

Art, culture, UNESCO treasures, innovative museums, social projects, sports, seaside life, street food and good food: whatever your approach to tourism and however varied your interests may be, Palermo will magically pull out of the hat a winning card. The good news, however, is yet to come: in just 48 hours you can enjoy a taste of all these travel experiences, certainly by trotting a bit but always allowing yourself to relax, because here you are in the most authentic South and you do not need to run, but to choose which side to take.

## **Day 1: walking between the center and the Zisa**

### **The heart of the center**

The spectacular opening of our itinerary is the center of the center: the seventeenth-century Piazza dei **Quattro Canti**, where the four historic districts converge, precisely called 'canti'. At each corner stands a facade that is a riot of coats of arms, columns and sculptures, arranged on three levels: on the first there is the statue of a season, on the second of a sovereign and on the third of a patron saint – so get used to it: in Palermo wherever you go there will be an icon of a saint to watch over your movements!

A few steps to the southeast take you to **Piazza Pretoria**, where you can cast a mischievous look at the statues that in the past made the nuns of the nearby convent scream scandal: here is the **Fountain of Shame**, all full of mythological figures who nonchalantly exhibit their private parts. Without any shame, however, you can choose whether to take a selfie next to a triton or a nymph before continuing towards the adjacent **Piazza Bellini** and read in the buildings that overlook a historical-architectural compendium of the city, which starts from the haggard remains of the Punic walls to reach the nineteenth-century Bellini Theater. Your attention will inevitably be drawn to the three red domes of the **Church of San Cataldo**, an iconic feature of Arab-Norman architecture (even if the red color is due to an error in the nineteenth-century restorations!), But the real surprise are the sparkling mosaics, among the oldest in Palermo, hidden behind the baroque facade of the Church of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio, known for all as **La Martorana**. The assonance with “martorana fruit” (marzipan) is not accidental: here in ancient times, on the occasion of the visit of a prelate, the nuns worked hard to replenish the bare branches of the oranges with fake but sugary fruits. Follow the common thread of sweetness to move on to the other grandiose convent complex in the square: the **Monastery of Santa Caterina d'Alessandria**, which hides the pastry shop in its magnificent majolica cloister. After succumbing to greedy temptations, some truly sinful like the 'minne di virgine' (boobs of virgins), you can seek redemption in the church of the complex, where the Baroque of Palermo reaches the heights of expressiveness: the statues that stand out against the colored marble inlays seem to come towards you. The view from the roofs, with the domes of the Palermo skyline at your fingertips, is unsurpassed.

## **A dip in multiculturalism from Ballarò to the Cathedral**

Beyond Via Maqueda, the **Ballarò market** is the heir to the souk that already occupied these streets under Arab domination and somehow still evokes their atmospheres. Be hypnotized by the “abbanniate”, the chants with which the

marketers promote their goods, and rely on the sense of smell for a taste of the most authentic street food: the smell of frying is an indication of freshly cooked “panelle”, if instead you find yourself immersed in a cloud of smoke accompanied by the smell of meat you are near a grill where the “stigghiole” are cooked (only for daring carnivores).

Proceeding west, you will enter the multi-ethnic soul of the neighborhood, which seems to have engraved the spirit of hospitality in its DNA - Ballarò is within the historic part of the Albergheria, the area that 'housed' the guests. Today, however, coexistence is an achievement to be sought in everyday life, not always free of conflicts, the result of constant dialogue between the inhabitants of Ballarò by birth and by adoption. One of the promoters of this dialogue is Moltivolti, a restaurant with international cuisine and a space for coworking, but also a social enterprise whose motto is "my land is where I put my feet". In the kitchen five chefs of different nationalities give life to a menu that combines dishes from the world, without neglecting Sicilian specialties, and that conquering our palate reminds us that the mix of traditions is always a resource.

Get back on your journey to discover a triumphal symbol of the city's multiculturalism: the **Palatine Chapel**, inside the Norman Palace. A masterpiece of syncretism of religions and cultures of the Mediterranean world, in its architecture it combines the Latin basilica plan with muqarnas decorations (honeycomb inlays) that are unmistakably Moorish, but its heart is Byzantine: the hemispherical dome with the mammoth mosaic of Christ pantocrator takes your breath away. Complete your contamination tour at the Cathedral, an exotic tangle of domes, towers and battlements, portals and arcades, majolica domes, arches-bridges and a bell tower.

### **From the fertile belly of Palermo to the Zisa: redevelopment and authenticity**

Leave the historic center behind by crossing the Porta Nuova to discover a lively hamlet that has changed so much in recent years that it is a secret even for many Palermitans: **Danisinni**. Free from the chaos and traffic of the surroundings, this luxuriant basin now welcomes travelers to an urban farm set between houses, where you can taste authentic home cooking thanks to the home restaurant initiatives, experience the hospitality of the social hostel conceived for connect guests and locals (those who stay there can actively participate in the life of the hamlet) or attend a circus show in the Chapiteau and enjoy a break in a rural setting without leaving the city, just a ten-minute walk away from the centre.

From Danisinni a stairway climbs towards the **Zisa**, the 'splendid' (this is the meaning of the name of Arab origin), an impenetrable fortress and a fairy tale dwelling for the entertainment of Norman kings. A short distance away, Palermo shows off the dynamic soul of its suburbs in the **Cantieri Culturali alla Zisa**, a former industrial complex that today produces culture and socialization in its gigantic pavilions rather than furniture and railway wagons. Active for years, the Cantieri on the one hand offer quality cultural proposals, guaranteed by excellences such as the International Center of Photography directed by Letizia Battaglia, the area dedicated to contemporary art ZAC recently taken over by the Merz Foundation and the cinema De Seta often hosts festivals, on the other hand they want to represent a meeting place for the community, also intended for those who live in the neighborhood, not for the intellectual elite. In this way realities have blossomed to be experienced in everyday life, such as the cyclofficina, the children's workshop of the Teatro Ditirammu and above all Cre.Zi. Plus, a catering space with hybrid functions, some related to social inclusion. You can stop for dinner and end your first day here, or go back to the center to pay homage to the **Teatro Massimo**, a symbol of the city's cultural rebirth, and to browse the many bars that animate its alleys.

## **Day 2: museums, sports and nature facing the sea**

**The sea bathes Palermo: from the Cala to Sant'Erasmus between blue waters, innovative museums and social projects.** On your first day of the itinerary, you may have forgotten that Palermo is a seaside city: we will remedy this on this second day, where the Mediterranean will strongly make its presence felt. So let's start from the water, from the **tourist port of Cala**. Here you can reconnect with the origins of Palermo, which already in its name reveals the indissoluble bond with the sea: it was the Greeks who baptized it Panormos, 'all port'. Enjoy the walk from the ancient **Castello a Mare**, of Arab origin, to the opposite end, where the lovely **Church of Santa Maria della Catena** (chain) owes its name to the chain that once stretched from here to the castle to close the port. Move to the enchanting **Piazza Marina**, a setting of refined historic buildings that embraces a public garden in which to laze in the shade of the foliage. The undisputed star of this garden is the mammoth *Ficus macrophylla* (recognizable by the aerial roots that connect the branches to the ground), the holder of a remarkable record: it is the largest tree in Europe. The next stop is **Palazzo Butera**, a newly conceived house-museum that offers an emotional and immersive art experience, thanks to an exhibition that creates a dynamic dialogue between different eras and worlds and between the container - the incredible and gigantic eighteenth-century noble palace - and the content, the very rich and very heterogeneous private collection of Francesca and Massimo Valsecchi, a 360-degree story of civilizations (ranging from the paintings of the ancient Branciforti domains to photos by Gilbert & George). Look out on the splendid majolica terrace to grasp another value of the museum: it gives back to those who enter it the view of the sea, for centuries the exclusive privilege of the princes who lived here. After getting lost in fantasizing immersed in beauty, return with your feet on the ground, but always close to the water, for a radical change of scene: from the splendor of a noble palace you will pass to a former fishing village. Head south with a small detour from the sea to yield to the charm of the deconsecrated **Church of Santa Maria dello Spasimo**, which has drawn a unique charm from the collapse of the vault: the glimpse of blue sky that has taken the place of the ceiling perfectly embodies the sublime towards which the columns tend with the typical mystical impetus of the Gothic. In Via dello Spasimo, three murals with a strong visual impact tell us about the role of street art in Palermo, which has helped revitalize the historic center, appropriating decadent walls to transform them into works of art and convey messages.

Then go back to the seafront and walk to the pier of **Borgo Sant'Erasmus**, your destination, the subject of a redevelopment that does not betray its maritime essence. Here the social hostel of the Odisseo Project is about to be born, which will guarantee guests a stay of high comfort at a controlled price, asking in exchange for some of their time to devote to social initiatives (projects against early school leaving and to support fragile families), according to the availability and skills of each. Next to the hostel, the Molo Sant'Erasmus restaurant is a rediscovered place, an abandoned trap transformed into a bright restaurant where you can enjoy a fish-based meal overlooking the Mediterranean. A little further south, finally, the Ecomuseo Mare Memoria Viva is a museum of 'memory' that tells a piece of history of the city facing the sea, adopting the approach of public history, but it is also a 'living' museum because through initiatives didactic interacts with the community living in the neighborhood to create awareness.

## **Sport and relax from the Favorita to Mondello**

At this point the desire for green, sea and relax will have taken over. Arrange yourself with a means of transport

to move from Sant'Erasmus, in the south, to the opposite end of the city. If you love walking in nature, wear comfortable shoes and give vent to your sporting impetus in the **Parco della Favorita**, which with its almost 400 hectares of extension is the green lung of Palermo; here the inhabitants come to train, cycle among the typical plants of the Mediterranean scrub and follow the paths that climb the slopes of Monte Pellegrino. If, on the other hand, you want to browse in an unusual architecture surrounded by manicured gardens and greenery, visit the Chinese Palace, the exotic hunting lodge built by Ferdinand I of Bourbon. Five kilometers north of the building begins the expanse of sandy beaches of **Mondello**, the beach of the inhabitants of Palermo with turquoise waters.

There is no better conclusion than this glimpse of the Mediterranean to leave Palermo after 48 hours and who knows, maybe you are already thinking about when to return.