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*Amber Road Tours*  
Unique small group cultural journeys

## **Ragusa Ibla, Sicily**

Buongiorno Antonella,

Situated in the Iblean hills, Ragusa is one of the most picturesque and unique towns in all of Sicily. Tangled alleyways and stone houses are etched into the hillside below the “new” town, *Ragusa Superiore*, and the remarkably preserved and restored “old” town, *Ragusa Ibla*, is a Baroque architecture lover’s dream. The winding road leading down the ravine to Ragusa Ibla affords sweeping views of the old town and the Valley of Bridges, and upon first glimpse, Ragusa Ibla could even be mistaken for a medieval hill town in Tuscany or Umbria. Upon closer inspection, best achieved by exploring on foot the narrow streets and sun-drenched piazzas of the town’s heart, visitors will find that it is decidedly Baroque in its orientation with the Duomo of San Giorgio as its central masterpiece.



A defining characteristic of Ragusa, and how it came to be a city divided into two parts, is the massive earthquake which occurred in 1693 that caused widespread devastation in eastern Sicily. It was the most powerful earthquake recorded in Italian history and killed more than half the population of Ragusa. The Ragusa seen today dates almost entirely to 1693. After the earthquake, inhabitants couldn’t agree on where to rebuild the town. Some town members built a new town where Ragusa Superiore stands today, and the other half of the population opted to rebuild on the original site, at the bottom of the gorge, which is

now Rabusa Ibla.



Ragusa Ibla may look familiar to fans of the TV Series, *Inspector Montalbano*, a Sicilian detective drama where many of the scenes of the fictional town *Vigata* are filmed. The cathedral of San Giorgio, Piazza Duomo and the neoclassical *Circolo di Conversazione* are featured prominently behind the scenes as the inspector's stomping grounds.



The *Circolo di Conversazione* was once a gathering place for Ragusan aristocrats to discuss current affairs. The nobility wanted a private locale where



they could meet, away from the common *Ragusani*.

One example of Ragusan aristocracy that is still active in everyday Ragusan life is the Arezzo family. Their *Palazzo Arezzo di Trifiletti* remains a wonderfully preserved and fully functional family home. The Arezzo first settled in Sicily in the 12th century, in Siracusa, and later relocated from Noto to Ragusa in the 17th century. The Baron Carmelo Arezzo purchased the noble palace where his descendants still reside today. The Palazzo was rebuilt after the earthquake and completed in the 19th century. Seeing firsthand the finely frescoed ceilings, the hand painted tiles on the floor of the grand ballroom, and striking views of the Piazza Duomo and Cathedral of San Giorgio during a private tour, contributes to a truly unique experience. Enjoying tea and snacks in the Palazzo's lush, private garden after the tour is an unforgettable bonus and highlight.



**Circolo di Conversazione - Interior**



**Circolo di Conversazione - Library**



**Palazzo Arezzo Trifiletti**



**Palazzo Arezzo Trifiletti - Ballroom**

Noble palazzos and ornate baroque balconies aren't the only offerings of a visit to Ragusa. The regional cuisine presents some variation to the fish and seafood so prevalent in other parts of Sicily. With a long, mild growing season and fertile land, the province of Ragusa provides much of Sicily's produce: almonds, olives and grapes, local honey, carob, and large, sweet Giarratana onions grow well here. One of the island's most

popular wines, the full-bodied red Cerasuolo di Vittoria DOCG, is produced here. This area has one of the highest populations of cattle in Sicily, and the regional cows' milk cheese, *caciocavallo ibleo* or *ragusano* is still processed using traditional methods.

Learn more about our Sicily Tour!

Let's make a traditional Sicilian dish, *Arancine*:



Arancine recipe from Ciccio Sultano, a Michelin Starred Chef at the restaurant *Duomo* in Ragusa:  
Makes 20 arancine balls.

#### **Ingredients**

1.1 lbs of Vialone Nano or Carnaroli rice  
5 ½ cups of water  
½ tsp saffron  
2 tbsp butter  
2.5 tsp salt (taste and adjust, if necessary, when the rice is half cooked)  
1.5 cups of aged Ragusano (*caciocavallo*) cheese, cut into small cubes  
2 cups of durum wheat bread crumbs

#### **Sauce**

1.1 lbs of ground beef (or lean pork)  
3.5 oz. of tomato paste  
7 oz. fresh tomato puree  
¾ cups of chopped onion  
1 clove garlic  
1 sprig of rosemary, 2 bay leaves, and thyme  
Salt, nutmeg and black pepper to taste

#### **Batter**

1 ¼ cups of water  
2 cups of wheat flour "00"

#### **Method**

##### **Rice**

Cook the rice as a risotto, so toast it in melting butter before adding boiling water. When water is halfway absorbed add saffron and stir. Pour the rice on a clean surface and add black pepper. Knead the rice for three minutes, then let cool.

##### **The sauce**

Sauté onion, garlic and rosemary, add ground meat, tomato paste dissolved in water and fresh tomatoes, add a pinch of salt and cook 2 hours over low heat until you get a thick sauce.

##### **The batter**

Gradually add *water to the flour*, mixing constantly, until smooth.

### ***Forming the Arancine***

Put a scoop of rice in your palm (approximately ½ cup) and form a cavity in which to place a little sauce (¼ cup) and a few cubes of cheese. With the other hand take some rice and place on top to form a ball. Let stand in refrigerator for half an hour, to firm up the rice. Dip in the batter and roll in bread crumbs. Then fry in vegetable oil for 10 minutes at 375 degrees F. until it reaches an intense golden color. The centers will be very hot so use caution when biting into them. **Buon Appetito!**

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