**Paradise Lake**

As cynical Israelis, whenever we find a corner of the globe that has yet to be discovered by our country men, we always keep quiet about it so that hordes of Israelis don’t descend on the place and spoil it. Yet I am going to write about such a gem - Lake Orta in Piedmont, which is only an hour's drive from Milan’s, Malpensa Airport.

Let's start our story with Giuseppe Tornatore. If I ask you a small question, who is the director of the unforgettable Oscar-winning Cinema Paradiso, I have no doubt that you will say, "Oh, of course I know who he is”.

Our friend Tornatore fell in love with this magnificent lake. He would go there every year and always stay in a regular room (Room 21) at the enchanting San Rocco Hotel. One of his visits was on a gray autumn day, with low clouds misting the beautiful little island of San Giulio.

It was then that Tornatore decided to write a screenplay to be filmed in this precise location and reflect its beauty. Usually they write a screenplay, cast actors, and only then choose the location for the shoot, but in this case it was the exact opposite. Tornatore wrote the script to fit the location.

This is the background for the film "La Corrispondenza" which was released in 2016, starring the wonderful Jeremy Irons and the beautiful Olga Corilenko. We will not go into the plot of this special film, but we will note that it was filmed from Room 21 in the hotel, and in the impressive yellow house directly opposite the hotel on the island of San Giulio. When I saw the film, I knew for certain that we would go there. No, not because I decided to do so, but because my wife simply told me: "We must go there…the sooner the better”

I would like to say that Orta is not a lake where first time travelers to Italy usually go. All the tourist books say, and perhaps rightly so, that if you want to go to the lakes of northern Italy you must visit Lago di Como, Lago di Maggiore and Lago di Garda. Only if you are already a veteran traveler to the one and only Italy, you should proceed to visit this jewel of a lake.

And if you go to Lake Orta - then the best thing you can do is stay in Hotel San Rocco. It is also the best of all hotels situated on the water front, it is in an ideal location right opposite the island of San Giulio, and the service is excellent. And, if you add the romance of the movie "La Corrispondenza," what more reasons do you need?

The San Rocco Hotel consists of two wings with 72 rooms. The hotel is located in what used to be two huge residential villas, (one of which belonged to an 18th century doctor). This is a four star hotel, but before I go into details I say and repeat - what a view!!!

The hotel is run by a young and very pleasant CEO - Attilia. Her great advantage is that she began work at the hotel as a receptionist and climbed up the ladder to the CEO's chair. Naturally we cannot regale her with our stories - she knows the hotel inside out.

Atelier explains that the message transmitted by the lake is "free your mind" and her aim is to educate hotel employees to convey this message to the guests. (I have to point out that service in the hotel is really excellent, friendly and incredibly courteous).

Beyond classical tourism, there are many golf courses in the area which ensure a high occupancy during the autumn. Companies also hold company meetings in the area.

Attilia points out that a two hour round trip from the hotel will take you to tourist attractions such as Milan, Verona, Dolomites, the sea, (yes, also the enchanting Portofino Cinque Terra), and Lakes Como and Maggiore. These are the famous risotto and wine making regions of Italy, one of which is in Geme. Not far from there you can also find the manufacturers of Grappa – Locanda. Furthermore, inevitably, you will also find two huge shopping malls, selling the best Italian brands (the best one is Vicolongo Outlet situated near Novara.

Just saying all this makes me feel tired. I know that when you are abroad "you have to do everything". I won’t tell you not to visit all the attractions, but I will try to convince you spend a whole day relaxing in the hotel’s magical terrace together with your partner, reading a good book and enjoying a bottle of local wine. Just drink in the beautiful scenery which changes color as the day progresses to afternoon and evening.

Another little tip: in the lake you can rent small boats for a whole day or half a day. The boats are very slow, anybody can sail them, and since the lake is small – not only can you sail around the whole lake in half a day but also stop for coffee, a cup of wine or a meal. There is only one company that hires boats, and it does not have many of them, so order a boat before you get there, via the hotel.

After you get what I’m trying to convey, you won’t be surprised to learn that in most cases visitors who came to the hotel for a short break, return for a longer stay. In fact, many guests reserve years in advance.

Another tip to conclude: even if you didn’t plan to go to Orta on this trip to Italy, some of you will probably be taking a morning flight back home from Malpensa.

Either way, it is advisable to spend the night close to the airport. Milan isn’t a wise choice because the morning traffic is horrendous. And, you deserve to end your trip with a crescendo instead of in a cheap motel. So – even if it’s only for the last night, treat yourself to the San Rocco Hotel. It’s only an hour’s drive to Malpensa (most of the way is highway), return the rental car, and board your flight after a well-deserved finale.

And the last surprise: though Orta Sen Giulio is a small town (with a charming center) surprisingly, there is a Michelin restaurant there- Orta di Locanda, perhaps its quality won’t surprise you, but the price will. I’ll leave that for my next article…

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