

Italy: Lake Como, Bellagio & Lake Maggiore

Tour-Only Itinerary



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 local cheese and organic specialties during a private lunch at a family-owned farm above Lake Orta

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

Cruise to the picturesque “Fisherman’s Island” by private motorboat to sample local wines and enjoy sunset on Lake Maggiore.

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 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

Como city walk; .5 miles, easy. Bellagio to Pescallo and Villa Melzi; 2 miles, easy. Optional Bellagio; 1 mile, easy to moderate

Your guides will hold an orientation and safety briefing before embarking on your first walk, a stroll through the city center of Como to its harbor. 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.

Included Meals: Dinner

DAY 2

The Wayfarer's Trail. Independent exploration of Varenna and Bellagio

Bellano to Vezio; 4 miles, easy to moderate. 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 "The Wayfarer's 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 traverse sleepy villages such as Regolo and pass many chapels—stops along this former pilgrimage route. 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 a very special experience—in an 18th century home restaurant run by Carlo and Ghaia—featuring ethically sourced local products, many of the vegetables and herbs coming straight from their two gardens.

Early this afternoon, a short walk or shuttle takes you down to colorful Varenna, where you'll have part of the afternoon to relax or explore on your own. Stroll Varenna's cobbled alleys and Riva Grande lake promenade or pay a visit to San Giorgio Church. Visit the Villa Monastero, with gorgeous botanical gardens extending down to the lake. Stop in at Varenna Caffè Bistrot for a sunset *aperitivo* before returning to Bellagio. 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.

You may wish to spend time in Bellagio this afternoon or evening to discover its beautiful old center and perhaps do some shopping. Browsing the shops, you'll find silk scarves, leather items, knives, and much more. Dinner is on your own tonight, and Bellagio offers several options, from gourmet restaurants to wine bars, pizzerias, and cozy trattorias.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 3

Villa Carlotta to Lenno and Villa Balbianello Garden. Travel to Stresa

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.

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 4

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

2 miles, 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 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 your guides, 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. 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. Ferry to Villa Taranto to enjoy its enormous gardens with a stunning collection of rare plants. Visit the extraordinary religious complex of Santa Caterina del Sasso, across the lake. Ferry to Isola Madre, stroll the gorgeous botanical gardens with exotic plants and roaming peacocks and pheasants, and visit the Palace with its marionette exhibit. Or, you may opt to pamper yourself at your hotel, perhaps relaxing on the rooftop lounge, indulging in a treatment at the spa, or taking a dip in the hotel's swimming pool, built on the lake.

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.

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

This morning, travel by minibus to the slopes of Mount Mottarone, which separates Lake Maggiore and Lake Orta. Weather permitting, there is an option to do a brief hike up to the summit (which is at an elevation of 3,500 feet) from where you'll enjoy breathtaking 360-degree views of Lake Maggiore, Lake

Orta, Lake Varese, and other smaller lakes all framed by the snowcapped Alps. (Should you prefer not to climb to the summit, you may relax at the alpine restaurant, perhaps savoring a mid-morning cappuccino.) Afterward, you'll walk as a group 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, with recommendations provided by your guides.

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

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.

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 7

Your Italy: Lake Como, Bellagio & Lake Maggiore tour concludes

After breakfast, a 75-minute drive brings you to Milan, where you can conveniently explore this fascinating city on your own, or make flight and rail connections for onward travels. Bid farewell to your Country Walkers guides at UNAHOTEL Cusani at 10:00 a.m.

Included Meals: Breakfast

What's Included

Tour Only

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| Exceptional boutique accommodations | ✓ |
| 12 on-tour meals: 6 breakfasts, 3 lunches, | ✓ |
| 3 dinners | ✓ |
| Local guides with you throughout tour | ✓ |
| 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 Global Assistance | ✓ |
| Telescopic walking sticks provided on tour | ✓ |