



AN EXCEPTIONAL HERITAGE OF ART, HISTORY AND NATURAL BEAUTIES,
EVERY YEAR RENEWED BY CULTURAL AND FOLKLORISTIC EVENTS

LAKE BOLSENA

**The largest volcanic lake in Europe, in the province of Viterbo,
in summer becomes a sheer paradise for swimmers and sportsmen**

Lake Bolsena, the largest European lake of volcanic origin, more than 300,000 years ago sprang from the eruptive activity of Volsini volcano that collapsed and created a huge caldera, slowly filled with rain-water and with the flows of water of its small but various tributaries. Its only effluent is the Marta River that, from the village of the same name, runs through Tuscania and Tarquinia and flows into the Tyrrhenian Sea. The lake covers an area of 114.5 sq. km, has a maximum depth of 151 m and an average depth of 81 m; its perimeter is 43 km long. Its only effluent is the Marta River that, from the village of the same name, runs through Tuscania and Tarquinia and flows into the Tyrrhenian Sea. The lake covers an area of 114.5 sq. km, has a maximum depth of 151 m and an average depth of 81 m; its perimeter is 43 km long. There are two remarkable phenomena connected with the lake: the "sesse", sudden and unforeseeable variations in the internal water level, caused by the atmospheric pressure or by the wind, and the anomalous wave appearing as a wide front that rapidly strengthens, moves forwards and breaks on the coast. Because of its purity, it is said that the water of the lake can be drunk. In fact the fishermen still use the lake water to cook the "Sbroscia", the typical local fish soup. The large number of water birds, especially the migratory ones, that here find abundant food and protection, delights the lovers of bird watching.

AROUND THE LAKE: VILLAGES AND LOCAL TRADITIONS

Lots of campsites, farmhouses and B&B, immersed in the beauty of nature, have been established around the lake to satisfy the demand of tourists. The lake offers welcoming shores, touched by the daily breeze that gently cools the summer heat. On the rocks of the port you can see the fishermen patiently waiting for their preys: the eel, the delicious whitefish, the pike, the royal perch, the carp, the tench, the rudd, etc. The lake is sailed on by all kinds of boats and various water sports can be done: canoeing, waterskiing, sailing and windsurfing, encouraged by the changeable but never hard blowing winds. There are small trattorie where you can taste the local dishes with lake fish.

THE ELLIPTICAL SHAPE OF THE LAKE AND THE PRESENCE OF TWO ISLANDS, ISOLA BISENTINA AND ISOLA MARTANA, POSSIBLE REMAINDERS OF VOLCANIC CRATERS, ARE THE EVIDENCE OF THE VOLCANIC ORIGINS OF LAKE BOLSENA

Isola Bisentina (0,17 sq. km)

This island is interesting from an historical, architectural and naturalistic point of view. In fact it preserves an uncontaminated natural environment with ilex woods, gardens, enchanting landscapes and various monuments: the church of San Giacomo and San Cristoforo, the Franciscan monastery, the Rocchina, the church of Santa Caterina, the Crucifix Chapel with frescoes of 1400 and the "Malta dei Papa", a prison dug in the earth, with just a small hole for the light, for those who were convicted of heresy. You will be enchanted by its wonderful small bays, by the hilly top of Monte Tabor, the cliffs over the light blue lake in the east and the green southern side towards the village of Capodimonte. The motorboats reaching the island from the village of Capodimonte can berth in the equipped tourist harbour.

Isola Martana (0,10 sq. km)

It is said that the remains of Santa Cristina were preserved on this island, with the intent to prevent them falling prey of barbarians. Isola Martana was also the place of the tragic historical event regarding Amalasuunta, the Queen of the Goths, who rose to power after Teodorico's death and here was murdered by her cousin Teodato. The island, uninhabited, was once the site of an Augustinian monastery. Now Isola Martana is a private property and cannot be visited.

VILLAGES AROUND THE LAKE

A panoramic route, offering enchanting views of the lake, connects San Lorenzo Nuovo with Grotta di Castro, famous for its tasty potatoes and whose historical centre, overlooked by the Church/Fortress of San Giovanni, is a tangle of narrow houses, huddled together and dark, among the most characteristic of the area. Gradoli, medieval centre placed on a tufa spur, is famous for its delicious Aleatico, one of the best D.O.C. wines of the Viterbese area: ruby red colour, intense fragrance and taste. Valentano is the place of the ceramics and its Rocca is home to an avant-garde museum with precious documents from Prehistory to Middle Ages. In front of Isola Bisentina there is Capodimonte whose historical centre, overlooked by Palazzo Farnese, offers a splendid landscape and is a nice touristic resort. Marta, the village of fishermen and good food, is just in front of Isola Martana.

Of particular interest are the traditional village fairs, celebrated every year around the lake. But the two most famous places, well-known also abroad, more and more visited by tourists, are Bolsena and Montefiascone.

BOLSENA

Only 100 km from Rome, along the Via Cassia, in the province of Viterbo, Bolsena is set on the hill slopes of the Volsini mountains (350 m above sea level). The town gently slopes down towards the north-eastern shore of the lake, surrounded by hills rich in cultivations such as vineyards, olive groves, potatoes, legumes, food for fodder on one side, and covered with woods on the other side. Its name comes from Velzna, the Etruscan town destroyed by the Romans in 264 BC, whose inhabitants populated this area. It was due to the raids of the Longobards that the Volsiniese community found refuge on the rocky and steep slope, then a medieval hamlet around the Monaldeschi Castle whose origins date back to between the 12th and the 14th centuries.

In 1263 a significant event marked Bolsena history: in the Basilica consecrated to San Giorgio and Santa Cristina, the Eucharist miracle took place and led Pope Urban IV to create the Festivity of Corpus Domini for the whole of the catholic world. Important for devotees is also the celebration of the Festivity of Santa Cristina (23-24 July), a Christian martyr that, under Diocletian's rule, was thrown into the lake tied to a stone; but the stone, instead of sinking her, made her float to the shore. The population is very proud and deeply attached to its historical and cultural traditions, that it is glad to share with tourists coming here also attracted by the thriving and unpolluted nature.

SANTA CRISTINA

The Basilica is an architectural structure divided into three parts: the hypogeal Basilica of the Saint and the Christian catacombs, a Romanesque building with a nave and two aisles (rebuilt in 1708 according to tradition) and the new Chapel of Miracle, erected starting from 1693.

CASTELLO MONALDESCHI

Its massive structure, dating from late 1200, houses the Territorial Museum of Lake Bolsena, with archaeological finds of great interest and didactic panels that present the history of the lake and the various civilisations developed around it.

MONTEFIASCONE

Montefiascone, known as the town of the Popes as well as the town of wine, lies between the regions of Lazio and Umbria, 17 km from Viterbo, at 98 km along the SS Cassia. Situated at 561 m above sea level, on the top of a hill overlooking the magnificent valley of the lake, rich in vegetable gardens, vineyards and olive groves, it is the area for the production of the famous Est!Est!Est!, since 1966 the second Italian D.O.C. wine. The town's history dates back to ancient times and the first settlements seem even to precede the Etruscan ones dated 1800 BC. The development of Montefiascone was also favoured by its location in a strategic spot, on the edge of the southern crater of the Volsini mountains and crossed by the consular Via Cassia, the via Francigena that used to connect Rome to France through the Pianura Padana. The Popes fortified the town centre and built an impressive Rocca (1200) whose works went on for centuries. Now the Rocca dei Papi, restored and improved, is often used to hosting cultural events. The town is recognizable by the dome, one of the largest in Italy, of the Cathedral of Santa Margherita (mid-1600) that rises above the town buildings: repeatedly damaged and restored, the Duomo is now the town symbol. The Church of San Flaviano is one of the best Romanesque buildings in the Tuscia Viterbese and dates back to the 9th century AD. On its façade there is a Renaissance loggia, covered in the 18th century, from which the Pope used to bless the population. It also preserves the gravestone of Giovanni Defuk, the religious man to whom is linked the tradition and legend of the local good wine: travelling from Germany to Rome, Defuk used to send a servant ahead in search for wineries with good wine, to be marked with the write "Est!" (It's here!). At Montefiascone the servant reinforced his affirmation with a triple: "Est! Est!! Est!!!" and for this reason the religious man decided to establish his residence in the town. Every year, on the second Sunday of August, the Commune organizes a parade in the town centre, with 200 figures in the 12th century costume. Also a Wine Feast is celebrated in the first half of August with a visit to the old wineries dug in the tufa.

PARKS AND NATURAL RESERVES

All over the territory included from the Apennine mountains and the Tyrrhenian Sea, full of important historic evidences, there are parks and protected areas, a big patrimony of all of us.

Parco di Turona

Along via Cassia, through a country road, you can get to the small archaeological/naturalistic park of Turona. A circular itinerary across the woods leads you to visit interesting areas with floristic and faunal species spread over the Volsini mountains.

Natural Reserve Selva del Lamone

Along the via Cassia, you can also reach the Natural Reserve Selva del Lamone situated in the territory of Famese. Because of its characteristic entangled forest, for long time Selva del Lamone was a refuge for brigands and smugglers. Now it is crossed by about 50 km of unsurfaced roads, that can also be travelled by car, and walking paths. The most interesting itinerary is the Brigands Path linking the reserve with the lake. All the archaeological finds of the Selva are now housed by the Museo Civico "Ferante Dittatore Vonwiller".

HYDRANGEAS FEAST

Of great interest, the Feast of Hydrangeas (a plant coming from China and Japan), is one of the most important flower exhibitions in Italy. It turns the town centre of Bolsena into a vast garden full of flowers and presents an interesting series of meetings with expert people.

Cuisine

The various restaurants of this area offer typical dishes of Lazio cuisine and the fresh lake fish, served with the most appreciated local wines, among which: the Aleatico of Gradoli, the red and white Colli Etruschi Viterbesi and, of course, the white Est!Est!Est!!! of Montefiascone.

If the cuisine can satisfy even the most demanding palates, it depends, most of all, on the high quality of the local products. Lamb, cow and pork meat, expertly cooked, become very tasty salami. Then the caciotte, pecorini and ricotte of Tuscia. The eel and the whitefish of Bolsena. Not to be missed the chickpeas of Valentano, the so-called "beans of the Purgatory" of Gradoli, the durum wheat, the asparaguses and the artichokes of the Maremma, as well as the potatoes of Grotta di Castro. All these products can be savoured with the pleasant flavour of the oil of Alta Tuscia, coming from the olive groves located around lake Bolsena.

TYPICAL DISHES SOUP

Soup is a very appreciated dish all over the area, especially the "Sbroscia". It consists of a fish soup, flavoured with the various herbs, cooked with potatoes and tomatoes and savoured with the tasty local extra-virgin oil. It is served on slices of stale bread, possibly toasted.

HOMEMADE PASTA

The first course mostly served is the homemade pasta, simply prepared with water and flour: the "Lombrichelli" (handmade short spaghettoni), the "Strozzapreti" shaped like small gnocchi or the classical gnocchi made with potatoes, lighter and good, especially if served with meat sauce.

FISH

The coregone (whitefish), also called "spigola di lago" because of its fine taste, is the most widespread fish. Also the famous lake eel, traditionally considered a fat fish, is very digestible if cooked "alla pescatora" or "alla cacciatora".

CHEESE

The Pecorino, typical of the area and appreciated by the connoisseurs for its good flavour, can be tasted fresh and when just salted, with broad beans or with pears.

VEGETABLES

The "misticanza" or the "strascinata" of fried chicory, are prepared with the various wild herbs of the area.

Getting to Lake Bolsena

By car: Along the via Cassia, 112 km both from Rome and from Siena.

A1 Motorway, exit at Orvieto (km 24) from the north

A1 Motorway, exit at Orte from the south, then expressway to Viterbo and SS Cassia to Siena

From Via Aurelia, exit at Montalto di Castro (60 km) to Canino and Valentano

From Viterbo along the Via Cassia (30 km)

By train: Orvieto, Viterbo or Roma stations, then by bus

By air: Roma/Fiumicino airport (140 km)

By ship: Civitavecchia Harbour, 40 km from the nearest village