



Sardinia

Archaeology, architecture and art

6–12 September 2024 (MK 404)

7 days • £2,670

Lecturer: Dr R. T. Cobiانchi

Includes the best of the island's material culture, from Neolithic and Bronze Age, through Punic and Roman to mediaeval and Renaissance.

The unique Bronze Age nuraghi are a striking feature, as are Tuscan-style Romanesque churches and 16th-century Catalan altarpieces.

See the Giganti di Mont'e Prama, an extraordinary group of sculpted life-sized warriors dating to 8th century BC.

Wonderful mix of sites from the south to the north following the west coast of the island.

Despite being the second largest island in the Mediterranean, Sardinia's cultural treasures remain largely undiscovered by travellers. Its extraordinary jagged coastline and clear blue seas have earned it a deserved reputation for beach tourism, with villas and resorts clinging to the cliffs along the Costa Smeralda. Yet the wealth of prehistoric sites, Punic and Roman remains and Pisan-Romanesque churches make it a fascinating destination for those prepared to forgo the luxury of the coast and explore inland.

As with all the larger islands in the Mediterranean, Sardinia was plundered and settled by a succession of pirates and empire builders. However, due in large part to its rugged and impenetrable landscape, Sardinian identity was never wholly extinguished. Her Bronze Age settlements truly set it apart. Deep gorges, craggy limestone and slate mountain ranges and swathes of verdant countryside hide over 7,000 nuraghi, peculiar conical stone structures which were forts, palaces and simple domestic dwellings. Much is left to the imagination as little is known about these edifices, though digs are leading to some fascinating insights.

Evidence of Phoenician power on the island can be seen at Tharros on the west coast, established in the eighth century BC in a strategic position jutting into the sea in the Gulf of Oristano. Later colonised by the Romans, the site is a remarkable example of a coastal city-state. Finds can be seen in Sardinia's superlative collection of archaeological museums, in Cagliari and Oristano.



Cagliari, late-19th-century engraving from Gazetteer of the World, Vol. II.

The decline of the Roman Empire left Sardinia open to Goths, Lombards, for a short spell the Byzantines, and to the new Muslim empires of North Africa and Spain. The Pisans and Genoese in the eleventh century left an indelible mark on the island with their superb Romanesque churches in the Logudoro region, indeed some of the finest in Europe.

Rule by the Kingdom of Aragón brought a Spanish dimension to the island's culture, concealed in mediaeval churches in tiny villages the length of the island, sumptuous sixteenth-century retables which rival coeval ones on the Italian mainland.

Itinerary

Day 1. Fly at c. 3.00pm (British Airways) from London Gatwick Airport to Cagliari. First of three nights in Cagliari.

Day 2: Cagliari. The morning is spent in the Cittadella dei Musei: the art gallery has works by the foremost Sardinian retable painter, Pietro Cavaro, and the excellent archaeological museum has important finds from the Nuragic, Phoenician and Roman periods. See the Giganti di Mont'e Prama, nuragic stone figures representing warriors, boxers and archers that have been recently reconstructed from over 5,000 fragments excavated in the 1970s. In the afternoon walk up the Bastione

St. Remy, an immense late 19th-century gateway to the Castello district. The cathedral has a remodelled Pisan-Romanesque façade and a sculpted pulpit from 1160. The Museo Diocesano has a 15th-century Flemish triptych.

Day 3: Barumini, Tuili. The Nuraghe Su' Nuraxi is the largest of the Bronze Age nuraghi, with an impressive central tower constructed of basalt. At nearby Tuili, the unprepossessing Chiesa di San Pietro houses an exquisite retable by the Maestro di Castelsardo (c. 1500). Return to Cagliari for a little free time. Stroll around the mediaeval ramparts or visit the several Baroque churches.

Day 4: Paulilatino, Oristano. The Basilica di Santa Giusta, erected in 1135, is one of the earliest of the Tuscan Romanesque churches. The Nuraghe Santa Cristina is the most picturesque nuragic site, surrounded by olive groves and with an astounding underground shrine from the second century BC. At Oristano there is a fine collection at the archaeological museum, a 14th-century polychrome statue by Nino Pisano in the cathedral. First of three nights in Oristano.

Day 5: Tharros, San Salvatore. Tharros is a magnificently located Punic and Roman site, with fine views over the Gulf of Oristano. The nearby Byzantine Church of San Giovanni in Sinis is the oldest of Sardinia's churches.

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Visit the Church of the Saviour, which has an underground hypogeum with 4th-century frescoes depicting animals and Roman mythology. Return through the marshes of the lagoon, stopping for lunch at a fish restaurant in the town of Cabras.

Day 6: Borruta, Torralba, Codrongianos.

San Pietro di Sorres is the most superbly situated Romanesque church in Sardinia, with typical Tuscan black and white stone banding. Visit Nuraghe Santu Antine, the most complex nuragic site in Sardinia. The cliff necropolis of Sant'Andrea Priu was used for burial in the 2nd and 3rd centuries BC. In the main chamber are exquisite fragments of later Roman and Byzantine frescoes. Continue north to see two examples of Pisan-Romanesque churches, each in a very different setting in the rural landscape. Santissima Trinità di Saccargia is a splendid example, built in black basalt and white limestone in 1116. Santa Maria del Regno has a magnificent ornate retable from 1515.

Day 7. Fly from Cagliari to London Gatwick, arriving c. 1.45pm.

Lecturer

Dr R. T. Cobianchi. Art historian and researcher specializing in Italian art and architecture of the Renaissance and Baroque. His interests also span from the iconography of the late Middle Ages to the sculpture of Neoclassicism.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £2,670 or £2,460 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £2,870 or £2,660 without flights.

Included: flights (economy class) with British Airways (Airbus 320); travel by private coach for airport transfers and excursions; hotel accommodation; breakfasts, 4 lunches (including 1 picnic) & 4 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Accommodation. Hotel Regina Margherita, Cagliari (hotelreginamargherita.com): refurbished 4-star hotel, externally unattractive but internally clean and bright, with spacious rooms. **Mariano IV Palace Hotel, Oristano** (hotelmarianoiv.com): the only centrally located 4-star hotel in the town, in need of refurbishment. Bedrooms are a good size if a little dated. *These hotels are the best in their localities, but are by no means luxurious or indeed memorable.*

How strenuous: A lot of walking, some over rough ground at archaeological sites or over cobbled or uneven paving. Fitness and sure-footedness are essential, particularly for clambering up nuraghi. Some days involve a lot of driving. Average distance by coach per day: 62 miles

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.