



Italian Grand Prix in Monza

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Off the Beaten Track in Monza

I was smitten instantly with the sleek lines and nonchalant sophistication of the gray 1953 *Lancia Aurelia*. Ah, I thought, "This will be *la mia macchina* (my car)."

I was milling about with members of my group trackside at *Autodromo Nazionale Monza* waiting to be driven around the track in vintage cars. Faster than I could say Juan Pablo Montoya (he holds the track speed record of 200 miles per hour), Sami Azer jumped into *my* Lancia and the driver took off.

I stubbornly resisted getting into the *Ferrari*, the BMW, or any of the other antique autos that queued up. I was holding out hope that my *Lancia* would return for me. As our allotted time dwindled, it became clear that my

options were either a newer model *Renault* sub-compact or the highway.

As Monza communications official *Roberto Arlati* maneuvered the Renault

at okay-by-me speeds of up to 50 miles per hour, I shelved my *Lancia* lust and savored the thrill of traversing this storied track. No hard feelings, Sami Azer. Not only are you a nice guy who had no clue I wanted the

Lancia, you're co-escorting this fabulous familiarization trip, sponsored by New Jersey-based travel company Central Holidays. Can't stay mad at you.

Racing and So Much More

While it's the Autodromo and the *continued on page 4*



Exploring the Po Valley on a Hotel Barge

During our trip on *La Bella Vita* through Italy's *Po Valley*, I began to understand why barging was once the preferred way for royalty to vacation.

Though just as luxurious, hotel barges are very different from river cruisers. They have many fewer passengers, and can escape into the remote countryside because they travel on canals, and thus provide tranquility. While the average number of passengers on a hotel barge is eight or ten, river cruisers typically carry over 100, and sometimes 200 passengers. Europe has had a canal system for transporting cargo since the 12th century. However, now most barges are recreational.

On our route from *Mantua* to *Venice*, we visited several provincial cities with ancient roots, plus a winery, markets and a villa. The boat was accompanied by a minibus and a guide, who transported us to sites along the way. Half a day was sightseeing, and the other half was relaxing on the boat. From the deck at the top we often had a wide view of farmlands, among the richest in Italy and major producers of milk and meat.

On the first night we moored on *Lake* *continued on page 2*

Autodromo Nazionale Monza has three race tracks.



Peter Booth

Mantua panorama from La Bella Vita

Maggiore, with Mantua's castle looming over us a few hundred feet away. The water was still except for ripples, and we feverishly took pictures before the light disappeared. Hotel barges do not travel at night. We slept there and began moving toward the *Bianca Canal* the next day. *La Bella Vita*, larger than most hotel barges, had capacity for 20 passengers, but since we were traveling earlier in the season, we had 13, a small enough number to dine at one table.

At each meal our chef *Eros*, aptly the name of the Greek god of love and creativity, gave delightful mini-lectures on the Northern Italian dishes he prepared. During the week we sampled a multitude of specialties, such as pumpkin *tortelli* with *amaretto*, roast veal, salmon tartar, *ventaglio* of scallops or eggplant *parmigiana*, saffron flavored cheese rolls, garlic and paprika zucchini, *carpaccio* (beef) salad, a variety of *cannoli* and fruit desserts, such as kiwi marinated in *grappa* and pineapple in thyme and balsamic vinegar. For the three of us who do not eat red meat, he created tasty alternatives, such as vegetable tortes and seafood salads.

Wines and cheeses were paired with the courses of each meal. Since we were in the heart of northern Italy's

richest farmland, we had many cheeses from the *Emilia-Romagna*, *Lombardy* and the *Veneto*. A highlight was *robiola*, soft-ripened and made with cow, goat and sheep milk. Wines came from as close as *Verona*, and as far away as Germany and *Sicily*.

Mantua and Ferrara

In the small city of Mantua, we walked from square to square while our guide pointed out the layers of Roman, Byzantine and Renaissance architecture. The Baroque cathedral has elaborate columns of trompe l'oeil and numerous oil paintings by such masters as *Correggio* and *Mantegna*.

In the walled city of *Ferrara*, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the enormous *Castle d'Este*, complete with moat, stands in the center of the huge town square. We wound our way down into the medieval section where the town actually started, and also toured *Schifanoia Palace*, whose early frescoes depicted allegories of the months. *Lucretia Borgia* was the duchess here in the early 16th century when she was married to *Alfonso d'Este*.

A Vineyard, A Villa and Seafood

At the vineyard *Dominio di Bagnoli*, a former monastery, we walked through gardens with lemon trees, mazes of smaller gardens with statues, and into the huge arbors, where one of the owners spent considerable time

explaining how the grapes were cultivated. The 18th-century artist *Longhi* designed the buildings, including a theater the owners built for the 18th-century playwright *Goldini*. The original frescoes are still visible on the walls.

For our one dinner off the boat we sipped wine on the long veranda and ate in the dining room of the rose

colored 17th-century villa *Ca'Zen* (www.tenutacazen.it), now a bed and breakfast in a five-acre park along the Po River. Lord Byron is said to have written his best poetry while having a love affair here with *Countess Guiccioli*.

Originally an area of salt flats, the town of *Chioggia* emerged in the 1400s when the barbarians were driving the Lombardians east into the swamplands that would become Venice. It is now one of the largest fishing towns in Italy. Boats line either side of the lagoon



Peter Booth

Ferrara castle

The first *Monza* track was b

“We headed north, passing many islands, some barren, some with small fishing huts, others that originally had hospitals for those returning from the Crusades, and later the Lido with its multi-colored houses.”

facing the Adriatic Sea, and 16th- and 17th-century towers atop the medieval churches rise above the smaller canals with houses and shops on either side.

The bell tower we passed on the way to the extensive fish market is said to be the oldest in the world. After going from stall to stall of colorful fresh fish, we helped find the mussels and sea bass Eros needed for dinner.



Peter Booth

Venice sunset

Last Stop: Venice

At that point we were at the entrance to the Lagoon of Venice, which separates the land from the Adriatic Sea. We headed north, passing many islands, some barren, some with small fishing huts, others that originally had hospitals for those returning from the Crusades, and later the Lido with its multi-colored houses. By noon on the last day we zoomed in on the classic Venice view with the Byzantine domes of St. Mark’s and the lacy loggias of the *Doge’s Palace*.

After giving us a helpful introduction to the sprawling St. Mark’s Square

area, with its many entrances and exits, our guide led us into the Doge’s Palace, whose walls and ceilings are covered with gold framed oil paintings by such Renaissance masters as *Tintoretto* and *Veronese*.

On the last night *La Bella Vita* moored in the quiet, walled basin of the Arsenal, where Venice’s ships were built until the 1700s. Eros created a sublime seven course captain’s dinner,

and the next morning we said our farewells and began our own exploration of the city.

La Bella Vita, the good life, had come to an end, but the trip had been a lush introduction to Venice, where we stayed on for eight more days to see Renaissance art in the city’s many museums and churches.

— Emilie Harting

The Details

La Bella Vita

European Waterways
(877) 879-8808 (in the U.S.)
www.gobarging.com

Rates: Prices for a 6-night cruise in 2011 start at \$3,490 per person for a twin/double cabin, including all meals, wines, an open bar, excursions, local transfers. Full boat charters also available from \$57,000.

On alternate weeks the boat travels from Venice to Mantua.

Travelers on the Mantua to Venice route usually meet at the *Laguna Palace Hotel*, close to the Venice airport and train stations. It’s a modern glass marina complex with excellent food.

www.nhlagunapalace.hotelinvenice.com

On the Venice to Mantua trip, travelers usually meet at the *Papadopoli Hotel*, close to churches and museums with famous art.

www.hotel-papadopoli-venice.com

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uilt in 1922 by 3,500 workers.

Formula 1 Italian Grand Prix that have brought *Monza* international fame, the city boasts a rich history and splendid attractions beyond the race track. My group arrived in Monza after several days touring the idyllic Lake Como area and the towns of *Como* and *Lecco* that anchor the west and east legs of the lake. Monza is the main city of the small province of *Monza-Brianza*, long considered the serene country garden north of Milan.



Autodromo bookstore



Author in the 600-seat media room at Monza

Guidarte guide and trained architect *Laura Radaelli* welcomed us warmly for what would be, fittingly, a whirlwind day. Perhaps Laura's mobile phone ring tone—the howl of Formula 1 cars at full throttle—should have been a clue.

A Medieval Queen's Legacy

The historical and religious foundation of the city is the bull's eye of the charming walled medieval center: The *Duomo* of Saint John the Baptist. The current Gothic structure was begun in 1300 on the remains of the original *Duomo* commissioned by Queen *Teodolinda* to celebrate her dynasty and the conversion of the Kingdom of Italy to Catholicism. *Teodolinda* is revered in *Monza*.



Monza Cathedral

The Longobards (or Lombards) were an East Germanic pagan tribe that

likely migrated south from Scandinavia during the early Middle Ages. From their invasion of the area that is now northern Italy in 568, they went on to rule much of the peninsula then



In the Renault, not racing

known as The Kingdom of Italy. Their legacy prevails today in the name of the region Lombardy.

Longobard King *Autari* married *Teodolinda*, the Catholic daughter of a Bavarian Duke, in 589 and so she moved to Monza. A year later, she was widowed. She soon married again to *Agilulfo*, the Duke of Turin. After his death in 616, she ruled as regent for her young son *Adaloalfo*.

Inside the *Duomo* to the left of the main altar, we stepped up into the *Teodolinda Chapel* that houses the Queen's remains. We could glimpse only sections of the floor to ceiling frescoes depicting events of the Queen's life. Painted by brothers *Ambrogio* and *Gregorio Zavattari* in the mid 1400s, the work is currently under restoration.

Fortunately, one priceless artifact was still visible. The young woman who had unlocked the chapel stepped up to the altar and

reached into the tabernacle to lift out a pillow holding the *Corona Ferrea* (Iron Crown). The circle of six wide gold sections is adorned with decorative enamel and precious stones.

Inside the crown is a metal band that is said to be one of the iron nails used in the Crucifixion of Christ. Used for many Longobard coronations including Charlemagne and Frederick I Barbarossa, the crown was donated to the *Duomo di Monza* in the 11th century.

We descended to the *Museo e Tesoro del Duomo di Monza* (the Museum and Treasury of the *Duomo*). Recently modernized, this sleek space houses a collection of fine, distinctive objects. One of the most striking is the gilt-silver "Hen and Chicks" from *Teodolinda's* tomb. Fashioned by Milanese goldsmiths, the naturalistic hen with ruby eyes may date from the



Museo e Tesoro del Duomo di Monza

Chiocci con i pulcini

4th century while the seven early 7th-century chicks, with sapphire eyes, are more stylized. *Laura* explained that the exact meaning of the group is uncertain. It may symbolize the Church protecting the faithful or Queen *Teodolinda* surrounded by Longobard dukes.

The Royal Palace

Just minutes from the medieval *centro* stands the magnificent *Villa Reale* (Royal Villa), which a different noble family—also Northerners—created more than a thousand years after *Teodolinda's* reign. Queen *Maria Teresa* of Austria commissioned the Neoclassical structure as a warm-weather estate for her son, the

Archduke Ferdinand in 1777. Calling this grandiosity a summer house is like referring to St. Peter's as a parish church.

Designed by *La Scala* architect *Giuseppe Piermarini* and completed in 1780, the villa features a horseshoe layout fronted by a formal courtyard and rose gardens. The rear of the villa gives out to lovely English gardens that are but a small portion of the sprawling *Parco di Monza* (more on that later.)



The central living quarters are flanked by the connected chapel, greenhouses, and stables with unified facades. Standing on *Viale Brianza* facing the villa, it's impossible for the eye to take in the structure in its wide-angled entirety.

Laura explained that we would be touring some sections of the Villa recently restored by the *Consorzio Villa Reale e Parco di Monza*. Comprised of representatives from the Ministry for Cultural Heritage and Activities, the region of Lombardy, Milan City Council and City of Monza, the Consorzio is dedicated to restoring the property and revitalizing it as a museum and civic space. One pending goal is to ready the site for international visitors who'll be coming from the World Expo Milano 2015. A daunting project, to be sure, considering the number of political entities involved.

After the Austrians, the villa experienced trauma, renovation and

then neglect. In the late 18th century, *Napolean Bonaparte* barracked his troops at Villa Reale. Definitely not good for the interior. The Austrians returned for a bit but after the unification of Italy in 1861, King



Guidarte guide Laura Radaelli



Villa Reale, the Grand Ballroom

Umberto I and Queen *Margherita* (now recognized by her namesake pizza) of the House of Savoy took over the property as a year-round residence. In the mid-1880s, Umberto refurbished it in contemporary décor and even wired the place making it probably the first palace in the world with electricity.

Umberto and Margherita were distant cousins fated to an unhappy union in an arranged alliance. Umberto kept a mistress ensconced nearby and employed secret passageways in and out of the villa to visit her discreetly. Passing through the silk-walled separate bedrooms, dressing rooms, and bathrooms of Umberto and Margherita, I could almost feel the sadness of their parallel lives. Ironically, private weddings take place these days in the Grand Ballroom.

Margherita took pleasure in literature. On Sundays, she hosted literary salons, favoring poets particularly. *Giosuè Carducci*, a Nobel-prize-winning poet was said to adore her. His cohorts mocked his devotion, saying he had turned from "a Republican Lion into a Royal Dog."

Part of the Consorzio's architectural teams' ongoing work is playing detective to retrieve original furniture and fixtures. Pieces have been found as far away as Buenos Aires and as close as the back garden. Of particular



note are the furniture and wood work of *Giuseppe Maggiolini* dating from the late 1700s. Working with dozens of different woods, soaking them first in cold water and then plunging them into hot sand, he achieved shadings as subtle as a master painter. The parquet and floor-to-ceiling cabinetry in Umberto's library is stunning.

The Savoy's residence at the villa came to an abrupt climax in the first year of the new century. Umberto was assassinated on July 29, 1900 during a gymnastic competition in the park. It was a sweltering night and the king decided not to wear his metal jacket even though there had been a previous attempt on his life.

Waiting in the park was *Gaetano* Bresci, a Tuscan weaver living and working in Paterson, N.J., who shot the king four times. *Bresci* was avenging the death of his sister, who was one of 90 unarmed civilians shot by Italian military police during a protest in Milan over high bread prices.

ze of New York's Central Park.

Backing up to the Villa Reale are more than 1,700 acres of Parco di Monza, the fourth-largest walled park in Europe. This verdant space of meadows and woods is twice the size of New York's Central Park.

After Umberto's burial in the Pantheon in Rome, the Savoy's dispersed the villa's furnishings and departed, never to return.

A Pleasure Park

Backing up to the Villa Reale are more than 1,700 acres of Parco di Monza, the fourth-largest walled park in Europe. This verdant space of meadows and woods is twice the size of New York's Central Park. Designed by Luigi Canonica for Napoleon Bonaparte and his stepson Eugène de Beauharnais, Viceroy of Italy, it encompasses verdant woods, meadows, stately villas, farm buildings and mills.

The Lambro River skirts the southern end of the park. Several bridges span it but the oldest is the 15th-century Ponte

delle Grazie Vecchie that crosses from the park into the city.

The Parco draws visitors from Milan and other towns in the region for its natural and recreational attractions such as the large campground.



Loggia of Palazzo Comunale



Lambro river

The Autodromo Nazionale Monza race track is located right inside the park. The Autodromo was built in a mere 110 days in 1922, commissioned by the Automobile Club of Milan. Extensively modernized since WW II, it is now owned by the cities of Monza and Milan and managed by the Automobile Club of Italy. Several civilian driver training schools operate at the track.

On days with no scheduled events, the public is welcome to visit the paddock, shopping area, the pit building, gift and book shops, bars and a self-service

restaurant, and to traverse the track in cars, motorcycles, bicycles, roller-blades, or on foot. My group was treated to a special behind-the-scenes visit to the control room, penalty room and the press room, which has space for 600 journalists.



For an outsider, it may seem jarring to find one of the fastest car racing courses on earth plunked in a vast serene park but it's a surprisingly harmonic convergence of technology and nature. Even in my brief visit, I sensed that the city and its region of Lombardy consider innovation and culture equals.

From a medieval queen to racing royalty, Monza has long been up to speed.

— Sharon Sanders

Travel and food communicator Sharon Sanders nurtures her inner Italian at www.simpleitaly.com

The Po is the longest ri

The Details

How to Get There

To reach Monza by car

From Milan, it's a 14-mile drive. Take *Viale Fulvio Testi* towards *Monza*, then SS36 towards *Lecco, Monza Villa Reale* exit.

From Como, it's a 25-mile drive. Take SS342 *Provinciale per Lecco* then SS36 to Monza.

To reach Monza from Milan airports by shuttle

Alimonda offers shuttle service to and from Malpensa and Linate Airports to Monza.

Reservations required 48 hours in advance (39) 039 3908983 or (39) 039 322306
www.alimonda.com

To reach Monza by train

From Milan's Central Station on the suburban rail network, it's a 13-minute ride. From the town of Como, the ride is a little over 1 hour. From Lecco, it's a 30-minute ride.
www.trenitalia.com

What to See

City of Monza

(39) 039 23721
www.comune.monza.it

Guidarte Association for promotion of the historic and artistic legacy of Monza

(39) 039 323222
www.guidarte.net

Guidarte offers several guided tours of either historical Monza, Villa Reale, or the park.

The fee is 60€ per hour for groups of up to 25 people plus the cost of any admission tickets. There's a 20% additional charge for English and 20% additional for Sundays and

public holidays. Customized tours may be arranged upon request.

Sites

Museo e Tesoro del Duomo di Monza

(39) 039 326383
www.museoduomomonza.it
Open Tuesday to Sunday: from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 2 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Tickets for the Teodolinda Chapel and Museum and Treasury of Monza Cathedral are 8€.

Villa Reale

(39) 039 39464213
www.reggiadimonza.it
On September 25, 2011, the restored rooms of Umberto I and Margherita will officially open to the public. Entrance fee and hours are to be announced.

Villa Reale Gardens

Open daily
Free admission
Winter hours: 7 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.
Summer hours: 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Parco di Monza

Open daily
Free admission to public areas
Winter hours: 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.
Summer hours: 7 a.m. to 8:30 p.m.
Biking trails include "The Green Giants" circuit passing centuries-old trees and gardens and "The Trail of the Park's Gnomes" for kids.

Autodromo Nazionale Monza

(39) 039 24821
www.monzanet.it
Open to the public all days except when race events are scheduled and Christmas.
Hours: Same as the Parco di Monza (preceding)
Fee for entrance from the Vedano Gate: 5€

Sunday afternoons from December to February, individuals can drive on the track in their own car for 30 minutes at a cost of 45€.

Where to Stay

Hotel de la Ville

Viale Regina Margherita di Savoia, 15
(39) 039 39421
www.hoteldelaville.com
Rates: A double superior room starts at 307€



A member of Small Luxury Hotels of the World, located across the street from the Villa Reale, this hotel feels like the home of a friend who has exquisite taste in antiques and décor. Comfy not stuffy. Intimate and charming. There are 63 rooms divided between the main hotel and the deluxe adjacent renovated villa.

Where to Eat

The Derby Grill

Hotel de la Ville (preceding)
Order a la carte or the 3-course tasting menu showcasing typical Lombardy dishes such as risotto with luganega sausage and red wine.
Open daily.
Tasting menu without wine, 39€ for lunch 49€ for dinner.

Osteria Della Buona Condotta

Via Cavenago, 2
Ornago
(39) 039 6919056
www.osteriadellabuonacondotta.it
Closed Sunday night

A little over nine miles east of Monza, *Matteo Scibilia*, current president of *Cuochi di Lombardia* association of chefs/restaurateurs, and *Nicoletta Rossi* specialize in seasonal fare prepared with ingredients from artisanal suppliers. In the country inn style dining room or outdoors under the garden gazebo (dogs are welcome!), sample dishes such as an antipasto platter of mixed salumi from *Marco d'Oggioni*; a *primo* risotto of *Camaroli* rice with *Vignola* cherries and smoked *provola* cheese; a *secondo* of swordfish *involtini* flavored with eggplant and mint. Average cost of three-course meal without wine is about 50€.

Travel Packages

Central Holidays Italian Grand Prix Packages

(800) 935-5000
www.centralholidays.com

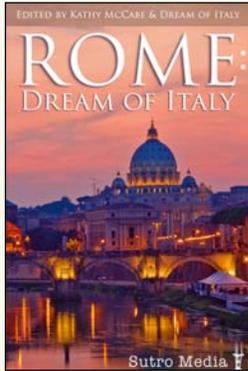
This New Jersey-based travel firm creates custom, individualized packages that can include entrance tickets to the Italian Grand Prix race, with either air plus land or land only. Held every year in September, this year's race is scheduled for September 9-11. During Grand Prix, Monza hosts countless events including concerts, dancing, sports competitions, book and photography exhibits. A custom package could include stays at Lake Como, Milan or other destinations in Lombardy.

1 € = \$1.42 at press time

ver (424 miles) in Italy.

Best of Rome From New App

This summer Dream of Italy released our first iPhone/iPad app called *Rome: Dream of Italy*. (We're hoping an Android version will be ready in a few months.) It includes over 380 entries on Rome's ancient sites, museums, hotels, restaurants, shops, markets, tour guides, culinary experiences, churches, parks, scenic views, day trips and more. We updated all of our Rome content from the past nine years and added new finds to the app. The app is only \$2.99 at Apple's iTunes Store (you can click on the link from the home page of www.DreamofItaly.com) and includes lifetime updates! Here are a few excerpts:



ones he found with Troiani. The guide has helped young women scour designer boutiques for a special rite-of-passage dress and customized a special bead and costume jewelry tour.

The best part of the tours is that Troiani is just lovely company and clearly

passionate about showing off her home as well as making sure her clients have an unforgettable shopping experience. For more information, call (39) 338 3508829 or visit www.romeshoppingguide.com

– K.M.

Museum Just for Kids

Though it's subtitled "The museum for the children of Roma" *Explora* is fun for everyone, including adults and visitors around the world (the staff members all speak at least Italian and English). This interactive kids' haven uses the concept of play to introduce fun and innovative educational lessons. The hands-on exhibitions allow kids to use their imagination while they create, engage in learning activities and stimulate their curiosity.

The museum features a playful learning environment



such as the child-size town, complete with a post office, supermarket, fitness center and bank. Children explore the life-like areas with an appointed guide but are allowed to exercise their freedom and spontaneity expected of a youngster. Or you can get your little one cooking at an early age in the Kitchen Studio. Here kids, ages five to 12, participate in kneading, rolling and baking dough to make biscuits they



can later take home.

The museum is open Tuesday through Sunday. Tickets for adults and children over three are 7€. Family tours are offered at four times per day. Via Flaminia, 80; (39) 06 3613776; www.mdbr.it

– Kendra Howard

Where to Eat Pistachio Gelato

Gelateria dei Gracchi, located near the Vatican, is run by ice cream maker *Alberto Manassei* and serves what many argue is the best pistachio *gelato* in Rome, using pistachios plucked from the area near Sicily's Mount Etna. The fruit flavors, made with fresh, seasonal fruit, have authentic fruit flavors and colors — the pistachio gelato is a muted green, as opposed to a bright green seen in some shops that use artificial food dyes.



Nut-flavored *gelati* can be ordered pre-scooped and rolled in whole pine nuts, pistachios, slivered or toasted almonds and hazelnuts. The chocolate flavor is made with rich chocolate fondant and Cuban rum, then rolled in cocoa powder, while the dairy-free dark chocolate is 80% cocoa.

Besides the standard flavors, the shop also serves creative combinations like meringue with pistachios, apple cinnamon and coffee with star anise. Manassei accommodates for egg, milk, and gluten allergies, and uses only natural ingredients to craft an authentic homemade taste. Via dei Gracchi, 272; (39) 06 3216668; www.gelateriadeigracchi.com

– Elaine Murphy

Private Rome Shopping Tour

No matter what it is you are looking for — from antiques to leather — surely one of Rome's magnificent shops or markets has it. But the Eternal City has so many hidden treasures, where to start? If you're serious about shopping, consider enlisting *Stefania Troiani* as your *Rome Shopping Guide*.



The Rome native will customize your private shopping tour to your exact needs and desires but some of her popular shopping itineraries focus on one of the following themes: shopping, orientation, made in Italy, outlets, food, designer, luxury, etc.



Almost no request is too unusual for Troiani. She had one client who wanted to buy exclusive luxury pens and ended up purchasing 5,000€ worth of the

The Commune of Rome covers 496 square miles.