



Ticino

POP 333,750 / AREA 2813 SQ KM / LANGUAGE ITALIAN

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Best Places to Eat

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Best Places to Stay

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Why Go?

The summer air is rich and hot. Vespas scoot along palm-fringed promenades. A baroque campanile chimes. Kids play in piazzas flanked by pastel-coloured mansions. Italian weather. Italian style. And that's not to mention the Italian gelato, Italian pasta, Italian architecture, Italian language. But this isn't Rome, Florence or Naples. Ticino is the Switzerland that *Heidi* never mentioned.

The Alps are every bit as magnificent as elsewhere in Switzerland, but here you can admire them while sipping a full-bodied merlot at a pavement cafe, enjoying a hearty lunch at a chestnut-shaded *grotto* (rustic Ticino-style inn or restaurant), or floating in the mirror-like lakes of Lugano and Locarno. Ticino tempers its classic Alpine looks with Italian good-living.

To the north, the stunning medieval fortress town of Bellinzona keeps watch over valleys speckled with homely hamlets and Romanesque chapels. Rearing above them are wild, forested peaks with endless hiking options past lakes and roaring mountain streams.

When to Go

Get into the carnival swing with feasting, parading and merrymaking at the pre-Lenten Rabadan in Bellinzona. Spring brings hikers to the wildflower-cloaked Alps and classical music fans to the Lugano Festival. Lugano stages open-air concerts in July, while Locarno zooms in on cinematic talent at its much-lauded film festival in August. Vintners in Mendrisio and Bellinzona toast the wine harvest in September. On a golden autumn day, nothing beats slow-cooked game and new wine in one of Ticino's rustic *grotti*.

History

Ticino, long a poor, rural buffer between the Swiss-German cantons north of the Alps and Italy to the south, was absorbed by the Swiss in the late 15th century after centuries of changing hands between the lords of Como and the dukes of Milan.

The founding cantons of the Swiss Confederation – Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden – defeated a superior Milanese force at Giornico in the Valle Leventina in 1478 and took Bellinzona in 1503, thus securing the confederation's vulnerable underbelly. In 1803, Ticino entered the new Swiss Confederation,



Ticino Highlights

- 1 Roam the trio of medieval castles in **Bellinzona** (p189) for spirit-soaring views of the Old Town and the Alps
- 2 Be spellbound by lake and mountain views from **Monte Brè** and **Monte San Salvatore** (p199) above Lugano
- 3 Indulge in Alpine cheese, merlot wines and gorgeous scenery in **Mendrisio** (p201)
- 4 Live a heart-stopping moment bungee jumping, rafting, paragliding and bouldering in the rugged **Val Verzasca** (p209)
- 5 Hike and cycle to wispy waterfalls, granite villages and authentic *grotti* in the **Valle Maggia** (p207)
- 6 Soak up the Mediterranean flair of **Locarno** (p201) in the postcard-pretty Old Town, lakefront gardens and lido
- 7 Catch the spectacular **Centovalli Railway** (p207) over hill and dale to Domodossola in Italy