

MALTA, SARDINIA & CORSICA

ISLANDS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

Bonifacio, Corsica

OVERVIEW

The Mediterranean's charm is based largely upon its complex history, diverse culture, and relaxed lifestyle, and nowhere are these better displayed than on the islands of Malta, Sardinia and Corsica – each with its own unique character, dramatic landscapes and extraordinary history dating back millennia.

Led by archaeologist Dr Estelle Lazer, our 19-day journey starts on the tiny island of Malta, home to an astonishing range of sites and monuments influenced by the invading Phoenicians, Romans, Knights of St John, Turks, French and British.

Travelling on to stunning Sardinia, we make our way to Cagliari to marvel at the Bronze Age conical towers of the Nuragic settlement at Su Nuraxi and explore the Phoenician and Roman remains at Nora and Tharros. We then visit the ancient necropolis at Anghelu Ruju and see the Spanish influence left on the city of Alghero by the 14th-century Catalan occupiers.

We end our journey on the 'Isle of Beauty', Corsica. Constantly invaded by the Carthaginians, Greeks, Etruscans, Vandals, Visigoths, Saracens and the Lombards, the granite backbone of the island reflects the strength of its independent inhabitants.



TOUR LEADER

Dr Estelle Lazer is an internationally renowned archaeologist and experienced tour leader. Her work on Pompeii has appeared in prestigious academic volumes and documentaries.

TOUR DATES

September 4-22, 2024

TOUR PRICE

\$14,220 per person, twin share
\$2,880 single supplement

TOUR DEPOSIT

A **\$1,000** non-refundable deposit is required per person to confirm your booking on tour.

GROUP SIZE

Maximum number of **16** in group

ITINERARY

Valletta (5 nights), Cagliari (3 nights), Santa Caterina (2 nights), Alghero (2 nights), Bonifacio (2 nights), Ajaccio (2 nights), Bastia (2 nights)

INCLUSIONS

18 nights' accommodation in centrally located 4 and 5-star hotels. All breakfasts, 6 lunches and 7 dinners. Services of an expert tour leader and an experienced tour manager throughout. All ground transport, entrance fees and tipping.



DETAILED ITINERARY

Start & Finish

The tour starts at 4.00pm on Wednesday 4 September, at the Grand Hotel Excelsior, Valletta.
The tour ends after breakfast on Sunday 22 September, at Hôtel Des Gouverneurs, Bastia.

Included meals are indicated with B, L, D.

Wednesday 4 September

Arrival

We meet tour leader Dr Estelle Lazer at 4.00pm in the hotel to embark on an orientation stroll of the local area, followed by an evening at leisure. Overnight Valletta

Thursday 5 September

Baroque Architecture, Gardens and Grand Monuments

Built by the Knights of the Order of Saint John after their victory over the Turks in 1565, the UNESCO listed city of Valletta features massive bastion walls, designed to discourage any further invasion. Our half-day guided walking tour will take you to the Upper Barracca Gardens and St John's Co-Cathedral, which holds, amongst its treasures, two paintings by Caravaggio – *St Jerome* and the vast *Beheading of St John*. Later, we visit the Neolithic temple complex at Tarxien, a site of extraordinary archaeological significance before journeying, in small groups, through an underground burial chamber at the Hypogeum of Hal Saflieni. This evening we enjoy a welcome dinner together in a local restaurant. Overnight Valletta (B, D)

Friday 6 September

Ancient Temples, Castles and Shrines

Today we travel to the small island of Gozo to marvel at the ancient and awe-inspiring Ggantija Temples. The UNESCO world heritage listed site is home to a complete megalithic temple complex, part of which predates Stonehenge and the Pyramids. We also visit the fortified Citadella at Victoria, the pilgrimage site of Ta' Pinu Sanctuary, and admire Gozo's natural beauty at Xlendi Bay and Dwejra. Returning to Valletta, the evening is at leisure. Overnight Valletta (B, L)

Saturday 7 September

Ice Age Malta and Inquisitors

This morning we head south to visit Malta's oldest prehistoric site, Ghar Dalam. The cave and museum contain the skeletal remains of animals that were stranded and subsequently became extinct in Malta at the end of the Last Glacial Maximum. After a light lunch in the traditional fishing village of

TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

Prehistoric & Baroque Malta

Experience Malta's enigmatic ancient sites, including the Neolithic temple complex at Tarxien and admire the baroque architecture and grand monuments to be found in the UNESCO-listed capital, Valletta.

Sardinia's Stone & Bronze Age Sites

Explore the island's prehistoric sites, ranging from 5,000-year-old necropoli to Bronze Age 'Nuraghe' dating from 2,000-1,200 BCE, and visit key museums to gain an understanding of Sardinia's ancient peoples.

Charming Cagliari

Enjoy the romantic beauty of the Castello district, the inner sanctum of Sardinia's charming capital, Cagliari, where 14th-century towers still stand guard over the medieval city walls now harbouring boutiques, bars and cafes.

Beautiful Bonifacio

Explore Corsica's southernmost town, dramatically situated high on the limestone cliffs of the straits that separate Sardinia and Corsica, and discover the magnificent fortress built by the Genoese in the middle ages.

Stone warriors of Corsica

Marvel at the extraordinary 3,500-year-old anthropomorphic menhirs which stand sentinel around the site of Filitosa, carved into human representations for reasons that are not entirely known.



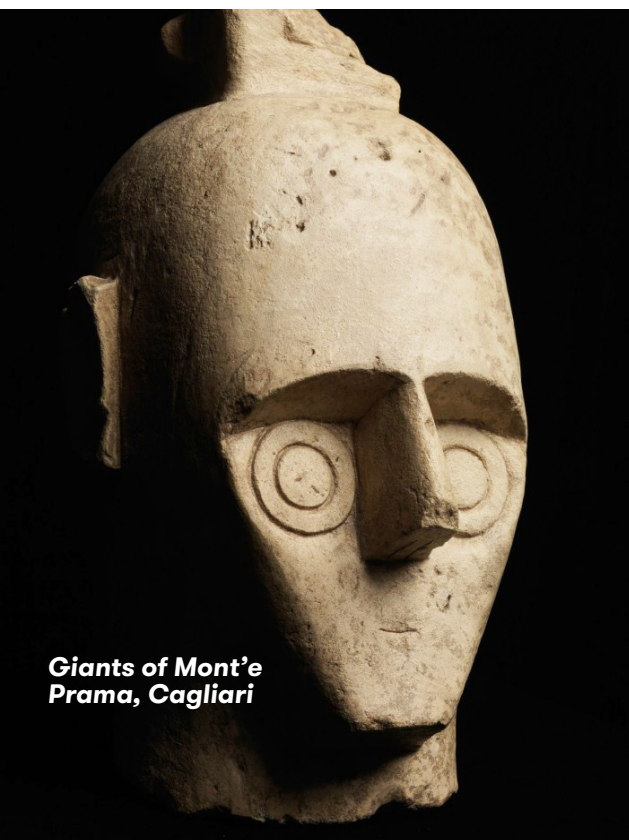
Valletta

Marsaxlokk, we make our way to the beautiful 'Three Cities' – Vittoriosa, Senglea and Cospicua. We will have time to explore the important historic sites, such as the Inquisitor's Palace and St Lawrence Church, before returning to our hotel. Overnight Valletta [B, L, D]

Sunday 8 September

Stunning and Unique Architectural Treasures

Our full day tour begins with a visit to the impressive Mosta Dome, featuring a spectacular unsupported dome which dominates the skyline of Malta. Our next stop is the medieval walled town of Mdina, centre of the Maltese nobility, whose unique architecture was featured in Game of Thrones. We make our way around the narrow, labyrinthine streets of the city before stopping for lunch in a local trattoria. Heading back to Valletta we will stop at the picturesque Dingli cliffs before having an evening at leisure. Overnight Valletta [B, L]



Giants of Mont'e Prama, Cagliari

Monday 9 September

Journey to Sardinia

This morning we depart Malta and take a flight to Sardinia. Upon arrival in colourful Cagliari, we will enjoy an afternoon walk together before having a relaxed dinner in a local restaurant. Overnight Cagliari [B, D]

Tuesday 10 September

The Noble's Manor: Castello

Home to wealthy noble families, the Castello district is the oldest part of Cagliari, built by the Pisans in the early 13th century. After entering through its ancient doors, we make our way to the Bastione San Remy, which has spectacular views over the seafront, then wander past the art and antique shops of the Via Marmora to the cathedral. After a break for lunch, we spend the afternoon exploring the vast collection of artefacts housed in the National Archaeological Museum, such as the important Stele di Nora, the most ancient written document of western civilisation. The evening is at leisure. Overnight Cagliari [B]

Wednesday 11 September

Phoenicians, Romans and Pirates

Today we travel south to the ancient city of Nora, located in the Pula Archaeological Park. Founded by the Phoenicians in the 9th century BCE, the settlement was a crucial exchange point for merchants who wanted to sell their goods to Sardinia. After the Punic Wars, Romans colonised the Phoenician cities and Nora grew in prominence under their rule. Thanks to its strategic position and sheltered harbour, it grew to become the island's most important city before being abandoned due to frequent pirate invasions. After exploring Nora and lunch at a beachfront restaurant, we will visit the idyllic village of Pula before returning to Cagliari. The evening will be at leisure. Overnight Cagliari [B, L]



Nora



Su Nuraxi
di Barumini

Thursday 12 September **Hidden Gems of Sardinia**

This morning we join our coach and head north. Our first stop is the well-preserved Romanesque sanctuary church of Santa Maria. The church is built in the Pisan style and reflects the presence of the maritime empire of Pisa in Sardinia. Nearby is the unique town of San Sperate, which is attractively decorated with elaborate murals and sculptures. After a light lunch, we continue to the defensive towers of Su Nuraxi, Sardinia's largest Bronze Age fortified village and a UNESCO World-Heritage site. In the afternoon we will visit the small coastal town of Santa Caterina di Pittinuri, famous for its crystal-clear water, before checking into our hotel and enjoying a relaxed dinner together. Overnight Santa Caterina (B, L, D)



Tharros

Friday 13 September **Sardinia's Ancient Sites**

Tharros, Sardinia's most impressive Punic-Roman site, dating from the 8th century BCE, is dramatically located on a headland jutting into the sea. Amongst the Phoenician ruins are two necropolises and evidence of a mysterious Tophet – a sacred precinct in which over 5000 urns and 300 stone tablets have been found. After visiting Tharros we enjoy a lunch break at San Giovanni di Sinis before heading to the nearby town of Cabras. Here we visit the excellent archaeological museum before returning to Santa Caterina, with the evening at leisure. Overnight Santa Caterina (B, D)

Saturday 14 September **Sacred Waters**

On departure from Santa Caterina, we head to the superbly preserved sacred well at Santa Cristina. Dating to the Nuragic period, the impressive ritual site is evidence of the advanced nature of this prehistoric period. Afterwards we visit the Roman bath complex of Fordongianus, built around a hot spring in the first century CE, then drive along a charming country road to Bosa, perhaps Sardinia's prettiest riverside town, where we will have free time to wander the ancient streets and enjoy the colourful architecture. This afternoon there is a stunning drive up the isolated western coast to Alghero, with views rivalling Italy's famed Amalfi Coast. Tonight, we will have a relaxed dinner in a local restaurant. Overnight Alghero (B, D)



Alghero

Sunday 15 September **The Catalan Enclave of Alghero**

The historic city of Alghero displays a clear Spanish influence, and a form of Catalan dialect is still spoken. Our walking tour this morning takes us along the winding cobbled streets of the fortified old city, followed by a visit to the ancient burial chambers of Anghelu Rujù. There will be some free time this afternoon and depending on the weather, it may be possible to take an optional boat trip to the 'Grotte di Nettuno' – a fine network of limestone caves just to the north of Alghero (own expense). The evening is at leisure. Overnight Alghero (B)



Sartène



Filitosa



Palais Fesch, Ajaccio

Monday 16 September

The Giant's Tomb

This morning we depart Alghero and head north, passing by the emerald waters of Costa Smeralda, an exclusive holiday destination on Sardinia's east coast, developed by the Aga Khan and now home to some of Europe's most expensive residences. We then visit the ancient Nuragic sites near Arzachena, including the 'giant's tomb' of Coddu Veccju, a monumental grave with a circle of impressive monoliths. Upon arrival at Santa Teresa we will check in for our 5.00pm ferry to Bonifacio, Corsica. The approach to Bonifacio by water is spectacular and once settled, we will have a relaxed dinner in our hotel. Overnight Bonifacio (B, D)

Tuesday 17 September

The City of Cliffs

Following a lecture in our hotel, a local guide shows us the highlights of Corsica's picturesque capital, Bonifacio, named after Boniface II of Tuscany, who came here in 828 CE. Due to its strategic position, the settlement faced attack from Saracens, Pirates and fighting Pisan, Genoese and Spanish forces, all wanting to control the port and town perched atop the limestone cliffs. After our morning tour, the afternoon and evening are free. There are several walks near the town, or you might like to take a short cruise of the harbour and nearby islands (own expense). Overnight Bonifacio (B)

Wednesday 18 September

Secrets of the Wild South-West

Today is spent traversing the rugged south-west corner of Corsica. We travel by coach to the medieval stronghold of Sartène, famous for its turbulent past saturated with stories of bloody vendettas, fierce banditry and recurrent conflict. After lunch we visit the mysterious megalithic warriors of Filitosa, Corsica's most important prehistoric site. We arrive in Ajaccio in the late afternoon and will enjoy dinner in a local restaurant. Overnight Ajaccio (B, D)

Thursday 19 September

Bonaparte's Corsica

Napoleon Bonaparte is Ajaccio's most famous son, and the city makes the most of the connection. Following a lecture in our hotel, this morning's tour takes us to Maison Bonaparte, Napoleon's childhood home, now a museum dedicated to the Emperor and his family. We also visit the fine arts museum at nearby Palais Fesch, which was once home to Napoleon's uncle, Cardinal Joseph Fesch. The cardinal was a major art collector, and many of his paintings are now to be found in the National Gallery, London, and The Louvre. The remaining collection includes many Italian masterpieces, such as works by Titian and Botticelli, as well as lesser-known Italian artists. After viewing the artworks we will venture into the Palace's Chapelle Imperiale, containing the tombs of several members of the Bonaparte family. The evening is at leisure. Overnight Ajaccio (B)

HOTELS

Hotels have been selected principally for their central location. All hotels are a comfortable 4- and 5-star standard.

Please note, our hotel in Bonifacio does not have an elevator (three-story hotel), so while porters will be on hand to assist with luggage, guests need to be comfortable with using the stairs throughout their stay.

Valletta, Grand Hotel Excelsior

(5 nights)

www.excelsior.com

Cagliari, Hotel Regina Margherita

(3 nights)

www.hotelreginamargherita.com

Santa Caterina, Hotel La Baja

(2 nights)

www.felixhotels.it

Alghero, Smy Carlos V Alghero

(2 nights)

www.hotelcatalunya.it

Bonifacio, Hôtel Spa Le Genovese

(2 nights)

www.hotel-genovese.com

Ajaccio, Palazzu U Domu

(2 nights)

www.palazzu-domu.com

Bastia, Hotel Des Gouverneurs

(2 nights)

www.hoteldesgouverneurs.fr

FITNESS REQUIREMENTS

Grade Two

This tour is designed for people who lead active lives. You should be able to:

- comfortably participate in up to five hours of physical activity per day, including walking at an easy to regular pace with short breaks
- keep up with the group at all times
- negotiate challenging archaeological sites, which are often uneven and unstable
- climb stairs and bridges
- stand for one to two hours in galleries and museums at a time
- get on and off a coach, train, ferry or boat with steep stairs unassisted
- use the stairs in our Bonifacio hotel

Friday 20 September

The Mountainous Heart of Corsica

This morning we embark on a spectacular drive, past massive granite cliffs, oak forests, and river valleys to Corsica's central mountain range. Amidst the peaks perches the historic town of Corte, sitting at the geographic centre of Corsica. It is intimately connected to the island's struggle for independence in the 18th century and, more recently, with Corsica's cultural identity. Here we visit the Musée de la Corse which explores Corsica's complex history and colourful traditions. We then proceed to a lunch of traditional Corsican specialities before continuing to Bastia for an evening at leisure. Overnight Bastia (B, L)

Saturday 21 September

Town of Art and History

On our final morning we explore the faded charm of Bastia. Named after its Genoese bastion, the traditional town features a lovely old port and elegant city squares. This afternoon we visit the small Roman archaeological site and Pisan church at Mariana, named after its founder, the Roman consul Marius. We then head to the hills to visit the Pisan Romanesque church of San Michele de Murato. The two-toned layering of stones (in this case limestone and serpentine) create a striking checkered effect. The late afternoon is at leisure before we enjoy a farewell meal in a local restaurant. Overnight Bastia (B, D)

Sunday 22 September

Departure

Our tour concludes this morning after breakfast in our hotel. (B)

WEATHER

September is an excellent time to visit the islands of the Mediterranean. Autumn has just arrived and while the heat of summer may have moved on, the weather will still be warm. Expect average daytime highs of 26-28°C and average night-time lows of 17-20°C.



ENQUIRIES & BOOKINGS

For further information or to secure a place, please contact **Sharon Williams** on 9235 0023 (Sydney) or 1800 639 699 (outside Sydney) or email:

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