



Lake Garda & Around

Includes ➔

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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.

Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Dal Pescatore (p208)
- ➔ La Rucola 2.0 (p180)
- ➔ Osteria Le Servite (p189)
- ➔ Agriturismo i Vegher (p182)
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Best Tours

- ➔ Isola del Garda (p183)
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- ➔ Try Verona (p198)
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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 |

Poets and politicians, divas and dictators, they've all been drawn to captivating Lake Garda (Lago di Garda). In fact, 7% of all tourists to Italy head for the lake's shores, taking to its wind-ruffled waters in the north and village- and vineyard-hopping in the south. Surrounded by three distinct regions – Lombardy, Trentino Alto-Adige and the Veneto – the lake's cultural diversity attracts a cosmopolitan crowd. Mitteleuropeans colonise northern resorts such as Riva del Garda and Torbole, where restaurants serve air-dried ham and Austrian-style *carne salada* (salted beef), while in the south, French and Italian families bed down in Valtenesi farmhouses and family-friendly spa towns such as Sirmione and Bardolino.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Verona-Villafranca airport (p200) is 20km from the lake. Regular buses link the airport with Mantua and Verona; Peschiera del Garda is 15 minutes by train from Verona.

BOAT

Navigazione Lago di Garda (☎ 030 914 95 11; www.navigazione.laghi.it) Lake Garda has a surprisingly extensive ferry network. One-day, unlimited-travel foot-passenger tickets include: lake-wide (adult/reduced €34.30/17.60); lower lake (€23.40/12.40); and upper lake (€20.50/11). Sample single passenger fares include Sirmione to Salò (adult/reduced €9.80/5.90) and Riva del Garda to Sirmione (adult/reduced €15.10/8.60). Car ferries link Toscolano-Maderno with Torri del Benaco and (seasonally) Limone with Malcesine.

There are no ferries in winter; services are reduced in spring and autumn.

BUS

ATV (☎ 045 805 79 22; www.atv.verona.it) Runs buses up the lake's west side, including regular connections between Desenzano del Garda train station and Riva del Garda, via Salò and Gardone. ATV also runs shuttles along the lake's east shore with regular services between Riva del Garda and Verona, via Garda.

SIA (☎ 840 620001; www.arriva.it) Operates regular buses from Brescia up the western side of the lake to Riva del Garda (€9, three hours, two-hourly). It also runs hourly buses linking Brescia with Desenzano, Sirmione, Peschiera and Verona along the southern shore.

Trentino Trasporti (☎ 0461 82 10 00; www.ttesercizio.it) Connects Riva del Garda with Trento (€4, one hour, every two hours).

CAR

Car is by far the best way of getting around. The lake sits just north of the A4 Milan–Venice autostrada, and just west of the A22 Modena–Trento route. A single-lane road circles the lake shore and is heavy with traffic in summer. Parking is difficult everywhere.

TRAIN

Desenzano del Garda and Peschiera del Garda are both on the Milan–Venice train line and have hourly trains in each direction. Excellent connections with Verona make the city an easy day trip.

LAKE GARDA SOUTH BANK

Sirmione

☎ 030 / POP 7650

Built on the end of an impossibly thin, appendix-like peninsula sticking out from the southern shore, pretty Sirmione has drawn the likes of Catullus and Maria Callas to its banks over the centuries, and today millions of visitors follow in their footsteps for a glimpse of Lake Garda's prettiest village and a dip in its only hot spring.

Sights & Activities

★ Grotte di Catullo

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE

(☎ 030 91 61 57; www.grottedicatullo.beniculturali.it; Piazzale Orti Manara 4; adult/reduced €6/3, with Rocca Scaligera €10/5; ☀ 8.30am–7.30pm Tue–Sat & 9.30am–6.30pm Sun summer, 8.30am–5pm Tue–Sat & 8.30am–2pm Sun winter) Occupying 2 hectares at Sirmione's northern tip, this ruined 1st century AD Roman villa is a picturesque complex of teetering stone arches and tumbledown walls, some three storeys high. It's the largest domestic Roman villa in northern Italy and wandering its terraced hillsides offers fantastic views.

Despite the name, there's no evidence Catullus lived here, although the poet did have a home in the village. Significantly, the living quarters were on the top floor, offering 360-degree vistas of the surrounding waters; it seems the Romans too liked rooms with a view.

★ Aquaria

SPA

(☎ 030 91 60 44; www.termedisirmione.com; Piazza Piatti; pools per 90min/day €19/53, treatments from €30; ☀ pools 9am–10pm Sun–Wed, to midnight Thu–Sat Mar–Jun & Sep–Dec, 9am–midnight daily Jul & Aug, hours vary Jan & Feb) Sirmione is blessed with a series of offshore thermal springs that pump out water at a