



MySecretView

THE GRAND TOUR OF LAKE COMO

A timeless journey through villas, waters, and poetry.
Relive the magic of the Grand Tour.



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INTRODUCTION

In the 18th and 19th centuries, Lake Como – a shimmering jewel cradled by the Italian Alps – was an unmissable stop on the Grand Tour—the long educational journey undertaken by young European aristocrats—especially from England, Germany, and France—in search of Italian art, nature, and culture. Stendhal, Goethe, Mary Shelley, Mark Twain, Turner, Liszt... All were captivated by the landscape, the historic villas, and the elegant villages reflected in the water.

This itinerary invites you to relive the emotions and places of that romantic and refined journey.

“...Lake Como – a shimmering jewel cradled by the Italian Alps –, sumptuously charming, and Lake Lecco, more austere. They are places of noble, elegant beauty, comparable, and not inferior, to the most famous landscapes in the world...” — Stendhal, *The Charterhouse of Parma*



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RECOMMENDED ITINERARY

(Ideal route over 1, 2, or 3 days — with travel options by boat, car, or bike)



1. Como – The Gateway

The starting point of the cultural journey. Travelers arrived here from Milan, drawn by the Cathedral, the medieval walls, and the first glimpses of the lake.

Highlights:

- Como Cathedral
- Villa Olmo (frequented by poet Ugo Foscolo)
- Lake promenade and Teatro Sociale



2. Cernobbio – Elegance and Contemplation

A favorite stop for lovers of tranquility, Cernobbio was synonymous with refined holidays.

Highlights:

- Villa d'Este (now a luxury hotel, once a noble residence)
- Lakeside promenade
- View of Mount Bisbino

Composer Franz Liszt and Countess d'Agoult stayed here.

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3. LENNO & VILLA DEL BALBIANELLO – LITERARY CHARM AND ADVENTURE

A place of inspiration for writers, travelers, and filmmakers. Frequented by explorers, collectors, and patrons.

Highlights:

- Villa del Balbianello
- Panoramic gardens
- Boat trip across the “Zoca de l’Oli” bay

 Mentioned by Lord Byron and featured in famous films (*Star Wars*, *James Bond*).



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4. Tremezzo – Art and Romantic Gardens

One of the most beloved stops for Europe's aristocratic tourism.

Highlights:

- Villa Carlotta: masterpieces by Canova, Hayez, and a botanical garden
- Panoramic view of Bellagio
- Lakeside promenade

An open-air artist's sketchbook



5. Bellagio – The Heart of the Grand Tour



The promontory where the waters split into two branches was considered “the most beautiful spot in Italy” by Stendhal.

Highlights:

- Villa Melzi d'Eril and gardens
- Historic village and staircases
- Villa Serbelloni (now the Rockefeller Foundation)

Described in the works of Flaubert, Twain, Longfellow, and Liszt.

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6. Varenna – Silent Poetry on the Eastern Shore

Once less worldly and more intimate, Varenna was a refuge for sensitive souls and poets. Today, it is a must-visit destination for the charm of its landscape — a little gem waiting to be discovered.

Highlights:

- Villa Monastero
- Lover's Walk
- Church of San Giorgio

Beloved by Mary Shelley and Northern European painters.

7. Menaggio – Watercolor Landscapes

Visited by 19th-century English and German painters.

Highlights:

- Historic center
- Belvedere Garibaldi
- Easy hikes with lake views

A base for plein-air paintings and travel diaries.



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8. Lecco – The Branch of *The Betrothed*

The eastern branch of Lake Como, immortalized by the writer Alessandro Manzoni in the celebrated novel *The Betrothed*, is a symbolic place for all Italians and a cultural reference for foreign travelers passionate about historical novels.

Highlights:

- Villa Manzoni (birthplace of the author, now a museum)
- Azzone Visconti Bridge
- Lakeside promenade
- Trails through Pescarenico, the Innominato's fortress, and Mount Resegone

“That branch of Lake Como – a shimmering jewel cradled by the Italian Alps –...” is the most famous opening line in Italian literature.

Romantic poets and Grand Tour painters admired the dramatic mountains plunging into the lake.



FAMOUS FIGURES OF THE GRAND TOUR ON LAKE COMO



Name	Origin	Reason for Travel
Goethe	Germany	Nature and contemplation
Stendhal	France	Romanticism and art
Mary Shelley	England	Literary inspiration
Turner	England	Study of light
Mark Twain	USA	Tourism and wit
Liszt	Hungary	Composition and love
Byron	England	Landscapes and reflection

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LOCAL TIPS FOR THE GRAND TOUR ON LAKE COMO

- Avoid **peak hours** in main towns like Bellagio, Varenna, and Como, especially on summer weekends. Early morning or late afternoon are best to enjoy places without crowds.
- Try ***polenta uncia*** (polenta with butter and cheese) in a traditional trattoria, especially in small restaurants away from tourist areas.
- **Chat with artisans** at local markets or workshops—they often share unique lake stories and tips for hidden spots.
- Choose **slow travel** on traditional ferries instead of hydrofoils for better views and a more relaxed journey.
- Visit **lesser-known churches** rich in history and art, like the Basilica of San Giacomo in Bellagio or San Lorenzo in Mandello del Lario.
- Book dinner at an **agriturismo** or **countryside “cascina”** to taste zero-mile products and traditional dishes.
- Take **lesser-known scenic trails**, like the Valle dei Mulini path in Civenna or the trail from Lecco to Colico.
- Join **village festivals**, especially in spring and autumn, for music, food, and local traditions in an authentic atmosphere.
- For coffee or an aperitivo with a view, ask for **“off-the-radar”** spots like Bar Vapore in Varenna or Caffè Monti in Bellagio, frequented more by locals than tourists.

Final Notes

Whether you choose to follow every step or just a few highlights, the Grand Tour promises moments you'll never forget.

- [Download your exclusive Lake Como map here](#)
- [Discover Lake Como's Annual Events](#)



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