

Welcome to the Italian Lakes

Formed at the end of the last ice age, and a popular holiday spot since Roman times, the lakes have an enduring, beguiling beauty.

Artful Landscapes

Travellers traversing the Alps wind down from the mountains to be greeted by a Mediterranean burst of colour: gardens filled with rose-red camellias, hot-pink oleanders and luxurious palms surrounding cerulean blue lakes. It's impossible not to be seduced. Fishing boats bob in tiny harbours, palaces float in the Borromean Gulf, rustic churches cling to cliff faces and grand belle époque spas and hotels line the waterfronts. No wonder George Clooney is smitten.

A Modern Legacy

Since Leonardo da Vinci broke all the rules in his stunning *Last Supper*, the indefatigably inventive Lombards seem to have skipped straight from the Renaissance to the 22nd century. Not only is Milan a treasure trove of 20th-century art, but art deco and rationalist architecture abound. Around the lakes, Michelin-starred restaurants push the boundaries of traditionalism, and vintners and oil producers experiment with the latest technologies and techniques. Even now, jackhammers are hard at work on the 420-acre Expo 2015 site, producing new Milanese neighbourhoods and a futuristic skyline modelled by star-chitects Zaha Hadid, Daniel Libeskind, Arata Isozaki and César Pelli.

Living By Design

Though Italian design is distributed globally, seeing it in a home context offers fresh appreciation. From Como's silk weavers to the wool merchants of Maggiorè and the violin artisans of Cremona, this region has an outstanding craft heritage. Today Milan is home to all the major design showrooms and an endless round of trade fairs. But it's not just a coterie of insiders who get to have all the fun. Milanese fashion houses have branched out into spas, bars, hotels, galleries and restaurants. So, why not join them for a touch of *la vita moda* (the stylish life).

The Lake Lifestyle

Home to many of Italy's foremost classical musicians, writers and artists, Milan and Verona are on the tour circuit of the best European and North American music acts, dance troupes, opera and theatre. In summer, film, music and art festivals abound in lakeside gardens and historic villas. At weekends, urbanites escape to the mountains and lakes for morning markets, sailing, cycling and walking, and long afternoon lunches. What could be more perfect?



Why I Love the Italian Lakes

By Paula Hardy, Author

From cutting-edge design showcases to hi-tech olive presses and a sidewalk scene that makes Fashion Week seem entirely redundant, Milan and the lakes are both thrilling and fun. Everyone here is fizzing with ideas, ambition and energy, and it's catching. Unlike nonna's Italy further south, Lombards, like New Yorkers, are refreshing modernists and after a few days, you'll begin to see why. The main currency here isn't the euro or amazing design gadgetry. It's inspiration – and that's what I love.

For more about our authors, see page 272