Sardinia captivates with its wild interior and out-of-this-world beaches. Its coastal drives thrill, its prehistory puzzles and millions of sheep rule the roads. Get the lowdown on the island’s outdoor appeal.

**Sights**

**Cala Goloritzè (Golfo di Orosei)**
The last little beach on the Golfo di Orosei, Cala Goloritzè rivals the best. At the southern end, bizarre limestone formations soar away from the cliffside. Among them is jaw-dropping Monte Caroddi or the Aguglia, a 148m-high needle of rock beloved of climbers.

**Cascata Lequarci (Ulassai)**
Particularly spectacular after heavy rainfall, this arresting waterfall five miles southwest of Ulassai has wispy threads that plummet almost 100m over a vertical rock face.

**Gola Su Gorropu (Supramonte)**
Sardinia’s most extraordinary gorge is flanked by limestone walls towering up to 500m in height. The endemic (and highly endangered) Aquilegia nuragica plant grows here, and at quieter times it’s possible to spot mouflon and golden eagles. From the Rio Flumineddu riverbed you can wander into the boulder-strewn ravine without climbing gear; follow the markers.

**Grotta di Ispinigoli (Golfo di Orosei)**
The magical Grotta di Ispinigoli is a veritable forest of glittering rock formations, including the world’s second-tallest stalagmite (the highest is in Mexico, at 40m). Unlike most coves of this type, which you enter from the side, here you descend 60m inside a giant ‘well’, at whose centre is the magnificent 38m-high stalagmite. You can admire the tremendous rock formations, many of them sprouting from the walls like giant mushrooms and broccolis.

**Isola Tavolara (Golfo Aranci)**
Rising from the sapphire sea like some kind of giant sea creature, this rocky island is a sight to behold. The main draws are splashing about in the translucent water of the white-sand Spiaggia Spalmatore, and marvelling at the incredible views of Tavolara’s heights and mainland Sardinia.

**Monte Ortobene (Nuoro)**
About five miles east of Nuoro is the granite peak of Monte Ortobene (955m), covered in thick woods of ilex, pine, fir and poplar, and capped by a 7m-high bronze statue of the Redentore (Christ the Redeemer). A favourite picnic spot, the mountain is also the focus of Nuoro’s annual Sagra del Redentore festival.

**Nuraghe Mannu (Cala Gonone)**
To get an eagle-eye view over the coast, follow the signs off the Cala Gonone–Dorgali road to this nuraghe (Bronze Age site). After two miles the rocky track peters out at a wild headland where you can see nearly the entire curve of the gulf. The location above a gorge is romantic, with silver-grey blocks strewn beneath the olive trees. First inhabited around 1600 BC, the tower is a modest ruin, but you can still see niches in the central chamber.

**Olivastri Millenari di Santo Baltolu (Near Sant’Antonio di Gallura)**
Off the beaten track, this delightful nature reserve shelters a group of wild olive trees that have been growing for millennia. The biggest, 14.5m tall and 20m wide, may be up to 3,800 years old, its gnarled, twisted trunk writhing upwards like something out of Lord of the Rings.

**Rocce Rosse (Arbatax)**
If you have a moment in Arbatax, head across the road from the port and behind the petrol station to the bizarre Rocce Rosse (red rocks). Like the ruins of some fairytale castle, these weather-beaten rock formations dropping into the sea are well worth a camera shot or two, framed in the distance by the imperious cliffs of the southern Ogliastra and Golfo di Orosei.

**Good to know**

If you’re not in a rush, one of the best ways of exploring Sardinia’s rugged interior is by taking the narrow-gauge *Trenino Verde*. There are six available routes: Mandas–Isili–Sorgono, Mandas–Seui, Arbatax–Gairo, Macomer–Bosa, Sassari–Tempio–Palau and Palau–Tempio (*treninoverde.com*).
**TOP PICKS**

**Alpha Diving**
Operating out of the port, this accredited diving outfit will set you up for dives around Capo Figari and Tavolara, a dreamy vision of sugar-white sand, flanked by eucalyptus, juniper and pines, and lapped by cobalt-blue waters.

**Scala di San Giorgio**
Tucked beneath sheer limestone cliffs, this gorgeous mountain is the foot of Monte Bardia. The town of Dorgali at the foot of Monte Bardia huddled in the eerie twilight of holm oak and turpentine trees jumbled stone foundations amid stone-and-mud huts to the place, stripping down the conical place from the Romans, and its inaccessibility ensured that the Sards were able to hold out here well into the 2nd century BC.

**Tiscali**
Hidden in a mountaintop cave deep in the Valle Lanaittu, the mysterious nuragic village of Tiscali is one of Sardinia’s archaeological highlights. Dating from the early 7th century BC, the village was rediscovered in the late 19th century. At the time it was relatively intact, but since then grave robbers have done a pretty good job of flushing the place, stripping down the conical stone-and-mud huts to the skeletal remains we see today.

**Selvaggio Blu**
This is the big one: an epic four-to-seventy-four-mile trek along the Golfo di Orosei’s dramatic coastline, traversing wooded cliffs and caves. A guide is recommended as the trail is not well signposted and there’s no return route if you’re going alone, be aware that the route involves scrambling, fixed-rope climbing and abseiling, so some alpine mountaineering experience is necessary.

**Sardinia Song**
If any type of music could encapsulate the spirit of Sardinia’s rugged mountains and pastoral landscapes, it is canto a tenore. This traditional male harmony singing is one of the oldest-known forms of vocal polyphony. It is performed by a four-part male choir: the tenores, made up of a soloist (the soloist and lead voice), bassu (bass), su contra (contra) and samedu-ghe (counter-tenor). Little is known of the canto’s origins but it’s thought that the voices were originally inspired by the sounds of nature – the contra based on a sheep’s bleat, the bassu on a cow’s moo and the samedu-ghe on the sound of the wind. The canto is performed in a tight circle, with the soloist singing a poem, often with a pastoral theme, to choral accompaniment.

Sights explore the nuragic village of Tiscali.

**Don’t miss**

**Spaggiara Biddorosa (Oroste)**
North of Marinu di Orroso, this beach is part of a nature reserve and never gets too busy because visitor numbers are restricted. A three-mile trail leads down to the beach, a dreamy vision of sugar-white sand, flanked by eucalyptus, juniper and pines, and lapped by cobalt-blue waters. The northern stretch stretches up to another fine beach, Berchida.

**Scala di San Giorgio (Ulassai)**
Accessible from the village of Ozesi, the Scala di San Giorgio is a vertical gully that takes its name from the 12th-century saint who is said to have divided the rock for Italy’s largest underground spring is the final outflow point through countless fissures and ravines, cliffs and caves. A guide is recommended as the trail is not well signposted and there’s no return route if you’re going alone, be aware that the route involves scrambling, fixed-rope climbing and abseiling, so some alpine mountaineering experience is necessary.

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**Strada Panoramica della Costa del Sud (Costa del Sud)**
Running along the Costa del Sud, this panoramic road - known more prosaically as the 597 - snakes along the spectacular coastline between Porto di Tonnara and Chia. It’s a beautiful drive whichever way you do it, with jaw-dropping views at every turn and a succession of bays capped by Spanish-era watchtowers.

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**Treking to Tiscali**
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**Perda Rubia, Cardedu**
At Cardedu Kayak, you can spend the day with your paddle slicing rhythmically through turquoise waters. Be sure to bring your swimming gear in summer. Francesco caters to kayakers of all levels and can help organise longer tours and ‘nautical mermaid’ sessions if you like fishing from the kayak and sleeping on secluded beaches.

**Isola Molara Boat Excursions (visittavolara.com)**
Make the most of your beach day and take an extended cruise from Tavolara. Boats set off at 11am from Porto San Paolo for Isola Molara, where you can swim in the natural pools before proceeding to Isola Tavolara around noon.

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**Sleeping**

**Agriturismo Codula Fuili**  
Best for epic views  
(codulafuili.com)  
This end-of-the-road agriturismo has bright rooms, spellbinding views, and dinners starring homegrown ingredients.

**Albergo Diffuso Mannois**  
Best for an old-town stay  
(mannois.it)  
In the heart of medieval Orosei, this lovingly restored hotel offers light-filled, pastel-hued rooms, each individually decorated.

**Casa Solotti**  
Best for idyllic rural surroundings  
(casasolotti.it)  
This relaxed B&B reclines in a rambling garden amid woods and walking trails near the top of Monte Ortobene.

**Hotel El Faro**  
Best for impressive extras  
(elfarohotel.it)  
This gorgeous whitewashed enclave is at the southern tip of Porto Conte. Two pools, plus a private jetty, spa and gym.

**S’Astore**  
Best for elegant grounds  
(hotelsastore.it)  
With sweeping panoramas of the sea far below, this whitewalled honeycomb building sits in beautifully landscaped grounds.

**Villa Las Tronas**  
Best for fin-de-siècle opulence  
(hotelvillalastronas.it)  
A 19th-century five-star palace set in its own lush gardens on a private headland, with antiques, oil paintings and elegant rooms.

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**Further Reading**

For more on the second-largest Mediterranean island, pick up our Sardinia guide (£14.99) or download the eBook (£10.49) from shop.lonelyplanet.com.