

# Sicily Sojourn:

## Trapani, Marsala, Mazara

I'm traveling west from *Palermo*, reveling in the thrill that always overtakes me when I land in Italy — surrounded by the sparkling sea, just-harvested vineyards, hills covered with olive groves — a classic southern Italian landscape. When my first meal arrives, I taste what gives this Trapani province its exotic twist: a delicious bowl of *Cous Cous di Pesce*. Here, about 100 miles from North Africa, Tunisian influences abound.

Also, Trapani is different from other parts of Sicily, (as any proud *Trapanese* will tell you), because this is where Sicily *first* became civilized. Phoenicians, and a tribe called the Elymians, fished and fought here for

centuries before the Greeks took over in the 5th century B.C.

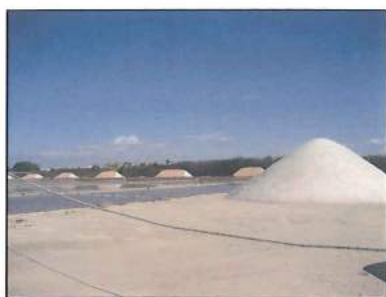
Though the entire province measures only 950 square miles, (imagine about 2/3 of Rhode Island), there's a remarkable variety of terrain and sites. Some of the best beaches in Italy can be enjoyed in the northern area in and around *San Vito lo Capo*, including the charming cove of *Scopello*, located next to *Lo Zingaro Nature Reserve*, where you can hike along sand dunes amidst wildflowers and birdsongs.

On the western shore, near *Marsala*, are marshlands, where the famous *Salt Pans of Mozia* magically appear —

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shimmering triangular white mounds, set amidst windmills, and remains of those Phoenicians who started excavating this mineral-rich salt thousands of years ago. Also, from the bustling ports of Trapani or Marsala, you can catch ferries to visit the Egadi Islands—a group of three small mountainous treasures: *Favignana, Levanzo, Marettimo*—where quaint fishing villages await.



salt mines

taverns, and found the wine quite wonderful, similar to Port that was popular in his homeland. He decided to fortify it with a bit of grape brandy and ship it off to Britain.

The wine was so well received that Woodhouse decided to put down roots in this part of Sicily, mass produce this wine he named “Marsala,” and distribute it all over the British Empire. Other entrepreneurs followed, Trapani’s economy was revived, and to this day the wine industry is a major money maker in these parts. In fact, little Trapani province produces more wine than the entire region of Tuscany.

I enter Marsala through the majestic *Porta Garibaldi* arch, that commemorates a major event in Italian history: the May 1860 landing of *Giuseppe Garibaldi* and his famous *Mille* (Thousand Man Volunteer Army). Garibaldi chose the legendary Marsala port to begin his campaign to free southern Italy. Apparently there wasn’t resistance at his first stop, and I imagine Giuseppe and his whole crew celebrated by toasting with the town’s famous wine.

I’m only two steps into Marsala’s grand pedestrian-only via, and already I’m surrounded by wine shops. The most inviting is the tiny *La Sirena Ubriaca* (*The Drunken Mermaid*), where a smiling *signorina* tends bar, proudly announcing each vintage as she offers me tastings, and setting out a bowl of olives and a plate of *delizioso bruschetta* slathered with *pistacchio crema*.

Further up is the impressive *Piazza della Repubblica*, graced with the 17th-century *Cattedrale di San Tommaso* (dedicated to Saint Thomas Becket of Canterbury) and Town Hall. It’s lunchtime and *bambini* with backpacks

fill the square, shouting and running off the narrow lanes that shoot out from here—off to their houses for lunch. A few rowdy boys hover under the town hall arches, taking turns poking at a cell phone screen, pumped over a competition. I love the contrasts—21st century-technology back-dropped by a centuries-old building that Garibaldi and his guys must have brushed up against.



Marsala



Porta Garibaldi

On my next visit here I’ll get to the *Museo Archeologico Regionale Baglio Anselmi*, on the Marsala seafront, that houses the remains of a 241 B.C. shipwreck from the first Punic War. Even better than the ship is another discovery displayed there that was dug up in 2005: a 2nd-century B.C. *Venus Callipigia* (Venus of the Beautiful Buttocks) statue—I love seeing remains of this ancient cult who prayed to the Goddess with the Great Backside for Good Fortune!

## Marsala



Immediately that sweet amber-colored wine comes to mind. Actually the town’s name came from the Arabs of the early Middle Ages, who revered the port here so much they called it *Marsa Allah*=Port of God. Marsa Allah thrived under Arab rule. Then came the conquering Normans, and the town fell into decline.



Marsala

# Mazara is home to the la





## Mazara del Vallo

Mazara del Vallo's marina, one of Italy's largest fishing centers, is pleasant, and a great place to take off for sailing adventures in season. But it's when I cross the street and slip into the town's historic center, that I become charmed by the place. Narrow zig-zagging alleys still exist from centuries past days of Arab rule, giving it the name "*Casbah*." Baroque and Norman architecture blend together, telling the town's multi-layered history.

And then I come upon a most unassuming building, the *Museo del Satiro*, that houses Mazara del Vallo's world famous treasure: an ancient bronze sculpture of a Dancing Satyr. The entrance area displays findings from Phoenician fishing days and then there's a media alcove where I stop to watch a video that tells the intriguing story of the discovery of *Il Satiro Danzante*=*The Dancing Satyr*.

The adventure began in June 1997, when *Francesco Andregana*, a local fisherman, and his crew aboard the *Capitan Ciccio* (Captain Fatso), were doing their regular run, 50 miles off shore, dropping nets for octopus and shrimp. To their surprise, up from the sandy sea floor, they pulled up a bronze leg. Signor Andregana handed it over to the archaeological authorities, who recognized that this must be part of a sculpture from an ancient shipwreck.

Andregana fantasized about someday finding the rest of the body. Almost a year later, one chilly March afternoon, while on another ho-hum fishing run, Andregana's dream came true. Up in the net appeared an awe-inspiring creature—the twisted torso and head (complete with pointy ears) of a Satyr. Andregana radioed the archaeological authorities, who met the boat when it arrived to shore, ecstatic over the find.

The discovery of the *Dancing Satyr* made international news. The barnacle-covered torso and leg were moved to a state-of-the art restoration center in Rome, where for 5 years, 30 technicians worked on it, cleaning it with miniscule tools. At first, the statue

was believed to be a creation of the famous Greek sculptor Praxiteles, but after closer examination, experts defined it as a Roman copy, made sometime between the second and third centuries B.C.

The restored Dancing Satyr was displayed with great fanfare in Rome, then moved back to this Mazara del Vallo museum in 2003. Its allure is huge—it's been transported and displayed to lines-around-the-block-enthusiasm at Japan's Universal Expo of Aichi, in Milan, and the Louvre.

I leave the video room and turn to see the Dancing Satyr reverently displayed...softly lit, suspended in the air. Even from a distance, the ecstatic passion of this one-legged, armless, twisted creature is evident.



Angelo Romano, wikipedia.org

Dancing Satyr

In Ancient Greek days, Satyrs were naughty, half man-half goats who flocked around Dionysus, the God of Wine, dancing in orgiastic frenzies with their female counterparts, Maenads.

I move closer to stand under *Il Satiro Danzante*, who is caught in mid-leap, chest flung forward, alabaster eyes blazing, hair flowing in the breeze... celebrating the ultimate joy of letting it all go... Such inspiration!

—Susan Van Allen

Longtime *Dream of Italy* contributor Susan Van Allen is the author of *100 Places in Italy Every Woman Should Go*. Visit her Web site at [www.susvanallen.com](http://www.susvanallen.com)

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Sicilian Baroque architecture in the fishing village of Mazara del Vallo



Mazara

## DREAM OF ITALY®

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Editor and Publisher

Copy Editor: Stephen J. McCabe  
Design: Leaird Designs  
[www.leaird-designs.com](http://www.leaird-designs.com)

*Dream of Italy*, the subscription travel newsletter covering Italian travel and culture, is published 10 times a year. Delivery by mail is \$99 in the U.S. and Canada and \$109 abroad. An Internet subscription (downloadable PDFs) costs \$79 per year. Subscriptions include online access to over 85 back issues and regular e-mail updates.

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# rgest fishing fleet in Italy.



## THE DETAILS

### Sightseeing

General Info: [www.turismotrapani.it](http://www.turismotrapani.it),  
[www.trapanigate.it](http://www.trapanigate.it)

### What to See

#### Museo del Sale

Via Chiusa, Nubia Paceco  
Trapani  
(39) 0923 867061  
[www.museodelsale.it](http://www.museodelsale.it)

#### Segesta Temple and Ampitheatre

[www.festivalsegesta.com](http://www.festivalsegesta.com)  
Open Daily: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.  
Admission: 6€  
Theatre Season: July-September

#### Selinunte Archaeological Site

[www.selinunte.net](http://www.selinunte.net)  
Open Daily: Winter, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.  
Summer, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission: 6€  
Theatre Season: July-August

#### Mazara del Vallo's

##### Museo del Satiro

Chiesa di Sant'Egidio  
Piazza Plebiscito  
Mazara del Vallo  
(39) 0923 933917  
[www.mazaraonline.it](http://www.mazaraonline.it)  
Open daily: 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

#### Marsala's Museo Archeologico Regionale Baglio Anselmi

Via Capo Lilibeo  
Marsala  
(39) 0923 952535  
Admission: 4€  
Open 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily, except  
Monday, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Kite Surfing: If you're up for an  
adventure on the calm sea off the  
coast of Marsala, check out *Le Vie*  
*del Vento*, [www.leviedelvento.it](http://www.leviedelvento.it)  
where you can rent kites and boards.

### Where to Eat & Drink

*For Cous cous di Pesce or  
Pesto Trapanese:*

#### Cantina Siciliana

Via Giudecca, 33  
Trapani  
(39) 0923 28673  
[www.cantinasiciliana.it](http://www.cantinasiciliana.it)

Here in the old Jewish Ghetto, Chef  
Pino Maggiore, a follower of the Slow  
Food Movement, expertly prepares  
traditional specialties. Adjoining the  
restaurant is a wonderful *enoteca* for  
you to taste local vintages.

*For Cannoli:*

#### Euro Bar

Via Garibaldi, 11-13  
Dattilo (Paceco)  
(39) 0923 861434

It's worth taking a short detour off the  
A29West when you see the sign for  
Dattilo, so you can have a taste of  
Euro Bar's famous cannoli, that  
*Trapanese* describe as *OTTIMO=*  
The Best! They are super-sized,  
made to order, filled with the freshest  
ricotta, and so delicious they have  
spoiled me for the rest of my cannoli-  
eating life!

*For Marsala:*

#### La Sirena Ubriaca (The Drunken Mermaid)

Via Garibaldi, 39  
Marsala

*For Grappa, Brandy, and  
Fruit Liqueurs:*

#### Distilleria Bianchi

Lungomare Mediterraneo, 31  
Marsala  
(39) 0923 951288  
[www.distilleriabianchi.it](http://www.distilleriabianchi.it)

Award-winning spirits are made at

this family run place that's been  
around since 1950, founded by  
Florentines who settled in Sicily.  
At the tasting bar and shop, besides  
the aged brandys and grappas,  
I enjoyed the *Segesta Amaro* (a bit-  
ter liqueur made from a variety of  
herbs), and wonderful fruit liqueurs,  
particularly the *Maraschino* (cherry),  
which is difficult to find in the US,  
and wonderful to add to desserts.  
By appointment only.

### Where to Stay

#### Agriturismo Fontana Salsa

Via Cusenza, 78  
Fontanasalsa  
(39)0923 591120  
[www.fontanasalsa.it](http://www.fontanasalsa.it)  
Rates: 100 to 170€ per night,  
with breakfast.

A restored farmhouse, surrounded by  
olive groves and vineyards, with an  
outstanding restaurant that features  
excellent Sicilian specialties using  
local products.

#### La Foresteria

Menfi  
(39) 0925 1955460  
[www.planetaestate.it](http://www.planetaestate.it)  
Rates: Start at 180€ per night,  
with breakfast.

A boutique hotel created by Sicily's  
famous Planeta Winery, where you  
can relax in luxury, enjoy a private  
nearby beach, cooking courses, and  
tranquil walks through landscaped  
paths.



### What to Buy

Yes, you can buy locally made coral  
jewelry and ceramics, but lately I'm  
finding the most appreciated sou-  
venirs are tastes of the places I have  
visited. In the Province of Trapani,  
there are many delicious options:

**Trapani Salt**, that's extra rich in  
minerals, can be found attractively  
packaged at many food stores and  
souvenir shops in Sicily.

In **Trapani food markets**, look out  
for:

**CondiAroma 33** for unique Sicilian  
balsamic-like vinegar.  
[www.condiaroma33.it](http://www.condiaroma33.it)

#### Olive oil from Frantoio Torre di Mezzo

[www.frantoiotorredimezzo.com](http://www.frantoiotorredimezzo.com)  
A top producer that has an ingenious  
production set up, where olives are  
hand-picked, and then processed  
through a computerized system to  
insure the highest quality.  
Appointments can be made to visit  
the *frantoio* and meet the genius  
behind the operation, *Alberto*  
*Galluffo*.

**Pasta from Pastificio Campo**,  
especially *busiate*—a short, curly  
spaghetti that's a local specialty.  
[www.pastificiocampo.it](http://www.pastificiocampo.it)

**Sundried tomatoes, jams, honey  
and pistachio cream from Antichi**  
**Sapori di Sicilia**, a company that  
expertly preserves flavors of the  
Trapani province.  
[www.antichisaporidisicilia.it](http://www.antichisaporidisicilia.it)

**Note:** For more Dream of Italy  
coverage of Trapani, check out  
*The Quiet Jewels of Western*  
*Sicily* (October 2007)

# Sicily's salt is gathered by hand.