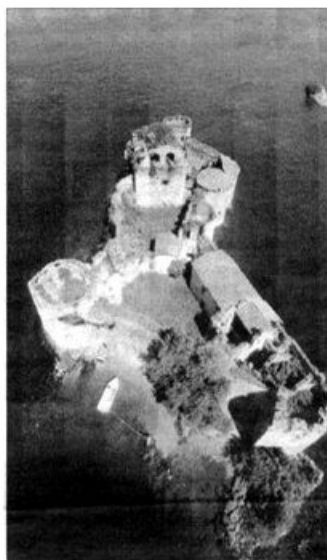


## Lake Maggiore, stretching between Piedmont, Lombardy and Canton Ticino

Italian lakes: incomparable natural sceneries

# Lake Maggiore, stretching between Piedmont, Lombardy and Canton Ticino



Lake Maggiore - Island of Cannero

### A land of water, brushed by the sky

This corner of Northern Italy between Piedmont and Lombardy is a land of water where two charming lakes, Lake Maggiore and, just beyond it, Lake Orta, form a landscape with infinite colour variations, depicting hours and seasons in a fairytale dimension. And in the western corner of Piedmont, we have the blue splash of Lake Viverone.

This land is also rich in history, narrating ancient stories and legends, while opening onto the present with a welcoming hospitality.

### Lake Maggiore

The lake offers visitors a breathtaking triptych of natural colours and environments: the blue mirror of the lake, the intense green of the hills and the dark mass of the mountains. A palette of colours entwine and mingle into each other, surrounding an unbroken sequence of picturesque villages and towns, which look onto the singular, tiny group of islands hovering over the centre of the stretch of water.

Stretching between Piedmont and Lombardy and northwards to Canton Ticino (Switzerland), Lake Maggiore is situated in the heart of the north west of the Italian peninsula, in an area that, besides local borough boundaries, finds its identity in a specific cultural setting which is largely shared. The roots of this unity are sunk in history. Both sides of the lake were the home of the noble Borromeo family, which lavishly spread its refined culture in this area from the Middle Ages on. Today the sumptuous houses on the islands, the rich Italian gardens and the imposing Angera fortress still bear witness to this prestige. The celebrated figure of Saint Carlo Borromeo also belongs to this family.

Alongside the ancient stories of the deeds of the lords of the lake, the unifying element for these lands is the "blue thread" of the River Ticino which forms the lake, flowing into it in Swiss territory, to leave it at Sesto Calende and continue its course towards the Po.

An endless number of streams and water courses, furrowing the hills and valleys overlooking the lake, also flow into it from both sides.

The landscape is therefore extremely varied: narrower in the northern part, and widening in the bay of Stresa and Verbania in an amazing wealth of vegetation and architecture, fostered by the climate and marked by the work of man. Further south, gentle hills progressively slope the shore, where sandy beaches and rock faces are interspersed between the mouths of river streams.

If you move away from the banks towards the centre of the lake in a boat, you can admire the display of Mediterranean flora which on the mountain sides gives way to broad-leaf and conifer woods, in a truly unique blend for these latitudes.



Lake Maggiore - Varese

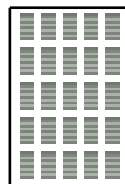
### Lakeside Towns

Our description of the Piedmontese bank can only start at **Arona**, the little town which is the largest harbour on the lake, today still profoundly marked by the memory of the Borromeo family. The town centre is in fact dominated by a 23.4-metre monumental statue in copper and bronze of Carlo Borromeo, popularly called San Carlone. The statue is hollow and visitors may climb the structure to reach its head. From the 'eye-windows' you may admire a fantastic view of the lake.

Continuing northwards, we come to **Meina**, an ancient little village whose centre leads to an unbroken sequence of villas and parks, and then **Lesna**, the favourite 19<sup>th</sup> century holiday home of the statesman Camillo Cavour and the writer and poet Alessandro Manzoni, a true admirer of Lake Maggiore, who stayed in the neo-classical Villa Stampa situated in the town square.

At **Belgirate**, clutched between the lake and the steep hill, we enter the Borromeo Gulf, whose pearl is the internationally famous town of **Stresa**, announced by the superb sight of its lakeside walk, with its rows of palm trees, flowering gardens and the façades of majestic hotels.

Then, turning our gaze to the lake, we see the theatrical **Borromeo Islands** (Bella, Madre and Pescatori), which emerge



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from the water as if enchanted. The splendour of this sight is enough to understand why Stresa became so famous in the early decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when its beauty was praised by visitors on their Italian *Grand Tour*.



Stresa

Its fame grew even more in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Vanderbilts and Rockefeller came to stay here, as did personalities of the world of culture and literature, such as Gabriele D'Annunzio and George Bernard Shaw, Ernest Hemingway and John Steinbeck, and actors such as Clark Gable and David Niven.

Stresa's "dolce vita" flourished between the hotel salons, the lake promenade and the beautiful, pleasant towns in the hinterland, at the foot of Mount Mottarone (where the Alpina Botanical Gardens and the curious Umbrella Museum deserve a visit, both at Gignese).

The *Settimane Musicali* remain as the heritage of this magnificent age; this is a major festival of symphonic and chamber music held each summer, with dozens of orchestras and instrumental groups from every part of the world taking part.

Further on, **Baveno** is noteworthy for the complex of the Romanesque church of Saints Gervasio and Protaso and its octagonal baptistery. At **Verbania** (a town which arose from the union of four villages: Pallanza, Fondotoce, Suna and Intra) a visit to the park of Villa Taranto is essential. It boasts a garden with over 2000 varieties of plants and one of the richest European collections of exotic species (we recommend a visit between the end of April and the beginning of May, when the tulips are in flower).

Just before the Swiss border we come to **Cannobio** and **Cannero**, the latter famous for its so-called castles: the ruins of fortifications on two islands quite near the shore which, according to a mixture of history and legend, were the refuge of pirates in the Middle Ages.

The main town on the Lombard shore is **Luino**, an elegant little town in a luxurious scenario with a Mediterranean-type climate and vegetation. Luino, near the border with Switzerland, is well known for its weekly market which is alleged to be the largest of its kind in Europe.

**Laveno**, overlooked by the steep Sasso di Ferro, a mountain which offers one of the most enchanting views of the lake, and a little further on the marvellous hermitage of Santa Caterina del Sasso, dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, are worth seeing.

Standing on a sheer rock overlooking the lake, the shrine of Santa Caterina del Sasso is made up of recently restored buildings with some well-kept frescoes dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Opposite Arona stands **Angera**, with its imposing Rocca dei Borromeo, an unusual example of a completely preserved medieval fortified building, standing on a spur of calcareous rock.

At the southernmost point of the lake, where it again becomes a river, we find the town of **Sesto Calende**.

All of the lake resorts have a well-established natural reputation for hospitality and catering, combining charm, art and fantasy. Everywhere, dishes cooked by master chefs may be enjoyed which are linked to Piedmontese and Lombard tradition, especially those based on lake fish (perch and whitefish).

### HOW TO GET THERE

The nearest airport to Lakes Maggiore and Orta is Milan Malpensa. Arona and Verbania, the two main centres on Lake Maggiore, are well served by railway trains from Milan, while Lake Orta may be reached by train by changing at Novara for local trains.

Lake Viverone is reached by Motorway A4 (Milan-Turin) and the A5 (Turin-Aosta).

There are not many islands in the Italian lakes. The four largest ones are situated in Lakes Maggiore and Orta: the Borromeo islands, in the bay at Stresa, are a veritable treasure-trove of art and tradition, while the island of San Giulio, near Orta, houses a Benedictine monastery famous throughout Europe.

The islands may be reached by an efficient boat service.



Lake Maggiore

For further information please contact:

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