

SOAK UP SARDINIA

FOLLOW IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF MODEL MATES BELLA HADID AND HAILEY BIEBER WHO HAVE BEEN SPOTTED ON THIS SUN-KISSED ITALIAN ISLAND

WHY GO?

There's no need to jet off to the Caribbean in search of crystal clear waters and powdery white sand – the Italian island of Sardinia has all that and far more and is just a two-hour flight away. You'll find a warm Sardinian welcome, some divine local cuisine and breathtakingly beautiful, rugged scenery. The Mediterranean island has long been a summer celeb magnet with Beyoncé, Jay-Z, Rihanna and Elton John all fans of the island's glitzy resort of Porto Cervo, where those infamous photographs of a naked Orlando Bloom paddle boarding with Katy Perry were snapped!



Cala Coticcio, part of the Maddalena islands, is a short boat ride away



WHERE CAN I STAY?

OK! stayed at the refurbished Hotel Marinedda Thalasso & Spa, a low-rise beachfront resort set on a hillside on the island's unspoiled north west coast near the pretty fishing village of Isola Rossa. The five-star hotel features 195 rooms and family suites, all with balconies where you can enjoy views of either the lush gardens scented with juniper, rosemary and bougainvillea or the azure blue sea. By day you can sunbathe by one of the two pools or stroll down to the white-sand beach. There are kids' clubs on offer while the Elicriso spa and thalassotherapy centre (above) – with its series of mineral-rich seawater plunge pools, indoor pool with hydromassage jets and body treatments using local plants – is one of the largest on the island. OK! loved our Elixir Of Youth facial, where some of the products contained essential oils from local cannonau grapes, which are packed with anti-ageing antioxidants.

WHAT ACTIVITIES CAN I DO?

Take a drive along the coast to Castelsardo, a confetti-hued town that seems to rise up out of the sea. Follow the winding alleys all the way to the castle at the top, where your climb is rewarded with stunning views. Further along the coast is Neptune's Grotto, an ancient stalactite cave (below). When the sea is calm, you can arrive by boat from Alghero or take the 654 steps down the cliff, but don't forget you have to walk back up!

Visit the seaside town of Santa Teresa di Gallura on market day (Thursday) and spend the morning browsing the stalls – we stocked up on cheese, figs and the biggest nectarines we'd ever seen! From here you can also catch a ferry to the magnificent citadel town of Bonifacio on the French island of Corsica.

Another memorable excursion is a sea safari boat cruise from Palau harbour to La Maddalena, a cluster of beautiful islands protected as a national park just off the coast of Gallura.



The alleyways of Castelsardo

WHERE CAN I DINE ?

Whether it's pizza, fresh pasta or seafood, Hotel Marinedda offers it all. OK! loved working our way through the Sardinian specialities such as culurgiones, pasta dumplings stuffed with lobster, fried tomato and lemon thyme, and the salt-crusted cod. The standout restaurant has to be Tramonto, where we feasted on seafood under the stars on the romantic candlelit terrace.

The hotel runs a bus to Isola Rossa, named after the local pink granite stone, less than a mile away. We enjoyed a pizza at Ristorante de Michele, overlooking the harbour. Make sure you stick around for the sunset – it's well worth it.

You'll be spoiled for choice in Castelsardo, where eateries line the alleys in the shadow of the castle – we took a seat at Trattoria La Schizzula (above), where we devoured a huge bowl of spaghetti alla vongole and then a divine tiramisu!

REPORT: ZOE HILL. EDITED BY: ANNABEL MACKIE. PHOTOS: STOCKPHOTO



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