



CORSICA

A slice of tranquility amid ancient citrus groves

LOCATION	Mediterranean Sea
COORDINATES	42.03° N, 9.01° E
AREA	3,368 sq. miles (8,722 sq. km)
POPULATION	349,465
MAIN TOWN	Ajaccio

Corsica is a fragrant marvel. Beyond the island’s principal cities and the seaside resort towns that feature on its postcards, there are jagged mountains ringed with lush vegetation reaching all the way down to white sandy beaches and the Mediterranean beyond. The perfume of rosemary, lavender, thyme, sage and mint common across the Mediterranean carries a top note of lemon here: the citrus groves tucked within the island’s vertiginous interior are a Corsican dietary staple.

An hour’s drive south of Bastia on the east coast, the Citrus Biological Resource Center in San Giuliano is a sprawling menagerie of nearly a thousand varieties of citrus fruit. The groves here nurture kumquats and Buddha’s hands, yuzu and the unique Corsican clementine, plus grapefruit, oranges, tangerines and—of course—lemons. The garden promotes citriculture in Corsica and throughout France (the island is a French territory with a measure of self-governance; some Corsicans wish it was independent) and is one of the most important collections of citruses in the world. It’s a favorite destination of perfumers and chefs, including Anne-Sophie Pic, a French chef with six Michelin stars to her name, who was so inspired by the groves of San Giuliano that she published the cookbook *Agrumes*, which means “citrus” in French.

A predecessor of the lemon, citron—*cédra* to French-speaking locals—is a pale-green fruit with a gnarled rind, a football shape, a juicy but bitter flesh and an invigorating aroma. Corsican citron was the foundation of the island’s export economy in the nineteenth century, and today this local variety is resurging as chefs seize on its distinctive notes to energize their recipes.

Cap Corse, a small finger of land to the north of the island, is home to some of Corsica’s most jungly stretches, and citrus groves flourish amid its wild landscape. Barrettali, an hour-and-a-half drive north of Bastia, was long Corsica’s prime citron-growing territory, and it is here that Xavier Calizi is reviving the tradition at Les Cédrats du Cap Corse. He welcomes visitors to his 4 acres (1.6 ha) of citron groves, where he produces artisanal citron-laced jams, liqueurs, beers and beauty products.

On the other side of the Cap, forty minutes from Barrettali, the cliff-top Hôtel Misincu is ensconced in a park of olive groves and citrus trees (the latter of which inspired the Corsican tea brand Callysthé to create its own Secret de Misincu blend, with lemons sourced from the hotel’s domain). The eco-resort, with a whitewashed exterior of arches and views over the viridian





GETTING THERE

The best way to explore the mountainous interior of Corsica is to hire a rental car. Bastia is a two-and-a-half-hour drive from Ajaccio, right through the heart of the island on the T20. Alternatively, Chemins de Fer de la Corse operates a train between the two cities four times a day. Bastia is also reachable by ferry from mainland France at Marseille, Nice and Toulon, and from the Italian town of Livorno.

SEE & TOUR

It is possible, over the course of an afternoon in Corsica, to travel from forested mountains to one of the island's soft-sand beaches. In the north, Plage de l'Ostriconi and Plage du Lotu are renowned for their wild and rugged beauty. Cap Corse is often referred to locally as an "island within an island," and there is plenty to explore. The small, ancient fishing village of Erbalunga is one of the most picturesque in the region.

STAY

There are ample options for every budget in Cap Corse, and even the smallest guesthouses take reservations by email. The Couvent de Pozzo, around a twenty-minute drive north from the center of Bastia, is a former fifteenth-century monastery that has been brought back to life as a peaceful guesthouse by owner Emmanuelle Picon. There are stunning sea views from the hotel.

WORTH KNOWING

Although Corsica has been part of France for more than two centuries, its native language, Corsican, is officially a dialect of Italian. While most Corsicans speak French, the French spoken on the island is Italian accented. The Corsican language is taught as part of every school's curriculum, and it's helpful to know a few basics: *bonghjornu* is "hello"; *per piacè* is "please"; and *à ringraziavvi* is "thank you."



of the sea, offers accommodations by London-based designer Olympia Zographos that bring the drama of the island's nature inside, with driftwood details and raw-wood beam ceilings, plus volcanic rock pools for each of the private villas; the famed terroir-to-table restaurant Tra di Noi serves up the taste of citrus and the rest of Misincu's garden.

The Couvent de Pozzo, a half-hour drive south, is a fifteenth-century monastery for Capuchin monks that has housed the family of Emmanuelle Picon since the French Revolution. A decade ago, Picon decided to open the doors of this private cloister to visitors. Today, as an inn, it maintains centuries of the family's original furnishings inside the stone palazzo. Like Hôtel Misincu, Couvent de Pozzo is surrounded by groves of lemons, mandarins, and clementines, plus permaculture gardens of vegetables, fruits and olive trees. Picon's great-great-grandfather cultivated citron in the mid-1800s, and today she serves the fruit as marmalade and confit to guests. Citrus suffuses other dishes on the menu, from the fresh-squeezed orange juice at breakfast to the sharp-flavored lemon rind used in *fiadone*, the traditional cheesecake of Corsica. A basket of just-picked lemons is a fixture in the

kitchen. "Corsican food is really farmer food," says Picon. "People use what they have around them, and here everyone has citrus trees in the garden."

Corsican chefs approach this local abundance with ingenuity. The beloved Libertalia Bistro Tropical, a thirty-minute drive east of Bastia, is a barbecue and brewery set among sylvan greenery. At this verdant restaurant, run by Pierre-François Maestracci, the homemade lemonade is as much of a signature as the proprietary beers on tap. Nearby, in Saint-Florent, the pier-front terrace of Mathys turns out perfect fish with added zing from hunks of locally sourced lemon.

At L.N. Mattei, a Corsican distillery that dates back to 1872, the original recipe for *cédratione*—a liqueur combining citron with a delicate concoction of herbs—is still in production. The aperitif can be tasted at Mattei's own boutique in Bastia, at bars across the island and at the countless delis stocking Corsican specialties, like the renowned *Épicerie Scotto* in Saint-Florent. "Everything we eat is connected to what we grow," says Picon, the hotelier at Couvent de Pozzo. "Life on an island is always about using what the island gives you."

RIGHT

The Citrus Biological Resource Center in San Giuliano is the leading rare citrus authority in France; nearly a thousand different species of citrus are grown in a 32-acre (13 ha) orchard, including three-hundred-plus varieties of mandarin oranges alone. The center studies diseases specific to citrus fruits and the effects of climate change.

BELOW

An unripe Corsican citron at the Citrus Biological Resource Center. The fruit is lemon yellow when ripe, and the pulp has a sweet flavor. The cédrat, as it is known locally, was once a considerable source of wealth for Corsica, to the extent that the island exported nearly 50,000 tons (45,000 MT) a year. Its production has shaped the island's landscape.



