

Italy: Lake Como, Bellagio & Lake Maggiore

Tour-Only Itinerary

Bellagio's spires and pastel-colored houses recede as your ferry zips across Lake Como, backed by lush green slopes and distant Alpine peaks. Ahead, your destination: the Villa Carlotta, a riot of neoclassical white surrounded by exuberant botanical gardens. After a morning exploring the azaleas and camellias, you'll stroll down the waterfront promenade to Lenno's open-air market, where your guides will introduce you to good-natured vendors and supply you with fruit, bread, and locally smoked fish for a lakeside picnic. Could this Italian Lake District tour get any better? *Certo!* You've got another villa to visit. This afternoon, follow your guide along cypress-lined paths to the romantic ivy-draped terraces of Villa Balbianello. And if the glamour of elegant estates gets to be too much, enjoy the down-to-earth pleasures of lunch at a local family's farm, savoring fresh fare from their garden.

Highlights

Envision famous British agents and Sci-Fi scoundrels as you tour the magnificent Villa Balbianello, the backdrop to *Casino Royale* and *Star Wars: Episode II - Attack of the Clones*

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 with over 20 fresco-filled chapels

Activity Level

This tour is one of our Guided Walking Adventures, rated easy to moderate with an average of 3 to 6 miles of walking per day and shorter and longer options on most days. 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 with rocks and roots and along cobbled streets. Several of the walks require a transfer from the hotel to the start of the walk. Van support is limited due to distinctive features of the region. Be prepared to travel by ferry and motorboat. Any luggage will be transferred by vehicle.

DAY 1

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

Como city walk; 0.5 miles, 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

to tonight's accommodation, 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 countless leaves changing colors.

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

Accommodation: Hotel Du Lac, Bellagio

Included Meals: Dinner

DAY 2

Wayfarer Trail from Bellano to Vezio. Independent exploration of Varenna and Bellagio

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 a waterfall and the 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, this trail 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 confirm this 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 will be able to visit).

Your lunch stop today is in an extraordinary place, the Crotto del Pepott. A *crotto* is a kind of rural tavern, but originally *crotti* were only natural caves formed within the remains of ancient landslides. The constant cold air current circulating inside the *crottos* made them ideal refrigerators for preserving foods like cheese, wines, and the local savory, salted beef, *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 to relax or explore on your own. Your guides will arrange your ferry ticket, and you can choose

what time you would like to ferry back to Bellagio and your hotel. Boats come and go frequently, and the ride takes just 10 minutes.

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

The colorful lake village of Varenna with its bustling shops and cafés, and the historical town of Bellagio on picturesque Lake Como, are perfect for immersing yourself in local life as you discover the area's relaxed vibe.

Accommodation: Hotel Du Lac, Bellagio

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

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.

Inside the villa you'll admire a collection of fine paintings, and on the grounds, you'll find an impressive collection of Romantic sculptures.

After some time on your own to explore the gardens or sip an espresso in the villa's café, you return to the lakeside promenade to walk an easy route to Mezzegra. Along the way, admire more elegant villas, scenic views of Bellagio on the opposite shore, and the glorious Alps. You'll next set off to Lenno, where a visit to

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. The villa was the setting for famous movies such as *Casino Royale* 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 wealthy, 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 your hotel's restaurant for dinner on your own.

Accommodation: Hotel La Palma, Stresa

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 4

Lake Maggiore, Isola Bella, and Isola dei Pescatori. Independent exploration of Stresa

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

Take a private motorboat to Palazzo Borromeo, an opulent island palace. Return to the mainland for free time, maybe relaxing at your hotel or exploring the many nearby attractions. This evening, boat to picturesque "Fisherman's Island" for a sunset dinner.

Begin the day with a closer look at Isola Bella, the most famous of Lake Maggiore's Borromean Islands. A private motorboat brings you to the island from Stresa—a brief journey of five minutes—where 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. Elaborate terraced gardens complement the sumptuous interior. Oleander, magnolias, camellias, and lemon trees fill the gardens, which 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, where splendid mosaics wrought with pebbles, seashells, and pink marble cover every inch of space.

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.

Regroup late this afternoon and set off in a private motorboat for Isola dei Pescatori ("Fishermen's Island"). Explore this beautiful island—the most picturesque island in the Borromean archipelago—along 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 your included dinner at a lakeside restaurant.

Take time to explore the fascinating islands off Stresa or on the opposite side of Lake Maggiore, where historical palaces, botanical gardens, and grand villas await.

Accommodation: Hotel La Palma, Stresa

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

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

Summit Mount Mottarone by cable car for stunning 360-degree views. Follow the footpaths down to Coiromonte for a picnic lunch at a local farm known for its excellent cheese. Later, trek along beautiful Lake Orta to your hotel.

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 the snowcapped Alps. You'll walk downhill along easy footpaths, mostly unpaved and covered with soft grass, dirt tracks, and uneven terrain 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 hotel 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.

Accommodation: Hotel San Rocco, Orta San Giulio

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

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

Today you hike into the hills to visit Monte Sacro, an enchanting UNESCO site dedicated to St. Francis of Assisi. Later, cruise to Isola San Giulio and walk "The Way of Silence." Tonight's farewell dinner includes savory, gourmet Italian specialties.

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 terracotta figures depicting the saint's life. Country Walkers' Sustainable Travel Initiative and guest donations contribute to the restoration of the frescoes. 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. This 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 Silenzio* ("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 ending 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.

Accommodation: Hotel San Rocco, Orta San Giulio

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

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, right next to the Cairoli metro station.

Included Meals: Breakfast

What's Included

Tour Only

Exceptional boutique accommodations

12 on-tour meals: 6 B, 3 L, 3 D

Local guides with you throughout tour

What's Included

Tour Only

Local wine and/or beer with dinner

Entrance fees and special events as noted in the itinerary

Travel assistance available 24/7 provided by Allianz