

Corsica – The Scented Isle

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1 Fly Corsica and transfer to Evisa

Day 2/3 Evisa

Day 4/7 Restonica

Day 8 Fly London

Departs

May

Focus

Plants, birds and walks

Grading

B. Day walks only. Between Sea level and 1,400 metres

Dates & Prices

See website (tour code FRA04) or brochure

Highlights

- Wildlife walks amongst spectacular mountains & gorges
- Unique scenery and culture
- Endemic Corsican Nuthatch, Corsican Finch and Crossbill
- A rich flora, including scented maquis and many endemics
- Characterful accommodation & tasty cuisine

Corsican Crocus



Golfe de Galeria



Corsican Nuthatch



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Introduction

Corsica is one of the Mediterranean's most captivating islands, combining dramatic mountain scenery, a rich cultural heritage and an exceptional diversity of wildlife. Rising steeply from the sea, its rugged landscapes encompass deep granite gorges, ancient pine forests, flower-rich meadows and fragrant maquis scrubland, creating a remarkable variety of habitats within a relatively small area. At this beautiful time of year, the island is at its most colourful, with endemic plants in bloom and migrant birds passing through on their journey north.

Our holiday is designed to explore the very best of Corsica's natural history at a relaxed pace. Based in two characterful mountain hotels, we will enjoy a series of gentle walks through some of the island's most scenic landscapes, from the spectacular Spelunca Gorge and Calanches de Piana to the forests and valleys surrounding Corte. Along the way we will search for many of Corsica's botanical specialities, admire magnificent mountain and coastal scenery, and discover the fascinating wildlife that makes the island such a rewarding destination for naturalists.

Corsica's long isolation has given rise to a wealth of endemic species, making it one of Europe's most important biodiversity hotspots. Among the avian highlights are the endemic Corsican Nuthatch, Corsican Finch and Corsican Crossbill, whilst the flora includes a rich variety of orchids, cyclamen and island specialities found nowhere else in the world. Combined with excellent local cuisine, warm Corsican hospitality and stunning scenery at every turn, this tour offers a wonderful introduction to one of the Mediterranean's most distinctive and unspoilt islands.

Itinerary

Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Fly Corsica and transfer to Evisa

We leave London this morning on a direct flight to Bastia*. After arriving in Corsica, we begin our journey westwards, following the island's spectacular northern coastline towards the historic town of Calvi. Dominated by its impressive Genoese citadel and bustling marina, Calvi provides a fitting introduction to this captivating island. Continuing south, we make our way slowly towards Evisa, stopping frequently to admire the scenery and become acquainted with Corsica's unique wildlife. The roadside flora is often exceptionally rich, with endemic species such as Corsican Storksbill *Erodium corsicum* and Corsican Sea Lavender *Limonium corsicum* growing alongside Tree Spurge *Euphorbia dendroides* and many of the aromatic shrubs that characterise the island's maquis vegetation. Birdlife may include Blue Rock Thrush and the elusive Sardinian Warbler.

Our route follows one of the most scenic roads in the Mediterranean, winding through wild hills clothed in dense maquis and offering breathtaking views across a dazzling turquoise sea. This remote stretch of coastline remains one of Corsica's least populated regions and is renowned for its dramatic cliffs, rugged mountains and outstanding natural beauty. There will be ample

opportunities to stop for photographs, admire the wildflowers and simply absorb the scenery before we arrive in the mountain village of Evisa.

Nestled on a hillside amongst ancient chestnut trees, Evisa enjoys a magnificent setting and commands some of the finest views on the island. To the east rise the forests of Aitone and the Col de Verghio, whilst below lie the dramatic Gorges de Spelunca, the famous pink granite pinnacles of the Calanches de Piana and the shimmering waters of the Golfe de Porto. We will spend the next three nights here in a welcoming family-run auberge, where comfortable accommodation, warm Corsican hospitality and excellent regional cuisine provide the perfect base from which to explore this beautiful part of the island. Fresh trout, wild boar and traditional Corsican omelettes are among the local specialities we may enjoy as the sun sets over the gulf below.

* Depending on available flights, we may fly to Calvi instead.

Day 2

Evisa

This morning we explore the magnificent Forest of Aitone, the largest natural pine forest in Corsica and one of the island's most important strongholds for wildlife. Beneath the towering Corsican Pines, the forest floor supports a rich flora, including Corsican Hellebore *Helleborus argutifolius* and the diminutive Corsican Mint *Mentha requienii*. Birdwatching can be especially rewarding here, and we will be keeping a careful lookout for Great Spotted Woodpecker, Wryneck, Eurasian Treecreeper and, above all, the endemic Corsican Nuthatch, one of the island's most sought-after avian specialities.

Later, we descend to the Gulf of Sagone and enjoy a picnic lunch beside the mouth of the Liamone River. Here, a fascinating mosaic of reedbeds, riverside woodland, maquis, dunes and coastal grassland attracts an impressive variety of birdlife. Regular species include Common Nightingale, Western Marsh Harrier, Tawny Pipit, Greater Short-toed Lark, Red-backed Shrike and Woodchat Shrike, together with a variety of warblers and buntings. Migration can bring additional surprises and previous visits have produced such species as Purple Heron, Black-winged Stilt, White-winged Tern, Audouin's Gull and Osprey.

The coastal dunes are also rich botanically, supporting attractive displays of Sea Bindweed *Calystegia soldanella*, Sea Medick *Medicago marina*, Three-horned Stock *Matthiola tricuspidata* and Yellow Horned Poppy *Glaucium flavum*. In the adjacent meadows, colourful orchid displays often include impressive concentrations of Tongue Orchid and Jersey Orchid, providing a fitting conclusion to a day that showcases both the botanical and ornithological riches of western Corsica.

Day 3

Evisa

This morning we explore the dramatic Spelunca Gorge, following sections of the ancient mule trail that once provided the only route between the mountain village of Evisa and the coast. One of Corsica's most scenic valleys, the gorge cuts through a rugged landscape of towering cliffs, crystal-clear streams and mature maquis woodland. The vegetation here is dominated by Holm Oak *Quercus ilex*, Strawberry Tree *Arbutus unedo* and Tree Heather *Erica arborea*, beneath which grow colourful Rock-roses, carpets of *Cyclamen repandum* and a fine selection of Corsican endemics. These may include Long-leaved Snowflake *Acis longifolia*, Illyrian Sea Daffodil *Pancratium illyricum*, the aromatic Cat Thyme *Teucrium marum* and Sticky Woundwort *Stachys glutinosa*.



The gorge is also an excellent place to appreciate Corsica's distinctive wildlife. As we make our way along the trail, we will listen for the calls of Eurasian Jay and Firecrest, whilst a variety of warblers may be encountered in the dense vegetation. The sun-warmed rocks are often alive with Tyrrhenian Wall Lizards, one of the most characteristic reptiles of the island and a member of Corsica's fascinating endemic fauna.

Following an undulating route through the valley, we reach the beautiful Genoese Zaglia Bridge, where we pause for a picnic lunch beside the river. Here, magnificent stands of Royal Fern *Osmunda regalis* line the water's edge and Dippers are frequently seen feeding amongst the boulders. Later, we descend to the attractive village of Ota for refreshments before continuing to the coast. Our day concludes amidst the extraordinary scenery of the Calanches de Piana, a UNESCO World Heritage Site where fantastical red granite pinnacles plunge dramatically towards the Mediterranean, creating one of the most celebrated landscapes in Corsica.

Day 4

Transfer to Restonica

This morning we leave Evisa behind and drive eastwards through some of Corsica's most spectacular mountain scenery. Our route winds steadily upwards through chestnut woodland and Corsican Pine forest to the Col de Verghio, the island's highest road pass. Here we will pause for a short walk, keeping an eye out for mountain birds such as Water Pipit and Woodlark, as well as any visible migration should conditions prove favourable.

From the pass, we descend through magnificent mountain landscapes, stopping for lunch en route before passing through the dramatic Santa Regina Gorge. Along the way there will be opportunities for botanical stops and to search the maquis for some of Corsica's more elusive warblers, including several members of the Curruca genus.

Reaching Francardo, we rejoin the main road and continue south through Corte, Corsica's historic former capital, dramatically situated beneath the island's highest peaks. From here it is a short

journey into the beautiful Restonica Valley, where our comfortable hotel will serve as our base for the next four nights.

Day 5

Restonica

We spend the morning exploring the beautiful Verghello Valley, where Eiffel's impressive railway bridge spans a deep and wooded ravine.



The valley supports a rich variety of habitats, from fragrant maquis dominated by Maritime Pine to extensive forests of endemic Corsican Pine at higher elevations. As we walk, we will search for a range of orchids, including Violet Helleborine, Tongue Orchid and Barton's Orchid *Dactylorhiza insularis*, whilst colourful drifts of *Cyclamen repandum* often brighten the woodland

floor. Birdlife may include Crag Martin, Corsican Nuthatch, Corsican Finch, Firecrest and Eurasian Treecreeper, while a soaring Bearded Vulture is always a tantalising possibility. Following periods of wet weather, we may also encounter the endemic Corsican Fire Salamander, one of the island's most sought-after wildlife specialities.

After a picnic lunch, we continue to the celebrated Forest of Vizzavona, lying beneath the striking peak of Monte d'Oro in the heart of Corsica. The forest is renowned for its magnificent stands of coppiced Beech, which mingle with Corsican Pine on the lower slopes. In autumn, the woodland floor is carpeted with the delicate pink flowers of *Cyclamen hederifolium*, creating a particularly enchanting scene. We round off the afternoon with refreshments at Vizzavona Station, the highest stop on Corsica's historic mountain railway, before returning to our hotel for dinner.

Day 6

Restonica

This morning we explore the pine-clad lower slopes of the Restonica Valley, one of the best places on the island to look for the endemic Corsican Nuthatch. The valley's magnificent forests and rocky mountainsides provide a beautiful setting for our walk, while the rich flora may include a variety of orchids and other spring flowers.

After lunch, we spend some time exploring the historic town of Corte before venturing into the surrounding hills in search of further botanical treasures. Depending on the interests of the group, there may also be the opportunity for a walk in the Tavignano Valley, where the low maquis supports one of Corsica's most sought-after birds, Marmora's Warbler. Although scarce throughout its limited Mediterranean range, this attractive species is more readily encountered in Corsica than almost anywhere else.

Day 7

Restonica

For our final day, we follow the Tavignano Valley to Corsica's eastern coast, where a rich mosaic of sandy beaches, agricultural land, freshwater wetlands and saline lagoons provides a striking contrast to the island's mountainous interior. These diverse habitats support a wide variety of birds and offer excellent opportunities for both wildlife watching and photography.

Wetland species such as Little Egret, Great Egret, Squacco Heron and Purple Heron are all possibilities, whilst Marsh Harrier is regularly encountered quartering over the reedbeds. The surrounding farmland and scrub support breeding Common Nightingale, Cetti's Warbler, Zitting Cisticola, Eurasian Stone-curlew and the ever-colourful European Bee-eater. Migration is often under way at this season and may produce additional highlights, including Red-footed Falcon, Western Osprey and Eurasian Golden Oriole, providing a fitting finale to our exploration of Corsica's unique wildlife and landscapes.



Day 8

Fly Corsica to London

Today we bid farewell to Corsica and transfer to the airport for our flight home. As we leave this beautiful Mediterranean island behind, we reflect on a memorable week exploring its dramatic landscapes, rich flora and unique wildlife, from mountain forests and deep gorges to fragrant maquis and sunlit coastal wetlands.

Tour Grading

This tour is graded B and is designed for those who enjoy gentle walks while taking time to appreciate the island's birds, flowers and scenery. Most walks will be no more than three kilometres in length and will be undertaken at a leisurely pace, although participants should be comfortable walking on occasionally uneven or rocky terrain.

A typical day will begin with breakfast at around 8am, before setting off on our excursion at approximately 9am. Picnic lunches will be taken in the field, allowing us to make the most of our time in Corsica's beautiful landscapes, and we generally aim to return to our hotel by around 6pm. Breakfast and dinner will be taken either at our hotel or in a nearby local restaurant.

There will be opportunities for optional early morning birdwatching on some days, and a degree of flexibility will be built into the programme to take account of local conditions and the interests of the group. All walks and excursions are entirely optional, allowing you to relax at the hotel or enjoy some independent exploration should you prefer a more leisurely pace on any given day.

Weather

May is one of the most rewarding times to visit Corsica. Spring migration is in full swing, resident birds are at their most active and the island's rich flora is at its peak, with hillsides, meadows and woodland clearings carpeted in wildflowers. The combination of mild temperatures, fresh spring vegetation and abundant wildlife makes this an ideal season for exploring the island's varied habitats.

We can generally expect plenty of sunshine, although spring weather in the Mediterranean can be variable and periods of cloud or occasional rain are always possible. Daytime temperatures are usually pleasant, rarely exceeding 20°C, while evenings can be noticeably cooler, particularly in the mountains.

At this season, Corsica is at its most verdant and picturesque. The maquis is lush and fragrant, rivers and streams are flowing well, and patches of winter snow often remain visible on the summits of the highest mountains, creating a striking backdrop to the island's forests, gorges and coastal landscapes.

Food & Accommodation included in the price

All food and accommodation are included in the price of this holiday, from dinner on Day 1 through to breakfast on Day 8. Throughout the tour, we will stay in comfortable, characterful accommodation that is ideally situated for exploring Corsica's diverse landscapes and wildlife.

Meals will be taken either in our hotels or in carefully selected local restaurants, allowing us to enjoy a range of traditional Corsican dishes and regional specialities. Picnic lunches will be taken in the field on most days, enabling us to make the most of our time exploring the island's mountains, forests and coastal habitats. Dietary requirements can be catered for, provided we are advised in advance.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking

form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting flights, at the time of booking.

