



Italy : dotted by lakes of a thousand faces

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Lake Trasimeno

The charm of the Italian lakes lies entirely in their peaceful landscapes, in the reassuring nearness of the shores, in the aristocratic presence of manicured gardens, and in the way these elements dominate the entire landscape. They are little worlds in miniature, where people and things have a familiar air.

The townships lining the lake shores are small architectural gems: tiny roads, hidden paths, windows that overlook other windows, houses that cling to one another as if vying for the scant space available.

The shores of the three largest lakes boast some splendid architectural marvels such as the fortress known as the Rocca di Angera or the scented gardens of Villa Taranto, which face each other on the opposite shores of Lake Maggiore.

The Scaligera fortress in Sirmione and the medieval stronghold in Riva del Garda are two privileged observation points set at the two extremities of Lake Garda.

Then there is the superb Villa Serbelloni in Bellagio, from whose immense gardens visitors can enjoy peerless views of the two branches of Lake Como.

No less beautiful are the smaller lakes of Iseo and Orta, whose most sumptuous treasures are hidden in the middle of their waters in the form of two islands that draw all eyes.

One, Monte Isola, is the largest and highest island of all of Italy's lakes. The other, San Giulio, is dominated by the imposing bulk of its great seminary. Fascinating microcosms, surpassed in beauty only by the Borromeo Islands, the pearls of Lake Maggiore, which boast grandiose aristocratic mansions.



Lake of Laures

While the north Italian lakes are characterised by their elongated shapes and the quasi omnipresence of the Alps, those of Central Italy have completely different landscapes and contours.

Once volcanic craters, their waters are very deep. And it is this volcanic origin that ex-

plains the characteristic round shapes of lakes such as Bolsena, Vico and Bracciano. Lake Trasimeno surpasses them all in size, but its shallow waters (six metres) reveal its different origin: millions of years ago a shallow sea covered this area and Lake Trasimeno was formed in a depression caused by geologic fractures.

The biggest lakes in Southern Italy lie by the shores of the Adriatic: only a slim strip of sand separates lakes Lesina and Varano, home to fish and birds of various species, from the waters of the sea.

But to find the greatest number of lakes we have to travel all the way back up the peninsula to the north, to the Alps. In fact the mountains enclose, hidden because of their height, a myriad of small, crystal clear lakes in which the surrounding peaks are reflected in all their majesty.

Discovering these places can be a demanding enterprise, requiring some relatively long climbs. But the effort is amply repaid by the majestic views of the landscape.

Italy is also a country of rivers, which run calmly through most of its cities. Along their banks and at their mouths there lie some authentic hidden natural paradises, which rival the beauty of the magnificent palazzi in the cities that line the courses of the various rivers.



Garda Island

Romantic waters

Great tongues of water that make their way between woods and cliff faces unwilling to stand aside. Little villages dotting the shores. Sumptuous residences that dominate the most evocative corners, their solitary presence embellished by an aristocratic frame made up of centuries-old trees and perfect gardens. Fragments of land in the middle of the water, enchanted islands that have sprung out of nowhere, little earthly paradises where time seems to have stood still. Solitary abbeys from whose windows the charm of the landscape is conducive to contemplation.

Lakes Garda, Maggiore, Lario and their smaller kin, Lakes Iseo and Orta, all offer a calm to be enjoyed in an unhurried manner, corner after corner, view after view, enchantment after enchantment.



Varenna, Lake Como



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Oases of peace

Small stretches of crystal-clear water in which the great mountain peaks are placidly reflected. Almost perfect liquid circumferences, a reminder of their volcanic origins. Segments of blue that gently break up the infinite lines of the contours of the landscape.

From the great Alpine valleys to the sun-kissed plains of Sicily, all of Italy is dotted by lakes with a thousand faces.

They can be gelid but fascinating like those of the mountains; gentle and welcoming like Trasimeno and the lakes of Bolsena and Bracciano; evocative and untamed like Lesina and Varano, separated from the sea only by a long sandbar; or evocative guardians of ancient secrets, such as Lake Resia, whose waters drowned the old town of Curon Venosta, leaving only the austere belltower standing in the middle of the lake.



Lake Orta

The public boat services on the three lakes: Maggiore, Garda and Como

The beginning of the public line service on Lakes Maggiore, Garda and Como, dates back to 1826-1827. At that time the industrial and commercial development in the Lakes area gave birth to the need for new and faster means of transport that could be an alternative to those by land, thought of as slow and inadequate.

In those years, two steam-ships, the "Verbano" and the "Lario", belonging to the "Lombardo-Sardo-Ticinese" Society, came into service respectively on Lake Maggiore and Como.

Later, the shipbuilder Society began the service on Lake Garda with the steam-ship "Arciduca Ranieri". The private management lasted until 1948, when, after the serious damages undergone during the Second World War, the commission Societies stopped their activity.

With the succeeding of the State, it was possible to assure the continuation of the public navigation transport on the lakes until 1957, when, with a special law, the Minister of Transport took the reorganisation upon itself.

It was then nominated a Governative Manager that began a technical and economical balancing project. With the Government Management 83 boats were added (among them: motor-ships, ferry-boats, motor-vehicles, steam-ships, etc) for a total passenger capacity of about 30,000, and 4 up-to-date equipped shipyards were built. Today, the Government organisation has 800 employees.

The structure has a General Direction with the head office in Milan and three operative offices: one in Arona for Lake Maggiore, one in Desenzano for Lake Garda, and one in Como for its lake.

The high standard offered by the motor-ship on service (cafes, restaurants, equipped conference rooms etc.), increased the flow of national and international tourists, especially during public holidays and summer. For the future, the construction of other naval units has been planned in order to further improve and extend this public service.



Stresa, Lake Maggiore

Technological progress and the introduction of steam in navigation operations

Power production using steam was one of the first sectors in which scientific principles were translated into technological applications. It was in fact in the field of navigation that this system was first used. Indeed, it could be used directly on waterways without having to set up a costly infrastructure such as with the railways.

In the 19th century this method of using steam developed extremely quickly.

The first steam-powered boats, in the 1820s, had a wooden hull and engines of a few tens of horsepower which could move rudimentary paddle wheels. Passengers on such vessels were practically fully exposed to bad weather conditions.

The boats later evolved towards a partially metal structure (external iron covering) and then, in around the 1870s, evolved into boats made entirely from steel, with a large indoor saloon, respectable power and speed (500 hp and more than 25 km per hour) and were capable of carrying up to seven hundred passengers.

In the last twenty years of the 19th century propellers were introduced to replace the side drive wheels, while in the early 1900s the diesel engine was used for the first time.

This replaced steam-powered engines, which, however, still remained in use for many years.

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