



Lombardy & the Lakes

Sprawling between the Alps and the river Po's plains, Lombardy (Lombardia) has one of Italy's most varied landscapes. Industrious cities, medieval hill towns and lakeside resorts are interspersed with powdered slopes, lemon groves, crop fields, vineyards and rice paddies.

Dominating it all is Lombardy's capital and Italy's economic powerhouse, Milan. Home to the nation's prime stock exchange, one of Europe's biggest trade-fair grounds and international fashion hub, it is Italy's second-largest metropolis after Rome.

Sparkling lakes are strung along the north of the region like a glittering necklace. Wedding-cake villas set in tiered gardens adorn elegant towns and coquettish villages along the shores. Further north still, the Valtellina and the wall of Alpine mountains abutting Switzerland are home to national parks and good skiing around Bormio.

South of the main chain of lakes, cities steeped in history include medieval Bergamo, Roman Brescia, the age-old violin-making centre of Cremona and the Renaissance city of Mantua.

Fresh lake fish grace Lombardy's tables, along with risotto and polenta from the plains. Alpine butter, cream and cheese from the Valtellina are prized, as are the dry Valtellina red wines and fizzy Franciacorta, produced using the same double-fermentation method as Champagne.

The catch? Lombardy's style comes at a price. Milan could be loosely compared with London. It's a frenetic place that 'enjoys' a climate reminiscent of London. The region's industry and agriculture make it one of the most affluent parts of Italy and one of the most expensive. There are ways to keep the costs down – but this region rewards you when you splash out.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Take a ferry at twilight for mesmerising views of **Lago di Como** (p299)
- Try to control overtly salivating over the gourmet treasures at Milan's 19th-century food emporium, **Peck** (see boxed text, p274)
- Go back centuries amid the medieval beauty of Bergamo's **Piazza Vecchia** (p281)
- Spend 15 minutes face to face with Leonardo's famous mural, **The Last Supper** (p265)
- Stroll among the peacocks in the palace gardens on Lago Maggiore's prettiest island, **Isola Bella** (p297)
- Ride Lago di Garda's winds at the home of the World Windsurf Championships, **Nago-Torbole** (p310)



■ POPULATION: 9.64 MILLION

■ AREA: 23,835 SQ KM



MILAN

pop 1.3 million

At first glance, Milan (Milano) can appear like one of the models gracing its catwalks: great bone structure (in the shape of historic and striking new architecture), extravagant taste and no obvious soul. But Milan's style and, yes, substance, are more than skin deep.

Milan is the engine room of the country's economy. Treasures that survived damage from Allied bombing during WWII include its elaborate cathedral, Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* and the Castello Sforzesco. The La Scala opera house also scraped through. What really sets Milan apart, however, is its creative streak and high-speed cosmopolitan feel.

Armani, Versace, Prada, Dolce & Gabbana, Gucci and many more took off on Milan's runways (although many, like Gucci, first came to the world's attention in Florence). Fashionistas make a pilgrimage here to shop at the designers' flagship stores in the Quadrilatero d'Oro (Golden Quad).

By night, the Milanese know how to enjoy themselves. They start with the *aperitivo*, a kind of extended happy hour in which the city's best bars offer a cornucopia of free bar food to go with wine and cocktails. Some head later for the many bars lining canals in the Navigli area.

Fashion and finance aside, Milan's other religion is *calcio* (football). The city is home to both AC Milan and Inter, two of Italy's top teams (the latter won the national champion-

REGIONAL ITINERARY

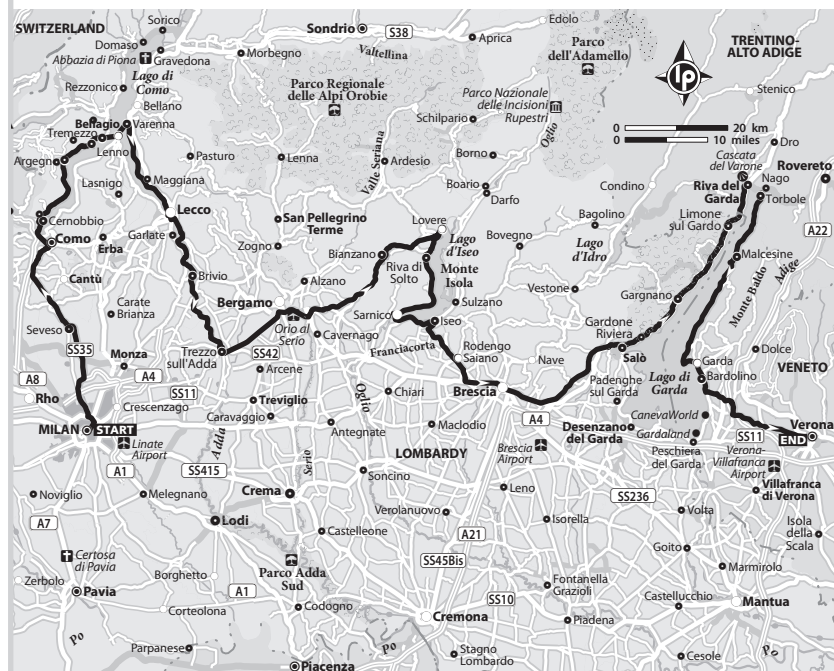
A LOMBARD LAKE JAUNT

Eight Days / Milan / Verona

Fast trains and a motorway make travelling from Milan east to Verona a speedy affair. But you could follow a different route, taking in some of the breathtaking beauty of Lombardy's lakes en route. From **Milan** (opposite), head north to **Como** (p299), where you could stop to admire the **Duomo** (p299) and **Basilica di Sant'Abbondio** (p301), and head up to **Brunate** for the views (p301). Head along the villa-lined west bank of the lake to **Lenno** (p304), where you can explore Villa Balbianello, and then **Tremezzo** (p305) for Villa Carlotta and its gardens.

A car ferry leads east from nearby Cadenabbia to beautiful **Bellagio** (p302), with more villas, and then on to equally engaging **Varenna** (p306) on the east bank. From here, you could head south via Lecco and pick up the A4 autostrada (or side roads) for **Bergamo** (p281), where a day can be spent exploring the *città alta* (upper town).

The SS42 road winds northeast past the tranquil Lago d'Endine to the north end of Lago d'Iseo at **Lovere** (p307). There are some great views over the lake from several towns high up above Lovere. South of Lovere is pretty **Sarnico** (p306), overlooking the lake and the Oglio river. A short trip brings you east to **Iseo** (p306), with an attractive waterfront, a beach and ferries to **Monte Isola** (p307), a soaring hill-island in the middle of the lake. From Iseo, roads penetrate southeast through the rolling countryside of **Franciacorta** (p307), a wine-growing region, to reach **Brescia** (p285). From Brescia, the SP11 and SS45Bis roads bring you to **Salò** (p309), on the lower west bank of Lago di Garda; it's a pretty stop before reaching **Gardone Riviera** (p309), dominated by the exuberant **Vittoriale degli Italiani** (p310) villa and gardens. **Riva del Garda** (p311) makes a good base for windsurfing and some fine walks. Heading south along the east bank, **Malcesine** (p310) is dominated by a castle and offers a cable-car ride to **Monte Baldo** (p308). From there, a pleasant drive south leads to the lakeside wine town of **Bardolino**, a short drive from **Verona** (p392).



OUR TOP FIVE MOST BEAUTIFUL SPOTS IN LOMBARDY

- **Orta San Giulio, Lago d'Orta** (p294)
- **Villa Balbianello, Lenno, Lago di Como** (p304)
- **Città alta, Bergamo** (p281)
- **Isola Bella, Lago Maggiore** (p297)
- **Gardone Riviera, Lago di Garda** (p309)

ship in 2009), and passionate crowds pack San Siro stadium every Sunday (the teams alternate) in season.

If you take the time to get under Milan's skin, chances are it will get under yours too.

HISTORY

Celtic tribes settled along the river Po in the 7th century BC, and the area encompassing modern-day Milan has remained inhabited since. In AD 313, Emperor Constantine made his momentous edict granting Christians freedom of worship here. The city had already replaced Rome as the capital of the empire in 286, a role it kept until 402.

A *comune* (town council) was formed by all social classes in the 11th century, and, from the mid-13th century, government passed to a succession of dynasties – the Torrianis, Viscontis and, finally, the Sforzas. It fell under Spanish rule in 1525 and Austrian in 1713. Milan became part of the nascent Kingdom of Italy in 1860.

Benito Mussolini, one-time editor of the socialist newspaper *Avanti!*, founded the Fascist Party in Milan in 1919. He was eventually strung up here by partisans after he sought to escape to Switzerland in 1945. Mussolini had dragged Italy into WWII on Hitler's side in 1940. By early 1945, Allied bombings during WWII had destroyed much of central Milan.

In 1992, the *Tangentopoli* scandal broke, implicating thousands of Italian (and many Milanese) politicians, officials and business-people, fashion designers Gianni Versace and Giorgio Armani among them.

Milan's self-made big shot and media mogul, Silvio Berlusconi, made the move into politics in the 1990s and has since been elected prime minister three times, most recently in 2008.

The city's next big date with destiny is Expo2015, a world exhibition.

ORIENTATION

Central Milan's spider's web of streets radiates from the city's geographical and spiritual heart, the Duomo (Cathedral).

North of the Duomo is the Quadrilatero d'Oro (Golden Quad), Milan's designer shopping precinct. Northwest is the gentrified, former bohemian quarter of Brera, with narrow cobblestone streets, upmarket antique shops and alfresco cafés. The city's best nightlife is on and around Corso Como, further northwest, beyond which is the edgy Isola design district. Northeast of the Duomo is the Stazione Centrale. To the Duomo's south lies the Navigli canal district, while the Castello Sforzesco stands in the Parco Sempione to the west.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

American Bookstore (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 87 89 20; Via M Camperio 16; ☎ 1-7pm Mon, 10am-7pm Tue-Sat) English-language novels and nonfiction.

Panton's English Bookshop (Map pp266-7; ☎ 02 469 44 68; www.englishbookshop.it; Via Mascheroni 12) New and second-hand English-language titles.

Rizzoli (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 8646 1071; Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II) Unbeatable range of translated works by Italian writers, and Italy-inspired travel literature.

Touring Club Italiano (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 852 63 04; Corso Italia 10) Outstanding range of guidebooks and walking maps.

Emergency

Foreigners police office (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 6 22 61; Via Montebello 26) For immigration matters.

Police station (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 6 22 61; Via Fatebenefratelli 11)

Internet Access

Internetpoint (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 7209 5780; Cairoli metro; per hr €4; ☎ 10am-9pm) A cute, well-run internet café inside the Via Dante entrance of the metro.

Laundry

Allwash (Map pp268-9; Via Savona 1; wash per 7kg €3.50, dryer per 20min €3.50; ☎ 8am-10pm)

Left Luggage

Stazione Centrale (Map pp266-7; 1st 5 hrs €4, per hr for next 7 hrs €0.60, then per hr €0.20; ☎ 6am-11.50pm) Five-day maximum.

Medical Services

24-hour pharmacy (Map pp266-7; ☎ 02 669 09 35; Stazione Centrale)

MILAN IN ...

Two Days

With two days, you can whip around the essentials. Item number one will be the Duomo, Milan's cathedral, followed by the nearby Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II and La Scala theatre. Round off with the Castello Sforzesco and down time in Parco Sempione behind it. Make sure you are booked to view Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* on the morning of day two. Inspired by such beauty, you might want to take a trip to the Monte Napoleone area (aka Quadrilatero d'Oro) for high-fashion shopping. Head down to the Navigli area for a bite and drinks in the evening.

Four Days

With two extra days, you can get to know the city a little better. For art, choose the Pinacoteca di Brera and Museo Poldi-Pezzoli. Make more time for hanging out, especially at *aperitivo* time, for instance along Corso Como. Lovers of architecture and history should hunt out the city's oldest basilicas: the Basilica di Sant'Ambrogio and Basilica di San Lorenzo.

One Week

With a week, you can mix it up with short trips outside Milan. Bergamo, Brescia, Crema, Pavia and Vigevano are all doable as day trips; the last two can be combined in one day. Using high-speed trains, you could even go as far afield as Verona, Bologna or Turin for the day.

Farmacia Carlo Erba (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 87 86 68; Piazza del Duomo 21; ☹ 3-7pm & 8pm-8.30am Mon, 9.30am-7pm & 8pm-8.30am Tue-Sat, 8pm-8.30am Sun)
Milan Clinic (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 7601 6047; www.milandclinic.com; Via Cerva 25) English-speaking doctors.
Ospedale Maggiore Policlinico (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 5 50 31, English speakers 02 5503 3137; www.policlinico.mi.it; Via Francesco Sforza 35) Hospital.

Money

There are currency-exchange offices at both airports and a couple on the western side of Piazza del Duomo.

American Express (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 7210 4006; Via Larga 4; ☹ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri)

Banca Cesare Ponti (Map pp268-9; Piazza del Duomo 19) Good rates and a 24-hour automatic banknote-exchange machine.

Banca Intesa San Paolo (Map pp268-9; Piazza della Scala) A 24-hour booth with currency-exchange machine and ATMs.

Post

Central post office (Map pp268-9; Piazza Cordusio 1)

Stazione Centrale (Map pp266-7; Piazza Duca d'Aosta; ☹ 8am-7pm Mon-Sat)

Tourist Information

Central tourist office (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 7740 4343; www.provincia.milano.it/turismo; lower level, Piazza del Duomo 19a; ☹ 8.45am-1pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Sun)

Welcome Desk Meeting Milano Linate airport (off Map pp266-7; ☎ 02 7020 0443; ☹ 7.30am-11.30pm);

Malpensa airport (off Map pp266-7; ☎ 02 5858 0080; Terminal 1; ☹ 8am-8pm)

Tourist Office (Map pp266-7; ☎ 02 7740 4318; Stazione Centrale; ☹ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Sun & holidays) In front of platform 13.

TRAVELLERS WITH DISABILITIES

For those with limited mobility, Milan's public transport system, ATM, has low-floor buses on many of its routes, and some metro stations are equipped with lifts. See the dual-language **Milano Per Tutti** (www.milano-per-tutti.it) for details as well as itineraries of accessible sights.

Travel Agencies

Agenzie 365 (Map pp266-7; ☎ 02 6749 3147; Piazza Luigi di Savoia, Stazione Centrale) At the airport-shuttle bus stop.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Pickpockets (including young children) prey on Milan's main shopping areas, train stations and busiest public transport routes.

SIGHTS

Many visitors hit Milan for its shopping rather than sights, but there's plenty to see beyond the boutiques.

Duomo & Around DUOMO

A frenzy of flying buttresses, 135 spires and a staggering 3200 statues, Milan's Gothic **Duomo**

(Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 7202 2656; www.duomomilano.it; Piazza del Duomo) is the world's largest of its kind, and third largest in any style in Europe. This vision of pink-tinged Candoglia marble was commissioned in 1386 by Gian Galeazzo Visconti and has a capacity for a congregation of 40,000 (Milan's population at the time).

Centuries of construction (from east to west) finally saw it largely completed in 1812 (although various bits and bobs would not be attached until the 1960s). Crowning this Gothic splendour is a gilded copper statue of the **Madonnina** (Little Madonna), the city's traditional protector. Curiously, there's no bell tower.

The cathedral's echoing interior is equally awe-inspiring, with 146 stained-glass windows, and intricately carved pillars. Although the ceiling also appears carved, it's a *trompe l'œil*. High above the altar is a **nail** said to have been the one that impaled Christ's right hand on the cross. Predating the cathedral is the early Christian baptistry, the **Battistero di San Giovanni** (admission €2; ☎ 9.30-5.15pm Tue-Sun), accessed via a stairwell next to the main entrance. The **crypt** (admission free) displays the remains of San Carlo Borromeo, who died in 1584, in a glass casket, while off to the side, the **treasury** (admission €1; ☎ 9.30am-1.30pm & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1.30pm & 2-5pm Sat, 1.30-3.30pm Sun) has a small collection of liturgical vessels (interesting only to the truly dedicated).

For a close-up of the forest of spires, statuary and pinnacles – and views as far as Switzerland on a clear day – you can climb 165 steps to the **cathedral roof** (admission €5; ☎ 9am-5.45pm). Alternatively, it's a quick zip up in the **lift** (admission €8; ☎ 9am-5.30pm) to the top. Entrances to both are outside the cathedral on the northern side.

The Duomo's surrounding plaza, the **Piazza del Duomo**, is the hub for the city's celebrations and festivities.

To learn more about the cathedral, you could, until 2005, pop into the **Museo del Duomo** (Map pp268-9; www.duomomilano.it; Piazza del Duomo 14). It's now closed and in need of refurbishment, but when this might happen is anyone's guess.

Looking on to Piazza del Duomo (and now covered by scaffolding) is Mussolini's **Arengario** (Map pp268-9) from where he would harangue huge crowds in the glory days of his regime. It will one day house the **Museo del Novecento** (www.museodelnovecento.org), a museum of 20th-century history and society.

GALLERIA VITTORIO EMANUELE II

Framed by an immense archway, the **Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II** (Map pp268-9) opens off the Piazza del Duomo's northern flank. This glass-and-steel-roofed shopping arcade is shaped like a crucifix, and is home to elegant boutiques, cafes, and, unfortunately, a McDonald's. More fittingly, it's also home to a seven-star (!) hotel, the **Townhouse Galleria** (www.townhouse.galleria.it).

Giuseppe Mengoni designed the Galleria as a showplace for modern Milan. Tragically, he plummeted to his death from scaffolding just weeks before his 14-year tour de force was completed in 1877. Long-standing Milanese tradition claims you can avoid Mengoni's bad luck by grinding your heel into the testicles of the mosaic bull on the floor (just to the left of the central cross when you're facing north).

PINACOTECA AMBROSIANA

Within Europe's first public library, the 1609 Biblioteca Ambrosiana, is its outstanding art gallery, the **Pinacoteca Ambrosiana** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 80 69 21; www.ambrosiana.it; Piazza Pio XI 2; adult/child €8/5; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Tue-Sun). Priceless works include Italy's first real still life, Caravaggio's *Canestro di frutta* (Fruit Basket) and Leonardo da Vinci's *Musico* (Musician).

La Scala

The austere facade of Milan's legendary opera house, **Teatro alla Scala** (La Scala) seems at odds with its sumptuous six-tiered interior, all chandeliers and scarlet-silk-lined private boxes. The disparity came about because at the time it was built in 1778, it was on a narrow street blocked by houses, making it impossible to admire the facade in any case. These have since been demolished to create the square out front, Piazza della Scala, revealing the underwhelming frontage.

Attending a performance is incredible; see p276 for ticket details. Otherwise, you can peek inside as part of a visit to the in-house **Museo Teatrale alla Scala** (La Scala Museum; Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 4335 3521; www.teatroallascala.org; Piazza della Scala; adult/child €5/4; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-5.30pm), provided there are no performances or rehearsals in progress. On the museum's ground floor is a chronologically arranged collection of opera-related items, including original advertising posters and the death mask and hand cast of Giuseppe Verdi, who premiered numerous operas here.

Around La Scala

Between Piazza della Scala and Piazza San Fedele, Galeazzo Alessi's **Palazzo Marino** (Map pp268-9) is a masterpiece of 16th-century residential architecture. Milan's municipal council has sat here since 1859. You can join **tours** (☎ 02 8845 6617; www.comune.milano.it; admission free; ☹ 9.30am-12.30pm & 2-5pm Mon-Fri, booking obligatory).

Botticelli's *Madonna and Child* is the star attraction at the nearby **Museo Poldi-Pezzoli** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 79 48 89; www.museopoldipezzoli.it; Via Alessandro Manzoni 12; adult/child €8/5.50; ☹ 10am-6pm Tue-Sun). Home to the city's most important private collection, it also displays some superb porcelain, jewellery, tapestries, antique furniture and paintings.

The Last Supper (Il Cenacolo Vinciano)

Leonardo Da Vinci's depiction of Christ and his dinner companions is one of the world's most iconic images. You need to book anything from two weeks to a couple of months ahead or take a somewhat pricey city tour (see p271) to see it. If you get lucky, you might find vacancies if you just turn up, but don't bank on it. Once in, you get just 15 minutes' viewing time.

The **mural** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 8942 1146; www.cenacolovinciano.org; adult/EU citizens 18-25 yr/EU citizens under 18 yr & over 65 yr €6.50/3.25/free, plus booking fee €1.50; ☹ 8.15am-7pm Tue-Sun) is hidden away on one wall of the Cenacolo Vinciano, the refectory adjoining the **Chiesa di Santa Maria delle Grazie** (Map pp268-9; Corso Magenta; ☹ 8.15am-7pm Tue-Sun). Restoration of *The Last Supper* was completed in 1999 after more than 22 years' work. Despite the painstaking restoration effort, 80% of the original colour has been lost. Da Vinci was partly responsible for all this trouble. Because he worked on a dry wall over three years (1495-98), rather than on wet plaster over a week, it is not really a fresco. And it began to deteriorate within a few years of completion.

Reservations must be made by phone. You'll be allotted a visiting time and reservation number, which you present 30 minutes before your visit at the refectory ticket desk. If you turn up late, your ticket will be resold.

English-language guided tours (€3.25) take place at 9.30am and 3.30pm Tuesday to Sunday – again you'll need to reserve ahead.

Castello Sforzesco & Parco Sempione

Originally a Visconti fortress, this immense red-brick **castle** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 8846 3700; www.milanocastello.it; Piazza Castello; adult/senior/child under 18yr

€3/1.50/free, after 2pm Fri free; ☹ castle grounds 7am-6pm or 7pm Tue-Sun, museums 9am-5.30pm Tue-Sun) was later home to the mighty Sforza dynasty that ruled Renaissance Milan. The castle's defences were designed by Leonardo da Vinci; Napoleon later drained the moat and removed the drawbridges. Today, it shelters a series of specialised museums, accessible on the same ticket.

Among the standouts is the **Museo d'Arte Antica** (Map pp268-9), containing Michelangelo's last, unfinished work, *Pietà Rondanini* (in the Sala degli Scarlioni). Paintings by Bellini, Tiepolo, Mantegna, Correggio, Titian and van Dyck take pride of place in the **Pinacoteca e Raccolte d'Arte** (Map pp268-9). Milan's distant past is unearthed at the **Museo della Preistoria** (Map pp268-9), which displays local archaeological finds from the Palaeolithic era to the Iron Age. Vintage instruments, including some of the world's earliest violins, are a must-see for music lovers at the **Museo degli Strumenti Musicali** (Map pp268-9).

Sprawling over 47 hectares, the castle's leafy **Parco Sempione** (Map pp268-9) is graced by a neoclassical arch and the **Torre Branca** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 331 41 20; www.branca.it; admission €3; ☹ 9.30pm-midnight Tue & Thu, 10.30am-12.30pm, 4-6.30pm & 9.30pm-midnight Wed, 2.30-6pm & 9.30pm-midnight Fri, 10.30am-2pm, 2.30-7.30pm & 9.30pm-midnight Sat & Sun mid-Apr-mid-Oct, 10.30am-12.30pm & 4-6.30pm Wed, 10.30am-1pm, 3-6.30pm & 8.30pm-midnight Sat, 10.30am-2pm & 2.30-7pm Sun mid-Oct-mid-Apr), a 108m-tall steel tower raised in 1933, from the top of which you have a wonderful, bird's-eye view of the city. Also here is the ageing **Acquario Civico** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 8646 2051; Viale Gadio 2; www.verdeacqua.eu; admission free; ☹ 9am-1pm & 2-5.30pm Tue-Sun) and the **Triennale di Milano** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 7243 4212; www.triennale.org; Viale Emilio Alemagna 6; adult/senior & student €8/6; ☹ 10.30am-8.30pm Tue-Sun). Regular shows in the Triennale building have championed design practice since it opened in the 1930s, but its permanent museum dedicated to Italian design was only launched late in 2007.

Around Castello Sforzesco

A trio of interesting sights spanning the ancient to the futuristic are just south of the castle.

The Monastero Maggiore, a 9th-century Benedictine convent rebuilt in the 1500s, is a dramatic backdrop for the extensive collections of Roman, Greek and Etruscan artefacts housed in the **Civico Museo Archeologico**







INFORMATION					
Allwash	1	A8	Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II	34	D6
American Bookstore	2	C5	Madonnina	(see 33)	
American Express	3	E7	Museo d'Arte Antica	(see 28)	
Australian Consulate	4	F6	Museo degli Strumenti Musicali	(see 28)	
Banca Cesare Ponte	5	D6	Museo del Duomo	35	E6
Banca Intesa San Paolo	6	D5	Museo del Novocento	(see 26)	
British Institutes	7	B5	Museo della Preistoria	(see 28)	
Central Post Office	8	D6	Museo Nazionale della Scienza e della Tecnica	36	A7
Central Tourist Office	9	D6	Museo Poldi-Pezzoli	37	E5
Farmacia Carlo Erba	10	D6	Museo Teatrale alla Scala	(see 71)	
Foreigners Police Office	11	E3	Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea	38	F4
French Consulate	12	E3	Palazzo Marino	39	D6
German Consulate	13	D2	Pinacoteca Ambrosiana	40	D6
Internetpoint	14	C5	Pinacoteca di Brera	41	D4
Japanese Consulate	15	E3	Pinacoteca e Raccolte d'Arte	(see 28)	
Milan Clinic	16	F6	Studio Museo Achille Castiglioni	42	B5
New Zealand Consulate	17	B6	Teatro alla Scala	(see 71)	
Ospedale Maggiore			The Last Supper (Il Cenacolo Vinciano)	43	A6
Policlinico	18	E8	Torre Branca	44	A4
Police Station	19	E4	Triennale di Milano	45	A4
Rizzoli	20	D6	SLEEPING		
Swiss Consulate	21	E4	3Rooms	(see 73)	
Touring Club Italiano	22	D8	Alle Meraviglie	46	C5
UK Consulate	23	E6	Antica Locanda Leonardo	47	A6
US Consulate	24	E3	Antica Locanda Solferino	48	D2
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES			Hotel Ariston	49	C7
Acquario Civico	25	C4	Hotel Casa Mia	50	F2
Arengario	26	D6	Straf	51	D6
Basilica di Sant'Ambrogio	27	B7	EATING		
Battistero di San Giovanni	(see 33)		Gelateria Le Colonne	52	C8
Castello Sforzesco	28	B5	L'Antico Ristorante Boeucc	53	E5
Chiesa di San Maurizio	29	B6	Latteria	54	D3
Chiesa di Santa Maria delle Grazie	30	A6	DRINKING		
Civica Galleria d'Arte Moderna	31	F4	Bhangra Bar	59	A3
Civico Museo Archeologico	32	B6	Caffè Zucca	60	D6
Duomo	33	E6	G-Lounge	61	E7
			Le Bicchiette	62	B8
			Living	63	A3
			Radetzky	64	C2
			ENTERTAINMENT		
			FNAC	65	C7
			Gasoline	66	C1
			La Scala Box Office	67	D6
			Le Banque	68	D6
			Ricordi Mediatore	69	D6
			Shocking Club	70	D2
			Teatro alla Scala	71	D5
			Teatro Smeraldo	72	D2
			SHOPPING		
			10 Corso Como	73	D1
			Alan Journo	74	E4
			Alessi	75	E5
			B&B Italia Store	76	F6
			Damiani	77	E5
			Ferrari Store	78	E6
			Giorgio Armani	79	E5
			Kartell	80	E4
			La Rinascente	81	E6
			Sermoneta	82	E4
			TRANSPORT		
			ATM Buses to Linate Airport	83	F6
			ATM Info Point	84	D6

(Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 8645 0011; Corso Magenta 15; adult/child €2/1, after 2pm Fri free; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-5.30pm Tue-Sun).

St Ambrose, Milan's patron saint, is buried in the crypt of the Romanesque **Basilica di Sant'Ambrogio** (Map pp268-9; Piazza Sant'Ambrogio 15), which he founded in the 4th century. Since then, the church has been repaired, rebuilt and restored several times, resulting in a mishmash of styles. Another lasting legacy of Ambrose is the term 'Ambrosian', which even today is often used as a synonym for 'Milanese'.

Kids and would-be inventors will go goggle-eyed at the **Museo Nazionale della Scienza e della Tecnica** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 48 55 51; www.museo.scienza.org; Via San Vittore 21; adult/child €8/6, incl submarine tour €10/8; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Tue-Fri, to 6.30pm Sat, Sun & holidays). Exhibits range from models that test da Vinci's far-fetched designs to electricity, astronomy, or clock- and guitar-making. Book ahead to tour a 1940s submarine.

Pinacoteca di Brera

Religious art amassed (or rather, purloined) by Napoleon formed the basis of the formidable collection at the 17th-century Palazzo di Brera's **Pinacoteca di Brera** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 8942 1146; www.brera.beniculturali.it; Via Brera 28; adult/child €10/7.50, EU adult/child €5/free; ☎ 8.30am-7.15pm Tue-Sun). Look out for Andrea Mantegna's masterpiece, *The Dead Christ*, as well as Veronese's *Last Supper* – very different in style from da Vinci's depiction of events. Also on show are pieces by Raphael, Bellini, Rembrandt, Goya, Caravaggio and van Dyck.

Civica Galleria d'Arte Moderna

Napoleon's temporary Milanese home, the 18th-century Villa Reale, now houses the **Civica Galleria d'Arte Moderna** (GAM; Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 7600 2819; Via Palestro 16; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Tue-Sun). This spread of 19th- and 20th-century Italian art ranges from neoclassical sculptor

Canova to futurist painters Giacomo Balla and Umberto Boccioni.

TOURS

The tourist office sells tickets for Autostradale's three-hour city bus tours (€55 including admission to *The Last Supper*, Castello Sforzesco and La Scala's museum). Although they whiz you through the city's main sights, your entry tickets to the Castello and La Scala are good for the rest of the day, allowing you to go back at leisure. Tours depart from the taxi rank on the western side of Piazza del Duomo at 9.30am Tuesday to Sunday (except for a couple of weeks during August). From April to October, there are also day trips to Lago di Como (€60).

Zani Viaggi (☎ 02 86 71 31; www.zaniviaggi.it) runs a variety of guided tours in and around the city (€25 to €55), some including admission to *The Last Supper*. Tours depart from Piazza Castello and Stazione Centrale.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

La Scala's opera season opens on Milan's biggest feast day, the **Festa di Sant'Ambrogio**, on 7 December.

Milan has two linked trade fairgrounds, collectively known as **Fiera Milano** (www.fiera.milano.it). The older of the two, **Fieramilanocity** (Map pp266-7), is close to the centre (metro line 2, Lotto Fieramilanocity stop), while the main grounds, **Fieramilano**, are west of town in the satellite town of Rho (metro line 2, Rho Fiera stop). See the boxed text, p277, for information on the international fashion shows here and elsewhere.

Other festivals to look out for:

Carnevale Ambrosiano The world's longest carnival, this event culminates with a procession to the Duomo; held in February.

Cortili Aperti (www.italiamultimedia.com/cortiliaperti)

For one May Sunday, the gates to some of the city's most beautiful private courtyards are flung open. Print out a map and make your own itinerary.

Festa del Naviglio Parades, music and performances take place during the first 10 days of June.

La Bella Estate (www.comune.milano.it) Concerts in and beyond town from June to August. Check the town hall website.

SLEEPING

Finding a room in Milan (let alone a cheap one) isn't easy, particularly during the fashion weeks, furniture fair and other exhibitions, when rates skyrocket.

The tourist office distributes *Milano Hotels*, a free annual listings guide to Milan's more than 350 hotels. Lonely Planet's online booking service (<http://hotels.lonelyplanet.com>) reviews standout properties that can be booked online.

Budget

The area around the Stazione Centrale can be seedy but has some of the city's least expensive accommodation.

HOSTELS & CAMPING

Campeggio Città di Milano (off Map pp266-7; ☎ 02 4820 7017; www.campingmilano.it; Via G Airaghi 61; camping 2 people, car & tent €28.50, 2-/3-/4-person bungalow from €90/105/120) Facilities at this four-star 'camping village' west of the centre include a bar, restaurant, laundry and bike rental, as well as an aqua park (with a 40% discount for campers). From the De Angeli metro station, take bus 72 from Piazza de Angeli to the Di Vittorio stop, from where it is a 400m walk. By car, leave the Tangenziale Ovest at San Siro-Via Novara.

La Cordata (Map pp266-7; ☎ 02 5831 4675; www.ostelli.milano.it; Via Burigozzo 11; dm/s/d €21/70/90; ☎ ☎) Handy for the canal district, these glass-and-brick premises have Spartan but spotless tiled rooms and a self-catering kitchen. Check-in is from 2pm to 10pm, and there's 24-hour access.

HOTELS

Hotel Etrusco (Map pp266-7; ☎ 02 236 38 52; www.hotel.etrusco.it; Via Porpora 56; s/d €60/80; ☎ P) This elegant little three-star features a lovely garden and pleasant rooms and is certainly the pick of the bunch around Piazza Aspromonte. Six rooms with terraces overlook the garden area.

Hotel Casa Mia (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 657 52 49; www.casamiahotel.it; Viale Vittorio Veneto 30; s/d €62/85; ☎ ☎) Cosying up to Piazza della Repubblica, 'My House' is a straightforward digs that is handily placed about halfway between Stazione Centrale and the Duomo, just over the road from the Giardini Pubblici gardens.

Midrange

Hotel Del Sole (Map pp266-7; ☎ 02 2951 2971; www.delsole.hotel.com; Via G Spontini 6; s/d €50/95; ☎ ☎) One of the best options near Stazione Centrale, this cheerful hotel has unadorned but acceptable rooms, some with balconies. Rooms with shared bathroom go cheaper.

HOME CHIC HOME

Milan is the world's capital of fashion for the home. The latest innovations are unveiled each April at the five-day **Salone Internazionale del Mobile** (International Furniture Fair; www.cosmit.it) at the **Fieramilano fairground** (www.fieramilano.it) in Rho. It has been wowing interior design aficionados since 1961.

Design showrooms, galleries and shops abound. A Ron Arad Bookworm bookshelf, produced by Milanese pioneer of plastic **Kartell** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 659 79 16; www.kartell.it; Via Carlo Porta 1), can be yours at its flagship store.

Minimalist-chic homewares are the hallmark of **B&B Italia Store** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 76 44 41; www.milano.bebitalia.com; Via Durini 14). And where would any design fiend worth their salt be without a kitchen appliance from **Alessi** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 79 57 26; www.alessi.it; Corso Matteotti 9)?

Half-price Flos desk lamps and Bugatti espresso-makers can be picked up at Milan's first discount outlet for designer furnishings, **Emporio 31** (Map pp266-7; ☎ 02 422 25 77; www.emporio31.com; Via Tortona 31). It's located inside the left courtyard.

Art and design intertwine at the city's ground-breaking contemporary galleries. Leading the pack is **Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea** (PAC; Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 7600 9085; www.comune.milano.it/pac; Via Palestro 14; adult/senior & student €5/3; 🕒 2.30-7.30pm Mon, 9.30am-7.30pm Tue, Wed & Fri-Sun, 9.30am-10.30pm Thu, to 7.30pm Sun), which mounts experimental exhibitions in all media. Retro items at **Studio Museo Achille Castiglioni** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 7243 4231; Piazza Castello 27; 🕒 tours 10am, 11am & noon Tue-Sun) range from the streetlight-turned-pendulum Arco floor lamp to early examples of Alessi's gadget wizardry. Tours are free with pre-purchased Triennale di Milano tickets (see p265), but booking is required.

At newsstands, look out for the magazines *Domus* (www.domusweb.it) and *Casabella*, both founded in 1928 by Gio Ponti, considered the architect of Italian design.

Milan itself is getting a design overhaul with a flurry of construction projects around town. Biggest and most controversial of them all is the CityLife complex (Map pp266-7). Architecture all-stars Zaha Hadid, Arata Isozaki, Daniel Libeskind and Pier Paolo Maggiora are reinventing the old trade-fair site just west of central Milan, which by 2014 will include three office towers, a 20-storey residential tower and parkland – if angry protest groups fail to halt the project in the courts, that is.

Vietnamonamour (Map pp266-7; ☎ 02 7063 4614; www.vietnamonamour.com; Via Alessandro Pestalozza 7; s/d from €80/120; 🍴 ☎) Beautiful timber floor and Vietnamese furnishings set the tone in this 1903 residence-turned-B&B, with four romantic rooms. Downstairs, the Paris-born Vietnamese owner offers an equally welcoming Vietnamese restaurant.

Foresteria Monforte (Map pp266-7; ☎ 02 7631 8516; www.foresteriamonforte.it; Piazza del Tricolore 2; d €150-190) With Philippe Starck chairs, flat-screen TVs and a communal kitchen, the three classy rooms in this upmarket B&B are a short walk from the Duomo. Breakfast is served in your room.

Hotel Ariston (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 7200 0556; www.aristonhotel.com; Largo Carrobbio 2; s incl breakfast €110-200, d incl breakfast €160-290; 🍴 🍷 📺 ☎) This ecological hotel offers such touches as herbal tea made with purified water, organic breakfast, natural fibre-filled mattresses, soaps and shampoos made with all-natural ingredients,

and to top it all off, a freely loaned bicycle at the door.

our pick Antica Locanda Leonardo (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 4801 4197; www.anticolocandaleonardo.com; Corso Magenta 78; s €120, d €165-245; 🍴 ☎) Rooms here ooze homey comfort, from the timber beds and parquet floors in some, to the antique furniture and plush drapes in others. Take breakfast in the quiet, scented, interior garden of this 19th-century residence.

Alle Meraviglie (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 805 10 23; www.allemeraviglie.it; Via San Tomaso 8; d €180-247; 🍴 🍷 ☎) There are just six soothing rooms at this boutique hotel in a pretty side street in the city centre. Each is uniquely decorated with beautiful fabrics and fresh flowers, and there are no TVs.

Top End

3Rooms (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 62 61 63; www.3rooms-10CORSOCOMO.COM; Corso Como 10; d €270-310; 🍴 🍷 📺 ☎) You can't drag yourself and

your shopping bags away from concept shop Corso Como? You don't have to: the villa's three guest rooms let you sleep amid Eames bedspreads, Arne Jacobsen chairs and Saarinen leather.

Straf (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 80 50 81; www.straf.it; Via San Raffaele 3; s/d from €295/320; ☹ ☹ ☹) Too cool for anything much, let alone school, this ultra-designer address is a shout from the Duomo. Some rooms have massage chairs and aromatherapy, and all share some extreme decor ideas. Cement, black stone and scratched glass are common features. The bar downstairs hosts art installations, and there's a gym for guests.

Antica Locanda Solferino (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 657 01 29; www.anticolocandasolferino.it; Via Castelfidardo 2; s €140-270, d €180-400; ☹ ☹ ☹) A genuinely charming hideaway with 11 rooms, decorated in a bygone style with some nice paintings and prints, this understated Brera boutique beauty attracts artists, writers and other layabouts, so booking is essential. They have a quite decent-sized single.

EATING

Like its fashions, meals in Milan range from classics to fusion and imports. Various fashion houses (Gucci, Armani and others) have exclusive cafe-restaurants attached to their stores.

Milan's provincial specialities include polenta and the first course of choice, *risotto alla milanese* (saffron-infused risotto made with bone-marrow stock). Milanese mains include *fritto misto alla milanese* (fried slices of bone marrow, liver and lung), *busecca* (sliced tripe boiled with beans) and *costoletta alla milanese* (breaded veal). Milan is also the home of *panettone* (a yeast-risen sweet bread) and *colomba* (a dry, dove-shaped cake first baked in the 6th century and traditionally accompanied by sweet dessert wine).

Restaurants

Smart business eateries congregate around the cathedral. In the Brera area, pavement terraces open up along hip Via Fiori Chiari in summer. The canal district has a host of appealing spots.

Reservations are generally a good idea and essential for top-end establishments.

Piccola Ischia (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 204 76 13; Via Giovanni Battista Morgagni 7; pizzas €8-15, meals €30; ☹ lunch & dinner Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri, dinner only Sat & Sun)

The Campanian potato croquettes, *arancini* (rice-stuffed pastries) and zucchini blossoms do nicely for starters, but the main attraction is the pizzas.

Latteria (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 659 76 53; Via San Marco 24; meals €25-30; ☹ Mon-Fri) If you can snare a seat in this tiny and ever-popular restaurant, you'll find old favourites like *spaghetti alla carbonara* mixed in with chef Arturo's own creations, such as *polpettine al limone* (little meatballs with lemon) or *riso al salto* (risotto fritters) on the ever-changing, mostly organic menu.

our pick Osteria Le Vigne (Map pp266-7; ☎ 02 837 56 17; Ripa di Porta Ticinese 61; meals €25-30; ☹ Mon-Sat) A perennially popular Navigli eatery, this place is hard to beat for value. Perusal of the menu will reveal such options as *straccetti di pasta fresca con pollo* (strips of fresh pasta with chicken).

Pescheria Da Claudio (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 805 68 57; Via Ponte Vetro 16; meals €25-30; ☹ 11am-8pm Mon, 9am-9.30pm Tue-Sat) Join the savvy suits for a power lunch or early dinner of *pesce crudo* (raw fish). Plates loaded with marinated tuna, mixed salmon, tuna and whitefish with pistachios or lightly blanched octopus 'carpaccio' are consumed standing around the horseshoe bar.

Piquenique (Map pp266-7; ☎ 02 4229 7225; Via Bergognone 24; meals €30; ☹ lunch only Mon, lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, brunch noon-3pm Sun) All the tables, chairs and linen are different, in a deliberately higgledy-piggledy way, floors are of exposed timber, and linen ranges from gingham to chintzy. Veggie options include couscous dishes, but there's something for everyone, made largely with organic products.

Acquasala (Map pp266-7; ☎ 02 8942 3983; meals €30-35; Ripa di Porta Ticinese 71; ☹ Tue-Sun) The nostalgic and mostly Puglian dishes here include *orecchiette* ('little ears' pasta) with various accompaniments, including a horse-meat sauce. Meat dishes dominate the mains, anything from horse-meat sausages to big Tuscan T-bone steaks.

El Brellin (Map pp266-7; ☎ 02 5810 1351; cnr Vicolo dei Lavandai 14 & Alzaia Naviglio Grande 14; meals €40-45; ☹ 7pm-2am Mon-Sat, 12.30-3pm Sun) Set around a 1700s public laundry that used water siphoned off from the Naviglio Grande canal, El Brellin's candlelit garden is a romantic spot for home-made pasta and classic Milanese specialities like *cazzoeula* (pork rib chops, skin and sausage stew).

L'Antico Ristorante Boeuc (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 760 20 224; Piazza Belgioioso 2; meals €60-80; ☹ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, lunch only Sun) Milan's oldest restaurant (since

EAT, DRINK & BE MERRY: MILAN'S APERITIVO SCENE

Happy hour elsewhere in the world might mean downing cut-price pints, but not in oh-so-stylish Milan. Its nightly *aperitivi* is a two- or three-hour ritual, starting around 6pm, where for €6 to €12, a cocktail, glass of wine, or beer comes with an unlimited buffet of antipasti, bruschetta, cured meats, salads, and even seafood and pasta. (Occasionally you'll pay a cover charge up front that includes a drink and buffet fare, which generally works out the same.) Take a plate and help yourself; snacks are also sometimes brought to your table. Most of the city's bars offer *aperitivi*, including those listed on right.

1696) serves up works of Lombard culinary art, from *crepelle al prosciutto* (a kind of cross between pasta and crepe with ham) to a *trancio di salmone al pepe verde* (a slice of salmon with green pepper) or Florentine steak.

Cafes & Quick Eats

Gelateria le Colonne (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 837 22 92; Corso di Porta Ticinese 75; gelati €2-3; ☎ 12.30pm-1.30am Mon-Thu, 12.30pm-2am Fri & Sat, 3pm-1am Sun) Come here for artisanal ice cream in wild flavours such as rice, amaretto, orange blossom and specials like Huehuetenango coffee flavour from Guatemala.

Princi (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 87 47 97; Via Speronari 6; meals €10; ☎ 7am-8pm Mon-Fri, 8am-8pm Sat) Equally delicious for an early-morning *cornetto* (Italian-type croissant) or *stracchino* (Lombard cows-milk cheese)-filled focaccia on the way home at midnight, Princi is perfect for a filling bite on the run.

Pizzeria Spontini (Map pp266-7; ☎ 02 204 74 44; Via Spontini 2; meals €10-15; ☎ Tue-Sun) Munch standing

up at this busy little joint, which has cooked the best pizza in the Stazione Centrale area since 1953.

Self-Catering

Stock up on supermarket produce at **Standa** (Map pp268-9; Via della Palla 2a), which has branches all over town, and fresh fruit, veg and fish at the covered market, **Mercato Comunale** (Map pp266-7; Piazza XXIV Maggio; ☎ 8.30am-1pm Mon, 8.30am-1pm & 4-7.30pm Tue-Fri, 8.30am-1pm & 3.30-7.30pm Sat).

DRINKING

Milanese bars are generally open until 2am or 3am, and virtually all serve *aperitivi* (see the boxed text, left).

The Navigli canal district, the cobbled backstreets of Brera, and swish Corso Como and its surrounds are all great areas for a drink, Milan-style.

Bar Basso (Map pp266-7; ☎ 02 2940 0580; Via Plinio 39; ☎ 9am-2am Wed-Mon) This elegant corner bar is home of the *sbagliato*, the Negroni made with Prosecco instead of gin, as well as the brilliant concept of *mangia e bevi* (eat and drink), involving a supersized goblet of strawberries, cream and *nocciola* (hazelnut) ice cream and a large slug of some kind of booze.

Bhangra Bar (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 3493 4469; Corso Sempione 1; admission free-€6; ☎ 7pm-midnight Wed & Thu, 7pm-2am Fri, 10pm-2am Sat, 7-10pm Sun) Bhangra Bar is famous for its cushions and couscous-and-curry *aperitivo* buffet, served with a side of African percussion on Friday.

Caffè Zucca (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 8646 4435; Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II 21; ☎ daily) The city's most historic cafe overlooks Piazza del Duomo, with a mosaic interior dating from 1867. Sip coffee but skip the meals.

G-Lounge (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 805 30 42; Via Larga 8; ☎ 7.30am-9.30pm Mon, 7.30am-2am Tue-Sun) It's *caipirinhas* (Brazilian cachaça-and-lime based cocktail) and chill-out in this fashion-

FEELING PECKISH

Forget *The Last Supper*: gourmands head to the food and wine emporium, **Peck** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 802 31 61; www.peck.it; Via Spadari 7-9; ☎ 3-7.30pm Mon, 8.45am-7.30pm Tue-Sat). This Milanese institution opened its doors as a deli in 1883. Since then, it's expanded to a dining room-bar upstairs and an *enoteca* (wine bar). The Aladdin's Cave-like food hall is smaller than its reputation suggests, but what it lacks in space it makes up for in variety, with some 3200 variations of *parmigiano reggiano* (Parmesan) at its cheese counter, just for starters. Other treasures include an exquisite array of chocolates, pralines and pastries; freshly made gelato; seafood; caviar; pâtés; a butcher; fruit and vegetables; truffle products; olive oils and balsamic vinegar.

WHERE TO SCORE TICKETS

Tickets for concerts, sporting events and the theatre can be booked online through **Ticket One** (☎ 892101; www.ticketone.it) or **Ticket Web** (☎ 199 158158; www.ticketweb.it). **Milano Concerti** (☎ 02 4870 2726) only handles ticketing for international rock concerts. **Box Tickets** (☎ 02 8470 9750; www.boxtickets.it, in Italian) sells tickets for musicals at Teatro Smeraldo and other shows around town.

In person, you can get tickets for concerts at **Ricordi Mediastore** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 8646 0272; www.ricordimediasiores.it, in Italian; Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II) and **FNAC** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 72 08 21; fnac@ticketweb.it; Via della Palla 2). The entrance to FNAC is on Via Torino.

able corner bar with red backlit shelves laden with bottles.

Le Biciette (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 5810 4325; Via Torti 4; ☎ 6pm-2am Mon-Sat, 12.30pm-2am Sun) Once a bike warehouse and now one of the best *aperitivo* bars in Milan. Evidence of its former life includes glassed-in bicycle memorabilia.

L'Elephante (Map pp266-7; ☎ 02 2951 8768; Via Melzo 22; ☎ 6pm-2am Tue-Sun) The arty-alternative crowd here is as mixed as its killer cocktails: gay, lesbian and straight, locals and visitors. The setting is equally eclectic: no two chairs are alike and the dominating colours are black, metallic grey and shades of deep purple.

Living (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 331 00 84; Piazza Sempione 2; ☎ 8-2am Mon-Fri, 9-2am Sat & Sun) Living has one of the city's prettiest settings, with a corner position and floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the Arco della Pace. The bounteous *aperitivo* spread and expertly mixed cocktails draw crowds of smart-casual 20- and 30-somethings.

Radetzky (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 657 26 45; Corso Garibaldi 105; ☎ 8pm-1am) Fabulous banquet and window seating make this one of the most popular places on this stylish, largely pedestrianised strip for an *aperitivo* or long Sunday sessions (well, it started with brunch...).

ENTERTAINMENT

Milan has some of Italy's top clubs and a lavish cultural calendar capped off by La Scala's opera season. The main theatre and concert season opens in October.

The tourist office stocks several entertainment guides in English: *Milano Mese*, *Hello Milano* (www.hellomilano.it) and *Easy Milano* (www.easymilano.it). The free Italian newspapers distributed on the metro are also handy for what's on listings.

For club listings, check out *ViviMilano* (<http://milano.corriere.it>, in Italian) which comes out with the *Corriere della Sera* newspaper on Wednesday, or the paper's Milan

pages (<http://milano.corriere.it>, in Italian); *La Repubblica* (www.repubblica.it, in Italian) is also good on Thursday. Another source of inspiration is *Milano2night* (www.milano2night.it). Check out *Milanodabere* (www.milanodabere.it) too.

Live Music

Blue Note (Map pp266-7; ☎ 899 700022; www.bluenote.it; Via Borsieri 37; tickets €23-30; ☎ concerts 9pm & 11pm Tue-Fri, 9pm & 11.30pm Sat, 9pm Sun) Top-class jazz acts from around the world. Tickets by phone, online or at the door from 7.30pm. They also do a popular easy-listening Sunday brunch (€35 or €55 for two adults and two children).

Magazzini Generali (Map pp266-7; ☎ 02 539 39 48; www.magazzinigenerali.it; Via Pietrasanta 14; ☎ 10pm-4am Wed-Sun) When this former warehouse is full of people working up a sweat in an international indie act, there's no better place to be in Milan. Most gigs are under €20, and there's free entry on other nights when DJs get the party started.

Scimmie (Map pp266-7; ☎ 02 8940 2874; www.scimmie.it; Via Cardinale Ascanio Sforza 49; admission €8-15; ☎ 8pm-3am Mon-Sat) Jazz, alternative rock, and blues are the stock in trade of the emerging talents who play to overflowing crowds inside, in the garden and on its summertime jazz barge. Concerts start at 10pm.

Most big names that play Milan do so at major venues outside the city centre, which run shuttle buses for concerts. They include **Mediolanum Forum** (off Map pp266-7; ☎ 199 128800; www.forumnet.it; Via di Vittorio 6, Assago; ☎ Romolo/Famagosto, then shuttle bus), **Palasharp** (off Map pp266-7; ☎ 02 3340 0551; Viale Sant'Elia 33; ☎ Lampugnano) and the **San Siro Stadium** (off Map pp266-7; Via Piccolomini; ☎ Lotto).

Clubs

Clubs generally stay open until 3am or 4am Tuesday to Sunday; cover charges vary from €10 to upwards of €20. Door policies can be formidable as the night wears on.

GAY & LESBIAN MILAN

Like that other queen of the catwalk, Paris, Milan confounds visitors trying to figure out the city's gay scene – because, as one baffled traveller put it, 'everyone's so stylish and sexy'. Added to that, virtually all of Milan's venues attract a mixed gay/lesbian/straight crowd – even on allocated 'gay nights'.

It's no Oxford St, Soho or West Village, but a small dedicated club strip is located in Via Sammartini, on the western side of Stazione Centrale.

Centro d'Iniziativa Gay – ArciGayMilano

(Map pp266-7; ☎ 02 5412 2225; www.arcigaymilano.org, in Italian; Via Bezzacca 3) can provide information for gay and lesbian visitors.

Gattopardo (Map pp266-7; ☎ 02 3453 7699; www.ilgattopardocafe.it; Via Piero della Francesca 47; ☎ 6pm-4am Tue-Sun) This gorgeous Champagne-coloured space in a deconsecrated church is filled with flickering candles and baroque-style furniture. Gattopardo's clientele is equally aesthetically blessed.

Le Banque (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 8699 6565; www.lebanque.it; Via Porrone Bassano 6; ☎ from 6pm Tue-Sun) Centrally located, this former bank has decent beats, a languid lounge bar and a mood-lit restaurant.

Plastic (Map pp266-7; ☎ 02 73 39 96; www.thisisplastic.com; Viale Umbria 120; ☎ 10pm-4am Tue-Sun) Friday's London Loves takes no prisoners with an edgy, transgressive indie mix and Milan's coolest kids. If you're looking fab, club art director Nicola Guiducci's private Match à Paris on Sunday mashes French pop, indie and avant-garde sounds.

Shocking Club (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 6269 0045; www.shockingclub.net; Bastioni di Porta Nuova 12; ☎ 11.30pm-4am Tue-Sat) A huge, popular club that hosts various nights; DJs spin everything from '80s schlock to commercial house to hip hop.

Gasoline (Map pp268-9; ☎ 339 7745797; www.disco gasoline.it; Via Bonnet 11A; admission around €20; ☎ 11pm-4am Thu & Sat, midnight-4am Fri, 6-11pm Sun, closed Aug) Nights include Thursday's electro grunge Popstartz, Friday's techno/house Queen and Saturday's disorderly Disorder.

Opera & Theatre

The opera season at Teatro alla Scala (Map pp268-9) runs from November through July,

but you can see theatre, ballet and concerts here year-round, with the exception of August.

You'll need perseverance and luck to secure opera tickets at La Scala (€10 to €180; up to €2000 for opening night). About two months before the first performance, tickets can be bought by telephone – ☎ 02 86 07 75 (24 hours) – and online; these carry a 20% surcharge. One month before the first performance, remaining tickets are sold (with a 10% surcharge) at the **box office** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 7200 3744; www.teatroallascala.org; Galleria Vittorio Emanuele; ☎ noon-6pm). On performance days, 140 tickets for the gallery are sold two hours before the show (one ticket per customer). Queue early.

Musicals are staged at **Teatro Smeraldo** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 2900 6767; www.smeraldo.it, in Italian; Piazza XXV Aprile 10; ☎ box office 10am-6.15pm Mon-Sat, noon-4.30pm Sun).

Classical concerts are held at the **Auditorium di Milano** (Map pp266-7; ☎ 02 8338 9401; www.laverdi.org, in Italian; Largo Gustav Mahler, Corso San Gottardo 42a; ☎ box office 2.30-7pm Tue-Sun).

Sport

FOOTBALL

The city's two clubs, the 1899-established AC Milan and the 1908-established FC Internazionale Milano (aka 'Inter') play on alternate Sundays in season at the **San Siro stadium** (Stadio Giuseppe Meazza; off Map pp266-7; ☎ 02 404 24 32; www.sansirotour.com; Via Piccolomini 5, museum & tours Gate 14; museum adult/child €7/5, incl guided tour €12.50/10; ☎ nonmatch days 10am-5pm).

Guided tours of the stadium, built in the 1920s, take you behind the scenes to the players' locker rooms and include a visit to the Museo Inter e Milan museum, a shrine of memorabilia, papier-mâché caricatures of players, and film footage.

Take tram 24, bus 95, 49 or 72, or the metro to the Lotto stop, from where a free bus shuttles to the stadium. Buy tickets at the stadium or, for **AC Milan** (www.acmilan.com) matches, from **New Milan Point** (Map pp266-7; ☎ 02 8942 2711; Corso San Gottardo 2) and Banca Intesa Sanpaolo d'Italia branches. For **Inter** (☎ 02 5 49 14; www.inter.it) matches, try Banca Popolare di Milano branches or Ticket One (see the boxed text, p275).

FORMULA ONE

Italy's Grand Prix tears around the **Autodromo Nazionale Monza** (off Map pp266-7; ☎ 039 248 22 12; www.monzanet.it; Parco di Monza, Via Vedano 5) in September. The track is 20km north of central Milan.

SHOPPING

Milan is a shopper's paradise for fashion (see the boxed text, below) and homewares (see the boxed text, p272).

FerrariStore (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 7631 6077; www.ferrari-store.com; Piazza Liberty 8) Formula One fans can make a pit stop here at the largest of Italy's outlets, spanning three floors of cool toys, accessories and racing wear. There are two Ferrari stores at Malpensa airport too.

Markets

Markets fill the canalside Viale Papiniano in the southwest of the city on Tuesday (7.30am to 1pm) and Saturday (7.30am to 5pm). There is an antique market in Brera on Via Fiori Chiari and nearby streets every third Sunday of the month. On the second Sunday of every month, an old and antique book fair is held on Piazza Diaz.

Old gramophones and turntables, lava lamps, Bakelite telephones, tailors' mannequins, crockery, furniture, vintage clothes, shoes, jewellery and more are laid out along both banks of the city's main canal, spilling over into the surrounding streets, during the antique market held on the last Sunday of each month on the Alzaia Naviglio Grande and Ripa di Porta Ticinese.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Most European and other international flights use **Malpensa airport** (www.sea-aeroportimilano.it), 50km northwest of the city. The majority of domestic and a handful of European flights use the more convenient **Linate airport** (www.sea-aeroportimilano.it), 7km east of the city centre. For flight information, call ☎ 02 7485 2200 (both airports).

FASHION CAPITAL

Milan outflanked Florence (and Rome) to become the country's haute-couture capital in the late 1960s. Nowadays, the world's top designers unveil their women's collections in February/March and September/October, while men's fashion hits the runways in January and June/July.

Where there are fashion shows, there is shopping. Gucci moved to town from Florence in the 1960s, and its flagship store ushered in what is now known as the **Quadrilatero d'Oro** (Golden Quad; Map pp268-9), a quadrangle of pedestrian streets bordered by Via della Spiga, Via Sant'Andrea, Via Monte Napoleone and Via Alessandro Manzoni. The quad's narrow streets are crammed with Italian designers such as **Giorgio Armani** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 7600 3234; www.giorgioarmani.com; Via Sant'Andrea 9), who revolutionised the industry with his prêt-à-porter (ready to wear) collection in the early 1980s. Among the numerous other flagship stores you'll find here are Prada, Versace, Dolce & Gabbana and Moschino. The tourist office has a free map, but the ultimate way to browse is simply meandering the streets.

To accessorise in style, head to Italy's leading diamond house, **Damiani** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 7602 8088; www.damiani.com; Via Monte Napoleone 10); snazzy glove-maker **Sermoneta** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 7631 8303; www.sermonetagloves.com; Via della Spiga); and milliner **Alan Journo** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 7600 1309; www.alanjourn.com; Via della Spiga 36). The word 'milliner' derives from 'Milan', dating back to the 16th century, when the city's residents were known for their head-turning caps and bonnets.

Fashion shopping isn't confined to the Golden Quad. Giorgio Armani started out as a window dresser at the city's main department store **La Rinascente** (Map pp268-9; www.rinascente.it; Piazza del Duomo; ☎ 9.30am-10pm Mon-Sat, 10am-9pm Sun). All the major labels are represented here; you can take time out from shopping to sit on the terrace of the 7th-floor bar-restaurant overlooking the Duomo's spires.

Ultra-exclusive concept shop **10 Corso Como** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 02 2900 2674; www.10corsocomo.com; Corso Como 10) was set up by former Italian *Vogue* contributor Carla Sozzani and is secluded in a vine-draped and plant-filled townhouse courtyard.

Pick up bargain-priced designer seconds, samples and remaindered cast-offs at discount fashion outlets around the city – the tourist office has a free map. It's worth having a stroll along Corso Buenos Aires too.

An increasing number of budget airlines also use Orio al Serio airport (☎ 035 32 63 23; www.sacbo.it), near Bergamo.

Bus

Most national and international buses use the new Lampugnano bus terminal by the Lampugnano metro station (line 1 – the red line), west of the city centre. The bulk of national services are run by **Autostradale** (☎ 02 7200 1304; www.autostradale.it), which has a ticket office at the main tourist office (see p263).

Train

You can catch a train from the grand **Stazione Centrale** (Piazza Duca d'Aosta; Map pp266-7) to all major cities in Italy.

Many daily trains (fares quoted here are for the fastest available services) run to and from Venice (€25.20, 2½ hours), Florence (€39.90, two hours, 10 minutes), Genoa (€15.50, 1¾ hours), Turin (€21.90, one hour 20 minutes), Rome (€67.50, 3½ hours) and also Naples (€75.10, four hours, 50 minutes). This is also a good point to pick up international connections to/from Switzerland and France.

Ferrovie Nord Milano (FNM) trains from **Stazione Nord** (Stazione Cadorna; Map pp268-9; www.ferrovienord.it, in Italian; Piazza Luigi Cadorna) connect Milan with Como (€3.60, one hour, half hourly). Regional services to many towns northwest of Milan are more frequent from **Stazione Porta Garibaldi** (Piazza Sigmund Freud; Map pp268-9).

GETTING AROUND

To/From the Airports

LINATE AIRPORT

From Milan's Piazza Luigi di Savoia, next to Stazione Centrale, **Starfly** (Map pp266-7; ☎ 02 5858 7237) runs buses to Linate airport (adult/child €4.50/2.50, 25 minutes, half-hourly between 5.40am and 9.35pm). Tickets are sold on board, at newsstands and at a ticket office on the ground floor of the station.

Local ATM bus 73 (€1, 20 minutes, every 10 to 15 minutes from 5.35am to 12.35am) from Piazza San Babila (Map pp268-9) also does the run comfortably.

MALPENSA AIRPORT

The **Malpensa Express** (☎ 199 151152; www.malpensa.express.it; ☎ ticket office 7am-8pm) train links Stazione Nord with Malpensa airport (adult/child €11/5.50, 40 minutes, every 30 minutes).

This is the best way out, as traffic can make bus times less reliable.

Malpensa Shuttle (☎ 02 5858 3185; www.malpensa-shuttle.com; ☎ ticket office 7am-9pm) coaches depart from Piazza Luigi di Savoia (adult/child €7/3.50, 50 minutes, every 20 minutes between 5am and 10.30pm). Tickets are available in the same places as for Linate.

Autostradale also runs buses roughly every 20 minutes between 4.30am and 11pm from Piazza Luigi di Savoia (adult/child €7.50/3.75, 50 minutes).

A taxi from Malpensa into Milan will cost at least €65 (much more during peak hour).

ORIO AL SERIO AIRPORT

Autostradale runs buses approximately every 30 minutes between 4am and 11.30pm from Piazza Luigi di Savoia to Orio al Serio airport, near Bergamo (adult/child €8.90/4.45, one hour). Another service is run by **Orio Shuttle** (www.orioshuttle.com; adult/child €8/3). Shuttles (one hour) depart Piazza Luigi di Savoia every 30 to 60 minutes from 4am to 11.15pm.

Bicycle

Milan's public bicycle network, **BikeMi** (www.bikemi.it), has stops across the city. By taking a daily, weekly or annual pass, you can use the bikes to get around town, picking up and dropping them off at whatever station you choose. You can get passes online, by calling the city's public transport body, **ATM** (☎ 800 808181), or by dropping by the ATM info points (see below).

Car & Motorcycle

Street parking costs €1.50 per hour in the city centre (€2 per five hours after 7pm). To pay, buy a SostaMilano card from a tobacconist, scratch off the date and hour, and display it on your dashboard. Underground car parks charge €2.50 for the first half-hour and between €1 and €3 per hour after that, depending on length of stay. Entry to the old centre is restricted to those who acquire an **Ecopass** (☎ 02 02 02; www.comune.milano.it/ecopass) in advance. You are better off parking outside the centre and using public transport.

Rental-car companies have offices at Stazione Centrale and both airports.

Public Transport

Milan's efficient public transport system is run by **ATM** (☎ 800 808181; www.atm-mi.it). The

metro consists of four underground lines (red MM1, green MM2, yellow MM3 and blue Passante Ferroviario), which run from 6am to midnight.

A ticket costs €1 and is valid for one metro ride or up to 75 minutes' travel on ATM buses and trams. You can buy a 10-ride pass for €9.20 or unlimited one-/two-day tickets for bus, tram and metro for €3/5.50. Tickets are sold at metro stations, tobacconists and newspaper stands around town. Tickets must be validated on trams and buses.

Free transport maps are available from the **ATM Info Point** (Map pp268-9; ☎ 7.45am-7.15pm Mon-Sat) inside the Duomo metro station.

Taxi

As elsewhere in Italy, hailing taxis is futile – they don't stop. Head for a taxi rank or call ☎ 02 40 40, ☎ 02 69 69 or ☎ 02 85 85. The average short city ride will cost €10.

SOUTH OF MILAN

PAVIA

pop 70,200

First impressions of Pavia are deceiving, as its pretty old town is encircled by an industrial-agricultural belt. Pavia's cobbled streets and piazzas buzz with students from the ancient university and are a refreshing change of pace from the hubbub of Milan, 30km north. Half a day is ample.

Until the 11th century, Roman Pavia rivalled Milan as the capital of the Lombard kings, who left behind a Romanesque basilica. Legacies of the battle-plagued years that ensued include medieval watchtowers, a domed cathedral, and the 15th-century castle, the Castello Visconteo.

The area's real highlight is the Carthusian monastery, Certosa di Pavia, one of northern Italy's most lavish buildings, a 10-minute trip from Pavia by bus or car.

Information

Tourist office (☎ 0382 59 70 01; www.turismo.provincia.pv.it, in Italian; Piazza Petrarca 4; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri).

Sights

OLD TOWN

Much of Pavia's medieval centre has restricted traffic, making it pleasant for a stroll.

Looming over the old town is the forbidding **Castello Visconteo**, built in 1360 for Galeazzo II Visconti. It now houses the **Museo Civico** (☎ 0382 30 48 16; www.museicivici.pavia.it; Viale XI Febbraio 35; adult/EU senior & child to 18yr €6/free; ☎ 9am-1.30pm Tue-Sun Dec-Feb, Jul & Aug, 10am-6pm Tue-Sun, Mar-Jun & Sep-Nov). Intriguing collections include archaeological, ethnographic and art collections, plus displays on medieval Pavia, the Renaissance, the Risorgimento (the Italian reunification period) and, in the east tower, a section on Somalia (once an Italian colony).

Christopher Columbus and inventor of the electric battery, Alessandro Volta, are two illustrious graduates of the **Università degli Studi di Pavia** (University of Pavia; ☎ 0382 98 11; www.unipv.it; Corso Strada Nuova 65). Founded as a school in the 9th century, it became a university in 1361. You can wander around the grounds and courtyards when the university is open. The stately campus houses the small **Museo per la Storia dell'Università di Pavia** (☎ 0382 98 47 09; Corso Strada Nuova 65; admission free; ☎ 2-5pm Mon, 9am-noon Wed & Fri), with exhibits on its history. Other university collections can only be seen, if at all, by appointment.

Crowning the town centre is the immense dome of Pavia's red-brick **cathedral** (Piazza del Duomo; ☎ 8am-noon & 3-7pm), which is Italy's third largest. Da Vinci and Bramante contributed to the design of the cathedral, which was begun in 1488 but not completed until the 19th century. In 1989, its bell tower collapsed, killing four people.

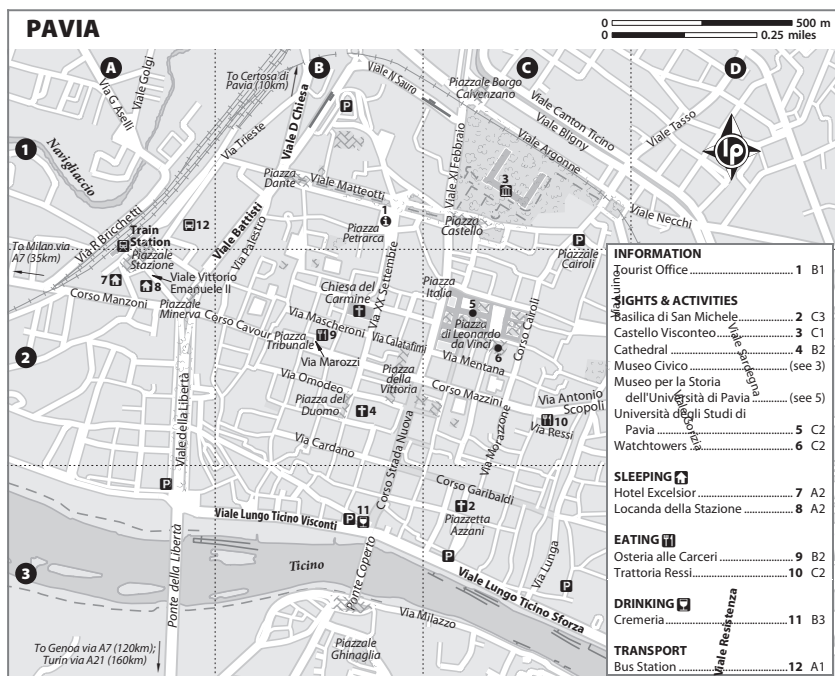
Barbarossa was crowned Holy Roman Emperor in 1155 at the **Basilica di San Michele** (Piazzetta Azzani 1), built in the Romanesque style in 1090.

More than 100 medieval watchtowers once dotted the old town; the trio of **watchtowers** on Piazza di Leonardo da Vinci and a couple scattered elsewhere in the city are all that remain.

CERTOSA DI PAVIA

One of the Italian Renaissance's most notable buildings is the splendid **Certosa di Pavia** (Pavia Charterhouse; ☎ 0382 92 56 13; www.certosadi.pavia.com; Viale Monumento; admission by donation; ☎ 9-11.30am & 2.30-5.30pm Tue-Sun). Gian Galeazzo Visconti of Milan founded the monastery, 10km north of Pavia, in 1396 as a private chapel for the Visconti family and a home for 12 monks.

The interior is Gothic, although some Renaissance decoration is evident. In the



former sacristy is a giant sculpture, dating from 1409 and made from hippopotamus teeth, including 66 small bas-reliefs and 94 statuettes. Behind the 122 arches of the larger cloisters are 24 cells, each a self-contained living area for one monk. Several are open to the public.

To reach the charterhouse (about a 10-minute walk) from the bus stop, turn right at the traffic lights and continue straight ahead. See right for bus details.

Sleeping

Locanda della Stazione (☎ 0382 2 93 21; www.locandellastazione.it; Viale Vittorio Emanuele 14; s/d with shared bathroom €30/40, d €60; ☎) With parquet or mosaic floors, stucco ceiling ornament and early-20th-century decor, this is something of a history time-war as well as pleasant, well-priced digs.

Hotel Excelsior (☎ 0382 2 85 96; www.excelsiorpavia.com; Piazzale Stazione 25; s/d €60/86; ☎) The value-for-money ratio here is high. Prints of old-town Pavia line the walls of spacious rooms, which have timber furnishings and floating floors.

Eating & Drinking

Osteria alle Carceri (☎ 0382 30 14 43; Via Marozzi 7; meals €30; ☎ lunch & dinner Mon-Fri, dinner only Sat) This inviting *osteria* (wine bar serving food) offers tables stamped with prison numbers, grilled meats and such openers as *linguine Cocco con guanciale*, *carciofi*, *semi di papavero* e *ricotta di pecora* (pasta with cheek meat, artichokes, poppy seeds and sheep's-milk ricotta).

our pick Trattoria Ressi (☎ 0382 2 01 84; Via Ressi 8-10; meals €30; ☎ closed Sun) Follow the red-brick wall down a lane to find this haven of Lombard cooking. Try the *pizzocheri valtelinesi* (a fresh buckwheat ribbon pasta served with vegetables).

Cremeria (☎ 0382 53 94 07; Piazzale Ponte Ticino 4; ☎ 11am-3pm & 6pm-2am Tue-Sat, 8.30am-2am Sun) Posers practise their art on the front terrace of this retro-glam bar overlooking the river.

Getting There & Away

Sila (☎ 199 153155; www.sila.it, in Italian) bus 175 (Pavia-Binasco-Milano) links **Pavia bus station** (Via Trieste) and Certosa di Pavia (15 minutes, at least seven daily). **Migliavacca** (☎ 0382 525858; www.migliavaccabus.it, in Italian) buses serve Milan's

Linate airport (€11, one hour) up to six times daily via Certosa di Pavia.

Plenty of direct trains link Pavia train station with Milan (from €3.05, 25 to 40 minutes), and a good number run south to Genoa (from €6.75, one hour 10 minutes to 1½ hours) and beyond.

EAST OF MILAN

Heading east of Milan brings you to the historic cities of Bergamo, Brescia, Cremona and Mantua. To their north are Italy's dazzling lakes. Lago di Como is north of Milan, while Lago d'Iseo is northeast of Bergamo and northwest of Brescia, and vast Lago di Garda is a short journey north from Mantua.

BERGAMO

pop 115,800

With its wealth of medieval, Renaissance and baroque architecture, Bergamo is one of northern Italy's most intriguing cities.

Actually, Bergamo comprises what are essentially two separate towns. The most interesting, by far, is its hilltop *città alta* (upper town), protected by more than 5km of heavy-duty walls. A funicular carries you from the western edge of the upper town up to the quaint quarter of San Vigilio. The walk to San Vigilio offers some stunning views. Down on the plain, the sprawling *città bassa* (lower town) is a mishmash of modern buildings and wide, traffic-filled streets.

Although Milan's skyscrapers to the southwest are visible on a clear day, historically Bergamo was more closely associated with Venice, which was in control of the city for 350 years until Napoleon arrived.

The nearby Bergamo Alps have a handful of small ski resorts, as well as ice- and rock-climbing opportunities.

Information

Lower town tourist office (☎ 035 21 02 04; www.turismo.bergamo.it; Piazzale Marconi; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 2-5.30pm Mon-Fri) Province-wide information, including Alpine activities. Check out www.apr.bergamo.it, too.

Ospedali Riuniti (☎ 035 26 91 11; Largo Barozzi 1) Hospital.

Police station (☎ 035 27 61 11; Via Noli 26)

Upper town tourist office (☎ 035 24 22 26; Via Gombito 13; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 2-5.30pm) Housed in a soaring, 12th-century family watchtower at the crossroads of what were once the imperial Roman roads to Milan, Brescia and Como.

Sights

PIAZZA VECCHIA

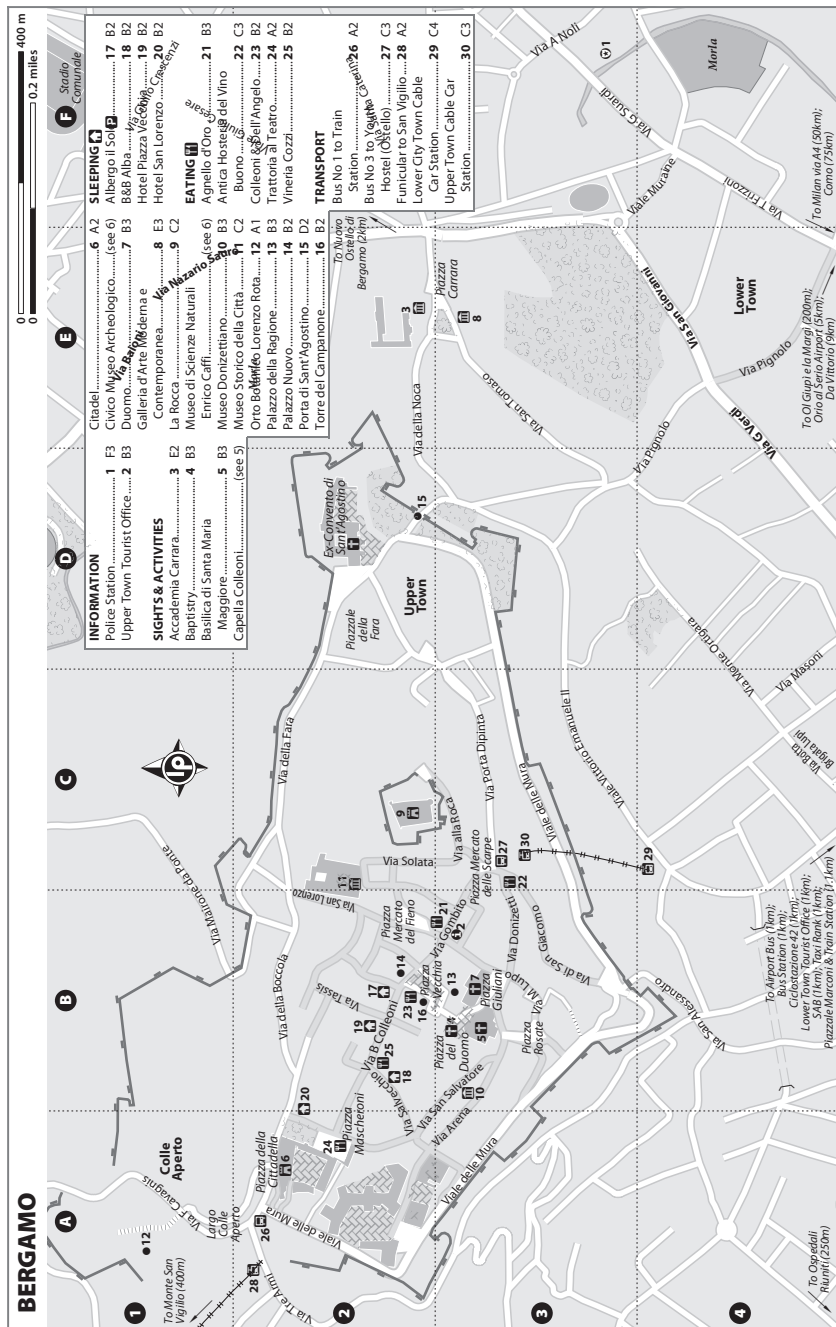
The upper town's beating heart is this cafe-clad piazza, lined by elegant architecture that is a testament in stone to Bergamo's long and colourful history. Le Corbusier apparently found it 'the most beautiful square in Europe' – good thing they didn't try out any of his ideas on it!

The white porticoed building on Via Bartolomeo Colleoni, which forms the northern side of the piazza, is the 17th-century **Palazzo Nuovo**, now a library. Turn south and you face the imposing arches and columns of the **Palazzo della Ragione**, built in the 12th century. The lion of St Mark is a reminder of Venice's long reign here. Across the square from the palace, the colossal, square-based **Torre del Campanone** (Piazza Vecchia; admission €3; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 2-5.30pm Tue-Fri, 9.30am-1pm & 2-7.30pm Sat & Sun mid-Mar–Oct, Mon-Sat by reservation Nov–mid-Mar) tolls the old 10pm curfew. There's a wheelchair-accessible lift to the top of the tower. For €5 you get entry to the tower and other sights around the city, including La Rocca and the Museo Donizettiano (see p283).

Tucked in behind these secular buildings is the core of Bergamo's spiritual life, the Piazza del Duomo. Roman remains were discovered during renovations of the modest baroque **Duomo** (cathedral; ☎ 035 21 02 23; Piazza del Duomo; ☎ 7.30-11.45am & 3-6.30pm). A rather squat ma-roon building, it has a brilliant white facade. A great deal more intriguing is the Romanesque **Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore** (☎ 035 22 33 27; Piazza del Duomo; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 2.30-6pm Apr-Oct, 9am-12.30pm & 2.30-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm & 2.30-6pm Sat, 9am-12.45pm & 3-6pm Sun Nov-Mar) next door. Begun in 1137, it is quite a mishmash. To its whirl of Romanesque apses (on which some external frescoes remain visible), Gothic additions were slapped on. A more obvious addition is the busy Renaissance **Cappella Colleoni** (☎ 035 21 00 61; Piazza del Duomo; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 2-4.30pm Tue-Sun Nov-Feb, 9am-12.30pm & 2-6.30pm Mar-Oct), on the side facing the square. Detached from the church is the octagonal **baptistry**.

CITADEL

Taking up the western corner of the upper town is the defensive hulk of Bergamo's citadel, occupied today by two mildly interesting museums, the **Museo di Scienze Naturali Enrico Caffi** and **Civico Museo Archeologico**.



MUSEO STORICO DELLA CITTÀ & MUSEO DONIZETTIANO

In the former Convento di San Francesco (founded in the 13th century), this **history museum** (☎ 035 2471 16; <http://fondazione.bergamoestoria.it>; Piazza Mercato del Fieno 6a; adult/child €3/free; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 2-5.30pm Tue-Fri, 9.30am-7pm Sat & Sun Jun-Sep, 9.30am-1pm & 2-5.30pm Tue-Fri Oct-May) emphasises the town planning that took place in the years leading up to Italian unification.

The history museum's 19th-century section is located in the fortress **La Rocca** (☎ 035 2471 16; Piazzale Brigata Legnano), whose round tower dates from Bergamo's days as a Venetian outpost. La Rocca keeps the same hours as the main museum. The same ticket covers entry here and also to La Rocca's surrounding **park**, with sweeping views over Bergamo.

History museum tickets are also good for the **Museo Donizettiano** (☎ 035 39 92 69; Via Arena 9; adult/child €3/free; ☎ 10am-1pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm & 2.30-5pm Sat & Sun), an ornate hall housing the piano and manuscripts of Bergamo's favourite musical son, Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848).

ORTO BOTANICO LORENZO ROTA

For more spectacular views, trudge uphill along Colle Aperto and bear left up a sign-posted flight of stone steps to Bergamo's **botanic garden** (Orto Botanico Lorenzo Rota; ☎ 035 39 94 66; www.ortobotanicodibergamo.it; Scaletta di Colle Aperto; admission free; ☎ 9am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-7pm Sat & Sun Apr-Sep, 9am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri Mar & Oct), planted with some 1200 species in a small but enchanting area carved out of the old Venetian defensive walls.

ART GALLERIES

Just east of the walls is one of Italy's great art repositories, **Accademia Carrara** (☎ 035 39 96 40; www.accademiaccarrara.bergamo.it; Piazza Carrara 82a; adult/child €2.60/free; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2.30-5.30pm Tue-Sun). Founded in 1780, it contains an exceptional range of Italian masters. Raphael's *San Sebastiano* is a highlight, but other artists represented include Botticelli, Canaletto, Mantegna and Titian.

To get here on foot from the upper town, pass through **Porta di Sant'Agostino** and down Via della Noca. At the time of writing it was closed for restoration, but a selection of its masterpieces was on show in the Palazzo della Ragione.

On the opposite side of the square is the **Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea** (GAMeC;

☎ 035 27 02 72; www.gamec.it; Via San Tomaso 53; admission free; ☎ 10am-1pm & 3-7pm Tue-Sun), which displays the academy's small permanent collection of modern works by Italian artists such as Giacomo Balla, Giorgio Morandi, Giorgio de Chirico and Filippo de Pisis.

Sleeping

Bergamo's proximity to the airport means hotels tend to fill up quickly – advance bookings are recommended any time of year and especially on weekends.

LOWER TOWN

Nuovo Ostello di Bergamo (☎ 035 36 17 24; www.ostellodibergamo.it; Via Galileo Ferraris 1, Monterosso; dm/s/d €18/35/50; ☎ 24hr; ☎) Bergamo's state-of-the-art HI hostel is about 4km north of the train station. Its 27 rooms offer views over Bergamo's *città alta* old centre. Take bus 6 from Largo Porta Nuova near the train station (get off at Leonardi da Vinci stop) or the No 3 bus for Ostello from the *città alta*.

UPPER TOWN

The most charming accommodation is on Bergamo's hilltop.

Albergo Il Sole (☎ 035 21 82 38; www.ilsolbergamo.com; Via Colleoni 1; s/d €65/85) The picture windows and colourful bedspreads at Il Sole lend its rooms a countrified air, which extends to its restaurant (meals €30; open Friday to Wednesday, March to October), set in a cool, leafy garden. Located just off Piazza Vecchia.

B&B Alba (☎ 349 5752596; www.bbalbachiara.info; Via Salvecchio 2; d/tr €100/120) Three spacious rooms are available in this rambling old townhouse. Mosaic and terracotta floors, high, frescoed ceilings, the odd item of antique furniture, and loads of atmosphere make this B&B attractive.

Hotel San Lorenzo (☎ 035 23 73 83; www.hotel.sanlorenzobg.it; Piazza Mascheroni 9a; s €75-110, d €100-170; ☎) San Lorenzo offers 25 quiet and comfortable (if somewhat plain) rooms in a thoughtfully renovated old building overlooking Piazza Mascheroni. Try for a room on the upper level with a mountain-facing balcony.

Hotel Piazza Vecchia (☎ 035 428 42 11; www.hotel.piazzavecchia.it; Via Colleoni 3; s €135-170, d €150-190; ☎) Carved out of a 13th-century building a few steps off Piazza Vecchia, this hotel's 13 rooms are all quite different. All have parquet floors and baths in stone, but details vary:

some have exposed beams while others have a balcony, or king-size bed.

Eating

The Bergamaschi like their polenta as much as many other northerners and even named a classic sweet after it: *polenta e osei* are pudding-shape cakes filled with jam and cream, topped with icing and chocolate birds. The final product looks like, but isn't, polenta. Bergamo also contributed *casonsei* (aka *casoncelli*), a kind of ravioli stuffed with meat, to the Italian table, and the area is noted for its fine red wines, including Valcalepio.

LOWER TOWN

Oi Giupi e la Margi (☎ 035 24 23 66; Via Borgo Palazzo 25; meals €30; ☹ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun, closed Aug) Sample authentic Bergamo delicacies in this authentic brick-vaulted restaurant. You can choose from fried sausages, risotto, and roast rabbit with grappa and polenta. They offer a set lunch menu at €28 and set dinner tasting menu for €40.

Da Vittorio (☎ 035 68 10 24; Via Cantalupa 17, Brusaporto; set menus €70-140; ☹ Thu-Tue, closed 3 weeks Aug) Bergamo's acclaimed Vittorio is set in a country house 9km east of town and is up there with the best restaurants in Italy, (not the least on account of its truffle dishes (a special truffle menu can cost €280). They also have some rooms (single/double €200/250).

UPPER TOWN

Picnickers can pick up steaming-hot pizza slices, focaccias and desserts at high-quality bakeries along the upper town's main street.

Agnello d'Oro (☎ 035 24 98 83; Via Gombito 22; set menus €20; ☹ lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Tue-Sat) With the incredible clutter of objects adorning every wall, this 17th-century spot could easily pass for an eccentric antique shop. Rooms here (singles/doubles €55/92) are attractive, and you can dine alfresco in summer.

Antica Osteria del Vino Buono (☎ 035 24 79 93; Piazza Mercato delle Scarpe; meals €25; ☹ dinner Tue, lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) Feast on typical dishes like cheese-sprinkled *casoncelli* (home-made pasta cushions filled with a spicy sausage meat and laced with a buttery sage sauce) followed by a plate of *stincò al forno con polenta* (baked beef shank with polenta).

Trattoria al Teatro (☎ 035 23 88 62; Piazza Mascheroni 3; meals €30-35; ☹ Tue-Sun) Located in a centuries-old building at the west end of the *città alta*,

this family-run spot has a limited but constantly changing menu of down-home local dishes. Choose from a handful of *primi* and *secondi*, with such local classics as *casoncelli alla bergamasca*, followed perhaps by a *filetto ai ferri* (a grilled beef filet).

Vineria Cozzi (☎ 035 23 88 36; www.vineriacozzi.it; Via Colleoni 22; meals €35-45; ☹ Thu-Tue) Sample the extensive wine list by the glass and dine inside or in the tiny courtyard. Several pasta and rice options lead the way, and you might follow with a rabbit done in local Valcalepio red wine. The desserts, with a slightly modern touch, are all homemade.

Colleoni & Dell'Angelo (☎ 035 23 25 96; www.colleonidellangelo.com; Piazza Vecchia 7; meals €50-60, tasting menus €75; ☹ Tue-Sun) Piazza Vecchia provides the ideal backdrop to savour inventive local cuisine in an extraordinary setting. First courses include *ravioloni ripieni di Bagoss alle foglie di basilico fritto e vitello glassato* (big dumplings filled with local Bagoss cheese with fried basil leaves and veal glazing).

Getting There & Away

AIR

Bergamo's airport, **Orio al Serio** (☎ 035 32 63 23; www.sacbo.it), is 4km southeast of the train station. Served by regular and budget airlines, there are daily flights to/from the UK and other European destinations.

BUS

From Bergamo's **bus station** (☎ 800 139392, 035 28 90 00; www.bergamotrasporti.it), just off Piazzale Marconi, **SAB** (☎ 035 28 90 00; www.sab-autoservizi.it, in Italian) operates services to the lakes and mountains.

TRAIN

From the Piazzale Marconi train station, there are one or two trains an hour to/from Milan, although not all call at Stazione Centrale (€4.20, 50 to 65 minutes). Every 30 to 60 minutes a train runs to/from Brescia (€3.60, one to 1½ hours).

Getting Around

TO/FROM THE AIRPORT

ATB (☎ 035 23 60 26) buses to/from Orio al Serio airport depart every 20 minutes from Bergamo bus and train stations (€1.70, 15 minutes). Direct buses also connect the airport with Milan and Brescia.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

ATB's bus 1 connects the train station with the funicular to the upper city and Colle Aperto (going the other way, some buses stop only at the Porta Nuova stop). From Colle Aperto, either bus 21 or a funicular continues uphill to San Vigilio. Buy tickets, valid for 75 minutes' travel on buses, for €1 from machines at the train and funicular stations or at newspaper stands. Funicular tickets cost €1.50.

BICYCLE

You can hire bikes just outside the train station at **Cidostazione 42** (☎ 389 5137313; www.pedalo.polis.org; Piazzale Marconi; per day €10; ☎ 7.30-11.30am & 4-7.30pm Mon-Fri).

VALTELLINA

Nestled at the foot of the Alps that sit astride the border between Lombardy and Switzerland, the Valtellina valley offers some great off-the-beaten-track exploration and, up in the mountains, skiing and walking options.

The **Valtellina tourist board** (www.valtellina.it) has several information points throughout the region, including the main **tourist office** (☎ 0342 45 11 50; Piazzale Bertacchi 77, Sondrio; ☎ 9am-noon & 3.30-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-noon Sat) in the transport hub of Sondrio. The tourist office has information for hikers. For information on the Alpine ski resort of Bormio, in Valtellina's far eastern reaches, see Parco Nazionale dello Stelvio, p335.

Trains link Milan with Sondrio (€7.80, two hours, every two hours) and terminate further east at Tirano. From Sondrio, buses connect the Valtellina's resorts and towns.

BRESCIA

pop 189,700

Urban sprawl, a seedy bus and train station area, and the odd skyscraper don't hint at Brescia's fascinating old town, which serves as a reminder of its substantial history.

Brescia already had centuries of (now-obscure) history behind it when the Romans conquered the Gallic town in 225 BC. The Carolingians took over in the 9th century, and were followed by a millennium's worth of outside rulers, including the Venetians. As revolutionary fervour swept Europe in 1848-49, Brescia was dubbed 'The Lioness' for its 10-day attempted uprising against Austria in a prelude to its participation in the move-

ment towards Italian unification a decade later.

Legacies of Brescia's past include significant Roman ruins, two cathedrals and a vast medieval castle. As a result, the town is filled with gaggles of kids on school excursions (if you're here during term time, you're bound to encounter them).

Information

Infopoint (☎ 030 240 03 57; www.provincia.brescia.it/turismo; Piazza Loggia 6; ☎ 9am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun & holidays)

Police station (☎ 030 3 74 41; Via Botticelli 2) South-east of the centre.

Post office (Piazza della Vittoria)

Spedali Civili (☎ 030 3 99 51; Piazzale Spedali Civili) Hospital, located north of the centre.

Sights

Audioguides (€5) covering the central sights are available from the tourist office.

CASTELLO

Brescia's historic centre is dominated by a hill, **Colle Cidneo**, crowned with the rambling **Castello** (Castle; admission free; ☎ 8am-8pm), which for centuries was at the core of the city defences. **Torre Mirabella**, the main round tower, was built by the Viscontis in the 13th century.

The castle hosts two mildly diverting **museums** (dual admission €5; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 2.30-5pm Tue-Sun Oct-May, 10am-1pm & 2-6pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep), the **Museo delle Armi Antiche** (☎ 030 29 32 92; www.bresciamusei.it), with its extensive collection of vintage weaponry, and the **Civico Museo del Risorgimento** (☎ 030 4 41 76), dedicated to the history of Italian unification.

ROMAN SIGHTS

The most impressive of Brescia's Roman relics are the remains of the **Tempio Capitolino** (Via dei Musei; admission free; ☎ 11am-4pm), a Roman temple built by the Emperor Vespasian in AD 73. The **Palazzo Martinengo** (☎ 030 280 79 34; Via dei Musei 28; admission varies; ☎ 9.15am-1pm Mon-Fri) provides a lavish backdrop for temporary art exhibitions.

About 50m east of the Tempio Capitolino along Via dei Musei, cobbled Vicolo del Fontanon leads to the well-preserved ruins of a **Roman theatre**. Limited remains of the ancient town's **forum** stand on Piazzale del Foro.

Continuing east you'll reach Brescia's most intriguing sight – the jumbled **Monastero di**



Santa Giulia & Basilica di San Salvatore. Inside this rambling church and convent complex is the **Museo della Città** (☎ 030 297 78 34; Via dei Musei 81b; adult/student 14-18yr/child €8/6/free, temporary exhibitions extra; ☎ 9am-7pm Tue-Thu & Sun, 9am-8pm Fri & Sat), where artefacts from the Roman town are on show, including some intricate mosaics. The star piece of the collection is the 8th-century Croce di Desiderio, a Lombard cross encrusted with hundreds of jewels.

CATHEDRALS

The most compelling of all Brescia's religious monuments is the 11th-century **Duomo Vecchio** (Old Cathedral; Piazza Paolo VI; ☎ 9am-noon & 3-7pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-noon & 3-6pm Tue-Sun Nov-Mar), a rare example of a circular-plan Romanesque

basilica, built over a 6th-century church. Interesting features include fragmentary floor mosaics and the elaborate 14th-century sarcophagus of Bishop Berardo Maggi. Next door, the **Duomo Nuovo** (New Cathedral; Piazza Paolo VI; ☎ 7.30am-noon & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 8am-1pm & 4-7pm Sun), dating from 1604, dwarfs its ancient neighbour but is of less interest. Also on the square is **il Broletto**, the medieval town hall with an 11th-century tower.

OTHER SIGHTS

Pinacoteca Civica Tosio-Martinengo (☎ 030 377 49 99; Via Martinengo da Barco 1; admission €3; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 2.30-5pm Tue-Sun Oct-May, 10am-1pm & 2.30-6pm Tue-Sun Jun-Sep) features works by artists of the Brescian school, as well as some by Raphael,

Lorenzo Lotto and Luca Giordano. It is closed for restoration until 2011.

The **Torre dell'Orologio** (clock tower), with its exquisite astrological timepiece, is modelled on the one in Venice's Piazza San Marco.

Sleeping

Hotel Cristallo (☎ 030 377 24 68; www.hotelcristallo.brescia.com; Viale della Stazione 12a; s/d €62/103; ☼ ☼ ☼) A short suitcase drag from the station, the straightforward Cristallo has dated veneer furniture, floral bedspreads and generous bathrooms. It's ideal for those with an early morning train.

Albergo Orologio (☎ 030 375 54 11; www.albergoorologio.it; Via Beccaria 17; s/d €115/130; ☼ ☼ ☼) Fine art and artefacts, and soft gold, brown and olive furnishings and terracotta floors make this boutique hotel a gem. It's right by its namesake clock tower in the pedestrianised old town.

Hotel Vittoria (☎ 030 28 00 61; www.hotelvittoria.com; Via X Giornate 20; s/d €166/274; ☼ ☼ ☼) With its chandeliers, grand ballrooms and classically appointed guest rooms, this 1938 hotel is a good value.

Eating

Risotto, beef dishes and *lumache alla bresciana* (snails cooked with Parmesan cheese and fresh spinach) are common in Brescia. The surrounding countryside produces good wines, including those from Botticino, Lugana and Riviera del Garda.

Osteria al Bianchi (☎ 030 29 23 28; Via Gasparo da Salò 32; meals €20-25; ☼ Thu-Mon) Crowd inside this late-19th-century classic for wine and snacks at the bar or a full meal at one of the timber tables out back. You might be tempted by the *pappardelle al Taleggio e zucca* (broad ribbon pasta with Taleggio cheese and pumpkin).

ourpick **Trattoria Due Stelle** (☎ 030 375 81 98; Via San Faustino 46; meals €30; ☼ Wed-Mon) Timber-panelled walls, sturdy dark-wood dining tables (each with candle) and great grub entice locals and outsiders alike to sit down for a feast. They do some excellent risottos (try *agli scampi mantecato alla citronette* – a creamy risotto loaded with crayfish and touched with citronette dressing).

La Sosta (☎ 030 29 25 89; Via Martino della Battaglia 20; meals €50-60; ☼ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun, closed Aug) Set partly in the stables of a 1610

palace, La Sosta excels at finely tuned gastronomic creations. The *filetto di vitello alla scamorza affumicata* (a veal filet cooked in smoked cheese) melts in the mouth.

For fresh fruit and vegies head for Brescia's colourful **market** (Piazza del Mercato; ☼ 7.30am-7pm Mon-Sat).

Getting There & Around

Brescia's underused **airport** (Aeroporto Gabriele d'Annunzio; ☎ 030 204 15 99; www.aeroporto.brescia.it) is 20km east of Brescia. Buses connect the airport with Brescia's bus station (to airport €11, from airport €7.50, 25 minutes).

From the **bus station** (☎ 030 4 49 15; Via Solferino) buses operated by **SAIA Trasporti** (☎ 800 883999; www.saiatrasporti.it, in Italian) serve destinations all over Brescia province. Some leave from another station off Via della Stazione.

There are regular trains to and from Milan (€5.55 to €13.30, 45 minutes to 1½ hours) and Verona (€3.95, 40 minutes).

Usually, from June to September you can pick up a bicycle (€1 for two hours, €10 a day) from the **bicycle kiosk** (☼ 7.30am-8.30pm) in front of the train station on Piazzale Stazione or from another bicycle station just off Via Gambara.

CREMONA

pop 72,000

A wealthy, independent city-state for centuries, Cremona boasts some fine architecture. The city is best known around the world, however, for its violin-making traditions (see the boxed text, p289).

Cremona's medieval heart, with its magnificent cathedral, is a beauty. On the main square, the **tourist office** (☎ 0372 2 32 33; <http://turismo.comune.cremona.it>; Piazza del Comune 5; ☼ 9am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Sep-Jun, 9am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Mon-Sat, 9am-12.30pm Sun Jul & Aug) can give you information on the town.

Sights

Cremona was an independent *comune* until the 14th century, when the Viscontis of Milan added it to their growing collection. To maintain the difference between the secular and spiritual, buildings connected with the Church were erected on the eastern side of **Piazza del Comune**, and those concerned with secular affairs were constructed across the way. On the second Sunday of every month, the piazza is filled with antiques stalls.

The cathedral's most prized possession is the 'Holy Thorn', allegedly from the Crown of Thorns worn by Jesus Christ, which was donated to the church by Cremona-born Pope Gregory XIV in 1591. It's kept behind bars in the Capella delle Reliquie. In the crypt, the robed and masked body of Cremona's 12th-century patron saint, Sant'Omobono Tucenghi, is on show in a glass casket.

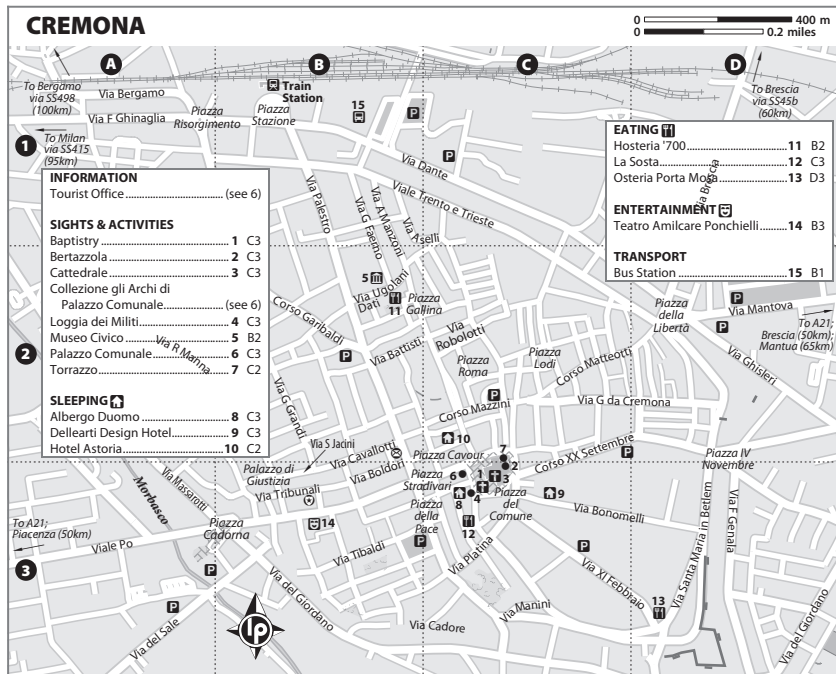
The adjoining 111m-tall **torrazzo** (bell tower; adult/child €4/3, incl baptistry €5/4; ☑ 10am-1pm Tue-Fri, 10am-1pm & 2.30-6pm Sat & Sun), which translates ap-

proportionately to something like 'great, fat tower', sports a giant zodiacal clock and is connected to the cathedral by a Renaissance loggia, the **Bertazzola**. On the other side of the cathedral is the tall, octagonal, 12th-century **baptistry** (adult/child €2/1, incl torrazzo €5/4; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2.30-6pm Tue-Sun), which houses some architectural fragments, including a 12th-century figure of the Archangel Gabriel that once perched on the roof of the baptistry.

Across the square is **Palazzo Comunale** and, to its south, the smaller porticoed **Loggia dei Militi**; both date to the 13th century. The former was, and remains, the town hall; the latter housed the town's militia.

Albergo Duomo (☎ 0372 3 52 96/42; fax 0372 45 83 92; Via Gonfalonieri 13; s/d €45/65; (P) ☒) Just a few steps from Cremona's cathedral and ablaze with flowers in wrought-iron boxes in spring, Albergo Duomo offers decent rooms with basic furniture and all-white decor

Hotel Astoria (☎ 0372 46 16 16; www.astoriahotel-cremona.it; Via Bordigallo 19; s/d €60/90; ♿) Down a quiet, narrow lane near Piazza Cavour, this



CREMONA'S VIOLINS

It was in Cremona that Antonio Stradivari lovingly put together his first Stradivarius violins, helping establish a tradition that continues today. Other great violin-making dynasties that started here include the Amati and Guarneri families.

Some 100 violin-making workshops in the streets around Piazza del Comune can be visited. The tourist office has a list, and can advise on those where English is spoken. You can also find information at www.cremonaliuteria.it.

Various events dedicated to violin-making take place each year, while the **Triennale Inter-nazionale degli Strumenti ad Arco** (International Stringed Instrument Expo; www.entetriennale.com) is held in Cremona every third year in September/October; the next will be in 2012.

Year-round you can visit the **Collezione gli Archi di Palazzo Comunale** (☎ 0372 2 05 02; Piazza del Comune 8; adult/child €6/3.50, incl Museo Civico €10/5; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun), featuring instruments from the Stradivari workshop. The **Museo Civico** (☎ 0372 3 12 22; Via Ugolani Dati 4; adult/child €7/4, incl Civica Collezione di Violini €10/5; ☎ 9am-6pm Tue-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun) has drawings and tools as well as instruments by Amati and Guarneri (plus art and archaeological finds).

To hear Cremona's violins in action, the season at the 19th-century **Teatro Amilcare Ponchielli** (☎ 0372 02 20 01; www.teatroponchielli.it; Corso Vittorio Emanuele II 52) runs from October to June; programs and ticket information are posted on its website.

is a charming spot with French-washed corridors and immaculate rooms (including some with separate bedrooms that are handy if you're travelling with kids).

Dellearti Design Hotel (☎ 0372 2 31 31; www.dellearti.com; Via Bonomelli 8; s/d €119/169; ☎ ☎ ☎) This rather self-consciously hi-tech vision of glass, concrete and steel has rotating displays of contemporary paintings and photographs, a Turkish bath and a gym, and suitably chic rooms with clean lines, bold colours and artistic lighting. For those who want to feel like they never left the fashion crowd in Milan, this could be the place.

Our pick **Hosteria '700** (☎ 0372 3 61 75; Piazza Gallina 1; meals €25-30; ☎ lunch & dinner Wed-Sun, lunch Mon) Behind the dilapidated facade and a row of parked cars lurks a sparkling gem. A series of vaulted rooms set a romantic scene for hearty Lombard cooking. Try the *marubini al brodo o al burro fuso* (meat- and cheese-stuffed disks of pasta in broth or melted butter), a Cremona speciality.

Osteria Porta Mosa (☎ 0372 41 18 03; Via Santa Maria in Betlem 11; meals €25-30; ☎ Mon-Sat) Dark, polished wood tables are offset by aquamarine decor and art hanging on the walls. The almost sugar-sweet *ravioli di zucca* (pumpkin ravioli) are especially good.

La Sosta (☎ 0372 45 66 56; Via Vescovo Sardo 9; meals €30-35; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun Sep-Jun) Surrounded by violin-makers' workshops, this is a beautiful place to feast on regional delicacies, such as *bollito* (boiled meats) and *co-*

techino (boiled pork sausage) with polenta and *mostarda* (fruit in a sweet mustard sauce).

Getting There & Away

The city can be reached by train from Milan (€5.55, one hour and 10 minutes to 1¼ hours, several daily), Mantua (€4.60, 45 minutes to 1½ hours, hourly) and Brescia (€4.20, one hour, hourly), or from the south by changing at Piacenza. Buses serve the local area.

MANTUA (MANTOVA)

pop 47,650

Serene and beautiful, Mantua lies on the shores of Lago Superiore, Lago di Mezzo and Lago Inferiore. Unlike the pre-Alpine and Alpine Lombard lakes further north, Mantua is on the open plain, and its trio of lakes is actually a glorified widening of the river Mincio. Parts of its waters are protected by the Parco del Mincio, but petrochemical-industry sprawl has scarred the surrounding countryside.

Mantua was settled by the Etruscans in the 10th century BC and prospered under Roman rule. Latin poet Virgil was born just outside the modern town in 70 BC. The city fell into the hands of the Gonzaga dynasty in 1328, under whose rule it flourished, attracting the likes of Petrarch and Rubens. Shakespeare's Romeo found his fateful poison in a Mantuan apothecary. The golden days of 'La Gloriosa' ceased when Austria took control in 1708. Habsburg troops were in control (aside from the Napoleonic interlude at the end of the

MANTUA

INFORMATION

- 1 Police Station 1 E3
 2 Post Office 2 D4
 3 Tourist Office 3 D3

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

- 4 Basilica di Sant'Andrea 4 D3
 5 Castello di San Giorgio 5 F2
 6 Cattedrale 6 E2
 7 Imbarco Motonavi Andes 7 F2
 8 Motonavi Andes 8 E2
 9 Navi Andes 9 C1
 10 Palazzo Broletto 10 E3
 11 Palazzo della Ragione 11 E3
 12 Palazzo Ducale 12 E2
 13 Rocanda di San Lorenzo 13 D3
 14 Torre della Gabbia 14 E3

SLEEPING

- 15 Hotel ABC 15 B3
 16 Hotel Broletto 16 E3
 17 Libenter B&B 17 E4
 18 Redigili Hotel 18 E3

EATING

- 19 Caravatti 19 E3
 20 Frangola Antica 20 F3
 21 Grifone Bianco 21 E3
 22 Hosteria dei Canossa 22 D2
 23 La Ducale 23 D3
 24 Libenter Moderna 24 E3
 25 Osteria 25 E3
 26 Pavesi 26 E3
 27 Ristorante Masseria 27 E3

TRANSPORT

- 27 Bus Station 27 B3



18th and early 19th centuries) until 1866, when Mantua joined a newly united Italy.

Superb architecture bears witness to the city's rich history, particularly around its four interconnected, cobbled old town squares. It so impressed Unesco that, along with nearby Sabbioneta (see p293), it became Italy's 42nd World Heritage site in 2008.

Information

The Mantova Card (€5), valid for five days, gets you reduced admission prices to various museums, free public transport and discounts in some hotels and restaurants. Ask at the tourist office.

Spedale Carlo Pola (☎ 0376 20 11; Via Albertoni 1) Hospital

Police station (☎ 0376 20 51; Piazza Sordello 46)

Post office (Piazza Martiri di Belfiore 15)

Tourist office (☎ 0376 43 24 32; www.turismo.mantova.it; Piazza Mantegna 6; ☎ 9.30am-6.30pm)

Sights

PALAZZO DUCALE

Occupying a whopping chunk of the city's northeastern corner, the imposing walls of **Palazzo Ducale** (☎ 0376 35 21 00; www.mantovaducal.it; Piazza Sordello 40; adult/student 18-25yr/EU senior & child €6.50/3.25/free; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Tue-Sun) hide three squares, 15 courtyards, a park and 500-odd rooms. The centrepiece is **Castello di San Giorgio**, overflowing with works of art collected by the Gonzaga family, Mantua's long-time rulers. Don't miss Andrea Mantegna's **Camera degli Sposi**, a wonderful series of frescoes executed by the master between 1465 and 1474 in one of the castle's towers. The trompe l'œil oculus adds a playful touch to the more formal family scenes. You may find it necessary to book entry to this for an extra €1. Other rooms worth pausing over include the **Sala del Pisanello**, decorated with unfinished 15th-century frescoes of Arthurian legends by Pisanello, the heavily frescoed **Sala di Troia** and the **Camera dello Zodiaco**, with its magnificent deep-blue ceiling festooned with figures from the zodiac. Equally bizarre is the 18th-century **Sala dei Fiumi**, a Habsburg-era folly with artificial grottoes covered in shells and mosaic. No photography is allowed.

CHURCHES

The elaborate baroque cupola of **Basilica di Sant'Andrea** (☎ 0376 32 85 04; Piazza Andrea Mantegna; admission free; ☎ 8am-noon & 3-7pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-

noon & 3-6pm Sat, 11.45am-12.15pm & 3-6pm Sun) lords it over the city. Designed by Leon Battista Alberti in 1472, it safeguards a much-disputed relic: golden vessels said to hold earth soaked by the blood of Christ. Longinus, the Roman soldier who speared Christ on the cross, is said to have scooped up the earth and buried it in Mantua after leaving Palestine. Today, these containers rest beneath a marble octagon in front of the altar and are paraded around the town in a grand procession on Good Friday. There is no dispute about the tomb of Andrea Mantegna, also inside the basilica.

South of the basilica, across 15th-century colonnaded Piazza delle Erbe, is the 11th-century Romanesque **Rotonda di San Lorenzo** (☎ 0376 32 22 97; Piazza delle Erbe; admission free; ☎ 10am-1pm & 3-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-1pm & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar), sunk below the level of the square and believed to stand on the site of a Roman temple dedicated to Venus. In the **Palazzo della Ragione**, (☎ 0376 22 00 97; Piazza delle Erbe; admission free; ☎ 10am-1pm & 4-7pm Tue-Sun during temporary exhibitions), which runs the length of the square from the Rotonda and was once the seat of secular power in the city, you can see exhibitions of varying interest (usually free).

The **Cattedrale** (Cathedral; Piazza Sordello 16) pales before the magnificence of the basilica. The facade was erected in the mid-18th century, while the decoration inside was completed by Giulio Romano after a fire in 1545.

PALAZZO TE

The main reason to visit Mantua's other Gonzaga palace, **Palazzo Te** (☎ 0376 32 32 66, 199 199111; www.centropalazzote.it; Viale Te; adult/student/senior/child €8/2.50/5/free; ☎ 1-6pm Mon, 9am-6pm Tue-Sun) isn't its modern art and Egyptian displays, but the fanciful 16th-century palace itself. Built by Giulio Romano, over-the-top rooms include the Camera dei Giganti, one of the most fantastic and frightening creations of the Renaissance, adorned with dramatic frescoes depicting Jupiter's destruction of the Titans.

OTHER SIGHTS

Past the 13th-century Palazzo della Ragione is **Palazzo Broletto**, which dominates neighbouring Piazza Broletto. In a niche on the facade is a seated figure wearing a doctor's cap said to represent Virgil.

Enter Piazza Sordello from the south, and on your left you have the grand house of the

Gonzagas' predecessors, the Bonacolsi clan. Hapless prisoners used to be dangled in a cage from the tower, aptly called the **Torre della Gabbia** (Cage Tower).

In 1476, the ruling Gonzaga family gave Andrea Mantegna land on which to build himself a house. You can see the results, now used as exhibition space in the **Casa Mantegna** (☎ 0376 36 05 06; www.provincia.mantova.it/casadelmantegna, in Italian; Via G. Acerbi 47; admission €2-5; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Tue-Sun). The sober facade gives way to a series of rooms built around a unique, cylindrical courtyard.

Activities

BOAT TOURS

Motonavi Andes (☎ 0376 36 08 70; www.motonaviandes.it, in Italian; Via San Giorgio 2) organises boat tours of the lakes (starting from €8 for 1½ hours), five-hour excursions to San Benedetto Po (one-way Monday to Saturday €13.50, Sunday €15.50) and day trips to Venice (€77 Monday to Saturday, €84 Sunday). Boats arrive/depart from the **Imbarco Motonavi Andes**, behind Castello di San Giorgio on Lago di Mezzo's shore.

The separate company **Navi Andes** (☎ 0376 32 45 06; www.naviandes.com; Lago di Mezzo jetty) runs similarly priced tours. **Local boat owners** (Barcaoli del Mincio; ☎ 0376 34 92 92; www.fiumeminio.it) arrange eco-themed trips on less-explored waterways. Ask at the tourist office.

CYCLING

The tourist office stocks an excellent booklet in English detailing cycling itineraries along the Po river, in the **Parco del Mincio** (☎ 0376 22 83 20; www.parcodelmincio.it; Piazza Porta Giulia 10, Cittadella) and around the lakes. One 48km route takes cyclists around Lago Superiore to the Santuario di Santa Maria delle Grazie and back to Mantua. Rent bikes from **La Rigola** (☎ 0376 36 66 77; Via Trieste 7; per day from €10).

PARCO DELL SCIENZA

A riverside promenade with an informative twist, the **Parco della Scienza** stretches along the shore of Lago di Mezzo from Porta San Giorgio to Porta Molina. Information panels and gadgets illustrate various physical and scientific phenomena in a kid-friendly fashion.

Festivals & Events

For five days each September, central Mantua is taken over by the **Festivaletteratura** (Literature

Festival; www.festivaletteratura.it), with open-air bookstalls, and readings and author discussions (some in English).

The city's jazz festival, **Mantova Jazz** (www.mantovajazz.it, in Italian) swings from late March through early May.

Sleeping

Hotel ABC (☎ 0376 32 23 29; www.hotelabcmantova.it; Piazza Don Leoni 25; s/d €65/95; ☎ ☎ ☎) Opposite the train station, this hotel is a reasonable and convenient option, with clean, comfortable rooms. Some have wooden beams in the ceiling.

Hotel Broletto (☎ 0376 22 36 78; www.hotelbroletto.com; Via dell'Accademia 1; s/d €75/120; ☎ ☎ ☎) The location of this hotel – just off Piazza Broletto and 100m from the lake – can't be beat. Rooms are somewhat old-fashioned (built-in wood-grain furniture, lino floors) but come with contemporary comforts, including satellite TV.

Libenter B&B (☎ 334 791 0912; www.libenter.org; Via Pomponazzo 15; apt incl breakfast €70-150; ☎ ☎) This artistically decorated house overlooking a courtyard has two one-room apartments and a two-room apartment, offering independence in a central location. Apartments sleep up to four. Breakfast is served at Libenter Moderna Osteria, the owners' trendy little eatery nearby at Piazza Concordia 18.

Rechigi Hotel (☎ 0376 32 07 81; www.rechigi.com; Via Pier Fortunato Calvi 30; s/d €140/190; ☎ ☎ ☎) A stark marble interior provides a fabulous backdrop for the Le Corbusier designer chairs and contemporary art at Mantua's unique art hotel. Less elaborate than the lobby, rooms are cool, calm and sophisticated. Out back is a relaxing courtyard.

Eating

More than a million pigs a year are reared in the province of Mantua. Try pancetta, *prosciutto crudo* (cured ham, aka Parma ham) and risotto with the locally grown *vialone nano* rice. *Tortelli di zucca* (sweet pumpkin-stuffed cushions of square pasta) is the city's most venerable dish, while *risotto alla pilota* (risotto with minced pork) and *luccio* (pike) also appear on most menus. Mantua is also renowned for its sweet specialities, including *torta di tagliatelle* (an unusual slice made from crunchy tagliatelle pasta baked with sugar and almonds) and *torta sbrisolona* (a hard, biscuitlike 'cupcake' with almonds).

Open-air cafes abound on Piazzas Sordello, Broletto and Erbe.

Fragoletta Antica (☎ 0376 32 33 00; Piazza Arche 5; meals €35; ☹ Tue-Sun) Set just back from the waterfront, this rustic place serves *risotto alla pilota*, and gnocchi with ricotta, burnt butter and *parmigiano reggiano*. The dining room is warm and cosy, filled with heavy wood and lined with bottles of wine.

Ristorante Masseria (☎ 0376 36 53 03; Piazza Broletto 7; meals €36; ☹ lunch Fri-Tue, dinner Thu-Tue) Masseria's supremely sweet *tortelli di zucca* is among the best in town; other house specialities include Mantuan beef stew with Lambrusco and polenta, and platters piled with local cheeses and dollops of mustard. Choose to eat in the cobbled square, or in a 13th-century dining room overlooked by a 15th-century fresco – the oldest depiction of the city in existence.

Hosteria dei Canossa (☎ 0376 22 17 50; Vicolo Albergo 3; meals €40-45; ☹ Wed-Mon) Hidden away on a tiny side street, this local gem dishes up regional risotto, pasta and meat dishes teamed with hard-to-find Lombard wines from between its red-brick walls.

Grifone Bianco (☎ 0376 36 54 23; www.grifonebianco.it; Piazza delle Erbe 6; meals €45-50; ☹ Thu-Mon) For gastronomic cuisine par excellence, Grifone's damask tablecloths and heavy silverware – not to mention the plates of local salami and pike with salsa and polenta – make it stand out.

Pick up sweet local treats from **Caravatti** (Piazza delle Erbe 18); **La Ducale** (Via Pier Fortunato Calvi 25), both dating from 1865; or the friendly **Pavesi** (cnr Via dell'Accademia & Via Broletto).

Getting There & Around

APAM (☎ 0376 23 01; www.apam.it, in Italian) operates buses to/from Sabbioneta (return tickets only) and San Benedetto Po. Azienda Provinciale Trasporti Verona (ARV) buses head to Lago di Garda (see p308).

From the **train station** (Piazza Don Leoni), there are direct trains to/from Cremona (€4.60, 45 to 90 minutes, one to two an hour), Milan (€7.85, two to 2½ hours, one every one to two hours) and Verona (€2.55, 45 to 50 minutes, once every hour or so – but none from 7.51am to 12.21pm!). Connect in Verona for Venice.

AROUND MANTUA

Sabbioneta

pop 4370

Some 30km southwest of Mantua, the surreal settlement of Sabbioneta was created in the

16th century by Vespasiano Gonzaga Colonna in an attempt to build a Utopian city.

Within the walls are four 16th-century monuments. Sabbioneta's **ticket office** (☎ 0375 5 20 39; www.sabbioneta.org; Piazza d'Armi 1; ☹ 9.30am-1pm & 2.30-6pm Tue-Fri, 9.30am-1pm & 2.30-6.30pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct, closes 1hr earlier Nov-Mar), inside Palazzo Giardino, sells tickets to all (adult/student/child €10/5/free).

The **Teatro all'Antica** (Antique Theatre, completed 1590) has statues of Olympic gods topping a loggia held up by Corinthian pillars, and the frescoed walls and painted-wood ceiling of the 90m-long **Galleria degli Antichi** (Gallery of the Ancients). The duke of Sabbioneta resided in **Palazzo Giardino** (Garden Palace) and ruled the dukedom from the 1554 **Palazzo Ducale**. Also within the walls are a 19th-century **synagogue** (separate ticket available for those who wish to visit only the synagogue, €4) and the **Museo di Arte Sacra**, with a treasury containing a Golden Fleece medallion found in the tomb of Vespasiano Gonzaga.

A handful of simple cafe-restaurants are scattered along Sabbioneta's streets.

APAM (☎ 0376 23 01; www.apam.it) buses link Sabbioneta with Mantua.

San Benedetto Po

pop 7640

The highlight of this otherwise sleepy Po valley town, 21km southeast of Mantua, is its Benedictine **abbey** (☎ 0376 62 00 25; Piazza Matteotti; church free, museum €2; ☹ church 7.30am-12.30pm & 3-7pm, cloisters 8am-7pm). Founded in 1007, little remains of the original buildings, although the Chiesa di Santa Maria still sports a 12th-century mosaic. Don't miss the Correggio fresco, which was discovered in the refectory in 1984.

Buses and trains both serve San Benedetto Po from Mantua, but the most scenic way to arrive is by boat (see opposite).

THE LAKES

Writers from Goethe and Stendhal to DH Lawrence and Hemingway have all lavished praise on the Italian lakes, but even their words scarcely express the lakes' beauty.

Elaborate villas attest to the roll call of celebrity visitors and residents that the lakes, which are ringed by snow-powdered mountains, have attracted over the centuries. Tourism, though, isn't as prevalent around the lakes as you might expect. Many northern

Italians visit for the day or weekend, and summer generally sees northerners head for the Ligurian seaside, meaning it's possible to find relative peace in many parts of the lakes even in Italy's peak holiday month of August.

The lakes fan out across Italy's north. In this guide, we've covered the main lakes from west to east. Sprinkled between them are several smaller lakes.

The westernmost of the main lakes, Lago d'Orta, is entirely within Piedmont and possibly the most romantic. The three big ones are, west to east, Lago Maggiore, with its spectacular Borromean Islands; Lago di Como, closed in by densely wooded mountains and sprinkled with dazzling villas and gardens; and Lago di Garda, the biggest and the busiest. Its southeast corner (in the Veneto region) has Disney-style family amusement parks, including Italy's largest, Gardaland. The northern reaches of Lago di Garda extend into the Alpine region of Trentino-Alto Adige.

Trains serve many of the lakes' main towns, while passenger and car ferries ply the waters. If you're travelling by car, there are some twisty but stunning lakeside drives. Heavy traffic and narrow roads make cycling along many stretches of the lakes less than ideal.

LAGO D'ORTA

Shrouded by thick, dark-green woodlands, little Lago d'Orta measures 13.4km long and just 2.5km wide. It's separated from its bigger and better-known eastern neighbour, Lago Maggiore, by Monte Mottarone.

The focal point of the lake is the medieval village of **Orta San Giulio** (population 1170), often referred to simply as Orta. Just across from the town's web of squares and cobbled lanes sits **Isola San Giulio**. The island is dominated at its south end by the 12th-century **Basilica di San Giulio** (☎ 9.30am-6.45pm Tue-Sun, noon-6.45pm Mon Apr-Sep, 9.30am-noon & 2-5pm, 2-5pm Mon Oct-Mar), full of vibrant frescoes that alone make a trip to the island worthwhile. The church, island and mainland town are named after a Greek evangelist, Giulio, who's said to have rid the island of snakes, dragons and assorted monsters in the late 4th century. The foot-path encircling the island makes for a peaceful stroll, hence its popular name of Via del Silenzio. You may find the island's only snack restaurant open on busy weekends. Regular ferries (€2.50 return) and private boats (€4 return) make the five-minute crossing.

For more serenity, head up to **Sacro Monte**, a hillside dotted with some 20 small chapels dedicated to St Francis of Assisi. The parklands here are a great spot for a picnic: pick up picnic fare at Orta San Giulio's Wednesday market.

Orta San Giulio's **main tourist office** (☎ 0322 90 51 63; www.comune.ortasangiulio.no.it; Via Panoramica; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-6pm Wed-Sun Apr-Oct, 9am-1pm & 2-6pm Wed-Fri, 8am-12.30pm & 1.30-5pm Sat & Sun Nov-Mar) has information on the lake and its green surroundings. The local **Pro Loco tourist office** (☎ 0322 9 01 55; Via Bossi 10; ☎ 11am-1pm & 2-6pm Mon & Wed-Fri, 10am-1pm & 2-6pm Sat & Sun) in the town hall is also useful.

Sleeping & Eating

Camping Orta (☎ 0322 9 02 67; www.campingorta.it; Via Domodossola 28, Orta San Giulio; camping 2 people, car & tent €27.50-31.50; ☎ ☎ ☎) Open year-round, with heated facilities in winter, this family-run camping ground is by the lake just 1.5km northeast of Orta San Giulio's medieval centre. The bulk of the sites are on the inland side of the main road. For a few euros extra, you can have a spot across the road on the lake.

Piccolo Hotel Olina (☎ 0322 90 56 56; www.orta.net/olina; Via Olina 40, Orta San Giulio; s/d €75/100; ☎ ☎) Artistically decorated with contemporary prints, bright colours and light-wood furniture, this ecofriendly hotel right in Orta San Giulio's medieval heart is a gem. They have home-baked breakfasts, and their avant-garde restaurant, **Ristoro Olina** (see opposite) is open to nonguests.

Villa Crespi (☎ 0322 91 19 02; www.slh.com/crespi; Orta San Giulio; s/d from €220/280; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Staying at this 19th-century Moorish caprice, which is topped with an aqua onion-dome spire, is to give oneself over to opulence. Grand interiors sport 19th-century furniture, and gardens sprawl out from the main property.

Enoteca Al Boeuc (☎ 339 584 00 39; Orta San Giulio 28; dishes €6-13; ☎ 6.30pm-1am) This candlelit old-town treasure is excellent for wine by the glass, cheese and meat platters and Piedmontese favourite, *bagna cauda* (a hot dip made of butter, olive oil, garlic and anchovies in which you dip vegetables).

Agriturismo Il Cucciaio di Legno (☎ 0322 90 52 80; Via Prisciola 10 Località Legro; set menus €25; ☎ dinner Thu-Sun) A 500m stroll beyond the train station, this honest-to-goodness *agriturismo* restaurant (no guest rooms) cooks up delicious local dishes including risotto, fish straight out of the lake,

and salami and cheese from the surrounding valleys. Dine alfresco on the vine-draped patio overlooking the herb-planted garden.

our pick **Ristoro Olina** (meals €30-35; ☎ Thu-Tue)

The restaurant at Piccolo Hotel Olina does imaginative takes on Italian cooking and has immaculate service. You might start with the slightly sweet and sour *gnocchi di castagne e zucca con crema di radicchio scottato* (chestnut and pumpkin gnocchi in a radish cream).

Getting There & Away

Orta Miasino train station is a 3km walk from the centre of Orta San Giulio. Between March and October, a little **tourist train** (one-way/return €2.50/4; ☎ Thu-Tue) shuttles between the town centre and the train station approximately every half-hour. From Milan there are trains from Stazione Centrale (change at Novara; 5.40, two hours).

Navigazione Lago d'Orta (☎ 0322 84 48 62) runs boats to numerous lakeside spots from its landing stage on Piazza Motta, including Isola San Giulio (one-way/return €1.80/2.50), Omegna (€4/6), Pella (€2.20/4) and Ronco (€2.80/4). A day ticket for unlimited travel anywhere on the lake costs €7.50.

LAGO MAGGIORE

If you're arriving from Switzerland by train, once you emerge from the Alpine tunnels into the bright Italian sunlight, the views of the flower-filled Borromean Islands studding the dazzling blue lake are unforgettable.

The train line shadows the lake's western shore, which is its prettiest side; sprinkled with picturesque villages and towns, including the main town, Stresa.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Bus routes leave from the waterfront at Stresa for destinations around the lake and elsewhere, including Milan, Novara and Lago d'Orta. The daily Verbania Intra-Milan bus service operated by **SAF** (☎ 0323 55 21 72; www.safduemila.com, in Italian) links Stresa with Arona (€2, 20 minutes), Verbania Pallanza (€2, 20 minutes), Verbania Intra (€2, 25 minutes) and Milan (€6.70, 1½ hours).

Stresa is on the Domodossola-Milan train line (see opposite). Domodossola (€3 to €7.60), 30 minutes northwest, is on the Swiss border, from where the train line leads to Brig and on to Geneva.

Ferries and hydrofoils around the lake are operated by **Navigazione Lago Maggiore** (☎ 800 551801; www.navigazionealago.it, in Italian), which has its main ticket office in Arona. Boats connect Stresa with Arona (one-way adult/child €7.40/4, 40 minutes), Angera (€7.40/4, 35 minutes), Baveno (€4.90/2.80, 20 minutes) and Verbania Pallanza (€6.30/3.50, 35 minutes).

Various one-day passes are also available: departing from Stresa, a ticket covering Isola Superiore (aka dei Pescatori), Isola Bella and Isola Madre costs €12; and an unlimited day ticket covering Isola Superiore and Isola Bella costs €9.80. More-expensive one-day passes also include admission to the various villas.

Services are drastically reduced in autumn and winter.

The only car ferry connecting the western and eastern shores for motorists sails between Verbania Intra and Laveno. Ferries run every 20 minutes; one-way transport costs between €6.90 and €11.50 for a car and driver or €4.30 for a bicycle and cyclist.

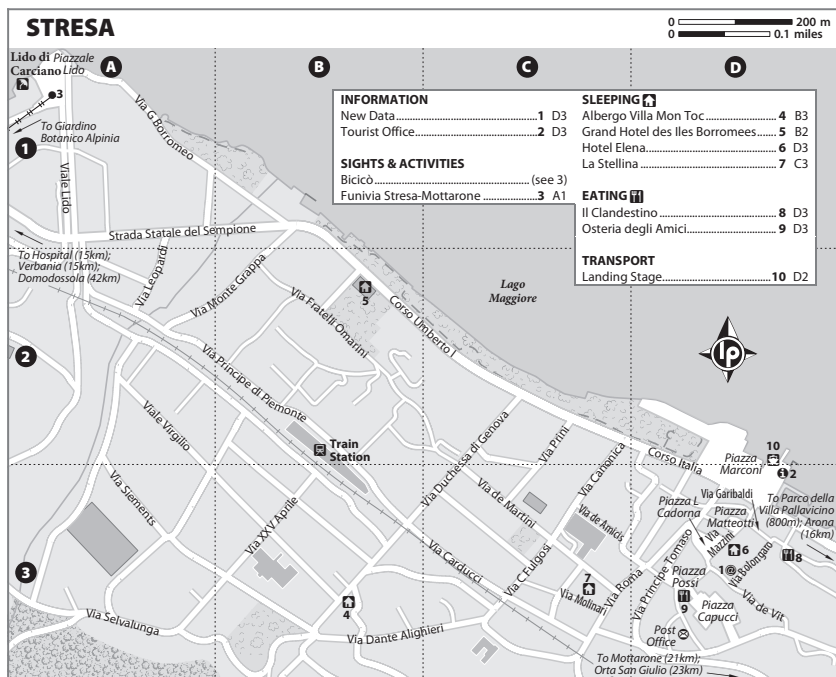
Stresa

pop 5180

Facing due east across the lake, Stresa has a ringside view of the fiery orange sun rising up over the water. The town's easy access from Milan has made it a favourite for artists and writers seeking inspiration. Hemingway was one of many; he arrived in Stresa in 1918 to convalesce from a war wound. A couple of pivotal scenes towards the end of his novel *A Farewell to Arms* are set at the Grand Hotel des Iles Borromees, the most palatial of the hotels garlanding the lake. Stresa still has something of a nostalgic air from this era.

LAGO MAGGIORE EXPRESS

Lago Maggiore Express (www.lagomaggiore-express.com; adult/child €30/15) is a picturesque day trip under your own steam (no guide) that includes train travel from Arona or Stresa to Domodossola, from where you get a charming little train to Locarno in Switzerland and a ferry back from Locarno to Stresa. The two-day version is perhaps better value if you have the time, costing €36/18. Tickets are available from Navigazione Lago Maggiore (above).



Offshore, the Borromean Islands make an ideal ferry excursion from Stresa.

INFORMATION

Banks and ATMs abound on Corso Italia, Stresa's waterfront promenade. Check out www.visitstresa.com for more info on the town.

New Data (☎ 0323 83 03 23; Via De Vit 15a; per 30min €3; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 3.30-6pm) Internet access.

Tourist office (☎ 0323 3 13 08; <http://distrettolaghi.eu>; Piazza Marconi 16; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 3-6.30pm mid-Mar-mid-Oct, 10am-12.30pm & 3-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-12.30pm Sat mid-Oct-mid-Mar).

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Captivating views of the lake unfold during a 20-minute cable-car journey on the **Funivia Stresa-Mottarone** (☎ 0323 3 02 95; www.stresa-mottarone.it; Piazzale della Funivia; adult/child return €17.50/11; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm) to the top of 1491m-high Monte Mottarone. Cars depart every 20 minutes in summer. On a clear day you can see Lago Maggiore, Lago d'Orta, several other smaller lakes and Monte Rosa, on the Alpine border with Switzerland.

At the Alpino midstation (803m), more than 1000 Alpine and sub-Alpine species flourish in the **Giardino Botanico Alpino** (☎ 0323 3 02 95; www.giardinoalpino.it; adult/child €2/1.50; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Apr-Oct), a botanical garden dating from 1934.

The mountain itself offers good **biking trails** as well as **walking** opportunities (it takes about four hours to walk from Stresa to the top). **Bicicò** (☎ 0323 3 03 99; www.bicico.it) rents out mountain bikes at the lower Stresa cable-car station. Rates include a helmet and road book detailing a 25km panoramic descent (about three hours, of which only about 30 minutes require slight ascents, thus making it accessible to pretty much anyone who can ride a bike) from the top of Mottarone back to Stresa. A one-way trip with a bike on the cable car to Alpino/Mottarone costs €7/10.

Skiing down Mottarone's gentle slopes is limited to five green and two blue slopes, making it good for beginners. Gear can be hired from the station at the top of Mottarone. The **ski pass** (www.mottaroneski.it; adult/child return €23/17.50) includes the cost of the cable car; you can hire gear at the top.

Exotic birds and animals roam relatively freely at the kid-friendly **Parco della Villa Pallavicino** (☎ 0323 3 15 33; www.parcozoopallavicino.it; adult/child €9/6; ☎ 9am-6pm Mar-Oct), at the southern end of Stresa.

SLEEPING & EATING

There are some 40 camping grounds up and down the lake's western shore; the tourist office has a list. Seasonal closings are generally November to February, but this can vary, so it's always best to check ahead. Beware that quite a few hotels close from late November to February too.

Hotel Elena (☎ 0323 3 10 43; www.hotelelena.com; Piazza Cadorna 15; s/d €55/80; [P]) Adjoining a cafe, the old-fashioned Elena is slap-bang on Stresa's pedestrian central square. Wheelchair access is possible, and all of Elena's comfortable rooms, with parquet floors, have a balcony, many overlooking the square.

La Stellina (☎ 0323 3 24 43; www.lastellina.com; Via Molinari 10; s/d €70/80) A couple of blocks' stroll from the main square, an early-19th-century building makes a beautiful backdrop for this charming little B&B. One of its three floral-themed rooms, the 'rose room', has a wooden spiral staircase leading to an attic sitting room.

Albergo Villa Mon Toc (☎ 0323 3 02 82; www.hotelmontoc.com; Viale Duchessa di Genova 67-69; s/d €55/85; [P]) A cheerful, three-storey, orange residence, this is a comfortable spot just back from the railway. Rooms have a pleasingly old-fashioned air, with dark wooden furniture, big beds and throw rugs on the tile floors. A big plus is the lovely garden out the back.

Osteria degli Amici (☎ 0323 3 04 53; Via Anna Maria Bolongaro 33; pizzas €4.50-9, meals €25) You may need to queue (it's always packed) but it's worth it to dine under vines on one of Stresa's most delightful terraces in the centre of town.

our pick Il Clandestino (☎ 0323 3 03 99; Via Rosmini 5; meals €30; ☎ Wed-Mon) An elegant corner dining room, Il Clandestino serves up great lake fish and seafood, with some of the ingredients and ideas coming from Sicily. Try the *scampi e gamberi di Sicilia nel raviolo di farro biologico* (Sicilian prawns and scampi in a big organic pasta raviolo).

Borromean Islands

Forming Lago Maggiore's most beautiful corner, Isole Borromee can be reached

from various points around the lake, but Stresa and Baveno offer the best access. Three of the four islands – Bella, Madre and Pescatori (also called Superiore) – can all be visited, but San Giovanni is off limits to the public.

ISOLA BELLA

Isola Bella took the name of Carlo III's wife, the *bella* Isabella, in the 17th century, when its centrepiece, **Palazzo Borromeo** (☎ 0323 3 05 56; www.borromeoturismo.it; adult/child €12/5; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Apr-mid-Oct), was built for the Borromeo family. Presiding over 10 tiers of terraced gardens, the baroque palace contains works by Tiepolo and van Dyck (to see the bulk of the art you have to buy a €16 ticket granting access to the Galleria dei Quadri), as well as Flemish tapestries and sculptures by Canova. Well-known guests have included Napoleon and Josephine in 1797 (you can see the bed they slept in), and Prince Charles and Princess Di in 1985. The Borromeo family still use it as their summer residence, occupying the 2nd floor during August and September (although the grounds and lower floors remain open to visitors). Beneath a 23m-high ceiling in the former concert room is a 200-year-old wooden model of the palace and island. A combined ticket covering admission to the Borromeo and Madre palaces costs €16.50/7.50 per adult/child.

What's left of the island swarms with stalls selling gelati, pizzas and souvenirs.

Elvezia (☎ 0323 3 00 43; Isola Bella; meals €30-35; ☎ Tue-Sun Mar-Oct, Fri-Sun Nov-Feb) is the place for authentic family cooking. It serves pastas, including ravioli stuffed with ricotta and a chunky lasagna, as well as lake fish such as perch baked in foil. Booking ahead is essential for dinner in winter.

ISOLA MADRE

All of Isola Madre is taken up by the fabulous 16th- to 18th-century **Palazzo Madre** (☎ 0323 3 05 56; adult/child €10/5; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mar-Oct). White peacocks whose fanned feathers resemble bridal gowns strut around English-style gardens that rival those of Isola Bella. Palace highlights include a neoclassical puppet theatre designed by a scenographer from Milan's La Scala, and 'horror' theatre with a cast of devilish marionettes.

See above for combined tickets for Isola Madre and Isola Bella.

ISOLA SUPERIORE (PESCATORI)

Tiny 'Fishermen's Island, in the absence of souvenir stalls, retains much of its original fishing-village atmosphere. Apart from an 11th-century apse and a 16th-century fresco hanging in the **Chiesa di San Vittore**, there are no real sights; hence many visitors make it their port of call for lunch. Restaurants cluster around the boat landing, all serving grilled fish fresh from the lake from around €15.

If you want to stay on the island, the romantic **Albergo Verbano** (☎ 0323 3 04 08; www.hotelverbano.it; s/d €120/185; ☹ Mar-Dec) has a dozen rooms with wrought-iron bedsteads, and half- and full-board options. The hotel will send its own boat out free for guests once the ferries have stopped running.

South of Stresa

It was in **Arona** (population 14,370), 20km south of Stresa, that the son of the Count of Arona and Margherita de' Medici, who would go on to become San Carlo Borromeo (1538–84), was born. His birthplace, the Rocca Borromea castle, was later destroyed by Napoleon. But Arona's saint is far from forgotten: in addition to a church and several chapels, the hill dedicated to him bears the revered religious monument, **Sancarlone** (admission €4; ☹ 9am–12.30pm & 2–6.15pm Apr–Sep, 9am–12.30pm & 2–6.15pm Sat & Sun Oct, 9am–12.30pm & 2–4.30pm Sat & Sun Mar, Nov & Dec). Erected between 1614 and 1698, the 35m bronze-and-copper statue can be climbed, affording a spectacular view from the top.

Across the water, the imposing medieval hilltop fortress, the **Rocca di Angera**, houses the 12-room **Museo della Bambola** (Doll Museum; ☎ 0331 93 13 00; adult/child €7.50/4.50; ☹ 9am–5.30pm Apr–mid-Oct), displaying the Borromeo family's priceless collection of dolls. Combined tickets with Isola Bella and Isola Madre are €20/10 for adult/child.

Various waterside cafes offer magnificent views of the castle, but for a culinary treat, head just outside the centre of town to **Hotel Lido Angera** (☎ 0331 93 02 32; www.hotellido.it; Viale Libertà 11; meals €45; ☹ lunch & dinner Tue–Sun, dinner Mon) for fresh lake fish. Set on the lake and surrounded by greenery, this hotel-restaurant serves up an original sushi platter of Lake Maggiore fish as a starter. The rooms (singles/doubles €78/110) are also tempting.

The **Monastery of Santa Caterina del Sasso** (admission free; ☹ 8.30am–noon & 2.30–6pm) is one of the

most spectacularly located places in northern Italy. Clinging to the high rocky face of this southeast shore of Lake Maggiore, about 13km north of Angera, it is reached by a spiralling stairway (a lift is being built too) from 60m above. The church is actually the cobbling together of a series of 13th- and 14th-century chapels to form an oddly shaped whole, and is filled with a carnival of frescoes.

North of Stresa

Heading 4km north of Stresa brings you to **Baveno** (population 4860), which has good ferry links to the Borromean Islands, and a fistful of hotels. If you've got energy to burn (or kids who do), stop off at **Lake Maggiore Adventure Park** (☎ 0323 91 97 99; www.sport-fun.info; Strada Cavalli 18, Baveno; adult/child €22/15; ☹ 10am–7pm Mar–Nov). Thrills and spills include suspension courses, an artificial climbing wall, a tram-pole 'acro-jump', and a cycling course with jumps. Its cafe has stunning lake views from its patio.

Further north towards Switzerland, **Verbania** (population 30,940), the biggest town on the lake, is split into three districts. Verbania Pallanza is the most interesting district, with a tight web of lanes in its old centre and, the city's highlight, the grounds of the late-19th-century **Villa Taranto** (☎ 0323 40 45 55; www.villataranto.it; Via Vittorio Veneto; adult/child €9/5.50; ☹ 8.30am–6.30pm Mar–Sep, to 5pm Oct). In 1931, royal archer and Scottish captain Neil McEacharn bought the villa from the Savoy family. He planted some 20,000 species over 30 years, and today it is considered one of Europe's finest botanical gardens. Boats stop at Pallanza and at the landing stage in front of the villa.

Verbania's **tourist office** (☎ 0323 50 32 49; www.verbania-turismo.it; Corso Zanitello 6–8; ☹ 9am–1pm & 3–6pm Mon–Fri) is on the waterfront in Verbania Pallanza and has accommodation details. Backpackers will want to make a beeline for the lake's only hostel, **Ostello Verbania** (☎ 0323 50 16 48; prenotazioni@ostelloverbania.it; Via alle Rose 7; dm incl breakfast €16, s/d €25/€50; ☹ reception 9am–noon & 4–10pm Mar–Oct & Christmas; P). It has lake glimpses for its privileged spot high up back from the old centre of Verbania Pallanza. **Caffè Bolongaro** (☎ 0323 50 32 54; Piazza Garibaldi 9; pizzas €4.50–8), on the waterfront in Pallanza, is the perfect place for pizza: they have an interminable and tasty selection.

Five kilometres short of the Swiss border is **Cannobbio** (population 5120). The **tourist office**

(☎ 0323 7 12 12; www.procannobio.it; Via Giovanola 25; ☎ 9am-noon & 4-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon Sun & holidays) is just inland off the main lakeside road, which here runs through the centre of town. Between that road and the lake, the tiny toy town's spotless cobbled streets are impossibly quaint and the pastel waterfront a dream location for the *passeggiata* and a bite at one of several eateries.

Cannobio has an active sailing and wind-surfing school, **Tomaso Surf & Sail** (☎ 0323 7 22 14; www.tomaso.com; Via Nazionale 7), next to a patch of gritty beach at the village's northern end. Mountain bikes can be hired per hour/day for €4/14 from **Cidi Prezan** (☎ 0323 7 12 30; www.cidiprezan.it; Viale Vittorio Veneto 9).

Hotel Pironi (☎ 0323 7 06 24; www.pironihotel.it; Via Marconi 35; s €120, d €130-170), in a 15th-century *palazzo* amid Cannobio's cobbled maze, is one of several charming hotels in the village. It also has a restaurant, with tables under the portico. Waterfront Piazza Vittorio Emanuele III is also lined by eateries.

LAGO DI COMO

In the shadow of the snow-covered Rhaetian Alps, Lago di Como (also known as Lago Lario) is the most spectacular of the lakes. Shaped like an upside-down letter Y, its squiggly shoreline is scattered with villages, including exquisite Bellagio, in the centre of the inverted V on the lake's southern shore. Where the southern and western shores converge is the lake's main town, Como. Lecco, the other large town on the lake, sits where the southern shore meets the less-explored eastern shore.

Lombard kings once took refuge from invaders on Isola Comacina, the sole island in this beguiling 146-sq-km body of water.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

The Como-based **ASF Autolinee** (☎ 031 24 72 47; www.sptlinea.it, in Italian) operates regular buses around the lake, which depart from the bus station. Key routes include Como-Colico (€5.10, 1½ hours, three to five daily), via all the villages on the western shore mentioned in this section; and Como-Bellagio (€2.75, one hour, 10 minutes, hourly).

Trains from Milan's Stazione Centrale and Porta Garibaldi station (€3.60 to €8.50, 40 minutes to one hour, hourly) use Como's main train station (Como San Giovanni), and some continue on into Switzerland. Trains

from Milan's Stazione Nord (€3.60, one hour, hourly) use Como's lakeside Stazione FNM (listed on timetables as Como Nord Lago). Trains from Milan to Lecco continue north along the eastern shore.

Navigazione Lago di Como (☎ 800 551801; www.navigazione.laghi.it; Piazza Cavour) ferries and hydrofoils criss-cross the lake, departing year-round from the jetty at the northern end of Piazza Cavour. One-way fares range from €1.90 (Como-Cernobbio) to €10 (Como-Lecco). Return tickets are double.

Car ferries link Cadenabbia on the west shore with Varenna on the eastern shore and Bellagio.

Como

pop 83,170

Elegant Como is the main access town to the lake. Its twin claims to fame are the lake with which it shares its name, and its silk industry. Como's mulberry trees died out in the early 1900s from a combination of disease and the Industrial Revolution, but although the yarn is now imported, silk is still woven and designed here.

INFORMATION

L'Arco del Sole (031 449 18 91; Via Garibaldi 59; per hr €3 ☎ 7am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun) A cheerful cafe with internet terminals and wi-fi.

Ospedale Sant'Anna (☎ 031 58 51; Via Napoleona 60) Hospital.

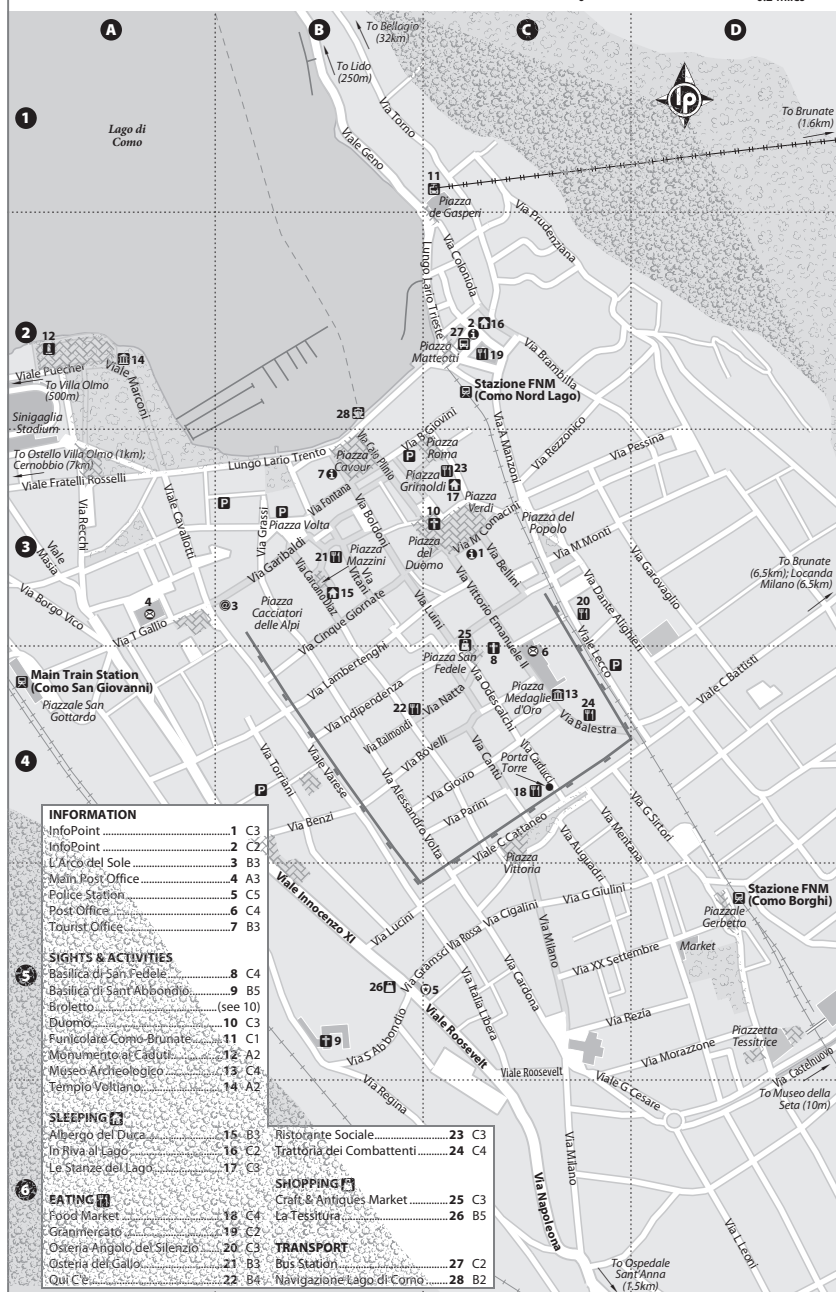
Police station (☎ 031 31 71; Viale Roosevelt 7)

Post office (☎ 8.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-12.30pm Sat) Main branch (Via T. Gallio 6); Old Town (Via Vittorio Emanuele II 113) The main branch also has currency exchange.

Tourist office (☎ 031 26 97 12; www.lakecomo.org; Piazza Cavour 17; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2.30-6pm Mon-Sat, plus 9.30am-1pm Sun Jun-Sep); InfoPoint (Bus station; ☎ 10.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-6pm Mon & Wed-Fri, 10am-8pm Sat, Sun & holidays); InfoPoint (Via Maestri Comacini; ☎ 10.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-6pm Tue-Fri, 10am-1pm & 2-6pm Sat, Sun & holidays).

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Como's lakeside location is stunning, and its narrow pedestrian lanes are a pleasure to explore, with some notable sights along the way. Elements of baroque, Gothic, Romanesque and Renaissance styles can be seen in Como's marble-clad **Duomo** (cathedral; Piazza del Duomo; ☎ 7am-noon & 3-7pm). The cathedral was built between the 14th and 18th centuries, and



is crowned by a high octagonal dome. Next door, the polychromatic **Broletto** (medieval town hall) looks like a mere appendage of the church.

The circular layout of the original 6th-century **Basilica di San Fedele** (Piazza San Fedele; ☎ 8am-noon & 3.30-7pm), with three naves and three apses, has been likened to a clover leaf. Its 16th-century rose window and precious 16th- and 17th-century frescoes add to its charm. The facade is the result of a 1914 remake, but the apses are the real McCoy, featuring some eye-catching sculpture on the east side.

About 500m south of the city walls and just beyond the busy and rather ugly Viale Innocenzo XI is the remarkable 11th-century Romanesque **Basilica di Sant'Abbondio** (Via Regina; ☎ 8am-6pm). In addition to its proud, high structure and impressive apse with beautiful geometric relief decoration around the exterior windows, there are remarkable frescoes depicting scenes from the life of Christ on the inside of the apse.

Significant remains from prehistoric and Roman times are displayed at the **Museo Archeologico** (☎ 031 25 25 50; Piazza Medaglie d'Oro 1; adult/senior/child €3/1.50/free; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 2-5pm Tue-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun). A block south, Como's **city walls** were rebuilt in 1162 following their demolition by the Milanese in 1127; They had forced Como to surrender, destroy all its buildings (save its churches) and walls, and become dependent on Milan until Barbarossa came along in 1152.

The lakeside **Tempio Voltiano** (☎ 031 57 47 05; Viale Marconi; adult/senior/child €3/1.50/free; ☎ 10am-noon & 3-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct, 10am-noon & 2-4pm Nov-Mar) was built in 1927. This neoclassical temple is now a museum devoted to Como-born electric-battery inventor Alessandro Volta (1745-1827). The **Monumento ai Caduti** (War Memorial; Viale Puecher 9), nearby, is a classic example of Fascist-era architecture and dates to 1931.

South of the old town, the **Museo della Seta** (Silk Museum; ☎ 031 30 31 80; www.museosetacom.com; Via Castelnovo 9; adult/child €8/2.60; ☎ 9am-noon & 3-6pm Tue-Fri) unravels the town's silk history, with early dyeing and printing equipment on display.

Northeast along the waterfront, past Piazza Matteotti and the train station, is the **Funicolare Como-Brunate** (☎ 031 30 36 08; www.funicolarecomo.it; Piazza de Gasperi 4; adult/child one-way €2.50/1.65, return €4.35/2.75; ☎ 6am-midnight mid-Apr-mid-Sep, to 10.30pm

mid-Sep-mid-Apr), a cable car built in 1894. It takes seven minutes to reach hill top **Brunate** (720m), a quiet village offering splendid views. In **San Maurizio**, about a 30-minute, rather steep walk (mostly along a stone, former mule path) from Brunate's funicular stop, there are 143 steps leading to the top of the lighthouse, built in 1927 to mark the centenary of Alessandro Volta's death.

The tourist office has ample walking and cycling information.

SLEEPING

Ostello Villa Olmo (☎ 031 57 38 00; ostellocomo@tin.it; Via di Bellinzona 6; dm incl breakfast €15; ☎ reception 7-10am & 4pm-midnight, closed Dec-Feb; ☎) In a rambling garden right on the lakefront, Como's HI hostel is two doors up from the heritage-listed villa of the same name. There's a midnight curfew but a fun night-time bar (alcohol service ceases at 10pm). Meals cost €10. The hostel is 1km from the main train station and 20m from the closest bus stop. Take bus 1, 6 or 11.

In Riva al Lago (☎ 031 30 23 33; www.inrivaallago.com; Piazza Matteotti 4; s/d without bathroom €38/47, s/d with bathroom €45/63, 2-person apt from €70; ☎) Don't be deceived by the unassuming exterior of this hotel, situated right behind the bus station. Simple but pleasing rooms with tile floors are tastefully furnished, some with original wood beams, and there are a handful of apartments for up to five people.

Le Stanze del Lago (☎ 339 544 65 15; www.lestanze dellago.com; Via Rodari 6; 2-/4-person apt from €70/90; ☎) Five cosy apartments, nicely decked out in modern but understated fashion, make for a good deal in the heart of Como. For stays of five days or longer you can use the kitchen too. They all feature double bed, sofa-bed, timber ceilings and tiled floor.

Albergo del Duca (☎ 031 26 48 59; www.albergodel duca.it; Piazza Mazzini 12; s/d €75/120; ☎ ☎ ☎) Set on a peaceful square in central Como, the hotel occupies a renovated 17th-century building with a pleasant internal courtyard. Rooms, which exude the warmth that comes from hardwood floors, look either on to the square or the courtyard.

Locanda Milano (☎ 031 336 50 69; www.locanda milano.it, in Italian; Via Volta 62, Brunate; s/d €80/100; ☎) Get away from it all in the hilltop village of Brunate, where Locanda Milano offers restful rooms in pretty yellow and blue hues, perched above its well-regarded restaurant (meals €45).

EATING

Trattoria dei Combattenti (☎ 031 270574; Via Balestra 5/9; meals €20; ☹ Wed-Mon) Set in the building of the Italian retired servicemen's association, this popular trattoria offers seating inside or in a sunny gravel yard at the front. Simple but irresistible cooking is the name of the game. Opt for an *insalatone* (€9) if you want a 'big salad', or the €14 set lunch.

Osteria del Gallo (☎ 031 27 25 91; Via Vitani 16; meals €25; ☹ lunch Mon-Sat) This ageless *osteria* is a lunchtime must. The menu is recited and might include a first of giant ravioli stuffed with mozzarella and topped with tomatoes, followed by lightly fried fillets of agone, a local lake fish.

Ristorante Sociale (☎ 031 26 40 42; Via Rodari 6; meals €25; ☹ Wed-Mon) The Sociale is a local institution. The upstairs dining room has an outsized baroque fireplace and frescoes. The server will announce a constantly changing series of dishes of the day. Cooking is no-nonsense, ranging from *risotto trevisana* (with chicory) to huge Milanese *scaloppine* (veal escalopes).

Osteria Angolo del Silenzio (☎ 031 337 21 57; Viale Lecco 25; meals €35-40; ☹ lunch & dinner Wed-Sun, dinner Tue) The Corner of Silence is loved by locals for dishes like *tagliatelle nere con gamberi e seppie* (black tagliatelle with shrimps and cuttlefish) or a succulent, fancily presented *petto d'anatra al pepe rosa* (duck breast cooked with pink pepper).

Self-caterers can stock up on supplies at **Granmercato** (Piazza Matteotti 3; ☹ 8.30am-1pm Sun-Mon, 8.30am-1.30pm & 3.30-7.30pm Tue-Fri, 8am-7.30pm Sat) and **Qui C'è** (Via Natta 43; ☹ 8am-1.30pm & 3.30-8pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-12.30pm Sun). Fresh fruit, vegetables and delicacies abound at Como's **food market** (☹ 8.30am-1pm Tue & Thu, 8.30am-7pm Sat) outside Porta Torre.

SHOPPING

La Tessitura (☎ 031 32 16 66; Viale Roosevelt 2; ☹ 11am-9pm Tue-Sat) Mantero, one of the biggest names in Como silk, runs this large-scale outlet-style store on the site of their former factory (which has been moved out of town). If you can print and weave it, you'll find it here.

A **craft and antiques market** (Piazza di San Fedele; ☹ 9am-7pm Sat) fills the piazza out the front of the basilica.

Southern Shore

Locals say that if you've driven from Como to Bellagio, you can drive anywhere around

the lake. The 32km western branch of the southern shore is a narrow, twisting, hillside drive, with a steady stream of traffic. Those with time could stop off in various villages along the way, but the 'pearl' of the lake is Bellagio itself, suspended like a pendant on the promontory where the lake's western and eastern arms split and head south.

The mountains between the lake's two arms (in the triangle formed by the water and the towns of Como and Lecco) afford sweeping views, and shelter some quaint, little-visited villages.

Another option for travelling between Como and Bellagio is to hike along a way-marked trail that follows old mule and cart tracks through this triangle. This scenic walk takes two days, with *rifugi* (mountain huts) and restaurants along the way. Como's tourist office can provide a free detailed route description.

BELLAGIO

pop 3020

The place that inspired the Las Vegas casino (the same one involved in a heist in *Ocean's 11*) lives up to its fabled reputation. Bellagio's sapphire-blue harbour, maze of stone staircases and colourful shuttered buildings are truly enchanting. Although summers and weekends teem with visitors, if you turn up on a weekday outside high season, you'll have the little village almost to yourself.

Bellagio's **tourist office** (☎ 031 95 02 04; Piazza Mazzini; ☹ 9am-12.30pm & 2.30-5pm Mon, Tue & Thu, 9am-1pm Wed, 9am-1pm & 3-6pm Fri & Sat), next to the boat landing stage, has information on water sports, mountain biking and other lake activities. Otherwise, **PromoBellagio** (☎ 031 95 15 55; www.bellagiolakecomo.com; Piazza della Chiesa 14; ☹ 9.30am-1pm Mon, 9.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-4pm Wed-Fri), in the basement of an 11th-century watchtower, also has information.

Internet access (terminals and wi-fi) is available at **bellagiopoint.com** (☎ 031 95 04 37; Salita Plinio 8-12; per 15min/hr €2/6; ☹ 10am-10pm). The place doubles as a cool little *aperitivo* bar in the evenings – the bar is laden to breaking point with snacks.

The lavish gardens of **Villa Serbelloni** (☎ 031 95 15 55; Via Garibaldi 8; adult/child €6.50/3; ☹ tours 11am & 4pm Tue-Sun Apr-Oct) cover much of the promontory on which Bellagio sits. Visits are by guided tour only and numbers are limited; tickets are sold 10 minutes in advance at PromoBellagio.

MORITZ MANTERO & HIS SILK ROAD

Moritz Mantero (born 1946) is the third generation of one of Como's largest silk producers, Mantero. We spoke to him in a reception room of the company's historic 1923 headquarters in central Como's Via Volta.

How did Como become a major silk producer?

Como had been a centre of wool production, and the spinning mills had tried silk, too, and fallen on hard times. Empress Maria Teresa [1717–80], seeing the plight of the Lago di Como area, declared all textile production there to be duty-free throughout the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In essence, that's how the modern Como silk industry got started.

There were other major silk centres in Europe. Why has Como survived?

In Krefeld [Germany] there is little left. Lyon [France] was the best known, but the French, shut in their ivory tower, said: 'we're French, we know best'. The Italians are more flexible, and our costs were lower.

Are costs still lower?

No, Como keeps the flag flying through innovation and flexibility.

How important is the silk industry?

Of all the natural and non-natural fibres consumed throughout the world, silk makes up just 0.2%. It's a niche. But in Como it's an important niche – a third of the workforce in Como province (27,000 people) is involved in the silk business.

How have those numbers changed over the years?

Ten years ago, the number was about 40,000.

What happened?

The first shock came from the WTO [World Trade Organisation] with the liberalisation of trade in all types of textiles.

Is China the main source of competition?

All our raw or partly finished silk has long come from China. For finished products, the Chinese concentrate on large-scale production of items of medium to low quality. Italian companies in that sector have had to close. We concentrate on top quality on a small scale.

You sell your products to the big-name fashion companies, but only their labels appear.

So Como silk is top of the range?

We will never be a university canteen, churning out food, rather a top-quality restaurant serving meals as they are ordered. We don't do TV dinners.

Mantero recently fused with one of the other big four Como silk firms. That stunned a few people.

It stunned everyone.

Why?

We had always been competitors. The alliance has been likened to a fusion of AC Milan and Inter [Milan's arch-rival football teams]. We have found integration relatively easy, and this will reduce our combined fixed costs.

Will the big silk companies one day fuse to be one?

That would be science fiction, but I can see Ratti [until now the biggest firm] buying some smaller companies.

Are there many of those?

Hundreds! Como has the greatest concentration of textile-design studios in the world, some of them run by only one person.

Is the worst of the industry's crisis over? How do you see the future?

That's hard to say, but the Chinese character for crisis has two meanings: risk and opportunity. I am positive. Manufacturing in the West will increasingly be in high-performance sectors. Companies able to renew themselves constantly in order to be the first to meet changes in the market will do well.

Moritz Mantero is President of Mantero.

For such an exquisite spot, there are a surprising number of affordable places to sleep and eat (and plenty of luxurious places where you can spoil yourself, too).

Residence La Limonera (☎ 031 95 21 24; www.residencelalimonera.com; Via Bellosio 2; 2-person apt €70-100; 📍) This elegant villa in an old lemon grove has been divided into 11 spacious and thoughtfully furnished self-catering apartments. Apartments for three and four people are also available.

Hotel Bellagio (☎ 031 95 22 02; www.hotelbellagio.it;
Salita Grandi 6; s/d €120/160; ☹) This two-star boutique hotel is tucked off a stair-lined street in the village centre. Views of the lake unfold from most of the artfully decorated, contemporary rooms, which have timber floors. It has a small gym and sun roof too.

Without the mountains blocking the light, the western shore gets the most sunshine on the lake. For this reason, it's lined with the most lavish villas, where high-fliers from football players to film stars reside. The shore stretches 80km from Como north to Sorico at the lake's tip; from here you can

In **Lenno**, scenes from *Star Wars: Episode II* and 2006's James Bond remake, *Casino Royale*, were shot at **Villa Balbianello** (☎ 0345 56110; www.fondosambiente.it; Via Comedio 5, Località Balbianello; villa & gardens adult/child €11/6, gardens only adult/child €5/2.50; 🕒 10am-6pm Tue & Thu-Sun mid-Mar-mid-Nov), a villa built by Cardinal Angelo Durini in 1787 and used for a while by Allied commanders at the tail end of WWII. It is one of the most extraordinary locations on Lake Como, with magnificent gardens tumbling down the sides of the

promontory and a curious collector's museum of all sorts of items in the villa itself. If you want to see the villa, you must join a guided tour (generally in Italian) by 4.15pm. Visitors are only allowed to walk the 1km from the Lenno landing stage to the estate on Tuesday and at weekends; other days, you have to take a **taxi boat** (☎ 333 410 38 54; return €6) from Lenno or Sala Comacina (a few kilometres south).

TREMEZZO

pop 1300

At the 17th-century **Villa Carlotta** (☎ 0344 4 04 05; www.villacarlotta.it; Riva Garibaldi; adult/senior & student/child €8/4/free; ☎ 9am-6pm Easter-Sep, 9am-5pm mid-Mar-Easter & Oct-mid-Nov), the botanical gardens are filled with colour in spring from orange trees knitted into pergolas and from some of Europe's finest rhododendrons, azaleas and camellias. The villa, which is strung with paintings, sculptures (especially by Antonio Canova) and tapestries, takes its name from the Prussian princess who was given the place in 1847 as a wedding present from her mother. The extensive gardens have everything from Japanese camellias to American sequoias.

Tremezzo's **tourist office** (☎ 0344 4 04 93; infotremezzo@tiscalinet.it; Via Statale Regina; ☎ 9am-noon & 3.30-6.30pm Wed-Mon Apr-Oct) adjoins the boat jetty.

A short stroll south, the 19th-century villa **Hotel Villa Marie** (☎ 0344 4 04 27; www.hotelvillamarie.com; Via Regina 30, Tremezzo; d €95-140; ☎ ☎ ☎) has a charming lakeside terrace and spacious, light-filled rooms. The two Liberty-style suites could be part of a museum.

CADENABIA & MENAGGIO

Motorists can cross the lake by car ferry in Cadenabbia. You could decide to sleep over for the night at **Alberghetto della Marianna** (☎ 0344 4 30 95; www.la-marianna.com; Via Regina 57, Cadenabbia di Griante; s/d €65/95; ☎ Wed-Mon; ☎). They also have a welcoming restaurant, **La Cucina di Marianna** (☎ 0344 4 31 11; menus €30-45, children's menu €12; ☎ Wed-Sun), where you can dine on original set meals whose theme changes daily.

A further 3km north is Menaggio (population 3260). The **tourist office** (☎ 0344 3 29 24; www.menaggio.com; Piazza Garibaldi 3; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 2.30-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun Apr-Oct, 9am-12.30pm & 2.30-6pm Mon, Tue & Thu-Sat Nov-Mar) has several excellent brochures on walking and biking in the area. Just 100m uphill from Menaggio's ferry wharf, its hostel, **Ostello La Primula** (☎ 0344 3 23 56; www

.lakecomohostel.com; Via IV Novembre 106; dm incl breakfast €16; ☎ reception 8-10am & 4pm-midnight mid-Mar-early Nov; ☎), has lake views from rooms housing 35 beds, and meals (including vegetarian options) for €13. You can rent bikes and kayaks (€14.50 per day) or chill on the pebbled terrace.

LAGO DI PIANO & LAGO DI LUGANO

Menaggio is the jumping-off point for Lago di Piano in the Val Menaggio, a remote valley connecting Lago di Como with Lago di Lugano, which straddles the Italian/Swiss border to the west. Tiny Lago di Piano is protected by the **Riserva Naturale Lago di Piano**. Three marked nature trails, 4km to 5.3km long, encircle the lake, and the **visitors centre** (☎ 0344 7 49 61; www.riservagodiopiano.it; Via Statale 117, Piano di Porlezza; ☎ 9am-noon Mon, Tue & Sat, 2-4pm Wed May-Oct), on the lake's northern shore, rents mountain bikes (€2.50 per hour), row boats (€7 per hour) and arranges guided visits on foot (€5/8 per person per half/full day).

A few kilometres east of Lago di Piano is Lago di Lugano. The main town on the Italian side is **Porlezza** (population 4470), from where ferries sail to Lugano in Switzerland.

You'll find a couple of camping grounds just east of the reserve, signposted just off the Menaggio-Porlezza-Lugano road.

ALTO LARIO

North of Menaggio, the road hugging Lago di Como's western shore flattens and widens (in relative terms), affording some spectacular views and an easier drive during which to appreciate them. This northern stretch of the lake is known as the Alto Lario ('upper Lario'; Lario being Lago di Como's alternate name).

An essential stop for water-sports enthusiasts is **Gravedona** (population 2750). Of the town's several hotels, **Hotel Regina** (☎ 0344 8 94 46; www.reginahotels.it; Via Regina Levante 18; s €65-100, d €100-140; ☎ ☎ ☎) fronts the beach and has a full range of facilities, including a gym and mountain bikes for exploring the surrounding mountains. They have a sunbathing area and a courtesy shower for those leaving late in the day.

Tourist offices around the lake have a list of camping grounds in the area and loads of info about sailing, windsurfing, kite-surfing and waterskiing.

Eastern Shore

Lago di Como's eastern shore is the least visited, but it shelters some really lovely villages.

If driving, skip the motorway, and stick to the lakeside SS36 from **Colico** south to Lecco.

About 3km south of Colico, the **Abbazia di Piona** (☎ 0341 94 03 31; www.cistercensi.info/piona; ☎ 7am-7pm), a Cistercian abbey, is a pocket of peace. From the lakeside, SS36, follow the narrow road for 2km; the last stretch is cobbled.

VARENNA

pop 850

Villa-studded Varenna, 13km south of the Abbazia di Piona, has a web of cobbled streets crowned by a castle.

Varenna's **tourist office** (☎ 0341 83 03 67; www.varennaitaly.com; Via del IV Novembre 7; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 3-5.30pm Tue-Sat, 10am-12.30pm Sun Apr-Sep, 10am-5pm Sat Oct-Mar) offers information on the lake's entire eastern shore.

The gardens of **Villa Monastero** (☎ 0341 29 54 50; www.villamonastero.eu; Via IV Novembre; adult/senior/child 7-13yr/child under 7yr €4/2/1/free; ☎ gardens 9am-6pm daily, house 9am-1pm & 2-6pm Sat, Sun & holidays Mar-Oct), a former-convent-turned-private-residence in the 17th century, and **Villa Cipressi** (☎ 0341 83 01 13; Via IV Novembre 22; adult/child €3/1.50; ☎ 9am-7pm Mar-Oct) can both be visited. Magnolias, camellias and yucca trees are among their floral wonders. To get to both villas from Piazzale Martiri della Libertà, the square next to the boat jetty, follow the narrow **lakeside promenade** around the shore then bear left (inland) up the steps to Piazza San Giorgio, the village square. Both villas are signposted from here. Make the effort to walk (a steep half-hour hike) or drive (3km) up to **Vezio**, where the views from the ruins of **Castello di Vezio** (☎ 348 824 25 04; www.castellodivezio.it; admission €4; ☎ 10am-6pm) down over Varenna are vertigo-inducing.

At the blue-shuttered **Albergo del Sole** (☎ 0341 81 52 18; www.albergoeldesole.it; Piazza San Giorgio 21; s/d €85/120; ☎), the half-dozen whitewashed rooms with polished wood floors are inspired by the lake's steamboats, and there's a good on-site restaurant. At the lakeside **Vecchia Varenna** (☎ 0341 83 07 93; www.vecchiavarenna.it; Contrada Scoscesa 10, Varenna; meals €40-45; ☎ Tue-Sun Feb-Dec), you can dine on risotto prepared with pears and Taleggio cheese, or choose from mains of lake fish, duck breast or, say, a *tagliata di struzzo con radicchio e noci* (ostrich steak with chicory and nuts).

LECCO & AROUND

pop 47,330

Lecco's attractive lakefront leads to a series of piazzas (but few specific sights), and in winter

you can **ski** the adjacent mountains. Lecco's **tourist office** (☎ 0341 29 57 20; www.turismo.provincia.lecco.it; Via Nazario Sauro 6; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-6pm mid-Mar-mid-Oct, 9am-1pm & 2.30-5pm Mon-Sat mid-Oct-mid-Mar) has details. A day's lift ticket costs €28.

From Lecco, it's an easy train ride (€2.75, 45 minutes) southeast to Bergamo.

LAGO D'ISEO

Less than 100km from both Bergamo and Brescia, Lake Iseo (aka Sebino) is one of the least known of the Lombard lakes. Shut in by soaring mountains, it is a magnificent sight. About halfway along the lake another mountain soars right out of the water to form an island.

With the exception of the south shore and a series of tunnels at the northeast end of the lake, the road closely hugs the water on its circuit around Lake Iseo and is especially dramatic south of Lovere. For information, check out www.lagodiseo.org.

Approaching Lago d'Iseo from the southwest brings you to **Sarnico** (population 6230), with its lovely Liberty villas and a smattering of hotels and restaurants. It is placed delightfully on the north bank of the Oglio river, where it meets the lake. For information, head for **Pro Loco Sarnico** (☎ 035 4 20 80; www.proloco.sarnico.it; Via Lantieri 6; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 3-6.30pm Tue-Sat, 9.30am-12.30pm Sun). You'll find four B&Bs along Via Lantieri, a few minutes' walk from the river. **B&B Borgo dei Lantieri** (☎ 035 91 40 76; www.borgodeilantieri.it; Via Lantieri 31; s/d €35/65) has a handful of rooms, a lovely plant-filled courtyard and a sundeck. For tasty cheese (like Lombard mountain Bagoss cheese) and meat platters, bruschetta and other snacks, as well as some great local wines, head downstairs to the **Taverna Enoteca Lantieri** (☎ 035 91 44 77; Via Lantieri 53; meals €10-15; ☎ Wed-Mon).

A 12km drive east along the camping ground-dotted south shore of the lake brings you to the main town, **Iseo** (population 9060). It's a pleasant enough spot, with a lovely waterside promenade and a public beach where you can hire canoes and pedaloes. To the south stretches a 2-sq-km protected wetland, the **Riserva Naturale Torbiere del Sebino** (www.torbiere.it), formed from 18th-century peat beds. In late spring, the pools are smothered in water lilies. Getting in is hit-or-miss, although there is a walking path around it.

Iseo's **tourist office** (☎ 030 98 02 09; Lungolago Marconi 2; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 3.30-6.30pm Easter-

Sep, 10am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-12.30pm Sat Oct-Easter) stocks information about the numerous walking opportunities around the lake and hinterland, and has a list of camping grounds.

Hotel Milano (☎ 030 98 04 49; www.hotelmilano.info; Lungolargo Marconi 4; s/d €50/90; ☞ ☑ ☒ ☓) is one of only two hotels in the centre of Iseo. It is right on the lakefront, and prices quoted are for rooms with lake views, giving you a front-row seat for sunset behind the mountains over the lake. It has its own restaurant.

Monte Isola (www.monteisola.com) is Europe's largest lake island, at 4.28 sq km. Only the doctor, police and the priest are allowed to drive on the island, making its little fishing village a peaceful retreat. Walk or bike the 15km-long trail that encircles the island, and pitch up at its simple camping ground, **Campeggio Monte Isola** (☎ 030 982 52 21; Via Croce 144; per person with own tent €10), which is open year-round. Boats converge on the island from several points, including Iseo, but the most frequent and quickest crossings are to Carzano from Sale Marasino, or to Peschiera from Sulzano, both on the east shore (€3.10 return, 10 minutes, every half-hour).

The **Franciacorta** – a patch of rolling countryside synonymous with its renowned wines – spreads south of the lake and east to Brescia. The Iseo tourist office has several brochures on the area; it makes for beautiful back country driving or cycling amid vineyards and villages, with the occasional manor, castle, Romanesque church and some fine restaurants.

Perched on the lake's northwest tip, the port town of **Lovere** (population 5410) is a working harbour with a higgledy-piggledy old centre and a wealth of walking trails in the hills behind it. Its cobbled old town curves around the harbour, shadowed by a leafy lakefront promenade. On the hill at the western end of the harbour is the lake's hostel, **Ostello del Porto** (☎ 035 983 52 90; http://ostellodelporto.interfree.it; Via Paglia 70; dm/s/d €17/35/42; ☞ mid-Mar–Oct; ☐ ☑). Housed in a former workers' meeting house, it is part of Lovere's one-time steelworks (accessed by a narrow pedestrian ramp from the road). En suite rooms all have lake views. Short drives out of Lovere to nearby villages like **Bossico** and **Esmate** bring you to marvellous lookout points high above the lake.

North of Lago d'Iseo, the **Valle Camonica** weaves its way to the vast **Parco dell'Adamello**

and, further north, to the **Parco Nazionale dello Stelvio** (p335). The area borders Trentino-Alto Adige and takes in the better parts of the Lombard Alps. The two national parks offer many walks and are dotted with Alpine huts where you can rest up.

About halfway between Darfo and Edolo, the **Parco Nazionale delle Incisioni Rupestri** (☎ 0364 4 21 40; www.arterupestre.it; Località Naquane; adult/child/senior €4/2/free; ☞ 9am-7.30pm Tue-Sun May-Sep, 9am to 1 hr before sunset Oct-Apr), at Capo di Ponte, is a 30-hectare open-air museum containing a representative array of rock engravings going as far back as the Bronze Age. Perched high on a rocky ledge over the Oglio river stands a grand Romanesque church, the 11th- to 12th-century **Pieve di San Siro** (☞ 3-6pm Sat-Mon).

The area north of Edolo offers some reasonable winter **skiing**, particularly near Ponte di Legno, at the northern end of the valley, and the nearby Passo del Tonale. Brescia's tourist office (see p285) stocks plenty of walking, camping and mountain-hut information.

In the valley there are several tourist offices, including the helpful **Pro Loco** (☎ 0364 4 20 80; www.proloco.capo-di-ponte.bs.it; Via Brisciole 42; ☞ 9am-noon & 2.30-4.30pm Tue-Sat, 9.30am-12.30pm Sun, Mon & holidays) at Capo di Ponte.

Getting There & Around

Frequent **SAB** (☎ 035 28 90 00; www.sab-autoservizi.it, in Italian) buses trundle between Sarnico and Bergamo (€2.80, 50 minutes). Trains link Iseo train station with Brescia (€2.85, 30 minutes, hourly), where you can connect to Bergamo.

Navigazione sul Lago d'Iseo (☎ 035 97 14 83; www.navigazione.lagoiseo.it) operates up to eight ferries daily between (south to north) Sarnico, Iseo, Monte Isola, Lovere and Pisogne (and some other smaller stops). Single fares range from €1.90 to €5.75. In winter there are substantially fewer sailings.

LAGO DI GARDA

A playground for Italians of all ages, Lago di Garda encompasses an immense 370 sq km. In the southwest corner, **Desenzano del Garda** is known as the *porta del lago* (gateway to the lake), with good transport connections around the lake and beyond. In the centre of the southern shore, on a sliverlike peninsula, is the impossibly quaint village of **Sirmione**. If you have kids to entertain, the lake's southeast corner is home to two amusement parks.

Particularly as you head north, Lago di Garda's Ora (southerly) and Peler (northerly) winds make it a windsurfer's haven. Once you've hit flower-filled **Gardone Riviera**, the lake rapidly narrows as the altitude climbs. Across from Gardone on the eastern shore, a cable car glides from the windsurfers' hang-out of **Malcesine** to **Monte Baldo** (2200m), where there's wintertime skiing and year-round mountain biking. By the time you reach the hiking haven **Riva del Garda**, at the northern tip, craggy mountains tower over the lake, lending it a fjordlike air.

Garda is the most (over)developed of the lakes and, despite a plethora of accommodation, booking ahead is advised.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

Buses run by **APT** (☎ 045 805 79 11; www.aptv.it) connect Desenzano del Garda train station with Riva del Garda (two hours, up to six daily) along the western shore. Peschiera del Garda train station (10km southeast of Sirmione) is on the Riva del Garda–Malcesine–Garda–Verona APTV bus route, with hourly buses to both Riva (€3.80, one hour 40 minutes) and Verona (€2.80, 30 minutes). Buses also run to/from Mantua (1¼ hours, up to eight daily) from Peschiera del Garda train station. The Riva del Garda–Milan (3¼ hours, three daily) bus route operated by **Società Italiana Autoservizi** (SIA; ☎ 030 377 42 37; www.sia-autoservizi.it, in Italian) also connects the western shore with Brescia. **Trentino Trasporti** (☎ 0461 821 000; www.ttesercizio.it, in Italian) runs hourly buses between Riva del Garda and Arco (20 minutes), Rovereto (45 minutes) and Trento (1¼ hours).

The two train stations serving the lake, Desenzano del Garda and Peschiera del Garda, are on the Milan–Venice train line. Most trains in either direction stop at one or the other.

Navigazione sul Lago di Garda (☎ 800 551801; www.navigazionealghi.it, in Italian; Piazza Matteotti 2, Desenzano del Garda) operates numerous passenger ferries year-round. Motorists can cross the lake using the car ferry that yo-yos between Toscolano-Maderno (on the western shore) and Torri del Benaco (on the eastern shore), or seasonally between Limone (11km south of Riva del Garda on the western shore) and Malcesine (15km south of Riva on the eastern side). One-way tickets (including change of ferry where necessary) can cost up to €11.30/6.50 (adult/child), eg

from Peschiera to Riva del Garda. A one-day ticket allowing unlimited travel costs €25.80/13.40 (adult/child).

Desenzano del Garda

pop 26,610

The lake's main transport hub, Desenzano del Garda, is more residential than its lakeside counterparts, and many tourists pass straight through with barely a backward glance. But while Desenzano is not as quaint as some other spots, it's also not as touristy and buzzes with activity year-round. Hidden amid its urban sprawl is an attractive old port and historic centre. You can get information on the town here from the **tourist office** (☎ 030 374 99 90; Via Porto Vecchio 34; ☎ 10am–12.30pm & 3–6pm Mon–Fri, 10am–12.30pm Sat).

Right on the lakefront by Desenzano's main beach, **Hotel Europa** (☎ 030 914 23 33; www.desenzano.com; Lungolago Battisti 71; s/d €62/104; ☎ ☎) is a breezy modern place with a good restaurant.

Desenzano is also a hub for nightlife in high summer, with bars and discos scattered around town.

Sirmione

pop 7830

Situated 9km northeast of Desenzano, quaint Sirmione sits on an islet at the end of a slender peninsula on Garda's southern shore. Even the tourists who pour into the village in their thousands don't detract from the village's charm or its wraparound lake views. At the gateway to the islet, its square-cut **castle** (Castello Scaligero; ☎ 030 91 64 68; adult/child €4/2; ☎ 9am–12.30pm & 3–6pm Mon–Fri, 9am–12.30pm Sat) was built by Verona's ruling family, the Scaligeri, in 1250. There's not a lot inside, but the views from the tower are spectacular.

The **tourist office** (☎ 030 91 61 14; Viale Marconi 6; ☎ 9am–9pm Easter–Oct, 9am–12.30pm & 3–6pm Mon–Fri, 9am–12.30pm Sat Nov–Easter) adjoins a bank and the bus station. Motorised vehicles are banned beyond this point, except for those with a hotel booking on the islet. (Driving even the smallest car along the miniature, pedestrian-clogged main street isn't fun, anyway.)

From the **jetty** near the castle, all sorts of vessels will make any manner of trip around the lake – at a price – and an array of water activities can be arranged.

North of the main cluster of shops and restaurants are the open-air and indoor pools of the **Terme di Sirmione** (☎ 030 990 49

22; www.termedisirmione.com; Piazza Virgilio 1; admission Mon-Fri for up to 5hr €29, all-day passes from €36; ☎ 2-10pm Mon, 10am-10pm Tue-Sun, to midnight Thur). The source of the lake's hot springs, offshore from Sirmione, were discovered in the late 1800s, and the pools are a natural 37°C. The pools are accessible for wheelchair-users; massage and other treatments are also available. You must make a reservation. Night-time admission (4pm to midnight) is €39 and includes a cocktail.

At the northern tip of the peninsula is the maze of Roman ruins known as **Grotte di Catullo** (☎ 030 91 61 57; adult/child €4/free; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Tue-Sat, to 5pm Sun Mar-Sep, 8.30am-5pm Tue-Sun Oct-Feb). In fact it's not a cave as the name suggests but was called this by explorers who saw the ruins overgrown with foliage on top and mistook them for grottoes. It's actually the largest domestic Roman villa uncovered in northern Italy, dating to the late 1st century BC.

SLEEPING & EATING

An inordinate number of hotels are crammed into Sirmione, many of which close from the end of October to March. Four camping grounds lie near the town, and the tourist office can advise on others around the lake.

Pizzerias, gelaterie and restaurants crowd around Piazza Carducci and along the main street; you'll also find atmospheric spots in the side streets leading to the lakefront on both sides of the peninsula.

Camping Sirmione (☎ 030 91 90 45; www.camp-ing-sirmione.com; Via Sirmioncino 9, Colombane; camping 2 people, car & tent €36; ☎ late Mar-early Oct; P ☎) This attractive, well-kept site at the base of the peninsula (2.5km from the castle) has smart, modern bungalows (€113 for up to four people) for those without tents and a restaurant, shop and waterskiing school.

Our pick Hotel Marconi (☎ 030 91 60 07; www.hotelmarconi.info; Via Vittorio Emanuele II 51; s €40-65, d €65-110; P ☎) Even if you're someone who takes nothing more than coffee for breakfast, the incredible spread of cakes, tarts and pies, made by hand by the family that runs this elegant hotel, is a feast for the eyes. Rooms are streamlined and spotless, and you can lounge beneath blue-and-white-striped umbrellas on a timber sundeck extending over the lake.

Hotel Catullo (☎ 030 990 58 11; www.hotelcatullo.it; Piazza Flaminia 7; d up to €140; ☎) One of Sirmione's

oldest hotels, dating to 1888, Catullo (named for the Roman poet who lived in the area) occupies a prime lakeside location and has a lovely garden and smart, contemporary rooms. Half- and full board are available, and lake-view rooms with a more old-world decorative finish cost just €10 extra.

Antica Trattoria La Speranzina (☎ 030 990 62 92; Via Dante 16; meals €60-65; ☎ Tue-Sun) This authentic little trattoria is tucked well away from the waterfront circus: dine in peace on a quiet lakeside terrace beneath the olive trees.

Lago di Garda Amusement Parks

The lake's lower eastern shore is home to larger-than-life dinosaurs, pirate ships, roller coasters and a dolphinarium at the kid-oriented **Gardaland** (☎ 045 644 97 77; www.gardaland.it; adult/child €35/29; ☎ 9am-11pm mid-Jun-mid-Sep, 10am-6pm Apr-mid-Jun & last 2 wks of Sep, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun Oct, late Dec, and early Jan).

To its north, **CanevaWorld** (☎ 045 696 99 00; www.canevaworld.it; Via Fossalta 1) has two theme parks. **Aquaparadise** (adult/child €23/18; ☎ 10am-7pm Jul & Aug, 10am-6pm mid-May-Jun & Sep) has lots of exhilarating water slides, while **Movieland** (adult/child €23/18; ☎ 10am-7pm Sun-Fri, to 11pm Sat Jul & Aug, 10am-6pm daily Easter-Jun & Sep, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun Oct) has stunt-packed action shows. Exact opening times may vary slightly throughout the year, so check the website for details. You can take on an evening **medieval show** (dinner & show adult/child €28/20; ☎ Apr-Sep) and banquet (of sorts).

Free buses shuttle visitors the 2km to both parks to/from the Peschiera del Garda train station.

Gardone Riviera & Around

pop 2710

Heading north from Desenzano del Garda on Garda's western shore brings you to **Salò** (population 10,420), a pretty village on the gulf which gave its name to Mussolini's puppet republic in 1943, after the dictator was rescued from the south by the Nazis.

Further north, at the head of a small inlet, is Gardone Riviera, once one of the lake's most elegant holiday spots. Mountains rise up around the village, whose gardens are filled with palms, magnolias, jasmine blossoms and age-old cedar and cypress trees. The **tourist office** (☎ 0365 374 87 36; Corso della Repubblica 8; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 2.15-6pm Mon-Sat) stocks a wealth of information on lake activities and accommodation.

Its heyday is recalled at the fabulous estate **Il Vittoriale degli Italiani** (☎ 0365 29 65 11; www.vittoriale.it; Piazza Vittoriale; adult/child Il Vittoriale grounds €7/5, Il Vittoriale & Museo della Guerra €12/8, Il Vittoriale, Museo della Guerra & Casa di d'Annunzio €16/12; ☎ Casa di d'Annunzio 9.30-7pm Apr-Sep, 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Oct-Mar, closed Mon, Museo della Guerra 9.30-7pm Apr-Sep, 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Oct-Mar, closed Wed, grounds 8.30am-8pm Apr-Sep, 9am-5pm Oct-Mar). Italy's controversial poet and ultranationalist, Gabriele d'Annunzio (1863-1938) retreated here in 1922 because, he claimed, he wanted to escape the world that made him ill. Visits to d'Annunzio's house are by guided 25-minute tour only (in Italian, every 10 minutes). The **Museo della Guerra** (War Museum) records d'Annunzio's WWI antics – one of his most triumphant and more bizarre feats was to capture a battleship from the fledgling Yugoslavia shortly after WWI, when Italy's territorial claims had been partly frustrated in postwar peace talks. In July and August, classical concerts, ballets, plays and operas are staged in the **open-air theatre** (☎ 0365 29 65 19) in the villa's lush grounds.

More plant life can be admired at **Giardino Botanico Fondazione André Heller** (☎ 336 41 08 77; www.hellergarden.com; Via Roma 2; adult/child €9/5; ☎ 9am-7pm Mar-Oct). The botanic gardens were laid out in 1900 and redesigned in the late 1990s by multimedia artist André Heller. Sculptures by Keith Haring and Roy Lichtenstein sit among some 8000 plant species.

Locanda Agli Angeli (☎ 0365 2 09 91; www.agliangeli.com; Via Dosso 7; s €70, d €90-150; ☎), a rambling house no more than a five-minute stroll from Il Vittoriale, has a variety of rooms, some with exposed-timber ceilings and air-con.

About 12km north of Gardone, just past the car ferry port at Toscolano-Maderno, is **Gargnano** (population 3070), a charming harbour where Mussolini based himself during the short life of his Repubblica Sociale Italiana (or Repubblica di Salò). The lake's most prized sailing regatta, the **Centomiglia**, starts near here each September.

Malcesine

pop 3640

On the lake's eastern shore, the windsurfing centre of Malcesine has a pretty, cobbled village centre crowned by the **Castello e Museo Scaligero** (☎ 045 740 08 37; Via Castello; adult/child €5/1; ☎ 9.30am-7pm Apr-Oct, 11am-4pm Sat, Sun & holidays Nov-Mar). Inside there are a couple of natural-

history museums and a collection of books by Goethe, who immortalised the castle. The top of the tower has fabulous views.

More eagle-eye views of the lake unfold during the 10-minute ride on the **Funivia Malcesine-Monte Baldo** (☎ 045 740 02 06; www.funiviedelbaldo.it; adult return €17, ski pass adult/child €18/14; ☎ 8am-6.45pm mid-Mar-Nov, 8am-4.45pm Dec-Feb), a cable car with rotating glass cabins. It departs every 30 minutes. Pick up trail information and maps from Malcesine's **tourist office** (☎ 045 740 00 44; www.malcesinepiu.it; Via Capitanato 6; ☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 3-6pm Mon-Sat 9.30am-12.30pm Sun). In winter you can ski on Monte Baldo's slopes.

Olives harvested around Malcesine are milled into extra-virgin olive oil by the **Consorzio Olivicoltori di Malcesine** (☎ 045 740 12 86; www.oliomalcesine.com; Via Navene).

The peach-coloured **Albergo Aurora** (☎ 045 740 01 14; www.aurora-malcesine.com; Piazza Matteotti 10; d €50; ☎) is a one-star family-run inn in the village heart. Rooms are neat, with parquet floors. For €7 per person extra, throw in breakfast. Tasty home cooking makes half-board an astonishing value at €43 per person.

Nago-Torbole

pop 2650

Goethe described the *comune* of Nago-Torbole, 15km north of Malcesine, as 'a wonder of nature, an enchanting sight', and its little township of Torbole still retains much of its original fishing-village charm.

Torbole's **tourist office** (☎ 0464 50 51 77; www.gardatrentino.it; Via Lungolago Verona 19; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Sun May-Sep, 10am-1pm & 2-5.30pm Mon & Wed-Sat Apr, Oct & Nov) has a list of windsurfing schools, distributes free mountain-bike and walking maps, and has accommodation information.

Picturesque strolls aside, most people come here to ride the wind. Throughout the summer, Torbole hosts various windsurfing and sailing competitions.

Beginners and pros alike can hook up with the **Marco Segnana Surf Center** (☎ 0464 50 59 63; www.surfsegnana.it; Foci del Sarca), which has bases at lakeside Lido di Torbole in Torbole and on Porfina beach in Riva del Garda. Three-hour lessons for beginners/advanced surfers are €59/68, excluding board hire (€18/42 per hour/day). It also rents catamarans (€39/89 per hour/half-day), kayaks and bikes.

One of the best-value lodging options is **Residence Garni Torbole** (☎ 0464 50 52 16; www.hotel-torbole.it; Via Lungolago Verona 47; d €84-100; (P)), with spacious rooms as well as apartments. Most have balconies with lake views.

The most atmospheric place to eat is **Ristorante Al Forte Alto** (☎ 0464 50 55 66; Via Castel Pedede 16, Nago; 5 courses €30; ☎ dinner daily, lunch Sat & Sun), serving top-notch typical Trentino cuisine in an 1860s-era former defensive fort just near Torbole's centre.

Riva del Garda

pop 15,610

Wedge between the towering rock face and the lake's narrow northern rim, Riva del Garda lies across the border from Lombardy in the Alpine region of Trentino-Alto Adige.

Like its neighbours Malcesine and Torbole, Riva is a well-known windsurfing spot and has several schools that also hire out equipment. The main **tourist office** (☎ 0464 55 44 44; www.gardatrentino.it; Largo Medaglie d'Oro; ☎ 9am-7pm May-Sep, to 6pm Oct-Apr) and its **kiosk** (☎ 0464 55 07 76; Lungolago d'Annunzio 4c; ☎ 10am-5.30pm Fri-Wed Apr-Oct), which overlooks Piazza Catena where the boats dock, have a list. They can also advise on everything from climbing and paragliding to wine-tasting and flea markets.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The main reason to visit the local-history exhibits at the **Museo Civico** (☎ 0464 57 38 69; Piazza Cesare Battisti 3; adult/child €2/1.50; ☎ 10.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Nov) is the waterfront castle, Rocca di Riva, dating from 1124, in which it's housed. You can scale the adjoining 34m-tall **Torre Apponale** (adult/child €1/free) for a stunning panorama of the lake and mountains. The 13th-century square tower is topped by an angel-shaped weather vane.

About 3km north of town – a pleasant 45-minute stroll – is **Cascata del Varone** (☎ 0464 52 14 21; www.cascata-varone.com; admission €5; ☎ 9am-7pm May-Aug, to 6pm Apr & Sep, to 5pm Mar & Oct, 10am-5pm Sun & holidays Nov). The cascading 100m waterfall is fed by the Lago di Tenno, a tiny lake northwest of Lago di Garda.

Riva makes a natural starting point for walks and bike rides, including trails around **Monte Rocchetta** (1575m), which looms over the northern end of the lake. Immediately south of the town, the shore's long shingle beach is framed by a wide green park.

SLEEPING & EATING

Campeggio Bavaria (☎ 0464 55 25 24; www.bavaria-net.it; Viale Rovereto 100; camping 2 people, car & tent €34; (P)) One of four camping grounds dotting Riva's lakeside, this one is part of the Marco Segnana Surf Center (see opposite) and is a meeting place for windsurfers and mountain bikers.

Ostello Benacus (☎ 0464 55 49 11; www.ostelloriva.com; Piazza Cavour 10; dm/d €16/40; ☎ reception 7-9am & 3-11pm Apr-Oct; (P) (Q)) Riva's HI hostel has a central location just off the main town square, a few moments' stroll from the waterfront, with its own parking and meals for €10. Reception hours are hit-and-miss, so it's a good idea to let them know in advance that you're coming or you may be in for a wait.

Hotel Giardino Verdi (☎ 0464 55 25 16; www.giardinoverdi.com; Piazza Giardino Verdi 4; s/d €66/122; (P) (Q) (Q) (Q)) With balconies overlooking a quiet square, the bright, white rooms in this three-star hotel are small (and bathrooms tiny), but they're streamlined and contemporary. The terrace out front is a coveted spot for regional cuisine; inside there's a chic, damask-draped dining room (meals €35 to €40). They also cater well to children.

Hotel Sole (☎ 0464 55 26 86; www.hotelsole.net; Piazza 3 Novembre 35; d €106-160; ☎ Mar-Oct; (P) (Q) (Q)) This grand, golden-hued hotel, once patronised by Nietzsche, is a landmark on Riva's lakefront. Many of its somewhat faded but perfectly pleasant rooms have balconies.

Riva has dozens of takeaway places and delicatessens for picnic supplies, in addition to lakeside cafes, pastry shops and gelaterie galore.

North of Riva del Garda

From the medieval village of **Arco** (population 16,160), 5km north of Riva, a 20-minute stroll through olive groves to **Castello di Arco** (☎ 0464 51 01 56; adult/senior & child under 18yr €2/1.50; ☎ 10am-7pm Apr-Sep, to 4pm Oct, Nov, Feb & Mar, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun Dec & Jan) limbers up the muscles for the more strenuous terrain awaiting walkers a few kilometres north.

Anyone looking to experience this outdoor-lover's paradise should hook up with **Friends of Arco** (☎ 0464 53 28 28; www.friendsofarco.it; Via Segantini 64, Arco; ☎ 5-10pm Mon-Fri, by appointment Sat & Sun, phone service from 9am), a mountain-guide service offering a huge range of

courses and excursions, from gentle day trips taking in the local botany to multiday adventure courses, including canyoning, trekking, climbing and ski mountaineering. The Friends can also help you book accommodation. Arco's **tourist office** (☎ 0464 53 22 55; Viale delle Palme 1; 🕒 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Sun May-Sep, 10am-1pm & 2-5.30pm Mon & Wed-Sat Oct-Apr) can also help.

Hotel L'Olivo (☎ 0464 51 64 30; www.hotelolivo.it; Via Roma 2; s/d €75/100; 📍 🚗 🚶) is an appealing three-star option with comfortable rooms in Arco's town centre. It has a small spa, which will come in handy after a vigorous day of mountain biking. Prices are valid for stays of three days or more, otherwise you may find yourself paying more in July and August.

© Lonely Planet. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'