

South Sardinia – Cagliari and Beyond

Published/Revised May 15, 2018 By [Claudia Flisi](#) This post may contain promotional and affiliate links. EuropeUpClose may receive commissions for purchases made through links in this post. Please read our [disclosure](#) for more info.

Beaches and boulders and blue-green waters are among the attractions in South Sardinia, but these features alone don't explain why the southern part of the island is experiencing the fastest growth in tourism these days.

Sun worshippers and nature lovers thrill to these attributes, but there is more than superficial beauty to be found in [Sardinia](#).



Cagliari Sardinia

Cagliari itself is the first example. It is by far the largest city of Sardinia and boasts the island's major airport hub, but summer vacationers often head for the seaside as soon as they land here. Too bad, as they are missing out when they do.

This urban center is not large (population of the whole province is under 600,000) and has a sunlit holiday feel, even in winter. The sunshine, ocean walks, wide tree-lined avenues, and pastel-colored low-slung buildings invite meandering.

Its various quarters are living testimony to the many cultures that have contributed to modern-day Sardinia over the last 1,500 years: Phoenicians, Punics. Romans, Greeks. Spanish, and mainland Italian city-states.

>>[Find Hotels in Cagliari](#)

Where to Stay in Cagliari: Castello

First and foremost is the area called [Castello](#), perched on a limestone hill overlooking the urban sprawl. Here are the most important architectural and cultural monuments of Cagliari – churches, palaces, museums, museums in palaces, the bastions of Santa Croce and St. Remy, the Elephant Tower (with a marble elephant to justify the name), and a building called “The Ghetto”, located near the former Jewish ghetto.

>>[Find Hotels in Castello](#)



The Bronzetti

Of special note is the Museo Archeologico Nazionale (National

Archeological Museum), with its collection of little bronze Nuragic statues (the bronzetti) and – for now – 16 of the Mont' e Prama stone giants. The latter will eventually be transferred to a purpose-built structure near Cabras, about 65 miles northwest of Cagliari.

A mystery of the bronzetti is that there are no copper mines in Sardinia. The metal had to come from somewhere else, and some experts speculate that locals traded obsidian – a hard volcanic rock found on this volcanic island – for the desired copper.

South Sardinia Beaches

Nora

Among Cagliari's churches, grand and modest, one, in particular, is worthy of mention. The Chiesa di Sant'Ef시오, Saint Ephysius, honors the patron saint of Sardinia and is the starting point for the longest (in distance) religious procession in Italy and in the Mediterranean.

Every May 1 since 1657, on the [feast of Saint Ephysius](#), a group of believers carries a statue of St. Ef시오 from the church to the town of Nora, a little over 40 miles away. (The saint was martyred in Nora in 303 AD). The procession takes four days and is accompanied by costumed celebrants, horses, carriages, local dignitaries, speeches, dancing, and culinary accouterments.

Nora lies southwest of Cagliari along the coast. Touring there or elsewhere calls for car rental or private taxis, as train connections are limited and delays are common on the island. We used the services of I-Van, jovially named for owner Ivan Atzori, who speaks English and knows – and loves – his territory. (Ivan Atzori's Email: pitzzy82@hotmail.com)



Villasimius

Heading east from Cagliari along the southern tip of Sardinia, an hour's car ride brings you to [Villasimius](#), known as Crabonaxa in the Sardinian language.

Nature is a major attraction here and this little town offers one of the prettiest of all Southern Sardinia Beaches. The seabed is white, so the color of the water seems more transparent than elsewhere in Sardinia, so the locals claim. That is a boon to scuba divers and snorkelers exploring the marine area's underwater ruins — from Roman ships to World War II airplanes shot down off the coast.

> [Find Hotels in Villasimius](#)



Festa della Madonna del Naufrago

The transparency is especially valued during the three-day Festa della Madonna del Naufrago (the festival of the shipwrecked Madonna). This unique yearly event is held above and below water each July off the coast of the Isola dei Cavoli south of Capo Carbonara. {Note: the island isn't actually named for cabbages (*cavoli*), but is instead a misunderstanding of the Sardinian word *càvurus*, or crab. }

In addition to the usual processions, food feasts, and music, a ceremony is conducted 33 feet underwater with a priest blessing a 10-foot statue of the Madonna positioned at that depth since 1979. Only divers and fish can “hear” the blessing but no one questions its power to protect sea-going fishermen and sailors.

Spiaggia del Riso

Back on land, you can dry off on any of the peninsula's 20 miles of South

Sardinia beaches. One is poetically called the Spiaggia del Riso (the Rice Beach) for its polished white sand. But there is more. On the southern tip of Capo Carbonara, a wide lagoon called Stagno Nottieri (Nottieri Pond) hosts both transiting and permanent pink flamingo populations. Guided tours will take you there, but it's easy to find Nottieri – and the birds – on your own.



Via Panoramica

Another excursion that can be done independently is the Via Panoramica (the Panoramic Way) hugging the coastline. It is especially inviting in the springtime when temperatures are still mild and the *macchia mediterranea* (local shrubbery) is at its greenest and most brilliant. You can drive, hike on trails, ride mountain bikes, or trek with horses. Or observe the peninsula from a fisherman's boat by booking a *pescaturismo* (fishing tourism) excursion. Two of these are offered and have proved popular.

The irony of this success is that Sardinians were not originally fishermen.

The most traditional dishes of Sardinian cooking were based on sheep, lamb, and pork, not fish. But no one is complaining these days, least of all the tourists.

South Sardinia – Cagliari and Beyond was written and photographed by [Claudia Flisi](#). [Cagliari Turismo](#) and [Sardegna Turismo](#) hosted and arranged her trip.

South Sardinia – Cagliari and Best Southern Sardinia Beaches – Pin for Later:



EuropeUpClose



*Top Sights in
South Sardinia*

Beaches and boulders and blue-green waters are among the attractions in South Sardinia, but these features alone don't explain why the southern part of the island is experiencing the fastest growth in tourism these days.

Sun worshippers and nature lovers thrill to these attributes, but there is more than superficial beauty to be found in [Sardinia](#).



Cagliari Sardinia

Cagliari itself is the first example. It is by far the largest city of Sardinia and boasts the island's major airport hub, but summer vacationers often head for the seaside as soon as they land here. Too bad, as they are missing out when they do.

This urban center is not large (population of the whole province is under 600,000) and has a sunlit holiday feel, even in winter. The sunshine, ocean walks, wide tree-lined avenues, and pastel-colored low-slung buildings invite meandering.

Its various quarters are living testimony to the many cultures that have contributed to modern-day Sardinia over the last 1,500 years: Phoenicians, Punics. Romans, Greeks. Spanish, and mainland Italian city-states.

>>[Find Hotels in Cagliari](#)

Where to Stay in Cagliari: Castello

First and foremost is the area called [Castello](#), perched on a limestone hill overlooking the urban sprawl. Here are the most important architectural and cultural monuments of Cagliari – churches, palaces, museums, museums in palaces, the bastions of Santa Croce and St. Remy, the Elephant Tower (with a marble elephant to justify the name), and a building called “The Ghetto”, located near the former Jewish ghetto.

>>[Find Hotels in Castello](#)



The Bronzetti

Of special note is the Museo Archeologico Nazionale (National Archeological Museum), with its collection of little bronze Nuragic statues (the bronzetti) and – for now – 16 of the Mont’ e Prama stone giants. The latter will eventually be transferred to a purpose-built structure near Cabras, about 65 miles northwest of Cagliari.

A mystery of the bronzetti is that there are no copper mines in Sardinia. The metal had to come from somewhere else, and some experts speculate that locals traded obsidian – a hard volcanic rock found on this volcanic

island — for the desired copper.

South Sardinia Beaches

Nora

Among Cagliari's churches, grand and modest, one, in particular, is worthy of mention. The Chiesa di Sant'Ef시오, Saint Ephysius, honors the patron saint of Sardinia and is the starting point for the longest (in distance) religious procession in Italy and in the Mediterranean.

Every May 1 since 1657, on the [feast of Saint Ephysius](#), a group of believers carries a statue of St. Ef시오 from the church to the town of Nora, a little over 40 miles away. (The saint was martyred in Nora in 303 AD). The procession takes four days and is accompanied by costumed celebrants, horses, carriages, local dignitaries, speeches, dancing, and culinary accouterments.

Nora lies southwest of Cagliari along the coast. Touring there or elsewhere calls for car rental or private taxis, as train connections are limited and delays are common on the island. We used the services of I-Van, jovially named for owner Ivan Atzori, who speaks English and knows — and loves — his territory. (Ivan Atzori's Email: pitzzy82@hotmail.com)



Villasimius

Heading east from Cagliari along the southern tip of Sardinia, an hour's car ride brings you to [Villasimius](#), known as Crabonaxa in the Sardinian language.

Nature is a major attraction here and this little town offers one of the prettiest of all Southern Sardinia Beaches. The seabed is white, so the color of the water seems more transparent than elsewhere in Sardinia, so the locals claim. That is a boon to scuba divers and snorkelers exploring the marine area's underwater ruins — from Roman ships to World War II airplanes shot down off the coast.

| [>Find Hotels in Villasimus](#)



Festa della Madonna del Naufrago

The transparency is especially valued during the three-day Festa della Madonna del Naufrago (the festival of the shipwrecked Madonna). This unique yearly event is held above and below water each July off the coast of the Isola dei Cavoli south of Capo Carbonara. {Note: the island isn't actually named for cabbages (*cavoli*), but is instead a misunderstanding of the Sardinian word *càvurus*, or crab. }

In addition to the usual processions, food feasts, and music, a ceremony is conducted 33 feet underwater with a priest blessing a 10-foot statue of the Madonna positioned at that depth since 1979. Only divers and fish can “hear” the blessing but no one questions its power to protect sea-going fishermen and sailors.

Spiaggia del Riso

Back on land, you can dry off on any of the peninsula's 20 miles of South

Sardinia beaches. One is poetically called the Spiaggia del Riso (the Rice Beach) for its polished white sand. But there is more. On the southern tip of Capo Carbonara, a wide lagoon called Stagno Nottieri (Nottieri Pond) hosts both transiting and permanent pink flamingo populations. Guided tours will take you there, but it's easy to find Nottieri – and the birds – on your own.



Via Panoramica

Another excursion that can be done independently is the Via Panoramica (the Panoramic Way) hugging the coastline. It is especially inviting in the springtime when temperatures are still mild and the *macchia mediterranea* (local shrubbery) is at its greenest and most brilliant. You can drive, hike on trails, ride mountain bikes, or trek with horses. Or observe the peninsula from a fisherman's boat by booking a *pescaturismo* (fishing tourism) excursion. Two of these are offered and have proved popular.

The irony of this success is that Sardinians were not originally fishermen.

The most traditional dishes of Sardinian cooking were based on sheep, lamb, and pork, not fish. But no one is complaining these days, least of all the tourists.

South Sardinia – Cagliari and Beyond was written and photographed by [Claudia Flisi](#). [Cagliari Turismo](#) and [Sardegna Turismo](#) hosted and arranged her trip.

South Sardinia – Cagliari and Best Southern Sardinia Beaches – Pin for Later:



EuropeUpClose



*Top Sights in
South Sardinia*