

GUIDE TO THE HISTORY OF CORSICA

Geography · History · Demography · Diaspora
Language · Politics · Economy · Nature · Cuisine

A complete, sourced synthesis, from the Greeks of Alalia to the present day

**VERIFIED, UPDATED AND SOURCED EDITION — Data current as of 21 June
2026**

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Introduction: an island, a crossroads, a singularity

Corsica is an island in the western Mediterranean of about 8,680 square kilometres, making it the fourth-largest Mediterranean island after Sicily, Sardinia and Cyprus. Lying around a hundred kilometres from mainland France but only about a dozen kilometres from Sardinia, from which it is separated by the Strait of Bonifacio, it is geographically closer to peninsular and insular Italy than to France. This crossroads position, at the centre of the western Mediterranean basin, is the key to its entire history: in turn Greek, Etruscan, Carthaginian, Roman, Pisan, Genoese, briefly independent and then French, Corsica has seen nearly every Mediterranean power pass through and settle there.

The island is above all a mountain in the sea. With an average altitude of about 568 metres, it is the highest of the western Mediterranean islands¹. The rugged relief peaks at Monte Cinto, 2,706 metres, and counts more than 120 summits above 2,000 metres. A ridge line running northwest to southeast traditionally divides the island into two: the “Hither Side of the Mountains” (Cismonte), to the northeast, more open and more populated, and the “Further Side” (Pumonti), to the southwest. This mountain geography, which isolates the valleys from one another, shaped a society long fragmented into micro-regions, an economy long turned inward and toward pastoralism, and a political history marked by the difficulty outside powers faced in durably controlling the interior.

Understanding contemporary Corsica — its landscapes, its language, its nationalist movement, its autonomy debates, its economic difficulties, its diaspora and its culture — means starting from this geographical bedrock and following the long thread of its history. To set the present scale at once: on 1 January 2026 the island had about 365,600 inhabitants², just over half a per cent of France's population. This guide follows a path in twelve parts, from physical geography to cuisine, by way of nature, history, demography and its great fact — emigration —, language, political life and the economy.

Corsica in a few figures

Area	≈ 8,680 km ² (4th-largest Mediterranean island)
Population (1 Jan 2026)	≈ 365,600 inhabitants
Demographic growth	≈ +1.0% a year (the highest in metropolitan France)
Fertility (2025)	1.12 children per woman (the lowest in France)
Highest point	Monte Cinto, 2,706 m (>120 summits over 2,000 m)
Watercourses	≈ 1,380 km, of which ≈ 90% unpolluted
GDP (2023)	≈ €10.7bn; ≈ €30,300/inhab. (the lowest in metropolitan France)
Tourism	≈ €3.5bn, i.e. ≈ 39% of regional GDP
Poverty rate	18.1% (the poorest region in metropolitan France)
Active Corsican speakers	≈ 39% of adults (2023 survey)
Status	Collectivity of Corsica (since 2018); autonomy bill under way

Detailed sources in the relevant parts and in the bibliography (appendix 3). Data current as of 21 June 2026.

Notes and sources for this part

1. Wikipedia, “Géographie de la Corse” (accessed 2026): average altitude of 568 m, the highest of the western Mediterranean islands; area 8,680 km², 180 km north to south, 82 km wide.
2. INSEE, “Une fécondité historiquement basse mais une population toujours en hausse,” Insee Analyses Corse no. 67, April 2026: population estimated at 365,636 on 1 January 2026.

PART ONE

Geography: how Corsica is organised · § 1 to 9

1. A mountain in the sea: the great divide

All of Corsican geography flows from a simple fact: it is an emerged mountain massif. The island measures about 180 kilometres north to south and 82 kilometres at its widest. A powerful backbone, the axial chain, crosses it diagonally from northwest to southeast and commands everything else: it separates the waters, orients the valleys, distributes the climates and long compartmentalised the people.

This backbone divides the island into two great wholes, according to an old and still-living distinction. The **Hither Side of the Mountains** (in Corsican *Cismonte*), to the northeast, is drained by the broad valleys of the Golo and the Tavignano and holds the highest summits, including Monte Cinto (2,706 m); it coincides almost exactly with the Haute-Corse department. The **Further Side** (*Pumonti*), to the southwest, is essentially formed of many narrow, parallel valleys running west to east, and peaks at the Maniccia (2,496 m); it coincides almost exactly with Corse-du-Sud³. This duality is not merely administrative: it overlaps differences of relief, vegetation, climate and tradition.

2. Schistous Corsica, granite Corsica: two geological islands

Onto the division by the ridge is superimposed a fundamental geological one. The northeastern quarter of the island — Cap Corse, the Nebbio, the Castagniccia and the Casinca — forms **schistous Corsica** (“alpine”): dark rocks, lustrous schists, gentler rounded relief, soils suited to the chestnut grove. All the rest — the west and south of the Cismonte and the whole of the Pumonti — forms **granite Corsica** (“hercynian”): pale granites, high summits, sharp ridges, needles, rocky chaos like the Calanche of Piana or the needles of Bavella⁴. This opposition between schist and granite explains much of the contrasts in landscape, soil and even traditional building from one micro-region to the next.

3. The massifs and the summits

The axial chain is organised into several great massifs, from north to south. The **Cinto** massif, to the northwest, bears the island's highest point (Monte Cinto, 2,706 m) and dominates the high Niolu valley. The **Rotondo** massif, in the centre, peaks at Monte Rotondo (2,622 m) above Corte, at the head of the Restonica valley; it is the island's water tower. Further south, between the Vizzavona and Verde passes, the **Renoso** massif (Monte Renoso, 2,352 m); then, from the Verde pass to the heights of the Freto, the **Incudine**-Bavella massif, lower but spectacular with its needles. Away from the backbone, **Cap Corse** aligns its own crests, dominated by Monte Stello (1,306 m) and the Cima di e Follicie (1,324 m).

Many high-altitude lakes (Melu, Capitellu, Nino, Creno, Bastani...) and the trough shape of some valleys testify to a glacial past. These lakes, frozen much of the year, feed the main watercourses and shelter prized trout.

4. Water everywhere: a “paradise of running water”

Contrary to the image of a dry island, Corsica is exceptionally rich in water: it has nearly 1,380 kilometres of watercourses, of which about 90% are reputed free of all pollution⁵. The watercourses nearly all rise in the heart of the axial chain and rush to the sea according to their slope. Because of the steep gradients, they are more torrents than rivers in the strict sense, with highly contrasting regimes by season. The eastern face is bathed by the Tyrrhenian Sea, the north by the Ligurian Sea and the western face by the Mediterranean proper.

5. The main rivers

Two great rivers dominate, both in the north of the island. The **Golo** (Golu in Corsican), the longest, rises in the Niolu, below the Cinto massif, crosses the spectacular Scala di Santa Regina and then the eastern plain, and reaches the Tyrrhenian Sea south of Bastia; it gave its name to the former Golo department, now Haute-Corse. The **Tavignano** (Tavignanu), second in length at about 89 kilometres, rises at the outlet of Lake Nino at 1,743 metres, runs east, crosses Corte where it receives the Restonica, then reaches the sea near Aléria⁶.

On the **western slope**, several coastal rivers flow into the western gulfs: from north to south, the Ostriconi, the Fango, the Porto, the **Liamone** (which gave its name to the former Corse-du-Sud department), the **Gravona** and the Prunelli (flowing into the Gulf of Ajaccio), the **Taravo**, the **Rizzanese** and the Ortolo further south. On the **eastern slope**, besides the Golo and the Tavignano, flow the Bravona, the Fium'Alto, the Fiumorbo and the Travo⁷. The Gravona matters on another count: its valley, used by the road and railway linking Ajaccio to Bastia via the Vizzavona pass, is one of the great routes of penetration into the interior.

6. The great valleys

The interior is organised into valleys, each a little homeland. The **Restonica valley**, above Corte, follows the river for some twenty kilometres up to the Grotelle sheepfolds (1,370 m), giving access to the great glacial lakes of Melu (1,711 m) and Capitellu (1,930 m); classified a “Grand Site,” it is one of the island's most visited natural attractions⁸. Beside it, the **Tavignano valley**, wild and accessible only on foot from Corte by an old mule track, is reputed one of the most beautiful mountain valleys of Corsica.

Further northwest, the **Niolu valley** (around Calacuccia) is a high mountain valley from which the Golo springs; it is reached from the Gulf of Porto by the Vergio pass (1,477 m, the island's highest road pass) or from Corte by the Scala di Santa Regina⁹. The **Asco valley**, narrow and mineral, leads to the foot of the Cinto. The **Fango valley**, listed as a

UNESCO biosphere reserve as early as 1977, is famous for its limpid waters and old oak woods. The **upper Gravona valley**, halfway between Ajaccio and Corte, offers forests and waterfalls. To the south, the plain and valleys of the Taravo and the Rizzanese, and the Cuscionu (Coscione) plateau, a vast high-altitude pasture dotted with “pozzines” (peaty lawns).

Physical map of Corsica



Physical map of Corsica: altitude (relief scale on the left), main cities, rivers, valleys, massifs, passes and gulfs. Source: Wikimedia Commons, "Corsica-geographic map-en.svg," Eric Gaba (Sting) and Domenico-de-ga, CC BY-SA 4.0.

7. Corte, the central core

At the meeting point of the two great northern rivers and their valleys stands **Corte** (Corti), the true geographic and symbolic heart of the island. The town was born of a remarkable defensive site: a rocky spur — the “eagle's nest” — crowned by a citadel, at the confluence of the Restonica and the Tavignano. This central position, sheltered from the raid-exposed coasts, explains its historical role: **Pasquale Paoli made it the capital of independent Corsica and founded its university there in 1765**. The Tavignano valley, together with that of the Restonica and the middle Golo valley, forms the “Corte furrow” (sillon cortenais)¹⁰, the inner corridor around which the whole centre of the island is organised.

Corte is not only a knot of valleys: it is the identity centre of inland Corsica. A university town (the Università di Corsica Pasquale Paoli reopened there in 1981), a seat of Paolist memory, a starting point for the highest massifs, it embodies the mountainous, “deep” Corsica, as opposed to the great coastal cities of Ajaccio and Bastia.

8. Gulfs, capes and coasts

The ridges of the backbone plunge into the sea and carve out, especially in the west, a succession of spectacular gulfs: from north to south, the gulfs of Saint-Florent, Calvi, Galéria, Porto (dominated by the Calanche of Piana and the Scandola reserve, both UNESCO World Heritage), Sagone, Ajaccio, Valinco and, at the far south, the gulfs of Santa Manza and Porto-Vecchio. **Cap Corse**, a long peninsula pointing north, is a world apart, stretched between crests and perched villages; it is sometimes called “the island within the island.” The **eastern coast**, by contrast, is straight and low: this is the great plain, fringed with coastal lagoons (Biguglia, the largest, Diana, Urbino), long unhealthy and drained in the 20th century.

9. The micro-regions

Traditional human geography divides the island into a mosaic of “countries” (paesi), corresponding to the old pievi. These are often grouped into about a dozen large micro-regions (the Regional Nature Park retains eleven “territories of life”), whose names remain in everyday use: **Cap Corse** and the **Nebbio** (around Saint-Florent) in the north; the **Balagne** (around Calvi and L'Île-Rousse), the “garden of Corsica” famed for its olive oil; the **Niolu** and the **Boziu** in the mountainous centre; the **Castagniccia**, land of the chestnut, and the **Casinca** on the schistous northeast slope; the **Eastern Plain** (around Aléria); the **Cortenais** at the island's heart; the **Taravo**, the **Sartenais** and the **Alta Rocca** in the south; **Ajaccio** and its region in the west; and finally the far south around Bonifacio and Porto-Vecchio. Each micro-region has its own personality — relief, accent, economy, traditions — inherited from centuries of relative isolation.

Map of the micro-regions of Corsica



The micro-regions of Corsica and their pievi: Cap Corse, Nebbio, Balagne, Castagniccia, Cortenais, Niolu, Deux-Sevi, Liamone, Gravona, Prunelli, Taravo, Alta Rocca, Fiumorbo, eastern plain... The large italic names denote the micro-regions, the smaller names the former pievi. Labels in French. Source: Wikimedia Commons, "Corse microregions.svg," Ricaudperetti, CC BY-SA 4.0.

9 bis. The climate and its tiers

Corsica has a Mediterranean climate on the coast — hot, dry summers and mild winters — that becomes mountain, even harsh, at altitude, with snow several months a year on the summits. This vertical stratification, from sea level to peaks above 2,700 metres, sets strikingly contrasting settings within a few dozen kilometres: sun-scorched beaches and maquis on one side, frozen lakes and snowfields on the other. Seasonal winds — the libecciu (southwest), the maestrale (northwest), the grecale (northeast) — set the pace of the weather and shape the vegetation. The western face, more exposed to weather fronts, is generally wetter than the eastern plain, while the Tavignano and Golo basins receive high rainfall that feeds the torrents. This generosity in water, combined with summer drought, explains both the richness of the flora and the high fire risk in summer.

9 ter. The main cities

Population and activity concentrate in two coastal conurbations. **Ajaccio** (Aiacciu), on the west coast, is the most populous city and the prefecture of Corse-du-Sud; an imperial city, Napoleon's birthplace, it hosts the seat of the Collectivity of Corsica and concentrates administration, services and tourism. **Bastia**, in the northeast, prefecture of Haute-Corse, is the great trading port and the gateway to Cap Corse and the eastern plain; long the Genoese capital, it keeps a rich old centre (the Terra Vecchia, the old port, the citadel). Around these two poles gravitate medium-sized towns of strong character: **Calvi** and **L'Île-Rousse** in the Balagne, **Porto-Vecchio** and **Bonifacio** in the far south (Bonifacio perched on its limestone cliffs), **Sartène**, “the most Corsican of Corsican towns” according to Mérimée, and **Corte**, capital of the interior (see § 7). The urban hierarchy remains modest: no commune reaches 75,000 inhabitants, and most of the territory is rural or mountainous.

Notes and sources for this part

3. Wikipedia, “Géographie de la Corse”: the Cismonte to the northeast is drained by the Golo and the Tavignano and bears Monte Cinto (2,706 m); the Pumonti to the southwest peaks at the Maniccia (2,496 m).
4. Wikipedia, “Géographie de la Corse”: a distinction is drawn between schistous Corsica (Nebbio, Cap Corse, Castagniccia, Casinca, to the northeast) and granite Corsica (west and south of the Cismonte, all of the Pumonti).
5. Wikipedia, “Géographie de la Corse”: Corsica has nearly 1,380 km of watercourses, of which about 90% are free of pollution; water resources far greater than the other Mediterranean islands.
6. Wikipedia, “Tavignano”: the Tavignano rises at the outlet of Lake Nino (1,743 m), runs 88.9 km and reaches the Tyrrhenian Sea near Aléria; main tributary the Restonica (joined at Corte), then the Vecchio and the Tagnone. In antiquity it bore the name Rhotanus.
7. “E fiume di Corsica” (Univ. Paris-3) and Wikipedia, “Liste des cours d'eau de Corse”: western slope (Mediterranean) — Ostriconi, Fango, Porto, Liamone, Gravona, Prunelli, Taravo, Rizzanese, Ortole; eastern slope (Tyrrhenian) — Golo, Bravona, Fium'Alto, Tavignano, Fiumorbo, Travo. The Liamone gave its name to Corse-du-Sud, the Golo to Haute-Corse.
8. Corsica Aventure, “The most beautiful valleys of Corsica”: the Restonica valley follows the river for 20 km from Corte to the Grotelle sheepfolds (1,370 m); lakes Melu (1,711 m) and Capitellu (1,930 m); access to the GR 20 toward Monte Rotondo (2,622 m).
9. Corsica Aventure, “The most beautiful valleys of Corsica”: the Niolu valley, a high valley where the Golo (Corsica's longest river) rises; villages of Calacuccia, Casamaccioli, Lozzi, Albertacce; reached via the Vergio pass (the island's highest road pass) or the Scala di Santa Regina.
10. Corsica Aventure, “The valley and gorges of the Tavignano”: “the Tavignano valley, together with that of the Restonica and the middle Golo valley, forms the Corte furrow.”

PART TWO

Nature: trees, plants and animals · § 10 to 13

10. The maquis and the vegetation tiers

Corsican vegetation is organised in tiers, from the coast to the summits. Around the Mediterranean fringe reigns the **maquis**, the dense, fragrant scrubland that covers much of the island: cistus, myrtle, mastic (lentisc), strawberry tree, tree heather, broom, immortelle. It is from this maquis that the phrase “taking to the maquis” comes. Corsican flora is estimated at about **2,000 plant species**, with a remarkable share of endemics¹¹. Above the maquis spread the oak tier (holm oak, cork oak) then the mid-mountain forest. Higher still, the subalpine tier (scented alder, lawns) precedes the high-altitude lawns and rocks.

11. The emblematic trees

Four trees sum up Corsica. The **Corsican pine** (*Pinus nigra laricio*), a magnificent conifer that can live nearly a thousand years, is the king-tree of the high-altitude forests (Aïtone, Valdu-Niellu, Vizzavona); its slender trunk once supplied ships' masts¹². The **chestnut**, planted and encouraged under Genoa, was the “bread tree” of the interior; it still structures the Castagniccia. The **cork oak**, mostly in the south, yields cork. The **olive**, concentrated in the Balagne and the south, gives a PDO olive oil. To these are added holm oaks, eucalyptus (imported to drain the plain), fig trees, citron trees and, in the riparian woods, alders and the plain's citrus orchards.

The endemic flora is estimated at about **280 species or subspecies (nearly 11% of the island's taxa), of which 140 exist only in Corsica**¹³. Among these endemics, often shared with Sardinia (“cyrno-sardinian” taxa): the Corsican peony, the Corsican saffron (crocus), the Corsican pink, the Corsican mint, and the immortelle (“dear to Napoleon”) whose aroma scents cheeses and perfumes. This richness justifies a strong network of protected areas: the Regional Nature Park of Corsica, several nature reserves, biosphere reserves, and protection of the coastline by the Coastal Conservatory.

12. The mouflon and the mammals

The emblematic animal of Corsica is the **mouflon** (a *muvara*, *Ovis gmelini musimon*), present on the island since the Neolithic — about 8,000 years. Pushed toward the high mountains by hunting and fire, it is now scarcely seen except in the steep massifs of the Cinto and Bavella, sometimes up to 2,500–2,600 metres; it comes back down in winter. **Hunting it has been banned since 1955** and the species, monitored by the Regional Nature Park, is thought to number only about 500 individuals¹⁴. Among the other mammals: the **wild boar** (*u cignale*), the island's king-game; the Corsican **free-ranging pig** (the “*nustrale*” pig, with a black snout), raised semi-wild in the chestnut and oak woods, the basis of the charcuterie; the Corsican red deer (reintroduced after its local extinction in 1969); the fox, the hare, and the Corsican donkey (*u sumeru*), long a working companion. Corsica's large wild fauna is on the whole modest: no big predators.

13. Birds, reptiles and amphibians

The Corsican sky is the domain of large raptors. The most spectacular is the **bearded vulture** (*altore*, the “bone-breaker”), an immense scavenging vulture with a wingspan approaching 2.60 metres, now rare and closely monitored; alongside it, the **golden eagle** rules the high summits, while the **red kite** soars above the valleys and the **osprey** and the **Audouin's gull** frequent the coasts (the latter nesting in the Finocchiarola reserve, at Cap Corse)¹⁵.

The emblematic bird remains the **Corsican nuthatch** (*Sitta whiteheadi*, a *pichjarina*): **the only bird endemic to France**, a small black-capped passerine that lives only in the old Corsican-pine forests of Corsica (and, locally, Sardinia), where it hollows its nest in dead trees¹⁶. As for reptiles and amphibians, several species are *cyrno-sardinian* endemics: Bedriaga's rock lizard, the Corsican brook newt and the Corsican fire salamander (always near water), as well as the Corsican painted frog (“the only toad of Corsica”). Hermann's tortoise, terrestrial and threatened, survives mainly in the south (plain and *maquis*), benefiting from protection programmes.

13 bis. The marine environment and the coastline

Corsican nature does not stop at the shore. The waters around the island shelter **Posidonia** seagrass meadows (an essential marine plant, a true “lung” and nursery of the Mediterranean), rocky bottoms rich in red coral, and an emblematic fauna: dusky grouper, dolphins, and several protected species. The **Scandola nature reserve** (Gulf of Porto, UNESCO-listed) and the **nature reserve of the Bouches de Bonifacio**, one of the largest in France, protect these environments. The coastline itself, an alternation of rocky coasts, deep gulfs, beaches and lagoons (Biguglia, Diana, Urbino), is a fragile space, exposed to tourist and urban pressure; the Coastal Conservatory has preserved entire stretches of it. This land-sea interface, where mouflons, raptors and tortoises sometimes come down, makes Corsica a condensed sample of Mediterranean environments, from high mountain to seabed.

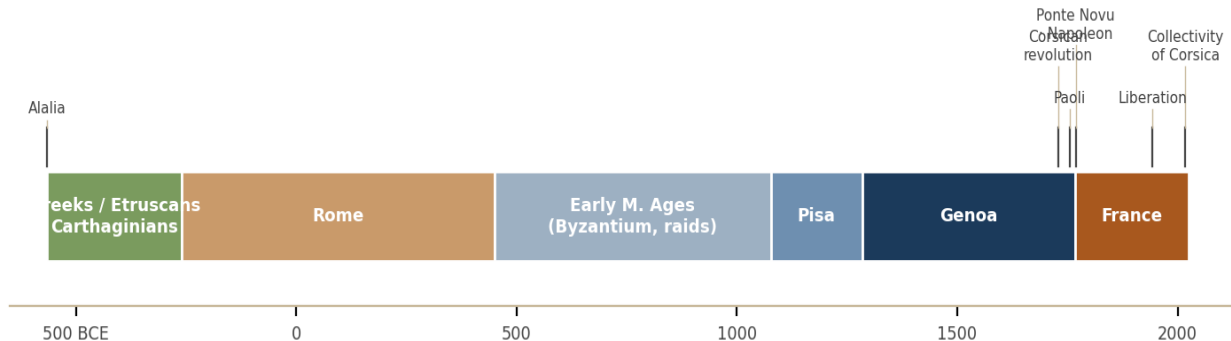
Notes and sources for this part

11. Rencontres-sauvages.com, “Discovering Corsican fauna and flora”: about 2,000 plant species in Corsica, of which nearly a hundred endemic; maquis and forest form the bulk of the plant cover.
12. Corsicatours, “Nature in Corsica: fauna and flora”: the Corsican (laricio) pine, an emblematic Corsican tree, can live 1,000 years; the forests of Aitone and Valdu-Niellu are the best known.
13. Wikipedia, “Endémisme en Corse”: endemic flora estimated at about 280 species or subspecies ($\approx 11\%$ of taxa), of which 140 exist only in Corsica; a figure liable to vary with taxonomic revisions.
14. Rencontres-sauvages.com and VivaCorsica, “Protected fauna”: the Corsican mouflon (a muvra) has lived in Corsica for $\approx 8,000$ years; hunting banned since 1955; population estimated at about 500 individuals, monitored by the Regional Nature Park of Corsica.
15. VivaCorsica, “Protected fauna” and Olmi-Cappella, “Fauna and flora”: bearded vulture (altore, wingspan ≈ 2.65 m), golden eagle, red kite, osprey; Audouin's gull nesting in the Finocchiarola reserve at Cap Corse.
16. Olmi-Cappella and gr20-infos.com: the Corsican nuthatch (*Sitta whiteheadi*, a pichjarina) is the only bird endemic to France; it lives almost exclusively in old Corsican-pine forests. Several sources also report it in Sardinia.

PART THREE

History — from prehistory to 1945 · § 14 to 25

The great periods of Corsican history



The great periods of Corsican history, from the Greeks of Alalia to the union with France and the Collectivity of Corsica.

14. Prehistory and the original settlement

Corsica has been inhabited for a very long time. Traces of human occupation go back to the Mesolithic, around the 9th millennium BCE; the “Lady of Bonifacio,” a burial dated to about 8,000 BCE, is among the oldest evidence of human presence on the island. The Neolithic and then the Bronze Age saw a remarkable megalithic civilisation develop (statue-menhirs, alignments), of which the Filitosa site, in the southwest, is the most famous example. This period also saw the appearance of a so-called “Torrean” culture, named after the “torre,” circular stone structures whose function is still debated.

15. The Greeks: the founding of Alalia (c. 565 BCE)

Corsica enters written history with the Greeks. Around 565 BCE, Phocaeen colonists (from Phocaea, an Asia Minor city that also founded Marseille) established on the east coast the colony of Alalia, on the site of present-day Aléria. This founding is known from Herodotus. Around 540 BCE the Battle of Alalia took place offshore, pitting the Phocaeans against an Etruscan-Carthaginian coalition. According to Herodotus, the Phocaeans won a victory so costly — a “Cadmean victory” — that they ultimately had to abandon the island. It was also the Greeks who are said to have introduced the vine to Corsica.

16. Roman Corsica (259 BCE - 5th century CE)

The Roman conquest began during the First Punic War: in 259 BCE the consul Lucius Cornelius Scipio seized Aléria. The island's full submission, however, was slow, the mountain dwellers of the interior resisting for decades. Corsica was administratively linked to Sardinia. Under the Empire, Aléria became a prosperous colony (forum, baths, busy port). Romanisation remained uneven: strong on the east coast, thin in the interior. It was in Roman times that Latin took root, the matrix of the future Corsican language. Tradition holds that Seneca was exiled to Corsica in the 1st century CE.

17. The dark centuries: Vandals, Byzantines, Lombards, Franks

The fall of the Western Roman Empire opened a long period of instability. In the 5th century Corsica came under Vandal rule; in the 6th, Byzantine armies retook it as part of Justinian's reconquest. Partial Lombard dominations followed, then, from the 8th century, the Saracen raids. At the end of the 8th century, amid Carolingian expansion, the Franks intervened in Corsica; tradition links to this period the partly legendary figure of Ugo Colonna. The island then entered the Frankish and later the papal orbit.

18. Pisan Corsica (11th-12th centuries)

At the turn of the second millennium, the papacy entrusted the administration and evangelisation of Corsica to the maritime Republic of Pisa. The 11th and especially the 12th century make up the “Pisan age”: a period of relative stability and of a flowering of Romanesque art (the Canonica cathedral at Mariana, the church of San Michele de Murato). The rivalry between Pisa and Genoa turned to the latter's advantage after the naval battle of Meloria, in 1284, where the Pisan fleet was crushed. Corsica gradually fell into the Genoese sphere.

19. Genoese Corsica (14th-18th centuries)

Genoese rule extended, with interruptions, over nearly five centuries. From 1453 the island's administration was entrusted to the Office of Saint George, a Genoese bank that ran it as a military and economic concern. Genoa developed a network of coastal strongholds — Bastia (the governor's seat), Calvi, Bonifacio, Ajaccio (refounded in 1492), Saint-Florent — and had a hundred or so coastal watchtowers built against the Barbary raids. The period was marked by great figures of resistance: Sambucuccio d'Alando (14th c.), Vincentello d'Istria (15th c.) and Sampiero Corso (16th c.), a condottiere in French service whose death in 1567 ended that episode. The Genoese record is mixed: defensive infrastructure and an encouraged chestnut grove, but a distant and fiscally burdensome administration.

20. The Corsican revolution and the Republic of Pasquale Paoli (1729-1769)

The most formative episode of Corsican identity is the revolution that, from 1729, rose against Genoa. In 1736 the German adventurer Theodor von Neuhoff had himself briefly proclaimed king as Theodore I. It was with **Pasquale Paoli** (1725-1807) that the revolution took on its full dimension. Elected “general of the nation” in 1755, Paoli endowed the island with a constitution resting on a separation of powers and an elected representation; he made Corte the capital and founded a university there in 1765. Remembered as the “Babbu di a Patria,” the Father of the Nation, he durably anchored the idea of a Corsican nation able to govern itself.

21. Annexation to France (1768-1769)

Unable to overcome the insurrection, Genoa ceded its rights over Corsica to France through the 1768 Treaty of Versailles. Paoli's forces rejected the transfer; the decisive confrontation came in May 1769 at **Ponte Novu**, where the Corsican troops were defeated. Paoli went into exile in England. A few months later, on 15 August 1769, **Napoleon Bonaparte** was born in Ajaccio: the child who would become emperor was born Corsican, in the very year the island lost its independence and became French.

22. Revolutionary and Napoleonic Corsica

The Revolution was at first welcomed, and Paoli returned from exile in 1790. But relations soured with the Montagnard Convention. In 1793 Paoli turned to England: this was the episode of the “Anglo-Corsican Kingdom” (1794-1796), with an English viceroy. The interlude ended when the armies of the Republic regained control of the island. Paoli went into definitive exile and died in 1807; his ashes would be repatriated to Morosaglia. Under the Consulate and the Empire, Corsica, Napoleon's native land, held a special place in the imperial imagination without enjoying notable economic development.

23. The 19th century: poverty, the civil service, early industrialisation

The long 19th century was a period of gradual integration into the French state and of persistent economic hardship. Society remained structured by clan solidarities and marked by the vendetta — an old social phenomenon amplified by Romantic literature (Mérimée's “Colomba,” 1840). Integration came through schooling, military service and administration: Corsicans invested massively in the civil service (army, customs, postal service, colonial administration), an essential outlet given the lack of local jobs. A surge of industrialisation — mining, metallurgy, sawmills — carried by the building of roads and the railway, began but would be broken by the bloodletting of 1914-1918¹⁷. The other great response to poverty was emigration, massive and continuous (see Part Four).

24. Corsica in the two World Wars

The First World War hit Corsica very hard: relative to population, the proportion of war dead was among the highest in France (the island lost about a quarter of its mobilised men). During the Second World War, the island was occupied from November 1942 by Italian and then German forces. It was the **first metropolitan French department to be liberated**: in September-October 1943, in the wake of the Italian surrender, an insurrection led notably by the internal Resistance (in which the Communist networks of the Front National played a leading role) and supported by forces from North Africa secured the island's liberation.

25. A few major figures (landmarks)

A few major figures may be retained: Sampiero Corso (16th c.), condottiere of the anti-Genoese resistance; Pasquale Paoli (1725–1807), founder of independent Corsica and of its university; Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821), born in Ajaccio. In the 20th and 21st centuries, on the nationalist side, the Simeoni brothers (Edmond, the figure of Aléria 1975; Max; then Gilles, an autonomist, president of the executive from 2015 to 2026) and Jean-Guy Talamoni (separatist, long president of the Assembly) embody the movement's main sensibilities. On the diaspora side, Raúl Leoni, president of Venezuela of Corsican origin, may be cited (see the next part).

Notes and sources for this part

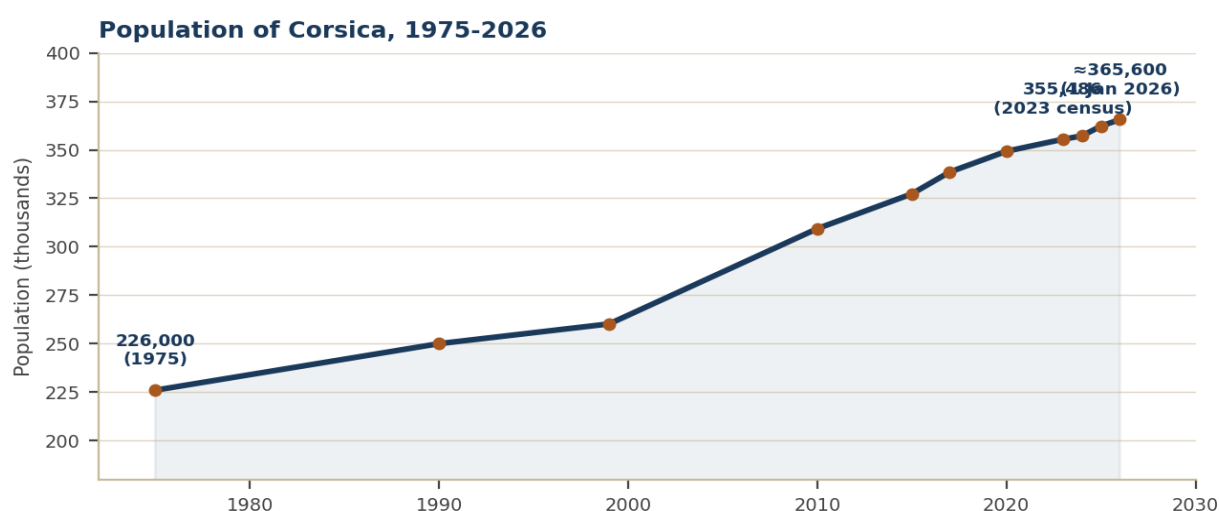
17. Wikipedia, “Économie de la Corse”: in the 19th century a surge of industrialisation (mines, metallurgy, sawmills), carried by roads and the railway, was broken by the demographic bloodletting of the First World War ($\approx 25\%$ of mobilised Corsicans lost), giving way to an economy of public employment and emigration.

PART FOUR

Demography, emigration and diaspora · § 26 to 31

26. From the post-war decline to demographic renewal

At the end of the Second World War, Corsica reached a demographic low: bled by the two wars and by a century of emigration, the island held only around 170,000 inhabitants in the mid-20th century. From the 1960s the trend reversed spectacularly, under the effect of the repatriation of “pieds-noirs” from Algeria (1962), who developed the eastern plain, the rise of tourism, and a migration balance that turned positive again. Since then the population has grown continuously and strongly.



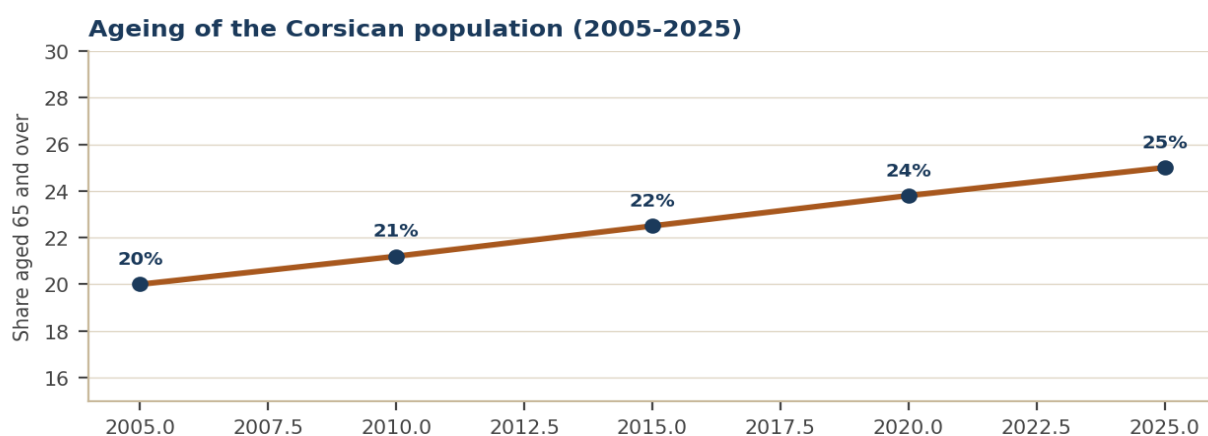
Source: INSEE, population censuses and estimates (Insee Analyses Corse no. 56 and 67).

Population of Corsica, 1975-2026. Source: INSEE, censuses and estimates.

27. The population today: a statistical portrait

The latest reference census counts **355,486 inhabitants on 1 January 2023¹⁸**. The most recent estimates put the population at **about 362,250 on 1 January 2025** and **365,600 on 1 January 2026¹⁹**. At roughly **+1.0% a year** over the last decade — three times the national pace — Corsica is the metropolitan region with the strongest demographic growth²⁰. This growth rests **exclusively on the migration balance**: the natural balance has been negative since 2013 (in 2025, a deficit of about -1,200 against an apparent migration balance of +4,583)²¹. Fertility, at 1.12 children per woman in 2025, is **the lowest in France** and at its lowest since 1975²².

The population is ageing markedly: the share of those 65 and over rose from about 20% to 25% in twenty years²³. Life expectancy, however, is among the highest in France (86 years and 3 months for women, 81 years and 6 months for men in 2025). The population is heavily concentrated on the coast and around Ajaccio and Bastia, while the mountainous interior remains very sparsely populated.



Source: INSEE, Insee Analyses Corse no. 67 (April 2026); intermediate points interpolated.

Share of those aged 65 and over, 2005-2025. Source: INSEE (Insee Analyses Corse no. 67).

28. Poverty and standard of living

Corsica is **the poorest region in metropolitan France**: the poverty rate reaches 18.1% (against 15.3% nationally), with the highest poverty intensity and a median standard of living of about €22,390²⁴. The high cost of living, especially for housing, deepens these vulnerabilities. These economic difficulties are the permanent backdrop to Corsican demographic history — and notably to its great fact: emigration.

29. The great exodus: Corsican emigration in the 19th-20th centuries

For more than a century, Corsica was a land of **massive emigration**. The causes were first economic: poverty, lack of land, export restrictions, agricultural crises, poor harvests linked to drought and crop disease, and the upheaval caused by the second industrial revolution, which emptied the countryside. For some, a resistance to French integration was added. The result was that there were long **more Corsicans off the island than on it**. The destinations fall into two great flows: the French colonies and the Empire's administration on one hand; Latin America and the Caribbean on the other²⁵. From the inter-war period, the flow redirected toward mainland France, especially Marseille, then nicknamed “the first Corsican city in the world” (about 200,000 Corsicans).

30. The exodus to the Americas: Puerto Rico and Venezuela

The best-documented strand is emigration to **Puerto Rico**. Opened to Catholic foreign immigration by the “Real Cédula de Gracias” of 1815 (a decree of the king of Spain, Ferdinand VII, intended to populate and develop the island), Puerto Rico drew Corsicans attracted by the demographic void, the abundance of land and the rise of sugar cane and then **coffee**. The migrants — mostly single young men, farmers or sailors — settled in the west and southeast of the island (the regions of Adjuntas, Yauco, Guayanilla, Guánica) and often became prosperous planters and traders²⁶. This emigration was overwhelmingly **from Cap Corse**: 71% of recorded individuals came from Cap Corse alone²⁷. The first documented Corsican in Puerto Rico, Giovan Maria Fantauzzi, arrived in the 18th century.

Venezuela was the other great pole: Corsicans exiled there from the 1850s, especially to Caracas, and formed an influential diaspora — so much so that the country had a president of Corsican origin, Raúl Leoni (1964–1969). Other Caribbean and South American destinations (Cuba, Guadeloupe, Mexico, Chile, Peru, Colombia) also received Corsicans²⁸. The figure of several hundred thousand descendants of Corsicans in Puerto Rico has sometimes been put forward, but such estimates are uncertain and to be handled with caution.

31. The “Americans' houses”: the stone of return

The most visible sign of this migratory saga is architectural: the “**Americans' houses**” (case d'Americani). Returning wealthy, or by sending money home, some emigrants had sumptuous, often ornate residences built or enlarged in their native village, sometimes flanked by a private chapel. These houses are estimated at **about 300** across Corsica, of which **nearly half in the eighteen communes of Cap Corse alone**²⁹. The oldest is said to have been built around 1724 at Brando for a Corsican returned from Mexico; the last, the Fantauzzi château at Morsiglia, dates from the early 20th century.

The Puerto Rican architecture professor Enrique Vivoni Farage, himself a descendant of Corsicans, recorded and classified these residences with his students, in conjunction with the University of Corte, distinguishing five types of palazzi: ancestral houses remodelled “American-style”; new houses of traditional form; more monumental variants; academic variants of French influence (late 19th–early 20th c.); and urban buildings, notably in Bastia³⁰. Heritage projects (multilingual centres for the study of Corsican emigration) seek to renew the thread with the descendants of the diaspora — illustrating how emigration, far from a mere episode of the past, remains a constitutive trait of Corsican identity.

31 bis. The diaspora today: the mainland and Marseille

From the inter-war period, the great migratory flow redirected from the Americas toward **mainland France**. Marseille became the chief Corsican home outside the island — to the point of being nicknamed “the first Corsican city in the world” (on the order of 200,000 people of Corsican origin). Paris, Nice, Toulon and the Marseille area concentrate a numerous diaspora, structured by a dense network of clubs, “circles” and village associations (nearly every commune has its mainland club). This diaspora keeps an intense link with the island: regular returns, homes in the village, transmission of the language and traditions, emotional and sometimes political investment. The relationship with the “mainland” is thus ambivalent and intimate — constant movement, dependence (studies, services, jobs) and an asserted distance. The recent demographic recovery, driven by arrivals from the mainland, is in turn reshaping the population and raises anew the question of belonging — by birth, ancestry, language, residence or commitment.

31 ter. Some Corsican figures

The island and its diaspora have produced many figures. The most universal remains **Napoleon Bonaparte** (1769–1821), born in Ajaccio. In letters and the arts, one may cite the singer **Tino Rossi**, an Ajaccio figure of French song, as well as the Corsican roots of many contemporary artists and athletes. The sporting world counts emblematic figures, notably in football around the island clubs (SC Bastia, AC Ajaccio). In the American diaspora, the success of descendants of Corsicans in Puerto Rico and Venezuela (up to Venezuelan president Raúl Leoni) prolongs the migratory saga. Finally, island political life has been marked by the nationalist figures already cited (the Simeoni brothers, Jean-Guy Talamoni) and, earlier, by dynasties of notables and parliamentarians who long structured the “politics of the clans.” This gallery, deliberately limited to a few markers, illustrates the dual Corsican presence: on the island and well beyond its shores.

Notes and sources for this part

18. INSEE, “En Corse, 355 486 habitants au 1er janvier 2023,” census results (geography as of 01/01/2025); confirmed by the regional review of December 2025.
19. INSEE, Insee Analyses Corse no. 67, 16 April 2026: 362,253 inhab. on 01/01/2025 and 365,636 estimated on 01/01/2026, i.e. +0.9% year on year.
20. INSEE, “Bilan démographique 2024,” Insee Analyses Corse no. 56, April 2025: growth $\approx +1.0\%$ /year over ten years, the highest in metropolitan France.
21. INSEE, Insee Analyses Corse no. 67, April 2026: natural balance -1,200, apparent migration balance +4,583 (estimate as of 01/01/2026).
22. INSEE, Insee Analyses Corse no. 67, April 2026: total fertility rate of 1.12 children per woman in 2025 (1.19 in 2024); $\approx$ 2,300 births in 2025, the lowest level since 1976.
23. INSEE, Insee Analyses Corse no. 67, April 2026: the share of those aged 65 or over rises from 20% to 25% over twenty years.
24. INSEE, “L’essentiel sur... la Corse” (Filosofi): poverty rate of 18.1%, the poorest metropolitan region; median standard of living of €22,390. See also Insee Dossier Corse no. 18, “Panorama de la pauvreté en Corse.”
25. Wikipedia, “Corses”: in the 19th–early 20th centuries Corsican emigration was very important; main destinations the French colonies and Latin America (Puerto Rico, Venezuela); from the inter-war period, mainland France became the major destination (Marseille, “the first Corsican city in the world,” $\approx$ 200,000 Corsicans).
26. Theses.fr, “L’émigration corse à Porto-Rico au dix-neuvième siècle”: migration of single young men, mostly from Cap Corse, farmers and sailors, drawn by sugar cane then coffee, settled in the west and southeast of the island. See also M.-J. Casablanca, “L’émigration corse à Porto Rico,” Le Signet, 1993.
27. Castellani, “L’émigration corse à Porto Rico au 19e siècle: familles et réseaux familiaux. L’exemple balanin,” Les Cahiers ALHIM no. 39, 2020: Corsican emigration to Puerto Rico concerned chiefly the inhabitants of Cap Corse (71% of recorded individuals).

28. M.-F. Poizat-Costa, “Le problème Corse,” L'Harmattan, 1987, cited by Wikipedia (“Corses”): a large Corsican diaspora in Latin America, especially in Caracas (exile from 1850; president Raúl Leoni was of Corsican origin). *Les Cahiers ALHIM* no. 39 (2020) also records Corsicans in Cuba, Guadeloupe, Mexico, Chile, Peru, Colombia.
29. *Corse Images et Histoire*, “Les Corses en Amérique hispanique” (2020): about 300 “Americans' houses” are scattered across Corsica, of which nearly half in the eighteen communes of Cap Corse alone; the earliest palazzu (Brando) is said to date from 1724, the last (the Fantauzzi château at Morsiglia) from the first quarter of the 20th century.
30. *Corse Images et Histoire* (2020) and *Destination Cap Corse*, “Les Capcoursins d'ailleurs”: Enrique Vivoni Farage, architecture professor at the University of Puerto Rico and a descendant of Corsicans, established with his students a five-category typology of “Americans' houses,” as part of the Corsican Studies Programme (PEC) run with the University of Corte from 2007.

PART FIVE

The Corsican language · § 32 to 35

32. Origin and nature of Corsican

Corsican (u corsu, a lingua corsa) is a Romance language, derived from spoken Latin. Within the Romance group it belongs to the Italo-Romance branch and is closely related to the Tuscan dialects and, more broadly, to medieval Italian and the dialects of central and insular Italy. This closeness is explained by history: the long Pisan then Genoese rule, and Corsica's inclusion in the Italian cultural sphere until the 19th century.

33. A plural language: from north to south

Corsican is not uniform. From north to south, one distinguishes the **northern** varieties (cismontano), spoken in Cap Corse, the Nebbio, the Balagne, the Castagniccia and the Cortenais, closer to Tuscan; and the **southern** varieties (pumontano), spoken in the Sartenais, the Alta Rocca and the Porto-Vecchio area, which share features with the dialects of northern Sardinia (Gallurese, Sassarese). A transition zone crosses the centre of the island (the Ajaccio area, the Fiumorbo). The differences bear on pronunciation (the famous final “u,” the treatment of consonants) and on vocabulary. This internal diversity led to conceiving Corsican as a “**polynomic**” language — a concept formalised notably by the linguist Jean-Baptiste Marcellesi — which recognises the legitimacy of its different varieties without imposing a single norm.

34. From Italian to Corsican: a linguistic emancipation

Until the 19th century, the language of culture and administration in Corsica was not Corsican but Italian (literary Tuscan); Corsican was the oral language of everyday life. Annexation to France set off a double movement: the replacement of Italian by French as the official language, and, more slowly, the assertion of Corsican as a language in its own right. This emancipation accelerated in the 20th century, especially from the 1970s, in the wake of the “riacquistu”: to claim, write, sing and teach the language was to assert the existence of a distinct Corsican people. The language is also carried by a living polyphony (the paghjella, UNESCO-listed) and a committed song tradition.

35. State of speakers, defence and co-officiality

Like most of France's regional languages, Corsican experienced a decline in family transmission in the 20th century and is classified by UNESCO as “endangered.” The most recent figure comes from a **sociolinguistic survey by the Collectivity of Corsica (2023)**, according to which **about 39% of adults living on the island are active speakers** of Corsican, with Centre-Corse counting the most bilinguals³¹. An earlier survey (OpinionWay, 2012) noted the speakers' high age and a massive social consensus — on the order of 90% — in favour of bilingualism³².

A major revitalisation effort has been undertaken: teaching from kindergarten to university, a bilingual track, a driving role for the Università di Corsica at Corte, Corsican-language media, widespread bilingual signage. The collectivity demands **co-officiality** (Corsican as an official language on a par with French), which runs into Article 2 of the Constitution (“the language of the Republic is French”). In its July 2025 opinion on the autonomy plan, the Council of State held that co-officiality clashed with Articles 1 and 2 of the Constitution³³. The language question thus remains inseparable from the institutional debate.

Notes and sources for this part

- 31. Sociolinguistic survey commissioned by the Collectivity of Corsica, presented in April 2023: $\approx$ 39% of adults living on the island are active speakers; Centre-Corse has the highest proportion of bilinguals. (Coverage by France 3 Corse / Fondas Kréyol, April 2023.)
- 32. First sociolinguistic survey on the Corsican language (OpinionWay, November 2012): $\approx$ 90% of respondents in favour of equal use of Corsican and French; active speakers of average age above 50.
- 33. Council of State, opinion of 17 July 2025 on the constitutional bill “for an autonomous Corsica within the Republic”: co-officiality of the Corsican language and the resident status are deemed incompatible, as drafted, with Articles 1, 2 and 3 of the Constitution.

PART SIX

The nationalist movement: autonomists and separatists · § 36 to 41

36. The roots of Corsican nationalism

Contemporary Corsican nationalism is rooted in several strata: the memory of Paoli's independent Corsica, raised to a founding golden age; a cultural regionalism that appeared in the early 20th century; and, above all, from the 1960s-70s, a protest fed by a sense of economic marginalisation and dispossession. Several grievances converge: economic (neglected development, youth forced into exile); decisions experienced as injustices (aid to Algerian repatriates seen as disproportionate, the “red mud” affair of the early 1970s); and cultural (defence of the language against a Jacobin state perceived as assimilationist).

37. Aléria 1975 and the birth of the FLNC

The founding event is the Aléria affair, in August 1975: militants of the ARC, led by Edmond Simeoni, occupied a wine cellar belonging to a repatriate, amid a wine-fraud scandal. The security forces' assault turned to tragedy, leaving gendarmes dead. It was in this context that the **FLNC (National Liberation Front of Corsica)** was created in 1976, a clandestine separatist organisation that would wage, for decades, a campaign of bombings most often targeting property. The clandestine movement underwent many splits and bloody fratricidal feuds in the 1980s-90s.

38. Autonomists and separatists

The movement is not monolithic. The **autonomists** demand a status of autonomy within the Republic (transfer of powers, recognition of a Corsican specificity, without breaking with France); this line is today embodied mainly by Femu a Corsica and Gilles Simeoni. The **separatists** ultimately seek sovereignty; this line is notably represented by Corsica Libera, long associated with Jean-Guy Talamoni. Many separatists have accepted a gradualist strategy, making autonomy a stage. In 2014 the FLNC (in its main components) announced a “demilitarisation” and exit from clandestinity.

39. From violence to electoral victory (1976-2018)

Between 1976 and 2015, Corsica went through nearly forty years marked by clandestine violence, state repression and attempts at political settlement. The electoral victory of 2015 ended this cycle: a nationalist coalition (Femu a Corsica and Corsica Libera) won the territorial elections for the first time. A reform merged, on 1 January 2018, the region and the two departments into a **single collectivity, the Collectivity of Corsica**.

39 bis. The successive statutes of Corsica (1982-2018)

Over the decades the state repeatedly changed the island's status in an attempt to answer the Corsican question. The **1982 statute** (“special statute”), in the context of decentralisation, gave Corsica an elected Assembly as early as 1982, ahead of the other regions. The **1991 “Joxe” statute** created the “territorial collectivity of Corsica,” with an original architecture (Assembly + Executive Council); the Constitutional Council, however, struck out the mention of a “Corsican people, a component of the French people,” held contrary to the unity of the French people. The **2002 “Matignon” statute** broadened powers. In 2003, a **local referendum** proposing a far-reaching institutional reform was narrowly rejected by Corsican voters. Finally, the **2018 reform** merged region and departments into a single collectivity. This succession illustrates a never-achieved search for a balance between recognition of island specificity and the unitary principles of the Republic.

39 ter. The Érignac affair: trauma and fracture

The assassination of prefect **Claude Érignac**, shot dead in Ajaccio in February 1998, is the gravest moment in the entire history of Corsican nationalism — a prefect, the state's highest representative, killed in the street. The long and controversial investigation led to the conviction of several militants. **Yvan Colonna**, named as the gunman, was arrested in 2003 and sentenced to life imprisonment — an involvement he always contested. His fatal assault in custody, in March 2022, by a fellow inmate, reopened a deep memorial fracture and triggered mass protests. It was precisely this drama that revived the institutional file and led to the opening of the “Beauvau process” (see § 40). The Érignac affair remains, for the state as for Corsican society, an unhealed wound.

40. The “Beauvau process” and the constitutional reform (2022-2026)

The trigger was the death of Yvan Colonna in custody, in March 2022, after an assault in prison; it caused protests of exceptional scale. To calm the situation, the government opened the door to a discussion on autonomy: the “Beauvau process.” In March 2024, in Ajaccio, President Macron accepted the principle of an autonomy written into the Constitution; the Assembly of Corsica approved a drafting on 11 March 2024. After the Council of State's reserved opinion (17 July 2025), the government tabled the **constitutional bill “for an autonomous Corsica within the Republic” on 27 April 2026³⁴**. The text creates a new **Article 72-5** recognising for Corsica a status of autonomy and the possibility, in matters set by an organic law, of adapting laws, or even enacting its own norms; sovereign powers remain excluded. The floor examination in the Assembly took place on 16-17 June 2026, with a rewriting emphasising an “island community” and a “singular bond with the land of Corsica”³⁵.

Ongoing file — to be re-checked. As of 21 June 2026, **the National Assembly's solemn vote had not yet taken place: it was scheduled for 23 June 2026**, with an uncertain outcome. Final adoption requires a vote in identical terms by the Assembly and the Senate (where opposition is stronger), then a referendum or a three-fifths Congress. The real content will further depend on an as-yet-unknown organic law. The outcome, the timetable and the scope therefore remained open at this guide's cut-off date.³⁶

41. Current executive and resident status

In the 2021 elections, the nationalist lists together took nearly 68% of the vote in the second round; Femu a Corsica won an absolute majority on its own (40 of 63 seats) and Marie-Antoinette Maupertuis became president of the Assembly of Corsica³⁷. **Update, May 2026:** elected mayor of Bastia, Gilles Simeoni resigned the presidency of the executive; on 4 May 2026, **Gilles Giovannangeli** (Femu a Corsica) succeeded him³⁸. Among the demands, the **“resident status”** — making property purchase conditional on a period of residence to protect inhabitants from soaring prices — remains emblematic, but was judged hard to reconcile with French and European law by the Council of State (July 2025).

Notes and sources for this part

- 34.** Constitutional bill “for an autonomous Corsica within the Republic,” tabled on 27 April 2026 (vie-publique.fr file no. 299712; National Assembly). It creates a new Article 72-5 of the Constitution.
- 35.** LCP-National Assembly, 17–18 June 2026: end of the text's examination in the Assembly; government rewriting amendment (“island community... having developed a singular bond with the land of Corsica”); amendment making consultation of Corsican voters mandatory.
- 36.** Public Sénat and Maire-Info, mid-June 2026: solemn vote in the Assembly scheduled for 23 June 2026; subsequent path through the Senate deemed uncertain; need for an identical vote by both chambers, then a referendum or a three-fifths Congress.
- 37.** Territorial elections of 20 and 27 June 2021: ≈ 68% for the nationalist lists in the second round; absolute majority for Femu a Corsica; Marie-Antoinette Maupertuis president of the Assembly. Mandate exceptionally extended to 2028.
- 38.** franceinfo / France 3 Corse, 4 May 2026: Gilles Giovannangeli elected president of the Executive Council of Corsica with 34 votes, against Jean-Martin Mondoloni (15 votes); AFP, 21 April 2026 (resignation of G. Simeoni, elected mayor of Bastia).

PART SEVEN

Organised crime and the “mafia” · § 42 to 45

42. An old reality, a term to handle with care

Corsica is associated with powerful, entrenched organised crime. The subject demands rigour: avoiding both complacency (denying a documented phenomenon) and conflation (equating an entire society with its criminal fringe, or confusing crime with nationalism, which are distinct phenomena). The very term “mafia” is debated: for a long time people spoke of “major banditry.” Since the 2010s, Corsican magistrates, elected officials and citizen movements have reclaimed the word “mafia” to denote a system combining violence, infiltration of the legal economy, capture of public procurement and land, and penetration of institutions.

43. Features of the criminal “system”

First, an exceptionally high level of homicidal violence: relative to its population, Corsica remains the metropolitan region with the most homicides per inhabitant. Recent prefectural reports record about **17 to 18 homicides and 16 attempts in 2024** for ~355,000 inhabitants, the island ranking “first nationally”³⁹. About 25 active criminal gangs are recorded, along with a weapons-possession rate far above the average⁴⁰. For 2025, interim reports recorded at least 11 homicides by mid-November.

Second, a logic of economic entrenchment: beyond trafficking and racketeering, Corsican organised crime is described as seeking to invest in the legal economy (real estate, tourism, construction, public procurement) and to capture land and tourism rent. **Third, porosities with the political-economic sphere,** favoured by the small size of society and networks of mutual acquaintance. By contrast, “mass” delinquency in Corsica remains below the national average (≈ 33.9 offences per 1,000 inhabitants in 2024, with an above-average clearance rate)⁴¹: the Corsican specificity lies in *organised* crime, not ordinary delinquency.

44. Distinguishing crime from nationalism

It is essential not to confuse organised crime with the nationalist movement: a political project on one side, enrichment and power on the other. History has shown contact zones (accusations of a “revolutionary tax”), and the exit from clandestinity of the 2010s aimed precisely to clarify that boundary. Nationalists in power display a will to fight the “mafia”: in February 2025 the Assembly of Corsica adopted some thirty measures against organised crime⁴². Their critics reproach them with uneven firmness.

45. Civil society against the mafia

A notable fact of the past decade is the emergence of a citizen anti-mafia mobilisation. Following assassinations that struck associative or economic figures (including Massimu Susini, a militant killed in Cargèse in 2019), collectives formed. In October 2025 an **Anti-Mafia Coordination of Corsica** was formed in Bastia, with a march in Ajaccio on 15 November 2025⁴³. It should be recalled that the vast majority of the Corsican population has no link to crime, and that crime is first of all suffered by Corsicans themselves — through violence, the distortion of the economy and the damaged image it projects onto the island.

Notes and sources for this part

- 39. Prefecture of Corsica, figures provided to AFP (February 2025): 17 to 18 homicides and 16 attempts in 2024, first nationally relative to population. Counts vary slightly across sources.
- 40. National Directorate of the Judicial Police, 2022 and 2025 reports (≈ 25 criminal gangs); statements by prefect Jérôme Filippini, early 2025 (≈ 350 weapons per 1,000 inhabitants against ≈ 150 nationally).
- 41. Journal de la Corse, based on Interior Ministry data (2024): ≈ 33.9 offences per 1,000 inhabitants, clearance rate $\approx 43.8\%$ (against $\approx 35\%$ nationally). The Corsican specificity lies in organised crime, not in ordinary delinquency.
- 42. Assembly of Corsica, session of 26 February 2025: presentation by Gilles Simeoni of 30 measures to fight organised crime.
- 43. Journal de la Corse, October–November 2025: formation of the Anti-Mafia Coordination of Corsica (4 October, Bastia); march in Ajaccio on 15 November 2025 (“Assassini, maffiosi fora!”).

PART EIGHT

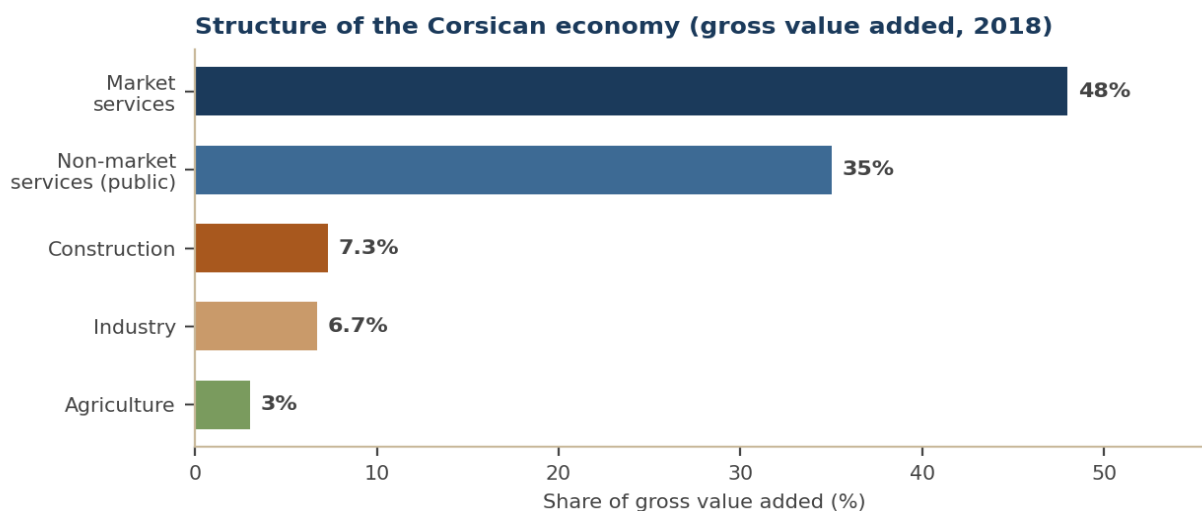
The economy of Corsica, in detail · § 46 to 54

46. Overview: a small, tertiary, insular economy

The Corsican economy has a very particular profile: predominance of services, the constraints of insularity, heavy dependence on public transfers and on tourism. In 2023, the **GDP of Corsica stood at €10.7 billion**, i.e. about **€30,300 per inhabitant — the lowest of the metropolitan regions**, some 15% below the average of the regions outside the Paris region⁴⁴. It is, in absolute terms, the smallest regional economy in France (about 0.4% of national GDP). But growth is dynamic: GDP rose by about 2.6% a year between 2015 and 2022⁴⁵.

47. The sectoral structure

The breakdown of value added is telling. In 2018, **market services** (trade, tourism, services) concentrated about 48% of the wealth created, and **non-market services** (administration, health, education) about 35% — making Corsica **the region where the weight of the public and para-public sphere in value added is the greatest** in France⁴⁶. **Construction** weighs a little over 7%, **industry** only 6.7% and **agriculture** about 3%.



Sources: INSEE, regional accounts; Wikipedia 'Economy of Corsica' after INSEE (2018).

Structure of the Corsican economy by value added (2018). Sources: INSEE; Wikipedia after INSEE.

48. Tourism: engine and fragility

Tourism is the real engine of the island economy: it represents **on the order of €3.5 billion, i.e. about 39% of GDP** — the highest share of any French region⁴⁷. In 2024, collective market accommodation recorded about **10.7 million overnight stays** (+6.7%), and the 2025 season set a post-Covid record with about 10 million overnight stays from April to September⁴⁸. Corsica is **the leading region for the weight of tourism in employment** (about one job in ten), but this dependence has a downside: strong seasonality (employment multiplied by more than three between January and August), precarious jobs, and pressure on water, waste, transport and above all housing.

49. Employment, unemployment and inequality

In 2024–2025, the **unemployment rate (ILO) stood at about 6 to 6.5%**, a historically low level and below the national average ($\approx 7.4\%$)⁴⁹. Salaried employment exceeded 129,000 jobs at the end of 2024. Unemployment is the only major indicator on which Corsica does better than the national average: conversely, the poverty rate (18.1%) is the highest in metropolitan France (see § 28). This coexistence of low unemployment and high poverty stems notably from the precariousness and seasonality of jobs, and from the cost of living.

50. Housing: the sharpest issue

The **housing question** has become the sharpest social issue. Corsica stands out for an exceptionally high share of **second homes (on the order of 30 to 37% of the stock depending on source)**⁵⁰, combined with the lowest share of vacant housing in France and a strong concentration of ownership (one physical owner in three owns at least three dwellings, against one in six in mainland France)⁵¹. These tensions sustain high prices and crowd out part of the permanent residents, feeding a sense of injustice that intersects with identity claims.

51. Insularity, transport and energy

Insularity makes everything dearer: “territorial continuity” (public subsidy of sea and air transport) is an essential mechanism and a recurring political issue. Links are provided by shipping companies (Corsica Linea, La Mériidionale, Corsica Ferries) and airlines (Air Corsica). Energy is a point of vulnerability: Corsica belongs to the “non-interconnected zones” (ZNI), cut off from the mainland electricity grid, and is seeking to develop renewables (solar, hydro) while securing its supply. Consumer prices are on average **about 7% higher than in mainland provincial France**, with a gap of about +14% for food⁵².

52. Construction and the business fabric

The **construction** sector holds a considerable place, sustained by residential and tourist demand and by public procurement. The business fabric is dominated by very small firms: the vast majority of establishments employ no or only one salaried worker⁵³. The rise in interest rates has recently weighed on building permits and real-estate projects. Trade and consumer services, closely tied to tourism, complete the picture.

53. Dependence on public transfers and the tax question

The Corsican economy is heavily supported by public transfers (over-represented public employment, social benefits, state grants, European funds). This dependence feeds the debate on fiscal autonomy: for its supporters it would allow taxation to be adapted to island realities and the tourism and land rent to be better captured; for its critics it would weaken a territory already dependent on national solidarity. Corsica enjoys specific tax arrangements inherited from its history, including the legacy of the “Miot decrees” (a derogatory Napoleonic inheritance regime), long the source of a major problem of property “titling” — a land disorder that hampers taxation, planning and transmission, and whose resolution is a long-term undertaking.

54. Fishing, the sea and new sectors

Fishing remains essentially artisanal, practised by small boats along the coast; annual output is estimated at about 1,000 to 1,500 tonnes, consumed mostly locally, and faces competition from imports and rising costs⁵⁴. The **maritime economy** (more than 1,000 km of coastline) is seen as a development reserve: oceanographic research (the STARESO station at Calvi), aquaculture, marine biotechnologies. The **energy transition** (sunshine, hydro) and quality **agri-food** (see next part) are the other lines of diversification for an economy seeking to reduce its dependence on seasonal tourism and transfers.

Notes and sources for this part

44. INSEE, “L'essentiel sur... la Corse,” regional accounts (provisional data): GDP of €10.7bn in 2023, i.e. $\approx$ €30,300 per inhabitant, the lowest of the metropolitan regions; GDP per job $\approx$ €76,200.
45. Astérès / DLR, “The Corsican economy” (2025): GDP $\approx$ €10bn (0.4% of national GDP), GDP/inhab. $\approx$ €29,300 (the lowest in metropolitan France, -26% vs national average); growth $\approx$ +2.6%/year between 2015 and 2022.
46. Wikipedia, “Économie de la Corse,” after INSEE (2018): market services 48%, non-market services 35%, industry 6.7%, agriculture $\approx$ 3% of value added; Corsica is the region where the weight of the public and para-public sphere is highest.
47. INSEE / Europe 1, December 2024: tourism represents $\approx$ €3.5bn a year, i.e. $\approx$ 39% of regional GDP; Corsica is the leading region for the weight of tourism in employment ($\approx$ 1 job in 10 on annual average).
48. INSEE, “Tourisme — Bilan économique 2024” (10.7 million overnight stays, +6.7%); “Corse — Premiers résultats de la saison touristique 2025,” Insee Analyses Corse no. 63, December 2025 ($\approx$ 10 million overnight stays April-September, a post-pandemic record). The Corsica Tourism Agency estimates total attendance, all accommodation, at $\approx$ 34.7 million overnight stays in 2024.
49. INSEE, “L'essentiel sur... la Corse” and conjuncture dashboard: regional unemployment rate $\approx$ 6.5% in 2024 (below the national average of $\approx$ 7.4%). Salaried employment exceeded 129,000 jobs at the end of 2024.
50. INSEE, “Résidences secondaires: un logement sur trois en Corse,” Insee Analyses Corse no. 29 (October 2020), Fideli tax source: 72,000 second homes, i.e. 28.8% of the stock in 2017 (of which 37% owned by island residents); some estimates reach $\approx$ 36-37% depending on scope.
51. INSEE, “Un propriétaire de logements corses sur deux est multipropriétaire,” Insee Analyses Corse no. 65 (2025), 2023 property base: one physical owner in three owns at least three dwellings.
52. INSEE, spatial comparison of price levels (cited by Wikipedia, “Économie de la Corse”): consumer prices $\approx$ +7% relative to provincial France, $\approx$ +14.4% for food. In 2025, several oil companies were fined by the Competition Authority (total €187.5m) for collusion over access to the island's oil depots.

53. CCI of Corsica, “Appui aux territoires” sectoral plan (November 2022): the vast majority of the island's establishments employ at most one salaried worker ($\approx 72\%$); fabric dominated by micro-enterprises.
54. Wikipedia, “Économie de la Corse”: Corsican fishing is essentially artisanal; output estimated at $\approx 1,000$ -1,500 tonnes/year, consumed locally.

PART NINE

Agriculture, terroirs and products · § 55 to 59

55. The traditional farming system and the terraces

On an island where slope is everywhere and flat land vanishingly rare, to cultivate long meant correcting the mountain: hence the **cultivation terraces** (*restanche*, *piazzili*), dry-stone walls built into the hillside, which carried vines, olive trees, fruit trees, cereals and kitchen gardens. The traditional farming system combined transhumant pastoralism, the nourishing chestnut grove, vine and olive on terraces, and gardens. The emigration and agricultural decline of the 19th-20th centuries drained the interior: untended, countless terraces collapsed, reclaimed by *maquis* — which also increased the mass of combustible vegetation and the fire risk.

56. The civilisation of the chestnut

At the heart of the traditional system stood the **chestnut**. The chestnut grove, particularly dense in the **Castagniccia** (but also in the Gravona and Taravo valleys), was the basis of mountain subsistence: the chestnut was the “bread tree,” its flour replacing cereal where wheat grew poorly. Genoa had encouraged, even imposed, its planting. This “civilisation of the chestnut” is enjoying a heritage revival, with a **Corsican chestnut flour PDO** and festivals such as the Fiera di a Castagna in Bocognano. The chestnut remains an identity marker, the basis of flours, cakes, beer (*Pietra*) and pig feed.

57. Livestock, the pillar of agriculture

Livestock is the dominant activity of Corsican agriculture, especially in mountain and mid-mountain areas. **Sheep and goat** flocks hold a central place, notably for traditional cheeses such as *brocciu* (PDO)⁵⁵. **Extensive pig farming** is a specificity: the “*nustrale*” pig, raised free-range in the chestnut and oak woods where it feeds on chestnuts and acorns, yields the meat at the base of the *charcuterie*. Mountain farming, extensive, plays a role beyond production: keeping landscapes open, preventing fires, passing on know-how.

58. Vine, citrus and the eastern plain

Viticulture is the leading Corsican agricultural activity by value. The vineyard covers about 7,000 hectares and is oriented toward quality, around local grape varieties: niellucciu (a cousin of Tuscan sangiovese), sciaccarellu and vermentinu (malvoisie). There is a regional appellation, “Vin de Corse” (1976 decree), with its designations (Calvi, Figari, Sartène, Coteaux du Cap Corse, Porto-Vecchio), two crus — **Patrimonio** (the first Corsican AOC, 1968) and **Ajaccio** — and the **Muscat du Cap-Corse** (a naturally sweet wine)⁵⁶. The **eastern plain** (around Aléria), drained in the 20th century and developed from the 1960s by repatriates from Algeria, concentrates an intensive, irrigated agriculture: plain vineyards and above all **citrus** — Corsica produces most French clementines (Clémentine de Corse PGI, hand-picked, seedless)⁵⁷.

59. Quality labels and moving upmarket

Corsican agriculture, modest in volume, banks on official quality labels (PDO/AOC, PGI). Besides wines and the clementine, there are the **Corsican chestnut flour** (PDO), the **Corsican olive oil - Oliu di Corsica** (PDO), **Brocciu** (PDO, since 2003), **Corsican honey - Mele di Corsica** (PDO, produced notably thanks to the endemic black bee) and several PDO charcuteries (prisuttu, coppa de Corse, lonzu de Corse)⁵⁸. This “moving upmarket” strategy rests on emblematic firms (cheese dairies, distilleries such as Mavela, the Pietra brewery, salting houses) and on short supply chains, but remains limited by geography, the small size of farms and the cost of shipping off the island.

Summary: the main quality labels

Vins de Corse (AOC)	Regional appellation (1976); crus Patrimonio and Ajaccio; Muscat du Cap-Corse
Clémentine de Corse (PGI)	Hand-picked, seedless; most of French production
Brocciu (PDO)	Fresh whey cheese of ewe/goat (PDO since 2003)
Corsican chestnut flour (PDO)	From the chestnut grove (Castagniccia, Gravona, Taravo)
Oliu di Corsica (PDO)	Corsican olive oil
Mele di Corsica (PDO)	Corsican honey, endemic black bee; several types by flora
Charcuterie (PDO)	Prisuttu, coppa de Corse, lonzu de Corse (nustrale pig)

Non-exhaustive list; sources INAO / INSEE (see appendix 3).

Notes and sources for this part

- 55.** Wikipedia, “Économie de la Corse”: livestock is the dominant activity of Corsican agriculture; sheep and goats central for cheeses (brocciu PDO); extensive free-range pig farming in the chestnut groves, the basis of PDO charcuterie (prisuttu, coppa, lonzu).
- 56.** Wikipedia, “Corse (AOC)”: regional appellation “Vin de Corse” (decree of 2 April 1976); designations Calvi, Figari, Sartène, Coteaux du Cap Corse, Porto-Vecchio; crus Patrimonio (AOC from 1968) and Ajaccio (1984); Muscat du Cap-Corse (naturally sweet wine). Vineyard of about 7,000 ha (INAO, Patrimonio specification).
- 57.** Manageo.fr (after regional data): Corsica produces ≈ 99% of French clementines; the Aléria plain concentrates viticulture (Muscat du Cap-Corse, Île de Beauté regional wines) and fruit production. Clémentine de Corse under PGI.
- 58.** Wikipedia, “Économie de la Corse” and TheFork/INAO: Corsican quality labels — Vins de Corse (AOC), Clémentine de Corse (PGI), Corsican chestnut flour (PDO), Olive oil - Oliu di Corsica (PDO), Brocciu (PDO since 2003), Mele di Corsica - Corsican honey (PDO, Apis mellifera mellifera corsica bee), PDO charcuteries (prisuttu, coppa, lonzu).

PART TEN

Corsican cuisine · § 60 to 64

60. A terroir cuisine, between mountain and sea

Corsican cuisine is rustic, generous and deeply tied to the terroir. It rests on a few simple pillars: the charcuterie of free-range pig, ewe's and goat's cheeses, chestnut flour, game (wild boar), Mediterranean fish and the herbs of the maquis. Passed down from generation to generation, it is organised around the products described in the previous part and reflects the island's history — Mediterranean, Italian, mountainous. It is a leading identity marker.

61. Charcuterie

Charcuterie is a summit of Corsican gastronomy, from the “nustrale” pig fed on chestnuts and acorns and cured in the mountain air. The emblematic pieces are **prisuttu** (dry ham, cured 15 to 36 months), **coppa** (dried pork neck), **lonzu** (dried fillet) and above all **figatellu** — a pork-liver sausage (from “fegatu,” liver), sometimes smoked over chestnut wood, eaten dried like a sausage or grilled⁵⁹. Grilled figatellu, with lentils or pulenda, is a convivial winter dish.

62. The cheeses: brocciu and the others

Brocciu (PDO since 2003) is considered the national cheese of Corsica: a fresh cheese made from the **whey** of ewe's or goat's milk (not the milk itself), available mostly from autumn to spring. Mild and creamy, it is eaten on its own (salted or sweet) and goes into countless recipes: omelettes (with mint), fritters, ravioli, sturzapreti (chard-and-brocciu dumplings), and above all the **fiadone**, a dessert close to a lemon cheesecake⁶⁰. Alongside, aged ewe's and goat's cheeses (casgiu vechju) offer powerful flavours, up to the “casgiu merzu” (“rotten cheese”).

63. The dishes: chestnut, game and sea

Pulenda is the symbol-dish of the interior: a thick chestnut-flour porridge, slowly cooked and rolled in a copper cauldron, served in slices (often cut with a thread) with eggs, brocciu or figatellu, or grilled⁶¹. **Wild-boar stew** (stufatu di cignale), marinated and slow-simmered in red wine with maquis herbs, is the great dish of the hunting season, served with pasta or chestnut purée. From the sea, **aziminu** is the Corsican version of bouillabaisse (rockfish, saffron), and one finds sea urchins, octopus and grilled fish. To these are added Corsican bean-and-vegetable soup, veal with olives, and the Italian heritage (pasta, brocciu-filled cannelloni).

64. Sweets, honey and drinks

Desserts rest on three favourite products: chestnut, lemon and brocciu. The **fiadone**, **canistrelli** (dry biscuits with lemon, aniseed, almond or white wine), **falculelle**, **migliacciu** and fritters play on these flavours. **Corsican honey** (PDO), produced thanks to the endemic black bee, ranges from a mild, floral spring honey to an amber, caramelised maquis honey, by way of the powerful chestnut honey⁶². As for drinks: the AOC wines (see § 58), **Pietra** beer (amber, brewed with chestnut flour), and **myrtle** (black-fruit and maquis aromas) and chestnut liqueurs as digestifs. The best place to discover this cuisine remains the farm inns, markets and village food festivals.

Notes and sources for this part

- 59. TheFork, “10 Corsican specialties”; Terdav, “Corsican culinary specialties”; Corsicalovers: figatellu (pork-liver sausage, from fegatu) often smoked over chestnut wood, eaten cured or grilled; prisuttu cured 15 to 36 months; coppa, lonzu. Several charcuteries have a PDO.
- 60. TheFork and Terdav: brocciu (PDO) is a fresh cheese from the whey of ewe's or goat's milk, best from autumn to spring; the basis of omelettes, fritters, sturzapreti and the fiadone (brocciu-and-lemon cake). “Casgiu frescu” (fresh) and “casgiu vechju” (aged) complete the range.
- 61. TheFork and Plats-corses.fr: pulenda (or pulenta) is a chestnut-flour porridge, cooked and rolled in a copper cauldron, cut with a thread and served with eggs, brocciu or figatellu, sometimes grilled.
- 62. TheFork, “10 Corsican specialties”: Mele di Corsica (PDO) is produced thanks to the endemic bee *Apis mellifera mellifera corsica*; spring honey (mild, floral, citrus), maquis honey (amber, caramelised), chestnut honey (powerful, bitter), honeydew.

PART ELEVEN

Heritage, culture and traditions · § 65 to 69

65. Built heritage: from the megalith to the Genoese tower

The Corsican landscape is dotted with traces of every era. To the **prehistoric sites** (statue-menhirs and castelli of Filitosa, Cauria, Palaggiu in the south) answers the ancient legacy of **Aléria** (remains and archaeological museum of the Greco-Roman city). **Pisan Romanesque art** left small marvels of balance: the Canonica cathedral and the church of San Parteo near Mariana, the polychrome church of San Michele de Murato, the church of the Trinity at Aregno in the Balagne. The Genoese period covered the island with citadels (Bastia, Calvi, Corte, Bonifacio, Ajaccio, Saint-Florent) and, above all, with the hundred or so **coastal watchtowers** that still punctuate the capes and gulfs — the most emblematic silhouette of the Corsican coast, inherited from the struggle against the Barbary raids.

To these are added the humpbacked **Genoese bridges** spanning the torrents, the chapels and convents of the interior, the perched villages of schist or granite houses, and — more singularly — the “**Americans' houses**” of Cap Corse, witnesses to the migratory saga (see § 31). This heritage, often modest but dense, tells on its own the layering of dominations and Mediterranean exchanges.

66. The protected natural sites

Several natural ensembles enjoy first-rank protection. The **Gulf of Porto** — with the calanche of Piana, the Gulf of Girolata and the **Scandola nature reserve** — has been a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1983; Scandola, of volcanic origin, is accessible only by sea. The **Fango valley** has been a UNESCO biosphere reserve since 1977. The **Bouches de Bonifacio** form a vast marine nature reserve, and the **Restonica valley** is classified a “Grand Site.” Across the island, the **Regional Nature Park of Corsica** protects much of the mountainous interior and the **Coastal Conservatory** has saved entire stretches of coast from development. These protections are both a tourist asset and an instrument of preservation against land pressure.

67. Polyphonic singing, music and orality

Corsican culture is first of all a culture of orality and the voice. Sacred **polyphonic singing**, in particular the **paghjella** — an a cappella song for three male voices — is inscribed by UNESCO on the list of intangible cultural heritage in need of urgent safeguarding. Alongside the sacred repertoire (masses, confraternity chants) there is a rich secular tradition: chjam'è rispondi (improvised sung jousts), lamenti, lullabies (nanne), work songs. The “riacquistu” of the 1970s revived this heritage and gave rise to a committed Corsican song, still very much alive today in festivals and village paghjelle.

68. Religion, confraternities and festivals

Corsica is of Catholic tradition, and Catholicism keeps a strong cultural place. Lay **confraternities**, Holy Week processions and the cult of patron saints still mark the life of many villages. The most famous of these is the **Cerca** and the **Catenacciu** of Sartène, on Good Friday, when a hooded penitent, barefoot and bearing a heavy cross, walks through the town dragging a chain — one of the most striking processions in France. To these religious high points are added the **patronal festivals** and rural **fairs** (chestnut festival in Bocognano, olive, honey, cheese and almond fairs), all occasions of transmission and village sociability.

69. Crafts, know-how and identity

Corsican crafts prolong this terroir culture: **knife-making** (the Corsican knife, u cultellu), **basketry**, work in olive and chestnut wood, **pottery**, **instrument-making** (cetera, a traditional stringed instrument), jewellery of the “eye of Saint Lucia” (a shell operculum charm). The terroir products — charcuterie, cheeses, honey, wines, liqueurs, jams, biscuits — have themselves become identity markers and economic levers (see the agriculture and cuisine parts). The **Moor's-head flag** (a bandera, a black head with a white band raised on the forehead), adopted by Paoli as the national emblem, is the island's most immediately recognisable symbol; it is found everywhere, from official pediments to bumpers. This omnipresence of symbols — flag, language, song, products — testifies to an asserted and maintained identity, one that irrigates daily life as much as political debate.

PART TWELVE

Today's challenges · § 70 to 71

70. The major challenges facing contemporary Corsica

The institutional and identity challenge: the autonomy question, which entered its parliamentary phase in 2026, remains to be settled. Its outcome will determine the island's future status, the degree of normative and fiscal power of its institutions, and the fate of the demands on language (co-officiality) and land (resident status).

The housing and land challenge: soaring prices, pressure from second homes and tourism, land disorder inherited from history, the difficulty for Corsicans to house themselves on their own territory — perhaps the most explosive social question, at the crossroads of economy and identity.

The development-model challenge: how to break free from excessive dependence on seasonal tourism and public transfers? How to reconcile attractiveness, preservation of an exceptional environment and residents' living conditions? “Overtourism” and sustainability are at the heart of the debates.

The security and rule-of-law challenge: the persistence of violent, entrenched organised crime, the high rate of unsolved homicides and the need to protect the legal economy call for a response that is both judicial and civic.

The demographic and environmental challenge: marked ageing, growth driven by new residents (integration and cohesion of a population being reshaped), strong inequalities, an interior threatened with desertification, and environmental risks (wildfires aggravated by agricultural decline and climate change, strain on water, artificialisation of the coast).

71. Conclusion: an island between memory and future

Corsica is a paradoxical land. Small in population, it occupies an outsized place in the French imagination and public debate. Geographically peripheral, it has been a crossroads of all the Mediterranean civilisations. Deeply integrated into France, it is also the only territory in metropolitan France where a nationalist movement has won power and carries a project of emancipation. Its geography of a mountain in the sea, its endemic nature, its language, its diaspora scattered as far as the Americas, its terroir cuisine and its fragile economy compose a strong and complex identity.

The long history — from the Greeks of Alalia to Paoli, from Genoa to the Collectivity of Corsica — illuminates the present: the demand for autonomy is not a recent whim but the contemporary expression of a very old experience of itself as a distinct community. As for the future, it is being decided largely in the current years, around the institutional process under way in Parliament, the housing question and the development model.

Which is to say how much this guide, on its most contemporary chapters, calls to be re-read against the very latest news.

For further reading. The reader who wishes to go deeper will find in appendix 3 a bibliography arranged by theme. For history, the scholarly syntheses (Graziani, Vergé-Franceschi) offer a solid framework; for figures, INSEE-Corsica's dossiers are the reference to consult directly, as they are regularly updated; for language and culture, the Università di Corsica and the island's cultural institutions publish work and resources. Above all, the best way to understand Corsica remains to travel it slowly: to climb to Corte and the inland valleys, to follow Cap Corse and its Americans' houses, to listen to a paghjella, to taste the terroir products, and to pay attention to the ever-present language and symbols. An island is not summed up by its figures or its landscapes: it lets itself be discovered, with patience and respect, in the thickness of its history and the vitality of its culture.

APPENDIX 1

Chronology (updated)

Date	Event
c. 8000 BCE	Human presence (“Lady of Bonifacio”); megalithic civilisation (Filitosa).
c. 565 BCE	Greek (Phocaeen) founding of Alalia (Aléria).
c. 540 BCE	Battle of Alalia; the Greeks leave the island.
259 BCE	Rome takes Aléria; beginning of the Roman conquest.
5th-6th c.	Vandals then Byzantine reconquest.
8th c.	Frankish intervention; Carolingian then papal orbit.
11th-12th c.	Pisan age; Romanesque art (La Canonica, San Michele de Murato).
1284	Battle of Meloria: Genoa prevails over Pisa.
14th-18th c.	Genoese rule; coastal towers, chestnut grove.
1729	Beginning of the Corsican revolution against Genoa.
1755	Pasquale Paoli “general of the nation”; constitution; capital at Corte.
1765	Founding of the University of Corte by Paoli.
1768-1769	Treaty of Versailles; defeat at Ponte Novu; end of independence; birth of Napoleon (15 Aug. 1769).
1794-1796	Anglo-Corsican Kingdom.
19th c.	Poverty, mass emigration (Americas: Puerto Rico, Venezuela); civil service.
1914-1918	Very heavy human toll (≈ 25% of mobilised men).
Sept.-Oct. 1943	Liberation of Corsica, the first metropolitan department freed.
1962	Repatriates from Algeria; development of the eastern plain.
1970s	Cultural “riacquistu”; the “red mud” affair.
Aug. 1975	Aléria affair: turn toward armed struggle.
1976	Creation of the FLNC.
1998	Assassination of prefect Claude Érnigac.
2014	FLNC announces its exit from clandestinity.
Dec. 2015	First electoral victory of the nationalists.
1 Jan. 2018	Creation of the single Collectivity of Corsica.
June 2021	Territorial elections: ≈ 68% for the nationalists; M.-A. Maupertuis president of the Assembly.
March 2022	Death of Yvan Colonna; protests; “Beauvau process.”
March 2024	Macron accepts the principle of constitutional autonomy.
July 2025	Reserved opinion of the Council of State on the constitutional bill.
27 April 2026	Tabling of the constitutional bill (Art. 72-5).
4 May 2026	Gilles Giovannangeli succeeds Gilles Simeoni as president of the executive.
16-17 June 2026	Examination of the text in the National Assembly; rewriting (“island community”).
23 June 2026	Solemn vote scheduled in the Assembly (outcome uncertain — to be updated; then Senate, Congress/referendum).

APPENDIX 2

Glossary

Cismonte / Pumonti	The “Hither Side” (northeast) and the “Further Side of the Mountains” (southwest), the island's two halves either side of the ridge.
Schistous / granite Corsica	The two great geological domains: schists in the northeast (Cap Corse, Castagniccia...), granite elsewhere.
Pieve (piève)	Former basic territorial and religious district; the origin of the micro-regions.
Corte furrow (sillon cortenais)	Inner corridor formed by the Tavignano, Restonica and middle Golo valleys, around Corte.
Maquis	Dense, fragrant scrubland; by extension, the refuge of clandestine fighters (“taking to the maquis”).
Pozzine	High-altitude peaty lawn (Cuscionu plateau), dotted with water holes.
Americans' house	A wealthy residence built or enlarged by a Corsican emigrant enriched in the Americas (mostly in Cap Corse).
Riacquistu	“Reappropriation.” The Corsican cultural and linguistic revival from the 1970s.
Polynomy	A language recognising the legitimacy of its varieties without imposing a single norm; theorised for Corsican.
Paghjella	A cappella polyphonic song for three male voices, inscribed in UNESCO intangible heritage (urgent safeguarding).
Mouflon (a muvra)	Wild sheep, emblem of the island, present for ≈ 8,000 years; hunting banned since 1955.
Corsican nuthatch	The only bird endemic to France; lives in the old Corsican-pine forests.
Corsican (laricio) pine	Emblematic conifer that can live ~1,000 years; king-tree of the high-altitude forests.
Brocciu	Fresh PDO cheese from the whey of ewe's or goat's milk; the “national” cheese.
Figatellu	Pork-liver sausage (from “fegatu”), often smoked, eaten dried or grilled.
Pulenda	Chestnut-flour porridge, the symbol-dish of the interior.
Fiadone	Brocciu-and-lemon dessert, close to a cheesecake.
Territorial continuity	Public subsidy of sea and air transport to offset insularity.
ZNI	“Non-interconnected zone”: Corsica is cut off from the mainland electricity grid.
Resident status	A demand to make land/property purchase conditional on a period of residence, to limit property pressure.
Co-officiality	A demand to recognise Corsican as an official language on a par with French.

Collectivity of Corsica	Single special-status collectivity born in 2018 (merger of region + two departments).
Article 72-5	The article the 2026 constitutional bill seeks to introduce to enshrine Corsica's autonomy.
FLNC	National Liberation Front of Corsica (clandestine, 1976); exit from clandestinity announced in 2014.
Babbu di a Patria	"Father of the Nation," Pasquale Paoli's nickname.

APPENDIX 3

Bibliography and sources · Consulted in June 2026 to verify and update the data

Geography and nature

- Wikipedia, “Géographie de la Corse” (accessed 2026): relief, ridge, Cismonte/Pumonti, schistous/granite Corsica, hydrography ($\approx 1,380$ km of watercourses).
- Wikipedia, “Tavignano,” “Restonica,” “Liste des cours d'eau de Corse”; “E fiume di Corsica” (Univ. Paris-3): rivers and tributaries.
- Corsica-aventure.com, “The most beautiful valleys of Corsica” and “The valley and gorges of the Tavignano” (Corte furrow, Restonica, Niolu).
- Wikipedia, “Endémisme en Corse”: ≈ 280 endemic taxa (of which 140 unique to the island).
- VivaCorsica, Olmi-Cappella, Rencontres-sauvages, Corsicatours, gr20-infos: fauna (mouflon, bearded vulture, Corsican nuthatch, Corsican pine).

History, emigration and diaspora

- Michel Vergé-Franceschi, “La Corse et les Amériques” (Alain Piazzola); Antoine-Marie Graziani (Genoese period).
- Les Cahiers ALHIM no. 39 (2020), “Corsican emigration to Puerto Rico in the 19th century... The Balanin example” (71% from Cap Corse).
- Thesis “L’émigration corse à Porto-Rico au dix-neuvième siècle” (1990); Marie-Jeanne Casablanca, “L’émigration corse à Porto Rico” (Le Signet, 1993).
- Corse Images et Histoire (2020) and Destination Cap Corse: ≈ 300 “Americans' houses” ($\approx$ half in Cap Corse); Enrique Vivoni's typology (PEC, University of Corte).
- Wikipedia, “Corses” and “Émigration corse vers Porto Rico”: migratory flows, Venezuela (Raúl Leoni), Marseille “first Corsican city in the world.”

Demography (INSEE Corsica)

- INSEE, “Une fécondité historiquement basse...,” Insee Analyses Corse no. 67, April 2026 (365,636 inhab. on 01/01/2026; fertility 1.12).
- INSEE, “Bilan démographique 2024,” Insee Analyses Corse no. 56, April 2025; “355,486 inhabitants on 1 January 2023” (Dec. 2025).
- INSEE, “L'essentiel sur... la Corse”; Insee Dossier Corse no. 18 (poverty).

Economy, agriculture, housing (INSEE and others)

- INSEE, “L'essentiel sur... la Corse”: GDP €10.7bn and $\approx$ €30,300/inhab. (2023); unemployment $\approx 6.5\%$; poverty 18.1%.
- Wikipedia, “Économie de la Corse” (2018 sectoral structure: market services 48%, non-market 35%, industry 6.7%, agriculture $\approx 3\%$); Astérès/DLR (2025).
- INSEE, “Tourisme — Bilan économique 2024” and “Saison touristique 2025” (Insee Analyses Corse no. 63); Europe 1 ($\approx 39\%$ of GDP).
- INSEE, Insee Analyses Corse no. 29 (second homes) and no. 65 (multi-ownership).
- Wikipedia, “Corse (AOC)” and INAO (Patrimonio); Manageo.fr ($\approx 99\%$ of French clementines).

Language, politics, crime

- Sociolinguistic survey of the Collectivity of Corsica (2023, $\approx 39\%$ active speakers); OpinionWay (2012).
- Council of State, opinion of 17 July 2025; constitutional bill of 27 April 2026 (vie-publique.fr no. 299712); LCP, Public Sénat (June 2026).
- franceinfo / France 3 Corse, 4 May 2026 (election of G. Giovannangeli); AFP, 21 April 2026.
- Prefecture of Corsica / AFP (February 2025); Journal de la Corse (2024–2025); DNPJ (≈ 25 gangs).

Cuisine

- Wikipedia, “Cuisine corse”; TheFork, “10 Corsican specialities”; Terdav; Corsicalovers; Art & Âme Corse: charcuterie, brocciu, pulenda, fiadone, PDO honey, Pietra.

Methodological note: figures for population, GDP, unemployment, poverty, tourism and housing come from INSEE; they are dated in footnotes throughout the text. Institutional elements rest on official texts, Council of State opinions and the reference press. For geography, nature, agriculture and cuisine, the sources combine reference encyclopedias, bodies (INAO, nature park) and specialist media; the structuring facts have been cross-checked. Where sources differed (e.g. homicide counts, the share of second homes, the number of diaspora descendants), the discrepancies were flagged rather than resolved.