

• SICILY • CAPRI • MAJORCA • SANTORINI • CRETE •

BON APPÉTIT

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ISLANDS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

DELICIOUS FOOD IN MAGICAL SETTINGS



ON CAPRI.
SPAGHETTI WITH CLAMS,
PARSLEY AND LEMON

CEPHALONIA • DJERBA • PANTELLERIA • MINORCA • CYPRUS

CORSICA • SARDINIA • GIGLIO • ELBA • OSLJAK • CORFU • MALTA

• KYTHERA • SAMOS • SYROS • FILICUDI • ISCHIA •

Refined Without a Fuss

Sophisticated restaurants don't have to be fancy. These top-notch spots in the Mediterranean prove the point.

BY HEIDI YORKSHIRE

HERE IS ONE of the many things I like about the islands of the Mediterranean: Just because you've spent the day lounging on a beach or hiking along a mountain trail doesn't mean you can't treat yourself to a truly civilized dinner. Refined, even. I'm not talking about coat-and-tie refined. I'm talking tastefully wrinkled linen and open-toed footwear—as well as gracious service, a splendid view and food that you'll long remember.

During the past decade or so, fine dining in the Mediterranean has changed. It used to be that a high-end restaurant was likely to offer a generic French or Italian menu based on ingredients from the mainland. These days, chefs are seeking out the best local produce and proudly incorporating traditional island specialties and cooking techniques into their menus, while adding their own personal spin.

These ten restaurants would be at home in Paris, Milan or Barcelona. But they're all on enchanting islands—which makes them that much more memorable.

MAJORCA SPAIN

In Palma, Majorca's largest city, the quiet, modern dining room at **KOLDO ROYO** provides a backdrop for the inventive cooking of one of Spain's most honored chefs. Koldo Royo, who was born in Basque Country, has embraced his adopted island with a passion, writing several books on Majorcan cuisine and starring in radio and television shows.

He applies his imagination to food from land and sea, whether the choice is an oyster salad with seawater granita or a warm duck salad with kumquats, a Majorcan specialty. Suckling pig arrives with crisp skin and tender meat, braised in a vibrant pomegranate sauce; quail is stuffed with duck liver and rose petals; monkfish is served with a saffron sauce; and meaty turbot comes with wild mushrooms. Dessert also emphasizes local ingredients, like the ➤



EL OLIVO, IN A CONVERTED OLIVE-OIL MILL, IS THE PREMIER RESTAURANT OF LA RESIDENCIA RESORT ON MAJORCA.

RAMON PATRICK

almond-blossom honey drizzled over crème fraîche ice cream.

The town of Deià on Majorca's rocky west coast is the dramatic setting for La Residencia, a hideaway resort that's part of Virgin Group entrepreneur Richard Branson's empire. Just the place for clients like the royal families of Spain and Japan, Tom Hanks and Sting, or anyone who likes to eat well.

The resort's top restaurant, **EL OLIVO**, set in an old olive-oil mill, offers food that reflects the bounty of the island and the skills of chef Guillermo Méndez. A tasting menu might include bacon confit with prawns on a puree of cauliflower and mushrooms; lobster ravioli with coconut and ginger; and rack of lamb in an olive crust. The wine list offers Binissalem, a famous Majorcan red.

CORSICA FRANCE

As you negotiate curves on the road to Palombaggia Beach, outside Porto Vecchio in the south of Corsica, you may catch a glimpse of the Hôtel Belvédère. With its desert-island-inspired architecture, you may think of Robinson Crusoe. But when you settle down to dinner at the hotel's restaurant, **LE BELVÉDÈRE**, you won't eat like a castaway.

In warm weather, the place to be is on the waterside terrace, with a luscious view of the old stone walls of Porto Vecchio across the gulf. The menu understandably favors the sea, with specialties that change daily, like lobster served with orange-spiced onion jam and escabeche of *rouget* with coriander-scented olive oil.

In Calvi, on the rugged northwestern coast, the Hôtel La Villa and its restaurant, **L'ALIVU**, overlook the imposing fortifications of the Citadel. Chef Christophe Bacquier displays a creative touch and a commitment to Corsican ingredients. Dinner might begin with an *amuse-bouche* of Corsican morel mushrooms with asparagus and paper-thin ribbons of ham in a light morel *jus*. Scorpion fish is baked with olive oil, wild thyme, potatoes and sea salt. Chestnuts, a Corsican specialty, show up at dessert: Light chestnut cream fills a chocolate *tuile*, which is topped with candied chestnuts and accompanied by clementine sorbet.

THE HIGH POINT OF THE DAY IS LUNCH AT TERRAZZA BRUNELLA, IN CAPRI'S VILLA BRUNELLA.



ELBA ITALY

Officially part of Tuscany, Elba is barely six miles from the Italian mainland and an easy one-hour ferry ride from Piombino, a port south of Pisa. In ancient times, the island's iron mines attracted the Etruscans and, later, the Medici. But the figure who casts the longest shadow over the island is Napoléon Bonaparte, who was exiled there from 1814 to 1815 and kept himself busy making laws, building roads and designing the flag that is still used today.

Most tourists head for Elba's capital, Portoferraio. In-the-know yachtsmen, however, drop anchor in the beautiful little harbor at Porto Azzurro, then work their way along the narrow alleyways of the old town to **L'OSTERIA DEI QUATTRO GATTI**. (Fortunately, the yachtless can get there by car.) With its three small rooms and nautical-themed knickknacks, the dining room's intimate scale makes it the perfect place for dinner for two.

The menu reflects the restaurant's proximity to the sea: Dishes include gnocchi with shrimp and fish grilled or baked and served with seasonal greens. Among the best menu offerings is the house-made *tagliolini* lightly drizzled with olive oil and topped with shaved *bottarga*, the pungent, complex-flavored dried fish roe that's an Elban specialty. The menu warns in two languages that *cacciucco*—a classic fish soup—must be ordered in advance. It's

worth the effort for the richly flavored tomato-and-garlic broth brimming with shellfish.

SARDINIA ITALY

Olbia, a port town on Sardinia's northeast coast, is the entrance to the island's main tourist destination, the rugged and pretty Costa Smeralda (Emerald Coast). Upon landing in town, most people whisk away in rental cars, but smart travelers know to fortify themselves in advance at the **HOTEL-RISTORANTE GALLURA**.

The first thing you see when you enter the country-chic dining room is a three-tiered table filled with dozens of platters of antipasti, such as oysters and truffles with lemon; goat cheese medallions rolled in toasted sesame seeds; fried baby shrimp; and mussels in tomato sauce on *bruschetta*. Most people come to feast on the creative starters and pasta dishes for which the inventive chef Rita Denza is known. So when diners who have had copious antipasti and a serious helping of noodles are too sated to order an entrée, Denza doesn't seem to mind.

CAPRI ITALY

Only four miles long and two miles wide, Capri defines the notion of a high-style island. It has been hosting the rich and privileged ever since the Roman emperor Tiberius built several villas there and amused himself by having his enemies ➤

tossed off a very picturesque cliff.

The main town, also called Capri, is a walkable fairyland of designer boutiques and picture-perfect piazzas with few cars or trucks. Its most beautiful residential street is Via Tragara, which leads up to the Faraglioni, giant rock sentinels jutting from the sea. That's where you'll find the hotel Villa Brunella, and its restaurant, **TERRAZZA BRUNELLA**, an unbeatable combination of elegant decor, polished service and the warm welcome only a family-owned restaurant can offer.

Sip a glass of Prosecco and nibble on crisp-fried, cheese-stuffed ravioli as you study the menu—if you aren't too distracted by the view of Marina Piccola, Capri's pretty little port, and the cliffs beyond. To choose is tough: fresh local fish, grilled or baked; pasta or risotto with shellfish; or the house special, ravioli Brunella, stuffed with ham and Parmesan, Romano and *caciotta* cheeses. End with wild strawberries in cream and a tiny glass of *limoncello*, the sweet liqueur made from Capri's aromatic lemons.

SICILY ITALY

EREMO DELLA GIUBILIANA, near Ragusa in the southernmost corner of Sicily, has seen a lot of travelers. Built as a monastery in the fifteenth century, it first served as an inn during the sixteenth century, sheltering Knights of Malta as they passed through. The modern-day hotel and restaurant opened in 1997, when the Nifosi family, local aristocrats, restored the property. The monks' cells, now transformed into guest rooms, demand not a smidgen of monastic self-denial.

The restaurant quickly developed a reputation for its renditions of disappearing regional dishes, notably focaccia rolled around a stuffing of eggplant, tomato and basil or broccoli *rabe* and ricotta. The wheat for the dough comes from the Nifosi family's own fields; the vegetables, from the restaurant's garden.

CORFU GREECE

Corfu, in a strategic position off the west coast of Greece, has been occupied by just about everybody over the past couple of thousand years, including, lately, hordes of northern Europeans looking for

CHEF CHRISTOPHE BACQUIER GOES TO GREAT LENGTHS—AND DEPTHS—TO MAKE HIS MEALS MEMORABLE AT L'ALIVU IN THE HÔTEL LA VILLA ON CORSICA.



sun. The Venetians reigned for more than four hundred years, and an Italian flavor still lives on in delightful ways—among them, the restaurant **ETRUSCO**, tucked away in an olive grove, near the town of Dassia. The place takes its name from chef Etrusco Botrini, who presides over the kitchen with his son, Ettore. The Botrini, natives of Tuscany, brought their Italian sensibility with them: They make their own bread, pasta, prosciutto and *bresaola* (thinly sliced dried beef); press their own olive oil; and even serve local wines from old Corfiote grape varieties.

Etrusco seats only 60 diners a night for sophisticated dishes like a terrine of lobster, leeks and caviar; grilled filet of beef with a sauce of rosemary, garlic and Brunello; and red snapper stuffed with clams in a crayfish reduction. Monica Botrini, Ettore's wife, is the pastry chef, turning out a rainbow of soft-frozen *semifreddi* and desserts like melon-white chocolate mousse with pineapple sauce.

SANTORINI GREECE

When it comes time to vote for Most Dramatic Landscape on Earth, one top candidate will certainly be the caldera of

Santorini, with its crescent of sheer black-and-red cliffs embracing a semicircle of blue Aegean.

At the northern tip of the crescent, the village of Oia frosts the land with a cluster of white houses, many built by wealthy shipowners in the nineteenth century. One of the most spectacular homes had been abandoned for more than three decades when architect Ioannis Zaggelidis began restoring it in 1986. He called it **RESTAURANT 1800**, and in the collection of intimate rooms under vaulted ceilings, you'll see ornate furniture that belonged to the shipowner. His sea chest stands in the entry, as if he were ready to make one more voyage.

The menu focuses on traditional Greek dishes, including roasted fish and a *mezedes* platter with local cheeses. Grilled lamb chops, a Greek classic, are served with an original touch: a sweet-and-sour green apple sauce. All are enhanced by the view from the rooftop garden, the perfect spot for a certain wealthy shipowner to be there in spirit. 🍷

Portland-based Heidi Yorkshire writes frequently about food and wine.