# Guide to Lake Como, Italy

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1. **Foreword**

We created this Lake Como Guide Book for all of you who find yourselves in the position we were in before our first visit, which was that we had chosen our destination and booked the trip but didn’t know very much about what to expect when we got there. We wanted to look in more detail at how we were going to get from the airport to the Lake, decide if we were going to rely on public transport or hire a car to get around the Lake, understand what kind of restaurants we would find there and, above all, get a better idea of what and where the individual attractions were.

We looked for a Lake Como Guide Book but could only see guides to the ‘Italian Lakes’, mostly about other Lakes we weren’t going to. Looking online we found information all over the place but no complete, straight forward Lake Como Guide. So we decided to look for one when we got to the Lake. What we found was that guide books are available at Lake Como but are written from a local viewpoint, giving equal emphasis to the most popular sights and places few visitors go to and more historical information than holiday help and that Tourist Information Offices vary in quality and mostly provide information on the place in which they are located.

In this Guide you will find information about things to see and do, by type of activity, together with ‘nuts and bolts’ information on matters such as ‘Getting to the Lake from the airport’, ‘Where to Stay’, ‘Getting Round the Lake’ and ‘Where to eat’. You can read this ebook online before the trip and then print it to bring with you. There are selective links to other web sites that can add value to that content and clear and logical arrangement of the sections of material.

This Guide is written for visitors by repeat visitors, based both on personal experience and informal feedback from other visitors. It’s a first edition so we would be pleased to receive any feedback you want to give.
2. About Lake Como

2.1. The most beautiful inhabited place on the planet

There’s a lot of detailed information in this Guide about things to see and do at Lake Como. The purpose of this section, however, is to describe how and why you will be seeing and doing those things in what is possibly the most shockingly beautiful inhabited place on the planet - where you will see less that is ugly or that doesn’t harmonise with its surroundings than you might have imagined possible.

Lake Como is situated at the northern end of the north Italian province of Lombardy, closer to Italian speaking Switzerland than to most of the rest of Italy - but it’s also only an hour and a quarter north of Milan.

The ‘pre-Alpine’ location is the reason why the one hundred and seventy kilometre perimeter of the Lake is almost entirely surrounded by mountains or, more accurately, by the sides of a deep valley carved by a glacier.

For comparison with more familiar high ground, the maximum height of the valley sides above water level is about two thousand, seven hundred metres, which is three times as high as Scafell Pike, the tallest mountain in the English Lake District, and about half as tall again as the sides of the Grand Canyon.
The valley floor is another four hundred metres below the surface, making this one of the deepest Lakes in Europe.

Lake Como is almost fifty kilometres long and varies from six hundred and fifty metres to four and a half kilometres wide. In places its edges are a succession of curves, turns, doglegs, bays and headlands and in parts its sides are very steep (emerging from the water at nearly ninety degrees). As a result it can look more like a river, or even fjord, than the conventional image of a lake.

The water divides into two separate branches about half way down, creating three sections of Lake – western branch, eastern branch and northern end. They form a distinctive ‘upside down Y’ shape. But if you find yourself imagining you see a figure, with its ‘western leg’ bent at the knee, straight ‘eastern leg’ behind it and torso leaning backwards - perhaps about to high jump – don’t worry. You’re not the only one who sees the Lake as an athletic creature with a scarf for a head.

Its irregular shape produces great variety within consistency in the scenery around the Lake. As you move about the area you frequently encounter striking new views made up of different combinations of width, steepness and changes of direction. As a result, you can be stopped in your tracks by what’s in front of your eyes just as easily on the last day of your visit as on the first.

But the highest ground around Lake Como is still much lower than the tallest peaks in the Alps, and the ‘mountains’ of Lake Como are therefore accessible in places by car, cable lift, funicular, bus and even foot. This adds a variety of viewpoints to the variety of scenery. As well as supplying magnificent views when you’re looking up from the side of the Lake, the tops of the valley sides also provide equally stunning panoramic views looking down over the lake and across at the opposite valley walls. And the Lake has one more visual treat in store – the scenery observed from the deck of a ferry boat following the irregular shoreline consists of a succession of new views revealed in graceful slow motion. It’s like being inside nature’s own slideshow. There may not be another place in the world where you can enjoy such dazzling scenery from so many viewpoints with so little effort as you can at Lake Como.
And of course there is the bonus that Switzerland is close enough for day trips from the Lake – either the short drive to Lugano or the longer excursion to St Moritz, including a ride on the only train that crosses the Alps above ground.

Lake Como is also about an hour and a quarter north of Milan, which makes it a convenient weekend and holiday refuge for that city. Of course the traffic between the two places flows in both directions, with Milan being popular for day trips from the Lake, for cultural attractions and shopping.

Much more significantly, rich Milanese have built no fewer than eighty ‘villas’ – like mansions, palaces or country houses, often with large grounds - around the edges of the Lake. Constructed in a wide variety of styles, they add elegance and splendour to the dramatic natural scenery. Or perhaps it’s the other way round – the Lake and mountains provide the only gallery splendid enough to host such a huge and varied collection of outstanding buildings. Many are still privately owned but some now provide up-market hotel accommodation. Others, taken into public ownership, are open for sightseeing, including two of the most popular attractions – the Villa Carlotta in Tremezzo and Villa del Balbianello in Lenno.

In addition to the villas, there are over thirty picturesque small towns or villages around the Lake. They look like bits of towns because of the size of both the residential and communal buildings but are only as big as villages, with permanent populations in the region of one to four thousand. Italians call them ‘communes’, and their suburbs ‘frazione’ – fractions - but we use ‘town’ and ‘village’ interchangeably, except for the two towns with relatively large populations - Como (eighty thousand) and Lecco (nearly fifty thousand).

No two villages are the same but their characteristic features include one or more of: nineteenth century Lakeside promenades and piazzas with pavement cafes; medieval districts with narrow, cobbled lanes; Romanesque and later churches; some highly unusual museums, a gelateria selling lots of different ice cream and a range of other small shops and places to eat, from informal pizzerias to big name restaurants; and of course, individual houses, because these are places where
people live. Surprisingly, despite the differences in their ages, the buildings look basically similar: all big, with the same range of colour renderings on the external walls and equally red roofing. There are very few that look mean or shoddy.

These towns must originally have occupied only the small areas of flat or gently sloping land between the water and the surrounding mountain sides but over time have expanded across the lower and middle slopes, clinging to steep sides as if building permits were issued together with exemption from the laws of gravity.

Lake Como is a perfect place to try water sports for the first time or to improve basic skills, because:

- there is a reliable wind – the Breva
- it only blows in the afternoon, leaving mornings free for other things
- there are no waves on a lake
- you can hire all the equipment you need
- courses are available at beginner and intermediate level
- watersports centres provide courses and other activities for kids too.

Most, but not all, of the facilities for watersports are located at the northern end of the lake (the Alto Lario) in Dongo, Gravedona, Domaso, Gera Lario, Sorico and Colico, often associated with accommodation in campsites and a livelier nightlife than in some other parts of the Lake. But you can get to these places from anywhere on Lake Como in time for the afternoon start.

In this part of the Lake the harmony of different individual elements is mainly about the orderly shared use of the water by, for example, sailing boats, windsurfers and kitesurfers in the afternoon - when the wind blows - and waterskiers, wakeboarders and kayak paddlers at other times, when it doesn't. Alternatively, there are also watersports facilities in Como, at the opposite end of the Lake, and some locations in between.

Lake Como is also a good place to try land based adventure activities because the surrounding mountains are high but a lot smaller than the nearby Alps, so
conditions are nowhere near as harsh. As with water sports, there are special arrangements for those wanting to try then for the first time. A surprising number of facilities for adventure sports are located close to either Bellagio or Menaggio, more often thought of as sightseeing locations.

At Lake Como the water, mountains, villas and towns are not only individually handsome, picturesque or magnificent but also co-exist so harmoniously that very little looks odd, inadequate or out of place. Lake Como is neither about national monuments in an urban setting nor about raw nature. It's a unique combination of stunning natural features and additions made by humanity that not only do not spoil the natural beauty but actually manage to add to it. As a result, Lake Como, taken as a whole, provides visitors with an experience that is probably more like practice for heaven than any other place on earth.
2.2. What’s the weather like at Lake Como?

The weather at Lake Como is typically mild and sunny between March and October. Indicative temperatures are no more than thirty degrees in June, July and August; twenty five degrees in May and September and twenty degrees in March, April and October.

Daily sunshine hours range from nine per day in the summer months to six in the spring and autumn. However, there can be rainy days in there too. And one feature of the weather that receives less attention than it deserves is the summer storm – dramatic and noisy, with more sheet and forked lightning than we’ve ever seen anywhere else.

But the typical weather in the long summer season is warm but not too hot to make it uncomfortable to move around and see and do things. Many visitors go for the spring and autumn months when the Lake is less busy but its gardens are covered in flowers, in the spring, or still pleasantly warm from summer, in the autumn.

Winter temperatures vary between a bit above and a bit below zero, with plenty of dense fog.

You can view monthly averages for Lake Como at [weather.com website](http://www.weather.com)

And [www.meteo.it](http://www.meteo.it) offers 15 day forecasts for a lot of places around the Lake. The site is in Italian but you can find the information you need by selecting from three successive drop-down menus: first, Regione (choose Lombardia); second Province (choose Como) and finally ‘Commune’ (select the town you want to find out about).
2.3. **The celebrity Lake**

There is something about Lake Como that has attracted a lot of famous visitors, some of whom have stayed for long periods. The reasons why so many great names have visited and stayed in the area have probably included: it’s where their rich patrons lived; or it offers a high level of privacy, respite from the pressure of their career activities or conditions under which they could get on with their work. But as the quotes at the foot of this article illustrate, distinguished visitors have also simply been stunned by the beauty of the scenery.

Anyone with an interest in the Lake, or in George Clooney, knows that he owns and spends time at Villa Oleander in Laglio and brings other stars such as Brad Pitt and Matt Damon with him when he stays there. Explaining the attraction of the place for him, he has said: ‘In LA I’m always on the go, working and networking. In Laglio, I understood there’s more to life than just a career. I became fascinated by the idea of slowing down and celebrating life.’ But as well as being a respite from making films, Lake Como also appears in them. The Villa Balbianello, for example, was used for scenes in Casino Royale and Star Wars II.

Another property owner at Lake Como is Richard Branson, whose Villa Cassinella can be hired by (rich) visitors. It was there that Louis Walsh and Ronan Keating selected the three X Factor groups for the finals, though the groups don’t seem to have shared the accommodation because they were shown arriving by boat – the only way to get to the Villa.

Footballers from Milan also spend free time at the Lake, including David Beckham when he’s on loan there. One of the places popular with famous visitors is an eccentric restaurant (Locanda) on the only island in the Lake – Isola Comacina. A list of its past customers includes Madonna; Jennifer Aniston; Arnold Schwarzenegger; Victoria Beckham and Elton John.

The attraction of the Lake for distinguished visitors can be traced back to Roman times when both Pliny the Elder and Pliny the Younger built villas here. And In the
fifteenth century Leonardo Da Vinci visited the Lecco area and is said to have reflected its rugged scenery in the background of paintings, including the Mona Lisa.

An upsurge in famous visitors occurred in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, a period associated with the concept of Romanticism, when the area was ‘discovered’ and publicised by writers such as Wordsworth and Shelley.

Celebrity visitor have stayed in a variety of different locations around the Lake. Liszt lived in Bellagio for several years; Rossini worked on Tancredi at the Villa Pliniana in Torno; Stendhal, Longfellow and even Queen Victoria stayed in Cadenabbia – Griante. Verdi also worked on Traviata there, at the Villa Margarita Ricordi, not far from Villa Collina, where Konrad Adenauer took his holidays. And Vincenzo Bellini, and Churchill, stayed in Moltrasio - at the Villa Salterio and Villa Rose respectively. It is difficult to move around the Lake without passing some spot associated with one or more famous visitors.

**Quotes from some distinguished visitors**

This Lake exceeds anything I ever beheld in beauty [Shelley]

I know of no other spot more obviously blessed by heaven [Liszt]

A treasure which the earth keeps to itself [Wordsworth]

A sublime and enchanting spectacle [Stendhal]

Is there a land of such supreme and perfect beauty anywhere? [Longfellow]

One almost believes that nowhere else than on the lake of Como can there be found such a paradise of tranquil repose [Mark Twain (Innocents Abroad)]
3. What you can see and do at Lake Como

Sightseeing is the main visitor activity in certain parts of the Lake and on a number of excursions. The section Ten Of The Most Popular Sightseeing Attractions gives details of sights that visitors say are their favourites. Seven of them are at the Lake and three are excursions.

The section headed Ten Other Sights Worth Seeing contains details of less well known attractions that we think are well worth a visit.

At Lake Como you can enjoy walks of varying lengths and degree of difficulty. The section Ten Opportunities for Walking And Hiking lists some of them.

But because the place is so beautiful, you can easily spend your time at the Lake doing nothing very much (hypnotized by what you see all around you). The Ten Ways To Enjoy An Inactivity Holiday page suggests ten ways you can do as little as possible at the Lake.

The inactivity option won’t be possible if you’ve brought young children with you, in which case here is a list of Ten Things You Can Do With The Kids.

The major attractions for some visitors are a range of exciting water and mountain based activities available at various locations around the Lake and described in our section on Ten Kinds Of Watersports and Adventure Pursuits.

Conventional sports are also catered for with prestigious Golf Courses and tennis courts. And of course the Lake provides opportunities for swimming, supplemented by a number of indoor pools.

In complete contrast, there are also opportunities for a range of different kinds of Shopping, including boutiques selling craft and luxury items, designer outlets and local markets. For the evenings there are some bars, discos and night clubs but visitors often prefer a meal at one of the prestigious Restaurants that attract customers from Milan, or in an informal pizzeria.
4. Ten of the most popular sightseeing attractions at Lake Como

Bellagio: The sightseeing attractions of the ‘Pearl of the Lake’ are boutiques selling locally crafted items and luxury goods in picturesque, steep, cobbled alleyways; tours of two villa gardens; churches, including one national monument and a museum of navigational instruments.

Villa Carlotta: The most visited villa at the Lake, easily reached both by road and by ferry. Striking features include a lovely external stairway in front of a neo-classical facade; a huge garden with a view across the Lake; historic furnishings and erotic sculpture.

Villa del Balbianello: A glamorous building on a prominent, multi-level site. The exterior has appeared in more international films than most actors and the interior celebrates the achievements of a great explorer, including the sledge he used to reach the North Pole.

Como: A modern commercial and silk manufacturing centre, with sightseeing concentrated in a compact old town containing a cathedral and other historic buildings and along the Lakefront (including the Temple of Volta). Other attractions include seaplane flights over the Lake and a funicular railway.

Varenna: A charming village on the east side of the Lake, with the Villa Monastero; falconry displays in the ruins of a hilltop castle, a shop selling Raku
pottery made on site and the shortest river in Italy. Varenna also has road and rail links to other places along the eastern side of the Lake.

**Menaggio**: Attractions include the most relaxed and relaxing piazza anywhere on the Lake; a handsome promenade; large commercial Lido; the ‘living museum of the Villa Vigoni Mylius and a road link to Lugano.

**The Abbey at Piona**: Hard to reach but worth the effort for the lovely church, the symbolic frescoes in the cloister and the grounds with Lake views - not to mention the shop selling own make liquor and sweets.

**Day trip to Milan**: Choose to visit one or more of: the gothic cathedral; La Scala opera house; the shopping mall connecting them; the San Siro football stadium; the Brera art gallery; the treasure house that is Castle Sforsesca, or Leonardo’s ‘Last Supper’.

**Lugano**: like a miniature Milan on an otherwise relatively undeveloped Lake, with a lane full of shops, including one selling fancy chocolate, and public toilets that are works of art.

**Bernina Express to St Moritz**: The only train that crosses the Alps above ground climbs from 429 to 2,253 metres, without the use of cog wheels, despite gradients of up to 70% - all of which means sensational scenery.
4.1. **Bellagio**

Approached by ferry, this is undoubtedly the best looking resort on Lake Como. Before you even get there, Bellagio has justified its nickname – the Pearl of the Lake. Located a little way down the western side of the promontory between the Lake’s two branches, Bellagio stands handsomely ‘square on’ to the approaching boat, in front of an immediate background of a small, gently rounded hill and a distant background of the high mountains of the eastern branch.

Franz Liszt lived at Bellagio for several years from 1837, staying in what is now the Hotel Metropole with Madame D’Agoult, a married woman with whom he had begun a passionate affair in Paris and who left her husband to be with him. From there he wrote: ‘I am living in the most beautiful area on earth’. There is however a case for saying that seen close up, the waterfront at Bellagio is now less attractive than it is from the deck of an approaching ferry.

The signature attraction in Bellagio is shopping – around the sides of the imposing blocks of buildings that stand between the Lakefront and historic centre and in the picturesque, steep, narrow alleyways that run through them. Here you can buy locally crafted wooden and silk items, food and wine and luxury goods such as clothing, watches and luggage, while cafes and restaurants provide an essential support system. Imagine the retail outlets of an upmarket departure lounge scattered around cobbled lanes and you’ll have a good idea of what to expect.
Guide to Lake Como, Italy

Sightseeing attractions in and around Bellagio include:

- A guided tour of the garden of the Rockefeller Foundation’s Villa Serbelloni (not to be confused with the hotel Villa Serbelloni) leaving twice daily (10.30 am and 3.30 pm) from the Promobellagio Office in the Piazza della Chiesa and lasting about one and a half hours. The high ground on which the villa sits provides wonderful views of both branches and the northern end of the Lake. The garden consists of a lower, informal area and a higher formally laid out part with terraces.

- Visiting the garden of the privately owned Villa Melzi, the first example of an ‘English’ garden at the Lake. It includes features such as the oriental garden, plane tree drive, lakeside terrace, Moorish kiosk and chapel, plus Roman statues and Egyptian sculpture.

Indicative ticket prices for both gardens are in the region of six to eight Euros.

- The Basilica of San Giacomo, in the Piazza della Chiesa – a building that is so outstanding it has been declared a national monument – and several other churches in the area.

- The Museum of Navigational Instruments in the suburb of San Giovanni, about twenty five minutes’ walk from the ferry point but included on the ‘suburbs’ route of a passenger-carrying ‘tour train’. The exhibits include telescopes and chronometers that are works of art as well as science

Links to further online information

www.bellagiolakecomo.com is the official website of the town and contains detailed information on the shops and the above sightseeing attractions.

www.giardinvillamelzi.it is the garden website of the Villa Melzi.

www.bellagiomuseo.com is the website of the Museum of Navigational Instruments.

You can also pick up a booklet – Bellagio Dove – on arrival at the ferry point.

© www.my-lake-como-holiday.com
4.2. **Villa Carlotta**

The Villa Carlotta in Tremezzo is the most popular of the villas around the Lake, providing visitors with ticketed access, on a ‘free range’ basis, to both the ‘house’ and the huge garden. Among its advantages is the fact that it’s easy to get to by road or ferry.

The neo-classical building has been described as ‘sober’. But that doesn’t apply to the external steps - a delightful arrangement of diagonal stairways leading up to and down from central balconies, with a playful contrast between the ^ shape of the stairs and the v shaped top of the gates.

There are two public floors – the first containing pictures, a plaster frieze with medals and a number of statues; and the second, elegant furnishings. The most famous sculpture in the villa is a copy of an extremely erotic Cupid and Psyche by Canova, the original of which is in the Louvre. Be prepared for a bit of a surprise when you see it from the side.

A major attraction, particularly in spring, is the large English garden, which explodes into colour when the azaleas and rhododendrons blossom. And if that isn’t enough, you also get a lovely view across the western branch towards Bellagio.

These are the things that make the Villa Carlotta one of the most popular attractions around the Lake.

Opening times, ticket prices and how to get there can be found on the [Villa Carlotta official website](https://www.my-lake-como-holiday.com).

[Arounder provides a good 360 degrees view of the gallery](https://www.arounder.com)
**Why the statue of Cupid and Psyche in Villa Carlotta is almost always photographed from the front and not from the side**

The sculpture of Cupid and Psyche in the Villa Carlotta is a copy of a statue by the French nineteenth century artist Canova, the original of which is in the Louvre. The theme of the piece is sexual love between a god (Cupid) and a mortal (Psyche).

The subject is taken from a bizarre and rather unpleasant story included by Apuleius in his novel ‘The Golden Ass’. Cupid is Psyche’s invisible lover until she finds a way to see him, whereupon he deserts her, leaving her to complete a series of superhuman tasks set by ‘mother in law from hell’, Venus. After completing them with secret, non human help, she then falls into a ‘deadly’ sleep from which she is awakened by the returning Cupid’s kiss - which is the moment captured in the sculpture. Love triumphs and they marry and have a daughter, whom they unfortunately name Voluptas, for which she probably never forgives them.

Seen from the ‘front’, the angle from which it is almost invariably photographed, the two bodies are positioned in what has been described as an X shape but which is also close to the ‘upside down Y’ shape of Lake Como, with Cupid’s kneeling body as the angular western branch, his wings as the northern end of the Lake and Psyche as the ‘straighter’ eastern branch.

But when you look at the sculpture from side on, you are faced with obvious anatomical evidence that Cupid is not about to ask Psyche to accompany him to the library. That’s why published photographs almost always show the sculpture from the front, presumably out of a sense of delicacy. So when you go to Villa Carlotta, be prepared for a bit of a surprise when you take your first sideways look at Cupid and Psyche. Then enjoy the whole thing for the stunning and beautiful image it is.
4.3. Villa del Balbianello

This stunning looking villa is probably the most distinctive building on the Lake, because of its position on a promontory jutting out into the water near Lenno and because of the stepped arrangement of its terraces. It’s owned by the Italian Environmental Foundation, which has managed to cast it in more films than most actors have appeared in, including Casino Royale, Star Wars II, A Month by the Lake and Oceans Twelve.

The villa was built by Cardinal Durini as a ‘place of delights’ and guests are welcomed by the slogan ‘Fay ce que voudras’ which translates as ‘do what you like’ (probably best not taken literally). The last private owner was the explorer Guido Monzino and the house showcases his achievements in the Museum of Expeditions, with exhibits including one of the sledges he used to reach the North Pole in 1971. There is also a map room (in the loggia) and adjacent library.

The house also contains a collection of Chinese, African and pre-Colombian art, and precious English and French furniture of the 1700s. But the true masterpiece is outside - the terraced garden dominated by the elegant "loggia" with three arches rising on the highest point of the promontory.

Opening times, ticket prices and how to get there can be found on the Villa del Balbianello official website

Arounder provides 360 degrees views of Villa del Balbianello
Como, at the foot of the western branch, is primarily an industrial town (manufacturing most of Europe’s silk) but has a variety of visitor attractions in its compact ‘old town’ and along its lake front. The former include the Duomo (cathedral) which took four hundred years to complete and is therefore constructed in a mix of styles, ranging from the marble late gothic facade (with statues of Pliny the Younger and Pliny the Elder, both former citizens of Como) to the baroque dome. The interior decoration includes tapestries, paintings, sculptures and wood carvings. Just bear in mind that the building closes for a few hours in the middle of the day. The Broletto (town hall) adjoins the cathedral and its facade, also marble, is arranged in different coloured stripes. The two buildings together make up an appealingly mixed up sight from a table at a pavement cafe on the opposite side of the Piazza Cavour. Also in the old town are the lovely Romanesque church of San Fedele, in the piazza of the same name and the Teatro Sociale (good enough to stand in for La Scala while it was under repair) which advertises guided tours ‘by appointment’.

There is a more diverse and scattered group of visitor attractions along the Lakeside, including a sea-plane hangar (from which you can take a flight over the Lake, landing on the water for a swim, if you like); the Villa Olmo (elegant on the outside and richly decorated inside but only accessible when hosting exhibitions) and the Volta Temple, dedicated to the achievements of the great scientist and son of Como, who invented the battery and after whom the volt is named. And at the opposite end of the lakefront is the funicular railway that carries passengers five hundred metres up to Brunate in a few minutes, from where there is a bird’s eye view of the town below.
**Links to further online information**

www.lakecomo.it and www.comune.como.it are official sites of the Province and Commune of Como, while www.visual-italy.it is a site promoted by the tourist authority of Lombardy. All three can be hard work. www.funicolare.it is the official site of the funicular railway operator

www.como-lake.arounder.com provides 360 degree views of the interior of the cathedral, Basilica San Fedele, Porta Torre (town gate) and view from Brunate.

**A salt and battery**

On the lakefront in Como there is a neo-classical temple honouring the achievements of the great scientist Alessandro Volta, who was born and lived much of his life in Como. The importance of his work can be gauged from the fact that the unit of electromotive force – the volt - is named after him. But for non-scientists his biggest achievement was the invention of the battery.

The museum inside the temple is dull, containing a lot of empty glass jars that Volta used in his work – it can be a bit like visiting a pile of washing up. And the small printed guidebook is so dry that you don’t mind that you have to hand it back at the end of your visit. But it’s worth having a look around the temple for the chance to see a couple of early versions of the battery, which was invented by Volta and originally called the Voltaic Pile. They don’t look much like the batteries we use now - one resembles a tea tray full of glasses and the other looks a bit like a concertina. But they were the ancestors of the modern battery.

Galvani was conducting experiments to demonstrate, with a pair of frog’s legs, that animal tissue generates electricity. Volta however was sure that the jerking motion of the legs was a reaction to electricity, not the source of it. He fixed pieces of cloth soaked in a saline solution between metal plates, converting chemical energy into electrical energy to produce the first continuous electric current. You could say it was a case of ‘a salt and battery’. That Volta was right is obvious now because we put rechargeable AAAs rather than the rear limbs of small green amphibians into the back of our TV remote controls. But the issue was the subject of heated scientific debate at the time. The exhibits in the Temple also include some sets of frog’s legs – the losing finalists, as it were - and the Legion D’Honneur awarded by Napoleon.
4.5. Varenna

Varenna, situated on the east side of the Lake, is a smaller, quieter place than either Menaggio or Bellagio - the other two ‘corners’ of the ‘mid Lake triangle’. But it has equally interesting attractions, plus a long, shaded promenade connecting the ferry point to a number of bars and restaurants.

Sightseeing attractions include the Villa Monastero, which combines a lavishly decorated, sometimes eccentric interior with a lovely Lakeside garden. A bit further to the south is the Fiumelatte, the shortest river in Italy, and a few kilometres to the north is Bellano, which has a long Lakeside promenade and the Orrido, a body of water crashing through a gorge.

The ruins of the thirteenth century Castello Di Vezio stand high above Varenna, requiring a fairly steep walk or a drive up a narrow road. But when you reach the top you find yourself on a terrace with spectacular views of the mid-lake. You can round off the visit to the castle by watching the resident falconer fly birds of prey at 4 pm every day.

On the way up to the castle there is a shop selling Japanese style Raku pottery, made on site.

Links to further online information

www.varennaitaly.com is the town’s official website;

www.villamonastero.eu and www.castellodivezio.it the dedicated sites of the two principal attractions.
4.6. Menaggio

Compared with Bellagio or Varenna, Menaggio has more flat and gently sloping land between the water’s edge and the mountains. This allows it the luxury of the broad Piazza Garibaldi, one of the most relaxed and relaxing places around the Lake, with tables and chairs outside bars, restaurants and a gelateria; a shop selling international newspapers, and the best tourist information office around the Lake. The definitive activity in Menaggio is therefore sitting at a table in the piazza, with a drink, meal or ice cream, catching up slowly on the news back home and looking up occasionally to ensure the Lake and mountains are still there. You can continue to check on that view while walking along the lakeside promenade, starting from the piazza; sunbathing or swimming at the commercial Lido di Menaggio at the end of the promenade or playing ‘obstacle’ golf (putting) just before the Lido gates. And if you’re a competent player, you can swap the view from the Lake for a panoramic view from the mountain side as you test your skills against the prestigious Menaggio and Cadenabbia Golf Club course.

The villa attraction in Menaggio is the Villa Vigoni Mylius, once a family home, now the Italo-German Cultural Centre. The interior has been described as a living museum of the nineteenth century and the English style park contains sculptures and a neo-classical chapel. It can be visited by appointment on Thursdays, in groups of a minimum of eight people.

Links to further online information

www.menaggio.com is the town’s official website

www.lidodimenaggio.it is the Lido site - in Italian only

www.villavigoni.it is the official site of the Villa Vigoni Mylius

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4.7. The Abbey at Piona

The Abbey is a very beguiling attraction located between Varenna and Colico on the north eastern side of the Lake.

The church is striking but the most fascinating area is the quadrangular cloister with its loggia style arches - a place of silence and symbolic visual communication. The four sides are representative of the four cardinal points – self contempt, world contempt, love for others and love for God and these ‘themes’ are reflected in what remains of some delightful frescoes on the walls of the ‘galleries’. But a recent visitor also found a collection of paintings, hanging in the cloister, in a style that can only be described as abstract surrealism, adding to the fascination of the place. In the middle of the cloister, a spring and a tree represent the spring of delight and the tree of life in the earthly paradise.

There’s a small souvenir shop in the cloister but a much larger one at the entrance to the site. The large shop sells bottles of liquor brewed at the Abbey; honey; herbal sweets; chocolate, and creams said to cure or prevent a surprisingly wide range of ailments. In the grounds there’s also a booth selling ice cream, sweets and crisps.

But it’s not an easy life for the residents of the Abbey, who follow a pretty rigorous schedule, waking up at five o’clock and putting in a full day of labour and devotional activity until the ‘beginning of the great silence’ at nine o’clock in the evening.

The Abbey of Piona isn’t easy to get to by public transport unless the trip is well planned, so driving yourself can be the most convenient way of getting there.
4.8. Day Trip to Milan

You can catch a train to Milan from either Como S. Giovanni or Varenna station. On a day trip, it’s impossible to cover even a fraction of the available attractions but these are some of the options you can choose from:

The Duomo (gothic cathedral) is often the first stop, because of its central location. Its impact was summed up by Mark Twain’s comment: ‘I cannot understand how it can be second to anything made by human hands’.

The Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II is a glazed nineteenth century arcade housing prestigious shops and connecting the Duomo with La Scala, probably the most famous opera house in the world. If you can’t, or don’t want to, see an opera, there’s a museum you can visit.

A theatre of a different kind is the eighty five thousand seat San Siro stadium, where both Inter-Milan and AC Milan (alternately) play their home games.

The Pinacoteca di Brera is the principal art gallery in Milan, with a collection of art spanning centuries. Two stand out pictures are a Raphael (Wedding of the Virgin) and a Caravaggio (Supper at Emmaus) but Piero della Francesca, Mantegna, Giovanni Bellini, Tintoretto and Veronese are also represented. And Italy’s contribution to modern art (Futurism) is illustrated by works from Boccione and Cara.

The Castle Sforzesco is a treasure house. Stunningly decorated rooms house works of art; weapons; musical instruments (ancestors of the modern guitar and piano) other beautiful ‘applied art’ objects such as plates, bowls and boxes - and even Neolithic implements. You could easily spend the entire day there.
In addition to the above attractions, there are a number of specialised tours of the city, such as:

**The San Siro Stadium tour** - for the football fans.

**Milan sightseeing tour including the Last Supper** – for everyone

The **Hop On Hop Off tour bus** circles around a route that allows participants to get on and off the bus as they please, picking another one up later.

**The Milan Segway tour** is unusual, not because of the itinerary but because of the means of transport around Milan - upright Segway motorised scooters.

**The Wine Tasting Tour in Milan** is not about visiting vineyards but about tasting a selection of wines while eating snacks.

**The photographic tour** gives you the chance to see Milan through the eyes of a professional photographer.

**Links to further online information**

www.isango.com is the website of the operator of the above tours

www.trenitalia.it: the trenitalia railway operator’s official website

**The Duomo**: the official website of Milan Cathedral

**San Siro stadium** : the website of the stadium where both Milan teams play

**Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II** – ‘arounder’ 360 degree view of shopping mall

**Teatro Alla Scala** – official website of opera house

**Pinacoteca di Brera** – official website of major gallery with large art collection

**Castle Sforzesco** – official website of magnificent museum
The Last Supper

The single piece of art that is prized above all others in Milan is on the wall of the refectory at the convent of Santa Maria Della Grazie. It’s Leonardo’s mural of the Last Supper, or what’s left of it.

The Last Supper was an experiment that went badly wrong. Leonardo didn’t follow the established practice for painting on walls, which was to apply the paint to wet plaster, so that the two dried together. Instead, he painted directly onto prepared but dry plaster, with catastrophic results. The Last Supper started to peel soon after it was finished and within sixty years Leonardo’s biographer, Vasari, reported that it was ‘ruined’.

Subsequent attempts to restore the work resulted in additional layers of colour being added, which became dirty both over time and through mistreatment. In addition a doorway was cut through part of the painting and then bricked up again. Then in 1972, a major restoration was embarked upon. It lasted twenty years and cost £5 million. The approach was very bold. All the paint added by earlier restorers was removed, leaving large bare patches, which were then painted with water colour. This produced a deliberate contrast between the clean flakes of original paint and the areas of water colour, making it obvious who did what.

The colours that emerged from this restoration are much lighter than before but have been criticised by some commentators, who prefer the pre-restoration version. Images of Christ and other figures, before, during and after cleaning, can be found on the Chicago Press website. Leonardo’s Last Supper - 360 degrees views with arounder.

You can book your 15 minutes in front of Leonardo’s Last Supper through VivaTicket. The earliest you can book for is usually three months from the current date.
4.9. Lugano

Like Como, Lugano is situated by the side of a Lake bearing the town’s name. And the two places are roughly similar to each other in size (Como has a population of about eighty thousand and Lugano between fifty and sixty thousand). But there are also significant differences between them.

Unlike Como’s lakefront, the promenade at Lugano is backed almost immediately by a smart modern financial and retail centre. A lane of shops there includes a delicatessen with lots of cheeses and cold meats hanging down from the arched front, like corks on an Australian bush hat; and a shop next door sells more kinds of chocolate than you knew existed.

The slopes around Lake Lugano are relatively lightly inhabited, as a result of which its ferries are organised to provide round trip ‘pleasure cruises’ rather than take passengers to many destinations around the Lake, as Lake Como ferries do.

You can catch the C12 bus to Lugano from Menaggio. But remember that the journey involves a border crossing into Switzerland, which is not part of the European Community, so take your passport with you.

Lugano may have the most beautiful public toilets in Europe, finished in shiny steel with ‘floating seat’ and ‘multi flush’ functionality. There’s one in the corner of the car park adjacent to where the bus from Menaggio stops but you can find them all over town. Transported to Tate Modern, they would be a serious contender for the Turner Price.

www.lugano-tourism.ch is the Lugano official website
4.10. The journey on the Bernina Express to St Moritz

There are frequent, organised day trips from Lake Como to St Moritz in the summer. A large part of the attraction of this excursion is that the journey includes a spectacular ride on the Bernina Express, on the only Swiss railway line that crosses the Alps above ground. In a way, it doesn’t matter that much that you end up in St Moritz. The most exciting thing about the visit is how you get there.

Passengers are taken by bus to Poschiavo, to join the Bernina Express, a bright red train designed inside as a sort of moving viewing gallery. But unlike other viewing galleries, this one climbs from 429 to 2,253 metres, without the use of cog wheels, despite gradients of up to 70%. The route is truly spectacular, with panoramic views of the valleys below as the train climbs higher and higher. There’s just one hitch. Sometimes the view is blocked by the foliage of young trees or by a fence. But when you can see it, the view can be dramatic enough to make timid passengers wish the fence was still there. As the train climbs higher, the landscape changes to a combination of permanent ice formations, sharp peaks and eerie lakes. You then rejoin the coach at Bernina Diavolezza for the last part of the outward journey.

There’s just enough time at St Moritz to have a cup of coffee, or a snack, and buy some chocolate. But the excitement isn’t over yet because the return journey involves the coach negotiating a steep descent from the mountains in a series of hairpin bends. It’s a long day and late when you eventually get back to the Lake, but worth it.

www.rhb.ch is the Bernina Express official website

and www.ilporticcioloviaggi.com the site of a travel agent that books this trip
5. Ten other sights worth seeing

Argegno: A picturesque hillside village with small but lively piazza and medieval lanes. Access to mountains by road or thrilling cable car ride.

Sala Comacina / Isola Comacina: A lovely bay with a fine restaurant / the island home of an eccentric restaurant visited by many celebrity guests.

Ossuccio: Starting point for an uphill walk past thirteen dramatically artistic shrines, to a Sanctuary with a restaurant. A World Heritage site.

Lenno: A curved Lakeside promenade with a panoramic view and large church at one end. But also a useful place – with gym, spa, post office and supermarket.

Mezzegra: Medieval hillside quarter and a cross marking the spot where Mussolini was shot.

Tremezzo: Grand hotels, restaurants, Lakeside promenade, villas and shops.

Two churches in Cadenabbia - Griante: One is beautiful but overlooked, the other has a spectacular ‘over looking’ location.

The lower western branch (Brieno to Cernobbio) where Mr Clooney and friends stay.

Sightseeing at the northern end of the Lake (the Alto Lario) - Dongo, Gravedona, Domaso and Colico

Excursion from Lake Como to Bergamo
5.1. Argegno

Argegno is a small but lively village consisting of a small piazza; short lakeside promenade with a ferry point; relatively large number of bars, restaurants and cafes; narrow, cobbled medieval lanes and houses scattered across the lower slopes. It also used to have a tourist information office but the building it occupied now houses a bank. There is also a large car park, the site of a weekly market, with a lovely church in one corner and a small harbour and grass and shingle area you can sunbathe on and swim from.

Because Argegno is located on a narrow stretch of the lake and because at this point the valley slopes are steep and covered in vegetation, the view across the water is dramatic, like looking at the other side of a green fjord. In addition, the almost ninety degree ‘dog leg’ in which the village is situated provides a unique viewpoint from which it’s possible to see not only across but also up and down the Lake, in both directions.

In addition, just outside of the village, a cable lift carries passengers up 800 metres in a matter of minutes to a very small mountain village called Pigra – not a ride for the faint hearted. But from the top there’s a spectacular view of Argegno and part of the lower western branch. Argegno is also the place where the C20 bus from Como turns left for San Fedele, in a mountainous region between Italy and Switzerland, earning the village the nickname of ‘The Gateway to the Val D’Intelvi’.
5.2. Sala Comacina and Isola Comacina

Sala Comacina is a mainly residential part of the greenway, but with a lovely bay, reached by a set of stairs. The highly regarded restaurant, La Tirlindana, has tables by the waterside looking onto a small boat dock from where you can take a water taxi to Villa Balbianello or to Isola Comacina, the only island in the Lake, uninhabited except for an eccentric restaurant – Locanda dell Isola Comacina. It attracts lots of visiting celebrities by serving the same six course meal every day and closing proceedings with a mock ‘exorcism’ in which brandy is ceremonially ‘burned’. A different kind of fire ceremony takes place every June when the island is the site of a spectacularly beautiful half hour fireworks display that is better than New Year’s Eve at the London Eye.

5.3. Ossuccio

The greenway passes the distinctive sail shaped tower of San Giacomo, the ‘Moorish’ tower of Santa Maria Maddalena and the lovely Villa Balbianello on the Lake side of the road. On the ‘mountain’ side there is a wonderful world heritage site – the Sanctuary of the Madonna dell Soccorso – consisting of a kilometre long walk rising four hundred metres to a church and adjacent trattoria, past thirteen shrines created between 1635 and 1710 depicting scenes from the Mystery of the Rosary with life sized figures sculpted in stucco and terracotta posed dramatically in front of frescoed backgrounds.
5.4. Lenno

Lenno is the location of the Villa del Balbianello, to which you can catch a boat from one end of the curved Lakefront or follow the signposted walk. Also at the southern end of the Lakefront are the large and richly decorated church of S Stefano and an octagonal Romanesque baptistry dating from the eleventh century. And further back from the water, up on the hillside, is the Abbazia dell’ Acquafredda with its lovely little church, private Abbey and free supply of cold water (acqua fredda).

The Lakeside promenade gives visitors the chance to enjoy a panoramic view in which each element of scenery ‘hands the viewer on’ to the next. It starts with the wooded hill on the promontory on the right hand side, behind which is the Villa del Balbianello. Then, as the eyes move to the left they pick up the gentler slopes of the eastern side of the western branch, which end at the town of Bellagio. And behind Bellagio the mountains of the eastern branch take over and carry the eye past the mid-lake to the mountains first of the eastern and then of the western side of the northern end of the Lake. And the best thing about this panorama is that you can enjoy it from a seat outside a cafe or restaurant or while strolling along the promenade eating ice cream from a gelateria.

Lenno also has a number of amenities with specific practical appeal, including the only supermarket – apart from two small places in Mezzegra – between Argegno and Menaggio; a gym; a modern spa with beauty and massage treatments and a post office – all sights for sore eyes if you need the facilities these places provide. Lenno also used to have a Lido that became a disco in the evening but it burned down recently.

- Lido di Lenno website

© www.my-lake-como-holiday.com
5.5. Mezzegra

After Lenno the greenway detours around the suburbs of Mezzegra, past the church of Sant’ Abbondio and the narrow cobbled medieval lanes of the suburb of Bonzanigo, where some houses have religious paintings on their external walls. But the greenway route misses one important monument, pictured right and described below.

Mussolini’s first, and last, visit to Lake Como

| In April 1945, Benito Mussolini and his mistress Clara Petacci, were part of a group of socialist republic party leaders trying to escape Italy in a convoy of retreating German soldiers. They were not fleeing empty handed, however, because the vehicles contained gold said to be worth USD 90 million, including three sacks of wedding rings donated by Italian women to help fund the invasion of Ethiopia. The museum of the resistance in the Palazzo Manzi in Dongo contains a document, written by Mussolini which if in English would read: ‘The 52nd Garibaldi Brigade captured me today, Thursday 27 April at Dongo. The treatment, both during and after the capture, has been correct.’ Mussolini and Clara were taken to Mezzegra, where they spent the night of 27 April, 1945 in the house of the De Maria family. On 28 April, Mussolini and Clara were being driven along via XXIV Maggio when the car was stopped outside no.14 (Villa Belmonte), the passengers removed and shot dead. A black cross, just outside the gate, is inscribed only with ‘Benito Mussolini’ and the date: ‘28 Aprile, 1945. Their bodies were then taken to Milan and hung upside down at a gas station. |
5.6. Tremezzo

At Tremezzo, the western branch - which from Argegno upwards is picturesque and charming - suddenly becomes elegant, grand and sumptuous. The change is signalled by the appearance, on the left side of the road, of two lovely private villas – the Villa La Quiete, with its ornate Italian terrace and, just next door, the Villa Carlia, standing at the end of a long drive, behind a smaller formal garden.

Those villas are the advance guard of a row of upmarket properties that include the five star Grand Hotel Tremezzo and the Villa Carlotta - the latter probably second only to Bellagio as the main tourist attraction at Lake Como. Also included in the row are a number of shops selling a range of luxury goods, and cafes and restaurants with tables on pavements under awnings.

On the other side of the road, only a pavement promenade separates the road from the Lake, which at this point, provides panoramic views that include Bellagio. The promenade can be particularly enjoyable because this part of the lake is renowned for its year round mild climate, which has earned it the nickname: The Tremezzina Riviera.

Things to see in Tremezzo include: the statue of the black Madonna in the baroque style church of S. Maria in the suburb of Rogaro; the church of S. Vincenzo at Portezza, noted for its bell tower and the frescoed interior of the church of S. Lorenzo.
5.7. Cadenabbia

Cadenabbia used to have a large number of British residents, which explains the otherwise surprising existence of an Anglican ‘Church of the Ascension’, just over the road from the Cadenabbia ferry point. Visitors waiting for the arrival of the boat can easily cross the road and spend ten or fifteen minutes looking round the building, which was the work of Italian architect, Giorgio Brentano. It’s just a few steps away. The interior is beautifully decorated with gold mosaic behind the altar, broad marble pillars, a rose window and stunning, larger than life line drawings of angels on a white background. The church is ‘open in the summer months’ for Sunday services

- [Church of Ascension in Cadenabbia](#)

Griante

The Church of San Martino, in complete contrast, is located, like an eagle’s nest, half way up a mountainside. You have to look carefully to see it (the small white object, half way up the mountainside, in the middle of the photograph). It’s a steep, winding walk up to the closed building, only made possible by twisting the path round 180 degree turns. So visiting this church is all about the exercise involved in getting there and the panoramic views of the Lake you are rewarded with when you arrive. The church itself is kept shut.
5.8. **Sightseeing in the lower western branch (Brienno to Cernobbio)**

The lower western branch is largely residential, with villages covering its lower to middle slopes. The C10 ‘Panoramic’ bus route runs along the winding mountainside road above the villages while the C10 ‘Lake’ route covers the same distance along the water’s edge, where there are also ferry points. The area is divided between a handful of small villages:

**Brienno** dates from the middle ages and is full of narrow, cobbled alleyways and steps. It also has an unusual war memorial, which is said to commemorate a battle in Libya in 1910 when an Italian battalion ran out of ammunition and resorted to throwing stones instead.

**Laglio** is the location of George Clooney’s Villa Oleander (the ‘Lake’ bus goes past his front gate).

**Carate Urio** is a medieval village, like Brienno, and has similar narrow passageways, compared on one website to a ‘kasbah’.

**Moltrasio** is the location of the luxurious Villa Passalaqua, which is available for hire. Previous visitors include Napoleon, Winston Churchill and the composer Bellini, who, according to the Villa website wrote Norma, La Somnambula and La Straniera while staying there between 1829 and 1833.

**Cernobbio**, has a broad, open piazza, lined with cafes and restaurants and an elegant metal art nouveau ferry terminal as well as two facilities – the Villa Erba and Villa D’Este - designed to attract the top level conference trade.
5.9. Sightseeing at the northern end of the Lake (Alto Lario)

There are some significant differences between the Alto Lario and the mid-Lake and western branch. For a start, the northern end looks different from the rest of the Lake. It’s often wider, with the surrounding pre-Alpine mountains set back further from the water’s edge.

The weather is different too, which is important because the Breva wind blows consistently in the afternoon, making the area suitable as an international centre for a range of water-sports. In addition to supplying equipment and instructors, many of the centres also provide accommodation – often in the form of campsites or caravan parks, rather than hotel rooms, or apartments - though there are plenty of holiday flats too.

The northern end of the Lake therefore tends to attract a higher proportion of younger visitors with more interest in nightlife. It also seems to appeal to specific nationalities, with German in particular being more widely heard than in other parts of the Lake.

The main towns of the Alto Lario are Dongo, Gravedona and Domaso on the western side, Sorico and Gera Lario at the top end and Colico on the eastern side.
**Dongo**

With a population of three and a half thousand, Dongo is slightly bigger than Menaggio. It’s a combination of four quite different parts. The first is the historic centre including the Palazzo Manzi. Formerly a private residence, now the town hall, it houses the tourist information office, the ‘gold room’ of the original ‘house’ and a museum of the resistance, with documents (unfortunately) only in Italian. The second area of Dongo is an industrial zone dominated by a steelworks and iron foundry. The third is the location of water-sports facilities, including sailing and motor boat rental, and associated camping and caravan sites; and the fourth is the surrounding mountains, with walks up to two churches with views over the Lake.

**Gravedona**

Gravedona occupies a semi-circular bay, with a promenade that, according to its own publicity, ‘lights up during the nice summer nights becoming the pre-eminent meeting point of the territory, with live music in the bars..., events and performances’. It’s also the location of a market, which takes place on the first and third Mondays of each month, selling wonderful local food. Sightseeing opportunities include at least four churches, notably the Romanesque Santa Maria del Tiglio and richly decorated eighteenth century San Vincenzo.
**Domaso**

Domaso is the premier water-sports centre on the Lake, particularly for windsurfing. Alternatively, you can hire a 40 hp motor boat, without a licence; or a J80 sail boat with its skipper. Such activity naturally attracts younger visitors, a situation that’s reflected in the names of nightspots, such as ‘Pub Crazy James’ and ‘blue Dog Pub’. Sightseeing in Domaso focuses on the Villa Camilla, which now serves as the town hall; and the church of San Bartolomeo. The tourist information office can be found on the lakeside, off the Via G. Garibaldi, just before it crosses the river.

**Colico**

Colico is the northern terminus of the C10 bus from Como, which sets you down next to the railway station. A short walk takes you to a large and attractive lakeside piazza with spectacular mountain views. Colico is a centre for windsurfing, kite-surfing and sailing, with schools for beginners. For après surfing relaxation, there are a number of bars and restaurants, and a night club – the Moulin Rouge. Local places of interest include the nearby Abbey of Piona and the Montecchio Fortress (the remains of a World War 1 fort, including the four largest cannon in Italy).

Gera Lario and Sorico are both watersports locations.
5.10. Excursion from Lake Como to Bergamo

Bergamo is much more than simply the location of the Orio al Serio airport. It is a cultural centre about an hour and a half from Como. Most of the attractions are located in the high level old town, including the Cathedral, St Maria Maggiore, the Colleoni Chapel and the Baptistery.

The town labels itself the ‘City of Music’ and is the birthplace of the composer Donizetti (both a theatre and museum are named after him). An opera season is held annually, from September to December, and there are also piano and jazz festivals during the year.

Bergamo also has a gallery – the Accademia Carrara – with paintings by artists including Raphael, Titian, Mantegna and Giovanni Bellini. Unfortunately the building is closed for renovation until July 2010 but a selection of paintings from the collection can be seen in meantime in the Palazzo dela Ragione in the old town.

Public transport in Bergamo features two ‘funicolare’ systems, which convey passengers from the lower to the high parts of the city.

Because it’s a longish way to get to from the Lake its worth thinking about looking around Bergamo on your day of arrival or departure if you’re using Orio al Serio airport.

Comune di Bergamo official website
6. Ten opportunities for walking and trekking

Visitors wanting to explore Lake Como by foot are spoilt for choice, both for serious trekking over longer distances and more difficult terrain; for less demanding but still reasonably vigorous walks of varying lengths and degrees of difficulty and for gentle strolls:

6.1. The greenway

The ‘greenway’ is a signposted 10.5 kilometre walk between Colonnno (just north of Argegno) and Cadenabbia – Griante (the last ‘stop’ on the upper western branch before Menaggio and the mid-Lake).

Because the route is mostly flat, at Lake level, and never strays far from the ferry points – or from the Via Regina and its bus stops – the greenway can easily be broken up into one or more smaller walks, beginning and ending pretty much anywhere along the route.

It doesn't matter too much from an aesthetic point of view which bits you ‘do’ because this walk is proof that you can probably go further at Lake Como than in any other inhabited location without seeing anything ugly.

The highlight of the first section of the walk, between Colonnno and Ossuccio, is when it passes the open gate of the Villa Balbiano, which frames the lovely house perfectly. This building should not be confused with the Villa Balbianello – you could say there’s an ‘ell’ of a difference between them.

The next stretch involves a bit of a diversion through Mezzegra, which however does not include the black cross outside the Villa Belmonte which marks the spot where Mussolini was shot.

The last stage of the route follows the Lakeside promenade through Tremezzo and Cadenabbia – Griante, passing the five star Grand Hotel Tremezzo and the Villa Carlotta, with views of Bellagio across the water to the right.
The walk ends at the ferry point in Cadenabbia but unfortunately makes no reference to the beautiful interior of the Anglican Church just a few steps across the road. It should be added.

There is an ‘open out’ leaflet, usually available at tourist information offices, covering the entire greenway walk in more detail.

The Greenway website

6.2. Two uphill walks to religious buildings on the western side of the Lake

There are two steep walks up the mountainside on the western branch. One begins at either Ossuccio or Lenno and passes thirteen shrines on its way to a Sanctuary. The other is a somewhat steeper, higher and longer walk up to what looks like a church nesting on a ledge on a rock face above Griante. They are described in more detail in the sightseeing on the western branch section of this Guide.

6.3. Eight walks in the hinterland of Menaggio

Menaggio produces a brochure in Italian, French, German and English (called ‘Walks’) giving details of eight walks of varying durations and climb in the high Menaggio hinterland. Some, like the walk to the little chapel of San Domenico near Breglia, are no more than an hour long while others, such as the walk from Menaggio to ‘Il Rogolone’, will take up to four and a half hours.
6.4. **By foot in the Province of Como - twenty two walks**

‘By foot in the Province of Como’ is a folder or ‘wallet’ containing details, on single files, of twenty two walks of varying lengths around the sides of the Lake, including:

6.5. **The suburbs of Bellagio**

The suburbs of Bellagio: a two hour walks around several suburbs on both sides of the promontory, including S. Giovanni, the location of the Nautical Instruments Museum.

6.6. **Argegno to Ossuccio**

Argegno to Ossuccio: a three hour walk that begins with the breathtaking cable car ascent from Argegno to Pigra, then continues with a walk back down to the Lakeside for the stretch between Colonno and Ossuccio.

6.7. **Dongo to Gravedona**

Dongo to Gravedona: a three kilometre lakeside stroll past campsites and watersports facilities.

6.8. **Gravedona to Domaso**

Gravedona to Domaso: a one and a half hour walk that moves away from the immediate lakeside and into the streets.
6.9. Domaso to Gera Lario

Domaso to Gera Lario: the third section of the north western side of the lake, together covering the area between Dongo and Gera Lario. This section takes a little over two hours on paths and stone paths.

6.10. Province of Como booklet on three trekking routes

The Province of Como produces a booklet on three trekking routes at Lake Como:

La Via dei Monti Lariani: a trail in four sections, totalling 125 kilometres; at an average height of 1,000 metres above the western side of the Lake, between Cernobbio and Sorico. Six days is the minimum amount of time said to be required for this walk.

La Dorsale del Triangolo runs from Brunate, above Como, bisecting the roughly triangular area between the two branches of the Lake and ending at Bellagio.

Il Sentiero delle 4 Valli meanders through the area between Lake Como and Lake Lugano, starting at Breglia and ending at Dasio. Total walking time is estimated to be close to twenty hours, over three days.

The booklet – Lake Como Trekking – gives maps and route details, as well as names and contact details of hotels and restaurants for each stage of each route.

The one thing these different types of walk have in common is that you can usually go a long way without seeing anything that’s very ugly or that doesn’t harmonise with everything around it.
7. Ten ways to enjoy an inactivity holiday

If you lead a hectic, stressful life and need a holiday that guarantees you the chance to rest, wind down, clear your mind and recharge your batteries, you’ll struggle to find a better destination than Lake Como.

It’s the perfect place for a relaxing, inactivity holiday, because you are staying in the most beautiful inhabited place on earth, which means you can justify spending quite a lot of time just looking at it. It’s not ‘doing nothing’ – it’s doing something extremely pleasurable that happens to require little or no effort. In that spirit, here are ten suggestions for ways to enjoy a relaxing, inactivity holiday at Lake Como:

7.1. Get a room with a view of the water and mountains

Because the lake is long and thin, you can enjoy stunning close-ups of the water and surrounding mountains from your hotel room or apartment. That sets the relaxed tone for the whole holiday. Because the view is so spectacular, you don’t feel that you have to rush out. You are sightseeing when you open the shutters in the morning, eat lunch or watch the sun go down with a glass of wine on your balcony or terrace. You could spend a lot of your holiday doing little more than stepping back in amazement at what you can see through the window and you wouldn’t have wasted a minute of it.

7.2. Lie in the sun at a shingle beach or Lido

Lake Como is not the seaside but you can sunbathe and swim at a number of shingle ‘beaches’ around the Lake. There are also more developed commercial Lidos, consisting of sun beds on a hard or grassy surface around a pool and/or beside the Lake. Facilities include changing and shower areas as well as catering and entertainment.

- Lido di Lenno
- Lido di Menaggio
7.3. A lake side latte

There are many small towns with waterside cafes and restaurants along the length of the lake. Because there are so many of them, so close to each other, that you don’t need to plan your meals and drinks, or watch the clock. Relax. When you’re ready, you won’t be far from a table and chair with a view of the water. Then you can continue sightseeing by looking up from your lunch or dinner. Try Menaggio, Cernobbio, Argegno, Colico or Varenna.

7.4. Read an international newspaper, slowly

Pick up an international newspaper and read it far more thoroughly than you would at home even though it’s yesterday’s news. It’s a low stress way of keeping up with what’s going on in the world.

7.5. Take a break in the middle of the day, as residents do

Adapt to local culture by taking the equivalent of a ‘siesta’ in the early afternoon when some local businesses close.

7.6. Book a relaxing spa, massage or beauty treatment

Apart from some large hotels, there are not many places around Lake Como that provide the kind of relaxed self indulgence offered by La Dolce Acqua - a smart, contemporary Spa that also offers beauty treatments and massages in a stylish new building set back from the water at Lenno.

Above a reception area and vitamin bar, the Spa fills the first floor with hot and cold pools, saunas and steam baths mixed with showers enhanced by music, scents and colours. The second floor contains the beauty treatment and massage area, where you can choose from a range of treatments using luxurious and exotic ingredients or based on aromatherapy, Ayurveda or chakra stones or enjoy a ‘solarium’ and a whirlpool, with spectacular views over the Lake. Here is a link to the La Dolce Acqua website.
7.7.  **Don’t drive everywhere – buses are comfortable, like coaches**

Don’t use your hire car all the time – the bus is comfortable and the driver knows his way around, including how to deal with congestion in a narrow section of road. For more information on the service, follow this link to [getting around Lake Como by bus](#).

7.8.  **Take relaxing ferry rides**

Take unhurried ferry rides through beautiful scenery – it’s like being inside nature’s own slow motion slide show. For more information on the ferry service, follow this link to: [getting around Lake Como by ferry](#).

7.9.  **Watch Italian TV, especially game shows**

Watch entertaining game shows on Italian TV – the fact that you don’t know what they’re saying only adds to the enjoyment.

7.10. **Eat out instead of cooking**

If you are self catering or not provided with dinner, eat out instead of cooking – menus range from Italian quick food to Italian fine dining.

You will find a list of restaurants in our section: [Eating out at Lake Como](#).
8. Ten ways to keep younger kids occupied

8.1. Buy lots of unusual flavours of ice cream

There are lots of unusual flavoured ice creams for kids (of all ages) to get through. The typical gelateria (ice cream counter) sells a large number of innovative flavours, such as Zuppa Inglese – literally English soup but based on sherry trifle – or liquiricia – exactly what it sounds like it would be. Ice cream is served in one, two or three scoops - in a cone or container.

8.2. Water sports centres have classes for kids over six years

A number of the towns at the northern end of the Lake are international centres for water sports. But they also make a particular effort to provide instruction for, and hire equipment to, adult beginners and kids over six years old. Other facilities include provision of play areas in some places.

More information in Lake Como Top Ten Watersports and Adventure Pursuits

8.3. Visit the ‘Orrido’ water feature in Bellano

At the ‘Orrido’ in Bellano, kids and parents can walk up, down and along what looks like scaffolding, through caves with viewing platforms in front of noisy torrents of water cascading down a gorge. It’s a narrow pathway so even easier for the kids than for adults.

8.4. Arrange accommodation that has UK television channels

Arrange accommodation that has some UK television channels that the children normally watch at home – after all they keep the kids entertained there. They may not automatically be provided in hotels or self catering apartments, so check it out in advance.
**8.5. Eat at McDonalds (outlets in and around Como)**

Italian food is tasty and healthy but if your kids will appreciate a meal at McDonalds during the holiday, there are outlets in Como - including one at the Bennetts shopping centre. The menu is as in the UK but with the addition of a dish of three large bread-crumbed prawns. There’s a drive through facility if you want to buy and go.

**8.6. Ride on the Funicular Railway from Como to Brunate**

A ride on the Funicular Railway from Como up to Brunate is not too scary, because it doesn’t leave the hillsde surface and the slope is gentler than, say, the cable car ride from Argegno to Pigra.

- [Como to Brunate funicular](#)
- [Argegno to Pigra funicular](#) (only in italian)

**8.7. Challenge them to a round of miniature (obstacle) golf**

There’s a small, ‘nine hole’, miniature (obstacle) golf on the promenade at Menaggio, very close to the entrance to the Lido.

**8.8. Book a hotel or apartment with a pool or visit a beach or Lido**

Book a hotel or apartment with a pool or visit a shingle beach or Lido – not exactly like the seaside but a decent alternative. Lidos have pools or Lake access, plus catering facilities and entertainment.

- [Lido di Lenno](#)
- [Lido di Menaggio](#)
8.9. Visit Jungle Raider Park near Civenna

Visit this family attraction consisting of four obstacle courses in trees for different age groups.

More information visit Jungle Raider Park Civenna

8.10. Enjoy a simple, comfortable bus ride along a high, ‘panoramic’ route.

Take a spectacular bus ride along a high, ‘panoramic’ route, choosing to sit on the Lake side of the bus for the views; or cruise along the Lake on a ferry boat. Kids like public transport.

For more information on the service, follow this link to getting around Lake Como by bus.
9. Lake Como Top Ten Watersports And Adventure Pursuits

**Sailing**: Charter a boat with a skipper, hire a boat or take lessons – available at beginner or intermediate level (and for kids too).

**Windsurfing** You can hire the equipment if you know what you’re doing or take courses at kids, adult beginner or advanced level.

**Kitesurfing** courses and hire of equipment are alternatives to windsurfing at the a number of watersports centres

**Waterskiing, wakeboarding, jetskiing**: Hire of equipment and/ or courses at various levels (including kids).

**Canoes and kayaks**: Hire of canoes and kayaks and organised trips.

**Parachuting and paragliding**: There are a number of providers, including those offering ‘tandem’ flights for beginners with someone experienced.

**Rock climbing and canyoning**: Facilities include rock gym and organised canyoning - walking, climbing, jumping and swimming through gorges.

**Mountain biking and road cycling**: A number of centres hire out mountain bikes and road bikes and organise one day and longer trips for both.

**Horse riding**: There are equestrian centres where you can ride by the hour, half day or full day and take lessons or join organised rides.

**Fitness Trails**: There is a 4k fitness trail above Menaggio and a park near Civenna with a set of four obstacle courses between trees for adults and kids.
9.1. Sailing

Sailing on Lake Como skippered boats (the ‘Limo’ option)

For visitors to Lake Como, the word ‘sailing’ can mean a number of different things. For example, a group of people can charter a boat with a skipper, rather like hiring a Limo with a chauffeur. Alternatively, one or two people can arrange the sailing equivalent of self drive hire - renting a smaller boat to sail in for a few hours, or even days. And a third option, for those who don’t know how to sail a boat, is to take a course that will give them that basic ability within a week, with only a couple of hours of lessons a day. The most common arrangement at Lake Como is to offer ‘self drive’ hire and lessons in one location, but there are a couple of centres that provide skippered boats.

Sailing Days, based in Como, is a good example of the ‘Limo’ option. It hires out eight different boats – from seven to thirteen metres long - all with a skipper and one or more cabins with toilets.

EaseAway based in Menaggio is a British company on Lake Como offering sailing on board a Beneteau 323 Celebration with skipper. Safety conscious and fully complying with MCA and RYA requirements, EaseAway can provide a ‘serious’ day sailing with a skipper, a champagne cruise or a training course.

Hiring a boat with a skipper is a way of finding out what sailing feels like, without any responsibility. It’s often a lot more exciting than you might expect.
**Self sail boat hire at Lake Como**

Lake Como gives visitors the chance to ‘self drive’ sail in warm weather and beautiful surroundings.

The two **Tabo Surf Centres**, in Gera Lario and Sorico, are a good example of this end of the sailing spectrum. They have a dozen boats for hire, both single hulls and catamarans. You don’t need a ‘licence’ to hire one, but the staff will evaluate your level of competence before letting you take a boat out. Rental charges vary according to the number of people sailing and the length of hire (hourly rates reduce on longer bookings), starting from a base level of €19 per hour, or €37 per half day. Hire of personal sailing kit costs an extra €9 per hour, or €13 per day (2009 prices).

The Tabo centres also run sailing courses for beginners and those wanting to get better; and teach, and hire equipment for, wind-surfing and kitesurfing. They also hire out canoes and mountain bikes. Additional facilities include the beach, children’s playground and tennis court.

**The Katsegeln Centre** in Domaso rents out Topcat K1 and K2 catamarans to those with a WDVS catamaran sailing licence. To illustrate cost, the charge for hiring a K1 is €37 for an hour; €87 for half a day - lifejackets and trapeze extra. The centre also runs sailing courses.

The Katsegeln Centre is a part of the **Windsurf Centre**, also in Domaso, which offers windsurfing lessons and equipment hire, and rents out canoes and mountain bikes.
Lake Como sailing lessons

You can go on holiday for a few days at Lake Como, never having set foot on a sailing boat before, take a few hours of lessons spread over three to five days and return home a week later with a basic ability to sail a boat. Or, if you already know the basics, you can develop your sailing ability to intermediate or advanced level. You could then include some sailing, at your level of expertise, in your future holidays – or do a bit at weekends, if you live near water. You won’t have to buy a boat, you can hire one when you know what you’re doing.

You’ll be surprised at how easy it is to get started. You don’t even have to be able to swim in order to sail, because you should be required to wear a lifejacket. If you can play golf, tennis or squash, you can sail. If you can drive a car, or even ride a bike, you can sail. If you’re a kid, over six years old, you can sail. You can make much quicker progress at sailing than at, say, skiing. And it’s more exciting for a beginner. Speed varies according to the type of boat and its position at different times, in relation to the prevailing wind. But when the wind is filling the sails to the maximum, you really feel as if you’re flying over the water at a high rate of knots (which of course you are).

Because tuition time is spread over several days, you can combine sailing with other active sports, sightseeing, nightlife or just relaxing on the beach. But that’s a happy co-incidence - not the reason why sailing is taught for only a few hours a day. The reason for it is that the most important wind – the Breva – blows only in the afternoon. Mornings and evenings are usually still. That’s when the motorboats, waterskiers, wakeboarders and canoeists take over the flat water.

Most sailing courses are for adults, either in a group class, or in private lessons. At the Tabo Surf Centres in Gera Lario and Sorico, group classes are available for beginners, improvers and advanced; and there’s a kids’ class for 6-12 year olds. Adult classes cost €250 for fifteen hours over five days (plus €25 for ‘FIV’ paperwork) while the kids’ class costs €165. All prices include the cost of kit. As the lessons progress, you move on to sportier boats and if you take private
lessons (starting at €50 per hour, with rate reductions for longer bookings) you get to sail a Hobie Catamaran.

The Tabo centres also hire ‘self drive’ sailing boats; teach, and hire equipment for, wind-surfing and kitesurfing; and rent out canoes and mountain bikes. Additional facilities include the beach, children’s playground and tennis court.

The Katsegeln centre in Domaso provides sailing training courses:

at introductory level, lasting seven and a half hours over three days

at basic level, lasting twelve and a half hours over five days, and

at advanced level, lasting ten hours over five days.

The courses cost €185, €290 and €375, including personal kit hire. Alternatively, you can also choose training by co-sailing at €80 for one hour and €120 for two.

The centre also hires out boats to sailors with an appropriate licence.
9.2. Windsurfing

Windsurfing is one of the most popular of Lake Como’s water sports, with centres in a number of locations (mostly around the northern end, because of its ‘Breva’ wind that blows in the afternoon). These centres typically hire out equipment for ‘own use’ and run group training courses, supplemented by individual tuition. Lessons are available at beginner, intermediate and advanced levels, and they often have a class for kids too.

The cost of hiring windsurfing equipment for independent use is in the region of €30 to €40 per day (but you’ll have to provide evidence of competence). Courses are structured as a total number of hours, spread over a certain number of days. Illustrative prices are €120 for five hours over two days, €200 for ten hours and €300+ for longer courses. Private lessons cost around €40 per hour.

Some of the windsurfing centres are:

Tabo Surf Centres in Gera Lario and Sorico - hire out gear for windsurfing and also run courses, for adults and kids. The centres also teach, and hire equipment for kitesurfing and sailing; and rent out canoes and mountain bikes. Additional facilities include the beach, children’s playground and tennis court.

The Windsurf Centre in Domaso - hires windsurfing equipment and runs basic and advanced courses for adults, plus a ‘Children’s Pirate Course’ (to introduce kids to windsurfing). Training alone, using your equipment, costs €55 per person per hour. The Windsurfer Centre is connected with the Katsegeln centre, also in Domaso, which hires out, and runs sailing courses on, Topcat Catamarans. The organisation also hires out mountain bikes and canoes.
9.3. **Kitesurfing**

Kitesurfing may be Lake Como’s most exciting water based activity. It’s found mainly at the northern end, where, a combination of the Breva wind and open beaches produces perfect conditions. Kitesurfing centres offer both hire of equipment for own use (proof of competence required) and classes ranging from beginner to advanced level. The cost of hiring the equipment is around €50 per day and group classes, structured as a certain number of hours over a number of days, run from €200 to €300 plus.

The are a couple kitesurfing centres on the Lake:

*The Tabo Surf Centre in Gera Lario and Sorico,* is an Italian Kitesurf Federation centre, hiring out boards and kites and running training courses. After an initial two hour ‘see if you like it’ lesson (€50), courses are available at basic, advanced and ‘full immersion’ levels. The centres also teach, and hire equipment for windsurfing and sailing, and rent out canoes and mountain bikes. Additional facilities include the beach, children’s playground and tennis court.

*Bomboklat Kite School in Sorico* offers kitesurfing courses running from basic to advanced, with ‘federal qualified instructors’. Duration and cost are not given on the website.
9.4. Waterskiing, wakeboarding and jetskiing

Waterskiing, wakeboarding and jetskiing are possible at Lake Como because winds such as the Breva, which are perfect for sail and kite based activities in the afternoon, drop in the morning and evening, leaving a calm, flat surface. Hire of equipment and instruction, together, can cost around €50 for half an hour, €100 for the whole hour.

Some of the centres on the Lake are:

**The Jolly Racing Club Lezzeno**, on the eastern side of the western branch of the Lake, below Bellagio, supplies ‘complete equipment’ and qualified instructors for wakeboarding, wakesurfing, acqua jump and acqua tube. In addition, there’s a solarium, bar, pizzeria, restaurant and hotel, as well as excursions by canoe, mountain bike and seaplane. And it caters for kids from five years old.

In a nearby part of the Lake the Liquid Park Waterski Club in Bellagio specializes in training beginners and intermediate skiers, wakeboarders and barefooters.

‘Wakeboard Lake Como’ in Moltrasio in the lower part of the western branch, has equipment and instructors for wakeboarding, wakesurfing and waterskiing as well as mountain and road bikes. You can also spend time doing nothing, in a deckchair in their camp with a beach.

And the Centro-Sci Nautico Como, based in Cernobbio, also offers classes in waterskiing and wakeboarding.
9.5. Canoeing and kayaking

Tabo Surf Centres in Gera Lario and Sorico hire out canoes, and organise trips into the Piano Di Spagna natural park. Illustrative hire rates, for one day, are: €19 (single, opened) €21 (single, closed) and €38 (double, opened). The centres also teach, and hire equipment for, sailing, windsurfing and kitesurfing; and rent out mountain bikes. Additional facilities include the beach, children’s playground and tennis court.

The Windsurfer Centre in Domaso hires out ‘collapse resistant’ single and double canoes, with lifejackets. It also hires out equipment and runs courses on, Topcat sailing, windsurfing and kitesurfing. It also rents out mountain bikes.

In the central Lake area, the Cavalcalario Club in Bellagio hires out canoes, kayaks and mountain bikes.

9.6. Parachuting and paragliding

Tandem parachute launches take place over Bellagio. The town’s official brochure, Bellagio Dove, gives the contact names ‘Para Lario’ and Giorgio Benzi and telephone number 031.951.363, for further information on this activity and also about helicopter trips. The same brochure refers to paragliding and hang-gliding at Cornizzolo (Civate), for which it gives as its first contact name and number ‘Gilardoni Corrado: Tel. 031.951.272’; and as its second, ‘Pierluigi Gandola: Tel. 031.952.493’.

Tandem paragliding flights (i.e. you and someone who knows what they’re doing) are provided by an organisation with the website address: www.arialibera.altervista.org. The flights start from Mount Muggio, 1,800 metres above Bellano. The Cavalcalario Club, near Bellagio, also offers dual seat paragliding ‘flights’ (with an ‘able pilot’), from Mount Nuvolone, with transport between the launch site and Bellagio.
9.7. Rock climbing, canyoning and related activities

Climbing is possible in a number of locations in the area around Bellagio.

The Casa delle Guide di Lecco, Valsassina e Orobie is a school that lists its activities as: winter mountaineering, climbing, canyoning, ice climbing, ‘freeride’, snowshoe hiking, ski touring, trekking, travel and fixed rope routes. These are obviously technical terms for a set of specialised activities. Unfortunately, Casa delle Guide di Lecco website, doesn’t go into more detail in English.

The Cavalcalario Club in the Galasco area provides specialised canyoning expeditions, involving walking, climbing, swimming and jumping through gorges. For more information on this emerging adventure activity, see Bellagio Mountains.

On the west side of the Lake, there is a Palestra di Roccia – literally, a ‘rock climbing gym’ on a pedestrian-only road that runs beside a tunnel on the main road running north from Menaggio. The organisation to make contact with for more information on climbing is the Club Alpino Italiano, Menaggio

9.8. Mountain biking and road cycling

Hire of mountain bikes is widespread around Lake Como. Some of the most popular locations are:

Tabo Surf Centres in Gera Lario and Sorico - new Scott Test Centre. Rates per day are: €15 (basic), €25 (front suspended Scale 50) and €27 (full suspended Aspect 15 and 25). Map of mountain routes available. The centres also teach, and hire equipment for, sailing, windsurfing and kitesurfing, and rent out canoes. Additional facilities include the beach, children’s playground and tennis court.

The Windsurfer Centre in Domaso hires out Stevens mountain bikes, at €16 for half a day. It also rents out canoes and hires equipment for, and gives lessons on sailing, windsurfing and kitesurfing.

The Cavalcalario Club, near Bellagio, offers six, eight and twenty two kilometre daily rides from Guello, with hire of bikes and helmets. It also organises one day
trips to Engadina and Colico, with fifty kilometres of riding on each, and a two day mountain bike excursion to Brunate. By a circular piece of logic, you have to be a club member to join in, but you become a member by taking one of the trips. An alternative way of enjoying mountain biking is downhill riding, on mountain paths.

9.9. **Horse Riding**

There are a number of locations around Lake Como for horse riding:

- The *Cavalcario Club, Bellagio*, provides horses for one, two hours or for the whole day.

- The *Centro Ippico del Lario in Sorico* and *El Picadero in Colico* organise both rides and lessons.

- The *Centro Ippico La Torre*, situated on the C12 bus route between Menaggio and Porlezza, offers rides by the hour and half day or full day trekking.

9.10. **Exercising and Fitness Trails**

The ‘Percorso della Salute’ is a 4 kilometre route through woods, with areas set aside for exercising. More information can be found on the [Menaggio.com website](http://Menaggio.com). The *Jungle Raider Park*, in Piano Rancio near Civenna, consists of four different obstacle courses, above ground, among the trees.

The easiest course is the ‘Air Path’, for kids at least 120cms tall. It has eighteen obstacles but none is more than three metres off the ground. The most demanding course is the ‘Hurricane’, for children and adults who are at least 160 centimetres tall. Platforms reach as much as fifteen metres high and there are ten obstacles to overcome.

The Air Path costs €10 and the Hurricane €16, but there are discounts for additional ‘turns’ on the same course or on more than one of the courses.
10. More things to do

10.1. Hire of motorboats

Motorboats can mean anything from inflatables (rubber dinghies) to a Gran Turismo 115 horsepower boat, though you won’t actually be able to drive anything bigger than 40 hp without qualifications. And you have to be at least eighteen to hire anything.

For a 40 hp boat, rates are in the range of €75 for one hour to €140 for six hours.

Some of the motorboat bases are:

- **Blue Easy Rent**, located in the Sporting Club Domaso, offers motor boat hire plus ‘private camping site, sunbathing area, dressing rooms, ...bar and lounge inside the club house, large parking site, and free beaches only fifty metres far’.

- **Rent A Boat Newton**, in Dongo, hires out two 40hp boats, without licence, and a 150hp and 330hp boat, both requiring a licence.

- **Cantieri A Mostes** and **Matteri Cantieri Nautico** hire out boats from Lezzeno, on the east side of the western branch, below Bellagio.
10.2. Golf

The closest golf courses to Lake Como are the Circolo Golf Villa D’Este at the southern end of the western branch and the Menaggio and Cadenabbia Golf Club, in the mid-lake area. Both are 6,000 yards + with some steep slopes and narrow fairways, making a certain level of accuracy a pre-requisite for achieving the respective 70 and 69 par scores.

The Villa D’Este Golf Club was built in 1926, to a Peter Gannon design. As you might expect from a club developed by the owners of the five star hotel Villa D’Este, its ‘gold book’ contains the signatures of royalty and aristocrats.

The Menaggio and Cadenabbia Club is of particular interest to British visitors. Founded in 1907 by four English gentlemen meeting at the Victoria Hotel, it has a club house described on its own website as ‘like taking a leap into the past, into a corner of England as it was a century ago’. What that seems to mean in practice is a worn wooden floor, old prints, leather sofas, a seafood restaurant, a library of valuable old golfing books and a baronial fireplace ‘to warm you up on autumn days’.

The course gets very busy at weekends, so it’s better to play during the week if possible. You may just find yourself sharing the fairway with newish member G.Clooney and his playing companions, B.Pitt and M.Damon.

Golfbreaks organises real treats in the form of four day breaks with two rounds of golf at a choice of four courses. Accommodation is provided at the five star Grand Hotel Tremezzo – a blend of old world luxury and state of the art spa facilities.

A golf break at Lake Como combines lavish accommodation with rounds of golf at historic Clubs set in beautiful scenery.

- Menaggio and Cadenabbia Golf Club
- Villa d’Este Golf Club
- Golfbreaks
10.3. Shopping at Lake Como

The definitive holiday shopping experience at Lake Como is found in Bellagio in boutiques scattered among the steep, cobbled alleyways linking the waterfront to the old centre. Items available include locally crafted or manufactured wooden or silk articles and international luxury goods. And the shopping can be combined with other attractions at the ‘Pearl of the Lake’ including sightseeing or relaxing at the Lido.

The nearest thing to a shopping mall close to the Lake is Bennett’s, in Como. It includes a McDonalds but the biggest part of the space is taken up with a supermarket. It’s located on the road one exit further round the roundabout than the exit that takes you out of Como and into the tunnel that leads you to the western branch. There is also a big retail park at Como South, about thirty minutes further away from the Lake by car.

For lots of designer outlets in one place, including Ferrari - with Schumacher’s car outside and red trainers (not his) at €200+ per pair - there is a shopping mall at Fox Town, over the Swiss border, with a web site address at Fox Town Factory Stores in Mendrisio, Switzerland.

There are also lots of lakefront (or close to lake) shops in Lugano, including one selling more variations on the theme of chocolate than you ever knew existed.
11. Eating out at Lake Como

Eating out at Lake Como reflects the nature of the location. Because the Lake is a weekend and holiday location for rich Milanese, there are up-market restaurants serving creative variations on traditional dishes. But there are also more traditional restaurants serving uncomplicated versions of regional specialities, as well as pizzerias with three generations of local residents around each table. Of course some bars and cafes around the Lake offer ‘convenience food’, out of a packet, and if you have young kids with you, they could be a Godsend. But the best restaurants still share a commitment to meals made with fresh, seasonal ingredients, sourced locally from the land or the Lake and a selection of wines that includes some produced in limited quantities in the region. They also maintain the tradition of unhurried dining with service so courteous that they won’t bring you the bill unless you make a point of asking for it. With all of that in mind, here are some of the most highly recommended places to eat around the Lake:

Cernobbio

Il Gatto Nero

This restaurant gives you a taste of the high life; both literally, because its location in the hills above Cernobbio, and metaphorically, because Gatto Nero is frequented by Italian football stars and by Mr. Clooney and friends, who enjoy signature dishes like risotto with tartufo.

Il Glicine

A trattoria – more informal than a restaurant, Il Glicine has a simple yet elegant indoor dining area and a covered terrace. The menu is based on Mediterranean dishes in summer, with dishes like prawns in tempura batter taking some beating.
**Villa D’Este**

Five star hotel, with formal and elegant Verandah, overlooking Lake and garden; ‘informal, cozy and chic’ Grill; family meals in Non Solo Pasta and snacks and light lunches overlooking the pool. Not cheap, especially with fine wines added.

**Carate Urio**

**Orso Bruno Hotel**

A ‘piccolo’ hotel, just fifteen metres from the waterside in one of the quietest spots on the Lake, has an informal restaurant with Lake views and food so good that it has non – residents flocking in and has acquired an international reputation. Every dish is freshly homemade, using olive oil from own trees, and well presented.

**Brienno**

**Il Crotto dei Platani**

A celebrated restaurant in a shallow cave (‘crotto’) on one side of the road but also with tables in a garden, small Terrace dining room and Veranda on the other side, with stunning views of the Lake. The menu includes traditional regional recipes updated in creative ways and in addition you can arrange for staff to transport you by limo, mini-bus or boat.

**Argegno**

A small but up and coming village with a big choice of places to eat and drink. Choose from Il Piazetta (combining modern Italian and European cuisine), Emilio’s (fish), Barchetta (local cuisine including risotto, polenta and lake fish) and Le Corte (pizza, pasta and fresh fish on Friday).
Argegno, Sant’ Anna

La Griglia

An informal restaurant/hotel reached by a narrow winding road rising high above Argegno into the suburb of Sant’ Anna, near the church. Quietly eccentric décor gives you something to discuss while waiting for large dishes of regional food such as black pasta, polenta (corn mash) and misoltini (dried, grilled fish).

Ristorante Sant’ Anna

A friendly, relaxed restaurant/hotel, just a few metres away from La Griglia, offering traditional Lombardian favourites such as wild boar with polenta and mushroom soufflé. In summer, you can eat in the peaceful garden, with stunning views of the mountains of the Val d’Intelvi that lie behind the building.

Sala Comacina

Locanda La Tirlindana

Rivals Crotto dei Platani for fine dining in a lovely setting with shaded tables at the water’s edge facing moored boats and the only island in the Lake. The menu is deliberately kept small and includes fresh pasta and lake fish dishes (the lemon ravioli with ricotta is a favourite.)

Locanda dell’ Isola Comacina

Dine on the only island in the Lake - Isola Comacina - where eating is as much an event as a meal. The same six course menu is served every day, and ends with coffee and brandy subjected to a mock exorcism by fire, enjoyed over the years by a ‘who’s who’ list of celebrities

Lenno

Il Cris

Large, informal pizzeria often bursting at the seams with Italian families.
Tremezzo

El Timon

Good value local dishes including excellent pizza. Ravioli with nut sauce is also a favourite.

Fagurida

Rustic, home cooked food in hillside restaurant recommended by locals in the know. The rabbit with roast potatoes, polenta with cheese and onion and asparagus with poached eggs provide an authentic taste of unpretentious food with the emphasis on flavour above presentation.

Menaggio

Il Ristorante (Palio)

A reputation for fine dining, an extensive wine list and a superb lake view from its central position in the piazza. A bit more expensive than some other restaurants but well worth the extra for Lake specialities and fresh pasta dishes, complemented by an excellent range of meat dishes.

Pizzeria Lugano

Situated above Menaggio, with off putting exterior but excellent value for money.

Il Pozzo

Rustic cooking popular with tourists

San Siro

Crème Caramel

Regarded by many locals as offering the finest pizza on the lake. Thin, crispy base, with every choice of topping imaginable. Superb lake side setting.
Varenna

Vecchia Varenna

On the lake front. Offers superb, traditional local cuisine with fresh lake fish and pasta dishes as the mainstays of the menu.

Bellagio

Hotel Villa Serbelloni

Five star award winning cuisine in a breathtaking location. A serious rival to Villa D’Este.

Antico Pozzo

Located in the heart of Bellagio historic centre, just 50 meters from the lake and the landing stage. The restaurant offers a menu including traditional Italian specialities as well as those particular to Lake Como. Lunch and dinner are served in the romantic courtyard or in the air conditioned restaurant dining room.
12. Getting around Lake Como

12.1. By car

For visitors who are self catering, whose accommodation is off the main road, who like to stay out late or who want to visit parts of the Lake that are not so well served by public transport, having the use of a car can be very convenient. It’s also usually easier to get to the Lake from the airport by car than by public transport. But remember to switch your lights on when you join the motorway and in tunnels (lots of drivers keep them on all the time, which is allowed).

To drive around Lake Como you need to be reasonably confident behind the wheel. Roads can be narrow, high or twisting, with steep slopes or the walls of centuries old houses on one side and a wide range of other road users approaching at speed on the other. And vehicles behind you tend to leave quite a small gap in anticipation of overtaking at the first opportunity. It sounds bad but local drivers are familiar with the conditions and know what they are doing, while overseas visitors get used to them fairly quickly and even start to enjoy the experience.

Roads can become congested in high season, so it’s a good idea to try to avoid driving to the most popular places at the weekend or getting caught up in the long stream of traffic heading back to Como down the western branch on Sunday evenings. But you can also encounter blockages at other times which require a coordinated effort, often orchestrated by a bus driver, to get the traffic moving again. In some of the tightest places there are traffic lights that alternate only between red (stop) and orange (proceed with caution).

It can be difficult to find a parking spot. Signposts that show the location of car parks use the familiar white ‘P’ on a blue background. Inside the car park, blue lines between the bays mean you have to pay and there should be a machine nearby. White lines tell you parking is free.

There are petrol stations in some of the towns and villages around the Lake, with pumps that can be used out of hours. But it’s much easier to buy fuel during
normal business hours because there will be an attendant to put the petrol in the
tank for you. All you have to do is let him know how much to put in, either in
money (e.g. ‘Venti euro’ = ‘twenty Euros worth’) or in quantity (‘Pieno per favore’
= ‘Fill it up please’) and enjoy some old fashioned service.

There is more information about car hire in our Car Hire section or to compare car
hire rates visit CarRentals.co.uk

12.2. By train

You can take a train stopping at stations along the eastern side of the Lake
(including Varenna) and extend the journey southwards to Bergamo and Milan and
northwards to Tirano, to connect with the Bernina Express. The route along the
eastern lakeside takes in Colico, one of the watersport towns of the Alto Lario;
Varenna, one corner of the mid-lake triangle and Mandello del Lario, on the
eastern branch, home to the Moto Guzzi factory and museum.

You can check train timetables and prices at trenitalia

12.3. By bus

There is one key bus service – the C10 – that runs from Como up the west side of
the lake and then round the northern end (as far as Colico on the north-east side
of the lake) before turning round and returning to Como.

Between Como and Argegno, however, the C10 is joined by a second bus service,
the C20. One takes a higher, ‘panoramic’, route above the villages and the other
follows the ‘Lake’ route along the waterside. At Argegno, the C20 turns ‘inland’
towards the mountains of the Val D’ Intelvi, while the C10 continues northwards
along the western branch, connecting with the C12 that runs between Menaggio
and Lugano and continuing round to Colico. On the other ‘shore’ of the western
branch the C30 runs between Bellagio and Como.
On ‘panoramic’ routes, bus drivers have to cope with narrow, twisting high level roads. And when they pass through centuries old lakeside villages they often have to manoeuvre their large vehicles through tight gaps between the walls of old houses and oncoming cars, or larger commercial vehicles. These conditions test the drivers’ skill, which is not found wanting. But they also mean that travelling by bus is not merely a matter of getting from one place to another. It’s also a bit of a thrill ride in its own right. And it’s not the same in a car – the size of the vehicle is the key factor.

The buses at Lake Como are new and smart – what we would call ‘coaches’ – and have their own payment system. To be allowed on you have to buy your ticket before the bus arrives, usually from a local bar or tobacconist. Drivers don’t sell tickets - they only ‘process’ the ticket you give them. The procedure is: you hold your ticket out, serrated part toward the driver and he twists off the end, leaving you with the rest of the ticket, which you throw away later, unless you haven’t used up its full value, when you can ‘twist again’.

Visit ASF Autolinee website for Lake Como buses timetables.

12.4. By ferry

The Lake Como ferry service provides transportation mainly for the tourism industry; but not primarily in the form of ‘pleasure cruises’ or ‘trips around the Lake’. Rather, it carries large numbers of visitors in dozens of boats of various types to more than thirty towns and villages around the lake’s 170 kilometre perimeter, either as an alternative to car or bus or, in the mid lake triangle, as the only practical way of travelling between Menaggio, Bellagio and Varenna.

Because the Lake is long and narrow; has an irregular perimeter, with promontories and bays; contains an island and divides halfway down into two branches (one with two ‘dog legs’) a ferry boat ride along some parts presents passengers with a succession of new and beautiful views, as if the boat were taking part in nature’s own slideshow. This makes a ride on a ferry not only a key form of transportation but also the definitive Lake Como leisure attraction.
The focal point of the ferry system is the ‘mid-lake triangle’ of Menaggio, Bellagio and Varenna, which has its own dedicated ferry service (including car ferries), shared only with Cadenabbia. In addition, a supplementary service brings passengers from stops in-between Lenno and Bellano, to connect with the mid-lake service. Relatively few boats travel up and down the entire length of the lake, though there are a fair number of morning and evening ‘commuter’ services between Como and half a dozen places on the lower western branch. And of those boats that do operate along the length of the lake, some provide a fast service with a separate timetable and fare structure.

**Ferry Timetable**

The Lake Como ferry timetable is complex, because it contains a number of different routes with different formats and some repetition. And as the staff at ferry points don’t necessarily speak English, it can sometimes be tricky to work out when you will be able to get on a boat going to where you want to go. There is, however, a set of timetables in English on the [Lake Como navigation official website](http://lakenavigation.com).

The official ‘Lago di Como’ ferry timetable (available from ferry points) contains details of the service along the length of the Lake between Como and Colico (and reverse) on one side; and four services on the other (counting ‘there’ and ‘back’ as one service). The following information is based on Summer 2009 timetable:

Bellagio – Lecco (and Lecco – Bellagio)

Servizio Navetta in Centro Lago

Servizio Autotraghetto / Fahre / Ferry – Boat

Servizio Rapido between Como and Colico (in both directions)

The Bellagio – Lecco timetable covers the less visited eastern branch and so is not likely to be of much relevance to most visitors.

The Servizio Navetto in Centro Lago is a repetition of services between Bellano and Lenno that are also included on the Como – Colico timetable.
The Servizio Rapido is a fast service, covering the same part of the Lake as the standard Como – Colico timetable but stopping only in the major locations and more expensive than the ‘standard’ service. It tends therefore not to be the routine choice of service for visitors but provides information which may be useful.

So, of the four services on one side of the timetable, only one contains guaranteed essential information. That is the Servizio Autotraghetto, which includes both vehicle and ‘passenger only’ ferries and runs only between the mid-lake towns of Varenna, Menaggio, Bellagio; and to Cadenabbia – it doesn’t go anywhere else.

On the other side of the timetable, the Como-Colico timetable actually contains details of only a handful of journeys between those two end points (because there are only a handful). Most of the information is about commuter ferries between Como and a few small villages at the southern end of the western branch, which are irrelevant to most visitors. In addition, as stated above, the information on the Servizio Navetto in Central Lago timetable is repeated on the Como- Colico schedule. So there is much less detail to consider on these timetables than a first impression would suggest.

To sum up the above information, visitors will usually only need to refer to the Como – Colico services on one side of the timetable (ignoring commuter ferries) and the mid-lake Servizio Autotraghetto (and perhaps the ‘fast service’) on the other side.

But in addition to understanding the different services, it’s also necessary to know what some of the most important additional information on the timetable means:

- A blue background to the route number, with ‘crossed hammers’, means the service runs on weekdays (Saturday included).
- A yellow background, with a red cross, means that it runs only on Sundays and holidays.
- When there is no colour and no other information to the contrary, it means the service runs seven day a week.
The intermittent horizontal blue shading on the timetable is only to make it easier for the eye to track the right line across the page and has no symbolic significance. Other symbols and Notes are reasonably straightforward.

The Servizio Autotraghetto (car ferry) timetable looks different from the others. It’s organised on a ‘from-to’ basis, with separate timetables for weekdays and holidays (including Sundays), both of which make it easy to read. It also identifies ferries that travel to one of the three mid-lake towns via the third - which means you could find yourself heading back to where you came from before continuing to your destination – and services for passengers only (no vehicles).

You can pick up an up to date ferry timetable at any ferry point.

12.5. Taxis

Lake Como is not heavily populated with taxis but there are services listed in its yellow pages for a number of towns and villages, including:

- Radio Taxi Lario 2000, Como, Tel: 003903127200
- Taxi Como, Como, Tel: 0039031261515
- Autopubbliche, Bellagio, Tel: 0039031950913
- Taxi Cernobbio, Cernobbio, Tel: 0039031511102
- Taxi, Menaggio, Tel: 0039034431244
- Taxi, Colico, Tel: 00390341940362
- M Barili, Varenna, Tel: 00390341815061
- R Maglia, Varenna, Tel: 00390341830580
12.6. Water taxis

Because the perimeter of Lake Como is dotted with dozens of small villages, a comprehensive public ferry service has been developed to link them. In the most visited parts of the Lake, boats run more frequently than buses. But there are circumstances in which you might want to take advantage of one of the small number of private water taxis that supplement the public ferries.

For example, there is at least one attraction that can only be reached by water - the restaurant La Locanda dell’Isola Comacina. It’s the only building on the only island in the Lake and boasts a ‘who’s who’ list of customers. The public ferry service does call at the island but the last one of the day will come and go before you can finish your meal. But you can engage a private ferry to take you the short distance between the mainland and the island restaurant.

Another major attraction, the spectacular Villa del Balbianello near Lenno, is more easily reached by water than by land, but is not served by public ferry. A trip there and back in a water taxi can be combined with a guided tour of the Villa, which has featured in a number of big films.

The Abbey at Piona, with its serene atmosphere, delightful frescoes and shop full of ‘home made’ alcohol – is also much easier to get to by boat - but very few public ferries call in there.

A water taxi can also be a convenient way of touring Lake Como with a small or large group, giving you the chance to ‘drop anchor’ for a while at a particular location – for example, near George Clooney’s Villa Oleandra at Laglio. Or it can be a romantic element in a wedding by the Lake, carrying bride and groom away in a white boat.
Water taxi services available at Lake Como include:

**The Taxi Boat Service**, based in Bellagio, runs five boats. Two of them – the Villa Serbelloni and the Carlotta – carry up to eighteen passengers each and are finished in pale wood and cream leather, for special occasions such as weddings. The largest boat – Nino Di Loppia – seats forty under cover, for Lake tours, while the smallest – Porto Felice – is used for transfers and water-skiing. The fifth boat – Venezia - carries fourteen passengers.

**Bellagio Water Taxis** runs two boats providing a cruise plus tour of Villa del Balbianello and a short ‘pre-dinner’ cruise.

**The Boat Service** is based in Sala Comacina, a short distance from Isola Comacina, with an office in Cadenabbia. But it will pick passengers up from any suitable docking area, including Como and the Villa D’Este in Cernobbio. It runs three general purpose taxi boats - the Larius for up 78 people, the Freccia Dell’Isola for up 44 people, the Zoca De L’Oli for up 20 people. They provide transfers from Sala Comacina to Villa del Balbianello, customised guided tours of the Lake and excursions to locations for hire of self drive motorboats (up to 20hp without a licence) and for waterskiing. A fourth boat, the Lucia, is used for transfers to the restaurant on Isola Comacina.

**Service Boat Menaggio** runs one large boat – Freccia azzura – which seats seventy five passengers (forty covered) and a smaller boat – Taxi Venezia – which seats fourteen. Services include transfers from Menaggio to Villa del Balbianello and back, combined with a guided tour of the Villa.
13. Where to stay at Lake Como

Accommodation for visitors to Lake Como is provided in approximately three hundred hotels – from five star ‘grand’ to bed & breakfast - plus a wide range of serviced or self catering villas and apartments, agriturismo operations and around fifty campsites and caravan parks, mainly at the northern end.

13.1. Hotels

Many of the hotels are located in the towns and villages of the mid lake triangle (Menaggio, Bellagio and Varenna), western branch (Cadenabbia – Griante to Cernobbio) or Como. In addition to providing accommodation, these buildings also contribute significantly to the grand or picturesque scenery that attracts visitors to these parts of the Lake.

There are three five star grand hotels and about fifty purpose built four star establishments, organised for conferences and weddings as well as holiday stays. But most Lake Como hotels are included in the more than two hundred and fifty relatively small, family owned establishments.

Almost every hotel effectively operates on a bed & breakfast basis, since only breakfast is normally included in the room rate. Other meals have to be bought. For lunch and dinner, a number of the hotels have their own restaurants, some placing such an emphasis on cuisine that they seem to be restaurants that grew rooms. A few have reciprocal arrangements with other hotels, and some have no dining area but will recommend local restaurants to their guests.

Hotels categorise rooms in a variety of ways, including size (sometimes defined by how many beds can be accommodated). Rooms are also classified by reference to whether bathrooms are en suite (the norm) or shared; whether the room has a balcony, or even a terrace, and whether a Lake view is full on or side on. But for hotels in renovated or converted buildings, many rooms are unique and some rooms within a particular category may unavoidably be better or worse than others. In-room amenities at their best will include satellite TV, direct dial...
telephone, internet access and room service, with a bathroom /shower room en suite.

Hotels at Lake Como differ in the extent to which they charge extra for amenities such as parking space and internet connection; or in a few cases, for breakfast. There may not always be on site parking and guests may then have to use separately located private parking or park on the street. Staff in hotels will not necessarily speak fluent or any English. So this one place where a phrase book can be very handy.

You can find, compare, check availability and book hotel accommodation in towns and villages around Lake Como with the industry leading search engine Hotels Combined. Select any location from the list to the right of the map and follow the instructions for quick and convenient link to the Hotels Combined site.

Click [here](#) for more information about Hotels Combined.

To search for hotels around Lake Como just select links below:

- Argegno, Bellagio
- Brunate, Cernobbio
- Como, Domaso
- Gravedona, Griante
- Laglio, Lecco
- Menaggio, Mezzegra
- Moltrasio, San Siro
- Tremezzo, Varenna
13.2. Self catering in rented accommodation

There are self catering houses and apartments along the entire length of both sides of the lake, and in the area below Bellagio, between the two branches. On the less visited eastern side and the Bellagio hinterland, you may well get more property for your money, but in a rather less convenient location.

Accommodation for rent can be found in a variety of places – in the streets of historic old towns; right at the water’s edge, or on the hillsides above the Lake, providing a surprisingly high percentage of the apartments with spectacular views. This means you may have to decide which features are most important to you and compromise on others. For example, if a panoramic view of the lake is the main requirement, you may have to accept a location that’s a little further away from the centre than you would ideally have preferred. And if your most important requirement is to be close to local amenities, you may have to put up with some traffic noise.

So, important things to check on with regard to location are the distance and difficulty of terrain between the apartment and local shops, restaurants and transport links. Depending on who’s in your party, those factors may determine whether or not you can stay in a particular apartment and whether you will need a car to get to and from it.

Some self catering apartments are modern, purpose built blocks but many are converted private homes. They provide accommodation that varies in size and quality upwards from a minimum of lounge/diner plus kitchen area, bedroom and bathroom to a spacious penthouse with wrap around balcony.

Renting from a reputable agent ensures you will see photographs and read in advance:

- what rooms the apartment consists of
- what furniture and equipment it contains
- how it’s decorated
- where it is in relation to shops, roads and public transportation, and
if it has a view of the Lake and mountains
if it’s suitable for kids, elderly or infirm

enabling you to select the apartment that you particularly like the look and/or sound of.

Following websites offer selection of self catering apartments:

- www.holidaylettings.co.uk
- www.italianapartments.co.uk
- www.bellacomo.com
- www.lakecomohomes.com
13.3. Agriturismo, caravan and campsites

Agritourismo arrangements, campsites and caravan parks are more frequently found in the northern part of the Lake (Alto Lario), between Dongo on the western side and Colico on the north eastern end of the Lake.

Campsites at Lake Como consist of a collection of ‘pitches’ - fully serviced or with just electrical hook ups - and/or facilities ranging from a toilet and shower block to a restaurant, bar or swimming pool. Prices for pitches in high season are in the range of €10 - €15 per day, plus €5 – 10 per day per adult, and smaller amounts for kids. Some sites have additional leisure or sports facilities on site, charged separately as and when used.

Some sites are in relatively remote spots and must cater mainly for serious mountain walkers. Of the rest, a high proportion are found in the Alto Lario (northern end), which is also the area of the lake most famous for water sports. Locations with a few campsites include the water sports centres of Dongo and Colico, but the town with the biggest concentration of campsites is Domaso, which is both the windsurfing ‘capital’ of Lake Como and a town with some of the liveliest bars around the Lake. This combination of expertise in water sports, number of campsites and contemporary night life is the direct result of the weather in the Alto Lario - in particular a wind called La Breva, which blows in the afternoon for sailors, windsurfers and kite surfers and dies down at other times, giving kayaks and water skiers their chance to get on to the water.

www.camping-italy.net/english/lombardia/como gives a list of campsites.
14. Getting to Lake Como

Visitors can get to Lake Como by air and rail, via Milan or Lugano, and by road directly.

14.1. By air

14.2. Airports serving Lake Como

There are four airports serving Lake Como - Milan Malpensa, Milan Linate and Bergamo Orio al Serio in Italy and Lugano Agno in Switzerland. You can check for good deals on flights on the price comparison website skyscanner.net

Airport Hotels

If you are arriving late or need an airport hotel for any other reason, here are links to hotels near Milan Malpensa, Milan Linate, Bergamo Orio al Serio and Lugano – Agno.

Bellow you will find detailed information on how to get from each of the airports to the Lake, by public transport, taxi and hire car.

14.3. Public transport from the airport

Getting to the Lake Como from Milan Malpensa airport

Milan Malpensa airport is about 45 kilometres (29 miles) north-west of Milan. It has two terminals connected by a free shuttle bus that runs every twenty minutes.

For Como: Take the 'Malpensa Express' train for Milan from terminal one but get off at Saronno and catch the train from there to Como Lago Nord station. The whole journey (Malpensa-Como) costs around €8.50 and lasts about 1hr 20min.
For destinations along the western side of the Lake: From the Como bus terminal just over the road from the Lago Nord station, you can take the C10 bus to all destinations along the west side of the lake and round as far as Colico on the north eastern edge of the Lake (but see rail alternative for Colico below).

For Bellagio: You can take the C30 bus to Bellagio from Como bus terminal.

Visit ASF Autolinee website for Lake Como buses timetables.

You could take a ferry boat to any destination around the Lake from the nearby waterfront, but it’s going to be more expensive and slower.

For destinations on the eastern side of the lake: Take the shuttle bus from Malpensa to Milan Central Station. The journey takes 50 minutes and a bus leaves every 20 minutes. It costs €6. From Milan Central Station, take a train going to Sondrio or Tirano, which will stop at Lecco, Mandello del Lario, Varenna, Bellano and Colico on the east side of the lake. It takes forty minutes to Lecco, an hour to Varenna and an hour and a half to Colico, the furthest point on the east side of the lake from Milan. As an indicator of cost, the price to Varenna is just under €5.

There are also trains running between Lecco and Colico and stopping at a number of less well known stations along the east side of the lake.

After you buy a train ticket, you have to insert it into one of the yellow boxes on the platform, which prints the date and time on it. This is something the inspector on board the train will check for. Failure to do it may result in a heavy fine.

Getting to Lake Como by public transport from Milan Linate airport

The airport, which has only one terminal, is about 7 kilometres (4 miles) east of Milan.

For Como: Take the Starfly airport shuttle bus to Milan Central Station and a train from there to Como San (or S.) Giovanni railway station. The journey to Milan Central Station takes thirty minutes and costs €4, and from Central Station to S. Giovanni, forty minutes and €8.50.
**For destinations along the western side of the Lake:** From S. Giovanni station you can take the C10 bus to all destinations along the west side of the lake, and round as far as Colico (but see train alternative for Colico below).

**For Bellagio:** You can catch the C30 bus to Bellagio from Como San Giovanni Station.

Visit ASF Autolinee website for [Lake Como buses timetables](#).

**For destinations on the east side of the Lake:** Take the Starfly shuttle bus to Milan Central Station (journey time and cost as above). From Milan Central Station, take a train going to Sondrio or Tirano, stopping at Lecco, Mandello del Lario, Varenna, Bellano or Colico on the east side of the lake. It takes forty minutes to Lecco, an hour to Varenna and an hour and a half to Colico, the furthest point on the east side of the lake from Milan. As an indicator of cost, the price to Varenna is just under €5.

There are also trains running between Lecco and Colico and stopping at a number of less well known stations along the east side of the lake.

After you buy a train ticket, you have to insert it into one of the yellow boxes on the platform, which prints the date and time on it. This is something the inspector onboard the train will check for. Failure to do it may result in a heavy fine.

**Getting to the Lake by public transport from Orio al Serio airport (Bergamo)**

**For Como (option 1):** Take the ATB shuttle bus from the airport to Bergamo railway station. It runs every twenty minutes in the summer and the journey takes fifteen minutes and costs €1.65 one way.

From Bergamo railway station, take the train to Como S. Giovanni railway station. It's not a direct train - you have to change, either at Monza or Seregno. It runs roughly every hour; takes one hour, forty minutes (including waiting for connection) and costs €4.95
For Como (option 2): Take the C46 bus from the bus station (across the road from Bergamo railway station) to Como bus station. It runs eight times a day on workdays (Monday to Saturday) and four times a day on 'holydays' (Sundays and public holidays). The journey takes two hours and costs €4.50.

For destinations on the western side of the Lake: From S. Giovanni station (option 1 above) or Como bus station (option 2 above) you can take the C10 bus to all destinations along the west side of the lake, and round as far as Colico on the north eastern side (but see train alternative for Colico below).

For Bellagio: From S. Giovanni station or Como bus station, catch the C30 to Bellagio.

Visit ASF Autolinee website for Lake Como buses timetables.

For destinations on the eastern side of the Lake. Take the ATB shuttle bus from the airport to Bergamo railway station; then catch a train to Lecco and change there for a Sondrio or Tirano train to Mandello del Lario, Varenna, Bellano or Colico - or change to a local 'stopping train' at Lecco for one of the many less well known destinations between Lecco and Colico.

As a guide the Bergamo – Colico journey time is between 1 hour 40 minutes and 2 hours depending on the connection at Lecco. It costs €4.95 single journey. After you buy a train ticket, you have to insert it into one of the yellow boxes on the platform, which prints the date and time on it. This is something the inspector on board the train will check for. Failure to do it may result in a heavy fine.

Getting to the Lake by public transport from Lugano Agno airport (Switzerland)

For Como: First take a shuttle bus to the Federal Railways Station in Lugano. From there you can take a train to Como S. Giovanni, either directly or changing at Chiasso (depending on the departure time). The direct train takes forty six minutes, while a change at Chiasso adds another five or six minutes.
For destinations along the western side of the Lake: From Como S. Giovanni, you can take the C10 bus to all destinations along the west side of the lake, and round as far as Colico.

For Bellagio: You can catch the C30 to Bellagio from Como S. Giovanni station.

Visit ASF Autolinee website for Lake Como buses timetables.

For destinations on the eastern side of the Lake take a train from Lugano to Monza, then change to the Sondrio or Tirano train for Lecco, Mandello del Lario, Varenna, Bellano or Colico.

There are also trains between Lecco and Colico, which stop at less well known stations along the east side of the lake.

After you buy a train ticket, you have to insert it into one of the yellow boxes on the platform, which prints the date and time on it. This is something the inspector onboard the train will check for. Failure to do it may result in a heavy fine.

The C12 bus runs between Lugano and Menaggio, but starts from a spot in Lugano well away from the town centre or bus depot.

14.4. Car hire

There are plenty of car hire firms at Malpensa, Linate and Orio al Serio airports but you should book in advance to ensure there will be a car available.

Driving from Malpensa airport to Lake Como is quicker and easier than from Orio al Serio, because the route is more direct and the bulk of the journey takes place on two expressways. From Orio al Serio, you have the choice between using expressways that initially take you towards Milan, in the opposite direction from Como, and following a more direct non motorway route that is much shorter in kilometres but takes about the same length of time – about one and a half hours – compared with about one hour from Malpensa. From Linate, the drive to the Lake is mostly on the expressway - easier than from Orio, but taking a little longer than from Malpensa.
There are some differences to bear in mind between British and Italian motorway driving. Every so often on an Italian motorway, you come to a line of booths, where you either have to pay a fixed fee or take a ticket and pay at a later set of booths. So make sure you have some Euros in a convenient place. There are different categories of booths for different paying arrangements – you need to pick a booth with a white logo above it. Booths are manned so you will get change if you don’t have the exact money. If you need them there are service stations on motorways, some of which are a bit basic.

Another point to note is that speed signs on Italian motorways indicate the minimum speed you’re allowed to drive, not the maximum. Italian drivers tend to drive close to the back of the vehicle in front, which can be a bit disturbing when you are in that vehicle. You will need to switch your lights on in tunnels, so it’s a good idea to check how to do that before setting off, or do as many Italians do and keep your lights on all the time.

Our first tip for car hire is to hire the smallest car you can manage with. Our second tip is to hire an automatic, if that’s what you usually drive. And our third is to bring your Sat. Nav. with you if it’s programmed for Europe – it will still talk to you in the same language as it does at home.

For those of you that intend to hire a car at your arrival airport below we give links to the leading price comparison website will search up to fifty car hire company web sites to provide you with the cheapest prices in the marketplace and to insurance cover for the excess in the car hire contract. The excess cover is available for the hirer and other drivers for this and other trips, for a single annual payment or daily rate.

- CarRentals.co.uk search for best car hire rates anywhere in the world
- Annual car hire excess cover from InsuranceForCarHire.com for residents anywhere in the world
- Daily car hire excess cover from DailyExcess.com for residents anywhere in the world
- Worldwide Insure offers car hire excess cover for UK and EU residents

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14.5. Taxis

Getting to Lake Como from the airports by taxi (private transfer)

Getting to the Lake by public transport can be a slow and complicated business. An alternative, which doesn’t involve driving yourself, is a private transfer, which will get you from the airport to your holiday destination in the quickest and most convenient way. It is expensive, unless you are a group, in which case it may possibly be the cheapest alternative.

With a private transfer, a driver will meet you on arrival and take you directly to where you are staying. The vehicle used will depend on the size of your party and could therefore be a taxi, minibus or coach. The service is exclusive to you or your party – there are no diversions to pick up or drop off anyone else. This makes it an ideal arrangement if you’re a first time visitor, bringing bulky sports equipment, travelling with young children or elderly or infirm passengers or just want to give yourself a treat. Costs are calculated in different ways by different service providers, for example, per vehicle or per passenger.

Below are details of, and links to, three airport taxi services – Shuttle Services Direct, Holiday Taxis and A-T-S which combine friendly web sites and booking procedures with competitive prices (for Lake Como). They offer transfers from three local airports (Milan Malpensa, Milan Linate and Milan Orio al Serio Bergamo) to destinations around the Lake:
14.6. By rail

Milan obviously has good rail links with the rest of Europe. For timetables and travel ideas see www.raileurope.com.

To get to Como from Milan Central station: Catch a train to Como San (or S.) Giovanni railway station.

For destinations along the western side of the Lake: From S. Giovanni station you can take the C10 bus to all destinations along the west side of the lake, and round as far as Colico (but see train alternative for Colico below)

For Bellagio: You can catch the C30 bus to Bellagio from Como San Giovanni Station.

For fares, journey times and timetables, visit ASF Autolinee website

For destinations on the east side of the Lake: From Milan Central Station, take a train going to Sondrio or Tirano, stopping at Lecco, Mandello del Lario, Varenna, Bellano or Colico on the east side of the lake. It takes forty minutes to Lecco, an hour to Varenna and an hour and a half to Colico, the furthest point on the east side of the lake from Milan. As an indicator of cost, the price to Varenna is just under €5. There are also trains running between Lecco and Colico and stopping at a number of less well known stations along the east side of the lake. After you buy a train ticket, you have to insert it into one of the yellow boxes on the platform, which prints the date and time on it. This is something the inspector onboard the train will check for. Failure to do it may result in a heavy fine.

14.7. By road

Driving to Lake Como can be enjoyable as long as you plan your route in advance. The advantage of travelling by car is that it allows you to do some sightseeing in other countries as well as enabling you to tour around the lake and visit less accessible attractions that you might not otherwise visit.
You can use sites like Via Michelin, Google Maps or Multimap to plan your journey including help with finding a hotel for an overnight stay if required. Having a Sat.Nav. programmed for Europe is a great help.

If you drive through Switzerland, you will need to buy a special motorway tax sticker - vignette which costs CHF40. This can be purchased at the border and paid in euro.

For a physical Lake Como Berlitz Holiday Map go to Amazon.co.uk or Amazon.com

15. Holiday extras

A range of added comforts is available to passengers who want to avoid unpleasant travel experiences, get into the holiday mood early or just give themselves a bit of a treat. We have chosen the following that we think are well worth considering.

15.1. Travel Insurance

- Travel insurance for UK residents from Direct Travel Insurance
- Travel insurance for US residents from Square Mouth
- Travel insurance for UK and EU residents from Worldwide Insure

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15.2. Foreign currency

You can purchase your foreign currency at rates previously offered only to business travellers and have it either delivered to your home in cash or loaded onto a debit card.

- **FairFx** – available to UK residents only

15.3. Hotels close to airport with or without parking

If your flight in or out is at an inconvenient time, or you just don’t want to rush around at the beginning or end of the holiday, you can find an overnight hotel here, often with parking while you are away and airport transfers.

- **Holiday Extras** – search for hotels in UK only
- **Booking** – search for hotels anywhere in the world
15.4. Private lounge pass at departure airport

One of the best value ‘extras’ per person is access to a private departure lounge at the airport you travel from. With drinks and other items you might pay for in the departure hall being supplied free of charge in your lounge you might consider the ‘net cost’ of a lounge pass a reasonable price to pay for a bit of pre-flight pampering. We give links to three providers with different arrangements to choose from. Just click on one of the images to go to relevant website to find out more:
16. Tourist Information Offices around Lake Como

**I.A.T. BELLAGIO**

Piazza Mazzini (at the ferry point)

Tel: 031.950204, Fax: 031.950204, e-mail: prombell@tin.it

Open all year round: Mon - Sat 9.00 - 12.00 and 15.00 - 18.00, Sun 9.00 - 12.00

**CERNOBBIO**

Via Regina, 23

Tel: 031.343235

Open between June and September: Tue - Sat 10.00 - 12.00 and 14.30 - 16.30, Sun 10.00 - 13.00

**I.A.T. COMO**

Piazza Cavour, 17

Tel: 031.269712, Fax: 031.240111, www.lakecomo.it, e-mail: lakecomo@tin.it

Open all year round: Mon - Sat 9.00 - 13.00 and 14.30 - 18.00, Sun 9.30 - 13.00 (only between June and September)

**DOMASO**

Via Roma

Tel: 0344.96322, Fax: 0344.96322, e-mail: ufficioturistico@comunedomaso.it

Open: 10.00 - 12.30 and 16.00 - 20.00 seasonal

**INFO-POINT ALTO LARIO COOPERATIVA TURISTICA IMAGO DONGO**

c/o Palazzo Manzi

Tel: 0344.82572, Fax: 0344.82572, www.imagolario.com, e-mail: info@imagolario.com, Open all year round
GRAVEDONA

PRO LOCO, Piazza Trieste
Tel: 0344.89637
Open between June and September

GRIANTE CADENABBIA

Via Regina, 1/1
Tel: 0344.40393, Fax: 0344.40393
www.cadenabbiadigriante.com, e-mail: info@ufficioturisticogriante.191.it
Open: Mon – Sun 9.30 - 12.30 and 15.30 - 18.30 (seasonal)

LENNO

UFFICIO TURISMO, Piazza XI Febbraio
Tel: 0344.5583417, e-mail: turisticolenno@tiscali.it
Open in season, Tue, Sat and Sun 10.00 - 12.00 and 16.00 - 18.00

I.A.T. MENAGGIO

Piazza Garibaldi, 8
Tel: 0344.32924, Fax: 0344.32924, E-mail: infomenaggio@tiscalinet.it
Open all year round, Mon - Sat 9.00 - 12.30 and 14.30 - 18.00
Sun 9.00 - 12.30, only from April till September

I.A.T. TREMEZZO

Via Regina, 3
Tel: 0344.40493
Seasonal, 9.00 - 12.00 and 15.30 - 18.30, Closed Wednesday
17. Your individual Lake Como Calendar

A souvenir of Lake Como that you can enjoy every day for the next twelve months

Individual – your choice of photographs

You choose your favourite twelve photographs online from a selection of xx breathtakingly beautiful images

Individual – you choose the starting month

You don’t have to wait for a new year to begin – start with the current or next month or later if you prefer

Individual – you add reminders on your own key dates

Add reminders for your important birthdays and anniversaries and/or meetings and other key work dates

Individual – your professionally finished A3 calendar delivered to you anywhere in the world

Click here to find out more and create Your Own Lake Como Calendar