

**WALKING  
LAKE GARDA AND ISEO**



### 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.

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# WALKING LAKE GARDA AND ISEO

by Gillian Price

## CICERONE

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*To dear Nicola, my special sherpa*

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### 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/1024/updates](http://www.cicerone.co.uk/1024/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](mailto: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 superb view over Lake Garda from the belvedere on Colmo di Malcesine, Monte Baldo (Walk 11)

## CONTENTS

Map key . . . . .	6
Overview pap. . . . .	7
<b>INTRODUCTION . . . . .</b>	<b>9</b>
Plants and flowers . . . . .	10
Wildlife . . . . .	10
Getting there . . . . .	11
Local transport . . . . .	12
Information . . . . .	13
When to go . . . . .	14
Accommodation . . . . .	15
Food and drink . . . . .	15
What to take . . . . .	17
Maps . . . . .	18
Dos and don'ts . . . . .	18
Emergencies . . . . .	19
Using this guide . . . . .	20
<b>LAGO DI GARDA . . . . .</b>	<b>21</b>
Walk 1 Valle delle Cartiere . . . . .	31
Walk 2 Eremo di San Valentino . . . . .	36
Walk 3 Campione to Pregasio Loop . . . . .	41
Walk 4 Campione to Pieve Loop . . . . .	47
Walk 5 Limone sul Garda and the Valle del Singol . . . . .	52
Walk 6 Monte Nodice and Pregasina . . . . .	56
Walk 7 Strada del Ponale to Pregasina . . . . .	61
Walk 8 The Venetian Bastione . . . . .	64
Walk 9 Monte Brione . . . . .	67
Walk 10 Torbole to Tempesta . . . . .	70
Walk 11 Monte Baldo: Ventrar to San Michele . . . . .	74
Walk 12 Monte Baldo: Cima delle Pozzette . . . . .	78
Walk 13 Monte Baldo: Eremo SS Benigno e Caro . . . . .	81
Walk 14 Monte Baldo: Rifugio Telegrafo Circuit . . . . .	86
Walk 15 Monte Baldo: Costabella to Prada Alta . . . . .	91
Walk 16 Torri del Benaco and Graffiti . . . . .	95

**LAGO D'ISEO** ..... 99

Walk 17 Punta Alta ..... 103

Walk 18 Santuario di San Giovanni ..... 108

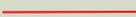
Walk 19 Corna Trentapassi ..... 112

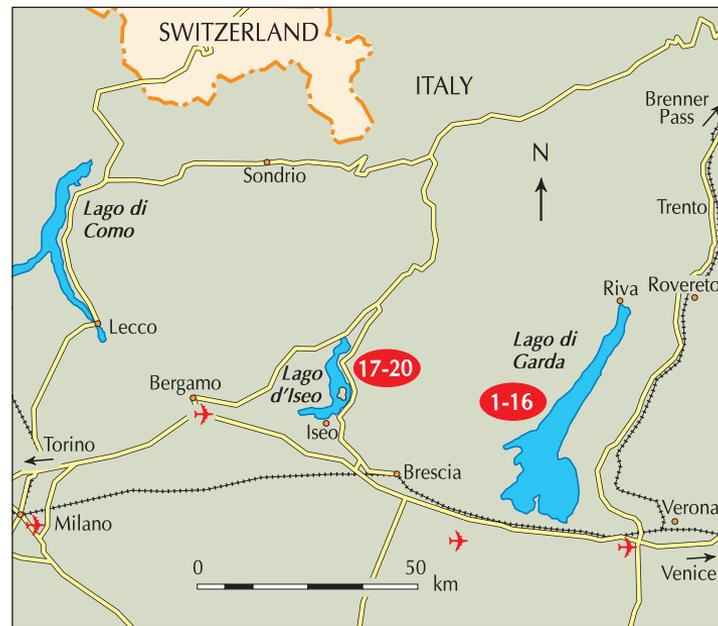
Walk 20 Monteisola and the Santuario della Ceriola ..... 116

**Appendix A** Route summary table ..... 120

**Appendix B** Glossary of Italian-English terms ..... 122

### 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 warning

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*.

*The old Strada del Ponale along the northeastern edge of Lago di Garda (Walk 7)*



## INTRODUCTION

At the foot of the Alps in north Italy, the magnificent expanse of Lago di Garda is an irresistible magnet for sport and nature lovers, along with its attractive western neighbour, lesser known Lago d'Iseo. Only steps beyond the beautiful lakefronts and its promenades is a wonderful world of footpaths traversing woods and rugged mountain valleys, often making use of a network of age-old paved mule tracks linking remote hamlets. This guide describes a selection of 20 routes suitable for enthusiasts of all levels of experience and ability, from a leisurely waterfront stroll to a demanding extended hike to alpine

heights. Well-marked straightforward routes can be enjoyed on walks that easily fit into the space of a day. And what's more, every single one can be accessed by the excellent local public transport network, be that ferry, train, bus, cable car or chair lift.

The two lakes are quite distinct in flavour and atmosphere – and both breathtakingly beautiful. How to decide which one to start with? In brief, Garda is more dramatic, vast and alpine in flavour, the upper lake hemmed in by awesome cliffs, while little brother Iseo is smaller, more remote, less touristy yet simply delightful. More details are given



*Olives flourish in the warm climate*

in the individual lake chapters. On the other hand further west are the great lakes of Como and Maggiore, described in a separate Cicerone guide *Walking Lago di Como and Maggiore*. Rest assured that once your enthusiasm is fired you'll want to see all four!

Italy's great northern lakes were formed by ancient glaciers that spread down from the Alps towards the plains. When temperatures started to rise – around 12,000 years ago – the ice began to melt and retreat, leaving elongated troughs scooped out by the passage of the frozen mass. These gradually filled up with water, giving rise to the spectacular lakes seen today. Lying on a north–south axis, they resemble deep fjords, wedged between line after breathtaking line of rugged mountain ridges rising well over 2000m. Fed by rivers and streams running straight off the Alps, their crystal-clear waters reach a comfortable 24°C in midsummer.

#### PLANTS AND FLOWERS

These lakes are a delight for plant and flower lovers as the warm climate and altitude range guarantee both Mediterranean and alpine species. Wildflowers can be expected to start blooming at low altitudes in spring-time as early as April and May, and from June through to August on the higher mountain ridges. Highlights include the gorgeous peonies in the 'Botanical Garden of Europe'

– namely Monte Baldo on Lago di Garda – as well as brilliant orange lilies in meadows, the concentrated blue-purple hue of the willow-leaved gentian that blooms in gay clumps on open grassland. Orchids are always a delight, and one special treasure is the rare insect orchid named after Lago di Garda (though not exclusive to that area): *Ophrys Benacensis*. An attractive and commonly encountered flowering bush is the smoke tree, its fluffy orange blooms reminiscent of clouds of smoke. Flower enthusiasts will appreciate the Cicerone mini guide *Alpine Flowers*.

High stone walls often boast magnificent bouquets of straggling caper plants, their open white petals brandishing purple pistils. It is their buds, picked and pickled or salted, which are the familiar ingredients of Italian cuisine. Moreover grape vines flourish in the mild climate as do olives, especially along the sun-blessed lake shores of Lago di Garda.

#### WILDLIFE

The hilly and mountainous surrounds of the lakes are home to a superb range of birds of prey such as kites and eagles that are easily spotted soaring overhead looking out for a meal, while myriad timid songbirds provide sonorous entertainment from the safety of tree cover.

Walkers in woods will often notice hoof marks in the mud and scratchings and diggings in the



(Clockwise from top left) Brilliant orange lily; delicate caper blooms; willow-leaved gentians; peonies on Monte Baldo

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.

#### GETTING THERE

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

#### By air

For Lago di Garda, the airports at Brescia ([www.aeroporto.brescia.it](http://www.aeroporto.brescia.it)) or Verona ([www.aeroporto.verona.it](http://www.aeroporto.verona.it)) are convenient whereas Bergamo's Orio Al Serio airport ([www.sacbo.it](http://www.sacbo.it)) is handy for Lago d'Iseo as are Milan's Linate and Malpensa airports ([www.sea-aeroporto.milano.it](http://www.sea-aeroporto.milano.it)).

The ferry landing stage at Iseo on Lago d'Iseo



### By train

The international train line between Austria and Italy (Innsbruck–Verona) comes in handy for Lago di Garda with a handy stop at Rovereto, which has good bus links for Riva del Garda (Austrian rail [www.oebb.at](http://www.oebb.at), Italian trains [www.trenitalia.com](http://www.trenitalia.com)).

### LOCAL TRANSPORT

The extensive network of trains, buses, ferries and cable cars around and across Lago di Garda and Lago d'Iseo is both easy to use and unfailingly reliable. All the walks in this guidebook start and finish at public transport (and the book was researched by public transport). 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 visitors never need to think of hiring or

taking their own car 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 holidays, which fall around 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 suspended. Exact dates vary from year to year, company to company and region to region, and can be checked on the websites listed under the individual lakes.

Reasonable pricing prevails everywhere: for instance, at the time of writing the ferry from Riva to Limone on Lago di Garda cost €5, and from Iseo to Peschiera on Monteisola

€3. Over 65ers are entitled to reductions. Day tickets are available – ask for *biglietto di libera circolazione* on Garda or *io viaggio* covering all public transport in Lombardia. The cable cars tend to be more expensive: the double-section Malcesine cable car on Lago di Garda costs €15 single, or €22 for the return trip.

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, then stamped on board. For trains,

always remember to validate (stamp) tickets 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](http://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

### 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.

*Cambio a.../coincidenza*  
*estivo/invernale*  
*feriale*  
*festivo*  
*giornaliero*  
*lunedì a venerdì/sabato*  
*navetta*  
*sciopero*  
*scolastico*

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

obtained from local tourist information offices and websites.

### Lago di Garda

[www.visitgarda.com](http://www.visitgarda.com)

- Desenzano Tel. 030 3748726  
[www.provincia.brescia.it/turismo](http://www.provincia.brescia.it/turismo)
- Gargnano Tel. 0365 791243  
[www.gargnanosulgarda.it](http://www.gargnanosulgarda.it)
- Limone Tel. 0365 918987/  
[www.visitlimonesulgarda.com](http://www.visitlimonesulgarda.com)
- Malcesine Tel. 045 7400044  
[www.visitmalcesine.com](http://www.visitmalcesine.com)
- Peschiera sul Garda Tel. 045 7550810  
[www.tourismpeschiera.it](http://www.tourismpeschiera.it)
- Riva del Garda Tel. 0464 554444  
[www.gardatrentino.it](http://www.gardatrentino.it)
- San Zeno di Montagna Tel. 045 6289296  
[www.comunesanzenodi montagna.it](http://www.comunesanzenodi montagna.it)
- Torbole Tel. 0464 505177  
[www.gardatrentino.it](http://www.gardatrentino.it)
- Torri di Benaco Tel. 045 7225120  
[www.tourism.verona.it](http://www.tourism.verona.it)
- Toscolano-Maderno Tel 0365 644298  
[www.prolocotoscolanomaderno.com](http://www.prolocotoscolanomaderno.com)

### Lago d'Iseo

- Iseo Tel. 030 3748733  
[www.visitlakeiseo.info](http://www.visitlakeiseo.info)
- Lovere Tel. 035 962178  
[www.visitlakeiseo.info](http://www.visitlakeiseo.info)
- Peschiera Maraglio, Monteisola Tel. 030 9825088  
[www.visitmonteisola.it](http://www.visitmonteisola.it)

### 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 March through to June, spring to early summer, are perfect and highly recommended for walking as temperatures are comfortable, the vegetation is brilliant green and the flowers blooming. However, September and October are wonderful as well, with marginally fewer visitors and clear crisp conditions once summer haze has dissipated. 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 in a high place.

The high-altitude walking routes are usually 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 services are reduced from November through to March, when much accommodation closes, as do villas and gardens.

The lakes can get very busy on the main Italian public holidays: 1 January (New Year), 6 January (Epiphany), Easter Sunday and Monday, 25 April (Liberation Day), 1 May (Labour Day), 2 June (Republic Day), 15 August (Ferragosto), 1 November (All

Saints), 8 December (Immaculate Conception), 25-26 December (Christmas and Boxing Day).

### ACCOMMODATION

The two lakes have a marvellous range of reasonably priced accommodation in hotels, B&Bs and campsites, as well as hostels and mountain huts. Suggestions for options in the middle price range (around €80–100 for a double room with breakfast) are given in the introductions to each lake; most have websites and accept credit card payments. A deposit may be required. Book well in advance around the Italian public holidays (see above) and the peak months of May and September. For self-catering possibilities contact the Tourist Offices or internet. All the major towns and villages have grocery stores and supermarkets, not to mention ATMs.

Remember that many places – but by no means all – close over the winter, usually from October/November to March/April, so check beforehand if planning on a low-season visit.

An overnight stay in a *rifugio* is always a memorable experience. These chalets – set on mountain slopes far from roads and villages, and accessible on foot – are staffed during the summer months and provide reasonably priced meals and dormitory accommodation for walkers and climbers. Contact details are given in the relevant walk descriptions (14 and 15).

If phoning from overseas to book accommodation preface the phone numbers with +39, country code for Italy, and always include the initial 0 of the area code, now incorporated into all Italian phone numbers. If calling from within Italy, dial that 0 as well. The only exceptions are Italian mobile phones which begin with 3, emergency numbers such as 118 for medical matters, or toll-free information services which start with 800.

### FOOD AND DRINK

Foodies have to plenty to look forward to. The two lakes featured in this guide belong to the northern Italian regions of Lombardia, Trentino-Alto Adige and the Veneto, and each proudly nurtures its own gastronomic specialties. Some explanatory notes are given here to guide visitors, but generally speaking the best rule is to be adventurous and ask for the day's speciality, which will usually feature seasonal, locally sourced products. *Che cosa avete oggi?* means 'What's on today?'

In terms of dinner, Lombardia spells risotto heaven. Impossible to beat is *risotto alla milanese*, creamy rice cooked in a delicate meat broth, fragrant with saffron and often twinned with *ossobuco*, tender braised veal shank. Pasta comes in all sorts of wonderful shapes and mouth watering sauces. Unusual choices include *strangolapreti* ('priest stranglers!'), a Trentino dish of small gnocchi dumplings of spinach and potato

passenger ferries across to Toscolano Maderno, though few passenger services around the lake. Set at the port is lovely Hotel Gardesana (Tel. 045 7225411 [www.gardesana.eu](http://www.gardesana.eu)), while less expensive and a short stroll away is Onda Garni (Tel. 045 7225895 [www.garnionda.com](http://www.garnionda.com)). Walk 16 departs from Torri to explore a clutch of modest rock engravings.

High above at 580m, **San Zeno di Montagna's** cool air is a great attraction for midsummer holidaymakers. It is linked to Torri del Benaco and Verona by ATV bus runs. The village is strung out along a panoramic ridge, and in summer the air is thick with the divine scent of lime trees. It has a scattering of shops, and a Tourist Office (Tel 045 6289296 [www.comunesanzenodimontagna.it](http://www.comunesanzenodimontagna.it)); friendly Hotel Centrale Tel. 045 7285111 [www.bbalbergocentrale.it](http://www.bbalbergocentrale.it)); Hotel Bellavista (Tel. 045 7285286 [www.bellavistahotel.eu](http://www.bellavistahotel.eu)); and Taxi (Tel. 045 7285590, Mob. 337 471658).

The road continues 6km north-east to **Prada Alta** set at 1000m, with the lifts up the eastern flanks of Monte Baldo explored in Walks 14 and 15. There's accommodation at hotel/campsite Edelweiss (Tel. 045 6289039 [www.edelweiss-hotel.it](http://www.edelweiss-hotel.it)), which also runs a well-stocked supermarket. A handy summer Walk&Bike bus organised by ATV from Verona draws in here on an almost daily basis. (**Note** It stops at the car park near the main

Chiesa di San Zeno di Montagna, before continuing up to Prada Alta.)

#### MAPS

Kompass sheet n.102 Lago di Garda, 1:50,000 covers all the walks with varying levels of accuracy. For greater detail, Riva del Garda Tourist Information sells a good 1:30,000 map for Walks 5–10, and Lagiralpina do two excellent 1:25,000 maps – n.12 'Alto Garda' covers Walks 3–13 and n.20 'Monte Baldo' is good for Walks 3, 4 and 12–16. Kompass map n.694 1:25,000 'Parco Alto Garda Bresciano' covers Walks 1 and 2.

#### TRANSPORT

- ATV buses  
Tel. 045 8057922  
[www.atv.verona.it](http://www.atv.verona.it)
- Ferry timetables  
Tel. 800 551801  
[www.navlaghi.it](http://www.navlaghi.it)
- Malcesine cable car  
[www.funiviedelbaldo.it](http://www.funiviedelbaldo.it)
- Prada Alta lifts  
[www.prada-costabella.it](http://www.prada-costabella.it)
- Arriva/SIA buses  
Tel. 840 620001  
[www.arriva.it](http://www.arriva.it)
- Trentino Trasporti buses  
Tel. 0461 821000  
[www.ttesercizio.it](http://www.ttesercizio.it)

## WALK 1

### Valle delle Cartiere

<b>Start/Finish</b>	Ponte Toscolano road bridge
<b>Distance</b>	7.3km (4.5 miles)
<b>Ascent/Descent</b>	400m/400m
<b>Difficulty</b>	Grade 1–2
<b>Walking time</b>	2hr
<b>Access</b>	Toscolano Maderno can be reached by bus or ferry. The road bridge over Torrente Toscolano where the walk starts is on the northern edge of the villages and has a bus stop.

The fascinating Valle delle Cartiere – valley of the paper mills – is hidden away at the rear of the combined Toscolano Maderno villages. As of the 1300s, papermaking flourished here thanks to Torrente Toscolano with around 60 mills operating; the Venetian Republic was an important 15th–16th century client. Times and machinery change; the last mill closed its doors in 1962 and a single mill moved to the lakefront. Modern day visitors are accompanied up the valley by helpful multilingual info boards explaining both history and landscape and a museum (Museo della Carta [www.valledellecartiere.it](http://www.valledellecartiere.it)) is well worth a visit. Further up the valley comes a suspended walkway over a gorge before a steep climb to a plateau and stroll through rural Gaino, then a leisurely return to the valley floor.

**Note:** should the Covoli walkway be closed, before the Luseto footbridge take the old mule track R (SE) up to the bench and shrine (260m) near Gaino, and turn R to slot into the main route.

From the bus stop cross the **Ponte Toscolano** road bridge (65m) and take the first street L curving past the Municipio following signs for Museo della Carta. The minor road for Gaino soon climbs R while you keep straight ahead N along Torrente Toscolano, the way soon unsurfaced. You pass an abandoned mill and hydroelectric plant before short tunnels cut through the soaring cliffs. After a **car park**, a final tunnel is all that separates you from the

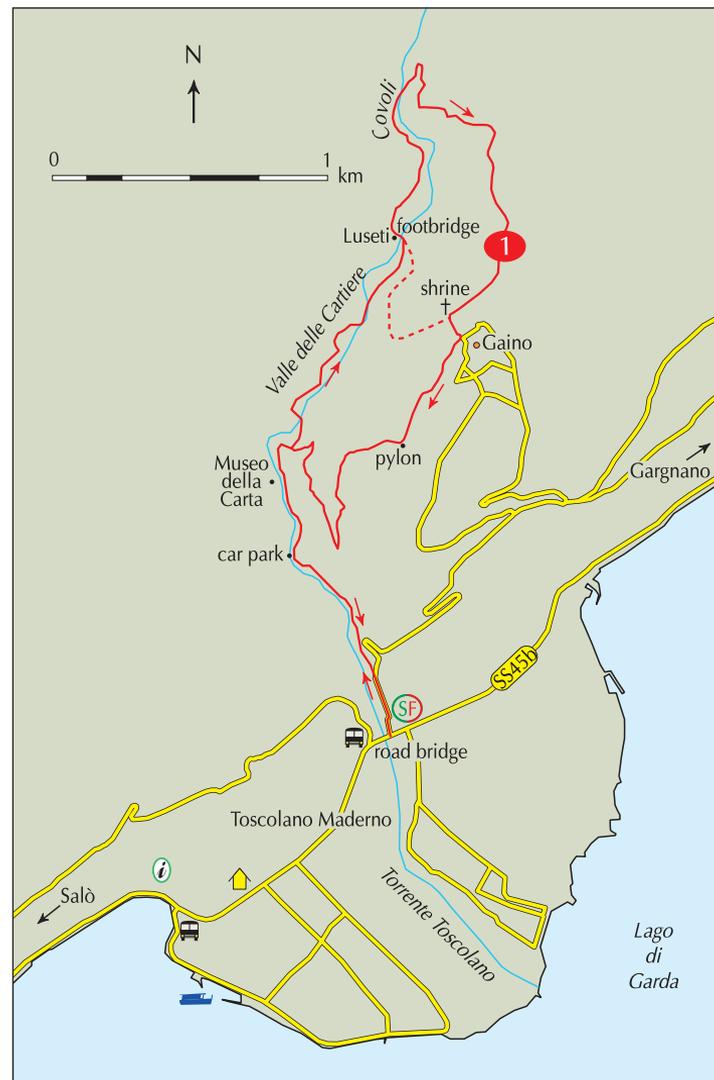
The peaceful lakefront at Toscolano



Museo della Carta (the papermaking museum) is well worth a visit

former paper mill now **Museo della Carta** and its riverside café, a worthwhile detour.

The walk proceeds in gentle ascent past the nearby fork (Lupo, 135m) where the return route from Gaino joins up. Bear L over the river to a junction and villa



where you keep R, in common with the BVG (Bassa Via del Garda) and n.217. From this point upper Valle delle Cartiere is clearly dominated by pyramidal Monte Castello, while the rocky river banks below host optimistic fishermen. An interesting series of 18th century kilns occupy this area, before a long stone wall and a bridge to the R bank and Caneto with picnic benches, houses and another fork for Gaino. The extensive remains of a mill close to the river are encountered before a **footbridge** takes the path back to the L bank at Luseti. Here it's R on n.279B past Scout Camp premises. At the ensuing fork in woodland keep L on n.220B and you quickly find yourself on a marvellous narrow walkway hanging off the cliff edge through the **Covoli** gorge (50min).

Where the normal path resumes, walk on to join the steep concrete lane climbing R through trees to emerge at a pylon amid fields and small farms. At a wide unsurfaced road branch R (E) on n.279 with bird's-eye views over Valle delle Cartiere, its old mills dwarfed by the dramatic cliff flanks. Heading S through olive groves

*Valle delle Cartiere is peppered with remains of old paper mills*



the quiet road, surfaced here, reaches a signed junction where you go R on Via Giotto (n.217/BVG) and along a high stone wall to a **shrine** and bench (260m, 30min).

Ignore the branch R signed for Valle delle Cartiere and veer L towards the houses of **Gaino**. Take the next R, Via Donatello, which meanders S out of the residential area as a quiet rural lane with some views through to the lake. A large **pylon** marks a fork where you keep R (initially W) for the start of descent through olive groves. At a house continue on a path R in woodland, soon widening to a lane and climbing briefly. Where this splits, go sharp R (NNW) for a leisurely descent on old cobbles past a traffic barrier. Down at the floor of Valle delle Cartiere fork sharp L back past the Museo della Carta and retrace your steps to the walk end at the **road bridge** (40min).

*The old road in lower Valle delle Cartiere*