

CORSICCA



As we pulled up next to the gasoline pump, a frustrated attendant waved his fingers and exclaimed in French "Il n'y a pas d'essence."

"Essence?" I questioned. This was the only word I understood meaning gasoline. "Non essence?" I tried to confirm.

"Non." he said, shrugging his shoulders.

Our tanks were half full, giving us a range of just over 100 miles. Not ideal for traversing the entire 350 miles of the Trans Euro Trail (TET) that winds through the island of Corsica from the ferry port at Bastia to the southern port city of Bonifacio.

"Perhaps there's another station not far away that has gas?" said Chantil into our Bluetooth headset.

"Perhaps." I replied, as we both motored away from the gas station in frustration.

The next two gas stations revealed the same result – no gasoline. After further questioning, we discovered that there was a group of Corsicans that were protesting the death of a local nationalist that had recently died in a French prison. Protests included riots and the blocking of fuel trucks from leaving the refineries and ports.

We decided to ride over the northern pass via the TET, with hopes that, with a bit of luck, there would be fuel in the next town of Saint-Florent. Nope – no fuel. In frustration, we booked an Airbnb with a view of the seaside and waited out the protests.





Welcome to Corsica!

Fortunately, after a few days of civil unrest, the fuel supply chain was restored, and the gas stations were in full operation once again. We excitedly topped off our tanks and our extra Rotopax canisters and continued riding the TET through this small but beautiful Mediterranean island.

Trans Euro Trail Corsica

The Corsica TET is part of a much larger network of trails that was designed by the dirt bike and adventure rider community, and includes more than 80,000 km (49,700 miles) of GPX routes that can be downloaded for free. Regional "linesmen" manage the routes for each country, with the Corsica portion of the TET being managed by French linesman Fabien Marque.

We started our journey to Corsica by boarding a ferry from Toulon, France to Bastia, Corsica. It didn't take us long before we were riding along narrow dirt roads, that serpentine up steep hills, and offered stupendous views of the coastline and Mediterranean Sea. Compared to the often hustle and bustle of mainland France, Corsica offers a much more laid-back vibe – Perfect for carving along backcountry roads at a leisurely pace, without dealing with the frustrations of slow camper vans or tailgating luxury sports cars.

It's a good idea to not travel too fast, because in the rural forests there are countless pigs roaming along the roads. All the pigs we encountered seemed to be domesticated – Local farmers seemed to have given up on trying to contain them. We passed many broken fences that looked like they had been ripped down by pigs yearning for the freedom to roam the countryside and roll in roadside mud. The pigs especially enjoyed it when we would stop and feed them from Chantil's "stray doggie" stash.

Pigs were just a few of the many surprises of riding the TET Corsica. Another surprise was the relatively high mountain passes. Corsicans often refer to their island as "A Mountain in the Sea" which includes 20 mountain peaks higher than 2,000 meters (6,560 feet) with the tallest being Monte Cinto, which rises 2,706 meters (8,800 feet) above the Mediterranean Sea. During our late April visit the high peaks still had snow covering them, and we even had to slog through a short section of the TET that was still snow covered. Our 50/50 rated tires were not ideal for the snow-packed muddy trails, so we took it nice and slow – coaxing them through the deeper sections as a team.





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TET



Living in a Stone Hut

One of the most memorable portions of the Trans Euro Trail was riding along the D81 in northern Corsica. This two-lane road snakes along the Calvi region from Saint-Florent to Losari. However, the best part was leaving the pavement at Bocca Di Vezzu, and riding the dirt portion to the northern coast of Paillers de Ghignu (Refuges of Ghignu). We fully expected to wild camp here but were surprised to see welcoming and well maintained stone huts that we could call home. As a bonus, we were outside the camping season, so they were completely free to enjoy. We ended up parking the mules and relaxing for a few days with nothing on the agenda other than soak up some "vitamin sea", enjoy the beauty of the beach, and warm spring sunshine. It was about as close to an overlanders beach paradise as we've ever come across.

Calanques de Piana

After returning to the D81, we continued following the magenta line of the GPS receiver that marked the TET slithering through the Calvi and Corte regions. The seaside views gradually disappeared and were replaced by forested roads and snow capped mountain vistas that wind through the center of the island. This is where we decided to jump off the TET in order to ride to the west coast, and a place we had heard that was worth the detour – Calanques de Piana.

The short, but breathtaking ride through Calanques de Piana is not to be missed. This UNESCO World Heritage Site felt like riding through a natural technicolored canyon where remarkable red granite rocks rise 1,300 feet above the aqua green waters of the Golfe de Porto (Gulf of Porto). This road is perfect for motorcycle touring since you can pull over and take in the splendid panoramic viewpoints without blocking the narrow roadway.

Home of a Future French Emperor

Our motorcycle meanderings continued south along the coast, towards the capital city of Ajaccio. It was here on August 15th, 1769 that a baby boy was born under the Italian name of Napoleone Buonaparte. Nearly two years later, he was baptized in the city's 16th-century cathedral, which still stands today and continues to have the same marble baptismal font. When Napoleon (his French name) turned nine, he was accepted to the elite military school in Brienne, France where he studied for five years before continuing to the military academy in Paris. Although Napoleon only lived in Ajaccio for a short time during his childhood, the city continues to remember the accomplishments of their national hero through numerous statues and museums dotted throughout the city.





ECORSICA



Corsica's Grand Finale

From Ajaccio, another portion of the TET continues south along the coast, but we were looking forward to returning to the less populated central portion of the TET that winds along the mountain range and into the southern Sartène region. This was, once again, some of the best riding and backcountry camping we could hope for – forested roads, moderate temperatures, and spring sunshine that warmed our open-visor faces.

As we neared Col de Bavella (Bavella Pass) a seasonal storm brought snow in the higher elevations. Although riding through the snow flurries was enjoyable, we knew that it may be difficult to travel the next day if we camped in the mountains. We wisely decided to drop down to the east coast and enjoy a few days in the beach town of Sari-Solenzara. When we returned to Bavella Pass, the roadsides were still covered in fresh snow that lasted until we descended the mountain to the south. There is something magical about riding on roads surrounded by snowfall – especially on a sunny, spring day. We honestly didn't think Corsica could get any better, but this memorable island still had one more surprise for us – the coastal town of Bonifacio.

Although Bonifacio isn't that large (only 3,200 inhabitants), it's steeped in history, and natural beauty perched precariously on a limestone promontory. Hiking to the overlook provides sweeping views of the town's marina and the clear aqua colored waters of the Tyrrhenian Sea. Be sure to explore the narrow streets and alleyways of the restored old town center and the 9th-century fortified walls of the citadel. For those wanting a sensational hike, try walking the 189 steps of the Escalier du Roy d'Aragon (The King of Aragon's Stairway), which was hand dug in 1420 to gain access to the fresh waters of Saint-Barthelémy well.





ET CORSICA

With the favorable spring weather and clear skies, we could easily spot the neighboring Italian island of Sardinia, beckoning us to continue our southerly journey across the Mediterranean. Crossing the 12 km (7.5 miles) of seaway between the two islands was as simple as scheduling, and paying for, the Ichnusa Lines ferry which makes daily crossings. With the excitement of new discovery, we eagerly rode onto the boarding dock and secured our mules for the next destination – More adventure awaits...

About viajarMOTO

Travis and Chantil Gill started full-time motorcycle overlanding on their pair of BMW G650GSs in March of 2020. They've explored 44 countries throughout North America, Europe, and north Africa, and hope to someday circumnavigate this "pale blue dot" they call home. Follow their journey at www.viajarMOTO.com.



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