



28 KILOMETERS OF COAST, FROM THE MOUTH OF THE RIVER RENO TO THE PO OF VOLANO

COMACCHIO AND ITS VALLEYS

Comacchio, picturesque lagoon city built on 13 islands and dating back to Late Roman age, preserves precious remains of the past times. Then there are the valleys of the Po Delta, miles of gentle and well-equipped golden beaches, pine forests, harbors, as well as sport facilities and a very special local gastronomy.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Comacchio's features and history have always been influenced by the morphological and hydrographical evolution of the Po Delta and the ever-moving coastline, due to the alluvial material flowing with the water of the River Po: canals, water basins and lagoons have incessantly been changing shape through time. The first settlements in the area go back to the founding of the town of Spina by the Etruscans in the 6th century B.C. and to the founding of Comacchio by the Romans in the 1st century B.C. After the fall of the Roman Empire, the territory became part of the Exarcate of Ravenna first and then of the Reign of Longobards. The Comacchio Valleys have always been the main local source of economy and,

at the same time, have also influenced the historical events. In 1325 Comacchio was ruled by the Estensi, in 1598 by the Holy See and in 1797 by Napoleon. Later the French Republic sold the valleys to the townspeople that, from then on had to take on expensive changes. From the 18th century onwards, lots of works were accomplished and more than 60000 hectares of land have since been reclaimed from the sea. Meanwhile the economy itself has radically changed: fishing, agriculture and most of all tourism along the coast, have developed. Since the 1980s, Comacchio and the Park of the Po Delta have also become the destination for nature lovers.

COMACCHIO: A LAGOON CITY

Bridges, canals, roads and coloured houses give Comacchio the features of a lagoon city, almost a "little Venice", also characterized by its culture and its architecture. Everywhere surrounded by the water, it preserves remarkable evidences of the past: magnificent churches, monuments and old bridges crossing the canals, the most impressive of which is the 17th-century Trepponti Bridge that was the ancient entrance to the city.

TREPPONTI BRIDGE

Trepponti Bridge is a monumental bridge built of bricks and stones of Istria in 1634 by the architect Luca Danese. It consists of three front and two back flights of steps; the upper part has two impressive square-shaped towers.

MONUMENTS TO BE VISITED

A stately structure of 1700 by Antonio Foschini from Ferrara, the **Vecchio Ospedale San Camillo** is a precious evidence of the social Enlightenment of Comacchio. The building, whose construction was started in 1778, has two square-shaped bell towers and hosts the Chiesa dello "Spatale", dedicated to Saint Peter, on its left side. Since 1970 it has no longer been a hospital but has housed the "Museo delle Culture Umane del Delta del Po".

The **Loggiato dei Cappuccini** is an open arcade realized in 1647, after escaping danger of a flood, that connects the town center with the Santuario di S. Maria in Aula Regia. The setting created by its 142 arches is full of charm. The Santuario di S. Maria in Aula Regia, best known as Chiesa dei Cappuccini, dates back to 1665. It has a neoclassical facade, more than once modified, and hosts a significant earthen statue of the Blessed Virgin, the protector of the city, an example of Renaissance work of the Ferrarese art.

Built in the first half of 1600 to store the wheat for Comacchio's poor, the **Loggia dei Mercanti** stands on a strategic spot in the center of the town. Its structure, of a rectangular shape, is characterized by some marble columns. Located on its side there is the Torre dell'Orologio, octagonal in shape with a base made of stones of Istria, that still strikes the hours at Comacchio. It was erected around 1330 and rebuilt in the first half of 1800 after an unexpected collapse. In 1850 the tower was enriched with a marble sundial.

The **Chiesa del Rosario** was built in 1618 at the will of the Confraternity of the S. Rosario. It boasts a remarkable brick facade and a beautiful portal made of stones of Istria. The interior has a nave with a lower barrel vault and hosts a significant wooden Crucifix by Filippo de Porris from Venice (1641). Dedicated to the Patron Saint of the town, the stately building of the **Duomo** rises on the site of the ancient Romanesque cathedral that had been erected in 708 and demolished in 1694. Rebuilt in the 17th century, it was raised to the status of Basilica Minore by the Pope John XXIII in 1961. Its brick facade is enriched with a few stones of Istria features and the aisle-less interior hosts twelve side chapels with some magnificent paintings by Biagio Bovi (18th century) of the Carracci school from Bologna. By the side of the Duomo you can see the Bell Tower, built in 1751 by Giorgio Fossati from Venice, but which collapsed in 1757 and was rebuilt in 1868.

A typical 19th-century noble house, **Palazzo Bellini** is a two-floor building with a rectangular layout. Its

sumptuous halls on the ground floor house the Municipal Modern Art Gallery, venue of national and international events and exhibitions. The upper floor hosts the Municipal Library "L.A.Muratori" while the attic is the seat of the Municipal Historic Archive.

THE CULTURAL MUSEUM OF THE PO DELTA

The 18th-century building of the Old Invalids' Hospital, situated in the historic center of Comacchio, hosts the Museo delle Culture Umane del Delta del Po (Museum of the Po Delta's Human Culture). Here there is an area dedicated to a Roman Ship, that was wrecked in 12 B.C., together with its whole cargo of goods and various daily objects. The spot where the ship was found, in 1981, in the surroundings of Comacchio, along the road towards Ferrara, is now placed in the country, but originally it lay by the coast. It consists of a cargo ship of medium size, about 20m long, with a flat bottom, that used to sail along the coast or in the inland waters. It is supposed that some of the goods coming from the Mediterranean and Aegean Sea could have been loaded on the ship at the harbour of Ravenna. After a careful work of restoration and classification, it is now possible to admire all the relicts of the cargo: lead bars, wine and oil, box-wood trunks, pottery, small artifacts such as miniature temples, perfumed oil phials, fishing tools, pots, dishes, caskets, flour, meat, etc.

THE LIDOS OF FERRARA

The Commune of Comacchio lies along 28 kilometers of coast and includes some beautiful seaside resorts, each of them with its own features and history, that can grant you different ways of spending your holidays. Seven are the lidos following one other from north to south : Volano, Nazioni, Pomposa, Scacchi, Porto Garibaldi, Estensi, Spina. From the oldest Porto Garibaldi to the most recent Volano, the lidos share a spacious and clear sandy shore as well as various avant-garde facilities. Hotels, guest-houses and restaurants offer a vast choice of accommodation opportunities to enjoy the rich and varied environment of the Park of the Po Delta.

Lido di Spina is a quiet and elegant seaside resort, named after a legendary Greek-Etruscan town; it is dotted with magnificent villas, immersed in a verdant pine forest, and boasts an avant-garde urban complex with sport and seaside equipment. Outdoor disco-pubs liven up young people's summer evenings with music and entertainment. Here the master Remo Brindisi built his villa-museum designed by the architect Nanda Vigo, then donated by his will to the Municipal Administration of Comacchio and now open to visitors. Inspired by the Bauhaus movement, the house-museum is aimed at promoting the integration of arts, with works that cover more than a century of research and cultural needs of the contemporary art.

THE COMACCHIO VALLEYS AND THE REGIONAL PARK OF THE PO DELTA

The beautiful Delta of the River Po, the ancient River Eridano, the longest river in Italy (652 km) with a hydrographic basin about 75000 sq.km wide, is an inestimable naturalistic, cultural and social value of an eco-system to be preserved. Lying among the River Po, the sea and the River Reno, the Comacchio Valleys can boast a rich halophilic vegetation that characterizes dunes and sandbanks, as well as a great number of birds immersed in their ideal habitat and the ancient activity connected with the breeding of the renowned eels of Comacchio. The Museum of the Valleys, located a few kilometers from the town, invite people to go on tour, on foot or by boat, among the valleys themselves, and visit the "casoni" and the fishing cages called "lavorieri" but, most of all, to enjoy very interesting bird-watching. The reclamation works, the embankments and the cultivation of the poplar groves have altered the original environment, but there are still very interesting natural habitats that are worth getting to know.

The Park of Po Delta - Emilia Romagna.

Declared a wetland of international interest in 1988, the area of Volano, Mesola and Goro has been inclu-

ded in the Po Delta Park, in order to grant the best way of preserving the environment and also making the naturalistic tourism become an important source of income. The Park is a unique example of an integration between works of art, culture and superb natural features. The ever-changing border between land and water causes a continuous evolution of the landscape where woods and pine forests alternate with internal fresh and salt water marshes.

The bio-diversity of this territory is exceptional: 970 species of flora and more than 400 species of vertebrates, 64 kinds of birds and 15 kinds of fishes, 11 species of amphibious and 16 reptiles have been counted. A recent piece of interesting data regards the most important settlement of pink flamingos in Europe, that counts 10000 birds distributed in both the Veneto and the Emilia-Romagna areas of the Po Delta. In 1999, the territory formed by the City of Ferrara, the "Delizie Estensi" and the Ferrarese side of the Po Delta, have been enrolled in the UNESCO's Humanity Heritage List

CUISINE

From Comacchio to Porta Garibaldi and along the coast, there are various restaurants and trattorie that offer a rich menu based on dishes with fish. In fact the fish is the star of the local gastronomy and especially the eel which is considered the "queen" of the cuisine and is cooked in thousands of ways. The hors d'oeuvre include mussels, scallops, lobster, squills, clams, pickled eels and prawns; varied are the first courses such as "risotto di mare" and "risotto alla pescatora", "spaghetti ai granchi", "spaghetti alle canocchie", "zuppe di pesce" and the main courses: "grigliate di pesce", "anguilla con polenta", soles, plaices, grey mullets, gilthead and basses, stuffed cuttle-fish and kebabs of lobsters. The food is accompanied by the excellent red wine of the Bosco Eliceo DOC Uva d'Oro, the only red wine that goes well with fish.

GETTING TO COMACCHIO

By car: A13 Motorway Bologna-Padova exit South Ferrara.

Motorway connections Ferrara-Portogaribaldi exit Comacchio.

By plane : Airports of Bologna "G. Marconi" and Venezia "M.Polo"

By train : from Ferrara, then Bus Service to Ferrara-Lidi.

By boat: Berth at Comacchio along the navigable canal Ferrara - Portogaribaldi.