

# Selinunte

## About Selinunte

Selinunte is one of Sicily's great Greek archaeological sites. In the western corner of Sicily, the isolated ruins here have stood since the 7th century BC. The lack of later development allows modern visitors to imagine how the site would have been two and a half thousand years ago. The site is a huge, incorporating Greek temples, ancient town walls, theatres, buildings, countryside paths and zones not yet excavated. If you are interested in Greek Sicily, this is a very important site to visit, and the temples' setting close to the sea is wonderfully picturesque. There are sandy beaches nearby, so a day out at Selinunte has a great deal to offer any traveller.



## Visiting Selinunte: Practicalities

The archaeological park covers a very large area. Many visitors will never make it to the farthest ruins; if you want to explore thoroughly you should allow a minimum of 3-4 hours. Wear sensible shoes and take water, a hat and sun protection (even an umbrella to use as a parasol) in the summer. There are some shady spots in a valley within the site where you could picnic; we also found an enterprising local selling iced drinks half-way around. Opposite the entrance are souvenir stalls and a bar with tables where you can buy drinks, snacks and freshly-made rolls. Toilets are available by the first group of temples.

There is a little electric 'train' service which runs around the site on a couple of different-length itineraries. If you have mobility problems or a very rushed schedule, this might be worth paying for. It's really much more pleasant, though, to wander around the site at your own pace and find moments of solitude among the ruins.

The archaeological park is open daily from 9am, closing at 5pm in the winter and 7pm in the summer. Like Italy's other state-run museums and archaeological sites, Selinunte is free for EU visitors over 65 or under 18, and reduced for 18-25 year olds. Sicily does have its own rules, but concessions generally also apply to students and to citizens of countries 'with reciprocal arrangements' so it's worth asking if you're not sure. Take passports or other proof of status. There's a book and souvenir shop inside the entrance; it's worth buying a map or guide to help you make sense of the site.

## Ancient Selinunte: History, temples and archaeological site

Selinunte - Selinus - actually wasn't a huge city. It was a reasonable-sized town, but the scale of its temples indicate Selinunte had ideas high above its station. Founded in the seventh century BC by Greeks from Megara Hyblaea, itself a colony of Megara in Greece, Selinus was spread over a couple of low hills on the seashore. The town probably reached its peak in the sixth and fifth centuries BC, the era when its grand temples were constructed. In 409 BC Selinus was attacked, defeated and destroyed by the Carthaginians. There were later attempts to re-fortify the citadel, but the town's greatest days were over.



After earthquakes shook the remaining buildings to bits in the Middle Ages, the site of Selinus was forgotten until its rediscovery in the sixteenth century. In the early nineteenth century English archaeologists began the work of excavation, which still goes on today.

On entering the archaeological park, the first sight you see is the grandest. The large Doric temple known as Temple E was re-erected in the 1950s and stands proudly on a rise. It is an impressive evocation of Sicily's Greek past, and, unusually, visitors can climb into the temple itself to get a real sense of the scale and history of the building.

Behind Temple E are two more temples - this low hill would have been a sacred site outside the town centre. These temples are much more ruinous. The furthest from the entrance, Temple G, was a massively ambitious project that may never have been finished. It would have been one of the biggest temples of the ancient world, and the mound of masonry is still impressive today. Clambering among the sections of column is a memorable experience - it is interesting to get an idea of Greek construction techniques from the blocks of carved stone, to marvel at the scale and ambition of the building, and at the force of its ultimate destruction, at the hands of the Carthaginian conquerors and of later earthquakes.

From this eastern part of the site, visitors cross a shallow valley where Selinunte's port once stood, and climb up to the heart of town on another low hill. The acropolis and more temples (one partially re-erected) were in this part of the city; the earliest part of Selinunte to be built and also the last to be inhabited by the survivors of the Carthaginian siege. At its heyday the town's main residential areas covered the level ground inland from this hilltop; parts of the street layout have been excavated, though the ruins aren't as striking as those in the main hilltop cluster.

On the western hill is a small museum which exhibits finds from the site and helps give an idea of how the temples - brightly painted and decorated - would have looked. Unfortunately the best portable remains, including the metopes - sculpture panels from the temple frieze - are now in the archaeological museum in Palermo, which is likely to be closed for restoration until at least 2012.

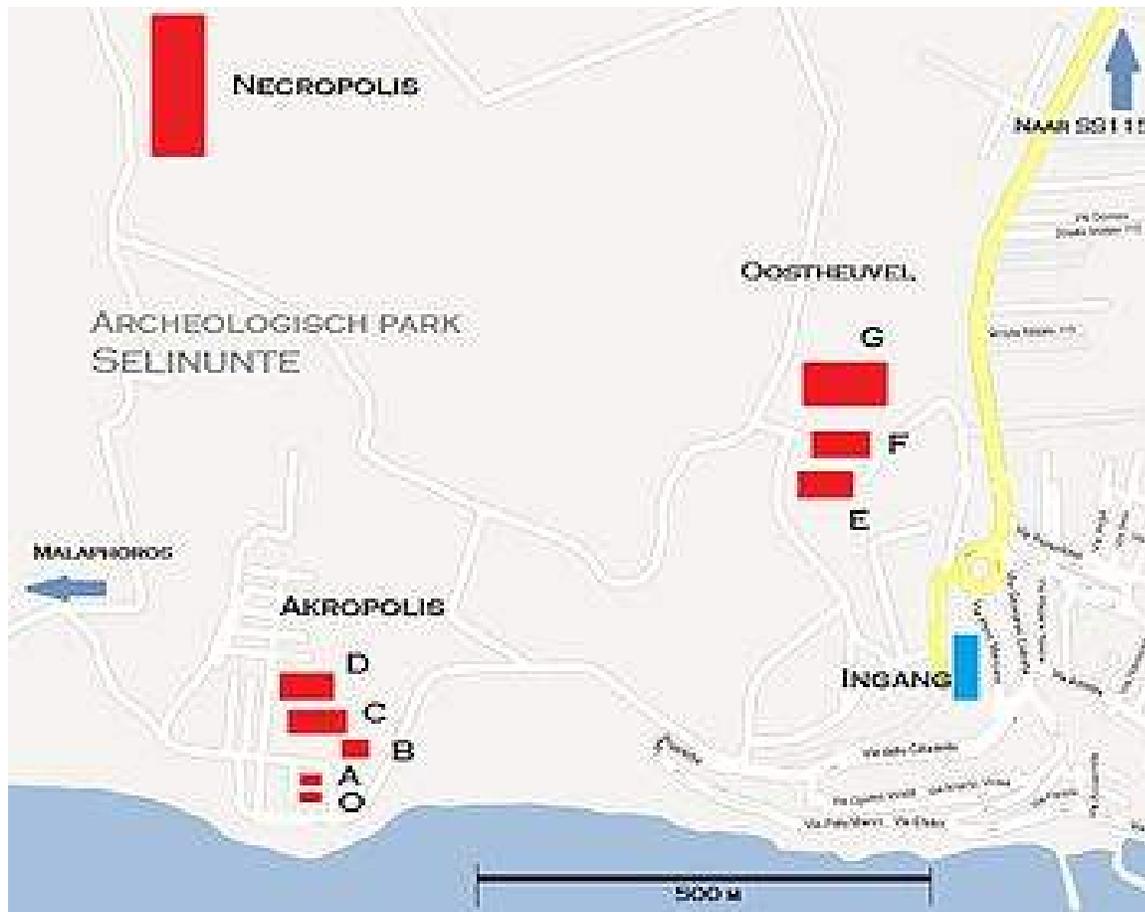


Despite the grandeur of Selinunte's temples and the powerful images of its jumbled columns, the town's domestic architecture can be at least as fascinating. A street of ruined shops is a compelling reminder of the everyday life in ancient Selinunte.

Some of the extant ruins at Selinunte are very poignant. After the big defeat in 409 BC, defensive walls built of existing masonry were thrown up in a desperate attempt to defend the nucleus of the city. A row of twelve narrow openings in the fortifications were supposedly designed for lines of men to run out in the town's defence in the event of a military assault; not an enviable job.

If you have the time, you should walk onwards to Selinunte's third major group of ruins, along a path to the west which leads through fields. By a stream you will find the remains of a very early sacred site, the Malophorus sanctuary. There is a simple temple here, sacrificial altars and a carefully constructed water course. This was evidently an important site used over a long period. Archaeologists found thousands of votive offerings, mostly terracotta figurines, here, and much of the Selinunte material exhibited in the Palermo archaeological museum is from this part of the site.

## Site map



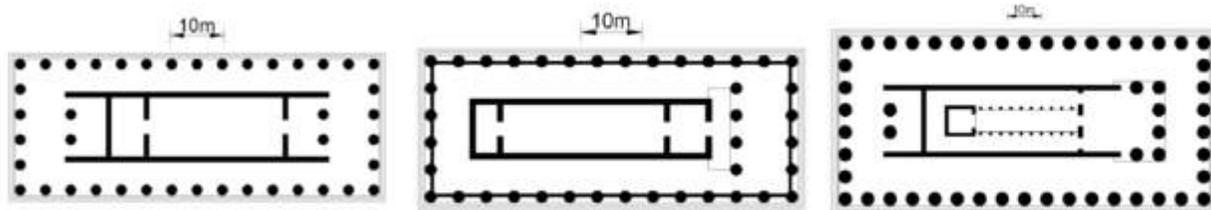
## Get around

The archaeological site of Selinunte is divided in several parts. The **eastern hill** area with the temples E, F and G. One kilometer further at sea the ruins of the old walled city with the **Acropolis** and temples A, B, C, D and O. Further west lies the shrine **Malaphoros** with a Necropolis. In the north part is a large **Necropolis**. All areas are connected with walking trails, however you can take the tourist train (Trenino) for € 6.00. Because it can be very hot, it is advisable to go as early as possible as there is little shade. Wear good walking shoes and take plenty of water. The park is at its best in spring with flower fields and with far fewer tourists than during high season. Opposite the entrance of the park you can buy soft drinks and sandwiches. At the East Hill and near the Acropolis are toilets.

## See

- **East hill** (italian: *Collina orientale*)

- **Temple E:** the classic Doric temple E, devoted to **Hera**, has an area of 70,2 x 27,6 m (15 x 6 columns) and was built between 460 - 450 BC. Four **Metopes** (decorative elements) can be found in the archeological museum of [Palermo](#). The temple was reconstructed in 1959 in a controversial manner. Most tourists don't care about this as the temple illustrates its heydays on a spectacular way. Temple E is the most photographed object in the park.
- **Temple F:** this is the smallest temple with an area of 61,8 - 24,4 m (6 x 14 columns). It is assumed that the temple is devoted to **Dionysos**. It was built between 550-520 BC. The stones of the temple were used for other purposes after his collapse. Metopes of this temple are also housed in the Archaeological Museum of Palermo.
- **Temple G:** This is the temple of **Zeus** with an area of 113 x 54 m (17 x 8 columns). It is the largest of Selinunte and one of the largest of entire Greek antiquity. Its construction was started in 530 BC and it is believed that the construction was not yet completed when the city was destroyed.



Temple E

Temple F

Temple G



Temple E



Temple F



Temple G

- **Acropolis**

- **City wall:** The city wall was restored after the destruction by the Carthaginians and surrounded the entire old town. Even now remains are still visible e.g. at the northern city port.

- **Temple O:** Only a few parts are left of this most southern temple on the acropolis. The temple had an area of 40,2 x 16,2 m (14 x 6 columns).
- **Temple A:** This temple is identic to temple O. The altar is found as well as spiral staircases leading to the **Naos** (the most holy room of the temple).
- **Temple B:** With an area of 8,4 x 4,6 m (4 columns in the front) temple B is the smallest temple. It is devoted to **Empedokles**. The colorful temple was discovered by **J. Hittorf** in 1824.
- **Temple C:** This temple was devoted to **Apollo** and has an area of 63,7 x 24 m (17 x 7 columns). It is the oldest and most glorious temple of Selinunte. Some metopes are housed in the Archaeological Museum of Palermo.
- **Temple D:** This temple with an area of 56 x 24 m (6 x 13 columns) is located further north.
- **Megaron:** This building with an area of 17,8 x 6,3 m was built 580 BC. A Megaron is a sanctuary.



Temple A



Temple C



Temple D

- **The sanctuary of Malophoros** – This part of the park is located in the west and can be reached by a trail that leads over the river **Modinone**.
  - **Temple N / Sanctuary of Hera:** is a small temple with a big altar devoted to the goddess **Hera**.
  - **Sanctuary of Demeter Malophoros:** This Megaron is devoted to **Demeter Malophoros**. 12.000 terracotta attributes were found here.
  - **Temenos of Zeus Meilichios:** Inmediattely right of the Demeter Malophoros sanctuary is an altar devoted to **Zeus**.

- **Source of Gaggera / Antiquarium:** is a small museum which is partially built over the antique edge of the source. Local founding's are displayed here.
- **Necropolis:** Parts of the tomb paintings that are found on the necropolis at the east side of the Modinone are on display in the visitor center at the Acropolis.



Temple N (West hill)



Sanctuary of Demeter Malophoros (West hill)



Sanctuary of Zeus Meilichios

