



SARDINIA

South West Report by Lee Jackson

For most people flying to Sardinia at this time of year the allure is the combination of long white sand beaches and crystalline blue sea that makes for an idyllic summer holiday. Having travelled across the North of the island on two other occasions I was looking forward to exploring the delights of the South. The island, over two hundred miles long, is the second largest in the Mediterranean with a unique culture, a rich history and a diverse landscape.

So under the searing midday sun I set about my travels and immediately draw an unlikely parallel with recent history at home!

In direct comparison to South Yorkshire the South West of Sardinia was until the 1980's the biggest mining area in Italy. While the Agha Khan was investing his millions to make the North West the Dream destination for the jet set, the locals in the South were hard at work underground just like many of the friends with whom I grew up.

This industry is now consigned to history but it makes for a fascinating backdrop amongst the limestone cliffs and fabulous coves that line the coast. I visited Porto Flavia, a triumph of engineering in 1924 that allowed large volumes of iron ore to be stored within the limestone cliffs and deposited directly to large container ships. The site is now available for a tour inside of the former silos and makes for a spectacular and eerie landmark on the cliff. Mix this with a boat trip along the coast, a spot of snorkelling and a stop at one of the white sand coves and you really have a unique and enjoyable aspect to your visit.

Beyond the mines (and the beaches!) I wanted to visit one of a few small Sardinian towns famed in recent history for the abundance of wall paintings. From our base in the south the easiest trip was due north to Villamar which also lays close to one of Sardinia's other attractions, the Nuraghe settlements.

Sardinia has over 7000 prehistoric "Nuraghe" sites across the island built between 1500-1800bc. There is Roman history in Pharrus, Nora and Cagliari all well worth a visit but the extent of the Nuraghe remains at Su Nuraxi tells of a civilisation which pre-dates history. Set on a vast plain in the interior of the Island the remains of the village at Su Nuraxi conjure a picture of life long before the comforts brought about by the Romans, let alone the iPad!

The Nuraghe Remains, along with many other facets of Sardinian life, are recorded on the streets of Villamar. They may not individually hold the weight of a Banksy picture, but as a combined effort across the whole town the murals provide a unique spectacle with the various works depicting Sardinian tradition, landscapes and also some with political sentiment. The pictures here were created by local artists and further examples can be found in the West of the island at Orgosolo. Perhaps this could provide inspiration for the Art Group back at home to set about painting up Bawtry, or maybe not!

Having sampled simpler village life it's a 30 minute drive into Cagliari, the Sardinian capital and a feast of architectural splendour. The city has always been Sardinia's main port and the centre of power for all the peoples who have ruled the island from the Phoenicians to the Romans, the Pisans, the Aragonese and now as part of Italian state. The 1 hour city tour is worth the effort, taking in the port, the beach area and the historic castle district that sits atop the hill.

I return to the castle ramparts for lunch and gaze out to the city's 7km long white sand beach. It is these beaches and the lovely blue sea, that bring the millions of visitors to the island, but beyond this there is much to explore both on and beneath this vast island.