



## Corsica and North Sardinia



Always to follow the LLLL rule: lead, log, longitude and lookout. Keep an eye around and always be sure of where you are and what you are supposed to have below your craft

There are few places in the world that provide a better definition of contrast than these two islands. No matter how trendy, noisy and glamorous the alleys around the harbours of Porto Cervo, Bonifacio, Calvi of Ajaccio might be, few miles along the road or up the hill will transport you into another world, made of desert white beaches, spectacular red cliffs and Alpine valleys. Then you meet a local, likely a grumpy old character, and he begins chanting... 'we do many things, because we have pigs, and also donkeys, cows and hens, and places nice...', and you might get a gentle whiff of the old days. Corsicans and Sardinians are possibly the kindest people on earth, as long as they don't get angry. By the way, Napoleon was born in Corsica. If you are into social life, the races at Porto Cervo in September are a must, with the Rolex venues, the Swan Cup and the Sardinia Cup.



**Suggested tour :1 week: Bonifacio strait :** Portisco - Tavolara - Cala Volpe/Mortorio - Caprera - Lavezzi - Bonifacio - Budelli/Razzoli - Maddalena - Santa Teresa. **2 weeks :** Costa Sudovest della Corsica senza perdere: Golfo di Roccapina - Punta Senetosa - Ajaccio - Capo Rosso - Scandola - Calvi - Capo Corso - Macinaggio

**Mileage (approx) :1 week :** 40 - 70. **2 weeks** 160 – 180 miles one way

**Difficulty :** high

**History and art :**Alas, not the area's strong point. There is a strong Napoleon heritage in Ajaccio (and the public library), but it's more the architecture, the atmosphere and the charm of the villages, that the locals preserve as a regional secret, that deserves a transatlantic flight. The Citadel of Bonifacio is art, anyway.

**Gastronomy :**Like Sardinians, the locals never loved the sea too much, because that's the place where invaders come from, and therefore chose to build many villages up in the mountains and build a culinary traditions on the land rather than on the sea. Corsica is the kingdom of salami (saucisson), goat cheese, lamb legs and chops (gigot d'agneau) and wild herbs. We know it is a challenge to the diet, but who cares about that on holiday? Local mussels and oysters are good. Hard to find local fish in summer. In Sardinia we like to go for Porceddu (milk pig) at the restaurant 'Il Mirto', on Maddalena Island. A good pizza in the area is at Santa Teresa, at the Pape Satan.

**Recommended restaurants of the Blue Prawn guide :** La Locanda del Mirto' - Isola Maddalena. Vedi il [sito](#).  
Ristorante 'Al Re di Tavolara' - Isola Tavolara

**Weather:** Like every famous expanse of water, the Bonifacio Strait and the Corsican Sea provide

both, stunning natural beauty and a remarkable amount of difficulties: these come in the shape of a northwesterly wind called Mistral, which may flow in every month of the year with fierceness carrying along high seas raised all the way back in the Lion's Gulf. When it is funnelled between Corsica and Sardinia and plays with the currents of the strait, a certain amount of fun must be expected. A good forecast (channel 79, 3 times a day), attention to the barometer (it's a cold front, therefore watch out when the glass stops to fall) and knowledge of the good shelters are the main ways to face it. Like every cold front, it follows a warm one, ending a possibly long series of hot, sticky and squally days. The other dangerous wind is the Libeccio, the southwesterly, usually less fierce and much warmer but again capable of raising decent rollers. The interesting side of Corsica is the west, therefore wide open to both bad winds, and not many are the coves providing good shelter to both winds. Here is a list of those providing protection from at least one of them, of choosing the most beautiful ones. We decided to list the harbours according to the shelter they afford to westerlies because the last month of August saw 5 westerly gales in Corsica, and not many of the sailors had much fun. We start from the beautiful SE side, all sheltered from the high seas of the west side, therefore providing a safe area to sail and anchor. Weather and navigation. The prudent sailor never casts off with the assumption that Nelson was right when he said 'there are three excellent harbours in the Med: Mahon, July and August'. Strong winds, cold fronts, thunderstorms and squalls must be expected at any month, even if they are of course less common in summer. True, safe havens, coves and bays abound along the Dalmatian coastline, and the endless channels provide smooth sailing even in strong winds. But nevertheless some cons must be reported. First of all some anchorages look bottomless. So always make sure that you are leaving with a long and heavy anchor chain, a serious spare anchor, possibly a fisherman, and lines to lay ashore in constricted waters and/or for better protection. Second, the more or less complete absence of sandy beaches indicates that sand is unlikely to be the **bottom** your anchor will fall on. Rocks, grass and other delicacies are more likely, and none rank high among the preference of sailors. So set your anchor well, have a look at it whenever possible with your snorkelling gear and always choose to lay out warps ashore towards the direction of the stronger **prevailing winds** whenever possible.

#### Style, elegance and social life

Corsicans are not strong at attracting the smart set, which can be a good thing if you prefer to stay away from the paparazzi bunch. But cross the Bonifacio strait to **Costa Smeralda** and the atmosphere is a trifle different. **Porto Cervo and Porto Rotondo** are the summer capitals of the Mediterranean if you own a Learjet, sail a superyacht or star in Hollywood. This is where Berlusconi, Putin and Blair meet and go sailing, where every single fashion guru spends his summer, and where models try to become tops. **September's Rolex Races in Porto Cervo** are a world venue.



#### Destinations

**Tavolara Island - Sardinia.** A favourite of our British guests, this amazing table-shaped island has 1500ft. cliffs falling straight in the most amazingly blue water, two nice anchorages at the W end and a decent restaurant as well! A must seefar from the madding crowd.

**Cala di Volpe and environs.** The VIP centre of the yachting Mediterranean, this wide bay affords good shelter, amazing beaches and blue waters, and the view of a fair slice of the world's superyacht at anchor (to save on the port tax)

**Caprera Island.** This mostly wild island is our favourite place in the area. **Porto Palma** affords great surroundings and the best all-weather anchorage available, **Cala Coticcio** and **Cala Napoletana** are simply amazing with their rock and colour show, one is a stone's throw from fancy Porto Cervo and still a century away. **Cala Portese** is another great cove. In case of strong westerlies, lay out lines ashore to the rocks at the W end.

**Maddalena Island:** the village is nice and cute, providing a very good stop for food and water. The coves north of the bridge linking Caprera and Maddalena have been foolishly been filled with private buoys and no anchorage is allowed. 70 € a night, it's outrageous. The nicest anchorage is Cala Francese, on the W coast. Obviously not well sheltered.

**Islands of Razzoli, Budelli and Santa Maria:** this is the wild heart of the Maddalena National Marine Park (do not be surprised when they come and sting you for 25 € just for being there). The superb blue lagoon in the middle cannot be accessed, also because too shallow, but vessels can anchor or moor to the buoys in the 3 different bays around it. Blue waters, red rocks, white and pink beaches, no one around at night when the tourist boats leave. A place to be in gales, when few boats will be around. A must

**Southeast Corsica:** Santa Giulia, Rondinara, Isola Piana and Porto Nuovo: the seas are flat but the wind howls down the mountains with increased fierceness, especially in the beautiful Porto Nuovo. A good anchor, maybe two, and long chains are necessary. This whole stretch of coast is red, spectacular and inviting. The bottom is generally thick grass, therefore providing poor holding ground. Set your anchor very well.

**Lavezzi Island:** this incredible mass of scattered pink rocks lies right in the middle of Bonifacio Strait and deserves the title of most amazing island in the area. Winds can be fierce and only a very small cove in the east side provides good shelter, with lines ashore and anchor set manually in the rocks in the NW side. Watch for a rock awash just 100 m off the entrance, slightly to the S. This is probably one of the most amazing anchorages in Corsica. In good weather the coves in the SW sides are simply marvellous, with the pink and grey rocks just standing on white beaches and blue lagoons. The island is a national park and hosts the cemetery of the victims of the Semillante, a ship sunk here with all 753 hands while carrying troops to the Crimea War in the 19th century.

**Bonifacio:** this is the writer's favourite harbour in the Mediterranean. A mile-long inlet between white cliffs and a medieval citadel. If you want to find a place in summer you must arrive before 1 pm. Good supermarkets and a great fishmonger. Eating out here is a challenge, because all restaurants are basically the same, catering tourists for high prices. Some are good but awfully expensive (Jules, Caravelle). When we have to eat out, we choose the cave of the Kissing Pigs, with Corsican cheese, salami and superb meat. Bonifacio is probably the best place to provision.

**Corsican Southwest coast:** there are no safe anchorages, except Figari, between Bonifacio and Propriano in case of strong westerlies. But the coves at Roccapina and around Punta Senetosa are certainly among the best around. Wild and rocky coast, long white beaches, amazing water, in good weather you can sail around here for days. Roccapina cove provides decent shelter from the NW, but swell can get in. Watch the two rocks awash in the middle of the entrance. North of Punta Senetosa 3 or 4 coves, Anse D'Arana among them, provide a stunning stop. Other good places are the coves at Ventilegne and Tizzano. Watch for the Monks and the Priest, extending for some miles off Roccapina. Best beach of the area is the Silver beach: **41°30'55.38"N, 8°53'17.33"E**

**The Valinco gulf** is not that inviting, and in case of bad weather you can choose the Campomoro bay by the S entrance (open to NW) and Porto Pollo by the N end (open to the SW).

The **Ajaccio Gulf:** the town of Ajaccio is certainly the most interesting place to visit. Napoleon was born here but you won't take long to discover that yourself. Try to find place in the old harbour downtown by the only trick of arriving soon enough. The old Genoese alleys and palaces around the main square are very nice, especially when, as it often happens in summer, the bars invade the walkways and bands play everywhere, and everyone dances in the streets. Good shopping and a real fish and food markets by the square: that's the place to buy saucissons!! Just S of Ajaccio, on the other side of the Gulf, the Saint Barb cove is a great place to swim around. The Sanguinaires Islands by the N entrance of the gulf do not afford shelter but are certainly nice to sail by.

The **Sagone Gulf:** this is the least inviting and sheltered of the four, and the only exception, even if exposed to the SW, is Cargese, the village at the N end. The small harbour and the village are both nice and are a good place to stop between the stunning north and the south.

**From Capo Rosso to Gargalo:** this is *the* place in Corsica, especially if you love nature. The shores rise up, play with colours and become in places of an intense red. Pillars, caves, sheer cliffs, tiny passages among rocks and deep, I mean really deep-blue waters. Coming from the S, Capo Rosso stands as imposing as a lighthouse and marks the boundary between the white and the red rocks, a colour that will follow the coast as far N as Scandola. This magnificent cape creates two bays, in the S **42°13'51.60"N, 8°33'39.79"E** and N sides, the latter more protected (not from the mistral) and spectacular, especially in the tiny cove just in the N end of the cape. Capo Rosso is the S entrance of the Gulf of Porto, and the whole coast of it is worth a close sail, apart, funnily enough, Porto itself. The most famous spot in the gulf is the Girolata Cove, once a pristine bay but now slightly built up with restaurants. Most of the cove is shallow (below 2 metres), and now they put moorings, so the number of boats that can stay well sheltered inside is rather limited. In case of mistral there are several small coves (use shore lines) like Cala Muretta and Cala Vecchia, between Girolata and the Scandola National Park, where anchorage is prohibited. The Scandola National Reserve begins at the Cape that bears the same name and ends after the Gargalo Island. Apart from a rock just off the Scandola Cape and around Gargalo, vessels can really have fun going very close to the majestic red pillars. Anchoring overnight is prohibited. The passage between Gargalo and Corsica is at least 4 metres deep, but is always breathtaking. DO NOT try it if the weather is not calm. Otherwise it's a must.

**Gargalo to St.Florent.** Most of this splendid coastline is open to the westerlies, but several coves



afford some shelter. Marina d'Elbo is right E of Gargalo and acceptable in a SW blow. The writer's favourite anchorage here is Porto Vecchiu, a wonderful cove a mile or so SE of Punta Revellata, the NW corner of Corsica, but I wouldn't try it in a strong NW. Calvi is a spectacular (and popular) citadel and cannot be forgotten easily. Harbour, moorings, anchorage, discos, supermarkets and so on. The coast E of Calvi is rather uninteresting but it soon becomes stunningly beautiful around the Agitates desert, especially by the beaches in the NW Balance, like Lotto and **Saleccia (42°43'36.73"N, 9°12'1.17"E)**, where the desert landscape, the white sand and the boats floating on crystal waters makes you pray for a calm day. Indeed there is absolutely no shelter here. St.Florent is another very nice town with its citadel, its markets and restaurant, and a protected harbour.

**St. Florent to Macinaggio.** Going N along the Cape Corso (the Corsican 'finger'), 13 miles from St.Florent, stop and visit the tiny village of Centuri (but beware of a very dangerous rock right in the middle of the bay) with its small harbour and old Genoese style houses. Capo Corso is among the stormiest places in the Mediterranean, but it affords excellent shelter in the east side, between Macinaggio and a line of Islets extending NE from the E corner of the Cape. The Cape itself is 5 miles wide and packed with bights, beaches, two small villages, the island of Giraglia and a stunning, Scotland-style and barren landscape where trees are not abundant. The Macinaggio harbour is safe and welcoming, and the two bays just N of it afford very good shelter from the westerlies, but keep in mind that it can blow 70 knots in August, and you need a very safe anchor for that.