

An aerial photograph of a rugged, rocky coastline. The water is a vibrant turquoise color, contrasting sharply with the golden-brown, craggy rocks. A small white boat is visible in the water, and another person is seen on a rock in the distance. The sky is a pale, clear blue.

SAILING IN THE PLAYGROUND OF THE RICH AND FAMOUS: ALONG THE GOLD COASTS OF SARDINIA AND CORSICA

SEE AND BE SEEN

BY BARRY PICKTHALL

sailboard circuit. He knows these waters and the local eateries like the back of his hand.

Whichever way the wind was blowing or at whatever strength, there was always somewhere sheltered to sail without going to windward. If the mistral was blowing, we kept inside the La Maddalena archipelago and ventured down the sheltered eastern coast of Sardinia as far as the commercial port of Olbia. Only when the wind was right did we strike out across the straits to Bonifacio from where one can choose to head up the west or east coast of Corsica—again depending on the winds at the time.



hey say gentlemen never sail to windward and there is no better place than here to keep up those appearances. During the summer months, the average temperature is 82 degrees F, which can rise as high as the 100-degree mark in July and August, the height of the cruising season. With the exception of the mistral, which blows

periodically from the northwest, and the sirocco winds, which can affect the southeast corner of Sardinia, the region enjoys steady seabreezes that die away at night. But even when these strong winds prevail, there are plenty of sheltered cruising grounds to explore. If the mistral, which is always forecast well ahead of time, blows up, after you have crossed the straits to Bonifacio, then you simply set a course around the eastern part of Corsica and take in the many sheltered coves as far as the historic town of Porto Vecchio. With more favorable winds from the normal high pressure system sitting to west, you can venture up Corsica's dramatic southwest coastline, first to Propriano and then on to the island's capital, Ajaccio, where Napoleon was born. Whichever way, a call first at Bonifacio is a must.

From a distance, the only outward sign of habitation is the fortress perched precariously on top of the deeply contoured limestone cliffs. Then, quite suddenly, this wall of rock opens as if someone has uttered "Open Sesame," revealing the entrance to a narrow fjord that widens to a sheltered harbor. Little wonder that the place, founded in 828 A.D., has a long history of piracy and sieges. Whomever controlled the parapets and harbor, controlled the strait and the strategic route between Genoa and France. The sign of past sieges remain. The cliffs are pockmarked with indentations from cannon fire and ballards set deep into the stone allow for the harbor entrance to be quickly closed with chains. The ancient citadel has no less than eight heavy gates guarding the single road, which until recent times was locked each night by the chief magistrate. Having climbed to the top, you find the fortress, which was inhabited by the Foreign Legion until 1983. You also see ancient silos large enough to store sufficient grain for the entire population and a series of arched aqueducts that carried rainwater from a communal cistern into a system of tanks that then fed into individual homes.

Being such a unique spot, Bonifacio harbor is so popular that all the guidebooks suggest an early arrival. A second fjord close to the entrance takes up any over-spill

of visiting yachts, and a launch is on hand to ferry crews across to the town. The town also has a unique aquarium set into the rock, but to see the many varieties of brightly colored fish in this area, you have only to sail the short distance to the small archipelago of Lavezzi guarding the eastern end of the straits. This is a nature preserve where fishing lines and spear guns are banned to protect a magical undersea world that rivals anything in the Caribbean. The food is typically Italian throughout Sardinia, with pizzas, pastas, roast lamb and suckling pig, all included in most menus. Fish is also readily available, though unlike in Corsica, there are few fishermen.

In Corsica, there is a definite French influence in the cuisine, though don't mention it to the waiters. Corsicans are fiercely independent, for their island was sold to the French and they have been trying to regain their independence ever since. First courses invariably include delicious vegetable and red bean stews, ravioli, lasagna and bouillabaisse, a fish soup served with garlic croutons. Main courses include smoked meats, wild boar and lamb as well as lobsters and freshwater trout.

Both regions are also fiercely proud of their wines. One Navigare charter client, who was something of a wine buff, ordered a list of fine French wines and was so disappointed to find none onboard, he caught the first ferry to French Corsica to buy them himself, only to face the stern rebuff: "And what's the matter with our wines then?" He settled for the Corsican brands and by all accounts went home having made a new discovery. Grape varieties from the south include Nielluccio and Sciacarello reds and Vermentino and Muscat whites. The wines from Sardinia are just as good and the names to watch out for include Cannonau, Malvasia, Monica, Torbato and Vernaccia. Navigare's Grand Soleil 37, the smallest in their fleet of charter yachts is fitted out with a double berth forward and two double berths aft that are divided by a narrow bulkhead. The 42 has a similar arrangement, though it is better suited to family sailing

PORTO CERVO:

YOU CAN RUB FEN

with one double berth and four singles. The 45, also a six-berth boat, is equipped with an owner's stateroom, while the 46.3 has eight berths, two of them doubles positioned in the stern like the 37. The 52 has an owner's stateroom aft with ensuite facilities, a double cabin forward of the mast and two singles opposite with a sliding divider between them which share their own ensuite facilities. The skipper's berth, situated in the bows, is accessed through a hatch on the foredeck.

Bareboat charter prices range from \$2,800 per week for the 37-footer, to \$6,100 for the 46.3. A skipper adds about \$1,000 to the price. *Hieracon*, which is available crewed only, charters for \$8,000 for six, or \$7,800 including cook, food and fuel when there are only four in the charter party. During the summer months there are regular connections from London and Paris, and hourly flights to Olbia, the closest airport, from Milan, Rome and Pisa. □

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Clockwise from top: Buildings cling perilously close to the cliffsides in Porta Francia, Bonifacio; *Hieracon* reaches off on an adventure; another view of Porta Francia; a hillside scene on Sardinia.



ERS WITH THE RICH AND FAMOUS

