



# Lake Maggiore & Around

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## Why Go?

Italy's second-largest lake, Maggiore is one of Europe's more graceful corners. Arrayed around the lakeshore is a series of pretty towns (Stresa, Verbania, Cannobio and, on the Swiss side of the border, Locarno) and these serve as gateways to gorgeous Maggiore islands. Behind the towns, wooded hillsides rise, strewn with decadent villas, lush botanical gardens and even the occasional castle. Further still from the lakeshore but not as far as you might think, the snow-capped peaks of Switzerland provide the perfect backdrop, and idyllic vantage points over the lake are many - from the breakfast terrace of your lakeside hotel to the eyries reached by cable car from Locarno, Laveno and Stresa. And fabulous detours await, whether into the high valleys from the northern end of the lake or to Orta San Giulio to the southwest, one of the region's most beguiling villages.

## Best Places to Eat

- Casabella (p81)
- Il Sole (p87)
- Ristorante Milano (p82)
- Ristorante Locanda Locarnese (p95)
- La Botte (p78)

## Best Places to Stay

- Grand Hotel des Iles Borromees (p197)
- Locanda di Orta (p198)
- Caffè dell'Arte (p198)
- Hotel Pironi (p197)
- Albergo Verbano (p197)

## Road Distances (KM)

Luino	39			
Orta San Giulio	64	48		
Stresa	56	38	27	
Varese	76	28	63	65
Locarno				
Orta San Giulio				
Stresa				
Varese				

## Getting Around

Lake Maggiore is well served by ferries that cover most towns along the lakeshore and connect them with the lake's islands. There are also buses and trains, although services are infrequent and don't serve all towns – the most picturesque train services are between Locarno and Domodossola. The prettiest drives hug the lake's west bank, and climb up through the Val Cannobina and then down to Locarno.

### 3 PERFECT DAYS

#### Day 1: Maggiore Islands

It's worth catching a ferry (with an all-day ticket) from Stresa or Baveno to Isola Bella in order to marvel at the baroque wealth of the Borromeo family's island pleasure palace and gardens. Once saturated by all this richness, it's possible to transfer to Isola Superiore for lunch at one of this Fishermen's Island's restaurants. The perfect way to complete this experience of the Borromeo Islands is to enjoy an afternoon on Isola Madre. For an extra treat, sleep on Isola Superiore.

#### Day 2: Lake Orta

Splendid views of the lakes and the Alps can be seen by driving, hiking or taking the funicular from the belle époque lakeside town of Stresa to Monte Mottarone. Then it's worth heading down the other side to enchanting little Lake Orta and its star village, Orta San Giulio, a quintessential romantic spot and the perfect base for local exploration, in particular of Isola San Giulio and the *sacro monte* (holy mountain).

#### Day 3: Northern Mountains

It's possible to enjoy a string of mountain valley villages by catching a train in Stresa bound for Domodossola, which is the starting point for the scenic Centovalli railway trip through mountain valley villages to Locarno in Switzerland. You can then explore this elegant film-festival town and its pretty lakeside neighbour, Ascona, for the rest of the day. From there you can head south, back over the Italian border, to reach captivating Cannobio, one of the most enticing villages on Lake Maggiore.

## Where to Stay

Accommodation is especially abundant in Stresa and Verbania, both of them launch pads for the Borromeo Islands and the latter home to the sumptuous Villa Taranto. There is also a fair choice in Locarno. The most romantic hotel locations are Isola Superiore, Orta San Giulio and Cannobio.

### DON'T MISS

An early morning start to beat the crowds on the decadent Borromeo Islands.

## Best Gardens

- ◆ Isola Bella (p79)
- ◆ Isola Madre (p80)
- ◆ Villa Taranto (p81)
- ◆ Villa della Porta Bozzolo (p86)
- ◆ Giardino Botanico Alpina (p76)

## Best Viewpoints

- ◆ Cardada (p95), Locarno
- ◆ Cimetta (p95), Locarno
- ◆ Monte Mottarone (p76), Stresa
- ◆ Funivia (p85), Laveno

## Resources

- ◆ **Borromeo** ([www.borromeoturismo.it](http://www.borromeoturismo.it)) All you need to know about the Borromeo Islands.
- ◆ **Lago Maggiore** ([www.lagomaggioreturismo.it](http://www.lagomaggioreturismo.it)) General information on Lake Maggiore.
- ◆ **Lago d'Orta** ([www.lagodortaturismo.it](http://www.lagodortaturismo.it)) General information on Lake Orta.
- ◆ **Varese Land of Tourism** ([www.vareselandoftourism.it](http://www.vareselandoftourism.it)) Varese province resource, including Lake Maggiore's east bank.