

VERSILIA

TUSCANY - ITALY







TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE TERRITORY

P. 4

HISTORY

P. 10

ARCHITECTURE AND ART

P. 12

VERSILIA DISTRICTS

P. 16

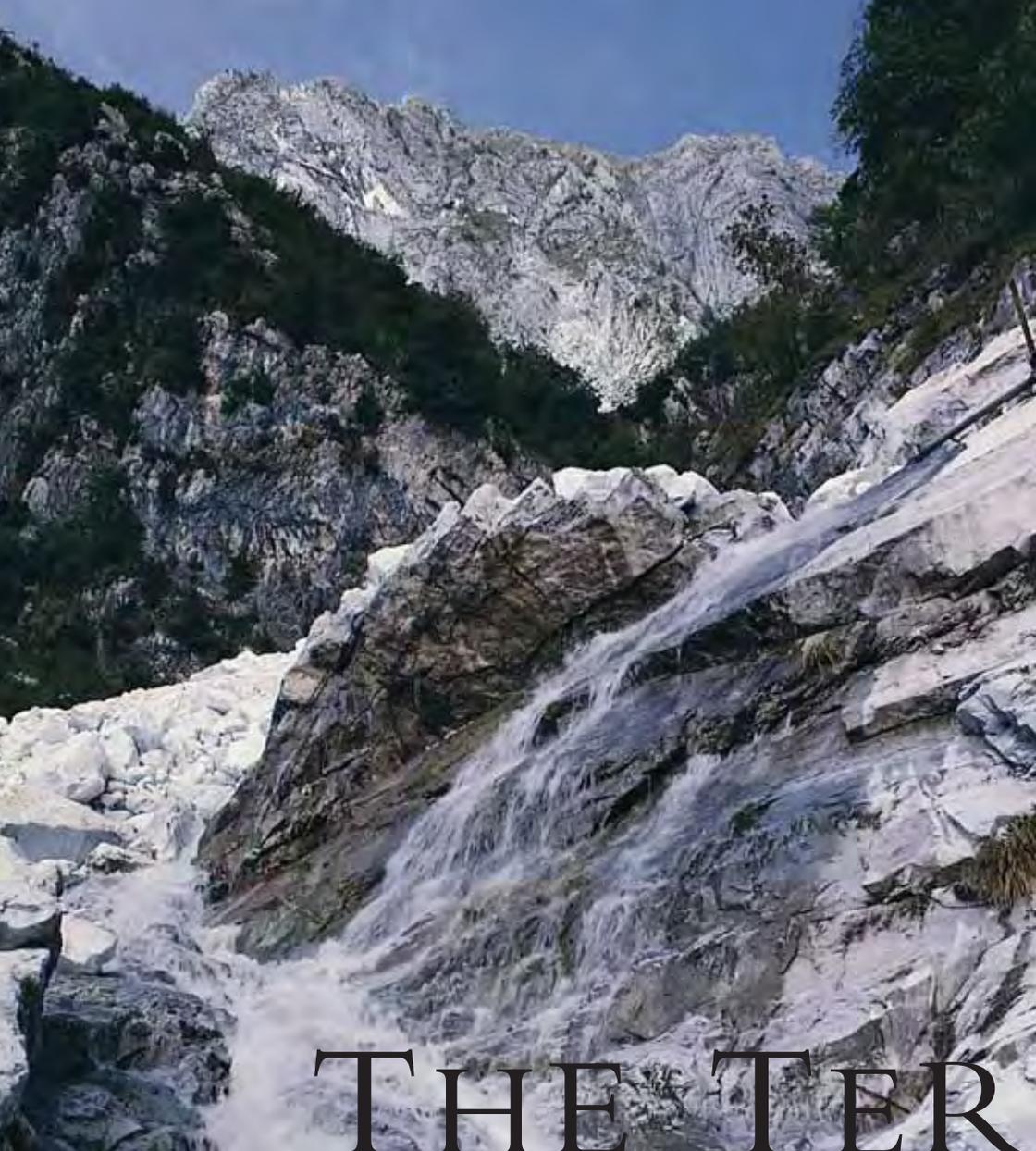
ECONOMIC RESOURCES AND ACTIVITIES

P. 28

EVENTS AND TRADITIONS

P. 31





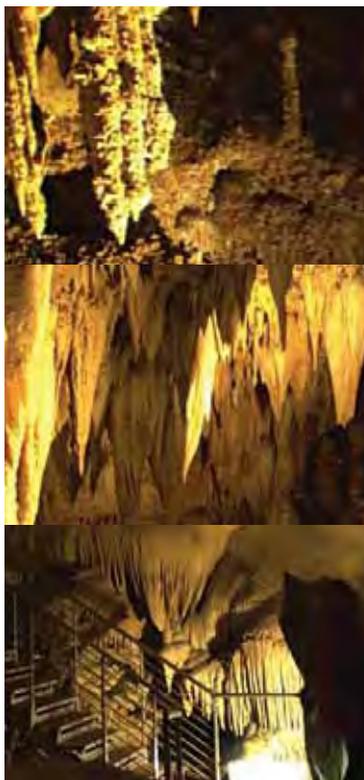
THE TER

THE SEA THE VEGETATION THE FAUNA

*An encompassing glance from the sea
to the beaches, from the pinewoods
to the lake, from the hills to the mountains
that define and protect this land*

The Versilia territory covers an area of about 160 square kilometres on the North-Western Tuscan coast. From an administrative point of view, it is a part of the province of Lucca, including the municipalities of Camaiore, Forte dei Marmi, Massarosa, Pietrasanta, Seravezza, Stazzema and Viareggio. The area has always had a natural tourist vocation as balneotherapy treatments started here during the second half of the 19th cent. with the building of the first bathing establishments. Nowadays Versilia is not only a beautiful stretch of coast but it also provides excellent opportunities to spend enjoyable holidays the whole year round, thanks to its mild climate and the wide range of entertainment and leisure facilities available.

The area is an important base to reach major Tuscan art cities such as Lucca, Pisa, Florence, Siena, San Gimignano and Volterra, reachable in a reasonably short time. From a naturalistic point of view, the area is well known for safeguarding the environment with a rich diversified natural landscape comprising the majestic mountains of the Apuan Alps - offering a magnificent backdrop to the colourful coastline - consisting in some of the highest peaks in the region. These are part of the well-known Apuan Alps Regional Park, providing an ideal environment for trekking, walking, cycling, horse riding or mountain climbing. To the south extends the Migliarino-San Rossore-Massaciuccoli Regional Park of-



*Details,
Antro del Corchia
previous page
The Serra river*

RITORY



*Forte dei Marmi,
the beach*



*View of Forte dei Marmi from the pier towards the mountains
Marina di Pietrasanta, the beach
Viareggio, the beach*

fering a wide variety of habitats, from the lush coastal pine wood to the salty swamps and lake. Both nature parks are ideal for people of all ages and families and can be enjoyed the whole year round. Furthermore, sea lovers can enrich their holidays consisting in dolphin and whale-watching cruises to the Cetacean Sanctuary, a water reserve located along the Tuscan Archipelago and the northern Tyrrhenian Sea – where





these animals can be observed in their natural habitat.

THE SEA

Versilia, boasts 20 km of uninterrupted sandy shore from Torre del Lago Puccini, stretching as far as Vittoria Apuana (Forte dei Marmi) in the north. The sea-bathing tradition of the region dates back to 1833 when Giuseppe Giannelli, a physician involved in medical hydrology, published the first study on the subject entitled “Il manuale per I bagni di mare” (treatise on sea-bathing), qualifying Versilia as a beach of tradition. Construction of the original bathing establishments began in the early 1900s with boardwalks and chalets. Since then Versilia beaches have created a trend from which its culture, entertainment and jet set originated. Today Versilia is in a position to offer a wide range of facilities ranging from affordable public beaches to more sophisticated bathing establishments – capable of satisfying even the most demanding requirements – providing bars, swimming pools, restaurants and night-clubs. An extensive range of accommodation facilities can also be found in the area, from camp grounds to small family-run hotels to luxury hotels with different architectural designs and settings and equipped with all sorts of comfort.



*Lido di Camaiore,
detail of the beach*

THE VEGETATION

The territory encompasses a richly varied landscape, forming a harmonic blend, from sandy coastal dunes, to exten-



*Multicoloured beach cabins
at Forte dei Marmi*

THE PINE WOOD

The vast pinewoods in Versilia, partly included in the Migliarino –San Rossore-Massaciuccoli Nature Park - were planted by man in the 17th and 18th centuries. They consist of cluster pine (*pinus pinea*), a species imported to Italy during the roman epoch, when it was well-known above all along the Tyrrhenian coast and in Sicily. Its spread over vast areas is due to the fact that every part can be exploited: from the trunk, to obtain timber, to the bark and resin used for dyes and chemical products, to the seed, the pine nut. During the 1930s the pine

sive luxuriant pinewoods and Mediterranean macchia (brush), alternating with sections of cultivated plots of land. Thanks to the abundant number of waterways, the forest of the macchia contains a great variety of trees, including British oak, ash and black alder trees. Of great naturalistic value are the artificial pinewoods planted by man, full of thick Mediterranean underbrush and trees such as hornbeams, and poplars.

THE FAUNA

Both the coastal and inland habitats abound in fauna. Birds who find the swamp system of the Massaciuccoli along their migratory route enrich the natural patrimony in Versilia. A rich variety of mammals live in both the coastal waters and inland territories.



tree industry became extremely important to Versilia's economy. Even if Versilia is still today one of the largest areas for the production of pine nuts in Italy, the value of its pinewood today is above all naturalistic. Of these woods, perhaps the most famous one is the Versiliana Park at Marina di Pietrasanta, which covers approximately 80 hectares celebrated in the verses of the poet Gabriele D'Annunzio. Today it is the property of the Pietrasanta municipality and is a venue for interesting cultural events.

*Torre del Lago Puccini,
Lago di Massaciuccoli
The canals of
Lago di Massaciuccoli*



*The human presence in Versilia
dates back to the Neolithic Age
and many traces still remain
in a number of areas*

The human presence in Versilia dates back to the Neolithic Age and many traces still remain in a number of areas. Then the Apuan Ligurians occupied the territory and fortified mountain passes and hills. Subsequently the Etruscans left but very few traces in the area.

When the Romans arrived, they built roads such as the ancient Via Aurelia and colonized the area with villas, hamlets and villages. The Lombards later occupied the Roman settlements, providing the territory with a layout similar to the present one.

A major development in Versilia's history was the founding of the 13th centuries of the two principal cities: Pietrasanta in the north and Camaiore in the southern area. Pietrasanta was dominated by Lucca, Pisa and Genoa and finally in 1513 it went under control of Florence. Camaiore instead was under the rule of Lucca. These two cities have played an important role in the area up to 1700 but during the following years - with its port and land reclamation operations - Viareggio grew in importance and began to expand until it obtained the dignity of a city.

Towards the end of the first half of the 19th century Versilia gradually became well known as a healthful place for sea bathing and heliotherapy treatments. This trend turned the area into a growing holiday destination, becoming popular among both pleasure seekers as well as those pursuing cures.

ROMAN BATHS

At Massaciuccoli (Massarosa) there are the ruins of a Roman villa with a small museum, **Antiquarium**, containing findings dating from the 2nd cent. B.C. to the 3rd cent. AD. A short distance from the centre are the ruins of the Roman Baths.



HISTORY

At the end of the 19th century the popularity of bathing expanded enormously throughout the region leading the area to the present situation.

Ruins of the Roman Spa at Massaciuccoli



*The artistic heritage of Versilia boasts
many monuments preserved
in the numerous towns and villages
scattered in the countryside*

The artistic heritage of Versilia boasts many monuments preserved in the numerous towns and villages scattered in the countryside. In Seravezza one can admire the cathedral dating to 16th cent. with its polychrome marbles as well as the 15th cent. baptismal font found in the inside by Stagio Stagi, an architect from Pietrasanta. Then, the Medici Palace with its impressive portal built in 1555 by Bartolomeo Ammannati for Cosimo I of the Medici family. Also outstanding is the Romanesque parish church of San Martino, situated in the mountain hamlet of Azzano. At Stazzema you can admire the 12th cent. Romanesque Church of Santa Maria Assunta, with several precious 15th and 16th cent. paintings and sculptures. The historic town of Pietrasanta contains the main monuments on the Cathedral square, such as the Duomo di San Martino, built in 1330 with a magnificent marble façade including three portals and a beautiful rose window. Here you also can find the Church of Sant'Agostino, with a lovely façade decorated by three blind arches. On the southern side is the Rocchetta Arrighina, a small fortress dating to 1324, rebuilt in 1487 and connected to the Porta a Pisa (city gate to Pisa), the only remaining gate of the ancient city walls. At Camaiore you can find the splendid Romanesque Collegiate Church dating to 1278, rising on the square dedicated to San Bernardino da Siena who preached here in 1410. Also remarkable is the small Church of San Michele with a Romanesque layout, as well as the Confraternity of the SS. Sacramento housing the Museum of Sacred Art. Finally, near the cemetery is the impressive Benedictine Abbey dating back to 11th cent.



*Camaiore, detail of the
Badia di San Pietro
previous page
Pietrasanta, the Duomo*

RE AND ART



*Camaiore, detail of the
Badia di San Pietro*

THE VIA FRANCIGENA

The Via Francigena was the most important road in medieval Italy, linking places of great Christian spirituality such as Canterbury Compostela, Rome, and Jerusalem.

These cities soon became major pilgrimage destinations for people of all nationalities, languages and traditions be it for religious, social or commercial reasons. Moreover, this road was used for transporting all kinds of goods and for the displacement of armies. The stretch of route involving Versilia went from Pietrasanta to Camaiore. From here the pilgrims reached Lucca, the main stopping-off place south of the Apennines. Along the way, in addition to the magnificent churches found in Pietrasanta and Camaiore, numerous traces of Christian art can be admired, such as the Parish Church of Santo Stefano at Vallecchia, the Parish Church of Santi Giovanni and Felicità at Valdicastello not far from Pietrasanta, as well as the Parish Church of San Pantaleone at Pieve a Elici (Massarosa). In the municipality of Seravezza is the 13th cent. parish Church of San Martino, decorated with a fine rose window popularly attributed to Michelangelo while at Stazemma you can visit the Romanesque Church of Santa Maria Assunta and the 18th cent. Sanctuary of the Madonna del Piastraio.

*Massarosa, the Parish Church
of San Pantaleone in Pieve a Elici*





LIBERTY STYLE

The development of most bathing establishments, restaurants and cafés in Viareggio began in 1902 when the Viale Regina Margherita was inaugurated. They were built in liberty style following the trend of the epoch using an easy-to-model material such as wood, which was suitable for building but required constant maintenance. Unfortunately a great part of the original architecture decorating the entrances of cafés, shops and bathing establishments was lost in a big fire that broke out in 1917. However, construction work began immediately afterwards availing itself of the collaboration of architects such as Galileo Chini, Alfredo Belluomini and Ugo Giusti. In a few years' time the town was provided with the typical characteristics of the Twenties and Thirties with a style that ranged from Liberty to Art deco, recognizable still today in the façades and architectures of many buildings. Among them is the well-preserved Cinema Savoia and, next to it, the Cinema Teatro Eden, both located along the Viale Margherita. A little further is the building of the Magazzini Duilio 48 (a small department store), abounding in stylistic details recalling Liberty style) Then, the Café Margherita - the ancient artists' meeting place - with its colourful oriental-style cupolas, a perfect expression of liberty style, achieved through close collaboration between the architects Chini and Belluomini. Further on, you can admire the entrance of the Balena club, with the typical bathing architecture dating to the same epoch. Furthermore, you can enjoy visiting a wide number of historic hotels dating back to the beginning of 1900, achieved through the partnership between Belluomini and Chini, such as Hotel Plaza, Hotel Liberty, Grand Hotel Royal, Grand Hotel Excelsior, Villa Tina, and the Principe di Piemonte, reflecting a range of architectural tendencies of the epoch. The lines and decorations of liberty style are also evident in the many residential buildings such as the "villini" lining the coast from Viareggio to Forte dei Marmi.



VERSILIA

Nowadays Versilia is not only a beautiful stretch of coast but it also provides excellent opportunities to spend enjoyable holidays the whole year round

Camaioire - The village is located at the bottom of a valley surrounded by hills as well as the northern Appenines. Small town founded in Roman times with the typical orthogonal layout, it contains many artistic treasures like the well known **Collegiate Church** and **Benedictine Abbey**. Due to the ideal location and characteristics of the territory, many Americans and English people have settled in this untouched countryside following the example of prominent Italian families like the Mondadori. The local economy is based on specialized agriculture and tourism with most of the hotels, bathing clubs and restaurants located in Lido di Camaioire, its seaside resort.

Forte dei Marmi - It is the most recent municipality, having been founded in 1914. Its territory borders Marina di Pietrasanta in the south and stretches up to Cinquale in the northern part. The modern area is built around its small historic centre near the **fort**, dating from 1782. Today, its pier stretching out into the sea for about 100 m, is frequented by strollers and fishermen but in the past was used for transporting marble from the Apuan Mountains. On clear days a breathtaking scenery of the sea and mountains can be enjoyed from here and the Apuans seem almost to soar above the sea. Today it is a very popular destination for tourists from all over the world. In the 1930s the Agnelli family chose the town for their summer residence making it famous and starting a trend for many other wealthy industrial families com-



*Camaioire,
Porta San Pietro
previous page
Camaioire, piazza
San Bernardino*

DISTRICTS

ing from northern Italy who continue to spend their holidays here. **Roma Imperiale**, to the south of the town centre, is a maze of small streets lined by magnificent villas completely surrounded by luxuriant vegetation where the night life is enjoyed with moderation but can be as exciting as in

*page 18-19
Forte dei Marmi,
the Leopold fort, 1782
Torre del Lago Puccini, the
Giacomo Puccini's monument*





the most famous resorts in Sardinia. Along its waterfront there are renowned haunts for dining and for evening entertainment. The incomparable Wednesday weekly market held in the town centre is famous all over Italy.

Massarosa – Located at the foot of the hills, the territory became inhabited ever since the pre-historic age with peculiar environmental features. It consists of **Lake Massaciuccoli**, cherished and celebrated by the famous composer **Giacomo Puccini**, as well as a hilly area cultivated with vineyards and olive groves which, along with the home cooking of its restaurants, makes it a haven of peace, ideal to spend an afternoon away from the bustling life at the beach.

Pietrasanta – Pietrasanta is a town of considerable artistic and cultural importance situated at the foot of the ancient **Lombardic Fortress** overlooking the built-up area around the magnificent **Piazza del Duomo** full of marble workshops and numerous sculpture studios. Artists of all nationalities work and meet in the town, creating an intense artistic activi-



ty and during the summer these organize exhibitions as well as “one-man shows” in relationship to more important events. Marble carving courses are also available for young artists from every part of the world. The town also hosts the **Museum of Models** where sketches and models of famous Italian and foreign artists are displayed. Thanks to all these cultural initiatives, the town has been defined *Little Athens*. **Marina di Pietrasanta**, the seaside resort, offers numerous welcoming cafés and discos in addition to a beautiful wide sandy beach and a clean sea.

Seravezza – The town is situated at the foot of the Apuan Alps and its origins are medieval. Its mountainous territory is characterized by marble quarries, the main source of wealth of the place, highly sought after ever since the 15th cent., to such an extent that actually **Michelangelo** came here to choose the raw material for his works of art. Of considerable interest is the 16th cent. **Medici Palace**, nowadays a venue for exhibitions and cultural events, in addition to a well-equipped Museum of Work and Popular Traditions.







Stazzema – Nestled on the slopes of Monte Matanna and surrounded by the fascinating peaks of the Pania della Croce and Corchia, the village of Stazzema is an ideal starting point for excursions to the **Park of the Apuan Alps**. The first historic traces of Stazzema date back to the 9th cent., when the construction of the **Church Santa Maria Assunta** began. Not far from the town is the **Antro del Corchia** – a huge Karstic cavern – recently opened to the public. In the area is the village of Sant’Anna, where one of the most horrendous massacres by the Nazis took place in 1944. On a hill a monument to Peace has been erected as a symbol for mankind.

Viareggio – Largest municipality in Versilia with an ancient centre dating back to the 12th cent. Its name derives from the Via Regia, which joined the coast to the hinterland during the Middle Ages. The city is a renowned seaside resort, with its economy based on tourism, trade, fishing and floriculture. It boasts an efficient tourist port containing a large number of boats. Viareggio’s shipyards are famous all over the world for the building, maintenance and repairing pleasure boats, mostly yachts. Towards the end of the 19th cent. boat building gave the inhabitants of Viareggio the idea for the construction of the first carnival floats supported by a wooden skeleton. In the course of time these became today’s artistically created papier maché floats. The Viareggio municipality also includes **Torre del Lago Puccini**, home to the Maestro **Giacomo Puccini**, where he lived and composed many of his operas.



Stazzema, panorama

previous page

Stazzema, the Parish Church of Santa Maria Assunta

page 24-25

*Viareggio, the shipyard
Viareggio, Torre Matilde*







VERSILIA FOR CHILDREN

A traditional destination for family vacations, Versilia is in a position to offer enjoyable and relaxing holidays with its 20 km of safe beaches and the vast green spaces of the pine woods.

Versilia resorts provide a wide choice of sports such as skating, horseback riding, five-a-side football and ping pong, as well as swimming, sailing and fishing. A good number of establishments organize a multitude of activities on the beach such as games and a



wide range of entertainment. In the pinewood forests can be found many facilities such as bicycle tracks, mini-golf, merry-go-rounds and trampolines and also provide picnic grounds, barbecue areas, cafés, ice-cream parlours, open-air restaurants and bars. Furthermore, a wealth of recreational opportunities for small children are available, such as puppet shows, workshops and games.



SPORTS LEISURE TIME

*Versilia has a varied range of
economic resources, that contribute
to the growth of the area*

Versilia has a varied range of economic resources, that contribute to the growth of the area. For many years the sea has been important for the evolution of tourism and tourist-related sectors like bathing and commerce, as well as the fishing and boating industries. In the hinterland environmental tourism is also growing rapidly, thanks to the vicinity of the Apuan Mountains. Furthermore, the economy has always been linked to the mining and working of marble and to agriculture-related activities, which have become specialized over the years, such as hothouse production of flowers (Viareggio is the second flower market in Tuscany), olive growing, and organic plantations.

SPORTS

Versilia claims countless opportunities to enjoy sports and recreational activities, ranging from hiking to horseback riding, to sailing and windsurfing or even taking part in regattas. A wide choice of sports is available, from swimming to playing tennis or golfing, thanks to the numerous swimming pools and sports centres available in the area. Moreover, you can enjoy sea and lake tours with a wide range of destinations. Every year Versilia plays host to important sporting events such as the Viareggio International Youth Football Tournament and Indoor Tennis Tournaments held in Forte dei Marmi as well as the Gran Premio Città di Camaiore for professional cyclists.



*Flowers in Versilia, details
previous page
Excursionists on monte Croce,
with a background of La Pania*

PLACES AND ACTIVITIES



Detail, marble crafting Atelier



*Pietrasanta, atelier
of artist of marble*

LEISURE TIME

All year round, according to the tradition of the '60s night club La Bussola – well- known all over Europe – Versilia offers all types of entertainment from pubs to piano bars, discos, music halls, theatres, as well as many other haunts and meeting places. Here you can truly find all kinds of musical trends, including classical music and opera.

The area offers also superb shopping with its many boutiques or antiques markets and artisan shops along the coast or in the hinterland. You can buy typical stone and marble items, small articles in paper maché, terracotta furnishings, as well as tables, fireplaces and garden fountains either in marble or wrought iron. Also available are many biological food products. Not to be forgotten are Versilia's excellent shops – open all year including Sundays and holidays – lining the seaside from Viareggio to Forte dei Marmi.

CONVENTIONS AND MEETINGS

With its numerous accommodation facilities, suitable for all types of meetings along with its pleasant climate during the winter months, Versilia represents the ideal place for the organization of conferences and work meetings. In the off season months the area offers the right atmosphere and tranquillity necessary to concentrate on work, with the possibility to reach in a short time historic towns, interesting environmental habitats as well as the most important Tuscan art cities.



Versilia offers visitors a calendar full of events and activities throughout the whole year.

THE CUISINE OF VERSILIA

Versilia offers a wide variety of environments ranging from a wide sandy coastline flanked by lush pine forests to the magnificent peaks of the Apuan Alps. This variety reflects the multitude of flavours of its cuisine, ranging from seafood to traditional mountain recipes. In the villages on the Apuan Mountains are served many types of savoury dishes (peasant cooking), some with evocative names such as “castagnaccio” (chestnut cake), “zuppa frantoiana” (olive-press soup) and “focaccia del cavatore” (quarryman’s yeast bread), even though gourmet tourism has a preference for Versilia’s renowned seaside cuisine, in demand throughout the year. The Versilia cookery skilfully employs fish in simple, refined dishes, traditional soups or imaginative hors-d’oeuvres served with all types of vegetables. The variety of preparations is endless, ranging from grilled to fried, from stewed to boiled, with a range of flavours capable of satisfying even the most demanding palates! Furthermore, according to the latest nutritional diets, Versilia employs also fish known as “pesce azzurro” (blue fish, including anchovies, sardines, mackerel, etc.) for simple but refined dishes.

EVENTS AND TRADITIONS

*Olive-grove nestling
in the Massarosa hills
Fishing scene*



EVENTS

Carnival of Viareggio – The tradition of the Viareggio Carnival has historic roots and dates to the 19th cent. The first masked parade was held in 1873 along the Via Regia, but in 1921 it moved on the sea front boulevards. Ever since its beginning, huge allegorical floats have been the main characteristic of the event, built by artists known as the wizards of papier mâché. Constructors are capable of achieving these huge works of art often having a base as large as 50 square metres and a weight of many quintals. The floats usually deal with national and international events and create original caricatures of celebrities of social and political life. Nowadays float building is carried out at the recently built Carnival Citadel, an innovative area conceived also as a meeting place for the inhabitants of Viareggio and tourists alike. The place also contains the Carnival Museum and exhibitions halls as well as a playground for children and is an important venue for a range of concerts and other events.

Festival della Versiliana – In the shade of century-old pine trees of the large Park, every year, in the summer, the Townhall of Pietrasanta organizes evening performances of plays, ballet and concerts while at the open air Caffé in the afternoon there are talk shows held with celebrities in the fields of show business, politics, culture, et. There is also an area especially created for children in the pinewood where they can play and attend shows with live entertainers.

Puccini Festival – In the magnificent scenery of Lake Massaciuccoli - one of the places most dear to Puccini and source of constant inspiration to him - every summer the Maestro's most famous operas are performed at the open air theatre with an extensive programme of events.

