

The crew in action in La Tonnara.

CORSICA

Words & Photos Eric de Cruz / Yellowflag / Nikon.

Only a few hours from mainland France by boat, the Mediterranean island of Corsica lives up to its name as the “Isle of Beauty”. It offers a range of accommodation to suit all tastes and budgets, from public campsites to 5 star hotels and perfect conditions for slalom and freeride windsurfing. This year, PWA slalom sailor **Benjamin ‘Babou’ Augé** took 3 young sailors, **Julien Mangel** (15), **Antoine Tavan** (14) and **Esteban de Cruz** (13) on a trip to the island to explore its southern shores and offer them some coaching at the same time. **Eric de Cruz** tells us more.

Corsica offers an intoxicating mix of sea and mountains, busy towns and isolated countryside. The good news for windsurfers is that it is also windy and thermal winds make it possible to sail on an almost daily basis with winds ranging from 15 to 25 knots in the main season. Even better is that Corsica isn’t some far flung paradise, it is easily accessible, with daily ferries from mainland France and an airport close to all the good spots on the south of the island. Here’s a guide to some of its main spots.



ISLE OF BEAUTY

Synchronised foil gybes in Sant'Amanza.



LA TONNARA

La Tonnara on the SW coast is one of the windiest spots in France in summer. It is easy to get to and offers plenty of space to park your car and rig your sails and you can eat on-site at one of the two ideally situated beach restaurants.

The spot is at the mouth of a large bay, renowned for its big waves during strong winter Mistral winds, but it's also a great slalom/freeride spot in summer depending on wind conditions and suitable for intermediate and above; beginners should stick to the shelter of the cove. A thermal wind often kicks in by mid-afternoon giving you great blasting sessions until sunset. It also works with east winds, but watch out as these are offshore.

You can also launch from la Punta, just across the bay from la Tonnara. To get there, go past the kitesurf learning area, head towards Pianotolli and you will find a recently resurfaced path on your left (look out for a small ruined house), it will take you straight to a beach you can sail from. The wind blows in a few knots stronger here, but it's not recommended for foils due to the shallow, rocky waters. But foiling can be done at la Tonnara. After sailing out of the channel, you can sail effortlessly within the bay and the more motivated may even want to ride upwind to Figari bay.

In peak season, beware of swimmers and kitesurfers. The beach is small and can get overcrowded too.

PIANTARELLA

Bonifacio, a town on the southern tip of the island, is one of the windiest spots in Europe, with over 190 days of force 4 or more. Just outside the town is the spot of Piantarella, to get there drive through Bonifacio and turn right at the surf shop. The spot has a real Caribbean atmosphere with white sand, a lagoon and crystal clear water! Your feet can touch the bottom of a large part of the lagoon, which makes it possible to reach the Lavezzi islands. Piantarella is suitable for everyone, from beginners to experts, who can leave the lagoon to sail further out. East winds are clean but a west/northwest wind is gusty with holes.

You can launch from both sides of the bay and rent windsurfing equipment from the Bonifacio windsurf shop. Be careful of the many boats which anchor in the bay in August. Foil use is possible but restricted due to shallow water in the middle of the lagoon. It's best to get to Piantarella early if you want a parking spot. You can eat on-site at Momo's beach bar, at the entry of Piantarella beach

SANT'AMANZA

On the east coast of the island, from Bonifacio, continue your journey towards Porto Vecchio and follow the signs for Sant'Amanza. This spot is awesome with an east wind and depending on the wind strength you can go slalom, freeride or wave sailing, just watch out for rocks. With good parking facilities, the spot is easily accessible and has few visitors, even in summer. It's very safe with an east wind and in a west wind the spot works well also, with a venturi effect in the middle of the bay, giving completely flat conditions for good blasting. If you're lucky, you may even catch a glimpse of the dolphins that come into the bay every day to feed!

EXPLORE

There are many other amazing spots on the island. Tacking upwind in the crystal clear waters around Palombaggia, near Porto-Vechhio on the east coast, is a memory that will stay with you forever.

It's best to visit off season as May/June and September/October will allow you to make the most of the conditions without the hassle of tourist beach rules and regulations.

“ Corsica offers an intoxicating mix of sea and mountains.”

Benjamin 'Babou' Augé jumps for joy in Piantarella!



Gybe training at Sant'Amanza.



Esteban de Cruz loving life in Piantarella!



Julien Mangel (15), Esteban de Cruz (13), Antoine Tavan (14) and Benjamin 'Babou' Augé.



I asked the four riders about their highlights of the trip.

BENJAMIN 'BABOU' AUGÉ

Corsica is a magical place for freeride sessions and it was great to be there with a group of kids, helping them with their technique. Sharing and passing on knowledge was a definite highlight of the trip. It was great to sail without the pressure of PWA slalom racing. What I remember most of all though is the outstanding beauty of southern Corsica with three spots within a 10 km radius covering all wind directions. A must see is the amazing turquoise water of Piantarella!

JULIEN MANGEL

My best memory was the first sail with my mates at la Tonarra after an 8 hour ferry crossing and a 2 hour drive, it's a really great windsurfing spot. Another highlight was freeriding in the warm and turquoise waters of Piantarella, so good!

ESTEBAN DE CRUZ

My favourite moment of the trip was the very first session at La Tonnara, we arrived at 8 p.m. and sailed until sunset. You know it's going to be an epic trip when it starts like that!

“Corsica is a magical place for freeride sessions.”

ANTOINE TAVAN

So many fantastic memories. I loved sailing in 20 knot west winds in Piantarella with a 5.6 Sailloft Ultimate race sail at full speed against my mates Este and Juju; Babou was way ahead of us in 'rocket' mode.

WEATHER

May / June and September / October are the best months of the year for good wind conditions. Water temperatures are around 25°C so only board shorts / lycra or summer wetsuits are required.

In July and August, recommended sails for a 75 kg sailor would be 7.8 to 5.6. In May, June, September and October, suitable sizes would be 4.0 to 7.0, covering slalom and waves. In the event of a strong Mistral wind, you can often find mast high waves in La Tonnara.

During our trip we used the following gear:
 Patrik Slalom boards - 140, 110, 95 and 92 litres with fins from 30 to 43 cm,
 Sailloft Mission and Ultimate Sails - 7.1, 6.3, 5.6 and 5.0, and for our smallest rider (32 kg) Sailloft Cross - 4.7 and 4.0.



Fun hiking in Corsica for the crew.

WHERE TO STAY

A wide range of accommodation is available. Our favourite campsite was La Trinité, Route de Bonifacio, close to all the spots. It features a great wood-fired grill restaurant which is open every night. There's also lots of Hotels and Airbnb options.

WHERE TO EAT

The food is really good in Corsica and there's lots of traditional fare on offer. All year-round you can find wild boar stew, a local favourite, served in all the good restaurants. At La Tonnara, I recommend Chez Marco, a fine seafood restaurant serving the day's catch. Other recommendations include: the 'Le Relai' restaurant in the village of Sotta near Figari, Restaurant Auberge du Sanglier in Zonca and Restaurant Le V.O. (Version Originale), at Porto Vecchio. There's also lots of good restaurants to choose from in Bonifacio.

WHERE TO GO OUT

Party-goers should head to Bonifacio and especially Porto Vecchio. Check out the popular Le Patio bar and Le Via Notte (club) in Porto Vecchio. Other places worth a look are Le Moby Dick in Santa Giulia (bar-restaurant), Le Shanka in Porto Vecchio (bar-restaurant), Le B52 (bar) in Bonifacio and Le Clint (bar-club) in Porto Vecchio.

NO WIND OPTIONS

Corsica is famous for hiking due to the GR 20, a long distance trail that traverses Corsica diagonally from north to south. Corsica is full of rivers with crystal clear and cool waters towards Porto Vecchio. Bavella offers nice diving opportunities at the start of the hike as the water there is deep. Those who seek peace and quiet can climb further up but ask about water depth before leaving and diving in as it varies depending on the season.

Other options include:

Karting in Figari (from 25 euros for 10 minutes), Bonifacio Golf course, hiking in the Cagna mountains, natural pools of Cavu, tree walking at l'Ospédale and diving and snorkelling.

SHOPS / RENTALS

'Tam Tam' surf shop in Bonifacio offers sales / rentals for windsurf, kitesurf, surf, wakeboard, kayak and bikes as well as weather forecast and spot info. direct from the shop. www.tam-tam.fr, infos@tam-tam.fr

You can also rent windsurfing gear from Bonifacio Windsurf in Piantarella who have the full RRD (windsurf and foil) range available. The centre is on the right hand side as you drive in right after restaurant 'Chez Momo'. www.bonifacio-windsurf.com, info@bonifacio-windsurf.com

You can also rent windsurfing equipment at La Tonnara but with a limited range of gear available.

GET THERE

Corsica has three airports, Figari, Bastia and Ajaccio and is well served with flights from the UK. Figari airport is ideally situated as it is only 15 minutes from Bonifacio and all the best spots. To get to the south of the island from Bastia or Ajaccio is a 2 to 2 ½ hour drive. From Bastia, it's an easy drive straight down the east coast to Porto Vecchio. From Ajaccio, the roads are winding but offer amazing views, it is my favourite route!

Alternatively ferries run from Marseille, Toulon or Nice and there are 3 main companies: Corsica Ferries, CorsicaLinea and La Méridionale. Planning your trip two months ahead will allow you to get the cheapest rates.



Perfect freeride waters in Piantarella