

2024-2025 Edition

An Incredibly Concise Guide for Your Stay in Messina

Written informally by Nicola Polloni to
ease your academic stay in town



Welcome to Messina

Messina –the ancient Zancle – is a city with a rich history dating back to the 8th century BCE. Today, Messina is a fascinating modern town where contemporary architecture blends seamlessly with medieval historical buildings. Natural events have not been kind to Messina: a series of devastating earthquakes – the last in 1908 – destroyed much of the old town. However, part of it has been carefully restored or reconstructed.

Despite the destruction (further exacerbated by WWII bombings), Messina has remarkably recovered, and over the past decade, it has emerged as one of the most captivating yet underrated cities in Southern Italy. Messina is also home to one of the oldest universities in Italy and its vibrant academic community.

This short guide will provide useful information for your stay – whether for a conference, a research visit, or any other occasion to dive into some wild medieval philosophy together!

Getting to Messina

From Villa San Giovanni

If you arrive at Aeroporto dello Stretto (in Reggio Calabria) or travel by train from the mainland, you'll disembark in Villa San Giovanni, a small town facing Sicily. From there, you will need to take a ferry to Messina. Depending on where you want to go in Messina (the city center or the northern part of the city), you have two options:

Caronte&Tourist (<https://carontetourist.it/en/caronte>). This ferry will take you to the C&T dock in the northern part of Messina (see the [map](#))

BlueJet (<https://www.blujetlines.it/>). This ferry will take you to the main port of Messina, which is very close to the train station (see the [map](#))

Please note that the two ferries depart from different docks. BlueJet's dock is directly in front of the train station (on the coast side), while Caronte's dock is about a 15-minute walk from there; turn right after exiting the station (coast side). You can purchase tickets at offices near the re-

spective docks or via the Caronte App (if you plan on using their services). The trip takes about 30 minutes and offers stunning views of the Messina Strait and the beautiful coastline on both sides.

From Catania

If you land in Catania, you may prefer to travel to Messina by train. Catania Airport has a train station, although it is about a 10-minute walk from the airport (see the [map](#)). You will likely need to disembark at Catania Centrale and transfer to another train bound for Messina Centrale. You can plan your itinerary on the Trenitalia website (<https://www.trenitalia.com/en.html>), or even better, download the Trenitalia App, where you can both plan your trip and purchase tickets.

Keep in mind that regional train tickets (i.e., all tickets except for high-speed trains such as Freciarossa and Intercity) do not include seat reservations. If you are using a paper ticket, it **must be validated** at a machine in the station. For virtual tickets purchased via the Trenitalia App, you must validate them within the app before the train's scheduled departure – even if the train is running late.

There are also coaches available from Catania Airport directly to Messina (Sais Autolinee). You can find more information at the following URL: <https://www.saisautolinee.it/en>.

From Palermo

If you land in Palermo, the trip to Messina will take a bit longer (about 2 hours and 40 minutes by either train or bus from Palermo Centrale). First, you will need to reach the main train station from the airport. You can do this either by train (which runs approximately once per hour) or by coach service (Prestia e Comandè), with information available directly at the airport.

Once you arrive at Palermo Centrale, you can either take a train directly to Messina or walk a few minutes to the coach station, located just behind the train station, and take a bus. The coach company is Sais Autolinee, and you can purchase a ticket through their website/app or directly when boarding, provided seats are available.

If you opt for the train, do not forget to **validate**

your ticket. For paper tickets, use a validation machine at the station. If you have a virtual ticket from the Trenitalia App, it must be validated in the app before the train's scheduled departure – even if the train is delayed.

In Messina

Getting to the department

It's very likely that whatever we have to do together will take place at my department, the **Dipartimento di Civiltà Antiche e Moderne** (Department of Ancient and Modern Civilizations), also known by its acronym, DICAM.



View of the Department

The department is located in the Campus Annunziata, specifically at Viale Giovanni Palatucci 13, on the northern hillside of Messina. Once you arrive on campus, you cannot miss the department's beautiful light-blue glass building (see picture above).

Although it is possible to walk there from downtown Messina, it would take over an hour, so depending on where you are staying, your best option is to either take a bus or call a taxi.

Two bus lines serve the campus: **Line 23** (uphill) and **Line 22** (uphill). Both stop at the Museo bus stop and follow Viale Annunziata all the way up to the campus (see the [map](#)). You can board the bus at any of the stops along the way. If you are coming from downtown Messina, you can either walk to the Museo stop or take Line 1 (direction Torre Faro) or the tramway from the train station, getting off at the Museo stop.

Confusing, right? The easiest way to navigate

Messina's bus system is to download the **ATM App**, the official app of the local transportation authority. It provides useful information to help plan your trip, and most importantly, allows you to purchase your bus ticket. Remember to validate your ticket once you board: for paper tickets, use the validation machine, and for app-based tickets, click the "validate" button in the app.

If you prefer taking a **taxi**, you can either call one or find one at a taxi stand (for example, in front of the train station). Keep in mind that taxis do not stop if you wave them down on the street. You can request a taxi service by calling the following number: +39.090.6505 (Radio Taxi Jolli Messina). There are other taxi services in Messina, but this is among the most reliable. Depending on where you are located and the time of day (night fares are higher), a taxi from the city center to the department will cost around 20 euros, more or less. That is why taking the bus is usually the better option.

Accommodations

Messina is neither Rome nor Palermo, so accommodation options are somewhat limited. Below, you will find a list of accommodations near the department (which are not very close to the city center) and a list of accommodations downtown (which, in turn, are not very close to the department). Depending on your preferences and needs, you can choose one of these options.

Please note that I am not endorsing any of these accommodations, and I am unfamiliar with their services, prices, or overall quality. I have simply focused on their location. Before making a reservation, you might want to check reviews on Booking.com to see how they have been rated by previous guests.

Close to the department

Not necessarily at walking distance, though.

B&B Villa Agrumé

Via Luigi Einaudi 10

Villa Scilla e Cariddi

Viale Annunziata - angolo Via G.A. Bosurgi, 20



Antonio Joli, Il porto e la città di Messina visti da Borgo San Leo, olio su tela, sec. XVIII

B&B Bonlet

Località Santissima Annunziata, 4

Residence Annunziata

Viale Annunziata 91/A

B&B Regina 381

Viale Regina Elena, 381

Al Papergatto

Viale Regina Elena, 40/A

In the city centre

Hotel Royal Palace

Via Tommaso Cannizzaro 3

Hotel Messenion

Via Faranda 7

Hotel Sant'Elia

Via I Settembre 67

Hotel CineApollo

Via San Filippo Bianchi 23

Feeling hungry?

Currently, there is only one café/restaurant on campus (with more expected to open soon). It is located quite close to the department, as shown on the [map](#). There are also vending machines

available in the department. However, if you are looking for restaurants, bars, or bakeries, you will need to walk a few minutes downhill.

What to eat in Messina

While in Messina, be sure to try some of the local delicacies. Sicily is renowned for its great food and unique flavours, and the Messina Strait is particularly famous for its swordfish. Some dishes you may want to sample include **arancino** (pl. arancini), a deep-fried rice ball traditionally filled with meat sauce or ham and cheese; **pitone** (pl. pitoni), a large deep-fried pastry with various fillings; and **involtini di pesce spada** (swordfish rolls filled with breadcrumbs). For dessert, there is **pignolata** (you may want to look online for a detailed description). Do not miss out on other Sicilian specialties like granita, pasta alla Norma, pistachios, and more. The [map](#) includes suggestions for places and restaurants where you can explore these culinary delights.

What to see in Messina

There are many things worth visiting in Messina, and the following is a list of must-see attractions. However, it is not comprehensive.

Cathedral of Messina

Dating back to the 12th century, the cathedral was reconstructed after the earthquake. The Bell Tower houses one of the largest astronomical clocks in the world (be there at noon).

Fountain of Orion

A splendid 16th-century fountain by Giovanni Angelo Montorsoli.

Santissima Annunziata dei Catalani

A masterpiece of Arab-Norman architecture and one of the oldest buildings in Messina.

Messina Regional Museum

A unique museum with a vast archaeological and artistic collection, including works by Caravaggio and Antonello da Messina.

Fountain of Neptune

Another remarkable fountain by Montorsoli, depicting Neptune.

Church of San Francesco

One of the city's oldest churches (13th century), known for its Gothic architecture.

Sanctuary of the Madonna di Montalto

This church offers one of the best panoramic views of Messina.

Ganzirri

A picturesque village between two small lakes and the sea, famous for its excellent fish restaurants.

Faro di Capo Peloro

Located at the northeastern tip of Sicily, it provides an unforgettable view of the Messina Strait.

Wandering Around the Messina Area

If you are feeling overwhelmed by your academic work and need a break, there are many amazingly unique places you can visit on a day trip from Messina. Here is a brief list of what I believe you should not miss.

The Volcano

Mount Etna is very close to Messina and offers a truly one-of-a-kind experience. It is by far my favourite place in Sicily (and one of my favourite places in general), and I strongly encourage you to go and feel like an explorer on extraterrestrial lands. However, it is not the easiest place to reach, so check online for more information.

The Aeolian Islands

More volcanoes, stunning beaches, and charming coastal villages – that is the allure of the Aeolian Islands (Lipari, Vulcano, Salina, Stromboli, Filicudi, Alicudi, and Panarea). There are direct ferries from Messina to Vulcano and Lipari, but their frequency depends on the season (check online for schedules). Alternatively, you can head to Milazzo (about 30 minutes from Messina by train),



Antonio Joli, Il porto e la città di Messina visti dal mare, olio su tela, sec. XVIII

where ferries to the islands are more frequent.

Scilla

Located across the Messina Strait, Scilla is a picturesque fishing village that has been wonderfully preserved. It is absolutely worth a visit. You can take a ferry from the Caronte dock to Villa San Giovanni, and from there, a short 10-minute train ride to Scilla. While there, be sure to try the famous swordfish sandwich and granita di bergamotto, two local specialties.

Taormina

There is not much I can add about Taormina, being such a well-known destination. It is an easy trip from Messina by train. A few tips: (1) When you arrive at the Taormina train station, you can either wait for a bus to take you uphill or hike up yourself – a challenging yet rewarding experience. (2) Avoid visiting during the high season, especially on weekends. (3) The Naxos archaeological site is close to Taormina and is definitely worth a visit.

Catania

An intriguing city built from volcanic rock, Catania is close to Messina by direct train. Its vibrant city centre unfolds around the Catania Cathedral. Do not miss the Ursino Castle and its fascinating museum, and make sure to try authentic pasta alla Norma while you are there.

Other Places to Explore

There are so many beautiful places near Messina that it is impossible to list them all. Beyond the ones mentioned, you might also want to consider **Savoca**, **Itala**, **Santo Stefano di Camastra** (for traditional pottery), **Milazzo**, **Reggio di Calabria** (especially the museum housing the famous **Bronzi di Riace**), the **Gole dell'Alcantara**, and **Cefalù** (a bit farther away, around 2 hours by train). If you are up for an overnight trip, you can reach Syracuse and Palermo by direct train and further explore western and southern Sicily.

Final pieces of information

The European emergency number is **112**. By calling it, you can reach the police, emergency health services, and all other life-saving services. If you need anything else, feel free to call me anytime (I assume you have my phone number).

Be especially cautious when crossing the streets in Messina. Sicilian drivers have a ‘peculiar’ driving style, which may differ significantly from what you are used to in Northern Europe or North America. Do not expect drivers to automatically stop at zebra crossings. Be extra careful in areas where sidewalks are narrow.

While Messina is not a dangerous city, it is wise to be vigilant when using public transportation, especially if you plan to visit nearby tourist hotspots like Taormina, Syracuse, Catania, or Palermo. Always keep an eye on your belongings and never leave them unattended.

Updates

You can check for updated versions of this guide and the [map](#) I have prepared for you at the following URL: <https://potestas-essendi.com/visiting-messina/>