

Sardinia



The Mediterranean's second-largest island, Sardinia is a strange and beautiful place. It's best known as a summer beach destination but venture inland and you'll discover an altogether different Sardinia, an island of untamed nature and proud tradition, of dark granite peaks, dizzying valleys and endless forests. Up to 7000 *nuraghi* (singular *nuraghe*; stone towers) litter this Celtic landscape, adding a sense of prehistoric mystery to the all-encompassing silence.

Tourist interest remains largely focused on the coast, which is one of Italy's most impressive. On the western coast, wild seas crash in on the untamed, unspoilt Costa Verde, while to the northeast, azure waters lap the Costa Smeralda's pristine bays. Further south, the Golfo di Orosei is ringed by a granite curtain of plunging cliffs and idyllic coves. Popular resorts get very busy in July and August, but with your own transport it's possible to escape the crowds even in peak months.

Until the advent of tourism in the 1960s, Sardinia was a poor and isolated outpost. Even on the island, communities were often cut off from their neighbours by inhospitable mountains and a lack of infrastructure. But with isolation came pride and a deep-rooted respect for local traditions. To get a feel for this aspect of island life, head to the area around Nuoro, where elderly women wear black and ancient festivals are celebrated with brooding passion. Encompassing much of the area, the Parco Nazionale del Golfo di Orosei e del Gennargentu offers superlative sport and innumerable photo opportunities.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Plunge into Europe's Grand Canyon, the **Gola Su Gorruppu** (p867), and trek to the *nuraghic* site of **Tiscali** (p868)
- Sail down the **Golfo di Orosei** (p868), stopping off at secluded beaches and magical coves
- Explore the medieval lanes of **Il Castello** (p838), Cagliari's rocky citadel, before an *aperitivo* on **Bastione San Remy** (p838)
- Leave civilisation behind and head to the wild, windswept beaches of the **Costa Verde** (p848)
- Drive the **Costa del Sud** (p845), a stunning stretch of southern coastline



■ POPULATION: 1.66 MILLION

■ AREA: 24,090 SQ KM

0 40 km
0 20 miles



History

Little is known about Sardinia's prehistoric history but the first islanders probably arrived from mainland Italy in about 350,000 BC. By the Neolithic period (8000 BC to 3000 BC) tribal communities were thriving in north central Sardinia. Their Bronze Age descendants, known as the *nuragic* people, dominated the island until the arrival of the Phoenicians in around 850 BC. The Carthaginians came next followed by the Romans, who took over in the 3rd century BC.

In the Middle Ages, the island was divided into four independent *giudicati* (kingdoms) but by the 13th century the Pisans and Genoese were battling for control. They were toppled by the Catalan-Aragonese from northern Spain, who also had to subdue bitter Sardinian resistance led by Eleonora d'Arborea (1340–1404), Sardinia's very own Joan of Arc.

Sardinia became Spanish territory after the unification of the Spanish kingdoms in 1479 and, still today, there is a tangible Hispanic feel to towns such as Alghero (p854) and Iglesias (p845). In the ensuing centuries, Sardinia suffered as Spain's power crumbled and, in 1720, the Italian Savoy took possession of the island. After Italian unity in 1861, Sardinia found itself under the disinterested boot of Rome.

In the aftermath of WWII, efforts were made to drag the island into the modern era. In 1946 a huge project was launched to rid the island of malaria and in 1948 Sardinia was granted its own autonomous regional parliament.

Coastal tourism arrived in the 1960s and has since become a mainstay of the Sardinian economy. And while most would argue that it has been beneficial, environmentalists worry about the impact it has had on the island's coastline.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Flights from Italian and European cities serve Sardinia's three main airports: **Elmas** (CAG; ☎ 070 211 211; www.sogaer.it) in Cagliari; Alghero's **Fertilia** (AHO; ☎ 079 93 52 82; www.aeroportodialghero.it); and the **Aeroporto Olbia Costa Smeralda** (OLB; ☎ 0789 56 34 00; www.geasar.it) in Olbia. As well as major international carriers, several no-frills airlines operate direct flights including **Ryanair** (www.ryanair.com), **easyJet** (www.easyjet.com)

and **Tuifly** (www.tuifly.com). Some routes are restricted to between April and October.

BOAT

Sardinia is accessible by ferry from Genoa, Savona, La Spezia, Livorno, Piombino, Civitavecchia and Naples, and from Palermo and Trapani in Sicily. Ferries also run from Bonifacio and Porto Vecchio in Corsica, and from Marseille and Toulon via the Corsican ports of Ajaccio and Propriano.

The arrival points in Sardinia are Olbia, Golfo Aranci, Palau, Santa Teresa di Gallura and Porto Torres in the north; Arbatax on the east coast; and Cagliari in the south.

The boxed text **Ferries to Sardinia** (p837) gives sample fares for the main routes and lists the main ferry operators.

Services are most frequent from mid-June to mid-September, when it is advisable to book well ahead. Useful online resources include www.traghettiweb.it and www.traghettionline.com (in Italian).

Getting Around

Getting round Sardinia on public transport is difficult and time-consuming, but not impossible. In most cases buses, which are generally cheap and efficient, are preferable to trains.

BUS

Sardinia's main bus company **ARST** (Azienda Regionale Sarda Trasporti; ☎ 800 865 042; www.arst.sardegna.it in Italian) runs most local and long-distance services.

FdS (Ferrovie della Sardegna; ☎ 800 460 220; www.ferroviesardegna.it in Italian) operates services between Cagliari and Nuoro, Oristano and Sassari.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Sardinia is best explored by road. For details about rental agencies in Cagliari, see p843. There are also rental agencies at airports and in major towns.

TRAIN

Trenitalia (☎ 89 20 21; www.trenitalia.com) services link Cagliari with Oristano, Sassari, Porto Torres, Olbia and Golfo Aranci. Services are slow but generally reliable. Slow **FdS** (Ferrovie della Sardegna; ☎ 070 34 31 12; www.ferroviesardegna.it, in Italian) trains serve Sassari, Alghero and Nuoro. Between mid-June and early September, FdS also operates a tourist train service known as the **Trenino Verde** – see p843.

REGIONAL ITINERARY

SAVOUR SARDINIA

One week / Cagliari / Cala Gonone

Kick off in **Cagliari** (opposite), Sardinia's down-to-earth capital. Explore the crowning citadel **Il Castello** (p838) and stroll the characteristic streets down by the seafront. Make sure to visit the **Museo Archeologico Nazionale** (p838), with its wonderful collection of *nuraghic bronzetti*, and the beach at **Poetto** (p839), a favourite with young Cagliariitani.

From Cagliari the road leads west to **Iglesias** (p845) in the heart of Sardinia's mining country. A night here is enough to lap up the vibrant Spanish atmosphere and investigate the pretty historic centre. To the northwest the **Costa Verde** (p848) is a magnificent, unspoiled stretch of hilly coastline. Book into an *agriturismo* and head down to **Spiaggia Piscinas** (p848), a broad swathe of virgin sand wedged between a desert of imposing dunes and a wild, untamed sea.

Continuing northwards brings you to **Oristano** (p848), a refined medieval town that was once the nerve centre of local resistance to Spanish colonialism. There are not many must-see sights but you'll enjoy the animated vibe and it makes a great base for visiting the ancient ruins at **Tharros** (p851), a short hop away on the Sinis Peninsula.

To get a feel for Sardinia's proud and ancient heart you need to visit the spectacular mountainous region around **Nuoro** (p864). Nuoro itself boasts a couple of worthwhile museums – the **Museo della Vita e delle Tradizioni Sarde** (p865), which documents Sardinian folklore and traditions, and the **Museo Deleddiano** (p865), dedicated to the life of Nobel Prize-winning author Grazia Deledda – but it's the exhilarating countryside that's the main draw here. Base yourself in **Cala Gonone** (p868) and take to the wild. Boats sail the imperious coastline of the **Golfo di Orosei** (p868) stopping off at the Grotta del Bue Marino (p868) and at dreamy beaches hidden in rocky coves. Inland, you won't want to miss the **Gola Su Gorruppu** (p867), dubbed Europe's Grand Canyon, and the *nuraghic* village of **Tiscali** (p868) after which former Sardinian president Renato Soru named his internet company.



FERRIES TO SARDINIA

Prices quoted here are adult high-season fares for a 2nd-class *poltrona* (reclinable seat) and small car. Children aged four to 12 generally pay around half-price; those under four go free. Most companies offer discounts for early booking and online deals – it's always worth checking.

From	To	Fare (€)	Car (€)	Duration (hr)
Bonifacio	Santa Teresa di Gallura	25	68	1
Civitavecchia	Arbatax	49	96	10½
Civitavecchia	Cagliari	58	104	14½
Civitavecchia	Olbia	43	102	4½-10
Civitavecchia	Golfo Aranci+	78	100	5½
Genoa	Olbia	59	108	13¼
Genoa	Porto Torres+	107	182	10
Livorno	G Aranci+	83-117	21-90	6
Livorno	Olbia	94	135	7-9
Marseille	Porto Torres	93	121	15-17
Naples	Cagliari	53	94	16¼
Palermo	Cagliari	52	92	14½
Piombino	Olbia	94	135	6½
Trapani	Cagliari	52	92	11

+ indicates a high-speed service

Ferry Operators

CMN La Meridionale (☎ France 0810 20 13 20; www.cmn.fr) To Porto Torres from Marseille via Corsica. In July and August some services depart from Toulon.

Grandi Navi Veloci (☎ 010 209 45 91; www.gnv.it) To Olbia and Porto Torres from Genoa.

Moby Lines (☎ 199 30 30 40; www.mobylines.it) To Olbia from Civitavecchia, Genoa, Livorno and Piombino; to Porto Torres from Genoa. Also has ferries between Sardinia and Corsica (April to September).

Sardinia Ferries (☎ 199 400 500; www.sardiniaferries.com) To Golfo Aranci from Civitavecchia and Livorno. Also Sardinia to Corsica (April to September).

Saremar (☎ 892 123; www.saremar.it) To Santa Teresa di Gallura from Bonifacio (Corsica).

SNCM (☎ France 08 91 70 18 01, Sardinia 079 51 44 77; www.sncm.fr) To Porto Torres from Marseille via Corsica. In July and August some services depart from Toulon.

Tirrenia (☎ 892 123; www.tirrenia.it) To Cagliari from Civitavecchia, Naples, Palermo and Trapani; to Olbia from Civitavecchia, Genoa; to Arbatax from Civitavecchia and Genoa; to Porto Torres from Genoa.

CAGLIARI

pop 158,040

Cagliari, Sardinia's capital and most cosmopolitan city, rises from the sea in a helter-skelter of golden-hued *palazzi*, domes and facades. Towering over everything, a rocky citadel provides an instantly recognisable landmark. Yet for all its splendour, Cagliari remains what it always has been – a busy working port with a gritty, down-to-earth atmosphere and a vibrant buzz.

The city was founded by the Phoenicians in the 8th century BC but came of age as a Roman port. Later, the Pisans arrived and treated it to a major medieval facelift, the results of which impress to this day.

Against this historical backdrop, the Cagliaritanis enjoy their city. Restaurants and bars cater to locals as much as tourists and a large student population ensures life in the piazzas.

ORIENTATION

The port is near Piazza Matteotti, where you'll find the main bus and train stations and the city tourist office. The busy seafront road Via Roma intersects with Largo Carlo Felice which heads up to Piazza Yenne, the centre's focal square. Rising above everything is the Castello (castle) district. Much of the budget accommodation and many good-value eateries are in the Marina neighbourhood down by the seafront.

INFORMATION

Emergency

Police station (Questura; ☎ 070 6 02 71; Via Amat Luigi 9)

Internet Access

Lamari (☎ 070 66 84 07; Via Napoli 43; per hr €3; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Sat)

Medical Services

Farmacia Dr Spano (☎ 070 65 56 83; Via Roma 99; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4.50-8.10pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat)

Guardia Medica (☎ 070 609 52 02; Via Talete) For an out-of-hours doctor.

Ospedale Brotzu (☎ 070 53 91; Via Peretti 21) Take bus No 1 from Via Roma.

Money

ATMs are available in the train station and along Largo Carlo Felice.

Mail Boxes Etc (☎ 070 67 37 04; Viale Trieste 65/b; ☎ 9am-1pm Mon-Sat & 4-7.30pm Mon-Fri) An agent for Western Union.

Post

Post office (Piazza del Carmine; ☎ 8am-6.50pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1.15pm)

Tourist Information

Main tourist office (☎ 800 20 35 41; www.cagliari.turismo.it; Piazza Matteotti; ☎ 8.30am-1.30pm & 2-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-8pm Sat & Sun)

Tourist Information Points (Piazza dell'Indipendenza (☎ 8am-8pm); Marina Piccola (☎ 8am-8pm))

SIGHTS

Il Castello & Around

Built by the Pisans and Aragonese, Cagliari's medieval citadel dominates the city skyline.

Precipitous stone walls enclose what was once the fortified home of the city's aristocracy and religious authorities, known to locals as Su Casteddu. Guarding its southern entrance, the **Torre dell'Elefante** (Via Università; adult/child €4/2.50; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3.30-7.30pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 9am-4.30pm Nov-Mar) is one of only two medieval towers still standing. It takes its name from the sculpted elephant by the vicious-looking portcullis. To the north, the 36m-high **Torre di San Pancrazio** (Piazza Indipendenza; adult/concession €4/2.50; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3.30-7.30pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 9am-4.30pm Nov-Mar) is built on the city's highest point.

At the heart of the district is Cagliari's striking cathedral, the **Cattedrale di Santa Maria** (☎ 070 66 38 37; www.duomodicagliari.it; Piazza Palazzo 4; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 4.30-8pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-1pm & 4-8pm Sat & Sun). Apart from the square-based bell tower, little remains of the original 13th-century Gothic structure – the interior is 17th-century baroque and the Pisan-Romanesque facade is a 20th-century imitation – but it's still an impressive sight. Inside are two intricate stone pulpits on either side of the central entrance, sculpted by Guglielmo da Pisa and donated to the city in 1312.

Cagliari's main museum complex, the **Citadella dei Musei**, houses four museums in what was once the city arsenal. Of these, the star is the **Museo Archeologico Nazionale** (☎ 070 68 40 00; Piazza dell'Arsenale; adult/concession €4/2, incl Pinacoteca Nazionale €5/2.50; ☎ 9am-8pm Tue-Sun), Sardinia's premier archaeological museum. Exhibits date from prehistoric to late Roman times, but the highlight is the superb collection of pint-sized *nuraghic bronzetti* (bronze figurines). In the absence of any written records, these are a vital source of information on Sardinia's mysterious *nuraghic* culture.

OUR TOP FIVE ACTIVITIES IN SARDINIA

- **Hiking** Head to the Parco Nazionale del Golfo di Orosei e del Gennargentu (p865) for stunning scenery and exhilarating trekking.
- **Cycling** It's tough going but cycling is a great way of experiencing Sardinia's countryside. Sardinia Hike & Bike (www.sardiniabikeandhike.com) is a great source of information.
- **Climbing** Rock climbers test their mettle on Cala Gonone's limestone peaks (p868) and around Domusnovas (p846).
- **Diving** Sardinia's fabulous waters are a divers' dream. Check out the Med's largest underwater cave near Alghero (p857), or the depths of the Parco Nazionale dell'Arcipelago di La Maddalena (p861).
- **Windsurfing** Winds course through the Bonifacio Straits between Sardinia and Corsica making Porto Pollo (p861) a top venue. Chia (p845) is another favourite spot.

The **Pinacoteca Nazionale** (☎ 070 68 40 00; Piazza dell'Arsenale; adult/concession €2/1, incl Museo Archeologico Nazionale €5/2.50; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4-8pm Tue-Sun) showcases a collection of 15th- to 17th-century art, including four outstanding works by Pietro Cavaro, father of the so-called Stampace school and arguably Sardinia's most important artist.

The other two museums are not quite what you'd expect. The **Raccolta di Cere Anatomiche** (Piazza dell'Arsenale; admission €1.55; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sun) is a kind of ghoulish Madame Tussaud's with 23 anatomical wax models, while the **Museo d'Arte Siamese** (☎ 070 65 18 88; Piazza dell'Arsenale, Citadella dei Musei; adult/concession €4/2; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4-8pm Tue-Sun) boasts an eclectic collection of Asian art, crafts and weaponry.

You can reach the citadel from various approaches. The most impressive is the monumental stairway that connects busy Piazza Costituzione with **Bastione San Remy**, formerly a strong point in the city walls and now a lively panoramic platform. Alternatively, you can climb the Scalette di Santa Chiara from behind Piazza Yenne, or, better still, take the elevator from the bottom of the Scalette.

To the north of Il Castello, the **Galleria Comunale d'Arte** (☎ 070 49 07 27; www.galleriacomunalecagliari.it; Viale San Vincenzo; adult/student/child €6/2.60/free; ☎ 9am-1pm & 5-8pm Wed-Mon Apr-Oct, 9am-1pm & 3.30-7.30pm Nov-Mar) displays a rich collection of modern Sardinian and Italian art.

Stampace & Marina

Stampace, the city's medieval working-class district, harbours several impressive churches including the 16th-century **Chiesa di San Michele** (☎ 070 65 86 26; Via Ospedale 2; ☎ 8am-11am & 6-9pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-noon & 7-9pm Sun), celebrated for its lavish 18th-century rococo decor. Outside in the atrium, note the four-columned pulpit from which the Spanish emperor Carlos V is said to have delivered a stirring speech before setting off on a fruitless campaign against Arab corsairs in Tunisia.

A steep uphill walk brings you to the **Orto Botanico** (Viale Sant' Ignazio; admission €2; ☎ 8.30am-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-1.30pm Sun Apr-Oct, 8.30am-1.30pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar), one of Italy's most famous botanical gardens. Just north of here is the **Anfiteatro Romano** (Roman amphitheatre; ☎ 070 65 29 56; www.anfiteatro romano.it; Viale Sant' Ignazio; adult/student/child €4.30/2.80/free; ☎ 9.30am-1.30pm Tue-Sat, 9.30am-1.30pm & 3.30-5.30pm Sun Apr-Oct, 9.30am-1.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun Nov-Mar), Cagliari's most im-

pressive Roman monument. Although much of the original 2nd-century theatre was cannibalised for building material, enough has survived to pique the imagination. In summer, the amphitheatre recovers something of its vocation by hosting summer concerts.

Back down by the seafont, the characterful Marina district is enjoyable to explore. Not so much for any specific sights, of which there are few, but for the authentic atmosphere of its dark, narrow streets filled with artisans' shops, cafes, and eateries of all description. In the centre of the district, the **Museo del Tesoro e Area Archeologica di Sant'Eulalia** (☎ 070 66 37 24; Vico del Collegio 2; adult/child €4; ☎ 10am-1pm & 5-8pm Tue-Sun) displays a rich collection of religious art, as well as an archaeological area which extends for up to 200 sq metres beneath the adjacent **Chiesa di Sant'Eulalia**.

East of the Centre

East of Via Regina Margherita, you'll find two of Cagliari's most important churches. The **Basilica di San Saturnino** (☎ 070 65 98 69; Piazza San Cosimo; ☎ closed for restoration) is an august example of Paleo-Christian architecture and one of the island's oldest churches. Dating from the 5th century, it stands over a Roman necropolis where Saturninus, a much revered local martyr, was buried in AD 304. Nearby, Cagliari's former abattoir houses **Exmà** (☎ 070 66 63 99; www.camuweb.it; Via San Lucifero 71; exhibitions €3-10; ☎ 5pm-midnight Tue-Sun Jun-Sep, 10am-1pm & 3-6pm Tue-Sun Oct-May), a cultural centre which stages contemporary art exhibitions and summer concerts.

Dominating the Bonaria hill, the **Santuario di Nostra Signora di Bonaria** (☎ 070 30 17 47; Piazza Bonaria 2; donations welcome; ☎ 6.30-11.30am & 5.30-7.30pm Apr-Oct, 6.30-11.30am & 4.30-6.30pm Nov-Mar) is a hugely popular pilgrim site. Devotees come from all over the world to pray to *Nostra Signora di Bonaria*, a statue of the Virgin Mary that is said to have saved a 14th-century Spanish ship during a storm. To the right of the sanctuary, the much larger **basilica** still acts as a landmark for returning sailors.

Poetto & the Sella del Diavola

An easy bus ride from the city centre, Cagliari's fabulous **Poetto** beach extends for about 6km beyond the green Promontorio di Sant'Elia, known locally as the **Sella del Diavola** (Devil's Saddle). In summer much of the city's youth decamps here to sunbathe by day and

INFORMATION			Orto Botanico.....17 B2	Mercato di San
Farmacia Dr Spano.....1 E3			Pinacoteca Nazionale.....(see 14)	Benedetto.....32 C2
Lamari.....2 E2			Raccolta di Cere	Monica e Ahmed.....33 E1
Mail Boxes Etc.....3 A2			Anatomiche.....(see 14)	Trattoria Gennargentu.....34 E3
Police Station.....4 D3			Santuario & Basilica di	
Post Office.....5 D2			Nostra Signora di	DRINKING ☞ ☞
Tourist Information Point.....6 C2			Bonaria.....18 D4	Antico Caffè.....35 F2
Tourist Office.....7 E2			Scalette di Santa	Caffè degli Spiriti.....36 F2
			Chiara.....19 F1	Caffè Librarium Nostrum.....37 F1
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Anfiteatro Romano.....8 B1			Torre di San Pancrazio.....21 C2	
Basilica di San Saturno.....9 C3				ENTERTAINMENT ☞
Bastione San Remy.....10 F2			SLEEPING ☞	Teatro Lirico.....39 C1
Cattedrale di Santa Maria.....11 F1			Albergo Aurora.....22 F1	
Chiesa di San Michele.....12 E1			B&B La Marina.....23 F3	SHOPPING ☞
Chiesa di Sant'Eulalia.....13 F3			Hotel A&R Bundes Jack.....24 E3	Durke.....40 E2
Citadella dei Musei.....14 B2			Hotel Miramare.....25 E3	Flea Market.....(see 10)
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Sant'Eulalia.....(see 13)			L'Osteria.....31 E1	

party in the restaurants, bars and discos that line the sand.

Water sports are popular and you can generally hire canoes at the beach clubs. From its base at **Marina Piccola**, the **Windsurfing Club Cagliari** (☎ 070 37 26 94; Viale Marina Piccola; www.windsurfingclubcagliari.it) offers a range of courses, starting from about €150.

For Poetto take buses PF or PQ from Piazza Matteotti.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Sardinia's patron saint is the star of Cagliari's blockbuster **Festa di Sant'Efisio** between 1 and 4 May. On the opening day the saint's effigy is paraded around the city on a bullock-drawn carriage amid an extravagantly costumed procession.

Cagliari also puts on a good show for **Carnevale** in February and Easter **Holy Week**, when a hooded procession climbs up to the cathedral in Il Castello.

SLEEPING

B&B La Marina (☎ 070 67 00 65, mobile 349 176 73 68; www.la-marina.it; Via Porcile 23; s €40, d €70-75) Owned by a cordial elderly couple, this modest B&B offers good value in the seafront Marina district. There's nothing flash about the sterile white rooms but they are clean and quiet, and the bathrooms have excellent showers.

Hotel A&R Bundes Jack (☎ 070 65 79 70; www.hotelbjvittoria.it; Via Roma 75; s €48-58, d €78-88; ☞) The best budget option on the seafront, this is an

old-fashioned family-run *pensione*. Run by a garrulous old boy, it has big, high-ceilinged rooms decorated with antique furniture and sparkling chandeliers. No breakfast or credit cards.

Hotel Miramare (☎ 070 66 40 21; www.hotelmiramarecagliari.it; Via Roma 59; s €76-122, d €98-146, ste €145-235; ☞ ☞) This boutique four-star is a good choice for a splurge. Rooms are individually styled but think crimson walls, spangly chandeliers, high wooden beds and modern bathrooms. Wi-fi is available and kids under 12 stay free.

Also recommended:

Albergo Aurora (☎ 070 65 86 25; www.albergoaurora.it; Salita Santa Chiara 19; s €41-47, d €65-70, without bathroom s €34-39, d €50-58; ☞) A friendly, spartan option just off Piazza Yenne.

Sardinia Domus (☎ 070 65 97 83; www.sardinia-domus.it; in Italian; Largo Carlo Felice 26; s €65-70, d €85-100, q €130-144; ☞ ☞) A slickly run B&B with exposed stone walls and inviting rooms.

EATING

Cagliari is chock full of with restaurants, trattorias, bars and takeaways. Dining hotspots include the Marina area and up near Piazza Yenne.

Isola del Gelato (☎ 070 65 98 24; Piazza Yenne 35; cone €2.50; ☞ 9am-2am Tue-Sun). This hugely popular gelateria boasts an incredible selection of ice-creamy treats, including low-fat, soy, yoghurt and *semi-freddo*, a delicious semi-frozen mousse.

Il Fantasma (☎ 070 65 67 49; Via San Domenico 94; pizzas €7; ☎ Mon-Sat) This boisterous pizzeria does the best pizza in Cagliari. Friendly waiters adroitly navigate the crowded barrel-vaulted interior to deliver bubbling pizzas straight from the wood-fired oven. Book or expect to queue.

Trattoria Gennargentu (☎ 070 65 82 47; Via Sardegna 60; meal €20; ☎ closed Wed lunch & Sun) It doesn't look much from outside but this no-frills trattoria serves excellent food. There's a full menu of pastas and meaty mains but the seafood is particularly good. Try the *spaghetti con arselle* (with clams) and you'll get the idea.

L'Osteria (☎ 070 311 01 68; Via Azuni 56; meals €28; ☎ closed Sun dinner) Homey decor, friendly service, and authentic local food – this spot-on trattoria fits the bill perfectly. Everything about the place is right, from the bare brick walls and earthenware wine jugs, to the warm bread doused in olive oil and the gorgeous food.

Da Lillicu (☎ 070 65 29 70; Via Sardegna 78; meal €30; ☎ Mon-Sat, closed late Aug) A Cagliari institution, this historic trattoria has an excellent local reputation and is nearly always packed. Diners come for the noisy, convivial atmosphere and excellent seafood – signature dishes include *fritto misto* (mixed fry) and *burrida* (catfish marinated in white-wine vinegar and served with nuts).

ourpick Monica e Ahmed (☎ 070 640 20 45; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 119; meals €30-40; ☎ closed Sun dinner) If you love seafood you'll love it here. Start with a mixed antipasto – at the time of research this comprised swordfish carpaccio, fried calamari, tuna with beans, mussels, and lobster in vinaigrette – before moving on to the main event. You could play it safe with *spaghetti ai frutti di mare* (with mussels and clams) or push the boat out and order grilled giant prawns.

Self-caterers can pick up picnic fare at **I Sapori dell'Isola** (☎ 070 65 23 62; Via Sardegna 50) or at Cagliari's historic morning food market, **Mercato di San Benedetto** (Via San Francesco Cocco Ortu; ☎ Mon-Sat).

DRINKING

Antico Caffè (☎ 070 65 82 06; www.anticocaffe1855.it; Piazza Costituzione; ☎ 7am-2am Wed-Mon) Unfortunately located on a busy road junction, this is Cagliari's most famous cafe. Sip cocktails on the terrace or inside amid the polished wood and brass.

Caffè Librarium Nostrum (☎ 070 65 09 43; Via Santa Croce 33; ☎ 7.30am-2am Tue-Sun) A modish Castello bar with panoramic seating on top of the city's medieval ramparts. Occasional live music jacks up the atmosphere in the brick-lined interior.

Caffè degli Spiriti (Bastione San Remy; ☎ 9am-2am) Grab a hammock, lie back and enjoy the vibe at this stylish lounge bar on the Bastione San Remy. If you get the munchies call for pizza (€7) or grilled meat (€17).

Il Merlo Parlante (☎ 070 65 39 81; Via Portoscalas 69; ☎ 7pm-3am Tue-Sun) Shoehorned into a narrow alley off Corso Vittorio Emanuele, this popular student pub serves lager and rock to a young international crowd.

ENTERTAINMENT

Cagliari's after-hours scene tends to revolve around the city's bars and cafes, which in summer means the beach at Poetto. Beach-front bars/clubs drift in and out of fashion but current favourites include **Emerson** (☎ 070 37 51 94; Viale Poetto, 4th stop) and **Café Oasi** (☎ 070 338 08 48; Viale Poetto, 4th stop).

For information on cultural events, ask at the tourist office or pick up a copy of the local newspaper *L'Unione Sarda*. Classical music, opera and ballet are staged at the **Teatro Lirico** (Teatro Comunale; ☎ 070 408 22 30; www.teatro.liricodicagliari.it; Via Sant'Alenixedda), to the north of the city centre. In summer, the **Anfiteatro Romano** (p839) stages a season of stand-up comedy, music and dance.

SHOPPING

A good place to pick up a last-minute gift, **Durke** (☎ 070 66 67 82; www.durke.com; Via Napoli 66) is an enticing Aladdin's cave of Sardinian sweets and pastries, all prepared according to traditional recipes. For something more weighty, **Loredana Mandas** (☎ 070 66 76 48; Via Sicilia 31) sells the fine gold filigree for which Sardinia is famous.

Market-goers will enjoy the Sunday morning **flea market** on the Bastione San Remy.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Cagliari's Elmas **airport** (CAG; ☎ 070 211 211; www.sogaer.it) is 6km northwest of the city centre. Flights connect with mainland Italy and European destinations including Barcelona, London, Paris and Stuttgart. In summer, there are additional charter flights.

TRENINO VERDE

If you're not in a rush, one of the best ways of exploring Sardinia's rugged interior is on the **Trenino Verde** (www.treninoverde.com), a slow, narrow-gauge diesel operated by Ferrovie della Sardegna (FdS). There are four tourist routes: Mandas to Arbatax; Isili to Sorgono; Macomer to Bosa; and Nulvi to Palau. Of these, the twisting Mandas-Arbatax line is particularly spectacular, crossing the remote highlands of the Parco Nazionale del Golfo di Orosei e del Gennargentu.

To get to Mandas, take the metro from Piazza Repubblica to Gottardo from where you can catch a train through to Mandas. Once there, trains depart at 8.35am and 3.25pm. A one-way ticket costs €17.50.

The Trenino Verde runs between mid-June and early September.

Boat

Cagliari's ferry port is just off Via Roma.

Tirrenia (☎ 892 123; www.tirrenia.it; Via dei Ponente 1) is the main operator, with year-round services to Civitavecchia, Naples, Palermo and Trapani. Book tickets at the port or at travel agencies.

See p835 for further details.

Bus

From the main bus station on Piazza Matteotti, buses serve nearby Pula (€2.50, 50 minutes, hourly) and Villasimius (€4, 1½ hours, six daily), as well as Iglesias (€4.50, 1½ hours, seven daily), Oristano (€6.50, one hour 35 minutes, two daily), Nuoro (€14.50, 2½ to five hours, two daily) and Sassari (€17.50, 3¼ hours, three daily). **Turmo Travel** (☎ 0789 214 87; www.gruppoturmotravel.com) runs a daily bus to Olbia (€18, 4¼ hours).

Get bus tickets from the McDonald's on the square.

Car & Motorcycle

The island's main dual-carriage, the SS131 Carlo Felice highway links the capital with Porto Torres via Oristano and Sassari. The SS130 leads east to Iglesias.

Train

The main Trenitalia station is on Piazza Matteotti. Trains serve Iglesias (€3.65, one hour, 10 daily), Carbonia (€4.15, one hour, six daily), Sassari (€15, four hours, five daily) and Porto Torres (€16.05, 4¼ hours, two daily) via Oristano (€5.65, one to two hours, hourly). A branch line connects with Olbia (€14.60, 4¼ hours, five daily) and Golfo Aranci (€15.80, five to seven hours, three daily) via Oristano or Chilivani.

For information on the Trenino Verde summer tourist train, check out the boxed text on above.

GETTING AROUND

To/From the Airport

Buses run from Piazza Matteotti to Elmas airport (€2, 10 minutes, 30 daily) from 5.20am to 10.30pm. Between 9am and 10.30pm departures are every hour and half past the hour.

A taxi costs about €35.

Bus

CTM (☎ 070 209 12 10; www.ctmcagliari.it, in Italian) bus routes cover the city and surrounding area. A standard ticket costs €1 and is valid for 90 minutes; a daily ticket is €2.30.

Car & Motorcycle

On-street parking within the blue lines costs €1 per hour. Alternatively, there's a useful car park next to the train station, which costs €0.90 per hour, €10 for 24 hours.

At **CIA Rent a Car** (☎ 070 65 65 03; www.ciairent.it; Via Molo Sant'Agostino 13) you can hire a Ford Fiesta from €69 per day.

Taxi

There are taxi ranks at Piazza Matteotti, Piazza della Repubblica and on Largo Carlo Felice. Otherwise you can call one from **Quattro Mori** (☎ 070 400 101; 🕒 24hr).

AROUND CAGLIARI

East and north of Cagliari, lies the lonely Sarrabus, one of Sardinia's least populated and least developed areas. In its centre rise the bushy green peaks of the Monte dei Sette Fratelli, a miraculously wild hinterland where some of the island's last remaining deer wander undisturbed.

East of Poetto the SP17 hugs the coast prettily (if precariously) all the way around to Villasimius and then north along the Costa Rei.

OUR TOP FIVE BEACHES IN SARDINIA

- **Chia** (opposite) Two golden strips of sand divided by a Pisan watchtower and beloved of windsurfers.
- **Spiaggia Piscinas & Scivu** (p848) Famous for their sand dunes and wild beauty, these are the stars of the Costa Verde.
- **Spiaggia del Principe** (p862) Prince of the Costa Smeralda's idyllic beaches.
- **Is Aruttas** (p852) On the Sinis Peninsula and prized for its white quartz sand.
- **Cala Mariolu** (p868) Dreamy tropical waters lap this tiny inlet on the Golfo di Orosei.

A few kilometres short of Villasimius, a road veers south to **Capo Carbonara**, Sardinia's most southeasterly point. On the western side of the peninsula is a marina and what remains of a Spanish tower, the **Fortezza Vecchia**. To the south is lovely **Spiaggia del Riso**. The eastern side is dominated by the **Stagno Notteri** lagoon, often host to flamingos in winter. On its seaward side is the stunning **Spiaggia del Simius** beach with its Polynesian blue waters.

VILLASIMIUS & COSTA REI

A popular resort, Villasimius is a lively, cheerful place, although activity all but dies out in winter. The central **tourist office** (☎ 070 793 02 71; www.villasimiusweb.com; Piazza Giovanni XXIII; ☎ 10am-1pm Mon-Fri plus & 3.30-6.30pm Mon & Thu, 4-7pm Fri) can provide information on activities in the town. At the Porto Turistico, about 3km outside of town, you can arrange boat tours (about €65 per person) and dives (from €35).

Campers converge on **Spiaggia del Riso** (☎ 070 79 10 52; www.villaggiospiaggidelriso.it; Località Campulungu; per person/tent/car €16/6/4, bungalows €80-150; ☎ May-Oct; (P)), a big camping ground near the Porto Turistico. It has excellent facilities but gets hellishly crowded in summer.

In the town centre, the year-round **Albergo Stella d'Oro** (☎ 070 79 12 55; fax 070 79 26 32; Via Vittorio Emanuele 25; s €35-55, d €60-110; (P) ☎) is a friendly, laid-back *pensione* with modest rooms and an excellent seafood restaurant (meals €25 to €30).

For a bite to eat, **Ristorante La Lanterna** (☎ 070 79 16 59; Via Roma 62; meals €30-35; ☎ closed Mon lunch) offers alfresco dining and fine seafood.

ARST buses run to and from Cagliari (€4, 1½ hours, six daily) throughout the year.

From Villasimius, the SP17 follows the coast north to the Costa Rei. About 25km out of Villasimius you hit **Cala Sinzias**, a pretty sandy strand with two camping grounds. Continue for a further 6km and you come to the Costa Rei resort, a holiday village full of villas, shops, bars, clubs and a few indifferent eateries. **Spiaggia Costa Rei** is, like the beaches to its south and north, a dazzling white strand lapped by remarkably clear blue-green water.

By the resort's southern entrance, **Camping Capo Ferrato** (☎ 070 99 10 12; www.campingcapoferrato.it; per person/tent €12.40/15.90; ☎ May-Oct) is a welcoming camping ground with direct access to the beach.

North of the resort, **Spiaggia Piscina Rei** continues the theme of blinding white sand and turquoise water. A couple more beaches fill the remaining length of coast up to **Capo Ferrato**, beyond which drivable dirt trails lead north.

The same ARST buses from Cagliari to Villasimius continue around to Costa Rei, taking about half an hour.

NORA & AROUND

About 30km southwest of Cagliari, the archaeological zone of **Nora** (adult/child incl Museo Archeologico in Pula €5.50/2.50; ☎ 9am-7.30pm) is what's left of a once powerful ancient city. Founded by Phoenicians in the 11th century BC, it passed into Carthaginian hands before being taken over by the Romans and becoming one of the most important cities on the island. Upon entry, you pass a single melancholy **column** from a former temple and then a small but beautifully preserved Roman **theatre**. To the west are the substantial remains of the **Terme al Mare** (Baths by the Sea). Four columns stand at the heart of what was a patrician villa; the surrounding rooms retain their mosaic floor decoration.

In nearby **Pula**, the one-room **Museo Archeologico** (☎ 070 920 96 10; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 67; admission €2.50, incl Nora €5.50; ☎ 9am-8pm Tue-Sun May-Sep, 9am-5.30pm Tue-Sun Oct-Apr) displays finds from Nora, including ceramics found in Punic and Roman tombs, some gold and bone jewellery, and Roman glassware.

For further information about Pula and the surrounding area, ask at the helpful **tourist office** (☎ 347 237 78 42; Piazza del Popolo; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) just off the town's main hub, Piazza del Popolo.

From Pula, the SS195 follows the coast round to Chia and the stunning Costa del Sud. But unless you're staying at one of the self-contained resort hotels that hog this stretch of coast you're unlikely to glimpse much of sea.

Accommodation tends to be expensive in these parts but you can still find some affordable, locally run places. Near the beach at Nora, the **Hotel Su Gunventeddu** (☎ 070 920 90 92; www.sugunventeddu.com; Località Su Gunventeddu; s€40-70, d€60-100; (P)) has spacious, old-fashioned rooms decorated with family knick-knacks and dark-wood furnishings. Its restaurant (meals €25 to €30) has an excellent local reputation, but doesn't open for Tuesday and Wednesday lunch.

Off the road to Santa Margherita di Pula are two further choices: **B&B Solivariu** (☎ 339 367 40 88; SS195 km33, Santa Margherita di Pula; per person €30-60; (P)), a lovely, authentic farm B&B surrounded by fragrant fruit trees; and **Camping Flumendosa** (☎ 070 920 83 64; www.campingflumondosa.it; SS195 km33, Santa Margherita di Pula; per person/tent €7.50/8.50), set in pine and eucalyptus trees near the beach.

Regular buses connect Pula and Cagliari (€2.50, 50 minutes). From Pula there are frequent shuttle buses down to Nora (€0.70), 4km away.

COSTA DEL SUD & AROUND

One of the most beautiful stretches of coast in southern Sardinia, the Costa del Sud runs 25km from **Chia** to **Porto Teulada**. Chia's two ravishing beaches are popular with wind- and kite-surfers, while 3km away there's a magnificent strip of sand at **Tueredda**. As you wind your way towards the high point of **Capo Malfatano** wonderful views spring into view around every corner.

Budget accommodation is available in two camping grounds at either end of the coastal run. At Chia, there's **Campeggio Torre Chia** (☎ 070 923 00 54; www.campeggiotorrechia.it; per person/tent €10.50/17), a busy spot a few hundred metres back from the beach, while 25km to the west, **Portu Tramatzu Camping Comunale** (☎ 070 928 30 27; Località Porto Tramatzu; per person/tent €10.50/9; (P)) week before Easter–Oct) has modest facilities and an on-site diving centre near Porto di Teulada.

Some 25km inland, the **Le Grotte Is Zuddas** (☎ 0781 95 57 41; www.grotteiszuddas.it in Italian; adult/child €8/5; (P)) entry at noon & 4pm Mon–Sat, 9.30am–noon & 2.30–6pm Sun Oct–Mar, 9.30am–noon & 2.30–6pm daily Apr–Sep) is a spectacular cave system.

From Cagliari, there are ARST buses to and from Chia (€3, 1¼ hours, 10 daily). Then, between mid-June and mid-September, two daily buses ply the Costa del Sud.

SOUTHWESTERN SARDINIA

IGLESIAS

pop 27,680

Surrounded by the skeletons of Sardinia's once-thriving mining industry, Iglesias is an urbane and lively city. Its historic centre, an appealing ensemble of lived-in piazzas, sun-bleached buildings and Aragonese-style wrought-iron balconies, creates an atmosphere that is as much Iberian as Sardinian, a vestige of its history as a Spanish colony. Visit at Easter to experience a quasi-Seville experience during the extraordinary drum-beating processions.

The Romans called the town Metalla, after the precious metals mined here, especially lead and silver. Mining equipment dating back to the Carthaginian era was discovered in the 19th century.

Sights

Iglesias' central square, **Piazza Quintino Sella** was laid out in the 19th century in what was at the time a field outside the city walls. Just off the square, scruffy stairs leading up to a stout tower are all that remains of **Castello Salvaterra**, a Pisan fortress built in the 13th century. A stretch of the northwestern perimeter wall survives along Via Campidano.

Dominating the eastern flank of Piazza del Municipio in the heart of the *centro storico*, the **Duomo** (Piazza del Municipio; (P)) closed for renovation) retains a lovely Pisan-flavoured facade, as does the bell tower, with its chequerboard stonework.

Bone up on Iglesias' mining history at the **Museo dell'Arte Mineraria** (☎ 0781 35 00 37; www.museoartemineraria.it; Via Roma 47; admission free; (P)) 7–9pm Sat & Sun Jul–Sep, 6–8pm Sat & Sun Jun, by appointment rest of year), a former mining school, where you can experience the harsh conditions in which miners worked in a series of recreated mine shafts.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Artu (☎ 0781 224 92; www.hotelartuiglesias.it; Piazza Quintino Sella 15; s €46–60, d €78–90, apt €65–95; (P))

Right in the heart of the action, this is a functional middle-of-the-road option. Beyond the awful concrete exterior, it offers comfortable modern rooms, a popular restaurant (meals €20 to €25) and a friendly welcome. Parking is available for €3.50.

Eurohotel (☎ 0781 226 43; www.eurohoteliglesias.it; Via Fratelli Bandieri 34; s €60-80, d €85-110; (P) ♿) A five-minute walk from the centre, this welcoming hotel resembles a kitsch Pompeian villa. With its porticoed entrance and gleefully OTT decor – think chandeliers, marble busts, gilt chairs and oil paintings – it's great fun. The restaurant is a good bet for a no-nonsense evening meal (€25 to €30).

Volters & Murion (☎ 078 13 37 88; Piazza Collegio 1; fixed menu €25; (♿) Tue-Sun) Serving everything from hamburgers to pasta and seafood, this is a cheerful eatery near the Duomo. With the TV on in the corner and locals laughing at the bar, it's a laid-back place, as good for a meal as an evening drink.

Getting There & Away

Buses for Cagliari (€4.50, 1½ hours, seven daily) arrive at and depart from Via XX Settembre. Get tickets from **Bar Giardini** (Via Oristano 8; (♿) 5.30am-2.30pm & 3.30-9pm Mon-Sat) across the park. From the train station on Via Garibaldi, a 15-minute walk from the town centre, there are up to 10 daily trains to Cagliari (€3.65, one hour, 10 daily).

AROUND IGLESIAS

A winding 15km drive north of Iglesias (follow for Fluminimaggiore) brings you to the sand-coloured **Tempio di Antas** (☎ 0781 58 09 90; adult/child €3/2; (♿) 9.30am-7.30pm daily Jul-Sep, 9.30am-5.30pm daily Apr-Jun & Oct, 9.30-4.30pm Tue-Sun Nov-Mar), an impressive Roman temple set in bucolic scenery. The 3rd-century temple was built by the Roman emperor Caracalla over a 6th-century-BC Punic sanctuary, which itself stood over an earlier *nuraghic* settlement. From near the ticket office a path marked *Antica Strada Romana*, *Antas Su Mannau* leads to what little remains of this settlement. About an hour and a half further on is the **Grotta de Su Mannau** (☎ 0781 58 04 11; www.sumanau.it; ♿ currently closed for work), an 8km-long cave complex with incredible rock formations.

About 10km east of Iglesias, the unremarkable town of **Domusnovas** sits at the centre of one of Sardinia's most exciting rock-climbing areas. The outlying countryside is peppered

with limestone rocks, cliffs and caves, many of which are ideal for sports climbing. For technical information, check out www.climb-europe.com/sardinia and www.sardiniaclimb.com.

Four kilometres north of town, the 850m-long **Grotta di San Giovanni** is an impressive sight. Eight daily buses connect Iglesias and Domusnovas (€1, 15 minutes).

IGLESIENTE COAST

Iglesias' local beach is at **Funtanamare** (also spelt Fontanamare), about 8km west of town. From Funtanamare, the SP83 coastal road affords spectacular views as it dips, bends and climbs its way northwards. Dominating the seascape off Nebida, 5.5km to the north, is the 133m-high **Scoglio Pan di Zucchero** (Sugarloaf Rock), the largest of several *faraglioni* (sea stacks) that rise out of the glassy blue waters. A small and rather drab village, **Nebida** is a former mining settlement sprawled along the road high above the sea. Near its southern entrance, **Pan di Zucchero** (☎ 0781 4 71 14; www.hotelpandizucchero.it; Via Centrale 365; s €40-45, d €55-60, half-board per person €70) is a family-run *pensione* with neat, modestly furnished rooms and a panoramic restaurant (meals €30 to €35).

A few kilometres north, **Masua** is another former mining centre. Seen from above, it looks pretty ugly but it's not without interest. The main draw is the town's unique mining port, **Porto Flavia** (☎ 0781 49 13 00; www.igeaminiere.it, in Italian; adult/child €8/4.50; ♿ by appointment). In 1924 two 600m tunnels were dug into the cliffs. In the lower of the two a conveyor belt received zinc and lead ore from the underground deposits and transported it via an ingenious mobile loading arm directly to the ships moored below.

Local buses run between Iglesias and Masua, stopping off at Nebida (€1.50, 30 minutes, 10 daily).

Beyond Masua, and signposted off the SP83, **Cala Domestica** is a cool sandy beach wedged into a natural inlet. **Buggerru**, the biggest village on this stretch of coastline and another former mining settlement, won't delay you long, but it has a useful **tourist office** (☎ 0781 540 93; SP83; (♿) 7am-8.30pm) on the main road. If the office is shut ask at the adjacent bar.

The road out of Buggerru climbs high along the cliffs for a couple of kilometres before descending down to **Spiaggia Portixeddu**, one of the area's best beaches. At its southern tip, you can dine on pizza and fresh fish at **Ristorante**

San Nicolò (☎ 0781 5 43 59; Località San Nicolò; meals €30, pizzas €7).

Accommodation in the area is limited, but the **Hotel Golfo del Leone** (☎ 0781 549 52; www.golfo.delleone.it; Località Caburu di Figù; s €48-53, d €63-90) boasts sunny sea-facing rooms about 1km back from the beach. Service is friendly and the helpful staff can organise horse-riding excursions. The adjacent restaurant serves up decent local food for about €25 to €30 per head.

Inland, there are several *agriturismi*, including **Biologico Fighezia** (☎ 348 069 83 03; Località Fighezia, Fluminimaggiore; half-board per person €45-50, B&B in winter per person €25-30). Set in tranquil countryside, it offers lush views and cabin-style rooms decorated with terracotta tiles, solid wooden fixtures and private terraces. Dinner is served on a large communal table on the terrace of the main house.

CARBONIA & AROUND

pop 30,125

You won't miss much if you bypass **Carbonia**, a drab town built by Mussolini to house workers from the nearby Sirai-Serbariu coalfield. However, in the vicinity there are a couple of sights worth a detour. The **Museo del Carbone** (☎ 0781 67 05 91; www.museodelcarbone.it; Località Grande Miniera di Serbariu; adult/child €6/4; ☎ 10.30am-7.30pm daily Jun-Sep, 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Oct-May) offers a chastening look into the life of Carbonia's miners, with an interesting collection of machines, photos and equipment, and guided tours into the claustrophobic mine shafts.

A short drive away, the ruins of the 7th-century-BC Phoenician fort at **Monte Sirai** (☎ 0781 626 65; www.meditinera.it; adult/child €5/3; ☎ 10am-8pm Tue-Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-5pm Wed-Sun Oct-Mar) sit atop a steep hill 4km northwest of Carbonia. Although not a great deal remains, you can make out the placement of the Carthaginian acropolis, a necropolis and *tophet*, a sacred burial ground for children.

SANT'ANTIOCO & SAN PIETRO

These islands off Sardinia's southwestern coast display very different characters. Both are popular summer destinations but Isola Sant'Antioco, the larger and more developed of the two, is less obviously picturesque with a rocky Sardinian landscape and gritty working port. Barely half an hour across the water, the pastel houses and bobbing fishing boats of

Isola di San Pietro are much more what you'd expect of a holiday island.

Information

Tourist office San Pietro (☎ 0781 85 40 09; www.prolococarloforte.it; in Italian; Piazza Carlo Emanuele III 19; 10am-1pm & 5-8pm); Sant'Antioco (☎ 0781 8 20 31; Via Roma 43; ☎ 10.30am-1pm & 4.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri)

Sights & Activities

The main sights are in Sant'Antioco. Up in the high part of town, the **Basilica di Sant'Antioco Martire** (☎ 078 18 30 44; Piazza Parrocchia 22; ☎ 9am-12pm & 3-6pm Mon-Sat, 10.30-11.15am & 3-6pm Sun) is a sublimely simple 5th-century church set over an extensive system of creepy **catcombs** (guided tours €2.50).

In the outskirts of town, the excellent **Museo Archeologico** (☎ 0781 821 05; www.archeotur.it; in Italian; admission €6/3.50; ☎ 9am-7pm) contains a fascinating collection of local archaeological finds.

For beaches head to **Maladroitxa** and **Spiaggia Coa Quaddus** on the eastern coast.

Over on Isola San Pietro the main activity is wandering the streets of laid-back **Carloforte**, the main town. On the seafront, **Cartur Dea** (☎ 0781 85 43 31; molo Tagliafico) is one of several outfits offering boat tours. Bank on about €25 per person. Carloforte's big annual event, the four-day **Girotonno** (www.girotonno.org) festival held in late May or early June is dedicated to the island's traditional tuna kill, known locally as the *mattanza*.

Sleeping

Hotel California (☎ 0781 85 44 70; www.hotelcalifornia.carloforte.it; Via Cavallera 15; s €32-50, d €45-90) In Carloforte, this super-friendly family-run *pensione* is in a residential street a few blocks back from the *lungomare*. It's a modest place but the spacious, sun-filled rooms are more than adequate and its location ensures a good night's sleep.

Hotel Moderno (☎ 0781 831 05; www.albergo.ristorantemoderno.com; Via Nazionale 82; Sant'Antioco; s €44-60, d €70-100; ☎) A bright, welcoming hotel on the main road into Sant'Antioco. Rooms are agreeable with a relaxing cream-and-salmon colour scheme and big, comfy beds. Downstairs, the airy restaurant (open April to October) serves a good line in local fish.

Also recommended:

Hotel del Corso (☎ 0781 80 02 65; www.hoteldelcorso.it; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 32; Sant'Antioco; s €44-60,

d €69-100; ☎) Has smart rooms over an elegant cafe in Sant'Antioco.

Hotel Riviera (☎ 0781 85 41 01; www.hotelriviera-carloforte.com; Corso Battellieri 26; s €75-120, d €120-190; ☎) Offers designer chic on the Carloforte seafront.

Eating

Tuna is king of *San Pietro* cuisine and appears on almost all island menus.

Ristorante Pizzeria Al Castello (☎ 0781 85 62 83; Via Castello 5; pizzas €6, meals €25; ☎ Mon-Sat) At the top of Carloforte, this is where locals come to get their pizza. A friendly, laid-back place with a spacious dining room and comprehensive menu, it's well worth the short but steep climb to get here.

Ristorante 7 Nani (☎ 0781 84 09 00; Via Garibaldi 139; pizzas €7, meals €30; ☎ Wed-Mon) A laid-back Sant'Antioco trattoria set-up with simple wood tables, a garden dining area and pictures of Snow White's seven dwarves. The wood-fired pizzas are superb, the seafood is fresh and the local *mirto* (a berry-based liqueur) a sweet way to finish off.

Osteria della Tonnara (☎ 078 185 57 34; Corso Battellieri 36; meals €35; ☎ Jun-Sep) Run by Isola San Pietro's tuna cooperative, this is the place to try *tonno alla carlofortina* (tuna roasted and served with a tomato sauce). Booking is recommended and credit cards are not accepted.

Getting There & Around

Sant'Antioco is connected to the mainland by a bridge and is accessible by bus from Iglesias (€3, 1¼ hours) and Carbonia (€1, 50 minutes).

To get to Isola San Pietro (Carloforte), you'll need to catch a ferry from Portovesme (per person/car €2.60/5.80, 30 minutes, at least 15 daily) or from Calasetta on Isola Sant'Antioco (per person/car €2.30/5, 13 daily).

Local buses run around Sant'Antioco, and limited summertime services operate on San Pietro. Tickets cost €1.

COSTA VERDE

One of Sardinia's great untamed coastal stretches, the Costa Verde (Green Coast) extends northwards from Capo Pecora to the small resort of Torre dei Corsari. Named after the green *macchia* (Mediterranean scrub) that covers much of its mountainous hinterland,

it's an area of wild, exhilarating beauty and spectacular, unspoilt beaches.

To reach the area's two best beaches, head inland from Portixeddu along the SS126 and follow for Arbus. Signs off to the left direct you to Gennamari, Bau and **Spiaggia Scivu**, a golden beach backed by 70m-high sand dunes. A further 4km beyond this turn-off is another for the ghost town of **Ingutosu** and beyond that, the magnificent and untamed **Spiaggia Piscinas**. Note that the route down to the beach involves at least 10km of dirt-track driving.

If you want to stay in the area, there's an excellent *agriturismo* off the SP65 between Montevicchio and Torre dei Corsari

our pick Agriturismo L'Oasi del Cervo (☎ 347 301 13 18; www.oasidelcervo.com; Località Is Gennas Arbus; half-board per person €43-60) is as authentic as it gets, a working farm at the end of a 2.5km dirt track in the middle of silent green hills. Rooms are extremely simple, but the location and the superb home-made food more than compensate.

North of here, **Torre dei Corsari** is a fairly uninspiring modern resort with a fine dune-backed beach. There's a useful **supermarket** (☎ 070 97 72 45; Piazza Stella Maris; ☎ 9am-1pm & 5-8pm daily) on the central square and a number of sleeping options. The best is **Verdemare** (☎ 070 97 72 72, in winter 070 773 08 49; www.verdemare.com; Via Colombo; s €46-68, d €70-104; ☎ Apr-Oct; ☎), a lovely villa with lush gardens, distant sea views and bright, cool rooms.

You'll really need a car to explore the Costa Verde. But during July and August, an ARST bus runs daily from Oristano to Torre dei Corsari (€4, 1½ hours).

WESTERN SARDINIA

ORISTANO

pop 32,620

With its elegant shopping streets, ornate piazzas and popular cafes, Oristano's animated centre makes a great base for exploring this part of the island. The city was founded in the 11th century and became capital of the Giudicato d'Arborea, one of Sardinia's four independent provinces. Eleonora of Arborea, a heroine in the Joan of Arc mould, became head of the *giudicato* in 1383 and led fierce resistance against the island's Spanish invaders. But with her death, anti-Spanish

opposition crumbled and Oristano was incorporated into the rest of Aragonese-controlled Sardinia. Eleonora is also remembered for her celebrated Carta di Logu (Code of Laws), an extraordinary law code which tackled land and property legislation as well as introducing a whole raft of women's rights.

Information

Farmacia San Carlo (☎ 0783 7 11 23; Piazza Eleonora d'Arborea 10/11)

Genius Point (Via Pietro Riccio 4; per hr €4; ☑ 8.30am-1pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat) Internet access.

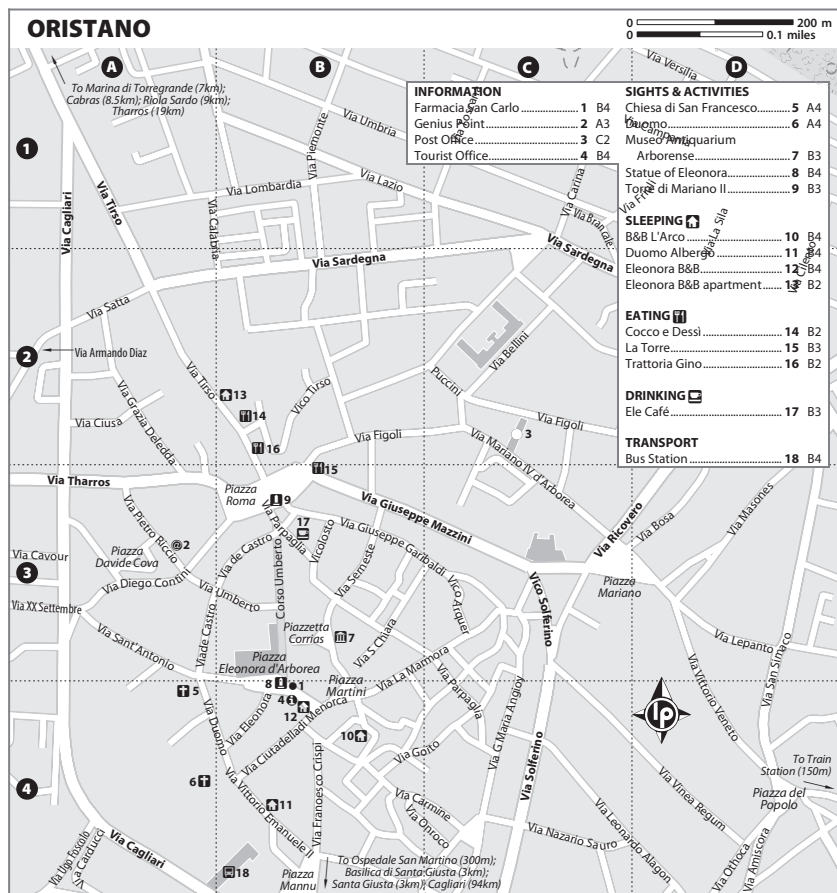
Ospedale San Martino (☎ 0783 31 71; Piazza San Martino)

Post office (Via Mariano IV d'Arborea)

Tourist office (☎ 0783 368 32 10; turismo@provincia .or.it; Piazza Eleonora d'Arborea 19; 🕒 9am-1pm Mon-Fri & 4-6.30pm Mon-Thu)

Sights

One of the few vestige's of Oristano's medieval past, the 13th-century **Torre di Mariano II** (Piazza Roma) was the town's northern gate and an important part of the city defences. From here, pedestrianised Corso Umberto I leads to Piazza Eleonora d'Arborea, Oristano's elegant outdoor salon. In the centre stands an ornate 19th-century **statue of Queen Eleonora**, raising a finger as if about to launch into a political discourse. Nearby, the neoclassical **Chiesa di San Francesco** (Via Sant'Antonio; ☎ Mass 6.30pm Sat, 7.30am, 9.30am & 6pm Sun) harbours a 14th-century wooden sculpture,



the *Crocifisso di Nicodemo*, considered one of Sardinia's most precious carvings. Follow Via Duomo to the **Duomo** (Piazza del Duomo; ☎ Mass 5pm Sat, 10am & noon Sun), built in the 13th century but remodelled 500 years later. Its free-standing *campanile*, topped by a conspicuous majolica-tiled dome, adds an exotic Byzantine look to Oristano's skyline.

Oristano's sole museum, the **Museo Antiquarium Arborese** (☎ 0783 79 12 62; Piazza Corrias; adult/child €3/1.50; ☎ 9am-2pm & 3-8pm) contains one of the island's major archaeological collections with prehistoric artefacts from the Sinis Peninsula and finds from Carthaginian and Roman *tharros*. There's also a small collection of *retablos* (painted altarpieces), including the 16th-century *Retablo del Santo Cristo*, which depicts a decorative series of Franciscan saints.

Around 3km south of Oristano at Santa Giusta is the 12th-century **Basilica di Santa Giusta** (☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Sat), one of Sardinia's finest Tuscan-style Romanesque churches.

Festivals & Events

One of Sardinia's top festivals, Oristano's **Sa Sartiglia** is held over two days, Sunday and *martedì grasso* (Shrove Tuesday or Mardi Gras). It involves a costumed medieval joust and some amazing acrobatic horse riding.

Sleeping

B&B L'Arco (☎ 0783 7 28 49; www.arcobedandbreakfast.it; Vico Ammirato 12; d without bathroom €60) This homey B&B is hidden away in a quiet cul-de-sac near Piazza Martini. There are only two guest rooms but they are spacious and tastefully decorated with exposed wood beams, terracotta tiles and dark-wood furnishings.

our pick Eleonora B&B (☎ 0783 7 04 35; www.eleonora-bed-and-breakfast.com; Piazza Eleonora d'Arborea 12; s €35-40, d €60-70, apt €80; ☎ ☎) Housed in a medieval *palazzo* on Oristano's central piazza, this charming B&B is an excellent option with tastefully decorated rooms, creaky parquet floors and heavy wooden furniture. Wi-fi is available. The young owners also rent out a funky, two-bedroom loft apartment, ideal for families or longer stays.

Duomo Albergo (☎ 0783 77 80 61; www.hotelduomo.net; Via Vittorio Emanuele 34; s/d €80/135; ☎ ☎) Inside and out, Oristano's top hotel is refined and elegantly understated. Behind the discreet

facade, spacious rooms reveal a low-key look with traditional fabrics and cooling white tones.

Eating & Drinking

La Torre (☎ 0783 30 14 94; Piazza Roma 52; pizzas €6.50, meals €20-25; ☎ Tue-Sun) This place doesn't look like much from outside; in fact, it's not so amazing inside either. No matter, it serves the best pizza in town. If you're off pizza but just want to enjoy the hectic atmosphere, there's a full menu of pastas and grilled mains.

Trattoria Gino (☎ 0783 7 14 28; Via Tirso 13; meals €25-30; ☎ Mon-Sat) An old-school neighbourhood trattoria, Gino has been serving tasty, no-nonsense food since the 1930s. The menu covers most bases, but it's the seafood that really stands out. Start with risotto *alla marinara* (seafood risotto) before diving into *chargrilled seppia* (cuttlefish).

Cocco e Dessi (☎ 0783 25 26 48; Via Tirso 30; meals €35, pizzas €6) Smart, but not oppressively so, this is a popular modern restaurant. Well-dressed diners sit down to whopping pizzas and tasty, stylishly presented local food. Menu staples include *polpi con patate* (octopus with potato), served cold as an antipasto, and *orata al vapore* (steamed sea bream).

Of the centre's various cafes and bars, **Ele Café** (☎ 0783 30 20 69; Via Pargaglia 6) is hot right now, filling quickly in the early evening and carrying on late.

Getting There & Around

From the bus station on Via Cagliari buses leave for Santa Giusta (€1, 15 minutes, half-hourly), Cagliari (€6.50, one hour 35 minutes, two daily), Sassari (€7.50 to €9.50, two hours, three daily) and Nuoro (€6.50, 2½ hours, six daily).

The main train station is in Piazza Ungheria, east of the town centre. Up to 12 daily trains run between Oristano and Cagliari (€5.65, one to two hours).

City buses on the *azzurra* (blue) line run from Via Cagliari to the beach at Marina di Torregranda (€0.70 or €1.10 if bought on bus, 20 minutes).

BARUMINI & AROUND

In the heart of voluptuous green countryside near Barumini, the **Nuraghe Su Nuraxi** (adult/concession €7/5; ☎ 9am-7pm summer, to 6pm

MYSTERY TOWERS, FAIRY HOUSES & SACRED WELLS

To the untrained eye, the strange stone circles that litter Sardinia's interior are mysterious and incomprehensible. But to archaeologists they provide one of the few windows into the dark world of the Bronze Age *nuraghe* people.

There are said to be up to 7000 *nuraghi* (stone towers) across the island, most built between 1800 and 500 BC. No one is absolutely certain what they were used for, although most experts think they were defensive watchtowers.

Early *nuraghi* were simple free-standing structures with internal chambers. Over time, they became bigger and more complex and eventually walls were added to form fortified villages. The most spectacular example of this is the Nuraghe Su Nuraxi (opposite) near Barumini.

Even before they started building *nuraghi*, the Sardinians were busy digging tombs into the rock, known as *domus de janas* (fairy houses). More elaborate were the common graves fronted by what appeared to be great ceremonial entrances known as *tombe dei giganti* (giants' tombs).

Evidence of pagan religious practices are provided by *pozzi sacri* (well temples). Built from around 1000 BC, these were often constructed so as to capture light at the yearly equinoxes, hinting at a naturalistic religion as well as sophisticated building techniques. The well temple at Santa Cristina (see p852) is a prime example.

spring & autumn, to 4pm winter) is Sardinia's sole World Heritage site and the island's most visited *nuraghe*. The focal point is the 1500 BC tower, which originally stood on its own but was later incorporated into a fortified compound. The first village buildings were erected in the Iron Age, and it's these that constitute the beehive of circular interlocking buildings that spread across the grass.

In Barumini, **Albergo Sa Lolla** (☎ 070 936 84 19; www.wels.it/salolla; Via Cavour 49, Barumini; s €42-47, d €55-65, meals €25; (P) ♿ ♿ ♿) is a tastefully refurbished farmstead with seven airy rooms and an excellent restaurant. Note that breakfast costs an extra €6.

Five kilometres west of Barumini, the village of **Tuili** is a gateway to the **Giara di Gesturi**, a high basalt plateau famous for its population of wild *cavallini* (literally 'minihorses'), most likely seen by shallow *pauli* (seasonal lakes) at daybreak or dusk.

To the east, it's a 25km drive to the village of Serri and the **Santuario Santa Vittoria di Serri** (adult/concession €4/2; ☎ 9am-7pm summer, to 5pm winter), the most extensive *nuraghic* settlement unearthed in Sardinia.

Three weekday buses run from Cagliari to Barumini (€4.50, 1½ hours), otherwise you'll need your own transport.

SINIS PENINSULA

West of Oristano, the Sinis Peninsula feels like a world apart with its glassy lagoons, low-lying countryside and snow-white beaches. The main sight is the ancient town of Tharros.

Tharros & Around

The blue choppy waters of the Golfo di Oristano form the ideal backdrop to the ruins of ancient **Tharros** (☎ 0783 39 73 06; admission incl Museo Civico in Cabras €5; ☎ 9am-8pm Jun-Sep, to 5pm Oct-May). Founded by the Phoenicians in the 8th century BC, it thrived as a Carthaginian naval base and was later taken over by the Romans. Much of what you see today dates to the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD, when the basalt streets were laid, and the aqueduct, baths and other major monuments were built.

On the side of the road just before Tharros, you'll see the 6th-century **Chiesa di San Giovanni di Sinis** (☎ 9am-7pm Jun-Sep, to 5pm Oct-May), one of oldest churches in Sardinia.

Some 4km north, the weird village of San Salvatore is worth a quick look. Used as a spaghetti-western film set during the 1960s, it is centred on a dusty town square surrounded by rows of tiny terraced houses, known as *cumbessias*. In the piazza, the 16th-century **Chiesa di San Salvatore** (☎ 9.30am-1pm daily & 3.30-6pm Mon-Sat summer, in winter morning only) is built over a pagan sanctuary dating from the *nuraghic* period.

Just beyond the turnoff for the village, the excellent **Agriturismo Su Pranu** (☎ 0783 39 25 61; www.supranu.com; Località San Salvatore; B&B per person €32-40, half-board per person €50-60; ♿) is a genuine working farm offering six bright guest rooms and superb home-grown food.

In July and August, there are five daily buses for San Giovanni in Sinis from Oristano (€1.50, 35 minutes).

Cabras

This straggling lagoon town is really only worth stopping at for the **Museo Civico** (☎ 0783 29 06 36; www.penisoladelsinis.it, in Italian; Via Tharros 121; adult/concession incl Tharros €5/3; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4-8pm Jun-Sep, 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Oct-May) at the southern end of the town. It houses finds from the prehistoric site of **Cuccuru Is Arrius**, 3km to the south-west, and Tharros. Buses run every 20 minutes or so from Oristano (€1, 15 minutes).

Beaches

The beaches on the Sinis Peninsula are well worth tracking down. One of the best is **Is Aruttas**, whose white quartz sand was for years carted off to be used in aquariums and on beaches on the Costa Smeralda. However, it's now illegal to take any. The beach is signposted and is 5km west off the main road north from San Salvatore.

Within walking distance of the beach, **Camping Is Aruttas** (☎ 0783 39 11 08; www.campingisaruttas.it; Località Marina Aruttas; per person & tent/car €16/4; ☎ mid-May-Sep) has modest camping facilities set amid olive trees and Mediterranean shrubbery.

At the north of the peninsula, the popular surfing beach of **Putzu Idu** is backed by a motley set of holiday homes, beach bars and surfing outlets. One such, the **Capo Mannu Kite School** (☎ 347 007 70 35; www.capomannukiteschool.it) runs kite-surfing lessons for all levels. For underwater thrills, **9511 Diving** (☎ 349 291 37 65; www.9511.it) runs dives and snorkelling trips, as well as excursions to the eloquently named **Isola di Mal di Ventre** (Stomachache Island), 10km off the coast. Another reliable operator is **Naturawentura** (☎ 0783 5 21 97; www.capomannu.it), which offers a whole range of activities, including wind- and kite-surfing, diving, rock climbing, mountain-biking and trekking.

As a rough guide, reckon on €35 plus for a standard dive and about €50 for an excursion over to Isola di Male di Ventre.

Two weekday buses run to Putzu Idu from Oristano (€2, 55 minutes). In July and August, there are four additional services.

Riola Sardo

The single main reason to stop off at this otherwise drab town, is to stay at the wonderful **ourpick Hotel Lucrezia** (☎ 0783 41 20 78; www.hotel.lucrezia.it; Via Roma 14/a, Riola Sardo; s €85-100, d €130-160; ☎). Housed in an ancient *cortile* (courtyard house) it has rustically decorated

rooms surrounding an inner courtyard complete with wisteria-draped pergola, fig and citrus trees. Free bikes are provided, and the welcoming staff regularly organise cooking, painting and wine-tasting courses.

NORTH ORISTANO COAST

North of the Sinis Peninsula, there are some superb beaches in and around the popular resort of **Santa Caterina di Pittinuri**. These include **Spiaggia dell'Arco** at **S'Archittu**, and further south, **Is Arenas**, one of the longest beaches in the area. Nearby, **Camping Is Arena** (☎ 0783 5 21 03; www.campingisarenas.it; per person/tent & car €11/14, 2-person bungalow €35-55) is one of three camping grounds in the vicinity. Large and well-equipped, it has tent sites and bungalows immersed in pine trees.

Inland, the **Monti Ferru** massif (105m) is a beautiful and largely uncontaminated area of ancient forests, natural springs and small market towns. There's some great walking in the area and gourmets will enjoy the wonderful food.

From Oristano, five weekday buses run to Santa Caterina (€2, 40 minutes) and S'Archittu (€2, 40 minutes). Extra services are added in July and August.

LAGO OMEDEO CIRCUIT

Follow the SS131 north out of Oristano for the **Nuraghe Santa Cristina** (☎ 0785 5 54 38; admission incl Museo Archeologico-Etnografico in Paulilatino €5; ☎ 8.30am-sunset), an important *nuraghe* whose extraordinary Bronze Age *tempio a pozzo* (well-temple) is one of the best preserved in Sardinia. Finds from the site can be viewed a few kilometres up the road at Paulilatino's small **Museo Archeologico-Etnografico** (☎ 0785 5 54 38; Via Nazionale 127; admission incl Santa Cristina €5; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sun May-Sep, 9am-1pm & 3-5.30pm Tue-Sun Oct-Apr).

Just north of Paulilatino is another major *nuraghe*, the impressive **Nuraghe Losa** (☎ 0785 5 23 02; www.nuraghelosa.net; admission €3.50; ☎ 9am-1hr before sunset) dating from 1500 BC.

About 14km to the northeast, the unremarkable rural town of **Sedilo** explodes into life for the **Ardia** festival on 6 and 7 July, when an unruly pack of skilled horsemen race around a dusty track while crowds of up to 50,000 drink, hoot and fire guns into the air.

Your own transport is needed to get to most of these sights, although buses do run from

Oristano to Abbasanta (€2.50, 55 minutes), via Paulilatino. These will drop you within walking distance of Nuraghe Losa.

BOSA

pop 8080

Bosa is one of Sardinia's most attractive towns. Seen from a distance, its rainbow townscape resembles a vibrant Paul Klee canvas, with pastel houses stacked on a steep hillside, tapering up to a stark, grey castle. In front, moored fishing boats bob on the glassy Temo River and palm trees line an elegant riverfront. Three kilometres west, Bosa Marina, the town's satellite beach resort, is less obviously attractive with modern low-rise hotels, restaurants and holiday homes.

In the absence of a working tourist office the best place for information is the Casa Deriu museum on Corso Vittorio Emanuele, Bosa's main strip. Check emails at **Web Copy** (☎ 0785 37 20 49; Via Vincenzo Gioberti 12; per hr €4; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4.30-8pm Mon-Sat).

Sights & Activities

It's quite a climb up to Bosa's hilltop castle, **Castello Malaspina** (☎ 333 544 56 75; admission €2.50; ☎ 10am-12.30pm Sat & Sun or by reservation), built in 1112 by a noble Tuscan family. Note that these opening times often change, and it might well be open for longer over summer.

Down below, the **Museo Casa Deriu** (☎ 0785 37 70 43; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 59; adult/concession €4.50/3; ☎ 10am-1pm & 4-6pm Tue-Sun) illustrates the town's history, including a section on Bosa's old tanning industry. Also of interest is the Gothic-Romanesque **Cattedrale di San Pietro Extramuros** (☎ 10.30am-12.30pm Sat & Sun Oct-Apr, to 7pm May-Sep), 2km from the old bridge on the south bank of the Temo.

Bosa has much to offer outdoor enthusiasts. You can hire bikes and scooters at **Cuccu** (☎ 0785 37 54 16; Via Roma 5), a mechanics' on the southern side of the river – €8 per day for a bike and €40 for a scooter. At Bosa Marina, **Bosa Diving** (☎ 335 818 97 48; www.bosadiving.it, in Italian; Via Colombo 2) runs dives (from €35) and snorkelling excursions (€35), as well as hiring out canoes (double canoe €10 per hour) and dinghies (from €25 per hour).

Sleeping & Eating

ostello Malaspina (☎ 346 236 38 44; www.valevacanze.com; Via Sardegna 1; dm €16, d €20, q €75-85; ☎) A

rare year-round option at Bosa Marina, this functional hostel offers reliable institutional-style accommodation in six-person dorms, double and family rooms. It gets bonus points for the garden out back, the washing machines (€5), evening meals (€10 to €15) and canoe hire.

Bio Agriturismo Baines (☎ 339 209 0 967, 0785 37 31 29; www.agriturismobainasbosa.com; Via San Pietro; s €35-50, d €60-75, q €118-136, meals €20) Surrounded by fields of artichokes, olive and orange trees, this modest *agriturismo* is about a kilometre outside of town. There are few frills but the guest rooms in the small farmstead are clean and do the job well enough. Outside, there's a verandah with lovely, bucolic views.

ourpick Corte Fiorita (☎ 0785 37 70 58; www.albergo-diffuso.it; Via Lungo Temo de Gasperi 45; s €45-90, d €65-115; ☎ ☎) Corte Fiorita has beautiful, spacious rooms in four refurbished *palazzi* across town – one on the riverfront and three in the historic centre. No two rooms are exactly the same but you'll generally find plenty of exposed stonework, wooden beams and vaulted ceilings. Mini-apartments are also available for longer stays (€390 to €950 per week).

La Pulce Rossa (☎ 0785 37 56 57; Via Lungo Temo Amendola 1; pizzas €6, meals €25; ☎ Tue-Sun) A 20-minute walk from the centre, this friendly family-run restaurant serves filling working-man's fare at decidedly untouristy prices. For a real gut-buster try the house speciality, *pennette 'Pulce Rossa'*, a rich concoction of pasta, giant prawns, cream and saffron.

Sa Pischedda (☎ 0785 37 30 65; Via Roma 8; meals €30-35, pizzas €7; ☎ Wed-Mon, daily summer) At the hotel of the same name, this is one of Bosa's best restaurants. Speciality of the house is stylishly presented fish, both seawater and freshwater, but it also does excellent pizza and pasta. Reservations in summer are a good idea.

Getting There & Away

All buses terminate at Piazza Zanetti. There are services to and from Alghero (€3 to €4.50, 1½ hours, two daily), Sassari (€5.50, 2¼ hours, three daily) and Oristano (€5.50, two hours, six daily Monday to Saturday). Get tickets from the bus depot on Via Nazionale (opposite Sa Pischedda restaurant) or ask the driver.

NORTHERN SARDINIA

ALGHERO

pop 40,800

A smart medieval town, Alghero is the main resort in northwest Sardinia. But although it's largely given over to tourism, it has managed to avoid many of its worst excesses, and it retains a proud and independent spirit. The main focus is the picturesque historic centre, a tightly knit enclave of shady cobbled lanes, Gothic *palazzi* and cafe-lined squares, all enclosed by robust, honey-coloured sea walls. Hanging over everything is a palpable Spanish atmosphere, a hangover of the 14th century when Sardinia's Aragonese invaders tried to 'ethnically cleanse' Alghero by replacing the local populace with Catalan colonists.

Orientation

Alghero's historic centre is on a small promontory jutting into the sea. The new town stretches out behind it and along the northern coast. Intercity buses arrive in Via Catalogna, just outside the historic centre. The train station is about 1km north, on Via Don Minzoni.

Information

Bar Miramare (☎ 079 973 10 27; Via Gramsci 2; per hr €5; ☎ 8.30am-1pm & 4.30pm-2am) Internet access.

Farmacia Bulla (☎ 079 95 21 15; Via Garibaldi 13)

Laundry (Via Sassari 113/A; 7kg wash/dry €7/1.50; ☎ 8.30am-8.30pm)

Ospedale Civile (☎ 079 99 62 00; Via Don Minzoni) The main hospital.

Police station (☎ 079 972 00 00; Piazza della Mercedes 4)

Post office (Via Carducci 35)

Tourist office (☎ 079 97 90 54; www.comune.alghero.ss.it; Piazza Porta Terra 9; ☎ 8am-8pm daily, closed Sun in winter)

Sights & Activities

A leisurely stroll around Alghero's animated *centro storico* is a good way of getting into the holiday atmosphere. Overlooking Piazza Duomo, the oversized **Cattedrale di Santa Maria** (☎ 079 97 92 22; Piazza Duomo; ☎ 7am-noon & 5-7.30pm) is an odd mishmash of Moorish, baroque, Renaissance and other influences. Of greater interest is the **campanile** (bell tower; admission €2; ☎ 7-9.30pm Tue, Thu & Sat Jul & Aug, 5-8pm Tue, Thu, & Sat Sep, on request rest of year) around the back, a fine example of Catalan-Gothic architecture.

On the old town's main street, the **Chiesa di San Francesco** (☎ 079 97 92 58; Via Carlo Alberto; ☎ 7.30-noon & 5-8.30pm) hides some beautiful 14th-century cloisters behind an austere stone facade.

Several 14th-century towers remain from the medieval city, including **Torre Porta a Terra** (☎ 079 973 40 45; Piazza Porta Terra; adult/child €2.50/1.50; ☎ 9am-1pm & 6pm-11pm Mon-Sat Jul & Aug, 9.30am-1pm & 4.30-8pm Mon-Sat Apr-Jun & Sep, 9.30am-1pm Mon-Sat & 5-7pm Wed & Fri Oct-Mar) which was once one of the city's two main gates. It now houses a small multimedia museum dedicated to the city's past and a terrace with sweeping, 360-degree views.

To the north, the **Bastione della Maddalena**, with its eponymous tower, is the only extant remnant of the city's former land battlements. The Mediterranean crashes against the seaward walls of the **Bastioni di San Marco** and **Bastioni di Cristoforo Colombo**. Along these bulwarks are some inviting restaurants and bars where you can watch the sunset over a cocktail.

North of Alghero's yacht-jammed port, Via Garibaldi sweeps up to the town's beaches, **Spaggia di San Giovanni** and the adjacent **Spaggia di Maria Pia**. Nicer by far, though, are the beaches near Fertilia (see p857). From the port you can take boat trips along the impressive northern coast to **Capo Caccia** (p857). Prices range from about €40 to €100 per person.

Courses

Brush up on your Italian with a course at **Stroll & Speak** (☎ 339 489 93 14; www.strollandspeak.com; Via Cavour 4; 20hr class of 5 students, per person €180), an established language school in the historic centre.

Festivals & Events

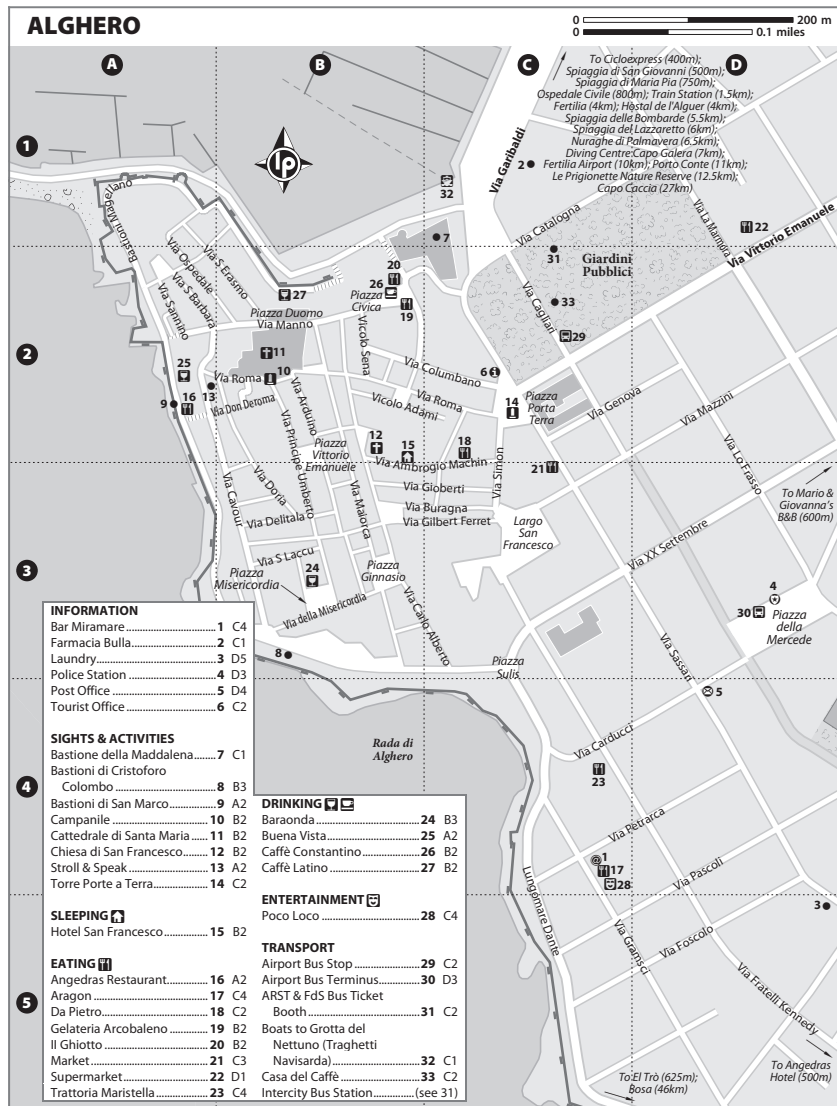
The **Estate Musicale Internazionale di Alghero** (International Summer of Music) is staged in July and August, and features classical music concerts in the evocative setting of the Chiesa di San Francesco cloister.

Sleeping

Booking ahead is a good idea year-round and essential in July and August.

Hostal de l'Alguer (☎ 079 93 04 78; www.alghero.hostel.com; Via Parenzo 79; dm €20, per person in d/tr & q €26/23, meal €10; ☎ ☎) About 4km north of town in Fertilia, this hostel is clean, friendly and characterless. You won't want to hang around much – single-sex dorms are in a series of prefabricated bungalows in a dusty compound – but

ALGHERO



if you're going to be on the beach all day, it's not a bad call.

Mario & Giovanna's B&B (☎ 339 890 35 63; www.marioandgiovanna.com; Via Canepa 51; d €50-80) Cheerfully cluttered with ornaments, paintings, and English porcelain, this B&B has three sunny rooms and a small courtyard garden. Located in the blander modern part

of town, it's about a 15-minute stroll to the historic centre. Mario also has self-catering apartments to rent.

Hotel San Francesco (☎ 079980330; www.sanfrancescohotel.com; Via Ambrogio Machin 2; s €52-63, d €82-101; 🚗 📶 📶) This is the only hotel in Alghero's *centro storico*. Housed in an ex-convent – monks still live on the 3rd floor – it has plain,

comfortable rooms set around an attractive 14th-century cloister. Wi-fi is available.

Anedras Hotel (☎ 079 973 50 34; www.angedras.it; Via Frank 2; d €75-120; ☹ ☹) A model of whitewashed Mediterranean style, the Anedras has cool, airy rooms with big French doors opening on to sunny patios. Its chic terrace is good for iced drinks on hot summer evenings.

Eating

Gelateria Arcobaleno (Piazza Civica 34) A tiny hole-in-the-wall gelateria on Alghero's showcase square. There are tonnes of flavours to choose from, including a divine *stracciatella*.

Il Ghiotto (☎ 079 97 48 20; Piazza Civica 23; meals €10-15; ☹ Tue-Sun) Fill up for as little as €10 from the tantalising lunchtime spread of *panini*, pastas, salads and main courses. There's seating in a dining area behind the main hall or outside on a busy window terrace.

Da Pietro (☎ 079 97 96 45; Via Ambrogio Machin 20; set menus €25-35; ☹ Thu-Tue) With its stone vaulted ceiling, intimate atmosphere and traditional menu, this is an archetypal Sardinian trattoria. If you've never had *ricci* (sea urchins), a prized local speciality, this is a good place to try them.

Trattoria Maristella (☎ 079 97 81 72; Via Fratelli Kennedy 9; meals €27; ☹ closed Sun dinner) Visitors and locals flock to this bustling little trattoria for reliable seafood and local specialities such as *culurgiones* (ravioli stuffed with potato, pecorino cheese and mint) and *crema catalana*, a delicious creamy dessert. Booking recommended.

Aragon (☎ 079 973 10 01; Via Gramsci 8; meals €30, pizzas €5; ☹ Tue-Sun) A big bustling restaurant-pizzeria just up from the seafloor. It gets fairly hectic and the service isn't exactly endearing but the wood-fired pizzas are superb and the pasta dishes are tasty and fresh.

Anedras Restaurant (☎ 079 973 50 78; www.angedrasrestaurant.it; Bastioni Marco Polo 41; meals €35; ☹ Wed-Mon) Dining on Alghero's honey-coloured stone ramparts is a memorable experience. This is one of the better restaurants on the walls, serving a largely traditional menu, including traditional roast suckling pig.

Self-caterers can stock up at Alghero's weekday **market** (Via Sassari 23) between Via Sassari and Via Cagliari. Otherwise, there's a **supermarket** (Via La Marmora 28) near the Giardini Pubblici.

Drinking

Baraonda (☎ 079 97 59 22; Piazza della Misericordia) Burgundy walls and black and white jazz photos set the tone at this moody wine bar. In summer, sit out on the piazza and watch the world parade by.

Caffè Latino (☎ 079 97 65 41; Bastioni Magellano 10; cocktails from €5) Up on the ramparts overlooking the port, this chic bar is a summer classic. Kick back on the grey rattan chairs, order from the ample menu, and listen to the breeze rattle the masts below you.

Caffè Costantino (☎ 079 97 61 54; Piazza Civica 31) The most famous cafe in town attracts a constant stream of tourists to its square-side tables. There's a full food menu, although if you just want to eat you'll get better value almost everywhere else.

our pick Buena Vista (Bastioni Marco Polo 47; cocktails €7) Fabulous mojitos, fresh fruit cocktails, golden views – what more could you want of a seafloor bar? Upbeat tunes and a cavernous interior add to the vibe at this popular bar on the western walls.

Entertainment

Poco Loco (☎ 079 973 10 34; Via Gramsci 8) An all-purpose venue with internet, beer on tap, pizza, live music and an upstairs bowling alley (closed Monday). The concert program covers a range of musical styles, but jazz and blues feature more than most.

El Trò (☎ 079 973 30 00; Via Lungomare Valencia 3) El Trò becomes a steamy mosh pit on hot summer weekends as hyped up holiday-makers boogie until dawn on the seafloor dance floor.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Fertilia airport (AHO; ☎ 079 93 50 39), 10km north of town, serves domestic flights to and from Italy, and **Ryanair** (www.ryanair.com) flights to and from London and Frankfurt.

BUS

Intercity buses stop at and leave from Via Catalagna, by the Giardini Pubblici. Buy tickets at the ticket office in the gardens.

Up to 11 daily buses run to and from Sassari (€2.50 to €3, one hour). There are also services to Porto Torres (€2.50, one hour, six daily) and Bosa (€4.50, 1½ hours, two daily).

TRAIN

The train station is 1.5km north of the old town on Via Don Minzoni. Up to 11 trains run to and from Sassari (€2.20, 35 minutes).

Getting Around

Hourly buses between 5am and 11pm travel between Via Cagliari and the airport (€1, 20 minutes).

Line AO runs from Via Cagliari to the beaches. For Fertilia and the youth hostel you can either take the airport bus or bus AF. Tickets are available at newsagents and *tabbachi* (tobacconists) across town.

Cicloexpress (☎ 079 98 69 50; www.cicloexpress.com; Via Garibaldi) hires out cars (from €55 per day), scooters (from €30) and bikes (from €8).

AROUND ALGHERO Along the Coast

A few kilometres west of Alghero are two favourite beaches: **Spiaggia delle Bombarde** and **Spiaggia del Lazzaretto**. Both are signposted off the main road, but if you've not got a car the Capo Caccia bus from Alghero passes nearby. Divers should continue westwards to the **Diving Centre Capo Galera** (☎ 079 94 21 10; www.capogalera.com; Località Capo Galera; d €65-100, dives from €20), which offers superlative diving in the Nereo Cave, the biggest underwater grotto in the Mediterranean, and cheerful accommodation in a big white villa.

Heading on to Porto Conte you'll pass the impressive **Nuraghe di Palmavera** (adult/child €3/1.50; ☎ 9am-7pm May-Sep, to 6pm Apr & Oct, 10am-2pm Nov-Mar), a 3500-year-old *nuraghic* village. You'll need your own transport to get there as the AF local bus from Alghero passes by but returns via an inland route, leaving you stranded.

Beyond the *nuraghe*, **Porto Conte** is a lovely unspoilt bay, centred on **Spiaggia Mugoni**, a good spot for windsurfing, canoeing, kayaking and sailing. Regular buses run between Porto Conte and Alghero (€1, 30 minutes, six daily).

Just west of Porto Conte at the base of Monte Timidone, **Le Prigionette Nature Reserve** (☎ 079 94 90 60; admission free but ID required; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Sat, to 5pm Sun) is home to deer, albino donkeys, Giara horses and wild boar. It has well-marked forest paths and tracks, suitable for walkers and cyclists.

At the end of the road, **Capo Caccia** is a dramatic cape jutting out high above the sea. From the car park, a vertiginous 654-step

staircase descends 110m of sheer cliff to the **Grotta di Nettuno** (☎ 079 94 65 40; adult/child €10/5; ☎ 9am-7pm), an underground fairyland of stalactites and stalagmites. If you don't fancy the staircase, there are ferries from Alghero – **Traghetti Navisarda** (☎ 079 95 06 03; adult/child return €14/7), departing hourly between 9am and 5pm from June to September, and four times daily in the rest of the year. Otherwise, there's a daily bus from Via Catalogna (€2, 50 minutes) which departs Alghero at 9.15am and returns at midday. From June to September, there are two extra runs at 3.10pm and 5.10pm, returning at 4.05pm and 6.05pm.

Those with transport should explore the flat, green land north of Capo Caccia. Hot spots include **Torre del Porticciolo**, a tiny natural harbour, backed by a small arc of beach, and 6km to the north, one of the island's longest stretches of wild sandy beach, **Porto Ferro**.

Inland

About 7km north of Alghero, just to the left (west) of the road to Porto Torres, lie scattered the ancient burial chambers of the **Necropoli di Anghelu Ruii** (adult/child €3/1.50; ☎ 9am-7pm May-Sep, to 6pm Apr & Oct, 10am-2pm Nov-Mar). The 38 tombs carved into the rock, known as *domus de janas*, date from between 3300 BC and 2700 BC.

Further up the road is the 650-hectare estate of Sardinia's top wine producer, **Sella e Mosca** (☎ 079 99 77 00; www.sellaemosca.com). Here you can join a free guided tour of the estate's **museum** (☎ 5.30pm Mon-Sat end Jun-Oct, by request rest of the year) and stock up at the **enoteca** (wine shop; ☎ 8.30am-1pm & 3-6.30pm Mon-Sat year-round, plus 8.30-8pm Sun mid-Jun–end Sep).

SASSARI

pop 129,085

Sardinia's second city is a proud and cultured university town with a medieval heart and a modern outlook. It's not an immediately appealing place but once you've broken through the drab outskirts you'll discover a grand centre and an evocative, lived-in historical core. You probably won't want to stay long – there's not that much to see – but if you need a shot of urban energy you'll find plenty of life in the student bars and excellent restaurants.

The city's golden age came in the 14th century, firstly as capital of the medieval Giudicato di Logudoro and then as an

In the heart of the *centro storico*, Sassari's **Duomo** (Piazza Duomo; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 4-7.30pm) dazzles with its 18th-century baroque facade, a giddy free-for-all of statues, reliefs, friezes and busts. Inside, the cathedral reverts to its original Gothic character.

Festivals & Events

One of Sardinia's most high-profile festivals, the **Cavalcata Sarda** is held on the second-last Sunday of May. Costumed processions and acrobatic horse riding are accompanied by much high-spirited singing and dancing.

A second big festival is **I Candelieri**, held every 14 August. Teams wearing medieval costume and representing various 16th-century guilds bear nine wooden columns (the 'candlesticks') through the town.

Sleeping

B&B Casachia (☎ 079 200 50 52, mobile 339 695 71 18; www.casachia.net; Vicola Bertolinis 7; s/d €30/60; ☑) In the buzzing uni area, this is a laid-back B&B with a breezy, homey atmosphere. Resembling a well-kept student flat, it's got three colourful bedrooms, a dining room and a cheerfully cluttered kitchen.

Hotel Vittorio Emanuele (☎ 079 23 55 38; www.hotelvittorioemanuele.ss.it, in Italian; Corso Vittorio Emanuele II 100-102; s €50-65, d €70-89; ☑ ☑) Housed in a medieval *palazzo*, this good-value three-star is awash with antiques and colourful paintings. Rooms are spacious if sterile with their corporate white-grey decor. Weekend discounts are available.

Eating & Drinking

Fainè alla Genovese Sassu (Via Usai 17; fainè €5; ☎ 7-11pm Thu-Tue) This no-frills spot is the place to fill up on *fainè*, a cross between a pancake and pizza. There's nothing else on the menu but with a wide range of toppings, you should find something to suit your tastes.

Trattoria Da Antonio (☎ 079 23 42 97; Via Arborea 2/b; meals €20; ☎ Tue-Sun) Affectionately known as *Lu Panzone* (the Big Belly), this boisterous, old-school trattoria does a great line in homespun, no-nonsense food. Think antipasti of salami, ham and cheese followed by steaming portions of pasta and hunks of grilled meat.

Trattoria Da Gesuino (☎ 079 27 33 92; Via Torres 17g; meals €30, pizzas €6.50; ☎ Mon-Sat) Hidden away in the newer part of town, Da Gesuino hits exactly the right tone. It's relaxed but service is efficient, the interior is inviting and the food

is excellent. Pizzas are always a good choice as is the delicious risotto.

Accademia (Via Torre Tonda 11; ☎ Mon-Sat) A cool bar in the buzzing university district. With tables in an attractive wrought-iron pavilion it gets very busy at lunchtime and on Friday and Saturday nights, when it stays open late.

Getting There & Away

At the time of research Sassari's main bus station on Via XXV Aprile was being dug up and a temporary terminus had been set up at Via Padre Zirano. By the time you read this, service should have returned to normal but there's no guarantee. Buses from Sassari connect with Alghero (€2.50 to €3, one hour, 11 daily), Porto Torres (€1.50, 35 minutes, hourly), Castelsardo (€2.50, one hour, 11 Monday to Saturday), Nuoro (€7.50 to €9.50, 2½ hours, seven daily) and Oristano (€7.50 to €9.50, two hours, three daily).

For Cagliari (€15, 3¼ hours, five daily) and Olbia (€7, two hours, four daily), you're better off taking the train. The train station is just beyond the western end of the old town on Piazza Stazione.

AROUND SASSARI

The countryside south and east of Sassari is a patchwork of rugged slopes and golden wheat fields peppered by delightful Romanesque churches built in a rough Tuscan style by the Pisans. The most impressive is the **Basilica della Santissima Trinità di Saccargia** (admission €1.50; ☎ 9am-8pm Jun-Aug, to 6.30pm Sep, to 6pm May, to 5.30pm Oct, to 5pm Apr, to 4.30pm Mar) about 18km southeast of Sassari on the SS597 road to Olbia.

Some 25km south, near Torralba, the **Nuraghe Santu Antine** (☎ 079 84 72 96; www.nuraghesantuantine.it; ☎ currently closed for restoration) is one of Sardinia's most interesting *nuraghe* sites dating from about 1600 BC. On weekdays, there are up to eight buses from Sassari to Torralba (€2.50, 1½ hours), although to get to the *nuraghe* from the village you'll have to walk about 4km.

On the coast north of Sassari, there are popular beaches at **Platamona** and **Marina di Sorso**, both accessible by the summer Buddi Buddi bus (line MP) from Via Eugenio Tavolara.

From here, the SS200 hugs the coast up to **Castelsardo**, a picturesque town with a dramatic medieval centre rising out of a rocky seafront peak. Regular buses run from Sassari (€2.50, one hour, 11 Monday to Saturday).

PORTO TORRES

pop 22,080

A busy working port surrounded by a fuming petrochemical plant, Porto Torres is no picture. But if you find yourself passing through – and you might, if heading to Corsica – take an hour or so to visit the impressive Basilica di San Gavino.

You can get information about the town and environs from the helpful **tourist office** (☎ 079 500 87 11; www.comune.porto-torres.it; Piazza Garibaldi 17; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat).

About 1km from the port up Corso Vittorio Emanuele, the **Basilica di San Gavino** (☎ 347 400 12 88; crypt €1.50; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm May-Sep, 9am-1pm & 3-6pm Oct-Apr) is Sardinia's largest Romanesque church. Built between 1030 and 1080 to honour three Roman-era Christian martyrs, it is notable for the apses on either end – there is no facade – and its two-dozen marble columns, pilfered by the Pisan builders from the nearby Roman site. Underneath, a crypt is lined with religious statuary and stone tombs.

If you want to stopover in Porto Torres, **Hotel Elisa** (☎ 079 51 32 60; www.hotelelisaportotorres.com; Via Mare 2; s €50-55, d €70-80; ☎) is a straightforward three-star place with functional, modern rooms and a convenient seafront location.

Buses leave from Via Mare for Sassari (€1.50, 35 minutes, hourly), Alghero (€2.50, one hour, six daily) and Stintino (€2.50, 30 minutes, five daily). For information on ferries, see p835.

STINTINO & PARCO NAZIONALE DELL'ASINARA

Once a forgotten fishing village, Stintino is now a sunny little resort and a good base for exploring the surrounding area. There are some fine beaches in these parts but pick of the bunch is the **Spiaggia della Pelosa**, a salt-white strip of sand fronted by shallow, turquoise waters and strange, low-lying licks of land. On the road to Pelosa beach, the **Asinara Diving Centre** (☎ 079 52 70 00; www.asinaradivingcenter.it; Porto dell'Ancora) offers a range of dives starting at about €35. On the beach itself, the **Windsurfing Center Stintino** (☎ 079 52 70 06; www.windsurfingcenter.it) rents out windsurfers (€15 per hour) and canoes (from €8 per hour).

Over the water from Pelosa lies Isola Asinara, home to native *asini bianchi* (albino donkeys), and until recently off-limits due to its maximum-security prison. The prison is now closed and the island

has been designated a national park, **Parco Nazionale dell'Asinara** (www.parcosasinara.org). From Stintino, **Linea del Parco** (☎ 079 52 31 18; Porto Mannu) offers a number of packages including bus/jeep tours (€36/55) and yacht/fishing boat excursions (€60/65 including lunch). If you want to visit on your own you'll have to take a bike as there's no public transport on the island and access is limited to certain restricted areas. Reckon on €22 for transport with bike and park admission.

Accommodation in the area is mainly in large, resort-style hotels but there are some pleasant lower-key choices. In Stintino, **Albergo Silvestrino** (☎ 079 52 34 73; www.silvestrino.it, in Italian; Via XXI Aprile 4; d €70-110, half-board per person €60-95; ☎ ☎) is a summery three-star place with cool tiled rooms and an excellent seafood restaurant (meals €35).

At laid-back **Lu Famili** (☎ 079 52 30 54; Lungomare C Colombo 89; meals €28, pizzas from €5.50) you can watch boats bob by as you dig into reliably good pizzas and seafood classics such as *calamari e seppie grigliati* (grilled calamari and cuttlefish).

There are five weekday buses to Stintino from Porto Torres (€2.50, 30 minutes) and Sassari (€4, one hour 10 minutes). Services are increased between June and September.

SANTA TERESA DI GALLURA

pop 5050

One of the main resorts on Gallura's northern coast, Santa Teresa di Gallura boasts a great seafront location and a young, laid-back summer vibe. It gets extremely busy in August yet somehow manages to retain a distinct local character, making it an agreeable alternative to the more soulless resorts on the Costa Smeralda. Nearby, Capo Testa is famous for its surreal wind-sculpted rocks, while over the water Corsica is a short ferry-hop away.

Information

Tourist office (☎ 0789 75 41 27; www.comune.santateresagallura.it; Piazza Vittorio Emanuele 24; ☎ 9am-midnight daily Jun-Sep, 9am-1pm Mon-Fri & 4-6pm Tue & Wed Oct-May) Has loads of useful information.
Bar Sport (Via Mazzini 7; per hr €5; ☎ 6am-midnight) Internet access is available here.

Sights & Activities

When not on the beach, most people hang out in the centre, eyeing-up fellow holiday-makers

and lounging around cafe-lined Piazza Vittorio Emanuele. Otherwise, you can wander up to the 16th-century **Torre di Longonsardo** near the entrance to the town's idyllic (but crowded) **Spaggianna Rena Bianca**.

Four kilometres west of Santa Teresa, **Capo Testa** resembles a bizarre sculptural garden. Giant boulders lay strewn about the grassy slopes, their weird and wonderful forms the result of centuries of wind erosion. On the way from town you'll pass by a couple of pleasant beaches – **Rena di Levante** and **Rena di Ponente**.

To stretch your legs you can rent bikes from **Global** (☎ 0789 75 50 80; Piazza San Vittorio 7; ☹ 9am–1pm) near the central piazza. Go diving with **Ildra Diving** (☎ 348 802 66 72; www.ildradiving.it; Camping Arcobaleno), whose prices start at about €40.

Sleeping & Eating

There are many hotels though most only open from Easter to October. In August you may have to pay *mezza pensione* (half-board).

Camping La Lìccia (☎ /fax 0789 75 51 90; www.camping.lalìccia.com; SP for Castelsardo km59; per person & tent/car €13/3, 2-person bungalow €50–96; ☹ May–Sep) This slick seaside camping ground is 5km west of town on the road towards Castelsardo. Its situated in typical scrubland and boasts extensive facilities including a restaurant, playground and sports area.

Hotel Moderno (☎ 0789 75 42 33, 0789 75 51 08; www.modernohotel.eu; Via Umberto 39; s €45–65, d €62–130; ☹ Easter–Oct; ☹) This is a homey, family-run *pensione* near the central piazza. Rooms are bright and airy with little overt decor but traditional blue-and-white Gallurese bedspreads and tiny balconies.

Caffè Mediterraneo (☎ 0789 75 90 14; Via Amsicora 7; cocktails €6.50, panini €3.50) With its arched windows and polished-wood bar, this stylish cafe attracts a young, good-looking crowd.

Ristorante Pizzeria La Lampara (☎ 0789 74 10 93; Via S. Pertini; pizzas from €5.30, meals €30; ☹ Wed–Mon) Down in a residential neighbourhood, this informal spot is popular with locals and visitors alike. Sit down on the roadside terrace and tuck into local speciality *ravioli Galluresi dolci* (sweet ravioli) or a crunchy *fritto misto* (mixed fish fry).

Il Grottino (☎ 0789 75 42 32; Via del Mare; pizzas from €5, meals €30; ☹ closed Feb & Mar) Il Grottino sets a rustic picture with bare grey stone walls and warm, low lighting. The food is similarly wholesome with hearty, no-nonsense pastas, fresh seafood and juicy steaks.

Getting There & Around

From the bus terminus on Via Eleonora d'Arborea, buses run to and from Olbia (€4.50, 1½ hours, five daily) and Sassari (€6.50, 2½ hours, three daily).

For information on ferries to Bonifacio in Corsica, see p835.

PALAU & ARCIPELAGO DI LA MADDALENA

On Sardinia's northeastern tip, Palau is a well-to-do summer resort crowded with surf shops, boutiques, bars and restaurants. From here year-round ferries make the short crossing over to **Isola della Maddalena**, the biggest of the more than 60 islands and islets that comprise the **Parco Nazionale dell'Arcipelago di La Maddalena** (www.lamaddalenapark.it). An area of spectacular, windswept seascapes, La Maddalena is best explored by boat, although the two main islands have plenty of charm with their sun-baked ochre buildings, cobbled piazzas and infectious holiday atmosphere. Up to 60 other islets are sprinkled round about, including Isola Spargi, Isola Santa Maria, Isola Budelli and Isola Razzoli.

Information is available at tourist offices in **Palau** (☎ 0789 70 70 25; www.palau.it; Piazza Fresi; 9am–1pm & 4–6pm Mon–Sat Oct–May, 9am–1pm & 5–8pm Mon–Sat Jun–Sep) and in **La Maddalena** (☎ 0789 73 63 21; www.lamaddalena.com; Cala Gavetta; ☹ 8.30am–1.30pm Mon–Fri & 3.30–5.30pm Mon & Wed).

Sights & Activities

The main activity in these parts is beach-bumming or boating around the islands. Down at the port in Palau, **Petagus** (☎ 0789 70 86 81; www.petagus.it) offers trips, which include lunch and several swimming stops, for €30 to €40 per person. On La Maddalena, operators congregate around Cala Mangiavolpe.

Windsurfers converge on **Porto Pollo**, about 7km west of Palau, for some of the best wind conditions on the island. You can also try kite-surfing, canoeing, diving and sailing, with kit and lessons available along the beachfront.

There's also some excellent diving in the marine park. In Palau, **Nautilus** (☎ 0789 70 90 58; www.divesardegna.com; Piazza Fresi 8, Palau) runs dives from €45.

Linked to La Maddalena by a narrow causeway is **Isola Caprera**, a tiny island where Giuseppe Garibaldi once lived. His home, the **Compendio Garibaldi** (☎ 0789 72 71 62; adult/

child €5/2.50; ☎ 9am-1.30pm Tue-Sun & 2.30-7pm Tue-Sat Jun-Sep, 9am-1.30pm Tue-Sun Oct-May), is visitable by guided tours (in Italian) only.

About 1.5km north of the Compendio, a walking trail drops down to the steep and secluded **Cala Coticcio** beach. Marginally easier to get to is **Cala Brigantina** (signposted), southeast of the complex.

Sleeping

Camping Baia Sardegna (☎ 0789 70 94 03; www.baia.saraceno.com; per person incl tent & car €18, 2-person bungalow €45-87; Località Punta Nera; ☎ Mar-Oct) Beautifully located on Palau's beach, this is a lovely spot to rest up. Pine trees provide shade for tents and bungalows, and the on-site restaurant-pizzeria means you don't have to go far to eat.

Hotel La Roccia (☎ 0789 70 95 28; www.hotellaroccia.com; Via dei Mille 15; s €50-90, d €78-150; ☎ Easter-Oct; P ☎) Lovely three-star La Roccia boasts simple, sun-filled white rooms and a festive blue and white boating decor. If possible go for a room with a seaview balcony.

Hotel Miralunga (☎ 0789 72 25 63; Strada Panoramica; www.miralunga.it; d €90-140, half-board per person €55-105; P ☎) A big modern affair west of the town centre, the Miralunga is one of Maddalena's few year-round hotels. Its bright, airy rooms are functional more than inviting but the views are great and the staff are friendly.

Eating

Osteria Enoteca da Liò (☎ 0789 73 75 07; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 2-6; sea/land menus €15/18) Go through the pretty ivy-clad exterior to enter this historic osteria, on the go since 1890. Don't expect fusion frills, just hearty bowls of steaming pasta and fish grilled straight off the boat.

Trattoria Pizzeria L'Olimpico (☎ 0789 73 77 95; Via Principe Amedeo 45-47; pizzas €6, meals €25-30; ☎ Wed-Mon) Escape the obvious tourist traps to this popular local eatery in the bland streets east of Maddalena's centre. The food is excellent – pizzas and the usual array of pastas, meats and seafood – and the friendly service a real pleasure.

San Giorgio (☎ 0789 70 80 07; Vicolo La Maddalena 4; pizzas €7, meals €30; ☎ closed Mon winter) One of the best eateries in Palau, this pizzeria-cum-restaurant is housed in a large chalet-style building near Hotel La Roccia. The pizzas are pretty good but pride of place goes to the spaghetti *allo scoglio* (with mixed seafood).

Opposite the port on La Maddalena you'll find a useful **Despar supermarket** (Via Giovanni Amendola 3).

Getting There & Around

Buses connect Palau with Olbia (€3, 1½ hours, 10 daily), Santa Teresa di Gallura (€2, 40 minutes, five daily) and Arzachena (€1, 20 minutes, eight daily). In summer, **Nicos-Caramelli** (☎ 0789 67 06 13) run buses to Porto Pollo (€1.50, 35 minutes), Baia Sardinia (€4, 35 minutes) and Porto Cervo (€4, 50 minutes).

All buses leave from the port.

Ferries to La Maddalena are operated by three companies: **Enermar** (☎ 899 20 00 01; www.enermar.it), **Saremar** (☎ 892 123; www.saremar.it), and **Delcomar** (☎ 0789 73 90 88; www.delcomar.it). Delcomar runs four night crossings between half past midnight and 4.30am, and the other two have crossings every half-hour between 6.15am and 11.45pm. The 20-minute trip costs single/return €5/9 and €13 for a small car.

COSTA SMERALDA & AROUND

Stretching 55km from the Golfo di Arzachena to Porto Rotondo, the Costa Smeralda (Emerald Coast) is Sardinia's most fêted summer destination, a gilded enclave of luxury hotels, secluded beaches and exclusive marinas. The area was first developed by the Aga Khan in the 1960s and soon became a favourite of the European jet set. It still is and every summer paparazzi swarm to the area hoping to snap celebs in compromising clinches. But despite all the superficial fluff, it's a stunning stretch of coast with great granite mountains plunging into emerald waters in a series of dramatic fjord-like inlets.

The Costa's capital is **Porto Cervo**, a weird, artificial town whose pseudo-Moroccan architecture and perfectly manicured streets give it a strangely sterile atmosphere. Out of season, there's virtually no one around, but between June and September this is party central with tanned beauties posing on the **Piazzetta** and cashed-up shoppers perusing the designer boutiques.

The coast's best beaches are all within striking distance of Porto Cervo. To the west, **Baia Sardinia** faces onto a gorgeous strip of sand, while to the south, aficionados head for **Capriccioli** and **Spiaggia Liscia Ruia**, both near the exclusive Hotel Cala di Volpe, and **Spiaggia del Principe**, near the signposted Hotel Romazzino.

Inland, the rustic village of **San Pantaleo** merits a quick look, particularly on summer evenings when its picturesque piazza hosts a bustling market. Further on, the workaday town of **Arzachena** offers some great accommodation

and a number of interesting archaeological sites, including the **Nuraghe di Albuiccu** (admission €5; ☎ 9am-7pm mid-Mar–mid-Oct) on the main Olbia road, and **Coddu Ecchju** (admission €5; ☎ 9am-7pm mid-Mar–mid-Oct), one of Sardinia's most important *tombe di giganti*.

Sleeping & Eating

Villaggio Camping La Cugnana (☎ 0789 3 31 84; www.campingcugnana.it; Località Cugnana; per person & tent/car €18/4.50, 2-person bungalow per week €270-610; ☎ May-Sep; 🚰) One of the very few budget options on the Costa, this slick, seaside camping ground is on the main road just north of Porto Rotondo. It has a supermarket, swimming pool and free beach shuttle bus.

La Villa Giulia (☎ 0789 9 86 29 or 348 511 12 69; www.lavillagiulia.it; Monticanaglia; d €69-89; ☎ Apr-Nov) Also calling itself B&B Costa Smeralda, this wonderful B&B sits in glorious isolation at the top of a tough dirt track. Rooms, with their homey furnishings and jolly tiled bathrooms, are modest, but the lovely natural surroundings and spectacular rates make it a real winner.

B&B Lu Pastruccialeddu (☎ 0789 8 17 77; www.pastruccialeddu.com; Località Lu Pastruccialeddu, Arzachena; s €50-100, d €70-120; 🍷 🍷) This is the real McCoy, a smashing *agriturismo* housed in a typical stone farmstead. It's run by the ultra-hospitable Caterina Ruzittu, who prepares the sumptuous breakfasts and keeps the seven simple rooms in pristine nick. Outside, a swimming pool shimmers in the lush green garden.

Il Fungo (☎ 0789 8 33 40; Via Lamarmora 21; pizzas from €5, meal €30; ☎ closed Wed winter) Wood-fired pizza and cracking seafood are the hallmarks of this cheerful restaurant in Arzachena. Locals come to grab a takeaway and chat with the *pizzaiola* (pizza maker) while out-of-towners sit down to huge helpings of fresh fish and juicy chargrilled steaks.

Il Peperone (☎ 0789 90 70 49; cnr Via Cerbiatta & Via Sa Conca; meals €35-40; ☎ Easter-Oct) This is a traditional pizzeria-cum-restaurant on the main road into Porto Cervo. There's nothing spectacular about the food but the pizzas are pretty good and the atmosphere is convivial.

For self-caterers and picnickers there's a **Despar supermarket** (Piazza Principe Porto Cervo), just outside the resort centre.

Getting There & Away

Between June and September, **Sun Lines** (☎ 348 260 98 81) operates buses from Olbia airport

to the Costa Smeralda, stopping at Porto Cervo and various other points along the coast. During the rest of the year, there's one daily bus between Porto Cervo and Olbia (€3, 1½ hours).

For Arzachena there are regular year-round services to and from Olbia (€2, 45 minutes, eight daily).

OLBIA

pop 60,000

Surrounded by industrial sprawl and thunderous roads, Olbia is a busy and unsightly transport hub. It's neither an easy place to warm to, nor is it as bad as it might at first seem. There's a small, well-kept *centro storico* and the main pedestrianised strip is a fun place to hang out on warm summer evenings.

Orientation

Ferries arrive at the Stazione Marittima (terminal) 1km east of town and the local bus 9 goes to the centre. Most interest lies in or around pedestrianised Corso Umberto, which runs from the waterfront to the train station.

Information

Inter Smeraldo (Via Porto Romano 8b; per hr €5;

☎ 9.45am-1.15pm & 4-8.30pm Mon-Sat) For internet.

Tourist office (☎ 0789 55 77 32; www.olbiaturismo.it; Via Nanni 39; ☎ 8am-2pm Mon-Fri & 3-6pm Mon-Thu) Near the causeway that leads to the port.

Sights

There's precious little to visit in Olbia apart from the Romanesque **Chiesa di San Simplicio** (Via San Simplicio; ☎ 7.30am-1pm & 3.30-6pm). Built entirely of granite in the late 11th century, it is a curious mix of Tuscan and Lombard styles.

To the south of Corso Umberto, the tightly packed warren of streets that represent the original fishing village have a certain charm, particularly in the evening when the cafes and trattorias fill with groups of hungry locals.

Sleeping

Hotel Cavour (☎ 0789 20 40 33; www.cavourhotel.it; Via Cavour 22; s €50-65, d €75-90; 🍷 🍷) An inviting hotel in Olbia's old town. Rooms are simple white affairs with unfussy furniture, pastel fabrics and double-glazed windows – a necessity given the noise from the lively streets below.

Hotel Terranova (☎ 0789 2 23 95; www.hotelterranova.it; Via Garibaldi 3; s €40-80, d €70-130; 🍷 🍷 🍷) On a narrow lane in the heart of the action, this

is a friendly, family-run three-star hotel with small, cosy rooms and a highly rated restaurant, **Ristorante Da Gesuino** (meals €35 to €40), specialising in seafood. Parking costs €7.

Eating & Drinking

Antica Trattoria (☎ 0789 2 40 53; Via Pala 4; fixed menus €15/19.80/25, meals €23; ☒ Mon-Sat) Welcome to antipasto heaven. Trays of marinated anchovies, vegetables in olive oil, creamy potato salad and a whole lot more, just sit there waiting to be eaten. There's also excellent pizza, pastas and failsafe meat dishes.

La Lanterna (☎ 0789 2 30 82; Via Olbia 13; pizzas €8, meals €30; ☒ Thu-Tue winter, daily summer) The Lanterna distinguishes itself with its cosy subterranean setting and beautifully fresh food. Start off with sweet-and-sour sardines and move on to almond-crusted bream served with a celery and pepper sauce.

Enoteca Cosimino (☎ 0789 21 00 13; Piazza Margherita 3) A cafe by day and elegant wine bar in the evening, Enoteca Cosimino is on Piazza Margherita, Olbia's main cafe strip. Cocktails cost around €7.50 and there's a comprehensive list of local wines.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Olbia's **Aeroporto Olbia Costa Smeralda** (OLB; ☎ 0789 56 34 44; www.geasar.it) is about 5km southeast of the centre and handles flights from most mainland Italian airports, as well as international flights from a number of European cities.

BOAT

Regular ferries arrive in Olbia from Genoa, Civitavecchia and Livorno. Book tickets at travel agents in town, or directly at the port. For further route details see p835.

BUS

Buses run from Olbia to Arzachena (€2, 45 minutes, eight daily), Golfo Aranci (€1.50, 25 minutes, six daily from mid-June to mid-September) and Porto Cervo (€3, 1½ hours, one daily). Further afield you can get to Santa Teresa di Gallura (€4.50, 1½ hours, five daily), Nuoro (€7.50, 2½ hours, five daily), and Dorgali (€7.50, 2¾ hours, two daily). Get tickets from **Café Adel** (Corso Vittorio Veneto 2), just over the road from the main bus stops.

Local bus 2 (€0.80 or €1.30 if ticket is bought on board) runs half-hourly between

7.30am and 8pm between the airport and Via Goffredo Mameli in the centre.

TRAIN

The train station is just off Corso Umberto. Trains run to Sassari (€7, two hours, four daily) and Golfo Aranci (€2.20, 25 minutes, five daily).

GOLFO ARANCI

Some 18km northeast of Olbia, Golfo Aranci is an important summer port – see p835 for route information. Most people pass through without a second glance and while it's not an especially beautiful place, it's not unpleasant and has three sandy white beaches. Regular buses and trains run to Olbia.

EASTERN SARDINIA

Considered Sardinia's traditional heartland, Eastern Sardinia is an area of unsurpassed natural beauty. From the great grey mountains of the Supramonte to the Golfo di Orosei's breathtaking coastline and the vast, empty valleys of the Ogliastra, this is one of Sardinia's great untamed wildernesses. A paradise for outdoor enthusiasts, it boasts exhilarating trekking, cycling and climbing, as well as myriad water-borne possibilities.

For centuries this uncompromising landscape kept the world at bay and even now there's a palpable sense of isolation, particularly in the inland Barbagia district. As a result traditions have survived and it's not uncommon to see elderly women wearing traditional black dress.

Although larger towns are accessible by bus, you'll get far more out of the area with your own transport.

NUORO

pop 36,495

A scruffy and not immediately likeable town, Nuoro does little to endear itself. But scratch beneath the surface and you'll discover a proud, hospitable city, sustained by long-held traditions and a deep-grained culture. Nobel prize-winning author Grazia Deledda was born here and its museums, some of the island's best, open a fascinating window onto the area's rural identity.

By the end of the 18th century Nuoro barely numbered 3000 inhabitants but it was the only real 'urban' centre in a world of subsistence

farming and banditry. The town took off after being made provincial capital in 1927.

Orientation & Information

The historic centre, in Nuoro's northeastern corner, is based around pedestrianised Corso Garibaldi. The train and bus station are west of the city centre. Information is available at two offices, both helpful: **Punto Informa** (☎ 0784 3 87 77; Corso Garibaldi 155; ☹ 9am-1pm & 3.30-7pm Mon-Sat) in the *centro storico*, and the official **tourist office** (☎ 0784 23 88 78; Piazza Italia 7; ☹ 9am-7pm daily May-Sep, 9am-1pm & 3-5pm Mon-Fri Oct-Apr).

Sights

Nuoro has various museums but two stand out. The **Museo della Vita e delle Tradizioni Sarde** (☎ 0784 25 70 35; Via Antonio Mereu 56; adult/child €3/1; ☹ 9am-8pm daily mid-Jun-Sep, 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Tue-Sun Oct-mid-Jun) provides a fascinating insight into Sardinian traditions, folklores, superstitions and celebrations. Its pièce de résistance is the colourful display of traditional costumes.

Up in the oldest part of town, the birthplace of Grazia Deledda has been converted into a lovely little museum, the **Museo Deleddiano** (☎ 0784 25 80 88; Via Grazia Deledda 42; admission free; ☹ 9am-8pm daily mid-Jun-Sep, 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Tue-Sun Oct-mid-Jun). The rooms, full of Deledda memorabilia, have been carefully restored to show what a well-to-do 19th-century Nuorese house actually looked like.

About 7km northeast of Nuoro, **Monte Ortobene** (955m) is capped by a 7m-high bronze statue of the Redentore (Christ the Redeemer) and covered in thick woods. Local bus 8 runs up to the mountain from Via Manzoni (€1.10, twice daily mid-September to mid-June, 14 times daily mid-June to mid-September).

Festivals & Events

The **Sagra del Redentore** (Feast of Christ the Redeemer) in the last week of August is the main event in Nuoro, and one of Sardinia's most exuberant festivals with parades, live music and a torchlit procession.

Sleeping & Eating

Casa Solotti (☎ 0784 3 39 54; www.casasolotti.it; per person €26-35) This welcoming B&B is set in a rambling garden near the top of Monte Ortobene. Surrounded by woods and walking trails, it's a relaxed place with modest rooms and a pleasant, family atmosphere. Horseback riding, packed lunches and evening meals can be arranged.

Hotel Grillo (☎ 0784 3 86 78; www.grillohotel.it; Via Monsignor Melas 14; s €65-75, d €91-110; ♿ ☎) The most central of Nuoro's five officially listed hotels, the Grillo is not an especially thrilling choice, but rooms are comfortable enough and the restaurant serves earthy Sardinian grub (meals €22 to €30). Wi-fi is available.

ourpick Il Rifugio (☎ 0784 23 23 55; Via Antonio Mereu 28-36; pizzas from €5, meals €30; ☹ Thu-Tue) Head down to this laid-back, local favourite for great pizzas and delicious Sardinian fare. Lamb features heavily on the menu, starring in dishes such as *pecora in cassola alla nuorese con cipolline e funghi* (Nuoro-style lamb with onions and mushrooms).

Getting There & Away

From the main bus station on Viale Sardegna there are services to Dorgali (€2.50, 45 minutes, six daily), Santa Maria Navarrese (€6.50, two hours 25 minutes, five daily), Tortolì (€6.50, two hours 40 minutes, five daily), Olbia (€7.50, 2½ hours, five daily), Oristano (€6.50, 2½ hours, six daily), Sassari (€7.50 to €9.50, 2½ hours, seven daily) and Cagliari (€14.50, 2½ to five hours, two daily). There are also regular buses to Oliena (€1, 20 minutes) and Orgosolo (€1.50, 35 minutes).

NORTH OF NUORO

Set in dramatic hill country near the dusty town of **Orune**, the **Fonte Sacra Su Tempiesu** (☎ 0784 27 67 16; adult/child €3/2; ☹ 9am-7pm daily Jun-Sep, to 5pm Oct-May) is a sophisticated and elegant *nuraghic* well temple, dating from the 2nd millennium BC. Its distinguishing feature is the strange keyhole-shaped entrance to the well.

Getting there is a problem if you don't have your own transport as buses only go as far as Orune, some 5km from the site.

SUPRAMONTE

Southeast of Nuoro rises the foreboding limestone massif of the Supramonte, its sheer walls like an iron curtain just beyond Oliena. This thrilling landscape forms the landward section of the **Parco Nazionale del Golfo di Orosei e del Gennargentu**, Sardinia's largest national park.

Oliena

pop 7500

From Nuoro you can see the multicoloured rooftops of Oliena cupped in the palm of Monte Corraisi. An atmospheric place with a

grey stone centre and a magnificent setting, it was founded in Roman times and is today famous its blood-red Cannonau wine and traditional Easter celebrations.

The best source of information is **Tourpass** (☎ 0784 28 60 78; www.galaveras.it; Corso Deledda 32; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Sat Mar-Nov, 9.30am-1pm & 4-7pm Mon-Fri Dec-Feb), which can advise on activities in the area, as well as providing internet access (€1 per 15 minutes), bike hire (€10 per half-day), and an accommodation booking service.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Piazza Santa Maria is the site of the Saturday market and the 13th-century **Chiesa di Santa Maria**. There are several other wonderful old churches here, including the blessedly simple 14th-century **Chiesa di San Lussorio** (Via Cavour).

The village's usual sleepy torpor is shattered on Easter Sunday for *S'Incontru* (The Meeting), a boisterous procession in which bearers carry a statue of Christ to meet a statue of the Virgin Mary in Piazza Santa Maria.

The countryside surrounding Oliena provides awesome trekking. **Sardegna Nascosta** (☎ 0784 28 85 50; www.sardegnanascosta.it) and **Barbagia Insolita** (☎ 0784 28 60 05; www.barbagiainsolita.it; Corso Vittoria Emanuele 48) both organise a range of excursions, including trekking, canoeing, abseiling, climbing and riding.

SLEEPING & EATING

Hotel Cikappa (☎ 0784 28 87 33; www.cikappa.com; Corso Martin Luther King; s/d €40/60, meals €25; ☎) A small hotel providing good modest digs above a popular restaurant. Rooms are simply decorated with pine furniture and bare white walls, and the best have balconies overlooking the surrounding mountains.

Hotel Monte Maccione (☎ 0784 28 83 63; www.coopenis.it; s/€37-46, d/€62-76; ☎) Run by the Cooperativa Enis, this place offers simple, rustic rooms and fine views from its hilltop location – deep in the woods of Monte Maccione (700m), 4km above Oliena. You can also pitch a tent in the grounds (per tent with breakfast €14 to €15) and eat at the tasty restaurant (€25).

our pick **Agriturismo Guthiddai** (☎ 0784 28 60 17, mobile 349 267 21 59; www.agriturismoguthiddai.com; Nuoro-Dorgali bivio Su Gologone; half-board per person €55-65; ☎ mid-Mar–mid-Nov) On the road to Su Gologone this fabulous *agriturismo* is in a lovely white-washed farmstead, surrounded by fruit trees and backed by a looming 500m sheer rock

face. Olive oil and wine are produced and home-grown fruit and veg ends up on the breakfast and dinner table. The wood-beamed rooms are exquisitely tiled in pale greens and cobalt blues.

Hotel Su Gologone (☎ 0784 28 75 12; www.sugologone.it; s/€115-180, d/€140-240, ste €340-440; ☎ Mar-Nov; ☎ ☎ ☎) Treat yourself to a spot of rural luxury at this retreat 7km east of Oliena. Rooms are decorated with original artworks and local handicrafts, and the facilities are top notch – there's a pool, a leisure centre, a huge wine cellar and a restaurant (meals €50 to €60), considered one of Sardinia's best.

Ristorante Masiloghi (☎ 0784 28 56 96; Via Galiani 68; meals €30) Housed in a sunny Mediterranean villa on the main road into town, this smart restaurant showcases local art in its rustic dining hall and serves delicious food. Speciality of the house is the local lamb.

Orgosolo & Mamoiada

For centuries **Orgosolo** was feared as a centre of banditry and kidnapping. Nowadays, it's better known for the vibrant graffiti-style murals that adorn much of its town centre. Like satirical caricatures, they depict all the big political events of the 20th century and are often very moving. An outstanding example is a series illustrating the death of 12-year-old Palestinian Mohammed el Dura as he hid behind his father during a Gaza shoot-out in 2000.

Ten kilometres to the west of Orgosolo, the undistinguished town of **Mamoiada** stages Sardinia's most sinister **carnival** celebrations. These kick off with the **Festa di Sant'Antonio** on 17 January, and climax on Shrove Tuesday and the preceding Sunday. At the centre of events are the *mamuthones*, costumed characters decked out in shaggy brown sheepskins and primitive wooden masks. Anthropologists believe that the *mamuthones* embodied all the untold horrors that primitive humans feared, and that the ritual parade is an attempt to exorcise these demons before the new spring.

Buses run to both Mamoiada (€1.50, 20 minutes) and Orgosolo (€1.50, 35 minutes) from Nuoro.

Dorgali pop 8450

Set amid vineyards and olive groves on the slopes of Monte Bardia, Dorgali is a typical Sardinian mountain town. It's a dusty, bustling place that, while of little interest in

itself, makes an excellent base for exploring the surrounding countryside.

The local **tourist office** (☎ 0784 9 62 43; www.dorgali.it, in Italian; Via Lamarmora 108/b; ☹ 9am-1pm & 4-8pm Mon-Fri) can provide plenty of local information, including contact details for trekking outfits and accommodation lists.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Other than perusing the local craftwork shops – Dorgali is famous for its leather goods, ceramics, carpets and filigree jewellery – the main attraction here is the great green wilderness.

There are several outfits that organise 4WD excursions, hikes and caving expeditions. These include **Atlantika** (☎ 328 972 97 19; www.atlantika.it; Via Lamarmora 195), a consortium of local guides which also hires out mountain bikes (from €20 per day) and canoes (€24 per day). Another, **Cooperative Ghivine** (☎ 0784 9 67 21, mobile 349 442 55 52; www.ghivine.com; Via Lamarmora 69/e), organises a huge range of expeditions, including a four-hour hike through the Gola Su Gorruppu (€35 per person) and a three-and-a-half-hour trek to the prehistoric village of Tiscali (€40 per person).

SLEEPING & EATING

Hotel S'Adde (☎ 0784 9 44 12; www.hotelsadde.it; Via Concordia 38; s €40-70, d €70-110, half-board per person €60-80; ☎ ☹) A short, signposted walk up from the main thoroughfare, this is a pink Alpine chalet affair. Rooms are pine-clad with terraces and green views, and the owners are welcoming. The restaurant-pizzeria (meals €25 to €30) opens onto a 1st-floor terrace.

Ristorante Colibri (☎ 0784 9 60 54; Via Gramsci 14; meals €30; ☹ Mon-Sat) Tucked away in an incongruous residential area, this is the bee's knees for meat eaters with dishes like *cinghiale al rosmarino* (wild boar with rosemary) and *porcettu* (suckling pig). The pasta is also excellent, unlike the drab decor.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Buses serve Nuoro (€2.50, 45 minutes, six daily) and Olbia (€7.50, 2¾ hours, two daily). Up to six daily services shuttle back and forth between Dorgali and Cala Gonone (€1, 25 minutes).

Grotta di Ispinigoli

Four kilometres north of Dorgali, the **Grotta di Ispinigoli** (adult/child €7.50/3.50; ☹ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm

Aug, to 6pm Jul & Sep, 9am-noon & 3-5pm Mar-Jun, 10am-noon & 3-4pm Nov & Dec, 10am-noon Jan & Feb) is home to the world's second-tallest stalagmite (the highest is in Mexico and stands at 40m). Unlike most caves of this type, which you enter from the side, here you descend 60m inside a giant 'well', at whose centre stands the magnificent 38m-high stalagmite.

Serra Orrios & Thomes

The *nuraghic* village of **Serra Orrios** (adult/child €6/2.50; ☹ 9am-noon year round, & 4-6pm Jul & Aug, 3-5pm Apr-Jun & Sep, 2-4pm Oct-Dec & Jan-Mar), while not as remarkable as the site at Santa Vittoria di Serri, is still worth a stop. The remnants of more than 70 huts are clustered around what is left of two temples. The site lies 11km northwest of Dorgali (3km north off the Dorgali-Oliena road).

From Serra Orrios you could continue north to see the **Tomba dei Giganti S'Ena e Thomes** (admission free; ☹ dawn-dusk), a fine example of a *tomba dei giganti*. The stone monument is dominated by a central oval-shaped stele that once closed off an ancient burial chamber.

Gola Su Gorruppu

Dubbed the 'Grand Canyon of Europe', the Gola Su Gorruppu (Gorruppu Gorge) is a spectacular gorge flanked by vertical 400m rock walls. There are two main approach routes. The hardest is from the **Genna 'e Silana pass** and is signposted to the east of the SS125 at km183. Note, however, that this is pretty much the last sign you'll see on this route. If you don't get lost, and it is a real possibility, you'll reach the gorge after about two hours.

The easier approach is via the **Sa Barva bridge**, about 15km from Dorgali. To get to the bridge, exit Dorgali and follow for Tortoli. After a few kilometres, you'll see a small sign on the right for the Gola Su Gorruppu and Tiscali. Take this and continue until the asphalt finishes after about 20 minutes. Park here and cross the Sa Barva bridge, after which you'll see the trail for the Gola signposted off to the left. From here it's a two-hour hike down to the mouth of the gorge, beyond which you can go for a further 500m or so until the path is blocked by a series of huge boulders. To go any further you'll need a guide.

As well as the outfits in Dorgali, the **Cooperativa Gorropu** (☎ 0782 64 92 82, mobile 333 850 71 57; www.gorropu.com) arranges all sorts of

excursions. Some of the longer treks also include meals and accommodation.

Tiscali

Hidden in a mountain-top cave deep in the Valle Lanaittu, the *nuragic* village of **Tiscali** (adult/child €5/2; ☎ 9am-7pm May-Sep, to 5pm rest of yr) is one of Sardinia's archaeological highlights. Dating from the 6th century BC and populated until Roman times, the village was discovered at the end of the 19th century. At the time it was relatively intact, but since then grave robbers have done a pretty good job of looting the place, stripping the conical stone-and-mud huts down to the skeletal remains that you see today.

Many local outfits offer guided tours (typically about €40) but if you want to go it alone the simplest route starts from same point as for the Gola Su Gorruppu (see p865). The trail is signposted and takes about one and three-quarter hours.

GOLFO DI OROSEI

Boasting Sardinia's most spectacular coastal scenery, this rugged gulf forms part of the Parco Nazionale del Golfo di Orosei e del Gennargentu. Here the high mountains of the Gennargentu abruptly meet the sea, forming a crescent of dramatic cliffs riven by false inlets and lapped by crystalline waters.

Cala Gonone

Backed by imperious tree-specked cliffs, the small but popular resort of Cala Gonone enjoys a stunning setting. And with plenty of hotels, bars and restaurants it makes an excellent base from which to explore the coves along this magnificent stretch of coast.

You can get plenty of local information at the **tourist office** (☎ 0784 9 36 96; www.calagonone.com; Viale Bue Marino 1/a; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-5pm daily, longer in summer) in the small park off to the right as you enter town.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

If you do nothing else in Sardinia, try to take a boat trip along Cala Gonone's southern coast. Some tasty beaches are accessible from town by car or on foot – **Cala Cartoe** to the north; **Cala Fuili**, and **Cala Luna**, to the south – but the best are only reached by sea.

From the port, boats head south to the **Grotta del Bue Marino** (adult/child €8/4, ☎ tours on the hr 9am-noon & 3-5pm Aug, 10am-noon & 3pm Jul, 10am, 11am & 3pm Sep, 11am & 3pm Mar-Jun, Oct & Nov), a haunting

complex of stalactite- and stalagmite-filled caves where monk seals used to pup.

From there follow a string of coves and beaches, from the crescent-shaped **Cala Luna** and **Cala Sisine**, backed by a green valley, through to the incredible cobalt-blue waters of **Cala Mariolu** and **Cala Goloritzè**. This last is a favourite with rock climbers who come to tackle its bizarre granite pinnacles.

Outdoor pursuits are big here and there's excellent diving, snorkelling, mountain biking and hiking. **Argonauta** (☎ 0784 9 30 46, 347 530 40 97; www.argonauta.it; Via dei Lecci 10) offers a range of water-based activities, including snorkelling tours (€25), dives (from €35) and canyoning excursions (€40). For climbing information contact **Prima Sardegna** (☎ 0784 9 33 67; www.prima.sardegna.com; Via Lungomare Palmasera 32), which also rents out mountain bikes (per day €24), kayaks (per day €30), scooters (per day €48) and cars (from €75).

To explore the rocky hinterland, **Atlantika** (☎ 328 972 97 19; www.atlantika.it) arranges all sorts of activities including excursions to Gola Su Gorruppu (€35) and Tiscali (€35). Another reliable operator is **Dolmen** (☎ 0784 9 32 60; www.sardegnaadiscoprire.it; Via Vasco da Gama 18) which runs 4WD tours into the Supramonte, and has bikes, scooters and dinghies for hire.

SLEEPING & EATING

Camping Cala Gonone (☎ 0784 9 31 65; www.camping.calagonone.it; per person incl car & tent €13.50-19.50, 2-person bungalow €48-105; ☎ Apr-Oct; ☎) By the entrance to town on the main road from Dorgali, this shady camping ground has excellent facilities, including a tennis court, barbecue area, pizzeria and swimming pool. Book ahead for August.

our pick Agriturismo Nuraghe Mannu (☎ 0784 9 32 64, mobile 328 868 58 24; www.agriturismonuraghe.mannu.com; off the SP26 Dorgali-Cala Gonone road; d €24-30, half-board per person €40-48, meals €25-35) Immersed in greenery and with blissful sea views, this cracking *agriturismo* has four simple rooms, plus space for five tent pitches (€8 to €10 per person). The superb farmhouse restaurant runs up feasts of local fare with plenty of home-produced cheese, salami, pork, lamb and wine.

Hotel Miramare (☎ 0784 9 31 40; www.htmlmiramare.it; Piazza Giardini; s €40-77, d €60-132; ☎ Apr-Oct; ☎) A super-friendly hotel right in the heart of the action. Outside, a large terrace hums with gossiping locals while inside, sunshine and

BOATING ALONG THE COAST

A huge fleet of boats, from large high-speed dinghies to small cruisers and graceful sailing vessels, is on hand at Cala Gonone to whisk you along the coast.

The **Nuovo Consorzio Trasporti Marittimi** (☎ 0784 9 33 05; www.calagononecrociere.it) offers a range of packages, including return trips to Cala Luna (€12 to €20), Cala Sisine (€18 to €24) and Cala Mariolu (€26 to €35). A return ticket to the Grotta Bue Marino costs €16.50 to €18, which includes entry to the cave, while a coastal cruise will set you back €26 to €35. Between June and August, it also hires out *gomme* (motorised dinghies). Prices vary according to month and the size of your group, but reckon on about €80 for two people and €100 to €120 for four.

Cielomar (☎ 0784 92 00 14; www.cielomar.it) is another outfit offering boat hire at the port. Reckon on €80 to €120 per day, excluding petrol which usually adds an extra €25 or so.

Boats generally operate from March until about November – dates depend a lot on demand. Prices vary according to season with ‘very high season’ being around 11 to 25 August. You can get information at agencies around town or at the booths at the port.

sea views (not all rooms have them) brighten the plain white accommodation. The restaurant is good for local fish and traditional Sardinian cooking.

Bue Marino (☎ 0784 92 00 78; www.hotelbue.marino.it; Via A Vespucci; s €60-98, d €75-135; ☹ Easter-Nov; ☼ ☑) This sunny blue-and-white themed hotel has a Mediterranean feel with its fashionable seafloor bar and coolly tiled rooms. The panoramic 4th-floor restaurant dishes up surprisingly unpretentious food at very reasonable prices (meals €30).

Fronte del Porte (Via Acqua Dolce 5; pizzas from €3.50, meals €15-25) This bright and breezy spot is a good call for a portside fill-up. The comprehensive menu caters to most tastes with everything from *panini* and ice cream to pizza, pasta and steaks.

Ristorante Acquarius (☎ 0784 9 34 28; Lungomare Palmasera 34; pizza €6-8, meals €30; ☹ Apr-Sep) One of a number of restaurants on the *lungomare*, this bustling, laid-back restaurant serves a typical menu of wood-fired pizza, pasta and seafood.

Getting There & Away

Up to six daily buses run to Cala Gonone from Dorgali (€1, 25 minutes, six daily) and Nuoro (€3, 70 minutes).

OGLIASTRA

Wedged in between the provinces of Nuoro and Cagliari, Ogliastro is a dramatic, vertical land of vast, unspoiled valleys, silent woods and windswept rock faces. To get here from Dorgali follow the SS125 as it winds its way south through the mountainous Parco Nazionale del Golfo di Orosei e del Gennargentu. The

first 18km to the **Genna’e Silana** pass (1017m) are the most breathtaking.

Baunei & the Altopiano del Golgo

Around 28km south of the Genna’e Silana pass, you come to the uninspiring shepherd’s town of Baunei. There’s little reason to stop off here, but what is seriously worth your while is the 10km detour up to the **Altopiano del Golgo**, a strange, otherworldly plateau where goats and donkeys graze in dusty shrubland. From the town a signpost sends you up a 2km climb of impossibly steep switchbacks to the plateau. Head north and after 8km follow the **Su Sterru** (Il Golgo) sign (for less than 1km), leave your vehicle and make for this remarkable feat of nature – a 270m abyss just 40m wide at its base. Its funnel-like opening is now fenced off but, knowing the size of the drop, just peering into the dark opening is enough to bring on the vertigo.

In the heart of the plateau, the **Locanda Il Rifugio** (☎ 0782 61 05 99, mobile 368 702 89 80; www.coopgoloritze.com, in Italian; half-board per person €100-110; ☹ Apr-Oct) has six basic rooms in a converted farmstead and facilities for campers (per tent €5). Managed by the **Cooperativa Goloritzè** (www.coopgoloritze.com), the refuge makes an excellent trekking base, organising a number of excursions ranging from trekking and horse riding (€15 per hour) to 4WD jeep trips. Many treks involve a descent from the plateau through dramatic *codula* (canyons) to the beautiful beaches of the Golfo di Orosei (see opposite). Staff at the refuge also organise guides and logistical support for walkers attempting the infamous Selvaggio Blu, Sardinia’s toughest trek – see the boxed text, p800.

Just beyond the refuge is the late-16th-century **Chiesa di San Pietro**, a humble construction flanked to one side by some even humbler *cumbessias* – rough, largely open stone affairs which are not at all comfortable for the passing pilgrims who traditionally sleep there on the saint's day.

Santa Maria Navarrese

At the southern end of the Golfo di Orosei, the unpretentious and attractive town of Santa Maria Navarrese is a popular beach resort. Shipwrecked Basque sailors built a small church here in 1052, dedicated to Santa Maria di Navarra on the orders of the Princess of Navarre, who happened to be one of the survivors. The church was set in the shade of a grand olive tree that is still standing.

Information is available at the **Tourpass office** (☎ 0782 61 53 30; www.turinformati.it; Piazza Principessa di Navarra 19; ☎ 9am–1pm & 4–6pm Mon–Sat, 4–7pm Tue & Thu in winter), hidden behind the Banco di Sardegna in the town centre.

Lofty pines and eucalyptus trees back the lovely beach lapped by transparent water (with more sandy stretches to the south). Offshore are several islets, including the **Isolotto di Ogliastro**, a giant hunk of pink porphyritic rock. The leafy northern end of the beach is topped by a watchtower built to watch for raiding Saracens.

Down at the port, the **Consorzio Marittimo Ogliastro** (☎ 0782 61 51 73; www.mareogliastro.com) runs boat tours along the Golfo di Orosei for between €30 and €35 per person.

There are several hotels in town, including **Ostello Bellavista** (☎ 0782 61 40 39; www.ostelloinogliastro.com; Via Pedra Longa; s €35–65, d €50–100; 📶), a rare year-round option which compensates for its inconvenient position – a steep climb from the village centre – with huge views and a warm welcome. There's a bit of an institutional feel about the place but rooms are good

value for money and the in-house restaurant serves cracking local food (meals €25).

A handful of buses link Santa Maria Navarrese with Tortolì (€1, 15 minutes, 11 daily), Dorgali (€4.50, 1½ hours, two daily) and Nuoro (€6.50, two hours 25 minutes, five daily).

Tortolì & Arbatax

pop 10,395

Tortolì, Ogliastro's provincial capital, is unlikely to make a big impression with its large roadside hotels and uninspiring shops. About 4km away, Arbatax is little more than a port fronted by a few bars and restaurants. The only sight of any note are the *rocce rosse* (red rocks), a series of bizarre, weather-beaten rocks rising from the sea in Arbatax.

Near the port, you'll find the terminus for the **Trenino Verde**, the summer tourist train to Mandas (see p843).

Local buses 1 and 2 run from Arbatax to Tortolì and, in the case of the latter service, to the beach and hotels at nearby Porto Frailis.

There's no shortage of accommodation in these parts, although most places tend to be big resort-style hotels. An exception is the old-fashioned **Hotel Splendour** (☎ 0782 62 30 37; www.hotelsplendour.com; Viale Arbatax; s €35–50, d €50–70; 📶), a cheery family-run two-star place halfway between Tortolì and Arbatax. The halls are decorated with colourful oil paintings and family knick-knacks while rooms are small and unpretentious. For a bite to eat **Star 2** (☎ 0782 66 75 03; Via Lungomare, Arbatax; pizzas €6, meals €25) serves tasty pizzas and juicy steaks in Arbatax.

For information on ferry connections, check out p835.

Buses connect Tortolì with Santa Maria Navarrese (€1, 15 minutes, 11 daily), Dorgali (€4.50, one hour 50 minutes, one daily), and Nuoro (€6.50, two hours 40 minutes, five daily), as well as many inland villages.

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