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PORT EXPLORER



AJACCIO

CORSICA

The city of Ajaccio is the cultural and political capital of the island of Corsica. Renowned as the birth place of Napoleon Bonaparte, Ajaccio's many squares and streets pay homage to the conqueror who never returned home. Located along Corsica's west coast, Ajaccio is a short drive away from hospitable beaches, soaring mountains, and unforgettable gorges. Visitors to the capital can walk along the quaint streets of its old town, stroll along the city's waterfront promenade, or venture out of the city and take in some of the island's unique natural beauty.

Corse, as it's pronounced in French, is as geographically diverse as many large countries, claiming more than 600 miles of coastline, large pine forests, and a mountainous continental divide topped with winter ski resorts. Corsica is home to other natural wonders, including the Prunelli Gorges and Les Calanches, a colorful spectacle of red granite mountains that tower above the aquamarine waters of the Mediterranean. The mountains of Les Calanches are said to change color with the movement of the sun. Mediterranean cultures have praised the island's natural beauty for centuries. As early as the 6th century BC the Greeks referred to Corsica as 'Kalliste', the beautiful.

Many native Corsicans retain an air of independence, regardless of the island's long history of occupation and foreign rule. The official language is French, however, the population of almost 260,000, speak their own language, an unusual mixture of Italian and French called Corsu. A common symbol seen throughout the island is the Moor wearing a headband. This is the symbol of independent Corsica, and many locals support a political platform of independence from France.



HISTORY

It is thought that the original Corsicans date back to the Stone Age. Radiocarbon dating has indicated that simple clay pots found on the island are 7,500 years old, and the island's many stone megaliths were created around 3500 B.C. This relatively peaceful culture flourished for thousands of years but were easily invaded by the Torreans, who brought with them bronze weapons.

The Greeks colonized Corsica around 600 B.C. and began utilizing Corsica's excellent location as a major trading route. Realizing the vast natural resources of the island, both the Etruscans and Carthaginians began settlements. During the Punic Wars of the 3rd century B.C. Corsica fell under rule of the Roman Empire who enslaved the majority of the indigenous Corsi, and declared Corsica and Sardinia a single Roman province. A Corsi rebellion against Roman forces in 175 B.C. ended in the annihilation of half of the native population. The remaining Corsi retreated to the island's interior.

With the fall of the Roman Empire, Corsica was frequently raided and invaded by the Vandals, Goths, Byzantines, and Langobards. The island was also stricken with malaria epidemics. The Moors conquered Corsica during the 9th century and proved to be the cruelest of rulers. They killed thousands of natives and punished anyone practicing Christianity. Again, the native Corsi retreated to the island's interior. This began the island's long history of resisting foreign occupation. Rule of Corsica fell into the hands of the maritime power of Pisa, realizing the exceptional trading routes the island provided. This rule was short lived as the Genoese invaded the island and gained control. During Genoese rule the island fell into civil war as various factions allied themselves with opposing forces. This conflict was driven further when the Pope granted rights of Corsica to the King of Aragon, James II. An era of destruction took its toll as unrest toppled churches and monasteries and plague, malaria and famine reigned. Revolts became common as natives were manipulated by the Genoese and Spanish.

The island was ruled by the Genoese from the 13th century to the middle of the 18th century, but in 1755 the islanders, led by Pasquale Paoli, declared the island independent. The Genoese retained ownership of Corsica until 1768 when the Treaty of Versailles transferred ownership to the French. With limitless troops the

French put an end to Corsican autonomy and rule it to the present day, however, the English ruled for a short time in the late 1700's and German and Italian forces occupied the island from 1940 to 1943.

The Corsican quest for independence, an underlying force throughout history, is today a point of contention. Linked by their roots and love

for their homeland, many Corsicans support the Nationalist party on a platform of Corsican autonomy. The national symbol of the Moor's head adorned with headband can today be seen on T-shirts and flags, embodying the freedom loving pursuit of the natives.



PLACES OF INTEREST

1 Cathedrale is Ajaccio's 16th century cathedral located in the old city. The Cathedrale is dedicated to 'La Madonuccia', or Little Madonna, the city's patron saint who is thought to have protected the residents from black plague epidemics. It houses the painting by Eugène Delacroix, Virgin of the Sacred Heart. Located to the right of the main entrance is Napoleon Bonaparte's baptismal font, where he was baptized in July of 1771.

2 Maison Bonaparte, located on the Rue de Letizia just off Rue Saint Charles, was the house where Napoleon was born and raised. A plaque above the entrance signifies Napoleon's birth on August 15, 1769. On display are family portraits, period furniture and memorabilia.



3 Hôtel de Ville is the Town Hall and is located on the Place du Maréchal Foch. On the first floor is the Musée Napoléon, which displays Napoleon's baptism certificate, portraits of family members, and his collection of military medals.

4 Place du Foch is the city's finest square. Lined with palm trees and located along the harbor front, the square is an excellent place to absorb the commotion of the surrounding city. A statue of Napoleon wearing a Roman toga sits above a fountain of four lions and faces the Gulf of Ajaccio.

5 Palais Fesch was the home of Napoleon's Uncle, Joseph Fesch, and houses the city's finest art museum. Musée Fesch contains a vast collection of Italian paintings, including works by Titian and Botticelli. Many of these works were spoils of war presented to Joseph Fesch by Napoleon. The Chapelle Impériale is also located here and was the Bonapartes' funeral chapel. Napoleon's parents, Carlo and Letizia, and other family members are buried in the crypt. These venues are currently closed for refurbishment.

6 Place du Gaulle is one of the city's main squares (known locally as Place du Diamant) and its main statue pays homage to Napoleon Bonaparte. Dressed as the Emperor of Rome, Napoleon is surrounded by his four brothers. The Square offers excellent views of the sea.

7 Place d'Austerlitz is home to another statue dedicated to Corsica's most famous son. The memorial was erected in 1938 on a sight where Napoleon liked to play as a child. It features Napoleon standing on a white pyramid in his most familiar pose.

Beyond Ajaccio

The Prunelli Gorges are located to the northeast of Ajaccio and are situated in the island's vast pine and beech forested mountains. Created by the Prunelli River, the Gorges are some of Corsica's largest and prove to be a completely different ecosystem to the sunny beaches of Ajaccio, a relatively short distance away.

Les Calanche (Les Calanques de Piana in French) is a mountainous area that rests high above the azure seas of the Gulf of Porto to the north of Ajaccio. The area's unusual rock formation, consisting of a red and orange hued granite, is a scenic rarity and receives hundreds of visitors each day.

SHORE EXCURSIONS

To make the most of your visit to Ajaccio and surrounding areas we suggest you take one of the organized Shore Excursions. For Information concerning tour content and pricing, consult with the Shore Excursion Desk. When going ashore, guests are advised to take with them only the items they need and to secure any valuables.

LOCAL CUSTOMS

Bargaining: Most shops have fixed prices with the exception of local street vendors.

Tipping: Generally service will be included in the bill, however, it is customary to leave a few coins. For taxis, a 10% gratuity is normal.

LOCAL CUISINE AND DRINK SPECIALTIES

Much of the island's gastronomic influence comes from mainland France and Italy. Corsica is known for its unique varieties of locally produced cheese.

There are a number of wineries on the island that produce a number of good quality red, white, and rosé wines.

SHOPPING

The main shopping areas are located downtown along Rue Fesch, Rue Bonaparte, and Quai Napoleon. Other shops are scattered throughout the downtown area and offer a wide variety of tourist and specialty shops. Shopping hours are typically from 8:30am - 12:30 pm and 2:30 pm - 7:00 pm, Monday through Friday. Monday mornings many shops are closed, opening during afternoon hours only.

Items of interest include Corsican wines, cheeses, and any items depicting Napoleon Bonaparte. Wines from other regions of France are also available.

A Value Added Tax (VAT), is added to most purchases. Visitors who spend over a certain amount may be entitled to re-claim some or all of the tax paid, however, regulations and conditions governing the refund of VAT are subject to change and RCCL cannot guarantee the cooperation of local authorities

LOCAL CURRENCY

The unit of currency in this port is the euro. There are 8 euro coins with a common face. On the reverse, each member state contributes a design. There are 7 euro notes. All euro coins and notes are legal tender in member states.

POST OFFICE AND TELEPHONE FACILITIES

The main Post Office is located downtown at 5 Cours Napoléon (#8). The Post Office also provides a foreign exchange service.

Telephones are available in the port terminal building. These phones can be operated by use of a credit card or local phone card.

TRANSPORTATION

Downtown Ajaccio is a short walk, approximately 1/4 mile (.5 km.), from the pier and terminal building. Taxis are available at the pier and downtown, but few drivers speak English. Fares within the city limits are metered.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The main Tourist Information Office is located at **1 Place Foch** along Place du Foch, off of the bay front promenade south of the tender landing area. This office can provide written information and maps but very few of its representative speak languages other than French fluently.

