

### France: Corsica, Mountains & Sea

Tour code: JMS

Revised: Nov 09

In 1971 the French Regional Nature Park of Corsica was formed to protect a large area of the mountains, which make up the backbone of this rugged island. Since then a network of footpaths has been designed to keep the (otherwise delightfully scented!) "Maquis" at bay and to introduce walkers to the very best of the inland scenery in such a way that it remains unspoilt. Today the most well known of these walks is the "GR20" a high level ridge walk (described as the toughest GR in France) which follows the north-south watershed of the mountains. However much less well known and yet in many respects more interesting and varied are the long distance footpaths which cross the mountains from east to west, or from "Sea to Sea" – Mare a Mare; as they are called. Based on old mule tracks and ancient routes of transhumance, these routes traditionally connected mountain villages with each other and with high level pastures. Crossing intermediate ridges and following forested valleys, they take the walker into the heart of the mountains, past tumbling rivers, mixed woodland and through attractive villages entirely missed by those doing the high ridge walk. Of course these lower walks do as well tend to be much warmer.



For our 7-day walk we have chosen the best section of the "Mare a Mare" North. Starting in Sermano (transferred from Corte) at 800m/2624ft and walking west via Corte and past the lake at Calacuccia, you reach the watershed at Col de Vergio 1,477m/4845ft. and from there, start your descent to the coast at Porto via the charming old chestnut town of Evisa.

Each evening you are free to relax and reminisce on the day in a comfortable inn with time to enjoy the island's distinctive cuisine and wine. A local vehicle will carry your baggage around from hotel to hotel so that you need carry only a light day sack throughout.

#### Travel Information

**Season:** May to October. Any day except Monday.

**This trip is offered on a land only basis.**

There are a number of possible ways to travel to and from Corsica that can easily be booked direct using the internet. Direct scheduled flights from London are limited to Easyjet flights to Ajaccio and Bastia. Either airport is convenient for the start of the trip but Ajaccio is by far preferable for the return journey. These flights only operate on Sundays. There is also the option of flying on an Air France scheduled service from London via Paris (change airports) on any day of the week, but you will need to add a night in Paris at the start of your trip.

Another alternative is to use Easyjet flights between London and Nice and take the ferry across to Bastia or Ajaccio. Ferries are operated by Southern Ferries, web site [www.southernferries.co.uk](http://www.southernferries.co.uk) (tel. 0844 815 7785). Nice flights can be cheaper, the ferry cost varies but for example a midweek foot passenger crossing in June from Nice to Bastia is approx 50 Euros per person. It is possible to fly from Nice to Ajaccio with Air France but this is an expensive route. If you travel via Nice you could add a night of two in this chic resort. In fact if you plan to use the

ferry then this will be necessary as the ferry departs at 08.00!

**End of Tour:** The cost of the bus transfer to Ajaccio from Porto on the penultimate day of the tour is not included (20 Euros approx) or from Ajaccio to the Airport for return flight, by bus which takes approximately 20 minutes and costs approx 8 Euros. Ferries depart from Ajaccio to Nice and other destinations on the south coast of France

#### Level of Difficulty

**Grade:** The tour is graded Moderate. This self-guided tour is not available for those who wish to travel alone.

**Fitness:** The trek is within the capabilities of any normally healthy and active individual who takes part in regular hill walking. The route itself is not difficult, although it is more than just a ramble - there are some fairly rough ascents, with maquis scrub to negotiate and sometimes on loose, stony ground. There is one unavoidably long day of around 9 hours average walking time. The other days are all considerably shorter.

**Day stages:** range in length from 9.5km/3 hours to 22.5km/9 hours.

**Waymarks:** the trail is generally well marked mostly with orange waymarks.

## General information

**Baths:** it is not normal for your room to have a bath, the main reason being that it takes up a lot of space, some hotels/guesthouses may have a separate room in the house where a bath is available to guests but in the main expect showers.

**Breakfast:** in countries such as France (Corsica) usually consists of coffee and bread/croissant with jams, if you want more for breakfast then we would suggest you purchase some food the night before. It is important for you to tell us if you have any dietary requirements when you book your holiday so that we can inform everyone that you are staying with.

**Language:** Note that you will not necessarily come across people speaking English. Remember you have left home to find things different; bring a phrase book, try to learn a bit of French!

**Luggage:** please bring portable, manageable luggage. On this tour there is a bit of travelling to do on buses and a train, with walks up to bus stops etc. When staying in hotels, sometimes your luggage will have been taken to your room awaiting your arrival. However don't be surprised if your luggage is waiting for you to take it up to your room please politely ask someone if you need assistance

## Accommodation & Meals

7 nights are spent in 2 star hotels with private facilities as standard. On 3 nights (The first night in Corte, Evisa and on one of the two nights at Calacuccia) evening meals are included in the tour price. On other evenings (Corte, Calacuccia, Porto and Ajaccio) there are local restaurants nearby. Picnic lunches can also be obtained from the hoteliers or purchased in local shops. You will need to take about £80 per person for 4 dinners and about £ 50 for 7 picnic lunches, with an additional allowance for daytime refreshments. (Drinks are rather expensive: a small beer or black coffee costs £1.50-£1.75; a large white coffee can be £2.50).

Most frequented hotels are described below but alternatives are used on occasion, when room availability is limited.

- ❑ **Night 1.** Corte. A comfortable 2 star hotel in the centre of Corte, all rooms have their own en suite facilities, telephone and television. Dinner is included.
- ❑ **Night 2.** Corte. Same hotel as night 1 but dinner is not included. There are numerous good restaurants in the Citadelle end of town.
- ❑ **Night 3.** Calacuccia. A comfortable modern hotel outside the village. This is a small family run establishment of twelve rooms, each with its own bathroom. There are splendid views over to Monte Cinto and Paglia Orba from the terrace bar. The hotel has a bar but no restaurant and you walk back into the village (a 10mn walk) for dinner. A set-menu dinner is included, normally at the restaurant U. Valdoniellu.
- ❑ **Night 4.** Calacuccia. Same hotel as night 3, but dinner is not included
- ❑ **Night 5.** Evisa. This 2-star hotel is set in spectacular surroundings. From the terrace restaurant there is an incredible view west across the Spelunca Gorge and forest, to the sea, and the peak of Capu D'Orto (1294m). Dinner is included in the tour price. Picnic lunches can be obtained from shops in the village. There is a swimming pool (open in Summer season).

❑ **Night 6.** Porto. Back down at sea level; we stay in this typically Mediterranean small resort. Our hotel is just by the harbour front. (If it is full, a suitable alternative is only a couple of minutes further along).

❑ **Night 7.** Ajaccio. We stay in a comfortable 3 star hotel in the old centre of Ajaccio, located near the bustling harbour of the town, the train and bus stations and a beach. The rooms are air conditioned, with en suite bathroom, television and telephone.

## Outline Itinerary

❑ **Day 1:** Arrive Ajaccio. On arrival transfer by taxi or airport bus to the railway station for a scenic journey through the mountains on the old rack railway to Corte. Taxi and train fares (about £17 per person) are not included in the tour price. For example, train: Depart Ajaccio 16.20. Arrive 18.33 at Corte.

If you arrive in Bastia you also need to take a taxi to the station and the train to Corte.

❑ **Day 2:** Clients are transferred by taxi to Sermano to start this day's walk back to Corte. 18km/6 hours. A good warm-up day as we traverse the hills and valleys from Sermano through maquis and chestnut, past a couple of sleepy villages with interesting churches and then descend from a high grassy pass, past cork oak and beeches to Corte, the ancient capital of the island.

❑ **Day 3:** Corte to Calacuccia. 22.5km/9-10 hours. We pass through the densely-forested Tavignano Valley and over the Col de la Croix before descending to the barraged Lac de Croix, and our hotel in the village of Calacuccia. At 850m. This is an unavoidably long day but we hope you will agree that the spectacular scenery provides adequate compensation. Possibility of shortening the walk by using a taxi (Approx. 90 Euros).

❑ **Day 4:** Calacuccia to Castel di Vergio. 14.5km/5 hours. Via the "chemin de ronde" to the Col de Vergio (1,477m/4,845ft). Today we ascend to the watershed, past shepherds' huts and with views of Monte Cinto (2,706m/8,875ft) the highest peak in Corsica. Transfer back to your hotel in Calacuccia. This trip can be done in reverse if preferred, making it largely a descent.

❑ **Day 5:** Transfer from Calacuccia to Col di Vergio (or just below) to start walk (cost included). Col di Vergio to Evisa. 9.5km/3 to 4 hours. In the morning we walk down through a forest of Lariccio pine, passing waterfalls and magnificent chestnut trees, to reach the attractive village of Evisa (850m/2,788ft) with its fine views of the valley. In the afternoon we can explore the village, which is famed historically for chestnut production.

❑ **Day 6:** Evisa to Porto. 13km/4 to 5 hours. In the morning we continue our descent of the Spelunca Gorge to Ota, another picturesque mountain village where we take lunch. Continuing on we arrive at the scenically located beach resort of Porto where there will be time for a swim, a walk up to the old Geonese fort, maybe a boat ride and always time for a great evening meal at one of the seaside restaurants, perhaps enjoying a great seafood dish.

**Day 7:** Porto to Ajaccio. Morning at leisure in Porto.

Then you need to walk up to the bus stop, which is 1.5 km away from the port, so bring portable bags and not too much weight to make it easier for you.

Take a coach at approx 14.00 hours along the corniche road, which winds into and around the Calanches National Park (consisting of impressive coastal cliff formations) to Ajaccio. This is a direct service, which takes approx 2.5 hours. (This is not included in tour price, and does not run on Sundays. This is why we do not start the trip on a Monday as to do would make day 7 a Sunday. If you do opt to make day 7 a Sunday you will need to take an expensive taxi transfer.) In Ajaccio, welcome back to a

busy cosmopolitan Mediterranean town with an impressive harbour and old winding streets crammed with little restaurants and boutique shops.

□ **Day 8:** Departure from Ajaccio. Local bus or taxi to airport.

### **What's Included**

Transfer from Corte to Sermano on Day 2. Baggage transfers between each overnight destination days 2 to 6. Your transfers from Col di Vergio to Calacuccia on Day 4 and from Calacuccia to Col di Vergio on Day 5. 7 nights Bed and Breakfast. Dinners on Nights 1, 3 and 5 are also included.

Note that your movements between Ajaccio and Corte and Porto and Ajaccio are not included.

### **On the Self Guided Tour we provide**

1:50,000 scale maps with the whole route marked; these are to be used in conjunction with our detailed Route Notes.

## **Escorted Departures**

EJMS16      Sun 16 May – Sun 23 May

### **Books & Maps**

*Walks in Corsica*, part of the Footpaths of Europe series (Robertson McCarta, 1990). This includes some 1:50,000 maps, which cover part of the route of this trek.

Carrington, D. *Granite Island* (Penguin) 1984 Erudite portrait of the island as shaped by its tumultuous past.

For general reference; *The Rough Guide to France*, Harrap Columbus. Lonely Planet: Corsica.

Travel books and larger scale (1:25,000) maps can be obtained from Stanford's, London Tel : 0207 836 1321, or web: [www.stanfords.co.uk](http://www.stanfords.co.uk).