



Lake Maggiore & Around

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Why Go?

Italy's second-largest lake, Maggiore is one of Europe's more graceful corners. Arrayed around the lake shore are a series of pretty towns (Stresa, Verbania, Cannobio and, on the Swiss side of the border, Locarno) and these serve as gateways to gorgeous Maggiore islands. Behind the towns, wooded hillsides rise, strewn with decadent villas, lush botanical gardens and even the occasional castle.

Further still from the lakeshore, but not as far as you might think, the snow-capped peaks of Switzerland provide the perfect backdrop, and idyllic vantage points over the lake are many, from the breakfast terrace of your lakeside hotel to the eyries reached by cable car from Locarno, Laveno and Stresa. And fabulous detours await, whether into the high valleys from the northern end of the lake or to Orta San Giulio to the southwest, one of the region's most beguiling villages.

Road Distances (km)


Luino	39			
Orta San Giulio	64	48		
Stresa	56	38	27	
Varese	76	28	63	65
Locarno				
Orta San Giulio				
Stresa				
Varese				

If Lake Maggiore is your first impression of Italy, you're in for a treat. By train or by road, travellers traversing the Alps from Switzerland at the Simplon Pass wind down from the mountains and sidle up to this enormous finger of blue beauty. The star attractions are the Borromean Islands, which, like a fleet of fine vessels, lie at anchor at the Borromean Gulf's (Golfo Borromeo) entrance, an incursion of water between the lake's two main towns, Stresa and Verbania.

More than its siblings to the east, Lake Como and Lake Garda, Lake Maggiore has retained a belle époque air. All three have mesmerised foreign visitors down the centuries but Lake Maggiore became a popular tourist destination in the late 19th century after the Simplon Pass was opened.

Getting There & Away


BOAT

Navigazione Lago Maggiore ( 800 551801; www.navigazionealghi.it) Operates passenger ferries and hydrofoils around the lake; its ticket booths are next to embarkation quays. Services include those connecting Stresa with Arona (€6.20, 40 minutes), Angera (€6.20, 35 minutes) and Verbania Pallanza (often just called Pallanza; €5, 35 minutes). Day passes include a ticket linking Stresa with Isola Superiore, Isola Bella and Isola Madre (€16.90). Services are drastically reduced in autumn and winter.

The full Como-to-Colico run happens only two to four times a day (and only on the high-speed ferry) from November to March. There's still service from Cernobbio and Moltrasio to Como every 40 minutes from 7am to 8pm.

The only car ferry connecting the western and eastern shores sails between Verbania Intra (often just called Intra) and Laveno. Car ferries run every 20 to 30 minutes; one-way transport costs from €8 to €13 for a car and driver; €5 for a bicycle and cyclist.

BUS

SAF ( 0323 55 21 72; www.safduemila.com) The daily Verbania Intra-to-Milan service links Stresa with Arona (€2.70, 20 minutes), Verbania Pallanza (€2.70, 20 minutes), Verbania Intra (€2.70, 25 minutes) and Milan (€10.50, 1½ hours).

SAF also runs the Alibus, a pre-booked shuttle bus linking the same towns with Malpensa airport (€15).

CAR

The SS33 hugs the western shore of Lake Maggiore, intersecting with the SS34 just north of Baveno. On the eastern shore the SP69 travels up most of the lakeside, though it morphs into the SS394 around Luino. A key gateway to the lake is Angera, 68km northwest of Milan (via the E62 and the SS33) and 26km west of Varese (via the SP36 and SP69).

TRAIN

Trains run the length of the east bank and up the west bank to Stresa before continuing on to Domodossola. Trains from both Milano Centrale and Porta Garibaldi run regularly to Arona (€6.10, one hour) and Stresa (€8.60, 70 minutes). FNM trains from Milan (Cadorna station) arrive in Laveno via Varese.

LAKE MAGGIORE WEST BANK

Stresa

 0323 / POP 5000

Perhaps more than any other Lake Maggiore town, Stresa, with a ringside view of sunrise over the lake, captures the lake's prevailing air of elegance and bygone decadence. This is most evident in the string of belle époque confections along the waterfront, a legacy of the town's easy access from Milan, which has made it a favourite for artists and writers since the late 19th century.


People still stream into Stresa to meander along its promenade and explore the little hive of cobbled streets in its old centre (especially pleasant for a coffee break is shady Piazza Cadorna).

Sights

Monte Mottarone

MOUNTAIN

The cable-car trip up Monte Mottarone (1492m) from the northwestern end of Stresa offers pretty views over Lake Maggiore, including Isola Bella and Isola Superiore. From the summit on a clear day you can see Lake Orta, several other smaller lakes and Monte Rosa, on the Alpine border with Switzerland.

The 20-minute cable-car journey on the **Funivia Stresa-Mottarone** ( 0323 3 02 95; www.stresa-mottarone.it; Piazzale della Funivia; return adult/reduced €19/12, to Alpino station €13.50/8.50; ☀ 9.30am-5.40pm