

# Understand the Italian Lakes

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While Italy struggles to stave off political and economic bankruptcy, Lombardy prepares for a spectacular comeback with Expo 2015.

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From Roman origins to Republican ambitions, Milan invented the idea of the city-state and flourished on the back of clever politicking.

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The home of Leonardo da Vinci and Caravaggio, drawing-room revolutionaries and world-class musicians, Lombardy is a cultural powerhouse.

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Paris, New York and London may be fashion-forward, but they can't compete with a town that lives and breathes fashion and design.

# The Italian Lakes Today

**News flash: Italy was not cryogenically frozen six centuries ago. Lombardy is one of Europe's most creative corners, contributing 20% of Italian GDP and registering one third of the country's innovation patents. Look around you and you'll notice breakthrough ideas literally popping up: urban art projects, green-designed parks and state-of-the-art neighbourhoods. Wary of the future, though, savvy Lombards are now investing heavily in the knowledge-economy.**

## Best in Print

**Promessi Sposi** (The Betrothed; 1827) Alessandro Manzoni's tale of two lovers, and a country, longing to be united.

**Design as Art** (1966) Illuminating text by designer Bruno Munari.

**Accidental Death of an Anarchist** (1970) A sly, subversive comedy by Dario Fo.

**Voices from the Plains** (1985) Gianni Celati's arresting stories of chance encounters on the Po plains.

## Best in Film

**Miracolo a Milano** (Miracle in Milan; 1951) Vittorio de Sica's fairy tale about a boy who unites the poor and is given the gift of miracles.

**Rocco and His Brothers** (1960) Luchino Visconti's take on southern immigration, boxing and brotherhood.

**Teorema** (1968) Pier Paolo Pasolini sets Terence Stamp loose on a haute-bourgeois Milanese family.

**I Am Love** (2009) Luca Guadagnino's drama about the suffocating power of family and tradition.

**Che Bella Giornata** (What a Beautiful Day; 2011) Gennaro Nunziante's comedy about a security guard from Brianza is Italy's most commercially successful film.

## Ambitious Industrialists

Lombardy stands out in the European landscape for its diverse economy, industrial strength and productive agricultural sector. With a population of nearly 10 million there are more Lombards than Swedes and with 8.45 companies for each 100 inhabitants, the region's economy is larger than Belgium's with GDP per capita 35% higher and unemployment less than half the European average. Some 220,000 students in 15 universities keep the region and its cities young and full of ideas, while foreign immigrants (25% of all foreign immigrants in Italy) give Milan a cosmopolitan flavour. And in the face of global recession, Lombards have simply redoubled their efforts, engaging Kartell president Claudio Luti to rebrand the Salone del Mobile, attracting Qatari investment to Porta Nuova and planning the biggest, commercial enterprise in recession-plagued Europe: Expo 2015.

## Reinventing the Future

As hardworking as the Lombards may be, if you hang out in Milan's piazzas and bars, you'll find plenty of Milanese who'll make time for conversation. They'll reveal that young Milanese are now taking jobs that interest them rather than positions with big salaries and career advancement. How Lombardy manages the transition from its traditional manufacturing and agricultural economy to specialist services and knowledge-intensive activities will be the key to maintaining its distinctive European position.

While multinational companies have a strong presence here, it is the 823,000 small- and medium-sized businesses that will have the largest role to play in this transformation. Employing more than 4.3 million people, they represent the life-blood of the region. And if they're to stand any chance in the changing global economy they will need to focus on differentiation and