



The most authentic towns, dramatic landscapes and stunning beaches lie in the south west of France's best kept secret

WORDS AND PICTURES: STEVE DAVISON

Corsican dream



Corsica is the fourth largest island in the Mediterranean, lying 170km from mainland France. Its diverse landscapes range from dense forests of pine, chestnut and oak to beautiful sandy beaches and lofty mountains, all infused with the scent of the maquis – a fragrant blend of rosemary, lavender, myrtle, juniper, sage and cistus that blankets much of the land. Dotted about this landscape are pretty towns and villages, steeped in history and intrigue, all just waiting to be explored. The island's most rural and genuine region is probably the south-west, below the town of **Ajaccio** with its airport and ferry connections. A journey southwards through this region passes prehistoric **Filitosa**, peaceful fishing villages round the **Golfe de Valinco**, and **Sartène**, known as the most Corsican of Corsica's towns, before reaching the island's most southerly point with the town of **Bonifacio**.

Golfe de Valinco

The **Golfe de Valinco** is the southernmost of four large bays that form Corsica's west coast. The gulf's main resort, midway between Ajaccio and Bonifacio, is the buzzing little port of **Propriano**, with ferry connections to mainland

France. Villages around the bay offer opportunities to laze on the beach and more active pursuits such as sailing, windsurfing or horse trekking – and for those wanting to try their hand at diving, the gulf is a prime location due to its clear waters and interesting dive sites including the spectacular *Cathédrales*, an underwater massif of rock pinnacles near **Porto-Pollo**.

The D121 meanders along the southern edge of the Golfe de Valinco ending at the idyllic village of **Campomoro**. Be sure to stop on the way at **Belvédère** for superb views of the bay towards Propriano and **Portigliolo's** deserted sandy beaches. Campomoro boasts just a couple of hotels, restaurants and shops set amongst eucalyptus groves, with not a sun lounger to be seen: just soft sand, turquoise sea, and a few boats. A whitewashed chapel stands on the edge of the beach, backed by maquis-covered hills, and overlooking the beach is a café with an open terrace beneath the trees – perfect for lunch. At the far end of the bay, and well worth the walk for the views, stands a 16th century Genoese watchtower. For a longer walk continue through the maquis-scented countryside to the little fishing village of **Tizzano**.



Left to right

The long curving beach at Campomoro, southern edge of the Golfe de Valinco; The steep Escalier du Roi d'Aragon (King of Aragon steps), that descends the cliff face down to the sea; Zonza surrounded by forests with the jagged outline of the Aiguilles de Bavella as a backdrop

Heading east along the northern shoreline of the gulf on the D157 takes you to **Olmeto-Plage** with its succession of small coves, sheltered beaches and several good campsites, all easily accessible from the road. After the sandy expanse of **Plage de Taravo**, the road heads inland along the **Taravo Valley**. Take a detour along the D757 to the charming little fishing village of **Porto-Pollo**, complete with beautiful beach, small harbour and great views. The name derives from the Corsican *Porti Poddu*, meaning 'troubled port' – a legacy of the pirate raids that ravaged the island's coast in former times.

Filitosa

If you can bear to leave the coastal scenery, heading inland from Porto-Pollo along the **Vallée du Taravo** for about 10km takes you to the **Station Préhistorique de Filitosa**. ➔



and the Torra Nova, home of the Durazzo family.

Further along the D69 the town of **Levie** is a must for anyone interested in ancient Corsican history. Visit the **Musée de l'Alta Rocca** to see the Dame de Bonifacio, a human skeleton discovered in a tomb at Bonifacio and believed to date from around 6570BC. Three kilometres to the west is the **Pianu di Levie**, and a short walk through oak and chestnut woods is the **Casteddu di Cucuruzzu**, a Torrèen settlement dating from 1400BC. Another 20 minutes walking brings you to **Capula**, a site occupied from the Bronze Age until the 13th century.

Inland along the D268 is the picture-perfect **Sainte-Lucie-de-Tallano**, high above the Vallée du Rizzanese. The town's graceful balconied houses remain as a legacy of the wealthy families who once lived here, and Sainte-Lucie's main treasures are housed in the baroque **Église Paroissiale**. Further on is the lovely village of **Zonza**, surrounded by dense forests with the imposing profile of the **Aiguilles de Bavella** beyond. The route between Zonza and **Solenzara** – the **Route de Bavella** – is perhaps the most dramatic road in Corsica as it climbs 1218m to the **Col de Bavella**, marked by a glistening white statue of Notre-Dame-des-Neiges. From here an amazing panorama is spread out, with the granite needles of the **Aiguilles de Bavella** standing high above the trees, and in the distance the east coast of Corsica. From the **Auberge du Col**, on the GR20 walking route between **Calenzana** and **Conça**, there are several marked trails. One of the best is to the Trou de la Bombe – a 30ft hole piercing a rock wall.

The Sartenais

To the south west of the Alta Rocca is the Sartenais region, so named for the town of **Sartène**, famous for its religious **U Catenacciu** procession. Held on Good Friday, the procession is led by the Grand Pénitent, dressed in a hooded red robe and chained at the ankles, who carries a heavy wooden cross through the candlelit streets. However, the town makes an interesting port of call at any time of the year.

Life in Sartène is based around **Place Porta**, surrounded by shady trees and several cafés with pavement terraces. The main square is home to a Saturday market, usually packed with people buying fresh local produce. Through an archway from the square lies the Vieille Ville, a labyrinth of narrow cobbled passageways with buildings that appear to defy gravity and small shops with hams hanging from ceilings and local wines. To add to the air of intrigue, the fascinating **Musée de la Préhistoire Corse**, packed with artefacts from Corsica's past, is housed in the town's former prison.

Only 10km from here are the **Megaliths of Cauria**. The most photographed of these is the flat-topped **Dolmen de Fontanaccia**, the remains of a Neolithic burial chamber known locally as the Stazzona del Diavolu – Devil's Forge. Nearby is the **Alignement de Startari**, a series of 22 menhirs, while partly hidden by trees is the **Alignement de Renaggiu**, a collection of 40 menhirs.

Left to right Spectacular scenery at the Col de Bavella; Col de Bavella overlooked by the Statue of Notre-Dame-des Neiges; Bonifacio perches on limestone cliffs

Described as the most important prehistoric site in Corsica, Filitosa has been occupied for several millennia; its earliest inhabitants were Neolithic farmers whose smoke-blackened rock shelters can be seen today. Filitosa also boasts the remains of a fully developed Torrèen castle and fortified settlement, as well as the fascinating stone menhirs – several carved with human faces – for which the site is renowned. After wandering through the sites, some clustered beneath gnarled olive trees, others scattered across open meadows, call in at the small museum which tries to untangle the mysteries.

Alta Rocca

Winding inland from the Golfe de Valinco, the **Rizzanese river** dominates the **Alta Rocca**, a wild mountainous region swathed in forests of chestnut, oak and pine, dotted with small towns and crowned by craggy granite peaks. Travel along the D69 and stop to admire the beautiful **Pont de Spin'a Cavallu**, a highly photogenic Genoese bridge spanning the Rizzanese. A short detour leads to atmospheric **Fozzano**, one of the better-known villages of the northern Alta Rocca – its notoriety dates from a feud between the Carabelli and Durazzo families. It was here that Prosper Mérimée found the inspiration for his novel *Colomba*, a romantic tale of Corsica framed round this bloody vendetta. Even today Fozzano's buildings are dominated by the brooding presence of the Torra Vecchia – the fortified home of the Carabelli



1 GOLFE DE VALINCO

The **Golfe de Valinco** is a beach and watersport paradise, offering direct ferry routes to mainland France from the main resort of **Propriano**. Picturesque fishing villages abound.



2 STATION PRÉHISTORIQUE DE FILITOSA

In the **Vallée du Taravo** is the UNESCO World Heritage site of **Filitosa**. The earliest inhabitants were Neolithic farmers and a **Torréen** castle and fortified settlement can be seen as well as three separate alignments of menhirs.

3 BAINS DE BARACCI

Near to **Propriano** is the **Bains de Baracci**, a thermal spa since Roman times, re-opened in 1992. Relax in the hot (around 40°C) sulphurous waters. Telephone 00 33 (0)4 95 76 30 40



4 PONT DE SPIN'A CAVALLU

The beautiful **Pont de Spin'a Cavallu** is a Genoese bridge spanning the Rizzanese. Its distinctive outline can be seen on the labels of some of the island's best red wine from the **Domaine Fiumicicoli**.

5 FOZZANO

Former hotbed of vendetta, **Fozzano** inspired the novel *Colomba* through which it has become known throughout France. Locations from the novel can be seen in the town, and some of the atmosphere remains.

6 LEVIE



Levie, former capital of the **Alta Rocca**, is now home to the **Musée de l'Alta Rocca** and the **Dame de Bonifacio**, a human skeleton dating from around 6570BC. Close by is the **Pianu di Levie** and the **Casteddu di Cucuruzzu**, the remains of a **Torréen** settlement.

10 BONIFACIO

Corsica's most southerly town perches dramatically on the edge of white limestone cliffs. The old port offers cafés, restaurants, an aquarium and boat trips to view the town from the sea and visit marine caves – and the **Îles Lavezzi** nature reserve. High above the quay is the atmospheric old town, from which the **Escalier du Roi d'Aragon** descends to the sea.



9 MEGALITHS OF CAURIA

Near **Sartène** are the megaliths of **Cauria**, including the Dolmen de **Fontanaccia**, a Neolithic burial chamber known as the *Stazzona del Diavolu* (Devil's Forge) and the menhir alignments of **Startari** and **Renaggiu**. Nearby is the the largest concentration of menhirs in Corsica: the **Alignement de Palaggiu**, comprising 258 menhirs.

8 SARTÈNE

Sartène was described by the French novelist **Prosper Mérimée** as "*la plus corse des villes corses*" or "*the most Corsican of Corsica's towns*". Famed for its religious Good Friday 'U **Catenacciu**' procession as the '*chained one*' plays out a dramatic night-time re-enactment of Christ's walk to **Golgotha**. The town's **Musée de la Préhistoire Corse** is housed in a former prison.



7 COL DE BAVELLA

Scaling the **Col de Bavella** (1218m), marked by the glistening white statue of **Notre-Dame-des-Neiges**, is rewarded with an amazing panorama, immortalised in the etchings of English devotee **Edward Lear**, who visited in the 1880's. From the **Auberge du Col** on the famous **GR20** long-distance walking route, there are several way-marked walking trails. One of the best is to the curious **Trou de la Bombe** – a wind-eroded hole, 30 feet across, that pierces the rock wall. The walk takes a couple of hours.



Wine

Corsica's nine AC wine regions include **Sartène** and **Figari**. The **Sartenais** region is one of the best, producing reds, whites and rosés: a visit to a vineyard is a popular excursion. To the north of **Sartène** is the **Domaine Fiumicicoli** where some of the island's best reds are produced. **Figari**, to the south, also produces some excellent wines. For more information go to www.vinsdecorse.com

Food

Corsican specialities include **sanglier** (wild boar); pungent **brocciu** (ewe's milk cheese), often served as **canneloni al brocciu** and **courgette farcie au brocciu**; charcuterie from the **Alta-Rocca** such as **prisuttu** (cured ham) and **figatellu** (pork liver sausage) and of course seafood from red mullet to sea bream, sea urchins and crayfish. The chestnut, once the staple of Corsican cuisine, is enjoying a renaissance – try the rather delicious chestnut ice cream. Other desserts to try include **tarte au brocciu** (cheese tart), **gâteau de châtaigne** (sweet chestnut flour cake) and **fiadone** (lemon-flavoured cheese tart).

Sporting Activities

Diving: crystal-clear water, dramatic sea bed and wealth of fauna and flora make Corsica a great place to dive and the **Golfe de Valinco** has a good reputation, boasting the spectacular *Cathédrales*, an underwater massif of rock pinnacles on the northern side of the gulf near **Porto-Pollo**. Several companies operate in the **Golfe de Valinco** and most offer lessons if you've never dived before. Rates for a single dive start at around 40 Euros.

Porto-Pollo Plongée 00 33 (0)4 95 74 07 46
Campomoro Plongée 00 33 (0)6 09 95 44 43
Valinco Plongée 00 33 (0)4 95 76 31 01

Horse Trekking: Several companies operate randonnée équestre for tourists ranging from a simple two hour ride to multi-day treks through the rugged coastal and mountain scenery. Try the **Centre Équestre de Baracci**, near **Propriano** telephone 00 33 (0)4 95 76 08 02.

Water Sports: all along the coastline windsurfing equipment, small boats and canoes can be hired

Walking: the region has many walking options covering both coastal and mountainous regions. For longer distance walking there is the famous **GR20**, passing the **Col de Bavella** between **Calenzana** and **Conça**. Close to **Propriano** is the **Mare a Monti Sud** to **Porticcio** and the well-signed, five stage **Mare a Mare Sud** to **Porto-Vecchio**, travelling through the **Alta Rocca**.

For more information see the Corsican Nature Discovery Activities brochure, available online at www.visit-corsica.com.

Tourist offices

Agence du Tourisme de la Corse
 17, Boulevard Roi-Jérôme
 20181 Ajaccio
 Telephone 00 33 4 95 51 77 77
 Fax 00 33 4 95 51 14 40
www.visit-corsica.com

Sartène 00 33 (0)4 95 77 15 40
Propriano 00 33 (0)4 95 76 01 49
Bonifacio 00 33 (0)4 95 73 11 88

Station Préhistorique de Filitosa 00 33 (0)4 95 74 00 91
Musée de l'Alta Rocca 00 33 (0)4 95 78 46 34
Musée de la Préhistoire Corse 00 33 (0)4 95 77 01 09

MAP SHOP SEE PAGE 94 or buy online
MICHELIN MAPS & GUIDES
REF: 345
 Corse-du-Sud
 Haute-Corse

Nearest town	Accommodation	Email Web	Open	Capacity	Swimming pool	Gardens	Restaurant	Shop	Laundrette	Self-catering	Electricity hookup	Motorhome service point	Hot showers	Children's playground	
BONIFACIO	HOTEL Hôtel Colomba 4 et 6 rue Simon Varsi 20169 Bonifacio Telephone 00 33 (0)4 95 73 73 74 Fax 00 33 (0)4 95 70 69 39	colomba@hotel-bonifacio.fr www.hotel-bonifacio-corse.fr	all year	10			●								
	Hôtel Résidence du Centre Nautique Quai Nord 20169 Bonifacio Telephone 00 33 (0)4 95 73 02 11 Fax 00 33 (0)4 95 73 17 47	info@centre-nautique.com www.centre-nautique.com		11	●	●	●								
ZONZA	L'Aiglon 20124 Zonza Telephone 00 33 (0) 4 95 78 67 79 Fax 00 33 (0) 4 95 78 63 62	info@aiglonhotel.com www.aiglonhotel.com													
SARTÈNE	CHAMBRE D'HÔTES Domaine de Croccano Route de Granace F 20100 Sartène Telephone 00 33 (0)4 95 77 11 37 Fax 00 33 (0)4 95 77 11 37	christian.perrier@wanadoo.fr www.corsenature.com		4											
PROPRIANO	Chambres d'hôtes de Baracci 20110 Propriano Telephone 00 33 (0)4 95 76 19 48 Fax 00 33 (0)4 95 76 19 48	www.gites-corsica.com		5											
ST LUCIE DE TALLANO	Mme Antionette Minchelli 20112 Sainte Lucie de Tallano Telephone 00 33 (0)4 95 78 81 40 Fax 00 33 (0)4 95 78 42 03	www.gites-corsica.com		1											
PROPRIANO	GITES & SELF-CATERING Vigna Maggiore Telephone 00 33 (0)2 35 87 12 90														
MONTROUGE	Arco Plage*** 97 Av. A Briand 92120 Montrouge Telephone 00 33 (0)1 42 31 00 02 Fax 00 33 (0)1 42 31 00 01	travel@e-mediatravel.fr www.corsica.net	19/03 - 05/11	sleeps 7 30 villas	●	●								●	
ZONZA	CAMPING La Rivière Route de Quenza 20124 Zonza Telephone 00 33 (0)4 95 78 67 72 Telephone 00 33 (0)4 95 78 73 23	letourisme@wanadoo.fr		50							●				
SARTÈNE	Camping Olva les Eucalyptus*** Route de la Castagna 20100 Sartène Telephone 00 33 (0)4 95 77 11 58 Fax 00 33 (0)4 95 77 05 68			130				●	●	●			●		
BONIFACIO	Pian del Fosse Route de Sant'Amanza 20169 Bonifacio Telephone 00 33 (0)4 95 73 16 34 Fax 00 33 (0)4 95 73 16 34	camping@piandelfosse.com www.piandelfosse.com	01/4 - 31/10	100				●	●		4A				
	Camping des Iles** Route de Piantarella 20169 Bonifacio Telephone 00 33 (0)4 95 73 11 89 Fax 00 33 (0)4 95 73 18 77	camping.des.iles.bonifacio@wanadoo.fr www.camping-desiles.com	01/04 - 31/10	100	●			●	●	●	●			●	
PORTO POLLO	L'Esplanade Olmeto Plage Telephone 00 33 (0)4 95 76 02 07	info@camping-esplanade.com www.camping-esplanade.com	01/04 - 30/09												
PROPRIANO	Camping Village Lecci e Murta*** Route de Campamoro Portiglio 20110 Propriano Telephone 00 33 (0)4 95 76 02 67 Telephone 00 33 (0)4 95 76 02 67	info@camping-lecciemurta.com www.camping-lecciemurta.com	01/04 - 31/10		●		●			●				●	

This is a sample of the accommodation to be found in this region. Please mention Destination France when you contact individual establishments for further details.



Above Beautiful 13th century Genoese Pont de Spin'a Cavallu bridge spanning the Rizzanese river

To the north of the road is the extraordinary **Alignement de Palaggiu**, the largest concentration of menhirs in Corsica. Here, 258 menhirs, some with carved weapons and facial features, are strewn amid the maquis. For a break from all this history, along the road is the peaceful fishing village of **Tizzano** with a small, sheltered beach and good coastal walks.

Bonifacio

The journey south along the N196 passes through **Roccapina**, a landscape of wind-weathered pink granite. Stop off near the *Auberge la Corrali* and look for the **Rocher du Lion** – a wind-eroded rock that really does look like a crouching lion. Eventually the road arrives at **Bonifacio**, dramatically teetering on the edge of limestone cliffs. In the lower part of town take a stroll round the old port and along **Quai Jérôme Comparetti**, now a popular promenade lined with cafés, restaurants and an interesting aquarium. Here you can relax and enjoy one of the most famous views of the town with the 16th century **Bastion de l'Étendard** towering over the marina. From the port it's a stiff climb up the stone steps of the **Montée Rastello** to reach the old **Porte de Gênes** and the haute ville.

To the south of what remains of the fortified citadel is the Romanesque **Église Ste-Marie-Majeure** close to the **place du Marché**. To the west is the 13th century Torrione (lookout post) and the **Escalier du Roi d'Aragon**; a flight of 187 very steep steps hewn out of the cliff wall. These were originally used to collect water from **St Barthélémy's Well**, although today they give access only to the shoreline. If you decide to go down the steps, on a hot day it's a long climb back up! Further west stands the **Église St Dominique**, a rare example of Corsican Gothic architecture, while beyond is the **Bosco** area and the **Cimetière Marin** (sailors' cemetery).

While in Bonifacio it is essential to take a boat trip to view the town from the sea and to explore the caves and surrounding islands. There's plenty of choice at the quay and you'll be practically press ganged by the competing crews. Short trips last around 45 minutes, offering great views of the old town and the King of Aragon's Steps, as well as visiting several grottes marines, the largest being the **Grotte du Sdragonatu** with its luminous blue water and a hole in the roof that is said to resemble the outline of Corsica. Longer excursions head for the **Îles Lavezzi** nature reserve, a maze of rocky islands surrounded by tropical blue water. You can disembark on the island of Lavezzi and catch a later boat back, giving you time to enjoy the island's abundant wild flowers.

And Bonifacio offers a ferry service to nearby **Sardinia**... but that's another story. 🇫🇷

Travel Tips



Air
Flights to **Ajaccio** operate from **London Gatwick** with British Airways and Air France, both via Paris or Marseilles/Nice. Alternatively fly to **Nice** and continue by local ferry.
British Airways
0870 8509 850
www.ba.com
Air France
0870 1424 343
www.airfrance.com/uk



Rail
London Waterloo to **Lille**, TGV to **Nice** and continue by local ferry.
Rail Europe
0870 4848 848
www.raileurope.co.uk
SNCF
www.sncf.com



Road
Paris – **A6** – Lyon – **A7** – Marseilles and continue by local ferry.



Ferries
Nice to **Ajaccio** with SNCM and Corsica Ferries
Toulon to **Ajaccio** with SNCM and Corsica Ferries
Marseilles to **Ajaccio** with SNCM and CMN
Marseilles to **Propriano** with CMN
SNCM Ferries
www.sncm.fr
00 33 (0)8 25 88 80 88
Corsica Ferries
www.corsicaferries.co.uk
00 33 (0)4 95 32 95 95
CMN
www.cmn.fr
00 33 (0)4 91 99 45 00

High-speed services take around four hours, slower services are typically overnight and take around nine hours.