



route, but the payoff comes in vistas that will take your breath away, assuming it wasn't already gone from all that extra climbing. Recommended variants include the stage 9 alternate between the Col de Vizzavona and Col de Verde via Monte Renoso (2,352m/7,717ft) and the Aiguilles de Bavella variant on stage 15. The bird's-eye views from these alternates give you an elevated sense of Corsica's striking geography—the granite peaks, ancient forests, and rugged headlands, all of which are enveloped by the deep-blue embrace of the Mediterranean Sea. (Note: Superlative views aside, these high-level alternates should only be taken if you have a favorable weather forecast.)

Since its inception in the 1970s, the GR20 has been commonly referred to as the “toughest trek in Europe.” Indeed, it's estimated that only 25 percent of people who start the hike actually finish it. While there's no denying that the GR20's rocky, steep, and exposed character (combined with stormy weather) makes for an exacting challenge, the reality is that many fail to complete the trek due to a lack of preparedness. In short, this is one hike where it pays to turn up in the best shape possible and with at least some backpacking experience under your hip belt. Doing so will exponentially increase your chances of reaching your goal and, more importantly, having a safe and enjoyable time in the process. ▲

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↑ Sunshine illuminates the leaf-carpeted forest of Vizzavona.
 → Cascades tumble down a narrow gorge near Paglia Orba (2,525 m) on the GR20.