

Sardinia:

Ancient traditions, pristine sea and longevity



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Sardinia is commonly perceived as an island for the rich and famous: sandy white beaches, yachts and a jet-set lifestyle. What is often overlooked is that Sardinia is a place in which nature is still to a large extent uncontaminated and where its inhabitants enjoy one of the longest life expectancies in the world. The Sardinian lifestyle has literally been following the trendy 'organic' and 'green' living craze for centuries.

Long life-span in Sardinia

Sardinia is Italy's second largest island. It is also known as a Blue Zone, one of those rare places in the world where people often live past 100. At least 220 of Sardinia's current 1.6 million people have reached the age of 100, twice the average of the rest of the world, and 20 times as many as in the United States.



Sardinian, a romance language

As a general rule Sardinians have dark hair and skin, the genetic result of them many Mediterranean peoples, such as the Spaniards, that ruled the island. The spoken language, although divided in Northern

and Southern groups, is certainly not similar to other mainland Italian dialects. The Sardinian language is considered a different romance language, like Italian, French or Spanish.

Language is not the only peculiarity: a long life-span is another one. Interestingly enough, men and women share longevity equally, whereas elsewhere, women reach the age of 100 four times more often than men. Scientists believe Sardinian men share a genetic trait passed from father to son that makes them less likely than the general population to die from heart disease or stroke.

Sardinian diet

Many think this is due to the Sardinian diet. It consists of a balance of healthy nutrients: fresh locally grown vegetables prepared simply with olive oil, lemon and garlic to compliment dishes. Meals are served in small courses usually with pasta or soup first, a main dish of vegetables, legumes, and nuts, and ending with a salad to aid the digestion.

Farms in Sardinia grow many different fruit and vegetable crops, such as tomatoes, oranges, figs, apples, apricots and grapes. The famous Sardinian cheese, called Pecorino Sardo, is made from grass-fed sheep's milk, which gives the product a high content of Omega-3 fatty acids. Also highly consumed is the Carta de Musica, a thin, whole wheat bread high in vitamin D. Meat intake is low in Sardinia - typically only once or twice a week - and consists of local lamb, lean pork, oily fish, and shellfish, commonly cooked over a wood fire. Cannonau is the most common and known Sardinian wine. Sardinia's sea-food includes tuna, which is fished in the southwest area of the island.

Travel within Sardinia

Cagliari, the capital city, hosts a main harbour that is one of the gateways to Sardinia. If you take a short 50-minute drive out of Cagliari and head southwest towards the coast, you will find Portoscuso, a town

originally inhabited by tuna and coral fishermen. One of its notable sights includes the Spanish Tower, built in 1594 by the Spaniards to defend the village from the Turkish raids. The Lido degli Spagnoli Hotel is a beautiful Spanish-style building that pays homage to history in its design. The hotel is situated on the southwest seafront overlooking the island of San Pietro.



Garbage collection and environment protection

Sardinia has taken many initiatives to protect its environment, although the balance between generating economic growth via tourism and other industries, and protecting the island's precious environment, is a difficult challenge and the subject of ongoing debate.

Disposing of garbage is a growing problem for the island. Landfill sites are under pressure and are viewed as a short-term solution. Most areas now have recycling schemes and colour-coded bins in the streets for plastic, glass, paper, aluminum and batteries. There is also daily rubbish collection of either non-recyclable ('secco') or compostable ('umido') items. The sea around Sardinia is generally amongst the cleanest in the Mediterranean. The island's economy is very dependent on the clarity and cleanliness of the sea, and Sardinia works hard to ensure its preservation.

The reserved and genuine character of the people, the exquisiteness of the many typical dishes, and its ancient traditions, make of Sardinia one of the most different and enchanting places in the Mediterranean. Let us hope the island will wisely tackle environmental changes to maintain its beauty for centuries to come. ❖



Fresh spring water



Spanish Tower, Portoscuso