

TRAVEL

DISCOVER THE DELIGHTS OF...

SARDINIA



Clear indigo waters make Sardinia a top favourite with the super-rich

With idyllic beaches, rugged scenery and delicious Italian cuisine, you should definitely consider Sardinia as a holiday destination for 2013.

Just 120 miles from Italy's mainland, the island of Sardinia gets around 300 days of sunshine a year and has a host of unspoilt towns and villages, as well as miles of glorious coastline to explore, making it quite simply: 'Bellissima!'

Although much of this Mediterranean jewel has a slower pace of life and more rustic feel than Italy itself, Sardinia has also garnered a reputation as a favourite mooring spot for the super-rich yachting set. So it's no surprise that when the likes of Heidi Klum, Gisele Bündchen, Gwyneth Paltrow and Rihanna want a break from the old routine, this is where they head.

SAMPLE THE ISLAND CULTURE

One of the loveliest towns is Alghero in the north-west. Once under Catalan rule, the old town and port have a distinctly Spanish flavour, and it is even affectionately known as 'Barceloneta' (Little Barcelona). Alghero's cobbled streets and courtyards are full of character, and the vast Santa Maria cathedral is well worth a visit, while a stroll around the old city walls is a must.

If the weather allows, take a short boat trip to Neptune's Grotto, an impressive series of caves where stunning limestone stalactites, bizarrely shaped like organ pipes, are dramatically reflected in the clear-water lake below.

If you want to stay in Alghero, make a beeline for the magnificent Villa Las Tronas, a 19th-century villa which was once a holiday home for Italian

royalty. The hotel is situated on a promontory overlooking the sea and has excellent facilities, including a lovely seafront pool, pretty gardens, a spa and gym. Many of the 24 rooms and suites have breathtaking views over the sea and the old town, while the restaurant is famed for its excellent seafood.

A ten-minute stroll from town is Alghero's first Michelin-starred eatery – the Andreini, set among the thick stone walls of an old olive oil warehouse. The skilled chefs specialise in seafood and fish dishes, as well as traditional Italian fare. *Star* can heartily recommend the tasting menu!

THE GLITZ FACTOR

The glamorous coast of northern Sardinia has become a Mecca for the super wealthy, and in particular, Porto Cervo is where you'll find the young party crowd, especially in the



Sardinia A-listers, Gisele Bündchen and Ri-Ri

summer months when its harbour is jam-packed with million-pound luxury yachts and the achingly fashion-conscious. A-listers who frequently drop anchor in this mini St Tropez include Gwyneth, Sofia Vergara, Bar Refaeli, Cindy Crawford and footballer Cristiano Ronaldo, while Ri-Ri's endless summer holiday last year saw her moor up with her champagne-guzzling entourage.

Nearby, on the famed Costa Smeralda, you'll find some of the island's best beaches – including Liscia Ruja on the gulf of Cala di Volpe. The sea is crystal clear and the crescent-shaped beach of fine sand is surrounded by verdant green hills. Nearby, the gorgeous azure-blue coves of Spiaggia del Principe are well known as snorkelling hot spots.



Stay in a 'treehouse' at the rural Li Pireddi



Alghero shows off its old town at dusk



Super-yachts moored in Porto Cervo



Villa Las Tronas was once a holiday home for Italian royalty

And if über-cool beach clubs are your thing, head to Phi Beach, where you can spend the day lounging by the sea, then party when the sun goes down.

HEAD INLAND

A couple of hours' drive south and a world away from the glamour of the Costa Smeralda is the hinterland of Sardinia. In the winter months you can ski at Monte Spada or Bruncu Spina, both close to Fonni, the highest town on the island and a winter-sports centre.

And if a rural escape is on your holiday agenda, head to the fabulous Su Gologone resort. This unpretentious, family-owned hotel has 68 delightful rooms, many of which have big jacuzzi baths and open fires. Outdoors, there's a huge, inviting spring-water pool, ideal for keeping cool in the summer months, and dotted around the grounds are several quiet terraces, gazebos and artistic works.

At the very least, drop in to Su Gologone for Sunday lunch, when dozens of convivial locals arrive en masse to sample the

speciality suckling pig, which is roasted over a roaring fire. The area is also perfect for outdoor-sports enthusiasts, with an abundance of spectacular walks and cycling routes, as well as off-road rides in 4x4 vehicles.

STAY WITH THE LOCALS

For a holiday with a difference, try one of Sardinia's 'agriturismos' – rustic, affordable farmhouse accommodation where you are encouraged to interact directly with the owners. One of the best is Li Pireddi, where there are a small number of tasteful rooms set in beautiful grounds. You can even stay in a specially converted 'treehouse' that's been expertly kitted out with mod-cons and even has a little terrace among the branches! The lovely owners and their children will make you feel right at home, hosting tasty communal evening meals for guests, and providing a taste of real Sardinian life. So, as the Italians say: 'Salute!' ■

Anna Pointer

BOOK IT!



GETTING THERE

■ Alitalia (www.alitalia.com) flies from London Heathrow to Cagliari in Sardinia from £135 return.

WHERE TO STAY

■ Villa Las Tronas (www.hotelvilla.lastronas.it). Doubles from £105 per night.
 ■ Su Gologone (www.sugologone.it). Doubles from £110 per night.
 ■ Li Pireddi (www.lipireddi.it). Rates from around £50 per person, per day.

EATING AND DRINKING

■ Ristorante Andreini (www.ristoranteandreini.it).

WHAT TO DO

■ Phi Beach (www.phibeach.com).
 ■ Neptune's Grotto (www.grottodinetuno.it).

For more information about Sardinia, visit www.sardegnaturismo.it/en