

INTRODUCING THE ITALIAN LAKES

DAMEN SIMONS

FORMED AT THE END OF THE LAST ICE AGE, AND A POPULAR HOLIDAY SPOT SINCE ROMAN TIMES, THE LAKES HAVE AN ENDURING, BREATHTAKING BEAUTY.

♥ Lined up one after another across northern Italy and, in part, the southern Swiss canton of Ticino, the lakes each have distinct characters. Lake Garda, the largest and most easterly, is like a cross between the French Riviera and southern Italy, with its olive and lemon groves. Central Lake Como mixes charming lakeside towns, such as Bellagio, with wild mountains and forests. The western lakes of Lugano and Maggiore are dotted with pretty towns, castles and villas.

In counterpoint come the big city sophistication of Milan and artistic wonders of cities like Bergamo, Mantua and Verona, while Po valley towns hide architectural gems, and deep green valleys crawl north to the Orobic Alps.

Hikers and cyclists will find plenty to keep them occupied, from the gentle vineyard plains of the Franciacorta to lakeside mountain trails, while foodies will discover all manner of local specialties, from steaming *pizzoccheri* (buckwheat pasta) and polenta to grilled fresh lake perch, all washed down with some of Italy's finest wines.

Art, architecture, scenery, sport, food and wine – no sensory stone is left unturned around the Italian lakes.

TOP Isola San Giulio, in Lake Orta **BOTTOM LEFT** A fountain in Bergamo's Città Alta **BOTTOM RIGHT** Mantua's Palazzo Ducale, in front of the Basilica di Sant'Andrea



LAKE ORTA



BERGAMO

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LAKE LUGANO



BELLAGIO



ROBERTO GEBONETTA
GIANNI GEBONETTI



LAKE MAGGIORE



ROBERTO GEBONETTA

VERONA

TOP LEFT A view of Lake Lugano from Brè village
TOP RIGHT An Isola Bella garden, Borromeo Islands
BOTTOM LEFT The grounds of Villa Melzi d'Eril, outside Bellagio
BOTTOM CENTRE Stone seats in Verona's Roman Arena
BOTTOM RIGHT Centovalli railway

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CENTOVALLI

GETTING STARTED

THE ITALIAN LAKES



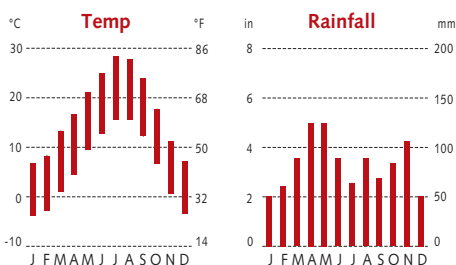
NOSENTHO/OLIVIERO

WHAT'S NEW

- ★ The Triennale di Milano's permanent design museum (p43)
- ★ BikeMi, Milan's public bicycle service (p57)
- ★ Classic racing cars at Museo Mille Miglia (p167)
- ★ The Museo del Ciclismo, on one of the legs of the Giro d'Italia cycle race (p116)
- ★ Mussolini's Arengario in Piazza del Duomo, Milan, will host the Museo del Novecento (p42)

CLIMATE: MILAN

Average Max/Min



PRICE GUIDE

	BUDGET	MIDRANGE	TOP END
SLEEPING	<€80	€80-200	>€200
MEALS	<€20	€20-45	>€45
PARKING	€0.50/hr	€2/hr	€20-25/day

GRANT DIXON



DARIO TORNABUONI

TOP Gargnano harbour (p200), Lake Garda **BOTTOM LEFT** A rifugio in northern Italy's mountains **BOTTOM RIGHT** A Roman bridge over the Adige in Verona (p213) **FAR RIGHT** Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II (p47), in Milan

ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation around Italy's lakes ranges from shoreline camping grounds, youth hostels, *agriturismi* (farm-stays) and *rifugi* (mountain huts), through to little B&Bs and hotels of all classes, to sublime comfort in lakeside villas and ultratrendy digs in the heart of metropolitan Milan. Or consider apartments, which offer the advantage of private cooking facilities. One key attraction of the lakes is the chance to enjoy some splendid views, so it is often worth paying extra for a room directly overlooking the lake of your choice. See the Accommodation chapter (p286) for listings.

MAIN POINTS OF ENTRY

MALPENSA AIRPORT (www.sea-aeroportimilano.it) Most European and other international flights use Milan's Malpensa airport, 50km northwest of the city.

LINATE AIRPORT (www.sea-aeroportimilano.it) The majority of domestic and a handful of European flights use Milan's secondary airport, a convenient 7km from the city centre.

ORIO AL SERIO (☎ 035 32 63 23; www.sacbo.it) Just 4km southeast of Bergamo train station, this airport receives regular European flights and has direct transport links to Milan.

THINGS TO TAKE

- ★ Robust shoes for walks in the hills around the lakes
- ★ A corkscrew for picnicking with marvellous wines
- ★ Mosquito repellent – a must in summer at the lakes
- ★ Warm clothes for the cool evenings and the mountains
- ★ Swimming costume for bracing baths in the lakes



MILANO CORRELLI

WEBLINKS

ITALIA (www.enit.it) Italian tourism

REGIONE LOMBARDIA: PORTALE DEL TURISMO (www.turismo.regione.lombardia.it) Lombardy tourism

DISTRETTO DEI LAGHI (<http://distrettolaghi.eu>) Lakes Maggiore and Orta

PROVINCIA DI VERONA (www.tourism.verona.it) Verona province, including Lake Garda

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

THE
ITALIAN LAKES

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JANUARY

CORTEO DEI RE MAGI

The three wise men hit Milan for this parade to celebrate Epiphany on 6 January (p51)

MARCH

MOSTRA NAZIONALE DELLA CAMELIA

Verbania gets a splash of extra floral colour in late March from a display of more than 200 varieties of camellia (p83; www.camelieinmostra.it)

APRIL

SETTIMANA DEL TULIPANO

Endless fields of tulips erupt in bloom on the grounds of Villa Taranto at the end of April (p80)

MAY

FESTIVAL DI CREMONA CLAUDIO MONTEVERDI

A month-long series of concerts in Cremona celebrates Claudio Monteverdi and other baroque-era composers (p172; www.teatroponchielli.it)

JUNE

GIRO D'ITALIA

The famous cycle race takes place in Bergamo's valleys and finishes in Milan (p23; www.ilgiroditalia.it)

JULY

ARENA DI VERONA

Verona's Roman Arena is a spectacular place for an opera season; from mid-June to the end of August (p220; www.arena.it)

ESTIVAL JAZZ

Free open-air jazz concerts over three days in early July in Lugano (www.estivaljazz.ch)

AUGUST

SWISS NATIONAL DAY

Fireworks over Lake Lugano celebrate Switzerland's nationhood on 1 August

FESTIVAL INTERNAZIONALE DI FILM

This two-week film festival in Locarno, one of Europe's most important, has been going since 1948 (p74; www.pardo.ch)

TOP Giro d'Italia racers power up a hill **RIGHT** Crowds in Locarno during the Festival Internazionale di Film

SEPTEMBER

ITALIAN F1 GRAND PRIX

Monza's historic autodrome hosts the F1 circuit (p62; www.monzanet.it)

CENTOMIGLIA

As many as 350 vessels turn out for this prestigious sailing regatta on Lake Garda (www.centomiglia.it)

SETTIMANE MUSICALI

Classical music from around the world is celebrated in Ascona from the end of August to mid-October (www.settimane-musicali.ch)

OCTOBER

MILANO MUSICA FESTIVAL

Contemporary compositions feature in a month of concerts throughout the city and at La Scala (www.milanomusica.org)

IL PALIO DI VIGEVANO

Parades in period dress celebrate central Vigevano's glory days as a Sforza residence, on the second weekend in October (www.paliodivigevano.it)

NOVEMBER

FESTA DEL TORRONE

A weekend celebration of the sticky Christmas sweet *torrone* (nougat) in Cremona (p172; www.festadeltorronecremona.it)

DECEMBER

FESTA DI SANT'AMBROGIO & FIERA DEGLI OBEI OBEI

The feast day of Milan's patron saint is celebrated in the city on 7 December with a large Christmas fair at Castello Sforzesco

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CULTURE

THE ITALIAN LAKES

TOP VILLAS

VILLA BALBIANELLO (p121) Dominating a wooded promontory, this villa was used as a set in *Casino Royale*

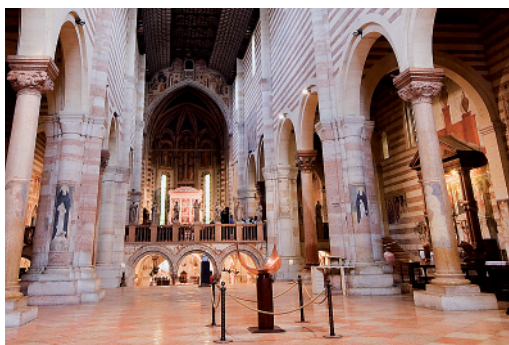
VILLA TARANTO (p80) A Scottish officer turned the grounds into a flourishing botanic garden

ISOLA BELLA (p86) The powerful Milanese Borromeo clan converted this island into a luxurious baroque fantasy

VILLA MELZI D'ERIL (p114) Soothing English-style gardens surround a stately home in Bellagio

VILLA CARLOTTA (p122) The villa bristles with statuary and its grounds with brilliant flowers and towering trees

VILLA MONASTERO (p126) A centuries-old magnolia dominates a dense garden surrounding the villa, which is crammed with period furniture



THE CRADLE OF ROMANESQUE

From around the 11th century, Lombard master builders began to build churches more or less modelled on Roman basilicas. The Maestri Comacini (Como Masterbuilders) spread across Lombardy and Europe (some travelling as far as Catalonia and St Petersburg). They left lovely stone churches scattered around the lakes, with characteristic square-based bell towers. Many are modest affairs but some, like the grand Basilica di Sant'Abbondio in Como, have an undeniable majesty. In Milan, the Po Valley and plains towns from Pavia to Verona, a more imposing variant evolved. Built largely in brick and far grander than their lakeside equivalents, these churches nonetheless had in common certain key features, among them the use of the semicircle in doorways, windows and apses. For more on the architectural history of the lakes area, see p250.



TOP CHURCHES

DUOMO (p39) Milan's Gothic masterpiece took centuries to complete.

BASILICA DI SAN ZENO MAGGIORE (p217) San Zeno is one of the most striking Romanesque churches in all northern Italy.

BASILICA DI SANT'ABBONDIO (p109) Como's towering Romanesque church boasts fine frescos.

BASILICA DI SANTA MARIA MAGGIORE (p148) Colleoni's Renaissance chapel was added to a Romanesque-Gothic mix in Bergamo.

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DON'T MISS EXPERIENCES

- ★ *Aperitivo* time – Snack and tittle in Milan's fashionable bars (p48)
- ★ Catch a ferry – Enjoy a jaunt around one of the great lakes
- ★ A night at the opera – Toss a coin and opt for a night of operatic grandeur at Milan's Teatro La Scala (p48) or Verona's Roman Arena (p220)
- ★ Buy silk – Browse in Mantero's Como silk showroom, La Tessitura (p111)
- ★ Discover the Città Alta – Wander the tight medieval web of Bergamo's old town (p149)
- ★ Art immersion – Visit the region's top art collections in Milan's Pinacoteca di Brera (p47) and Bergamo's Accademia Carrara (p149)

WEBSITES

- IL CENACOLO VINCIANO** (www.cenacolovinciano.org) Book your visit to *The Last Supper* mural
- BORROMEAN** (www.borromeo.turismo.it) Information on the Borromean Islands
- MUSEO DELLA SETA** (www.museosetacomo.com) A font of information on Como's silk history
- RUPESTRE.NET** (www.rupestre.net) Valle Camonica rock art details
- CONSORZIO LIUTAI ANTONIO STRADIVARI CREMONA** (www.cremonaliutaria.it) Information on the tradition of violin-making and modern violin-makers in Cremona

CULTURE

THE ITALIAN LAKES



FINEST CASTLES

CASTELLI DI BELLINZONA (p138) Bellinzona's three castles form a magnificent ensemble.

CASTELLO SFORZESCO (p43) Milan's castle exudes little menace and is home to a series of museums.

ROCCA D'ANGERA (p88) This Borromeo fortress commands fine views atop a vine-layered hill.

ROCCA DI SONCINO (p175) The Sforza family raised this four-towered fortress in 1473.

CASTELLO DI VEZIO (p127) The castle ruins above Varenna are a draw for the views.

TOP FRESCOS

IL CENACOLO VINCIANO (p42) Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper*

BASILICA DI SAN GIULIO (p98) Vivid depictions of saintly martyrs

PALAZZO DUCALE (p223) Mantegna's work is Mantua's top draw

CHIESA DI SANTA MARIA FORIS PORTAS (p94) Rare, pre-Romanesque frescos in a 7th-century church

BASILICA DI SANT'ABBONDIO (p109) An extraordinary series charting scenes from Jesus' life

COLLEGIATA, CASTIGLIONE OLONA (p93) The life of St John the Baptist, by Florentine master Masolino da Panicale

RENAISSANCE ART IN LOMBARDY

The Renaissance explosion in Florence and later in Venice did not leave Lombardy and other parts of northern Italy indifferent. Andrea Mantegna was one of the first northern artists to absorb the lessons of some of Florence's finest, and went on to leave major works in Verona's Basilica di San Zeno Maggiore and the Palazzo Ducale in Mantua. Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper* fresco is the greatest testimony to that artist's long stint in Milan. Other Renaissance stars to work in the area include Lorenzo Lotto, Pordenone and Masolino da Panicale. For more on the region's art history, see p244.

TOP A statue in a Castello Sforzesco courtyard **RIGHT** *Oculus*, by Andrea Mantegna, in the Palazzo Ducale

COMO'S SILK TRADE

The art of silk-weaving and -printing reached Italy in the 13th century. Silk-weavers appeared around Lake Como in the 14th century but the industry didn't take off until Empress Maria Theresa made Lake Como textile production duty-free. Lyon (France) and Krefeld (Germany) provided stiff competition but by the early 20th century Como was established as a centre of fine silk. Since the end of WWII (by which time Lyon and Krefeld had ceased to be active producers), Como's silk dynasties have concentrated on top-quality design and production for the world's leading fashion houses. Mass silk production in China, fierce competition and the global economic downturn are all putting pressure on these businesses. For more on Como silk, see p265.

DOS & DON'TS

- * Italians take pride in their dress and appearance. You don't have to go as far as they do but it's easy enough to avoid fashion faux pas.

- * The standard form of greeting is a handshake. Kisses (one on each cheek, right then left) are for intimates.

- * Dress up, not down: flip-flops and T-shirts don't cut the mustard in restaurants and cafes.

- * Cover yourself when entering a church.

- * Topless bathing is not at all the norm on lake beaches.

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FOOD & DRINK

THE ITALIAN LAKES

TOP WINE AREAS

BARDOLINO (www.stradadelbardolino.com) One of the Veneto's top reds is cultivated on Lake Garda.

FRANCIACORTA (www.franciacorta.net) Spumante (sparkling) whites and rosés have made this wine region northwest of Brescia a household name.

OLTREPÒ PAVESE (www.vinoltrepo.it) Some 20 wines are classified as DOC in this area around Pavia, south of Milan.

SOAVE (www.ilsoave.com) The area east of Verona produces some of Italy's finest white wines.

TICINO (www.ticinowine.ch) Merlot is king in the Swiss canton.

VALPOLICELLA (www.valpolicella.it) Home of the legendary Amarone della Valpolicella DOC.

VALTELLINA (www.valtellinavini.com) The Lombard valley boasts two DOCGs, including the prized Sforzato.



MAURO CORRELLI

WHAT'S COOKING?

Climate and history have influenced cooking around the lakes, with boiled meats and escalopes (a reminder of the Austrians' long presence in Lombardy) high on the list of typical products. Milan is an island in food terms, combining traditional tastes with cuisines imported with migrants from around Italy (and, more recently, the world). Restaurants around the lakes will happily prepare seafood but prefer fresh local fish, like *persico* (perch), and the Alpine country around the lakes is a source of tasty cheeses. Many main courses come with polenta, a maize-based staple that comes as a thick yellow wedge or in a porridgelike form, and the Po plains produce 50 types of rice, the basis for fine risottos. For more on the delicious dishes of the region, such as the irresistible northern *panna cotta* (literally 'cooked cream', a creamy set dessert bathed in sauce), see p274.



DANA AMFIELD

TOP Indulge in local pastries in Milan **BOTTOM** DOC wines and picturesque countryside in Valpolicella
RIGHT Take a break in a Milan cafe **FAR RIGHT** Sample just-caught fish on the lakes

TOP RESTAURANTS

CASABELLA (p88) Elegantly prepared fish, and lake views

EL BRELLIN (p52) Romantic, canalside spot in Milan

HOTEL LIDO ANGERA (p90) Lake-fish sushi platters on Lake Maggiore

DA ANNETTA (p94) Exquisite cuisine near Lake Varese

LA COLDANA (p176) Feast in a sprawling farmhouse

LA CUCINA DI MARIANNA (p124) Imaginative, down-home cooking



DON'T MISS EXPERIENCES

- ★ Franciacorta – Take a drive through this undulating wine country, visiting monasteries and castles on the way (p160)
- ★ Wine tasting – Tour the Costaripa winery and sample some chiaretto (p195)
- ★ Soave – Sample some fine white wine at Enoteca Il Drago in the shadow of Soave's castle (p222)
- ★ Tasting oil – Learn how olive oil is made, and taste test at the Frantoio Montecroce (p193)
- ★ Gourmet hideaway – Head out of the way and submit your palate to pleasure at Ristorante Marconi (p77)
- ★ Delicatessen – Drop by Peck, Milan's famous gourmet food store, to make some mouth-watering purchases (p53)

TOP DROPS

AMARONE DELLA VALPOLICELLA DOC

A velvety red made from dried grapes

BARDOLINO SUPERIORE DOCG

An excellent, dry red

FRANCIACORTA DOCG

Sparkling whites and rosés

SOAVE SUPERIORE DOCG

Among Italy's best still whites

SFORZATO DI VALTELLINA DOCG

A strong, tannin-heavy nebbiolo-based red

OLTREPÒ PAVESE SANGUE DI GIUDA DOC

A sweet red known as Judas' Blood

FOOD & DRINK

THE ITALIAN LAKES



TOP CHEESES

STRACCHINO Made from cow's milk extracted during the seasonal moves to and from Alpine pastures

GORGONZOLA A well-known cheese whose two-curd, blue-mould version is strong on the nose

TALEGGIO A popular soft cheese

MASCARPONE Used especially to make desserts

BAGOSS Mature and strong flavoured

ROBIOLA Soft-ripened cheese with a thin rind

TOP REGIONAL DISHES

Trying out strictly local dishes is part of the fun around the lakes.

CASONSÈI Big egg-based ravioli (aka *casoncelli*) stuffed with meat, cheese or spinach

GNOCCHI DI PATATE Potato-based balls usually served in a meat or tomato sauce

MARUBINI Meat and cheese stuffed discs of pasta served in a broth

PASTISSADA DE CAVAL Horse-meat stew

PIZZOCCHERI Buckwheat tagliatelle

RISOTTO A dish with limitless variations

SCALOPPINA ALLA MILANESE A breaded veal escalope

NORTH ITALIAN WINES

The lakes of northern Italy extend from eastern Piedmont across Lombardy and into the Veneto and Trentino-Alto Adige, a formidable battery of wine-growing areas. Italians love trying wines from other regions but are equally loyal to good local product. In restaurants on the Piedmont side of Lake Maggiore, you may well be served typical Piedmontese drops such as Barbera d'Asti, Dolcetto d'Alba and Barolo. Hop over the west side of the lake and it's likely to be a Lombard tippie – an Oltrepò Pavese, for example, or a Sforzato from the Valtellina. Around Verona, Valpolicella and Soave rule, OK. For more on wine, see p270.

TOP Valtellina's own *pizzoccheri* (buckwheat pasta) **RIGHT** Alfresco dining in Milan's Brera district (p47)

BEYOND PASTA

Some 50 varieties of rice are grown in the Po Valley plains. Indeed, rice is the traditional *numero uno* staple in Lombardy and much of Piedmont and the Veneto: a risotto has more northern cache than pasta ever will. Sure, pasta (probably an import from more southern climes and an integral part of Italian cooking by the 17th century) abounds but you can do without it altogether. Verona is the birthplace of *gnocchi di patate* (little potato-based pasta balls), which can be served with all sorts of accompaniments. The least-known *primo* (first course) is *pizzoccheri*, a kind of buckwheat tagliatelle served with potatoes, cabbage and melted cheese, which has its origins in the Valtellina, in northern Lombardy. For more on your first course, see p277.

RESTAURANTS WITH FABULOUS VIEWS

GATTO NERO (p124) High-end Italian cuisine with unfettered views over Lake Como

LA COLLINA (p157) Classy countryside hilltop dining

AL BORDUCAN (p93) A tasteful hideaway high above Varese

RISTORANTE MILANO (p85) Verbania's classiest eatery has a lakeside garden

CASABELLA (p88) Elegantly prepared fish with close-up views of Isola Superiore

ALBERGO BELVEDERE (p117) Romantic pergola in a village overlooking Lake Como

ALBERGO SILVIO (p118) Fine lake fish and sunset views just outside Bellagio



OUTDOORS

THE ITALIAN LAKES

TOP WALKS

GREENWAY DEL LAGO DI COMO (p122) An easygoing 10km stroll on the west bank of Lake Como

MONTE MOTTARONE (p82) Opt to hike all or part of the way up or down Monte Mottarone, a superb lookout point

CIMETTA (p70) A gentle walk that leads to 360-degree views above Locarno; further trails abound

DORSALE (p116) Two-day hike (with option to follow the crests) from Brunate to Bellagio

ANELLO AZZURRO (p99) A pretty three-day route around Lake Orta

VIA DEI MONTI LARIANI (p122) A classic 130km trail along high ground above the west flank of Lake Como



NORIKO IYAMA

OUTDOOR PURSUITS

Both the lakes and the mountains around them offer plenty of incentives for outdoor activity. For many it will simply be a case of getting about on your own two pins. Options cover every level, from meandering in the fabulous gardens of many a lakeside villa, to short, intense upward hikes that lead to inspiring lookout points. Serious hikers can spend days trekking in the mountains between *rifugi* (mountain huts). Cycling is an excellent (and popular) way to get around the lakes, while some of the better laid-out walking trails (often one-time mule tracks) are ideal for mountain biking. Water-sport options abound, from tootling about on pedalos to sailing, windsurfing, kitesurfing, wakeboarding or just swimming. Although top ski fields lie further afield, there is no shortage of family-style spots for a day's fun in the white stuff. For more details, see p260.



DENNIS JONES

TOP Lake Garda seen from Monte Baldo **BOTTOM** Parasurfing on Lake Garda **RIGHT** San Siro stadium in Milan **FAR RIGHT** A catamaran on Lake Garda

TOP PANORAMIC VIEWPOINTS

SASSO DEL FERRO (p89) Catch the Laveno Funivia to this marvellous viewpoint

MONTE BALDO (p207) For panoramic views of Lake Garda and beyond

BRUNATE (p111) Take the funicular high above Como

SACRO MONTE DEL ROSARIO (p93) A historic pilgrimage ends in a hamlet with splendid views

MONTE GENEROSO (p136) The best viewpoint in Ticino, with 360-degree views

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DENNIS JONES

DON'T MISS EXPERIENCES

- ★ Rifugio Menaggio – Hike up to the Rifugio Menaggio mountain hut for superb views of Lake Como and, with luck, a meal (p122)

- ★ Windsurfing – Make the best of the Pelèr and Ora winds to sail at speed on Lake Garda (p206)

- ★ Onno beach – Stretch out for some rays and take a brisk dip in Lake Como southeast of Bellagio (p124)

- ★ Gooaaaa! – Join Milan's *tifosi* (fans) for an afternoon's *calcio* (football) excitement at San Siro stadium (p49)

- ★ Lake Como waterskiing – Hire your own boat and equipment for a morning's waterskiing or wakeboard fun at Lake Como's north end (p124)

GLIDE & SURF

- ★ Paragliding – Take to the skies at the top of Lake Maggiore's Laveno Funivia (p89) or Monte Baldo (p207)

- ★ Kitesurfing – Head for the little-touristed north of Lake Como (p130)

- ★ Windsurfing – Speed along Lake Garda at Torbole (p206)

- ★ Canoeing – Push the boat out for a paddle on Lake Endine (p161)

OUTDOORS

THE ITALIAN LAKES

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TOP SPORT EVENTS

FOOTBALL (p49; September to May) Twice a year, rivals AC Milan and Inter clash in Milan

GIRO D'ITALIA (opposite; May) Italy's great cycle race, runner-up in importance to the Tour de France.

CENTOMIGLIA (September) A forest of white sails sweeps across Lake Garda during this classic race.

FORMULA ONE (p62; September) Ferrari and co compete for line honours at Monza.

A SPOT OF SKIING

Excellent skiing can be had just beyond the scope of this book, in Bormio (www.bormio.it) and around Monte Rosa (especially Macugnaga; www.macugnaga.it). For a modest family outing closer by, there are several options:

FOPPOLO (p263) A popular ski station in the Alpi Orobie

MONTE MOTTARONE (p82) Attracts families for snow and lake views

MONTE BALDO (p82) Offers runs above Lake Garda

PIAN DEL TIVANO (p116) Northeast of Como, this area has cross-country runs

CIMETTA (p70) Locarno folks get in some practice here

FOOTBALL AS RELIGION

For many Lombards, the true cathedral in Milan is not the Duomo but the San Siro football stadium (p49). *Calcio* is more than a religion for many Italians, it is a *raison d'être*. Here, two of the country's best teams, AC Milan and FC Internazionale Milano (aka Inter), play on alternate weeks. Inter took the 2009 premier league (Serie A) trophy in 2009, leaving AC Milan (owned by Italy's ubiquitous prime minister-cum-media tycoon, Silvio Berlusconi) down the table and in financial difficulty. There is nothing as electric as when Milan's competing home sides clash in the local derby.

THE GIRO D'ITALIA

Around Lake Como and in the Bergamo valleys, you'll soon espy groups of weekend cyclists kitted out as champions. Just as in any elegant Milan bar, locals like to do things with class. Many follow routes that have been used as stages of the nation's great cycle race, the Giro d'Italia. Second only to the Tour de France, the Giro has drawn champions from around the world since its inauguration in 1909. The rugged Lombard territory is perfect for challenging competition, and at least one stage in the race is usually held in the mountains north of Bergamo. A speed racers' stage in Milan is tradition. Italians have dominated the Giro but, in 2009, the Russian Denis Menchov took the pink maillot.

CYCLING ROUTES

Cycling is a great way to get around the lakes, although traffic can be heavy on popular routes on summer weekends. Some walking trails also make good mountain-biking routes.

-
- * Dorsale - This hiking trail is ideal for a day's mountain-bike exploration (p116)
-
- * Monte Mottarone - Rent a mountain bike for the 25km descent to Stresa (p82)
-
- * Madonna del Ghisallo - Feel like a champion on this classic climb from Bellagio (p116)
-
- * Monte Isola - Cycle round Lake Iseo's island (p158)

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FAMILY TRAVEL

THE ITALIAN LAKES


ROCCO MANSANO

TOP LODGINGS

AGRITURISMO IN LOMBARDIA (www.lombardia.campagna mica.it) An exhaustive site on Lombard farm-stays and farm restaurants

AGRITURISMO MUNT DE VOLT (p294) A house in sloping, open fields (with swings) high up inland from Bellagio

HOTEL AURORA (p295) A hotel with kayaks, waterskiing and an aqua-trampoline in the lake waters.

LE STANZE DEL LAGO (p294) Handy apartments in the heart of Como

DON'T MISS EXPERIENCES

GARDALAND (p212) One of Italy's top theme parks, with dinosaurs, pirate ships and roller coasters

CANEVAWORLD (p212) Medieval shows, an aqua park and Movieland Studios, where action-packed stunt shows are held

SWISSMINIATUR (p136) Countless Swiss monuments presented as kid-size replicas

PARCO DELLA VILLA PALLAVICINO (p81) Animals and exotic birds roam free

AERO CLUB COMO (p106) Take to the air in a flying boat over Lake Como

LAGO MAGGIORE ADVENTURE PARK (p83) Climb and abseil your way to exhaustion

TRAVEL WITH CHILDREN

A lakeside holiday can be perfect for kids and adults. While touring the cities can become trying for smaller children, they will soon warm to the lakes, which offer an array of plannable activities. There are plenty of small beaches, ideal for lying and splashing around, and in many places you can hire pedalos, kayaks and small boats. We don't provide camping-ground information in this book, but there are plenty of options, particularly at the beaches along the south sides of Lakes Garda and Iseo. Rides on ferries and hydrofoils, as well as some of the funiculars leading to lookout points, will also thrill most children, and the occasional gelato reward is guaranteed to please.

THE BEST OF THE ITALIAN LAKES

It's hard to tire of seeking new views of the lakes from near and afar, or from another mesmerising mountain-top angle. Equally fascinating to witness are human contributions, from Milan's Duomo, to lush villa gardens, to local cooking, which spans fabulous rice and fish dishes, washed down with a stunning variety of wines.

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THE BEST ARCHITECTURE

1 DUOMO // MILAN

With its ageless marble facade and countless pinnacles and spires piercing the sky, Milan's splendid Gothic cathedral (p39) leaves visitors speechless. Building began in the 14th century, and it was still being tweaked in the 19th. Climb the 165 steps to the roof for a close-up of the spires.

2 ROMAN ARENA // VERONA

The cream and pink arches of Verona's amphitheatre (p215) are impressive by day and beautifully floodlit at night. The third largest Roman amphitheatre in existence was built in the 1st century, and originally seated 30,000 people. Today, it still hosts quite a few for the opera season (p220).



SHANGHAI

3 CASTLES // BELLINZONA

Bellinzona's three castles (p138) form a World Heritage trio, stacked one above the other in the Ticino canton's capital. Castelgrande, along whose walls you can wander, is the most impressive, and the views from Castello di Montebello and Castello Sasso Corbaro are worth the climb.

4 BASILICA DI SANTA MARIA MAGGIORE // BERGAMO

Already a noteworthy mix of Romanesque and Gothic, this basilica (p148) received a striking addition in 1472–76 – the Renaissance Cappella Colleoni. The mausoleum-cum-chapel contains frescos by Giambattista Tiepolo below the dome.

5 BASILICA DI SANT'ABBONDIO // COMO

Aside from being an unusually tall example of Lombard 11th-century Romanesque with beautiful external geometric decoration, the Basilica di Sant'Abbondio (p109) houses a remarkable fresco series inside the apse, charting scenes from the life of Christ.



SCOTT NELSON

MARIO CORBELLI



3

TOP The roof of Milan's Duomo **BOTTOM LEFT** Frescos decorate the Basilica di Sant'Abbondio
BOTTOM RIGHT The castles of Bellinzona



3

THE BEST VILLA GARDENS

1 VILLA TARANTO // VERBANIA

In 1931 a Scottish captain bought the late-19th-century Villa Taranto (p80). He planted some 20,000 species and today it's one of Europe's finest botanic gardens. Revisit several times and witness how it transforms through the seasons – a June-to-October dahlia display is a highlight.

2 ISOLA BELLA // STRESA

Isola Bella (p86), a short ferry ride from Stresa, is a noble family's fantasy land. At its heart stands Palazzo Borromeo. Part of this sumptuous residence may be visited, after which you will emerge in its elaborate, baroque Italian garden, amid strutting white peacocks.



2



3 **VILLA CARLOTTA** // TREMEZZO

The botanic gardens of the 17th-century Villa Carlotta (p122) are filled with colour in spring, with orange trees knitted into pergolas, and some of Europe's finest rhododendrons, azaleas and camellias. The villa contains statues (some by Antonio Canova), tapestries and period furniture.

4 **VILLA BALBIANELLO** // LENNO

Occupying a steep and heavily wooded promontory just outside Lenno, Villa del Balbianello (p121) is one of northern Italy's most dramatic locations. The largely Italianate sculpted gardens, littered with statues and draped over the promontory, are the perfect place for hopeless romantics.

5 **VILLA MELZI D'ERIL** // BELLAGIO

Bellagio's lakeside neoclassical Villa Melzi d'Eril (p114), built in 1808 for one of Napoleon's associates, is at the heart of a beautiful stretch of gardens. This English-style park, the first of its kind on Lake Como, flashes to life with the flowering of azaleas and rhododendrons in spring.



5

TOP Villa Carlotta and its gardens **BOTTOM LEFT** The gardens of Palazzo Borromeo on Isola Bella
BOTTOM RIGHT A detail in the English-style gardens of Villa Melzi d'Eril

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1

THE BEST VIEWPOINTS

1 MONTE MOTTARONE // LAKE MAGGIORE

Captivating views of Lake Maggiore unfold during a 20-minute journey on the Funivia Stresa-Mottarone, which ascends 1491m Monte Mottarone (p82). On a clear day you can see Lakes Maggiore and Orta, several smaller lakes, and Monte Rosa, on the Alpine border with Switzerland.

2 CIMA SIGHIGNOLA // LAKE LUGANO

For extraordinary views over Lake Lugano, and on to Monte Rosa and the Matterhorn, head for the high point known as the Balcone d'Italia (1320m; p120). Also look out for part of Lake Maggiore, Varese, the Alps and the Lombard plains.

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3 CASTELLO DI VEZIO // LAKE COMO

A road leads 3km out of Varenna up to these castle ruins (p127). From the watchtower (which you can climb) there are great views across the three arms of Lake Como. You can also peer over the huddled rooftops of Varenna, far below.

4 MONTE BISBINO // LAKE COMO

Some 17km out of Cernobbio, a scenic road leads to Monte Bisbino (1325m; p119). At every turn on the way up, look back on the lake from different angles. At the top, the eye roams the Lombard plain and as far as the Jungfrau in the Alps.

5 SANTUARIO DI MONTECASTELLO // LAKE GARDA

Around 8km north of Gargnano, near the village of Tignale (500m) and clinging to a spur of rock above the hamlet of Gardola, is the 16th century Santuario di Montecastello (p202). Examine the 15th-century gilded wooden altar and Giotto school frescos before marvelling at the extraordinary views along all of Lake Garda.

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TOP Cracco Restaurant **RIGHT** Restel de Fer

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THE BEST RESTAURANTS

4

1 GATTO NERO // CERNOBBIO

Finding your way up from lakeside Cernobbio ain't easy but it's worth the effort. Book a front-row table in this locally renowned eatery for the unobstructed view of the lake far below (p124). It's the perfect setting for gourmet romantics, hushed and low-lit.

2 HOSTERIA '700 // CREMONA

A series of vaulted rooms, some with ceiling frescos, winds past the kitchen (p172), and antiques and dark timber furniture lend a noble air. It does hearty Lombard cooking and local specialities.

3 CRACCO // MILAN

Star chef Carlo Cracco (p51) keeps the Milanese in thrall with his inventiveness. Cherry-wood boiserie on the walls and creamy lighting are neutral enough to allow you to concentrate on your food, like the delicate *rognoni di vitello e ricci di mare* (veal kidney served with sea urchins).

4 RESTEL DE FER // RIVA DEL GARDA

This family-run *locanda* (inn; p206) is one to linger over. Expect worn leather armchairs, cooking pots and glinting blue glass. Seasonal delicacies include *tagliatelle alle erbe aromatiche con ragù di agnello da latte* (ribbon pasta with aromatic herbs and a suckling lamb sauce).

THE AUTHORS



DAMIEN SIMONIS

Coordinating Author, Milan, Lake Maggiore & Lake Orta, Lake Como & Lake Lugano, Bergamo, Brescia & Cremona

Damien still remembers listening to crackly shortwave Italian broadcasts on Australian midsummer nights in the '80s. His love of Italy blossomed into a university obsession. In the 1990s he lived in Milan and this guide was something of a home-coming. He has never been long absent from the *bel paese* (beautiful country), having worked on eight editions of Lonely Planet's *Italy*, as well as *Venice*, *Best of Venice*, *Florence*, *Tuscany* and *Sardinia*.



BELINDA DIXON

Lake Garda, Verona & Mantua

Belinda first experienced the wonder that is Italy on the ubiquitous teenage month-long rail trip and has been an enthusiastic visitor ever since. This latest Lonely Planet adventure has been an absolute treat: opera, art and ferry-hopping; cheeses, truffles and wine trails. It really doesn't get much better than that.

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

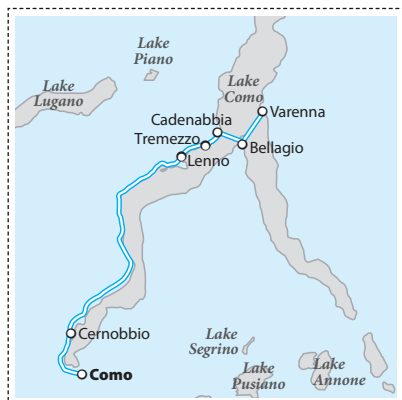
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ITINERARIES

THE VILLAS OF LAKE COMO

THREE DAYS // COMO TO VARENNA // 38KM

Lake Como is studded with villas and, especially, gardens of extraordinary beauty. Start in Como with **Villa Olmo** (p110) before moving up the road to **Cernobbio**



(p118), where you will need to book to get into the grounds of Villa d'Este (unless you're sleeping there!). A drive up the west bank will take you past many private mansions until you reach the promontory paradise of **Villa Balbianello** (p121), in Lenno. A short jaunt northeast will lead you to **Villa Carlotta** (p122), in Tremezzo, with statuary inside and botanical wonders outside. A ferry makes the hop from nearby Cadenabbia to **Bellagio** (p114), where two breathtaking gardens surround Villas Serbelloni and Melzi d'Eril. Another ferry heads to pretty **Varenna** (p126), home to two more villas.

THE BEST OF LAKE MAGGIORE

FOUR DAYS // LOCARNO TO ANGERA // 89KM

Starting in film-festival town **Locarno** (p65) and adjacent Ascona, this southbound trip leads over the Switzerland–Italy border to **Cannobio** (p79), where you might overnight in **Hotel Pironi** (p292) before making a pilgrimage to the Sacro Monte della SS Trinità at **Ghiffa** (p80). In Verbania, time should be made for the spectacular gardens of **Villa Taranto** (p80). While here, take a boat to **Isola Madre** (p87), one of the three Borromean Islands. The others are more easily accessed from **Stresa** (p80). Behind that gentle lakeside town, hike up **Monte Mottarone** (p82) for the views, or take the cable car. Next, stop at a huge hollow statue the Borromeo clan left in **Arona** (p83), south of Stresa, and, lastly, at their fortress across the lake in **Angera** (p88).



VERONA & THE BEST OF LAKE GARDA

SIX DAYS // VERONA ROUND TRIP // 224KM

After a couple of days strolling magical **Verona** (p215), head across the Valpolicella wine region to **Bardolino** (p210), a fine little wine town on Lake Garda. To the north, the road will take you through **Torri del Benaco** (p209) and fetching **Malcesine** (p206), from where you can take the cable car to Monte Baldo. An excellent stop at the top end of the lake is **Riva del Garda** (p203) and the first stop on the west bank is **Gargnano** (p200), surrounded by lemon and olive terraces. Follow this with **Gardone Riviera** (p199), home to the oddball Vittoriale degli Italiani mansion-monument. Pretty **Salò** (p197) has a dark history, while the slim **Sirmione** (p191) peninsula boasts Roman remains. From here, it's a short trip back east to Verona.



A PO VALLEY TOUR

SIX DAYS // CREMONA ROUND TRIP // 207KM

For something different, a tour of southern Lombardy is rich in discovery. After a full day admiring the medieval heart of **Cremona** (p169), head west for the fortress village of **Pizzighettone** (p173), on the Adda river. Zip further west to **San Colombano al Lambro** (p270) to taste local wine before continuing to the student town of **Pavia** (p58), with its pretty old centre. Then make the excursion north to the impressive **Certosa di Pavia** (p58) and northeast to central **Lodi** (p174), which harbours a Renaissance gem in the Tempio Civico dell'Incoronata. Another 16km brings you to **Crema** (p174), a surprise packet that repays exploration. Then, head on to **Soncino** (p175), graced by a fine Sforza fortress, and take a gentle back-country drive south back to Cremona.



CITY LINE-UP

FIVE DAYS // MILAN TO VERONA // 182KM

The A4 motorway and railways link some of the region's main cities in a neat line. Starting in **Milan** (p33), you could take as little or long as you want to complete the trip, perhaps taking a leisurely couple of days to wander the Lombard capital, with its **Duomo** (p39), shops and gourmet indulgence in places like **El Brellin** (p52). Exploration of **Bergamo** (p146) could take a day, punctuated with an overnight stay in **Hotel Piazza Vecchia** (p298). A short morning ride leads east to historic **Brescia** (p164), where you can explore the Roman relics and churches before heading to romantic **Verona** (p213), worth at least two days of your time, especially if you can include a night at the **opera** (p220).



A TRIANGULAR CIRCUIT

FIVE TO SEVEN DAYS // COMO ROUND TRIP // 108KM

The **Triangolo Lariano** (p114) is worth exploring if you're after a little-touristed area of Lake Como. The first stop out of Como should be **Torno** (p115), with its enchanting lake square. **Careno** (p116) is a typical, steep village with a great eating stop (p116) and **Bellagio** (p114) is the place to spend a night or two. Use the latter as a base for ferry rides to **Tremezzo** (p122) and **Varenna** (p126). Then follow the cyclists' climb south to **Magreglio** (p116) and stop at **Lasnigo's** (p117) lovely Romanesque church, from where you can wind down to the beach at **Onno** (p124). Further south, **Civate** is the starting point for a pretty hike to a hilltop abbey (p117). Backtrack a little for a well-deserved lake-side drink at **Lecco** (p126) before returning to Como.



A WINE MEANDER

ONE DAY // BARDOLINO TO SOAVE // 77KM

Although it is not always easy to find wineries that open to passers-by, a wander across the wine territory east of Lake Garda can be highly pleasurable. Start in **Bardolino** (p210), lakeside home of the eponymous wine, then head west into **Valpolicella** wine territory (p221) for **San Giorgio**, its views and Romanesque church. Nearby **Gargagnano** is home to that king of local drops, Amarone. To the north, the narrow country roads to Marano di Valpolicella take you through the heart of wine country, a lovely drive, from where you can turn southeast to Negrar, a quiet wine village, and drop down to Parona di Valpolicella. End the wine tour east in the capital of Veneto whites, castle-topped **Soave** (p222).



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