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TRIP DETAILS

7 days ~ Italy

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

6 nights hotels

2008 DATES

May 18–May 24

Jun 8–Jun 14

Jun 29–Jul 5

Sep 7–Sep 13

LAND COST

*\$3,795 per person
(7-14 members)*

*\$3,995 per person
(4-6 members)*

\$800 single supplement

HIKING ABOVE THE ITALIAN LAKES

Day Hikes & Explorations in Northern Italy

TRIP LEVEL
MODERATE

HIGHLIGHTS

- *Hike trails that only the locals know (and that you'd never find on your own!)*
- *Explore the enchanting lakeside towns of Bellagio, Varenna, Orta San Giulio, and more!*
- *Dine on fine Piemontese and Lombard cuisine and sip world-famous regional wines*
- *Relax in beautiful lakeside hotels with panoramic views*

Revised November 5, 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 Mazzocone (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 will have some 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 4 (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 a light lunch at a local café. After lunch 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 set 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. We will meet in the early evening for a welcome drink and a briefing before dinner on the outside patio of the hotel.

L,D...Hotel La Bussola, 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 we meet our bus and drive back to Orta San Giulio. Dinner on your own. Our hike today is about 4½ hours with an elevation gain and loss of approximately 1,850 feet.

B,L...Hotel La Bussola, 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 (and 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 4½ hours with an elevation gain and loss of approximately 2,100 feet.

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, with a visit to the Borromeo Islands. We start with a short boat ride 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 continue 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 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. After lunch, we take a boat ride 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 at a local restaurant or at the hotel.

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

DAY 5 ~ Monte San Primo – Bellagio

A short boat ride takes us to Bellagio where we 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 a mountain restaurant, where we enjoy a hearty, traditional meal before returning 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) – Como

Today we explore Varenna's surroundings. We begin with a half-hour walk 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 will have an early picnic lunch. In Bellano we board the boat to Lenno where we have an exclusive tour of 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. After the tour we transfer by boat to Como, arriving in the late afternoon. 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. We encourage you to spend an extra day on your own to explore this beautiful town.

B L,D...Hotel Metropole Suisse, Como

DAY 7 ~ 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). Please finalize all of your travel plans to other destinations before you leave the US. You will not have access to travel agencies or train stations while on this trip.

B...

LAND COST

\$3,795 per person (7-14 members)

\$3,995 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 Bezzola was born and raised in northern Italy, and has been hiking in the Alps since childhood. She has studied and worked in theater as a lighting designer, has worked for several years in our home office, and has been guiding for Mountain Travel Sobek for the last 15 years. In addition to being multilingual, Anna truly enjoys people, and her passion and love for nature and her country are truly contagious. She currently also guides our *Hiking Piemonte's Wine Region* trip, and has guided *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 the Italian-speaking region of Switzerland.

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 diving instructor and a passionate mountain biker.

Jimmy Sabbadin grew up in Valcamonica, in northern Italy, where the mountains are his constant horizon and life's passion. Jimmy is multi-lingual, has a degree in Sociology, with specialization in Land and Environment, and is a licensed ski instructor and excursion guide. In summer, he guides trips in Valcamonica, specializing in rupestrian art, archaeology, and environmental education. In winter, he is a ski instructor in Val d'Isere, France.

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 four to four and a half 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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