



REGIONE AUTÒNOMA DE SARDIGNA  
REGIONE AUTONOMA DELLA SARDEGNA  
ASSESSORADU DE SU TURISMU, ARTESANIA E CUMMERTZIU  
ASSESSORATO DEL TURISMO, ARTIGIANATO E COMMERCIO

SARDEGNA



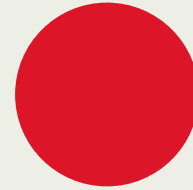
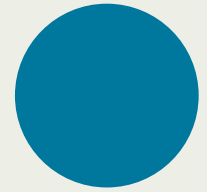
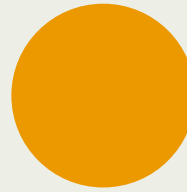
Diocesi di  
IGLESIAS



# Travel notes: discovering Sardinia's religious destinations

DORGALI • GALTELLÌ • GESTURI • LACONI • LUOGOSANTO • ORGOSOLO • SANT'ANTIOCO •

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People always arrive at the right moment at the place  
where someone awaits them.

(Paulo Coelho, The Pilgrimage)





# A WORD FROM THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES

## Giovanni Chessa

Councillor for Tourism, Crafts and Trade

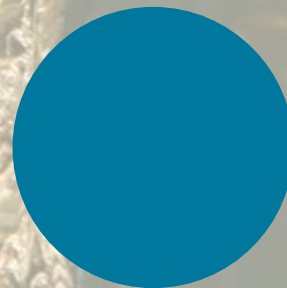
A tourism model linked to promoting the landscapes and itineraries that cross them and the villages and communities that bring them to life, focused on physical and mental wellbeing and on sharing culture and experiences between travellers and those who welcome them. Sardinia is environment, history, tradition and a warm welcome; it is a land to “experience” all year round, in harmony with nature and in contact with people, it is a land that creates unbreakable bonds between inhabitants and their guests.

The cornerstones of the project, launched in 2012 by the Regional Tourism Council, are slow and sustainable tourism, culture and spirituality, a sense of community and hospitality; this has become Pilgrimages of Sardinia, Franciscan Sites and Pilgrimage Destinations, each offering an intimate and introspective experience, combining spiritual and cultural dimensions in places characterised by deep devotion.

The aim of this offer is to help visitors discover the island’s tangible and intangible heritage and the peculiarities of the territories, helping them feel part of the communities that inhabit them. The same principles also accompany the Network of Sardinian Villages regional project: villages offer an authentic cross-section of the island and its soul, the expression of ancient traditions and know-how. The offer of pilgrimages and villages is closely linked to other forms of tourism, partly linked to the outdoors, excursion and cycling tourism networks, horseback excursions and the little Green Train, a unique excellence in Italy.

As Councillor for Tourism, Crafts and Trade, interpreter of a policy that is close to our citizens and our guests, like all Sardinians, I look forward to welcoming you, ready to help you discover our fascinating and mysterious land. It will be an unforgettable holiday that will stay in your hearts forever.







# SPIRITUALITY AND TOURISM: SEVEN RELIGIOUS DESTINATIONS

## Mons. Carlo Cani

Diocese of Iglesias

I think the key to understanding this project and its realisation can be expressed fully by the pilgrimage experience. The entire history of humanity is interwoven and marked by pilgrimages and common wisdom sees them as a metaphor of life! When it transforms into a desire for religion and communion with others, the specific journey becomes a “pilgrimage” – in other words, the time and place of man aimed at disclosing the meaning of life in relation to his particular situation, today in all its dimensions.

Over time, different types of pilgrimage have developed, creating a “sacred” grammar that even modern pilgrims recognise. The focus is on listening, seeing, touching, invoking, prostrating oneself; attitudes that ancient yet nevertheless, always new and loaded with profound religious meaning. Basically, pilgrims experience a sense of being “called to a meeting”; they are almost drawn to rediscovering their original grace and the so eagerly-anticipated destination seals the deep desire for contentment and fulfilment.

In their specific identity, the sites are always inhabited sites; inhabited by a presence that over time has become history, tradition and identity, narrating a world that would otherwise be incomprehensible. Testimonies focus heavily on this universal language of memory, presence and prophecy.

The communities involved are called upon to jealously safeguard a living heritage that is invaluable; they have the responsibility of passing the baton onto future generations, with the truth and coherence that history has handed down to them. It is a compelling challenge and our sincere wish for everyone is that we can be key players in this challenge to build a future, with a future.





# PILGRIMAGE DESTINATIONS IN SARDINIA

by Ornella D'Alessio

There's another Sardinia, the spiritual one that, far from the noise and bustle of August, brings together all the island's many facets and combines them to give life to a strong devotional identity.

Sardinia is the European region that celebrates the largest number of religious festivals, events that bring people together in celebration of their faith. Linked by fine lines, this is a rich, tangible and intangible heritage that is a strong driving force for travelling to discover this profound and intimate aspect of Sardinian life. To promote this aspect, we have set up the Identity, Culture and Religious Tourism Network, with the full participation of the region's ecclesiastical and civil institutions.

The second largest island in the world's oldest sea is an ideal destination for religious tourism that, along with cultural, food and wine and art tourism, becomes key to developing the areas and territories involved, with the aim of favouring moments bringing together visitors and locals to generate large numbers of pilgrims, as in other parts of Italy and Europe. The strategic aim of the Autonomous Region of Sardinia's project is to promote the spiritual and religious importance of seven municipalities, tracing the footsteps of the island's key spiritual figures.



Our spiritual journey begins in **Luogosanto**, in the heart of the Gallura region, a popular destination for pilgrimages since time immemorial thanks to the presence of a Holy Door, which is opened every seven years. The 13th-century Basilica of Nostra Signora di Luogosanto was afforded the privilege of having a holy door by Pope Honorius III in 1227. Built using granite ashlars, since 1954 the basilica has housed a wooden statue of a crowned Virgin Mary, known as the Queen of Gallura; for this reason, Luogosanto has been a Marian town since 2008. The name Locusànto (literally holy place in English) derives from the fact that two Anchorite saints, Nicholas and Trano, lived nearby. Indeed, one of the many rural churches near the village, centres of ancient popular devotion, is dedicated to the latter saint. After walking through the historic centre, which has remained largely intact, it is worth visiting the ruins of Palazzo di Baldu and Balajana Castle. Luogosanto is an ideal destination for those wishing to discover the region of Gallura and enjoy its many delicious dishes, such as suppa cuata (or Gallura soup), accompanied by a nice glass of Vermentino di Gallura, Sardinia's only DOCG wine.

In the central-eastern part of the island is **Galtellì**, a small village in the Baronia region at the foot of Mount Tuttavista. It rose to fame thanks to "Reeds in the Wind"





a book by Nobel-prize winning author Grazia Deledda. In 2012 festivities were held commemorating the 400th anniversary of The Miracles of Christ, celebrating the deep bond locals have with religious traditions. Further evidence of this are the many churches and chapels honouring various saints and the age-old worship of the miraculous image of the Cross, to which the parish church is dedicated.

The main devotional moments of the liturgical year of 1612, the date of the miracle of the sweating of the Cross, are accompanied by two confraternities - the Brotherhood of the Holy Cross and the Brotherhood of the Souls. The village flourished in particular in the Middle Ages when, protected by fortified Pontes Castle, it was the regional administrative centre and Bishop's seat for the diocese. What remains to bear witness to this period are the Cathedral of San Pietro, which houses a series of frescoes depicting the presentation of Jesus at the Temple and Cain's Sin from the Old Testament.

In Galtelli - which is part of the Authentic Villages of Italy Association (Borghi Autentici d'Italia) - traditions handed down include the production of excellent red wines, the use of ancient looms and the harvesting of endemic wild herbs, used to season simple, tasty dishes.

**Dorgali**, on the east coast, is the birthplace of Blessed Maria Gabriella Sagheddu, described by Pope John Paul II in the homily during her beatification on 25 January 1993, as "a sign of the times and a model of that spiritual ecumenism referred to by the Second Vatican Council".

In the old town, the house where she lived can be visited, thanks mainly to the tireless work of volunteers who delight in illustrating the life of the Trappist nun. It is the Benedictine nuns of "Mater Umanitas per l'Unità della Chiesa" Convent who have handed down worship of the blessed nun and the values that led her to offer up her young life. Local excellences worth recalling are the artistic craft of filigree and Salvatore Fancello's "interrupted design", which embraces the town's fountain, as well as the wines made by the local Wine Cooperative and egg biscuits, which it appears even Sister Maria Gabriella enjoyed.

The Church of Madonna del Carmelo offers truly breath-taking views from its position high above the town. In Dorgali, spirituality and devotion to Blessed Maria, venerated in the chapel of the Church of Santa Caterina d'Alessandria, live harmo-





niously alongside a territory rich in history, as highlighted by the Nuragic village of Serra Orrios and more recently, by the agricultural-pastoral tools displayed in S'Abba Frisca park-museum. Local gastronomic delights include macarrones de punzu (a traditional pasta dish) and visitors should not forget the natural wonders of Ispinigoli Grotto, the beaches of the Gulf of Orosei and the protected area of the Oasis of Bidderosa.

One of the delights of the Nuoro region, on the slopes of the Gennargentu, is **Orgosolo**, undecipherable and mysterious for the hasty traveller, but rich and fascinating for those who respect it and are guided by their heart. The town and its Supramonte, with dense woods of holm oak, strawberry trees and junipers, are famous for murals, the symbol of Barbagia pride. The town was the birthplace in 1919 of young Antonia Mesina who was beatified in 1987. Thanks to the education she received from Catholic Action and her profound faith, aged only sixteen the martyr chose to defend her chastity to the death. Her body rests in the crypt of the Church of San Salvatore in a simple sarcophagus bearing the image of the young woman wearing traditional Sardinian costume. Her face is framed by “su

lionzu”, the typical headscarf worn with the traditional costume, still handwoven in an educational workshop in Orgosolo. The “Orgosolo breed” of silkworm - the only type in the world to produce yellow, rather than white silk - are still bred here. Visitors shouldn't forget to try maharrones lados, medallion-shaped homemade pasta shapes served with lamb sauce and Pecorino cheese.

The southern gateway to the Barbagia region, **Laconi**, on the upland plateau of Sarcidano, is the land of St Ignatius, Sardinia's best loved saint. The devotional journey dedicated to him leads from the Church of San Ambrogio e San Ignazio, to the house where the saint was born and a new museum, divided into two venues, that houses relics of the saint, some personal belongings, precious liturgical vestments and regalia donated by noble families (and still used in celebrations), silverware and precious wooden sculptures.

Guarding the village, on the slopes of the chalky ridge of S'Atza 'e Carradore, a monument of the saint on horseback has been erected and can be reached from the old town after an uphill climb of less than an hour. Thanks to its strategic



position, in the fertile heart of the island, the territory was extremely wealthy, a fact highlighted by the Neoclassical ostentatiousness of Palazzo Aymerich, the last residence of the Marquises of Laconi and home to the Museum of Sardinian Prehistoric Statuary (statue menhirs). Visitors here will also find precious original wallpaper, manufactured by Dufour, and the eponymous 22-hectare park with waterfalls and exotic plants embracing the residential area. The Sulis family's Liberty villa, one of the best-preserved examples of this style in Sardinian, will delight visitors.

It may come as a surprise that this is a land of truffles, underground fungi celebrated in many local dishes. The area is also famous for its aromatic liqueurs, distilled from spontaneous plants found in Santa Sofia wood.

A few kilometres south-east is the lower Marmilla region where we find **Gesturi**, the birthplace of Blessed Brother Nicholas. So beloved of the faithful, this humble beggar lived between 1882 and 1958 and is famous as someone who got what he needed without ever asking. The religious itinerary through the old town starts at the Church of Santa Teresa D'Avila, before heading to the birth

house of the blessed brother (where he lived until the age of 13) and the Church of Santa Maria Egiziaca, also known as the Church of the Sepulchre. It is the seat of the Blackfriars, thus named due to their black habits and hoods, which holds rites during Holy Week, and finally the Church of Madonna del Rosario and San Sebastiano Cemetery, seat of the Whitefriars, who wear a black cape over a white habit and hood.

The agricultural and pastoral origins of the village can be seen on illustrative panels in Giara Museum and are further highlighted by the welcoming country homes, accessed through beautiful gateways that open onto large courtyards. Artisan activities are also linked to history - from the blacksmith workshop, to the honey producer's shop, from the cheese maturing huts to the ovens. Gesturi is very well preserved, the houses are tidy, the tables heaving and the welcome particularly warm. The village and its Giara, a vast plateau of basalt origin dotted with paulis (seasonal marshes), are famous for their small horses; no taller than 120 cm at the withers, these sweet yet indomitable horses live in the wild. Also on the plateau is Brunku Madugui, a "corridor" proto-nuraghe that dates from the Bronze Age.





To the south-west of Sardinia, **Sant'Antioco** is the fourth largest island in the Mediterranean and has always been an important landing place for seafarers, including the Nuragic and the Phoenicians; even Lord Nelson's fleet sheltered here from 1803 to 1805. Along with thousands of faithful, St Antiochus has been venerated for centuries. He is the patron saint of Sardinia and his remains can be found in the town's ancient basilica, making it popular with tourists and pilgrims alike. The oldest historical reference to the martyr from Sulcis, the "Passio Sancti Antiochii Martyris", dates from the 12th century, but his remains were not found until 18 March 1615.

This discovery was celebrated with one of the key events of the 17th century which drew 30,000 people here from all over Sardinia and from many other parts of Europe too. The Manna Festival, one of the most heartfelt since the Middle Ages,



is celebrated a fortnight before Easter and is followed by two other important events - dedication of the church to St Antiochus on 1st August and Dies Natalis celebrations on 13th November. Sant'Antioco and the Island of San Pietro are at the centre of the transit of tuna fish and for this reason, the tastiest tuna in Europe have always been caught and processed here.

The history of local shipwrights, the lagoon and sailing is told by Mu.Ma, the Museum of the Sea, whilst the ruins of Sulky (now Sant'Antioco), the oldest Phoenician town discovered in Sardinia, are displayed in the archaeological museum not far from the underground village with Punic tombs, which were reused in later periods by the population as dwellings. The sandy soil here meant the vineyards of Carignanone were protected against phylloxera (or vine pest).

Thanks to this, Sardus Pater Wine Cellar produces wine from ungrafted vines that are more than 120 years old. The particular geomorphology of Sant'Antioco means it is protected against both the northwest and the sirocco winds that blow over the island; thanks to this, the beaches have always been sheltered.



## There are many sides to Sardinia.

The Sardinia of know-how and ancient traditions, handed down over the centuries, and the Sardinia of genuine flavours and warm people. The Sardinia that glows with intense colours and, particularly at sunset, turns striking shades of deep red and violet, hues reflected on the mountain sides. The Sardinia lapped by the sea, raging against the reefs. Windy Sardinia, where warm African winds shape the golden dunes and beaches, dominating the nuraghes, the Domus de Janas (pre-Nuragic chamber tombs) and the fragrant Mediterranean scrub. And the other Sardinia; the emotional one, with religious festivals and celebrations marking the passing seasons, history and daily life.







**religious destinations  
in Sardinia**





# Dorgali

This is one of the most famous tourist resorts in the Nuoro region and indeed, in all of Sardinia. Natural wonders and archaeological heritage make Dorgali one of the island's most popular tourist destinations. The town is also a renowned cultural centre, closely linked to the farming and pastoral traditions of yesteryear and religious rites and celebrations, as well as the birthplace of Blessed Sister Maria Gabriella Sagheddu. The "sister" is a key figure in Catholicism, an international ecumenical icon and promoter of inter-religious dialogue. Worship of the blessed sister magically coexists on a territory with many cultural and natural attractions, especially around the seaside resort of Cala Gonone – from Bue Marino Grottoes to Cala Luna.



History and archaeology, traditions and the art of manufacturing, an enchanting sea and the wild mountains of Supramonte, covered in fragrant woodland, will take visitors into a magical and mythical world. Dorgali boasts a natural heritage of 225 square kilometres, one of the largest and most beautiful municipal territories in Sardinia. The characteristic streets of the old town are lined with houses built from volcanic rock and workshops where filigree jewellery, pottery and carpets highlight the town's artisan calling. The Church of San Lussurio, the Church of Madonna d'Itria and the parish Church of Santa Caterina bear witness to the deep devotion of the town's citizens. The archaeological museum takes visitors on a journey back in time with artefacts from the Nuragic Age (in particular, from the Nuragic village-sanctuary of Serra Òrrios) and the Punic and Roman Eras. Meanwhile,

nature, traditions and culture come together in S'Abba Frisca park-museum and just few kilometres from the town, visitors can take an excursion to Lanaittu Valley, crossing the mythical village of Tiscali, a defensive fortress against the advance of the Romans.

Just outside the town, after a short tunnel that is like a gateway between the mountains and the sea, visitors can enjoy spectacular views of the Gulf of Orosei. A charming and winding descent leads to the village of Cala Gonone, famous for its small inlets and coves that attract nature and adventure lovers and are the ideal destination for romantic boat trips. The village is on a steep hillside that drops to the sea, with the golden sandy beaches of Cala Cartoe, Ziu Martine and Cala Osalla. Either by sea or after a demanding, but





pleasant trek is Cala Luna that borders with Baunei; surrounded by an oleander wood, this is one of the most enchanting, fine sandy beaches on the Mediterranean and is famous as the setting for the cult film "Swept Away". Further on, visitors reach Codula di Luna, a gorge between steep chalky cliffs surrounded by spectacular centuries-old junipers that have guarded local attractions since time immemorial. From Cala Gonone, a guided excursion takes visitors to the famous natural caves of Bue Marino Grottoes - a spectacular "forest" of stalagmites and stalactites, once the natural habitat of Mediterranean monk seals, which boasts an underground saltwater lake. The grottoes are the venue for a unique and truly spectacular concert held as part of the Cala Gonone Jazz festival. On the subject of marine attractions, visitors should also not miss the opportunity to visit the aquarium in the village of Cala Gonone.





# Galtelli

Stone houses, narrow cobbled streets, five churches within a square kilometre, a park dedicated to Grazia Deledda and an extraordinarily devout community; Galtelli is a unique town in the Baronia area, once the seat of a diocese and a destination for pilgrimages due to the blessed Cross. Housed in the church dedicated to it (Chiesa del SS. Crocifisso), miracles dating back to 1612 have been attributed to it. In its honour, processions and rites are held accompanied by ancient liturgical chants known as "sos gozzos". Behind the cemetery is the former Cathedral of San Pietro, which houses a series of 13th-century frescoes depicting scenes from the Old and New Testament. Overlooking the village is Mount Tuttavista, on top of which is a statue of Christ. This too attracts the faithful who reach it after a charming pilgrimage over the slopes of the mountain.

On the banks of the River Cedrino, Galtelli stands on a spectacular plateau at the foot of Mount Tuttavista. On top of the mountains stands the majestic bronze statue of Christ of Miracles, a destination for pilgrims who follow a path up its steep slopes. The sculpture is a reproduction of the "miraculous" wooden Christ housed in the eponymous church. Built in Gothic style in the 16th century, it replaced the 14th-century Church of Santa Maria delle Torri, which had become too small to accommodate the faithful flocking to admire the statue of Christ. Today, it is a destination for pilgrims from all over Europe.

The history of the town, which was a Bishop's seat until 1495, is marked by fervent religious devotion and its narrow, cobbled streets lined with stone houses are home to an extraordinarily devout population (of about 2,500). Next to the Holy Cross is the mediaeval Church of Santa Croce and less than 100 metres away, the Church of Beata Vergine Assunta and the Church of San Francesco, both dating from the 17th century, with another two on the slopes of Mount Tuttavista, the Church of Santa Caterina and the Church of Nostra Signora d'Itria.

Inside the cemetery walls is the complex of the former cathedral dedicated to St Peter, home to a series of 13th-century frescoes depicting scenes from the Old and New Testament. There are three diocesan buildings here - a soaring bell tower, the imposing but unfinished late 11th-century cathedral and the Romanesque Church of San Pietro, which was expanded after the previous site was abandoned. The village comes to life during Holy Week with heart-wrenching chants and centuries-old liturgies. Not to be missed are the celebrations dedicated to the Holy Cross in early May, when worship blends with folklore and spectacle, and the bonfires lit in celebration of St Anthony Abbot on 17 January.

Galtelli has been awarded an Orange Flag by the Touring Club of Italy. The streets of the town centre, traditions and emotions inspired the author Grazia Deledda who set her book "Canne al Vento" (Reeds in the Wind) here. The bond with the Nobel-winning author is cemented thanks to Deleddiano literary park, an itinerary to





the places she mentions in her book. Aside from being a spiritual guiding light, the town was once a centre of power, symbolized by Pontes Castle, a late 11th-century fortress, later conquered by the Aragonese.

Casa Marras, an 18th-century noble residence, is now an ethnographic museum displaying 1,800 artefacts representing the community's collective memory. Other attractions in the town include Malicas Park, an oasis of greenery surrounding an early 20th-century castle, and some Domus de Janas, bearing witness to man's presence in the area since the Neolithic Age. The several nuraghes here, including Su Gardu, date from the 2nd millennium BC. From culture to nature - Mount Tuttavista, a haven for trekking enthusiasts, separates the town from the sea with sheer cliffs kitted out for rock climbing. The summit affords spectacular views of the Gulf of Orosei and during the climb, Preta Istampata, a rock with an enormous hole and "window" overlooking the wood-covered valley.

A magnificent old town, featuring traditional houses with courtyards and characteristic wooden portals (there are over a hundred) served by narrow cobbled streets, is home to numerous B&B and diffused hotels.



# Gesturi



From Sarcidano to Marmilla: here is Gesturi, a place of meditation where the lay brother Blessed Nicola was born, around whom a halo of “prodigious” veneration remains. A humble beggar, who lived between 1882 and 1958, he was beatified in 1999 by Pope John Paul II. He is still much loved by the faithful who recognise his goodness and miraculous abilities. From his modest home, an itinerary begins through the narrow streets to traditional dwellings, ancient churches and rural sanctuaries. The oasis of Giara (sa Jara Manna) is a backdrop for the call to meditation: this upland plateau, where time has stood still, is a “natural museum” with botanical species and typical fauna, where man has left many traces of his passing, including the “father of all nuraghes”, Bruncu Madugui.

An enchanting landscape where time has stood still, Nuragic legacy and intense devotion; this is how to best describe Gesturi, the northernmost town in the Marmilla area with over a thousand inhabitants. Its territory partially occupies Giara, a 600-metre-high plateau that was once an imposing volcano and is now an unspoiled oasis that is unparalleled in the Mediterranean. Here, plants and animals live in symbiosis: a “natural museum” with a thick blanket of botanical species, flowers and rare plants that have adapted to the climate and territory.

It receives water from Is Paulis, enormous wells that are up to four metres deep. All around are valleys overlooked by Mediterranean scrub and hills covered in olive groves and vineyards, from which quality olive oil and wine are obtained. Meanwhile, along the plateau’s rocky ridges there are oak woods and poplars that give way to cork oak woods on the summit; almost all of these trees are “crooked”, bent over by the force of the winds that blow here.

This wild and beautiful place is home to ducks, woodcocks, jay birds, hares and in particular, Giara horses. This is a protected breed whose origins are shrouded in mystery and there are about 500 living here in small groups. On the plateau, rocky elevations interrupt the generally flat landscape. All around are the ruins of what man has left behind over 3,500 years, including the “father of all nuraghes”, the proto-nuraghe Bruncu Madugui. There are thirty archaeological sites here, including statue menhirs and the Domus de Janas in Sa Ucca ‘e Su Pau, the Giants’ Tomb, the nuraghes of Pranu ‘e Mendula and the Punic and Roman villages of Tana and Tupp’e Turri.

Gesturi is a popular destination for pilgrimages thanks Blessed Nicola (1882-1958); beatified by Pope John Paul II, he once lived in a modest house in the small town, which is now a museum. The itinerary leads from here, through narrow streets lined with houses with portals and archivolted verandas, to ancient churches and



rural sanctuaries. Devotion is expressed in six religious buildings - in the centre is the soaring, 30-metre-high bell tower of the Parish Church of Santa Teresa d'Avila (1607), whose feast day falls in mid-October. On the outskirts is the Church of Santa Barbara, the oldest in the town (1473) and just outside the municipality, the Church of Madonna del Rosario (17th century), home to Is Cunfrarius Biancus, the Whitefriars who tend to Our Lady during Holy Week. Meanwhile, tending to Jesus is the role of the Brothers of the Holy Sepulchre, who reside in the small Church of Santa Maria Egiziaca, an unusual example thanks to its architecture and "dressed statues". Four kilometres from the village, nestled in a forest of centuries-old trees, is the Church of Madonna d'Itria (1620), who has been celebrated on the first day of Pentecost perhaps since Byzantine times. Along with these celebrations, there is also a lay Sheep Festival but the most heartfelt festivity is the one for the Blessed Nicola with two days of intense celebrations.





# Laconi

A charming town in the Sarcidano area, surrounded by lush greenery and prehistoric ruins. Since 2005, Laconi has had Orange Flag recognition awarded by the Touring Club of Italy and has been linked to the Franciscans since the middle of last century. Its original fame is linked to Sardinia's first and best-loved saint, Saint Ignatius (18th century); indeed, veneration of the saint attracts thousands of pilgrims here each year. A devotional journey through the narrow streets stops at ten different sites, including the house where the saint, who lived by all Franciscan rules, was born. Thanks to his simple messages, it is a pilgrimage of spiritual healing. The traditional image of the saint is that of a humble monk, bent over and deep in prayer, who always helped everyone. A visit continues with the Statue Menhir Museum and beautiful Aymerich Park, which houses the remains of an ancient castle.



A lush green oasis in the town, unique prehistoric ruins and community values, Laconi is a "gem" with two thousand inhabitants, nestled in a forest near the hills of Sarcidano, which boasts an Orange Flag (Bandiera Arancione) awarded by the Touring Club of Italy. Its original fame is also linked to Sardinia's best-loved saint, St Ignatius. Veneration of the saint attracts tens of thousands of pilgrims, especially during festivities commemorating him, held at the end of August.

Any visit should begin at his birth house that, along with the museum of sacred art and the parish church dedicated to the saint and to St Ambrose, built in the 15th century and modified several times throughout the 19th century, are stages on a devotional journey through the old town. Other monuments here include the ancient Church of San Giovanni Battista, with its wooden roof, and the Church of Sant'Antonio Abate, in whose honour fires are lit in January to accompany the

feast of traditional pastries. At the end of the year, Ocraxus is an event during which many old houses and noble villas are open to the public.

Visitors here can admire this open-air museum; the first traces of human presence date back to 6000 BC, whilst between the end of the Neolithic Age and the start of the Metal Age (3700-2400 BC) a unique sculptural phenomenon developed - statue menhirs or standing stones. These can be admired in the Statue Menhir Museum (Civico Museo Archeologico della Statuaria Preistorica) in ancient Palazzo Aymerich.

The building houses dozens of sculpted monoliths dating from between the 4th and 3rd millennia BC, some of which are huge. They were mainly found in the area near Laconia, particularly in Perda Iddocca and Pranu Maore. The museum itinerary is completed by ceramics and obsidian and metal items, discovered in other



sites in the municipal territory; these include the megalithic tomb of Masone Perdu and the Dolmen (burial chamber) of Corte Noa. Nuragic civilization is represented by the Genna 'e Corte nuraghe; yet to be dug out completely, it consists in a central tower, a courtyard and a bastion with five towers, two of which are more evident.

Thanks to its woods, the habitats for many rare birds and mammals, including the rare autochthonous breed of Sarcidano horse, Laconi is a haven for botanists. The area abounds with truffles and has the biggest number of orchids on the island. Close to the town centre is resplendent Aymerich Park, which owes its name to the last noble family of Laconi. It stands around the mediaeval ruins of a castle whose main tower dates from the 11th and 12th centuries. The castle is on two floors; the lower floor that dates from the same period as the tower and the upper floor that has Catalan-Aragonese windows and mouldings. The castle's portico is particularly impressive. The marquises were responsible for the layout of the

garden, in which exotic plants have been integrated with the holm oak forest. Visitors can admire a majestic cedar of Lebanon, a weeping beech, a Corsican pine, a southern magnolia and other interesting tree species and series of paths lead to small caves, streams, waterfalls and lakes dotted all around the park.

Also, well worth visiting is the hamlet of Santa Sofia, which boasts the ruins of a Byzantine church, and the fascinating area of Su Dominariu.





# Luogosanto

Literally meaning “holy place”, the name itself is extremely evocative. Luogosanto was founded by Franciscan monks and is a place of worship par excellence. Clinging to the granite rocks of deepest Gallura, the town exudes fraternal spirituality. It is famous for its holy door, a recognition awarded by the Vatican to its monumental and austere basilica, which houses the statue of Our Lady of Gallura. Around the village, surrounded by lush Mediterranean vegetation, there are 22 fascinating sites of contemplation, small rural churches or hermitages carved out of granite: the oldest and most popular is the Hermitage of San Trano, the ideal place for contemplation.



A genuine and “sacred” place where time passes slowly and a welcoming destination for pilgrims that owes its names to the devotion of its community and 22 sanctuaries dotted all around the area. In the heart of Gallura, Luogosanto is a town of fewer than two thousand inhabitants on the slopes of the granite Mount Ghjuanni, famous for a Nuragic site with an intact “capanna delle riunioni” or “meeting hut” (that is open for visits). The town was founded in the early 13th century on the arrival of the Franciscans who established a monastery here, one of the first to be built while Saint Francis was still alive.

Today, following restoration work, it hosts the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Museum, a centre documenting the Middle Ages in Gallura that covers local historical and religious events and displays the votive offerings donated to the Virgin Mary over the centuries. The basilica, which is dedicated to Our Lady of Luogosanto, was built in Romanesque style by the Franciscans using granite ashlar. It

boasts a wooden Madonna (Our Lady of Gallura) and in the 18th century received the privilege of a Holy Door - made in the 1970s, this bronzed door was created by Luca Luchetti and opens to pilgrims for a year every seven years. According to legend, it was built on the site where Our Lady first appeared to two monks to tell them where to find the remains of Saints Nicholas and Trano. The monks found them on a rocky spur where in 1227 they built a sanctuary to the two martyrs, incorporating the cave where they were said to have lived. Known as the Hermitage of San Trano, its altar is a block of stone and the cave forms a natural apse. After depopulation lasting two centuries, Luogosanto began to flourish again in the 17th century thanks to typical rural settlements known as “stazzi”: a census has found 350 in the area and their history is documented in Agnana museum. Today, the town boasts narrow cobbled streets and houses similar to noble palaces, with small iron balconies. From the town, an itinerary that leads to a number of other mediaeval sites, along narrow roads through oak woods and natural treasures,





which can be covered on foot, bicycle or horseback. Visitors will find the remains of Villa Sent Steva, a complex that has “existed” here since the mid-14th century, consisting in 16 rooms overlooking a courtyard. In the south-east corner of the complex are the ruins of Palazzo di Baldu, which was perhaps owned by Ubaldo Visconti, a judge from Gallura (1225-38); the small Church of Santo Stefano (17th century) is also part of the complex. On top of Mount San Leonardo stands Balaiana Castle, which can be accessed via a stone stairway. Dating from the 11th century, it was the judge’s summer residence and was still standing until the arrival of the Aragonese. A path from the fortress leads to the Church of San Leonardo; originally the castle’s chapel, it is now a rare example of Romanesque architecture in Gallura. Nearby are other sanctuaries including San Gavino di Li Coddì, which is covered in junipers, and San Salvatore, which is built entirely of granite. Close to the town is the Church of San Quirico that at the beginning of August hosts one of the rural festivals that bring the community to life from April to November; this culminates in early September with the Manna Festival. Visitors shouldn’t miss Calici DiVini in August, a great opportunity to try local Vermentino wine.



# Orgosolo

From the coast of Cala Gonone to the heart of the Barbagia of Nuoro to discover an unusual little town steeped in history, culture and spirituality. This is Orgosolo, the town of murals that also boasts breath-taking natural wonders such as Su Gorropu Canyon or the sinkhole of Su Suercone. This is where the young martyr, Blessed Antonia Mesina, was born in 1919; aged 16 she defended her chastity to the death. Her relics are housed in the parish church dedicated to St Saviour. From the crypt, the tomb of the blessed martyr reminds worshippers of her stubborn resistance to the evil of man, whilst the frescoed walls of the town's houses bear powerful universal messages of peace and brotherhood and the struggle against social injustice.



History narrated on the walls of a village-museum. Orgosolo reveals a deep bond with its Barbagia roots and the uses and customs of times gone by: the land of Canto a Tenore (a style of polyphonic folk singing) and the town of murals, it has been proclaimed a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. With 4,500 inhabitants, the town is famous worldwide for its charming paintings that adorn the walls of narrow streets, squares and houses in the old town centre and the facades of new buildings.

These murals tell the story of local politics and culture, intimate discontent and popular revolts, disquiet and social injustice, daily life and pastoral traditions. In the late-19th century, the town became notorious for banditry: in his film, *Bandits of Orgosolo* (1961), the Italian film director, Vittorio De Seta, described the bitter fight to defend land confiscated by the State.

During the 20th century, cultural ferment grew; still active to this day, Muralism was originally an instrument of protest. A number of both local and international artists have helped to create an open-air museum of over 300 pieces, which will surprise visitors thanks to their bright colours and stylistic merit. Another ancient tradition concerns "su lionzu", the elegant headscarf worn framing the face by women in traditional costume. To make the scarf silk threads are used for the warp (with silkworms bred locally), while saffron is used to colour the weft.

There are two key dates to remember: on the 15th August bank holiday, Sa Vardia 'e mes'Austu hosts a wild horse race, whilst in mid-October Gustos e Nuscos, is the local edition of the Autumn in Barbagia event, with the focus is on delicious, traditional meat dish called "sa purpuzza".



The town is about 600 metres above sea level, on the slopes of Mount Lisorgoni, an off-shoot of the Gennargentu massif that dominates the valley crossed by the Cedrino River. All around is the spectacular, but impassable landscape of Supramonte di Orgosolo: wild and unspoilt nature in the heart of the Barbagia of Ollolai. It should only be explored accompanied by experienced guides, trekking along paths criss-crossed only by strong winds and wild boar and moufflon. For centuries this was the refuge for bandits and shepherds alike.

Here deep gorges, grottoes and chalky wedges abound, like Mount Novo San Giovanni (1300 metres) and Mount Fumai, and golden eagle nest on Mount Su Biu. Along one of the paths that depart from the village, is the sinkhole of Su Suercone, where the land has created a 200-metre-deep and 400-metre-wide chasm. Another unmissable natural monument is the 22 km-long Su Gorroppu Canyon, some of its rock faces are 450 metres high and it is the deepest gorge in Europe, but only accessible in part. Other itineraries lead to Sas Baddes Forest, a rare holm oak wood that also boasts centuries-old yews, junipers and holly bushes and Montes Forest, dotted with shepherd's huts called "pinnettos". These enchanted places are home to pre-historic remains such as the Domus de Janas, the Giants' Tombs and Su Calavriche and Mereu nuraghes.



# Sant'Antioco

A charming coastal town, today Sant'Antioco is a well-known tourist resort, but with an ancient history steeped in emotion and devotion. Originally known as Sulki, it was a flourishing colony, initially settled by the Carthaginians and then the Romans. At the very dawn of Christianity, Antiochus, an exile from Mauritania, lived and preached here between the late 1st and early 2nd century AD. He was persecuted and martyred by Emperor Adrian for professing the new creed. The site of his martyrdom became a destination for the first pilgrims, many of who sought to be buried around his tomb. The catacomb cemetery is now the "heart" of the Basilica of Sant'Antioco, cathedral of the diocese of Sulcis from the 5th to the 13th centuries AD. The island's patron saint has been celebrated since 1360 in what are the oldest festivities on the island or perhaps all of Europe.



A small port town of coloured houses and restaurants that fill the air with inebriating fragrances: this is the seafaring soul of Sant'Antioco. This well-known town of the Sulcis archipelago, populated by eleven thousand residents and tens of thousands of visitors in summer, is the main town on Sardinia's largest island and is connected to it by an artificial isthmus, which was perhaps built by the Carthaginians and later completed by the Romans. Its resources are fishing, salt and agriculture, as can be seen in the ethnographic museum Su Magasinu de Su Binu.

Local industries included weaving, the processing of byssus, which has its own dedicated museum, and wooden boat building. MuMa Museum, on the other hand, focuses on the town's maritime history and traditions, including the Lateen sail. The town was originally known as Sulky and was founded by the Phoenicians (770 BC), although later conquered by the Carthaginians.

Traces of the early settlement remain in the form of a 'tophet' and a necropolis (5th-3rd centuries BC) that occupies the entire hillside of the basilica and on which the Roman necropolis and then the cemetery of catacombs, the only one of its kind in Sardinia, once stood. Sulci flourished most during Roman time: along with Karalis, it was the most prosperous 'municipium' on the island. In the centre, visitors can admire Sa Presonedda Mausoleum (1st century BC), which was influenced by both Carthaginian and Roman cultures. The island has been inhabited since the 3rd millennium BC and what has been left behind are Pre-Nuragic remains, like the Domus de Janas in Is Pruinis and the statue menhirs of Sa Mongia and Su Para, as well as the ruins of about thirty nuraghes, including the particularly impressive S'Ega de Marteddu, Corongiu Murvonis and Antiogu Diana. Nearby are sacred springs and several Giants' Tombs, including Su Niu and Su Crobu. The Grutt'i Acqua Complex is simply extraordinary and consists in a polylobed nuraghe, a sacred well, a village with water works, walls, megalithic circles and small caves



used for collecting water. The village extends as far as Portu Sciusciau, which was possibly a Nuragic port. Visitors can admire artefacts from the area, in particular small bronzes, in F. Barreca Archaeological Museum.

The name of the island and town derives from the patron saint of Sardinia, an African martyr called Antioch exiled to the island, to whom the Basilica of Sant'Antioco is dedicated. Although Sulci was the Bishop's seat from 484 AD (until the 13th century), it was only mentioned for the first time in 1089. Originally a Byzantine building with a cross-shaped layout, today it has three naves and as many apses. The eternal bond linking the local community and the saint is renewed each year a fortnight after Easter, with the oldest religious festival in Sardinia, which has remained the same since 1615. Between the 16th and 17th centuries, the uninhabited island was invaded by thousands of worshippers celebrating the martyr. These days, the Saturday before the Manna Festival, it hosts the parade of Is Coccois (ceremonial bread), while another festival commemorating the saint is held on 1st August with a parade in traditional costume.

To the south, the coastline is dominated by tall and jagged dark trachyte cliffs, whilst to the north, coasts are sandy and an ideal destination for divers. Portixeddu is the small beach closest to the town; it is surrounded by light-coloured rocks and lush rare Phoenician junipers, ancient dwarf palms and other Mediterranean plants. It is pebbly, as is larger Turri beach, whilst Maladroxa has fine grey sand and thermal waters, which spring from its sea bed, have been enjoyed since Roman times. Beyond Serra is Tres Portus promontory and Santa Caterina pond, where black-winged stilt and flamingo nest, is the wide and winding beach of Coqquaddus.



# Travel Notes

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**SARDEGNA**



Diocesi di  
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