

WITH the area becoming more and more fashionable, and since it was established by Italy's own gay community, the options for gay entertainment and accommodation in this part of Tuscany have begun to emerge. Firstly, in the form of various B&Bs, all different in style and themes but all within the same price bracket (between 50 and 60 euros per night depending on the size of the room). You'll find most of them situated in the Puccini district of Torre del Lago and they all offer good quality, air-conditioned rooms.

**The Libano**, situated on Via Tabarro, was where we stayed. Each of the rooms is named after Italian Opera Composers and we had the pleasure of booking into the Bellini room - quaint but not over sentimental. Open for five years, Signor Barsacchi's charming villa was one of the first to be established in the area together with the Boheme. It's quite apparent that the managers at each - especially Therese at the Boheme - were keen to promote a friendly, even family-run, vibe to the guests. The effect is a warm and welcoming atmosphere of peace and relaxation. Early evening 'get togethers' are common and the perfect time to discuss the pleasures of your day.

**The Boheme** has a very 'Romeo on Romeo' situation going on - every room has a balcony which is handy for your lover when he feels the urge to serenade you. **Le Villi** is another B&B that offers unique and atmospheric rooms. The owner has taken time to create spaces that are extremely stylish and show a passion and a flair for things operatic. **Las Dunas** has a nautical flavour to it with a great outdoor area. **Fate & Folletti** (Gnomes and Fairies)

offers basic no-frills accommodation and has a very impressive banana plant in its courtyard - jokes associated with phallic imagery were quick to come to mind.

To help you get about, most proprietors can rent you a bicycle for as little as 4 euros a day. The surrounding countryside is very flat which makes cycling a great way to get to the beach and back, taking less than 15 minutes.

Sandwiched between Viareggio and Torre del Lago is the beachy area of La Lecciona. Popular with gay guys, it can be reached by an almost secret path leading to a private and secluded area; its only downside is that it is lacking in amenities.

The area is vibrant in the daytime and has great evening entertainment too. All situated on the Viale Europa, it is possible to start your evening either with a pre-dinner cocktail in the **Priscilla** bar, hosted by the ever so glam tran Regina, or stay on **Mama Beach** until it's time to ▶

# VIVACIOUS AND VIBRANT VERSILIA

**Gay people set trends, instigate fashion phenomenon and discover fab places to visit long before the hetties get their grubby fingers on them. We can officially declare that the next travel hot spot for gay travelers is Versilia, Italy's best kept secret... until now! STEVE V reports...**

Photos by Mickael Martinais



**Mama Beach**



**Caffeletti**



**Libano**



**Le Villi**



**Las Dunas**



**Libano**



**Principe Di Piemonte**



**Regina**

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▶ party. This beach is exceptionally laid out and was the first gay and lesbian, fully equipped beach in Italy. To save the sand getting in all your nooks and crannies you can hire two beds and an umbrella for 18 euros a day. You should note that the beach is divided for your cruising ease; the gay boys mostly gather on the left and the gay girls on the right of the walk-way down to the beach. Facilities on the beach are very good and after a swim it's so refreshing to be able to take a shower right there and then. You'll also find a host of other 'services' available on the beach, from full body massages and henna tattoos to getting your hands on faux Gucci and Vuitton.

The nightlife is good with most of the clubs, especially **Mama Mia**, putting on different cabaret shows and changing the theme of the club on a weekly basis. I was asked to judge the Miss Italia Drag Queen competition - the contestants could only be described as fierce! Next door is **Boca Chica** (the 'Salvation' of the strip) where the men could not be more like the 'Italian Stallion' variety if they tried! Excellent for sunset watching and eye candy.

A superb way to bring your evening to an end, albeit for us at 5am, was a coffee on the beach at **Cafe Bukowski**. As with most 'gay villages' it's ideal in that, once you've parked your bike, you can walk everywhere... and that 'all important' coffee does go some way to prepare you for the cycle home. As part of Tuscany, the region of Torre del Lago, is Italy's gay seaside hot spot.

Being in this part of Italy meant that trips to both **Pisa** and **Florence** were most certainly on the cards. Pisa is less than 30 minutes by car and I would recommend you go either very early in the morning in order to get a great shot

of the sunrise around this architectural 'masterpiece'. Or, as I did, at 7pm when the cloud patterns in the sky added to the magnificence of the photographic opportunity.

Calazoni (a rolled and filled pizza) is a specialty of the region and, of course, was consumed with great gusto and washed down with one of the most full-bodied red wines I have ever enjoyed.

When we were in Florence temperatures were a sizzling 41 degrees and one was tempted to see if it were possible to fry an egg on the pavement. Michaelangelo's David is a must see; a lot has been said about this anatomical masterpiece and I can only concur. However, if you want to see the actual David and not the copy then a visit to the **Gallerie dell' Accademia** should be arranged, but allow half day out as there may be queues. Florence's gay bars are varied and spread about but can be reached by foot with an approximate ten minute walk between each of them. The bars do charge an entrance fee of 29 euros but - as with many European countries - is redeemable against drinks by simply presenting your entry ticket to the bar staff. **Crisco** is a popular leather bar complete with dark

rooms and private cabins. **Y.A.G** bar is more popular with a younger crowd. When we were there DJs had set up impromptu discos in many of the historic squares pumping out the sounds of Italian House. This modern sound combined with the historic visual setting was very cool! With music in mind it was time to try two outdoor events. First was the **H2O** pool party, an event staged at a resort pool (which you'll need a car to get to) with up to 1000 Latin lovers strutting their stuff. It was simply outrageous, wet n wild hedonism. On the outskirts of Firenze, at Junction 11 on the A1 motorway, is the superclub **Fabrik** which is well worth a visit. Do remember to take your passport with you as it's the club policy to create a members card for you on your first visit, a procedure that takes about 10 minutes. The cost of admission is similar to the price of a superclub event in the UK.

Flying from Stansted on Ryan Air (book online for the best deals) took only 1 hour 50 mins to get to Pisa. The development of this yet unspoilt resort is being strictly controlled and the gay scene is emerging at a comfortably chic pace.

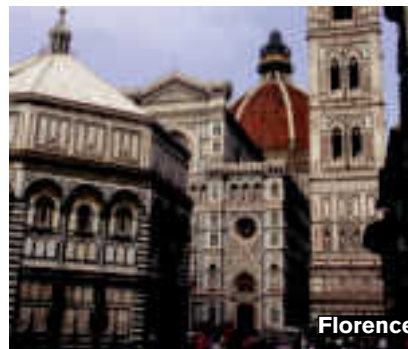
**Useful web addresses:**

- [www.ryanair.com](http://www.ryanair.com)
- [www.gay.it](http://www.gay.it)
- [www.outtravel.it](http://www.outtravel.it)
- [www.friendlyversilia.it](http://www.friendlyversilia.it)

All the web sites offer hyperlinks to the individual sites where more detailed info can be obtained to make your visit to this part of Italy fantastic.



**David in Florence**



**Florence**



**Mama Mia**



**Cafe Bukowski**



**Torre del Lago**



**Pisa**



**Boca Chica**

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