



↑ Looking across the Ladroncellu valley from the Bocca Piccaia.
➤ The refuges offer basic accommodations.



ABOUT THE TRAIL

- **DISTANCE** 180 km (112 mi)
- **DURATION** 12 to 16 days
- **LEVEL** Very Hard

The GR20, traversing the Mediterranean island of Corsica from north to south, is one of the world's best multi-day hikes. It has a ferocious reputation, too, and while you'll often find the GR20 on lists of "Europe's toughest trails," fit and prepared hikers who have spent time scrambling up and down big mountains will find it well within their capabilities. The terrain's rough, but this is no rock climb. The trail is well marked and there are regular options for accommodations and resupplying.

This hike is about one thing: mountains. The goal is to spend as much time up high in rugged, awe-inspiring scenery as possible. With its sunny Mediterranean climate and acres of rocky ridges and cirques to explore, the GR20 is a paradise for the mountain-loving trekker. Like many of the GR (Grande Randonnée) paths, the GR20 has lots of optional variants and side trails; while the classic trek takes about a fortnight, those wishing to take their time could add several days to create a more varied itinerary. There are also lower-level options that take some of the sting out of the route. However, to get the full GR20 experience, you'll want to stay high.

The toughest sections are in the first half of the walk, known as GR20 Nord, from Calenzana to Vizzavona. From the small town of Calenzana, the trail heads straight up into the mountains and climbs 1,550 m (5,085 ft) in the first 12 km (7 mi). The first day is described by guidebook writer Paddy Dillon as a "shock to the system"—there are no streams on the first day, and the relentless climbing with a heavy pack through thorny undergrowth can feel like a trial by fire. The short but difficult first day ends at the PNRC Refuge d'Ortu di u Piobbu, perched at an altitude of 1,570 m (5,151 ft) and surrounded by high mountains. The refuge was burned down in May 2019, but temporary accommodations, toilets, and water are available at the site until the hut can be rebuilt. The next couple of days are tough, too, but the mountain scenery is never short of exceptional, especially at the magnificent Bocca Piccaia—a dramatic gap at the head of the wild Ladroncellu Valley filled with rock pinnacles and spires.