

Rosalia closes Palermo’s 402nd Festino

Posted on July 16, 2026 by Alina Trabattoni

PALERMO — Palermo residents enjoyed fireworks on the city seafront waiting earlier this week as the 402nd *Festino di Santa Rosalia* (Palermo’s patronal festival) celebrations ended, a day after Rosalia’s float ran the length of the Cassaro, the traditional name for the city’s oldest road.

“On July 14 the city of Palermo stops,” Paolo Licata, an award-winning film director, told Italy Now. “Everyone is down in the historic centre, elbow to elbow, with family, friends, the ex, the neighbours, waiting for the fireworks.”

The theme the city chose to celebrate Santa Rosalia this year is *ribelle* (rebel.) Rosalia was a 12th century noblewoman promised to a man at the local Norman court. Legend has it that rather than marry him, she fled to a cave on Monte Pellegrino, the headland above the bay of Palermo.

“She was an aristocrat, but so religious that she gave up her wealth and withdrew to live as a hermit in a grotto on Monte Pellegrino, above Palermo, where she also died,” said Alberto Ciarallo, founder of Conoscenti Travel.
“She saved the city from the plague, she allowed Palermo to be reborn, so the festival matters enormously here.”

Ciarallo, who runs a boutique travel agency told Italy Now “we take people up to the grotto. It’s stunning, inside the La Favorita nature reserve. The festival too is very colourful, and it lasts a full day.”

In the plague summer of 1624, four centuries after her death, a hunter dreamed of her and the dream led to the discover of what were attributed to be her bones. An existing plague that had

Source: https://italynow.co.uk/rosalia-closes-palermos-402nd-festino/

ravaged the island started tapering out after the relics were carried up the Cassaro, and Palermo has repeated the symbolic procession every July since.

Gate to gate

The route runs gate to gate, mountain to sea, pausing at the Palazzo dei Normanni, a heritage site that today is the headquarters of the regional government, past the city cathedral, through the iconic crossroads of the Quattro Canti, and up to Porta Felice. Again this week as has been done for centuries across time, the silver urn holding her relics left the cathedral to close the festival, with each procession stop carrying with it performances of actors, dancers, orchestras, and projections.



Palazzo dei Normanni projection (*Credits: Marco Russo*)

“The Festino is a great spectacle in movement,” Luca Pintacuda, creative director of this year’s Santa Rosalia festival, told Italy Now. This year’s themes and symbolism showcases Rosalia’s to the Norman conquest, ahead of the European Year of the Normans in 2027.

“They are two stories born from drama, the drama of conquest and of plague,” Pintacuda said, “and across the centuries they turn into beauty.”

Source: https://italynow.co.uk/rosalia-closes-palermos-402nd-festino/

Modern plague

For Antonio Rini, Palermo's culture councillor, the plague is not a closed chapter. "Every year has its own plague, updated to the signs of the times," he told Italy Now. "Today one of the new plagues could be drug use, above all among the young and the very young." The hope is that modern-day miracles emerge to reduce the effects of current forms of epidemics, he said.

Along the Cassaro the stalls sell *babbaluci*, snails boiled with garlic and parsley, alongside watermelon and salted seeds, and the crowd eats them past midnight.

Rini put last year's turnout at 350,000 and expects this year to have exceeded these figures.

Today, the "miracle is also that deep connection you see every year in the faces and the eyes of Palermitani," Rini said. Four centuries on, the bones still gather a crowd no municipal programme could summon alone.

Source: https://italynow.co.uk/rosalia-closes-palermos-402nd-festino/

Source: https://italynow.co.uk/rosalia-closes-palermos-402nd-festino/