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48 Hours In Palermo: What To See, Do And Eat



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Travel

I share stories about travel, culture, food & wine.

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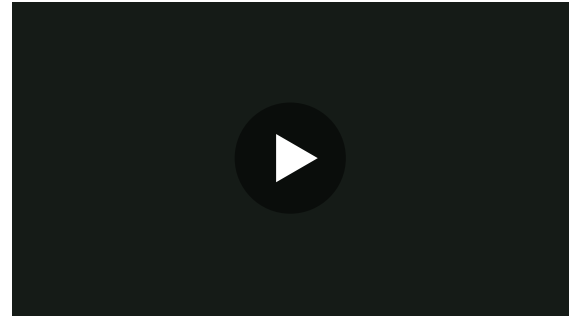
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Palermo rooftops as seen from the Cupola of San Salvatore. LIVIA HENGEL

As the former capital of the Kingdom of Sicily, Palermo has long been regarded as one of the most important and dynamic cities in the Mediterranean. The Phoenicians, Romans, Byzantines, Greeks, Arabs and Normans all left their mark on the city making it a fascinating place to discover. And with United Airlines announcement of a new direct flight from



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Newark Liberty International Airport to Palermo starting May 20, 2020 (the only daily nonstop flight from the US to Sicily) there’s even more reason to explore this vibrant city.

Day 1

First things first: breakfast! Make like the locals and keep cool with a granita and brioche. It may seem like an unlikely morning meal, but Sicilians swear by this icy treat which sees fruits and nut pastes churned into a frozen sweet similar to gelato. One of the best places to enjoy this treat in the city is the inconspicuous **Caffetteria del Corso**, where friendly owner Pino makes a handful of flavors from scratch on a daily basis. Topped with freshly whipped cream, they are an indulgent and refreshing way to start your day.



Palermo is well known for its colorful and bustling open-air markets, including Vucciria, Ballarò and Mercato il Capo. LIVIA HENGEL

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Palermo is well known for its colorful and bustling open-air markets, including **Vucciria**, **Ballarò** and **Mercato il Capo**. You can shop for seasonal fruits and vegetables and taste Sicilian fried treats at the numerous stands packed within: taste *arancini* (fried rice balls), *pane e panelle* (sandwiches stuffed with chickpea fritters) and thick slices of *sfincione* (a type of focaccia usually topped with a sweet tomato sauce, onions and caciocavallo cheese). Another great place to try Palermo's famous *fritti* is **Francu U Vastiddaru**, a street food joint down by the port.



Located right across the street from Teatro Massimo, Palazzo Sovrana is home to luxurious suites that look out onto the opera house. COURTESY OF PALAZZO SOVRANA

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Next, stop by nearby **Teatro Massimo** for a visit of Italy's illustrious opera house, dedicated to King Victor Emmanuel II. The exterior pays homage to Sicily's Greek roots and incorporates elements from the Selinunte and Agrigento temples. The final scenes of The Godfather III were filmed at the theatre as well.



Osteria Pane e Alivi is a casual trattoria located in Piazza Sant'Onofrio that serves typical Sicilian dishes. LIVIA HENGEL

For a relaxed lunch, head over to **Osteria Pane e Alivi** for local specialties at a great price, including the house special, spaghetti

made with sundried tomatoes, olives, capers and sprinkled with breadcrumbs.



Climb the Palermo Cathedral for a view of the city from the rooftop. LIVIA HENGEL

With the afternoon ahead of you, there is plenty of time to take in Palermo's main sights, including the **Quattro Canti**, **Fontana Pretoria**, **Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio**, and the **Cattedrale of Palermo**, which you can easily visit in a couple hours. Pro tip: enter Palazzo Pretorio, the Town Hall of Palermo, for a view of Fontana Pretoria from up above. You can also climb the Cathedral for a view from the roof. For an even better view of the city though, climb up the **Cupola of San Salvatore** – you'll see all the domes of Palermo and the sea in the distance.



The 16th century Fontana Pretoria was built in Florence and transferred to Palermo in 1574. LIVIA HENGEL

In the evening, enjoy a glass of wine with your toes in the sand at **NautoscopioArte**, a lively beach and cultural club open from June to October each year. Then head to the retro New York-style dining room at **Buatta** for a taste of local dishes like Bucatini pasta with cauliflower, raisins and saffron, Aeolian-style fish with tomatoes and Eggplant caponata.



Nautoscopio Arte is open from June to October each year. LIVIA HENGEL

Day 2

Start your morning at **Ciocolateria Lorenzo**, a quaint café in the bohemian

Khalsa neighborhood that has a tantalizing menu of sweets and caffeinated drinks to power your day. The outdoor courtyard is a lovely place to relax and features paintings and illustrations by local artists for sale on the walls.



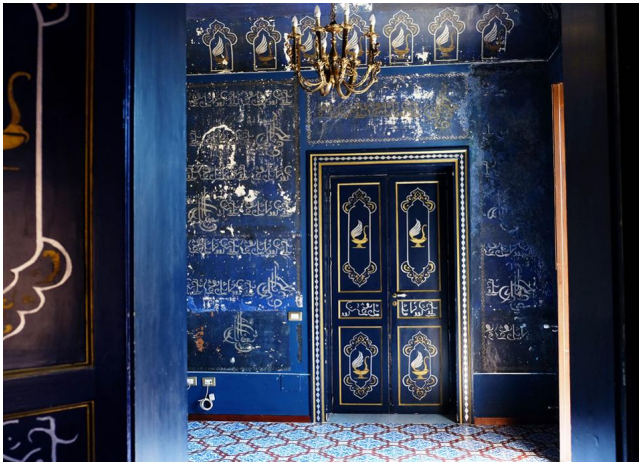
Cioccolateria Lorenzo, a quaint café in the bohemian Khalsa neighborhood of Palermo. LIVIA HENGEL

Today you'll pay a visit to the **Palazzo dei Normanni**, the Royal Palace of Palermo which served as the seat of the Kings of Sicily during the Norman domination. This lavish property, which dates back to the 12th century and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is the oldest private residence in Europe. The highlight is the gilded Cappella Palatina, one of the best examples of the city's unique Arab-Norman-Byzantine style of art and architecture. Inside, the **Fondazione Federico II** hosts numerous art exhibitions, including a recent show about Flemish paintings and another about Rosalia, the patron saint of Palermo.



The Church of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio is adorned with Byzantine mosaics. LIVIA HENGEL

Just steps from the Royal Palace of Palermo lies one of Palermo's most intriguing gems: the **Camera delle Meraviglie** (or “Room of Wonders”). This mysterious blue chamber is decorated with Arabic inscriptions, verses and designs and arresting for its color and artistry. It was hidden from view for centuries behind layers of plaster in a private home and only recently discovered during routine restoration works, though its function remains unclear. You can visit it on a private tour guided by Giuseppe and Valeria who own the apartment (reservations must be made in advance by calling +39 3383483372).



La Camera delle Meraviglie is arresting for its color and decorated with Arabic inscriptions, verses and designs. LIVIA HENGEL

Don't miss stopping by nearby **Pasticceria Cappello**, a historic pastry shop that dates back to 1940, for a taste of Sicilian pastries including *cannoli*, *cassate* and other delicacies. If you want to feast on more savory foods, wander back towards the center of town for lunch at **Antica Focacceria San Francesco**, an institution in the city and a restaurant that is set within one of the loveliest piazzas in the city. Try the *Tabulè alla Siciliana* (vegetable cous cous) or baked Anelli pasta with ragù.



The Antica Focacceria San Francesco has been serving traditional Sicilian dishes since 1834. LIVIA HENGEL

From here, head north to wander around Castellammare, one of the oldest neighborhoods in Palermo. The **Oratory of Santa Cita** features an amazing chapel with intricate white stucco sculptures, while the **Museo Palazzo Branciforte** houses archeological works and a wooden theater with Giacomo Cuticchio's Sicilian Puppet collection. Be sure to seek out **Pietro Tramonte's outdoor library** on Via Monte Santa Rosalia, the largest al fresco "bookstore" in the world. Thousands of volumes line the streets and can be picked up or exchanged through a barter system.



Pietro Tramonte's "Biblioteca Itinerante" is home to over 5,000 books. LIVIA HENGEL

In the evening, whet your appetite at **CiCala**, a cozy wine and cocktail bar that is a popular hangout with locals. You can stick around for artisanal pizzas and fresh pastas or 'round the corner for dinner at **Osteria Mangia e Bevi**, a trattoria with heart (and a delightfully shabby chic vibe). One of the restaurant's highlights is a unique version of *Pasta alla Norma* that

sees spaghetti with tomato sauce, eggplants and cheese fried and served directly in the pan.

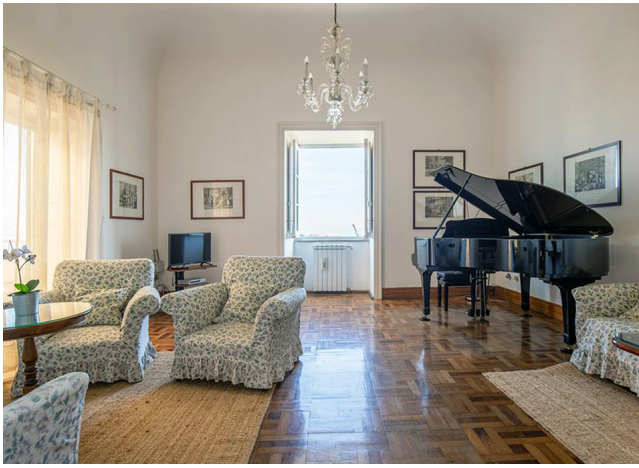


CiCala is a wine and cocktail bar with over 300 labels and a tantalizing menu of appetizers, artisanal pizzas and more. LIVIA HENGEL

Where To Stay

Butera28

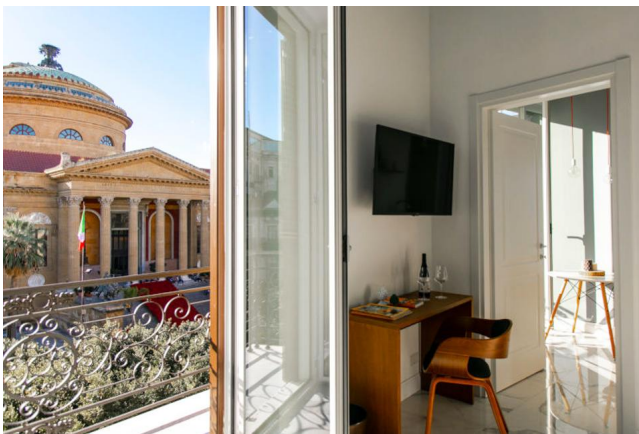
Located within the 18th century Palazzo Lanza Tomasi, [Butera28](#) is a collection of elegant, historic apartments – many with views of the sea. The Palazzo originally belonged to writer Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa who wrote *The Leopard*, an Italian novel inspired by his great-grandfather. Today, it is owned by his heirs Gioacchino and Nicoletta Lanza Tomasi, the Duke and Duchess of Palma, who have restored the home to its former glory. Butera28 also hosts A Day Cooking with the Duchess, Sicilian cooking lessons hosted by Ms. Lanza Tomasi herself.



Butera28 apartments are set within the 18th century Palazzo Lanza Tomasi. COURTESY OF BUTERA28

Palazzo Sovrana

Across the street from Teatro Massimo, [Palazzo Sovrana](#) offers incredible views of the opera house and surrounding mountains. The twelve luxury apartments are spacious and bright, with modern design elements and the latest technology. They each have private balconies and guests can also enjoy the rooftop panoramic terrace at breakfast each morning.



Palazzo Sovrana's luxury apartments are spacious and bright, with views of the city and surrounding landscape. COURTESY OF PALAZZO SOVRANA

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Livia Hengel

I'm an Italian-American writer, photographer and culture enthusiast with a penchant for la dolce vita and a severe case of wanderlust. Originally born in Rome, I grew u... **Read More**

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