





Verbania is known for its Villa Taranto Botanical Gardens, home to thousands of plant species from around the world. Photo by Harm van de Ven

Want a Low-Key Italian Lake Escape? Head for Lake Maggiore

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Lake Maggiore is one of the most enchanting spots in the [Lakes Region of Italy](#) — a place where the Alps meet quaint waterfront villages framed by palm trees, botanic gardens and grand villas. Straddling the border of Italy and Switzerland, it offers a quieter, more understated form of luxury than neighboring [Lake Como](#) or [Lake Garda](#). Here, days unfold at a gentler pace, with an easy blend of culture, nature and family-friendly activities that make it an ideal choice for visitors who crave beauty without the bustle.

Part of Lake Maggiore's appeal lies in its effortless charm. It's dotted with scenic towns that invite you to slow down, savor a long lunch on a sun-drenched terrace, watch small boats glide between the islands or wander through gardens that feel pulled from the pages of storybooks. While Como draws the jet-set crowd and Garda attracts throngs for its theme park, Maggiore's relaxed sophistication sets it apart.





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Lake Maggiore with Kids: What to See and Do

With so many stunning towns surrounding Lake Maggiore, you'll want to pin down your home base and plan your activities from there.

Stresa, Verbania and Baveno

This trio anchors the Piedmont side of Lake Maggiore and provides easy access to the Borromean Islands just offshore. Train service from Milan to Stresa typically takes about an hour, and once you're there, you can visit nearby towns by ferry, taxi or local train.

Lakeside promenades, bustling town squares and a variety of botanical gardens make this area popular with visitors. Drive or hike to the top of Mount Mottarone to visit Alpyland, where thrill seekers can enjoy the mountain coaster followed by lunch with a view at Villa Pizzini.

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Laveno-Mombello

A quick ferry ride from Stresa or Intra will get you to Laveno-Mombello on Lake Maggiore's Lombardy side. Here, families can enjoy shallow beaches, playgrounds and waterfront cafés. To see the town and lake from above, ride the historic cable car to the top, where you'll find hiking trails and a restaurant serving seasonal fare along with panoramic views.



The border town of Locarno blends Swiss efficiency with Italian-influenced food and culture. Photo by Michael Görög

Locarno, Switzerland

Lake Maggiore's northern portion sits in [Switzerland](#), and you should plan to spend at least a day there. You can access Locarno from other towns on Lake Maggiore via the Lago Maggiore Express, which includes a boat trip and the narrow-gauge Vigezzina-Centovalli train, one of the best ways to see the region.

Families looking to spend time in the water can head to the Lido Locarno aquatic center, where you'll find indoor and outdoor pools, waterslides and beach access. Settle into an outdoor café and listen to live music playing in Piazza Grande before strolling Locarno's shopping district for souvenirs. Then ride the funicular to the sanctuary of Madonna del Sasso, where you can tour the church and grounds while taking in the mountain views.





Palazzo Borromeo, an essential stop on Isola Bella, is a 17th-century Baroque masterpiece with lavish interiors and tiered gardens crowned by fountains and statuary. Photo by Harm van de Ven

Things to Do

Visit the Borromean Islands

Not far from Stresa are the islands of Isola Bella, Isola Madre and Isola dei Pescatori (plus a fourth island not open to visitors). Small motorboats depart from Stresa and nearby towns, or you can take the ferry. A hop-on/hop-off boat service is your best bet if you plan to visit more than one island.

- **Isola Bella:** The majestic palace and gardens are the main draw of this popular spot for visitors. Purchase the audioguide to learn about the works of art housed inside the former aristocratic residence or book a guided tour that extends into the gardens.
- **Isola Madre:** The largest of the Borromean Islands, Isola Madre welcomes visitors to tour its botanical garden and opulent palace, where you can see what life was like when the Borromeo family visited in years past. The Marionette Theatre is a kid favorite, with a collection of 17th- through 19th-century puppets on display.
- **Isola dei Pescatori:** The Island of the Fisherman is the only Lake Maggiore island with year-round residents, and you can visit it without a fee (the other two require tickets). It is a favorite for families looking to dine on lake perch and other fresh seafood.





A regal white peacock presides over its perch on Isola Madre. Photo by Harm van de Ven

Meet Animals at Villa Pallavicino

If you haven't gotten enough of the area's roses, rhododendrons and magnolias, a stop at Villa Pallavicino is a must. Just a short walk from Stresa, here you can meet the resident sheep, llamas, alpacas, wallabies and white peacocks. Enjoy a picnic on the grass and then let the kids explore the playground.

Splash Down at Aquadventure Park

Families with tweens and teens looking for a bit more excitement can spend the day at this adventure park in Baveno. A treetop adventure course with ziplines will get the adrenaline flowing before you zoom down one of the park's waterslides. There's a beach and a swimming pool when you're ready to chill.



Built in the early 20th century, Villa e Palazzo Aminta combines a romantic Art Nouveau–influenced design with postcard-perfect views of the Borromean Islands. Photo courtesy of Leading Hotels of the World

Where to Stay

You'll feel like an aristocrat at [Villa e Palazzo Aminta](#), where lavishly decorated suites offer plenty of room for families to spread out. Book a lake view room to take in the Borromean Islands from your private balcony and make time for a kid-free afternoon at the spa, where a dip in the Turkish bath is a highlight. Located in Stresa, Villa e Palazzo Aminta has its own private beach and outdoor pool, perfect for cooling off after a busy day of exploring.

Just up the road in Verbania, a majestic Belle Époque villa welcomes guests looking for top-tier service and tranquility on the shores of Lake Maggiore. The [Grand Hotel Majestic](#) offers expansive rooms and suites with lake and park views, plus a private dock from which guided lake tours depart. Walk into town via the lakeside path, and don't miss a stop at the large Saturday market if you're there on a weekend.

Good to Know

Many of the restaurants and activities around Lake Maggiore close from mid-November through mid-March.