



I CAMMINI dello **SPIRITO**

The Paths of the Spirit

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Welcome to the brochure dedicated to the “Cammini dello Spirito” (*Paths of the Spirit*). As President of the GAL Nuorese Baronia, the project leader, I am delighted to present this initiative, which aims to establish a network of routes in Sardinia centered on the theme of spirituality, with the goal of fostering local development through slow and sustainable tourism.

This initiative connects the cultural heritage embedded in these places with new opportunities for growth in our rural areas by rediscovering and enhancing ancient devotional routes. The “Cammini dello Spirito” are not merely geographical trails but true journeys of the soul, offering walkers and pilgrims the chance to experience the profound connection between landscapes and historical settlements, religious practices, and the traditions of local communities.

The project aims to promote authentic experiences that strengthen the connection between visitors and the places they traverse, fostering dialogue and mutual understanding between walkers and host communities. Each step along these paths marks the direction toward protecting the natural ecosystem and its local traditions.

We warmly invite you to become an active part of this project, not just as visitors but as builders of a sustainable future for our towns. Whether as residents, tourism operators, travelers, artisans, or passionate supporters, your contribution is crucial to ensure that the ‘Cammini dello Spirito’ become a vehicle for economic development, social cohesion, and cultural revival.

Thank you for walking alongside us!

The President

Dr. Loredana Contu

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the "Cammini dello Spirito" (*Paths of the Spirit*).

"I Cammini dello Spirito", a unique experience that goes beyond mere walking, a journey that nourishes the soul

Sardinia, an island of myths and legends, holds a rich and precious spiritual heritage within its landscapes and traditions. Imagine walking along ancient paths winding through rolling hills, centuries-old forests, and crystal-clear coastal routes that not only traverse a land of extraordinary beauty but also delve into the timeless spirituality of this land. It is a rich heritage, still little known to the wider community of walkers and pilgrims

The importance of spiritual paths in Sardinia

In an era where tourism seeks authentic and sustainable experiences, the Cammini dello Spirito (Paths of the Spirit) align with the growing phenomenon of walking tourism, offering a unique perspective on the island. The distinctiveness of these paths lies in their ability to provide a slow and mindful journey of discovery, attuned to the new sensibilities of contemporary tourism.

I Cammini dello Spirito: from method to results

The Steering Committee, in its role of guiding and supervising the "Cammini dello Spirito" project, presents the results of studies and research conducted according to the highest quality standards, integrating various regulations, including the Atlas of Paths, which aligns with the territorial enhancement objectives of the Sardinia Rural Development Program 2014–2022.

Based on the in-depth work carried out by specialized consultants, the Committee has validated:

- The identification of a network of 71 significant places of worship, selected based on predefined criteria of historical relevance, accessibility, and usability potential.
- The definition of interconnected itineraries that meet established standards of walkability and safety.
- Comprehensive documentation for each site, including:
 - Architectural information about the sacred location.
 - Details about the specific cult of the saint and local devotion.
 - Descriptions of civil and religious festivities.
 - "Curiosities" and "not to be missed" sections to enrich the visitor's experience.

Specifically, the Cammini dello Spirito represent a rich heritage of trails united by the theme of spirituality and Sardinian popular devotion. These paths form a network connecting sanctuaries, rural churches, and sacred sites where ancient rites and religious traditions are still celebrated today. This integrated system of paths offers visitors not only an experience through landscapes of extraordinary beauty but also a journey into the heart of the island's faith and millennia old traditions. It serves as a living testament to a unique cultural heritage in the Mediterranean, manifested not only in the stones of sacred buildings but especially in the vibrant hearts of the communities that keep these ancient traditions alive.

This document reveals how, here, every step is a silent dialogue between past and present, between land and spirit, offering an experience that transforms mere walking into a profound act of connection with the most authentic soul of Sardinia.

Project presentation

The “Cammini dello Spirito” within the Rural Development Program for Sardinia 2014/2022, Measure 19 - Support for Rural Development Leader CLLD 2014/2020, Submeasure 19.3, is an interterritorial cooperation project spanning seven different GAL areas: Nuorese Baronia, Barbagia, Barbagia Mandrolisai Gennargentu, Barigadu Guilcer, Logudoro Goceano, Ogliastra, Sarcidano Barbagia di Seulo. Each area brings its own wealth of churches, saints, and traditions, with the aim of fostering the socio-economic fabric of these territories by creating new opportunities linked to sustainable tourism.

Following an initial phase of territorial mapping to identify and rediscover ancient itineraries, the main points of religious interest within each area were identified. This local survey was then synthesized into a comprehensive main route that connects the various territories.

To enhance the project with best practices in the field, study visits and experience exchanges were conducted with successful local and European initiatives. During these visits, local operators were actively involved in identifying virtuous elements and practical solutions that could be effectively adapted and implemented in the context of the Cammini dello Spirito (Paths of the Spirit).

Significant attention has been devoted to promoting the Paths. A distinctive brand was created with a logo and coordinated image, dedicated pages were developed on the partner GALs’ websites, and both printed and digital informational materials were produced. An important promotional event was organized to launch the initiative. In parallel, a strategic marketing plan was developed to effectively position the offering in the tourism market. All activities were coordinated and supervised by a steering committee that met regularly to ensure the proper progress of the project and the achievement of its set objectives.

The GAL Steering Committee

Project Leader: Dr. Alessandro Caria

MATTEO CARA

Geographer

When identifying a network of routes across a vast territory, regardless of their nature, numerous challenges arise. However, the resolution of each challenge is accompanied by the allure of solutions offered by the landscapes themselves, with their diverse, ancient, and modern patterns. When the routes to be georeferenced focus primarily on the theme of religious pilgrimage, the Sardinian society and communities, which have shaped the island's intricate rural landscapes, become essential partners in the research underpinning such projects.

In this context, "planning" does not carry the usual architectural connotation of assembling elements to construct something pre-imagined. Instead, it entails selecting, from among the best possibilities, those paths and roads that most effectively narrate the history embedded within the landscape's monuments and spiritual sites.

The preliminary phase of a project like this involves selecting maps and gathering a substantial amount of geographic data. Potential connections between identified points of interest are analyzed on paper, while challenges related to private property largely circumvented in this instance and the overuse of paved roads are anticipated. Following this comes the most labor intensive yet rewarding part of the work: on site inspections.

During these inspections, one uncovers extraordinary trails and paths long forgotten or, more commonly, ancient roads that abruptly end, blocked by modern gates or overtaken by vegetation reclaiming these ancient pathways. Gradually, the project takes shape, and the GIS system finalizes the route, refining the traces gathered on site, conducting necessary measurements and checks, as well as estimating the work required to eventually develop the Paths of the Spirit. Today, the project has reached an advanced design phase but will not be fully accessible until, as with all completed and functional paths, issues related to signage, maintenance, and hospitality are resolved.

Nevertheless, routes like these provide a compelling indication of the opportunities and richness our territories offer. They highlight the immense value of ancient rural pathways too often viewed as problems until they are paved over. These routes are, and will increasingly become, opportunities for development and infrastructure that simultaneously enable tomorrow's travelers while preserving the memory of the generations that created them.

THE PATH

This booklet is not intended to be a hiking guide but rather a collection of sacred and secular stories, of testimonies of faith and beyond, woven into the territories of the areas involved.

We aim to point out a path to follow and nurture together: a journey born from the connection between communities, visitors, and landscapes, where every step helps weave new relationships and keeps the memory of these places alive. It is an evolving project enriched through the exchange of experiences. Like every true journey, this one is built step by step with the participation of all: the local communities who safeguard the sites, the travelers who rediscover them, and the institutions that protect them. This is an invitation to become part of this collective journey, where everyone can contribute to preserving and revitalizing Sardinia's extraordinary spiritual and cultural heritage.

In the villages along the way, we invite you to engage in local life. Meeting the locals is a way to discover the authenticity of the territories and enhance your experience.



I CAMMINI dello SPIRITO

1. **Ozieri:** Sant'Antioco di Bisarcio
2. **Ardara:** Nostra Signora del Regno
3. **Borutta:** San Pietro di Sorres
4. **Torralba:** Nostra Signora di Cabuabbas
5. **Giave:** Santi Cosimo e Damiano
6. **Bonorva:** Santa Lucia

7. **Aidomaggiore:** Santa Greca
8. **Ardauli:** San Quirico
9. **Sorradile:** Santa Maria Turrana
10. **Sorgono:** San Mauro
11. **Bidoni:** Santa Maria Ossolo
12. **Nughedu Santa Vittoria:** San Basilio

13. **Sedilo:** San Costantino
14. **Ottana:** San Nicola
15. **Orotelli:** San Pietro di Oddini
16. **Orani:** San Francesco Saverio
17. **Orgosolo:** Santi Egidio e Anania
18. **Oliena:** Nostra Signora della Pietà

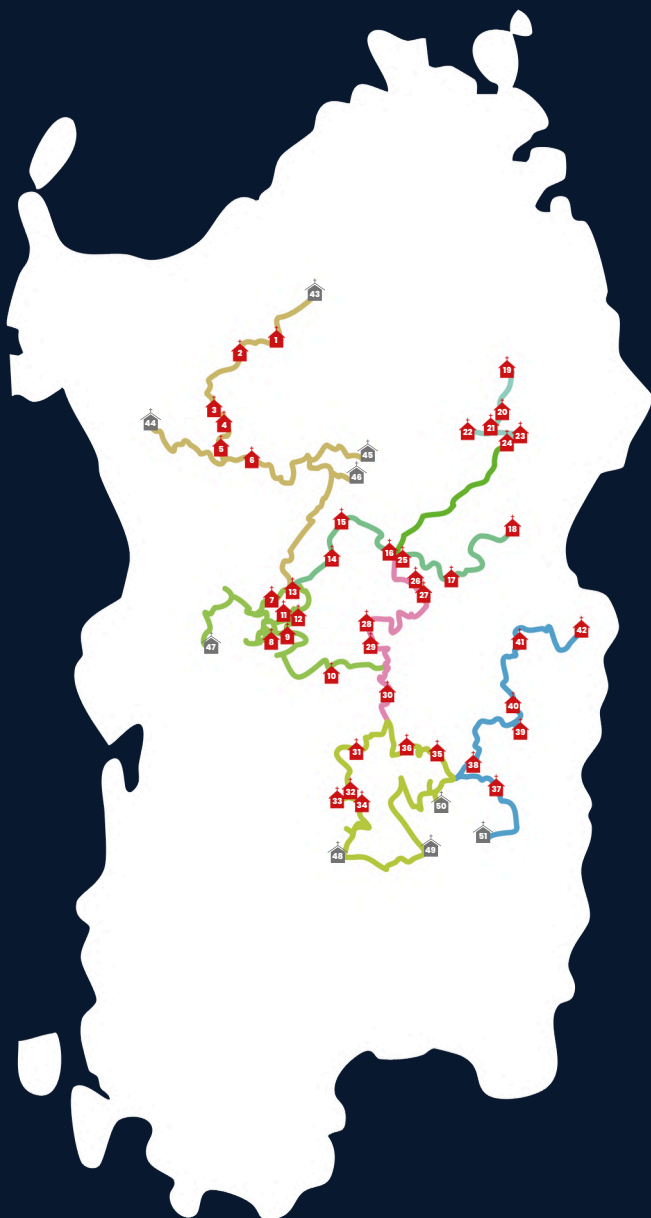
19. **Bitti:** Santissima Annunziata
20. **Onani:** San Bachisio
21. **Onani:** San Pietro Apostolo
22. **Bitti:** Villaggio scomparso di Dure
23. **Lula:** Nostra Signora del Miracolo
24. **Lula:** San Francesco

25. **Sarule-Orani:** Nostra Signora di Gonare
26. **Mamoiada:** Santi Cosimo e Damiano
27. **Gavoi:** Nostra Signora d'Itria
28. **Teti:** San Sebastiano
29. **Tiana:** San Leone
30. **Belvi:** Santa Margherita

31. **Laceni:** Santa Sofia di Sarcidano
32. **Nurallao:** Madonna della Strada
33. **Nuragus:** Sant'Elia
34. **Isili:** San Sebastiano
35. **Seui:** San Sebastiano e Santa Barbara
36. **Seulo:** Santi Cosimo e Damiano

37. **Ulassai:** Santa Barbara
38. **Ussassai:** Santissimo Salvatore
39. **Elini:** Nostra Signora del Carmine
40. **Villagrande Strisaili:** Santa Barbara
41. **Urzulei:** San Basilio
42. **Baunei:** San Pietro di Golgo

43. **Tula:** Nostra Signora di Coros
44. **Monteleone Rocca Doria:** Sant'Antonio Abate
45. **Benetutti/Bultei:** San Saturnino
46. **Bono:** San Gavino di Lorthia
47. **Paulilatino:** Santa Cristina
48. **Escolca:** San Simone
49. **Orroli:** Santa Caterina D'Alessandria
50. **Esterzili:** Santa Vittoria
51. **Perdasdefogu:** Santa Barbara



- From Goceano to Logudoro
- Around the lake and inland
- From Cedrina to Tiro
- The Barbagia of Bitti
- The heart of Sardinia
- From Barbagia to the plains
- From Ogliastro to Barbagia of Seulo
- Other points of interest



THE BARBAGIA OF BITTI

The northeastern branch of the Cammini dello Spirito (*Paths of the Spirit*) begins its journey in the village of Bitti, at the heart of the Barbagia. From the start, pilgrims step onto ancient rural paths connecting modern day towns and passing the remnants of villages that disappeared over the centuries.

Here, they discover the Churches of Dure, once part of a now vanished village. From this point, the path winds through countryside lined with cork oaks and rolling pastures, with the imposing Montalbo mountain closing off the horizon to the east. An important crossroads signals the approach to Onani: here, a branch of the path veers left, crossing through the small village with its beautiful churches, and continues beyond a hilltop along the Riu Mannu valley.

Walking along an ancient road that follows the river's bends, pilgrims are immersed in the rugged heart of the Barbagia of Bitti, with the rocky Mamone uplands and the pale cliffs of Montalbo rising above. Passing near the rural Church of San Bachisio, the path continues in increasing solitude until, solitary and white, the splendid Sanctuary of S'Annossata appears. This symbolic site, nestled among deep valleys and distant peaks, has welcomed generations of pilgrims through the centuries.

Returning to Onani, the path once again threads through cork forests, heading toward Lula. Here, Montalbo looms like a massive wall, while trails lead to the Church of Madonna del Miracolo, located at the very foot of its towering cliffs, home to eagles and the perpetual flight of imperial ravens. Skirting the mountain's base, the path finally reaches the Sanctuary of San Francesco. Each year, pilgrims journey here from distant Nuoro, and after a night of prayer and walking, they are warmed by su Filindeu and refreshed with the ritual of foot washing. San Francesco is a special place, set on a hilltop that overlooks mountains and valleys already scented with the sea. From here, the long path leads pilgrims onward toward Nuoro.

1. BITTI, CHURCHES OF DURE
2. ONANI, CHURCH OF SAN PIETRO APOSTOLO
3. ONANI, CHURCH OF SAN BACHISIO
4. BITTI, CHURCH OF SANTISSIMA ANNUNZIATA
5. LULA, CHURCH OF NOSTRA SIGNORA DEL MIRACOLO
6. LULA, CHURCH OF SAN FRANCESCO

THE VANISHED VILLAGE OF DURE

BITTI

The legend of the curse of the vanished village of Dure and its little churches

A village once inhabited has now vanished, but traces of its history remain through the presence of a full five small churches. The legend, which emerged in the 1300s, tells that the abandonment began during that period and that the village's final disappearance is attributed to a curse. It is said that Nostra Sennora (Our Lady), a housewife who had run out of sourdough for bread, went to ask the other women in the village, but none of them responded to her. Faced with such indifference, the woman cursed the entire village, and Babbu Mannu (God the Father) punished all the inhabitants for their greed and selfishness with a rain of fire and brimstone. The villagers fled to the surrounding areas, reaching as far as Bitti, and never returned to Dure, though they maintained their bond with its churches and the Saints to whom they were dedicated. In reality, during the 14th century, many villages were depopulated and eventually abandoned due to wars and the plague, much like many other places in Europe. The churches that testify the presence of the ancient village in the countryside are still visited and lovingly maintained by the community. There are five churches, dedicated respectively to Babbu Mannu (or the Holy Spirit), Santa Maria of Dure, San Giorgio of Suelli, Santo Stefano the First Martyr, and Santa Lucia of Dure. These churches are located just a few kilometers from Bitti and are still easily reached today, though while people used to walk, now they can be reached by motor vehicles. However, the festivals are still honored with large gatherings, processions, and a grand communal banquet. The Feast of Su Babbu Mannu (Holy Trinity and Holy Spirit) is celebrated on the third Sunday of October. The temple, dating back to 1496, originally had land holdings. Over time, it has been restored while maintaining its simplicity. Its facade features a tympanum with a floral cornice in relief.

Flanking the doorway are two niches housing marble statues, and the bronze bell in the bell gable dates to 1788. Inside, the central nave is separated from the side aisles by massive pillars and features a barrel vault. The presbytery is distinguished by a marble balustrade and altar, behind which stands the titular statue. Santa Maria or the Nativity of Mary is documented as early as 1388 in the peace treaty between Arborea and John I of Aragon. It is also mentioned in 1600 by Giovanni Arca, in the 1700s, and during restorations in the 1930s and 1950s. The stone structure shows signs of aging, with only the facade featuring a bell gable being plastered. The facade is marked by a lunette shaped window, while lateral walls are supported by buttresses. Inside, the raised presbytery houses the Madonna in the altar niche. The church dedicated to Saint George the Bishop, documented since 1598, underwent its last restoration in the 1900s. Celebrated on the last Sunday of May, the modest central nave contains the titular saint's statue in an altar display case, and several ex votos adorn the walls. Its plastered facade has a gable shape with a double pitched roof, topped by a bell gable with a bell donated along with a missal in the early 20th century. A lunette above the door provides light. The Feast of Saint Stephen of Dure is celebrated twice: in May with a communal meal and on December 26 with a liturgical service. The church is documented between 1602 and 1803, was abandoned, and later restored to worship around 1980 thanks to community donations. Reopened with new furnishings and facilities for the celebration, the stone facade features a lunette topped doorway and a bell gable, giving it the characteristic appearance of rural chapels. Inside, a wooden plank roof is supported by wooden trusses, and the masonry altar with floral decorations is topped by a niche housing the martyr's statue. Lastly, Saint Lucy, Virgin and Martyr, is celebrated on the fourth Sunday of June and December 13 with a Mass. Mentioned in the 1496 diocesan inventory, it was deconsecrated in the 16th century and rebuilt by farmers and shepherds in 1775. It was reconstructed in 1920 using granite ashlar, with a white plastered interior and a bell gable topped by an iron cross.

THE CHURCH OF SAN BACHISIO AND THE CHURCH OF SAN PIETRO APOSTOLO

The church of Saint Peter

Celebrated everywhere on June 29, the veneration of Saint Peter promote to Sardinia as a way to strengthen the Sardinians' loyalty to the Vatican and the Basilica of Saint Peter in Rome. For this reason, monks and bishops promoted the cult of Saint Peter the Apostle, dedicating cathedrals, some monasteries, parish churches, and small rural chapels in country villages to him. Today, 63 of these churches dedicated to the saint still remain and are actively used during feast days. The Church of San Pietro in Onanì is a true gem. Preserving its original appearance, it is built entirely of stone, even up to the roof, and represents an excellent example of pure and simple Romanesque architecture, showcasing the skill of talented craftsmen. Records of its existence date back to 1341, according to the payment registers to the Holy See, though it was constructed earlier, in the 12th century. Made of granite, the church is distinguished by a large bell gable likely added later along, with a semicircular apse featuring a central single light window and a second cruciform window above the entrance door's lunette. Inside, the barrel vaulted nave is adorned with frescoes, adding to the church's beauty.



The church of Saint Bachisio

The small church dedicated to San Bachisio, located furthest from the village of Onanì, holds the most intense affection of the local community. This strong affection may stem from its remote location, the long procession to the rural temple, and the centuries old devotion to the martyr, whose veneration in Sardinia dates back to the Byzantine era. Saint Bachisio, a Roman officer under Emperor Diocletian, was martyred in the 3rd century AD for refusing to renounce the Christian God.

The details of the church's foundation remain uncertain, the festival honoring the saint is well established, taking place on the last Sunday of May. This celebration is marked not only by the pilgrimage but also by a rural gastronomic banquet, where local products and dishes are enjoyed. The church itself has a simple gabled structure with a small bell gable on top and features an elongated form due to a side room that houses a niche with an image of the protector. Inside, the space is modest and small, with an arch separating the nave from the presbytery, where a simple stone altar stands.



THE BARBAGIA OF BITTI



THE SANCTUARY OF SS. ANNUNZIATA

BITTI

Among the most well known novenaries in the province of Nuoro, there is one nestled in the rural countryside near Bitti. Viewed from above, it resembles a compact village made up of about a hundred white cottages, surrounding and protecting the church dedicated to the Blessed Annunciation, which has been the focus of deep and heartfelt devotion by the local community for centuries. The construction of the church dates back to 1585/88, and in 1619, it received official approval from Archbishop Monsignor D'Esquivel in favor of four brothers, co-patrons of the building.

The sanctuary comes to life during the novena period leading up to the main celebration on the third Sunday of May. It is maintained and managed by those responsible for organizing the festival, with

every donation and offering meticulously recorded in accounting ledgers, reflecting the community's devotion through the gifts made to the Virgin and her novenary. The church has a gabled structure with a pedimented façade and a lunette over the entrance door. At the top of the building stands a stone cross. Inside, the barrel-vaulted nave leads to the presbytery, where the altar niche houses the figures of the Virgin and the Announcing Angel, who share the church's dedication.

Emotion and devotion of a community

Legend has it that the origin of the sanctuary is tied to two sisters, both called Our Lady, who parted ways after a quarrel, choosing different paths. One sister headed toward the mountains, reaching the heights of Gonare, while the other descended to the valley in the Mamone area.

During the novenary, the "cumbessias" (pilgrim lodgings) are assigned to the residents of Bitti, both local inhabitants and those who have moved elsewhere. Tradition also tells of a dispute between Lodè and Bitti, as both towns claimed the sanctuary, which lies between their territories. Today, however, an agreement has been reached, and the two communities celebrate in harmony during the novena.

The most important moments of the festival, beyond the solemn Sunday, occur on Friday evening when the Madonna is carried in procession through the novenary. As she passes each "cumbessia," a candle is lit, filling the sanctuary with light and creating a magical and enveloping atmosphere in a moment of deep communion. On Saturday, the knights, under the coordination of the priors, express their devotion by performing three ritual laps around the church to pay their respects to the Madonna and offer their tribute of faith. The role of the priory rotates every three years, ensuring the sanctuary is maintained with care and that the saint is honored with dignity during the festival.

Devotion and the cult of Mary

On the island, the spread of devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary can be attributed to religious orders, initiatives by the local rulers, or in response to extraordinary events. In Mary's name, places of worship were built, often dedicated to Santa Maria and distinguished by the local place name, which frequently recalls a long lost medieval village. Throughout Sardinia, religious monuments can often be found standing alone in the countryside. Sometimes they are small, modest rural churches, while other times they are grand basilicas. In both cases, these structures are often the last remnants of ancient, now abandoned villages that once grew around the church. The significance of the building often hints at the size and importance of the former settlement.

Many Marian cults are linked by popular tradition to miraculous events, such as the discovery of a statue, often made of wood or terracotta, or unexplained movements of sacred objects. These legends, born from the people's deep love and poetic imagination, continue to shape the island's religious life.

THE BARBAGIA OF BITTI

CURIOSITY

Nestled on an olive covered hillside, BittiRex Park is an educational project designed for families and schools, offering guided tours, thematic trails, workshops, and engaging learning experiences. The park is further enhanced by Bittinsecta, a geodesic dome that houses 25 large scale insect replicas, along with an educational path exploring entomology and the vital role of insects in our larger ecosystem.

CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT



NOT TO BE MISSED

Romanzesu is an archaeological site that showcases the monumental complexity and architectural ingenuity of the Nuragic civilization. This sacred site includes both religious and communal structures. At its heart is a well-temple accompanied by a remarkable multi-level layout, two megaron-style temples, a large sub-elliptical enclosure, a labyrinthine ritual path, circular and oval huts, five large meeting huts, and an exceptional find of amber beads within a rectangular structure with three betyls.

Spanning nearly 8,000 hectares of untouched forests, trails, springs, and streams, Tepilora Regional Natural Park located within the municipalities of Bitti, Lodè, Posada, and Torpè is an ideal destination for those seeking a nature-focused getaway. In June 2017, UNESCO designated "Tepilora, Rio Posada, and Montalbo" as a Biosphere Reserve within the "Man and Biosphere (MAB)" program. This designation was the result of cooperation among local administrations and various public and private stakeholders, coordinated by the Tepilora Regional Natural Park.

The reserve encompasses parts of four historical regions of Sardinia: Baronia, Nuorese, Gallura, and Montacuto; and includes 17 municipalities: Bitti, Galtellì, Irgoli, Loculi, Lodè, Lula, Onanì, Orune, Osidda, Posada, Siniscola, Torpè, Alà dei Sardi, Buddusò, Budoni, Padru, and San Teodoro. The choice of the area of the Biosphere Reserve, linked to the differentiation of landscapes, with mountain areas and the Montalbo massif (formerly SIC) lowlands, river and coastal areas and the wealth of history and culture is why one of the main challenges of the Reserve is to rebalance the relationship between mountain and coast, which has traditionally characterized these territories.

In the heart of Bitti, a cultural center honors the tradition of canto a tenore, which UNESCO recognized as an intangible cultural heritage of humanity in 2005. This vibrant art, practiced with passion and fervor, can be experienced live during performances tied to local events or explored in the Multimedia Museum. The museum is filled with resources that delve into the ancient Sardinian tradition of four-part folk singing.

THE BARBAGIA OF BITTI



THE CHURCH OF MADONNA DEL MIRACOLO AND THE CHURCH OF SAN FRANCESCO

LULA

The Church of Madonna del Miracolo

Deeply rooted in the island's rural traditions, the ritual feast for the Madonna del Miracolo in Lula takes place on the first Sunday of September. On this occasion, the statue of the Virgin is carried in a solemn procession, leading up to the religious celebration, followed by a traditional meal featuring boiled lamb and blood sausage. Nestled in the green woods of Mount Turuddò, the church was built in 1899 and consecrated in 1901. It was supported by farmers and shepherds from Lula who were devoted to the Virgin of the Miracle. The temple, still lovingly maintained, is accessed by a broad staircase leading up to the pedimented façade topped with a small bell gable. The central nave is illuminated solely by the light from the narrow lunette above the entrance door. Inside, the apse houses the altar, once made of stone and lime, and the wooden statue of the Virgin, which is returned to the parish church after the festivities.

The novenary dedicated to San Francesco of Assisi

In the Gulf of Orosei, the number of churches dedicated to Saint Francis is significant, likely linked to the presence of the medieval port, which facilitated the spread of devotees and followers. Churches dedicated to him can be found in Orosei,

Galtelli, Siniscola, Dorgali, Irgoli, Bitti, Onani and finally in Lula, where a temple was erected at the request of a bandit accused of murder who vowed to build it if acquitted. Since then, a well known festival has been celebrated in the area, during which the traditional dish filindeu is offered to all pilgrims who gather for the feast on October 4 and May 5.

The sanctuary, along with its cumbessias (pilgrims' lodgings), is perched on a hill. The first record of the church dates back to 1587, when it did not yet have any possessions. The building, in Baroque style with a two tiered façade, was rebuilt in 1795 and became a destination for pilgrims and newlyweds. The entrance features a lunette above the door, flanked by two niches, with an elongated window above. A bell gable rises on the side wall, facing the statue of the saint in the churchyard. The barrel vaulted nave is illuminated by several windows, and the light from the octagonal dome shines down on the altar in the presbytery, where a 17th century wooden statue of the saint, crafted by a Neapolitan workshop, is displayed. The inscription on the façade serves as a historical summary of the building.

CURIOSITY

Deledda sets several key moments of her novel *Elias Portolu* in the sanctuary, providing a faithful depiction of the rural festival and the traditions of the novenary. She describes customs such as arriving barefoot and the importance of eating the communal soup, as leaving it uneaten is considered a sacrilege!

The Franciscan cult and the monks of the island

In the 13th century, the mendicant orders emerged, quickly gaining popularity and support. The first to arrive in Sardinia was the Order of Friars Minor, founded by Saint Francis of Assisi in 1208, initially approved verbally by Pope Innocent III and later officially sanctioned by Pope Honorius III in 1223. The first convent was established in Cagliari near Bonaria Hill, followed by others in Monte Rasu, Sassari, Oristano, Stampace in Cagliari, and Luogosanto (though records for this last one are lacking). In the 1300s, convents were also founded in Alghero and Iglesias.

After theological disputes in the 14th and 15th centuries, the order divided into two branches: the Observants, who upheld the original vow of poverty, and the Conventuals, who allowed the ownership of property. Another order that followed Francis' example was the Poor Clares, inspired by Saint Clare and later split into two branches: the original order and the Capuchin Clares. Both orders established numerous convents, many of which still stand today, along with various churches dedicated to Saint Francis of Assisi and his teachings.

CURIOSITY

Industrial Archaeology

Lula has a mining heritage connected to the extraction sites of Sos Enathos, Guzorra, S'Arghentaria, and Nurai, exploited since ancient times, with peaks of activity during the Roman period and the 19th century. After a pause during the two World Wars, mining resumed in the early 1950s, continuing until the late 1990s. These mines are closely tied to significant labor rights movements. In April 1899, the site witnessed what is considered Italy's first labor strike, which ultimately led to tragic events a few years later in Bugerru, a mining center in southwestern Sardinia.

These sites have been recognized by UNESCO as World Heritage Sites and are now part of the Historic Environmental Geomining Park of Sardinia. Today, plans are underway to repurpose the sites to host the Einstein Telescope project for gravitational wave research, with Lula's candidacy approved alongside another European location.

THE CHURCH OF SAN FRANCESCO

LULA





FROM CEDRINO TO TIRSO

The Church of Nostra Signora della Pietà overlooks Sardinia's most important spring, the stunning natural monument of Su Gologone. Here, pilgrims begin their westward journey, departing from the park beside the springs and skirting the limestone walls that form a gateway to the Supramonte wilderness. A network of well-maintained paths and trails leads toward the village of Oliena, winding through holm oak forests and Oliena's famous vineyards and olive groves, passing the Church of Nostra Signora di Monserrata before reaching the town.

Continuing along the base of the Supramonte, with breathtaking landscapes all around, the route eventually ascends to Orgosolo after a long trek through rural lands. In Orgosolo, visitors can explore the streets adorned with its famous murals, then reach the Church of Sant'Egidio and Anania, perched on a rocky hill. From here, a series of country roads wind through the heart of the Barbagia, passing the site of Blessed Antonia Mesina's martyrdom, before descending among the renowned vineyards of Mamoiada, finally reaching the village through the Lort'Attesu vineyards.

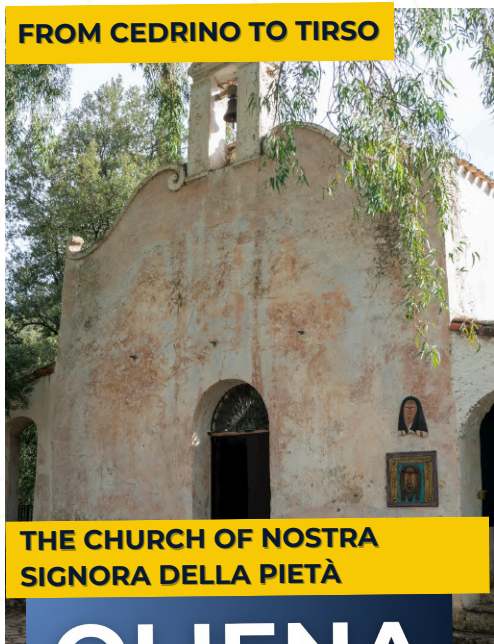
The journey continues up through oak and holm oak woods, aiming for the unmistakable peak of Gonare, a symbolic landmark visible across entire regions. At the top, a narrow path worn by countless pilgrims reveals itself, offering breathtaking views as it leads to the sanctuary dedicated to the Virgin at the highest summit, a place of profound ancient reverence, cherished by the communities of Sarule and Orani and venerated across Barbagia.

Following in the pilgrims' footsteps from the sanctuary, the path descends to Orani, passing the Church of San Francesco Saverio before reaching the old town. From there, the route climbs through the wooded hills separating Orani from Oniferi. The Tirso Valley then opens up, and the path follows the river's course. Pilgrims reach Orotelli with its Romanesque cathedral, then continue on an ancient route to San Pietro of Oddini, traversing roads that once connected now vanished settlements.

This network of ancient paths takes travelers across the plains, first reaching the magnificent Cathedral of San Nicola in Ottana, then following the Tirso River to Sedilo and its renowned sanctuary of San Costantino, now overlooking Lake Omodeo.

1. OLIENTA, CHURCH OF NOSTRA SIGNORA DELLA PIETÀ
2. ORGOSOLO, CHURCH OF SANTI EGIDIO AND ANANIA
3. ORANI, CHURCH OF SAN FRANCESCO SAVERIO
4. OROTELLI, CHURCH OF SAN PIETRO DI ODDINI
5. OTTANA, CHURCH OF SAN NICOLA
6. SEDELO, CHURCH OF SAN COSTANTINO

FROM CEDRINO TO TIRSO



THE CHURCH OF NOSTRA SIGNORA DELLA PIETÀ

OLIENA

The Church of Pietà by the springs

Outside the village of Oliena, not far from the churches of San Giovanni and Santa Lucia, lies the rural church dedicated to Our Lady of Pietà, nestled in the stunning natural setting of the Su Gologone Springs. This simple building is always open to welcome the many visitors to the springs, making it one of the most well known churches in the area. A document from 1624 records its license for foundation.

The church features a façade adorned in its upper portion with flowing decorative moldings, framing a small pedimented bell gable complete with a bell. Inside, the simple nave is divided into two bays with a vaulted ceiling. The walls bear remnants of once beautiful pastel colored paintwork, now faded with time. Light enters through lunettes along the walls, while a balustrade separates the presbytery, which houses a freestanding, boat shaped altar. Here, an image of the Madonna is enshrined, holding the body of the dead Christ with profound compassion.

Between mysticism and meditation

In this small church, a symbol of Marian devotion in Oliena, the setting takes on an almost mystical aura. Perhaps it's the surrounding nature, the woods, the waters, and the rock upon which it rests, that embraces the site, inviting visitors to pause for quiet reflection. Inside, the church features simple wooden pews and two stone benches built along the walls.

Outside, two porticoes flank the building, historically used to host pilgrims during the mid September feast, fulfilling the traditional function of these loggias. Common around rural churches in Sardinia, they are known as cumbessias or, in the Oliena dialect, humbressias. These spaces provided opportunities for socializing and fostering connections among people from different towns during the celebrations.

In this consecrated temple, the Madonna of Pietà symbolizes Mary's participation in the Passion of Jesus, as she accepts her son's death as the will of the Lord.

NOT TO BE MISSED

Crystal clear waters amid limestone peaks

In the heart of the Supramonte of Oliena lies the Lanaitho Valley, a haven of trails, caves, and streams surrounded by flourishing olive trees. It is home to the extraordinary archaeological site of Sa Sedda e Sos Carros. From a fissure in the rocky wall, millions of liters of fresh, pure water gush forth.

During the dry season, the crystal clear waters are so transparent that visitors can see deep into the chasm, which plunges hundreds of meters into a submerged abyss. However, with the rains, nature's power roars to life, and the spring releases over 500 liters per second, emerging from the most significant karst system in the Supramonte.

These are the Su Gologone springs, where water permeates the limestone mountains, travels through the rock, and resurfaces to join the Cedrino River, forming the namesake lake. The lake is bordered by a lush green park, a must visit spot that refreshes the soul and mind. From here, excursions depart, offering canoe trips on the lake and hiking or horseback rides in the nearby valley. The park, equipped with rest areas and services, provides a perfect retreat under the shade of the woods.

FROM CEDRINO TO TIRSO

Saints Egidio and Anania martyrs of the faith

On the first Sunday of June, the rural church dedicated to Saints Egidio and Anania, located near Orgosolo along the path leading to the site of Blessed Antonia Mesina's martyrdom, becomes a focal point of local devotion to the two martyrs, Santu Naniu and Santu Ziliu. The historian Angius mentioned these martyrs in his writings, describing their deaths at the hands of pagan Barbaricini near the temple in the Berghiè area. The church, ancient in origin though of uncertain date, stands where the saints' relics were discovered. In the 1600s, during the search for holy remains, stone urns believed to contain the relics were found here, bearing inscriptions recounting their martyrdom in 300 AD. According to tradition, Anania, converted by the African bishop Egidio, embraced the new faith and dedicated himself to converting the local population, still practicing pagan worship at the time.

In 1777, a detailed description of the fortuitous discovery was documented, noting that the church was in good condition. These records are preserved in the parish archives.

The rural temple to restore the soul

This small countryside church is modest and simple, reflecting the Iberian style common in many 17th century churches. It features a single nave illuminated by a few side windows and a circular oculus on the façade, aligned with the main door. Buttresses provide lateral support to the structure. The façade is crowned with flowing lines and topped by a metal cross. Inside, the space is divided by four arches, and the ceiling is wooden. The presbytery area is adorned with ancient frescoes of uncertain date, now deteriorating due to humidity. Within the masonry altar niche stands the image of Saint Egidio, while Saint Anania is preserved in a wooden case. In these solitary and rural surroundings, visitors experience a sense of introspection that restores the soul and clears the mind.

NOT TO BE MISSED

Stories of blessed shepherds and murals

In Orgosolo, the village that best embodies the essence of Sardinian pastoralism, history is written on the walls of its houses, depicting events from the past 60 years. The murals reflect the struggles of a people fighting for their rights to work, education, and peace. They reject all forms of violence and war, denounce oppression, and defend the earth, the common mother of all. Through them, the laments and hardships of a people are vividly expressed. Orgosolo is also the birthplace of Blessed Antonia Mesina, a young girl who lived in the early 20th century. She defended her honor to the death against her attacker and is now venerated with deep affection and respect for her courage and determination, a spirit that mirrors the resilience of the people of this land. This is a devoted community, preserving ancient traditions and living in harmony with nature, which responds with abundant generosity.

THE CHURCH OF SANTI EGIDIO AND ANANIA

ORGOSOLO



THE CHURCH OF SAN FRANCESCO SAVERIO



A church in honor of Saint Francis Xavier

The small and unassuming rural church dedicated to the missionary saint Francis Xavier is about a 30 minute walk or a few minutes' drive from Orani. It is the only rural church in Sardinia dedicated to the Jesuit saint, who lived in the 1500s. Perched in solitude on a hill, it overlooks the nearby village. Built as early as 1608, even before his canonization in 1622, the church was originally very humble and bare.

By the 1900s, it had taken on a modest, rustic appearance, with a simple stone-clad façade, a small bell gable, and a flat arch entrance. A few small side windows and a side door provide light to the barrel vaulted nave. The space ends in a square shaped apse. La Marmora noted that devotion to the saint gave Mount Gonare its name, also known as "Mount of Saint Francis" due to the church located on its lower slopes. The church was frequented annually for its feast day, which drew large crowds and hosted a fair and horse races.

A life dedicated to evangelization

Who was this young man of privilege who chose poverty to follow Jesus? Francis Xavier, a native of Navarre, studied at the Sorbonne and became a teacher. His life took a transformative turn when he met Ignatius of Loyola in Paris. At first, Xavier mocked Loyola for his simplicity and modest lifestyle, but their encounter changed him forever. In 1534, Loyola, Xavier, and Pierre Favre founded the Society of Jesus, guided by vows of poverty, obedience, chastity, and a commitment to pilgrimage in the Holy Land. In 1537, Xavier was ordained as a priest and, in 1541, set sail for India. He dedicated his life to evangelizing the Far East with unyielding zeal and the power of the Holy Spirit. Traveling from village to village, he taught the Our Father, Hail Mary, Creed, and the Ten Commandments, while performing countless miracles. It is said that he preached in his native language to people of different nationalities, who miraculously understood him. On one occasion, he transformed seawater to quench the thirst of a 500 person crew and used the same freshwater to heal many sick individuals. His ultimate dream was to evangelize China, but he fell ill and died in 1552 at the age of just 46.

Xaverian devotion

At the hilltop church, the Novena of Grace is held from March 4 to 12, invoking the intercession of Saint Francis Xavier, the patron saint of missions, who, along with Our Lady of Gonare, protects the villages of Orani and Sarule. The missionary spirit is kept alive through a special celebration on December 3, when a ritual takes place: the statue of the saint is dressed in priestly robes and carried on the shoulders of the faithful for three circuits around the church, symbolizing the Holy Trinity, accompanied by the singing of the Gosos. According to tradition, those who dress the statue are either married within the year or blessed with the arrival of a child. Another celebration for the saint takes place in June, featuring a pilgrimage to the church. Thirteen banners are carried in procession from the village to the sanctuary, representing the countries where missionaries work, always to the singing of Gosos in praise of Saint Francis Xavier.

This devotion gained prominence following the miraculous healing of the Jesuit Mastrilli, who, in gratitude, spread the teachings of the Xaverian saint. Francis Xavier preached that "those who sought his intercession before God for nine days would receive the grace of salvation."

NOT TO BE MISSED

In Orani, perched on the hilltop belvedere known as Su Cantaru, lies the Nivola Museum, dedicated to showcasing the work of the artist who collaborated and shared friendships with figures like Le Corbusier, Jackson Pollock, Saul Steinberg, Willem de Kooning, and Alexander Calder. The site, once home to an ancient washhouse, blends the legacy of an archaic tradition with the modernist elements that define Costantino Nivola's work. A must-visit destination.



THE CHURCH OF SAN PIETRO ODDINI

OROTELLI

Saint Peter of Oddini

Where the medieval village of Oddini or Ollin once stood, today the beautiful Romanesque church remains, solitary and adorned with the reddish hues of trachyte, an unusual feature in the Nuoro region. The church dates back to the 12th century when it was associated with a Benedictine monastery. While many settlements disappeared by the late 14th century, Oddini survived until 1456, but the Aragonese conquest led to the closure of many monasteries, prompting the Benedictines to leave the island. The church, mentioned in diocesan visitations of the 18th century, was still in use during the 19th century, although little remains of the monastery's structures. Today, the Church of San Pietro di Oddini showcases its reddish ashlar blocks, featuring two entrances one on the façade and one on the side and receives light through five single lancet windows and an oculus above the main entrance. The oculus is adorned with a Greek cross and a charming rope like motif, which is echoed in the arch of the apse's lancet window, divided into five panels by fluted pilasters at the base. The interior is simple, with a trussed roof. The distinctive details reflect the craftsmanship of Tuscan artisans who worked on the church.

Community and religious engagement

The small scale church bears a resemblance to the Church of San Nicola in Ottana.

Located near the left bank of the Tirso River, it is about ten kilometers from the village of Orotelli, which once temporarily served as a diocesan seat. This site has become a place where the people of Orotelli create moments of religious and community involvement. For the past twelve years, an association has organized a festival at the end of June, keeping alive rural traditions and ancient rituals. The program includes both liturgical and secular events, offering in depth visits to the church and the remains of the monastery, which stand as valuable Romanesque testimonies. At the end of June, Orotelli hosts a rich schedule of religious and festive events, including the Via Crucis —known locally as the rite of Sas Ruches— and the traditional nighttime rituals of Santu Juanne de lampadas, enriched by oral histories from the village elders. The festivities culminate with Fainas de Oroteddi, a celebration of local culture. On June 28, 29, and 30, the Triduum in honor of Saint Peter of Oddini takes place, culminating in a solemn Mass on July 2, followed by a communal feast

NOT TO BE MISSED

The stone mushroom of Orotelli

In the territory of Orotelli, in the area known as Eriotta, a rock rises from the ground, shaped over time by natural elements such as wind and water. This weathering has given the monolith a form resembling a mushroom, evocative of a giant cardoncello mushroom.

FROM CEDRINO TO TIRSO

OTTANA

THE CHURCH OF SAN NICOLA

Consecrated in 1160, the imposing cathedral dedicated to Saint Nicholas of Bari, Bishop of Myra, is a Romanesque-style place of worship. Once the seat of the Diocese of Ottana under the Giudicato of Torres (1112), it now serves as the parish church. The cathedral stands atop a hill, overlooking the village that has grown around it. The structure features a crux commissa plan with a single nave and a wooden truss roof. It was constructed using blocks of dark violet basalt and reddish trachyte. The exterior is adorned with a series of 27 hanging arches and pilasters that embellish the apse, transept, and side walls.

Light enters the nave through nine single lancet windows: three on each wall, two in the transept, and one in the apse. The beautiful façade is divided into three tiers. The first tier features three arches and decorative diamond shapes, framing the architraved portal. The second tier is highlighted by a prominent mullioned window. In the third tier, with its faux loggia, the arches increase to five and house ceramic basins in green and yellow hues. The church preserves a 16th century wooden crucifix and a 14th century polyptych, known as the "Altarpiece of Ottana" or "of Saints Francis of Assisi and Nicholas of Bari." The artwork also portrays two historical figures: Bishop Silvestro of Ottana and Mariano IV of Arborea. This monument is both mysterious and captivating, with its striking overall bichromatic effect and its austere yet simple forms.

The festival and the votive sweet

Although Saint Nicholas is the patron saint of Ottana and is venerated on December 6, his main celebration takes place in the warmer season on the third Sunday of May. The town's most important festival, preceded by a novena, features a long and well attended procession with horsemen and numerous women dressed in traditional attire. The procession also includes a votive sweet called s'angule, prepared as an offering to ask for a favor or to give thanks to the saint. Made at home using honey and semolina, this very sweet cake is covered with honey, orange zest, and sugar sprinkles, then decorated with roses. Brought to the church, the sweet is blessed and later shared with friends, acquaintances, and family. Saint Nicholas is especially invoked by women seeking a husband. According to legend, depicted on the church's altarpiece, the saint offered a bag of coins to help poor maidens without dowries, secretly providing them with the means to find a husband. He is also known as a benefactor of the poor and protector of children. Devotion to Saint Nicholas runs deep in Ottana, extending beyond the town's borders. Many faithful turn to him in prayer for grace, and, at times, the saint responds with benevolence.



NOT TO BE MISSED

The carnival of Ottana on the night of San Anthony with Boes and Merdules

The traditional masks of Ottana's Carnival are called Boes and Merdules, representing the eternal struggle between instinct and reason. The Boes embody the ox, while the Merdules represent the master or guardian of the oxen. These symbolic figures make their first appearance on the night of January 17, when bonfires are lit to honor Saint Anthony. In Sardinia, many Barbagia villages have their own unique masks. In Fonni, for example, we encounter the Urthos and Buttudos, where S'Urzu symbolizes the God of the Dead and Darkness, dressed in sheep or goat skins and held on a chain by the Buttudos. In Orani, the local mask is Su Bundhu (the demon), featuring a large cork mask or visor, representing an anthropomorphic-bovine figure that strides forward leaning on a wooden pitchfork.

FROM CEDRINO TO TIRSO



THE CHURCH OF SAN COSTANTINO

SEDILO

The sanctuary of San Costantino the Emperor

Legend has it that the present church was built by a man who survived a pirate attack thanks to Saint Constantine. In gratitude, he erected a church in the saint's honor, resulting in this 15th century temple with graceful Gothic forms. The elegant façade, made of red trachyte, stands out with its curved roof profile and intricate decorative elements, including arches, volutes, and columns. Inside, a soft light illuminates the space, divided into three barrel vaulted naves. Several altars house valuable sculptures, including depictions of Saint Constantine himself in various poses, most notably a majestic representation of him riding a white steed. The original presbytery features a cross vaulted ceiling. On the front façade, the portal is topped by a tympanum supported by half columns, while to the left, a small bell gable houses the church's bell.

The building has been modified over time, losing some of its original features. A stone embedded in the wall bears the date of renovations: 1789. The sanctuary is notable for its extensive collection of ex-votos, including paintings, photographs, silver hearts, embroideries, and dedications expressions of deep faith and gratitude.

The Ardia, the horse race in honor of Santu Antinu

In the village of Sedilo, a deeply felt devotion is renewed every year in July and August to honor the historical figure of Emperor Constantine, known locally as "Santu Antinu." The most dramatic expression of this devotion is the Ardia, a breathtaking horse race held in July. Hundreds of riders gallop around the church amid the thunder of gunfire and hoofbeats, raising a cloud of dust around the hilltop sanctuary. This event symbolizes the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312 AD, which secured the triumph of Christianity.

The Ardia of Saint Constantine is one of Sardinia's most famous and evocative devotional events. The race takes place around the church, which is surrounded by muristenes (pilgrim lodgings), with the stunning backdrop of Lake Omodeo. The race is held at sunset and dawn on July 6 and 7. The first Pandela (the lead rider), followed by two horsemen and three escorts, represents Saint Constantine and his army, while another hundred riders symbolize the pagan army of Maxentius.

The oldest known record of the cult of Constantine in central Sardinia is a parchment from 1265 AD, discovered in Norbello during the demolition of an ancient altar.

The cult of San Constantine in Sardinia

At Monte Isei, where the novenary is enclosed by protective walls, the ancient Byzantine-origin cult of Saint Constantine was introduced by Basilian monks who established the first religious site there in the 6th century. Although the monks eventually abandoned the area, the memory of the devotion to Saint Constantine endured through the centuries. Today, this location remains the most prominent center for the veneration of the Roman Emperor who, in 313 AD, issued the Edict of Milan, granting Christians the freedom to worship and ending the era of terrible persecutions.

During the Byzantine period, soldiers stationed in Sardinia venerated their saints, including Emperor Constantine, patron of the imperial army, influencing the local populations they interacted with. This cultural exchange led to the construction of numerous churches and altars dedicated to Santu Antinu along the Byzantine defensive line established to guard against rebel incursions from the Gennargentu regions. This network included the villages of Nordai, Sedilo, Norbello, Genoni, Siamaggiore, Ollastra, Simaxis, and Samugheo.

To this day, many devotees continue to visit these sacred sites, where, until the 18th century, Saint Constantine was invoked as the "victor" in the struggle against the enemies of God and the Church.

A mysterious betyl

CURIOSITY

In the sacred area of the San Costantino novenary, there is a Nuragic artifact a betyl, or a vertically placed stone in the ground, which is believed to represent a female deity symbolizing fertility, abundance, and life. The historian Giovanni Lilliu described it as being kept in the churchyard of the rural sanctuary, around which riders circled during the Ardia.

This rare betyl, or betile, features a breast and a small hollow, seemingly representing both male and female elements in a single piece. Given that the church is thought to have been built over a sacred well and a Giants' Tomb, the presence of an artifact tied to ancient cults is not surprising.

Legend has it that the betyl was originally found inside the church, but because it depicted a female figure with a bare breast, the clergy removed part of it. Eventually deemed unsuitable to remain indoors, it was relocated outside. Theories by historians and archaeologists over time remain inconclusive, but the betyl stands out as an intriguing and evocative object, both in its form and its location, as well as for the enduring mystery surrounding it.

THE CHURCH OF SAN COSTANTINO

SEDILO





FROM GOCEANO TO LOGUDORO

The Sanctuary of San Costantino in Sedilo has, for centuries, been a destination reached by long pilgrim trails, especially during the grand July celebration. One of these paths begins in Bono, at the foot of the Goceano region, and can be traced backward, following the course of the Tirso River. Along the way, it passes the Sanctuary of Madonna di Luche, continues toward Anela and its Madonna di Mesumundu, and includes an essential detour to the plain to visit the Church of San Gavino di Lorthia (or San Saturnino). This remarkable example of religious syncretism was built atop a trilobate nuraghe near later Roman baths. From Anela or Bono, the trail ascends the Goceano range, following ancient transhumance routes that once led to the Nurra region. This journey winds through forests and offers sweeping views, passing areas rich in archaeological monuments that testify to the historical significance of these paths in Sardinia's ancient road network. Descending from the Goceano brings travelers to the special plains of Santa Lucia, where the Church of Santa Lucia stands amidst ancient necropolises and the village of Rebeccu. Here, old trails lead to Bonorva, the gateway to the Meilogu region. At Bonorva, the paths diverge. One branch heads west, reaching the Romanesque Church of Santa Maria Scalas. From there, the trail crosses the dramatic Monte Traessu to the isolated Sanctuary of Bonu Ighinu, nestled in a landscape rich with archaeological treasures and shaped by a complex geological history. Continuing on, the trail leads to the fortress of Monteleone, tracing the steps of pilgrims who once journeyed to the medieval churches of Sant'Antonio or Santo Stefano. Another path turns north, offering a series of exceptional churches and sanctuaries scattered across the Sardinian landscape like a rosary. These include SS. Cosma and Damiano in Giave, N.S. di Cabuabbas, and the Abbey of San Pietro di Sorres, one of a kind in Sardinia. Here, pilgrims can pause to admire the vast plain, shaped by volcanic upheavals and dotted with some of the island's most stunning nuraghes. The volcanic plateau of Monte Pelao and Monte Santu signals the approach to Siligo and, lower down, the Sanctuary of Bubalis, built on the site of an important Roman settlement. While ancient roads have been overlaid by modern infrastructure, the journey to the Palatine Chapel of Santa Maria del Regno in Ardara and the ancient Cathedral of Bisarcio retains its timeless allure as it winds through the Logudoro countryside.

Finally, to the north, the pilgrim's journey concludes in Tula, where the Romanesque Church of Santa Maria stands in quiet harmony beside the village's small cemetery.

1. OZIERI, CHURCH OF SANT'ANTIOCO DI BISARCIO
2. ARDARA, CHURCH OF NOSTRA SIGNORA DEL REGNO
3. BORUTTA, CHURCH OF SAN PIETRO DI SORRES
4. TORRALBA, CHURCH OF NOSTRA SIGNORA DI CABU ABBAS
5. GIAVE, CHURCH OF SANTI COSMA E DAMIANO
6. BONORVA, CHURCH OF SANTA LUCIA

Saint Antioco of Bisarcio

The imposing Basilica, a representative example of Romanesque architecture in Sardinia, belongs to a monumental complex that once included a rectory and an episcopal palace, now reduced to ruins. It served as the episcopal seat of Guisarchium, an ancient medieval village that was eventually abandoned. The church is documented as early as 1065 in records of property transactions and in 1503 for the merging of the dioceses of Bisarcio, Castro, and Ottana with the Diocese of Alghero, later re-established in 1803 with its seat in Ozieri. The building, made of reddish brown trachyte, reveals several construction phases. The first phase (1080) included the eastern flanks built with roughly hewn stone blocks. In the second phase (1153), the apse was constructed using well shaped medium to large stone blocks. The third phase, in 1195, saw the addition of a finely decorated portico. The façade, partially reconstructed after a collapse, is asymmetrical, with some sections decorated and others left smooth. The square based bell tower remains incomplete. Inside, the austere central nave, with its wooden truss roof, is flanked by side aisles with cross-vaulted ceilings. These spaces are separated by columns and pillars that divide the interior. Finally, anthropomorphic and phytomorphic figures, along with scenes of rural life, adorn the corbels supporting the arches along the side walls, adding to the basilica's unique character.

Two annual celebrations for Sardinia's co-patron saint

Patron saint of Ozieri and Sant'Antioco, he is also recognized as a co-patron of Sardinia.

The temple, imbued with the charm and mystery of a magical and mystical place, where popular devotion intertwines with history and faith passed down through generations, hosts two annual celebrations: one on November 13, commemorating his death, and another in spring, held in mid May or early June. This second celebration holds a propitiatory meaning tied to agrarian societies, giving thanks for good harvests and invoking new fertility.

Elders in Ozieri recall that during the festivities, oxen were not yoked to avoid offending the saint and thus were not used in the fields. In May, many pilgrims used to stay in the cumbessias near the basilica. While social changes have altered the celebration over time, the community still gathers to renew its cultural identity.

THE CHURCH OF SANT'ANTIOCO DI BISARCIO



The event is organized by the Società Religiosa di Sant'Antioco di Bisarcio, which meticulously oversees every detail, from the flag parade and the procession to moments of entertainment and tastings offered to participants.

The saint: the cult of Sant'Antioco, physician and martyr, in Sardinia

Born in Mauretania, Antioco lived during the reign of Emperor Hadrian. Exiled to Sardinia, he arrived in Sulci, where he worked in the mines and died in 127 AD. He became one of the first Christian martyrs of Sardinia for converting many people to Christianity in Cappadocia, Galatia, and Anatolia, where he spread the revealed word of God.

The cult of the martyr physician spread across the island, particularly in Sant'Antioco in southern Sardinia and in Ozieri, where he is celebrated as patron saint on November 13. It is no surprise that one of the most impressive and beautiful Romanesque churches in Sardinia was built in his honor. The church features fearsome and terrifying decorative figures, intended to admonish the faithful and inspire virtuous conduct by warning against yielding to passions or the temptations of the devil. Above all, these sculptures serve as a reminder to combat evil and keep it far from God's sacred spaces. Their mysterious design gives the church a striking resemblance to Notre Dame in Paris. Numerous signs of devotion to the saint are also visible in the footprints of sandals left by pilgrims over the centuries, etched into the stone as a mark of their journey.

THE CHURCH OF NOSTRA SIGNORA DEL REGNO

ARDARA

Our Lady of the Kingdom

Originally built as the Palatine Chapel of the Judges of Torres and later expanded, the church was connected to the nearby Palazzo Giudiciale, of which only a few ruins remain. An inscription from 1107 confirms its consecration in the 12th century, though it was constructed in the 11th century at the behest of Judge Comita. Imposing yet austere in its lines, the church exudes strength and simplicity. It is divided into three naves separated by pillars and arches. The central nave is covered with a wooden ceiling, while the side aisles feature cross-vaulted ceilings. The façade is adorned with pilasters, a central arched portal, a beautiful mullioned window topped by a cruciform light, and a square based bell tower on the north side. In the apse is the Retablo Maggiore of Ardara, a 16th century polyptych by Giovanni Muru. Cylindrical pillars host 16 painted panels, each depicting a saint or apostle, dating back to the 17th century.

Set within a volcanic landscape, the church is built from black basalt, which makes it stand out in the surrounding environment at the foot of Monte Santo, dominating the entire valley. Majestic and striking, it is among the most important Romanesque churches in Sardinia. Here, the rulers of Torres swore their oaths of office at its altar, celebrated their marriages, and were ultimately laid to rest in burial.

A marvel of painting

Within the majestic Church of Our Lady of Ardara is housed a magnificent masterpiece of sacred art: the largest polyptych in Sardinia. This remarkable decoration once adorned the altar where the Kings of Torres took their oaths. Dating back to 1515, it consists of a series of panels depicting scenes from the life of the Virgin, the visit of the Magi, and Saints Peter and Paul, who stand on either side as if guardians.

The paintings show the influence of Flemish masters, with striking use of red and gold tones that add exceptional value, brilliance, and warmth to the work. The paintings and sculptures featured in polyptychs and retables served not only as ecclesiastical furnishings but also as visual narratives of Christ's story and Passion, the life of Mary, and the lives of saints and martyrs. They stand as witnesses of the Gospel and concrete models of faith for all Christians to follow.

Celebration and devotion

In this place steeped in mystical memory and symbolic evocation, Nostra Signora del Regno (Our Lady of the Kingdom) is adored and venerated as the patroness of Ardara. The patronal festival draws crowds of devotees, with celebrations reaching their peak during the procession on May 9 or the second Sunday of the month, accompanied by the gosos, traditional hymns of praise in honor of the Madonna. The festivities include songs, dances, and folk performances. Marian devotion, evident since medieval times, is reflected in the artistic richness of the temple's interior, which narrates the History of Salvation through images of prophets, patriarchs, saints, and the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Retablo Maggiore, one of the largest in Sardinia, consists of 31 panels showcasing various saints and scenes from Mary's life. At the center stands the figure of Nostra Signora del Regno, holding the Christ Child. This nearly two meter tall gilded and monochromatic wooden statue from the 15th century is placed in a star adorned niche, crowned by a canopy. She holds a scepter, wears a crown, and is surrounded by a radiant halo, embodying a perfect fusion of art and faith. The polyptych is a biblical epic of symbolic nature, depicting the Birth of the Mother of God, the Annunciation, the Nativity, and the Adoration of the Magi. The narrative is complemented by the Retablo Minore, which features the Madonna nursing the Child at its center, along with scenes from the Life and Passion of Christ, culminating joyfully with the Resurrection.

Saint Peter of Sorres

The Romanesque Cathedral dedicated to San Pietro di Sorres is one of the most fascinating and stunning monuments in Sardinia's sacred architectural heritage. Perched atop a hill, it commands the landscape with a striking presence, dominating the horizon. Built between the 11th and 12th centuries, the cathedral was constructed using black trachyte and white limestone by craftsmen from Pisa, Pistoia, France, and the local region. The interior, marked by significant vertical development, is divided into three naves supported by cruciform pillars and covered with cross-vaulted ceilings. Among the furnishings are a Gothic ambo, a sarcophagus with a crozier, a funerary monument, and a 15th century Madonna and Child. The sacristy features a rib vaulted ceiling, and the barrel vaulted chapter room opens onto the cloister.

The exterior, grand and solemn, is characterized by the dichromatic stonework, rich carvings, the three tiered façade, and the intricate inlays framed by the hanging arches along the perimeter walls. It stands as one of the most refined medieval sacred monuments on the island. To the right of the cathedral are the rectory and the episcopal palace, as well as the Benedictine cloister and convent. The façade is the most elaborate architectural feature, enriched with detailed iconography. It is divided into four levels, three of which feature arches, while the uppermost is crowned by a pediment and a circular oculus. The intricate inlays lend a sense of elegance to the entire structure.

Symbolism and devotion

The Cathedral of Sorres conceals a rich symbolism within its forms, conveying a profound message in which the building becomes a metaphor for the Church as the "Ship of Peter," oriented toward the Risen Lord. When a worshipper enters through the main door on the west side, they undertake an Easter journey from sunset to sunrise, from death to life, from sin to grace where God is the light. The three windows and lancet openings in the apse on the east side symbolize the Holy Trinity, while the mullioned window represents Christ as the Light: "one in person, dual in nature." The ambo, resembling Christ's empty tomb, proclaims His Resurrection.

The cathedral is adorned with finely crafted furnishings and spaces, including an inlaid wooden choir, an organ, a stone altar, and a tabernacle inspired by medieval reliquaries, handcrafted in Spanish metalwork. The elevated presbytery houses a suspended crucifix made of gilded bronze, the work of a German sculptor. This remarkable site, which served as a diocese from 1112 to 1503, celebrates the feast of June 29 with vespers and a procession on foot and horseback from Borutta to the monastery, honoring Saint Peter, the church's patron. Its dedication to Saint Peter reflects the close connection with the Roman papal seat.

The benedictine monastery and monastic hospitality

Already designated a national monument in 1894, the building was restored by the Subiaco Benedictine monks in 1950. In 1954, a Benedictine cenobium was established, founding the only active rural monastery in Sardinia. Monastic life here is structured around three key activities: prayer, divine reading, and both intellectual and manual labor. Since 1970, the monastery has hosted a book restoration workshop, serving ecclesiastical institutions, archives, and libraries both on the island and the mainland, as well as major private collectors. Today, the Abbey has its own Abbot who welcomes pilgrims to a place that offers hospitality and spiritual retreat. Visitors can stay in comfortable rooms and enjoy meals prepared in the monastery kitchens, embracing the experience of Benedictine fraternal conviviality.

THE CHURCH OF SAN PIETRO DI SORRES

BORUTTA



FROM GOCEANO TO LOGUDORO



THE CHURCH OF NOSTRA SIGNORA DI CABU ABBAS

TORRALBA

The Church of Nostra Signora di Cabu Abbas

Known as a place of prayer, the Church of Nostra Signora di Cabu Abbas is also a window into Sardinia's past, revealing the island's ancient roots. Located on a panoramic plateau abundant with water sources - hence the name "at the head of the waters" - the church overlooks the grand Nuraghe of Santu Antine, the largest in the Valley of Nuraghi. This region testifies to continuous human presence since ancient times and was heavily Romanized due to the Cardabus Turrem route, which connected the coast to the interior. The area also bears traces of successive settlements, reflected in the high medieval rock churches, Byzantine, Romanesque, Gothic, and Late Gothic architecture. Despite its historical significance, the building itself is simple in structure, constructed from medium sized blocks of limestone and dark trachyte. It features a single nave with a vaulted ceiling made of black trachyte and bricks, divided into three bays supported by half pilasters. The entrance has a flat architrave, and the façade includes an anthropomorphic bas relief figure, possibly representing a Paleo Christian deity. The floor is paved with triangular stone slabs.

The festival of the Virgins

Part of a larger monastic complex attributed to the monks of Montecassino, the church once belonged to the Villa of Cabu Abbas Curatoria in the Kingdom of Torres, a settlement that later disappeared.

Built in the 12th century with a light and dark bichromatic design, it was restored in 1971. Devotion to the Madonna has endured over time, and her feast is still celebrated on September 8 in honor of Mary as a child.

The celebration is followed by a reception at the sanctuary, hosted by the Obriere, a spontaneous committee of "Virgins" made up of young women from the village. The president of the group changes each year. The symbolic opening of the church door by the young women, assisted by older ones, enacts a rite of passage from maidenhood to adulthood. This ancient ritual highlights how traditional beliefs have been interwoven with Christian worship over time, preserving a blend of ancestral customs and religious devotion.

NOT TO BE MISSED

Nuraghe Santu Antine

In a broad valley in the Meilogu region, crossed by streams and enriched by fertile land, human settlements have left an abundant and significant legacy. This is the Valley of Nuraghi, named for its remarkable density of archaeological remains: within approximately 3,500 hectares are around thirty nuraghi, a dozen megalithic tombs from the same period, domus de janas, necropolises, and dolmens. The most imposing structure, visible across the entire area, is the Reggia di Santu Antine (Palace of Santu Antine), one of the most important and fascinating buildings in the Mediterranean. It consists of an 18 meter tall central tower with three levels, built with massive blocks of volcanic stone, surrounded by a triangular bastion and three corner towers. Inside, a network of corridors connects various rooms, including a courtyard and a well. Around the structure are the remains of numerous circular huts, with only the foundations preserved. The site also shows evidence of Roman era activity, as seen in rectangular shaped structures. Located just one kilometer from the Church of Nostra Signora di Cabu Abbas, this remarkable site is open year round, managed by a local cooperative. Visitors can deepen their understanding by exploring the Museum of the Valley of Nuraghi, which features a permanent archaeological exhibition showcasing artifacts from the Logudoro and Meilogu regions, spanning from the pre-Nuragic to the medieval periods. The museum also includes an ethnographic section and hosts temporary themed exhibitions on local culture, traditions, and typical products.

FROM GOCEANO TO LOGUDORO

The sanctuary of Saints Cosmas and Damian: a place of faith and tradition

In a small village of about 600 inhabitants, on the outskirts lies the church dedicated to the healing saints Cosmas and Damian. Their feast, celebrated on September 26, draws large crowds of faithful from the surrounding areas. While there are no records or historical sources about the founding of the sanctuary, the building's perfect eastward orientation and its original convex apse suggest a medieval origin.

The interior consists of three naves, and the exterior features a bell tower. Historical accounts from 1734 mention two altars, one in the presbytery and another lateral, while today there are three, each hosting various wooden statues dated to the 18th and 19th centuries. The first altar contains a crucifix flanked by Saints Cosmas and Damian, attributed to an unknown Sicilian carver. The second features a representation of the Holy Family, believed to be the work of Giacomo Lo Monaco. The third houses the image of Saint Calogero the Hermit, again carved by an unknown Sicilian artisan.

The façade is particularly noteworthy, featuring a portal made of local sandstone, adorned with the emblem of the martyrs. This too is believed to be the work of an unidentified Sicilian stonecutter.

The festival of nostalgia and return: a blend of devotion and identity

Set amidst a landscape rich in archaeological treasures like the Valley of Nuraghi and natural volcanic monuments such as Pedra Mendalza, the area is dotted with numerous pinnettas, stone huts with conical roofs. These structures, mirroring the architecture of Nuragic huts, have been used by shepherds as shelters for centuries and are still in use today. The local economy remains rooted in agriculture and pastoralism, and the small rural church dedicated to the healing saints continues to draw shepherds and pilgrims from the surrounding region, fueled by deep devotion.

The celebration of the saints has become the most significant and heartfelt festival, a time of return for those from Giave who have left the village, answering the nostalgic call to reunite with friends and family. The highlights of devotion are revived through the practice of Bidalzosu, a vigil in honor of the saints, which complements the

religious ceremonies and the procession. The procession is accompanied by horsemen and groups in traditional dress. The festival, which marks the end of summer, culminates in colorful fireworks, bringing the celebration to a vibrant close.

The cult

The September festival represents the pinnacle of the devotion of the people of Giave to their patron saints, who are considered key figures in the town's religious history. Although historical records about the church are scarce, oral tradition tells of a site that has served as a destination for pilgrimage and prayer for centuries. Over time, it became the heart of a celebration that blends faith and tradition. For visitors, participating in the festival offers a unique opportunity to experience the sacred site and discover the customs and strong sense of community that defines Giave.

THE CHURCH OF SANTI COSMA E DAMIANO

GIAVE



FROM GOCEANO TO LOGUDORO



THE CHURCH OF SANTA LUCIA

BONORVA

The church in honor of Santa Lucia

In the plain known as Santa Lucia, near the important necropolis of Sant'Andrea Priu and the Fonte di Santa Lucia, stands the rural church of the same name, whose ancient origins are evident from the place name itself. Located in Meilogu, the "middle place," a crossroads of human settlements, the region holds significant archaeological evidence and artifacts that tell its history. The fountain Sa Funtana Sansa, more commonly known as Funtana 'e Santa Lughia (Fountain of Santa Lucia), is nearby. Its waters are said to have therapeutic powers attributed to the intercession of the saint. The fountain is close to the rural church, which was once surrounded by cumbessias, shelters for pilgrims who came from far and wide to pray and honor the martyr. Though altered by numerous restorations, the church has lost its original Romanesque forms, dating back to the 14th century, with its origins tracing to the 13th century. Oriented westward, the single nave building features a main façade that is plastered and painted, framed by pilasters supporting a

cornice topped with spherical acroteria. The portal is aligned with a large rose window that illuminates the nave. On the southern side, there is a loggia with two round arches and a central pillar, while on the northern side, several rooms are used during the festival. The interior is plastered and painted, with a beautiful wooden ceiling. The floor is paved with rectangular marble slabs.

Poetry as a historical memory of devotion

Every May 1st, the site becomes a destination for pilgrims from across Sardinia who come to seek grace or fulfill a vow. The celebrations for Santa Lucia blend religious rituals with civil festivities, featuring food stalls offering roasted fish and eel, folkloric events, songs, and dances.

The rural festival dedicated to the veneration of Lucia the Martyr and Saint is deeply rooted in ancient traditions cherished by the entire community. This enduring devotion is immortalized through numerous dialectal poems, leaving an indelible mark on the hearts of both the people of Bonorva and Sardinians as a whole.

The cult

The story of Santa Lucia is steeped in legend, reflecting the immense devotion surrounding her. Her passio recounts that she was martyred under Diocletian, with her birth traditionally placed in 283 AD in Syracuse, to a wealthy family. She was betrothed to a pagan, but during a visit to the tomb of Saint Agatha in Catania, she took a vow of virginity and distributed her wealth to the poor, renouncing marriage. Her fiancé, enraged by her decision, denounced her, leading to her arrest. She was tortured, dragged by oxen, doused with boiling pitch, and placed on burning coals. According to legend, she gouged out her own eyes to escape her tormentor. Eventually, she succumbed to exhaustion and died. Her relics were stolen by the Byzantines and taken to Constantinople, only to be looted by the Venetians. Her iconography often reflects the legend of her voluntary removal of her eyes. Santa Lucia is typically depicted holding a cup or dish bearing her eyes. Other attributes include a sword or a cup with a flame rising from it.

Santa Lucia in Sardinia

One of Sardinia's most cherished festivals dedicated to the saint is the Santa Lucia Vergine Martire patronal feast in Barrali, held in July. Barrali, originally a Roman settlement, is said to have been founded by the will of Santa Lucia herself. According to legend, the village arose around a lime kiln after the saint appeared to a young woman, asking her to build a church. Houses with grapevine pergolas, called barrali in Sardinian, were later built around the church. Similarly, a well known and highly regarded mineral water in Sardinia bears the name of Santa Lucia, named after the site of the Fonte di Santa Lucia in Bonorva. This spring is believed to have healing properties attributed to the saint. There are numerous locations dedicated to Santa Lucia across the island, especially in the Sulcis region. Notable examples include Santa Lucia in Fluminimaggiore, Palmas Vecchia, Villaperuccio, and Teulada.



THE HEART OF SARDINIA

Gonare is an exceptional place: its prominence makes this mountain visible from great distances, elevating it as a landmark for entire regions and communities. The sanctuary at its summit is, therefore, a particularly significant place, a focal point of geopolitical logics and deep spiritual sentiments. From its peak, the descent winds slowly through forests toward the crossroads of Umadu, where the journey continues into the heart of the Barbagia, passing through silent cork oak forests, Neolithic necropolises, isolated granite boulders, and dense, water-rich woodlands.

Like a mirage, the novenari of San Cosimo and Sa Itria emerge, which, during festival days, come alive with a fervent multitude of devotees. A long country road follows the highlands, offering breathtaking views of the Gennargentu and Supramonte: thus, the path leads to Fonni and its Basilica of the Martyrs, a place of rest after the long journey before descending into the rugged valleys of the Taloro. The Basilica of the Holy Martyrs. A complex structure consisting of an upper basilica and a lower crypt sanctuary, adjacent to a convent of the Observant Franciscan Friars. The building, richly decorated with stuccoes and mural paintings of great artistic value, has been declared a national monument. Here, the ancient Sardinians built their sanctuaries along the transhumance routes that led shepherds from the Gennargentu to the plains for wintering. Today, pilgrims follow in their footsteps, skirting Lake Gusana and ascending through dense forests to the Church of San Pietro de Oleri, in the territory of Ovodda, before descending again toward Lake Cucchinadorza and climbing once more to Teti and its sanctuary of San Sebastiano.

Another valley, that of the Torrei, marks the way forward: from here, the route follows the river towards Tiana, continuing through silent woods and magnificent chestnut groves, which have long been the wealth of these valleys, before finally reaching Tonara, perched on a wide mountain pass.

Here, the Cammini divide: one can continue westward, toward San Mauro and the Barigadu, or head south, ascending the rushing valley of Uatzo to reach the Church of Santa Margherita of Belvi. From this point, the trail continues toward the mountains, reaching the symbolic peak of Texile before descending southward to merge with the Cammino leading to the Sarcidano.

1. SARULE - ORANI, CHURCH OF NOSTRA SIGNORA DI GONARE
2. MAMOIADA, CHURCH OF SANTI COSIMO E DAMIANO
3. GAVOI, CHURCH OF NOSTRA SIGNORA DI ITRIA
4. TETI, CHURCH OF SAN SEBASTIANO
5. TIANA, CHURCH OF SAN LEONE
6. BELVI, CHURCH OF SANTA MARGHERITA

THE HEART OF SARDINIA

THE CHURCH OF NOSTRA SIGNORA DI GONARE

SARULE - ORANI

The legend of Mount Gonare, the Judge, and the Church

Atop Mount Gonare, a prominent peak in central Sardinia between the villages of Orani and Sarule, stands the Church of Nostra Signora di Gonare. It was built at the behest of Gonario II, Judge of Torres, after he survived a storm at sea on his return from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Having invoked the Madonna for his salvation, he vowed to build a temple in her honor. Legend has it that a woman carrying a child appeared to Gonario and pointed to the mountain before vanishing. The peak was thus named after the judge, and the church was dedicated to the Madonna of Gonare, becoming a popular pilgrimage site for communities in Barbagia and Logudoro. Originally built in the 12th century, the church was expanded in 1620. It was consecrated in 1912 by Bishop Piovella of Alghero. However, in 1958, Bishop Melas was unable to crown the Madonna in the Diocese of Nuoro, as the communities of Orani and Sarule, who organized the festivities in her honor, refused to allow the statue to be taken to the regional capital. The coronation eventually took place in 1972 atop Mount Gonare, led by Cardinal Baggio, Archbishop of Cagliari.

The Sanctuary of Nostra Signora di Gonare

The most striking and renowned Marian sanctuary in Sardinia, whose origins are shrouded in legend, is today a deeply venerated site. Perched at 1,086 meters above sea level, it is the highest church on the island, offering panoramic views from the eastern to the western seas. Like the mountain itself, the sanctuary is divided between the territories of Orani and Sarule. The cumbessias—small porticoed dwellings that accommodate worshippers during celebrations—are located both near the church, with the oldest ones, and further down the slope. Built from stone and supported by robust lateral buttresses, the sanctuary has a fortified appearance rather than a traditional religious one. Inside, a single nave with a pointed vault is divided into bays by pointed arches, alongside a series of false lateral chapels, some

with niches. First mentioned in 1341, the building has undergone renovations over the centuries, showcasing Gothic elements and traces of Cistercian craftsmanship. This is evident in the two trachyte rose windows, which feature decorative motifs typical of the mystical iconography and symbolism introduced by monks invited to the island by Gonario II.

The original presbytery, with its ribbed cross vault in trachyte, is an exceptional feature found only in the most prominent churches of larger cities. The statue of the Madonna and Child dates back to 1618. The sanctuary can be reached via a steep, rocky trail.

Religious celebrations

The serene silence of the sanctuary is broken during the festival days, when pilgrims and worshippers from all over ascend the steep, ancient path carved into the rock. On March 25, the Feast of the Annunciation, the traditional "Pane 'e vintichimbe" is distributed to everyone at the end of the Mass in Sa Corte, the square surrounded by the cumbessias. In May, the Feast of the Coronation takes place, while the "Festa Grande" is celebrated on September 8, preceded by a well attended novena.

This place, steeped in charm and mystery, stands amidst lush natural surroundings. Visitors climbing to the sanctuary walk through a dense forest of chestnut, holm oak, and downy oak trees, treading on a carpet of astragal grass, helichrysum, ferns, orchids, and mountain roses that paint the landscape with vibrant colors. The path, marked by crosses and footprints believed to have been left by the Madonna herself, culminates at the summit, where sun and wind reign supreme.

CURIOSITY

The magical of vertical weaving

The village of Sarule is renowned for its traditional carpet weaving, crafted on vertical looms. Sa burra is the name of this exquisite textile creation, unique in its kind, featuring vibrant and cheerful colors such as yellow, black, red, and brown. The patterns are stylized with geometric designs or nature inspired figures, following age old schemes passed down through generations. Visitors can admire the weaving process in the many workshops around the village and at the weaving museum dedicated to Eugenio Tavalara.

THE HEART OF SARDINIA

THE SANCTUARY OF SANTI COSIMO E DAMIANO

MAMOIADA

The rural novenary dedicated to the healing Saints Cosma and Damiano

In September, the sanctuary of Santu Cosimo in Mamoiada comes alive, nestled in a natural setting surrounded by the picturesque pastures of the plateau, interwoven with a dense network of trails. It is believed to have been built on a pre-existing Byzantine place of worship, as suggested by certain architectural elements and frescoes, although no definitive sources confirm this. The presbytery decoration is thought to date to the 18th century. What is certain, however, is the sacred nature of the site, tied to the presence of a miraculous spring. The church is documented in a bell dated 1666, and in the 19th century, accounts speak of a fair linked to a major rural festival, where worshippers stayed in small houses reserved for the novenanti (participants of the novena). The church stands at the center of a circle of 60 cumbessias, creating a sacred ring accessible through two gated entrances. The place of worship is simple, with a gabled roof, a bell gable on the façade, and an oculus aligned above the main door. On one side, loggias intended for merchants are attached. Inside, the nave is divided by arches with a barrel-vaulted ceiling, and the flooring slopes downward toward the entrance. The church houses images of the saints, one pair in wood and another in alabaster. Of particular note are the ceramic Stations of the Cross, which were displayed in Rome for Good Friday in 1998.

A sacred place devoted to hospitality

The most beloved sanctuary in Barbagia is dedicated to Saints Cosmas and Damian, twin brothers and martyrs who practiced medicine, treating the sick for free during the reign of Diocletian. Persecuted for their Christian faith, they endured horrific tortures before being beheaded in 303 AD. The festival, held in September and culminating on the solemn days of the 26th, 27th, and 28th, has attracted continuous crowds since the 1600s. Even today, the cumbessias, accommodations for the faithful during the novena, are allocated to those who request them through the priorato (priory). The priory organizes the festivities, welcomes pilgrims in a communal space, and maintains the buildings through donations and offerings.



THE HEART OF SARDINIA

The deep devotion to the healing saints is strong, and they are invoked to cure all ailments. It is said that Emperor Justinian, healed of a severe illness through the intercession of the two martyrs, expressed his gratitude by expanding and fortifying the city of Cyrrhus in Syria, where the brothers' remains were transferred. These relics were later moved to Rome.

From the beautiful church in the capital of the Empire, their cult spread throughout the Mediterranean and Sardinia, where splendid gosos (devotional hymns) are dedicated to them.

NOT TO BE MISSED

The mystery of "Sa Perda Pintà"

In 1997, during excavation work in a private courtyard in Mamoiada, a large carved stone was discovered, now known as Sa Perda Pintà. This artifact is associated with the water cult of the Ozieri culture and dates back to between 3200 and 2800 BCE.

One face of the stone features numerous cup marks and concentric motifs, which have sparked various interpretations. Some suggest they represent ripples formed on water when a stone is thrown, while others see depictions of planets or children's games. However, the true purpose of the monolith remains a mystery to this day.



CURIOSITY

In the land of masks

In a region deeply connected to the land and propitiatory rites, the tradition of the mamuthones masks has emerged beings between the divine and nature. When a person dons the furs, bells, and wooden mask, they transform, perpetuating an ancient ritual tied to awakening the earth from its winter slumber to ensure a fruitful agricultural season. For this purpose, the mask performs movements that appear at times awkward, at others like a hopping dance, striking the ground with its feet to rouse it and restore its fertility for the rebirth of spring. These areas of Barbagia are steeped in spirituality and millennia old magical rituals, which can be explored in depth by visiting the Museum of Mediterranean Masks in the village center.



THE HEART OF SARDINIA



The cult of the Madonna d'Itria

In a region marked by millennia of human presence, as evidenced by numerous archaeological remains, it is fitting to find a church in the ancient village, though its exact date of origin is unknown. Nearby stands an enormous, unhewn monolithic granite column known as Sa Perda de sa Itria, its purpose shrouded in mystery. The origins of the cult of Sa Itria are rooted in legend, which tells that veneration for the Madonna of Itria originated from a painting by Saint Luke, created during Mary's lifetime. The painting depicts her holding the infant Jesus. It came into the possession of Pope Sylvester in Rome in the 4th century and was later gifted to Constantine, remaining in the imperial seat for 1,120 years until the Muslim conquest by Mehmed II in 1453. As the palace was about to fall, the Virgin herself is said to have commanded that the painting, encased in a chest, be thrown into the sea to save it from desecration and destruction. Carried by the waves, the sacred image reached southern Italy, where it sparked the veneration of the Madonna of Itria. The name derives from the eastern title Madonna Odigitria, meaning "Way of Light, Guide of the Path" in Greek, referencing the miracle in which the Virgin restored sight and salvation to two blind men.

A sacred place devoted to hospitality

The numerous miracles attributed to the Madonna of Itria have fueled widespread devotion across southern Italy, the islands, and Sardinia, where many churches were built in her honor. One such example is the sanctuary Sa Itria in Gavoi, located on a lush plateau that comes alive every summer for a vibrant festival in her honor, held on the last Sunday of July. The temple has a solemn appearance, with a gabled granite façade. A circular window above the door illuminates the interior. At the entrance, the year 1903 is inscribed,

marking the restoration of an older structure, traces of which remain in a bell housed inside the church, bearing an inscription from 1543. Over the centuries, faithful devotees have made significant offerings to the Virgin and her sanctuary, including money, land, and livestock, recorded in accounting books dating back to the 1800s. Such fervent devotion and the large number of pilgrims necessitated the expansion of the building, which now ends in a spacious apse. These renovations also included the restoration of the numerous muristenes, small dwellings surrounding the sanctuary that host worshippers during the novena, transforming the area into a lively village quarter during the festival. The event fills the site, steeped in history and spirituality, with intense emotions. Immersed in nature, the sanctuary becomes a hub of celebration, with the people of Gavoi organizing performances and showcasing their renowned hospitality. The new building preserves the wooden statue of the Madonna and incorporates elements of the older structure, visible in the perimeter walls and the restored muristenes.

The festival as an ancient rite

The festival now held in July was originally dedicated to the Madonna of the Shepherds and took place in June during the summer solstice. However, it was moved to July because shepherds, occupied with milking, could not participate. In the past, when invited to the muristenes, shepherds would offer fresh cheese and milk to those attending the novena. Even today, the people of Gavoi leave their daily routines behind for ten days to stay at the sacred site, where they share a time of devotion, generous hospitality, and dancing, driven by genuine faith and the allure of ancient rituals. Traces of these rituals still linger in the area's nuraghi, villages, hypogeal tombs, and standing stones. A symbol of the festival is the Palio di Sa Itria, an equestrian competition that originally began as a contest among Gavoi's shepherds. Today, it has evolved into a prestigious race featuring Sardinia's top riders. On Wednesday, after ten days, the community returns home with "sa ghirada", as the muristenes empty and the novenanti resume their everyday lives in Gavoi. This anticipated ritual includes a caravan of supplies and people returning to the village, transforming the departure into a joyous homecoming celebration welcomed with emotion.

Lake Gusana

A destination for fishing enthusiasts and athletes, Lake Gusana has become a favorite venue for competitive events in water sports, triathlon, and mountain biking. Thanks to its natural beauty and the amenities available in the area, it is one of the most visited spots year round.

CURIOSITY

THE HEART OF SARDINIA

THE CHURCH OF SAN SEBASTIANO

TETI

The church in the park

The small church of San Sebastiano, accompanied by several cumbessias, is nestled within a park of holm oaks and downy oaks. Built in a typically Sardinian style, it has undergone various renovations over the centuries. Of medieval origin, it stands on the site of a former Byzantine monument, possibly from the 6th century, with a Greek cross layout. During the Aragonese period, the church was expanded into a Latin cross shape. In the 18th century, the sacristy was added, the bell was installed in 1738, and the central nave lost its transept, as evidenced by the blind stone arches. In 1993, the façade was remodeled into a smooth, square plastered design with a small bell gable. The entrance features a wooden arched door, a niche above it, and a trachyte rose window that illuminates the interior. Structurally and decoratively, the church is often compared to the San Mauro complex in Sorgono, both sharing Gothic Aragonese style with some classical elements. The façade conceals the gabled roof, while external buttresses in local stone provide support. Inside, the terracotta flooring and plastered walls give the space a sense of simplicity. The single barrel vaulted nave is divided into three bays and ends in the presbytery. Two large niches with round stone arches and exposed ashlar frame two secondary masonry altars, while the main altar, still in use, is made of granite. At the back, a niche houses a modern statue of San Sebastiano Martire, pierced by arrows. Natural light enters through two small square windows and the rose window.

The original bronze bell bore the inscription S. SEBASTIAN + 1737

The religious festival, accordion showcase, and devotion to the Martyr

The festival of San Sebastiano, celebrated from the last Saturday in August, is considered the most important in the area. The church is regarded as a sanctuary, a sacred place for the devotion of the faithful to the image of San Sebastiano, housed within. The festival begins on the last Saturday in August and concludes on the Sunday nine days later. In the past, it was held in the third week of September but was moved earlier to coincide with the return of local emigrants, the presence of tourists, and more favorable weather conditions. The celebrations include a procession to the rural church, where families of the faithful who follow the saint are hosted in the cumbessias. The sacred rituals are followed by civil and folkloric events, including a renowned accordion showcase.

CURIOSITY

The sacred area of Abini

The territory of Teti is renowned for its historical significance, evidenced by the remains of the village of Abini, dating back to the 8th and 7th centuries BCE. This site has yielded important artifacts and traces of continuous human activity over the centuries.

The sanctuary village, excavated by Taramelli in 1930, features 26 huts and a sacred area with an enclosure and a well temple associated with the water cult. It was a gathering place for various tribes to perform rituals during shared religious occasions. Among the numerous finds and worked stone blocks, the most striking are the votive bronze figurines of warriors, a warrior on a boat, and the unique figure of a demon with four eyes and two shields—a sort of double-featured superhero.

Discovered in 1865, the site has unveiled a significant settlement. It is unsurprising that in the small modern village, once home to a sacred place in antiquity, a profound devotion to the arrow-pierced martyr has flourished.

THE HEART OF SARDINIA



THE CHURCH OF SAN LEONE

TIANA

Saint Leo, the Great Pope

Once celebrated in June, the solemn feast day is now held on September 8. Over three days, a horseback procession takes place, with the statue of the saint carried through the village on a decorated cart pulled by oxen, accompanied by Tianesi in traditional costume. The procession is followed by unique sacred and secular events. Devotion to the pope who, in 452, halted the advance of the Huns by presenting the cross, is evidenced in Tiana by a small church that existed in the 18th century. It disappeared in the 19th century but was later rebuilt thanks to donations from several devoted families.

The temple

The architecture of 2006/09, inspired by the rural and Romanesque style of Sardinian tradition, is embodied in the small church of San Leone, built on the site of the former village of the same name, where the saint was its patron. Constructed from gray granite with a wooden gabled roof inside and a concrete slab covering, the façade features a central door framed by four squared arches, topped by a round window set within a square frame. The doors, of varying symbolic sizes, open on the façade and along the sides of the church. The wide central portal symbolizes Faith. The two smaller side doors represent Charity and Hope. On the right side of the building, a low, wide door symbolizes Penitence. On the opposite side, a tall, wide door symbolizes Perseverance.

In the apse, long, narrow vertical slits with stained glass allow light to enter, casting colorful panels onto the interior. In the single nave, wall niches house terracotta sculptures by Pietro Costa, depicting angels armed with swords, evoking Saint Leo the Great's defense against Attila and the invasion of the papal city. In the presbytery, a large figure of Jesus floats suspended, without a cross. Its human form poignantly represents the Crucifixion.

The legend of San Leone Magno

Saint Leo the Great is remembered for his commitment to peace and his courage in dissuading invaders. In 452 AD, the leader of the Huns withdrew after seeing the Apostles Peter and Paul, armed with swords, standing behind the Pope. In 455 AD, the unarmed pontiff stopped the Vandals of Africa at the gates of Rome, preventing the city and its churches from being destroyed. As a Doctor of the Church, he played a key role in the Council of Chalcedon, affirming the union of Christ's human and divine natures. He was celebrated with the proclamation: "Peter has spoken through the mouth of Leo, who taught with piety and truth." Dedicated to the needs of the faithful, Saint Leo promoted works of charity and clemency during times of severe famine, poverty, and injustice.

CURIOSITY

The only original and functional fulling mill in Europe

In a region abundant with water, humans have long harnessed its power through mills and fulling mills. In Tiana, there remains a unique device designed for fulling sheep's wool, used to process orbaice, a durable and waterproof fabric traditionally employed to make Sardinian traditional clothing. Today, the fulling mill is part of a living museum that demonstrates its ancient use. The mechanism, equipped with a vertical wheel, utilized the energy generated by water to operate. Once numerous and vital economic resources for the village, these devices are now a rare testament to the ingenuity of the past.



THE HEART OF SARDINIA

THE CHURCH OF SANTA MARGHERITA

BELVÌ

Saint Margaret of Antioch

In the valleys of Belvì stands a solitary church, once the ancient parish of Saint Gemilian, Bishop, now co-dedicated to Saint Margaret of Antioch. A devoted celebration in her honor takes place during the first week of June. As is often the case, the church, dating back to the 17th century, has outlasted the village, which was abandoned over time due to a plague.

The decaying church was restored between 1920 and 1981, when it was reopened for worship. Today, the modest yet charming building features a façade clad in roughly hewn dark local stone. The arched doorway is topped by a small bifora, and the wooden roof adds to its rustic appeal. A distinctive low bell tower with a metal cross adds character to the structure.

Inside, the small, colorful altar adorned with angelic figures catches the eye. The statues, all modest in size, include the oldest one of Saint Gemilian and another of Saint Peter. The statue of Saint Margaret, however, is kept in the parish church, displayed in a glass case, and dates back to the 18th century. For the feast, it is carried in procession to the temple and then returned to the village.

The festival

In the village of Belvì, its festivals deserve special mention. Among them are the Holy Week Rites, including the Washing of the Feet, s'Ispravamentu (the Descent from the Cross), and s'Incontru (the Encounter).

The Festival of Saint Margaret on the Hill takes place on the first Sunday of June. The rituals and events are held on the hill that houses the small church dedicated to the virgin and martyr of Antioch. Margaret was born into a pagan family in Syria, but under the guidance of her Christian nurse, she chose to dedicate her life to Jesus. She refused marriage to the governor, who condemned her for her faith, and she was martyred in 305.

As the patron saint of farmers, women in labor, and nurses, Saint Margaret is invoked for protection against infertility.



FROM OGLIASTRA TO BARBAGIA OF SEULO

San Pietro rises on the basalt plateau of Golgo, surrounded by the white peaks of the Supramonte of Baunei. The ancient path once taken by pilgrims during the novena now forms part of the Cammini dello Spirito (Paths of the Spirit). It follows Bacu Dolcolce, passing through the woods and valleys of Eltili, beyond the church and ruins of the village of the same name, and then ascends to Urzulei.

From here, the old provincial road runs through the valleys of another vanished village, Mannorri, leading to San Basilio and continuing through the woods of Talana. The path climbs to the village and the sanctuary of San Giovanni. The Nuraghe Bau 'e Tanca stands as a sentinel over the ridge that separates the valleys already traversed from the airy crests ahead. These lead to the remarkable peak of Olinie and, finally, through dense and quiet forests, to the small church of Santa Barbara, nestled within a holm oak grove.

Beyond Monte Idolo lies the church of Carmine, also shaded by its surrounding forest. From here, the route extends northward to the Flumendosa River, immersing travelers in silent places, almost abandoned by human presence. It traverses Montarbu di Seui, crosses the Frumini valley, and reaches the church of San Girolamo in Ussassai.

Forest trails and ancient cart paths gradually climb to reveal the beautiful landscape of the Barbagia of Seui. The route eventually reaches the Arcueri pass, an important reference point for travelers of the past and present.

To the east, beyond the nuraghe known as Su Casteddu 'e Joni, another branch of the path stretches toward the mountains of Ulassai, reaching the secluded church of Santa Barbara near the Lequarci waterfalls. The route again crosses the Flumineddu River, ascending toward the rocks and archaeological monuments of Monte Corongiu. Finally, through isolated, wind swept ridges, it arrives at Perdasdefogu and its lovely Santa Barbara church, nestled within its namesake forest.

1. BAUNEI, CHURCH OF SAN PIETRO DI GOLGO
2. URZULEI, CHURCH OF SAN BASILIO
3. VILLAGRANDE STRISAILI, CHURCH OF SANTA BARBARA
4. ELINI, CHURCH OF NOSTRA SIGNORA DEL CARMINE
5. USSASSAI, CHURCH OF SANTISSIMO SALVATORE
6. ULASSAI, CHURCH OF SANTA BARBARA



THE CHURCH OF SAN PIETRO IN GOLGO

BAUNEI

The church of San Pietro di Golgo

A legend tells that the church was built between the 17th and 18th centuries after the local population was freed from a monster that lived in the Su Sterru chasm, a 260 meter deep abyss. The creature was only appeased by the sacrifice of young virgins. To end these offerings, Saint Peter, invoked by a young girl, defeated the terrifying serpent Scultone and instructed the people to construct the temple.

In the collective imagination, the deep karst chasm symbolizes sin, while the Church of Saint Peter stands as a powerful symbol of redemption and the path to Paradise.

The church was erected in Golgo, an area of great historical and natural significance, frequented throughout time, as evidenced by a betyl carved with a human face and two nearby Nuragic wells. These suggest the existence of a prehistoric sanctuary. The church is enclosed within a walled courtyard surrounded by small porticos called istaulus, once used by merchants and pilgrims.

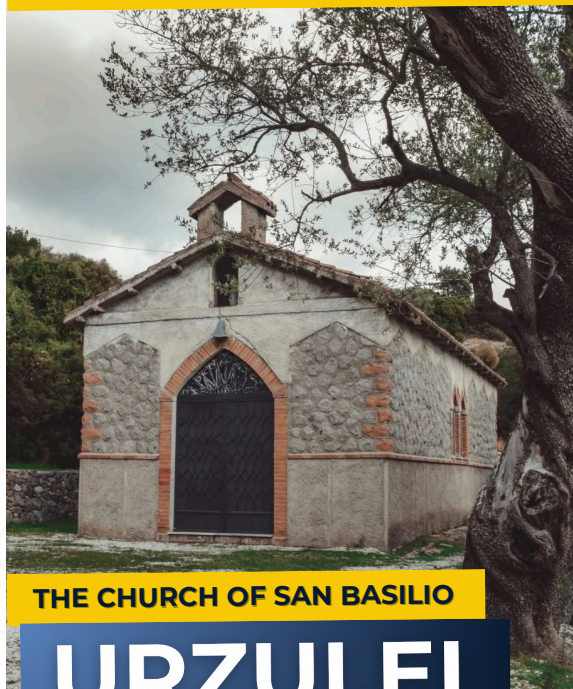
The façade features white plaster, a flat arch doorway, and an oculus. Above these elements, rising beyond the roof of the single nave, is a three arched bell tower topped with a triangular pediment. The rustic masonry is composed of medium sized trachyte blocks. Inside, the simple interior houses the statue of the titular saint, placed in a niche above the masonry altar.

Saint Peter of Golgo

The Church of Saint Peter was built through the offerings of shepherds who wished to honor him during his June feast, celebrated on the 29th but practically moved to the last Sunday of the month to allow greater participation. Since 1606, the festivities have been a deeply emotional event for the inhabitants of the villages near Golgo. Up until the 19th century, the celebrations even included a palio, a horse race featuring the region's finest riders.

Set in an unspoiled and wild landscape, beloved by tourists, the colorful festival honoring the saint combines religious celebrations with the Goat Festival, rooted in the ancient tradition of offering a piece of meat to pilgrims who traveled to the church for the occasion.

This harmonious blend of faith and tradition spans a couple of days, during which the Obrieri di Santu Pedru meticulously organize every detail. Religious ceremonies and processions are interspersed with civil rites, traditional dances, and the melodies of the launeddas (traditional Sardinian pipes).



THE CHURCH OF SAN BASILIO

URZULEI

The sanctuary of San Basilio Magno

Once the parish church of the lost village of Mannorri, the Church of Saint Basil the Great is referenced in documents from 1316 regarding tributes to Pisa. According to Father Vittorio Angius, Mannorri disappeared following a feud ignited by a stolen kiss from a beautiful young woman, avenged with blood by her family. This conflict led to a violent clash between two factions, decimating the population. The 150 survivors relocated to Urzulei and Talana, abandoning the village entirely by 1776-78. The church was well-maintained and richly adorned in 1560, 1617, and up until 1923, but it was demolished along with its cumbessias in 1956. Rebuilt and consecrated in 1969, the church retains a distinct charm and houses the 1658 statue of its titular saint.

The structure is simple, featuring a rectangular floor plan typical of rural churches. The exterior walls are clad in stone, the roof is gabled with Sardinian tiles, and a small bell tower rises above the entrance, which is aligned with a single lancet window on the façade.

Feast and Devotion for Saint Basil the Great, Doctor of the Church.

Commemorated on January 2 in the Roman calendar and January 1 in the Orthodox Church, Saint Basil the Great, Bishop and Doctor of the Church, is honored with a grand festival in Urzulei, even though he is not the patron saint. The main celebration takes place over a Saturday and Sunday in mid-June, featuring a solemn procession. The entire community participates in a large communal meal held in the Mannorri area, where traditional macarrones imboddiaos, a cherished local dish with an ancient recipe, are served. Saint Basil is celebrated together with Our Lady of the Rosary.

The colossal monk of the Eastern episcopate

Saint Basil, known as "the Great" for his doctrine and wisdom, is remembered for founding a monastery in the 4th century, where he served as its leader for four years. During this time, he wrote the Rules based on principles of solitude and perfection, teaching his monks meditation, obedience, and brotherly charity. He became the Bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia and dedicated himself to converting heretics and improving the education of priests, seen as the true Christian sentinels of their communities. He died in poverty after a long illness and was proclaimed a Doctor of the Church for his numerous writings. He was called the Colossus of the Eastern Episcopate, a beacon of orthodoxy, and the patriarch and legislator of monastic life.

FROM OGIASTRA TO BARBAGIA OF SEULO

The church of Santa Barbara of Nicomedia

The current monument dedicated to Saint Barbara, nestled in a park surrounded by woodland, is located in the territory of Villagrande Strisaili. Its construction dates back to 1950 and was intended to preserve the memory of the veneration of Saint Barbara near the ruins of an earlier temple. Although no definitive records of the original church exist, references to the Church or Chapel of Saint Barbara appear in donation registers and restoration works from 1645 and 1887, as well as in complaints addressed to Archbishop D'Esquivel in 1609.

The new church is a charming, single nave structure with a stone clad façade featuring a double leaf glass door, an oculus, a cross atop the gabled roof, and a small bell tower with a single bell. The interior is simple and orderly, with minimal furnishings and a stone block altar. The statue of the patron saint is kept in the parish church and is brought to the woodland chapel in a procession for her feast day in July, after which it returns to the town.

Devozione e generosità popolare

The feast in honor of Saint Barbara takes place partly in the namesake woodland on the second Sunday of July. On Saturday evening, the statue of the saint is carried to the rural chapel in a highly evocative procession involving nearly the entire village. Leading the parade are horses with riders dressed in traditional costumes, followed by the folk groups of Villagrande and guest groups, and finally the statue itself, placed on a cart drawn by oxen. Throughout the procession, participants sing *is goccios*, verses in prose recounting the life of the Martyr, interrupted only by the sound of the *launeddas* and the prayers of the faithful. After the priest's blessing, the festivities begin with Sardinian dances and musical performances. This day is referred to as *su esperu* (the eve), while the main celebration, *sa die de sa festa* (the day of the feast), takes place on Sunday. Families gather to enjoy an outdoor meal in the forest, followed by a procession in the late afternoon to return the saint to the village. The following day, known as *sa die de sa corona* (the day of the crown), a group of young men, called *is cumandaos*, carries the saint's crown to every household. The crown is kissed as a sign of devotion and honored with a donation.

NOT TO BE MISSED

The forest of Santa Barbara

Located 3 km from the village, the forest named after Saint Barbara spans a natural area of 646 hectares, protected and managed by the Sardinian Regional Authority. The forest is home to lush aromatic and medicinal plants such as thyme, rosemary, *helichrysum*, gentian, and foxglove. It also boasts centuries-old specimens of oak, holm oak, juniper, alder, and holly, along with Mediterranean shrubs like strawberry trees. This green oasis in Ogliastro is nourished by a dense network of streams and numerous natural water springs.

The site holds evidence of ancient human activity, with archaeological remnants such as giants' tombs, nuraghi ruins, sacred wells, traces of villages, and a megalithic tomb. The area is equipped with facilities including playgrounds for children, picnic areas, benches, and a small sports field, making it an ideal destination for outdoor activities or leisurely picnics.



THE CHURCH OF SANTA BARBARA

VILLAGRANDE STRISAILI

FROM OGLIASTRA TO BARBAGIA OF SEULO

Vergine del Carmelo, Il Carmine or Su Cramu

The church, built at the end of the last century on the remains of an earlier structure of unknown date, was, according to oral tradition, once dedicated to Saint Maurus Abbot. It is said that during the Aragonese period, the cult of Our Lady of Mount Carmel was introduced, leading to a change in the church's dedication, although no archival sources confirm this.

Preceded by a staircase, the church features a gabled roof with a cross at its peak and a central oculus above the entrance portal. Inside, the raised presbytery houses an altar supported by a solid tree trunk, surrounded by several pieces of sacred art among the older ecclesiastical furnishings. The roof is constructed with beams and reeds, topped with traditional Sardinian tiles. This modest temple is located within the Carmine Natural Park, equipped with picnic areas and abundant with water springs that sustain the lush vegetation of the area.

Devotion and popular piety

The festival dedicated to Our Lady of Mount Carmel, a profound expression of faith, takes place during the weekend closest to July 16 and lasts an entire week.

At dawn, the long procession of young people carrying the Virgin on their shoulders, accompanied by the statue of Saint Maurus, begins with the sound of launeddas and the recitation of the rosary in Sardinian. The procession pauses at its pasadorgiosus (designated rest stops) on its way to the Sanctuary, a sacred site revered for its religious tradition and the deep devotion of the faithful to Sa Madonna de Su Cramu. After Mass, a traditional sweet, su cumbidu, is offered, followed by songs and dances in the churchyard. In the afternoon, the statues are carried back to the parish church. Devotion to Our Lady of Mount Carmel, or Su Carmine, which is also widespread in Switzerland's Canton of Ticino, is closely linked to the Carmelite Order. According to tradition, the Virgin appeared to the order's prior on July 16, 1251, and handed him the Scapular or Habit, a symbol of dedication to Mary and a badge of the confraternity, promising health, salvation from danger, alliance, and peace.

"Whoever dies wearing this garment will not suffer eternal fire" is the motto of the devout. This deeply felt and widespread devotion is rich with spirituality, inspiring confraternities and lay associations alike.

LA CHIESA DELLA VERGINE DEL CARMELO

ELINI



FROM OGLIASTRA TO BARBAGIA OF SEULO

The history of the church of the Santissimo Salvatore known as San Girolamo

In the countryside of Ussassai, where the medieval village of Trobigitei or Turbigintillis once stood, now lies one of the three churches dedicated to worship in the area. One was named after St. Sebastian, and another after St. Jerome. The latter collapsed in the 19th century due to a landslide, but an antique silver aspergillum, a holy water font, and the statue of the saint were salvaged and preserved in the third church, dedicated to the Most Holy Savior, commonly referred to as St. Jerome.

A deep devotion to the saint endures to this day, and the church remains a destination for historical pilgrimages. His name has also been immortalized in the nearby San Girolamo Bridge, the stream of the same name, and a local railway station.

Rustic architecture in the rural novenary

The church exhibits a rustic charm, built in the 12th century using local schist and travertine stones, blending Romanesque Byzantine styles with Aragonese influences. It is surrounded by is posadas or cumbessias, the lodgings for pilgrims during the festive period. The structure features three naves separated by arched columns, while the Sardinian style roof is made of wood with beams, trusses, and traditional Sardinian tiles. Although the original apse has disappeared, its presence is still evident through the stone arch at the far end of the nave. The stone slab flooring lends the temple a touch of grace and elegance.

Ancient devotion between myth and legend

The devotion to the Most Holy Savior reflects the worship of Jesus Christ as the redeemer of the world. The Ussassai folk group, named after the saint, preserves the tradition of local Sardinian dance. Once the parish of the ancient village located at 748 meters above sea level, at the foot of Mount Tacchixeddu, tradition holds that it was established on the site of the episcopal seat of the mythical Miriensi Ecclesia diocese. This diocese was said to have been founded by one of the 120 bishops exiled to Sardinia by the Vandal King Trasamund in the 5th century, as cited by Fara.

In the only novenary in Ogliastra, steeped in a mystical atmosphere, both sacred and more secular gatherings take place.



THE CHURCH OF SANTISSIMO SALVATORE

USSASSAI

NOT TO BE MISSED

The Niala nature park

Near Ussassai lies the Niala Park, a well known destination for tourists seeking refuge from the summer heat in a forested area where the presence of water makes the site ideal for shaded walks, enhanced by the pleasant climate. The Trenino Verde of Sardinia passes through here, crossing the Su Ponti 'e Irtzioni, an iron bridge over the Rio San Girolamo that has been in use since 1894. After the bridge, the train stops at the Niala railway station, adjacent to a well equipped rest area an ideal starting point for exploring the forest and experiencing local hospitality.

Not far from this area, visitors can marvel at Su Tuvu Nieddu, a natural bridge carved by the river through limestone rock. It is believed that the name "Ussassai" derives from "al di qua de s'assa" (beyond the cliff), reflecting the area's distinct terrain, marked by taccus, limestone outcrops partially covered by forests of holm oaks, strawberry trees, and junipers. Among these formations is Su Casteddu 'e Jeni, with its spires and peaks dominating the valley. This landscape, reminiscent of the American West, offers breathtaking panoramic views.

Saint Barbara of Nicomedia

It is said that in 1609 the community of Ulassai complained to the Archbishop of Cagliari because the newly established feast of Saint Barbara in Villagrande Strisaili overlapped with the solemn celebration in the church of Saint Barbara in Ulassai during the same dates in July, causing economic losses for the Ulassai community. This reveals that rural festivals were significant opportunities for economic exchanges, as they were often linked to agricultural or livestock fairs held during the novena in honor of the saint. More importantly, it highlights the older origins of the Ulassai celebration compared to the one in Villagrande.

During these occasions, merchants and vendors conducted business, and pilgrims could purchase goods that were otherwise hard to find in their villages. While the feast was originally celebrated in summer, it is now held on the third Sunday of May, renewing devotion to the martyr. Saint Barbara's widespread veneration across Sardinia commemorates the young woman who was beheaded by her father, a staunch opponent of her conversion to Christianity, after she chose to remain chaste and dedicate herself to the one true God.

THE CHURCH OF SANTA BARBARA

ULASSAI



The rural sanctuary complex

Parish administration records provide data on the functioning of the temple in the 1700s and 1800s, extending up to livestock bequests in 1972. However, the construction date remains uncertain due to the absence of archival sources. It is believed that the sanctuary dates back to the medieval period, while the cumbessias were built in various construction phases. The church was restored in 1998 and stands near two long open arcades, known as *is loggettasa*, delimited by arches that historically hosted pilgrims and merchants.

The complex, which spans just over half a hectare, includes structures both inside and outside the enclosure. The temple's layout consists of three naves, measuring 10 meters in width and 18 meters in length. The masonry is a mix of schist stones and trachyte blocks. The finishes are simple, with wooden lintels on all openings. On the façade, the bell housed in the small gable bell tower clearly indicates the building's sacred purpose. The three wooden side windows with double shutters are protected by metal grates, and the two modest entrance doors are made of wood. The roof has a dual pitched structure, covered with traditional tiles. Inside, the temple preserves a historic 17th century statue. Located in the countryside, the sanctuary is situated along the road leading to the extraordinary Lequarci waterfalls.

NOT TO BE MISSED

An Unmissable Western Landscape

The Ogliastra region is renowned for its Tacchi, distinctive and imposing limestone plateaus that define the horizon, rising solitary amidst a rugged and wild landscape. Among these stands the majestic Monte Tisiddu, offering views of the Gennargentu on clear days. The panorama is further enriched by towering waterfalls and deep caves, revealing an intricate underground karst system.

A must visit is the Grotta Su Marmuri—the Cave of the Whisper—stretching 800 meters long. This magical spot is a true wonder to explore. During the winter, rainwater flows through the cave, feeding the impressive Lequarci Waterfalls, which plunge 50 meters. The surrounding environment is characterized by diverse flora and fauna thriving in the evergreen forests of the Girisai Oasis.

FROM OGLIASTRA TO BARBAGIA THE SEULO

CURIOSITY

Some historians suggest that the Sanctuary of San Salvatore played a significant role in the complex process of converting the Barbaricini, initiated by Pope Gregory the Great and entrusted to their leader, Ospitone. The wise Pope understood that uprooting communities from their habitual worship at pagan sites would be unsuccessful. Instead, he promoted the practice of building new Christian places of worship either on or near these ancient sacred sites. By leveraging the familiarity of the location, the transition to the new faith was made easier.

Whether by coincidence or design, this effort to convert the Barbaricini on the southern slopes of the Gennargentu mountains led to a proliferation of small churches over the centuries. These churches, during liturgical celebrations, continue to attract numerous devotees and pilgrims from neighboring villages.

Well-being and longevity

This region is also renowned for another remarkable feature: in the small villages of Ogliastro, a Blue Zone has been identified—a geographical area with the highest longevity rates among its inhabitants. The reasons behind this phenomenon are believed to lie in the quality of life and diet, rather than just the purity of the air or genetics. Along the streets of several villages, portraits of these individuals—past or present—who have surpassed the age of 100 can be found displayed on the walls of houses, celebrating their extraordinary lives.





FROM BARBAGIA TO THE PLAINS

At Arcueri, the paths of the Cammini dello Spirito converge from Ogliastra. Just a bit further west, on a panoramic and windswept ridge, lies S'Enna 'e s'Omini, the pass where two significant routes branch off. The northern route descends and ascends through Seui, leaving the village behind and climbing to the small church of San Sebastiano and Santa Barbara, dedicated by the miners of the nearby Corongiu excavations. Following the windy and scenic peaks of Lareri, the path reaches Seulo, brushing past ancient trails, the Stampu su Turrunu waterfall, and entering the small town at the heart of the namesake Barbagia. From here, it continues to the church of SS. Cosma e Damiano, shaded by a monumental oak tree.

The journey proceeds overlooking the Flumendosa River, winding through rugged limestone peaks and deep valleys before ascending to Gadoni via a spectacular stretch along the river. Here, the route intersects with the path from the Barbagia of Belvi and San Mauro. Beyond the Funtana Raminosa mine, the pilgrim's steps climb to the Ortuabis pass, following ancient transhumance routes guarded by the venerable church of Santa Sofia, which leads to the center of Laconi.

From this village, renowned for its connection to Saint Ignatius, the Cammini dello Spirito head south through rolling hills and wheat fields, with the Giara Manna serving as a prominent landscape marker. Along the way, sacred landmarks like the Madonna della Strada, Sant'Elia, San Sebastiano, San Salvatore, and the renowned sanctuary of Santa Vittoria punctuate the landscape, blending with remnants of ancient proto-Sardinian religions.

Further south, the path reaches San Simone, a medieval church isolated in the countryside. Here, the Cammini turn eastward, eventually reconnecting to S'Enna 'e s'Omini. Along the pilgrim's journey, the route passes through San Giovanni and the narrow streets following the steps of the Cammino di San Giorgio, reaching Orroli and its Santa Caterina, and further north, San Pietro and San Giuliano.

Finally, the imposing Monte Santa Vittoria comes into view. The trail ascends past the Madonna d'Itria in Saddai, crossing the silent forest of Bettili before climbing the mountain. At the summit, the silent and isolated ruins of the ancient church, which gave the mountain its name, stand as a testament to a long-forgotten history.

1. SEUI, CHURCH OF SAN SEBASTIANO E SANTA BARBARA
2. SEULO, CHURCH OF SANTI COSIMO E DAMIANO
3. LACONI, CHURCH OF SANTA SOFIA DI SARCIDANO
4. NURALLAO, CHURCH OF MADONNA DELLA STRADA
5. NURAGUS, CHURCH OF SANT'ELIA
6. ISILI, CHURCH OF SAN SEBASTIANO

THE CHURCH OF SAN SEBASTIANO E SANTA BARBARA

SEUI

A temple for Saint Sebastian and Saint Barbara

The church stands in the countryside of Seui, not far from the ruins of a 17th century place of worship that fell into disrepair, near the Fundu 'e Corongiu mine, whose remains are still visible. Built in stone, the church features a spacious rectangular hall with a small semicircular apse. Its façade is characterized by a large wooden arched double door, aligned with a small rose window above. The gabled roof, covered with tiles, is topped by a single arched bell gable with a metal cross.

The altar, simple and crafted from stone, is accompanied by portraits of the two saints. Despite its simplicity, the church exudes a certain elegance. Constructed in 1988 and consecrated in 1990, it is dedicated to the martyr San Sebastiano as well as Santa Barbara, the patron saint of miners, due to its proximity to the mine. The church was built with contributions from local citizens and the voluntary labor of local craftsmen.

The original temple was erected as a votive offering to San Sebastiano to free the village from the plague.

The life of Saint Sebastian

The Greek name "Sebastian" translates to "venerable." Born in France in the 3rd century AD to

a noble family, he was raised with values of generosity and courage. A staunch defender of the Church, he traveled to Rome to support Christians, offering protection and preventing apostasy under torture.

He is remembered as a soldier in the Roman imperial army, rising through the military hierarchy to become one of the young commanders of the Praetorian Guard during the reign of Emperors Diocletian and Maximilian, who held him in high regard. In 287 AD, during the horrific year of persecutions and the massacre of Christians in the Colosseum, Sebastian could no longer conceal his faith. He was denounced to the Emperor, who summoned him to explain himself. Sebastian confessed his faith and was sentenced to death, tied to a tree, and shot with arrows. This is how he is often depicted in iconography, pierced by darts.

However, he was found alive, nursed back to health, and returned to confront Diocletian, prophesying that God's wrath would punish him. The Emperor, enraged, sentenced him again to death, this time by flogging and drowning, which occurred on January 20, 304. Today, Saint Sebastian's remains rest in the Basilica of San Sebastiano (4th century).

The saint's fame spread quickly, and he became known as a miracle worker and protector against the plague. Appointed "Defender of the Church" by Pope Caius, he is also the patron saint of archers, Italy's municipal police, and a co-patron of Rome.

FROM BARBAGIA TO THE PLAINS

Annual festivities dedicated to San Sebastiano

Saint Sebastian is honored twice a year, in August and January, with distinct rituals.

The August celebration begins early on Saturday with a procession of the statues from the village to the rural church, followed by a morning service in the countryside. Evening masses continue at the parish church and near the mine to honor the miners. On Sunday morning, masses are first held in the parish, culminating in a solemn sung mass at San Sebastiano. In the evening, the Rosary is recited, prayers are offered to the Saint, and the new steward is chosen by lot. Finally, the statues are returned to the parish, where they remain until the next celebration.

In January, the ancient tradition of lighting “is fogoronis” is renewed, combining religious and civil events. A mass is held at the parish church in honor of the three saints—Efisio, Sebastian, and Anthony the Abbot—traditionally associated with “is fogoronis.” The program concludes with “S’Intregu,” the ancient rite of handing over and blessing the banners and crosses for the parish associations, followed by a procession through the historic center with the statues of the three saints and the lighting of bonfires in various neighborhoods.

CURIOSITY



The rural churches in the Seui area were built starting in the 17th century and are still frequented by pilgrims and locals during the patron saint's feast days when they are opened for prayer. Each rural church was established to honor a saint connected to the local community, who is invoked for blessings during natural calamities such as droughts or plagues. Among these, in addition to San Sebastiano and Santa Barbara, are the Madonna del Carmine, Santa Lucia, and the oldest church, San Cristoforo.

NOT TO BE MISSED

Seui, a museum village

Seui offers visitors a fascinating historic center, characterized by winding medieval streets, stone houses, wooden balconies, and wrought iron railings. Of particular interest is the museum itinerary, which begins at the Spanish prison, continues through the "Farci" House and the Liberty Building, and concludes at the 19th-century Municipal Palace, home to the Civic Gallery. The museum houses a collection of over 5,000 items representing local ethnographic heritage, traditional trades, documents on emigration, and archaeological materials. These artifacts were gathered in the 1970s by volunteers who now form the museum's scientific committee.

FROM BARBAGIA TO THE PLAINS

THE CHURCH OF SANTI COSIMO E DAMIANO

SEULO

The church of San Cosimo: A step away from the monumental holm oak

In Seulo, the small church dedicated to the physician saints Cosmas and Damian, dating back to the 16th century, is nestled within lush vegetation that surrounds it completely. However, it remains visible from the village through the holm oaks. This ancient devotion, linked to the Aragonese dominion, was already mentioned in 1599. Originally a simple chapel, the current structure was later added, reportedly maintained by a hermit named Basilio Agus, who was appointed by the bishop in 1691.

Over time, the community of Seulo has taken care of its maintenance, ensuring the place of worship remains suitable for celebrating annual liturgical rites. This is a distinctive monument compared to typical rural churches, with a significant hall measuring 25 meters and a squared, flat topped façade concealing the double pitched roof. The wooden portal is framed by two white stone columns that extend into a pointed arch above it. Above this, a stone rose window is adorned with decorative elements such as rings, lobes, and small crosses. A second arched side entrance and a square window in the barrel vaulted presbytery allow natural light to fill the interior. The hall features a wooden ceiling, and while the original masonry altar has been replaced by a wooden table, two niches house the statues of the saints for the annual festival. At other times, the statues reside in the parish church.

The festival

San Cosimo is honored on the third Sunday of May and the last Sunday of September, with the liturgical feast day on the 27th. The church opens for the three-day celebration, welcoming back the two 17th-century statues that preside over the religious and civil rituals, accompanied by songs and dances where sweets and wine are offered. This twice yearly tribute of faith brings together devoted worshippers, with a more intimate ceremony held in the lower district of the village, along the traditional procession route, and a broader gathering of faithful from Seulo, nearby towns, and even returning emigrants.

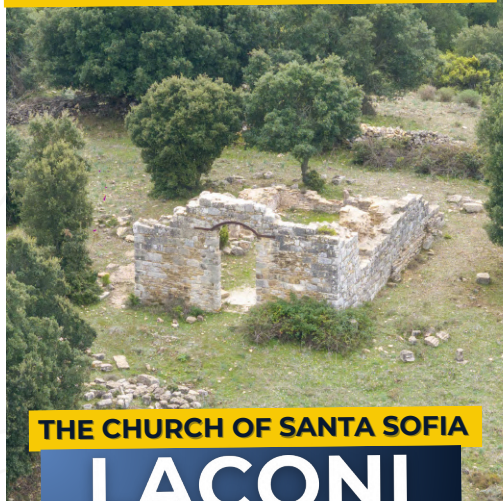
The statues are carried on an adorned cart through the village, accompanied by horsemen, folk groups, the prioresses, the parish priest, local authorities, and the faithful. Along the procession route, is goettus echo with the notes of the sung rosary. On Sunday, after Mass, the statues return to the village amid the sound of sa batteria (firecrackers) and fireworks. The civil rituals, managed by annually appointed stewards (obrieri), are carried out with devotion. Traditionally, the procession was accompanied by the confraternities of Our Lady of Sorrows and the Rosary, singing is Goccius. Some devout participants would descend a steep hill on their knees before continuing on foot to the church. The festival is an opportunity for farmers and shepherds to ask the martyrs for a favorable year and an abundant harvest, making it one of the most important celebrations in Barbagia.

NOT TO BE MISSED

Sa Stiddiosa, or the dripping water

Described by visitors as "a corner of paradise," "a unique waterfall," "an amazing experience," "pure magic," and "a piece of Sardinia to carry in your eyes, heart, and skin forever," Sa Stiddiosa is a masterpiece of nature along the Flumendosa River. It stands in a landscape marked by Mediterranean scrubland, abundant waters, and features such as caves and gorges like Su Stampu 'e su Turrunu and the Piscina 'e Licona spring. Among these natural wonders, a stunning natural lake is distinguished by an enormous travertine wall entirely covered with maidenhair fern, from which water trickles, forming calcareous deposits. The name Sa Stiddiosa means "dripping place," derived from is stiddiu, referring to the continuous, dense dripping effect created by water falling from an overlying karst spring.

FROM BARBAGIA TO THE PLAINS



THE CHURCH OF SANTA SOFIA

LACONI

Saint Sophia of Sarcidano

In the Funtanamela Nature Oasis, a few kilometers from Laconi, lay the ruins of the Byzantine church of Santa Sofia del Sarcidano, later modified during the medieval period. This structure carries the legacy of a past shrouded in the mists of time. The church lent its name to the nearby hamlet of Santa Sofia, located about 800 meters above sea level on a plateau near Laconi. In 1767, a new church was built by Salvatore Lostia, who was granted the title Count of Santa Sofia. The new sanctuary met the spiritual needs of the inhabitants and was entrusted to the Capuchin Fathers of the Laconi Convent. In the post-war period, land reclamation efforts under the Sardinian Land Reform and Transformation Program revitalized the area, leading to population growth in Santa Sofia. The ruins of the earlier church are referenced in 1224 by Pope Honorius III in a document listing the possessions of the Archdiocese of Oristano, which were donated by the Judges of Arborea. Abandoned in 1742, the church and the deserted village were noted by the historian Angius. Partial restoration of the surviving ruins was undertaken in 1999, revealing the use of finely worked small stones and an exquisite cocciopesto pavement, likely part of a former loggia.

An ancient cult

In Christian tradition, Saints Sophia and Irene, martyred in Cyprus, are commemorated, as well as Saint Sophia, a virgin martyred in the 3rd century, who is deeply venerated in Cilento. Another notable figure remembered is a Roman

matron, the wife of a senator and mother to three daughters named after the theological virtues: Faith, Hope, and Charity. While some scholars view these as allegorical figures, the ancient cult suggests a historical basis. Sofia, after converting her husband to Christianity and becoming a widow, dedicated her life to charitable works for the poor while living in Rome. She was denounced by the Prefect Antiochus to Emperor Hadrian for her preaching, which encouraged married women to embrace chastity. Upon confessing her Christian faith and refusing idolatry, she was publicly humiliated and flogged. Her daughters were tortured and beheaded in her presence to force her to renounce her faith, but she remained steadfast. After burying them along the Via Aurelia, she died three days later in prayer and grief. The cult of Saint Sophia spread from the 6th century onward. She is regarded as the protector of mothers and a pillar of strength, with her name meaning "wisdom." She endured martyrdom alongside her daughters, offering her life for the kingdom of Christ.

CURIOSITY

The new church built in the 1950s in the village of Santa Sofia remains only as a memory in name, but it is still visited during the annual festivities. While the procession is no longer held, Santa Sofia is celebrated with a Mass each year, with the date determined by organizational needs. The statue of the saint, contemporary with the building, is preserved in the church.

NOT TO BE MISSED

Aymerich Park and Castle - Menhir Museum - The Figure of Fra Ignazio

In the village of Laconi, located in the Sarcidano region, several noteworthy attractions await visitors. Among them is the spectacular Aymerich Park, home to the ruins of the Aymerich Castle. Nestled in a verdant oasis, the park features meandering trails through the forest, alongside streams and small waterfalls, showcasing a lush natural environment with a rare and beautiful botanical variety.

The area is also rich in archaeological treasures, including the Menhir Museum, which unveils the history and significance of these monolithic stones —captivating symbols of an ancient culture.

Laconi is also a center of deep spirituality, rooted in Franciscan devotion and profoundly tied to the figure of Fra Ignazio. A native of this village, Fra Ignazio is honored in the parish church dedicated to him. His birthplace has been transformed into a sanctuary, a sacred site drawing pilgrims and devotees from around the world. There, visitors can venerate his statue, depicted kneeling in prayer before an apparition of the Virgin Mary.

FROM BARBAGIA TO THE PLAINS



THE CHURCH OF MADONNA DELLA STRADA

NURALLAO

cross-shaped stained-glass window flanked by narrow vertical windows. The octagonal dome is tiled, and at its peak stands a statue of the Madonna holding a child. In the presbytery, the altar table and a painting of the Madonna adorn the sacred space.

The noisy procession of trucks carries the Saint

This church becomes a place of celebration on August 11 for drivers, but it remains a year-round destination for the faithful. The festival, deeply cherished by the community, lasts five days and attracts numerous participants from across the island. It is a moment of faith and an occasion for visitors to gather. The Driver's Festival, dedicated to Our Lady of the Road, began in 1987 and is renewed each year thanks to the consistent and enthusiastic presence of many drivers and transport workers. The rural church of Our Lady of the Road, located along State Road SS. 128 at kilometer 53.850, becomes the final destination of a pilgrimage and procession. Each year, giant trucks parade from the town to the small church, which was built through a collective fundraising effort. Decorated tractor units proceed to the church, while trailers are parked in a separate area. Once the vehicles are parked, everyone joins in celebrating the various liturgies held throughout the day and evening.

The village of pitchers and abundant water springs

The small town in the Sarcidano region was once renowned as the "village of pitchers" due to its rich clay deposits, which fueled the local pottery craft. Until the 1950s, Nurallao was well-known for the production of lime, roof tiles, and broccas (pitchers), sold across the island. Remnants of this industrious past include the Funtana e Susu facilities, an example of industrial archaeology where roof tiles, bricks, pitchers, vases, and dough troughs were manufactured. Around 50 hectares of land were dedicated to the extraction of refractory clay and kaolin, and several lime kilns scattered across the territory remain visible. The extraction activities ended with the closure of the Niachili quarries. This region is also rich in springs and watercourses, highlighted by the Funtana Is Arinus Natural Park, a picturesque and unique destination set in a hilly landscape covered by oak and holm oak forests. These are nourished by the spectacular Su Craddaxioleddu waterfalls, created by the dramatic drop of the Sarcidano River.

Nurallao, the sardinian truffle capital

Nurallao, a town in the Sarcidano region, is renowned as the Sardinian capital of truffles. Each year, between 1,200 and 1,500 kilograms of this delicacy are harvested locally, making it a hub for truffle production. The highest number of truffle related businesses in Sardinia are concentrated in this region and village. Every June, Nurallao hosts an extraordinary Truffle Fair dedicated to the Scorzone del Sarcidano (*Tuber aestivum* or summer black truffle), a prized delicacy that grows abundantly in symbiosis with holm oaks and oaks in the region's limestone plateau. During the fair, visitors can enjoy truffle based dishes in the Is Arinus park and purchase fresh truffles directly from local gatherers.

The Monument to Our Lady of the way

The church dedicated to Our Lady of the Road, the patron saint of truck drivers, was built in the 1970s and is located in the forested area of "Gurei." The origin of this church is quite unique, as truck drivers from Nurallao and nearby areas pooled their resources to begin construction and dedicate the monument to the Madonna who protects them on the road.

The church was inaugurated in 1987, the year of its first celebration. Materials were sourced from various parts of the island, including trachyte from Fordongianus, Ruinas, and Asuni for the walls, and white marble from Orosei for the flooring. Preceded by a staircase, the imposing central structure is octagonal in shape and connected to the presbytery and two lateral chapels. The stone façade features a beautiful wooden door sheltered by a canopy supported by terracotta brick pillars. Above the entrance is a

CURIOSITY

NOT TO BE MISSED

The church of Saint Elia

The church stands in an area historically frequented by various civilizations, near the ancient city of Parte Valenza, a curatorial district of the Arborea Judicate. From the settlement, which disappeared in the 14th century, the ruins of the Church of the Virgin Mary and remnants of the paved ancient road remain. In the 18th century, diocesan records also mention the small Church of Sant'Elia the Prophet, which was already referenced in 1647 as an existing early Christian site, though definitive sources are lacking. Over time, the church underwent significant modifications, losing its original appearance. The structure is distinguished by a unique façade with three arched wooden entrances. A corner stone bears the date 1876 and some names, likely linked to restoration work. Above the central door, a cruciform oculus made from repurposed stones from the original structure is visible. A double-light bell tower adjoins the façade, housing bells, one of which dates back to 1441. The interior, divided into three naves, is illuminated by large windows. At the end of the central nave, the back altar is raised in steps and crowned by a painting depicting the titular saint holding a sword and a book, alongside another figure. The painting is a copy of the original from 1745.

A devotional festival dating back to the byzantine era

An ancient devotion animates the faithful of Nuragus in their veneration of Saint Elijah. This festival was one of the most important in the region during the Middle Ages when the town was a notable religious center. Even today, it is celebrated with significant participation, drawing people from neighboring villages. The liturgical celebrations take place from July 5th to 7th, with key moments marked by sacred rural festivities. A procession of 40 riders and amazons weaves along a path adorned with a stunning carpet of flowers over which the saint's

statue passes, accompanied by the town's band and traditional music groups. The procession, covering about 3 km, is greeted by the joyous ringing of the church bells. On the second day, a Mass is held for the sick, during which blessed bread is distributed, and the evening is filled with lively dancing and companionship until late. On the solemn day, after the religious and civil rites, the statue is brought back to town. Around the church, several small loggias remain functional for the festival.

Elia the Hebrew prophet venerated by Christians, defended the one true God against pagan unfaithfulness

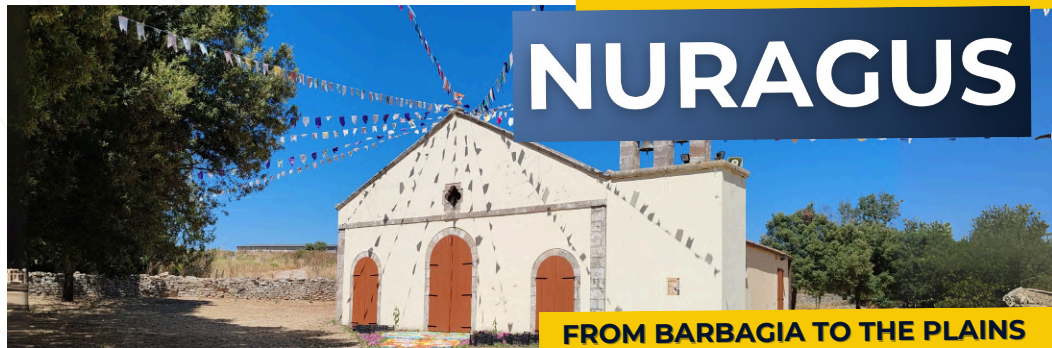
Elijah was a prophet of the Old Testament who lived around 900 B.C. His life, recounted in the Book of Kings, depicts him as the man who stands in the presence of God. His symbol is fire, representing the fervor of his faith. In the biblical narrative, he appears as a lightning bolt delivering the word of God. Sent by the Lord to punish the King of Samaria for serving the idol Baal, Elijah was persecuted and forced to hide. However, he found refuge with a widow, to whom he repaid her hospitality by multiplying the little food she had offered him and resurrecting her dead son.

The anecdotes about his life are numerous, as are his trials. The greatest was the confrontation with King Ahab on Mount Carmel, where the pagan prophets of Baal faced the people of Israel, and Elijah triumphed. He is an exemplary figure of obedience to God. Regarded as the father of monasticism, his legacy is preserved on Mount Carmel, and he is considered a model for contemplatives and monks. His successor was Elisha. Finally, he was taken up into heaven in a chariot of fire with fiery horses, which is why he is the patron saint of aviators.

THE CHURCH OF SANT'ELIA

NURAGUS

FROM BARBAGIA TO THE PLAINS



FROM BARBAGIA TO THE PLAINS

The church of Saint Sebastian

The charming church of San Sebastiano on the lake in Isili is no longer used for worship and fell into ruin after the tragic fate of a couple who, according to legend, accidentally fell to their deaths from the cliff. With the construction of the Is Barroccus dam, the cliff hosting the church at its summit became an islet, accessible only by boat or visible from the SS. 128 road. The church's founding date is uncertain, but a donation document attests to its existence since 1598. It was restored after falling into disrepair, and in 1996, an excavation revealed that it was built on Punic-Roman remains.

The sacristy retains its original flooring, while the wooden trusses were restored. The medieval building, modified in the 1500s, featured a gabled profile; its façade is simple and squared, with a double-arched bell gable. The only notable decorative detail is the ediculate portal. The nave is devoid of an altar but includes an open loggia, functioning as a cumbessia, making the site ideal for moments of devotion and contemplation.

Devotion and pilgrimage in remembrance

The memory of San Sebastiano is honored on January 19th with the lighting of bonfires, an event promoted by the Nautical Club. Additionally, Isili's association network enhances activities for enjoying the lake. On other occasions, particularly, a kind of pilgrimage is organized in memory of San Sebastiano and the church. Participants reach the islet by boat and follow a path from the shore to the panoramic point where the rural church stands.

NOT TO BE MISSED

Outdoor activities for enthusiasts and athletes.

The San Sebastiano Lake is nestled in a green park, offering a variety of outdoor activities such as trekking or climbing on the ancient cliffs, formed 23 million years ago, which attract climbers from across Europe. Visitors can also enjoy canoeing, cycling, horseback riding, or practicing yoga by the shore. The artificial reservoir, fed by the waters of the Mannu River and Rio Corrigas, is rich in fish, making it ideal for sport fishing. Additionally, the Green Train travels along the coastline route towards Sorgono. However, swimming is strictly prohibited.

The area is rich in archaeological treasures, most notably the impressive white Nuraghe Is Paras, which is well worth a visit. Meanwhile, the charming historic center of Isili preserves the precious local textile and copper-working traditions, showcased in the MARATE museum, housed in an old convent. Here, visitors can admire the exquisite designs and tapestries, unique works of art of great refinement and inestimable value.

LA CHIESA DI SAN SEBASTIANO

ISILI



AROUND THE LAKE AND INLAND

The San Costantino Novenary in Sedilo occupies a central position within the geography of the Cammini dello Spirito (Paths of the Spirit). It serves as the convergence point for the long routes arriving from the Barbagie and Logudoro regions and as the starting point for two major variants that encircle Lake Omodeo. Along these paths, several of the island's most significant novenaries can be found. To the west of the lake, the sanctuaries of Santa Greca, Santa Maria Maddalena, San Michele, Santissimo Salvatore, and San Serafino mark an invaluable route that extends across the basaltic plateau. This route encounters many other places of worship and numerous archaeological monuments. Throughout the journey, the Tirso Valley and the lake's waters serve as constant landmarks, while the sanctuaries reflect the profound spirituality of the local communities and the crucial importance of this geographical region as a transit hub. Further afield, the churches of Sant'Agostino, Sant'Ignazio, and Santa Cristina are accessed by small rural roads that wind through the picturesque Guilcer countryside, bearing witness to its long agricultural and pastoral history.

On the opposite side, pilgrims' steps follow ancient paths that crossed the Taloro and Tirso rivers both treacherous waterways prone to sudden and devastating floods. Along the ancient Camminu de Muru Longu, travelers ford the river, leaving behind the saltu di Lochele and reaching the eastern bank to enter the Barigadu region. Here, the route ascends narrow rural tracks between enclosed fields (tancati), passing by the churches of Santa Maria Ossolo, San Basilio, Santa Maria Turrana, and, via secluded trails through woods and rocky terrain, reaching San Quirico. The path then continues upward through forests and cultivated areas to S'Anghelu.

The route towards the heart of Sardinia passes by Sant'Isidoro, retracing ancient transhumance paths steeped in history. Here, the ancient Sardinians left traces of their spirituality, such as at Biru 'e Concas, marking the same routes still walked today. San Mauro serves as the gateway to the Mandrolisai region, from which the Cammini dello Spirito extend inland towards Tonara, reconnecting with the route traversing the Barbagia.

1. AIDOMAGGIORE, CHURCH OF SANTA GRECA
2. BIDONÌ, CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA OSSOLO
3. NUGHEDU SANTA VITTORIA, CHURCH OF SAN BASILIO
4. SORRADILE, CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA TURRANA
5. ARDAULI, CHURCH OF SAN QUIRICO
6. SORGONO, CHURCH OF SAN MAURO

AROUND THE LAKE AND INLAND



THE CHURCH OF SANTA GRECA

AIDOMAGGIORE

The sanctuary of Santa Greca e Santa Giusta

The rustic basalt stone church in the rural territory of Aidomaggiore, originally dedicated to Santa Giusta in the 6th century, was destroyed by lightning. It is believed to have been the church of the medieval village of Lokeri, which disappeared by 1580. Thanks to the generosity of a devout individual who sought permission from the Bishop to rebuild it and dedicate it to Santa Greca—as a vow for healing his son and protecting his family—the church was reconstructed. In the 19th century, the church was blessed, and the Putzolu heirs were granted patronage, preserving the statues of the two simulacra from the 16th and 18th centuries.

The church stands on an ancient Roman site, evidenced by basalt funerary urns from that era found around the temple. The facade, marked by its gabled roof, features a wooden door and a circular oculus, which, along with a lunette in the apse, illuminates the small interior hall divided by three arches. In the elevated presbytery, a masonry altar houses a double niche containing the titular statues, flanked by decorative columns. To the left is the sacristy and additional rooms adapted from the old Lozas or muristenes. The floor is made of terracotta tiles.

Twin towns in honor of Santa Greca

The church, located on a hill overlooking the lake, has an unknown construction date for its original

Romanesque structure. It was rebuilt in 1797 and is surrounded by archaeological landmarks. In this enchanting setting, rites in honor of the martyred saints are celebrated on May 14. Over time, devotion to Santa Giusta has diminished in favor of Santa Greca, whose cult remains strong. The Putzolu patrons donated land to ensure the church's upkeep and the continuation of the festivities. Elderly residents recall grand celebrations, with devotees arriving from nearby towns and a horse fair accompanying the event. Today, attendance in Aidomaggiore is smaller, but since 1991, after the parish priest of Decimomannu gifted a relic of Santa Greca, the two twinned towns have always participated in each other's celebrations. The novena begins on May 5, and on the 14th, the relics are displayed, the Rosary and Litanies are recited, and hymns are sung. The obrieri host the event by offering sweets and white wine. The modern statues housed in the church replace the original ones, which remain in the care of the patron family.

Saint Greca

Monsignor Ottorino Alberti, during the proclamation of Santa Greca as Co-Patroness of Decimomannu, recounted that the name of Santa Greca and her cult are deeply rooted in Sardinia's ancient tradition, linked to a medieval monastery dedicated to her. Within the monastery, a marble epigraph bearing the name "Greca" was discovered in 1560. Additionally, references to a church dedicated to Santa Greca Martyr in the village of Decimomannu appear in documents dating back to 1413. These include records on Sardinian tithes from 1346–50 housed in the Vatican Archives, as well as other archival mentions from 1359 and 1363 in the State Archive of Cagliari. In 1618, Santa Greca Martyr's name was officially inscribed in the list of known Sardinian cults, thanks to the epigraph bearing her name. Subsequent excavations of the monastery in 1633 uncovered a tomb containing female remains, believed to be the relics of the saint. These were divided: one portion was placed under the main altar of Decimomannu's parish church, while the other was transferred to Cagliari and safeguarded in the "Sanctuary of the Martyrs" beneath the main altar of the Cathedral. Santa Greca, a young Christian who lived in Sardinia between the 3rd and 4th centuries, was martyred under the reign of Diocletian. She was scourged and had three nails driven into her head in an attempt to force her to renounce her faith.

AROUND THE LAKE AND INLAND

THE CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA OSSOLO

BIDONÌ

The Novenary of Saint Mary Ossolo

The church dedicated to Sancta Maria di Orussolo, mentioned in the Condaghe di Santa Maria di Bonarcado (1184), originally belonged to a Camaldolese monastery and dates back to the 13th century. However, the current structure, built from pink volcanic stone, is the result of a 1632 restoration, as indicated by inscriptions naming the master builders. It stands out among local rural churches for its Catalan Gothic style. The church is located within a park and surrounded by small buildings that once served as lodgings for pilgrims and novena participants. The layout consists of three naves separated by wide arches, each featuring a stone altar. The side altars house niches with shell motifs and statues of the Madonna with Child, while the central altar features an aedicule with a statue. The façade is fronted by a three arched portico crowned by a small cross at the apex, and the bell gable with a bell is positioned on the right slope of the roof. The wooden entrance portal is adorned with gray stone moldings, flanked by two columns, and topped with a pediment. There are two additional entrances on the lateral walls. In the rectangular presbytery, the apse has a flat architrave roof supported by three columns. The flooring is made of terracotta tiles.

A territory rich in spaces for religious organization

In the Barigadu and Guilcer regions, numerous temporary villages of Byzantine origin are found, consisting of muristenes arranged in rows around the church, often established on ancient pagan sacred sites. According to oral tradition, the Church of Le Grazie or Ossolo, named after the toponym of the area, was built as a soldier from Bidonì fulfilled a vow to the Virgin. Festivities include a procession carrying the Virgin of Le Grazie from the Parish Church, starting on August 29 with the novena that concludes at the end of the month, culminating on September 8 in honor of the Nativity of Mary. Each evening, the novena and rosary are followed by musical entertainment and dancing. On the solemn day, after the celebrations, the procession returns to the village.

CURIOSITY

Bidonì is a tiny village with just over 119 inhabitants, perched on the shores of Lake Omodeo and surrounded by cultivated fields and pastures. A few narrow streets wind through the settlement, characterized by low houses built from red trachyte. Of particular interest are the ruins of the Temple of Jupiter, one of only three known in the Mediterranean, consisting of a rock altar on the sacred mountain of Onnariu, dating back to 50 B.C. In the village, the Museum of Witches delves into themes of magic and superstition through the story of Julia Casu, a healer arrested in 1596 and interrogated by the Inquisition of Sassari. Julia was known for her use of medicinal herbs to aid the sick. However, possibly out of envy, she was accused of causing illnesses or deaths and subsequently imprisoned. After an initial trial, she was acquitted, but new accusations led to her reappearance in court, after which she mysteriously vanished. Some attribute her disappearance to the devil, others to providence. A room in the museum recounts her story, displaying objects such as amulets and potions associated with her practices.

The Novenary of Saint Basil

The rural church dedicated to Saint Basil the Great is part of a novenary overlooking Lake Omodeo. Completed around the mid-1600s, it features a single nave layout with a double pitched roof divided into four bays by alternating pointed and semicircular arches. Its squared façade includes a bell gable with a bell on the right side. The arched portal, adorned with moldings, is framed within an entablature and topped by a rectangular window created from a previous rose window.

On the right side, a colonnaded loggia provides an outdoor space for worshippers, who still reside during the novena in the 12 muristenes located on the left side. The dimly lit nave ends in a raised presbytery, which houses a marble altar and a wooden mensa. The sacristy was added in 1834. The flooring retains original sections with white and red cement tiles in the nave and trachyte slabs in the presbytery. The roof structure is wooden, with reed mats and curved tiles as the outer covering.

Saint Basil the Great, Bishop and Doctor of the Church

He was born in 329 in Caesarea of Cappadocia, Turkey, and died in 379. His feast day is celebrated on January 2. He is remembered as the patron of the Basilian monks, known for managing hospitals and carrying out reforms. Basil studied diligently in Caesarea and refined his education in Constantinople. He eventually founded a monastery and authored its rules before being elected Bishop of Caesarea, succeeding Eusebius, whom he had assisted during his episcopate. An exemplar of virtue, Basil consistently adhered to the rules of his order. He was devoted to the education of priests, whom he considered the guides of the faithful, and he lived a life of poverty and simplicity. Upon his death, the Church proclaimed him a Doctor for his numerous and influential writings.

Saint Basil, the beloved saint of many sardinian villages

In the park that encompasses the novenary of Saint Basil, alongside the church, a series of structures form the area known as "Sa Corte e sa festa"—the Courtyard of the Feast. This space includes a loggia, the muristenes, a square, an amphitheater, the rectory, and facilities for food services. It is here that the procession arrives with the statue of the saint, which departs from the village on August 24th, marking the beginning of the novena. The celebrations culminate on September 1st with the solemn feast in honor of Saint Basil, cherished not only by the inhabitants of Nughedu Santa Vittoria but also by those of Silanus. In the 17th century, during a plague outbreak, the people of Silanus prayed to Saint Basil for deliverance and, in gratitude for the grace received, vowed to always attend his feast. For centuries, they have walked 40 kilometers to the sanctuary, following an ancient path. Along the way, they make stops at Santa Sabina and Sedilo, resting overnight at the sanctuary of Saint Constantine before resuming their journey. This spiritual bond between the communities has been renewed over time, and in 1950, the people of Silanus even built their own muristene at Saint Basil's sanctuary as a place of rest and support.

NOT TO BE MISSED

The Sas Arzolas de Goi necropolis, consisting of five Domus de Janas of various types, is carved into trachyte rock and features eighteen burial chambers. These structures bear witness to the human presence in the area and exemplify the ancient cult of the dead. Carvings in the stone represent deities worshipped during the Neolithic period, such as the bull's head with ears and horns, symbolizing the male god. Some chambers include hearths or architectural elements reminiscent of domestic environments. The site dates back to the Ozieri Culture, which developed during the Late Neolithic (around 3200 BCE) and extended into the Early Copper Age (circa 1800 BCE).

At the Naturalistic Museum of the Assai Oasis, once a shelter for shepherds, visitors can view taxidermy specimens of Sardinian fauna, as well as a collection of minerals, fossils, and various types of wood from Mediterranean scrub and other island vegetation. Outside the museum, examples of a traditional charcoal pit and a shepherd's pinnetta are displayed, constructed using traditional techniques.

AROUND THE LAKE AND INLAND



THE CHURCH OF SAN BASILIO
NUGHEDU SANTA VITTORIA

The Novenary of Saint Mary Turrana or Our Lady of Grace

In the early 20th century, the church dedicated to the Virgin of Graces in Turrana, near Sorradile, had adjoining lands. Archival sources date it to the 16th century, but it was consecrated in 1250. The building, made of trachyte, is plastered and painted, flanked by muristenes and the sacristy. The front façade and part of the left side are covered by a portico supported by quadrangular columns.

The small, simple interior hall with a wooden ceiling features, in the raised presbytery—preceded by a stone arch—a trachyte altar with a niche that houses the Virgin of Graces during the festivities. Some storage compartments are set along the side walls. The flooring is made of trachyte slabs. The gabled façade includes decorative friezes on the entrance frame.

After a fire in the 1980s, significant restoration was carried out on the roof, flooring, and walls, completed by local volunteers. The statue of the Virgin features a dark skinned face, reminiscent of Byzantine iconography.

Devotion and prayer in praise of the mother of the redeemer

The temple is located at the foot of Mount Cresia, where devotees arrive on foot, escorting the Madonna to begin the novena on August 30. The ancient wooden statue reveals a dark-skinned face and departs from the parish church accompanied by the Confraternity of Nostra Sennora. It moves through the village streets and then along the forest path Sas Iscaleddas, reaching Turrana in the evening.

Only after circling the building does the procession enter the church, where the Madonna is placed on the altar, and the Laudas—hymns in Sardinian—are sung in her honor, celebrating the day of her birth on September 8.

Outside, the obrieri, volunteers acting out of devotion or fulfilling a vow, offer wine to everyone and coffee to the women, as a gesture of hospitality and camaraderie. They are responsible for organizing the celebration, maintaining and decorating the church, arranging floral displays, and hosting dinners for relatives and friends.

AROUND THE LAKE AND INLAND



THE CHURCH OF SANTA MARIA TURRANA

SORRADILE

CURIOSITY

The devoted novenanti spend nine nights in the muristene mannu reserved exclusively for women. They arrive in the evening, either on foot or by other means, and recite the Rosary and Laudas, followed by Sardinian dances and musical moments. On the eve of the feast, the ritual of S'izzadorzu takes place, with the devotees staying awake until dawn. On the day of the celebration, the Madonna is honored, and everyone returns to the village. During the processions, the hands of the Madonna are adorned with precious rosaries gifted by the faithful.

Nativity of Saint Mary, Mother of God

Among the liturgical celebrations in the Christian calendar, the Nativity of Mary on September 8 is one of the oldest, alongside the feast of Saint John the Baptist on June 24 and the birth of Jesus at Christmas. Tradition links it to the founding of a church dedicated to Mary in the 4th century in Jerusalem, known as the Basilica of Saint Anne, which is believed to have been the home of Joachim and Anne, Mary's parents, and thus the place of the Virgin's birth.

This feast honors the Mother of God's Son—a joyful day marking the beginning of her life, full of grace. Mary was also the model disciple, an example of Christian living, obedience, and strength, a refuge and comfort for humanity.

AROUND THE LAKE AND INLAND

The church of Saint Quirico

Overlooking Lake Omodeo, the church is mentioned in diocesan records from the 18th century. It was declared unfit for use in 1788 due to its dilapidated state. In 1807, an ultimatum was issued to provide an endowment or the church would be deconsecrated. By 1834, there was no custodian to manage collections, but ten years later, Rector Palmas equipped it with a new marble altar. The church, supported by its lands and offerings, covered the costs of small works and ensured the celebration of its feast day. The church is a classic example of rural architecture. Its gabled roof features a tiny bell gable with a bell and a small cross at the apex. The plastered façade is enhanced by a beautiful arched wooden portal adorned with stone moldings and floral decorations on the capitals.

A secondary entrance is located on the side, nestled between the external buttresses aligned with the internal arches of the nave's bays. The single-nave layout houses the statues of the patron saints, Quirico and Giulitta, displayed in a pedimented niche within the barrel vaulted presbytery.

Saint Quirico, the child martyr, and Saint Giulitta, the mother

The small rural church in Ardauli, dedicated to Saints Quirico and Giulitta, is well-preserved after various restorations and is set in a scenic landscape overlooking Lake Omodeo. Devotion to these patron saints was brought to Sardinia by the Byzantines, and the building stands on the site of a previous temple, one of many erected by monks around the 1100s. Its structure is similar to many novenari found along the lake. Here, the community honors the martyred saints of Asia Minor, fulfilling a yearly vow. The story tells of Giulitta, a noble and wealthy widow from Turkey, who fled her city and abandoned her wealth to escape the Diocletian persecutions with her young son, Quirico. They were arrested, and despite the tortures and interrogations, Giulitta remained steadfast in her faith, even when the governor killed her child by throwing him to the ground in front of her. She was later executed by beheading.

Moments of devotion

The feast is celebrated three times a year: on Easter Monday, on July 15, the day dedicated to the memory of Saints Quirico and Giulitta, and in August with a novena from the 16th to the 24th, culminating in the solemn festival on the 25th. This nine-day celebration blends prayer and civil festivities, centered on life in the novenario near the muristenes surrounding the church.

The saints are carried on foot along su cammineddu, an ancient path, from the parish church to the novenario. In addition to daily prayers, certain moments hold special significance, such as August 19, when the communal ritual sa chena takes place—a shared dinner among all the novenanti, fostering harmony. Another important moment is S'izzadorzu on the 24th, a night vigil for the saints on the eve of the festival.

During the novena days, a culinary showcase is organized to prepare traditional dishes like culurzone and s'ortau. On the 25th, after the mass, vows are fulfilled, and the saints are returned to the parish. The San Quirico Association oversees every detail, ensuring the festival is an inclusive celebration of the community.



THE CHURCH OF SAN QUIRICO

ARDAULI

THE CHURCH OF SAN MAURO

SORGONO

Saint Maurus Abbot

The sanctuary, surrounded by cumbessias, stands on a hillside atop a pre-existing monument near the menhir site of Biru 'e Concas, resembling a medieval village. Founded by the Benedictines in the 12th century, it is distinguished by its imposing rose window—the largest of its kind on the island—in Romanesque style, adorning the squared gray trachyte facade, and by the harmonious blend of simple and complex architectural elements.

The building is dedicated to Saint Mauro Abbot, deeply cherished and venerated by the inhabitants of Sorgono. The earliest records of the church date back to 1574, and over time it underwent various modifications during the 15th and 16th centuries. These expansions reflect a mix of styles, from late Gothic to Renaissance and Baroque, following the tastes of different eras.

The central nave has a rectangular plan with a ribbed barrel vault, divided into six bays. In the raised presbytery, a Baroque altar is flanked by a niche at the rear that houses a beautiful wooden statue of the Saint.

Access to the temple is via a staircase flanked by two lions—symbols of Aragon—serving as sentinels to the fortress-like structure, emphasized by the battlements crowning the front facade. Outside, large buttresses support the building and its roof.

La festa per il Santo tanto amato

The serene atmosphere of the area is interrupted throughout the year to honor the Saint, who is celebrated on three occasions. In January, Santu Mauru de is dolos is invoked as a healer for the health of the faithful. After Easter, Santu Mauru de frores welcomes spring. Finally, in late May and early June, Santu Mauru erriccu is celebrated with nine days of prayer, hymns, dances, songs, and a palio, drawing large crowds of devotees and pilgrims.

In the past, the religious rites were solemn, accompanied by lavish feasts and an impressive livestock fair. Historical accounts describe a deep popular faith and devotion to the Abbot, evidenced by the vast collection of ex-voto offerings. As late as 1923, the church walls, entrance columns, and nearby chapels were adorned with hundreds of silver candles, hearts, hands, and feet, long braids of hair, medals, and small paintings. Names and inscriptions of those who received graces were carved into the columns flanking the main entrance. Offerings overflowed onto the altar, steps, and adjacent chapels.

The festivities were brought to life with the vibrant colors of traditional Sardinian attire, elegant young couples, a palio race in the valley below, dances, songs, and competitions between impromptu poets. Devotion to Saint Mauro is widespread across Sardinia, and the dialect hymns dedicated to him are widely renowned.

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