

# Sicily



More of a sugar-spiked espresso than a milky cappuccino, Sicily will reward you with an intense bittersweet experience rather than anything lightweight and frothy. In Sicily it seems as though the sun shines brighter, the shadows are darker, and life is lived full-on and for the moment. Overloaded with art treasures, undersupplied with infrastructure and continuously struggling to thwart Mafia-driven corruption, Sicily possesses some baffling social topography. Brace yourself to reconcile architectural beauty with modern squalor, artistic excellence with moral ambivalence and the rational with the sensual. This is an island to be visited with an open mind – and a healthy appetite; one factor remains a constant, and that is the uncompromisingly high quality of the cuisine.

After some 25 centuries of foreign domination, Sicilians are heirs to an impressive cultural legacy, from the refined architecture of Magna Graecia to a beguiling, if contradictory, artistic fusion of Arab craftsmanship and Norman austerity. This complexity of culture is matched by a startling diversity of landscape that includes bucolic rolling countryside, a smouldering Mt Etna, kilometres of aquamarine coastline and a tiara of island gems.

Today, Sicily's new generation is loathe to remain trapped in the past. New ventures are seeing aristocratic entrepreneurs prising open the doors of some of Europe's finest *palazzi* and villas, while sensitive *agriturismi* (farm-stay accommodation) are shedding light on Sicily's hidden rural treasures and national parks. Sicily also has a refreshing lack of neon-blazing entertainment and theme parks, which further helps preserve its individuality and appeal.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Bargain with the fish vendors at dawn, climb Europe's most active volcano in the afternoon and enjoy Sicily's best nightlife in constantly buzzing **Catania** (p793).
- Soak up the sun and hike to your heart's content as you island-hop across the seven stunningly beautiful **Aeolian Islands** (p778)
- Marvel at the majesty of **Segesta** (p829), whose perfectly preserved Greek temple sits in splendid isolation on a windswept hillside
- Shop till you drop in **Taormina** (p789), or ply the limpid waters in the sparkling coves below
- Test the legendary acoustics of Dionysius' Ear, then settle in for an evening of classical drama at the fabled Greek amphitheatre in **Syracuse** (p808)
- Get that end-of-the-earth feeling amid the black volcanic cliffs, domed *dammusi* and brilliant blue waters of **Pantelleria** (p831).



■ POPULATION: 5 MILLION

■ AREA: 25,708 SQ KM

## History

Sicily's list of invaders features all the usual suspects: Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Byzantines, Spaniards and, more surprisingly, the Normans with their delightful Monty Python-style names (King Roger, William the Bad, Walter the Archbishop...).

The island's most deeply ingrained cultural influences, however, originate from its first inhabitants – the Sicani from North Africa, the Siculi from Latium (Italy) and the Elymni from Greece in the south. The subsequent colonisation of the island by the Carthaginians (also from North Africa) and the Greeks, in the 8th and 6th centuries BC respectively, compounded this cultural divide through decades of war when powerful opposing cities, such as Palermo and Catania, struggled to dominate the island.

Although inevitably part of the Roman Empire, it was not until the Arab invasions of AD 831 that Sicily truly came into its own. Trade, farming and mining were all fostered under Arab influence and Sicily soon became an enviable prize for European opportunists. The Normans, desperate for a piece of the pie, invaded in 1061 and made Palermo the centre of their expanding empire and the finest city in the Mediterranean.

Impressed by the cultured Arab lifestyle, King Roger squandered vast sums on ostentatious palaces and churches and encouraged a hedonistic atmosphere in his court. But such prosperity – and decadence (Roger's grandson, William II, even had a harem) – inevitably gave rise to envy and resentment and, after 400 years of pleasure and profit, the Norman line was extinguished and the kingdom passed to the austere German House of Hohenstaufen with little opposition from the seriously eroded and weakened Norman occupation. In the centuries that followed, Sicily passed to the Holy Roman Emperors, Angevins (French), Aragonese (Spanish) and Austrians in a turmoil of rebellion and revolution that continued until the Spanish Bourbons united Sicily with Naples in 1734 as the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. Little more than a century later, on 11 May 1860, Giuseppe Garibaldi planned his daring and dramatic unification of Italy from Marsala.

Reeling from this catalogue of colonisers, Sicilians struggled in poverty-stricken conditions. Unified with Italy, but no better off,

nearly one million men and women emigrated to the USA between 1871 and 1914 before the outbreak of WWI.

Ironically, the Allies (seeking Mafia help in America for the reinvasion of Italy) helped in establishing the Mafia's stranglehold on Sicily. In the absence of suitable administrators, they invited the undesirable *mafiosi* Don Calògero Vizzini to do the job. When Sicily became a semi-autonomous region in 1948, Mafia control extended right to the heart of politics and the country plunged into a 50-year silent civil war. It only started to emerge from this after the anti-Mafia maxi-trials of the 1990s, which led to important prosecutions against members of the massive heroin and cocaine network between Palermo and New York, known as the 'pizza connection'.

Today most Sicilians continue to be less than enthralled by an organisation that continues to grow rich on money from the illegal drugs trade, human trafficking and – that old, ubiquitous cash-flow booster – extortion and protection which, experts say, many businesses in Sicily still pay. At least the thuggery and violence of the 1980s has diminished and there have been some important arrests (see boxed text, p761). The 2008 conviction of Sicilian governor Salvatore Cuffaro based on his alleged ties to Cosa Nostra (an unimaginable scenario in years past) has also served to encourage those who would speak out against Mafia influence.

## Dangers & Annoyances

Although it's unlikely that you'll be subjected to a Mafia shoot-out at your favourite pizzeria, there *is* petty crime here, particularly in Palermo, with pickpockets and bag-snatchers most notably in the marketplaces. Car theft is also a problem in the city, so use private, guarded car parks if possible.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

An increasing number of airlines fly direct to Sicily – although most still require a transfer in Rome or Milan. **Alitalia** ([www.alitalia.com](http://www.alitalia.com)) is the main carrier. See **p772** and **p890** for further details.

### BOAT

Regular car and passenger ferries cross the strait between Villa San Giovanni (Calabria) and Messina. Hydrofoils connect Messina with

## TRAIPSING ROUND THE TRIANGLE

**One Week / Syracuse / Catania**

Start in **Syracuse** (p808): one of the great cities of the ancient world, where traces of Magna Graecia are everywhere in evidence, from papyrus-fringed **Fontana Aretusa** (p809) to the amphitheatres, altars and caves of the **Parco Archeologico** (p809). Sicily's countless layers of history continue to reveal themselves as you head inland, first in the terraced baroque architecture of **Ragusa** (p816) then in the dazzling Roman mosaic floors at **Villa Romana del Casale** (p818), where bikini-clad gymnasts and wild African beasts prance side by side.

The history-fest just gets better heading west. Nowhere in Italy is there such a dramatic concentration of Greek temples as in the archaeological sites of **Agrigento** (p818), **Selinunte** (p822) and **Segesta** (p829). Next, sidle through the salt marshes to **Trapani** (p825), and savour the influence of nearby north Africa with a meal of seafood couscous before climbing to the medieval hilltop village of **Erice** (p828) for stunning views down to the wild coastline of **Riserva Naturale dello Zingaro** (p829).

Sicily's most exotic city, **Palermo** (p761), will lure you in with its ebullient **street markets** (p766) and the splendid mosaics of the **Capella Palatina** (p766). From here, detour into the mountainous reaches and stone villages of **Parco Naturale Regionale delle Madonie** (p774) before dropping back through fragrant citrus groves to the seashore at captivating **Cefalù** (p776).

Floater over to the **Aeolian Islands** (p778), a land of capers, ancient volcanoes and fabulous hikes. Walk through six millennia of ancient history at Lipari's **archaeological museum** (p779) or revel in the mystical fireworks of **Stromboli** (p785), an eternal lava-lamp that lights up the sky and sea nightly.

Start winding down with a little shopping and swimming in picturesque **Taormina** (p789). At sundown, gaze across at **Mt Etna** (p806) and start daydreaming about your final day, either forging up the volcano's smoky slopes or circumnavigating it by train. Finally, devote your last evening to the cosmopolitan pleasures of **Catania** (p793), the Sicilian city that never sleeps.



Reggio di Calabria. See the Getting There & Away sections of Messina (p788) and Reggio di Calabria (p753).

Sicily is also accessible by ferry from Naples, Genoa and Cagliari, as well as from Malta and Tunisia. Prices are at their most expensive between June and September. Tickets can be booked through the companies' respective websites or at travel agencies. In summer you may need to book several weeks in advance. Offices and telephone numbers for the ferry companies are listed in the Getting There & Away sections of the relevant cities.

**Grandi Navi Veloci** (☎ 091 58 74 04; [www.gnv.it](http://www.gnv.it))

Daily ferries from Genoa to Palermo and weekly from Tunis to Palermo.

**Grimaldi Ferries** (☎ 081 49 64 44; [www.grimaldi-ferries.com](http://www.grimaldi-ferries.com)) Operates a twice-weekly service from Tunis to Palermo.

**Siremar** (☎ 091 749 31 11; [www.siremar.it](http://www.siremar.it) in Italian) Local operator with services from Palermo to Ustica, Palermo and Milazzo to the Aeolian Islands, Trapani to the Egadi Islands and Pantelleria, and Porto Empedocle (Agrigento) to the Pelagic Islands.

**Tirrenia** (☎ 02 263 028 03; [www.tirrenia.it](http://www.tirrenia.it)) The main company servicing the Mediterranean. Routes include a weekly ferry from Cagliari to Palermo and a daily ferry from Naples to Palermo.

**TTT Lines** (☎ 081 575 21 92; [www.tttlines.it](http://www.tttlines.it), in Italian) Based in Naples, TTT Lines has a daily car ferry from Naples to Catania.

**Ustica Lines** (☎ 0923 87 38 13; [www.usticalines.it](http://www.usticalines.it)) Hydrofoil from Naples, Palermo and Cefalù to the Aeolian Islands, Reggio Calabria to Messina, Trapani and Marsala to the Egadi Islands, and Porto Empedocle (Agrigento) to the Pelagic Islands.

**Virtu Ferries** (☎ 095 53 57 11; [www.virtuferries.com](http://www.virtuferries.com)) Runs a daily high-speed hydrofoil service between Malta

## OUR TOP FIVE WALKS IN SICILY

- **Stromboli** (p785) Watching the sun sink into the sea and anticipating the evening fireworks as you climb towards the summit.
- **Riserva Naturale dello Zingaro** (p829) Snaking in and out of dramatic coves along the trail through Italy's oldest nature reserve.
- **Fossa delle Felci** (p783) Watching extinct volcanoes lined up in perfect formation from the summit of Salina Island's highest point.
- **Riserva Naturale di Torre Salsa** (p822) Squishing sand between your toes and watching for birds on the long, wild strand of Torre Salsa beach.
- **Mt Etna** (p806) Sniffing for sulphur and feeling the earth's heat under your feet as you ascend towards the craters of the 3329m-high summit.

and Pozzallo, just south of Syracuse, and up to four daily services in July and August.

## BUS

Major companies that run long-haul services from Rome or Naples to Sicily include **Interbus** (☎ 0935.50 27 11; [www.inte rbus.it](http://www.inte rbus.it)).

## TRAIN

Direct trains run from Milan, Florence, Rome, Naples and Reggio di Calabria to Messina and on to Palermo, Catania and other provincial capitals – the trains are transported

## OUR TOP FIVE SICILIAN FILM LOCATIONS

- **Pollara** (p783) This dramatically sited town on Salina Island was where Pablo Neruda philosophised with a humble postman in *Il Postino* (1994).
- **Teatro Massimo** (p767) The grandiose front steps of this theatre were site of the grisly climactic scene in *The Godfather, Part III* (1990).
- **Cefalù** (p776) The tangle of medieval streets in this Tyrrhenian coastal town formed part of the backdrop for *Cinema Paradiso* (1989).
- **Stromboli** (p785) The Aeolian Islands' most famous volcano presided over the scandalous romance between Ingrid Bergman and Roberto Rossellini and lent its name to their 1949 film *Stromboli*.
- **La Martorana** (p765) In *The Talented Mr Ripley* (1999), this church in Palermo served as a last-minute stand-in for director Anthony Minghella's intended shooting location in Venice.



## SICILIAN GODFATHER ARRESTED

Bernardo Provenzano, Italy's reputed number one Mafia boss, was arrested in Sicily on 11 April 2006 after more than four decades on the run. Provenzano's nickname was *Binnu u tratturi* (Bennie the tractor) because, in the chilling words of one informant: 'he mows people down'. Bernardo was captured when some 50 policemen swooped on a farmhouse in the countryside near Corleone. The police were able to pinpoint Provenzano's exact location by the most mundane of means: they tracked a delivery of clean laundry from his family to the farmhouse hideout.

Provenzano, who had reputedly been on the run longer than any other criminal, was condemned to life imprisonment for more than a dozen murders, including those of two of Sicily's top anti-Mafia magistrates, one of whom was Paolo Borsellino. Until his arrest, the only known photographs of Provenzano were taken during the 1950s. The authorities had claimed to have been 'close' to locating the Mafia boss on numerous occasions over the previous 10 years, declarations that had been greeted with a certain degree of scepticism – after all, how could a man remain undetected for such a long time, especially on a relatively small island such as Sicily? It is, rather, believed that 'Uncle Bernie', as he is known to his friends, had a tacit understanding with the Italian authorities, under which he was not harassed. Indeed, the very fact that his predecessor, Totò Rina, was finally arrested at his home address after supposedly being also 'on the run' for nearly 20 years, lends credence to this theory.

from the mainland by ferry from Villa San Giovanni.

## Getting Around

### AIR

Palermo's Falcone-Borsellino is the hub airport for regular domestic flights to Pantelleria and Lampedusa. Local carriers Alitalia, Meridiana and Air One offer a good choice of flights. Tickets can be bought online, at the airport or through any travel agent.

### BUS

Bus services within Sicily are provided by a variety of companies. Buses are usually faster if your destination involves travel through the island's interior; trains tend to be cheaper (and sometimes faster) on the major coastal routes. In small towns and villages tickets are often sold in bars or on the bus.

### CAR & MOTORCYCLE

There's no substitute for the freedom your own vehicle can give you, especially when getting to places not well served by public transport. The roads are generally good and autostradas connect most major cities. There's a cheap and worthwhile toll road running along the Ionian coast. Drive defensively; the Sicilians are some of the most aggressive drivers in Italy and have a penchant for overtaking on blind corners with a mobile phone in one hand while gesticulating wildly with the other!

### TRAIN

The coastal train service is very efficient. Services to towns in the interior tend to be infrequent and slow, although if you have the time the routes can be very picturesque.

**Trenitalia** ([www.trenitalia.com](http://www.trenitalia.com)) is the partially privatised train system. IC trains are the fastest and most expensive, while the *regionale* is the slowest. All tickets must be validated via a machine on the platform or in the station before you board the train.

## PALERMO

pop 663,200

Palermo is a city of decay and of splendour and – provided you can handle its raw energy, deranged driving and chaos – has plenty of appeal. Unlike Florence or Rome, many of the city's treasures are hidden, rather than scrubbed up for endless streams of tourists. Be prepared to explore: this giant treasure trove of palaces, castles and churches has a unique architectural fusion of Byzantine, Arab, Norman, Renaissance and baroque gems. Palermitans themselves have inherited the intriguing looks and social rituals of their multicultural past. Life here is full on: a very public, warm-hearted and noisy affair.

While some of the crumbling *palazzi* bombed in WWII are being restored, others remain dilapidated; turned into shabby apartments, the faded glory of their ornate



## PALERMO

0 500 m  
0 0.25 miles

## INFORMATION

|                                 |   |    |
|---------------------------------|---|----|
| Nettuno Embassy .....           | 1 | C3 |
| Ospedale Civico .....           | 2 | B6 |
| Tourist Information Booth ..... | 3 | C3 |
| Tourist Office .....            | 4 | A3 |

## SIGHTS &amp; ACTIVITIES

|                                        |          |
|----------------------------------------|----------|
| Cappella Palatina                      | (see 13) |
| Chiesa della Concezione                | 5 A4     |
| Chiesa di San Giovanni degli Eremiti   | 6 A6     |
| Complesso di Santa Maria dello Spasimo | 8 D4     |
| Galleria Regionale Siciliana           | 9 C4     |
| Giardino Garibaldi                     | 10 A3    |
| Hammam                                 | 11 D4    |
| Museo Internazionale dell'Arte         | 12 D4    |
| Palazzo Chiaramonte Steri              | 12 D4    |

|                            |          |    |
|----------------------------|----------|----|
| Palazzo dei Normanni ..... | 13       | A5 |
| Teatro Politeama           |          |    |
| Garibaldi .....            | (see 24) |    |

## SLEEPING

|                                 |    |    |
|---------------------------------|----|----|
| Al Giardino dell'Alloro .....   | 14 | C5 |
| Albergo Aniston .....           | 15 | B3 |
| Grand Hotel et des Palmes ..... | 16 | B3 |
| Hotel Orientale .....           | 17 | C5 |

## EATING

|                             |    |    |
|-----------------------------|----|----|
| Antico Caffè Spinnato ..... | 18 | B3 |
| Il Baretto .....            | 19 | B3 |
| Kursaal Kalhesa .....       | 20 | A3 |

## DRINKING

|                             |    |    |
|-----------------------------|----|----|
| Antico Caffè Spinnato ..... | 18 | B3 |
| Il Baretto .....            | 19 | B3 |
| Kursaal Kalhesa .....       | 20 | A3 |

## ENTERTAINMENT

|                                  |              |
|----------------------------------|--------------|
| Lo Spasimo .....                 | (see 7)      |
| Teatro Politeama Garibaldi ..... | <b>24</b> B3 |

## TRANSPORT

|                                      |    |    |
|--------------------------------------|----|----|
| Auto Europa .....                    | 25 | C3 |
| Avis .....                           | 26 | C3 |
| Azienda Siciliana Trasporti .....    | 27 | C6 |
| Bus to Airport and Local Buses ..... | 28 | C6 |
| Bus to Mondello .....                | 29 | B3 |
| Bus to Monreale .....                | 30 | A5 |
| Cuffaro .....                        | 31 | C6 |
| Ferry Terminal .....                 | 32 | C3 |
| Grandi Navi Veloci .....             | 33 | B2 |
| Grimaldi Ferries .....               | 34 | C3 |
| Intercity Bus Station .....          | 35 | C6 |
| Rent a Scooter .....                 | 36 | B3 |
| SAIS .....                           | 37 | C6 |
| Segesta .....                        | 38 | C6 |
| Siremar .....                        | 39 | C3 |
| Tirrenia .....                       | 40 | C3 |



## EXPRESS TRAINS ITALY–SICILY

For travellers originating in Rome and points south, InterCity trains like the *Archimede* and the *Peloritano* cover the distance from mainland Italy to Sicily in the least possible time, without a change of train. If coming from Milano, Bologna or Florence, your fastest option is to take the ultra-high-speed *Frecciarossa* as far as Naples, then change to the *Archimede* for the rest of the journey. Night trains like the *Freccia del Sud*, the *Gattopardo*, the *Bellini* and the *Trinacria* will still get you there fast – but without taking such a big bite out of your budget.

| Route         | Fastest (cost €) | Fastest (duration hours) | Cheapest (cost €) | Cheapest (duration hours) |
|---------------|------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|
| Milan-Catania | 174/124          | 13¾                      | 52.60             | 17½                       |
| Milan-Messina | 166/119          | 12                       | 51.10             | 15¾                       |
| Milan-Palermo | 184/131          | 15                       | 81.70             | 19½                       |
| Rome-Catania  | 69/50            | 9¾                       | 36.90             | 10¾                       |
| Rome-Messina  | 63/46            | 8                        | 32.80             | 9                         |
| Rome-Palermo  | 80/58            | 11                       | 50                | 12¼                       |

facades is just visible behind strings of brightly coloured washing. The evocative history of the city remains very much part of the daily life of its inhabitants, and the dusty web of backstreet markets in the old quarter has a tangible Middle Eastern feel.

The flip side is the modern city, a mere 15-minute stroll away, parts of which could be neatly jigsawed and slotted into Paris with their grid system of wide avenues lined by seductive shops and handsome 19th-century apartments.

At one time an Arab emirate and seat of a Norman kingdom, Palermo became Europe's grandest city in the 12th century but, in recent years its fame (or notoriety) has originated mainly from headline-grabbing assassinations and political corruption. The Mafia still maintains a stranglehold on the city; many of the judges require 24-hour police surveillance and protection pay-offs remain commonplace.

## SICILY FERRY CROSSINGS

| Route                              | Cost (€)<br>adult seat/car | Duration<br>(hours) |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| Genoa-Palermo                      | 102/27                     | 19                  |
| Malta-Pozzallo                     | 87/70                      | 1½                  |
| Naples-Catania                     | 38/75                      | 11                  |
| Naples-Palermo                     | 47/79                      | 10                  |
| Naples-Trapani<br>(hydrofoil only) | 90                         | 7                   |
| Reggio di<br>Calabria-Messina      | 1.50/23                    | 35min               |
| Tunis-Palermo                      | 44/70                      | 10                  |

## ORIENTATION

Palermo is a large but manageable city. Via Maqueda is the central street, extending from the train station in the south through Via Ruggero Settimo to the grand Piazza Castelnovo in the north. Here it turns into Viale della Libertà, a wide leafy boulevard marking the start of the city's modern district.

The intersection known as the Quattro Canti (Four Corners) divides the historic centre into four traditional quarters that contain the majority of Palermo's sights.

## INFORMATION

### Bookshops

Several newsstands around Piazza Verdi sell foreign newspapers.

**Feltrinelli** (Map p764; ☎ 091 78 12 91; Via Cavour 133)

Great bookshop with city maps, guides and a foreign-language section.

### Emergency

**Ambulance** (☎ 091 30 66 41)

**Police station** (Map p764; ☎ theft & lost documents 091 21 01 11, foreigners office 091 656 91 11; Piazza della Vittoria) For reporting theft and other petty crimes.

### Internet Access

There are countless internet points in the old centre, particularly around Via Maqueda where they double as phone centres for the city's immigrant population.

**Aboriginal Café** (Map p764; ☎ 091 662 22 29; www.aboriginalcafe.com; Via Spinuzza 51; per hr €3.50; ☎ 9am–3am) A lively Australian-style bar and internet cafe.





**INFORMATION**

|                                |    |    |
|--------------------------------|----|----|
| Aboriginal Café.....           | 1  | B1 |
| Delfino Blu.....               | 2  | D4 |
| Farmacia Inglese.....          | 3  | A1 |
| Feltrinelli.....               | 4  | B1 |
| Police Station.....            | 5  | A4 |
| Post Office.....               | 6  | C2 |
| S Tagliavia.....               | 7  | B1 |
| Tourist Information Booth..... | 8  | B1 |
| Tourist Information Booth..... | 9  | C4 |
| Tourist Information Booth..... | 10 | A4 |

**SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES**

|                                        |    |    |
|----------------------------------------|----|----|
| Cathedral.....                         | 11 | A4 |
| Chiesa di San Cataldo.....             | 12 | C4 |
| Civica Galleria d'Arte<br>Moderna..... | 13 | D4 |
| Fontana Pretoria.....                  | 14 | C3 |
| La Martorana.....                      | 15 | C4 |
| Mercato del Capo.....                  | 16 | A2 |
| Mercato della Vucciria.....            | 17 | D2 |
| Mercato di Ballarò.....                | 18 | C4 |

|                                              |          |    |
|----------------------------------------------|----------|----|
| Museo Archeologico Regionale.....            | 19       | B2 |
| Oratorio del Rosario di San<br>Domenico..... | 20       | C2 |
| Oratorio del Rosario di Santa<br>Zita.....   | 21       | C1 |
| Oratorio di San Lorenzo.....                 | 22       | D3 |
| San Giuseppe dei Teatini.....                | 23       | C3 |
| Sant'Agostino.....                           | 24       | B2 |
| Teatro Massimo.....                          | (see 43) |    |

**SLEEPING**

|                            |    |    |
|----------------------------|----|----|
| A Casa di Amici B&B.....   | 25 | A2 |
| Centrale Palace Hotel..... | 26 | C3 |
| Hotel del Centro.....      | 27 | D4 |
| Hotel Firenze.....         | 28 | B3 |
| Hotel Gallery House.....   | 29 | B1 |
| Hotel Letizia.....         | 30 | D3 |
| Hotel Tonic.....           | 31 | B1 |

**EATING**

|                                            |    |    |
|--------------------------------------------|----|----|
| Antica Focacceria di San<br>Francesco..... | 32 | D3 |
|--------------------------------------------|----|----|

|                                                           |          |    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|----------|----|
| Bellini.....                                              | 33       | C3 |
| Caffetteria-Ristorante<br>Galleria d'Arte<br>Moderna..... | (see 13) |    |
| Casa del Brodo.....                                       | 34       | D3 |
| Les Amis.....                                             | 35       | D4 |
| Osteria dei Vespri.....                                   | 36       | D4 |
| Primavera.....                                            | 37       | B3 |
| Sant'Andrea.....                                          | 38       | C2 |
| Trattoria Basile.....                                     | 39       | B2 |

**DRINKING**

|                      |    |    |
|----------------------|----|----|
| I Grilli Giù.....    | 40 | C2 |
| Mi Manda Picone..... | 41 | D3 |

**ENTERTAINMENT**

|                      |    |    |
|----------------------|----|----|
| Cuticchio Mimmo..... | 42 | B1 |
| Teatro Massimo.....  | 43 | A2 |

**SHOPPING**

|                              |    |    |
|------------------------------|----|----|
| Casa Merlo.....              | 44 | D3 |
| Il Laboratorio Teatrale..... | 45 | B2 |

centre (Map p764; ☎ 091 605 83 51; Piazza Castelnuovo 34; ☎ 8.30am-2pm & 2.30-6pm Mon-Fri) Has friendly, multilingual staff and abundant brochures.

**Travel Agencies**

**S Tagliavia** (Map p764; ☎ 091 58 25 33; www.tagliavia.it; Via Cavour 117; ☎ 9am-12.45pm & 4-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.45pm Sat) Can book train, ferry and air tickets.

**SIGHTS****Around the Quattro Canti**

The busy intersection of Corso Vittorio Emanuele and Via Maqueda marks the **Quattro Canti**, the centre of the oldest part of town, neatly dividing the historic nucleus into four manageable sectors.

Nearby **Piazza Pretoria** is the civic heart of Palermo, where a crowd of imposing churches and buildings surrounds the ornate **Fontana Pretoria** (Map p764). This huge fountain fills the piazza with its tiered basins, supporting the sculptures, rippling in concentric circles. The city bought the fountain in 1573; however, the flagrant nudity of the provocative nymphs proved too much for Sicilian church-goers attending Mass at the grandly formal **San Giuseppe dei Teatini** (Map p764), and they prudishly dubbed it the Fountain of Shame.

Twelfth-century **La Martorana** (Map p764; Chiesa di Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio; Piazza Bellini 3; ☎ 8.30am-1pm & 3.30-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-1pm Sun) was originally planned as a mosque by King Roger's

Syrian Emir, George of Antioch. In 1433 the church was donated to an aesthetically challenged order of Benedictine nuns who demolished most of the stunning mosaics executed by Greek craftsmen and replaced them with gaudy baroque ornamentation, thus destroying the church's cohesive integrity. The few remaining original mosaics include two magnificent portraits of George of Antioch and Roger II that are well worth seeking out.

The **Chiesa di San Cataldo** (Map p764; Piazza Bellini 3; adult/concession €1.50/free; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 3.30-6pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1pm Sat & Sun) almost looks Eastern European but, disappointingly, is almost bare inside. Its main point of interest to visitors lies in the Arab-Norman style of its exterior: the dusky-pink bijoux domes, solid square shape, blind arcing and delicate tracery.

In nearby Piazza Sant'Anna, the **Civica Galleria d'Arte Moderna** (Map p764; ☎ 091 843 16 05; www.galleriadartemodernapalermo.it in Italian; adult/concession /child €7/5 /free; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Tue-Sun) is housed in a 15th-century *palazzo*, which metamorphosed into a convent in the 17th century. The wide-ranging collection of 19th- and 20th-century Sicilian art is beautifully displayed, and there's a regular program of modern-art exhibitions here, as well as an excellent bookshop and gift shop.

**Albergheria**

The austere fortified palace of **Palazzo dei Normanni** (Map p762; Palazzo Reale; ☎ 091 705 70 03;

Piazza Indipendenza 1; adult/concession incl Cappella Palatina €7/5 Tue-Thu, €8.50/6.50 Fri-Mon; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-12.30pm Sun) was once the centre of a magnificent medieval court.

On the middle level of the three-tiered loggia is Palermo's premier tourist attraction, the **Cappella Palatina** (Map p762; ☎ 091 705 47 49; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Sat, 8.30-9.45am & 11am-12.30pm Sun), designed by Roger II in 1130. Restoration work completed in July 2008 (after a small earthquake in 2002 damaged the structure) has returned the chapel to its original splendour, and the walls once again swarm with figures in glittering, dreamy gold. These exquisite mosaics recount tales of the Old and New Testaments, capturing expression, detail and movement with extraordinary grace. The harmony of the chapel's decoration is further enhanced by the inlaid marble floors and the wooden *muqarnas* ceiling, a masterpiece of honeycomb carving in Arabic style that reflects the cultural complexity of Norman Sicily. Outside the chapel, a 12th-century stone tablet affixed to the wall bears inscriptions in Latin, Greek and Arabic, further exemplifying the Normans' engagement with the island's many cultures.

South of the *palazzo* are the peaceful Norman cloisters of the **Chiesa di San Giovanni degli Eremiti** (Map p762; Via dei Benedettini; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat).

Behind the splendours of the Palazzo dei Normanni lies the contrastingly shabby, run-down district of Albergheria, once inhabited by Norman court officials and now home to a growing number of immigrants who are attempting to revitalise its dusty backstreets. This is also the location of Palermo's busiest street market, the **Mercato di Ballarò** (Map p764), which throbs with activity well into the early evening. It's a fascinating mix of noise, smells and full-on street life, and the cheapest place for everything from Chinese padded bras to fresh produce, fish and meat, plus the best and most appetising cheese selection imaginable – smile nicely for a taste.

## Capo

On 5 May 1072 the Norman 'wolf' Robert Guiscard seized Palermo, thus beginning the city's most prosperous era. Ambitious builders, the Normans gave birth to the extraordinary Arab-Norman style unique to Sicily. Chief among these is the **cathedral** (Map p764; [www.cattedrale.palermo.it](http://www.cattedrale.palermo.it); Corso Vittorio Emanuele; ☎ 7am-

7pm), an extraordinary (and enormous) feast of geometric patterns, zigurat crenulations, majolica cupolas and blind arches. The interior, although impressive in scale, is a marble shell, a sadly un-exotic resting place for the royal Norman tombs. The **crypt** and **treasury** (adult/concession €2.50/1.50; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) contain various jewels belonging to Queen Costanza of Aragón, a bejewelled Norman crown and, most bizarrely, a tooth extracted from Santa Rosalia, Palermo's patron saint.

The Capo, another web of interconnected streets and blind alleys, has its own street market, **Mercato del Capo** (Map p764), running the length of Via Sant'Agostino. Like Ballarò it is a seething mass of colourful activity during the day. You can also pop your head into the madly marbled **Chiesa della Concezione** (Map p762; Via Porta Carini; ☎ 9am-noon & 4-6pm Mon-Sat) along the way.

The centrepiece of the quarter is the imposing monastery of **Sant'Agostino** (Map p764; ☎ 7am-noon & 4-6pm Mon-Sat, 7am-noon Sun). Redecorated by the wealthy Sclafani family, the interior sports *putti* (cherubs) statues by Giacomo Serpotta, while the older cloister is decorated in a similar style to that of Monreale (p773).

## Vucciria

Architectural gems in this quarter include the **Oratorio del Rosario di Santa Zita** (Map p764; Via Squarcialupo; admission free; ☎ 9am-1.30pm Mon-Sat), the **Oratorio del Rosario di San Domenico** (Map p764; Via dei Bambinai 2; admission free; ☎ 9am-1pm Mon-Sat) and the **Oratorio di San Lorenzo** (Map p764; Via dell'Immacolata; admission €2.50; ☎ 10am-6pm). Covered in ornate stuccowork, these former social clubs for the celebs of their time are ostentatious displays of 17th-century status and wealth.

In stark contrast to this splendour, the shabby streets of Vucciria mark the chasm between rich and poor. Palermo's notorious street market, **Mercato della Vucciria** (Map p764; Piazza Caracciolo) was once known as a den of Mafia activity but is a muted affair today compared to the spirited Ballarò and Capo markets.

North along Via Roma, the **Museo Archeologico Regionale** (Map p764; ☎ 091 611 68 05; Piazza Olivella 24; adult/concession €6/3; ☎ 8.30am-1.45pm & 3-6.45pm Tue-Fri, 8.30am-1.45pm Sat-Mon), in a Renaissance monastery, displays some of Sicily's most valuable Greek and Roman artefacts. The galleries surround a gracious courtyard and display treasures from Selinunte such as a

series of decorative friezes depicting classical scenes, full of humour and energy. In one, Perseus gleefully beheads the Gorgon, and the Ceropes twins, hanging upside down, laugh at the sunburnt bum of Hercules. There's good wheelchair access.

## La Kalsa

Due to its proximity to the port, La Kalsa was subjected to carpet bombing during WWII, leaving it derelict and rundown. Mother Teresa considered it akin to the shanty towns of Calcutta and established a mission here. Thankfully, this galvanised embarrassed authorities into action and the quarter is now undergoing extensive restoration.

The arterial Via Alloro hides the wonderful **Galleria Regionale Siciliana** (Map p762; ☎ 091 623 00 11; Via Alloro 4), closed indefinitely for restoration at the time of research, whose collection includes works by Sicilian artists from the Middle Ages to the 18th century.

Just south of the gallery is the **Complessa di Santa Maria dello Spasimo** (Map p762; Via Spasimo; admission free; ☎ 8am-8pm), originally a church and convent and the only example of northern Gothic style in Sicily. Its elegant polygonal apse and tall slender nave have stood for centuries without a roof. It makes a fabulous venue for regular exhibitions and concerts in the summer.

Lovely **Piazza Marina** is lined with *palazzi* and flanked by the small but beautiful **Giardino Garibaldi** (Map p762). In contrast, the 14th-century **Palazzo Chiaromonte Steri** (Map p762; Piazza Marina; adult/concession €5/3; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2.30-6.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) has a dark past: in the 17th century it was the headquarters of the Inquisition, where heretics were routinely burnt to death.

On a more jolly note, the **Museo Internazionale delle Marionette** (Map p762; ☎ 091 32 80 60; www.museo.marionettepalermo.it, in Italian; Via Butera 1; adult/child & concession €5/3; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) houses over 3500 puppets, marionettes and glove puppets from Italy, China, India, southern Asia, Turkey and Africa. Delightful puppet shows are staged every Friday at 5.30pm. For more on Sicily's famous puppet tradition, see boxed text, p809.

## The 19th-Century City

North of Piazza Giuseppe Verdi, Palermo elegantly slips into cosmopolitan mode with some fabulous neoclassical and art-nouveau

buildings hailing from the last golden age of Sicilian architecture.

The grand neoclassical **Teatro Massimo** (Map p764; ☎ tour reservations 091 609 08 31; www.teatro.massimo.it; Piazza Giuseppe Verdi; guided tours adult/concession €5/3; ☎ 10am-2.30pm Tue-Sun) took more than 20 years to complete. Nowadays the theatre is an iconic Palermo landmark and has become a symbol of the triumph and tragedy of the city. Appropriately, the closing scene of *The Godfather: Part III*, with its visually stunning juxtaposition of high culture, low crime, drama and death, was filmed here.

**Teatro Politeama Garibaldi** (Map p762; ☎ bookings 091 605 33 15; Piazza Ruggero Settimo; ☎ performances Nov-May) is Palermo's second theatre. Designed by architect Giuseppe Damiani Almeyda between 1867 and 1874, it has the same imposing circular layout as the Teatro Massimo and features a striking facade resembling a triumphal arch topped by a huge bronze chariot.

Beyond Piazza Ruggero Settimo, the broad boulevard of Viale della Libertà is lined with late-19th-century mansion blocks. Head up here for a sybaritic experience at Palermo's **Hammam** (☎ 091 32 07 83; www.hammam.pa.it; Via Torrearsa 17d; admission €40; ☎ 2-9pm Mon-Fri, 10am-7pm Sat, men only Tue, Thu & Sat, women only Mon, Wed & Fri), a luxurious marble-lined Moorish bathhouse where you can indulge in a vigorous scrub-down, a steamy sauna and many different types of massages and therapies. There's a one-off charge (€10) for slippers and a hand glove.

## The Suburbs

The morbid **Catacombe dei Cappuccini** (☎ 091 652 41 56; Piazza Cappuccini; admission €3; ☎ 8.30am-1pm & 2.30-6pm) is home to the mummified bodies and skeletons of some 8000 Palermitans who died between the 17th and 19th centuries. Earthly power, sex, religion and professional status are still rigidly distinguished; men and women occupy separate corridors and within the women's area there's a 1st-class section for virgins. Dressed in their Sunday best, the corpses' clothes have survived better than some of the bodies themselves. This is possibly not a place to take the kiddies. From Piazza Indipendenza, it's a 15-minute walk; alternatively, catch any bus running along Via Cappuccini to the corner of Via Pindemonte, then walk one block to Piazza Cappuccini.

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Palermo's biggest annual festival, **U Fistinu**, celebrates the patron saint of the city, Santa Rosalia, with parades amid four days of partying from 10 to 15 July.

In February Sicily's oldest **Carnevale** is held in the coastal town of Termini Imerese, 26km southeast of the city en route to Cefalù with parades of decorated floats and giant papier-mâché figures.

At Easter, **Settimana Santa** (Holy Week) is the year's major religious festival, celebrated virtually all over the island. In Palermo there are Greek Orthodox celebrations at La Martorana (p765).

**Palermo di Scena** ([www.associazioneculturalechiediscena.com](http://www.associazioneculturalechiediscena.com)) is a series of music, cinema, theatre and ballet programs held throughout the summer.

During the **Festa di Morgana** ([www.museomarionetpalermo.it](http://www.museomarionetpalermo.it), in Italian), puppeteers from all over the world gather at Museo Internazionale delle Marionette. Dates vary each year, so check out the website.

## SLEEPING

Compared with the rest of Italy, Sicilian accommodation is reasonably priced. Most budget options can be found around Via Maqueda and Via Roma in the vicinity of the train station. The majority of midrange and top-end hotels are located north of the Quattro Canti. Book ahead in summer.

Parking usually costs an extra €10 to €15 per day.

## Budget

**Camping Trinacria** (☎ 091 53 05 90; [www.campingtrinacria.it](http://www.campingtrinacria.it); Via Barcarello; camp sites per adult/child/tent/car €7/6/7/4, 2-person bungalow €40-60) Situated across from the sea this camping ground has good facilities, including a pizzeria and a few plain but comfortable bungalows.

**Hotel Firenze** (Map p764; ☎ 091 784 76 45; [www.palermohotelfirenze.com](http://www.palermohotelfirenze.com); Via Candelai 68; dm/s/d without bathroom €18/30/45, s/d with bathroom 35/50) Steps away from the youthful bar scene on Via Candelai, this recently opened hostel in a converted old *palazzo* can get very noisy, but it has a nice communal kitchen and rooftop terrace to go along with basic dorms and private rooms.

**A Casa di Amici B&B** (Map p764; ☎ 091 58 48 84; [www.acasadiamici.com](http://www.acasadiamici.com); Via Volturmo 6; dm/s/d without bathroom €25/35/60, s/d with bathroom 40/70; ☎ ☎) This friendly, hostel-type place has an artsy

atmosphere, a youthful clientele and a slightly wacky owner named Claudia. It's right behind Teatro Massimo in a renovated 19th-century *palazzo*, with four lovely rooms that sleep from two to four people. Each room has a different theme, but all have high ceilings, colourful walls and 'ethnic' decor. There are shared bathrooms and a kitchen.

**Hotel Orientale** (Map p762; ☎ 091 616 57 27; [www.albergoorientale.191.it](http://www.albergoorientale.191.it); Via Maqueda 26; s €30-50, d €50-70; ☎) This *palazzo*'s arcaded courtyard, complete with rusty bicycles, stray cats and strung-up washing, is an evocative introduction to an atmospheric hotel. Rooms have wrought-iron beds, tall windows and heavy wooden furniture. Check out the lovely frescoed ceiling in the library. The cheapest rooms come with shared bathrooms. Breakfast is served at the café down the street.

**Albergo Ariston** (Map p762; ☎ 091 33 24 34; [www.aristonpalermo.it](http://www.aristonpalermo.it); Via Mariano Stabile 139; s €42-49, d €60-69; ☎ ☎ ☎) Behind a deceptively shabby exterior, this simple 6th-floor hotel in the new part of town is a great budget option, featuring bright, clean and spacious rooms equipped with private bathroom, frigobar and wi-fi. Owner Giuseppe speaks French and English. Breakfast (€2.50) is optional.

## Midrange

**Al Giardino dell'Alloro** (Map p762; ☎ 091 617 69 04; [www.giardinodellalloro.it](http://www.giardinodellalloro.it); Vicolo San Carlo 8; s €40-45, d €80-90, tr €120; ☎ ☎ ☎) This bijou B&B with flat-screen TVs, free wi-fi and walls hung with artwork from the nearby academy is a very pleasant retreat. The rooms are painted in vivid colours and there's a communal fridge for guests' use. It's tucked down a slender alley opposite a wisteria-draped wall.

**Hotel del Centro** (Map p764; ☎ 091 617 03 76; [www.hoteldelcentro.it](http://www.hoteldelcentro.it); Via Roma 72; s €60-110, d €80-130, tr €95-175; ☎ ☎ ☎) Rooms are attractively decked out with brass beds, colourful botanical prints and pale yellow walls at this pleasant hotel overlooking the trees and bustle of Via Roma. Perks include wi-fi access and double-glazed windows to keep out the street noise.

**Hotel Tonic** (Map p764; ☎ 091 58 17 54; [www.hoteltonic.it](http://www.hoteltonic.it); Via Mariano Stabile 126; s €72-90, d €88-110, ste €145-180; ☎) This townhouse hotel towards the top of town has been thoroughly revamped, while retaining attractive original features like painted tile floors and high ceilings. Two rooms are equipped for guests with disabilities, and there are four spacious suites, each



named after a famous artist (Monet, Van Gogh, Klimt and Degas).

**Hotel Gallery House** (Map p764; ☎ 091 612 47 58; www.hotelgalleryhouse.com; Via Mariano Stabile 136; s €80-110, d €100-140; (P) (♿) (🚿)) Gallery House stands out amid the clutch of hotels in this area. Rooms are furnished in warm ochres, oranges and yellows, and come with chic marbled bathrooms. Tapestries, carpets and nice wooden floors in the common areas add to the elegant feel.

**Hotel Letizia** (Map p764; ☎ 091 58 91 10; www.hotelletizia.com; Via dei Bottai 30; s €85-110, d €115-125, ste €134-150; (♿) (🚿)) This boutique hotel is situated just off lovely Piazza Marina. Rooms, while on the small side, are warmly decorated with rugs and parquet floors, plus tasteful artwork and furniture. The hotel also operates a B&B on the floor above (single/double/suite €65/85/125).

## Top End

**Centrale Palace Hotel** (Map p764; ☎ 091 33 66 66; www.centralepalacehotel.it; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 327; s €130-170, d €187-190; (P) (♿) (🚿)) This 18th-century *palazzo* is one of Palermo's most elegant hotels with a superb location in the heart of the historic centre. The hotel offers a high level of service and the rooms are comfortable, if a little corporate-looking. The restaurant is over-the-top opulent with its frescoed ceiling, geometrically patterned marble floor and twinkling chandeliers.

**Grand Hotel et des Palmes** (Map p764; ☎ 091 602 81 11; www.hotel-despalmes.it; Via Roma 398; r €225-255; (P) (♿)) The Grand Hotel, which opened in 1874, is one of Palermo's most historically fascinating hotels. Like a royal court, it has been the scene of intrigue, liaisons and double-dealings throughout Palermo's history. The grand salons still impress with their chandeliers and gigantic mirrors, while the rooms are regally luxurious. The official rates listed above are often slashed in half during slow periods; look online for special deals.

## EATING

One of Sicily's best-kept secrets is its ancient cuisine, a mixture of spicy and sweet flavours. Palermo's most famous dish is *pasta con le sarde* (pasta with sardines, fennel, peppers, capers and pine nuts). Cakes and pastries are works of art – try the *cannoli* (tubes of pastry filled with cream, ricotta or chocolate) – and, like the Spaniards, Sicilians have a penchant for marzipan. The locals are also

late eaters and restaurants rarely start to fill up until 9.30pm.

## Restaurants

### BUDGET

**our pick** **Trattoria Basile** (Map p764; ☎ 091 33 56 28; Via Bara all'Olivella 76; meals €6-10; ☎ noon-3.30pm Mon-Sat) This popular, unpretentious trattoria offers an unforgettable, authentic Palermitan eating experience. Pay first, take a number at the window for your pasta (€2 to €2.50) or main course (€3 to €4), then sidle over to the antipasti bar where you can choose three items for €2 or six items for €3.50. While enjoying your appetisers, listen for your number – they'll bellow it out (in Italian) when the rest of your food is ready. Try to avoid the really busy period between 1pm and 2pm when every workman in town is elbowing in for his plate of pasta.

**Antica Focacceria di San Francesco** (Map p764; ☎ 091 32 02 64; Via Alessandro Paternostro 58; meals €12; ☎ closed Tue) A Palermitan institution, this atmospheric, informal place is one of the city's oldest eating houses (opened in 1834). It hosted the first Sicilian parliament and was a favourite haunt of notorious Mafia boss 'Lucky' Luciano. Fixed-price menus including *cannoli* and the drink of your choice cost €6 to €12. The sandwiches (€2 to €4) are also great – try an oven-baked *Vecchia Palermo moffoletta* with cherry tomatoes, anchovies, *caciocavallo* cheese and oregano, or brave a *maritata*, the age-old Palermitan snack featuring *milza* (veal innards) and ricotta cheese.

### MIDRANGE & TOP END

**Trattoria Biondo** (Map p762; ☎ 091 58 36 62; Via Carducci 15; pizzas €5-12; meals €30-40; ☎ closed Wed) Biondo has a split personality. The trattoria side is pure Fellini film set, always crammed with congenial, noisy locals who come for Palermitan classics such as *involtini di pesce spada* (swordfish roulades) or *pasta con le sarde*. Crates of fresh produce greet you at the door, which leads to several low-ceilinged dining rooms decorated with plates, tiles and paintings. Just around the corner, Pizzeria Biondo offers the same great quality at half the price. An animated crowd fills the sidewalk tables every night for some of Palermo's finest pizza.

**Casa del Brodo** (Map p764; ☎ 091 32 16 55; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 175; meals €18-28; ☎ closed Sun) This old-fashioned place is another Palermo classic, with bow-tied wait staff and elegant red and gold tablecloths. Founded in 1890, the restaurant



is named after its heart-warming pots of *brodo* (broth), such as *macco di fave e finocchietto* (broad bean soup with fennel). There's also a soul-satisfying antipasti spread (€9).

**Primavera** (Map p764; ☎ 091 32 94 08; Piazza Bologna 4; meals €20-23; ☎ closed Mon) This Slow Food-recommended spot doesn't look like much from the outside, but the kitchen prepares excellent, authentic Sicilian stalwarts at very reasonable prices, including *risotto funghi e noci* (mushroom-walnut risotto).

**Bellini** (Map p764; ☎ 091 616 56 91; Piazza Bellini 6; pizzas €4-9, meals €20-30; ☎ closed Mon in winter) In the shadow of La Martorana, this pleasantly situated restaurant is in an ex-theatre, with tables sprawling out onto a terrace. It's justifiably touristy but the Sicilian cuisine (and ice cream) remains reliably good, and the speedy service comes with a smile.

**Les Amis** (Map p764; ☎ 091 616 66 42; Piazza San Carlo 9; meals €25; ☎ dinner Wed-Mon) A community trattoria with tasty fish and pasta dishes, Les Amis has had consistently good recommendations over the years. It's decorated in classic Italian style, with terracotta walls and peachy lighting.

**Caffetteria-Ristorante Galleria d'Arte Moderna** (Map p764; ☎ 091 617 16 31; Via Sant'Anna 21; meals €25-30; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Tue-Sun) A hidden gem in the courtyard of Palermo's modern art museum, this bright, informal and artsy cafe features a short menu of dishes like *tonno e pesce spada affumicati con mousse di formaggio fresco al finocchietto selvatico* (smoked tuna and swordfish with cheese and wild fennel mousse). If the quality-to-price ratio seems surprisingly good, that's because it's owned by the same people who run the elegant Osteria dei Vespri across the street.

**Acanto Blu** (Map p762; ☎ 091 32 04 44; Via Torreaarsa 10; meals €30-35; ☎ dinner Mon-Sat) New-town elegance together with inventive cooking make L'Acanto one of the most fashionable restaurants among the designer-chic crowd. In the summer tables are set out back on the patio and fill up around 10pm.

**Sant'Andrea** (Map p764; ☎ 091 33 49 99; Piazza Sant'Andrea 4; meals €30-35; ☎ dinner Mon-Sat) The position of this excellent restaurant is a reflection of Palermo's contradictory appeal. It's tucked into the corner of a ruined church in a shabby piazza. Sant'Andrea's well-heeled customers pick their way across the broken flagstones to enjoy creative, yet classic, dishes such as tagliatelle with lobster and almond pesto.

**Cucina Papoff** (Map p762; ☎ 091 58 64 60; Via Isidoro la Lumia 32; meals €30-35; ☎ closed Sat lunch & Sun) Specialising in Sicilian classics like *trancio di pesce in umido con capperi e olive* (slow-simmered fish stew with capers and olives), Papoff creates an intimate ambience with carved wooden ceilings, exposed brickwork and torch-style lighting.

**Osteria dei Vespri** (Map p764; ☎ 091 617 16 31; Piazza Croce dei Vespri 6; meals €40-55, tasting menu €75; ☎ closed Sun) This sophisticated Michelin-star restaurant has a stone-vaulted ceiling and intimate dining space. In the summer, sit out under the shadow of the *palazzo* and tuck into dishes such as purple potato and oregano gnocchi with porcini mushrooms, chestnuts and peppers, topped off with the deliciously calorific dark-and-white chocolate mousse with candied orange peel.

## Cafes

There are plenty of cafes with outdoor tables, where you can soothe your travel-worn spirit and linger a while.

**Antico Caffè Spinnato** (Map p762; ☎ 091 32 92 20; Via Principe di Belmonte 107-15; snacks €4-8) A sophisticated cafe dating back to 1860 located on the smart pedestrian boulevard. Sit on the vast terrace to enjoy coffees, cocktails, ice creams, sumptuous cakes and snacks.

**Il Baretto** (Map p762; ☎ 091 32 96 40; Via XX Settembre 43; salads & sandwiches €5-8; ☎ closed Sun) This tiny tearoom, wedged between expensive boutiques, is where designer-dressed women and well-oiled men with shades congregate for their light lunch or early evening chit-chat.

## DRINKING

Three of the liveliest clusters of bars are on Via Alessandro Paternostro; along Via dei Candela; and in the area around Piazza Olivella, Via Spinuzza, and Via Patania. Higher end bars and dance venues are concentrated in the newer part of Palermo. In summer, many Palermitans decamp to Mondello by the sea.

**Mi Manda Picone** (Map p764; ☎ 091 616 06 60; Via Alessandro Paternostro 59; ☎ 8pm-1am) Housed in a sumptuous 13th-century building is this stylish wine bar with brick arches, sitting pretty on the square. It hosts art exhibitions and is a good choice for getting in the mood for an indulgent night out.

**our pick Kursaal Kalhesa** (Map p762; ☎ 091 616 00 50; www.kursaalkalhesa.it, in Italian; Foro Umberto I 21; ☎ Tue-Sun noon-1.30am) Recline on plump sofas

## SICILIAN STREET FOOD

If you were taught that it was bad manners to eat in the street, you can break the rule in good company here. The mystery is simply how Palermo is not the obesity capital of Europe given just how much eating goes on! Palermitans are at it all the time: when they're shopping, on the way to work, on the way home from work, when they're discussing business, romancing...basically at any time of the day. What they're enjoying is the *buffitieri* – little hot snacks prepared at stalls and meant to be eaten on the spot, just as they were in the marketplaces of Sicily's Greek-settled cities.

Kick off the morning with a *pane e pannelle*, Palermo's famous chickpea fritters – great for vegetarians and they make a change from a sweet custard-filled croissant. Or, if it's later in the day, you might want to go for the potato croquettes, the *sfincione* (a spongy, oily pizza topped with onions and *caciocavallo* cheese) or *scaccie* (discs of bread dough spread with a filling and rolled up into a pancake). In summer, locals enjoy a freshly baked brioche filled with a type of ice cream flavoured with fruits, coffee or nougat.

From 4pm onwards the snacks become decidedly more carnivorous and you may just wish you hadn't read the following translations: how about some barbecued *stigghiola* (goat intestines filled with onions, cheese and parsley), for example? Or a couple of *pani cu'la mensa* (bread roll stuffed with sautéed beef spleen). You'll be asked if you want it '*schietta o maritata*' ('single or married'). If you choose *schietta*, the roll will only have ricotta in it before being dipped into boiling lard; choose *maritata* and you'll get the beef spleen as well. Somewhat tamer, and a favourite in Catania, are all manner of *impanata* (bread-dough snacks) stuffed with meat, vegetables or cheese, and the unique *arancino* (a deep-fried rice ball stuffed with meat, tomato and vegetables).

with silk cushions and sip a cocktail beneath the high vaulted ceilings. There's a roaring fire in winter, plus art exhibits and a bookstore with foreign newspapers. A lively unpretentious crowd is attracted by the good program of music and literary events. Meals (from €30) are served in the dining room or on the leafy patio flanked by 15th-century walls.

**I Grilli Giù** (Map p764; ☎ 091 58 47 47; Piazza Cavaliere di Malta 11) A popular cocktail bar (and restaurant) northeast of the Vucciria market. Here you can sip a long, cool drink and hip-sway to the latest DJ sounds.

Via dei Candelaï is also a short stagger of a street flanked by pubs, bars and discos catering to a younger, rowdier crowd.

## ENTERTAINMENT

The daily paper *Il Giornale di Sicilia* has a listing of what's on. The tourist office and information booths also have programs and listings.

**Lo Spasimo** (Map p762; ☎ 091 616 14 86; Via Spasimo) This cultural centre in the atmospheric, if tragic, bombed-out remains of a church (see p767) hosts art exhibitions and live concerts from May through September.

**Teatro Massimo** (Map p764; ☎ 091 605 35 80; www.teatromassimo.it; Verdi 9) Ernesto Basile's art-nouveau masterpiece stages opera, ballet and

music concerts. The theatre's program runs from October to May.

**Teatro Politeama Garibaldi** (Map p762; ☎ 091 616 79 73; Via Castrolillo 30) Another grandiose theatre for opera, ballet and classical concerts. The season runs from November to May.

**Teatro della Verdura** (☎ 091 688 41 37; Viale del Fante) A summer-only program of ballet and music in the lovely gardens of the Villa Castelnuovo.

**Cuticchio Mimmo** (Map p764; ☎ 091 32 34 00; www.figlidartecuticchio.com; Via Bara all'Olivella 95; ☎ 6.30pm Sat & Sun Sep-Jul) A charming low-tech choice for children (and adults) with fabulous hand-crafted puppets (see boxed text, p809). Visit the workshop (see below), a few doors away, where they're made.

You can also catch performances at the Museo Internazionale delle Marionette (see p767).

## SHOPPING

Via Bara all'Olivella is good for arts and crafts. Check out the puppet workshop of the Cuticchio family, **Il Laboratorio Teatrale** (Map p764; Via Bara all'Olivella 48-50). For exquisite and innovative Sicilian ceramics and pottery, stop by **Casa Merlo** (Map p764; ☎ 091 623 06 47; Via Merlo 44), which also ships abroad.

Palermo is famed for its elaborately sculptured marzipan sweets, the best of which are

produced by Antico Caffè Spinnato (p770). To stock up on Sicilian wines, check out the huge selection at Mi Manda Picone (p770).

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Air

**Falcone-Borsellino airport** (PMO; ☎ 091 702 01 11; www.gesap.it) is at Punta Raisi, 31km west of Palermo.

Several no-frills airlines operate between major European cities and Palermo. Falcone-Borsellino is also the hub airport for regular domestic flights to the islands of Pantelleria and Lampedusa.

### Boat

The ferry terminal is located off Via Francesco Crispi. Ferries depart regularly from Molo Vittorio Veneto for Cagliari and Naples. Ferries for Genoa leave from Molo S Lucia.

**Grandi Navi Veloci** (Map p762; ☎ 091 58 74 04; www.gnv.it, in Italian; Calata Marinali d'Italia) Ferries from Palermo to Genoa (€96, 19 hours, daily).

**Grimaldi Ferries** (Map p762; ☎ 091 611 36 91; www.grimaldi-ferries.com; Via Enrico Amari 8) Ferries from Palermo to Tunis (€44 to €65, 10 hours, twice weekly).

**Siremar** (Map p762; ☎ 091 749 31 11; www.siremar.it, in Italian; Via Francesco Crispi 118) Ferries (€17.35, 2½ hours, one daily) and summer-only hydrofoils (€21.55, 1¼ hours, two daily) from Palermo to Ustica.

**Tirrenia** (Map p762; ☎ 091 976 07 73; www.tirrenia.it; Calata Marinali d'Italia; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 3.30-8.45pm Mon-Fri, 3.30-8.45pm Sat, 5-8.45pm Sun) Services from Palermo to Cagliari (€52, 13 hours, one weekly) and an overnight ferry to Naples (€47, 10 hours, one daily). The office is located at the port to the right of the main entrance.

**Ustica Lines** (☎ 0923 87 38 13; www.usticalines.it) Summer-only hydrofoil service to Lipari (€38.25, four hours, two daily) and other points on the Aeolian Islands.

### Bus

The main intercity bus station is on Via Paolo Balsamo, one block east of the train station. Sicily's buses are privatised, and different routes are serviced by various companies, all with their own ticket offices in the same area.

**Azienda Siciliana Trasporti** (Map p762; AST; ☎ 091 680 00 32; www.aziendasicilianatrasporti.it; Via Rosario Gregorio 46) Services to southeastern destinations including Ragusa (€12.60, four hours, four daily Monday to Saturday, two on Sunday).

**Cuffaro** (Map p762; ☎ 091 616 15 10; www.cuffaro.info; Via Paolo Balsamo 13) Services to Agrigento (€8.10, 2½ hours, three to nine daily).

**SAIS** (Map p762; ☎ 091 616 60 28; www.saisautolinee.it; Via Paolo Balsamo 16-20) Services to Cefalù (€5, one hour, four Monday to Saturday, one Sunday), Catania (€12, 2¾ hours, at least nine daily) and Messina (€12, 2¾ hours, three to eight daily).

**Segesta** (Map p762; ☎ 091 616 90 39; www.segesta.it; Via Paolo Balsamo 26) Services to Trapani (€8.60, two hours, at least 10 daily). Also sells Interbus tickets to Syracuse (€15.30, 3¼ hours, two to three daily).

## Car & Motorcycle

Palermo is accessible on the A20-E90 toll road from Messina and the A19-E932 from Catania via Enna. Trapani and Marsala are also easily accessible from Palermo by motorway (A29), while Agrigento and Palermo are linked by the SS121, a good state road through the interior of the island.

Car hire is not cheap in Sicily (a week can cost anything from €250 to €500). It often pays to shop around and book your rental online before you leave home. One dependable low-budget choice in downtown Palermo is **Auto Europa** (Map p762; ☎ 091 58 10 45; www.autoeuropa.it; Via Mariano Stabile 6a). **Aviss** (www.aviss.com; airport ☎ 091 59 16 84; port (Map p762; ☎ 091 58 69 40; Via Francesco Crispi 115) also has a downtown branch and is among the many larger car-hire companies represented at the airport. Alternatively, the originally named **Rent a Scooter** (Map p762; ☎ 091 33 68 04; www.rentascooters.com; Via Amari 63) rents scooters starting at €27 per day.

## Train

Regular trains leave for Messina (€11 to €24, 3½ hours), Agrigento (€7.60, 2¼ hours, 11 daily) and Cefalù (€4.70, one hour, 17 daily). There are also intercity trains to Reggio di Calabria, Naples and Rome. Train timetable information is available in English at the station.

For Catania or Syracuse, you're generally better off taking the bus. There's only one direct train daily to Catania (€11.60, 3¼ hours); all the others require a time-consuming change at Messina.

## GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

**Prestia e Comandè** (☎ 091 58 63 51; www.prestiaecomande.it) runs a half-hourly bus service from the airport to the centre of town, with stops outside Teatro Politeama Garibaldi and at the train station. Tickets for the 50-minute journey cost €5.60 and are available on the bus.

Return journeys to the airport run with similar frequency and pick up at the same points.

The Trinacria Express train also runs from the airport to the train station (€5.50, one hour, half-hourly Monday to Saturday, hourly on weekends). There are plenty of taxis outside the airport but the fare for the same trip is a crippling €50.

## Bus

Palermo's orange **city buses** (AMAT; ☎ 091 35 01 11, 848 80 08 17; [www.amat.pa.it](http://www.amat.pa.it)) are frequent but often crowded and slow due to the traffic. Ask at the tourist information booths around town for a leaflet detailing the bus lines; most stop at the train station. Tickets must be purchased before you get on the bus, available from *tabacchi* (tobacconists) or AMAT booths at major transfer points. They cost €1.20 for up to 90 minutes or €3.50 for a day.

There are two small buses – Linea Gialla and Linea Rossa (€0.55 for 24-hour ticket) – that operate in the narrow streets of the *centro storico* and can be useful if you're moving between tourist sights.

For bus 389 to Monreale, head to the stop at Piazza Indipendenza.

## Car & Motorcycle

Driving is frenetic in the city and best avoided, if possible. Theft of, and from, vehicles is also a problem; use one of the attended car parks around town (€10 to €16 per day) if your hotel lacks parking.

# AROUND PALERMO

Palermo is as exhausting as it is energising, and visitors may welcome an occasional break. Three excellent excursions are to the nearby beaches of Mondello, the island of Ustica and the medieval brilliance of the mosaics at Monreale.

## MONDELLO

Set in the lee of **Monte Pellegrino** is the typical Italian beach resort of Mondello. The long, sandy beach here became fashionable in the 19th century, when people came to the seaside in their carriages, thus warranting the huge art-nouveau pier. Most of the beaches near the pier are private (two sun lounges and an umbrella cost €10 to €20); however, there's a wide swath of public beach opposite the centre

of town with all the prerequisite pedaloes and jet skis for hire. You can also rent a bike with **Ciclotour** (091 45 47 98; [www.ciclotour.it](http://www.ciclotour.it); Via Principe di Scalo; per day €10).

Given its easygoing seaside feel, Mondello is an excellent base for families. The **Splendid Hotel La Torre** (☎ 091 45 02 22; [www.latorre.com](http://www.latorre.com); Via Piano Gallo 11; s €110-158, d €145-182; P ♿ ☎ ) has every luxury, along with dramatic views and direct access to the beach. A couple of blocks inland are the much simpler **B&B Il Banano** (☎ 091 45 59 26; [www.ilbanano.com](http://www.ilbanano.com); Via Stesicoro 3; s €33-40, d €66-80) and **B&B Al Baglio** (☎ 091 684 12 75; [www.mondellobaglio.com](http://www.mondellobaglio.com); Via Gallo 19; s €60-65, d €80-90).

The waterfront is lined with snack stalls, terrace bars and restaurants, and the central Piazza Mondello has a couple of good gelaterie (ice-cream shops). Mondello's most memorable dining experience is at the classy **Charleston** (☎ 091 45 01 71; Viale Regina Elena; meals €35-40), a fairytale art-nouveau palace jutting out over the waves.

To get to Mondello take bus 806 (€1.20, 30 minutes) from Piazza Sturzo in Palermo.

## MONREALE

Inspired by a vision of the Virgin and determined to outdo his grandfather Roger II, who was responsible for the cathedral in Cefalù and the Cappella Palatina in Palermo, William II set about building the **Cattedrale di Monreale** (☎ 091 640 44 03; Piazza del Duomo; ☎ cathedral 8am-6pm, treasury 9.30am-noon & 3.30-5.30pm), 8km southwest of Palermo. The resulting cathedral is considered the finest example of Norman architecture in Sicily, incorporating Norman, Arab, Byzantine and classical elements.

The interior, completed in 1184 and executed in shimmering mosaics, depicts 42 Old Testament stories. There's a captivating naivety in the style, a complete contrast to the sophisticated realism of the Cappella Palatina. Here, the child-sized scenes depict classic storybook images: Noah's huge ark perches atop the waves, while Christ heals a leper afflicted with wildly exaggerated sores and blotches.

Outside the cathedral, the **doister** (admission €6; ☎ 9am-7pm) is a tranquil courtyard with a tangible oriental feel. Surrounding the perimeter, elegant Romanesque arches are supported by an exquisite array of slender columns alternately decorated with mosaics. The detail on each capital is different; together they represent a unique sculptural record of medieval Sicily. The capital of the 19th column on the

west aisle depicts William II benevolently offering the cathedral to the Madonna.

To reach Monreale (€1.20, 35 minutes, half-hourly) take bus 389 from Piazza Indipendenza in Palermo. A word of warning: this generally crowded bus is notorious for pickpockets.

## USTICA

Another easy overnight trip from Palermo is to the tiny volcanic island of Ustica, which became Italy's first marine reserve in 1986. This island (8.7 sq km) is actually the tip of a submerged volcano and, as a result, the surrounding waters are a feast of fish and coral, ideal for snorkelling, diving and underwater photography. In July the island hosts the **International Festival of Underwater Activities**, which draws divers from around the world. The best months in which to visit, however, are June and September when the wild coastline and dazzling grottoes can be appreciated without the crowds.

The best dive sites are the **Secca Colombara** to the north of the island and the **Scoglio del Medico** to the west. Note that Zone A of the marine reserve is a protected area. Fishing, diving and even swimming are forbidden here. For landlubbers the rugged coastline can be enjoyed from a series of coastal paths, the most scenic of which passes through pine woods up to the summit of **Guardia di Mezzo** (248m) before descending to the best part of the coast at **Spalmatore**, where you can swim in natural rock pools.

**Profondo Blu** (☎ 091 844 96 09; [www.ustica-diving.it](http://www.ustica-diving.it); Contrada Oliastrello; dive from €40, 10 dives package €330) is one of several dive centres on the island. It offers a young, enthusiastic vibe, a wide range of courses and pleasant two- and four-person apartments (€60 to €90 and €120 to €190 respectively).

## Sleeping & Eating

There are several hotels, plus *affittacamere* (rooms for rent).

**Hotel Clelia** (☎ 091 844 90 39; [www.hotelclelia.it](http://www.hotelclelia.it); Via Sindaco I 29; s €29-99, d €48-158) A neat little three-star hotel in a central location that offers bargain rates outside the busy summer season. Divers will also like their seven-night, six-dive packages starting at €384 per person.

**Schiticchio** (☎ 091 844 96 62; Via Tre Mulini; pizzas €5-10, meals €25-30) This down-home, informal restaurant serves wonderfully fresh fish along with superb pastas and pizzas.

**Ristorante Giulia** (☎ 091 844 90 07; Via San Francesco 16; meals €25-35; ☎ dinner) Near Ustica's central square, this family-run place is renowned for its seafood.

## Getting There & Around

**Siremar** (☎ 091 844 90 02; Piazza Capitano Longo 9) operates a year-round car ferry (€17.35, 2½ hours, one daily) from Palermo. From June to September two daily hydrofoils are also in service (€21.55, 1¼ hours). Siremar's ticket office is a 10-minute walk uphill from the port, in the centre of Ustica.

From June to the end of September you can also pick up the Trapani-Favignana-Ustica-Naples hydrofoil, run by **Ustica Lines** ([www.ustica-lines.it](http://www.ustica-lines.it)) three days a week. The journey from Naples to Ustica takes four hours and costs €72.40 one way.

Orange minibuses (€1) make a round trip of the island; they leave from Piazza Umberto every half-hour in summer (hourly the rest of the year). Alternatively, rental scooters are available all over town (per day €20 to €25).

# TYRRHENIAN COAST

The coast between Palermo and Milazzo is studded with popular tourist resorts attracting a steady stream of holiday-makers, particularly between June and September. The best of these include the two massive natural parks of the Madonie and Nebrodi mountains, the sweeping beaches around Capo d'Orlando and Capo Tindari, and Cefalù, a resort second only to Taormina in popularity.

## PARCO NATURALE REGIONALE DELLE MADONIE

This 40,000-hectare park between Palermo and Cefalù incorporates the Madonie mountain range and some of the highest mountains in Sicily after Mt Etna, including the imposing Pizzo Carbonara (1979m). The wild, wooded slopes are home to wolves, wildcats and eagles. Forests cover vast areas of the mountains and include the near-extinct ancient Nebrodi fir trees that have survived since the last ice age. In summer, *agriturismi* offer a good way of exploring the area and enjoying the distinctive rural cuisine, which includes roasted lamb and goat, cheeses, grilled mushrooms and aromatic pasta with *sugo* (sauce).



The park is actually an inhabited area, rather than simply a nature reserve, so you can combine walking with visits to handsome mountain towns such as **Castelbuono**, the colourful capital of the Madonie. Castelbuono has fine restaurants and excellent pastry shops such as historic **Fiasconaro** ([www.fiasconaro.com](http://www.fiasconaro.com); Piazza Margherita 10), with its exclusive hand-wrapped Mannetto sponge cakes spiked with candied fruit or chocolate. Other lovely old towns are **Petralia Soprana** and **Petralia Sottana** perched across from one another on hillsides. And in winter **Piano Battaglia** is the only place in Sicily, other than Etna, where you can ski.

## Information

The body responsible for the park is **Ente Parco delle Madonie** (☎ 0921 68 40 11; [www.parcodelle-madonie.it](http://www.parcodelle-madonie.it); Corso Paolo Agliata 16), which has its headquarters in Petralia Sottana, a branch office in Cefalù and an excellent, informative website. Another useful information source is the **Municipal Tourist Office** (☎ 0921 67 11 62; [www.comune.castelbuono.pa.it](http://www.comune.castelbuono.pa.it); Via Sant'Anna 25; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-6pm) in Castelbuono. All of these offices can provide information about transport, activities and accommodation in the park. Eggheads may enjoy the *Madonie Park Geological Guide* (€10), which includes information on the fossils and geology of the park.

## Activities

The park is ideal for hiking, cycling and horse trekking. The tourist office has a wealth of information, including a booklet, *Stones and Water* (€1), that highlights several walking trails with photos and descriptive explanations. The office can also provide you with a free map, *Madonie Itinerari nel Parco*, that highlights 15 footpaths, ranging from 3km to 16km, with details and level of difficulty (in English). Cyclists can pick up the free, glossy *Moving Landscape* brochure with its seven detailed itineraries. If you fancy a canter in the park, contact **Accademia della Stella** (☎ 339 489 63 32; [www.castelbuonotrekking.it](http://www.castelbuonotrekking.it); Via Conceria 57, Castelbuono; from €90) which organises guided treks of three to 10 days.

## Sleeping

There are several *rifugi* (mountain huts) in the park and some good B&Bs and *agriturismi*. Many hotels have their own restaurants and some only offer full or half-board.

**Rifugio Piero Merlino** (☎ 0921 64 99 95; [www.rifugiopieromerlino.it](http://www.rifugiopieromerlino.it); Piano Battaglia; B&B/full board per person €25/60) An alpine chalet in the heart of the mountains, with wood-panelled rooms and rustic decor, this place caters to all ages and has lots of info on cycling and walking in the region.

**Albergo Il Castello** (☎ 0921 64 12 50; [www.il-castello.net](http://www.il-castello.net) in Italian; Via Generale di Maria 27, Petralia Sottana; s/d/tr/q €40/65/90/115; ☎) This sweet, stone-built hotel at the top of town has simple, comfortable rooms.

**L'Antico Casale** (☎ 0921 55 11 60; [www.anticocasaleparcomadonie.it](http://www.anticocasaleparcomadonie.it) in Italian; r per person €45-50; with full board €70-80; ☎ ☎ ☎) A delightful country hotel 9km north of Polizzi Generosa, with simple large rooms, fabulous views and an excellent restaurant. Figs, apricots, oranges, almonds and hazelnuts are grown on the land, and the tennis court, surrounded by trees, will surely inspire your game.

**Relais Santa Anastasia** (☎ 0921 67 22 33; [www.santa-anastasia-relais.it](http://www.santa-anastasia-relais.it); Contrada Santa Anastasia, Castelbuono; s/d/ste from €140/190/310; ☎ ☎) This luxurious resort is set in a 12th-century abbey among vineyards and rolling hills. The decor is disappointingly staid but the views are superb, especially from the pool. It's 9km from Castelbuono in the direction of Cefalù.

## Eating

**Trattoria-Pizzeria 'da Salvatore'** (☎ 0921 68 01 69; Piazza San Michele 3, Petralia Soprana; pizzas €3.50-8, meals €25; ☎ lunch & dinner daily Jun-Sep, lunch Wed-Mon, dinner Sat & Sun Oct-May) Charismatic Salvatore (who speaks German, French and some English) has run this popular, Slow Food-recommended trattoria in 'upper' Petralia for 25 years. The wide-ranging antipasti selection (€9) includes grilled seasonal vegetables and a delicious fresh ricotta frittata (omelette). Everything is prepared in the wood-burning oven, including pizzas (from €4), which are an evening-only treat.

**Ristorante Petrae Lejum** (☎ 0921 64 19 47; Corso Paolo Agliata 113, Petralia Sottana; meals €15-20) At this cosy family-run place specialising in mountain cuisine, you can indulge in rare treats such as *cinghiale affumicato* (smoked wild boar), *tagliatelle delle Madonie* (pasta with fennel, almonds, fresh sardines, raisins, tomato sauce and pecorino cheese) or *maccheroni alla carrettera ottocentesca* (macaroni with parsley, pistachios, hot peppers, garlic and pecorino cheese).



**Nangalarruni** (☎ 0921 67 14 28; Via delle Confraternite 5/7, Castelbuono; meals €25-45) A restaurant famous throughout Sicily for its mushrooms, local cheeses, roast meats and vegetable dishes. Spike your appetite with *zuppa di funghi e legumi* (mushroom and vegetable soup).

## Getting There & Away

**SAIS** (☎ 091 616 60 28) runs services from Palermo and Cefalù to Castelbuono and some of the other mountain towns. However, to fully appreciate the Madonie, you're better off hiring a car for a couple of days. Bussing around this area is time-consuming, and you'll miss out on the opportunity to explore the pretty backroads at your own pace.

## CEFALÙ

pop 13,800

This popular holiday resort wedged between a dramatic mountain peak and sweeping stretch of sand has the lot: a great beach; a truly lovely historic centre with a grandiose cathedral; and winding medieval streets lined with restaurants, boutiques and small, intriguing shops. Avoid the height of summer when it's hard to find towel space on the beach and the charm of the place is tainted by bad-tempered drivers trying to find a parking space.

From the train station, turn right into Via Moro to reach Via Matteotti and the old town. If you're heading for the beach, turn left and walk along Via Gramsci, which in turn becomes Via V Martoglio.

## Information

There are plenty of ATMs in town along Corso Ruggero.

**Ambulance** (☎ 0921 42 45 44)

**First aid** (☎ 0921 42 36 23; Via Mazzini 8)

**Hospital** (☎ 0921 92 01 11; Contrada Pietrapollstra)

On the main road out of town in the direction of Palermo.

**La Galleria** (☎ 0921 42 02 11; Via Mandralisca 23; per hr €6; ☎ 11am-midnight Fri-Wed) Cocktail bar with two fast internet computers.

**Police station** (☎ 0921 42 11 04; Via Roma 15)

**Post office** (Via Vazzana 2) Just in from the *lungomare* (seafront promenade).

**Presidio Parco delle Madonie** (☎ 0921 92 33 27; [www.parcodellemadonie.it](http://www.parcodellemadonie.it), in Italian; Corso Ruggero 116; ☎ 8am-8pm) The official office for the Madonie park, with lots of relevant information.

**Tourist office** (☎ 0921 42 10 50; [strcefulu@regione.sicilia.it](mailto:strcefulu@regione.sicilia.it); Corso Ruggero 77; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat) English-speaking staff, offering lots of leaflets and good maps.

## Sights

Looming over the town, the craggy mass of **La Rocca** appears a suitable home for the race of giants that are said to have been the first inhabitants of Sicily. It was here that the Arabs built their citadel, occupying it until the Norman conquest in 1061 forced the locals down from the mountain to the port below. An enormous staircase, the **Salita Saraceno**, winds up through three tiers of city walls, a 30-minute climb nearly to the summit. There's stunning views of the town below and the ruined 4th-century **Tempio di Diana** provides a quiet and romantic getaway for young lovers.

Cefalù's **cathedral** (☎ 0921 92 20 21; Piazza del Duomo; ☎ 8am-5.30pm winter, to 7.30pm summer) is the final jewel in the Arab-Norman crown alongside the Cappella Palatina and Monreale. Inside, a towering figure of Christ Pantocrator is the focal point of the elaborate 12th-century Byzantine mosaics. Framed by the steep cliff, the twin pyramidal towers of the cathedral stand out above the magnificent **Piazza del Duomo**, which swarms with camera-snapping tourists among the pavement cafes and restaurants.

Off Piazza del Duomo is the private **Museo Mandralisca** (☎ 0921 42 15 47; Via Mandralisca 13; adult/child €5/3; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm). The museum has an interesting collection that includes Greek ceramics and Arab pottery, the highlight being the *Portrait of an Unknown Man*, a Renaissance masterpiece painting by Antonello da Messina.

## Activities

Cefalù's crescent-shaped beach is lovely, but in the summer get here early to find a patch for your brolly and towel.

You can escape with a boat tour along the coast or to the Aeolian Islands (from €60) during the summer months with several agencies located along Corso Ruggero. The **Barakuda Diving Centre** (☎ 347 685 30 51; Hotel Kalura, Via Vincenzo Cavallaro 13) organises dives, or you can ride horses in the hinterland with **Vallegrande** (☎ 0921 42 02 86; [www.vallegrande.it](http://www.vallegrande.it); Contrada Vallegrande; 3hr trek €54). If you prefer pedal power, **Scooter for Rent** (☎ 0921 42 04 96; [www.scooterforrent.it](http://www.scooterforrent.it); Via G Matteotti 13) rents out bicycles (€10 to €15 per day) and scooters (€35 per day).

## Sleeping

Cheap accommodation is generally scarce year-round. Bookings are essential.

**Camping Costa Ponente** (☎ 0921 42 00 85; Contrada Ogliastrello; camping 2 people, tent & car €24.90; 🚰) This camping ground, 4km west of the town, has a tennis court and pool. Take the bus (€1) from the train station heading for La Spisa.

**Locanda Cangelosi** (☎ 0921 42 15 91; [www.locanda.cangelosi.it](http://www.locanda.cangelosi.it); Via Umberto I 26; r without bathroom €35-40) Four clean, simple rooms, with a shared TV room, are available in this private home; it's the cheapest indoor sleep you'll find on this stretch of coast.

**B&B Dolce Vita** (☎ 0921 92 31 51; [www.dolcevitabb.it](http://www.dolcevitabb.it); Via Bordonaro 8; r €60-120; 🚰 📺 📶) This popular B&B has one of the loveliest terraces in town, complete with deck chairs overlooking the sea and a barbecue for those warm balmy evenings. Rooms are airy and light, with comfy beds. Free wi-fi access is a bonus.

**L'Arca** (☎ 0921 42 33 65; [www.sunseasically.com](http://www.sunseasically.com); Via Seveso 14, Contrada Pisciotto; 2-person apt per week €300-575) These cute-as-a-button apartments are recommended for longer stays – but only if you rent a car. They are located above the town and have stunning views; see the website for exact location details.

**Hotel Kalura** (☎ 0921 42 13 54; [www.hotel-kalura.com](http://www.hotel-kalura.com); Via Vincenzo Cavallaro 13; d €90-150; 📺 🚰 📶) East of town on a rocky outcrop, this German-run, family-oriented hotel has its own pebbly beach, restaurant and fabulous pool. Most rooms have sea views, and the hotel arranges tonnes of activities, including mountain biking, hiking, canoeing, pedaloes, diving and dance nights. It's a 20-minute walk into town.

## Eating & Drinking

There are dozens of restaurants along Via Vittorio Emanuele, but the food can be surprisingly mundane and the ubiquitous tourist menus can quickly pall.

**Al Porticciolo** (☎ 0921 92 19 81; Via Carlo Ortolani di Bordonaro 66; pizzas €5-11, meals €18-30; 📶 closed Wed Oct-Apr) If the indoor dining room looks empty, it's because everyone's piled out on the ample waterfront terrace, one of the prettiest in town. The pizzas are excellent, and fixed-price menus start at €18.

**Lo Scoglio Ubriaco** (☎ 0921 42 33 70; Via Carlo Ortolani di Bordonaro 2; pizzas €5-10, meals €20-35; 📶 closed Tue) Dine in a five-star setting without shifting your credit card into overdrive at this elegant restaurant with its seaview terrace. Pizzas are served at night, while the whole gamut of pasta, meat and fish choices is available at midday.

**La Galleria** (☎ 0921 42 02 11; Via Mandalisca 23; cocktails €5, meals €25-40; 📶 11am-midnight Fri-Wed) Here you'll find a literary cafe, sophisticated cocktail bar, and tasteful art gallery combined into a supercool, one-of-a-kind venue. Start or end your evening here, or stick around for dinner on their outdoor patio.

**Sotto Zero Café** (Via Lungomare; snacks €5, drinks €3-6; 📶 11am-late) A very cool waterfront bar, spread out along the steps leading to the beach. Its Buddha Bar-inspired decor is dreamy: seating on low cushions, with the candlelit stairs covered in soft carpets and the sound of the sea lapping below. It's a great place for *aperitivi*, cocktails and chatting till late.

## Getting There & Away

The best way of getting to and from Cefalù is by train. The line links Cefalù with Palermo (€4.85, one hour, hourly) and virtually every other town on the coast.

From June to September, you can also get a hydrofoil from Cefalù to the Aeolian Islands with **Ustica Lines** ([www.usticalines.it](http://www.usticalines.it)). Hydrofoils depart daily at 8.15am for Alicudi (€19.25, 1½ hours), Filicudi (€22.40, 1½ hours), Salina (€25.70, 2½ hours) and Lipari (€28.10, 3¼ hours). You can buy tickets at the dock or at **Pietro Barbaro** (☎ 0921 42 15 95; Corso Ruggero 82; 📶 8am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat).

## MILAZZO

pop 32,700

Most visitors only treat Milazzo as a stepping stone to get off the main island and head for the Aeolian archipelago. But away from its oil refinery and busy dock, Milazzo's Spanish quarter is actually very pretty, and the isthmus that juts out to the north is an area of great natural beauty.

## Information

All the ferry-company offices are directly opposite the port, along Via dei Mille.

**Petit Hotel** (Via dei Mille) This friendly hotel across from the hydrofoil docks stores bags (€2 apiece); the adjoining newsagent is a good source of Aeolian Islands maps and books.

**Tourist office** (☎ 090 922 28 65; [strmilazzo@regione.sicilia.it](mailto:strmilazzo@regione.sicilia.it); Piazza C Duilio 20; 📶 8.30am-1.30pm Mon-Sat) Has very limited information.

## Sights & Activities

Milazzo's main in-town attraction is its enormous **Spanish castle** (☎ 090 922 12 91; Via Impallomeni)

It was closed indefinitely for restoration at the time of research; when open, it has guided tours on the hour and is a lovely site to clam-ber around, full of flowers and crumbling walls with dreamy views of the Aeolians. To reach the castle, climb the **Salita Castello**, which rises up through the atmospheric Spanish quarter.

There's good swimming to be had at **Capo Milazzo** (6km north of the city) at the tip of the spit of land that stretches out towards the Aeolian Islands; the most accessible pebble beach is at the end of Via Colombo.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Petit Hotel** ( ☎ 090 928 67 84; [www.petithotel.it](http://www.petithotel.it); Porto di Milazzo; s/d/tr/q €75/120/150/180; ☼ ☑ ) The hotel of choice in Milazzo is right opposite the hydrofoil dock. Obsessively ecofriendly, it uses renewable energy sources and serves a delicious home-made breakfast. It has very friendly staff, and you can leave your car here (€12 to €20 per day) while visiting the islands.

**U Pignataru** ( ☎ 090 928 68 88; Via L. Rizzo 24; meals €13) With its €13 lunch menu, this place near the waterfront is perfect for a mid-day bite while awaiting the hydrofoil to the Aeolian Islands.

## Getting There & Away

Milazzo is easy to reach by bus or train from Palermo and Messina. All intercity buses run from Piazza della Repubblica along the quay-side. **Giuntabus** ([www.giuntabus.com](http://www.giuntabus.com)) runs bus services from Messina (€3.80, 50 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday, three Sunday).

Frequent trains leave from Milazzo's station, 4km south of the centre, for Palermo (€9.65, 2½ to three hours) and Messina (€3.10, 30 to 45 minutes). The train station is connected to the port by AST buses (€1, once or twice hourly).

If you fancy leaving your car here while you island-hop, there are plenty of well-advertised garages by the port, charging €12 to €20 per day depending on vehicle size.

See right for details of travel to and from the Aeolian Islands.

# AEOLIAN ISLANDS

The Aeolian Islands are a little piece of paradise. Stunning cobalt sea, splendid beaches, some of Italy's best hiking, and an awe-inspiring volcanic landscape are just part of

the appeal; the islands also have a fascinating human and mythological history that goes back several millennia; the Aeolians figured prominently in Homer's *Odyssey*, and evidence of the distant past can be seen everywhere, most notably in Lipari's excellent archaeological museum.

The seven islands of Lipari, Vulcano, Salina, Panarea, Stromboli, Alicudi and Filicudi are part of a huge 200km volcanic ridge that runs between the smoking stack of Mt Etna and the threatening mass of Vesuvius above Naples. Collectively, the islands exhibit a unique range of volcanic characteristics, which earned them a place on Unesco's World Heritage list in 2000. The islands are mobbed with visitors in July and August, but out of season, things remain remarkably tranquil.

## Getting There & Away

In summer, ferries and hydrofoils leave regularly from Milazzo and Messina. In Milazzo, the ticket offices are in or around the port, while in Messina the office is halfway up Via Vittorio Emanuele II. Peak season is from June to September with winter services much reduced and sometimes cancelled due to heavy seas. All of the following prices are one-way high-season fares.

### FERRY

Siremar and **NGI Traghetti** ( ☎ 090 928 40 91; [www.ngi-spa.it](http://www.ngi-spa.it)) both run car ferries from Milazzo to the islands; they're slightly cheaper, but slower and less regular than the summer hydrofoils.

### HYDROFOIL

Both Ustica Lines and Siremar run hydrofoils from Milazzo to Lipari (€15.80, one hour), and then on to the other islands. From 1 June to 30 September hydrofoils depart almost hourly (from around 7am to 7pm) to Lipari, stopping en route at Vulcano (€15, 45 minutes) and continuing onward to Santa Marina or Rinella (€17.55, 1½ to two hours) on Salina island. Beyond Salina, boats either branch off east to Panarea (€17.80, 2¼ hours) and Stromboli (€20.95, three hours), or west to Filicudi (€22.25, 2½ hours) and Alicudi (€27.70, 3¼ hours).

In summer, Ustica Lines hydrofoils also connect Lipari with Messina (€22.90, 1½ to 3¼ hours, five daily), Reggio di Calabria (€23.90, two to three hours, five daily), Cefalù

(€28.10, 3½ hours, one daily) and Palermo (€38.25, four hours, two daily).

## Getting Around

### BOAT

Regular hydrofoil and ferry services operate between the islands. On Lipari all hydrofoil and ferry services arrive at and depart from Marina Lunga. Siremar and Ustica Lines have ticket offices in a cabin opposite the port. Full timetable information is available at all offices. On the other islands, ticket offices are at or close to the docks.

The following table lists destinations, fares and approximate sailing times from Lipari.

| Destination           | Cost (€)<br>hydrofoil/ferry | Duration<br>hydrofoil/ferry |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Alicudi               | 18.85/15.45                 | 2/4hr                       |
| Filicudi              | 15.80/13.90                 | 1¼/2¼hr                     |
| Panarea               | 10.40/9                     | 1/2hr                       |
| Salina (Rinella)      | 9.60/8.80                   | 45min/1½hr                  |
| Salina (Santa Marina) | 8.80/6.70                   | 25/45min                    |
| Stromboli             | 17.80/13.90                 | 1¾/4hr                      |
| Vulcano               | 5.80/4.70                   | 10/25min                    |

### CAR & SCOOTER

If you're only visiting the islands for a couple of days, it's not worth the expense of taking a car; you can garage it in Milazzo from €12 per day (see opposite). For longer trips, however, it works out cheaper than hiring one on the islands. You can take cars by ferry to Lipari, Vulcano and Salina, all of which have scooter- and car-hire outlets.

## LIPARI

pop 11,100 / elev 602m

At the centre of the archipelago, Lipari has been inhabited for some 6000 years. The island was settled in the 4th millennium BC by Sicily's first known inhabitants, the Stentilleni, who developed a flourishing economy based on obsidian, a glassy volcanic rock. Commerce subsequently attracted the Greeks, who used the islands as ports on the east-west trade route.

Today's trade is still flourishing, with a bustling and historic main street flanked by shops, restaurants and bars. Overlooking the colourful snake of day-trippers is a grand dame of a castle, once plundered by pirates such as Barbarossa (or Redbeard), who was eager to get his hands on Lipari's lucrative obsidian and pumice mines.

Lipari is the best-equipped base for island-hopping, with plenty of places to stay, eat and drink.

## Orientation

Lipari has two harbours, Marina Lunga and Marina Corta. They frame either side of the cliff-top citadel, which is surrounded by 16th-century walls. The town centre extends between the harbours. The main street, Corso Vittorio Emanuele, runs roughly north-south to the west of the castle. From Marina Corta, walk across the piazza to Via Garibaldi; follow the *centro* signs for Corso Vittorio Emanuele.

## Information

Corso Vittorio Emanuele is lined with ATMs. The other islands have fewer facilities so it's best to sort out your finances here before moving on.

**Ambulance** (☎ 090 988 54 67)

**Farmacia Sparacino** (☎ 090 981 13 92; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 174; ☎ 10am-1pm & 5-9pm)

**Internet Point** (☎ 090 988 04 11; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 185; per hr €5; ☎ 9.30am-1.30pm & 4.30-9pm winter, 9am-1pm & 5.30pm-midnight summer)

**Ospedale Civile** (☎ 090 988 51 11; Via Sant'Anna) Operates a first-aid service.

**Police** (☎ 090 981 13 33; Via Guglielmo Marconi)

**Post office** (Corso Vittorio Emanuele 207)

**Siremar ticket office** (Marina Lunga; per bag per 12/24hr €5/9; ☎ 8am-8pm) Left-luggage facilities.

**Tourist office** (☎ 090 988 00 95; www.aasteolie.191.it; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 202; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4.30-7pm Mon-Fri year-round, 8.30am-1.30pm Sat & Sun Jul & Aug) Lipari's office provides information covering all the islands and can assist with finding accommodation.

## Sights

After Barbarossa rampaged through the town in 1544, murdering most of the citizens, enslaving the women and desecrating the relics of St Bartholomew (charming fellow that he was), the Spaniards rebuilt and fortified Lipari with the **citadel** (☎ 9am-7pm). Within these fortifications you will find the fabulous **Museo Archeologico Eoliano** (☎ 090 988 01 74; Castello di Lipari; admission €6; ☎ 9am-1.30pm & 3-7pm), one of the very best museums in Sicily, tracing the volcanic and human history of the islands. It is divided into three sections: an archaeological section devoted to artefacts from the Neolithic period and Bronze Age to the Roman era; a classical section with finds from Lipari's necropolis (including the most complete collection of

sensational miniature Greek theatrical masks in the world); and a section on vulcanology and finds from the other islands.

The southern part of the citadel contains viewable **archaeological ruins** dating from the Neolithic period to the Roman era, which have given archaeologists valuable clues to the prehistoric civilisations that flourished in the Mediterranean.

## Activities

Sunbathers and swimmers head for Canneto, a few kilometres north of Lipari town, to bask on the pebbly **Spiaggia Bianca**. Further north are the **pumice mines** of Pomicciaio and Porticello, where there's another beach, **Spiaggia della Papessa**, dusted white by the fine pumice that gives the sea its limpid turquoise colour.

A nice excursion on the island's west side is the scenic boat trip past the *faraglioni* (rock spires) to **Spiaggia Valle i Muria**, a rocky beach with gorgeous views south to Vulcano. Call **Barni** (☎ 349 183 95 55), to arrange boat transport (€5/10 one way/return), or catch the bus from Marina Lunga towards Quattropani, get off at Quattrochi and walk 15 minutes steeply down towards the water. On the beach Barni operates a snack shack and kayak-rental place, built into a cave.

Another pleasant hike is the hour-long stroll from Quattropani to Acquacalda along Lipari's north shore, which affords spectacular views of Salina and a distant Stromboli. Take the bus to Quattropani, then simply proceed downhill on the main road 5km to Acquacalda, where you can catch the bus back to Lipari.

Given the crystal-clear waters, snorkelling and scuba diving are also incredibly popular. For details on courses or hiring equipment, contact **Diving Center La Gorgonia** (☎ 090 981 26 16; www.lagorgoniadiving.it; Salita San Giuseppe, Marina Corta; dive/night dive/beginner course €32/40/60).

## Tours

You can take boat tours to the surrounding islands (€20 to €40), or arrange a day trip to hike up Stromboli with agencies throughout town, including **Da Massimo/Dolce Vita** (☎ 090 981 30 86; www.damassimo.it; Via Maurolico 2) and **Gruppo di Navigazione Regina** (☎ 090 982 22 37; www.navigazione.regina.com; Via Maurolico).

## Sleeping

Lipari provides plenty of options for a comfortable stay; however, prices soar in summer.

The tourist office may be able to help find accommodation in private homes.

**Baia Unci** (☎ 090 981 19 09; www.baiaunci.com; Via Marina Garibaldi, Canneto; campsite per person €7-14; ☒ mid-Mar–mid-Oct) This camp ground 2km north of Lipari provides excellent facilities, shady sites and an ace (if noisy) position along the sea-front promenade. Book ahead in August.

**Casa Vittorio** (☎ 090 981 15 23; www.casavittorio.com; Vico Sparviero 15; r per person €18-45) These comfortable rooms, some sleeping up to five people, are off Via Garibaldi near Marina Corta. You'll find the owner nearby at Vico Selinunte 21. There's a communal kitchen, plus two terraces with views. Prices are significantly reduced out of season or for longer stays.

**our pick Diana Brown** (☎ 090 981 25 84; www.diana.brown.it; Vico Himera 3; s €30-80, d €40-100; ☒) Tucked down a narrow alley, South African Diana has delightful rooms decorated in contemporary style with tile floors, abundant hot water, bright colours and welcome extras such as kettles and fridges. Darker rooms downstairs are compensated for by built-in kitchenettes. There's a sunny breakfast terrace and solarium with deck chairs, plus book exchange and laundry service. The optional breakfast costs €5 extra.

**Enzo Il Negro** (☎ 090 981 31 63; www.enzoilnegro.altervista.org; Via Garibaldi 29; s €40-50, d €60-90; ☒) This is a great low-season choice in the thick of the action. In a multistorey private home near Marina Corta, it sports large, brightly tiled and pine-furnished rooms with fridges. There are two panoramic terraces and a rooftop solarium overlooking the rooftops and castle walls.

## Eating & Drinking

Fish abound in the waters of the archipelago and include tuna, mullet, cuttlefish and sole, all of which end up on local menus. Try *pasta all'eoliana*, a simple blend of the island's excellent capers with olive oil, anchovies and basil.

Bars are concentrated along Corso Vittorio Emanuele and down by Marina Corta. In peak season everything stays open into the wee hours.

**Bar Pasticceria Subba** (☎ 090 981 13 52; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 92; pastries from €1; ☒ 7am-10pm) Feed your sweet tooth with fabulous pastries at this long-established bakery (since 1930); the pistachio profiteroles with green cream filling are to die for!



**La Piazzetta** (☎ 090 981 25 22; pizzas €5-9; ☎ dinner, closed Tue Sep-Jun) A lively pizzeria with vine-draped outdoor seating that has served the likes of Audrey Hepburn. It's off Corso Vittorio Emanuele, behind Pasticceria Subba.

**La Cambusa** (☎ 349 476 60 61; Via Garibaldi 72; meals €20; ☎ lunch & dinner, closed Nov-Easter) This single-room, family-run place serves delicious, reasonably priced Aeolian food, from the *misto di capricci siciliani* (roast peppers, aubergine *caponata* and vegetables of the day) to the classic *fritto misto* (fried shrimp and squid).

**Kasbah** (☎ 090 981 10 75; Via Maurolico 25; pizzas €6-8, meals €25-30; ☎ 7pm-3am mid-Mar-Oct) Choose the environment that suits you best: the sleek contemporary white banquettes in the interior dining room or the vine-covered, candlelit garden out back. The food is superb, including delicious pizzas and delicacies such as *agnello stracotto in umido alla siciliana* (stewed lamb with almonds and dates).

**Filippino** (☎ 090 981 10 02; Piazza Municipio; meals €30-50; ☎ closed Mon Oct-Mar) Celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2010, Filippino's is a mainstay of Lipari's culinary scene, its menu filled with traditional dishes named in Sicilian dialect such as *maccarruna i casa alla Filippino* (pasta with tomatoes, courgettes, basil, mint, mozzarella and ricotta) and close to 20 delectable desserts. There are separate menus for olive oil, bottled water, grappas (120) and, more conventionally, wine.

**E Pulera** (☎ 090 981 10 02; Via Isabella Vainicher Conti; meals €30-50; ☎ dinner May-Sep) Filippino's sister restaurant just west of the centre has a serene garden setting and equally exquisite food. Despite the upmarket ambience, the menu includes some surprisingly affordable choices.

Self-caterers can shop for supplies at the **SISA supermarket** (Corso Vittorio Emanuele).

## Shopping

You simply can't leave these islands without a small pot of capers and a bottle of sweet Malvasia wine. You can get both, along with meats, cheeses and other delicious goodies at **La Formagella** (☎ 090 988 07 59; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 250; ☎ 7.30am-9pm Mon-Sat, to 1.30pm Sun) Try the house speciality, *alerchino di capperi*, a pungent mix of capers, garlic, pepper, oil and vinegar.

## Getting There & Around

**Autobus Urso Guglielmo** (☎ 090 981 12 62, 090 981 10 26; Via Cappuccini 9) runs frequent buses around

the island from Marina Lunga (€1.50 to €1.90 depending on destination). One main route serves the island's eastern shore, from Canneto to Acquacalda, while the other serves the western highland settlements of Quattrochi, Pianocone and Quattropiani. Multi-ride booklets (six/10/20 rides €7/10.50/20.50) will save you money if you're here for several days.

**Roberto Foti** (☎ 090 981 13 70; Via F Crispi 31) rents scooters (€20 to €35 per day) and cars (Fiat Uno €40 per day).

See p778 for ferry and hydrofoil details.

## VULCANO

pop 720 / 500m

Vulcano is a memorable island, not least because of the vile smell of sulphurous gases. Once you escape the drab and dated tourist centre, Porto di Levante, there's a delightfully tranquil, unspoilt quality to the landscape. Following the well-marked trail to the looming Fossa di Vulcano, the landscape gives way to rural simplicity with allotments, birdsong and a surprising amount of greenery. The island is worshipped by Italians for its therapeutic mud baths and hot springs, and its black beaches and weird steaming landscape make for an interesting day trip.

## Orientation

Boats dock at Porto di Levante. To the right, as you face the island, is the small Vulcanello peninsula. To reach the mud baths, walk right along the *lungomare* and at the end, hidden behind a small hillock, are the pools. All facilities are concentrated between Porto di Levante and Porto di Ponente, where you will find the Spiaggia Sabbia Nera (Black Sand Beach).

## Information

**Emergency doctor** (☎ 090 985 22 20; Via Lentia)

**Thermessa Turismo** (☎ 090 985 22 30; Via Provinciale) Changes money and sells tickets for Ustica Lines hydrofoils.

## Activities

The top attraction is the trek up the **Fossa di Vulcano** (391m). Follow the signs south along Via Provinciale out of town. It's about an hour's scramble to the lowest point of the crater's edge (290m), but once you reach the top, the sight of the steaming crater encrusted with red and yellow crystals is reward enough. The bottom is clearly visible from the rim and you can take a steep trail down to walk along



the crater floor. Wimps can opt for walking clockwise around the crest and be smugly rewarded with stunning views of all the islands lined up to the north.

Set out early in the day if possible and don't forget a hat and water. If you want to hire a guide, contact **Gruppo Trekking Vulcano** (☎ 339 418 58 75). More sedentary volcano-watchers can visit the small museum administered by **Gruppo Nazionale Vulcanologia** (☎ 090 985 25 28; Porto Ponente; admission free; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 5-8pm Jun-Sep), which has displays about Vulcano and a video (in English, French and Italian) about Stromboli's last big eruption.

Mud-bath enthusiasts should head for the **Laghetto di Fanghi** (admission €2), a large mud pit of thick, smelly, sulphurous gloop that has long been considered an excellent treatment for arthritis, rheumatism and skin disorders. Don't wear your designer swimsuit (you'll never get the smell out), and be sure to leave your gold chains behind (they will tarnish). Afterwards you can hop into the water at the adjacent beach where *acquacalda* (hot springs) create a natural jacuzzi effect.

On the far side of the peninsula from Porto di Levante at Porto di Ponente is the dramatic **Spiaggia Sabbia Nera**, curving around a pretty bay and only mildly commercialised. It is one of the few sandy beaches in the archipelago. A similar, quieter beach, **Spiaggia dell'Asina**, can be found on the island's southern side near Gelso.

You can go diving with the **Diving Center Saracen** (☎ 090 985 21 89; [www.divingcentersaracen.com](http://www.divingcentersaracen.com); Porto di Ponente; dive/night dive €33/40).

## Sleeping

Unless you're here for the walking and the mud baths, Vulcano is not a great place for an extended stay; the town is pretty soulless, the hotels are expensive and the mud baths really do smell. If you do stay, the best hotels are situated around Spiaggia Sabbia Nera.

**Camping Togo Togo** (☎ 090 985 23 03; [www.campingvulcano.it](http://www.campingvulcano.it); Porto Ponente; campsite per person €10-12, 2-/4-person bungalow €60/100; ☎ Apr-Sep) Offering eucalyptus-shaded campsites and somewhat musty bungalows, Togo Togo is just back from Spiaggia Sabbia Nera.

**La Giara** (☎ 090 985 22 29; Via Provinciale 40; s €31-59, d €62-102; ☎ Apr-Oct; ☎) A fine choice between the dock and the volcano, fronted by lemon trees in a quiet residential street. The rooftop breakfast terrace has impressive volcano views

and eclectic decor, including a lovely antique Sicilian cart.

**Hotel Conti** (☎ 090 985 20 12; [www.contivulcano.it](http://www.contivulcano.it); Porto Ponente; s €50-71, d €84-126) An older hotel with an attached restaurant and sprawling terrace overlooking Spiaggia Sabbia Nera. Rooms are a bit cramped, but you can't argue with the location; book ahead for beachfront rooms 24 to 27.

**Hotel Les Sables Noires** (☎ 090 985 01 11; [www.framon-hotels.com](http://www.framon-hotels.com); Porto Ponente; s €95-170, d €150-250; ☎ May-Sep; ☎) Vulcano's premier hotel has a fabulous pool backed by the volcano's looming presence, and a restaurant-bar with fine views of the island's best black-sand beach.

## Eating & Drinking

Vulcano's restaurants tend to be overpriced, and some offer very average food. The following are welcome exceptions.

**La Forgia Maurizio** (☎ 339 137 91 07; Via Provinciale 45; meals €25-30) The owner of this devilishly good restaurant spent 20 winters in Goa, India; eastern influences sneak into a menu of Sicilian specialties, all prepared and presented with flair. Don't miss the *liquore di kumquat e cardamom*, Maurizio's home-made answer to *limoncello*. The tasting menu is an excellent deal at €25 including wine and dessert.

**Trattoria Maniaci Pina** (☎ 090 985 22 42, 368 66 85 55; Gelso; meals €20-25; ☎ May-Oct) On the south side of the island, beside a black-sand beach, this atmospheric, down-to-earth trattoria serves hefty portions of fresh-caught fish at affordable prices. Try the spaghetti with *nero di seppia* (cuttlefish ink).

For pizzas and snacks, try **Café Piazzetta** (☎ 090 985 32 67; Piazzetta Faraglione; pizzas €6-8), which has live music in the summer.

## Getting There & Around

Vulcano is an intermediate stop between Milazzo and Lipari and a good number of vessels go both ways throughout the day. See p778 for more details.

Scooters (per day €15 to €45), bicycles (€5 to €8) and small motorised cars (€35 to €70) can be rented from **Sprint** (☎ 090 985 22 08) or **Da Paolo** (☎ 090 985 21 12), both well signposted near the hydrofoil dock. The former is run by Luigi and Nidra, a friendly multilingual couple with in-depth knowledge of the island; they offer helpful tourist info and rent out an apartment in Vulcano's tranquil interior.

You can hire boats at **Centro Nautico Baia di Levante** (☎ 339 337 27 95; [www.baialevente.it](http://www.baialevente.it); ☎ Apr-

Oct), in a shed on the beach to the left of the hydrofoil dock.

## SALINA

pop 2300 / elev 962m

In stark contrast to Vulcano's barren landscape, Salina's twin craters of Monte dei Porri and Monte Fossa delle Felci are lushly wooded, a result of the numerous freshwater springs on the island. Wildflowers, thick yellow gorse bushes and serried ranks of grapevines carpet the hillsides in vibrant colours and cool greens, while its high coastal cliffs plunge towards dramatic beaches.

The famous Aeolian capers grow plentifully here, as do the grapes used for making Malvasia wine.

## Orientation

Most boats dock at Santa Marina Salina. The main road, Via Risorgimento, runs parallel to the *lungomare* and is filled with small boutiques. Accommodation can be found in Salina's three main towns: Santa Marina Salina, Malfa and Rinella, a fishing hamlet on the southern coast.

## Information

All addresses below are in Santa Marina Salina. Tourist information is available through the Lipari office.

**Banco di Sicilia** (Via Risorgimento) Has an ATM on Santa Marina's main pedestrian street, just in from the waterfront.

**Emergency doctor** (☎ 090 984 40 05)

**Police** (☎ 090 984 30 19)

**Post office** (Via Risorgimento)

**Salina Computer** (☎ 090 984 34 44; Via Risorgimento 110; internet per hr €5; ☎ 9am-1.30pm & 4.30-8pm)

## Sights & Activities

For jaw-dropping views of Salina and the surrounding islands, climb to Salina's highest point, the **Fossa delle Felci** (962m). At Valdicchia, in the valley that separates Salina's two volcanoes, is the **Santuario della Madonna del Terzito**, which is a place of pilgrimage, particularly around the Feast of the Assumption on 15 August. From the church, you can follow the track (signposted) up through a nature reserve all the way to the peak (about two hours). Once you've reached the top, you have unparalleled views of the entire archipelago. To get to the trailhead, take the bus from Santa Marina Salina to Malfa, then change for a Rinella-

bound bus and ask the driver to let you off at the sanctuary.

Don't miss a trip to **Pollara**; sandwiched dramatically between the sea and the steep slopes of an extinct volcanic crater on Salina's western edge. The gorgeous beach here was used as a location in the 1994 film *Il Postino*. Although the land access route to the beach has since been closed due to landslide danger, you can still descend the steep stone steps at the northwest end of town and swim across, or simply admire the spectacular view, with its backdrop of volcanic cliffs.

Boats are available for hire from June to August at **Nautica Levante** (☎ 090 984 30 83; Via Risorgimento, Santa Marina Salina).

## Tours

**Eolie Adventure** (☎ 333 469 95 30; [www.eolieadventure.com](http://www.eolieadventure.com)) organises excellent nature hikes on Salina, as well as the other islands.

## Sleeping & Eating

The island remains relatively undisturbed by mass tourism, yet still offers some fine hotels and restaurants.

**Campeggio Tre Pini** (☎ 090 98 01 55; [www.trepini.com](http://www.trepini.com); Rinella; campsite per person/tent/car €8/7.70/3.50; ☎ Mar-Oct) This camp ground has lovely terraced sites amid olive groves and eucalyptus trees overlooking the sea, plus a supermarket and restaurant. It's a five-minute walk from Rinella's hydrofoil dock.

**Casa del Melograno** (☎ 333 469 95 30; [www.eolieadventure.com](http://www.eolieadventure.com); Via Fontana 2; s €20-70, d €30-90; tr €45-120) A steep climb uphill from Santa Marina's hydrofoil dock, this budget option is housed in an old building with high ceilings, original tiled floors, pretty patios and views. Friendly local guide Emanuele Bottari, who runs the place, can organise boat rides, tours and outdoor activities. No breakfast.

**A Cannata** (☎ 090 984 31 61; [www.acannata.it](http://www.acannata.it); Via Umberto, Lingua; r per person incl breakfast €35-85, incl half-board €60-100) This simple *pensione* and its Slow Food-acclaimed restaurant (meals €25 to €30) overlook an unruly garden shaded by pines, just inland from Lingua's waterfront. Half-board rates are available from March through October.

**Hotel Mamma Santina** (☎ 090 984 30 54; [www.mammasantina.it](http://www.mammasantina.it); Via Sanità 40, Santa Marina Salina; d €110-230; ☎ Apr-Nov; ☎ ☎ ☎) A labour of love for its architect owner, this boutique hotel has inviting rooms decorated with original artwork

and pretty tiles in traditional Aeolian designs. Many of the sea-view terraces come equipped with hammocks, and on warm evenings, the attached restaurant has outdoor seating overlooking the glowing blue pool and landscaped garden filled with cacti and lemon trees.

**our pick Da Alfredo** (☎ 090 984 30 75; Piazza Marina Garibaldi, Lingua; granite €2.50, sandwiches €5-9) The most atmospheric place on Salina for an affordable snack, Alfredo's place has been renowned for decades for its *granite* (ices made with coffee, fresh fruit or locally grown pistachios and almonds) and *pane cunzato* (open-faced sandwiches piled high with tuna, ricotta, eggplant, tomatoes, capers and olives).

**Porto Bello** (☎ 090 984 31 25; Via Bianchi 1, Santa Marina Salina; meals €30-50; ☒ Tue-Sun) This award-winning seafood restaurant dates back to 1978 with the same family at the helm. It has a terrace overlooking the harbour. Aside from fish, it's famous for its *pasta al fuoco* (fiery pasta with hot peppers).

**'nni Lausta** (☎ 090 984 34 86; Via Risorgimento, Santa Marina Salina; meals €35-40) This acclaimed restaurant with its cute lobster logo serves superb food based on fresh local ingredients. The understatedly elegant upstairs dining area features high ceilings, white lacquered tables and an outdoor terrace. The downstairs bar is a popular late-night drinking spot.

## Getting There & Around

Hydrofoils and ferries service Santa Marina Salina and Rinella from Lipari. You'll find ticket offices in both places.

**CITIS** (☎ 090 984 41 50) buses run roughly half-hourly from Santa Marina Salina to Lingua, Malfa, Rinella, Pollara, Valdichiesa and Leni (€1.50 to €2.20 depending on destination). Timetables are posted at the ports and bus stops. The service is reduced out of season, to around once every 90 minutes.

Motorcycles and scooters can be hired (per day from €20) in Santa Marina Salina from **Antonio Bongiorno** (☎ 090 984 34 09; Via Risorgimento 240) and in Rinella from **Giro dell'Isola** (☎ 090 984 40 34; Via Roma 112).

## PANAREA

pop 320 / elev 421m

Just 3km long and 2km wide with adobe-style whitewashed houses, tiny Panarea feels like a Greek island. Exclusive and expensive, it's the smallest and most fashionable of the Aeolians, attracting the international jet-

setters and Milanese fashionistas for a little taste of *dolce far niente* (sweet nothing). In the summer, luxury yachts fill the tiny harbour while flocks of day-trippers dock at San Pietro, where you'll find most of the expensive accommodation.

## Sights & Activities

Originally a bigger island, Panarea is now a mini archipelago of its own – the original volcano is long gone. The other five islets of Basiluzzo, Dattilo, Lisca Bianca, Bottaro and Lisca Nera are located off the eastern shore and can only be reached by boat. **Tesoriero Roberto** (☎ 090 98 30 33; Via San Pietro) and **Nautilus** (☎ 333 423 31 61; Baia di Drautto) offer all kinds of boat rentals (per day from €65 to €150). **Amphibia** (☎ 335 613 85 29; dive from €35), at the port, organises scuba dives.

On Panarea you will find the remains of a **Bronze Age village** at the rocky outcrop of Punta Milazzese (it's about a 30-minute walk from the port).

Other than around exclusive hotel pools, you can bronze yourself on the pretty **beaches** of Cala Junco and Caletta degli Zimmari (south from the port) or Spiaggia Fumarola (north from the port).

## Sleeping & Eating

Accommodation can be nightmarishly expensive in July and August. Out of season, however, prices plummet.

**Da Francesco** (☎ 090 98 30 23; www.dafrancesco.panarea.com; Via San Pietro; r per person €40-80) This place overlooking the dock offers 12 pleasant rooms, some with sea-view terraces, for a fraction of the price you'd pay elsewhere on Panarea. Meals in the attached restaurant are also excellent value at €25 to €30.

**Raya** (☎ 090 98 30 13; www.hotelraya.it; Via San Pietro; d €180-540, ste €420-750; ☒ ☑ ☒) The absolute blow-out choice for experiencing Panarea's chic allure to the fullest, Raya is a honeycomb of exquisite white adobe-walled rooms tucked up against a flower-bedecked volcanic hillside. Each room is different, but seductive details abound, including hand-batiked tree-of-life bedspreads, picture-perfect terraces looking out to Stromboli, private gardens and shower-saunas, and a jacuzzi filled with mineral water from the island's natural hot springs. There's also a popular summer disco crawling with beautiful people, plus a fab pool.

**Trattoria da Paolino** (☎ 090 98 30 08; Via Iditella 75; meals €30-35; ☹ Apr-Oct) Top quality, home-style Aeolian specialties are served on Paolino's pretty terrace, a 10-minute walk north from the harbour.

## Getting There & Away

In summer there are at least six daily hydrofoils and one daily ferry that link the island with Stromboli to the northeast and Salina to the west.

## STROMBOLI

pop 400 / elev 924m

Stromboli's perfect triangle of a volcano juts dramatically out of the sea. It's the only island whose smouldering cone is permanently active, thus attracting experts and amateurs alike, like moths to a massive flame. Volcanic activity has scarred and blackened one side of the island, while the eastern side is untamed, ruggedly green and dotted with low-rise whitewashed houses. A youngster among the Aeolians, Stromboli was formed a mere 40,000 years ago and its gases continue to send up an almost constant spray of liquid magma. The most recent major eruptions took place in February 2007 when two new craters opened on the volcano's summit, producing two scalding lava flows. Although seismic activity, including rock falls, continued for several days, fortunately no mass evacuation was deemed necessary.

## Orientation

Boats arrive at Scari/San Vincenzo, downhill from the town. Most accommodation, as well as the meeting point for guided hikes up the volcano, is a short walk up the Scalo Scari to Via Roma. For the beaches, follow the road along the waterfront.

## Information

**Emergency doctor** (☎ 090 98 60 97; Via Vittorio Emanuele)

**Police station** (☎ 090 98 60 21; Via Roma) Just on the left as you walk up Via Roma.

**Post office** (Via Roma)

**Totem Trekking** (Piazza San Vincenzo 4; per 15min €1; ☹ 10am-1pm & 4-7pm) One agonisingly slow internet computer.

**Volcanological Information Centre** (Porto Scari; ☹ 10.30am-1pm & 5-7.30pm Mon-Sat) An information centre dedicated to the volcano; located 150m west of the port.

## Activities

Note that you're legally required to hire a guide if you're considering climbing the volcano.

The path to the summit (920m) is a demanding five- to six-hour trek (rest stops every 40 minutes), but the atmosphere is charged and you will be rewarded with tremendous views of the **Sciara del Fuoco** (Trail of Fire) and the constantly smoking crater. Fiery explosions usually occur every 20 minutes or so and are preceded by a loud belly-roar as gases force the magma into the air. Departure times for organised treks vary from 3.30pm to 6pm, depending on the season; treks are always timed so you can observe sunset from the mountaintop, then ooh and aah over the crater's fireworks for about 45 minutes as night falls.

To undertake the climb you will need heavy shoes; clothing for cold, wet weather; a torch (flashlight); a backpack that allows free movement of both arms; and a good supply of water. **Totem Trekking** (☎ 090 986 57 52; Piazza San Vincenzo 4) hires out all the necessary equipment, including headlamps (€3), trekking boots (€6) and windbreakers (€5).

Two other great ways to see the volcano, with less huffing and puffing, are the hike up to L'Osservatorio (p786) and the nightly boat tours to Sciara del Fuoco (below). To reach the pizzeria, follow the waterfront 2km west from the hydrofoil dock to the community of Piscità, then climb the gradual, winding path 1km further, following the signs.

The most accessible swimming and sunbathing is at **Ficogrande**, a beach of rocks and black volcanic sand 10 minutes by foot from the hydrofoil dock. Further-flung beaches worth exploring are at **Piscità** to the west and **Forgia Vecchia** to the south. **La Sirenetta Diving Club** (☎ 347 596 14 99; www.lasirenettadiving.it; Via Marina 33) offers diving courses and accompanied dives.

## Tours

**Magmatrek** (☎ 090 986 57 68; www.magmatrek.it; Via Vittorio Emanuele) has experienced, multilingual vulcanological guides that lead regular treks (maximum group size 20) up to the crater every afternoon (per person €28). It can also put together tailor-made treks for individual groups.

**Società Navigazione Pippo** (☎ 090 98 61 35) and **Antonio Caccetta** (☎ 090 98 60 23) are among the numerous boat companies at Porto Scari

offering daytime circuits of the island (€20) and sunset excursions to watch the Sciarà del Fuoco from the sea (€15 per person).

## Sleeping & Eating

Overnighting on Stromboli can be very pleasant, although as elsewhere on the islands, prices erupt in the high season.

**Pensione Aquilone** (☎ 090 98 60 80; www.aquiloneresidence.it; Via Vittorio Emanuele 29; per person €25-50) A cheerful little place with a sunny patio and views up to the volcano; some rooms come with cosy cooking nooks; otherwise, the friendly owner Francesco provides breakfast.

**Casa del Sole** (☎ 090 98 63 00; casa-del-sole@tiscali.it; Via Domenico Cincotta; dm €25-30, s €30-50, d €60-100) This wonderful Aeolian-style guest house, painted in warm colours, is only 100m from a sweet black-sand beach. Rooms (dorms and private rooms) surround a sunny patio, overhung with vines, fragrant with lemon blossoms, and decorated with the masks and stone carvings of sculptor-owner Tano Russo. There's also a nice guest kitchen.

**Il Giardino Segreto** (☎ 090 98 62 11; www.giardino-segretobb.it; Via Francesco Natoli; s low season only €35, d €70-110) This fabulous little B&B offers ultra-clean, stylishly tiled and decorated rooms five minutes' walk above the church on the way to the volcano, in a 'secret garden' framed by picturesque rows of cypresses. Five-day minimum stay in peak summer season.

**Locanda del Barbablù** (☎ 090 98 61 18; www.barbablu.it; Via Vittorio Emanuele 17; d €110-240; ☎ Apr-Oct) This dusky-pink Aeolian house is an inn in the true sense of the word. Its six sumptuous rooms each have private terrace, period furniture and the contemporary luxury of pure silk coverlets. The universally acclaimed restaurant is the island's classiest, serving a nightly four-course tasting menu of traditional Sicilian dishes for €50 (drinks excluded).

**Ritrovo Ingrid** (☎ 090 98 63 85; Piazza San Vincenzo; ☎ 8am-midnight Sep-Jun, 8am-3am Jul & Aug) Trekkers gather here to gossip over ice cream or sun-downers, while locals come for morning coffee and pastries; in summer, the attached restaurant serves pizzas and full meals.

**L'Osservatorio** (☎ 090 98 63 60; pizzas €7-10; ☎ lunch & dinner) Sure, you could eat a pizza in town, but come on – you're on Stromboli! Make the long uphill trek to this pizzeria and you'll be rewarded with exceptional volcano views, best after sundown.

Also recommended is **Punta Lena** (☎ 090 98 62 04; Via Marina, Ficogrande; meals €30-40; ☎ lunch & dinner) for delicious seafood accompanied by magnificent sea and Strombolicchio views; reserve ahead.

## Getting There & Away

It takes four hours to reach the island from Lipari by ferry, or 1½ to two hours by hydrofoil. Ticket offices for **Ustica Lines** (☎ 090 98 60 03) and **Siremar** (☎ 090 98 60 16) are at the port.

## FILICUDI & ALICUDI

### pop 300

Filicudi is arguably the wildest and the prettiest of the Aeolian Islands, with crystal-clear waters and deep grottoes, including the dazzling **Grotta del Bue Marino**. Other attractions include **Scoglio della Canna** (Cane Reef), a dramatic 71m rock tower off Filicudi's northwestern shore, and Capo Graziano, 1km southeast of the port, where you'll find the remains of a **prehistoric village** dating from 1800 BC. There's also a network of beautiful hiking trails, with destinations including the abandoned village of Zucco Grande and the mid-island peak called Fossa Felci (774m).

**I Delfini** (☎ 090 988 90 77; www.idelfinifilicudi.it, in Italian; Pecorini Mare) rents out scooters, boats and diving equipment; you can also explore the watery depths with the **Apogon Diving Center** (☎ 347 330 71 85; www.apogon.it, in Italian; dive from €35).

For real isolation, head for Alicudi, the furthest island from Lipari and the least developed of all the Aeolians. It's home only to a handful of fishermen. While here, walk up **Monte Filo dell'Arpa** (672m) to see the crater of the extinct Montagnola volcano and the **Timpone delle Femmine**, huge fissures where women are said to have taken refuge during pirate raids.

## Sleeping & Eating

Accommodation on both islands is scarce (Alicudi in particular has only one proper hotel), so it's advisable to book ahead. Half-board is obligatory at most places in July and August.

**our pick La Sirena** (☎ 090 988 99 97; www.pensione-lasirena.it; Pecorini Mare, Filicudi; r per person with half-board €65-100; ☎ Mar-Nov) On the quiet side of already quiet Filicudi, La Sirena overlooks a beachfront filled with colourful fishing boats. Run by a lovely British-Italian couple, it's got high-



ceilinged rooms with French doors opening onto harbour views, and one of the Aeolians' most innovative restaurants; people sail over every summer for specialities such as *carbonara di tonno con la pasta arrostita* (toasted pasta with egg-and-tuna carbonara sauce) and *penne al ragù di arancia* (pasta with a sauce of oranges, minced meat, tomatoes and orange peel).

**La Canna** (☎ 090 988 99 56; www.lacannahotel.it; Via Rosa 43, Filicudi; r per person incl breakfast €45-80, incl half-board €65-105; ☹ Apr-Nov; ♿ ♿) Perched like a private paradise high above the port, this delightful hotel features rooms with beams, terracotta tiles, bright rugs, modern artwork and panoramic terraces with a seagull's-eye view of the harbour sparkling below. Delicious traditional meals at the attached restaurant feature olives, vegies and wine from the adjacent gardens.

**Ericusa** (☎ 090 988 99 02; www.alicudihotel.it; Via Regina Elena, Alicudi; r per person with half-board €70-90, with full-board €90-110; ☹ Jun-Sep) This pleasant 12-room hotel also has a good restaurant.

## IONIAN COAST

Magnificent, overdeveloped, crowded – and exquisitely beautiful – the Ionian coast is Sicily's most popular tourist destination and home to 20% of the island's population. Moneyed entrepreneurs have built their villas and hotels up and down the coastline, eager to bag a spot on Sicily's version of the Amalfi Coast. Above it all towers the muscular peak of Mt Etna (3329m), puffs of smoke billowing from its snow-covered cone. The volcano is surrounded by the huge Parco dell'Etna, the largest unspoilt wilderness remaining in Sicily.

### MESSINA

pop 244,000

Messina is a chaotic, traffic-clogged city; most people come here to travel the high seas to mainland Italy or because they have four flat tyres and no car jack. The reality is that Messina is all about the straits, a veritable highway of seafaring traffic. The Greeks mythologised the clashing currents as the twin monsters of Charybdis (the whirlpool) and Scylla (the six-headed monster), and strong currents still make swimming a danger.

Beneath the choppy surface of the sea a geological fault line has brought both prosper-

ity and adversity to the city. In 1908 it was responsible for one of the worst natural disasters to hit the island – an earthquake sank the shore by half a metre and killed 84,000 people – but the narrow waterway is also the secret of Messina's economic success. Plans to build the world's largest suspension bridge to span the straits between Sicily and the mainland – already on the drawing board for years – are still a bone of contention among Sicilians (see boxed text, p789).

### Orientation

Wide boulevards and a practical grid system make Messina relatively easy to navigate, although the style of driving is a combination of dodgem and Formula One. The main transport hub, home to the train station and intercity bus station, is Piazza della Repubblica, just south of the centre; Trenitalia ferries also arrive here.

Those visitors coming by hydrofoil from Reggio di Calabria arrive about 1km north of the city on Corso Vittorio Emanuele II, while drivers on the private car ferry from Villa San Giovanni land a few kilometres further along, just north of the trade-fair area (Fiera).

### Information

**Internet Point DGD** (090 71 07 19; Via I Settembre 68; per hr €3; ☹ 9am-8pm) Telephones and internet connection.

**Ospedale Piemonte** (☎ 090 22 21; Viale Europa) Has a casualty service.

**Tourist office** (☎ 090 67 29 44; infotur@comune.messina.it; Piazza della Repubblica 44; ☹ 9am-1.30pm & 3-5pm Mon-Thu, 9am-1.30pm Fri) To the right as you exit the train station. Friendly English-speaking staff with good information about Messina and onward travel.

### Sights

Messina is a rusty tiara with a few precious gems. The Norman **cathedral** (Piazza del Duomo; ☹ 8am-6pm) is one of the most attractive in Sicily despite having been stricken by one disaster after another. Built in 1150, it suffered its first mishap in 1254 at the funeral of Conrad IV (son of Frederick II), when a mass of candles set the church on fire. Devastating earthquakes in 1783 and 1908, and a WWII incendiary bomb in 1943, put paid to the rest. True to their patrician nature, the Messinese rebuilt it faithfully in the style of the original basilica, complete with its mosaic apses. The lovely stripy marble inlay, the tracery of the facade and the Catalan-Gothic portal with its



sculpted columns are some of the few original elements that were salvaged.

The magnificent 1668 Golden Mantle (a cloth that's draped around an image of the Virgin at key religious festivals), designed by Innocenzo Mangani, is kept in the cathedral **treasury** (adult/concession €3/1; ☎ 9am-1pm Mon-Sat). Outside, the elegant **campanile** (admission €3.50; ☎ 9am-1pm Mon-Sat) houses the world's largest astronomical clock. It strikes at noon, setting in motion a procession of slow-moving bronze automata that set off a comical roaring lion and crowing cockerel. You can climb the bell tower and see the enormous figures up close and personal.

Below the tower, the pale marble **Fontana di Orione** (1553) commemorates Orion, the mythical founder of Messina. It was constructed by Giovanni Angelo Montorsoli (a pupil of Michelangelo) to celebrate the construction of Messina's first aqueduct (the local residents were the first in Sicily to receive running water).

Catch the city tram at Piazza Carioli (or the train station), and take a laid-back ride up the sickle-shaped harbour. Halfway up is Messina's other great fountain, the 16th-century **Fontana del Nettuno**. Get off here to enjoy views over the harbour and admire the huge golden statue of the **Madonnino del Porto**. Alternatively, continue on to the end of the tram line to the **Museo Regionale** (☎ 090 36 12 92; Viale della Libertà 465; adult/concession €4.50/2; ☎ 9am-1.30pm Mon, Wed & Fri, 9am-1.30pm & 3-5.30pm Tue, Thu & Sat, 9am-12.30pm Sun). It houses works of art including the *Virgin and Child with Saints* by Antonello da Messina (born here in 1430) and two masterpieces by Caravaggio – *L'Adorazione dei pastori* and *Resurrezione di Lazzaro*.

If you have your own transport, the drive north along the coast from Messina to Capo Peloro and then round to the east is pretty, and there are some reasonable beaches between the Cape and Acquarone. Alternatively, you can take bus 79 or 80 to the lighthouse at **Torre del Faro** (8km north) and the popular summer resort of **Mortelle**.

## Sleeping

Despite being a major transport hub, Messina is not geared for tourists. If you do have to stay here, you'll be rubbing shoulders with insurance salesmen and the like. Prices generally don't vary with the season.

**Hotel Touring** (☎ 090 293 88 51; [www.hoteltouring-me.it](http://www.hoteltouring-me.it); Via N Scotti 17; s/d €40/60; ☎) This is a pleasant, well-maintained cheap sleep near the station.

**Royal Palace Hotel** (☎ 090 65 03; [www.nh-hotels.it](http://www.nh-hotels.it); Via Tommaso Cannizzaro 224; s €60-86, d €100-125; (P) ☎) Rooms at this grey concrete monster have dated, dizzying-patterned decor; the public areas are more attractive. Sixth-floor rooms with terraces are nicest.

**Grand Hotel Liberty** (☎ 090 640 94 36; [www.nh-hotels.it](http://www.nh-hotels.it); Via I Settembre 15; s €85-137, d €104-165; (P) ☎) The most comfortable hotel in Messina, the Grand is a renovated Liberty-style villa with luxurious rooms decorated in fashionable earthy colours.

## Eating

Messina is most famous for its delicious swordfish dishes.

**Trattoria da Mario** (☎ 090 4 24 77; Via Vittorio Emanuele II 108; meals €20-25; ☎ closed Wed) Opposite the Ustica Lines hydrofoil dock, this fish restaurant is popular with locals. Antipasti are laid out buffet-style – a delicious mixture of fish and vegetables.

**Da Piero** (☎ 090 640 93 54; Via Ghibellina 121; meals €35-45; ☎ Mon-Sat) A classy restaurant frequented by well-heeled Messinese. It's an excellent place to try the typical swordfish *agghiotta*, flavoured with pine nuts, sultanas, garlic, basil and tomatoes. Reservations are essential.

Also recommended: **Pasticceria Irrera** (☎ 090 67 38 23; Piazza Cairoli 12; pastries from €1; ☎ 8am-9pm), a fabulous pastry shop celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2010.

## Getting There & Away

### BOAT

Messina is the main point of arrival for ferries and hydrofoils from the Italian mainland, just a quick hop across the straits.

**Trenitalia/Bluvia** (☎ 090 66 16 74; [www.trenitalia.it](http://www.trenitalia.it); Ferry Dock) runs frequent passenger-only ferries to Reggio di Calabria (€3.30, 35 minutes) and car ferries to Villa San Giovanni on the Italian mainland (passenger/motorcycle/car €1.50/6/23, 35 minutes).

**Ustica Lines** (☎ 090 36 40 44; [www.usticalines.it](http://www.usticalines.it); Via Vittorio Emanuele II) runs hydrofoils to Reggio di Calabria (€4.30, 15 minutes, two daily) and Lipari in the Aeolian Islands (€22.90, 1½ hours, five daily in summer, one in winter).

## IN SUSPENSION

Like a never-ending ping-pong match, debate rages on about plans for a bridge across the Strait of Messina. Despite receiving EU approval and having a construction schedule already in place, the bridge was put on hold back in April 2006 when Italy's centre left came to power. But with Silvio Berlusconi back in the driver's seat, the bridge has once again gotten the green light – in March 2009 the re-elected premier pledged €1.3 billion towards its completion.

Supporters argue that the bridge is an essential infrastructure project that would boost the depressed Sicilian economy and provide jobs for some 40,000 people. Environmentalists have long been fiercely opposed to the project, while other critics argue that it would be unsafe in an earthquake-prone area and would waste billions of euros. Still others fear Mafia involvement, saying that crime clans would be able to obtain lucrative building contracts by intimidating competitors and bribing local officials. Stay tuned – as always, the bridge remains a very volatile political hot potato.

**Caronte** (☎ 800 62 74 14; [www.carontetourist.it](http://www.carontetourist.it); Viale della Libertà) runs ferries to Salerno (passenger/car €30/80, eight hours, two daily).

## BUS

**Interbus** (☎ 090 66 17 54; [www.interbus.it](http://www.interbus.it); Piazza della Repubblica 6) runs a regular service to Taormina (€3.50, 1½ hours, hourly Monday to Saturday, three on Sunday).

**SAIS** (☎ 090 77 19 14; [www.saisautolinee.it](http://www.saisautolinee.it); Piazza della Repubblica) serves Palermo (€14.80, 2¾ hours, eight daily Monday to Friday, two daily Saturday and Sunday) and Catania (€7.50, 1½ hours, half-hourly Monday to Saturday, five on Sunday).

**Giuntabus** (☎ 090 67 57 49; [www.giuntabustrasporti.com](http://www.giuntabustrasporti.com); Piazza della Repubblica 278) runs a service to Milazzo (€3.80, 50 minutes, at least hourly Monday to Saturday, three on Sunday) to catch the ferries and hydrofoils to the Aeolian Islands.

## CAR & MOTORCYCLE

For Palermo (or Milazzo and the Aeolian Islands), turn right from the docks and follow Via Garibaldi along the waterfront. After about 1km, turn left into Viale Boccetta and follow the green autostrada signs for Palermo. To reach Taormina and Syracuse, turn left from the docks into Via La Farina and follow the autostrada signs for Catania.

Car hire is widely available along Via Vittorio Emanuele II between the train station and the Ustica Lines hydrofoil dock.

## TRAIN

Several trains daily connect Messina with Milazzo (€3.10, 30 minutes), Taormina (€3.70, 40 to 75 minutes), Catania (€6.45, 1½ to two

hours), Syracuse (regional/InterCity train €9/14.50, three to 3½ hours) and Palermo (regional/InterCity train €11/18, three to four hours). However, be aware that the train stations for Milazzo and Taormina are inconveniently located some distance from their respective town centres.

From Messina you can also take the train across the straits for Rome and Milan (for details, see p759).

## Getting Around

An electric tram runs the length of the town, from Piazza Cairoli via the train station up to the Museo Regionale. You can buy a single-ride ticket (€0.50) or a two-hour ticket (€1) from local *tabacchi*.

City buses (tickets €1, valid for two hours) run from outside the train station.

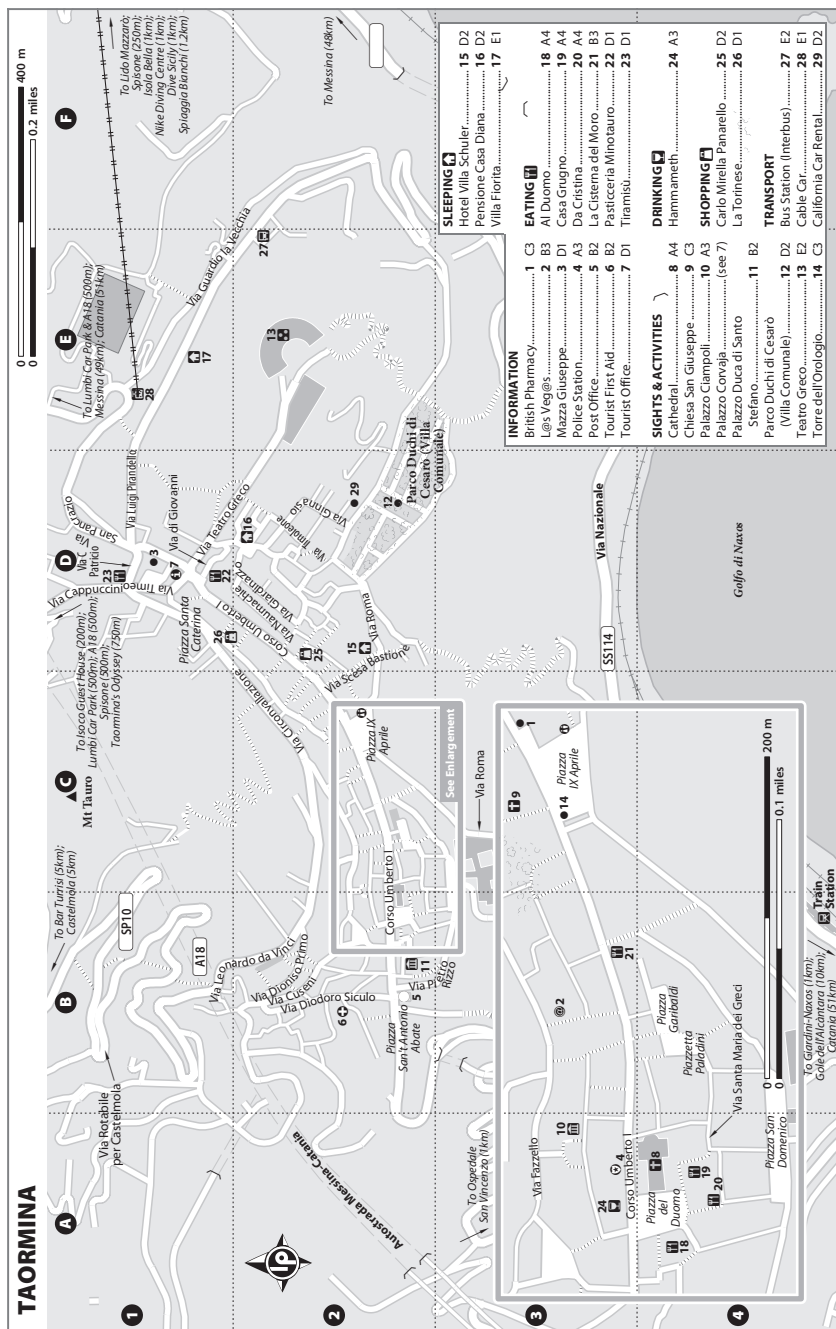
## TAORMINA

pop 11,000 / elev 204m

Spectacularly situated on a terrace of Monte Tauro, with views westwards to Mt Etna, Taormina is a beautiful small town, reminiscent of Capri or an Amalfi coastal resort. Over the centuries, Taormina has seduced an exhaustive line of writers and artists, aristocrats and royalty, and these days it's host to a summer arts festival (p792) that packs the town with international visitors.

Perched on its eyrie, Taormina is sophisticated, chic and comfortably cushioned by some serious wealth – very far removed from the banal economic realities of other Sicilian towns. But the charm is not manufactured. The capital of Byzantine Sicily in the 9th century, Taormina is an almost perfectly preserved medieval town, and if you can tear

**TAORMINA**



yourself away from the shopping and sunbathing, it has a wealth of small but perfect tourist sites. Taormina is also a popular resort with gay men.

Be warned that in July and August the town is choked with tourists and the only space left on the beach may well be next to the rubbish bins.

## Orientation

The train station (Taormina-Giardini) is at the bottom of Monte Tauro. From there you'll need to hop on an Interbus coach (€1.50) to get to the bus station on Via Luigi Pirandello. A short walk uphill from the bus station brings you to Corso Umberto I, which traverses the length of the medieval town and connects its two historic town gates, Porta Messina and Porta Catania.

## Information

There are plenty of banks with ATMs along Corso Umberto I.

**British Pharmacy** (☎ 0942 62 58 66; Piazza IX Aprile; ☎ 8.30am-8pm) Offers an emergency night call-out service.

**L@s Veg@s** (☎ 0942 2 40 59; Salita Alexander Humboldt; per 20min €2; ☎ 11.30am-9.30pm Nov-May, 10am-late Jun-Sep) A slick internet bar with several fast computers, wi-fi and a choice of cocktails.

**Mazza Giuseppe** (Corso Umberto I 9) Newsagent selling foreign newspapers and magazines.

**Ospedale San Vincenzo** (☎ 0942 57 92 97; Contrada Sirina) Downhill and 2km southwest of the centre. Call the same number for an ambulance.

**Police station** (☎ 0942 61 11 11; Corso Umberto I 219)

**Post office** (Piazza Sant'Antonio Abate)

**Tourist first aid** (☎ 0942 62 54 19; Piazza San Francesco di Paola) A 24-hour, free medical service available from 16 June to 15 September.

**Tourist office** (☎ 0942 2 32 43; www.gate2taormina.com; Palazzo Corvaja, Corso Umberto I; ☎ 8.30am-2pm Mon-Fri & 4-7pm Mon-Thu) Busy tourist office with informative brochures and helpful staff.

## Sights

One of the chief delights of Taormina is wandering along its medieval main avenue, and browsing among the antique and craft shops, delis and designer boutiques. If you're seeking more tranquillity, check out **Teatro Greco** (☎ 0942 2 32 20; Via Teatro Greco; adult/concession €6/3; ☎ 9am-7pm Apr-Oct, 9am-4.30pm Nov-Mar), Taormina's premier attraction. This perfect horseshoe-shaped theatre, suspended between sea and

sky, was built in the 3rd century BC and is the second largest in Sicily (after Syracuse), and the most dramatically situated Greek theatre in the world. In summer the theatre is used as the venue for the international arts festival, Taormina Arte (see p792). In peak season the site is best explored early in the morning to avoid the crowds.

When the shops and the sights have exhausted their charms, revel in the stunning panoramic views from Piazza IX Aprile and pop your head into the charming rococo church, **Chiesa San Giuseppe** (Piazza IX Aprile; ☎ 9am-7pm).

On the western side of Piazza IX Aprile is the 12th-century clock tower, **Torre dell'Orologio**, which leads you through into the Borgo Medievale, the oldest quarter of the town. Head down here to Piazza del Duomo, where teenagers congregate around the ornate baroque fountain (built 1635), which sports a two-legged centaur with the bust of an angel, the symbol of Taormina. On the eastern side of this piazza is the 13th-century **cathedral** (Piazza del Duomo; ☎ 8am-noon & 4-7pm). It survived much of the Renaissance-style remodelling undertaken throughout the town by the Spanish aristocracy in the 15th century. The Renaissance influence is better illustrated in various palaces like **Palazzo Duca di Santo Stefano Corvaja** (the tourist office) and **Palazzo Ciampoli** (now the Hotel Palazzo Vecchio).

To get away from the crowds, wander down to **Villa Comunale** (Parco Duchi di Cesaro; Via Bagnoli Croci; admission free; ☎ 9am-midnight summer, 9am-10pm winter). Created by Englishwoman Florence Trevelyan, these hanging gardens are a lush paradise of tropical plants and delicate flowers. There's also a children's play area.

For eye-popping views of the coastline, head 5km up Via Leonardo da Vinci to **Castelmola** with its ruined castle; the walk will take you around an hour along a well-paved route. Alternatively, Interbus runs an hourly service (€1.50) up the hill.

## Activities

Many visitors to Taormina come only for the beach scene. To reach **Lido Mazzarò**, directly beneath Taormina, take the **cable car** (Via Luigi Pirandello; one way/return €2/3.50; ☎ 8am-8.15pm, to 1am in summer). This beach is well serviced with bars and restaurants; private operators charge a fee for umbrellas and deck chairs (€5 per person

per day). To the west of the beach, past the Sant'Andrea hotel, is the minuscule **Isola Bella**, set in a stunning cove with fishing boats. You can walk here in a few minutes but it's more fun to rent a small boat from Mazzarò and paddle round Capo Sant'Andrea.

**Nike Diving Centre** (☎ 339 196 15 59; www.divenike.taormina.com; Contrada Isola Bella Spiaggia; dive from €30), located opposite Isola Bella, offers a wide range of courses for children and adults. **Dive Sicily** (☎ 360 28 95 55; www.divesicily.com; Lido Mazzarò) offers similar deals.

For a sandy beach you will have to go to **Spisone**, just beneath the autostrada exit (left from the cable-car station). When you reach Le Capinera restaurant, take the staircase on your right, which will take you through a tunnel and out onto the large sandy beach.

**Spiaggia Bianchi**, popular with gay men, is located around 1km north of the cable-car station.

Other activities involve short excursions around Taormina, one of the most popular being to the **Gole dell'Alcàntara**, a series of vertiginous lava gorges swirling with rapids. The Gole dell'Alcàntara runs **tours** (☎ 0942 98 50 10; adult €4.30) on-site and hires out the necessary wellies and wetsuits (€6). Take the bus from Taormina (€4.30, one hour, four daily Monday to Saturday). It's forbidden to enter the gorges from around November to May due to regular flooding.

## Festivals & Events

The **Taormina Arte festival** (☎ 0942 2 11 42; www.taormina-arte.com) from June to August includes films, theatrical events and music concerts from an impressive list of international names.

**Raduno del Costume e del Carretto Siciliano** is a parade featuring traditional Sicilian carts and folkloric groups. It's usually held in autumn; ask at the tourist office for details and dates.

## Sleeping

Taormina has plenty of expensive and luxurious accommodation; the following are among the more reasonable options. You will also need to book your parking place at most hotels. This usually incurs an extra charge of €10 to €15 per day.

**Taormina's Odyssey** (☎ 349 810 77 33; www.taormina-odyssey.com; Traversa A, Via Gaetano Martino 2; dm/s/d with-out breakfast €19/30/60; ☎) This welcoming hostel has earned a flurry of complimentary letters from Lonely Planet readers who highly rate

its warm, friendly atmosphere, lack of curfew and open kitchen. It's a 10-minute walk from the town centre.

**Pensione Casa Diana** (☎ 0942 2 38 98; Via Di Giovanni 6; s/d €35/50) This centrally located *pensione* is resided over by an elderly, deaf, Italian *signora* (with no English). The rooms are plain, small and clean, with well-dusted plastic flowers.

**Isoco Guest House** (☎ 0942 2 36 79; www.isoco.it; Via Salita Branco 2; s €65-120, d €85-120; ☎ ☎ ☎) Every room in this exceptionally welcoming, gay-friendly B&B is dedicated to an artist – from Botticelli to the sculpted buttocks and pant-popping thighs on the walls of the Herb Ritts room. The excellent breakfast, free internet access, sun decks and outdoor jacuzzi are great as well. In summer, owner Michele serves multi-course dinners on the terrace for €25 per person (including drinks).

**Villa Fiorita** (☎ 0942 2 41 22; www.villafioritahotel.com; Via Luigi Pirandello 39; s/d €110/125; ☎ ☎ ☎) A quiet, old-fashioned hotel decorated with oriental rugs, antiques and fine artwork. Private terraces and balconies have sea views. There's a nice pool, a pretty garden and even an ancient Greek tomb.

**Hotel Villa Schuler** (☎ 0942 2 34 81; www.hotel-villaschuler.com; Via Roma, Piazzetta Bastione; s €120, d €134-190; ☎ ☎) Surrounded by shady terraced gardens and with views of Mt Etna, the rose-pink Villa Schuler is family-owned and preserves a homely atmosphere. A lovely breakfast is served on the panoramic terrace. A great choice.

## Eating

Eating out in Taormina goes hand in hand with posing. It's essential to make a reservation at the more exclusive choices. Be aware that Taormina's cafes charge extraordinarily high prices even for coffee.

**La Cisterna del Moro** (☎ 0942 2 30 01; Via Bonifacio 1; sandwiches €5, pizzas €5.50-9.50) Affordability and aesthetics don't usually go hand in hand in Taormina, but this restaurant down an alley off Corso Umberto I is a welcome exception. Enjoy pizza, sandwiches or full meals as you contemplate the view from their pleasant outdoor terrace.

**Tiramisù** (☎ 0942 2 48 03; Via Cappuccini 1; pizzas €7-10, meals €30-40; ☎ closed Tue) This stylish but unpretentious place hidden away just outside Porta Messina makes fabulous meals, from *linguine cozze*, *menta e zucchini* (pasta with mussels, mint and courgettes) to old favourites like



*scaloppine al limone e panna* (veal escalope in lemon cream sauce). When dessert rolls around, don't miss their trademark tiramisu, a perfect ending to any meal here.

**Al Duomo** (☎ 0942 62 56 56; Vico Ebrei 11; meals €45, tasting menu €60; ☞ lunch & dinner) This highly acclaimed restaurant with a romantic terrace overlooking the cathedral serves a mix-and-match menu of antipasti, first and second courses. Choose your favourite two or three items for a fixed price, or go all out and indulge in the chef's comprehensive tasting menu.

**Casa Grugno** (☎ 0942 2 12 08; Via Santa Maria dei Greci; tasting menus €80-100; ☞ dinner Mon-Sat) Despite the Austrian chef in the kitchen, the cuisine is modern Sicilian – and sublime. This is Taormina's most fashionable restaurant and has a walled-in terrace surrounded by plants.

Also recommended for quick, low-cost snacks are **Pasticceria Minotauro** (☎ 0942 2 47 67; Via di Giovanni 15; ☞ 9am-8.30pm), whose €0.50 *minicannoli* make the perfect mid-afternoon pick-me-up, and **Da Cristina** (☎ 0942 2 11 71; Via Strabone 2; snacks from €1.75) for tasty focaccia, *arancini* and pizza slices.

## Drinking

**Hammameth** (☎ 349 849 71 18; Piazza del Duomo; ☞ 10am-3am) Sip your cocktail while sitting on satin cushions in a seductive candlelit atmosphere; there are also outside tables for balmy night-time quaffing.

**our pick! Bar Turrisi** (☎ 0942 2 81 81; Castelmola; ☞ 9am-2am) A few kilometres outside Taormina, in the hilltop community of Castelmola, this whimsical bar is built on four levels overlooking the church square. Its decor is an eclectic tangle of Sicilian influences, with everything from painted carts to a giant stone *minchia* (you'll need no translation once you see it). Sip a glass of almond wine, enjoy the view, and don't forget to check out the bathrooms on the way out!

## Shopping

Taormina is a shopper's paradise, choked with smart boutiques, quaint antique shops, stylish jewellers and tempting delis. The quality in most places is high but don't come here expecting a bargain – instead think of purchasing one or two memorable items such as a piece of quality ceramic art from **Carlo Mirella Panarello** (Via Antonio Marziani). If olive oil, capers, jam and wine are more your cup of tea, head for **La Torinese** (Corso Umberto I 59).

## Getting There & Around

### BUS

The bus is the easiest way to reach Taormina. **Interbus** (☎ 0942 62 53 01; Via Luigi Pirandello) services leave daily for Messina (€3.70, 55 minutes to 1¾ hours, 10 daily Monday to Saturday) and Catania (€5, 1¼ hours, six to nine daily). The Catania bus also services the train station (€1.50). Additional services go to the Gola dell'Alcantara (€4.30, four daily) and up to Castelmola (€1.50, 15 minutes, four daily).

### CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Taormina is on the A18 autostrada and the SS114 between Messina and Catania. Parking is a complete nightmare and Corso Umberto I is closed to traffic. The only real place to park is the **Lumbi car park** (☎ 0942 2 43 45; ☞ 24hr), north of the town centre. There's a shuttle service to the centre from Porta Messina.

**California** (☎ 0942 2 37 69; Via Bagnoli Croce 86; Vespa 125 per day/week €30/189, Fiat Punto €72/327) rents out cars and scooters at reasonable prices.

### TRAIN

There are regular trains to and from Messina (€3.70, 40 to 75 minutes, hourly) and Catania (€3.70, 40 to 55 minutes, hourly), but the awkward location of Taormina's station is a strong disincentive. If you arrive this way, catch an Interbus service (€1.50) up to the town. They run roughly every 30 to 90 minutes (less frequently on Sunday).

## CATANIA

pop 299,000

Catania is a true city of the volcano. Much of it is constructed from the lava that poured down the mountain and engulfed the city in the 1669 eruption in which nearly 12,000 people lost their lives. It is also lava-black in colour, as if a fine dusting of soot permanently covers its elegant buildings, most of which are the work of baroque master Giovanni Vaccarini. He almost single-handedly rebuilt the civic centre into an elegant modern city of spacious boulevards and set-piece piazzas.

Catania is Sicily's second commercial city – a thriving, entrepreneurial centre with a large university and a tough, resilient local population that adheres strongly to the motto of *carpe diem* (seize the day).





## Orientation

The main train station is near the port at Piazza Giovanni XXIII, and the intercity bus terminal is one block up at Via d'Amico. Most sights are concentrated around and west of Piazza del Duomo, while the commercial centre of Catania is further north around Via Pacini and Via Umberto I.

## Information

Banks with ATMs are concentrated around Piazza del Duomo and along Via Etnea.

**Ambulance** (☎ 118)

**Etna Convention Bureau** airport (☎ 095 093 70 23; [aerportocto@live.it](mailto:aerportocto@live.it); ☎ 9am-9pm); train station (☎ 095 093 70 24; [stazionect@gmail.com](mailto:stazionect@gmail.com) ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Sat) Has taken over airport and train station tourist information posts formerly operated by Catania's provincial tourism board.

**Farmacia Consoli** (☎ 095 44 83 17; Via Etnea 400; ☎ 4.30pm-1pm Mon-Fri, 8pm-8.30am Sat & Sun) Late-night pharmacy that closes for lunch during the week and daytimes on weekends.

**Internetteria** (☎ 095 31 01 39; Via Penninello 44; per hr €2; ☎ 10am-10pm) Fast internet and a great little bar-café.

**Municipal tourist office** (☎ 095 742 55 73; bureau [turismo@comune.catania.it](mailto:turismo@comune.catania.it); Via Vittorio Emanuele 172; ☎ 8.15am-7.15pm Mon-Fri, 8.15am-12.15pm Sat)

**Ospedale Vittorio Emanuele** (☎ 091 743 54 52; Via Plebiscito 628) Has a 24-hour emergency doctor.

**Police station** (☎ 095 736 71 11; Piazza Santa Nicoletta)

**Post office** (Via Etnea 215)

**Train station** (per bag per 12hr €3; ☎ 7am-9pm) Left-luggage service.

## Sights

Catania's central square, **Piazza del Duomo**, is a Unesco World Heritage site. It's a set piece of sinuous buildings and a grand cathedral, all built in Catania's own style of baroque, with its contrasting lava and limestone. In the centre of the piazza is Catania's most memorable monument, and a symbol of the city, the smiling **Fontana dell'Elefante** (built in 1736). The statue is crowned by a naive black-lava elephant, dating from the Roman period, surmounted by an improbable Egyptian obelisk. Legend has it that it belonged to the 8th-century magician Eliodorus, who reputedly made his living by turning men into animals. The obelisk is believed to possess magical powers that help to calm the restless activity of Mt Etna.

Facing the statue is Catania's other defence against Mt Etna, St Agata's **cathedral** (☎ 095 32

00 44; Piazza del Duomo; ☎ 8am-noon & 4-7pm), with its impressive marble facade. Inside the cool, vaulted interior lie the remains of the city's patron saint, the young virgin Agata, who resisted the advances of the nefarious Quintian (AD 250) and was horribly mutilated. The saint's jewel-drenched effigy is ecstatically venerated on 5 February in one of Sicily's largest *feste* (see below).

A few blocks northeast you'll stumble onto Piazza Bellini. Its centrepiece is the **Teatro Massimo Bellini** ([www.teatromassimobellini.it](http://www.teatromassimobellini.it); Via Perrotta 12; guided tours €5; ☎ tours Wed, Fri, Sat), named after the composer Vincenzo Bellini, the father of Catania's vibrant modern musical scene. There's a small museum, **Museo Belliniano** (☎ 095 715 05 35; Piazza San Francesco; admission free; ☎ 9am-1pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-1.30pm Sun & holidays), which houses a collection of memorabilia from the composer's life.

The best show in town, however, is the bustling **La Pescheria** (fish market; Via Pardo; ☎ 5-11am) and adjoining **food market** (Via Naumachia; ☎ 8-9am & 6-7pm) where carcasses of meat, silvery fish, skinned sheep's heads, strings of sausages, huge wheels of cheese and piles of luscious vegetables are all rolled together in a few noisy, jam-packed alleyways. The **Fontana dell'Amenano** marks the entrance to the market and is Tito Angelini's commemoration of the Amenano River, which once ran overground and on whose banks the Greeks first founded the city of Katáne.

Catania also has a number of Roman remains dotted throughout the city. West along Via Vittorio Emanuele II is the **Roman theatre** and a small rehearsal theatre, the **Odeon** (Via Vittorio Emanuele II 266), both closed for restoration at the time of research. North of Piazza del Duomo, more leftovers from Roman days include a modest **Roman amphitheatre** on Piazza Stesicoro. For relief from the madding crowd, continue north along Via Etnea to the lovely gardens of **Villa Bellini** (☎ 8am-8pm) with its views of Mt Etna.

Catania's **Museo Civico** (☎ 095 34 58 30; Piazza Federico II di Svevia; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-1.30pm Sun) is housed in the grim-looking **Castello Ursino**. The museum is the repository of the valuable Biscari archaeological collection, an extensive exhibition of paintings, vases and sculpture, plus an impressive coin collection.

## Festivals & Events

There are hysterical celebrations during **Festa di Sant'Agata** (3 to 5 February), where one

million Catanians follow as the Fercolo (a silver reliquary bust of the saint) is carried along the main street of the city accompanied by spectacular fireworks.

Held in July are **Catania Musica Estate**, a classical music festival; **Settimana Barocca**, a week of baroque concerts, pageants and other performances; and **Etna Jazz** – ask at the tourist office for information on these musical events.

## Sleeping

Catania is served by a good range of reasonably priced places to stay, making it an excellent base for exploring the Ionian coast and Etna.

**Agorá Hostel** (☎ 095 723 30 10; [www.agorahostel.com](http://www.agorahostel.com); Piazza Currò 6; dm €18–21, s €25–30, d €50–55; ☑) A classic hostel with rooms of six to 10 beds and some doubles. There's no lockout, an internet point is provided (€2 per hour) and you can do laundry (€4 per wash). Its location near La Pescheria makes it a great base for self-caterers, and its restaurant-bar is one of Catania's coolest night spots.

**Hotel Bellini** (☎ 095 715 09 69; [www.bellinihotel.com](http://www.bellinihotel.com); Via Landolina 41; s €35–40, d €50–60; ☑ ☑ ☑ ☑) A good budget choice near Teatro Bellini and its lively bar scene, with free wi-fi and limited free parking. Breakfast (optional) costs €5 extra per person.

**B&B Faro** (☎ 349 457 88 56; [www.bebfaro.it](http://www.bebfaro.it); Via San Michele 26; s €50, d €70–80; ☑ ☑) You'll need to call ahead to arrange your visit to this stylish B&B in the historic centre. There's not even a sign outside – yet the place does a brisk word-of-mouth business. Artists Anna and Antonio have completely remodelled four spacious rooms with polished wood floors on the upper floor of an older building, incorporating double-glazed windows, top-of-the-line modern bathroom fixtures, antique tiles and bold colours into a uniquely cohesive design concept. The one larger suite is especially nice, and during slower season can sometimes be booked for the price of a double. They also rent out a lovely apartment with its own kitchen near the Roman amphitheatre on Piazza Stesicoro (€35 per person).

**Pensione Rubens** (☎ 095 31 70 73; [www.hotelrubenscatania.com](http://www.hotelrubenscatania.com); Via Etna 196; s/d/tr/q €45/75/95/115; ☑ ☑) Seven comfortable, spacious rooms are kept in tip-top condition by the affable Signor Caviezel, whose advice on his home town makes for a rewarding and enjoyable stay; book ahead.

**Hotel del Duomo** (☎ 095 250 31 77; [www.hoteldelduomo.it](http://www.hoteldelduomo.it); Via Etna 28; s €50–65, d €75–95; ☑ ☑) Enjoying an ideal location between Piazza del Duomo and Piazza dell'Università, this hotel occupies an entire wing of an ancient *palazzo*. The rooms have elegant Regency-style furnishings, and many offer romantic views over the floodlit piazza at night.

**our pick B&B Crociferi** (☎ 095 715 22 66; [www.bbcrociferi.it](http://www.bbcrociferi.it); Via Crociferi 81; s/d €65/90; ☑ ☑) Affording easy access to the animated nightlife of Catania's historic centre, this B&B in a beautifully decorated family home is one of Catania's most delightful places to stay. With only three rooms, it fills up fast, so advance booking is essential. Rooms are spacious, with tall ceilings and artistic accoutrements brought back from the owners' travels in India. Mario (who speaks French) can offer tours of the coastline in his private boat, while Teresa (who speaks excellent German and English) makes a memorable breakfast, often including freshly squeezed orange juice, scrambled eggs and home-made cake.

**Il Principe** (☎ 095 250 03 45; [www.ilprincipetel.com](http://www.ilprincipetel.com); Via Alessi 24; s €89–114; d €124–159; ☑ ☑ ☑ ☑) This boutique-style hotel in an 18th-century building features luxurious rooms on one of the liveliest nightlife streets in town (thank goodness for double glazing!). Perks include international cable TV, free wi-fi and fluffy bathrobes to wear on your way to the Turkish steam bath. Check online for regularly updated special rates. More expensive rooms have marble bathrooms with jacuzzis and spiral staircases leading to a second level.

Also recommended: **Hotel Etna 316** (☎ 095 250 30 76; [www.hoteletnea316.com](http://www.hoteletnea316.com); Via Etna 316; s/d €60/80; ☑ ☑ ☑), located opposite the Bellini gardens.

## Eating

Aside from some very good restaurants, the city has a number of street-facing bar counters serving *arancini* (fried rice balls filled with meat, cheese or tomatoes), *cartocciate* (bread stuffed with ham, mozzarella, olives and tomato) and *pasta alla Norma* (with basil, aubergine and ricotta), a dish that originated here.

**Al Cortile Alessi** (☎ 095 31 54 44; Via Alessi 28; pizzas €6–8; ☎ 8pm–1am) Catanians of all ages flock here on weekend evenings, drawn by the excellent pizzas, draft beer and relaxed atmosphere. The outdoor courtyard is especially fun, with its banana trees and overhanging silk tapestries.

(Continued on page 805)

(Continued from page 796)

**Nieski Pub** (☎ 095 31 37 92; Scalinata Alessi 15; meals €15-25; ☎ 8pm-2am) Popular with Catania's alternative crowd, this place serves affordable food and alcohol with a slightly arch attitude (one sign at the bar translates as, 'we don't serve minors, and we don't serve Red Bull or other crap like that'). Cuban revolutionary posters adorn the walls, while the menu is an eclectic mix of salads, vegetarian fare and fish brought in daily from La Pescheria market. At night the beer flows freely as students gather on the steps outside.

**Trattoria La Paglia** (☎ 095 34 68 38; Via Pardo 23; meals €15-25; ☎ closed Sun) This is a great, cheap trattoria with an in-your-face view of the action around La Pescheria market.

**Fiaschetteria Biscari** (☎ 095 093 27 61; Via Museo Biscari 8; meals €25-30; ☎ closed 1 variable day per week) In the former stables of Palazzo Biscari, this wonderfully atmospheric wine bar and restaurant places a high value on quality; the menu is built around ultra-fresh ingredients from the nearby fish and produce markets.

**Osteria Antica Marina** (☎ 095 34 81 97; Via Pardo 29; meals €30-35; ☎ closed Wed) This rustic-style trattoria behind the fish market is the place to come for seafood. Try the local favourite, a raw anchovy salad (tastier than it sounds!). Decor-wise think solid wooden tables and rough stone walls. Reservations are essential.

**Metrol** (☎ 095 32 20 98; Via Crociferi 76; meals €25-35; ☎ closed Sun) This Slow Food-recommended eatery prides itself on stylish presentation and innovative adaptations of traditional Sicilian specialities. Their *tonno in cipudata* (tuna steak smothered in caramelised onions) is fabulous, as is the *dialogo fra il cioccolato e il pistacchio* (a slice of sinfully dense chocolate cake topped with a thin layer of cream and accompanied by a dome of pistachio flan).

**Grand Café Tabbacco** (Via Etnea 28) An old-style *pasticciera* (pastry shop) with outdoor seating at the lively junction of Via Etnea and Piazza del Duomo, this is the perfect place to people-watch during the *passeggiata*. Try a selection of mini-tarts filled with fresh fruit.

The **morning market** adjacent to La Pescheria (see p795) is a fantastic place to shop for fruit, cheese, and sandwich fixings (don't let those staring swordfish intimidate you!).

## Drinking

Not surprisingly for a busy university town, Catania has a reputation for its effervescent nightlife. Fun streets for bar-hopping include (from west to east) Via Alessi, Via Collegiata, Via Vasta, Via Mancini, Via Montesano, Piazza Spirito Santo and Via Teatro Massimo.

**Tertulia** (☎ 095 715 26 03; Via Michele Rapisardi 1-3; ☎ 4.30pm-1.30am Sep-Jul) A nocturnal bookshop-café with a stylish tea-house atmosphere. There's occasional live music, plus literary evenings and book presentations.

**ourpick Agorà Bar** (☎ 095 723 30 10; www.agora hostel.com; Piazza Currò 6) The super-atmospheric bar here is in a neon-lit cave 18m below ground, complete with its own subterranean river. The Romans used it as a spa and now a cosmopolitan crowd lingers over drinks in the cavern. Meals cost €20 to €25.

**Waxy O'Connor's** (Piazza Spirito Santo 1) A popular Irish pub where revellers down pints of Guinness on the sidewalk terrace while listening to (sometimes pretty dodgy) live music and watching the dancers shake their booties. There's another Irish pub, Joyce, just across the street.

**Osteria i Tre Bicchieri** (☎ 095 715 35 40; Via San Giuseppe al Duomo 27; ☎ 8pm-midnight Mon-Sat) The dark wood-panelled interior creates the perfect atmosphere for this elegant wine bar that stocks more than 400 different labels. There's a classy restaurant adjacent (meals €30 to €35).

## Entertainment

Pick up a copy of *Lapis*, a free bi-weekly program of music, theatre and art available throughout the city.

**Teatro Massimo Bellini** (☎ 095 730 61 11; www.teatromassimobellini.it; Via Perrotta 12; ☎ Oct-May) Ernesto Basile's art-nouveau theatre stages opera, ballet and music concerts. You can book tickets online.

**Zò** (☎ 095 53 38 71; www.zoculture.it; Piazzale Asia 6) Just northeast of the train station, Catania's former sulphur works, Le Ciminiere, has been renovated into a very cool cultural centre featuring films, live music, dancing, and a bar-café-restaurant serving good food.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

Catania's airport, **Fontanarossa** (☎ 095 723 91 11; www.aeroporto.catania.it), is 7km southwest of the city centre. To get there, take the

special Alibus 457 (€1, 30 minutes, every 20 minutes) from outside the train station. **Etna Transporti/Interbus** (☎ 095 53 03 96; [www.interbus.it](http://www.interbus.it)) also runs a regular shuttle from the airport to Taormina (€5.60, 1½ hours, six to nine daily). All the main car-hire companies are represented here.

## BOAT

The ferry terminal is located south of the train station along Via VI Aprile.

**Virtu Ferries** (☎ 095 53 57 11; [www.virtuferries.com](http://www.virtuferries.com); one way/return €87/119) runs direct ferries from Catania to Malta (three hours) at least once weekly from May through October, with more frequent service to Malta via the southern port of Pozzallo (four hours including connecting coach from Catania to Pozzallo).

**TTT Lines** (☎ 800 91 53 65, 081 575 21 92; [www.tttlines.it](http://www.tttlines.it)) has a daily ferry from Naples to Catania (seat €38 to €60, cabin per person €63 to €165, car €75 to €115, 10½ hours).

## BUS

Intercity buses terminate in the area around Piazza Giovanni XXIII, in front of the train station, and depart from Via d'Amico one block north. Catania's buses surpass the rather plodding train service.

**AST** (☎ 095 723 05 35; [www.aziendasicilianatrasporti.it](http://www.aziendasicilianatrasporti.it); Via Luigi Sturzo 230) runs similar services to SAIS and Interbus, as well as to many smaller provincial towns around the Catania region, including to Nicolosi (€2.20, one hour, half-hourly).

**Interbus** (☎ 095 53 03 96; [www.interbus.it](http://www.interbus.it); Via d'Amico 187) runs buses to Syracuse (€5.20, 1¼ hours, hourly Monday to Saturday, eight on Sunday), Piazza Armerina (€8.30, 1¼ hours, six daily Monday to Saturday) and Taormina (€5, 1¼ hours, six to nine daily).

**SAIS** (☎ 095 53 61 68; [www.saisautolinee.it](http://www.saisautolinee.it); Via d'Amico 181) serves Palermo (€13.90, 2¼ hours, hourly Monday to Saturday, four on Sunday), Agrigento (€12.20, three hours, at least 10 daily) and Messina (€7.50, 1½ hours, hourly Monday to Saturday, five on Sunday). It also has an overnight service to Rome (€46, 12 hours).

## CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Catania is easily reached from Messina on the A18 autostrada and from Palermo on the A19. From the autostrada, signs for the centre of Catania will bring you to Via Etnea.

## TRAIN

Frequent trains connect Catania with Messina (€6.65, 1¼ hours, hourly) and Syracuse (€6, 1¼ hours, 11 daily). There are one or two direct trains to Palermo (€11.95, 3¼ hours) and Agrigento (€10.95, 3¼ hours, five daily) each day, but the bus is usually a better option for these cities.

The private Ferrovia Circumetnea train line circles Mt Etna, stopping at the towns and villages on the volcano's slopes; for details, see p808.

## Getting Around

Many of the more useful **AMT city buses** (☎ 095 736 01 11) terminate in front of the train station. These include Alibus 457 (station to airport every 20 minutes), bus 1-4 (station to Via Etnea) and bus 4-7 (station to Piazza del Duomo). A 90-minute ticket costs €1. In summer, a special service (D) runs from Piazza G Verga to the sandy beaches.

For a taxi, call **CST** (☎ 095 33 09 66).

For drivers, some words of warning: there are complicated one-way systems around the city and the centre has now been pedestrianised, which means parking is scarce.

## MT ETNA

elev 3329m

Dominating the landscape of eastern Sicily and visible from the moon (if you happen to be there), Mt Etna is Europe's largest volcano and one of the world's most active. Eruptions occur frequently, both from the four craters at the summit and on the slopes of the volcano, which is littered with fissures and old craters. The volcano's most devastating eruptions occurred in 1669 and lasted 122 days. A huge river of lava poured down its southern slope, engulfing a good part of Catania and dramatically altering the landscape. Considerably more recently, in 2002, lava flows from Mt Etna caused an explosion in Sapienza, which destroyed two buildings in the complex and temporarily wiped out the use of the cable cars. Locals understandably keep a close eye on the smouldering peak.

Since 1987 the volcano and its slopes have been part of a national park, the Parco Naturale dell'Etna, a territory that encompasses a fascinatingly varied natural environment, from the severe almost surreal summit to deserts of lava and alpine forests.



## Orientation & Information

The two main approaches to Etna are from Piano Provenzano on the northern flank and Rifugio Sapienza on the southern flank. You can pick up information at a number of sources, the most convenient being the main tourist office in Catania (p795).

On Etna the office of the **Parco dell'Etna** (☎ 095 82 11 11; [www.parcoetna.ct.it](http://www.parcoetna.ct.it), in Italian; Via del Convento 45; ☎ 9am-2pm & 4-7.30pm) is in Nicolosi on the southern side. Near the summit at Rifugio Sapienza, you will find the **Etna Sud Tourist Office** (☎ 095 91 63 56; ☎ 9am-4pm), plus souvenir shops, restaurants, a couple of *albergos* (hotels) and groups of shivering tourists wishing they had remembered to dress warmly.

On the northern side of the mountain, the local **tourist office** (☎ 095 64 73 52; [www.procolinguaglossa.it](http://www.procolinguaglossa.it); Piazza Annunziata 5; ☎ 9am-3pm) in Linguaglossa is the best source of information.

## Sights & Activities

With a daily bus link from Catania via Nicolosi, the southern side of the volcano presents the easier ascent to the **craters**. The AST bus drops you off at the **Rifugio Sapienza** (1923m) from where **Funivia dell'Etna** (☎ 095 91 41 41; [www.funiviaetna.com](http://www.funiviaetna.com); cable car one way/return €14.50/27, incl bus & guide €60; ☎ 9am-4.30pm) runs a cable car up the mountain to 2500m (the ticket office accepts credit cards).

Once out of the cable car you can attempt the long walk (3½ to four hours return) up the winding track to the authorised crater zone (2920m). If you plan to do this, make sure you leave yourself enough time to get up *and* down before the last cable car leaves at 4.45pm. Otherwise hop on one of the Mercedes Benz trucks (with obligatory guide; €21).

On a clear day, the landscape above the cable-car station is stunning – the black cone of the Cratere Sud-Est against a bright blue sky. The guided tour takes you on a 45-minute walk around the Bocca Nuova. On the eastern edge of the volcano, the Valle del Bove falls away in a 1000m drop. Smoke billows up from its depths, enveloping you on the ridge above.

On the northern flank of the volcano, you can also make an ascent from the **Piano Provenzano** (1800m). This is the area that was severely damaged during the 2002 eruptions and, although it has been largely rebuilt, the bleached skeletons of the surrounding pine

trees bear testament to the disaster. There are regular 4WD excursions to the summit from here (around €40 per person). To reach this side of the volcano you will need a car, however, as there's no public transport from Linguaglossa, 16km away.

If you're interested in hiking solo on Mt Etna, pick up a copy of the excellent free *Mt Etna and Mother Nature* tourist map from tourist offices throughout the region; it has detailed mapped-out routes of 14 hikes of varying difficulty.

Passionate hikers should also consider visiting the **Parco Regionale dei Nebrodi** ([www.parcodinebrodi.it](http://www.parcodinebrodi.it)) just northwest of Etna, which covers some 85 hectares of densely wooded and mountainous countryside. A very well-signposted 70km, three-day hike known as La Dorsale dei Nebrodi recently opened here, which includes places to stay. Check the website for details.

## Tours

**Volcano Trek** (☎ 333 209 66 04; [www.volcanotrek.com](http://www.volcanotrek.com); Via Minicucca 16, San Giovanni La Punta) is run by expert geologists. Several tour options are available; see the website.

**Siciltrek** (☎ 095 96 88 82; [www.siciltrek.it](http://www.siciltrek.it); Via Marconi 27, Sant'Alfio) runs group tours up Etna, including the cable car and bus trip to 2900m. Andrea Ercolani of Siciltrek also organises and leads excellent private tours throughout the region.

**Gruppo Guide Alpine Etna Sud** (☎ 095 791 47 55; Via Etna 49, Nicolosi) is the official guide service on the mountain's southern flank, running day or multiday guided itineraries from their hut below Rifugio Sapienza.

**Gruppo Guide Alpine Etna Nord** (☎ 095 64 78 33; Piazza Santa Caterina 24, Linguaglossa) runs a similar tour service to Etna Sud, taking in the north side of the volcano.

## Sleeping & Eating

There's plenty of accommodation around Mt Etna, particularly in the small, pretty town of Nicolosi. For information on local B&Bs, contact **EtnaTourism** (☎ 095 791 62 87; [www.etna-tourism.it](http://www.etna-tourism.it)), a consortium whose members will also grant you a 20% discount on the Mt Etna cable car.

**B&B Massalargia** (☎ 095 791 45 86; [www.massalargia.it](http://www.massalargia.it); Via Manzoni 19; s €30-40, d €48-70; (P) (Q)) An amiable owner runs this pleasant place, 2km from Nicolosi en route to Catania. The



rooms are large with lots of thoughtful, homey touches and there's a sitting room for the use of guests.

**B&B La Giara** (☎ 095 791 90 22; [www.giara.it](http://www.giara.it); Viale della Regione 12a, Nicolosi; s €35-55, d €55-80; ) The rooms here are washed in bright colours and sport wrought-iron beds, rattan furniture, colourful prints and large balconies. There's free wi-fi, and your friendly, English-speaking hostess Patrizia can help with excursions, bike rental and transfers from the Catania airport (€40).

**Rifugio Sapienza** (☎ 095 91 53 21; [www.rifugio.sapienza.com](http://www.rifugio.sapienza.com); Piazzale Funivia; per person B&B/half-board €55/75) As close to the summit as you can get, this place adjacent to the cable car offers comfortable accommodation with a good restaurant (fortunately – there's not a lot of choice in these parts!).

## Getting There & Away

Having your own transport will make life much easier around Mt Etna, but there are some public transport options.

### BUS

**AST** (☎ 095 53 17 56) runs daily buses from Catania to Rifugio Sapienza (one way/return €3.40/5.60, one hour). Buses leave from the car park opposite Catania's train station at 8.15am, travelling via Nicolosi, and return at 4.45pm.

### TRAIN

You can circle Etna on the private **Ferrovie Circumetnea** (FCE; ☎ 095 54 12 50; [www.circumetnea.it](http://www.circumetnea.it); Via Caronda 352a, Catania) train line. Catch the metro from Catania's main train station to the FCE station at Via Caronda (metro stop Borgo) or take bus 429 or 432 going up Via Etna and ask to be let off at the Borgo metro stop.

The train follows a 114km trail around the base of the volcano, providing fabulous views. It also passes through many of Etna's unique towns such as Adrano, Bronte and Randazzo (€4.70, two hours).

## SOUTHEASTERN SICILY

This is a region of river valleys, fields of olive, almond and citrus trees and magnificent ruins. Within the evocative stone-walled checkerboard lies a series of handsome towns: Ragusa, Modica and Noto. Shattered by a devastating earthquake in 1693, they were rebuilt in the or-

nate and much-lauded Sicilian baroque style; that lends the region a honey-coloured cohesion and collective beauty. Writer Gesualdo Bufalino described the southeast as an 'island within an island' and, certainly, this pocket of Sicily has a remote, genteel air – a legacy of its glorious Greek heritage.

## SYRACUSE

pop 123,600

A dense tapestry of overlapping cultures and civilisations, Syracuse is one of Sicily's most visited cities. Boosted by EU funding, derelict landmarks and ancient buildings lining the slender streets are being aesthetically restored. Settled by colonists from Corinth in 734 BC, Syracuse was considered to be the most beautiful city of the ancient world, rivalling Athens in power and prestige. Under the demagogue Dionysius the Elder, the city reached its zenith, attracting luminaries such as Livy, Plato, Aeschylus and Archimedes, and cultivating the sophisticated urban culture that was to see the birth of comic Greek theatre. As the sun set on Ancient Greece, Syracuse became a Roman colony and was looted of its treasures. Lacking the drama of Palermo and the energy of Catania, Syracuse still manages to seduce visitors with its quiet decrepitude, excellent hotels and fascinating sights.

## Orientation

The main sights of Syracuse are in two areas: on the island of Ortygia and 2km across town in the Parco Archeologico della Neapolis. The train station is located to the west of busy Corso Gelone. If you arrive by bus, you'll be dropped across the street on Corso Umberto. Stay on Ortygia for atmosphere, great restaurants and good-quality hotels.

## Information

There are numerous banks with ATMs throughout the city.

**Fish House** (☎ 339 777 13 64; Via Cavour 29-31, Ortygia; internet per hr €3; ☎ 10am-midnight Jun-Sep, 10am-1pm & 4-8pm Oct-May) Has several fast computers.

**Lavanderia Roma** (☎ 338 214 56 74; Via Roma 123, Ortygia; wash & dry per kg €5) Laundry with next-day service.

**Tourist office** (☎ 0931 46 42 55; Via Maestranza 33, Ortygia; ☎ 8am-2pm & 2.30-5.30pm Mon-Thu, 8am-2pm Fri) English-speaking staff and lots of good information.

**Ospedale Generale Provinciale** (☎ 0931 72 40 33; Via Testaferatta 1)

**Police station** ( ☎ 0931 46 35 66; Piazza S Giuseppe)  
**Post office** (Riva della Posta)

## Sights

### ORTYGiA

Despite its baroque veneer, the Greek essence of Syracuse is everywhere in evidence, from the formal civility of the people to disguised architectural relics. The most obvious of these is the **cathedral** (Piazza del Duomo; ☎ 8am-noon & 4-7pm), which is, in fact, a Greek temple that was converted into a church when the island was evangelised by St Paul. The sumptuous baroque facade, designed by Andrea Palma, barely hides the Temple of Athena skeleton beneath, and the huge 5th-century-BC Doric columns are still visible both inside and out.

Just down the winding main street from the cathedral is the **Fontana Aretusa**, where fresh water bubbles up just as it did in ancient times when it was the city's main water supply. Legend has it that the goddess Artemis transformed her beautiful handmaiden Aretusa into the spring to protect her from the unwelcome attention of the river god Alpheus. Now populated by ducks, grey mullet and papyrus plants, the fountain is *the* place to hang out on summer evenings.

Just up Via Capodici from the fountain is **Museo Regionale d'Arte Medioevale e Moderna** ( ☎ 0931 6 96 17; Via Capodici 14). Closed indefinitely for restoration at the time of research, it houses a respectable collection of sculpture and paintings dating from the Middle Ages to the 20th century. Its highlights in-

clude Byzantine icons and Caravaggio's *La Sepoltura di Santa Lucia* (The Burial of St Lucy; 1608). The *palazzo* itself is Ortygia's finest Catalan-Gothic mansion.

Simply walking through the tangled maze of alleys that characterises Ortygia is an atmospheric experience, especially down the narrow lanes of **Via Maestranza**, the heart of the old guild quarter, and the crumbling Jewish ghetto of **Via della Giudecca**. Renovations at the Alla Giudecca hotel (see p812) uncovered an ancient Jewish **miqwe** (ritual bath; ☎ 0931 2 22 55; Alla Giudecca, Via Alagona 52; hourly tours €5; ☎ 10am-7pm) some 20m below ground level. The baths were blocked up in 1492 when the Jewish community was expelled from the island and hadn't been revealed since then.

Also in the Jewish quarter is Syracuse's own thriving puppet theatre, **Piccolo Teatro dei Pupi** ( ☎ 0931 46 55 40; www.pupari.com; Via della Giudecca 17). See its website for a calendar of performances. The workshop, where you can buy puppets, is at No 5.

### PARCO ARCHAEOLOGICO DELLA NEAPOLIS

For the classicist, Syracuse's real attraction is the **Parco Archeologico della Neapolis** ( ☎ 0931 6 62 06; Viale Paradiso; adult/concession €8/4; ☎ 9am-2hr before sunset, to 4.30pm during theatre festival), with its pearly white, 5th-century-BC **Teatro Greco**, hewn out of the rock above the city. This theatre saw the last tragedies of Aeschylus (including *The Persians*), which were first performed here in his presence. In summer it is brought to life again with an annual season of classical

### IL TEATRO DEI PUPPI

Any preconceptions you may have about puppet shows being only fit to keep small children quiet at the seaside deserve to be challenged in Sicily. Since the 18th century the traditional Sicilian puppet theatre has been enthralling adults and children alike. The shows are a mini theatrical performance with some puppets standing 1.5m high – a completely different breed from the Pooh Bear-style of glove puppet popular in the West. These characters are intricately carved from beech, olive or lemon wood with realistic-looking glass eyes and distinct features. And, to make sure that they will have no problem swinging their swords or beheading dragons, their joints have flexible wire.

The tales are suitably swashbuckling; they centre on the legends of Charlemagne's heroic knights, Orlando and Rinaldo, and the extended cast includes the fair Angelica, the treacherous Gano di Magonza and forbidding Saracen warriors. Good puppeteers are judged on the dramatic effect they can create – lots of stamping feet and a gripping running commentary – and on their speed and skill in directing the battle scenes.

Effectively the soap operas of their day, puppet theatres expounded the deepest sentiments of life – unrequited love, treachery, thirst for justice and the anger and frustration of the oppressed. Pretty timeless themes, you could say.

0 500 m  
0 0.25 miles



|                                                 |    |    |                                                 |          |    |
|-------------------------------------------------|----|----|-------------------------------------------------|----------|----|
| <b>INFORMATION</b>                              |    |    |                                                 |          |    |
| Fish House.....                                 | 1  | B5 | Orecchio di Dionisio.....                       | 16       | A1 |
| Lavanderia Roma.....                            | 2  | B6 | Parco Archeologico Ticket Office.....           | 17       | B2 |
| Ospedale Generale Provinciale.....              | 3  | B2 | Piccolo Teatro dei Pupi.....                    | 18       | B5 |
| Police Station.....                             | 4  | B6 | Sailing Team.....                               | 19       | A5 |
| Post Office.....                                | 5  | C3 | Teatro Greco.....                               | 20       | A1 |
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| <b>SIGHTS &amp; ACTIVITIES</b>                  |    |    |                                                 |          |    |
| Anfiteatro Romano.....                          | 7  | A2 | <b>SLEEPING</b>                                 |          |    |
| Ara di Gerone II.....                           | 8  | A2 | Alla Giudecca.....                              | 21       | C5 |
| Cathedral.....                                  | 9  | B6 | B&B Aretusa.....                                | 22       | B6 |
| Ente Fauna Siciliana.....                       | 10 | C3 | B&B dei Viaggiatori, Viandanti e Sognatori..... | 23       | B6 |
| Fontana Aretusa.....                            | 11 | B6 | Hotel Gran Bretagne.....                        | 24       | C4 |
| Latomia del Paradiso.....                       | 12 | A1 | Hotel Gutkowski.....                            | 25       | D3 |
| Museo Archeologico Paolo Orsi.....              | 13 | C1 | Hotel Riviera.....                              | 26       | D2 |
| Museo del Papiro.....                           | 14 | C1 | Hotel Roma.....                                 | 27       | B5 |
| Museo Regionale d'Arte Medievale e Moderna..... | 15 | B6 | <b>EATING</b>                                   |          |    |
|                                                 |    |    | Do Schogghiu.....                               | 28       | B5 |
|                                                 |    |    | Jonico.....                                     | 29       | D1 |
|                                                 |    |    | Osteria da Mariano.....                         | 30       | B6 |
|                                                 |    |    | Produce Market.....                             | 31       | D3 |
|                                                 |    |    | Ristorante Medusa.....                          | 32       | B6 |
|                                                 |    |    | Sicilia in Tavola.....                          | 33       | B5 |
|                                                 |    |    | Taberna Sveva.....                              | 34       | D5 |
|                                                 |    |    | <b>DRINKING</b>                                 |          |    |
|                                                 |    |    | Bar Zen.....                                    | (see 29) |    |
|                                                 |    |    | Biblos Cafe.....                                | 35       | B5 |
|                                                 |    |    | Il Blu.....                                     | 36       | C6 |
|                                                 |    |    | Il Sale.....                                    | 37       | A5 |
|                                                 |    |    | San Rocca.....                                  | 38       | B6 |
|                                                 |    |    | <b>SHOPPING</b>                                 |          |    |
|                                                 |    |    | Circo Fortuna.....                              | 39       | C5 |
|                                                 |    |    | Massimo Izzo.....                               | 40       | B5 |
|                                                 |    |    | <b>TRANSPORT</b>                                |          |    |
|                                                 |    |    | Allakattalla.....                               | 41       | B5 |
|                                                 |    |    | AST Bus Ticket Office.....                      | 42       | C3 |
|                                                 |    |    | Intercity Bus Stop.....                         | 43       | B3 |
|                                                 |    |    | Urban Bus Station.....                          | 44       | C3 |

theatre. Check the [www.apr-siracusa.it](http://www.apr-siracusa.it) website for information.

Just beside the theatre is the mysterious **Latomia del Paradiso** – deep, precipitous limestone quarries out of which the stone for the ancient city was extracted. These quarries, riddled with catacombs and filled with citrus and magnolia trees, are where the 7000 survivors of the war between Syracuse and Athens in 413 BC were imprisoned. The **Orecchio di Dionisio** (Ear of Dionysius), a grotto 23m by 3m deep, was named by Caravaggio after the tyrant, who is said to have used the almost perfect acoustics of the quarry to eavesdrop on his prisoners.

Back outside this area you'll find the entrance to the 2nd-century-AD **Anfiteatro Romano**. The amphitheatre was used for gladiatorial combats and horse races. The Spaniards, little interested in archaeology, largely destroyed the site in the 16th century, using it as a quarry to build the city walls of Ortygia. West of the amphitheatre is the 3rd-century-BC **Ara di Gerone II**. This monolithic sacrificial altar to Heron II was a kind of giant abattoir where up to 450 oxen could be killed at one time.

To get to the park, take bus 4, 5, 6, 8, 11, 12 or 15 from Piazza della Posta to Corso Gelone/Viale Teracati. The walk from Ortygia will take about 30 minutes. If you have a car, you can park along Viale Augusto for €1 (for as long as you like).

## MUSEO ARCHEOLOGICO PAOLO ORSI & MUSEO DEL PAPIRO

In the grounds of Villa Landolina, about 500m east of the archaeological park, is the **Museo**

**Archeologico Paolo Orsi** ( ☎ 0931 46 40 22; Viale Teocrito; admission €4; 9am–7pm Tue–Sat, 9am–2pm Sun). It contains the best organised and most interesting archaeological collection in Sicily (and one of the most extensive archaeological collections in Europe) and certainly merits a visit. The opening hours are all over the place and are often extended in summer; check with one of the tourist offices. The museum is wheelchair accessible.

Around the corner, the **Museo del Papiro** ( ☎ 0931 6 16 16; Viale Teocrito 66; admission free; 9am–1pm Tue–Sun) includes papyrus documents and products, boats and a good English-language film about the history of papyrus. The plant grows in abundance around the Ciane River, near Syracuse, and was used to make paper in the 18th century.

## Activities

Syracuse is all about urban pleasures with few activities more energetic than shopping and sightseeing. You can book yourself a pew on Syracuse's tiny **Lido Maniace** ([www.lidomaniace.it](http://www.lidomaniace.it)), a platform crowded with sunbeds and shades (€10 for two people), where you can take a dip into the water – a pastime particularly recommended in midsummer when Ortygia steams like a cauldron. Longer stretches of sand can be found at **Arenella** (take bus 23 from Piazza della Posta) and the **Fontana Bianche** (bus 21 or 22), but note that they are very busy and, as with many Sicilian beaches, there are charges on certain sections. From mid-June to mid-September, there's also great sunbathing (for a fee) and diving off the rocks adjacent to Bar Zen (p813), 2km north of Ortygia.

Landlubbers should consider an excursion with **Ente Fauna Siciliana** (☎ 338 488 8822; [www.entefaunasiciliana.it](http://www.entefaunasiciliana.it)). Itineraries include short hikes along the coastline (€5 per person) and archaeological and botanical itineraries. A *calendario attività* (activities calendar) with booking numbers and departure points can be downloaded from the website. Most of the tours are in Italian only.

In May and June Syracuse hosts the **Ciclo di Rappresentazioni Classiche** (Festival of Greek Theatre; ☎ 0931 48 72 48; [www.indafondazione.org](http://www.indafondazione.org); Via Cavour 48). Syracuse boasts the only school of classical Greek drama outside Athens and the performances (in Italian) attract Italy's finest performers. Tickets (€22 to €58) are available online, from the Via Cavour office in Ortygia or at the ticket booth outside the theatre.

During the **Festa di Santa Lucia** (13 December) the enormous silver statue of the city's patron saint wends its way from the cathedral to Piazza Santa Lucia accompanied by fireworks.

Syracuse prides itself on discerning tourism, reflected in its excellent hotels. The best options are on Ortygia. Cheaper hotels are located around the train station.

**B&B dei Viaggiatori, Viandanti e Sognatori** (☎ 0931 2 47 81; [www.bedandbreakfastsilly.it](http://www.bedandbreakfastsilly.it); Via Roma 156; s €35-50, d €55-70, tr €75-85, q €100, ☞ ☞) An old palace at the end of Via Roma cradles this lovely B&B. Rooms are colourfully and stylishly decorated, with super-comfy beds. There's free wi-fi, and the sunny roof terrace with sweeping sea views makes a perfect breakfast spot.

**B&B Aretusa** (☎ 0931 48 34 84; [www.aretusavacanze.com](http://www.aretusavacanze.com); Vicolo Zuccalà 1; s €55, d €79; ☹ ☒ ☎) This great budget option, elbowed into a tiny pedestrian street in a 17th-century building, has large rooms and apartments with kitchenettes, computers, wi-fi, satellite TV and small bal-

conies from where you can shake hands with your neighbour across the way.

**Alla Giudecca** (☎ 0931 2 22 55; [www.allagiudecca.it](http://www.allagiudecca.it); Via Alagona 52; s €60-75, d €80-120; 🍷) Located in the old Jewish quarter, this charming hotel boasts 23 suites with warm terracotta-tiled floors, exposed wood beams and lashings of heavy white linen. The communal areas are a warren of vaulted rooms full of museum-quality antiques and enormous tapestries, and feature cosy sofas gathered around huge fireplaces. During renovations an ancient Jewish *miqwe* was discovered here (see p809).

**Hotel Riviera** (☎ 0931 6 70 50; [www.hotelriviera.siracusa.com](http://www.hotelriviera.siracusa.com); Via Eudeida 7; s/d/tr/q €67/87/115/125; **P** ☼) One of the only hotels in Syracuse with a sea-front location, this friendly family-run place offers lovely views from the 1st-floor terrace and most rooms.

**Azienda Agrituristica Limoneto** (☎ 0931 71 73 52; [www.emmeti.it/Limoneto](http://www.emmeti.it/Limoneto); Via del Platano 3; s €50-60, d €90-120; (P) (R) (C)) This large country farm set amid attractive citrus and olive groves is noted for its organic produce and excellent restaurant (meals cost €25). You'll find it 9km from Syracuse along the SS124.

**Hotel Gran Bretagne** (☎ 0931 6 87 65; [www.hotelgranbretagna.it](http://www.hotelgranbretagna.it); Via Savoia 21; s €75-90, d €90-125; 📶 📺)  
This handsome, small hotel is in a great location on Ortygia. Rooms are spacious, with chequered floors and high ceilings, a few adorned with frescoes. Don't miss the glass panel adjacent to the breakfast room revealing the 16th-century town wall below.

**Hotel Gutkowski** (☎ 0931 46 58 61; [www.guthotel.it](http://www.guthotel.it); Lungomare Vittorini 26; s/d €80/110; ☼ ☼) Book well in advance for one of the seven sea-view rooms at this charming and friendly hotel on the Ortygia waterfront. Rooms in the original hotel have pretty tiled floors, colourful walls, and retain the building's historic character, while those in the annexe down the street have a more modern feel. There's a nice rooftop sun terrace with sea views, and a brand new bar adjoining the pleasant breakfast area.

**Hotel Roma** (☎ 0931 46 56 26; [www.hotelroma.sr.it](http://www.hotelroma.sr.it); Via Roma 66; s €80-90, d €100-150; **P** **☒** **☎** **☎**) Set in a restored *palazzo*, the Roma has individually decorated rooms with parquet floors, oriental rugs, wood-beam ceilings and tasteful artwork. Additional amenities include a peaceful courtyard, a gym and a Finnish sauna, plus



wi-fi in the lobby and several guest rooms. Parking costs €10 extra.

## Eating

The best restaurants are on Ortygia.

**Sicilia in Tavola** (☎ 392 461 08 89; Via Cavour 28; meals €16-30; ☎ closed Mon) A tiny place with a dozen tables that specialises in all manner of fresh pasta dishes (try the speciality of the house, seafood ravioli).

**Taberna Sveva** (☎ 0931 2 46 63; Piazza Federico di Svevia; meals €23-30; ☎ closed Wed) This charming tavern has a cosy terrace on a peaceful cobblestoned square, down near the castle at Ortygia's southern tip. Food is top-notch, all the way from *primi*-like *gnocchi al pistacchio* (with olive oil, parmesan, pepper, garlic and grated pistachios) to a delicious tiramisu to wrap things up

**Ristorante Medusa** (☎ 0931 6 14 03; Via S Teresa 21-23; meals €25-35; ☎ closed Mon) At this elegant eatery run by an Italian-Tunisian family, the week's highlight is the Thursday night couscous feast, but it's worth a visit any day of the week for the delicious seafood-based pasta dishes and mains.

**Osteria da Mariano** (☎ 0931 6 74 44; Vicolo Zuccalà 9; meals €17-21; ☎ Wed-Mon) Specialising in the mountain cuisine of nearby Ragusa, with more meat than fish, this cheerful place sets out a river of tables under the lights and balconies of a narrow alleyway, with cosy indoor seating in a beamed dining room. Everything's tasty and affordably priced, and the atmosphere's very convivial, if you can forgive the sometimes lackadaisical service.

**Do Schogghiu** (Via Domenico Scinà 11; meals €20; ☎ closed Mon) A very basic, family-run *spaghetteria* that serves up pasta a million different ways, with plenty of agreeable father-son banter in the background. Ask for the free *aperitivo* offered on the menu.

**Jonico** (☎ 0931 6 55 40; Riviera Dionisio il Grande 194; pizzas €4-7, meals €20-30; ☎ closed Tue) Inconveniently located but worth the trek or taxi ride, Jonico's Liberty (art nouveau) dining room and its open-air terrace have spectacular views of blue-green sea and sandstone cliffs, while the all-Sicilian menu features dishes such as *tonno all' siciliana* (tuna with cherry tomatoes, capers and white wine) and *orata c'aranci* (gilthead with orange juice, orange peel and black pepper). Below the restaurant, the alluring Bar Zen (open 7.30pm to 2am mid-June to mid-September) doubles as a

swimming area and solarium during the day, where you can plunge off rocks or lounge under an umbrella all day before retiring to the outdoor deck to sip drinks all night.

Syracuse's **produce market** (Antico Mercato; ☎ 8am-1pm Mon-Sat) is near the harbour where red-canopied stalls overflow with piles of mussels, oysters, octopuses and shellfish.

## Drinking

Syracuse is a vibrant university town, which means plenty of life on the streets at cocoa time.

Four recommended drinking spots in Ortygia are the literary **Biblios Cafe** (Via del Consiglio Regionale 11; ☎ 10am-1.30pm & 5-9pm, closed Wed & Sun mornings); **Il Sale** (Via dell'Amalfitania 56/2), hidden away in a courtyard and recognisable from the street only by the beckoning glow of its twin Paulaner München lamps **Il Blu** (Via Nizza), a superb wine bar with a cosy front porch near the waterfront; and lovely **San Rocca** (Piazzetta San Rocca), the most popular of several bars with tables sprawled across bustling Piazzetta San Rocca.

## Shopping

Ortygia is full of quirky little shops such as **Circo Fortuna** (☎ 347 216 33 74, [www.circofortuna.it](http://www.circofortuna.it); Via dei Tolomei 20), which produces lots of cheeky ceramics, and **Massimo Izzo** (☎ 0931 2 23 01; Piazza Archimede 25; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4-8pm Tue-Sat, 4-8pm Mon), specialising in jewellery handcrafted from Sciacca coral and gold.

## Getting There & Away

### BUS

Long-distance buses operate from a strip along Corso Umberto, just east of Syracuse's train station. **Interbus** (☎ 0931 6 67 10) runs buses to Catania (€5.20, 1¼ hours, 19 daily Monday to Saturday, eight on Sunday) and its airport, and Palermo (€15.30, 3¼ hours, two to three daily).

**AST** (☎ 0931 46 27 11) offers services to Noto (€3, 50 minutes, 12 daily Monday to Saturday) and Ragusa (€6.40, 2½ hours, six daily Monday to Saturday).

### CAR & MOTORCYCLE

If arriving from the north, you'll enter Syracuse on Viale Scala Greca. To reach the centre of the city, turn left onto Viale Teracati and follow it south; Viale Teracati eventually becomes Corso Gelone.



There's a large underground car park on Via V Veneto on Ortigia where you can park for €1.

### TRAIN

More than a dozen trains depart daily for Messina (InterCity/regional train €14.50/9.25, 2½ to 3¼ hours) via Catania (€7.50/6, 1¼ hours). Some go on to Rome, Turin and Milan as well as other long-distance destinations. For Palermo, the bus is a better option. There are also local trains from Syracuse to Noto (€3.20, 30 minutes) and Ragusa (€7.25, 2¼ hours).

### Getting Around

AST city buses 1, 4 and 12 make the trip from Ortigia's Piazza della Posta to Parco Archeologico della Neapolis. A two-hour city bus ticket costs €1.

**Allakattalla** (☎ 0931 67452; Via Roma 10; ⌚ 9am-1pm & 4-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat) hires out bicycles (€15 per day) and scooters (€35 per day).

### NOTO

pop 23,500 / elev 160m

Flattened in 1693 by an earthquake, Noto was grandly rebuilt by its nobles. It is now the finest baroque town in Sicily, especially appreciable at night when the illuminations introduced in 2006 accentuate its beauty and intricately carved facades. The baroque masterpiece is the work of Rosario Gagliardi and his assistant, Vincenzo Sinatra, local architects who also worked in Ragusa and Modica. Recently added to Unesco's list of World Heritage sites, Noto's fragile sandstone buildings are currently undergoing extensive restoration. On 16 March 1996 the town was horrified when the roof and dome of the cathedral collapsed during a thunderstorm – luckily it was 10.30pm and the cathedral was empty. In June 2007 the cathedral finally reopened after lengthy reconstruction.

### Information

**Ambulance** (☎ 0931 89 02 35)

**Police station** (☎ 0931 83 52 02)

**Tourist office** (☎ 0931 57 37 79; www.comune.noto.sr.it; Piazza XVI Maggio; ⌚ 9am-1pm & 4-8pm) An excellent and busy information office with multilingual staff and free maps.

### Sights

The **San Nicolò Cathedral** stands in the centre of Noto's most graceful square, Piazza

Municipio, and is surrounded by elegant town houses such as Palazzo Ducezio (Town Hall) and Palazzo Landolina, once home to Noto's oldest noble family. The only *palazzo* that has so far been restored to its former glory, however, is the **Palazzo Villadorata** (Palazzo Nicolaci; ☎ 0931 83 50 05; www.palazzonicolaci.it; Via Corrado Nicolaci; adult/concession €4/2; ⌚ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Tue-Sun), where wrought-iron balconies are supported by a swirling pantomime of grotesque figures. Although empty of furnishings, the richly brocaded walls and frescoed ceilings of the *palazzo* give an idea of the sumptuous lifestyle of Sicilian nobles, as brought to life in the Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa novel *Il Gattopardo* (The Leopard; see p66).

Two other piazzas break up the long Corso Vittorio Emanuele: Piazza dell'Immacolata to the east and Piazza XVI Maggio to the west. The latter is overlooked by the beautiful **Chiesa di San Domenico** and the adjacent Dominican monastery, both designed by Rosario Gagliardi. On the same square, Noto's elegant 19th-century **Teatro Comunale** is worth a look, as is the mirrored Sala degli Specchi in the **Palazzo Ducezio** opposite the Duomo (admission to either €2, combined ticket €3). For sweeping rooftop views of Noto's baroque splendour, climb the *campanile* (bell tower) at **Chiesa di San Carlo al Corso** (admission €2; ⌚ 9am-12.30pm & 4-7pm) or **Chiesa di Santa Chiara** (admission €1.50; ⌚ 9.30am-1pm & 3-7pm).

### Festivals & Events

**Infiorata**, held for two weeks in mid- to late May, is Noto's colourful flower festival, celebrated with parades, historical re-enactments and a public art project in which artists decorate the length of Via Corrada Nicolaci with designs made entirely of flower petals.

### Sleeping

B&Bs are plentiful in Noto. Ask at the tourist office for a detailed list.

**Il Castello Youth Hostel** (☎ 392 415 78 99, 329 396 11 71; world-service@simail.it; Via Fratelli Bandiera 2; dm €16) Directly uphill from the Duomo in a beautiful old building, this place commands fabulous views and is great value for money, despite a few downsides (no guest kitchen, a 10am to 3pm lockout and an 11.30pm curfew).

**B&B Montandon** (☎ 0931 83 63 89; www.b-bmontandon.it; Via Sofia 50; s €40-55, d €65-80; ☎ P) Accessed via impressive vaulted hallways, this B&B in a crumbling *palazzo* near the top of town

has lovely, light rooms with elegant furnishings. Upper rooms have panoramic views over town.

**Hotel della Ferla** (☎ 0931 57 60 07; www.hoteldellaferla.it; Via A Gramsci; s €48-78, d €84-120; (P) (X) (S)) This small, friendly hotel is located in a residential area near the train station, around 10 minutes' walk downhill from the historic centre. Rooms are large and bright, with pine furnishings, small balconies and free wi-fi.

## Eating

The people of Noto are serious about their food, so take time to enjoy a meal and follow it up with a visit to one of the town's excellent ice-cream shops.

**Trattoria del Carmine** (☎ 0931 83 87 05; Via Ducezio 1; meals €15-20) A low-key eatery that's popular with locals, serving classic Sicilian cuisine.

**Trattoria Ducezio** (☎ 347 858 73 19; Via Ducezio 51; meals €15-20) Duzezio is another popular local trattoria.

**Trattoria Baglieri Crocifisso** (☎ 0931 57 11 51; Via Principe Umberto 48; meals €25-30) This Slow Food-acclaimed trattoria is one of Noto's finest eateries. The list of bottled wines is extensive, but you can also get an excellent glass, starting at €3.50.

**Ristorante Il Cantuccio** (☎ 0931 83 74 64; Via Cavour 12; meals €30-35; ☎ dinner Tue-Sun, lunch Sun) Chef Valentina presents a seasonally changing menu that combines familiar Sicilian ingredients in exciting new ways. Try her exquisite *gnocchi al pesto del Cantuccio* (ricotta-potato dumplings with basil, parsley, mint, capers, almonds and cherry tomatoes) and follow it up with *legaccio di spigola al limone con insalata d'arancia e finocchi* (lemon-stuffed bass with orange-fennel salad).

**Caffè Sicilia** (☎ 0931 83 50 13; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 125) Dating from 1892, this vies with Dolceria Corrado Costanzo (below) for the honours of Noto's best dessert shop. Sicilia is especially renowned for its *granita*.

**Dolceria Corrado Costanzo** (☎ 0931 83 52 43; Via Silvio Spaventa 9) This is just around the corner from Caffè Sicilia. Both make superb *dolci di mandorla* (almond cakes and sweets), *casata* (with ricotta cheese, chocolate and candied fruit) and *torrone* (nougat). Costanzo is famous for its *gelati*.

## Getting There & Around

Noto is easily accessible by AST and Interbus buses from Catania (€6.70, 1¼ hours, 12 daily

Monday to Saturday, seven on Sunday) and Syracuse (€3, 50 minutes, 12 daily Monday to Saturday). From June to August only, buses run frequently between Noto and Noto Marina. Trains from Syracuse are frequent (€3.20, 30 minutes, 11 daily), but the station is located 1.5km south of the bus station area.

## MODICA

pop 54,300 / 296m

A powerhouse in Grecian times, Modica may have lost its pre-eminent position to Ragusa, but it remains a superbly atmospheric town with its ancient medieval buildings climbing steeply up either side of a deep gorge.

The multilayered town is divided into Modica Alta (Upper Modica) and Modica Bassa (Lower Modica). A devastating flood in 1902 resulted in the wide avenues of Corso Umberto and Via Giarrantana (the river was dammed and diverted), which remain the main axes of the town, lined by shabby *palazzi* and tiled stone houses.

Aside from simply wandering the streets and absorbing the atmosphere, a visit to the extraordinary **Chiesa di San Giorgio** (Modica Alta; ☎ 9am-noon & 4-7pm) is a highlight. This church, Gagliardi's masterpiece, is a vision of pure rococo splendour, a butter-coloured confection perched on a majestic 250-step staircase. Its counterpoint in Modica Bassa is the **Cattedrale di San Pietro** (Corso Umberto I), another impressive church atop a rippling staircase lined with life-sized statues of the Apostles.

Modica is also famous for its confectionary, a legacy of the town's Spanish overlords who imported cocoa from their South American colonies. To taste some sweet crunchiness – flavoured with cinnamon, vanilla and orange peel – head for Sicily's oldest chocolate factory, **Dolceria Bonajuto** (☎ 0932 94 12 25; www.bonajuto.it; Corso Umberto I 159; ☎ 9am-1.30pm & 4.30-8.30pm Mon-Sat, 4.30-8.30pm Sun).

## Sleeping & Eating

The quality-to-price ratio tends to be excellent, making Modica a top destination for discerning travellers.

**Albergo I Tetti di Siciliando** (☎ 0932 94 28 43; www.siciliando.it; Via Cannata 24, Modica Alta; s €30-35, d €42-60) A delightfully friendly guest house, with bright, artistically decorated rooms and balconies with views.

**Palazzo Failla** (☎ 0932 94 10 59; [www.palazzofailla.it](http://www.palazzofailla.it); Via Blandini 5, Modica Alta; r €100-195; (P) (♿) (📶)) This exquisitely restored 18th-century palace has retained its historical splendour, with original frescoed ceilings and hand-painted floor tiles. There's a generous breakfast buffet, plus two good restaurants – one more traditional, one more innovative – under the same management nearby.

**Osteria dei Saperi Perduti** (☎ 0932 94 42 47; Corso Umberto I 228-230; meals €14-17) On Modica's main drag, this attractive restaurant mixes rustic decor, elegantly dressed waiters, and very reasonable prices on Sicilian specialities like *cunigghju à stimpirata* (sweet and sour rabbit).

**Taverna Nicastro** (☎ 0932 94 58 84; Via S Antonino 28, Modica Alta; meals €13-19) With over 60 years of history and a Slow Food recommendation, this is one of the upper town's most authentic and atmospheric restaurants; the nightly tourist menu is a bargain at €15 including antipasti, wine and dessert.

## Getting There & Away

From Modica's train station, 600m east of the centre, eight trains daily (three on Sunday) leave for Syracuse (€6.65, 1¼ hours). Buses run two to four times daily to Syracuse (€5.80) and Ragusa (€2.20, 30 minutes) from Corso Umberto I near Chiesa di San Giorgio.

## RAGUSA

pop 72,500 / elev 502m

Like a grand old dame, Ragusa is a dignified and well-aged provincial town largely overlooked by tourists. Like every other town in the region, Ragusa collapsed after the 1693 earthquake; a new town called Ragusa Superiore was built on a high plateau above the original settlement. But the old aristocracy were loathe to leave their tottering *palazzi* and rebuilt Ragusa Ibla on the original site. The two towns were only merged in 1927.

## Orientation

Ragusa Ibla remains the heart and soul of the town, and has all the best restaurants and the majority of sights. A perilous bus ride or some very steep steps connect the lower town to its modern sister up the hill.

## Information

**Ibl@café** (☎ 0932 68 31 08; Piazza della Repubblica 10; per hr €3; (📶) 7am-midnight) Internet café housed inside a bar.

**Tourist office** (☎ 0932 22 15 29; [www.ragusaturismo.it](http://www.ragusaturismo.it) in Italian; Via Capitano Bocchieri 33; (📶) 9am-1.30pm Mon-Fri & 4-6.30pm Tue)

## Sights

Grand churches and *palazzi* line the twisting, narrow streets of Ragusa Ibla, interspersed with gelaterie and delightful piazzas where the local elderly gather on benches. If you continue east from the Via 11 Febbraio intersection along Via del Mercato (which has excellent views of the valley below), you'll get your first view of palm-planted Piazza del Duomo, dominated by the **Cattedrale di San Giorgio** (🕒 10am-12.30pm & 4-6.30pm). The cathedral, with its magnificent neoclassical dome and stained-glass windows, dates from 1739. The smaller **Chiesa di San Giuseppe** is on Piazza Pola, east of Piazza del Duomo.

At the eastern end of the old town is the **Giardino Ibleo** (🕒 8am-8pm), a pleasant public garden laid out in the 19th century that is perfect for a picnic lunch.

## Sleeping & Eating

All places listed here are in Ragusa Ibla, the picturesque lower town.

**Ai Giardini Iblei** (☎ 0932 24 68 44; [www.aigiardini.it](http://www.aigiardini.it); Via Normanni 4; s €35-40, d €50; (♿)) Nicely positioned near the entrance to the public gardens, this simple B&B is run by a lovely Italian-Brazilian couple.

**our pick Risveglio Ibleo** (☎ 0932 24 78 11; [www.risveglioibleo.com](http://www.risveglioibleo.com); Largo Camerina 3; s €35-42.50, d €70-85; (P)) This welcoming place, housed in an 18th-century Liberty-style villa, has spacious, high-ceilinged rooms, walls hung with family portraits and a flower-flanked terrace overlooking the rooftops. The exceptionally warm older couple who run the place go out of their way to share local culture, including their own home-made culinary delights.

**Locanda Don Serafino** (☎ 0932 22 00 65; [www.locandadonserafino.it](http://www.locandadonserafino.it); Via XI Febbraio 15; s €118-165, d €148-195) This historic building near the Duomo has beautiful rooms, some with original vaulted stone ceilings. Guests have access to the hotel's private beach at Marina di Ragusa, 20km away.

**our pick Gelati DiVini** (☎ 0932 22 89 89; [www.gelati.divini.it](http://www.gelati.divini.it); Piazza Duomo 20; ice cream from €1.80) You've never had ice cream like this before! DiVini (which is a play on the words 'divine' and 'wine' in Italian) makes wine-flavoured ice creams like marsala, muscat and *traghetto*

*d'acqua*, along with exceptional offerings like rose, fennel and wild mint, all derived from the original plant.

**Il Barocco** (☎ 0932 65 23 97; Via Orfanotrofo 29; meals €17-30) This beloved traditional restaurant has an evocative setting in an old stable block, the troughs now filled with wine bottles instead of water. You can taste cheeses and olive oils and purchase all sorts of exquisite hand-selected Sicilian gastronomic treats at the newly opened *enoteca* (wine bar) next door.

**Ristorante Duomo** (☎ 0932 65 12 65; Via Capitano Bocchieri 31; meals €75-90, tasting menu €120) It has been called Sicily's best restaurant. Inside, a quintet of small rooms are outfitted like private parlours, ensuring a suitably romantic atmosphere. Dishes reflect a creative approach to classic recipes.

## Getting There & Around

There are four daily trains to Syracuse (€7.25, 2¼ hours) via Noto (€5.40, 1½ hours).

**Interbus** (Viale Tenente Lena 42) runs daily buses to Catania (€6.95, two hours, six to 10 daily); information and tickets are available at the nearby Caffè del Viale. **AST** (☎ 0932 68 18 18) offers service to Syracuse (€6.40, 2½ hours, six daily Monday to Saturday).

City buses 1 and 3 run from Piazza del Popolo in the upper town to Piazza Pola and the Giardino Ibleo in the lower town of Ragusa Ibla.

# CENTRAL & SOUTHERN SICILY

This is an area of great panoramas, where coastal plains push inland to the mountains. The juxtapositions continue with undulating fields and severe mountain ridges; shabby hilltop towns and superb sandy beaches; and the busiest and most lauded classical site in Sicily – unfortunately set against hectares of hideous modern development. Persevere in this ancient landscape and you will be rewarded with an insight into a more authentic Sicily not yet sanitised for tourists.

## ENNA

pop 28,100 / elev 931m

The highest provincial capital in Italy and a natural balcony frequently blanketed by cloud, this handsome working town and

agricultural centre has long been the seat of a sacred cult of Demeter (the goddess of fertility). Throughout the Greek, Roman and Arab periods, Enna supplied far-flung places with grain, wheat, cotton and cane; a tradition it continues, albeit on a far smaller scale, today.

## Information

**Parco Savarese** (☎ 0935 50 22 14; [www.parcosavarese.it](http://www.parcosavarese.it); Via Roma 464; ☎ 3-7pm Mon, 9.30am-1.30pm & 3-7pm Tue-Sat) More helpful than the official tourist office, the multilingual staff at this cultural centre offer information about Enna as well as internet access (€2 per hour).

**Tourist office** (☎ 0935 50 08 75; [www.ennaturismo.info](http://www.ennaturismo.info), in Italian; Piazza Colajanni; ☎ 9am-1pm Mon-Fri)

## Sights

Jealously guarded by locals, Enna's massive **Castello di Lombardia** (☎ 0935 50 09 62; Piazza Mazzini; admission free; ☎ 9am-7pm) is the most obvious physical manifestation of the inward-looking nature of Sicily's mountain villages. It is hardly surprising given the waves of invaders who sought to possess this mountain eyrie. This history is perfectly illustrated in the hotchpotch architecture of the **cathedral** (☎ 9am-1pm & 4-7pm), a catalogue of Graeco-Roman remains, medieval walls, Gothic doors and apses, Renaissance artwork and baroque carvings.

To enjoy a gorgeous sunset over the rusted town of Calascibetta, situated on the opposite hill, head for Piazza Francesco Crispi and its spectacular **belvedere**.

## Festivals & Events

During **Holy Week** (Easter), thousands of people participate in a solemn procession to the cathedral, wearing hoods and capes that represent the town's different religious confraternities.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Grande Albergo Sicilia** (☎ 0935 50 08 50; [www.hotelsiciliaenna.it](http://www.hotelsiciliaenna.it); Piazza Colajanni 7; s €55-62, d €75-91; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Newly refurbished in 2009, Enna's best hotel has a panoramic breakfast terrace and cheery, comfortable rooms with kitsch gold-framed Botticelli prints and wrought-iron bedheads.

**Ristorante Centrale** (☎ 0935 50 09 63; Piazza VI Dicembre 9; meals €25; ☎ closed Sat in winter) This

place has friendly service, an outside terrace and excellent traditional mountain food.

**Antica Hostaria** (☎ 0935 2 25 21; Via Castagna; meals €30; ☒ closed Mon night & Tue) This Slow Food-acclaimed eatery is famous for its pork *ragù*, an ancient mountain staple served only in winter; no worries if you're visiting in summer: the menu features other fine local recipes year-round.

**Alkenisa** (☎ 0935 2 64 35; Via Roma 481; ☒ 10am-10pm Mon-Fri, 10am-11pm Sat) Up near the castle, this newly opened literary cafe is beautifully sited amid the restored stone walls of an ancient mosque-turned-church.

## Getting There & Around

Enna's official **bus station** (Viale Diaz) is in the historic upper town (Enna Alta); however, service is much more frequent from the separate stop called Enna Bassa, 3km downhill. **SAIS** (☎ 0935 50 09 02) runs buses (mostly from Enna Bassa) to Catania (€7.20, 1½ hours, nine daily Monday to Saturday) and Palermo (€9.20, 1¾ hours, six daily Monday to Saturday). For connections to Agrigento, head to Caltanissetta (€3.70, one hour, six daily Monday to Friday) Regular buses also run to Piazza Armerina (€3, 45 minutes, six daily Monday to Saturday). Service to all destinations is significantly reduced on Sunday.

The train station is inconveniently located at the bottom of a steep hill 3.5km northeast of Enna Alta. Trains service Catania (€6, 1½ hours, three daily) and Palermo (€8.40, 2½ hours, two daily); purchase tickets from the machine on the platform. Local buses (€1) make the run to town hourly (except Sunday, when you might have to wait a couple of hours between buses). You can call for a taxi on ☎ 0935 50 09 05.

## VILLA ROMANA DEL CASALE

Situated 35km southeast of Enna and 5km southwest of Piazza Armerina is the **Villa Imperiale** (☎ 0935 68 00 36; www.villaromanadelcasale.it; adult/concession €6/3; ☒ 8am-6.30pm), a stunning 3rd-century Roman villa and one of the few remaining sites of Roman Sicily. This sumptuous hunting lodge is thought to have belonged to Diocletian's co-emperor Marcus Aurelius Maximianus. Buried under mud in a 12th-century flood, it remained hidden for 700 years before its magnificent floor mosaics were discovered in the 1950s. It is worth

arriving out of season or early in the day to avoid the hordes of tourists.

The mosaics cover almost the entire floor (3500 sq metres) of the villa and are considered unique for their narrative style, the range of subject matter and variety of colour – many are clearly influenced by African themes. Along the eastern end of the internal courtyard is the wonderful **Corridor of the Great Hunt**, depicting chariots, rhinos, cheetahs and lions in rich golden colours. The stylised animals seem ready to jump out of the scene, watched by the voluptuously beautiful Queen of Sheba. On the other side of the corridor is a series of apartments, where floor illustrations reproduce scenes from Homer. But perhaps the most captivating of the mosaics is the so-called **Room of the Ten Girls in Bikinis**, with depictions of sporty girls in scanty bikinis throwing a discus, using weights and throwing a ball; they would blend in well on a Malibu beach.

The helpful multilingual staff at **Omniaturist** (☎ 0935 68 66 54; Via Umberto I 3, Piazza Armerina; ☒ 9am-8.30pm) provides free town maps and an Italian-English brochure about the villa and other local attractions.

From 1 May to 30 September, Autolinee Urbane runs eight buses daily to the villa (€0.70, 30 minutes), leaving Piazza Armerina's Piazza Manescalchi on the hour (9am to noon and 3pm to 6pm) and returning from the villa on the half-hour.

If visiting outside of summer, you'll have to walk (5km, mostly downhill), drive or get a taxi. Taxis (parked all over town) will take you there, wait for an hour and drive you back to Piazza Armerina for about €20. If you have your own car, head south along the SS117.

## AGRIGENTO

pop 59,200 / elev 230m

Surrounded by green, Agrigento's rows of bland modern apartment blocks curve around Sicily's oldest tourist site (the Valley of the Temples, or Valle dei Templi), first put on the map by Goethe in the 18th century. In ancient times, Pindar declared that the people of Akragas were 'built for eternity but feasted as if there were no tomorrow'. Nowadays modern Agrigento, one of the liveliest and most aggressive cities in Sicily, has more in common with the character rather than the aesthetics of its ancient counterpart. Overshadowed by the new city on the hill above it, the splendid



0 400 m  
0 0.2 miles

**INFORMATION**

|                           |      |
|---------------------------|------|
| Municipal Tourist Office  | 1 D3 |
| Police Station            | 2 D2 |
| Post Office               | 3 D2 |
| Provincial Tourist Office | 4 D2 |
| Telematics Internet Point | 5 C2 |

**SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES**

|                                 |          |
|---------------------------------|----------|
| Cathedral                       | 6 A1     |
| Chiesa di Santa Maria dei Greci | 7 B2     |
| Ethnographic Museum             | (see B2) |
| Monastero del Santo Spirito     | 8 C2     |
| Museo Archeologico              | 9 A3     |
| Tempio di Asclepiodote          | 10 B4    |
| Tempio di Castore e Polluce     | 11 A4    |
| Tempio di Ercole                | 12 A4    |
| Tempio di Giove                 | 13 A4    |
| Tempio di Giunone               | 14 B4    |
| Valley of the Temples           | 15 A4    |
| Entrance                        | 16 A4    |

**SLEEPING**

|                 |       |
|-----------------|-------|
| Atenea 191 B&B  | 16 B2 |
| Camere a Sud    | 17 C2 |
| Colleverde Park |       |
| Hotel           | 18 B3 |
| Hotel Amici     | 19 D3 |

**EATING**

|                         |       |
|-------------------------|-------|
| L'Ambasciata di Sicilia | 20 B2 |
| Le Cuspidi              | 21 D3 |
| Pizzeria Miniana        | 22 C2 |
| Ristorante Per Bacco    | 23 C2 |
| Trattoria Concordia     | 24 C2 |

**DRINKING**

|               |       |
|---------------|-------|
| Mojo Wine Bar | 25 C2 |
|---------------|-------|

**ENTERTAINMENT**

|                   |       |
|-------------------|-------|
| Teatro Pirandello | 26 B2 |
|-------------------|-------|

**TRANSPORT**

|                                          |       |
|------------------------------------------|-------|
| Bus Ticket Booth for Palermo and Trapani | 27 D2 |
| Intercity Bus Station                    | 28 D2 |
| SAIS Bus Ticket Office                   | 29 D2 |

Valley of the Temples loses much of its immediate impact and it is only when you get down among the ruins that you can appreciate its true monumentality.

Intercity buses arrive on Piazza Rosselli; the train station is slightly south on Piazza Marconi. Running between Piazzale Aldo Moro and Piazza Pirandello is the main street of the medieval town, Via Atenea. Frequent city buses run to the Valley of the Temples below the town (see p822).

There are banks on Piazza Vittorio Emanuele I and along the high street, Via Atenea.

**Municipal tourist office** (☎ 0922 59 61 68; hotel dovillo@libero.it) train station (🕒 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm Sat); Piazzale Aldo Moro (🕒 8am-2pm Mon-Fri, 3-6pm Tue & Thu) Provides maps of Agrigento and information about the archaeological park.

**Provincial tourist office** (☎ 800 23 68 37; [www.provincia.agrigento.it](http://www.provincia.agrigento.it); Piazzale Aldo Moro; 🕒 8am-2pm & 3-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm Sat) Provides local and regional information.

**Telematics Internet Point** (☎ 0922 40 27 83; Cortile Contarini 7; per hr €3.20; 🕒 9.15am-1.15pm & 3.30-9pm Mon-Sat) Internet and international phone service.

## Sights

### VALLEY OF THE TEMPLES

The Valley of the Temples is one of Sicily's premier attractions. A Unesco World Heritage site, it incorporates a complex of temples and old city walls from the ancient Greek city of Akragas. Despite the name, the five Doric temples stand along a ridge, designed as a beacon to homecoming sailors. Although in varying states of ruin, the temples give a tantalising glimpse of what must truly have been one of the most luxurious cities in Magna Graecia. The most scenic time to come is from February to March when the valley is awash with almond blossom. The main entrance to the Valley of the Temples is at Piazzale dei Templi which also has a large car park. There's a second entrance and ticket office, west of here, at the intersection of Viadotto Akragas and Via Panoramica dei Templi.

The **archaeological park** (📞 0922 49 72 26; adult/concession/child €8/4/free, incl archaeological museum €10/5/free; 🕒 9am-11.30pm Jul & Aug, 9am-7pm Tue-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun & Mon Sep-Jun) is divided into two main sections. East of Via dei Templi are the most spectacular temples, the first of which is the **Tempio di Ercole** (Temple of Hercules), built towards the end of the 6th century BC and believed to be the oldest of the temples. Eight of its 38 columns were raised in 1924 to reveal a structure that was roughly the same size as the Parthenon. The magnificent **Tempio della Concordia** (Temple of Concord) is the only temple to survive relatively intact. Built around 440 BC, it was transformed into a Christian church in the 6th century. The **Tempio di Giunone** (Temple of Juno) stands high on the edge of the ridge, a five-minute walk to the east. Part of its colonnade remains and there's an impressive sacrificial altar.

Across Via dei Templi, to the west, is what remains of the massive **Tempio di Giove** (Temple of Jupiter), never actually completed and now totally in ruins, allowing you to appreciate the sheer size of the rocks. It covered an area of 112m by 56m with columns 20m high. Between the columns stood *telamoni* (colossal statues), one of which was reconstructed and is now in the Museo Archeologico (see right). A copy lies on the ground among the ruins and gives an idea of the immense size of the structure. Work began on the temple around 480 BC and it was probably destroyed during the Carthaginian invasion in 406 BC. The nearby **Tempio di Castore e Polluce** (Temple

of Castor and Pollux) was partly reconstructed in the 19th century, although probably using pieces from other constructions. All the temples are atmospherically lit up at night.

The **Museo Archeologico** (📞 0922 401 11; Contrada San Nicola; adult/concession €6/3; 🕒 9am-7pm Tue-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun & Mon), north of the temples, has a huge collection of clearly labelled artefacts from the excavated site. It also has wheelchair access.

### MEDIEVAL AGRIGENTO

Roaming around the town's lively, winding streets is relaxing after a day among the temples. The **Chiesa di Santa Maria dei Greci** (Salita Santa Maria dei Greci; 🕒 8am-noon & 3-6pm Mon-Sat), uphill from Piazza Lena (at the end of Via Atenea), is an 11th-century Norman church built on the site of a 5th-century-BC Greek temple. Note the remains of the wooden Norman ceiling and some Byzantine frescoes. If the church is closed, check with the custodian at Salita Santa Maria dei Greci 1, who will open the doors for you (don't forget to tip).

Further up the hill is the fragile-looking **cathedral** (Via Duomo; 🕒 9am-noon & 4-7pm). Built in AD 1000, it has been restructured many times, and is dedicated to the Norman San Gerlando. Back towards the Piazza Vittorio Emanuele I, the **Monastero del Santo Spirito** was founded by Cistercian nuns at the end of the 13th century. Giacomo Serpotta is responsible for the stuccoes in the chapel. There's a small **Ethnographic Museum** (📞 0922 59 03 71; Via Foderà; admission free; 🕒 9am-1.30pm & 4.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat) above the old church. The nuns here will sell you cakes and pastries, including *dolci di mandorla*, *cuscusu* (couscous made of almonds and pistachio) and *buccellati* (rolled sweet dough with figs).

### Tours

The tourist office can provide you with a list of multilingual guides. The official rate is €95 to €115 for a half-day.

**Michele Gallo** (📞 0922 40 22 57) is an excellent English-speaking guide who can organise individual and group itineraries (two to 3½ hours) according to travellers' specific interests.

### Festivals & Events

The **Sagra del Mandorlo in Fiore** is a huge folk festival held on the first Sunday in February, when the Valley of the Temples is cloaked in almond blossom.

**Festa di San Calògero** (Feast of St Calògero) is held on the first Sunday in July. It's a week-

long festival in which the statue of St Calògero (who saved Agrigento from the plague) is carried through the town while spectators throw spiced loaves at it.

## Sleeping

The places listed below all offer good value for money.

**Hotel Amici** (☎ 0922 40 28 31; [www.hotelamici.com](http://www.hotelamici.com); Via Acrone 5; s €35-45, d €65-75; ☎) Directly across from the train station, the Amici is a good budget option, with plain but spotlessly clean rooms, comfortable beds, free wi-fi in the lobby and excellent facilities for disabled travellers.

**Atenea 191 B&B** (☎ 349 59 55 94; [www.atenea191.com](http://www.atenea191.com); Via Atenea 191; s €35-55, d €50-85) The gregarious, multilingual and well-travelled Sonia runs this B&B on Agrigento's main shopping thoroughfare. The breakfast terrace has sweeping views over the valley, as do some rooms. Sonia is a great source of local travel tips and an entertaining storyteller (ask about her close encounters with whales and sharks, or her trip to Antarctica).

**Camere a Sud** (☎ 349 638 44 24; [www.camereasad.it](http://www.camereasad.it); Via Ficani 6; r €60-70) Run by a friendly Agrigentan couple, this extremely cute and well-signposted B&B has cheerful rooms and a delightful roof terrace. Cash only.

**Colleverde Park Hotel** (☎ 0922 2 95 55; [www.colleverde-hotel.it](http://www.colleverde-hotel.it); Via Panoramica dei Templi; d €130-190; ☎ ☎ ☎) A good choice if you have a car, this hotel halfway between the town and the valley looks disarmingly modern and blockish, but the lushly landscaped gardens are lovely and the rooms bright and comfortable.

## Eating

**Le Cuspidi** (☎ 0922 59 59 14; Viale della Vittoria; ice cream from €1; ☎ 9am-late) This fabulous gelateria is the perfect antidote to Agrigento's oppressive heat. Especially scrumptious is the pistachio, flecked with nuts and oh so creamy.

**Pizzeria Miriana** (☎ 0922 2 28 28; Via Pirandello 6; pizza slices €1.20) This is a local favourite for good, cheap pizza.

**Trattoria Concordia** (☎ 0922 2 26 68; Via Porcello 8; meals €18-30) Tucked up a side alley, this rustic trattoria with exposed stone and stucco walls specialises in grilled fish along with traditional Sicilian *primi* like *casarecce con pesce spada*, *melanzane e menta* (pasta with swordfish, eggplant and mint).

**Ristorante Per Bacco** (☎ 0922 55 33 69; Vicolo Lo Presti 2; meals from €17; ☎ dinner Tue-Sun) The set

menus – including antipasto, *primo*, *secondo*, *contorno*, local wine, water and dessert for under €20 – are a great deal at this restaurant just above Via Atenea.

**L'Ambasciata di Sicilia** (☎ 0922 2 05 26; Via Giambertoni 2; meals €20-25; ☎ Mon-Sat) At the 'Sicilian Embassy', they do everything they can to improve foreign relations, plying tourists with tasty plates of traditional Sicilian fare. Try to get a table on the small outdoor terrace, which has splendid views.

**Leon d'Oro** (☎ 0922 41 44 00; Viale Emporium 102; meals €30; ☎ closed Mon) An excellent restaurant that warrants its high prices and perfectly mixes the fish and fowl that typify Agrigento cuisine. Try the *coniglio in agrodolce* (rabbit in a sweet sauce) or the *triglia e macco di fave* (mullet with broad beans).

## Drinking

**Mojo Wine Bar** (☎ 0922 46 30 13; Piazza San Francesco 11-13; ☎ Mon-Sat) A trendy *enoteca* (wine bar) in a pretty piazza. Enjoy a cool white Inzolia, and munch on olives and spicy salami, as you listen to laid-back jazz.

## Getting There & Away

### BUS

For most destinations, bus is the easiest way to get to and from Agrigento. The intercity bus station and ticket booths are located on Piazza Rosselli, just off Piazza Vittorio Emanuele I. **Autoservizi Camilleri** (☎ 0922 59 64 90) runs buses to Palermo (€8.10, two hours, five daily Monday to Saturday, two on Sunday). **Lumia** (☎ 0922 2 91 36; [www.autolineelumia.it](http://www.autolineelumia.it)) has departures to Trapani (€11.10, three to four hours, three daily Monday to Saturday, one on Sunday) and **SAIS** (☎ 0922 2 93 24) runs buses to Catania (€12.20, three hours, hourly).

### CAR & MOTORCYCLE

The SS189 links Agrigento with Palermo, while the SS115 runs along the coast, northwest towards Trapani and southeast to Syracuse. To get to Enna, take the SS640 via Caltanissetta.

Driving in the medieval town is near impossible due to all the pedestrianised streets. There's metered parking at the train station (Piazza Marconi) and free parking along Via Esseneto just below.

### TRAIN

Trains run regularly to Palermo (€7.85, 2¼ hours, 11 daily). There's also one daily train to

Catania (€10.95, 3¼ hours). Although trains serve other destinations as well, you're better off taking the bus.

The train station has left-luggage lockers on the lower level (€2.50 per 12 hours).

## Getting Around

City buses (€1) run down to the Valley of the Temples from in front of the train station. Take bus 1, 2 or 3 and get off at either the museum or the Piazzale dei Templi. Bus 1 continues to Porto Empedocle and bus 2 continues to San Leone. The Linea Verde (Green Line) bus runs hourly from the train station to the cathedral.

## AROUND AGRIGENTO

Twenty-three kilometres due west of Agrigento, **Siculiana Marina** has a pleasant unspoilt beach and a World Wildlife Fund-protected park nearby. If you want to stay overnight, beachfront **Hotel Paguro** (☎ 0922 81 55 12; [www.hotelresidencepaguro.it](http://www.hotelresidencepaguro.it); s €35-40, d €60-70, 5-person apt per week €700-750) has spacious rooms and family-sized apartments, many with sea views. Or head for well-signposted **Camping Canne** (☎ 338 747 66 60; campsite per person €7.50-10), whose facilities include a mini-market and restaurant. Just in from the sweeping Lido Sabbia d'Oro beach, **La Scogliera** (☎ 0922 81 75 32; Via S Pietro; meals €25-35) has excellent fresh seafood, an unforgettable *sorbetto di limone e basilico* (lemon-basil sorbet), a good wine list and a terrace overlooking the sea.

The stunning 761-hectare natural park, **Riserva Naturale di Torre Salsa** ([www.wwf-torresalsa.it](http://www.wwf-torresalsa.it)), administered by the World Wildlife Fund, is signposted at the approach to the marina; alternatively, you can follow the SS115 10km north of Siculiana Marina to the second Montalegre exit and follow the signs for 'WWF Riserva Naturale Torre Salsa'. There's plenty of scope for walkers here with well-marked trails and sweeping panoramic views of the surrounding mountains and coast. The long, deserted Torre Salsa beach (reached from the northern entrance) is especially beautiful, although the access road is rough.

## SELINUNTE

The ruins of Selinunte are the most impressively sited in Sicily. Try to visit in spring when the surroundings are ablaze with purple, yellow and white wildflowers. The huge city was built in 628 BC on a promontory

## SIDE TRIP: THE PELAGIC ISLANDS

Burnt out on temples and tour buses? Consider a trip to the Isole Pelagie (Pelagic Islands), a three-island archipelago halfway between Agrigento and Africa. Home to some spectacular beaches – Lampedusa's Spiaggia dei Conigli makes it onto many world Top 10 lists – it's also reputed to have the cleanest waters in Italy, and it's hard to disagree once you get an eyeful of that dazzling aquamarine colour.

From May through October, **Ustica Lines** ([www.usticalines.it](http://www.usticalines.it)) runs hydrofoils (€53.90, 4¼ hours) daily to Lampedusa and its sister island Linosa (€34.10, three hours) from Porto Empedocle just outside of Agrigento.

overlooking the sea, and for 2½ centuries it was one of the richest and most powerful in the world. It was destroyed by the Carthaginians in 409 BC and finally fell to the Romans in about 350 BC, at which time it went into rapid decline and disappeared from historical accounts.

The city's past is so remote that the names of the various temples have been forgotten and they are now identified by the letters A to G, M and O. The most impressive, **Temple E**, has been partially rebuilt, its columns pieced together from their fragments with part of its tympanum. Many of the carvings, particularly from **Temple C**, are now on display in the archaeological museum in Palermo (see p766). Their quality is on a par with the Parthenon marbles and clearly demonstrates the high cultural levels reached by many Greek colonies in Sicily.

No visit to Selinunte is complete without a walk along the beach below the city, from where there are marvellous views of the temples. The road down is to the left of the parking area adjacent to Temple C.

The **ticket office** (☎ 0924 4 62 51; adult/concession/child €6/3/free; ☒ 9am-1hr before sunset) is located near the eastern temples. Just within the site you can join a tour by electric cart (half-hour/two hours costs €3/€12) to explore the enormous site.

## Sleeping & Eating

Selinunte is close to the fishing village and popular Italian resort of Marinella di Selinunte. There are several beachfront hotels that drop prices drastically in the off-season.

**Hotel Miramare** (☎ 0924 460 45; www.hotelmiramare.selinunte.com; Via Pigafetta 2; s €40-45, d €60-80) With its bland decor and plastic deck furniture, this hotel won't win any style awards, but it's hard to argue with the free access to Miramare's private beach below. Several rooms have terraces facing the sea, and there's also a waterfront restaurant with distant temple views where you can grab a bite or a drink between swims.

**our pick Vittorio** (☎ 0925 7 83 81; Porto Palo; meals €25-45) If you've got a car, this is one detour you absolutely shouldn't miss. In business for over 40 years, Vittorio has earned a reputation as one of Sicily's best seafood eateries, serving hefty portions of the freshest fish and shellfish around. Come here at sunset and dine to the sound of crashing breakers. It's right on the beach in Porto Palo, a 15km drive east of Selinunte. Rooms are available upstairs for anyone too stuffed to drive home (single/double €60/80).

## Getting There & Away

**Autoservizi Salemi** (☎ 0924 8 18 26) runs six buses daily from Selinunte to Castelvetro (€0.90, 30 minutes), where you can make onward bus connections to Agrigento, or train connections to Marsala (€3.70, 40 minutes), Trapani (€5.40, 1¼ hours) and Palermo (€7.25, 2½ hours).

If travelling by car, take the Castelvetro exit off the A29 and follow the brown signs for about 6km. If you're driving from Agrigento, take the SS115 and follow the signposts.

# WESTERN SICILY

The west of the island is a different Sicily from the ordered and industrious east. Colonised by Arabs who preferred carefree indulgence to orderly Greek temples, western Sicily has a bit of the Wild West about it – which is all part of the appeal. There's plenty to incite the senses here, ranging from unpretentious fishing towns to one of Sicily's finest nature reserves, the Riserva Naturale dello Zingaro. The offshore cluster of islands, Pantelleria and the Egadi archipelago, are steeped in history and prehistory – the latter was once a land bridge between Italy and North Africa.

## MARSALA

pop 82,500

Best known for its sweet dessert wines, the historic centre of Marsala is an elegant town

full of stately baroque buildings and bookshops within a perfect square of walls.

It was founded by the Phoenicians who escaped the Roman onslaught at Mozia. Not taking any chances, they fortified their city with 7m-thick walls, which ensured it was the last Punic settlement to fall to the Romans. In AD 830 it was conquered by the Arabs, who gave it its current name, Marsa Allah (Port of God).

It was here in 1860 that Giuseppe Garibaldi, leader of the movement for Italian unification, landed in his rickety, old boats with his 1000-strong army – a claim to fame that finds its way into every tourist brochure.

## Information

**Biblioteca Comunale** (Via XI Maggio 65; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Free internet access in the public library just off Piazza della Repubblica.

**Hospital** (☎ 0923 71 60 31; Contrada Cardilla) Marsala's brand-new hospital is on the eastern outskirts of town.

**Police station** (☎ 0923 71 88 11; Via Verdi 1)

**Post office** (Via Garibaldi)

**Tourist office** (☎ 0923 71 40 97; ufficioturistico.proloco@comune.marsala.tp.it; Via XI Maggio 100; ☎ 8.30am-1.30pm & 3-8pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun) A friendly tourist office with a good map and brochures.

## Sights & Activities

Marsala's finest treasure is the partially reconstructed remains of a Carthaginian *liburna* (warship) in the **Museo Archeologico Baglio Anselmi** (☎ 0923 95 25 35; Lungomare Boeo; admission €3; ☎ 9am-6pm). Sunk off the Egadi Islands during the first of the Punic Wars nearly 3000 years ago, the ship's bare bones are the only remaining physical evidence of the Phoenicians' seafaring superiority in the 3rd century BC. The ship resonates with history – especially if you see it after you visit the excavations on San Pantaleo (p825) – giving a glimpse of a civilisation that was extinguished by the Romans.

Marsala's other sights are limited to the **Museo degli Arazzi Fiammingi** (☎ 0923 71 13 27; Via Giuseppe Garaffa 57; admission €2.50; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 4.30-6pm Tue-Sat, 9.30-12.30 Sun), which displays eight 16th-century Flemish tapestries woven for Spanish king Philip II, and the adjoining **cathedral** on elegant Piazza della Repubblica. Although the cathedral was built in the 17th century, it wasn't actually completed until 1956 when a returning emigrant donated some much-needed cash.



## Festivals & Events

The **Processione del Giovedì Santo** (Holy Thursday Procession) is a centuries-old tradition, where actors depict the events leading up to Christ's crucifixion.

## Sleeping

Marsala has few hotels within the historic centre.

**Villa Favorita** (☎ 0923 98 91 00; [www.villafavorita.com](http://www.villafavorita.com); Via Favorita 27; s €60-100, d €85-125; P ♿ 📺 📶 🚰) This 19th-century villa surrounded by lovely gardens has an old Spanish hacienda feel, but it's also jam-packed with 21st-century amenities including tennis courts and wi-fi. Choose between the large rooms in the main hotel or the poolside bungalows out back.

**Hotel Carmine** (☎ 0923 71 19 07; [www.hotelcarmine.it](http://www.hotelcarmine.it); Piazza Carmine 16; s €70-90, d €100-125; P ♿ 📺 📶 🚰) This lovely hotel in a 16th-century monastery has elegant rooms (especially numbers 7 and 30), with original blue-and-gold majolica tiles, stone walls, antique furniture and lofty beamed ceilings. Enjoy your cornflakes in the baronial-style breakfast room with its historic frescoes and over-the-top chandelier, or sip your drink by the roaring fireplace in winter. Modern perks include wi-fi and a rooftop solarium.

## Eating

**Divino... Rosso** (☎ 0923 71 17 70; Via XI Maggio; pizzas €5-7, meals €20-30; ☎ 7-11pm) With outdoor tables on Marsala's main pedestrian thoroughfare, this excellent restaurant and wine bar serves pizzas, over 150 different wines and an extensive menu of local dishes.

**Trattoria Garibaldi** (☎ 0923 95 30 06; Piazza Addolorata 35; meals €18-28; ☎ closed lunch Sat & dinner Sun) This reliable trattoria, a perennial favourite of the Slow Food judges, has a pleasant traditional dining space and serves hearty Sicilian fare, with an emphasis on seafood.

**Il Gallo e l'Innamorata** (☎ 0923 195 44 46; Via San Bilar dello 18; meals €20-25) Warm orange walls and arched stone doorways lend an artsy, convivial atmosphere to this Slow Food-acclaimed eatery. The menu is short and sweet, featuring a few well-chosen dishes each day, including the classic *scaloppine* (veal cooked with marsala wine and lemon).

## Shopping

Tipplers should head to **Cantine Florio** (☎ 0923 78 11 11; [www.cantineflorio.it](http://www.cantineflorio.it); Lungomare Florio; tours €5;

☎ tasting room 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat, English-language tours 11am & 4.30pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am Sat) on the road to Mazara del Vallo (bus 16 from Piazza del Popolo). Florio opens its doors to visitors to explain the process of making Marsala wine and to give you a taste of the goods. Pellegrino, Donnafugata, Rallo, Mavis and Intorcía are other producers in the same area. Booking is recommended; ask at the tourist office.

You can sample and buy the wine in town at several *enoteche*, including classy **La Sirena Ubriaca** ([www.sicilywine.com](http://www.sicilywine.com); Via Garibaldi 39).

## Getting There & Away

From Marsala, buses run to Agrigento (Lumia bus company; €9.20, 2½ to 3½ hours, one to three daily) Trapani (AST; €3, 30 minutes, four daily Monday to Saturday) and Palermo (Salemi; €8.60, 2½ hours, 15 daily).

There's also regular train service to Trapani (€3.20, 30 minutes, 14 daily) and Palermo (€8.70, 3½ hours, six daily).

**Ustica Lines** (☎ 348 357 98 63; [www.usticalines.it](http://www.usticalines.it)) runs daily hydrofoils to Favignana year-round (€8.80) and to Marettimo from June through September (€15.30).

## SALINE DI TRAPANI

Drive along the SS115 coast road between Marsala and Trapani and you will find yourself in a bleached landscape of shallow *saline* (salty pools) and softly shimmering heaps of salt. The salt from these pans is considered the best in Italy and has been big business since the 12th century. Now, however, only a cottage industry remains, providing for Italy's more discerning dinner tables.

The most attractive spot along the coast is the **Riserva Naturale di Stagnone**, a shallow lagoon and noted wetlands area. In the foreground floats the site of ancient **Mozia** (see boxed text, opposite) on the tiny island of **San Pantaleo**, connected to the mainland by a Phoenician road that can still be seen at a depth of 1m below the water. The island is accessible by a private boat (€5 return), which departs every 25 minutes from 9am to 6:30pm.

The island (5km north of Marsala) was bought in 1888 by the amateur archaeologist Joseph Whitaker, who spent decades excavating and assembling the unique collection of Phoenician artefacts that now appear in the **Whitaker Museum** (☎ 0923 71 25 98; adult/concession €9/5; ☎ 9.30am-1.30pm & 2.30-6.30pm Mar-Sep). The museum's main treasure is *Il Giovinetto*

*di Mozia*, a marble statue of a young man in a pleated robe suggesting Carthaginian influences.

On the mainland near the pier is the small **Museo Saline Ettore e Infera** (☎ 0923 73 30 03; admission €4; ☎ 9.30am-sunset Apr-Oct, by appointment Nov-Mar), a salt museum housed in an old windmill. The museum shows a film in multiple languages about the history of salt production in this area. Ask at the reception about renting bikes (€10 per half-day) and canoes (€6 per hour, summer only).

There's a busy cafe, **Mamma Caura** (☎ 0923 96 60 36; meals €30-35), opposite the pier, with outdoor tables overlooking the lagoon. It's a lovely place for an evening drink as the sun turns the salt pans rosy pink. The menu features dishes made with *aglio rosso di Nubia*, a variety of red garlic grown only in this area. Above the cafe, **La Finestra sul Sale** (☎ 348 380 4301) rents out three attractive beamed rooms (single/double €100/130) with views over the salt pans.

To get here from Marsala, take bus 4 from the Piazza del Popolo (€0.80, 25 minutes, Monday to Saturday).

## TRAPANI

pop 70,600

The lively port city of Trapani makes a wonderful base for exploring Sicily's western tip. Its historic centre is filled with atmospheric pedestrian streets and some lovely churches and baroque buildings. The surrounding countryside is beautiful, ranging from the watery vastness of the coastal salt ponds to the rugged mountainous shoreline north of town.

Once situated at the heart of a powerful trading network that stretched from Carthage to Venice, Trapani's sickle-shaped spit of land hugs the precious harbour, nowadays busy

with a steady stream of tourists and traffic to and from Tunisia, Pantelleria and the Egadi Islands.

## Orientation

The main bus station is on Piazza Montalto, with the train station around the corner on Piazza Umberto I. The cheaper hotels are in the heart of the old centre, about 500m west. Make for Piazza Scarlatti down Corso Italia. The narrow streets of the old part of town can be a nightmare to negotiate if you're driving, so head for the port and park near there.

## Information

Trapani has dozens of banks with ATMs.

**Egatours** (☎ 0923 2 17 54; [www.egatourviaggi.it](http://www.egatourviaggi.it); Via Ammiraglio Staiti 13) Travel agency for bus, plane and ferry tickets.

**Emergency doctor** (☎ 0923 2 96 29; Piazza Generale Scio 1)

**Internet Point** (Via Regina Elena 26-28; per hr €5; ☎ 10am-1pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat)

**Ospedale Sant'Antonio Abate** (☎ 0923 80 91 11, casualty 0923 80 94 50; Via Cosenza)

**Police station** (☎ 0923 59 81 11; Piazza Vittoria Veneto)

**Post office** (Piazza Vittoria Veneto)

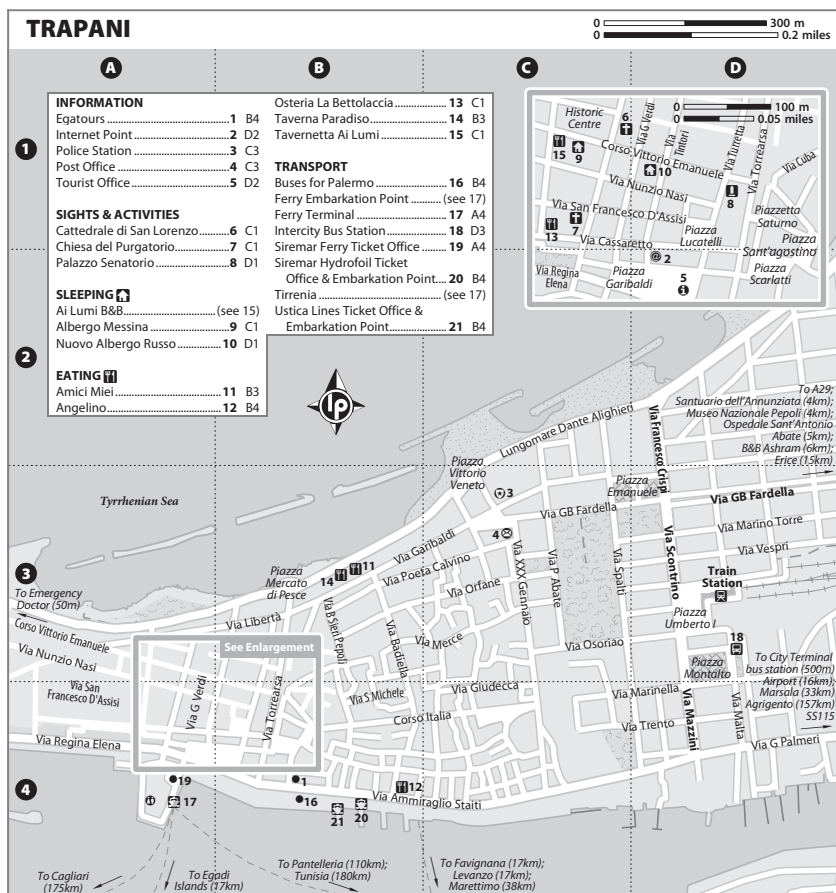
**Tourist office** (☎ 0923 2 90 00; [infotp@micso.net](mailto:infotp@micso.net); Casina delle Palme, Piazza Garibaldi; ☎ 8am-2pm Mon-Sat) One of Sicily's friendliest and most informative tourist offices, thanks to Agostino Mighali, who's worked here since 1978.

## Sights

The narrow network of streets in Trapani's historic centre remains a Moorish labyrinth, although it takes much of its character from the fabulous 18th-century baroque of the Spanish period – a catalogue of examples can be found down the pedestrianised **Via Garibaldi**. The best time to walk down here is in the early

## SPOILS UNDERFOOT

In mid-2005 a Phoenician temple was unearthed in Mozia, at the site of the ancient city of Motya, after a portion of a lagoon was drained. When the pool began to fill up again, a freshwater spring was discovered, indicating that this was once probably a holy place. Phoenicians typically placed their cities on the coast near water springs, which for them symbolised a divine presence. Digs are continuing at the site after the thrilling discovery, which includes Phoenician columns and fragments of an obelisk. The most recent discovery in August 2006 was 40 sarcophagi unearthed at the sacred Phoenician burial grounds of nearby Birgi. The tombs were discovered by chance by a group of construction workers excavating the foundations of a house. Given Sicily's extraordinary history as heir to many cultures and civilisations, it makes one ponder exactly what other riches are waiting to be discovered.



evening (around 7pm) when the *passaggiata* is in full swing.

Trapani's other main street is Corso Vittorio Emanuele, punctuated by the huge **Cattedrale di San Lorenzo** (Corso Vittorio Emanuele; ☎ 8am-4pm), with its baroque facade and stuccoed interior. Facing off the east end of the corso is another baroque confection, the **Palazzo Senatorio**.

Just off the corso, south along Via Generale Dom Giglio, is the **Chiesa del Purgatorio** (☎ 0923 56 28 82; Via San Francesco d'Assisi; ☎ 4-6.30pm), which houses the impressive 18th-century *Misteri*, 20 life-sized wooden effigies depicting the story of Christ's Passion (used in I Misteri; see opposite).

Trapani's major sight is the 14th-century **Santuario dell'Annunziata** (Via Conte Agostino Pepoli

179; ☎ 8am-noon & 4-7pm), 4km east of the centre. The Cappella della Madonna, behind the high altar, contains the venerated *Madonna di Trapani*, thought to have been carved by Nino Pisano.

Adjacent to the Santuario dell'Annunziata, in a former Carmelite monastery, is the **Museo Nazionale Pepoli** (☎ 0923 55 32 69; Via Conte Agostino Pepoli 200; adult/concession €4/free; ☎ 9am-1.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-12.30pm Sun). It houses the collection of Conte Pepoli, who made it his business to salvage much of Trapani's local arts and crafts, not least the garish coral carvings – once all the rage in Europe before the banks of coral off Trapani were decimated. The museum also has a good collection of Gagani sculptures, silverwork, archaeological artefacts and religious artwork.

## Festivals & Events

**I Misteri** (Easter Holy Week), Sicily's most venerated Easter procession, is a four-day festival of extraordinary religious fervour. Nightly processions, bearing life-sized wooden effigies, make their way through the old quarter to a specially erected chapel in Piazza Lucatelli. The high point is on Good Friday when the celebrations reach fever pitch.

## Sleeping

Trapani has a limited choice of small hotels and *pensioni*. The best options are, thankfully, in the historic centre.

**Albergo Messina** (☎ 0923 2 11 98; [albergomessina@libero.it](http://albergomessina@libero.it); Corso Vittorio Emanuele 71; s/d without bathroom €20/40) The entertaining Albergo Messina is run by an ancient Trapanese couple. It is cheap and basic but a real insight into 1950s Italy. Beware of being greeted by a quizzical old guy in his dressing gown – he's your host! Breakfast costs an extra €3.50.

**B&B Ashram** (☎ 0923 56 06 06; [www.ashram.it](http://www.ashram.it); Via Martogna 16; d €60; ☐) This 16th-century former monastery 4km from Trapani on the road from Erice is being sensitively restored by the architect Fluvio and his wife. There are six rooms, plus a living room in the former sacristy; the adjacent chapel is also being restored to its former glory. There are superb views, and a farmyard of animals, including cows, chickens and donkeys, creates a delightful rural atmosphere.

**Nuovo Albergo Russo** (☎ 0923 2 21 63; [www.nuovoalbergorusso.it](http://www.nuovoalbergorusso.it); Via Tintori 4; s €40-45, d €70-85; ☎) This small, somewhat eccentric *albergo* is in a superb location across from the cathedral; the rooms have small balconies and are clean and bright. Some have been remodelled, but many retain their dated 1950s decor and furniture.

**Ai Lumi B&B** (☎ 0923 54 09 22; [www.ailumi.it](http://www.ailumi.it); Corso Vittorio Emanuele 71; s €50-70, d €80-100, 3-/4-/5-person apt €105/130/145; ☎) Housed in an 18th-century *palazzo* on Trapani's most elegant pedestrian street, Ai Lumi offers good-value rooms and small apartments furnished with wrought-iron beds. Guests receive a discount at the Tavernetta Ai Lumi next door (right).

## Eating

Sicily's Arab heritage and Trapani's unique position on the sea route to Tunisia have made couscous ('*cuscus*' or '*kuscus*') as they spell it around here) a local speciality.

**Angelino** (☎ 0923 2 80 64; Via Ammiraglio Staiti 87; ☎ 6.30am-midnight) On the waterfront near the hydrofoil docks, this is a convenient place to pick up Sicilian sweets, snacks, light meals or other provisions before heading off to the islands.

**Amici Mieì** (☎ 0923 2 59 07; Lungomare Dante Alighieri 30; pizzas €4-10; ☎ dinner) On balmy evenings, locals throng the sidewalk tables at this lively pizzeria across from Trapani's northern waterfront.

**Osteria La Bettolaccia** (☎ 0923 2 16 95; Via Generale Enrico Fardella 25; meals €25-35; ☎ closed Sat lunch & Sun) An unwaveringly authentic, Slow Food-recommended restaurant, this is the perfect place to try *cuscus con pesce a zuppa* (couscous with mixed seafood in a spicy fish sauce flavoured with tomatoes, garlic and parsley).

**Tavernetta Ai Lumi** (☎ 0923 87 24 18; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 73-77; meals €30-45) Converted from an 18th-century stable block, this tavern is rustic to the core. Exposed brickwork, heavy wooden furniture and huge arches lend the dining room great character, while the outside terrace, in the heart of historic Trapani, is delightful on summer evenings. The menu features plenty of fresh seafood along with superbly prepared local classics such as *casarecce al pesto trapanese* (pasta with a sauce of tomatoes, toasted almonds and garlic).

**Taverna Paradiso** (☎ 0923 2 23 03; Lungomare Dante Alighieri 22; meals €30-50; ☎ dinner daily, lunch Tue-Sat) This is Trapani's best restaurant, where Dolce & Gabbana-clad women and bejewelled men gorge themselves on succulent seafood specialities from an encyclopaedic 24-page menu. Reservations are essential, as is donning the glad rags.

## Getting There & Around

### AIR

Trapani's small **Vincenzo Florio Airport** (TPS; ☎ 0923 84 25 02) is 16km south of town at Birgi. **Ryanair** ([www.ryanair.com](http://www.ryanair.com)) flies to and from Birmingham, Dublin and London Luton; other destinations include Pantelleria, Rome and Tunis.

AST buses connect Trapani's port and bus station with the airport (€3.50, 45 minutes, hourly Monday to Saturday, seven on Sunday).

### BOAT

Trapani's main **ferry terminal** (☎ 0923 54 54 11) is located opposite Piazza Garibaldi. Inside you'll find ticket offices for Tirrenia and Siremar ferries.

For Ustica Lines and Siremar hydrofoils, the ticket office and embarkation point is 150m further east along Via Ammiraglio Staiti.

**Ustica Lines** (☎ 0923 87 38 13; [www.usticalines.it](http://www.usticalines.it); Via Ammiraglio Staiti) runs hydrofoils year-round to Favignana (€9.80, 20 to 40 minutes depending on routing), Levanzo (€9.80, 20 to 40 minutes) and Marettimo (€17.30, one to 1½ hours), plus thrice-weekly summer-only services to Ustica (€24.40, three hours) and Naples (€89.40, seven hours).

**Siremar** (☎ 0923 54 54 55; [www.siremar.it](http://www.siremar.it); Via Ammiraglio Staiti) runs ferries and hydrofoils to Favignana, Levanzo and Marettimo for similar prices as Ustica Lines, plus a daily ferry to Pantelleria (€31, six hours) at midnight from June to September.

**Tirrenia** (☎ 0923 52 18 96; [www.tirrenia.it](http://www.tirrenia.it); ferry terminal) runs a weekly service to Cagliari (seat €49, 2nd-class cabin €120, 10 hours).

**Grimaldi Lines** ([www.grimaldi-ferries.com](http://www.grimaldi-ferries.com)) also runs weekly services to Tunisia (€50, eight hours) and Civitavecchia (€80, 14 hours). Tickets can be purchased at Egatours (p825).

## BUS

Intercity buses arrive and depart from the new City Terminal bus station on Piazza Papa Giovanni Paolo II. Tickets can be bought from kiosks in the station or at Egatours (p825) near the port.

**Segesta** (☎ 0923 2 17 54) runs express buses connecting Trapani with Palermo (€8.60, two hours, hourly Monday to Saturday). You can board at the bus stop across the street from Egatours or at the bus station.

**AST** (☎ 0923 2 32 22) runs from Trapani's bus station to Erice (one way/return €2.20/3.40, 45 minutes, 10 daily) and Marsala (one way/return €3/4.90, 30 minutes, four daily). Autoservizi **Tarantola** (☎ 0924 3 10 20) runs service to Segesta (one way/return €3.40/5.60, 35 to 50 minutes, four daily).

**Lumia** (☎ 0923 2 17 54) buses serve Agrigento (€11.10, three to four hours, one to three daily).

Two free city buses (No 10 and 11) do circular trips through Trapani, connecting the bus station, the train station and the port.

## TRAIN

Trapani is linked to Palermo (€7.35, 2½ hours, 10 daily) and Marsala (€3.20, 30 minutes, 14 daily). The train is the best option for travelling along this coast.

## ERICE

pop 28,600 / elev 751m

One of Italy's most spectacular hill towns, Erice combines medieval charm with astounding 360-degree views. Erice sits on the legendary Mt Eryx (750m); on a clear day, you can see Cape Bon in Tunisia. Wander the medieval tangle of streets interspersed by churches, forts and tiny cobbled piazzas. The town has a seductive history as a centre for the cult of Venus. Settled by the mysterious Elymians, Erice was an obvious abode for the goddess of love, and the town followed the peculiar ritual of sacred prostitution, with the prostitutes themselves accommodated in the Temple of Venus. Despite countless invasions, the temple remained intact – no guesses why.

Erice's tourist infrastructure is excellent. Posted throughout town, you'll find bilingual (Italian-English) informational displays along with town maps displaying suggested walking routes.

## Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 0923 86 93 88; [sterice@regione.sicilia.it](mailto:sterice@regione.sicilia.it); Via Tommaso Guarasi 1; ☎ 8.30am–2pm Mon–Fri, plus 3.30–6pm Wed) is in the centre of town.

## Sights

The best views can be had from **Giardino del Balio**, which overlooks the rugged turrets and wooded hillsides down to the salt pans of Trapani and the sea. Adjacent to the gardens is the Norman **Castello di Venere** (Via Castello di Venere), built in the 12th and 13th centuries over the Temple of Venus where all that debauchery was taking place. The castle now houses the town's most exclusive hotel, Torri Pepoli (see opposite).

There are several churches and monuments in the small, quiet town and you can purchase a €5 ticket to visit the lot. Especially lovely are the 14th-century **Chiesa Matrice** (Via Vito Carvini; admission €2; ☎ 10am–8pm May–Sep, 10am–6pm Oct–Apr), just inside Porta Trapani, and its adjacent bell tower, **Torre di Re Federico** (admission €2), where climbing the 110 steps rewards you with fabulous views. Together the church and tower form a truly graceful ensemble.

## Sleeping & Eating

Erice has some excellent hotels and, after the tourists have left, the town assumes a beguiling medieval air.

**Hotel San Giovanni** (☎ 0923 86 91 71; [www.hotel.sangiovannierice.it](http://www.hotel.sangiovannierice.it); Via Nunzio Nasi 12; s/d €45/75, with full-



board €67/114; (P) This excellent budget choice in a former convent enjoys some of the most stunning views in town. Public areas are glossily marbled while the rooms are plain with tiny bathrooms.

**Hotel Moderno** (☎ 0923 86 93 00; www.hotelmoderno.erice.it; Via Vittorio Emanuele 63; s €70-90, d €95-120; ☼) The ironically named Moderno is one of Erice's oldest hotels, dating back to the 1880s. Cosy and small, it retains a lovely, distinguished air and features rooms with bright rugs and mismatched furniture that somehow work together. The friendly owner speaks impeccable English.

**Hotel Elimo** (☎ 0923 86 93 77; www.hotelelino.it; Via Vittorio Emanuele 23; s €80-110, d €110-130, ste €170; (P) ☼) Elimo is in an atmospheric historic house with tiled beams and marble fireplaces. The eccentric owner has filled his communal rooms with intriguing art, knick-knacks and antiques. The bedrooms are more mainstream, although many – along with the hotel terrace and restaurant – have breathtaking vistas.

**Torri Pepoli** (☎ 0923 86 01 17; www.torriepoli.it; Giardini del Balio; d €150-240, ste €300-500; (P) ☼) Being king (or queen) of the castle and stay in one of Sicily's grandest hotels, opened in 2005. There are just six rooms, plus a suite in the tower. The rooms are brightly coloured and exquisitely decorated to blend with the natural stone and embellishments; the bathroom in room 1 is set into the rock side. The restaurant lives up to royal expectations (meals €35 to €40).

**Osteria di Venere** (☎ 0923 86 93 62; Via Roma 6; meals €20-30; ☼ closed Wed) Downhill from Erice's main square en route to the castle, this traditional, family-run tavern makes excellent regional food, with special emphasis on grilled meat and fish.

Erice has a tradition of *dolci ericini* (Erice sweets) made by the local nuns. There are numerous pastry shops in town, such as **Antica Pasticceria del Convento** (☎ 0923 86 97 77; Via Guarnotti). Try the *bellibutti*, dense marzipan concoctions bursting with the fragrance of almonds and lemons.

## Getting There & Away

There's a regular AST bus service to and from Trapani (one way/return €2.20/3.40, 45 minutes). A **funicular** (tickets €3; ☼ 12.30-9.30pm Mon, 8.30am-9.30pm Tue-Fri, 9.30am-midnight Sat & Sun) also runs from opposite Erice's main car park (at the foot of Via Vittorio Emanuele) to Via Martogna in Trapani.

## SEGESTA

elev 304m

The ancient Elymians must have been great aesthetes if their choice of sites for cities is any indication. Along with Erice, they founded Segesta. Set on the edge of a deep canyon in the midst of wild, desolate mountains, this huge 5th-century-BC temple is a magical site. On windy days its 36 giant columns are said to act like an organ, producing mysterious notes.

The city was in constant conflict with Selinunte in the south, whose destruction it sought with dogged determination and singular success. Time, however, has done to Segesta what violence inflicted on Selinunte; little remains now, save the **theatre** and the never-completed **Doric temple** (☎ 0924 95 23 56; adult/concession €6/2.50; ☼ 9am-4pm Nov-Mar, 9am-7pm Apr-Aug), the latter dating from around 430 BC and remarkably well preserved. A shuttle bus (€1.50) runs every 30 minutes from the temple entrance 1.5km uphill to the theatre.

During July and August, performances of Greek plays are staged in the theatre. For information, contact the tourist office in Trapani (p825).

Segesta is accessible by **Tarantola** (☎ 0924 3 10 20) buses from Trapani (one way/return €3.40/5.60, 35 to 50 minutes, four daily in summer). Otherwise catch a train from Trapani (€3.20, 25 minutes, three daily) or Palermo (€6.65, two hours, three daily) to Segesta Tempio; the site is then a 20-minute walk away. There are signs to direct you.

## GOLFO DI CASTELLAMMARE

Saved from development and road projects by local protests, the tranquil **Riserva Naturale dello Zingaro** (☎ 0924 3 51 08; www.riservazingaro.it; adult/concession €3/2; ☼ 7am-7.30pm Apr-Sep, 8am-4pm Oct-Mar) is the star attraction on the gulf. Sicily's and Italy's first nature reserve, Zingaro's wild coastline is a haven for the rare Bonelli's eagle along with 40 other species of bird. Mediterranean flora dusts the hillsides with wild carob and bright yellow euphorbia, and hidden coves, such as Marinella Bay, provide tranquil swimming spots. The main entrance to the park is 2km from Scopello. There are several walking trails, which are detailed on maps available for free at the entrance. You can also download these from the website (in Italian only).

**Cetaria Diving Center** (☎ 0924 54 11 77; www.cetaria.com; Via Marco Polo 3) in Scopello organises dives

and underwater tours of the nature reserve from the Tonnara di Scopello in summer.

Once home to tuna fishers, **Scopello** now mainly hosts tourists, although outside of peak summer season it retains some of its sleepy village atmosphere. Its port, 1km below town by footpath or 2.5km by car, is extremely picturesque, with a rust-red *tonnara* (tuna processing plant) and *faraglioni* (rock spires) rising out of the water.

There are plenty of places to stay and eat clustered around the old manor house at the centre of town. The comfortable rooms at **La Tavernetta** (☎ 0924 54 11 29; [www.albergolatavernetta.it](http://www.albergolatavernetta.it); Via Diaz 3; s €55-75, d €68-95; (P) (F) (A) (S)) are enhanced by free wi-fi, parking (a hot commodity hereabouts) and an excellent restaurant downstairs. Nearby, **Pensione Tranchina** (☎ 0924 54 10 99; [www.pensionetranchina.com](http://www.pensionetranchina.com); Via Diaz 7; B&B per person €36-46, half-board per person €55-69) is another good choice. **Il Baglio** (☎ 0924 54 12 00; Baglio Isonzo 4; pizzas €4-9), despite its hilariously bad attempts at English translation, serves great pizza in the huge cobblestoned courtyard at the heart of town.

AST buses run from Trapani to Castellammare del Golfo (€3.70, five daily), where you can make onward connections to Scopello (€2.20, four daily).

## EGADI ISLANDS

For centuries the Egadi islanders have lived off the sea – most famously from the tuna harvest in spring. The lucrative industry caused successive conquerors to fortify the islands until the 17th century, when they were sold to Genovese bankers and ultimately passed into the hands of business tycoon Ignazio Florio, who made his fortune from them.

These days the waters around the islands have been overfished and the tuna fishery (once the only cannery in Europe) is long closed. Tourism has become the main earner – even the *mattanza*, the ritual slaughtering of tuna, has become a spectator sport (see boxed text, right).

Ferries and hydrofoils run between the islands and to Trapani. See p827 for details.

### Levanzo, Favignana & Marettimo

Closest to Trapani lies Levanzo, the smallest island of the archipelago, inhabited by just a handful of people due to its lack of fresh water. A steady stream of tourists visit here, however, mainly to see the ancient rock

carvings at **Grotta del Genovese**. The huge cave exhibits Mesolithic and Neolithic etchings ‘painted’ on the walls using animal fat and carbon. Fittingly, there’s one image of the tuna that, even then, must have been revered. In all, the prehistoric art comprises 29 animals and four fragile human figures. The cave can be visited by sea (if you negotiate with one of the fishermen at the port). Contact Signor Natale Castiglione, the **custodian** (☎ 0923 92 40 32, 339 741 88 00; [ncasti@tin.it](mailto:ncasti@tin.it); visits by foot/boat €6/12; ☎ 10am-1pm & 3-6pm).

The largest of the islands is butterfly-shaped Favignana, dominated by Monte Santa Caterina. It is pleasant to explore on bicycle as it’s almost completely flat, and around the coast tufa quarries are carved out of the crystal-clear waters – most notably around **Cala Rossa** and **Cala Cavallo**. Wander around the *tonnara* at the port. It was closed at the end of the 1970s due to the general crisis in the local tuna fishing industry.

Given the history, this is unsurprisingly an excellent place to pick up tuna-related products. **Capricci del Tonno** (☎ 0923 92 24 91; Piazza Madrice) and **Casa del Tonno** (☎ 0923 92 22 27; Via Roma 12) are two great little shops filled to the rafters with smoked and canned blue-fin tuna, *bottarga* (roe), sardines and a host of other fishy delicacies.

**Elyos** (☎ 0923 92 25 87; [elyos.coop@libero.it](http://elyos.coop@libero.it); Piazza Madrice 37; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 4.30-7pm Mon-Sat year-round, 9.30am-12.30pm Sun Jun-Sep) provides tourist information and internet access (€1 per 10 minutes) in Favignana town, with a summer-only branch at the port. You will find dive-hire outlets at the small harbour, and bicycles or scooters for rent all over town.

The last of the islands, and the most distant, is Marettimo. A few hundred people live mostly in the tiny village on the eastern coast and there are no roads. The island’s crystal-clear waters are the main attraction for divers. Alternatively, you can explore some of the 400 grottoes along the rocky coast by arranging an excursion with one of the local fishermen at the port.

### SLEEPING & EATING

There’s good accommodation on Favignana and two hotels on Levanzo. There are no hotels on Marettimo, but some of the locals let out rooms, so ask around.

During the *mattanza* and in August you’ll have trouble finding a bed without an advance booking.

**Albergo Egadi** (☎ 0923 92 12 32; [www.albergoegadi.it](http://www.albergoegadi.it); Via Colombo 17, Favignana; s €65-115, d €100-200) This small *albergo*, whose friendly staff and food earn rave reviews from guests, has 12 rooms decorated in soft blues and pinks with wafting chiffon curtains. Its restaurant is among the best on the islands (meals €35 to €45, dinner daily).

**Trattoria Due Colonne** (☎ 0923 92 22 91; Piazza Madrice 76; meals €20-30; ☑ lunch & dinner) With down-to-earth Sicilian home cooking, cheery blue-and-orange decor, outdoor seating on Favignana's main square and that rarest of all rarities – no cover charge – Due Colonne makes an appealing lunch spot.

Levanzo has slim pickings for staying overnight. The best hotel, **Albergo Paradiso** (☎ 0923 92 40 80; Via Lungomare; half-board per person €60-75; ☑), is a whitewashed building with sea-blue trim, a geranium-clad terrace and a happy holiday feel.

## PANTELLERIA

This volcanic outcrop is Sicily's largest off-shore island, although it lies closer to Tunisia than it does to Sicily. Buffeted by winds, even in August, the island is characterised by jagged lava stone, low-slung caper bushes, dwarf vines, steaming fumaroles and the **Bagno dell'Aqua** (Lago di Venere) mud baths near Bugeber. Near Siba, at the summit of Montagna Grande (836m), there are also steaming natural saunas, **Stufa del Bagno di Arturo**.

Pantelleria has no true beaches, but its gorgeous, secluded coves are perfect for snorkelling and diving. The northeastern end of the island provides the best spots with a popu-

lar **acquacalda** at Gadir. Here you can while away your day wallowing like a walrus in the hot, shallow springs. Further down the coast you'll find ever more scenic spots such as **Cala Tramontana**, **Cala Levante** and **Balata dei Turchi**. Boat excursions are available from numerous companies along the waterfront.

The island has excellent hiking trails, not only along the coast but in the high vineyard country of **Piana di Ghirlanda**. Near **Mursia** on the west coast, there are also some signposted but poorly maintained remnants of *sesi* (ancient funerary monuments), evidence of a Bronze Age settlement. Many of the tombs have been destroyed and the lava rock used to build the famous *dammusi* (houses with thick, whitewashed walls and shallow cupolas). The exotic and remote atmosphere of Pantelleria has long made it a favourite with celebrities from Truman Capote to Sting, Madonna and Giorgio Armani, who has his own *dammuso* here.

There's a small **tourist office** (☎ 0923 91 18 38; [www.pantelleria.com](http://www.pantelleria.com); Piazza Cavour; ☎ 8.30am-1.30pm Mon-Fri, plus 4-6.30pm Tue & Thu) in the corner of the Municipal Hall.

## Sleeping & Eating

Summer accommodation bookings should be made well in advance. While you can save money by staying in Pantelleria town, the places in the surrounding countryside are much more appealing and generally have their own restaurants.

**Papuscia Resort** (☎ 0923 91 54 63; [www.papuscia.it](http://www.papuscia.it); Contrada Sopra Portella 48, Tracino; s €50-75, d €70-120; ☑)

## LA MATTANZA

A centuries-old tradition, the Egadi Islands' *mattanza* (the ritual slaughter of tuna) is on the critical list. For centuries, shoals of tuna have used the waters around western Sicily as a mating ground. Locals recall the golden days when it wasn't uncommon to catch giant breeding tuna of between 200kg and 300kg. Today, tuna stocks are less than 70% of what they were in the 1970s due to competition from long-line trawlers and, more recently, a new 'hi-tech *mattanza*' that deploys satellite detection to scour the oceans for the schools of tuna; high-speed fishing fleets subsequently capture the tuna in huge nets and cages. Several countries are involved and there's EU and (some say) Mafia investment. Most of the tuna heads for Japan where it ends up daubed with *wasabi* as tuna sushi, the country's veritable national dish.

Meanwhile on Favignana the *mattanza* is putting up a fight and reinventing itself as a tourist attraction. From around 20 May to 10 June visitors flock here to witness the event. For a fee you can watch the fishermen from nearby boats (ask at the tourist office on Favignana) but be prepared: you will need a strong stomach (if any fish are caught, that is). It's a bloody affair with up to eight or more *tonnarottis* (tuna fishermen) sinking huge hooks into a tuna and dragging it aboard. The word *mattanza* comes from the Spanish word *matar* (to kill). No surprises there.

In the hills on the island's east side, this delightful stone-clad B&B is set in a lovely garden.

**Zubebi Resort** (☎ 0923 91 36 53; [www.zubebi.com](http://www.zubebi.com); Contrada Zubebi; per week d €980-2000, ste €1200-2600;