

Sardinia

HIGHLIGHTS

- Stumbling like an archaeological pioneer upon the hidden Nuraghic village of **Tiscali** (p296) obscured in a hard-to-reach sinkhole above the Valle del Lanaittu
- Exploring the mountainous area of Barbagia, including **Gola di Gorropu** (p294)
- Wandering along the secluded coastline of the **Golfo di Orsei** (p299) and wondering where all the other hikers are

Signature food: *Porcheddu*
(roast suckling pig)

Celebrated native: Grazia
Deledda (author)

Famous for... Centenarians

And now for something completely different...

Sardinia is Italy's time-warped pre-Roman relic, a rugged, often misunderstood region once famous for its brutal kidnappings but now more revered for its unspoiled coastline and – for those in the know – barely charted hikes. An island of roaming shepherds and barren, bushy wilderness, this strangely untapped Mediterranean enclave evades the standard Italian stereotypes of high fashion and high-brow culture, and instead throws up some esoteric inventions of its own. While Sicilians have traditionally hogged the coast, the Sardinians have burrowed resourcefully inland hiding behind the giant limestone slabs of the Supramonte where they fashioned independent tight-knit mountain settlements that raised goats, sheep and pigs.

Sardinia's separation from what locals refer to as *il continente* (mainland Italy) has its roots in Palaeolithic times when Nuraghic villages were built on barely pregnable ridges, mounds and karstic sinkholes. The Romans arrived in 238 BC. In the early 14th century the Spanish came, and their 400-year occupation diluted Sardinian culture with Iberian traditions, customs and linguistic peculiarities.

Harsh and sparsely populated, contemporary Sardinia harbours some of Italy's most challenging hiking terrain and is bereft of any real discernable trail network. Signposting and path markings in the complicated puzzle of valleys and gorges are often deliberately vague – a feature that, while initially confusing, can sometimes be a blessing in disguise (read: fewer people).

This chapter offers two grand walking epics in the rugged heart of eastern Nuoro province that will test the stamina and navigational skills of adventurous hikers in search of solitude, mysterious *nuraghe* ruins, and Europe's own mini Grand Canyon.



