

This Top Sardinia Resort Brings Low-Key Glamour To The Mediterranean

A close connection with wild nature and Italian culture sets the two hotels of Valle dell'Erica apart from the shinier, newer outposts of luxury in the nearby Costa Smeralda.

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The private pool in a suite at Hotel Erica DELPHINA HOTELS & RESORTS

The marketing come-on for Sardinia is simple: The Italian island calls itself the Caribbean of the Mediterranean.

As comparisons go, it's a good one. Sardinia is ringed with coves lapped by translucent turquoise water, soft white sand beaches and some of the warmest swimming conditions in the region, as balmy as 80 degrees in summer. It has its glitzy yacht-filled enclaves—Porto Cervo and the Costa Smeralda—and its quieter reaches. And like so many places worth visiting these days, it has quite a lot of tourists during the high season.

But at the same time, the island is still a European corner of the world. And that's especially clear in some of its top locally owned hotels. Their amenities hold their own with those in properties elsewhere in the world, but their accent is distinctly Italian and uniquely Sardinian.



The presidential suite at Hotel Erica DELPHINA HOTELS & RESORTS

That's particularly true of [Valle dell'Erica](#), the flagship of Dephina Hotels & Resorts, a company formed from a partnership between two Sardinian families that build, own, sell and manage hotels. Their portfolio includes eight resorts, from the romantic [Capo d'Orso](#) to the practical (beachfront apartments) [Residence Il Mirto](#), mostly on the less-crowded northern shores of the island. Valle dell'Erica is in the far north, at the tip of the region called Gallura. On a clear day, you can see the cliffs of Bonifacio in Corsica.

Dephina PR and marketing manager Tamara Amadu stresses that the familial ownership—with its attendant commitment to culture and heritage—is important. “Our boss is 74 years old,” she says. “He doesn’t have a computer” and does business with handshakes. And not only is all that nice and reassuringly traditional, but it also gives them the agility and freedom to undertake yearly upgrades and refurbishments during the winter closures.

The Valle dell'Erica resort contains two hotels. Hotel Erica was named for a fuzzy-looking flower, *Erica terminalis*, which is also known as Corsican heath. La Licciola takes its name from a type of local oak tree. The nature-based names are no accident, as protecting the island's plants, flowers and wildlife has always been paramount for the developers, from early decisions to build around trees rather than removing them to today's sustainability initiatives (renewable energy sources and the like), which Amadu avidly ticks off.



A suite at La Licciola DELPHINA HOTELS & RESORTS

They share the grounds—including nearly a mile of coastline—a thalassotherapy (seawater) spa and the central Piazzetta degli Ulivi, a square meant to recall a typical Sardinian village, with bars and shops and a corner where live musicians sometimes play. The transition along the winding footpaths between them is seamless, and guests on a half-board booking at either have access to the restaurants and saltwater swimming pools at both. But their rooms have different characters.

Hotel Erica was built first—parts of it, at least the idea of them, date from 1957—and lies closer to the sea. Its 148 rooms are built in separate low-slung blocks, mostly with entrances directly from the outdoors, making it the first dispersed resort in northern Sardinia. Some of them are on the small side, but their look is cheerful, with seaside colors and white tile floors, and every room has a veranda with a sea view. It's a point of pride for Delphina that as much as possible—textiles, marble, decorative items—was made in Sardinia. The colorful rag rugs were woven by hand in a nearby village.

La Licciola came later. Built in 2013, it's the newest member of the group. Its 125 rooms are more contemporary in spirit, with their interplay of stone, ceramics, wood and accessories crafted by Sardinian artisans. The designer paid attention to the details: hand-woven Aggius fabrics on the cushions, Orosei marble in the bathrooms, Castelsardo rush baskets and Etruscan terra-cotta in the decorative tiles.



Seafront dining at Li Zini DELPHINA HOTELS & RESORTS

“Our hotels always follow nature,” says Amadu, emphasizing that Dephina’s objective is to preserve nature rather than destroying it to make way for hotel blocks. The gardens are natural in style, full of native Mediterranean flowers and herbs. Nothing is manicured, and none of the plants were imported from outside the island.

The same is mostly true of the resort’s six restaurants, which, Amadu says, have a “kilometer zero” philosophy and use 80% local products, including many grown in Delphina’s 12-acre garden. Several of them are set up as extensive buffets with live cooking stations, wood-fired pizza ovens and other options for fresh food. But the showplaces are more special.

The beachside Li Zini focuses on fresh fish and lobster, and in the evenings, its staff sets up dinner tables in the sand or atop the rocks as the waves roll in, and the candlelit, romantic La Prua turns out a tasting menu of “revisited” Mediterranean cuisine. Far less formal but arguably more delightful is Li Ciusoni, which takes its name from the Sardinian word for a type of gnocchi-like dumpling pasta that’s unique to the island.



A pasta making demonstration at La Ciusoni DELPHINA HOTELS & RESORTS

Surprisingly, there's no fish in sight; Amadu explains that Sardinia's strategic location made it appealing to would-be conquerors, so people lived in the central hills and far from the sea. There, they ate pig.

And so do today's diners at Li Ciusoni, which is set up like a rustic country house during a party. There are platters of cured meat, local cheeses and marinated vegetables laid out around a fire-fueled outdoor stove in the courtyard for the antipasti. Then, in the dining room, guests enjoy a menu of meaty pasta and hunks of grilled pork.

The pasta maker, in full sight of the dining room, is a cousin of the family of owners. It's another way, says Amadu, that Valle dell'Erica offers its guests a "real experience, like being with [a Sardinian] family for a special day like Christmas or Easter." And in that moment, all comparisons, to the Caribbean or anywhere else, fall away.