

INSIDE: EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO PLAN YOUR TRIP

FRANCE

Britain's best-selling magazine about France

May 2011 Issue 152

DORDOGNE DELIGHTS

Enjoy beautiful
villages by car

Boulogne

TAKE A SHORT BREAK
IN THE CITY BY THE SEA

PITCH PERFECT

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OF THE
BEST

FRENCH CAMPSITES

EMILIO ESTEVEZ

The Hollywood
actor on his
love of France

Corsican escape

Explore the most remote corner of
this captivating island in the sun

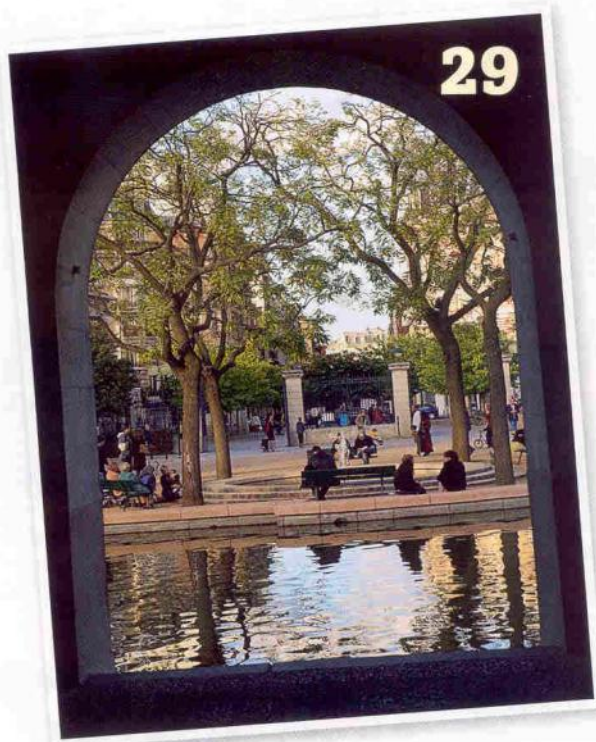
PLUS

Riverboat camping along the Sarthe, Provence village life,
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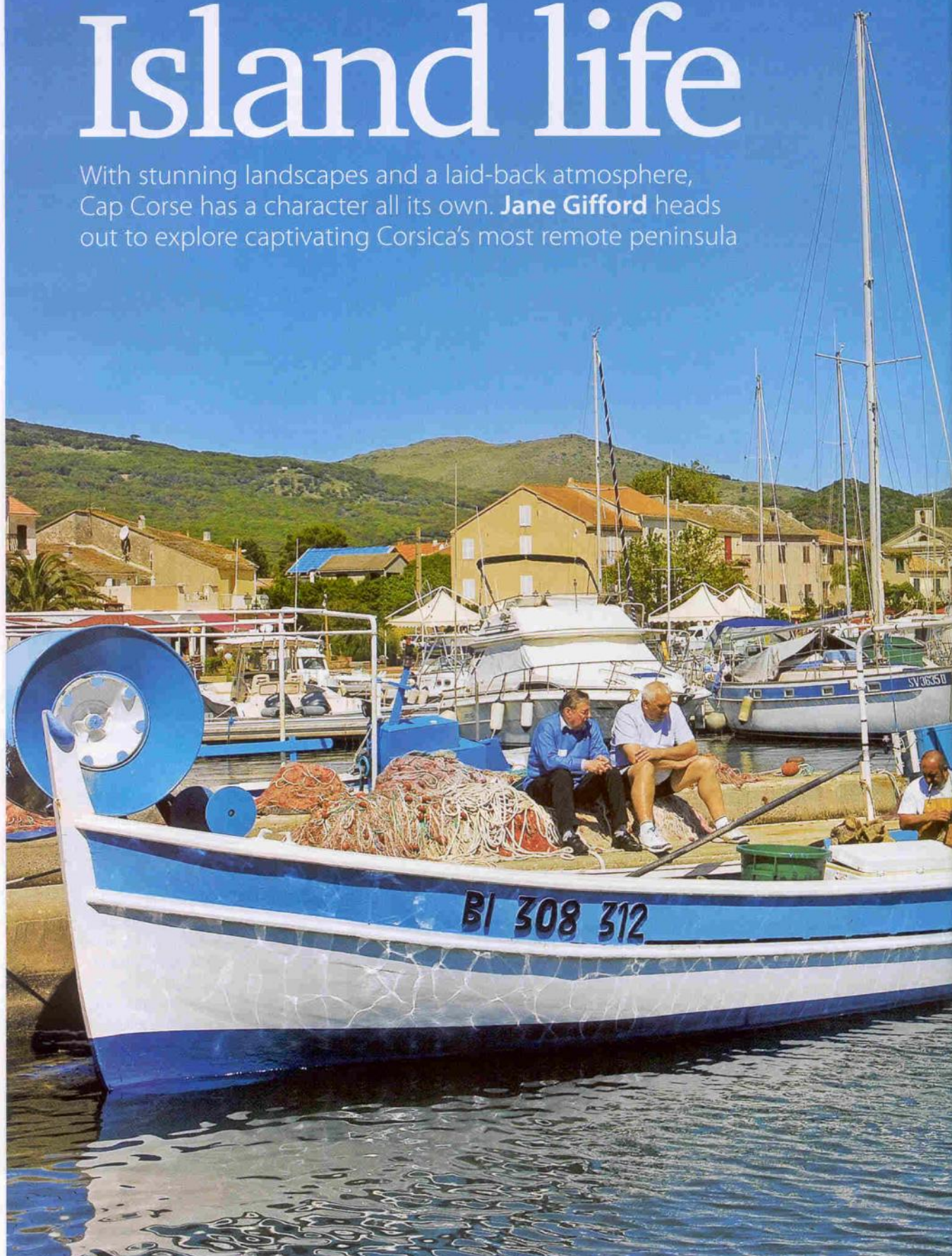
Take a road trip rich in history and culture through delightful Dordogne's most beautiful villages.

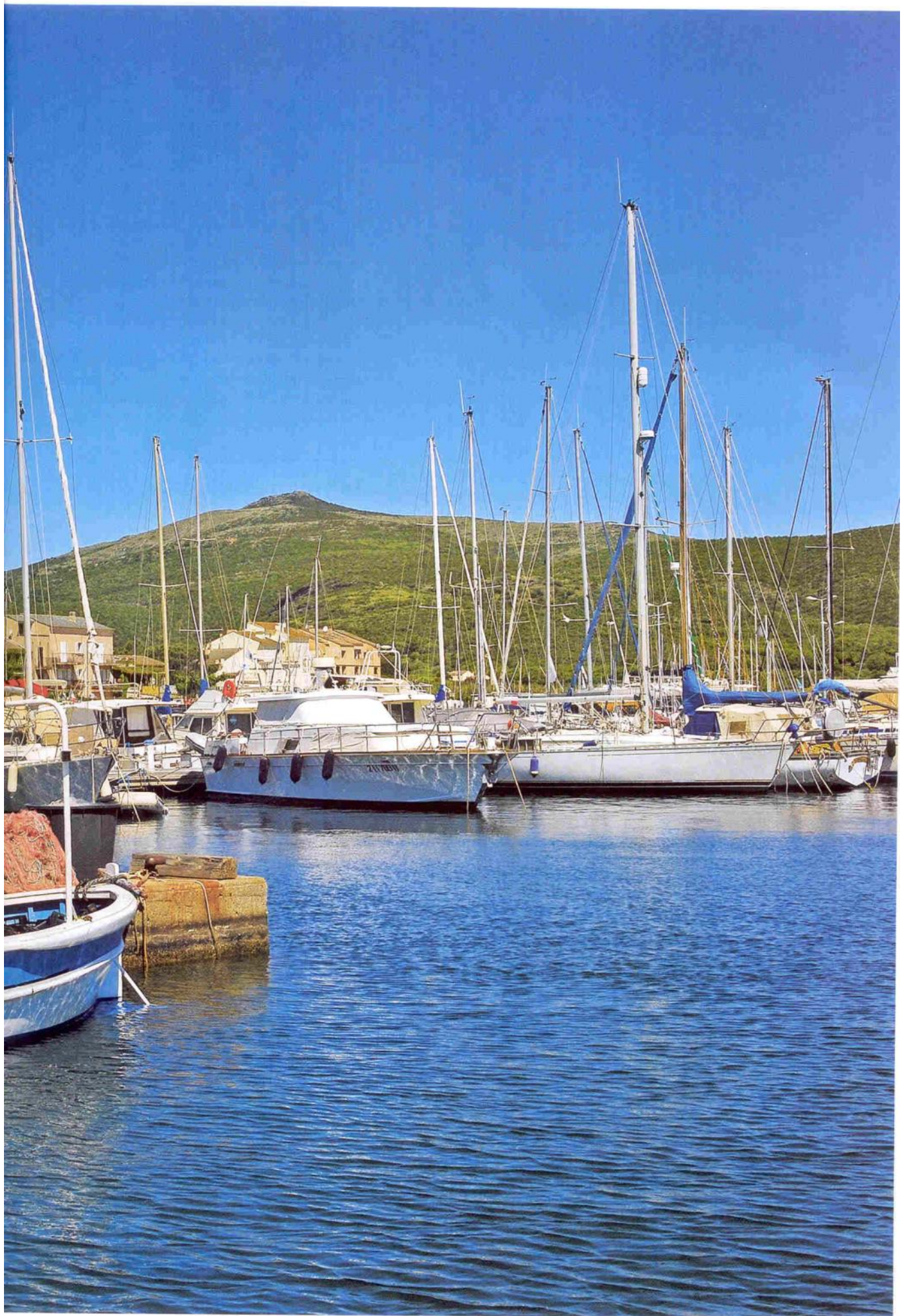
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Hollywood star and 1980s Brat Pack actor Emilio Estevez shares his French experiences.

Island life

With stunning landscapes and a laid-back atmosphere, Cap Corse has a character all its own. **Jane Gifford** heads out to explore captivating Corsica's most remote peninsula





OPENING PAGE:
The port of
Macinaggio
BELOW: Bastia,
the gateway
to Cap Corse
and the island's
principal port
and commercial
town FACING
PAGE: La
Citadelle in
Sainte-Marie

Cap Corse is unlike the rest of Corsica. Protruding from the far north of the island, like a craggy finger pointing across the Mediterranean towards Italy, it is commonly referred to as being like 'an island in an island'. There is just one road skirting the peninsula's coastline, the D80; a winding route which veers across the mountains, omitting the most northerly point to join east coast with west.

The pace of life on Cap Corse is slow, the people are laid-back and the landscape is extraordinarily beautiful. With little easily accessible level land it remains relatively undeveloped from the point of view of mass tourism. Spring is the best time to visit, when the maquis, Corsica's evergreen and fragrant mountain scrub, is ablaze with wildflowers and the sea is a stunning blue.

Fly to Bastia, the gateway to Cap Corse, and spend your first night in the city centre. The island's principal port and commercial town, especially famous for its wines, Bastia is an attractive and unpretentious coastal city, wedged between the mountains and the sea. Friendly, safe and easily explored on foot, it's the perfect place to get in a Corsican mood before tackling the D80.

For many centuries Corsica has been an unfortunate pawn in the power struggles of European dynasties. Bastia was Corsica's capital under the Genoese until the administrative centre was moved to Ajaccio by Napoléon. Pasquale Paoli, the defeated 18th-century independence leader, remains a national hero. French is the official language but place names are predominantly Italian, although the Corsican native tongue has recently had a revival and is on many road signs. Today Bastia shares equal status with Ajaccio and is the capital of the Haute-Corse *département*.

The D80 heads out of Bastia down the east coast of Cap Corse from the northern end of Place Saint-Nicolas. This enormous square, lined with palm trees, bars and eateries, faces the sea and is overlooked by elegant five and six-storey buildings. Walk towards the statue of Napoléon dressed as a Roman emperor. He is, of course, Corsica's most famous son. Beyond this you will find Vieux Port, a busy harbour full of fishing and pleasure boats, with the distinctive twin spires of l'Église Saint-Jean-Baptiste rising above them. A sweeping flight of stairs takes you up to La Citadelle crowned with the 16th-century Genoese Palais des Gouverneurs, and Bastia's former cathedral, the baroque Église Sainte-Marie. Tucked away up here is A Casarella, chef Andy Caravel's restaurant, where you can eat exquisite local fish dishes while enjoying a

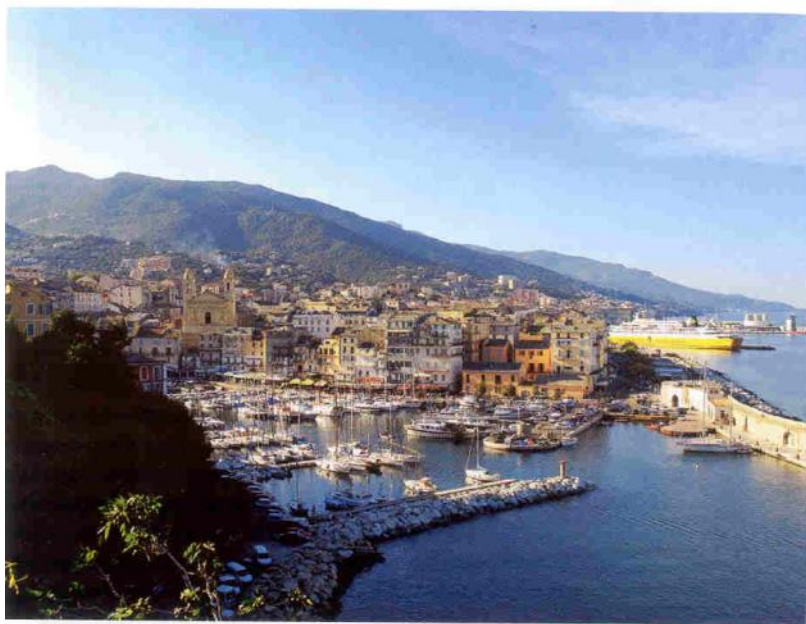
As you travel further north, the maquis takes over with dense-flowering carpets of pink and white rock roses

romantic night-time view over the harbour and city lights, off into the Cap Corse distance.

Leaving town, first stop is Miomo, where an ancient round tower guards the pebbly beach. Corsica has 100 such watchtowers built between the 14th and 17th centuries to warn the surrounding *communes* of attack by Barbary *corsaires*, sometimes called Barbary pirates (pirates and privateers who operated from North Africa). A quarter of these lookout posts are on Cap Corse. Another sits in ruins at the end of an attractive little peninsula with old houses crammed along its length and around the tiny harbour. This is Erbalunga. Being fairly close to Bastia, Erbalunga has become a tourist honeypot and parking is at a premium. It is still worth stopping to explore the narrow streets and enjoy a meal or drink with a sea view. If you walk along the shore on the south side of the peninsula you can stretch out on the flat rocks with your feet in the water and take in a great view back down the coast towards Bastia. The colour of the Tyrrhenian Sea really is as stunning as the brochures say.

Carpets of flowers

As you travel further north, heading for Macinaggio, the road becomes narrower and the maquis takes over with dense-flowering carpets of pink and white rock roses covering the steep mountainsides. The Tour de l'Osse, one of the better preserved of the Genoese watchtowers, comes in to view on a tight bend through tall stands of bright yellow broom. Marine de Porticciolo is tucked away in a tiny sheltered cove, first ▶







ABOVE: The peaceful fishing port of Barcaggio
RIGHT FROM TOP TO BOTTOM: A decorative cottage in Centuri; Erbalunga and the east coast; Untangling spider crabs at Macinaggio; The busy little fishing port of Centuri

glimpsed through pines on yet another tight bend. If you drive through the village, park above the beach and follow the path down to the marina, where you can step outside time for a while in the jumble of simple, whitewashed houses. The port of Macinaggio at the end of the east coast road is surrounded by a rare expanse of flat land. From Roman times right up to the 19th century, this was one of Corsica's most active ports, exporting agricultural produce, wine and olive oil. Today pleasure is the main business and the marina is popular with visiting yachts. There is ample car parking with plenty of bars and eating places, even souvenir shops. Local fishermen sell the best of their catch to chefs and holidaymakers before it even leaves the boat. A large campsite and some modern holiday flats make this the closest thing to a holiday resort on Cap Corse.

For lovers of wild Corsica, Macinaggio's charm lies in following the coastal path, the *Sentier des Douaniers* (Customs Officers' Path), through the Capandula

nature reserve, taking in Tamarone beach, Tour de Santa Maria (with its feet in the sea) and the clifftop Tour d'Agnello. The trail covers 12 spectacular miles of remote sandy beaches, dunes, cliffs and sweet-smelling maquis, passing through the fishing village of Barcaggio on the tip of Cap Corse and ending on the west coast in Centuri. There is little shelter along the way so it's best to start very early. Take swimming gear, drinking water and an umbrella for shade. Try walking the trail in three leisurely stages, setting out from Macinaggio, then Barcaggio and finally Centuri. A far less strenuous way to see the most northerly tip of Cap Corse is with U San Paulu sea tours, whose boats leave from the quayside in Macinaggio. The cliffs, towers, lighthouses and island nature reserves on the Îles Finocchiarola and Île de la Giraglia, are best seen from the water, as are the glorious colours of the sea itself.

For a great view of the east-coast sunrise and a fascinating insight into the history of Cap Corse, stay in

the mountains above Macinaggio in the *commune* of Rogliano, signed from the D80. The road is barely a car's width and is full of bends and riddled with potholes. For 500 years, until the 17th century, this was the feudal domain of the Genoese da Mare and Negrone dynasty. The medieval ruins of their castle, San Colombano, look down over the mountainside *commune*. There are some beautiful churches, two watchtowers, a mill and a ruined convent to discover.

Elaborate mansions

Rogliano once had a population of more than 4,000 – now, less than 500 remain. Among the modest cottages there are many grand houses. These are known as the *maisons des Américains*. When *phylloxera* wiped out their vines in the 19th century, many Cap Corsins emigrated to South America. Some made their fortunes in coffee and sugar then returned home and built ostentatious mansions as a testament to their wealth. Their elaborate family homes and mausoleums are an incongruous feature in the rural landscape throughout Cap Corse. You can stay in a converted *maison des Américains* hosted by the Albertini family at Hôtel U Sant' Agnellu. Be sure not to

Walk to the top for a panoramic view of the mountains and sheer cliffs of the rugged west coast

miss the spectacle of dawn over the Baie de Tamarone and the island of Capraia.

Before leaving the tip of Cap Corse, take a steep detour on the D253, down through the densely wooded slopes dotted with isolated hamlets, to the peaceful little port of Barcaggio. You can take a swim from the beach to the east of the village and eat on the waterfront at hotel-restaurant Chez Noëlle Hôtel, at U Pescadore. Back on the D80 you can climb up to Moulin Mattei. This is not a working windmill but an advertisement for Louis-Napoléon Mattei's vermouth-style apéritif which enjoyed worldwide popularity in the 19th century. Walk to the top for a dramatic panoramic view of the mountains and sheer cliffs of the rugged west coast.

Not far below, take the switchback D35 down to Centuri-Port. You can see back up the steep mountainside to Moulin Mattei. The entrance to this busy little fishing port is guarded by another watchtower and the tiny harbour is ringed with bars, restaurants and a few shops. Centuri is an excellent stopover with a reasonable choice of accommodation. The evening light is famous, making this a popular ►





ABOVE: The large marina at Saint-Florent, know locally as *le petit Saint-Tropez*

haunt for artists. Eat on the terrace at Hôtel Restaurant de la Jetée for the best view.

The west coast of Cap Corse is even wilder than the east. The D80 is narrow and tortuous, zigzagging down to remote beaches and then climbing back up to considerable heights, all the while clinging to the mountainsides with sheer drops down to the sea. The verges are a mass of flowers and there are very

few places to park. The village of Morsiglia has six 15th-century towers around impressive Château Fantauzzi. In Pino there are some very grand *maisons d'Américains* among the pine trees. Unlike the rest of the towers so far, that at Nonza is square and was built by order of Pasquale Paoli to defend against the French. It is perched on top of the ruined Château Gentile on a tall, sheer cliff which juts out into the sea. Walk up to the tower for the view along the coast and back over to the bright orange baroque church of Santa Giulia, who was martyred here in the fourth century. Tucked away in the castle ruins you will find La Sassa, where you can enjoy excellent ices, salads and another great view.

Journey's end is Saint-Florent, know locally as *le petit Saint-Tropez*. Surrounded by mountains, the large marina bristles with expensive yachts, a few local fishing boats and has shops purveying a wide selection of wares. Here you can take a boat trip with Le Popeye sea tours across to the silver sands of Plage du Lodo on the edge of the Désert des Agriates nature reserve. Amble along Saint-Florent waterfront and take your pick of bars and restaurants. Watch life on the marina from chic bar-restaurant Le Petit Caporal. Then enjoy the sunset view from Saint-Florent harbour wall, where the colours of the evening sky extend down the full length of Cap Corse. 🌅

FRANCOFILE

Enjoy the pace of life and extraordinarily beautiful landscapes of Cap Corse

GETTING THERE

By air: Jane Gifford flew into Aéroport International Bastia-Poretta with easyJet. www.easyjet.com
Car hire is available from the Hertz depot at the airport. www.hertz.fr

WHERE TO STAY

Hôtel Les Voyageurs
9 Avenue Maréchal Sebastiani
20200 Bastia
Tel: (Fr) 4 95 34 90 80
www.hotel-lesvoyageurs.com

Hôtel Restaurant U Sant' Agnellu
20247 Rogliano
Tel: (Fr) 4 95 35 40 59
www.hotel-usantagnellu.com

Hôtel Restaurant de l'Europe
Place des Portes, Port de Plaisance, 20217 Saint-Florent
Tel: (Fr) 4 95 37 00 03

www.hotel-europe2.com

WHERE TO EAT

Restaurant A Casarella
6 Rue Sainte-Croix
20200 Bastia
Tel: (Fr) 4 95 32 02 32

Bar Restaurant Ind'e Noi (Chez-Nous)
Pian Di Fora, 20222 Erbalunga
Tel: (Fr) 6 24 30 52 99

Restaurant U Pescadore
La Giraglia, Barcaggio
20275 Ersa
Tel: (Fr) 4 95 35 64 90

Hôtel Restaurant de la Jetée
20238 Centuri Port
Tel: (Fr) 4 95 35 64 46
www.la-jetee.net

Restaurant Le Petit Caporal
Port de Plaisance

20217 Saint-Florent
Tel: (Fr) 4 95 37 20 26

THINGS TO DO

Le Popeye Promenades en Mer
Tel: (Fr) 4 95 37 19 07
www.lepopeye.com
Boat trips to Plage du Lodo.

U San Paulu Promenades en Mer
Port de Plaisance de Macinaggio
Tel: (Fr) 4 95 35 07 09
www.sanpaulu.com
Boat trips to the tip of Cap Corse from Macinaggio.

TOURIST OFFICES

Agence du Tourisme de la Corse
17 Boulevard du Roi Jérôme
20181 Ajaccio
Tel: (Fr) 4 95 51 00 00
www.visit-corsica.com

Communauté de Communes du Cap Corse

Maison du Cap, Port Toga
20200 Bastia
Tel: (Fr) 4 95 31 02 32
www.destination-cap-corse.com

Office de Tourisme de Bastia

Rue José Luccioni, Port Toga
20200 Bastia
Tel: (Fr) 4 95 54 20 40
www.bastia-tourisme.com

Office de Tourisme de Macinaggio-Rogliano

20248 Macinaggio
Tel: (Fr) 4 95 35 40 34
www.ot-rogliano-macinaggio.com

Office Municipal du Tourisme de Saint-Florent

20217 Saint-Florent
Tel: (Fr) 4 95 37 06 04
www.corsica-saintflorent.com