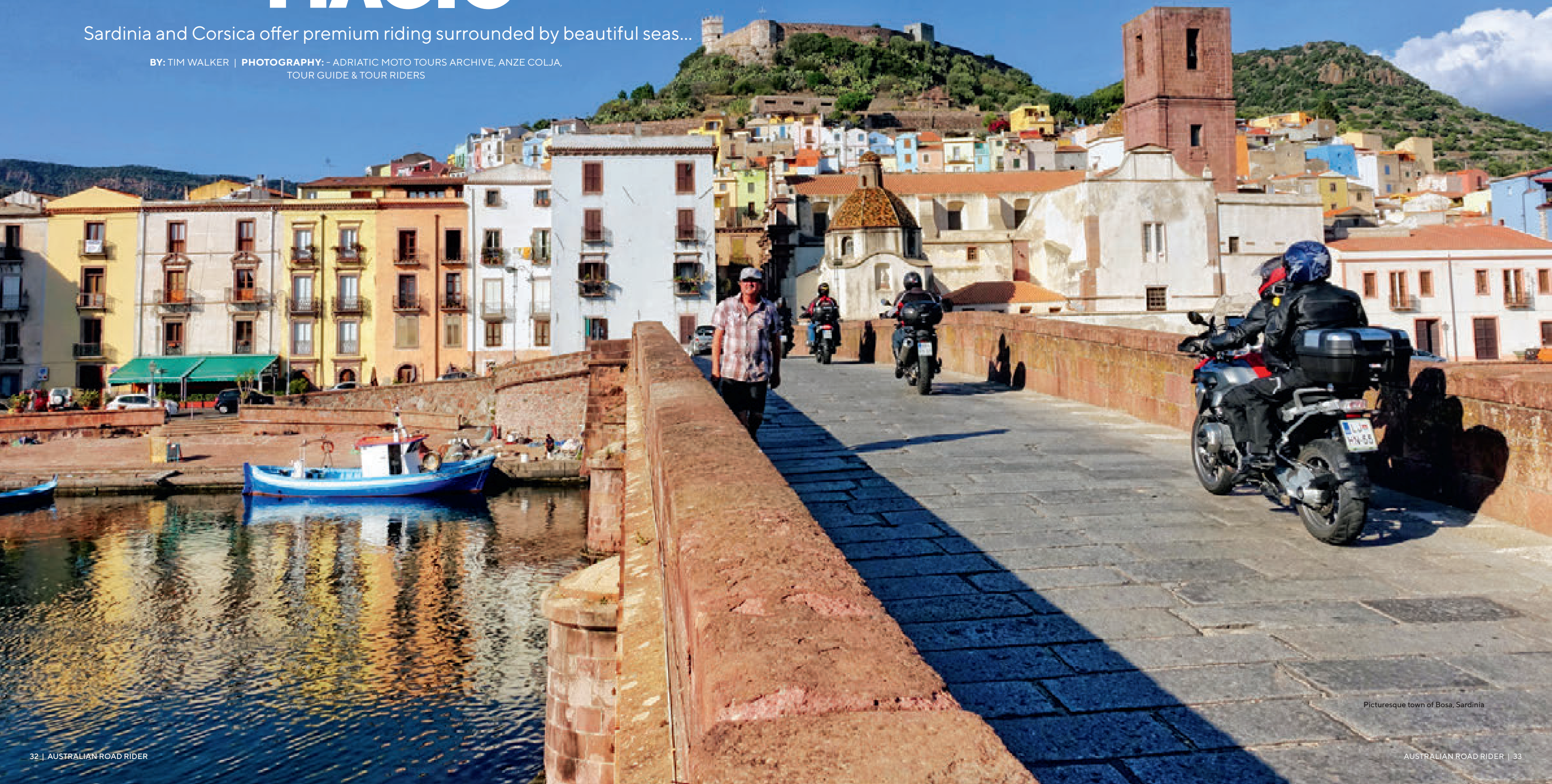


# MEDITERRANEAN MAGIC

Sardinia and Corsica offer premium riding surrounded by beautiful seas...

BY: TIM WALKER | PHOTOGRAPHY: - ADRIATIC MOTO TOURS ARCHIVE, ANZE COLJA, TOUR GUIDE & TOUR RIDERS



Picturesque town of Bosa, Sardinia



Old port Bastia, Corsica



Left: tour riders posing at Calanques de Piana, Corsica  
Right - View of Bonifacio port from the fortress

Great roads are created by bitumen following the paths of rivers and winding their way up and down mountains, which makes Corsica — effectively the top of a mountain sticking out of the Mediterranean Sea — a rider's paradise.

Those great roads have led to international bike launches being held on the Island, at least in part so the bike journalists can get to experience a variety of fun roads in a short time... so doing a nine-day tour around Corsica and its neighbour Sardinia with Adriatic Moto Tours (AMT) was something I'd been looking forward to for a while.

Although parked seemingly off shore to Italy, Corsica is a French territory and Sardinia Italian. There have been plenty of fights over the islands over the

centuries, although these days the running of the territories is pretty smooth.

Rugged and sparsely populated, these two islands are surrounded by the temperate blue waters of the Mediterranean. Each island offers unique takes on its respective country's cuisine, plus rugged inland mountains crammed next to spectacular stretches of unspoiled coastlines — all intertwined with some of the best-maintained roads in Europe.

### RIDERS' HEAVEN

AMT's guided tour is a loop on each island (see map), starting and ending in Olbia, Sardinia. The loops ensure that on each island, riders explore both the

## "...A DEPENDABLY WARM AND SUNNY CLIMATE FOR MOST OF THE YEAR"

gentle sweepers along the coasts and the technically challenging hairpin turns in the interior mountains.

The company operates two of these nine-day tours, which run in the shoulder seasons — before and after the high season months of June, July and August — thus avoiding the crush of tourists who crowd both islands during those months. The May 2022 tour was full, so I opted for the October tour and to be honest, I was a little worried the weather might be wet and cold. My worries were unfounded; because they are surrounded by the temperate Mediterranean Sea, the islands have a dependably warm and sunny climate for most of the year. The sea is even warm enough in October to swim in, which I and some of the other riders did on the penultimate day of our tour.

### DAY 1: ONWARD TO CORSICA!

After the morning briefing in our Olbia hotel parking lot outlining this first riding day of the tour, we mounted up, eager to start our adventures. Myself and two other riders rode a Yamaha Tracer 7, a mid-size motorcycle with specs close to what I ride at home, a 600cc Honda Transalp. This gave me a relatively lightweight motorcycle that I could really throw around in the curves and be nimble enough to navigate in crowded city traffic.

The other eight people in our tour group had larger bikes, late-model BMWs that suited their riding styles. All were in immaculate condition, with great rubber (we all checked, of course). I learnt later from Peter, our van driver and guide, that AMT sell all their bikes at the end of their northern-hemisphere riding season, so all tours are outfitted with new or practically new machines.

And then we were off, saying *arrivederci* to Olbia and heading north along the well-paved roads of the Costa Smeralda or Emerald Coast, which is dotted with cosy white-sand beaches nestled in rugged coves.

After a scenic one-hour ferry ride under sunny skies, we arrived at the heavily fortified Corsican city of Bonifacio, the City of Cliffs, situated under the majestic Old Stone Citadel towering over the harbour. Most major Corsican towns are fortified, because Italy and France have fought for control of Corsica since medieval times. It has been part of France since 1769, but its Italian roots remain strong. The Corsican language, still spoken by many here, has an Italian flavour and many people and places have Italian names.

We didn't stop in Bonifacio, but rode north-west to Corsica's capital, Ajaccio, where we would spend the night. The afternoon's route mainly followed the coast, so we rode gentle sweepers with rocky reddish cliffs to our right and shimmering blue vistas on our left.



Above: Orgosolo with its famous colorful murals, Sardinia. Below: One of the best riding in Sardinia on the way to Cala Gonone SS125.



## "...WE RODE GENTLE SWEEPERS WITH ROCKY REDDISH CLIFFS TO OUR RIGHT AND SHIMMERING BLUE VISTAS ON OUR LEFT"

Corsica has more rivers and mountains than any Mediterranean island, and the interior mountains have such rugged terrain that they have deterred industry and large-scale agriculture. The island has an arid climate, so when our route moved away from the sea, our roadside companions were mostly scrubby pines, firs, olive trees, prickly pear cactuses and yuccas. This was also the group's first experience with some of the other companions we would intermittently share the road – or the side of the road – with: farm animals such as sheep, pigs and cows.

Corsica is also known as the birthplace of Napoleon Bonaparte, and one can still feel several lingering legacies of him here, more than 200 years after his reign ended. For example, the French emperor ordered the planting of chestnut trees to line the roads all over France, both to give his troops shade to march in and to provide food for French citizens. Napoleon's decree also resulted in two other things: messy chestnuts falling onto the roads (a slippery danger for motorcyclists), and castagnaccio, a Corsican chestnut and honey cake (dangerous for your waistline).

### FOOD, FRIENDS AND THE CORSICAN WAY

At our first dinner on the road, in Ajaccio, it was clear this group was going to have fun together. Fun from the ride, and fun from getting to know each other. When the phones came out, we were not isolating, but showing each other photos of our families and bragging about them.

The 11 people on the tour came from five countries (Australia, Brazil, Canada, Kuwait and the US) and we loved swapping stories about our homelands and what it's like to be a motorcyclist there. We quickly learnt that Habib, from Kuwait, was an incessant jokester who entertained us and kept us on our toes. And a Melbournian nicknamed "Hondo" (I never learnt his real name) had great stories to tell about his time blowing things up while being an ordinance disposal technician in the Australian army.

Corsican cuisine is a mixture of French and Italian influences, and the seafood lovers in our group got their fill of Italian pastas and French stews made with fresh catches of the day. Vegetarian dishes don't lack for flavour, and the grilled or batter-fried vegetable dishes on the menu are also sensationally spiced. Plus, the fresh Mediterranean-style salads often include pecorino, a seasoned sheep cheese that's a Sardinian specialty.



Red rock formations between Porto and Piana, the Calanche of Piana, Corsica.

Below: Nuraghe Losa, tall beehive-shaped stone towers from Bronze Age unique to Sardinia.



Below: Riding Heaven, Corsica. Above right: Fabulous food on on both islands.



Scenic coastal town of Castelsardo with the fortified city perched atop a tall stone outcropping extending into the sea, Sardinia.



Above: Orgósolo and one of its famous wall paintings. Below: Red Rock riding, Corsica.



The meat lovers enjoyed dishes created from the semi-wild boars that roam free in the interior mountains, foraging for food for much of the year. This leads to excellent flavour – the boars eat a lot of chestnuts! – but they can be a hazard for motorcyclists.

### CORSICA'S INLAND MOUNTAINS

Our second day of riding took us from Ajaccio to Corte, and this route gave us our first taste of the technically challenging mountain twists and hairpin turns. Our AMT riding guide, Anže, who teaches at a high-performance riding school in Slovenia, prepared us for the challenges ahead by giving us tips on mountain riding.

Two parts of this day's ride were especially thrilling. First, the twisty climb up into and through the red rock formations of Calanche of Piana ("Calanques de

## TOURS THAT WILL EXCEED YOUR EXPECTATIONS

Attention to detail is a strength of Adriatic Moto Tours. Our itinerary was meticulous, with every coffee, lunch and servo stop planned in advance (and programmed into everyone's handlebar-mounted GPS), leaving us free to focus on the roads and the sights, or to easily do our own thing and rejoin the group later.

Anže and Peter chose the best restaurants for dinners. We almost always dined alfresco in the heart of a town's charming old section, and we had full, unrestricted access to the menu. Overnights were mostly in small, family-run boutique hotels – either four- or five-star quality – which meant we had first-rate, personal attention, along with opportunities to experience local hospitality and culture.

And the icing on the cake? Peter delivering our luggage to our hotel rooms before we arrived each afternoon!

#### EACH TOUR INCLUDES:

- Late-model motorcycles
- Experienced guide on a motorcycle
- Support van for luggage, souvenirs, and one or two passengers
- Accommodations, with breakfasts, in quality, mostly four- and five-star hotels
- Dinner every evening, except on rest days
- Airport transfers on arrival and departure
- Maps with highlighted routes, and an extensive tour booklet
- GPS with all daily routes uploaded

For a full list of what's included on AMT tours, visit [adriaticmototours.com](http://adriaticmototours.com)



Bosa, one of the numerous colourful old towns in the interior of Sardinia.

Piana") between Piana and Porto. It was here we took our best group photo, in my opinion. The second bit of incredible riding was on the curvy ride going east from Porto to Corte. This was when we rode up and over the Col de Vergio mountain pass, then descended through the Canyon de La Ruda. This 16km stretch wound its way through reddish rock walls shaped and perforated by wind and rain.

We spent the night in Corte, Corsica's capital when it was briefly independent in the late 1700s. We stayed in a small family-run hotel with a Victorian interior design complete with flowery wallpaper, antique wooden wardrobes, dressers and vanities, and porcelain vases holding dried flowers. This awesome hotel is a prime example of ATM's extreme care and attention to detail when selecting hotels and all other elements of their tours.

The dinner at the family's nearby restaurant featured hearty Corsican farm-style dishes, including the roasted wild boar that I couldn't get enough of. No one, if I remember correctly, ordered the tripe!

On our third day of riding, we rode out of Corte heading south through dense pine forests to our day's end destination, Bonifacio. We rode the twisties through the relatively sparsely inhabited interior mountains, on narrow roads passing through very small, very French-style villages. The day's highlights were light traffic, serene pine forests, and crossing over three mountain passes.

Whereas our first experience of Bonifacio was just a quick pass through, our return visit included an overnight stay in this picturesque port city. We arrived early enough to explore the old High Town and peek over its fortified walls to take in the dramatic limestone cliffs extending from the city.

### RETURN TO SARDINIA

On our fourth riding day, we headed directly to Bonifacio's port for a morning ferry ride to Sardinia. The perfect weather made the trip a pleasure and the one-hour passage gave us another chance to swap stories of our journey so far and to get excited about the Sardinian roads ahead.

Several of us remarked that this was the fourth consecutive day of summer-like temperatures and sunny skies, and that the weather forecast for the duration of our tour was for that streak to continue – which was a great situation to be in! Making good time, we arrived mid-day at the scenic coastal town of Castelsardo with the afternoon to take in this fortified city perched atop a tall stone outcropping extending into the sea. We took the opportunity to take selfies and group photos with the prominent town as a dramatic backdrop.

Soon we were in Alghero, the day's final destination, and enjoying strolling along the sea wall promenade and the cobbled medieval streets of the uncrowded old town, where we'd have a group dinner. Sardinians often grill their fish whole, from head to tail, with simple spices such as mint, onions and leaves from the aromatic local shrub called mirto. Some riders were fond of ordering fish for two, which features the waiter skilfully filleting the cooked fish at the table side, partitioning it into two servings. The evening ended with a surprise from the restaurant owner, who generously gave us all shots of mirto, a dark-red aperitif made from the berries of the apparently very versatile mirto plant.

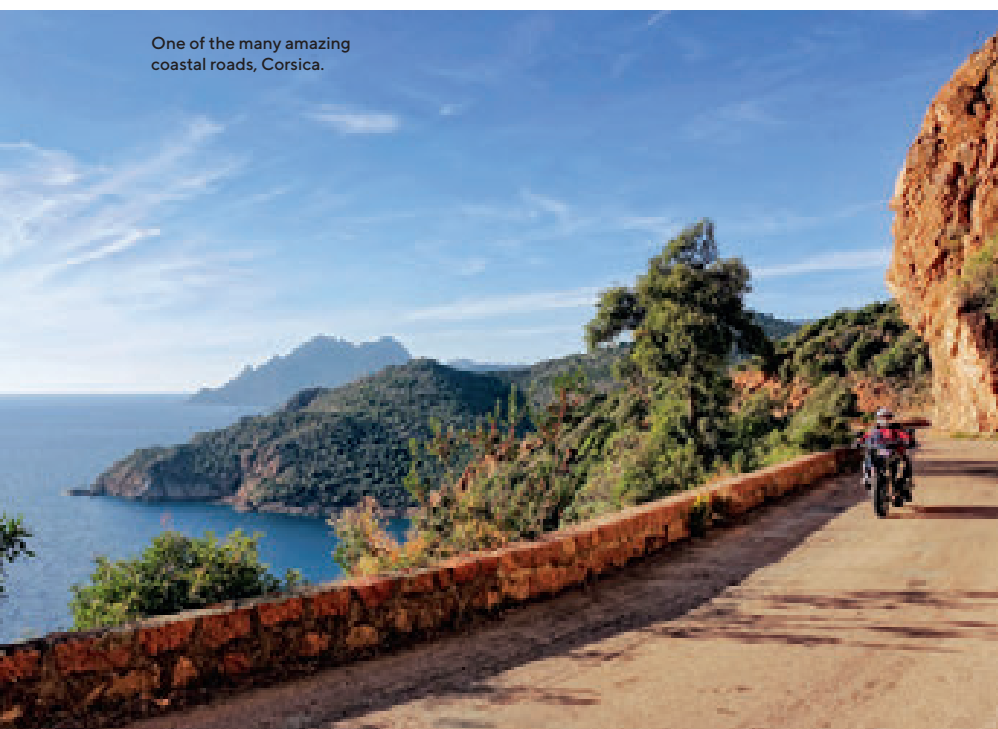
We had a planned rest day in Alghero, with several options. Rest, of course, is always an option, and a tempting one at our five-star hotel, which had a spa



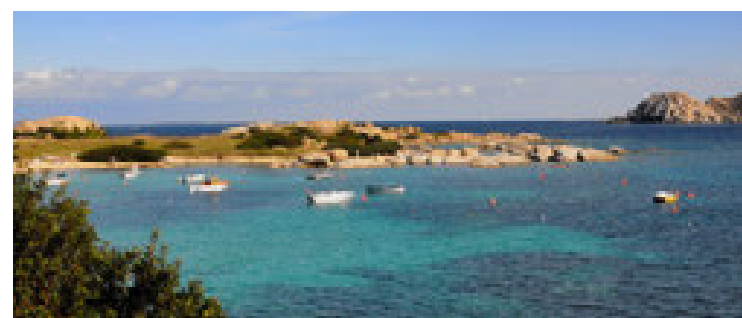
The rough Sardinia interior.



Above: Sardinia is full of nice beaches and perfect for swimming. Above right: Bosa view of the fortress, Sardinia



One of the many amazing coastal roads, Corsica.



and a large outdoor salt-water swimming pool. Some in our group opted for the half-day boat trip arranged by AMT that went to the Grotta di Nettuno (Neptune's Cave), which extends more than 2km into a cliff. Others went riding to visit nearby sights, either on their own or with AMT guide Peter.

**WINDING DOWN**

Refreshed and ready to ride, we started off going south along a scenic and sweeping coastal road for about 40km before turning east into the island's interior. Near Abbasanta, we took a break to visit the Nuraghe Losa, tall beehive-shaped stone towers that were the centrepieces of the Nuraghi, a Bronze Age people living in Sardinia between 1600 and 1200 BCE. The edifices are not found anywhere else in the world, so they have become symbols of Sardinia and its distinctive culture. The Nuraghi were a mysterious people and archaeologists have not determined the exact function of the towers they built, of which more than 7000 still pepper the Sardinian landscape.

A post-lunch rest stop in Orgòsolo allowed riders to refresh with coffee and other treats, plus a chance to wander the streets to view the more than 150 colourful murals the village is famous for. Beginning in 1975, artists began painting the walls of the buildings and

houses lining the streets, and most have political or revolutionary themes. Many have a style reminiscent of Pablo Picasso's cubist and surrealism periods.

Our route continued eastward toward the coast, and it was on this segment that I had my closest encounter yet with animals in the road. As I slowly crept through about two dozen head of cattle on a mountain road, some of the mommas – with horns, I must add – began to huff their displeasure with me for getting too close to their babies. Suddenly, one of them on my left lowered her head and lunged at me. Thank goodness I had by then cut through most of the herd and had a sufficiently clear path ahead of me. I twisted the throttle and blasted out of there. Phew!

After that close call, I was glad to end the day with an uneventful, curve-filled afternoon descending into Cala Gonone. This town on Sardinia's east coast is popular with tourists for its beaches, with magnificent views of the Golfo di Orosei and the sheer limestone cliffs surrounding it. We arrived at our beachside hotel in time for a swim in the still-warm waters of the gulf, and most of the group jumped in for a brief swim before dinner.

Conversations over breakfast the next morning included wishes that all of us have a great time on this last day of riding, and sad acknowledgements that soon we would be travelling our separate ways. This last day's ride was north to Olbia, and it climbed away from the east coast of the island and into the interior foothills. The climate here is perfect for growing cork oak and we rode through plantations of this ancient tree species, the bark of which is stripped away to make corks to plug bottles. It's a pretty evergreen tree, growing up to 25m high, so this part of our ride was often in the shade, making it very pleasant.

The day's ride ended with all of us safely returning to Olbia by mid-afternoon. There, Peter greeted us with sparkling white wine to celebrate this final day of a tour that has given us unforgettable memories – and perhaps life-long friends. We toasted Anze and Peter and thanked them for successfully keeping us safe, well fed, quartered each night in excellent hotels, and prepared for each day's ride – all with good spirits and great senses of humour that kept us smiling. Our goodbyes were bittersweet, of course, but tempered by the fact that we've all shared our contact information with one another.

So I will again say to the friends I met on these two wonderful islands that I hope we see each other somewhere down the road. Perhaps it will be on another AMT tour, for this group is already exchanging messages online proposing to take one of AMT's tours in the Alps in July! *ARR*

Article supplied by Adriatic Moto Tours

**AMT'S TUSCANY SARDINIA CORSICA TOUR**

AMT also offers a 16-day tour that expands the Sardinia and Corsica tour by adding seven days in the Tuscany region on the Italian mainland. The Tuscany Sardinia Corsica tour starts and ends in Venice, Italy, and the Tuscany portion includes the great cities of Florence, Siena and Pisa, among others, where you will take in stunning art and architecture, not to mention exquisite regional food and wine.

There are four rest days in Florence, Siena, Cala Gonone and Portovenere, giving riders time to experience these scenic locales.

Highlights include riding all of the great routes of the Sardinia and Corsica tour, plus traversing the curvy roads winding among Tuscany's medieval-era hilltop villages. There's even a stop in the town of Maranello, the home of the Ferrari factory and museum, which you can visit, and if you're inclined, rent a Ferrari and go for a spin around the town or into the mountains.

For more details on AMT's Tuscany Sardinia Corsica tour, visit [adriaticmototours.com](http://adriaticmototours.com)



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