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English guide

ITINERARY • ORTIGIA

Ortigia in a day: from the Temple of Apollo to the castle, through squares and sea

Nine walking stops on the island of **Ortigia**, the historic centre of Siracusa: from the **Temple of Apollo** to the **Fonte Aretusa**, from the **Cathedral** built inside a Greek temple to **Castello Maniace**, up to the sea. For each stop, find out what to see, how long to stay, and a practical tip.

DURATION

One day

6-7 hours with breaks

STOPS

9 stops

about 3 km

GETTING AROUND

On foot.

The island is small and almost entirely flat, but driving here is a problem.

ONLINE VERSION WITH MAP

www.marzamemi.com/itinerari/ortigia-in-un-giorno



STOP 1 OF 9

The Temple of Apollo and the market

🕒 Recommended time: 25 minutes



The columns of the Temple of Apollo in Largo XXV Luglio, at the entrance of Ortigia

You can walk from Siracusa across the **Ponte Umberto**, built in the 19th century and named after King Umberto I. Just after, in **Largo XXV Luglio**, there are the remains of the **Temple of Apollo**, from the early **6th century BC**: it is considered the oldest Doric temple in Sicily.

Over the centuries, it has been a Christian church in the Byzantine era, a mosque in the Arab period, a Norman basilica, and then part of a Spanish barracks. It was freed from surrounding buildings only in the early 20th century: today the columns emerge amid the traffic.

Behind the temple, **in the morning and every day except Sunday**, there is the **Ortigia market**: the right place to understand the rhythm of the island.

A TIP

Driving here is a problem, with the ZTL and narrow alleys: **park in Siracusa** and walk here. The market is only **in the morning**.

STOP 2 OF 9

Piazza Archimede and the Fountain of Diana

🕒 Recommended time: 20 minutes



The Fountain of Diana with the tritons in the basin, in Piazza Archimede in Ortigia

Continue to **Piazza Archimede**, an open square only in the second half of the **19th century**: much more recent than the surrounding alleys. At the centre is the **Fountain of Diana**, created by **Giulio Moschetti** built **between 1906 and 1907**, in reinforced concrete.

It tells the myth of **Aretusa**: Diana, with bow and dog, dominates the scene; at her feet, Aretusa is about to transform into a spring to escape Alfeo. In the basin, four tritons ride two sea horses and two sea monsters.

Surrounding it are buildings from the 15th to the 20th century, including the **Palazzo dell'Orologio** and the 15th-century **Palazzo Lanza Bucceri**.

A TIP

Get closer to the basin: the tritons and masks can only be seen well up close.

STOP 3 OF 9

The Giudecca, San Giovannello and the Jewish bath

🕒 Recommended time: 30 minutes



The ancient façade of the church of San Giovannello in Piazza del Precursore, in the Giudecca

Towards the interior of the island, you enter the **Giudecca**, the Jewish quarter, which retains the narrow layout of the ancient settlement. The Jews left the city in **1492**, when the king ordered their expulsion; after the earthquake of **1693**, the buildings were reconstructed in a uniform style, so few visible signs of that world remain.

In **Piazza del Precursore**, there is the façade of **San Giovannello**, which stands on a basilica from the **4th century** and has the appearance of **1380**, with a pointed portal and rose window.

In the basement of a building, now a hotel, you can visit the **Jewish bath (miqwe)**: a pool fed by spring water, about **twenty metres** deep, among the oldest in Europe.

A TIP

The Jewish bath is visited **only at certain times**, usually with a guide: check in advance.

STOP 4 OF 9

Piazza Duomo and the Cathedral, a Greek temple

🕒 Recommended time: 45 minutes



The baroque façade of the Cathedral in Piazza Duomo in Ortigia

Piazza Duomo is the highest point of the island, a large elliptical square surrounded by Baroque buildings. The **Cathedral** is the most surprising monument: in **480 BC**, the tyrant **Gelone** had the **Temple of Athena** built here to celebrate the victory over the Carthaginians at Himera; in the **7th century**, Bishop **Zosimo** transformed it into a church, bricking up the spaces between the columns.

The Baroque façade is instead from the 18th century: it was designed by **Andrea Palma** after the earthquake of **1693**, and completed in **1753**. The two statues on either side are **Saint Marciano** and **Saint Lucia**.

The **Doric columns** of the temple can still be recognised on the side of the church and inside, where the central nave has a **16th-century wooden ceiling**. The Archbishop's Palace and the Palazzo Beneventano del Bosco also overlook the square.

A TIP

Enter: the columns inside are the most beautiful part. Entry may be charged and times vary: check.
Shoulders and knees covered.

STOP 5 OF 9

The Vermexio and Santa Lucia alla Badia

🕒 Recommended time: 30 minutes



The tall and narrow façade of the Church of Santa Lucia alla Badia in Ortigia

On the same square is the **Palazzo del Vermexio**, the town hall, built at the beginning of the **Seventeenth Century** to a design by **Giovanni Vermexio** as the seat of the city government. Look in the top left corner for a small carved **gecko**: it is the architect's signature.

At the end of the square, the church of **Santa Lucia alla Badia**, dedicated to the city's patron saint, has a tall, narrow façade with an upper order in Rococo style. Here, from **2011**, the **Burial of Saint Lucia** by **Caravaggio**, painted in **1608**, was displayed: since **6 December 2020**, it has returned to **Santa Lucia al Sepolcro**, in the Borgata neighbourhood, on the mainland.

A TIP

Many guides still indicate Caravaggio in this church: **it is no longer there**. To see it, go to Santa Lucia al Sepolcro and check the times.

STOP 6 OF 9

The Foro Vittorio Emanuele II and the Fonte Aretusa

🕒 Recommended time: 25 minutes



The Aretusa Fountain with the papyrus and the sea behind it, in Ortigia

You descend to the sea and stroll along the **Foro Vittorio Emanuele II**, the seafront built to celebrate the **Unification of Italy**, with trees and benches. Along the road, there is the **fontana degli Schiavi**, a drinking trough from the 16th century carved into the walls, and a small garden with ancient ficus trees.

At the end, you arrive at the **Fonte Aretusa**, a pond of **fresh water** full of **papyrus**, just a few steps from the sea: the locals call it a *funtana re papiri*. According to legend, Aretusa, the nymph of Diana, fled from the river Alfeo and the goddess transformed her into a spring; Alfeo, turned into an underground river, still feeds her.

A TIP

Look at the fountain **from above**: it's already beautiful without a ticket. To walk around its perimeter, a ticket may be needed: **check** if it's open during that period.

STOP 7 OF 9

Maniace Castle

 Recommended time: 45 minutes

The Maniace Castle at the tip of the island of Ortigia, overlooking the sea

At the southern tip of the island is the **Maniace Castle**, built between **1232 and 1240** at the behest of **Frederick II**, with a square plan and four cylindrical towers at the corners. From its position, it controlled the port and the city. The name recalls the Byzantine general **George Maniace**, who in **1038** helped to reclaim Siracusa from the Arabs.

Inside, the rooms are bare, but they have large **pointed arches** beneath which you walk. The courtyard has two levels: from the upper floor, you can see the round arches that you will encounter later when descending.

A TIP

It's worth the ticket: **enter and walk through the rooms**. Check opening hours and closing days.

STOP 8 OF 9

The Levante Promenade and Cala Rossa

🕒 Recommended time: 40 minutes



The small beach of Cala Rossa seen from above, on the Levante seafront in Ortigia

On the eastern side of the island, the **Levante Promenade** runs steeply over the sea. You pass by the **Enzo Maiorca viewpoint**, a belvedere with four benches dedicated to the champion who in **July 1988** reached **101 metres** in free diving.

A little further on, a steep staircase descends to the small beach of **Cala Rossa**, whose name comes from the colour of the sand: clear sea, fresh water showers, and in the afternoon, shade.

A TIP

In summer, **bring your swimsuit**: the staircase is steep and the beach is small.

STOP 9 OF 9

Forte Vigliena and the sea

🕒 Recommended time: 25 minutes



The Vigliena Fort with the steps leading down to the sea, in Ortigia

Further north, on the same coast, **Forte Vigliena** is a stone bastion built under Spanish rule to defend the city from pirates. Today it serves as a **solarium** and access to the sea: from the steps, you can descend to the rocks for a swim or a break.

A TIP

For the **sunset**, return to the other side of the island, at Foro Vittorio Emanuele II: **the sun sets on the west side**.

Frequently asked questions

How much time is needed to see Ortigia?

For the main points, **half a day** is enough. With the Cathedral, the castle, a swim, and some breaks, you need **a whole day**.

Can you drive to Ortigia?

Better not: there's a **ZTL** and the alleys are narrow. It's advisable to **park in Siracusa** and walk, about a quarter of an hour from the station, or take the electric bus that circles the island.

When is the Ortigia market open?

In the morning, every day except Sunday, behind the Temple of Apollo, on Via De Benedictis.

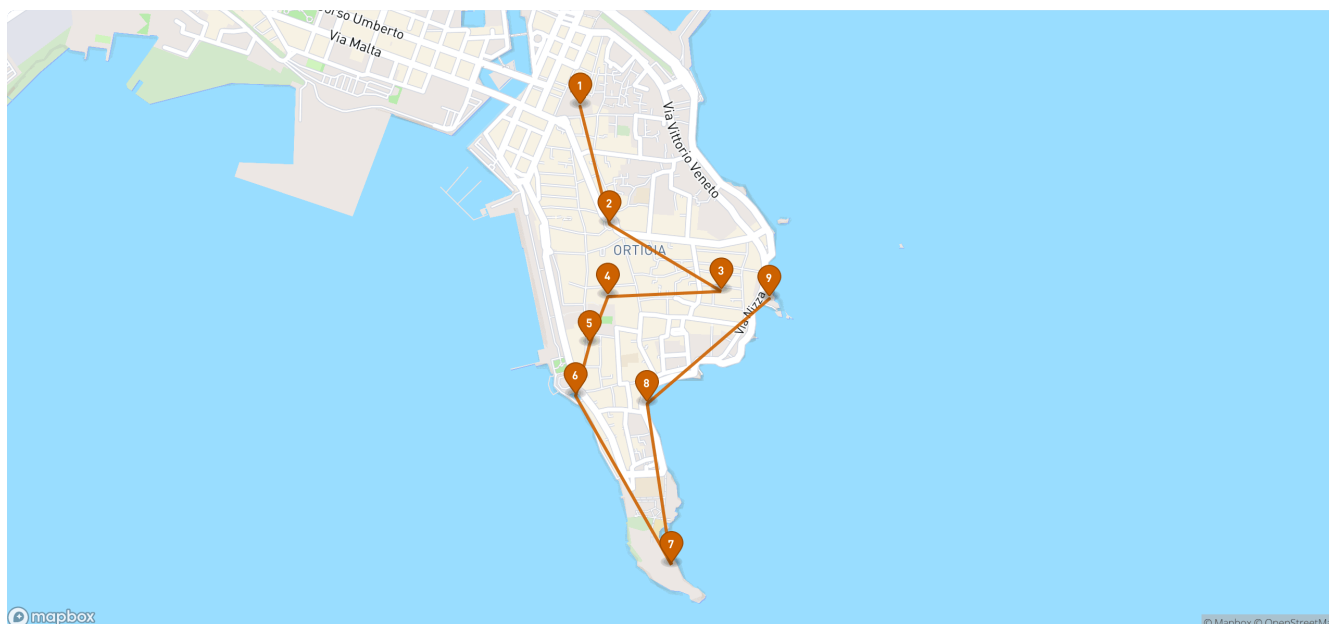
Where is Caravaggio in Siracusa?

The **Burial of Saint Lucia** is in the basilica of **Santa Lucia al Sepolcro**, in the Borgata district, on the mainland, since 6 December 2020. It was previously at Santa Lucia alla Badia, in Ortigia.

What to see with more time available?

You can add **Palazzo Bellomo** (museum), the **Puppet Museum**, the **Municipal Theatre**, **Siracusa Ipogea** (limited hours), the church of **San Martino**, **Palazzo Beneventano del Bosco**, **Porta Marina** with the remains of the Greek walls, and on the mainland, the **Archaeological Park of Neapolis**.

Route map



The numbers follow the order of the stops. The map shows no commercial businesses.

Practical information

DURATION

One day (6-7 hours with breaks)

GETTING AROUND

On foot. The island is small and almost entirely flat, but driving here is a problem.

BEST TIME

Spring and autumn. In summer, it's best to go early in the morning, when there's the market, and return in the late afternoon for sunset.

TOTAL WALKING

about 3 km

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