



## SARDINIA AND SICILY

### SARDINIA

The crossing from Civitavecchia on the mainland of Italy to Olbia in the north of Sardinia is convenient for a number of reasons. First off, it's an eight-hour overnight sailing and there are comfortable bunks, so you don't lose any riding time and arrive early morning good and fresh.

Secondly, there are daily overnight sailings from Cagliari in the south of the island to Naples on the mainland which means you can tour from north to south (or vice versa) without backtracking.

Prior to our 2018 trip I'd spent time on Sardinia riding, hiking and climbing throughout the country. From the magnificent SP71 coastal road down at the very south of the Island right up to the

tip of the Punta Marmorata peninsular up north. However, as is usually the case, it's the regions with high rugged peaks that tend to draw me back and that was the case on this occasion.

If you're going to tour Sardinia and your idea of an adventure ride includes off-road trails, then you just have to head to the mountain village of Oliena near the island's highest peak. Once there you're going to need to find the hotel and restaurant Albergo Monte Maccione.

The hotel is on the mountainside way above the village and the ride up is all tarmac but be prepared for an outrageous sequence of hairpin bends, I counted 18 within a single mile. It's worth popping in here for a coffee even if you have no intention of riding what comes next.

From the hotel, follow the road until it

turns into a trail and take the next right. From this point on you'll need to have off-road experience and a good head for heights as the trail ascends the high rock face ahead, the Punta Corraisi.

This trail is a fantastic adventure experience and whilst I'd not class it as highly technical (if you're competent riding rocky trails, you'll be OK) it does require a cool head and safe hands especially if you are riding a big, heavy adventure bike. On this occasion we did not reach the top due to a landslide about 200 metres from the summit but having been up the trail two years previous I can't recommend it highly enough. Go and ride it you'll be delighted, or terrified, or both. The views from the summit, and as you ascend rapidly up the rock face as outstanding, and it offers a true feeling of adventure.



INCREDIBLE VIEWS FROM PUNTA CORRAISI



THE TRAIL UP PUNTA CORRAISI



ETNA LOOMING OVER MILITELLO IN VAL DI CATANIA



THE REMARKABLY PRESERVED TEMPLE OF CONCORDIA

There's plenty more to discover in Sardinia with the spectacular coastal region of Cala Gonone nearby, and the dramatic coastal cliffs of Cala Goloritze – last time I was there you could ride down on dirt tracks to viewpoints.

And if you're intending to depart via Cagliari, set aside some time for the SO71 and take a ride over to Sant'Antioco Island via the causeway on SS126.

### SICILY

At 3,329m high and covering an area of 459 square miles you simply cannot visit Sicily without seeing the looming presence of Etna, Western Europe's highest volcano. Well, actually, you can, as we found out the day we sailed into Catania.

As luck would have it, a major storm was blowing in with the focus and epicentre being on Mount Etna. However, we still felt the need to ride up the mountain even if we couldn't see it, and so we found ourselves at the start of the SP92 loop road in the village of Zafferana Etnea on-route to the café complex near the summit cone at just under 2,000m.

In good conditions, this road up Sicily's number one tourist attraction would be busy, but during a storm of tropical proportions in the first week of October we had it all to ourselves – that must be a first.

We arrived at the highest car park with its numerous bars and restaurants looking a little forlorn as the main storm event started to batter the mountain. Apart from a single Russian tourist, we were the only other people in town.

After a quick coffee it was back out into the thunder and lightning for a ride down the south side of Etna to the village of Nicolosi. We had one brief period when the cloud lifted to reveal the old lava fields we were travelling through, but other than that it was torrential rain which translated into two-inch deep rivers flowing down the roads by the time we were coming off the mountain and flash floods appearing all around.

The conditions made the trip up Etna a lot of fun, but having been previous in clear, warm weather I have to say the latter is preferred to be able to view and absorb the stunning scenery and extent and power of previous lava flows.

Leaving the east coast of Sicily and heading inland, a tour of this island would not be complete without setting course for the town of Agrigento on the south coast. You'll get to experience the interior of the island and just outside the town of Agrigento you'll find the most visited historical site on the island; the Valley of the Temples.

The Valley is a UNESCO site and includes the remains of seven well-preserved temples including the Temple of Concordia, an ancient Greek temple built between 440-430BC, which is noted as the best-preserved example in the world other than the Parthenon in Athens.

Heading north from Agrigento you'll find roads going through the most mountainous part of the interior all the way to the regional capital of Palermo, which you may be surprised to know is the fifth most populated city in Italy.

It was here that we finished our trek down through Italy when we boarded a 24-hour ferry back to Genoa on the northern Mediterranean coast. A sailing which allowed us to arrive back in northern Italy relaxed and refreshed having saved over 800 miles and two big days of motorway travel.