

Trip Itinerary and Details

- **Day 1 - Welcome to Bellagio on Lake Como.**
Meet your trip leader at the Milan, Italy, Malpensa (MXP) airport at 2pm. A private transfer from Malpensa to Bellagio is provided. Bellagio is one of the most charming villages of Lake Como, or Lago di Como, in the Italian Lake District. Located in the middle of the ancient glacier lake, the village provides amazing views of both branches of the Y-shaped lake and the pre-Alps. The Mediterranean-type climate is perfect for bougainvillea, olive and lemon trees, as well as elegant lakeside gardens and villas, which have long inspired visiting poets and painters of the romanticism period. After checking into our lakeside hotel, we will have a gentle walk through the historical center of Bellagio and the small fisherman village of Pescallo before making our way to the 19th century Villa Melzi Botanical Garden. Enjoy a welcome dinner discovering the ancient recipes of the lake. We spend the next three nights in Bellagio at a lovingly restored 17th-century lakefront hotel. Dinner included.

Transfer: 1.5 hours; Walking: 2 hours.
- **Day 2 - Follow the "Pilgrim Path"—one of the lake's historical coastal pathways.**
The ferries on Lake Como carry names from Alessandro Manzoni's 1827 romance novel, "The Betrothed". Following breakfast we board a ferry for a short, scenic ride to Varenna, a picturesque village with brightly painted houses and a medieval castle. Setting out through olive tree terraced fields, we soon reach the Castle of Vezio, which is now a bird of prey breeding, nursing and training center. Our hike continues on the historical Pilgrim Path which links the Alps to Milan, bringing us to Bellano, home of the Santi Nazaro e Celso. This Romanesque church was built in 1348 and showcases beautiful rose windows and frescoes of the Lombard school. We'll also visit the Orrido of Bellano, a natural gorge cut deep into the rocks of a cliff by the Pioverna River. The gorge trail offers breathtaking panoramas and lush vegetation, waterfalls and natural caves. We hop a short ferry back to Bellagio with time to relax or a swim in the lake. Tonight we head to a restaurant in the forest to taste the typical food of the mountains surrounding the lake, such as Pizzoccheri and toc, a polenta and cheese dish. All meals included.

Hiking: 5 miles; 4.5 hours; Elevation gain/loss: 1280'.
- **Day 3 - Climb the peak of Mount San Primo and get a birds-eye view of Lake Como.**
We begin our day at the Madonna del Ghisallo Church, home of the Patron Saint of Cyclists and a huge collection of historic cycling memorabilia. We then transfer to the base of Mount San Primo and begin hiking through a centenary beech forest and past an alpine farm that yields local milk and butter. We are soon rewarded with panoramic views of the rugged limestone cliffs of the Grigne Mountains. Upon reaching the peak of Mount San Primo (5570'), we admire the views of Y-shaped, glacier-formed Lake Como. Weather permitting, you might see the sparkle of the tallest buildings of Milan to the west. Our afternoon highlight is a tasting of wines and cheeses of the Valtellina Valley, which is tomorrow's destination. Dinner is on your own tonight, providing the opportunity to experience the local fish, risotto, osso buco or other specialties. Breakfast and lunch included.

Transfers: 40 minutes; Hiking 8 miles, 6 hours; Elevation gain 1300', Elevation loss 2300'.
- **Day 4 - Ride the Bernina Express, the highest rail in Europe, to St. Moritz, Switzerland.**
Let's head to the Swiss Alps! After a short ferry ride on the lake we drive to the Italian town of Tirano, located in the heart of the Valtellina Valley. The Bernina Express is considered the highest rail in Europe and arguably offers one of the most beautiful rail trips in the world. Our journey starts at Poschiavo Lake, passing through tunnels and crossing suspension bridges over bold gorges before arriving at the face of the Piz Palu Glacier. This is just the beginning of our discovery of the Bernina Mountain Group. We cross over the Bernina Pass at 7600' and reach the famous resort town of St. Moritz, Switzerland (6089'), surrounded by glacial lakes and lush pine wood of the Engadine Valley. St. Moritz is home to the 1928 and 1948 Winter Olympics and owes its original fame to its therapeutic springs which were visited by summer spa guests as early as the middle ages. The harmony of the upper Engadin landscape with approximately 90 mountain lakes and dramatic glacier-capped mountains is a mecca for hikers and climbers. This afternoon we enjoy a moderate hike up to the fabulous Lej da Staz (Lake Staz). Overnight in St. Moritz the next three nights. All meals included.

Transfer: 1 hour 45 minutes (by vehicle); 2 hours 15 minutes (by train); Hiking: ~2 miles; 2 hours; Elevation gain/loss: 650'.
- **Day 5 - Hike to the top of Alp Suvretta overlooking four alpine lakes.**
We hike in the footsteps of the 19th century painter Giovanni Segantini, one of the most famous artists in Europe in the late 19th century and known as the Van Gogh of the Alps. Departing from our hotel, our path leads us to Alp Suvretta in the Bernina mountain range. An opening in the peaks will reveal some of the most important shapes and silhouettes in the legendary history of mountaineering including the Piz Bernina and the Biancograt ridge of Piz Scerchen. In the valley below, the colors of the lakes and ice melt into one as we look out over four alpine Engadina lakes. Returning to St. Moritz this afternoon, we visit the museum dedicated to Giovanni Segantini to view his masterpieces. Tonight's dinner is on your own; your guide will suggest restaurants for a hearty meal of traditional

Swiss mountain specialties such as spätzle, cheese fondue or Rösti und Spiegel mit Käse gratiniert (Swiss potato dish with sunny-side up eggs and cheese). Italian influences abound and the pizza or gnocchi will not disappoint. Breakfast and lunch included.

Hiking: 5 miles; 5.5 hours; Elevation gain/loss: 1,968'.

- Day 6 - Explore the Roseg Valley and enjoy epic views of the Bernina Piz.
A transfer by public bus brings us to Pontresina (5,922'), the gateway to Roseg Valley, one of the most beautiful valleys of the Alps. A one hour horse-drawn carriage ride follows the Rosegbach River past European larch, stone pine and mountain pine to the Hotel Roseg Gletscher (6,562'). In the distance, the first glaciers of the Bernina group reveal themselves: the Caputschin, the Piz Roseg and Piz Glousciunt. "Piz" means peak in romance language, which is still spoken in the Engadin Valley. From the hotel we hike towards the Chamanna Tschierva mountain hut (8,441'), enjoying exquisite views in all directions. Biancograt, the legendary ice ridge to the summit of Bernina, and a sea of 13,000' snowcapped mountains provide a backdrop for our picnic lunch. Our return hike down the valley returns us to Pontresina, where we bus back to St. Moritz in time for dinner. All meals included.

Transfers: 25 minutes (each way); Horse Carriage Ride: 1 hour; Hiking: 11 miles; 6 hours; Elev. gain: 1,879', Elev. loss: 2,519', Maximum elev. 8,441'.

- Day 7 - Discover the ancient town of Chiavenna, and take a guided walking tour of Milan.
Bidding farewell to Switzerland and the Alps of Engadin, we depart for Milan. Our scenic, sometime winding drive includes the 5955' Maloja Pass, ancient stone villages and green hillsides. We'll stop at the Cascade dell'Acqua Fraggia, an incredible 328' waterfall that so impressed Leonardo da Vinci, he commented on it in his "Codex Atlanticus". We continue to Chiavenna, a fundamental crossroads for trade and cultural exchange, and known by the Romans as Clavenna or "key". Wandering the narrow cobblestone streets that border the Mera River, we make our way to the Collegiata di San Lorenzo, which consists of a 5th century church, baptistery, and cloister with bell tower. Following lunch in a grotto (cave) that's been converted into a restaurant, we continue to Milan for a walking tour of the city. We'll see the Duomo, the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II, Castello Sforzesco and La Scala. Tonight we raise a toast to our Italian and Swiss adventure, and "salute" our newfound friends. All meals included.

Transfer: 3.5 hours; Walking: 4 miles; 3 hours.

- Day 8 - Our adventure ends in Milan.
After breakfast, transfer on your own to Milan's Malpensa or Linate airport, or continue your travels in Italy. Arrivederci! Breakfast included.

Notes on Itinerary

Day 1 is the day you should plan to arrive at the meeting point for the trip. This may require departing your hometown one or more days in advance and traveling on an overnight flight.

Although we do our very best to adhere to the schedule above, this itinerary is subject to change for numerous reasons beyond our control including weather and terrain conditions.