

Corsica



Kallisté to the Greeks, Corse to the French, and 'La Montagne en Mer' (mountain in the sea) to the island's more poetically minded inhabitants, the mysterious island of Corsica goes under many sobriquets. But there's one that sums up the island in a nutshell – the *île de beauté* (beautiful island). Crowned by sawtooth peaks, mantled in forest cloaks of green oak, chestnut and pine, and shot through with rushing rivers and tumbling cascades, it's one of the most dramatic, diverse and downright gorgeous islands in the Mediterranean.

Officially a part of France, and yet fiercely proud of its own culture, history and language, Corsica has long had a love-hate relationship with the mainland: you'll see plenty of anti-French slogans on the walls, and French-language road signs are an enduring target for nationalist spray-cans. Despite the political posturing and its reputation for aloofness, Corsica has long hosted a hotchpotch of cultures: everyone from ancient Greeks to Genoese settlers has helped shape the island's history, and you can still feel the cultural melting pot at work today.

While most people make a beeline for the glittering bays, glitzy ports and bone-white beaches around the 1000km coastline, Corsica's mountainous interior is where you'll find the island's rugged heart and soul. Shrouded in dense shrubs, gnarled trees and unruly scrubland known as the maquis (whose wild herbs flavour the island's cheeses and charcuterie), Corsica's mountains and pastures were traditionally the preserve of bandits and *bergers* (shepherds). But today, the high-altitude trails are more often frequented by trekkers: the GR20 hike cuts down the island's spine through an otherworldly landscape of peaks, forests, waterfalls and shimmering mountain lakes. Prepare to be dazzled by France's diamond in the rough.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Discover your own pocket-sized island paradise for a day on the **Îles Lavezzi** (p934)
- Ponder the architectural ambitions of ancestors at **Filitosa** (p932) and **Alignement de Paddaghiu** (p932)
- Explore the remote peninsula of **Cap Corse** (p914) by way of winding coastal roads
- Cruise the sapphire waters of the **Réserve Naturelle de Scandola** (Scandola Nature Reserve; p922)
- Wander the backstreets and bask on the beaches around **Bonifacio** (p932)
- Bone up on your Bonaparte around Napoléon's hometown, **Ajaccio** (p926)



■ POPULATION: 260,150

■ AREA: 8680 SQ KM

History

From the 11th to 13th centuries Corsica was ruled by the Italian city-state of Pisa, superseded in 1284 by its arch-rival, Genoa. To prevent seaborne raids, a massive system of coastal citadels and watchtowers was constructed, many of which still ring the coastline.

In 1755, after 25 years of sporadic warfare against the Genoese, Corsicans declared their independence, led by Pascal Paoli (1725–1807). Under Paoli's rule they established a National Assembly and founded the most democratic constitution in Europe. They also adopted *La Tête de Maure* (the Moor's Head) – a profile of a black head wearing a white bandanna and a hooped earring, which first appeared in Corsica in 1297 – as a national emblem. According to legend, the bandanna originally covered the Moor's eyes, and was raised to the forehead to symbolise the island's liberation.

Corsicans made the inland town of Corte their capital, outlawed vendettas and established a university, but the island's independence was short-lived. In 1768 the Genoese ceded Corsica to Louis XV, whose troops crushed Paoli's army in 1769. The island has since been part of France, except for 1794–96, when it was briefly under English domination, and during the Axis occupation of 1940–43.

Corsicans have long cared for their island's ecology. In 1972 the formation of the Parc Naturel Régional de Corse (PNRC) protected more than a third (3505 sq km) of the island.

The 1998 assassination of Corsica's *préfet* (prefect; the State's representative), Claude Erignac, in Ajaccio, rocked Corsica. In 2001, the French parliament granted Corsica limited autonomy in exchange for an end to separatist violence. The bill was later overturned by the French high court because it threatened the principal of national unity.

Despite ongoing media coverage, relatively few Corsicans support the separatist Front de Libération Nationale de la Corse (FLNC). In 2003 a long-awaited referendum, which would have united the island's two *départements* (administrative divisions of France) of Haute-Corse and Corse-du-Sud, and granted the island greater autonomy, was rejected despite a nail-biting electoral race. Nevertheless, the nationalist issue remains a burning topic: several FLNC bombs exploded across the island in 2005, and in December of 2007 the militant nationalist Yvan Colonna was

sentenced to life imprisonment for the assassination of Claude Erignac nine years earlier. Typically for a Corsican, after five years on the run he was discovered hiding out in a shepherd's hut.

Internet Resources

Corse Matin (www.corsematin.com) The island's daily newspaper.

Gîtes de France Corse (www.gites-corsica.com) Rural *gîtes* (cottages for rent) and *chambres d'hôtes* (B&Bs) on the island.

Parc Naturel Régional de Corse (www.parc-naturel-corse.com, in French) Official site for the natural park.

Visit Corsica (www.visit-corsica.com) Main tourism portal, with practical info and accommodation details.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Corsica's main airports are at Ajaccio, Bastia, Figari (near Bonifacio) and Calvi.

Air France (☎ 08 20 82 08 20; www.airfrance.com) and **Compagnie Corse Méditerranée** (CCM; ☎ 08 20 82 08 20; www.aircorsica.com) collectively provide year-round flights from Paris, Marseille, Lyon and Nice to all of Corsica's airports, with seasonal flights from Bordeaux, Lille, Nantes, Mulhouse, Strasbourg, Clermont-Ferrand and Brest to Bastia, Ajaccio and occasionally Figari.

British Airways (☎ in France 08 25 82 54 00, ☎ in UK 0844 493 0 787; www.ba.com) has seasonal flights from London to Ajaccio, Bastia and Figari; there are also summer charter flights from other regional airports in the UK.

BOAT

Mainland France

Several companies run between the French mainland and Corsica's main ferry ports (Ajaccio, Bastia, Calvi, Île Rousse, Porto-Vecchio and Propriano):

Corsica Ferries (☎ France 08 25 09 50 95; www.corsicaferries.com) Year-round from Nice to Ajaccio, Bastia, Calvi and Île Rousse, and from Toulon to Ajaccio, Bastia and Île Rousse.

La Méditerranée/CMN (☎ France 08 10 20 13 20; www.cmn.fr) This Société Nationale Maritime Corse-Méditerranée subsidiary has year-round sailings between Marseille and Ajaccio, Bastia and Propriano.

Société Nationale Maritime Corse-Méditerranée (SNMCM; ☎ 08 91 70 18 01; www.sncm.fr) Year-round ferries from Nice and Marseille to all of Corsica's ports, plus high-speed *navettes à grandes vitesses* (NGVs) from Nice to Ajaccio and Île Rousse in summer.

CORSICA (CORSE)



To Îles Lavezzi (10km);
Santa Teresa, Sardinia (15km)

TAMING THE TREMBLER

Famous among trainspotters and railway fanatics, Corsica's venerable single-track railway, the **Chemins de Fer de Corse (CFC)**, has been clattering its way around the island for over a century, traversing a network of 32 tunnels and 76 bridges and viaducts (including one designed by a certain Gustave Eiffel). The first CFC line opened for business in 1888, an engineering marvel on an island still largely reliant on mules for transport – although even in its heyday it was never renowned for its reliability, smoothness or punctuality (the train was affectionately dubbed '*U Trinighellu*' – 'The Trembler' – and impromptu stops for sheep, goats and cows were a regular occurrence). But change is afoot even for this most hallowed Corsican institution: the old TGV (*train à grand vibration*) and its vintage *Micheline* carriages are being phased out in favour of smoother, more efficient and altogether less characterful trains – good for journey times, not so good for trainspotters. But CFC bosses insist that some of the old cars will be retained for posterity, and for the moment, the **Tramway de la Balagne** (see p921) has resisted the relentless urge for modernisation...

The quickest NGVs from Nice take about three hours, with normal ferries taking between four and five hours; ferries from Marseille and Toulon take between eight and 10 hours depending on your destination port. There can be as many as 10 boats a day in the high season, dropping to a single daily sailing in winter: reservations are essential in summer. In bad weather, boats can be cancelled at very short notice (often on the day of departure).

The fare structure varies depending on your route. Fares are broadly similar for all three main companies, starting at around €20 and rising to around €70 per person, with various discounts offered throughout the year. Private cabins will set you back €54 to €159, or you'll pay €17 to €23 for a shared-berth cabin. Vehicles cost between €44 and €156; bikes cost a flat €3. Remember to factor in taxes of €7 to €12 per person, plus €5 to €10 per vehicle.

Italy

Between April and October, ferries link Corsica with the Italian ports of Genoa, Livorno and Savona, and Porto Torres on Sardinia. Fares vary depending on the crossing time and route, with one-way trips starting as low as €10 per adult. It costs around €35 to transport a small car (add €18 to €25 for taxes).

Operators on the island include the following:

Corsica Ferries (☎ Livorno 0586 88 13 80, Savona 019 215 62 47) Livorno to Bastia (April to early November) and from Savona to Bastia, Calvi and Île Rousse (April to September).

La Méditerranéenne/CMN (☎ France 08 10 20 13 20; www.cmn.fr) Ferries (April to October) between Porto Torres (Sardinia) and Propriano and Ajaccio.

Moby Lines (☎ Corsica 04 95 34 84 94, Genoa 010 254 15 13, Livorno 0565 93 61; www.mobyline.it) Ferries (May to September) from Genoa and Livorno to Bastia, plus small ferries from Santa Teresa di Gallura (Sardinia) to Bonifacio from April to September.

Getting Around

BUS

Travelling around Corsica by bus can be hard work, as there are a multitude of companies and (except in summer) buses rarely run on Sundays. **Eurocorse** (☎ Ajaccio 04 95 21 06 30, Bastia 04 95 31 73 76) handles the main intercity routes.

There's a useful online resource for bus timetables at www.corsicabus.org – although as it's run by a private enthusiast, updates can be a little erratic.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Driving is the most convenient way to explore Corsica, but navigating its narrow, twisting roads is not easy (take particular care on the treacherous coast road between Calvi, Porto and Les Calanques). A good road map is indispensable – Michelin's 1:150,000 *Corsica* (Map No #345) or IGN's 1:250,000 *Regional Touring Map to Corsica* (Map #R19) are both excellent, or there are a number of alternatives available on the island.

TRAIN

Corsica's railway system is operated by **Chemins de Fer de Corse** (CFC; ☎ Bastia 04 95 32 80 61; www.ter-sncf.com/corse, in French) The two lines meet at Ponte Leccia: the Bastia–Corte–Ajaccio line

is served by four daily trains, with two connections from Ponte Leccia to Calvi via Île Rousse. Services are greatly reduced in winter and on public holidays.

Under 12s travel half-price; under fours (and, bizarrely, dogs in a basket) travel free. Return journeys of more than 200km qualify for a 25% discount (known as the *billet touristique*), or 10% for journeys of more than 75km in summer. There are also discounts for Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer Français (SNCF) family ticket-holders (between 30% and 70%) and InterRail travellers (50%). The CFC sells its own rail pass – the Carte Zoom – which costs €48 for seven days' unlimited train travel.

BASTIA AREA

BASTIA

pop 37,800

Tucked into the island's northeastern corner, the bustling old port of Bastia is many people's first glimpse of Corsica. However, surprisingly few visitors take the time to explore this dynamic little city, put off by its hectic traffic, peeling paintwork and ramshackle tenement blocks. And that's a shame: while Bastia might not measure up to the sexy style of Ajaccio or the architectural appeal of Bonifacio, in many ways it's a more authentic snapshot of modern-day Corsica, a lived-in, well-loved city that's resisted the urge to polish up its image just to please the tourists. Narrow alleyways climb from the old harbour to the 16th-century citadel, which was the former seat of the town's Genoese governors, and is presently the site of one of the largest (and costliest) renovation projects in the island's history.

Orientation

Place St-Nicolas is the central hub. The train station is northwest along av Maréchal Sébastiani; west are the city's main shopping streets, bd Paoli and rue César Campinchi. The city's three older neighbourhoods are south of place St-Nicolas: Terra Vecchia (centred on place de l'Hôtel de Ville), the Vieux Port (Old Port) and the citadel.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Librairie Album (☎ 04 95 31 08 59; 19 bd Paoli; ☎ 8am-noon & 1.30-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-12.30pm Sun) Big bookshop with an excellent travel section.

Librairie-Papeterie Papi (☎ 04 95 31 00 96; 5 rue César Campinchi; ☎ 7.30am-noon & 1.30-7pm Mon-Sat) Sells walking maps, topoguides and travel books.

EMERGENCY

Centre Hospitalier Général Paese Nuovo (☎ 04 95 59 11 11; Rue Impériale) Located south of town.

Police Nationale (☎ 04 95 54 50 22; av Paul Giacobbi) Near the northern ferry terminal.

INTERNET ACCESS

Oxy Cyber Café (☎ 06 84 76 11 65; 1 rue Salvatore Viale; per hr €3.10; ☎ 10am-2am Mon-Sat, 1pm-2am Sun)

LAUNDRY

Le Lavoir du Port (☎ 7am-9pm) In the car park near the end of rue du Commandant Luce de Casabianca.

MONEY

Most of the big French banks are dotted along place St-Nicolas, rue César Campinchi and rue du Conventionnel Salicetti. Most have ATMs.

POST

Post Office (av Maréchal Sébastiani; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist Office (☎ 04 95 54 20 40; www.bastia-tourisme.com; place St-Nicolas; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon & 4-7pm Sun Jul & Aug, 8.30am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-1pm Sun Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct, 8.30am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-noon Sun Nov-Mar) Multilingual tourist office in a hut on place St-Nicolas.

Sights

Even by Corsican standards, Bastia is a pocket-sized city, and you can tick off the main sights in an afternoon. The 19th-century square of **place St-Nicolas** sprawls along the seafront between the ferry port and the harbour. Named after the patron saint of sailors – a nod to Corsica's seagoing heritage – the square is lined with plane trees and busy cafés, as well as a **statue of Napoléon Bonaparte** depicted as a cross between a Grecian warrior-hero and a pumped-up bodybuilder.

A network of narrow lanes leads south towards the old port and the neighbourhood of **Terra Vecchia**, a muddle of crumbling apartments and balconied blocks. The shady **place de l'Hôtel de Ville** hosts Bastia's lively morning market from Tuesday to Saturday.

Further south is the Vieux Port (Old Port), ringed by pastel-coloured tenements and buzzy brasseries, as well as the twin-towered **Église St-Jean Baptiste**. The best views of the harbour are from the **Jetée du Dragon** (Dragon Jetty) or from the hillside park of **Jardin Romieu** (Romieu Garden) reached via a twisting staircase from the waterfront.

Behind the garden looms Bastia's sunbaked **citadel**, built from the 15th to 17th centuries as a stronghold for the city's Genoese masters. Since 2005 the citadel has been part of a huge €12.5m restoration project, currently focused on the **Palais des Gouverneurs** (Governors' Palace; place du Donjon), earmarked to house Bastia's long-awaited history museum. Originally slated for completion in late 2008, work is at least a year behind schedule; check at the tourist office for the latest news.

One of the citadel's landmarks, the former cathedral of **Église Ste-Marie** (rue de l'Évêché), has already benefited from a much-needed facelift. Inside, the gloomy interior houses a landmark Italian organ and a Virgin Mary fashioned from solid silver (drop a coin into the box for illumination). But the city's most treasured relic is behind the cathedral in the gilded **Oratoire de la Confrérie de la Ste-Croix** – a mysterious black-oak crucifix supposedly plucked from the sea by fishermen in 1428. The chapel is run by the Brotherhood of Ste-Croix, the oldest of the city's Christian brotherhoods. Other chapels worth visiting include the baroque **Oratoire de l'Immaculée Conception** on rue des Terrasses, which served as the seat of the short-lived Anglo-Corsican parliament, and the **Oratoire de la Confrérie de la St-Roch** (rue de Napoléon), known for its 18th-century organ and *trompe l'œil* roof, covered with storm clouds and ethereal angels.

Activities

Objectif Nature (☎ /fax 04 95 32 54 34; objectif-nature@wanadoo.fr; 3 rue Notre Dame de Lourdes; ☞ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat) organises outdoor activities including kayaking, sea-fishing, hiking, mountaineering and diving. It will also look after your luggage for €3.

Festivals & Events

Bastia's calendar is chock-a-bloc with festivals and events.

Italian Cinema Festival (www.festivalcineitalien.com) Bastia's annual *homage* to Italian cinema is held in February, with British and Spanish film-weeks being held later in the year.

BD à Bastia In April, Bastia hosts France's trendiest *bandes dessinées* (comics) festival, attracting big names from the pen-and-ink world.

Feux de la St-Jean Midsummer fireworks and bonfires to mark the longest day in June.

Nuits de la Guitare à Patrimonio (☎ 04 95 37 12 15; www.festival-guitare-patrimoine.com) July sees the tiny village of Patrimonio, about 10km west of Bastia, host one of Europe's major guitar festivals.

Musicales de Bastia Polyphonic singers, Corsican musicians and blues bands fill the streets for this celebration of Corsican culture in October.

Festival Arte-Maré Mediterranean culture, art and films take centre stage at this November festival, focusing on a guest country (in 2008, it was Portugal).

Sleeping

Camping San Damiano (☎ 04 95 33 68 02; www.camping sandamiano.com; campsite tent & vehicle €5-7 plus per person €5-7.50, chalets per week €441-798 Jul & Aug, per night €45-72, per week €315-504 Apr-Jun, Sep & Oct; ☞ Apr-Oct) An idyllic beachfront campsite, shaded under pines about 6km south of Bastia. For extra comfort, cute wooden chalets are available.

Hôtel Athéna (☎ 04 95 34 88 40; 2 rue Miot; d €40-60) This cut-price hotel is about the cheapest sleep in town, so you can forgive it a few bits of battered furniture and flaking paint. Rooms are clean, spartan and simple: light-sleepers should avoid the ones overlooking the street.

Hôtel Univers (☎ 04 95 31 03 38; www.hotelunivers.org, in French; 3 av Maréchal Sébastiani; s €45-60, d €50-70; ☞) Bang in front of the post office and a short stroll from place St-Nicholas, the Univers makes a decent Bastia base, but don't expect too many frills. A scruffy staircase leads to the upper floors and whitewashed rooms, finished in blue-and-yellow bedspreads, laminate floors and good-sized bathrooms. Double-glazing shuts out (most) of the street noise.

Hôtel Posta Vecchia (☎ 04 95 32 32 38; www.hotel-postavecchia.com; quai des Martyrs de la Libération; d €55-92, f €65-100; ☞) If it's sea views you're after, make a beeline for the Posta Vecchia – the only place in town where you can watch bobbing boats and Mediterranean waves from your bed (worth the €10 surcharge). Rooms are light and bright, with wood floors and stripy furnishings – a few have minifridges.

Hôtel Central (☎ 04 95 31 71 12; www.centralhotel.fr; 3 rue Miot; s €55-75, d €65-95, apt €85-105; ☞) Stairs climb past a teeny courtyard garden to the 1st-floor reception of this renovated tenement, the pick of Bastia's town-centre hotels. Unfussy rooms,

most with timber floors, checks and nautical pictures, are dotted around the corridors: a €10 supplement buys a titchy balcony above the garden, or you could splash out on an 'apartment' with self-contained kitchenette.

Hôtel Les Voyageurs (☎ 04 95 34 90 80; www.hotel-lesvoyageurs.com; 9 av Maréchal Sébastiani; s €70-75, d €80-95, tr €90-110; ☹ (P)) Swish furnishings and efficient service make this fancy hotel popular with business travellers and well-heeled tourists. Buttermilk walls, modern-art prints and blindingly white en suites fill the rooms; you'll secure more space, plush sofas and a minifridge if you splash more cash. There's covered parking (€6) and free wi-fi.

Hôtel Bonaparte (☎ 04 95 34 07 10; www.hotel-bonaparte-bastia.com; 45 bd Général Graziani; s €70-80, d €75-160; ☹ (P)) A cute little three-star place with a cluster of eclectic rooms: some small, snug and carpeted in mix-and-match fabrics, others larger with white-tiled floors, Mediterranean colours and street-front balconies, plus a couple of suites with separate sitting areas. Parking costs €8.

Eating

You'll find endless restaurants around the old port and quai des Martyrs, but quality can suffer in the high season.

Chez Vincent (☎ 04 95 31 62 50; 12 rue St-Michel; mains €8-18; ☹ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) Not up to the gastronomic heights of A Casarella (see below), but this next-door neighbour still offers Corsican staples and wood-fired pizzas. The *Assiette du Bandit Corse* (€18) features a smorgasbord of local nosh, including Corsican meats, chestnuts, cheese and boar.

our pick A Casarella (☎ 04 95 32 02 32; rue du Dragon; mains €9-28; ☹ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) Poised above the old port in the heart of the citadel, this well-hidden restaurant boasts the loveliest patio in Bastia. Tuck into inventive variations on traditional Corsican cuisine – tuna with caramelised figs, or Brocciu (ewe's- or goat's-milk cheese)-stuffed sardines – with the twinkling lights of the harbour below, or on colder nights duck into the dining room, filled with bric-a-brac and black-and-white prints.

Le Bouchon (☎ 04 95 58 14 22; 4bis rue St-Jean; mains €15-21, no credit cards; ☹ closed Sun) Dinky, down-to-earth bistro from the Lyonnaise school, with a blackboard of specials running the gamut from Corsican sausages to pork steaks. The food's filling, the welcome's warm, and the tables are packed in tight – go for the terrace

in warm weather, illuminated by candles stuffed into old bottles.

U Tianu (☎ 04 95 31 36 67; 4 rue Rigo; menus €19; ☹ dinner Mon-Sat, closed Aug) A favourite Bastia's hideaway for aeons, this is as close as you'll come to a traditional Corsican kitchen. Hunting rifles, country knick-knacks and dog-eared posters cover the walls, and you'll tuck into five-course platters of Corsican food including cheese, aperitif and coffee, whipped up by the venerable mamas in charge of the kitchen.

Le Caveau de Marin (☎ 04 95 31 62 31; quai des Martyrs de la Libération; ☹ closed lunch Sat-Mon) Maritime paraphernalia and a shipshape atmosphere defines this longstanding seafood restaurant, especially strong on sea-fresh fish – oysters, grilled sea bass, giant-sized mussel platters and sea urchins, with a choice of tables in the vaulted dining room or on the portside patio.

SELF-CATERING

Cheese, fish, fruit, veg and Corsican charcuterie fills the morning **food market** (place de l'Hôtel de Ville; ☹ Tue-Sun), or you can pick up supplies at Spar supermarkets on rue César Campinchi and bd Paoli. For big shops, head out of town for the Casino supermarket at the Géant Port Toga Centre Commercial.

Drinking

Cafés line the edges of place St-Nicolas and the backstreets around the Vieux Port.

La Rhumerie (☎ 06 86 37 09 32; place Galetta; ☹ 8pm-2am Mon-Sat Jun-Aug, Wed-Sat Sep-May) If you can look beyond the dodgy fibreglass pirates guarding the doorway, you'll find a treasure chest of rums behind the bar of this popular drinking hole, not to mention beers and cocktails.

LVP Café (quai du 1er Bataillon de Choc, Vieux Port; ☹ 10am-2am) Currently the hot-tip of Bastia's port-side bars, crammed with bursting with bright young things sipping pastis and Pietras.

La Soupière (☎ 06 42 85 44 11; ☹ 6.30pm-2am) Hidden behind the old port on a cobbled ramp next to rue Général Carbuccia, this *café littéraire* (literary café) hosts regular poetry readings and open-mike nights.

Entertainment

Le Régent (☎ 04 95 31 30 31; www.leregent.fr; rue César Campinchi) A multiscreen cinema screening the latest releases (nearly always in French).

Studio Cinéma (☎ 04 95 31 12 94; www.studio-cinema.com; rue Miséricorde) A small arts cinema where you can catch French and international flicks, often in *version originale* (the original language version).

Shopping

LN Mattei (15 bd Général de Gaulle) An institution in Basti – founded by local man Louis Napoléon Mattei (who also cooked up the local liqueur, Cap Corse). It's *the* place for local delicacies, including liqueurs, jams, honeys and olive oils.

For Corsican wines, drop by **Les Grands Vins de Corse** (☎ 04 95 31 24 94; www.lesvinscorse.com, in French; 24 rue César Campinchi).

A Sunday flea market takes place on place St-Nicholas, but the bargains go early, so pitch up before 9am.

Getting There & Around

AIR

Aéroport Bastia-Poretta (☎ 04 95 54 54 54; www.bastia.aeroport.fr) is 24km south of the city. Buses (€8.50, eight daily) depart from outside the Préfecture building. The first bus from town is around 6am and the last bus from the airport is around 9pm; schedules are posted at the bus stop. A taxi will set you back €37/50 during the day/night with **Taxis Bleus** (☎ 04 95 32 70 70).

BOAT

Bastia has two ferry terminals connected by a free shuttle bus. All the ferry companies have information offices in the southern terminal, which usually opens for same-day ticket sales a couple of hours before each sailing. If the kiosks for Corsica Ferries or Moby Lines are closed, try stopping by the main offices nearby.

Corsica Ferries (☎ 04 95 32 95 95; www.corsicaferreries.com; 15bis rue Chanoine Leschi; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) Opposite the northern terminal.

Moby Lines (☎ 04 95 34 84 94; www.mobylines.it; 4 rue du Commandant Luce de Casabianca; ☎ 8am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat)

SNCM (☎ 04 95 54 66 81; www.sncm.com; inside Southern Terminal; ☎ 8-11.45am & 2-5.45pm Mon-Fri, 8am-noon Sat)

BUS

There are three bus stops in Bastia: outside the tourist office, at the train station, and at the 'bus terminal' (actually a car park) north of Square St-Victor.

Autocars Cortenais (☎ 04 95 46 02 12) Travels to Corte (€10, two hours) once daily on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Buses leave from the train station.

Beaux Voyages (☎ 04 95 65 11 35) Travels to Île Rousse (€10, 90 minutes) and Calvi (€16, two hours) daily except Sunday. Buses leave from the train station.

Eurocorse (☎ 04 95 31 73 76) travels to Ajaccio (€22, three hours) via Corte (€11, two hours) twice daily except on Sundays from Bastia's 'bus station'.

Les Rapides Bleus (☎ 04 95 31 03 79; 1 av Maréchal Sébastiani) Runs buses to Porto-Vecchio (€20, per baggage item €1, bikes €8, three hours) every day except Sundays and holidays.

For buses to Cap Corse, see p916.

TRAIN

The **train station** (☎ 04 95 32 80 61; av Maréchal Sébastiani; ☎ 6am-8.30pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-8.30pm Sun) is beside the large roundabout on Square Maréchal Leclerc. Main destinations include Ajaccio (€23.90, four daily) via Corte (€11.20), and Calvi (€18.10, three hours, three or four daily) via Île Rousse (€15).

CAP CORSE

Poking an accusatory finger towards mainland France, Corsica's northerly peninsula feels one step removed from the rest of the island – hardly surprising, since before the road arrived the only way to reach the peninsula was by mule track or boat. Genoese watchtowers and hidden coves line the coastline, while maquis-covered slopes flank the peninsula's hilly spine. The twisting coastal roads make for adventurous driving; factor in plenty of time to account for caravans and roadside goats in summer.

From Bastia, the coast unfolds through seaside resorts and small beaches towards the quaint harbour of **Erbalunga**, 9km north, famous for its August music festival (☎ 04 95 33 20 84), and **Pietracorbara**, the sexiest stretch of sand on the east coast.

At Santa Servara, the road splits: the west fork climbs to the Col de Ste-Lucie and its hilltop tower (supposedly where the Roman poet-philosopher Seneca was exiled in the 1st century). The second fork continues north to the little port of **Macinaggio**, where you'll find a smattering of hotels and bistros and the cape's sole **tourist office** (☎ 04 95 35 40 34; www.ot-rogliano-macinaggio.com; Port de Plaisance de Macinaggio; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon Sun Jul & Aug, 9am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat Sep-Jun). Boat trips putter along the coastline from the

CORSICA'S GRANDES RANDONNÉES

The holy grail for many a hardy hiker, the **GR20** (aka the Frá Li Monti, 'between the mountains'), cuts through the middle of the island for a distance of 168km, from Calenzana (10km southeast of Calvi) to Conca (20km north of Porto-Vecchio) in the southwest. It's a stunning traverse through high mountain scenery, but it's not for novices – the terrain is tough, the route is long, steep and often dizzyingly lofty, and creature comforts (hotels, ATMs, supply shops and food stores) are nonexistent. Much of the route is above the snowline at 2000m and passable only from mid-June to October: you'll need camping equipment, ample food supplies, drinking water and a stove, and at least 15 days to complete it. Parc Naturel Régional de Corse (PNRC) *refuges* (mountain huts) are dotted along the trail, but they don't accept reservations. Wild camping and the lighting of fires are strictly forbidden.

Lonely Planet's *Corsica* and *Walking in France* guides have extensive sections on hiking the GR20, with full day-by-day route guides, accommodation listings and practical advice. Despite the challenges, the 10,000 walkers who tackle the trail every year receive a justifiable sense of achievement upon completing the route – you can rightly count yourself a *grand randonneur* if you reach the end in one piece.

If you don't feel like taking on the full-blown route, it's possible to divide the GR20 into smaller sections: Vizzavona makes a convenient halfway stage. Alternatively you could take on one of Corsica's other *grandes randonnées*; the **Maison d'Information Randonnées du Parc Naturel Régional de Corse** (☎ 04 95 51 79 10; www.parc-naturel-corse.com) provides information.

Trails within Corsica:

Mare a Mare Centre A seven-day trail linking Porticcio (south of Ajaccio) with Ghisonaccia. Open May to November.

Mare a Mare Nord Cargèse (north of Ajaccio) to Moriani (40km south of Bastia), one route (of two alternatives) passing through the forest of Vizzavona and the village of Vénaco. Allow seven to 12 days. Open May to November.

Mare a Mare Sud Five days from Propriano (south of Ajaccio) to Porto-Vecchio, passing Zonza en route. Open year-round.

Mare e Monti Nord Cargèse to Calenzana (via Évisa, Ota, Girolata and Galéria) in around 10 days. Open all year, but best in spring and autumn.

Mare e Monti Sud Porticcio to Propriano via Porto Pollo and Olmeto; open year-round.

harbour, and a coastal trail – the Sentier des Douaniers – leads north to the remote village of **Barcaggio**.

Round the peninsula's tip, the road sweeps along the western side, wilder and grander than the east, with cliff-top villages, jagged coves and houses hidden deep in the maquis. A restored windmill overlooks the village of **Centuri**, but the highlight of the west coast is **Nonza**, perched above a black-sand beach with an 11th-century chapel dedicated to St Julia (Corsica's patron saint, martyred here in the 5th century). The final stretch sweeps past sandy bays to the touristy harbour of **St-Florent**.

Sleeping & Eating

CAMPING

Cap Corse has several lovely campsites.

Camping La Pietra (☎ 04 95 35 27 49; www.la-pietra.com; Pietracorbara; campsites per adult €7.70-9.80, tent €3.30-4.70; ☞ Apr-mid-Oct; ☑) Regally equipped camp-

site with lots of tree-shaded pitches (some wheelchair accessible), tennis courts, a buffet-bar and a fantastic swimming pool.

Camping U Stazzu (☎ 04 95 35 43 76; campsites €15; ☞ May-Sep) Pleasant campground handy for Tamarone beach, just north of Macinaggio.

HOTELS

Relais du Cap (☎ 04 95 37 86 53; www.relaisducap.com; d €45-70; ☞ Apr-Oct) For the ultimate seaside escape, bag one of the four doubles or the roomy apartment at this tiny little B&B perched on the sands of a pocket-sized pebble beach, 5km south of Nonza. Beachside barbecues, a private boat and fabulous watery views make for a gold-dust getaway.

Casa Maria (☎ 04 95 37 80 95; www.casamaria-corse.com, in French; d €70-90, ste €120-160; ☞ ☑) What a find – a bewitching little hideaway in Nonza, coolly refurbished with white-washed walls, wrought-iron staircases and reclaimed beams, and an endearingly pastoral

ambience that makes for a great refuge from the outside world.

Le Vieux Moulin (☎ 04 95 35 60 15; www.le-vieux-moulin.net, in French; d incl half-board €100-280) Split over two buildings (a lovely colonial-style holiday house and a more modern annexe) in Centuri, this is one of the poshest places to stay on the peninsula. It's a real pamper-pad crammed with rugs, antique pots and chaise longues. The annexe rooms are disappointingly bland, but the restaurant's top-notch (mains €15 to €25).

Hôtel Castel Brando (☎ 04 95 30 10 30; www.castelbrando.com; Erbalunga; d €105-210; ♿ ♻️ 🏠) Smart, swish, sophisticated hotel in Erbalunga, with four grades of rooms ranging from 'Charming' to 'Suite', and a choice of buildings (19th-century mansion or modern annexe). Peaches and yellows dominate the decor; some rooms have private patios, others flat-screen TVs and sea views. Wi-fi is standard throughout, and the beach couldn't be much closer.

Osteria di U Portu (☎ 04 95 35 40 49; Macinaggio; mains €15-25; 🍷 lunch & dinner) Fab seafood straight off the quayside of Macinaggio, supplemented by a quartet of simple *chambres d'hôtes* (d €40 to €60) in summer.

Getting There & Away

The main road around Cap Corse is the D80. **Société des Transports Interurbains Bastiais** (☎ 04 95 31 06 65) runs several buses to Cap Corse from Bastia, with destinations including Erbalunga (€2), Sisco (€2) and Pietracorbara (€2.60). **Transport Micheli** (☎ 04 95 35 14 64) runs to Macinaggio (€6.40, two daily Sunday to Friday, one on Saturday). Buses leave from outside the Bastia tourist office.

THE NORTH COAST

ÎLE ROUSSE (ISULA ROSSA)

pop 2300

Sun-worshippers, celebrities and holidaying yachting all buzz around the busy beach town of Île Rousse, straddling a long, sandy curve of land backed by maquis-cloaked mountains and a sparkling beach. Originally founded by Pascal Paoli in 1758 as a rival port to pro-Genoese Calvi, 24km to the southwest, the town was later renamed after the russet-coloured rock of Île de la Pietra offshore (now home to the town's ferry-port and lighthouse).

Orientation

The **tourist office** (☎ 04 95 60 04 35; www.balagne-corsica.com; place Paoli; 🕒 9am-7pm mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 9am-12.30pm & 2-6pm May, early Jun & late Sep, 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri Oct-Apr) is on the southern side of place Paoli. The station is north along the Rte du Port, which joins the mainland to the Île de la Pietra and the ferry port.

Sights

The modern-day town is short on sights, but the backstreets around the grand marketplace (complete with 21 neo-Grecian columns) are worth a stroll. All roads in Île Rousse lead to the tree-shaded place Paoli, where you can watch nightly boules contests courtesy of the local gents while you sip *eau de vie* (clear fruit or nut brandy) at one of the square-side cafés.

Île Rousse's beaches stretch along the sea-front, known as **Promenade a Marinella**, for 3km east of town, but things get very crowded in the summer months – you can usually find more room at **Algajola**, 7km to the west, accessible via the clanking **Tramway de la Balagne** (p921). Ask at the tourist office or the train station for timetables.

The ferry-port is north of town on the **Île de la Pietra**, where you'll also find an old Genovese **watchtower** and a **lighthouse**. You can rent out jet skis, dinghies and sailing boats from **Club Nautique** (☎ 04 95 60 22 55), based on the beach running alongside the Rte du Port.

Four kilometres inland from Île Rousse in the village of Monticello is the **Parc de Salecchia** (☎ 04 95 36 88 83; adult/child €7/5; 🕒 10am-8pm Jul & Aug, 9.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-8pm Sun, occasionally closed Mon & Sat mornings mid-Mar-Jun & early Sep-mid-Sep), a 7-hectare park reclaimed from fire-ravaged land and now brimming with native Corsican plants, including cypresses, olive trees, myrtles and wildflowers.

Sleeping & Eating

Splendid Hotel (☎ 04 95 60 00 24; www.le-splendid-hotel.com; s €53-85, d €58-100, tr €79-138; 🕒 late Mar-Oct; ♿ 🏠 📶) This coral-pink tower has been sheltering seaside travellers in Île Rousse for decades (it even served as a field hospital during WWII), but despite the name, rooms are satisfactory rather than splendid. The decor's dated, but the facilities are decent – palm-shaded pool, wi-fi and a swish cocktail bar, to boot; the sea-view rooms are well worth the €5 supplement.

L'Amiral (☎ 04 95 60 28 05; www.hotel-amiral.com; 163 bd Charles Marie Savelli; d €65-100; 🕒 Apr-Oct; ♿) This

neo-Cubist lump would be more at home on the Costa del Sol than the Corsican coastline, but for beach babies it's ideal – seafront bars and soft white sand nearby, and most of the boxy modern rooms have bay-view balconies. Just don't expect much character.

L'Escale (☎ 04 95 60 10 53; rue Notre-Dame; mains €11-25)

For sea-view dining, head for the wood-decked terrace at L'Escale, where you can tuck into huge seafood platters, mussels, pastas and fresh lobster plucked (literally) straight from the tank, all with unparalleled vistas of the blue, blue sea.

Restaurant L'Île d'Or (☎ 04 95 60 12 05; place Paoli; menus €12.50-35) There's something to suit all budgets at this venerable bistro, which offers front-row seats for the town's nightly boules contests. The *menu* (fixed-price meal) takes in everything from wood-fired pizzas to gourmet salads and *fruits de mer* (seafood).

U Lubecciu (☎ 04 95 60 13 82; 3 rue Paoli; mains €15-22;

☎ lunch & dinner) A short hop from the market and decked out with slatted chairs and black umbrellas, this restaurant serves up the town's best seafood – swordfish kebabs, scorpion-fish fillet and lots and lots of mussels (try them with chorizo, pancetta, Roquefort or the house Cap Corse sauce).

Stop by the buzzy **covered market** (place Paoli; ☎ 8am-1pm) for fish, vegetables, fruit and Corsican delicacies.

Getting There & Away

Les Beaux Voyages (☎ 04 95 65 11 35) runs a morning bus from Calvi (€4, 15 minutes) to Bastia (€10, two hours), which stops at Île Rousse. There's also an afternoon bus in the opposite direction. The service runs from Monday to Saturday year-round.

In summer, **Transports Santini** (☎ 04 95 37 02 98) runs two daily buses to St-Florent (€10, one hour, two daily Monday to Saturday from July to August).

The **train station** (☎ 04 95 60 00 50) has two daily trains to Bastia (€15, 2½ hours) and Ajaccio (€24.60, four hours) via Corte (€12, 2¼ hours) year-round.

For ferries to Île Rousse, see p907. **Corse Voyages** (☎ 04 95 60 11 19; place Paoli) and **Tamar** (☎ 04 95 60 09 56; av Joseph Calizi; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-noon Sat) both sell tickets.

LA BALAGNE

Stretching inland from the barren 5000-hectare **Désert des Agriates** east of Île Rousse to the snowy crest of Monte Cinto, the

Balagne is a remote and traditional area, dotted with scrubby knolls, maquis-covered hills and tiny backcountry villages. A century ago this was one of the island's richest agricultural regions, colloquially known as the Garden of Corsica – a fertile landscape covered with olive farms, orange plantations and fig orchards. But economic decline and steady depopulation during the early 20th century emptied many of the orchards and farming communities, and it's only in recent years that the area has rediscovered its soul as a centre for local craftwork and small-scale cultivation.

A signposted route, the **Strada di L'Artigliani** (Route des Artisans, in French), links up the region's most attractive villages, and details local workshops belonging to potters, beekeepers and luthiers. You can pick up a route map from the tourist offices in Calvi and Île Rousse.

Of particular interest is the craft centre of **Pigna**, 7km from Île Rousse, where dotted around the cobbled streets you'll find makers of everything from candles to lutes and music boxes, and **Calenzana**, the northern terminus of the GR20 and Mare e Monti trails (see p915).

Casa Musicale (☎ 04 95 61 76 57; www.casa-musicale.org; Pigna; d €50-94; ☎) Riding Pigna's Bohemian vibe, this charming hotel has quirky rooms finished with painted frescoes and fabulous valley views, and it hosts regular concerts of local music. The patio restaurant brims with Balagne ingredients.

our pick U Palazzu (☎ 04 95 47 32 78; www.hotel-palazzu.com; Pigna; d €130-210, ste €210-260; ☎) A palace indeed! This wonderfully luxurious place occupies a Pignan 18th-century mansion, with three super-plush doubles (shared patio) and two regal suites (private terrace). All boast rich fabrics, antique furniture, original carpentry and period features; some have jaw-dropping views of the Bay of Algajola. Not convinced? Stop by the rustic restaurant, which serves Corsican dishes inside a refurbished olive mill. Trust us – you'll never want to leave.

CALVI

pop 5600

Basking between the fiery orange bastions of its 15th-century citadel and the glittering waters of a moon-shaped bay, Calvi feels closer to the chi-chi sophistication of a Côte

d'Azur resort than a historic Corsican port. Palatial yachts and private cruisers jostle for space along its harbourside, lined with up-market brasseries and cafés, while high above the quay the watchtowers and battlements of the town's Genoese stronghold stand guard, proffering sweeping views inland to Monte Cinto (2706m). Unsurprisingly, Calvi is one of Corsica's most popular tourist spots and in summer it's crammed to bursting (and chronically overpriced) – pitch up in the shoulder seasons, when you'll be able to stroll the citadel's cobbled alleys in relative peace and quiet.

Orientation

The citadel – also known as the Haute Ville (Upper City) – sits on a rocky promontory northeast of the Basse Ville (Lower Town). Bd Wilson, the major thoroughfare through town, is uphill from the marina.

Information

Banks, including Crédit Lyonnais, can be found along bd Wilson.

Antenne Médicale du SAMU (☎ 04 95 65 11 22; rue de Santore)

Café de l'Orient (☎ 04 95 65 00 16; quai Landry; internet access connection €1 plus per min €0.10; ☎ 9am-late)

Citadel Tourist Office (citadel gate; ☎ 9am-noon Mon-Sat Jun-Sep)

Hall de la Presse (☎ 04 95 65 05 14; 13 bd Wilson; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat) Sells topoguides and walking maps.

Main Tourist Office (☎ 04 95 65 16 67; www.balagne-corsica.com; Port de Plaisance; ☎ 9am-noon & 3-6.30pm Jul & Aug, 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat May, Jun, Sep & Oct, 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri Nov-Apr)

Post Office (bd Wilson)

Sights & Activities

CITADEL

Set atop a lofty promontory, Calvi's massive fortified citadel completely dominates the harbour skyline. Built by the town's Genoese governors, Calvi's citadel has seen off several major assaults down the centuries, fending off everyone from Franco-Turkish raiders to Anglo-Corsican armies, notably during the siege of 1794 when the citadel was attacked by the forces of the revolutionary leader Pascal Paoli. During the ensuing battle, a young British captain by the name of Horatio Nelson lost his right eye.

Inside the battlements, the **Palais des Gouverneurs** (Governors' Palace; place d'Armes) was the seat of power for the Genoese administration and now serves (under the name Caserne Sampiero) as a base for the French Foreign Legion. Look out for soldiers wearing the regiment's distinctive white *kepis* (military caps) around town. The citadel's enduring loyalty to Genoa is recalled by the motto *Civitas Calvi Semper Fidelis* (The City of Calvi, Forever Faithful) carved over the citadel gateway.

Uphill from Caserne Sampiero is the 13th-century **Église St-Jean Baptiste**, rebuilt in 1570 following an explosion at a nearby gunpowder store. The church's most celebrated relic is the ebony *Christ des Miracles*, credited with saving the town from Saracen invasion in 1553; legend has it that the besieging Turkish fleet fell back after the statue was paraded around Calvi's streets.

In the northern part of the citadel, a **plaque** marks the house where navigator Christopher Columbus was supposedly born. However, despite the assertions of many Corsican historians, it's generally accepted that the globetrotting explorer was actually born in Genoa.

BEACHES

Sunworshippers don't have far to stroll – Calvi's stellar 4km beach begins at the marina and runs east around the Golfe de Calvi. You can rent out kayaks and windsurfers from the **Calvi Nautique Club** (☎ 04 95 65 10 65; www.calvinc.org; Base Nautique, Port de Plaisance; ☎ May-Oct).

Tours

Croisières Colombo Line (☎ 04 95 65 32 10; www.colombo-line.com; marina; ☎ Apr-Oct) runs glass-bottomed boat excursions to the Réserve Naturelle de Scandola (Scandola Natural Reserve), starting from around €35.

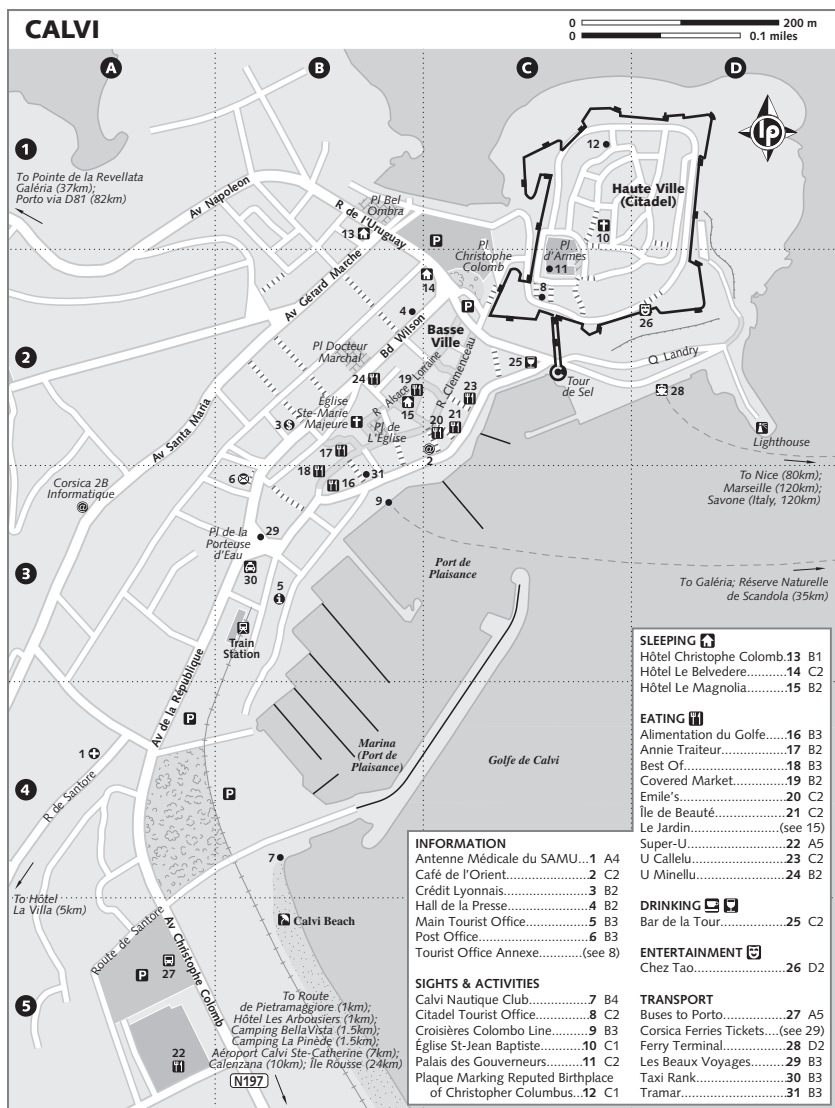
Festivals & Events

La Semaine Sainte Easter festival, culminating in street processions on Good Friday.

Calvi Jazz festival Corsica's biggest jazz festival, in June.

Rencontres Polyphoniques Traditional Corsican chants – traditionally sung *a cappella* (without instrumental accompaniment) – can be heard at this five-day music festival in September. The stirring *paghjellas* feature three male voices – a tenor, baritone and bass – and mark the passage of life.

Le Festival du Vent (☎ 04 95 65 16 67; www.le-festival-du-vent.com) In autumn, this festival celebrates wind in all its forms, with musical instrument and theatre



performances, art exhibitions, sailing and windsurfing, and paragliding and air displays.

Sleeping

Despite the eye-watering prices, Calvi's hotels are packed out in summer, so book well ahead unless you fancy kipping on the beach.

CAMPING

Calvi has plenty of campsites.

Camping La Pinède (☎ 0495 65 17 80; www.camping-calvi.com; rte de la Pinède; adult €6.50-9, tent €2.50-3.50, car €2.50-3.50; 📅 mid-May–mid-Oct; 📍 🚰) Handy for Calvi town and the beach, this shady spot has sites sheltered under tall pines, and, if

CORSICAN POLYPHONY

Spend some time on the island and you're bound to hear some traditional **Corsican singing** belting out of a neighbourhood bar. Distinguished by its distinctive multilayered harmony and emotive vocal style, traditional song is a key component of Corsican culture, and can trace its roots back to the island's earliest settlers. Listen carefully and you'll hear strains of North African, Greek, Latin, Spanish and Middle Eastern music buried in the melody, tied together with a healthy strain of Gregorian plainchant. Usually arranged for between three or four voices and sung *a cappella* (without instrumental accompaniment), the most distinctive form is the **paghjella**, which marks the passage of life and explores the trials and troubles of the human heart (especially unrequited love).

Calvi holds an annual festival of Corsican music (see p918), and concerts are held throughout the summer at Casa Musicale in the Balagne (see p917).

you fancy a roof over your head, there are cosy chalets.

Camping Bella Vista (☎ 04 95 65 11 76; www.camping-bellavista.com; per person €5.50-8, tent €3-3.50, car €2.50-3; ☞ Apr-mid-Oct) A spacious campsite with chalets and roomy tent-sites. It's about 500m to the beach, but it's often less hectic than Calvi's other campgrounds.

HOTELS

Hôtel Le Belvedere (☎ 04 95 65 01 25; www.calvi-location.fr; place Christophe Colomb; d €47-117, tr €72-132; ☞) With a top-town position and top-notch views of the citadel and Golfe de Calvi, this hotel has been refurbished in spick-and-span corporate style – wooden floors and Mediterranean accents throughout, with a zippy lift and a pleasant panoramic breakfast room overlooking the bay. Wi-fi costs €3 per half-hour. No credit cards.

Hôtel Les Arbousiers (☎ 04 95 65 04 47; hotel.lesarbousiers@wanadoo.fr; rte du Pietramaggiore; d €50-76; ☞) Not the most charming choice, but at least you won't have to stump up a second mortgage. Lodged behind the rosy-pink walls are squarish motel-style rooms, some with small balconies over the hotel courtyard. The owners speak lots of languages, and the beach is a stroll away.

Hôtel Christophe Colomb (☎ 04 95 65 06 04; www.calvi-location.fr; place Bel Ombrà; d €55-115, tr €85-135; ☞) Run by the same management as the Belvedere (above), this is another reasonably priced option within striking distance of the citadel. Rooms are comfortable if unremarkable: Mediterranean colourwashes and cheery fabrics keep things jolly, and there's a pleasant ground-floor lounge where you can hook up to the hotel's wi-fi.

Hôtel Le Magnolia (☎ 04 95 65 19 16; www.hotel-le-magnolia.com; rue Alsace Lorraine; r €60-140) An oasis

from the harbourside fizz, set behind a walled courtyard and a handsome magnolia tree. Rooms are old, plain and on the small side, but boast more character than most in Calvi – definitely fork out for the sea-view rooms.

Hôtel La Villa (☎ 04 95 65 10 10; www.hotel-lavilla.com; r from €200) If you're going to spend top dollar in Calvi, head straight for this lavish hilltop hideaway, brimming with boutique trappings. Clean lines, cappuccino-and-chocolate colour schemes, designer fabrics and minimalist motifs distinguish the rooms, while the exterior facilities include spas, tennis courts, a Michelin-starred restaurant and one of the most fabulous infinity pools you could ever hope to see. Seriously swanky.

Eating

Calvi's quayside is chock-a-bloc with restaurants, but many focus more on the ocean ambience than on the quality of the food.

Île de Beauté (☎ 04 95 65 00 46; quai Landry; mains €15-35; ☞ lunch & dinner mid-Mar-Dec) As chic as any Côte d'Azur bistro, this seafood palace oozes designer style. Monochrome decor (black umbrellas, see-through chairs, ice-white tablecloths) set the tone for Calvi's finest *fruits de mer* – authentic *bouillabaisse* (fish chowder), *marmite de pêcheurs* (fishermen's stew) and any dozen of the deep you could wish for.

U Minellu (☎ 04 95 65 05 52; Traverse à l'Église; menus from €17; ☞ lunch & dinner, closed Sun in winter) For down-to-earth cooking, you can't top this family-run operation opposite Église Ste-Marie Majeure. Duck under the ramshackle awning and prepare for hearty portions of wild boar stew, Brocciu cannelloni and chestnut cake.

Le Jardin (☎ 04 95 65 19 16; rue Alsace Lorraine; mains €18-28, menus €21/27) You couldn't ask for a more romantic setting than the Magnolia Hotel's

(opposite) courtyard restaurant, sheltering beneath the boughs of the eponymous tree. Corsican produce and seafood take centre stage, with a *menu* including crayfish stew, stir-fried scallops and lobster in 'hell-fire' sauce.

U Callelu (☎ 04 95 65 22 18; quai Landry; menu €23, mains €12-28) The *menu* chases the changing seasons at this homespun eatery, run with passion and flair by a born-and-bred islander who tracks down the best local ingredients for his dishes: meat and veg from the market, wine direct from the vineyards, fish straight off the boats. Who needs sexy decor when the food's this good?

Emile's (☎ 04 95 65 09 60; quai Landry; menus €23-120, mains €24-60; ☺ lunch & dinner Apr, dinner May-Oct) If you want to blow the budget, climb the stairs from the quayside to this gastronomic sanctuary. Roast pigeon, caviar and langoustines grace the super-chic *carte* (menu), or you can let the chef choose the dishes with the multicourse 'signature' *menu* (€120).

QUICK EATS & SELF-CATERING

Piping-hot panini, flatbreads and stuffed pittas are available from the *sandwicherie* **Best Of** (1 rue Clemenceau; sandwiches €4-7; ☺ 11.30am-10pm). You can pick up fresh fruit and veg from the **Alimentation du Golfe** (rue Clemenceau; ☺ Apr-Oct) across the street or the **covered market** (marché couvert; ☺ 8am-noon Mon-Sat) near Église Ste-Marie Majeure. If you're doing a big shop, you'll be better off at the **Super U** (av Christophe Colomb) near the bus station.

For souvenirs and Corsican goodies, seek out **Annie Traiteur** (rue Clemenceau; ☺ Apr-Oct), where the shelves are creaking with *artisanal* jams, honeys, Corsican charcuterie and umpteen varieties of *canistrelli* (sweet Corsican biscuits).

Drinking & Entertainment

There are plenty of places around town at which to whet your whistle: the best views are from the laid-back **Bar de la Tour** (☎ 04 95 46 39 74) at the end of the quay, which serves cocktails, cold beers and chilled wine till late, but for historical provenance swing by **Chez Tao** (☎ 04 95 65 00 73; ☺ May-Oct), inside the citadel. It's a super-smooth piano bar that was founded in 1935 by Tao Kanbey de Kerekoff, an escaping member of the Russian White Cavalry, and it still attracts hedonistic hipsters seven decades later.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Seven kilometres southeast of town is **Aéroport Calvi Ste-Catherine** (☎ 04 95 65 88 88; www.calvi.aeroport

.fr), with regular Air France (CCM) flights to Nice, Marseille and Paris Orly, plus selected seasonal flights. There's no airport bus: taxis with **Radio Taxis Calvis** (☎ 04 95 65 30 36) or **Association Abeille Taxis** (☎ 04 95 65 03 10) cost about €25.

BOAT

Calvi's ferry terminal is at the northeastern end of quai Landry, with regular ferries to Nice offered by SNCM and Corsica Ferries.

Ferry tickets can be bought at the port two hours before departure. At other times, SNCM tickets are handled by **Tramar** (☎ 04 95 65 01 38; quai Landry; ☺ 9am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat). Tickets for Corsica Ferries are handled by **Les Beaux Voyages** (☎ 04 95 65 15 02; place de la Porteuse d'Eau).

BUS

Les Beaux Voyages (☎ 04 95 65 15 02; place de la Porteuse d'Eau) runs daily buses to Bastia (€16, two hours) via Algajola and Île Rousse (€4, 15 minutes).

Autocars Ceccaldi (SAIB Autocars; ☎ 04 95 22 41 99; www.autocarsiledebeaute.com) runs a daily bus to Porto (€17, 2¼ hours) leaving from opposite the Super U supermarket in Calvi and the main road opposite the pharmacy in Porto. There's one bus daily from July to mid-September. From mid-May to June, and late September, there's no bus on Sundays. There's no service at all from October to mid-May.

TRAIN

Calvi's **train station** (☎ 04 95 65 00 61; ☺ to 7.30pm) has connections to Ajaccio (€27.80, five hours, two daily) via Corte (€15.10, four hours two daily). You'll need to change trains at Ponte-Lecchia. There are also two daily trains to Bastia (€18.10, three hours).

From April to October, the CFC's **Tramway de la Balagne** clatters along the coast between Calvi and Île Rousse (45 minutes). The line has three sectors – you need one ticket for each sector. *Carnets* (books) of six tickets (€8) are sold at stations.

PORTO TO AJACCIO

PORTO (PORTU)

pop 250

Lodged at the base of a thickly forested valley trammelled on either side by crimson peaks, Porto has one of the most dramatic locations of any of Corsica's westerly ports. Buzzing

in season and practically deserted in winter, it's a fantastic spot for exploring the shimmering seas around the Réserve Naturelle de Scandola, a UNESCO-protected marine reservation (the only one in Corsica), or venturing inland to the plunging canyons around the Gorges de Spelunca and the valley villages of Ota and Évisa (p924).

Orientation

Porto is split into three sections: the seaside marina; the Vaita quarter (Guaita in Corsican), 800m further uphill; and the main road from Calvi, 1.3km from the sea. There are shops, hotels and restaurants in all three districts.

Information

Le Moulin (internet access per 1/2hr €5/8; ☎ 2pm-2am Apr-Oct, 2-10pm Oct-Mar) Pricy cybercafé downhill from Camping Les Oliviers.

Post Office Next to Hôtel Lonza in Vaita.

Tourist Office (☎ 04 95 26 10 55; www.porto-tourisme.com, in French; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat Jun-Sep, 9am-6pm Mon-Sat Apr & May, 9am-5pm Mon-Fri Oct-Mar) Just behind the marina's upper car park.

Sights & Activities

Porto's main sights are all dotted around the harbour. Once you've climbed the russet-coloured rocks up to the **Genoese tower** (adult/under 12yr €2.50/free; ☎ 9am-9pm Jul & Aug, 11am-7pm Sep-Jun), you can stroll round to the bustling marina, from where an arched footbridge crosses the estuary to a **eucalyptus grove** and Porto's pebbly patch of beach. Fish-fanatics can drop by the **Aquarium de la Poudrière** (☎ 04 95 26 19 24; adult/7-12yr €5.50/3, joint ticket with Tour Génôise €6.50/3), which houses fishy specimens from around the Golfe de Porto.

The best way to appreciate Porto's beautiful location is (ironically) by leaving it: the view of Porto's natural harbour and the surrounding coastline from way out to sea is utterly unforgettable, and if you have the time it's well worth exploring further afield to the **Réserve Naturelle de Scandola** and the tiny seaside village of **Girolata**, accessible only on foot or by boat.

BOAT TRIPS

Lots of operators based around Porto's marina offer boat trips from April to October. Expect to pay €20 to €25 for trips to the Calanques, or €35 to €45 for trips including Réserve

Naturelle de Scandola (Scandola Nature Reserve) and Girolata. Most offer informative commentaries (usually in French) – a few of the captains speak passable English, so ask at the quay before booking your boat. Some operators located near the quayside:

Nave Va (☎ 04 95 26 15 16; www.naveva.com) The slickest operator with one of the poshest (and biggest) boats. Info from Restaurant Les Flots Bleus.

Pass'Partout (☎ 06 75 99 13 15; www.lepasspartout.com) Smaller firm with a more personal feel. Info from Restaurant Le Cyrnée.

Porto Linea (☎ 04 95 21 52 22; www.portolinea.com) Trips to the Calanques, plus Scandola and Girolata aboard the twin Mare Nostrum vessels. Info from Hôtel Monte Rosso.

Via Mare (☎ 06 07 28 72 72) Experienced operator with a selection of trips and good commentaries. Info from Hôtel Le Golfe.

BOAT HIRE

Hiring your own vessel can be a good way to escape the crowds, but you'll obviously miss out on the local knowledge. Smaller vessels don't require a licence – most places charge the same fees, at around €75/115 per half/full day.

Patrick & Toussaint (☎ 06 81 41 70 03; www.patrickettoussaint.com)

Porto Bateaux Locations (☎ 06 88 84 49 87; www.portobateaulocation.com)

DIVING

Porto is one of the island's best-known diving spots. If you're a qualified submariner you'll be in seventh heaven, especially around the Capo Rasso area and the edges of the Scandola reserve – although diving within the protected zone itself is strictly forbidden. Porto is well stocked with accredited outfits, all offering single- and multi-trip dives (from around €35, including equipment) as well as courses and *baptême* (introductory) sessions.

Centre de Plongée du Golfe de Porto (☎ 04 95 26 10 29; www.plongeeporto.com; Porto Marina; ☎ Easter-Nov)

École de Plongée Génération Bleue (☎ 04 95 26 24 88; www.generation-bleue.com; Porto Marina; ☎ May-Oct)

Méditerranée Porto Sub (MPS; ☎ 04 95 26 19 47; www.plongeeocese.fr; Porto Marina; ☎ mid-Apr–Sep)

HIKING

There are many stunning hikes around Porto, Ota and Évisa, 28 of which are detailed in *Hikes & Walks in the Area of Porto* (€2.50), available from the tourist office.

CORSICAN ESSENTIALS

If there's one thing that gets the Corsicans fired up, it's their food. We've listed a few delicacies to look out for on your travels, but this is really just a start – you'll find lots of other variations on traditional dishes scattered across the island, so it's well worth asking for local recommendations.

Cheese

King of the island's cheeses is Brocciu, a crumbly white ewes'- or goats'-milk cheese protected by its own *Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée* (AOC), and used in lots of Corsican dishes. The classics to try are *omelette au brocciu* and *cannelloni au brocciu*.

Chestnuts

Since the 16th century, Corsicans have been lovingly tending their *chataigniers* (chestnut trees), sometimes affectionately dubbed *l'arbre à pain* (the bread tree). Look out for chestnut fritters, chestnut flour, chestnut mousse, chestnut jam, chestnut biscuits – and even chestnut beer (Pietra).

Sausages

Lonzu, *figatellu*, *coppu*, *salsiccia* – Corsica has more varieties of sausage than you could count on one trotter, but make sure you're getting the real McCoy. To avoid knock-offs, buy only from good delis, local market stalls or high-quality restaurants.

Wild boar

Sanglier (wild boar) is traditionally eaten in the rich meaty stew known as *civet de sanglier*, and is a must-try for committed carnivores.

Wine

Corsica's wines are rapidly growing in reputation, with nine AOC-labelled areas and over 7000 hectares of vines on the islands: areas to watch out for are Patrimonio, Cap Corse, Ajaccio and Sartène.

Corsica Cola

Corsica's own answer to 'the real thing', produced by the makers of Pietra beer and dubbed 'the cola for hotheads' by the adverts. Can you taste the difference? Well yes, frankly.

Oursin

Corsica is renowned for its fantastic shellfish, but gastronomic adventurers should try the local speciality, *oursin* (sea urchin). These spiny critters definitely look as though they don't want to be eaten, but the local fishermen swear by 'em.

Sleeping

Even by Corsican standards, Porto's hotel prices are truly out of this world in July and August, and many places shut up shop between November and March.

Camping Sol e Vista (☎ 04 95 26 15 71; www.camping-sol-e-vista.com; per person €5.50-5.70, tent €2.20-2.50, car €2.20-2.50, 4-bed chalet per week €400-550) Climbing the hillside beside the Spar supermarket, this terraced campground is basic but still very attractive, with spacious sites, laundry facilities and a small café.

Camping Les Oliviers (☎ 04 95 26 14 49; www.camping-lesoliviers.com; per person €6.80-9.10, tent €3-6.50, car €2.50-

3.50, 5-bed chalet per week €429-826; ☒ late Mar-early Nov; 🏠) Idyllically set among overhanging olive trees, this campsite's deluxe facilities include a gym, pizzeria and rock-surround swimming pool, plus wooden chalets straight out of *Little House on the Prairie*. Expect company in the high season.

Bon Accueil (☎ 04 95 26 19 50; BA20150@aol.com; Vaita; d €41-51; 🏠) About the cheapest option in town, removed from the harbour hustle above a café-cum-souvenir shop in Vaita. For this kind of cash you can expect clean, spartan rooms with minimal frills: bag a balcony room and you won't even notice the lack of furniture.

Le Belvedere (☎ 04 95 26 12 01; www.hotel-le-belvedere.com; d €45-110; 🏠) Our pick of the seemingly endless hotels around Porto's marina (as long as you're not staying in high summer, when prices skyrocket). It's modern and functional, and has top-drawer bay-view balconies, shiny bathroom suites, ice-cold air-con and a sunset aspect worth triple the price.

M'Hôtel Corsica (☎ 04 95 26 10 89; www.hotel-corsica-porto.com; d €55-85; 🏠) Get past the livid-pink facade and you'll be hard-pushed to find a better-value spot in Porto. It's a reliable hotel occupying a valley spot framed by eucalyptus, riotous plants and a top-drawer pool (squint a bit and it's Caribbeanesque). Admittedly, the decor's dated, but the valley views are super; kitchenettes and air-con are optional extras.

Le Colombo (☎ 04 95 26 10 14; www.hotelcolombo.com, in French; rte de Calvi; d incl breakfast €62-127; 🏠 Apr-Oct; 🏠) A cut above Porto's cookie-cutter condo-hotels, this quirky little place has an eclectic jumble of rooms. Most are a soothing sky-blue with views of garden, sea and mountain, supplemented by offbeat touches such as tree-branch table lamps and a Corsican brekkie served up by the *patronne* (owner).

Eating

Le Sud (☎ 04 95 26 14 11; mains €24-28; 🏠 Apr-Oct) An excellent fish and seafood restaurant with Mediterranean overtones and a lovely verandah overlooking the port and watchtower. Try the *lotte au chorizo* (monkfish with chorizo) or plump for the fish of the day (decent value at €7 per 100g).

Self-caterers have two side-by-side supermarkets: **Spar** (🕒 8.30am-12.30pm & 3-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-12.15pm Sun) and **Banco** (🕒 8.30am-12.30pm & 3-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-12.30pm Sun) on the main Calvi road, plus an excellent bakery in Vaita.

Getting There & Around

Autocars Ceccaldi (☎ 04 95 22 41 99) operates buses from Porto to Ajaccio (€11, 2½ hours, two daily, no Sunday buses except from July to mid-September), stopping at Piana and Cargèse en route. For buses from Porto to Calvi, see p921).

Transports Mordiconi (☎ 04 95 48 00 44) links Porto with Ota (€4) and Èvisa (€8), the Col de Vergio (€14, 2¼ hours) and Corte (€20, 2¾ hours) once daily except on Sundays from July

to mid-September. Buses leave from behind the beach near the Restaurant Mini-Golf.

Opposite the supermarkets, **Porto Locations** (☎/fax 04 95 26 10 13) hires out bikes (€15/58 per day/week), scooters (€46/198) and cars (€58/298).

For a taxi contact **Chez Félix** (☎ 04 95 26 12 92).

OTA & ÈVISA

pop 300

Hidden in the hills inland from Porto, the twin villages of Ota and Èvisa dangle defiantly above a plunging canyon blanketed with thick woods of pine, oak and chestnut, hemmed in by sky-reaching peaks and plunging defiles. Quintessentially Corsican, these magical mountain villages are a haven for hikers, positioned halfway along the Mare e Monti trail and within striking distance of the Forêt d'Aitone and Corsica's answer to the Grand Canyon – the Gorges de Spelunca.

The Porto tourist office (see p922) provides information on Èvisa, Ota and the surrounding areas, including tips on hiking trails.

Sights & Activities

Carpeting the slopes east of Èvisa is the **Forêt d'Aitone**, home of Corsica's most impressive stands of Laricio pines. These arrow-straight, 60m-high trees once provided beams and masts for Genoese ships. The Èvisa area is also famous for its chestnuts (which have been granted their very own AOC label), and every year the village celebrates its nutty produce at the **Fête du Marron** in November.

Between Ota and Èvisa plunges the unforgettable **Gorges de Spelunca**, one of the deepest natural canyons in Corsica. Until the D84 was carved out from the mountainside, the only link between the villages was a tiny mule track via two Genoese bridges, the Ponte Vecchju and Ponte Zaghlia. The track is now part of the Mare e Monti hiking trail. The stretch between Ota and Èvisa makes a fantastic day-hike, winding along the valley floor past the rushing River Porto and soaring orange cliffs, some more than a kilometre high. The whole Ota-Èvisa route takes about five hours return, or you can follow the two-hour section between the bridges: pick the trail up at the arched road-bridge 2km east of Ota.

There are lots of other wonderful hikes in the area, including the **Sentier de Chataignes** (2½

hours, 7km return from Évisa), which winds through chestnut forest and mountain pools to the crashing Cascades d'Aitone (Aitone Falls, 7km return). There are also several trails venturing off from the 1477m-high **Col de Vergio**.

Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel L'Aitone (☎ 04 95 26 20 04; www.hotel-aitone.com, in French; d €35-110; ☹ Feb-Nov; 📶 P) Plonked at the top of Évisa, the endearingly old-world Aitone feels like it's dropped out of a wormhole to the 19th century. The rooms are plainly furnished and pretty basic (cheaper rooms have a shared loo), and the rustic restaurant – complete with roaring fire and sweeping valley view – is hardly haute cuisine (mains €12 to €20), but somehow it's still delightful. Make sure you get a valley outlook and leave time to lounge in the lovely panoramic pool.

La Châtaigneraie (☎ 04 95 26 24 47; www.hotel-la-chataigneraie.com, in French; d €40-53, tr €59-67) In the lower part of the village, on the left-hand side as you drive up from Ota, this sweet little stone house is run by an engaging American-Corsican couple (and their energetic kids): expect apple-green shutters, chintzy, comfy rooms and home-cooked food prepared by *la patronne*.

If you're tramping on the trail, you'll find cut-price *gîte* beds and solid food at **Chez Félix** (☎ 04 95 26 12 92; place de la Fontaine; dm €13) and **Chez Marie** (☎ 04 95 26 11 37; dm €16), both in Ota.

Getting There & Away

There's a daily bus from Monday to Saturday from Évisa to Porto (€8, 40 minutes) and Corte (€17, two hours).

PIANA

pop 500

Teetering above the Golfe de Porto and surrounded by the scarlet pillars of Les Calanques, Piana makes for a less frenzied base than nearby Porto in the high season, and is a useful launching pad for exploring the idyllic beaches of **Ficajola** (4km from Piana) and **Arone** (11km southwest on the D824). The town's main landmark is the Église Ste-Marie, the focus for the annual Good Friday procession of La Granitola.

The **Tourist Office** (Syndicat d'Initiative ☎ 04 95 27 84 42; www.sipiana.com; place Mairie; ☹ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri) is next to the post office.

Piana has a limited supply of hotels.

Le Scandola (☎ 04 95 27 80 07; www.hotelscandola.com; d €50-100), uphill from the village on the left-hand side of the D81 as you drive towards Cargèse, near the turn-off to Ficajola, might resemble a Costa del Sol reject, but give it a chance; the rooms are bright and breezy, bathrooms are spotless, and the balconies have some of the best views in town.

The best budget option is **Hôtel Continental** (☎ 04 95 27 83 12; www.continentalpiana.com; d €54-80, tr €64-67; ☹ Apr-Sep), in the middle of Piana on the main road near the petrol station, which has two buildings separated by a grassy garden. The blue-shuttered 19th-century townhouse has the older rooms; more modern, beach-style rooms (with town-view balconies) are found in the annexe.

Corsica's original luxury hotel, **Hôtel des Roches Rouges** (☎ 04 95 27 81 81; www.lesrochesrouges.com; D81; d €90-105, tr €135, q €129-160; ☹ mid-Mar–mid-Nov), built in 1912, is still one of the most idyllic places to stay on the island. It's on the right-hand side of the D81 as you drive from Porto, just before Piana. The rambling corridors and musty rooms are full of early-20th-century ambience, despite modern en suites, wi-fi and phone lines – you half expect Hercule Poirot to wander round the corner twiddling his moustache. Don't even consider cutting costs by not taking a sea-view room – you'll regret it.

Buses between Porto and Ajaccio stop near the church and the post office.

LES CALANQUES

Flaming fiery red in the sunlight, the crimson cliffs and weird rock pillars of Les Calanques de Piana (E Calanche in Corsican) are one of Corsica's most photogenic sights, carved out by centuries of sun, wind and rain. Several trails wind their way around these dramatic rock formations, many of which start near the Pont de Mezzanu, a road bridge near the Chalet des Roches Bleues souvenir shop, about 3km from Piana along the D81. The Piana tourist office has a free leaflet detailing more walks.

Four trails begin nearby:

Chemin des Muletiers The old 'Mule-Drivers' Trail' that once linked Piana and Ota is a classic, with some of the best Calanche views; look out for the signed trailhead 50m from the Pont de Mezzanu.

Chemin du Château Fort A one-hour trail to a fortress-shaped rock with stunning views of the Golfe de Porto. The trailhead is on the D81 beside the distinctive Tête de Chien (Dog's Head) rock, 3.5km east of Piana.

La Forêt de Piana Three possible routes through pine and chestnut woods, starting about 1.5km from Porto near the Pont de Mezzanu.

La Tour de Capo Rosso A stiff three-hour walk to the Tour de Turghiu (331m) and the Capo Rosso, Corsica's most westerly point. The trail starts about 6km from Piana on the D824 towards Arone.

CARGÈSE (CARGHJESE)

pop 900

With its whitewashed houses and sunbaked streets, Cargèse feels more like a Grecian hilltop village than a Corsican harbour – this is hardly surprising, since the village was founded by refugee Greeks fleeing their Ottoman-controlled homeland in the 19th century. The town is known for its **twin churches** – one Eastern (Orthodox), the other Western (Catholic) – that eye each other across vegetable plots, like boxers squaring up for a bout. The interior of the 19th-century Greek church contains original relics carried across by settlers from their Peloponnese homeland.

The **tourist office** (☎ 04 95 26 41 31; www.cargese.net; rue du Docteur Dragacci; ☎ 9am–7pm Jun–Sep, 9am–12.30pm & 2.30–6pm Mon–Sat Oct–May) is a little way north of the churches, while the town's harbour is downhill to the south. Boat trips with **Nave Va** (☎ 04 95 28 02 66; www.naveva.com) and **Crosières Grand Bleu** (☎ 04 95 26 40 24) sail to Scandola, Girolata and Les Calanques in summer.

One kilometre north of Cargèse is the small strip of Plage de Pero, overlooked by a couple of Genoese watchtowers, but for more space you'll need to push on south towards the popular bay of Sagone, about 10km further along the coastal D81.

Hôtel Cymos (☎ 04 95 26 49 47; www.torraccia.com, in French; rue de la République; d €35–60), a lemon-yellow townhouse in the heart of Cargèse, has freshly decorated, good-value rooms. The pick of these have dinky balconies teetering over the town's rooftops.

Tumble straight from your room onto the soft sands of Pero beach at lovely little **Hôtel Thalassa** (☎ 04 95 26 40 08; www.thalassalura.com; d €70–80; ☎ May–Sep; ☐), which is simply but sweetly furnished with views of garden and ocean. There are great weekly and half-board deals if you fancy sticking around to soak up the sunshine.

Two daily buses from Ota (1½ hours) via Porto (one hour) to Ajaccio (one hour) stop in front of the post office. There are no buses on Sunday except in July and August.

AJACCIO (AJACCIU)

pop 52,880

The spectre of Corsica's great (little) general looms over the elegant port city of Ajaccio (pronounced a-zhaks-jo). Napoléon Bonaparte was born here in 1769, and the city is dotted with relics relating to the diminutive dictator, from his childhood home to seafront statues, historic museums and countless street-names. Often dubbed *La Cité Impériale* in recognition of its historic importance, Ajaccio is the capital of the Corse-du-Sud *département* and is the island's main metropolis.

Orientation

Ajaccio's main street, *cours Napoléon*, stretches from place de Gaulle northwards to the train station and beyond. The old city is south of place Foch. The port is on the eastern side of town, from where a promenade leads west along *plage St-François*.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Album (☎ 04 95 21 81 18; 2 place Foch; ☎ 8.30am–noon & 2.30–7pm Mon–Sat, 8.30am–noon Sun Oct–May)

EMERGENCY

Centre Hospitalier Notre-Dame de la Miséricorde

(☎ 04 95 29 90 90; 27 av de l'Impératrice Eugénie; ☎ 24hr)

Police Station (☎ 04 95 11 17 17; rue Général Fiorella)

INTERNET ACCESS

Cyber Espace (rue Docteur Versini; per 30min/1hr €2/3; ☎ 10am–12.30am Mon–Sat)

LAUNDRY

Lavomatique (rue du Maréchal Ornano; ☎ 8am–10pm)

MONEY

Banks with ATMs are found along place de Gaulle, place Foch and *cours Napoléon*.

POST

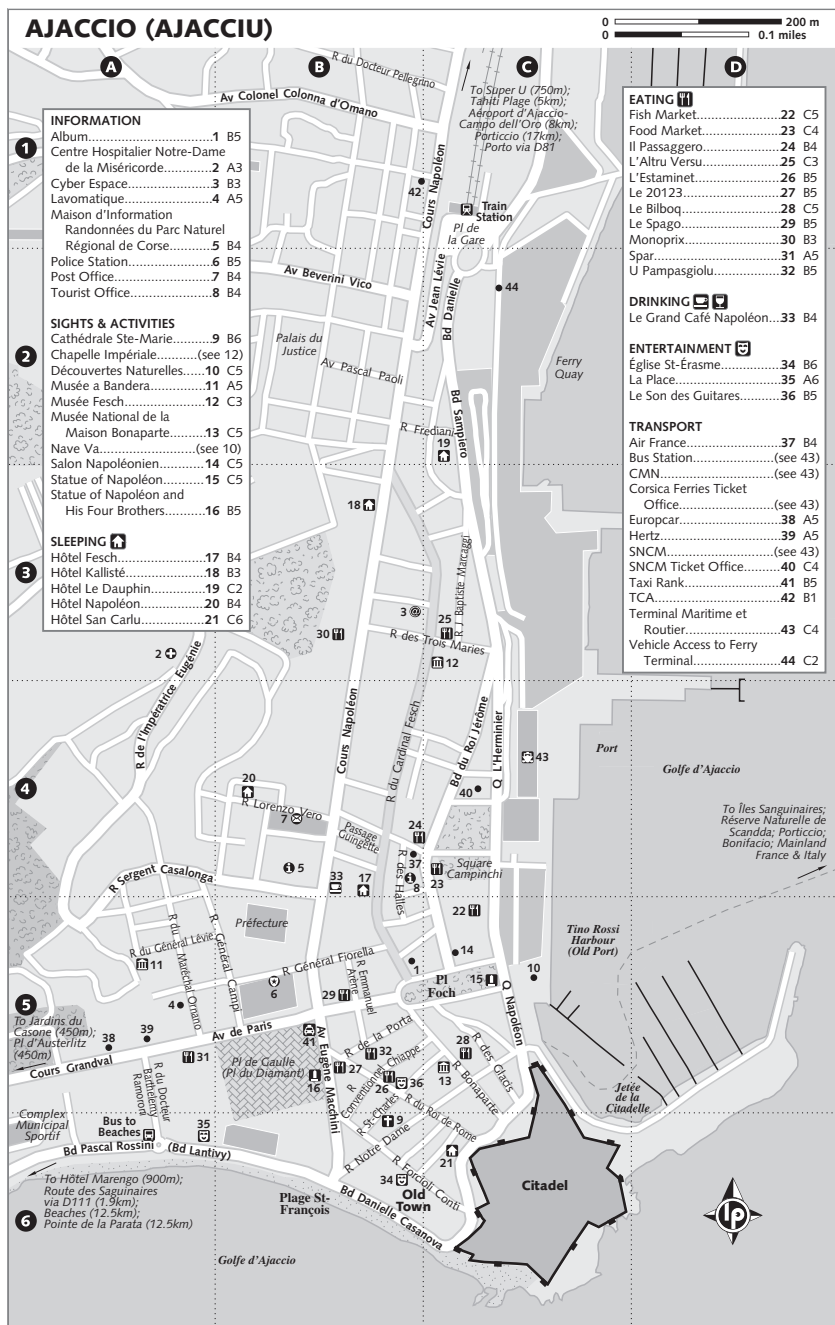
Post Office (13 *cours Napoléon*)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist Office (☎ 04 95 51 53 03; www.ajaccio-tourisme.com; 3 bd du Roi Jérôme; ☎ 9am–6pm Mon–Sat, 9am–1pm Sun Jun–Sep, 8.30–11.30am & 1.30–4pm Mon–Fri Oct–May) Free internet kiosk.

Maison d'Information Randonnées du Parc Naturel Régional de Corse (☎ 04 95 51 79 10; www.parc-naturel-corse.com; 2 rue Sergent Casalonga;

☎ 8am–noon & 2–6pm Mon–Fri Jun–Sep, 8am–noon &



2-5pm Oct-May) Information on Parc Naturel Régional de Corse and its hiking trails.

Sights

Despite Ajaccio's endless Napoléonic connections, *le petit caporal's* attitude to his home island was rather ambivalent. Born to an Italian father and a Corsican mother, and largely educated in France (where he was mercilessly mocked for his provincial Corsican accent), Napoléon actually spent relatively little time on the island, and never returned following his coronation as Emperor of France in 1804. But there's no doubt that Napoléon's Corsican roots exerted a powerful hold on his imagination – famously, while exiled on Elba, he is said to have claimed he could recognise his homeland purely from the scent of the maquis.

The story begins at the **Musée National de la Maison Bonaparte** (☎ 04 95 21 43 89; rue St-Charles; adult/concession €5/3.50; 🕒 2-5.50pm Mon, 9-11.30am & 2-5.30pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep, 2-4.15pm Mon, 10-11.30am & 2-4.15pm Tue-Sun Oct-Mar), where Napoléon was born and spent his first nine years. Ransacked by Corsican nationalists in 1793, requisitioned by English troops from 1794 to 1796, and eventually rebuilt by Napoléon's mother, the house became a place of pilgrimage for French revolutionaries, and visitors are still encouraged to observe suitably hushed tones. Among the period furniture and information panels, look out for Napoléon's baptismal certificate; a glass medallion containing a lock of his hair; and a trio of eerie death masks that bring you face-to-face with Corsica's most celebrated son. Next door, the boutique sells souvenirs ranging from lead soldiers and letter-openers to a replica of the general's trademark hat.

On the 1st floor of the **Hôtel de Ville**, the **Salon Napoléonien** (☎ 04 95 21 90 15; place Foch; adult/child €2.30/free; 🕒 9-11.45am & 2-5.45pm Mon-Fri mid-Jun–mid-Sep, 9-11.45am & 2-4.45pm Mon-Fri mid-Sep–mid-Jun) exhibits Napoléonic medals, portraits and busts, as well as a fabulously frescoed ceiling of Napoléon and entourage. Outside on place Foch is a **statue** depicting the emperor flanked by lions, while on place de Gaulle, a mounted Napoléon stands surrounded by his four brothers.

The 16th-century **Cathédrale Ste-Marie** (rue Forcioli Conti; 🕒 hr vary) contains Napoléon's baptismal font and the *Vierge au Sacré-Cœur* (Virgin of the Sacred Heart) by Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863).

Established by Napoléon's uncle, the **Musée Fesch** (rue du Cardinal Fesch), one of the island's flagship museums, is currently closed for major renovations until late 2009. The next-door **Chapelle Impériale**, built in the 1850s as a sepulchre for the Bonaparte family, was also closed at the time of writing.

Last stop is place d'Austerlitz and the **Jardins du Casone**, 800m west of place Foch, home to the city's grandest Napoléonic monument. It's a huge stone plinth, inscribed with his battles and other achievements, crowned by a replica of the statue found on place Vendôme in Paris (p141).

After all that, you might be glad to visit an entirely Napoléon-free zone, so drop by the quirky **Musée a Bandera** (☎ 04 95 51 07 34; 1 rue du Général Lévie; adult/student €4/2.60; 🕒 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon Sun Jul–mid-Sep, 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat mid-Sep–Jun), which explores Corsican history up to WWII.

CITÉ IMPÉRIALE

The citadel is normally off-limits to the public, but the tourist office runs **guided tours** from April to October at 10pm (adult/under 18 years €10/8).

BEACHES

The town's most popular beach, Plage de Ricanto, popularly known as **Tahiti Plage**, is 5km east of town towards the airport, served by bus 1. A series of small beaches west of Ajaccio (Ariane, Neptune, Palm Beach and Marinella) are served by bus 5 from the town centre, terminating at the car park on Pointe de la Parata, 12km west of the city. From the point you'll have a grandstand view of the **Îles Sanguinaires** (Bloody Islands), so named because of their vivid crimson colours at sunset.

Beach bums will prefer the sands of **Porticcio**, 17km across the bay from Ajaccio, but be warned – in the high season the wind-breaks are packed in sardine-tight, so look elsewhere if you're after seaside seclusion. Both of Ajaccio's boat companies (see Tours, below) run a summer ferry service (€5/8 single/return, 30 minutes).

Tours

Two companies run boat trips around the Golfe d'Ajaccio and the Îles Sanguinaires (€25), and excursions to the Scandola Nature Reserve (adult/child costs €50/35), departing daily from the quayside opposite place Foch.

Découvertes Naturelles (☎ 06 24 69 48 80; www.promenades-en-mer.org; ☹ May-Sep) Also offers a sunset cruise to the Îles Sanguinaires (€25), returning around 10pm.
Nave Va (☎ 04 95 51 31 31; www.naveva.com; ☹ May-Sep) Also offers a cultural tour (adult/child costs €28/20) and a voyage down to Bonifacio (€57/40), including a four-hour stop on shore.

Festivals & Events

Like many of Corsica's towns, Ajaccio has a line-up of annual festivities that adds some extra spice to the town's streets.

Chants Polyphoniques Corsican concerts are held every Wednesday at 7pm in Église St-Érasme.

Festival de la St-Érasme Fishy festival in honour of the patron saint of pêcheurs, held around 2 June.

Fêtes Napoléoniennes Ajaccio's biggest bash celebrates Napoléon's birthday on 15 August, with military-themed parades, street spectacles and a huge fireworks display.

La relève de la Garde Impériale Every Thursday at 7pm in summer, you can watch the pomp and ceremony of the changing of the guard on place Foch in front of the town hall.

Sleeping

Ajaccio's hotels are steeply priced, especially in the high season – book well ahead for big events such as the WRC Car Rally and the Fêtes Napoléoniennes.

ourpick Hôtel Kallisté (☎ 04 95 51 34 45; www.hotel-kalliste-ajaccio.com, in French; 51 cours Napoléon; s €56-69, d €64-79, tr €79-99; ☹ ☑ ☒ ☓) Exposed brick, neutral tones, terracotta tiles and a funky glass lift conjure a neo-boutique feel at the Kallisté. Double-glazing and electric shutters keep out the traffic hum from nearby cours Napoléon, and the facilities are fab – wi-fi, satellite TV, an on-site laundry and a stonking buffet brekkie. Unfortunately, the secret's out, so book ahead.

Hôtel Marengo (☎ 04 95 21 43 66; www.hotel-marengo.com; 2 rue Marengo; d €61-79, tr €75-95; ☹) For something more personal, try this jolly, hospitably run little bolthole. Country prints and vintage furniture throughout, plus pastel rooms (all with balconies) and a quiet flower-filled courtyard, all just a stroll from the beach.

Hôtel Fesch (☎ 04 95 51 62 62; www.hotel-fesch.com; 7 rue du Cardinal Fesch; s €61-86, d €66-97, tr €87-122; ☹ closed mid-Dec–mid-Jan; ☹) A grand old dame that's starting to show her years, but if it's old-fashioned service and traditional rooms you're after, the Fesch fits the bill. Free wi-fi (ask for the code) and flat-screen TVs meet old-

fashioned furniture in the 77 rooms, but the cheaper rooms are poky (wheelchair users and baggage-luggers won't appreciate the weird 1st-floor lift).

Hôtel San Carlu (☎ 04 95 21 13 84; www.hotel-san-carlu.com; 8 bd Danielle Casanova; s €76-86, d €85-99; ☹) About the only place to stay in the old city, the San Carlu occupies a fine position opposite the citadel – but don't even think about getting a room without a view, as the motel-style decor is hardly cutting edge.

Other options:

Hôtel Le Dauphin (☎ 04 95 21 12 94; www.ledauphin-hotel.com; 11 bd Sampiero; s €52-59, d €60-79, tr €79-96; ☹) Ajaccio's idea of a budget hotel, with cheap(ish), functional rooms, some with port-view balconies overlooking the hectic road and ground-floor café-bar.

Hôtel Napoléon (☎ 04 95 5154 00; www.hotel-napoleon-ajaccio.fr; 4 rue Lorenzo Vero; s €65-92, d €77-109; ☹ ☐) Modernish rooms in a quiet spot, all with complimentary wi-fi, LCD TVs and safes.

Eating

Tiny street-side restaurants cram the old quarter, and eating out there on a sultry summer night is an experience not to be missed.

Il Passaggero (☎ 04 95 21 30 52; 3 bd du Roi Jérôme; mains €12-18; ☹ daily) Hip new Italian-cum-Mediterranean restaurant by the harbour, specialising in authentic pastas, fresh fish and inventive risottos – try the one made with *oursin* (sea urchin).

Le Spago (☎ 04 95 21 15 71; rue Emmanuel Arène; mains €14-22; ☹ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner Sat) Sleekly styled bistro with a metropolitan edge, from the space-age lime-green chairs to the customised oil dispensers and retro lighting. Fusion food fills the *carte* – chicken kebabs, pesto gnocchi, Moroccan *tajines* (slow-cooked meat and vegetable stews) – and the clientele is cool and classy.

U Pampasgiolu (☎ 06 09 39 26 92; 15 rue de la Porta; mains €14-24, platters €26-27; ☹ dinner) The rustic arch-vaulted dining room of this Ajaccio institution is packed with punters nearly every night of the week. They come for the first-rate Corsican food – from pork fillets in chestnut-honey to veal cutlets and farm-fresh *fromage de brebis* (sheep's cheese). If you're a novice, the *planches* (platters) offer bite-sized dishes – the *planche spuntinu* concentrates on country tucker while the *planche de la mer* offers fruits of the sea.

L'Altru Versu (☎ 04 95 50 05 22; 16 rue J Baptiste Marccaggi; mains €22-28; ☹ lunch Tue-Sat, dinner Tue-Sun) One of the

top tables for Corsican cuisine: dishes at 'The Other Side' include prawn and Brocciu tart, pork with Cotticcio almonds, and even sorbet tinged with Pietra beer. It's cosy and convivial: pans clatter, waiters hustle and Corsican *soms et guitares* (guitar players) serenade the terrace on Friday and Saturday nights.

Le 20123 (☎ 04 95 21 50 05; 2 rue du Roi de Rome; menus €32; ☎ dinner Tue-Sun) This one-of-a-kind place started life in the village of Pila Canale (postcode 20123 – get it?), and when the owner upped sticks to Ajaccio he decided to take the old village with him – water pump, washing line, central square et al. It sounds completely daft, and it is – but you won't find many more characterful places in Corsica. Needless to say, the food is 100% authentic, too.

Also recommended:

Le Bilboq (☎ 04 95 51 35 40; 2 rue des Glacis) An unpretentious diner with lots of Corsican staples and a sweet vine-covered patio.

L'Estaminet (☎ 04 95 50 10 42; 5 rue du Roi de Rome; mains €15.50-24.50, menus €18.50 & €25) An old-style brasserie decked out with shiny wood and polished brass, plus plenty of heart-and-soul country classics.

SELF-CATERING

The open-air **food market** (square Campinchi; ☎ to noon, closed Mon) is stacked with cheese, sausages, jams, fruit and veg, while piscatorial treats are available at the nearby fish market.

Self-caterers have a **Spar** (cours Grandval; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 3-7.30pm Mon-Sat) and **Monoprix** (cours Napoléon; ☎ 8.30am-7.15pm Mon-Sat) in the city centre, or a huge **Super U** (19 cours Prince Impérial; ☎ 9am-8.30pm Mon-Sat) on the outskirts.

For Corsican goodies, there's only one address that matters: **U Stazzu** (☎ 04 95 51 10 80; 1 rue Bonaparte; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 2.30-7pm), famous for its handmade charcuterie.

Drinking & Entertainment

Le Grand Café Napoléon (10 cours Napoléon; ☎ 8am-midnight daily) Ajaccio's jet-set dines in expensive style inside the chandelier-strewn dining room of this historic brasserie, but mere mortals can soak up the ritzy ambience with coffee on the street-side terrace.

Le Son des Guitares (☎ 04 95 51 15 47; 7 rue du Roi de Rome) Local guitarists serenade the punters at this cosy bar from around 10pm.

La Place (☎ 04 95 51 09 10; bd Lantivy; ☎ 11pm-3am Fri-Sat) Ajaccio's only club is hardly cutting-edge, but local DJs host house and techno nights at weekends.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Aéroport d'Ajaccio-Campo dell'Oro (☎ 04 95 23 56 56) is 8km east of the city centre. Charter airlines have kiosks at the airport, but **Air France** (☎ 08 20 82 08 20; 3 bd du Roi Jérôme) also has an office in town.

BOAT

Boats depart from **Terminal Maritime et Routier** (quai l'Herminier), the combined bus/ferry terminal.

CMN (☎ 08 10 20 13 20; www.cmn.fr; bd Sampiero; ☎ 8.15am-6pm Mon-Fri, 8.15am-noon Sat, open to 7pm Mon-Fri & from 4.30-7pm Sat on departure days) Located inside the terminal.

Corsica Ferries (☎ 08 25 09 50 95; www.corsicaferries.fr) Inside the terminal.

SNCM (☎ 04 95 29 66 99; www.sncm.fr; ☎ 8am-8pm Tue-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat) The main office is on quai l'Herminier, and there's a ticket and information kiosk inside the terminal, which opens before most sailings.

BUS

Lots of local bus companies have kiosks inside the terminal building. As always in Corsica, expect reduced services on Sunday and during the winter months. The bus station information desk (☎ 04 95 51 42 56) can supply timetables.

Ceccaldi/SAIB (☎ 04 95 22 41 99) Travels to Porto (€11, two hours, two daily) via Tuccia (30 minutes), Cargèse (55 minutes), and Piana (one hour and 25 minutes).

Eurocorse (☎ 04 95 21 06 30) Travels to Bastia (€22, three hours, two daily) via Vizzavona (one hour), Corte (1¼ hours) and Ponte Leccia (two hours). Connecting buses travel from Ponte Leccia to Calvi. There's also a route to Bonifacio (€22, four hours, two daily) via Propriano (1½ hours) and Sartène (€13.60, two hours).

CAR

The main car-rental companies also have airport bureaux.

Europcar (☎ 04 95 21 05 49; 16 cours Grandval)

Hertz (☎ 04 95 21 70 94; 8 cours Grandval)

Hôtel Kallisté (p929) rents out cars and mopeds cheaply.

TRAIN

The **train station** (☎ 04 95 23 11 03; place de la Gare) is staffed until 6.30pm (to 8pm May to September). Services include Bastia (€23.90, four hours, three to four daily), Corte (€12.70, two hours, three to four daily) and Calvi (€27.80, five hours, two daily; change at Ponte Leccia).

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

Transports Corse d' Ajaccio (TCA) bus 8 links the airport with Ajaccio's train and bus stations (€4.50). Hourly buses run from around 6am to 7pm from the bus station, and from 9am to 11pm from the airport. A taxi costs €30 to €35.

BUS

TCA (☎ 04 95 23 29 41; 75 cours Napoléon) operates Ajaccio's municipal bus network. A single ticket/*carner* of 10 costs €1.20/9. Most buses operate from place de Gaulle and cours Napoléon; useful lines include number 5 to Pointe de la Parata and number 8 to the airport.

TAXI

There's a **taxi rank** (☎ 04 95 21 00 87) on place de Gaulle.

SOUTH OF AJACCIO

SARTÈNE (SARTÈ)

pop 3500

With its grey granite houses, secretive cul-de-sac and slightly sombre, introspective air, Sartène has long been said to encapsulate Corsica's rugged spirit (French novelist Prosper Mérimée dubbed it the 'most Corsican of Corsican towns'). There's no doubt that Sartène feels a long way from the glitter of the Corsican coast; the hillside houses are endearingly ramshackle, the streets are shady and scruffy, and life still crawls along at a traditional tilt. But it offers a much more convincing glimpse of how life was once lived in rural Corsica than do any of the island's more well-heeled towns. Notorious for its banditry and bloody vendettas in the 19th century, Sartène has more recently found fame thanks to the annual Procession du Catenacciu, a re-enactment of the Passion that takes place in the town every Good Friday.

Orientation & Information

Sartène's main square is place Porta (sometimes called place de la Libération), connecting the main streets of cours Sœur Amélie and cours Général de Gaulle. The Santa Anna quarter is north of place de la Libération.

Crédit Lyonnais (14 cours Général de Gaulle) Has an ATM.

Post Office (rue du Marché) Has an ATM.

Tourist Office (☎ 04 95 77 15 40; ot-sartene@wanadoo.fr; cours Sœur Amélie; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 2-6.30pm Mon-Fri, plus 9am-12.30pm & 2.30-6.30pm Sat in high season)

Sights & Activities

The only way to explore Sartène is on foot, and the town's corkscrew alleyways and shady staircases make an agreeable stroll on a blazing summer's afternoon. An archway through the **town hall** (formerly the Governors' Palace) leads to the residential **Santa Anna quarter**, where you'll find the town's most atmospheric streets.

Near the **WWI memorial** on place Porta is the granite **Église Ste-Marie**, which houses the 35kg cross and 17kg chain used in the annual **Procession du Catenacciu**. Since the Middle Ages, every Good Friday the Catenacciu ('chained one') has lugged this massive hunk of wood through town in a re-enactment of Christ's journey to Calvary. Barefoot, red-robed and cowled (to preserve his anonymity), the penitent is chosen by the parish priest to atone for a grave sin – in times gone by, legend has it that notorious bandits descended from the maquis to expiate their crimes.

South of Sartène are several lovely beaches, including windswept **Roccapina**, the remote beaches of **Erbaju** and **Tra Licettu**, and the heart-meltingly pretty little port of **Tizzano**, at the end of the D48.

Sleeping & Eating

Hôtel La Villa Piana (☎ 04 95 77 07 04; www.lavillapiana.com; d €50-115; ☎ Apr-mid-Oct; 🍷) This attractive villa-style hotel mixes up-to-date-comfort and good old-fashioned service. Run with trademark efficiency by the bustling madame, you'll find spacious rooms decked out in solemn beiges and dark wood. Outside, drink in views of Sartène from the hilltop pool and breakfast patio. The excellent restaurant across the street, L'Instant (mains €16 to €28), serves some of Sartène's most contemporary food.

Hôtel des Roches (☎ 04 95 77 07 61; www.sartenehotel.fr; s €54-90, d €64-100; ☎ Apr-Oct) It won't win any beauty contests, but Sartène's only central hotel still packs in the coach parties thanks to its central location and (at least in some rooms) plunging valley views. Boxy, modern rooms are plainly furnished and a bit threadbare in places; management can be a little offish, too.

Self-caterers can stock up at **Spar** (14 cours Général de Gaulle) or **Atac** (cours Sœur Amélie) supermarkets, or pick up Corsican delicacies

STONES OF THE SARTÈNAIS

Dotted around the granite hilltops of the Sartèna is Corsica's most astonishing prehistoric sites. Some time around 4000–3000 BC, Corsica developed its own megalithic faith (possibly imported by seafaring settlers from mainland Europe); most of the island's standing stones and menhirs date from this period. The most important site is **Filitosa** (☎ 04 95 74 00 91; admission €5; ☎ 8am–8pm Apr–Oct), northwest of Sartène, where a collection of extraordinary carved menhirs were discovered in 1946 by the land's owner, Charles-Antoine Césari (an episode memorably recounted in Dorothy Carrington's classic book on Corsica, *Granite Island*). The Filitosa menhirs are highly unusual: several have detailed faces, anatomical features (such as ribcages) and even swords and armour, suggesting that they may commemorate specific warriors or chieftains. A small **museum** displays arrowheads, pottery and other archaeological artefacts.

Southwest of Sartène are the **Cauria** alignments – the **Alignement de Stantari** and the **Alignement de Renaju** – several of which show similar anatomical details and weaponry to those of Filitosa. Nearby is one of Corsica's few burial chambers, the **Fontanaccia** dolmen, with its supporting pillars and capstones. Look out for the turn-off about 8km along the D48 towards Tizzano.

Four kilometres further on from the turn-off is the Mediterranean's largest alignment of standing stones, the **Alignement de Paddaghiu**, with four distinct rows of huge menhirs perfectly aligned to face the rising sun. The site is reached via a rough track from the car park near the Mosconi vineyard.

What did these strange sites signify for their megalithic architects? Were they ritual temples? Sacred graveyards? Mythical armies? Or even celestial timepieces? Despite countless theories, PhD papers and academic postulations, no one has the foggiest idea.

at **U Maggiu** (☎ 04 95 77 21 36; ☎ Apr–Oct), near pl Porta, just along from the town hall.

Getting There & Away

Sartène is on the twice-daily **Eurocorse** (☎ 04 95 21 06 30) bus line linking Ajaccio with Bonifacio.

BONIFACIO (BUNIFAZIU)

pop 2700

With its glittering harbour, creamy white cliffs and stout citadel teetering above the cornflower-blue waters of the Bouches de Bonifacio, this dazzling port is an essential stop on everyone's Corsican itinerary. Just a short hop from Sardinia, Bonifacio has a distinctly Italianate feel: sun-bleached townhouses, dangling washing lines and murky chapels cram the web of alleyways of the old citadel, while down below on the harbourside, brasseries and boat-kiosks tout their wares to the droves of day-trippers. Perfectly positioned for exploring the island's southerly beaches and the Îles Lavezzi, Bonifacio is the minxish little sister to Corsica's more grown-up towns.

Orientation

Bonifacio is split in two: the hilltop citadel (often referred to as the Haute Ville), reached via av Charles de Gaulle or on foot by two

sets of steps, and the harbour, which sits beneath the citadel at the southeastern corner of Goulet de Bonifacio. The ferry terminal is northwest of the citadel.

Information

Boniboom (☎ 04 95 73 55 45; quai Jérôme Comparetti; internet access per 30min/1hr €3/5; ☎ 7am–midnight) Internet café.

Lavoir de la Marine (1 quai Jérôme Comparetti; ☎ 7am–10pm) Wash your beach togs here.

Post Office (place Carrega; ☎ 8.30am–12.30pm & 2–4pm Mon–Fri, 8.30am–noon Sat) Has an ATM.

Société Générale (38 rue St-Erasme; ☎ Mon–Fri) ATM and currency exchange.

Tourist Office (☎ 04 95 73 11 88; www.bonifacio.fr; 2 rue Fred Scamaroni; ☎ 9am–8pm Jul & Aug, 9am–7pm May, Jun & Sep, 9am–noon & 2–6pm Mon–Fri Oct–Apr)

Tourist Office Annexe (Le Port; ☎ 9am–7pm Jun–Sep) Seasonal office by the harbour.

Sights & Activities

CITADEL (HAUTE VILLE)

A long slog from the harbour via the double staircases of Montée Rastello and Montée St-Roch brings you to the citadel's old gateway, the **Porte de Gènes**, complete with its original 16th-century drawbridge. Inside the gateway is the 13th-century **Bastion l'Étendard**, which

houses a small historical museum exploring Bonifacio's past. Stroll the ramparts to **place du Marché** and **place Manichella**, which both offer views of the Bouches de Bonifacio; the two holes covered by glass pyramids in place Manichella were used to store grain, salted meats and supplies during times of siege.

Much of Bonifacio's charm comes from strolling its shady streets, soaking up the architecture and the atmosphere. Several streets are spanned by arched aqueducts, which originally collected rainwater to fill the communal cistern opposite **Église Ste-Marie Majeure**. Look out for the wooden loggia outside the church: though heavily restored, it's one of the best examples of medieval carpentry in Corsica.

From the citadel, the **Escalier du Roi d'Aragon** (King of Aragon's stairway; admission €2.50; ☞ 9am-7pm mid-Apr-Sep) cuts down the southern cliff-face. Its 187 steps were supposedly carved in a single night by Aragonese troops during the siege of 1420, although the troops were rebuffed by retaliating Bonifacio residents once they reached the top.

West along the limestone headland is the **Église Ste-Dominique** (☞ 9.30am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Mon-Sat mid-Jun-mid-Sep), one of Corsica's few Gothic buildings. Further west, near three ruined mills, are the ornate tombs of Bonifacio's **Cimetière Marin** (Marine Cemetery), and the remains of **subterranean tunnels** dug by the Germans during WWII, overlooking the rudder-shaped rock known as the **Gouvernail de la Corse** (admission €2.50; ☞ 9am-noon & 2-6pm) from where there are views all the way to Sardinia when the weather's good.

WALKING

Several walks start near the top of Montée Rastello, including a 2km stroll east along the maquis-covered headland with great views of Bonifacio's buildings arching out over the water. Further east is the **Phare de Pertusato** (Pertusato Lighthouse), 5.6km from the citadel.

BEACHES

Bonifacio's town beaches are a little underwhelming. **Plage de Sotta Rocca** is a small pebbly cove below the citadel, reached by steps from av Charles de Gaulle, while **plage de la Catena** and **plage de l'Arinella** are sandy inlets on the northern side of Bouches de Bonifacio. On foot, follow the trail from av Sylvère Bohn, near the Esso petrol station.

For finer stretches of sand you'll need to head east along the D58 to the little cove of **Spérone**,

opposite the islets of Cavallo and Lavezzi. Nearby **Piantarella** is popular with windsurfers, while further east is shingly **Calalonga**. There are several other lovely beaches around the **Golfe de Sant'Amanza**, 8km east of Bonifacio.

Best of all is the horseshoe bay of **Rondinara** (about 18km northeast from Bonifacio) and tree-fringed **Palombaggia** (about 30km north-east near Porto-Vecchio), which you'll see gracing postcards all over Corsica. Both can be reached from the N198 north of Bonifacio.

Tours

You couldn't leave without exploring the idyllic waters around Bonifacio – thought by some scholars to have featured in Homer's *Odyssey*. The largest (and most visited) island of the group, Île Lavezzi, covers around 65 hectares and marks the southernmost point of Corsica; there are lots of natural pools, deserted beaches and swimming holes to explore, as well as a monument to the victims of the wreck of the *Sémillante*, a military frigate which came to grief on the island in 1855.

To reach some of the more remote islands you'll probably need your own yacht (you'll see plenty moored up around the islands' sheltered bays), although the skippers of the local tour boats can occasionally be persuaded to take a detour via the other islands.

The superexclusive Île de Cavallo is one of the only regularly inhabited islands, but you'll need deep pockets to visit; it's a favourite island getaway for celebrities and the super-rich.

Lots of boat companies offer trips from April to October, but it's worth shopping around for summer deals. There are one-hour trips to the Grotte du Sdragonato (around €15), a vast water cave with a natural rooftop skylight; longer trips to the wild, uninhabited Îles Lavezzi cost around €25, and allow time to explore the islands' beaches and gin-clear waters (take your own picnic, drinks and beach supplies).

Rocca Croisières (☎ 04 95 73 13 96; www.rocca-croisieres.com)

Les Vedettes Corsica (☎ 06 03 48 58 59)

Thalassa (☎ 04 95 73 10 17; www.vedestesthalassa.com)

Sleeping

Steer well clear of Bonifacio in July and August unless you're a fan of sky-high prices and tourist-thronged streets.

Camping L'Araguina (☎ 04 95 73 02 96; av Sylvère Bohn; per person/tent/car €5.85/2.40/2.40; ☞ Mar-Oct)

Bonifacio's main campsite is near the Hôtel des Étrangers, with plenty of tent sites and rental chalets, but the roadside location can be less than soothing.

Hôtel des Étrangers (☎ 04 95 73 01 09; hoteldesetrangers.iffrance.com; av Sylvère Bohn; d €35-70; ☞ Apr-Oct; ♻️ (P)) Bunking down in Bonifacio doesn't have to shatter your budget, thanks to the Foreigners' Hotel. It's a solid, unfussy place offering spick-and-span rooms, all with tiled floors, clean bathrooms and simple colour schemes (more-expensive ones have air-con). Yes, it's basic, and the main road outside's a bother, but for this price it's a steal.

Hôtel Le Royal (☎ 04 95 73 00 51; fax 04 95 73 04 68; 8 rue Fred Scamaroni; s €40-95, d €45-105; ♻️) This bare-bones hotel above a popular brasserie-bar is the cheapest option inside the citadel. In exchange for the top-drawer location you'll have to make some sacrifices: street noise, dullish decor and faded furnishings – but score a sea-view room and you won't give a fig.

Hôtel du Roy d'Aragon (☎ 04 95 73 03 99; www.royaragon.com; 13 quai Jérôme Comparetti; d €50-150, ste from €130; ♻️) In summer it's as overpriced as anywhere on Bonifacio's quayside, but pitch up out of season and you'll bag a top-drawer sea view for a knock-down price. Despite the upmarket location, the room décor is surprisingly generic (creams, peaches, watercolour prints); don't let yourself be fobbed off with a rear or side-view room – you're paying seaside prices, remember.

Hôtel Colomba (☎ 04 95 73 73 44; www.hotel-bonifacio.fr; rue Simon Varsi; d €78-155; ♻️) A newish addition to Bonifacio's hotel scene, and a welcome one – a not-quite-boutique hotel in a picturesque side street, bang in the heart of the old town. The rooms are all pleasantly individual – wrought-iron bedsteads and country fabrics in some, carved bedheads and chequerboard tiles in others – and while they're all on the small side, they have a whole lot more character than at many places in Bonifacio.

Eating

Swish terrace restaurants pack the quay-side, but the food isn't always as fancy as the ambience suggests.

Kissing Pigs (☎ 04 95 73 56 09; quai Banda del Ferro; mains €8-15; ☞ lunch & dinner daily) Sporting quite possibly the oddest name of any restaurant in Corsica, Kissing Pigs is a cosy wine bar and temple to cheese and charcuterie. Diners pack in among swinging sausages for platters

of Corsican meats and cheeses – committed carnivores go for *l'incontournable* (all meat; €18), while undecideds plump for the *moitié-moitié* (half cheese, half meat; €15).

Cantina Doria (☎ 04 95 73 50 49; 27 rue Doria; mains €10-14; ☞ Apr-Oct) The Doria is the place in Bonifacio for Corsican country food. Squeeze onto wooden benches amid copper pots, rustic tools and dented signs, and tuck into *soupe Corse*, *aubergines à la Bonifacienne* (aubergines stuffed with breadcrumbs and cheese) and slabs of beef, veal and pork. It's so popular, it's opened a sister place with a fishier focus on the quay – Cantina Grill (☎ 04 95 70 49 86). You'll find the Grill at 3 quai Banda del Ferro (open April to October), with mains costing €9 to €15.

ourpick L'Archivolto (☎ 04 95 73 17 58; rue de l'Archivolto; mains €10-16; ☞ dinner Mon-Sat mid-Mar–Oct) Steps from the Église Ste-Marie Majeure, this gloriously offbeat bistro is part jumble sale, part hippie-chic antique shop and part fine-dining restaurant. Bric-a-brac, rustic curios, dangling guitars and mix-and-match furniture fill the salon from floor to ceiling, and the chalked-up menu is just as eclectic, swinging from seared tuna to chicken in Pietra beer. Choose a seat among the clutter or on the alleyway patio – either way, you'll be charmed.

U Castille (☎ 04 95 73 04 99; rue Simon Varsi; menus €14-22; ☞ lunch & dinner in summer, closed Mon & Sun in winter) Tucked away up a gut-squeezing alleyway off place Bonaparte, this cosy little alcove restaurant offers Corsican meats, cheeses and salads, as well as pasta and pizza from next door.

SELF-CATERING

Bonifacio has two wonderful bakeries where you can buy local specialities such as *pain des morts* (a nut-and-raisin brioche traditionally eaten for the Fête des Morts – Festival of the Dead – on 2 November), *fugazzi* (aniseed and orange cakes) and *tarte brocciu* (Brocciu tart). Pick them up at **Boulangerie-Pâtisserie Faby** (4 rue St-Jean Baptiste; ☞ 8am-8pm Jul & Aug, 8am-12.30pm & 4-7pm Sep-Jun) in the citadel or **Boulangerie-Pâtisserie Michel Sorba** (1-3 rue St-Érasme; ☞ 6am-8pm Jul & Aug, 8am-12.30pm & 4.30-7pm Tue-Sat, 8am-12.30pm Sun Sep-Jun) by the quay.

There are side-by-side supermarkets on quai Jérôme Comparetti: **Spar** (☞ 8am-12.30pm & 3.30-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 8am-12.30pm Sun) and Coccimarket (with the same opening hours as at Spar).

Getting There & Away

AIR

Bonifacio's airport, **Aéroport de Figari** (☎ 04 95 71 10 10), is 21km north of town. A shuttle bus runs from the town centre in July and August (€9, 30 to 40 minutes) five times daily.

BOAT

Sardinia's main ferry operators, **Saremar** (☎ 04 95 73 00 96; www.saremar.it, in Italian) and **Moby Lines** (☎ 04 95 73 00 29; www.mobyline.it), offer services between Bonifacio and Santa Teresa in summer. Costs vary according to the time and day of sailing, but range from around €9 to €18 one-way plus taxes; the crossing lasts about an hour.

BUS

From Monday to Saturday, **Eurocorse** (☎ 04 95 21 06 30) has a twice-daily service to Porto-Vecchio (€7.50, 30 minutes), with onward connections to Ajaccio (€22, four hours) via Sartène and Propriano. Buses leave from behind the tourist office annexe, with greatly reduced numbers of services outside summer.

CORTE AREA

CORTE (CORTI)

pop 5700 / elevation 400m

The mountain town of Corte (pronounced cor-tay) is the heart and soul of Corsica, both geographically and politically. Hemmed in by high mountains, and frequently blanketed in cloud, Corte has been at the centre of the island's fortunes since Pascal Paoli made it the capital of his short-lived Corsican republic in 1755. With its high-rise apartment blocks, tatty tenements and rough-and-ready streets – not to mention a liberal smattering of nationalist graffiti – it's certainly not the island's smartest town, but if you're after Corsican culture in the raw, then this is definitely the place. Around the town's cobbled streets you'll find the national history museum, a historic inland citadel and Corsica's university, Università di Corsica Pasquale Paoli. Founded by Paoli in 1765, the university closed four years later following the fall of the republic, reopened to great fanfare in 1981, and is now playing a vital role in the ongoing renaissance of the Corsican language.

Orientation

Corte's main thoroughfare is cours Paoli. At its southern end is place Paoli, from where the narrow streets of the Haute Ville (Upper Town) continue uphill to the citadel. The train station is 500m downhill from cours Paoli.

Information

Banks with ATMs are found along cours Paoli.

Grand Café (22 cours Paoli; internet access per 15min/1hr €1/3.50; ☎ 7am-2am) Late-night café with internet terminals.

Maison de la Presse (cours Paoli; ☎ 8am-6pm) Maps, walking guides and lots of Corsican books.

Post Office (av du Baron Mariani)

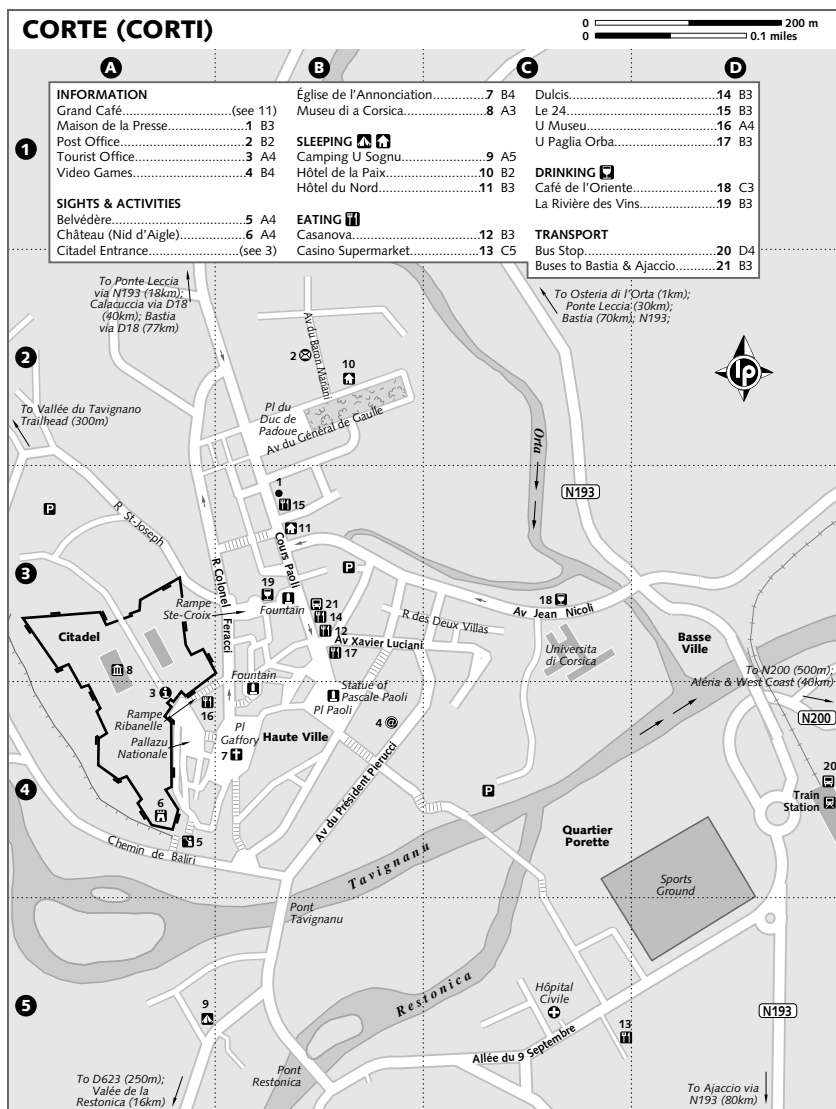
Tourist Office (☎ 04 95 46 26 70; www.corte-tourisme.com; citadelle; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 2-5.30pm Mon-Thu, 9am-noon & 2-5pm Fri, longer hr summer)

Video Games (av du Président Pierucci; internet access per hr €4; ☎ 10am-midnight) Online gamers' hang-out with net access.

Sights

Of Corsica's six citadels, Corte's is the only one not on the coast. Jutting out above the Rivers Tavignanu and Restonica and the cobbled alleyways of the Haute Ville, the citadel's highest point is the **château** (known as the Nid d'Aigle – the Eagle's Nest), built in 1419 by Vincentello d'Istria, a Corsican nobleman rebelling against Genoese occupation.

The town's finest views are from the **belvédère** (viewing platform), reached via a steep staircase just outside the citadel's ramparts. Inside the walls are the former barracks and administrative buildings, which previously served as a WWII prison and a French Foreign Legion base. They now house the tourist office and the **Museu di a Corsica** (Museum of Corsica; ☎ 04 95 45 25 45; adult/student €5.30/3.80; ☎ 10am-8pm mid-Jun–mid-Sep, 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Apr–mid-Jun & mid-Sep–Oct, 10am-5pm Tue-Sat Nov-Mar), Corsica's main national museum. Dramatically designed by Italian architect Andrea Bruno, the museum is split into two sections. The Galerie Doazan houses over 3000 artefacts exploring traditional crafts such as shepherding, weaving, agriculture and rustic life in Corsica, while the Museum in Motion explores Corsican history and industry through an eclectic collection ranging from vintage tourist posters to a reconstructed asbestos factory. English audioguides cost €1.50.



Further downhill is the 15th-century **Église de l'Annonciation** (place Gaffroy). The walls of nearby houses are pock-marked with bullet holes, reputedly from Corsica's war of independence.

Situated halfway along the Mare a Mare Nord, and surrounded by mountain trails,

Corte is also rapidly becoming one of Corsica's main hiking centres (see p938).

Sleeping

Camping U Sognu (☎ 04 95 46 09 07; per tent/person/car €6.50/2.50/2.50) The pick of Corte's campsites, with lovely views of the city, and lots of

pleasant sites sheltering under olive trees and green oak. It's a 10-minute walk south of town along av du Président Pierucci.

Hôtel de la Paix (☎ 04 95 46 06 72; <http://monsite.wanadoo.fr/socoget/>; av du Général de Gaulle; d €35-62; ☹ Apr-Oct) On a quiet cul-de-sac just off cours Paoli, this peach-coloured tenement hotel isn't going to win any design awards, but it's ship-shape, clean and reasonably priced. Rooms are split into 'Confort' (overlooking the valley or the square) and 'Supérieure', with mountain-view balconies and bigger bathrooms.

Hôtel du Nord (☎ 04 95 46 00 68; www.hoteldunord-corte.com; 22 cours Paoli; d €68-83, tr €105-134; ☎) From the outside, Corte's oldest hotel looks like it's teetering on the verge of collapse, with peeling paint and rickety cast-iron balconies overlooking cours Paoli. So the freshly polished decor and contemporary colour schemes come as a real surprise – checked bedsprings, laminate floors and wi-fi throughout, and valley views from the top-spec rooms.

Osteria di l'Orta (☎ 04 95 61 06 41; www.osteria-di-l-orta.com; d €70-80, ste €110; ☎ (P)) Inside a porcelain-blue townhouse on the N193, this fantastic *chambre d'hôte* is a spoil, run by a charming couple with a keen designer's eye. The three rooms (named after local notables) are lovely, with polished wood floors, gleaming walls and great showers, but for real luxury, go for the massive Pascal Paoli suite, with its own private sitting room. There's a communal lounge on the 3rd floor with DVD, library and internet terminal.

Eating

U Museu (☎ 04 95 61 08 36; rampe Ribanelle; menus €13-17; ☹ lunch & dinner, closed mid-Nov-Mar) Corte has plenty of restaurants serving 'classic' Corsican fare, but for the real deal head for U Museu, sheltering on a quiet gazebo patio under a brace of red umbrellas. Three set *menus* are stuffed with local fare – *soupe Corse*, wild boar stew with myrtle, and lima beans with *figatellu* (a type of Corsican sausage) and peppers.

Le 24 (☎ 04 95 46 02 90; 24 cours Paoli; mains €13-22; ☹ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) After something more upmarket? Then swing by Corte's foodie spot, Le Vingt-Quatre, where top-quality local ingredients take precedence on the seasonal menu, and traditional dishes are given a contemporary twist. Rustic stone and just-so reclaimed wooden furniture continue the up-to-date vibe.

U Paglia Orba (☎ 04 95 61 07 89; 5 av Xavier Luciani; menu €15, mains €7-18; ☹ lunch & dinner Mon-Sat) A de-

cent option if you're watching the pennies, this humble diner dishes up pizzas, pastas and hearty steaks, as well as Corsican staples such as pigeon pâté and aubergine gratin.

SELF-CATERING

Corte has some excellent patisseries. For cakes and sweet treats head for **Casanova** (☎ 04 95 46 00 79; 6 cours Paoli), and for local savouries (including *bastelle*, a kind of pasty stuffed with Brocciu and vegetables), try **Dulcis** (☎ 04 95 46 24 91; 10 cours Paoli).

There are small food shops on place Paoli and a large **Casino** (allée du 9 Septembre) on the edge of town.

Drinking

Join the student crowds at **Café de l'Oriente** (☎ 04 95 61 11 17; av Jean Nicoli; ☹ 9am-midnight), opposite the university, or try local wines accompanied by platters of Corsican hors d'oeuvre (including cheese, charcuterie, *terrines de sanglier* – wild boar terrine – and *figatellu*) at rustic **La Rivière des Vins** (☎ 04 95 46 37 04; 5 rampe Ste-Croix; menu €16; ☹ noon-3pm & 6-11pm Mon-Sat).

Getting There & Away

BUS

The most useful bus service is run by **Eurocorse** (☎ 04 95 31 73 76) from Ajaccio to Bastia (€11, two hours), stopping at Corte en route (€11, 2¾ hours). There are two daily buses except on Sunday from Brasserie Majestic at 19 cours Paoli.

Transports Mordiconi (☎ 04 95 48 00 44) links Corte with Porto (€20, 2¾ hours) once daily except on Sundays from July to mid-September, leaving from outside the train station.

TRAIN

The **train station** (☎ 04 95 46 00 97; ☹ 6.30am-8.30pm Mon-Sat, 9.45am-noon & 4.45-8.35pm Sun) is east of the city centre. Destinations include Bastia (€11.20, two hours, three to four daily) and Ajaccio (€12.70, two hours, three to four daily).

AROUND CORTE

If you're a trail junkie, the area around Corte offers some of the finest hiking on the island. Key spots include the **Vallée de la Restonica**, accessed via the D623 and choked with traffic in July and August. From the car park at **Bergeries de Grotelle** (1375m), 16km from Corte, an hour-long walk leads up the dramatic

valley to the high-mountain tarns of **Lac de Mello** (Melu; 1711m) and **Lac de Capitello** (Capitellu; 1930m), 45 minutes' walk further on.

West of Corte, and usually much quieter than Restonica, is the remote trail through the **Vallée du Tavignano** all the way up to **Lac Nino** (Ninu; 1743m) on the GR20, a tough 9½-hour slog from Corte. If you're really up for a challenge, the six-hour ascent to the crest of **Monte Cinto** (2706m), Corsica's highest mountain,

starts at the tiny village of Lozzi – don't even think about attempting the mountain without hiking supplies, trail maps and a favourable weather forecast.

South of Corte, there are less-challenging trails through the pine and oak woods of the **Forêt de Vizzavona**. Two waterfalls, the **Cascade des Anglais**, accessible from Vizzavona, and the **Cascade du Voile de la Mariée**, near Bocognano, are both worth the walk.