



Provincia di  
Trapani

Customaci

Welcome





## Custonaci is...

Custonaci is the city of marble and presents itself as the first marble basin in Sicily, the second in Italy and Europe. The town is near an area of great naturalistic interest, the Oriented Natural Reserve of Mount Cofano, with rough, uncontaminated sea bays: it can be explored through pathways which

offer panoramic views of unmatched beauty. In the suggestive natural cavern of the Mangiapane Cave in Scurati, uses, customs and traditions of early twentieth century Sicily are relived during the Presepe Vivente - Living Nativity Scene (Christmas) and during the Museo Vivente - Living Museum (summer).

Not to be missed in the summer are the celebrations in honour of the Madonna of Custonaci, with the disembarkation in the sea of a copy of the much venerated painting of the Virgin Mary, the original of which dates back to the XV century, and is kept in the Sanctuary of the same name.

Marble quarries



RNO Mount Cofano



Madonna of Custonaci







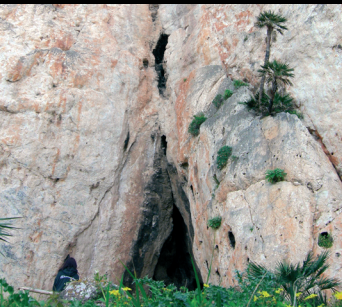
## History

Custonaci or Custunaci - according to the diction indicated in the most ancient documents and still today reflected in popular speech - has always indicated a combination of rural districts which have only come together to form one town in the last fifty years. The root aci or akis (ancient Sicilian or

Greek origin) can be found in other terms like Sparaci e Scuraci and indicates a sharp object. The root of the name might mean Kustuni, or steep rock. It might also be of Byzantine origin or come from the nymph Chustonachi. The name Custunachi referring to a river of the territory, today named Forgia is

quoted in a document of Emperor Federico II in 1241. The urban development is linked to the sanctuary of the Madonna di Custonaci. The controversies which, over time, the city had with Erice brought about the acquisition of Town Council autonomy on the 3rd of December 1948.

Crucifix Cave



Sanctuary



Monsignor Rizzo





## Landscape

Visitors to Custonaci are captivated by its landscape and the extraordinary beauty of the views which can be admired from the observation points. From the Belvedere of the Angelo Messina gardens, next to the Town hall, there is a captivating view of Mount Erice in the south,

and sweeping ones gaze to the north, Mount Cofano rising majestically over the bay of Cornino. The Sanctuary which overlooks the town, is framed by the mountainous complex Sparacio with the white geometric incisions of the Perlato quarries which gives the landscape a

particular connotation linked to the main economy of the town. Colours and views which at twilight assume particular effects due to the colour of the rocks and vegetation which in the valley is rich with the beauty of the cultivations of olive trees and vines.

View of Mount Erice



RNO Mount Cofano



Cerriolo Park





## Nature

The territory possesses extraordinary characteristics connected to the Riserva Naturale Orientata di Monte Cofano - Oriented Nature Reserve of Mount Cofano and the mountainous complex of Sparacio which encloses different examples of vegetation: the prairie of *Ampelodesma* and the garrigue areas with the dwarf palm and the presence of

strips of Leccio (*Quercus ilex*). The numerous endemisms, including the *Brassica drepanensis*, the *Euphorbia bivonae*, the *Hieracium cophanense* and the *Delphinium emarginatum* define fine naturalistic conditions, especially in Spring when it is possible to see the wild orchids flower. These areas fall into the zones of

European Community interest SCI and ZPS (IBA) for bird protection. In fact the Peregrine falcon, kestrel, buzzard, the raven, the wild dove and the common seagull live here. The Fossa della Bufara - Bufara pit, a dolina caused by the subsiding of the limestone rocks underneath, è clear expression of the karstic origins of the territory.

*Ampelodesma tenax*



*Chamaerops humilis*



Dolina della Bufara







## Traditions

Scurati is a small village overlooked by a line of rock, an extension of Mount Cofano, along which there are natural caves and sheltered areas some of which were used by shepherds. In this suggestive scenery, the Grotta Mangiapane - Mangiapane cave, the largest of all the

caves, holds inside a tiny village characterised by a long corridor paved with stones and pebbles. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Mangiapane family built five small, two storey houses, a storeroom and two stables there; other rooms were made, closing off the end of the cave, and

a large oven was built. Outside some small houses were built, and a smaller cave was used to house the sheep. The family lived there until 1950: today the village is used for the Museum and Living Nativity Scene. The Rumena cave, near the Forgia stream, was also used as housing.

Living Museum



Living Museum, room



Living Museum, the weavings





## Religion Remembrance Bonds

The Madonna di Custonaci, patron saint of various municipalities separated from Erice, holds today the identity of the population of the Erice area. The Sanctuary was, for centuries, a destination for pilgrims coming to pay homage to the Madonna who, according to tradition, arrived by sea on a Venetian or French boat,

which had avoided shipwreck and landed at Cala Bukutu. This legendary event is evoked on the Monday before the last Wednesday in August during the celebrations in honour of Madonna, with the arrival of a sailing boat and the carrying ashore of a copy of the famous painting in the bay illuminated by fireworks

and numerous worshippers many of whom follow the sacred image in a torch lit procession to the Sanctuary. It was a secular custom, strongly desired by the people of Erice and opposed by the inhabitants of Custonaci to transport the painting of the Madonna up to the top of the Mount San Giuliano every year.

Debarcation Madonna of Custonaci



Madonna of Custonaci procession



Madonna of Custonaci Festivities





A graceful Madonna in trono con il Bambino, incoronata da Angeli - Madonna on a throne with child, crowned by angels, is the first image on which the cult of the so called Madonna di Custonaci was based: painted on a wooden panel around 1460, she has a cape decorated with pod shaped vases full of ears of wheat. The apse of the Sanctuary

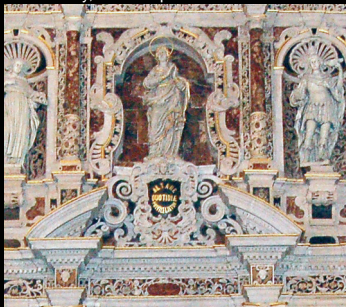
holds the painting, and the most splendid baroque plastic-architectural sacred furnishings in the Trapani area: a large marble tribune decorated with the Immacolata in marble from the XVII century and by four wooden statues (about 1770) by Pietro Calamela from Trapani. Also noteworthy in the Sanctuary are the frescoes by Domenico La

Bruna, the paintings by Giuseppe Felici (first half of XVIII century) and the pictorial decoration by Carlo Righetto (1900). To great effect is the wooden engraved and painted choir (XVIII century). Also interesting: a tablet attributed to the workshop of Antonello Crescenzo (first half of XVI century) and a wooden altar piece (XV-XVI century).

Madonna on a throne with child



Sanctuary, marble apse



Sanctuary, wooden choir







## Archaeology

**I**n the territory of Custonaci there are caves which were inhabited from prehistoric times. Slivers of obsidian and flint and fragments of ceramics which are all over the surface of the caves indicate the presence of man from extremely ancient times. The grotta Mangiapane - Mangiapane cave, about 70

metres high and 50 deep, explored in 1870 by the Marquis Dalla Rosa and in 1925 by the Frenchman Vaufrey, was inhabited by man from Upper Palaeolithic times. From the same period are the fossils, cave paintings and lithic material in the Buffa Cave and the linear incisions inside Miceli cave. The remains

of a necropolis from the bronze age can be found in Tuono district and the ruins of a Roman bridge in Linciasella. The presumed identification of the Greek city of Eraclea, in the remains found on Mount Cofano, are unconfirmed by scientific research and remains, for the moment, simply a hypothesis.

Mangiapane Cave



Miceli Cave



Roman Steps





## Monuments

The sanctuary with late sixteenth century origins, is the most representative monument of the town, an ancient place of cult worship and a pilgrimage destination; the façade with an ogival arched doorway and rose windows and the neo-Gothic interior are the expression of the last restructuring at the beginning of the twentieth

century. The monumental stairway and the flooring of the churchyard paved with characteristic cobble stones are of great decorative effect. Dotted around the countryside are bagli (from the Arabic bahal, courtyard), rural fortified structures, characterised by an internal courtyard. Situated in a dominating position, they had areas destined for use as

seasonal accommodation for the owner, and for agricultural use. Along the coast which flanks Mount Cofano are situated: The San Giovanni Tower, part of the sixteenth century defence circuit, the chapel of the Crocefisso (crucifix), the Cofano tower, with a star layout and the remains of a tonnara (tuna fish warehouse).

Sanctuary, paving of churchyard



Baglio



Tonnara di Cofano, tower





## Museums Science Education

The ex - “Casa del pellegrino e convento dei francescani” - “Pilgrim house and monastery of the Franciscans”, a building attached to the Sanctuary, has become a museum which is one of the most interesting in the Erice area for its collection of liturgical treasures, silverware and works linked to the cult of the Madonna di Custonaci, including the

wooden aedicule with Madonna in trono con Bambino - Madonna on a throne with child, by a Sicilian engraver from the end of the XV century beginning of the XVI century. Also exhibited are some procession standards, wooden statues, ex voto, paintings, portraits. Noteworthy is a historic relic: the elegant and robust chest in decorated wood,

used for the transport - to and from Erice - of the precious painting now in the Sanctuary. Designed by priest Carlo Peraino, it was made by the cabinet maker Giuseppe Loretta (1831). Another cultural institution is the Biblioteca Comunale Municipal library with a patrimony of 14,412 volumes, which in summer promotes Una Biblioteca sul Mare - A Library on Sea.

Casa del Pellegrino Museum



Casa del Pellegrino Museum, vara



Municipal Library







## Typical produce

Custonaci is the first marble basin in Sicily, the second in Italy and Europe covering 62 km<sup>2</sup>, and is of great importance geologically but also from an economic point of view. Today the Pietra di Custonaci - Custonaci stone is exported all over the world. The libeccio antico - a polychrome marble with different shades of red has

been used since medieval times and covers important buildings such as the Reggia di Caserta (Palace of Caserta) and the Basilica of St Peter in Rome. After the second world war, thanks to industrialization, Custonaci assumed an important role on the international stage thanks to the Perlato di Sicilia, the second most sold marble in the world after

the white marble of Carrara. It is a fossiliferous limestone from the lower Cretaceous period and has a light ivory base, with brown swirls and beautiful splashes of pure calcspar and it is mainly extracted in the south-east zone of Mount Cofano. Other types of marble extracted here are: Perlantino di Sicilia, Botticino, Avorio venato, Brecciato, Libeccio.

Marble quarries



Marble quarries



Tuff stone Quarries





## Wine and food

The gastronomy is the typical gastronomy of Trapani where the flavours of the sea mix with those of the countryside: starting with couscous of Arab origin, made from bran dressed with fish broth; bass, sargo, mullet, various types of fish, roast or “a ghiotta”- cooked in a dripping pan

or fried; tuna also conserved in salt (tunnina), using all parts of the fish including the eggs (bottarga) and the interiors, treated opportunely. The traditional cuisine of the countryside includes dishes of strong flavours and unmistakable aromas like pasta with *Trapanese pesto*, *busiate*,

twisted strips of pasta, dressed with pork stew, the *ricotta cassatelle* in broth, goatling and lamb roast with laurel and rosemary or cooked in a dense tomato sauce, always accompanied by a fine local wine. Typical cakes and pastries include fried *ricotta cassatelle*, *spincie*, *pignolata* and the *mandorlata*.

*Busiate*



Local cheese



*Spincie*





## Shows and events

Custonaci is animated all year round. In the suggestive Mangiapane cave, periodically two ethnological events of great interest are held, the Presepe Vivente - Living Nativity Scene at Christmas and the Museo Vivente - Living Museum in summer, both of which re-evolve moments of daily life of the beginning of the twentieth century in the Erice area. The

actors are real craftsmen, farmers, shepherds, women and children and sellers who repeat ancient gestures and make ancient trades now no longer existing come back to life. Inside the little village, workshops and domestic scenes are reproduced using original utensils and tools. In the Christmas period, the museum is enriched with the nativity scene in the heart of

the cave. The appointments with the Musical-Theatre-Dance group, the Spincia Fest and Degustando la busiata - Tasting the busiata (pasta), and also the celebrations honouring Maria SS di Custonaci with lo Sbarco - the Landing, and the festa di San Giuseppe with the characteristic Invito - Invitation, are also looked forward to.

Mangiapane Cave, Living Nativity



Mangiapane Cave, Living Museum



Spincia Fest







## Entertainment, sport and free time

The bay of Cornino, an ancient marine village of Custonaci, has a suggestive sandy inlet, frequented in summer by numerous bathers who, attracted by the crystalline water, have chosen this line of coast as the place for their holiday home. The splendid sea, awarded the European Blue Flag in 2001, is also perfect

for boat excursions while the great number of fish in the sea attract those who love fishing. From the bay of Cala Bukutu, a trekking route begins which goes from the Riserva Naturale Orientata Monte Cofano and allows the observation of San Giovanni tower (XVI century), the chiesetta del Crocefisso - small

church of the Crucifix, a place of pilgrimage on the last Friday in March, the cave of the same name above it, and the ex-tonnara (tuna fish warehouse) of Cofano. Some sporting associations and a Diving club promote excursions, tournaments, championships and races in various disciplines.

Angelo Messina gardens



Angelo Messina gardens



Bukutu Cove





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REGIONE SICILIANA  
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Provincia Regionale  
di Trapani



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