



## GUIDE

# ZANNONE LINE

*Boat excursion discovering  
the wild island of Circeo Park*

<b>Departure:</b>	11:00 AM - Molo Musco (under the orange lighthouse)
<b>Navigation:</b>	45-50 minutes from Ponza
<b>Trekking:</b>	About 2 hours of free trail on the island
<b>Organization:</b>	Cooperativa Barcaioli Ponzesi

### COOPERATIVA BARCAIOLI PONZESI

Via Sindaco De Luca, snc (Tunnel)  
04027 Ponza (LT), IT

Office Tel.: +39 0771 809929  
Mobile: +39 340 397 9916

**Web:** [barcaioliponza.it](http://barcaioliponza.it)  
**Email:** [barcaioli@barcaioliponza.it](mailto:barcaioli@barcaioliponza.it)

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## Safety Tips On Board

Welcome aboard! Today we will spend an entire day together discovering the wonders of the island of Zannone. Before we begin, here are some important guidelines to ensure your safety and comfort during the excursion.

### Rules to follow on board

1. Once on board, please go barefoot; flip-flops can only be used to go to the bathroom.
2. You can use the bathroom at any time during the day, except when we are stopped for swimming.
3. The onboard bathroom is not like the one at home: do not throw any objects (e.g., sanitary pads) or paper into the toilet. Everything goes in the bin. To flush, hold down the button for about 15 seconds. **The sink water is NOT DRINKABLE.**
4. For those with children: always keep them under supervision.
5. To go to the upper deck, go barefoot; we are not responsible for any injuries.
6. When leaving and entering the port and while sailing, hands, legs and objects must stay inside the boat.
7. Diving from the upper deck is not allowed.
8. During navigation, please remain seated to avoid losing your balance.
9. When boarding from the beach: board barefoot with rinsed feet (free of pebbles).
10. The beach has no waste collection service: bring everything back on board for disposal upon return.

**NOTE:** Make sure to take the right boat by checking the flag matching the color of your ticket.

## The Island of Zannone

### Origin and characteristics

**Zannone** is the northernmost island of the Pontine Archipelago. Unlike the other islands in the archipelago, which have volcanic origins, Zannone is characterized by **calcareous** and **dolomitic** rocks, similar to those of the nearby Circeo promontory.

For the **Romans** and **Greeks**, Zannone was called "**Sinonia**". The island is reachable in **45-50 minutes of sailing** from Ponza and is completely **uninhabited**, preserving an unspoiled natural environment.

Feature	Value
Surface area	about 1 km <sup>2</sup>
Maximum altitude	Monte Pellegrino (194 m)
Distance from Ponza	45-50 minutes sailing
Rock type	Calcareous and dolomitic
Ancient name	Sinonia (Greco-Roman)

### Circeo National Park

Zannone is part of the **Circeo National Park**, one of the oldest national parks in Italy, established in 1934. The island is subject to strict environmental protection constraints that preserve its unique ecosystem.

**NOTE:** Access to the island is regulated. You can do free trekking on marked trails for about 2 hours.

## The Excursion

After leaving the Bourbon port of Ponza, the navigation to Zannone takes about **45-50 minutes**. The excursion includes circumnavigation of the island with the possibility of going ashore for a trek of about 2 hours.

### Punta Varo and the Roman Murena Pool

The landing is at **Punta Varo**, a natural inlet where over time a landing has been created on the rock. On the right you can see an arched opening with steps leading down to the remains of the **Roman murena pool**.

The **murena pool** was a structure where the Romans bred moray eels, considered a delicacy. This archaeological testimony demonstrates the importance of the island in ancient times.

### Trekking on the Island

From Punta Varo starts a **trail** that allows you to explore the island. The route, lasting about **2 hours**, leads through unspoiled natural landscapes to **Monte Pellegrino** or, with a small detour through the holm oak forest, to the **Capo Negro Lighthouse**.

Destination	Route	Difficulty
Monte Pellegrino	Main trail	Medium
Capo Negro Lighthouse	Detour through holm oak forest	Medium
Cistercian Monastery	Visible along the route	-

### Hunting Lodge and Monastery

Along the trail you will encounter the **Hunting Lodge**, a structure used in the past by park rangers. Nearby are the evocative ruins of the **Cistercian Monastery of Santo Spirito**, testimony to the monastic presence on the island in the Middle Ages.



*Hunting lodge*



*Cistercian Monastery ruins*

## The Thief's Cave

Continuing the boat excursion along the coast, you arrive at the **Grotta del Mariuolo** (in Italian "thief"). The curious name derives from the fact that fishermen, when they pulled up their nets after a few hours or days, found them torn and fishless.

The "thief" responsible were the **monk seals** that once stayed in this cave to rest. Unfortunately, the monk seal has now almost completely disappeared from the Mediterranean.

## Capo Negro Lighthouse

Continuing the navigation you can admire the **Capo Negro Lighthouse**, which dominates the cliff. Above you can see the remains of the Cistercian monastery. The lighthouse is an important reference point for navigation in these waters.



Capo Negro Lighthouse

## The Calcareous Beach

Just after the lighthouse is the **Calcareous Beach** of Zannone, characterized by the typical white rocks that give the island its name. The calcareous formations create a unique landscape, very different from the volcanic coasts of Ponza and Palmarola.



*Calcareous Beach*

## Island History

### Pirates and Monasteries

Zannone is deeply linked to **piracy**, which influenced its fate for centuries. The most significant human presence on the island was that of the **Benedictine monks** (9th century) and then the **Cistercians** (12th century).

Both monastic communities were forced to definitively abandon the island and the **Monastery of Santo Spirito** due to the incessant raids by **Saracen and Barbary pirates**.

Legend has it that the pirate **Blackbeard** decided to hide his treasure on Zannone, attracted by its isolated, strategic position and dense vegetation, excellent as a base for his hideouts.

Period	Event
9th century	Benedictine monks settlement
12th century	Arrival of Cistercian monks
Middle Ages	Pirate raids and monastery abandonment
1914-1918	Sinking of the Ponza mail boat
Until 1970	Private property of the Casati family
1979	Entry into Circeo National Park

### World War I

During **World War I**, a German submarine off Zannone torpedoed the Ponza mail motor-sailer. **35 Ponzese people** lost their lives in the sinking, a tragedy that deeply marked the island's community.

### The Casati Family

Zannone also has a more recent and controversial history. Until **1970** the island was **private property** of the noble **Casati family**, who built a hunting villa there. The Casati family's story, which ended tragically, fueled the news and gossip of the time for years.

## Flora and Fauna

Zannone hosts a unique ecosystem in the Pontine Archipelago, thanks to its calcareous nature and the protection offered by the Circeo Park. The island is a true paradise for naturalists and birdwatching enthusiasts.

### The Holm Oak Forest

The island is covered by a dense **holm oak forest** (*Quercus ilex*), one of the last examples of primeval Mediterranean forest. The undergrowth hosts numerous Mediterranean scrub species.



*Holm oak forest*

### The Mouflons

On the island there are **mouflons**, a species of wild sheep with characteristic rounded horns. They were **imported from Sardinia** by the Casati family for hunting purposes and now live in the wild.



*The mouflons*

The island is also home to an **endemic lizard**, *Podarcis siculus patrizii*, found exclusively on Zannone and representing an important restricted endemism.

## Birdlife

Zannone is an important site for birdwatching. Among the species that can be spotted:

Species	Characteristics
Peregrine falcon	Raptor, nests on cliffs
Cory's shearwater	Pelagic seabird
Alpine swift	Summer migrant
Short-toed lark	Small passerine
Nightjar	Nocturnal crepuscular bird

## The Monk Rock

The circumnavigation of the island ends with the view of the **Monk Rock**, an evocative rock formation emerging from the sea. The name probably derives from its shape resembling the silhouette of a hooded monk.



*The Monk Rock*

After admiring the Monk Rock, the boat heads back to the **port of Ponza**. The excursion to Zannone represents a unique experience to discover a wild and unspoiled island, rich in history, nature and legends.

## Useful Information

Service	Details
Departure	11:00 AM from Molo Musco (under the orange lighthouse)
Navigation	45-50 minutes from Ponza
Trekking	About 2 hours free trail
Park	Circeo National Park
Return	In the afternoon (check time with the Cooperative)

Point of interest	Type	Notes
Punta Varo	Landing	Roman murena pool ruins
Santo Spirito Monastery	Historical	12th century Cistercian ruins
Hunting Lodge	Historical	Former park guard station
Thief's Cave	Naturalistic	Ancient seal home
Capo Negro Lighthouse	Panoramic	Cliff view
Calcareous Beach	Geological	Unique calcareous formations
Monk Rock	Naturalistic	Rock formation
Monte Pellegrino	Trekking	Highest point (194 m)

## Contacts



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