

ITINERARY • HALF DAY

Pantalica in half a day: tombs in the rock, canyon and prince's palace

A circular walk of about **8 km** in the **Pantalica Reserve**, where thousands of tombs are carved into the walls of a canyon: from the **northern necropolis** to the **Anaktoron**, the prince's palace, down to the **Anapo** river. For each stop, find what to look at and a practical tip.

DURATION**Half a day**

about 3 hours of walking

STOPS**6 stops**

about 12.5 km

GETTING AROUND

On foot along paths with climbs and stretches exposed to the sun, for about 8 km.

You arrive by car: there is no public transport.



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STOP 1 OF 6

The entrance of Serramezzana and how to prepare

🕒 Recommended time: 10 minutes



The entrance to Serramezzana with the sign and the path that descends into the Pantalica Reserve

Pantalica is a plateau carved over the centuries by the **Anapo** and **Calcinara** rivers, which have formed deep canyons. It is part of the **Pantalica, Valle dell'Anapo and Torrente Cava Grande Nature Reserve** and has been a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** since 2005.

You can enter from several entrances. This itinerary starts from the **Serramezzana** entrance, on the side of **Sortino**, where you usually leave the car along the road, a few steps from the gate. Spaces are limited: **arrive early**. At the entrance, there may be an information point, where you leave your name and phone number, and a map with the paths, indicated by **colour** and difficulty.

The route is a **loop**, to be done in an **anti-clockwise** direction: green, white, red, yellow, then back to red to return.

A TIP

Bring **plenty of water**, a hat and walking shoes, and a **torch** (the one on your phone is enough): along the path, there are no refreshment points and a tunnel is unlit.

STOP 2 OF 6

The green path, the northern necropolis and the church of the Crucifix

🕒 Recommended time: 60 minutes



The rock-cut tombs carved into the walls of the northern necropolis of Pantalica

From the entrance, the **green path** descends to the first necropolis, the **northern necropolis**, the oldest: its tombs were carved between the mid **13th** and the **11th century BC**. They are **cave tombs**, small chambers carved into the walls, almost **five thousand** in total throughout Pantalica.

What strikes is the number: the walls are punctured by rows of entrances, amidst a wild nature that grows on the rock. Much of the path is **carved into the rock** and can become **slippery when it rains**.

Along the route, you will encounter the **rock church of the Crucifix**, a small cave long mistaken for a catacomb. It is one of the **three rock churches** in Pantalica and preserves frescoes, including a **Crucifixion** in the apse; according to scholars, they date back to the period between the **12th and 14th centuries**.

A TIP

Stop every now and then and **look up**: the highest tombs can only be seen from afar, and the viewpoints over the canyon are the most beautiful of the entire route.

STOP 3 OF 6

The Anaktoron, the prince's palace

🕒 Recommended time: 45 minutes



The large stone blocks of the base of the Anaktoron on the Pantalica plateau

After the green path, take the **white path**, an asphalted road, and climb until the sign for the **Anaktoron**. From here, the view of the canyon is the best: you can see the river that has carved the rock, and along the road, tombs carved into the mountain occasionally appear. Then the **red path**, unpaved, continues to climb.

The **Anaktoron** means "prince's palace" (in Greek, anax): it is the only stone building in all of Pantalica and dates back to the **12th-11th century BC**. The great palace remains only the **foundations**, made of **huge blocks** reminiscent of Mycenaean constructions, but you can clearly understand how imposing it was. It stood at the central point of the plateau, at **408 metres** above sea level.

In Byzantine times, it was reused; then a great fire, perhaps during Arab raids, led to its abandonment. It was discovered and studied by **Paolo Orsi** at the end of the 19th century.

A TIP

It is the highest point of the route and **almost without shade**: take a break here, but don't stay too long in the sun.

STOP 4 OF 6

The former railway, the Cascitta tunnel and the southern necropolis

🕒 Recommended time: 35 minutes



The former railway track along the Anapo River, in the southern necropolis of Pantalica

From the Anaktoron, descend towards the river, passing by a few more tombs, and arrive at the route of a former **railway**, which connected **Siracusa and Vizzini**. It runs alongside the **Anapo** and occasionally crosses it: this is the **yellow path**.

You pass through the old **Cascitta tunnel**, which **is not lit**. The path also runs alongside the **southern necropolis**, with the more recent tombs, carved between the **9th and 8th centuries BC**; they are less visible than those of the northern necropolis.

A TIP

Turn on the **torch** before entering the tunnel and **walk slowly**: it is dark inside.

STOP 5 OF 6

The Bisanti tunnel and the Anapo river

🕒 Recommended time: 35 minutes



The Anapo River with the high canyon walls, near the Bisanti tunnel in Pantalica

The yellow path continues inside the **canyon**, with high rock walls on either side: on one side, the rock is drier and bare, on the other, greener. Next to it, the **river** flows, with some small rocky beaches and little waterfalls: **in summer, you can cool off**.

This leads to the **Bisanti tunnel**, about **220 metres** long. You can cross it, or take the **blue path** on the left, which climbs a bit, offers other views and descends to reconnect with the yellow path right at the end of the tunnel.

A TIP

If the tunnel doesn't convince you, take the **blue path**: it's a bit longer, but you see the canyon from above.

STOP 6 OF 6

The ford and the climb back to Serramezzana

🕒 Recommended time: 30 minutes



The steep ascent of the red path towards Serramezzana, above the Anapo River in Pantalica

Back on the yellow path, the **return** begins with the **red path**. You start **crossing the river** on some **fairly stable stones**, then the path climbs quickly: from the river level, you need to return to the top, where you entered.

It is the **steepest and most tiring** part of the route, but in about twenty minutes, you will reach the entrance.

A TIP

Save some **water and energy for the climb**: it's the hardest part and comes at the end, with the sun on you.

Frequently asked questions

How long is the route and how much time is needed?

The described loop is about **8 km** long and requires **two and a half to three hours** of walking, not including stops. From Siracusa by car, it takes about **45 minutes**.

Do I need a ticket or a reservation?

So far, **entry to the reserve is free** and does not require permits, but there are plans to introduce a ticket: **check first**. After heavy rains, the reserve may remain **closed for three days**, and in summer there may be a ban due to fire risk.

What should I bring?

Plenty of water, a hat, sunscreen, walking shoes, a **torch** for the Cascitta tunnel, and something to eat. The route is very exposed to the sun, so in summer **set off early**.

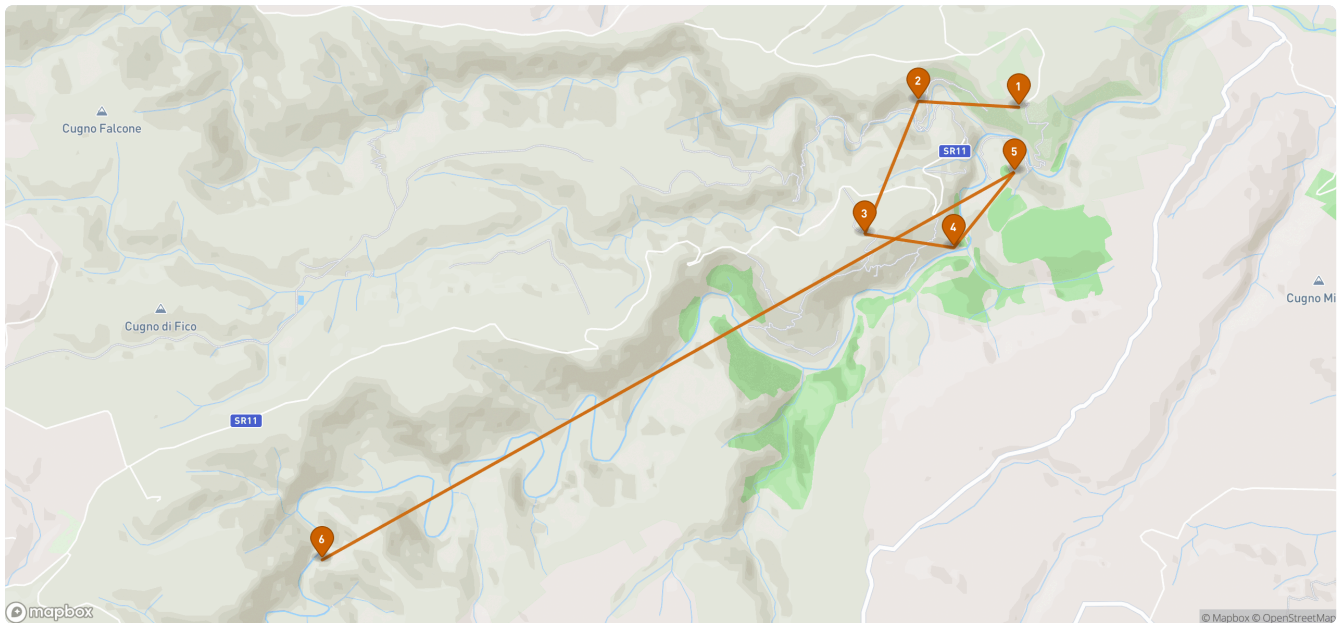
Which entrance should I choose?

For this route, **Serramezzana, Sortino side**, from which the described loop starts and which is closest to the **northern necropolis**, the most spectacular. There is also an entrance from the **Ferla and Cassaro** side, but between the two sides, it requires a drive of **45-60 minutes**, as the Calcinara valley separates them.

What can I see with more time available?

You can add **San Micidiario**, a Byzantine village carved into the rock with about **150 dwellings**, the **frescoed chapel of San Nicolicchio**, the **Hypogeum of Dionysius**, the **Sella di Filiporto**, and the **Bat Cave**.

Route map



The numbers follow the order of the stops. The map shows no commercial businesses.

Practical information

DURATION

Half a day (about 3 hours of walking)

GETTING AROUND

On foot along paths with climbs and stretches exposed to the sun, for about 8 km. You arrive by car: there is no public transport.

BEST TIME

Spring and autumn. In summer, there is little shade: better **early in the morning** or a few hours before sunset.

TOTAL WALKING

about 12.5 km

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