

“Tabisuru Sardinia” Tharros for January 2014

Do you know what the restaurant Tharros is named after?

It's named after an ancient city on the west coast of Sardinia in Italy, that is currently an archaeological site near the village of San Giovanni di Sinis.

The island of Sardinia functioned as a very important place for trade around the Mediterranean Sea. Tharros was originally built by Phoenicians who came from the west of the Mediterranean Sea in the eighth century BC. Geographically, it's location was very important for trade.

Excavations have shown that from the eighth century BC until its abandonment in the tenth century, Tharros was inhabited by Phoenicians and then the Punics. After this, it fell under Roman domination.

Tharros was the capital of the medieval Giudicato of Arborea, a Roman/Byzantine relict state from the 9th century until 1070. The city was abandoned and relocated to Oristano after constant raids by North African pirates and Sardinian coast raiders.

As Tharros has been ruled by a variety of races, each with distinct cultures, you can find many different cultural influences in its remains. For example, archaeological research has found that the architecture of public baths in Tharros was very similar to that of Tunisia.

Tharros is now an open air museum. The archeological site of Tharros enchants visitors with the remains of the old commercial town and the way it overlooks both the Oristano Gulf and the Monte Linas range.

If you visit Tharros in summer, you simply must visit the beautiful beach near the ruins. At its restaurants, be sure to savor fresh dishes including seafood fritto and pasta with botargo.

And, if you happen to speak with the locals, be sure to tell them there is a good restaurant called Tharros in Tokyo!

“Tabisuru Sardinia” Oristano for February 2014

Located approximately 30 minutes drive inland from Tharros is Oristano, a spot known for botargo mullet roe and Vernaccia di Oristano, a variety of grape used in Italian wines. In Oristano, you can see many old buildings and relics reminiscent of the Middle Ages.

Among these pieces of history is the statue of Eleanor of Arborea, who was the giudicessa ("female judge") of Arborea from 1383 until her death. She was one of the last, most powerful, and significant Sardinian judges, and the island's most renowned heroine. The statue holds the Carta de Logu, a body of laws that came into effect in April of 1395. Every year in September, Oristano has a festival in which people dress up in costumes of the Middle Ages and walk around the city, to commemorate Eleanor and her achievements.

Carnival, or *Carnevale* in Italian, takes place across Italy from late February to early March. During this period, Oristano has a festival called the Sartiglia on the last Sunday and Tuesday of Carnival. It is one of the most spectacularly choreographed forms of Carnival of Sardinia.

These traditional festivals symbolize the tradition of noble purity, prosperity and foresight from the Middle Ages, and even now attract large numbers of people to Oristano.

“Tabisuru Sardinia” Alghero for March 2014

100 kilometers north of Oristano on Sardinia's State Road 292 North West is the town of Alghero. Due to its strategic position in the Mediterranean Sea, Alghero was built around a fortified port, founded by the Genoese Doria family around 1102. Roughly 40% of the Alghero population speaks a dialect of Catalan – in 1353 Alghero was conquered by the crown of Aragon, and the indigenous population was expelled to allow Catalan settlers to populate the town.

Alghero also has an airport, so you might fly in through here when visiting Sardinia by plane.

Alghero and its surrounding areas are full of sightseeing spots: the center of Alghero is home to a kasbah retaining the atmosphere of the old fortified town, there is a variety of old architecture preserved along the coast, and small souvenir shops line the labyrinth of narrow streets.

Alghero has more than 300 grottos by the sea, the most famous of which is Neptune's Grotto. It lies at the foot of the Capo Caccia cliffs, approximately 25 km west of the town. The 654-step Escala del Cabirol (goat's steps), a stairway cut into the cliff in 1954, leads from the top of the cliff down to the entrance. Neptune's grotto is also accessible via short boat trip from the port of Alghero, and these trips are arranged hourly over summer.

Wine lovers are encouraged to visit Sella & Mosca, a major Sardinian winery in Alghero, to taste of their fine selection.

If you plan to visit Alghero in March, please do not miss Sagra del Bogamari – the sea urchin festival. Attracting large numbers even outside of Alghero, the festival is a great opportunity to savor fresh sea urchin with bread and wine.

Tharros in Shibuya, too, has a special sea urchin promotion over the March period!

“Tabisuru Sardinia” Olbia for April 2014

Costa Smeralda is one of the most renowned resorts in Europe. For the month of April, we are talking about Olbia, which is known as the gateway to Costa Smeralda, a luxurious and renowned coastal resort. Olbia is located in the Gallura sub-region of northeastern Sardinia, approximately 80 km from Alghero.

Costa Smeralda is loved by the world's top celebrities, and it's no wonder – white sandy beach stretches approximately 10 kilometers north of Olbia, and scenic islands including Caprera dot the Maddalena archipelago. During vacation season, it's common for hotels here to charge a couple of thousand US dollars per night!

The Olbia area was developed by Prince Shah Karim Al Hussaini Aga Khan in the 1960s. While it is denounced by some locals on the grounds that it lacks Sardinian authenticity, the Olbian contribution to local tourism is undeniable.

Gallura is also known for its cork production, and in fact, 90% of wine bottle corks in Italy

are produced in Sardinia. West of Olbia, in Calangianus, there is even an occupational school for cork craftsmen. At Olbia airport, you can find a variety of souvenirs made from cork.

This area is also known for Vermentino di Gallura, a Sardinian DOCG (Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita, an assurance of quality) white wine.

A classic Vermentino di Gallura wine is the color of fresh straw, with the greenish tinge of drying grass. The nose offers a delicate and refreshing bouquet of white blossoms, and the palate retains these floral elements, balancing it out with a zingy acidity and a hint of minerality.

Over April at Shibuya's Tharros, you can enjoy Vermentino di Gallura by the glass while you imagine a trip to Costa Smeralda.

“Tabisuru Sardinia” Cagliari for May 2014

Cagliari is the capital of Sardinia. Situated in the south of the island, overlooking the center of the eponymous gulf, interesting sites abound – Mercato San Benedetto boasts one of the largest fresh produce markets in Europe, and the beaches of Poetto stretch on for approximately eight kilometers, attracting many tourists during summer.

Even before summer, however, people flock to Cagliari: The yearly festival commemorating Saint Eufisio, held on the first of May, is also popular.

So what exactly does the festival celebrate?

In 1652, Sardinia was afflicted by a plague that killed half of Cagliari, and the population turned to their saint, Eufisio di Elia, to save them. The authorities, in recognition of the tide of popular feeling, made an announcement: if the plague were to be halted by Saint Eufisio, the people of Cagliari would carry his statue in a procession from the church in Cagliari to one in Nora, every year, forever. The plague disappeared, and the people of Cagliari have kept their promise, every year, ever since.

The locals proudly claim this procession as the biggest and most colorful religious in the world. It's the only religious procession that lasts for four days: 7,000 people take part, led by 30 wooden wheeled ox-drawn carts, all beautifully decorated with produce from the land and typical Sardinian foods.

A carnival atmosphere fills the city as people from more than 100 local cultural groups parade, and the event finishes with a gigantic banquet. This banquet is a highlight for Cagliari's renowned seafood.

As Cagliari is the capital of Sardinia, its local food is popular throughout the island. A traditional Sardinian fritter, seadas, which is made of semolina, cheese and honey, is arguably the oldest dessert in Europe.

Tharros in Shibuya also does a popular Cagliari dish called Fregula: a type of pasta similar to couscous!

“Tabisuru Sardinia” Carloforte for June 2014

The small island of Carloforte is located off the southwest coast of Sardinia. It lies approximately 80 km. from Cagliari, the Sardinian capital, and is accessible via ferry from Portoscuso.

Carloforte has a population of around 65,000, and is full of colorfully painted houses. It was founded in the 18th century by some 30 families of coral fishers, originally from Pegli, near Genoa, Liguria. These families built and painted their houses in the tradition of their ancestors. In fact, the dialect of Liguria is still spoken in Carloforte, and people still eat dishes with basil paste just as the people of Liguria do.

The main industry of Carloforte is fishery, and the reason it is often called the island of bluefin tuna. Every year schools of Atlantic bluefin tuna come to Carloforte in early summer, where local fishers catch them with traps and nets. This traditional method of fishing of tuna is called mattanza.

There is also a tuna festival called Girotonno which attracts many tourists and is centered around enjoying wine and freshly caught tuna. Even after the festival, the island attracts tourists, especially in July and August. In fact, the number of visitors over this period is easily more than double its population!

If you'd like to try a representative dish of Carloforte at Tharros in Shibuya, try the cassuli with bluefin tuna, tomato and basil paste on the early summer menu!

“Tabisuru Sardinia” Gallura for July 2014

For the month of July, let's visit Gallura, located west of Olbia (which we visited in May!)

Past the jagged coastline of Gallura is a landscape characterized by granite rocks and harsh mountains. Among these mountains are small villages, and driving from one village to another, you often see vineyards. These vineyards are almost always exclusively growing vermentino, a light-skinned wine grape variety.

This month let's look at three wineries in this region of northern Sardinia.

Jankara

This fairly young vineyard produced its first vintage in 2010, but does not yet own a winery. Its location is optimal, with a lake close by and the nearby mountains offer a nice breeze. As the vineyard is very well cared for, it grows arguably the best grapes in the region.

Cantina Monti

The Cantina Monti Winery is located in a village called Monti approximately 30 minutes drive southwest of Olbia. This is a large winery equipped with both a shop and a tasting room, and it produces a wide variety of wines made from the vermentino grape.

“Tabisuru Sardinia” Sassari for August 2014

Sassari is the second largest city in Sardinia, with a population over 275,000. Historically, the region has been ruled by varying ethnicities. Approximately 120,000 people in the region speak a dialect called Sassarese, which interestingly is said to be close to the

dialects of Liguria, Tuscany and Corsica belonging to France. Also, as the region was once ruled by the Spanish Kingdom of Aragon, some people still speak the Catalan language of north-eastern Spain.

The region holds a festival on August 14th, called Faradda di li Candareri (The Descent of the Candelieri). It's a devotional procession in which enormous wooden candles are carried by members of the city [guilds](#) from the town center to the church of Santa Maria of Betlem. The procession commemorates the end of the plague in 1582.

What people enjoy eating on special occasions like Faradda di li Candareri is dishes of land snails. The island of Sardinia, and especially Sassari, has a tradition of eating snails. It is not unusual to find snail shells in the remains of ancient architecture.

As the old part of Sassari still has many cultural properties. Sassari is a great place to get in touch with ancient history.

Please discover and enjoy Sassari's rich heritage and unique food culture!

“Tabisuru Sardinia” Cabras for September 2014

For the month of September, we're looking at the port city of Cabras, located not too far from Tharros and Oristano, which we covered in an earlier issue.

The biggest festival in Cabras is called Corsa degli Scalzi, literally translated as, 'barefoot race'. The festival, held in honor of San Salvatore, takes place over nine days in late September.

The Corsa degli Scalzi peaks in the first weekend of September. It commemorates an Arab pirate attack in 1506 that forced the Cabras' faithful to save a statue of the savior by carrying it from town to its hiding place in San Salvatore.

Since then, every year at dawn on the first Saturday in September, this "rescue" is recreated by a group of a thousand runners, all barefoot youth in white robes, carrying a representation of San Salvatore from the church of Santa Maria Assunta in Cabras to the rural church of San Salvatore seven kilometers away.

During the festival period, people eat Cabras' famed grilled gray mullet, and drink Vernaccia di Oristano, a wine typical of the region.

Botargo is a Mediterranean delicacy of salted, cured fish roe, often called Italian caviar. Among these, the botargo of grey mullet is considered most premium.

Of course, another way to savor the combination of botargo and Vernaccia di Oristano produced by the winery of Contini is at Tharros in Shibuya, Tokyo!

“Tabisuru Sardinia” Bosa for October 2014

Last month we took you to Cabras in the province of Oristano. This month, we'd like to take a look at Bosa, also located in Oristano. Bosa can be found slightly north, on the west coast of Sardinia. A small city with a population of 8,000, Bosa is surrounded by a beautiful coast and mountains, with the Temo river also nearby. The state highway, Strade Statali 105, which runs along the coast from Bosa to Alghero, is a beautifully scenic experience.

Bosa was ruled by the Spanish Kingdom of Aragon from the 13th to the 18th century, and so still retains many colorfully painted houses reminiscent of the Spanish countryside. The city's stone pavement was made by Romani, and it is thought that Bosa was originally established by Phoenicians.

In terms of wine, Bosa is home to the Malvasia grape, which is used for the long-term aged wine Malvasia di Bosa. This wine has a mouth-filling flavor and aroma which can only be achieved through long-term aging, much like sherry. If you are a wine lover, and visiting the Bosa area, this is a wine to be on the lookout for; the Malvasia di Bosa is still hard to come by in Japan.

“Tabisuru Sardinia” Barumini for November 2014

Let's take a look at Barumini this month. Take the state highway from Cagliari, the island capital, on the Strade Statali 131 to Oristano and you'll see a sign for Barumini. Located approximately 25 kilometers inland from the state highway, Barumini boasts both the Nuraghe and the Su Nuraxi.

The Nuraghe is a type of ancient megalithic edifice found in Sardinia, and developed during the Nuragic Age between 1900 and 730 BCE. Though there is no consensus on the function of the nuraghes - they could have been religious temples, ordinary dwellings, rulers' residences, military strongholds, meeting halls, or a combination of the former - more than 7,000 of them can be found on the island.

Among them, the most important complex is the Su Nuraxi di Barumin. It is a settlement consisting of a Nuraghe, a bastion of four corner towers plus a central one, and an inhabited village. The Su Nuraxi is considered by scholars the most impressive expression of the Nuragic civilization and was included in the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites in 1997. It's also possible to go inside through regular guided tours conducted in Italian, and scheduled for every 30 minutes.

“Tabisuru Sardinia” Nuoro for December 2014

The Final Chapter

Our final destination brings us to Nuoro, a mountainous region located east of the central island.

Nuoro itself is a city of 35,000 located at the foot of Mount Ortobene, approximately 90 minutes drive from both Oristano in the west and Olbia in the north-east. Driving to Nuoro on state highway 131 brings with it a gorgeous mountain view.

Sardinia is often called the island of shepherds, so it comes as no surprise that grazing is commonplace in the mountainous regions around Nuoro. In fact, one of the most popular dishes in the region, Pane Frattau, was initially a dish for shepherds. And this dish, made with a traditional flatbread called pane carasau, together with tomato sauce, broth, egg and pecorino cheese, is also available at Tharros in Shibuya - a great way to warm yourself up over these cold winter days.

As for wine, a popular option in this region is a red wine called cannonau, made with grenache. One winery and vine yard producing this wine is owned by Giuseppe Gabbas, a simple but deeply caring vinedresser who is more than capable of showing the wonderful

heritage of the great Sardinian wine tradition. His vineyard and winery is only a 20 minute drive from the city, and two of his wines - Lillove and Dule - are ideal choices for the winter months.