

Issue 54

# FEATURES



68

**CORSICA ON TWO WHEELS**

Ready to burn rubber? Renting a scooter can give you a completely new perspective on your travels, and you don't even need to be an experienced biker.



41

**FLORENCE ON THE GROUND**

Our in-depth guide to Florence, Italy, will help you plan your time in this art lover's city. We've got the lowdown on where to sleep, eat, drink, shop and go sightseeing.



60

**PARC LIFE**

We visit La Brenne, a stunning regional park in the heart of France where you can embark on a mini-safari as you try to spot some of the native wildlife, including terrapins and butterflies.



74

**BURGER GEEKS**

In London, we find there's a whole community of people utterly obsessed with finding – and of course eating – high-quality hamburgers. There's even a burger detective on the case.



80

**FEEL THE BURN**

Sick of stuffy, expensive gyms? Our writer road-tests a fitness retreat in the Algarve where sunny days and sandy beaches are all part of the routine. That doesn't mean they go easy on you, though.



**+ 91-107**

**TWO-MINUTE GUIDES**

Eight countries, 24 cities, updated every month! It's our ever-popular Two-Minute Destination Guides. Use them now, or keep for your next trip. Plus, check out our route map for all Ryanair destinations.

PHOTOS © RAMA KNIGHT, TIM WHITE, KATHRYN TOMASETTI

The best (and cheapest) way to enjoy Corsica's miles of stunning coastline is on a scooter, says **Tristan Rutherford**. Photography by **Kathryn Tomasetti**



# CORSICA ON TWO WHEELS



**I**'m 40 hours into my week-long motorcycle loop around southern Corsica when it hits me: two wheels are way better than four. It's at Sartène, 50km north of Figari airport, when this eureka moment arrives. The medieval hill town tumbles into the valley in my bike's rear-view mirror, and far ahead 20km of empty asphalt ribbons down to the sea.

Every time I take a corner the bike rears up slightly and I can glimpse further open road ahead. Invariably, it's a clear shot past low fields, as snowcapped mountains frame the horizon. I gun the motor and dip into the opposing lane as the bike springs slowly back to vertical and catapults out of the corner. As a 125cc scooter virgin I'm only doing 60km/h, but this honestly feels like flying.

Corsica is ideal for motorbikes of all calibres, but you need no special training to hire a scooter, only a driving licence. The island boasts the same amount of coastline as Spain's Balearic Islands, yet receives just 20% of the visitors – and only a handful of them outside July and August. Locals ply their empty roads in pick-up trucks, tractors or

## The magical beauty that places Corsica in a different league to other Mediterranean islands is visible at every turn



on two wheels themselves. In a land with an average of just 16 rainy days between May and September it's easy to see the attraction.

On a bike the island's scenery is scarily intense. Inland, over 20 mountains soar above 2,000m. Their snowmelt is funnelled into raging rivers, which are criss-crossed by ancient stone bridges. In the west lie the Calanques, where the coast road threads through cavernous rock formations that glow red in the setting sun. And in the south-east – where I've planned my lazy loop (see map, right) – are gentle palm-lined shores, as well as a clutch of what are regularly voted the world's greatest beaches.

On day three, in Bonifacio, the island's prettiest seaside resort, I receive a lesson in biker camaraderie. In almost every Corsican town motorcycles may park up on the main square for free. The bigger the vehicle the bigger the posing rights, and the Harley-Davidsons – thoroughbred



stallions to my donkey of a moped – have taken centre stage. But bikers of all persuasions then sit and sip espressos together, from Italians on speedy Kawasakis to Germans touring on Honda Gold Wings. It's a free-living fraternity, albeit one involving lots of leather, and I feel like I belong. Then we all leave, the riders on their beast bikes revving and roaring, me with a quieter 'putt putt' sound.

It's said that every road in Corsica leads to a beach. My guidebook lists 100 great ones, but there are over 100 more that remain unmarked on the highway and many more that remain unnamed. A case in point is Pianottoli-Caldarellu Plage, which I discover by pointing the scooter coastward off the main Bonifacio road.

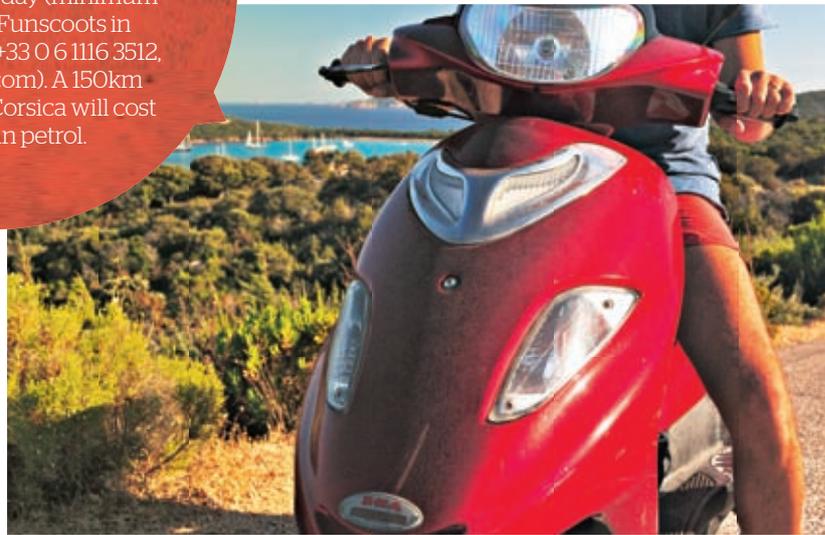
After 5km of tree-lined tarmac I glide the scooter through a minefield of rutted dirt road. Patches of sand mark a tricky final passage – bikers must speed into them, push straight ahead and hold on tight – before I spot a Yamaha silhouetted against a wide arc of beach. Its two riders are swimming naked off a rocky outcrop at one end and seem oblivious to my presence. I walk the other way and slip into a blue watery paradise of my own. Little wonder it's not been tagged on Google Maps.

For a taste of the interior, I point my scooter towards Propriano in the south-



### FOODIE RIDER

- The hill town of Sartène
- Pick up some tasty local products along the way
- Find your perfect beach



### SCOOT ON

125cc scooters are the most powerful bikes that can be rented without a motorcycle licence on Corsica – a regular driving licence will suffice. A new Honda can be rented for €40 per day (minimum four days) from Funscoots in Porto-Vecchio (tel: +33 0 6 1116 3512, [www.funscoots.com](http://www.funscoots.com)). A 150km tour of southern Corsica will cost about €7 in petrol.

west of the island. This region is a tranquil meadowland traversed by slow country roads and is consequently off the main biker trail. The magical beauty that places Corsica in a different league to other Mediterranean islands is visible at every turn.

The scooter's revs are low enough to hear the twitter of birdsong. Lizards and the odd snake squiggle out of my path. Near the village of Orasi, two eagles soar overhead then dip down to 20m, wheeling around in a circular patrol over a field of ripening corn. Though it's summer I don't see another vehicle for a good half-hour.

The liberty that a motorbike offers you to tour at both high and low speeds – or to stop off at will – becomes apparent as the days pass. The cafés that line the road between Sartène and Figari make for unscheduled breaks, as do countryside stalls selling island jam and honey. The weekly fruit market >

### Follow the route



### MORE WHEEL AND WATER TOURS AROUND THE NETWORK

#### SEGWAY TOUR PARIS, FRANCE

Scoot around leafy parks, under the Eiffel Tower and even along the banks of the Seine by night with these cool Segway tours. [WWW.CITYSEGWAYTOURS.COM/PARIS](http://WWW.CITYSEGWAYTOURS.COM/PARIS)

✕ FLY TO PARIS (BEAUVAIS AND VATRY) FROM 43 DESTINATIONS, INCLUDING TURIN. [WWW.RYANAIR.COM](http://WWW.RYANAIR.COM)

#### RICKSHAW TOUR LONDON, ENGLAND

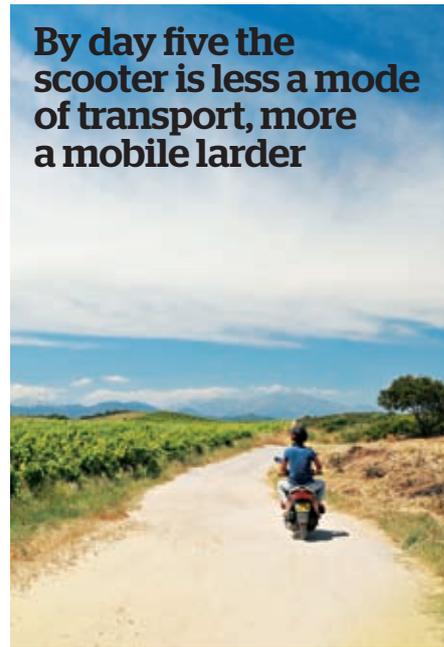
Use pedal power – but thankfully not your own – to take in London's best sights, from Soho to Harrods and Notting Hill. [WWW.INWHEELS.WETRUST.COM](http://WWW.INWHEELS.WETRUST.COM)

✕ FLY TO LONDON (GATWICK, LUTON AND STANSTED) FROM OVER 100 DESTINATIONS, INCLUDING CORFU. [WWW.RYANAIR.COM](http://WWW.RYANAIR.COM)

#### KAYAK CRUISE STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN

Stockholm Adventures gets you paddling past parks, sunbathing at the beach and mooring up for Swedish meatballs, in this city on the water. [WWW.STOCKHOLMADVENTURES.SE](http://WWW.STOCKHOLMADVENTURES.SE)

✕ FLY TO STOCKHOLM (SKAVSTA AND VASTERAS) FROM 45 DESTINATIONS, INCLUDING SEVILLE. [WWW.RYANAIR.COM](http://WWW.RYANAIR.COM)



**By day five the scooter is less a mode of transport, more a mobile larder**



**Fast facts**

**GETTING THERE**  
Figari airport is located 25km from Porto-Vecchio and 20km from Bonifacio. A daily bus service operates between the two towns, where you can pick up scooters. Taxis to Bonifacio cost about €39, and €48 to Porto-Vecchio. Alternatively, Hertz ([www.hertz.com](http://www.hertz.com)) is Ryanair's exclusive rental partner and provides special rates for passengers.

**WHERE TO STAY**  
About 1km outside Bonifacio, the great-value Hôtel des Étrangers (doubles from €45, tel: +33 0 4 9573 0109, [www.hoteldesetrangers.fr](http://www.hoteldesetrangers.fr)) has tidy guestrooms, free wi-fi and secure parking. In Porto-Vecchio, Hôtel le Goéland (doubles from €180, tel: +33 0 4 9570 1415, [www.hotelgoeland.com](http://www.hotelgoeland.com)) has hip, comfy rooms, and a waterfront location that's great for families. They also welcome bike and scooter enthusiasts too. Just outside Sartène – with an infinity pool that looks over the mountains – is the Hôtel Fior di Ribba (doubles from €76, tel: +33 0 4 9577 0180, [www.hotelfioridiribba.com](http://www.hotelfioridiribba.com)). On the west coast, in the sleepy town of Porto-Pollo, sits the Hôtel Les Eucalyptus (doubles from €93, tel: +33 0 4 9574 0152, [www.hoteleucalyptus.com](http://www.hoteleucalyptus.com)). It offers tennis courts, free wi-fi, a beachfront location and private parking for scooters.

in the fortress town of Porto-Vecchio is a particularly colourful place to stock up. By day five the scooter is less a mode of transport, more a mobile larder, as Corsican *figatelli* salami, *tomme* sheep's cheese, heirloom tomatoes (aged varieties out in years past) and local cucumbers are stuffed into every crevice. Rounding Corsica's southernmost tip again on day six I pull over at the distant sight of kitesurfers. The Italian island of Sardinia lies clear across the strait and the wind whips between the two islands. Four surfers ride the waves a kilometre out in the ocean, their red sails carving through the air like courting butterflies. Passports in hand they could be eating *prosciutto* after a 10-minute race across the water. However, I gun the scooter's motor, keen to spend my final full day on the famed beaches of the south-east coast. Little prepares you for the ice-white sands

of Palombaggia and Rondinara, Corsica's two finest beaches. Palombaggia is a triple-bayed delight fringed by palms and the odd hippy-chic beach bar. Rondinara is so beautiful it looks like it's been created using Photoshop. What may be the planet's most perfect arc of sand is shaded by Aleppo pines and lapped by half a metre of turquoise blue water. I glide past the rows of cars to the edge of the sand. On my morning of departure I run the scooter up to Porto-Vecchio, which lies close to Figari airport. The scooter feels like an extension of my body as I weave up the winding highway heading north. Such scenic rhythmic silence encourages quiet contemplation. In the classic biker book *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, the lead character achieves inner peace amid the constant hum of rubber on open tarmac. It's a feeling I know I'll miss. 

**ROAD TO SWELL**

-  A hot day in Porto-Vecchio
-  Pianottoli-Caldareello
-  Plage is worth seeking out
-  Scooting on to the next destination

# EDITOR'S WORD

It's August, and the main thing to remember about August is that it's still summer and there's still time to go on holiday, relax, chill out, read the books you've always wanted to but never had the time, tan, swim and generally lounge about. You could opt for an artistic city break in Florence and all the magic this gorgeous Tuscan Renaissance city has to offer (see page 41), or perhaps get back to nature at France's gorgeous La Brenne regional park (see page 60). Or why not hit the beautiful island of Corsica (see page 68), hire a scooter and discover some of the most spectacular and deserted beaches in the Med?

Or maybe you're one of those people who thinks that all play and no work is just not for you, in which case opt to go on a summer fitness retreat instead. Like our writer, who went off to the Algarve in Portugal for a rigorous week-long get-fit session (see page 80). There's no relaxation to be had on these kinds of trips, I can tell you. You know the sort of thing, running with logs, six-hour hikes, circuits, soup and vegetables to eat and shakes to drink.

Whoever called that a holiday? OK, you probably will lose some weight, which I suppose is the point – no pain, no gain after all. But still, if you asked me I'd probably tell you to book a beach holiday instead. Go swimming in the sea up against some good waves and you'll get all the workout you need. Plus, you can still have a beer at the bar at the end of the day.

And you won't have to give up hamburgers. Remember Cookie Monster from *Sesame Street*? Well, when it comes to hamburgers I'm like Cookie Monster. Me want burger! Me eat burger! Which is why we thought all you travellers to London should hear about the city's underground burger scene and meet the players. There's even a burger detective caller Burgerac whose goal in life is to find the perfect burger in town, no joke! See page 74.

So after all that, I think I've got the perfect holiday mapped out: beach, beer, sun and hamburgers. Stop thinking about it, book it! You know I'm right.

Wherever you're going this summer, enjoy your trip and have a great flight!

## Contributors



**TRISTAN RUTHERFORD**

Based in the sunny south of France, travel writer Tristan contributes to publications such as the *Guardian* and the *Daily Telegraph*. He visits Corsica every year and loves that it's calm, beautiful and inexpensive. Read about his scooter tour of the island on page 68.



**RAMA KNIGHT**

Photographer Rama has shot for publications like *Monocle* and *GQ Travel* and for companies like the Wellcome Trust. We sent him to the gorgeous Tuscan town of Florence to shoot our cover feature on the city, starting on page 41. [www.ramaknight.com](http://www.ramaknight.com)



**JONNY BENARR**

Property investment consultant, and property presenter for the BBC, Jonny writes our new regular feature "To Buy In...". This month he explores Puglia in south-east Italy, finding holiday homes and investment properties for all budgets (see page 87). [www.jonnybenarr.co.uk](http://www.jonnybenarr.co.uk)



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