the perfume blends perfectly with the aroma of the food you are eating.

There is a wide choice of first courses in Taormina and we suggest you try a simple **pasta sauce** that is used often here on pasta, made from tomatoes, capers, basil and anchovies.

Taormina, which has an ideal geographical position between the land and the sea, allows you to choose both meat, which you must try in one of the several trattorie on the

slopes of Mount Etna, and fish. Fish is the true protagonist at the dinner table, however, especially **swordfish and smaller fish like tuna, mackerel, sardines and anchovies** that are always extra fresh, and that are prepared in various ways, according to the traditional Sicilian cooking recipes and served in all the restaurants in Taormina. We recommend you try one of the little restaurants on the beaches near the port of Giardini Naxos, where you can enjoy a splendid view, and taste the fish-based dishes.

A typical wine of the area around Taormina, from Castelmola, is almond wine, a white wine served cool to accompany desserts.

Shopping



Taormina: Corso Umberto I

In **Corso Umberto I**, the most elegant street in the city, and in all the surrounding little lanes, there are many high fashion stores, jewelers' shops containing handmade gold and silver objects, antique shops, souvenir shops and lots of others too.

Craftwork lovers will be happy in Taormina, as you can find all the typical Sicilian craftwork products in many of the shops: **pottery from Caltagirone, carved marble and wrought iron.**

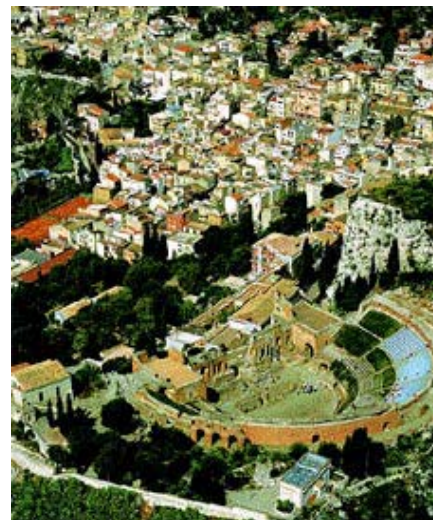
This last craft in particular has many famous followers in the city. Some shops sell wonderful objects and furniture for the home, inlaid in marble and semi-precious stones and made using ancient techniques: after designing the object (most of which are representations of Nature), the marble base is chosen, on which the design is traced and then the semi-precious stones are added for the inlaid work.

In the summer in Piazza Carmine, near to the cathedral, a small open-air market is opened where you can buy typical local food and craft products of various kinds: statues made

in lava stone or paintings of the breath-taking landscapes in the area.

Other typical products of this area are **Vino alle mandorle**, a dry white wine made from mixing alcohol with bitter almonds and other essences, that is made in **Castelmola**, a charming village near Taormina, which is famous for its sixteenth century castle.

Hotels and lodging



Taormina: aerial view

If you are arranging a **vacation in Taormina**, there are lots of types of accommodation to choose from. There is everything to choose from in this wonderful city, from luxury five-star hotels to the cheaper solutions.

If you are one of those people who like a little luxury every now and again, you will be fully satisfied: there are many sophisticated, elegant hotels in Taormina with lovely bedrooms that face out onto the crystal-clear sea.

If you prefer to spend a little less money, you can choose a lower category of accommodation that is still comfortable and pleasant. In Taormina the hotels are available for anyone's budget! There are also several guesthouses and bed & breakfast. Taormina is also the ideal base for lots of excursions, but if you prefer you can stay in rural farmhouse accommodation near the city, on the slopes of Mount Etna.

Events



Taormina: the traditional costume and sicilian cart fair

All the artistic and cultural events in Taormina take place in the summer, when the city is at its best and there are crowds of tourists. For this reason, if you are planning a trip to this area between June and September, we strongly advise you to book your hotel in Taormina well in advance.

Taormina arte - June/July/August

It is one of the most famous events in Sicily. A Festival dedicated to music, from symphonies to rock, dance and theater during which famous artists from all over the world come to perform in the wonderful, beautiful setting of the Ancient Theater. One section of the Festival over the years has become so popular that it has become an event in itself: the **Taormina Film Festival**.

Taormina Film Festival - June

After the International Film Festival in Venice, this is the oldest film festival in Italy. World-famous guests, film directors, script-writers, composers from Hollywood and independent ones too all come to the festival, whether

they are busy or not. The setting is the amazing Ancient Theater of Taormina. At the end of the Festival, that usually lasts a week, there is the awards ceremony, during which the *Nastri d'Argento* for Italian cinema are handed out, a prestigious award that is much sought after by our national artists. In addition to the competitions, there are also retrospective sessions and side-sections with a specific theme.

Madonna della Rocca - September

The statue of the Madonna della Rocca is housed in a sanctuary between Taormina and Castelmola. In the second weekend of September, a religious procession carries the statue from the sanctuary to the town where a large banquet is organized, to eat "*carne infornata*": lamb cooked with spices and herbs in a wood-fire oven.

Other festivals and fairs that are regular events in Taormina are the **Sagra del Costume e del Carretto Siciliani** - The Traditional Costume and Sicilian Cart Fair (May), the **Festa Patronale di San Pancrazio** - the San Pancrazio Patron Saint Festival - (every four years in July) and **Carnival** (February).

La Dolce Vita



Taormina: Audrey Hepburn

Taormina, city of art and a seaside resort, a place that fascinates and enraptures you, that seduces you and ties you to it, is still an elitist tourist resort today, for those people who love to sit at the tables of some elegant open-air coffee shop or on the terrace of some local restaurant every summer. At the end of the eighteenth century, **Johann Wolfgang Goethe** came to this place during his "Journeys through Italy" and was amazed and charmed by its beauty. After him came **Guy de Maupassant**, and then many other intellectuals and artists, from **Henry Faulkner** to **Paul Klee**, from **Truman Capote** to **Tennessee Williams**, some of whom lived in Taormina for long periods, increasing the city's prestige and filling it with legend. **Hollywood** was also enchanted by this "little piece of paradise": **Greta Garbo**, **Marlene Dietrich** (who carried on ignoring each other here too, due to their legendary rivalry), **Audrey Hepburn**, **Lana Turner** and **Liz Taylor** who spent a stormy honeymoon here with **Richard Burton**. Internationally famous stars spent their vacations here, most of whom

stayed in the wonderful, old San Domenico Palace Hotel, often during the prestigious **Taormina Film Festival** and helping to make Taormina one of the legendary locations of the Dolce Vita.

At the end of **Corso Umberto I** you will find Piazza IX aprile, that is home to the Church of Sant'Agostino, the Church of San Giuseppe and the Porta di Mezzo (Middle Gate) that includes the wonderful Clock Tower. This square, that provides a wonderful view over the Gulf of Messina, is surrounded by elegant open-air coffee shops, meeting places for the famous and not so famous tourists on summer evenings.

After an aperitif in the square, the evening often continues in the nearby lounge bar **La Giara**, or in other clubs such as the **Septimo**, on the Salita San Pancrazio. Another very popular club, especially in the summer is the **Panasia beach**, and elegant and original seaside establishment where there are sofa beds (yes, it's true!) available on the beach where you can relax and sip a cocktail.

A special day



Taormina: Porto Messina

Taormina can easily be visited on foot in one day, even though after seeing all the beautiful sights and admiring the views in the wonderful climate that the city enjoys, you may decide to spend a few days more in Taormina.

Morning

Our itinerary starts with a breakfast of *granita al caffè* (iced coffee with whipped cream) and sweet-breads: a must in Taormina, and necessary for providing the energy needed to complete this itinerary.

Let's begin the route from **Piazza Sant'Antonio (Porta Catania)**, where **Corso Umberto I**, the road that crosses the whole town, begins.

From there you can go to the **Badia Vecchia** on foot, a building-fortress that dates back to the 14th century, home to the **Archaeological Museum** of Taormina (that we recommend you visit some other time).

Now head towards the **Duomo**, on foot, where you can see the pretty fountain, built

around 1600, as well as the Church. Go back to **Corso Umberto I** and walk along it until you get to **Piazza 9 aprile**, a very charming place that opens onto the view of the sea and which contains the **Torre dell'Orologio (Clock Tower)**, the **Church of San Giuseppe**, that can be reached from a staircase, and the Church of Sant'Agostino, with its adjacent convent.

Time for lunch already? Along the staircases that look down onto **Corso Umberto I**, there are lots of restaurants: choose one that you like to relax a while, and taste some typical Taormina food. Try a dish with swordfish, cooked by the experienced, creative Taormina chefs. Don't worry about calorie-counting, Sicilian food is generally very light, especially the fish dishes.

Afternoon

After being suitably refreshed, walk through the remaining part of **Corso Umberto I** as far as **Piazza Vittorio Emanuele (Porta Messina)**. Next to the square there is the Odeon, a small theater built for the Emperor Octavian. **Via Teatro Greco** starts off in **Piazza Vittorio Emanuele**: walk along it and after 500 meters, you will come upon the **Greek-Roman Theater** the symbol of Taormina. This amazing spectacle will stay with you forever. This ancient theater, surrounded by such wonderful scenery, nestling in the mountains, will enchant you into standing and contemplating the incredible view: the sapphire-colored sea, Etna, and the city.

After contemplating this true wonder, trace your steps back along **Via Teatro Greco** until you see the tree-lined staircase of **Via Timoleone** on your left. Go down it and then walk along **Via Jallia Bassia**, **Via del Ginnasio** and **Via Bagnoli Croce**. At one point you will catch sight of the beautiful **Villa Comunale**, surrounded by the **Trevelyan Gardens**, where there are rare plants, and a series of "Victorian follies", eccentric constructions that were built by the original, and just as eccentric former owner.

Evening

Now is the time to concentrate on society life, that is never missing in Taormina. After an aperitif in one of the coffee-shops in the center, choose one of the many restaurants in Taormina and allow yourself to try a whole Sicilian menu, from the hors d'oeuvres to the sweet, all washed down with a good local wine.

After dinner, you may choose to spend the night in one of the elegant clubs in the town (link to [Dolce Vita](#)), sipping a cocktail on the beach under the moonlight. After getting to know Taormina, do you really want to leave? If you have changed your mind and want to stay a little longer in this wonderful place, you can always book another night in the hotel in Taormina that you have chosen!

Isola Bella, the Alcantara River park and Castelmola



Taormina: Castelmola

Our tourists' guide to taormina offers three trips outside the town, to discover places that seem out of this world, in an oasis of peace and quiet that will remain with you forever.

The Isola Bella Nature Reserve

Considered to be the "Pearl of the Ionian", due to its wild but unspoilt beauty, in spite of Man's presence, Isola Bella is protected by the WWF and was recently declared a **Nature Reserve**. It is a magical place that cannot be missed if you are near Taormina.

This small island can be reached from the town along long groups of staircases and lanes, crossing over the National *Strada Statale*, down Monte Tauro 200 meters until you reach sea level where the island is connected to the land by a thin strip of sand.

The best period to visit this area is from the beginning of spring to the first days of autumn. There are several **sea birds** that live in this place: Herring Gulls, Kingfishers, Peregrine Falcons, Cormorants, and Grey

Hérons. The **luxuriant vegetation** on Isola Bella is a fantastic mixture of Mediterranean scrub and rare exotic plants, imported by its original owner, the eccentric Miss Traveled. The **sea beds** surrounding the island are also amazing from Nature's point of view: if you have mask, snorkel and flippers, even the most inexpert explorer can look at a spectacle that will stay impressed on your minds forever. This stretch of sea is home to multitudes of organisms, various species of seaweed, multi-colored fish, all sizes of crustaceans and other living beings.

How to get to Isola Bella from Taormina

In Via Pirandello you can take the municipal cableway to Mazzarò. Once there, turn right onto the National Strada Statale: the entrance to the Reserve is about 200 meters away. If you want to walk, cross Via Pirandello onto the viewing point "Isola Bella": from there, there is a path made of stairs and lanes that take you right up to the Reserve entrance.

Alcantara River Park

Alcantara River Park, an extremely attractive place about 25 km Taormina, is famous for all its **Gole, or gorges**, fashioned into the rock by geological phenomena whose origins are lost in the mists of time. All this took place when, long ago, a small volcano erupted and spurted out a mass of lava that formed a huge crack. In the part of its path where there was most clay, the lava sunk to a depth that formed two large black columns of basalt that were 50 meters high. This crack is now run along by the River Alcantara, whose name comes from the Arabic Al Qantarah. A visit to the Gole dell'Alcantara, walking along a small stretch of the river bed, is a truly unique experience, but it can only be done from May to September, when the water level lowers. If you want to try out this adventure, we advise you to wear "river boots" (like the ones with braces used by river fishermen), as a safety measure and to stop you from getting cold: the river water is freezing even in summer!

At other times of the year, trips there only go as far as the entrance to the gorges. The sight before you is amazing: the gorges, so black and prismatic, create wonderful reflections of light and shadows as soon as the sun hits their surface.

Castelmola

This is a tiny, picturesque village that is about 500 meters above sea level, with a fantastic view looking out over the sea.

This is an ancient town. Castelmola was built to defend Taormina from the attacks of potential invaders. There is still an atmosphere of "old times" that transmits a feeling of temporarily going back in time. This feeling is made even stronger by the fact that no cars can be driven in Castelmola.

The cathedral dedicated to San Nicolò of Bari and the seventeenth century church built to honor San Giorgio are very characteristic. Castelmola is famous for its vino alle mandorle and for the medieval **castle** ruins.

Not to be missed

The splendid view from Piazza Belvedere that takes in the land, the sea and Etna.

A few bottles of the almond wine for your friends and relatives back home.

Bar Turrisi: a very "special" place that will amaze you, we are sure.



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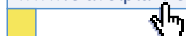


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