

# The Pontine Islands - Latium

Ponza, Palmarola, Zannone, Ventotene, Santo Stefano, the small island of Gavi and the solitary rock of **la Botte** are the most extraordinary group of islands in the Tyrrhenian sea because of the variety of their coastlines, the colours of the rocks, the attractive villages and the small ports in pure Mediterranean style. The islands (Province of Latina) are very close to the coasts of Latium (the minimum distance between *Zannone* and *Circeo* is 18 miles) and of Campania (the minimum distance between *Santo Stefano* and the *isle of Ischia* is 22 miles), and can be reached easily from several continental ports.



The history of the islands traces its beginnings to the prehistoric period and later in a series of events involving the presence of the Greeks, the Romans, the Pharnesians, the Bourbons and the British.

Even pirates and the Saracens attacked the islands several times before they were definitively included in the Unity of Italy in 1861. The islands have always been renowned for their mild climate and for the beauty of their surrounding sea and sea-beds which have an average depth ranging from 3 to 50 metres and a maximum depth measuring below 100 metres at a distance of over 3 miles from the coast. Here, divers will experience magical emotions in a totally unspoilt environment. The Pontine islands have a volcanic origin and are rich in rhyolitic lava, tuffaceous rocks and vulcanites. Their spectacular and bright colours give the islands a particular charm and a surprising beauty also due to the wide variety of small coves, bays or inlets and to the different choices of fascinating walks through the history and nature of the islands.

## Palmarola



This is the most western of the Pontine islands. If you love solitude and living in wild nature this is the most charming place you can find. Palmarola is the second largest Pontine island. The few summer facilities available are the only inhabited places. From a geological point of view the island offers remarkable curiosities such as the oxidianic rock in its northern part, although its biggest attraction is its perfectly transparent sea. The island lies approximately 6 miles from Ponza and can be reached by shuttle or by rented boats.



There are no specific tourist facilities, but there are two typical restaurants open in summer at *Cala di Porto*. Palmarola has an extremely craggy coast dotted with grottos, bays, cliffs and crags. Landing is possible at a small natural harbour where you can make a brief stop and take a look at the grottos excavated by the sea.

## Ponza



*Monte La Guardia* (915.3 feet) is Ponza's highest point. From there you can admire the beauty of this narrow, long and half-moon-shaped island. Its coasts are ragged and rich in coves and smaller crags such as the small isle of *Cavi* and the cliff of *La Botte*. Excellent hotels and comfortable boarding-houses are available on the island. This island which is only 4.97 miles long is full of places to visit, such as the lovely beach of *Ghiaia di Luna*, which can be reached through a tunnel dug out by the Romans and which is full of archaeological remains scattered everywhere. Tourists who intend to explore the whole island have a wide choice of suggested itineraries that will satisfy all types of interests. Minibuses and open-roof taxis will help the tourist to reach all the interesting spots in very little time.

## Santo Stefano



The isle of lies less than a mile east from the island of Ventotene. Its 0.11 sq. miles surface makes it the smallest of the Pontine islands. There are 4 small landing spots that can be used according to the winds. This island of volcanic origin has probably been inhabited since the Roman age (as the few remains found there seem to prove), although some oxidian finds allow us to assume the existence of even earlier settlements. During the centuries the island was given several names such as *Partenope*, *Palmosa*, *Dommo Stephane* and *Borca*. This uninhabited island can be reached from Ventotene with a rented boat. The boat tour around the island is quite brief and offers fascinating views enhanced by the intensely blue-coloured sea and by the dark and ragged basaltic rocks. The sea-beds around the island are full of different species of fish.

## Ventotene



This small island (0.5 sq. miles) was formed by volcanic, mainly tufaceous rocks once used to build houses (as you can see when entering the port). Ventotene has generally high and ragged coasts and two small, beautiful beaches just behind the built-up area: *Cala Rossano* (close to the *Porto Nuovo*) and *Cala Nave* (with the three cliffs: *Nave di Terra*, *Nave di Fuori* and *Scoglitello*). In isolated areas away from the port there are other stretches of beach such as: *Parata della Postina*, *Moggio di Terra* and *Parata Grande*. The island was first used as a base by the Phoenicians, the Greeks and the Romans in the 1st. century and was subsequently equipped by Augustus with a port dug in volcanic rock which is still in use today and which serves the huge Villa Giulia where he had relegated his daughter accused of infidelity. After the decadence and abandonment period of the Middle Ages the island was repopulated by the Bourbons during the second half of the XVIII century. They created the current built-up area with the castle (today's town-hall), the church of *Santa Candida* and the wide square.

## Zannone



Zannone has a surface of little more than 0.38 sq. miles and lies approximately 6.5 miles from the port of Ponza. It is part of the *Circeo* National Park because of its beauty and the integrity of its environments. The island is uninhabited but supervised by the Forestry Service. There are no tourist facilities and camping or overnight stays are prohibited although no special permit is required to visit the island. It is mainly covered with a thick vegetation based on Mediterranean scrub, but there is also a small ilex-wood. On top of *Monte Pellegrino* there is a Forestry Service station with a small educational exhibition concerning the naturalistic aspects of the island. Beside the building you will also find the ruins of a Benedictine convent dating back to the XIII century. The complete tour following well-marked paths along the upper ridge of the island takes 40 minutes; don't be surprised if you meet some wild sheep during your walk.

