

travel

# Boasting beauty and charm, this picturesque island lives up to hype

Corsica may only be 160km off the Cote d'Azur, but it is thousands of miles from the hustle and bustle of the French Riviera. **Rob Perkins** found out more



This month sees the first flights from Bristol to the Corsican city of Bastia – the gateway to the La Balagne and Cap Corse and some of the most spectacular scenery you could wish for.

From pristine white sand beaches to dramatic cliffs plunging into azure blue seas, Corsica lives up to its name of Ile de Beaute – the beautiful island.

The first impression as you come into land is that you've been in a time warp and the flight which lasts less than two hours has transported you off to a Caribbean paradise.

The sea changes colour from a deep blue to aquamarine as the waves gently lap the white-sanded beaches.

This is a stunningly beautiful island with contoured coastline, pleated mountains and timeless hill-top villages. Corsica has something for everyone.

My journey began in Ile Rousse. Here you can sit on the white sandy beaches for the whole of your holiday, but if you want to see the real Corsica you have to head into the land behind the coastal area La Balagne. Here is where the real Corsicans live and have done for centuries. Fearful of raids from pirates of many descriptions over the years, the Corsicans took to hilltop villages for safety.

Inland from Ile Rousse is a whole trail of village communities that haven't changed for centuries – from Sant'Antonino, the oldest inhabited village on the island to Pigna where a music box shop will have you nodding your head along in time to the music emanating from everything from an owl to a frog. But be advised that many of the villages have car parks that charge 2 euro, so take plenty of change with you or face an embarrassing U-turn at the barrier.

For another unforgettable experience, you can take possibly one of the most picturesque train rides anywhere in the Mediterranean.

The trip from Ile Rousse to Calvi takes less than 40 minutes but make sure you get to the station early as this is one of the most popular tickets in town. Pay the 6 euro for the ride on u tringhelli (the trembler), and grab a sea-side seat for the journey, stopping along the way at some of Corsica's most picturesque beaches.

The end of the line is Calvi – the place where the young Horatio Nelson lost an eye after a wayward shot by French musketeer hit a rock and a splinter ricocheted into his eye during the siege of the town by the British navy in 1794. The citadel towers above the port of Calvi and is

well worth the climb for the magnificent views over the bay. And when you are done here the best way to finish off is a beer or wine alongside the water people watching.

And if people watching is your thing, there is no better place for it than Sainte Florent – the Corsicans like to think of it as their equivalent of St Tropez. The yachts in the harbour certainly rank alongside those seen on the Cote d'Azur.

The five-star La Dimora with its 17 rooms built around a former farmhouse is a real haven of tranquility – the pool, Jacuzzi and Turkish bath will soothe away any stress, while the gardens and dining areas are made for relaxing.

Further afield on the western coast, the roads become more tricky with hairpin bends the order of the day as you head towards the Golfe de Porto.

The D81 between Porto and Piana on Corsica's west coast is more suited to the age of the horse and cart than modern transport. Such is the popularity of this part of the island and the natural wonders found here that tourists are quite happy to put up with the odd delay to take in the wondrous sights on offer.

But be warned you will find yourself having to manoeuvre your way through cars, coaches, motorcyclists and pedestrians who have stopped to get photos of Les Calanches and the Scandola nature reserve as well as the Golfe de Porto.

It may be traffic chaos but there is no denying that as far as vistas go, it's very hard to beat.

The drive from Calvi to Piana is not one for the faint-hearted, but the reward in terms of views is nothing short of spectacular. From the Col de Croix you get your first breathtaking

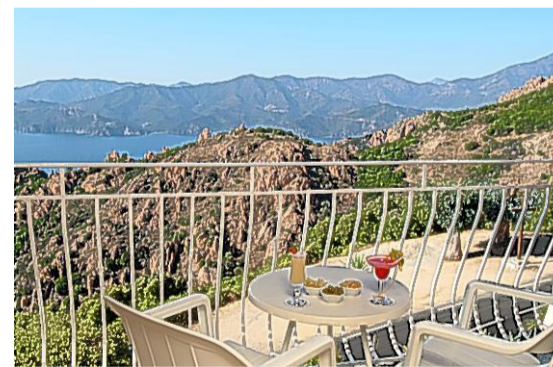
## factfile

Corsican Places begin a weekly direct flight from Bristol to Bastia with BMI Regional from June 23. Choose between self-catering villas or hotels on a bed and breakfast or half-board basis. Prices start from £399 based on seven nights self-catering at Villa Sirio, a three-bedroom, seaside villa (sleeps up to six), near St Florent with car hire and return flights from Bristol. Visit the website [www.corsica.co.uk](http://www.corsica.co.uk) for more information.



There is plenty to explore inland on Corsica, including the village of Sant'Antonino, perched on a densely forested hilltop, main picture; above left, Cap Corse in the north of Corsica and, right, the Calanches on the Golfe de Porto

**'From pristine white sand beaches to dramatic cliffs plunging into azure blue seas, Corsica lives up to its name of Ile de Beaute – the beautiful island'**



Taking in the views from the balcony at Capo Rosso Hotel in the Golfe de Porto, top; inside the tranquil five-star hotel La Dimora, built around a former farmhouse. PICTURES: CORSICAN PLACES

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## LAKE GARDA, VENICE & VERONA

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**Price includes:**

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- Tour of beautiful Lake Garda, Italy's largest lake
- Guided sightseeing tour of Verona, the city of Romeo and Juliet
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## RIO FERDINAND TESTIMONIAL MATCH MAN UTD V SAVILLA

Departing Friday 9 August 2013



2 days by Coach from **£140** per person

David Moyes' Manchester United will face Sevilla at Old Trafford on Friday, 9 August in Rio Ferdinand's testimonial match. The 34-year-old, will start his 12th season at the club with a showpiece match against the La Liga side ahead of the Reds' Community Shield clash with Wigan Athletic.

**The price includes:**

- Overnight stay at a 3 or 4 star North West area hotel with full English breakfast
- A match ticket with a face value of £25 (plus booking fee) for Rio Ferdinand's testimonial match against Sevilla at Old Trafford on Friday 9 August 2013
- Free time in Manchester
- Return coach travel from Bristol

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Calls cost 5p/min from a BT landline. You may also be charged a connection fee. Mobile and other providers' charges may vary. Prices are from, per person, based on two people sharing a standard room unless stated otherwise, and may have been rounded up or down to the nearest pound. Any applicable discounts have already been deducted. These holidays are subject to availability. Book by dates may apply. Single rooms are also subject to availability and a supplement may apply. Prices and holidays are subject to availability and change. Some holidays are subject to minimum passenger numbers. Terms and conditions apply. Rio Ferdinand's testimonial match is operated by Omega Events, ABTA 155/04. Match tickets are subject to general sale and will be booked with the home fans. Northern Lights is operated by Omega Holidays Plc, ABTA 147/82, ATOL protected (061). This supplier is independent of Local World. When you respond, the holiday supplier and Local World may contact you with offers/services that may be of interest. Please give your mobile or email details if you wish to receive such offers by SMS or email. We will not give your details to other companies without your permission.



## IN SEARCH OF THE NORTHERN LIGHTS

Evening excursion, Wednesday 27 November 2013 from Bristol airport



Evening Excursion from **£200** per person

Enjoy a wonderful journey through a star-studded sky in the company of our expert astronomer in a quest to see one of the most spectacular natural phenomena known to man. Our most popular charter flight is an ideal gift or simply a well deserved treat for yourself.

**The price includes:**

- Pre-flight illustrated presentation by our guest astronomers
- Flight in search of the Northern Lights of approximately three hours departing from Bristol airport
- Services of our astronomers on board
- Airport taxes

Important note: the Northern Lights are natural phenomena which cannot be guaranteed to occur during our flight, although they have been visible on many previous outings. Our guest astronomer advises at least an 80% chance of a sighting.