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An Authentic Taste of Palermo

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Fresh Vegetables at Capo Marketplace in Palermo

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The best way to experience a city is through sampling the foods, sounds, and sites during a stroll amid the thriving, bustling marketplaces in existence for thousands of years.

Under the expertise of such tour guides as Marco Romeo of [Streat Palermo Tour](#), a visitor to Sicily's grand capital of Palermo will be given a food passport (Passaporto del Mangione) to be stamped along a four-hour tasting tour through the city's back streets and three main historic marketplaces: Capo, Vucciria, and Ballaro. These markets are opened daily around 7 a.m. with varied closing times, anywhere from midday to around 8 p.m. Sundays they normally remain active until after lunch.

The marketplaces are more than just an endless array of colorful vegetables, fresh fish and

meats, and stalls of enticing cheeses, but it is the local's social life. At night the area is alive with music and young people eating and drinking, while during the day people of all ages are visiting their trusted vendor to buy the produce and foods of the day. You can even see buckets lowered from windows above for people to collect their wares as they did centuries past. Everywhere you turn, the markings of the mixtures of cultures are visible: from the Phoenicians to Carthaginians, to Greeks and Romans. However, the elaborate mosques and domes are the evidence of how Palermo thrived during the 9th to 11th century under Arabic rule before being empowered by the Normans and Europeans centuries thereafter.



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Your delectable journey starts through Palermo's striking Teatro Massimo, which some will remember as the site of the closing scene in the film *Godfather III*. You can even take a five to eight euro tour of this elaborate building, considered one of largest opera houses in Italy and Europe, which stages both dance and music concerts from September through June.

Marco takes your small group of four or five through the energetic Capo marketplace filled with ongoing rows of fresh vegetables, fruits, fish, meats, and cheese stands. The group stops for a taste of *panelle* (chickpea fritters), *cazilli* (potato croquets), and *arancine*, a stuffed saffron fried rice dome filled with carrots, onions, and veal, all popular foods with the locals.

Along the way, Marco buys some cheeses at a nearby store for the forthcoming picnic at the local bar. Also on view are the fish mongers proudly yelling out their catch of the day to passersby.

You head on to La Vucciria Market crossing the main street of Via Roma near the 17th-century baroque-style San Domenico Church at the small Piazza San Domenico. The area is a bit more run-down than Capo and less filled with sumptuous produce, though historically important.

First stop by a stand and taste a *sfincione*, a pizza look-a-like, with tasty tomato, onions, oregano, and touch of pepper or chili to liking, all on extremely soft bread which is specially prepared. The group is now ready for the *schiticcio*, or picnic lunch inside the Taverna Azzurra, especially popular with young people at night. Marco lays out the array of fresh cheese, plump olives, and rich red *sangue*, the local wine.

You continue on through the old Jewish Quarter for a taste of grilled spleen, a 500-year-old recipe. Give it a try because it is quite tasty. The tour takes a turn back across Via Roma

toward other major streets of Via Maqueda and Via Emanuele, at the Quattro Canti, four corners and center of Palermo. You are now embraced by four similar baroque buildings with sculptures of ladies overseeing above each structure for protection of the city. Each building also consists of a fountain representing one of the four seasons.

Another grand historic building not to be missed is the nearby City Hall along with the Mayor's Palace, which is quite a sight lit up at night. The group will stop briefly at the temple of San Cataldo dating back around 1150 A.D. exhibiting the Arab and Norman-style architecture. Notice the Arabic dome above.

The tour's final market tour is Ballaro, filled with mostly household wares and hardly any fresh produce. According to Marco, the area is being phased out. The neighborhood youth have made an attempt to help beautify the area through such gardens as in the Piazza Mediterranean.

A tasting tour would not be complete without a dulce or dessert. You will visit F.lli Rosciglione, a family bakery since 1840, for a luscious ricotta-filled cannoli or cassata.

The group will depart from the 700-year-old Cathedral, an exquisite ending, or maybe just the beginning, to experience the tantalizing tastes and sights of Palermo. Also, don't forget to have your food passport stamped for a memorable souvenir. Buon Appetito.

For further info on Palermo and Sicily, check out www.visitingsicily.it and www.visitpalermo.it.

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