



**ALONG THE LAKESIDE YOU CAN STILL SEE THE NETS SPREAD  
OUT TO DRY**

## **MONTE ISOLA, THE HEART OF LAKE ISEO**

An enchanting place, still little known to foreign tourists and even to Italians themselves. The beauties of nature and the peaceful atmosphere due to the lack of cars passing, as well as the variety of accommodation facilities, come together to meet every kind of tourist demand

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Inhabited since the Stone Age, Lake Iseo has always been a fundamental resource for the populations living along the coast: set at the end of Valle Camonica, a passage towards the region of Trentino and Central Europe, for centuries the lake was the most travelled route, even if not easy to pass through, from the North to Pianura Padana and back. The mildness of the climate favoured the fruitful cultivation of grapevines and olive trees, but fishing, more than agriculture, was the real resource of this territory. Fishing not only provided sardines and chubs, then dried in the sun on large grids, but also fostered related activities, such as the manufacturing of boats and nets.

From the early Middle Ages up to the last century, the boats used to ferry people and goods: the agile “naèt” and the “naf” or the “barcù”, big boats with square or rectangular sails and a big side rudder, ploughed incessantly on Lake

Sebino, as it was called by the Romans, exploiting the local winds "ora" and "vèt". Especially the "naèt" was for Monte Isola the irreplaceable link to the coast. In fact this exceptional and long-lasting fishing boat could cover long distances in every season with good or bad weather. Looking like a "gondola" and also revealing the same manufacturing method used in the Venetian lagoon, it is such an ingenious boat that it is now exhibited at the Shipping Museum of London.

Crafted with chestnut and larch wood at Peschiera by the Archetti family, the expert carpenters of the place, the "naèt" is still home-produced at the two dockyards of Monte Isola.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the railway line Brescia-Iseo-Edolo opened an easier passage from Iseo to the valley, so that the "naèt" and the "barcù" were no longer essential.

Today Monte Isola can be reached by ferry. The fishermen are now old people and always diminishing in number, since the work is hard, tiring, unprofitable and implies good knowledge and love for the lake.

## **MONTE ISOLA**

The largest lake island in Europe, located in Lake Iseo, with its 9 km of coastline divides the center of the lake into two channels. Monte Isola can be reached by ferry in a short time, thanks to a shipping line service connecting it to the coastal villages. Walking through the narrow lanes and along the lakeside (not all the roads are asphalted, but there are also unpaved roads and mule tracks), you can enjoy its peaceful atmosphere, due to the lack of cars passing by. The western hinterland is rich in broom and olive groves while the eastern one is covered by shrubs. For its features, Monte Isola has been proclaimed "Area of natural and environmental importance" by the Italian Laws. The island has three important centers: Siviano, the main town, Carzano and Peschiera Maraglio and also includes the two small islands of San Paolo and Loreto.

## **A WEEKEND AT MONTE ISOLA**

Although the island tour is completed in a few hours with the bus line - the only vehicle running along its roads - you can better enjoy Monte Isola by spending one or two days there, immersed in an enchanting environment, visiting it carefully and getting to know its history and its culture. To nature-lovers we would suggest walking or cycling along its various paths, especially the carriage road that links the villages of the island.

Where to spend the time in the evening? People who do not like walking along the lakeside of Peschiera Maraglio, can have a drink at the Bar Birreria "Al Coren" of Senzano, run by Elio, where boys and girls of the island are used to spending the evenings together, or go to the disco "Mon Ami" at Siviano. It is also worth staying at a typical B&B.

## **THE ISLAND TOUR**

You land at Peschiera Maraglio, a typical small harbour where the "naèt", the characteristic fishing boats of Monte Isola, are moored and the nets are spread out to dry. As in the past, the craftsmen still carry on the art of weaving the fishing and sport nets: rare products, famous all over the national territory, that are the pride of the island.

In the town center you can admire the Church of San Michele, dating back to the 17th century.

The walking tour starts at Peschiera and lasts about 3-4 hours, taking you around the island to admire the beauties of nature and lovely scenery of the past. Also pleasant is the typical bike tour, quite easy, along a route of about 9,5 km.

From the town center of Peschiera, you follow the coastal side among the ancient olive trees that have inspired poets and artists, as far as the tiny village of Sensole with a small harbour; then you continue towards Menzino, a hamlet halfway up the side of the mountain. Along a cobblestone road, you get to the Rocca Oldofredi-Martinengo, built around the year 1000, where the Oldofredi family, in 1497, hosted Caterina Cornaro, Queen of Cipro. The castle is a private property and cannot be visited, but outside you can admire the cylindrical tower and the ruins of the old walls.

Going on towards Siviano, you can see the Church of San Carlo dating back to the 17th century. Siviano is the chief town of the island with the town hall: a center probably of Roman origins, then a fortified village in the Middle Ages, it still preserves the original town planning. Siviano is characterized by medieval narrow lanes and flights of steps, with a group of houses rising up the hill. It is overlooked by the impressive Parish Church of Baroque origins, dedicated to San Faustino and San Giovita. Among its roofs you can admire the Square Tower of the 14th century, owned by the Martinengo family. Very interesting is a visit to Villa Solitudine, built in 1500.

The tour carries on towards Carzano, a picturesque village inhabited by fishermen, set along the lakeside. Here the characteristic feast of Santa Croce is held every five years, to celebrate the end of the cholera epidemic; on this occasion the village is adorned with paper-flower garlands created by the inhabitants. In the neighborhood you can see the Palazzo Martinengo built in 1500. Those looking for relaxing holidays, can enjoy the broad beach of Carzano. Walking towards Peschiera, through the villages of Senzano and Cure famous for their tasty salami, the route makes a detour to the Santuario della Madonna della Ceriola that, lying on a spur of the Mesozoic Era, is the most attractive spot of the island with a magnificent view of the lake. The Church is dedicated to the Madonna della Ceriola

that is represented sitting on the throne, with a big mantle and the Baby Jesus in her arms. Built in 1200 on the site of a pre-existent temple dedicated to pagan divinities, the Sanctuary has been altered and restored many times. It hosts some works of art; besides the statue of the Madonna, in the side chapel, you can admire two big pictures on canvas: one of 1500 by an unknown painter representing S. Fermo and the other dedicated to S. Giuseppe. Not to be missed two frescoes with respectively the image of Christ tied to a column and crowned with thorns of 1400 and the image of the Madonna dating back to 1509.

### **ISOLA SAN PAOLO AND ISOLA LORETO**

Isola San Paolo, so named after the apostle Paolo, has always been a shelter for sailors in difficulties. This little plot of land, at first regarded as a neglected cliff, had a troubled story because of its location of strategic importance to get control of the lake. A property of the monastery of Cluny in the 11th century, it belonged to the Order of Franciscans until 1783. It is currently owned by the Beretta family

The story of Isola Loreto, located to the north of Monte Isola, is still partly mysterious, even if the discovery of some coins seems to be the evidence of the passage of fishermen, merchants and pilgrims since the 13th century. It probably belonged to Religious orders for centuries, in 1910 Cav. Richieri erected a neogothic-styled castle here, sheer down to the sea, surrounded by a park of conifers, that can boast an enchanting panoramic view. Now Loreto Island is a private property.

### **THE LEGEND OF SARNEGHERA**

The "Sarneghera" is a weather phenomenon that often occurs on the south-western side of Monte Isola in summertime: a strong wind starts blowing, some enormous black clouds turn up from Sarnico, the water of the lake ripples and becomes as black as soot and the rainstorm breaks. A legend tells about the impossible love between a girl from Monte Isola, betrothed to a nobleman from Franciacorta, and a fisherman from Sarnico. The girl was punished and locked up in the castle while the fisherman was shut up in a subterranean cave. On the wedding day, the bride's father ordered that the fisherman should be murdered. The girl was so distressed that she threw herself into the lake to die with her lover. It is said that the two lovers, looking for each other at the bottom of the lake, in revenge, fling the storm against Sarnico, Monte Isola and Franciacorta.

### **THE EASTERN SIDE OF LAKE ISEO**

Lake Iseo is a unique and remarkable area in the panorama of the Italian Prealpi, still uncontaminated from a physical point of view. As regards the landscape, we would suggest a lake cruise, lasting about 4 hours, in summertime or at the time of festivities in spring/autumn. Lake Iseo is also the ideal place for water sports: thanks to the wind always blowing, at Sale Marasino the kitesurfing is now practised, besides the windsurfing, paragliding and sailing. Located in an area rich in history and culture, it is worth visiting the villages of the lakeside : Iseo, Pisogne, Marone, Zone, Sulzano, Clusane and Paratico.

Zone also features the Piramidi di Terra, an exceptional example of erosive phenomenon; giant stones, more than 30 m high; they are bound to stand with the passing of the time

Sulzano, provided with a small beach and a swimming spot, is the holiday resort chosen by lots of tourists.

Famous for the "Sagra delle Aole" and the "Settimana della Tinca", Clusane has a quaint historic center and is the most visited village of Lake Iseo in summer.

Very interesting is the itineray aimed at admiring the works of art by Romanino. Always seeking new styles, the painter Girolamo Romanino from Brescia (1512-1560) was influenced by the Lombard painting of Bramantino and the Venetian painting of Giorgione and Tiziano. He worked at Padova, Mantova, Brescia, Cremona, Trento and in the end in Valcamonica, at the peak of his artistic activity, expressing a personal, anti-classical and popular language. There are some of his remarkable works in Breno (Presbiterio della Chiesa di S. Antonio), in Bienno (Chiesa di Santa Maria Annunciata) and in Pisogne. Here, in the Chiesa di Santa Maria della Neve, you can see the biggest of his holy cycles with scenes of Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ. Not to be missed the monumental Crucifixion.

### **TYPICAL PRODUCTS AND LOCAL CUISINE**

An excellent olive oil is produced from the olive groves spread on Monte Isola that, for its best qualities, is used not only for cooking but also as a medicine. A typical product is the salami of Cure, prepared, according to an ancient tradition, between January and February at the time of the waning moon. It is smoked in a stone cellar by burning dried wood inside a closed fireplace, to give it its typical aroma. Characterized by ancient and tasty flavors, the cuisine of the island still maintains the typical features of a poor and traditional way of cooking. The restaurants propose ancient recipes with a hint of innovation. Always included in the menu are the salami of Monte Isola, the dried

sardines and chubs, tasty first courses with lakefish, such as the risotto with perch; the main courses vary from the roasted or fried lakefish to meat with polenta or sausages with cabbage, along with the excellent wine from Franciacorta to complement any type of meal.

### ***GETTING THERE***

By car: A4 motorway, exit Palazzolo sull'Oglio, Rovato, Ospitaletto.

By air: Brescia-Montichiari or Verona-Villafranca Airports

By train: Ferrovie Nord along Brescia-Edolo line, Sulzano or Sale Marsino stations

Then ferry (no cars) to Monte Isola