

## CORSICA: HIKING THE GR20

*August 22 – September 1*

This is perhaps the **best hiking trip** I have ever taken. The scenery is spectacular and rather varied given the small geographical area, yet Corsica is not so far from Paris and offers conveniences to those who live in Paris, such as no language problems, no roaming charges on your cell phone, cheap shipping back to Paris if you don't want to carry everything with you when you start your hike. On top of that, the **food in Corsica is fresh and delicious** (especially the seafood) and you have **wonderful beaches** to relax at after your hike. See my "**Le Marche, Italy & Corsica**" itinerary posted under "Longer Trip Itineraries" for the start of this trip. I have outlined below only the hiking portion of the trip as it can easily be done on its own.

**Some background on the GR20:** it's part of the French *grande randonnée* system of long distance trails, and widely considered to be the hardest of the trails in France and possibly in Europe. It runs about 180km from southeast (Conca, near Portovecchio) to northwest (Calenzana, near Calvi), or vice versa, depending on your starting point. Despite the difficulty, no technical climbing ability or gear is needed (do see, however, my May 19, 2011 post on "**How Do I Pack for a Hiking Trip?**"). The full trail is generally hiked in **15 days**, though many hikers (I included) divide the hike into two trips: the **9 days** of the northern trail and the **6 days** of the southern trail. Below is my itinerary from the 9 northern days. We're hiking the southern 6 stages this summer, so stay tuned for a sequel! The northern section is considered to be harder with more spectacular scenery. The southern part is (I'm told!) not as difficult but the scenery is not quite as spectacular and the daily distances are generally longer. It's worth spending some time looking at the routes and where else in Corsica you'd like to visit before or after the hike, then deciding whether to hike from north to south (the most popular route, and a route that eases you in a bit more if starting in Conca) or south to north (what we did, to avoid the crowds). See this very helpful website for more details: <http://corsica.forhikers.com/gr20>. I also recommend purchasing a **detailed map** before you go or in one of the larger cities in Corsica. I also enjoyed reading the book *Honorable Bandit: A Walk across Corsica* by Brian Bouldrey. It's not the best book ever written but it gives you a sense of what you're getting yourself into!

### **TIMES AND ASCENTS (again, just the northern 9 days)**

	<b>From - To</b>	<b>Highest Point</b>	<b>Descent</b>	<b>Ascent</b>	<b>Time</b>
1	Vizzavona (920 m) to <b>Refuge de l'Onda</b> (1430 m)	2141 m	711 m	1221 m	7h00
2	Refuge de l'Onda (1430 m) to Refuge de <b>Pietra Piana</b> (1842 m)	1842 m	490 m	902 m	5h15
3	Refuge de Pietra Piana (1842 m) to <b>Refuge de Manganu</b> (1601 m)	2225 m	830 m	589 m	6h00
4	Refuge de Manganu (1601 m) to <b>Refuge de Ciottulu di i Mori</b> (1991 m)	1991 m	643 m	1033 m	8h30
5	Refuge de Ciottulu di i Mori (1991 m) to <b>Refuge de Tighjettu</b> (1683 m)	1991 m	607 m	78 m	6h30
6	Refuge de Tighjettu (1683 m) to <b>Refuge d'Asco Stagnu</b> (1422 m)	2183 m	999 m	738 m	6h00
7	Refuge d'Asco Stagnu (1422 m) to <b>Refuge de Carrozzu</b> (1270 m)	2010 m	790 m	638 m	5h30
8	Refuge de Carrozzu (1270 m) to <b>Refuge d'Ortu di u Piobbu</b> (1520 m)	2010 m	790 m	638 m	6h30
9	Refuge d'Ortu di u Piobbu (1520 m) to <b>Calenzana</b> (275 m)	1550 m	1295 m	50 m	5h00

**A note about times:** we hiked the trail segments in about 2/3 the times listed above but we hiked quite fast and didn't stop much at all. In part we hiked more quickly than the others on the trail at the same time because we packed much lighter. We didn't carry tents or food (more than a couple granola bars) or anything non-essential. We had packs that were larger than daypacks but not full hiking backpacks. If you are a fairly strong hiker but stop more often to rest or for photos, etc. or certainly if you are carrying a full pack, these times are probably fairly

accurate. Certainly others hiked much slower than these times too. The good news is you have plenty of daylight time to hike at even half the average pace. The bad news is that in August there are oftentimes late afternoon thundershowers, so you are best off getting into the next shelter by mid-afternoon. Most people were up and out by 6:30am or so... we were the slackers who hit the trail more like 7:30am most days....

***A note on reserving the refuges (shelters):*** This is the official website for the park, and the site by which you reserve/pay for the refuges: <http://www.parc-corse.org/vad/>. You must reserve in advance (and I'd recommend reserving well in advance just in case, because there are no alternative accommodations aside from your own tent). The site is a bit confusing: for one thing, **it will not work with older (i.e. most) versions of internet explorer** (try Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox, Opéra or Internet Explorer 9.0 instead—in my experience, Firefox works most reliably for this site). Secondly, you must put the nights in the shelters in your basket, then you must go to another page to pay within about 10 or 15 minutes, or you will have to start the process over. Take your time to figure out which nights you are staying where and then dedicate a good 30 minutes to the reservation process!

Date	To	Time	Hotel	Cost	Comments
Sat, Aug 22	Vizzavona	--	<p><a href="#">Hotel Monte d'Oro</a> (tel. 0495472106, 0495472344) in the village of Foce</p> <p>No Res. No.</p> <p>Hotel Monte d'Oro looks as though it hasn't been renovated since 1930. Yet it's cozy and friendly with a decent restaurant, and there isn't much choice in Vizzavona anyways. Don't expect anyone to but up and about if you try to pay for the room and grab breakfast in the morning before hitting the trail early. Best to buy food supplies and water (or fill from the tap) the day before and pay for the room the day before as well.</p>	<p>No deposit, total price €98 (Note, this is the price for 3 people as originally a 3rd friend was joining just for this night. A double would be a bit cheaper.)</p>	<p>Train to Vizzavona 16h55-18:08</p> <p>The night before beginning the hike, my friend flew into Ajaccio and we took a later afternoon train to Vizzavona, the "mid-point" (more or less) of the 15-day hike or the start of our 9-day hike.</p>

Sun, Aug 23	Refuge de l'Onda	6h15-7h	Reservation No. 95543714	€20 paid by Abby (€10 per person)	All of the shelters offer food so you really don't need to bring your own, unless you have specific snack foods you prefer or want to bring some ice tea or lemonade mix or something to flavor the water once in a while. Food is expensive relative to the price of a bed (around €20 for dinner, €10 for lunch and €7 or so for breakfast), but you can also purchase food (pasta, cans of tunafish, etc.) to cook yourself in the refuge kitchens if you want to save some money. Drinks are available but cost extra. The tricky part is that you need to pay for everything in cash and there are no ATMs, so you need to decide in advance how much you plan to spend. We decided we'd eat most meals at the refuges but not drink any alcohol the whole time. So to be safe we budgeted about €40/day or €360 for the 9-day trek—let's say €400. In the end, we ate all dinners at the shelters, about 2/3 of our lunches and very few breakfasts—we just bought snacks and for breakfast. We probably indulged on a coca cola a day...all in all we spent just about all of our budgeted money.
Mon, Aug 24	Refuge de Pietra Piana	5h15	Reservation No. 58168768	€20 paid by Abby	
Tues, Aug 25	Refuge de Manganu	6h-6h45 + 4h30 up Monte Ritondu and back to Pietra Piana	Reservation No. 14676798	€20 paid by Abby	We had grand plans to climb a few mountains on the side, and while we did often drop our bags at the refuges and set out on a shorter hike in the afternoons, we didn't actually do any of the additional peaks we had planned on. Usually just finding a rock in the sun and reading or napping was more appealing!
Wed, Aug 26	Refuge de Ciottulu di I Mori	8h30	Reservation No. 72284102	€20 paid by Abby	This is the one long day of the northern 9 days. But there is a shop/restaurant about half-way along to eat at and to restock on supplies (including chocolate).
Thurs, Aug 27	Refuge de Tighiettu	3h30 + 3h to Paglia Orba and back to Ciottulu di I Mori	Reservation No. 68000257	€20 paid by Abby	

Fri, Aug 28	Refuge de d'Asco Stagnu/Hôtel le Chalet Haut	5h30-6h	Hôtel le Chalet Haut Asco (tel.: 04 95 47 81 08, fax: 04 95 47 11 20)  http://www.hotel-lechalet-asco.com/  1 July : "Je vous confirme la réservation du 28/08, nous allons débiter 30 euros sur votre carte de crédit."	€30 deposit paid by Abby. Total price: €110	This is the one night in this half of the trek where a hotel is an option and we gladly indulged. The hotel is nothing special at all but the restaurant was quite good and the hotel was worth it just for then hot shower and electricity to recharge our phones and camera batteries (albeit we had to recharge at reception—there were no plugs in the rooms). Be sure to bring extra camera batteries as there is really nowhere for several days on end to recharge.
Sat, Aug 29	Refuge de Carozzu	5h30 (+ 7h to Monte Cinto and back to Asco!)	Reservation No. 64802545	€20 paid by Abby	
Sun, Aug 30	Refuge d'Ortu di u Piobbu	6h30	Reservation No. 60421882	€20 paid by Abby	
Mon, Aug 31	Calenzana	5h + 2h30 to Monte Corona & back to Ortu di u Piobbu	Hotel A Flatta, 20214 CALENZANA Tél : 04 95 62 80 38  No reservation no.	40% paid by Abby. Total price: €123	Hotel A Flatta is a charming hotel with a beautiful pool and absolutely amazing restaurant in a serene spot outside of Calenzana. We enjoyed just relaxing and making use of running water and of course, the dining. However, you may be ready to get back to civilization at this stage. You can take a bus to Calvi from Calenzana if you time it right, or a taxi at about €35-40 (20-30 minutes).
Tues, Sept 1	Calvi to Nice	--	Palais De La Mediterranee 15 Promenade Des Anglais, Boite Postale 1655 Cedex 1, Nice 06000 France  I'm a big fan of <b>La Voglia</b> , 2 Rue Saint François de Paule , 06300 Nice, Tél : 04 93 80 99 16 for hearty Italian food when in Nice.	Abby paid ferry (€81 total)  €233 hotel— Abby paid (no penalty for cancellations before noon Aug 28)	Calenzana to Calvi taxi—€35-40 Calvi to Nice (ferry) 15h-20h30  Your Direct Ferries Reference Number is DFP2860942  Your Corsica Sardinia Ferries Reference Number is 2963706  We took a taxi to Calvi in the mid-morning then spent some time walking around Calvi and having lunch before our ferry to Nice.  I decided to splurge on the hotel in Nice to have a relaxing day at the pool and pamper myself a bit. Unfortunately I ended up spending the day in the business center....