Lake Maggiore
travelling by water

History and stories
Itineraries
Descriptions
Travel information
Useful numbers
The northern lakes of our country have always been a great attraction thanks to their pleasant environmental setting and surrounding landscape. Lake Como, with its memories of Manzoni’s great book, is striking in the unusual, “fjord-like” appearance of its banks and the gradual advance of the lake basin into mountainous country, accompanied along its route by the “Regina”, the ancient road that follows the outline of the western bank.

Lake Garda rests in a hollow surrounded by hills richly clad with olive-groves and lemon-groves, which flourish thanks to Garda’s mild microclimate and help to make the lake an important tourist attraction.

Lake Maggiore still retains an elegant “fin de siécle” atmosphere, emphasized by the stylish villas along its banks and the special beauty of the Borromean Islands.

The intensive urbanisation that has occurred in the lakes zone has given rise to a very sharp increase in the demand for services, such as the high priority placed on the need for local public transport following the congested state of traffic along the roads bordering the lakes. Hence the ever-increasing importance of alternative transport systems such as that provided by Navigazione Laghi, present for over a century first as a private firm then as a public enterprise in this area, whose boat services advantageously connect the banks of our rivers.

Following the development that has occurred in the socio-productive context of our areas, Navigazione Laghi has decided to produce these new guidebooks as a useful aid for both residents and visitors to our beauteous regions, in the hope that they may provide a helpful service to our users.

A service for residents, a marvel for tourists

The Governing Manager
Renato Poletti
Lake Ferry Company

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Lake Ferry Company

The public transport service provided by the Navigazione Lago Maggiore is central to the economic and social life of the Verbano region, fully meeting the needs of what is the area’s lifeblood, tourism.

Modern vessels, hydrofoils, catamarans, car ferries and vintage boats weave a web of routes going in all directions in order to satisfy the various transport needs.

This web becomes more complete and trips multiply during the warm season when days become longer and the banks of the lake are full of tourists.

The best way to appreciate the beauty of the lake is to board a Ferry Company vessel linking the main places on the Piedmontese and Lombard banks with those on the Swiss side.

The wide availability of open-air
seats on tourist vessels enables passengers to admire the magnificent landscapes, the islands, coasts, towns and villages, and the mountains in the distance. A rapid service is available for those in a hurry; and there are ferries for those who cross the lake with a car, enabling passengers to avoid the long journey around the lake by motorway. Ferry services offer a wide choice of services and opportunities, such as day tickets that enable people to “wander about” the lake and visit ports of call at their leisure. Special initiatives are available, such as day and night cruises, itineraries which are linked to tourist trains, or special trips offering on-board lunch.

An essential service

The history of the public transport service on the lake began in the first half of the 19th century, but vessels, especially cargo ones, have always offset the lack of roads and means of transport in the past, reducing the centuries-old isolation of towns and villages. Foodstuffs, wine, wood and building materials were all transported on the lake.

In this regard, the inscription accompanying the Condoglia marble (tax free) used for the construction of Duomo in Milan, is well known: Ad Usum Fabricae, from which came the folk expression “AUF”, in other words, “at no cost”. As with the entire history of the Navigation service, one key date stands out from the seminal study by Prof. Francesco Ogliari, transport and navigation historian: the wooden vessel Verbano was launched on February 15, 1826 in Magadino. It took a whole day to reach the Sesto Calende harbour from the northern bank of the lake.

In 1842, with the Verbano getting on in years, the first steel steamer using steam power was put into service: it was the San Carlo which was joined in 1844 by its twin ship, also named Verbano. Four years later both ships were used by Garibaldi to go from Arona to Intra and then to Luino.
From the Radetsky to the Paleocapa

In 1851 the Austrian government ensured the passenger and cargo transport service by means of the warship Radetsky, complemented by the Taxia, the Benedeck from 1853, and finally the Ticino. In 1855 the Kingdom of Sardinia acquired the San Carlo and Verbanò and placed three more steamers in service, the San Gottardo, Lucomagno and San Bernardino. With the paddle steamer Verona performing a service that, starting from Trieste and Venice touching, goes up the Po and the Ticino near to Pavia and finally entering into the waters of Lake Maggiore to reach finally Locarno; transportation is not limited to the passengers but extends to the post service and the salt.

In 1869 the small steamer Paleocapa entered service. This vessel could carry 30 people and was powered by a propeller system. Seven years later, in 1876, the glorious name of Verbanò was given to a large vessel, which had a capacity of 600 people and 500 horsepower; it was built entirely in Italy.

The recovery after the First World War began in 1923 with the arrival of the modern diesel engine that was fitted to five new vessels capable of carrying 250 passengers: the Arona, Dovia, Legnano, Monfalcone and Racconigi. Other motor vessels were subsequently added: the Azalea, Camelia, Fiordaliso and Magnolia, all capable of carrying 150 people. In the meantime, road travel grew and tourism shifted mainly onto the roads, so that numbers of travellers on the lake decreased. Therefore, the service on offer also had to change.

The great vessels of the 20th century

At the start of the 20th century large vessels capable of transporting hundreds of passengers entered service: in 1903 the Lombardia (700 passengers), in 1904 the Regina Madre (500) and in 1908 the Francia. The Regina Madre, having been refurbished several times and well maintained, has its original features today and is still in service with the name of Piemonte: it is the jewel in the crown of The Lake Maggiore Ferry Company. In the following years, the first three large steam vessels with propellers entered service: the Milano (1912), Torino (1913) and Genova (1914).
Car ferries

In 1933 car ferries were a novelty. An old motor ship, the San Cristoforo, carried 252 passengers and 21 tonnes of cars from Intra to Laveno in twenty minutes. The time saved in crossing from the Piedmontese to the Lombard banks was significant. During the Second World War some vessels were destroyed, others were seriously damaged, and this meant that everything had to start anew: first with three motorboats (the Albatro, Cigno and Ibis), the San Carlo ferry (120 tonnes of vehicles and 400 passengers), and again the Milano, Genova and San Gottardo. In 1956 the service was extended to the north, in the Swiss basin. In the same year the Roma, with two propellers, was launched. This vessel could transport 840 passengers. A third ferry, the San Bernardino, was added in 1960 and two years later the Venezia, identical to the Roma, entered service.
Arrows across the Lake

The first hydrofoil entered service in 1964 – the Freccia del Verbano (freccia means “arrow”) which reached a cruising speed of approximately 60 km per hour. The fleet kept on growing – the Italia and Helvetia, which were identical to the Venezia and Roma, had a maximum capacity of 760 people.

The fourth ferry was the San Cristoforo, which took the place of the 1933 San Cristoforo. In 1968 the second hydrofoil, the Freccia del Ticino, entered service, providing an international route from Arona to Locarno. The crossing took one and a half hours compared with four hours for the other vessels.

Between 1972 and 1974 the six vessels of the Alpino series entered service which to this day, thanks to their features and carrying capacity, constitute the most important element of the fleet operating on the lake.

In 1976, in addition to the two new hydrofoils, the Freccia delle Camelianie and Freccia delle Magnolie, both of which had capacity for 80 passengers, the two-way ferry Sempione entered service. With its twin decks, carrying capacity of 90 vehicles and 600 passengers, as well as the new Voith-Schneider propulsion system, this vessel was a truly innovative step forward in the service.
The Verbania: pride of the fleet

In 1980 and 1982 two large hydrofoils capable of carrying 180 people, the Freccia dei Giardini and Enrico Fermi, entered service on the international route to Switzerland.

Four years later in 1986 the Verbania, the flagship of the fleet, entered service with a capacity of 1,100 passengers. Capable of serving meals to 400 people, in addition to ferry routes it is particularly well suited to cruises arranged for meetings or other occasions, and these in turn can be enlivened by on-board parties.

In fact, it is possible to organise congresses and business meetings on all the vessels operating on the lake routes.


MORE THAN 1,500 KM PER DAY

Thanks to its imposing fleet of more traditional vessels and modern, rapid ferries, the Lake Maggiore Ferry Company has routes around the Italian part of Lake Maggiore covering an average of approximately 430 km per day during the low season.

This increases three-fold, up to 1,570 km per day, during peak season.

In the Swiss part, the average daily distance covered is 115 km in winter and 570 km in summer.
# Maggiore Lake

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Maggiore Lake

Let’s get started by saying that the Lago Maggiore, called by the Romans Lacus maximus or Verbanus, is not the largest to the extension. We may, to be precise, call it Verbano, the name by which it is still known. We can then give way to history and tradition and for all intents and purposes recognise this grandiose name, as it really is: Lake Major.

Let us add quietly that anyway the name was usurped from Lake Garda. The latter, which in fact was created as a result of the same geological phenomena, retains its geographical record as the largest Italian lake. This “arrogance” can be excused thanks to the majesty of its landscapes, the beauty of its islands, and the charm of the cities and villages overlooking it.

The geography of the Lake

Turning to its geography: the lake, which occupies a basin of tectonic-glacial origin, belongs to Piedmont in the west and Lombardy in the east. The northern part, representing approximately one-fifth of its surface area, is part of Canton Ticino in the Italian part of Switzerland. Its lowest point is near Ghiffa, which lies at 372 metres depth. The Ticino river is, in fact, the main tributary in the north and sole effluent in the south, near Sesto Calende. Other minor tributaries are the Verzasca, Maggia and Toce (which have isolated the small Mergozzo lake), the Tresa, effluent of Lake Lugano, and the Bardello, effluent of Lake Varese, in addition to numerous streams.

We are, therefore, in the middle of a very wide catchment (6,200 square kilometres) which carries a large quantity of rainwater capable of raising the level of the lake by several metres, particularly in the spring and autumn.
The landscape

At the foot of the first spurs of the Lepontine Alps, which are visible in the distance, Lake Maggiore offers a very varied landscape: in the north are the floodplains of Ticino and Maggia, and beyond the two banks, pastures and hills, woods and mountains. The territory around the lake is a veritable explosion of colours, from the blue of the waters to the mellow green of the hills and the intense green of the woods, up to the rocks and whiteness of the alpine peaks. The variety in colours is matched by the variety of landscapes and in the artistic and cultural character found there. Stern in the north, up to the narrow pass between Cannobio and Maccagno, the landscape opens up on a wide basin in the west, while the east is marked by steep and rocky hills belonging to the Pizzoni in Laveno and Ferro (Iron) Mount. From Castagnola Point in the south, the lake widens into the gulf of Pallanza and descends down to Arona in a constant series of villas and gardens. The eastern bank is less varied in landscape and goes gently as far as Angera. The somewhat monotonous landscape is broken by the cliff with the remarkable Sanctuary of St. Catherine in Sasso and the hill of St. Quirico with the fortress of Angera. Farther south, beyond Arona in the west and Angera in the east, the lake narrows between low banks, with marshy tracts, up to Sesto Calende, where the Ticino river continues on its course.

THE ISLANDS

There are eleven islands in the lake. The most famous, in the Borromeo group, is Isola Bella (Beautiful Island) with the 17th century Borromeo Palace and a magnificent terraced garden. This is a true palace-island, a prized feature in an architectural system set up by the Borromeo family as a park of wonders. The Isola dei Pescatori (Fishermen’s Island) has in fact been shaped into a rustic-island, and the Isola Madre (Mother Island) was transformed into an island-garden. Isola Bella is “fantastic and unreal”, so Charles Dickens described it in his Pictures from Italy, chronicle of a journey to Italy in the middle of the 19th century. He wrote, “The marvellous day was nearing sunset when we reached Lake Maggiore, graced with its uplifting islands. Although Isola Bella is unreal and fantastic, it is nevertheless truly beautiful. Any shape rising from those blue waters cannot help but be beautiful with such scenery surrounding it”. What more need be said after this very English acknowledgment? One can really imagine him as he stares in open-mouthed wonder: it is truly beautiful. And other famous visitors loved the three islands in the lake, which was an obligatory stop on the grand tours of Italy. Royal guests such as Queen Victoria and Emperor Frederick II savoured their beauty. As well as Dickens came George Bernard Shaw, Ernest Hemingway and the composer Umberto Giordano. Just to mention a few on the international cultural scene; today we would say in the international jet-set. Going back to the islands, there is also the small island of San Giovanni (St. John) which Toscanini wanted entirely for himself. The great orchestra conductor retired there to his 17th century palace for many years, enjoying the silence and beauty of the landscape.
The tourist boom

As for the other great lakes, economic growth, a wider range of transport services, and increased wealth significantly changed society in these areas. After the Second World War there was a boom in tourism, and it has since rapidly become the principal generator of business and employment.

Tourism has changed from an elitist activity to a social phenomenon. This is partly due to a wider range of transport services on the lake, which have created an intricate network of routes providing a much wider choice, making it possible to transport cars. There are services that suit both “hit and run” tourists as well as those preferring longer stays.

The climate

The Alps and alpine foothills protect the lake from the northern winds. The body of water fulfils a significant thermoregulatory function.

As a result of this, the climate is enviably mild, particularly on the western side.

In winter, the temperature normally does not fall below 3 °C and in summer it rarely goes above 30 °C. The climate favours the cultivation of both fruit and ornamental plants that normally grow in Mediterranean or more temperate areas: olive trees, orange trees, lemon trees, and cedars.

As for all water basins surrounded by mountains, the surface of the lake is swept by periodic winds: the north wind “Tramontana” in the morning and then the “inverna” which blows from the south. There is also a “zone” wind, the “mergozzo”, which blows from the bay of Pallanza, whereas the stormy wind is known as “maggiore”.

A human presence

On the western bank are important tourist centres, grandiose buildings, villas, parks and gardens; on the eastern bank silence envelops the urban centres, which retain their rustic charm intact.

An archaic and remote ambience surrounds the entire lake, once you have passed the major hotels and the two banks.

The art is mainly in the Romanesque style, certainly not exemplary, but testimony to simple and spontaneous religious spirit in churches and belfries. Certain churches, however, stand out for their stylistic character. Some of these are St. John the Baptist in Montorfano, the parish

Lake Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total area</td>
<td>212 square kilometres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area of the Swiss part</td>
<td>45 square kilometres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altitude</td>
<td>193 metres above sea level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length</td>
<td>65 kilometres between Magadino and Sesto Calende</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum width</td>
<td>12 kilometres between Mergozzo and Cerro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum width</td>
<td>3 kilometres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average depth</td>
<td>175 metres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum depth</td>
<td>372 metres near Griffa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lake circumference</td>
<td>170 kilometres</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THE BORROMEO FAMILY

For the Visconti and Sforza families and for all the powerful individuals who followed them, the dominion of these lands could only be guaranteed by a defence system capable of firmly controlling the passageway for troops to move from north to south along the course of the Ticino river and the lake basin.

Bellinzona and Locarno took control of access in the north; Angera and Arona in the south; Vigogna on the Toce river ensured access to Ossola.

In line with the wishes of the dukes of Milan, the Borromeo family were entrusted with controlling these defences, especially from Swiss incursions, but they managed to establish a truly autonomous State which, at the time of its maximum extension, covered 1,000 square kilometres. This noble family has left its mark on the history and art in every town on the eastern bank, and had a strong Lombard influence in Piedmontese territory due to its close links with Milan.

History has seen the French occupation of Lombardy, the temporary Swiss incursions, the presence of Charles V, Francesco Maria Sforza’s rule and, finally, the domination by the Hapsburgs of Spain in 1535.

The Spaniards imposed a harsh regime, with an ensuing cycle of famine and pestilence. The Borromeo family, especially St. Charles and Cardinal Federigo, were a symbol of unity and a source of security and safety for the people of the Verbano area.

The statue of St. Charles in Arona expresses these ties with the people of the lake visually, not only spiritually.

Churches of Baveno and Trebbia, and St. Vittore in Locarno. An obligatory stop is the small church of Santa Caterina del Sasso, a sanctuary at Laveno place on a sheer cliff overlooking the lake. There are also some good examples of Renaissance art, particularly in the restoration of ancient Romanesque churches. The interiors of these churches are characterised by the presence of several works of art: frescoes dating back to the 14th century (Angera), and to the Renaissance period, altar pieces by Gaudenzio Ferrari and works by Morazzone in Arona, leading to the marvellous collections of paintings in the halls of the Borromeo Palace on Isola Bella and in the museum at the Dugnani Palace in Pallanza.
The full light of the sun

In relation to the lake’s connection with the world of letters, it is interesting to note that Piero Chiara and Vittorio Sereni were both born in Luino in the same year (1913).

The former has written numerous novels which, taken as a whole, paint a cross-section of the human comedy in a consciously provincial key and which have been adopted by the film industry in the Italian comedy genre. Sereni’s oeuvre is totally original in the context of national poetry. Many writers and poets have left important signs of their passage on Lake Maggiore. Petrarch started this tradition when he described the Verbano as an exceedingly healthy resort in a letter to his doctor, Albertino da Cannobio. However, it was particularly during the Romantic period that foreign travellers flocked to its shores, attracted by the beauty of the landscape and charm of the lake’s atmosphere. One need only think of Goethe, Heine, Stendhal, Dickens, Dumas, Valéry, Flaubert and Faure.

Barrès (1862-1923) was one of the many to be enchanted by the Borromean islands. In connection with Isola Bella, he wrote “…here are the gardens of Armida depicted by Tasso, here is the island of Alcina described by Ariosto…”.

John Addington Symonds (1840-1893), suggesting a comparison of the beauties of the Italian lakes, seems to prefer Verbano which has no equal for “those who love the infinite space, the shadows

O tranquil Belgirate!
The hall looks onto the garden:
among the straight tree-trunks shines the turquoise mirror of the lake.

From Grandmother Hope’s friend di Guido Gozzano

I could at least be the lord of a humble parish,
tell you, with the flock in the evenings along the hill slopes,
the prayers. With the sun, the rocks, with this Your saintly people repeat the offer.

From Poems in the church-yard by David Maria Turoldo, Taino, Lake Maggiore, 1947.
of the slowly sailing clouds on the azure slopes, the islands and gardens, the distant eyeing of the mountains covered in snow and the breath, the air, the immensity and the full light of the sun...”. Stendhal said: “If you possess a heart and a shirt, sell the shirt and go and see the banks of Lake Maggiore”. And it was by these banks that he was inspired to write the Charterhouse of Parma, his masterpiece. Other artists, poets, men of letters, were attracted by it: Fogazzaro, D’Annunzio, Thomas Mann, just to mention a few. Nor should we forget that Lake Maggiore served partly as a background in Hemingway’s great novel, A Farewell to Arms.

The lake breathes a hidden palpitation
And the stars bat their eyelids
Divine: the myth of the mountains
Appears limpid, and eavesdrops.

From Lyric fragments, by Clemente Rebora

Dead in foggy sunsets of other skies
I survive your azure evenings,
the occasional boats in the late evening blooming with lights.
When you tend to sleep
and make sounds of hooves and of song
and I linger lost at your crossroads
you light in the darkness of a square
a beacon of calm, a window.

From Winter in Luino, by Vittorio Sereni

These passages are drawn from an essay by Roberto Cicala on the image of Lake Maggiore in the works of 20th century Italian poets, which appeared in Verbanus, 20/1999, published by Alberti Editore on behalf of the association “Società dei Verbanisti”.

Suddenly the evening is upon us.
One no longer knows
Where the lake ends...

From Terrace, by Vittorio Sereni
# Itineraries

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Heading North
on the Lake Maggiore Express

This tour offers an unforgettable journey with the boats of the Navigazione Lago Maggiore and the charming narrow gauge railway Vigezzina - Centovalli.

Let’s leave our cars behind, although they can be taken from one bank to the other by ferry. The recommended mode of transport is by boat, from which we can admire the view from a privileged and somewhat unusual vantage point, the lake.

In the first itinerary there is an exception: as well as Ferry Company vessels, there will be trains – the Swiss one from Centovalli and a Trenitalia one. This is the Lake Maggiore Express, a happy tourist combination of train and ship and a model of international tariff integration.
We shall concentrate on the boat trip, travelling for four hours. We shall board in Arona and head north, visiting various towns until arriving at Locarno. This booklet is not intended to be a tourist guide but merely to recommend some places where the boats go that have interesting features, tourist sights, interesting anecdotes, famous monuments that are not to be missed, churches, villas, parks and gardens. Below are a few suggestions for appreciating wonderful places. This itinerary is not intended to be complete, nor will it mention all the places in the area. Some localities will be mentioned in the itineraries which follow. After all, as mentioned at the start: visiting Lake Maggiore is wonderful and somewhat surprising. There are too many interesting attractions, too many places worth visiting, too many marvels. It is, in any event, a challenge worth undertaking.

A lake... around which my heart has never ceased to wander.

J.J. Rousseau, Memorie

LAKE MAGGIORE EXPRESS

A day-trip on Lake Maggiore and through the Centovalli (Hundred valleys), the Valley of Vigezzo and the Val d'Ossola may start from any of the locations covered in the itinerary. The day is rich in contrasts: travelling in Italy and the southern part of Switzerland, the Canton Ticino. We can travel on the entire lake, on the modern motor ships of the Lake Maggiore Ferry Company, admiring the Borromeo Islands, the Cannero castles and the Brissago Islands until reaching Locarno in Switzerland at the northern tip of Lake Verbano. We shall be able to have lunch on board, in the ship’s restaurant, or in some small inn on the lake or inland. We shall cross one of the wildest and most romantic territories, from Locarno to Domodossola, with the colourful train of the Centovalli and Vigezzo Valley Railways. This area is characterised by hair-raising bridges, streams and waterfalls, vineyards, impenetrable forests and villages on mountain slopes. Then Trenitalia crosses the Val d'Ossola to return to Lake Maggiore, to its southern part in Baveno, in Stresa, up to Arona. The loop trail (in a geographical sense clockwise or counterclockwise), it can start from any of the places mentioned by the entire path. A two-day trip is also possible, stopping overnight at any place on the journey. There are, in fact, two types of ticket: A valid for one day; the other is valid for two days and also entitles one, to an intermediate stop, accommodation in a place on the itinerary (this is not included in the price of the ticket) and free passage aboard all vessels on the lake. For more information please visit www.lagomaggioreexpress.com.
Let’s start our first virtual trip on the lake as if an imaginary day would never end aboard our fantastic ship. One look at the map: heading south to north, from Arona to Locarno, examining the places to visit and what to see. Only essential information is provided for certain places, as they will be covered more extensively in other itineraries later in the guide.

**Arona**

*West bank (Piemonte)*

Altitude 212 m  
Population 16,000

- To see  
  - Corso Marconi, along the lake.  
  - House of the Podestà  
  - Church of the Martyr Saints  
  - Church of Santa Maria Nascente  

2.5 km away: the statue of St. Carlone and the church of St. Carlo Borromeo (St. Charles).

**Angera**

*East bank (Lombardia)*

Altitude 205 m  
Population 5,200

- To see  
  - The Fortress  
  - Civic and Archaeological Museum

**Meina**

*West bank (Piemonte)*

Altitude 214 m  
Population 2,100

Which is a starting point for excursions in the Vergante area. Two villas are worth mentioning: Villa Pasta (neoclassic with early liberty features), and Villa Ferggiana (which has a grandiose façade). The 18th century parish of St. Margherita houses frescoes by Peracino and Peretti dating back to 1817.
Lesa
West bank (Piemonte)
Altitude 198 m
Population 2,400

- To see
  Villa Stampa
  St. Sebastian, small Romanesque church dating back to the 11th century, in the neighbourhood of the Villa.
- The surrounding area
  In Massino Visconti on the Vergante hills, the Visconti d’Aragona Castle dating back to the 13th century and Romanic St. Michael’s Church

Villa Stampa is situated on the lakeside: it was the home of Alessandro Manzoni. Across the road, in the midst of a vast park, is the neoclassical Villa Noseda.

Belgirate
West bank (Piemonte)
Altitude 199 m
Population 530

- To see
  The Chiesa Vecchia, (Old Church), rebuilt in the 17th century, and retaining the Romanesque belfry.

Many villas have been inhabited by famous people, from Manzoni to Rosmini, from Benedetto to Giovanni Cairoli, and Guido Gozzano.

The first Italian rowing club was founded here.

The next stops by Lake Maggiore Ferry Company vessels are Stresa and Pallanza, both on the west bank. These towns face each other at the entrance to a wide bay, the most beautiful place on Lake Verbano, made more precious by the Borromeo Islands.

Stresa
West bank (Piemonte)
Altitude 200 m
Population 4,800

- To see
  Lungolago (the lakeside) with Piazza Marconi (Marconi Square).
  St. Ambrose
  The former Villa Ducale
  Villa Pallavicino
  The Congress Building
  Great Hotels of the end ‘800 and the Roaring Twenties.
Pallanza

West bank (Piemonte)
Altitude 197 m
Population 1,300

• To see
  St. Stephen’s
  Dugnani Palace
  Museum of Landscape
  Church of the Madonna di Campagna
  Punta Castagnola
  (Castagnola Point)
  Villa Taranto

We shall visit these places by following other itineraries. There is also a visit to Intra, from where the ferry for Laveno, on the east bank, sets off.

We leave behind the bay, from the imaginary line joining these two destinations. Lake Maggiore resumes its northerly route.

Baveno

West bank (Piemonte)
Altitude 205 m
Population 5,000

Located on the western bank of the lake, in front of the Borromeo gulf, it is famous for its pink granite quarries and the elegant ancient villas.

Ghiffa

West bank (Piemonte)
Altitude 201 m
Population 2,500

• The surrounding area
  The Morigia castle, dating back to the 15th century, is situated in the district of Frino. This was extended and refurbished in the 17th and 19th centuries. The castle is situated on a small headland on the slopes of mount Carciago.
  Piero Chiara’s novel, “The Bishop’s Room”, is set in a villa in Ghiffa. The church of Santa Croce, dating back to the 18th century, is worth visiting. However, Ghiffa is mainly famous for the nature reserve of Sacro Monte della SS. Trinità, which covers an area of approximately 200 hectares. The Sanctuary, built between the 17th and 19th centuries on the foundations of a late-Romanesque oratory, consists of a church, three chapels dedicated respectively to St. John, Abraham and the Coronation of the Virgin, and a portico with the Via Crucis.

Intra

West bank (Piemonte)
Altitude 201 m
Population 30,000

Together with Pallanza, it has been part of the municipality of Verbania since 1939.

• To see
  S. Fabiano
  Oratorio di S. Giuseppe Perretti and Scaramuccia Palaces
  The Duomo of St. Vittore

Cannero Riviera

West bank (Piemonte)
Altitude 225 m
Population 1,100

It stands on a promontory north of Verbania, thanks to a natural creek, enjoys an enviable privilege of being sheltered from cold winter winds. The mild climate allows the growth of a lush Mediterranean vegetation characterized by citrus, palms, olive trees and during the spring season, favors the early blooming of camellias, rhododendrons and azaleas together to transform the country every year in a lush flowery balcony on the lake.

The church of St. Gottardo, dating back to the 14th century, is situated in Carmine Superiore, a village built in grey stone. This is decorated with Lombard frescoes dating back to the early 15th century.
Lake Maggiore travelling by water

Luino

East bank (Lombardia)
Altitude 202 m
Population 15,500

- To see
  The Madonna del Carmine
  (15th century) with frescoes.
  Civic Museum
  St. Peter’s, with its Romanesque belfry and an Adoration of
  the Magi attributed to Bernardino Luini.

The Reserve of the Sacred Mount in GhiFFa

The eastern slope toward the lake is very steep, whereas the reserve slopes very gradually to the west and is crossed by many small streams. The forest dominates with its oak trees, chestnut trees, lime trees, birches and alders. The range of fauna is similarly varied: roe deer, badgers, foxes, squirrels, marten and beech-marten. Sometimes it is possible to see wild boars and stags. For trekking fans there are excursions and panoramic trails on the slopes of Mount Carciago and near the Laghetto delle Streghe. It is also possible to walk the historical and archaeological trail, known as “segni sulla pietra” or “signs on rocks”: it takes approximately 90 minutes. The Sanctuary is certainly worth a visit.

The Castles

The Cànnero castles: these are ruins of medieval fortresses, originally belonging to the Malpagas, rebuilt by the Borromeo family in 1519. The Vitaliana fortress served a defensive purpose and was also used to control the burgeoning trade with Switzerland which took place on the lakeside. Until a short time ago, this was the most accessible route for communication.
The municipality has its historical centre in the lower part (Maccagno Inferiore); located south of the smal river Giona which separates it from the upper part (Maccagno Superiore). The Imperial Tower dominates the urban centre. It is said that Otto I stayed here after a shipwreck in AD926, and in fact the Ottos made it an Imperial court. Maccagno remained independent until 1692, when it became part of the Borromeo domain.

The Civic Museum

The Maccagno Civic Museum is located in a “bridge-like building” on the Giona river. It was founded in 1979 and its principal aim was to represent various facets of contemporary art, displaying more than two thousand works including sculptures, paintings, engravings and photographs of the period 1930-1980. De Chirico, Fiume, Levi, Parisi and Picasso are among the artists represented here.

THE GIONA PARK AND SPORTS IN MACCAGNO

On the banks of the river, the Giona Park is truly a green oasis surrounding its mouth. The place offers tree-lined beaches: as well as the Park beach, there are also the lido beach and the one in Ronco delle Monache. All water sports may be practised in this part of the lake. There is also a yacht club with a port for boats. Athletics and tennis can also be practised in Maccagno. Excursions on foot may be made towards Monte Venere (Mount Venus), Montagnola and Monte Borgna. Maccagno is part of one of the most interesting itineraries in the Veddasca Valley, going to the Forcora Pass and Lake Delio.

Maccagno

East bank
Altitude 210 m
Population 2,200

Here, as the Palazzo della Zecca, dating back to 1622, bears testimony granting this municipality the right to mint coins until the time of Napoleon. We approach the pier, not far from the small tourist harbour, which faces Piazza Roma. The Sanctuary of the Madonna della Punta is situated nearby. From here it is possible to enjoy a magnificent view of the lake and the castles in Cànnero, which we saw on the other bank.
TORPEDO-BOATS

From 1892, in order to guard the Italian-Swiss border, the Italian Navy had a few torpedo-boats of the Euterpe type on Lake Verbano. These included the Locust, which was built in Great Britain in the Thornycroft shipyards and launched in 1883. On January 9, 1896 this boat sank with 12 men on board, during a storm off the coast of Poggio di Tronzano. The wreck was found near Cannobio.

(reference source: Verbanus 2002 – Alberti/Società dei Verbanisti, page 469)

Cannobio

West bank (Piemonte)
Altitude 214 m
Population 5,500

- To see
  Santuario della Pietà, dating back to the end of the 16th century, with an octagonal dome built in 1600, and an altar piece by Gaudenzio Ferrari.
- The surrounding area
  Val Cannobina and Orrido di Sant’Anna

Halfway along the trip, between Cannobio and Bressago, we crossed the Swiss Border. On the map, the last Italian town is Piaggio Valmara. This is the Swiss part of the lake and we proceed swiftly towards Locarno.

Another itinerary concentrates on the Upper Verbano in Switzerland. Here the next stops are: Ranzo, Gerra-Gambarogno, Ascona, S. Nazzaro, Vira, Magadino and Locarno, the final destination for this first journey.

THE GAMBAROGNO RIVIERA

Lake Maggiore Ferry Company vessels plying the waters from Ranzo to Magadino stop at all towns on the Gambarogno Riviera. It is a very small region, almost a garden, with plants, flowers and lights. Not far off, in the mountains, is Indemini, the best known among many villages with stone houses, as well as trails, the chestnut woods, the peace of the fores.
Isola Bella

and Isola dei Pescatori

Isola Bella and Isola dei Pescatori (Fishermen’s Island): the former is almost entirely covered by the Borromeo Palace complex and its Italian gardens; the latter is characterised by a picturesque village with narrow winding streets.

Leaving Stresa, the vessel soon reaches Isola Bella, the southernmost and most famous of the islands in the archipelago. Until the first decades of the 17th century this was considered to be “a rough rock inhabited by fifty families”. In 1632, however, thanks to Charles III Borromeo construction on the monumental complex was started.

Dedicated to Charles’ wife, Isabella d’Adda, the island was named Isabella. It only took on the name by which it is known to this day in 1735.

First the Borromeo family’s oratory was built and dedicated to St. Justine. Then work on the gardens was started, a job which required several decades and which completely changed the look of the island. Vast quantities of fertile soil were brought, slo-
ping terraces were created and forest trees and flowers were cultivated. The Italian gardens were then further embellished with statues and water displays. On the death of Charles III the palace was completed by his sons. Today people can admire one of the most important examples of baroque architecture, with the great ballroom as its centrepiece. It is reached via a monumental stairway. People are allowed into the magnificent rooms, rich in stuccos and reliefs, furnished with antique furniture and Murano chandeliers, and made more precious by paintings by famous masters. The dance-hall, designed at the end of the 18th century by the abbot Zanoia, is one of the most beautiful rooms. Also worth mentioning are the music room, the medal room, and the tapestry gallery. Six artificial caves, almost at sea-level, are covered with pebble mosaics and represent different marine environments. Inside are the impressive collection of marionettes, statues by Gaetano Monti, Chinese sculptures and interesting handicrafts. Part of the Palace is open to visitors. To fully appreciate the beauty of the art collections, the richness of the history of the Borromeo family, the charm still emanating from these rooms, it is necessary to have a guided tour. Still reeling from the beauty of Isola Bella, after a few minutes we reach the Isola dei Pescatori (Fishermen’s Island). It has preserved the charm of an ancient fishing village and was probably the first of the islands to be inhabited by people. As testimony to this, one can see the church of St. Vittore, dating back to the 11th century and extended and restored several times. Narrow roads link small and simple dwellings, with their stone portals and picturesque underpasses. Only a few inhabitants of the island currently practise the original fishing activity, but all have retained their distinguishing character, which is the real source of attraction for tourists. Naturally, the inns on the island offer a variety of dishes based on fish from the lake. The Borromeo Islands shut off the bay formed by the lake between Pallanza (with Castagno-la Point) and Stresa. The islands also include St. John’s Island, a few metres away from the Pallanza lakeside, and the islet of La Malghera, which is uninhabited. This is situated directly between Isola Bella and Fishermen’s Island.

**THE ITALIAN GARDENS**

Immediately after 1635, forest trees were planted only in the north-eastern corner of the island, while the rest of the garden consisted of lawns and flower beds. Half a century later the structure of the garden was changed: forest trees occupied the whole island and fauna was introduced. The gardens are laid out in ten overlapping terraces, with balustrades and statues by Resnati and Simonetta. The names of the different garden levels evoke the corresponding statues or plants. Hence there is Diana’s Courtyard, the Camphor Level, the Theatre Level, the Flower Garden, the Garden of the Azaleas and the Garden of Love, on the fifth terrace, with water lilies, citrus fruits, box-wood trees and yew trees amid statues of the Four Seasons. The garden is a living botanic encyclopaedia: azaleas, rhododendrons, camellias, olea fragrans and many valuable varieties of plants. A true paradise for garden-lovers.
From Arona, which is called “the entrance of Lake Maggiore”, famous for its colossal statue of Sancarlone, take the boat and cross the lake at its narrowest point, we land in Lombardy, Angera, dominated by the famous fortress that keeps the imposing castle Borromeo. We stay on the boat sailing in a northerly direction and then reach, facing Stresa, the hermitage of Santa Caterina del Sasso. According to the most reliable accounts, the sanctuary was founded in the second half of the 12th century by a rich merchant, Alberto da Besozzo. Having survived a storm, he made a vow to live the rest of his days in poverty and penance.

The first reliable historical details date back to 1314 when the Milanese monks of St. Ambrose ad Nemus enclosed three small buildings in a single area. Subsequent extensions and other consolidation works have preserved both the facade and the frescoes in the halls of the chapter-house. The hermitage appears to cling to the cliff, which falls sheer onto the lake. The best view is from here, but the her-
Lake Maggiore travelling by water

The Sanctuary has suffered as a result of the constant threat of landslides, which have also affected the church vault. In the second half of the last century, an important project of architectural and artistic refurbishment was undertaken. This has protected one of the most beautiful places on Lake Verbano. There is an interesting artefact in the courtyard of the Sanctuary: a well-preserved wine-press dating back to the middle of the 18th century.

The church is flanked by a Romanesque belfry, has two aisles and contains works dating back to various periods. The original building is at the back of the church. This was built in honour of St. Caterina and of the cave where the hermit lived.

Having left the hermitage, the boat heads south on the lake until it reaches Angera. The town is almost almost overhung by the mighty Fortress which towers over the whole southern part of the lake. It was built by Milanese bishops during the 11th century, passed on to the Visconti family in the 14th century and to the Borromeo family a century later. The remains of four construction sites are enclosed within the crenulated walls, among which the Fortress is the oldest. The Visconti wing (1280) is of great interest, with its Hall of Justice in which valuable frescoes are preserved. The Scala wing (1374-1385) hosts the Doll Museum with an original collection of great historical value. The most recent is the Borromeo wing which dates back to the 16th and 17th centuries. There is a magnificent view looking out towards the lake. On a clear day one can see the Ossola mountain peaks.

Coming down from the Fortress towards the centre of Angera, one gets to a natural cave known as “Wolf’s Lair”. The cave was inhabited as far back as prehistoric times. It was a pla-

THE CHURCH OF ST. CATERINA

The building of the present church of St. Caterina was constructed towards the end of the 16th century (a vault bears the date 1587). This coincides with the period of greatest construction activity in the hermitage. The fusion of various elements from pre-existing buildings into a single great hall was a rather difficult task. Three well-defined areas are visible, marked by different descending levels of floorings and vaults. On the side near the top are the three chapels which, one presumes, are the surviving parts of the apses of the pre-existing small churches. On the side near the lake there is a minor nave. This probably had the function of linking the ancient entrance at the end of the church to the exit beneath the portico facing the monastery.
ce of worship in Roman times and was known in those days as “Mithras’ Den”. This was an eastern divinity, the protector of commerce, which was evidently already widespread throughout the lake. The Archaeological Museum in the 16th century Pretorio Palace contains exhibits, found near the cave, dating back to prehistoric and Roman times. Those with access to a small boat can easily reach the Islet or Isle of Partegora, in the middle of the bay on which Angera is situated. The small island is rich in cane thickets, vegetation and fauna typical of lakes. Leaving the Fortress of Angera behind, it takes only a few minutes to reach the west bank of the lake, in Arona. Arriving by lake, the “Queen of

**DOLLS AND AUTOMATA**

The Museum of Dolls and Children’s Fashions is located in a number of the halls in the Fortress of Angera. This is the most important such collection in Europe, and includes an ample section devoted to mechanical automata of the 19th and 20th centuries, all in perfect working order. The Museum includes over a thousand different items including dolls, toys, miniature furniture and board games which illustrate the historical and cultural evolution of these children’s objects. The section on children’s fashion is a record of tastes in this area starting from the 17th century up to the 20th century. This is achieved through rare and valuable models. The collection includes dresses and complete outfits for playing and for parties as well as various accessories. This is an interesting journey in time for those interested in the history of customs and fashions.

**THE HOLY MAN OF THE COUNCIL OF TRENTO**

Carlo Borromeo was born in 1538. In 1559 he graduated from Pavia University in canon and civil law. A year later, at the young age of 22, he was appointed Bishop of Milan by his uncle, Giovanni Angelo de’ Medici, a Roman pontiff who took the name of Pius IV. The Pope established that Carlo should rule his diocese from Rome and delegate duties to the vicars.

In 1562 he convinced the Pope to reconvene the Council of Trent, which ended in December 1563.

Upon the death of the Pope, two years later, Carlo Borromeo finally took his place in the Ambrosian Diocese and worked hard to bring the customs of the Lombard clergy into line with the rigid norms established by the Council.

His greatness and saintliness are associated especially with work done in helping the poor, to whom he left his entire and substantial wealth. He died in 1584.
Verbano” is easy to spot since the huge statue of San Carlo Borromeo rises on the hill overlooking it. The remains of the ancient Borromean Fortress, which is today a charming public park, are on the same hill, but nearer the lake.

The lakeside has many gardens and ancient homes.

The church of the Martyrs Graziano and Felino, Romanesque in origin, is worth visiting to see its baroque facade and neoclassical interior.

Inside the Collegiate Church of St. Mary’s there Ferrari dating back to 1511 and a number of paintings by Morazzone.

Every year in July, Arona hosts an international organ festival, whereas in the area of the lakeside promenade, the last Sunday of the month there is a market of hobbyists as well as numerous events throughout the year that make it alive the town. It is worth taking a walk in the Piazza, which is adorned by porticoes of the 15th century, with or without the market. The square is overlooked by the church of the Madonna of the Square and the House of the Podestà, or Palace of Justice, erected in the 15th century.

"SANCARLONE"

The colossal statue of San Carlo Borromeo rises on the hill overlooking Arona, at an altitude of 352 metres.

The Sancarlone ("huge St. Charles") is flanked by the palace (a former seminary) housing the De Filippi college, and by the church dedicated to the saint.

The statue is 20.68 metres high and rests on a base that is more than 11 metres high. It is made of copper and bronze and a staircase climbs all the way to the top inside.

A magnificent view of the lake may be enjoyed from the “Sancarlun” (as it is affectionately called in the local dialect) spanning the Piedmontese and Lombard banks, from St. Caterina del Sasso as far as Angera.

The statue of the Saint is giving a blessing with his right hand whilst his left arm holds the texts of the Council of Trento close to his chest.
From Laveno to Isola Madre in the Magic Triangle

We can come directly to Laveno with a train from Milan Cadorna Ferrovie Nord Milano. At Laveno we embark on a Navigazione Laghi boat to reach Isola Madre, the most important destination of the route that is proposed below.

The start of the day is, however, marked by Laveno: it is the only natural harbour on the east bank of the lake. The small Bosesio river flows into it, and it is the administrative centre of the Laveno-Mombello municipality. From the bay on which it is located it is possible to enjoy a view of the gulf, bordered by Stresa and the Castagnola Point, and also the Borromeo Islands.

The lakeside walk is charming. The old port is near the pier used by the ferries. The typical boats of the region are moored here. These have flat bottoms and are covered by large coloured canopies.

The former Municipal Palace, the church of St. James and St. Philip, the 18th century De Angeli Frua villa, with its garden now a public park, are all worth visiting. Other villas and homes dating back to the 17th and 18th centuries bear testimony to the importance as well as the beauty of the area. Laveno has become an important tourist centre as a result of its easy access from Milan and of its being a key point in communications between Lombardy and Piedmont. The city, however, also has industrial and crafts activities and is, in fact, renowned internationally for its ceramics and pottery.

Some link the name with that of General Titus Labienus, Julius Caesar’s lieutenant, but there is no firm evidence of this.
Tourist attractions in Laveno include an important music festival, the underwater crib which is lit up during the Christmas period, and the firework display on the night of Ferragosto (a mid-August public holiday). After leaving Laveno we head east via the ferry for vehicles that connects us with Intra (Piedmont) with a frequency of every twenty minutes (hence the slogan “your way on the lake”). From Intra continue by boat to Isola Madre. This is the farthest island from the lake shores and the most extensive. In the 16th century it was transformed from a fortified island into a very comfortable residence by Lancelot and Renato Borromeo. It is almost entirely taken up by a magnificent botanical garden, spread over five terraced levels. Another Borromeo Palace rises in a large courtyard, next to the family mausoleum. The building’s façade displays a double portico. It has been converted into a museum which houses a collection of period interiors, of tapestries and china and the famous marionettes’ theatre. There is also an impressive picture-gallery with paintings of the 17th century Lombard period. The garden is the “jewel in the crown” of the island. It is rich in rare plants and exotic flowers, a place where one might see white peacocks, pheasant, heron and multi-coloured parrots. In springtime, it is possible to appreciate the azaleas, rhododendrons and camellias in bloom.

THE CERAMICS MUSEUM

The city of Laveno is famous for the manufacture of tableware, many of which has typically traditional shapes. The Italian Ceramics Society grew significantly in the second half of the 19th century, and by 1880 already had 500 employees. The company specialised in household pottery, but also manufactured finer and artistic ceramics. The height of its success, also in the artistic sense, came between the two world wars. However, after a crisis in the 1960s, it was taken over by the Richard Ginori company in Milan. The Manifattura Revelli was another important factory. The best pieces are to be found in the Ceramics Museum – Civic Pottery Collection which is housed in the 16th century Perabò Palace, in the Cerro area, 3 km south of Laveno.

THE MARIONETTES’ THEATRE

The Marionettes’ Theatre in the Borromeo home still manages to surprise people with its wonders and infernal monsters. The theatre has been restored to its original splendour, after having been stored in the loft of the Palace for a long time. Today it fascinates a vast public and represents a valuable reference for students of theatre and customs. The marionettes represent ladies and gentlemen, devils and winged dragons, animals and masks. They are all carved from wood by superbly skilled craftsmen, and dressed in velvet, silk and satin, exquisitely made with elegance and style. These wooden actors have fantastic characters, incredible appearances, contraptions and stage tricks, coloured flames and smoke, sound machines and lighting effects.
The “Centrolago” Stresa and Baveno

The two famous resorts overlook the enchanting scenery of the Borromean islands and due to their favorable geographical position, have been the focus of international tourism on Lake Maggiore since the early twentieth century. With over one hundred facilities, from large and charming hotels Liberty to modern campsites offer almost nine thousand beds.

From Stresa and Baveno, ideal starting point for visiting the islands, the Navigazione Lago Maggiore offers frequent scheduled flights which allow, in the tourist season, every thirty minutes to reach the main places of interest; are also among the most important interchange points for international Italy-Switzerland that occur at daily frequency.

Stresa, the “Pearl of Verbano”, is right at the southern end of the Borromeo Gulf, in front of Punta Castagnola.

And the old Strixia, first feud of the Visconti and then of course the Borromeo. Meet on the lakefront villas and palaces which are now almost all been converted into a luxury hotel.

It is the ancient Strixia, formerly a fief of the Visconti family, and subsequently of course, of the Borromeo family. On the lakeside we come across villas and palaces which have all since been converted into luxury hotels.

The proximity to major centers such as Milan and Turin with their airports, Palazzo dei Congressi, hotels that combine modern equipment with a tradition of hospitality, lush gardens (thanks to a temperature mitigated by the climate of the lake), make that Stresa is today one of the most famous Italian places.

Continuing along the lake we reach Marconi square from where you can take a boat Navigazione Lago Maggiore and head to any other location that overlooks the lake; the public boat service also offers many convenient alternatives.

Staying in Stresa for the time being, facing the pier we can see the Town Hall and, more inland, Cadorna square, which is a sort of elegant open-air drawing room.

The Villa Ducale, formerly the Bolongaro Palace, is in the town centre. The philosopher Antonio Rosmi-
Lake Maggiore travelling by water

ni, who received it as a present in 1848, spent the last years of his life there. Today it is the headquarters of the Centre for Rosminian Studies and houses a museum dedicated to the philosopher. The neoclassical church of St. Ambrose (1790) is near the Villa Ducale. The walk along the lakeside leads one to the Grand Hotel e des Iles Borromées, built in 1862 as a project by Polli. Also in the area is the modern Congress Palace. Baveno is a town rich in history, traditions and culture; there are numerous archaeological and architectural treasures of past ages from discoveries of human settlements since the Neolithic era to continue with finds from the Roman period. From 1.500 you date the beginning of the extraction of precious pink granite of the same name; flourishing business that continues to this day. In the nineteenth century the development of major roads such as the inauguration of the carriage road of the Simplon by Napoleon to connect Paris to Milan and the activation of a regular service of steamers for sailing tourism in the Lake Maggiore, make it a sought after place international holiday resort. Of great value is the baptismal church called Romanesque Pieve and important center of worship in Roman Franca. The parish church is located in the center of Baveno, overlooking the square built in the late ‘500 in the cemetery enclosed by a Via Crucis nineteenth century. On the right is a building of compact volume, with smooth ashlar base and two rows of windows initially was part of the rectory, but in 1870 was absorbed by the State, which was renovated in neo-classical style and used as a Town Hall. The dedication of the church refers to the two Holy Martyrs Roman, whose bodies were found by St Ambrose, and thus testifies to a kind of addiction to Baveno from the Diocese of Milan.

THE MUSICAL WEEKS

The Palazzo dei Congressi in Stresa hosts important events and international conferences. The Stresa Musical Weeks-International Festival take place in August and September. There is a camellia display in the town in April. The Music Competition for young people takes place there as well. The famous Stresa Prize for Fiction is awarded in October.

AROUND STRESA

The lake and the mountains are linked by the top of Mount Mottarone, which is at an altitude of almost 1,500 metres, in only twenty minutes. The view embraces several lakes in the region (it is between lakes Maggiore and Orta) and the spectacle is well worth the time taken for the excursion. Other towns above the urban centre enjoy panoramic views and have several churches which often contain small artistic masterpieces. Some of the places around Stresa which are worth visiting, provided one has more than a few minutes to spare, are Binda, Passera, Vedasco, Brisino and Magognino.
Visiting villas and botanical parks

There are many beautiful and historic villas that surround the lake; among these, on the two ends of the geographical Borromeo Gulf, you will find Villa Pallavicini, south of Stresa and Villa Taranto, north of Pallanza. A holiday on Lake Maggiore can not do without a visit to their beautiful gardens.

Villa Pallavicino is a neo-classical building amidst a park. It has been open to the public since 1956 and is approximately 20 hectares, with avenues lined with flowers and mature trees and a wonderful botanical garden.

The main attraction of the park (a perfect example of English garden) is the animals: more than 40 species including mammals and exotic birds (llamas, kangaroos, zebras, flamingos, etc.) live in wide open spaces.

Villa Pallavicino, can be reached from the pier of Stresa with a short walk lasting about ten minutes.

The boats of the Navigazione Lago Maggiore arrive at the entrance of the impressive gardens of Villa Taranto at the pier with the same name: Villa Taranto. The villa’s park covers approximately one quarter of the area of the Castagnola Point.

This is a magnificent residence where the gardens were restored between 1931 and 1936 by a Scottish millionaire, the Captain Mac Eacharn, who owned the villa at the time. It now
Lake Maggiore travelling by water

Belongs to the Italian Prime Minister’s Office. The English-style park is home to a wealth of plants and flowers, including eucalyptus, magnolias, water lilies, lotus flowers and tropical plants as well as beech, birch and chestnut trees. Terraces, avenues and fountains with small ponds make this a unique place, especially when the flowers are in bloom. One can admire them against the backdrop of the lake, which is particularly picturesque.

In 2014, according to the ranking by TheNeeds, the Park of Villa Taranto was declared “the most beautiful garden in the world.”

In 1931, the Scottish Captain Mc Eacharn bought a large estate on the hill of Castagnola Pallanza by the Earl of St. Elias. An ancestor of the captain received from Napoleon the title of Duke of Taranto and the Scottish gentleman decided to call this, his possession Italian Villa Taranto.

Mc Eacharn transformed the old Italian garden in a modern park, enriching it with more than three thousand specimens of plants from all over the world, terraces, pools, expansive lawns sloping down to the lake. Villa Taranto became an important point of reference for contemporary botanists and some of his precious specimens was even considered a “museum of rarities.” The Scottish captain wanted his garden became the garden, and in 1938 he donated all of Villa Taranto in Italy.

With the opening of the gardens to visitors the captain undertook to embellish further cultivating thousands of flowering plants, especially tulips.

The perpetual magnolia: opens its flower/ here the lonely oleander and the queenly/ Brazilian rose. Here dawns / the camellia Empress of dances!... And from the open slopes / everything smiles on the lake’s zephyrs.

G. Prati
Markets on the lake

The destinations in this itinerary have one thing in common, the weekly market. Numerous vessels and hydrofoils, particularly Swiss ones, go to the principal Italian markets.

There are markets in Luino on Wednesdays, in Intra on Saturdays and in Cannobio on Sundays. The Luino market, one of the most important in Italy, is particularly popular. The Lake Maggiore Ferry Company transports more than 3,000 passengers a day on Wednesdays in summer, with departures from all towns. Starting in Luino, on the Lombard shore, we take advantage of the weekly event to take a look at the three towns on the lake. The other two, Cannobio and Intra, are on the Piedmontese shore.

The market in Luino was established by Imperial decree in 1541. Over the years beginning in the second half of the 19th century, this tradition has favoured an active industrial sector alongside the tourism industry, as well as the growth of trade connected with it. Thanks to the beauty of the natural landscape and to the infrastructure serving the area, over time Luino has consolidated
its standing as a tourist centre. The infrastructure includes the narrow-gauge railway leading to Ponte Tresa and the tourist tramways connecting Varese, the road network and especially the service offered by the Lake Maggiore Ferry Company. The market has become an event of significant importance for tourists and a factor of economic development locally.

Luino is also known as the birthplace of the writers Piero Chiara and Vittorio Sereni (see page 16).

Places worth visiting include the tree-lined lakeside, the characteristic historical centre, the Civic Archaeological Museum, the church of the Madonna del Carmine with fifteenth-century frescoes by Bernardo Luini and the equally noteworthy church of St. Joseph. St. Peter’s parish church (1668) contains an Adoration of the Magi also attributed to Luini. There is another weekly market in Cannobio.

This town is situated on the delta formed by the small Cannobino river in a naturally sheltered position. It has a mild climate and harsh landscape since it overlooks a rather narrow part of the lake. As in all centres on Lake Verbano, a walk along the lakeside is absolutely obligatory.

We can admire the Pietà Sanctuary dating back to the end of the 16th century. It has an octagonal dome built in 1601 and an altar piece by Gaudenzio Ferrari, the Ascent to Calvary.

The historical centre is characterised by the collegiate church of St. Vittore and the medieval Palace of Reason, known as Parrasio. Intra is the final destination in our tour of the markets.

Here too visitors are encouraged to take a walk along the lakeside, going from the pier and ferry quay up to the gardens at the mouth of St. John’s river, with a view of the Laveno basin and the Lombard shore.

Intra, together with Pallanza, has been the provincial capital of the Verbano-Cusio-Ossola region since 1992.

The city of Verbania was “created” in 1939.

Intra is an ancient Roman settlement. Its medieval traces have disappeared, but there are some from the baroque period in St. Fabian’s church, St. Joseph’s oratory, the Peretti and Scaramuccia Palaces, and the Town Hall.

From the lake the tall copper dome of St. Vittore’s Duomo is unmistakable. This was built in the 18th century on the spot where a church dating back to the 11th century had once stood.

The town is particularly important as a result of the service provided by the Lake Maggiore Ferry Company: vessels and ferries continually moor at its pier, especially those sailing from Laveno.
Locarno, Ascona, Brissago
and its islands

With this itinerary we finally reach the upper basin of the lake, on the Swiss side of Lake Maggiore.

Our destination is the Brissago Islands, which may be reached from all Swiss ports of call (and, of course, from ports in Italy as well, thanks to the Lake Maggiore Ferry Company).

Routes from Locarno, Ascona and Brissago are very frequent during the tourist season. A shuttle vessel provides a service between Porto Ronco and the Islands.

Below are a few comments on the places mentioned previously, prior to setting foot on the Brissago Islands.

Locarno is well-known for its Mediterranean climate, pleasant summer temperature and mild winter weather.

Heading north from Locarno the best known tourist destinations are the valleys and alpine ranges. Heading south along the lake, there is a wealth of riches.

In August however, people are advised to stay on the lake for

**LOCARNO LIGHTS UP THE NIGHT**

In mid-July the spectacle of the firework display (almost 6,000 fireworks) lights up the skies of Locarno for half an hour.

“Lights and Shadows” represents the highlight of two days of festivities on the lake.
Lake Maggiore travelling by water

the International Film Festival, the fourth most important after Cannes, Venice and Berlin.
This is attended by more than 170,000 spectators and 4,000 film professionals, who gather in eight cinemas and the Piazza Grande, as well as the old quarter, the cafés, the intimate restaurants and the flower-lined lakeside.
Separated from Locarno by a headland and by the Maggia river, Ascona is well-known internationally for its tourist and cultural attractions. It is situated in a beautiful sunny bay and endowed with an artistic heritage full of medieval and renaissance historical mementos. There are numerous traces left by the artists who have lived in Ascona since the 17th century, one of which is the magnificent baroque facade of Casa Serodine.
The islands may also be reached from Porto Ronco and Brissago, also on the east bank of the Swiss side.
Brissago is a small town at the foot of Mount Limidario, renowned for its manufactured tobacco and cigars, as well as for its mild climate, rich vegetation, stately mansions and elegant hotels.

MUSIC FOR ALL TASTES

Ascona follows the Locarno Film Festival with a rich programme of “Musical Weeks” from the end of August to the second half of October.
The most important European Festival devoted to “hot jazz” takes place between the end of June and the first week in July. This attracts more than 260 musicians taking part in more than 230 concerts.

THE CANTON TICINO BOTANICAL GARDEN

In the Canton Ticino Botanical Garden, on the Brissago islands, visitors can see sub-tropical plants as well as natural vegetation typically found in the region. On the Isola Grande or St. Pancras’ Island, there is a vast collection of exotic plants, whereas on the Isolino or Isola Piccola, also known as Sant’Apollinare, vegetation is kept in its wild and natural state.
The history of the islands is lost in time. Roman traces have been found on the Isola Grande and the remains of a church dating back to around 1250 have been found on the Isolino. As well as Mediterranean plants, there are also specimens from the Americas, the sub-tropical regions of China, Japan and Korea, from southern Africa, from Australia and some islands in Oceania.
The Islands have been open to the public since 1950. At least four million people are estimated to have visited them.
Six lakes
apart from Verbano

The Navigazione Lago Maggiore suggests some destinations which may be reached at a reduced fare thanks to particular arrangements enabling visitors to combine other means of transport with the vessels.

Enables The traveller can reach the jetty of Mottarone Cableway in Carciano from any port of call. From here it is possible to take the cableway to the peak at an altitude of 1,385 m, from where there are exceptional views.

It is possible to view up to seven lakes from a single vantage point: Maggiore, Orta, Mergozzo, Varese, Biandronno, Monate and Comabbio.

“Of old green cloth, the Mottarone”, sang Gino Bonola in his
Elegy of Lake Orta. The intense and ever-changing green of the natural environment has survived and is still one of the major attractions, as is the view of the “mountain of the two lakes”.

But let us return to the lake. In Carciano we can set off for any of the destinations on Lake Maggiore: we suggest Isola Bella, for those who have yet to see the Borromeo Palace and the gardens.

There is another arrangement on the same day with a day-return ticket which enables us to set off from one of the many ports of call on the lake, visit one of the Borromeo islands, return to Stresa, take a bus which goes through the Mottarone mountain, and passing through Gignese, visit the picturesque village of Orta.

After a visit to the town, a Lake Orta Ferry Company vessel takes us to the Isola di San Giulio, and we can enjoy an atmosphere and a charm which can only be compared to those left behind on Lake Maggiore.

Our itineraries end here. We have suggested a few destinations, some excursions and many boat or hydrofoil trips to admire the many towns and villages on the lakeshores.

We can guarantee one thing. You can buy a Lake Maggiore Ferry Company ticket from any port of call. Even if you do not know your direction or the next destination, you can relax. You will see beautiful places and breathtaking views, in any season and in any weather.

Lake Verbano and the Lake Maggiore Ferry Company are awaiting you. Be sure that you won’t be disappointed.
## Go at the right time

### Shows and events

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<td>“Tredicino aronese”</td>
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<td>Autumn feast and chestnut festival</td>
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<td><strong>Cannobio</strong></td>
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<td>Festa dell’Assunta Torchlight procession on the lake</td>
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<td><strong>Locarno</strong></td>
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<td>Back Home Again, American Music Festival</td>
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<td>I fell good, Locarno Funk Fest</td>
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<td>Palio Remiero, night competition on galleons</td>
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<td><strong>Pallanza</strong></td>
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**Wandering through fairs and markets**

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<td>Angera</td>
<td>Fiera del Borgo, Antiques fair</td>
<td>second Sunday in the month</td>
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<td>Arona</td>
<td>Lake Maggiore fair</td>
<td>May - June</td>
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<td>Hobbyst’s market</td>
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<td>Ascona</td>
<td>Christmas market</td>
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<td>Cannobio</td>
<td>Open-air market</td>
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<td>Ghiffa</td>
<td>Fiera della SS. Trinità Antiques and handicrafts</td>
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<td>Ceramics trade fair</td>
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<td>Locarno</td>
<td>Mercato Brocante, Antiques fair</td>
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<td>Book market exhibition</td>
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NAVIGAZIONE LAGO MAGGIORE
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(+39) 0322 233 200 • fax (+39) 0322 249 530
informaggiore@navigazionelaghi.it

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www.navigazionelaghi.it
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