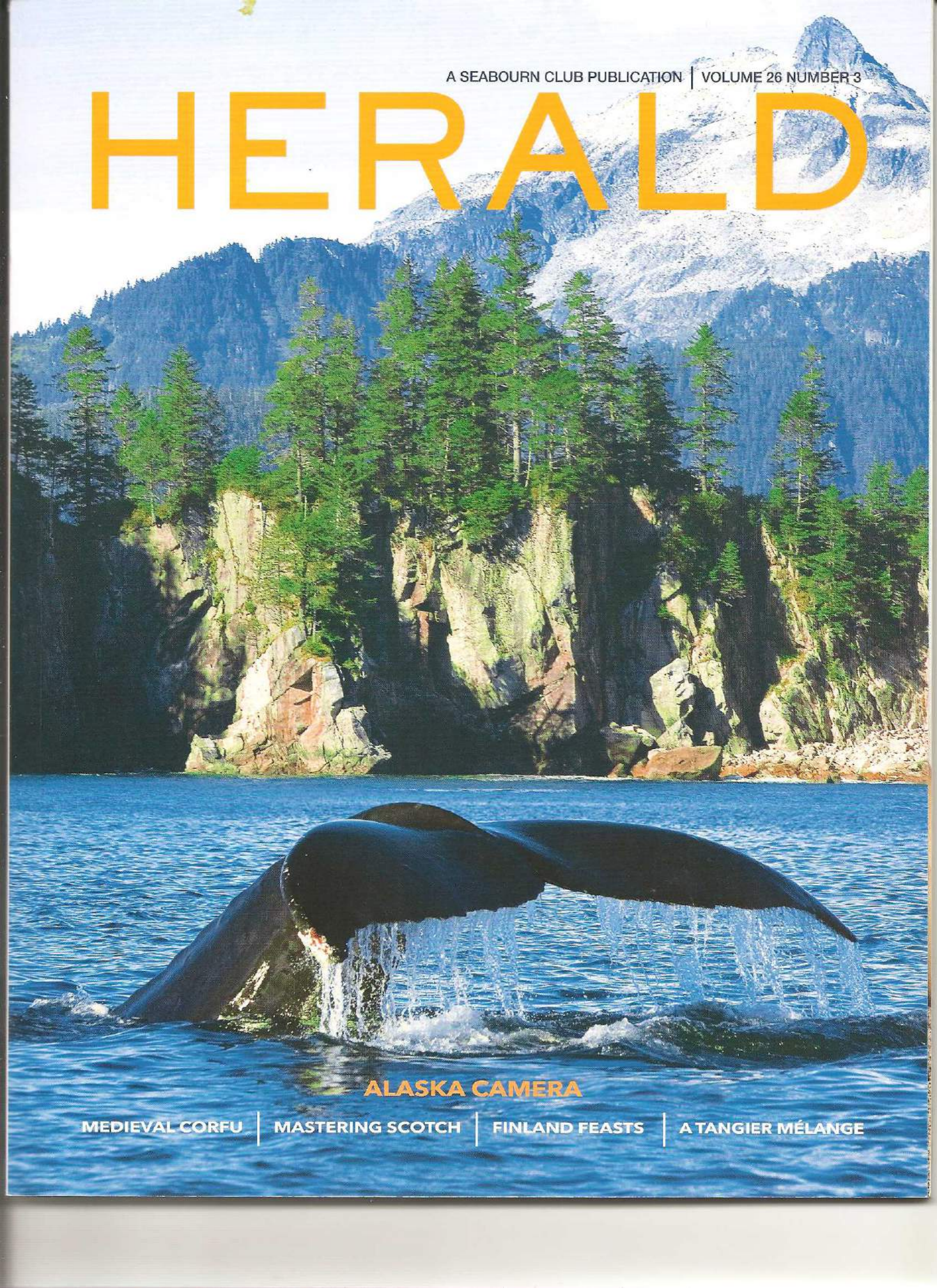


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# HERALD



## ALASKA CAMERA

MEDIEVAL CORFU

MASTERING SCOTCH

FINLAND FEASTS

A TANGIER MÉLANGE



Tullio & Bruno Morana/Getty Images

# CORFU'S

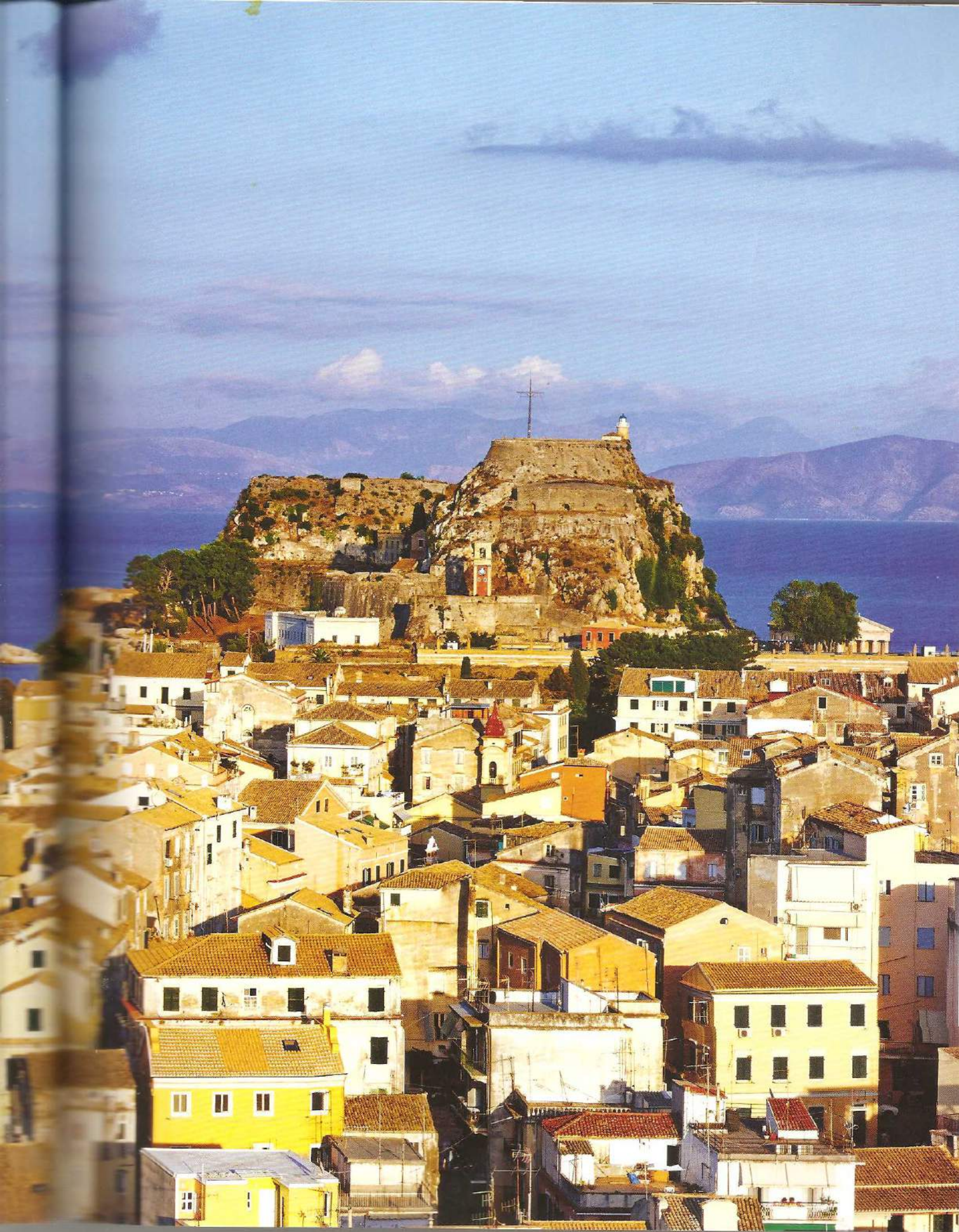
*From classic architecture to spicy cuisine*

## VENETIAN LEGACY

BY RICHARD VARR









A stroll through the streets of Old Town Corfu brings to mind a touch of Venice. No, there aren't singing gondoliers or the green-tinted canals weaving around the centuries-old buildings you might see in a Canaletto painting. You will, however, notice a church tower or two in the architectural style of a Venetian belfry. A closer look at the lower stories of the central Town Hall reveals uniquely Venetian rounded arches above its windows and door. And you may hear Italian words in everyday conversation.

"Venice in Greece?" you might ask. Yes, and there's good reason for it. Old Town Corfu's winding street grid and some of its buildings, with their muted red and ochre facades, date back as far as 500 years, to the centuries when Venice ruled this northernmost Ionian island. That era, from 1386 until 1797, left behind a legacy of Venetian architecture, cuisine and traditions that remain to this day.



City Hall

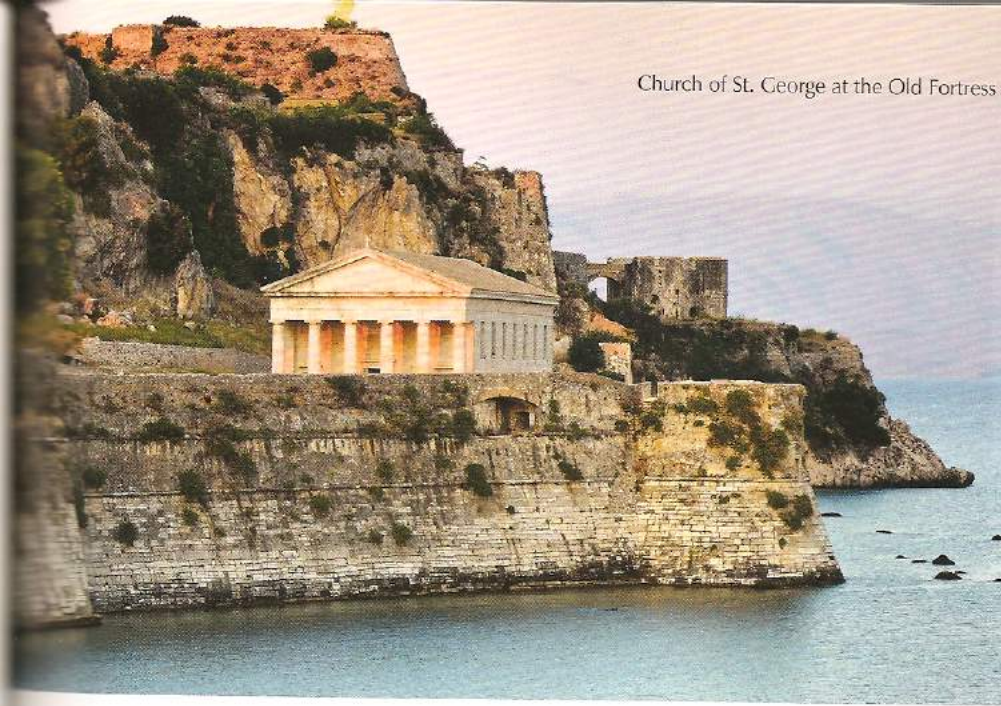
"Corfu was under Venetian rule long enough to be able to say that a very special culture was created here on this island, bringing together some of the finest elements of the Venetian and Greek Byzantine traditions," explains Maria Voulgari, president of the Ionian Islands Licensed Tourist Guides Association. "When walking in the narrow alleys of Old Town, you get the feeling you are in Venice or at least in an Italian town. The alleys form a maze and sometimes end up in a small piazza with a well in the middle, so much resembling the Venetian ones."

"One can also listen to the people speaking in the local dialect which is a blend of Italian and Greek words. Even when the Corfiots speak in Greek, they have a strong Italian accent," Voulgari adds. "And some local music is influenced by traditional Italian songs."

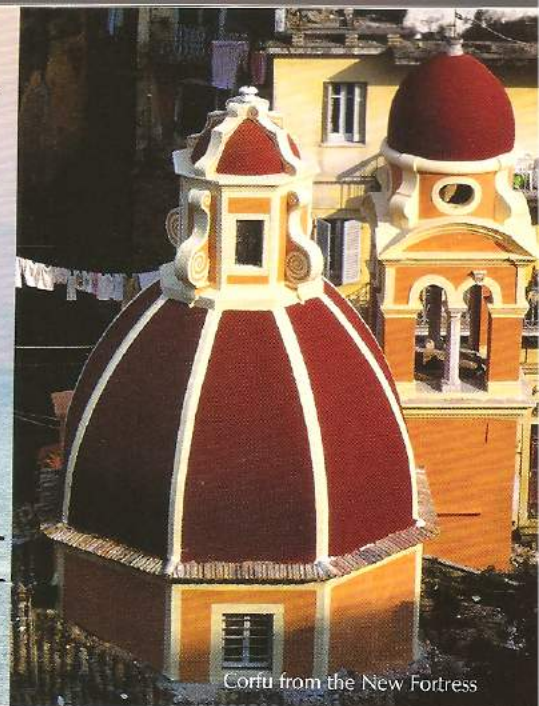


Corfu Old Town





Church of St. George at the Old Fortress



Corfu from the New Fortress

Architectural styles in Corfu Town, Kerkira or Kerkyra in Greek, run the gamut from older Greek and Byzantine structures, to Venetian-built three- and four-story buildings with arched windows. These are painted in the traditional colors of Corfu — yellow and ochre, with windows in dark green and doors with an occasional splash of terracotta pink. Town Hall's gold and yellow trim is one example, built over 30 years and completed in 1693. First used as a noblemen's club, it became the San Giacomo Theater in 1720, a famed venue for Italian musicians and composers. Converted to Town Hall in 1903, the building crumbled during World War II bombing but was soon renovated to what stands today.

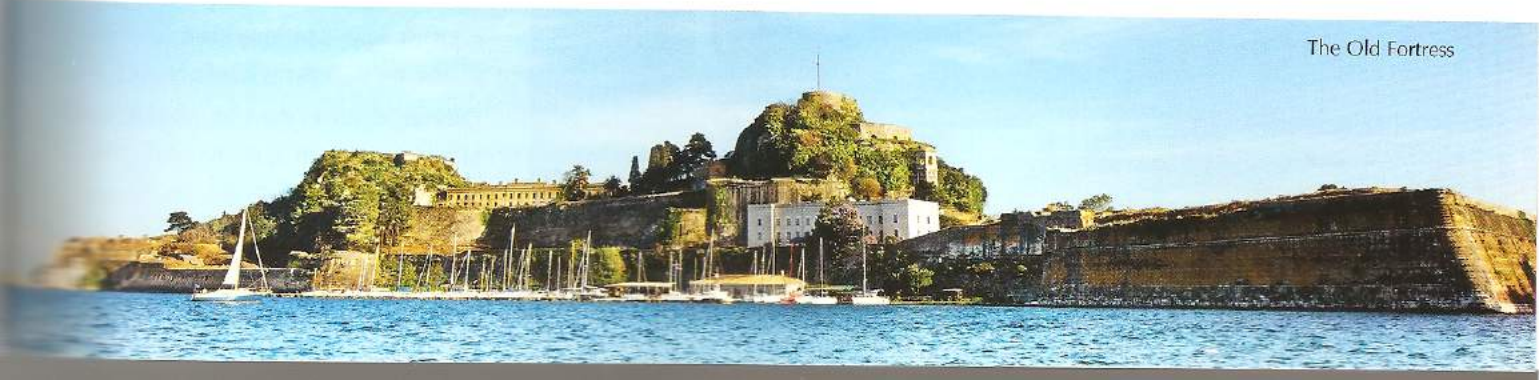
Some buildings include a carving or motif of the Lion of St. Mark — symbolizing not only the Serene Republic of Venice and her patron saint, but also the emblem of the Ionian Republic, the last Greek independent state.



**SOME BUILDINGS INCLUDE A CARVING OR MOTIF OF THE LION OF ST. MARK — SYMBOLIZING NOT ONLY THE SERENE REPUBLIC OF VENICE AND HER PATRON SAINT, BUT ALSO THE EMBLEM OF THE IONIAN REPUBLIC.**

During Ottoman invasions, Corfu never fell under Turkish rule thanks to Venetian military engineers who built the town's two impressive forts, both prominent symbols of Venetian rule. "In all of its history, the island suffered from the frequent invasions of pirates, so in a way it was a voluntarily submission of Corfu to Venice in their attempt to protect the island against the pirates and the Ottomans Turks," explains Voulgari. "The weakening of the Byzantine Empire allowed Venice to conquer and rule throughout the northwestern part of the Empire."

The Old Fortress or Palaió Frotúrio was completed in 1559 on the central island's easternmost peninsula. Its stone walls stand tall with far-reaching views stretching over Old Town and out to the Ionian Sea. The builders separated the fort from the mainland by digging a fosse or narrow canal — an added defense originally used to deter enemy penetration of the fort, but today a peaceful mooring



The Old Fortress



area for pleasure craft. What looks like an Italianate tower rises from the fort's rocky base, while the columned, temple-like Church of St. George was added by the British in the 1800s.

Construction of the New Fortress, also called Fortress of St. Mark or San Marco, was completed in the mid 17th century. Located on the town's western edge, the new fort bolstered Old Town's defenses and protected the harbor. Ramparts were later completed during French and British rule. On the main gates are two winged Lions of St. Mark, and the fort's dry moat now serves as the grounds for a vegetable market near the harbor:

Ruins of Venice's military presence also remain about five miles northeast



## THE MOST RECOGNIZED VENETIAN-ERA CHURCH IS AGIOS SPYRIDON WITH ITS RED-DOMED BELFRY, THE HIGHEST POINT IN OLD TOWN.



of Corfu Town at the village of Gouvia. Arches, columns and walls of a former arsenal, where repairs were made to Venetian navy vessels, are still intact.

The most recognized Venetian-era church is Agios Spyridon with its red-domed belfry, the highest point in Old Town. "The bell tower, built in 1620, is plain and squarely profiled in an Italian style which resembles the bell tower of the Greek Church St. Giorgio Dei Greci in Venice, but with a red dome," points out Voulgari. "Underneath the bell is a clock with Latin numbers and gold pointers."

The locals will tell you Agios Spyridon is the holiest place on the island — the final resting place of the island's patron saint. St. Spyridon, entombed in a silver casket, his remains smuggled out of Constantinople in the 15th century, is said to have warded off Turkish invaders in 1716 and spared Corfu from the plague



twice in the 17th century. Modern-day miracles are still attributed to him. Paintings and icons emblazon the inside of this single-nave church, updated in the mid-19th century with two white-marble railings from Venice.

Artist Panagiotis Doxaras' 1727 paintings in Agios Spyridon, notes Voulgari, are today considered some of the most important examples from the Ionian School of painting. "Art in the Ionian islands shifted towards Western styles by the end of the 17th century with the gradual abandonment of strict Byzantine conventions and technique," she explains. "Artists were now increasingly influenced by Italian Baroque and Flemish painters rather than from their Byzantine heritage."

Palaces and other Venetian-era buildings include the 17-century Ricci Mansion at Moustoxydou Street, No. 15, with its classic arcade supporting a spacious balcony where town leaders watched jousting events. The mansion at 4th Street off Ypapandis Street, No. 4, has Venetian-style balusters along the balcony, the only ones surviving within a Corfu-Town home. St. Jacob's Cathedral's Venetian style is described as having a Baroque curve and a laced Gothic tower. Like many Corfu buildings, it was restored after World War II devastation.

Venetian influence reaches the dinner table cooked into Corfu's most popular dishes, including *sofrito*, sliced veal or lamb cooked with vinegar, garlic and parsley, and the fish stews *bourdeto* and white *bianco*, spiced respectively with pepper and garlic. *Pastitsada* is a signature island dish often served during holidays or at official dinners. It's made with poultry or veal browned with spices,

then cooked with tomatoes, tomato paste and macaroni and sprinkled with *kefalotyri*, a strong Greek cheese.

The Venetians brought opera to the island starting in 1733 at the San Giacomo Theater, the first modern Greek theater and opera house. The cosmopolitan city was quickly noted for its high standards.

"In fact, the people of Corfu were considered such a difficult audience," explains Voulgari, "that when a new opera was presented and was distinguished with the *applaudito a Corfu* (applauded in Corfu), then the success in the rest of the theaters all around Europe was guaranteed."



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SEABOURN ENCORE CALLS ON CORFU DURING THE 14-DAY VENICE TO ROME VOYAGE DEPARTING JUNE 24, 2017