



{ESCAPE}

Sail Away

With sun-soaked voyages that go everywhere from Sardinia to St. Lucia, the Sailing Collective makes vacations as much about the journey as the destination.

In the morning, on the deck of the sailboat, we filled our bellies with soft scrambled eggs and a spiral of pan-fried Sardinian sausage with sliced kiwi and Greek yogurt sprinkled with chia seeds, goji berries and honey. And coffee. Lots of coffee.

Bobbing while we anchored in a little cove, the crisp blue sea plunged below us, and the ragged coast of Isola Razzoli promised a hike through the uninhabited island's interior to a crumbling lighthouse on a cliff.

We were somewhere in the middle of the

Mediterranean, somewhere between the islands of Sardinia and Corsica, Italy and France. But for the next few days, all that really mattered was the geomorphology of different coves, whether we spotted sea urchins or fire coral on the seafloor, the angle of our tack at full sail and trying to describe what shade of blue the ocean was.

I couldn't decide if Razzoli — with its dusty pink granite erupting from the earth's crust, punctuated by emerald outcroppings of sagebrush and thyme and tiny yellow flowers — reminded me of the landscape of my Southern California childhood or my imagination of prehistoric times; perhaps, a little bit of both. The rocks in France at Lavezzi were different, monumental in scale with smooth, rounded edges, balanced atop one another as if plunked down from heaven just so.



Above: Anchored at Isola Razzoli, part of a cluster of three small islands just north of Sardinia in Italy. Left: Relaxing on the calm water between Sardinia and Corsica.

DESTINATIONS AT SEA

Our captain, Dayyan Armstrong, and his stepbrother Ross Beane taught themselves how to sail on their 24-foot sloop Pelican as kids on Lake Winnepesaukee in New Hampshire.

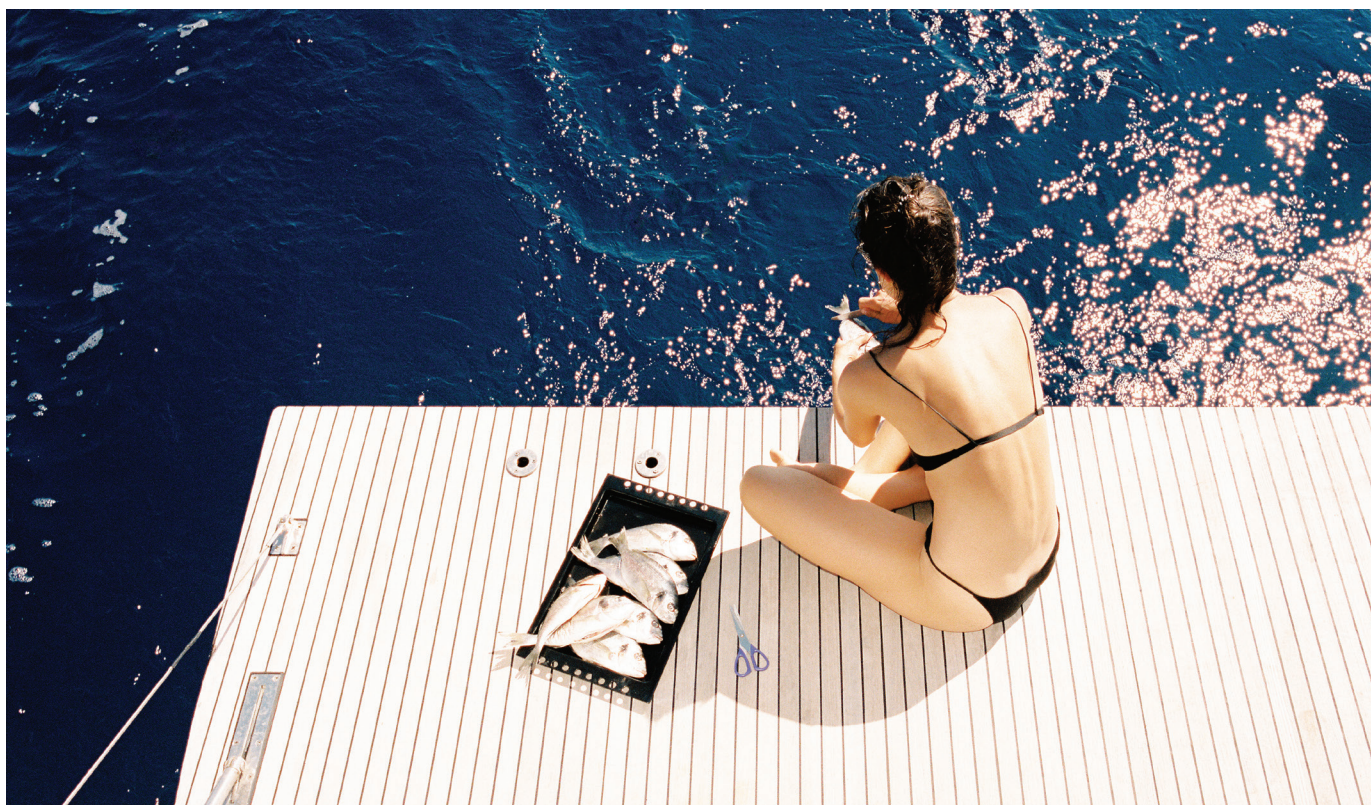
Armstrong founded the Sailing Collective in 2011, which he runs with Beane in New York City, describing it as a “travel company that organizes sailing journeys as opposed to a sailing company that organizes vacations.” Sailing Collective trips are tailored to anyone who likes the idea of approaching a new destination by boat aboard a private or group charter with a captain, chef and weeklong itinerary in place.

“The Sardinia-Corsica itinerary definitely speaks to me,” said Armstrong, who captains about half a dozen Sailing Collective charters a year. “It’s not the geography or the topography, the plant life or even the color palette, but in a very odd sense, I think it resembles the Gulf of Maine where I grew up camping. The main reason is the diverse anchorages within a relatively small sailing ground. It’s childhood memories of running along Maine’s rocky coast just like those big, granite-style boulders in Lavezzi.”

The Sailing Collective (sailingcollective.com) arranges charters in Europe in the summer and the Caribbean in the winter to destinations including Croatia, Turkey, Greece, British Virgin Islands, Grenadines, Martinique, Dominica and St. Lucia, as well as seasonal trips to Thailand and Madagascar. “We want to bring people to as many places around the world as possible for real cultural engagement,” Armstrong said.



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Above: Wine and snacks on the bow at sunset in Lavezzi, an island preserve south of Corsica in France. Left: Chef Katja Tausig cleans seabream for dinner that she picked up at a Sardinian market. Every day of the trip, Tausig creates fresh and flavorful meals from a tiny galley kitchen aboard the 56-foot sailing yacht.

Clockwise from right: Mussels starred in a Sardinian pasta dish with saffron; boiled eggs topped an eggplant stew for breakfast; pan-seared skate with clams and potatoes served as the last lunch of the sailing voyage.



AN ADVENTURE AWAITS

On my journey in July, our crew included Armstrong at the helm, a newly married couple from New York, a photographer who recently returned to Minneapolis after a stint in Hawaii, and our London-based chef, Katja Tausig, all aboard the 56-foot Bavaria cruiser *Dignity*.

I was there with two girlfriends, celebrating the end of my decade-plus chapter in South Florida. Sailboats and a thirst for adventure and travel are what drew me to Florida in the first place, so this felt like an appropriate cap to that journey before moving back to New York in August. There were four other Sailing Collective boats on our itinerary that week with their own captains (including Beane) and chefs, and we'd rendezvous with them at various anchorages.

Sometimes, the only thing to do was dive in the water. The sea was 10 degrees cooler than the balmy air, making for a perfectly invigorating immersion every time. We'd flutter around new coves, exploring the shapes of their perimeters, scaling rocks above the surface. Afterward, napping on the bow, my cheek pressed to the warm teak deck, drying off naturally in the sun, I wasn't sure it was possible to be more relaxed.

Another preoccupation of our crew was just how Tausig managed to outdo herself, day after day, night after night, whipping up outrageously flavorful meals in the tiny, boiling hot galley

kitchen down below. She'd emerge with platters of mussels swimming in fragrant saffron broth with fregola pasta, a local specialty. Sea bream rested atop a bed of lentils and tomatoes. There was spaghetti con le sarde, Cornish game hen, endive salad, all provisioned from local markets and paired with cold Sardinian wine.

None of us had ever eaten so well for so

many consecutive meals. Tausig's coup de grâce was our final lunch, anchored off Isola Mortorio before rounding the final bend and returning to Sardinia's Porto Cannigione. We dined on pan-seared skate with clams, guindilla peppers and potatoes, gnocchi with marinara and local hard sausage and zucchini salad, the aquamarine sea our ceaseless backdrop.



DAYVAN ARMSTRONG (EGGS)

NOSTALGIA OF YOUTH

There were adventures on land, too. We docked at the Bonifacio marina for the night, nestled between dramatic granite cliffs, at the southern tip of Corsica, cozying up to megayachts and a ragtag community of Mediterranean pleasure cruisers. There was a little town to explore with cafes and ice cream shops, terraces crawling with bougainvillea, a charming maritime antique shop and a tacky nightclub where revelers, ourselves included, spilled onto the docks after midnight.

At La Maddalena, back in Italy, we rented scooters and rode across a bridge to Caprera through pine forests to secret rocky beaches and up to the highest point, where a military fort had been in use through World War II. There's plenty of ancient Roman history in Caprera, but for us, the thrill was the view, the rocky coves, the epic stretch of the blue sea (what shade was it now?), the islands on the horizon that felt familiar, our shared landscape.

We spent the evening watching soccer on TV in a little piazza near the docks over pizza and white wine. A woman sold English-language books translated to Italian on folding tables in the square, including Hemingway's *Il Vecchio e Il Mare*, and we laughed and laughed that we could still understand Papa's spare, seafaring prose even in Italian.

"I think with any vacation, there's a link of childhood nostalgia, and you can create your own with these experiences," Armstrong told me a few months later at a wine bar in Soho, near his office. We were bundled up in sweaters and coats, the warm deck of our sailboat in the Mediterranean felt far way.

"I'm very excited for the future nostalgia that somebody traveling on a Sailing Collective journey is going to have."

WORDS BY SHAYNE BENOWITZ / PHOTOGRAPHY BY ASHLEY CAMPER



Clockwise from top: When a vacation is more about the journey than the destination, you have time to do things like float in the sea; enjoy the view of Tavolara, off the western coast of Sardinia; and read on the aft deck.