

Sardinia



Located closer to Africa than Italy, Sardinia's turquoise sea and white sandy beaches rival the tropics. Away from the coast, the scenery can be similarly stunning with a pastoral quilt of forested mountain peaks, valleys of citrus groves and pastures of happily grazing cattle and sheep. In contrast, the urban scene can be disappointing. Some towns are, frankly, dull and depressing with breeze-block buildings and graffiti. Others, like medieval Bosa in the west, are impossibly picturesque with their pink-and-golden buildings flanking the river. Traditional culture thrives most vigorously in the heartland where the elderly women are still draped in black; here tourists are rare – stared at – but ultimately welcomed. Subjected to a history of domination by outside forces, the proud Sardinians have never lost their sense of identity.

Across the landscape are scattered 7000 *nuraghi*, strange conical stone fortresses seemingly built by a Sardinian Fred Flintstone. Curious temples, tombs, mysterious menhirs and remains of entire Bronze Age villages complete the prehistoric cartoon.

Sardinia distinguishes itself in the kitchen with hearty pastas and a love for pungent local cheeses, like *pecorino* and smoked ricotta. Sardinians also produce notable wines and a head-splitting firewater, *filu e ferru*.

Avoid visiting during broiling, crowded July and August, as well as in winter when the island goes into hibernation and many restaurants and hotels are closed. The best times of the year to visit are in the spring, when the wildflowers are in bloom, and during the early autumn when the temperatures are still pleasantly warm and most of the tourists have left.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Take the plunge and go diving in crystalline waters with the superbly professional **Diving Center Capo Galera** (p835), near Alghero
- Push the boat out with the delicious *ventresca di tonno* (tuna steak) from one of San Pietro's fine **restaurants** (p826)
- Island hop around the **Parco Nazionale dell'Arcipelago di La Maddalena** (p839), enjoying the unspoilt scenery and plenty of kick-back time
- Indulge in, quite simply, the most delicious *semi freddo* ice cream in Sardinia at Cagliari's **Isola del Gelato** (p819)
- Build sandcastles, sunbathe and swim at Sardinia's wildest, most stunningly beautiful beaches, on the **Costa Verde** (p826)



POPULATION: 1.65 MILLION

AREA: 24,090 SQ KM

History

Our primitive forebears may have been wandering around Sardinia as long as 400,000 years ago. Their Bronze Age descendants, known as the nuragic peoples, long dominated the interior of the island, even after the arrival of Phoenician traders around 850 BC, subsequently to be replaced by the Carthaginians and Romans. The latter eventually took control of much of the island and the indigenes faded into history.

The departure of the Romans and the ensuing chaos left Sardinia at the mercy of Vandal raiders, Byzantine occupiers and Arab corsairs. Four *giudicati* (kingdoms) emerged in the Middle Ages but, by the 13th century, the Pisans and Genoese were battling for control. They were eventually toppled in 1323 by the Catalano-Aragonese from northern Spain who stayed put some 50 years. Eleonora d'Arborea (1340–1404; p827) battled against them heroically and remains justifiably revered as Sardinia's very own Joan of Arc.

Sardinia became a Spanish territory after the unification of the Spanish kingdoms in 1479 and, still today, there is a tangible Hispanic feel to towns such as Alghero (p832). In the ensuing centuries, Sardinia suffered as Spain's power crumbled and, in 1720, the Italian Savoy kingdom took possession of the island. After Italian unity in 1861, Sardinia found itself under the disinterested boot of Rome.

In 1943, during WWII, Cagliari was heavily bombed by the Allies. On a brighter note, one of the most important postwar successes was the elimination of malaria in the 1950s, which allowed the development of coastal tourism that today forms a pillar of Sardinia's economy, although the impact of the Decreto Soru (p842) is causing some in the tourism industry to worry.

In June 2004, Renato Soru, founder of Italy's largest internet company, Tiscali, beat Mauro Pili, then-prime minister Silvio Berlusconi's protégé, by a wide margin to become president of the island. A central-left politician, Soru's successful campaign was based on the revitalisation of the island's economy and environmental issues, including his pledge to close the American nuclear submarine base on the Arcipelago di La Maddalena (p839). A timetable for withdrawal has since been confirmed by the Italian Defence Ministry and US authorities.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The main airports at Cagliari, Olbia and Alghero link Sardinia with major Italian and European cities. As well as the major international carriers, there are several no-frills airlines, although some routes are restricted to between April and October.

BOAT

The island is accessible by ferry from Genoa, Savona, La Spezia, Livorno, Piombino, Civitavecchia, Fiumicino and Naples, and from Palermo and Trapani in Sicily. Ferries also run from Bonifacio and Porto Vecchio in Corsica. French ferries running from Marseille and Toulon sometimes call in at Ajaccio and Propriano (in Corsica) en route to Sardinia.

The arrival points in Sardinia are Olbia, Golfo Aranci, Palau, Santa Teresa di Gallura and Porto Torres in the north; Arbatax on the east coast; and Cagliari in the south.

Italy's main ferry company is **Tirrenia** (☎ 081 017 19 98; www.tirrenia.it). It runs ferries to Porto Torres, Golfo Aranci, Olbia, Arbatax and Cagliari from all the above Italian ports, except Savona, La Spezia, Livorno and Piombino.

Listed with their main routes, other companies include:

Grandi Navi Veloci (☎ 010 2 54 65; www.1.gnv.it) Has year-round luxury ferry services from Genoa to Porto Torres and Olbia.

La Mèridionale (☎ 081 021 13 20; www.cmn.fr) Has twice-weekly boats from Marseille to Porto Torres.

Moby Lines (☎ 061 111 40 20; www.mobylines.com) Operates year-round between Genoa and Olbia, Porto Vecchio, Livorno and Piombino and Civitavecchia to Olbia. Also has ferries between Sardinia and Corsica.

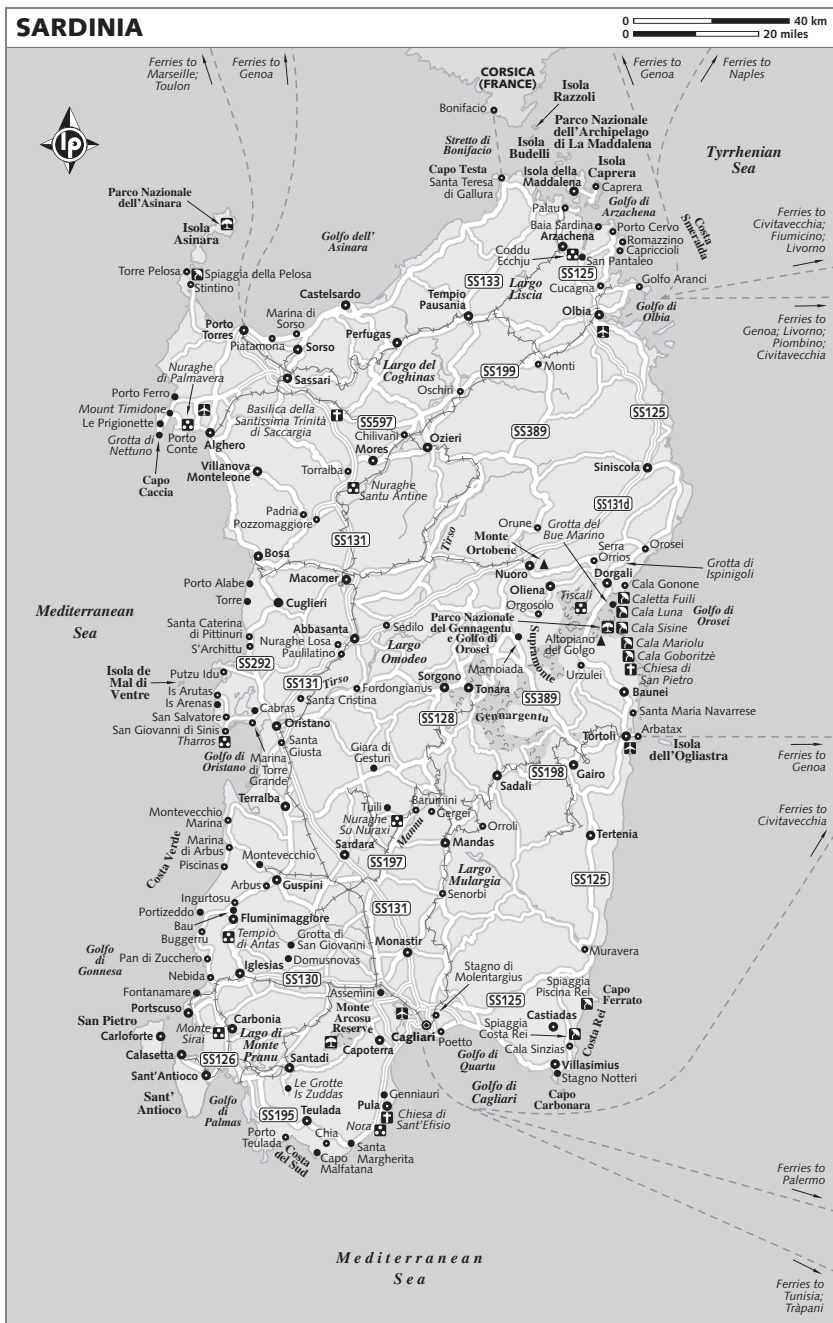
Sardinia Ferries (☎ 199 940 05 00; www.sardiniaferries.com) Operates from Civitavecchia and Livorno to Golfo Aranci and Civitavecchia to Cagliari.

Saremar (☎ 0789 75 41 56; www.saremar.it in Italian & French) Operates regular ferries between Sardinia (Santa Teresa di Gallura) and Bonifacio, across the straits in Corsica.

SNCM (☎ in France 08 91 70 18 01, in Sardinia 079 51 44 77; www.sncm.fr) Runs ferries from Marseille to Porto Torres (via Corsica). There are two to four sailings weekly, but in July and August some leave from Toulon instead.

For tickets and information in Porto Torres, go to **Agenzia Paglietti** (☎ 079 51 44 77; fax 079 51 40 63; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 19).

For sample fares and trip durations see boxed text, p815.



SARDINIA FERRY CROSSINGS

The following table has sample fares on a selection of the main routes. The fares are standard high-season one-way fares (in an armchair, one up from deck class, which is around €7 less). Children aged four to 12 generally pay around half and those under four travel free. Also included here is the high-season cost of transporting a small car. Note that special cut-price fares are frequently available if you book online.

Destination	Adult/car (€)	Duration (hr)
Bonifacio (Corsica)—Santa Teresa di Gallura	15/35	1
Civitavecchia—Olbia	35/96	7
Civitavecchia—Olbia*	54/95	4¾
Genoa—Olbia	63/115	9
Genoa—Porto Torres	58/74	10
Livorno—Golfo Aranci*	48/58	6
Marseille—Porto Torres	75/109	16
Naples—Cagliari	44/90	16¼
Palermo—Cagliari	42/88	13½
Piombino—Olbia	39/65	7
Tràpani—Cagliari	39/89	11

*Fast ferries

Getting Around

BUS

The main bus company is **Azienda Regionale Sarda Trasporti** (ARST; ☎ 800 86 50 42; www.arst.sardegnait.it in Italian), which operates extensive services throughout the island. **FdS** (☎ 070 34 23 41; www.ferroviesardegnait.it) operates a faster service linking Cagliari, Oristano, Sassari, Nuoro Oristano and Porto Torres.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Sardinia is best explored by road. For details about rental agencies in Cagliari, see p821. There are also rental agencies at most other larger towns.

TRAIN

The main **Trenitalia** (www.trenitalia.it) train lines link Cagliari with Oristano, Sassari and Olbia, and are reliable, if slow. The FdS links some of the smaller towns with even slower narrow-gauge trains. From April until September several **Trenino Verde** (www.treninoverde.com) steam-train services use the scenic lines that have long since gone out of standard commercial action. Some lines are very pretty, especially Arbatax—Mandas. The others include Palau—Tempio Pausania; Tempio Pausania—Nulvi (from where you can connect with a regular service to Sassari and Alghero); Bosa—Macomer (which links with the Macomer—Nuoro line); and Sorgono—Isili (linking with the Cagliari line).

CAGLIARI

pop 161,500

This historically heady city hasn't succumbed to being either glossily heritagized or blighted by high-rise hotels, despite the frequent budget flights disgorging tourists from the UK. Instead, Cagliari is a cosmopolitan working city surrounding an evocative medieval centre where taverns and restaurants casually spill out onto the many cobbled piazzas.

Cagliari's two thousand years of history has also left its mark, with archaeological remains, superb churches and several fine museums. Nearby, the city's long Poetto beach is good for a city-side splash, while the salt marshes are preferred by such feathered friends as pink flamingos, cranes and cormorants.

ORIENTATION

The main port, bus and train stations are near Piazza Matteotti, also home to the tourist office. Running through the square is Via Roma, part of the principal route to Poetto and Villasimius in the east and Pula and the south coast to the west.

The warren of lanes just inland from Via Roma is known as the Marina, and is where most of the cheaper and midrange hotels and numerous restaurants are located.

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INFORMATION**Bookshops**

Librerie Zona (☎ 070 65 11 85; Largo Carlo Felice 76) Stocks Lonely Planet guidebooks and a few English-language classics and novels.

Emergency

Police station (☎ 070 49 21 69; Via Amat Luigi 9) The main police station; located behind the imposing law courts.

Internet Access

Lamari (☎ 070 66 84 07; Via Napoli 43; per hr €3.50; ☎ 9am-8pm) Surf through a cappuccino while you check your emails. Also offers wi-fi connection and a scanning and fax service.

Medical Services

Guardia Medica (☎ 070 50 29 31) For a night-time emergency call-out doctor.

Ospedale Brotzu (☎ 070 54 32 66; Via Peretti 21) Northwest of the city centre; take bus 1 from Via Roma.

Money

Bips (☎ 070 65 35 73; Via Sicilia 23) Send or receive money via Western Union here. Telephone booths.

Post

Post office (Piazza del Carmine) Has a fax service and *fermo posta* (poste restante).

Tourist Information

Tourist office Piazza Matteotti (☎ 070 66 92 55; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat Apr-Sep, 8am-2pm Sun Jul-Aug, 8.30am-1.30pm & 2-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat Oct-Mar); Stazione Marittima (☎ 070 66 83 52; ☎ 8.30am-1.30pm & 3-6pm)

SIGHTS**Castello**

The white stone walls of medieval Cagliari, with two of the grand-looking Pisan towers still standing watch, enclose the **castello** (castle), a once virtually impregnable fortress town. The lofty white **Torre di San Pancrazio** (Piazza Indipendenza; admission €2; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3.30-7.30pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 9am-4.30pm Tue-Sun Nov-Mar), next to the northern city gate, is one of the two medieval towers still standing. Under the Catalano-Aragonese it became an austere office for civil servants before being downgraded to a prison (with a view) in the 17th century. The second watchtower, known quaintly as the **Torre dell'Elefante**, takes its name from a small sculpted elephant to the left of the alarming-looking port-cullis door, as you enter from Via Camino Nuovo.

Little remains of the original 13th-century church, now the site of the **Cattedrale di Santa Maria** (☎ 8am-12.30pm & 4.30-7pm) that was buried in a heavy baroque remake in the 17th century. Centuries later, from 1933 to 1938, a reasonably successful throwback façade was added. The square-based bell tower *does*, however, date from the 13th century. Inside are two magnificent stone pulpits on either side of the central entrance, sculpted by Guglielmo da Pisa and donated by Pisa to Cagliari, also way back in 1312.

Cagliari has four important museums located in what was once the city's arsenal (the Regio Arsenale). Constituting the **Citadella dei Musei**, these include the island's most important archaeological and art collections,

located amid remains of the old arsenal and city walls.

The **Museo Archeologico** (☎ 070 68 40 00; adult/concession €4/2, incl Pinacoteca €5/2.50; 🕒 9am-8pm Tue-Sun) contains material found at sites across Sardinia, dating from pre-nuragic to late Roman times. Most impressive is the *bronzetti*, astonishing bronze figurines that (in the absence of any written record) provide one of the few clues to the nuragic people. Roman artefacts include mosaics, statuary, jewellery and coins.

The **Pinacoteca** (☎ 070 68 40 00; adult/concession €2/1, incl Museo Archeologico €5/2.50; 🕒 9am-8pm Tue-Sun) showcases Sardinian art history, particularly from the 15th to the 17th centuries. The four works by Pietro Cavaro, father of the so-called Stampace school and possibly Sardinia's most important artist, are outstanding.

The city's other museums are decidedly more bizarre.

Mostra di Cere Anatomiche (☎ 070 675 70 00; admission €1.50; 🕒 9am-1pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sun) contains some fairly gruesome 19th-century anatomical wax models (long before Dr Gunther von Hagen's *Body World* exhibitions shocked the world!), while the **Museo d'Arte Siamese** (☎ 070 65 18 88; adult/concession €2/0.50; 🕒 9am-1pm & 4-8pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep, 9am-1pm & 3.30-7.30pm Tue-Sun Oct-May) houses a former private collection of Southeast Asian art, crafts and weaponry.

For the best overview of the historic city centre, climb the grand steps to the terrace of monumental **Bastione San Remy** (Piazza Costituzione), remains of defensive walls dating from the late 19th century. There's a flea market here on Sundays.

Marina, Stampace & Around

South of Piazza Costituzione the maze of lanes leading to the seafront is known as the Marina and, aside from being good for hotels and restaurants, this area is also blessed with several interesting churches. The **Chiesa di Sant'Eulalia** has the added perk of the **Museo del Tesoro e Area Archeologica di Sant'Eulalia** (Museo; ☎ 070 66 37 24; Piazza Sant'Eulalia; adult/concession €3/1.50; 🕒 10am-1pm & 5-11pm Jul-Sep, 10am-1pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sun Oct-Jun). In the underground area you can see evidence of Roman roads, discovered when restoration work began on the church. Upstairs is the treasury containing a rich collection of religious art and artefacts.

The centuries-old working-class district of Stampace has several impressive churches

including the triple-arched **Chiesa di San Michele** (Via Ospedale 2; 🕒 7.30-11am & 7-8pm). The most flamboyant and colourful example of rococo in Sardinia, this was an appropriate locale for a rousing prewar speech by Habsburg emperor Carlos V before he set off on what transpired to be a fruitless campaign against Arab corsairs in Tunisia in 1535.

Of the few reminders of the Roman presence in Cagliari, the most important is the **Anfiteatro Romano** (☎ 070 677 64 70; www.anfiteatro romano.it; admission adult/concession €3/2; 🕒 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-4pm Tue-Sun Nov-Mar). The puff-you-out climb to this marvellous 2nd-century outdoor theatre carved out of the hillside is well worth the effort. Although much of the original theatre was cannibalised for other buildings over the centuries, enough has survived to pique your imagination. In summer the amphitheatre is an evocative venue for a series of annual outdoor concerts. Check the website for more information.

Just south of here is the leafy retreat of the **Orto Botanico** (☎ 070 675 35 22; admission €0.50; 🕒 8am-1.30pm & 3-7pm Apr-Oct, 8am-1.30pm Nov-Mar), the city's botanical gardens.

From here you can head further north for a slug of contemporary culture at the recently restored **Galleria Comunale d'Arte** (☎ 070 49 07 27; Viale Regina Elena; adult/concession €3.10/1.05; 🕒 9am-1pm & 5-9pm Wed-Mon Apr-Oct, 9am-1pm & 3.30-7.30pm Nov-Mar) where more than 650 works of Italian art from the mid-19th century to the late 20th century are on display.

Villanova

Although exhaust fumes and soulless modern apartment blocks typify Cagliari's new town of Villanova, this area east of Via Regina Margherita has some worthy sites. Readily visible between the concrete towers are such curiosities as the **Basilica di San Saturno** (Piazza San Cosimo; 🕒 9am-1pm Mon-Sat), the site of a 6th-century church, and one of the island's oldest. Within, excavations of the necropolis continue and you can clearly see several tombs. Nearby, the former abattoir now serves as the **Exmà** (☎ 070 66 63 99; Via San Lucifero 11; exhibition about €3; 🕒 10am-1pm & 5pm-midnight Tue-Sun Jun-Sep, 9am-1pm & 4-8pm Tue-Sun Oct-May), which is both an art-exhibition space and a venue for classical and jazz concerts.

The **Santuario & Basilica di Nostra Signora di Bonaria** (Viale Bonaria; 🕒 6.30am-noon & 4.30-7.30pm Apr-Oct, 6.30am-noon & 4-6.30pm Nov-Mar) houses the

miraculous statue of the Virgin Mary and Christ that allegedly washed ashore from a shipwreck in the 14th century. The sanctuary is dwarfed by the basilica to its right. It was bombed in WWII and restoration was only completed in 1998.

Beaches

Relax for the day with a good read at either the little **Calamosca** or longer **Poetto** beaches, about 1.5km east of the centre. There are several small bars with outside tables where you can sip a cold beer with sand between your toes. The more energetic can take a windsurfing course at the **Windsurfing Club Cagliari** (☎ 070 38 09 18; www.windsurfingclubcagliari.it; Marina Piccola; 6 hr course from €110). Alternatively, head over to the **Stagno di Molentargius**, just west of Poetto, where you may spy pink flamingos on the salt lake.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

The **Festa di Sant'Efisio** is one of the island's most colourful festivals honouring the memory of Sardinia's patron saint in Cagliari. On 1 May the saint's effigy is paraded around the city on a bullock-drawn carriage amid a colourful and extravagantly costumed procession. Cagliari is also known for its lively **Carnevale** in February.

SLEEPING

B&B La Marina (☎ 070 67 00 65; www.la-marina.it; Via Pordile 23; s/d €35/65) Owned by a diminutive elderly couple, this B&B has spacious beamed rooms offering good value with their five-star-style glossy bathrooms with high-pressure showers and fancy gold-coloured tilework. There are a couple of communal breakfast rooms with fridges for the use of guests.

Hotel Aurora (☎ 070 65 86 25; www.albergoaurora.3000.it; Salita Santa Chiara 19; s €37-41, d €60-68; 📞) A pleasantly shabby old *palazzo* just up from the cheerful bustle of Piazza Yenne. The rooms are large with exposed stone and brick and high ceilings; but economical (read saggy) mattresses. Breakfast at a corner café is included in the price.

B&B Sardinia Domus (☎ 070 65 97 83; www.sar diniadomus.it; Largo Carlo Felice 26; s/d €45/70; 📞) This boutique B&B, housed in an elegant building, has rooms washed in pastel colours, comfy sofas and chunky original beams. The owners run a sophisticated wine bar around the corner.

Hotel A&R Bundes Jack (☎ /fax 070 66 79 70; Via Roma 75; s €46-56, d €68-86) This grand old-fashioned place has high ceilings, chandeliers, original painted floor tiles and antique furnishings. Choose a room above the arches with views of the port. Owner Luigi is a real charmer.

EATING

The Marina area around Via Sardengna offers a spoilt-for-choice range of restaurants including traditional cheap eats and more gourmet options designed to blow minds and budgets. There's a good city *mercato* (market) just north of Piazza Yenne in Stampache.

our pick **Isola del Gelato** (☎ 070 65 98 24; Piazza Yenne 35; 🕒 9am-2am Tue-Sun) A bogging 280 variations on the ice-cream theme, including 'low fat' (who are you kidding!), yogurt, soy and *semi freddo* (semifrozen) – the latter is truly delicious with a consistency of mousse.

L'Oca Bianca (☎ 070 66 43 39; Via Napoli 38; pizzas €7.50-10) Even on a quiet night in midwinter, this place is packed with a youthful crowd, here for the lip-smacking choice of pizzas. There are also a couple of risottos on the menu, including a vegetarian favourite: *risotto fantasia di verdure* (with vegetables).

Da Fabio (☎ 070 65 21 40; Via Concezione 25; meals €12-25) This local favourite has three brick-clad dining rooms, remains of a Roman column and a hearty menu with pasta, meat and fish dishes, including red mullet, *ravioli di ricotta* (ravioli with ricotta cheese) and a tourist menu for a reasonable €12.

Da Lillicu (☎ 070 65 29 70; Via Sardegna 78; meals about €25; 🕒 closed Aug) This seafood institution has been in the family since Raffaele Zucca opened it back in the 1920s, and is generally considered one of the best trattorias in the Marina. Try the *burrida* (catfish in white-wine vinegar and nuts) or octopus in red wine. It attracts a regular deluge of locals, so be prepared to wait.

Ristorante Royal (☎ 070 34 13 13; Via Bottego 24; meals €25-30) Tuck into a succulent Florentine steak or choose from a range of other meat and vegetable dishes at this restaurant that offers a window on Tuscany. There's not much fishy fare available but there are plenty of salivatory desserts, including *seadas* (light pastries filled with cheese and covered with honey).

Dal Corsaro (☎ 070 66 43 18; Via Regina Margherita 28; meals €50-55) Dal Corsaro is a classic of Cagliari's fine-dining scene, attracting stern-looking

business types and stiff first dates. Eat à la carte or choose from a range of set-meal options starting at €50. The white-smocked waiters provide impeccable service. Try the delicate handmade lemon-filled tortellini.

The **Vinagreta Salad Bar** (☎ 070 66 46 83; Via dei Pisani 18; salads from €5) offers a vast and imaginative salad choice.

DRINKING

Antico Caffè (☎ 070 65 82 06; Piazza Costituzione; ☎ 10am-midnight) The city's most elegant café dates back to 1855. Sipp your coffee or cocktail on the terrace or under the sumptuous butter-coloured ceiling. DH Lawrence reputedly penned a few words here.

Sotto La Torre (☎ 070 66 01 99; Via San Croce 1; ☎ 8am-3am) An atmospheric cavernous place with several dimly lit rooms and low-beamed ceilings. Ask to peer down the vast downstairs cistern here; it dates back to Punic times.

Il Merlo Parlante (☎ 070 65 39 81; Via Porto Scalas 69; ☎ 10am-midnight) Expect grizzled old geezers and students on the razzle at this boisterous *birreria* (bar serving beer) in a narrow alley off Corso Vittorio Emanuele II. Well-stuffed *panini* are available for the peckish.

De Candio (☎ 339 882 21 46; Via Marco de Candia 1-3, Bastione San Remy; ☎ 11am-2am) Shoehorned into a corner with soul-stirring views from the Bastione across the way. Think subdued lighting, squishy Med-blue sofas and a stone-clad setting with mirrors. There's occasional live music in summer.

ENTERTAINMENT

Aside from the height of summer, most of the nocturnal revelry takes place in Assemini, 16km northwest of Cagliari. The majority of clubs shut down in July and August as Cagliaritanis and visitors shimmy over to the open-air beachside clubs. The night-time scene stretches along the coast as far east as Villasimius and west to Pula and Santa Margherita. Clubs include Pirata, along the SS195 in Pula (km 29.5), and Corte Noa, 3km further along. Both offer a good mix of music and international DJs at high-season time.

Teatro Comunale (☎ 070 408 22 30; Via Sant'Alexinedda) is the main stage for more grown-up classical music concerts and opera.

SHOPPING

For Sardinian crafts, blow your hand-luggage weight limit at the one-stop regional-crafts

shop, **Isola** (☎ 070 49 27 56; Via Baccaredda 176-178). There are additional branches around the island.

Cagliari is the only place in Sardinia to do big-city shopping. Italy's quality department store, **La Rinascente** (Via Roma 141) has a branch here.

A sound outlet for Sardinian music is **Grand Wazoo** (☎ 070 66 60 39; Via Giuseppe Garibaldi 143).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Boat

Boats run from Cagliari's Stazione Marittima (ferry terminal) to various ports on the Italian mainland, as well as to Palermo and Trapani in Sicily.

Bus

The main **ARST** (☎ 800 86 50 42; www.arst.sardegna.it) intercity bus station is on Piazza Matteotti.

FdS buses to Oristano (€6.50, one hour 35 minutes), Nuoro (€12.50, 3½ hours) and Sassari (€14.50, 3¼ hours nonstop) leave from outside the Stazione Marittima. The ticket office for most bus journeys is inside the adjacent McDonald's.

For Iglesias (€3.20, one to 1½ hours), Carbonia, Portovesme (€5, two hours) and the Sulcis area, buses leave from the Viale Colombo 24 bus stop. Buy tickets from Bar Mura, also located here.

Car & Motorcycle

The SS131 Carlo Felice highway links the capital with Porto Torres via Oristano and Sassari. It is the island's main dual-carriage artery. Another highway, the SS130, scoots east to Iglesias.

Train

The main Trenitalia station is on Piazza Matteotti. Trains service both Iglesias (€3.15, 1½ hours) and Carbonia (€3.50, 1¼ hours) in the southwest, while the main line proceeds northwards as far as Sassari (€12.70, 4¼ hours) and Porto Torres via the towns of Oristano (€13.60, 4¼ hours) and Macomer. A branch line from Chilivani heads out for Olbia (€13, four hours) and Golfo Aranci.

The FdS train station for trains travelling north to Dolianova, Mandas and Isili is on Piazza Repubblica. In the summer, the Trenino Verde scenic service operates several routes in this area; for more information on these services, see p815.

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

Cagliari's **Elmas airport** (CAG; ☎ 070 2 10 51) is 6km northwest of the centre. Up to 24 daily buses connect with the city centre (ARST station in Piazza Matteotti). The trip normally takes 10 to 15 minutes and costs €1. A taxi costs around €15.

Bus

CTM (☎ 070 209 12 10) buses have routes across the city and surrounding area. They are handy for the Calamosca and Poetto beaches. A single ticket costs €1, while a *biglietto giornaliero* (day ticket) costs €2.30.

Car & Motorcycle

Parking in blue zones costs €0.60 for the first hour and €1.10 for each hour thereafter. Buy special tickets to leave on the dashboard of your car from newspaper stands or a parking attendant.

International car-rental agencies are represented at the airport and at the ferry port. Local company **CIA** (☎ 070 65 65 03; www.ciaent.it; Via S Agostino 13) charges €205 a week for a Ford Fiesta.

Taxi

There are taxi ranks at Piazza Matteotti, Piazza della Repubblica and on Largo Carlo Felice. You can call for a taxi on ☎ 070 40 01 01.

AROUND CAGLIARI

Beyond the sandy strip of Poetto, the road east hugs the coast prettily (if precariously) all the way around to Villasimius and then north along the Costa Rei.

The landscape is bare and hilly and the more clicks you put between yourself and Cagliari the more enticing the beaches. Numerous nondescript hotels beyond Poetto can put you up, but you are better off pushing onto Villasimius and the Costa Rei.

VILLASIMIUS & COSTA REI

A few kilometres short of Villasimius, a road veers south along the peninsula that leads to **Capo Carbonara**, the most southeasterly point of Sardinia. En route is a camp site and the remains of a square Spanish tower. South of the tower are several beaches, including the lovely sandy stretch of **Spiaggia del Riso**, lapped by azure-coloured sea. The east side is dominated by the **Stagno Notteri** lagoon, seasonally frequented by flamingos. On its seaward side is, yet another, sweeping beach, the **Spiaggia del Simius**.

Villasimius is the most developed town in this area and has a luxury yachting port on the Golfo di Carbonara.

The only camp site nearby is **Spiaggia del Riso** (☎ 070 79 10 52; www.villaggiopiaggiadelriso.it; per adult/child/tent €10/5/10, 4-person bungalow €50-140; ☎ May-Oct) on the beach of the same name, about halfway down the west side of the Capo Carbonara peninsula. It has excellent facilities for families but gets hellishly crowded in midsummer.

Albergo Stella d'Oro (☎ 070 79 12 55; www.steladorolamon.it; Via Vittorio Emanuele 25; s/d €35/70; ☎) is a charming and casual small hotel about 50m east off Piazza Gramsci. Rooms are reasonably sized and all but the one single have their own bathroom. There's a good restaurant (meals €12) here too, serving pizzas and traditional dishes.

Ristorante Carbonara (☎ 070 79 12 70; Via Umberto I 60; meals €30) is seaside chic with a sunny

MONTE ARCOSU RESERVE

Nature lovers should check out this beautiful natural park, located 20km northwest of Cagliari. Protected by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), the reserve covers 36 sq km of natural forest with cork and holm oaks amid spectacular mountainous countryside. The wildlife found here includes several threatened species, most notable of which are the rare Sardinian deer and European wild cats. There are also wild boar, weasels, foxes and an abundant bird life that includes goshawks, golden eagles and kestrels. At the time of writing, there were some 20km of signposted trails open to the public. There are also organised study weekends and courses, guided walks, and plans to build simple cabin-style accommodation. The reserve is free to visit and open at weekends from 9am to 6pm. For more information contact the **Cooperativa il Caprifoglio** (☎ 070 96 87 14; www.ilcaprifoglio.it in English) or the **WWF Sardinian Delegation** (☎ 070 67 03 08; www.worldwildlifefund.org).

blue-and-white colour scheme and a good standard range of seafood dishes. The watery critters are on display for you to choose for your main course.

In the summertime, ARST has up to nine buses daily from Cagliari (€3.30, 1½ hours) to Villasimius.

To take the scenic high coastal road west and then north towards the Costa Rei, head south out of Villasimius and follow the signs. About 25km out of Villasimius you hit **Cala Sinzias**, a pretty, sandy strand with two camp sites. About 6km north you come to the resort of **Costa Rei**, with villas, shops and bars. Like those beaches to its south and north, the **Spiaggia Costa Rei** is pure Bounty-bar commercial: a dazzling white sandy beach lapped by impossibly clear blue-green waters.

Camping Capo Ferrato (☎/fax 070 99 10 12; www.campingcapoferrato.it; camp site per adult/child/tent €10/6/9, 4-person bungalow €43-90; ☽ Mar-Oct) is a shady good-value camping ground at the southern entrance to the Costa Rei resort, 7km from Capo Ferrato.

North of the resort scene, **Spiaggia Piscina Rei** has blinding white sand and turquoise water; there's a camp site fenced-in just behind it. More beaches fill the remaining length of coast up to **Capo Ferrato**, beyond which driveable dirt trails lead north.

The same ARST buses from Cagliari to Villasimius continue around to Costa Rei (€3.80, 30 minutes).

NORA & AROUND

Possibly founded by the Phoenicians in the 8th century BC, the port town of **Nora** was later occupied by Carthaginians and Romans and only finally abandoned in the Middle Ages. The **ancient site** (adult/concession incl Pula museum €5.50/2.50; ☽ 9am-7pm) mostly dates back to ancient Roman times. Upon entry to the site you pass by a single standing column of a former temple, and then the small **theatre** (www.lanottedeipoeti.it in Italian), which creates an atmospheric setting for the annual summer season of performances, including theatre, music and poetry readings. Towards the west are the substantial remains of the **Terme al Mare** (Baths by the Sea). Four columns (a tetrastyle) stand at the heart of what was a patrician villa whose surrounding rooms retain their mosaic floor decoration.

In nearby Pula, the **Civico Museo Archeologico** (☎ 070 920 96 10; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 67; adult/concession incl Nora site €5.50/2.50; ☽ 9am-8pm Sep-Jul, 9am-

midnight Aug), near the central Piazza Municipio, has selected finds taken from Nora – mostly ceramics found in Punic and Roman tombs, a few bits of gold and bone jewellery, Roman glassware and the like.

For a delightful coastal drive, follow the signs to Camping Flumendosa to the coast and head west for around 4km on a narrow asphalted road almost on a level with the sea. You can go diving with the **Scuba Diving School** (☎ 070 924 53 33; www.costadeifiori.it; Hotel Costa dei Fiori, SS 195, km 33.200, Santa Margherita; dive from €35) in nearby Santa Margherita.

If you are looking for tent peg space, try **Camping Flumendosa** (☎ 070 920 83 64; www.campingflumendosa.it; camp site per adult/child/tent €6/3/7.50), located just 20 metres from a stunning sweep of sand. This well-established camp site is shaded by eucalyptus and pine trees and has a bar and minimarket. There is also a **wind-and kite-surfing school** (per hr €25; ☽ Jun-Sep) on the beach here.

There are several luxury hotels in these parts. For somewhere more economical check in at **Hotel Su Guventeddu** (☎ 070 920 90 92; fax 070 920 94 68; s €34-68, d €52-86; (P)), 2km from the Nora site on the road leading around to the Su Guventeddu beach. Set in bucolic surrounds, the rooms here are gradually being redecorated with wrought-iron bedheads, bucket wicker chairs and dark-wood furnishings. The restaurant has traditional dishes (meals €15 to €20) like gnocchi in butter and *pecorino* cheese. English is spoken.

Zio Dino (☎ 070 920 91 59; Viale Segni 14; meals €30) is in an unassuming building, but it serves robust and tasty portions of seafood and meat. The atmosphere is cranked up on Saturdays when wooing couples swoop in to dine on such dishes as *spaghetti allo Zio Dino*, a seafood special. Head for the upstairs terrace.

Regular ARST buses run from Cagliari to Pula (€2.20, 50 minutes). The last one back to Cagliari leaves at 9.30pm. Up to 16 local shuttle buses circulate between Pula and Nora; alternatively it's a 3km walk.

COSTA DEL SUD & AROUND

The small town and beach of **Chia** marks the start of the beautiful Costa del Sud (Southern Coast). The coast winds its way west to Porto Teulada and offers several enticing beaches en route, including Cala Teulada. Stop at the lookout point for the magnificent views high above Capo Malfatano.

MYSTERY TOWERS, FAIRY HOUSES & SACRED WELLS

As early as 1800 BC, Sardinians started raising *nuraghi* (rudimentary defensive towers). These Bronze Age structures, usually made of great slabs of dark basalt or trachyte, have defied explanation throughout the centuries, but one thing is for certain – their creators were astute engineers and mathematicians. In their more complex form, these conical towers, consisting of several levels, are held together by the force of gravity.

Even before they started building *nuraghi*, the Sardinians were busy digging tombs into the rock across the island. These cavities were later known to the superstitious as *domus de janas* (fairy houses). More elaborate were the common graves fronted by what appeared to be great ceremonial entrances known as *tombe dei giganti* (giants' tombs).

From about 1100 BC the island's people began to construct elaborate *pozzi sacri*, or sacred well-temples. Those that have been discovered display many common traits. These include a keyhole-shaped opening in the ground with a triangular stairwell leading down to a well. The wells always face the sun and are so oriented that during solstice the sun shines directly down the stairs. The building techniques were more refined than those employed in the *nuraghi* and nowhere is this more evident than in the Santa Cristina site (p830), northeast of Oristano.

Campeggio Torre Chia (☎ 070 923 00 54; www.campeggiotorrechia.it; camp site per adult/child/tent €8.50/4/6.50, 4-person villa €80-120) is a few hundred metres back from Spiaggia Su Portu, so gets seriously crowded in August. Facilities include a tennis court, pizzeria and children's playground. Turn right at the Chia junction and follow the signs.

ARST buses to/from Chia run along the Costa del Sud a couple of times daily in summer. Up to eight buses run between Cagliari and Chia daily (€3.10, 1¼ hours).

Inland **Le Grotte Is Zuddas** (☎ 0781 95 57 41; www.grotteiszuddas.it; adult/concession €8/4; ☽ 9.30am-noon & 2.30-6pm Apr-Sep, noon-4pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-noon & 2.30-7pm Sun & holidays Oct-Mar) is one of the island's many spectacular caves. The largely limestone rock lends the stalactites and stalagmites a particularly translucent quality. There are hourly tours with English spoken.

SOUTHWESTERN SARDINIA

IGLESIAS

pop 30,100

Despite the ghostly remains of a mine that closed in the 1970s, Iglesias is a lively, appealing town. Head for the main piazza and the pedestrian streets around Via Cagliari for the most atmosphere and life. The Spaniards are long gone but the place retains an Iberian feel with sun-bleached buildings, Aragonese-style wrought-iron balconies and a vivacity you find

in many a Spanish town. Visit at Easter to experience a quasi-Seville experience during the extraordinary drum-beating processions.

The Romans called the town Metalla, after the precious metals mined here, especially lead and silver. Mining equipment dating back to the Carthaginian era was discovered in the 19th century.

Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 0781 3 11 70; www.prolocoiglesias.it in Italian; Via Roma 10; ☽ 10am-noon & 5-9pm Mon-Fri) has information on the town and the surrounding Iglesiasiente region.

Sights

The grand Piazza Sella was laid out in the 19th century. Just off the piazza, amid pleasant hillside sculpted gardens, stand the remains of **Castello Salvaterra**, a Pisan fortress built under Catalan-Aragonese rule. A stretch of the 14th-century northwestern perimeter wall survives along Via Campidano.

The **Duomo** (cathedral) dominates the east of Piazza del Municipio and retains its Pisan-flavoured Romanesque-Gothic façade, as does the bell tower with its chequerboard variety of stone. At the time of writing the cathedral was closed for long-term restoration work.

The **Museo dell'Arte Mineraria** (☎ 333 447 99 80; www.museoartemineraria.it; Via Roma 17; admission free; ☽ 7-9pm daily Jun-Aug, 6-8pm Sat & Sun Sep-May) was a mining school and is designed to re-create the reality of the mines. Many of the materials and displays downstairs were used by the school to train senior mine workers.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Artu (☎ 0781 2 24 92; www.hotelartuiglesias.it; Piazza Sella 15; s €45-76, d €58-86; P ☒ ☒) The most central option, this hotel's exterior ugliness grates with the rest of the square. Thankfully, once inside, the rooms have been recently updated with limed blue-and-green wooden fittings and furniture and plasma-screen TVs. Ask for a view of the square, although on Saturdays this could mean sleeping with a pillow over your head. The management also has apartments to rent.

Euro Hotel (☎ 0781 2 26 43; www.eurohoteliglesias.it; Via Fratelli Bandiera 34; s/d €0/90; ☒) A five-minute walk from the centre, this hotel is astonishingly kitsch and flamboyant. The walls are covered with stylised 18th-century-style paintings in heavy gilt frames and the furniture, doorways and ceilings are similarly delightfully faux. On the modern front, there are fridges, hairdryers and excellent firm mattresses.

Volters & Murion (☎ 0781 3 37 88; Piazza del Collegio 1; meals €25; ☒ closed Tue) This voguish bar and restaurant is tucked into an elbow of Piazza del Collegio, opposite the church. Arty prints decorate the dining rooms with their tubular chairs and chequered tablecloths. The menu is ideal for fussy families and includes stuffed *panini*, corn on the cob, hamburgers and various pasta dishes. There is an outside terrace for enjoying an evening tippie in summertime.

Getting There & Away

Intercity buses arrive at the Via Oristano side of the Giardini Pubblici (Public Gardens). For information and tickets head for Bar Giardini across the road. As many as 10 FMS buses run daily from Cagliari to Iglesias (€3.20, 1½ hours), and as many as 16 trains travel between Iglesias and Cagliari (€3.15, one hour). The **train station** (Via Garibaldi) is about a 15-minute walk along Via Matteotti from the town centre.

TEMPIO DI ANTAS

This Carthaginian-Roman **temple** (☎ 347 817 49 89; adult/concession €3/2; ☒ 9.30am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-5.30pm Sat & Sun), about 15km north of Iglesias on the twisting road towards Fluminimaggiore, is set in a wide, picturesque valley complete with fields of sheep and goats. What you see, including the eight resurrected columns, dates back to Roman times.

There is an enjoyable gentle hike along a former Roman road from here to the **Grotta de**

Su Mannau (☎ 0781 58 01 89; admission adult/concession €6/3.50; ☒ 9.30am-6.30pm), which is an 8km-long cave with incredible rock formations; advance reservations are essential from October to April. For the hike, follow the signs to the Villaggio di Antas, the site of a Roman village. The path continues to the Grotta and is well signposted. Allow around 1½ hours to get there. Alternatively, it's a short drive.

IGLESIENTE COAST

It's not so much the place but the getting there... **Buggerru**, 20km northwest of Iglesias, just south of the Costa Verde, is a small ex-mining town with a small harbour and a rash of holiday apartments. Three kilometres north of town is one of the island's most magnificent beaches. Follow the signs to **Ristorante San Nicolò** (☎ 0781 5 43 59; meals €18), located a Frisbee throw from the sand and good for fresh fish dishes. The wide arc of golden sand stretches a couple of kilometres from here to lovely **Portzeddo** with, yet another, restaurant with magnificent views of the coast, this time with a mountain backdrop. **La Terrazza** (☎ 0781 5 49 49; meals €15) has mainly fish and pasta dishes, plus a bar generally heaving with locals.

If you want to stay, there are several well signposted *agriturismo* (farmstays) including the excellent **Biologico Fighezia** (☎ 348 069 83 03; Località Fighezia, Fluminimaggiore; d half-board €80) situated between Portzeddo and tongue-twister Fluminimaggiore. The location is truly stunning, with views of the lush valley surrounded by green rolling hills and the ocean beyond. The cabin-style rooms have pale terracotta tiles, solid wooden fixtures and private terraces. Dinner is served on a large communal table on the terrace of the main house.

If you fancy a gallop on the beach, check out **Centro Ippico Idaho** (☎ 340 552 34 23; Gabu de Figo, Fluminimaggiore; per hr/day €15/60) which can also organise clip-clops through the surrounding mountains.

Heading south, just 8km west of Iglesias, is the local golden beach of **Fontanamare**, facing the Golfo di Gonnessa. Swing north from Fontanamare along the coast road, which quickly climbs the rocky walls of the Iglesiasiente coast to provide spectacular views northwards. Even before you reach Nebida, 5.5km away, three *faraglioni* (craggy outcrops jutting out of the sea) and the bizarre **Scoglio Pan di Zucchero** (Sugarloaf Rock) islet come into view against a majestic backdrop of sheer rugged cliffs.

GOING VERTICAL

From its initial development in the 1980s, the area around **Domusnovas**, 6km east of Iglesias, has evolved into one of Europe's key climbing destinations with many high-quality cliffs and a staggering 440 routes for both novice and experienced climbers. The two major cliffs are south-facing Chinatown and the high standard west-facing Ruota del Tempo, although there are many other excellent cliffs nearby, particularly those centred around the large natural cave of Grotta di San Giovanni, which is easily accessible by road. The limestone lends itself to a variety of short-to-long multipitch climbs with slabs, overhangs and tafas, while the climate makes this area an excellent winter-sun rock-climbing destination with favourable conditions from early autumn right through to late spring. There are a number of excellent rock-climbing websites, including www.climb-europe.com, which also publishes a rock-climbing guide to Sardinia that can be ordered directly from the site.

Nebida is a sprawling, fairly drab former mining town, uplifted by great views and a useful hotel with a good restaurant. **Pan di Zucchero** (☎ /fax 0781 4 71 14; Via Centrale 365; s €40-50, d €45-55) is in an ugly mustard-coloured block but has a welcoming family feel with children's toys (and grandma) in the lobby. The rooms are neat, if spartan, and some boast balconies and stunning coastal views. The restaurant serves delicious seafood pasta dishes; try the fish-stuffed *ravioli di pesce*.

You can go canoeing or on boat excursions at the nearby coast here with **Mitza** (☎ 0781 4 73 37; Pizzeria Il Giardino, Nebida; ☒ May-Sep).

A few kilometres north, **Masua** boasts close-up views of the Scoglio Pan di Zucchero and the chance to visit a singular mining 'port'. In 1924 a 600m twin-tunnel was dug into the cliff here towards the open sea. An ingenious mobile 'arm' shoved the raw minerals from a conveyor belt to ships moored directly below. **Porto Flavia** (☎ 0781 49 13 00; adult/concession €8/4.50) can be visited daily for one-hour tours (the staff provide the hard hats!) in July and August (four or five visits a day depending on demand). In other months it is generally only possible for groups to visit by calling ahead.

Up to 11 FMS buses run between Iglesias and Masua, just up from Nebida (€1.35, 30 minutes).

CARBONIA & AROUND

pop 32,800

The listless grid-plan town of Carbonia was to have been the pride and joy of the island. In 1936 work began on the island's so-called coal capital. Unfortunately, the idea of attaining self-sufficiency in coal had no chance and today the town is worth no more than a hiccup of a stop. That said, palaeontology fans

may enjoy the **Museo Paleontologico-Speleologico** (☎ 0781 6 91 00 62; Via Campania 1; adult/concession incl guided tour €3/2; ☒ 9am-1pm & 4-8pm Tue-Sun May-Sep, 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Tue-Sun Oct-Apr), with its 700 fossils, rock specimens, cave photos and fauna, and a few intriguing oddities including a reconstructed rodent once unique to Sardinia (but now, perhaps thankfully, extinct).

About 4km west of Carbonia is **Monte Sirai** (admission €2.60; ☒ 9am-5pm Oct-Apr, 9am-1pm & 4-8pm May-Sep). The high plateau was a natural spot for the fort the Phoenicians built here in 650 BC. They were dislodged by local Sardinian tribes and later replaced by the Carthaginians. You can still make out the placement of the Carthaginian acropolis and defensive tower, a necropolis and the grim-sounding *tophet* (where deceased children were interred).

SANT'ANTIOCO & SAN PIETRO

These islands, off the southwestern coast of Sardinia, have sandy beaches and quiet coves, as well as the cheerful towns of Calasetta (Sant'Antioco) and Carloforte (San Pietro), both with whitewashed and pastel-coloured houses lining narrow streets. The town of Sant'Antioco is more developed, but parts still have a delightful, dilapidated feel.

Information

Tourist office San Pietro (☎ 0781 85 40 09; Piazza Carlo Emanuele III 19; ☒ 9.30am-12.30pm & 5-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-noon Sun); Sant'Antioco (☎ 0781 8 20 31; Piazza Repubblica 31a; ☒ 9am-noon & 5.30-9pm Mon-Fri)

Sights & Activities

In Sant'Antioco the **Basilica di Sant'Antioco** is worth visiting for its **catacombs** (Piazza Parrocchia 22; admission €2.50; ☒ 9am-noon & 3-6pm Mon-Sat, 10-11am & 3-6pm Sun), where the early Christians

buried their dead. A few doors down from this quasi-Hammer film-set is a small archaeology museum, while across town some Carthaginian sites are scattered.

A couple of beaches worth bucket-and-spading it to are **Maladroixa** and **Spiaggia Coa Quaddus** along the eastern coast. The town of Calasetta on the northwest of the island is a sleepy place, and there's a boat here that heads across to the Isola San Pietro, whose main resort, **Carloforte**, is relaxed yet elegant with some fine restaurants and cafés.

The tourist offices can recommend **sailing** and **diving** outfits, especially on the Carloforte waterfront.

Sleeping

On both islands you will find a few camping grounds and a handful of hotels.

Hotel La Matta (☎ 0781 82 81 02; www.hotel-lamatta.com; Via Nazionale 125; Sant'Antioco; s/d €35/70; 🏠) A small hotel near the centre, the rooms are modest, but pleasant, with wrought-iron bedheads, a peach-and-white colour scheme and cheery brightly tiled bathrooms. The sepia photos of historic Carloforte are a nice touch. Breakfast can be served in the bedroom for slackers.

Hotel del Corso (☎ 0781 80 02 65; www.hoteldelcorso.it; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 32; Sant'Antioco; s €44-69, d €60-100) This is the best hotel in town, on a leafy tree-lined street with an elegant café downstairs and a gelateria two doors down. The rooms are quietly elegant with terracotta tiles, regency-striped fabrics and small balconies overlooking the street.

Hotel Hieracon (☎ 0781 85 40 28; www.hotelhieracon.com; Corso Cavour 63, San Pietro; s €60-93, d €90-136; 🏠) Carloforte's faded jewel, this hotel is housed in a grey Art Nouveau mansion at the northern end of the waterfront. There's a something-for-everyone choice of rooms, including a family-sized room with four beds.

Eating

Ristorante del Passeggero (☎ 0781 8 37 94; Vespucci 52, Calasetta, Sant'Antioco; meals €18-20) Across from a small strip of park fronting the sea, this restaurant has a warm intimate atmosphere and a menu of pizzas (from €4.50), plus fish dishes like *zuppe di pesce* (fish soup) and *grigliata mista di pesce* (grilled mixed fish).

Ristorante 7 Nani (☎ 0781 84 09 00; Via Garibaldi 139, Calasetta, Sant'Antioco; meals €25-30) Spread out over several floors indoors with a garden dining area, this restaurant dishes up unfussy sea-

food, topped off with a selection of Sardinian sweets and a complimentary glass of *mirto* (the local liqueur) to send you on your way.

Tonno di Corsica (☎ 0781 85 51 06; Via Marconi 47, Carloforte, San Pietro; meals €35-40) Up a few blocks from the seaside along Via Caprera (then turn right), this place is paradise for tuna-lovers (and we're not talking the stuff from the tin...).

Getting There & Around

Sant'Antioco is connected to the mainland by a bridge and is accessible by bus from Cagliari and Iglesias. Regular ferries connect Calasetta and Carloforte. From Carloforte boats run to Portovesme on the mainland. The one-way trip on any of these boats costs approximately €3 per person. Local buses run around Sant'Antioco, and limited summer-time services operate on San Pietro.

COSTA VERDE

From Capo Pecora in the south to Capo Frasca in the north, the Costa Verde (Green Coast) boasts some of Sardinia's most beautiful, unspoiled beaches.

From the south, head inland along the SS126 and turn west at the turn-off for Bau and Gennamari. A high hill road winds out towards the coast. Watch for signs to **Spiaggia Scivu**, a spectacular golden beach. Almost 4km north of the Bau and Gennamari turn-off is another for the ghost town of **Ingurto**. Follow this and the track that winds out west to the coast to reach the magnificent dune-backed **Spiaggia Piscinas**.

From here the road winds north through green *macchia* bush and squat pine trees past several beaches. If you want to stay, look for the *agriturismo* signs. Situated on the slopes of Monte Arquentu just, north of Montevecchio, **Agriturismo L'Aquila** (☎ 347 822 24 26; www.aglaquila.com; Località Is Gennas Arbus; d €48-62) typifies what is available. This traditional working farm is reached via a 2km, winding dirt track and offers comfortable rustic accommodation in tranquil pastoral surrounds.

Just north of here is the low-key Torre dei Corsari resort. While the buildings are fairly bland and modern the broad beach backed by dunes is magnificent.

Brezza Marina (☎ 338 367 68 86; Viale della Torre; apt for per person €40) is run by a charming English-speaking Sardinian couple who rent out several apartments in town.

Verdemare (☎ 070 97 72 72; www.torre-dei-corsari.it; Via Colombo; s/d €40/80) features a vast front terrace, lush garden surroundings and distant sea views making it a winner. The rooms are shiny, large and modern with a love-it-or-ump-it pistachio green-and-white colour scheme.

You will need a car to explore the Costa Verde. A couple of buses run to Ingurto from the inland town of Guspini (reached in turn from Cagliari or Oristano), but from there you have to walk.

WESTERN SARDINIA

The focal point for most visitors is the ancient site of Tharros on the Sinis Peninsula and the beaches to the north. But the sleepy capital, Oristano, has a pleasant centre for strolling and a tangible sense of history. It is well worth a stopover, together with several towns and nuraghic sites in the interior.

ORISTANO

pop 32,800

Oristano has a quietly prosperous feel – despite the mindless graffiti scribbles – with its elegant architecture, palatial piazzas and pedestrian strut of shops and boutiques. The city was founded in the early Middle Ages and, by the 11th century, had grown to become the capital of the Giudicato d'Arborea, one of four provinces in the country prior to the takeover by the Crown of Aragón. Eleonora d'Arborea (1340–1404) became the head of the *giudicato* in 1383 and has gone down in history for her wise administration and resistance to the Catalano-Aragonese. Eleonora's death in 1404 led to capitulation but her Carta de Logu, an extraordinary law code, outlived her. You can see her statue in Oristano's namesake piazza.

Information

Genius Point (Via Pietro Riccio 4; per hr €4; ☎ 8.30am-1pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat) Internet access.

Guardia Medica (☎ 0783 7 43 33) For medical assistance.

Hospital (Viale Fondazione Rockefeller) The main hospital is south of the town centre.

La Pergomena (☎ /fax 0783 7 50 58; Via Vittorio Emanuele II 24) Books on Sardinia, plus a handful of novels in English, French and German.

Pharmacy (Corso Umberto 51)

Post office (Via Mariano IV d'Arborea)

Tourist office Piazza Eleonora d'Arborea 19 (☎ 0783 3 68 31; enturismo.oristano@tiscali.it; ☎ 8am-2pm & 4.15-6.45pm Mon-Sat); Via Ciudadella di Menorca 14 (☎ 0783 7 06 21; ☎ 9am-noon & 4.30-7.30pm Mon-Fri)

Sights

The 13th-century **Torre di Mariano II** (Piazza Roma) is one of the only vestiges of Oristano's medieval walls. The shopping street of Corso Umberto leads from Piazza Roma to **Piazza Eleonora d'Arborea**, presided over by a 19th-century statue of Oristano's heroine. The neo-classical **Chiesa di San Francesco** (Via Sant'Antonio; ☎ 8am-noon & 5-7pm Mon-Sat, 8am-noon Sun) is home to the *Crocifisso di Nicodemoa*, a 14th-century wood sculpture made by an unknown Catalan artist.

Follow Via Duomo to the **Duomo** (Piazza del Duomo; ☎ 7am-noon & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 8am-1pm Sun), built in the 13th century but remodelled in the 18th century. Its baroque bell tower is topped by a multicoloured dome.

Museo Antiquarium Arborese (☎ 0783 79 12 62; Piazzetta Corrias; adult/concession €3/1; ☎ 9am-1.30pm & 3-8pm), in the heart of the town, contains one of the most important collections found on the island. Artefacts dug up at Tharros and on the Sinis Peninsula range from pre-nuraghic items to early medieval pieces. A section of the museum hosts a small collection of *retablos* (painted altarpieces). One series of panels, the *Retablo del Santo Cristo*, painted by the workshop of Cagliari's Pietro Cavoro in 1533, depicts a decorative series of Franciscan saints.

Around 3km south of Oristano at Santa Giusta is the **Basilica di Santa Giusta**. Built from 1135 to 1145, it's one of the earliest Tuscan-style Romanesque churches built on the island. The basilica is easily accessible by local ARST buses.

Festivals & Events

Oristano bursts into life with **Sa Sartiglia**, held on the last Sunday of Carnevale (late February or early March) and repeated on Shrove Tuesday, with its jousting medieval tournament of horsemen in masquerade.

Sleeping

B&B L'Arco (☎ /fax 0783 7 28 49; www.arcobedandbreakfast.it; Vico Ammirato 12; s/d €35/60) This charming B&B, tucked into the corner of a quiet pedestrian street, has just two aesthetically

furnished rooms with beams, terracotta tiles and dark-wood furnishings. Bathrooms have tubs, as well as showers, and there's a small terrace for smoking and sunbathing.

Our pick Eleonora B&B (☎ 0783 7 04 35; Piazza Eleonora d'Arborea 12; www.eleonora-bed-&-breakfast.com; s/d €40/70; ♿ ☒ ☒ ☒) Parts of this high-on-atmosphere *palazzo* date back to medieval times. Tastefully decorated by the owners Andrea and Paola, there are several en-suite rooms to choose from, including one with Jacuzzi bath and another with a balcony overlooking the pretty garden. There is wi-fi access, plus fridges for the use of guests.

Duomo Albergo (☎ 0783 77 80 61; www.hotelduomo.net; Via Vittorio Emanuele II 34; s €70-90, d €110-150; ♿ ☒) A real charmer with spacious rooms

set around a central courtyard. Decorations throughout the hotel are deeply traditional, with wall hangings of local embroidery. The same owner runs Ristorante Craf (opp).

Eating

Trattoria Gino (☎ 0783 7 14 28; Via Tirso 13; meals €20) is possibly not the place for proposing marriage: think bright lights and humble interior. But the food is made with salutary (and salutatory) care, particularly the simple pasta dishes like *fettucine al funghi* (with mushrooms) or *ravioli burro e salvia* (butter and sage).

Antica Trattoria del Teatro (☎ 0783 7 16 72; Via Pargaglia 11; meals €20-25) This lustrous trattoria is on a quiet street in the pedestrian area, opposite the theatre. It is washed in sunny yellow with

a sky blue ceiling and the menu includes a hearty minestrone and several lightweight options such as a fish and vegetable tempura.

Ristorante Craf (☎ 0783 37 06 89; Via de Castro 34; meals €35) has carafe loads of atmosphere. It's a 17th-century former granary, with vaulted brick-faced dining rooms and folksy clutter. The menu smacks of traditional Sicilian cuisine including *panne frattau* (Sardinian bread soup), fish and if you're game, *grigliata di carne* (stew of ram, kid, piglet and donkey).

Shopping

Specialità Sarde (☎ 0783 7 27 25; Via Figoli 41; ☒ closed Sun) Try this one-stop showroom for all the gourmet Sardinian goodies, including cheese and various fancy fare in jars. Typical basketry is also on sale.

Getting There & Around

The main intercity bus station is on Via Cagliari. ARST buses leave for destinations all over the province, as well as to longer-distance destinations such as Sassari (€7.50, four daily) and Cagliari (€6.50, three daily). Buses leave once every half-hour for the 10- to 15-minute trip to Santa Giusta.

FdS buses travel to Cagliari (€6.10, 1¼ hours, four daily) plus Sassari (€7.75, 2½ hours, four daily); several also head east to Nuoro (€6, two hours, four daily). These buses arrive and leave from Via Lombardia. Buy tickets at **Blu Bar** (Via Lombardia 30; ☒ 6am-10pm Mon-Sat) or on the bus on Sunday.

As many as 20 trains run between Cagliari and Oristano (€5, two hours). Some trains arrive from Sassari and Olbia. The station is southwest of the centre on Piazza Ungheria.

Oristano city buses on the *azzurra* (blue) line run from Via Cagliari to the Marina di Torregrande.

BARUMINI & AROUND

A World Heritage site and one of the most important of the island's megalithic *nuraghi* is the **Nuraghe Su Nuraxi** (adult/concession €4.20/2.10; ☒ 9am-8pm), which lies 500m to the west of the village of Barumini on the road to Tuili. The hulk of the central tower of the complex stands as a prominent landmark; however, what makes it impressive is not so much the central tower but the extent of the village ruins around it, some of which date from the Bronze Age. Note the council's room with its seats and niches, presumably used for meetings.

Hotel Sa Lolla (☎ 070 936 84 19; fax 070 936 11 07; Via Cavour 49; s/d €42/60; ♿) is a striking ranch-style hotel with seven freshly decorated rooms and a welcoming home-sweet-home vibe. The restaurant here pumps out exquisite home-cooked food (meals €15) and there's a pool and tennis court for working off the extra kilos. The location, a few hundred metres east of the Chiesa di Santa Tecla, is excellent.

To the hotel's north is the high **Gia di Gesturi** plateau, home to some 500 wild *cavallini* ('mini-horses', or ponies), most likely seen by shallow *pauli* (seasonal lakes) at daybreak or dusk.

About 24km by road to the east (you have to double-back through Serrior or you'll miss it) is the **Santuario Santa Vittoria di Serri** (adult/concession €4/2; ☒ 9am-7pm), the most extensive nuraghic settlement unearthed in Sardinia.

You need your own transport to get around this area as buses are rare and may leave you stranded.

SINIS PENINSULA

West of Oristano stretches the Sinis Peninsula (Penisola di Sinis), with sandy beaches, the ruins of ancient Tharros and the possibility of being in the pink – and seeing flamingos.

Tharros & Around

The ancient city of **Tharros** (☎ 0783 37 00 19; adult/concession incl Museo Civico in Cabras €4/2; ☒ 9am-sunset), set impeccably against the sea at the southern extreme of the peninsula, reached the height of its importance under the Carthaginians. What is visible today, however, largely dates back to the Roman era, when the city underwent a thorough overhaul, particularly in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD, when the basalt streets were laid, and the aqueduct, baths and other major monuments were built.

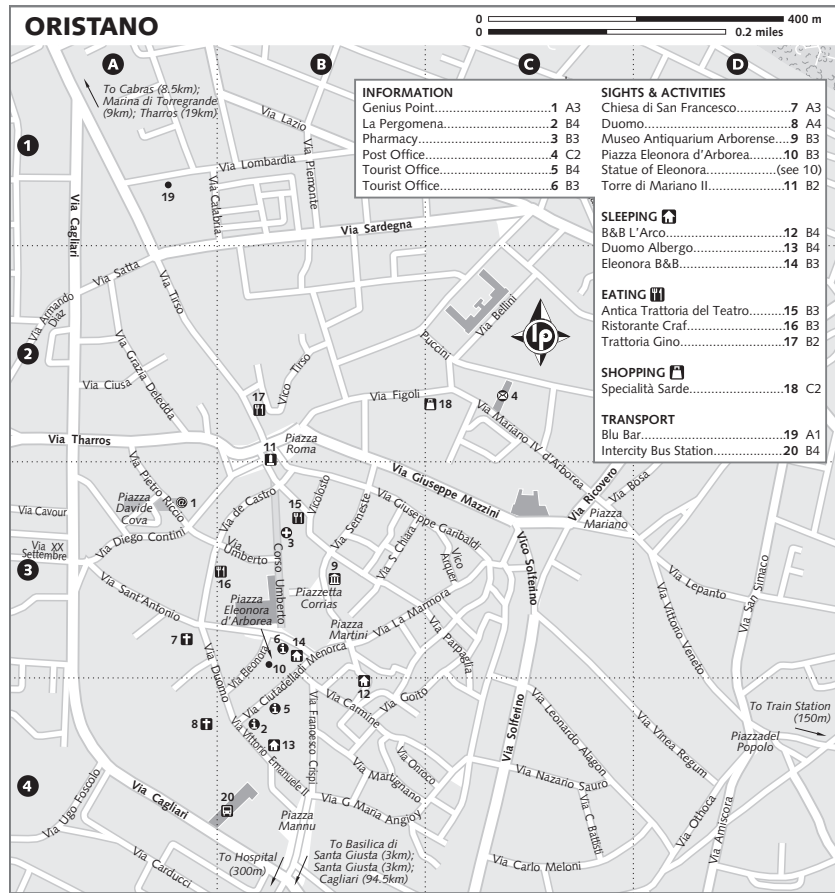
Just before Tharros is the settlement of **San Giovanni di Sinis**, with its 6th-century Byzantine church of the same name; it's one of the oldest in Sardinia.

Some 4km north, in a tiny village of pastel-coloured houses once used for spaghetti westerns, is the tiny church of **San Salvatore**, built over a pagan temple.

In summer, four ARST buses per day head out to Tharros from Oristano (€1.55, 20 to 30 minutes).

Cabras & Around

This straggling lagoon town is really only worth stopping at for the **Museo Civico** (☎ 783



29 06 36; Via Tharros 121; adult/concession incl Tharros €4/2; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4-8pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep, 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Tue-Sun Oct-May) at the southern end of the town. It has Carthaginian and Roman artefacts from Tharros, as well as prehistoric items from the nearby archaeological site of Cuccuru in Arius. Regular ARST buses run from Oristano (€0.85, 15 minutes).

Heading 6km north you come to the fairly unspectacular small town of Riola Sardo with the decidedly spectacular **Hotel Lucrezia** (☎ 0783 41 20 78; www.hotellucrezia.it; Via Roma 14; s €75-90, d €120-150; ☎). The Lucrezia is a former manor house and oil mill with rooms surrounding an inner courtyard complete with wisteria-draped pergola, fig and citrus trees. The rooms have high plush beds with antique bedheads and furnishings with sumptuously tiled bathrooms. The management regularly organises Italian cooking, water-colour painting and wine-tasting courses. Or if that all sounds like too much brain power, opt for a massage (€60).

For Italian language and culture courses contact the **Dolce Vita School** (☎ 0783 5 15 31; www.dolcevitaschool.com; Casella Postale, Milis; courses per week from €120) in nearby Milis.

Beaches

The **Spiaggia di San Giovanni di Sinis** beach nearest to Tharros has the advantage of being relatively free of rocks and algae, although this can equal a definite lack of sun-bronzing space in high season.

Of the many beaches further north, **Is Arutas** is certainly different. Mingled in with the pebbles and sand is a good quantity of quartz – walking along the beach is like getting a foot massage (but making a souvenir of some of the quartz is illegal, enforceable by law). The beach is signposted and is 5km west off the main road leading north from the church of San Salvatore.

At **Putzu Idu**, a long and sandy beach is backed by a motley set of holiday homes and beach bars. The lagoon inland from Putzu Idu often hosts some of Sardinia's flamingo population. The funky **Scuba Café** (☎ 349 876 14 27; Lungomare, Putzu Idu) has a wide terrace on the sand, live music at weekends and can assist with arranging wind- and kite-surfing rental and courses. Alternatively, explore the watery depths with **9511 Diving** (☎ 335 605 94 12; www.9511.it; dive from €35; ☎ May-Sep), which has a kiosk on the beach.

Yet another option is to take a trip to the **Isola di Mal di Ventre** with **Naturaventura** (☎ 0783 5 21 97; www.capomannu.it; half-/full day excursion incl short hike €40/60). The company also runs a wind- and kite-surfing school, offers diving and rock climbing courses, rents out mountain bikes and organises treks.

You can find accommodation in Putzu Idu, Mandriola and Su Pallosu, and a handful of restaurants or pizzerias keep hunger at bay. Up to three ARST buses run from Oristano to Putzu Idu (€1.70, 30 minutes) in summer. The summer service to Tharros goes on as far as Is Arutas.

NORTH ORISTANO COAST

Further north of the Sinis Peninsula are some superb beaches around and in the low-key **Santa Caterina di Pittinuri** resort, flanked by soaring cliffs. The emerald waters in the cove of **S'Archittu** are similarly tempting. Alternatively, head a few kilometres south for the **Is Arenas** beach, reached via tracks passing three camp sites. Buses between Oristano and Bosa stop at Santa Caterina, S'Archittu and Cuglieri and at the camp sites on request. At the small town of Tresnuraghes, head towards Torre for some great hiking country. West is **Porto Alabe** which has a great swathe of sand and is popular with divers and surfers. You can arrange rental and courses for both at **Bar Lidolando** (☎ 0384 7 49 46; www.lidolando.it; dive from €30), right on the beach, which also has live music in the summer.

LAGO OMEDEO CIRCUIT

Following the SS131 highway north out of Oristano, look for **Santa Cristina** (admission incl Paulilatino archaeological museum €3.50; ☎ 8.30am-11pm May-Sep, 8.30am-9pm Oct-Apr), site of a small pilgrims' church, nuraghic village and, most importantly, an ancient nuraghic well-temple whose lines are so perfect it could have come from an Ikea flat pack. Finds from the Santa Cristina site can be viewed a few kilometres north at a small archaeological museum in **Paulilatino**. Just north of Paulilatino is one of the island's most important **nuraghi**, the impressive **Nuraghe Losa** (☎ 0785 5 48 23; admission €3.50; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm), dating back to 1500 BC.

About 14km northeast of the Nuraghe Losa is the unremarkable rural town of **Sedilo**, which crackles to life for the **Ardia** festival on 6 and 7 July when an unruly pack of skilled horsemen race around a dusty track while onlookers drink, hoot and fire their guns into the air.

About 30km south of Sedilo on the banks of the Tirso river is the pretty rosy-glow town of **Fordongianus**, where everything seems to be made of the local rust-coloured trachyte stone. Luxuriate at the **Terme Romane** (Roman baths; ☎ 0783 6 01 57; admission €3; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 3-7.30pm summer, 9.30am-1pm & 3-5.30pm winter), from where piping hot water still bubbles forth into the river.

Your own transport is needed to get to and around most of these sights, although several ARST buses run from Oristano to Fordongianus (€2.20, 40 minutes). Buses from Oristano to Abbasanta (€2.80, 55 minutes), via Paulilatino, put you within walking distance of the Nuraghe Losa.

BOSA

pop 7900

Bosa has seductive looks. Washed-out pastel houses in shades of green, yellow, coral and ochre line an evocative historic centre of ancient cobbled streets, crowned by a ruined castle. The flip side to this medieval honey pot is the nearby beach resort with its modern low-rise hotels, restaurants and holiday homes. Bosa lies within the fat finger of Nuoro province, which slips its way to the western coast between the provinces of Sassari and Oristano.

Information

Medical services (☎ 0785 37 46 15; Viale Italia) Just off the beach at Bosa Marina.

Tourist office Bosa Marina train station (☎ 0785 37 71 08; ☎ 10am-1pm & 7-10pm Jun-Sep); Via Azuni 5 (☎ 0785 37 61 07; www.infobosa.it in Italian; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 6-8.30pm May-Sep)

Sights & Activities

Bosa's medieval **castle** was built in 1112 by a noble Tuscan family. The Temo river, with its 8km of navigable waters, supported a local tanning industry. Also of interest is the Romanesque church of **San Pietro Extramuros** (☎ 10am-7pm May-Sep), 2km from the old bridge on the south bank of the Temo. Bosa Marina's broad, sandy **beach** is the perfect place to end a tough morning's sightseeing. Wind-and-kite surfers like this spot and it is possible to hire gear on the beach. There are spectacular coral reefs offshore. To organise dives, contact the **Bosa Diving Center** (☎ 0785 37 56 49; Via Colombo; dives from €35) near the beach.

The coastline between Bosa and Alghero is stunning, with rugged cliffs dropping down to coves. It's a protected area and a breed-

ing ground for several rare bird species. If you would like to join a **bird-watching** group, contact Antonio Cossu care of Le Palme hotel (see Corte Fiorita, below).

Sleeping & Eating

Corte Fiorita (☎ 0785 37 70 58; www.albergo-diffuso.it; Via Lungo Temo de Gasperi 45; s €42-90, d €60-110; ☎) Three historical homes have been aesthetically restored into boutique hotels: Le Palme, 1 Gerani and Le Conce. All are located in and around the historic centre of town. Check-in and information for all accommodation is only available from Corte Fiorita, located on the street flanking the river, just over the bridge.

our pick **Lido Chelo** (☎ 0785 37 38 04; www.lidochelo.it; Lungo Mare Mediterraneo, Bosa Marina; 2-bed apt from €100; ☎) These apartments have a blissful beachside location with private terraces complete with deck chairs and wooden tables and chairs. The apartments are modern and well equipped. Be prepared to grow happily plump; the management runs the adjacent ice-cream café, with a more formal restaurant upstairs. Note that there's a two-day minimum stay (shouldn't pose a problem).

Bainas (☎ 339 209 09 67; agriturbainas@tiscali.it; Via San Pietro; s/d €35/70) Located a 10-minute walk from town, this dark-red ochre low-rise *agriturismo* is stunningly positioned surrounded by fields of artichokes, olive and orange trees. The four rooms are modern and tastefully decked out with terracotta tiles and the veranda views are blissful, especially at sundowner time. Breakfast and half-board available.

La Pulce Rossa (☎ 0785 37 56 57; Via Lungo Temo Amendola; meals €24) Across from the river, this restaurant's menu is unwaveringly authentic, with delicious pasta made daily by flamboyant chef Vincenzo. For undecided tastebuds, there are more than 47 pizzas to choose from, as well.

Sa Pischedda (☎ 0785 37 30 65; Via Roma 8; meals €25-30) This kitchen is recognised by both the Slow Food Movement and the Michelin guide. It is run with passion by the son of the owner (his brother runs the same-name hotel where the restaurant is located). Try the *fregola alla arselle* (homemade rice-shaped pasta with clams and cherry tomatoes); this type of pasta is similar to couscous and thought to originate from North Africa.

Also recommended is **Bert Pizzeria** (☎ 0785 37 46 10; 50 Corsia Vittoria Emanuele 2; pizzas from €5). On Bosa's prettiest street, it has excellent pizzas and *panini* to eat here or take away.

Getting There & Away

All buses stop at Piazza Zanetti. Most services are run by FdS, which has a ticket office on the square. Up to four buses run to/from Alghero. The quicker ones take the scenic coastal route (€3, 55 minutes). To reach Sassari takes over double the time (€6, 2¼ hours).

NORTHERN SARDINIA

ALGHERO

pop 42,000

Alghero's medieval centre with its cobbled lanes, bustling squares and honey-coloured walls preserves more than a whiff of the centuries of Catalan presence here. This legacy dates back to 1323 when the conquerors of the Crown of Aragón tried to 'ethnically cleanse' several Sardinian cities by replacing the local populace with Catalan colonists. These attempts largely failed except here, where Catalan is still spoken and street signs and menus are often in both languages. Alghero makes an agreeable base for exploring the northwest but can get crowded in summer and at weekends with a steady stream of tourists arriving on cut-price flights from the UK and Germany.

Orientation

Alghero's historic centre is on a small promontory jutting into the sea, with the new town stretching out behind it and along the coast to the north. Intercity buses arrive in Via Catalogna, just outside the historic centre. The train station is about 1km north, on Via Don Minzoni.

Information

Bar Miramare (☎ 079 973 10 27; Via Gramsci 2; per hr €5.10; ☎ 8.30am-1pm & 4.30pm-2am) Check your emails at this gruff, old-fashioned bar.

Farmacia Bulla (Via Garibaldi 13) Pharmacy.

Ospedale Civile (☎ 079 99 62 00; Via Don Minzoni) The main hospital.

Post office (Via Carducci 35)

Tourist office Piazza Porta Terra 9 (☎ 079 97 90 54; www.infoalghero.it in Italian; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun Apr-Oct, 8am-2pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar); Fertilia airport (☎ 079 93 51 24; ☎ 8.30am-2.30pm & 5-10pm)

Sights & Activities

Situated in the historic centre of town, the **Cattedrale di Santa Maria** is an odd mishmash

of Moorish, baroque, Renaissance and other influences, but its **bell tower** (€1.50; ☎ 7-9.30pm Jul-Sep) remains a fine example of Catalan-Gothic architecture. Next door, the **Museo Diocesano** (Piazza Duomo; adult/concession €3/1.50; ☎ 10am-1pm Apr-Dec, 5-8pm Apr-Jun, 6-10pm Jul & Aug) houses religious treasures in a former chapel.

On the old town's main street is the engaging **Chiesa di San Francesco** (Via Carlo Alberto; ☎ 9.30am-noon & 5-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 5-7.30pm Sun), a combination of Romanesque and Gothic styles with an austere stone façade.

Several landward towers remain, including **Torre Porta Terra** (Piazza Porta Terra; adult/concession €2.50/1; ☎ 9am-1pm & 5-9pm), with its panoramic viewing terrace overlooking the city's rooftops, an excellent tourist bookshop and a display on the town's history. To the south, impressive **Torre di San Giovanni** (admission free; ☎ 9am-1pm & 5-8pm Mon-Sat) houses an art gallery.

Due north, the **Bastione della Maddalena**, with its eponymous tower, is part of the only remnant of the city's former land battlements. The Mediterranean crashes against the seaward walls of the **Bastioni di San Marco** and **Bastioni di Cristoforo Colombo**. Along these bulwarks are some inviting restaurants and bars where you can camera-snap the sunset over a cocktail.

North of Alghero's yacht-jammed port, Via Garibaldi sweeps up to the town's beaches, **Spiaggia di San Giovanni** and the adjacent **Spiaggia di Maria Pia**. Indeed, the sands continue pretty much uninterrupted around the coast to Fertilia.

Courses

If you want to brush up on your Italian, **Stroll & Speak** (☎ 328 765 54 77; www.strollandspeak.com; Via Cavour 4; 20hr/5 students €180) is well established.

Festivals & Events

The **Estate Musicale Internazionale di Alghero** (International Summer of Music) is staged in July and August, and features classical music concerts in the evocative setting of the Chiesa di San Francesco cloister.

Sleeping

It is virtually impossible to find a room in August unless you book in advance.

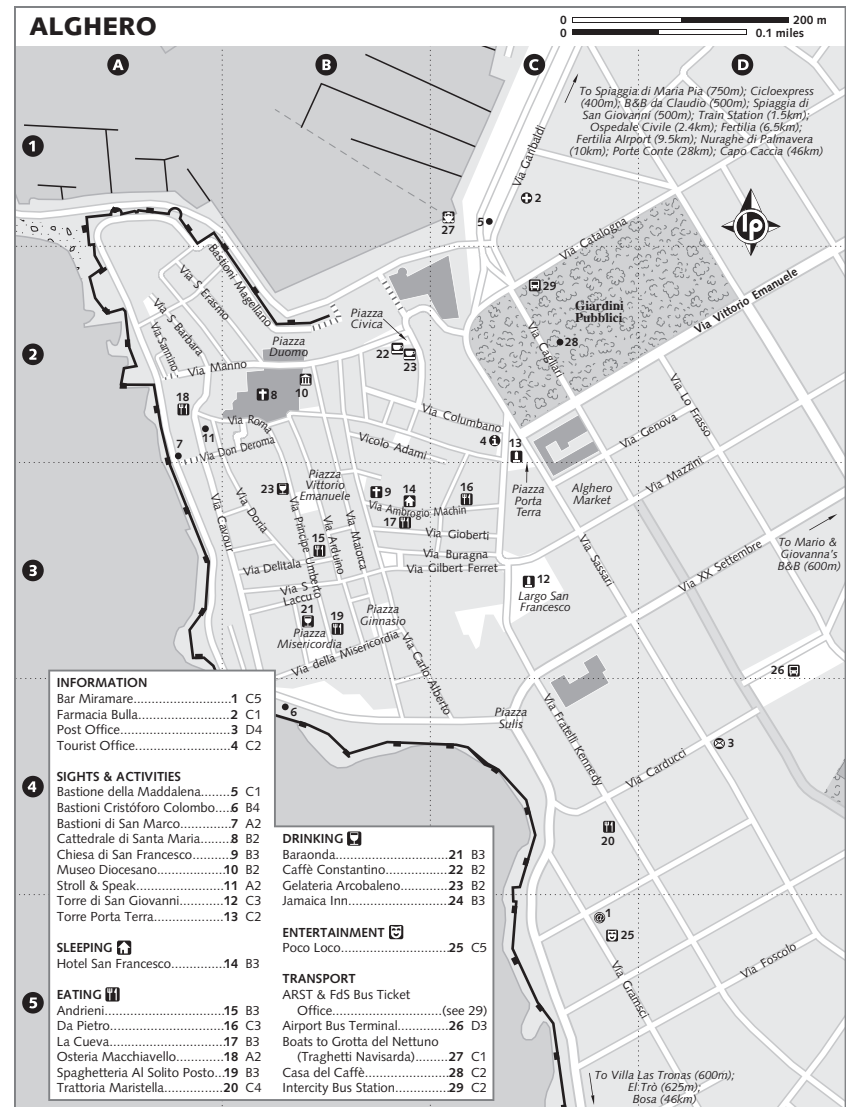
Mario & Giovanna's B&B (☎ 339 890 35 63; www.marioandgiovanna.com; Via E Porro 17; s/d €35/55, d with bathroom €60; ☎) Run by an affable couple, this place has homey rooms lovingly furnished with pictures and ornaments. Mario worked

as a chef in England and guests are welcomed with a drink while he practises his English with a friendly chat. Located in the blander, modern part of town, it's about a 15-minute stroll to the historic centre. Mario also has apartments to rent.

B&B da Claudio (☎ 079 98 42 36; 7 Via Don Minzoni; s/d €45/60) More like an apartment than a true

B&B, there are three bedrooms, two bathrooms and a kitchen; a great choice if you are travelling with friends or grandma in tow. Let's hope this place keeps going – Claudio is studying to be a lawyer.

Hotel San Francesco (☎/fax 079 98 03 30; www.sanfrancescohotel.com; Via Ambrogio Machin 2; s/d €56/96; ☎ ☎) Monks still live on the 3rd floor of



this hotel, built in the former convent of the Chiesa di San Francesco. The hotel rooms are five star in monastic terms, but still nothing fancy – aside from the satellite TV. Try to get a room overlooking the lovely medieval cloisters. There are classical concerts in the summer.

Villa Las Troncas (☎ 079 98 18 18; www.hvlt.com; Lungomare Valencia 1; s €100-220, d €160-290; P ♻️ 🚰 🚿) Splash out and stay at this 19th-century Art Nouveau palace situated above the waves. The former holiday home of Italian royalty, the rooms are pure *fin de siècle* plush, with acres of brocade, elegant antiques and moody old oil paintings.

Eating

Gelateria Arcobaleno (Piazza Civica 34) According to the placard outside, the *Sunday Times* (UK) reckons this place has 'the best ice cream in town'. Join the queue and try the three-scoop combo of hazelnut, *stracciatella* (vanilla with chocolate shavings) and coffee.

Spaghetteria Al Solito Posto (☎ 328 913 37 45; Piazza Misericordia; meals €20-25; ♻️ Fri-Wed) The corner TV and plastic tablecloths create an overwhelming ambience but the pastas are *al dente* delicious; try the pasta *gorgonzola brucoli e panna* (with gorgonzola, broccoli and cream).

Trattoria Maristella (☎ 079 97 81 72; Via Fratelli Kennedy 9; meals €22-25) Here you'll find one of the best deals in town for moderately priced but innovative fare. The canary-yellow décor is classic modern Mediterranean and in summer you can sit outside. Try the pasta shells with tomatoes, rocket and smoked ricotta.

Da Pietro (☎ 079 97 96 45; Via Ambrogio Machin 20; meals €25) Typical restaurant in every way from the stone vaulted ceiling to the fish dishes, pastas and risottos. The atmosphere is intimate and the *crema catalana* (an agreeable import from Spain) is worth keeping space for.

Osteria Macchiavello (☎ 079 98 06 28; Via Cavour 7; meals €22-28) This restaurant specialises in full-on meaty flavours like gnocchi with wild boar, but with a thoughtful few choices for the vegetarian in the family, such as homemade pasta with cheese, potatoes and mint in a tomato and basil sauce.

La Cueva (☎ 079 97 91 83; Via Gioberti 4; meals €30-35) This bright hole-in-the-wall arrangement is *the* best place in town for reasonably priced lobster dishes. Note that lobster is a costly delicacy everywhere, so get it weighed first to avoid possible indigestion when you come to pay the bill.

Also recommended is **Andrieni** (☎ 079 98 20 98; Via Arduino 45; meals €50), an upscale restaurant that will appeal to foodies.

Drinking

Caffè Costantino (Piazza Civica 31; ☎ 7.30am-midnight) The classiest coffee stop in town is on the ground floor of the Gothic Palazza d'Albis. Alternatively, you can sip your cappuccino *al fresco* while people-watching on the square. Sadly, the food doesn't live up to the setting.

Jamaica Inn (☎ 079 973 30 50; Via Principe Umberto 57; ♻️ 7pm-late Tue-Sun) Look for the barn-size green doors and outside seating on the corner of this medieval square. This place takes pride in its cocktails including 'tequila sunrise' and 'sex on the beach' (for adventurous quaffers).

Baraonda (Via Principe Umberto 75; ♻️ 10am-late) This moody wine bar for swooning couples has burgundy walls and a couple of cosy rooms for locked-eyes-over-cocktails time; there is outside seating as well.

Entertainment

Poco Loco (☎ 079 973 10 34; Via Gramsci 8; ♻️ 7pm-1am) Gets the thumbs up from readers for its cavernous atmosphere and regular programme of live music. Frothy draught beer and pizza help stave off the midnight munchies. There's the added surprise of a bowling alley upstairs.

El Tró (Lungomare Valencia 3; ♻️ Tue-Sun 9pm-late) Less than 1km south of the centre, El Tró is a kind of beach bar without the beach, situated on a rocky outcrop by the sea. People flock here and, late at night, start working on their moves on the dance floor. On Friday and Saturday it's a steamy dance-pit until dawn.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Fertilia airport (AHO; ☎ 079 93 50 39), 10km north of town, has domestic flights from Italy, and Ryanair flights from London and Frankfurt.

BUS

Intercity buses stop at Via Catalogna, by the Giardini Pubblici. Buy tickets for ARST and FdS buses at the booth in the gardens.

Up to 18 buses (ARST and FdS) depart daily to/from Sassari and take around an hour (€2.50 to €2.75). ARST runs up to eight buses to Porto Torres (€3.20, 50 minutes). Other routes include two buses daily to Bosa (€3, 55 minutes) and three buses daily to Olbia, direct and via Sassari (€4 to €6.10, 2½ hours).

TRAIN

The train station is 1.5km north of the old town on Via Don Minzoni. Up to 11 trains run to and from Sassari (€2, 35 minutes, daily).

Getting Around

Eight FdS buses a day travel between the Giardini Pubblici and the airport (€0.70, 20 minutes). A taxi to the airport costs around €25.

Line AO runs from Via Cagliari (via the Giardini Pubblici) to the beaches. Urban buses also operate to Fertilia as well as several places beyond. You can pick up these buses at stops around the Giardini Pubblici. Tickets (€0.70) are available at Casa del Caffè in the park and most *tabacchi* (tobacconists) outlets.

Cicloexpress (☎ 079 98 69 50; www.cicloexpress.com; Via Garibaldi; bikes per day €7-14, scooters per day from €23), can provide pedal power and scooters.

AROUND ALGHERO

About 6km northwest of Alghero on the road to Porto Conte is one of the island's most professional diving centres: **Diving Center Capo Galera** (☎ 079 94 21 10; www.capogalera.com; Località Capo Galera; dive from €40; d €60-100, 6-bed apt from €100) which also offers accommodation in a tastefully refurbished holiday villa dating from the '50s.

Continuing on the road to Porto Conte you reach the impressive **Nuraghe di Palmarvera** (☎ 079 99 00 40; admission €3, audioguide additional €3, guided visit additional €2, incl Necropoli di Anghelu Ruiu €5/10/8; ♻️ 9am-7pm Apr-Oct, 9.30am-4pm Nov-Mar). At the heart of this 3500-year-old nuraghic village stands a central limestone tower and an elliptical building with a secondary sandstone tower that was added later. The AF local bus from Alghero to Porto Conte passes through here (€0.70, 15 to 20 minutes).

About 7km north of Alghero, just to the left (west) of the road to Porto Torres, lie scattered the ancient burial chambers of the **Necropoli di Anghelu Ruiu**. The 38 tombs carved into the rock date from between 2700 and 3300 BC. These sorts of tombs came to be known as *domus de janas* (fairy houses). You need your own vehicle to get here.

Just 2km further up the road are the beautiful vineyards and **enoteca** (wine shop) of **Sella & Mosca** (☎ 079 99 77 00; www.sellaemosca.com; ♻️ 8.30am-1pm & 3-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-8pm Sun mid-Jun-mid-Sep), the island's best-known wine-makers. Join a tour of the **museum** and **cellars** (☎ 079 99 77 00; admission free; ♻️ tours 5.30pm Mon-Sat mid-Jun-mid-Oct).

The road west from the *nuraghe* heads to **Porto Conte**, a lovely unspoiled bay; turn left at the *scuola di vela* sign and stop at **Bar delle Ninfe** (☎ 340 936 24 35; Pineta Mogoni, Porto Conte), an unpretentious beach bar with a backdrop of mimosa and eucalyptus trees. The **Club della Vela** (☎ 3394 39 16 69; windsurfing courses per hr from €25) also operates from here and offers windsurfing, canoeing, kayaking and sailing courses, as well as renting out boats, ranging from rubber dinghies to catamarans.

Just west of Porto Conte at the base of Mount Timidone is the nature reserve, **Le Prigionette** (☎ 079 20 182 00; ♻️ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) with marked forest paths and tracks. The wildlife here includes Tibetan goats and wild boar. There is free entrance, but you need to show ID. Double back and carry on to **Capo Caccia**, a dramatic cape jutting out high above the Mediterranean. The end of the road is marked by the **Grotta di Nettuno** (☎ 079 94 65 40; adult/concession €10/5; ♻️ 9am-7pm Apr-Sep, 9am-6pm Oct, 9am-2pm Nov-Mar); to get there, climb down several hundred steps along the seaward face of Capo Caccia. The grotto is an underground fairyland that can also be accessed by sea. **Traghetto Navisarda** (☎ 079 95 06 03; adult/concession €12/6) runs several boats a day from April to October and allows you a fish-eye view of the coast from Alghero to Capo Caccia before depositing you at the grotto. Otherwise, there is the FdS bus that leaves daily from Via Catalogna in Alghero (€3.55 return, departs 9.15am, 3.10pm and 5.10pm from June to September, 9.15am only the rest of the year, 50 minutes).

Those with transport should explore the coast north of Capo Caccia. Just a few kilometres north of the turn-off for Alghero, the road continues north. After 2km turn west for the delightful bay of **Torre di Porticciolo** (which has a decent camp site). Around 7km further north is **Porto Ferro**, an unspoiled beach that even gets a few small waves on wilder days.

SASSARI

pop 125,000

Don't expect a beautiful place; Sardinia's second-biggest city has the gritty individuality and drabness of a Sardinian working town. The outer shell is comprised of traffic-choked streets and modern apartments, but the medieval kernel is worth dipping into, especially at mealtimes; the old city hides some wonderful traditional restaurants.

Sassari rose to importance as its coastal counterpart, Porto Torres, began to decline. The capital of the medieval Giudicato di Logudoro, Sassari resisted both Genoese and Catalan-Aragonese rule. A university was set up here in the 16th century, but this has done little to arrest the city's slow decline.

Orientation

Sassari has a compact centre concentrated around its cathedral, but most services are in the busy newer part of town centred around the vast 18th-century Piazza Italia. The main bus and train stations are west of the centre.

Information

Banca di Sassari (Piazza Castello 8) Western Union representative.

Hemingway Café (Via Trento 4; per hr €4; ☎ 9am-2pm & 4-10pm Mon-Sat) Internet access.

Nuovo Ospedale Civile (☎ 079 206 10 00; Viale Italia) Hospital.

Police station (☎ 079 283 55 00; Corso Giovanni Maria Angioy 16)

Post office (Via Brigata di Sassari)

Tourist office (☎ 079 23 17 77; www.regione.sardegna.it/azstss; Via Roma 62; ☎ 9am-1.30pm & 4-6pm Mon-Thu, 9am-1.30pm Fri) Lots of brochures and information on the city.

Sights

In the heart of the medieval quarter stands the ebullient baroque façade of Sassari's cathedral, the **Duomo di San Nicola**, complete with grimacing gargoyles.

Just beyond what were once the city walls stands the **Chiesa di Santa Maria di Betlem** (Piazza Santa Maria). The mostly Romanesque façade betrays Gothic and vaguely oriental touches. Inside, the Catalan-Gothic vaulting has been preserved but baroque flamboyance is still in evidence, providing a playful flipside to the Gothic austerity.

Located in the new part of the city, the **Museo Nazionale Sanna** (☎ 079 27 22 03; Via Roma 64; adult/concession €2/1; ☎ 9am-8pm Tue-Sun) holds one of the island's most important archaeological collections, with in-depth coverage of the nuraghic period. There is also an impressive gallery with paintings dating from the 14th century.

Festivals & Events

Both **Cavalcata Sarda** on the second-last Sunday in May and **I Candelieri** on 14 August provide locals an opportunity to dress up in colourful

traditional costumes for parades and parties in the street. La Cavalcata includes a horseback parade and horse races, plus some spectacular equestrian feats, while I Candelieri is more pagan with local guilds carrying giant wooden candlesticks festooned with ribbons throughout the town.

Sleeping

B&B Casachiera (☎ 079 20 05 52; www.casachiera.net; Nicola Bertolinis 7; s/d €30/60; ☎ ☑) Someone has had fun with the paint pots here; the rooms are decked out in bright primary colours with coordinating bed linen and wicker or wood furniture. This friendly low-key place has a kitchen for the use of guests.

Frank Hotel (☎ 079 27 64 56; Via Armando Diaz 20; s €50-75, d €75-80; ☎ ☑) Despite the disarming pea-green exterior, this solid no-surprises hotel exudes old-fashioned comfort with oriental rugs throughout and spacious rooms with satellite TV, minibar and balcony.

Hotel Vittorio Emanuele (☎ 079 23 55 38; www.hotelvittorioemanuele.ss.it; Corso Vittorio Emanuele II 100; s €65, d €90; ☎ ☑) This hotel, an aesthetically renovated old palazzo, has an air of all-round poshness with antiques and tasteful paintings coupled with a slick corporate feel.

Eating

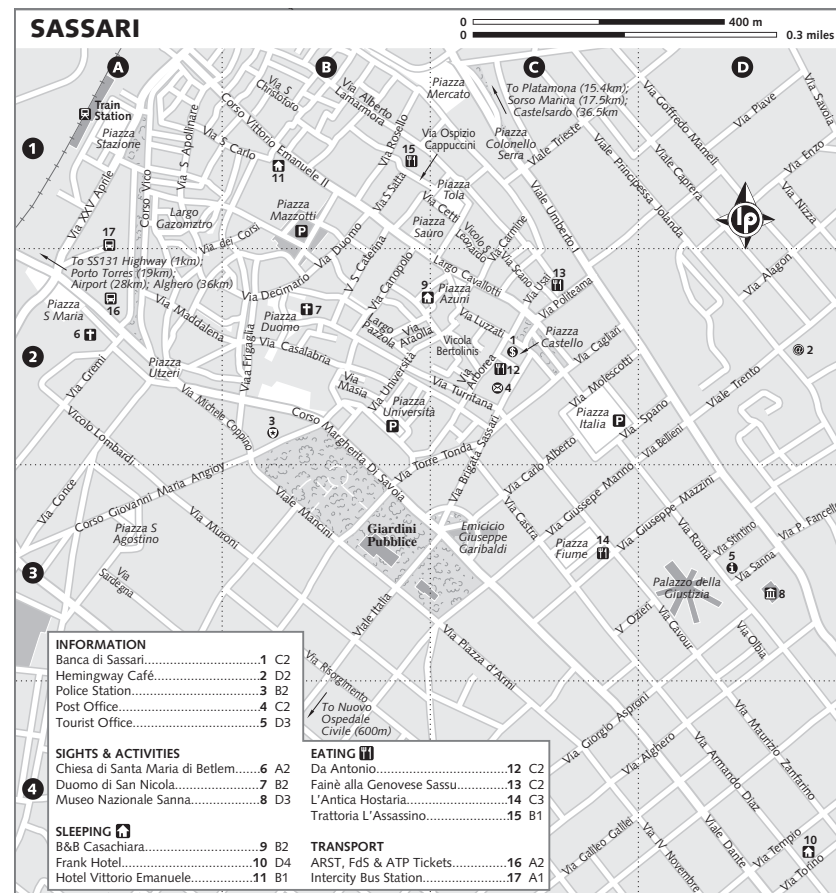
Eating is a delight in Sassari. A local curiosity is *faïnè*, a cross between a pancake and a pizza, introduced by the Genoese, with a base made from chickpea flour.

Fainè alla Genovese Sassu (Via Usai 17; ☎ dinner Mon-Sat) Welcome to Sassari's original purveyor of fine *faïnè*. Toppings vary from onions to sausage and, with prices starting at €3.50, this is a filling option if you're suffering from wallet stress.

Trattoria L'Assassino (☎ 079 23 50 41; Via Ospizio Cappuccini 1a; meals €12-15) The trattoria is hidden in a back alley off Piazza Tola. Be adventurous and try a selection of 10 what-your-appetite starters (€20). These can include classics like *funghi arrosto* (roasted mushrooms) and *lumaconi* (big snails). If you get really lucky you may find calf's testicles on the menu as well.

Da Antonio (☎ 079 23 42 97; Via Arborea 2b; meals €18-20) This place attracts a loud, good-natured crowd with its unwaveringly authentic menu, huge portions and reasonable prices.

L'Antica Hostaria (☎ 079 20 00 60; Via Giuseppe Mazzini 27; meals €40-45) L'Antica is a special-occasion restaurant. In intimate surround-



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ings with vaulted ceilings and butter-coloured walls, you are treated to inventive cuisine rooted in local tradition. Meat-lovers should try the *tagliata di manzo* (pasta with beef).

Getting There & Away

The **intercity bus station** (Via XXV Aprile) is near the train station (Piazza della Stazione). ARST, FdS and some ATP local buses operate from here. Tickets for all but FdS can be bought at the bar next to the petrol station. FdS has a separate ticket booth at the other end of the bus station.

FdS has up to 10 services to/from Cagliari (€14.50, 3¼ hours). Four buses run to Nuoro (€7.20, 2½ hours) and seven to Oristano (€7.50, 2½ hours).

Plenty of ARST buses depart to Alghero (€2.50 to €2.75, 50 to 60 minutes), Porto Torres (€1.60, 35 minutes) and Castelsardo (€2.30, one hour).

Three direct trains link the city with Cagliari (€12.70, 4¼ hours).

AROUND SASSARI

The northwestern Sardinian countryside is peppered with delightful Romanesque churches built in a rough Tuscan style by the Pisans. One of the more impressive is the **Basilica della Santissima Trinità di Saccargia**, about 18km southeast of Sassari on the SS597 road to Olbia.

About 2.5km back towards Sassari, head south about 23km to Torralba, and the

magnificent **Nuraghe Santu Antine** (☎ 079 84 72 96; admission €3; ☎ 8.30am-sunset). Set in the Valle dei Nuraghi (Nuraghes Valley), it is a unique blast from the past – at least 1600 years BC. If you only see one *nuraghe* in Sardinia, see this one, which rivals Su Nuraxi at Barumini. Just outside the village of Borutta is a fine Romanesque church, **Chiesa di San Pietro Sorres**. ARST buses from Sassari stop at Torralba.

North of Sassari stretch the locals' favourite beaches, such as **Platamona** and **Marina di Sorso**. The coast road leads northeast to the coastal bastion of **Castelsardo**, a confusion of tiny lanes wrapped around a high promontory that juts defiantly out to sea. ARST buses run from Sassari (€2.30, one hour) and Santa Teresa di Gallura (€4.75, 1½ hours).

PORTO TORRES

pop 21,800

This port town and petrochemical centre is unlikely to hold your attention for long, but a couple of sites are worth the effort if you're in sightseeing mode.

The Pro Loco **tourist office** (☎ 079 51 50 00; Piazza Garibaldi; ☎ 8.30am-1pm & 6-8pm Mon-Sat) is a couple of streets back from the port.

Just a five-minute walk from the main port is the **Antiquarium** (Via Ponto Romano 89; admission €2; ☎ 9am-8pm Tue-Sat), which houses artefacts discovered in Turrus Libisonis, the present city's Roman predecessor. More interesting is what is outside: the excavated remains of the Roman city's public baths, plus remnants of Roman streets and mosaics.

Equally fascinating is the limestone Romanesque **Basilica di San Gavino** (☎ 8.30am-1pm & 3-7pm), about 1.5km inland on Corso Vittorio Emanuele, the town's main road. Built in 1050 to honour three Roman-era Christian martyrs, it is an extraordinary church, notable for the apses on either end.

You can almost drop anchor at **Hotel Elisa** (☎ 079 51 32 60; fax 079 51 37 68; Via Mare 2; s/d €55/80; ☎), a modern, plain-looking hotel a block back from the port. The rooms are cheery, however, painted an appropriate nautical blue and boasting sea views.

Cristallo (☎ 079 51 49 09; Piazza XX Settembre 11; meals €35) is a sprawling restaurant with a terrace on the town's main shopping street. Exercise your tastebuds with good seafood and a selection of Sardinian favourites, such as lamb. Sweet treats include *pan a spagila con crema*, a decadent cream-cake affair.

Most buses leave from Piazza Colombo, virtually at the port. Plenty head to Sassari (€1.55, 35 minutes). As many as six buses per day head for Alghero (€3.20, 50 minutes) and another six to Stintino (€2.30, 30 minutes). Trains also run south to Sassari (€1.60, 15 minutes) and beyond.

For information on ferries, see boxed text, p815.

STINTINO & PARCO NAZIONALE DELL'ASINARA

Stintino, a no-frills fishing village, lies at the core of this peninsula resort area. Above all, people come here for the magnificent azure waters of the **Spiaggia della Pelosa** towards the northern end of the peninsula. The area's main island stretching off to the north is the **Parco Nazionale dell'Asinara** (www.parcosinara.org), named after the remarkable white donkeys native there.

Until recently the island (Isola Asinara) was off limits as a penitentiary but it has now been converted to a national park offering organised boat excursions and tours. Bring lunch as there is nowhere on the island to buy anything. Stintino can be a windy place that can pose problems if reading a newspaper on the beach, but is great for windsurfers. The **Windsurfing Center Stintino** (☎ 079 52 70 06; Porto dell'Anchora; 6hr course €200) offers courses and rents the gear. Alternatively, you can go diving with the **Asinara Diving Center** (☎ 079 52 70 00; www.asinaradivingcenter.com; Porto dell'Anchora; dive from €30) which also rents windsurfing equipment.

There are three hotels and a couple of B&Bs in Stintino and another dozen mostly mid range to top-end places dotted along the coast.

Albergo Silvestrino (☎ 079 52 34 73; www.silvestrino.it; Via XXI Aprile 4; s €30-33, d €60-65) is a spruce modern hotel five minutes from the beach. It has been slickly redecorated with highbrow abstract paintings throughout and bright light rooms with a nautical blue-and-white theme. The elegant restaurant is considered one of the best places to eat in town (meals cost €25).

Lu Famili (☎ 079 52 30 54; Lungomare C Colombo 89; pizzas from €5), one of the few restaurants open year-round, is a friendly, unbuttoned place with a wide terrace. It's across from the bobbing boats and specialises in reliably good pizzas, pastas and ice cream.

Up to eight buses run from Sassari to Stintino and Spiaggia della Pelosa in summer (€3.25, one hour 10 minutes). As many as six run from Porto Torres (€2.30, 30 minutes).

SANTA TERESA DI GALLURA

pop 4500

Together with Palau, about 20km to the east, this unspoilt seaside resort is a more pleasing alternative to the more soulless resorts on the Costa Smeralda. The old centre has plenty of vernacular architecture and has a prosperous attractive feel with its speciality delis and good-value restaurants and hotels. Head for the surreal, wind-sculpted granite rock-forms of the nearby Capo Testa. You can see Corsica across the Stretto di Bonifacio or even catch a ferry to Bonifacio for a day trip.

The town was founded in 1808 by the island's Savoy rulers to combat smugglers. These days the invaders are tourists, numbering some 50,000 in August.

Information

The **tourist office** (☎ 0789 75 41 27; Piazza Vittorio Emanuele I 24) has information on the town and surrounding area. Check your email at **Bar Dello Sport** (Via Mazzini 7; per hr €7).

Sights & Activities

After strolling the streets, head for the 16th-century Spanish watchtower, the **Torre Longonardo** (admission €1.50; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 4-7pm Jun-Sep) and kick back on the local beach, the **Spiaggia Rena Bianca**.

About 5km west of Santa Teresa, the granite headland of **Capo Testa** seems more like a divine sculpture garden. The place also has a couple of beaches (and a resident cat colony) on offer. Five daily buses run here from Santa Teresa from June to September only. If you have your own transport, follow the coast road west towards the town of Castelsardo and choose any of a number of wild and barely visited beaches.

You can pedal the streets by renting a bike from **Global** (☎ 0789 75 50 80; Piazza San Vittorio 7; per day €5) in front of the church. Go diving with **Ildra Diving** (☎ 3338 95 38 96; www.idradiving.it; Camping Arcobaleno; dive from €38).

Sleeping & Eating

There are many hotels though most only open from Easter to October. In August you may have to pay *mezza pensione* (half board).

Camping La Liccia (☎ 0789 75 51 90; www.campingalliccia.com; camp site per adult/child/tent €12/5/8, 4-person bungalow €74; ☎ Apr-Sep) The camping ground is in a pleasant spot about 6km west of town overlooking the sea and with a nearby sandy beach. It has a restaurant, playground and entertainment.

Hotel Da Cecco (☎ 0789 75 42 20; hoteldacecco@tiscalinet; Via Po 3; s €45-50, d €65-70; ☎ ☎) This place should be selling ice cream with its pistachio and pale pink exterior, a colour theme that continues throughout the excellent-value hotel. The rooms are plainer and comfortable; several open out onto a vast sea-view terrace.

Trattoria Savoia (☎ 0789 75 52 53; Via XX Settembre 6; meals €25; ☎ Apr-Sep) Has a wide terrace on a bustling street near the main square and a beamed interior with jolly red-and-white tablecloths. Star turns on the menu include risotto with grapefruit and *ricci* (small mussels) and *tagliata rucola e grana* (meat with rocket and grana cheese).

Ristorante La Torre (☎ 0789 75 46 00; Via del Mare 36; meals €30; ☎ Apr-Sep) Views of the small sandy cove, plus an outside terrace add to the enjoyment of robust portions of risotto or seafood. Locals rate this place – always a good sign.

Getting There & Around

Buses stop at Via Eleonora d'Arborea, near the post office. ARST buses operate up to seven times a day between Olbia and Santa Teresa (€4, one hour 50 minutes) and five times daily to/from Sassari (€6.20, 2½ hours). Get tickets from Bar Central opposite.

For information on ferries to Bonifacio in Corsica, see p815.

PALAU & ARCIPELAGO DI LA MADDALENA

Close to the Costa Smeralda, **Palau** is an honest resort with a refreshing lack of souvenir shops and tourist restaurants (or Irish pubs). Catch a ferry from here to **Isola della Maddalena**, the main island of an archipelago of seven islands and 40 islets, classified as a national park: **Parco Nazionale dell'Arcipelago di La Maddalena**. The magic lies in exploring these islands by boat, although the two main islands have plenty of charm with their sunbaked ochre buildings, timeless piazzas and low-key pace of life.

Palau's **tourist office** (☎ 0789 70 85 56; Via Nazionale 107; ☎ 8.30am-1pm & 8pm) can advise on accommodation. La Maddalena's **tourist office** (☎ 0789 73 63 21; Via XX Settembre; ☎ 8.30am-1pm & 4.30-7.30pm

Jun-Sep, shorter hours Oct-May) has information on the entire archipelago. Check your email at **Net Art** (☎ 0789 72 10 24; Via Giordano Bruno 2; ☎ 9am-1pm & 5-8pm Mon-Fri).

Sights & Activities

Linked to La Maddalena by a narrow causeway is **Isola Caprera**, home to legendary revolutionary Giuseppe Garibaldi who was famed for his campaigns in the pursuit of liberty and Italian unification. Visit his **Compendio Garibaldi** (adult/concession €2/1; ☎ 9am-1.30pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep, 9am-1.30pm Tue-Sun Oct-May), which remains an object of pilgrimage for many Italians; guided visits are in Italian only. It is filled with personal memorabilia. A walking trail north of here leads down to the secluded **Cala Coticcio** beach.

The five remaining main islands can only be reached by boat. Numerous excursions leave from Isola della Maddalena and Palau. Or you can hire motorised dinghies and do it yourself. The three northernmost islands are **Isola Budelli**, **Isola Razzoli** and **Isola di Santa Maria**.

Wind- and kite-surfers go to town on the windswept waters of Porto Pollo. You can hire the gear at several shops near Camping Isola dei Gabbiani on the peninsula of the same name. Both Palau and La Maddalena have several diving outfits, including **Scuba Point** (☎ 338 24 43 53; www.scubapoint.info; Porto Turistico, Palau; dive from €37) and **Sea World** (☎ 0789 73 73 31; www.seaworldscuba.com; Piazza XXIII Febraio; La Maddalena) with similar prices.

Sleeping

Camping Abbatoggia (☎ 0789 73 91 73; www.campingabbatoggia.it in Italian; camp site per adult/child/tent €10/7/3; ☎ Jun-Sep) The best of Isola della Maddalena's handful of camping grounds is in the north of the island in Località Abbatoggia. It has access to a couple of good beaches, including Lo Strangolato, and can arrange the rental of canoes and windsurfing equipment.

Hotel Piccada (☎ 0789 70 93 44; www.hotelpiccada.com; Via degli Asfodeli 6, Palau; s/d €65/85; ☎ ☎) Despite the rather dreary exterior this is a cheerful modern hotel with bright primary colours in the well-equipped rooms. It's on the hillside east of the harbour; go for a room with a terrace overlooking the sea.

Hotel Miralonga (☎ 0789 72 25 63; Strada Panoramica; d €90-140; ☎ ☎ ☎) A rare year-round option is this large modern hotel located west of La

Maddalena's centre. The hotel has a pleasing minimalist look that feels uncluttered and pleasantly cool in the baking hot summer months.

Eating

La Maddalena has a few worthwhile dining options.

Our pick Osteria Enoteca da Liò (☎ 0789 73 75 07; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 2-6; meals €10-20) This rare open-all-year choice is fronted by an earthy bar full of crusty locals and black-and-white pics of bygone days. The menu is tummy-filling rather than wallet-slimming, with a €12 lunch menu or à la carte options such as *carpaccio di salmone* (very thin slices of raw salmon). There is a choice of dining room: one with blaring TV; the other more intimate, and painted a sunny yellow.

Trattoria La Grotta (☎ 0789 73 72 28; Via Principe di Napoli 3; meals €18-25) This appropriately named cavernous restaurant, located on a slender pedestrian street, dates back to 1958. Owner Enzo is a real character and will help you make your selection from the tanked-up tentacle-wavers at the entrance.

Ristorante Al Mare (☎ 0789 70 30 55; Cala Gavetta; meals €25) A slightly smarter proposition with an extensive fish and seafood choice, including squid, tuna, rock lobster and an excellent *bottarga* (mullet roe). Although the fresh fish dishes can't be faulted, the service may see you twiddling your thumbs.

Getting There & Around

ARST buses connect Palau with numerous destinations including Olbia (€2.80, one hour) and Santa Teresa di Gallura (€1.80, 30 minutes). **Caramelli** (☎ 0789 70 94 95; ☎ May-Sep) buses run frequently to nearby destinations such as the Costa Smeralda, Isola dei Gabbiani and Capo d'Orso. All buses leave from Palau's port.

The **Trenino Verde** (☎ 079 24 57 40; www.treninoverde.com in Italian) is an old-world train that runs from Palau twice daily to Tempio Pausania; see p815 for details.

Several companies have regular car ferries to Isola della Maddalena. **Enermar** (☎ 0789 70 84 84; www.enermar.it) runs from 6.15am to 11.45pm (€3.50, 20 minutes); a small car costs €9. **Saremar** (☎ 0789 70 93 70) and **Tremar** (☎ 0789 73 00 32) also operate regular services. The latter has an hourly late-night service until dawn. Ticket prices are similar on all vessels.

COSTA SMERALDA & AROUND

In the early '60s this was paparazzi heaven, owned by the Aga Khan and used as a holiday home and vacation spot for his pals like Frank Sinatra, Aristotle Onassis and the Kennedys. Undisputedly a strip of beautiful Sardinian coast, the capital of the Costa Smeralda (Emerald Coast) is the yachtie haven of **Porto Cervo**, distinctive for its troglodyte-style architecture in pastel colours that were favoured back in the 60s (but which look a tad dated today).

Out of season this is a sad place with more seagulls than celebrities and the shutters down. From June to September, though, the heat is on, the hibiscus is in flower and the resort throbs with moneyed tourists and Italian sophisticates. There are some lovely beaches that are wonderful year-round, such as **Capriccioli**, **Spiaggia Liscia Ruia** (both near the exclusive Moorish-style Hotel Cala di Volpe, 6km south of Porto Cervo) and the **Spiaggia del Principe**, 2km further around the headland near Romazzino. The oft-crowded beach of **Baia Sardinia**, 5km west of Porto Cervo, outside the Costa Smeralda area, boasts waters of an incredible blue hue.

Overlooking the old marina, **Cervo Hotel** (☎ 0789 93 11 11; www.sheraton.com/cervo; Porto Cervo; d from €226; ☎ ☎ ☎) has a courtyard-style setting. Beauty salons, restaurants and designer boutiques are a short swagger away. Glossily refurbished throughout, the rooms are luxurious and large. Extras include squash and tennis courts, as well as a private secluded beach.

Ristorante Gianni Pedrinelli (☎ 0789 9 24 36; Piccolo Pevero, Porto; meals €35-40) is located a couple of kilometres south of the port. Look for the sumptuously coloured building in mulberry and ochre festooned with bougainvillea. The dining room is timeless chic while the gastro-flair menu includes dishes like *risotto con asparagi selvatici* (risotto with wild asparagus). The dessert buffet is pure seduction.

Lord Nelson Pub (Porto Cervo Marina; ☎ 5pm-late) is an institution in these parts with its English pub atmosphere and stools under the arches overlooking the gin palaces.

Away from the port it is another world. Take the winding coastal road towards Arzachera for some of the prettiest bucolic scenery on the island with dry brick walls, low rolling hills and fields of grazing cattle. This is wonderful walking (or painting) countryside. If you feel like staying, **Agriturismo Rena** (☎ 0789 8 25 32; agriturismo.rena@virgilio.it; Località Rena,

Arazchena; s €45-60, d €90-120) offers half-board only and is a real farm with pigs, cows and sheep. Guests stay in the magnificent 18th-century honey-coloured stone house in gardens of pomegranate and olive trees. The rooms are simple and rustic and there are two living spaces with fireplaces.

Sitting high above the port is **San Pantaleo**, a gem of a place surrounded by gap-toothed mountain peaks. The village comprises a huddle of ancient stone houses around a central rectangular piazza lauded over by a humble church. Slip round the corner for the best cappuccino in town at **Caffe della Piazza** (Via delle Basilica).

Dreamy **Hotel Arathena** (☎ 0789 65 4 51; www.arathena.it; Via Pompei; s €64-98 d €128-230; ☎ ☎ ☎) which opened in early 2007 offers half-board only and five-star treatment and style. Washed in ochre and warm yellow, the rooms ooze relaxed glamour with natural colour fabrics and pale terracotta tiles. The location is pin-drop quiet and the views are sublime. The adjacent Trattoria Balbacana is open to the public and similarly hits pitch-perfect notes in cuisine and ambience.

Arzachena, a sprawling town 19km inland from Porto Cervo, is the launching pad for a driving tour to explore the ancient nuragich sites including **Coddu Ecchju** (☎ 0789 8 15 37; admission €2; ☎ 9am-8pm Jun-Sep), a so-called *tomba dei giganti* that is in fact an ancient burial ground fronted by what indeed seems like a giant's door. To get there, head south out of Arzachena and follow the signs.

As if in defiance of all the wealth on the Costa Smeralda, a highly strategic camp site lies to the south of Golfo di Cugnana. **Villaggio Camping La Cugnana** (☎ 0789 3 31 84; www.campingcugnana.it; Località Cugnana; camp site per adult/child/tent €11.50/9/4, 2-person bungalow per week €245-585; ☎ May-Sep) has a convenient supermarket, backs onto the sea and organises a free shuttle bus to various Costa Smeralda beaches.

OLBIA

pop 60,000

This chaotic city and industrial centre can seem an edgy place given the flotsam and jetsam that always tend to drift around port cities. Although it's not a pretty place, the buzzing Piazza Regina Margherita has a certain charm and the street that leads to it – Corso Umberto – is good both for shops and restaurants.

Orientation

Ferries arrive at the Stazione Marittima (terminal) 1km east of town and the local bus 9 goes to the centre. Trains run from the station to the port to coincide with ferry departures.

Information

Inter Smeraldo (☎ 0789 2 53 66; Via Porto Romano 8b; per 15 min €1.25) Internet connection.

Tourist office (☎ 0789 2 14 53; fax 0789 2 22 21; Via Catello Piro 1; ☎ 8am-2pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-12.30pm & 5-7pm Sun Jun-Sep, 8am-2pm & 3.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat Oct-May) Handily located just off the port end of Corso Umberto.

Sights

There's precious little to visit in Olbia apart from the **Chiesa di San Simeone** (Via San Simeone; ☎ 9am-noon & 4-7pm), a Romanesque jewel set aside from the town hubbub. Built entirely of granite, it is a curious mix of Tuscan and Lombard styles.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Cavour (☎ 0789 20 40 33; www.cavourhotel.it; Via Cavour 22; s/d €65/90; (P) (S)) These rooms sparkle with lots of fresh white paint artfully colour-coordinated with pastel fabrics. The double-glazed windows are a godsend on a Saturday night. Boat excursions can be arranged.

Hotel Terranova (☎ 0789 2 23 95; www.hotelterrano.it; Via Garibaldi 6; s/d €55/110; (P) (S)) This hotel

is right in the town centre. The rooms are small, yet classy and decorated with terracotta tiles and earth colours. Most sport balconies overlooking the cobbles below.

Barbagia (☎ 0789 5 16 40; Via Galvani 94; meals €30) Out of the centre this is one of the best spots in Olbia to get a taste of authentic Sardinian luscious food. You can't go far wrong whatever the choice.

Ristorante Gallura (☎ 0789 2 46 48; Corso Umberto 1 145; meals €25-35) The menu at this Michelin-star restaurant reads like an Italian culinary dictionary with at least 20 different risottos to choose from, plus polenta and homemade pasta dishes. The atmosphere is nicely low-key and traditional, a bit more appealing than the hotel upstairs.

Also recommended:

Bacchus 2 (☎ 0989 2 16 12; Via G Di Annunzio; meals €25) Overlooks the Roman ruins: try the rolled fillet of beef with smoked ham.

La Lanterna (☎ 0789 2 30 82; Via Olbia 13; meals €30) Excellent for antipasti and pizzas.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Olbia's **Aeroporto di Costa Smeralda** (OLB; ☎ 0789 6 90 00; www.olbiaairport.it) is about 5km southeast of the centre and handles flights from most important Italian mainland destinations, as well as international flights from London, Paris and Frankfurt.

BOAT

Regular ferries arrive in Olbia from Genoa, Civitavecchia and Livorno. For more details, see boxed text, p815.

BUS

You can buy tickets from the bus or train station. ARST has buses travelling from Olbia to destinations all over the island:

Destination	Cost (€)	Frequency (daily)
Arzachena	2.10	11
Dorgali	6.60	3
Golfo Aranci (summer only)	1.55	8
Nuoro	7.10	7
Porto Cervo	3	5
Santa Teresa di Gallura	4	6

There's a half-hourly bus service from the airport to Piazza Regina Margherita (€0.70).

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Holiday Car (☎ 0789 2 84 96; Via Genova 71) will rent you a Fiat Punto from €45 a day.

TRAIN

The Trenitalia station lies parallel to Via Gabriele d'Annunzio – walk through the bus station. One direct train a day runs to Cagliari (€13, four hours). Otherwise you have to change at Chilivani (and sometimes Maccomer too). Up to three trains run to Sassari (€6.10, one hour 50 minutes) and up to seven to Golfo Aranci (€2, 25 minutes).

GOLFO ARANCI

Sardinia Ferries and Tirrenia run ferries from Livorno, Civitavecchia and Fiumicino to this ferry terminal located on the promontory northeast of Olbia. There's not a great deal else to say about this place, although there are some pleasant-enough beaches on the coastal route to Olbia. Regular buses and trains connect Olbia and Golfo Aranci.

EASTERN SARDINIA

If Sardinia is a world apart from the Italian mainland, Nuoro is an island within the island. Much of Sardinia's most rugged mountain territory is concentrated in this defiant and inward-looking province in the central eastern part of the island. More than any-

where else in Sardinia the people of this region are firmly attached to their traditions and, particularly in the remoter villages, elderly women still wear traditional dress.

The dark majesty of the Supramonte and Gennargentu Mountains and the inland Barbagia region is matched by the extraordinary beauty of the Golfo di Orosei coast, a series of magical coves, including the spectacular Grotta del Bue Marino (blue grotto). Northwest of here and inland, the breathtaking gorges of the Gola Su Gorroppu are a hiker's delight; the entire mountainous province presents some of Sardinia's best walking country.

Fine country restaurants of all classes purvey heaped dishes of solid comfort food, best washed down with a robust Cannonau red.

Although larger towns are accessible by bus, you need your own wheels to truly get to grips with this part of the island.

NUORO

pop 36,700

Sadly, the capital of the province has little to excite the senses. That said, there are a handful of museums and churches and an attractive historic centre. This is the birthplace of Sardinia's most celebrated writer, Grazia Deledda, although he would surely turn in his grave if he could see the graffiti that blights the town today.

By the end of the 18th century Nuoro barely numbered 3000 inhabitants but was the only real 'urban' centre in a world of subsistence farming and banditry. The town took off after being made provincial capital in 1927.

Orientation

The old centre of the town is in the northeast corner of the city around Piazza San Giovanni and Corso Garibaldi. The train and main bus stations are west of the city centre.

Information

Tourist office Corso Garibaldi 155 (☎ 0784 3 87 77; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3.30-7pm Mon-Sat); Piazza Italia 19 (☎ 0784 3 00 83; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat)

Sights

The **Museo della Vita e delle Tradizioni Sarde** (☎ 0784 25 70 35; Via Antonio Mereu 56; adult/concession €3/1; ☎ 9am-8pm Tue-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun mid-Jun-Sep, 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Oct-mid-Jun) has displays of richly embroidered costumes from all over the province. Textiles, traditional musical instruments

MAKING WAVES: THE DECRETO SORU

In September 2006 the island's regional assembly approved a law that had been pending for two years and which, essentially, bans all construction within 2km to 3km of the island's coastline. The *Decreto Soru* is thought to have first been introduced by Renato Soru, president of Sardinia, in direct response to plans by Silvio Berlusconi's brother, Paolo, to build a huge tourist complex on the Costa Turchese (home to a marine nature reserve) on the island's east coast. The plan involved some 500 hectares of villas and hotels, and moorings for 2000 yachts and, despite being rejected by successive island governments, finally received the green light in 2004, thanks to a 'friendly' mayor in nearby Olbia. Now, it is, thankfully, doomed.

While the new law bans new buildings, projects under way may be completed. Reconstruction is similarly permitted in existing resort areas. The latter is reasonably good news for Californian tycoon Tom Barrack, who owns much of the Costa Smeralda and will be allowed to rebuild in existing urban areas within the resort. He is also permitted to replace the naval shipyard with a hotel. At the same time, Soru has imposed a wealth tax charged to yachts over 14m, private planes and second homes within 3km of the sea – expected to raise as much as €800 million for the island. Sources and crew in Italy report that the tax has driven yachts from Sardinia to neighbouring destinations, including Corsica.

Others in the tourism industry are likewise far from happy and say that Soru's environmental crusade will paralyse the building industry, cause mass unemployment and be detrimental, overall, to tourism on the island.

and photographs of a bygone age offer a fascinating insight into the culture and folklore of the past.

The **Museo Archeologico Nazionale** (Via Mannu 1; admission free; ☎ 9am-1.30pm & 3-6pm Wed & Fri, 9am-1.30pm Tue, Thu & Sat) has a collection of artefacts ranging from ancient ceramics and fine *bronze* to a drilled skull from 1600 BC and early medieval finds.

Around 7km out of Nuoro rises **Monte Orto-bene**, a favourite picnic spot with locals. The local bus 8 runs up to the mountain seven times a day from Piazza Vittorio Emanuele.

Festivals & Events

Festa del Redentore (Feast of Christ the Redeemer) Held during the last week of August it has evolved as one of the most exuberant folkloric festivals, with parades, live music and a torchlit procession finale.

Sleeping & Eating

Casa Solotti (☎ 0784 3 39 54; www.casasolotti.it; s/d €30/60) Set in a rambling garden on Monte Ortobene is this charming house surrounded by woods and walking trails. The accommodation is suitably relaxed, with a friendly family atmosphere complete with pets. Horseback riding may be arranged, as well as packed lunches for hikers and evening meals.

Hotel Grillo (☎ 0784 3 86 78; fax 0784 3 20 05; Via Monsignor Melas 14; s/d €60/75) This hotel is on the edge of town near the Museo della Vita e delle Tradizioni Sarde. Its rooms are compact but manage to squeeze in every mod con (including MTV on the telly); you pay an extra €10 for more space and a balcony.

Il Rifugio (☎ 0784 23 23 55; Via Antonio Mereu 28-36; meals €25-30) An age-old trattoria in a modern new locale. Grab a table in front of the entertaining *pizzaioli* (pizza makers) if you can. We recommend the pizzas here, or try one of the inventive pasta dishes like the house speciality, *culurgiones, basilico e mandorle* (pasta with fresh basil and ground almonds).

Getting There & Away

FdS buses run from Cagliari (€12.50, 3½ hours) four times a day via Oristano (€6, two hours), and from Sassari (€7.20, 2½ hours) up to six times daily. There is a ticket office at Via Brigata di Sassari 19.

ARST buses run from the station on Viale Sardegna. There are two or three daily runs to Baunei (€5.10), Santa Maria Navarrese

(€5.60), Olbia (€7.10) and Tortoli-Arbatax (€5.85). Regular buses make the trip to Oliena (€1, 20 minutes) and Orgosolo (€1.65, 30 minutes). Up to nine buses run to/from Dorgali (€2.10, 45 minutes).

AROUND NUORO

Fonte Sacra Su Tempiesu

The **Fonte Sacra Su Tempiesu** (☎ 0784 27 67 16; adult/concession €2/1; ☎ 9am-6pm) is unique among the nuraghic temples for its A-shaped housing rising above the typical keyhole-shaped well. It is a masterpiece of ancient engineering and was only unearthed in 1953. You need your own transport to get here. Head for **Orune**, 18km northeast of Nuoro (buses come this far), from where it is a 7km drive southeast down a narrow country route (signposted).

Oliena

From Nuoro you can see the multicoloured rooftops of Oliena town cupped in the palm of the majestic Monte Corraisi. This town is up there with the best of them when it comes to stunning settings and is an atmospheric place well worth exploring, especially if you want to snap a few photos of locals in their traditional black shawled garb. They are mainly seriously elderly (a recent study revealed that the indigenous folk from this part of the island are twice as likely as average to reach 100 years of age!). Perhaps it is no coincidence that Oliena is also a centre of good Cannonau reds – stop by one of the local bars and ask for the local drop.

INFORMATION

The **tourist office** (☎ 0784 28 60 78; Via Grazia Deledda 32; per hr €4; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat) offers internet access and have plenty of information on activities in the area, including mountain biking and trekking.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Piazza Santa Maria is the site of the Saturday market and the 13th-century Santa Maria church. There are several other wonderful old churches here, including the blessedly simple 14th-century **San Lussorio** (Via Cavour). Go trekking, canoeing, abseiling or riding with **Sardegna Nascosta** (☎ 0784 28 85 50; www.sardegna.nascosta.it; Via Masiloghi 35) or **Barbagia Insolita** (☎ 0784 28 60 05; www.barbagiainsolita.it; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 48). Prices depend on the size of the group; contact them directly.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hotel Cikappa (☎ 0784 28 80 24; www.bestsardinia.com/oliena/cikappa; Corso Martin Luther King; s/d €45/60; ☎) In this cheerful small hotel near the old centre, rooms are pleasant with pine furniture and balconies. Go for a room in the front overlooking the town and mountain backdrop views beyond. There's a local bar downstairs and a reliably good restaurant (meals €20) serving mainstay pasta and pizza choices.

Hotel Monte Maccione (☎ 0784 28 83 63; www.coop.enis.it; Località Monte Maccione; s €36-45, d €60-74; ☎) Also known as Cooperativa Enis, this place is 21 hairpin bends (4km) up in the woods south of Oliena at a height of 800 metres. The rooms are light and modern with pine furniture and leafy views. There are walls equipped for some climbing practice, plus guided excursions by foot or in 4WD vehicles

our pick Agriturismo Guthiddai (☎ 0784 28 60 17; www.agriturismoguthiddai.com; Nuoro-Dorgali bivio Su Gologone; half-board per person €53) On the road to Hotel Su Gologone (below) is this exceptional *agriturismo* set in similar blissful surroundings to its sophisticated neighbour and backed by a 500m sheer rock face. It's run by the Amtomellas in their family home, and daughter Floris speaks fluent English. The whole place has a welcoming feel surrounded by fig, olive and fruit trees with lawns and a central courtyard. Olive oil and wine are produced and home-grown fruit and veg ends up on the breakfast and dinner table. The rooms are exquisitely tiled in pale greens and cobalt blues.

Hotel Su Gologone (☎ 0784 28 75 12; www.sugologone.it; s €140-160, d €200-240, half-board s €180-195, d €280-310; ☎ Mar-Sep & mid-Dec-early Jan; ☎ ☎) About 7km east of Oliena is one of the loveliest hotel/restaurant complexes on the island. A discreet series of ivy-covered buildings contain artistic and originally decorated rooms. Facilities include tennis courts and organised hikes; the restaurant (meals €50) is rated as one of Sardinia's best.

Masiloghi (☎ 0784 28 56 96; Via Galiani 68; meals €28) An atmospheric restaurant just out of town on the road to Dorgali. The dining room is all neutral tones and ochre, and showcases local artists' work. The pasta is homemade and includes the ravioli-style speciality *angelottos* stuffed with fish or cheese.

Orgosolo

Some 18km further south and backed by the dramatic grey wall of the Supramonte, Or-

gosolo means sheep-rustlers and bandits to most people. More recently this dusty, insular town has gained a little fame for its vibrant graffiti-style murals that express the social and political concerns of locals. They range from Sardinian issues to world politics and new ones still appear, 30 years after the originals.

Mamoiada

This undistinguished town 14km south of Nuoro does not have a whole lot going for it. Time your visit for January, however, and you can witness a remarkable winter celebration that dates back to pagan times.

For the **Festa di Sant'Antonio Abate** on 16 and 17 January the townspeople turn out to behold the frightful *mamuthones* as they parade about the town. According to myth, Sant'Antonio stole fire from hell to give to man and giant bonfires are lit in central squares.

For an up-close look at the local masks and costumes, check out the **Museo delle Maschere** (☎ 0784 56 90 18; www.museodellemaschere.it; Piazza Europa 15; adult/concession €4/2.60; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Tue-Sun) on the northwestern side of town.

Regular buses service Mamoiada from Nuoro (€1.35, 20 minutes).

DORGALI & AROUND

Although its name has a touch of the Irish about it, Dorgali is a very typical Sardinian mountain town. It makes an excellent central base lying at the crossroads for traffic south to Arbatax and beyond; north to the coast and Olbia; east 10km to Cala Gonone; and west towards Oliena and Nuoro.

The **tourist office** (☎ 0784 9 62 43; Via La Marmora 108b) has a good stock of brochures and business cards for hotels and B&Bs in the area, but is otherwise fairly unhelpful.

Sights & Activities

Dorgali is well cited for hiking excursions. Several groups can take you on 4WD excursions, hikes and caving expeditions. **Gennargentu** (☎ 0784 9 43 85; www.gennargentu.com; Via La Marmora 204) organises one-day trips into the Gola Su Gorroppu (€28) and into the Supramonte (€46). **Ghivine** (☎ 0784 9 67 21; www.ghivine.com; Via La Marmora 69e) offers a vast range of 4WD excursions, guided hikes, climbing and caving expeditions. Other companies offering similar activities include **Itinere** (☎ 0784 9 67 77; www.escurioniitinere.com; Via Marche 15) and **Atlantika** (☎ 328 972 97 19; www.atlantika.it; Via La Marmora 195).

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Il Querceto (☎ 0784 9 65 09; www.ilquerceto.com; Via Marmora; s €40-80, d €50-100; P ♻️ 🚰) This place is an ecofriendly hotel using solar and geothermal energy. Recently revamped with additional rooms and an inside and outside pool, the rooms are nicely low-key with lashings of cream linen and honey-coloured tiles. Prices plummet out of season.

Ristorante Colibri (☎ 0784 9 60 54; Via Gramsci 14; meals €27-30) This restaurant must have an interest in the signposting business: there are directions from everywhere in town. Located in an incongruous residential area this is the real McCoy for meat eaters with dishes like *cinghiale al romarino* (wild boar with rosemary) and the like. Don't expect atmosphere – you are here for the food.

Grotta di Ispinigoli

Mexico is home to the world's tallest stalagmite (40m) but you shouldn't worry about settling for second best here – the natural spectacle of its slightly shorter counterpart is every bit as awe-inspiring. **Grotta di Ispinigoli** (adult/concession €7/4.50; ☎ 9am-7pm Aug, shorter hours Apr-Jul & Sep-Nov) is just 4km north of Dorgali.

Serra Orrios & Thomes

The nuraghic village of **Serra Orrios** (adult/concession €5/2; ☎ hourly visits 9am-1pm & 4-6pm), while not as remarkable as the site at Santa Vittoria di Serris, is still worth a stop. The remnants of more than 70 huts are clustered around what is left of two temples. The site lies 11km northwest of Dorgali (3km north off the Dorgali–Oliena road).

From Sierra Orrios you could continue north to see a fine example of a *tomba dei giganti*. Continue 3km north of the crossroads with the Nuoro–Orosei route; the **Tomba dei Giganti S'Ena e Thomes** (☎ sunrise-sunset) is signposted to the right. The stone monument is dominated by a central oval-shaped stele that once closed off an ancient burial chamber.

OGLIASTRA

The southeastern sector of Nuoro province is known as the Ogliastra. From Dorgali, the SS125 (Orientale Sarda) highway winds southwards through the high mountain terrain of the eastern end of the **Parco Nazionale del Gennargentu e Golfo di Orosei**. The 18km stretch southwards to the Genna 'e Silana pass (1017m) is the most breathtaking. A useful

local website for this area is **Welcome in Ogliastra** (www.turinformati.it).

Tiscali

A first detour comes a few kilometres south of Dorgali with a road dropping off to the southwest past Monte Sant'Elene towards the nuraghic village of **Tiscali** (adult/concession €5/2; ☎ 9am-7pm May-Sep, 9am-5pm Oct-Apr). The village is thought to date back to the 3rd or 4th century BC, and was built in the white limestone *dolina* (sinkhole) inside the modest Monte Tiscali (515m) at an altitude of 360m.

From Dorgali, you drive about 14km to a bridge where a walking trail (1.5km) to the site is signposted. Another, tougher approach for walkers is from the north down the Valle di Lanaitto. If you're on a 4WD tour, you will be transported down this valley and to within about an hour's walk of the site.

Gola Su Gorroppu

When you reach the **Genna 'e Silana** pass you could stop for a morning's hike to the **Gola Su Gorroppu** (Gorroppu Gorge). The trail is signposted to the right (east) side of the road and is easy to follow. You reach the gorge with its claustrophobically tight, high walls after about two hours' hiking. There is nothing to stop you from wandering a little either way along the Rio Fluminedda riverbed, but beyond that you will need harnesses and proper equipment to get in any deeper.

To get to the gorge entrance by car, head south of Dorgali along the SS125 and turn right into the Hotel Sant'Elene. Follow this dirt road into the valley for 8km (don't head uphill to the hotel) and you'll get to a small bridge. Here you will have to park the car and continue on foot. Walk for about 1½ hours to two small lakes and the entrance to the gorge – one of the most spectacular and romantic landscapes in Sardinia. The huge boulders scattered around the entrance are a reminder that nature can be harsh as well as beautiful. Allow a full day for the expedition, which will give you time for the walk, a picnic and a swim.

Cooperativa Gorroppu (☎ 0782 64 92 82; www.gorroppu.com; Via Sa Preda Lada 2, Urzulei; 6 days incl accommodation from €389) organises treks, botanical field trips and even cookery courses.

Baunei & the Altopiano del Golgo

Around 28km south of the Genna 'e Silana pass you roll into the town of **Baunei**. There is

nothing of particular interest to hold you up long here but you could sit at Bar Belvedere for a drink and soak in the mountain-valley views to the west.

However, what is seriously worth your while in Baunei is the 10km detour up to the mountain plateau known as the **Altopiano del Golgo**, signposted from the middle of town. A steep 2km (10-degree incline) set of switchbacks gets you up to the plateau. Head north through heavily wooded terrain and, after 8km follow the Su Sterru (Il Golgo) sign (for less than 1km), leave your vehicle and head for this remarkable feat of nature – a 270m abyss just 40m wide at its base. Its funnellike opening is now fenced off but, knowing the size of the drop, just peering into the dark and damp opening of this eroded phenomenon is enough to bring on a case of vertigo.

At the end of the dirt trail is the **Locanda il Rifugio** (☎ /fax 0782 61 05 99; www.coopgoloritze.com; s €35-50, d €40-60; meals from €12; ☎ Apr-Oct), which the Cooperativa Goloritzè has carved out of a one-time shepherd's farmstead. You can opt for full board and take your meals in the excellent restaurant. All the meat is raised by the shepherds' cooperative – the place is surrounded by cattle, pigs and donkeys. The cooperative organises horse riding, 4WD excursions and hiking. From the plateau, 4WD trails lead to within 20 minutes' hiking distance of the marvellous Cala Goloritzè and Cala Sisine beaches.

Just beyond their stables is the late-16th-century **Chiesa di San Pietro**, a humble construction flanked to one side by some even humbler *cumbessias* – rough, largely open stone affairs that are not at all comfortable for the passing pilgrims who traditionally sleep here to celebrate the saint's day.

Santa Maria Navarrese

At the southern end of the Golfo di Orosei, the unpretentious and attractive small town of Santa Maria Navarrese is a tempting alternative to its busier northern counterpart, Cala Gonone. Basque sailors shipwrecked here built a small church in 1052, dedicated to Santa Maria di Navarra on the orders of the Princess of Navarra, who happened to be one of the survivors. The church was built in the shade of a grand olive tree that still thrives today.

Lofty pines and eucalyptus trees back this lovely beach lapped by transparent water

(with more sandy stretches to the south). Offshore are several islets, including the **Isola dell'Ogliastra**. The leafy northern end of the beach is topped by a watchtower built to look out for raiding Saracens.

About 500m further north is the small pleasure port, where **Nautica Centro Sub** (☎ 0782 67 50 80) organises dives and rents out *gommoni* (high-speed dinghies) for exploring the Golfo di Orosei coast to the north. They start at €175 a day for up to 10 people (see boxed text, p848). Out of season, prices plummet to around a third.

There are several hotels here. **Hotel Plammas** (☎ 0782 61 51 30; www.hotelplammas.com in Italian; Viale Plammas 59; s €28-50, d €56-100) is the cheapest deal and, while unremarkable, is pleasant enough and conveniently placed just up from the central square. The rooms are sparsely furnished but sport balconies with distant sea views. The restaurant is popular for its pasta dishes (try the fish-based *culurgiones*) and seafood mains.

You'll find several other restaurants and bars within strolling distance of the centre and fronting the beach.

A handful of buses (sometimes only one a day) link Santa Maria Navarrese with Tortoli (€0.80, 15 minutes), Arbatax (€1.05, 30 minutes), Dorgali (€4.50, 1½ hours), Nuoro (€5.60, 2½ hours) and even Cagliari (€7.85, four hours).

Tortoli & Arbatax

The rather dispiriting sprawl of Tortoli and, 4km east, its industrial outgrowth and port Arbatax are unlikely to enthral you. If you have to kill time here, head across the road from the port and behind the petrol station to the *rocce rosse* (red rocks) which are bizarre, weather-beaten rock formations dropping into the sea. In the distance your gaze is attracted by the imperious cliffs of the southern Ogliastra and Golfo di Orosei.

Just by the port is the terminus for the FdS Trenino Verde (p815) summer tourist train to/from Mandas.

Local buses 1 and 2 run from Arbatax to Tortoli and, in the case of the latter service, to the beach and hotels at nearby **Porto Frailis**. If you want to stay and be able to splurge, luxurious **La Bitta** (☎ 0782 66 70 80; www.arbataxhotels.com; Porto Frailis; s/d €99/200; P ♻️ 🚰) is right on the beach and has palatial rooms with columns, arches and seamless sea views.

A few buses run from both these destinations to Santa Maria Navarrese, Dorgali, Nuoro and Cagliari, as well as many inland villages. Frequency is generally low, with sometimes only one departure a day.

CALA GONONE & AROUND

The fast-developing seaside resort of **Cala Gonone**, just 10km east of Dorgali, is in a stunning position and makes an excellent base from which to explore the coves along the most startling stretch of the Golfo di Orosei's coastline.

Cala Gonone's port is also a launch pad for boat excursions to the magical coves and cliffs to the south.

At the **tourist office** (☎ 07849 36 96; Viale Bue Marino 1a; ☎ 9am-6pm Apr-Oct, 9am-11pm Jul & Aug) there is plenty of info on the area. Click on www.calagonone.com for comprehensive information on the area and www.escursioniin Sardegna.com for activities and excursions.

Sights & Activities

Several decent beaches stretch to the immediate south of the port. Some better ones, including the sugar-white strand of the **Cala Cartoe**, are accessible only by car – take Via Marco Polo away from the port and then follow the signs.

Don't miss out on one of Sardinia's most memorable experiences – an excursion to ex-

plore the magical coves along a 20km stretch south of Cala Gonone. The first stop is lovely **Grotta del Bue Marino**. Monk seals used to come to this natural wonder, a series of stalactite- and stalagmite-filled caves, to pup. Guided visits take place up to seven times a day.

From there follows a string of coves and beaches, from the crescent moon-shaped **Cala Luna** and **Cala Sisine**, backed by a green valley, through to the incredible cobalt blue waters of **Cala Mariolu** and **Cala Goloritzè**. Indeed, the waters along this coast cover an exquisite spectrum from deep purple through emerald green to cerulean blue.

You can also walk to Cala Luna from Cala Gonone. The track starts at **Cala Fuili**, 3.5km from Cala Gonone. It's then 4km (about 1½ hours) between the two coves on rocky terrain but with breathtaking coastal views. Several local excursion and hiking outfits will put you onto this and other trails (on foot or in a 4WD), including descents of the Gola Su Gorroppu gorge and visits to the Tiscali nuragich village (see p846): try **Dolmen** (☎ 0784 9 33 45; www.sardegna.dascoprire.it; Via Vasco da Gama 18).

Several operators offer diving courses on the Golfo di Orosei, including **Argonauta** (☎/fax 0784 930 46; www.argonauta.it; Via dei Lecci 10; cave dive from €45), which also offers Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) courses and abseiling. You can rent bikes for €16 per day from **Dongal** (☎ 0784 9 33 67; Lungomare Palmasera 32).

Sleeping & Eating

Camping Cala Gonone (☎ 0784 9 31 65; www.campingcalagonone.it; camp site per adult/child/tent €16.50/8.50/free, 4-person bungalow €74-140; ☎ Apr-Oct) This shady camp site is back from the waterfront on the road from Dorgali. The facilities are excellent with tennis court, playground, bar, restaurant, pizzeria and barbecue grills.

Hotel Miramare (☎ 0784 9 31 40; fax 0784 9 34 69; Piazza Giardini; s €40-77, d €67-120; ☎ Apr-Oct; ♿ ♿) The family-owned Miramare is a well-aged classic dating back to 1955. All the rooms have balconies and sea views while the vast front terrace attracts gossiping locals as well as guests. The restaurant serves reliably tasty, and traditional, Sardinian dishes.

Bue Marino (☎ 0784 92 00 78; www.hotelbueamarino.it; Via A Vespucci; s €55-95, d €75-130; ♿ ♿) This sunny blue-and-white themed hotel has a Mediterranean feel with its bar overlooking the surf and rooms with brightly coloured tiles. The 4th-floor restaurant continues the good-time holiday feel with beach and ocean views.

Nuraghe Mannu Agriturismo (☎ 0784 9 32 64; www.agriturismonuraghemannu.com; Strada per Cala Gonone-Dorgali; half-board s €23-26, d €39-42) Follow the signs to Nuraghe Mannu to reach this sublimely

tranquil *agriturismo* surrounded by rolling countryside and mountains. There are just four simple cabins with private bathrooms; plus space and facilities for camping (€15 per tent). Wine, goat's cheese and salamis are produced by the farm and Margarita cooks up a culinary feast each night.

Bar Gelateria Fronte del Porte (Via Acqua Dolce 5; pizzas from €3.50) It's not the place for a cosy head-to-head, but this bright and breezy bar-restaurant has lots of snacks on offer, including good pizza and *panini*, plus ice creams.

Ristorante Acquarius (☎ 0784 9 34 28; Lungomare Palmasera 34; meals €35; ☎ Apr-Sep) On the waterfront is one of the best dining options in Cala Gonone, with the added bonuses of a bar and an ice-cream counter. Sit on the front terrace and choose between a mix of Sardinian and standard Italian dishes. Try the *cozze alla marinara* (mussels).

Getting There & Away

In summer, as many as 10 ARST buses travel from Dorgali (€0.70, 20 minutes, 10km) and pull up at Via Marco Polo, near the port. Seven of these come in from Nuoro (€2.60, 70 minutes).

BOATING ALONG THE COAST

There are various options available for visiting the coves south of Cala Gonone. A fleet of boats, from large high-speed dinghies to small cruise boats and graceful sailing vessels, are available and there's a broad range of excursions on offer. The most basic option would be joining a group of punters to be transported to one of the beaches along the coast.

The basic cost of such trips starts at €10 for the return trip only from Cala Luna (for those who elect to walk there). The return trip to Cala Luna or Grotta del Bue Marino is €16. Both Cala Luna and Grotta del Bue Marino costs €26. The return trip to Cala Mariolu costs €25. Prices drop in the slower months.

Full-day cruises, with visits to various (but usually not all) beaches and other beauty spots, can cost from €25 for a minicruise. Much nicer is the day-long trip on a sailing boat, costing €75 a head. If you want lunch on board (instead of taking your own), add €20. Contact **Cala Gonone Charter** (☎ 0784 9 37 37; Via S'Abba Irde 3).

The final option is the most tempting and the most expensive. Consider hiring a *gomme* (a big motorised dinghy). They start at €175 plus a further €15 for petrol. Nothing beats the freedom this offers you.

Boats operate from March until about November – dates depend a lot on demand. Prices vary dramatically according to the time of year and can plummet in low season. 'Very high season' is around 11 to 25 August. You can get information at agencies around town or at a series of booths directly at the port.

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