

# NO TREAT, ITALY'S CURSED



**I**sola della Gaiola is actually two small islets joined by a very narrow, natural arched stone bridge. Gaiola Island is located offshore in the Gulf of Naples, part of the volcanic Campanian Archipelago 30 meters from the city's Posillipo area. The island is close to the coast and can be easily reached by swimming or by boat. The island gets its name from the numerous small caves and cavities that dot the coastline here. The word caviola is the local dialect for the Latin *cavae* meaning "little cave." Gaiola Island is located within the "Parco sommerso di Gaiola," a 42-hectare preserve created to protect the diverse marine ecosystem and many ancient submerged Roman ruins scattered around the island's crystal clear waters.

Gaiola Island has a long history beginning with the Roman era when aristocrats constructed villas along the coast. The island, originally known to the Romans as Euplea, was considered to be the protector of safe navigation and was home to a temple erected in honor of the goddess Venus. The remains of an Imperial Age villa can be seen today in the clear waters surrounding the island. According to legend, the Roman poet and, some say, magician Virgil once taught his students here on the island among the area's majestic scenery. In the 17th century, the island was virtually littered with Roman factories while two centuries later, the island served as a battery in defense of the Gulf of Naples.

The glory days for the island were limited to ancient times. Since the beginning of the 19th century,

Naples's legend has considered Gaiola a "cursed island." Italians are a superstitious bunch and believe that under this island's beauty hides some sinister power, a "restless fate," the "Gaiola Malediction." Today, the island is abandoned, and many locals refuse to be near it in fear of challenging the "Gaiola Malediction." Its reputation developed not from local superstition or some marketing trick but substantiated from its history of frequent strange events involving murder, ruin, misfortune, misery, and premature deaths in the families of its 20th-century owners.

So, where did it all go wrong for Isola della Gaiola? The run of bad luck might have started in the 1800's when a hermit known as *Il Mago* or "The Wizard," lived on the island. He was isolated from the community, wandering about and surviving on a meager diet of fish given to him by generous local fishermen. *Il Mago* lived a solitary existence so there was no one to explain why he suddenly and mysteriously disappeared.

In 1911, Captain Gaspare Albenga was interested in buying the island. While navigating his ship around the island, he crashed his boat into rocks and drowned. Some sources say the story was even more dramatic and that his boat did not sink but it disappeared along with the captain himself.

After that, Luigi de Negri, the owner of a very lucrative fishing company, became the next inhabitant. He built a majestic residential villa on one of the islets, which still stands almost intact. Soon after purchasing

# GAIOLA ISLAND

By JIM SANO

REGIONS  
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the island, Negri's fish packing business had huge financial problems which drove him into bankruptcy and his business empire collapsed.

In the 1920's, it came into the ownership of Hans Braun, a Swiss businessman. Soon after moving into the villa, Braun was found mysteriously murdered at the mansion with his body rolled up and hidden within a carpet. Shortly after this gruesome discovery, Braun's wife would tragically drown in the calm, clear waters of the gulf, even though she was a strong swimmer and conditions had been placid.

Pharmaceutical industrialist Maurice-Yves Sandoz was the next to purchase the island and its villa. Soon after his purchase, he was declared insane and later committed suicide at a mental hospital in Switzerland in 1958. The island's ownership passed on to the wealthy German Otto Grunback, who promptly suffered a fatal heart attack while staying in the island's villa.

Four mysterious deaths later did not deter other wealthy Europeans from vying for ownership of Gaiola Island. Baron Karl Paul Langheim bought the island next. The German steel industrialist did not die a gruesome death, but his life was left in catastrophic economic ruin not long after this purchase, losing his entire vast fortune from his "wild lifestyle." He sold the island to Gianni Agnelli, owner of Fiat (the most important automobile manufacturer in Italy), who had substantial personal sufferings during his life; his only son committed suicide. After his son's untimely death,

Gianni had started grooming his nephew Umberto Agnelli to run Fiat, but Umberto died of a rare cancer at the young age of 33.

The billionaire American industrialist John Paul Getty had his fair share of misfortunes after buying the island, with the suicide of his oldest son and the death of his youngest son. In 1973, the Calabrian Mafia ('Ndrangheta) kidnapped his grandson. They forced him to pay the ransom of 3 million dollars by cutting off the boy's ear and sending it to him in the mail. The island's last owner Gianpasquale Grappone was jailed for fraud and embezzlement when his insurance company failed. While in prison, his wife died in a car accident in 1978.

The island is currently owned by the region of Campania and positioned in the middle of the Gaiola Underwater Park, which manages and preserves the ancient Roman ruins and the rare flora and fauna found in the area. Gaiola island has been uninhabited for 40 years. The curse has not stopped; in 2009, Franco Ambrosio and his wife Giovanna Sacco were murdered in a villa they owned opposite the island. The killers were never caught. Once again, the press and locals attributed it to the "Gaiola Malediction." Many locals still refuse to go near it for fear of becoming the next victim of the island's curse.

***Is this seemingly peaceful, postcard-perfect island of Gaiola cursed? Is its magnificence a veneer behind which some ancient evil lurks? Can the string of misfortunes attributed to the island be blamed on dark forces that somehow twist and warp the fates of those who come here, or is this simply a series of unfortunate coincidences?***



# ISLANDS OF BASILICATA, CALABRIA & EMILIA-ROMAGNA

By JIM SANO

**W**hile two of the largest islands in the Mediterranean Sea belong to Italy, there are numerous additional islands totaling 1/6 of the nation's land mass.

So exactly how many islands does Italy have altogether? The total number of Italian islands is over 450, with about 350 sea islands (including 13 archipelagos), about 100 lagoon and lake islands, and a few river islands like the Isola Tiberina on the Tiber in Rome. Venice alone has 32 inhabited lagoon islands.

Nearly every region of Italy has its islands, except three: Abruzzo, Molise, and Marche, even though the sea borders them. Umbria, which has no coastline, still has islands, though these are river islands. Only about 1/10 of the total population lives on Italy's islands.

## Isola Santo Janni

(Aka Santo Ianni) is an island in Basilicata located in the Gulf of Policastro northwest of Marina di Maratea. The island of Santo Janni is 200 meters long, and at the point of maximum width reaches 80 meters. The highest rocky outcrop measures 18 meters above sea level. The islet owes its name to an ancient chapel dedicated to St. John, located near its highest rocky outcrop. The island of Santo Janni, together with the



Isola Santo Janni

smaller island called La Matrella and the surrounding rocks, constitutes the so-called archipelago of the Italian islands of Maratea.

In the waters around Santo Janni, the largest reservoir of anchors and Roman era jars in the Mediterranean Sea was discovered. On the rocky spurs of the islet, there have also been found numerous tanks intended for the production of garum, fermented fish sauce which

was used as a condiment in the cuisines of Phoenicia, ancient Greece, Rome, Carthage, and later Byzantium.

The history of the island is above all linked to the story of Saint Blaise's relics and the transfer of ownership of these sacred relics to Maratea. It was here in 732 that the crew of the ship carrying the relics of the saint and heading for Rome, handed them over to the inhabitants of Maratea.

Around Santo Janni's islet, the seabed preserves one of the richest deposits of amphorae and relics of the Roman Age. Many of these relics are on exhibit at the Palazzo De Lieto in Maratea.

Due to the significant exposure to sunlight, the flora of the island is weak. What is of great interest is the so-called Dragon of Santo Janni, a zoological phenomenon. The blue-brown lizard, confined to the rocky ravines of this islet, is considered an endangered species.

## Cirella Island

Cirella Island is located on the northwestern coast of the Tyrrhenian Sea in Calabria, opposite the village of Cirella and the city of Diamante in the province of Cosenza. It has an area of 0.12 km<sup>2</sup> and reaches a maximum height of about 40 meters. The island's limestone rocks, subjected to sea erosion, gave rise to many caves and bays. The flora is typical of the Mediterranean scrub, enriched by groves of lemons.

At the top are the ruins of a military fortification called the Tower of the island of Cirella. The Tower, with sides 10 meters long and walls three or four meters wide, was built in 1562 to prevent the Turkish pirates from attacking Cirella.

Around the island are some archaeological finds dating back to the Greco-Roman period. The seabed of the east side of the island is rich in marine vegetation (*Posidonia Oceanica*), and there are also specimens of *Pinna Nobilis*, the largest clam in the Mediterranean.



**Cirella island**

Periodically World War II bombs are found only a short distance from the island's east coast. The Coast Guard routinely detonates these projectiles with the most recent event being on December 22, 2020.

## Isola di Dino

Isola di Dino is the larger of the two small islands in the Tyrrhenian Sea off Calabria's coast near Praia a Mare. The island's name derives from the Italian *aedina*, a temple, or Greek *dino*, a vortex or storm. The island covers an area of 120 acres and has a maximum altitude of 330 ft. The vegetation is Mediterranean scrub with many migratory birds, gulls that nest on cliffs, and some birds of prey. There are also small rodents and several species of reptiles. Water erosion has given rise to many caves, including Monaco, Sardine, Cascade, and Leone. Grotta Azzura (the Blue Grotto) is the largest cave, while Grotta Gargiulo is almost entirely submerged and reaches 59 ft below sea level. The island

was frequented by Muslim ships in their military expeditions to Italy in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries. The Turks invaded in the summer of 1600. Citizens resisted the attack until they were all captured and killed. In 1806, the island became the base of operations of the English fleet under Admiral Sidney Smith, who tried to oppose Calabria's invasion by Napoleon.

In 1928, the island became the autonomous property of the municipality of Praia a Mare. In 1956, the island was given a concession for 99 years, and in



**Isola di Dino**



**Comacchio**



1962 it was sold for 50 million lire to Gianni Agnelli to develop the island for elite international tourists. Development included constructing a new 1,700-meter road from the pier inland, new housing, and other facilities. On June 13, 2014, a court annulled the contract.

## Comacchio

(Comacchiese) is in Italy's Emilia-Romagna region, specifically within Ferrara's province. Comacchio's structures are over two thousand years old, with foundations attributed to the Etruscan. This small village, where the Po River and the sea intersect, is often called 'the small Venice'. It forms the union of thirteen small islands joined by bridges. Comacchio was built to financially exploit the river's advantages. The remnant is an extensive maze of canals, with small bridges connecting the various corners of the town and pastel-colored terraced houses that characterize the inner streets. The channels are genuinely magnificent and can be explored on gondolas, boats or by walking alongside the waterways to see the best that Comacchio has to offer.

Comacchio is not known as Little Venice for any old reason, but because this is a town whose canals' beauty can rival the famous water-based city to the north. For many centuries, Comacchio was a flourishing port city that rivaled Venice for power and influence in the region. Ultimately though, Venice became the maritime power, and Comacchio fell into relative obscurity in comparison. For thousands of years, the economy was based on fishing and the salt trade, which has given way to remarkable tourist development. Comacchio's beaches, these 7 Lidos or seaside resorts, are set away from the town and the canals and offer a pleasant escape along the coast. The more than 20 km of fine golden sand combined with a tranquil and shallow sea have earned top Blue Flag beach designations for years, making this the ideal destination for family holidays.



**Po Delta Regional Park**

From the Etruscans to the Byzantines to the Lombards to Charlemagne and to the church, the political control of Comacchio mimics the history of many other Italian provinces. Land was the prize over which much blood was spilled. The booming salt trade and rivalry with Venice ended with a Venetian victory and the destruction of Comacchio. It was slowly rebuilt over centuries and once again came under Papal control until the arrival of Garibaldi and his troops and the resulting unified Italy. After Italy's unity, large drainage projects took place, reclaiming land for agriculture and, more recently, tourist development.

Comacchio has ancient origins and is still a lagoon city whose historical center still retains its most famous monuments, such as the Trepponti bridge, with its majestic staircases, the seventeenth-century Cathedral of San Cassiano, the elegant Bellini Palace, and the distinctive Manifattura dei Marinati. In this old factory, eels were cooked and marinated. Tours on the traditional *butane* (small flat-keeled boats), which were the usual means of transport for the inhabitants until a few decades ago, should not be missed.

Just as impressive as the vast network of canals that crisscross through the town, many bridges span the waterways, connecting one side to another. Many of these bridges are impressive works of architecture in themselves, and they offer visitors great photographic opportunities and great views along the canals. The most famous bridge is Trepponti, which dates to the



**Marina di Maratea**

early 17th century; the bridge was designed not just as a crossing but also as a defensive structure. This bridge consists of five elegant staircases built at the confluence of five canals and surmounted by two small towers; the bridge allowed for the waters of the internal channels to flow into the sea and, at the same time, it constituted a defense gate at the main entrance to the town. For many centuries it served as a significant deterrent to pirates and would-be invaders looking to pillage Comacchio's wealth. On the square opposite Trepponti is the Pescheria, which dates to the 17th century, and is still a huge fish market. The Palazzo Bellini is another of Comacchio's impressive, historic buildings.

It is home to a beautiful collection of the old and the new from Giacomo Balla, Filippo de Pisis, Lucio Fontana to Andy Warhol.

In addition to the historical structures, this area is an extraordinary naturalistic attraction, especially regarding birdwatching activities. The Po Delta Regional Park is a UNESCO World Heritage Site that protects an incredible wetland ecosystem along the coast. Po Delta Regional Park is the largest area of protected wetlands in Italy and is teeming with wildlife. Comacchio has over 320 bird species. The most valuable are Grebe, the Shelduck, the Curlew, the Egret, various Heron types and more than 400 fabulous pink flamingos.

Comacchio has been famous for its local eels for centuries. Locals have made a living from the wetlands by fishing for these slippery creatures amongst the lagoons' reeds and marshes. The Po Valley's humid atmosphere is the perfect natural habitat for the eel which became the main economic and food livelihood for the local fishermen over the centuries. There are 48 different eel dishes nowadays, ranging from the very delicate risotto to the brodetto (soup), from the sweet and sour steaks to the marinated fillets right up to the grilled eel. This long culinary tradition is celebrated every October when the locals hold the Comacchio Eel Festival at the start of the month.



**Comacchio Eel Festival**

# Islands of Campania

By JIM SANO



**L**he Campanian Archipelago, also known as the Neapolitan Archipelago, is an archipelago in the Gulf of Naples in southwestern Italy. It principally is comprised of the five islands of Capri and the four Phlegraean Islands of Ischia, Nisida, Procida, and Vivara which are all administered by the Metropolitan City of Naples. The nearby islets of Aragonese Castle, Sirenuse (the Galli), Gaiola Island (Cursed Island Siamo Qui October 2021), Megaride, Pennata Island, San Martino, Rovigliano Skerry, and Vetara are usually included in the archipelago as well. The archipelago's ancient name was the Parthenopaeian Islands which came from Parthenope, the ancient name of Naples. It originally also included the Pontine Islands, which are now considered an archipelago in their own right.

## Capri

First, the correct pronunciation of Capri is CAH-pri, not cuh-PRI. The standard tourist mispronunciation of the island's name sounds just like a local dialect expression meaning, "Please, I would like to give you some more of my money."

Capri first attracted real and royal attention when Caesar Augustus dropped by in 29 B.C. He liked it so



**Monte Solaro**

much that he traded Ischia for it. Since that time, there has been an unbroken chain of Capri admirers from the Longobards to the Normans, Angevins, Spanish, Austrians, English, and modern Italians. All this attention is understandable. Of the islands in the Bay of Naples, Capri has the most to offer. It is geologically spectacular from its two high points, Monte Solaro and Monte Tiberius that rise like pillars at opposite ends of the island, to natural wonders such as the Blue Grotto and the twin rocks known as the Faraglioni jutting up from the waters just off the island's east end.



**Villa of Axel Munthe**



**Faraglioni**

Nowhere in the Gulf of Naples or the vicinity, not from any of the other islands, not even from the mountains above nearby Sorrento, will you find a view equal to that from the vantage points on Capri. Some main attractions not to be missed include The Blue Grotto, the Villa of Tiberius, the Villa of Axel Munthe, and Monte Solaro. Its manmade attractions are also hard to beat: an old Saracen tower on Mt. Barbarossa, the cliffside path named via Krupp, a hermitage, a monastery, and the most serene chairlift you will find anywhere, leading from the town of Anacapri up to the top of Monte Solaro. Additionally, you can hike, hang-glide, scuba-dive, go down in a submarine, shop till you drop, and then relax with all the other "beautiful people" at an open-air cafe in one of the most famous squares of its kind in the world.



**The Blue Grotto**

The island can be divided into two parts, Capri and Anacapri. Capri includes the delightful little main square in Capri's town and everything leading out towards the island's eastern height and Tiberius's villa. It might also include going down the via Krupp pathway (named for Alfred Krupp) to the north side of the island and the Marina Piccola (small harbor). The Anacapri side includes the town of Anacapri, itself quaint and less frequented than its famous sister town, and Monte Solaro, accessible on foot (up the "Phoenician stairs") or by chair lift.

Private vehicles are forbidden for transport over to Capri, but taxis and buses are available from the port to virtually every part of the island accessible by wheeled vehicles. Along with many other convertible car enthusiasts, I fell in love with the 9-seater Fiat convertible taxis only produced for use on Capri, and no amount of money will get one imported even to mainland Italy. Frequent ferry and hydrofoil services are available to Capri from Naples and Sorrento.

## Phlegraean Islands

Procida and the sloping volcanic islands of Ischia, Vivara, and Nisida collectively are part of the Phlegraean Islands which are the result of the massive Phlegraean eruption. Twelve thousand years ago, a volcano violently exploded in the modern-day suburbs of Napoli. Traces of the explosion have been discovered as far away as Siberia, Scandinavia, the Iberian Peninsula, and the Alps. In addition to radically and permanently altering the European continental shelf, the eruption caused specks of the earth to detach from the mainland. This event will likely occur again as the underground caldera known as the Campi Flegrei or Burning Fields are still highly active. The name is derived from the joint affiliation to the geologic area of the Phlegraean Fields. The Island of Capri is usually excluded, as it does not belong to the same geologic formations. Legend had the monster Typhon buried under Ischia and the Giant Mimas buried under Procida. Such stories might be significant as a clue to how the ancient Greeks attempted to account for the whole area's volcanism.

**Procida** is located halfway between Ischia and Naples and is the smallest island in the Bay of Naples. The island derives its name from the ancient Greek verb prokeitai, meaning 'it lies forth,' because of the island's appearance as seen from the sea. Procida has such a low profile in the water that it is hard to spot in bad weather.

Of all the islands embracing the Gulf of Naples, Procida has best succeeded in preserving its original, genuine beauty, unpolluted nature, and simplicity of life. The island's most prominent physical feature is the medieval fortress, the so-called "Terra Murata," set high above the sea on the eastern approach to the main harbor. In the last 3,000 years, the island has been



**Procida Island**

home to a strategic port, a bustling maritime academy, and a fascist prison. Procida, along with its sister island, Vivara, to which it is linked by a bridge, is rich in attractions and archaeology.

Although you may not have heard of Procida, chances are that you will have seen it. The Island of Procida is probably one of the most photographed in all of Italy. The iconic shot of Procida's Corricella Marina appears on Italian guidebook covers in over fifty languages internationally. This 17th-century colorful fishing village is built into the rock leading to the sea and can only be reached by stairs in passageways through the houses since automobile usage is limited. If you are a movie buff, you may recall Procida from the 1999's Academy Award-nominated thriller, "The Talented Mr. Ripley". Its most prominent and feted role is still in one of Italian cinema's modern classics, "Il Postino (The Postman)."

**Ischia** is the most developed and largest island in the Bay of Naples and is considered by many to be the most beautiful though Capri is considerably more famous. Ischia has a long history as one of the earliest Greek colonies in this part of the Mediterranean. The first settlers (circa 7th century B.C.) named the island Pithecusa or The Island of Monkeys. According to legend, the name was not about a primitive man they found there but in deference to the Cercopes, mythical inhabitants of volcanic zones who were changed by Zeus into yellow-haired monkeys and banished to Pithecusa. Ischia has



been colonized in turn by the Syrausansa, Romans, Saracens, Turks, and Aragonese, all of whom were interested in its excellent strategic position and therapeutic hot-spring waters. The result of this varied history is seen in the ruins of various outposts, towers, and rock shelters hidden all over the island.

Ischia today is famed for its thermal spas, manicured gardens, and striking Aragonese castle. The castle stands on a rocky volcanic islet, Castello Aragonese, that connects to the larger island of Ischia by a causeway, Ponte Aragonese. Hiero I of Syracuse built the castle and two towers in 474 BC. to control the movements of enemy fleets. The rock was then occupied by Parthenopeans, the ancient inhabitants of Naples. In 326 BC, the



**Ischia Island spas**



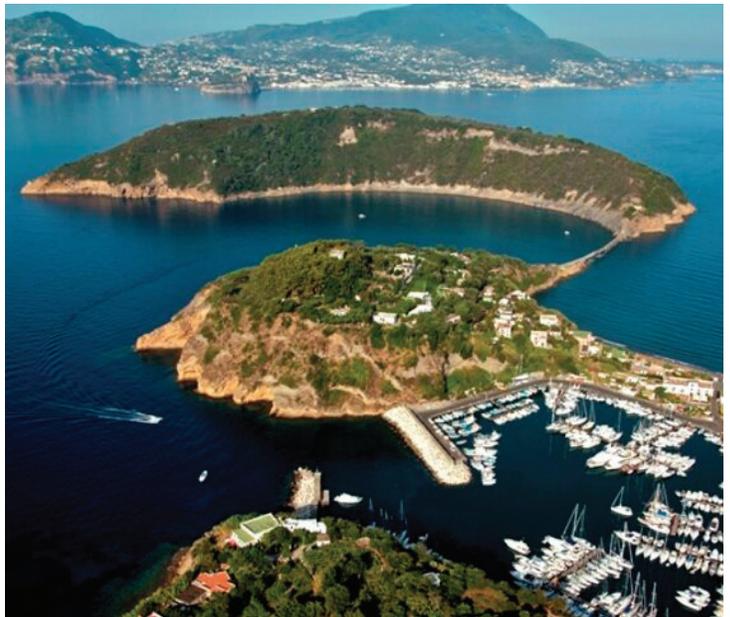
**Castello Aragonese**

fortress was captured by Romans and then again by the Parthenopeans. In 1441, Alfonso V of Aragon connected the rock to the island with a stone bridge instead of a wood bridge and fortified the walls to defend the inhabitants against pirates' raids. The most famous fortification and landmark on the island is the castle. Once the D'Avalos family's baronial seat, the palace housed several prominent women such as the poet, Vittoria Colonna, who married Ferrante D'Avalos in the castle in 1509. She gave her name to a yearly literary prize awarded by the island to women writers. Around 1700, about 2000 families lived on the islet along with a Poor Clares convent, an abbey of Basilian monks of the Greek Orthodox Church, the bishop, and the prince's military garrison. The castle was ruined during the wars with Revolutionary France and the Neapolitan Republic of 1799. Commodore Trowbridge, under the command of Admiral Nelson, bombarded the occupying French garrison into submission. In 1912, the castle was sold to a private owner. Today the castle is the most visited monument on the island. Annually on the 26th of July, the castle hosts the spectacular Festa di Sant'Anna, which culminates in an amazing firework display.

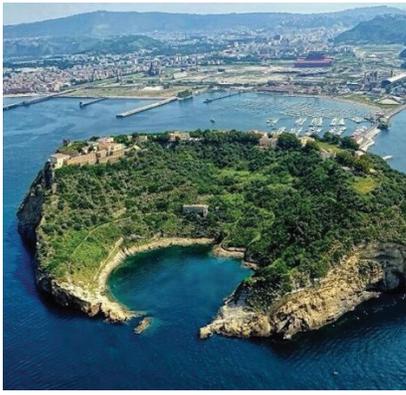
Ischia is also known as "The Green Island" due to its numerous pine trees and rich Mediterranean vegetation that make the island explode in color and fragrance in springtime. The vineyards, cultivated in terraced fields, add a special touch to the island's general landscape. This volcanic island has a high concentration of under-

ground thermal springs that make Ischia the "capital of European spas," with more than 300 spas for the regeneration of mind and body. Ischia's thermal springs have been renowned since ancient times and have been tested by many Italian and foreign scientists for their therapeutic features. The thermal waters are used in baths and thermal gardens; they are also found in small springs on some beaches and streams. The health and wellness industry has led the island to recover its economy and find its place as a center of well-being for countless visitors. Six million tourists (principally from the Italian mainland and Germany) flock to the island for its volcanic thermal spas as well as for its beaches and food.

**Vivara** is a satellite islet of Procida. Separated from Procida by a few meters of water and now connected to it by a bridge, this crescent-shaped remnant is the rim of an ancient volcanic crater. It is now an 88-acre nature preserve, one of the last unspoiled bits of greenery and wildlife havens in the area. As a result of recent archaeological work, it is also a place to catch a glimpse of the first great civilization of the ancient Greeks, the Mycenae. Mycenae was the home of "proud Agamemnon," who rallied his fellow princes to sail forth and besiege Troy to avenge Helen's abduction in 1200 B.C. Mycenae then turned out to be the dominant Mediterranean civilization for almost 400 years, from 1450 to 1100 B.C. Though there was not yet a single significant city anywhere in Italy (the Etruscans would build the first in about 900 B.C.), the Mycenaeans carried on a flourishing trade with small outposts scattered throughout Sicily and the islands and coastal areas of southern Italy. One such outpost was Vivara.



**Vivara Island**



**Nisida** is a picturesque volcanic islet. It lies at a short distance from Cape Posillipo, just north of Naples, and is now connected to the mainland by a stone bridge. The islet is almost circular with a flooded crater forming Porto Paone's bay on the southwest



**The Sirenasas**

coast. The original Greek settlers of the area called this small island Nesis, Greek for "islet" (small island). The Romans called it Nisida. It was a favored spot for holidays during the Roman era; Brutus had a holiday villa here. It was here Brutus plotted with Cassius on the assassination of Julius Caesar. A Neapolitan castle was constructed in the 1500's as a defensive structure and during the 1800's, the Bourbons placed a high-security and controversial prison here which the British also used during WWII for war prisoners. In the 1960's, an Italian Air Force Academy was located here. It was later replaced by an Italian naval facility, a juvenile detention facility, and a NATO base.

The Sirenasas (AKA, Li Galli, "the Cocks") references the ancient sirens' bird-like form. This archipelago of three little islands, Gallo Lungo, La Castelluccia, and La Rotonda, are located off the Amalfi Coast of Italy between Capri and Positano. The name, Sirenuse, refers to the mythological sirens, and like the mythical sirens, the real rocky islands were a severe threat to the coastal seafaring of antiquity. The sirens are mentioned in the 1st century B.C. by Strabo, the Greek geographer, and by Straton of Sardis in 120 AD. In ancient stories, the sirens were depicted as having bird bodies and human heads, but the medieval interpretations of the stories depicted them as mermaids. Originally the site of an ancient Roman anchorage in the Middle Ages, the islands became medieval fiefdoms of the 13th-century emperor, Frederick II, and the Capetian House of Anjou. In 1225, Emperor Frederick II gave the islands to the monastery of Positano. They were mentioned as tres Sirenas quae dicitur Gallus ('three sirens called rooster'). The largest of the islands, Gallo Lungo, is the only one settled since ancient times; the island hosted a monastery and then a prison. Eventually, with the establishment of the Republic of Italy, ownership passed to the town of Positano. The town later sold the islands to Russian choreographer and dancer Leonide Massine, who converted them into a private residence. Massine built a large villa on Gallo Lungo which was rebuilt thirteen years later by Charles Édouard Jeanneret (AKA- Le Corbusier), a Swiss-French architect,

designer, painter, urban planner, writer, and one of the pioneers of modern architecture. After Le Corbusier's death, the islands were purchased in 1988 by Russian dancer Rudolf Nureyev, who spent the last years of his life here. After Nureyev's death, a Sorrento hotelier purchased the islands making them available for private rental with a staff.

The uninhabited rocky islets of Scruopolo, Megaride, Pennata Island, San Martino, Rovigliano Skerry, and Vetara are considered part of the Sirenasas as well. They mostly amount to small rocks in the sea. All of them are deserted, many had Roman settlements on them and all are under the strict protection of the national Parco Marino della Penisola Sorrentina Nature Reserve.

**Isca** (also Scoglio d'Isca or Galluzzo "chicken") is a small island in the Gulf of Salerno. It is located about a hundred meters off the Amalfi Coast, south of the peninsula of Sorrento. In 1948, the Italian playwright Eduardo De Filippo purchased this island (later owned by his son Luca De Filippo), where he built his summer residence. The main house is believed to be in the same area where an ancient Roman villa was located. It is divided into two floors, a ground floor divided into six rooms, two bathrooms, two passageways, a storage room, and the first floor with a large living room, three rooms, a gallery, and four small rooms which may be joined. The property has been offered for sale regularly for years; most recently, a public listing of this island in 2011 was for US\$268 million.



**Isca Island**

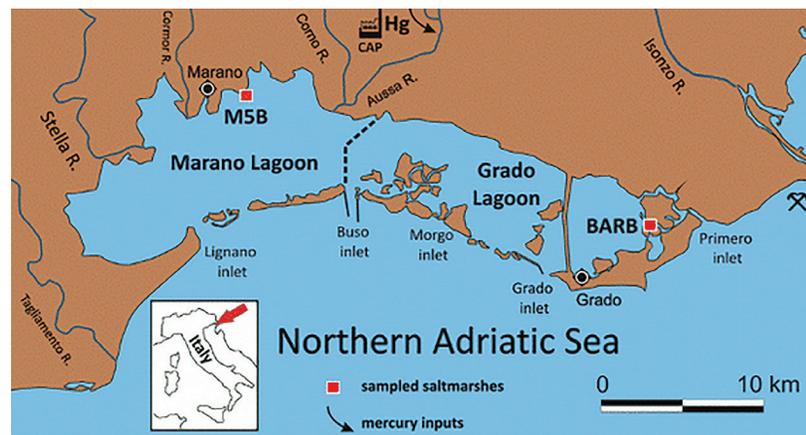
## REGIONS OF ITALY



# Islands of Friuli-Venezia Giulia

By JIM SANO

Italy is divided into twenty regions and, in almost every part, you can find a few islands. The only regions that do not have any islands are Abruzzo, Molise, Aosta Valley, and Marche. The islands of Friuli Venezia Giulia are in the Marano/Grado Lagoon. This massive lagoon in northeastern Italy has a surface area of around 160 square kilometers (62 sq mi). The Marano section covers an area of 70 square kilometers and has fewer islands than the Grado section. The Marano section of the lagoon starts on the southern side with Lignano Sabbiadoro, a resort city developed mainly after World War II, and goes until the "Palud de Soto" near Porto Buso on the island of Anfora which is next to the mouth of the small river, Aussa. The mooring complex (marina) of Lignano Sabbiadoro (Golden Sand) is the largest in Italy and among the largest in Europe, having more than 5,000 berths. The various structures of Aprilia Marittima, the harbor Marina Punta Faro, and the docks Porto Vecchio are strategically positioned around and near Marano Lagoon's southern areas. The Grado Lagoon is a spectacular natural setting that extends from Fossalon di Grado to the island of Anfora and to the mouths of the Aussa and Corno Rivers. Grado and Marano Lagoons form critical ecological



systems, both for numerous vegetal and animal species' habitats. At present, six sandbars separate the lagoons of Marano and Grado from the Adriatic Sea.

The Nature Reserve of the Marano Lagoon stretches over more than 1,400 hectares, and it consists of two smaller reserves, the Reserve of the Stella River Mouth ("Riserva Foci dello Stella") and the Reserve of Canal Nuovo Valley ("Riserva Valle Canal Novo"). The environment consists mainly of reed thickets, water, and sandbanks. What is specific to the Marano Lagoon is the variety of water salinity levels. This variety has enabled



**Grado Lagoon**



("Palud de Soto"). The Grado Lagoon is bordered to the west by the Marano Lagoon. It is crossed longitudinally by the Venetian coast waterway, a waterway that connects Venice with the Isonzo River's mouth. The Grado Lagoon offers a landscape rich in colors with the green of the luxuriant vegetation and the Adriatic Sea's blue. The origins of this lagoon are relatively recent. Until the fifth century, the land covered all the area, as evidenced by several archaeological findings including a Roman road, now entirely underwater, which connected Aquileia to Grado. The typical boat of the lagoon's inhabitants is the batèla, which has a flat bottom and is operated by rowing. The batèla, which may be equipped with a sale, is usually 5 to 10 meters long and is guided by an oarsman standing in the stern. The lagoon is fertile in trees, particularly tamarisk, elm, poplar, junipers, and pines. Simultaneously, the fauna presents a considerable variety of birds such as gulls, grey herons, wild ducks, sea swallows.

## Grado

Grado is the biggest island in the Grado Lagoon and is a town on the lagoon between Venice and Trieste located just 20 km from the Isonzo River's mouth. The island, connected to the mainland by bridges, is a great vacation destination for those visiting this exciting but less-explored part of Italy. This area was once part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Many tourists are German-speaking so menus appear in German and Italian. There is a lot of English spoken as well. The town, which has a population of 9,000, is a working fishing port with a lovely historic town center frequently described as a northern relative to Venice. Like Venice, Grado became populated as the inhabitants of mainland Roman settlements fled into the lagoons to escape successive invasions. Grado is the birthplace of Biagio Marin, a poet who sang about the island in the local Venetian dialect. Grado (AKA L'Isola del Sole "The Sunny Island") attracts many tourists each year for its miles of well-equipped sandy beaches, hotels, and campgrounds. For years, this area belonged to the Austro-Hungarian empire, and during that time, Grado developed as a spa resort.

the development of impressive biodiversity, both on land and in the water. Birdlife is the most prominent in this lagoon, so birdwatchers are highly likely to get exceptional satisfaction while visiting the Lagoon. The lagoon is also scattered with casoni or temporary fishermen huts. These picturesque marsh cane 'houses' capture the lagoon's ancient culture and lifestyles, which have not been lost to history. These fishermen are specialists who, over the centuries, have honed the art of aquaculture because going out in the open sea is quite complicated here at the mouth of the Tagliamento in the Adriatic, due to the persistent bora winds. For a large part of the year, these men live in unique homes built with Robinia branches, with roofs of lagoon canes gathered in August and left out to dry for a few months. Bass, sea breams, eels, and mullets are patiently farmed by these fishing experts, who are also the inventors of a famous fish soup called boreto. The Murano Lagoon is home to owls, magpies, swans, mockingbirds, herons, terns, and harriers. Two nature preserves were created in 1979 for the impressive variety of birds' protection. The Grado Lagoon section extends from the Fossalon island near Grado to the island of Anfora, next to the mouth of the small river, Aussa. This lagoon, which covers an area of about 90 square kilometers and has nearly 120 islands, is divided into an eastern sector (called in Italian "Palud de Sopra") and a western sector



### Grado Island

The town has a charming well-preserved historic pedestrian-only center, lined with picturesque medieval buildings, trees, shops, parks, and old churches. Grado's cathedral, the Duomo or Basilica di Sant'Eufemia, is the town's best tourist sight. It lies in a picturesque little square called Campo dei Patriarchi which is the historic heart of Grado. Behind the Basilica, there is a Lapidarium (stone collection) displaying fragments of ancient statues and tombs. Remains of floor mosaics from a 4th-6th century church were uncovered in Piazza Biagio Marin, a big square just outside the historic center. Across the square from the Duomo is another impressive early church, the Basilica di Santa Maria delle Grazie. The island makes an excellent overnight stop on a tour of this part of Italy, a base for visiting the extensive ruins at Aquileia, 6 miles away, or an ideal holiday destination for a trip that combines sun, sand, sightseeing, and archaeology.

### Barbana

Barbana is a small island located at the northern end of the Grado Lagoon, near Trieste. Barbana is known worldwide for its sanctuary dedicated to the Virgin

Mary. A Franciscan friars community currently inhabits the 1500-year-old Santuario di Barbana (Sanctuary of "Mary, mother of Jesus"). This ancient Marian shrine dates back to 582 when Elia, the Patriarch of Aquileia, built a church near the hut of a hermit from Treviso named Barbanus. The shrine's foundation originates from the Virgin Mary's image which was carried in by the sea and found at the foot of an elm after a fierce storm. At that time, the site was part of the mainland; the Grado Lagoon formed between the 5th and 7th centuries. This shrine is one of the most visited in Italy. Barbana is the destination of many pilgrimages, the most famous being the Perdon de Barbana, held each July to celebrate the end of a visitation of the plague in Grado in 1237 and includes a procession of boats decorated with flags in the lagoon from Grado to Barbana.

From the foundation to around 1000, Barbana became an island, and the shrine was served by a community of monks unique to the island, called the Barbitani. The original church was destroyed by floods and rebuilt. Mary's image was lost and in the 11th century and replaced by a wooden statue known as the Madonna mora. This Black Madonna resides in the Domus Mariae (House of Mary) chapel near the main church.

In the 11th century, the shrine's care was entrusted



**Barbana Island**



to Benedictine monks, who served there until the 15th century. A Franciscan community succeeded the Benedictine monks and built a new church in the 18th century. The modern Romanesque style church built at the beginning of the 20th century includes two Roman columns from the first church and a 10th-century relief portraying Jesus. The crowned statue of Mary dates from the 15th century, while the 17th century is represented by several altars and paintings, including one from the school of Tintoretto. In the woods near the church, a small chapel, the Cappella dell'apparizione, was built in 1854, where Mary's original image was found. The church's baptismal font is supported by a figure of the Devil, sculpted in red marble. It is the work of Claudio Granzotto, a Franciscan friar and noted religious artist of the mid-20th century.

## **Anfora**

The westernmost island is Anfora, which acquired strategic importance in 1866 when it marked Italy's boundary with the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Today it houses the small island town of Porto Buso. This small island has great historical significance. On May 24, 1915, the Kingdom of Italy entered World War I on the side of the Entente. The raid on Porto Buso was an assault launched by the Italian Royal Navy on an Austro-Hungarian naval station; this incursion became the first offensive action of the Italian Navy in the conflict. The result was the destruction of the maritime outpost,



**Santuario di Barbana**

the sinking of a flotilla of small vessels, and the capture of most of the Austro-Hungarian garrison. The action resulted in the withdrawal of all Austro-Hungarian forces from the nearby town of Grado and neighboring islands during the subsequent days.

## **Isola Ravaiarina**

This private island, for sale for \$3,584,658USD, is located just a few minutes by boat from the city of Grado. It offers a lot of tourism potential, mainly due to its restaurant, which in former times thrived but is currently closed, and two apartment buildings with the possibility of further development. The buildings on the island were restored in the 1990s. Ravaiarina has a long history as a fish farm that dates back to the ancient Romans. It has a small harbor where it is easy to reach the open sea and is 54 nautical miles from Venice and 17 nautical miles from Trieste.



**Anfora Island**



**Isola Ravaiarina**



**Gorgo Island**

## San Piero D'Orio

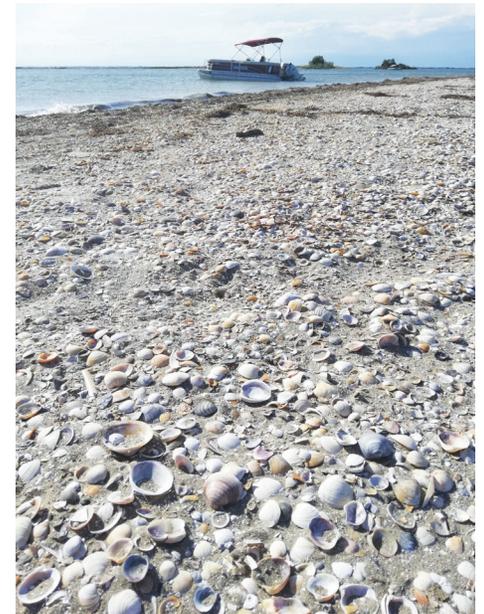
The island of San Piero D'Orio was once dry land and was connected to the Isola di Grado. It has ancient origins and was settled by the Romans, who built a temple dedicated to Apollo. Later it was home to a monastery of Franciscan friars and a church which was destroyed by a storm. In 1820, a Venetian-style bell tower was rebuilt on the island, but in 1915 it was damaged with mines by the Italian army to prevent it from Austrian artillery fire.



**San Piero D'Orio**

## Gorgo Island

The island of Gorgo (Santi Cosma e Damiano) is crossed by traces of the ancient Roman route joining Aquileia and Grado. Numerous human remains and ancient artifacts have been found here. Like several islands in the lagoon, it was home to a church and from 1917 until 1945, it was also home to a military base. Gabriele D'Annunzio was a frequent visitor to the island during World War I. It is a large island frequented by numerous birds including herons, egrets, and cormorants.



**Isola delle Conchiglie**

## Martignano

Martignano, also known as Isola delle Conchiglie ("island of shells"), is located close to Lignano Sabbiadoro's peninsula and is ideal for hikers who love unspoiled nature. Besides swimming in pristine waters, sunbathing, bird watching, and shell collecting, the island is a habitual destination of "Kiters" since it has ideal breezes for these enthusiasts.

## Schiusa Island

Schiusa Island is linked with Grado by a pedestrian bridge with a charm reminiscent of Venice's Rialto Bridge. The island did not exist before 1957, when a massive reclamation project created with fill material transformed 17 hectares of the lagoon for land development. Today Schiusa Island is entirely urbanized and consists of a sports facility, school and health building, and a large parking facility able to accommodate several hundred cars.



**Schiusa Island**

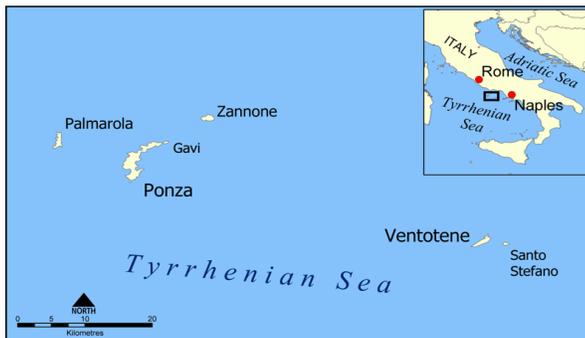
There are nearly 120 islands in the Marano-Grado Lagoon. Other islands worthy of mention are Monton for hay production, the island of Beli, home to the legendary witch Bela who confused sailors to crash into rocks, Volpera, a camping site, San Giuliano, home to a 9th-century Roman villa, Zemole, along with ancient findings of coins, and Villanova Island which was the site of an ancient Celtic settlement.



# The Islands Of Lazio

By JIM SANO

REGIONS  
OF  
ITALY



**T**he Pontine Islands are a small volcanic archipelago in the Tyrrhenian Sea west of the Italian region of Lazio, sitting in the Gulf of Gaeta 19–25 miles from the European continent. The Pontines consist of the following islands: Gavi, Zannone, Palmarola, Ventotene, Santo Stefano and, Ponza, the largest island.

The island chain takes its name from the most frequented of the islands—Ponza. Covering a mere 3.1 square miles of terrain, it is a concentration of both rocky and sandy beaches, natural arches, faraglioni or sea-stacks, pristine waters, romantic coves, landfalls for mooring and magnificent, hilly scenery. But it also has concentrations of tiny, rambling streets, artisan workshops, and typical restaurants and cafes buzzing with tourists each evening. Some houses sport slightly-barrel vaulted roofs, and some sit right on the port and shine like the sun with their bright, pastel colors. Ponza and Ventotene comprise the total population of

the archipelago with 4,066 inhabitants. Santo Stefano and Zannone are desert isles dominated by wilderness; they are also land and sea conservation areas (Circeo National Park) supervised by the Italian State. Currently, tiny vineyards, wild herbs and flowers, and secluded beaches and grottos make them a popular tourist destination.

Fluorescent blue waters, cozy beach bars, stunning natural scenery, great seafood, and affordable prices have turned the cool marine jewels of the Pontine Islands, off the coast between Rome and Naples, into the "Pearls of the Mediterranean." It is possible to tour all five of them on the weekend.

Numerous beaches and tiny harbors define the coast of Ponza. The most famous are Chiaia di Luna, marked by golden sand and rocky bluffs; the beach of Lucia Rosa, known for beautiful sunsets; Fèola Cove, which has natural shallow pools and Frontone Beach, which is the happening spot to enjoy an early-evening aperitivo. In addition to beautiful beaches, the Pontine Islands also have crystalline waters with breath-taking marine landscapes. Scuba divers and snorkelers will marvel at an underwater isthmus that connects Ponza to its neighboring isle of Zannone, as well as pirates' caves that house numerous sunken relics of ancient Roman ships and sunken World War II steamships. The Italian ferryboat, the Santa Lucia, is one such relic. It was bombed by an English torpedo-bomber stationed near Ventotene in 1943. With large chunks of these islands off the west coast of Italy unsuitable for permanent settlements,

nature preserves have sprung up, enabling the average person to have the opportunity to see the natural ecosystem untouched by the hands of man. Besides their naturalistic value, the Pontine Islands also have an important historical and cultural heritage waiting to be discovered.

## HISTORY

The Pontine Islands have a long and rich history, attested to by Roman ruins and cave-tombs; the islands are nevertheless little known to international tourists. Scholars believe Ponza to be Aea, home of Circe, the sorceress who turned men into animals, depicted in Homer's "The Odyssey." With its reddish-yellow layers, the popular Chiaia di Luna cliff looks like a slice of Mars and is towards the south of the island, opposite the harbor. You can swim in Roman aqueducts, cisterns, and fisheries at Pontius Pilate's caves adjacent to the port, named after the Roman governor of Judea, who loved to bathe there. Legend has it that the island is named after Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor who condemned Jesus to death for acting against Roman law. There is no evidence to support this claim, so it is more likely that the name comes from the Latin word "Pontia" (meaning bridge), as Ponza has many natural bridges. The archipelago is volcanic and has been inhabited for thousands of years. Neolithic artifacts and Bronze Age obsidians have been excavated on the islands.

The earliest recorded history of the islands occurs with the Roman victory over the Volsci in 338 BC. According to a local legend, this was once the lost Kingdom of Tyrrhenia, which sank with a narrow strip connected to mainland Italy. During Augustus' reign, residential expansion on the islands was encouraged, and people spread from Ponza to Ventotene. Rome used the two islands as a retreat and a place to exile politically troubling citizens. Some two thousand years later, the islands were used for the same reason by the Fascist regime. Agrippina the Younger, mother to the future Roman emperor, Nero, was exiled to the Pontine Islands by her brother, the then Roman emperor, Caligula, in 39 A.D., before having the exile lifted by her uncle, the emperor Claudius upon his succession. Deposed Pope Silverius was exiled there in 537 shortly before his death. The islands were abandoned during the Middle Ages after raids by Saracens and pirates. During the 18th century, the Kingdom of Naples re-colonized the islands, and they later became part of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861.

## THE ISLANDS

**Ponza**, the main island, is shaped like a crescent moon and is roughly nine square kilometers. It is also très chic, so be prepared to bump into celebrities and



**Ponza Island**



**Grottos of Ponza Island**

royals. Ponza is famous for rocky and hilly landscapes, romantic and silent bays, uncontaminated beaches, and natural arches. Ponza's welcoming little town is full of typical, delicious restaurants, artisanal shops, and vibrant nightlife. Among the places not to be missed are Chiaia di Luna's splendid beach, the beach of Lucia Rosa, known for its sunsets, the bay of Cala Fèola, with its natural pools and the beach of Frontone, where many crowd at sunset to enjoy an aperitif. The island also has many archaeological ruins, including Egyptian, Canaanite, Greek, and Phoenician. It is home to many spectacular caverns, such as the Serpent's Grotto and the Cave of Ulysses of the Blood. Places of interest include The Ponza Botanical Garden, Moon Gravel Beach, Forte Papa, and Monte Guardia.

**The Grottos of Ponza Island** are world-renowned, thanks to the beauty in crafting and their age. Numerous grottos date back to the Roman Empire, providing access from the ancient town to multiple points along the island. A walk along one of the many winding roads will bring you to numerous delightful sites, everything ranging from modern-day restaurants to harbors created in the time of Caesar. Ponza and the Pontine Islands have been well known for being a lovely retreat from the ordinary hustle and bustle of city life since the Roman Empire. If large crowds are not your thing, then it is best to avoid Ponza during the August



**Ventotene Island**

high-season. Another interesting fact about Ponza: Benito Mussolini was briefly held in prison on the island in 1943. According to the New York Times, Ponza is so remote that many locals had never heard of him or World War II when Mussolini arrived. An American lieutenant described Ponza as "another world," a paradise unmarred by the violence of war.

**Ventotene** is an island that is southwest of Ponza by 22 nautical miles. This island, tiny in size, has a rich culture and history dating back to the Roman Empire. Ventotene, also known as Pandataria, is famous for being the island of exiles. It is best known as the island to which the emperor Augustus banished his serial adulterous daughter Julia the Elder in 2 B.C. Emperor Tiberius banished Caligula's mother, as did Nero to his wife Claudia Octavia in 62 A.D. whom he later sentenced to death. Other exiles included Saint Flavia Domitilla, Sandro Pertini, and Mussolini after being overthrown and arrested in 1943. The discovery in 2009 of five Roman ships off Ventotene's coast yielded an assortment of artifacts, many now displayed on the island. Some other places of interest are the ruins of Villa Guila, Torre Borbonico, an old Bourbon fortress, Piazza Castello, Semaforo, and Moggio di Terra.

**Palmarola** is the second largest and most westerly island of the Pontine archipelago, dominated by an extremely rugged coastline and menacing cliffs. It is almost uninhabited and primarily a nature reserve. Palmarola is thought to be one of the most beautiful islands in the entire world and is a natural showcase. Houses carved into the rock, cliffs in odd shapes, caves, grottos and faraglioni (oceanic rock stacks) can all be admired on this island. Therefore, photographers and people who love to relax on a beach or swim in the azure-colored sea frequent Palmarola. This island is also where Pope Silverus was exiled and eventually died in 537. Some other places of interest on the island are the San Siliviero shrine and the Cava Mazzella.



**Zannone Island**

**Zannone** is an uninhabited island approximately one square kilometer in size and just 10 km from Ponza and is the most northern island of the archipelago. This island is one of the most well-known and frequently visited nature preserves in the region. The island is under the Forestry Service's protection and is part of the Parco Nazionale del Circeo (Circeo National Park) established by Benito Mussolini to preserve the Pontine's last marshes. Although the island can be visited, there are no tourist facilities and camping or overnight stays are prohibited. Zannone Island also contains the remains of an early 13th-century Benedictine monastery.

Since Roman times, **Santo Stefano** had several names, such as Partenope, Palmosa, Dommo Stephane, and Borca. This circular island measures just 400 meters in diameter and is dominated by a prison (shown in the upper right of the photo) built initially by the Bourbons in 1797. The prison comprises 99 cells constructed around a central watchtower and, although made to accommodate 600 prisoners, it housed over 800. Some of the more infamous prisoners included Gaetano Bresci, who assassinated King Umberto I, the brigand, Carmine Crocco, also known as Donatello, who fought alongside Giuseppe Garibaldi, and the journalist and politician Sandro Pertini, who went on to become the seventh president of the Italian Republic. Following the prison's closure in 1965, the island has remained uninhabited except for the daily influx of tourists. Maybe one of those visitors will want to buy it. This island remains for sale with an asking price of €20,000,000. Unfortunately, the price does not include the prison.

**Gavi**, the smallest island of the archipelago (2300 ft x 1,150 ft) is completely devoid of beaches. Giant boulders dot the jagged coast, to accompany Gavi's only cave, the grotto of Gavi. Gavi is a private uninhabited island home to wild rabbits, a rare lizard, mice and scorpions. It is a nature preserve and visitation is prohibited. There are no boat trips to Gavi and visitors are not allowed on this protected nature reserve.



**Palmarola Island**



**Santo Stefano Island**



**Tiber Island**

## LAKE ISLANDS

**Isola Bisentina** is the more northern and larger of Lake Bolsena's two islands. The other island is **Isola Martana**. The Etruscans and the Romans left few traces of their stay on the island. In the 9th century, it provided refuge from the incursions of the Saracens.

About 1250, it became the property of the Lord of Bisenzio, who abandoned it and burned it following disagreements with the island's inhabitants. In 1261, Urban IV reconquered it. The island was destroyed once again in 1333 by Louis IV of Bavaria, who was accused of heresy and excommunicated by the pope. From 1400 it became the Farnese family's property. This was a period of prosperity, and many popes visited Isola Bisentina. In 1635, it was governed by Odoardo Farnese, Duke of Castro, who entered into conflict with the Church, resulting in Castro's destruction. The two islands returned to the Church's control but were soon ceded again. Princess Beatrice Spada Potenziani, the wife of Duke Fieschi Ravaschieri, sold it in 2017. The island is currently private property, and no visitors are allowed.

**Martana Island** is located opposite Marta township. The island is reputed to have once guarded Saint Christine's relics to keep them from falling into the barbarians' hands. During the dominion of the Goths, their queen Amalasantha was assassinated there. The island is currently private property, and no visitors are allowed.

**Tiber Island** is a small island in the Tiber river in Rome. The island is connected to the mainland by two bridges

built before Christ. The island is home to the Basilica of San Bartolomeo all 'Isola and a hospital run by the Merciful Brothers Order. The Jewish community of Rome has maintained a hospital there and established a small synagogue, the Tempio dei Giovani, in 1937, which reopened in 1985.

Lago del Salto is a reservoir lake in the Rieti Province and home to two small uninhabited islands **Isola De Bonis** and **Isola Porcini**.

Lago di Scandarello is a reservoir in the Province of Rieti and was created in 1924 when a dam was built across the Scandarello stream. This lake also contains another small uninhabited island, **Isola della Rocca**.



**Gavi Island**

# The Islands Of Liguria

By JIM SANO

REGIONS  
OF  
ITALY

There are five islands in the Ligurian Sea that are either protected nature reserves or part of the Italian national parks. Three islands, Palmaria, Tino, and Tinetto, make up the Spezia archipelago (UNESCO World Heritage Sites); the other two islands are Bergeggi and Gallinara. The Ligurian Islands are characterized by their small size and their vicinity to the coast. These islands share two standard features, their well-preserved Mediterranean vegetation with rare surviving species and the presence of ruined abbeys and monasteries dating back to the late Roman times.



## Island of Palmaria

Palmaria Island is the largest and the most popular island in the Spezia Archipelago, and every year, thousands of tourists choose to visit its beautiful, uncontaminated beaches and crystalline waters. Palmaria is located in front of the beautiful village of Portovenere where they are separated by a narrow, shallow strait. Twice a year, this crowded channel is closed to boat traffic by the Port Authority, allowing bathers to cross the channel safely.

Palmaria Island takes its name from the term "Balma," meaning cave. The island offers many



Island of Palmaria



**Blue Cave and Marble Caves**

different landscapes: the eastern part is densely covered with Mediterranean scrub, and the western side is characterized by steep sea cliffs.

The island also presents many exciting and spectacular sights, such as the Grotta Azzurra (Blue Cave) on the western side, which can be reached only by boat, and the Grotta dei Colombi (Cave of Pigeons) accessible only by coming down with climbing ropes. The caves have proven to be of great historical importance after the fossilized bones of animals, including chamois, and the remains of human burials dating back to the Pleistocene period were discovered, proving the island was populated at least 5,000 years ago by humans.

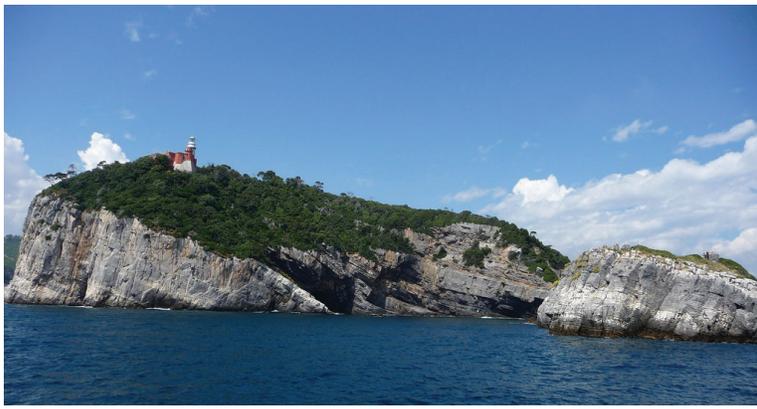


Another important site is an abandoned quarry situated in the southern part of the island called Pozzale, which was used for the mining of Portoro marble, black marble with gold streaks.

The island has a handful of houses and even a restaurant, with little human habitation. At the top of the island sits a 19th-century Savoy-built military fortification, which has now been refurbished and houses a marine and environmental education center.



**Island of Palmaria**



**Tino Island**



**Tinetto Island**

## Island of Tino

Further east of Palmaria is the island of Tino, characterized by lush Mediterranean vegetation of maritime pines, oaks, myrtles, mastics, and strawberry trees. Among this fragrant blanket of green lives euleptes, Europe's smallest reptile and a monotypic genus of gecko. The island is owned by the Navy, which operates a lighthouse that guides thousands of boats, ships, and vessels. Therefore, Tino is a military area inaccessible to visitors, except for September 13th, San Venerio's Day. San Venerio is the gulf's patron saint; he was a hermit who lived on the island in the tenth century. Legend tells us that St. Venerio would light bonfires on the island's summit to warn ships of its location, and because of this, in 1961, he was also made the patron saint of Italian lighthouse keepers. On San Venerio's Day, tourists can visit the island and examine the ruins dating back to the Roman Age along with the ruins of an 11th-century monastery.

## Island of Tinetto

The island of Tinetto is the smallest one in the Spezia Archipelago and is separated from Tino by just a few submerged rocks. Experts called the island of Tinetto "La Lama di La Spezia" ("The blade of La Spezia") because of its emerging Triassic carbonate rocks. The area has a circumference of only 300 meters and does not exceed 55 feet in height. Tinetto is little more than a large rock jutting out above the waves. Yet this rock has such uniqueness in natural and historical terms that it can be considered one of the most important places in the La Spezia Gulf.

Tinetto had the first monastic settlement constructed in the 6th century. After the Saracens destroyed it, the monastery moved to the island of Tino. On the southern side, a small oratory remains intact, along with a church that can still be viewed today.

One of the smallest and exclusive inhabitants of Tinetto Island is called *Podarcis muralis tinettoi* (common wall lizard of Tinetto), a subspecies of the most common wall lizard that diversified from the other one probably 8-9 thousand years ago. The world's



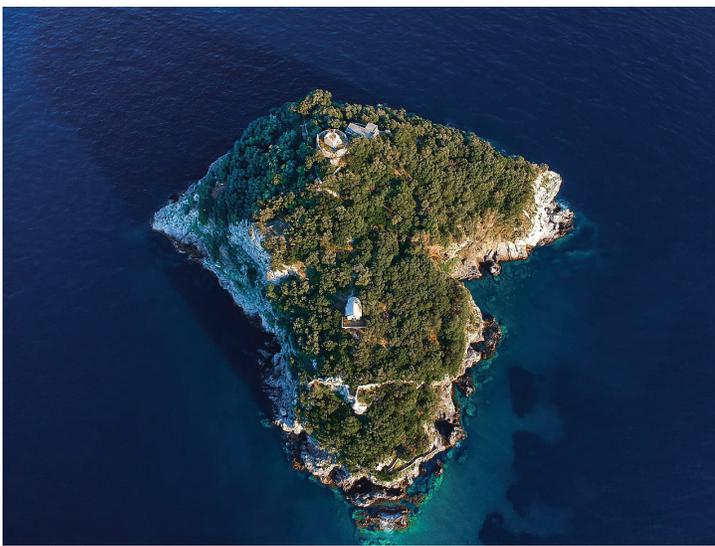
**Stella Maris**

population of this kind of lizard is estimated at only 200, living only on Tinetto.

The Stella Maris, located in front of Tino Island, is a Virgin Mary statue with folded hands towards the open sea. The statue's primary function is to signal mariners to avoid the dangerous Scoglio do Diao (the Devil's Rock in the local language). It is on this rock that rests the base of the statue.

## Island of Bergeggi

The little island of Bergeggi is a 53-meter-high cornet-shaped limestone rock in the province of Savona, just 250 meters from the shore of the town that shares its name. It is part of a regional protected marine area for the important biological species in its seabeds. In all areas, it is strictly forbidden to do any activity that might disturb the animal and plant life, such as bathing, navigation, anchorage, mooring, water motors, water skiing, underwater fishing or aquaculture. The seas around Bergeggi are the perfect habitat for anyone wanting to see sea perch, lobsters, and the monstrous-looking angler fish. The pink coral-colored coralline seaweed grows in



**Bergoggi Island**

abundance, as does the seagrass, *Posidonia Oceanica*, creating great underwater meadows. The vast array of vegetation isn't confined to just the seabed as the island is prolifically covered, making it ideal for your inner botanist. Exciting plant species can be found here, like *euphorbia arborea* and *campanula sabatia*, a rare Italian bell-shaped flowering plant that has since been classified as vulnerable on the ICUN Red List of Threatened Species. Due to the diversity of flora, the island, which is part of the Regional Nature Reserve, is protected under a national preservation program.

The island has several signs which prove human settlement occurred on the island during the Roman age. One can find a very ancient circular sighting tower and the ruins of a Roman church dedicated to St. Eugenio, dating back to the fourth century. In 992, the bishop of Savona ordered the construction of a monastery on the island to pay homage to St. Eugenio. It was gifted to the Colombian monks of Lérins. Today, the ruins of the monastery remain intact. During the Middle Ages, another sighting tower was built on the ruins of the Roman one. Recently, a private villa was built on the island, but now it is empty and abandoned.

On the western part of the island, a *pifferaio* (Pied piper), a metal statue representing a sitting human figure playing a wind instrument, can be seen. The statue depicts a shepherd calling a little goat from the cape's gardens in Torre del mare.

## Island of Gallinara

Located a kilometer from the coast of the town of Albenga is the oddly hump-shaped island of Gallinara and its nature reserve. The island of Gallinara takes its name from the wild hens (*Gallina* = hen in Italian) which once lived there. The island has a surface of 0.23 sq. miles. It is a small island that sheltered St. Martin of Tours between 356 and 360, when he was escaping from Milan to avoid the Aryan persecutions. It became a monastic community where the first order of Saint



**Gallinara Island**

Columbanus was formed to honor the Irish missionary and, subsequently, was inhabited by the Benedictines. The monastery extended its influence into the Riviera di Ponente in the 11th century, but the abbey gradually fell into decay during the 13th and 14th centuries. Today, the island preserves the monastery ruins, the 16th-century tower, and the little neo-gothic church.

The Herring Gulls chose this wonderful place to nest without being disturbed, creating one of the largest colonies in the northern Tyrrhenian Sea. The less steep northern coast used to be a landing place for the Roman ships, whose important finds are safeguarded in the Albenga Museum. The sea environment of the island is still in great measure unspoiled. The island's southern and eastern sides consist of sheer cliffs that house various sea birds like cormorants, petrel, and the largest European population of yellow-legged gulls. The waters around the cliffs are a popular destination with divers exploring the ancient relics from the wrecked ships dating back to the 5th century. Punta Falconara is popular with divers due to the giant statue of Christ beneath the blue waters. With depths of up to 30 meters, Punta Sciusciau allows divers to get up close to octopus, scorpionfish, and if they are brave enough, moray eels. If scuba diving is not your thing, Gallinara is an ideal island for walkers, with over 10 kilometers of paths crisscrossing its terrain.

The Scoglio FEMALE is a small rocky island that rises from the Ligurian Sea about 170 meters from the Riviera di Levante. At the top of this island is a large marble cross, which replaced an older cross made of iron, thus Scoglio FEMALE (Iron Rock). The island is the only surviving island of a series of rocks removed by Cinque Terre to fill the Pisa-La Spezia-Genoa railway line route. □



**Scoglio FEMALE**

# No April Fools

## The Island Nation That is Not an Island



By JIM SANO

One may dream of doing it but one man really built his own island nation. His island, his rules, his lifestyle. In 1967, a 42-year-old Bologna born engineer, Giorgio Rosa, did precisely that. He decided to create his own island nation as a symbol of freedom separate from his native Italy. Consuming ten years of hard work and sacrifice, he built not a real island but an artificial platform in the Adriatic Sea. Giorgio set out to create a micro-nation, designing and financing the construction of the 4000 sq. ft. platform just outside of Italian territorial waters at 7.5 miles from the coast of Rimini in the Adriatic Sea.

The structure was one floor and rested on 25 columns of reinforced concrete. It was a constant and continuous fight against Italian bureaucracy because his dream was built by bypassing or ignoring the necessary permits and regulations. This was a genuine libertarian project. Fed up with the inner workings of Italian politics, he planned and built his Rose Island as an independent nation.

The premise for the island's sovereign independence was based on its distance of 7.5 miles off the coast of Rimini (Emilia Romagna) and its location in international waters. The project attracted international media attention. With a global backdrop of the Vietnam War, civil rights protests and the Prague Spring, Giorgio saw his 1960s project as a natural progression of the times to escape and to create his own nation. While his endeavor to create his own personal island was quite a controversial topic back in the '60s, many today have no idea it ever existed.





The project was real and well-engineered. Rosa designed a 400-square-meter platform suspended above the Adriatic Sea with slender support columns not unlike a stilt house, just bigger. The engineer spent a full ten years to realize his project. Along with four friends and a small team of workers, work began on the platform's construction in 1958. The island was completed in 1967. Giorgio's construction started with empty pillars. He then inserted steel tubes in the pillars and pushed them into the seafloor, filling them with cement to avoid corrosion. He later patented this modular pier system that used these hollow pipes like stilts that were injected with concrete. Strong, stable, and ingenious, these piers not only held his island nation but soon became widely used as a more frugal and better way to build sea platforms.

Italy was not immune to the controversies, problems, and frictions of the 1960s. In 1962, the Italian authorities ordered Giorgio "to remove all obstacles to navigation." Undeterred, Rosa contacted the Port Authorities of Rimini, Ravenna, and Pesaro, purchased space on the wharf, obtained diesel fuel supplies and permission to build part of the structure on land and towed it to the final site while continuously publishing a notice to mariners warning of the presence of the rising structure. While he managed to restart construction in 1964, the Rimini Harbor Master's Office once again ordered construction to cease at the staging site. Rosa refused stating that he leased the space from ENI-Italy's Energy Company. The construction of the island continued. Slowly a reinforced concrete platform of 400 square meters and walls were put in place. In addition, a landing point called Porto Verde was created, equipped with a dock and access stairs. While the initial plan was to create five floors, only one was completed.



Flag



With the drilling and completion of a 280 meters deep freshwater well, the island was opened to the public on August 20, 1967. It immediately became a tourist attraction for thousands of people. On May 1, 1968, Rose Island declared itself an independent state with Giorgio Rosa as its head. He called his island **The Republic of Rose Island**, not from his surname but because he intended to build "a flower garden" in the middle of the sea. The newborn "nation" adopted Esperanto (One who hopes), a constructed international language created by a Polish ophthalmologist in 1887 as its official language. Therefore, in official Esperanto, it was called **Respubliko de la Insulo de la Rozoj**.

# The Island Nation That is Not an Island

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Rose Island had its own government. Giorgio was the president and the other island dwellers filled the official positions of finance minister, minister of internal affairs, and minister for foreign affairs. Its official periodical was entitled *Osservatore Dominicano*, published in collaboration with Bologna's Dominican fathers. The island was flooded with mail from eager applicants willing to gain citizenship from the paradisiacal micronation. To most, the island looked just like a platform on stilts; but Rose Island had a restaurant, nightclub, bar, souvenir shop and post office but no antennas for "pirate radio." The island had three functioning toilets. Rosa's original intention was to add five floors, one extra floor each season. The structure was extraordinarily strong, but Rose Island was never formally recognized as a sovereign state by any country of the world.

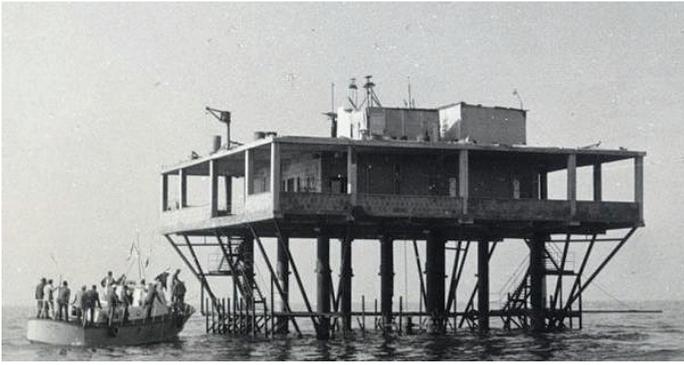


The Republic of Rose Island became a haven for party-loving students in the late 60s who traveled by boat from across Europe. The island was a symbol of freedom and attracted like-minded people looking to escape traditional society's confines. Visitors flocked to the island in 1968 and found a small pocket of paradise. While the world was experiencing chaos and unrest, Rose Island offered tourists a bit of temporary reprieve. Newspapers in 1967 made mention of hidden financiers at the cost of 100 million lire at the time that were behind Rose Island, but nobody ever came forward.

Authorities and politicians, horrified by the structure, clamored that it was being used for drinking and gambling and all forms of debauchery. The Italian authorities believed he had a money-making, tax-free tourist goldmine. That did not make them happy. It seemed to draw concern from people no matter their political affiliation. Parliamentary questions came from the right and the left, and soon all were united against the offenders. The Secret Service was sure that the platform was a base for Russian submarines; others saw Rose Island as a concealed Albanian outpost. It scared the central State, who was worried about creating some uncontrollable tax-free zone; it scared non-Communists, who thought the island could become some Communist outpost. It was in one of the Cold-War's most fragile interfaces, the Adriatic Sea, where the US and USSR would often jockey for position.

Rosa's refusal to give in to the Italian government's demands that it be dismantled was fueled by his belief that his sovereign state's creation broke no laws. Rosa always asserted that he was following the law in the 60s which said if you were more than six miles from the coast, it is nobody's land. Whether or not this was the real reason behind Rosa's micronation, the Italian government's response was swift.





After 55 days, on June 26, 1968, the island was occupied by the Italian police, army, treasury officials and subject to a naval blockade. Protests about the military occupation fell on deaf ears. The platform's Council of Government is said to have sent a telegram, presumably to the Italian government, to protest the violation of its sovereignty and the injury inflicted on local tourism by the military occupation, but this was ignored. That fall, legal proceedings were initiated in Strasbourg, where both parties went before the European Court, which regulates disputes between states. The court found that all claims of sovereignty, independence, and international rights acquired by the platform owners were unfounded and almost ridiculous. The court simply stated that all Italian citizens, even outside Italy, must submit to Italy's laws. The islet was accused of obstruction of navigation and ordered to be removed.

Facing the impossible task of disassembling the island, the Italian government determined the need to bomb it into oblivion. The island did not collapse with the first round of explosives (120 kilos of explosives to each pole) on February 23, 1969. The Italian Navy tried again two days after the first attempt but with more powerful explosives and managed to deform the platform's structure. An act of God, a storm, delivered the final blow destroying the platform on February 26, 1969. Today it lies on the seabed of the



Adriatic. Since World War II, Italy has never attacked any country, except this island, this dream nation.

The demise of Rose Island had numerous outcomes. The first result was a major international law expanding the physical boundaries of a government's legal ability to exercise authority from 6 to 12 nautical miles. The second result was Giorgio Rosa who, defiant to the end, declared two moral victories: given the island's bombing, Italy admitted it was another state. Giorgio was also satisfied by the experience because he demonstrated the importance of individual freedom even though he was forced to pay all demolition costs.



After Italian authorities destroyed Rose Island, Rosa continued to be an engineer and university lecturer. Dying in 2017 at the age of 92, Rosa was so devastated by the island's destruction that he never spoke of it again. He did, however, agree to tell his story through film. The movie, *Rose Island*, shares his tale and can currently be viewed on Netflix.

Some may philosophically argue that today rules and regulations have become more important in our lives, often at the cost of personal freedom. Giorgio Rosa, a man who struck out alone, was determined to escape the system and decide on his path through his own sovereign state. Rose Island may be gone, but Giorgio and his merry band of rebellious malcontents partied, played, and lived free and happy-albeit for a short time.