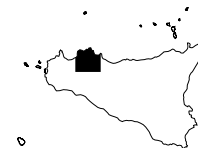


# Palermo



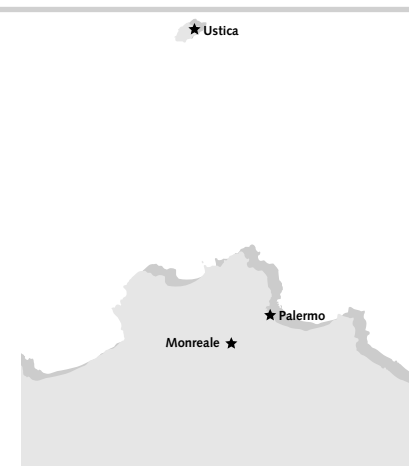
Palermo (population 680,000) is a city that's quite apart from the rest of Sicily's urban spaces. Though it's on the traditional end of the scale, it carries with it a sense of unpredictability and adventure: its streets are jam-packed with traffic; its markets are a hive of hollers, smells and countless gastronomic offerings; the winding, palazzo-strewn streets of the old quarter contrast with the wide boulevards and glam shops of the new town. It's a European city with a chaotic nature and a penchant for rule bending.

This is an ancient city that showcases the remains of Sicily's countless invaders: it was once an Arab emirate, the seat of a Norman kingdom and, in the 12th century, Europe's grandest city; later, its fate was more grim than glam. The city is still a real beauty, but its gems often need seeking out. You'll be surprised by the number of gorgeous, swirling palazzi – the fusion of Byzantine, Arab, Norman, Renaissance and baroque architecture is a feast for the eyes.

But it's not just history that makes Palermo so terrific. An increasing number of bars, clubs and great restaurants means it's fun after dark, while Mondello beach is a mere 15-minute bus ride away, making it easy to cool off on summer days. And should the chaotic capital make you crave some peace and quiet, the lonely island of Ustica offers total escape. While you're in the city, don't miss its simple joys, such as watching families stroll and eat ice cream by the seafront, or bargaining with the quick-witted market salesmen. But most importantly, whatever you do, don't miss Palermo.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Feel faint before the beauty of the glittering mosaics at the **Cappella Palatina** (p81) and **Cattedrale di Monreale** (p99)
- Weave through the smells and the yells of Palermo's **street markets** (p96)
- See some breathtaking opera in the impressive **Teatro Massimo** (p88)
- Get up close and personal with Sicily's history and culture in two of the island's finest museums, the **Museo Archeologico Regionale** (p85) and the **Galleria Regionale Siciliana** (p86)
- Admire the underwater beauties in **Ustica** (p101), a world centre for diving



## HISTORY

Palermo looks old for a reason – it is. Nearly 3000 years old, at that. It started life as a huddle of Phoenician stores on a peaceful bay surrounded by the fertile Conca d'Oro, a prime piece of real estate that long made it a target for Sicily's colonisers. As the Carthaginians and Greeks began to flex their territorial muscles, the little depot grew in strategic and economic importance. It became Panormus (the Greek word for port).

Conquered by the Arabs in AD 831, the port flourished and became a very fine city. So much so that when the Normans invaded in 1072, Roger I (1031–1101) made it the seat of his kingdom, encouraging the resident Arabs, Byzantines, Greeks and Italians to remain. In Sicily, the Normans found their longed-for 'kingdom of the sun' and under their enlightened rule Palermo became the most cultured city of 12th-century Europe.

The end of Roger's line (with the death of William II in 1189) was to signal the very long and terminal decline of the city to its modern-day nadir. A series of extraordinary and often bloody political struggles saw the island pass from German (Hohenstaufens) to French (Angevins) to Spanish (Aragonese) and English rule. None of these powers – who were nearly always uninterested and removed from Palermo – could regain the splendour of the Norman era. The only physical change to the city occurred under the Spaniards, with the imposition of a rational city plan that disguised the original Moorish layout. If you see the city from an altitude, you'll notice the baroque domes rising like islands above a sea of alleyways.

Industrial entrepreneurs, such as the Florios and the Whitakers, gave the city a brief flash of brilliance in the pre-WWI period by dressing it in the glamorous and decadent structures of art nouveau, resulting in Palermo's final *belle époque*. But two world wars and massive material damage sank the city into despair and disrepair. At the end of 1945, the city was flooded by hundreds of impoverished rural labourers and gripped by Mafia violence.

The middle classes moved out into newly built housing estates, escaping the new wave of violence (and the bad plumbing). By the 1980s the city was virtually a European pariah, notching up weekly murders. It is only since the climax of the Mafia supertrials of the 1990s

that Palermo has begun to emerge from its troubled past. In addition, Palermo's mayors, Leoluca Orlando and Diego Cammarata, have dedicated themselves to restoring the city to its former glory, though cynics say that the Mafia has traded guns and violence for suits and success. In the meantime, you'll see lots of work-in-progress in Palermo's old quarter and on its beautiful palazzi (palaces or mansions). As ever, only time will tell what the future holds in store for Europe's most Byzantine city.

## ORIENTATION

Palermo is large but easily walkable – if you can brave crossing the street, that is. Via Maqueda is its central street, extending from the train station in the south before turning into Via Ruggero Settimo. At Piazza Castelnuovo it turns into Viale della Libertà, a lush boulevard lined with late-19th-century apartment blocks that marks the start of the modern half of the city.

Via Maqueda is bisected by Corso Vittorio Emanuele, running east to west from the port of La Cala to the cathedral and Palazzo dei Normanni. The intersection of Via Maqueda and Corso Vittoria Emanuele, known famously as Quattro Canti (Four Corners), divides historic Palermo into four traditional quarters: La Kalsa (east), Vucciria (north), Il Capo (west) and Albergheria (south). These quarters contain the majority of Palermo's sights.

Parallel to Via Maqueda runs Via Roma, a popular shopping street. A one-way system moves traffic north up Via Roma from the train station and south down Via Maqueda.

## INFORMATION

### Bookshops

Generally, bookshops open from 9am to 2.30pm and 4.30 to 8pm Monday to Saturday, and 10am to 1pm and 3pm to 8pm Sunday. Several stands around Piazza Verdi sell foreign newspapers.

**Feltrinelli** (Map p82; ☎ 091 58 77 85; www.lafeltrinelli.it; Via Maqueda 395-399) Sicily's best foreign-language book section; it has an excellent choice of classics and contemporary titles, maps and Palermo guides.

**Mondadori** (Map p82; ☎ 091 32 54 92; www.mondadori.it; Via Roma 287) A small selection of foreign-language books covering romance, mystery and the classics.

### Emergency

**Central Police** (questura; Map pp78-9; ☎ theft & lost documents 091 21 01 11, foreigners office 091 651 43 30;

Piazza della Vittoria) Go here to report thefts and other petty crimes.

**City Police** (☎ 091 695 41 11) If your car has been towed away, call to find out where to collect it.

### Internet Access

Internet cafés come and go rapidly and your best bet is the internet and cheap-phone-call outlets along Via Maqueda (they stay open all day, and some run until midnight). Prices are generally around €6 per hour. As a result of Italy's antiterrorism laws, you'll be asked to provide ID before you can use a computer; a passport photocopy usually suffices.

**Aboriginal Café** (Map p82; ☎ 091 66 22 22; www.aboriginalcafe.com; Via Spinuzza 51; ☎ 6pm-2am) The most central internet café; it's also an Australian-style bar that gets very busy in the evenings.

### Left Luggage

**Ferry Terminal** (Map pp78-9; Molo Vittorio Veneto; per bag per hr from €1; ☎ 7am-8pm)

**Train Station** (Map p82; Piazza Giulio Cesare; per bag per 12hr €3.90; ☎ 7am-11pm)

### Medical Services

**Ambulance** (☎ 091 30 66 44)

**Farmacia Da Naro** (Map p82; ☎ 091 58 58 69; Via Roma 207; ☎ 24hr)

**Ospedale Civico** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 666 11 11; Via Carmelo Lazzaro)

### Money

There are plenty of ATMs dotted around the city and on all the major streets.

**Cambio** Falcone-Borsellino airport (☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Sat); Train Station (Map p82; ☎ 8am-8pm) These places have exchange offices open outside normal banking hours.

**Ruggieri & Figli** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 58 71 44; Via Enrico Amari 40; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Representatives for American Express; will only cash travellers cheques for card-holders.

### Post

**Main post office** (Map p82; Palazzo delle Poste, Via Roma 322; ☎ 8.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-12.30pm Sat) This impressive monolithic building, propped up on the largest pillars you'll ever see, is one of the few Fascist-era buildings in Palermo. Smaller branch offices can be found at the train station (Map p82) and on Piazza Verdi. All have the same opening hours.

### Tourist Information

**Main tourist office** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 605 81 11; www.palermotourism.com; Piazza Castelnuovo 35;

☎ 8.30am-2pm & 2.30-6pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-2pm Sat) Sicily's regional tourist office is thin on personal help, but offers some very good brochures on Palermo, the most useful of these being the bimonthly *Agenda Turismo* and the *Lapis Palermo* guide, with listings of cultural events.

**Tourist office** Falcone-Borsellino airport (☎ 091 59 16 98; ☎ 8am-noon); Train Station (Map p82; ☎ 091 605 81 11; ☎ 8.30am-2pm & 2.30-6pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-2pm Sat) There are also information booths on Molo Piave (Map pp78-9), Piazza Bellini (Map p82), Piazza Marina (Map p82) and Piazza della Vittoria (Map pp78-9); these are usually open from 9am to 2pm and 3pm to 8pm Monday to Thursday, 8.30am to 8.30pm Friday and Saturday, and 9am to 1pm and 3pm to 7pm Sunday.

### Travel Agencies

You can book train, ferry and air tickets at the following agencies:

**CTS** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 611 07 13; www.cts.it in Italian; Via Nicolò Garzilli 28g) A branch of the national youth-travel agency. Also offers tours of the city.

**Record Viaggi** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 611 09 10; Via Mariano Stabile 168)

**Sestante CIT** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 58 63 33; Viale della Libertà 12)

## DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

The days when Palermo was known as a dangerous city are over, with its traditional trouble spots – in particular the area from Mercato della Vucciria to the port and La Kalsa – the focus of restoration programmes that have made them more pleasant for residents and tourists alike.

That said, do keep your eye on your belongings, especially in crowded market areas and the main intercity bus station on Via Paolo Balsamo, where pickpockets are known to work their fingers. You should also be aware of the existence of bag-snatchers who – you guessed it – snatch bags from pedestrians, operating from speedy scooters; make sure you carry your daily bag draped across your body rather than having it slung over your shoulder. Stay away from poorly lit streets, particularly late at night or if you are alone.

## SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

### Around the Quattro Canti

The busy intersection of Corso Vittorio Emanuele and Via Maqueda marks the **Quattro Canti** (Four Corners; Map p82), the centre of Palermo. This intersection is surrounded by a perfect circle of curvilinear façades that disappear up to the blue vault of the sky in a

**PALERMO**

0 500 ft 0.3 miles

**INFORMATION**

- Central Police.....1 C6
- CitySightseeing Palermo.....2 C4
- CTS.....3 B3
- German Consulate.....4 D3
- Information Booth.....5 C6
- Main Tourist Office.....7 C4
- Ospeale Civico.....8 C7
- Record Viaggi.....9 C4
- Ruggieri & Figli.....10 D3
- Sietatene CIT.....11 C3

**SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES**

- Cappella Palatina.....(see 24)
- Castello della Zisa.....12 A5
- Catacombe dei Cappuccini.....13 A6
- Cathedral.....14 C6
- Chiesa di San Giovanni degli Eremiti.....15 C6
- Chiesa di Sant'Agostino.....16 C5
- Complessa di Santa Maria dello Spasimo.....17 E6
- Convento dei Cappuccini.....(see 13)
- Hammam.....18 E5
- Museo Diocesano.....20 C6

**EATING**

- Antico Caffè Spinnato.....35 C4
- Cucina Papoff.....36 C3
- Il Fritto.....37 C3
- Il Fritto.....(see 33)
- Kursaal K'alhessa.....38 F5
- L'Acanto.....39 C3
- Massaro 2.....40 C7
- Trafforia Biondo.....42 C4

**DRINKING**

- Berlin.....43 C3
- Exit Drinks.....44 C4
- Kursaal K'alhessa.....(see 38)
- Rocket Bar.....45 C4

**ENTERTAINMENT**

- Compagnia Argento.....46 C6
- La Scaba.....47 L1
- Teatro Massimo.....(see 36)
- Teatro Politeama Garibaldi.....(see 27)

**SHOPPING**

- Antico Caffè Spinnato.....(see 35)
- I Pecciatucci di Mamma Andrea.....48 D4
- Mangia.....49 C4
- Silvanna Sansone.....50 C3
- Tre Erre Ceramiche.....51 D3

**TRANSPORT**

- Allitalia.....52 C3
- Azienda Siciliana Trasporti.....53 C7
- Buses for Airport.....54 C4
- Buses for Monreale.....55 B6
- Buses for Monte & Monte Pellegrino.....56 C3
- Ferry Terminal.....57 E3
- Grandi Navi Veloci.....58 D3
- Pietro Barbaro.....59 D4
- Sicily by Car.....60 D4
- Sirena.....61 D4
- Tirrenia Navigazione.....62 D3

**SLEEPING**

- A Casa di Amici B&B.....30 C5
- Albergo Aniston.....31 C4
- Grand Hotel et des Palmes.....32 C4
- Hotel Principe di Villafranca.....33 B3
- Jolly Hotel.....34 F5

**MUSEO INTERNAZIONALE DELLE MARIONETTE**

- Marionette.....21 E5
- Otto Botanico.....22 F6
- Palazzo Chiaramonte.....23 E5
- Palazzo dei Normanni.....24 C6
- Porta Nuova.....25 C6
- Teatro Massimo.....26 C6
- Teatro Politeama Garibaldi.....27 C4
- Tower.....28 C6
- Villa Giulia.....29 F6

**TO GRAND HOTEL VILLA IGREA (1km), MONTELEONE (9km)**

**TO MESSINA (29km), CATANIA (73km), ENNA (135km)**

**TO MONREALE (5km), TRAPANI (104km)**

**See Central Palermo Map (p82)**

**PALERMO**

0 500 ft 0.3 miles

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**TO MONREALE (5km), TRAPANI (104km)**

**See Central Palermo Map (p82)**

## PALERMO IN...

## Two Days

Get up early and have a quick breakfast, Sicilian style, and dive straight into the crowds at the **Mercato della Vucciria** (p96), where you can take in Palermo's spirit, and taste local produce as you go along. Emerge at Corso Vittorio Emanuele and start your sightseeing with the chaos and the fun of the market still in your hair. Explore the **Quattro Canti** (p77) and the **Piazza Pretoria** (below), and find tranquility in the beauty of **La Martorana** (opposite) and **Chiesa Santa Caterina** (below). Walk up Via Maqueda to **Teatro Massimo** (p88) and take a tour around the luxurious building. Finish off your day with a relaxing dinner at **L'Acanto** (p94).

Day two should be another early start. Head for the **Palazzo dei Normanni** (opposite) and the **Cappella Palatina** (opposite), then treat yourself to a coffee and a *cannoli* (pastry shell stuffed with sweet ricotta) at **Massaro** (p94) and gaze at the pink domes of the **Chiesa di San Giovanni degli Eremiti** (p83) on your way back to the centre. Drop into the **cathedral** (p84) on your way to the **Galleria Regionale Siciliana** (p86), where you'll see Sicily's best artwork collection. Spend your afternoon with some classical history at the **Museo Archeologico Regionale** (p85), then sample some imaginative Sicilian cuisine on the terrace of **Kursaal Kalhesa** (p93).

## Four Days

Follow the itinerary for the first two days. On the third day take a bus to Monreale, dominated by the huge **Cattedrale di Monreale** (p99); don't miss the beautiful cloister. For views, you can climb up the tower to the roof. When you return to Palermo, book yourself into the **hammam** (p88) and spend a few hours being pampered.

Day four is ideally spent rummaging around one of Palermo's many **markets** (p96) or, if you're a sun fan, heading out to the beach at **Mondello** (p99). Eat at one of the cheap cafés backing the beach or really splash out at the **Charleston** (p99).

clever feat of perspective. It is known locally as *Il Teatro del Sole* (Theatre of the Sun) as each façade is lit up in turn throughout the course of the day.

In the southwestern corner is the **Chiesa di San Giuseppe dei Teatini** (Map p82; Corso Vittorio Emanuele; admission free; ☎ 8.30-11am & 6-8pm), topped by a soaring cupola. The monumental interior is baroque at its brashest, and has been lovingly restored after it suffered substantial damage during WWII.

## PIAZZA PRETORIA

Across Via Maqueda is Piazza Pretoria (Map p82), a crowd of imposing (and recently restored) churches and buildings that surround the fabulously ostentatious – and, unfortunately, fenced-off – **Fontana Pretoria** (Map p82). The fountain dominates the piazza, with its tiered basins rippling out in concentric circles crowded with nude nymphs, tritons and river gods that leap about the water. Designed by the Florentine sculptor Francesco Camilliani between 1554 and 1555 for the Tuscan villa of Don Pedro di Toledo, the fountain was bought by Palermo in 1573

in a bid to outshine the newly crafted Fontana di Orione installed in Messina. Proudly positioned in front of the **Palazzo Pretorio** (Municipal Hall; Map p82), the fountain's flagrant nudity and leering nymphs proved a bit much for Sicilian churchgoers attending the grandly formal Chiesa di San Giuseppe dei Teatini, and they prudishly dubbed it the *Fontana della Vergogna* (Fountain of Shame).

Closing off the eastern side of the square is the **Chiesa di Santa Caterina** (Map p82; ☎ 338 722 87 75; admission €1; ☎ 9.30am-1pm summer & 25 Nov), Palermo's finest baroque church. Belonging to a Dominican monastery, the church is held in trust by seven very old nuns, who kept the doors of the church shut for 14 years, finally opening them again for visitors on Christmas Eve 2006. The entrance is on Piazza Bellini.

The Dominican monastery was founded around 1310, and it is said that it initially offered refuge mainly to prostitutes. However, the local aristocrats soon took notice of its prominent location and began getting financially involved. With the boost to Catholicism under Spanish rule in the 16th century, the number

of nuns and the pious rose, and the ever-expanding monastery effectively swallowed up the existing church. With the old one bursting at the seams, a new one was needed. The Chiesa di Santa Caterina was then built between 1566 and 1596 by an unknown architect. The rich décor was enhanced by a marble coat in the 17th and 18th centuries, and many of the smooth white statues, gilded stucco and whirling frescoes were added in this period, as well as the carved marble presbytery and the amethyst tabernacle behind the main altar, the altar's silver angels and the silver girds on the confessional boxes. Once you view the church you'll understand why the nuns have been so possessive and secretive over this explosion of baroque.

## LA MARTORANA &amp; CHIESA DI SAN CATALDO

Palermo's most famous – and beautiful – medieval church is **La Martorana** (Chiesa di Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio; Map p82; Piazza Bellini 3; admission free; ☎ 8am-1pm & 3.30-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-1pm Sun), which is often buzzing with wedding ceremonies (always scheduled late morning and usually on Saturdays). This 12th-century structure was the brainchild of King Roger's Syrian emir, George of Antioch, and, like many structures dating from this period, it was originally planned as a mosque. Delicate Fatimid pillars support a domed cupola depicting Christ enthroned amid his archangels, while Arabic script endlessly repeats the name of Allah. The stunning Byzantine mosaics are the legacy of the Greek artisans employed to decorate the church, who brought with them an Orthodox Christian sense of religious décor.

In 1433 the church was given over to a Benedictine order of nuns, founded by Eloisa Martorana (hence its nickname), who tore down the Norman apse, reworked the exterior in a fussy baroque fashion and added their own frescoed chapel, unfortunately at the expense of some of the wonderful mosaic work. Fortunately two of the original mosaics to survive are the portrait of George of Antioch, crouched behind a shield at the feet of the Virgin Mary, and one of Roger II receiving his crown from Christ (the only portrait of him to survive in Sicily).

Mussolini returned the church to the Greek Orthodox community in 1935, and the Greek Mass is still celebrated here.

While La Martorana preserves its interior, the small pink-domed **Chiesa di San Cataldo** (Map p82; Piazza Bellini 3; admission free; ☎ 9am-3.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat, 9am-1pm Sun & public holidays) is almost bare inside. It was founded in the 1150s by Maio of Bari (William I's emir of emirs) but Maio's murder in 1160 meant it was not finished – hence the lack of adornment within. However, the main interest lies in the exterior, which illustrates perfectly the synthesis of Arab-Norman styles.

## Albergheria

Once inhabited by Norman court officials, Albergheria has been a poor and ramshackle quarter since the end of WWII – indeed, you can still see wartime bomb damage scarring some buildings. The area is now home to a growing immigrant population that has revitalised the streets with its aspirations and homesickness. It is also the location of Palermo's busiest market, Mercato di Ballarò (see p96).

## PALAZZO DEI NORMANNI

West along Corso Vittorio Emanuele, past the waving palms in Piazza della Vittoria, rises the fortress palace of **Palazzo dei Normanni** (Palazzo Reale; Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 705 43 17; fax 091 705 47 37; Piazza Indipendenza 1; admission incl Cappella Palatina €6; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon Sun), once the centre of a magnificent medieval court and now the seat of the Sicilian parliament. Guided tours (in Italian only; group visits must be prebooked by fax) take you through the Sicilian parliamentary assembly and to the sumptuous **Sala di Ruggero II**, the king's former bedroom, where some of the only secular mosaics of the day still decorate the walls with Persian peacocks and exotic leopards.

Downstairs, just off the three-tiered loggia, is Palermo's premier tourist attraction, the **Cappella Palatina** (☎ 091 705 48 79; ☎ 9am-11.45am & 3-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-11.45am Sat & Sun), designed by Roger II in 1130. The chapel was under restoration at the time of research, with the ceiling and most of the walls covered by scaffolding, but the work is meant to be finished in the summer of 2008, when you should be able to see the mosaics in renewed shiny splendour.

This is one of the busiest tourist sites in Palermo, so be prepared to queue. Once in possession of your ticket you will have to



## INFORMATION

Aboriginal Café.....	1	A1
British Consulate.....	2	A1
Cambio.....	3	C6
Dutch Consulate.....	4	A1
Farmacia di Naro.....	5	B3
Feltrinelli.....	6	A2
Information Booth.....	7	D3
Information Booth.....	8	B4
Main Post Office.....	9	B2
Mondadori.....	10	B2
Post Office.....	11	D6
Tourist Office.....	12	D6

## SIGHTS &amp; ACTIVITIES

Chiesa della Magione.....	13	D5
Chiesa di San Cataldo.....	14	B4
Chiesa di San Domenico.....	15	B2
Chiesa di San Francesco d'Assisi.....	16	C3
Chiesa di San Giuseppe dei Teatini.....	17	B4
Chiesa di Santa Caterina.....	18	B4
Chiesa di Santa Zita.....	19	C2
Fontana Pretoria.....	20	B4
Galleria d'Arte Moderna.....	21	C4
Giardino Garibaldi.....	(see 29)	
Horse-Drawn Carriages.....	22	B4
Horse-Drawn Carriages.....	23	A2
La Martorana.....	24	B4
Museo Archeologico Regionale.....	25	B2

Oratorio del Rosario di San Domenico.....	(see 15)	
Oratorio del Rosario di Santa Zita.....	(see 19)	
Oratorio di San Lorenzo.....	26	C3
Palazzo Mirto.....	27	D3
Palazzo Pretorio.....	28	B4
Piazza Marina.....	29	D3
Piazza Pretoria.....	30	B4
Piazza San Francesco d'Assisi.....	31	C3
Quattro Canti.....	32	B4

## SLEEPING

4 Quarti.....	33	A4
Ai Cartari.....	34	C3
Allakala.....	35	D2
Ambasciatori Hotel.....	36	C4
B&B Ai Bottai.....	(see 40)	
BB22.....	37	C2
Centrale Palace Hotel.....	38	B4
Hotel del Centro.....	39	C5
Hotel Letizia.....	40	D3
Hotel Tonic.....	41	A1
San Francesco.....	42	D4

## EATING

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## ENTERTAINMENT

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queue once again outside the chapel as minders limit the number of people. The whole process is often badly managed, but don't let yourself be hurried through one of Sicily's finest sights.

The chapel's mosaics are considered one of the world's primary works of art, and with every inch of its bijou interior inlaid with precious marbles and exquisite mosaics the chapel has a jewel-like quality. The mosaics are incredibly sophisticated, capturing expressions, detail and movement with extraordinary grace and delicacy. The bulk of the mosaics recount the tales of the Old Testament, but other scenes recall Palermo's pivotal role in the Crusades, an ironic reference given the fact that the chapel was decorated by Muslim artists. But it's not only the mosaics you should be gazing at – don't miss a good gawp at the wooden *muqarnas* (a decorative device resembling stalactites) ceiling, a masterpiece of honeycomb carving that is unique in a Christian church (and, many speculate, a sign of Roger II's secret identity as a Muslim). The floor too, with its carved marble is breathtaking: marble was as precious as gems during the 12th century, so the value this floor had at the time is almost immeasurable by today's standards.

## PORTA NUOVA

Next to the palace is the Porta Nuova (Map pp78–9), built to celebrate the arrival of Carlos V in Palermo in 1535 after a victory over the Tunisians. Designed in the mannerist style, the gate was partially destroyed by lightning in 1667 and rebuilt with the addition of the conical top. More than 400 years later, it still serves as a demarcation line between the old and new city.

## CHIESA DI SAN GIOVANNI DEGLI EREMITI

Just south of the Palazzo dei Normanni, the **Chiesa di San Giovanni degli Eremiti** (Map pp78–9; ☎ 091 651 50 19; Via dei Benedettini; admission €6; ☎ 9am–1pm & 3–7pm Mon–Sat, 9am–12.30pm Sun & public holidays) is Palermo's best-known example of the Norman-Arab architectural mix. Built under Roger II, it is topped by five red domes and set in a pretty, tree-filled garden with **cloisters** (admission €3) offering temporary respite from the chaos outside. The bare interior of the now deconsecrated church features some badly deteriorated frescoes. The cloisters were undergoing renovation at the time of writing, but were expected to reopen in summer 2008.

There is a **tower** (Map pp78–9; admission free) next door to the church that has lovely views of

the pink domes, with the spires of the cathedral thrown in.

## Capo

Bordering the Albergheria quarter, Il Capo is another web of interconnected streets and blind alleys. Impoverished like its neighbour, it too has its own street trade, Mercato del Capo (see p96) running the length of Via Sant'Agostino. The centrepiece of the quarter is the imposing monastery of **Chiesa di Sant'Agostino** (Map pp78-9; Via Sant'Agostino; admission free; ☎ 8am-noon & 4-5.30pm), which ran the region in medieval times.

## THE CATHEDRAL

Ambitious builders, the Normans converted mosques and palaces, giving rise to the Arab-Norman style that is unique to Sicily. Chief among these is the **cathedral** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 33 43 76; www.cattedrale.palermo.it in Italian; Corso Vittorio Emanuele; admission free; ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Sat, 8am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Sun & public holidays), an extraordinary feast of ziggurat crenellations, majolica cupolas, geometric patterns and blind arches. It's an impressive building that has aesthetically suffered somewhat from the many reworkings during its history (pick from Arab-Norman, Catalan-Gothic, Gothic and neoclassical); with the palms swaying in the foreground, however, the Arab influence is still strong enough to skew your compass.

Construction began in 1184 at the behest of Palermo's archbishop, Walter of the Mill (Gualtiero Offamiglio), an Englishman who was tutor to William II and who held unlimited funds at his disposal and, seemingly, unlimited power in the Kingdom of Sicily. However, he felt his power diminishing with the construction of the magnificent cathedral at Monreale, and thus ordered for Palermo's cathedral to be built. It was erected on the location of a 9th-century mosque (itself built on a former chapel), and a detail from the mosque's original décor is visible at the southern porch, where a column is inscribed with a passage from the Koran. The cathedral's proportions and the grandeur of its exterior became a statement of the power struggle between church and throne occurring at the time, though Walter's death (in 1191) prevented him from seeing the finished building.

Since then the cathedral has been much altered, sometimes with great success (as in

Antonio Gambara's 15th-century three-arched portico that took 200 years to complete and became a masterpiece of Catalan-Gothic architecture), and sometimes with less fortunate results (as in Ferdinando Fuga's clumsy dome, added between 1781 and 1801). Thankfully Fuga's handiwork did not extend to the eastern exterior, which is still adorned with the exotic interlacing designs of Walter's original cathedral. The southwestern façade was laid in the 13th and 14th centuries, and is a beautiful example of local craftsmanship in the Gothic style. The cathedral's entrance is through the three magnificent Catalan-Gothic arches built by Gambara in 1426, which is fronted by gardens and a statue of Santa Rosalia, one of Palermo's patron saints. A recent renovation unearthed a beautiful painted intarsia decoration above the arches, which depicts the tree of life in a complex Islamic-style geometric composition of twelve roundels that show fruit, humans and all kinds of animals. It's thought to date back to 1296.

Although impressive in scale, the interior is a sadly unflamboyant resting place for the royal Norman tombs, which contain the remains of two of Sicily's greatest rulers, Roger II (rear left) and Frederick II of Hohenstaufen (front left). Halfway down the right aisle is a magnificent **treasury** (admission €2; ☎ 8am-6pm Mon-Sat), whose most extraordinary exhibits are the fabulous 13th-century crown of Constance of Aragon (wife of Frederick II), made by local craftsmen in fine gold filigree and encrusted with gems, and a tooth extracted from Santa Rosalia, whose ashes are also kept here in a silver reliquary. For information about the Festino di Santa Rosalia, see p91.

## MUSEO DIOCESIANO

Next to the cathedral is the **Museo Diocesano** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 607 72 15; www.diocesipa.it in Italian; Via Matteo Bonello 2; admission €4.50; ☎ 9.30am-1.30pm Tue-Fri & Sun, 10am-6pm Sat), which houses an important and rather extensive collection of artworks from the cathedral and churches destroyed during WWII; these include paintings, and marble, fresco and mosaic fragments. There's a friendly guide who will explain the significance of each piece (they are largely unmarked), though she speaks Italian and French only. The ground floor holds 15th-century frescoes, along with Byzantine paintings and icons, among which the most beautiful is the 1171 *Madonna della*

*Perla*, rescued from the now-no-more church of San Nicolò Reale. Seek out the room dedicated to the 17th-century Sicilian painter Pietro Novelli (1603-47), who was one of the region's finest and served as a court painter to Spain's ruler, Philip IV. Much influenced by Anthony Van Dyck and Raphael, Novelli often appears in his chiaroscuro paintings. The museum's basement level is a mixture of sculpture, finds from destroyed churches, and paintings of Palermo.

## Vucciria

The shabby Vucciria is known throughout Sicily for its rampant Mercato della Vucciria (see p96), a bustling market filled with shrieking vendors, staring silvery fish, swaying carcasses, fresh fruit and vegetables, and smoking meat grills. The market inspired Sicilian painter Renato Guttuso's most important work, *La Vucciria* (1974), described by Leonardo Sciascia as 'a hungry man's dream'.

Once the heart of poverty-stricken Palermo, and a den of crime and filth, Vucciria illustrated the almost medieval chasm that existed between rich and poor in Sicily up until the 1950s. Though it's still pretty shabby, the quarter attracts tons of visitors and is one of Palermo's most fascinating areas to wander around.

## MUSEO ARCHEOLOGICO REGIONALE

One of the most important museums of its kind in Europe, the wonderful **Museo Archeologico Regionale** (Map p82; ☎ 091 611 68 05; Via Bara all'Olivella 24; admission €6; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-1.30pm Sat, Sun & public holidays) houses an extensive collection of archaeological artefacts. Among its treasures are Phoenician sarcophagi from the 5th century BC, 10,000 Etruscan artefacts, Greek carvings from Selinunte, the Hellenistic *Ariete di bronzo di Siracus* (Bronze Ram of Syracuse), the largest collection of ancient anchors in the world, and finds from archaeological sites throughout the island.

Without a doubt, the museum's most impressive rooms are at the back of the luxuriant cloister. They house the huge, fragmented Gorgon's head (570 BC) from Temple C at Selinunte, and 19 (out of an original 59) of the large lions' heads that formed the spouts of an enormous fountain at Tempio della Vittoria at Himera (see p133), the first Greek colony in Sicily's northern region.

Beyond these is the Sala di Selinunte, featuring the metopes (stone carvings) from the seven Greek temples at Selinunte. The metopes are carved in limestone with marble inserts and were originally vividly colourful – the background was bright blue, while the figures were drenched in crimson. There were originally 12 metopes, but only five remain. Discovered in 1823 by two British archaeologists, they depict scenes full of humour and energy: Heracles fights a wilting Amazon while Actaeon is devoured by his hounds; Perseus, supported by Athena, gleefully beheads the Gorgon (Medusa), who has just given birth to Pegasus; Heracles carries the naughty Cercopes twins on a pole for trying to steal his weapons, while they, hung upside down, laugh at his sunburnt bum.

Upstairs, room after room houses delicate painted vases and a rare collection of Etruscan mirrors. The 1st floor is fantastic for children, with dozens of animal figurines lining the cabinets in the corridors and an entire room dedicated to explaining some of the mythical animal sculptures.

The museum is wheelchair-friendly.

## CHIESA DI SAN DOMENICO

About 200m southeast of the museum, off Via Roma, is the **Chiesa di San Domenico** (Map p82; ☎ 091 58 48 72; Piazza San Domenico; admission free; ☎ 9-11.30am Mon-Fri, 5-7pm Sat & Sun). It was built in 1640 following the design of architect Andrea Cirincione; the façade was added in 1726 after the buildings that once occupied the square were demolished to give the church some space. The church has been the place where Italian VIPs have been buried since the Middle Ages; among the tombs and cenotaphs of notable Sicilians, you'll find the names of parliamentarian Ruggero Settimo, painter Pietro Novelli, and the former Italian prime minister Francesco Crispi.

More exciting than the church is its oratory, **Oratorio del Rosario di San Domenico** (Map p82; Via dei Bambinai 2; admission free; ☎ 9am-1pm Mon-Fri, 2-5.30pm Sat), which is dominated by Anthony Van Dyck's fantastic blue-and-red altarpiece, *The Virgin of the Rosary with St Dominic and the Patronesses of Palermo*. Van Dyck left Palermo in fear of the plague, and painted the work in Genoa in 1628. There are also paintings by Pietro Novelli, while Giacomo Serpotta's stuccowork (from 1720)

is some of the most amazing you'll see; his elaborate work, vivacious and whirling with figures, brought rococo to Sicilian churches. Serpotta's name meant 'lizard' or 'small snake', and he often included one of the reptiles in his work as a sort of signature.

#### CHIESA DI SANTA ZITA

The nearby 14th-century **Chiesa di Santa Zita** (Map p82; Via Valverde 3; admission free; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) church is named after the tired patron saint of domestic servants. The church's funerary chapels are particularly lavish, thanks to the clever idea of the Dominican priests who acquired the church in the 16th century to allow rich families to bury their dead here, thus collecting income for the priests' monastery. There are some fine sculptures by Antonio Gagini here but, again, the real beauty is in the adjoining 17th-century **Oratorio del Rosario di Santa Zita** (Map p82; Via Valverde 3; admission free; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat), where you can see more of Serpotta's breathtaking stuccos. Indeed, this is where his work is at its best. The real masterpiece is the elaborate *Battle of Lepanto* on the entrance wall, depicting the Christian victory over the Turks, a scene that is framed by stucco drapes held by hundreds of naughty cherubs who were modelled on Palermo's street urchins.

#### La Kalsa

Plagued by poverty, La Kalsa is one of the city's most notorious neighbourhoods and, at least until a few years ago, most visitors were advised to keep away once the sun went down. Certainly Mother Teresa considered it no better than the Third World and even established a mission here. Rightfully shamed, the authorities were galvanised into action and the quarter is now the main beneficiary of the Palermo restoration project.

#### GALLERIA REGIONALE SICILIANA

The arterial Via Alloro hides Palermo's best museum, the wonderful **Galleria Regionale Siciliana** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 623 00 11; Via Alloro 4; admission €6; ☎ 9am-2pm Mon & Fri, 9am-2pm & 3-8pm Tue, Wed & Thu, 9.30am-1.30pm Sat & Sun), full of treasures and paintings from the Middle Ages to the 18th century. The building itself is a gorgeous Catalan-Gothic palace sensitively transformed into an exhibition space in 1957 by Carlo Scarpa, one of Italy's leading designers.

The gallery gives a great insight into Sicilian painting – an art form sadly lacking in more recent years – and numbers among its treasures the *Trionfo della Morta* (Triumph of Death), a magnificent fresco. Mounted on his wasted horse, demonic Death wields a wicked-looking scythe, leaping over his hapless victims (notably the vain and pampered aristocrats of Palermo) while the poor and hungry look on from the side. The huge image, carefully restored, has sensibly been given its own room and can be viewed both at ground level and from a galleried platform.

Other treasures include a remarkable 12th-century Arab doorframe and Antonello da Messina's well-known panel of the *Assunzione* (Assumption). It is interesting to see Messina's work alongside the sculptures of Francesco Laurana, most notably his exquisite bust of *Eleonara di Aragona*, which is exhibited in Room 4. Both artists specialise in an economy of detail that lends their paintings and sculptures a perfect stillness that sets them apart from those of their contemporaries. In Laurana's case this is starkest when compared to the saccharine sweetness of the pearly white Madonnas of Domenico Gagini and his son Antonello. Like the Mona Lisa, Eleonara's grace and beauty are timeless.

#### GALLERIA D'ARTE MODERNA

Moved from its abode inside the walls of Teatro Politeama, Palermo's **Galleria d'Arte Moderna** (Map p82; ☎ 091 843 16 05; www.galleriadartemodernapalermo.it; Via Sant'Anna 21; adult/child €7/free; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm Tue-Sun) is located in a wonderfully restored old complex. The building's interior is sleek and very 'modern art', but the art itself is unfortunately not very heartstopping. Divided over three floors, the artwork is dedicated largely to Sicily and Palermo as its subjects, thus ruling out pieces that might be otherwise interesting and brightening to the collection. The gallery's highlights are the paintings of Michele Catti (1855-1914), whose large canvases portray moody scenes of *fin-de-siècle* life in Palermo's streets. The *Ultime foglie* (Last Leaves; 1906) is a beautiful image of a wet Viale della Libertà on a late autumn day. Also interesting is the 1930s painting by Corrado Cagli (1910-76), on the 2nd floor, depicting Mussolini's programme of land irrigation around Rome; in the painting, Cagli

combined an ancient wax-painting method and a modernist style. *Il tram*, painted by Mario Sironi (1885-1961) and *Le nozze*, by Massimo Campigli (1895-1971), are fun products of futurism.

#### MUSEO INTERNAZIONALE DELLE MARIONETTE

With over 3000 puppets, marionettes, glove puppets and shadow figures, the **Museo Internazionale delle Marionette** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 32 80 60; www.museomarionettepalermo.it in Italian; Via Butera 1; adult/child €5/2.50; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) is almost single-handedly preserving the popular puppet culture that has long been a feature of Sicily's big-city life; see p64 for more information on puppet theatre. Established by the Association for the Conservation of Popular Traditions, the museum's collection derives from Palermo, Catania and Naples, as well as from far-flung places such as China, India, southern Asia, Turkey and Africa. There is also a room where children can play with the puppets and even try to create their own.

The museum stages shows on Fridays at 5.30pm in the autumn and winter months. Every year, puppeteers from all over the world converge on the museum for the Festa di Morgana, which the museum sponsors.

#### PIAZZA SAN FRANCESCO D'ASSISI

The Piazza San Francesco d'Assisi (Map p82) is Palermo's picture-perfect piazza, overlooked by the charming **Chiesa di San Francesco d'Assisi** (Map p82; Piazza San Francesco d'Assisi; admission free; ☎ 9am-noon Mon, 9am-4pm Tue-Fri, 9am-noon Sat), which features a fine rose window and a flamboyant Gothic portal; it's understandably popular on the wedding circuit. The church's most interesting feature is the rare arch of the **Cappella Mastrantonio** (Chapel of Mastrantonio), carved in 1468 by Francesco Laurana and Pietro da Bonitate, and one of the only true examples of Renaissance art in Palermo. The church also showcases sculptures by the Gagini family, Giambattista Ragusa and Giacomo Serpotta.

Nearby is another of Serpotta's extravagant stucco oratories, the **Oratorio di San Lorenzo** (Map p82; Via dell'Immacolatella; admission free; ☎ 9am-noon Mon-Fri), built in 1569 by the Compagnia di San Francesco. The work includes a series of panels with details from the lives of St Lawrence and St Francis, the best of which is

the *Martirio di San Lorenzo* (Martyrdom of St Lawrence), on the far wall. A large *Natività* (Nativity) by Caravaggio once hung on the wall behind the altar, but it was stolen in 1969 and has never been found.

#### PIAZZA MARINA

Surrounded on all sides by elegant palazzi, gentrified Piazza Marina (Map p82) is Palermo's quietest piazza, and its small **Giardino Garibaldi** (Map p82; Piazza Marina; admission free; ☎ 24hr) encloses Palermo's oldest tree, a venerable 25m-high, 150-year-old *figus ben-jamin*. Dedicated to Garibaldi, the square has witnessed its fair share of bloody executions – something that's unsurprising given that the largest palazzo on the square, the imposing 14th-century **Palazzo Chiaramonte** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 33 41 39; Piazza Marina 60) was the headquarters of the Inquisition. Now part of the University of Palermo, it is only open for special exhibitions.

Just off the piazza is one of the only palazzi open to the public, **Palazzo Mirto** (Map p82; ☎ 091 616 75 41; Via Merlo 2; adult/child €3/2; ☎ 9am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun). Considering Palermitan extravagances, the palazzo is actually pretty modest. Its walls are covered in acres of silk and velvet wallpaper, and vast embroidered wall hangings, while its floors are paved in coloured marbles and mosaics. The real extravagance, however, is the tiny **Salottino Cinese** (Chinese Salon) full of black lacquer, silken wallpaper and a rather conceited ceiling painting of European aristos viewing the room from above.

#### COMPLESSA DI SANTA MARIA DELLO SPASIMO & CHIESA DELLA MAGIONE

Behind the Galleria Regionale Siciliana is the **Complessa di Santa Maria dello Spasimo** (☎ 091 616 14 86; Via Spasimo; admission free; ☎ 9am-midnight), with its elegant polygonal apse and a tall slender nave that has stood for centuries without a roof. The only example of northern Gothic in Sicily, the church was built by a wealthy doctor, Girolamo Basilio, on his return from the Holy Land in the early 1500s. The good doctor then commissioned Raffaello Sanzio (1483-1520) to produce a panel painting for the altar, the *Spasimo di Sicilia*, but this is now sadly missing, having been spirited away to Madrid (it now hangs in the Prado) by the viceroy Ferdinando d'Ayala, who bribed the not-so-saintly abbot. The complex is now one

of the success stories of the restoration programme, having reopened in 1995 as a venue for concerts and exhibitions (evenings from June to end of September).

Across Piazza Magione from Lo Spasimo is the **Chiesa della Magione** (Map p82; ☎ 091 617 05 96; Via Magione 44; admission free; ☞ 9.30am-6.30pm), also known as La Magione. It's a fine example of the more austere Romanesque style that the Normans brought to Sicily.

### The 19th-Century City

North of Piazza Giuseppe Verdi, Palermo's streets widen, the buildings lengthen, and the shops, restaurants and cafés become more elegant (and more expensive). Glorious neo-classical and Art Nouveau examples from the last golden age in Sicilian architecture give the city an exuberant and grandiose feel that contrasts with the narrow, introspective feel of the old quarter.

### TEATRO MASSIMO

Built between 1875 and 1897 by Giovanni Battista Basile and subsequently his son, Ernesto, to celebrate the unification of Italy, **Teatro Massimo** (☎ 091 605 31 11, toll free 800 65 58 58; www.teatromassimo.it; tours adult/concession €5/3; ☞ 10am-3.30pm Tue-Sun) has become a symbol of the triumph and tragedy of Palermo itself. Supposedly the third-largest 19th-century opera house in Europe (only the Paris and Vienna Opera Houses are larger), its long history is symptomatic of the conflicting powers that struggle for supremacy in Palermo society – civic pride and cultural creativity pitted against the sinister bureaucracy and Mafia control (which is said to have been responsible for the extraordinary 24 years it took to restore the theatre). Appropriately, the closing scene of *The Godfather III*, with its visually stunning juxtaposition of high culture and low crime, drama and death, was filmed here.

Giovanni Basile was Palermo's most popular architect in the years preceding WWI and, in addition to the theatre, he also designed the two kiosks outside it, which now sell newspapers, tobacco and magazines.

Tours run every 30 minutes. See p95 for box-office and performance details.

### TEATRO POLITEAMA GARIBALDI

Palermo's second theatre, the **Teatro Politeama Garibaldi** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 605 33 15; Piazza Ruggero

Settimo), was designed in classical form by Giuseppe Damiani Almeyda between 1867 and 1874. It features a particularly striking façade that looks like a triumphal arch topped by bronze chariots. The theatre is only open for performances.

### HAMMAM

You'll hardly need any more heat if you're here in the summer, but you'll surely crave some peace and tranquillity after you've been schlepping around the busy streets of Palermo all day. In case of the latter, head over to the city's only **hammam** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 32 07 83; www.hammam.pa.it; Via Torreaarsa 17d; admission €30; ☞ men 10am-10pm Tue, Thu & Sat, women 10am-10pm Mon, Wed & Fri), a modern affair with a lavish marble-faced bath hall and a mean, brick-domed steam room. The changing rooms are spacious and clean, and all the kit you need is supplied: black olive soap, *ghassoul* (a mixture of clay mud, rose petals and lavender), henna for softening the skin, and a vicious scrubbing glove and slippers; there's a one-off charge of €7 to buy your own glove and slippers, which for hygiene reasons can't be borrowed.

After your scrub you can indulge in any number of massages and therapies, which range in price from €15 to €40, or you can simply relax with a mint tea and Arabian sweets in the cooling-off room or café.

### Outside the City Centre

#### CASTELLO DELLA ZISA

A short bus or car journey southwest from Piazza Castelnuovo leads to **Castello della Zisa** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 652 02 69; Piazza Zisa; admission €6; ☞ 9am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat & Sun), one of the only remaining monuments to the decadence of Moorish Palermo. With *muqarnas* vaults, latticework windows, fountains and even a wind chamber to protect the emir's family from the *scirocco* (the hot African wind), the villa deserves its name, which comes from the Arabic *al aziz*, meaning 'magnificent'. Today it houses a museum of Arabic crafts, the main features of which are some superbly crafted screens and a gorgeous 12th-century bronze basin. Take bus 124 from Piazza Ruggero Settimo.

#### CATACOMBE DEI CAPPUCCINI

Despite its famous manuscript collection and the tomb of novelist Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa in the adjoining cemetery, the

**Convento dei Cappuccini** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 21 21 17; Via Cappuccini 1; admission to church & catacombs €1.50; ☞ 9am-noon & 3-5pm) is best known for its altogether more macabre catacombs, where the mummified bodies of some 8000 Palermitans who died between the 17th and 19th centuries are on show.

Originally the preserve of monks, the catacombs were eventually opened to a select and moneyed few who made substantial donations of land or money to the monastery. For their pains, these lucky individuals were laid out 'to drain' – ugh – after death, before being washed with vinegar, and powdered with arsenic and milk of lime. They were then dressed in their Sunday best and propped up in their very own niche.

Earthly power, sex, religion and professional status are rigidly distinguished. Men and women occupy separate corridors, and within the women's area there is a first-class section for virgins. The most disconcerting sight is the near-perfectly preserved body of Rosalia Lombardo (just follow the signs for *bambina* or 'baby girl'), who died at the tender age of two in 1920. Gory and perturbing, the catacombs are one of the city's premier tourist attractions.

### Public Parks

Palermo has a number of pleasant parks. **Villa Giulia** (Map pp78-9; Via Abramo Lincoln; ☞ 8am-8pm) in La Kalsa is a welcome relief from the claustrophobic streets, although its formal planting scheme is severely challenged by the rampant fecundity of the island.

Laid out by Léon Dufourny and Venanzio Marvuglia, the gorgeous **Orto Botanico** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 623 82 41; www.ortobotanico.palermo.it; Via Abramo Lincoln 2b; adult/concession €4/2; ☞ 9am-1.30pm & 2.30-7.30pm) is a tropical paradise, with massive fig trees, tall palms and dazzling hibiscus bushes. There is an avenue of the bizarre-looking bottle, soap and cinnamon trees, as well as coffee trees, papaya plants and sycamores. It's a real haven of silence and fascinating botany, with a large herb garden that focuses on Mediterranean plants. Beware the mosquitos at dusk though.

About 3km to the north of the centre is Palermo's biggest park, the **Parco della Favorita** (off Map pp78-9; admission free; ☞ 24hr). Ferdinand purchased the land in 1799 and commissioned the original layout, and he lived in the extraordinary Chinese pagoda palace,

the **Palazzina Cinese** (☞ closed to the public), with his wife during his exile from Naples. Originally built as Ferdinand's hunting lodge by Venanzio Marvuglia, the *palazzina* is an odd but charming mixture of Chinese and neoclassical styles (if you can imagine such a thing).

The palace also houses the **Museo Etnografico Pitirè** (off Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 740 48 79; Via Duca degli Abruzzi 1; admission €5; ☞ 8.30am-8pm Mon-Thu & Sat), Sicily's best ethnographic museum. It holds over 5000 objects, including traditional costumes, pottery, puppets, votive offerings, torture instruments and a model of the 18th-century Carrozza di Santa Rosalia (a massive cart used to carry the effigy of the saint through the streets during the Festino di Santa Rosalia).

### WALKING TOUR

Palermo is a dense city and is best explored on foot. This itinerary covers the eastern half of the city and the labyrinthine alleys of La Kalsa.

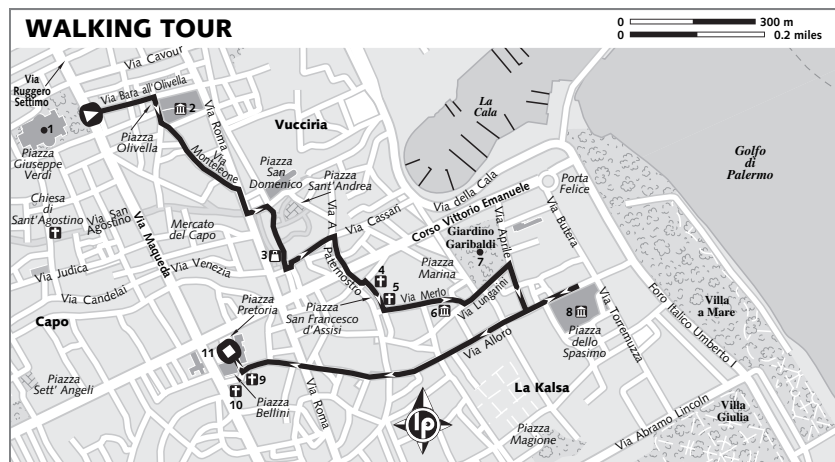
Start at Piazza Giuseppe Verdi, dominated by the neoclassical **Teatro Massimo** (1; opposite). Facing south, turn left down Via Bara all'Olivella to arrive at the **Museo Archeologico Regionale** (2; p85), which houses one of Sicily's finest collections of classical art.

Next head southeast down Via Monteleone towards Via Roma. Walk along Via Roma and then take the steps alongside Chiesa di Sant'Antonio, which should bring you into the heart of **Mercato della Vucciria** (3; p96). Exit the market and cross into Via Alessandro Paternostro to arrive at the pretty Piazza San Francesco d'Assisi. Look into the **Oratorio di San Lorenzo** (4; p87) for some stupendous stuccowork, then pop into the **Chiesa di San Francesco d'Assisi** (5; p87) to see the Cappella Mastrantonio by Francesco Laurana and fine sculptures by the Gagini family.

Heading east down Via Merlo will bring you to **Palazzo Mirto** (6; p87), before you emerge at Piazza Marina and the tranquil **Giardino Garibaldi** (7; p87). Pick up Via IV Aprile in the southeast corner of the square and walk south. This should bring you to Via Alloro, where a left turn leads to the **Galleria Regionale Siciliana** (8; p86).

To finish, head west along Via Alloro, then cross Via Roma to reach Piazza Bellini, with the glittering mosaics of **La Martorana** (9; p81) and the peculiar pink domes of **Chiesa**





### WALK FACTS

**Start** Piazza Giuseppe Verdi  
**Finish** Piazza Pretoria  
**Duration** 1½ hours

di San Cataldo (10; p81). Finish up at Piazza Pretoria, where you can see vast **Fontana Pretoria** (11; p80).

### PALERMO FOR CHILDREN

Palermo is a friendly place for children, though the heavy traffic is not too pleasant for the little ones. There are, however, tons of fun things to do – and there is always good ice cream! Palermo has a couple of good, child-friendly museums: at the Museo Internazionale delle Marionette (p87), Sicily's biggest puppet museum, children can make their own puppets or watch the daily puppet show, while the Museo Archeologico Regionale (p85) is a great introduction to the classical world.

Little ones will be as fascinated as you are by the endless noise and bustle of the Mercato della Vucciria (p96), while a horse-drawn carriage (right) is a great way to take a turn around the historic centre; you can pick them up at Teatro Massimo and Piazza Pretoria.

If the bustle of the city all gets too much for the kids, head for the sandy beaches and waterfront eateries of Mondello (p99). Also located outside the city limits, Ustica (p100) is the perfect place for older children who like to

indulge in all manner of activities, including walking, snorkelling, diving and cycling.

### TOURS

You do not need a guide to enjoy Palermo. However, should you want one, the official rate set by the tourist office is a whopping €116 per half-day and €180 per day (up to 50 people). It is better to contact individual guides separately to negotiate a price for smaller groups.

**Associazione Guide Turistiche di Palermo e Provincia** (☎ 091 30 84 10; www.palermoguide.eu) The first independent guide service set up in Palermo. It has an extensive list of guides on its website.

**CitySightseeing Palermo** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 58 94 29; www.palermo.city-sightseeing.it; Piazza Castelnuovo 6; adult/child €20/10) The pan-European-bus-tour company takes you around central Palermo (Linea A) or out to Giardini Inglese and Castello della Zisa (Linea B). Commentary in eight languages, you can hop on and off the buses, and the tickets are valid for 24 hours. Both tours start at Teatro Politeama.

**Horse-drawn carriage** (Map p82; tours €50) A fun, though rather *puzzolente* (smelly) way to get around the city. You can find the old carriages, which carry two to four people, at Teatro Massimo and Piazza Pretoria.

### FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Palermo hosts tons of religious processions throughout the year. Information about local festivals can be found on the website of the **tourist office** (www.palermotourism.com).

**Easter Holy Week** This major religious festival is celebrated virtually all over the island. In Palermo there are Greek Orthodox celebrations at La Martorana.

**Palermo di Scena** Music, theatre, cinema and ballet programmes run throughout the summer.

**Festino di Santa Rosalia** Held between 10 and 15 July, Palermo's biggest annual festival celebrates Santa Rosalia, the patron saint of the city. The saint's relics are paraded through the city amid four days of fireworks and partying. It's a great time to be in the city.

**Festa di Morgana** (www.museomariettepalermo.it in Italian) Puppeteers from all over the world gather at Museo Internazionale delle Marionette (p87) for this festival. Dates vary so check the website.

**Opera Season** Teatro Massimo (p88) commences its opera season in December; it ends in May.

### SLEEPING

Palermo has a wide range of accommodation, though finding really good budget sleeps is a tad more difficult than in the rest of Sicily. Prices in Sicily, and especially in Palermo, fluctuate depending on season and demand. You should book in advance at the better places, particularly between June and October. Prepare to lug suitcases up steep stairs in the older buildings.

All the midrange and top-end hotels are located north of the Quattro Canti, around Piazza Giuseppe Verdi and in the newer part of Palermo. Most of the budget options can be found on Via Roma towards the train station; this is not a good option for lone women travellers.

A useful agency that specialises in B&Bs and apartments in and around Palermo is **Sicily Location** (☎ 347 519 03 15; www.sicilylocation.com).

### Budget

**A Casa di Amici B&B** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 58 48 84; www.acasadiamici.com; Via Volturmo 6; dm €22.50-25, s with shared bathroom €35-45, d with shared bathroom €55-65; ☎ ☑ ☒) Palermo's only hostel-type place, this spot has a friendly atmosphere, youthful clientele and a slightly wacky owner named Claudia. It's near Teatro Massimo in a renovated 19th-century palazzo, with four lovely rooms that sleep from two to four people. Each room has a different theme, but all have high ceilings, colourful walls and 'ethnic' décor. There are shared bathrooms and a kitchen.

**Hotel Regina** (☎ 091 611 42 16; www.hotelregina.palermo.it; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 316; s with shared bathroom €28, d with shared bathroom €48-58) You won't find many rooms cheaper than this in Palermo – especially not in such a central location. The

### TOP FIVE STYLISH SLEEPS IN PALERMO

- 4 Quarti (p92)
- Allakala (p92)
- BB22 (p92)
- Grand Hotel Villa Igia (p93)
- Hotel del Centro (p92)

rooms are neat and simple, with nice blue walls, airy gauze curtains, large windows and ceiling fans, but there's no air con and the shared bathrooms are not massively clean come the end of the day; the most inconvenient thing is the midnight curfew.

**ourpick B&B 316** (☎ 091 611 42 16; www.hotelreginapalermo.it; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 316; s €30-40, d €50-80; ☎ ☑ ☒) Run by the same family as the Hotel Regina, this is a more upmarket place with a decent breakfast and a lovely roof terrace. The rooms are large, with good bathrooms and views of the roof and church tops of old Palermo; again, the price and location are excellent. Bizarrely, the air conditioning is only available between 5pm and 7am.

**Albergo Orientale** (☎ 091 616 57 27; www.albergoorientale.191.it; Via Maqueda 26; s €30-50, d €45-70) This fantastic hotel in a crumbling 18th-century palazzo is as atmospheric as you're going to get in the capital. The rooms are clean (the cheapest ones have shared bathrooms), with wrought-iron beds, high ceilings and nice big windows. Check your room before you commit, though, because some can be a bit boxy.

**ourpick Albergo Ariston** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 33 24 34; www.aristonpalermo.it; Via Mariano Stabile 139; s €40-49, d €50-69; ☎ ☑ ☒) Palermo's best budget hotel is set inside an inconspicuous tower block in a great location in the new part of town. The place is impeccably clean and simply decorated, and there's even wi-fi access. The double rooms are spacious. Breakfast is optional (€2.50), and can be brought to your room if you're feeling lazy.

### Midrange

**Ai Cartari** (Map p82; ☎ 091 611 63 72; www.aicartari.com; Via Alessandro Paternostro 62; 2-bedroom apt per person €45-60; ☎ ☑ ☒) This B&B comprises two nicely decorated apartments, each with its own front door that's separate from the main building. Both suites sleep up to five people, and secure

parking is available for €10 per day. English and French are spoken by the owners.

**Ambasciatori Hotel** (Map p82; ☎ 091 616 68 81; www.ambasciatorihotelpalermo.com; Via Roma 111; s €55-75, d €85-105; P ☎) This place was recently renovated to resemble a semiposh hotel, with a gleaming, chandelier-lit reception and breakfast area, but the glitz unfortunately doesn't carry on into the rooms. Sitting on the 5th floor of an old palazzo, the hotel has a marvellous rooftop terrace where you can eat your breakfast in the morning and sip cocktails in the evening.

**San Francesco** (Map p82; ☎ 091 888 83 91; www.sanfrancescopalermo.it; Via Merlo 30; s/d €60/90; ☎) Tiny and family run, San Francesco has three lovely rooms, one with a vaulted roof, and the other two with traditional wood-beamed ceilings. Decorated with old radios and bits of antiques, it's a cosy and good-value place to stay in the old town.

**Hotel del Centro** (Map p82; ☎ 091 617 03 76; www.hoteldelcentro.it; Via Roma 72; s €65-100, d €85-120; P ☎) This great little hotel has tasteful, elegant rooms decorated in greens and browns, plus wrought-iron beds, traditional floor tiles and floral prints on the walls. The bathrooms are humungous, and the high ceilings are covered with original 19th-century paintings.

**our pick Allakala** (Map p82; ☎ 091 743 47 63; www.allakala.it; Corso Vittoria Emanuele 71; s €75-100, d €95-130; ☎) A B&B that's a shrine to stylish design, Allakala overlooks the old part of the port and has a fantastic central location. The rooms whisper 'pampering' with their tasteful and soothing whites and blues, the décor is minimal, and the bathrooms are gorgeous. Breakfast is brought to your room on a silver tray.

**Hotel Letizia** (Map p82; ☎ 091 58 91 10; www.hotelletizia.com; Via dei Bottai 30; s/d €85/115; ☎) This little hotel off the quaint Piazza Marina has faux-aristo décor that sometimes verges on tacky. There is also a small terrace on which you can enjoy your breakfast (€5). The cheaper B&B Ai Bottai (single/double €65/€85), upstairs, has some screamingly over-the-top rooms with black walls and golden bedspreads; it has the same contact information as Hotel Letizia.

**Hotel Tonic** (Map p82; ☎ 091 58 17 54; www.hoteltonic.com; Via Mariano Stabile 126; s €85-90, d €110; ☎) A friendly and efficient hotel, though a little on the impersonal side. The rooms are comfortable, with two reserved for people with disabilities.

**our pick 4 Quarti** (Map p82; ☎ 091 58 36 87; www.quattroquarti.it; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 376; s/d €100/120; ☎) A fabulously decorated B&B in a 17th-century building that belonged to a nobleman's family, 4 Quarti feels like you're the aristocrats' guest, with plush antiques, shiny chandeliers and heavy drapes. The four rooms are supercomfortable, the owners are friendly and the location is excellent.

**Jolly Hotel** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 616 50 90; www.jollyhotels.it; Foro Italo Umberto I; s €117-132, d €136-172; P ☎) Large, modern and drab in a 1980s style, the Jolly Hotel's redeeming features are its seafront location opposite the Villa Giulia park, rooms with sea views and its big pool (open from 15 May to 9 September). If you have children, this is a decent option.

**our pick BB22** (Map p82; ☎ 335 790 87 33; www.bb22.it; 22 Largo Cavalieri di Malta; s €100-115, d €130-150, ste s €120-170, d €140-200; ☎) It calls itself a B&B, but this place is a little palace of luxury, with rooms so elegant and stylish you'll hardly want to go out. It's all virginal whites, silky quilts, quirky designer lamps and plasma TVs. The beds are as firm as Brad Pitt's buttocks, and the suite is pure honeymoon material with its freestanding bath (right in front of the bed), gorgeous wooden floors, antique furniture, a walk-in wardrobe, and a kitchenette with – of course – designer crockery.

## Top End

**Grand Hotel et des Palmes** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 602 81 11; www.grandhoteldespalme.it; Via Roma 398; s/d €103/191; P ☎) Like a royal court, this hotel has been the scene of intrigues, double-dealings and liaisons throughout Palermo's history, although it was abandoned by the elite in the 1970s in favour of Villa Igia. The grand salons still impress with their huge chandeliers and gigantic mirrors, while the rooms are sumptuously decked out.

**Centrale Palace Hotel** (Map p82; ☎ 091 33 66 66; www.centralepalacehotel.it; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 327; s €130-170, d €160-210; P ☎) Thoroughly elegant, this renovated 18th-century palazzo right next to the Quattro Canti prides itself on its high level of service. It also has an excellent rooftop restaurant with views over Palermo.

**Hotel Principe di Villafranca** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 611 85 23; www.principedivillafranca.it; Via Turrisi Colonna 4; s €150-206, d €220-332; P ☎) Furnished with Sicilian antiques and expensive linens, this hotel is situated just west of Viale della Libertá in one of the most exclusive areas of Palermo.

Its excellent restaurant Il Firriato, cosy library with a huge fireplace, and cutting-edge gym make this the ultimate in discreet luxury.

**Grand Hotel Villa Igia** (off Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 54 37 44; www.hotelvillaiגיעpalermo.com; Salita Belmonte 43; s/d €172/330; P ☎) What can you say about an Art Nouveau villa that was designed by Ernesto Basile for the Florio family (of tuna and Marsala-wine fame)? You know it's going to be magnificent. It sits 3km north of the city centre, luxuriating in its five stars and its status as the best hotel in Palermo. It has its own beach, swimming pool, tennis court, you name it. Best of all, prices drop by 50% in the low season, so check rates with the hotel before you book.

## EATING

There's lots of good food to be had in Palermo, though you'll have to be discerning when choosing a restaurant in the streets around Teatro Massimo. Palermitans generally dine late and although kitchens open around 7.30pm, you'll eat alone if you get to a restaurant before 9.30pm. Eating with the locals makes a huge difference to a restaurant's atmosphere, but make sure you book in advance for dinner after 9pm in most places.

## Restaurants

### BUDGET

**our pick Focceria del Massimo** (Map p82; ☎ 091 33 56 28; Via Bara all'Olivella 76; meals €8-10; ☎) closed Sun) This is one of Palermo's best places for lunch, and not only for those of you wanting a bit of cheap grub. The *foccherie* are traditionally workmen's eateries, and the system of choosing and ordering from the counter can be a bit daunting until you get the hang of it. There's a board with the daily specials and an antipasti buffet that you can pick from, so get a plate of antipasti – grilled aubergines, artichokes, green beans and olives – and a *primo* (first course) of the daily pasta (€2 per plate), finishing with a slice of fresh watermelon in the summer months. It's better to get here around 2.30pm, when the lunch crowds have dispersed.

**Antica Focceria di San Francesco** (Map p82; ☎ 091 32 02 64; Via Alessandro Paternostro 58; meals €10-15; ☎) closed Mon) A Palermitan institution popular with working men and families, this is one of the city's oldest eating houses; it opened in 1834, and even hosted the first Sicilian parliament. You may find its

## TOP FIVE PLACES TO EAT

- Focceria del Massimo (left)
- Kursaal Kalhesa (below)
- L'Acanto (p94)
- Massaro (p94)
- Osteria dei Vespri (p94)

reputation better than its food, though the age-old Palermitan snack of *panino con la milza* (sandwich of veal innards and ricotta cheese) is worth trying.

**Casa del Brodo** (Map p82; ☎ 091 32 16 55; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 175; meals €20; ☎) closed Wed) This old-school trattoria (informal restaurant) has had soup as its speciality for more than 100 years, though the fresh fish and seafood are highly recommended by the locals. The *tortellini in brodo* (tortellini pasta in broth) is truly restorative after a hard day's sightseeing.

**Les Amis** (Map p82; ☎ 091 616 66 42; Piazza San Carlo 9; fixed menu €20; ☎) closed Tue evening) A great spot for a fixed lunch menu of fish, Les Amis has had consistently good recommendations over the years. It's decorated in the classic Italian style, with terracotta walls and peachy lighting.

**Sant'Andrea** (Map p82; ☎ 091 33 49 99; Piazza Sant'Andrea 4; meals €20-30; ☎) closed Tue & Jan) Right in the heart of Vucciria, this good restaurant serves fresh food from the market. It was the regular haunt of Peter Robb while he researched *Midnight in Sicily*, and the brooding atmosphere of the book mirrors that of the restaurant. The pasta is superb.

## MIDRANGE

**La Cambusa** (Map p82; ☎ 091 58 45 74; Piazza Marina 17; meals €25; ☎) closed Sun) La Cambusa is a local favourite, and its proximity to the old port makes it a serious fish restaurant. You select your fish from the cold counter (around €35 per kilogram) and the staff whisk it off to be cooked. Although the restaurant has a great atmosphere in the evenings, the busier it is, the more inattentive the service becomes.

**our pick Kursaal Kalhesa** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 616 22 82; www.kursaalkalhesa.it in Italian; 21 Foro Italo Umberto I; meals €25-30; ☎) closed Mon lunch & Sun evening) Recline on silk-covered cushions beneath soaring vaulted ceilings or sit outside in the expansive garden while you savour crispy Tunisian *brik* (pastries) and aromatic

*fettucine con vongole e gamberi* (fettucine with clams and prawns). The mains are meaty, with veal and lamb steaks, and the *granite* (flavoured crushed ice) are perfect for dessert. The cocktail and wine lists are extensive.

**our pick** **L'Acanto** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 32 04 44; Via Torrearsa 10; meals €25-35; ☎ closed Mon) The decoration is gorgeous, the food delicious and the staff friendly at this elegant restaurant that sits at the end of a small street in new Palermo. The menu is traditional with a modern twist, sprinkled with some excellent fresh seafood and grilled fish, and there's a decent wine list for boozy dinners. You eat by candlelight under canvas canopies in the leafy back garden.

**Trattoria Biondo** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 57 36 62; Via Carducci 15; meals €25-35; ☎ closed Wed) Be prepared to brave the stares as you ring the bell to gain entry to this trattoria. You are on native turf here and the atmosphere, well oiled with a fine wine list, is darkly intimate.

**Cucina Papoff** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 58 64 60; Via Isidoro la Lumia 32; meals €25-35; ☎ closed Sun & Aug) This is an intimate restaurant with exposed brickwork and an Art Nouveau theme. Despite being founded by a Bulgarian, the restaurant serves imaginative Sicilian dishes such as a *u maccu* (broad beans in fennel).

**Il Firriato** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 53 02 82; Via G Turrisi Colonna 4; meals €30-40; ☎ closed Sun) Although Il Firriato is the restaurant for Hotel Principe di Villafranca, it is also open to the public. The restaurant's limited menu is a sign of the care it takes with each dish – the roast lamb is particularly delicious, and the desserts are to die for.

## TOP END

**our pick** **Osteria dei Vespri** (Map p82; ☎ 091 617 16 31; Piazza Croce dei Vespri 6; meals €45-55; ☎ closed Sun) If you want to try modern Italian cuisine, this is the perfect place to surrender your taste buds. Add the pleasure of sitting in the shadow of the venerable palazzo where Luchino Visconti filmed parts of *Il gattopardo*, and you have the perfect restaurant. But it's really the cuisine you'll be focusing on – dishes include *anelletti* (pasta ringlets) with octopus poached in nero d'Avola wine and wild fennel, with a hint of saffron; and quail and prunes in Marsala wine on cannellini beans and celery.

## Cafés

There are numerous cafés with outdoor tables on Via Principe di Belmonte (which is closed

to traffic between Via Ruggero Settimo and Via Roma).

**Massaro** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 42 05 86; Via E Basile 24-26; sandwiches & cakes €3-5; ☎ 7am-4pm Mon-Sat, closed Sat afternoon) Here's a true Palermo institution – it's a bit out of the way, but it's as traditional and loved by its regulars as it gets. It's excellent for breakfasts or snacks, but it's best for the vast variety of cakes, which range from pistachio balls to pine nut-encrusted rolls to creamy *cannoli* (pastry shells stuffed with sweet ricotta). There's a smaller, more modern Massaro 2 (Map pp78-9; Via Brasa 6-8; open 7am to 4pm Monday to Saturday), where you'll find fewer cakes but delicious ice cream, great coffee, sandwiches and futuristic décor in shiny aluminium. The Via Brasa branch has window stools for people- (and traffic-) watching.

**Antico Caffè Spinnato** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 58 32 31; Via Principe di Belmonte 107-15; breakfast €5, lunch €6-10) Thanks to the café's immense popularity, both with Palermo's professionals and with tourists, the local pigeons are so used to good food lying about they occasionally dive-bomb the tables outside, trying to get to the crisps and olives. Considering this rather unpleasant feature, you're perhaps better off inside the sophisticated tea salon, which serves every imaginable Sicilian drink, plus ice creams and cakes. Great for a late lazy breakfast with the newspaper.

**Il Baretto** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 32 96 40; Via XX Settembre 43; salads & sandwiches €6-8; ☎ closed Sun) This little café with its besuited waiters gives you a good insight into how the other half lives. Rich young Palermitans dressed head to toe in designer labels, ladies with serious hairdos, and eccentric old men with Panamas and shades all congregate here for their light lunch.

## DRINKING

In contrast to crazy traffic, the raucous markets and the general buzz of the city during the day, Palermo's night scene can get quite snooty, especially in the old town. The most lively street is Via Candelai (this is the area to head to if you're under 21), while Piazza Olivella and Piazza San Francesco di Paola are also popular evening areas, with bar crowds spilling out onto the streets.

**our pick** **Cambio Cavalli** (Map p82; ☎ 091 58 14 18; Via Patania 54; ☎ 8pm-1am) Definitely Palermo's

coolest and most stylish bar, Cambio Cavalli has candlelit tables under the stars, plus some impressive 16th-century arches. This was one of the city's first bars and the regulars have remained loyal, keeping the atmosphere relaxed and friendly. Cocktails are all €5, and you'll find the usual suspects on the list. It gets busy after 11pm.

**Kursaal Kalhesa** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 616 21 11; Foro Italo Umberto I 21; ☎ 8pm-1am, closed Mon lunch & Sun evening) This gorgeous wine-and-cocktail bar has a bohemian atmosphere and an elegant design under its vaulted exposed-brick ceilings. In winter grab a foreign-language newspaper or a book and toast yourself by the fire; in summer sip on a cocktail under the stars in the lush garden.

**Rocket Bar** (Map pp78-9; Piazza San Francesco di Paola 42; ☎ 8pm-1am, closed Mon) This is the centre of Palermo's 'alternative' scene, with photographs of Blondie, Elvis, the Ramones, and other kings and queens of rock and punk. The Rocket gets packed after 10.30pm, with the crowds spilling out onto the piazza and staying there until the early hours.

**Exit Drinks** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 348 400 52 51; www.exitdrinks.com; Piazza San Francesco di Paola 40; ☎ 8pm-1am) Situated right next door to Rocket Bar, but with a distinctly different atmosphere, this is one of the city's favourite gay bars. It's a pretty flamboyant affair, with gilded plush furniture, cocktails and great parties. In the summer months, Exit Drinks moves to Rise Up (off Map pp78-9; Via Ugo la Malfa 95), its outdoor venue, where it hosts regular parties. Check out the website for what is coming up next.

**Mi Manda Picone** (Map p82; ☎ 091 616 06 60; Via Alessandro Paternostro 59; ☎ 8pm-1am) Set in a fabulous 13th-century building (and with summer seating in the beautiful Piazza San Francesco d'Assisi), this excellent wine bar serves hearty platters of cheese and charcuterie (mains €8 to €12). The walls are lined with an extensive selection of Sicilian wine, and staff are knowledgeable and helpful.

**I Grilli Giù** (Map p82; ☎ 091 58 47 47; Piazza Cavalieri di Malta 11) This is a popular bar and restaurant where you can sip a cocktail and listen to the latest DJs. It's north of Mercato della Vucciria.

**Berlin** (Map pp78-9; Via Isidoro la Lumia 21) In the newer part of the city to the north, Berlin is an ultrasleek bar popular with Palermo's gay community.

## ENTERTAINMENT Nightclubs

**I Candelai** (Map p82; ☎ 091 32 71 51, information 333 700 29 42; Via Candelai 65; ☎ Thu-Sat) Housed in a converted furniture warehouse, this bar-club features live music, impromptu theatre, art exhibitions and a booming sound system.

**La Cuba** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 30 92 01; www.lacuba.com; Viale Francesco Scaduto 12) This place opened in 1997, and has been considered one of Palermo's most fashionable clubs and bars ever since. A difficult place to pigeonhole, La Cuba serves wine and cocktails, as well as food, and hosts parties and live music throughout the year. It has a fantastic outdoor space in the garden of Villa Sperlinga, backed by the villa's dreamy pink domes.

## Live Music

**Lo Spasimo** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 616 14 86; Via Spasimo) Fantastic cultural centre in the bombed-out remains of a church (see p87). Hosts interesting art exhibitions and atmospheric live concerts.

## Theatre

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

**Teatro Massimo** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 605 31 11; Piazza Giuseppe Verdi 9) Giovanni and Ernesto Basile's Art Nouveau masterpiece, now restored to its former glory, stages opera, ballet and music concerts. Its programme runs from October to May.

**Teatro Politeama Garibaldi** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 605 32 49; Piazza Ruggero Settimo) This is the main venue for music and ballet.

**Teatro della Verdura** (off Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 688 41 37; Viale del Fante) Offers a summer-only programme of ballet and music in the lovely gardens of Villa Castelnuovo. Ask at the tourist office for details.

## Puppet Theatre

**Cuticchio Mimmo** (Map p82; ☎ 091 32 34 00; www.figlidartecuticchio.com; Via Bara all'Olivella 52; adult/child €5.50/2.60; ☎ performances 6.30pm Sat & Sun Sep-Jul) This is a good break for young kids, and the elaborate old puppets will endear themselves to adults too. You can visit the workshop (see p96) in the same street.

Other puppet-theatre venues include **Opera dei Pupi Ippogrifo** (Map p82; ☎ 091 32 91 94; Vicolò

## STREET MARKETS

Palermo's historical ties with the Arab world and its proximity to North Africa are reflected in the noisy street life of the city's ancient centre, and nowhere is this more evident than in its markets.

Each of the four historic quarters of Palermo has its own market. The following three are the most popular. The **Mercato della Vucciria** (La Vucciria; Map p82; Piazza Caracciolo) is the most famous, selling fresh produce and fish. Although it's popular with tourists, many Palermitans shop for their fresh produce and household goods at **Mercato di Ballarò** (Map p82; Via Ballarò), as well as at the flea market **Mercato del Capo** (Map p82), which extend through the tangle of lanes and alleyways of the Albergheria and Capo quarters respectively.

Markets open from 7am to 8pm Monday to Saturday (until 1pm on Wednesday), although they are busier in the morning. Keep an eye on your belongings while walking through the markets.

Ragusi 4) and **Compagnia Argento** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 611 36 80; Via Novelli 1). You can also catch performances at the Museo Internazionale delle Marionette (p87).

## SHOPPING

Via Bara all'Olivella is good for arts and crafts. Here you will find the puppet workshop of the Cuticchio family, **Il Laboratorio Teatrale** (Map p82; Via Bara all'Olivella 48-50) and the lovely toy shop, **Bottega Ippogrifo** (Map p82; Via Bara all'Olivella 60), with its handcrafted toys.

**Tre Erre Ceramiche** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 32 38 27; Via Enrico Amari 49) has a huge selection of ceramics, and **Silvana Sansone** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 32 15 93; Via Torrearsa 9) has some wonderful modern jewellery, although expect high prices.

For homemade jams, sweets and other confectionery, head for **I Peccatucci di Mamma Andrea** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 33 48 35; Via Principe di Scordia 67); for wine, there is a huge selection on offer at the wine bar **Mi Mandà Picone** (Map p82; ☎ 091 616 06 60; Via Alessandro Paternostro 59; ☎ 8pm-1am) and at **Mangia** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 58 76 51; Via Principe di Belmonte 116). For the most skilfully crafted marzipan sweets, look no further than **Antico Caffè Spinnato** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 58 32 31; Via Principe di Belmonte 107-15; ☎ noon-3pm & 7.30-11pm).

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Air

**Falcone-Borsellino airport** (off Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 702 01 11) is at Punta Raisi, 31km west of Palermo. For 24-hour information about domestic flights, call **Alitalia** (Map pp78-9; ☎ airport 091 601 92 50, office 091 601 93 33; www.alitalia.com; Viale della Libertà 39). For international flights call the airport. See p295 for more information about international travel to/from Palermo.

Falcone-Borsellino is the hub airport for regular domestic flights to the far-away islands of Pantelleria and Lampedusa. Alitalia, **Meridiana** (IG; ☎ 199 11 13 33; www.meridiana.it) and **Air One** (AP; ☎ 199 20 70 80; www.flyairone.it) offer a good choice of flights at competitive prices (a one-way fare is usually between €25 and €30).

For more information on tickets and routes, both international and domestic, see p295.

### Boat

The ferry terminal (Map pp78-9) is located off Via Francesco Crispi. Ferries depart regularly from Molo Vittorio Veneto for Cagliari (Sardinia), Naples, Livorno and Genoa; see p299 for details.

**Tirrenia Navigazione** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 602 11 11, toll free 199 12 31 99; www.tirrenia.it; Calata Marinai d'Italia; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 3.30-8.45pm Mon-Fri, 3.30-8.45pm Sat, 5-8.45pm Sun) is the main company servicing the Mediterranean, with ferries to Cagliari (€38.50, 13 hours, one weekly) departing at 7pm, and an overnight ferry to Naples (€39, nine hours, one daily). The office is located at the port to the right of the main entrance.

From July to August, **Siremar** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 58 24 03; www.siremar.it in Italian; Via Francesco Crispi 118) runs ferries (€10.80, 2½ hours, two daily) and hydrofoils (€15.90, 1½ hours, four daily) to Ustica. It also runs summer-only hydrofoils to the Aeolian Islands (Lipari €32, four hours, one daily).

**Ustica Lines** (www.usticalines.it in Italian) runs summer-only hydrofoil services to the Aeolian Islands (Lipari €31.30, four hours, one daily) and Cefalù (€12.60, one hour, one daily). Buy tickets from **Pietro Barbaro** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 33 33 33; Via Principe di Belmonte 55).

**Grandi Navi Veloci** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 58 74 04; www.1.gnv.it; Calata Marinai d'Italia) runs ferries from Palermo to Genoa (high season €99, 20 hours, one daily) and Livorno (€65, 19 hours, three weekly). The office is at the port to the left of the main entrance.

### Bus

The main intercity bus station (Map p82) is near Via Paolo Balsamo, east of the train station. Sicily's buses are privatised and different routes are serviced by different companies, all with their own ticket offices.

**SAIS Autolinee** (Map p82; ☎ 091 617 11 41; Via Paolo Balsamo 20) runs services to Cefalù (€4.50, 1 hour, two daily), Catania (€13.20, 2½ hours, 17 daily Monday to Saturday), Enna (€8.80, 1¾ hours, six daily), Piazza Armerina (€10.80, 1½ hours, eight daily) and Messina (€14.10, 3¾ hours, hourly).

**Segesta** (Map p82; ☎ 091 616 90 39; www.segesta.it in Italian; Via Paolo Balsamo 26) runs very frequent services to Trapani (€8, two hours, eight daily).

**Cuffaro** (Map p82; ☎ 091 616 15 10; www.cuffaro.it in Italian; Via Paolo Balsamo 13) has buses to Agrigento (€8, two hours, seven daily Monday to Saturday, two Sunday).

**Azienda Siciliana Trasporti** (AST; Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 680 00 11, 222; www.aziendasicilianatrasporti.it in Italian; Via Brasa 4), away from the main terminal, runs buses to Ragusa and Syracuse (€12, four hours, six daily Monday to Saturday, three Sunday). It also operates services to Corleone and Cefalù.

Numerous other companies service points throughout Sicily, and most have offices in the Via Paolo Balsamo area. Their addresses and telephone numbers, as well as destinations, are listed in the *Agenda Turismo*, available at the main tourist office (p77).

See p298 for details of services to destinations throughout the rest of Italy.

### Car & Motorcycle

Palermo is accessible on the A20-E90 toll road from Messina, and from Catania (A19-E932) via Enna; the second route is quicker. 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 you will generally get the best deal if you book

your rental via the internet before you leave home. A week's car hire will cost anything from €350 to €500 so be sure to shop around first; often it is the larger companies that offer the best deals. All the car-hire companies are represented at the airport and listed in *Agenda Turismo*, which is available at the main tourist office (p77). The local firm **Sicily by Car** (Map pp78-9; ☎ 091 58 10 45; www.sbc.it; Via Mariano Stabile 6a) has good deals and also rents out scooters (€25 per day).

### Train

Regular trains leave from the **train station** (Map p82; ☎ ticket office 091 603 30 88; ☎ 7am-9pm) heading for Messina (*diretto* €11, Intercity adult/concession €22/17, *diretto* 3½ hours, every 30 minutes), Catania (*diretto* €12, 3½ hours, six daily) and Agrigento (€7, 2½ hours, 11 daily), as well as nearby towns such as Cefalù (€4, half-hourly, five daily); there are trains to Syracuse (€17.20 to €20.20, six to 10 hours, five daily), but you will need to change at Messina or Catania. There are also Intercity trains to Reggio di Calabria, Naples and Rome; see p299 for the details.

Train-timetable information is available in English at the train station. There are left-luggage and clean toilet facilities (€0.20) inside the station.

## GETTING AROUND

### To/From the Airport

A half-hourly bus service run by **Prestia e Comandè** (☎ 091 58 04 57) transfers passengers from the airport to the centre of Palermo, dropping people off outside the Teatro Politeama Garibaldi (Map pp78-9) and the train station (Map p82). 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. This is by far the best way to travel to Palermo from the airport.

A train service, the Trinacria Express, also runs from the airport to the train station (€4.50, one hour, every 45 minutes).

There are plenty of taxis outside the airport and the fare for the same trip is about €50.

All the major car-hire companies are represented at the airport including Hertz, Avis and Sicily by Car.

## Car & Motorcycle

Palermo has a massive problem with gridlock, and Palermitans have little respect for the rules of the road (though if you have dealt with the roads in Rome or Naples, Palermo will present few difficulties).

Some hotels have small car parks, but they are often full, so book your space in advance. Theft of and from vehicles is a problem, and you are advised to use one of the attended car parks if your hotel has no parking space; you'll be looking at €13 to €16 per day.

See p97 for car-hire information.

## Public Transport

### BUS

Palermo's orange **city buses** (AMAT; ☎ 091 35 01 11; www.amat.pa.it in Italian) are overcrowded and slow due to the appalling traffic. Ask at the tourist booths for a leaflet detailing the different lines; most stop at the train station. Tickets must be purchased before you get on the bus and are available from tobacconists or the booths at the terminal. They cost €1 and are valid for two hours. Once you get on the bus you need to validate the ticket in the orange machine,

which prints a 'start' time on it. You can be fined if you don't do this, although conductors are lenient with tourists.

There are two small buses – Linea Gialla and Linea Rossa – that operate in the narrow streets of the historic centre and can be useful if you are moving between tourist sights.

### METRO

Most visitors will have little cause to use Palermo's metro system, as its 10 stations radiating out from the main train station are a good hike from any destination likely to interest them. There is talk of expanding the system to Falcone-Borsellino airport, which would be useful should it ever happen. A single-trip ticket costs €1.

## AROUND PALERMO

Visitors to Palermo will probably welcome a break from this raucous city, which is as exhausting as it is energising. Like the capital, Palermo's environs have a long history,

from the prehistoric carvings of the Grotta dell'Addaura and the shrine of Santa Rosalia to the mythology of the Mafia, which envelops towns such as Corleone. And, most famous of all, the Cattedrale di Monreale remains a beacon of medieval brilliance that shouldn't be missed.

## MONDELLO

Mondello is Palermo's beach resort, though it's mainly the haunt of Palermitan teenagers who, along with the yelling vendors of jewellery, fruit and plastic toys, crowd the beach during the summer months. If you like quiet beach time, this is not the place for you.

Originally a muddy, malaria-ridden port, Mondello only really became fashionable in the 19th century, when people came to the seaside in their carriages, thus warranting the huge Art Nouveau pier that dominates the seafront. Most of the beaches are private (two loungers and an umbrella per day €9), but there is a wide swath of public beach with all the requisite pedalos (standard/with slide €9/12 per hour) and jet skis (€55 per 20 minutes).

If you want to lounge on the beach yet be able to pop over to Palermo, Mondello provides the best of both worlds. The **Addaura Hotel** (☎ 091 684 22 22; www.addaura.it; Lungomare Cristoforo Colombo 4452; s/d €91/139; P ☎ ☎) and the **Splendid Hotel La Torre** (☎ 091 45 02 22, toll free 800 23 61 18; www.latorre.com; Via Piano Gallo 11; s/d €104/136; P ☎ ☎) are two good options that both have access to the beach. Or try the B&B **Il Banano** (☎ 091 45 59 26; www.ilbanano.com; Via Stesicoro 3; s €33-40, d €66-80; P).

There are numerous seafood restaurants and snack stalls along the seafront (Viale Regina Elena). One of Sicily's classiest restaurants is the **Charleston** (☎ 091 45 01 71; Viale Regina Elena; meals €35; ☎ closed Wed), located inside an enormous Art Nouveau palace with a wide terrace jutting out over the sea. It's hosted the great and the good, and the food is suitably fine, with an emphasis on Palermitan favourites. Eating here is a real event – if you don't want to look out of place put on your best outfit. Make a reservation.

With a great location overlooking the harbour, historic **La Locanda** (☎ 091 684 01 27; Via Torre 26; meals €25; ☎ closed Thu), open since 1865, has a good range of seafood dishes.

To get here take bus 806 from Piazza Sturzo (Map pp78–9; €1.20, 20 minutes).

## MONTE PELLEGRINO

elev 606m

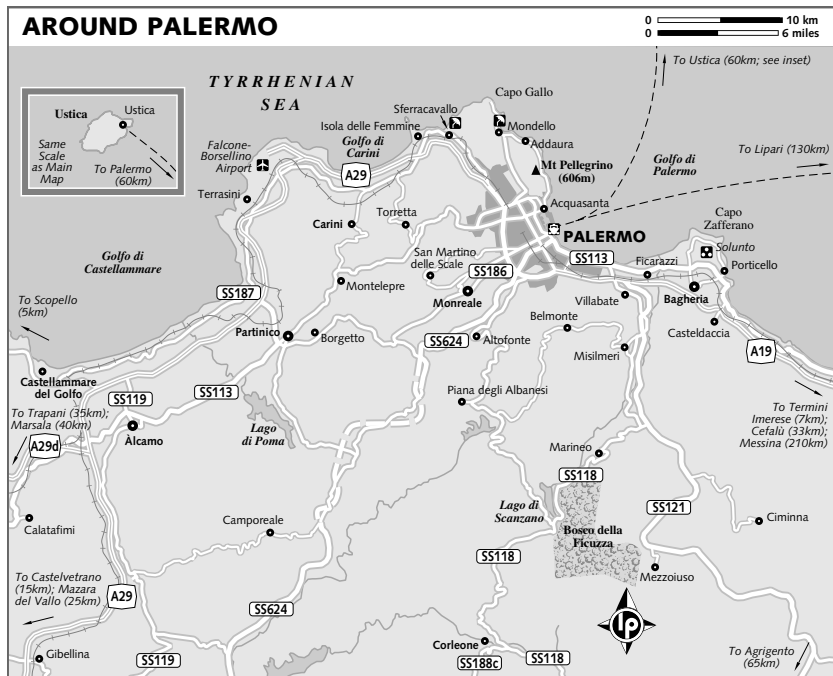
Between Palermo and Mondello is Monte Pellegrino (606m) and the **Santuario di Santa Rosalia** (☎ 091 54 03 26; admission free; ☎ 7am–7pm). One of Palermo's patron saints, St Rosalia, lived on the mountain as a hermit in a cave, which is now the site of a 17th-century shrine. The water, which is channelled from the roof of the cave into a large font, is said to have miraculous powers. It is a fascinating place to visit, but remember that it is a shrine and not a tourist haunt. To get here, take bus 812 from Piazza Sturzo (Map pp78–9).

On the northern side of Monte Pellegrino is the **Grotta dell'Addaura** (☎ 091 696 13 19; ☎ closed indefinitely due to rock falls), where cave drawings from the Upper Palaeolithic and Neolithic periods have managed to survive into the 21st century. You can see casts of the engravings in the Museo Archeologico Regionale (p85) in Palermo, where you can also obtain up-to-date information on the status of the caves. To get there, head up the road above the beach at Addaura and follow the signposts (the caves are about 400m away).

## MONREALE

Inspired by a heavenly vision of the Virgin and driven by earthy ambition, William II set about building the magnificent **Cattedrale di Monreale** (☎ 091 640 44 13; Piazza Duomo, Monreale; admission free; ☎ 8am–6pm, treasury 9.30am–noon & 3.30–5.30pm) 8km southwest of Palermo. Living in the shadow of his grandfather, Roger II – who was responsible for the cathedral in Cefalù and the Cappella Palatina – and vying with the Palermitan archbishop, Walter of the Mill, William was determined that his cathedral should be the biggest and best. The result was Monreale, considered to be the finest example of Norman architecture in Sicily. The mosaicists were from Sicily and Venice, but the stylised influence of the Byzantines pervades their work. Completed in 1184 after only 10 years' work, the mosaics are an articulate and fitting tribute to the grandeur of Sicilian culture at the time.

The interior is one of the most impressive creations of the Italian Middle Ages. A catalogue of shimmering mosaics depicts essential Old Testament stories from the creation of man



**DETOUR: CORLEONE**

Sixty kilometres south of Palermo, through the tawny landscape of central Sicily, is the town of Corleone, best known through Francis Ford Coppola's classic *Godfather* trilogy, which starred Marlon Brando and Al Pacino. But, tired of living in a town that has suffered centuries of poverty and has a reputation as the home of murderous thugs, residents are trying to reclaim Corleone for themselves.

Take the free town tour and you will hear about not only the local history of organised crime, but also the efforts of those who have fought it and other aspects of the town's history. After all, we were told on the threshold of the impressive 14th-century **Chiesa Madre** that Corleone gave the world two saints. The tour also includes wine tasting at a local cellar and lunch on a farm. The main stop, however, is the anti-Mafia centre, which also houses an archive of documents from major Mafia trials conducted in the 1980s.

The authorities hope that after the tour visitors will take away another impression of Corleone. 'But to be honest,' said the guide, 'they come here because of *The Godfather*'. You can pick up the tour at the **Museo Civico** (☎ 091 846 36 55; Palazzo Provenzano, Via Orfanotrofo; admission free; ☹ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun).

The only hotel in town is the **Hotel Belvedere** (☎ 091 846 49 64; fax 091 846 40 00; Contrada Belvedere; s/d €61/72; 📞 📺 📺). There are regular Azienda Siciliana Trasporti (AST) buses from Palermo (€3.60, 1½ hours, four daily).

to the Assumption in 42 different episodes. The beauty of the mosaics cannot be described – you have to see Noah's ark perching atop the waves or Christ healing a leper infected with large leopard-sized spots for yourself. The story of Adam and Eve is wonderfully portrayed, with a grumpy-looking, post-Eden-eviction Eve sitting on a rock while Adam labours in the background. The large mosaic of Christ, covering the dome, is stunning.

Outside the cathedral is the entrance to the **doister** (admission €6; ☹ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1.30pm Sun), which illustrates William's love of Arab artistry. This tranquil courtyard is pure Orientalism, with elegant Romanesque arches supported by an array of slender columns alternately decorated with shimmering mosaic patterns. Each capital is different, and taken together they represent a unique sculptural record of medieval Sicily. The capital of the 19th column on the west aisle depicts William II offering the cathedral to the Madonna.

William II succeeded in his ambition of creating the most sumptuous cathedral in Sicily – and it remains so today. He now lies entombed in a white marble sarcophagus in the cathedral.

To reach Monreale take bus 389 from Piazza Indipendenza in Palermo (Map pp78–9; €1, 20 to 30 minutes, hourly). The bus will drop you off outside the cathedral in Piazza Duomo. A taxi from the Quattro Canti in Palermo to Monreale will cost you €20 one way.

**SOLUNTO**

About 20km east of Palermo are the remains of the Hellenistic-Roman town of **Solunto** (☎ 091 90 45 57; admission €2; ☹ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri), founded in the 4th century BC on the site of an earlier Phoenician settlement. Although the ancient city is only partially excavated, the ruins are beautifully sited on the slopes of Monte Catalano. Wander along the Roman *decumanus* (main street), and take detours up the steep, paved side streets to explore the ruined houses, some of which still sport their original mosaic floors. Take particular note of the theatre and the Casa di Leda (if you can find it), which has an interesting floor mosaic.

To get there, take the train from Palermo to the Santa Flavia–Solunto–Porticello stop (€1.65, 15 minutes, every 30 minutes) and ask for directions. The ancient city is about a 30-minute uphill walk.

**USTICA****pop 1200**

If Palermo's bustle becomes so overbearing that all you really want is to have a day or two of peace and quiet, your best bet will be the tiny island of Ustica, which floats alone almost 60km north in the Tyrrhenian sea. Part of the Aeolian volcanic chain, this mini island (8.7 sq km) is actually the tip of a submerged volcano. You'll be mesmerised by its black volcanic-rock landscape, which is sprinkled with blazing pinks and reds of hibiscus flowers and

prickly greens of cacti. The limpid waters surrounding the island are kept sparklingly clean by an Atlantic current, so it's a haven for serious divers and a prime spot for anyone wanting to see the multitude of fish and coral.

In 1986 Ustica was made Italy's first marine reserve, and it remains a centre for diving and marine research. In July the island hosts the International Festival of Underwater Activities, drawing divers from around the world. It's best to visit in June and September to appreciate the dramatic coastline and grottoes without the crowds.

**Information**

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-Apr, 8am-9pm Mon-Fri Jun-Sep) is in the centre of the village and can advise on activities, boat trips and dive centres. In case of an emergency, call the **police** (☎ 091 844 90 49) or **first aid** (☎ 091 844 92 48).

**Activities**

Among the most rewarding 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 *riserva marina* (marine reserve), taking in a good stretch of the western coast north of Punta dello Spalmatore, is protected; you'll need permission to fish, dive or swim. The reserve's information office can organise diving excursions into the zone.

Most dive-hire outlets operate between April and September. **Profundo Blu Ustica** (☎ 091 844 96 09; www.ustica-diving.it; Via C Colombo), **Katuma Scuola Sub** (☎ 091 844 92 16; www.katuma.it in Italian; Via Petriera 7) and **Tortuga** (☎ 335 833 20 20; www.tortugadiving.eu; Via della Vittoria) are recommended, and all offer a range of itineraries, including a deep-sea archaeological tour that explores wrecks and amphora in their original sites. The cost of dives ranges from around €38 for a single dive to €340 for a full open-water course. All outfits rent wetsuits and equipment. Official guides for snorkelling, diving and boat trips can all be arranged at the visitors centre; the boat trip is particularly worthwhile as it allows you to view the stunning grottoes.

You can hike or cycle along the mountain trails, the most scenic of which passes through pine woods 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.

**Sleeping & Eating**

There are eight hotels and several *affittacamere* (rooms for rent) on Ustica.

**Hotel Clelia** (☎ 091 844 90 39; www.hotelclelia.it in Italian; Via della Vittoria 5; s €35-85, d €60-150; 📞 📺 📺) This neat three-star hotel has a good restaurant and welcoming management.

**Villaggio Punta Spalmatore** (☎ 091 844 93 88; Località Spalmatore; r €55-105, 4-person bungalow €65-115; 📞 📺 📺) An excellent hotel complex with charming bungalow accommodation amid tumbling gardens. A great choice for families or water-sports enthusiasts.

**Grotta Azzurra** (☎ 091 844 90 48; www.sicily-hotels.com/siti/framon-hotels/grottaazzurra; Contrada San Ferlicchio; s €110-140, d €152-256; 📞 📺 📺) All the rooms in this cliff-top hotel have a romantic terrace overlooking the sea. The hotel's rocky beach has a hydro-massage centre.

A good place to eat and find accommodation and local information is **Trattoria da Umberto** (☎ 091 844 95 42; www.usticatur.it; Piazza Umberto I 26; meals €20). The friendly Tranchina family organise rooms, apartments and villas on the island (doubles from €40) and the son, Gigi, speaks good English.

One of the town centre's best eating options is **Giulia** (☎ 091 844 90 39; Via San Francesco 16; meals €25), which is renowned for its seafood. It's small and busy so book ahead. Also try the fantastic pizza at **Schitichio** (Via Tre Mulini; pizza €6-8).

Night fun and cocktails can be had at the **220 Bar** (Via Tre Mulini 1; ☹ from 6pm), or you can go partying at the Il Faraglione beach, situated at Cala Santa Marina.

**Getting There & Around**

Siremar operates a year-round car-ferry service (€14.70, 2½ hours, one daily) from Palermo, and additional hydrofoils run from June to September (€19.90, 1¼ hours, two daily). The office for **Siremar** (☎ 091 874 93 111; Piazza Capitano Longo 9) is in the centre of Ustica.

From June to the end of September you can take the Trapani-Favignana-Ustica-Naples hydrofoil, run by Ustica Lines three days per 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, every 30 minutes). Alternatively, hire a scooter at the **Albergo Ariston** (☎ 091 844 90 42; Via della Vittoria 5) from around €25 to €30 per day.

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