

# CORSICA

## A wine lover's guide

Going off-peak offers the perfect opportunity to enjoy the captivating scenery and culture of this memorable island, almost as much Italian as it is French, and to seek out gastronomic delights you won't find in the summer months

STORY CAROLYNBOVD

**P**ick any vineyard in Corsica and there is a high chance you'll enjoy a spectacular view as well as excellent wines. You might gaze upon the sea from the vineyards in Cap Corse or admire the wave-shaped La Conca d'Oru mountain in the Patrimonio wine region. Wherever you are on the island, the breathtaking scenery varies, but so too does the soil, ranging from slate to clay-limestone to granite. It means Corsica delivers a huge variety of wine, even with the same grapes being used throughout.

Although the summer sees a huge influx of visitors, those in search of Corsica's vitous and gastronomic assets will find the cooler months bring fewer crowds, along with rewards such as vineyard walks and the chance to try its rustic, seasonal cuisine which isn't available in peak

summer – the island's much-loved brocciu cheese comes back into production in October, while the chestnut polenta (similar to polenta, but made with chestnut flour) and figarella sausage are eaten over the autumn and winter. A week allows for a whistle-stop tour of the 180km-long island, but a trip of 10 to 14 days allows for a more comfortable pace.

A good place to start is Domaine Devichi ([milledevichi.com](http://milledevichi.com)), which is now in the hands of Marie-Françoise Devichi, the sixth generation and the first woman in the family to run the estate. As well as developing her own modern 'Mille Devichi' branding for the wines and experimenting with biodynamics and ecological methods, she offers visitors the chance to take guided walks around the 42ha site to learn

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about the clay-limestone terroir and how the grapes – namely, Nielluccia for reds, Vermentinu for whites and Muscat à Petis Grains for dessert wine – grow in the company of broom flowers, wild asparagus and wild pear.

At the centre of the vines is her grandfather’s winery and house, shaded by mighty 200-year-old eucalyptus trees (*giacintu piu*). Devichi hopes to one day put it back into use, but for now tastings are offered at her family’s newer winery, set in the village of Barbagio. The Patrimonio appellation, to which Domaine Devichi belongs, was the first in Corsica to be awarded its AOP in 1968, and it has a winning combination of *terre et mer* in that it is close to the sea with a clay-limestone soil. It lies at the foot of Cap Corse, the mountainous peninsula that juts out to the north. The vines here gain minerality from the stacc soil and have a much stronger influence from the sea. This is also reflected in its social history: its inhabitants were sailors and explorers rather than farmers and shepherds as with the rest of the island.

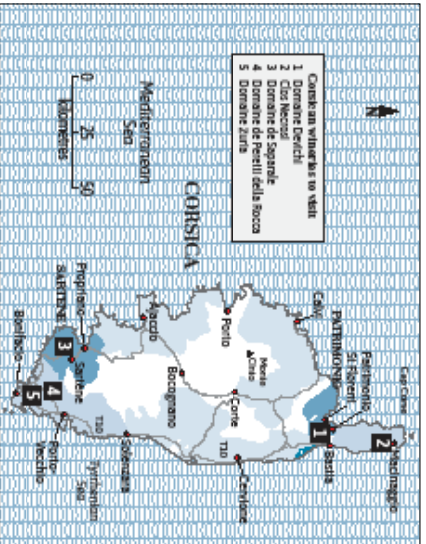
#### SEAFARING LEGACY

Tucked away in the village of Macinaggio, in the Cap’s northeast corner, Sebastian Luigi’s family winery Clos Nicrosi (+33 06 91 91 12 15) was established in the 1850s by Luigi’s four-times-great-grandfather who had – as many Cap Corsicans did – sailed to the Americas to make his fortune. To show how well he had done, he built their family home, a so-called *Maison Americain* – these elegant, Tuscan-style mansions can be seen throughout Cap Corse and are testimony to a history shared by many other local families. Though Luigi’s father and grandfather continued to look abroad to sell, Luigi has scaled back on the exports, preferring to keep the wines more exclusive and sell to the island’s best restaurants. One of these smaller-scale wineries is rappu, a sublimely moreish sweet red wine unique to Cap Corse made with the Aletico grape.

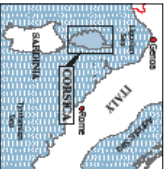
In northwest corner of the Cap, you will find Centuri, a fishing village where you can enjoy the local speciality of lobster and langoustine at one of the many quayside restaurants, such as U Cavallu Di Marc (+33 06 85 76 39) with a view of the harbour. Reclaiming south along the twisting roads of the jagged east coast, you come



Domaine Saprane, near Sartène village (see p106)

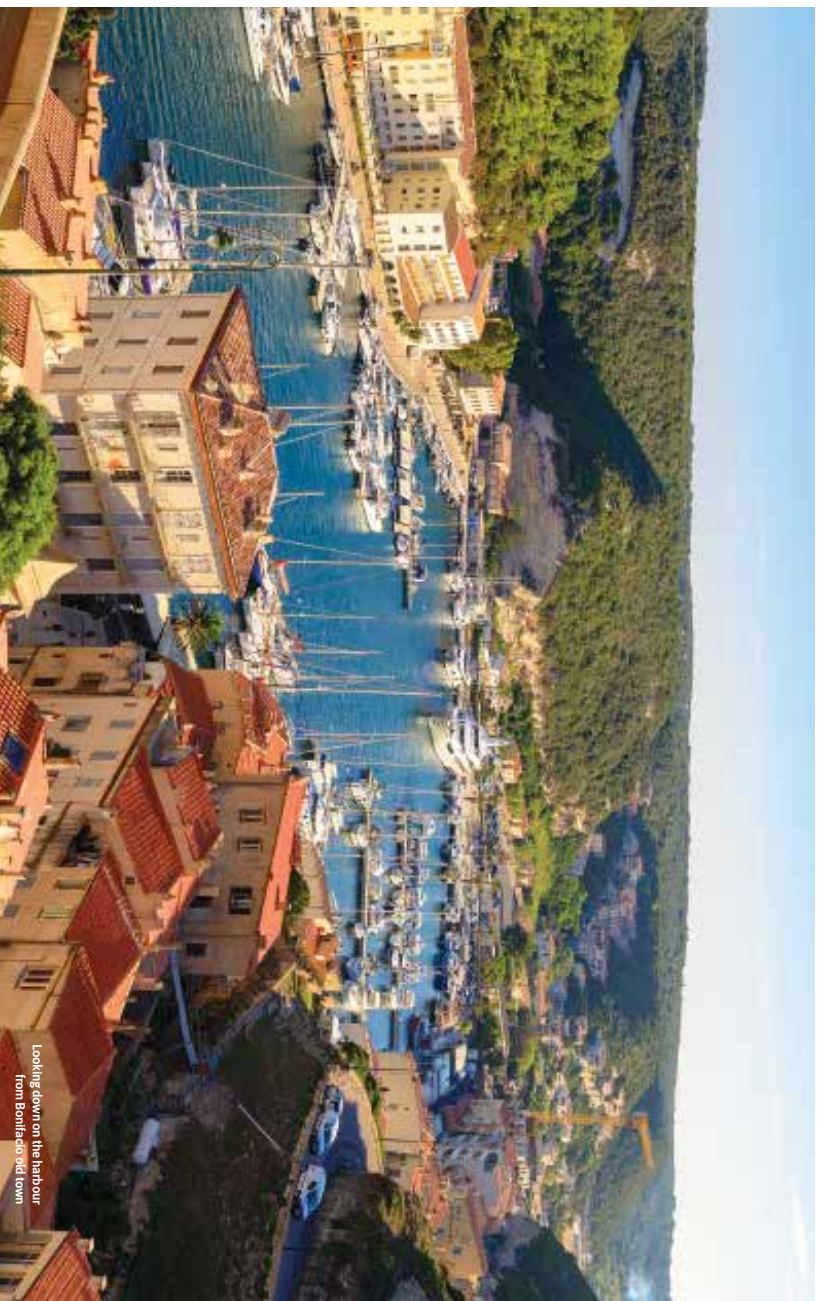


- Corsican wineries to visit
1. Clos Nicrosi
  2. Clos Nicrosi
  3. Domaine de Saprane
  4. Domaine de Perelli della Rocca
  5. Domaine Zaira



#### How to get there

Bastia airport, in the north of the island, is less than two hours’ drive from the tip of Cap Corse and 30 minutes from the Patrimonio vineyards. Figari airport, in the south, is 30-40 minutes from the vineyards of Sartène and Bonifacio.



Looking down on the harbour from Bonifacio old town

## MY PERFECT DAY IN SARTÈNE & BONIFACIO

### MORNING

Corsica’s villages are ideal for the *flâneur*, the village of Sartène offers the chance to stroll through narrow medieval streets, up steps and down alleys, before stopping for a café crème in Place Porta. From there it is a 25-minute drive to Domaine Saprane (see p106), a beautiful winery overlooking L’Onudu Cagna. It is set in the buildings of a former hamlet where you can see that the estate even had its own police station to protect it from 19th-century bandits. A tour of the winery followed by a tasting of their excellent wines is a joy, while it also gives the chance to discover their new range of natural wines.

### AFTERNOON

Just 15 minutes from the winery is La Bergerie d’Acciaia (see p106), a restaurant where the island’s characterful meat and cheese producers are celebrated. From there, it’s just a 14km detour to one of the island’s best beaches, Plage de Roccapina. a



La Bergerie d’Acciaia



Hôtel Le Royal

strip of fine blond sand lapped by tranquil azure waters. It’s a good place to pause before the hour’s drive to Domaine Zaira (see p106) to take a winery tour and a tasting before heading on to Bonifacio.

### EVENING

While Bonifacio is best viewed from the sea, you get an incredible view of the limestone coastline and the town’s cliff-top houses from the Campu Rumanulu viewpoint a few

minutes’ drive south. Once you get into the maze of narrow streets, there are galleries and boutiques to explore, while L’Assaggiu bar (21 rue du Padai) offers the owner’s homemade aperitif made with the island’s chestnuts. The restaurant L’Archivolto (2 rue Archivolto) is just around the corner serving vegetables within its cosy, character-filled interior. Stay at the Hotel Le Royal (hotel-leroyal.com), just a few steps away. ▶

to Bastia. This lively town, where ferries arrive from Italy and France, offers fine food and wine stores, such as **Mattet Concept Store** (see p107) and **U Pesca** (*upesea.corsica*), where the island's signature characteric hangs from the rafters. Take the newly installed lift from the **Quai Albert Gillio** up to the town's 14th-century citadel, where you can explore the network of narrow streets, browse its boutiques and pause for dinner overlooking the old harbour.

**THE BEAUTIFUL SOUTH**

The road from Bastia to the Sartène wine region, a 3.5-hour drive to the southwest, takes you right across the island and through the jaw-dropping scenery in its heart. In this region the terror is granitic and red wines come from the Sciacarellu grape, as well as Niellucciu and Grenache. A visit to **Domaine Sapanale** ( *pictured, p104; sapanale.com*) near the village of Sartène gives the chance to enjoy a tasting and hear about the domaine's storied past. Sapanale was established in 1850 by a lawyer who had explored Africa for years – inspiring the winery's elephant logo – returning home to pursue his dream of developing a self-contained village and vineyards. "People thought he was mad," says today's owner Julia Farinelli. "But he really had a vision to create great Corsican wines." Sadly, the success was short-lived due to phylloxera and the world wars, but Julie and husband Philippe have restored the

**'In Corsica's far south, the wine scene offers yet another experience'**

estate and now produce natural wines alongside its usual range. A hotel will open in 2024 to add to its luxurious self-catering accommodation, set in the estate's former shepherd's huts.

Indeed, this is how many other wineries in the area, such as **Domaine de Peretti della Rocca** (*depereitdellarocca.com*), are using their ancient buildings to welcome guests. As well as his four beverages, Jean-Baptiste de Peretti runs a chic restaurant overlooking the domaine's vines with a view of the dramatic mountain L'Omù di Cagna.

In the island's far south, the wine scene offers yet another experience. After visiting Bonifacio, a town perched on a high promontory where you can lose yourself in the narrow streets of the old town, visit **Domaine Zuria** (*domainezuria.com*).

This winery offers tours and tastings (Monday to Saturday 11am-3pm, €24 per person; book ahead) that reveal how the limestone soil in this southern tip offers yet another character for Corsica's wines. And while summer sees the winery host such events as music evenings and hog roasts, autumn is the time when they tend the vineyards with the help of their horse-drawn plough.



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**YOUR CORSICA ADDRESS BOOK**

**ACCOMMODATION**

**Domaine Sapanale, Sartène**  
This sophisticated winery in Corsica's southwest has converted three shepherds' huts into luxurious accommodation, each with a swimming pool. Homemade meals and local produce can be delivered. [lehamedeasapanale.com](http://lehamedeasapanale.com)

**Hotel Le Saint Jean, Ersa**  
Set high above the coast in the village of Ersa at the northern tip of the Cap Corse peninsula, this hotel offers breathtaking views of the coastline. The restaurant offers a good-quality menu and a small selection of local wines. [lesaintjean.net](http://lesaintjean.net)

**La Dimora, Oletta**  
This chic hotel is set in an 18th-century farmhouse 6km from the small waterfront town of St-Florent, and boasts a beautiful outdoor pool and an excellent restaurant. It is also within easy reach of the Patrimonio vineyards. [ladimora.fr](http://ladimora.fr)

**RESTAURANTS**

**A Nephtia, Ajaccio**  
British chef Simon Andrews arrived in Corsica 20 years ago and A Nephtia has become one of the most acclaimed restaurants on the island. He uses carefully chosen Corsican produce and his wine list showcases some excellent local vineyards. [anephtia.fr](http://anephtia.fr)

**La Bergerie d'Acciolu, Giuncheto**  
This relaxed yet sophisticated restaurant serves dishes cooked on its wood-fired grill, using top-quality produce. Its wine list gives a full explanation of how each of its chosen wines is made as well as tasting notes. +33 (0)4 95 77 14 00

**Le Petit Vincent, Bastia**  
Next to the citadel, this intimate restaurant serves a short but carefully created menu with locally caught fish. Its terrace offers an excellent view of the city's harbour, with blankets on hand for chillier nights. +33 (0)4 20 00 14 67



Simon Andrews, A Nephtia



Domaine Sapanale, Bonifacio (see p104)



Mattet Concept Store



Jardin des Abeilles

**THINGS TO DO**

**Jardin des Abeilles, Ocana**  
Honey is another of the island's specialities and its flavour varies depending on the season and location of the hives. Tour the bee garden to learn more and try the six different types, including chestnut honey. [lejardindesabeilles.com](http://lejardindesabeilles.com)

**Local producers**  
Visit some of the island's cheese, charcuterie or other food producers, who are signposted throughout the island as part of the Route des Sens Authentiques initiative. They will show you their workshops and you can buy direct. [guide.corsica.com](http://guide.corsica.com)

**Mattet Concept Store, Bastia**  
Next to Bastia's main square, Place St-Nicolas, this Art Deco-fronted boutique is owned by the Distillerie Mattet. Its classy, wood-pannelled interior has shelves filled with its range of aperitifs, liqueurs and beers, as well as other foods from the island. [distilleriemattet.com/concept-store](http://distilleriemattet.com/concept-store) **D**