

Palermo lives up to the Italy of popular imagination

By **CAIN BURDEAU**
The Associated Press

PALERMO, Sicily — For many travelers, Italy is seen as romantic, mysterious and a bit chaotic, with torpid heat, gorgeously rich colors and irresistible food.

In reality, of course, every region has a distinct culture and identity. But Palermo, the ancient capital of Sicily and jewel of the Mediterranean, lives up to the Italy of popular imagination. It's joyful and colorful, rich in art and cuisine, but also disorganized, unable even to reliably collect the garbage.

Life is busily lived on the streets here. Clothes hang haphazardly from balconies. Motor scooters zip down narrow alleyways (often driven by children going the wrong way). People shout in Sicilian — a dialect incomprehensible to many Italian speakers — back and forth across streets and from windows. They gesture, sing and openly observe others.

All this plays out in a city steeped in religious rituals, intricate history, stunning art and stunning decay. It's a place living amid the past — a past lost in so much of today's modernizing Italy.

It's also a culture that can seem oddly familiar to outsiders, likely due to the waves of Sicilians who emigrated to the U.S. and made their mark on everyday American life in everything from food to pop culture. Part of "The Godfather" was filmed here and the Mafia remains a force despite government crackdowns and the public's outrage and resistance in the wake of bombings that killed two anti-Mafia magistrates and others with them in 1992.

Palermo's mosaic

Before being bombed by Americans in World War II and ransacked by the Mafia after the war, Palermo was for centuries one of Europe's most splendid cities, rich with churches, palaces, theaters, villas. Much of that illustrious past remains, albeit faded, but so does deep poverty.

There are medieval Arab-Norman palaces (La Zisa, La Cuba, the Norman Palace), fantastic churches (the main cathedral with tombs of Norman royalty and the Cathedral of Monreale with extraordinary mosaics), art-filled Spanish palaces, the grand Teatro Massimo opera house, and much more.

What makes the city unique is the mixture of cultures across centuries: a tapestry of Phoenician, Greek, Roman, Arab, Norman, Jewish, French, English, Spanish and Italian influences.

"You need an encyclopedia to describe the Palermitan," says Pietro Tramonte, a retired accountant who runs an eccentric outdoor bookstore. "Here you find a laboratory, just like when life began. It's an impossible mosaic. But we're forced to live together."

Just then, a man in a car hails Tramonte from the end of the alleyway. He's dropping off a strange donation: hardbound books



This April 7 photo shows a vendor in the Ballaro market in Palermo passing a bag of fruit he has sold to a client. Outdoor markets are some of the best places to revel in Palermo. The ancient capital of Sicily and jewel of the Mediterranean lives up to the Italy of popular imagination. Visitors will find a cultural mosaic, with palaces, churches and markets.



This April 7 photos shows apartment buildings in the historic center of Palermo with their characteristic balconies where residents hang laundry and grow plants.



This April 7 photo shows the palm trees inside the Villa Bonnano park in Palermo.

about fascism by the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini.

"Palermo is the fountain of serendipity," Tramonte continues. "When a foreigner comes to Palermo, he should let himself go. Let yourself be a feather in the wind and you can find that that wind can take you to beautiful places."

The markets

Outdoor markets are some of the best places to revel in Palermo.

Vendors shout out prices. Butchers slice, pound, weigh meat. Fishmongers' stands display decapitated swordfish. Things sizzle in pots and pans of kiosks: chickpea fritters (panelle), potato and egg rolls (crocche), stuffed rice balls (arancine).

Your head spins at the movement, the flashes of life: A fellow brushes by with a pushcart full of sardines for sale; another tries to catch your attention to buy a

bouquet of flowers. You admire displays of oranges, lemons, apples, strawberries, lettuce heads, broccoli and tomatoes as mouth-watering works of art.

You're in a stream of people, moving, buying, looking, talking, bumping into each other with bags full of food. A scooter blows its horn and plows through.

Your senses are assaulted by mounds of olives and dried tomatoes, bunches of rosemary and bay leaves, cheeses.

"We were born here and we will die here," says Francesco Andolina, a fruit and vegetable vendor whose family has been getting up before dawn and working until dusk in the Ballaro market for generations.

But Palermo's most famous market, the Vucciria, is a shadow of its former self. Merchants now offer antiques and souvenirs to tourists. The streets are no longer slick with

vegetable and fruit remains.

"All the people want to go to the supermarkets with their carts," Andolina says and mockingly pretends to push a cart.

Capital of culture

Palermo recently restricted most cars from the city center. "Now you can hear your own footsteps, you can hear your voice. That was taken away when there were cars," says Sara Cappello, a folk singer and storyteller.

And in 2018, Palermo is being celebrated as Italy's Capital of Culture. "We deserve to be the cultural capital because we are a wonderful city," Cappello says.

She then thinks of the city's continuing problems: Trash piling up, corruption, unregulated development, poverty.

"We mistreated our city so badly," she says. "But maybe this too is the fascination of Palermo."

GREEN SALAD WITH PUMPKIN VINAIGRETTE & ROASTED APPLES

Servings: 4

Start to finish: 30 minutes

Salad:

- 2 large tart apples (such as Granny Smith), cut into 1-inch cubes (unpeeled), about 3 cups
- 2 teaspoons fresh minced rosemary
- 5 cups baby spinach or kale,
- ½ cup baby tomatoes, halved or quartered
- 1 ½ cups shredded cooked white meat chicken or turkey

- ¼ cup marcona almonds
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- Olive oil in a mister

Pumpkin Vinaigrette:

- ¼ cup pumpkin puree
- 1 tablespoon water
- 1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar
- 1 tablespoon maple syrup
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- ½ teaspoon minced rosemary
- 1 teaspoon minced shallot
- a few turns of freshly ground black pepper

Preheat the oven to 425 F. Place the cubed apple on a parchment-lined baking tray and spray with an olive oil mister to coat the cubes. Sprinkle on the minced rosemary and salt, and gently toss the cubes to coat. Bake just until tender and edges are starting to turn golden, about 12 minutes.

Remove from oven and set aside to cool just a few minutes. While the apples are roasting, make the vinaigrette. Place the pumpkin puree, water, vinegar and maple syrup in a small bowl. Whisk the olive oil into the mixture until well-blended. Add the rosemary, shallot and black pepper and stir.

To assemble the salad: place the spinach in a bowl or platter and top with the tomatoes, chicken, almonds and warm, roasted apples. Drizzle with pumpkin vinaigrette, toss, and serve.

Nutrition information per serving: 239 calories; 75 calories from fat; 8 g fat (1 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 45 mg cholesterol; 336 mg sodium; 21 g carbohydrate; 6 g fiber; 12 g sugar; 20 g protein.

Why should summer have all the leafy fun? Try a winter salad

By **MELISSA D'ARABIAN**
Associated Press

Summer may officially be the season of green salads, but wintertime versions have advantages that make them worth exploring.

The cooler weather seasonable greens are hearty and darker green, which makes them nutrient-rich. And, these thicker-leaved greens such as kale or spinach can hold up to the addition of warm ingredients, opening up the possibilities for topping your salad with roasted goodies in a way that delicate butter lettuce never could.

Have some hearty root veggies in the fridge? Toss them (and some whole garlic cloves — yum!) in some olive oil and roast them up, and add warm to raw kale leaves with lemon juice, Parmesan and black pepper and you've got a winter salad rivaling anything you'd make in July.

Today's recipe takes inspiration from this season's holiday cooking pantry ingredients that I always seem to have on hand. Apples, leftover from apple pie, are the salad's real star, while the pumpkin vinaigrette — also of pie fame — plays an important supporting role.

I cut the apples into small cubes and quickly roast them in a little salt and rosemary at high heat, and the little cubes turn into sweet, herbaceous



Green salad with roasted apple and pumpkin vinaigrette.

nuggets of flavor — like raisins, but better — and make other ingredients almost unnecessary. I add leftover turkey for protein, almonds for crunch and tomatoes for a tiny bit of acid.

You could even add blue cheese or feta if you happened to have some floating around the house, leftover from a cheese party platter. Feel free to swap out ingredients to match your

pantry: As long as you are topping winter greens with something warm, whether roasted Brussels sprouts or pan-seared salmon, you'll be on your way to a tasty winter green salad.

Food Network star Melissa d'Arabian is an expert on healthy eating on a budget. She is the author of the cookbook, "Supermarket Healthy."

How do airlines decide who gets their seat upgraded?

NEWYORK (AP)—Ever wonder how airlines decide who gets a seat upgrade on flights? Airlines say it's strictly by the book: Loyal customers are rewarded based on their status in frequent flyer programs.

But some flyers insist that once in a while, they get upgraded even when they've bought the cheapest seat. AirfareWatchdog.com founder George Hobica, in an interview with the AP Travel podcast "Get Outta Here," even suggests that how you dress and act could give you an edge.

Hobica acknowledges that "upgrades mostly go to people with status in the program. If you're silver or gold on British Airways or United, and they have to upgrade people because they've oversold economy class, the first thing they do is go down the list of (who has) status." But he says he's also been inexplicably upgraded when he was "wearing a nice suit and tie" and all the other passengers were "looking like Richard Simmons."

A number of airlines contacted for comment said it never works that way.

"The list is the list and the gate agents work the list," said American Airlines spokesman Josh Freed, referring to the "list of customers who potentially qualify for upgrades based on elite frequent flyer status." Gate agents, he stressed, are "not out there putting who they like, or who's best dressed, further up the list. It's pretty straightforward. If there are three unsold seats in first class, the top three people on that list are going to get them."

Alaska Airlines spokesman Cole Cosgrove agreed, saying upgrades go to elite members of the airline's mileage plan. If you're not an elite member, the only way to get an upgrade on Alaska is by redeeming miles (15,000 miles one way), using a guest upgrade code given to the airline's "MVP gold members," who are permitted to share the codes with friends or family; or by paying for an upgrade at the gate (\$50-\$200, depending on length of flight) if first class isn't full and all eligible elites have already been upgraded.

Cosgrove added that Alaska Airlines' policies do not allow agents to make exceptions for guests who aren't elite members of the airline's mileage plan "even if those guests are really friendly."

Other airlines, including Delta and United, also said their agents are bound by upgrade policies as described on their websites, which explain how to use award miles and exactly what their mileage program members are eligible for.

And yet, there are people who say they've gotten upgrades without status.

"To those people who say, nonsense, this can't happen, I disagree wholeheartedly. This has happened to me from coach to business class a number of times," said Ann Lombardi, a business English teacher and tour organizer at The Trip Chicks. What's her secret? "I just smile and say thank you for your help. I might tell a little story about myself. It may be the combination of being nice, dressing decently and the luck of the draw."

She got a surprise upgrade earlier this year flying on Emirates. "I was just standing in line, I got to boarding, the woman pulled me aside and gave me my boarding pass and it said 1B," she recalled. "I said, 'Is there an extra digit left out (on the seat number)?' and she said, 'No, you decided to upgrade you.'" The upgrade to first class from coach put her in a private compartment. After a knock on the door, she was asked, "Would you like Dom Perignon and black caviar now or later?"