

COORDINATES: [38°06′56″N 13°21′41″E](#) **SURFACE:** 158,88 km² **INHABITANTS:** 656.607

Palermo (Italian pronunciation: [paˈlɛrmo], Sicilian: *Palermu*, Latin: *Panormus*, from Greek: Πάνορμος, *Panormos*),

Arabic:

پاليرمو

بالهارم

Balharm

) is a historic city in Southern Italy, the capital of both the autonomous region of Sicily and the Province of Palermo. The city is noted for its rich history, culture, architecture and gastronomy, playing an important role throughout much of its existence; it is over 2,700 years old. Palermo is located in the northwest of the island of Sicily, right by the Gulf of Palermo in the Tyrrhenian Sea.

{oziogallery80}

The city was founded by the Phoenicians, but named by the Ancient Greeks as *Panormus* meaning

(Largest)Port of All(Sea)

. Palermo became part of the Roman Republic, the Roman Empire and eventually part of the Byzantine Empire, for over a thousand years. From 827 to 1071 it was under Arab rule during the Emirate of Sicily when it first became a capital. Following the Norman reconquest, Palermo became capital of a new kingdom (from 1130 to 1816), the Kingdom of Sicily. Eventually it would be united with the Kingdom of Naples to form the Two Sicilies until the Italian unification of 1860.

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The population of the Palermo urban area is estimated by Eurostat to be 855,285, while its metropolitan area is the fifth most populated in Italy with around 1.2 million people. In the central area, the city has a population of around 670,000 people. The inhabitants are known as *Palermi* or *tans*

poetically

panormiti

. The languages spoken by its inhabitants are the Italian language and the Sicilian dialect.

Palermo is Sicily's cultural, economic and touristic capital. It is a city rich in history, culture, art, music and food. Numerous tourists are attracted to the city for its good Mediterranean weather, its renowned gastronomy and restaurants, its Romanesque, Gothic and Baroque churches, palaces and buildings, and its nightlife and music. Palermo is the main Sicilian industrial and commercial center: the main industrial sectors include tourism, services, commerce and agriculture. Palermo currently has an international airport, and a significant underground economy.

In fact, for cultural, artistic and economic reasons, Palermo was one of the largest cities in the Mediterranean and is now among the top tourist destinations in both Italy and Europe. The city also works through careful redevelopment, preparing to become one of the major cities of Euro-Mediterranean area.

Roman Catholicism is highly important in Palermitan culture. The patron saint of the city is Saint Rosalia. Her feast day on July 15 is perhaps the biggest social event in the city. The area attracts significant amounts of tourists each year and is widely known for its colourful fruit, vegetable and fish market at the heart of Palermo, known as the *Vucciria*.

History

Ancient era Evidence for human settlement in the area now known as Palermo goes back to the Pleistocene Epoch, around 8000 BC.

This evidence is present in the form of cave drawings at nearby Addaura crafted by the Sicani who, according to Thucydides, arrived from the Iberian Peninsula (perhaps Catalonia).

During 734 BC the Phoenicians, a sea trading peoples from the north of ancient Canaan, built a small settlement on the natural harbour of Palermo. Some sources suggest they named the settlement "Ziz". The Greeks, who were the most dominant culture on the island of Sicily due to the powerful city state of Syracuse to the east, instead called the settlement

Panormus

. Its Greek name means "all-port" and it was named so because of its fine natural harbour.

Palermo was then passed on to the Phoenician's descendants and successors, in the form of the Carthaginians.

During this period it was a centre of commerce; however a power struggle between the Greeks and the Carthaginians broke out in the form of the Sicilian Wars, causing unrest. It was from Palermo that Hamilcar's fleet (which was defeated at the Battle of Himera) was launched. Palermo eventually became a Greek colony when Pyrrhus of Epirus gained it during the Pyrrhic War period in 276 BC.

However, as the Romans flooded into Sicily during the First Punic War, the city came under

Roman rule only three decades later. The Romans made sure that, in the words of Roman consul M. Valerian to the Roman Senate; "no Carthaginian remains in Sicily". This period was quite a calm time for Palermo, which was growing into an important Roman trade centre. Also during this period Christianity first began to be practised in Palermo.

The Middle Ages

As the Roman Empire was falling apart, Palermo fell under the control of several Germanic tribes. The first were the Vandals in 440 AD under the rule of their king Geiseric. The Vandals had already invaded other parts of Western Europe establishing themselves as a significant force. However, they soon lost these newly acquired possessions to another East Germanic tribe in the form of the Goths. The Ostrogothic conquest under Theodoric the Great began in 488; although the Goths were Germanic, Theodoric sought to revive Roman culture and government instead. The Gothic War took place between the Ostrogoths and the Eastern Roman Empire, also known as the Byzantine Empire. Sicily was the first part of Italy to be taken under control of General Belisarius who was commissioned by Eastern Emperor Justinian I who solidified his rule in the following years.

After the Byzantines were betrayed by Admiral Euphemius, who fled to Tunisia and begged the Aghlabid leader Ziyadat Allah to help him, there was a Muslim conquest of Sicily, putting in place the Emirate of Sicily. The Arab rulers allowed the natives freedom of religion on the condition that they paid a tax. Although their rule was short in time, it was then that Palermo (Balharm during Arab rule) displaced Syracuse as the prime city of Sicily. It was said to have then begun to compete with Córdoba and Cairo in terms of importance and splendor.

The Arabs also introduced many agricultural items which remain a mainstay of Sicilian cuisine. After dynasty related quarrels however, there was a Christian reconquest in the form of the Normans from the Duchy of Normandy, descendants of the Vikings; the family who returned the city to Christianity were called the Hautevilles.

Palermo was conquered in 831 by Arabs from North Africa and became the capital of the Arabian Emirate of Sicily until 1072 where it was back under Christian rule due largely to the efforts of Robert Guiscard and his army, who is regarded as a hero by the natives. For more than two hundred years Palermo, was the capital of a flourishing Islamic civilisation in Sicily. By 1050, Palermo had a population of 350,000, making it one of the largest cities in Europe, second only to Islamic Spain's capital Cordoba, which had a population of 450,000.

It was under Roger II of Sicily that his holdings of Sicily and the southern part of the Italian Peninsula were promoted; from the County of Sicily into the Kingdom of Sicily. The kingdom was ruled from Palermo as its capital, with the king's court held at Palazzo dei Normanni. Much construction was undertaken during this period, such as the building of the Palermo Cathedral. The Kingdom of Sicily became one of the wealthiest states in Europe, as wealthy as the fellow Norman state, the Kingdom of England. Although the city's population had dropped to 150,000, it became the largest city in Europe, due to the larger decline in Cordoba's population.

Sicily, in 1194, fell under the control of the Holy Roman Empire. Palermo was the preferred city of the Emperor Frederick II. Muslims of Palermo were migrated and expelled during Holy

Roman rule. After an interval of Angevin rule (1266–1282), Sicily came under the house of Aragon. By 1330, Palermo's population had declined to 51,000. From 1479, it was ruled by the Kingdom of Spain until 1713 and between 1717–1718. Palermo was also managed by Savoy between 1713–1717 and 1718–1720 and Austria between 1720–1734.

Two Sicilies

After the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), Sicily was handed over to the Savoia, but by 1734 it was again a Bourbon possession. Charles III chose Palermo for his coronation as King of Sicily. Charles had new houses built for the increased population, while trade and industry grew as well. However, Palermo was now just another provincial city as the royal court resided in Naples. Charles' son Ferdinand, though disliked by the population, took refuge in Palermo after the French Revolution in 1798. His son Alberto died on the way to Palermo and is buried in the city.

From 1820 to 1848 all Sicily was shaken by upheavals, which culminated on January 12, 1848, with a popular insurrection led by Giuseppe La Masa, the first one in Europe that year. A parliament and constitution were proclaimed. The first president was Ruggero Settimo. The Bourbons soon reconquered Palermo (May 1849), which remained under their rule until the appearance of Giuseppe Garibaldi. This famous general entered Palermo with his troops (the "Thousands") on May 27, 1860. After the plebiscite later that year Palermo and the whole of Sicily became part of the new Kingdom of Italy (1861).

Italian unification and today

From that year onwards, Palermo followed the history of Italy as the administrative centre of Sicily. A certain economic and industrial growth was spurred by the Florio family. In the early twentieth century Palermo expanded outside the old city walls, mostly to the north along the new boulevard, the Via della Libertà. This road would soon boast a huge number of villas in the Art Nouveau style or Stile Liberty as it is known in Italy. Many of these were built by the famous architect Ernesto Basile. The Grand Hotel Villa Igeia, built by Ernesto Basile for the Florio family, is a good example of Palermitan Stile Liberty. The Teatro Massimo was built in the same period by Basile and his son and was opened in 1897.

During World War II, Palermo was untouched until the Allies began to advance up Italy after the Allied invasion of Sicily in 1943. In July, the harbour and the surrounding quarters were heavily bombed by the allied forces and were all but destroyed. Six decades later the city centre has still not been fully rebuilt, and hollow walls and devastated buildings are commonplace.

In 1946 the city was declared the seat of the Regional Parliament, as capital of a Special Status Region (1947) whose seat is in the Palazzo dei Normanni. Palermo's future seemed to look bright again. Unfortunately, many opportunities were lost in the coming decades, due to incompetence, incapacity, corruption and abuse of power.

The main topic of the contemporary age is the struggle against Mafia and bandits like Salvatore Giuliano, who controlled the neighbouring area of Montelepre. The Italian State had to share effective control, economic as well as the administrative, of the territory with the Mafiosi families.

The so-called "Sack of Palermo" is one of the major visible faces of this problem. The term is used today to indicate the heavy building speculations that filled the city with poor buildings. The reduced importance of agriculture in the Sicilian economy had led to a massive migration to the cities, especially Palermo, which swelled in size. Instead of rebuilding the city centre the town was thrown into a frantic expansion towards the north, where practically a new town was built. The regulatory plan for the expansion was largely ignored. New parts of town appeared almost out of nowhere, but without parks, schools, public buildings, proper roads and the other amenities that characterise a modern city. The Mafia played a huge role in this process, which was an important element in the Mafia's transition from a mostly rural phenomenon into a modern criminal organisation. The Mafia took advantage of corrupt city officials (a former mayor of Palermo, Vito Ciancimino, has been condemned for his bribery with Mafiosi) and protection coming from the Italian central government itself.

Many civil servants lost their life in the struggle against the criminal organisations of Palermo and Sicily. These include the Carabinieri general Carlo Alberto Dalla Chiesa, the region's president Piersanti Mattarella, Padre Pino Puglisi, a priest who had fought for the young people living in the suburbs, and courageous magistrates such as Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino.

Today, Palermo is a city still struggling to recover from the devastation of World War II and the damage caused by decades of uncontrolled urban growth. The historic city centre is still partly in ruins, the traffic is horrific, and poverty is widespread. Being the city in which the Italian Mafia historically had its main interests, it has also been the place of several recent well-publicized murders. Situated on one of the most beautiful promontories of the Mediterranean, Palermo is anyway an important trading and business centre and the seat of a University frequented by many students coming from Islamic countries, as its relationships with Muslim world were never ceased.

Palermo is connected to the mainland through an international airport and an increasing number of maritime links. However, land connections remain poor. This and other reasons have until now thwarted the development of tourism. This has been identified as the main resource to exploit for the city's recovery, the marvellous legacy of three millennia of history and folklore.

Churches

- Palermo Cathedral is the city's cathedral and main church. It is characterized by the presence of different architectural styles, due to a long history of additions, alterations and restorations, the last of which occurred in the 18th century. The cathedral is located at Corso Vittorio Emanuele, corner of Via Matteo Bonello, Palermo.
 - San Giovanni dei Lebbrosi
 - San Giovanni degli Eremiti (St. John of the Hermits) is a church near the Palazzo dei Normanni. The church is notable for its brilliant red domes, which show clearly the persistence of Arab influences in Sicily at the time of its reconstruction in the 12th century. In his *Diary of an Idle Woman in Sicily*, F. Elliot described it as "... totally oriental... it would fit well in Baghdad or Damascus". The bell tower, with four orders of arcaded loggias, is, instead, a typical example of Gothic architecture.
- Chiesa della Martorana, also known as *Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio* (*Saint Mary of the Admiral*), is annexed to the next-door church of San Cataldo and overlooks the Piazza Bellini in central Palermo. The original church was built in the form of a compact cross-in-square ("Greek cross plan"), a common south Italian and Sicilian variation on the standard middle Byzantine church type. The three apses in the east adjoin directly on the naos, instead of being separated by an additional bay, as was usual in contemporary Byzantine architecture in the Balkans and Asia Minor. In the first century of its existence the church was expanded in three distinct phases; first through the addition of a narthex to house the tombs of George of Antioch and his wife; next through the addition of a forehall; and finally through the construction of a centrally-aligned campanile at the west. The campanile, which is richly decorated with three orders of arches and lodges with mullioned windows, still serves as the main entrance to the church. Significant later additions to the church include the Baroque façade which today faces onto the piazza. In the late 19th century, historically-minded restorers attempted to return the church to its original state, although many elements of the Baroque modifications remain.
- San Cataldo is a church building on the central Piazza Bellini. It is a notable example of Norman architecture. The church is annexed to that of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio.
 - Santa Maria della Gancia
 - Santa Maria della Catena was built in 1490–1520, designed by Matteo Carnilivari. The name derives from the presence, on one of the walls, of a chain (Italian: *catena*) which closed the Cala port.
- San Giuseppe dei Teatini is a Baroque church located near the Quattro Canti, and is

considered one of the most outstanding examples of the Sicilian Baroque in Palermo.

- Oratorio di San Lorenzo
- Oratorio del Rosario
- Santa Teresa alla Kalsa derives its name from Al-Khalisa, an Arab term meaning *elected*.

The church, constructed in 1686–1706 over the former emir's residence, is one of the most outstanding examples of Sicilian Baroque. It has a single, airy nave, with stucco decorations from the early 18th century.

- Santa Maria dello Spasimo was built in 1506 and later turned into a hospital. For this temple Raphael painted his famous *Sicilia's Spasimo*, now in the Museo del Prado of Madrid. The church today is a fascinating open-air, which occasionally houses exhibitions and musical shows.

- the Church of the Jesus (*Chiesa del Gesù*) was built by the Jesuits in the centre of the city in 1564, over a pre-existing convent of Basilian monks. The edifice was further enlarged starting in 1591, becoming one of the most relevant examples of Sicilian Baroque, though retaining some severe late Renaissance fashion. The church was heavily damaged after the 1943 bombings, which destroyed most of the frescoes. The interior has a Latin cross plan with a nave and two aisles, characterized by a particularly rich decoration of marbles, tarsias and stuccoes, especially in the St. Anne's Chapel. At the right is the Casa Professa, with a 1685 portal and a precious 18th century cloister. The Church of the Jesus is home to the Municipal Library, placed here in 1775.

- The church of St. Francis of Assisi was erected between 1255 and 1277 in what was once the market district of the city. It was built at the site of two pre-existing churches and was largely renovated in the 15th, 16th, 18th and 19th centuries, the latter after an earthquake. After the 1943 bombings, the church was restored to its Mediaeval appearance, which now includes part of the original building such as part of the right side, the apses and the Gothic portal in the façade. The interior has a typical Gothic flavour, with a nave and two aisles separated by two rows of cylindrical pilasters. Some of the chapels are in Renaissance style, as well as the late 16th century side portals. The church includes precious sculptures by Antonio and Giacomo Gagini and Francesco Laurana, plus a noteworthy wooden choir dating from the 16th century. Of note are also the allegorical statues by Giacomo Serpotta (1723), also author of the stucco decoration.

- The church of the Magione (officially church of the Holy Trinity), an ancient example of Norman architecture, was founded in 1191 by Matteo d'Ajello, who donated it to the Cistercian monks.

Palaces and museums

- Palazzo dei Normanni, one of the most beautiful Italian palaces and a notable example of Norman architecture, probably built over an Arab fortress. It houses the famous Cappella Palatina.

- Zisa (1160) and Cuba, magnificent castles/houses used by the kings of Palermo for hunting. Similar buildings were common in northern Africa, but today these two are the only ones remaining. The Zisa houses the Islamic museum. The Cuba was once encircled by water.

- Palazzo Chiaramonte
- Palazzo Abatellis, with the Regional Gallery. It was built at the end of the 15th century for the prefect of the city, Francesco Abatellis. It is a massive though elegant construction, in typical Catalan Gothic style, with Renaissance influences. The Gallery houses an Eleonora of Aragon bust by Francesco Laurana (1471) and the *Malvagna Triptych* (c. 1510), by Jan Gossaert and the famous *Annunziata* by Antonello da Messina. The exposition in the museum has been designed by the architect Carlo Scarpa.
- The Museo Archeologico Regionale is one the main museums of Italy: it includes numerous remains from Etruscan, Carthaginian, Roman and Hellenistic civilizations. It houses all the decorative parts from the Sicilian temples of Segesta and Selinunte.

Opera houses

- The Teatro Massimo ("Greatest Theatre") was opened in 1897. Closed for renovation from 1974 until 1997, it is now carefully restored and has an active schedule. Enrico Caruso sang in a performance of *La Gioconda* during the opening season, returning for *Rigoletto* at the very end of his career. It is the largest theater in Italy and the third largest in Europe (8000 sm) .
- The Teatro Politeama was built between 1867 and 1874.

Squares

- Quattro Canti is a small square at the crossing of the ancient main roads (now: Corso Vittorio Emanuele and Via Maqueda) dividing the town into its quarters (*mandamenti*). The buildings at the corner have diagonal baroque facades so that the square gets an almost octagonal form.
- Piazza Pretoria was planned in the 16th century near the Quattro Canti as the site of a fountain by Francesco Camilliani, the Fontana Pretoria.

Other sights

The cathedral has a heliometer (solar "observatory") of 1690, one of a number built in Italy in the 17th and 18th centuries. The device itself is quite simple: a tiny hole in one of the minor domes acts as Pinhole camera, projecting an image of the sun onto the floor at solar noon (12:00 in winter, 13:00 in summer). There is a bronze line, *la Meridiana* on the floor, running precisely N/S. The ends of the line mark the positions as at the summer and winter solstices; signs of the zodiac show the various other dates throughout the year.

The purpose of the instrument was to standardise the measurement of time and the calendar. The convention in Sicily had been that the (24 hour) day was measured from the moment of sun-rise, which of course meant that no two locations had the same time and, more importantly,

did not have the same time as in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. It was also important to know when the Vernal Equinox occurred, to provide the correct date for Easter.

The Orto botanico di Palermo, founded in 1785, is the largest in Italy with a surface of 10 ha.

One site of interest is the Capuchin Catacombs, with many mummified corpses in varying degrees of preservation.

Close to the city is the 600 m-high Monte Pellegrino, offering a panorama of the city, its surrounding mountains and the sea.

Demographics

In 2007, there were 666,552 people residing in Palermo, of which 1.5 million live in the greater Palermo area, and of whom 47.6% were male and 52.4% were female. Minors (children ages 18 and younger) totalled 21.64% of the population compared to pensioners who number 16.54%. This compares with the Italian average of 8.06% minors and 19.94% pensioners. The average age of Palermo resident is 37 compared to the Italian average of 42. In the five years between 2002 and 2007, the population of Palermo declined by 2.92%, while the population of Italy, as a whole, grew by 3.56%. The reason for Palermo's decline is a population flight to the suburbs, and to Northern Italy. The current birth rate of Palermo is 10.75 births per 1,000 inhabitants compared to the Italian average of 9.45 births.

As of 2006, 97.79% of the population was of Sicilian/Italian descent. The largest immigrant group came from South Asia (mostly from Sri Lanka): 0.80%, other European countries (mostly from Albania, Romania, Serbia, Macedonia and Ukraine,): 0.3%, and North Africa (mostly from Tunisia): 0.28%.

Economy

Being Sicily's administrative capital, Palermo is home to much of the region's main economic, financial, touristic and commercial life. The city currently hosts an international airport,^[30] and Palermo's economic growth over the years has brought to the opening of many new businesses and entrepreneurial opportunities. The economy mainly relies on tourism and services, but also commerce, shipbuilding, trade and agriculture. The city, however, still has high unemployment

levels, high corruption and a significant black market empire (Palermo being the home of the Sicilian Mafia). Even though the city still suffers from widespread corruption, inefficient bureaucracy and organized crime (Mafia), Palermo's crime level has gone down dramatically, unemployment has been decreasing and many new, profitable, strategies (especially regarding tourism) have been introduced, making the city safer and better to live in.

[2]

Patron saints

The patron saint of Palermo is Santa Rosalia, who is widely venerated. On 14 July, people in Palermo celebrate the *Festino*, the most important religious event of the year. The Festino is a procession in the main street of Palermo to remember the miracle attributed to Santa Rosalia who, it is believed, freed the city from the Black Death in 1624. The cave where the bones of Santa Rosalia were discovered is on Monte Pellegrino (see above): when her relics were carried around the city three times, the plague was lifted. There is a Santuario marking the spot and can be reached via a scenic bus ride from the city below.

Before 1624 Palermo had four patron saints, one for each of the four major parts of the city. They were Saint Agatha, Saint Christina, Saint Ninfa and Saint Olivia.

Saint Lucy is also honoured with a peculiar celebration, during which inhabitants of Palermo do not eat anything made with flour, but boil wheat in its natural state and use it to prepare a special dish called *cuccìa*. This commemorates the saving of the city from famine through the intercession of St Lucia. A ship full of grain mysteriously arrived in the city's harbour and the population was so hungry that they did not waste time in making flour but ate the grain as it had arrived.

Saint Benedict the Moor is the heavenly protector of the city of Palermo.

The ancient patron of the city was the Genius of Palermo, genius loci and numen protector of the place, that became the laic patron of the modern Palermo

Climate

Palermo experiences a hot-summer Mediterranean climate (Koppen climate classification: *Csa*)

. Winters are mild and wet, while Summers are warm to hot, and dry. Palermo is one of the warmest cities in the Mediterranean, with an average annual ambient air temperature of 18.5 °C (65.3 °F). It receives approximately 2,530 hours of sunshine per year.

Climate data for Palermo

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
Average high °C (°F)	14.8			
(58.6)	15.1			
(59.2)	16.1			
(61)	18.4			
(65.1)	21.8			
(71.2)	25.1			
(77.2)	28.3			
(82.9)	28.8			
(83.8)	26.6			
(79.9)	22.9			
(73.2)	19.3			
(66.7)	16.0			
(60.8)	21.1			
(70)				
Daily mean °C (°F)	11.5			
(52.7)	12.1			
(53.8)	13.2			
(55.8)	15.7			
(60.3)	18.9			
(66)	22.4			
(72.3)	25.6			
(78.1)	26.2			
(79.2)	24.1			
(75.4)	20.4			
(68.7)	16.8			
(62.2)	13.3			
(55.9)	18.3			
(64.9)				
Average low °C (°F)	8.2			
(46.8)	9.1			
(48.4)	10.9			
(51.6)	12.9			
(55.2)	16.0			
(60.8)	19.7			
(67.5)	22.9			
(73.2)	23.6			

(74.5) 21.5
(70.7) 17.8
(64) 14.3
(57.7) 10.5
(50.9) 15.6
(60.1)

Precipitation cm (inches) 7.16

(2.819) 6.54
(2.575) 5.95
(2.343) 4.41
(1.736) 2.55
(1.004) 1.22
(0.48) 0.51
(0.201) 1.33
(0.524) 4.15
(1.634) 9.80
(3.858) 9.43
(3.713) 8.0
(3.15) 61.05
(24.035)

Avg. precipitation days 9.7 10.0 8.7

Source: [World Meteorological Organization](#) ([UN](#))

Source Wikipedia