

**WALKING LAKE COMO
AND MAGGIORE**



About the Author

Gillian Price was born in England but moved to Australia when young. After taking a degree in anthropology and working in adult education, she set off to travel through Asia and trek the Himalayas. The culmination of her journey was Venice where, her enthusiasm fired for mountains, the next logical step was towards the Dolomites, only hours away. Starting there, Gillian is steadily exploring the mountain ranges and flatter bits of Italy and bringing them to life for visitors in a series of outstanding guides for Cicerone.

When not out walking with Nicola, her Venetian cartographer husband, Gillian works as a freelance travel writer (www.gillianprice.eu). An adamant promoter of public transport to minimise impact in alpine areas, Gillian is also an active member of the Italian Alpine Club and Mountain Wilderness.

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Walking in the Dolomites

Walking in Tuscany

Walking in Umbria

Walking Lake Garda and Iseo

Walking on Corsica

Walking on the Amalfi Coast

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Maritime Alps

WALKING LAKE COMO AND MAGGIORE

by Gillian Price

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To dear Nicola, my special sherpa

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Big brother Marty made good use of his running shoes checking out alternate routes, and his taste buds, in the quest for that perfect evening meal.

Updates to this Guide

While every effort is made by our authors to ensure the accuracy of guidebooks as they go to print, changes can occur during the lifetime of an edition. Any updates that we know of for this guide will be on the Cicerone website (www.cicerone.co.uk/1023/updates), so please check before planning your trip. We also advise that you check information about such things as transport, accommodation and shops locally. Even rights of way can be altered over time. We are always grateful for information about any discrepancies between a guidebook and the facts on the ground, sent by email to updates@cicerone.co.uk or by post to Cicerone, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Road, Kendal LA9 7RL.

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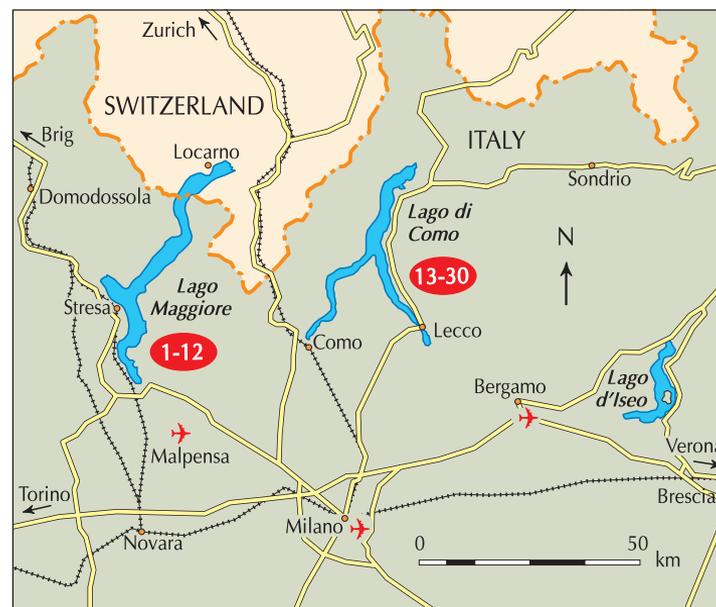
Front cover: The glorious waterfront at Bellagio on Lago di Como

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Map key

	sealed road		town/village
	railway		tower/castle
	walk route		church/chapel/shrine/cross
	walk variant		cable-car
	walk direction		chair lift
	stream/river		funicular railway
	ridge with summit		gondola
	accommodation		ferry landing stage
	walk start/finish		bus stop
	walk start/walk finish		tourist office
	walk number		car park



Mountain safety

Every mountain walk has its dangers, and those described in this guidebook are no exception. All who walk or climb in the mountains should recognise this and take responsibility for themselves and their companions along the way. The author and publisher have made every effort to ensure that the information contained in this guide was correct when it went to press, but, except for any liability that cannot be excluded by law, they cannot accept responsibility for any loss, injury or inconvenience sustained by any person using this book.

To call out the Mountain Rescue, ring 118: this will connect you via any available network. Once connected to the operator, ask for *Soccorso Alpino*.

Monte Zeda dominates the western branch of Val Cannobina, Lago di Como (Walk 9)



INTRODUCTION

Nothing in the world could compare to the charms of these days spent on the Milanese lakes.

Stendhal (1783–1842)



Beyond Bellano is the Dervio peninsula in upper Lago di Como (Walk 24)

A duo of magnificent lakes stand out in the north of Italy at the foot of the Alpine chain on the border with Switzerland. Their glittering expanses have been visited by English-speaking travellers since the days of the Grand Tour for their exquisite villas and lush gardens where camellias and rhododendrons spill over terraces.

Nowadays Lago Maggiore and Lago di Como are well-known destinations for holidaymakers from the four corners of the globe attracted by relaxing ferry cruises and romantic

waterfront restaurants. Yet only steps beyond the popular lakesides a wonderful world of old villages and verdant alpine landscapes waits to be discovered. The 30 walks described in this guidebook wander around these beautiful lakes making use of a vast network of age-old paved mule tracks through woodland and pasture once used to link remote hamlets and alpine valleys in the interests of trade, pilgrimage and travel. Walking enthusiasts of all levels of experience and ability can enjoy well-marked

routes ranging from leisurely lakeside promenades for novice walkers up to strenuous climbs up panoramic peaks. There is something for everyone. All of them can easily be fitted into the space of a single day. And what's more, all the walks can be accessed by the excellent system of local public transport, be that ferry, train, bus, cable car or chair lift.

The two lakes are strikingly beautiful yet surprisingly different in flavour and atmosphere. So how do you decide which one to start with? Laid-back Maggiore boasts a bevy of picturesque islands-cum-villages backed by lofty mountains dotted with old hamlets. On the other hand quintessentially romantic Como is pure elegance in terms of its villas and gardens, although the lake's edges also feature

surprisingly sheer cliffs and dramatically scenic pathways. More enticing details can be found in the individual lake chapters. Further east lie Lago di Garda and Lago d'Iseo which are covered in the separate Cicerone guide *Walking Lake Garda and Iseo*. Rest assured that once your enthusiasm is fired you'll want to see them all!

The lakes owe their formation to the massive glaciers that slowly spread down from the Alps towards the Italian plains hundreds of thousands of years ago. The glaciers carried with them rock debris which was bulldozed into long uniform ridges known as moraines. When temperatures rose – around 12,000 years ago – the ice began to melt and retreat, leaving elongated troughs which filled with water forming the



The beautiful grounds of Villa Melzi, Lago di Como (Walk 26)

THE LINEA CADORNA

In the period preceding World War I, the fledgling Republic of Italy feared an invasion from Germany and Austria by way of neutral Switzerland, and set on the idea of protecting its frontiers. The Linea Cadorna, named after its principal creator General Luigi Cadorna, became reality between 1912 and 1916. An incredible 40,000 men were put to work constructing a man-made barrier stretching across the mountain tops and valleys of the alpine foothills up to the 2000m mark from Passo del Sempione northwest of Lago Maggiore all the way to Chiavenna well north of Lago di Como, and touching on the shores of the great lakes. A total of 296km of roads, 398km of mule tracks and 72km of trenches were constructed, as well as lookout posts, command structures and barracks (never thankfully put to the test), still in remarkably good condition. Sections of the Linea Cadorna are visited on Walks 3, 7 and 8 on Lago Maggiore, as well as Walk 18 on Lago di Como.

spectacular lakes. Lying on a north-south axis, they resemble deep fjords, wedged between line after breathtaking line of rugged mountain ridges rising well over 2000m. Rivers and streams running straight off the Alps feed the lakes which take until mid-summer for their crystal-clear waters to reach 24°C, a bearable temperature for swimming.

PLANTS AND FLOWERS

The Italian lakes offer much for flower lovers to admire as the equable climate and a broad altitude range guarantee myriad Mediterranean as well as alpine species. Spontaneous blooms complement the magnificent exotic plants and trees found in the many formal villa gardens.

Exquisite wildflowers can be expected as early as April and May

(spring) at lower altitudes, while the main display on the high alpine mountain ridges gets underway in June. High stone walls are often adorned with magnificent bouquets of straggling caper plants, their open white petals brandishing purple pistils. It is their buds, picked and pickled or salted, which are familiar ingredients of Italian cuisine. Blooms and colours continue through to late summer (August–September), while autumn (October) brings russet hues in woods and forests.

Other highlights include brilliant orange lilies in shady meadows, the concentrated blue-purple willow-leaved gentian that blooms in gay clumps on open grassland, and true alpine species such as cinquefoil and alpine cornflower. Enthusiasts will appreciate the Cicerone mini guide *Alpine Flowers*.

WILDLIFE

One presence, albeit mysterious, that sets Lago di Como aside from the other northern Italian lakes is the 'dreaded' Lariosaurus, a mythical reptilian creature said to resemble the famed Loch Ness monster in appearance and behaviour. However Larrie (as it has been nicknamed) is reputedly smaller – under 2m in length – but much more ferocious than its Scottish counterpart!

Walkers in woods will often notice hoof marks in the mud and scratchings and diggings in the undergrowth, a sure sign of the presence of wild boar. Actual sightings are extremely rare as the creatures are very timid.

Chances are better of spotting roe deer flitting between trees, while higher rocky terrain is home to the dainty goat-like chamois, recognisable for their trademark crochet-hook horns and dark-patched rear quarters. Grassland over the 800m mark is home to colonies of endearing alpine marmots, often seen dashing across the meadows on a quest for sugary wildflowers to feast on.



A marmot at its burrow

The area is also home to a superb range of birds of prey such as kites and eagles soaring overhead looking out for a meal, while myriad timid songbirds provide sonorous entertainment from the safety of tree cover.

GETTING THERE

Both lakes can easily be accessed by overseas visitors. Specific details for getting around locally are given in the introduction to each chapter.

By air

Milan's airports Malpensa (www.milanomalpensa-airport.com) and Linate (www.milanoliniate-airport.com) are handy for both Lago di Como and Lago Maggiore. Bergamo's Orio Al Serio airport (www.sacbo.it) can also be used for Lago di Como.

By train

A couple of international train lines between Switzerland and Italy come in handy. The Brig to Milano Centrale run via Domodossola calls in at Stresa on Lago Maggiore. For Lago di Como there are direct Zurich-Milano Centrale trains via Chiasso to San Giovanni station at Como. (Italian trains www.trenitalia.com, Swiss rail www.sbb.ch).

LOCAL TRANSPORT

The extensive network of trains, buses, ferries and cable cars around and across Lago Maggiore and Lago

di Como is easy to use and unfailingly reliable. All the walks in this guidebook start and finish at a point that is accessible by local public transport (and the book was researched using it). Local bus drivers know the roads and conditions like the back of their hand, leaving passengers free to sit back and enjoy the views. So you never need to think of hiring a car or taking your own, and so can avoid contributing to air pollution and traffic congestion in these magical places.

Generally speaking, bus schedules follow the Italian school year,

with extra runs during term time. Slightly reduced summer timetables correspond to the main holidays, which fall mid-June through to mid-September. Full ferry services are timetabled from March/April through to October/November; during winter services are cut back drastically, and some lines are suspended. Exact dates vary from year to year, company to company and region to region, but can easily be checked on the websites listed under the individual lakes.

Reasonable pricing prevails: for instance, at the time of writing the

USEFUL EXPRESSIONS

These expressions may come in useful when purchasing tickets.

One ticket/two tickets to Monteisola, please.

single

return

How much is that?

platform

timetable

Thank you

You're welcome

Un biglietto/due biglietti per Monteisola, per favore.

andata/corsa semplice

andata e ritorno

Quanto costa?

binario

orario

Grazie

Prego

The following words may be helpful for understanding timetables.

Change at.../connection

summer/winter

working days (Monday to Saturday)

holidays (Sundays and public holidays)

daily

Monday to Friday/Saturday

shuttle service

strike

during school term

Cambio a.../coincidenza

estivo/invernale

feriale

festivo

giornaliero

lunedì a venerdì/sabato

navetta

sciopero

scolastico

ferry from Intra to Laveno on Lago Maggiore cost €3.40. Over 65ers are entitled to reductions (Monday–Friday). Day tickets are available – ask for *biglietto di libera circolazione*. A local train ticket from Stresa to Belgirate costs €1.90, while the funicular from Como to Brunate is €3 one-way or €5.50 return. The cable cars tend to be more expensive, although the Argegno–Pigra run on Lago di Como is only €3.40.

Bus tickets should usually be purchased before a journey, either at the bus station or newsstands or tobacconists displaying the appropriate logo for the relevant transport company. Should a railway station be unmanned and have no automatic machine (common at minor stations), ask the conductor on board the train



A gondola rises to dizzy heights over Laveno on Lago Maggiore (Walk 12)

to sell you a ticket. At the larger stations, remember to validate (stamp) train tickets at one of the machines on the platform before boarding, so as to avoid a fine.

Specific details for buses, trains, ferries, cable cars and taxis are given at the beginning of each chapter.

INFORMATION

The Italian Tourist Board (www.enit.it) has offices all over the world and can help those planning to visit the Italian lakes with general information.

Information on accommodation, transport and what to see can be obtained from local tourist information offices and websites.

Lago Maggiore

- Cannero Riviera
Tel 0323 788943
www.cannero.it
- Cannobio Tel 0323 71212
www.procannobio.it
- Laveno Tel 0332 667223
www.stradasaporivallivaresine.it
- Luino Tel 0332 530019
www.comune.luino.va.it;
www.vareselandoftourism.it
- Stresa Tel 0323 31308
www.stresaturismo.it;
www.visitstresa.com
- Verbania: Pallanza
Tel 0323 503249
www.verbania-turismo.it;
Intra Tel 348 2547482



Bellagio and far-off Monte Legnone from the belvedere, Lago di Como (Walk 27)

Lago di Como

- Bellagio Tel 031 951555
www.promobellagio.it
- Como Tel 031 269712
www.visitcomo.eu
- Domaso Tel 324 0914635
www.visitdomaso.com
- Gravedona Tel 0344 85005
www.visitgravedona.it
- Lecco Tel 0341 295720
www.lakecomo.it
- Menaggio Tel 0344 32924
www.menaggio.com

WHEN TO GO

The lakes are renowned for their mild climate. Temperatures range from around 13°C in December to the high 20s in July.

Generally speaking the months of spring through to early summer

(March to June) are recommended for walking in the area as temperatures are usually reasonable, the vegetation is a brilliant green and the flowers blooming. However, September and October are wonderful as well, with marginally fewer visitors and clear, crisp conditions once any summer haze has dissipated. At low altitudes midsummer (July and August) can get quite hot – up to 30°C – although an afternoon breeze is nearly always guaranteed. Of course the heat can be tempered by a dip in a lake (or your hotel swimming pool) or better still, a walk at an alpine elevation.

The high-altitude walking routes are out of bounds throughout the winter months due to snowfalls. However, crisp sunny winter days can make for perfect low-altitude walking with brilliant visibility. Be aware that ferry

MAPS

The Kompass map 1:50,000 n.90 Lago Maggiore is fine for general orientation and planning, and covers all the routes except for Walk 3. However, it is lacking in local detail and is often inaccurate, so use a local map where possible.

A decent 1:30,000 map of the paths around Stresa (useful for Walks 1 and 2) can be downloaded from www.stresaturismo.it. Tourist Offices including Luino and Laveno in the Province of Varese can provide the free map 'Via Verde Varesina' Istituto Geografico De Agostini 1:35,000, good for Walks 11 and 12.

For Walks 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 there's the Cartine Zanetti 1:30,000 sheet n.58 'Cannobio, Cannero Riviera' on sale locally.

TRANSPORT

- Baldioli buses Tel 0332 530271 www.baldioli.it
- CTPI buses Tel 0332 530271 www.CTPI.it
- Trenord Tel 02 72494949 www.trenord.it
- Ferry timetables Tel 800 551801 www.navlaghi.it
- Italian State Trains Tel 892021 www.trenitalia.com
- Laveno cable car Tel 0332 668012 www.funiviedellagomaggiore.it
- Mottarone cable car Tel 0323 30295 www.stresa-mottarone.it
- SAF buses Tel 0323 552172 www.safduemila.com
- VCO buses Tel 800 503001 www.vcotrasporti.it

The Baveno waterfront



WALK 1

Stresa to Belgirate

Start	Stresa Tourist Office, Piazza Marconi
Finish	Belgirate railway station
Distance	9km (5.6 miles)
Ascent/Descent	300m/270m
Difficulty	Grade 1–2
Walking time	2hr 30min
Access	Stresa can be reached by train and is well served by ferries which moor at Piazza Marconi alongside the Tourist Office. From Belgirate, trains back to Stresa are approximately hourly, more frequent than ferries.

A string of old pathways, possibly of ancient Roman origin, link the lovely town of Stresa with quiet Belgirate, a little-visited lakeside village to the south. Waymarked as L2, most of the way it passes through divine chestnut woods, with clearings offering inspirational lake views. The chestnut fruit was once fundamental to this area's economy and is referred to as *arbul* – in the local dialect: 'the tree' – *par excellence*. Harvesting the nuts and maintaining man-made terraces is a thing of the past now, but plenty of reminders can still be seen along the way. This is an easy and very enjoyable half-day walk, with a return to Stresa either by ferry or train.

Before setting out get a ferry or train timetable from the Tourist Office and arm yourself with drinking water and a snack as there is nothing in the way of cafés or restaurants until Belgirate.

From lakefront Piazza Marconi and the **Tourist Office** (200m) at **Stresa**, go L (SSE) away from the town along the water's edge as far as the café Pasticceria Gigi. Here turn R on Via Rosmini (red/white waymarks) in gentle ascent past houses and a church, then go L on Via Castello. This becomes a grassy path alongside a stone wall and soon joins a paved old way in ascent to a cluster of houses.



The lakefront
at Stresa

At an intersection with a shrine, fork L on Via Vecchia per Passera, a shady cobbled lane leading SSE into woodland along the boundary of the Villa Pallavicini gardens. It narrows to a good path accompanied by a stream, and climbs steadily, maintaining the same direction. Further along, a house or two is passed and a minor road crossed, then it's up to a wonderful belvedere at the **Oratorio di Passera** (320m), a modest church erected in the 1700s by a local wine merchant to give thanks for deliverance after being shipwrecked on the lake. A quiet surfaced road then a lane lead ahead and there are beautiful views to the opposite shore and the Sasso del Ferro mountain above Laveno.

Ignore the fork L for 'Sentiero dei Castagni' and continue along to a short stretch of road up to the picturesque church and cemetery of **Sant' Albino** (370m, 1hr 15min). Don't take the fork for Magognino but keep straight ahead for a beautiful section on a wide path through ancient chestnut trees, old terracing and huge fallen boulders. At a junction with a shrine, keep L as per the red/white signs and onto a lane through to a vineyard and the pretty hamlet of **Falchetti** in a scenic spot. There's





*On the way to
Belgirate*

more gentle uphill before a worthwhile 5min detour to a clearing and the 12th-century chapel of **San Paolo**.

Back on the main path, in a little while you begin a gradual descent. After crossing the stream Rio San Paolo the path moves out to fields and views towards the lower lake, including the vast line-up of moraine ridges extending east around Varese. A minor road with a tongue-twisting name (Via Pore Musolischvili) leads you to a bridge crossing – then you fork sharp L to where the path resumes as a lovely stepped way. Down at a road turn R and almost straightaway L at a shrine. A flight of steps concludes at the cemetery and Romanesque frescoed church, which boasts an elegant bell tower.

Keep down the paved road, following it as it veers L under the railway line. Then either continue down to the lakeside and ferry wharf, or go L along the road a further 10min to the **railway station of Belgirate** (230m, 1hr 15min).

WALK 2

From the Mottarone to Baveno

Start	Stresa cable car, Lido di Stresa
Finish	Baveno ferry wharf
Distance	15km (9.3 miles)
Descent	1300m
Difficulty	Grade 2+
Walking time	3hr 45min (+ 20min for lift rides)
Access	Stresa is well served by trains and ferries which moor at the Carciano wharf (Lido di Stresa); otherwise from the centre of Stresa it's a beautiful 15min walk along the lakeside to the <i>funivia</i> /cable car. Baveno has frequent ferries back to Stresa.

The route begins with the popular mechanised ascent, a memorable experience for the spectacular vistas over lake and Alps. It's advisable to purchase the combined cable-car/chair lift (*funivia/seggiovia*) ticket all the way to the top. The walk is a very long descent but there's plenty of variety in terms of landscape and terrain with woodland and pasture. The day concludes at utterly charming Baveno. From here you catch a ferry back to Stresa via those fairy-tale islands Isola dei Pescatori and Isola Bella that you've been admiring all day. Meals and refreshments are available at the top of the Mottarone as well as at the Alpino cable-car station halfway down, while an Agriturismo eatery is located at Alpe Cristina, in an especially panoramic spot (check opening times with the Tourist Office in advance).

If the complete walk looks too long for comfort, take a variant: either conclude at Alpino and the botanical garden (<http://giardinobotanicoalpinia.altervista.org>), well worth a visit, or ride the cable car from Stresa to Alpino and start there by following the detour to pick up the main route for Baveno.

From **Lido di Stresa** (200m) the cable car makes a spectacular lakeside departure on its two-stage trip to the **Mottarone station** (1378m). A chair lift climbs the final leg to the actual 1491m top of **Mottarone** where an amazing panorama awaits.