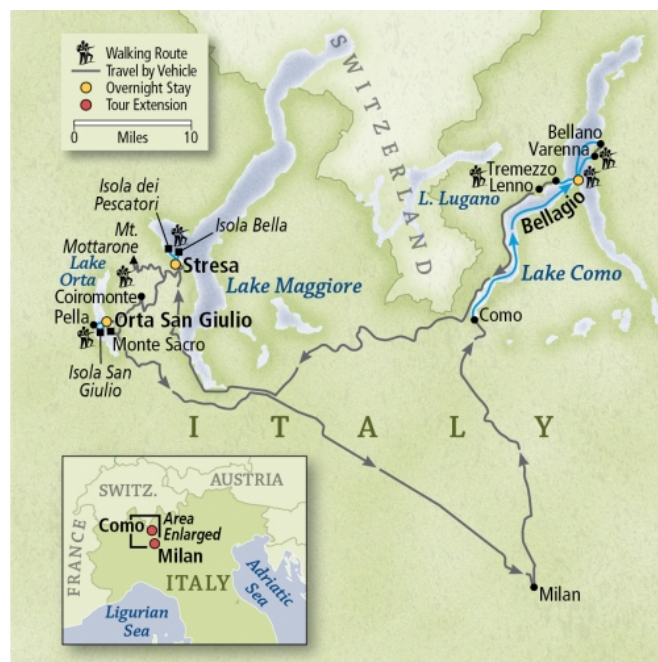


Italy: Lake Como, Bellagio & Lake Maggiore

Tour-Only Itinerary

Surround yourself in the splendor of northern Italy's serene waters, rugged mountains, gardens and medieval villages. Cruise alpine lakes in a private boat and visit famous attractions and peaceful devotional sites, while (of course) taking in views of the glorious Italian Alps. Witness the vibrant energy of everyday life, as you stroll cobblestone streets in medieval villages. On our Italy lake district tour, you'll sip local wines and savor food specialties as you discover the area's rich culture. Delight in a picnic at a small farm sampling fresh cheeses, and even dine on *pizzoccheri*, the Valtellina valley's trademark dish, inside a *crotto* cave-tavern. This unforgettable walking tour brings you into the heart of the classic towns and alpine beauty found only in northern Italy.



Highlights

Experience a region known for inspiration- visited by Ernest Hemingway himself

Sample cheese and organic specialties during a private lunch hosted by a family-owned farm in Coiromonte

Wander through cobblestone streets lined with candy-colored villas in Bellagio

Marvel in the artistic collections and lush gardens of the Villa Carlotta royal estate

Take in the stunning 360-degree view of Italy's scenic Piedmont wine region as you ascend the summit of Mount Mottarone by cable car

Cruise to the picturesque "Fisherman's Island" by private motorboat to sample local wines and enjoy the pastel sunset

Explore the historic, religious memorial of Monte Sacro and its over 20 fresco-filled chapels

On all Guided Adventures you can count on ...



Expert local guides to introduce you to the best of your destination.



Gracious accommodations that are a clean, comfortable home away from home.



Off-the-beaten-path places you'd never find on your own.



Experts to handle all the details.



A maximum of 18 fun-loving fellow travelers to share the journey.



Flight + Tour Combos include plane tickets, airport car service, and pre- and post-tour accommodations.



Delicious, authentic multi-course meals—virtually all are included.

Activity Level

This tour is one of our Flex-Guided Walking Adventures, rated easy to moderate with an average of 3 to 6 miles of walking per day. The trails feature a combination of easy uneven terrain and paved roads mixed with some short steep hills. Walks are in open countryside and small cities, sometimes on uneven footpaths over grass and soil pathways and cobble streets. It is ideal for enthusiastic beginners and experienced walkers. It is important to wear appropriate shoes with excellent tread to ensure the perfect grip on uneven and rocky terrain. We plan both longer optional walks and short easy options for those who want to spend more time on their own exploring the cities and surroundings. Be prepared to use ferry and motorboats extensively for our transfers. Both morning and afternoon or evening options are available

every day. Several of the walks require a transfer from our hotel to the start of the walk. Van support is limited due to distinctive features of the region. Some vehicle support is provided where possible. As one of our Flex-Guided tours, some days offer options for self-guided walks, self-exploration, cultural visits, or free time to relax on your own.

DAY 1

Join your *Italy: Lake Como, Bellagio & Lake Maggiore* tour. Ferry ride to Bellagio and Villa Melzi

Como city walk; 0.5 mile, easy. Bellagio to Pescallo and Villa Melzi; 2 miles, easy. Optional Bellagio; 1 mile, easy to moderate

Your guide(s) meet you at 8:45 a.m. in the lobby of the Albergo le Due Corti hotel (Piazza Vittoria 12, Como; Tel. +39 031 328 111). Your guide(s) will be wearing a Country Walkers shirt. Please be dressed for walking.

Your guide(s) will hold an orientation and safety briefing before embarking on your first walk, a stroll through the city center of Como to its harbor (approximately 0.5 miles / one kilometer). Here, you'll board a boat bound for Bellagio, admiring the sumptuous private villas and small villages lining the shores of Lake Como throughout your two-hour cruise. The views of the surrounding mountains are magnificent.

Once in Bellagio, choose from among the many local restaurants for lunch on your own. After you check in, you'll regroup for a walking tour of the town, known for its 12th-century basilica, cobblestone streets and stone staircases. Your route follows the waterfront up to Punta Spartivento and ends at Villa Melzi. Built in 1808 to honor Napoleon, the villa is famous for its romantic English-style gardens, which welcome visitors each spring with a profusion of azaleas and rhododendrons. If you travel in the fall, you will see maples at full splendor, some winter camellias (sasanqua), and plants turning colors.

This evening, gather for a welcome reception, followed by dinner at the hotel.

Included Meals: Dinner

Accommodation: Hotel Du Lac

DAY 2

Wayfarer Trail from Bellano to Vezio

Bellano to Vezio; 4 miles, easy to moderate. Optional independent Vezio to Varenna; .5 miles, easy

After breakfast, a short spin across the lake takes you to the nearby village of Bellano. Here you'll cross the waterfall and dramatic Pioverna river gorge, before starting your walk along the *Sentiero del Viandante*, or "Wayfarer Trail." A former mule path that connects the various towns and villages on Lake Como's eastern shore, it was once the area's only road. As you walk, you'll pass through sleepy villages such as Regolo, and many chapels scattered along the way that testify that the path was once used as a pilgrimage way. Your walk ends in the fascinating medieval hamlet of Vezio, known for its ancient stone houses and 13th-century castle that you visit.

Your lunch stop today is in a very special place, the Crotto del Pepott. A crotto is a kind of rural tavern, but originally *crotti* were only natural caves penetrating within the remains of ancient landslides. The constant cold air current circulating inside made them ideal refrigerators for preserving foods like cheese, wines and local bresaola. You will be treated with delicious *pizzoccheri*, the trademark dish of the Valtellina valley and a popular meal in the mountains of northern Italy.

Early this afternoon, a short walk or shuttle takes you down to Varenna, where you'll have most of the afternoon at leisure to relax or explore on your own. Your guides will handle your ferry ticket, and you can choose what time you would like to ferry back to Bellagio and your hotel. Boats come and go and your ride will just take 10 minutes.

Flex-Guided Options include:

Stroll Varenna, its cobbled alleys and Riva Grande lake promenade, or pay a visit to San Giorgio Church. Varenna is a very picturesque and colorful lake village, with several little cafes and gelateria. Our guests like to stop for a beer or an aperitivo at Varenna Caffè Bistrot, especially at sunset! If you want to purchase some local cuisine, consider the butchers' shop Lillia Pietro Matteo.

In Varenna, visit Villa Monastero, whose gorgeous botanical gardens extend down to the lake. Its name comes from the past, as the villa was an old monastery before becoming a patrician residence. You can admire a beautiful collection of citrus trees and palms and take great pictures of the lake.

Spend time in Bellagio, to discover its beautiful old center and maybe do some shopping. You can find silk scarves, leather items, knives, and much more.

Dinner is on your own tonight. Bellagio offers several options, from gourmet restaurants to wine bars, pizzerias, and cozy trattorias.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Accommodation: Hotel Du Lac

DAY 3

Villa Carlotta, Lenno, the Villa Balbianello and Stresa

Villa Carlotta to Lenno and Villa Balbianello Garden; 3 miles, easy. Optional Mezzegra to Lenno; 3 miles, easy to moderate

Early this morning, you'll ferry to Lake Como's opposite bank to discover Tremezzo and Villa Carlotta. The 17th-century villa is named after Charlotte, the daughter of Princess Marianne of Nassau, who purchased the property in the mid-1800s and presented it to Charlotte as a wedding gift. Charlotte's botanist husband expanded the existing landscape, including an exotic corner laid out according to the dictates of English gardens. In spring, the villa's grounds are bursting with more than 150 varieties of azaleas and rhododendrons. In April you will see most of the camellias, magnolias, mimosas, wisterias, and some rhododendrons. In late May enjoy the camellias, most rhododendrons, some magnolias, paulownias, dogwoods, and azaleas.

After some time on your own to explore the gardens or sip an espresso in the villa's café, return to the lakeside promenade to walk an easy route to Mezzegra, admiring more elegant villas, scenic views of Bellagio on the opposite shore, and the glorious Alps. You'll next set off to Lenno, where a weekly market provides a colorful snapshot of local life. You can choose to ferry to Lenno, or venture there on foot, walking an easy-to-moderate route out of Mezzegra, with a stop at the church of San Abbondio.

Situated just a few feet above the lake, Lenno offers sweeping views of the area. After lunch on your own, follow your guides into the gardens of Villa del Balbianello, located on a steep promontory overlooking Lake Como, and the setting for famous movies such as *Casino Royal* and *Star Wars: Episode II - Attack*

of the Clones.

You will visit the villa interiors with a local guide. Presenting a different type of Villa, this was the house of a rich, local entrepreneur and explorer between 1974 and 1988, Guido Monzino. The rooms include art collections and unusual memorabilia of his international expeditions, as well as Italian furniture from the eighties.

Later, you'll shuttle to Stresa on the shores of Lake Maggiore, and settle into your next hotel. Tonight, choose from among several nearby trattorias or our hotel's restaurant for dinner on your own.

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodation: Hotel La Palma

DAY 4

Lake Maggiore, Isola Bella and Isola dei Pescatori

Isola Bella & Isola dei Pescatori; 2 miles, easy. Optional independent Stresa; 1 mile, easy

Begin the day with a closer look at Isola Bella, the most famous of Lake Maggiore's Borromean Islands. A private motorboat brings you here from Stresa—a brief journey of five minutes—and you'll be treated to panoramic views of Palazzo Borromeo, the opulent baroque and neoclassical palace occupying the island.

The sprawling villa was built during the 17th century by the wealthy and influential Borromeo family, who continue to use its upper floors as a summer residence today. Accompanied by a local guide, you'll discover room after lavish room, featuring paintings and sculptures by Lombardy artists, elaborate Flemish tapestries, and stunning Murano glass chandeliers. The sumptuous interior is complemented by the equally elaborate terraced gardens outside, which are filled with oleander, magnolias, camellias, and lemon trees, and gently slope down to Lake Maggiore. Before reaching the gardens, however, you'll descend a staircase from the main house into a cavernous grotto comprising six rooms, in which every inch of space is covered in splendid mosaics wrought with pebbles, seashells, and pink marble.

Back in Stresa, you'll enjoy lunch on your own and time at leisure during the afternoon.

Your options are endless and your guides will facilitate your discoveries.

Flex-Guided Options include:

Peruse Stresa's many gourmet shops and boutiques selling leather goods, and stroll among flowery grass islands and lush parks on the town's long lakeside promenade.

Pay a visit to the Grand Hotel des Iles Borromées, next door to your hotel, which has welcomed countless famous guests, from kings and maharajas to Nobel prize-winning author Ernest Hemingway.

Ferry to Villa Taranto to enjoy its enormous gardens with rare plants. Visit the extraordinary religious complex of Santa Caterina del Sasso, across the lake. Clinging to a rock face directly overhanging the lake, the Hermitage is a very popular sight for many Country Walkers guests.

Ferry to Isola Madre, stroll the gorgeous botanical gardens with exotic plants, free peacocks and pheasants, and visit the Palace and its marionette exhibit.

Walk to Villa Pallavicino garden and zoo with its exotic plants and fauna including kangaroos, zebras, deer, llamas, goats, parrots, and toucans. Then enjoy scenic views of the lake.

Pamper yourself at your hotel, perhaps relax on the rooftop lounge, at the spa, or in the new swimming pool built on the lake.

Regroup late this afternoon and set off in a private motorboat for the most picturesque island in the Borromean archipelago, Isola dei Pescatori ("Fishermen's Island"), which you'll explore with your guides.

The sunsets are especially lovely here, and you'll have time to savor one while sipping a glass of local wine before enjoying our included dinner at a lakeside restaurant.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Accommodation: Hotel La Palma

DAY 5

Monte Mottarone and Lake Orta

Mottarone to Alpe Cortano; 3 miles, easy to moderate. Alpe Cortano to Coiromonte; 2.5 miles, easy to moderate. Optional Orta city walk; 1 mile, easy

This morning, a 20-minute cable car ride takes you up 3,500 feet to the summit of Mount Mottarone. From here, you'll enjoy breathtaking 360-degree views of Lake Maggiore, Lake Orta, Lake Varese, and other

smaller lakes, all framed by snowcapped Alps. You'll walk downhill along easy footpaths, mostly unpaved and covered with soft grass, dirt tracks, and uneven terrains to Coiromonte. Here, you'll visit a small farm known for producing excellent cheese, which you'll have the opportunity to sample during a picnic lunch prepared by the farm's owners. Your feast also includes local specialties made with organic vegetables grown in the owners' garden. If you prefer, you can shorten the walk by taking a shuttle to Coiromonte instead of walking all the way.

Early this afternoon, you'll shuttle to the village of Orta San Giulio, for an easy, short walk in the city and along Lake Orta to your hotel. Later, check into your hotel and enjoy free time. The grounds include a large, attractive garden and a terrace on the sunny side of the lake, with mountain views.

Dinner is on your own tonight.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Accommodation: Hotel San Rocco

DAY 6

Monte Sacro, Isola San Giulio and Pella

Sacromonte and San Giulio Island; 2 miles, easy to moderate. Lagna to Pella; 3 miles, easy to moderate

This morning's walk brings you along the shores of Lake Orta and up into the surrounding hills for a visit to enchanting Monte Sacro, a UNESCO World Heritage site. A devotional complex dedicated to St. Francis of Assisi, it consists of more than 20 chapels filled with frescoes and life-sized terra-cotta figures depicting the saint's life. You'll enjoy views of Lake Orta below as you walk in the shade of tall, leafy trees and drink in Monte Sacro's magical atmosphere.

You'll return to Orta San Giulio and enjoy a tour of this pretty little village with your guides; then have lunch at a local enoteca where you'll taste Piedmont wines and local specialties like *bagna cauda*, a fondue-like dip made with butter, garlic, and anchovies and served with crostini, truffles, and vegetables.

After lunch, you'll board a private boat for a five-minute cruise to Isola San Giulio. The tiny island is named for the fourth-century saint who introduced Christianity to the region. The beautifully frescoed basilica is

the hundredth, and final church founded by Saint Julius. You'll have time to navigate *La Via del Silenzi* ("The Way of Silence"), a footpath that encircles the island. Afterward, you can return to the hotel, or cruise to Lake Orta's western shore for a final easy-to-moderate scenic walk that ends in the picturesque village of Pella.

During tonight's farewell dinner, you'll enjoy fine Italian specialties at your hotel's gourmet lakeside restaurant, Teatro Magico.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Accommodation: Hotel San Rocco

DAY 7

Transfer to Milan. Your *Italy: Lake Como, Bellagio & Lake Maggiore* tour concludes

After breakfast transfer to our Milan hotel where your trip concludes at approximately 10:00 a.m. From here, you can pursue your own travel arrangements. The hotel is located in central Milan on Via Cusani and is right next to the Cairoli metro station.

Your hotel is a short walk from the convent of Sta. Maria delle Grazie, a UNESCO World Heritage site famous for Leonardo da Vinci's fresco *The Last Supper*. Please note: If you'd like to visit the convent, reservations are necessary and should be made in advance at vivaticket.it. For more information about the convent of Sta. Maria delle Grazie or the special events scheduled for 2020 visit turismo.milano.it/wps/portal/tur/en.

You can also walk to the pedestrian-only shopping district of Via Dante, right outside the hotel; explore the wonderful Duomo cathedral; browse the boutiques of the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele; and visit the *Palazzo Reale* or "Royal Palace." In the evening, you can stroll to Brera, the art and fashion district, to people-watch in one of the city's many trendy cafés. If you are looking for a guided walk, contact your recommended guide in advance.

Included Meals: Breakfast

What's Included

Tour Only

| | |
|--|---|
| Exceptional boutique accommodations | ✓ |
| 12 on-tour meals: 6 breakfasts, 3 lunches, 3 dinners | ✓ |
| Local guides with you throughout tour | ✓ |
| Entrance fees and special events as noted in the itinerary | ✓ |
| Travel assistance available 24/7 provided by Allianz | ✓ |