

The Hotel Europa

1800 - 1925

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The Birth of Tourism in Rapallo

Rapallo debuted as a centre of tourism in the second half of the 19th Century. Even if the town was still quite small, "...it had other attractions in this end of the century, the ones it had always had really: the climate, the geographical position, the beautiful nature and additionally the peaceful existence of a village of friendly fishermen, artisans and farmers. (1) In that period the remittances by Rapallo emigrants who were becoming rich in the far countries of South and North America, started to come back to the town, too. It was then when the beautiful villas with gardens and the other nice buildings that made Rapallo look beautiful, were built. Their town was a safe refuge after so many years of hard work abroad for a peaceful old age.

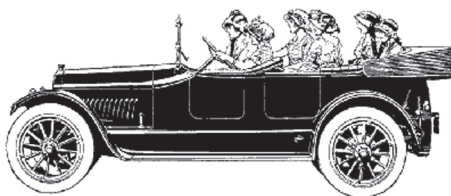
In this period, despite scant communications and rudimentary forms of transport, the first English and German visitors arrived. However it was only in 1868 when there was a great change in the Ligurian infrastructures with the opening of the train line from Turin – Genoa and Genoa – La Spezia. Now the city of Rapallo was on the main national line and later the international line. In the same year, in addition to a sort of winter tourism, the seasonal seaside tourism also began to be fashionable.

"Between 1870 and 1880 some articles come out on Italian and foreign magazines which illustrate and exalt the natural beauty and the climate of the Tigullio Gulf and of Rapallo in particular, so much that in 1880 Achille Bizzoni, patriot, writer, journalist and director of the *Gazzettino Rosa*, put it this way: "The Riviera of Levante, which has been neglected for a long time by foreign visitors who ignored its existence or preferred to frequent the fashionable south of France in particular around Nice, was now considered quite highly and worthily described by visitors who put it next to its rival sister, up till now unfairly the favourite." (2)

One of the pieces of writing that Bizzoni was referring to was *Bathing in the sea in Liguria- The Rapallo Gulf*, published in Milan in 1875 and written by the Rumanian writer Elena Ghika a Rumanian who had married a Russian Prince and whose pen-name was Dora d'Istria. She stayed in Rapallo for the first time in 1870 where she lived in the Barbagelata house, as Arturo Ferretto wrote and was known as the *Russian Princess*." (3)

The Grand Hotel et d' Europe

The economic and social change of tourism in Rapallo needed well prepared and highly motivated entrepreneurs. “....the decisive element in the evolution of tourism in San Remo was the first real hotel, Hotel de Londres, which was built in 1861 by a gentleman from the Piedmont town of Rivoli, Mr Pietro Bogge, a pioneer in the hotel industry; whereas the real tourist life of Rapallo began in 1874 when Angelo Prandini, a gentleman from Piedmont, who had been running a hotel in Pegli (Pegli with San Remo, Alassio, Cornigliano, Nervi and La Spezia was one of the most frequented resorts in Liguria and well-known all over Europe), came to Rapallo with the idea of opening “a Grand Hotel which had to be more like what tourism needed in the future than at present.” Mr Prandoni in 1874 purchased the 17th Century Palazzo Serra, once called Spinola, opposite the medieval castle, giving the necessary impulse to the opening of the first grand hotel in Rapallo, the Grand Hotel Europe. With a rectangular shape, completely isolated by two private gardens, even if the view over the stream of Saint Francesco couldn't be defined as picturesque, the hotel had large rooms heated in the winter, source water, luxury apartments, reading rooms, big dining rooms, carriages for seasonal tours and to the station, nearby beach huts and a chapel for non-Catholics as many of the guests were English and German who increased a lot towards 1900.



The Grand Hotel et d'Europe (this was its correct name) underwent a complete renovation and enlargement in 1900-1901. Already before 1878 it was the only hotel mentioned- because it was first category- in the International guides like the one of J.A. Du Pays (*Italie et Sicilie*, - collection des guides Joanne, Paris). ...”. (4)