

"All the News
That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

National Edition

Northern California: Fog and clouds at coast, highs near 70, sunny elsewhere, highs 90-105. A few storms in Nevada, highs 95-105. Details are in Sports/Sunday, Page 12.

VOL. CLVII . . No. 54,384

© 2008 The New York Times

SUNDAY, JULY 27, 2008

Printed in California

\$5.00

36 Hours Palermo



PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHRIS WARDE-JONES FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

LEFT TO RIGHT Ceiling of Church of Santa Maria Dell'Ammiraglio; patrons arrive at Bar Malù; some of the 8,000 corpses at Catacombe dei Cappuccini; the cloisters at the Duomo in Monreale.

By ARIEL FOXMAN

IN ITS 2,700-year history, the port city of Palermo has undergone three golden ages: the Carthaginians, Arabs and Normans all found glory along its rugged shores. And now, after decades of post-War neglect and mafia corruption, the often overlooked Sicilian capital is poised for a fourth — or at least a well-deserved comeback. Crumbling roads are being repaved, landmarks scrubbed clean and a newfound pride can be felt. But the essential charms of this mysterious and intoxicating city thankfully remain intact. There are still seductive old neighborhoods, a delightful patchwork of architecture (what's the word for Arab-Norman-Spanish-Baroque?), and a belching chaotic mess known as Palermo traffic.

residents shopping for weekend essentials in the Ballarò, the city's oldest Arab-style open market in the decrepit yet atmospheric Albergheria quarter. Join the crowds at either end (enter through Piazza Ballarò or Piazza del Carmine) and browse stalls with all types of fish still twitching on trays of ice, alongside crates of squash as long as didgeridoos and capers the size of grapes. If the vendors who perform like carnival barkers aren't entertainment enough, grab a piping-hot panelle, a street-food fritter made of chickpeas (about 5 euros, or \$8 at \$1.62 to the euro).

5:30 p.m.

3 Divine Architecture

It wouldn't be a trip to Italy without a dip into a magnificent church. Make a 10-or-so-minute walk north to Piazza Bellini in the old city's center and ascend the steps to a pair of famed houses of worship. The Church of San Cataldo (Piazza Bellini 2), a rather nondescript diminutive chapel, is best appreciated from the outside, where one can take in its three Saracen cardinal-rose domes. But a few steps away is the Church of Santa Maria Dell'Ammiraglio, a.k.a. La Mortarana, which offers a quintessential blend of Arab-Norman architecture, including an impressive campanile that dates back to 1143. Gorgeous, well-maintained mosaics and frescoes abound; no wonder the space is booked solid for weddings.



ONLINE READERS' THOUGHTS

Ever been to Palermo? Share your suggestions on where to stay, where to eat and what to do. nytimes.com/travel/palermo

631-2111; www.hotelvillagiapalermo.com), a luxury hotel on the slopes of the charming Monte Pellegrino. This Art Nouveau grande dame is nestled among gardens and courtyards that offer indelible 180-degree views of the Bay of Palermo. Sip a glass of crisp and fruity Donnafugata white (10 euros) while sampling the wide range of tempting snacks at the Bar des Arcades.

8:30 p.m.

10 Seaside Supper

For a nice break from all the seafood in the city, try Bye Bye Blues (Via del Garofalo 23; 39-091-684-1415; www.byebyeblues.it), an award-winning restaurant in the beachy Mondello neighborhood. Incredibly fresh ingredients conspire to create delicious plates like an appetizer of country cheeses served with walnuts and marmalade (13 euros). Follow it up with a delicious serving of pasta alla Norma, an island classic of rigatoni, tomato, ricotta and fried eggplant (12 euros). Pair it with a yummy 2004 Cerasuolo di Vittoria (22 euros), one of the 350 wines on hand.

Friday

4 p.m.

1 Bread and Circus

The ancient city is studded with vibrant and raucous outdoor markets. Mix with

THE BASICS

From July through October, Eurofly (www.euroflyusa.com) flies direct to Palermo from L.F.K. in New York twice a week. A recent online search found very limited availability.

THE NEW YORK TIMES