

No Bullshit Guides

Corsica to Sardinia Swim

When planning a swim, it's all too easy to trawl through blogs and website to research the swim, but what you really need is the hard-and-fast, no bullshit info. Reports 'bigging up' the swim don't really help. If we believed some of the reports of EC crossings where there were enormous shoals of jellyfish so dense you could walk on top of, ships coming within 5m of the swimmer, tides directly against you the whole way, pilots that went the wrong way, acres of floating rubbish and sewage, seas that made hardened sailors soil themselves, water so cold there were icebergs in it, and giant squid fighting with sperm whales, one would never give it a bash!

After doing the swim from Corsica to Sardinia this Summer, here is the no-bull guide. No ethereal waffle about how spiritual it was. No stories of heroics. Just info I'd like to have known before I started looking at it!

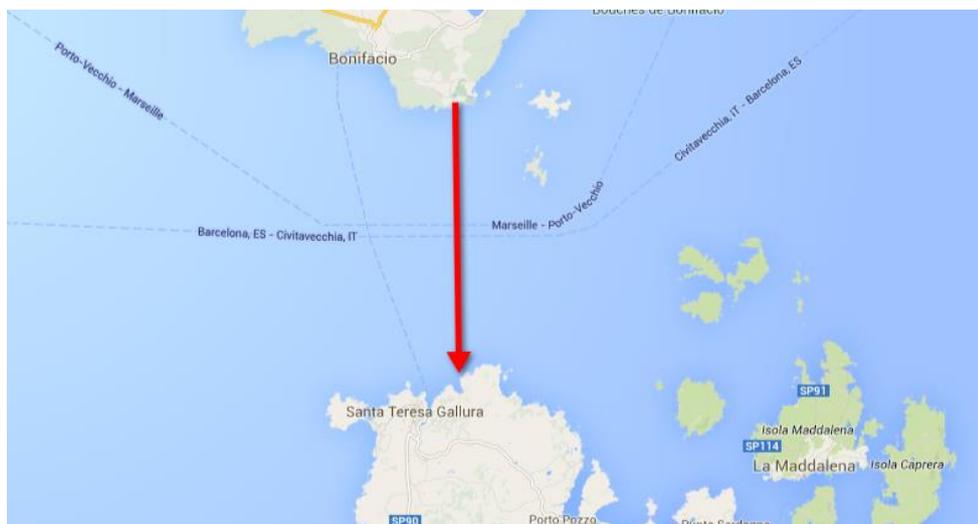
Where is it?

Between two islands to the west of Italy. Roughly 2.5 hours flying time from London. We flew to Olbia, which is the closest airport to the swim start.



How far is it?

The shortest distance is just over 12km/7.5 miles. However, if you want to go from beach to beach it will add just over 1.5km/1 mile, or so, to the swim. It took us 4 hours and 22 minutes, at a VERY slow pottering pace, so there's a record to be had for those glory hunters out there!!



Who runs the 'show'?

This is a swim that is relatively new. They only know of a handful of swimmers that have done it before us, all of whom used wetsuits. There is no governing body to ratify or organise the swim.



Corsica is a French island, whilst Sardinia is Italian. The straits between them can become quite rough, so ships carrying hazardous cargo are not allowed to travel through the gap between the islands. This means the straits are watched by both French and Italian authorities/coastguards. You NEED to gain permissions to do the swim.

We found a lovely chap called Tommaso who runs a dive centre, and seems to be involved in loads of other 'enterprises'. He speaks very little English. Out of season there is little diving tourism, so he was more than happy to help us make the swim happen, as he had the boats, knowledge and connections.

Tommaso sorted out the logistics, and the all-important permissions. His trusty RIB pilot was a charming chap called Paulo who spoke zero English (Photo: Paulo on left, Kristy McIntyre on right)



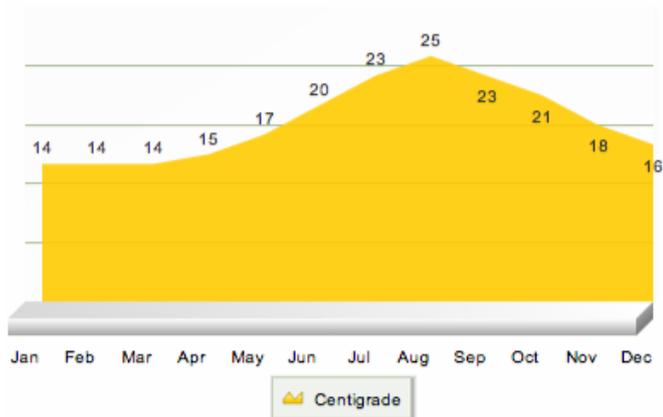
What are the tides and currents like?

Tides tend not to be a problem in any way, given it is the Mediterranean. Currents are dependent on winds, and in our experience were not something to worry about. You can pretty much swim straight across. The wind strength determines whether they will take you out to try the swim. When we did the swim it was a force 4-5 from the NE which didn't cause us too much hassle.

When to do the swim

You could conceivably do the swim any time of year, as the water temperature is 14C at it's coldest. However, out of season the accommodation is far far cheaper, and Tommaso is not busy with divers. We did the swim in late October, and found the water very comfortable.

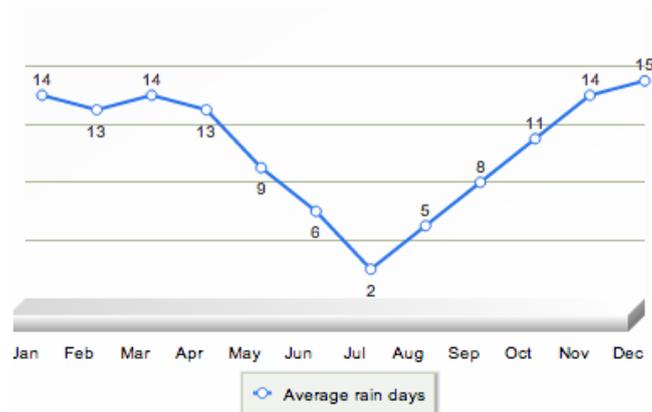
Average Sea Temperature - Sardinia



Average Temperature - Sardinia

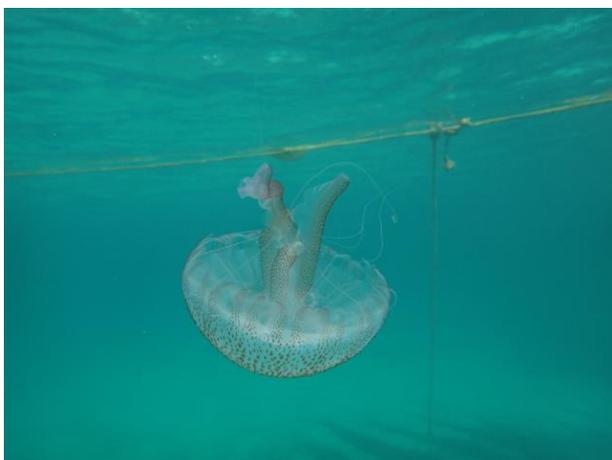


Average Rainfall - Sardinia



Nasty things in the water?

Sharks – NO. Nasty jellyfish, the nasty little purple ones – YES!! We saw quite a number on training swims, and we all got stung a number of times. Thankfully we saw very few on the actual crossing. However, if you ran into a large patch of these jellyfish, you would not be wise to try and swim through them. This could be a 'show-stopper'.



Wetsuit or not?

Obviously without wetsuit is preferable!!! Tommaso has taken wetsuited swimmers before, and I am pretty sure he'd do so again.

How are the swims conducted?

You meet early morning at the jetty and meet the doctor (on left in photo), which is part of the package, and he checks through your medicals with you, and asks any relevant medical questions. The doctor speaks good English, and his specialty was Urology!!

Tommaso provides his 10m RIB for the swim, and it's piloted expertly by Paulo, who only speaks Italian. Tommaso remains on land to communicate with authorities and the press. Along with Paulo and the doctor, there were two other gentlemen to look after us and take photos/video.



We were lucky enough to have a swimming friend with us, who was willing to be our crew, and knew exactly what she was doing regarding feeding and recording swim details/data. Conceivably you could go without a crew, and talk them through a simple feeding plan and hope they can deliver it as planned.

Crew and swimmers then board the RIB, and motor over to Corsica. They stop around 100m from the beach, and you have to swim in to the beach from there. They allow you to grease and sun cream up on the boat when you get to Corsica, but be careful not to make a mess of their boat.

When you have got onto dry sand, you raise your arm and then start the swim. Photo on below shows getting in off the RIB, and the starting beach in the background.



Due to the strong wind the shallow bottomed boat found it tough to steer a straight course, so we had to sight ourselves for the finishing point, which wasn't easy for one of our swimmers with poorer eyesight. You will need to be able to swim and sight if it is rough.

Feeding is easy; one swims to the boat and quickly feeds. Warm feeds might be tricky logistically, i.e. thermoses rolling around on a RIB.

The preferred finishing point is a sandy beach at the end of a bay (below right). Landing on the closest piece of Sardinia is not an option, as it is rocky, covered in sea urchins, and unsafe to land on (below left). This can be frustrating, swimming past land for 10 minutes at the end of the swim!



One then lands, and then swims back to the boat. The boat then returns to the starting jetty.

Multiple swimmers side by side

Tommaso was happy for up to four swimmers swimming the Straits at the same time, with the same boat cover. You must swim close together. If one is jeopardising the success of the others, they will be pulled by the support team. Make sure you can all swim together, at one speed, before you book this!



Due to the water temperatures, it's feasible for a swimmer to swim slower than their usual pace to remain in the 'pod'.

Tommaso and his team took us out on the RIB for a training swim, so that they could satisfy themselves that we could swim in a 'pod'.

How much does it cost?

These are the 2013 prices, so they may change for when you want to swim:

We paid €650 in total for all four of us, i.e. €162.50 each, which makes it very cheap per person, especially for all that Tommaso threw in for us.

We did not pay a deposit. We paid cash after the swim. We got the feeling Tommaso cared more about making the swim a success than the money it earned him. He 'worked' the press rather well, and I think it was great PR for him and his various businesses. However, if more start to book this swim, he may become more business-like.

What do I get for my money?

The all-important permissions, a boat and the crew. A doctor on the boat. This is not a developed and established swim/organisation, so there is no formal procedures or recording of swims and swimmers. Perhaps with time this will change. You will not get a certificate or chart. There are no t-shirts or caps to buy.

Sardinian Hospitality

Tommaso was so warm and welcoming to us, and as we were the first group of non-wetsuit foreign swimmers he went well above the call of duty. If you are offered any hospitality, please do take it up.



How do I book it?

Email Tommaso (details below) and ask when he might be able to take you. He is completely new to the swimming 'game', so I have no idea what procedures and booking systems he will introduce.

Admin required

We got Tommaso copies of our passports, which he needed for the permissions. He initially wanted a medical form (undefined) and an ECG. We didn't like the sound of the ECG bit, so convinced him we were all experienced open water swimmers with long swims completed in under 12 months, and presented him with our completed CS&PF medicals. In the end he seemed happy with this, so I'd suggest that is something you might strive to replicate.

All our paperwork we scanned and emailed to him, in as an efficient manner as possible. We gave him the hard copies when we got to Sardinia.

Where does one stay?

Santa Teresa Gallura is full of holiday apartments, and if you go out of season, a quick Google search will provide plenty of options. We used www.airbnb.com and the 3-bed apartment we found was excellently placed and very cheap (<https://www.airbnb.co.uk/rooms/1026208>)

Dining options are restricted a little off-season, but you can pretty easily find places in the central parts of town to eat out.

Language difficulties

Tommaso and his team speak very little English, so communicating with them beforehand involved a lot of Google Translate, which seemed to work well.

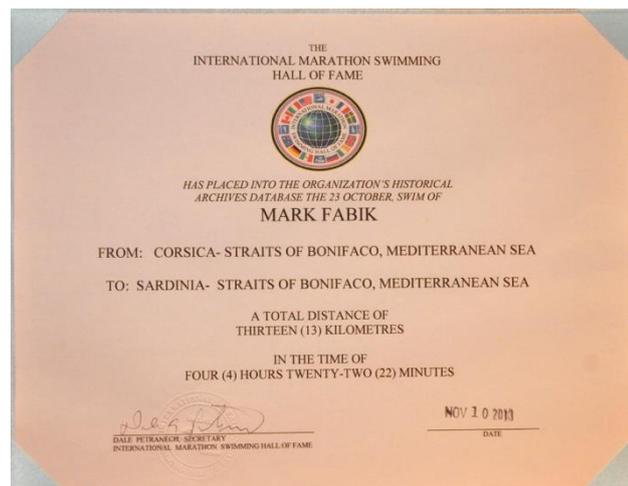
However, once in Sardinia, communicating with our hosts was not easy, and we were very lucky that one of us (Tori Thorpe) spoke good Italian. That is not to say the swim can't be done without an Italian speaker on the team; it just makes it tougher!

Now that they have seen one group swim in a pod, and feed via bottles on a reel, they would understand how to facilitate that with another group.

Would we go back?

This is a great swimming location, with crystal clear water, and a relaxed atmosphere. I can imagine it would be far more frenetic in peak season, so I would avoid going then. The water temperature is perfect. My only concern is the jellyfish, as if they were pushed there en masse during your trip, it could make the crossing impossible.

There are plenty of other swims you could conjure up, such as 2/3/4-ways, or swims through/round/to/from the Arcipelago di La Maddalena National Park which is a beautiful place.



Have a great swim, and say hi to Tommaso for us.

Big love
Nick

Video in the Italian press:

<http://www.videolina.it/video/servizi/52681/a-tre-londinesi-il-nuovo-record-di-traversata-delle-bocche.html>

Tommaso @ Dive Centre: Diving Mediterraneo

+ 34 88002388

info@divingmediterraneo.it

<http://www.divingmediterraneo.it/>

16 Via del Porto, 07028 Santa Teresa Gallura, OT, Italy

Useful Positions

Start Point	41.368499, 9.213900	[41°22'06.6"N 9°12'50.0"E]
End Point	41.247562, 9.215189	[41°14'51.2"N 9°12'54.7"E]
Olbia Airport	40.902515, 9.515569	[40°54'09.1"N 9°30'56.0"E]
Our apartment	41.242633, 9.187171	[41°14'33.5"N 9°11'13.8"E]
Favourite Supermarket	41.238348, 9.187538	[41°14'18.1"N 9°11'15.1"E]
Dive/Souvenir shop	41.243155, 9.191682	[41°14'35.4"N 9°11'30.1"E]
Dive Centre	41.237942, 9.191983	[41°14'16.6"N 9°11'31.1"E]
Boat dock	41.236469, 9.194144	[41°14'11.3"N 9°11'38.9"E]
Training Beach 1	41.245118, 9.189314	[41°14'42.4"N 9°11'21.5"E]
Training Beach 2	41.240060, 9.158391	[41°14'24.2"N 9°09'30.2"E]
Training Beach 3	41.245852, 9.237032	[41°14'45.1"N 9°14'13.3"E]

All of these positions are in the .kml file that accompanies this guide. Drag the file into Google Earth to see them in relation to each other.