

TRAVEL

ESCAPE TO SARDINIA

Lynne Coates visits Su Gologone, an idyllic hideaway in the heart of the Sardinian countryside.



The deserted Mediterranean island in *Swept Away*, the Guy Ritchie film starring his then wife Madonna, was actually a stretch of the spectacular coast of Sardinia. During the month of filming the couple stayed at a magical hideaway in the Supramonte Mountains. Chosen for the natural beauty of its secluded location, Su Gologone provided them with the privacy and tranquillity they required.

Originally a family owned restaurant, Su Gologone was imaginatively extended by the owner's daughter, Giovanna, to create a hotel. A talented artist, her collaboration with renowned Sardinian architect, G A Sulas, resulted in a unique collection of distinctive rooms, reflecting the magnificent surroundings and seamlessly enveloping nature into its design, ethos and character. Art is the predominant theme throughout the hotel, housing an eclectic collection of new and old works by the islands artists, together with handcrafted furniture, sculptures and antiques. Locally produced fabrics complement each room's unique design. Outside, terraces and courtyards abound, with bowls of vividly coloured flowers and secret, shady corners where guests can relax and enjoy the ambiance of this glorious property. Su Gologone is so much more than just a hotel.

It takes a while to acquaint yourself with all the little paths leading to the different areas. If you follow a trail of brightly-painted stones you arrive at the White Tablao terrace lounge. This bar is beyond cool – a vision of white-tented seating with splashes of Mediterranean colours, surrounded by untamed nature. The white limestone Monte Corraisi Mountain, provides a spectacular backdrop to this truly enchanting place. By night an array of flickering candle lit lanterns turn the terrace into a dreamy haven. Add chill-out music, pre-dinner cocktails and live 'la dolce vita'.

There are further terraces and gardens to enjoy as well as a generously-sized outdoor pool, a library, art gallery and the Botteghe d'Arte, where you can find unique works by local artists and craftsmen. Undeniably



proud of its history there are some fascinating Sardinian artefacts on display throughout the hotel. The design of each of the rooms and suites is bespoke, some having outdoor baths to take full advantage of the staggering views while soaking in hot bubbles - fabulous! The latest addition to the hotels accommodation is 'The Wild Suite' - a fusion of contemporary design and traditional touches, inspired by the wild nature of the Barbagia region. This sensational two bedroom, two bathroom suite definitely has the 'wow' factor with a gorgeous secluded outdoor terrace, where you can enjoy an open-air Jacuzzi, wash at a bespoke sink installed between the branches of a fig tree, and sleep on a hammock beneath an endless starry sky. Not surprisingly it's already very popular, with advance bookings.

The restaurant has earned its excellent reputation, serving traditional recipes and delicious, creative dishes all made with local produce, much of which is grown in the hotel's own farm and vegetable gardens. There is an excellent choice of fresh pasta dishes and vegetarian options, though meat dishes are more typically served. Sheep and cattle are predominantly farmed on the island, fishing seems to be less common. There is a theory that Sardinians live long lives because they drink red wine made from the Cannonau grape (similar to the Grenache). The grape, originating on the island, is thought to have high levels of beneficial antioxidants. Of course, I had to sample quite a few for research purposes, and I can tell you it's a robust, full bodied red and very enjoyable! Whether it's an elixir to ward off old age is questionable - but the island does boast the highest proportion of centenarians among its population, in the world.

Sardinia is more commonly known for its beach resorts yet this is an island with an inner beauty that craves to be explored. Secluded



beachy coves, often only accessible on foot, wind their way along the east coast of the island, surrounded by high cliffs and twisty-mountain roads. We took a guided day tour of the areas around Su Gologone and there are plenty of attractions to enjoy. Trekking and canoeing are very popular and the best way to enjoy the diverse landscapes of the region. We passed by the breathtaking Cedrino Lake, on our route through the dramatic Oliena mountainous ranges. We stopped to picnic at Cala Luna beach where 'Swept Away' was filmed, a perfect location, as it is quite deserted most of the year. We ate a simple but delightful lunch of cold meats, local cheeses, luscious tomatoes, home-made breads accompanied, of course, by a bottle of Cannonau wine. After lunch we visited a network of caves that surrounds Su Gologone where natural springs occur, created by fractures in the underground rivers. Walking paths around the springs make it a popular tourist attraction. Sardinia is renowned for its many ancient archaeological sites. We stopped in the Valle Di Lanaito, to visit Villaggio Nuragico Carros, a unique site where a whole village has been excavated, revealing how ancient dwellers harnessed the power of water. Apart from an unexpected dunking, when our guide drove his Land Rover through a shallow river, causing much shrieking from us in the back. It was an excellent tour. A great way to see the rugged east coastline and experience the natural beauty of Sardinia.

For those who really want to get away from it all and immerse themselves in nature Su Gologone is the ideal luxury retreat. The hotel runs 'Experience' packages, such as 'Detox in the Wild' - which includes meditation training, massage, nutrition workshops, detox meals and a Shamanic ceremony. The surroundings are exquisite and the hotel is a heavenly oasis - I guarantee you will not want to leave!

Details:

Easy Jet operates flights from Manchester to Olbia three times a week www.easyjet.com Su Gologone is about an hour's drive from the airport.

Rates starting at Su Gologone from €198 per night for double occupancy, bed and breakfast accommodation in a Classic Room.

Rates for the Wild Suite per night, double occupancy, bed and breakfast accommodation starting at €1,480.00 per night.

Visit: www.sugologone.it/en.