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TRIP DETAILS

8 days ~ Italy

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

7 nights hotels

2007 DATES

May 13–May 20

Jun 3–Jun 10

Jun 17–Jun 24

Jul 1–Jul 8

Jul 15–Jul 22

Aug 19–Aug 26

Sep 9–Sep 16

Sep 23–Sep 30

LAND COST

*\$3690 per person
(7-14 members)*

*\$3990 per person
(4-6 members)*

*Extend your adventure! You can
do this trip back to back with Hill
Towns & Vineyards of
Piemonte. Ask for separate
itinerary.*

HIKING ABOVE THE ITALIAN LAKES

Day Hikes & Explorations in Northern Italy

TRIP LEVEL
MODERATE



HIGHLIGHTS

- *Hike trails that only the locals know, with views of the Alps and sparkling lakes*
- *Explore the most enchanting villas and gardens of Lake Maggiore and Lake Como*
- *Dine on fine Piemontese and Lombard cuisine and sip world-famous regional wines*
- *Relax in beautiful lakeside hotels with panoramic views*

Revised July 17, 2007



HIKING ABOVE THE ITALIAN LAKES

Day Hikes & Explorations in Northern Italy

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 cobblestone streets and pastel-washed houses of Orta San Giulio.

We begin at Lake Orta, tucked in the foothills of the alpine chain, with visit to the lake's tiny San Giulio Island and its Basilica with its Romanesque art treasures.

We will hike to the top of Monte Mazzone (4,742'), a vantage point for 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 an exclusive guided tour of Villa Del Balbianello 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

☞ This trip begins with a rendezvous at the Malpensa International Airport in Milan, Italy, on Day 1.

DAY 1 ~ Arrive in Italy

Your tour leader will meet you at 10:30 a.m. in front of Exit 2 (indoors) on the Arrivals floor of Terminal 1 of Malpensa International Airport. *Note—Many international flights arrive after our recommended meeting time on Day 1. Depending on your arrangements, we suggest you arrive at least one day early (or more).* Transfer by private bus (about one hour drive) to Orta San Giulio, a picturesque village on the shore of Lake Orta. This lake is the smallest of the Italian Lakes we will explore, and is nestled among granitic mountains and surrounded by the stunning backdrop of the Prealps. A relaxing half-hour walk allows us to enjoy the peaceful environment of the lake before our 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 for a walk around the tiny island and a visit to the noteworthy Romanesque Basilica, with its frescoes and valuable art works. We return to Orta where the rest of the afternoon is yours to walk around. Worthwhile is a visit to Sacro Monte, the perfect vantage point above town with great views of the Lake Orta and the surrounding mountains. Here you can visit the 20 chapels depicting the life of Saint Francis of Assisi.

Our accommodation is the refined **Hotel San Rocco**, perfectly located in a romantic spot on the lakeshore and in the heart of Orta's historical center. Once a place of meditation, Hotel San Rocco was for 150 years a seclusion convent, looking architecturally similar today, until the 1960s, when the Giuseppine nuns gave it up and it became the present hotel. Our lake view rooms have all the amenities and the bathrooms display an elegant workmanship of the granite quarried in the area. In the late afternoon, you can enjoy a swim in the pool right by the lakeshore, or simply relax and sip an aperitif while watching the glittering water and the soft light on the Island of San Giulio.

We will meet on the outside patio of the hotel for a welcome drink and a briefing before dinner at a local restaurant where we will savor an array of local dishes.

L.D...Hotel San Rocco, Orta San Giulio

Note—Please make sure you arrive prepared for the initial walk and the tour of the town after lunch. Hiking boots are not necessary but we highly recommend you wear comfortable walking shoes and proper clothing for your visit of the Basilica (shorts and sleeveless shirts are not allowed). We also recommend you bring a daypack to carry the items you may need such as camera, sweater, etc.

DAY 2 ~ Quarna – Monte Mazzone

A private bus takes us from Orta San Giulio to Quarna, a small town where wind instruments have been manufactured since 1818, and where we begin our hike toward Monte Mazzone. The peaceful and spectacular trail, with a few short but steep stretches, winds through pristine birch and chestnut forests, over granite boulders, then follows a grassy ridge offering us a serene view of Lake Orta, the surrounding hills, and the distant Po Plains. Once at the top (4,742'), a spectacular world opens up to us, with views of wild, narrow, and precipitous Valstrona, also called the Valley of Pinocchio. In fact, even today, family-run factories still produce Pinocchios of different sizes in an artisanal way and export them internationally. 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 (15,348'—the second highest mountain in Western Europe) commands our view to the west, blanketed in its

perennial snows. We descend into an idyllic pastoral setting where, accompanied by cowbells, we have a picnic lunch consisting of mouth-watering delicious local cheeses and cold cuts, olives, and other delicacies. We then continue our descent along a nice path through conifer, birch, and chestnut forests back to Quarna, where, if the owners are available and willing, we take an exclusive tour of the family-run wind instrument factory. Drive back to Orta San Giulio. Our hike today is about four and a half hours with an elevation gain and loss of approximately 1,850 feet.

B,L...Hotel San Rocco, Orta San Giulio

DAY 3 ~ Val Grande National Park

Today we transfer by private bus to Miazzina (3,165'), a sunny destination favored by famous painters and artists of the 19th century. We then start hiking on a gentle uphill panoramic trail that takes us through conifer forests and along the ridge that follows the southern boundary of Val Grande National Park. All along the trail, rhododendrons, heather, ferns, raspberries, blueberries, as well as porcini mushrooms in the fall, contour and color our path. The trail becomes steeper for about twenty minutes as we approach Pian Cavallone (5,210'). Here we relax, spread out our display of yet more local delicacies, 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 after the dramatic events that unfolded during World War II, when the area was a Partisan stronghold. At our feet, the blue expanse of Lake Maggiore conveys a sense of peace to this rugged landscape while creating a contrast of colors and textures. We continue our hike, descending through a peaceful forest 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.

The elegant *Hotel La Palma* is a luxurious four-star hotel, built in the early 1960s, when tourism began to take a strong hold on Lake Maggiore, and remodeled in 1995. Here all the comfort is at your disposal and deluxe rooms with a balcony and wonderful views of the lake awaits you. A Jacuzzi and a solarium could be the perfect way to relax after two days of hiking. You may also choose to sit by the private swimming pool on the edge of the lake and take in the beauty of the Borromeo Islands (which we will visit the next day) and the jagged peaks of the Val Grande National park across the gulf. Dinner will be at a renowned family-run restaurant in the heart of this charming town.

B,L,D...Hotel La Palma, Stresa

DAY 4 ~ Isole Borromeo

Today we shed our hiking boots, and spend the morning on Lake Maggiore, the second largest of the Italian Lakes, and visit the Borromeo Islands. We start with a short ride in a private boat from our hotel to Isola Bella, where we take a guided tour of the sumptuous palace containing invaluable art pieces, and whose architectural style spans from the neoclassical to the baroque period. On your own, you will visit the impressive gardens, the most exquisite and elegant example of "Italian gardens," rich with an incredible variety of rare flowers and home to the famous white peacocks. 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 ride 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 where we meet the bus for our transfer to Varenna, on Lake Como, which will take about two and one half hours. Varenna is a romantic and quaint medieval town with a layout of Roman origin and an obligatory stop for those who visit Lake Como's eastern shore. Sitting at the base of a small promontory, Varenna beckons the visitor like a sparkling jewel while maintaining its medieval atmosphere. Its houses painted with bright ochre and red are a splash of color in the lush vegetation surrounding the town. A few religious sites comprise the town's historic center, and patrician villas, enclosed in parks, house rich art collections and host exhibits and conventions. Dinner is on the

lakeshore veranda of an exquisite local restaurant. The soothing sound of small waves reaching the shore and the occasional call of the ducks will accompany our meal.

Our accommodation is the exquisite *Hotel Villa Cipressi*. Perfectly situated at the edge of town and right on the lake, Villa Cipressi is an elegant, newly renovated villa, rich in history, and built mainly between the 1400s and the 1800s. Through the centuries the property changed hands from one noble family to the other until 1980, when the people and friends of Varenna bought it through a voluntary subscription. The recent renovations were carried out in compliance with the pre-existing architectural design and by harmoniously reconciling antiquities with functionality. The breakfast/dining area opens up to an intimate garden with gazebos and a Jacuzzi, and its century-old botanical garden descends in tiered terraces to the lake and contains plants of a rare beauty and of worldwide botanic importance.

B,L,D...Villa Cipressi, Varenna

DAY 5 ~ Monte San Primo – Bellagio

We take a private boat to Bellagio where we meet our private 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 filled with wildflowers including cyclamens, ranunculus, narcissus, primroses, and more. We will be thrown back into a fairytale world, and look at the dramatic, calcareous spires of the Grigne range, a famous rock-climbing destination. From the ridge and to the north we'll have an unparalleled view of Lake Como and its characteristic Y-shape, and of the Alps in the background. On a clear day we can see Milan to the south, as well as the chain of the Apennine mountains. We then descend through more pastures to Alpe del Borgo, where we enjoy a hearty, traditional meal at a mountain restaurant. After lunch, we return by van to Bellagio where you can spend the rest of the afternoon on your own visiting the town or shopping and to let your imagination take you back to that splendid past. 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.

Return to Varenna by boat. Dinner is on your own tonight. 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...Villa Cipressi, Varenna

DAY 6 ~ 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 36-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 through olive groves 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 mule 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 will step over the official geological border between the Prealps and the Alps. We then return by train or boat to Varenna, where you can spend some time on your own meandering its narrow streets, visiting the gardens of Villa Monastero, 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 with specialties of the area along the way. Dinner will be in a unique restaurant on one of the narrow

cobblestone pathways of Varenna. The restaurant, run by Mario, owner, chef, waiter and host, only sits fourteen people.

B,L,D...Villa Cipressi, Varenna

DAY 7 ~ Como

The day begins with a boat ride to the town of Lenno, on the western shore of Lake Como. We will walk about twenty minutes along the shore and on a beautiful path through the woods to Villa del Balbianello, a villa on Lake Como of unique, unusual history and of exceptional interest. Sitting at the edge of a promontory jutting out into Lake Como, the Villa is today a museum hosting a breathtaking array of memorabilia and equipment collected by its late owner, Guido Monzino, an Italian industrialist and a famous and extravagant explorer responsible, among other feats, for organizing the first successful Italian expedition to the summit of Mount Everest in 1973. The Villa is an extraordinary expression of his taste and character. With the knowledge of a private guide, his life and adventures will come to life and you will feel as if you are partaking of his travels and passion. After the tour, we will walk back to Lenno, where you can have a light lunch on your own before boarding the hydrofoil for our final 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. This could also be a good time to go over your departure details with your trip leader, in the event that you need any assistance. Once in Como, you are on your own for the rest of the afternoon to explore the town and do some last minute shopping. 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. We will bid good-bye with a farewell dinner at the hotel or at a local restaurant.

Accommodation is the sumptuous *Palace Hotel*, a splendid four-star hotel built in 1890, last remodeled in 1992, and today under the ownership of Villa d'Este. It is perfectly located a few minutes walk from Como's historical center and the rooms enjoy a beautiful view of the lake and offer all modern comforts. Frescoes and grand windows bestow upon the dining and breakfast room a truly sumptuous atmosphere. Exquisite cuisine tops off the day. We will bid good-bye with a farewell dinner at a local restaurant.

B,D...Palace Hotel, Como

DAY 8 ~ Departure

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. Please do not schedule your flight before 12:00 noon. 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).

B...

LAND COST

\$3690 per person (7-14 members)

\$3990 per person (4-6 members)

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

Single Supplement—\$800 for “requested” singles; \$400 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 porters and drivers
- ◆ guided walking tours
- ◆ entrances to museums as specified in the itinerary
- ◆ transportation within Italy as per the itinerary
- ◆ basic medical and evacuation insurance

What's Not

International airfare; any transfer from Como at the end 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 trip leader and tour guides; 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

Airfare is not included in the land cost of our trips. For air reservations, we recommend you contact the airlines directly, either by phone or the Internet. In addition, many travelers elect to use their "frequent flyer" miles when traveling with us. **But please check with our staff before purchasing or obtaining your tickets.** We need to verify your arrival and departure schedule and 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. The following people regularly guide this trip:

*"Anna took eight strangers and turned us into a family in a matter of days. She met and exceeded any expectations I might have had prior to the trip and did so with much joy and enthusiasm. She was the true jewel of this trip."
Mary Garcia*

Anna Bezzola was born and raised in northern Italy, and has been hiking 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, and her passion and love for nature and her country are truly contagious. She has worked in theater as a lighting designer and enjoys ballroom dancing. Anna has been guiding for Mountain Travel Sobek for the last 12 years,

and her trips have included our *Hiking in Italy's Lake District*, *The Great Walser Trek*, *Hiking the Bernese Oberland*, *The Tour of Monte Rosa* and *Hiking in Ticino* in the Alps, as well as *The Chomolhari Trek* in Bhutan. She has also escorted trips for us in the Arctic and Antarctic. She currently lives in Switzerland but returns to California, her other home, in winter on a regular basis.

Cain Olsen was born in England, and grew up on a farm near Florence in Tuscany, where he achieved degrees in physical education and sports management. After a brief career in the sporting goods industry and extended climbing and trekking trips to Nepal and Patagonia, Cain successfully completed a selective UIAGM / IFMGA mountain guide course in Italy. Valcamonica, in the Central Alps, is his home base, where he lives with his wife, Alice, and his son, Joshua. Cain is also a scuba diver instructor and a passionate mountain biker.

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

Activity Level

This is an excellent trip for those who are looking for moderate hikes combined with a cultural experience. There are three to five hours of hiking on most of the hiking days, so it does require some degree of stamina. Although the hikes are quite varied and there are some ascent and descents, they are not strenuous. 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!

Just call us at 1-888-MTSOBEK (687-6235) and reserve your spot! 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.

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 best to adhere to the itinerary schedule as listed, it is subject to change. Please read the Limitation of Liability and Booking Conditions in the four-page Participant Information Form. You can find all this information on our website at www.mtsobek.com/faq and the form itself at www.mtsobek.com/pdf/participant_info.pdf.

Terms & Conditions

Once you have made a deposit for a trip, you agree to be bound by all our terms and conditions including the Limitation of Liability Clause. The full Terms and Conditions can be found at www.mtsobek.com/faq/#liability or call 1-888-MTSOBEK (687-6235) for a copy. These are partial conditions. Your participation is contingent on your signature on the full list of terms specified in the four-page Participant Information Form (www.mtsobek.com/pdf/participant_info.pdf). Any dispute concerning, relating or referring to the Terms and Conditions, to any literature concerning this trip, or the trip itself, shall be resolved exclusively by binding arbitration in San Francisco, California, according to the then existing commercial rules of the American Arbitration Association. Such proceedings will be governed by substantive California law (but not procedural law) without regard to the California Arbitration Act.

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