

serenity

HOLIDAYS MAGAZINE

Discover your perfect
Holiday
in 2011

SARDINIA'S TOP 10

Our tips for the best of what to see and do on this beautiful island.

GAMBIA ON TV

TV presenter Anna Williamson talks about her first trip to Africa, filming at the luxurious Coco Ocean Resort & Spa.

A superior holiday experience - offering a wide range of holidays from West Africa to the mediterranean islands.

A WARM WELCOME

From Serenity Holidays

Welcome to the first ever edition of *Serenity*, the magazine produced by the staff of Serenity Holidays. We offer a very diverse range of holidays, but one thing that is common throughout is the passion of our staff which we hope to be able to share with you.

We have been organising holidays for over 20 years and strive to offer the best holidays possible to the destinations we feature: The Gambia, Cape Verde, Senegal, Corsica, Sardinia plus European short breaks through Great Escapes.

below top:
street art in
The Gambia

below
bottom:
festival in
Corsica

WHAT'S NEW FOR 2011

Wide Open Walls Street Art Project - The Gambia

A rural village near Makasutu Cultural Forest in The Gambia recently hosted a group of international street artists who adorned the village buildings with artwork. The paintings are individually impressive but together and in situ within the African bush are truly breathtaking. Tourists can visit the area when staying at Mandina Lodges in Makasutu Forest or on day trips from the coastal hotels and their support will help the village and the sustainable tourism ethos of the project. Next year's event is already being planned involving artists from South Africa, the UK and USA.

Find out more on our website
theGambiaBlog.co.uk

NEW Rivers of West Africa Cruise The Gambia & Senegal

New this winter is a 7-night cruise from Dakar through the Saloum Delta in Senegal and the River Gambia, stopping off at the former slave-trading post of Goreé Island and Djiffere in Senegal as well as the River Gambia National Park. Along the way there is the chance of seeing chimpanzees, hippopotami, dolphins, plus hundreds of species of bird.

NEW Camel Safari on Boa Vista, Cape Verde

Experience the beauty and tranquillity of the Viana Desert on Boa Vista with this new excursion. The Camel Tour starts in Pascià Village and passes through the oasis of Estancia de Baixo before reaching the silky white sands of Viana Desert, where you will wait awhile to take in the magic of the area before the return ride.





Calvi Jazz Festival The Island of Corsica

The annual Calvi Jazz Festival will take place between 21st & 26th June this year and is once again expected to attract big names from the world of jazz as well as audiences from around the world. During the event evening concerts are held on the main stage below the Citadel and there are jamming sessions on the quay.

S'Ardia Horse Race in Sédilo The Island of Sardinia

Sardinia hosts over a thousand festivals and events each year and one of the most exciting is the S'Ardia Horse Race in which bareback riders race recklessly round the church of Sant'Antine accompanied by gun shots and loud cheers from the crowds. It's a thrilling spectacle which attracts thousands of spectators each year.

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If you fancy yourself as a bit of a travel writer and have an experience to share you could win a £100 holiday voucher.

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Matt Smith

has worked for us in various guises whilst studying for a degree in English and now puts his talents to good use writing for thegambiablog.co.uk. He is also our e-commerce guru.



Salome Munuo

is a fashion journalist and stylist for a national paper and runs a personal styling company fashionsos.co.uk. She spent a romantic week in Boa Vista with her partner discovering all aspects of the island.



Kathy Burrington

is a graphic designer and keen photographer; in this issue she writes about her trip to Bandia Nature Reserve in Senegal.



Anna Williamson

is a TV presenter; her children's show Toonattik has recently moved from ITV to Nickelodeon. She was recently filming in The Gambia; find out what she thought.

What's Your Experience?

Earn a £100 holiday voucher & be featured in one of our magazines.

MORE - PAGE 19

SARDINIA & CORSICA



This fantastic
view from
the villa
L'Ancre
Bleue is by
Jon Banfield

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L'Ancre Bleue
by Jon Banfield

[Corsica.co.uk/Flickr](https://www.corsica.co.uk/Flickr)

Sardinia has the very best the Mediterranean has to offer: turquoise waters and wide sandy beaches, long hours of sunshine, fine cuisine and a laid back lifestyle.

TOP 10 THINGS TO DO

When Visiting Sardinia

opposite:
Porto
Giunco
Villasimius

Sardinia is a fascinating island with glamorous resorts, a rich history, interesting towns and hundreds of cultural events but with so much on offer, it's difficult to know where to start. Here Sardinian Places product manager Amandine Blanchard gives her Top 10 'must sees' when visiting the island.

1. The beaches

It sounds an obvious choice, but Sardinia really has some of the best beaches in Europe, with crystal clear waters and powdered white sands. In particular there are many fantastic bays and beaches on the Costa Smeralda. Some are well signposted, others hidden down small winding tracks, so a little exploring on foot will always pay off. My favourites are those on the Capriccioli headland and the remote Spiaggia del Principe.

2. Tee off!

There are some first-class golf courses on Sardinia and the breathtaking scenery adds to the fantastic quality of the courses. The Pevero near Olbia, surrounded by dense vegetation and bizarre rock formations, is one of Europe's most beautiful.

3. Join in the local festivities

The island hosts hundreds of events throughout the year from colourful carnivals to religious processions and these are your chance to experience a piece of true Sardinia. Festivals in Sardinia often have a religious theme but others include the Fish festival in July where you can sample a wonderful combination of fried fish and wine, or the International Jazz festival in August, one of the most important festivals in Sardinia.

4. Go to market

Shopping in Sardinia ranges from the glitz and glamour of the chic designer boutiques in the larger towns, to traditional village craft and food markets. Different regions of the island are renowned for their craft traditions and in some areas it will feel like stepping back in time – women still make baskets out of rush, willow and dwarf pine leaves, along with a variety of other traditional handicrafts.

5. Horse-riding

Hacks and excursions for all abilities are available whether you're a beginner or an experienced rider and this truly is a fantastic way to discover hidden Sardinia and explore areas that cannot be reached by car.

6. Sardinia on foot

Whether you are a serious hiker or simply enjoy a stroll in beautiful surroundings, there is something for walkers of all levels on Sardinia and some would say getting the walking boots on and fresh air in your lungs is the perfect way to enjoy the island's tranquillity and natural beauty.





7. Self-drive & explore

Sardinia is a large island with contrasting landscapes and driving is the best way to take in the scenery. Follow the main roads and travel across the island can be pretty quick and easy, and the best thing is that you are free to explore to your own agenda discovering the island's hidden gems as you go, stopping for a walk or a picnic.

8. Take a boat trip

What better way could there be to explore Sardinia's magnificent coastline of islands, coves and grottos? Don't miss the Maddalena archipelago, a cluster of islands off the northeast coast with national park status. From Palau, regular ferry crossings take just 20 minutes and dock at the largest of the islands – La Maddalena, where most of the hotels and restaurants can be found – and from here you can drive or bike across to the neighbouring island of Caprera.

9. Take a real life history lesson

The Roman ruins at Nora are part submerged beneath the sea and include an amphitheatre, the raised Temple of Tanit (goddess of fertility), tombs and Roman baths, some decorated with distinct black and white mosaics.

10. Agriturismo

Family-run cottages and farmhouses, or agriturismo, offering informal dinner, bed and breakfast are a fantastic way to experience some authentic Sardinian country cooking - many are renowned for their cuisine and wine and the restaurants are usually open to evening dinner guests too. Some also offer activities such as walking, horse-riding and mountain biking, but the main reason people love them is for the homely family feel and their remote locations away from the busier resorts.

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In a brief three-day tour of the South, Matt Smith discovers unspoilt beaches, breathtaking mountains, ancient art and glamorous resorts.

SOUTHERN CORSICA

BY Matt Smith

opposite:
Santa Giulia

below:
Bonifacio

The remit went something like this: fly into Figari, hire a car and go looking; take in as much of the south of the island as possible. It was only a short trip, and it amounted to an area of a few hundred square miles so I did wonder how much I'd see... As it turned out, I saw more than I could have possibly hoped.

I arrived in Porto Vecchio at dusk. Like many of Corsica's main coastal towns, it is split into two parts: a modern level, which sits directly on the sea, and high above, the old walled town or citadel – an imposing granite fortress lit up on all sides. The narrow streets of the citadel were thronged with people, sat at café tables, peering into restaurants or out for an evening stroll. I ate beneath the town walls and listened to the guttural Corsican dialect, more ancient than the language of the mainland, and walked back to my hotel beneath a full moon, hanging high above the maquis softened outlines of the coastal mountains.

Porto Vecchio by daylight was a gently stunning prospect: a glass-still sea nearly enclosed in a pincer of low hills, the whiteness of yachts bright against the sea and the ever-present uniform green of the maquis. I drove into the mountains, a slow winding ascent that took me through the cool pine forests and onwards to the Col de Bavella, a jaw-dropping pass through the central fin of mountains that runs the length of Corsica. The Aiguilles de Bavella, a series of granite needles that seem to pierce the very firmament, is the dominant feature here, and a genuinely sublime sight.

That afternoon I visited Filitosa on the west coast, a world-renowned archaeological site that still feels like a secret. Here are some of the most astonishing examples of megalithic art anywhere in the world – some thought to be as much as 4000 years old. As you walk around the site you note the layers of history: the ancient fire-forged granite of the hills and the distant wash of the sea; the crude human likenesses of the megaliths, monumental in their size and meaning; a torre, built by the usurpers of the megalithic people; the spread of olive trees, brought to the island by the Romans; and in the distance the spire of a church, evidence of a far more recent history.

I came to Bonifacio in the late afternoon and parked in the low light of the natural harbour. The high town, much like Porto Vecchio, is a citadel; but Bonifacio, sat atop a crag of

“
The narrow streets of the citadel were thronged with people, sat at café tables, peering into restaurants or out for an evening stroll.
”





limestone, seems to be naturally lit from within. Even from below, the town has a strange half glow; yet as I ascended the steep steps and walked into the full force of the evening sun, the whole place burned with a fierce fire, the cliffs and outer walls dazzling to the eyes. The interior was cool and quiet in comparison, a dense, alluring place of tight streets and roadside cafés. Houses tower from street level, entered by near-vertical stairways that disappear into the gloom and the streets curve in on themselves. It is one of those magical towns that you could try to capture inch by inch, in film or in photo, and never fully encapsulate, something always left over, escaping.

The beach at San Ciprianu is simple and beautiful. It is little more than a half moon of white sand, but the setting is everything, with little, if any development. There is actually only one permanent building here now, the rest are built from local timber and deconstructed at the end of each season and stored away.

Palombaggia feels a little more built up, but is no less beautiful. There is a real contrast of colours here, with rust-red rocks, the vaporous green haze of the pines and the surrounding hills, and of course the brilliant white of the sand.

Santa Giulia is close to Palombaggia, and very similar in terms of look and feel - but is its quieter cousin. It's easy to see why these beaches, plus Rondinara to the south, and Pinarellu to the north, are so popular. Aside from their beauty, they exude a quiet and generally unspoilt calm. I stayed awhile at Santa Giulia, shaded beneath the heady scent of towering maritime pine. I knew my plane was leaving in two hours, but as the sea gently pawed at the sand I fantasised about letting myself fall asleep amid all this grandeur of granite and sand and staying. I wouldn't be the first to be bewitched by this extraordinary island...

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THE ISLANDS OF CAPE VERDE



A colourful
image
captured
by Jon
Banfield on
the island
of Sal.

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On the Beach
by Jon Banfield

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Journalist Salome Munuo explores Boa Vista - the stunning beaches, festivals, all-inclusive hotels and goes snorkelling over dramatic shipwrecks.

WAITING TO BE DISCOVERED

BY Salome Munuo

There are not many holiday companies that give the customer a sense of discovery; travelling to the island of Boa Vista with The Cape Verde Experience my partner and I certainly felt like true explorers.

We stayed at the all-inclusive resort of Iberostar, a four-star luxury hotel in Praia des Chaves on the west coast of the island. Set along white sandy beaches with crystal blue seas the location is postcard picture perfect. The hotel boasts three pools including a breathtaking infinity pool. Also on site is Renova, the tranquil spa, and a high-tech gym. During our stay we both enjoyed an invigorating massage in the spa, and I also found a little time to fit in a luxury pedicure!!

The hotel houses two main restaurants: a buffet-style restaurant with open grill cooking and one with a seafood menu and also has three bars that provide a delicious selection of cocktails, a fantastic way in which to while away the evening whilst enjoying the most breathtaking sunsets.

The day after we arrived we were guided through the catalogue of activities: snorkelling among the

coral reefs, quad bike safaris, tours by 4x4, visiting local towns or trailing across the Viana desert - Boa Vista's answer to the Sahara. We took part in a wide range of trips, by far the favourites were the snorkelling for its amazing sea life and dramatic shipwrecks and the cross country trail for its volcanic landscapes, vintage villages and breathtaking beaches. For an island that is only 620 square kilometres and with a population of only 5,000 you certainly get the full 'Tardis' experience with such a wide choice of adventure.

THREE THINGS YOU MUST DO in Cape Verde

1. Head to Ervatao beach on Boa Vista to catch a glimpse of the famous loggerhead turtles which nest between July and September.
2. Go for a sunset walk along the unspoilt coastline for the most breathtaking views.
3. Visit the villages' bustling markets for a true taste of traditional Cape Verde.

During our stay we enjoyed shopping trips to the capital Sal Rei and at night we visited a festival in the smaller village of Estancia de Baixo, which is the annual end of Harvest celebration. Traditionally held on the last Saturday of May it's a carnival mix of local food, dance, drums and live music. The evening was a magical mix

opposite:
Iberostar
Club Boa
Vista





and we easily embraced the spirit - dancing the Funana (the traditional salsa style dance) in the street with the rest. The Cape Verdeans are a naturally friendly population and guests are given a warm welcome in all the local towns.

The Cape Verde islands are such a melting pot of cultures and races due to its rich history of colonial influence of the French, Dutch and Portuguese. The international influence is clear in the beautiful architecture of the local towns and villages of Boa Vista. The colonial style buildings, though weathered, are painted in candy colours making for a beautiful backdrop against the arid landscapes. European styled cobbled squares are found in each village - these are the hub of the village and the main gathering place for local events and festivals or just a daily spot for retired locals to gather and play card games and socialise. On our cross-island tour we were able to buy local arts and crafts in the square and enjoy the atmosphere.

Cape Verde is famed for its mouth-watering seafood cuisine. The locals are gifted in mixing spices with traditional cooking techniques, producing some amazing dishes. On our last night we enjoyed an enchanting lobster dinner with live music from the locals, arranged as another excursion booked through our tour

guide. The evening was filled with aromas from the food fused with the heady atmosphere of the music. We dined on the most succulent dishes and danced the night away.

The whole trip was a truly colourful carnival experience. The Cape Verde Experience really provides you with the true essence of Cape Verde, changing us from ordinary tourists into adventurous travellers. We were left satisfied but wanting more...

Extract of article by Salome Munuo, as featured in The Daily Express.

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Kathy Burrington, graphic designer for Serenity Holidays, enjoys a close encounter with African wildlife.

BANDIA NATURE RESERVE

BY Kathy Burrington

For as long as I can remember I have had a keen interest in animals, both wild and domestic, in fact, although I now work as a graphic designer, my main subject at University in Bristol was Zoology and one of the first jobs I ever had was in a zoo. I'm also an enthusiastic photographer so you can imagine my delight when, I was asked if I'd like to visit Senegal to photograph some new hotels. The visit would also include a mini-safari to Bandia Nature Reserve, near the coastal resort of Saly. Before you know it my bags are packed, I've got my malaria tablets and I'm on my way.

I was only in Senegal for three days but we did so much, visiting many hotels, the beautiful Sine Saloum Delta, Gorée Island, craft markets, a fishing village and, of course, Bandia. One of the highlights was the chance to see these wonderful creatures up close. "Could that rhino turn this truck over?" I thought, as he (or it could have been a she) stood just a few feet away serenely posing for my camera.

My favourite animals, however, were the giraffes. We were allowed to get out of the truck and move closer to the family of three - a little shy than the rhino but nevertheless a close encounter. A family of ostriches were also delightful - the father on constant guard of his mate, youngster and four little ones. I also photographed antelope, buffalo, monkeys, crocodiles and more – but will have to return to capture the elusive zebra.



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DISCOVER THE GAMBIA



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TV presenter Anna Williamson spent a few days in The Gambia earlier this year, filming for a TV programme. Here you can read her views of her first trip to Africa.

MY GAMBIA EXPERIENCE

BY Anna Williamson

opposite:
Makasutu
Cultural
Forest

below:
Coco
Ocean

I've never been to Africa. Always wanted to go, but never had the opportunity. That is until I received a frantic phone call from one of my producers....'

Can you go to The Gambia to film....tomorrow morning!!' Guaranteed sunshine, a luxury hotel, my favourite film crew... the answer was of course, most definitely, YES! I've been hosting holiday competitions for a few years now. I've been lucky to have visited some lovely places but none quite so unique as The Gambia.

After a last minute scramble to get my stuff together and an emergency trip to the doctor to get some malaria tablets... I found myself in the airline lounge at Gatwick Airport with my GMTV team and Jo Wedeman from The Gambia Experience. It is often a myth that TV is glamorous, believe me... behind the gloss of the finished product you (hopefully) enjoy, there is often a lot of stress, waiting, unforeseen problems, unhelpful people...you name it...

“

When the aeroplane doors open and you get that first waft of warm air on your face... nothing quite beats it!!

we encounter it. So it was a great start that upon arrival at Gatwick the lovely Jo got us checked in ahead of the queue and whisked us all to the special airline lounge assigned to The Gambia Experience.

After a quick complimentary breakfast and the obligatory mad magazine dash, we boarded our (on time) flight to Banjul, the capital of The Gambia. Six hours, and a most satisfactory aeroplane lunch of chicken curry later, we touched down in the small airport of Banjul. Don't you love that moment when you've left rainy England and arrived in a hot country, when the aeroplane doors open and you get that first waft of warm air on your face....nothing quite

beats it!! Well, The Gambia didn't disappoint and by the time we'd made it down the plane steps into the tiny terminal, my jeans were already most uncomfortably hot!

One tip for you – take your read magazines off the plane and give them to the airport workers...their wives love the pictures and fashion apparently!! As I soon realised with the people of The Gambia, it's the simple things we take for granted,

”

bring the most joy to others....a theme that was recurrent throughout my week.

Upon arrival at our luxury hotel, The Coco Ocean, we were met by Mary who showed us the complex. WOW. This hotel really does have it all. From the moment we arrived it was champagne cocktail welcome drinks, wicker





hand fans to keep us cool, and the rooms and facilities are second to none.

My Beach House overlooked the ocean and shared a pool with only a few other rooms. The bed was a huge, comfortable four-poster, and there were all the mod cons and luxuries one would expect from a 5 star hotel. I had the best night's sleep in that bed, listening to waves crashing..... In addition to the top notch rooms, there was a small gym and a beautiful spa that really is the pièce de résistance for this resort. I experienced a herbal bath massage which was most relaxing and their signature 'hamman' is really worth a try.

A tired and hungry crew require feeding and the restaurants absolutely delivered in quality, choice and service. From fresh sushi, to Thai, to traditional African cuisine, our taste buds were spoilt for choice. A special mention to the wonderful staff who always greeted us with a smile and couldn't have been more helpful. It was quite humbling.

Out and about in The Gambia is a must. We went on a four-wheel drive excursion which took in all the local life, wildlife and gave a real insight into the poverty and culture of the country. The locals are so welcoming and thanks to our

guide, Mucki, we learnt the traditional greeting which is pronounced 'al –saam-a-day' which helped us feel like we were making some effort!


I also enjoyed a trip in a canoe meandering along the river listening to sounds of the native drums. Bliss. In a nutshell, The Gambia exceeded my expectations. A Gambia Experience is a great way to do just that, experience a country that has it all – culture, sunshine, beaches and fine cuisine. This time I was there for work, next time I'm going back for a holiday!!

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Have you watched the sun rise from your villa in Corsica, explored the Gambian markets in Banjul or dived the Tres Grote off the Cape Verde Island of Sal?

WHAT'S YOUR EXPERIENCE?

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We hope you have enjoyed sharing the experiences of members of our team and people that have travelled with us, if you would like to share yours we are looking to feature articles by our customers in future editions of *Serenity*.

If you fancy yourself as a bit of a travel writer and would like to share your experiences of any of the countries we feature, please send your articles of around 350 or 700 words to *Serenity* HOLIDAYS MAGAZINE, Serenity Holidays, Atlantic House, 3600 Parkway, Solent Business Park, Fareham, Hampshire PO15 7AN or email experience@serenityholidays.co.uk

Any article chosen to feature in our magazine will receive a **£100 holiday voucher** valid against any holiday with Serenity Holidays.

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