



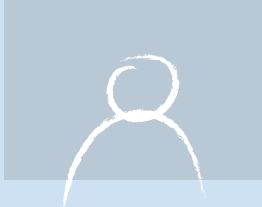
Provincia di  
**Trapani**

**Erice**



**Welcome**





## Erice is...

If the origins of Erice have become lost in the fog of time, walking through the cobbled streets of the medieval town on the summit of Mount San Giuliano, that same fog allows the discovery of signs, symbols and legends which originated long before the

Punics and Romans who erected a sanctuary dedicated to the Goddess of Love here. Visiting Erice means, in fact, losing oneself amongst thousands of glimpses of cobbled streets, fortifications, ancient churches (the Mother Church and Sant'Orsola), monasteries,

craft shops (producing ceramics, typical pastries, rugs), pine woods and gardens to then lose oneself on the edge of the town, in breathtaking views towards the Egadi Islands, the Stagnone, the salt pans and the cultivated fields of the whole of the province of Trapani.

Historic Centre



Mother Church



Castle of Venus







## History

The first information existing about Erice has it as a sacred city of the Elymians, a population whose origins are still unclear, with a temple-sanctuary, a pilgrim destination dedicated to the Goddess of fertility. Over the centuries Punics, Greeks and Romans worshipped respectively Astarte, Aphrodite and Venus,

making Erice an important worshipping place and reference point for those sailors to whom the Venus of Erice became protector. During the Roman empire, Erice lost its strategic importance, to assume a central position once again after the Arabs, under the Normans. They changed the

name of the town and mountain to San Giuliano, building a castle in the place of the sanctuary and giving the centre and the territory its current layout: the fortifications were strengthened and the city assumed an important role as a garrison over the coast and the vast territory below.

Venus's Well



Elymian Wall



Del Balio Tower





## Landscape

The small, medieval town of Erice is situated on a plateau surrounded by strong Cyclopean masonry with a symbolic and mysterious equilateral triangle layout. The cobbled streets and alleyways closely wind their way around the interior and become even more suggestive if you walk through them on a foggy day, which is a climatic characteristic of the town.

Losing oneself within its typically paved streets, is a good way to experience the atmosphere, catching glimpses of the characteristic internal courtyards of the houses and enjoying the views which open up between churches, ancient buildings and the castle, proof of a glorious past. Strolls around the alleyways, some so small as to allow only

enough space for one person, can be combined with walks immersed in the green of the Balio Gardens from which one can admire one of the most beautiful views in Sicily: the salt pans and the countryside with the sea and the Egadi Islands in the background can be seen, while on clear days even Pantelleria and Ustica can be made out.

Trapani and the islands



Alleyway



Gardens





## Nature

The territory presents differentiations linked to a multitude of locational factors. In fact, moving upwards from the sea towards the summit of the mountain, three types of climate are crossed: a marine climate, a hilly and Apennine climate passing from the halophyte vegetation near the sea to carobs and oaks and finally, further up the mountain, one can find ash (*Fraxinus ornus*)

and downy oak trees (*Quercus pubescens*), a deciduous oak which is to be found on the northern facing slopes. The flora of Erice is very varied and has been the subject of analysis by numerous researchers since the beginning of the 1800s. The presence of about 20 endemic species constitutes Erice's most expressive and representative flora like, for example, the

*Brassica drepanensis* and *Limonium ponzoii* which are present exclusively in the province of Trapani. There are varied bird species present in the territory, some migratory, others sedentary and they are distributed in the various locations which are most suitable to them, from rocky area to woodlands, from cultivated zones to areas near streams.

*Salicornia fruticosa*



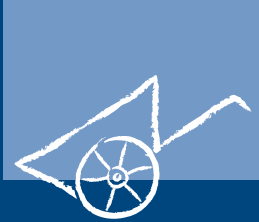
*Brassica drepanensis*



*Limonium vulgare*







## Traditions

The particular and deeply mysterious atmosphere which is breathed in Erice has favoured the diffusion of numerous legends. The first, specifically about its origins, tells that the town was founded by king Erice, son of Aphrodite, who died following a fight with Heracles over the rule of the

mountain. Another myth about its foundation is the one by Virgil: Aeneas docked at Pizzolungo, at the foot of the mountain where he held his father Anchises's funeral. Following some fires, the hero was forced to leave some of his travel companions behind, who settled on the mountain, founding the town. Finally,

there is also the myth of the Venus of Erice whose cult is so famous that it spread through the whole of the Roman world: the goddess offered her protection also to those who conjugated with the priestesses, who practiced sacred prostitution in return for donations and gifts.

Venus's Fountain





## Religion Remembrance Bonds

**A**t the end of August the Madonna of Custonaci is celebrated: improvised, carefully decorated, altars are set up in honour of the Virgin in the characteristic internal courtyards of the houses and on the last Wednesday of the month, the votive painting kept in the Mother Church is paraded through the streets of the town, until its return

in the evening, accompanied by spectacular fireworks synchronized with music. On Good Friday the “*Misteri*”, four groups of statues made from wood, cloth and glue (XVIII century) depicting episodes from the passion of Christ are paraded through the town, followed by Jesus in the tomb and the wooden statue of the

*Addolorata* (Our Lady of Sorrows) (XVI century). Leaving from the church of San Giuliano, where they are kept during the year, they are carried in a procession in an extremely suggestive atmosphere, enhanced by the funereal music which resounds through the streets and by the crowd which follows them.

Madonna of Custonaci

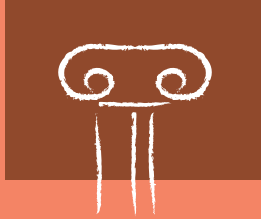


Misteri



Misteri





## Art

The churches of Erice do not only represent fine examples of architectural styles, they also conserve precious works of art. Some of the most important among these are the sculptures of the Gagini school: in the Mother Church a fifteenth century *Madonna with child* attributed to Domenico Gagini, a large marble bas-relief depicting the Madonna

surrounded by saints and with scenes from the passion of Christ (sixteenth century work by Giuliano Mancino), and the greatly venerated *Madonna di Custonaci*, a nineteenth century copy of the original (end XV century) kept inside the sanctuary of the same name. Inside the church of San Giovanni Battista (Saint John the Baptist) one can admire a

sculpture depicting *San Giovanni Evangelista* - Saint John the Evangelist by Antonino Gagini and a statue of *San Giovanni Battista* - Saint John the Baptist, a work by Antonello Gagini; by the same artist is a *Madonna with child* kept in the Sant'Orsola church. This rich collection of art is completed by the precious works which can be seen in the Cordici Museum.

Mother Church, Madonna with child



Statue of Saint John the Baptist



Cordici Museum, Annunciation







## Archaeology

The ancient surrounding wall, in a triangular layout is made up on the lower level of large megalithic blocks of the same height, attributed to Elymian-Punic times, and by a higher level from medieval times. On the lower blocks, clearly engraved, numerous Phoenician letters can still be read today. The walls were interspersed with towers and

posterns, small doors of which remain few examples today. Another structure of architectural interest is the castle, which holds the remains of the temple of Venus and a Roman thermal building “*il muro di dedalo*” - “Daedalus’s wall” built with the isodomus technique, and the so-called well of Venus where, legend has it, the goddess bathed and

in which a number of archaeological finds have come to light. Finally, not to be forgotten is the aeneolithic, suggestive *vaso a saliera* - salt-cellar pot, the praxitelean *testina di venere* - small head of venus, symbol of the city, the small vases of the Punic necropolis and the numismatic collection, conserved in the Civic Museum.

Head of Venus



Archaeological finds



Archaeological finds





## Monuments

**I**t is impossible to summarize the stone treasures present in Erice, where the Elymian-Punic surrounding wall conserves three almost complete gateways (*Porta Spada*, *Porta Carmine*, *Porta Trapani*) dating back to the Norman domination. A little way past the walls, the *Quartiere spagnolo* - Spanish Quarter, of the XVII century is to be found, which is an imposing incomplete structure used to accommodate military garrisons; around the *Balio Gardens* we can find the *Castle* (on the exterior of which

one can admire the coat of arms of the House of Habsburg) and the *Pepoli Turret*, while the *Balio Towers* are today a luxurious resort. Also, in the small inhabited area, there are numerous churches showing various architectural styles and holding precious works of art: the most important is the *Mother Church* (of the *Assunta* - Our Lady of the Assumption), from 1314, next to which the imposing bell tower rises which was originally a watch tower. Also worth visiting are the church of *San Martino*, of probable

Gothic origins but which was rebuilt and reshaped between the XVII and the XVIII century; *San Giovanni*, the original structure of which dates back to the XII century; *San Cataldo*, rebuilt in the eighteenth century on a fourteenth century structure. Walking around the streets of the town, one can also admire numerous noble palaces among which are worth mentioning: *palazzo Militari* (with Gothic and Chiaramontan elements), *palazzo Palma* (XVII century) and *palazzo Majorana* (XVIII century).



## Museums Science Education

In the Antonio Cordici Civic Museum, there are archaeological finds from different periods (Elymian-Punic, Greek, Roman), paintings from the XVII and XVIII centuries and sacred paraments from the same period. Of importance are the *testa di Afrodite* - head of Aphrodite from the IV century B.C., one of the best loved symbols of Erice, and

the marble *Annunciazione* - Annunciation from the Carmine church, which Antonello Gagini sculpted in 1525 on commission from a nobleman from Erice. Contemporary art is also exhibited in Erice at the “*La Salerniana*” Civic gallery which periodically holds exhibitions. The Ettore Majorana Centre of Scientific Culture is the venue for con-

ventions, meetings and debates of such interest as to have procured the town the title “City of Science”. Descending towards Trapani, in the San Matteo locality, one can stop at the Museo Agroforestale which, in an old farmhouse immersed in green, shows native manifestations of flora and fauna and old tools of country life.

Cordici Museum



Library



Agro-forestry museum







## Typical produce

The cobbled streets of the town centre are full of crafts shops showing typical wares from Erice, including rugs, the making of which, on ancient looms, requires several days work: through a complex system of weaving, of manual and pedal work, the pattern

becomes interlocked in the warp, producing the characteristic geometric brightly coloured designs. Once, the rugs were created by women in their spare time, using remnants and leftover material. The ceramics must still be included (plates, vases,

various objects), they are produced according to ancient working methods, with a rigorously hand-painted decoration of floral or geometric patterns, and are characterised by the use of intense colours (green, yellow, blue and orange).

Ceramics laboratory



Rug weaving





## Wine and food

In the territory of Erice, fine wines are produced (Erice D.O.C.) and a characteristic green coloured liqueur (*Monte ericino*). But it is the pastries and confectionary which make the town an undisputed must as regards the food and wine of the island. Guided by aromas

you might find yourself in pastry laboratories, the recipes of delicacies once prepared by nuns in closed convents on the summit remain a secret known by few. The pastries made from almond pastry are typical: the *bocconcini* (small spheres filled with citron and cinnamon), *i belli e brutti*

(with an irregular shape and aromatized with lemon) the chocolate *palline*. A must are the *genovesi* (a particularly soft short crust pastry filled with confectioner's cream) and the *mostaccioli* (dry, very hard biscuits, often accompanied by liqueurs and dessert wines), classic or with honey.

DOC Wine



Bocconcini



Genovesi





## Shows and events

**I**n Erice events of international importance periodically take place. Among these, the *Settimana Internazionale di Musica Medievale e Rinascimentale* - International week of Medieval and Renaissance Music (September) is worth noting, when the churches of the centre become the stage

for artists of international fame and the ancient music mixes perfectly with the landscape, giving the town a unique atmosphere. Erice has also, for many years now, played host to the numerous scientific conventions of the Ettore Majorana Centre of Scientific Culture. The uphill time trial of Mount Erice is a

car race which winds its way along the tortuous road which connects Valderice to Erice; the event is very popular amongst the local population who station themselves in prearranged areas to cheer them on. During the summer period, the central square often becomes animated with concerts and performances.

Medieval and Renaissance Music



Uphill time trial Monte Erice



Uphill time trial Monte Erice







## Entertainment, sport and free time

**I**n Erice there are football grounds, tennis courts and boules areas. Some accommodation facilities put local guides at their guests' disposal to carry out guided excursions and trekking activities in the pine woods and in the green areas surrounding the mountain. What is more,

the whole mountain, thanks to its sights and views, is perfect for independent excursions to discover the numerous rural churches or along the forest roads towards the agro-forestry museum of S. Matteo, to see close at hand the last Pantellerian donkeys, saved and looked after by the

*Azienda Foreste* or towards the hermitage and the naturalistic area of Martogna. In the sea in front of the San Giuliano beach, a particularly windy area, sailing sports are practised and from the summit it is also easy to see sailing boats and kite surfers training.

Kite surfing



Playground



Pine Wood/Martogna Park





UNIONE EUROPEA  
F.E.S.R.



REGIONE SICILIANA  
Assessorato BB.CC.AA. e P.I.



Provincia Regionale  
di Trapani



**Sponsor welcome!**

POR SICILIA 2000-2006. Mis. 6.06 c  
PIT 18 Alcinoo. Int. 37 codice  
1999.IT.16.1.PO.011/6.06c/9.03.13/0030z

*Foto Archivio Provincia Regionale di Trapani, eccetto foto 1 (W. Leonardi)*

**You are here:**



European Tourist and Cultural routes  
La Via del Sale e il Patrimonio della  
Italia - Trapani Sicilia Occidentale



REALIZZATO SECONDO  
GLI STANDARD CISTE