



Lake Garda & Around

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Dal Pescatore (p192)
- ➔ Locanda 4 Cuochi (p183)
- ➔ Osteria Le Servite (p173)
- ➔ Agriturismo i Vegher (p167)
- ➔ Locanda San Vigilio (p178)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Villa Arcadio (p204)
- ➔ Agriturismo San Mattia (p205)
- ➔ Dimora Bolsone (p203)
- ➔ Sanzenetto (p205)
- ➔ Armellino (p206)

Why Go?

Covering 370 sq km, Lake Garda is the largest of the Italian lakes, straddling the border between three regions: the Lombard plains to the west, Alpine Trentino Alto-Adige to the north and the rolling hills of the Veneto to the east. Look around and you'll be surprised to see a Mediterranean landscape of vineyards, olive groves and citrus orchards that is thanks to the lake's uniquely mild microclimate.

Like the best Italian lunch, exploring this region can't be rushed. You'll want to linger in Sirmione's thermal pools, amble around Roman ruins and ferry-hop between villages. Then you might consider touring vineyards that feature in many sommeliers' top 10s: Valpolicella, Soave and Bardolino. Further south, in incurably romantic Verona, sit beneath the stars and enjoy world-class opera; and, in Mantua, feast on Renaissance frescoes. Uncork it, savour it, then come back for more.

Road Distances (KM)

Mantua	59			
Desenzano del Garda	98	55		
Salò	36	21	76	
Riva del Garda	52	88	77	95
	Verona	Mantua	Desenzano del Garda	Salò

DON'T MISS

Christmas shopping in Verona on St Lucy's day (13 December), when piazze fill with traditional market stalls.

Best Tours

- **Isola del Garda** (p168) A tour of Garda's only private island.
- **Allegrini** (p187) Savour Valpolicella reds in a palatial setting.

Advance Planning

- **Three months** Book tickets for headline operas.
- **One month** Plan activities and secure equipment, guides or courses.
- **One week** Book to see Mantegna's *Camera degli Sposi* to ensure you're one of the 1500 people allowed to visit each day.
- **One day** Reserve wine tastings to ensure someone is in.

Resources

- **Visit Garda** (www.visitgarda.com) A one-stop shop for Lake Garda.
- **Strada del Valpolicella** (www.stradadelvalpolicella.com) Valpolicella's wine roads.
- **Tourism Verona** (www.tourism.verona.it) Covers Verona and eastern Lake Garda.

Getting Around

Having a car here can be both a blessing and a curse. It opens up the wine regions and allows an escape from the tourist trail, but summertime traffic around Lake Garda's perimeter road is best avoided, and traffic limitations in central Verona and Mantua make a car unnecessary. An extensive ferry network and excellent region-wide rail and bus links mean you can go largely car free, only getting behind the wheel for day trips into the vineyards and hills.

3 PERFECT DAYS

Day 1: Culture-Fix Verona

Exploring the art-packed halls of the Museo di Castelvecchio could easily take all morning, while Verona's architecture-rich piazzas are perfect for a post-lunch stroll. Countless wine cellars offer a different slice of cultural life; Antica Bottega del Vino and Osteria del Bugiardo are great places to start. If you've booked for the opera in the Roman Arena, it starts around 9pm – take your seats after a gourmet bite at Locanda 4 Cuochi.

Day 2: Adventurous Lake Garda

With its mountain hinterland, regular winds and enormous expanse, Lake Garda is the perfect outdoor playground. Come summer you'll find climbers clinging to Arco's rock faces like brightly coloured lizards, paragliders sailing off Monte Baldo's summit and bikers racing down its slopes. In Riva, windsurfers launch off the lakefront in large flocks of neon sails, and in the Valtenesi families ride out through vineyards and olive groves. At the end of the day, sore muscles can be soothed in Sirmione's thermal spa.

Day 3: Renaissance Mantua

Afloat in the watery hinterland of the Mincio river, fog-bound Mantua is known locally as *La Bella Addormentata* (Sleeping Beauty). Sleepy it may seem today, but in the 1500s this was one of Italy's greatest Renaissance courts where Mantegna, Giulio Romano and Raphael came to work for the ostentatious, art-loving Gonzagas. The result is some of Italy's finest frescoed palaces and perfectly preserved medieval piazzas.

Getting Off the Beaten Track

- Hike the Ponale Road (p172) from Riva del Garda for a bird's eye view of Lake Garda.
- Barge and cycle down the Mincio river with Avemaria (p206).
- Swim in icy melt waters in the Valle delle Cartiere (p170).
- Cycle through the evergreen woods around the Rocca di Manerba (p166).
- Scale the Alto Garda plateau on horseback with Scuderia Castello (p170).