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Taking slow in Sardinia

NADIA, Auckland

Taking it slow in Sardinia

Italy is a long way from home so it makes sense to fit in as much as possible, right? Not so for newlywed Your Home and Garden editor Kristina Rapley and husband Ashton, who discovered they could experience more by doing less.

Our honeymoon must-haves included sun, sand and sea, sleep-ins, amazing food and culture. After Googling “clearest water in the world”, up popped Sardinia. It looked perfect. After a busy year, rest and relaxation was the top priority so Ashton and I made a few ground rules to ensure we didn’t get too caught up in trying to see and do everything. Read on for a lazy girl’s guide to mastering the art of ‘slow holidaying’ in Sardinia.

Me time or island time? Kristina embraced them both, whether she was admiring the Gulf of Orosei from her hotel balcony in Cala Gonone or visiting some of the island’s beautiful beaches, such as this little gem (opposite).

WORDS Kristina Rapley PHOTOGRAPHY Kristina Rapley, Ashton Lines-Sherwood Hotel photos supplied.
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Sardinia, the second-largest island in the Mediterranean, is tricky to get to from New Zealand so a pit stop was necessary (ground rule #1). We spent two nights catching up on sleep and eating pasta in Rome. Jet lag got us out of bed stupidly early on both mornings which meant we were able to fit in some exploring and sightseeing before the crowds. We didn’t put any pressure on ourselves to see anything (ground rule #2); we just wandered around and explored things if they caught our eye, and stopped to eat at places that looked nice.

We found this great bed & breakfast through Booking.com called Ale & Niki’s located in Vaticano Prati, it was only 500 metres from the Vatican Museums and Saint Peter’s Square, so the perfect walking distance to some incredible sights and amazing eateries. We spent the afternoons snoozing with the stunning double windows wide open, curtains fluttering in the summer breeze, with all the noise and hustle and bustle of the city in the background.

BEST MEAL: Cacio e pepe (cheese and pepper) and ragu at Osteria da Fortunata

Once on Sardinia, ground rule #3 came into play: stay no less than four nights in each location. We didn’t want to feel like we were packing and unpacking every two seconds, plus getting to the next location can really eat into your days. First stop was a five-star adults-only boutique hotel in Costa Rei, which we found through the Small Luxury Hotels website. Perched on a private stretch of the most pristine white beach with calm, brilliantly blue water is La Villa del Re, aka actual heaven on earth.

And while I love a good sleep-in, the hotel’s breakfast spread would be enough to get me out of bed at the crack of dawn every single day of my life. Espresso, prosecco (why not?!), pastries, fresh cheeses and cured meats, the most delicious fresh fruit – everything your heart has ever desired and more. We spent our four days here eating, drinking, sunbathing, swimming and yep, you guessed it - snoozing! Bliss. We promised ourselves we’d go back one day.

BEST MEAL: The custard and fig tarts from the breakfast buffet made by La Villa del Re’s in-house pastry chef.
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Opposite

Rome without rules – Kristina and Ashton threw away the guidebooks and wandered (and ate pasta) at will. This page First stop on the couple’s Sardinian meander was the luxury hotel La Villa Del Re on the Costa Rei with its infinity pool, private beach and stupendous breakfasts.
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We stayed the next four nights at Hotel Villa Gustui Maris, which we found through Booking.com in an amazing part of Sardinia called Cala Gonone. Nestled into the hillside, our room had breathtaking water views and was a short stroll away from a pretty village with shops, restaurants and gelaterie. After all the beach time in Costa Rei, it was nice to have a busy and vibrant village to explore and we spent our days wandering the streets, finding the best foodie spots, shopping and reading by the pool.

**BEST MEAL:** The lasagne at Hotel Miramare, Cala Gonone

Hillside heaven Tucked into the foot of Mount Irveri is the Hotel Villa Gustui Maris in Cala Gonone where Kristina and Ashton soaked up the views (and enjoyed a romantic dinner) on their balcony, swam in the exquisite, stone wall-lined pool and investigated the pretty village (opposite top right).
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Time for a little adventure

The one and only thing on our must-do list for Sardinia was to rent a speedboat and jet around to some of the most beautiful beaches in the world that can only be reached by boat. We’d done some research and the best place to do this is from an island in northern Sardinia called La Maddalena.

We booked an Airbnb apartment there and it was lovely to be able to do some washing and get supplies from the local supermarket to cook our own meals (I still made pasta!). There are loads of rental places down by the port and we booked a boat a day in advance (you don’t need a special licence) and took some maps to plan out our big adventure for the following day. A chilly bin is supplied so we picked up some goodies for an onboard picnic and jetted off bright and early (okay it was 10am, but remember this is a lazy girl’s guide).

We spent the whole day cruising around the best spots in the La Maddalena archipelago – some with deserted white sandy beaches, and all indeed with the clearest water we’d ever seen.

BEST MEAL: Store-bought ricotta ravioli cooked in our apartment with a homemade tomato and red wine sauce. We went out for dessert and ordered the berry panna cotta at Ristorante Sottovento – it was the best I’ve ever had. SPECIAL MENTION must go to the carpaccio di zucchine at Bar Madrau – thin shavings of courgette dressed with lemon juice and olive oil with rocket and parmesan. Simple and delicious.

On reflection

I’ll admit there was the odd day I felt guilty for not jumping out of bed with vigour, ready to take in every sight and sound Italy has to offer. It would be different if we were somewhere tiny and tropical, but of course Italy has so much to explore. I guess it’s all about mindset – we were determined to relax, and relax we did. My one regret? I wish I’d asked the pastry chef at La Villa del Re for the custard and fig tart recipe.

ROME: ALE & NIKI’S ON BOOKING.COM
COSTA REI: SLH.COM/HOTELS/LA-VILLA-DEL-RE | CALA GONONE: HOTEL VILLA GUSTU MARIS ON BOOKING.COM
LA MADDALENA: AIRBNB.CO.NZ

Kristina’s favourite feasts

ROME
Beef ragu

COSTA REI
Custard and fig tart

CALA GONONE
Lasagne

LA MADDALENA
Ricotta ravioli

LA MADDALENA
Berry panna cotta

LA MADDALENA
Carpaccio di zucchine
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