



ACCOMMODATION

FINDING ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation in the Lombardy and lakes area in northern Italy ranges from the simple *rifugio* (mountain hut), through grand lakeside villas, to fashion-conscious, avant-garde digs at the hip and high end of the scale in Milan.

Alberghi (hotels) and *pensioni* (guest houses) make up the bulk of the offerings, covering a rainbow of options from cheap dives near train stations to grand hotels oozing luxury. There is often little difference between a *pensione* and an *albergo* but a *pensione* will generally be of one- to three-star quality and tradition-

ally has been a family-run operation, while an *albergo* can be awarded up to five stars.

The star system gives limited clues to quality. One-star hotels/*pensioni* tend to be basic and without private bathrooms. Two-star places are similar but each room will generally have a private bathroom. At three-star joints you can assume reasonable standards. Four- and five-star hotels offer facilities such as room service, laundry and dry-cleaning.

Locande (inns) long fell into much the same category as *pensioni*, but the term has become trendy and reveals little about the quality of a place – not infrequently it will be attached to a nice bijou spot. *Affittacamere* are rooms for rent in private houses and are generally simple. B&Bs have become a popular alternative to hotels since the 1990s, partly due to relaxed regulations that have allowed their proliferation.

For those looking for a base for a week or two, an apartment, house or villa is tempting. There is enormous variety, from studio flats in towns like Como

BOOK YOUR STAY ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at www.lonelyplanet.com/hotels. You'll find the true, insider low-down on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

ONLINE RESOURCES

The following is a non-exhaustive list of websites where you can begin your search for lodgings in and around the lakes area of northern Italy.

Agriturismo in Lombardia (www.lombardia.campagnamica.it, in Italian) One of the most exhaustive sites on farm-stays and farm restaurants in Lombardy, which takes in most of the lakes district.

Agriturismo.com (www.agriturismo.com) Search system by region and province.

Agriturist (www.agriturist.com, in Italian) Limited selection of farm-stays.

Alberghi in Italia (www.alberghi-in-italia.it) Search by region and province with direct links to hotel websites.

All Hotels in Italy (www.hotelsitalyonline.com) US-based hotel booking agency.

Bed & Breakfast Italia (www.bbitalia.it) With about 30 options in Milan, a dozen in Verona and a sprinkling across the rest of the region.

Club Alpino Italiano (CAI; www.cai.it, in Italian) Owns and runs many of the *rifugi* (mountain huts).

Cottages & Castles (www.cottagesandcastles.com.au) An Australian-based specialist in villa-style accommodation, with 20 addresses in the lakes area.

Cuendet (www5.cuendet.com) Has some attractive properties (mostly holiday houses sleeping up to 10 people) on Lakes Como and Garda.

Guest in Italy (www.guestinitaly.com) Click on Lakes and then search for hotels by town.

Holiday Lettings (www.holidaylettings.co.uk) Has several hundred apartments to let in the lakes area, especially Lake Como.

In Italia (www.initalia.it) Detailed site with hotel descriptions, photos and occasional comments from guests.

Interhome (www.interhome.co.uk) Click on Lakes & Mountains and search on Italy and Switzerland for apartments.

Monastery Stays (www.monasterystays.com) A good starting point for searching out accommodation in convents or run by religious orders.

Parker Villas (www.parkervillas.co.uk) Has a limited selection of houses and villas, mostly on Lakes Como, Maggiore and Garda.

through to more spacious flats scattered about lakeside villages, or independent houses and villas (more often than not equipped with swimming pools). In some cases, historic buildings have been completely refurbished and divided into holiday apartments. Holiday apartment blocks (containing anything from four to 100 apartments) known as *residenze* are another option for stays packaged in weeks.

Tourist offices can usually supply you with exhaustive lists of all these options.

Agriturismi (farm-stays) are also an option. Some are working farms, others converted farmhouses (often with a pool). Provinces especially blessed with

such options include Brescia, Mantua and Verona but you'll find a handful scattered across the whole lakes area – there is no shortage of websites.

The network of *rifugi* in the Alps and Lombard pre-Alps are usually only open from July to September. Accommodation is generally basic and in dormitories but some of the larger refuges have doubles. The price per person (which usually includes breakfast) ranges from €17 to €26 in a dorm depending on the quality of the refuge. A hearty postwalk single-dish dinner will set you back another €11.50. Many huts belong to the Club Alpino Italiano (CAI). Book in advance where possible.