Undeniably Italian, yet expressing a unique regional identity, Sardinia presents a distinctive take on the Mediterranean island experience. Its position midway between Italy and the North African coast, have together forged a hybrid, fragmented character. D.H. Lawrence referred to it as “lost between Europe and Africa,and belonging to nowhere”. Continue reading to find out more about...Best time to go to Sardinia. Getting to Sardinia. Getting around Sardinia. Top things to do in Sardinia. Sardinia cultural and natural attractions. Where to stay in Sardinia. Where to eat out in Sardinia. The best restaurants in Sardinia. Best places to drink in Sardinia. Places to visit in Sardinia. In fact, the Sard people reject the need to “belong” anywhere. While accepting their shared Italian culture, they are also passionately loyal to their island home in all its diversity, from the rocky headlands and secluded beaches on the coast to the forested mountains and pungent expanses of wilderness in the interior. Backed by lagoons and surmounted by an imposing ring of medieval walls, Sardinia’s capital, [Cagliari](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/sardinia/cagliari-around/), is visually the most impressive of the island’s cities. The city retains a very distinctive identity, offering both chic sophistication and medieval charm in the raggle-taggle of narrow lanes crammed into its high citadel and port area. Discover everything you need to know before your trip with our Sardinia Travel Guide. Best time to go to Sardinia. If you’re looking for the best time to visit Sardinia, we recommend avoiding the month of August if at all possible. The negative factors include sweltering heat, crowds, increased prices, frayed tempers and scarce accommodation. June, July and September can also be oppressively hot, but there is nothing like the kind of holiday frenzy of the peak weeks. You can count on swimming fairly comfortably at any time between May and October, and you won’t be considered excessively eccentric if you take dips during the winter months. There’s much to be said for travelling to Sardinia in winter – the weather can be warm and clear and the tourist presence is refreshingly low-key, though the diminished daylight hours can limit your freedom of movement, and you may find many facilities (including most campsites) closed. Some of the best festivals take place in spring, and this is also the ideal period for walking, when the countryside is at its most vibrant, the air limpid and the wildlife abundant. Autumn is also an inspiring time for being outdoors, especially for the gradations of colour on the forested slopes of the interior. Getting to Sardinia. By plane. From the UK, flights operated by [Ryanair](https://www.ryanair.com/gb/en), [Tui](https://www.tui.co.uk/) and [easyJet](https://www.easyjet.com/en) to Alghero, Olbia and [Cagliari](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/sardinia/cagliari-around/) are hard to beat for price. From the Italian mainland, there are frequent daily flights to the island’s airports from [Rome](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/rome-lazio/), [Milan](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/lombardy-lakes/milan/) and [Bologna](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/emilia-romagna/bologna/), with less frequent connections from smaller centres. Most routes are served by [Alitalia](https://www.alitalia.com/en_gb), [Air Italy](https://www.airitaly.com/en/), [easyJet](https://www.easyjet.com/en) and [Ryanair](https://www.ryanair.com/gb/en). Prices start at around €40 for a one-way Milan–Alghero ticket. By ferry. Regular, year-round ferries sail to Sardinia from mainland [Italy](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/), [Sicily](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/sicily/), [Corsica](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/corsica/) and [France](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/). Reserve well in advance for summer crossings, especially if you have a car or bike. August sailings can be fully booked by May. Prices in high season start from about €40/person, depending on the route. The cheapest tickets (“Ponte”) involve sleeping on deck. Pricier tickets include a reclining armchair and a berth adds another €45 or so. The charge for a medium car is around €130 in high season. Look out for discounts on return tickets bought in advance within certain periods, and for special deals for a car plus two or three passengers. Getting around Sardinia. By car. The best way of getting around Sardinia is undoubtedly by car. There are rental offices in all the major towns including [Cagliari](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/sardinia/cagliari-around/). By bus. The island-wide bus service is run by [ARST](http://www.arst.sardegna.it/), supplemented by smaller independent operators covering specific long-distance routes, for example [Turmo](https://gruppoturmotravel.com/" \t "_blank) between [Cagliari](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/sardinia/cagliari-around/) and Olbia. By train. Trains connect the major towns of [Cagliari](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/sardinia/cagliari-around/), Oristano, Sassari and Olbia, operated by [Trenitalia](https://www.trenitalia.com/). Smaller narrow-gauge lines linking Nuoro and Alghero with the main network are run by [ARST](http://www.arst.sardegna.it/). From mid-June to mid-Sept, the [Trenino Verde](http://www.treninoverde.com/" \t "_blank) trains take slow but scenic routes to various destinations around the island, including Bosa, Tempio Pausania and Láconi. Top things to do in Sardinia. We’ve selected the very best things to do and unique experiences for your visit to Sardinia. Walk to Tiscali. The climb to this Nuraghic village – cunningly hidden within a huge cave in the Lanaittu valley east of Nuoro – makes a fabulous half-day hike. Ethnographic Museum, Nuoro. A visit to this extensive collection – crammed with masks, costumes, craftwork and musical instruments – offers intriguing insights into the local culture. Visit for Easter celebrations. Costumes, processions and intense drama are the main ingredients of Sardinia’s various feste commemorating Easter. Inland Gallura. Interspersed with thick groves of cork oaks, the granite rockscape of this scarcely populated mountainous zone offers unforgettable panoramas. Nora. An important Phoenician, Carthaginian and Roman centre for more than a thousand years, Nora’s splendid seaside position and fragmentary ruins still evoke its former glory. Castelsardo old town. With historic churches buried among its steep lanes, and a castle/museum at its summit affording distant coastal views, this old Doria stronghold repays the uphill slog. Tharros, Sinis peninsula. Founded by the Phoenicians on a promontory jutting into the sea, this historic site retains extensive evidence of the Punic and Roman settlers who followed. Eat seafood in Alghero. Alghero’s restaurants are renowned for their fresh seafood platters, with ingredients straight off the boat. Bosa. Explore the atmospheric lanes of this quiet riverside town overlooked by a hilltop castle, dine at its excellent restaurants and enjoy the enticing beaches nearby. Lobster is the local speciality. La Pelosa. The beaches and rocky backdrop of this beauty spot are postcard-perfect, with aquamarine water and mesmerizing views. Nuraghe Santu Antine. One of the island’s most imposing nuraghi, on the plains southeast of Sássari amid a cluster of these prehistoric monuments. Sa Sartiglia, Oristano. Costumed high jinks and equestrian showmanship recall the medieval roots of this boisterous festival. Visit Sassari’s old town. The compact old quarter of Sardinia’s second city makes for an atmospheric wander through its medieval lanes. Neptune’s Grotto, Alghero. Stalactites, stalagmites and eccentric rock formations are the highlights of a tour through the Grotta di Nettuno, a cave complex set in towering cliffs by the sea. Museo Archeologico, Cagliari. Sardinia’s premier archeological collection includes grinning deities, nuraghic figurines and ancient Phoenician inscriptions. Sardinia cultural and natural attractions. Sardinia is a place that constantly throws up new discoveries and experiences not always appearing in the tourist brochures. Visit Sardinia to experience these great places: Sardinian beaches. Even the pickiest of beach aficionados will be sated with the choice of swimming spots around Sardinia’s coasts. From perennial favourites to scrubby hideaways in secluded coves or wild, dune-backed strands stretching to the horizon, there’s something for everyone. Some of the [best beach holidays in Italy](https://www.roughguides.com/article/the-best-beach-holidays-in-italy/) can be found in Sardinia. Church treasures. You don’t have to visit galleries to see great art in Sardinia – some of the smallest, most unprepossessing churches preserve some real gems of medieval art; the magnificent altarpiece in San Pietro Apostolo, Tuili, is well worth a detour. Rides and drives. The landscape of Sardinia is itself one of its greatest pleasures, best appreciated on long, meandering journeys through the mountainous interior. Favourite routes include the roads running through Gerrei, south of Dorgali and west of Aggius. Isles of wonder. The island has its own subgroups of islands, the most dramatic of which is the archipelago of La Maddalena, off the northeastern coast; you can explore the pristine beaches and silky waters on boat trips – join a group or rent your own motor-dinghy. Ancient towers. Nuraghe-spotting is one of the classic pastimes when travelling through the island. Some of these prehistoric monuments are well restored and can only be visited with a ticket; others are mossy ruins in fields, free to enter. One of the most exhilarating is the Nuraghe Mannu outside Cala Gonone. Culinary pursuits. You’ll enjoy exquisite sea and land-based dishes in restaurants throughout the island, but some of the best places, combining tasteful decor, friendly service and outstanding, reasonably priced food, are off the tourist track, in such inland centres as Sássari and Nuoro. Where to stay in Sardinia. On the whole, accommodation in Sardinia is cheaper than in the rest of Italy. The main problem is lack of availability, as the various options can be fully booked in summer. Even outside the high season, it’s advisable to book as early as you can. As well as hotels, there are hostels, B&Bs, agriturismi (rural accommodation), self-catering villas and apartments, and campsites with bungalows or caravans to rent. There is certainly no shortage of options when deciding where to stay in Sardinia. Nearly all hotels and B&Bs include breakfast in the price, whether you want it or not. Cheaper places may have shared bathrooms, though many also have a few en-suite rooms. Hotels. There’s a vast range of hotel accommodation in Sardinia, officially graded from one to five stars, and taking in everything from small, family-run places to large, impersonal establishments with sports facilities, private parking and restaurants on the premises. Prices vary according to grading, location, season and availability. When demand is high, many establishments require that you take half or full board, and there may also be a minimum stay of three nights or a week. In practice, if you call on spec, you’ll often be given a room for just a night or two if there’s availability. In all cases, always ask to see the room before you agree to stay: posso vedere? (“May I see?”). There are few single rooms available, and these are often occupied during the week by workers and commercial travellers. In high season especially, lone travellers will often pay most (if not all) the price of a double. Three or more people sharing a room should expect to pay around 35 percent on top of the price of a double room. B&Bs and agriturismi. Recent years have seen a huge growth in B&Bs in Sardinia, mostly in towns. These can vary a lot, but are generally clean and comfortable, and set apart from the host family’s living quarters. Increasingly, rooms have private bathrooms, either en suite or close by. Some places can be fairly luxurious, with all the facilities you might expect in a three-star hotel, but with better breakfasts. The quality of the accommodation isn’t always reflected in the price; most charge €30–45 per person per night, depending on the season and location. Ask at the local tourist office for a list of B&Bs; alternatively, consult the websites of B&B associations, and watch for “B&B” or “cámere” (rooms) signs. An affittacámere (rented room) is simply a bureaucratic name for a B&B with more than three rooms – otherwise, there’s little difference between the two categories. Rural accommodation. Outside towns, you might consider a night or two in an agriturismo, a cottage or farmhouse offering informal dinner, bed and breakfast. Many also have various activities available, such as escorted walks and excursions, horseriding, hunting and mountain- biking. Some of these places are relatively remote, but if you want to get close to nature, or to isolated beaches, they’re ideal. Although some agriturismi have expanded and standardized their facilities, detracting from one of the main reasons to stay in them in the first place, others retain a homely feel, and often offer more authentic country cooking than most restaurants – indeed, some are renowned for their cuisine. They tend to be pricier than B&Bs, charging around €70–100 for a double room, plus €25–30 a head for a three-course dinner. Some agriturismi are detailed in the Guide, and local tourist offices can tell you of all the suitable places in the area. Agriturismi can be one of the best places to stay in Sardinia if you’re looking for a more authentic experience. Rented apartments and villas. For longer-term stays in resorts, you might consider renting a villa or apartment. This can be expensive in high summer – €1000–1200 a week for a one-bedroom place in Alghero, for example – but there are real bargains to be had in May, June and September, not to mention the winter months; ask in the local tourist office or estate agency (Agenzia Immobiliare), and keep an eye out for local advertisements. Hostels. Sardinia has three official [Hostelling International](https://www.hihostels.com/) (HI) youth hostels: in Porto Torres, Pula and [Cágliari](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/sardinia/cagliari-around/). There are also unofficial hostels, for example at Oristano and Santa Maria Navarrese. For the official ones, you need to have HI membership, and booking in advance is essential, either over the phone or on the websites of [AIG](https://www.aighostels.it/), or [Hostelling International](https://www.hihostels.com/). Availability is limited at all times, and in the summer months, hostels are almost permanently full. Charges for HI or AIG members are around €25 for a dormitory bed, €15 for an evening meal and €3 for breakfast (if this is not included in the overnight rate). AIG membership costs €3, valid for a year, and comes with a few perks such as discounts on car rental, student cards and travel insurance. For HI membership, contact your home hostelling organization. Camping. Sardinia has about ninety officially graded campsites dotted around its coasts and the islands, but there are no official sites in Sardinia’s interior apart from the occasional field attached to a hotel or agriturismo. Facilities range from very rudimentary to the full gamut of shops, disco, pool and diving tuition. Campers can expect to pay €15–35 per pitch in high season, sometimes with an extra charge per person, and a car may cost an extra €5 per day or so, a campervan €10–15. Many sites also offer bungalows, caravans or cabins with cooking facilities at reasonable rates – €30–80 a night for a bungalow or caravan for two people in high season. Electricity and gas are included in the price; extras may include bed linen (around €10) and final cleaning (€20–30). Months of opening are detailed in the Guide – though these periods are very flexible, and campsites generally open or close according to demand. Very few campsites stay open between October and April. Don’t assume there will always be availability in summer: the better sites fill up quickly (particularly in August), so always phone first. More details of Sardinia’s campsites and reviews can be found on the websites [easycamping.it](http://www.easycamping.it/), [camping.it](https://www.camping.it/) and [campeggi.com](https://www.campeggi.com/). By and large, camping rough is a non-starter: it’s frowned upon in the tourist areas and regarded with outright suspicion in the interior (locals are especially wary of the danger of forest fires). Where to eat out in Sardinia. Eating and drinking are refreshingly good value in Sardinia, and the quality is usually high. Often, even the most out-of-the-way village will boast somewhere you can get a decent lunch, while towns like [Cágliari](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/sardinia/cagliari-around/) and Alghero can keep foodies happy for days. A full meal with local wine averages at around €30 a head, though there are often much cheaper set-price menus available. Breakfasts and snacks. Most Sardinians start the day in a bar, their breakfast (prima colazione) consisting of an espresso and the ubiquitous cornetto – a croissant, either plain or filled with jam, custard or chocolate, which you usually help yourself to from the counter; bigger bars and patisseries (pasticcerie) will have more choice. Hotel breakfasts may be limp, forgettable affairs, but you’ll often find a truly impressive spread at B&Bs and agriturismi, including home-made jams, fruit and yoghurt. At other times of the day, rolls (panini) can be pretty substantial, packed with any number of fillings. Numerous bars sell these, though you may find fresher fare by going into an alimentari (grocer’s shop) or supermarket and asking them to make you one from whatever’s on offer, for which you’ll pay €2–5, depending on what and how much you choose for the filling. Bars may also offer tramezzini, ready-made sliced white bread sandwiches with mixed fillings – lighter and less appetizing than your average panino. Toasted sandwiches (toste) are common too: in a sandwich bar you can get whatever you like put inside them; in bars which have a sandwich toaster you’re more likely to be limited to cheese with ham or tomato. Apart from sandwiches, other takeaway food is pretty thin on the ground. You’ll get small pizzas, portions of prepared pasta, chips, even full hot meals, in a távola calda, a snack bar that’s at its best in the morning when everything is fresh. Full meals: lunch and dinner. Full meals can be elaborate affairs. These are generally served in a trattoria or a ristorante, though these days there’s often a fine line between the two: traditionally, a trattoria is cheaper and more basic, offering home cooking (cucina casalinga), while a ristorante is more upmarket (tablecloths and waiters). Typical costs. In either, a plate of pasta, a meat or fish course, fruit and a drink should cost €20–40 (though seafood usually pushes up the price). Watch out for signs saying menu turístico, pranzo turístico, pranzo completo or prezzo fisso – a limited set menu with or without wine, which can cost as little as €15, but is usually more in the region of €20–25 (less at lunchtime). Classier ristoranti will charge around €40–60 per head, including quality wine. Many of these are worth blowing the budget and going out of your way for. Alternatives to restaurants. Other eateries usually found in tourist resorts include the hybrid trattoria-ristorante-pizzeria; the spaghetteria, which specializes in pasta dishes; and the birreria – a pub with snacks and music, often the haunt of the local youth. Lastly, if you ever tire of the Sardinian diet you might try out one of the many Chinese, North African and Indian restaurants that have sprouted in the bigger towns in recent years – they’re mostly as good as or better than the ones at home, and significantly cheaper than most Italian restaurants. Many eating places close for three or four weeks in November or February. The best restaurants in Sardinia. Here are the very best restaurants from our Sardinia Travel Guide. Antica Dimora del Gruccione, Santu Lussurgiu. This gourmet restaurant concentrates on local meat products (with veggie options) and charges €35 for a five-course meal (reservation advised if you’re not staying in the hotel). In summer you can eat in the courtyard garden. Dal Corsaro, Cágliari. At this venerable spot – one of Cágliari’s oldest restaurants and the only one that is Michelin-starred – the dominant tone is hushed elegance. Modern, stripped-down versions of classic fish and meat dishes are often memorable, and there’s an excellent wine list. It’ll make a serious dent in your budget though, with tasting menus for €95, €115 and €125. Il Mosto, Aggius. In the centre of Aggius (on the corner of the main Via Roma), this granite-walled trattoria is among Gallura’s finest, offering honest gallurese cuisine at moderate prices (€30 per head for two courses). The small menu is strong on grilled meats and pecorino cheese, and there’s a great range of local and international wines too. Il Pórtico, Nuoro. You’ll find an innovative approach to the traditional Sard dishes on offer in this smart place with modern art on the walls – such as lados con tonno fresco (fresh pasta with tuna), laganelle con cozze e zucchine (fresh pasta with mussels and courgettes) and spigola con crosta di patate (sea bass in a potato crust). Leave space for the lip-smacking desserts, and there’s a good wine list too. Starters are €10–12, mains around €15. Mabrouk, Alghero. This is about as near as Alghero comes to a cosy neighbourhood trattoria, where there’s no written menu but a democratic €40 fixed-price dinner for everyone – including unlimited house wine and limoncello. It’s all seafood: a typical meal might start with five antipasti, followed by three types of pasta, the catch of the day, prawns, calamari and delicious desserts. Best places to drink in Sardinia. Although Sard children are brought up on wine, there’s not the same emphasis on dedicated drinking here as there is in some other countries. You’ll rarely see drunks in public, young people don’t make a night out of getting wasted, and women especially are frowned upon if they’re seen to indulge. Where to drink. Bars in Sardinia are either functional refuelling stops – good for a coffee in the morning, a quick beer or a cup of tea – or social centres, which have tables and a greater range of snacks, and are conducive to whiling away part of a morning or afternoon, reading or people-watching. Many bars don’t stay open much after 9pm, though this varies from place to place, and hours are extended in summer, sometimes to midnight or 1am. As in bars throughout the Mediterranean, there are no set licensing hours and children have free access. All have toilets, and most won’t object to you using their facilities even if you’re not drinking there. Paying for drinks in Sardinia. If you’re just having a drink at a stand-up bar, pay first at the cash till (la cassa), present your receipt (scontrino) to the bar person and give your order. If there’s no cashier, pay either before or after being served. If you’re sitting down, wait for someone to take your order, and there’ll usually be a 25–35 percent service charge (shown on the price list as távola); you’re often expected to pay the bill on being served. If you don’t know how much a drink will cost, there should be a list of prices (listino prezzi) behind the bar or cassa. When you present your receipt, it’s customary to leave an extra €0.50 or so on the counter – though no one will object if you don’t. Learn more about [food and drink in Italy](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/food-drink/). Places to visit in Sardinia. Nora. Forty kilometres south of [Cagliari](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/sardinia/cagliari-around/), 3km outside the small town of Pula, the ancient remains of Nora constitute one of Sardinia’s most important archaeological sites. Founded by the Phoenicians and settled later by Carthaginians and Romans, Nora was abandoned around the third century AD, possibly as a result of a natural disaster. Now partly submerged under the sea, the remains on land include houses, Carthaginian warehouses, a temple, baths with some well-preserved mosaics, and a theatre which hosts summer performances. The rest is rubble, though its waterside position gives it plenty of atmosphere. The archaeological museum at Corso Vittorio Emanuele 69 in Pula (closed for renovation at the time of writing) gives background and displays some of the finds. Beside the site is a lovely sandy bay lapped by crystal-clear water, but packed with day-trippers in season. Behind the beach stands the rather ordinary-looking eleventh-century church of Sant’Efísio, site of the martyrdom of [Cagliari’s](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/sardinia/cagliari-around/) patron saint and the destination of an annual four-day procession from [Cagliari](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/sardinia/cagliari-around/) on May 1. Sant’Antioco. Joined to the mainland by a road causeway and bridge, Sant’Antioco is the larger of Sardinia’s southwest islands, measuring about 15km by 10km at its longest and widest. The main town – also called Sant’Antioco – has a sheltered harbour that made this an important base for the Phoenicians, Carthaginians and the Romans, allowing them control over the whole of Sardinia’s southwest coast. The second town, Calasetta, on the island’s northern tip, lies close to some good beaches and is the port for the island of San Pietro. Su Nuraxi. If you only see one of Sardinia’s nuraghi (ancient stone dwellings) you should make it the biggest and most famous: Su Nuraxi, between [Cagliari](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/sardinia/cagliari-around/) and Oristano. The majestic UNESCO-protected complex is a compelling sight, surrounded by the brown hills of the interior, and a good taste of the primitive grandeur of the island’s only indigenous civilization. Su Nuraxi’s dialect name means simply “the nuragh”, and not only is it the largest Nuraghic complex on the island, but it’s also thought to be the oldest, dating probably from around 1500 BC. Comprising a bulky fortress surrounded by the remains of a village, Su Nuraxi was a palace complex at the very least – possibly even a capital city. The central tower once reached 21m (now shrunk to less than 15m), and its outer defences and inner chambers are connected by passageways and stairs. The whole complex is thought to have been covered with earth by Sards and Carthaginians at the time of the Roman conquest, which may account for its excellent state of preservation: if it weren’t for a torrential rainstorm that washed away the slopes in 1949, the site may never have been revealed at all. Oristano. The province of Oristano roughly corresponds to the much older entity of Arborea, the medieval giudicato which championed the Sardinian cause in the struggle against the Spaniards. Then as now, Oristano was the region’s main town, and today it retains more than a hint of medieval atmosphere. The historic centre has a relaxed and elegant feel, and although it is 4km from the sea, the town is attractively surrounded by water, its lagoons and irrigation canals helping to make this a richly productive agricultural zone (the southern lagoon, the Stagno di Santa Giusta, is home to a local colony of Sardinia’s flamingo population). Many people, however, come to Oristano simply to visit the nearby Sinis peninsula, home to the impressive Punic and Roman ruins of Tharros and a string of wild beaches. Sa Sartiglia. The rituals of Oristano’s flamboyant Sa Sartiglia festival perhaps originated with knights on the Second Crusade, who in the eleventh century may well have imported the trappings of Saracen tournaments to Sardinia. In the period of the Spanish domination, similarly lavish feasts were held for the ruling knights. In time, these celebrations took on a more theatrical aspect and merged with the annual Carnival – the Sa Sartiglia is now a three-day festival ending on Shrove Tuesday. With all the participants masked and costumed, the whole affair exudes a drama unrivalled by Sardinia’s other festivals. The climax of proceedings, in Piazza Eleonora, is the joust after which the festival is named, when mounted contestants attempt to lance a ring, or sartiglia, suspended in the air, charging towards it at full gallop. Eleonora di Aroborea. Oristano’s finest hour is recalled in the marble statue of Eleonora d’Arborea that presides over the piazza named after her in the old centre. Eleonora was the giudice of the Arborea region from 1384 to 1404 and is the best-loved of Sardinia’s medieval rulers, having been the only one who enjoyed any success against the Aragonese invaders. She died from plague in 1404, though her most enduring legacy survived her by several centuries: the formulation of a Code of Laws, which was eventually extended throughout the island. Eleonora’s statue, carved in 1881, shows her bearing the scroll on which the laws were written, while inset panels depict her various victories. Tharros. About 20km west of Oristano, the Punic and Roman ruins at Tharros are spread across an isthmus that forms the northern tip of the mouth of the Golfo di Oristano. Now overlooked by a sturdy Spanish watchtower, the site was settled by Phoenicians as early as 800 BC, and consists mostly of Punic and Roman houses arranged on a grid of streets, of which the broad-slabbed Decumanus Maximus is the most impressive. The two solitary Corinthian columns marking the site of a first-century-BC Roman temple are in fact a modern reconstruction. Like Nora, there is much more submerged underwater, the result of subsidence. Near the site stands the fifth-century church of San Giovanni di Sinis, which vies with [Cagliari’s](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/sardinia/cagliari-around/) San Saturnino for the title of oldest Christian church in Sardinia. Bosa. Some 60km north of Oristano, Bosa presents an appealing picture of pastel houses huddled around a hilltop castle on the banks of the Temo River. Exploring the mazy lanes of its medieval centre is the chief pleasure here, and it makes a pleasant, if sleepy place to hole up for a few days. Running parallel to the river, Bosa's long main street Corso Vittorio Emanuele cuts through Sa Piana, the lower town, site of the cathedral at the Corso’s eastern end, by the old bridge. From Sa Piana, the cobbled lanes of Sa Costa, or upper town, straggle up the hill towards the castle. For a swim, head to Bosa Marina, 2km west, where a crescent of sandy beach is backed by restaurants and bars. Nuoro. “There is nothing to see in Nuoro: which to tell the truth, is always a relief. Sights are an irritating bore,” wrote D.H. Lawrence of the town he visited in 1921, though he was impressed by its appearance – “as if at the end of the world, mountains rising sombre behind”. Nuoro’s superb backdrop – beneath the soaring peak of Monte Ortobene and opposite the sheer and stark heights of Monte Corrasi – is still a major part of its appeal. Some absorbing museums and a vibrant old centre bisected by the pedestrianized Corso Garibaldi are added reasons to spend time here. Evident everywhere are reminders of Nuoro’s distinguished literary and artistic heritage, notably in connection with the locally born Sebastiano Satta (1867–1914), Sardinia’s best-known poet; Grazia Deledda (1871–1936), who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1926 in recognition of a writing career that chronicled the day-to-day trials and passions of local life; and the modernist sculptor Francesco Ciusa (1883–1949). The town is also home to one of Sardinia's most spectacular festivals, the annual Festa del Redentore (last ten days of Aug), where enthusiastic dancing and singing in dialect culminate in a costumed procession to Monte Ortobene. Monte Ortobene. Signposted west of town, a lane climbs through the forested slopes of Monte Ortobene to its summit (955m), 8km away, presided over by a bronze statue of the Redeemer. From here there are majestic views over the gorge separating Nuoro from the Supramonte massif, while the woods are perfect for walks, picnics or a dip in the open-air pool at Farcana (summer only). During Nuoro’s Festa del Redentore a procession from town weaves up the mountain. The interior and the east coast. Though little travelled by tourists, Sardinia’s interior is in many ways the most interesting part of the island, dominated by thick forests and rugged peaks. The local inhabitants have retained a fierce sense of independence and loyalty to their traditions, and this is especially true in the ring of the once almost impenetrable Monti del Gennargentu, centred on the island’s highest peak, La Mármora (1834m). The range forms the core of the Barbagia region, called Barbaria by the Romans who, like their successors, were never able to subdue it, foiled by the guerrilla warfare for which its hidden recesses proved ideal. More recently, the isolation and economic difficulties of the Barbagia’s villages led to wide scale emigration and, among those who stayed behind, a wave of sheep-rustling, internecine feuding and the kidnapping of wealthy industrialists or their families that continued until the last decades of the twentieth century. Today, the Barbagia's main appeal is to outdoors enthusiasts, particularly mountain hikers; Oliena’s tourist office for routes and lists of guides. Sardinia’s long eastern seaboard is highly developed around the resorts of Siniscola and Posada, but further south it preserves its desolate beauty, virtually untouched apart from a couple of isolated spots around Cala Gonone, and, further down, around the port of Arbatax, in Ogliastra province. Hikes from Oliena, Dorgali and Cala Gonone. South of Oliena and Dorgali, the Supramonte massif provides lots of opportunities for mountain hikes, which should be accompanied by a guide – lists of available guides are available from the tourist offices at Oliena and Dorgali. The most popular excursion is to the Nuraghic village of Tiscali, spectacularly sited within a vast mountaintop cavern; allow 4–6 hours for the return walk from Su Gologone on the Oliena side, or from the Flumineddu River on the Dorgali side (an easier ascent). One of Sardinia’s most dramatic mountain landscapes lies further south, cut through by the Flumineddu Valley and the Gola di Gorropu, one of southern Europe’s deepest canyons. You’ll get some stunning views of the valley from the SS125, running high above it, but you should hook up with a guide to experience it more directly. Even for shorter hikes, you’ll need hardy footwear with a secure grip and ankle support, and preferably some head protection against bumps and falls: the boulders can be extremely slippery, especially when wet. Along the coast, you can make half- or full-day hikes from Cala Gonone to the beaches at Cala Luna and Cala Sisine. From Cala Sisine, the route wanders inland up the Sisine canyon, as far as the solitary church of San Pietro, from where a track leads down to the village of Baunei. Again, guides are advised for all but the most straightforward coastal routes. The Gennargentu massif. The central region of the Barbagia holds the Gennargentu chain of mountains – the name means “silver gate”, referring to the snow that covers them every winter. Here, you’ll find the island’s only skiing facilities on Monte Bruncu Spina, Sardinia’s second-highest peak (1829m). In spring and summer, you can explore this and other areas on mountain treks, best undertaken with a guide; the tourist office at Nuoro can supply a list. Buried within chestnut forests, the isolated villages of the region make useful bases for both skiers and trekkers, for example Fonni, 36km south of Nuoro and at 1000m the island’s highest village. Try to coincide your visit with one of Fonni’s costumed festivals, principally the Madonna dei Mártiri, on the Monday following the first Sunday in June, and on San Giovanni’s day on June 24. Other centres for excursions and to get a flavour of the mountain culture include Tonara, a quiet, traditional village some 30km southwest of Fonni, famed for its chestnuts and torrone (a sticky, sweet nougat confection), and Aritzo, 15km further south. Boat tours from Cala Gonone. Tickets for a range of boat trips from Cala Gonone to the beaches and deep grottoes that pit the shore are sold at the port. Most famous of the grottoes is the Grotta del Bue Marino, formerly home to a colony of Mediterranean monk seals, or “sea ox”. It’s among Sardinia’s most spectacular caves, a luminescent gallery filled with remarkable natural sculptures, resembling organ pipes, wedding cakes and even human heads – one of them is known as Dante, after a fondly imagined resemblance to the poet. Other sea excursions provide access to various beaches along the coast, the most popular of which are Cala Luna and Cala Sisine – for more solitude, opt for one of the remoter swimming and snorkelling stops. Olbia. The largest town in northeastern Sardinia, Olbia is in some ways the least Sardinian of the island's major centres, predominantly modern and usually busy with tourists, many of them bound for one of the Mediterranean’s loveliest stretches of coast, the [Costa Smeralda](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/sardinia/costa-smeralda-around/). But there's more to Olbia than its port and airport – it has one of Sardinia's most significant Romanesque churches, a good museum, and a lively selection of bars and restaurants. The Maddalena islands. The profusion of minor islands off Sardinia’s northeastern coast, more than sixty in all, form part of La Maddalena national park, which can be explored on various boat tours from the mainland or from the archipelago’s only port, La Maddalena, reachable on ferries from Palau (10km up the coast from Cannigione). The island invites aimless wandering and offers a variety of sandy and rocky beaches in mostly undeveloped coves. The beaches on the northern and western coasts are most attractive, particularly those around the tiny port of Madonetta, 5km west of La Maddalena, and at Cala Lunga, 5km north of town. Attached to the main island by a causeway is neighbouring Caprera, the island on which Garibaldi spent his last years. Santa Teresa Gallura and around. The road northwest from Arzachena passes a succession of lovely bays, some dramatic rocky coastline and a handful of campsites. Six kilometres west of Palau, the slender isthmus of Porto Pollo is Sardinia’s busiest watersports centre, with ideal conditions for windsurfing and kitesurfing. There are numerous surf schools and rental outfits, while the sheltered, dune-backed beaches will equally appeal to non-surfers. Some 15km further west, Santa Teresa Gallura is Sardinia’s northernmost port. The town gets extremely lively in summer, with a buzzing nightlife, but the main draw is the beaches, many enjoying superb views over to Corsica, just 11km away. There’s one stretch of sand right at the edge of town, but some of the finest beaches on the whole island are a short bus-ride away, with Punta Falcone and La Marmorata to the east, and Capo Testa, with its wind-sculpted granite rock formations, 3km west of Santa Teresa. Castelsardo. On Sardinia’s north coast, 70km southwest from Santa Teresa di Gallura, Castelsardo lies picturesquely draped over a promontory overlooking the Golfo dell’Asinara. The town was the Sardinian power base of the Genoan Doria family for nearly 250 years, and the historic centre preserves a pungent medieval flavour, crowned by a castle that now holds a museum of basketwork. This local speciality, combined with the town’s photogenic setting, has helped to transform Castelsardo into a fully-fledged holiday resort, with numerous hotels, restaurants and handicrafts shops. Sassari. Sardinia’s second city, Sassari combines an insular, traditional feel, as embodied in its well-preserved old quarter, with a forward-looking, confident air that is most evident in its modern centre. Here, leading off from the grandiose Piazza Italia, the café-lined Via Roma holds the city’s principal sight, the Museo Sanna, displaying some of the island’s most important archaeological finds. While [Cagliari](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/sardinia/cagliari-around/) was [Pisa’s](https://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/tuscany/pisa-around/) base of operations in Sardinia during the Middle Ages, Sassari was the Genoan capital, ruled by the Doria family, whose power reached throughout the Mediterranean. Under the Aragonese it became an important centre of Spanish hegemony, and the Spanish stamp is still strong, not least in its churches. In the sixteenth century the Jesuits founded Sardinia’s first university here, which continues to excel in the spheres of law, medicine and politics. La Cavalcata. One of Sardinia’s showiest festivals – La Cavalcata – takes place in Sassari on the penultimate Sunday of May, the highlight of a month of cultural activities. Originally staged for the benefit of visiting Spanish kings or other dignitaries, it attracts hundreds of richly costumed participants from villages throughout the province and beyond. The festival is divided into three stages: the morning features a horseback parade and a display of the embroidered and decorated costumes unique to each village, after which there is a show of stirring horsemanship at the local racecourse. The day ends with traditional songs and dances back in Piazza Italia. Stintino and around. The coast north of Sassari is lined with beaches, the most alluring of them lying around the port and resort of Stintino, on Sardinia’s northwestern tip. Until recently nothing more than a remote jumble of fishermen’s cottages jammed between two narrow harbours, Stintino remains a small, laidback village for most of the year, but is transformed into a busy holiday centre in the tourist season. With no beaches to speak of in the resort itself, most of the sunning and swimming takes place to either side – 4km south at the beach of Le Saline or the same distance north at La Pelosa – though most of the area’s bars, restaurants and reasonably priced accommodation lie in Stintino. La Pelosa. Some 4km up the road from Stintino a clutter of tourist villages backs the otherwise idyllic promontory of La Pelosa, location of one of Sardinia’s most deluxe beaches. With its fine sand, turquoise water and views out to the isles of Piana and Asinara, it can get horribly crowded in the peak tourist season, but nothing can spoil its setting. Trips to Asinara. Previously a prison island, the elongated offshore isle of Asinara is now a national park and nature reserve. Boat trips leave Stintino daily between Easter and October at around 9.30am, returning at 5/6pm. Book tickets at least one day before from the kiosks by the port or an agency in town such as La Nassa, Via Tonnara 35. Alghero. Alghero, 40km southwest of Sassari, is one of Sardinia’s most charming towns, and one of its busiest resorts. The predominant flavour here is Catalan, owing to a wholesale Hispanicization that followed the overthrow of the Doria family by Pedro IV of Aragon in 1354, a process so thorough that it became known as “Barcelonetta”. The traces are still strong in the old town today, with its flamboyant churches and narrow cobbled lanes named in both Italian and Catalan, all sheltered within a stout girdle of walls that now hold bars and restaurants – a fine venue for watching the sunset. Neptune's Grotto. One of the best excursions from Alghero is to Neptune’s Grotto (daily: April & Oct 10am–6pm; May–Sept 9am–8pm; Nov–March 10am–4pm; last tour 1hr before closing), a dramatically lit marine cave with stalagmites and stalactites. Boat trips to the grotto leave from Alghero’s port between March and October. Before buying tickets, check with the operator that you’ll be able to visit the grotto on that day, as you can’t enter if the sea is too rough – and if the winds are up, be prepared for a choppy ride (40min). Alternatively, local buses depart from the Alghero’s Giardini Pubblici (1–3 daily), leaving you at the top of a long and steep flight of steps that corkscrews down to the cave mouth.