



By Jeremy Phillips

BY THE time we picked our way up a short path to the hilltop, I was already regretting my wife's suggestion that we skip breakfast and nourish our chakras instead with a morning yoga session. But 20 minutes later, stretched, relaxed by calming breathwork and feeling thoroughly chilled out, I sat gazing at the sea and wondering why every day couldn't start like this.

Sounds like classic California? Well, if you want yoga by the shore, miles of sandy beaches, surfing, sunsets that turn the sea to fire and vineyards, then that is the place.

But what if you could experience all this without flying for 11 hours?

You'll find it all in the north-west of Sardinia, a place so life-giving it's bursting with oenophiles. The only surprise was that we didn't see any of them on a surfboard.

BASK ON THE BEACH

THERE'S always something charmingly old-fashioned about Italian beaches - the locals are perfectly happy with a wonky umbrella and a towel.

A favourite for Sardinian families is Li Junchi beach, which unfolds in a majestic five-mile curve of white sand heading south from the town of Isola Rossa. They also flock to one of the island's longest stretches of sandy beach, just below Badest.

Here, beach bars gaze out on limpid waters in which we floated for hours. Shoals of inquisitive fish drifted near our feet, while another day we spotted a ray drifting gracefully along the seabed.

A FAMILY HIDEAWAY

WITH our two teenagers we stayed at Hotel Le Sabine, the newest and most secluded hotel at the Resort & Spa Le Dune, which overlooks the beach. It's a haven for families - each hotel has its own pool and restaurant, but you can swim wherever you like and, on a half-board basis, can choose a different place to eat every night.

We returned night after night to the Il Laccio restaurant in Hotel Le Sabine. It served the children's favourite, sushi, which they attacked like true epicureans.

Hotel Le Sabine was conveniently positioned next to the modern and peaceful Indu spa, where we enjoyed a few hours of

With miles of sandy beaches, surfing, vineyards, yoga by the shore - and even a prison island...

Sardinia is the new California!

adults-only time. Some days we lazed by the main pool, rising only for an occasional dip or a round of salmon toasties at the pool bar. We strolled to the beach most days either hiring hotel loungers or doing as the locals do, sprawling on a towel.

We could have had a surfing lesson or tried paddleboarding, but instead we crashed through the waves with boogie boards, tumbling off them like drunks in fits of giggles.

SARDINIA'S WINELANDS

TWO names are big in these parts. Vermentino and Cannonau. Just back from the beach is a delightful vineyard which has made an art out of both.

Those Californian winelands might have been made famous by the movie Sideways, but Sardinia's sun-kissed slopes have their own charms.

We were welcomed at the Cantina Li Duni by the manager Francesco, for tastings on a terrace overlooking vines that stretch down to the beach. Eliana, the resident expert, had us slurping away like old hands at a very punchy 16.5 per cent white wine, Vermentino di Gallura (the name of this wine region), a sparkling white, and big-bodied, medal-winning Cannonau red.

We were even delivered a plate of peccorino and figs grown in the vineyard. They sell their wines at just €3.50 for a litre.

HIPPY MECCA

THE stretch of north-west coast cries out to be explored. The roads curl around

fantastical granite rock formations like demented walnut whips, with views out to Asinara, the nearby island used as a Second World War POW camp.

Hippies used to camp here at Valle della Luna - Moon Valley - near Santa Teresa. We could see why they loved this spot, where

SUNSHINE STATE: The bay of Santa Teresa Gallura. Left: One of the island's vineyards

granite columns still stand or lie in the shallow water, carved in Roman times to be shipped to the heart of the Empire. You won't find them in California.

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TRAVEL FACTS

Seven nights' half-board at Resort & Spa Le Dune from £787pp, including flights from City Airport (baholidays.com). Wine tasting at Cantina Li Duni is available Monday to Saturday, 10am to 1pm and from 4pm to 6pm (cantinaliduni.it).

CALM STRETCH: Yoga on a Sardinian beach

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