

GIOIOSA GUARDIA PLACE OF HISTORY AND NATURE

Sicily, of the 20 Italian regions, is the one that most possesses a history and a tradition that has made Italy great.

Gioiosa Guardia, in the Province of Messina, is a fine example of this since it offers a fascinating look at our past.

It is located on **Mount Meliuso** at about 800 meters above sea level. Its position indeed served well its purpose as a watch tower (hence the name “guardia”) against pirate incursions, which were regrettably frequent during the Middle Ages.

The church seen in our video, San Francesco (Saint Francis), besides being a place of worship, also served this purpose until the population was forced to flee the site. However, the video also shows the ruins of the actual watch tower higher up. It also shows several antique communications antennae!

From here one takes in a magnificent view of Capo d’ Orlando to the west, Milazzo to the east, the Aeolian Islands to the north and Mount Etna, the highest volcano in Europe, towards the south.

It was founded in 1364 under the reign of Frederic III of Aragon but subsequent excavations have discovered the remains of an antique Greek settlement on this site. The objects yielded by these excavations can be seen at the Antiquarium of the new town of Gioiosa Marea, as the images show.

Unfortunately, the town was later abandoned because of an **earthquake** in 1783 and an **invasion of locusts** one year later. The inhabitants fled to the coast, founding the above-mentioned town of Gioiosa Marea. Many of the sacred objects and paintings recovered from the Church of San Francesco can be admired at the Sacred Art Museum at the same location.

FLORA

Its vegetation is very rich and varied and it is part of what is defined the Thermo-Mediterranean Zone. Here we find cork trees (*Quercus suber*) and many plants, such as heather (*Erica arborea*), broom (*Ginestra spinosa*), myrtle (*Myrtus communis*) and ilex (*Quercus ilex*).

FAUNA

Once the realm of bears, deer and roe, this area is now home to mammals, reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates and many species of birds.

Among the mammals we can observe warthogs (*Sus scofa*), foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*), the wildcat (*Felis silvestris*), the weasel (*Mustela nivalis*) and the rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*). The mammals seen in the video, though they are not part of the location's wildlife, are certainly wild at times!

Among the reptiles one may encounter the common tortoise (*Testudo hermanni*), the natrix (*Natrix natrix*) and the coluber (*Hierophis viridiflavus*).

Speaking of amphibians, the area boasts the Sicilian emerald toad (*Bufo siculus*) and the common frog (*Rana esculenta*).

Many types of birds are observable also, among which there are the falcon, the kestrel and the sparrow-hawk.

Among the invertebrates of course we find the butterfly, many species of which are here and throughout the Nebrodi Park area, of which Gioiosa Guardia is a part. Some of these species can only be found here in Sicily.

EXTINCT WILDLIFE

Unfortunately, as almost everywhere in the world, man has done his best to ruin our natural treasures, therefore we must sadly list a few of our animal friends who are no longer with us. We thus remember the deer (*Cervus elephus*), the wolf (*Canis lupus*) and the eagle-owl (*Bubo bubo*).

The last survivor of the griffin was killed in the 1960s.

Although we have concluded on this sad note, we hope you have enjoyed this very brief description of one of Sicily's artistic treasures. Please come and visit us (better in the summer), we would greatly look forward to it!

TEACHER MICHELE LUIGI SOTTILE and his class 5B Art School