

Understand the Italian Lakes

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Over the past century, many of Italy's pivotal changes began in northern Italy: socialism, Fascism, the '60s boom, the '80s political turmoil. And now, a young and dynamic renaissance.

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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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Northern Italy's penchant for the 'outdoor room' has been going strong since Roman emperors landscaped their holiday homes.

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From Alpine pastures to Po Delta rice paddies, the lakes cuisine is as intriguing as its trade-route history.

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Italy is home to some of the oldest wine-producing regions in the world, many of them located around the lakes.

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Paris, New York and London may be fashion-forward, but they can't compete with a town like Milan, which 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, standing alongside Baden-Württemberg, Rhône-Alpes and Catalonia as one of the Four Motors for Europe. Just look around you, and you'll see breakthrough ideas literally popping up: urban art projects, sustainable architecture and cutting-edge design and fashion. As Leonardo da Vinci did in the past, Lombards are busy pioneering the future.

Best on Film

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

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

Romeo & Juliet (1968) Franco Zeffirelli's film is still the best adaptation of Shakespeare's love story.

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

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.

Best in Print

I 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 comedy by Dario Fo.

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

Italian Neighbours (1992) Tim Parks writing about his home town, Verona.

Northern Powerhouse

Stand at the base of Milan's cloud-piercing, LEED-certified UniCredit Tower and you'll understand why Lombards think their regional capital, Milan, is Italy's guiding light. This region – home to 17% of all Italians, 826,000 businesses and 30% of all multinationals in Italy – has in the last few years become an irresistible magnet for the brightest and best, who flock here to work in design, media, fashion, food, biotech, finance, engineering and technology. Milan and Lombardy play a vital role in European manufacturing and agriculture, bringing together industry and services, art and culture, university research and new technology giants.

Towns like Brescia, Bergamo, Monza, Brianza, Varese, Lecco and Como, let alone Milan, represent some of the most specialised manufacturing areas on the continent, placing the region 10th when compared with other European countries. Since the financial crash of 2008, vast sums of money have been invested in Milan's Porta Nuova and CityLife developments, the largest in the country since WWII. And, in the wake of the successful Expo 2015, Milan now has some of the best infrastructure in Europe: reachable by high-speed rail, three highways and an intercontinental airport. By 2024, the Expo area itself is earmarked to become a 'Human Technopole', housing the scientific faculties of the University of Milan and a new life sciences research centre.

A Cultural Renaissance

It's not just business, finance and science that this region excels at – the fashion, design, food and art worlds speak Lombard too. The 'Made in Italy' brand (much of it made in northern Italy) accounts for 30% of the €32 billion global design market. Fashion mecca Milan, bustles with over 12,000 fashion and design companies, 800