



HIKING IN ITALY'S LAKE DISTRICT

Day Hikes & Explorations in Northern Italy

ITALY ~ HIKING ~ 9 DAYS

TRIP DETAILS

4 days moderate hiking on rugged terrain (maximum elevation 5,300')

7 nights hotels

2004 DATES

May 8–May 16

May 22–May 30

Sep 4–Sep 12

Sep 18–Sep 26

LAND COST

*\$3290 per person
(7-14 members)*

*\$3590 per person
(4-6 members)*

**LEVEL
3**

“One can’t describe the beauty of the Italian Lakes, nor would one try if one could,” wrote Henry James. Nevertheless, you might be inspired to put pen to paper, too, after this fine adventure.

The extravagant beauty of the Italian Lake Region has attracted visitors since the time of the Roman Empire, inspiring poets, writers, and musicians with its idyllic landscape of peaceful lakes framed by steep, rugged granite mountains.

This hiker’s ramble combines exhilarating day hikes among the pinnacles and towers of the surrounding mountains with a discovery of the picturesque charm and Mediterranean atmosphere of such lakeside towns as Bellagio, Varenna, and the narrow cobbled streets and pastel-washed houses of Orta San Giulio.

We begin at Lake Orta, tucked in the foothills of the alpine chain. We’ll visit the lake’s tiny San Giulio Island with its Romanesque art treasures and hike to the top of Monte Mazzocone (4,742'). From here we’ll enjoy spectacular views of the lake, the Po Plains, the Alps, and Monte Rosa (15,348'), the second highest mountain in Western Europe. We’ll also venture into the Val Grande National Park, with its balcony views of Lake Maggiore to the south and the Monte Rosa chain to the west.

Lake Maggiore enjoys a Mediterranean climate that fosters rich botanical gardens filled with hundreds of species of flowers and plants. We’ll visit the Borromeo Islands with their manicured gardens, elegant palaces, and quaint fishing villages before heading to Lake Como, lined with sumptuous villas and peaceful small towns. Based at Varenna, a charming, medieval town on the eastern shore of the lake, we’ll explore the region, including a hike above the town of Bellagio. We will enjoy unparalleled views of the lake and its backdrop of stunning mountains, and discover why the area has enjoyed favor for centuries (both Pliny and the poet Longfellow wrote of the lake’s luxuriant beauty). Our adventure concludes with a visit to the elegant Villa del Balbianello and its gardens, and a boat ride down the lake to the city of Como, where we have ample time to enjoy its architecture and do some last minute shopping before reluctantly bidding farewell.

ITINERARY

DAY 1 ~ Fly to Italy

Leave your hometown and fly to Milan, Italy, arriving on Day 2.

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DAY 2 ~ Arrive in Italy

Your tour leader will meet you at 10:30 a.m. outside Exit 3 on the ground floor of the Arrivals terminal of Malpensa 2000 airport. Transfer by private bus service to Orta San Giulio, a picturesque village on the shore of Lake D'Orta (our drive will take about one hour). We take a short boat ride to the Island of San Giulio, founded, according to tradition, by San Giulio at the end of the fourth century. Here we will enjoy our first Italian meal at a lakeshore restaurant before setting out to visit the noteworthy Romanesque Basilica, with its frescoes and valuable art works. Upon our return to Orta San Giulio, you are free to explore the town on your own or to venture up to Sacro Monte, a perfect vantage point above town to enjoy a great view of the Lake Orta and the surrounding mountains. Here you can also visit the twenty-one chapels depicting the life of Saint Francis of Assisi.

L,D...Hotel San Rocco

Note—Many international flights arrive after our recommended meeting time on Day 2. Depending on your arrangements, we suggest you arrive one day early.

DAY 3 ~ Quarna – Monte Mazzone

A 45-minute bus ride takes us from Orta San Giulio to Quarna, a small town where wind instruments have been manufactured for the past two centuries, and from where we begin our hike toward Monte Mazzone. The trail, at times quite steep, winds through pristine birch and chestnut forests, then it narrows and follows a grassy ridge offering us a serene view of Lake D'Orta, the surrounding hills, and the distant Po Plains. Once on the summit (4,742'), a spectacular world opens up to us, with views of wild, narrow, and precipitous Valstrona, famous for its artisans who lathe wooden objects. Slate-roofed villages still clinging to superstitions and legends are perched mid-way up the sunny side of the valley. On a clear day, the impressive summit of Monte Rosa commands our view to the west, blanketed in its perennial snows that light up with a deep pink glow at sunrise. After a picnic lunch, we will descend along a nice path back to Quarna. Drive back to Orta San Giulio. Our hike today is about five hours with an elevation gain and loss of approximately 1,850 feet.

B,L...Hotel San Rocco

DAY 4 ~ Val Grande National Park

We drive about one hour to Miazzina (3,165'), a destination favored by famous painters and artists of the nineteenth century. We then start hiking on a gentle, panoramic trail that takes us through conifer forests and along the ridge that follows the southern boundary of Val Grande National Park. We then reach Pian Cavallone (5,210'), where we can relax, have a picnic lunch, and enjoy a view of Val Grande, the largest wilderness area in Italy. This unique valley, crowned by solitary and craggy peaks, is where nature is reclaiming its space. It holds a place in history for the role it played as a Partisan stronghold during World War II. At our feet, Lake Maggiore with its blue expanse conveys a sense of peace to this rugged landscape while creating a contrast of colors and textures. We continue our hike, descending into Caprezzo, where we meet our bus and drive to Stresa. Today we hike about 5 hours with an elevation gain and loss of approximately 2,100 feet.

B,L,D...Hotel La Palma

DAY 5 ~ Isole Borromeo

We shed our hiking boots and spend the day on Lake Maggiore, the second largest of the Italian Lakes, and visit the Borromeo Islands, owned by the Borromeo family since the 16th century. We take a short motorboat ride from Stresa to Isola Bella, the most famous of the islands. Here we visit the sumptuous palace containing invaluable art pieces, and the majestic "Italian gardens," rich with an incredible variety of rare plants and flowers. We continue on

to Isola Madre, the largest and most peaceful of the islands, where silence and the occasional call of peacocks accompany us during our visit. We then continue to Isola dei Pescatori (Fishermen's Island), where we enjoy the very simple and rustic aspect of this hamlet and a lunch at a waterfront restaurant. Return to Stresa and drive about two and one half hours to Varenna. Varenna is a beautiful and quaint medieval town with a layout of Roman origin and an obligatory stop for those who visit Lake Como's eastern shore. A few religious sites comprise the town's historic center, and patrician villas, surrounded by a vast park, house rich art collections and host exhibits and conventions.

B,L,D...Hotel Royal Victoria

DAY 6 ~ Monte San Primo – Bellagio

We take a boat to Bellagio where we meet our van and transfer to Piano Rancio. Here we start our gentle two-hour hike up to the ridge of Monte San Primo (5,300'). We'll walk through woods and across peaceful pastures that seem to throw us back into a fairytale world, and look at the dramatic, calcareous spires of the Grigne range, a famous rock-climbing destination. From the ridge we'll have an unparalleled view of Lake Como and its characteristic Y-shape, and of the Alps in the background. We then descend to Alpe del Borgo. We follow a dirt road for a very short stretch to a local mountain restaurant, where we enjoy a hearty, traditional meal before we meet the van and return to Bellagio.

The Romans called Lake Como "the pearl of the Lario," and Bellagio is perched at the very end of the promontory that divides the lake into two separate branches. Since the middle of the 18th century, eminent personalities of the nobility, artistic, and literary worlds have chosen Bellagio as their summer residence. You are on your own for a short visit to the shops under the porches, to admire the opulent villas and their gardens, and let your imagination take you back to that splendid past. Return to Varenna by boat. Dinner on your own. Total hiking time today is about 4 hours with an elevation gain of about 1,700 feet and an elevation drop of 1,452 feet.

B,L...Hotel Royal Victoria

DAY 7 ~ Sentiero del Viandante (The Wayfarer's Trail)

Today we explore Varenna's surroundings. We begin with a half-hour walk to the source of the Fiumelatte (Milk River), which, with a descent of only 833 feet from its source to its mouth, is the shortest creek in Italy. Its foaming waters, rumbling down at a thirty-six degree angle, give it a milky-white color. Here we make a short stop to observe this peculiar and mysterious creek, which has held the interest of speleologists for decades. We continue up the hill to the 14th-century Castle of Vezio (1,165'), from where we enjoy a beautiful view of the rooftops of Varenna and both branches of Lake Como. From the castle we start hiking toward Bellano on the Sentiero del Viandante, a beautiful path following the lakeshore used in the old days to bring goods from Milan and the plains to the north. As we hike along we pass through hamlets surrounded by vineyards and thick woods, while to the north we take in a spectacular view of the Alps. We then return by train to Varenna where you can spend some time on your own meandering its narrow streets or enjoying an espresso at a lakeside cafe. Today's hike is only about three hours with minimal elevation gain or drop. We will have a picnic lunch along the way.

B,L,D...Hotel Royal Victoria

DAY 8 ~ Como

Today we take a boat ride to Lenno and visit the Villa del Balbianello and its gardens. Belonging to the Italian Environmental Fund, the Villa today is a museum, hosting art collections of the explorer Guido Monzini as well as his travel and explorations memorabilia. We then board a boat again and continue our ride down the western branch of Lake Como, with time to admire the villages, villas, and manicured gardens that dot the lake's coastline.

It's one more opportunity to enjoy all this beauty before we reach Como in time for you to have lunch on your own and spend the afternoon exploring the town. Founded by Julius Caesar in the first century B.C., Como has been famous for its silk manufacturing since 1510. But pretty scarves, ties, and printed silk fabrics are not all the city has to offer. The historical center holds several astounding monuments, including the Duomo, a blend of Gothic, Renaissance, and Baroque styles. For those with a sweet tooth, there are choices of typical desserts such as *resta*, *matoch*, and *masigott*.
B,D...Palace Hotel

DAY 9 ~ Departure

Today we say farewell. Due to a variety of schedules and plans, the trip ends in Como. If you are returning to Malpensa International Airport to connect with your homeward-bound flight, there is a public bus from Como to the airport. If you are continuing on to other destinations in Italy or elsewhere in Europe, you can take a taxi (five-minute ride) from the hotel to the San Giovanni train station in Como (the main train station). Your trip leader can assist you with the details.

B...

LAND COST

\$3290 per person (7-14 members)

\$3590 per person (4-6 members)

Rates quoted are per person, based on sharing double accommodations.

Single Supplement—\$600 for “requested” singles; \$300 for “forced” singles.

If you prefer single accommodations, you must pay the Single Supplement Fee. If you're traveling alone and wish to share accommodations, we'll try our best to find you a roommate. If that's not possible, we will only charge you half of the single supplement.

What's Included

- ◆ expert leadership
- ◆ accommodations
- ◆ meals as noted (B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner)
- ◆ transfer from Malpensa Airport to Orta San Giulio
- ◆ tips to drivers and porters
- ◆ transportation within Italy as per the itinerary
- ◆ basic medical and evacuation insurance

What's Not

International airfare; any transfer from Como at the of the trip; meals not noted on itinerary; insurance other than basic medical and evacuation insurance noted above (we strongly recommend you purchase the supplementary trip insurance offered by Mountain Travel Sobek, which includes trip cancellation insurance); optional tipping to leader, guides and local staff; excess baggage charges; airport taxes (if any); cost of medical immunizations; and items of a personal nature (sodas, alcoholic beverages, laundry, etc.). Unused transportation to/during the tour will not be reimbursed.

Air Travel Options

Air carriers impose strict ceilings on the special fares we are permitted to offer our travelers. With so many choices of air carriers and special promotional fares through newspapers, travel agents, and the Internet, not to mention “frequent flyer” miles, we suggest you call your local travel agent or the airline directly. We’ll be happy to provide you with a list of toll-free numbers for some of the major air carriers after you sign up.

Note—Please check with us before purchasing your air tickets. We need to ensure we have enough participants to operate the trip.

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT

Expert Leadership

Expert leadership is the key to an exciting, unforgettable experience. Our trips feature gifted leaders for whom leading trips is a true vocation. Besides showing you wonders you’d never find on your own, they make sure everything runs smoothly and safely without a hitch. They are knowledgeable about all aspects of your trip, and take great pleasure in sharing their insights with you. More than just guides, they positively elevate your experience by being teachers, companions, and the best of friends. You’ll be in good hands with them every step of the way.

Although trip leader assignments are subject to change, *Anna Bezzola* is scheduled to lead this trip. Anna was born and raised in northern Italy, and has been hiking and climbing in the Alps since childhood. In addition to being multilingual, she is very knowledgeable about the history and customs of the area as well as the flora and fauna. Anna truly enjoys people, has a deep sense for nature and her passion for the mountains is truly contagious. She has worked for several years in theater and is an avid ballroom dancer. Anna also leads departures of our *Great Walser Trek* and *Bernese Oberland* treks.

Leader assignments will be confirmed in the Final Bulletin sent to you three weeks prior to departure.

Activity Level

On a scale from 1 to 5, we rate this trip as a 3 (moderate in nature). It’s an excellent trip for those who are looking for moderate hikes combined with a cultural experience. There are five to six hours of hiking on most of the hiking days, so it does require some degree of stamina. Although the hikes are quite varied, they are not very strenuous. There are some ascents and descents, but the trails are seldom very steep. There is always the option to skip a hike and spend the day on your own.

You need to be in good health and physical condition to enjoy this trip, with adequate muscular strength, cardiovascular endurance, and good balance. The level of fitness and endurance needed for this trip requires regular aerobic exercise at least one hour 3-4 times per week, performing moderate intensity hiking, cycling, swimming, or other forms of cardiovascular exercise. You must be able to hike four to six hours a day for at least two consecutive days and be comfortable hiking on rough terrain.

If you are not optimally conditioned, we recommend that you start a training program *at least three months* before departure, gradually increasing the intensity and duration. If your health is questionable or your physical stamina is limited, please discuss other trip options with us.

THE NEXT STEP

Ready to go? Signing up is easy!

Call us at 1-888-MTSOBEK (687-6235) and reserve a space with your credit card or use the enclosed reservation card. You can also book a reservation online at our website (www.mtsobek.com). If you prefer to use a travel agent, he or she can book your trip at no extra cost and provide other helpful assistance. Frequent flyers with mileage-earning credit cards take note: you also have the option to make all your payments by credit card so you can rack up even more mileage for your next trip!

Then Leave the Rest to Us

Before you go, we provide you with extensive pre-departure information, including clothing recommendations, suggested reading lists, and other details.

Why Mountain Travel Sobek is Your First Choice for Adventure

Mountain Travel Sobek is the pioneer in active adventure travel. No other adventure travel company can lay claim to that title. We were the first to take Americans trekking in Nepal, raft the wild rivers of Africa, and open up many previously inaccessible corners of the world to curious travelers. We set the standard for adventure travel and have a strong reputation for excellence that we do everything we can to maintain. Since we are the leading adventure company, we have a lot to live up to, so we make sure we provide safe, quality trips and the best customer service to our passengers.

With Mountain Travel Sobek, you'll see this part of Italy as only an insider can, with friendly, hospitable guides who know the region intimately. They'll accompany you throughout the day, lending support and insights about where you are and what you see. Their close familiarity with the local geography, history, culture and traditions (plus their entertaining stories and great jokes) are the key to a superb, informative experience—one you just can't get on your own.

References

Don't take our word for how great our trips are. We'll be happy to provide you with references of satisfied past travelers.

Questions?

Feel free to call us at 1-888-MTSOBEK (687-6235) if you still have any questions or concerns. We're here to help you. You can also check out our website at www.mtsobek.com.

Note on Itinerary

Although we will do our very best to adhere to the itinerary schedule as listed, it is subject to change for numerous reasons beyond our control. Please read the Limitations of Liability and Booking Conditions in the four-page Participant Information Form.

Conditions of Participation

Your participation on a Mountain Travel Sobek trip is subject to the conditions stated in the four-page Participant Information Form, which includes the Agreement and Release from Liability and the Booking Conditions. We urge you to read this information carefully, and to call us if you have any questions.

Note on Services

We often use local suppliers who provide services that may include transportation, equipment, logistic support, and other services (hotels, restaurants, etc.). We do not own or operate these independent suppliers. We work with service providers who share our commitment to safety and quality, and work closely with them to develop itineraries unique to Mountain Travel Sobek.

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CST 2014882-10

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