

Marsala

Westwards, where Sicily ends, on a promontory exposed to sea and wind, it rises the town the Phoenicians called **Lilibeo** and that Arabs wanted to renominate **Marsa Ali**.

Around a centre, small but full of art and history, it opens a vast territory that includes an infinity of loose hamlets, the so-called "contrade". In the surrounding lands, far from town frenzy, it is produced a wine of ancient and glorious history, with an unique taste and fragrance: the **Marsala**.

The promenade, very beautiful for so many palms succeeding on both sides, will take you directly to the bathing area, where free beaches and bathing establishments alternate. There, in hot summer days, when the sun does not fail to make strongly feel everybody its presence, a limpid and inviting sea will open to your eyes.

Instead, on the opposite side, towards Trapani, a still more particular landscape awaits you: the "**Stagnone**" lagoon with **Mothia** and the other little islands that form part of the **Natural Reserve** and, a little further on, the **Salinas** with the tanks for the salt picking and the windmills.

The origins – The history of Marsala begin on a small island not far from the coast, well protected within the Stagnone lagoon: **Mothia**. At the time when the ships of the **Carthaginians** crossed the Mediterranean Sea to carry from end to end their products, the island of **Mothia**, in the middle of this sea, represented an excellent trade junction.

The more the power of the Carthaginians grew, the more **Mothia** became important. But the more the power of the Carthaginians grew and the more it dashed with the other big masters of the Sicily: the Greeks and the masters of Eastern Sicily, the **Magna Grecia**. So, in 397 B.C., **Dionysus the old**, tyrant of **Syracuse**, attacked and destroyed the island of **Mothia**. Its inhabitants sheltered on the coast, on that promontory that stood in front of their island. **Lilybeo** was born there.

The Romans – The town remained to the



Carthaginians until I Punic war, that Carthaginians and Romans fought exactly in this area of the Mediterranean Sea. At that time **Lilybeo** was a town very important for being well fortified and surrounded by a sea with seabeds insidious for who is not experienced in it. The Romans had to be besieging for ten years before they succeeded in capturing it. It had been part of the Roman Empire until the end of the same.

The Arabs – After a difficult period of vandalic sacks, the town went through a period of great splendour when the Arabs arrived in Sicily. People of great intelligence, it succeeded in making the town revive with the new name of **Marsa Ali** (Harbour of Ali) or **Marsa Allah** (Harbour of Allah), in honour of its important harbour. Many buildings and mosques, then unfortunately got lost, rose. However the Arab presence is clearly visible in the names, in the cookery traditions, in

the town-planning system and in some architectural features.

The Spanish – Then all the people that dominated Sicily passed through Marsala: Swabians, Normans, Angevins and Aragoneses. The rule of Spain lasted a long time and it brought a slow decline.

Garibaldi and the thousand men (his troops) – The Bourbon kingdom collapsed only on the 11th of May 1860, when **Garibaldi** with his **Mille** landed in Marsala to set free the southern Italy and give it to **Vittorio Emanuele** (Victor Emmanuel).

Golden Medal for Civic Valour – During the II world war, on the 11th of May 1943, Marsala was hit by an hard bombing that destroyed many buildings and caused hundreds of dead. The **Golden Medal for civic valour** was recognized to the town.

Useful Information and Numbers

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Comune 0923 993111 www.comunemarsala.it

Ospedale "San Biagio" 0923 782111

Polizia 113 / 0923 718811

Carabinieri 112 / 0923 723537

Vigili del Fuoco 115 / 0923 951222

Emergenza per l'ambiente 1515

Capitaneria di Porto 0923 951184

Emergenza in mare 1530

Ufficio Turistico - Via XI Maggio, 100 - 0923 714097

Imbarcadere per Mothia 347 7790218

Museo a Mothia 0923 712598

Museo Archeologico Baglio Anselmi 0923 953614

Museo degli Arazzi 0923 711327

Pinacoteca Comunale 0923 711631

Biglietteria Autoservizi Salemi 0923 762339

www.autoservizisalemi.it

What to see

Coming in from **Garibaldi Gate**, on the right side you will find the market of fish, that every morning is full of sellers and buyers and the sixteenth-century **Spanish Quarter**, nowadays seat of the town hall.

Instead, on the left, a little square embellished by the elegant face of the **Santuario dell'Addolorata** (Sanctuary of Our Lady of Sorrows), opens. Further



on, the street ends in the main square of the historical centre where **Palazzo VII Aprile** (VII of April Mansion) and the main Church overlooks. This last, consecrated to St Thomas of Canterbury, dominates the square with its seventeenth-century two-orders face. Inside, in the many sides-chapels, sculpture works and important paintings are preserved.

At the back of this, the auditorium **Santa Cecilia**, also this remarkable for the rich decorations of the Baroque face. Not far from there the **Complesso San Pietro** (St Peter Unit), a sixteenth-century monastery, nowadays a cultural centre that lodges inside also the Civic Museum with the Garibaldi section.

Very particular is the tiled **dome**, also visible from via **XI Maggio** (XI of May street), the fulcrum of modern town life and night amusements. If you are there or in its continuation, via Roma, every now and then look up: both of them are surrounded by liberty style affected and refined mansions.

The Stagnone lagoon – An expanse of closed and protected sea, declared Natural Reserve, offers to visitors an unequalled spectacle. Here it is also situated the small island of Mothia, the ancient vital nucleus of the area. And a little further on, you will find the tanks for salt picking.

Behind the windmills, every evening the sun sets giving shivering landscapes.



Baglio Anselmi Archaeological Museum – A last century wine factory is today seat of the museum that preserves the archaeological finds discovered during the several archaeological excavations campaigns between Marsala and Mothia. It is a considerable collecting of pottery, amphorae, funerary furnitures, votive steles, furnishings and jewels, architectural features and objects of every kind. Here it is also preserved a splendid mosaic coming from the Roman island.

The museum also boasts the presence of the Callipigia Venus and of the Punic ship. The **Callipigia Venus**, recently recovered, though limbs and head lacking, attracts immediately the attention of the visitor on its soft and elegant figure and on its drapery that, instead of covering it, shows off its nudity.

The **Punic Ship** is a remarkable testimony of the ancient wars that Romans and Carthaginians fought in these waters. Probably the wreck sank during the battle of the Egadi that in 241 B.C. ended the I Punic war. The ship has been rebuilt inside the museum: you may see the larboard side and the part of the stern. Together with the ship, also part of the shipload has been got back.



Events

In Marsala, the main events, taking place during the Holy Week, are two: the procession of **Holy Thursday**, and the one of **Holy Friday**.

The **Procession of Holy Thursday** every year repropose the Passion, the Death and the Resurrection of Christ. Some citizens of Marsala play the various characters and the crucial moments narrated by the Gospel. The scenes begin with the representation of the entering of Christ in Jerusalem and ends with the Resurrection, creating a long procession that, during all the Holy Thursday afternoon, passes by through the streets of the historical centre. Every year, for the procession of the Holy Thursday, the town is crowded by a number of spectators. The costumes used during the procession are kept and visible in the apposite section of the Civic Museum, situated inside the St Peter monumental unit.

The Procession of **Holy Friday** is less spectacular, less noisy but much felt. It only consists of devoted people passing through the town streets, following a simulacrum of Our Lady of Sorrows and of Dead Christ. The participants are so many that, every year, the procession gets very long: whole kilometres of praying believers. The statue of Our Lady of Sorrows comes out of the Mother Church in Republic Square and, late in the night, returns to the sanctuary devoted to Her, where the believers, in small groups, enter for a last prayer.



Useful Information and Numbers

MUSEO ARCHEOLOGICO BAGLIO ANSELMI

WHERE: LUNGOMARE BOEO

WHEN: FROM 9.00 TO 18.00 EVERY DAY

3 € TICKET 2 € REDUCED TICKET

FREE ENTRANCE FOR VISITORS UNDER 18 YEAR AND OVER 65 YEAR

The Map

