

# ERICE

## ***TOURIST SITES in ERICE***



Erice is a picturesque and charming town situated at the height of 750 meters on the sea level. From here you can admire a wonderful view of Trapani, its salt pans and the Egadi Islands and it is also possible to see the city of Marsala and the island of Mothia.

Erice was probably founded by the Elymians, a native Sicilian people. After the Greeks, the Carthaginians and the Romans, the town was later ruled by the Arabs. But it was only with the Normans that the town returned to its former glory: they reinforced the walls, they built the Castle and wonderful palaces and churches, they reorganized the urban shape. Originally the name of the city was Eryx, from the name of its first king and founder, then it was named Monte San Giuliano by the Norman Count Ruggero, because before the decisive battle against the Arabs he had dreamt San Giuliano, who had helped him to win. Only with Mussolini Erice returned to its original name.

## **THE VENUS CASTLE**



The Venus castle today is a fortress. In origin it was a temple dedicated to the goddess of fertility venerated by the Elymians (an ancient pre-Roman population) and after by the other populations who conquered the town. The temple was a very important place, known all over the Mediterranean Sea. There lived the priestesses of Venus, who practiced the sacred prostitution, considered a true liturgical act and not pure sex. After several centuries the temple was destroyed and in the Middle Ages the Normans used the stones of the temple to build the castle. It was the center of a defensive system that included the Balio towers and the walls of the city. Inside the castle it is possible to see several architectural elements and fragments of the ancient sanctuary.

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## **THE BALIO GARDENS**



The Balio gardens are located around the Castle of Venus. They were made in true “English style” by will of the Conte Agostino Pepoli at the end of the 19th century. The Balio gardens’ vegetation consists mainly of Mediterranean plants and trees such as pines, cypresses, ashes, oaks, almonds and palms.

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## **THE BALIO TOWERS**



The Balio towers of Erice date from the Middle Ages. They were part of the defensive system of the fortress which included the Venus castle. They were connected to the castle by a drawbridge which after was destroyed and substituted by the stairs of the castle. There lived the Bajulo, a magistrate who represented the king. He lived in the towers with his family and his court. Like the gardens, also the towers were restored by will of the Conte Agostino Pepoli



## PEPOLI TOWERS



Looking out from the balcony situated under the Balio towers you can see the Pepoli Tower. It was built by the same Conte Agostino Pepoli on a rocky isolated platform overlooking the wonderful landscape of Cofano mountain. All around the tower there is a pine forest where the Conte Pepoli loved to walk and reflect. Today the Pepoli tower belongs to the city of Erice and in 2010 it was restored, becoming the seat of the Observatory for Peace in the Mediterranean.

The observatory will deal with all matters concerning human rights, international cooperation and peace in the Mediterranean zone.

## SAINT CARLO CHURCH



The small church, dedicated to San Carlo Borromeo, was erected together with the monastery in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and renovated at the end of the eighteenth century and again in the middle of the nineteenth century. Today the church has a single nave with a majolica floor, made by Neapolitan workers in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. On the right there is the sacristy: there it is possible to see a carved stone sink, a wooden "wheel" and a revolving door, the only point of communication between the monastery and the outside world. In the church you can admire several statues and paintings but the most important is the Madonna del Soccorso of the Gagini school. Characteristics are the grilles that allowed the sisters of the Monastery to participate in religious services. The nuns took care of the orphans entrusted to them and taught the girls the secrets of their famous and secret sweets, which they sold through the "wheel" in the church.

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### Third Step

## PALAZZO SALES

In 1600 the building was built to house a convent dedicated to Santa Teresa and welcomed about 12 (twelve) maidens. In the XIX (nineteenth) century, when religious orders were suppressed, it was closed and abandoned. Later it became a school, with refectory and dormitories, that welcomed the youth of the whole province.



Today Palazzo Sales, totally renewed in the 80s (eighties), is the seat of the offices of the municipality of Erice. It is partly used as a venue for conventions and cultural events and partly as the headquarters of the "Ignazio e Vincenzo Florio" Institute.

## ELIMO-PUNIC WALLS

The Elimo - punic walls are a wonderful testimony of the past. Their construction dates back to about 2000 (two thousand) years ago and after several reconstructions they were completed by the Normans.

Because of their gigantic dimensions, they are known as “cyclopean walls” and a legend says that they were built by Dedalus.

In ancient times they surrounded Erice completely, But today they go around the city for a distance of about 700 (seven hundred) metres.

Along the walls it is still possible to see:

- 16 (sixteen) quadrangular towers connected to each other by solid intermediate curtains,
- 6 (six) secondary gates, used for emergency and
- 3 (three) main gates:



**Porta Trapani** is situated in the southern part of the walls, so named because it looks towards the city of Trapani. It has an ogival shape.

**Porta Spada** is situated in the northern part of the walls, so named because there 100 (one hundred) enemy soldiers were killed by the sword during the Vespers War in the 13th (thirteenth) century.



**Porta Carmine** is situated in the middle, between Porta Trapani and Porta Spada. On the top of this gate is located a Saint Albert's statue.

The base level of the walls is made of very big blocks. It dates back to the Elymian period.

A second level is formed by well squared blocks. It dates back to the Phoenician-Punic period. The final level is made of small stones, with an irregular shape. It dates back to the medioeval period.

The ancient origin of the walls is testified by the presence of several letters of the Punic alphabet engraved into the stones. They are the letters:

“beth” that means “house”

“ain” that means “eye”

“phe” that means “mouth”

These letters may have the following meaning:

“The walls have eyes to see the enemy, a mouth to eat him when attacked and they are the safe house for the inhabitants”.



## **THE SPANISH DISTRICT**



The Spanish District rises on a spur that leans out on the Cofano Montain. It was built in the XVII (seventeenth) century to receive the Spanish soldiers. Today it is the center of the etno-anthropological museum.

A legend says that in the stormy nights the spirit of the Captain of the garrison flutters there. The same legend tells that this captain, named "Birrittedda Russa" because of his red cap, had a relationship with a woman of the city and that he killed her husband when he discovered their relationship.

Then he was condemned to death and after the execution a strong wind got up and his red cap was brought away from his head. The spectators, frightened, abandoned the execution. From then it is said that the ghost of the soldier roams the streets of the town.





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