



Lake Como & Around

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Best Places to Eat

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- Materia (p129)
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- Osteria Sale e Tabacchi (p138)

Best Places to Escape

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Why Go?

Set in the shadow of the snow-covered Rhaetian Alps and hemmed in on both sides by steep, verdant hillsides, Lake Como (aka Lake Lario) is perhaps the most spectacular of the three major lakes. Shaped like an upside-down Y, measuring around 160km in squiggly shoreline, it's littered with villages, including exquisite Bellagio and Varenna. Where the southern and western shores converge is the lake's main town, Como, an elegant, prosperous Italian city.

Among the area's siren calls are some extraordinarily sumptuous villas, often graced with paradisiacal gardens. The mountainous terrain means that opportunities for taking bird's-eye views of the lake and its towns are numerous. And with a fraction of the visitors drawn here compared to Lake Maggiore or Lake Garda, Lake Como and its surrounding area offer the traveller the chance to enjoy a real sense of discovery.

Road Distances (km)

Bellinzona	91			
Como	31	60		
Lecco	27	92	28	
Lugano	63	29	32	60
Bellagio				
Bellinzona				
Como				
Lugano				

COMO

📍 031 / POP 84,500

With its charming historic centre, the town of Como sparkles year-round. Within its remaining 12th-century city walls, the beautiful people of this prosperous city whisk about from shop to cafe, sweeping by the grandeur of the city's cathedral, villas and the loveliness of its lake shore with admirable insouciance. The town is a lovely spot for an aimless wander, punctuated with coffee and drink stops, especially in Piazzas Cavour, Alessandro Volta and San Fedele.

Como built its wealth on the silk industry and it remains Europe's most important producer of silk products.

👁️ Sights

★ Basilica di San Fedele

BASILICA

(Piazza San Fedele; ☀️ 8am-noon & 3.30-7pm) With three naves and three apses, this evocative basilica is often likened to a clover leaf. Parts of it date from the 12th century while the facade is the result of a 1914 revamp. The 16th-century rose window and 16th- and 17th-century frescoes enhance the appeal. The apses are centuries-old and feature some eye-catching sculpture on the right.

A craft and antiques **market** (Craft & Antiques Market; ☀️ 9am-7pm Sat) fills the piazza in front of the basilica on Saturdays.

Villa Olmo

HISTORIC BUILDING

(📍 031 25 23 52; www.villaolmocomo.it; Via Cantoni 1; gardens free, villa entry varies by exhibition; ☀️ villa during exhibitions 10am-6pm Tue-Sun, gardens 8am-11pm Apr-Sep, to 7pm Oct-Mar) Set facing the lake, the grand creamy facade of neoclassical Villa Olmo is one of Como's biggest landmarks. The extravagant structure was built in 1728 by the Odescalchi family, related to Pope Innocent XI. If there's an art exhibition showing, you'll get to admire the sumptuous *stile liberty* (Italian art nouveau) interiors. Otherwise, you can enjoy the Italianate and English gardens.

At press time, parts of the grounds and sections of the villa were closed for long-term restoration and garden improvements.

★ Duomo

CATHEDRAL

(Cattedrale di Como; 📍 031 3 31 22 75; Piazza del Duomo; ☀️ 10.30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1-4.30pm Sun) Although largely Gothic in style, elements of Romanesque, Renaissance and baroque can also be seen in Como's imposing, marble-clad *duomo*. The cathedral was built

between the 14th and 18th centuries, and is crowned by a high octagonal dome.

Villa Sucota

HISTORIC BUILDING

(📍 031 338 49 76; www.fondazioneratti.org; Via Cernobbio 19; ☀️ gardens 10am-6pm Sun year-round, daily in Aug; museum hours vary) A grand villa overlooking the lake, northwest of the centre, Villa Sucota was built in the late-19th and early-20th centuries. It has been home to various aristocratic families over the years, including Metternich, Napoleon's doctor. These days it serves as the headquarters for the Antonio Ratti Foundation, with a focus on textiles and contemporary art. Changing exhibitions are held inside (some free), and there's usually public art in the gardens.

Museo della Seta

MUSEUM

(Silk Museum; 📍 031 30 31 80; www.museoseta.como.com; Via Castelnuovo 9; adult/reduced €10/7; ☀️ 10am-6pm Tue-Fri, to 1pm Sat) Lake Como's aspiring silk makers still learn their trade in the 1970s-built Istituto Tecnico Industriale di Setificio textile technical school. It's also home to the Museo della Seta, which draws together the threads of the town's silk history. Early dyeing and printing equipment features amid displays that chart the entire fabric production process.

Basilica di Sant'Abbondio

BASILICA

(Via Regina; ☀️ 8am-6pm summer, to 4.30pm winter) About 500m south of Como's city walls

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

OPEN GARDENS

On Sundays, the interconnected grounds of three Como villas open to the public (from about 10am to 6pm). Dotted the shore just northwest of the centre, a 1km promenade connects the **Villa Olmo**, the **Villa del Grumello** (www.villadelgrumello.it; Via Cernobbio 11; ☀️ grounds 10am-7pm Sun year-round, daily in Aug) and the **Villa Sucota**. Sometimes referred to as the Chilometro della Conoscenza (Kilometre of Knowledge), this scenic stroll takes in lush trails, fragrant gardens and hilltop views with lovely Lake Como ever in the background. Be sure to stop in the Villa Olmo and the Villa Sucota, which often host temporary art exhibitions.