

Mazara del Vallo



Welcome





Mazara is...

In a strategic position at the centre of the Mediterranean, between the European and African continents, Mazara has always been a destination for conquest. On the mouth of the river Mazaro, which crosses the city, rises the canal port on which the activity of the largest fishing fleet in Italy is based. The city is always a crossroads, a

privileged point of cultural and commercial exchange. In this sense, the city's openness to others and its multiethnicity is written in its history and is still seen today in its large Tunisian community. The numerous civil and religious buildings to admire in the historic centre show the cultural influences that have involved

the city. Absolutely not to be missed is the Dancing Satyr, an extraordinary bronze sculpture from the Hellenistic period, found in the Strait of Sicily. Nearby the interesting naturalistic sites of the lake Preola and Gorgi Tondi Integrated Nature Reserve and the Paludes of Capo Feto and Margi Spanò are to be found.

Dancing Satyr



Canal Port



RNI Lake Preola and Gorgi Tondi





History

The town developed from Phoenician times on the left hand bank of the Mazaro river; - in Phoenician Mazaro means stronghold, castle - the role of fortress or outpost was given to the city by the Greek Selinunte, to defend its western frontiers. To remember her function as chief town of the biggest Wal

(valley) in Arab Sicily, in 1862 it was given the name Mazara delVallo. Nothing remains of the fervid and prosperous Islamic period, but the cultural influence can be seen in the intriguing urban area. Under the Normans it was seat of one of the most ancient bishops' residences and in 1097 Ruggero held

the first Parliament. Today Mazara tells its story through the quarters, the canal port, the religious complexes, the ancient buildings and it boasts the illustrious figures of San Vito, the juror Imam-Al Mazari, the doctor and scholar Gian Giacomo Adria and the sculptor Pietro Consagra.

Canal Port



Norman Arch



Cathedral, Count Ruggero





Landscape

The landscape of the Mazara territory, crossed by the Mazaro and Delia rivers, is quite rich and diversified, with the sea and its coastlines and the river Mazaro with the canal port. For the variety of geomorphologic aspects and the presence of human settlements, the countryside alternates between hills,

marshland, lakes, streams, *sciare* (in Arab, dry land) where a xerophyte vegetation of dwarf palms prevails: at intervals, there are towers, *bagli* (rural fortified structures), stone quarries - the *Grotte di San Cataldo* are fascinating - mills, small churches, hypogeums (Miragghianu district), necropoleis dug into the

rock (Roccazzo district). Dotted around the plains of the *deccachi* (flat topped hills), among crops and vines, there are *bagli* and towers in the fertile countryside of Mazara. The *bagli*, majestic fortified structures with an internal courtyard are typical rural architectural structures of the whole of the territory of the province of Trapani.

View of Canal Port



RNI Lake Preola and Gorgi Tondi



Miragghianu, caved tombs





Nature

The *Riserva Naturale Integrale Lago Preola e Gorghi Tondi* - Integral Nature Reserve of Lake Preola and Gorghi Tondi is a wetland characterised by the absence of contact with the sea, with small lacustral depressions, flat *sciare* (dry land) and woodland scrub of great interest for the vegetation and the birdlife.

The area for about 100 hectares is covered in thick marsh vegetation typical of the coastal Mediterranean, lightly salted ponds. The strips of wood with *Quercus ilex* and *Quercus colliprinus* are of great importance for the landscape. The *Paludi di Capo Feto e Margi Spanò* - Paludes of Capo Feto and Margi Spanò make up a

very particular natural area, with a large depression, separated from the sea by a long sandy strip of land which in winter is filled with sea water while in summer becomes partially dried out; the vegetation is made up of a rare combination of various vegetation typical of sandy and wet or highly salted areas.

Capo Feto Reserve



RNI Lake Preola and Gorghi Tondi



RNI Lake Preola and Gorghi Tondi





Traditions

According to ancient popular belief, some spaces in the city and the river Mazaro have magical powers able to influence man and nature. The Arabs called the Mazaro river *Wadi al Wagnun*, river of the spirits, as they were unable to explain the volcanic phenomenon of the quick lowering or heightening of

the waters. The space around the cathedral in ancient times was called *u firriatu*, that is to say, the place where they did the *firriari*, making horses affected with intestinal colic turn around three times to invoke the protector Sant'Eligio (Sant'Aloi) in the hope that their pain would diminish. The *pozzo delle*

fate - fairy well is to be found in the Pilazza Courtyard, from which one could obtain coins, on the condition that a single person pulled the bucket: this was impossible as, once it reached the top, the bucket became extremely heavy and could not be pulled out without the help of others.

Mazaro River



Piazza Courtyard





Religion Remembrance Bonds

During the last week in August, the city celebrates the Patron Saint San Vito, dedicating numerous celebrations, historical reenactments, concerts, fireworks and processions including the one which takes place before sunrise, in torchlight - the earliest in Italy- which ends with a

firework display named *jocu di focu a diunu*, and the final one over the sea. The painting by Sebastiano Conca depicting the *Madonna del Paradiso*, co-patron saint of the city, is an object of great devotion and celebrations for the Madonna take place in mid July. Suggestive and spectacular is the *Aurora* -

Dawn, meeting between the statues of the Madonna and resurrected Christ which, on Easter morning ends the rites of Holy Week in an exultation of crowds, voices, movement and sound. The name comes from the custom, now no longer in use, to celebrate the rite at the first light of day.

San Vito Festivity



Madonna del Paradiso



Aurora





Art

The churches are real treasure chests of art, above all the Cathedral, a real triumph of decoration and artwork: from the Hellenistic sarcophaguses to the sculptures by Domenico, Antonello and Antonino Gagini - including the imposing group of the *Trasfigurazione* by Antonello and Antonino (1535) - to

the paintings by Giambecchina. Extremely fine works also include the medieval fresco depicting *Cristo Pantocrator* (XIII-XIV century), and the thirteenth century wooden painted cross. A statue of *Santa Caterina*, a fine work by Antonello Gagini (1524) is kept in the church of the same name. Paintings and

frescoes by Tommaso Sciacca from Mazara (XVIII century) decorate the interior of the fine church of San Michele with stuccoes by Bartolomeo Sanseverino. The statue of San Vito (1771) is by Ignazio Marabitti, and stands in the centre of the Piazza della Repubblica, the ancient *Piano Maggiore*.

Cathedral, Transfiguration, Gagini



Cathedral, Painted wooden cross



San Vito, Marabitti





Archaeology

Under the terrace in front of the church of *San Nicolò Regale* there are the remains of a Roman building with thermal rooms, walls with frescoes and mosaic floors, dating from between III and V century A.D. in which the figure of a young running deer is particularly notable. Other archaeological findings

in the *palazzo dei Cavalieri di Malta* document the various phases of the life of the city: Punic areas, datable to the end of the IV century B.C, and structures from Arab and Norman times. Outside the urban centre, various findings of knives, burins and flint blades show the presence of man in the

territory from the stone age; in Roccazzo district there are signs of a Aeneolithic hut (III millennium B.C.) and the remains of caved tombs dug into the rock, a common type particularly in the Bronze age, as shown by more findings in other areas of the surrounding countryside of Mazara.

San Nicolò Regale, mosaics



Finds from Roccazzo



Mirabilia urbis





Monuments

Among the monuments, the ones which draw most attention are the monastery complexes, many of which were restructured in the XVII and XVIII centuries, giving Mazara a great Baroque period: the complexes of Santa Caterina, San Michele, San Francesco, Santa Veneranda and the church and college

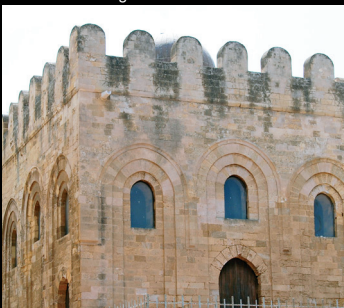
of the Jesuits. It is, however, the cathedral which dominates for its size and importance: built by Count Ruggero, parts of the walls of the transept and the external structure of the apse decorated with blind arcades remain. One of the oldest churches is *San Nicolò Regale*, a splendid beauty of Norman times from which

remains an ogival arch of the castle which Ruggero had built. In addition to the *Sant'Egidio* church (XV-XVI century), the present seat of the regional museum of the Satyr, the *Palazzo Vescovile* (XVI-XIX century) and the *Seminario dei Chierici* (XVIII century) which dominate the main square are noteworthy.

Cathedral



San Nicolò Regale Church



Santa Veneranda Church





Museums Science Education

The most well known of the museums is that of the Satyr which holds an extremely rare example of a bronze Greek statue from the IV century B.C. discovered in March 1998 by a fishing boat from Mazara in the Strait of Sicily: it represents a young satyr with pointed ears, dancing deliriously with the left leg lifted, the body turned and the arms open

wide. The Diocesan Museum holds sacred paraments and liturgical furnishings in gold and silver of extraordinary beauty, dating from the XIV to the XIX century, mostly from the cathedral. The College of the Jesuits is the usual seat of the Civic Museum (at present allocated at the San Bartolomeo church) which is organised in archaeological, medieval and

contemporary sections with a collection of works by Pietro Consagra. The library of the *Seminario Vescovile* and the municipal library boast a notable patrimony of volumes with diverse special archives. The ornithological museum, a scientific-cultural destination, is an interesting collection of ornithology - taxidermy situated in the via SS. Salvatore.

Diocesan Museum



Municipal library



Ornithological Museum





Typical produce

The typical produce is linked to the secular marine vocation of the city; the local craftsmen create tools for fishing of various types, including nets and *nasse* (baskets that fish cannot get out of once they have entered them), and also bread baskets and baskets. In Mazara a number of boatyards exist

which specialise in the construction of hulls in wood and iron of medium tonnage, and which also offer nautical products and services. Some companies work in the ice production sector. These traditional activities are flanked by the handcrafting of iron, wood and artistic ceramics; small factories

produce furniture, paint and building products. Qualified companies devote themselves to the making of uniforms, clothing and complete supplies for institutions and factories, and craft laboratories work in the sewing sector. It is also easy to find typical, Tunisian, handmade articles in Mazara.

Canal Port



Nassarolo (fishing basket maker)



Fishing nets





Wine and food

Protagonist of the local gastronomy is naturally the infinite variety of fish which is offered roast, fried, baked *a ghiotta* (soup) and also salted, or as a condiment to delicious first courses. In Mazara like in all the coastal areas of the province of Trapani, the typical dish is *couscous*, of clear Arab influence, made

from bran steamed and dressed with fish broth. Real delicacies are all the pastries and cakes of Sicilian tradition. The Benedictine nuns of the convent of San Michele, following ancient recipes, produce fine pastries, including the *muccunetti*, small balls of almond pasta (marzipan) filled with pumpkin

conserve and covered in icing sugar. Wine production is also notable and there is a rich production of olive oil, cereal, fruit and citrus fruit. There are also numerous fish conservation and oenological factories. The milling industries and pasta production have reached national and international dimensions.

Fish market



Couscous



Muccunetti





Shows and events

The Estate Mazarese - Mazara Summer, has a busy calendar of events: various types of music, theatre performances, tournaments and sporting competitions, a *Rassegna Cinematografica* - Cinema Review in the open air. From the first to the sixth of August, on the

San Vito seafront, the traditional *Fiera di San Salvatore* takes place. In October the *Festa della Borgata Costiera* takes place, which is part of the promotional activities of the territory, of its artistic -cultural- traditional resources and of the local

food and wine with tasting of typical products. The programme of events during the Christmas period is particularly rich; typical and highly appreciated are the traditional carols of the *novene di Natale* in front of votive aedicules.

La Padellata





Entertainment, sport and free time

The entertainment and sporting possibilities are numerous: sandy beaches like San Vito and Tonnarella, or rocky beaches like Quarara, offer pleasant bathing and are equipped with bathing stations. In the extraordinarily transparent sea, mini cruises can be taken and aquatic

sports like surfing, kite-surfing, sailing and scuba diving can be practiced, promoted by clubs, circles and a subaquean centre. Mazara has municipal structures like the stadium, a gym, and also an Olympic sports ground equipped for clay pigeon shooting, and a provincial fencing centre. If

one prefers horse riding, tennis or ice-skating, there are private facilities specialising in these disciplines. It is also pleasant walking in the town centre or along the sea front, the most important areas for nightlife which boast well known discotheques.

Mazzini sea front



Tonnarella beach



Quarara coastline





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