

# 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 heir 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 accommodations) 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.

SICILY

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Marvel at the cohesive beauty of baroque Siciliana in **Catania** (p780), **Noto** (p793), **Modica** (p794) and **Ragusa** (p795)
- Be dazzled at night by the multicoloured pyrotechnics of **Stromboli** (p764), a smouldering volcano that refuses to give up
- Step back in time after the coach tours have left and wander the misty medieval streets in magical hilltop **Erice** (p807)
- Wander through 2500-year-old ruins at **Selinunte** (p801), **Agrigento** (p797), **Segesta** (p808) and **Syracuse** (p790)
- Indulge in some chic shopping in **Taormina** (p780), followed by a spot of island-hopping in the **Aeolian Islands** (p756)
- Marvel at the magnificent floor mosaics at the 3rd-century **Villa Romana del Casale** (p797), buried under mud for 700 years



POPULATION: 5 MILLION

AREA: 25,708 SQ KM

## History

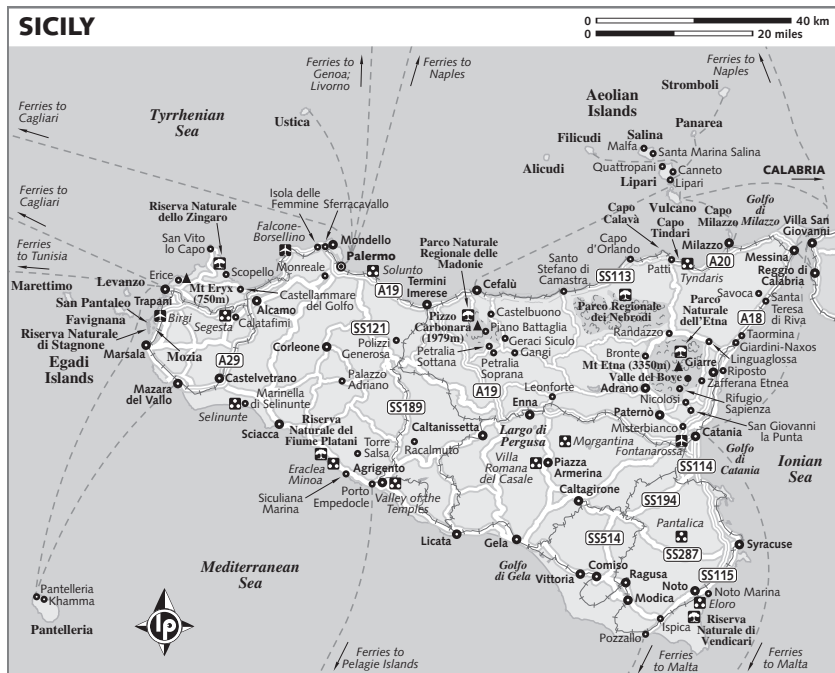
Sicily's list of invaders features all the usual suspects: Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Byzantines, Spaniards and, more surprisingly, the Normans with their delightful Monty Python-style names (King Roger, William the Bad, Walter the Archbishop...).

The island's most deeply ingrained cultural influences, however, originate from its first inhabitants – on the one hand the Sicani from North Africa, and on the other 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 (see boxed text, p803) 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 Calógero 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, below). On the downside, the defeat in April 2007 of Rita Borsellino (the sister of Mob-slain anti-Mafia prosecutor Paolo

Borsellino) by Salvatore Cuffaro was a political knife in the back. Cuffaro is a Christian Democrat politician re-elected as the island's governor despite being concurrently on trial for Mafia association. In contrast, Borsellino has dedicated the last 14 years to combatting the Mafia, including becoming deputy chairperson of Libera (Free), an association founded to encourage a sense of lawfulness and justice among young Sicilians.

## Dangers & Annoyances

Although it is unlikely you will 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 or, better still, walk.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

A limited number of airlines fly direct to Sicily – most require a transfer in Rome or Milan. **Alitalia** ([www.alitalia.com](http://www.alitalia.com)) is the main carrier. See p749 and p868 for further details.

### BOAT

Regular car and passenger ferries cross the strait between Villa San Giovanni (Calabria) and Messina. Hydrofoils connect Messina with Reggio di Calabria. See Messina (p776) and Reggio di Calabria (p733).

## 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 hide-out.

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 have claimed to have been 'close' to locating the Mafia boss on numerous occasions over the last 10 years, declarations that have been greeted with a certain degree of scepticism – after all, how can 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.

**SICILY FERRY CROSSINGS**

Route	Cost (€) adult seat/car	Duration (hr)
Genoa-Palermo	79/133	20
Malta-Pozzallo	50/85	1½
Naples-Catania	28/76	7½
Naples-Palermo	23/57	11
Naples-Trapani (hydrofoil only)	83	7
Reggio di Calabria-Messina	2.50/18	25min
Tunis-Palermo	44/59	10

Sicily is also accessible by ferry from Naples, Genoa, Livorno 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 will 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** (www.gnv.it) Genoa (☎ 010 58 93 31); Palermo (☎ 091 58 79 39) Daily ferries Monday to Saturday from Genoa to Palermo and weekly from Tunis to Palermo.

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

**Siremar** (☎ 091 749 31 11; 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** (☎ 081 017 19 98; 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** (☎ 095 746 21 87; www.tttlines.it in Italian) Based in Naples, TTT Lines has a daily car ferry from Naples to Catania.

**Ustica Lines** (☎ 0923 87 88 13; www.usticalines.it) Hydrofoil from Naples, Palermo and Cefalù to the Aeolian Islands, Reggio Calabria to Messina, Trapani and Marsala to the Egadi Islands, Mazara del Vallo and Marsala to Pantelleria, and Porto Empedocle (Agrigento) to the Pelagic Islands.

**Virtu Ferries** (☎ 356 31 88 54; www.virtuferries.com; 8 Princess St, Ta'Xbiex, Malta) Runs a daily high-speed hydrofoil service between Malta 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** (Segesta; ☎ 091 616 90 39; www.interbus.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 from the mainland by ferry from Villa San Giovanni. Eurostar (ES) trains are more costly, but faster and more punctual than the Intercity (IC) trains.

**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 at the airport or booked through any travel agent, including **Sestante CIT** (☎ 091 58 63 33; Via della Libertà 12, Palermo).

**BUS**

Bus services within Sicily are provided by a variety of companies. Buses are usually faster if your destination is not on the main (read

**TRAIN FARES ITALY-SICILY**

Route	Cost (€) Eurostar 1st/2nd class	Cost (€) Intercity 1st/2nd class	Duration (hr)
Milan-Catania	123/102	99.25/72	15½-18
Milan-Messina	128/102	95/70	12½-13
Milan-Palermo	129/108	105/79	16½-20
Rome-Catania	88/72	61/45	9½-11
Rome-Messina	73/64	57/44	7½-9
Rome-Palermo	87/79	70/57	10-12

'coastal') train line, although trains tend to be cheaper on the major routes. In small towns and villages tickets are often sold in bars or on the bus.

### CAR & MOTORCYCLE

There is 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 is 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, however, can 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 675,300

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 façades 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 payoffs remain commonplace.

### 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** (☎ 091 58 77 85; Via Maqueda 395) Great bookshop with a foreign-language section and plenty of city maps and guides.

#### Emergency

**Ambulance** (☎ 091 30 66 41)

**Police station** (☎ theft & lost documents 091 21 01 11, foreigners office 091 651 43 30; Piazza della Vittoria) For reporting thefts 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** (☎ 091 662 22 29; [www.aboriginalcafe.com](http://www.aboriginalcafe.com); Via Spinuzza 51; per hr €5; ☎ 11am-1pm & 2pm-3am Tue-Sat) An Australian-style bar and internet café.

## Left Luggage

**Train station** (per bag 1st 5hr €3.80, then up to 12hr €0.60 per hr, maximum 5 days; ☎ 7am-11pm)

## Medical Services

**Farmacia da Naro** (☎ 091 58 58 69; Via Roma 207; ☎ 24hr)

**Ospedale Civico** (☎ 091 666 11 11; Via Carmelo Lazzaro) Emergency facilities.

## Money

ATMs are prolific. There are exchange offices open outside normal banking hours at the airport (8am to 7pm Monday to Saturday) and train station (8am to 8pm).

## Post

**Post office** (Palazzo delle Poste, Via Roma 322) This monolithic post office is one of the few Fascist buildings in Palermo. Smaller branch offices can be found at the train station and on Piazza Verdi.

## Tourist Information

**Tourist information booths** (☎ 9am-2pm & 3-8pm Mon-Thu, 8.30am-8.30pm Fri & Sat, 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Sun) These can be found on Molo Piave, Piazza Bellini and Piazza della Vittoria.

**Tourist office** ([www.palermotourism.com](http://www.palermotourism.com) in Italian) airport (☎ 091 59 16 98; ☎ 8am-noon); Piazza Castelnuovo (☎ 091 605 81 11; Piazza Castelnuovo 35; ☎ 8.30am-2pm & 2.30-6pm Mon-Fri); train station (☎ 091 616 59 14; ☎ 8.30am-2pm & 2.30-6pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-2pm Sat) The office at Piazza Castelnuovo is the main tourist office. It has plenty of brochures on Palermo and the island; pick up the bimonthly *Agenda Turismo*. Helpfulness of staff varies greatly.

## Travel Agencies

The following agencies can book train, ferry and air tickets.

**Record Viaggi** (☎ 091 611 09 10; [www.recordviaggi.it](http://www.recordviaggi.it); Via Mariano Stabile 168)

**Sestante CIT** (☎ 091 58 63 33; Viale della Libertà 12)

## 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**. 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 churchgoers attending mass at the grandly formal **San Giuseppe dei Teatini**, and they prudishly dubbed it the Fountain of Shame.

Twelfth-century **La Martorana** (Chiesa di Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio; Piazza Bellini 3; ☎ 8am-1pm & 3.30-7pm Mon-Sat) was originally planned as a mosque by King Roger's Syrian Emir, George of Antioch. In 1433 the church was donated to an artistically and aesthetically challenged order of Benedictine nuns which demolished most of the stunning mosaics executed by Greek craftsmen. The nuns replaced them with gaudy baroque ornamentation, thus destroying the cohesive integrity of the church. 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** (Piazza Bellini 3; adult/concession €1/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 arcading and delicate tracery.

In nearby Piazza Sant'Anna, the **Civica Galleria d'Arte Moderna** (☎ 091 843 16 05; adult/child/concession €7/free/2.50; ☎ 9.30am-7.30pm Tue-Sun) is housed in a 15th-century *palazzo*, which was metamorphosed into a convent in the 17th century. There is a regular programme of modern art exhibitions here, as well as an excellent bookshop and gift shop. Note that as magnificent as this museum is, at the time of research there was talk of a Guggenheim Museum being opened in the city which, if it ever sees fruition, will really put Palermo on the culture-vulture map.

### Albergheria

The austere fortified palace of **Palazzo dei Normanni** (Palazzo Reale; ☎ 091 705 70 03; Piazza Indipendenza 1; adult/concession incl Cappella Palatina €6/3; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-noon Sun) was once the centre of a magnificent medieval court.

Downstairs, just off the three-tiered loggia, is Palermo's premier tourist attraction, the **Cappella Palatina** (☎ 091 705 47 49; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-12.30pm Sun), designed by Roger II in 1130. Unfortunately, a small



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earthquake in 2002 necessitated extensive restoration, and scaffolding may obscure some of the finer details of the interior, such as walls swarming with figures in glittering, dreamy gold. These exquisite glass-and-gold mosaics recount tales of the Old Testament, capturing expression, detail and movement with extraordinary grace and accuracy. Other scenes recall Palermo's pivotal role in the Crusades, an ironic reference given that the chapel was decorated by Muslim artists. The wooden *muqarnas* ceiling (if on view) is unique in a Christian church and a masterpiece of honeycomb carving.

Don't miss visiting the basement where remains of the ancient Punic city wall were excavated in 1984 and are now on display below the well-lit walkways.

South of the *palazzo* are the peaceful Norman cloisters of the **Chiesa di San Giovanni degli Eremiti** (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 illegal immigrants who are attempting to revitalise its dusty backstreets. This is also the location of Palermo's busiest street market, the **Mercato di Ballarò** (Piazza Ballarò), which throbs with activity well into the early evening. It is a fascinating mix of noise, smells and full-on street life, as well as being the cheapest place for anything from padded bras from China to every kind of 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** ([www.cattedrale.palermo.it](http://www.cattedrale.palermo.it); Corso Vittorio Emanuele; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm), an



extraordinary (and enormous) feast of geometric patterns, ziggurat 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, the patron saint of Palermo.

The Capo, another web of interconnected streets and blind alleys, also has its own street market, **Mercato del Capo**, 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** (Via Porta Carini; ☎ 9am-noon & 4-6pm Mon-Sat) along the way.

The centrepiece of the quarter is the imposing monastery of **Sant'Agostino** (☎ 7am-noon & 4-6pm Mon-Sat, 7am-noon Sun). Redecorated by the wealthy Scálfani family, the interior sports *putti* (cherubs) statues by Giacomo Serpotta, while the older cloister is decorated in a similar style to that of Monreale (p751).

## Vucciria

Architectural gems in this quarter include the **Oratorio del Rosario di Santa Zita** (Via Squarcialupo; admission free; ☎ 9am-1pm Mon-Sat), the **Oratorio del Rosario di San Domenico** (Via dei Bambinai 2; admission free) and the **Oratorio di San Lorenzo** (Via dell'Immacolatella; admission €1; ☎ 9am-noon Mon-Fri). These former social clubs for the celebs of their time are an ostentatious display of 17th-century statues and wealth. Covered in the fabulously ornate stuccowork favoured by Palermitan nobles, the Oratorio del Rosario di San Domenico unfortunately was closed temporarily at the time of writing.

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** (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** (☎ 091 611 68 05; Via Bara all'Olivella 24; adult/concession €6/3; ☎ 8.30am-1.15pm & 3-6.15pm Tue-Sat, 8am-1.15pm 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 Cercopes twins, hanging upside-down, laugh at the sunburnt bum of Hercules. 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 run-down. Mother Teresa considered it akin to the shantytowns 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** (☎ 091 623 00 11; Via Alloro 4; adult/concession €6/3; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2.30-7pm Tue-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat-Mon), which provides real insight into Sicilian artists from the Middle Ages to the 18th century. Numbered among its treasures is the famously terrifying *Trionfo della Morte* (Triumph of Death), a 15th-century fresco by an unknown artist. The gallery also holds a range of temporary exhibitions.

Just south of the gallery is the **Complessa di Santa Maria dello Spasimo** (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**. In contrast, the 14th-century **Palazzo Chiamonte Steri** (Piazza Marina; ☎ exhibitions only) 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** (☎ 091 32 80 60; www.museo-marionettepalermo.it in Italian; Via Butera 1; adult/child & concession €5/3; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) houses over 3500 puppets, marionettes and glove puppets from Italy, as well as from 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, p790.

## 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** (☎ 091 605 35 55; www.teatromassimo.it; Piazza Giuseppe Verdi; guided tours adult/concession €3/2; 🎫 10am-3.30pm 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** (☎ 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 façade 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; 🎫 10am-10pm, 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 is a one-off charge (€8) for slippers and a hand glove.

## The Suburbs

The morbid **Catacombe dei Cappuccini** (☎ 091 21 21 17; Via Cappuccini 1; admission €1.50; 🎫 9am-noon & 3-5pm) 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 is a first-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.

## 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 (p741).

**Palermo di Scena** (www.associazioneculturalechiediscena.com) is a series of music, cinema, theatre and ballet programmes held throughout the summer.

During the **Festa di Morgana** (www.museomari onetepalermo.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 on Via Roma towards 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; Via Barcarello; camp sites per adult/child/tent €7/3/7, 2-person bungalow €40-60; 🎫 year-round) Situated across from the sea this camping ground has good facilities, including a pizzeria and a few plain but comfortable bungalows.

**Hotel Sicilia** (☎ 091 616 84 60; www.hotelsiciliapalermo.it; Via Divisi 99; s €30-45, d €50-90; 📍 ☒) At the Sicilia, run by exuberant Benito, every room in this agreeably shabby *palazzo* has its own character, washed in pale yellow with original painted tile floors, antiques, plush oriental rugs and spanking-new walk-in showers. Room 22 is particularly spacious and homey with its bathroom on a separate floor.

**Artepalermo** (☎ 091 32 57 80, 338 131 17 09; www.marjoleinwortmann.com; Vicolo Madonna del Cassaro 7; s/d €30/50) This fantastic deal in the historic centre is run by Marjolein, a multilingual Dutch artist and delightful hostess. The two comfortable rooms, both with balconies, are cool and airy; you can also make yourself at home in the kitchen and sunbathe on the pretty tiled

rooftop terrace (complete with shower). A friendly and informal place, but beware the hike up to the 5th floor.

**Hotel Orientale** (☎ 091 616 57 27; prenotazioni@albergoorientale.191.it; Via Maqueda 26; s/d €44/55, with bathroom €50/70; (P)) 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, heavy wooden furniture and modern en-suite shower rooms. Check out the lovely frescoed ceiling in the library.

**Al Giardina dell'Allora** (☎ 091 617 69 04; www.giardinodellallora.it; Vicolo San Carlo 8; s €50-60, d €80-90; ☼ (P)) This bijou B&B with its paintings, photographs and sculptures is great for beret-and-smock types. The rooms are painted in vivid colours and there's a communal fridge for the use of guests. It's tucked down a slender alley opposite a wisteria-draped wall.

## Midrange

**Hotel del Centro** (☎ 091 617 03 76; www.hoteldelcentro.it; Via Roma 72; s €52-75, d €60-90; ☼ (P)) A pleasant hotel overlooking the trees and bustle of Via Roma – fortunately there are double-glazed windows. Rooms are attractively decked out with brass beds, colourful botanical prints and pale yellow walls. There's wi-fi access.

**Hotel Tonic** (☎ 091 58 17 54; www.hoteltonic.com; Via Mariano Stabile 126; s/d/tr €80/100/135; ☼) This town-house hotel towards the top of town is undergoing a necessary revamp. The rooms have retained their best feature – the original painted tiles – but the more dated décor has been treated with a fresh modern look. The public areas still evoke pure old-fashioned elegance, however, with chandeliers and plush oriental carpets.

**Hotel Joli** (☎ 091 611 17 65; www.hoteljoli.com; Via Michele Amari 11; s/d €68/108; (P) ☼ (P)) Hotel Joli is a reliable old timer. It enjoys a central location in an elegant building in the new town, with balconies overlooking Piazza Florio. The rooms are old-fashioned and large, if a little bare, although several have sumptuous frescoed ceilings.

**Hotel Gallery House** (☎ 091 612 47 58; www.telgalleryhouse.com; Via Mariano Stabile 136; s/d €100/120; (P) ☼ (P)) It opened in 2005 in what mysteriously resembles an apartment block and is the best of a clutch of hotels in the area. The rooms are furnished in warm ochre, with colour-coordinated stripy fabrics and chic marbled bathrooms in burnt sienna and cream.

The wonderful old tapestries hanging in the public areas and bar distinguish this hotel from the formulaic modern standard.

**Hotel Letizia** (☎ 091 58 91 10; www.hotelletizia.com; Via dei Bottai 30; s/d/tr €85/134/155; ☼ (P)) This boutique hotel is situated just off lovely Piazza Marina. The rooms are warmly decorated with rugs and parquet floors, plus tasteful artwork and furniture. The complimentary bottle of wine is a nice touch and the breakfast room and bar are bright and contemporary with unusual stencilled paintings on the beams.

## Top End

**Centrale Palace Hotel** (☎ 091 33 66 66; www.centralepalacehotel.it; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 327; s €130-170, d €187-190; (P) ☼ (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 e des Palmes** (☎ 091 602 81 11; www.amhotels.com; Via Roma 398; s/d €130/190; (P) ☼) The Grand Hotel which opened in 1874 is one of Palermo's most historic 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.

## 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

**Trattoria Basile** (☎ 091 33 56 28; Via Bara all'Olivella 76; meals €6-12; ☼ noon-3.30pm Mon-Sat) This popular, unpretentious trattoria is located on an otherwise bland culinary street of tourist-gear restaurants. Slices of pizza, daily pasta dishes and an excellent antipasti spread provide sim-

ple but filling fare. Try to avoid the really busy period between 1pm and 2pm when every workman in town is elbowing in for his plate of pasta.

**Al Garage** (☎ 333 490 63 56; Via San Nicolò All'Albergheria 43; meals €12-14; ☎ dinner) This tiny restaurant with just four tables is run by a congenial Tunisian, who cooks, serves and still has time for a friendly chat. Delicious grilled fish is the speciality, served with market-fresh green salad. Vegetarians are also catered for.

**Antica Focacceria di San Francesco** (☎ 091 32 02 64; Via Alessandro Paternostro 58; meals €10-15; ☎ closed Mon) A Palermitan institution, this atmospheric 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. Brave an age-old Palermitan snack – a *panino* (filled roll) with *milza* (veal innards) and ricotta cheese. Upstairs is a more elegant (and expensive) restaurant.

**La Kasbah** (☎ 091 612 43 65; Via Materassai 48; meals €15-20) The evocative interior here has stone walls, arches and high ceilings. And belly dancing if there's a crowd. The Tunisian chef whips up all sorts of goodies, such as several varieties of couscous, including fish, meat and vegetable and excellent crisp-based pizza.

## MIDRANGE & TOP END

**Moon Indian Restaurant** (☎ 091 338 52 47; Via Mariano Stabile 35; meals €20) For travellers who have had their fill of pizzas or pasta, Moon Restaurant is a zesty Indian alternative. The English-speaking proprietors are undertaking a brave venture in the unadventurous Sicilian restaurant scene, but they are charming and deserve to succeed.

**Bellini** (☎ 091 616 56 91; Piazza Bellini 6; meals €20-25) In the shadow of La Martorana, this is one of the loveliest settings in town. The restaurant is in the ex-theatre and has tables sprawling out onto a terrace. It's justifiably touristy but the Sicilian cuisine (and ice cream) remains reliably good, and the service is with a smile and fast.

**Trattoria Biondo** (☎ 091 57 36 62; Via Carducci 15; meals €25; ☎ closed Wed) This small, informal trattoria is pure Fellini film set, always crammed with congenial, noisy locals. Crates of fresh produce greet you at the door, which leads to several low-ceilinged dining rooms decorated with plates, tiles and paintings. The food is excellent and includes Palermitan classics such as *pesce spada* (swordfish) or *pasta con le sarde*.

**Capricci di Sicilia** (☎ 091 32 77 77; Via Istituto Pignatelli 6; meals €22-26; ☎ closed Mon) Tucked behind

## 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 *buffittieri* – 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).

And you thought fast food meant hamburgers and hot dogs...

the concrete columns of drab Piazza Sturzo, this convivial restaurant bubbles with energy and serves succulent dishes such as *spaghetti ricci*, seasoned with sea urchins, tomatoes and herbs, and *polpette* (fishballs of fresh sardines). There's also great pride taken in the *cassata Siciliana*, Sicily's fabled dessert, a cholesterol-laden confection of sponge, ricotta and chocolate topped-off with luridly coloured candied fruit.

**Primavera** (☎ 091 32 94 08; Piazza Bologni 4; meals €22-28) Bag a table on the terrace overlooking atmospheric Piazza Bologni. The food is nonsense and authentic with steaming plates of all the Sicilian stalwarts, including pizza, pasta, fish and meat dishes.

**L'Acanto** (☎ 091 32 04 44; Via Torrearsa 10; meals €28-35; ☹ closed Mon) 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.

**Casa del Brodo** (☎ 091 3 21 55; Corso Vittoria Emanuele 175; meals €30) One of the classics in the historic centre with a bow-tied, white-tablecloth ambience. Founded in 1890, the restaurant is named after its heart-warming pots of different kinds of *brodo* (broth), simmering on the stove. You can also fill up cheaply here with the soul-satisfying antipasti spread (€8).

**Sant'Andrea** (☎ 091 33 49 99; Piazza Sant'Andrea 4; meals €30-35; ☹ Wed-Mon winter, Mon-Sat summer) 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.

**Osteria dei Vespri** (☎ 091 617 16 31; Piazza Croce dei Vespri 6; meals €50; ☹ 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 artichoke-stuffed ravioli with ricotta, basil, tomatoes and aubergines, topped off with the deliciously calorific dark-and-white chocolate mousse with candied orange peel.

## Cafés

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

**Antico Caffè Spinnato** (☎ 091 58 32 31; Via Principe di Belmonte 107-15; snacks €4-8) A sophisticated café dating back to 1860 located on the smart pedestrian boulevard. Sit on the vast terrace among the powdered ladies and city sophisticates to enjoy coffees, cocktails, ice creams, sumptuous cakes and snacks.

**Il Baretto** (☎ 091 32 96 40; Via XX Settembre 43; salads & sandwiches €5-8) Il Baretto, wedged between expensive boutiques, is where designer-dressed women and well-oiled men (with shades) congregate for their light lunch. Take note of the fabulous Art Deco building one block south from the café on the corner of Via XX Settembre and Via XII Gennaio.

**Andrea di Martino** (☎ 091 58 59 90; Via Mazzini 54; burgers €6-8) A very busy, large café just off Viale della Libertà that serves cocktails and tastier-than-the-norm fast food. In the evenings the outdoor tables are swamped.

## DRINKING

Sicilian nightlife is more subdued than you may expect given the exuberant temperament of the locals, and is mainly centred on restaurants and private parties. Most good bars and dance venues are in the newer part of Palermo, although Piazza Olivella and Piazza Magione are both popular places to hang out. In summer, everyone decamps to Mondello Lido by the sea.

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

**Hanami Wine Bar** (☎ 091 32 02 64; Via Alessandro Paternostro 57; ☹ 6pm-midnight) A pocket-sized wine bar with arches, tubular lights and minimalist décor for quaffing sassy cocktails and superb local wines.

**All'Antico Arco Pub** (☎ 392 769 93 63; Via dell'Orologio 26; ☹ 10am-6am) This hussy of a place is wedged in among an energetic stretch of restaurants on a popular pedestrian street. Warm tones, mellow lighting and a good mix of music create a chilled-out setting for a mixed crowd of locals and tourists.

**I Grilli Giù** (☎ 091 58 47 47; Piazza Cavalieri 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, including the cavernous beer-lovers' **Cucinci** (No 39) with its nine-plus brews, and smaller (and sweatier) **Brill** (No 48). Farther along, **Mescal Disco Pub** (No 75) attracts a hip-swaying crowd with its primarily Latin beat. All three open at around 10pm and go till late.

## ENTERTAINMENT

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

**Kursaal Kalhesa** (☎ 091 616 22 82; www.kursaalkalhesa.it in Italian; Foro Italico Umberto I 21; ☎ Tue-Sat, lunch Sun, dinner Mon) Recline on silk cushions and sip a cocktail beneath the soaring vaulted ceilings. There is a roaring fire in winter, plus internet access, plump sofas and foreign newspapers. A lively unpretentious crowd is attracted by the good programme of jazz and live music (check the website for details). Lunch costs around €15 and dinner €25.

**Lo Spasimo** (☎ 091 616 14 86; Via Spasimo) This cultural centre in the atmospheric, if tragic, bombed-out remains of a church (see p744) hosts art exhibitions and live concerts.

**Teatro Massimo** (☎ 091 605 31 11; www.teatromassimo.it; Piazza Verdi 9) Ernesto Basile's Art Nouveau masterpiece stages opera, ballet and music concerts. The theatre's programme runs from October to May.

**Teatro Politeama Garibaldi** (☎ 091 616 79 73; Via Castrolifippo 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 programme of ballet and music in the lovely gardens of the Villa Castelnuovo.

**Cuticchio Mimmo** (☎ 091 32 34 00; www.figlidartecuticchio.com; Via Bara all'Olivella 52; adult/child €5.15/2.60; ☎ 6.30pm Sat & Sun Sep-Jul) A charming low-Tec choice for children (and adults) with fabulous handcrafted puppets (see boxed text, p790). Visit the workshop (see right), a few doors away, where they're made.

You can also catch performances at the Museo Internazionale delle Marionette (see p744).

## SHOPPING

Via Bara all'Olivella is good for arts and crafts. Check out the puppet workshop of the Cutic-

chio family, **Il Laboratorio Teatrale** (Via Bara all'Olivella 48-50). For exquisite and innovative Sicilian ceramics and pottery, stop by **Casa Merlo** (☎ 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** (☎ 091 58 32 31; Via Principe di Belmonte 107-15). To stock up on Sicilian wines, check out the huge selection at Mi Manda Picone (opposite).

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

**Falcone-Borsellino airport** (PMO; ☎ 091 702 01 11) is at Punta Raisi, 31km west of Palermo. For 24-hour information on international and domestic flights, contact **Alitalia** (☎ 091 601 92 50; www.alitalia.com).

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 (Isole Pelagie).

## Boat

The ferry terminal is located off Via Francesco Crispi. Ferries depart regularly from Molo Vittorio Veneto for Cagliari and Naples. Ferries for Genoa and Livorno leave from Molo S Lucia. Buy tickets from any travel agency in town.

**Grandi Navi Veloci** (☎ 091 58 79 39; www.gnv

.it in Italian; Calata Marina d'Italia) Ferries from Palermo to Genoa (€83, 20 hours, one daily Monday to Saturday).

**Grimaldi Ferries** (www.grimaldi-ferries.com; Palermo ☎ 091 611 36 91; Via Enrico Amari 8; Naples ☎ 081 49 64 44; Calata Marina d'Italia) Ferries from Palermo to Tunis (€76, 14 hours, twice weekly).

**Siremar** (☎ 091 7 49 31 11; www.siremar.it in Italian; Via Francesco Crispi 118) Ferries (€13, 2½ hours, one daily) and summer-only hydrofoils (€16, 1¼ hours, two daily) from Palermo to Ustica.

**Tirrenia** (☎ 081 017 19 98; www.tirrenia.it; Calata Marinali d'Italia, Via del Mar; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 3.30-8.45pm Mon-Fri, 3.30-8.45pm Sat, 5-8.45pm Sun) Services from Palermo to Cagliari (€42, 13 hours, one weekly) and an overnight ferry to Naples (€55, nine 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 on the Aeolian Islands (€34, four hours, one daily).

## Bus

The main intercity bus station is on Via Paolo Balsamo, east of the train station. Sicily's

buses are privatised, and different routes are confusingly serviced by various companies, all with their own ticket offices and offices in the same area. Their contact details are listed in the *Agenda Turismo*, available from the tourist office.

**Azienda Siciliana Trasporti** (AST; ☎ 091 680 00 32; www.aziendasicilianatrasporti.it; Via Rosario Gregorio 46) Services to Catania and the southeast including buses to Ragusa (€13.75, four hours, four daily Monday to Saturday, two on Sunday).

**Cuffaro** (☎ 091 616 15 10; www.cuffaro.it; Via Paolo Balsamo 13) Daily buses to Agrigento (€7.40, 2½ hours, seven daily Monday to Saturday).

**SAIS** (☎ 091 617 11 41; Via Paolo Balsamo 20) Services to Cefalù (€4.40, one hour, two daily), Catania (€12.80, 2½ hours, 17 daily Monday to Saturday), Enna (€8.85, 1¾ hours, six daily) and Messina (€13.60, 3¼ hours, hourly).

**Segesta** (☎ 091 616 90 39; www.segesta.it; Via Paolo Balsamo 26) Frequent services to Trapani (€8, two hours, eight 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 and it pays to book your rental online before you leave home. A week's car hire can cost anything from €250 to €500 so shop around. Often the larger companies offer good deals. All the hire companies are represented at the airport and listed in the tourist information booklet *Agenda Turismo*.

**Avis** (www.avis.com; airport ☎ 091 59 16 84; Via Francesco Crispi ☎ 091 58 69 40; Via Francesco Crispi 115) has a branch in town as does the less expensive **Auto Europe** (☎ 091 58 10 45; www.autoeuropa.it; Via Mariano Stabile 6a). You can rent a scooter from the originally named **Rent a Scooter** (☎ 091 33 68 04; www.rentascoters.com; Via Amari 63) for €25 per day.

## Train

Regular trains leave for Messina via Milazzo (€10.75 to €18.35, 3½ hours, every 30 minutes); Catania (€11.75 to €14.50, 3½ hours, two daily; some trains may require a change at Messina which can bump up the journey's duration by around half an hour); Syracuse (€17.20 to €20.15, six to 10 hours, five daily) with a change at Messina or Catania; Agrigento (€6.85, 2½ hours, 11 daily); as well as

nearby towns such as Cefalù (€4.35, 50 minutes, five daily). There are also intercity trains to Reggio di Calabria, Naples and Rome. Train timetable information is available in English at the station. In summer the train station **ticket office** (☎ 091 89 20 21; ☎ 7am-8.45pm) gets very busy, so allow enough time before you depart for purchasing tickets.

## GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

A half-hourly bus service runs to the centre of town, with stops outside Teatro Politeama Garibaldi and at the train station. Tickets for the 45-minute journey cost €5 and are available on the bus. Return journeys to the airport run with similar frequency and pick up at the same points.

An hourly train service, the Trinacria Express, also runs from the airport to the train station (€4.50, one hour, hourly). There are plenty of taxis outside the airport but the fare for the same trip is a crippling €45 to €50.

## Bus

Palermo's orange **city buses** (AMAT; ☎ 091 35 01 11; 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 tobacconists or the booths at the main bus station. They cost €1.05 for up to an hour or €3.35 for a day.

There are two small buses – Linea Gialla and Linea Rossa (€1) – that operate in the narrow streets of the *centro storico* and can be useful if you are moving between tourist sights (and wore the wrong shoes).

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 is lined with terrace bars and restaurants, and the central Piazza Mondello has not one but two excellent gelaterie (ice-cream shops), plus family-style restaurants and shops. Mondello 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-loungers and an umbrella costs €10); however, there is a wide swathe of public beach opposite the centre of town with all the prerequisite pedalos (standard €10, with slide €12 per hour) and jet skis (€60 per 20 minutes) for hire. You can also rent a bike with **Ciclotur** (091 45 47 98; www.ciclotur.it; Via Principe di Scalea; per day €15).

Given its easy-going seaside feel, Mondello is an excellent base for families. The **Splendid Hotel La Torre** (☎ 091 45 02 22; www.latorre.com; 11 Piano Gallo; s €104-146, d €136-172; 📞 🚗 🚿) has every luxury as well as direct access to the beach. Or check out central **B&B Al Baglio** (☎ 338 976 21 87; www.mondellobaglio.com; Via Gallo 19; s €60-65, d €80-90), with its sparkling blue-and-white décor and topnotch facilities including fridges, satellite TVs and private terraces.

There are numerous seafood restaurants and snack stalls near the seafont. Homesick Americans should check out **Billy's** (☎ 091 689 37 93; Via Mondello 41; meals €20) with its menu of giant salads, Tex Mex favourites, gourmet burgers and man-sized steaks; there are ocean views to boot. The locals' favourite for a swanky night out is **Bye Bye Blues** (☎ 091 684 14 15; Via del Garofalo 23; meals €30-35), featured in the US *Gourmet* magazine for its superb Nouvelle Sicilian dishes such as sweet and sour tuna with red onions and prawns.

To get to Mondello take bus 806 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; www.comune.monreale.cres.it; Piazza

del Duomo; 🕒 cathedral 8am-6pm, treasury 9.30am-noon & 3.30-5.30pm), located 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 is 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 **cloister** (admission €4.50; 🕒 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1.30pm Sun) 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 (€1.10, 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 without permission from the Marine



Reserve Visitors Centre, which can organise diving excursions into the zone. 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.

The **Marine Reserve Visitors Centre** (Centro Accoglienza; ☎ 091 844 94 56; Piazza Umberto 1; 🕒 8am–1pm & 4–6pm Mon–Fri, 8am–2pm Sat & Sun Oct–May, 8am–9pm Jun–Sep) is the centre of the village and can advise on room rentals, activities, boat trips and dive centres (most of which are open from April to October).

**Profundo Blu** (☎ 091 844 96 09; www.ustica-diving.it; Contrada Oliastrelo; dive from €40, 10 dives package €330) is a superb diving resort with a young, enthusiastic vibe and a wide range of courses available. There are also pleasant two- and four-person apartments to rent for €50 to €85 and €110 to €180 respectively.

## Sleeping & Eating

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

**Hotel Clelia** (☎ 091 844 90 39; www.hotelclelia.it; Via della Vittoria 5; s/d €83/145) A neat little three-star hotel in a central location that has recently been vastly upgraded – double glazing in the rooms means you no longer have to sleep under the bedclothes.

**Grotta Azzurra** (☎ 091 844 90 48; www.framonhotels.com; Contrada San Ferlicchio; s €72–84, d €152–187; 🍷 🍷) This hotel dominates the cliff top above the Grotta Azzurra. Its rooms each have a romantic terrace overlooking the sea. The rocky beach of the hotel is equipped with a swimming pool that has hydro massage jets.

**Schiticchio** (☎ 091 844 96 62; Via dei Tre Mulini; meals €20) Down-home informal restaurant for enjoying wonderfully fresh and simple dishes such as grilled fish and superb pastas and pizzas.

## Getting There & Around

**Siremar** (☎ 091 874 93 111; Piazza Capitano Longo 9) operates a year-round car ferry (€14.10, 2½ hours, one daily) from Palermo. From June to September additional hydrofoils are in service (€20, 1¼ hours, two daily). The office is 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.usticalines.it) three days a week. The journey from Naples to Ustica takes four hours and costs €66 one way.

Orange minibuses make a round trip of the island; they leave from the town hall (€1.10, half-hourly). Alternatively, you can hire a scooter at the **Hotel Ariston** (☎ 091 844 90 42; Via della Vittoria 5; per day €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 the popularity stakes.

## 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; 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.parcodellema.donie.it](http://www.parcodellema.donie.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 descriptive photos and 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 from three to 10 days.

## Sleeping

There are several *rifugi* (mountain huts) in the park and some good B&Bs and *agriturismo*. Due to the nature of the area, many hotels have their own restaurants and some only offer full- or half-board accommodation.

**L'Antico Casale** (☎ 0921 55 11 60; [www.anticocasa.leparcomadonie.it](http://www.anticocasa.leparcomadonie.it) in Italian; full board per person €70; ☎ ☎ ☎) 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.

**Donalegge al Castellazzo** (☎ 0921 56 22 89; [www.donalegge.com](http://www.donalegge.com); B&B/half-board per person €65/95; ☎ ☎ ☎) Just 5km along SS120 south-east of Polizzi Generosa, this B&B resembles a standard rustic-style *agriturismo*. But inside, interior designer Philippe Starck has ensured

a cool, modern look, with moulded white fireplaces and an interplay of black, white and natural stone. You can rent bicycles, and the countryside is ideal for gentle hikes.

**Relais Santa Anastasia** (☎ 0921 67 22 33; [www.santa-anastasia-relais.it](http://www.santa-anastasia-relais.it); Contrada Santa Anastasia, Castelbuono; d/ste €210/280; ☎ ☎) A 12th-century abbey set among vineyards and rolling hills. The décor is disappointingly staid but the views are superb, especially from the pool. A beauty farm is due to open here in 2008. The hotel is located 9km from Castelbuono in the direction of Cefalù.

Also recommended, **B&B La Meridiana del Corso** (☎ 0921 64 15 37; Corso Paolo Agliata 139, Petralia Sottana; s/d €25/50; ☎ ☎) is a family-run, comfortable place.

## Eating

**Trattoria-Pizzeria 'da Salvatore'** (☎ 0921 68 01 69; Piazza San Michele 3, Petralia Soprana; meals €18-22) Charismatic Salvatore (who speaks German, French and some English) has run this popular trattoria for 25 years. There is no written lunchtime menu; it changes daily. The antipasti (€9) comes recommended, as well as the vegetarian *frittata* (fluffy omelette stuffed with fresh ricotta and grilled mushrooms). Pizzas (from €4) are an evening-only treat, prepared in the giant wood-burning oven.

**Nangallaruni** (☎ 0921 67 14 28; 5 Via Alberghi delle Confraternite 10, Castelbuono; meals €30) A restaurant famous throughout Sicily for its mushrooms, pistachio cream, roast meats (including wild boar) and vegetable dishes. Spike your appetite with *zuppe di funghi e legumi* (mushroom and vegetable soup).

**our pick Tenuta Gangivecchio** (☎ 0921 64 48 04; [www.tenutagangivecchio.com](http://www.tenutagangivecchio.com); Contrada Gangi Vecchia; meals €30) This impressive restaurant is set in a 17th-century monastery built on the site of an ancient Greek town. The central quadrangle is surrounded by dark crimson and butter-coloured peeling façades; a Roman tomb was recently unearthed here. The kitchen is presided over by Giovanna Tornabere who, with her mother, has published three award-winning cookery books (translated into English). The restaurant's cuisine is based on traditional Sicilian dishes prepared with innovative flair but is open only for lunch with advance reservations. Adjacent is an extraordinary country hotel (☎ 0921 68 91 19; doubles €90) and a second restaurant owned by the same family; the hotel is popular with painters, walkers and

those seeking utter tranquillity. The rooms are rustic and comfortable and the rambling countryside setting is idyllic.

## Getting There & Away

Bussing around the Madonie area is time-consuming. **SAIS** (☎ 091 616 60 28) runs services from Palermo to Cefalù and most of the mountain towns, including Castelbuono, Geraci Siculo, Gangi, Isnello and Gibilmanna. Frequent services run to Castelbuono (€2, 45 minutes, seven daily Monday to Saturday) and the popular Gibilmanna (€1.40, 20 minutes, three daily Monday to Saturday).

If you are planning on travelling in the Madonie, it is worth considering car hire for a couple of days from Cefalù or Palermo.

## CEFALÙ

pop 14,200

This popular holiday resort wedged between a dramatic mountain peak and sweeping stretch of sand has the lot: a great beach; a modern town with good shops and services; 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 are 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. The *cambi* (exchange) booths around town don't offer as good a deal as the banks and are not recommended.

**Ambulance** (☎ 0921 42 45 44)

**Banca S Angelo** (Via Roma; ☎ 8.30am-1.30pm & 2.45-3.45pm Mon-Fri) Has an exchange office.

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

**Hospital** (☎ 0921 92 01 11; Contrada da Pietra Pietrapollastra) On the main road out of town in the direction of Palermo.

**Infocart** (☎ 0921 92 12 45; Via S Pasquale 6; per 30 min €2.50) Eight computers and fast internet access.

**Police station** (☎ 0921 92 60 11; Via Roma 15)

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

**Presidio Parco delle Madonie** (☎ 0921 92 33 27;

www.parcodellemadonie.it; Corso Ruggero 116;

☎ 8.30am-1.30pm & 4.30-7.30pm Mon-Sat) The official office for the Madonie park, with lots of relevant buf.

**Tourist office** (☎ 0921 42 10 50; www.cefalu-tour.pa.it; Corso Ruggero 77; ☎ 8am-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1.30pm Sun) 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-noon & 3.30-7pm) 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 pyramid towers of the cathedral stand out above the magnificent **Piazza del Duomo**, which swarms with camera-snapping tourists among the pavement cafés and restaurants.

Off Piazza del Duomo is the private **Museo Mandralisca** (☎ 0921 42 15 47; Via Mandralisca 13; adult/child €4.50/2; ☎ 9am-7pm). The museum has a random and pretty feeble collection of 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. Hotels and the tourist office have flyers. The **Barakuda Diving Centre** (☎ 347 685 30 51; Hotel Club Kalura, Via Vincenzo Cavallaro 13; 2hr initiation dive €60) can organise dives, or you can trek in the hinterland with **Valle Grande** (☎ 0921 42 02 86; www.vallegrande.it; Corso da

Vallegrande; 3hr trek €54). If you prefer pedal power, **Scooter for Rent** (☎ 0921 42 04 96; Via G Matteotti 13) can rent you a bicycle (€10 per day) or scooter (€35 per day).

## Courses

**Solemar** (☎ 338 737 28 33; www.solemar-sicilia.it; Via Perez 85) offers Italian courses, including accommodation, from €220 per week.

## Sleeping

Cheap accommodation is generally scarce year-round and in the height of summer it's nonexistent. Bookings are essential.

**Costa Ponente Internazionale** (☎ 0921 42 00 85; Località Contrada Ogliastrillo; camp sites per person/tent €6/5; 📍) 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.

**B&B Dolce Vita** (☎ 0921 92 31 51; www.dolcevitabb.it; Via Carlo Ortolani Bordonaro 8; s €55-60, d €65-75; 🍷 📍) The owner has bagged a place with one of the loveliest terrace views in town, complete with deck chairs and barbecue for those warm balmy evenings. Enjoy carafes of atmosphere and a welcoming vibe.

**La Giara** (☎ 0921 42 15 62; www.hotel-lagiara.it; Via Veterani 40; s €52-116, d €70-140; 🍷) This is one of the rare hotels situated in the historic centre, around the corner from the magnificent Piazza del Duomo. The smallish rooms can be dark with their elaborate dark-wood headboards and furniture, but the overall atmosphere is warm and friendly.

**Astro Hotel** (☎ 0921 42 16 39; www.astrohotel.it; Via Nino Martoglio 10; s €60-80, d €80-110; 📍 🍷) The Astro is located on the main approach to town and within strolling distance of the beach and historic centre. It's a solid, reliable place with large and adequate, if dated, rooms – some with balconies.

**Arca** (☎ 0921 42 33 65; www.sunseasically.com; Via S Elia; 2-person apt per week €375) 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.

## 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.

**Trattoria La Botte** (☎ 0921 42 43 15; Via Veterani 6; meals €20; 📍 closed Mon) This restaurant, just off Corso Ruggero, continues to produce excellent antipasti and pasta dishes. A house special, *arrosto alla palermitana* (roast veal in bread-crumbs), makes a change from fishy fare.

**Ostaria del Duomo** (☎ 0921 42 18 38; Via Seminario 5, Piazza del Duomo; meals €20-25; 📍 closed Mon) As it's right on Piazza del Duomo, with outdoor tables facing the cathedral, you might think this would be a poncy, overpriced restaurant. Surprisingly, it serves up tasty dishes such as *pasta e fagiolo* (pasta with white beans) at very reasonable prices.

**Lo Scoglio Ubrico** (☎ 0921 42 33 70; Via Carlo Ortolani di Bordonaro 2; meals €20-25) Dine in a five-star setting without shifting your credit card into overdrive at this elegant restaurant with its sea-view terrace. Pizzas served at night start from just €4.20, while the whole gamut of pasta, meat and fish choices is available at midday.

**La Galleria** (☎ 0921 42 02 11; Via XXV Novembre 1856 22-24; cocktails €5; 📍 closed Wed) A literary café, sophisticated cocktail bar and tasteful art gallery combined equals a supercool venue; light meals and internet access are also available.

## Shopping

Cefalù, like Taormina, has a maze of streets lined with crafty (and sometimes naff) shops and delis for both sweet tooths and savoury lovers. Stock up on some fruity Madonie cheeses at **Gatta Gaetano** (☎ 0921 42 31 56; Corso Ruggero 152).

## Getting There & Away

Bus routes run from outside the train station. **SAIS** (☎ 091 617 11 41) buses service Palermo (€4.40, one hour, two daily Monday to Saturday) and Termini Imerese (€2, 30 minutes, three daily Monday to Saturday).

The best way of getting to and from Cefalù is by train. The line links Cefalù with Palermo (€4.15, one hour, half-hourly) and virtually every other town on the coast.

You can also get a hydrofoil from Cefalù to the Aeolian Islands with **Ustica Lines** (www.usticalines.it). Hydrofoils depart Cefalù for Alicudi at 8.10am (€14.50, one hour, one daily) from June to September and at 3.20pm three times weekly from October to May. There are also hydrofoils to and from Palermo (€19.60, 1½ hours, one daily) with the same seasonal frequency. You can buy tickets at **Pietro Barbaro** (☎ 0921 42 15 95; Corso Ruggero 82).

## MILAZZO

pop 247,600

This is the sort of city that takes a while to appreciate, particularly given the industrial outer shell with its belching oil refineries. In reality, the prime reason for setting foot in this town is to get off the main island and head for the Aeolian archipelago. But away from the 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.

**Tabacchi Edicola** (Via dei Mille) This newsagent is a better source of Aeolian maps and books than the tourist office.

**Tourist office** (☎ 090 922 28 65; Piazza C Duilio 10; ☹ 8am-2pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm Sat) Located behind Via Crispi. Has very limited information.

### Sights & Activities

If you have time on your hands in Milazzo, head straight for the enormous **Spanish castle** (☎ 090 922 12 91; Via Impallomeni; admission free; ☹ 10am-noon & 3-5pm Tue-Sun Sep-May, 10am-noon & 5-7pm Tue-Sun Jun-Aug); it has guided tours on the hour. It is a lovely site to clamber 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 is 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, but the most accessible pebble beach is at the end of Via Colombo.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Jack's Hotel** (☎ 090 928 33 00; Via Col Magistri 47; s €40-50, d €60-80; ☹) This old-timer dates back to the '70s – along with the décor – but the rooms are large and clean and the location is within a suitcase trundle from the hydrofoil dock.

**Cassisi Hotel** (☎ 090 922 90 99; www.cassisihotel.com; Via Cassisi 5; s €70-95, d €110-150; ☹ ☹ ☹) This sophisticated boutique hotel opened in 2006. It has small, exquisite rooms decorated in black, cream and brown, with soft pillows and white linen. Staff can arrange parking (€10 per day) and the bar and lounge area are pure city slick with lots of shiny black and acid green.

**U Pignataro** (☎ 090 928 68 88; Via L Rizzo 24; meals €12) Despite its disquieting tourist menu and rough-and-ready appearance, this restaurant across from the harbour has solidly traditional and tasty dishes. The sprawling terrace attracts happily chomping locals as well as passing tourists.

**Salamone a Mare** (☎ 090 928 12 33; Strada Panoramica; meals €25; ☹ closed Mon) A wonderful seafood restaurant, situated north along the isthmus. It is superbly sited right on the cliff edge, with a terrace jutting out over the water offering views of the Aeolians.

Also recommended, **L'Angolo degli Aragonesi** (☎ 090 922 49 27; Via GB Impallomeni; meals €20) serves crepes and Sicilian cuisine near the castle.

### Getting There & Away

Milazzo is easy to reach by bus or train from Palermo and Messina. **Giuntabus** (☎ 090 67 37 82) runs a service from Messina (€3.60, 50 minutes, half-hourly). All intercity buses run from Piazza della Repubblica along the quayside. Trains are more frequent, with two departures and arrivals hourly for both Palermo (€9.40, 2½ to three hours) and Messina (€2.85, one hour). The train station is very far away on Piazza Marconi, connected to the port by AST buses (€1, half-hourly).

If you fancy leaving your car here while you island-hop, there are plenty of well-advertised garages, including **Garage Central** (090 928 24 72; Via C Borgia; per day €10).

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

## AEOLIAN ISLANDS

Stunning cobalt sea, windswept mountains and a charming film about a postman (see p762) go some way to explaining why the Aeolians (Isole Eolie) are the European Holy Grail for island-lovers. The seven islands of Lipari, Vulcano, Salina, Panarea, Stromboli, Alicudi and Filicudi are part of a huge 200km volcanic ridge and lie 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 (see boxed text, p758). This is an area of extraordinary natural beauty but, unfortunately, the word is out, so visit out of season if you can.

## 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 runs car ferries from Milazzo to the islands (per person/small car €7.30/€24.40, two hours, five daily), but they are slower and less regular than the summer hydrofoils. **NGI Traghetti** (☎ 090 928 40 91; Via dei Mille 26, Milazzo) runs a thrice-daily car ferry for the same rates.

### HYDROFOIL

Both Ustica Lines and Siremar run hydrofoils from Milazzo to Lipari (€13.20, 40 minutes), and then on to the other islands. From 1 June to 30 September hydrofoils depart almost hourly (from around 7am to 8pm) to Lipari, and also stop at Vulcano (€11, 45 minutes) and either Santa Marina or Rinella (€14, 1½ to two hours) on Salina. Services to the other islands are less frequent unless you change boats in Lipari; there are nine departures daily for Panarea (€13.80, two hours) and Stromboli (€18, 2½ hours). There are four daily departures for Alicudi (€20.80, three hours) and Filicudi (€18.20, two hours 20 minutes).

Ustica Lines hydrofoils also connect Lipari with Messina (€14.80, 1½ hours, three daily) and Reggio di Calabria (€15.50, two hours, five daily), as well as Naples (€86.20, 5½ hours, one daily, summer only) and Palermo (€37.20, four hours, one daily, summer only).

## Getting Around

### AIR

For some real Aeolian style, book yourself an excursion around the islands in your very own helicopter with **Air Panarea** (☎ 090 983 44 28; www.airpanarea.com; Via Ilditella, Panarea). Tours over Stromboli cost €199 per person.

### BOAT

Regular hydrofoil and ferry services operate between the islands. On Lipari nearly 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 (€)		Duration	
	hydrofoil/ferry	hydrofoil/ferry	hydrofoil/ferry	hydrofoil/ferry
Alicudi	14.10/8.95		2/4hr	
Filicudi	11.30/6.40		1¼/2¾hr	
Panarea	6.90/3.85		55min/2hr	
Salina (Rinella)	6.10/3.40		45min/1½hr	
Salina (Santa Marina)	5.30/3		35/45min	
Stromboli	13.30/7.70		1¼/4hr	
Vulcano	2.50/1.30		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 for €10 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 12,500 / elev 602m

At the centre of the archipelago, Lipari has been inhabited for some 6000 years or so. 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 *grande 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 built for defence. 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 do not have such good facilities so it is best to sort out your finances here before moving on. Outside of banking hours you can change cash at the post office and travel agencies.

**Ambulance** (☎ 090 988 54 67)

**Farmacia Internazionale** (☎ 090 981 15 83; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 28; ☎ 10am–8pm) The *farmacie di turno*, a timetable showing which pharmacy is on duty each night, is displayed in the window of each pharmacy.

**Internet point** (☎ 090 981 34 94; Via Vittorio Emanuele 185; per hr €5; ☎ 10.30am–1.30pm & 6.30–11.30pm)

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

**Post station** (☎ 090 981 13 33; Via G Marconi)

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

**Siremar ticket office** (Marina Lunga; per bag per hr €4; ☎ 8am–8pm) Left-luggage facilities.

**Tourist office** (☎ 090 988 00 95; www.aasteolie.191.it; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 202; ☎ 8.30am–1.30pm & 4.30–8pm Mon–Fri year-round, 8.30am–1.30pm Sat & Sun Jul & Aug) This office provides information covering all the islands and can assist you with finding accommodation. Pick up a free copy of *Ospitalità in Blu*, which contains details of accommodation and services on all the islands. Off-peak the office is closed in the afternoon on random days.

## 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 & 3–6pm Mon–Sat), 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 finds from the other islands.

Nearby is the **Chiesa di San Bartolo** (☎ 9am–noon & 4–7pm), built in 1654 to replace the Norman church that Barbarossa destroyed. The only part of the original structure to survive the raids is the 12th-century Benedictine **cloisters** (admission €1; ☎ 9am–1pm & 4–7pm).

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 is another beach, **Spiaggia della Papesca**, dusted white by the fine pumice dust that gives the sea its limpid turquoise colour.

Given the crystal-clear waters, snorkelling and scuba diving are also incredibly popular.

### GREED VERSUS STATUS

At the time of writing, the Aeolian Islands were at risk of being struck off Unesco's World Heritage list. This was due to pumice stone quarries remaining active and the construction of eight hotels since 2004 – despite environmental legislation that clearly forbids both these activities. In February 2007 a commission from the World Conservation Union (IUCN), which verifies the state of the Unesco sites, visited the archipelago. The Sicilian response was immediate: the quarries were closed and 60% of Lipari was declared a natural reserve. A management plan was also hastily put into place, designed to ensure the geological, natural and environmental integrity of the islands. At the time of research, Unesco had yet to come to a decision as to whether the Aeolian Islands would retain their World Heritage site status or not, although it is generally believed that they will be forgiven – at least this time around.

For details on courses or hiring equipment, contact **Diving Center La Gorgonia** (☎ 090 981 20 60; www.lagorgoniadiving.it; Salita San Giuseppe, Marina Corta; dive/beginners courses €32/90).

## Tours

You can take a boat tour between the islands with **Da Massimo** (☎ 090 981 30 86; www.damassimo.it; Via Garibaldi 2, Marina Corta) or **Gruppo di Navigazione** (☎ 090 988 04 10; www.navigazioneiregina.com; Via Varisana Sopra; ☹ Mar-Oct), including Lipari to Salina (€30), Lipari to Vulcano (€15) and Lipari to Panarea and Stromboli (€45 each).

## 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** (☎ /fax 090 981 19 09; www.baiaunci.com; Marina Garibaldi 2, Località Canneto; camp site per person €7-10, per tent €8-12; ☹ 15 Mar-15 Oct) The island's only camping ground is at Canneto, about 2km out of Lipari town. It provides an ace position by the sea, excellent facilities and shady sites. Book ahead in August.

**Casa Vittorio** (☎ 090 981 15 23; www.eolnet.it/casa-vittorio; Vico Sparviero 15; d €36-70) These comfortable rooms, some of which sleep up to five people, are off Via Garibaldi near Marina Corta. You'll find the owner (unless he finds you first) at Via Garibaldi 78. There is a communal kitchen, plus two terraces with views.

**our pick** **Diana Brown** (☎ 090 981 25 84; www.diana-brown.it; Vico Himera 3; s €30-75, d €40-100; ☹) Tucked down a narrow alley, South African Diana has delightful rooms decorated in a contemporary style with local tiles, bright colours and welcome extras such as kettles and fridges. The darker rooms downstairs are compensated for by the built-in kitchenettes. There's a solarium with deck chairs, plus book exchange and laundry service.

**Enzo Il Negro** (☎ 090 981 31 63; www.enzoilnegro.altervista.org; Via Garibaldi 29; d €60-110; ☹) This is a great low-season choice in the thick of the action. It sports large, brightly tiled and pine-furnished rooms with fridges. There are two terraces and a rooftop solarium overlooking the rooftops and castle walls. The owners also run excursions to the surrounding islands

**Poseidon** (☎ 090 981 28 76; www.hotelposeidonlipari.com; Via Ausonia; s €40-90, d €65-130; ☹) This small hotel is near the harbour so it's handy if you're hauling luggage. It could belong on a Greek

isle with its bright blue-and-white paintwork and colourful plants and trees. The rooms and terrace continue the breezy Med feel with cool tiles and lots of white.

**Villa Diana** (☎ 090 981 14 03; www.villadiana.com; 1 Via Tufo; s €40-75, d €75-130; ☹) Swiss artist Edwin Hunziker converted this Aeolian house into a bohemian-spirited hotel in the 1950s. It stands above Lipari town in a garden of citrus trees and olives and offers panoramic views from the terrace.

Also recommended is **Villa Augustus** (☎ 090 981 12 32; www.villaaugustus.com; Vico Ausonia 16; s €40-100, d €70-180; ☹).

## Eating

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'aeoliana*, a simple blend of the island's excellent capers with olive oil and basil.

**La Piazzetta** (☎ 090 981 25 22; pizzas €4-7; ☹ 7-11pm Sep-Jun) A popular pizzeria restaurant with a great location and lively atmosphere that has served the likes of Audrey Hepburn. It's off Corso Vittorio Emanuele, behind Pasticceria Subba.

**La Nassa** (☎ 090 981 13 19; Via G Franza; meals €20-25) Genuine Aeolian cuisine is served in this family-run trattoria. Favourites include the Aeolian sausages, a speciality of the house.

**Trattoria D'Oro** (☎ 090 981 13 04; Via Umberto I 28; meals €25; ☹ closed Sun Nov-Mar) From the atmospheric dining room hung with tiles and plates to the menu with its speciality fish-based pasta dishes, this place won't disappoint. The wine list is seriously extensive with tipples hailing from all over Italy.

**Kasbah** (☎ 090 981 10 75; Via Maurolico 25; pizzas €8, meals €25-30; ☹ 7pm-3am Mar-Oct) The Kasbah has a sleek contemporary look: white banquettes line the walls and a vine-covered garden beckons out back. The food is as good, including delicious pizzas and delicacies such as linguine with *bottarga* (dried pressed fish roe).

**Filippino** (☎ 090 981 10 02; Piazza Municipio; meals €40-50; ☹ closed Mon Oct-Mar) Founded in 1910, this is no ordinary restaurant. Owner Antonio has separate menus for olive oil, bottled water (including Norwegian), grappas (120) and, more conventionally, wine. Reassuringly, there is a food menu as well that includes specialities such as *maccarruni i casa alla Filippino* (pasta with tomatoes, courgettes, basil, mint, mozzarella and ricotta) and close to 20



delectable desserts. There's a large terrace and an intriguingly cluttered dining room.

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

## Drinking

You may fancy a late-night drink or want to be in the right place for crowd-gazing during the *passaggiata* (evening stroll).

**Bar La Precchia** (☎ 090 981 13 03; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 191) This bar is a local favourite. It has an enormous menu of drinks, from *caffè frappé* (iced coffee) and fruit milkshakes to cocktails and wine. In summer it's open until 3am and often has live music.

## 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, plus lots of other delicious goodies, at **F.lli Laise** (☎ 090 981 27 31; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 118).

## Getting There & Around

**Autobus Urso Guglielmo** (☎ 090 981 12 62, 090 981 10 26; Via Cappuccini 9) runs a frequent bus service around the island, departing from Marina Lunga. There are departures for Canneto (€1.45, nine daily), Acquacalda, Porticello and Quattrocchi. If you plan on using the bus a lot, buy a booklet of 10 tickets (€10), which you can use as and when you like.

The company also offers tours of the island. These trips (€4, one hour) depart at 9.30am, 11.30am and 5pm daily from 1 July to 30 September.

**Roberto Foti** (☎ 090 981 23 52; Via F Crispi 31) rents scooters (€15 to €30 per day) and cars (Fiat Panda/Uno €50/55 per 24 hours).

See p757 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 is a tranquil, unspoilt quality to the landscape, and a refreshing lack of souvenir shops selling (yet more) black-lava trinkets. 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). Note that for some inexplicable reason, there are virtually no street signs in Vulcano.

## Information

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

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

**Tourist office** (☎ 090 985 20 28; Via Provinciale 41;

☎ 8am-2pm Jun-Oct) A domelike building on the main street, 50m back from the dock. It provides information on rooms for rent.

## 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 of the crater is clearly visible from the rim and you can take a steep trail down to the bottom for a walk along the crater floor. Wimps can opt for walking clockwise around the crest and be smugly rewarded by stunning views of all the islands lined up to the north.

Either way, set out early in the day if possible and don't forget a hat and water. If you want to hire a guide, contact the **Gruppo Nazionale Vulcanologia** (☎ 090 985 25 28) or **Gruppo Trekking Vulcano** (☎ 339 418 58 75). The latter has a stand by the restaurant Da Maurizio (see opposite).

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 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 Gelsò.

You can go diving with the **Diving Center Saracen** (☎ 090 981 32 71; Porto di Ponente, dive from €33, night dive €40).

## Tours

**Vulcano Navigazione** (☎ 090 985 31 05; www.vulcanonavigazione.it; Porto di Levante) organises boat trips around the island and beyond (from €20 per person).

## Sleeping

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

**La Giara** (☎ 090 985 22 29; Via Provinciale 40; s/d €45/75; ☹ Apr-Oct; ♿) A fine choice fronted by lemon trees in a quiet residential street and opposite a handy supermarket. The rooms are simply decorated with blue-and-white décor. There's a solarium.

**Villa Il Glicine** (☎ 338 575 46 78; www.villailglicine.com; Contrada Porto Levante; s €55-65, d €110-130) One of several B&Bs that have recently opened on the island. This one has pleasant rooms furnished in a bright contemporary style, plus fridges and a homey terrace overlooking the mature garden.

**Eolian Hotel** (☎ 090 985 21 51; Via Porto di Ponente; s €62-88, d €120-170; ♿) The accommodation is bungalow-style surrounded by pretty landscaped gardens. The rooms don't exactly sparkle but are comfortable enough, and extras include a tennis court and a private sulphurous pool (no less).

## Eating & Drinking

Some of Vulcano's restaurants can seem overpriced and some offer very average food. The following are sure to please.

**La Forgia** (☎ 090 985 20 77; Via Provinciale 45; meals €15) This stylish restaurant concentrates on

vegetarian dishes including a *mussaka di patate* (potato moussaka) and *lasagne verdi* (vegetable lasagne). Live music is staged here in the summertime and the atmosphere is moody and chic. It's a welcome change from the norm.

**Trattoria Maniaci Pina** (☎ 090 985 22 42; Gelsò; meals €20-25; ☹ Apr-Oct) On the south side of the island, beside a black-sand beach, this down-to-earth trattoria serves hefty portions at affordable prices and has a superb atmosphere. Try the spaghetti with *nero di sepià* (cuttlefish ink).

**Da Maurizio** (☎ 090 985 24 26; Via Porto di Levante; meals €40; ☹ Apr-Oct) This is considered to be one of the best restaurants on the island. It is a shady oasis of a place with a pretty garden and unpretentious atmosphere. Go for one of the catch-of-the-day seafood dishes, such as swordfish.

Also recommended is **Café Piazzetta** (090 985 32 67; Piazzetta Faraglione; pizzas €5), which serves pizzas and snacks and 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 p757 for more details.

Scooters, bicycles and small motorised cars can be rented from **Da Paolo** (☎ 090 985 21 12) or **Sprint** (☎ 090 985 22 08) at the intersection of Via Provinciale and Via Porto Levante. Scooters cost around €20 per day.

You can hire boats at **Centro Nautico Baia di Levante** (☎ 090 982 21 97, 0339 337 27 95). Rentals start at around €120 for the day. You will find it in a shed on the beach to the left of the hydrofoil dock.

## SALINA

pop 2300 / elev 962m

In a 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 vines 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

In summer, tourist booths operate in all three towns; during the rest of the year, contact the Lipari office. You will find public phones at the island's ports.

**Banco Antoveneta** Santa Marina (Via Lungomare Notar Giuffrè; ☎ 8.40am-1.20pm Mon-Sat); Malfa (Via Provinciale 2) The Santa Marina branch has an ATM and is to the right along the *lungomare*.

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

**Police** (☎ 090 984 30 19)

**Post office** (☎ 090 984 30 28; Via Risorgimento, Santa Marina Salina)

## Sights & Activities

If you are feeling energetic, you could climb the **Fossa delle Felci** (962m) and visit the nature reserve. At Valdichiesa, 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) all the way to the peak (about two hours). Once you've reached the top (the last 100m are particularly tough), you have unparalleled views of the entire archipelago. You can get to the sanctuary by taking a bus from Santa Marina Salina to Rinella or Leni, and asking the driver to let you off.

You can also make the climb from **Lingua**, walking through some of the hectares of vineyards that cover the island. **Rinella**, on the south side of the island, is a popular spot for spear-gun fishing. For information, contact the tourist booths. Boats are available for hire from June to August at **Nautica Levante** (☎ 090 984 30 83; Via Risorgimento, Santa Marina Salina).

Don't miss a trip to the beach at **Pollara**, one of the locations in the heart-wrenching film *Il postino* (1994), about the exile of Chilean poet and communist Pablo Neruda and the bond he formed with the local postman who brought his correspondence every day. The climb down is a bit tricky but the beach, with its backdrop of volcanic cliffs, is unbeatable.

Visit in the afternoon – the beach is in shadow in the morning.

## Tours

**Eolie Adventure** (☎ 090 984 41 34, 333 469 95 30; www.eolieadventure.com) organises excellent nature hikes on Salina, as well as the other islands. Hikes cost €25 per person per day; a three-day hike to Filicudi including tent and sleeping bag costs €80. During summer the tour company has a table at Santa Marina harbour (where the hydrofoils dock) where it takes bookings.

**Salina** (☎ 338 282 16 63; Santa Marina harbour) organises boat trips around the island (€15 per person).

## Sleeping & Eating

The island remains relatively undisturbed by mass tourism and offers some gorgeous upmarket accommodation in a few small hotels. The majority of restaurants on Salina are located in hotels (open to the public although reservations are recommended). The two reviewed are notable exceptions.

**Campeggio Tre Pini** (☎ 090 980 91 55; www.trepini.com; Frazione Rinella-Leni; camp sites per adult/child/tent €9/5/9; ☎ Mar-Oct) This camping ground has terraced sites overlooking the sea, plus a supermarket, restaurant and piano bar – although romantic decamp to nearby Hotel L'Ariana for sundowners.

**Casa del Melograno** (☎ 333 469 95 30; www.eolieadventure.com/info.htm; Via Speranza 11; s without bathroom €15-30, d without bathroom €20-70) This welcome cheap-sleep opened in 2007. It is housed in a lovely old building with high ceilings, original tiled floors (and olive-oil millstone), and has pretty patios and views. The owners can organise boat rides, tours and sports activities.

**Hotel L'Ariana** (☎ 090 980 90 75; www.hotelariana.it; Via Rotabile 11; s €40-105, d €80-210) A patrician villa with gracious, comfortable rooms overlooking the sea at Rinella. The huge terrace is the place to be at sundown, as the sun sets on this side of the island.

**Hotel Punta Scario** (☎ 090 984 41 39; www.hotelpuntasario.it; Via Scalo 8, Malfa; d €100-130; ☎ May-Sep; ♿) This is not the most famous or luxurious hotel in town, but it was one of the first hotels to open here and exudes plenty of charm. The site, with a near sheer drop to the sea, is stunning, while the rooms are large, cool and comfortably furnished. The delightful owners speak English. Only half-board in August.

**Hotel Mamma Santina** (☎ 090 984 30 54; www.mammasantina.it; Via Sanità 40, Santa Marina; d €110-210; ♿ ♻️ 🚿) Despite the name, there's nothing mumsy about this boutique hotel with its Med-style ochre exterior, landscaped garden with cacti and lemon trees, its cool, tiled rooms and terraces hung with hammocks.

**La Salina** (☎ 090 984 34 41; www.lasalinahotel.com; Via Manzoni; d €150-200) This smart boutique hotel was recently opened by the owner of Porto Bello seafood restaurant. The rooms are on the small side, but furnished with a refreshing pastel and white colour scheme.

**A Cannata** (☎ /fax 090 984 31 61; www.acannata.it; Via Umberto 1; meals €25-30) The excellent A Cannata is a member of the Slow Food Movement. The restaurant sits on a wild, green bluff and overlooks an unruly garden shaded by pines; there are also 10 simply furnished rooms (doubles cost €80 to €150).

**Porto Bello** (☎ 090 984 31 25; Via Bianchi 1, Santa Marina Salina; meals €30; 🚫 closed Mon) This excellent seafood restaurant dates back to 1978 with the same family at the helm. It has a terrace overlooking the harbour. Aside from fish, the pasta dishes are delicious.

## 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 (€1.80). 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 from **Antonio Bongiorno** (☎ 090 984 34 09; Via Risorgimento 240, Santa Marina Salina; per day €24). If you feel like hiring a scooter in Rinella (and given the steepness of the road from here to the rest of the island, your knees may appreciate it), check out **Giro dell'Isola** (☎ 090 984 40 34; Via Roma 112), where you can hire scooters from €20 per day.

## PANAREA

pop 320 / elev 421m

Tiny Panarea is just 3km long and 2km wide and feels like a Greek island with its adobe-style whitewashed houses. Exclusive and expensive, it is the smallest and most fashionable of the Aeolians, attracting the international trust-fund babes and Milanese fashionistas for a little taste of *dolce far niente* (sweet noth-

ing). In the summer, luxury yachts fill the tiny harbour while flocks of day-trippers dock at San Pietro, where you will 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) offers all kinds of boat rentals. Expect to pay around €55 for half a day. **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 tiny **beaches** of Cala Junco and Spiaggia Fumarola.

## Sleeping & Eating

Finding accommodation can be expensive and nightmarish in the high season of July and August. Out of season, however, prices plummet.

**Tesoriero** (☎ 090 98 30 98; www.hoteltesoriero.it; Via San Pietro; s €45-80, d €90-160; ♿ ♻️ 🚿) Family-run hotel with pleasant rooms decorated with jazzily patterned tiles, wrought-iron bedheads and questionable artwork. There are small terraces with deck chairs.

**Quartara** (☎ 090 98 30 27; www.quartarahotel.com; Via San Pietro 15; s €120-170, d €180-240; 📞 ♿ ♻️ 🚿) The latest luxury resort, located close to the harbour. Rooms are sumptuously decorated with handmade teak furniture, lava stone flooring and handmade tiles. The rooftop solarium has glorious sea views.

**Da Francesco** (☎ 090 98 30 23; Via San Pietro; meals €25) This place overlooks the dock and is good value for Panarea. Try the speciality *spaghetti con le cozze* (spaghetti with mussels). In summer, Da Francesco also rents out 12 pleasant rooms (singles cost €55 and doubles €90).

**Trattoria da Pina** (☎ 090 98 30 32; Via San Pietro; meals €30) A seductive restaurant just up from the harbour where tables spill out onto a large covered terrace. Try the unusual house speciality, *gnocchi di melanzane* (aubergine dumplings). Da Pina attracts a stylish crowd, so don't be glad rags before you step out here.

## Getting There & Away

In summer there are at least six daily hydrofoils and a daily ferry that link the island with Stromboli to the northeast and Salina (and onto Lipari and Milazzo) to the west.

## STROMBOLI

pop 400 / elev 924m

Stromboli's perfect triangle of a volcano juts dramatically out of the sea. It is 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 volcanic 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. Accommodation is a short walk up the Scalo Scari to Via Roma or, if you plan to head straight for the crater, 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** (☎ 090 98 60 27; Via Roma)

**Totem Trekking** (Piazza San Vincenzo 4; per 30 min €3.50; ☎ 10am-1pm & 4-8pm) For internet.

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

## Activities

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

The path to the summit (920m) is a demanding six- to seven-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 exploding crater.

These explosions usually occur every 20 minutes or so and are preceded by a loud belly-roar as gases force the magma into the air. From March to June and September to October the treks head off at 3.30pm, but in the hot summer months the departure time is delayed until 6pm. You can also undertake a seven- to eight-hour night trek, which involves camping on the volcano, a breakfast on the beach and a leisurely boat trip back to town.

To undertake the climb you will need heavy shoes and clothing for cold, wet weather; a torch (flashlight) if you're climbing at night; and a good supply of water. **Totem Trekking** (☎ 090 986 57 52; Piazza San Vincenzo 4) hires out all the necessary equipment, from torches to trekking boots. The cost of the whole kit is around €16 for 24 hours.

The less ambitious can follow the road leading right along the waterfront to the **Osservatorio di Punta Labronzo** (follow the signs), from where you have good views of the volcano. The ascent to the summit starts here.

Make your way to the beach of rocks and black volcanic sand at **Ficogrande** to swim and sunbathe. **La Sirenetta Diving Center** (☎ 347 596 14 99; www.lasirenettadiving.it; La Sirenetta Park Hotel, Via Marina 33; 3 dives with equipment €150) offers diving courses and accompanied dives.

## Tours

**Magmatrek** (☎ 090 986 57 68; www.magmatrek.it; Via Vittorio Emanuele) has experienced, multilingual volcanological guides that take groups of 10 people up to the crater (afternoon trek €22). Contact the office around noon to make a booking. It can also put together tailor-made treks for individual groups.

**AGAI** (Associazione Guide Alpine Italiane; ☎ 090 98 62 63; Via Pola 1; ☎ Apr-Oct), down the steps from Piazza San Vincenzo, is the volcano's own information office. It also takes groups to the crater for a similar price to Magmatrek.

**Società Navigazione Pippo** (☎ 090 98 61 35; Via Roma 47) and **Bortolo** (☎ 090 98 60 65; www.strombolitour.it; Porto Scari) take visitors for a 1½-hour gander at the Sciara del Fuoco from the sea (€18 per person). Both leave at 10pm from the port.

## Sleeping & Eating

There is limited accommodation on Stromboli and, as elsewhere on the islands, prices erupt in the high season. An alternative is one of the

(Continued on page 773)

(Continued from page 764)

half-dozen *affittacamere*, which charge from €45 for doubles.

**Park Hotel La Sirenetta** (☎ 090 98 60 25; www.sirenetta.it; Via Marina 33; s €90-140, d €100-150; ☹ Apr-Oct; 🚰 🚰) The Park Hotel is perfectly situated on the beach at Ficogrande in front of Strombolicchio. Although the décor won't blow your socks off – think modern, pine and bland – it's a good location and has its own diving centre.

**Locanda del Barbablu** (☎ 090 98 61 18; www.barbablu.it; Via Vittorio Emanuele 17; d €120-210; ☹ 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 fabulous restaurant is the island's classiest and exudes plenty of Latin swank. The menu is deeply traditional with dishes such as fried ravioli stuffed with aubergine, and pasta with sardines. Open for dinner; meals cost €25 to €30.

**Ritrovo Ingrid** (☎ 090 98 63 85; Piazza San Vincenzo; meals €15-20; ☹ 8am-midnight Sep-Jun, 8am-3am Jul-Aug) Situated at the high point of Piazza San Vincenzo with panoramic scenic views from the terrace, Ritrovo Ingrid is the heart of Stromboli. Trekkers come here for sundowners and pizza, as well as the day's gossip.

**Ai Gechi** (☎ 090 98 62 13; Vico Salina 12, Porto Scari; meals €25; ☹ 6.30-11pm) Ai Gechi, a favourite with the locals, serves traditional food in a typical Aeolian house. The emphasis is on seafood, and the simplest dishes are the best – try the potato gnocchi with mullet roe.

Also recommended is **Punta Lena** (☎ 090 98 62 04; Via Marina, Ficogrande; meals €25-30) for delicious seafood accompanied by magnificent sea and Strombolicchio views.

## 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.

**Motonautica Mandarano** (☎ 090 98 62 12; Via Marina) has scooters for hire (€20 per day).

## FILICUDI & ALICUDI

pop 300

Filicudi is arguably the wildest and the prettiest of the Aeolian Islands, with crystal-clear waters and deep grottoes. The most attractive of these is **Grotta del Bue Marino**. If you want

to explore the grotto, boats are available for hire (from €25) from the main port as well as from **Marco Polo Noleggio Barche** (☎ 090 988 90 77; Via Pecorini, Pecorini Mare) for a similar price. To the northwest, **Scoglio della Canna** (Cane Reef) towers 71m out of the sea. On Capo Graziano, located south of the port, are the remains of a **prehistoric village** dating from 1800 BC. You can explore the watery depths with the **Apogon Diving Center** (☎ 090 988 99 46; Via Porto; dive from €35).

For real isolation, escapists should 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 on the island, 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 Alicudi is scarce. There are a slim number of options on Filicudi with just a couple or so hotels, three B&Bs and a modest apartment complex.

**Villa La Rosa** (☎ 090 988 99 65; www.villalarosa.it; Via Rosa, Filicudi; s/d €45/80) Villa La Rosa is a splash of rust red against a verdant backdrop. It is a private house and the rooms are lovingly furnished with romantically draped mosquito nets. The restaurant is excellent; try the spaghetti with broad beans for an unusual taste-bud treat. There is the added surprise of a disco here in the summer months.

**La Canna** (☎ 090 988 99 56; www.lacannahotel.it; Via Rosa 43, Filicudi; s €37-77, d €64-140; 🚰 🚰) After an exhausting walk uphill (or you can be picked up from the ferry), the Hotel Canna appears like a private paradise sitting high above the port. The delightful rooms have beams and terracotta tiles accentuated by bright rugs and modern artwork. There are great panoramic views and the restaurant serves up traditional cuisine, such as *pennette* pasta with swordfish and mint. Meals cost €18.

**Hotel Phenicura** (☎ 090 988 99 46; Via Porto, Filicudi; s €34-100, d €68-170; ☹ May-Sep) This boxy modern hotel dominates the port and provides predictably bland but comfortable accommodation. Ask for a room with a sea view.

**Elicusa** (☎ 090 988 99 02; www.alicudihotel.it; Via Regina Elena, Alicudi; d half-board €120-150; ☹ May-Sep) This pleasant 12-room hotel also has a good restaurant. Bookings are essential unless you fancy a night on the beach.

## 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 (3323m), 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 247,600

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 prosperity 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. The building of the world's largest suspension bridge to span the straits between Sicily and the mainland, which has been on the drawing board for years, seems less certain these days (see boxed text, opposite).

### 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

**CTS** (☎ 090 292 67 61; Via Ugo Bassi 93) Student travel group with special deals for students and those under 26.

**Fast Net Café** (090 66 27 58; Via Garibaldi 72; per hr €3;

☎ 9am–8pm) Telephones and internet connection.

**Ospedale Piemonte** (☎ 090 222 43 47; Viale Europa) Has a casualty service.

**Tourist office** (☎ 090 67 42 36; Via Calabria 301;

☎ 9am–1.30pm & 3–5pm Mon–Thu, 9am–1.30pm Fri) To the right of the 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 disaster 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 façade 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).

## IN SUSPENSION

Despite receiving EU approval and having a construction schedule already in place, plans for the bridge across the Strait of Messina have been put on hold since the centre left came to power in the April 2006 elections. Premier Romano Prodi has refused to give the green light to the bridge which, the National Alliance opposition argue, 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, however, 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. With the opposition demanding a referendum, the bridge is still a political hot potato.

Meanwhile, a second major project that has been in the pipeline, literally, for several years is finally seeing fruition: one of the major schemes of its kind in the world, the West Libya Gas Project has resulted in a natural-gas pipeline linking Libya to Gela, Sicily, with a capacity of some 27.5 million cubic metres per day.

Catch the free 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 tramline 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 will be rubbing shoulders with insurance salesmen and the like. Prices generally don't vary with the season.

**Royal Palace Hotel** (☎ 090 65 03; www.framonhotels.com; Via Tommaso Cannizzaro 224; s/d €104/126; 📞 🚿) This is a grey concrete monster near the train station. Rooms have dated, dizzying patterned décor, while the public areas are more modern and attractive; there's wi-fi in the lobby.

**Grand Hotel Liberty** (☎ 090 640 94 36; www.framon-hotels.com; Via I Settembre 15; d/ste €175/235; 📞 🚿) The most comfortable hotel in Messina, the Grand is a renovated Liberty-style villa with luxurious rooms decorated in fashionable earth colours. The staff speak English and are efficient.

Messina's two budget hotels, the **Touring** (☎ 090 293 88 51; Via N Scotto 17; s/d €40/60; 🚿) and the **Mirage** (☎ 090 293 88 44; Via N Scotto 3; d €40, with bathroom €55) are both near the station. They are both fairly drab but perfectly adequate for a cheap sleep.

## Eating

Messina is most famous for its delicious swordfish dishes.

**Al Padrino** (☎ 090 292 10 00; Via Santa Cecilia; meals €15) With cramped tables and bright lights, this is not the place to come if you are in a wooing mood, but the food is delicious. Try the house speciality *pasta bucca* (pasta with vegetable sauce). The owner is a robust, entertaining host.

**Il Campanile** (☎ 090 71 14 18; Via Loggia del Mercanti 9; meals €20) This restaurant is in a prime location (and there aren't many in this city), next to the cathedral. The menu includes stuffed swordfish, pasta with porcini mushrooms and pizzas.

**Da Piero** (☎ 090 71 83 65; Via Ghibellina 121; meals €25-40; 🕒 8-11pm Mon-Sat) A classy restaurant frequented by well-heeled Messinese. It is an excellent place to try the typical swordfish *agghiotta*, flavoured with pine nuts, sultanas, garlic, basil and tomatoes. Reservations are essential.



## Getting There & Away

### BOAT

Messina is the main point of arrival for ferries and hydrofoils from the Italian mainland, only a 20-minute trip across the straits.

**Ustica Lines** (☎ 090 36 40 44; [www.usticalines.it](http://www.usticalines.it); Via Vittorio Emanuele II) runs hydrofoils to Reggio di Calabria (€2.50, 15 minutes, five daily) and summer-only hydrofoils to the Aeolian Islands (€17.50, 1½ hours, five daily), arriving at Lipari.

**Caronte** (☎ 090 371 83 24; [www.carontetourist.it](http://www.carontetourist.it); Viale della Libertà) runs ferries to Salerno (foot passenger/car €28/76, 7½ hours, one daily).

### BUS

**Interbus** (☎ 090 66 17 54; [www.interbus.it](http://www.interbus.it); Piazza della Repubblica 6) runs a regular service to Taormina (€2.85, 1½ hours, hourly Monday to Saturday) and has a weekly connection to Rome (€34.75, 9½ hours, one Saturday).

**SAIS Autolinee** (☎ 090 77 19 14; Piazza della Repubblica 6) serves Palermo (€13.60, two hours, nine daily Monday to Friday, two daily Saturday and Sunday) and Catania (€6.85, 1½ hours, half-hourly Monday to Saturday, five on Sunday). The Catania bus travels via Taormina, Giardini-Naxos, Giarre and Acireale.

**Giuntabus** (☎ 090 67 37 82; Via Terranova 8) runs a service to Milazzo (€3.60, 45 minutes, half-hourly Monday to Saturday, one 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, including the following:

**Sincar** (☎ 090 66 26 79; [www.sincar.it](http://www.sincar.it); Via Vittorio Emanuele II 35)

### TRAIN

Hourly *diretto* (direct) trains connect Messina with Catania (1st/2nd class €10/8, 1½ to two hours, hourly), Taormina (1st/2nd class €7.75/6.50, 40 minutes, hourly), Syracuse (Intercity 1st/2nd class €18/13.50, 2½ to three hours, hourly) and Palermo (Intercity €18.35,

regional €10.75, 3½ hours). You can also get the train to Milazzo (€2.85, one hour, 10 daily, hourly), but buses are generally faster. 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 p739).

## Getting Around

An electric tram runs up and down the length of the town, from Piazza Cairoli via the train station at Piazza della Repubblica up to the Museo Regionale. You can buy a ticket (€1, valid for two hours) from the ticket conductor at the stop.

City buses (tickets €1, valid for two hours) run from outside the train station to Ganzirri (buses 79 and 81) and Mortelle (buses 79 and 80).

## TAORMINA

pop 10,800 / elev 204m

Spectacularly located 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 is host to a summer arts festival (p779) 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 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 (€1) to get to the bus station (for local and intercity services), which is on Via Luigi Pirandello. A short walk

uphill from the bus station brings you to the old city entrance and Corso Umberto I, which traverses the town.

## Information

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

**British Pharmacy** (☎ 0942 62 58 66; Piazza IX Aprile; ☎ 8.30am-1pm & 4.30-8.30pm) Offers a night call-out service on ☎ 338 15 87 988.

**L@s Veg@s** (☎ 0942 2 40 59; Salita Alexander Humboldt; per 20 min €2; ☎ 8am-1pm & 7pm-2am Tue-Sun) A slick internet bar with several fast computers and a choice of cocktails.

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

**Spedale San Vincenzo** (☎ 0942 5 37 45; Piazza San Vincenzo) Call the same number for an ambulance. It is just outside Porta Catania.

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

**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 & 4-7pm Mon-Sat) Tourist office with informative brochures and moderately 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 are 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 p779). 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** with its Norman-Gothic windows, **Palazzo 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 Cesarò; 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 fabulous sweeping 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.

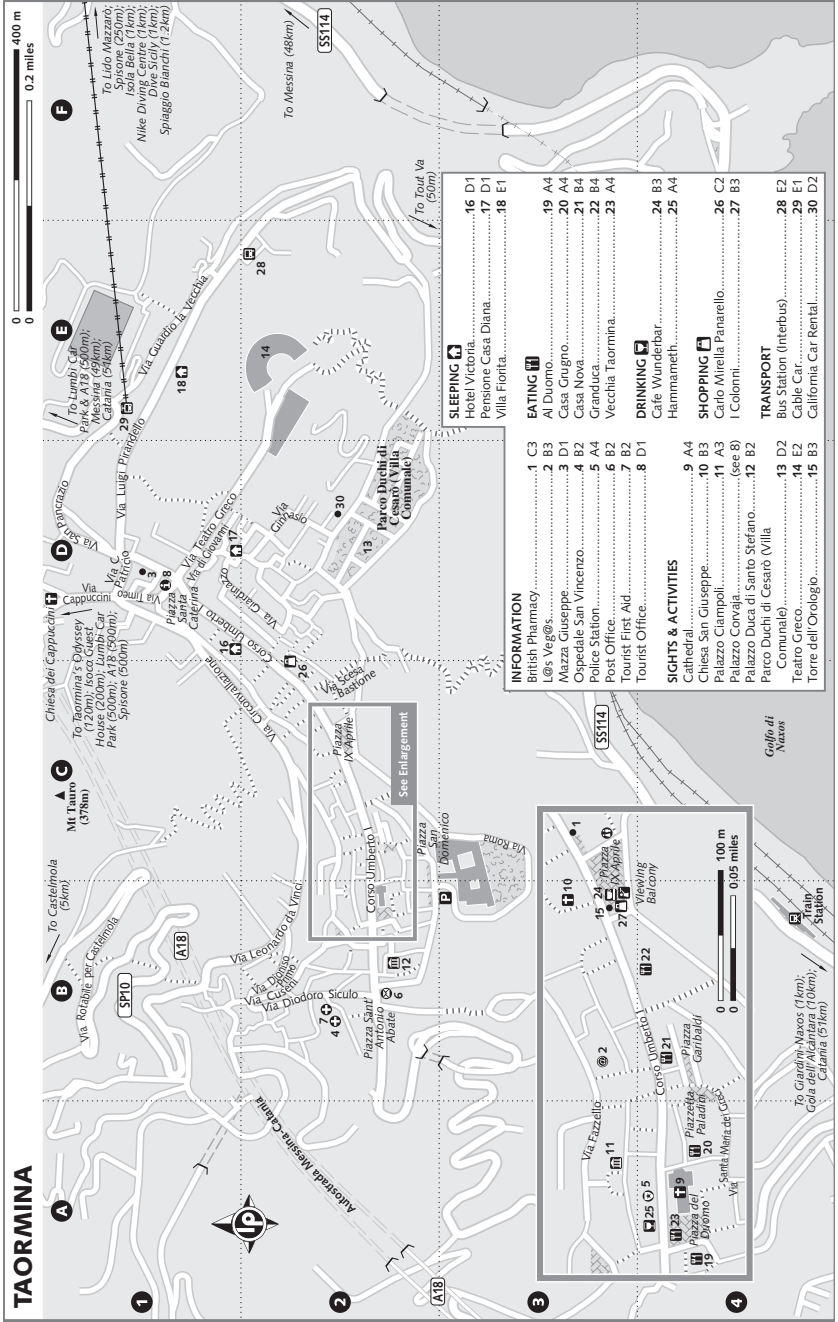
## Activities

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 €1.80/3; ☎ 8am-1am). 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.

The **Nike Diving Centre** (☎ 0942 4 75 34; www.divenike.com; Contrada Isola Bella Spiaggia; dive from €30), located opposite the 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

TAORMINA



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- 21 B4 Casa Nova
- 22 B4 Granduca
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- 24 B3 Cafe Wunderbar
- 25 A4 Hammameth
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your right, which will take you through a tunnel and out onto the large sandy beach.

**Spiaggio 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 €4.50) on site and hires out the necessary wellies and wetsuits (€6). Take the bus from Taormina (€4.80 return, one hour, four daily Monday to Saturday). It is 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) in July and 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** (☎ 0942 2 45 33; www.taorminaodyssey.com; 2 Traversa A, Via Gaetano Marino 2; dm/d €15/40; (P)) A welcoming hostel that has earned a flurry of complimentary letters from LP readers who highly rate its warm, friendly atmosphere, lack of curfew and open kitchen. A seven-minute walk from the town centre.

**Pensione Casa Diana** (☎ 0942 2 38 98; Via Di Giovanni 6; s/d €35/45) The 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.

**Hotel Victoria** (☎ 0942 2 33 72; www.albergovictoria.it; Corso Umberto I 81; s €45-72, d €75-120; (P)) This is the second-oldest hotel here, dating from 1885. It's in a charming (if noisy) spot on Corso Umberto. The small, comfortable rooms have an antique, preened look with wrought-iron beds and painted furniture.

**Isoco Guest House** (☎ 0942 2 36 79; www.isoco.it; Via Salita Branco 2; s €60-115, d €80-115; (P) (Q)) Every room in this gay-friendly hotel is dedicated to an artist – the sculpted buttocks and pant-popping thighs on the walls of the Herb Ritts room will give you the general idea.

**Villa Fiorita** (☎ 0942 2 41 22; www.villafioritahotel.com; Via Luigi Pirandello 39; s/d €110/125; (P) (Q) (R)) A quiet, old-fashioned hotel decorated with oriental rugs, antiques and fine artwork. Private terraces and balconies have sea views. The pretty garden lies adjacent to an ancient (but empty) Greek tomb.

## Eating

Eating out in Taormina goes hand in hand with posing. There are some excellent restaurants serving very good food but it is essential to make a reservation at the more exclusive choices. Be aware that Taormina's cafés charge extraordinarily high prices even for coffee.

**Vecchia Taormina** (☎ 0942 62 55 89; Vico Ebrei 3; pizzas from €5.50, meals €15) A reader-recommended, inexpensive restaurant with tables set on a small terrace under the washing lines. The menu includes a delicious antipasti, several salads and unusual pizzas such as *pizza inverno* with sausage, spinach, olives and mozzarella.

**Al Duomo** (☎ 0942 62 56 56; Vico Ebrei 11; meals €30-40; (M) closed Sun) Discreet Al Duomo has a romantic terrace overlooking the cathedral and an excellent selection of seafood, including baked mussels, and more rustic dishes such as stewed lamb with potatoes.

**Granduca** (☎ 0942 2 49 83; Corso Umberto I 172; pizzas €6, meals €30-60; (M) closed Wed) Depending on the weight of your wallet, you can opt for a €6 pizza or the €54 catch-of-the-day fish dish here – either way, the terrace setting is unbeatable and the most atmospheric in town.

**Casa Grugno** (☎ 0942 2 12 08; Via Santa Maria dei Greci; meals €80; (M) dinner only) 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 is **Casa Nova** (☎ 0942 2 39 45; Vico Paladini 2; pizza €6; (M) 11am-late), serving pizza, fondue, *panini* and late-night cocktails.

## Drinking & Entertainment

**Cafe Wunderbar** (Piazza IX Aprile 7; alcoholic drinks €5.50-7, coffee €3.50) A quintessential and timeless Italian café. Sip a long cold glass of *latte di mandorla*

(almond milk), don the shades and enjoy the preeners and the poseurs.

**Hammameth** (☎ 349 848 71 18; Piazza del Duomo; ☹ 10am-late) Sip your cocktail while sitting on satin cushions in a seductive candlelit atmosphere; there are also outside tables for balmy night-time quaffing.

**Tout Va** (☎ 0942 2 38 24; Via Luigi Pirandello 70; ☹ 6pm-3.30am) Down by the water, this open-air club sees the hottest summer action. It also serves up food late into the night on a panoramic terrace.

## 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 exquisitely handcrafted jewellery from **I Colonna** (☎ 0942 2 36 80; Corso Umberto I 164) or some quality ceramic art with delightful, naive designs from **Carlo Mirella Panarello** (Via Antonio Marziani).

## 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 (€2.83, 1½ hours, five daily Monday to Saturday) and Catania (€4.40, 1½ hours, hourly). The Catania bus also services the train station and Giardini-Naxos (€1.85). There are also services to the Gola dell'Alcàntara (€4.85 return, four daily) and up to Castelmola (€1.45, 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 is a shuttle service to the centre from Porta Messina.

**California** (☎ 0942 2 37 69; Via Bagnoli Croce 86) rents out cars and scooters at reasonable prices. A Fiat Punto with air-con costs €65/300 per day/week. A Vespa 125 costs €35/200 per day/week.

### TRAIN

There are regular trains to and from Messina (1st/2nd class €7.45/6, 40 minutes, half-hourly)

and Catania (1st/2nd class €4.45/3, 45 minutes, half-hourly), but the awkward location of Taormina's station is a strong disincentive. If you arrive this way, catch an Interbus service up to the town. They run roughly every 30 to 90 minutes (less frequently on Sunday).

## CATANIA

pop 305,800

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's shades and shadows run deep, right into the heart of a murky local government, which shamefully neglects large portions of the decaying historic centre. It's therefore surprising to discover that Catania is Sicily's second commercial city – a thriving, entrepreneurial centre with a large university and a tough, resilient local population who adhere 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 along Corso Sicilia and Via Etnea.

**Ambulance** (☎ 118)

**CIT** (☎ 095 31 35 77; Via Antonino di San Giuliano 205)

Book train, ferry and air tickets.

**Del Centro** (☎ 095 31 36 85; Via Etnea 107) Late-night pharmacy.

**Mihim** (☎ 095 723 20 13; Via Giuseppe Garibaldi 23; per hr €2; ☹ 8am-midnight) Cheapest internet connection in town, plus phones, fax and photocopying service.

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

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

**Post office** (Via Etnea 215)

**Sestante Vacanze** (☎ 095 31 35 17; Via Antonino di San Giuliano 208) For train, ferry and air tickets.

**Tourist office** (www.apr.catania.it in Italian; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm Sat) airport (☎ 095 730 62 66); train station (☎ 095 730 62 55); Via Cimarosa (☎ 095 730 62 22, 095 730 62 11; Via Cimarosa 10-12) Organises free guided tours of the city from 10am to 1pm Monday to Friday departing from in front of the main tourist office at Via Cimarosa.

**Train station** (per bag per 12hr €3.90; ☎ 24hr) 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 façade. 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 *festas* (see right).

A few blocks northeast you'll stumble onto the shabby Piazza Bellini. Its centrepiece is the **Teatro Massimo Bellini** (☎ 095 730 61 11; Via Perrotta 12; ☎ performances only), named after the composer Vincenzo Bellini, the father of Catania's vibrant modern musical scene. There is a small museum, **Museo Belliniano** (☎ 095 715 05 35; Piazza San Francesco; admission free; ☎ 9am-1.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-12.30pm 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, rolls 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 Katane.

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; admission incl Roman theatre €2; ☎ 9am-1.30pm & 3-7pm). North of Piazza del Duomo, more leftovers from Roman days include a modest **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; admission €4; ☎ 9-11am & 3-6pm Tue-Sat, 9am-noon 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.

If you have some extra time another curious site is the renovated sulphur refineries, **Le Ciminiere** (☎ 095 734 99 11; Viale Africa), which now constitute a cultural centre with a cool restaurant. Meals cost €18.

## 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. Quality top-end hotels, however, are thin on the ground.

**CATANIA**

0 500 m  
0 0.3 miles

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**IONIAN SEA**

**TO BAERLES (2km); AIRPORT (5km); SYRACUSE (60km)**

**Agorá Hostel** (☎ 095 723 30 10; www.agorahostel.com; Piazza Curró 6; dm €18-20, d €45-50; 📺) A classic hostel with rooms of six to 10 beds and some doubles. There is no lockout, an internet point is provided (€3 per hour) and you can do laundry (€5 per wash). Its location near La Pescheria makes it a great base for self-caterers, although its restaurant/bar is also sociable and good.

**San Demetrio Hotel** (☎ 095 250 02 37; www.hotel.sandemetrio.com; Via Etna 55; s €45-60, d €65-82; 📺 📺) A grand old building houses this homey accommodation with original frescoes and soaring ceilings; bathrooms are the boxy built-in variety, but more than compensated for by having breakfast provided in your room. Private balconies overlook the wide, bustling boulevard below.

**Pensione Rubens** (☎ 095 31 70 73; fax 095 715 17 13; Via Etna 196; s/d €45/78; 📺) Housed in a shabby old building, along with the Thai Embassy, Pensione Rubens has seven comfortable rooms. The owner's advice on his home town makes for a rewarding and enjoyable stay; it's advisable to book ahead.

**Hotel del Duomo** (☎ 095 250 31 77; www.hotel.delduomo.it; Via Etna 28; s €60-100, d €80-100; 📺 📺) Enjoying an ideal location on the Piazza del Duomo, the hotel occupies a wing of an ancient *palazzo*, and the recently refurbished rooms have elegant regency-style furnishings, fitted carpets and romantic views over the floodlit piazza at night.

**La Vecchia Palma** (☎ 095 43 20 25; www.lavecchia.palma.com; Via Etna 668; s/d €60/100; 📺 📺) This beautifully renovated *palazzo* adds a touch of style to the rather bland Catanian hotel scene. The 14 rooms are simply gorgeous, with frescoed ceilings, panelled walls and antique tiled floors. The grand baroque furnishings complement the grandeur of the place and the summer garden is delightful.

**Il Principe** (☎ 095 250 03 45; www.ilprincipelhotel.com; Via Alessi 24; s €114-143, d €154-194; 📺 📺) This boutique-style hotel in an 18th-century building opened in 2006. The luxurious rooms are furnished in earth colours, and the marble bathrooms have Jacuzzis; for those who need a good scrub up, don that fluffy bathrobe and head for the Turkish steam bath. It's located on one of the liveliest nightlife streets in town (thank goodness for double glazing!).

Also recommended, the **Hotel Etna 316** (☎ 095 250 30 76; www.hoteletna316.com; Via Etna 316; s/d €55/90; 📺 📺) is 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.

**Nievski Pub** (☎ 095 31 37 92; www.nievski.it; Scalinata Alessi 15; meals €10-15; 📺 closed Sun & Mon) On the heaving Scalinata Alessi, this is a good place to mingle with Catania's alternative crowd. Cuban revolutionary posters adorn the walls, and the menu uses fair-trade produce for its Greek and Cuban dishes.

**Trattoria La Marchesana** (☎ 095 31 51 71; Via Mazza 4-8; meals €15) A small, friendly trattoria with two dining rooms decorated in sunny yellow and an excellent antipasti choice (€6), plus tasty stalwarts such as linguine with squid, cuttlefish, shrimp and tomatoes.

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

**Osteria Antica Marina** (☎ 095 34 81 97; Via Pardo 29; meals €20-25; 📺 closed Tue) This rustic-style trattoria behind the fish market is the place to come to for fish. Try the local favourite, a raw anchovy salad (tastier than it sounds!). Décor-wise think solid wooden tables and rough stone walls. Reservations are essential.

**Sicilia in Bocca** Piazza Lupo (☎ 095 746 31 61; Piazza Lupo 16-18; mains €8-16; 📺 lunch & dinner Thu-Tue, closed Wed & lunch Sun); Via Dusmet (☎ 095 250 02 08; Via Dusmet 31-35; meals €20-25; 📺 Tue-Sun) Stone arches and terracotta tiles create a classy rustic atmosphere for enjoying that special seafood moment. Traditional Sicilian fish dishes such as spaghetti *ai ricci* (with sea urchins) are on the menu. The Piazza Lupo branch is the original.

**Cantine del Cugno Mezzano** (☎ 095 715 87 10; Via Museo Biscari 8; meals €22; 📺 closed Sun & Aug) This wine bar and restaurant in the former stables of Palazzo Biscari has a great atmosphere. It places a high value on quality and all the food on its reassuringly brief menu is organic.

An old-style *pasticcERIA* (pastry shop), **Pasticceria Caprice** (Via Etna 30) is the perfect place to come during the *passaggiata*. Try a selection of mini tarts filled with glistening fresh fruit.

Every morning except Sunday, Piazza Carlos Alberto is flooded by the chaos of a **produce market** (La Fiera; 📺 7am-noon Mon-Sat). The other major market is La Pescheria (p781).



## Drinking

Not surprisingly for a busy university town, Catania has a reputation for its hopping nightlife.

**Osteria i Tre Bicchieri** (☎ 095 715 35 40; Via San Giuseppe al Duomo 31; 🕒 8pm-midnight Tue-Sun) The dark wood-panelled interior creates the perfect atmosphere for this classy wine bar that stocks more than 1000 different labels. The fondue (€20) is great fun on evenings of live jazz. Cheese platters cost €10. There's a classy restaurant adjacent (meals €30).

**Tertulia** (Via Michele Rapisardi 1-3; 🕒 4.30pm-1.30am Sep-Jul) A nocturnal bookshop and cafeteria that's a mix between a stylish teahouse and bar. There is occasional live music, plus literary evenings and book presentations.

**Agorá Hostel** (☎ 095 723 30 10; www.agorahostel.com; Piazza Curró 6) The superatmospheric bar here is in a neon-lit, subterranean cave 18m below ground where a stream bubbles to the surface. The Romans used it as a spa and now a cosmopolitan crowd lingers over drinks in the cavern. Meals cost €15.

**Joyce** (☎ 0349 810 78 96; Via Montesano 46; 🕒 9pm-2am Tue-Sun) An Irish pub where you can enjoy pints of Guinness in a pleasant courtyard. It's a popular place (Italians think Irish culture is really glamorous) with a great blarney atmosphere inside.

## Entertainment

Pick up a copy of *Lapis*, a free weekly programme 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; 🕒 1-3pm & 8.30pm-12.30am Tue-Sat) This bar/café/restaurant serves good food in an impressive venue – the converted sulphur works, Le Ciminiere (p781). At weekends there is live music and dancing.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

Catania's airport, **Fontanarossa** (☎ 095 30 45 05; www.aeroporto.catania.it), is 7km southwest of the city centre. To get to the airport, take the special Alibus 457 (€1) from outside the train station. There is also a regular shuttle from the airport to Taormina (€6, hourly, 7am to

8pm). 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; one way/return €81/99) has several daily ferries from Pozzallo to Malta from April to September, with frequency decreasing in the winter months. The trip takes 1½ hours with a coach from Pozzallo to Catania (two hours) included in the fare.

**TTT Lines** (☎ 095 746 21 87; www.tttlines.it in Italian) has a daily ferry from Naples to Catania (€56 to €87, 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** (☎ 095 746 10 96; 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 (€3.80, 50 minutes, half-hourly).

**Interbus** (☎ 095 53 27 16; www.interbus.it; Via d'Amico 181) runs buses to Syracuse (€4.75, 1¼ hours, half-hourly Monday to Saturday, eight on Sunday), Piazza Armerina (€8.80, 1½ hours, nine daily Monday to Saturday) and Taormina (€4.40, 1½ hours, four daily Monday to Friday).

**SAIS Autolinee** (☎ 095 53 62 01; Via d'Amico 181-187) serves Palermo (€12.80, 2½ hours, 17 daily), Agrigento (€12.60, three hours, 14 daily Monday to Friday, seven daily Saturday and Sunday) and Messina (€6.85, 1½ hours, half-hourly Monday to Saturday, two on Sunday). It also has a service to Rome (€45, 14 hours) that leaves at 8pm.

### 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 (1st/2nd class €10/8, two hours, half-hourly) and Syracuse (€6.85, 1½ hours, 18 daily) and there are less-frequent services to Palermo

(€11.75, 3½ hours, six daily) and Agrigento (€12.55, 4½ hours, five daily).

The private Ferrovia Circumetnea train line circles Mt Etna, stopping at the towns and villages on the volcano's slopes; for details, see p787.

## Getting Around

Many of the more useful **AMT city buses** (☎ 095 7360111) terminate in front of the train station. These include Alibus 457 (station to airport every 20 minutes), buses 1 to 4 (station to Via Etnea) and buses 4 to 7 (station to Piazza del Duomo). A two-hour 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 3350m

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 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, along with resident experts, such as Andrea Ercolani (see boxed text, p786).

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 (p781).

On Etna the office of the **Parco dell'Etna** (☎ 095 82 11 11; www.parcotna.ct.it; Via Etnea 107a; ☎ 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.procololingua.glossa.it; Piazza Annunziata 5; ☎ 9am-3pm) in Linguaglossa is the best source of information.

For up-to-date information on eruptions and weather forecasts, and for a detailed account of the mountain's geology and history, take a look at [www.etnaonline.it](http://www.etnaonline.it).

## 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; cable car €25, incl bus & guide €45, incl pick-up from hotel €57; ☎ 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. 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 is no public transport from Linguaglossa, 16km away.

If you are 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 more details.

## Tours

**Volcano Trek** (☎ 333 209 66 05; Via Minicucca 16, San Giovanni La Punta) is run by expert geologists. Several options are available, including a one-day 4WD tour (€85) and one-day trek (€90 per person, €195 per group of four).

**Siciltrek** (☎ 095 96 88 82; [www.siciltrek.it](http://www.siciltrek.it); Via Marconi 27, Sant'Alfio; per person €62) runs group tours and the price includes the cable car and bus trip to 2900m. Private treks with Andrea may also be arranged; see boxed text, below.

**Speleo Trekking** (Map p782; ☎ 349 540 82 39; [www.etnatura.it](http://www.etnatura.it); Via BG Jugan 6, Catania) has several tours including a day trek (€75), which includes bus pick-up from your hotel.

**Acquaterra** (Map p782; ☎ 095 50 30 20; [www.acquaterra.com](http://www.acquaterra.com); Via A Longo 74, Catania) runs several adventure-style courses, including rock climbing at Mt Etna (eight-lesson course €150).

**Ferrovia Circumetnea** (FCE; Map p782; ☎ 095 54 12 50; [www.circumetnea.it](http://www.circumetnea.it); Via Caronda 352a, Catania; 🕒 8am-5pm) has some good tours to Mt Etna and the surrounding region. The Crateri Silvestri-Grotta Cassone-Zafferana Etnea all-day tour (€13.50) includes transport to the Silvestri crater and the Cassone cave, but not the cost of lunch.

**Gruppo Guide Alpine Etna Sud** (☎ 095 791 47 55; Via Etnea 49, Nicolosi) is the official guide service on the mountain, running day or multiday itineraries with a guide. The service also has a hut at Rifugio Sapienza from where it runs a daily trek into the Valle del Bove (€55, four hours, departs 9am).

**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 is plenty of accommodation around Mt Etna, particularly in the small, pretty town of Nicolosi, which has sprouted 12 B&Bs (at last

### VOLCANOES ARE MY VOCATION

#### Name?

Andrea Ercolani

#### Official title?

Volcano Guide. I conduct group hikes to the summit, although private tours are my speciality.

#### How did you arrive at Etna?

I visited here with a friend when I was 19 and we climbed Mt Etna with really no idea what to expect. At the time there was quite a lot of activity and it was very dramatic. From that time I knew what I wanted to do and realised that volcanoes were going to be my passion. I moved to Sicily in 1998 and studied to become a guide, specialising in volcanoes.

#### What do you enjoy most about your job?

The fact that Etna is an active volcano means that you can observe possible lava flows and explosive activity close up, which is a spectacular experience. The panorama is also breathtaking; you feel your soul opening up and the absolute peace of solitary nature when you climb the volcano. There is also a feeling and respect for both life and death, with the destructive eruptions coupled with the rich and fertile soil that result from the ash emissions.

#### Do you visit other volcanoes?

Yes, this is also a passion of mine. I have visited volcanoes in Indonesia, Alaska, the Canary Islands, Hawaii and Ecuador.

#### Any advice for anyone planning to climb Etna on their own?

Never forget that Mt Etna is active and that the main craters can explode with no warning!

count). If you get stuck, call the B&B consortium (☎ 095 7 91 62 87), whose members will also grant you a 20% discount on the Mt Etna cable car.

**Ostello della Gioventù Etna** (☎ 095 791 46 86; fax 095 791 47 01; etnahostel@hotmail.com; Via della Quercia 7, Nicolosi; dm €29) Has cheap beds in a no-frills hostel.

**B&B Santa Nicola** (☎ 095 791 56 80; www.bb-santaniola.it; Via d'Aragona 14; d €50) Situated on the edge of the Parco Naturale dell'Etna. The B&B's rooms are large and have fridges and balconies; there's a handy pizzeria next door.

**B&B La Giara** (☎ 095 791 90 22; www.giara.it; Viale della Regione 12a, Nicolosi; s €35-50, d €50-75; (P) (♿)) The rooms here are washed in bright colours and sport wrought-iron beds, rattan furniture, colourful prints and large balconies. Your friendly hostess can help with excursions and bike rental and also arrange rental in a chalet on the wooded slopes of Etna (€550 to €950 per week, sleeps four). There is wi-fi access.

**B&B Massalargià** (☎ 095 79 14 86; www.massalargia.it; Via Manzoni 19; s €27-35, d €55-70; (P) (X) (♿)) 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.

**Rifugio Sapienza** (☎ 095 91 63 56; Piazzale Funivia; s/d €65/100) Comfortable accommodation adjacent to the cable car with a good restaurant (fortunately – there's not a lot of choice in these parts!) serving meals for €25.

## 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 buses from Catania to Rifugio Sapienza (€3.65, one hour). Buses leave from the car park in front of the main train station in Catania at 8.15am, travelling via Nicolosi, and return at 4.45pm.

### TRAIN

You can circle Etna on the private **Ferrovie Circumetnea** (FCE; Map p782; ☎ 095 54 12 50; www.circumetnea.it; Via Caronda 352a, Catania) train line. You can catch the metro from Catania's main train station to the FCE station at Via Caronda (metro stop Borgo) or catch 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 from where you get great views of the mountain. It also passes through many of Etna's unique towns such as Adrano, Bronte and Randazzo (€4.20, 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 lie a series of handsome towns: Ragusa, Modica and Noto. Shattered by a devastating earthquake in 1693, they were rebuilt in the ornate 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 123,400

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 Archaeologico della Neapolis. The train station is located to the west of busy Corso Gelone. If you arrive by bus, you'll be dropped in or near Piazza della Posta in Ortygia. Stay on Ortygia for atmosphere, great restaurants and good-quality hotels.



## Information

There are numerous banks with ATMs throughout the city. There are plenty of public phones on the streets.

**Internet Train** (☎ 0931 46 19 71; Via Roma 122, Ortygia; per hr €3; ☎ 7.30pm-midnight Tue-Sat) There are 15 fast computers, with colour printing, digital downloads and scanning available.

**Main tourist office** (☎ 0931 48 12 00; www.apt-siracusa.it in Italian; Via San Sebastiano 43; ☎ 8.30am-1.30pm & 3.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat) Multilingual staff and a useful city map. Ask about the cumulative tickets for the sites.

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

**Ospedale Generale Provinciale** (☎ 0931 72 41 11; Via Testaferatta 1)

**Police station** (☎ 0931 46 35 56; Via San Sebastiano)

**Post office** (Piazza della Posta 15)

**Syrako Porta Marina Tourist Point** (☎ 0931 2 41 33; Largo Porta Marina; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-8pm Mon-Sat)

This information/tourist centre also provides an internet service (per hour €3).

## 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 façade, 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 Capodieci from the fountain is **Museo Regionale d'Arte Medioevale e Moderna** (☎ 0931 6 96 17; Via Capodieci 14; adult/concession €4.50/2; ☎ 9am-1.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-12.30pm Sun), housing a respectable collection of sculpture and paintings dating from the Middle Ages to the 20th century. Highlights of the museum include Byzantine icons and various bloodthirsty religious paintings, including 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 p792) uncovered an ancient Jewish **miqwe** (ritual bath; ☎ 0931 2 22 55; Alla Giudecca, Via Alagona 52; admission €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.

<b>INFORMATION</b>		Museo del Papiro.....	15 C1	Le Baronie.....	30 B4
Internet Train.....	1 B6	Museo Regionale d'Arte Medioevale e Moderna.....	16 B6	Produce Market.....	31 D3
Main Tourist Office.....	2 B1	Orecchio di Dionisio.....	17 A1	Sicilia in Tavola.....	32 B5
Ortygia Tourist Office.....	3 B5	Piccolo Teatro dei Pupi.....	18 C5	Trattoria La Foglia.....	33 A4
Ospedale Generale Provinciale.....	4 B2	Sailing Team.....	19 C4	Trattoria La Tavernetta.....	34 B6
Police Station.....	5 B1	Teatro Greco.....	20 A1	<b>DRINKING</b> ☎ ☎	
Post Office.....	6 C3	<b>SLEEPING</b> ☎		Biblios Cafe.....	35 B5
Syrako Porta Marina Tourist Point.....	7 A4	Acropolis.....	21 B5	Il Blu.....	36 C5
<b>SIGHTS &amp; ACTIVITIES</b>		Alla Giudecca.....	22 C5	San Rocca.....	37 B6
Anfiteatro Romano.....	8 A2	B&B Aretusa.....	23 B6	<b>SHOPPING</b> ☎	
Ara di Gerone II.....	9 A2	Hotel Gran Bretagna.....	24 C4	Circo Fortuna.....	38 B6
Cathedral.....	10 B5	Hotel Gutkowski.....	25 D3	Lecomari.....	39 C4
Ente Fauna Siciliana.....	11 C3	Hotel Riviera.....	26 D2	<b>TRANSPORT</b>	
Fontana Aretusa.....	12 A6	Hotel Roma.....	27 B5	Allakatala.....	40 B5
Latomia del Paradiso.....	13 A1	<b>EATING</b> ☎		AST Bus Ticket Office.....	41 C3
Miqwe.....	(see 22)	Don Camillo.....	28 C5	Interbus Ticket Office.....	42 D3
Museo Archeologico Paolo Orsi.....	14 C1	Jonico-a Rutta'e Ciauli.....	29 D1	Intercity & Urban Bus Station.....	43 C3

Also in the Jewish quarter is Syracuse's own thriving puppet theatre, **Piccolo Teatro dei Pupi** (☎ 0931 46 55 40; www.pupari.it; Via della Giudicca 17; admission €5; 🕒 shows 9.30pm Tue, Thu & Sat, 6.30pm Sun). The workshop, where you can buy puppets, is at No 5.

#### PARCO ARCHEOLOGICO DELLA NEAPOLIS

For the classicist, Syracuse's real attraction is the **Parco Archeologico della Neapolis** (☎ 0931 6 62 06; Viale Paradiso; adult/concession €4.50/2; 🕒 9am-2hr before sunset), 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 theatre. Check the 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 (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 €4.50; 🕒 9am-2pm Tue-Sat). 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-1.30pm Tue-Sun) includes papyrus documents and products. The plant grows in abundance around the Ciane river, near Syracuse, and was used to make paper in the 18th century.

#### 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.

## 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) and the **Fontana Bianche** (bus 21 or 22 from Piazza della Posta), but note that they are very busy and, as with many Sicilian beaches, there are charges on certain sections.

One of the best activities is taking a boat trip on one of the gorgeous rigs rented out by **Sailing Team** ([www.sailingteam.biz](http://www.sailingteam.biz); ☎ 0931 6 08 08, 335 785 03 44; [www.sailingteam.biz](http://www.sailingteam.biz); Via Savoia 14). The whole day costs €350 (for up to twelve people), departing at 10am and returning at 6pm, enabling you to explore the coastline and snorkel to your heart's content.

Landlubbers should definitely take an excursion with **Ente Fauna Siciliana** ([www.entefaunasiciliana.it](http://www.entefaunasiciliana.it); ☎ 0931 71 73 35, 328 885 70 92; [www.entefaunasiciliana.it](http://www.entefaunasiciliana.it); Viale Montedoro 79). Itineraries include short hikes along the coastline (€6 per person) and archaeological and botanical itineraries. Booking numbers and departure points are all on their website. Most of the tours are in Italian only.

You can hire a bike for €10 per day from Internet Train (see p789).

## Tours

**Syraco Porta Marina Tourist Point** (☎ 0931 2 41 33; Largo Porta Marina; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-8pm Mon-Sat) can help you to arrange guides, and runs good tours with varying themes from classical to baroque itineraries.

## Festivals & Events

In May and June Syracuse hosts the **Ciclo di Spettacoli Classici** (Festival of Greek Theatre; ☎ 0931 44 93 58; [www.indafondazione.org](http://www.indafondazione.org)). Syracuse boasts the only school of classical Greek drama outside Athens and the performances (in Italian) attract Italy's finest performers. Tickets (€15 to €35) are available online, from the tourist office or at the booth at the entrance to 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.

## Sleeping

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.

### BUDGET

**B&B Aretusa** (☎ 0931 48 34 84; [www.aretusavacanze.com](http://www.aretusavacanze.com); Vicolo Zuccalà 1; d €59, apt €105; **P** **☎**) Elbowed into a tiny pedestrian street in a 17th-century building, this B&B has large rooms and apartments with wrought-iron beds, terracotta tiles and small balconies from where you can shake hands with your neighbour across the way. There is wi-fi and satellite TV.

**Hotel Riviera** (☎ 0931 6 70 50; [www.hotelriviera.siracusa.com](http://www.hotelriviera.siracusa.com); Via Euclide 7; s €52-62, d €67-83; **P** **☎**) This is one of the only hotels in Syracuse with a seafront location and it offers lovely views from the 1st-floor terrace and most of the rooms. It is a friendly family-run hotel (English is spoken) and the rooms are glossy and comfortable.

**Acropolis** (☎ /fax 0931 44 93 04; [www.siracusa-hotels.it](http://www.siracusa-hotels.it); Via Roma 15; s/d €55/75; **☎** **☎**) Guests at the family-run Acropolis get the perk of using a small kitchenette. The rooms are large with terracotta or parquet floors, homey furnishings and bathrooms with tubs, as well as showers. There's a solarium that overlooks the rooftops, plus a pretty internal courtyard. A second, recommended B&B, L'Acanto, shares the building and has similar prices.

### MIDRANGE & TOP END

**Azienda Agrituristica Limoneto** (☎ 0931 71 73 52; [www.emmeti.it/Limoneto](http://www.emmeti.it/Limoneto); Via del Platano 3; d €80-120; **P** **☎**) This large country farm set amid attractive citrus and olive groves is noted for its organic produce and excellent restaurant (meals cost €25). You will find it 9km from Syracuse along the SS124.

**Hotel Gutkowski** (☎ 0931 46 58 61; [www.guthotel.it](http://www.guthotel.it); Lungomare Vittorini 26; s/d €70/100; **☎** **☎**) This charming pastel blue hotel with crisp minimalist rooms has the added plus of offering excellent excursions (€40 per person) to natural beauty spots, as well as Italian lessons. Ask for sea-view rooms and book several weeks in advance.

**Hotel Gran Bretagne** (☎ 0931 6 87 65; [www.hotelgranbretagna.it](http://www.hotelgranbretagna.it); Via Savoia 21; s/d €85/110; **☎**) This handsome, small hotel is in a great location on Ortygia. Rooms may cause a dose of the blues, however – from the baby-blue



bathrooms to the rooms with their blue-and-white chequered floors and petrol blue fittings. Don't miss the glass panel in the breakfast room revealing the Roman fortifications below.

**Our pick Alla Giudecca** (☎ 0931 2 22 55; www.allaggiudecca.it; Via Alagona 52; s/d €75/120; ♿) It's located in the old Jewish quarter, and 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 p789).

**Hotel Roma** (☎ 0931 46 56 26; www.hotelroma.sr.it; Via Roma 66; s/d €136/200; ♿) Set in a restored *palazzo*, the Roma has individually decorated rooms with parquet floors, oriental rugs, wood-beam ceilings and tasteful artwork. And there's more... including a peaceful courtyard, Finnish sauna and wi-fi in the lobby.

## Eating

The best restaurants are on Ortygia.

**Sicilia in Tavola** (☎ 392 461 08 89; Via Cavour 28; meals €18) A tiny place with a dozen tables that specialises in all manner of fresh pasta dishes (try the speciality of the house, seafood ravioli). It fills up quickly in the evenings, so reservations are advised.

**Trattoria la Tavernetta** (☎ 0931 6 63 85; Via Cavour 44; meals €20) A low-priced, low-key trattoria with all the pasta favourites and a few surprises, such as pasta quills with tangy pesto, cherry tomatoes and almonds.

**Trattoria la Foglia** (☎ 0931 6 62 33; www.lafoglia.it; Via Capodici 21; meals €25) The cuisine here is described as Mediterranean and vegetarian with a healthy choice of both depending on what is fresh in the market that day. The atmosphere is a cheerful clutter with chandeliers, shawls as tablecloths, good (and ghastrly) artwork and grandchildren's toys.

**Le Baronie** (☎ 0931 6 88 84; Via Gargallo 24; meals €25-30; ☹ closed Mon) A sumptuous atmosphere in an old Sicilian villa with a garden patio. Le Baronie prides itself on traditional cuisine with a twist, such as *pesce spada d'Almeria* (swordfish with a pepper and brandy sauce).

**Jonico** (☎ 0931 6 55 40; Riviera Dioisio il Grande 194; pizzas €3.50-8, meals €35; ☹ closed Tue) Very inconveniently located but worth the trek or taxi ride – providing you reserve in advance. Jonico,

perched above the sea, has a delightful Liberty (Art Nouveau) interior. Its innovative menu includes swordfish roulades with raisins, breadcrumbs and pine nuts, and steak in a white-wine salsa.

**Don Camillo** (☎ 0931 6 71 33; Via Maestranza 96; meals €35-40) Soak up the *dolce vita* (sweet life) ambience and 450-plus wine list in a former convent setting. The cuisine is creative and satisfying and includes a dazzling antipasti array and arguably the best fish soup in town.

The **produce market** (Antico Mercato; ☹ 8am-1pm Mon-Sat) is near the harbour where red-canopied stalls overflow with piles of muscles, oysters, octopi and shellfish.

## Drinking

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

There are dozens of small bars, but three recommended spots in Ortygia are the literary **Biblios Cafe** (Via del Consiglio Reginale 11; ☹ 10am-1.30pm & 5-9pm Mon, Tue & Thu-Sat Oct-Aug); the superb wine bar overlooking the surf, **Il Blu** (Via Nizza; ☹ 4.30pm-3am), located across from Punta Maiera; and lovely **San Rocca** (Piazzetta San Rocca; cocktails €5), which has tables sprawled across the evocative, small square.

## Shopping

Ortygia is full of quirky little shops such as **Circo Fortuna** (☎ 0931 6 26 81; Via Capodici 42), which produces lots of cheeky ceramics. Another good ceramicist can be found at **Lecomari** (Via Salvatore Chindemi 21).

## Getting There & Away

### BUS

Unless you're coming from Catania or Messina, you'll almost always find buses faster and more convenient than trains. **Interbus** (☎ 0931 6 67 10; Via Trieste 28) buses leave from Riva della Posta, or near the Interbus office a block in. They connect with Catania (€4.75, 1¼ hours, 19 daily Monday to Friday, eight on Sunday) and its airport, and Palermo (€14.35, four hours, four daily Monday to Saturday, three on Sunday).

**AST** (☎ 0931 46 27 11; Riva della Posta 9) runs buses to Palermo (€14.60, four hours, six daily Monday to Saturday, three Sunday) and a local network to Piazza Armerina (€8.75, four hours, one daily), Noto (€3.25, one hour, 12

daily Monday to Saturday) and Ragusa (€6.10, two hours, nine daily Monday to Saturday) from its office.

### CAR & MOTORCYCLE

If arriving from the north, you will 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 is a large underground car park on Via V Veneto on Ortygia where you can park for free.

### TRAIN

More than a dozen trains depart daily for Messina (1st/2nd class €18/13.50, 2½ to three hours) via Catania (€13.20/9, 1¼ hours). Some go on to Rome, Turin and Milan as well as other long-distance destinations. For Palermo (€17.20, five to six hours) you will have to change at either Catania or Messina. There are several slow trains from Syracuse to Noto (€2.85, 30 minutes) and Ragusa (€6.15, 2¼ hours).

### Getting Around

If you arrive by bus, you'll be dropped on or near Piazza della Posta in Ortygia. Buses 1 and 4 make the trip from Piazza della Posta to Parco Archeologico della Neapolis. All city buses cost €1 for two hours, irrespective of the number of buses you take within that time.

To hire a bicycle (€10 per day) or scooter (€30 per day), ask at **Allakatalla** (☎ 0931 67452; Via Roma 10) travel agency.

### NOTO

pop 23,100 / 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 façades. 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; Via Maggiore) On the eastern extension of Via Aurispa.

**Tourist office** (☎ 0931 57 37 79; www.comune.noto.sr.it; Piazza XVI Maggio; ☎ 8am-2pm & 3.30-6.15pm Mon-Sat) 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; Via Corrado Nicolaci; adult/concession €3/1.50; ☎ 10am-1pm & 3-7pm Tue-Sun), where wrought-iron balconies are supported by a swirling pantomime of grotesque figures. Although empty of furnishings, the *palazzo's* richly brocaded walls and frescoed ceilings 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 p63).

Two other piazzas break up the long Corso Vittorio Emanuele: Piazza dell'Immacolata to the east and more notably 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 way up to Piazza XVI Maggio, climb up the **campanile** (admission €1.55; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 4-7pm) of the Chiesa di San Carlo al Corso for some sweeping rooftop views.

### Festivals & Events

**Infioraci**, held on the third Sunday of May, is Noto's colourful flower festival, when artists line the length of Via Corrada Nicolaci with artwork made entirely of flower petals.

### Sleeping

Noto has very limited hotel accommodation, but there are plenty of good B&Bs. Ask at the tourist office for a detailed list.

**Il Castello Youth Hostel** (☎ 0931 89 16 52; ostellodino@tin.it; Via Fratelli Bandiera; dm €15; ☎ closed

Nov-Feb) Right in the centre of things in a beautiful old building, this place is the pride of Noto and great value for money. There are 68 beds and an open-all-day policy.

**B&B Teatro** (☎ 0931 83 85 03; www.bbnoto.com; Vico Salonia 10; s/d €45/75; 🚻 📺) A gingerbread-style B&B with green shutters and flower-filled balconies overlooking a lively piazza across from the San Domenico convent and church. Rooms are large and elegantly furnished and breakfast is fresh from the bakery downstairs.

**Hotel della Ferla** (☎ 0931 57 60 07; www.hoteldellaferla.it; Via A Gramsci; s €48-78, d €84-95; 📺 🚻) This small, friendly hotel is located in a residential area, around 10 minutes' walk from the historic centre. The rooms are large and bright with cream-and-white décor, pine furnishings and small balconies.

## 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 Mannarazzi** (☎ 0931 57 31 80; Via Cavour 116; meals €12) Set on three levels with '60s abstracts on the walls, this place is always packed. The reliably good menu includes a tasty *penette alla vegetariana* (vegetarian pasta). Avoid the house wine (which is better for pickling onions).

**Ristorante Il Cantuccio** (☎ 0931 83 74 64; Via Cavour 12; meals €15-20) This is the restaurant that the locals recommend if you are looking for top fish and seafood dishes.

**Caffè Sicilia** (☎ 0931 83 50 13; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 125), dating from 1892, and **Corrado Costanzo** (☎ 0931 83 52 43; Via Silvio Spaventa 9), around the corner, sell outrageously fattening and delicious ice cream and cakes. Both make superb *dolci di mandorla* (almond cakes and sweets), real *cassata* (made with ricotta cheese, chocolate and candied fruit) and *torrone* (nougat).

## Getting There & Around

Noto is easily accessible by AST and Interbus buses from Catania (€6.10, 2¼ hours, 12 daily Monday to Saturday, seven on Sunday) and Syracuse (€3.25, one hour, 12 daily Monday to Saturday). From June to August only, buses run frequently between Noto and Noto Marina (in the winter there is a school-bus service). Trains from Syracuse are frequent (€2.10, 30 minutes, 11 daily), but the station is located 1.5km south of the bus station area.

## MODICA

pop 52,900 / 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 that was cut in prehistoric times.

The multilayered town is divided into Modica Alta (High Modica) and Modica Bassa (Low 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 **Antica Dolceria Bonajuto** (☎ 0932 94 12 25; www.bonajuto.it; Corso Umberto I 159).

## Sleeping & Eating

Modica is slowly developing into a wonderful base for discerning travellers. New hotels and B&Bs are opening all the time.

**Albergo Il Tetti di Siciliano** (☎ 0932 94 28 43; www.siciliano.it; Via Cannata 24, Modica Alta; s €24-34, d €42-60) Delightful, simply furnished, light rooms plus balconies with views. Also holds arts and crafts courses, including painting and mosaic work.

**Carрубе & Cavalieri** (☎ 0932 94 18 37; Corso San Giorgio 111; s/d €30/55) A simple B&B with basic rooms, located near Chiesa di San Giorgio.

**Palazzo Failla** (☎ 0932 94 10 59; www.palazzofailla.it; Via Blandini 5, Modica Alta; s/d €75/120; 📺 🚻 📺) This superb former 18th-century palace that opened as a hotel in 2006 has been exquisitely restored, retaining the original frescoed ceilings, hand-painted floor tiles and historical splendour. The breakfast buffet is more generous than most.

**Hosteria San Benedetto** (☎ 0932 75 48 04; Vico Navio 32, Modica Alta; meals €25) Dishes up excellent Sicilian meals using organic produce, and holds regular art exhibitions and jazz concerts.

## Getting There & Away

There are plenty of buses and trains to Modica from Syracuse (€6.60, five buses daily Monday to Saturday) and to Ragusa (€1.65, 30 minutes, four buses daily Monday to Saturday, two on Sunday). Buses arrive and depart from Corso Umberto I near Chiesa di San Giorgio.

## RAGUSA

pop 69,700 / 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. Everything else, including the majority of hotels, is up in the newer town. A perilous bus ride or some very steep steps connect the two towns.

## Information

**lbl@café** (☎ 0932 68 31 08; Piazza della Repubblica 10; per hr €3.50; ☎ 8am-1.30pm & 3.30-9.30pm) Internet café for checking your emails.

**Pro Loco** (☎ 0932 24 44 73; Largo San Domenico 6; ☎ 9am-1pm & 5-8pm) Tourist office.

**Tourist office** (☎ 0932 22 15 11; www.ragusaturismo.it; Via Capitano Bocchieri 33; ☎ 9am-1.30pm & 3.30-6pm Tue-Sun) Offers a good map and information booklet.

## 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 Febraio 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

Most of Ragusa's large hotels are found in the upper town, but recently a rash of B&Bs has opened in Ragusa Ibla, where there are also a number of exceptional restaurants.

**Risveglio Ibleo** (☎ 0932 24 78 11; www.risveglioibleo.com; Largo Camerina 3; s €34-42, d €68-84; (P)) Risveglio Ibleo, housed in an 18th-century Liberty-style villa, has walls hung with family portraits and its spacious rooms have a welcoming, homey feel. There is a flower-flanked terrace overlooking the rooftops.

**Il Barocco** (☎ 0932 65 23 97; www.ilbarocco.it; Via S Maria La Nuova; s €60-65, d €90-100; (P) ☎ ☎ ☎) Distinctive for its dark ochre exterior and rooms set around a courtyard, Il Barocco is cool and rustic with terracotta tiles, dark-wood furniture and walls painted in pale peach.

**Il Barocco** (☎ 0932 65 23 97; Via Orfanotrofico 29; meals €20) Leased by the hotel of the same name to the amiable Emanuele Giummarra, this restaurant has an evocative setting in an old stable block, the troughs now filled with wine bottles instead of water. Dishes include a delicious tagliatelle with walnuts and, for those with a sweet tooth, *cannoli di ricotta* (pastries stuffed with fresh ricotta) flavoured with Marsala wine.

**Ristorante Duomo** (☎ 0932 65 12 65; Via Capitano Bocchieri 31; degustation menu €50) It has been called the best restaurant in Sicily. Inside, a quintet of small rooms are outfitted like private parlours, ensuring a suitably romantic atmosphere. Dishes reflect a creative approach to classic recipes.

Also recommended, **Locanda Don Serafino** (☎ 0932 24 87 78; Via Orfanotrofico 39; meals €20-25) is an elegant and atmospheric restaurant with an adjacent American-style wine bar.

## Getting There & Around

Ragusa is accessible by train from Syracuse (€6.15, 2¼ hours, eight daily) and Noto (€4.65, 1¾ hours, eight daily).

**Interbus** (Viale Tenente Lena 42) runs daily buses to Catania (€6.95, 1¾ hours, 10 daily Monday

to Friday, five daily Saturday and Sunday); information and tickets are available at the nearby Caffè del Viale. **AST** (☎ 0932 68 18 18) runs the local network to Syracuse (€6.10, 2½ hours, six daily Monday to Saturday). An AST timetable is posted on Piazza Gramsci where AST buses stop.

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 hill-top 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 28,800 / 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

**Main tourist office** (☎ 0935 52 82 88; www.apt-enna.com; Via Roma 413; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat) Provides a good map and information about the province. Helpful staff.

### Sights

Jealously guarded by locals, Enna's massive **Castello di Lombardia** (☎ 0935 50 09 62; Piazza Mazzini; admission free; ☎ 9am-8pm) 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. Note that the entrance to the cathedral is at the back. Behind the cathedral is the **Museo Alessi** (☎ 0935 50 31 65; Via Roma), which houses the contents of the treasury. At the time of writing, the museum was temporarily closed for refurbishment.

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

### Festivals & Events

**Holy Week** is celebrated at Easter. Thousands of people wearing hoods and capes representing the town's different religious confraternities participate in a solemn procession to the cathedral.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Grande Albergo Sicilia** (☎ 0935 50 08 50; fax 0935 50 04 88; Piazza Colaianni 7; €52-72, d €80-120; ☎ ☎) Despite the Soviet prison-style crumbling concrete exterior, the refurbished rooms here are cheery and comfortable with kitsch gold-framed pictures and elaborate wrought-iron bedheads.

**Hotel Bristol** (☎ 0935 2 44 15; www.hotelbristolenna.it; Piazza Ghisleri 13; s/d €60/90; ☎ ☎) A slick new and modern hotel with bright yellow-and-blue décor and quality pine furniture. There's Sky TV, and tubs as well as showers. Room 210 has an extra-large terrace with great panoramic views.

**La Fontana** (☎ 0935 2 54 65; Via Volturo 6; meals €15-20) A welcoming family-run restaurant on the belvedere with paintings by the owner and her daughter lining the walls. The food includes vegetarian dishes, such as a recommended *minestrone di verdure* (vegetable minestrone).

**Ristorante Centrale** (☎ 0935 50 09 63; www.ristorantecentrale.net; Piazza VI Dicembre 9; meals €20) This place has friendly service, an outside terrace and dishes up traditional mountain food, including *polpettone* (stuffed lamb or meatballs).

There is a morning **market** (Via Mercato Sant'Antonio; ☎ Mon-Sat) where you can find fresh produce.

### Getting There & Around

The **bus station** (☎ 0935 50 09 05; Viale Diaz) is in the historic town from where **SAIS Autolinee** (☎ 0935

500902) runs services to Catania (€10.50, 1½ to two hours, 10 daily Monday to Saturday) and Palermo (€8.85, 1¾ hours, two daily Monday to Saturday). It is possible to reach Agrigento via Caltanissetta (€3.60, one hour, three daily Monday to Friday) and regular buses also run to Piazza Armerina (€2.75, 45 minutes, two daily Monday to Saturday). There is only one bus on Sunday.

The train station is inconveniently located at the bottom of a steep hill 3.5km northeast of Enna Alta. Trains service Catania (€4.95, seven daily) and Palermo (€8.20, four daily) and you can purchase tickets from the machine on the platform. Local buses (€1.75, day pass €3.10) 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 **tourist office** (☎ 0935 68 02 01; www.comune.piazzaarmerina.en.it; Via Cavour 15; 🕒 8.30am-12.30pm & 3-7pm Mon-Fri) in Piazza Armerina hands out brochures of the villa with a floor plan and an explanation of the mosaics. Otherwise you can get hold of a copy at one of the many souvenir stalls around the villa's entrance.

Autolinee Urbane runs buses from Piazza Armerina to the villa (€0.85, 30 minutes, six daily, 1 May to 30 September). Buses depart from the piazza on the hour (9am to 11am and 3pm to 5pm) and return on the half-hour (9.30am to 11.30am and 3.30pm to 5.30pm).

If visiting outside of summer, you will have to walk (an easy-going 5km 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 €22. If you have your own car, head south along the SS117.

## AGRIGENTO

pop 55,900 / 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 the modern town, with its savvy inhabitants, 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 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. Modern Agrigento is one of the most lively and aggressive cities in Sicily and, disquietingly, has been known to harbour a number of notorious Mafia families who are reputedly key players in Italy's narcotics trade.

## Orientation

Intercity buses arrive on Piazza Rosselli; the train station is slightly south on Piazza Marconi. Lying 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 p801).

## Information

There are banks on Piazza Vittorio Emanuele I and along the high street, Via Atenea. Out of hours, there's an exchange office at the post office and another at the train station, although the rates are mediocre.

**Ambulance** (☎ 0922 40 13 44)

**Caffetteria Letteria** (☎ 0922 4 04 09; Via Panoramica dei Templi 21; per hr €3; ☎ 9am-1.30pm & 5-7.30pm Mon-Fri) Enjoy a frothy cappuccino while you check your emails at this cosy bookshop and café on the edge of the archaeological park.

**Ospedale Civile San Giovanni di Dio** (☎ 0922 40 13 44; Via Giovanni XXII)

**Police station** (☎ 0922 59 63 22; Piazzale Aldo Moro 2)

**Post office** (Piazza Vittorio Emanuele I)

**Tourist office** (☎ 0922 2 04 54; www.agrigento-sicilia.it; Via Cesare Battisti 15; ☎ 8.30am-1.30pm Mon-Fri)

Staff have maps of the archaeological park and information on guides.

## 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 is 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 €6/3/free, incl archaeological museum €10/5/free; ☎ Temples of Hera, Concord & Hercules 8.30am-10pm, Temples of Zeus & Dioscuri & Sanctuary of Chthonic deities 8.30am-7pm) 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 is an impressive sacrificial altar.

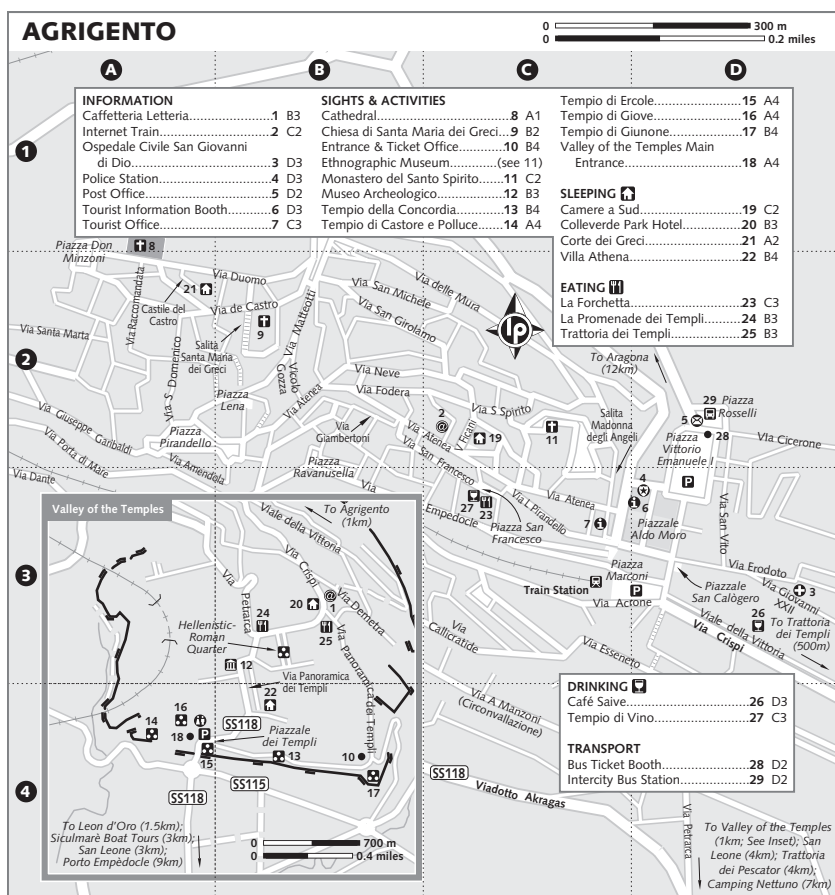
Across Via dei Templi, to the west, is what remains of the massive **Tempio di Giove** (Temple of Jupiter), never actually completed and now totally in ruins, allowing you to appreciate the sheer size of the rocks. It covered an area of 112m by 56m with columns 20m high. Between the columns stood *telamoni* (colossal statues), one of which was reconstructed and is now in the Museo Archeologico (see below). 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 is 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 *bucellati* (rolled sweet dough with figs).

## Tours

The tourist office can provide you with a list of multilingual guides. The official rate is €84 for a half-day.

**Michele Gallo** (☎ 0922 40 22 57, 0360 39 37 30; www.sicilytravel.net; temples €90, incl museum €115) 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

Rapacious tourism has made the modern town expensive and the services lousy. Most of Agrigento's better hotels are out of town around the Valley of the Temples or near the sea.



**Corte dei Greci** (☎ 339 422 04 76; www.cortedeigreci.it; Cortile Zeta 3; s €25-40, d €40-80) Located high up in the old Arab quarter of town, this B&B is a series of renovated old houses surrounding a quaint internal courtyard. Each room is really a suite, charmingly decorated with traditional Sicilian furniture. Breakfast is served in the old stables.

**Camere a Sud** (☎ 349 638 44 24; www.camereasad.it; Via Ficani 6; s €40-45, d €60-70) This cute B&B is well signposted, so it's easy to find. It's run by three sparky Agrigentans. In addition to the cheerful rooms and delightful roof-terrace breakfast, personal tours can be organised, including a Vespa ride around the winding backstreets of town. Cash only.

**Colleverde Park Hotel** (☎ 0922 2 95 55; www.colleverde-hotel.it; Via Panoramica dei Templi 21; s/d €120/145; **P** **☎**) A good choice if you have a car as the hotel is located halfway between the town and the valley. Although the building looks disarmingly modern and blockish, the lushly landscaped gardens are lovely and the rooms bright and comfortable.

**Baglio della Luna** (☎ 0922 51 10 61; www.bagliodelaluna.com; Contrada Maddalusa; s/d €150/200; **P** **☎**) This handsome converted *baglio* (traditional rural home) 2km southwest of the Valley of the Temples is full of character and extremely comfortable. The restaurant is rated as one of the best in Sicily. Meals cost €25.

**Villa Athena** (☎ 0922 59 62 88; www.athenahotels.com; Via Passeggiata Archeologica 33; s/d €130/210; **P** **☎** **🚗**) Agrigento's most famous hotel, set in a grand 18th-century villa, enjoys a peerless position overlooking the temples. Recently refurbished, spacious rooms remain firmly in classical mode while including every luxury, such as walk-in showers, Sky TV and terraces.

## Eating

**La Forchetta** (☎ 0922 59 45 87; Piazza San Francesco 9; meals €15) One of the cheapest meals in town can be found here. The cramped dining room is popular with locals who come for the ever-changing daily specials.

**Trattoria dei Templi** (☎ 0922 40 31 10; Via Panoramica dei Templi 14; meals €20) This restaurant comes well recommended by locals. There is an excellent antipasti spread (€8) and fresh fish is the speciality, with dishes such as fettucine with lobster among the scrumptious choices.

**Trattoria dei Pescator** (☎ 0922 41 43 42; Lungomare Falcone e Borsellino; meals €25) This is widely regarded as the best restaurant on the San

Leone beachfront strip. Its vast terrace, generally packed with local businessmen and ladies at lunch, faces the small harbour. Among the fish on offer, try fried cuttlefish or *taglioline* (pasta) with lobster.

**Leone 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

**Tempio di Vino** (☎ 0922 59 67 86; 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.

**Café Saieva** (☎ 0922 2 06 71; Viale della Vittoria 61) The best of several cafés on this grand sweep of street overlooking the valley. It has a real old-fashioned gelateria feel with a vast glassed-in terrace and its elderly staff dressed in traditional aprons and hats.

## Getting There & Away

### BUS

For most destinations, bus is the easiest way to get to and from Agrigento. The intercity bus station is located on Piazza Rosselli, just off Piazza Vittorio Emanuele I, and the ticket booth (with timetables) is in the same piazza. **Autoservizi Cuffaro** (☎ 0922 41 82 31) runs daily buses to Palermo (€7.40, two hours, seven daily Monday to Saturday, two on Sunday). **Lumia** (☎ 0922 2 04 14) has departures to Trapani (€11.10, three hours, three daily Monday to Saturday, one on Sunday) and **SAIS** (☎ 0922 59 52 60) runs buses to Catania (€12.10, three hours, half-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 is metered parking at the train station (Piazza Marconi) and Piazza Rosselli.

### TRAIN

There are plenty of trains daily to and from Palermo (€7.20, two hours, 11 daily) and Ca-

tania (€12.55, 3½ hours, six daily). Although trains serve other destinations as well, you're better off taking the bus. The train station has left-luggage lockers (€3 per 12 hours).

## Getting Around

City buses 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 (€2.20). Bus 2 continues to San Leone (€1). 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 unspoiled beach, beachfront restaurants, a camp site fronting the sand and a nearby World Wildlife Fund-protected park. If you want to stay overnight, beachfront **Hotel Paguro** (☎ 0922 81 55 12; Via Principe di Piemonte 7) was in the throes of renovation at the time of research. Or head for well-signposted and shady **Camping Canne** (☎ 338 242 66 60; camp sites per adult/child/tent €5/free/5), which has excellent facilities, including a minimarket and restaurant. Just in from the sweeping Lido Sabbia d'Oro beach, **La Scogliera** (☎ 0922 81 75 32; Via S Petro; meals €20) has a reassuringly brief menu of fresh seafood dishes and a terrace overlooking the sea.

The stunning 761-hectare natural park, **Torre Salsa** ([www.wwf.torresalsa.it](http://www.wwf.torresalsa.it)), is signposted at the approach to the marina. Follow the 3km road to the entrance. There is plenty of scope for walkers here with well-marked trails and some sweeping panoramic views of the surrounding mountains and coast.

Around 43km southeast of Agrigento, follow the signs to **Licata**. It's a raw and appealing Sicilian port town and well worth a stop for its humming atmosphere, lack of tourists, and baroque palaces and churches centred around the main square, Piazza del Duomo. If you want to stay, **Al Faro** (☎ 0922 77 01 76; [www.alfarohotel.it](http://www.alfarohotel.it); Via Dogana 6; s/d €60/80; 📺) has a stuffy old-fashioned lobby but excellent rooms with Sky TV, balconies overlooking the harbour and modern furnishings.

## SELINUNTE

The ruins of Selinunte are the most impressively sited ruins in Sicily. Try to visit in spring when the surroundings are ablaze with pur-

ple, yellow and white wildflowers. The huge city was built in 628 BC on a promontory overlooking the sea, and for two-and-a-half 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 p744). 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 Mon-Sat, 9am-noon & 3-6pm Sun) is located near the eastern temples. Just within the site you can join a tour on an electric cart (half-hour/two hours €3 to €15) to tour the enormous site.

## Sleeping & Eating

Selinunte is close to the fishing village and popular Italian resort of Marinella di Selinunte. There are plenty of expensive hotels here that are worth checking out in low season when prices drop drastically.

**Lido Azzurro** (☎ 0924 4 62 56; [www.hotellidoazzurro.it](http://www.hotellidoazzurro.it); Via Marco Polo 98; s/d/tr €40/60/85) Run by an affable Dutchman who speaks five languages (and owns the seafood restaurant Calannino Roccafé across the way), this simple, comfortable place has year-round reasonable prices – a rarity in these parts. Bag one of the rooms fronted by a terrace overlooking the beach.

**Villa Anna Bed & Breakfast 'Il Gattopardo'** (☎ 0924 4 68 81; SS115 136; s/€30-50, d/€50-80; 📺 🍷) This characterful B&B is ideal for families, with large rooms that can sleep up to four (€20 for each extra bed), a vast sitting room with toys and TV, and adjacent fully equipped kitchen. The

child-friendly garden has a barbecue and gazebo. You'll find it on the main road into Selinunte (about 2km before the village).

**Al Ristorante Pierrot** (☎ 0924 462 05; Via Marco Polo 108; meals €15-20) This place is very popular; it does a fantastic buffet, good fish, including a speciality – *spaghetti ai gamberi con asparagi e rucolo* (spaghetti with prawns, asparagus and rucolo) – and a decadently delicious *torta al limone* (lemon cake).

### Getting There & Away

Regular AST buses link Selinunte and Marinella di Selinunte to Castelvetro (€0.90, 20 minutes, five daily), which is linked by bus with Agrigento, Marsala and Trapani. Very slow trains also run from Palermo and Trapani to Castelvetro.

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 is plenty to incite the senses here, ranging from unpretentious fishing towns to one of Sicily's finest nature reserves, the Riserva Naturale dello Zingaro. Offshore a cluster of islands, Pantelleria and the Egadi archipelago, share some 15,000 years of history between them – the latter was once a land bridge between Italy and North Africa.

### MARSALA

pop 78,000

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

**Centro Servizi** (☎ 0923 76 22 21; Via Garibaldi 2;

☎ 9am-2pm & 3-8pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon Sun) A central internet space also with telephones.

**Spedale San Bagio** (☎ 0923 71 60 31; Piazza San Francesco)

**Police station** (☎ 0923 92 43 71; Via Gramsci)

**Post office** (Via Garibaldi)

**Tourist office** (☎ 0923 71 40 97; Via XI Maggio 100;

☎ 8am-2pm & 3-8pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon 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 Regionale Baglio Anselmi** (☎ 0923 95 25 35; Lungomare Boeo; admission €2; ☎ 9am-1.30pm daily, 4-6.30pm Wed & Fri-Sun). 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 (p805) – giving a glimpse of a civilisation that was quite literally extinguished by the Romans.

Marsala's other sights are limited to the **Museo degli Arazzi Fiammingi** (☎ 0923 71 29 03; Via Giuseppe Garraffa 57; admission €1; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sun), which displays eight 16th-century Flemish tapestries woven for Spanish king Philip II, and the adjoining **cathedral** on 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.

If you're travelling with small children, you might enjoy a break at **Villa Cavalotti**, a large park just outside the Porta Nuova with a playground and acres of space for a relaxing walk.

### 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.

## A REGION BLIGHTED

By the end of the 19th century Sicily was officially the chief area of emigration in the world, with nearly 1.5 million Sicilians trying their luck elsewhere; the effect of the depopulation was greatest in the southwestern interior. Novelist Leonardo Sciascia captured the huge emigration with his stories 'The Long Crossing' and 'The Test'. You can find them, with other great stories about Sicily, in his collection *The Wine Dark Sea*.

It is hardly surprising that Sciascia was able to capture the Sicilian longing for a better life so vividly. He grew up in Racalmuto, and his own grandfather worked in the sulphur mines that surround Caltanissetta. By 1900 Italy had a world monopoly on the sulphur trade, but for the 16,000 miners working in 300 mines life was not so rosy. At the age of nine, Sciascia's grandfather went to work down the mine – children were used as they were the only ones small enough to crawl through the suffocating 60m-deep galleries. Naked, maltreated, clawing the sulphur out of the pits with their bare hands, they must have had a hellish existence, and many only saw the light of day once a week.

The grandfather of Sicily's greatest novelist taught himself to read and write in the evenings, enabling his son (Sciascia's father) to become a mine clerk who could afford shoes for the young Leonardo to wear to school. By the end of the 19th century, American sulphur was beginning to dominate the markets and the consequent collapse of the Sicilian industry started the huge exodus of rural poor.

The **Marsala Jazz Festival** is held in the historic centre in July. It's sponsored by Marsala wine companies and increasingly attracts major artists.

## Sleeping

Marsala has few new hotels within the centre.

**Hotel Centrale** (☎ 0923 95 17 77; www.hotelcentralemarsala.it; Via Salinisti 19; s €40-59, d €60-70; 🏠) A welcome new addition to the historic centre, this comfortable small hotel has rooms set around a central courtyard with potted palms. The rooms are spacious, washed in pastel colours and have the self-catering perk of fridges.

**Hotel Favorita** (☎ 0923 98 91 00; Via Favorita 27; s €55-70, d €80-100; 🏠 🚰 🚿) This 19th-century villa has a Spanish hacienda feel with its ochre colour scheme and courtyards. Surrounded by lovely gardens, the rooms are large, washed in pale yellow and ochre with formulaic modern furnishings (a pity).

**ourpick! Hotel Carmine** (☎ 0923 71 19 07; www.hotelcarmine.it; Piazza Carmine 16; s €70-90, d €100-125; 🏠 🚰 🚿) This hotel opened in 2006 in a 16th-century monastery and could easily double its prices. The rooms are fabulous: original blue-and-gold majolica tiles combined with parquet floors, beams, stone walls, antique furniture and lofty ceilings. Enjoy your cornflakes in style in the baronial-style breakfast room where historic frescoes were

revealed during restoration. Modern perks include wi-fi and a rooftop solarium.

## Eating

**Trattoria Garibaldi** (☎ 0923 95 30 06; Via Rubbino 35; meals €15) This reliable trattoria has a pleasant traditional dining space and serves hearty Sicilian fare; there's a particularly tasty antipasti range including *bisiate* (pasta) with seafood and mussels.

**Divino...Rosso** (☎ 0923 71 17 70; Via XI Maggio; meals €20; 🍷 7-11pm) Across from imposing Palazzo Fici is this excellent restaurant and wine bar. It concentrates on seafood-based local dishes, such as *spaghetti ai ricci* (spaghetti with sea urchins). Choose from a 150-plus wine list.

**Fonte d'Oro** (☎ 0923 71 95 86; Via Curatolo; meals €20-25) It is surprisingly hard to find good restaurants in Marsala, but this trendy restaurant is an exception. It specialises in superfresh fish; the catch of the day is always good, or try the crisp *fritto misto* (seafood fry-up).

When everywhere else is closed you can always count on **Caffetteria Grand Italia** (☎ 0923 95 68 28; Piazza della Repubblica 3; sandwiches €3.50).

## Shopping

Tipplers should head to **Cantine Florio** (☎ 0923 78 11 11; www.cantineflorio.it; Lungomare Florio; 🍷 3-5pm Mon-Thu, 10am-noon Fri) 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 (contact it via the website to make a reservation for one of the free tours). Pellegrino, Rallo, Mavis and Intorcia are four of the other producers in the same area (which are usually open from about 9am to 12.30pm). Booking is recommended; ask at the tourist office.

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

### Getting There & Away

There are buses from Trapani on AST or Lumia (€2.80, 55 minutes, four daily Monday to Saturday), from Agrigento (Lumia; €8.25, 3½ hours, three daily) and Palermo (Salemi; €8.15, 2½ hours), but the best way to travel along this coast is by train.

Regular trains serve Marsala from Trapani (€3.15, 30 minutes, 20 daily) and Palermo (€8.20, three hours, six daily).

**Ustica Lines** (☎ 0923 87 38 13; [www.usticalines.it](http://www.usticalines.it); ☹ Jun-Sep) runs daily hydrofoils to Favignana and Levanzo (€5.30) and to Marettimo (€11.80).

### 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 private boat (€5 return), which operates from 9am to around 6pm (mornings only in winter).

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; admission €5.50; ☹ 9am-1pm & 3-6.30pm Mar-Sep). The museum's main treasure is *Il Giovinetto di Mozia*, a mar-

ble 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 Inferza** (☎ 0923 96 69 36; admission €3; ☹ 9.30am-1.30pm & 3-7pm), a salt museum housed in an old windmill. Ask at the reception about renting canoes (€6 per hour, summer only).

There is a busy café, **La Finestra sul Sale** (☎ 0923 73 30 03; Contrada Ettore Inferza 55), opposite the pier, with outdoor tables overlooking the lagoon. It is a lovely place for an evening drink as the sun turns the salt pans rosy pink. Above the café are three attractive beamed rooms (singles €100 and doubles €130) with views over the salt pans.

To reach the Stagnone islands and the embarkation point for San Pantaleo from Marsala, take bus 4 from the Piazza del Popolo (€5.10, 25 minutes, Monday to Saturday).

### TRAPANI

pop 68,400

Arriving in Trapani through drab suburbs of concrete block apartments and a confusing one-way system can be enough to make anyone bolt from what is, sadly, one of the worst abuses of unchecked Mafia construction. Ensclosed in the tightknit historic centre, however, the environment softens with atmospheric pedestrian streets and some lovely churches and baroque buildings. Once situated at the heart of a powerful trading network that stretched from Carthage to Venice, the 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

There are dozens of banks in Trapani and nearly all of them have ATMs. Public telephone booths can be found in front of the ferry terminal. The terminal also has a phone centre on the 1st floor.

## 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.

**Agatours** (☎ 0923 2 17 54; Via Ammiraglio Staiti 13) Travel agency for bus and ferry tickets.

**Emergency doctor** (☎ 0923 2 96 29; Piazza Generale Scio 1)

**Internet Point** (Via Regina Elena 26-28; per hr €4; ☎ 10.30am-1pm & 4-10pm Mon-Sat) Has internet connection, plus Western Union services and telephones.

**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)

**Salvo Viaggi** (☎ 0923 54 54 55; Corso Italia 48) Travel agency for boat and air tickets to Pantelleria.

**Tourist office** (☎ 0923 2 90 00; www.apr.trapani.it in Italian; Casina delle Palme, Piazza Garibaldi; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon Sun) A friendly tourist office with bags of information on the province and a good town map.

## 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 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 façade 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 below).

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 Tue-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 respectable collection of Gagini sculptures, silverwork, archaeological artefacts and religious artwork.

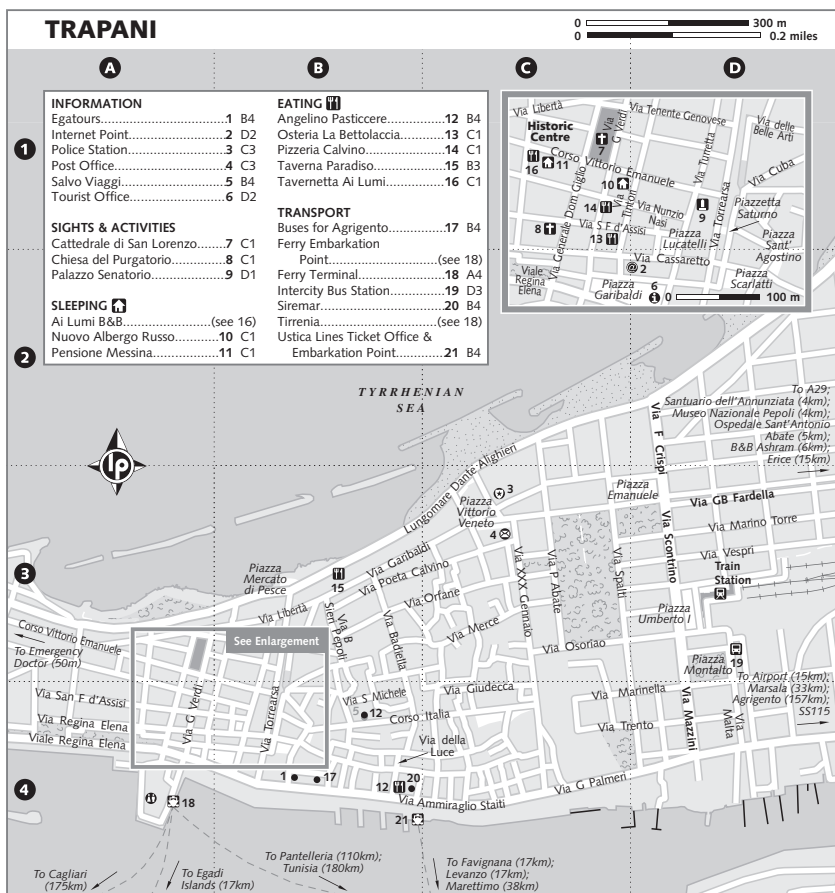
## Festivals & Events

**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 Luatelli. 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.

**Pensione Messina** (☎ 0923 2 11 98; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 71; s/d without bathroom €21/40) The entertaining Pensione Messina is run by an ancient Trapanesi 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.

**our pick B&B Ashram** (☎ 0923 56 06 06; 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 just six rooms, with a living room set 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.

**Ai Lumi B&B** (☎ 0923 87 24 18; www.ailumi.it; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 71; s/d €55/70; 📍) Enjoys a perfect

location on the city's most elegant pedestrian street surrounded by swirling baroque architecture. Housed in an 18th-century *palazzo*, the rooms and small apartments are excellent value and well furnished with wrought-iron beds and antiques. Guests receive a 15% discount at the Tavernetta Ai Lumi (opposite).

**Nuova Albergo Russo** (☎ 0923 2 21 63; www.nuovoalbergorusso.it; Via Tintori 4; s €40-45, d €70-85; 📍) This small *albergo* is in a superb location across from the cathedral; the rooms have small balconies and are clean and bright.

### 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) something of a speciality, particularly when served with a fish sauce that includes tomatoes, garlic and parsley.

**Angelino Pasticcere** (☎ 0923 2 80 64; Via Ammiraglio Staiti 87; cakes €2.50-3.50) A heavenly café serving a delicious array of cakes, chocolates, Sicilian sweets and light savoury meals. It is a great place to pick up a snack before heading off to the islands.

**Pizzeria Calvino** (☎ 0923 2 14 64; Via Nunzio Nasi 77; pizzas €3.50-7; 🕒 7pm-midnight Wed-Mon) You can't get a much better recommendation than being told this place is the town's favourite take-away-pizza place.

**Osteria La Bettolaccia** (☎ 0923 2 16 95; Via General Enrico Fardella 25; meals €15) An unwaveringly authentic restaurant heaving with locals; go for one of the simple pasta dishes such as *busiate al pesto* (a typical local pasta with pesto).

**Tavernetta Ai Lumi** (☎ 0923 87 24 18; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 15; meals €20) This tavern, converted from an 18th-century stable block, is rustic to the core. Exposed brickwork, heavy wooden furniture and huge arches lend the dining room great character, while the menu features mostly unpretentious country fare. There's a classy wine bar next door.

**Taverna Paradiso** (☎ 0923 87 37 51; Lungomare Dante Alighieri 24; meals €35; 🕒 closed Jan) This is Trapani's best restaurant, where Dolce & Gabbana-clad women and bejewelled men gorge themselves on succulent seafood specialities. The atmosphere here is heavily charged by influential patrons and during the *mattanza* season (see boxed text, p810) the tables are cleared for live traditional music. Reservations are essential, as is donning the glad rags.

An open-air morning **fish market** (Piazza Mercato di Pesce) is held Monday to Saturday on the northern waterfront.

## Getting There & Around

### AIR

Trapani's small **Vincenzo Florio Airport** (TPS; ☎ 0923 84 25 02) is located 16km south of town at Birgi. Flights head to Pantelleria, Rome and Tunis. AST buses connect the Trapani bus station with the airport (€3.65, 20 minutes, 10 daily Monday to Saturday, two on Sunday).

### BOAT

Trapani's main **ferry terminal** (☎ 0923 54 54 11) is located opposite Piazza Garibaldi. Inside you will find a money exchange, the Tirrenia and Siremar ticket offices and clean toilets.

For the embarkation point of Ustica Lines hydrofoils you will need to head down Via Ammiraglio Staiti.

**Siremar** (☎ 0923 54 54 55; www.siremar.it; Via Ammiraglio Staiti 61) runs ferries/hydrofoils to Favignana (€7.20/9.30, 20 minutes), Levanzo (€7.20/9.30, 35 minutes) and Marettimo (€11.20/15.90, one hour). The same company runs a daily ferry to Pantelleria (€32.30, five hours) at midnight from June to September.

**Ustica Lines** (☎ 0923 2 22 00; www.usticalines.it in Italian; Via Ammiraglio Staiti 23) runs hydrofoils to Favignana, Levanzo and Marettimo for similar prices as Siremar, as well as summer-only services to Ustica (€19, 2½ hours, one daily), Naples (€83, seven hours, one daily) and Pantelleria (€34, 2½ hours, one daily).

**Tirrenia** (☎ 0923 52 18 96; www.tirrenia.it; ferry terminal) runs a weekly service to Cagliari (seat €41, 2nd-class cabin €54, 11½ hours).

### BUS

Intercity buses arrive and depart from the bus station on Piazza Montalto. Tickets can be bought from kiosks in the station.

**Segesta** (☎ 0923 2 17 54) runs express buses connecting Trapani with Palermo (€8, two hours, eight daily). **AST** (☎ 0923 2 32 22) buses serve Erice (€2.20, 45 minutes, 10 daily Monday to Saturday) and Marsala (€2.80, 30 minutes, eight daily Monday to Friday). Autoservizi Tarantola runs a bus service to Segesta (€2.95, 25 minutes, five daily June to September).

**Lumia** (☎ 0923 2 17 54) buses serve Agrigento (€11.10, three hours, two daily). You can pick up these buses outside Eगतours (p805) where you purchase the tickets.

A free bus (No 11) does a circular trip through Trapani, leaving from the bus station and stopping at the train station on the return leg.

### TRAIN

Trapani is linked to Palermo (€6.95, 2½ hours, 10 to 12 daily) and Marsala (€3.15, 30 minutes, 20 daily). The train is the best option for travelling along this coast.

## ERICE

pop 28,900 / elev 751m

One of Italy's most spectacular hill towns, 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.

## Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 0923 86 93 88; Via Tommaso Guarraresi 1; 🕒 8am–2pm Mon–Sat) 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 (see right).

There are several churches and monuments in the small, quiet town and you can purchase a €5 ticket to visit the lot. The 14th-century **Chiesa Matrice** (Via Vito Carvini; admission €1; 🕒 10am–8pm May–Sep, 10am–6pm Oct–Apr), just inside Porta Trapani, is probably the most interesting by virtue of its separate bell tower (admission €1), where climbing the 110 steps rewards you with fabulous rooftop (and beyond) views. The interior of the church was remodelled in the 19th century with heavy use of decorative stucco; there's a small ecclesiastical museum here as well.

**La Salerniana** (☎ 0923 86 92 24; Vicolo San Rocco 5; admission free; 🕒 10am–1pm & 3–7pm Tue–Sun) is a well-lit, modern art gallery showcasing Sicilian paintings and sculpture. It opened in late 2006.

## Sleeping & Eating

Erice has some excellent hotels and, after the tourists have left, the town assumes a beguiling medieval air.

**Hotel Villa San Giovanni** (☎ 0923 86 91 71; www.hotelsangiovannierice.it; Via Nunzio Nasi; s €40, d €65; (P)) An excellent budget choice in a former convent perched on a ridge at the edge of town. The public areas are glossily marbled while the rooms are plain with tiny bathrooms – more than compensated for by the terraces with their stunning panoramic views.

**Elimo** (☎ 0923 86 93 77; www.hotelesimo.it; Via Vittorio Emanuele 75; s €90, d €130–170; (P) 🕒) Elimo is in an atmospheric historic house with tiled beams and marble fireplaces. The eccentric owner and chef has filled his communal rooms with intriguing art, knick-knacks and antiques. The rooms are more mainstream but, along with the hotel terrace and restaurant, have breathtaking vistas.

**Torri Pepoli** (☎ 333 301 05 04; www.torripepoli.it; Giardini dei Balio; d/ste €200/400; (P) 🕒) Be 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 rockside. The restaurant lives up to royal expectations (meals €35 to €40).

**Monte San Giuliano** (☎ 0923 86 95 95; Vicolo San Rocco 7; meals €20–25) You enter this restaurant through a crumbling arch into a cool patio graced with drooping hydrangeas. The terrace is canopied with a roof of vines and the food matches the heady surroundings.

**Ulisse** (☎ 0923 86 93 33; Via Chiaramonte; meals €20–25) The informal dining room is vast but you'll still be lucky to grab a table at this local hot spot. The menu includes some excellent vegetarian pastas, plus steak and fish dishes. The pizzas served at midday are reputed to be the best in town.

Erice has a tradition of *dolci ericini* (Erice sweets) and there are numerous pastry shops in town, such as **Antica Pasticceria del Convento** (☎ 0923 86 97 77; Via Guarnotti), which has an array of delicious marzipan sweets made by the local nuns.

## Getting There & Away

There is a regular AST bus service to and from Trapani (€2.10/3.15 one way/return, 45 minutes, 10 daily Monday to Saturday, four on Sunday). A funicular also runs from opposite the main car park outside Porta Trapani to Via Martogna in Trapani (€2.90) from 7.30am to 8.30pm daily. Metered parking is available along Viale Conte Pepoli and costs €1 per hour.

## 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 (p805).

Segesta is accessible by **AST** (☎ 0924 3 10 20) buses from Piazza Montalto in Trapani (€3.10, 25 minutes, five daily in summer). Otherwise catch a train from Trapani (€2.95 return, 25 minutes, 10 daily) or Palermo (€5.50, one hour 40 minutes, 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/free; 🕒 7am–9pm 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 Centre** (☎ 0924 54 10 73; www.cetaria.com; Via Marco Polo 3; dives from €35) 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 its sleepy vil-

lage atmosphere remains unspoiled. Its port is extremely picturesque, with a rust-red *tonnara* (tuna processing plant) in the foreground and *faraglione* (rock towers) rising out of the sea. If you want to stay, check out **Grace's Place** (☎ 0924 54 14 13; Corso da Piano Vignazze 87; s/d €60/90), which offers comfortable rooms and use of a kitchen, plus a terrace with rocking chairs for sundowner time.

AST buses run to San Vito lo Capo and Castellammare del Golfo from Trapani's Piazza Montalto. From Castellammare, it is possible to catch a bus to Scopello (€2.10/2.85 one way/return). There is no road through the Zingaro park.

## 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, p810).

Ferries and hydrofoils run between the islands and to Trapani. See p807 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 is 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; 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. **Casa del Tonno** (☎ 0923 92 22 27; 12 Via Roma) is a great little deli filled to the rafters with smoked and canned blue-fin tuna, and a host of other fishy delicacies such as *bottarga* (roe) and sardines.

There is a **tourist office** (☎ 0923 92 16 47; www.egadi.com; Piazza Matrice 8; 🕒 9am–12.30pm & 4.30–7pm Mon–Sat year-round, 9.30am–12.30pm Sun Jun–Sep) in Favignana town. You will find dive-hire outlets and bicycles or scooters for rent around the town and at the small harbour.

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 is 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 will have trouble finding a bed without an advance booking.

**Albergo Egadi** (☎ /fax 0923 92 12 32; www.albergoegadi.it; Via Colombo 17, Favignana; s €50–100, d €100–200) This small *albergo*, run by the Guccione sisters, has 12 rooms decorated in soft blues and pinks with wafting chiffon curtains. It also has the best restaurant on the islands (meals €25 to €30, open Thursday to Tuesday from March to January).

**Albergo Aegusa** (☎ 0923 92 24 30; www.aegusahotel.it; Via Garibaldi 11, Favignana; s €54–90, d €108–180; 🍷) An attractive hotel with comfortable, well-furnished rooms right in the centre of Favignana. There is also a good restaurant in an outdoor courtyard.

Levanzo has slim pickings for staying overnight. The best hotel is **Albergo Paradiso** (☎ 0923 92 40 80; Via Lungomare; s/d half-board €60/120; 🍷) set in a whitewashed building with suitable sea-blue trim. The restaurant's geranium-clad terrace has a happy, holiday feel and the food is solidly traditional and good (meals cost €25).

## PANTELLERIA

This volcanic outcrop is Sicily's largest offshore 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**.

## 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 is 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.

The island is more famous for its secluded coves, which are perfect for snorkelling and diving. The northeastern end of the island provides the best spots with a popular **acquacalda** at Gadir. Here you can while away your day wallowing like a walrus in the hot, shallow springs. Further down the coast you will find ever more scenic spots such as **Cala di Tramontana** and **Cala di Levante**. Boat excursions are available at the dock; contact **Minardi Adriano** (☎ 0923 91 15 02; Via Borgo Italia 5; per person €25) for day trips.

The only archaeological site on the island is at **Mursia**, where the remnants of *sesi* (ancient funerary monuments) are the only remaining evidence of a Bronze Age settlement. Many of the tombs have been destroyed and the lava rock was 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 Madonna and Giorgio Armani, who has his own *dammusi* here.

There is a small **tourist office** (☎ 0923 91 18 38; www.pantelleria.com; Piazza Cavour; ☎ 9.30am–12.30pm & 5.30pm–6.30pm Mon–Sat, 9–11am Sun) in the corner of the Municipal Hall.

## Sleeping & Eating

Summer accommodation bookings should be made at least a month in advance.

**Zubebi Resort** (☎ 0923 91 36 53; www.zubebi.it; Contrada Zubebi; 2-/4-person apt €800/1600; P ♻️ 🚰 🚰) A complex made up of traditional *dammusi*. Inside the décor is austere minimalism, smooth concrete walls and Indian furnishings. There is also an uberstylish crescent-shaped pool and on-site mountain bikes and scooters. Weekly rental only.

Also recommended is delightful stone-clad B&B **Albergo Papusia** (☎ 0923 91 54 63; www.papuscia.it; Corso da Sopra Portella 48, Tracino; d €59–89; ♻️), set in a lovely garden.

Dine out at Slow Food–recommended **Favarotta** (☎ 0923 91 53 47; Contrada Favarotta, Pantelleria Town; meals €30) on favourite local dishes such as roasted hare.

## Getting There & Away

Pantelleria is 30 minutes by air with **Meridiana** (☎ 0843 55 55 88; www.meridiana.it; €37.43) and **Alitalia** (☎ 06 2222; www.alitalia.com; from €125) from Rome. The local bus connects the airport with Pantelleria Town.

All boats arrive at the port in Pantelleria Town. **Ustica Lines** (☎ 0923 87 38 13; www.usticalines.it) has hydrofoils departing from Trapani at 6pm daily from June to October (€34, 2½ hours, one daily). **Siremar** (☎ 091 749 31 11; www.siremar.it) runs regular ferries from Trapani to Marettimo (€15.80), to Levanzo (€9.30) and to Favignana (€9.30). There are reduced services from October to May.

You can purchase ferry and hydrofoil tickets from **Agenzia Rizzo** (☎ 0923 91 11 04; www.agenziarizzo.com; Via Borgo Italia 12) and air tickets from **La Cossira** (☎ 0923 91 10 78; www.lacossira.it; Via Borgo Italia 19), both in Pantelleria Town.

Local buses depart from Piazza Cavour in Pantelleria Town at regular intervals each day (except Sunday) and service all the towns on the island. Alternatively, you can rent scooters (€10 per day from September to June, €25 per day from July to August) and cars (Fiat Panda €15 per day from September to June, €40 per day from July to August) from **Autonoleggio Policardo** (☎ 0923 91 28 44; Via Messina 35), to the left of the Port Hotel.

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