



THE CENTRAL MOUNTAINS

3 PERFECT DAYS

♥ DAY 1 // THE KERNEL OF CORSICA

Start gently in picturesque Corte (opposite), then drive out due north along the N193 to the lightly trafficked Vallée du Niolo. On your way you can stop at Prumitei – Centre des Arts du Feu (p175) to see skilled craftspeople at work. In the Vallée du Niolo, allow a few hours to explore the cluster of villages (p179) near Calacuccia, the ‘capital’ of the valley. A two-hour horse-riding excursion (p180) in the magnificent Forêt du Valdu Niellu is the perfect finish to a fantastic day.

♥ DAY 2 // ALFRESCO ATTRACTIONS

In Corte, rise early to make it to Vallée de la Restonica (p177) before the crowds arrive. Drive along the river until you find the perfect bathing pool and smooth rocks (p178). Come lunchtime, tuck into an *omelette au Brocciu* (omelette with goat’s or ewe’s-milk cheese) at Bergeries de Grotelle (p178). Suitably re-energised, you could tackle the ascent to Lac de Melu (p178) or, if you’d like something more gentle, leave the valley and drive to Pont de Noceta (p183) for an afternoon dip in the Vecchio river.

♥ DAY 3 // FORESTS AND FRESH MOUNTAIN AIR

From Corte, make your way to the peaceful mountain hamlet of Vizzavona, surrounded by the majestic Forêt de Vizzavona (p184); be sure to stop at Cantina di Matteu (p184) in Venaco for gourmet picnic supplies on the way. In the forest, take your pick from the gentle walking options on offer: try Cascades des Anglais (p184) or Cascade du Voile de la Mariée (p184). Spend the afternoon at Parc Vizzavona Aventure (p184) for a bout of action amid pine trees. Heading back to Corte, enjoy a hearty Corsican meal at U Stazzu (p176).

TRANSPORT

CAR // The N193, which links Bastia to Ajaccio, cuts through the mountains, and serves Corte, Venaco, Vivario and Vizzavona.

PARKING // It's comparatively easier to park your car in Corte than in the coastal cities, though the streets in the centre are still congested in summer. Corte has a few car parks for €1.50 per hour.

BUS // **Eurocorse Voyages** (☎ 04 95 21 06 30) runs buses between Ajaccio and Bastia (twice daily, Monday to Saturday), stopping at Vizzavona, Vivario, Venaco and Corte. From July to mid-September, **Autocars Mordiconi** (☎ 04 95 48 00 04) runs buses from Corte to Porto (one daily, Monday to Saturday) via Calacuccia and Évisa. **Autocars Cortenais** (☎ 04 95 46 02 12) has one bus to Bastia from Corte via Ponte Leccia on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. It also operates a service to Aléria from Corte (one daily Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday) in July and August only.

TRAIN // **Chemins de Fer de la Corse** (☎ 04 95 23 11 03; www.train-corse.com) runs four trains daily from Ajaccio, stopping at Vizzavona, Vivario, Venaco, Corte, Ponte Leccia and Bastia. For Calvi and Île Rousse, change at Ponte Leccia.

BICYCLE // **Altipiani** (☎ 06 86 16 67 91; www.altipiani-corse.com; 5 rue du Professeur Santiaggi, Corte; bicycle per day €18) hires out bikes.

CORTE (CORTI)

.....

pop 6350

Corte, roughly midway between Bastia and Ajaccio, feels different to other Corsican cities. This is the heart and soul of Corsica. Caretaker of the island's identity, the town was, so briefly, the capital of an independent Corsica between 1755 and 1769, and remains a symbol of its people's aspirations and longings.

Beautifully positioned at the confluence of several rivers, Corte is blessed with an

awesome setting. From the N193, you can view the fairy-tale sight of Corte's citadel atop a craggy mount that bursts forth from the valley. The town's sizeable student population – testified to by the number of bars in the main street – gives the town a special buzz during term time. During the summer, it's mainly tourists who walk the streets and fill the cafes, supplemented by a sun-bronzed bevy of hikers enjoying day walks amid the soul-stirring scenery of the Restonica and Tavignano Valleys, both of which open out at the foot of the town.

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

TOURIST OFFICES // **Tourist office** (☎ 04 95 46 26 70; www.centru-corsica.com; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon, Wed & Sat, 9am-7pm Tue, Thu & Fri Jul & Aug, 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri Sep-Jun) In the Caserne Padoue at the entrance to the citadel. Has information about Corte and the valleys of the central mountains.

EXPLORING CORTE

🗺️ CITADEL & MUSÉE DE LA CORSE // GET THE LOW-DOWN ON

CORSICA'S PAST AND CULTURE

For a bird's-eye view of Corte and the cobbled alleys of the *haute ville* (upper town), haul your way up to the citadel, which seems to grow organically from the rocky pinnacle to which the town clings. The citadel itself was built in 1419, while the two buildings facing one another past the gate, the Caserne Padoue (Padoue Barracks) and the Caserne Serrurier (Serrurier Barracks), were added in the 19th century. The latter houses the organised **Musée de la Corse** (Museu di a Corsica; ☎ 04 95 45 25 45; admission €5.50; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-mid-Jun & mid-Sep-Oct, 10am-8pm mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 10am-5pm Tue-Sat Nov-Mar), the island's major museum