



Independent walking tour (COM1)

Lake Como

*Italian charm in the Alps,
wonderful coloured villages along a mountain lake*



TRIP NOTES

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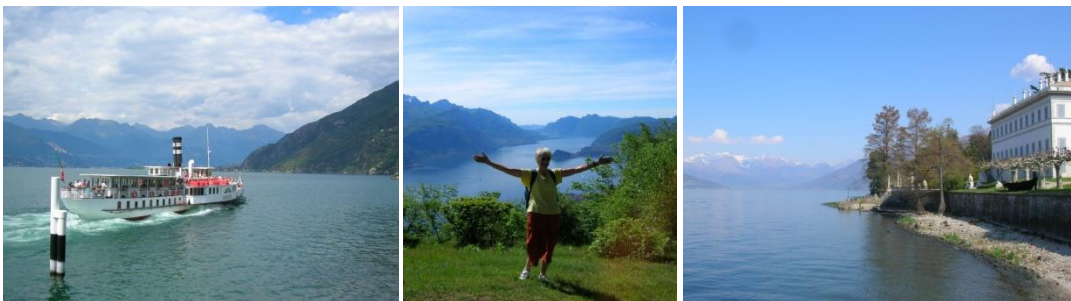
INTRODUCTION

Lake Como is one of the three 'Great Lakes' of northern Italy, and perhaps the most scenic alpine lake. It has therefore been a major tourist destination, already since Roman times, when the rich and influential built their villas along its shores, a practice which has continued until today, with the rich and famous having their villas along the lake shore. A gorgeous blue ribbon, surrounded by chains of impressive mountains, will give you an astonishing amount of great photo opportunities!

During this tour you will travel from the southern leg, featuring the beautiful town of Como itself, to the central part, where the three long 'legs' of the lake meet. Here you'll find the picturesque town of Bellagio, nicknamed the 'Pearl of the Lake', situated on the promontory between the legs, but also Menaggio and Varenna, the latter considered to be the 'most romantic town on the lake'. You'll find that visitors have been coming here for over 2000 years for a good reason: tranquil lakeside atmosphere and accessible alpine beauty. The best way to experience the region is to combine walking the trails and using the ferries to access many of the chic and charming villages. In doing so, you will have the opportunity to really learn how to know and love this area of stunning beauty, full of unique and evocative landscapes. Your walks will bring you through forest and pastoral land, but will also take you up towards the steep naked peaks surrounding Lake Como.

The first days of your trip will allow you to fully explore the charming city of Como and its Alpine surroundings. You will go for a ridge walk high above the lake enjoying sweeping views to both sides followed by a descent to the shore of Lake Como at Torno. You can spend an afternoon in Como itself, renowned for its Romanesque churches, its wonderful cathedral, medieval town walls and impressive villas, to visit the historic town centre. Then you might stroll around the lake to soak up the tranquil 'old world' atmosphere. The next day you travel by boat and taxi from Como to the charming village of Breglia. Here you can make a short walk to Madonna di Breglia, a 'church with a view'. From Breglia a longer circular walk takes you to a mountain but providing spectacular views across Lake Como. A short extension to this walk brings you to 'Pizzo Coppa' for views as far as Lake Lugano in Switzerland. Dedicated walkers can make it to the summit of Monte Grona (alt. 1736 m.).

From Breglia you will then travel by boat to get to the charming village of Varenna, deemed 'Italy's most romantic village' (quite a claim considering the rivals!). Varenna has inspirational views of the lake and the distant mountains, brightly painted houses adorned with flower-filled balconies, a bustling waterfront and a maze of meandering cobblestone streets. Here you can walk from Varenna to the small village of Bellano, passing through the canyon of the River Pioverna. Or you walk on the northern stretch of the 'Sentiero del Viandante', a relatively easy lakeside path from Dervio or Bellano back to Varenna. Views over the lake from this path are marvellous as you walk through a terraced landscape and visit the abbey of Piona, a most intriguing place. From Varenna it's well worth embarking on a day's boat tour of the lake. There are several places you could visit or start a walk from, including the splendid Villa Carlotta with its beautiful gardens, and Bellagio. Highly recommended is the incredibly scenic walk through the delightful countryside, passing the fishing village of Pescallo, climbing to the charming hamlet of Visgnola, and then descending to the lakeshore and the wonderful gardens of Villa Melzi.



Please note: this is a moderately easy tour which is suitable for those who have some experience of walking and a good general physical condition. Most of the walks are on good paths, sometimes on steep terrain. Average walking times: approx. 3 to 6 hours each day



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DAY-TO-DAY PROGRAMME

Day 1 – Arrival in Como

Arrival in Como, either by train or bus. You can already pay a short visit to the very interesting historic town centre and maybe stroll around the lake to soak up the tranquil 'old world' atmosphere.

Accommodation: Como – Hotel */******

Alternatively: Arrival in Milan. You are met by a taxi and brought to your hotel.

Accommodation: Como – Hotel */******

Day 2 – From Brunate to Lake Como

Today you take the cable car up to Brunate where you make a wonderful panoramic walk along a well-kept path on the ridge, high above the lake, with views to both sides. You could have a panoramic lunch in Brunate, but there are also many other nice spots to have a good picnic lunch at. Past the ruins of a medieval castle you descend back towards the lake. Those who feel like it can continue the walk down to the lakeside village of Torno and take the boat back. Otherwise you return through the forest to Brunate and travel back by cable car to Como. In the evening you can enjoy a nice meal in a good restaurant in the historic city centre.

Accommodation: Como – Hotel */******

Total walking distance: 9 km. Approx. walking time: 3,5 h. Ascent & descent: + 450 m./- 900 m. (longer option available)

Options for an extra day in Como: around Como there are many villas and estates to visit. You could go and see Villa Olmo and perhaps Villa D'Este as well. Travelling by boat to some other lakeside villages in this southern part of the lake is also a worthwhile experience. Cernobbio for example, surrounded by beautiful villas, has a wonderful relaxed atmosphere.

Day 3 – Through the city of Como and up to Menaggio

The first part of the day is dedicated to the old town of Como, renowned for its Romanesque churches, wonderful Duomo, medieval town walls and silk products. But its fine villas, 'fin-de-siècle' hotels and rationalist architecture along the lakeshore are also equally impressive. Stroll through the alleys and around the lake to get the real feel of the city. From Como you then travel by boat to Menaggio, admiring all the charming villages from the lake. In Menaggio you are met by your taxi and brought up to the charming village of Breglia, along a wonderful panoramic road. Here you can already go for a first short walk to the Madonna di Breglia, a 'church with a view', and San Domenico. You return to your hotel, going past the Roman excavations, to relax on the terrace and breathe in the fresh mountain air.

Accommodation: Plesio/Breglia – Hotel ***

Total walking distance: 5 km. Approx. walking time: 4 h. Ascent & descent: +/- 100 m.

Day 4 – Into the mountains above Menaggio

You start a wonderful round walk, which will bring you up to Menaggio's mountain hut, straight from your hotel in Breglia. The walk is relatively easy, but nonetheless offers unforgettable views of the lake! First you walk through the old part of the village and beautiful forests. You come across a number of spectacular viewpoints over Lake Como. A final steep section brings you up to the mountain hut, where you can have lunch. A short extra walk brings you to the saddle of 'Pizzo Coppa' where you can admire the whole region, from Lake Como to Lake Lugano (Switzerland). An



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optional detour can even bring you to the top of Monte Grona (1736m). You return to Breglia along a gradually descending path, with continuous spectacular views of Lake Como and the surrounding mountains.

Accommodation: Plesio/Breglia – Hotel ***

Total walking distance: 9 km. Approx. walking time: 4,5 h. Ascent & descent: +/- 650 m. (longer option available)

Day 5 – Sentiero del Viandante: Varenna - Lierna

You are brought down to Menaggio where you take the boat to the charming village of Varenna, deemed 'Italy's most romantic village', and settle in at your hotel. Varenna, with its inspiring views of the lake and the distant mountains, brightly painted houses adorned with flower-filled balconies, a bustling waterfront and a maze of meandering cobblestone streets, is a delightful place to explore. You'll walk a stretch of one of the historical pathways of the area, the so-called '*Sentiero del Viandante*', which brings you to the curious Fiumelatte, Italy's shortest river, for which it was subject to investigations by Leonardo da Vinci a few centuries ago. In the afternoon you can opt to visit the small village of Bellano, where you can make a short, but very interesting walk into the canyon of the River Pioverna. Or perhaps you'll just want to relax and eat in a *trattoria* somewhere in the village.

Accommodation: Varenna – Hotel ***

Total walking distance: 8 km. Approx. walking time: 4 h. Ascent & descent: +/- 700 m.

Day 6 – Sentiero del Viandante: Varenna - Dervio

Today you will walk the northern stretch of the '*Sentiero del Viandante*'. There are several options for doing either a shorter or longer walk. From Varenna you travel by boat or bus to Dervio or Bellano, and from there you walk along this relatively easy coastal path back to Varenna. Views over the lake from this path are marvellous and you walk through a nice terraced landscape. Those who feel like it can combine the walk with a visit to the Abbey of Piona, one of the most intriguing places around Lake Como.

Accommodation: Varenna – Hotel ***

Total walking distance: 10 km. Approx. walking time: 4,5 h. Ascent & descent: +/- 150 m.

Day 7 – Boating on Lake Como & discovering the countryside

Today you will discover the whole central part of Lake Como by boat. Depending on your interests there are several 'must-see' places to visit: the splendid Villa Carlotta, with its beautiful gardens overlooking the lake, the charming Menaggio, and of course Bellagio, 'the pearl of the lake', situated on the Punta Spartivento, where the two arms of Lake Como meet. Here you'll make an incredibly scenic walk through the delightful countryside and charming fishing village of Pescallo and up to the scenic hamlet of Visgnola. Down at the lake you walk back through the wonderful gardens of Villa Melzi. Then there is time to explore any number of the local villages by boat, or relax with a drink somewhere along the lake, before returning to the hotel.

Accommodation: Varenna – Hotel ***

Total walking distance: 7 km. Approx. walking time: 2,5 h. Ascent & descent: +/- 150 m.

Day 8 – Departure

End of tour.



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TOUR DETAILS

ACCOMMODATION & MEALS

Accommodation is mainly on a bed and breakfast basis in 3/4-star hotels. Only on the two nights in Plesio are you on a half-board basis. On the other nights you are free to organise your dinner arrangements from the wide choice of restaurants in the area. All rooms have en-suite facilities.

No picnic lunches are included in the tour price. Materials for picnics can be purchased in the villages where you'll be staying. It is also possible to have lunch in the villages on all walking days.

UPGRADE/CHANGES IN ACCOMMODATION

It is possible to book an upgrade in some of the places en route. Details and prices on request.

INCLUDED

- 7 nights accommodation - BB/HB
- 2 nights in Como*** - BB
- 2 nights in Plesio** - HB
- 3 nights in Varenna*** - BB
- Extensive route notes, with description of the route & tourist information
- Maps at 1 : 25.000 scale (or better)
- Luggage transfer on day 3 & day 5
- 24/7 h local assistance

NOT INCLUDED

- Departure & city taxes
- Visa & Travel Insurance
- Drinks and meals not mentioned in the itinerary
- Optional additional tours or activities
- Items of personal nature

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

Easy to moderate (2-3): In the standard programme there are some more difficult walks, which include some longer sections uphill, sometimes on paths with rough surfaces. Most of the trails are well maintained. Parts of these walks can be shortened, including the sections on easy paved paths, which are clearly visible and easy to follow. For the serious walkers longer options are available on some days (e.g. days 2, 4, 5 and 6), with some steeper climbs and descents as well.

Fitness: High standard of fitness is not necessary but you should be able to walk for up to 5 hours a day. Shorter and longer options are always available.



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FOOTPATHS & WAYMARKING

Waymarking: Only some parts of the route are waymarked; elsewhere you need to follow the route descriptions provided together with the maps. Some walking maps are available from the tourist information centres at Como, Menaggio and Bellagio. Other maps are on sale at the newsagent's.

ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE

Arrival: The tour starts in COMO. A regular train service runs from Milan (about 1 hour). There are also buses directly from the airport of Milano – Malpensa. Regular ferries run to and from all sites along the lakeshore. A pickup service with private taxi from Milan or the airport can be arranged on request.

Departure: The tour ends after breakfast in VARENNA on day 8 (or 6). The return is most easily made by boat to Como, then by train to Milan, or by bus directly to the airport. Several taxi services are available. A private taxi can be arranged on request.



TOUR VARIATIONS

EXTRA NIGHTS

It is possible to include extra nights in any of the towns en route. Details and prices on request. *Extra walking or sightseeing options will be provided!!!*

EXTENSIONS

It is possible to extend the tour with walks around Menaggio. It is possible to extend the journey with 3 or more days on Lake Garda (3-5 days).

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