



COMPELLING CORSICA

Sea Kayaking & Mountain Hiking in the Mediterranean

Corsica was recently voted by National Geographic as the 2015 Best New Trips! This adventure is an ideal combination of hiking the spectacular granite mountains of Corsica (including a bit of the legendary GR20) and paddling the azure waters of the UNESCO World Heritage Site of the Reserve Naturelle de Scandola. This active, hotel-based trip offers superb local cuisine for which the “Isle of Beauty” is famous. Talented bilingual guides help ease all guests into a deep appreciation of “corsitude” as we embrace the authentic McDonalds-free local culture!

With the highest rainfall of any island in the Mediterranean, Corsica is also the greenest. It rises dramatically from the sea to peaks over 8800’ (2700 meters) and within this rise are three climate zones. Over 2800 plant species live here and the island’s maquis (a thick and tangled forest of oak, juniper, heather and herb) became the name for the French WWII resistance movement, due to this formidable landscape. Forests of endemic pines along with a host of wildlife call the island home.

Food is central to life in Corsica and flavors of the maquis are found in honey, cheeses and grilled meats. Chestnuts (planted by the Genoese several hundred years ago) are central to the flavors of Corsica. Delectable wines, cured meats, fresh seafood and savory cheeses round out the culinary scene.

Singing is another joy of Corsica, where ancient polyphony thrives and perhaps more than anywhere in Europe, Corsica has resisted modern pop music to nurture its own rich musical music. Sometimes referred to as “Corsican blues,” polyphony is performed by over 80 groups on the island. The haunting beauty of this music will likely send shivers down your spine.

Join us to explore this fascinating corner of Europe, where megalithic stones still stand, the ghost of Napoleon lives on (he was born in the city of Ajaccio in 1769), and traditional life, language, music and customs are alive and well.

As the British author Dorothy Carrington, who spent half her life on the island and wrote a number of books about Corsica noted, “One cannot know Corsican history without regretting that Shakespeare never heard of its tales.” This adventure is an ideal combination of hiking the spectacular granite mountains of Corsica (including a bit of the legendary GR20) and paddling the azure waters of the UNESCO World Heritage Site of the Reserve Naturelle de Scandola. This active, hotel-based trip offers superb local cuisine for which the “Isle of Beauty” is famous. Talented bilingual guides help ease all guests into a deep appreciation of “corsitude” as we embrace the authentic McDonalds-free local culture!



ITINERARY

Day 1 - Arrive in Ajaccio

Activities: Explore the town/ orientation meeting with the group/ dinner together

Arrive in the port town of Ajaccio, birthplace of Napoleon, set on a large crescent bay. Settle in to our centrally located hotel and meet with your ROW Adventures guide for an evening orientation meeting followed by dinner together.

[Hotel Fesch](#) or similar. D

Day 2- Sea Kayaking to the Isolella Peninsula

Activities: Sea Kayak or Hike around Ajaccio

Our plan today is to sea kayak to the Isolella Peninsula where the majestic rocks of Sette e Nave are perched dramatically by the sea. History and raw nature combine to create a mesmerizing beauty. The day starts when we arrive on a beach where our sea kayaks await. After a safety orientation we begin paddling. After a couple hours, we stop for a picnic lunch on a beach, and for those who wish, a swim in the warm Mediterranean. After lunch we continue our paddle, soaking in the Isle of Beauty. If the weather doesn't cooperate and the seas are too rough for kayaking, we have the choice of two excellent hikes set up as back up. At the end of the day, we return to our centrally located hotel and enjoy French cuisine, good wine and laughter.

Total Paddle Distance: 4-12 miles / 2-4 hours depending on weather and group ability

[Hotel Fesch](#) or similar. B,L,D.

Day 3 – Hiking the prehistoric site of Filitosa and Cucuruzzu

Activities: Visit the prehistoric sight of Filitosa in Mountains, Hike Cucuruzzu (<http://www.filitosa.fr/en/>)

After breakfast we drive into the dramatic mountains southeast of Ajaccio. Narrow, winding roads take us quickly higher into cooler climes. We stop for a historical visit of Corsica's impressive megalithic art. Filitosa is considered to be one of the most mysterious cultural sites in the Mediterranean, let alone one of the most beautiful Prehistoric art collections in Europe. We will explore this beautiful area that gives us an overview of 8,000 years of human history. After we are fully immersed in some Corse history we head out to lunch for some traditional Corsican fare – salamis, dry-cured ham, sheep and goat cheese, fresh bread, dark wine and more. After lunch, we continue our journey as we step back in time and take an afternoon walk through a magical forest of oak and beech at the prehistoric site of Cucuruzzu. Brought to light in 1959 by archaeologist Roger Grosjean, the site was hidden under dense vegetation. Among the 100 most important historical sites of communal value in the

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Mediterranean, today it is a Corsica Regional Nature Park. Some of the rock structures date to the 2nd century B.C. while others date to the Middle Ages. History buffs will be delighted and for those less intrigued, the setting and scenery provide plenty of stimulation. After our afternoon walk, we drive a short distance to our home for the night in the sweet town of Zonza. Here we relax, breathe in fresh mountain air and dine on food that is all local and lovingly prepared.

The Cucuruzzu park hike is about 3 miles / 2 hours with an elevation gain of 59 meters / 193ft

[Hotel du Tourisme](#) or similar. B,L,D.

Day 4 – Hiking in the Col de Bavella

Activities: Hiking in the Col de Bavella, Travel to Piana

After a nice breakfast in Zonza, we head back in to the Col de Bavella set in the Alta Rocca Mountains. The dramatic granite spires slice the cobalt sky to create a spectacular site. The first sight on our hike is the serene statue of Notre-Dames-des-Neiges (Lady of the Snow) which is set as a marker for Bavella Pass. She rises above a mound of granite stones and plaques, testament to the deep faith of many Corsicans. We set out on a two hour hike, with a 200 meter (600 ft) elevation gain, set beneath the high-rising pinnacles of the Col de Bavella. After our morning hike, we start our drive back to the coast, stopping for lunch along the way. We pass through Ajaccio and then continue north along the western side of Corsica. We arrive mid-afternoon at Cargese, perched on a steep hill above the sea. This small village of 1100 inhabitants was settled by a group of some 700 Greeks from the Peloponese who were fleeing the Ottoman Turks. We spend an hour or so exploring this charming seaside town along with two small churches from the 1800's – one built by Catholics and the other by descendants of the Greeks. We then continue on to the village of Piana, set high on a steep rising mountain above the sea. Piana is surrounded by colorful pink and rose porphyritic spires of rock that rise like sentinels above the turquoise Mediterranean. It is on the edge of the UNESCO World Heritage site of the Gulf of Porto that includes the Calanche of Piana, the Gulf of Girolata and the Scandola Reserve. *Learn more about this region at: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/258>.* At the end of our day we return to the comfort of our hotel and enjoy sunset views over the sea.

"Le Trou de la Bombe" Hiking Distance: 4-4.5 miles / 3 hours with an elevation gain of 200 meters / 600 ft

[Hotel Capo Rosso](#) B,L,D.

Day 5- Sea Kayaking in the Mediterranean

Activities: Kayaking around Piana, Cargese and Arone Beach

Our itinerary is designed to allow us maximum flexibility in choosing our kayak routes, or if weather conditions do not allow us to kayak. By basing in the village of Piana, if we can't kayak, we have miles of trail to explore in the stunning Calanche of Piana area. That said, our plan is to kayak the next two days. The first day we drive south to a lovely sand beach, climb into the kayaks and then paddle north around sheer- faced cliffs with sea caves and is a paddling dream if the seas are calm. This is our most challenging paddle, covering about 13 miles. If this is beyond the ability of the group, we have several other shorter routes available that are also beautiful! We enjoy drinks at the elegant Roches Rouges hotel, with romantic views and a feeling of stepping into days of old, then spend the night at the more comfortable Hotel Capo Rosso where we spend three nights in total.

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Total Paddling Distance: 13 miles (may be altered based on the group's ability)

[Hotel Capo Rosso](#) B,L,D.

Day 6- Sea Kayaking in the Mediterranean

Activities: Kayaking around Piana, Ficaghjola and the Gulf of Porto

Another day of kayaking is launched! Depending on where we kayaked yesterday, we pick up and continue. Today's paddle will be shorter, likely in the four to seven mile range. We stop on a picturesque beach for a picnic lunch, a swim in the sea or a nap on the sand. Our guides share the history and stories of much-fabled Corsica. We try and end our paddle by mid-afternoon allowing time for a drive and walk in the spectacular Calanche de Piana. Filled with wonder, we return once again to our hotel in Piana.

Total Paddling Distance: 4-7 miles (may be altered based on the group's ability)

[Hotel Capo Rosso](#) B,L,D.

Day 7- Hiking in the Gorge de Spelunca

Activities: Gorge de Spelunca Hiking/ transfer from Evisa to Vizzavona

Today is a hiking day. We rise early for our drive a short distance inland and then start a hike through the Gorge de Spelunca. Within this gorge the river is spanned by two beautiful 18th century stone bridges, both built with a single arch and protected as historic monuments. We take time to swim and enjoy the surrounding forest. By lunch time we arrive in the village of Evisa set amid a thick forest with views over the surrounding valleys. After lunch we drive south again, through the mountains and arrive at the train station in Ajaccio in time for the late afternoon train. For many this is a highlight as we climb aboard the Trinighellu scenic train, a narrow-gauge railroad that careens through twisted mountain gorges as we ride for about an hour to the summit at Vizzavona. Here the turn-of-the-century Hotel Monte D'Oro welcomes us. Built as an escape for the British aristocrats who were living in Ajaccio at the end of the 19th century and who sought relief from the heat of the summer that cloaks the coast in July and August, this hotel of yesteryear is full of charm. Enjoy a drink at the bar, then sit down to a bountiful feast!

Gorge of Spelunca Hike: 4 miles with an elevation gain 330 meters / 1080 ft

[Hotel Monte d'Oro](#) B,L,D.

Day 8 – Hiking the GR20

Activities: Hiking "Cascade des Anglais" near Vizzavona

Legendary in Europe, the most famous hiking trail in all of France, the GR20 weaves its way from the north to south of Corsica. We hike a small part of this trail this morning along a lovely stream beneath a forest of pines, oaks, beech and

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chestnuts. This is a leisurely hike and stop for a swim in the beautiful pools along the way. After our hike we head to a restaurant for another French reaps of local and fresh fare. After a bit of free time, we head to the train station for the late afternoon train North. We pass through the mountain town of Corte, the geographical center of Corsica. It was here that Pascal Paoli started an independence movement against the Genoese in 1755, only to be thwarted by the French conquest of Corsica in 1768 that shaped Napoleon's future anger towards the French. After about two hours on the train, over bridges and beneath the peaks of mountains, we arrive in Bastia. This lively town has a colorful old quarter with narrow passages, colorful but faded houses and an exotic flair. The small fishing port is chock full of boats and the restaurants feature the catch of the day. We enjoy a farewell dinner together and overnight at a local hotel.

The "Cascade des Anglais" hike is a 5 miles (3.5 hours loop) of hiking with an elevation gain of 270 meters / 885 ft

Note: There are several hiking route choices available / hike may be altered depending on group ability

[Hotel des Gouverneurs](#) B,L,D.

Day 9- City Tour of Bastia

Activities: Optional morning city tour of Bastia / departure

For those who are not rushing off, we explore Bastia in the morning on a guided walking tour of the town, childhood home of Victor Hugo, where new and old stand in stark contrast. Designated as a French "Town of Art & History" there are many stories to uncover under the ancient stones. Our trip ends about noon as the walking tour finishes. At this point you have many choices! You might want to spend another night in Bastia (recommended) before starting home. Or, you may wish to catch an afternoon flight and spend a day or two in Paris on the way home. Or, there are ferries that leave Bastia for Livorno, Italy, a four-hour crossing as well as ferries that go to Genoa and Nice. Schedules and information are at <http://www.mobylines.com/routes/ferry-corsica.html> or <https://www.corsica-ferries.co.uk/> Our office is happy to help with suggestions. To learn more about Corsican polyphony, you may enjoy: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FU4_MCEjUIM (it helps if you speak French) or simply look up "Coriscan polyphony" on youtube.com for a variety of videos of performances.

COMPELLING CORSICA TOUR QUICK FACTS

- **DURATION:** 9 days
- **INTENSITY:** Intermediate
- **SEASON:** May, June, September, & October
- **MINIMUM AGE:** 14
- **BEGINS IN:** Ajaccio (Corsica)
- **ENDS IN:** Bastia (Corsica)
- **AIRPORTS:** Ajaccio Napoleon Bonaparte Airport (AJA) & Bastia International Airport (BIA)
- **TRIP INCLUDES:** Services of our talented adventure consultants and professional guides, all meals & beverages (beer and wine provided at meals) as indicated in itinerary, hotel accommodations as indicated, transportation to and from meeting points while on tour
- **DOES NOT INCLUDE:** Airfare, transportation to and from the airport, guide gratuities, items of a personal nature
- Be sure to check out our [FAQ section on the Compelling Corsica Webpage](#) for more information about your trip!

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