



The Palio of Siena

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Palio is one of Italy's best-known events and is famous throughout the world. The event lasts four days and ends with a race in which ten of the seventeen Contrade, or districts, in which the city is divided, participate. Each district participates with a horse assigned to them by a drawing from a shortlist of selected horses. The jockey is chosen independently by each Contrada. The July 2 (dedicated to Our Lady of Provenzano) and August 16 (in honor of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary) events represent the culmination of a religious and popular tradition in which the Sieneese participate throughout the year. This tradition includes intimate and collective moments, celebrations, and activities within the Contrade that highlight the uniqueness of the Palio.

Origins

As old as Siena itself, the race's history is deeply rooted in the city's. In the past, the race was different: so-called "palii alla lunga" were run. These were races that took place on a course from outside the city walls to the cathedral, with or without jockeys. The winner received a "pallium," a precious cloth drape ("Drappellone"), which would later give its name to the race and the entire festival. In the first decades of the seventeenth century, the Palio concluded its transition to the main square of the city, "Il Campo," becoming a popular event. On July 11, 1605, the City Council officially received the proposal to run the race in its current location. However, the Palio did not take its final form until 1656, and it was not until 1721 that it was regulated by a proclamation forming the basis of the modern Palio regulations.



Contrade



The city is composed of seventeen Contrade, or territories, that make up the historic center. These territories have remained unchanged since 1729, when the city's governor, Princess Violante Beatrice of Bavaria, officially established the current boundaries of Siena within the walls through a "Bando sui confini." Each Contrada has its own territory, people, and "government" elected periodically to oversee its administration. This organization carries out many initiatives throughout the year. Each Contrada also maintains a museum where you can admire the Palii won over the centuries, as well as the Masgalani, precious prizes awarded to the Contrada that parades best during the Historical Procession preceding each Palio. The Contrade also run social and recreational venues, or "societies," where Contradaioi (Contrada members) meet throughout the year. Each Contrada has a "fontanina," a monumental fountain with Contrada symbols. This is where the "baptism" takes place, a pagan rite that enshrines membership in the Contrada for life. In the oratory of each Contrada, the horse is blessed before the race in a particularly evocative rite.

The Drappellone

The Drappellone, also known as the Palio and called the "rag" by the Sienese, is the prize awarded to the winning Contrada in the July 2 and August 16 races. The Palio is an original painting on silk with a unique elongated rectangular shape. The process an artist must follow to create the Drappellone is very rigid because it must comply with precise iconography. Many artists, including internationally renowned masters, have been called upon to paint it.



The 17 Contrade

	Aquila		Nicchio
	Bruco		Oca
	Chiocciola		Onda
	Civetta		Pantera
	Drago		Selva
	Giraffa		Tartuca
	Istrice		Torre
	Leocorno		Valdimontone
	Lupa		

Map of the Contrade





The Horses

Ten out of the seventeen Contrade run in each Palio. They are established according to a precise mechanism: the seven Contrade that did not run in the July Palio of the previous year are joined by three chosen from among the ten that did. The same process occurs for the August 16 Palio. The drawing for the July Palio takes place on the last Sunday in May, and the drawing for the August Palio takes place on the first Sunday following the July Palio. The ten Contrade participate in the Palio with a horse assigned to them by drawing lots from a shortlist of horses deemed physically fit after passing strict inspections. On the day of the "tratta" (June 29 and August 13, respectively, for the two Palios),



the horses are matched with the ten Contrade participating in the Palio. In the morning, the horses, which have already been examined by a special veterinary commission, are led into the Entrone (the Cortile del Podestà of the Palazzo Pubblico). There, they are grouped into batteries and tested on the track in the Piazza del Campo to ensure they can navigate the path and the tuff, the special earth laid in the Piazza for Palio days. Once the batteries are finished, the captains meet in the presence of the mayor to select the ten horses deemed eligible. Then, on a stage set up in front of the public palace, the draw takes place, and each horse is matched with a Contrada. The "Barbaresco" (the official stable boy of the Contrada) takes the horse and leads it to the Contrada's stable, accompanied by the Contradaïoli.

The Trails

There are six trials before the Palio, which take place every morning at 9:00 a.m. and every afternoon at 7:45 p.m. in July and at 9 a.m. and 7:15 p.m. in August, in the days leading up to the Palio. These trials are essential for checking the condition of the horses and jockeys. The horse is assigned by drawing and cannot be changed, but the jockey is chosen by the Contrada for each Palio and can be changed until the day of the race. For each trial, a large group of Contradaioli accompany the horse from the Contrada's stable to the Piazza del Campo, singing traditional Siena songs along the way. The fifth trial, which takes place the day before the race, is called the "prova generale". You can watch the trial runs and the Palio by paying to access the stages set up around the Piazza or the windows and balconies overlooking it. Alternatively, you can watch for free from inside the Piazza.



The Historical Procession

It precedes the Palio as a solemn civic, historical, and triumphal choreography. It commemorates the institutions, customs, and grandeur of the ancient Sienese Republic. The Contrade play a central role in it, with their groups of costumed figurants known as "Comparsa." Today, the historical procession parading through the Piazza includes fourteen groups with nearly six hundred figurants in total. On the day of the Palio, in the early afternoon, the Comparsa of the Contrade and some of the Municipality's figurants line up in the Piazza del Duomo. Then, they parade through the streets of the historic center until they arrive in the Piazza del Campo. The historical procession enters the Campo with the first chime of "Sunto," the large bell atop the Torre del Mangia. The procession concludes with the Carroccio, the modern equivalent of the Republic's triumphal chariot, which carries the Palio, the race's prize. Once the tour of the piazza is over, the figures take their places on the Comparsa stage. The Palio is hoisted on the race judges' stage at the height of the "mossa," or start of the race, and the seventeen bishops of the Contrade perform the "sbandierata of victory" to the roll of their drums. bearers of the Contrade perform the 'sbandierata della Vittoria' (victory flag-waving display) to the beat of their respective Contrada's drum.



The Day of the Palio

On July 2 and August 16 every year, the Archbishop of the city's diocese celebrates the "jockey mass" at 8 a.m. in the chapel adjacent to the municipal building and blesses the jockeys who will run the Palio. Immediately afterwards, the last trial before the Palio, known as the "provaccia" due to the jockeys' lack of commitment as they prepare for the challenging evening race, is run. At mid-morning, at the town hall and in the presence of the mayor, the "signing of the jockeys" takes place. This formalizes the agreement between the jockey and the Contrada that has chosen him. From that moment on, it is no longer possible to change. In the early afternoon, the blessing of the horses takes place in the oratories of each Contrada. It is a religious, almost mystical rite in which the horse and jockey stand in front of the altar. The Contrada priest, known as the "Correttore," concludes the blessing by saying, "Go and come back a winner," to wish them victory.



The race



On July 2 at 7:30 p.m. and August 16 at 7:00 p.m., a mortar shell will burst. This device is placed at the start and detonates a charge to announce the horses' exit from the Entrone. It is time for the Palio! The horses and jockeys then approach the starting point, where two canapi (large intertwined ropes) are stretched. They will be called to line up between these ropes. The order of entry is secret until called by the "mossiere" and is determined by a drawing of lots made immediately before the race. The "mossiere" is responsible for receiving the order of entry and calling the entrance of the Contrade. He also sanctions the start of the race by lowering the front canape when he deems the Contrade's alignment appropriate. Nine of the Contrade enter between the canapi, and the tenth enters "in chase," standing outside the two canapi. Only after the tenth Contrada enters can the mossiere lower the front canape. If the start is deemed invalid, a mortar will burst to stop the horses, who will then return to the starting point. The horses must make three laps around the 1,000-meter track in Piazza del Campo, and only the first to finish will be victorious. Even a horse "scosso", i.e., one without a jockey, can win. After the race, the winning Contrada receives the Palio and celebrates for months.

Contrade Historical Museum Locations

Imperiale Contrada della Giraffa
Piazzetta della Giraffa, 2
www.contradellagiraffa.com

Contrada Sovrana dell'Istria
Historic Seat, via Camollia, 89
Museum Spaces Palazzo Nerli Pieri,
via Camollia, 86
www.istriche.org

Contrada del Leocorno
Piazzetta Virgilio Grassi, 6
www.contradaleocorno.it

Contrada della Lupa
Via Vallerozzi, 63
www.contradellalupa.it

Nobile Contrada del Nicchio
Via dei Pispini, 70
www.nobilecontradelnicchio.it

Nobile Contrada dell'Aquila
Casato di Sotto, 82
www.contradellaquila.com

Nobil Contrada del Bruco
Via del Comune, 44
www.nobilcontradadelbruco.it

Contrada della Chiocciola
Via San Marco, 37
www.contradellachiocciola.it

Contrada Priora della Civetta
Via Cecco Angiolieri, 41
museo@contradellacivetta.it

Contrada del Drago
Piazza Matteotti, 18
Costume Gallery
Via del Paradiso, 121
www.contradeldrago.it

Nobile Contrada dell'Oca
Via Santa Caterina, 66
info@contradadelloca.it

Contrada Capitana dell'Onda
Via Giovanni Dupré, 103
www.contradacapitanadellonda.it

Contrada della Pantera
Via San Quirico, 26
www.contradellapantera.it

Contrada della Selva
Piazzetta della Selva, 4
www.contradellaselva.it

Contrada della Tartuca
Via Tommaso Pendola, 19
www.tartuca.it

Contrada della Torre
Via di Salicotto, 76
www.contradellatorre.it

Contrada di Valdimontone
Via Valdimontone, 8
www.valdimontone.it

You can visit the Contrada
museums by making
a reservation directly
with Contrada





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CONSORZIO PER LA TUTELA DEL PALIO DI SIENA



MAGISTRATO
DELLE CONTRADE

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