



# Savage Beauty: the trek across northern Corsica

Trip# 1941 6 - 19 October 2019



**What is Corsica?** It is “the land of the vendetta, the siesta, complicated political games, potent cheeses, wild pigs, succulent blackbirds, and ageless old men who watch life go by.” [Gosciny and Uderzo - Asterix in Corsica]

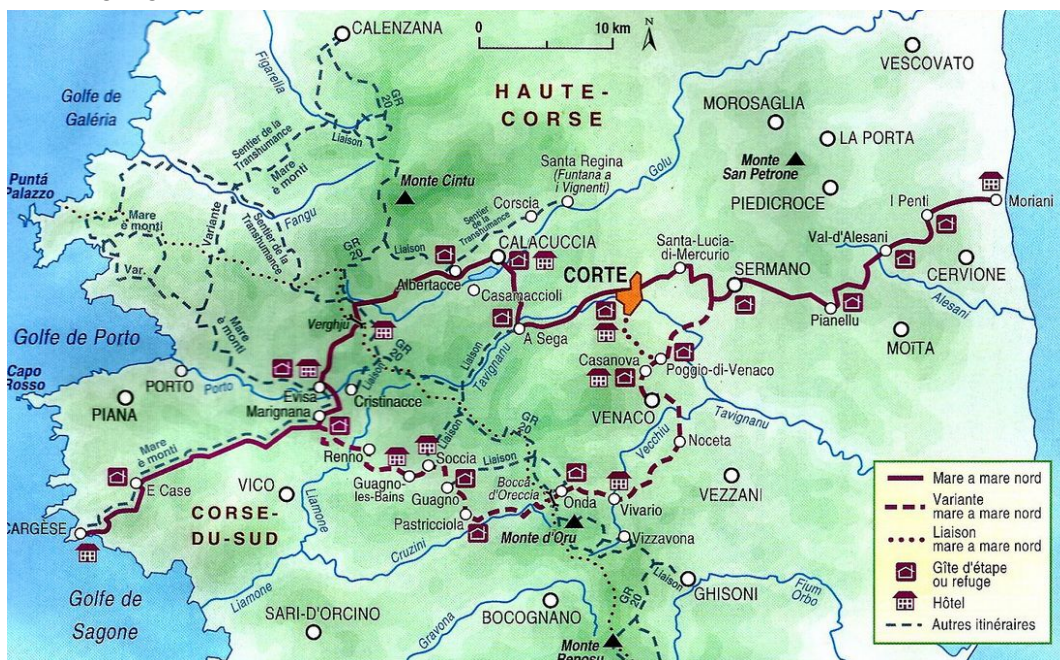
“Add to these rugged mountains, crystal-clear rivers, turquoise coves, romantic forests, the unforgettable scent of the maquis scrub, easy-going people, ... and you have, in a nutshell, a walker’s paradise.” [from the introduction of “Walking on Corsica” by Gillian Price]

Corsica, the birthplace of Napoleon, is a mediterranean island located off of Italy's west coast but governed by France. It has fascinating a history and ecology. Until it became French in the the mid-18th century, Corsica was ruled by the Republic of Genoa, Italy. Corsica retains many influences of its Italian heritage including its own unique language and cuisine. Its coastal zone features a mediterranean climate with hot, dry summers and mild, rainy winters. The natural vegetation is Mediterranean forests, woodlands, and shrubs. The mountain regions are cooler and wetter, and home to the mixed forests which support oak, pine, and broadleaf deciduous trees. The vegetation there is more typical of northern Europe.

**Introduction to our travels:** The path known as "Mare a Mare Nord" is a extraordinary trek across the northern half of Corsica. While not as famous as the GR20 north/south backpack along the island's central spine, it offers similar dramatic landscapes with breakfast, dinner, and lodging provided rather than carried. Our trip won't be as demanding, yet it will provide you with the same experience of Corsican savage beauty, whether along the sea shore or tucked in the mountains.

After leaving the sea behind, hikers will experience the remoteness of the maquis, which reveals itself in the diversity of landscapes and flora and fauna. As we will go through villages and mountain paths, we will discover what makes the Corsican spirit so legendary : a strong sense of insular identity, closed-knit communities, the importance of family ties and connections, secular traditions of getting the best of the land, beautiful villages tucked on the mountain side and isolated shepherd huts. Guiding you will be two experienced leaders both fluent in French, the primary island language: Marianne Bonnard, a French native currently living in Quebec, Canada, and Steve Cohen, chair of the Adventure Travel program.

Our route is highlighted below, and consists of 10 stops. It's referenced as Mare a Mare Nord.





Excellent reference sites (in French though) are [Mare i Monti](#) and [corse rando](#). If your French is not ready yet, you might also enjoy [the report](#) of a two Americans who hiked the trail in 2002 or the book [Walking in Corsica](#).

This [amazing 3D video](#) will give you a good idea of the itinerary, length and elevations, while in [this other video](#) you will have a foretaste of the trip. Can you smell the mountain and the sea already?



*shoreline along the coast south of Bastia*

## Trip Itinerary

We will meet in Bastia, the island's principal port, which is located on Corsica's northeastern coast. It is readily accessible from European airports. We will spend a day there to visit and adjust to Europe-time. A local guide will introduce us to Corsica's historical and cultural attributes. The next morning, we will transfer to Santa Reparata di Moriani, a small inland community, to start our trek. We leave the sea behind us to traverse the mountains of Corsica's interior. We reach the sea again on the west coast of the island, after a 10-day long trek. We end our journey in Cargese and then travel by bus to Ajaccio, Corsica's capital, largest city, and home of 'Maison Bonaparte' - Napoleon's birthplace. There we will celebrate our remarkable journey "from sea to sea" - Mare a Mare.



# Daily Itinerary

All distance & elevation information are approximate based on representative maps. The leaders reserve the right to change the itinerary for reasons such as weather, trail conditions, availability of accommodations, group preference, etc.

A typical day will have us waking up at 6:30 and on the trail by 8:00. We aim to arrive at our destination between 16:00 -17:00 each afternoon. Almost all huts & hotels have showers. The meals are hearty Corsican country cuisine. Vegetarian options are very limited. Most people are in bed by 21:00–22:00.

<i>Day</i>	<i>Activities</i>	<i>Trail</i>
Sunday, Oct 6	Depart US to Europe.	n.a.
Monday, Oct 7	Arrival in Bastia Check-in at hotel Evening : group dinner	n.a.
Tuesday, Oct 8	Bastia Morning : tour of the city Afternoon : free time Evening : independent dinner	n.a.
Wednesday, Oct 9	Bus from Bastia to Santa Reparata di Moriani. After a short warm up, we will start a steep ascent of Monte Castello	 4:00  9km  380m

	d'Osari to reach 1029 meters in altitude, before going back down to the next valley through Sambuchi notch and reach the village of Valle d'Alesani.  Overnight in Valle d'Alesani	↓ 300m
Thursday Oct 10	The next day will be similarly demanding, with a steep ascent to Pointe de Sambuco, the highest point of the trek, providing a 360 degrees views, up to the sea. From there, we will start our descent towards the small village of Poggio - Pianello.  Overnight in Pianello	🔄 4:30 ➡ 11km ↑ 515m ↓ 400m
Friday Oct 11	The hike to Sermano is a challenging yet very rewarding day. Starting at about 800 meters, we will reach again a magnificent viewpoint above 1000 meters. This would be the last day in a green environment, with many brooks and small rivers along the way.  Overnight in Sermano	🔄 4:50 ➡ 12.2km ↑ 540m ↓ 600m
Saturday Oct 12	We will enter the center of Corsica, where so few people live that we might not meet many! The beginning of the day will be challenging, but offering beautiful of the village tucked on the side of the mountain. After a good descent, the last few kilometers will smoothly bring us to our destination.  Overnight in Corte	🔄 5:00 ➡ 15.5km ↑ 695m ↓ 1050m
Sunday Oct 13	This is when we will enter the rugged mountains of Corsica and its mineral landscape, through the grand and savage valley of Tavignano, to reach the mountain hut of a Sega, at 1200 meters high. Beautiful swim holes await you upon arrival!  Overnight in Refugi de la Sega	🔄 5:30 ➡ 12.6km ↑ 775m ↓ 30m
Monday Oct 14	An amazing view over the valley of Albertacce, the dam of Calacuccia and the mountains around will be the reward for a swift ascent to Bocca di l'Arinella,	🔄 5:15 ➡ 11.9km ↑ 545m

	<p>at 1592 meters, and the highest point of the whole trek. After a 6 km descent, we will reach the lake of Calacuccia before arriving at the village.</p> <p>Overnight in Calacuccia</p>	<p>↓ 885m</p>
Tuesday Oct 15	<p>On that day we will follow a traditional “transhumance” trail, which herdsman - and their herds - have traveled for hundreds of years. We will be surrounded by Corsica’s highest peaks : Monte Cinto, Paglia Orba, Punta Minuta, Capu Falu, Cinque Frati. After a 4km ascent, will reach our destination, the notch of Vergio at 1470 meters.</p> <p>Overnight in Col de Vergio</p>	<p>🕒 4:45 ➡ 12km ⬆ 740m ⬇ 141m</p>
Wednesday Oct 16	<p>Day 8 of the trek is an easy descent through wild forests, luxurious flora, small brooks, natural swimming pools, and views over the Gulf of Porto and the Mediterranean Sea.</p> <p>Overnight in Marignana</p>	<p>🕒 4:30 ➡ 15km ⬆ 120m ⬇ 880m</p>
Thursday Oct 17	<p>This day will give a foretaste of what to expect if you ever hike GR20: 11 miles trail, more than 1000 meter combined elevation gain and loss, and a long day out. Beautiful views of remote valleys and mountains will be the reward, before reaching our destination, where you can enjoy a beautiful sunset view over the sea on the horizon.</p> <p>Overnight in E Case Revinda</p>	<p>🕒 6:30 ➡ 16.9km ⬆ 610m ⬇ 720m</p>
Friday Oct 18	<p>This last hiking day, will be an easy, though long descent towards Cargese, with magnificent panoramic views of the seaside most of the way.</p> <p>Transportation by bus from Cargese to Ajaccio.</p> <p>Dinner in Ajaccio</p> <p>Overnight in Ajaccio</p>	<p>🕒 5:00 ➡ 12.2km ⬆ 380m ⬇ 910m</p>



Saturday Oct 19	Depart to US or continue on your own private trip. You very well may wish to spend at least one additional day in Ajaccio and visit the birthplace of Napoleon among other attractions	n.a.
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*The Gulf of Ajaccio - our final destination*

## Lodging

We will spend every night in either hotels (Bastia, Corte, and Ajaccio) or mountain lodges/huts. Hotels will have two-four persons per room with twin beds. Excluding hotels, participants must bring a sleeping bag liner (sleep sack) to use instead of sheets. Accommodations outside the cities are typically in a bunk room with 4–12 people of mixed gender. Mattresses are either side-by-side or in two-level bunk beds. We will also have a couple of nights in huts that may not have showers or flush toilets. These remote and primitive locations are a necessary part of the Corsican trekking experience.

Each day we will enjoy breakfast at our hut or hotel and then embark on a hike to our next stop. while crossing from a valley to the other and enjoying the wonderful scenery around us. Each

day is designed to enable us to have time for lunch and pictures along the way, sometimes at mountain villages and to arrive at that day's lodging at a reasonable time. Diner will be provided at the hut or hotel.



*A typical "gîte" - corsican mountain refuge*

## Participants

### Profile

You should enjoy traveling with a group for extended periods of time and be comfortable traveling in areas which are unfamiliar to you. You should recognize that you may find yourself in closer quarters or be less comfortable than you are used to at home. You should make it a priority to help others on the trip and contribute to their having a great time. If you do that, we guarantee that you will have a great time.

This is a [vigorous](#) hike, suitable for those with recent hiking experience and at least intermediate to advanced hiking skills. While no technical climbing is required, the trail is rated as difficult. While the pace will be moderate, you should be able to be active up to 5-6 hours per day, with brief breaks, for 10 back-to-back days, with sometimes little shade and warm temperatures (high of 75-80 degrees in October).



Since breakfast, dinner and lodging are provided, we will be traveling light, with backpacks in the range of 20-25 pounds fully loaded. What you need for the 10 days, you will need to carry in your backpack. Typical daily treks will include five hours of hike time excluding breaks, with between 6 and 10 miles and an altitude gain between 1,000' and 2,700'.



*how we like to feel at the end of a great day outdoors*

## Experience & Risks

We will hike between 0 and 4,500'. Weather is likely to be warm & sunny, although there is always a possibility of some precipitation. That said, mountain climate is unpredictable and can range from 50–80°F in Corsica at that time of year.

People wishing to participate in this trip must have previous hiking and backpacking experience, at the intermediate level or higher. You need to be prepared to commit yourself to keeping in shape between the time you sign up for the trip to the time you depart on it.

When you participate in this activity, you should be prepared both physically and mentally, and equipped with the appropriate gear. You should always be aware of the risks involved and conduct yourself accordingly. We are not responsible for your safety—you are.

Nonetheless, it may happen on any trip that a trip member is or becomes unable to participate in one or more of the planned activities. Leaders in their sole judgment have the right and obligation to refuse participation in any activity to any group member for reasons of group or individual safety. Illness, injury or lack of proper gear or fitness for a particular activity are

examples of some conditions that might result in a participant's being unable to perform one or more activity. Leaders may try to find a substitute activity for the trip member, but this may not always be possible.

Prior to your being accepted as a participant in this trip, you will be asked to discuss your capabilities and experience with us. Please do not be offended by our questions.



*Corte - our midway destination*

## Trip Price

The final trip price will be adjusted in accordance with the best final arrangements we can make and currency fluctuations. Any savings we achieve, as well as any cost increases, will be passed back to you. Our cost estimates are conservative, and so a refund is considerably more likely than a price increase.

Price is \$2,700 per person shared occupancy for AMC members. Non-members can join for \$50, and get the same price.

Deposit of \$1,000 is due with application. Balance of \$1,700 is due by 1 April 2019.

Includes:

- 12 nights of lodging.
- Breakfast and dinner for the entire trip, starting with dinner on the first night through breakfast on the last morning, but excluding dinner on October 8 in Bastia
- Bus transport as a scheduled part of the itinerary.
- Emergency medical & evacuation insurance coverage.

Does not include:

- Airfare. The trip leaders will advise you as much as you need and will facilitate group travel. At this time, we estimate that the cost for a round trip ticket between the US East Coast and Europe/Corsica will be in the range of \$1,000 - \$1,500. Flying first to Paris, and then booking separate internal flights to/from Corsica could prove to be cheaper.
- Lunches, beverages, & incidental expenses.
- Local transport between arrival airport & beginning of trip.
- Local transport between end of trip & departure airport.
- Insurance for travel delay, interruption, cancellation, or for baggage loss. If the possibility of such problems concerns you, individual travel insurance is suggested. The AMC has a recommended vendor whose material will be sent to you if your application is accepted.

## Registration

We expect a group size of 12 people, including the 2 leaders. This trip is likely to fill quickly. If you are interested, you should apply as soon as possible. When registration is complete, we will send all participants the names, addresses, and phone numbers of all those going on the trip.

To apply, you must download, complete, and submit the [Application Documents](#) which consist of:

- Application
- Confidential medical form
- Acknowledgement and Assumption of Risk and Release form
- Supplemental Medical Questionnaire (optional)

You will not be accepted and your check will not be deposited until the leaders have determined by telephone conversation with you that you and the trip are a good match. Deposit checks from waitlisted applicants will not be cashed until a spot is available, the applicant is accepted onto the trip, & they confirmed their continued interest.

## Participant Cancellation Policy

Cancellation will not be allowed to raise the cost to the other participants or to the leaders.



The minimum cancellation fee is \$200 once the trip has been declared a go. If actual costs (expenses already incurred on your behalf, and any unavoidable future expenses that will be incurred as a result of your registration & cancellation) are higher, they will be assessed instead, unless they can be applied toward another acceptable participant.

## Trip Cancellation Policy

In the unlikely event that the trip is cancelled, everything you have paid to AMC for this trip will be refunded in full.

Participants are responsible for their own airline tickets & other external expenses. Most airlines no longer give refunds for cancellations; instead, they issue coupons for a future trip with an administrative charge and an expiration date. Trip cancellation insurance is advised—policy information will be supplied to all participants.

## Disclosure

AMC Adventure Travel trips are run on a nonprofit basis. Leaders are not compensated except for their travel and administrative costs associated with the trip. A program fee is assessed toward AMC Adventure Travel program and administrative expenses.

## Leaders



**Steve Cohen** has been an active AMC adventure travel leader since 2012. He has planned and led 18 hiking/ trekking-oriented Adventure Travel trips to such destinations the Haute Route (from Chamonix, France to Zermatt, Switzerland), the Alta Via II through the Italian Dolomites, the tour of the Jungfrau region (Switzerland), Patagonia, the high mountains huts of Austria, etc. He lived in Europe for four years and is fluent in both French and German. Steve is chair of Adventure Travel.

**Marianne Bonnard** is an active AMC leader with the Boston chapter (Hiking/Backpacking Committee and Young members). Now based in Québec after 4+ years in the Boston area, she leads hikes in New England and Québec. Born, raised and educated in Europe, she's a native French speaker and has lived in five countries. A community organizer since her teenage years, she has substantial experience in leading various groups. This will be Marianne's first Adventure Travel trip as a co-leader, though she has been a participant in three Adventure Travel trips before.



## Packing List

### Backpack

We cannot emphasize enough the attention you need to give for choosing the correct pack and pack weight.

- Size & weight (without water or food) matter. Aim for 32 liters & 5kg (11lb) for comfortable light hike that allows you to run up the mountain. Cannot fit everything in? Try 35 liters & 6kg (13lb), trading some comfort with a third change of clothes. You cannot hike without those extra equipment “just in case”, no matter how much your shoulders ache & feet suffer? Go all out with 38 liters & 7kg (15lb). But remember, “we *you told so*”. Do not bother coming on the trip with anything larger & heavier.
- [Fit matters](#): get the right fit for your torso. Ever wondered what all these straps are for? Stop by your REI or local outdoor store for proper fitting.
- [Packing matters](#): keep heavy items in the middle to lower part of the pack, close to your back. Light items go on the outer & top layers. But none of this matters, because your whole pack is very light, right?

### Required

- Passport. Tourist visa not required for US citizens. For other citizens, check with the French consulate. The passport must be valid for at least six months from the start date of the trip.
- Broken-in waterproof hiking boots
- At least 2-3 set of hiking socks with liners
- Non-cotton shorts (or long pants) and shirt for hiking
- Sleeping bag liner (sleep sack)
- Waterproof wind and rain gear (tops and bottoms)

- Wool sweater, or synthetic pile/fleece jacket
- Long underwear top and bottom
- Hat for warmth, & gloves or mittens
- Polypropylene, Coolmax, Bergelene or other synthetic extra layer clothing
- Sunglasses
- Hat or bandana for sun protection
- Sunscreen
- Sandals/crocs/etc to wear in huts, which do NOT permit the wearing of hiking boots outside of the public areas
- Headlamp or flashlight with fresh batteries
- Unbreakable bottles or hydration bladder (at least 3 liters total capacity)
- Waterproof pack liner and/or pack cover
- High-energy trail snacks
- Toiletry kit (many huts do not supply soap or shampoo)
- Camp towel (most huts do not supply towels)
- Ear plugs
- Personal first aid kit (leaders will have a group first aid kit)

## Optional

The following is a long list of optional items to bring. Use it as a reminder of additional items that can make your trip more comfortable.

- Casual clothing for use in a hut
- Swim suit (for sea and rivers by the huts)
- Gaiters (for rain)
- Hiking poles
- Whistle
- Knife
- Smartphone
- Camera
- Batteries/charger/adapter plug
- Pillowcase