



THE MOST IMPORTANT SKIING RESORT IN SOUTHERN CENTRAL ITALY

ROCCARASO

THE TOURISM ROUTE

It lies between the Parco Nazionale dell'Abruzzo and the Parco della Majella and, thanks to its natural location, to its excellent accommodation facilities and sports equipment, Roccaraso, also called the "Cortina of the South", is a tourist resort becoming more and more appreciated by skiers and mountain lovers in every season of the year

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Between the National Park of Abruzzo and the Majella Park, a massive group of mountains bounds the region of the broadest plateau of the Abruzzo region, among which there is Piano delle Cinquemiglia that stretches for

about nine kilometres. It's a place rich in surprises for tourists: a broad territory of about 30 km, with remarkable beauties of nature and landscapes. The altitude, the richness in water and the good quality of the pastures favour both agriculture and farming. At the centre of the plateau there is Roccaraso, lying just at the beginning of the big valley of the River Rasine, tributary of the River Sangro, at the foot of Monte Zurrone. The village sprang up around the year 1000 in a strategic position, since it controlled the only southern passage of the region, on the Via Minucia, the main route between the North and the South of the Peninsula. Around 1700 Roccaraso was a quiet village rich in the breeding of animals and pastures, with 300 inhabitants and a flourishing economy based on breeding and an ancient textile art. At the beginning of 1900, together with the decline of the textile activity, the tourism started to develop and Roccaraso invested the whole of its resources on it, with the advantage of being easily reached both on road and by train (the Sulmona-Carpinone railway line has stopped at Roccaraso since 1897!). The first lift, a sledge-lift with an electrical motor, dates back to 1937 and has been very important for the town.

Almost all the first tourists came from Naples, only 140 km far, and from Rome; then people from all over the Peninsula, including important figures of the time and the Royal family, chose to spend their holidays here. During the Second World War, Roccaraso was the most damaged town of its tableland because of its strategic position. In 1943, 98% of the town was totally razed by the Germans that also destroyed the hamlet of Pietransieri and massacred 127 inhabitants. Despite the massive destruction, some evidences of the past times have been preserved, such as the Chiesa di San Rocco and the Chiesa di S. Bernardino. The Roccolani did not surrender and rebuilt their town that now is the new guidance centre of the Abruzzese ski, the most ancient, the most developed and advanced of the southern-central Appennine Region and first-rate in Italy.

ROCCARASO: THE BEST EQUIPPED MOUNTAIN TOURIST DISTRICT IN ABRUZZO

The sports facilities of the territory of Roccaraso, that includes the towns of Rivisondoli, Pescocostanzo e Rocca Pia, offer the tourists lots of opportunities both in Summer and in Winter: skating and swimming, bowling and tennis, besides 30 km of ski-slopes covered with snow. People who love these mountains in winter, love them in summer too: wholesome walks and long excursions among the beauties of nature and the surrounding natural parks have made Roccaraso become one of the most appreciated mountain resorts of Abruzzo all the year round. The Province of L'Aquila is rich in winter resorts, well-equipped with modern ski-lifts and ski-slopes, from the easiest ones up to the ones recognized for national and international races. The lifts are spread among Gran Sasso and Majella, Velino-Sirente and the mountains of the National Park of Abruzzo, Altopiano delle Cinquemiglia and the Carseolani and Simbruini mountains. To be mentioned are Campo Imperatore and Monte Cristo, Campo Felice, Ovindoli, Marsia, Campo Rotondo, Pescasseroli, Roccaraso, Scanno and Rivisondoli.

Roccaraso, at the beginning of Altopiano delle Cinquemiglia, is the best-known winter resort of the Abruzzo region and of Southern-Central Italy. Much appreciated is the Aremogna-Pizzalto area that from 1500 m of the plateau goes up to 2140 of Toppe del Tesoro: besides the cross country slopes, it can boast 12 km of variously difficult ski-slopes and is served by 2 cable cars, 12 ski-lifts and 8 chair-lifts.

At Pizzalto there is a low hill called the "Montagnetta", a training ski-slope for beginners that is reached by two rolling carpets. Here, together with the neighbouring Rivisondoli, the tourists can avail themselves of about 110 km of ski-slopes almost always sunny and covered with snow. For Nordic skiing lovers, there is a remarkable variety of cross-country slopes on the plateau; training courses are also organized by qualified local ski-instructors. The Alto Sangro ski-pass is available also for the Pescocostanzo, Pescasseroli and Rivisondoli-Monte Pratello sky-slopes.

PLACES OF INTEREST AT ROCCARASO AND SURROUNDINGS

All the surroundings deserve to be visited, but we specially recommend a tour to Pescocostanzo and Rivisondoli that, together with Roccaraso, form a united tourist resort.

PESCOCOSTANZO

Thanks to a clever, cultured and well-off ruling local class, Pescocostanzo has developed arts and culture between 1400 and 1700. Its precious and intact heritage, rich in Renaissance and Baroque monuments, has made it known as an artistic and cultural town, besides a Summer and Winter holiday resort. The Basilica di Santa Maria del Colle is one of the most interesting churches of the region for its works of art and rich ornaments. New workshops have now re-started the traditional goldsmith's art of producing filigree jewels, while a municipal school is aimed at bringing back to life the ancient pillow-lace craft: very interesting is a visit to the Pillow Lace Museum that houses period artifacts and prints.

RIVISONDOLI

At Rivisondoli you can still see the assembled urban structure of the historic center with the houses opening onto the original network of narrow lanes and flights of steps. It still preserves some architectural buildings such as the Palazzo Baronale with the facing Chiesetta di Sant'Anna and the nice 18th-century Chiesa del Suffragio. The town is also famous for the performance of the living Presepe. The ski-lifts and the ski-slopes of Monte Pratello together with the ones of Roccaraso form a first-rate district of Italian skiing.

PROTECTED AREAS

To the west of Roccaraso, very important is the National Park of Abruzzo, known as one of the most attractive parks in Europe, an example of eco-tourism where the unspoilt nature perfectly meets the visitors' needs. To the North-East there is the National Park of Majella, of European and worldwide importance.

Parco Nazionale d'Abruzzo

The oldest of the Appennine parks, it has had a fundamental role in the protection of some of the most important species of the Italian fauna such as the brown bear of Marsica, the chamois and the wolf. From this protected area some deer, re-introduced in the park in the 1970s, moved towards the East, along the steep slopes of Serra Rocca Chiarano, and also some examples of bears have been attracted by the flocks of Piano le Gravare. As for the flora, the mountain areas have vast beech woods, the valleys have oak woods and the steep areas have scrubs of black pines.

Surprising is the Spring and Summer flowering that brighten the green glades. There are three other Natural Reserves: the very small (2 hectares) reserve of Lake Pantaniello, the regional reserve that protects the Bosco di S. Antonio (the first protected area in the Abruzzo region) and then the reserve of Quarto S. Chiara that, from the side of M. Porrara, borders the eastern side of Pizzalto.

Parco Nazionale della Majella

It is unique of its kind for its geographic position, its roughness, vastness and stateliness, as well as for the rigours and the inconstancy of its climate.

In the past the destructive action of man had caused the extinction or the extreme rareness of the fauna of the Park. Today, thanks to the new conservation project, we can see the deer and roe-deer, chamois, black bear of Marsica, Apennine wolf, otter, wild cat, stone marten, weasel, eagle and hawk.

Of European and worldwide importance, the national heritage of bio-diversity of the Park: there are more than 2000 vegetable species counted in a census, one third of the Italian flora.

The most interesting tree is surely the Italic Black Pine that grows freely on the most inaccessible rocks.

CUISINE

THE FLAVOURS OF THE AQUILANA CUISINE

The flavours and tastes that have characterized the local cuisine for generations come from the woods, the pastures and the fertile hills that form the territory of the Province of L'Aquila. The typical dishes of the plateau are the homemade pasta, the polenta and, most of all, the "gnocchi di patate con ragù di castrato" together with the pecorino cheese. In Spring the most popular are the soups with mountain vegetables or with legumes. Among the best sweets there is the "cicerchiata" with honey, typical product of the plateau. In the Province of L'Aquila, the local production of pasta, meat, salami, cheese, oil, wine and liqueurs have always been famous everywhere. We would also like to mention the "pasta all'amatriciana", a dish famous all over the world, originating from Amatrice, in the Province of L'Aquila. Besides the tomatoes and pecorino, it is made with the "guanciale amatriciano" and used to be the favourite food of trans-humance people for its caloric qualities and for being easily conserved. Various too are the dishes cooked with mutton, lamb (la pecora aju cotturu e l'agnello cacio e ova) and horse meat, from animals that have always been present in the hills and mountains of the territory of L'Aquila. The ham and the salami are carefully made: famous are the sausages both traditionally made or made from the pork liver, and the Ventricina, a salami that can be spread on bread, still made at Campotosto with a mixture of lean pork veined with flavoured fat. Among the cheeses: the pecorino (fresh or ripe), ricotta and caciocavallo, typical products of the plateaux, are very important in the local gastronomy. Very tasty are the vegetables distributed all over the Peninsula, also well appreciated is the production of vegetables in oil. The excellent black truffle is also used to make sausages, oil and flavoured cheese. Other exquisite products are the saffron, the torrone with chocolate and the sweets from Sulmona.

GETTING THERE

By car: A24 and A25 Roma/Pescara (Pratola Peligna exit), SS17 to Sulmona through Altopiano delle Cinquemiglia (31 km). A2 Motorway (Caianello exit) SS17 to Venafro, Castel di Sangro

By train: FFSS station in the center of the town, from Roma, L'Aquila, Pescara, Bari and Napoli

By bus: Bus Services from Pescara, Napoli, Roma

By air: Pescara Airport

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