



## A local's guide to Palermo

City food guide  
 Marco Romeo on the sardines, spumante and street dancing that give the Sicilian capital its distinctive vibe

Interview: Serena Micalizzi-Coyle

### Food

There are two parallel culinary worlds in Palermo: traditional home cooking and street food. Palermitans are very proud of their traditional food, and I'd advise a stop at Trattoria da Nonna Dora for *pasta con le sarde*, which celebrates local ingredients sardines, pine nuts, raisins and wild fennel. A generous portion costs €6. After fresh fish? Try Osteria Mercede for its *tonno rosso* (red tuna, €18), and homely I sapori del Mare for its killer *pasta porticello* (pasta with king prawns, €16). Cheese lovers should not miss the *ragusano all'argentiera* (caciocavallo cheese pan-fried with oil, garlic and vinegar, €10) at La Buatta on Via Vittorio Emanuele.

*Pani cã meusa* (focaccia stuffed with sauteed beef spleen and a cascade of grated caciocavallo, €2.50) is the street food trophy of Palermo. Francu U Vastiddaru near Piazza Marina is my first choice. Top carb choice (and vegetarian) is a *panino con panelle e crocchè* (a sesame roll with chickpea fritters, potato croquettes and mint). Fratelli Testagrossa in Piazza Indipendenza does big portions for €2.

### Inspiration

MEC museum and restaurant ([mecmuseum.it](http://mecmuseum.it), entry €7) is an

inspiring meeting of innovation with style and ingenious food. Visionary architect Giuseppe Forello has put together one of Europe's largest collections of Apple computers and other artefacts (including a pair of Steve Jobs's shoes, pictured below), and it's all now on display in 16th-century Palazzo Castrone. Sharing the building is experimental next-gen hotspot restaurant MEC, serving avant-garde Sicilian fine dining, with intriguing flavours that will raise your "tech" experience to a different level.

### Neighbourhood

La Kalsa, the historic Arab quarter, is one of the oldest areas in the city. To experience its diverse urban vibe, head east from Piazza Sant'Anna and let the cacophony of the city be replaced by the sound of your steps on ancient cobblestones and laughter



from the quaint little bars. There are photo opportunities on every corner, and the street art on Via dello Spasimo is a vortex of colour and historic figures. In recent years, the neighbourhood has been transformed into a hub of bars, eateries and artisan boutiques. It's great for cocktail lovers: try bitter Sicilian orange liqueur and signature house spirits at Dal Barone or an aperitivo at Nautoscopio, which has a sweet seating area on a small beach.

### Green space

To escape the city, take a train from Palermo Centrale towards the airport at Punta Raisi. Get off at Sfraccavallo station and the Barcarello-Capo Gallo nature reserve, a real gem little visited by tourists, is about a 25-minute walk away. Take a picnic, and enjoy being surrounded by sea and rocky shoreline: the views of the sun setting over the sea can be captivating. One train stop along is Isola delle Femmine town, where the energetic can hire a standup paddleboard at Isola Surf (€15). If you prefer lounging with an aperitivo and a seafood platter, one of my favourite bar/restaurants, Il Miramare, is right there.

### Nightlife

Palermo nightlife is about open-air drinking, talking and spontaneous dancing. A typical night for me would start with a glass of Sicilian spumante at Seven Restaurant (the roof terrace of Hotel Ambasciatori), which offers the best views in town, before a wander between the Vucciria (Piazza Marina) and Piazza Olivella district. Sicilians love welcoming tourists, so do not be surprised if you end the night with a group of 15 new friends. One of my favourite bars is the quiet Bottega Monteleone, which does quality natural Sicilian tipples such as Baracco Ambras and catarratto orange wines.

### Stay

Afea Art & Rooms (doubles from €90 B&B, [bbafea.it](http://bbafea.it)) is a concept B&B - an original combination of creativity and hospitality. The rooms have been individually designed by local artists, using the furnishings as a canvas to tell their story.

Marco Romeo is a food guide in Palermo and founder of Streaty, a tour company specialising in food and wine experiences in several Italian cities

Illustrations: Hennie Haworth