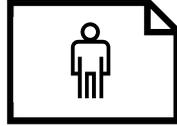


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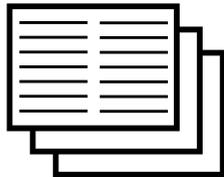
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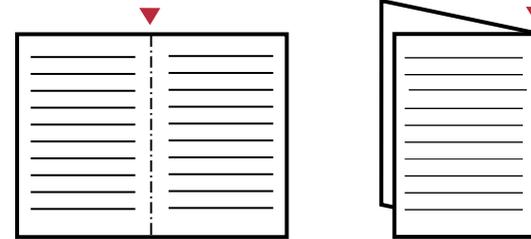


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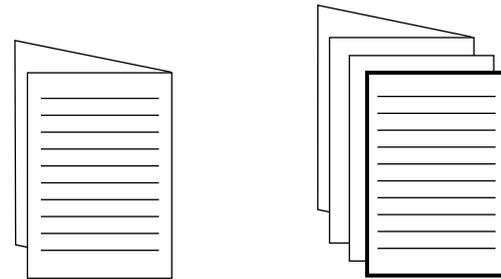


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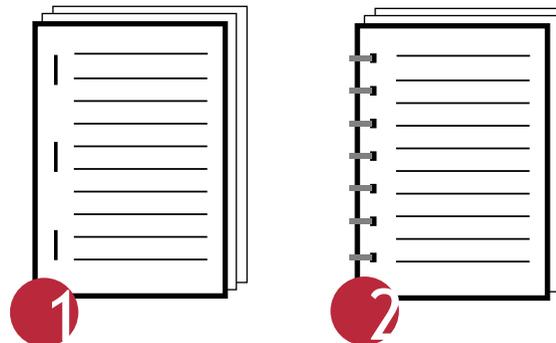
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# THE AGRIGENTO CITY GUIDE





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## Getting there



Agrigento: the Temple of the Dioscuri

Agrigento lies along the south coast of Sicily, connected to the rest of the island by an extensive network of streets and by rail.

**By car:** from Taormina, take the Autostrada A18 for Catania. Continue on the A19 toward Palermo and take the Caltanissetta exit. Continue on Statale 640 until you reach Agrigento. From Palermo, take Autostrada A19 toward Catania, and exit at Villabate. Follow Statale 121 and continue for 118 km until you reach Agrigento. From Siracusa, follow the coastal route on Statale 115 via Noto, Ragusa and Gela until you reach Agrigento. If you are coming from continental Italy, take Autostrada A3 Salerno-Reggio Calabria, and exit at Villa San Giovanni, then take the ferryboat for Messina. From Messina, take the Autostrada A18 for Catania. Continue on the A19 toward Catania-Palermo and take the Caltanissetta exit. Continue on Statale 640 until you reach Agrigento.

**By train:** Agrigento has a train station, but except for Palermo (about 2 hours away),

connections to other destinations in Sicily are scarce. If you are arriving from Taormina or Catania, you will have to change trains once or twice. For train schedules, consult Trenitalia's website, or call their toll-free number: 89 20 21. The best way to arrive and depart to and from Agrigento is by bus, which leaves from the Piazza Rosselli station (Tourist Information +39.0922.20391).

**By plane:** Palermo Airport (PMO) offers direct flights from all major Italian airports, and low-cost connections with European cities such as Amsterdam, Barcelona, Köln, London, and others. From the airport, the shuttle train "Trinacria Express" leaves about every half hour from Palermo Central Station, with many trains going to Agrigento (about a 2 hour trip). There is also a bus service which runs from the airport directly to Agrigento, operated by SAL (Phone: +39.0922.401360). An alternative is the **International Airport of Catania (CTA)** which offers connections with all the major Italian and European airports, including all the capital cities. SAIS Trasporti operates a bus service running directly from the airport to Agrigento (about a 2.5 hour trip).

## History and culture



Mazzara del Vallo: Regional Archeological Museum

The history of Agrigento begins in 581 b.C., when it was founded under the name of Akragas by a group of Greek colonists. The city reached the height of its splendor in the 5th century B.C. under the tyrant Tenore, who extended his dominion out to the northern coasts of Sicily. During this period, art and culture were intensely pursued in the city. It was in this period that the temple of Olympian Zeus was constructed, as well most of the other temples, rendering Agrigento, according to the Greek poet Pindaro, "The most beautiful among the dwellings of mortals." The year 406 was a tragic one in the history of Agrigento: the city was defeated by Hannibal and the Carthaginians, who completely destroyed the city. Agrigento was refounded in the 4th century by the statesman and general Timoleon. During this period, the new Hellenic quarter was constructed, signaling the grand rebirth of Hellenistic art and culture in Agrigento, until 210 B.C., when the city came under Roman rule.

After the fall of Imperial Rome, the city did not return to its former splendor until after

the Arab and Norman occupations. In the 9th century, the Arabs built a new city, which still stands today as both medieval and modern Agrigento. In 1087, they were succeeded by the Norman occupation. With the construction of numerous churches, the Normans gave new life to the Christian arts and culture. The fortifications they built defended Agrigento from the incursions of Saracen pirates.

The 18th century marked another cardinal moment for the history of the city: the flowering of the baroque period in Agrigento, evident today in nearly all the churches in the city. In the following years, the city suffered under the ill-governing of the Bourbons, as did all of Sicily, until 1860, when Sicily officially linked itself with the Kingdom of Italy. The 20th century marked the advent of chaotic construction development in the city, which has threatened the very integrity of the archeological zone.

## Churches and Museums



Agrigento: the Cathedral

Agrigento, medieval and modern, rises from the tops of the hills that dominate the Valley of the Temples. The nucleus of the city is a labyrinth of alleyways and courtyards with a classically Arab flavor. Entering this labyrinth, one discovers a treasure trove of churches and buildings.

The entry into the medieval city is Aldo Moro square. From here begins the 18th century Via Atenea, flanked by old buildings, shops and pleasant cafés. Along Via Atenea lies the baroque church of **San Lorenzo**; to the left of the church is the open entrance to the ancient hypogeum, a web of subterranean aqueducts built in the 5th century B.C.

### The Cathedral

can be reached by going up the alleys from Piazza Pirandello. The building is preceded by a spectacular grand staircase. Its construction dates from the 11th century, but it has undergone many alterations through the centuries, giving it a completely unique appearance. The façade is flanked by an

unfinished bell tower, which is embellished by a richly decorated balcony. The inside, divided in three naves, is a triumph of baroque decoration. But perhaps most impressive is the wood ceiling, richly adorned so that it appears to be a hanging garden. Make sure to visit the chapel of San Gerlando, in the right transept.

### The Church of Santo Spirito

is a Cistercian convent, constructed in 1260, its beautiful gothic portal surmounted by a rose window. The inside is a single nave with enclosed sculptures in stucco. Make sure to visit the adjoining convent, with its beautiful cloister, where you can purchase local sweets of almonds and pistachios, made by the nuns who live here.

### Regional Archaeological Museum

Hours: Open every day from 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Located between the modern city and the Valley of the Temples, in the center of the Hellenistic-Roman quarter. The 18-room museum holds numerous interesting findings from Agrigento and the surrounding region, arranged by expository theme. The museum contains an outstanding collection of Attic vases, including the famous Crater of Dionysus, as well as the marble statue of Ephebus of Agrigento, a young athlete who lived in the 5th century B.C.

### Church of San Nicola

Next to the Archeological Museum stands the Church of San Nicola.

This church, constructed in the 13th century, is made of volcanic rock taken from ruins of the Temple of Zeus.

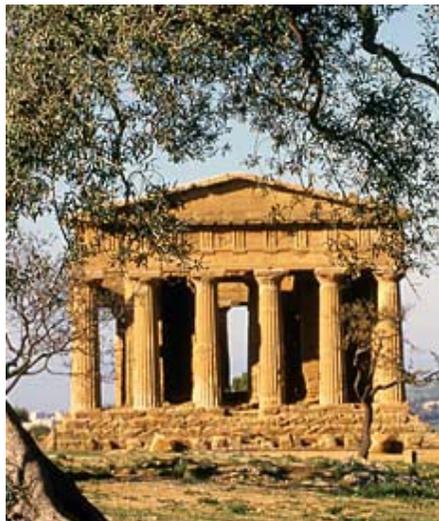
Entering through the beautiful Romanesque portal, you will come upon the unique nave. The second chapel to the left contains the Roman sarcophagus of Hippolitus and Phaedra, much loved by Goethe during his stay in Agrigento. The sarcophagus is decorated with bas-reliefs telling the tragic story of Phaedra

and her stepson Hippolitus, who was exiled or killed by order of Phaedra because he did not return her love.

### Pirandello's House

South of Agrigento and the Valley of the Temples, lies the birthplace of the playwright Pirandello. The house has been converted into a museum, preserving both written and graphic materials: family photos, portraits of the writer, theatrical images, manuscripts, and editions of theatrical works and novels. Make sure to follow the short path through the pines, where Pirandello loved to sit and contemplate. This is where the author wanted to be buried. A simple stone marker, retouched by the sculptor Mazzacurati, guards the urn containing the ashes of the Master.

## Valley of the Temples



Agrigento: the Temple of Concordia

Valley of the Temples is the most renowned attraction in Agrigento, a large archeological site containing the remains of various Doric temples dating from the 5th century B.C. Hours are from 9:00 a.m. to sunset. A fee is required to enter.

### The Temple of Concordia

erected around 430 B.C., is the best-preserved among the Doric temples of the Greek world, and one of the most beautiful in proportion and harmony of form. It is a four-sided structure measuring 20 by 42 meters. The elegant and airy colonnade, following the classic model, has 6 by 13 columns, each of a height of 6.75 meters. The temple underwent major transformation and adaptations after the 6th century A.D., when Bishop Gregory transferred the seat of the cathedral to Agrigento. Because of this, the temple was saved from the destruction wrought upon the other temples at the hands of Christian fanaticism. North of the temple extends the Paleochristian Byzantine Necropolis, a vast complex of open-air tombs.

### The Temple of Giunone

at the far end of the hill of temples, is identical in dimension to the Temple of Concordia. The view from the Valley of the Temples is simply striking. The edifice holds 40 columns, 16 with capitals. To the east lie the sacrificial altars, which according to Greek religious practices were located outside of the temple.

### The temple of Hercules

is the most ancient of the Agrigento's temples. It was built in peripteral hexastyle (an architectural style using a single row of columns on all sides, and 6 frontal columns in the portico) but on the long sides it had 15 columns instead of the usual 14. There are 8 of this type of temple standing on the south side. The ruins clearly show that the temple was destroyed by an earthquake. To the south of the Temple of Hercules stands the Temple of Terone, a truly imposing sepulchral monument, made up of two superimposed sections: a nearly cubical podium and a kind of small Doric temple with false doors and angular Ionic columns.

### The Temple of Olympian Zeus

of which remains only massive ruins, was one of the largest buildings of Greek architecture, measuring 112.60 by 56.30 meters. It was built in 480 b.C. in honor of Zeus, after the great victory brought against the Carthaginians. The shape of this temple was absolutely unique due to its feature of having a wall surrounding the temple with half-columns emerging up from it. Between them stood impressive statues of giants, the telamones, which functioned as load-bearing supports for the structure. A copy of one of these giants remains among the ruins, while the originals are on display at the Archeological Museum.

In the area of the Valley of the Temples also lie the less preserved of the other sacred buildings, like the Temple of Asclepion, the Temple of Castor and Pollux and the Temple of Ephestus.

### Hellenistic-Roman Quarter

Leaving the Hill of Temples and coming toward the city, we come upon the excavations of the Hellenistic-Roman quarter, a zone comprised of 4 parallel centers, from which emerged dwellings and shops dating from between the 3rd century B.C. and 4th century A.D. Many dwellings are decorated with mosaics of various kinds and constructions. Note also the presence of wells, cisterns and sewer systems with which the city was equipped.

## Eating and Drinking



Agrigento: cous-cous and fish

By virtue of its location on a hillside, yet only 4 kilometers from the sea, the cuisine of Agrigento encompasses both the traditions of the sea and those purely from the countryside, and as in the rest of Sicily, it is rich in the influences of other cultures, especially Arab.

The restaurants of Agrigento offer fantastic **antipasti**, typically Mediterranean, and made with simple and flavorful ingredients: salted anchovies, olives, vegetables preserved in oil, sundried tomatoes or the traditional dish called "pitaggio", made of fresh fava beans, peas, and artichokes. Sicily also offers delicious variations on pizza: layers of puff pastry stuffed with various ingredients; at least try one of the "sfincioni", the "miscati" the "mignolate" or the "cudruni".

**First-course dishes** are a triumph of pasta. Among the most popular recipes is "cavatelli" (a kind of pasta) with tomatoes and eggplant, or with fava beans and ricotta. Often you find pasta prepared with fish, as in the famous "pasta con le sarde" (pasta with sardines),

often embellished with exotic touches like fennel and pistachios.

**Among the meats**, the cuisine of Agrigento features roasted goat and barbequed lamb. In the winter, you can enjoy pork, sweet and sour duck, or barbequed sausage flavored with fennel and peppers. Meats are always accompanied by flavorful seasonal vegetable dishes, prepared in various styles. Not to be missed is "cafonata", a dish of fried mixed vegetables, served cold.

**Fish** has an important place on the tables of Agrigento, given its vicinity to the sea. All types of fish are used in the most varied recipes. The most common dish, however, is sole, stuffed sardines with nutmeg, and the exquisite dentex in meat broth.

**Finally, dessert:** it would take too much space to enumerate here the specialties of Sicilian pastry. They are among the most original and renowned in all of Italy. Be sure to make your way into a pastry shop, and let your curiosity be your guide. Buon appetito!

## Shopping



Trapani: traditional coral traditions

**Via Atenea** is the main commercial street in Agrigento and the "living room" of the city. The street is extensive, winding between ancient buildings and churches of varying styles. Do as the Agrigenti do, and take the traditional "passeggiata" (walk) to do some shopping.

**The artisans of Agrigento** sell their original creations, such as their ancient tradition of objects and sculptures made out of cork, or terracotta, carpets, wrought iron, wicker and traditional musical instruments. Real connoisseurs can observe the construction of the ciaramedde, unique Sicilian bagpipes requiring a complex manufacturing process, which is remembered and practiced by only a few remaining artisans in the area.

In Casteltermini, a city north of Agrigento, saddles and accessories for horseback riding are produced.

## Hotels and lodgings



Selinunte: archeological park Temple E

Agrigento has a good selection of lodgings, particularly 3 and 4 star hotels. According to your needs and your budget, you can choose your lodging from amongst any number of hotels, agritourist lodgings, or bed-and-breakfasts.

If you prefer a full service hotel, whether a few steps from the Valley of the Temples or on the beach of San Leone, Nozio can help you find a hotel in Agrigento. If you need a more economical solution, but still desire all the urban comforts, why not opt for a bed-and-breakfast in Agrigento? If you're more interested in contact with nature, try the many different farmhouse lodgings, or agriturismo, available in Agrigento, immersed in the rough and wild beauty of the Mediterranean countryside.

## Events



Agrigento: Almond Blossom Festival

**The Almond Blossom Festival**, in February  
This event takes place during the first half of February, in the breathtaking Valley of the Temples in Agrigento. The celebrations include costumed parades, shows, and concerts.

For many years, The Almond Festival has been supported by the International Folklore Festival (or Ethnic Almond Festival), a competition between folklore groups divided into three categories: dance, traditional costumes, and music. Through the years, the festival has attained international renown, bringing together folklore groups from around the world who come to Agrigento to promote and preserve their own popular traditions.

**The Carnival of Sciacca**, in February  
The Carnival of Sciacca is one of the most famous in Sicily and Italy for the sumptuousness of its allegorical wagons.

The main event of the Carnival is the parade of allegorical wagons, which takes place every day from Saturday to Tuesday. The most unique part of the Carnival is the wagon of "Peppe Nappa", the King of the Carnival of

Sciacca. From his wagon comes the traditional distribution of candies, wine, and sausage to the crowd, prepared in the back end of the wagon. The evening of Fat Tuesday, the end of the event, the pyre of Peppe Nappa is started: everyone gathers around the King, throwing thousands of carnival hammers on the flaming puppet.

**The Festival of San Calogero**, in July

San Calogero, the "Black Saint", is certainly the most loved by the Agrigenti. The festivities last for 8 days, from the first to the second Sunday in July.

It is difficult to describe this festival in the usual terms it unites mysticism, ancient traditions and profound Christian faith, radiating an energy that is difficult to describe. The festival culminates with the procession of sacred figures of the Saint, accompanied by the sounds of the tambourine, recalling the ancient Arab presence on the island. One characteristic of the festival is the preparation of typical bread loafs, with sesame seeds and fennel, which are thrown before the saint's cart in the procession, as dictated by tradition.

**Blues & Wine Soul Festival**, in July

The Blues & Wine Soul Festival is a big wine and music event, three phenomenal days dedicated to the biggest stars from abroad, in the heart of the Valley of the Temples archeological park.

The event joins together the best blues, soul, and gospel with the tasting of Sicilian wines. While the Hammonds and guitars of some of the biggest international blues & soul artists vibrate onstage, the best vintners of Sicily and of Italy present their own products, and professional sommeliers guide the public in wine tastings.

By day, educational visits are organized in the wineries, as well as conferences on safeguarding the environment and viticulture.

**Pirandello Week**, in December

International convention of Pirandello studies. An event articulated by themes ranging from literature to cinema to theatre, and with a unique structure employing schools from 30 provinces.

Students assemble in Agrigento for the conference, with time to make visits to the places Pirandello lived, worked, and visited. This event is organized by the National Center for the Study of Pirandello.

The Center was founded in 1967 with the aim of promoting international encounters between critics and students, and the collection of all testimonials to the work of Luigi Pirandello.

## Sciacca and Selinunte



Eraclea Minoa Coast

This itinerary carries you to the discovery of the coast between Agrigento and Selinunte, touching the historical city of Sciacca to arrive at the final destination: the archeological marvels of Selinunte.

**The coast between Agrigento and Sciacca** is dotted with gorgeous, yet still-unknown beaches: long, white, sandy beaches encircled by sand dunes and white cliffs. Coming from Agrigento, there are three beaches you should visit:

The Turkish Stairs near Realmente, a white cliff that the wind has shaped like an enormous staircase plunging into the sea.

Torre Salsa: between Siculiana Marina and Eraclea Minoa extends the World Wildlife Federation reserve of Torre Salsa, where chalk cliffs alternate with long, golden beaches. Beach access points are varied and can be found in Montallegro.

Eraclea Minoa: a white, sandy shore of 5 km, circled by a dune and protected by a compact forest. In the coastal waters of the

beach lie the ruins of the Greek-Roman city of Eraclea.

**Sciacca**

This Agrigentan town is famous for its carnival, its hot spring and its baroque and medieval architectural beauty, but it preserves a little-known jewel: the Arab quarter.

Sciacca has very ancient origins, even the Greeks exploited the therapeutic properties of its natural "ovens". Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Normans, and Spaniards left a piece of their culture that we still find today in the artistic heritage of the city and in its popular traditions. In 1831, Sciacca was the protagonist in an extraordinary geological event: a volcanic island emerged from the sea in front of the city, and it sunk after only six months: the Ferdinandeia Island.

The city is an intricate labyrinth of alleyways, into which open up piazzas that hold beautiful churches and buildings. Sights you should see:

The Cathedral (Duomo), of Norman origins (1108), was expanded in 1656 on the plans of Michele Blasco. The incomplete baroque façade is missing one of two belltowers; on the sides there are statues of Antonio and Gian Domenico Gagini from the 16th century. On the inside are three naves, holding many works of art, among which are various sculptures dated from the 16th century.

The Church of Collegio, which is rich inside with paintings, among those the Adoration of the Magi by Giovanni Portalone, and a Saint John the Baptist attributed to Domenichino.

The Church of Santa Margherita, renovated in the 1500's, is interesting for its Renaissance Gothic portal and, inside, the stucco polychromes and frescoes.

The Steripinto is a singular building from the 1500s, in the Sicilian-Catalonian style. the facade is notable for its tiny conches pointed with diamonds and battlements with a mask

in the center, a Renaissance portal, and elegant double lancet window. The arts and crafts of Sciacca express the best of majolica, traditional Sicilian painted earthenware. The ceramics here follow an ancient tradition dating from medieval times. The glasswork of Sciacca adorns almost all the noble buildings of Agrigento from the 14th to the 18th century.

### Selinunte

In the center of the biggest archeological park in the Mediterranean, Selinunte greets visitors with its ruins of colossal Greek temples. It was founded in 650 B.C. or in 627 B.C., on a sea promontory between two rivers, whose estuary was then navigable. Selinunte was a thriving and prosperous city, but in 409 B.C. was conquered and destroyed by the Carthaginians. Those same Carthaginians destroyed it later on during the first Punic war, to prevent it from falling into the hands of the Romans.

The archeological area opens with the eastern hills, where the remains of three large Doric temples lie: Temple G, dedicated to Zeus, today is completely in ruins. It was one of the largest temples in antiquity: it measured 113 by 54 meters, with columns standing 16 meters high. Temple F, dedicated to Athena, is the smallest of the temples. Dating from the end of the 6th century B.C., today it is completely destroyed. Temple E, dedicated to Hera, is the most striking, thanks to the reconstruction undertaken by archeologists in the 1950s. Beyond the eastern hill extends the area of the Acropolis, on which was discovered the remains of 5 Doric temples. Around the Acropolis were discovered fortifications made of squared blocks (from the 5th and 6th centuries). To the north and to the west of the Acropolis lie two great necropolises, still in excavation, containing dozens of excavated tombs of volcanic rock and sarcophagi of terracotta. The excavations of the archeological area

still continue; the many findings discovered at Selinunte are preserved in the Archeological Museum of Palermo and the Civic Museum of Castelvetrano. Archeological Park Information: Telephone: +39 0924 46251

## Trapani, Erice and Marsala



Trapani: panorama with Egadi Islands

This itinerary carries you along the ancient Salt Route, next to the extreme west corner of Sicily, where a fine historical heritage and absolutely unique natural features await the tourist. Come with us to discover why...

**Lodging:** According to your needs and your budget, you can choose your lodgings from among any number of options, including hotels of every kind, or comfortable bed-and-breakfasts at Trapani, Erice, or Marsala. If you're looking for a unique experience, opt for one of the many agritourism lodgings, or charming and hospitable residence hotels in a real "baglio", or ancient Sicilian farm, immersed in the country or looking out over the sea.

### Marsala

Marsala is a gorgeous city of art, rich in Punic, Roman, Norman, Arab, and Spanish heritage. It was founded by the Carthaginians at the beginning of the 4th century B.C. under the name of Lilibeo, but during medieval times, it was conquered by the Arabs, who called

it Mars-el-Allah (port of God). The Normans conquered Marsala in 1072, erecting a castle and constructing churches and convents. The name of the city is connected to the famous wine that has been produced here since the end of the 8th century. An enterprising Englishman, John Woodhouse, established the first wine factory that produced marsala, which went on to have such a large part in the economic fortunes of the city.

**The Cathedral (Duomo)**, constructed by the Normans and largely remodeled in the succeeding centuries. The building face dominates the piazza in Doric style, with 18th century elements like the portal and the displays on the windows.

Behind the Duomo, don't miss the **Tapestry Museum**, with 8 beautiful Flemish tapestries from the 16th century, representing scenes from the war of Tito against the Judeans.

On the seafront lies the **Regional Archaeological Museum**, where visitors can admire Punic findings from the Isle of Mozia and from the necropolises of Lilibeo. In one large room the remains of a Punic nave are preserved, a unique example of this type of nave which was discovered in the Stagnone lagoon.

Continuing along the seafront, down to the easternmost point of the city, we come upon an **archeological park** containing remains of a Roman city from the 3rd or 4th century B.C.: remains of dwellings, a bathhouse and some lovely polychromatic mosaics.

Another important attraction of Marsala are the **historical Florio wine cellars**, two centuries old (Lungomare Florio, 1 Marsala +39 0923 781111), where you can observe the production processes of this lovely aromatic wine.

### The saltworks

The coast from Marsala to Trapani is characterized by one of the landscapes

most peculiar to Sicily: the saltworks. Large mirrors of saltwater form an irregular and multicolored chessboard, where for centuries the precious substance has been produced. In some areas you can see a windmill, which at one time served to pump water and grind the salt.

Among the most beautiful of these are the Saltworks of Trapani and Paceco, which are protected by the World Wildlife Federation for their role as home to around 170 different bird species, including flamingos, storks, cranes, and herons.

The saltworks visitor center can be found at Nubia, just below Trapani on the coastal road SP 21. In a 300-year old salt house, the Museum of Salt was instituted, illustrating the phases of salt production and some of the equipment utilized for its extraction and collection. By night, nature offers most beautiful sunsets in Sicily, with colors that shift from red to orange to pink, encircling the ancient mills and the silhouettes of the Egadi Islands.

### Trapani

Trapani, of winding design and baroque architecture in bright stone, extends out into the sea in its characteristic shape of a scythe, with the majestic Tower of Ligny rising from its extreme point. Under Arab dominion, Trapani was a flowering center for the production of salt, tuna, and coral. In the 16th century, Trapanese coral artisans made the city famous throughout the Old World. A gorgeous collection of works in coral is preserved in the Pepoli Museum.

**Corso Vittorio Emanuele**, the main street of the old city, is flanked by baroque churches and buildings:

The Jesuit Church of Collegio, from the 17th century, has a wonderful baroque facade of great relief moldings. Inside there are three naves, with some notable 18th-century altars

of mixed marble and, in the main altar, a bas-relief by Marabiti, representing Maria Immacolata.

The Cathedral, constructed in the 17th century, guards within it some funerary monuments and a crucifix, which some attribute to Anthony Van Dyck.

In the ancient **Jewish quarter**, along Via Giudecca, it is worth the trouble to stop in front of the Giudecca Palazzo, from the 16th century, constructed in the Spanish plateresque style.

**The Sanctuary of Annunziata** is an original church from the 15th century, with rose window and portal from the 1400s, the belltower from 1650. Inside it contains beautiful chapels, rich in masterpieces. The most celebrated and lovely chapel is the **Chapel of the Madonna**. On the main altar there is a statue of the Virgin: the Madonna of Trapani, by Nino Pisano, extremely venerated by the Trapanese. It is a true and inimitable masterpiece of sculpture.

The former convent of the Annunciation hosts the **Pepoli National Museum** which, for the richness and variety of its collections, is considered one of the most important museums in Sicily, and worth a visit just for its striking ambiance. The first floor hosts the **picture gallery**, which collects many precious paintings, including a Pietà masterpiece by Roberto Oderisio from 1380. Don't miss the artistic creations in coral (necklaces, sacred furnishings and nativity figurines), which bear witness to the artistic quality achieved by the artisans of Trapani.

**The procession of the Mysteries:** of exceptional power is the procession of the Saint Friday, when the Mysteries, ancient wooden statues that represent scenes from the Passion of Christ, are carried on the shoulders in an imposing procession that covers, for 24 consecutive hours, the streets of the

historical center, while from the balconies, onlookers throw down flower petals.

### Erice

It is the best-known city of this edge of Sicily, and with good reason. Located in a panoramic position 750 feet above sea level, Erice preserves whole all the fascination of an ancient medieval village, with little piazzas, winding streets, gorgeous flowering courtyards and more than 60 small churches. The view from here can span over all of eastern Sicily, over Trapani, Marsala, and the Egadi Islands.

Erice was founded in the 7th century b.C. by the Elymians, who erected the temple dedicated to the worship of their fertility goddess. Afterward, the Greek worshipped Aphrodite and Roman Venus. On the ruins of the Temple stands today the Castle of Venus, from the Norman times.

The historical center is surrounded by **Cyclopiian walls** of Punic origin (6th century b.C.). The Normans opened up three ports (Trapani, Carmine, and Spada). Entering through the port of Trapani, one comes upon the Duomo (cathedral), erected in the 14th century in Gothic style. The isolated belltower served also as a lookout tower for defense of the city. The inside was rebuilt in the 19th century in Neogothic style.

Southeast of the inhabited areas, above an elusive rock from where the Temple of Venus arises, the Normans erected the grandiose **Castle of Venus**, an impregnable fortress in defense of the city, sometime between the 12th and 14th centuries. Some towers and walls still remain from this castle. To the left of the Norman castle rises the **Castle of Balio** (the governor), constructed by Count Pepoli in the 1800's and the medieval Norman towers, restored by the Count during the same period.

Every summer Erice hosts the famous **Week of Medieval and Renaissance Music**, which attracts internationally famous artists and a great many fans.

# The Egadi islands



Egadi Islands: Favignana, traditional tuna fishing

The Egadi are three distant islands, a few thousand meters from the coast of Trapani. You can arrive there in a few minutes thanks to the many connections from the port of Trapani, yet just visiting the Egadi, one feels far away from everything, immersed in a pristine environment of rare beauty. These islands are a little outside of time, where the tourist can abandon themselves happily to the rhythm of life so different from their own.

**How to get there:** transportation from Trapani to the Egadi Islands is by boat, hydrofoil, and ferry, operated by Tirrenia (Call Center 892 123 from cell phones, or from abroad +39.081.8449297) and Ustica Lines (information and reservations at 0923 873813).

**Where to stay:** The Egadi islands offer different arrangements depending on your needs and your budget. There is a moderate choice of hotels and tourist villages, with various degrees of comfort, services and prices. For those who want to abandon

themselves to the enchantment of the island for a longer period, we advise you to rent a vacation house or apartment, ideal for a relaxing family vacation. With a smaller budget, one can opt for an bed-and-breakfast, or a guesthouse in the Egadis, while campers will find some quality campgrounds at Favignana.

## Favignana

with its typical butterfly shape, is the biggest island of the Egadis. Arriving by boat, one is immediately greeted with the elegance of the Palazzo Florio. The Florio was constructed in 1874 when the old **tonnare** (the extensive buildings used for tuna working) were acquired, and which still today dominate the port of Favignana. Until the 1800's, the tuna industry of Favignana was created around Palazzo Florio, one of the biggest industrial food complexes in the world, at the vanguard of conservation activity and packing of tuna. Today the tonnare are in disuse, but they will soon be converted into a museum and cultural center.

The historical center gravitates around the **Piazza Madrice**, which contains a baroque church, shops, bars, and gelato shops. It is always crowded, especially in the summer. It is possible to lose one's self in the streets of the 17th century center, among the simple houses, which hide gardens that diffuse the scents of flowers and aromatic herbs into the air.

Leaving the town, there appears an island in all its rough beauty. The Mediterranean brush covers vast expanses: thistles, prickly pears and agave make this landscape extraordinarily fascinating.

The coast is scattered with cliffs and coves: **Cala Rossa** is really the best-known: viewing it from above its fortresses gives an indescribable feeling. Abandoning one's self to the care of the sun and the sea, and to the beautiful **Cala Azzurra**, **Cala Stornello**, and **Cala Rotonda** surely will one's expectations will not go unfulfilled. A boat trip allows you

to discover the grottoes that open up to the sea and the less-accessible solitary beaches.

## The old tuff stone quarries

concentrated in the northeast of Favignana, are another attraction not to be missed. In ancient times this volcanic rock was the principal resource for the inhabitants of the island: the blocks of tuff, extracted using long hand saws, were taken across the sea on board sailing ships for export to all of Sicily and North Africa. Today these quarries, which make this landscape unique, are becoming large vegetable gardens and underground flower gardens, where capers and other aromatic Mediterranean plants grow.

## Levanzo

To the north of Favignana emerges the island of Levanzo, the smallest of the Egadi islands. The island has high and steep coasts which are intact and beautiful, a truly pristine paradise for those who love a more quiet kind of tourism. Life goes at a slow pace, completely removed from the world of home. Levanzo is an island to explore by foot, along the paths that rise toward the mountain and along the coasts.

There is a unique little town on the island, overlooking it like a terrace over the little port, where islanders and tourists live elbow to elbow.

A boat ride will allow you to discover the north coast, rising straight from the ocean, and to explore coves accessible only by sea. Those who love history cannot miss the Grotto of the Genovese: it is a large cavern with prehistoric paintings and graffiti inside, with scenes of hunting and fishing from more than 10 million years ago.

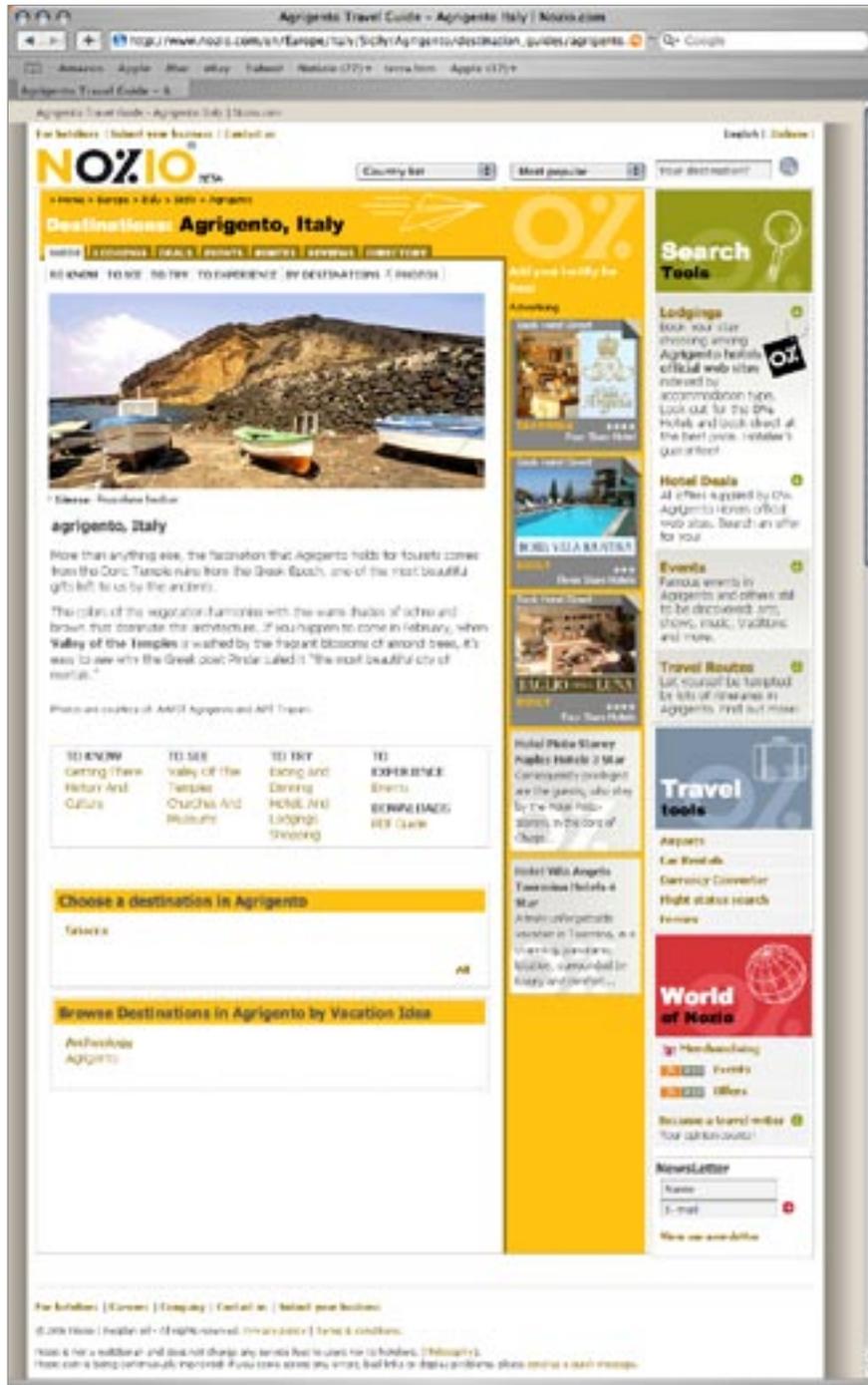
## Marettimo

is the furthest away and the most wild of the three Egadis, an island that is extremely dominated by the bulk of Monte Falcone.

If you're looking for urban comforts and nightlife, this is not the place: there are only a few such facilities on the island. Marettimo is instead ideal for lovers of trekking and swimming. The rich depths are justly protected in the Egadi Marine Nature Reserve.

**An island boat trip** (ask the local fishermen) is intensely exciting. The eastern coast offers more complex scenery: very high fortresses rising up from the turquoise sea, where marine grottos open up to create fantastic plays of light. Some are so vast that they allow access to two or three boats at a time.

History has also left its traces on Marettimo: a mule track that rises from the port city to the rest of the Roman houses, while on the point of Troia, inaccessible as an eagle's nest, overhangs a castle to the left, which was made into a prison by the Bourbons.



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