



# LAKE COMO & LAKE LUGANO

## 3 PERFECT DAYS

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### ♥ DAY 1 // FROM COMO TO CERNOBBIO

Take an early funicular up to Brunate (p111) to catch views of the city and lake under the rising sun's rays. Back in Como, explore the old centre, making time for the Duomo and to see the remarkable frescos in Basilica di Sant'Abbondio (p109). It's then time for lunch at Osteria del Gallo (p112), after which you can head 7km around the lake to Cernobbio (p118), to admire the pretty lakeside villas, followed by a drive up to Monte Bisbino (p119), arriving in time for sunset views over the lake. You could finish with a splendid meal at Gatto Nero (p124).

### ♥ DAY 2 // FERRY YOURSELF TO BELLAGIO AND VILLA CARLOTTA

Catch a ferry from Como to Bellagio (p114), where you could take a room and spend the morning discovering the gardens of two fine villas, and the topsy-turvy beauty of the town itself. Lunch could follow at Albergo Silvio (p118) before taking a car ferry to Cadenabbia for an afternoon visit to nearby Tremezzo's Villa Carlotta (p122). Car ferries returning to Bellagio run late into the evening.

### ♥ DAY 3 // VARENNA'S VILLAS AND A SERENE ABBEY

From Bellagio, jump on another car ferry to Varenna (p126), a rival in beauty to Bellagio. You could spend the bulk of a day here, especially if you include a walk up to the Castello di Vezio (p127) to gaze back down on Varenna. Those with wheels can easily head north for the medieval hamlet of Corenno Plinio (p127) and, just further on, the lovely Abbazia di Piona (p128), where you can stay if you don't want to turn back.

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# LAKE COMO

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In the shadow of the snow-covered Rhaetian Alps and hemmed in on both sides by steep, verdant hillsides, Lake Como (aka Lake Lario) is the most spectacular and least visited of the three major lakes. Shaped like an upside-down Y, measuring around 160km in squiggly shoreline, it's littered with villages, including exquisite Bellagio and Varenna. Where the southern and western shores converge is the lake's main town, Como. Lecco, the other large town on the lake, sits where the southern shore meets the less-explored eastern shore.

Among the area's siren calls are some extraordinarily sumptuous villas, often graced with paradisiacal gardens. The mountainous terrain means that opportunities for taking bird's-eye views of the lake and its towns are numerous. Much of the area has a wild feel, especially with its extravagantly luxuriant greenery. Como long ignored tourism, confident of the wealth generated by the silk business. As foreign competition in that sector began to bite deeper, interest in developing tourism grew from the mid-1990s. Still, the figures speak for themselves. While 1.5 million overnight stays were registered in Lake Como hotels in 2008, Lake Maggiore had 12 million and Lake Garda 23 million. For that reason alone, the lake and its surrounding area offer the traveller the chance to enjoy a real sense of discovery.

## TRANSPORT

**Navigazione Lago del Como** (☎ 031 57 92 11, 800 55 18 01; [www.navigazione.laghi.it](http://www.navigazione.laghi.it); Piazza Cavour) Ferries and hydrofoils operated by this Como-based company criss-cross the lake, departing year-round from the

## TOP FIVE

### LAKE VIEWS

**Rifugio Menaggio** (p122) A couple of hours' hiking is rewarded with Lake Como views.

**Monte Bisbino** (p119) A winding 17km drive leads to wonderful vistas over Lake Como, the Lombard plains and Alps.

**Brunate** (p111) Take the funicular high above Como.

**Castello di Vezio** (p127) A castle lookout for eagle-eye views of Varenna.

**Cima Sighignola** (p182) Italy's Balcony affords views as far west as the Matterhorn.

jetty at the north end of Piazza Cavour. Single fares range from €1.90 (Como–Cernobbio) to €10 (Como–Lecco). Return fares are double. Hydrofoil fast services entail a supplement of €1.10 to 3.90, depending on the trip.

**Car ferries** (see p118) connect Bellagio with Varenna and Cadenabbia. A whole host of other tickets is available, including those for day cruises with lunch and those that include admission to lakeside villas.

## COMO

### pop 83,170

With its charming historic centre, Como sparkles year-round. Within its remaining 12th-century city walls, the beautiful people of this prosperous city whisk about from shop to cafe, sweeping by the grandeur of the city's cathedral, villas and the loveliness of its lakeshore with admirable insouciance. The days since the Milanese conquered Como's forces in 1127 and ordered the destruction of all walls and buildings save its churches are long gone. Indeed, the locals seem quite indifferent to folks from the Lombard capital.

Como built its wealth on the silk industry and it remains Europe's most important producer of silk products. You can buy silk scarves and ties for a fraction of

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