

# ENDLESS CURVES

Sardinia & Corsica - Riders' Heaven Tour with Adriatic Moto Tours

Story and photos by SCOTT A. WILLIAMS

*This was my first guided motorcycle tour. It won't be my last. For nine days in mid-October, I rode with 10 experienced riders from six countries on intensely winding roads through spectacular scenery. We toured the Mediterranean islands of Sardinia (an autonomous region of Italy) and Corsica (an autonomous region of France). Adriatic Moto Tours made it easy: Just show up with your gear and ride.*

## DAY 1: OLBIA, SARDINIA

After exploring Olbia's old town on foot, I returned to the hotel to find 10 motorcycles lined up like soldiers awaiting inspection. I recognized a smiling face from the Adriatic Moto Tours website and said hello to Anže Colja, our guide for the Sardinia & Corsica - Riders' Heaven tour. Six riders in our group had taken an AMT tour before, and one was taking his fifth.

Later, at the introductory briefing, Anže offered insights about riding these Mediterranean islands. "The

roads are fantastic," he said, "the best in Europe. Every day we will ride narrow, twisty, technical roads, but you're not on a racetrack, you're on vacation. Can you see far enough to pass? Wait until it's safe, then commit and go! Take care of each other, and have fun."

Born and raised in Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia, Anže is an economist by training and an affable



Happy riders from six countries mug for the camera at Calanques de Piana, Corsica.



This winding road hugs the sides of colorful peaks rising from the sea at Calanques de Piana, Corsica.

soul by nature. He speaks Slovenian, English, German, and Croatian, plus enough Italian and French to help us order meals in restaurants that cater to locals rather than tourists. And, as we discovered, he's one talented rider.

Anže explained that our group would stay united, though not always together, using the system of Static Corner Marking. Anže would always lead, one rider would bring up the rear, and riders in between would alternate "marking" where the route turns by remaining at the junction until the next rider arrives. Each rider also had a GPS with daily routes pre-programmed, so it was hard to get lost. And if we wanted to go on our own, we simply let Anže know.

We also met Peter Cvelbar, who drove the support van and managed tour logistics. Peter is a staff sergeant in the Slovenian Army, and he used a portion of his leave to work this tour. Each morning, we found our bikes wiped down and positioned for a smooth departure, but he did much more. Our luggage was waiting for us in each new hotel room. Bike or equipment issues were quickly addressed. We were given information regarding travel, food, and culture. Both disciplined and easygoing, Peter worked his magic behind the scenes so all we needed to do was ride.

After being assigned bike keys, registration papers, and GPS units, we checked out our machines. I chose a BMW F 900 XR for its torquey twin-cylinder engine, flickable handling, and strong brakes. Its Galvanic Gold colorway certainly stood out too.

When we gathered for dinner, a guide's principal value – local knowledge – was revealed. In Olbia's old town, Anže led us off the main pe-

destrian way and along a succession of narrow cobblestone alleys, past a sign declaring "NO PIZZA," and downstairs to an intimate restaurant. Staff were expecting us, and our table was waiting. After dessert, we returned to the hotel and traded stories on the portico, eagerly anticipating the next day's ride. (Breakfast and dinner are included on this tour. Riders pay for their lunch, alcoholic drinks, and fuel.)



Stone peaks in shades of red, brown, and orange jut from the sea at Calanques de Piana, Corsica. The island is an autonomous region of France.

**DAY 2: OLBIA - AJACCIO**

Our first day riding took us north along the famous *Costa Smeralda* (Emerald Coast) and past the granite and basalt rock formations that form the view the roads. The route was scenic and curvy, but Anže said we hadn't seen anything yet.

In Santa Teresa, we caught a ferry to Bonifacio, Corsica, a historic city on a cliff, and then rode north toward Ajaccio, birthplace of Napoleon Bonaparte and the capital of Corsica. The roads to Ajaccio became tight and technical, with curves that just kept coming.

Along the coastal road in Coti-Chiavari, I spied an unpaved lay-by with a stellar view, so I pulled over. While shooting photos, I walked up to the highest rocky point. A man was sitting there, seemingly alone with his thoughts, but he gestured for me to join him. "Parlez-vous anglaise?" I asked, hoping he spoke English. He shook his head. "Non." So instead of talking, we shared the dramatic vista in silence. After a while I said, "Au revoir," and we shook hands genuinely, cementing a friendship of coincidence.

At dinner in Ajaccio, Anže asked the group which of the next day's two route options we preferred. I was leaning toward the longer option (more riding), but he suggested the shorter option through the sparsely populated interior. "Less traffic," Anže assured me. "And twistier." Local knowledge proved its worth once again.

**DAY 3: AJACCIO - CORTE**

Corsica has more mountains and rivers than any Mediterranean island, and the roads hug the constantly changing landscape. After a mid-morning break

for coffee, we rode to the Calanques de Piana, spiky granite formations that rise from the sea in shades of red, brown, and orange. The road is carved into their sides. Places to stop and safely enjoy the view are few, but Anže knew just the spot. I set up a group photo against a red rock backdrop; that one's going in a frame.

Next, we turned inland for the mountain route. Flat land is rare on Corsica, so it's common to see cows grazing along the road. They seemed accustomed to motorcycles passing by, but we slowed down and gave them space. I had to wait as two cows crossed a one-lane bridge at a leisurely cow pace. We also encountered large pigs foraging in the road on fallen chestnuts. Later, Anže explained that Napoleon had planted chestnut trees along roads in lands he controlled to provide his troops with shade and a source of food. The pigs appreciated that too.

We continued curving and gaining elevation. Our hotel in Corte overlooked the rugged landscape we rode through. The view from my room was stunning. For dinner, I chose local pork (chestnut fed?) roasted for six hours and served with cannellini beans. It was succulent – definitely not your mom's pork-and-beans.

**DAY 4: CORTE - BONIFACIO**

Anže mentioned at our first rider briefing that he's an instructor at a high performance riding school. I rode behind him as we ascended mountains through one hairpin turn after another. I noticed he was looking back at me in his mirrors – always the instructor.

We built a fair distance between us and the next rider, so Anže pulled into a lay-by to regroup. While we waited, I asked how I was doing through the hairpins and what I could do better. He suggested looking even deeper into corners and modulating speed in turns using the rear brake instead of rolling off. On these roads, I practiced this technique over and over. When our group stopped in Cozzano, Anže and I continued the lesson over coffee.

That evening, we caught a dazzling sunset from the limestone cliffs at Bouches de Bonifacio, a nature reserve. After some free time exploring the narrow, cobbled alleys of Bonifacio's old town, Anže led us to a small restaurant that caters to Corsicans.

**DAY 5: BONIFACIO - ALGERO**

As we boarded the ferry that brought us there three days ago, we left behind



The coasts of the Mediterranean islands of Sardinia and Corsica are dotted with small ports and harbors full of fishing boats, sailboats, and yachts.



In Coti-Chiavari, Corsica, I shared a spectacular view of the Mediterranean with this coincidental friend.



Sunrise in Corte, Corsica, foretells another beautiful day.

the most intense, continuous twisties I've ever ridden. Anže assured me there would be more in Sardinia. Along the route in Località Murteddu, we visited Elephant Rock, which lives up to its name. Farther on, we stopped at the coastal town of Castelsardo, known for colorful homes built into the mountainside above the sea.

We savored more twisties and sparse traffic until we approached our destination of Alghero. In this historic and congested city, Static Corner Marking kept the group united. We all arrived safely at our hotel as the sun was setting over Rada di Alghero.

The Carlo V Hotel and Spa is rated five stars. It's the fanciest hotel I've ever visited while riding a motorcycle. Throughout this tour, our accommodations exceeded my expectations. The dinners were impressive as well. Each evening, Anže ably selected starters for the table, then we all ordered a la carte from the menu.

### DAY 6: REST DAY IN ALGHERO

A day away from continuous, intense twisties afforded my mind and body a well-earned break. Fueled by a growing Italian vocabulary, a willingness to wander, and two scoops of mid-morning gelato, I explored the sprawling old town. After lunch, four of us enjoyed afternoon cocktails and a swim in the hotel pool, which wasn't heated – brrrr!

When my stomach signaled it was ready for dinner, I searched for *cucina tipica Sarda* (typical Sardinian cuisine) and chose *pescata de giorno* (catch of the day). The server took me to select the specific fish the chef would prepare

for me. "You like grilled with *patatas* and *pomodori*, *signore?*" *Si, grazie.* The chef served my dish tableside, and everything was delicious. A lemony concoction arrived for dessert, then I ordered a dram of 16-year-old scotch to complete the experience. Walking back to our hotel, I ran into tour members dining al fresco on the seaside promenade. We all had a good day off.



Rocky scenery surrounded us, such as here in Zérubia, Corsica.



Above left: Each morning, Anže briefed us on the day's ride. Above right: Everyone enjoyed riding at their own pace, and we'd regroup at stops.

### DAY 7: ALGHERO - CALA GONONE

Refreshed and ready, we followed Anže along the winding coastal road south to Bosa. As we rolled through town, a smiling old woman stood on her stoop and waved to us. I blew her a kiss in return, and by the look of her reaction, I suspected it made her day.

We kept twisting east on roads less traveled through Macomer and on to our first stop, the Nuraghe Losa of Abbasanta. It's one of thousands of cyclopean stone monuments unique to Sardinia and built by a Bronze Age people called the Nuraghi between 1,600 BCE and 1,200 BCE. Anže arranged a private tour, and a delightful woman named Pina helped us appreciate the monuments and the people who built them.

Over lunch, Anže reminded us to embrace Sardinia's offering to riders: roads with practically perfect grip and corners that seem to continue forever. AMT schedules the Riders' Heaven tour twice a year: in spring (before tourist season begins) and in fall (after it's over). That's why these roads were largely ours.

For afternoon coffee, we stopped in Orgosolo, which has murals painted on buildings throughout the town. Most feature themes of social resistance, and many seem informed by the style of Picasso's *Guernica*.

Next, we carved curves down the mountains to Cala Gonone. Our hotel was across the street from the Mediterranean Sea, and several of us enjoyed a swim before dinner. Thankfully, the water was warmer than the hotel pool in Alghero. After dinner and more conversation, I retired for the night to the sound of waves crashing ashore outside my window.



Views from the cliffs at Bonifacio, Corsica, did not disappoint.

**ENDLESS CURVES**



At Castelsardo, Sardinia, colorful homes are built into the rocky hillside.



We spent our rest day in Alghero on Sardinia's western coast.

**DAY 8: CALA GONONE – OLBIA**

After following closely behind Anže for several days, I volunteered to bring up the rear, which presented opportunities to enjoy scenery that wasn't whooshing past in a blur. Beyond Lula, we gained elevation along a meandering road chiseled into the mountainside. Up to the east were bald peaks reaching skyward. Off to the west was a rolling valley of green forest interrupted occasionally by terraced farmland. A road was carved into the next distant mountain too, leading to a village perched on a rocky hillside. Farther west were multiple rows of rock-topped mountains fading into the horizon.

At our final dinner, Anže told me that Sardinia and Corsica are his favorite places to ride, without question. "Not for the sights or food, which are still good, but for the roads, which are insanely good. The grip is great, the curves have positive camber, and you just keep twisting through mountains, forests, and coastlines. And off-season, when the crowds are gone, you can just go."

From Nuoro to Bitti, the roads zigged and zagged through cork plantations and over mountains. Eventually we reached Olbia and concluded this incredible journey at the same hotel where it started. Peter welcomed us with champagne, and we raised our glasses in celebration. What a trip it had been!



In Località Multeddu, Sardinia, Elephant Rock lives up to its name.

AMT's Riders' Heaven tour was a fantastic experience for me at every level: bike, roads, routes, scenery, sights, cities, towns, people, food, accommodations, leadership, logistics – the whole package. And leveraging a guide's local knowledge brings it all together.

In 2023, the Sardinia & Corsica - Riders' Heaven tour runs May 13-21 and Oct. 14-22. Visit [AdriaticMotoTours.com](http://AdriaticMotoTours.com) for more information.



Scott A. Williams tells stories that convey his love of speed and motion, preference for roads less traveled, and chosen role as an ambassador for the motorcycling community. A lifelong New Englander, Scott's writing reflects the insights of a regular guy with a keen sense of observation and a passion for exploring on two wheels. He's been a Rider contributor for 20 years.



Top: Near Siniscola, Sardinia, this road curves along below the ridgeline. Above: Bark has been harvested from this cork oak. The bark will grow back, making it a sustainable resource. Below: A champagne toast marks the end of the Riders' Heaven tour. *Salute!*

