

<<科西嘉岛指南The Rough Gu>>

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内容概要

That these extraordinary landscapes have survived the ferro-concrete revolution of the past few decades unscathed seems miraculous when you consider the fate of comparably beautiful parts of southern Europe. Nearly two million visitors descend on the island annually (two thirds of them in July and August), yet purpose-built resorts are few and far between, while high-rise blocks remain outnumbered by extravagant Baroque churches and old fortified houses built to protect families formerly embroiled in vendettas. Overlooked by Corsica's trademark seventeenth-century watchtowers, long stretches of the shore remain backed by unbroken maquis, while forests of holm oak, chestnut trees and magnificent Laricio pines carpet the interior valleys, dotted with pretty stone villages. "Provence without the Brits" is how rural Corsica is often described in holiday brochures, but the gloss fails to convey the island's distinctive grandeur: the wildness of its uplands, the vivid atmosphere of its remote settlements, and arresting emptiness of its valleys and woodlands, where wild boar are still more numerous than people. Corsica's pristine state is largely the legacy of economic neglect, compounded by the impact of two world wars and mass out-migration in the twentieth century. Lured by the island's abundant natural resources and strategic position on the Mediterranean seaways, successive invaders – from the Greeks, Carthaginians and Romans, to the Aragonese, Italians, British and French – all came and conquered, but none were able to establish lasting prosperity. Nor were they ever able to subjugate fully the rebellious spirit of the islanders themselves, who at various times in their history have mounted fierce resistance to colonial occupation. In the nineteenth century, an armed uprising established a fully independent government led by one of the most charismatic political figures of the Enlightenment, Pascal Paoli. Before it was ruthlessly crushed by the French, the regime introduced the vote for women and a democratic constitution which would later be used a model for that of the United States.

Violent opposition to French rule flared up once again in the mid-1970s, since when nationalist paramilitary groups have been waging a bloody campaign against the state and its representatives, both on the island and on the Continent. Among ordinary islanders, support for the armed struggle – whose bombings and shootings have claimed hundreds of lives but seldom, if ever, affect tourists – has dwindled to virtually nil over the past decade. Yet the desire for greater autonomy remains as fervent as ever, in spite of the fact that the island imports virtually everything it needs and receives huge financial support from Paris and the EU. Having had to struggle for centuries to preserve their language and customs, Corsicans have gained a reputation for being suspicious of outsiders. You will, for example, get a very frosty response indeed (or worse) if you attempt to broach the subject of nationalist violence, the Mafia, religious brotherhoods or belief in occult phenomena such as the Evil Eye. But express admiration for those facets of island life which the islanders are overtly proud of – such as their cuisine, fine wines, enigmatic carved menhirs and polyphony singing – and you'll soon feel the warmth of traditional hospitality. Save for the ubiquitous nationalist graffiti, sprayed-out road signs and odd fire-bombed villa or beach restaurant, Corsica's dark underbelly is barely discernible these days, as its population is drawn ever closer to the European mainstream. Lasting impressions tend instead to be dominated by the things which have beguiled travellers since Boswell first raved about the island in the mid-eighteenth century: the breathtakingly unspoilt scenery and distinctive Mediterranean way of life which, although bearing strong resemblances to the cultures of neighbouring Tuscany and Sardinia, the French Riviera and Sicily – somehow manages to remain quite different from any of them. Two hundred years of French rule have had limited tangible effect on Corsica, an island where Baroque churches, Genoese fortresses, fervent Catholic rituals and an indigenous language saturated with Tuscan influences show a more profound affinity with neighbouring Italy. During the long era of Italian supremacy the northeast and southwest of Corsica formed two provinces known as Diqua dei monti – "this side of the mountains" – and Dila dei monti, the uncontrollable "side beyond". Today the French départements of Haute-Corse and Corse du Sud roughly coincide with these territories, and remain quite different in feel.

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