

Nuoro & the East



To get a feel for Sardinia's proud and ancient heart you need to visit this spectacular mountainous region. Often dubbed an island within an island, Nuoro and its provinces have been shaped by centuries of isolation. Uncompromising mountains have kept the world at bay, and small rural communities have learned to fend for themselves. As a result, local traditions have survived and the countryside has remained largely unspoilt.

Nowhere else in Sardinia is the landscape such an overpowering force. From the great, grey arena of the Gennargentu to the breathtaking coastline of the Golfo di Orosei and the vast, empty valleys of the Ogliastra, this is one of Sardinia's great untamed wildernesses. A paradise for outdoor enthusiasts, it boasts exhilarating trekking, cycling and climbing, as well as myriad water-borne possibilities.

Yet while the landscape thrills, the towns are often downright ugly. Cheap breeze-block housing and neglected roads suggest that the problems of poverty, unemployment and emigration have not all been consigned to the history books. But get behind the veneer and you'll discover a defiant spirit. Nuoro, not one of Sardinia's most beautiful cities, has produced a string of top authors, including Nobel Prize-winner Grazia Deledda, and hosts one of the island's most theatrical festivals. Orgosolo, once the kidnap capital of Sardinia, is reinventing itself as a tourist site thanks to its colourful murals, while the small Barbagia village of Gavoi stages an international literature festival.

Of the many archaeological sites, the prehistoric village of Tiscali is strange and wonderful, and the Fonte Sacra Su Tempiesu is magnificently located.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Plunge into Europe's Grand Canyon, the **Gola Su Gorruppu** (p210), and trek to **Tiscali** (p211), a poignant prehistoric village
- Sail down the **Golfo di Orosei's** imperious coastline, stopping off at secluded beaches and hidden coves (p212)
- Leave the world behind as you explore the weird highland plain of the **Altopiano del Golgo** (p217)
- Scale the hidden heights in the hills around **Ulassai** (p217)
- Get a glimpse into the life of Sardinia's most famous author at her childhood home, now resurrected as Nuoro's **Museo Deleddiano** (p193)



NUORO

pop 36,455

A scruffy and not immediately likeable town, Nuoro (Nugoro in the local dialect) does little to endear itself. Its nondescript suburbs are modern and ugly and there's little of immediate interest, even in the historic centre. But scratch beneath the surface and you'll discover a proud, hospitable city, sustained by long-held traditions and an ingrained culture. Literary heroine Grazia Deledda was born here, as was novelist Salvatore Satta and acclaimed poet Sebastiano Satta, and its museums, some of the island's best, open a fascinating window onto the rural identity of its mountainous environs.

HISTORY

Archaeologists have unearthed evidence of prehistoric nuraghic settlements in the Nuoro area. A popular theory maintains that the city was established when locals opposed to Roman rule grouped together around Monte Ortobene. The fact is, however, little is known of the city before the Middle Ages, when it was passed from one feudal family to another under the Aragonese and later Spain.

By the 18th century the town, by now under Piedmontese control, had a population of around 3000, mostly farmers and shepherds. A tough, often violent place, it rose in rebellion in 1868 when citizens burned down the town hall to protest attempts to privatise public land (and thus hand it to the rich landowners). This action, known as *Su Connuttu*, no doubt confirmed the new Italian nation's view of the whole Nuoro district as a 'crime zone', an attitude reflected in its treatment of the area, which only served to further alienate the Nuoresi and cement their mistrust of authority.

Nuoro was appointed a provincial capital in 1927. It quickly developed into a bustling administrative centre, attracting internal migrants from all over the province. Although the traditional problem of banditry has subsided and the town presents a cheerful enough visage, Nuoro remains troubled, as high unemployment forces many young people to leave in search of work.

ORIENTATION

The old centre is huddled into Nuoro's northeastern corner, on a high spur of land that juts eastward to become Monte

Ortobene. The main street is Corso Garibaldi, which bisects a warren of tidy lanes, where you'll find several restaurants and popular cafes. Most of Nuoro's hotels are in the scruffy modern town that extends westwards of the *centro storico*. The train and bus stations are down Via Lamarmora, the extension of Corso Garibaldi, and the tourist office is on Piazza Italia, a big modern square above the historic centre.

INFORMATION

Banco di Sardegna (Corso Garibaldi 90) One of several banks with an ATM.

Libreria Mondadori (☎ 0784 3 41 61; Corso Garibaldi 147) A bookshop selling good maps, but little in English.

Main post office (Piazza F Crispi; ☎ 8am-6.50pm Mon-Fri, 8am-1pm Sat)

Ospedale Civile San Francesco (☎ 0784 24 02 37; Via Mannirioni) The city's main hospital, west of the centre.

Police station (☎ 0784 3 21 00; Viale Europa)

Punto Informa (☎ 0784 3 87 77; Corso Garibaldi 155; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3.30-7pm Mon-Sat) A very helpful private tourist office.

Tourist office (☎ 0784 3 00 83; www.enteturismo.nuoro.it; Piazza Italia 19; ☎ 8.30am-1.30pm & 3-7pm daily Jun-Sep, same hours Mon-Fri Oct-May) Has plenty of useful information on Nuoro and environs, including an excellent archaeological map of the province, the *Carta Archeologica Illustrata*.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Nuoro's appeal lies in the historic centre. To put the area into geographical perspective, stop for a moment on Via Aspromonte, the road that twists along the *centro storico's* eastern lip, to admire sweeping views over to Monte Ortobene. This panorama reminds the visitor that Nuoro was originally an isolated hilltop village. Indeed, the alleyways around Grazia Deledda's old house retain something of a rural atmosphere.

Museo della Vita e delle Tradizioni Sarde

The wonderful **Museo della Vita e delle Tradizioni Sarde** (☎ 0784 25 70 35; Via Antonio Mereu 56; adult/child €3/1; ☎ 9am-8pm daily Jun-Sep, 9am-1pm & 3-7pm daily Oct-May) provides a fascinating insight into Sardinian traditions, folklores, superstitions and celebrations. The museum's 8000-piece collection comprises filigree jewellery, carpets, tapestries, rich embroidery, musical instruments, weapons, household tools and