

A POSTCARD FROM... SARDINIA

Whether visiting its remote inland outposts or glam coastal resorts, Italy's golden-hued island is a melting pot of natural beauty, ancient traditions and time-honoured craftsmanship

FEATURE EMMA J PAGE



Le Dune Piscinas, a luxury hotel set on the beach on Sardinia's rugged Costa Verde

Though it's best known for its turquoise waters and sandy beaches, Sardinia – Italy's second largest island after Sicily – is a land that combines mountains, vast plains, plentiful streams and rocky coastlines. Fittingly for an island that's been occupied by countless civilisations, from the Nuragic to the Spanish, its dialect, food and passion for folkloric craft lend it a personality distinct from mainland Italy. Sardinians have a deep devotion to the land reflected in an alternative daily rhythm. Here, the passage of time is marked by handed-down crafts, slow food and wine, revered rituals and the steadfast presence of nature. Its beauty can be polished, as reflected in the glamorous resorts studding the Costa Smeralda, or rugged, epitomised by its unspoilt inland villages and mountainous regions accessed by infinite roads criss-crossing the landscape. Perhaps what makes this place so seductive is the unexpected combination of the two. To see this island at its best, make time for both its clear coastal waters and its mysterious inner landscape.

BY THE SEA

Perhaps the island's most famed stretch of coast is the glamorous Costa Smeralda, so called for its clear, emerald-hued waters. It's hard to believe that this 20km north-eastern region was, until only a few decades ago, both undeveloped and difficult to access. It was here, in 1961, in a spot that was then without electricity or water, that Prince Aga Khan IV conceived the first broadly sustainable high-end holiday resort. With the upscale village of Porto Cervo at its heart, a series of low-laying lime plaster buildings in white, sand and terracotta echo the sinuous shapes of the landscape. Despite its organic look and feel, this is one of the most expensive locations in Europe, known for its exclusive resorts and private beaches. But the area remains closely connected to nature thanks to a considered approach to architecture and a celebration of the island's farm to fork food culture.

At Sardinia's most northern point, the seaside resort of Santa Teresa Gallura offers a more



Boutique hotel Aethos
Sardinia in Cannigione
on the Costa Smeralda



A suite at Gallicantu
Stazzo Retreat in
Sardinia's Gallura region

PHOTOGRAPHS (LE DUNE PISCINAS AND GINEPRO BAR) MATTIA AQUILA; (AETHOS SARDINIA) BRIGITTE WEHNER; (GALLICANTU STAZZO RETREAT) TIZIANO CANU



Ginepro Bar at
Romazzino, A Belmond
Hotel near Porto Cervo

down-to-earth version of the good life, characterised by nature trails among the macchia (Mediterranean scrub), Roman quarries, vast granite rocks, hidden bays and small coves. And for those keen to fully escape the madding crowd, the island's lesser-explored south-western Costa Verde spans 47km, from Capo Frasca in the north, to Capo Pecora and Portixeddu in the south. Studded with gnarled juniper trees, coastal sand dunes, deer, abandoned coal mines and dramatic cliffs, this beautiful region is characterised by a sense of uncomplicated hospitality, from family-run farmhouses to low-slung villas. →



The pool at Casa Saltara near Santa Teresa Gallura



Stella Maris church in Porto Cervo

WHERE TO STAY

Close to Porto Cervo, **Romazzino, A Belmond Hotel** features terracotta-topped buildings that effortlessly frame a series of terraced gardens and the Tyrrhenian Sea beyond. With its own private beach, a spa, two pools (one seawater, one freshwater), and an array of elegant dining and bar choices, this a luxurious option, but one that celebrates Sardinian craftsmanship at every turn.

In the former fishing village of Cannigione, **Aethos Sardinia** offers a panorama of La Maddalena Archipelago from its covetable Costa Smeralda vantage point. Yacht trips and sunset cruises along the coastline, e-bike island explorations, horseback riding and kayaking offer connection to the local landscape.

Close to Santa Teresa Gallura and only four kilometres from Rena

Majore beach, **Casa Saltara**, run by husband and wife Natalia and Gian Mario, has a refined, natural, low-key aesthetic. Eight rooms and suites nestle among nature, while farm-to-table dining includes breakfasts featuring bread baked daily by Natalia. Each night, dinner showcases the family's Gallurian recipes.

A thirty-minute drive from the Costa Smeralda, **Gallicantu Stazzo Retreat** is a rural getaway with an elevated offering. Carved out of the sinuous rocky landscape, simple whitewashed rooms are characterised by soft arches and gentle shapes.

On the Costa Verde, **Le Dune Piscinas** is a former 19th-century mineral repository-turned-contemporary hideaway. Known for its untamed natural beauty, this spot, on the island's south-east coast, is a haven for nature lovers.

DON'T MISS

Porto Cervo has high-end boutiques for followers of fashion labels, but for a connection to the landscape, explore the architecture instead. Head to Stella Maris church, known for its undulating forms. Created by architect Michele Busiri Vici in the 1960s, it is both contemporary yet deeply embedded in the land.

On the Costa Smeralda, explore the nature trail between Pevero and Romazzino bays, winding around Monti Zoppu. Go early, before the heat of the day, when the scent of Mediterranean scrub lingers in the air and pine needles crunch underfoot.

The island is known for its Bronze Age beehive-shaped stone ruins called nuraghi – close to the town of Arzachena, a stone granite tower called Nuraghe Albucciu offers a window into lives that flourished here long before Roman times.



Hotel Su Gologone is set at the foot of the Supramonte mountains

PHOTOGRAPHS (CASA SALTARA) SARA MONTALBANO; (STELLA MARIS CHURCH) EMMA J PAGE; (HOTEL SU GOLOGONE) LINDA HERMANS

HEAD TO THE WILD

The island's inland regions offer a closer connection to Sardinian life. Unfairly christened 'land of the Barbarians' by the Romans because of its remoteness, Barbagia, known for its monolithic sculptural rocks, arid amber terrain and mountain ranges, is peppered with ancient villages like Orgosolo, Dorgali, Oliena and Nuoro. Here, the time-honoured traditions of weaving, sheep farming, gold production, pottery and wine-making still reign. Shop windows in villages display colourful costumes woven with gold thread, once a way to denote lineage, wealth, social and marital status within a community. This agricultural land, where shepherds are revered, has also spawned a culture of craftsmanship inspired by the natural world. Professions are handed down father to son, mother to daughter,

resulting in an abundance of cheeses, textiles and baskets made using a technique called *su iscrarionzu*. Look out too for street murals, initiated by artist Francesco del Casino in the early 1970s as a protest against land interventions. Now, hundreds of examples cover walls and doorways of Orgosolo and beyond.

WHERE TO STAY

In the foothills of the Supramonte mountains, **Su Gologone** comprises a series of rooms and suites that give the impression of having sprung from the hillside organically. Run by artist Giovanna Palimodde, it features collected pieces, from 18th-century vessels to Sardinian art, while rooms showcase textiles woven on site. The jewel in its crown is its nightly communal suppers in the gardens. Though the hotel's inland setting is

secluded, it's within easy reach of the eastern coast by car, plus the region's fascinating villages.

In Oliena, **Locanda Tipica Sa Corte** combines tradition and innovation, thanks to seven simple, affordable rooms, dressed with ceramics, art and textiles, combined with some of the best of the area's cooking, courtesy of a Michelin Guide awarded restaurant run by chef-patron Salvatore Pisanu. From here, you can explore the pretty, bunting-strung town as well as the Gennargentu National Park.

On the outskirts of the region, between the rocks of Barbagia and the Gulf of Orosei, **L'Hotel La Favorita** looks out over the island's east coast. Blue and white rooms are simple, the restaurant heroes freshly caught seafood, and mountain trekking or boat excursions are happily facilitated by friendly staff. →



The mountainous landscape of Barbagia at Sardinia's centre



The former home of writer Grazia Deledda, now a museum in Nuoro

DON'T MISS

The Barbagia region is known for its leather production. In Oliena, shoemaker and leatherworker Franco Corrias produces sturdy shepherds' boots, elegant women's shoes, cowhide backpacks and exquisitely embroidered belts from his first-floor atelier, by appointment.

A few kilometres away, in Mamoiada, local restaurant Su Tapiu offers typical dishes such as lados (pasta discs) served with ragù and salty cheese, which pair perfectly with hyper-local wines produced by vintner Francesco Mulargiu.

Head to the town of Dorgali to find the region's famed filigree gold (a technique of interweaving fine threads to produce beautifully decorative jewellery). Explore a selection of antique and new pieces at family-run Guskini Gioielli, as well as fine linen stores on the main

street. Bear in mind that shops here, like in much of mainland Italy, close between 1pm–5pm.

The town of Nuoro is the birthplace of female Italian author and 1926 Nobel prize for literature recipient Grazia Deledda. The 18th-century house where she lived, full of manuscripts, photographs, documents and personal items, is a fascinating insight into both her life and the town itself.

Visitors and locals alike make a beeline for Nuoro's Il Rifugio, known for its daily changing menu of Sardinian classics, including Pane Frattau Nuorese con l'uovo, made with Sardinia's most famous bread

– wafer-thin crispy pane carasau – topped with a simple tomato salsa, a poached egg and grated pecorino.

A NOTE ON TRAVEL

- Covering 9,300 square miles, Sardinia is a large island, comprising several sparsely populated regions. If you're planning on exploring, car hire is essential.
- The island has three main airports: located in the south, Cagliari is the largest. In the north-east, Olbia serves the Costa Smeralda and provides easy access to Barbagia. Meanwhile, Alghero is ideal for exploring Sardinia's north-west. All of them offer car hire options. 🚗

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