

# Bastia & the Far North



For many, Bastia is their first port of call, whether they arrive by air or tumble off a ferry from mainland Europe. But so many visitors pass through, on and out, scarcely giving her a glance. She deserves more. For centuries, the town was the de facto capital of Corsica until Napoleon snatched away that honour and bestowed it upon Ajaccio. Her roots still show through in the characterful old port (nowadays given over to pleasure craft), the narrow alleys that nuzzle up to the quayside and the citadel, with its commanding views of town and sea.

To the city's north lies the long finger of Cap Corse. Along the promontory's eastern shore are a succession of small resorts and harbours, ideal for families. Should the summer crowds begin to oppress, simply cross over the sierra that extends along the interior and drop to the west coast – wilder, less trafficked, bucking and rumped.

St-Florent, the only other town of consequence (if a settlement of only 1500 can be called a town) sits at the base of the cape's west coast. It's a chic little resort (see the luxury yachts moored alongside quai d'Honneur) that has some tempting dining options. It's also a great base for radiating out to explore the Nebbio region's inland villages and, to the west, the haunting wilderness of the Désert des Agriates and its lovely beaches of fine sand.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- **Wraparound View**  
Haul your way up to the Tour de Sénèque (p114)
- **Walking & Waves**  
Hike a section of the Sentier des Douaniers (p112) around Cap Corse's northern tip
- **Dining**  
Enjoy a total gastronomic experience at Ferme-Auberge Campo di Monte (p121) near Murato
- **Wining**  
Visit a vineyard and sample some of the famous AOC wines of Patrimonio (p119)
- **Funky Festival**  
Take your pick of folk, jazz or salsa at the international Nuits de la Guitare (p121) in Patrimonio
- **Boat & Beach**  
Take a boat trip from St-Florent (p116) and spend the day on the fine white sand of Plage du Loto (p121) or Plage de Saleccia (p121)
- **The Open Road**  
Drive down the less-explored west coast (p113) of rugged Cap Corse



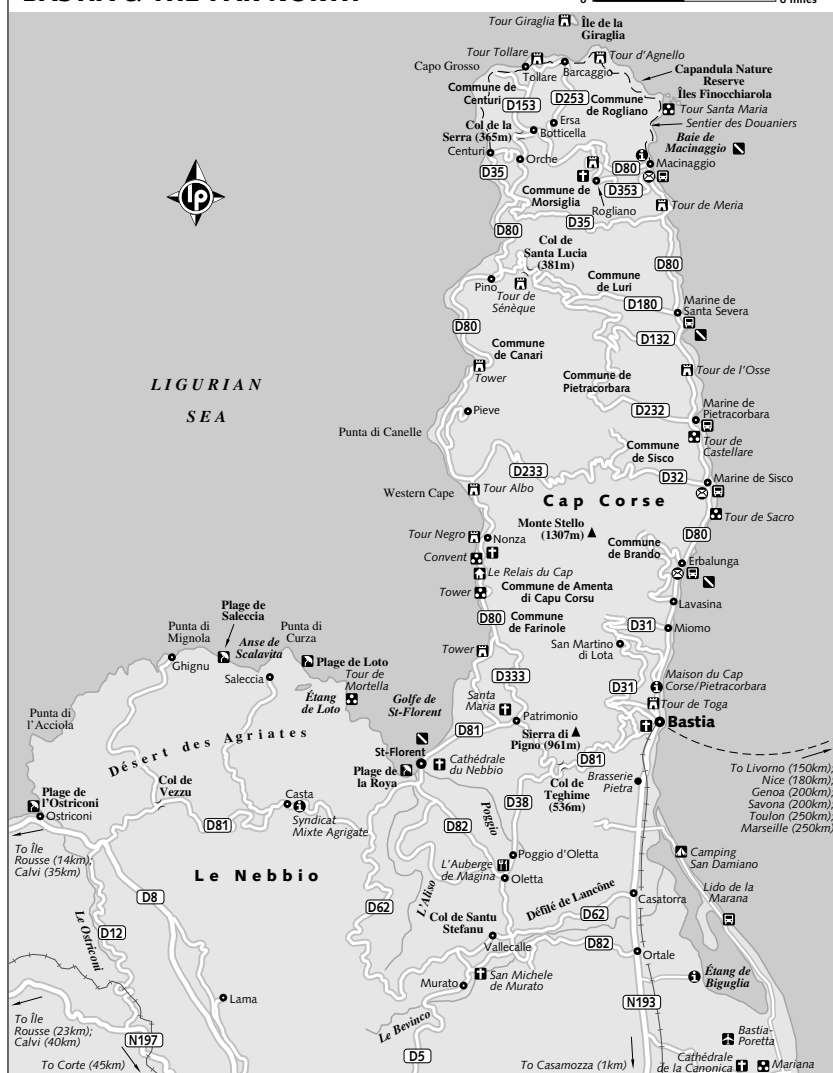
# BASTIA

pop 38,000

Most visitors drive off the teeming ferries from mainland Europe (in terms of passenger traffic through its port, Bastia ranks second in France only to the Channel port of Calais), then head

straight out of town for Cap Corse or the beaches around St-Florent. But Bastia warrants more than a fleeting glance. Economically Corsica's most dynamic city and capital of the *département* of Haute-Corse, this thriving city has a rough-round-the-edges appeal that accepts but doesn't pander to tourism. Linger a little and you won't be disappointed.

## BASTIA & THE FAR NORTH



## HISTORY

The city of Bastia was officially founded in 1372, although there were settlements in the area as far back as Roman times. The Genoese governor of the time, residing in the poorly defended Château de Biguglia in a malaria-infested area several kilometres away, understandably decided to go up-market and build himself a fortress (or *bastiglia* – hence Bastia) on the only really significant rocky headland protecting the island from seaborne incursions.

But not everyone saw things that way. Many freedom-minded Corsicans saw the fortress, or citadel, as the prime symbol of Genoese oppression. Indeed, on several occasions villagers came down from the mountains and sacked the town in protest over Genoese taxes. But despite the periodic instability, Bastia would always lick its wounds and continue to expand.

Napoleon (a son of Corsica, remember) would stand for no such nonsense from his compatriots and revolts in the town were brutally suppressed. More damaging for the town in the long term was his 1811 diktat that Ajaccio should supplant Bastia as capital of Corsica.

In 1943, in one of the cruellest errors of WWII, US Air Force bombers raided the town, just after the last Axis troops had withdrawn. Several people, joyously celebrating their liberation in the streets, were killed and many buildings destroyed.

In the postwar period the strength of Bastia's port has contributed to the town's resurgence as the island's most dynamic economic pole.

## ORIENTATION

Place St-Nicolas, a long, traffic-free rectangle, is at the heart of Bastia. At the square's northern end, av Maréchal Sébastiani, links the southern ferry terminal with the train station. West of the square, parallel *blvd Paoli* and rue César Campinchi, each running north-south, are the main shopping streets.

## INFORMATION

### Bookshops

**Le Point de Rencontre** (☎ 04 95 31 23 10; cnr *blvd Général Giraud* & *la Montée Ste-Claire*) Bookshop-cum-arts centre with a range of local-interest texts. Stages regular exhibitions and readings by local authors.

## Cultural Centres

**Una Volta** (☎ 04 95 32 12 81; [www.una-volta.org](http://www.una-volta.org) in French; ☎ Sep-Jun) Bastia's cultural home stages exhibitions and literary events.

## Emergency

**Police station** (☎ 04 95 54 50 22; *rue du Commandant Luce de Casabianca*)

## Internet Access

**Café Albert I** (11 *blvd Général de Gaulle*; per hr €3; ☎ noon-2am)

**Cyber Oxy** (1 *rue Salvatore Viale*; per hr €3.10; ☎ 10am-2am Mon-Fri, 1pm-2am Sat)

## Laundry

**Lavoir du Port** (25 *rue du Commandant Luce de Casabianca*; ☎ 7am-9pm)

## Left Luggage

**Objectif Nature** (☎ 04 95 32 54 34, 06 12 02 32 02; [www.objectif-nature-corse.com](http://www.objectif-nature-corse.com) in French; 3 *rue Notre-Dame de Lourdes*; ☎ 8am-7pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-noon Sun) Will store your pack during working hours for €3 per day.

## Medical Services

**Bastia hospital** (☎ 04 95 59 11 11; Furiani) Bus 1, which leaves from opposite the bus station on *blvd Général Graziani*, terminates at the hospital.

## Post

**Post office** (av Maréchal Sébastiani)

## Tourist Information

**Tourist office** (☎ 04 95 54 20 40; [www.bastia-tourisme.com](http://www.bastia-tourisme.com); place St-Nicolas; ☎ 8am-8pm daily Apr-Sep, 9am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Sat Oct-Mar) Has leaflets in English for two town walking tours and two drives around the environs of the town.

## SIGHTS

### Place St-Nicolas

This vast square, nearly 300m long and one of France's largest, overlooks the commercial harbour. Shaded by palms and viciously pollarded plane trees, it's bordered by a string of attractive terrace cafés along its western edge. At night rollerbladers race and twirl, taking advantage of this traffic-free space. There's a lively flea market on Sunday mornings and throughout summer it's enlivened by free concerts. On 14 July fireworks spurt and crack above it to mark Bastille Day.

At the square's northern end is Bastia's **War Memorial**, a striking bronze statue of a mother