

LAGO DI COMO *lakeside splendour*

Text and photos by NYX MARTINEZ

"When you write the story of two happy lovers, let the story be set on the banks of Lake Como." — Franz Liszt





Lago di Como. It's the place you go to live life beautifully. It's where close-knit families converge, where lovers stroll, bike, or roll past in their convertibles. Bikini-clad dog-walkers are abundant, as are sunbathing grandmas. It's where people look good at any age.

It's Italy.

It's also where you'd picture James Bond racing down narrow, winding roads. Blockbuster films like *Star Wars* and *Ocean's Twelve* were shot here, and that little brush with Hollywood fame is what drives thousands of tourists to the lake's shores year after year. From Queen Victoria to Sting and the Beckham brood, Lake Como has been a popular vacation destination with A-listers for centuries. Online, you will hardly find an article not associating the lake with its most famous resident, George Clooney.

Located in the Lombardy region of Northern Italy, Lake Como sits serenely between Milan and Switzerland, in the shadow of the majestic Alps. Shaped like a wishbone, it is the third largest lake in Italy and the deepest in Europe at 1,345 feet.

From the water's viewpoint, the beautiful pastels of the sky blend into the mountains; swans glide across flat waters while parachutes sail down from the mountainside. There's not a corner that isn't picture perfect, so don't forget to bring your camera.

Lake Como is for both adventure and leisure. Every kind of water sport is available: kayaking, kitesurfing, paddleboarding. But for

those who aren't athletic, eating and drinking can easily be the main agenda. Gelato shops are as abundant as the ice-cream flavors they offer. Many café/bars, like the family-owned Bar Pace in Gera Lario are the pulse of a small village.

Hungry? Look for an agriturismo (agriculture + tourism) to eat at. This is where you'll get a true taste of local cuisine. Usually a family-run farm with lodging and restaurant, agriturismos serve locally produced or farmed ingredients in generous portions. We recommend the always fully booked neighborhood nook, El Mercante Agriturismo in Via Laghetto, Colico. Reserve your seating at (+39) 0341930 257.

If you prefer the feel of the fancy cellar, head to the cozy wine bars for a sampling of cheeses and cold cuts with your wine. Remember that lunch time is siesta time—everything comes to a standstill, shops close their doors, and everyone pauses to enjoy the sweet, slow life. You should, too.

Take the C30 bus to travel between Como and Bellagio or the C10 line running between Como and Colico. But this route may take awhile, as the only road on the lake is typically narrow, so unless you've got what it takes to plow between those infamous Italian drivers, or unlimited time at your disposal, you're better off sightseeing with the scheduled passenger ferries.

Buy an all-day ferry pass for just 9 euros, which will allow you to hop on and off at any port, exploring the towns that dot the lake. Smaller boat rentals are a good option for families or groups. Or,



you can drive your own motorboat for a quick cruise around the water. The most popular towns are Bellagio, Mennaggio, and Varenna—expect lots of crowds here.

Once in any town, go around on foot. It's all about personal exploration—tuck into a side corner, go up a sudden flight of cobblestone steps, follow that lone fisherman as he turns the corner to find a quiet place. Beauty springs from every nook and cranny here.

There's plenty to see and do in Lake Como, but once you get here, doing anything might be the least of your agenda. You may find yourself content to simply take in the stunning Alpine views, sip wine late into the evening, or lounge around in local cafés, fascinated by the lively conversations of Italians, with their hand gestures and animated speech, their big bear hugs and effortless warmth.

Here, breathing beauty, it is easy to forget that life goes differently in other parts of the world, and that's fine. On Lake Como, forgetting everything else is perfectly okay.

CHECK YOUR CALENDAR

Summers in Italy are HOT but if you've packed your sunblock, the best time for tanning is June-August. You can avoid the Milan crowd by coming on weekdays, but most foreign visitors like to stay or camp out for a couple of weeks at a time. The lake is usually busy and lively in April-October, while December and January are the coldest. During the winter, tourists disappear with the sun, but some still visit to go skiing and snowboarding in the nearby mountains.

STAY AWHILE

Choose villas, rented apartments, five-star hotels or budget-friendly campsites (a lot of families do this at designated campsites on the waterfront). Check online ahead of time for reservations or deals as summer will see many places already fully booked a year in advance.

SIDETRIPS

Abbazia di Piona in Colico (Piona Abbey) is perfect for quiet strolls around the church and cloister, a peaceful place where you'll suddenly feel the urge to meditate. But if shopping is still in order, buy honey, liqueur and monk-made wines at the small store on-site.

Villa Carlotta in Tremezzo is one of the most popular public villas to visit and can be reached via ferry. It's a perfect example of the pretty palaces and villas common in this area.

The View from Al Veluu. Locals and visitors swear by the romantic atmosphere of this posh hotel and restaurant, ignited by gorgeous lake views from a perched dining side. www.alveluu.com