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‘As the Southern Cross tilts over my head, five shooting stars zip across the milky way’

Laura Jackson reviews Namibia’s most off-grid lodge

FRANCESCO RICCARDO IACOMINO/GETTY IMAGES



Cala Goloritze in the Gulf of Orosei

Sardinia: 25 fantastic holidays

From glitzy Costa Smeralda hotels to mountain retreats, here’s where to stay and what to do on the Italian island. By Matthew Bell

An island off Italy — now that’s always a good idea for a holiday. Perhaps it’s the guarantee of delicious food, great swimming and plenty of sunshine. But what makes Sardinia even more interesting is that it’s not just an Italian island, but also a Spanish one, located halfway between the two countries, and having a surprising amount of Hispanic influence (Spain ruled it for 400 years).

Take the place names — Iglesias, Porto Torres — and cities like Alghero, where a dialect of Catalan is still spoken. Then there’s the food — paella algherese, their take on the rice dish, and torrone, that delicious almond nougat.

As if that cultural mash-up wasn’t enough, it was the Aga Khan, spiritual leader of the Nizari Ismaili Shia Muslims, who put the “in” into Sardinia by buying up swathes of the northeast in the 1960s and building resorts to lure the jet set. His legacy endures, and the Costa Smeralda still offers some of the most eye-wateringly perfect bays and beaches on the island, an unspoilt landscape fringed by Caribbean-blue water. As my barber in Florence once told me: “Anyone who likes the sea will *love* Sardinia.”

But Sardinia is not just about beach life. Sardinians have historically always lived inland, the safer place to be during one of the many coastal invasions.



Casa Clat, Cagliari

Because like Sicily (the only Italian island that’s bigger), Sardinia has been conquered by everyone — Greeks, Turks, Vandals and Saracens. Today this gives the curious traveller a lot of layers to peel away, and 20th-century history adds yet more, from magnificent abandoned mining towns on the west coast to the former Mafia prison island now colonised by albino donkeys.

And you don’t have to look far to find one of the 7,000 *nuraghi*, stone

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towers scattered across the island, evidence of human activity in the Bronze Age. History is everywhere here.

This summer Sardinia is having a bit of a moment, with the opening of (among others) the long-awaited La Tiara di Cervo hotel and the launch of a direct flight from New York to Olbia with Delta. There are nearly 70 direct flights a week from the UK (including new ones to Olbia from London with British Airways), and with three airports on the island, it's easy to fly into one and out of another, allowing you to discover more than one region.

Wherever you go, be sure to allow plenty of time, because this is a place that begs you to slow down. Start living like a Sardinian and you'll see why so many of them live to 100. Here are 25 ideas to get you started.

Chic weekend in Cagliari

Sardinia's capital Cagliari has been enjoying a renaissance in the past couple of years, with investment and leading architects pouring into this bustling port which was badly bombed by, er, us, during the war. Top of the crop of chic new hotels is Casa Clat, a 19th-century townhouse with nine suites, the grandest occupying the top floor and commanding views of the port. On a leafy boulevard just below the monumental St Remy Bastion, this is the perfect year-round base for exploring the city by foot. The garden lounge bar complements refreshing plunge pools and the restaurant offers an unusually sophisticated menu featuring crudi, caviar and fish.
Details: B&B doubles from £190 (casaclat.it). Fly to Cagliari

Romance and glamour at Capo Farro

The only thing you might argue about while staying at the secluded Hotel Capo d'Orso is which swimming spot to choose. Spread out on a wooded hillside overlooking the bay towards Capo Farro, this 25-acre resort feels empty even when fully occupied. As well as a huge pool and a private sandy beach, there are swimming platforms over crystal blue waters and, through a little wooden gate, a wooded walk takes you to a secluded beach, Spiaggia di Punta Cardinalino. There are three restaurants, one of which, Île Flottante, is on a deck on the water. In the evenings, a guitarist will serenade the terrace at cocktail hour. Perfect for couples wanting to properly relax but also have some life around them.
Details: B&B doubles from £345 (hotelcapodorso.com). Fly to Olbia

Family and spa hotel in the northeast

It's hard to find fault with the luxurious family-focused Valle Dell'Erica Thalasso & Spa Resort on the magnificent northeast coast, which was one of the first resorts to be built in Sardinia and is still run by two founding families. The 70-acre site is so vast that staff whizz around on golf buggies, and with seven restaurants and four swimming pools to keep kids happy, plus several private beaches, you need never leave. That said, don't miss a speedboat tour of the archipelago of the Maddalena Islands, which has some of the best swimming in Sardinia. Zipping over to Corsica for a complete change of scene and culture is another excursion offered by the resort.
Details B&B doubles from £225 (hotelvalledellerica.com). Fly to Olbia

A Bond fantasy hotel

Picture a "groovy" Mediterranean hotel from a Roger Moore-era Bond film and you are probably thinking of Cala di Volpe, designed in the 1960s by Jacques Couëlle to resemble a surrealist fishing village. Bond (Moore) and Anya Amasova (Barbara Bach) checked into "suite A5, a sitting room with two bedrooms" in *The Spy Who Loved Me*, sections of which were filmed here. Everyone from Saudi princes to Diana, Princess of Wales, would descend from their yachts to dine in the restaurant in the 1990s; Diana spent her last holiday here with Dodi Fayed before flying to Paris. Today the hotel retains a certain 1960s cool, the decor featuring jaunty multicoloured staircases set against a fresh white palette. Arrive by speedboat or, even better, drive your white Lotus straight out of the water and onto the beach, just as Bond did.
Details B&B doubles from £600 (marriott.com). Fly to Olbia

Shopping and sailing from a Sixties hotel in Porto Cervo

When the Aga Khan dreamt up Porto Cervo in the 1960s, he wanted to create a low-rise authentically Sardinian-style village with luxury facilities. The main hotel was called the Cervo (it now belongs to Marriott), and was where European royalty and billionaire industrialists would stay if they weren't on a yacht. Now popular with Russian tourists (the main restaurant is called Novikov), it remains the primary hotel in this tiny and slightly bizarre waterside shopping mall where it's easier to buy a Bulgari bangle than a pint of milk. Fans of 1960s architecture will appreciate the whitewashed lounge caves and faux-rustic verandas, while those who like shopping are a short stagger from all the high-end outlets. It might be argued that Porto Cervo is best seen from the water, so it's worth chartering a boat for the day for lunch and a swim off one of the many fabulous islands nearby.
Details B&B doubles from £284 (marriott.com). Fly to Olbia



Beach base with culture

Cagliari is officially twinned with Buenos Aires, but Miami would be more appropriate, given that they are both buzzing beach cities. The five-mile Poetto beach is Cagliari's outdoor living room in summer, where residents hang out all day by their *casotti*, or beach huts. Hotel Nautilus occupies an ideal position in a lush garden at the better end of Poetto, where the water is translucent green like a Caribbean lagoon. There's lots of good eating — the restaurant serves squid ink gnocchi and octopus; the vibey beach restaurant La Palmette a grilled sea bream with beetroot. For a lux day on the beach, book day beds at the Emerson Beach Club which has changing rooms, an all-day restaurant and bar and parasols (from £19 per day; emersonbeachclub.it)..
Details B&B doubles from £93 (hotelnautiluspoetto.com). Fly to Cagliari


Petra Segreta, San Pantaleo

Kayak to the Roman city of Nora

The ruined Phoenician and Roman city of Nora stands on a promontory on the southwest tip, its intact amphitheatre looking out to sea. The mosaic floors are ravishing and in incredible condition despite being open to the elements. No wonder Dolce & Gabbana chose to host its Alta Moda fashion show here in 2024. This is a must for anyone interested in classical history and you can approach it by sea for an authentic perspective — Nora was an important port, after all. Next door is the family-friendly Hotel Baia di Nora, a chic four-star resort from whose beach you can kayak round to Nora, with or without a guide. The hotel has its own white sandy beach with a beach club, two pools — one with a swim-up bar — tennis courts, restaurant, and free activities for children over six.
Details: B&B doubles from £163 (hotelbaiadinora.com). Fly to Cagliari

Laidback hillside retreat

Apparently the reason so many Sardinians live so long, earning parts of the island "blue zone" status, is because of a particular gene, as well as their frugal diet and regular exercise. The northern area of Gallura is chock full of centenarians, giving oxygen to the theory that it's the delicious Gallura red wine they make there that does it. Gallicantu Stazzo Retreat is a recently renovated farmhouse high up in the wild inland cork forests of Luogosanto (translation: holy place), where you can immerse yourself in blue-zone life without sacrificing creature comforts. Flop by the pool, relax in the wellness centre, take guided walks and try wine-tasting in its Nuraghic grotto.
Details B&B doubles from £176 (gallicantu.it). Fly to Olbia

Follow in the footsteps of DH Lawrence

In January 1921 the English novelist DH Lawrence and his wife, Frieda, set off on a spontaneous nine-day trip across