More than three million people visit **Corsica** each year, drawn by the mild climate and some of the most diverse landscapes in all Europe. Nowhere in the Mediterranean has beaches finer than the island’s perfect half-moon bays of white sand and transparent water, or seascapes more dramatic than the red porphyry **[Calanches](file:///C:\\destinations\\europe\\france\\corsica\\porto-portu-around\\calanches\\" \o "The Calanches)** of the west coast. Even though the annual visitor influx now exceeds the island’s population nearly ten times over, tourism hasn’t spoilt the place: there are a few resorts, but overdevelopment is rare and high-rise blocks are confined to the main towns. [**Bastia**](file:///C:\destinations\europe\france\corsica\bastia-around\), capital of the north, was the principal Genoese stronghold, and its fifteenth-century citadelle has survived almost intact. It’s first and foremost a Corsican city, and commerce rather than tourism is its main concern. Also relatively undisturbed, the northern Cap Corse harbours inviting sandy coves and fishing villages such as **[Macinaggio](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/corsica/cap-corse/macinaggio/" \o "Macinaggio)** and **[Centuri-Port](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/corsica/cap-corse/centuri-port/" \o "Centuri-Port)**. Within a short distance of Bastia, the fertile region of the Nebbio contains a scattering of churches built by Pisan stoneworkers, the prime example being the Cathédral de Santa Maria Assunta at the appealingly chic little port of [**St-Florent**](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/corsica/nebbio-u-nebbiu/st-florent/). To the west of here, **[L’Île-Rousse](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/corsica/balagne-a-balagna/lile-rousse/" \o "L’Île Rousse)** and **[Calvi](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/corsica/balagne-a-balagna/calvi/" \o "Calvi)**, the latter graced with an impressive citadelle and fabulous sandy beach, are major targets for holiday-makers. The spectacular **[Scandola nature reserve](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/corsica/the-reserve-naturel-de-scandola/" \o "The Réserve Naturel de Scandola)** to the southwest of Calvi is most easily visited by boat from the tiny resort of [**Porto**](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/corsica/porto-portu-around/), from where walkers can also strike out into the wild [**Gorges de Spelunca**](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/corsica/porto-portu-around/gorges-spelunca/). [**Corte**](file:///C:\destinations\europe\france\corsica\corte-corti-around\), at the heart of Corsica, is the best base for exploring the mountains and gorges of the interior which form part of the Parc Naturel Régional that runs almost the entire length of the island. Sandy beaches and rocky headlands punctuate the west coast all the way down to [**Ajaccio**](file:///C:\destinations\europe\france\corsica\ajaccio-aiacciu\), Napoleon’s birthplace and the island’s capital, where pavement cafés and palm-lined boulevards teem with tourists in summer. Slightly fewer make it to nearby **[Filitosa](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/corsica/le-golfe-valinco/filitosa/" \o "Filitosa)**, greatest of the many prehistoric sites scattered across the south. **[Propriano](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/corsica/le-golfe-valinco/propriano-prupria/" \o "Propriano (Pruprià))**, the area’s principal resort, lies close to stern **[Sartène](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/corsica/sartene-sarte-and-around/" \o "Sartène (Sartè) and around)**, former seat of the wild feudal lords who once ruled this region and still the quintessential Corsican town. More megalithic sites lie south of Sartène on the way to [**Bonifacio**](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/corsica/bonifacio-bonifaziu-around/), a comb of ancient buildings perched atop furrowed white cliffs at the southern tip of the island. Equally popular, [**Porto-Vecchio**](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/corsica/porto-vecchio-around/) provides a springboard for excursions to the amazing beaches of the south. The eastern plain has less to boast of, but the Roman site at **[Aléria](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/corsica/aleria/" \o "Aléria)** is worth a visit for its excellent museum. **Brief history** Set on the western Mediterranean trade routes, Corsica has always been of strategic and commercial appeal. Greeks, Carthaginians and Romans came in successive waves, driving native Corsicans into the interior. The Romans were ousted by Vandals, and for the following thirteen centuries the island was attacked, abandoned, settled and sold as a nation state, with generations of islanders fighting against foreign government. In 1768 France bought Corsica from Genoa, but nearly two-and-half centuries of French rule have had a limited effect and the island’s Baroque churches, Genoese fortresses, fervent Catholic rituals and a Tuscan-influenced indigenous language and cuisine show a more profound affinity with Italy. Corsica’s uneasy relationship with the mainland has worsened in recent decades. Economic neglect and the French government’s reluctance to encourage Corsican language and culture spawned a nationalist movement in the early 1970s, whose clandestine armed wing – the FLNC (Fronte di Liberazione Nazionale di a Corsica) – and its various offshoots were until recently engaged in a bloody conflict with the state. Relations between the island’s hardline nationalists and Paris may be perennially fraught, but there’s little support among ordinary islanders for total independence. Bankrolled by Paris and Brussels, Corsica is the most heavily subsidized region of France. Moreover, Corsicans are exempt from social security contributions and the island as a whole enjoys preferential tax status, with one-third of the permanent population employed in the public sector. Opinion, however, remains divided on the best way forward for the island. While centre-right parties push for an all-out promotion of tourism as a socio-economic cure-all, local nationalist groups resist large-scale development, claiming it will irrevocably damage the pristine environment visitors come to enjoy. Meanwhile, bombings of second homes – a feature of island life since the 1980s – has given way to a marked increase in assassinations and counter killings, most of them linked to organized crime and corruption rather than feuds between nationalist factions, as in the past. Corsica now suffers the highest per capita murder rate of any European region – a statistic attributed by locals to the failure of the French government to address ingrained social and economic problems, but which has roots deep in the island’s cultural DNA. The extent to which violence is nowadays a symptom of mob influence rather than part of the liberation struggle was dramatically underlined in June 2014, when the FLNC announced a definitive end to its armed conflict with the French state. The announcement came in the wake of a particularly bloody period for the island, during which several prominent figures, including politicians, lawyers and civil servants, were gunned down. Corsica’s troubled underbelly, however, is largely invisible to visitors. Political graffiti and bullet-scarred signposts, which used to be ubiquitous, are fast becoming a thing of the past, while the drive-by shootings and mafia assassinations which dominate the local press tend to occur well away from the resorts.