

Forte Village Resort

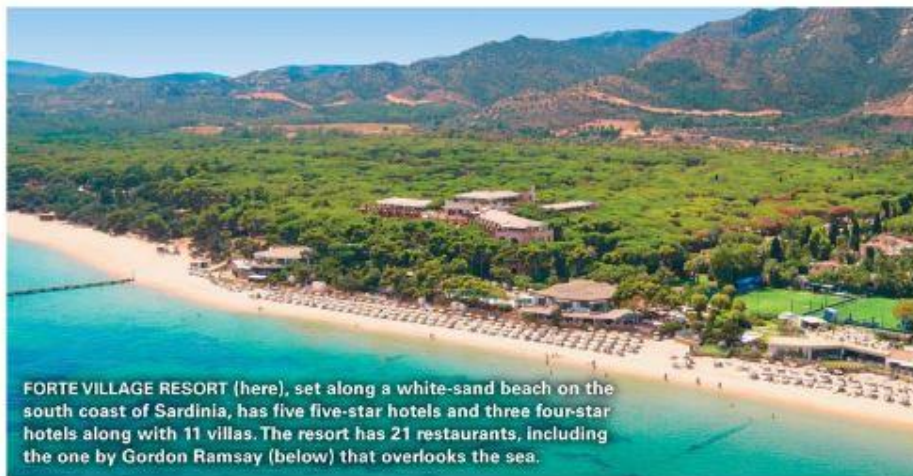
in Southern Sardinia

Amie O'Shaughnessy, CEO of Ciao Bambino! recently took a family vacation to Italy and is back with this report.

A beloved seaside playground for Europeans over the decades, Sardinia is surprisingly unknown to many Americans. We're always looking for new experiences to present to our clients and this can be tough in Italy as it is so well-traveled. I was particularly excited, therefore, to visit Forte Village Resort earlier this year and discover that Sardinia solves this problem. There is much to explore that's exclusive to the island and it is easily accessible from the Italian mainland.

We took a short, 45-minute flight to Cagliari's Elmas Airport in Southern Sardinia on Alitalia from Rome. Flights are inexpensive and run frequently from Italy's main cities, as well as other hubs around Europe. Our pleasant car rider from the airport took us through beautiful villages and coastal views and in less than an hour we had arrived at Forte Village Resort.

Southern Sardinia has 300 days of sunshine a year and is much less developed than the northern part of the island frequented by the international jet set. There are some



FORTE VILLAGE RESORT (here), set along a white-sand beach on the south coast of Sardinia, has five five-star hotels and three four-star hotels along with 11 villas. The resort has 21 restaurants, including the one by Gordon Ramsay (below) that overlooks the sea.

sensational things to see and experience in this region, and we were lucky enough to visit a few, including the Zuddas Caves — some of the oldest caves in Europe; the ancient Nora Ruins dating back to pre-Roman times; and the delightful historic districts of Cagliari, Sardinia's vibrant capital city. We also found time to sample some of the vintages at Santadi Winery, part of Sardinia's fast-growing wine tasting route, which I whole-heartedly recommend!

That said, once we arrived at Forte Village Resort, our challenge was finding the time and will to leave, as the resort is a destination in and of itself, with an array of things to do for every age and stage.

Founded in 1970 by Charles Forte (Sir Rocco Forte's father), Forte Village was conceived as a resort immersed in the beauty of the southern tip of Sardinia. Today, the property is home to 120 acres of gardens, eight hotels, 720 guestrooms, 21 restaurants, 80 chefs and a wine cellar with 600 labels. Despite this eye-popping variety of offerings, we found the resort to be unbelievably

intimate. Although each hotel has its own personality, they are cleverly integrated in the leafy landscape, and one building seems to blend into another. Forte Village Resort really feels like a village, serving all guests' needs (and more) within minutes of leaving their rooms. Manicured pathways weave through the property — scootering and biking are popular ways for guests and staff alike to get around. Facilities are contained in a clever, compact footprint and the property feels extremely safe; school-age and older kids have complete independence here and bike around in packs laughing and playing.

The star of the visual show is the resort's powdery white-sand beach, set on crystal-clear water in shifting shades of vibrant blue. There are just enough waves to keep it interesting, yet it's shallow enough to wade out a good distance without swimming, making it perfect for families and visiting travel advisors alike! Extensive beach umbrellas and chairs line the shore, so guests don't have to wake up at dawn just to grab a chair with shade. There are enough for everyone, particularly



JUST BACK



VILLA LAVINIA is a two-story villa with a private garden and a pool.



CASTELLO SUITES in Hotel Il Castello have sweeping views of the sea and gardens at Forte Village Resort.

since the resort has so many other activities that the beach isn't the activity for the day; it's an activity in any day.

Accommodation options include both four- and five-star hotels in a range of shapes, sizes, views and price points, as well as 11 independent villas with private gardens, pools and 24-hour butler service. We stayed in one of the luxury Castello Suites located on the fourth and fifth floors of the Hotel Il Castello. It had private lift access and a beautiful terrace overlooking the gardens and the sea. Service was lovely throughout the resort, but we especially loved the pampering we received in Castello Suites, which included a surprise cake and champagne on my birthday from the ever-thoughtful and attentive staff.

All of the hotels have their own dining facilities for breakfast, but guests are free to move around and dine at any of the various hotels. Breakfasts are delightful, and we found fresh fruit and vegetables, baked goods, charcuterie and made-to-order options at different restaurants throughout the duration of our stay.

Restaurants are varied and feature cuisine from around the world with consistently high-quality fare, including the buffet options. Settings range from lush waterfront gardens to rooftop dining and more. We found the food to be exceptional throughout our stay, including the freshly caught fish at the Beachcomber Restaurant overlooking the ocean; the sophisticated à la carte menu of Le Dune Restaurant, or the exclusive Belvedere Restaurant where the gourmet cuisine artfully blends European and traditional Italian dishes.

Celebrity Chef Nights throughout the summer months host an array of Michelin-starred superstars, from Gordon Ramsay to Rocco

Iannone — there is no chance foodies will get bored. Meanwhile, families will love the outlets around the property for ice cream and snacks.

For families, Forte Village truly delivers well beyond the usual all-inclusive resort. Structured entertainment for young kids takes place in Children's Wonderland, filled with pint-sized pleasures. Babies and toddlers under the age of two have their own staffed nursery and mini club. The beloved La Casa di Barbie hosts themed activities and a branded play space loaded with toys from this doll icon. Mario's Village is built just for kids and includes a fire station, beauty center and cinema; hours of entertainment takes place right here. And this doesn't include the school-age mini club workshops with structured activities, from cooking classes to art classes to dance. The best part? The supervised options give parents the opportunity to get kid-free downtime.

Swimming pool options include Aquapark, with slides, tunnels and a plethora of water toys. Older kids will appreciate Leisureland, which has a go-kart track, bowling, a full-size football pitch and, Forte Fortissimo, a nightclub for teens. What really sets Forte Village Resort apart, however, is their Sport Academy program, with professionally run lessons in soccer (led by the Chelsea Football Club), rugby, basketball, tennis, swimming, boxing, table-tennis — not to mention go-karting and fencing. And those in the mood for classes less physically demanding can opt for cooking or chess.

Acquaforse Thalasso & Spa is Forte Village Resort's headquarters for detoxification and relaxation. Sardinia's first medical spa, the facility features six seawater soaking

pools with a range of temperatures, salinity and mineral content — each has a specific function and purpose, which we found totally rejuvenating. A visit to the pools can be paired with a long list of therapeutic massage and body treatments, as well as a comprehensive personal fitness program with a private instructor. There's also a new 300-meter private spa with three pools, hammam, emotional shower, private lounge areas and service for groups of up to 10 people.

Nightlife is one of the joys of a European resort experience, and Forte Village offers live entertainment in the heart of the resort at Piazza Luisa. We explored the delights of Brunello Cucinelli, Diesel and Versace for some shopping before settling in for some "people watching" as families and couples alike enjoyed a night of music and dancing under the stars. During July and August, Forte Arena, an open-air theater for special concerts and performances, hosts renowned artists like Sting and Andrea Bocelli. Forte Village Resort guests have special access to the event.

All of these incredible choices make Forte Village Resort complicated to sell if you haven't been there, and engaging with Waterstone (their North American luxury representation) or their in-house sales team is a great way to ensure the perfect match is made for your clients. Advisors can reach out to Lynne Partridge (Lynne@waterstone marketing.com), Waterstone's director of sales & strategic partners; and Paolo Mancuso (Paolo.Mancuso@fortevillage.com), director of projects & business development at Forte Village. For general reservations and enquiries, e-mail Assunta.carta@fortevillage.com.

—Amie O'Shaughnessy