



Pantelleria

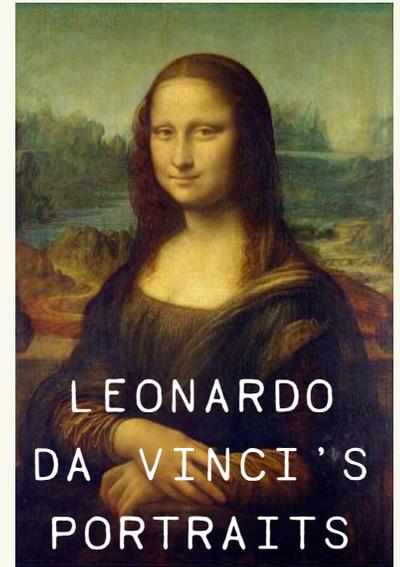
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# DREAM OF ITALY®



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## PANTELLERIA :

### *Unspoiled Paradise*

**I** first read about the island of *Pantelleria* in 1989. The writer referred to it as “a speck between Sicily and Africa,” and added, “Pantelleria feels as if it was formed only a week ago last Thursday” and that the islanders (known as Pantescans) “seem in no hurry to become modern,” all of which intrigued me.



not exactly on the map: not a single person had heard of it when I mentioned I was going last fall.

It's perhaps best to state early on that Pantelleria, which was created by volcanic eruptions almost 300,000 years ago, is not for everyone. It is everything that the chic ports of call elsewhere in Italy —

*Portofino, the Amalfi Coast,*

*Lake Como* — are not. There are no beaches on the entire island, and its landscape is a rugged mix of black lava shapes, dramatic and jagged cliffs that descend straight into the sea, hot springs, a thermal lake, the occasional palm tree, terraced farms, and low-lying *macchia*,



In the years since, Pantelleria has been described as “The Mediterranean’s Last Great Unspoiled Destination,” “Italy’s Anti-Capri” and “Italy’s Most Fantastically Awesome Island You Didn’t Know About.” Even now, after a handful of celebrities and the 2015 filming of the movie *A Bigger Splash* brought the island some fame, it’s still

*continued on page 2*

**G**rowing up in late 15th-century Florence, *Leonardo da Vinci* was surrounded by smart, beautiful women. While the young artist was learning from *Andrea del Verrocchio*, painters were busy depicting upstanding women in profile. In these portraits, the point was not to reveal anything about the woman’s personality, but rather to showcase the wealth of her husband or father. The focus was on embroidery details, expensive gems, a twist of gold cord in the hair.

But Leonardo da Vinci saw things differently. Along the way, he made us see women of the Italian Renaissance in ways they had never been seen before.

As a 21-year-old artist recently hatched from Master Verrocchio’s workshop, Leonardo da Vinci was hired to paint *Ginevra de Benci*, the 16-year-old daughter of a Florentine banker. To our knowledge, this portrait was Leonardo’s first non-religious painting. The commission may have been arranged by Leonardo’s father, a man of modest origins who nonetheless served as a notary to some of the city’s most influential families.

What’s remarkable about this painting *continued on page 6*

*Pantelleria* is closer to Tunisia than Sicily.

densely packed and aromatic shrubs.

Yet Pantelleria is stunningly beautiful, and its laid back vibe and utter lack of pretension is precisely what has attracted Madonna, Sting, Gerard Depardieu, New York City specialty food retailer Eli Zabar, Italian photographer *Fabrizio Ferri*, Cate Blanchett, French actress Carole Bouquet (who owns a wine estate) and *Giorgio Armani*, who has been a part-time resident since the early 1980s. A visit to Pantelleria feels like you have gone somewhere very far away.

And it is far, over 60 miles from the southwest coast of Sicily and 37 miles from Tunisia, and is a bit hard to reach (two or three flights or a boat from Trapani, Sicily). But after the journey to get there the sense of tranquility and the relaxed pace is immediate.

## NARROW ROADS LINED WITH STONEWALLS

The island is only 32 square miles so it doesn't take very long to get anywhere, and if there is a stoplight on the island I never saw one, but the main reason visitors experience the island slowly is that many of the roads are very narrow. They're also lined with stone walls that have prickly pear and bougainvillea cascading over them, so driving fast isn't an option, and mere inches are between any passing vehicle other than a scooter.



Stone wall on the sea

neglected to pay close attention to the route, and many hours later we discovered there were not many street lights and we could not find our way back as all the roads looked the same.

Our cell phone's power was nearly gone, and after driving around for 30 minutes, we saw some policemen who were directing traffic after a concert, and my friend asked (in Italian) for directions. We set out again for another

30 minutes and just as we'd decided that we were going to have to call it quits and find a hotel in Pantelleria Center, we saw a sign we'd missed previously and finally made it back at midnight. From then on, we took note during the day of all landmarks and switchbacks.

## THE WINDS BRING BOUNTY

Pantelleria was occupied by north African Arabs for many years, and one source of the island's name is *Bent-el Riah*, Arabic for Daughter of the Wind (many words in the Pantescan dialect are of Arab origin, like the hamlets of Bukkuram, Rakhali, Gadir, etc.). The *maestrone* or *sirocco* winds swirl around the island 337 days of the year, which is why flights can be delayed or cancelled (planes at the airport sometimes have to be tied down or they'll blow over).

The winds also dictate how the island's olives and *Zibibbo* grapes, used to make *Passito di Pantelleria*, are grown, which is low to the ground akin to bonsai. In 2014, the *Zibibbo* practice of head-trained bush vines (*vite ad albarello*) was recognized by UNESCO, which also recognized, in 2018, the art of the island's dry-stone walls. It may seem improbable that they grow here

at all, on an island with no fresh water source and little rainfall, but the volcanic soil is fertile, and capers, too, thrive here.

Pantelleria capers are widely considered the world's best, and they are the only Italian capers with the *Indicazione Geografica Protetta* designation. They're packed in sea salt (no spare water for curing) and are a perfect souvenir (a great place to buy them is the *Cooperativa Agricola Produttori Capperi*, where plenty of locals buy them, too). Every single olive, grape, and caper is picked by hand, one by one.

## PANTELLERIA'S DAMMUSI

Not long ago, apart from some decidedly average hotels in the center, most visitors stayed in *dammusi* (singular *dammuso*), cubic stone dwellings with domed roofs dating back to the 10th century that have become the architectural symbol of Pantelleria. The word's origin may be from the Latin *domus* (house) or the Arabic *dammus* (vaulted building).

The one-level *dammusi* are often black due to the use of volcanic rock in their



Prickly Pear Cactus



Volcanic rock

construction, thus the island’s “Black Pearl of the Mediterranean” moniker, and they have exceptionally thick walls that keep them cool in the summer and warm in the winter. The painted white lines on the domes may appear to be merely decorative but they are a brilliant method of collecting rainwater, which flows to a nearby cistern.

Dammusi are still a popular accommodation choice, and the best known on the island are those of the *Tenuta Borgia* estate, where *A Bigger Splash* was filmed. What was once a summer retreat for *Milanese* proprietor *Rosa Borgia Baroness Collice* is now a 27-acre property: when neighboring properties were up for sale, she bought them to prevent their demolition and to preserve her surroundings.

There are seven individual dammuso that accommodate from two to eight people (the entire estate sleeps 24 people, perfect for any kind of reunion or celebration). My friend and I stayed at *Limoni*, which consists of two dammusi, a separate kitchen, outdoor dining area, and a small pool.

Borgia worked with architect *Gabriella Giuntoli*, who lives on the island and has been referred to as the “savior of Pantelleria,” for the restoration. (Giuntoli also restored Armani’s dammuso, among many others.) Each dammuso is rustic and stylish in an *agriturismo* kind of way (appropriate as the estate is also a farm producing olives and grapes) and overall the

effect is eclectic — there are aquatic light fixtures of hand-blown glass in the Dammuso Grande mixed with antiques, all personally selected by Borgia.

The estate also has one of the best examples of a *giardino Pantesco* (or *jardinu* in local dialect; also called an Arab garden) on the island. These are composed of stone walls that typically enclose citrus trees, and they’re built at a specific height to protect the trees from the wind while still allowing for sufficient sun.

There are a few distinctive hotels on Pantelleria but none capture so perfectly the island’s sense of place than *Sikelia*. Owner *Giulia Paziienza Gelmetti*, who in a previous life was a professional basketball player, first came to Pantelleria in 2000 and was smitten. She’d wanted to open a hotel for many years, and when an old villa built in the traditional local style was

up for sale, she felt it was the right opportunity. Gelmetti says her vision was a place “that when you close the door, you feel the space, the sunset, the stars, and the silence of Pantelleria.”

She also enlisted architect Giuntoli as she wanted a partner who was equally respectful of Pantelleria’s natural features. Sikelia’s 20

suites, converted dammusi, are all unique but each exudes the look and feel of the island: a color palette of gray, gold, black, silver, beige, white, and purple mixes perfectly with bronze and other metals, as well as glass, and texture is everywhere — in patterned metal artworks, plush velvet chairs, natural fiber rugs, coral vases, and carved wooden tables on terraces.



Dammuso grande



Dammusi



continued on page 4



Limoni bedroom



Limoni exterior

## DREAM OF ITALY®

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served as a place of banishment.

The décor is minimalist but Frette linens, Gessi fixtures, Hermès toiletries, Harmon Kardon speakers, and attention to the small details insure a luxurious stay. The hotel's restaurant, Themà, turns out dishes that blend Sicilian, North African, and local flavors under the direction of chef *Diego Battaglia*. It is sheer bliss eating at one of the outdoor tables. The capers and bread, made on site, are outstanding.

## GETTING THERE AND AROUND

**Arriving by air:** A number of European airlines fly to Catania, Trapani, and Palermo where connections may be made for Pantelleria. I flew back to Palermo from Pantelleria on DAT ([www.dat.dk](http://www.dat.dk)), which also has flights from Catania and Trapani (flight time between Palermo and Pantelleria is 45 minutes). Within Italy, Alitalia ([www.alitalia.com](http://www.alitalia.com)) has flights from Milan and Rome and Volotea ([www.volotea.com](http://www.volotea.com)) has flights from Genoa, Torino, and Venice.

**Arriving by sea:** Liberty Lines ([www.libertylines.it](http://www.libertylines.it)) offers ferries and hydrofoils between Trapani and Pantelleria and is the best option among the other lines, which take longer and whose boats are older.

### Car Rental:

#### **Policardo**

Via Messina, 31  
(39) 0923 912844  
[www.policardo.it](http://www.policardo.it)

### Boat, kayak, and mountain bike rentals:

#### **Viva Pantelleria**

Piazza Messina, 18  
(Pantelleria Town)  
(39) 328 3889893  
[www.vivapantelleria.it](http://www.vivapantelleria.it)

Trekking excursions also arranged as well as transfer services.

Find out more at [www.pantelleria.com](http://www.pantelleria.com)

Gelmetti also owns three wine estates, and the one nearest Sikelia is *Coste Ghirlanda*, where a pop-up restaurant, *Officina*, is open in the summer. A wine tasting I attended there was positively magical. It was held outdoors in the early evening and there were twinkling lights all around the estate, which is set in a valley overlooking the plain of Ghirlanda, in the center of the island. Themà manager *Angelo* poured a series of excellent wines while the sky above changed from fiery red and orange to lilac.

Aside from annual Carnevale celebrations, feast days, a regatta, and some concerts and festivals, there's not much happening on Pantelleria and the only cultural must-see is *La Collina di Loredana*, an open-air museum with 25 installations by contemporary artists, most created in situ.

Pantelleria Town was heavily bombed by the Allies in 1943 so it doesn't hold much appeal, though the *Castello Barbacane*, of Byzantine origin, is well preserved and is slated to become a museum; there are also a few good shops and restaurants as well as one of the island's two gas stations. But the island's outdoor pursuits are its star attractions.

## OUTDOOR LIFE

The *Lago Specchio di Venere* (Mirror of Venus Lake) is a deep, thermal lake with nutrient-rich mud and it has a beach around most of it. The Neolithic village and tombs known as the *Sési*, dating from about 5,000 years ago, are

fascinating and are considered one of the most important archeological sites in the Mediterranean.

Picturesque sites along the coast road include *Arco dell'Elefante*, *Salto la Vecchia* and *Cala Cinque Denti*, and many of the roads that descend from the coast road lead to swimming spots — the Pantescans have cleverly built

wooden platforms over the rocky shoreline with ladders into the sea.

There are hiking trails galore and the *Montagne Grande* (the island's highest peak) as well as diving and boating opportunities. Stepping into the fine *giardino Pantesco* (or *jardinu* in local dialect; also called an Arab garden) at the

*Donnafugata* winery is also a singular experience — this type of garden is composed of stone walls that typically enclose citrus trees, and the walls are built at a specific height to protect the trees from

the wind while still allowing for sufficient sun. Donnafugata's garden is circular and contains a single orange tree inside (sipping the winery's Ben Ryé *Passito* at a tasting is an equally pleasant pursuit).

Still, the best thing to "do" on Pantelleria is settle into the languorous rhythm and plan your days around meals and sunsets, which are among the most memorable you'll ever see. Giulia Gelmetti notes there is a local saying that once you have spent a bit of time on Pantelleria, you realize you really don't need anything else.

—Barrie Kerper

Barrie Kerper, author of *The Collected Traveler series*, has traveled throughout Italy but now dreams only of Pantelleria.



Odd Welles, flickr.com

Vineyard



Mauro, flickr.com

Lago Specchio di Venere





## The Details



### WHERE TO STAY

#### Sikelia

Via Monastero  
(39) 0923 408120  
www.sikeliapantelleria.com  
Open April to October.  
No children under age 12.  
Rates: Half-board from 560 to 1,700€; bed and breakfast rates from 440 to 1,580€.

#### Tenuta Borgia

Salto La Vecchia  
www.tenutaborgia.it  
Rates: From 650 to 9,200€ per week. Inquire directly about nightly rates and the price for the entire estate. (If mosquitos like you, bring repellent.)

*Other Dammusi Rental Agencies:*  
InSicily  
www.insicily.com

Relais Euterpini  
www.euterpini.com

Solopantelleria  
www.solopantelleria.com

### WHERE TO EAT

**Themà** at Sikelia is open to non-guests and it is sheer bliss eating at one of the outdoor tables. The *ricotta* and mint *ravioli* and *pesto* Pantescan are stand-outs and don't miss the capers and bread, made on site. Sikelia guests may dine at the Coste Ghirlanda Officina at any time (shuttle service provided); non-guests are welcome at the pop-up restaurant from July to late September.

#### Il Gabbiano Azzurro

Via Trieste, 5  
(Pantelleria Town)  
(39) 0923 911909  
Somewhat of an old-fashioned place serving traditional local dishes. Good *caponata*, not-so-good fried *calamari*. Good for long, relaxing meals as the service is not speedy.

#### Osteria Il Principe e Il Pirata

Strada Punta Karace  
(39) 0923 691108  
www.ilprincipeeilpirata.it  
Inventive and delicious dishes, mostly seafood, with local ingredients. The fish and vegetable couscous is terrific, as is the outdoor seating. With notice from both Michelin and Slow Food, this may be the best restaurant on the island.

#### Ristorante La Nicchia

Contrada da Scauri  
(Scauri Basso)  
(39) 0923 916342  
Everyone ends up at La Nicchia eventually. Lively atmosphere with outdoor and indoor seating (tables are set around an orange tree). Great grilled whole fish and *insalata Pantescas* (potatoes, tomatoes, red onion, olives, and capers, *naturalmente*).

#### Panificio Gelateria Katia

Lungomare Paolo Borsellino, 84  
(Pantelleria Town)  
Really good *gelato* and also a great place to try the *bacio Pantescas* (Pantescan kiss), a fried waffle confection with a filling of ricotta, chocolate chips and cinnamon (trust me, it's worth the calories).

### WHERE TO SHOP

*Nota bene:* Many shops and services in Pantelleria Town close between 1:00 and 5:00 p.m.

#### Casbah

Two locations:  
Piazza S. Gaetano, 73 (Scauri)  
Via Trieste, 1  
(Pantelleria Town)  
Appealing boutique with cool cotton clothing, interesting jewelry, gifts, cotton sheets for the beach or *al fresco* picnics in Casbah-logo drawstring bags. The Pantelleria Town location is small while in Scauri there are two shops, one devoted to colorful ceramics.

#### Cooperativa Agricola Produttori Capperi

Via del Cappero, 11  
(Scauri Basso)  
www.capperipantelleria.com  
Bags of capers are 2.50 to 12€  
No mail orders filled outside Italy, but capers from La Nicchia, a noted producer since 1949, are available from its online shop, [www.lanicchia.com](http://www.lanicchia.com); Eataly ([www.eataly.com](http://www.eataly.com)) and Zingerman's ([www.zingermans.com](http://www.zingermans.com))

#### Emporio del Gusto

Via Napoli, 9  
(Lungomare, Pantelleria Town)  
www.emporio-gusto.com  
Good selection of quality culinary provisions, wine, local ceramics, books, and gifts. Sottovento, via Borgo Italia, (Pantelleria Town). Stylish women's clothing.

### WHAT TO READ

#### Admiring Pantelleria

Giuseppe Julio Rodó  
EBS print, 2019  
Available at the Pantelleria airport and in some shops, this is a "Guide Book with Paths, Places, Photos, and history of the Island" by a local resident who is passionate about his home. The English translation is not always perfect, but it's a comprehensive book with lots of photos (some of Pantelleria Town before it was bombed) and a pull-out map. Rodó also offers personal panoramic tours of the island: [www.bit.ly/pantbook](http://www.bit.ly/pantbook)

#### Mediterranean Living

Lisa Lovatt-Smith  
Watson-Guptill, 1998  
The cover photo is of the patio at Giorgio Armani's *dammuso* on Pantelleria and the first home profiled in the book is his. The author writes, "this tiny windswept island is a minuscule domain unto itself" and "the landscape is rugged, and the local architecture unlike anything seen elsewhere." Aside from this mention of Pantelleria the book is a beautiful, passionate love letter to the Mediterranean.



1€ = \$1.19 at press time

*tagna Grande, reaches 2,743 feet.*

## Da Vinci's Portraits *continued from page 1*

is the immediacy of Ginevra herself. Already in this early portrait, Leonardo is beginning to change the way women are portrayed. Ginevra seems to sit at the surface of the picture, gazing outward. (This effect is made stronger by the fact that the portrait was cropped at some point; originally, we probably would have seen Ginevra's torso and hands, too.)

Ginevra is not simply a status symbol but a *real* person. Rather than settling on her clothing or jewels, our eye is drawn instead to the girl's beautiful yet puzzling face. Is she melancholy?

Bored? Sick? Are we looking at the familiar ennui of a teenager? Ginevra seems to look through us instead of at us; what is going through her mind? It's this psychological rather than emblematic treatment of the sitter that sets this portrait apart.

At the same time, Ginevra's portrait is traditional in that it is full of allegory. The prominent juniper behind Ginevra's head was a symbol of chastity as well as a play on her name (*ginepro* = Ginevra). In the Renaissance, it was not uncommon for the back of a panel to be painted as well as the front. In the case of Ginevra's portrait, the symbolic foliage and inscriptions on the back give us more information about the circumstances of the portrait's creation.

There is some controversy about the portrait's patron. Some believe it may have commemorated Ginevra's marriage in 1474 to *Luigi Niccolini*, a widower twice her age. However, many scholars believe the patron to be

*Bernardo Bembo* (1433-1519), a middle-aged, married Venetian diplomat who perhaps was infatuated with Ginevra. As difficult as it is for us to imagine today, platonic "love affairs" between upstanding gentlemen and much younger, learned ladies were not only socially acceptable but they also inspired an entire corpus



Ginevra dei Benci  
1474-78  
tempera on panel,  
National Gallery of Art,  
Washington, DC



of love poems and other effusive expressions of esteem and honor. Ginevra's admirers included not only her fiancé and Bembo, but also *Lorenzo de Medici*, who celebrated Ginevra in writing. The palm and laurel on the back of Ginevra's portrait appear in Bernardo Bembo's emblem; his motto, *Virtus et honor* (virtue and honor), was painted beneath the scroll.

Leonardo would try to move onto big scientific and engineering projects, but he would always return to portraiture. Ginevra was the first in a list of learned ladies he would paint.

In 1482, Leonardo left Florence. He had managed to gain employment at the court of Milan, where Ludovico Sforza "Il Moro" reigned as the de facto duke. There, Leonardo painted one of his most remarkable portraits, a likeness of another teenaged girl who was Ludovico's favorite mistress.

*Cecilia Gallerani's* family was busy shuttling her off to a Milanese convent when she caught the eye of Ludovico Sforza. He holed Cecilia up behind the fortified walls of the *Castello Sforzesco* instead. When Leonardo da



Domenico Ghirlandaio,  
Portrait of Giovanna  
Tornabuoni, 1488, Museo  
Thyssen-Bornemisza,  
Madrid



Cecilia Gallerani,  
1489-90, oil on panel  
Czartoryski Museum,  
Kraków

Vinci began to capture Cecilia's lively presence in paint, Ludovico was set to marry *Beatrice d'Este* but he had postponed the marriage allegedly because he was in love with Cecilia. By the time Leonardo finished the portrait, Ludovico and Beatrice were married; Cecilia was pregnant.

Cecilia's bright, alert expression gives us the illusion of immediacy. It feels as if Cecilia's attention has just been captured by something outside the frame of the painting, like a bird fluttering on the windowsill or someone appearing at the door. In stark contrast to the static profile portraits that were the norm at the time, Cecilia turns with a dynamic sense of liveliness.

Like Ginevra's portrait, Cecilia presents us with a combination of realism and allegory. The white ermine in her lap has formed the subject of much speculation. It may have been a play on Cecilia's surname, which sounds

# Leonardo Da Vinci did not re

similar to the Greek word for *ermine*. Traditionally, the white ermine was a symbol of purity; according to legend, it would rather die than soil its fur. In 1488, Ludovico also entered the chivalric Order of the Ermine.

After Ludovico's marriage to Beatrice, Cecilia left the ducal palace, taking Leonardo's portrait with her. It passed through Cecilia's heirs until it landed in the collection of a noble Polish family. Incredibly, the *Lady with the Ermine* became the object of desire of another powerful tyrant in the twentieth century. Hans Frank, the Nazi governor of Poland, stole it away to his Bavarian estate until it was recovered by Allied troops.

The identity of the woman in this beautiful portrait remains contested, though we know Leonardo

Portrait of a Lady, circa 1495, oil on panel Musée du Louvre, Paris



completed it during his tenure at the ducal court of Milan. Traditionally, the Louvre has called her *La Belle Ferronnière*, named after the band around her head.

One theory is that the portrait represents *Lucrezia Crivelli*, who became Ludovico Sforza's mistress after Cecilia Gallerani exited the ducal palace. Other scholars think it represents Beatrice d'Este, Ludovico's bride who died in childbirth at 21.

Once again, Leonardo offers us a unique mixture of tradition and innovation. On the one hand, the picture conforms visually to the tradition of representing a sitter behind a parapet or windowsill. For a moment, we expect to see one of those beautifully adorned, impenetrable, and frozen ladies depicted in profile.

But not so fast. The woman in profile has suddenly broken free of her frozen stance, and has turned her head to stare boldly at us, even to smirk. We wonder what Leonardo might have said to inspire such a compelling expression that endures more than five centuries later.

In 1499, the French

Isabella d'Este, 1499-1500, charcoal and pigments on paper Musée du Louvre, Paris



Lisa Gherardini (Mona Lisa), 1503 onward, oil on panel Musée du Louvre, Paris



invaded Milan and Leonardo left for Venice. On his way, he stopped in Mantua to visit *Isabella d'Este*, one of the most prolific and influential women of the Italian Renaissance. Leonardo captured Isabella in a carefully executed drawing in charcoal, highlighted with various colored pigments. This time, he adhered to the idea of a profile.

A flute player named *Lorenzo Gusnasco da Pavia* wrote to Isabella d'Este, stating that in Venice, Leonardo had shown him an image of her. In 1504, Isabella wrote to Leonardo:

...We have conceived the hope that

*something we have long desired might come true: to have something by your hand. When you were here and drew our portrait in charcoal, you promised one day to do it in color.*



Leonardo and Isabella continued to exchange letters for years, but we have no evidence that he ever completed her painted portrait. Over his career, Leonardo took on many more commissions than he finished.

The portrait of Isabella d'Este may have been a promised work, never delivered, and we must content ourselves with a tantalizing drawing.

Back in Florence at the age of 51, Leonardo accepted a commission to paint the wife of *Francesco del Giocondo*, a wealthy silk merchant. Leonardo's father, who had some business connections to Francesco, may have been involved once again in securing the commission for his now aging son.

Lisa Gherardini was born to a family with little left to show for itself other than a noble pedigree. However, she married well in 1495, joining Francesco del Giocondo, who had already lost two wives in childbirth. At a time when birth and death were often intertwined, this portrait may have celebrated Lisa after she gave birth to two sons who survived (a baby girl, *Piera*, died in 1499).

As in his portrait of Ginevra, Leonardo's focus is on the inner life of his subject and on virtue; witness Lisa's

*continued on page 8*

ceive any formal education.

# SUCH WAS THE SKILL, ADAPTABILITY AND LONGEVITY OF LEONARDO, WHO COULD ADAPT TO HIS PATRON'S REQUIREMENTS, CHANGING TIMES AND THE SPARK OF HIS OWN IMAGINATION.

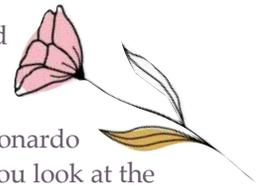
famously discreet smile, her hands laid one on top of the other. Even though Lisa is lifelike, she is also an ideal, the archetype of universal beauty. Other artists must have seen Leonardo's portrait in progress, for we see the influence of Lisa's portrait on other artists' work even before it was completed.

One of the reasons for this portrait's ultra-refined quality — and its mystique — lies in the fact that Leonardo never delivered it to Lisa and Francesco. We don't know the exact circumstances, only that Leonardo carried this portrait with him for the rest of his life and continued to work on it intermittently. He packed it on a

mule and took it to Rome, then across the Alps to the court of France, where he died with it in his possession. By that time, the portrait was already celebrated, but Leonardo could have no idea how much of an icon it would become.

Attributions can be tricky, and a handful of additional portraits scattered in collections around the world carry disputed connections to Leonardo da Vinci. When you look at the portraits of Ginevra, Cecilia, and Lisa, you might think that these upper-class, learned ladies were painted by three different artists. And yet, in Ginevra's portrait, we see the seeds that will be sown in the *Mona Lisa*. Such was the skill, adaptability and longevity of Leonardo, who could adapt to his patron's requirements, changing times and the spark of his own imagination.

*Laura Morelli is a Yale-educated art historian and historical novelist. Her latest book, The Night Portrait—based on the centuries-long saga of Leonardo da Vinci's Lady with the Ermine—was released September 8th. For more information, visit: [www.lauramorelli.com/NightPortrait](http://www.lauramorelli.com/NightPortrait)*



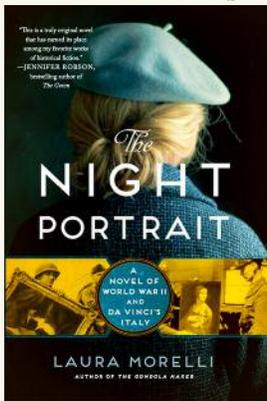
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## ABOUT THE NIGHT PORTRAIT

An exciting, dual-timeline historical novel about the creation of one of Leonardo da Vinci's most famous paintings, *Portrait of a Lady with an Ermine*, and the woman who fought to save it from Nazi destruction during World War II.



Munich, World War II: After a modest conservator unwittingly places a priceless Italian Renaissance portrait into the hands of a high-ranking Nazi leader, she risks her life to recover it, working with an



American soldier, part of the famed Monuments Men team, to get it back.

Two women, separated

Milan, 1492: When a 16-year-old beauty becomes the mistress of the Duke of Milan, she must fight for her place in the palace—and against those who want her out. Soon, she finds herself sitting before Leonardo da Vinci, who wants to ensure his own place in the ducal palace by painting his most ambitious portrait to date.

by 500 years, are swept up in the tide of history as one painting stands at the center of their quests for their own destinies.

# Da Vinci meaning “of Vinci” re

# GIVE PRATO A GO



Iris Origo's 1957 work *The Merchant of Prato: Daily Life in a Medieval Italian City* at times paints a rather bleak picture of the townspeople. Early in the text, scholar-biographer Origo quotes an unknown 14th-century *Pratese* gentleman's reflective writings upon returning from time spent in *Padua* and *Ferrara*: *I feel as if I had come back into the land of the Philistines. All gladness in life is quenched, and it seems to me that the men who live here feel shame to be alive.* Ouch. Doesn't inspire much faith in the local folk, does it?

But that gentleman would be floored by the lively culture and gregarious residents that populate Prato today. Boundary-pushing contemporary art exhibitions, a thriving textile trade, and a surprisingly vibrant nightlife scene exist in harmony with rock-solid food and wine traditions, Renaissance heritage and quaint, typically Tuscan piazzas.

Home to Europe's second largest Chinese community (only after Paris), the city is also a fascinating case study for Italy's ever-evolving social fabric. (Its multiculturalism is part of why Pope Francis made a much-publicized stop here during the last Jubilee Year).

If this is your first Tuscan rodeo, you will likely pop over to Prato as a day trip from Florence (it's an easy 20-minute train ride that will set you back just 5€). But if you're a Renaissance city veteran, consider getting the full Prato

## Prato has a long history of textile production and a district that remains Europe's largest today.

experience by staying the night. To feel deep in the Tuscan countryside without roaming too far or forgoing comforts, opt for **La Rugea – Le Spighe**, an elegant but homey escape about 20 minutes by car from *piazza del Duomo*.

### Textile Heritage

Florence may claim a lot of *visible* fashion world credibility — *Pitti Uomo* shows, *Ferragamo* flagship bragging rights, the *Gucci* Garden and beyond — but Prato has a long history of textile production and a district that remains Europe's largest today. The latest stats from the local Chamber of Commerce count some 2,000 textile-focused businesses and, more broadly, 7,000 fashion-related enterprises.

What do they do, exactly? For many major Italian and international brands, Prato is the main source city for fabrics and materials. But the textiles stretch beyond ready-to-wear clothing: local

companies produce furnishing-specific fabrics, yarns for the knitting sector, non-woven fabrics and special textiles for industrial purposes. And while visits to factories may be too technical, too off-the-trail, for casual day-trippers, it's good to keep the textile sector's many purposes and projects in mind when exploring the **Museo del Tessuto (Textile Museum)**.

The museum is inside the *Cimatoria Campolmi*, a former factory that grew out of a 15th-century mill and saw its peak activity during the 19th and 20th centuries. While the interdisciplinary temporary shows are what tends to draw in most visitors — past themes have spanned cinema, anthropology and 1950s Italy — the permanent collection will appeal to both clotheshorses and more casually curious museumgoers.

Downstairs features a wide-ranging collection of displays, from local fabric swatches to textiles from as far as Indonesia, China and Japan, as well as some striking garments. Machinery and production processes are the focus of the upper level.

### Cathedral Culture

It may not have the pulling power of its counterpart in, say, Siena, but the **Prato Cathedral (Duomo di Prato)** holds more than its share of masterworks and local lore (and is refreshingly free of the fight-to-the-front-for-a-selfie behavior that can taint busier destinations). In particular, Prato's Duomo is home to a fresco cycle by the 15th-century painter *Filippo Lippi* depicting the lives of saints Stephen and John the Baptist. But

*continued on page 10*



Andrea Paoletti

Museo del Tessuto



Andrea Paoletti

Museo del Tessuto

fers to his Tuscan town of birth.

Giacomo Megera, flickr.com



Duomo di Prato

Wikimedia Commons



Filippo Lippi's *Banquet of Harod*

Filippo Lippi's personal exploits in Prato are easily as compelling.

A Carmelite friar who abandoned monastic life, but was still bound by his vows, Lippi was working on this very fresco cycle, along with several other local commissions, when he met the young nun *Lucrezia Buti*.

She'd been sent to the nearby convent of *Santa Margherita*, along with her

sister *Spinetta*, by her brother, the de facto provider for the family of 11 after their father's death. By most accounts — including that of *Giorgio Vasari* — the two met in Santa Margherita, where a smitten Lippi managed to convince the nuns to let her sit for him as the face of the *Madonna*, giving rise to their illicit relationship (and eventually, the birth of their son, the painter and *Botticelli* protégé *Filippino Lippi*).

Another story closely linked to the Duomo is the legend of the **Sacra Cintola**, or the "Holy Girdle", which the Virgin Mary is said to have given to a doubtful Saint Thomas upon her ascension into heaven.

Local legend has it that a dashing Prato merchant, in the years just after the first Crusade, married a woman in Jerusalem whose dowry included the Madonna's belt. He carried it with him back home, and on four separate occasions each year (May 1, August 15, September 8, December 25), the girdle, now both a civic and religious icon of the city, is ceremoniously exhibited before churchgoers and crowds in the piazza.

## Contemporary Art

So there's a pretty cathedral with popular associated legends. What really sets Prato apart from other Tuscan day trips? In a word, edge. While Florence has tried to solidify its contemporary art world clout by bringing in blockbuster names for short-term shows — think *Jeff Koons*, *John Currin*, *Marina Abramovic* — Prato's scene is arguably more dynamic.



Centro Pecci

The Pecci

This is thanks, in large part, to the Luigi Pecci Center for Contemporary Art, shortened by most locals to *The Pecci*, Italy's first space created specifically for contemporary and avant-garde art (rather remarkably, it was founded in just 1988).

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## THE DETAILS

### Where to Stay

#### La Rugea – Le Spighe

Via della Rugea, 9/11/13

(39) 0574 541112

www.larugea.it

Rates: Apartments from 60€

per night for two people.

#### Museo del Tessuto

Via Puccetti, 3

(39) 0574 611503

www.museodeltessuto.it

Admission: 10€

Open daily for a full day and on Sunday for afternoon only.

#### Centro Luigi Pecci

Viale della Repubblica, 277

(39) 0574 5317

www.centropecci.it

Admission: 10€

Open daily at 10 a.m. Stays open until 11 p.m. on Friday.

#### Osteria su Santa Trinita

Via Neroni, 4

(39) 0574 605899

Open Tuesday through Saturday, 7:30 to 11 p.m.

#### Biscottificio Antonio Mattei

Via Ricasoli, 20

(39) 0574 25756

www.antoniomattei.it

Open most days; check website for times.

#### Ravioli Liu

Via Fabio Filzi, 39

(39) 0574 830973

Open daily, 10 a.m. to midnight

### What to See & Do

#### Duomo di Prato

Piazza Duomo, 49

(39) 0574 29339

www.diocesiprato.it

Open daily; check website for times.

### Where to Eat

#### Pasticceria Nuovo Mondo

Via Giuseppe Garibaldi, 23

(39) 0574 27765

www.pasticcerianuovomondo.com

Open Tuesday to Sunday, 7:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 3:30 to 8 p.m.



# Prato has played a leading role



# When popping into a neighborhood bar for your morning (and, okay, your afternoon) caffè, skip the cornetto or simple pastry and instead opt for a Pesca di Prato a "Pratese peach."

The Pecci's spaceship-like exterior is a bizarre sight to behold from the busy boulevard beside it; inside, the atmosphere is no less otherworldly. Installations are often immersive, big-picture, "cosmic concept" experiences (like "The End of the World," which inaugurated the new Pecci after its 2016 multimillion euro renovation).

Frequently, though, the space also hosts smaller-scale shows focusing on social issues and contemporary culture, and the permanent collection is nothing to sneeze at: works by *Andy Warhol*, *Sol Lewitt*, *Jan Fabre* and *Michelangelo Pistoletto* are all part of the lineup. Finally, a packed calendar of film screenings, lectures and concerts rounds out the reasons to visit.

## Prato for Gourmands

Back off, *bistecca alla Fiorentina*: Prato has a culinary and wine culture with just as much bite as its more famous neighbor.

When popping into a neighborhood bar for your morning (and, okay, your afternoon) caffè, skip the *cornetto* or simple pastry and instead opt for a *Pesca di Prato* — a "Pratese peach." Sugar-dusted, liqueur-soaked vanilla custard buns, these charming brioches are made to look like peaches and are said to have first emerged at a Pratese post-Italian

unification dinner party in piazza del Duomo in 1861. A beloved "pit stop" (forgive us) is the *Pasticceria Nuovo Mondo*, but you'll find *pesche di Prato* even in the most unassuming of corner bars.

An everyman-dish to order in Prato is *sedani ripieni alla Pratese*, mouthwatering veal and local mortadella-stuffed celery stalks, drowning in *ragù*, parsley, and *parmigiano*. The liveliest and lip-smackingest place to enjoy them is local favorite *Osteria Su Santa Trinita*.

production territory. (Medium-bodied Carmignano DOCG wines blend *Sangiovese*, that trademark Tuscan grape, with Cabernet Franc and/or Cabernet Sauvignon; *Ambra*, *Pratesi* and *Bacchereto* are some of the area producers to keep an eye out for.)

You could opt for a total departure from the usual Tuscan template, venturing to the city's Chinatown to feast on dirt-cheap dumplings, family-style, at *Ravioli Liu*. The important thing is not to forego Prato's signature post-dinner delight: the simple almond cookies known as *cantucci*, or *biscotti di Prato*. Made with just flour, eggs, almonds, sugar and pine nuts, biscotti di Prato are practically synonymous

with one specific brand, the *Biscottificio Mattei*, which sells its crunchy delights in trademark, instantly-recognizable royal blue bags.

While they're best served alongside Vin Santo come dessert time,

dunking is largely considered non-kosher, seen as an insult to the "sacred wine" you're supposed to be sipping on its own.

—Mary Gray

Mary Gray is a Florence-based journalist who has written about Livorno, accessible travel and UNESCO intangible culture for Dream of Italy.

For more information, visit [www.verymarygray.com](http://www.verymarygray.com)



gwang17, wikimedia.com

Biscotti di Prato



Cassie Prena

Ravioli



Audrey H. flickr.com

Biscottificio Antoni Mattei



Pasticceria Nuovo Mondo

Pesche di Prato

Wash them down with a hearty glass (or a few) of *Carmignano DOCG* wine rather than a *Chianti* or *Chianti Classico*, since you're in the heart of the

# in the Slow Food movement.

# The Layers of Sicily and Eggplant Parmigiana

When I dream of Italy, I dream of... Sicily and all the many ways they eat eggplant. That beautiful, shiny, dark purple vegetable is everywhere. You eat it hot and cold...in pasta and in salads...in *caponata* and, of course, in eggplant parmesan (*parmigiana di melanzane*).



finally, homemade tomato sauce. You repeat these layers over and over.

Then you bake it... and you wait... slowly letting the aroma of sauce remind you of why you love Italy. The result? The

unique taste of eggplant is celebrated and adored. No one ingredient dominates the others.

They say in Sicily that parmesan has nothing to do with the cheese. It comes from a Sicilian word *parmigiana* which means "shutters." At least that is what the chef told me during our cooking lesson at *Osteria Scopari* in *Mazara del Vallo*. And when I travel, I tend to believe everything. Why not?!

eggplant parmesan. You know the one — breaded eggplant pieces, drowning in melted *mozzarella*.

The Sicilian eggplant parmesan recipe calls for layers and layers (shutters) of five ingredients — eggplant, breadcrumbs, cheese, basil, and sauce. You begin with a layer of unbreaded, sliced, fried (or baked) eggplant, followed by layers of breadcrumbs, sliced *caciocavallo* cheese (similar to mozzarella), torn fresh basil pieces and

Sicily, itself, is like eggplant parmesan with its many layers and distinct flavors. This diverse island has been conquered by a lot of cultures over the centuries — Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Arabic, Norman, Spanish and others. The Sicily of today retains ingredients of each of them.

—Sandra MacNeill Mirisola

First, before I describe this delicious dish, please remove any memories you have of the American version of

## Share YOUR Dream of Italy GROWDSOURCED TRAVEL DREAMS

Send us 350 words on *When I dream of Italy, I dream of...* to: [shareyourdream@dreamofitaly.com](mailto:shareyourdream@dreamofitaly.com)

# A Heavenly Tuscan Guest House

When I dream of Italy, I dream of... being lifted, as if on wings, to the *Fonte Martino Guest House and Estate*, nestled in the Tuscan countryside of *Montepulciano*. Floating up a winding path between cypress trees that pierce through ethereal clouds to touch the blue sky, I arrive at an impeccably restored stone farmhouse with stunning views of rolling hills, blanketed with uninterrupted vineyards and olive groves.



aroma of herb gardens mingles with the fragrance of lavender, roses and hydrangeas.

Toby seamlessly checks me in while David serves a chilled *Prosecco* and I take in the chic modern décor that splendidly connects the past and present. My suite is decorated in cool

neutrals and features state of the art amenities like Alexa.

My genial hosts personalize a Tuscan experience beginning with dinner in town. The peal of church bells, espresso cups gently tapping on saucers, a masterclass of musicians rehearsing at the famed *Palazzo Ricci* and the laughter of *cittadini* (citizens) blend into a perfect symphony as I



wander the cobblestone streets bathed in the glow of a burnished evening sun.

The intoxicating aroma of simmering *cinghiale* (wild boar) and *pici* pasta, beckon me into the restaurant and a culinary adventure that pays homage to tradition but with a modern inventive twist. Moonlight guides me back to where I now call home and a sublime slumber next to a fire.

In the morning, the curtain rises on a postcard perfect day. I'm drawn to the outdoor breakfast terrace by the smells of Nana's zucchini bread and Toby's homemade quiche baking. Local meats and cheeses, homemade jams, fresh fruit and yogurts, bread and pastries make for a visual and culinary feast. For more information, visit [www.fontemartino.com](http://www.fontemartino.com)

—Georganne Vartorella

# Three seas surround the island of Sicily.