



BONIFACIO

CORSICA

Corsica (Corse) rises up out of the western Mediterranean Sea, the fourth largest island following only Cyprus, Sicily and just eight miles to the south, across the Strait of Bonifacio, Sardinia. One hundred miles to the northwest is Nice, Marseilles and the French Riviera. Directly north, across the Ligurian Sea, is Genoa. Fifty miles to the east across the Tyrrhenian Sea is the Italian mainland and Tuscany.

Much of Corsica is stunningly beautiful. The island is just over one hundred miles long, approximately fifty miles wide, comprising about thirty-three hundred square miles. With over one thousand miles of coastline Corsica has many natural harbors and hundreds of beautiful beaches.

The interior of the island is rugged, heavily forested and steeped in mystery with deep valleys and towering mountains that divide the island from the northwest down to the southeast. Twenty of Corsica's mountains are over 6,500 feet with the highest being Mount Cintu climbing to nearly 9,000 feet above the Mediterranean Sea.

Corsica, though a part of France since 1768 and usually referred to as one of the 26 French Regions, is actually a Collectivité Territoriale with slightly more autonomy. The island is the least populated (just over 250,000) and least developed region of France.

Agriculture, sheep and goats have been the backbone of the island's economy. This was never enough and deprivation often led to smuggling and piracy. Today the importance of tourism can not be underestimated, especially in the northwest around Calvi and far to the south around Porto Vecchio and Bonifacio.

Though a part of France, one would be hard-pressed to find an ethnic Corsican that would refer to himself as French. Their language has been heavily influenced by old dialects from the region of Genoa and Tuscany. Yet even from village to village there are differences in words and pronunciation. There has always been a strong oral tradition and, in fact, there was no written form of the Corsican language till the late 1800s.



HISTORY

The history of Corsica is the history of seafaring people in search of new trading partners, empires in search of new conquest, principalities and Popes in search of expanding their influence and power and an island people in search of independence and freedom as they struggle to preserve their unique language, culture and way of life.

Archeological evidence of habitation on Corsica dates back to the early Neolithic Period of 7,000 BC. The discovery of numerous rough stone monoliths called menhirs and crude stone tombs known as dolmen provide proof of a very early people on the island. Little is known of who they may have been or from where they may have originally come.

By the Bronze Age, 1000 BC, subsistence farming, the raising of flocks, the development of a structured society and the building of fortified villages were common in the southern regions of the island. This simple pastoral existence would be continually disrupted for much of the following three millennia.

The Phoenicians founded the first trading port of Aleria on the southeast coast of the island around 500 BC. The town flourished for hundreds of years through numerous and successive foreign occupants and rulers. However, the Corsicans themselves profited little and chose to remain, for the most part, holed-up in the safety of their rugged mountains.

Three men who came from tiny Corsica have literally changed the world ... well, two of them Corsicans definitely and one of them ... plausibly and arguably.

The first man, is Christopher Columbus. Corsica claims that the great explorer was born in the northwest coastal town of Calvi in 1451 during the time that the island was under the rule of Genoa. This powerful City-State took credit for Columbus (he was definitely raised in Genoa)

and lowly Corsica, the place of his birth, could do nothing about it.

The second important man to come from Corsica, though far less known, is Pasquale di Paoli, the father of Corsica's independence movement. Though he spent many years in exile in London when the island was under early French rule, Paoli wrote a constitution for what he dreamed would become a free and democratic Corsica. The author of the constitution of the United States, Thomas Jefferson, was a friend and admirer of Paoli. A number of towns in the US are named in his honor.

The third great man to have come from Corsica was Napolione di Buonaparte, born in the coastal port town of Ajaccio in 1769. Young Napolione would soon amaze his instructors at the Royal Military Academy in Paris with his command of the sciences, geography, mathematics and the art of war. Often hundreds of scientists, naturalists and chemists would accompany Napolione on his later travels. In 1798 Napolione would be elected to the prestigious French Academy of Sciences.

On a snowy December 2nd, 1804 in Notre Dame Cathedral de Paris, in a crowded setting of incredible pomp and splendor, Pope Pius VII, who had traveled all the way from the Vatican in Rome, bowed at the alter and blessed the newly made Crown of Charlemagne then returned to his seat next to the throne. Napolione then stepped to the alter, took the crown in his own hands and turned to face the splendidly bejeweled audience that packed the ancient cathedral. Young Napolione di Buonaparte, from Ajaccio, Corsica, the son of a poor Italian of minor nobility ... crowned himself Napoleon Bonaparte, Emperor of France. This Corsican would personally command La Grande Armée on battlefields

throughout the continent, Egypt and the Mid-East and build one of the greatest empires the world has ever known.

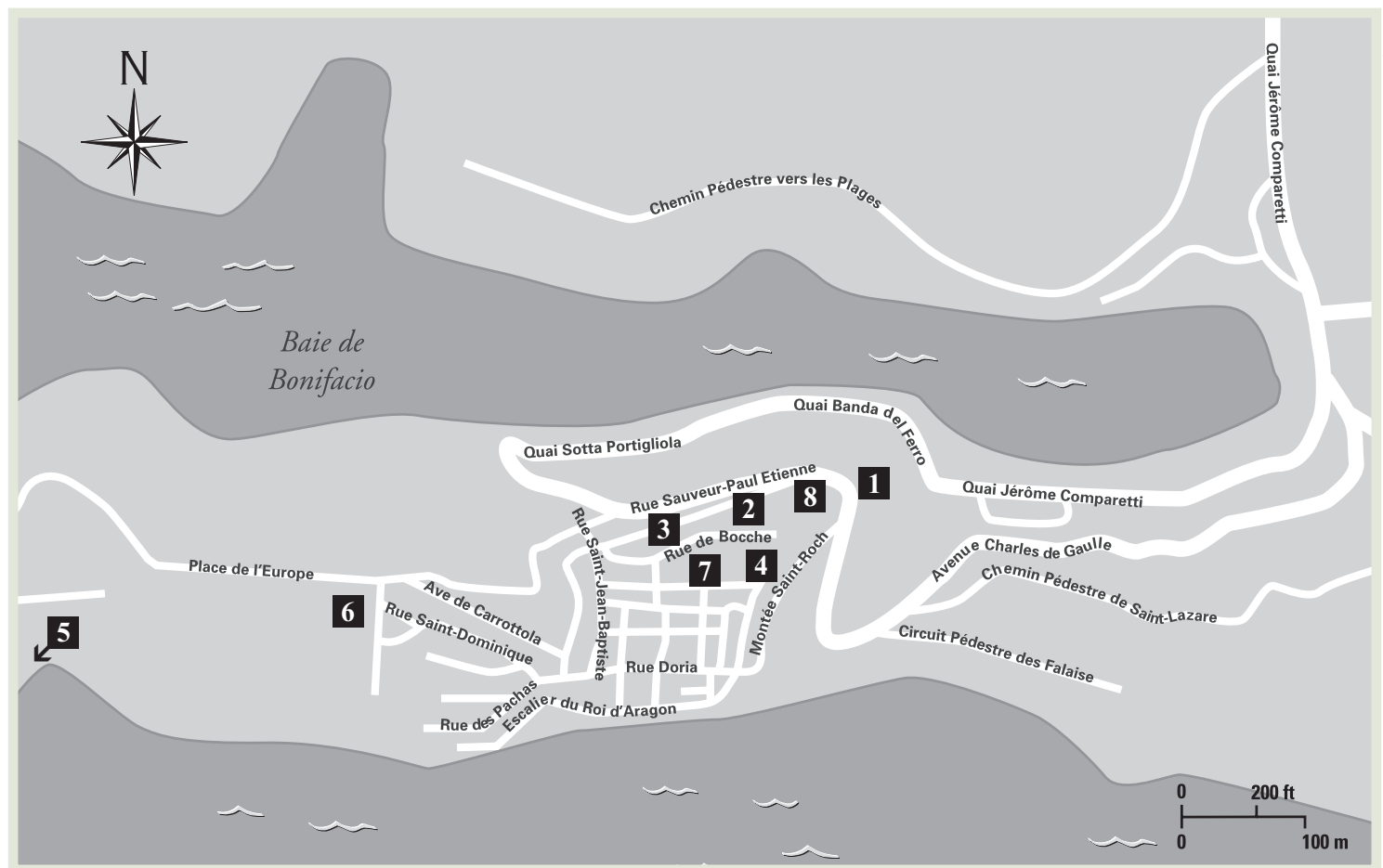
The list of people, nations and empires that have, through the centuries, over-run tiny Corsica reads like a "who's - who" of Mediterranean history. Iberians from what is now Spain, tribes from the Italian and French coastal region of Liguria, the Phoenicians from Lebanon, the Greeks and Etruscans, the Carthaginians from North Africa, the Romans, Vandals, Ostrogoths and Lombards from northern Europe, the Byzantines from Constantinople, Islamic Saracens and Barbary Coast Pirates also from North Africa, the City States of Pisa, Genoa and the Roman Catholic Papacy, the French gained Corsica by treaty, occupied by fascist Italy and Nazi Germany and finally, from 1944 to 45, thousands of young American pilots and flight crews who were flying from what they affectionately dubbed as "Carrier Corsica" during the last year of World War II. The people of Corsica have been witness to them all.

PLACES OF INTEREST

Bonifacio is a beautiful medieval town that sits high on cliffs overlooking the beautiful Mediterranean Sea. There are a number of interesting things to see when you take a walk through the town.

1 **Montée Saint Roch** provides one of the most striking views of the Old City and the famous picturesque cliffs of Bonifacio. On the site is a charming old chapel that dates to the early 1500s.

2 The **Rue des Deux Empereurs** is named in honor of Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte of France and Charles V, Em-



peror of the Holy Roman Empire in the early 1500s. Both Emperors stayed in houses along this beautiful avenue when they visited Bonifacio.

3 The **Rue du Palais de Garde** is another of the attractive avenues of the Old City. There you will find interesting architecture with gracefully arched windows and hidden arcades.

4 The **Church of Saint Marie Majeure** has been restored and added on to many times over the centuries. The main body of the church is believed to have been built in the late 1200s or early 1300s. It was originally designed in the Romanesque style. The bell tower dates to the 1300s. In the 1700s the church was restored in the Baroque style that you see today. The church claims to have a piece of the True Cross of Jesus in addition to some of the remains of Saint Boniface. Depending upon on-going restoration the church may or may not be open for visitors.

5 The **Convent of Saint Francis** has a very interesting cemetery that is the final place of sailors and fishermen who lost their lives at sea. There are numerous mausoleums that are designed and built in a wide variety of architectural designs.

6 The **Church of Saint Dominique**, with its eight-sided bell tower, is believed to have been built around 1270 by the Knights Templar and the Dominicans. The gothic design of the church is very rare for Corsica. The interior of the church is purposely simple and unadorned.

7 The **Palazzu Publicu** is a history and art museum with exhibits dedicated to numerous "Brotherhoods" in Bonifacio. Brotherhoods are Roman Catholic fraternal organizations separate from the official church itself. Many of the Brotherhoods were founded as far back as the 1100s. The Brotherhoods have traditionally been dedicated to leading church processions and helping the poor. The Brotherhoods are well known for their beautifully soulful chants.

8 The **Bastion of the Standard** is a massive fortification built by the French in the 1500s to guard the town and harbor. Today the citadel is home to a large exhibit that relates the history of Bonifacio.

Beyond Bonifacio

Sartene is a quaint town west of Bonifacio along the beautiful coastal road. The town is quintessential Corsican. There is breathtaking scenery all along the drive. Built high on a hill close to the sea, with its narrow stone streets and centuries old buildings, the town has seen its share of pirates and invaders.

The **Sea Grottoes** along the cliffs and small islands that dot the coast around Bonifacio are justifiably famous for their beauty. Visitors can tour by boat the marine reserve as well as La Vezzi Cavallo archipelago.

Roccapina Beach has beautiful white sand and calm, crystal clear water. The beach is located west about half way between Bonifacio and the town of Sartene near the famous natural rock formation known as The Lion of Roccapina.

Palombaggia's Beach is the one of the most beautiful and popular on Corsica. The beach is north of Bonifacio along the east coast towards the town of Porto Vecchio. The beach has clear blue water and fine white sand and is lined with plenty of trees that provide shade.



SHORE EXCURSIONS

To make the most of your visit to Bonifacio and surrounding areas we suggest you take one of the organized Shore Excursions. For information concerning tour content and pricing, consult your Shore Excursion Order Form or contact the Shore Excursion Desk. When going ashore, be advised to take only necessary items and secure any valuables onboard.

LOCAL CUSTOMS

Bargaining: Prices are usually clearly marked and bargaining is not a custom.

Tipping: Most restaurants will add an automatic service charge but a 10% tip to your waiter and taxi driver is customary and always appreciated.

LOCAL CUISINE AND DRINK SPECIALTIES

Corsica's cuisine is a combination of Italian, French and the island's simple traditional and seasonal dishes. Until after World War II the importation of food products to the island was minimal. Much as it is today, over the generations there have always been olive groves, fruit orchards, vineyards, vegetable gardens, sheep, goats and pigs. Nuts and wild herbs are found throughout the island. Of course, being an island in the Mediterranean, coastal towns and villages still supply langoustine, bream, lobster and oysters. Though Corsica is relatively small different regions on the island are known for different products. Most of the flocks of sheep and goats and herds of pigs are raised "free-range" in the mountains. This gives them a distinctive flavor. Some of the island's traditionally favorite dishes include: Prisetu, a slow cured smoked ham. Minestra, a soup of smoked pork, cabbage and beans. Fromage de tête, seasoned pig brain called "head cheese", Salamu, a spicy sausage much like salami. Figatelli, sausage made from pig liver, Chestnut polenta, often served with wild boar stew, Brocciu, fresh or aged goat cheese. Beignet, a sweet roll made with chestnut flour, Fiadone, a soft cheese tart.

As is common throughout the Mediterranean, grapes have been grown on Corsica for nearly 3,000 years. Red wines seem to be Corsica's best though there are some good white wines produced. Among some of the local favorites are: Patrimonio, Niellucciu, Montanaccia and Biancu Gentile.

SHOPPING

Value added Tax (VAT), is added to most purchases. Visitors who spend over a certain amount may be entitled to re-claim some or all of the tax paid, however, regulations and conditions governing the refund of VAT are subject to change and RCCL cannot guarantee the cooperation of local authorities.

LOCAL CURRENCY

The unit of currency in Corsica is the euro. There are 8 euro coins with a common face. On the reverse, each member state contributes a design. There are 7 euro notes. All euro coins and notes are legal tender in member states. Most stores accept major credit cards and debit cards. ATM's are usually available, especially in heavily trafficked tourist areas. At smaller establishments cash may be required. Traveler's Checks are widely accepted.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The Tourist Information Center in Bonifacio is located at 2, rue Fred Scaramoni.

TRANSPORTATION

Corsica, for the most part, does not have a public transportation system that is tourist-friendly. Taxis and car rentals, unless you are taking one of our organized Shore Excursions, are your only real options.

To rent a car the driver must be over 21 and had a valid license for over one year. Know what your personal auto insurance cov-

ers before you buy the rental company's insurance. Remember the roads on the island are narrow and winding, especially in the mountains. Though the island's roads are in very good condition they are notoriously slippery after a rain. Rules of the road are strict and enforced. Police can require that a ticket be paid for on the spot. Corsica has some very nice wines but, if you are driving, be aware that the blood alcohol limit is below .05%.

USEFUL WORDS AND PHRASES

Hello - Salut
Good morning/good day - Bon jour
Glad to meet you - Enchante
How are you? - Comment allez-vous?
Please - S'il vous plaît
Thank you - Merci
You're welcome - De rien
Do you speak English? - Parlez-vous anglais?
Excuse me/sorry - Excusez-moi
I don't understand - Je ne comprends pas
Good-bye - Au revoir
