

ORTA SAN GIULIO & LAKE ORTA



St Giulio Island - Lake Orta

The area around Lake Orta has long been a favorite of tourists, thanks to the quiet beauty of the landscape, its fascinating history and its wealth of artistic treasures - principally Romanesque and Baroque architecture. Lake Orta lies to the west of Lake Maggiore, in the northern Italy. It is a minor star in the constellation of the subalpine lakes, but all the fascination and the history of the larger lakes seem to be concentrated in this short space.

Shrouded by thick, dark-green woodlands, little Lago d'Orta measures 13.4km long and just 2.5km wide. It's separated from its bigger and better-known eastern neighbour, Lake Maggiore, by Monte Mottarone. The focal point of the lake is the quaint medieval village of **Orta San Giulio** (population 1130; elevation 293m), which is often referred to simply as Orta. Just across from the town's web of squares and cobbled lanes sits the island of **Isola San Giulio**.

The island is almost entirely taken up by **Basilica di San Giulio**, a 12th-century basilica inhabited by just a few nuns today - hence its nickname 'island of silence'. The official name for the village and island comes from the Greek evangelist, Giulio, who's said to have rid the island of snakes, dragons and assorted monsters in the late 4th century. Boats at Orta San Giulio's waterfront simply depart when there are sufficient passengers to warrant the five-minute crossing.



Villa Crespi - Orta



Closeup of St Giulio Island - Orta

There are no hotels or restaurants on the island, but the footpath, **La Via del Silenzio** (The Path of Silence), encircling the island makes for a peaceful stroll. For more serenity, head up to **Sacro Monte**, a hillside dotted with some 20 small chapels dedicated to St Francis of Assisi.

The parklands here are a great spot for a picnic: pick up picnic fare at Orta San Giulio's Wednesday market, or pop over by boat from Orta San Giulio to **Omegna** (population 15,000) for its lively Thursday market. The skies above Omegna light up each August during the **World Fireworks Championships**. Read more: