



# CALVI

pop 5200

The most dramatic way to arrive in Calvi, 'capital' of the Balagne region, is by boat from mainland Europe, ideally as dawn bursts above its backdrop of mountains. A thriving little town, it stretches lazily along the bay under the watchful eye of its citadel. It's the Corsican town that's closest to the Mediterranean coast of metropolitan France and, with its thriving café culture, restaurants ringing the port and sandy beach, it resembles any number of the smaller towns along the French Riviera.

Explore the lanes and alleys of the citadel, dine at one of the restaurants that fringe quai Landry, loll on the long strand of beach to the south or indulge in some more strenuous aquatic activity. Do reserve at least half a day to jump aboard the Tramways de Balagne (see the boxed text, p133) and trundle to Île Rousse and back, stopping off at some delightful beaches on the way. Calvi is also a major access point for the villages of the Balagne interior (see the driving route described on p139).

On the downside, the little town attracts more holidaymakers than any other Corsican destination except Porto-Vecchio and the Ajaccio area. In July and August, when the resident population swells to over 40,000, prices are correspondingly high and hotels and camping grounds are stretched to bursting.

## HISTORY

It was in the 1st century AD that the Romans laid the foundations of the town of Calvi, although the Golfe de Calvi had been a port of call for sailors from even earlier times. Sacked subsequently by Barbary raiders, Calvi got back on its feet under the Pisans between the 11th and the 13th centuries. Rivalries between local lords, especially those from Cap Corse, finally led the population to turn to Genoa for protection in 1278. The then-powerful republic on the Italian mainland could not have asked for better luck and wasted no time in turning the inhabitants of Calvi into good Genoese citizens. Using Calvi as a base, along with the southern town of Bonifacio (which it already controlled), Genoa was able to exert its power over the rest of the island.

Calvi came to be so totally identified with its loyalty to Genoa that many other Corsican communities considered Calvi, rather than Genoa, the oppressor. It was under the Genoese that Calvi's citadel was built and fortified against the outside world. Over the centuries of Genoese overlordship, Calvi would nevertheless be put sorely to the test.

In the mid-16th century Corsica was caught up in the rivalry between Henri II of France and Charles V of Spain (king of Spain and also holy Roman emperor). In 1553 France dispatched a squadron made up of French troops and Turkish forces under the command of the Turkish privateer Dragut. This fleet captured Bastia, St-Florent and Bonifacio but failed to take Calvi. It was on this occasion that Genoa gave the town its motto in recognition: *Civitas Calvi Semper Fidelis* (City of Calvi forever faithful).

## ORIENTATION

The citadel – also known as the upper town (*haute ville*) – is built on a promontory to the northeast of the lower town (*basse ville*), which is home to most of the town's eating, sleeping and shopping options. The hub of activity by day is centred around the long beach that stretches southeast of town. By night it transfers to quai Landry (along the front of the marina) for bars, beers and brasseries. Blvd Wilson is the main shopping street and the place to find banks and shops. Rue Alsace Lorraine, part of the small cobbled pedestrianised area, is worth a browse for its handful of artisan workshops and craft studios.

## INFORMATION

### Bookshops

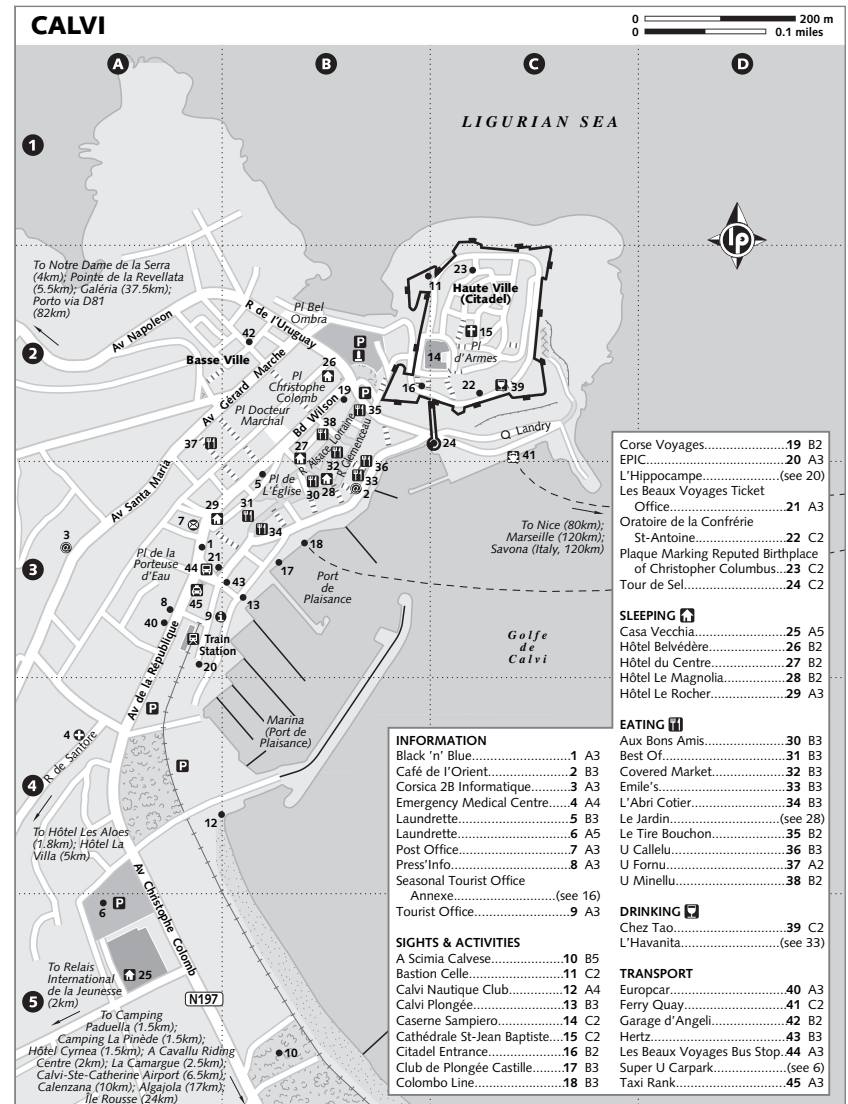
**Black 'n' Blue** (20 blvd Wilson) French and a few foreign-language books, guides, maps and a selection of Corsican CDs.

**Press'Info** (av de la République) A good range of French-language and foreign newspapers, magazines and guidebooks.

### Internet Access

**Café de l'Orient** (16 quai Landry; €1 connection plus per min €0.10; ☎ 10am-midnight) Quayside café with a set of computer terminals.

**Corsica 2B Informatique** (av Santa Maria; per hr €3; ☎ 9.15am-9pm Mon-Sat, 3.30-9pm Sun) Half the price and twice as fast.



## Laundry

**Laundrette** (10 blvd Wilson; ☎ 7am-10pm)

**Laundrette** (av Christophe Colomb; ☎ 7.30am-10.30pm)

Above Super U car park.

## Medical Services

**Emergency Medical Centre** (☎ 04 95 65 11 22; rte du Stade; ☎ 24hr) Off rte de Santore.

## Post

**Post office** (cnr blvd Wilson & av de la République)

## Tourist Information

**Tourist office** (☎ 04 95 65 16 67; www.balagne-corsica.com in French; port de plaisance; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 3-6.30pm daily Jul & Aug; 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Sat May, Jun, Sep & Oct; 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri Nov-Apr)