

If you thumb through the many guidebooks you'll discover why 5,000 years of turbulent history make Sardinia an ideal destination for archaeology fans, but although we enjoy cultural pastimes as much as the next person, we were here to relax given our stressful lives. For us, this would be a holiday of sublime inactivity, spent on some of Sardinia's many hidden beaches.



HEAVEN IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Earlier in the year I was fortunate enough to visit The Gambia with The Gambia Experience operated by Serenity Holidays whom I was very impressed with. Everything had been taken care of, with the greatest attention to detail, from the accommodation to the excursions and I'd felt then that should the opportunity arise to use them again, I certainly would.

We landed in Olbia, about an hour's drive from our villa, Villa Oro Verde on Sardinia's northeast coast. Our hosts Paola and Pierro were there to greet us and give us the keys. Not a word of English could be spoken, but we muddled through with a bit of sign language. Our first impression of the villa was that it was truly authentic in its decor and style, as we wandered through the various rooms.

The garden areas were equally as impressive with a huge pool adjacent to, wait for it, a vineyard. Music to my ears! Just like the children's tv character, Mr Benn, Pierro appeared with a huge bottle of red wine from his vineyard. There was already a bottle of bubbly on the table and a nice welcome note from them and an impressive welcome pack from Sardinian Places. What a welcome!



"We didn't want to leave our lovely villa or indeed the beautiful island of Sardinia. We had never seen such stunning landscapes."

It was time for our annual holiday and we'd heard good things about Sardinia, the second largest island in the Med. When I learned that Serenity Holidays also operated Sardinian Places (part of its Mediterranean offering along with Corsican Places) and had villas and hotels on the island, that clinched the deal. I phoned them to discuss what we were looking for i.e. authentic villa, quiet location, good size pool and plenty of sunshine. In no time at all, I got the call saying that they had found the ideal location. They had found out about the flight details and all we had to do was book the holiday and the flights.



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As well as the more popular beaches on the Costa Smeralda, we visited many uninhabited beaches off dirt tracks. The sea was indescribably bluey-green.



Villa Oro Verde's big selling point, besides the vineyard, is its proximity to world-class beaches.

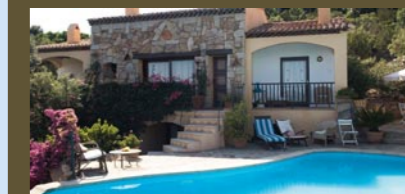


The stunning view from Gastronomìa Belvedere

Other villas and hotels available through Sardinian Places



LU TRIUZZU
Santa Teresina, Costa Smeralda
3 bedroom villa, sleeps 6
Private pool (freeform)
10m x 6m, depth 1m - 2m



VILLA MARIA
Santa Teresina, Costa Smeralda
5 bedroom villa, sleeps 10
Private pool (freeform)
11m x 7m, depth 0.6m - 2m



VILLA NIALICCIA
Costa Smeralda
4 bedroom villa, sleeps 8
Private pool
8m x 4m, depth 1.1m - 1.6m



HOTEL CAPO D'ORSO THALASSO & SPA (5 STAR)
Palau, north east Sardinia
Number of Rooms: 84
2 sea water pools (one for general use and one in the Thalasso Centre)

Please check online for 2009 prices



To enquire about a holiday to Sardinia please contact Sardinian Places
Reservations 0845 330 2050
holidays@sardinianplaces.co.uk
www.sardinianplaces.co.uk



Owners of Gastronomìa Belvedere served the best pasta ever!



Caffè Nina

Villa Oro Verde's big selling point, besides the vineyard, is its proximity to world-class beaches, the nearest being only 8km away. The nearest town of Arzachena, is a mere 3km away.

As it was quite late by the time we arrived, we planned on a quick visit to the supermarket and a night getting to know our surroundings. That wasn't to be the case as our hosts invited us to a fiesta which was held three times a year. Delighted with the prospect, we headed off in their car to San Antonio to spend the evening with their family and friends. The table was set and we feasted on traditional pasta and stew dishes, with the obligatory wine. These events usually go on until the early hours but as we'd had a long day, Pierre kindly offered to take us home and return to the festivities.

The next day we discovered what was to become a popular beach for us, Baia Sardinia, which has a long stretch of white sandy beach, a smattering of smart shops and boutiques and a few quality restaurants, our favourite being right on the beach. Ten minutes drive from there was the very glamorous Porto Cervo. Lined with cafés, bars and restaurants, the 'Piazzetta' was the perfect spot to pose and party. It's a shopper's paradise, if you happen to shop at Dior, Chanel, Dolce and Gabbana and the like. A-listers are known to frequent Porto Cervo - Flavio Briatore of Formula One fame has a club there and the Aga Khan moors his yacht there. Too rich for our pockets but fun to see nevertheless, we headed off to the port and found a fantastic little bar and restaurant which served amazing cocktails. Another spot to people watch at more reasonable prices.

A ten minute drive the other direction from our villa was San Pantaleo, a beautiful traditional village and one of the prettiest on the island. Bursting with character, the village is set around a piazza along with lively cafés and artisan shops. In the height of summer, they hold regular 'festes' and weekly markets and I'd revisit the island just to see these again!

I couldn't finish this review without talking about the Sardinian food. Firstly, the island's name has nothing to do with Sardines! Surprisingly given its island setting, the cuisine is generally meat rather than fish-based, the most popular dish being suckling pig. However, their fish is exceptionally good. Traditionally the Sardinians start with a plate of pasta, followed by a meat course, and finishing off with a salad. The pizzas are amazing, as you'd expect, but the bread is good too as are their pastries. I found the food quite simple, as they don't swamp everything in sauces as we tend to do, letting the flavours of the produce speak for themselves. You must try the local agritourismi, which are farm based restaurants dotted around the island. On our last day, we found an amazing restaurant in Porto Cervo called Gastronomìa Belvedere, which served the freshest pasta I've ever eaten.

We didn't want to leave our lovely villa or indeed the beautiful island of Sardinia. We had never seen such stunning landscapes or more sparkling, inviting waters. However, I truly believe that travel is just as much about the people as the place and we found a real sense of kindness and serenity about the people of Sardinia. We will definitely return.



The view from the fiesta at San Antonio



Tranquil setting to moor your yacht.

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