

# 9 Milan & the Lake District

The wealthy region of Lombardy combines commerce with high living.

by Reid Bramblett

MILAN IS THE GLITZY CAPITAL OF LOMBARDY (LOMBARDIA), ITALY'S MOST prosperous region. Its factories largely fuel the Italian economy, and its attractions—high fashion, fine dining, hopping dance clubs, and da Vinci's *Last Supper*—have much to offer the visitor. But there's much more than a sophisticated city to Lombardy. To the north, the region bumps up against craggy mountains in a romantic lake district, and to the south it spreads out in fertile farmlands fed by the mighty Po and other rivers.

Lombardy has a different feel from the rest of Italy. The *Lombardi*, who descended from one of the Germanic tribes that overran the Roman empire, and who have over the centuries been ruled by feudal dynasties from Spain, Austria, and France, are a little more Continental than their neighbors to the south; indeed, the *Lombardi* are faster talking, faster paced, and more business-oriented. They even dine differently, tending to eschew olive oil for butter and often forgoing pasta for polenta and risotto.

The Italian lakes have entranced writers from Catullus to Ernest Hemingway. Backed by the Alps and ringed by lush gardens and verdant forests, each lake has its own charms and, accordingly, its own enthusiasts. Not least among these charms is their easy accessibility to many Italian cities, making them ideal for short retreats: Lake Maggiore and Lake Como are both less than an hour from Milan, and Lake Garda is tantalizingly close to Venice and Verona. Each of these world-renowned resorts—Como (the choicest), Maggiore (speckled with elegant islands), and Garda (a windsurfing hot spot, and microcosm of Italy, with the Mediterranean lemon groves and vineyards of the south gradually shading to Teutonic schnitzel and beer on the north end)—can make for a great 1- or 2-day break from Italy's sightseeing carnival.

## DON'T LEAVE MILAN & THE LAKE DISTRICT WITHOUT . . .

**PAYING HOMAGE TO DA VINCI AND MICHELANGELO** You'll find *The Last Supper* in Santa Maria delle Grazie and the *Pietà*, Michelangelo's last work, inside the medieval Castello Sforzesco.

**CLIMBING TO THE ROOF OF THE DUOMO** Wander amid the Gothic buttresses and statue-topped spires for a citywide panorama.

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**SEEING THE BRERA AND AMBROSIANA PICTURE GALLERIES** They feature plenty of stunning work by the Old Masters.

**TAKING A WINDOW-SHOPPING SPIN** Walk past the high-end boutiques in Milan's Golden Rectangle, and then go on a budget shopping spree through the stock shops and outlets of Corso Buenos Aires.

**INDULGING IN THE NIGHTLIFE** The converted warehouses along the Navigli canals are always hopping after dark.

## FERRYING BETWEEN LAKE MAGGIORE'S BORROMEAN ISLANDS

You can tour the palaces of one of Lombardy's last remaining Renaissance-era noble families and watch the peacocks wander their exotic gardens.

## MILAN

Milan (Milano) is Italy's financial center, business hub, and fashion capital, as well as one of its most industrialized major cities. That also means it's crowded, noisy, hot in summer; damp and foggy in winter; and distinctly less easygoing (and more expensive) than most Italian cities.

Milan reveals its long history in monuments, museums, and churches—its cathedral is one of Europe's great Gothic structures, and another church contains Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper*. This sophisticated city also supports a thriving cultural scene embracing La Scala (one of the world's top opera houses), high-fashion boutiques and shows, and a throbbing nightlife.

## LAY OF THE LAND

Think of Milan as a series of concentric circles radiating from the central **Piazza del Duomo**, the Cathedral Square. Within the inner circle, once enclosed by the city walls, are many of the churches, museums, and shops that'll consume your visiting hours. For a general overview, obtain one of the serviceable maps with a street index that the tourist offices provide for free.

The city's major neighborhoods encircle the hub, Piazza del Duomo. Looking east from the Duomo, you can see the imposing **Castello Sforzesco**, at one end of the well-heeled **Magenta neighborhood**. You can walk to the Castello in about 15 minutes by following Via Orefici to **Piazza Cordusio** and from there Via Dante. The other major draw in Magenta is **Santa Maria delle Grazie** (*home of The Last Supper*); to reach it, leave Via Dante at Via Meravigli, which becomes Via Magenta and leads to the church (total walking time from Piazza del Duomo to the church is about 20 min.).

Heading north from Piazza del Duomo, walk through the city's glass-enclosed shopping center (the world's first), the **Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II**. Emerging from the northern end of the Galleria, you'll be in **Piazza della Scala**, steps away from Milan's famous opera house, **La Scala**. A walk northeast of about 5 minutes along Via Manzoni takes you to Via Montenapoleone and the **Quadrilatero d'Oro**, the city's high-fashion shopping district, the epicenter of Italian design. A walk of about 10 minutes northwest of Piazza della Scala along **Via Brera** brings you into the atmospheric **Brera neighborhood**, where cobblestone streets and old *palazzi* surround the city's major art collection, the **Pinacoteca di Brera**.

Another neighborhood to set your sights on is **Ticinese/Navigli**, often referred to just as the Navigli, which translates as “canals.” A 15-minute tram ride due south of Piazza del Duomo, the Navigli’s old quays follow what remains of an elaborate canal system, designed in part by Leonardo da Vinci, that once laced the city. The moody charm of this area isn’t lost on prosperous young Milanese, who are converting old lofts and moving into former quarters of the working classes. The attendant bars, shops, and restaurants on the ground floors have sprung up to serve their needs. It’s also the only part of Milan open in August. You can walk to the Navigli in about 30 minutes from Piazza del Duomo by following Via Torino south to Corso Porta Ticinese, but a tram ride (or the Metro to Porta Genova) will get you there more quickly, in about 15 minutes.

### GETTING THERE

Both of Milan’s **airports** are operated by **SEA** (☎ 02-74852200; [www.sea-aeroporti.milano.it](http://www.sea-aeroporti.milano.it)). **Milan Malpensa**, 45km (27 miles) northwest of the center, handles most international flights. For general information, call ☎ 02-74852200 or 02-76800613. A 40-minute **Malpensa Express train** (☎ 02-20222; [www.ferroviennord.it/webmpx](http://www.ferroviennord.it/webmpx)) costs €11 and heads half-hourly to the Cadorna train station in western Milan—not to the larger and more central Stazione Centrale (you’ll have to take the Metro to get there). More convenient are the Malpensa shuttle buses, which run every 20 to 30 minutes and will take you directly to a bus stop on the east side of Stazione Centrale in 50 minutes. Your choices are **Malpensa Bus Express** (☎ 02-33910794), which costs €5.50, or the cheaper **Malpensa Shuttle** (☎ 0331-258411)—same exact service at a lower price: €5. The trip into town by taxi costs a whopping €60 to €75.

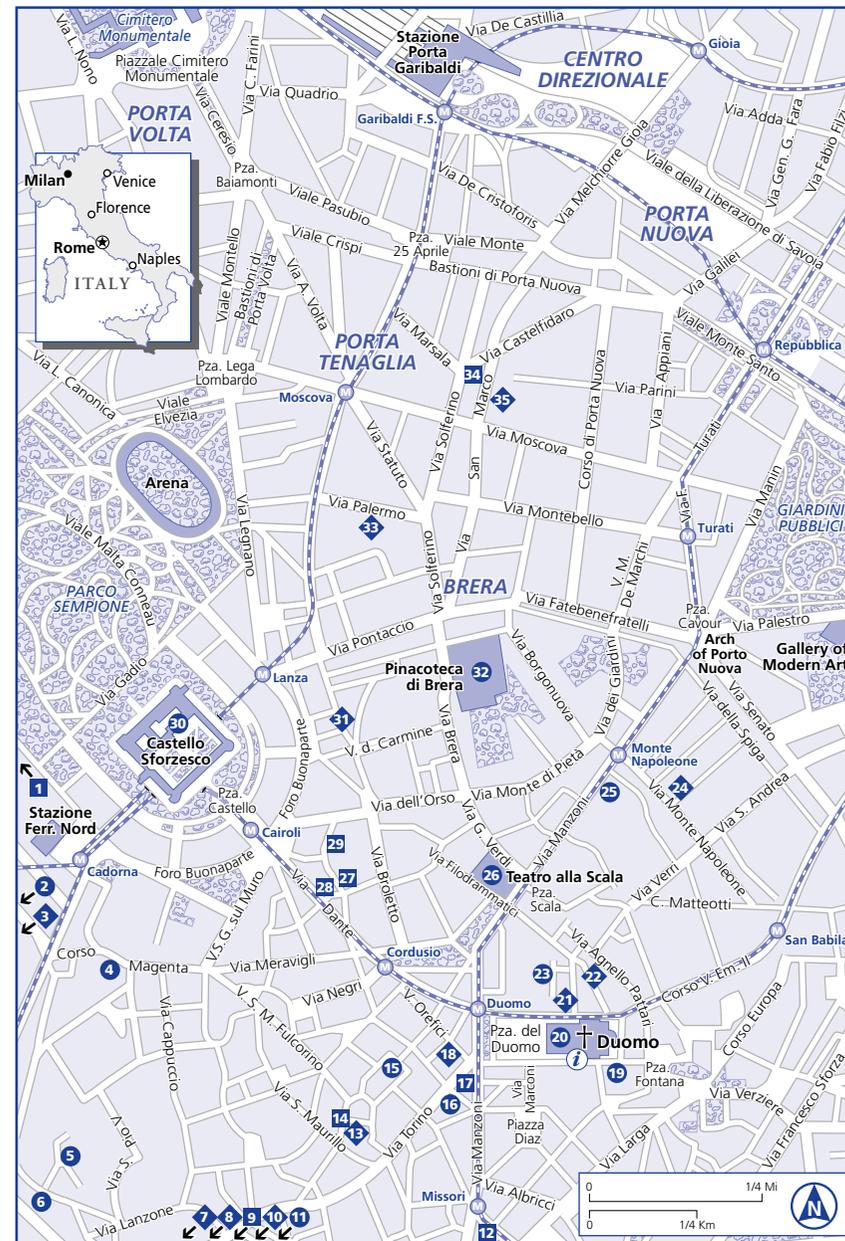
The airport called **Milan Linate**, only 7 km (4 miles) east of the center, handles some European flights (which are increasingly being moved to Malpensa) and domestic flights. For information, dial ☎ 02-74852200. **Starfly buses** (☎ 02-58587237) run from Linate to Stazione Centrale every 20 to 30 minutes; allow 20 minutes for the trip, which costs €3. For €1 you can also take city bus no. 73 to and from Linate from the southeast corner of Piazza San Babila, a few blocks east of the Duomo. The trip into town by taxi costs about €12 to €18.

**By train**, Milan is 552km (343 miles) northwest of Rome (hourly trains; 4½–6 hr.), 288km (179 miles) northwest of Florence (hourly trains; 2¾–4 hr.), and 257km (160 miles) west of Venice (half-hourly trains; 2½–3½ hr.).

The **Stazione Centrale**, a vast fascist-era structure, is about a half-hour walk northeast of the center, with easy connections to Piazza del Duomo in the center of downtown by Metro, tram, and bus. The stop on the Metro for the train station

### Tip for Departing Passengers

If you’re going to the airport to leave on a flight, make sure you call the airline beforehand to find out which terminal you need, as Malpensa’s Terminal 1 and Terminal 2 are actually several kilometers apart.



**ATTRACTIONS** ●

- Basilica di Sant'Ambragio 5
- Castello Sforzesco 30
- Chiesa di San Lorenzo Maggiore 11
- Civico Museo Archeologico 4
- Duomo 20
- Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II 23
- Museo del Duomo 19
- Museo Nazionale della Scienza 6
- Museo Poldi Pezzoli 25
- Pinacoteca Ambrosiana 15
- Pinacoteca di Brera 32
- Santa Maria delle Grazie (*The Last Supper*) 2
- Santa Maria presso S. Satiro 16
- Teatro alla Scala 26

**ACCOMMODATIONS** ■

- Alle Dolce Vite 9
- Antica Locanda Solferino 34
- Ariosto 1
- Bed and Bread 9
- Cocoon 9
- Hotel Aliseo 12
- Hotel America 41
- Hotel Giulio Cesare 27
- Hotel Kennedy 39
- Hotel Paganini 38
- Hotel Pavone 40
- Hotel Rovello 29
- Hotel Santa Marta 14
- Hotel Speronari 17
- London Hotel 28

**DINING** ◆

- Al Pont de Ferr 7
- Bar Zucca/Caffè Miani 21
- Brek 37
- Gelateria Ecologica 10
- Gelateria Toldo 31
- La Crêperie 8
- La Milanese 13
- Latteria 35
- Luini 22
- Joia 36
- Pasticceria Confetteria Cova 24
- Pasticceria Marchesi 3
- Peck 18
- Pizzeria Grand'Italia 33

is “Centrale F. S.” To get downtown, the Metro is fastest (10 min.), but if you want to see something of the city en route, take bus no. 60 from the station to Piazza del Duomo. If you decide to walk, follow Via Pisani through the district of high-rise office buildings around the station to the equally cheerless Piazza della Repubblica, and from there continue south on Via Turati and Via Manzoni to Piazza del Duomo.

Chances are you'll arrive at Stazione Centrale, but some trains serve Milan's other train stations: Stazione Nord (with service to/from Como, among other cities), Porta Genova (with service to/from Alessandria and Asti), and Porta Garibaldi (with service to/from Lecco).

## GETTING AROUND

An extensive and efficient **Metro** (subway system), **trams**, and **buses** make it very easy to move around Milan. The Metro closes at midnight, though buses and trams run all night. Tickets good for one Metro ride (or 75 min. worth of surface transportation) cost €1. You can also get a *carnet* of 10 tickets for €9.20, or purchase unlimited-ride tickets good for 1 day (€3) or 2 days (€5.50). Tickets are available at Metro stations and at newsstands. You must stamp your ticket when you board a bus or tram—you can be slapped with a hefty fine if you don't. For information about Milan public transportation, visit the information office in the Duomo metro stop (☎ 02-72524301 or 800-808181; [www.atm-mi.it](http://www.atm-mi.it)).

The main Azienda di Promozione Turistica del Milanese (APT) **tourist office** is in the Palazzo del Turismo (Via Marconi, 1, on the south side of Piazza del Duomo; ☎ 02-72524301; [www.milanoinfotourist.com](http://www.milanoinfotourist.com)). There is also an extremely well-hidden office in Stazione Centrale (☎ 02-72524360). To find it, as you exit the train platform into the main commercial hall—before taking the escalators downstairs to the ticketing areas—head to your left and look for the side corridor on the right whose entrance is lined in flashing neon lights. The tourist office is down that corridor, just past the rock shops flanking either side.

These offices issue maps, museum guides, hotel and restaurant listings, and other useful information, but because they're now privately run, they charge nominal fees for the majority of the more useful materials. The tourism section of the city's website ([www.turismo.comune.milano.it](http://www.turismo.comune.milano.it)) is also helpful, as is [www.museidelcentro.mi.it](http://www.museidelcentro.mi.it), which covers several of the minor, special-interest museums in the historical center. The private [www.hellomilano.it](http://www.hellomilano.it) is particularly good for events. They publish a monthly events newspaper, free at the tourist offices; online, click on “What's On” for the events calendar.

## ACCOMMODATIONS, BOTH STANDARD & NOT

Most Milan hotels are oriented toward business types, with precious few left over for the relatively few tourists who don't high-tail it for more popular cities such as Venice or Florence. It's difficult to find rooms in *any* price category when fashion shows and trade fairs are in full swing (often Oct and Mar). Many hotels raise their prices at these times, too. August is low season, and hotels are often willing to bring prices down considerably (though you really don't want to be here), as they will sometimes do on slow weekends. Always ask for the lowest possible rate when booking and be prepared to bargain.

Though they won't book a room for you, the tourist office (see "Getting Around," earlier in this chapter) will help you track down hotels within your budget (and, if you go to the main office in person, will even call around for you).

### Bed & Breakfasts in Milan

Milan doesn't go in much for alternative accommodations. There are only 18 registered B&Bs in the entire city, and few of them are anywhere near the historical center, nor do they offer particularly good savings over hotels.

€€-€€€ There is, however, a clutch of them in the residential district just north of the Navigli, packed with locals' restaurants and low-key bars, and within about a 10-minute walk from a Metro stop. Closest to the Navigli are the three €120 rooms at **Cocoon** (Via Voghera, 7; ☎ 02-8322769 or 349-8606014; Metro: Porta Genova). A few blocks farther north you'll find the three €110-to-€120 attic rooms at **Alle Dolce Vite** (Via Cola di Rienzo, 39; ☎ 02-4895-2808; [www.ladolcevite.net](http://www.ladolcevite.net); Metro: S. Agostino), with a lovely garden. Between Piazza Vesuvio and Piazza Po, **Bed and Bread** (Via Vetta d'Italia, 14; ☎ 02-468267 or 333-8396441; [www.bedandbread.it](http://www.bedandbread.it)) offers three small but nice rooms for €100 to €110 and a denlike shared living room with a DVD player and low vaulted brick ceiling. You can always find a handful of other B&Bs, as well as apartments for short-term let, at the official tourist office site [www.milanoinfotourist.com](http://www.milanoinfotourist.com) and at the private broker [www.friendly-home.org](http://www.friendly-home.org).

### Hotels near the Duomo

€€ The **Hotel Speronari** ★★ (Via Speronari, 4; ☎ 02-86461125; [hotel.speronari@inwind.it](mailto:hotel.speronari@inwind.it); Metro: Duomo) is where I usually stay when I come to town: It's a budget hotel—€76 for a double without private bathroom, €96 with bathroom—in a deluxe location, tucked into a tiny pedestrian side street between Via Torino and Via Mazzini near the church of Santa Maria presso S. Satiro. The staff is earnest, and the rooms are basic but done well: cool tile floors, functional furnishings, ceiling fans, and brand-new cot springs. Even those without full bathroom have a sink and bidet, and all, save a few of those without bathrooms, have TVs. Rooms on the third and fourth floors are brighter, and those on the courtyard are a tad quieter than rooms facing the street (there are convenient trolleys a half-block in either direction, but they come with a distant but noisy rumble for rooms on the street side). Credit cards are accepted, but they'll round the room price down if you pay cash.

€€ A 15-minute walk south of the Duomo, the **Hotel Aliseo** (Corso Italia, 6; ☎ 02-86450156 or 02-804535; Metro: Missori) offers a lot of comfort in addition to its good location and great rates: €60 to €75 for a double room without bathroom, €80 to €100 for one with. The management is friendly, and rooms are furnished with pleasant modern pieces and decent beds (no phones, though). Rooms without bathroom come with a tiny washroom with sink and a bidet, just no toilet or shower (large, spanking-clean bathrooms are in the hallway). Rooms on the street side open to small balconies, but are noisier than those overlooking the *cortile*. The Aliseo—which used to be called the Ullrich—books up quickly, so be sure to call ahead.

€€-€€€ The narrow Via Santa Marta is a slice of old Milan, cobblestoned and lined with charming old buildings, one of which houses the **Hotel Santa Marta** ★ (Via Santa Marta, 4; ☎ 02-804567; [www.hotel-santamarta.it](http://www.hotel-santamarta.it); Metro: Cordusio or Duomo). Recent modernizations have preserved the old-fashioned ambience while adding such modern comforts as air-conditioning, but rates for a double have stayed around €120 to €130 (dropping to €80 on weekends; spiking to €190 during trade fairs). It's also across the street from one of the city's most atmospheric restaurants (La Milanese; see below), and a short walk from the Duomo and other sights. The tile-floored guest rooms are comfortable and decorated with a matter-of-fact fashion sense; some are cramped and others are quite large, and there's a renovation scheduled for August 2006. If they're full, they'll send you to their sister hotel, the Rovello (see below).

### The Magnificent Midrange Hotels of Via Rovello

Halfway between the Duomo and the Castello, just above Piazza Cordusio, a quiet side-street angles off the wide, cafe-and-shop-lined artery of Via Dante. It's called Via Rovello, and it's home to a trio of wonderful midpriced hotels that put you in the heart of the action—no more than a 10-minute stroll from the castle, Duomo, Brera museum, and La Scala opera house—yet tucked away from the busy streets.

€€-€€€€ The 10-room **Hotel Rovello** ★ (Via Rovello, 18; ☎ 02-86464654; [www.hotel-rovello.it](http://www.hotel-rovello.it); Metro: Cordusio) was also completely renovated in 1999 with striking results. The unusually large guest rooms occupy the first and second floors of a centuries-old building and incorporate many of the original architectural details, including exposed timbers and wood-beamed ceilings. Handsome contemporary Italian furnishings are set off by gleaming hardwood floors, the tall casement windows are covered with attractive fabrics, and walls are painted in soothing green and gold tones. The orthopedic mattresses are covered with thick quilts for a homey feel. Many of the rooms have dressing areas in addition to the large new bathrooms. A breakfast of rolls and coffee is served in a sunny room off the lobby.

€€-€€€€ Unlike its neighbors, the **London Hotel** ★ (Via Rovello, 3; ☎ 02-72020166; [www.hotellondonmilano.com](http://www.hotellondonmilano.com); Metro: Cordusio) sticks to its old-fashioned ways—and lower prices: Doubles without bathroom go for €100 to €130, with bathroom for €120 to €150. The big fireplace and cozy green velvet furniture in the lobby say a lot about the comfort level and friendly atmosphere that bring many guests back time after time. Just beyond the lobby, there's a bar where beverages are available almost around the clock; guests can purchase cappuccino or a continental breakfast in the morning. Upstairs, the rooms look as if they haven't been redecorated in a number of decades, but they're roomy and bright, and the heavy old furnishings lend a charm very much in keeping with the ambience of the hotel. Rooms on the first floor tend to be the largest, and they get smaller as you go up.

€€€ A recent renovation has brought **Hotel Giulio Cesare** ★ (Via Rovello, 10; ☎ 02-72003915; [www.giuliocesarehotel.it](http://www.giuliocesarehotel.it); Metro: Cordusio) thoroughly up-to-date, with a grandiose marble lobby and a handsome lounge and bar area with

deep couches—though management can be a bit brusque. The rooms are contemporary chic, with starkly modern minimalist furnishings, but do reflect the building's centuries-old heritage with their tall windows and high ceilings. Some are quirkily shaped, and a few singles are cramped. Doubles go for €150.

### Cheap Hotels Far East of the Duomo

€€ Though tiny **Hotel America** (Corso XXII Marzo, 32, in the block east of Piazza Emilia; ☎ 02-7381865; [www.milanohotelamerica.com](http://www.milanohotelamerica.com); Metro: Porta Vittoria, though it's more convenient by tram/bus: 12, 27, 45, 60, 66, 73, or 92) is a bit off the beaten track, in a middle-class neighborhood a 10-minute tram ride east of Piazza del Duomo, the young owner and his family work overtime to make this *pensione* one of the best lower-priced lodgings in Milan. The €52-to-€62 rooms (€68 if you want a private bathroom) occupy the fourth floor of an apartment house, with streamlined, wood-veneer modern furnishings and, in many, a thematic stars-and-stripes decor—which is taking the theme a bit too literally. Guests are welcome to join the resident innkeepers in the living room and watch TV. The Rolling Stone music club, a venerable fixture on the Milan nightlife scene, is on the ground floor of the building, a good reason to ask for a room facing the quieter *giardino* courtyard (room 10 even has a balcony).

€€-€€€€ The family-run **Hotel Pavone** ★ (Via Dandolo, 2, off Corso di Porta Vittoria; ☎ 02-55192133; [www.hotelpavone.com](http://www.hotelpavone.com); tram: 12, 23, 27, 60, or 73) is around the corner from the Palace of Justice, about a 15-minute walk east of the Duomo in a neighborhood more geared to business than to the tourist trade. Rooms run €90 to €19 and tend to be a bit sparse, with gray tile floors and no-nonsense Scandinavian-style furniture, but they were spruced up in 2003 with new linens and decor. Most are unusually large and cloaked in a silence unusual for big-city Milan (rooms 12, 14, 16, or 18, all of which overlook a garden, are the quietest of the bunch). Many rooms are outfitted as triples and are large enough to accommodate an extra bed, making this a fine choice for families.

### Cheap Hotels near Stazione Centrale & Corso Buenos Aires

€€ The Bianchi family is genuinely welcoming to the many English speakers who find their way to their **Hotel Kennedy** (Viale Tunisia, 6; ☎ 02-29400934; [www.kennedyhotel.it](http://www.kennedyhotel.it); Metro: Porta Venezia), a block from the southern end of Corso Buenos Aires. Their homey establishment on the sixth floor of an office-and-apartment building (there's an elevator) is sparkling clean and offers basic accommodations in large, tile-floored rooms that cost €52 to €80 for a double without private bathroom, €65 to €120 for one with bathroom. Room 13 has a terrace, while room 15 has a small balcony that even glimpses the spires of the Duomo in the distance. Amenities include a bar in the reception area, where coffee and soft drinks are available, as is a light breakfast of brioche and coffee that doesn't cost much more than it would in a cafe.

€€ Occupying an old house on a quiet residential street off the north end of Corso Buenos Aires, the **Hotel Paganini** ★ (Via Paganini, 6; ☎ 02-2047443;

Metro: Loreto) has minimal public areas (except for a reception area with a self-serve espresso machine), but the guest rooms are large, bright, and embellished with tile floors, high ceilings with elaborate moldings, solid beds, and banal modular furnishings—all for just €63 for a double. The one room with a bathroom is just inside the entrance, with wood floors, a ceiling decorated with molded stuccoes, and plenty of elbowroom for €83. The shared bathroom facilities are modern enough and kept spanking clean by the owners, who are happy to point their guests to restaurants and sights. The best rooms are in the rear, overlooking a huge private garden. There is much to be said for this location: The Stazione Centrale is only a 10-minute walk way down Via Pergolsi, and if shopping is on your agenda, the nearby Corso Buenos Aires is one of the city's bargain fashion meccas.

### Hotels Worth a Splurge

€€€-€€€€ Tucked away in a residential neighborhood of apartment houses and old villas near *The Last Supper*, the **Ariosto** ★★ (Via Ariosto, 22; ☎ 02-4817844; [www.hotelariosto.com](http://www.hotelariosto.com); Metro: Conciliazione) is a refreshingly quiet retreat—all the more so because many of the newly refurbished rooms face a private garden, and some open onto balconies overlooking it. All the rooms are decorated with wood-and-wicker furnishings, shiny parquet floors, and hand-painted wallpaper, and while most are decently sized, singles tend to be skinny. Many of the doubles have separate dressing areas off the tile or stone bathrooms, which are equipped with hair dryers (and a few with Jacuzzis). The rack rate for doubles is €220, but that's only applied during trade fairs, and may be discounted by as much as 45% during slower periods.

€€€€ If the charmingly funky **Antica Locanda Solferino** ★★ (Via Castelfidardo, 2; ☎ 02-6570129 or 02-6592706; [www.anticolocandasolferino.it](http://www.anticolocandasolferino.it); Metro: Moscova or Repubblica) in the artsy Brera neighborhood hadn't been discovered long ago by members of the fashion world and film stars—this was Marcello Mastroianni's preferred Milan hostelry—you would consider it a find. The €200-to-€220 rooms have more, shall we say, character than they do modern comforts, but the eclectic smattering of country antiques and Art Nouveau pieces more than compensates for the absence of minibars. Nor do the repeat customers seem to mind that some of the bathrooms are miniscule (though modern), or that there is no lobby or breakfast room (coffee and rolls are delivered to your room). So be it—this is a delightful place to stay in one of Milan's most enticing neighborhoods, and reception manager Gerardo Vitolo is very friendly. The rooms on the tiny courtyard are quieter, but those on the street have plant-filled balconies (the best is room 10 on the corner, if you don't mind a tub rather than a shower).

### DINING FOR ALL TASTES

The Milanese are more willing than Italians elsewhere to break the sit-down-meal tradition and grab a sandwich or other light fare on the run. And with so many students and young professionals, Milan has no shortage of *pizzerie* and other low-cost eateries.

### Restaurants near the Duomo

€ **Luini** ★★ (Via S. Radegonda, 16, 2 blocks east of the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II; ☎ 02-86461917; www.luini.it; no credit cards; Tues–Sat and Mon until 3pm, closed Aug; Metro: Duomo) has been a Milan institution since 1948, and it's so good they've even opened a branch in London. You'll have to elbow your way through a throng of well-dressed patrons at this stand-up counter in order to plunk down €2 to €3 for the house specialty: *panzerotto*, a pocket of pizza crust stuffed with all sorts of ingredients, including the basic cheese and tomato.

€ Busy **La Crêperie** (Via C. Correnti, 21, an extension of Via Torino, about a 10-min. walk southeast of Piazza del Duomo; ☎ 02-8395913; www.la-creperie.it; Mon–Sat, closed July 15–Aug 25; Metro: Sant'Ambrogio) is an ideal stop for a light lunch or a snack while visiting the nearby church of Sant'Ambrogio or Museo Nazionale di Scienza. Crepes come in both the meal (prosciutto, cheese, and so on) and the dessert variety (I recommend the Nutella, with its creamy hazelnut-chocolate spread). They've recently expanded beyond crepes to serve other foreign and exotic hand-held foods, such as *hot dogs americani* and waffles.

€–€€ **Peck** ★★ (Via Spadari, 9; ☎ 02-8023161; Mon–Sat, closed Jan 1–10 and July 1–20; Metro: Duomo) is Milan's most famous food emporium, its glittering cases filled with a wonderful selection of roast veal, risottos, *porchetta*, salads, aspics, cheeses, pastries, and other fare from its exquisite larder for €3 to €12. You can eat at the stand-up bar where, especially around lunchtime, it can be hard to find elbowroom, or you can put together a gourmet picnic to go.

€€–€€€ For a sit-down meal, head to Milan's most classic restaurant since 1933, **La Milanese** ★★ (Via Santa Marta, 11; ☎ 02-86451991; closed Tues, Dec 25–Jan 8, Apr 24–May 2, and July 20–Aug 31; Metro: Cordusio), tucked into a narrow lane in one of the oldest sections of Milan just west of the Duomo. In the three-beamed dining room, Milanese families and other patrons share the long, crowded tables. Giuseppe prepares traditional Milanese fare, and you can even try their twin specialties—without pigging out—*risotto e osso buco*, a half-portion each of *risotto alla milanese* (rice cooked with saffron and beef marrow) and perfect *osso buco* (tender veal shanks on the bone) for just €21.

### Restaurants in Magenta & Brera

€ Any time one of my Milanese friends says “Hey, let's go get pizza!” they invariably take me to **Pizzeria Grand'Italia** ★★ (Via Palermo, 5; ☎ 02-877759; no credit cards; Metro: Moscova). It serves up a huge assortment of salads, pizzas, homemade pastas, and *focacce farcite* (focaccia bread stuffed with cheese, mushrooms, and other fillings) along with wine and oil from the Furfaro family's farm in Tuscany. Rather than get a whole pie, you get one thick-crust mega-slice topped however you like it. The late hours make this a prime nightspot, and part of the fun is watching the chic, young Milanese stopping by for a snack as they make the rounds of the nearby Brera district bars and clubs.

€€ The main business at **Latteria** ★★ (Via San Marco, 24; ☎ 02-6597653; no credit cards; Mon–Fri, closed Aug; Metro: Moscova) was once dispensing milk and eggs to a press of neighborhood shoppers, but now the emphasis is on serving the La Brera neighborhood delicious, homemade fare in a room decorated with paintings and photographs of roses. The minestrone and other vegetable soups are delicious, as are the many variations of risotto, including the typical *riso al salto*, a delicious dish of leftover *risotto alla milanese* that is fried with butter. The menu changes daily, and the friendly staff, including owners Arturo and Maria, won't mind explaining the different dishes. The place is tiny, doesn't take reservations, and is immensely popular, so arrive right when it opens at 7:30pm—or wait until 9pm or later, when a few tables will free up as the early-dining tourist clientele clears out and the locals take over.

### Restaurants near Stazione Centrale & Corso Buenos Aires

€ If you're looking for an excellent, cheap, and quick meal near the train station, head to the nearby branch of **Brek** (Via Lepetit, 20; ☎ 02-6705149; www.brek.com; closed Sun lunch; Metro: Stazione Centrale), one of the world's best quick-casual food chains. Even when the Italians do something as low-concept as a cafeteria, they can't help but make it fashionable and pour their hearts into the quality of the food. At the various food-prep stations, the friendly and helpful staff make pasta and risotto dishes on the spot, and roast pork, veal, and chicken to order. The large selection of cheeses would put many a formal restaurant to shame, and you can even get excellent wines in tiny bottles. Best of all: Almost every dish goes for just €3 to €8. There's another branch at Via dell'Annunciata, 2 (☎ 02-653619), just off Piazza Cavour, a 5-minute walk from the Brera museum, the shops of the Quadrilatero d'Oro, and the Giardini Pubblici park.

€€€€ Decidedly more upscale, and a few blocks from the southern end of Corso Buenos Aires, is the worthy splurge of **Joia** ★★ (Via P. Castaldi, 18; ☎ 02-2049244; www.joia.it; Mon–Fri, closed Aug; Metro: Repubblica), once called by Michelin the best vegetarian restaurant in Europe. (Translation: Book ahead, and bring your credit cards.) The innovative vegetarian creations of Swiss chef Pietro Leemann—a welcome respite from Northern Italy's orientation to red meat—incorporate the freshest vegetables and herbs in a seasonally changing menu. You can even fiddle around with the traditional Italian menu, ordering first courses as main courses, and many of the main courses can be served as appetizers. The one drawback is the price: €17 or €18 for first courses—whew! They've recently opened a **branch** at Corso di Porta Ticinese, 106 (☎ 02-89404134; closed Mon lunch and Sun), in the hopping Navigli district.

### Restaurants in the Navigli

You can't swing a salami without smacking some place in which to eat or drink along the quays of Milan's defunct canal system. The former warehouses are now packed with bars, pubs, *pizzerie*, *trattorie*, and restaurants. Here are a few of my faves.

€ The most popular pizzeria in the Navigli, **Premiata Pizzeria** ★ (Via Alzaia Naviglio Grande, 2; ☎ 02-89400648; closed Tues lunch; tram: 3, 15, 29, 30, or

### Cafes & Gelaterie

€ **Bar Zucca/Caffè Miani** (at the Duomo end of the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II; ☎ 02-86464435; www.caffemiani.it; Metro: Duomo) is best known by its original name, Il Camparino. It's the most attractive and popular of the Galleria's many bars and introduced Italy to Campari, the country's ubiquitous red cordial. You can linger at the tables set up in the Galleria for views of the Duomo's facade, or in one of the Art Nouveau rooms inside.

€ You can find organic gelato at the **Gelateria Ecologica** (Corso di Porta Ticinese, 40; ☎ 02-58101872; Metro: Sant'Ambrogio or Missori), in the Ticinese/Navigli neighborhood. It's so popular, there's no need for a sign out front. Strollers in the atmospheric Brera neighborhood sooner or later stumble upon the **Gelateria Toldo** (Via Ponte Vetro, 9; ☎ 02-8646-0863; Metro: Cordusio or Lanza), where the gelato is wonderfully creamy and many of the *sorbetto* selections are so fruity and fresh they seem healthy.

€ The **Pasticceria Confetteria Cova** (Via Montenapoleone, 8; ☎ 02-76000578; Metro: Montenapoleone) is approaching its 200th year in refined surroundings near the similarly atmospheric Museo Poldi-Pezzoli. It's usually filled with shoppers making the rounds in this high-fashion district. You can enjoy a quick coffee and a brioche at the long bar, or take a seat in one of the elegant adjoining rooms.

€ The **Pasticceria Marchesi** (Via Santa Maria alla Porta, 13; ☎ 02-862770; Metro: Cordusio) is a distinguished pastry shop, with an adjoining wood-panel tearoom. Because it's only steps from Santa Maria delle Grazie, you can enjoy the old-world ambience and a cup of excellent coffee (or one of the many teas and herbal infusions) as you dash off postcards of *The Last Supper*. Of course, you'll want to accompany your beverage with one of the elegant pastries, perhaps a slice of the *panettone* (cake laden with raisins and candied citron) that's a hallmark of Milan. No one prepares it better than they do at Marchesi.

59) stays packed from early dinnertime until the barhopping crowd stops by for late-night munchies. The restaurant rambles back forever, exposed copper pipes tracing across the ceilings of rooms wrapped around shaded outdoor terraces set with long, raucous tables. Seating is communal and service hurried, but the wood-oven pizzas are excellent (€6–€12). If you're hungrier, there's a long menu of pastas and meat courses, while those with lighter appetites can enjoy a selection of salads (€5–€9), or cheese or salami platters made for two (€14).

€€ **Al Pont de Ferr** ★★ (Ripa di Porta Ticinese, 55, on the Naviglio Grande; ☎ 02-89406277; tram: 3, 15, 29, 30, or 59) has long been one of the more

respectable of the Navigli joints, with tables set out on the flagstones overlooking the canal (regulars know to bring tiny cans of bug spray to battle the mosquitoes in summer). The €9 risotto is livened up with a guinea fowl *ragù*, Camembert, and milk; and the €9 oven-baked rosette of fresh pasta is inventively stuffed with Prague ham, cheese, and walnut. There's a surprisingly good selection of half-bottles of wine, but most full bottles start at €15 and go senselessly higher. On the whole, portions could be a lot larger, but you gotta love a place whose menu opens with the quip, "Good cooking is the friend of living well and the enemy of a hurried life."

€€–€€€€ **Ponte Rosso** ★ (Ripa di Porta Ticinese, 23, on the Naviglio Grande; ☎ 02-8373132; Tues–Sat, Mon lunch only; tram: 3, 15, 29, 30, or 59) is an old-fashioned trattoria on the canal, a long railroad room crowded with tiny tables and a short, simple menu of simple, hearty home cooking. The owner hails from Trieste (which explains the old Triestino photos on the walls), so kick a meal off with a €10 *antipasto di salami misti*, a mixed platter of cured meats from the Friuli region, famous for producing San Daniele, the most delicate prosciutto in Italy. In fact, dishes on the always-changing menu hail from all corners of Italy, from Milanese risotto with saffron (€10), to homemade Ligurian *stracetti maccheroni* with pesto (€10), to Sardinian spaghetti *con la bottarga* (dried fish roe) with crumbled sheep's cheese (€12).

### WHY YOU'RE HERE: THE TOP SIGHTS & ATTRACTIONS

Despite hosting some major sights—Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper*; the gargantuan Gothic Duomo bristling with statues, spires, and pinnacles; the Old Masters in the Brera and Ambrosiana picture galleries; the fashion boutiques; and La Scala opera house—Milan is not a place that rewards folks who linger too long.

Sure, it's a nice enough town, with great restaurants and a hopping nightlife. But when you compare this dingy, gray, work-oriented city with beauty queens like Venice, Florence, and Rome, or with the charms of Tuscan hill towns, Sicilian villages, or the resorts of the coast or the nearby lake district, Milan just doesn't hold a candle. For that reason, give Milan a day or two to hit the highlights, and move on.

Luckily, Milan's airport is second only to Rome in international arrivals, so it's easy to route yourself through here, spending the first or final night of your holiday in the city in order to knock off that *Last Supper* and maybe catch an opera at world-renowned La Scala.

### Il Duomo (The Cathedral)

When Milanese think something is taking too long, they refer to it as *la fabbrica del Duomo* (the making of the cathedral). It took 5 centuries to complete Milan's magnificent Gothic **Duomo** ★★★ (Piazza del Duomo; ☎ 02-72022656; www.duomomilano.com; daily 7am–7pm; Metro: Duomo), which was begun by the ruling Visconti family in 1386. The last of Italy's great Gothic structures is the fourth-largest church in the world (after St. Peter's in Rome, Seville's cathedral, and a new one in Ivory Coast), with 135 marble spires, a stunning triangular facade (currently under restoration wraps), and 3,400-some statues flanking the massive but airy, almost fanciful exterior.

The cavernous interior, lit by brilliant stained-glass windows, seats 40,000 but is unusually spartan and serene, divided into five aisles by a forest of 52 columns. The poet Shelley used to sit and read Dante amid monuments that include a gruesomely graphic **statue of St. Bartholomew Flayed** ★ and the tombs of Giacomo de Medici, two Visconti, and many cardinals and archbishops. Another British visitor, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, rhapsodized about the view of the Alps from the **roof** ★★ (elevator on the church's exterior northeast corner for €6; stairs on the exterior north side for €4; Nov 14–Feb 13 daily 9am–5pm, Feb 14–Apr 30 and Oct 10–Nov 13 daily 9am–6pm, May 1–Oct 9 daily 9am–6:30pm), where you get to wander amid the Gothic pinnacles, saintly statues, and flying buttresses. You are joined high above Milan by the spire-top gold statue of *Madonnina* (the little Madonna), the city's beloved protectress.

“How glorious that Cathedral is! Worthy almost of standing face to face with the snow Alps; and itself a sort of snow dream by an artist architect, taken asleep on a glacier.”

—Elizabeth Barrett Browning, in a letter from 1851

Back on terra firma, the cathedral's **crypt** (€1.55; daily 9am–noon and 2:30–6pm) contains the remains of San Carlo Borromeo, one of the early cardinals of Milan and a member of the noble family that still owns much of the prime real estate around Lake Maggiore (later in this chapter). A far more interesting descent is the one down the staircase to the right of the main entrance, to the **Battistero Paleocristiano S. Giovanni alle Fonti** (€1.50; Tues–Sun 9:45am–12:45pm and 2–5:45pm), the ruins of a 4th-century baptistry believed to be where St. Ambrose baptized St. Augustine.

The Duomo houses many of its treasures across the piazza from the right transept in a wing of the Palazzo Reale devoted to **Museo del Duomo** (Piazza del Duomo, 14; ☎ 02-860358; €6; daily 10am–1:15pm and 3–6pm). Among the legions of statuary saints are a significant painting, **Tintoretto's Christ at the Temple**, and some intriguing displays chronicling the construction of the cathedral.

The best place from which to admire the Duomo facade is an outdoor table at Caffè della Zucca, the bar that invented Italy's consummate aperitif, Campari-soda. This genteel cafe lies at the entrance to the elegant **Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II** ★★, Milan's late-19th-century version of a mall. This wonderful steel-and-glass-covered, cross-shaped arcade is the prototype of the enclosed shopping malls that were to become the hallmark of 20th-century consumerism—though it's safe to say that none of the imitators have come close to matching the Galleria for style and flair. The designer of this urban marvel, Giuseppe Mengoni, didn't live to see the Milanese embrace his creation: He tripped and fell from a

### A Duomo Combo

Catch the elevator to the Duomo's roof and see the cathedral museum together with a €8 Combination Ticket.

### Milan Itineraries

#### If you have only 1 day in Milan

Book ahead—at least 2 weeks in advance if possible—for the very first entry time of the day (8:15am) to see **Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper**. Head east to Milan's gargantuan **Castello Sforzesco** for Michelangelo's final *Pietà* and a clutch of fine Renaissance paintings. Stroll down the largely pedestrianized Via Dante, pausing for a cappuccino break in one of its many cafes, to Piazza del Duomo and Milan's enormous Gothic **Duomo**. Be sure you make it up onto the roof—my favorite Milan experience—to duck under buttresses and wend your way between the statue-topped spires for thrilling citywide panoramas that, on the few winter days when industrial smog doesn't interfere, stretch all the way to the Alps. Join the throngs of locals and businessmen on break and grab a *panzerotto* from **Luni** for a typical Milan lunch on the go, and then wash it down with a view of the Duomo facade and Italy's prototypical aperitif, a Campari-soda, in the very bar that invented it, **Caffè della Zucca**.

Amble through the glass atrium of the historic **Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II**, ending up in front of **La Scala** opera house, where you can visit the operatic collections in its **Museo Teatrale** and check into last-minute tickets for that night's performance. While you window-shop the world-famous boutiques of **Quadrilatero d'Oro**, pop into the private collections of the **Museo Poldi Pezzoli** for 30 minutes, whetting your appetite for the artistic giants in the **Pinacoteca di Brera**, where you can peruse the paintings until they kick you out at 7:30pm. Hop on a tram down to the **Navigli**, Milan's trendiest restaurant district and nightlife scene, strung out along the remnants of the city's old canals.

girder a few days before the Galleria opened in 1878. His shopping mall par excellence provides a lovely route between the Duomo and Piazza della Scala and is a fine locale for watching the flocks of well-dressed Milanese.

#### The Last Supper

What draws so many visitors to Milan is the *Cenacolo Vinciano*, better known to English-speakers as **Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper** ★★ (Piazza Santa Maria delle Grazie, 2, a wide spot along Corso Magenta; ☎ 02-89421146; www.cenacolovinciano.it; €6.50 plus a required booking fee of €1.50; Tues–Sun 8:15am–7pm; Metro: Cardona or Conciliazione). From 1495 to 1497, Leonardo da Vinci painted this poignant portrayal of confusion and betrayal for the wall of the refectory in the Dominican convent attached to the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie. Aldous Huxley called this fresco the “saddest work of art in the world,” a comment in part on the deterioration that set in even before the paint had dried on the moisture-ridden walls. The fresco got a lot of well-intentioned but poorly executed “touching up” in the 18th and 19th centuries, though a recent lengthy

### If you have only 2 days in Milan

On Day 1, start off at the **Pinacoteca Ambrosiana** when it opens (10am) for 90 minutes of Old Masters (Raphael, Caravaggio, da Vinci) before moving on to see Bramante's illusory architectural masterpiece inside the tiny church of **Santa Maria Presso S. Satiro**, and then plunge right into the sights around Piazza del Duomo: the **Cathedral** itself (don't forget the roof!), a light lunch at **Caffè della Zucca**, and a stroll through **Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II** to **La Scala** opera house (give its **Museo Teatrale** 30 min. of your time, and check into buying tickets for tonight's—or tomorrow's—performance). End the day as above, window-shopping the **Quadrilatero d'Oro**, visiting the **Museo Poldi Pezzoli**, and touring the **Pinacoteca di Brera** until it closes—but instead of heading to the Navigli tonight, stick around the Brera neighborhood, which is also chock-a-block with bars and pubs and great restaurants.

Start Day 2 at the medieval **Castello Sforzesco**. On your way to see **da Vinci's Last Supper** (book tickets for noon), stop into the **Museo Archeologico** to see how the Roman town of *Mediolanum* grew to become the metropolis of Milan. Take lunch at the bistrolike Art Nouveau **Bar Magenta**, and head south to the gorgeous 4th-century church of S. Ambrogio and the nearby **Museo Nazionale della Scienza**, filled with scale models of Leonardo's inventions. Make your way east to the ancient church of **San Lorenzo Maggiore**, and then stroll south a few blocks to jump into the pub, jazz club, and restaurant scene of the Navigli.

restoration has done away with all that over-painting, as well as tried to undo the damage wrought by the clumsy patching and damage inflicted when Napoleon's troops used the wall for target practice, and from when Allied bombing during World War II tore off the room's roof, leaving the fresco exposed to the elements for 3 years.

In short, *The Last Supper* is a mere shadow of the work the artist intended it to be, but the scene, which captures the moment when Christ told his apostles that one of them would betray him, remains amazingly powerful and emotional nonetheless. Only 25 people are allowed to view the fresco at a time, with a 15-minute limit, and you must pass through a series of devices that remove pollutants from clothing. Accordingly, lines are long and tickets are usually sold out days in advance. I'm serious: If you don't book ahead—preferably a week or two in advance—you'll most likely be turned away at the door, even in the dead of winter when you'd expect the place to be empty (tour bus groups swallow up inordinately large batches of tickets, leaving precious few for do-it-yourself travelers).

## Milan by Tram

For an excellent overview of the city, hop aboard vintage 1920s tram no. 20, distinguished by CIAOMILANO emblazoned on its sides, for a tour with commentary in English and five other languages. The 1¾-hour tours are hop-on/hop-off for a full day and run daily at 11am and 1pm (also 3pm in summer) from Piazza Castello (Metro: Cairoli). The only drawback: It costs a whopping €20. For more details, call ☎ 02-33910794.

Often overlooked are the other great treasures of the late-15th-century **Church of Santa Maria delle Grazie** itself (☎ 02-48014248; Mon–Sat 7:30am–noon and 3–7pm, Sun 7:20am–12:15pm and 3:30–9pm, may close earlier in winter; Metro: Cardona or Conciliazione), foremost among them the fine dome and other architectural innovations by one of the great architects of the High Renaissance, Bramante (one of the architects of St. Peter's in Rome). To one side of the apse, decorated in marble and terra cotta, is a lovely cloister.

### Other Outstanding Sights

The **Brera** ★★ (Via Brera, 28; ☎ 02-722631; www.brera.beniculturali.it; €5; Tues–Sun 8:30am–7:30pm; Metro: Lanza or Montenapoleone) is one of Italy's top museums of medieval, Renaissance, and 20th-century paintings, including the world's finest collection of Northern Italian works. The concentration of so many masterpieces in this 17th-century palace is the work of Napoleon, who used the *palazzo* as a repository for the art he confiscated from public and private holdings throughout Northern Italy; fittingly, a bronze likeness of the emperor greets you as you enter the courtyard.

Just to give you a sampling of what you'll encounter in these **40 or so rooms**, three of Italy's greatest masterpieces hang here: Andrea Mantegna's amazingly foreshortened *Dead Christ* ★★, Raphael's *Betrothal of the Virgin* ★★, and Piero della Francesca's *Madonna with Saints* ★★ (the Montefeltro Altarpiece). It is an indication of this museum's ability to overwhelm visitors that the last two absolute masterpieces hang near each other in a single room dedicated to late-15th-century works by Tuscan and Umbrian masters.

Among the other important works are Jacopo Tintoretto's *Finding of the Body of St. Mark* ★, in which the dead saint eerily confronts appropriately startled grave robbers who come upon his corpse, and several by Caravaggio, including the masterful *Supper at Emmaus* ★★. Just beyond is a room devoted to works by foreigners, among them Rembrandt's *Portrait of a Young Woman*. Given Napoleon's fondness for the Venetian schools, it is only just that the final rooms are again filled with works from that city, including Canaletto's *View of the Grand Canal*.

### Sights between the Duomo & the Brera

The stunning treasure trove of antiques and Bellinis, Botticellis, and Tiepolos in the private **Museo Poldi Pezzoli** ★★ (Via Manzoni, 12; ☎ 02-794889; www.museopoldipezzoli.it; €7; Tues–Sun 10am–6pm; Metro: Duomo or Montenapoleone) leans a bit toward Venetian painters (such as Francesco Guardi's elegantly moody

*Grey Lagoon*), but also ventures widely throughout Italian painting—Antonio Pollaiuolo's *Portrait of a Young Woman* is often likened to the *Mona Lisa*—and into the Flemish school. It was amassed by 19th-century collector Giacomo Poldi-Pezzoli, who donated his town house and its treasures to the city in 1881. CD-ROM terminals let you explore bits of the collections not currently on display, especially arms and armor, the best of which is housed in an elaborate *pietra serena* room designed by Pomodoro. Pick up a free audioguide in English at the ticket desk.

Milan's renowned opera house, **Teatro alla Scala** ★★ (Piazza della Scala; ☎ 02-72003744 or 02-860775 for the box office; www.teatroallascala.org; Metro: **Duomo** or **Montenapoleone**), was built in the late 18th century on the site of a church of the same name. La Scala is hallowed ground to lovers of Giuseppe Verdi (who was the house composer for decades), Maria Callas, Arturo Toscanini (conductor for much of the 20th c.), and legions of other composers and singers who have hit the high notes of fame in the world's most revered opera house. La Scala emerged from a multiyear restoration on December 7, 2005—the traditional gala opening night—and between opera, ballet, and orchestral performances, the theater now maintains a year-round schedule. Treat yourself to an evening performance; the cheap seats start at just €10.

With restoration now complete, the **Museo Teatrale alla Scala** (☎ 02-88792473; €5; daily 9am–12:30pm and 1:30–5:30pm; Metro: **Duomo** or **Montenapoleone**) has also moved back into its permanent home just to the left of the main entrance. The operatic nostalgia includes such mementos as Toscanini's batons, a strand of Mozart's hair, a fine array of Callas postcards, original Verdi scores, a whole mess of historic gramophones and record players, and costumes designed by some of Milan's top fashion gurus and worn by the likes of Callas and Rudolf Nureyev on La Scala's stage.

### Sights between the Duomo & The Last Supper

The collection of the **Pinacoteca Ambrosiana** ★★ (Piazza Pio XI, 2; ☎ 02-806921; www.ambrosiana.it; €7.50; Tues–Sun 10am–5:30pm; Metro: **Cordusio** or **Duomo**) focuses on **treasures from the 15th through the 17th centuries**: An *Adoration* by Titian, Raphael's cartoon for his *School of Athens* in the Vatican, Botticelli's *Madonna and Angels*, Caravaggio's *Basket of Fruit* (his only still life), and other stunning works hang in a series of intimate rooms. Notable (or infamous) among the paintings is *Portrait of a Musician*, attributed to Leonardo da Vinci but, according to many scholars, of dubious provenance; if it is indeed a da Vinci, the haunting painting is the only portrait of his to hang in an Italian museum. The adjoining Biblioteca Ambrosiana, open to scholars only except for special exhibitions, houses a wealth of Renaissance *litteraria*, including the letters of Lucrezia Borgia and a strand of her hair. The most notable holdings, though, are da Vinci's *Codice Atlantico*, 1,750 drawings and jottings the master did between 1478 and 1519. These and the library's other volumes, including a rich collection of medieval manuscripts, are frequently put on view to the public; at these times, an admission fee of €10 allows entrance to both the library and the art gallery.

Though it's been clumsily restored many times, most recently at the end of the 19th century, the fortresslike **Castello Sforzesco** ★★ (Piazza Castello; ☎ 02-88463700; www.milanocastello.it; €3; Tues–Sun 9am–5:30pm; Metro: **Cairoli**, **Cadorna**, or **Lanza**) continues to evoke Milan's two most powerful medieval and

Renaissance families, the Visconti and the Sforza. The Visconti built the castle in the 14th century and the Sforza, who married into the Visconti clan and eclipsed them in power, reconstructed it in 1450. The most influential residents were Ludovico il Moro and Beatrice d'Este (he of the Sforza and she of the famous Este family of Ferrara), who commissioned the works by Bramante and Leonardo da Vinci in the kilometers of rooms that surround the Castello's enormous courtyard.

The castle's salons house a series of small city-administered museums known collectively as the **Civici Musei Castello Sforzesco**—which were, up until the city got greedy in 2005, always free. Ah, well. They're still worth the relatively small admission charge for the *pinacoteca*, with its minor works by Bellini, Correggio, and Magenta, and the extensive holdings of the Museo d'Arte Antica, filled with Egyptian funerary objects, prehistoric finds from Lombardy, and several giant tapestries in a room containing historical musical instruments. The biggest draw is the final work of an 89-year-old Michelangelo, his unfinished *Rondanini Pietà* ★★, a work so intense and abstract it almost seems to prefigure 20th-century art. Apparently, the master was dissatisfied partway through—or there was a flaw in the material—and he started reworking the piece, but died before he could finish; look for an extraneous arm from the earlier version.

The most fascinating finds in the **Civico Museo Archeologico** ★ (Corso Magenta, 15; ☎ 02-86450011; €2; Tues–Sun 9:30am–5:30pm; Metro: **Cadorna**) are the everyday items from Milan's Roman era—tools, eating utensils, jewelry, and some exquisite and remarkably well-preserved glassware. The exhibits fill a 16th-century monastery with Greek, Etruscan, and Roman pieces from throughout Italy; there's also a section devoted to ancient remains from Ghandara, India. You can get a glimpse of Roman architecture in the garden: two Roman towers and a section of a road, part of the walls enclosing the settlement of *Mediolanum*, once capital of the Western Roman empire.

If you didn't get enough of Leonardo da Vinci with the *Last Supper*—or just want to see another side of his genius—check out the scale wooden models of many of his most amazing inventions at the **Museo Nazionale della Scienza e della Tecnologia Leonardo da Vinci** ★ Kids (Via San Vittore, 21; ☎ 02-48555331; www.museoscienza.org; €8, though families pay €6 per adult plus €3 per child under 18; Tues–Fri 9:30am–5pm, Sat–Sun 9:30am–6:30pm; Metro: **Sant'Ambrogio**), including submarines, helicopters, and other engineering feats that, for the most part, the master only ever invented on paper. This former Benedictine monastery and its beautiful cloisters are also filled with planes, trains, carriages, sewing machines, typewriters, optical devices, and other exhibits, including enchanting re-creations of workshops, that make up one of the world's leading collections of mechanical and scientific wizardry.

From here, you're just 2 blocks from one of the most underrated sights in Milan, the Basilica di Sant'Ambrogio (see below), which lies in the neighborhood south of the Duomo.

### A Trio of Top Churches South of the Duomo

In the 4th century A.D., Milan was (briefly) the capital of the Western Roman empire—and the capital of Western Christendom. Long before the bishop of Rome turned the papacy into the most powerful center for the church, it was the

bishop of Milan who called the shots, and the greatest bishop of 4th-century Milan was St. Ambrose.

Little remains of the first **Basilica di Sant'Ambrogio** ✨ (Piazza Sant'Ambrogio, 15; ☎ 02-86450895; [www.santambrogio-basilica.it](http://www.santambrogio-basilica.it); Mon–Sat 7am–noon and 2:30–7pm, Sun 7am–1pm and 2–8pm; Metro: Sant'Ambrogio), constructed by the saint on this site, but the 11th-century structure built in its place (and renovated many times since) is remarkable. It has a striking atrium, lined with columned porticos, and a brick facade with two ranks of *loggie* flanked by bell towers. Look carefully at the door on the left, where you'll see a relief of St. Ambrose. Note the overall effect of this architectural assemblage because the church of Sant'Ambrogio set a standard for Lombard Romanesque architecture that you'll see imitated many times throughout Lombardy. On your wanderings through the three-aisled nave you'll come upon a gold altar from Charlemagne's days in Milan, and, in the right aisle, the all-too-scant remains of a Tiepolo fresco cycle, most of it blown into oblivion by World War II bombs. The little that remains of the original church is the Sacello di San Vittore in Ciel d'Oro, a little chapel in which the cupola glows with 5th-century mosaics of saints (€2; enter from the right aisle). The skeletal remains of Ambrose himself are on view in the crypt. As you leave the main church from the left aisle you'll see one of the "later" additions, by the great architect Bramante—his Portico dell Canonica, lined with elegant columns, some of which are sculpted to resemble tree trunks.

What makes the beautiful church of **Santa Maria Presso S. Satiro** (entered down a short alley on the east side of Via Torino, just south of Via Speronari and Piazza del Duomo; ☎ 02-874683; Mon–Fri 7:30–11:30am and 3–7pm, Sat 9:30am–noon and 3–7pm, Sun 8:30am–12:30pm and 3–7pm; Metro: Duomo or Missori) so exquisite is what it doesn't have—space. Stymied by not being able to expand the T-shaped apse to classical Renaissance, cross-shaped proportions, the architect Bramante designed a marvelous relief behind the high altar that creates the illusion of a fourth arm. The effect of the *trompe l'oeil* columns and arches is not entirely convincing but is nonetheless magical. Another gem lies to the rear of the left transept: the Cappella della Pietà, so called for the 15th-century terracotta *Pietà* it now houses, but built in the 9th century to honor St. Satiro, the brother of St. Ambrose, and covered in lovely Byzantine frescoes and Romanesque columns.

Set back from the road beyond a free-standing row of 16 ancient Roman columns (probably from the 2nd c. A.D.), the **Chiesa di San Lorenzo Maggiore** ✨ (Corso di Porta Ticinese, 39; ☎ 02-89404129; [www.sanlorenzomaggiore.com](http://www.sanlorenzomaggiore.com); daily 7:30am–12:30pm and 2:30–6:45pm; Metro: Missori) is further testament to the days when the city was the capital of the Western Roman empire. The 4th-century early-Christian structure has been rebuilt and altered many times over the centuries (its dome, the highest in Milan, is a 16th-c. embellishment), but retains the flavor of its roots in its octagonal floor plan and a few surviving remnants. These include 5th-century mosaics—one depicting a beardless Christ—in the Cappella di Sant'Aquilino, which you enter from the atrium (€2). A sarcophagus in the chapel is said to enshrine the remains of Galla Placidia, sister of Honorius, last emperor of Rome, and wife of Ataulf, king of the Visigoths. Just where Ms. Placidia ended up is a point of contention. Her official mausoleum is one of the

mosaic masterworks of Ravenna, but she is most likely buried in Rome, where she died. You'll be rewarded with a glimpse of even earlier history if you follow the stairs from behind the altar to a cryptlike room that contains what remains of a Roman amphitheater.

## THE OTHER MILAN

Unlike other Italian cities, Milan doesn't give much thought to tourism beyond its major sights. Sure, it has a vibrant cultural scene; a busy schedule of events, exhibitions, and trade fairs; and a fashion industry that, outside of the boutiques, keeps itself behind closed doors and invitation-only parties. But because most of Milan's cultural events are conducted in Italian only, they're a bit inaccessible to the visitor who doesn't speak the language. Which brings me to the first way to break out of the tourist mold in Milan.

### Parla Italiano?

Lots of foreigners come to Milan for business reasons, many on frequent visits or for stints of a few months or longer, so the city is better equipped than most with language schools—especially the kinds devoted to getting you up to speed quickly, teaching you how to get by in everyday conversation rather than mucking about for weeks with obscure verb conjugations. All of these institutions offer lengthy courses spread over many weeks or months; I'll just mention the courses they offer that last a week or two and are thus better suited to tourists.

The **Scuola Leonardo da Vinci** (Via Darwin, 20; ☎ 02-83241002; [www.scuolaleonardo.com](http://www.scuolaleonardo.com)) has been teaching Italian to foreigners since 1977; 2 weeks of 40 lessons in small classes (12 people maximum) cost €280. The **International House Milano** (Piazza Erculea, 9; ☎ 02-86457408; [www.ihmilano.it](http://www.ihmilano.it)) offers two levels of 2-week courses: 15 hours per week for €290, or 20 hours per week for €385. You can also get one-on-one intensive lessons for €44 per hour plus a €60 enrollment fee, though you have to sign up for a minimum of 20 hours—that means an investment of at least €940. **Accademia di Italiano** (Via P. Paleocapa, 1; ☎ 02-87388760; [www.aimilano.it](http://www.aimilano.it)) teaches small classes (no more than six), with an intensive 2-week course totaling 40 hours of lessons (8 hr. a day) for €305.

The **Società Dante Alighieri** (Via Napo Torrani, 10; ☎ 02-6692816; [www.societadantealighieri.org](http://www.societadantealighieri.org)) has the benefit of pedigree—it's been around since 1889—and offers one-on-one lessons from €35 per hour. Don't confuse that one with the **Istituto Dante Alighieri** (Piazzale Cadorna, 9; ☎ 02-72011294; [www.dantealighieri.org](http://www.dantealighieri.org)), which has also been around a while (established 1923); it offers two levels of short-term courses consisting of 45-minute lessons. It's pricier than the others, but has the benefit of some 1-week options: Semi-intensive courses for 1 week (25 lessons; €635) or 2 weeks (50 lessons; €1,160), and intensive courses for 1 week (35 lessons; €790) or 2 weeks (70 lessons; €1,445). You can also get individual tailored courses, starting at €560 for 15 lessons.

### Attend Mass in a Historic Church

The Milanese may worship the almighty euro Monday to Friday, and pray for bargains on haute couture during Saturday-morning shopping sprees, but come Sunday they remember that they're Italian—and Catholic—and show up for

Mass. As so much of Milan's urban fabric is made up of gray, utilitarian architecture lining broad boulevards strung with tram lines and teeming with traffic, it comes as a bit of a shock to realize that the city is also home to some stupendous churches—a heritage from its 4th-century role as a capital of Western Christianity.

On Sundays, dress to the nines (this *is* Milan, after all) and take your pick of churches for Mass, from the huge, echoing nave of the Gothic **Duomo** (Sun at 7, 8, 9:30, 10, and 11am and 12:30 and 5:30pm—plus lauds at 10:30am and vespers at 4pm), to that hidden jewel box of Renaissance architecture, **Santa Maria Presso S. Spirito** (Sun at 10am or 6pm). Perhaps the most evocative spaces, though, are those 4th-century churches just south of the center: the elegant Romanesque interior of **Sant'Ambrogio** (a popular place, with Sun Masses scheduled at 8, 10, and 11am—that one's in Latin—and at 12:15, 6, and 7pm) or the ancient octagon of **San Lorenzo Maggiore** (Sun at 9:30, 11:30am, and 6pm—or, for an odd experience, pop into the 4pm Mass in Tagalog; this church serves as a cultural center for Milan's sizeable Filipino community).

### Shop with the Locals

So many people come to Milan for the shopping, but so very few can afford the prices in the Quadrilatero d'Oro boutiques. That's why the real Milanese don't bother buying there; they just window-shop and pause for see-and-be-seen drinks at Cova. When it actually comes time to break out the credit cards, most Milanese head instead for two neighborhoods where prices are cheap, stock shops abound, and midpriced middle-class goods take precedence over Prada and Armani designs.

To the northwest of the historical center lies *the neighborhood for true bargain hunters*, the grid of streets southeast of the train station surrounding the broad **Corso Buenos Aires** (follow Via Vitruvio from Piazza Duca d'Aosta in front of the station; Metro stops Lima and Loreto are the gateways to this bargain stretch). This wide boulevard is home to a little bit of everything, from shops that hand-sew men's dress shirts to CD megastores. As it crosses Piazza Oberdan/Piazza Venezia heading south, it becomes Corso Venezia and the stores start moving up the scale.

Men will want to stop at **Darsena** (Corso Buenos Aires, 16; ☎ 02-29521535), where you just might find an Armani suit or jacket at a rock-bottom price. **Calzaturificio di Parabiago** (Corso Buenos Aires, 52; ☎ 02-29406851) shods men and women fashionably at reasonable prices, with an enormous selection and a helpful staff. For designer shoes at a discount, look no further than **Rufus** (Via Vitruvio, 35; ☎ 02-2049648; Metro: Centrale F.S. or Lima), which carries men's and women's styles from lots of labels for under €100.

**Spacci Bassetti** (Via Procaccini, 32; ☎ 02-3450125; Metro: Garibaldi F.S., but closer on tram 33 or 94) is a discount outlet of the august Bassetti line of high-quality linen, and the huge space offers the luxurious towels and sheets at excellent prices. They also have regular (non-discount) stores at Corso Buenos Aires, 52 (☎ 02-29400048; Metro: Lima), and Via Botta, 7A (☎ 02-55183191; Metro: Porta Romana), near the Navigli.

The other hunting ground for discount fashions is south of the historical center in the **Navigli district** (starting at the south end of Corso di Porta Ticinese; Metro to Porta Genova, or trams to Piazza XXIV Maggio). Women can shop at **Eliogabalo** (Piazza Sant'Eustorgio, 2; ☎ 02-8378293; Metro: S. Agostino), where some of the

offerings may be secondhand, but only in the sense that a model donned them briefly for a show or shoot.

**Biffi** (Corso Genova, 6; ☎ 02-8375170; Metro: S. Agostino) attracts fashion-conscious hordes of both sexes in search of designer labels and the store's own designs. One more Navigli stop, and again well stocked with designer wear for men and women—but especially dresses (no changing rooms, so come prepared)—is nearby **Floretta Coen Musil** (Via San Calocero, 3; ☎ 02-58111708; Metro: S. Agostino), open Monday through Saturday, afternoons only from 3:30 to 7:30pm; credit cards are not accepted.

### CHIC SHOPPING

For the best discounts, you want to “Shop with the Locals,” as detailed above. But bargains be damned, the best spot for fashion gazing and supermodel-spotting is along four adjoining streets north of the Duomo known collectively as the **Quadrilatero d'Oro (Golden Quadrilateral)**: Via Montenapoleone, Via Spiga, Via Borgospesso, and Via Sant'Andrea, lined with Milan's most expensive high-fashion emporia. (To enter this hallowed precinct, follow Via Manzoni a few blocks north from Piazza della Scala; San Babila is the closest Metro stop.)

The main artery of this shopping heartland is Via Montenapoleone, lined with chi-chi boutiques and the most elegant fashion outlets, with parallel Via della Spiga running a close second.

If your fashion sense is greater than your credit line, don't despair: Even the most expensive clothing of the Armani ilk is usually less expensive in Italy than it is abroad, and citywide *saldi* (sales) run from early January into early February, and again in late June and July.

Even if your wallet can't afford it, stop by to browse the new flagship **Armani megastore** (Via Manzoni, 31; ☎ 02-72318630; [www.armani-viamanzoni31.com](http://www.armani-viamanzoni31.com); Metro: Montenapoleone). To celebrate 25 years in business in the summer of 2000, Giorgio opened this new flagship store/offices covering 743 sq. m (8,000 sq. ft.) with outlets for his high-fashion creations, the Emporio Armani and Armani Jeans lines, plus the new Armani Casa selection of home furnishings; flower, book, and art shops; a high-tech Sony electronics boutique/play center in the basement; and an Emporio Café and branch of New York's Nobu sushi bar.

### Books

Milan has two English-language bookshops. **The American Bookstore** (Via Camperio, 16, at the corner with Via Dante; ☎ 02-878920; Metro: Cordusio) and **The English Bookshop** (Via Ariosto, at Via Mascheroni, 12; ☎ 02-4694468; [www.englishbookshop.it](http://www.englishbookshop.it); Metro: Conciliazione).

The glamorous outlet of one of Italy's leading publishers, **Rizzoli** (in the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II; ☎ 02-8052277; [www.libreriarizzoli.it](http://www.libreriarizzoli.it); Metro: Duomo), also has some English-language titles (in the basement), as well as a sumptuous collection of art and photo books.

If it's a bargain on bookish souvenirs you're after, **Remainders** (in the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II; ☎ 02-86464008; Metro: Duomo) hawks glossy coffee-table tomes and art books at half price and, on the second floor, offers cut rates on English-language books—just a few novels, plus lots of art and academic books.

## High Fashion at Low Prices

Inspired by the window displays in the Quadrilatero, you can scour the racks of shops elsewhere for designer seconds, last year's fashions, imitations, and other bargains. The best place to begin is **Il Salvagente** (Via Fratelli Bronzetti, 16, off Corso XXII Marzo; ☎ 02-76110328; Metro: San Babila), where you can browse through an enormous collection of designer clothing for men, women, and children (mostly smaller sizes) at wholesale prices. **Dmagazine** (Via Montenapoleone, 26; ☎ 02-76006027; Metro: Montenapoleone) may sit on the boutique-lined main shopping drag, but its merchandise is pure discount overstock from big labels such as Armani (I saw slacks for €99), Prada (how about a sweater for €72?), and Fendi (designer scarves for €44 anyone?).

## Italian Design

The top name in Italian homeware design since 1921 has been **Alessi** (main showroom: Corso Matteotti, 9; ☎ 02-795726; www.alessi.com; Metro: San Babila; sales outlet: Via Montenapoleone, 19; ☎ 02-7602-1199; Metro: Montenapoleone), which just since the late 1980s has hired the likes of Michael Graves, Philippe Starck, Frank Gehry, and Ettore Sottsass to design the latest in teakettles, bottle openers, and other housewares.

The 1980s was really part of a renaissance of Italian industrial design. This is the era when design team **Memphis** (Via della Moscova, 27; ☎ 02-6554731; www.memphis-milano.it; Metro: Turati), led by Ettore Sottsass, virtually reinvented the art form, recruiting the best and brightest architects and designers to turn their talents to lighting fixtures, kitchen appliances, office supplies, and even furnishings. Italian style has stayed at the very top of the designer homewares market (well, sharing popularity space with Scandinavian furniture) ever since. Part of the Memphis credo was to create the new modern, and then bow out before they became establishment, so they self-destructed in 1988, though you can still find their influential designs in many homeware shops, and in the main showroom.

## Linens

For Milanese design with which to dress the bed, visit **Frette** (Via Visconti di Modrone; ☎ 02-777091; www.frette.it; Metro: San Babila). This outlet branch of the high-fashion linen house offers the line of tablecloths, towels, robes, and bedding that it supplies to the world's top hotels at substantial discounts. They have other stores at Via Montenapoleone, 21 (☎ 02-783950; Metro: Montenapoleone), Via Manzoni, 11 (☎ 02-864433; Metro: Montenapoleone), Corso Buenos Aires, 82 (☎ 02-29401072; Metro: Lima), Corso Vercelli 23/25 (☎ 02-4989756; Metro: Conciliazione), and Via Torino, 42 (☎ 02-86452281; Metro: Duomo).

The elegant swirling paisleys of **Etro** (Via Montenapoleone, 5; ☎ 02-76005049; www.etro.it; Metro: Montenapoleone) have been decorating the walls, furniture covers, and accessories in some of Italy's richest and aristocratic homes since 1969. They've since expanded into full lines of clothing and leather goods, as well as perfumes and accessories (available at the branch on the corner of Via P. Verri and Via Bigli, ☎ 02-7600-5450; Metro: Montenapoleone).

## NIGHTLIFE

On Wednesdays and Thursdays, Milan's newspapers tend to devote a lot of ink to club schedules and cultural events. If you don't trust your command of Italian to plan your nightlife, check out the tourist office on Piazza del Duomo—there are usually piles of flyers announcing upcoming events. The tourist office also keeps visitors up-to-date with the *Hello Milano* (www.hellomilano.it) free newspaper and *Milano Mese*, the official events, exhibitions, markets, and trade fairs monthly.

## The Performing Arts

For the lowdown on Milan's premier opera house, **Teatro alla Scala** ★★★, see p. 399.

Milan's "**Giuseppe Verdi**" **Symphony Orchestra** plays at the **Auditorium di Milano**, a renovated 1930s movie house at Via S. Gottardo, 42/Largo Gustav Mahler (☎ 02-83389222; www.auditoriumdimilano.org; Metro: Duomo, then tram no. 3 or 15). Concerts run from late September to May, usually on Thursdays at 8:30pm, Fridays at 7:30pm, and Sundays at 4pm.

## Pubs

A publike atmosphere, induced in part by Guinness on tap, prevails at Liberty-style **Bar Magenta** (Via Carducci, 13, at Corso Magenta; ☎ 02-8053808; closed Mon; Metro: Cadorna), in the neighborhood for which it takes its name. One of the more popular La Brera hangouts, with a young following, is **El Tombon de San Marc** (Via San Marco, 20, at Via Montebello; ☎ 02-6599507; closed Sun; Metro: Moscova), which despite its name is an English pub-style bar and restaurant.

Among the Navigli nightspots (growing in number all the time) is **El Brellin** (Vicolo della Lavandaia, off Alzaia Naviglio Grande, 14; ☎ 02-58101351; closed Sun; Metro: Genova F.S.), an intimate, canal-side piano bar with its own minicanal. **Birreria La Fontanella** (Alzaia Naviglio Pavese, 6; ☎ 02-8372391; closed Mon; Metro: Genova F.S.) has canal-side tables outside in summer and the oddest-shaped beer glasses around—that half-a-barbell kind everyone seems to order is called the "Cavalliere."

## A Jazz Club

Since Capolinea got ousted (warning: the club's name is still there at Via Ludovico il Moro, 119, but it is *not* the old jazz club where the greats came to play; rather, it's some pathetic mimic of it slapped together by the next-door neighbors who forced the original owners out of this space), the best venue on the jazz-club scene is the Navigli's **Le Scimmie** (Via Ascanio Sforza, 49; ☎ 02-89402874; www.scimmie.it; closed Tues; Metro: Porta Genova), where shows start at 10:30pm and the cover ranges from free to €8—plus it has its own bar-boat moored in the canal.

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## Nightlife Tip

The Navigli/Ticinese neighborhood is currently on the rise as Milan's prime night turf, though the Brera retains its pull with night owls as well.

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## Discothèques

The dance scene changes all the time in Milan, but at whatever club is popular (or in business) at the moment, expect to pay a cover of €5 to €20, depending on how good-looking and/or female you are. Models, actors, sports stars, and the attendant fashion set favor **Hollywood** (Corso Como, 15; ☎ 02-6598996; www.discotecahollywood.com; closed July 23–Sept 7; Metro: Moscova), which is small, chic, and centrally located in La Brera.

**Grand Café Fashion** (Corso di Porta Ticinese, 60, at Via Vetere; ☎ 02-89400709 or 0336-347333; Metro: Porta Genova) is a multipurpose nightclub halfway to the Navigli with a restaurant open from 9pm and a disco nightly from 11:30pm. It brings a beautiful crowd to the Ticinese neighborhood, where they dance the night away, sometimes to thematic evenings like Latino Mondays and, er, lap-dance Sundays.

Milan's most venerable disco/live music club is **Rolling Stone** (Corso XXII Marzo, 32, just east of Piazza Emilia; ☎ 02-733172; www.rollingstone.it; closed Sun–Mon; tram: 12, 27, 45, 60, 66, 73, or 92), in business since 1982. Most of the performers these days are of a rock bent, and the club is as popular as ever.

## The ABCs of Milan

**Consulates** The **U.S. Consulate** at Via Principe Amedeo, 2/10 (☎ 02-290351; Metro: Turati), is open Monday to Friday 9 to 11am and 2 to 4pm. The **Canadian Consulate** at Via Vittor Pisani, 19 (☎ 02-67581; Metro: F.S. Centrale or Repubblica), is open Monday to Friday 9am to noon. The **British Consulate** at Via San Paolo, 7 (☎ 02-723001; Metro: Duomo), is open Monday to Friday 9:15am to 12:15pm and 2:30 to 4:30pm. The **Australian Consulate** at Via Borgogna, 2 (☎ 02-77704217; Metro: San Babila), is open Monday to Thursday 9am to 5pm, Friday 9am to 4:15pm. The **New Zealand Consulate** at Via Guido d'Arezzo, 6 (☎ 02-48012544; Metro: Pagano), is open Monday to Friday 8:30am to 5pm.

**Crime** For police emergencies dial ☎ **113**. There is a **police station** in Stazione Centrale. The main Questura (police station) is just west of the Giardini Pubblici (**Via Fatebenefratelli, 11**; ☎ 02-62261; Metro: Turati), though the entrance for the office for foreigners and passport problems is at Via Montebello, 26 (☎ 02-62265777; Metro: Turati). Milan is generally safe, with some notable exceptions, especially at night, including

the public gardens, Parco Sempione, and the area to the west of Stazione Centrale. The train station is notorious for pickpockets, whose favorite victims are distracted passengers lining up for the airport buses at the east side of the building. You should likewise be vigilant for pickpockets on all public transportation and in street markets.

**Drugstores** Pharmacies rotate 24-hour shifts; look for signs posted in most pharmacies announcing which shops are open all night on any given day. The **Farmacia Stazione Centrale** (☎ 02-6690935), in the main train station, is open 24 hours daily and some of the staff members speak English. There are also **night pharmacies** at **Piazza del Duomo, 21** (☎ 02-86464832), **Corso Buenos Aires, 4** (☎ 02-29513320), **Via Boccaccio, 26** (☎ 02-4695281), **Viale Lucania, 10** (☎ 02-57404805), **Piazza V Giornate, 6** (☎ 02-55194867), and **Via Stradivari, 1** (☎ 02-29526966).

**Emergencies** The general number for emergencies is ☎ **113**. For the Carabinieri police, call ☎ **112**. For first aid or an ambulance, dial ☎ **118**. For a fire, call ☎ **115**.

**Hospitals** For an ambulance, call ☎ **118**. The Ospedale Maggiore Policlinico (**Via Francesco Sforza, 35**; ☎ 02-55031; www.policlinico.mi.it; Metro: Duomo or Missori) is centrally located, a 5-minute walk southeast of the Duomo.

**Lost Property** The city-run *ufficio oggetti rinvenuti* (**lost-and-found office**)—where you check for items lost on the street or public transportation—is just south of Piazza del Duomo (**Via Friuli, 30**; ☎ 02-88453907; Metro: Duomo or Missori) and is open Monday to Friday 8:30am to 4pm. The *oggetti smarriti* (lost objects) at Stazione Centrale (☎ 6371-2667) is located in the same office as the luggage storage and is open daily from 6am to 1am.

**Post Office** The main post office, Poste e Telecomunicazioni, is just west of Piazza

del Duomo, at **Via Cordusio, 4**; (☎ 02-72482126; www.poste.it; Metro: Cordusio). Windows are open Monday to Friday 8am to 7pm and Saturday 8:30am to noon. Most branch offices are open Monday to Friday 8am to 2pm, Saturday 9:30am to 1pm.

**Taxis** To find a taxi in Milan, walk to the nearest taxi stand, usually located near major *piazze* and major Metro stops. In the center, there are taxi stands at Piazza del Duomo and Piazza della Scala. Or call a radio taxi at ☎ **02-4040**, 02-8383, 02-8585, 02-4000, or 02-6969 (the desk staff at many hotels will be happy to do this for you, even if you are not a guest). Cab meters start at €3.10, and add a surcharge of €3.10 at night, €1.55 on Sundays.

## THE LAKE DISTRICT

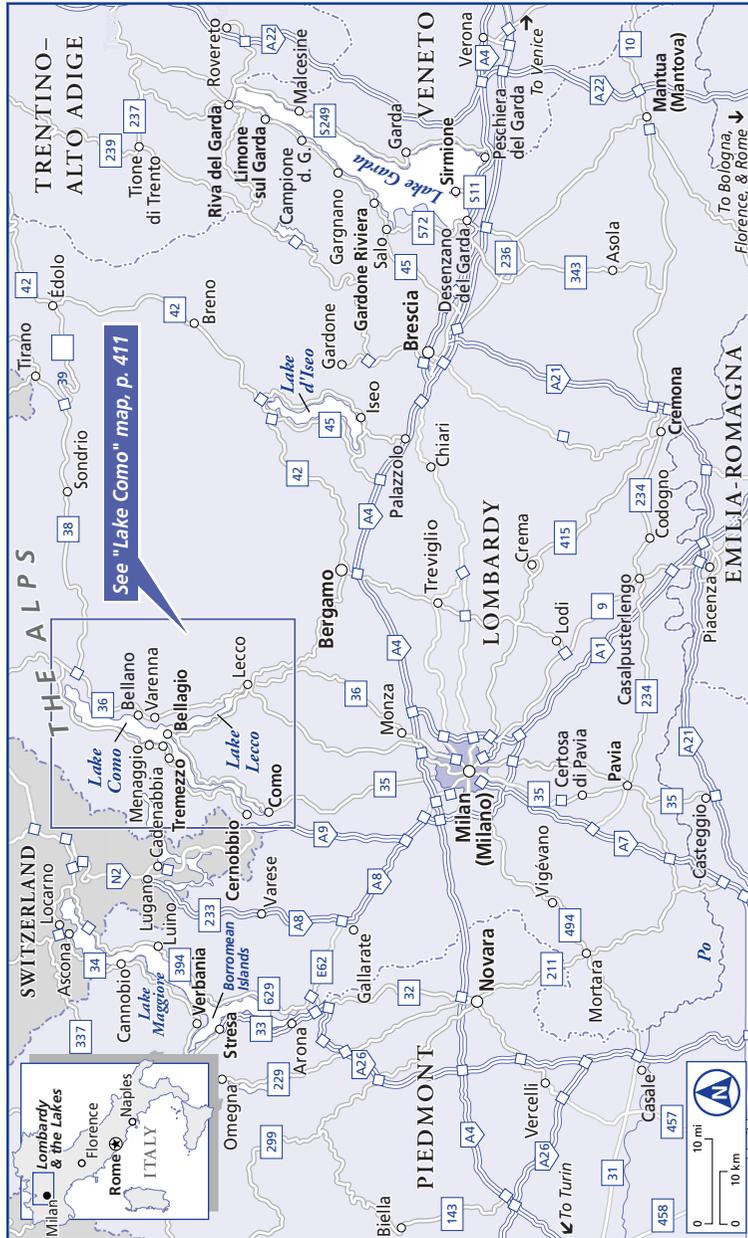
Poets, composers, and mere mortals have been rhapsodizing about the Italian lakes for centuries—most vocally since the 18th century, when it became de rigueur for travelers on the Grand Tour to descend through the Alps and enjoy their first days on Italian soil on the shores of the lakes.

### LAKE COMO ★★

If you have time for only one lake, make it Como. The first sight of the dramatic expanse of azure Lake Como, ringed by gardens and forests and backed by the snowcapped Alps, has a history of evoking strong emotions. Over the centuries, the lake has inspired poets (Lord Byron), novelists (Stendhal), composers (Verdi and Rossini), and plenty of less famous visitors.

The lake has drawn everyone from deposed queens (George IV of England exiled Caroline of Brunswick here for her adulterous ways) to well-heeled travelers, and is still sought after by the rich and über-famous. George Clooney recently moved into the neighborhood, buying a villa from Teresa Heinz and her hubby, Senator John Kerry—it featured as the bad guy's home in *Ocean's Twelve*.

Aside from its emotional pull, Como is also just an enjoyable place to spend time. Less than an hour from Milan by train or car, its deep waters and verdant shores provide a wonderful respite from modern life. Tellingly, Lake Como served as a backdrop for the romantic scenes in *Star Wars II: Attack of the Clones*—one of the very few settings in the film *not* created entirely by CGI computer programs. I guess even George Lucas realized that Como was a place of such unearthly beauty as to need little digital touching-up.



Como

The largest and southernmost town on the lake isn't likely to charm you. Long a center of silk-making, this city—which traces its roots to the Gauls, and after them, the Romans—bustles with commerce and industry. You'll probably want to stay in one of the more peaceful settings farther up the lake, but Como amply rewards a day's visit with some fine Renaissance churches and palaces and a lovely lakefront promenade.

**LAY OF THE LAND** Como is 78km (47 miles) northeast of Milan. One to three trains hourly connect Milan and Como's Stazione San Giovanni on Piazzale San Gortardo (regional trains from Milan's Piazza Garibaldi station take 55–65 min.; high-speed trains from Milan's Stazione Centrale station take 35–40 min.).

The **regional tourist office** (Piazza Cavour, 17; ☎ 031-269712 or 031-3300111; www.lakecomo.org; sometimes closed Sun in winter) dispenses a wealth of information on hotels, restaurants, and campgrounds all around the lake. There is also a **city tourist office** (☎ 031-3371063) in a little trailer that keeps moving around but is always somewhere near Piazza del Duomo; currently it's parked on Via Maestri Comacini, around the right side of the cathedral.

**ACCOMMODATIONS & DINING** Como's moderately priced hotel scene is pretty slim pickings, but I do have a few suggestions for travelers on a budget and those who wish to splurge a bit.

€ If you're really pinching pennies, you could do worse (not much worse, mind you) than the seven bare-bones rooms above the **Ristorante Sociale** (Via Maestri Comacini, 8; ☎ 031-264042), tucked under an arcade next to the Duomo's right flank. Its big selling points: a prime location next door to the Duomo and double rooms that go for just €40 without private bathroom, €50 with. The

“This lake exceeds any thing I ever beheld in beauty, with the exception of the arbutus islands of Killamey. It is long and narrow, and has the appearance of a mighty river, winding among the mountains and the forests.”

—Percy Bysshe Shelley, writing about Lake Como in a letter from 1818

**restaurant** ★—which features simple dishes at low prices; closed Mondays—far outshines the rooms. This is where Comaschi go to dine after a play at the Teatro Sociale (the restaurant's walls are plastered with playbills and signed actor photos), where the local soccer team celebrates its victories, and where the local equivalent of the ladies' auxiliary meets to have long, voluble conversations while enjoying one of the best fixed-price menus on the lake. For €16 you get a choice of four *primi*,

four *secondi*, a side dish, and water or wine—though they usually give you both at no extra charge. Just steer clear of the fish—it's frozen . . . rather scandalous for a place located just 2 blocks from the fishing boats bobbing in the harbor.

€€€-€€€€ You can get far nicer rooms—but at a much higher rate of €128 to €198 for a double—at the **Hotel Metropole Suisse** ★ (Piazza Cavour, 19; ☎ 031-269444; www.hotelmetropolesuisse.com). This massive 1892 hotel closes

## Lake Como



one side of Como's main square, and while accommodations vary—some carpeted with nice contemporary furnishings; others older with wood floors, brass beds, and embroidered upholstery—almost all overlook the lake, at least partially (the best with full-on views from small balconies). The corner bar/lounge has picture windows for lake views, and the restaurant (under separate management) has tables out on the piazza.

€ I'd take dinner at the Sociale, above. But the best lunch spot is **Pasticceria Monti** (Piazza Cavour, 21; ☎ 031-301165; Wed–Mon), a busy cafe on the main lakefront piazza and one of Como's favorite places to gather and watch passersby. They make excellent sandwiches and other light fare from €2.50, including daily pasta dishes, not to mention sublime coffee, pastries (from €1.50), and gelato (from €1).

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**WHY YOU'RE HERE: THE TOP SIGHTS & ATTRACTIONS** Part Gothic and part Renaissance, Como's **Duomo** ★★ (Piazza del Duomo, in the center of town just off the lake; ☎ 031-265244; daily 7:30am–noon and 3–7pm) is festooned with exuberant masonry and sculpture. Statues of two of the town's famous native sons, Pliny the Elder and Pliny the Younger, flank the main entrance. Inside, beneath an 18th-century dome by Juvarra—the architect who designed much of Turin—is a lavish interior hung with mostly 16th-century paintings and tapestries, with lots of helpful leaflets in English to explain the major works of art.

The black-and-white-striped 13th-century **Broletto (Town Hall)** abuts the Duomo's left flank, and adjoining it is the **Torre del Comune**. As a study in contrasts, the starkly modernist and aptly named **Casa del Fascio**, built in 1936 as the seat of the region's fascist government, rises just behind the Duomo.

Como's main drag, **Corso Vittorio Emanuele II**, cuts through the medieval quarter, where wood-beamed houses line narrow streets. Two blocks south of the Duomo, the five-sided **San Fedele** (Piazza S. Fedele; daily 8am–noon and 3:30–7pm) sits on a charming square. Though largely 12th-century, parts of the church, including the altar, date from the 6th century.

To see **Como's most alluring church**, though, you've got to venture into the dull outlying neighborhood southwest of the center where, just off Viale Roosevelt, you'll come to the five-aisle, heavily frescoed **Basilica of Sant'Abbondio** ★★ (☎ 631-3388111; daily 8am–6pm, except during weddings, which are hugely popular here), a Romanesque masterpiece from the 11th century lined with great 14th-century frescoes.

Lakeside life revolves around **Piazza Cavour** and the adjoining **Giardini Pubblici**, where the circular **Tempio Voltano** (☎ 031-574705; €3; Tues–Sun 10am–noon and 3–6pm, Oct–Mar 2–4pm) houses memorabilia that'll enlighten you about the life and experiments of native son and electricity pioneer Alessandro Volta.

For a quick retreat and some stunning views, take the **Brunate funicular** (Lungo Lario Trieste; ☎ 031-303608; €4.10 round-trip; every 15 min. in summer, every 30 min. in winter) for a 7-minute ride up to the top of the forested

### A Word about Alternative Accommodations on the Lakes

With the exception of the B&Bs noted below, the lake region is a bust when it comes to finding alternative accommodations. Como itself has only four B&Bs (all too far out of town to be feasible); Bellagio has only one in town (the recommended restaurant, Barchetta—see below—rents five rooms for €80 each); Varenna has none. On Lake Garda, it's a similar story: Sirmione has precisely zero B&Bs or rental rooms (it would be hard to find a place to stick them because almost every building is already a hotel). Riva del Garda has one B&B (out on the very edge of town), and of the dozen *affittacamere* (rooms for rent), only one is in the center; the others are either up near the suburb of Arco or in places no visitor would want to lodge.

hill above the town. The tourist office has maps that detail several trail hikes from the top.

## Bellagio

Bellagio is often called one of the most beautiful towns in Italy. Nestled amid cypress groves and verdant gardens, its earth-toned old buildings climb from the lakefront promenade along stepped cobblestone lanes. It has become a popular retreat for everyone from Milanese out for a day of relaxation to Brits and Americans who come to relax for a week or two.

It also occupies by far the loveliest spot on the lake, the section known as the Centro Lago where the three legs of Lake Como meet. Bellagio is at the tip of the peninsula at this fork with frequent ferry service, making this a great base for exploring Varenna (see below) and other spots on the nearby shores of the Centro Lago.

**LAY OF THE LAND** There are one to three **SPT buses** (☎ 031-247111; [www.sptcomo.it](http://www.sptcomo.it)) per hour from Como (70-min. trip), where you can get train connections. **Ferries** (☎ 800-551801 or 031-579211; [www.navigazioneelaghi.it](http://www.navigazioneelaghi.it)) from Como take 2 hours; hydrofoils 35 to 45 minutes. Schedules vary with season, but from Easter to September a ferry or hydrofoil makes the trip from Como to Bellagio and other towns along the lake at least hourly. The picturesque lakeshore **road** from Como, the SS583, can be very crowded in summer, so allow at least an hour of traveling time by car.

Bellagio's **tourist office** is at Piazza della Chiesa, 14; (☎ 031-950204; [www.bellagiolakecomo.com](http://www.bellagiolakecomo.com)), a steep 1½ blocks up from the port.

**ACCOMMODATIONS & DINING IN BELLAGIO** Note that a wider selection of moderately priced hotels can be found across the lake from Bellagio, in Varenna (see below). If you're traveling on a budget, your best bet is to lodge there and then simply make Bellagio a day trip.

€€ The best deal is the little **Giardinetto** (Via Roncati, 12, just off Piazza del Chiesa; ☎ 031-950168; closed Nov–Mar; no credit cards), at the top of town. The rooms are basic, but quite large and bright, with solid old armoires, big windows, and—in the better rooms—box-spring-and-mattress beds rather than the standard cots. The best part: Doubles cost a mere €52 to €55 (breakfast tacks on another €6 per person). Most rooms overlook a gravelly grapevine-covered terrace, where you're welcome to bring your own food for an alfresco meal, and those on the upper floors even catch a glimpse of the lake from their balconies (especially rooms 18–20). Some, though, are on the airshaft or even come with no window whatsoever.

€€–€€€ The 10 simple rooms at the **Suisse** ★ (Piazza Mazzini, 23; ☎ 031-950335; Oct–Nov and Dec–Feb closed Wed), a 15th-century lakeside villa right on the main harbor square, have a pleasant but budget decor: parquet floors, stylish solid-wood furnishings with lovely inlaid or carved details, and plain bathrooms. Not only do you get water views, but the €100 to €154 for a double room includes half-pension at the restaurant, so it's like getting two meals a day for free. What's more, the restaurant is pretty good—Italian fare year-round, with an inventive fusion flair in summer—served either alfresco under the arcades, in a

plain ground floor room, or in the understatedly elegant upstairs dining room, with a decorated ceiling and a lake-view terrace.

€€–€€€€ Spend a bit more to splurge on Suisse's neighbor, the 150-year-old **Hotel Du Lac** ★★ (Piazza Mazzini, 32; ☎ 031-950320; [www.bellagiohoteldulac.com](http://www.bellagiohoteldulac.com); closed early Nov to Easter), run with an air of graciousness and old-fashioned comfort by the Leoni family. Downstairs, a bar opens onto the arcaded sidewalk, there is a series of pleasant sitting rooms, and meals are served in a nicely appointed dining room with panoramic views of the lake (half-board is an extra €15 per person). Each of the smallish guest rooms is unique, though they tend toward cushy armchairs and a nice smattering of antiques and reproductions, many with balconies or terraces, and cost €110 to €180 for a double. There's a rooftop sun terrace with sweeping lake views, and free access to the Leoni's nearby sports center with a pool, tennis courts, and a children's center.

€ **Bar Café Rossi** ★ (Piazza Mazzini, 22/24; ☎ 031-950196; Oct–Mar closed Thurs) is one of the nicest of Bellagio's pleasant lakefront cafes, tucked under the arcades of the town's main square. You can dine at one of the few outside tables or in the delightful Art Nouveau dining room with its intricate tilework, carved wood cabinets, and stuccoed ceilings. Wine and the excellent house coffee are available all day, but a nice selection of pastries and sandwiches (€2.50–€4) makes this a good stop for breakfast or lunch.

€–€€ **La Grotta** (Salita Cernaia, 14; ☎ 031-951152; credit cards accepted only for bills totaling more than €21; closed Nov 15–Dec 25 and Mon Oct–June) is tucked away on a stepped street just off lakefront Piazza Mazzini, and has a cozy, informal series of vaulted-ceiling dining rooms with extremely friendly service, not to mention a wide-ranging menu. Most of the regulars come for the fish specials, including lake trout (€12), or the delectable pizzas (€5–€10) that are the best for miles around (I've made sure of this by sampling them six or seven times).

€€€ **Barchetta** ★★ (Salita Mella, 13; ☎ 031-951389; [www.acena.it/la\\_barchettadibellagio](http://www.acena.it/la_barchettadibellagio); closed Nov–Mar and June 15–Sept 15 Tues–Wed at lunch) is one of Bellagio's best restaurants, specializing in fresh lake fish (try the perch or angler fish). In all but the coldest weather, food is served on a bamboo-enclosed heated terrace. Most of the pastas are innovative variations on traditional recipes, such as *ravioli caprino* (with goat's cheese, topped with pear sauce) and savory risotto with hazelnuts and pistachios. Book ahead.

**BELLAGIO'S GARDENS** One of Bellagio's famed gardens surrounds the **Villa Melzi d'Eril** (☎ 031-950204; €5; late Mar to early Nov daily 9am–6pm), built in 1808 by Francesco Melzi, a friend of Napoleon and an official of his Italian Republic. The villa was later the retreat of Franz Liszt and is now the home of Count Gallarati Scotti, who allows the public to stroll through his acres of manicured lawns and fountains and visit a pavilion displaying a collection of Egyptian sculpture.

Bellagio's other famous gardens are those of the **Villa Serbelloni** ★ (☎ 031-951555; €6.50; Apr–Oct, tours Tues–Sun at 11am and 4pm), occupying land once owned by Pliny the Younger and now in the hands of the Rockefeller Foundation.

You can visit the gardens and villa on twice-daily guided tours (reserve ahead), about 1½ hours long, in Italian and English (tours require at least six people to depart). You meet at the little tower on the backside of Piazza della Chiesa.

### Varenna

You can happily spend some time clambering up and down the steep steps that substitute for streets in this charming fishing village on the eastern shore of the lake, just 10 minutes by ferry (5 min. by hydrofoil) from Bellagio. There's a tiny **tourist office** at Piazza S. Giorgio/Via IV Novembre (☎ 0341-830367; www.aptlecco.com).

The hilltop ruins of the **Castello di Vezio** (☎ 335-465186; www.castellodi vezio.it; €4; 10am to sunset, Apr–Oct daily, Feb, Mar, and Nov Sat–Sun only, Dec Sun only, closed Jan) lie a 20-minute hike above the town. The main reason for a visit is to enjoy the stunning views of the lake, its shoreline villages, and the backdrop of mountains at the northern end.

The gardens of the **Villa Monastero** ★ (☎ 0341-830129; www.villamonastero.org; €2; Mar–Oct daily 9am–7pm) are more easily accessible at the southern edge of town along Via IV Novembre, and you can reach them by following the series of lakeside promenades through the old town from the ferry landing. This villa and the terraced gardens that rise from the lakeshore were once a not-so-spartan monastery—until it was dissolved in the late 17th century, when the nuns in residence began bearing living proof that they were on too friendly terms with the priests across the way. If you find it hard to tear yourself from the bowers of citrus trees and rhododendrons clinging to terraces, you'll find equally enchanting surroundings in the adjoining gardens of the **Villa Cipressi** (☎ 0341-830113; www.hotelvillacipressi.it; €2; Mar–Oct daily 9am–7pm).

**ACCOMMODATIONS & DINING** As I said before, a stay in Varenna is one of the best options for value-conscious travelers (and the village is also quite lovely in its own right).

€€–€€€ You'd have to look hard to find a more pleasant retreat by the lake than the **Milano** ★★ (Via XX Settembre, 29; ☎ 0341-830298; www.varenna.net; closed Dec–Feb), an old lakefront house renovated into a boutique hotel by Bettina and Egidio Mallone, a friendly young Italian-Swiss couple. The modern common area now has a TV with satellite channels and computer with free Internet. The rooms were overhauled in 2003 with new beds and antique-style furnishings, and spanning new bathrooms as of 2004. All rooms have balconies. Rooms 1 and 2 (which open onto a wide terrace) and rooms 5 and 6 have full-on lake vistas (doubles €130–€145); the others overlook the neighbor's pretty garden with askance lake views (doubles €120–€130). In summer, breakfast is served on the outdoor terrace, as are the €25, three-course dinners, available upon request Monday and Wednesday through Saturday. They also have an apartment nearby (no views, though) that they'll rent out—preferably to families or groups of four—for €55 per person, including breakfast back at the hotel.

€€–€€€€ If you enjoyed your tour of Varenna's lush gardens (see above), there's no need to leave. The 16th-century **Villa Cipressi** ★★ (Via IV Novembre, 18; ☎ 0341-830113; www.hotelvillacipressi.it; usually closed late Oct to Mar, but

some years open year-round) was converted to a hotel nearly 2 centuries ago, and though it's geared toward hosting conferences, other guests can book, space permitting. Though the rooms have been renovated without any attempt to retain historic character, they're extremely large and attractive. Not every room gets a lake view (doubles €120–€150), but all save a few small ones on the road side enjoy marvelous views over those famous gardens (and they cost less: €100–€120). Suites (€120–€150) take advantage of the high ceilings and contain loft bedrooms, with sitting areas below that can easily fit a couple of single beds (€45 extra) for families.

€€€ One of your most memorable experiences in this region could be a meal at the romantic **Vecchia Varenna** ★★ (Via Scoscasa, 10; ☎ 031-830793; www.vecchiavarenna.it; closed Mon and Jan), on a terrace over the water or in a beautiful stone-floored room with white stone walls. The kitchen makes the most of local herbs and vegetables and, of course, the bounty of the lake—*quadrucci* (pasta pockets) are stuffed with trout (€11), and one of the best of the many risottos combines wild mushrooms and *lavarello* (a white fish from the lake; €11). The grilled lake trout stuffed with mountain herbs is sublime (€15). Reservations are required.

### LAKE MAGGIORE

Anyone who reads Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* will recognize this lake and its forested shores. That's just the sort of place Lake Maggiore (Lago Maggiore) is: a pleasure ground steeped in associations with famous figures—Flaubert, Wagner, Goethe, and Europe's other great minds seem to have been inspired by the deep, moody waters backed by the Alps—and not-so-famous wealthy visitors. Fortunately, you need be neither famous nor wealthy to enjoy Maggiore, which is on the Swiss border just a short dash east and north of Milan.

### Stresa & the Borromean Islands

Strolling and relaxing seem to be the main activities in Stresa, a pretty little place with a long lakefront promenade, a lively center, and a bevy of restaurants and hotels that range from the expensive and splendid to the affordable but comfortable. Sooner or later, though, most visitors climb into a ferry for the short ride to the trio of famed islands just off Stresa's shore, the Isole Borromee.

**LAY OF THE LAND** Stresa is 80km (48 miles) northwest of Milan, linked by 20 **trains** daily (58–84 min.). The **tourist office** is at the ferry dock (☎ 0323-31308; www.lagomaggiore.it, www.illagomaggiore.com, or www.stresa.it), closed Sundays November to April.

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### Cumulative Ticket

You can get a cumulative ticket covering both Isola Bella and Isola Madre for €15. Audio tours help make sense of it all for €3.50 each or €5 to rent two sets of headphones.

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### Making the Most of Your Time Here

To squeeze as much of Stresa's sights in as you can in a day, note that the ferry back from the Isole Borromee stops first at the Mottarone Funivia area before chugging down the coast to the center of Stresa and the main docks. You can hop off here either to (1) ride the cable car up the mountain (€13 round-trip, or €7 one-way and walk or bike—€21 rentals—back down), or (2) simply walk back into Stresa itself along a pretty lakeside promenade, past crumbling villas and impromptu sculpture gardens, in about 20 minutes.

**ACCOMMODATIONS IN STRESA & THE ISLANDS** This is one of the few places in the region where the options include both standard hotels and more interesting B&B accommodations.

€€ For much of the spring and summer, the street in front of **Hotel Primavera** ★★ (Via Cavour, 30; ☎ 0323-31286; [www.stresa.it](http://www.stresa.it); closed Dec 20, and some years Jan–Feb) is closed to traffic and filled with flowering plants and cafe tables. The relaxed air prevails throughout this bright little hotel a block off the lake in the town center. The tile-floored rooms are furnished in functional walnut veneer and go for €75 to €105. Many rooms have balconies just wide enough to accommodate a pair of chairs; a few on the fourth floor even get a sliver of lake view around the apse and stone bell tower of the Duomo.

€€ The same family runs the more modern, though equally priced **Hotel Meeting** ★ (Via Bonghi, 9; ☎ 0323-32741; [www.stresa.it](http://www.stresa.it); closed Dec some years, Jan–Feb others), named for its proximity to a conference center. It's a 5-minute walk from the lakefront in a quiet and leafy setting—though light sleepers on the back may notice the trains passing in the distance. The Scandinavian rooms are big and bright, and all come with balconies.

€€ Just uphill from the train station—and an unfortunate 10-minute walk from the center of town and the lakeside—the family-run **Mon Toc** ★ (Via Duchessa di Genova, 69; ☎ 0323-30282; [www.hotelmontoc.com](http://www.hotelmontoc.com); closed Jan or Nov) is surrounded by a private garden for an almost countrylike atmosphere. The functional €78 doubles are unusually pleasant for a hotel this cheap (though a few of the tidy bathrooms are of the miniscule, molded, airplane variety). The friendly owner refuses, out of honesty, to call the sliver of lake visible over the rooftops from the second-floor rooms a “lake view.”

If you don't luck out with those, there are always the bland rooms at the **Fiorentino** (see “Dining in Stresa,” below).

**DINING IN STRESA** As befits the select nature of the area, the restaurants of Stresa are also quite special.

€–€€ It's hard to find friendlier service or homier trattoria-type food in Stresa than at the **Hotel Ristorante Fiorentino** (Via A. M. Bolongaro, 9–11;

### A Few B&B Options

€€ There's only one B&B in the heart of Stresa—but it's a doozy, right across the street from the lake. At her **Il Viaggiatore** (Corso Italia, 38; ☎ 0323-934674; [www.bb-ilviaggiatore.it](http://www.bb-ilviaggiatore.it)), Rosanna rents two large, homey rooms with killer lake views for €70 to €80. They share a kitchen, and Rosanna is an avid outdoors-woman and rock climber who helps run a guide service for hiking and climbing in nearby Piemonte parkland.

€€€ For a truly unique lake experience, stay on the Isola Superiore itself. From March to October, the **Verbano** ★ (see “Dining in Stresa,” above) rents some beautiful lake-view rooms in the villa upstairs for €148 per double.

€€ Cheaper—but only open in summer (Apr–Sept)—are the €60-to-€70 doubles at **Chez Manuel** (Via Di Mezzo, 41; ☎ 0323-31165; [www.bedandbreakfaststresa.com](http://www.bedandbreakfaststresa.com); closed Oct–Mar), with wood floors, blond furnishings, a shared kitchen, and rooftop views.

☎ 0323-30254; [www.hotelfiorentino.com](http://www.hotelfiorentino.com); closed Nov–Feb), especially at these prices—the €14 *menu turistico* is a steal. Everything that comes out of the family-run kitchen is made fresh daily, including cannelloni (€6) and other pastas. You can dine in a big cozy room or on a patio out back in good weather. As you might have guessed from the name, they also rent rooms—quite nice, if boring, ones at just €74 to €80 per double.

€–€€ Most of Stresa seems to congregate in the **Taverna del Pappagallo** (Via Principessa Margherita, 46; ☎ 0323-30411; [www.tavernapappagallo.com](http://www.tavernapappagallo.com); no credit cards; closed Tues–Wed except in summer) for the most popular pizza in town (€4.20–€10). But just about all the fare that comes out of the family-run kitchen is delicious, including delectable homemade gnocchi (€6.20) and such dishes as grilled sausage with beans (€8). Weather permitting, try to dine at one of the tables in the pleasant garden.

€€–€€€ **Verbano** ★★ (Isola Superiore; ☎ 0323-32534; [www.hotelverbano.it](http://www.hotelverbano.it); closed Jan and sometimes Wed in winter) has a fairy-tale location on the point of the “Fisherman's Isle,” taking up the jasmine-fringed gravelly terrace next to the hotel. The waters lap right up to the wall and the views are over the back of Isola Bella and the lake around you on three sides. The cooking needn't be anything special given its location in a prime tourist spot, but surprisingly it's almost as lovely as the setting. First courses cost just €5 to €10, and include such delectables as a *zuppa di verdure* (vegetable soup), hearty with barley and grains; and a *paglia e fieno* (“hay and straw”) mix of regular (yellow) and spinach (green) tagliatelle noodles in a *ragù* made of scorpion fish, carrots, and zucchini. Definitely leave room for a grilled lake trout accompanied by rice stained black with squid ink. March to October, they also rent some beautiful rooms in the villa upstairs for €148 per double.

**EXPLORING THE ISLANDS** Since the 12th century, the Borromeo family has owned these three islets, which float in the misty waters off Stresa and entice visitors with their stunning beauty. Isola Bella and especially Isola Superiore have villages you can hang out in for free, but Isola Madre consists solely of the admission-charging gardens.

**Isola Bella** ★★ (☎ 0323-30556; [www.borromeoturismo.it](http://www.borromeoturismo.it); €10; Mar 25–Oct 22 daily 9:30am–5:30pm) remains true to its name, with splendid 17th-century gardens that ascend from the shore in 10 luxuriantly planted terraces. The Borromeo *palazzo* includes a room in which Napoleon and Josephine once slept.

The largest and most peaceful of the islands is **Isola Madre** ★★ (☎ 0323-30556; [www.borromeoturismo.it](http://www.borromeoturismo.it); €9; Mar 25–Oct 22 daily 9am–5:30pm), all 8 acres of which are covered by the Orto Botanico, teeming with exquisite flora and exotic, colorful birds. The villa in the center of it all was built in 1518 to 1585 and is still filled with Borromeo family memorabilia and some interesting old puppet-show stages.

Most of Isola Superiore, also known as Isola dei Pescatori (Fishermen's Island), is occupied by a not-so-quiet old fishing village—every one of the tall houses on this tiny strip of land seems to harbor a souvenir shop or pizza stand, and there are hordes of visitors to keep them busy.

Public **ferries** (☎ 800-551801 or 0322-233200; [www.navigazionealghi.it](http://www.navigazionealghi.it)) leave for the islands every half-hour from the big building with triple arches on Stresa's Piazza Marconi. Round-trip tickets to any one island cost €5.20 (Isola Bella or Isola Superiore) to €7 (Isola Madre), so it's far more economical to get a €10 day pass allowing you to ride as much as you'd like. You'll see other ticket booths and touts dressed as sailors who will try to lure you aboard; avoid these overpriced private hucksters and stick with the public ferry service.

## LAKE GARDA

Lake Garda (Lago di Garda), the largest and easternmost of the lakes, laps against the flat plains of Lombardy and the Veneto at its southern extremes, and in the north, where it juts into the Trentino-Alto Adige region, becomes fiordlike and moody, its deep waters backed by Alpine peaks. All around the lake, Garda's shores are green and fragrant with flowery gardens, groves of olives and lemons, and forests of pines and cypress.

This pleasing, vaguely exotic landscape has attracted everyone from the poet Gabriele D'Annunzio to the dictator Benito Mussolini who, retreating with his Nazi minders, founded the short-lived Republic of Salò on the lake's western shores (where he ultimately was captured and killed by Partisans).

Long before them, the Romans discovered the hot springs that still gush forth at Sirmione, the famed resort on a spit of land at the lake's southern reaches. Today's visitors come to swim (Garda is the cleanest of the major lakes), windsurf (Riva del Garda, at the northern end of the lake, is Europe's windsurfing capital), and enjoy the easygoing ambience of Garda's many pleasant lakeside resorts.

## Sirmione

Garda's most popular resort sits on the tip of a narrow peninsula of cypress and olive groves that juts due north from the center of the lake's southern shore.

Despite an onslaught of visitors, Sirmione manages to retain its charm (though just barely in the heaviest months of July–Aug). Vehicular traffic on the narrow, marble-slab streets is kept to a minimum; only by booking a hotel within the old city can you get your name on the list of cars allowed past the guard at the lone city gate. The emphasis here is on strolling, swimming in waters that are warmed in places by underwater hot springs, and relaxing on the sunny terraces of pleasant lakeside hotels.

**LAY OF THE LAND** Sirmione lies just off the A4 **autostrada** between Milan, 127km (76 miles) to the west, and Venice, 149km (90 miles) to the east. **Train** connections are via nearby Desenzano (20 min. from Sirmione by half-hourly bus), which is on the Milan–Venice trunk line. There are trains almost every half-hour in either direction, stopping in Verona (25 min.), Venice (1½–2½ hr.), and Milan (1–1½ hr.).

**Hydrofoils and ferries** operated by **Navigazione Lago di Garda** (☎ 800-551801 or 030-9149511; [www.navigazionealghi.it](http://www.navigazionealghi.it)) ply the waters of the lake. One or two hourly ferries and four daily hydrofoils connect Sirmione with Desenzano (20 min. by ferry; 10 min. by hydrofoil). Two daily ferries and three daily hydrofoils connect Sirmione with Riva (almost 4 hr. by ferry; 2 hr. 10 min. by hydrofoil). Service is curtailed from October to April.

The **tourist office** is just outside the old town near the castle (Viale Marconi, 2; ☎ 030-916245 or 030-916114; [www.bresciaholiday.com](http://www.bresciaholiday.com); Nov–Mar closed Sat afternoon and Sun).

**ACCOMMODATIONS & DINING** Sirmione's gaggle of moderately priced hotels book up quickly in July and August, which is when they charge the higher rates quoted below. The tourist office will help you find a room in your price range on the day you arrive, but they won't book ahead of time.

€€ One of Sirmione's best-value lodgings is also one of its most romantic. The **Grifone** ★★ (Via Bocchio, 4; ☎ 030-916014; [www.sirmionehotel.com](http://www.sirmionehotel.com); no credit cards; closed late Oct to Easter) is a vine-clad stone building with fantastic views of the neighboring castle and lake from its simple, plain, pleasant, and remarkably cheap (€55 double) rooms. Top-floor rooms (36–42) even have small balconies. There's also a shady patio off the lobby and a small pebble beach. Brother and sister Nicola and Cristina Marcolini oversee the hotel and adjoining restaurant with a great deal of graciousness, carrying on several generations of a family business.

€€ The family-run **Corte Regina** ★ (Via Antiche Mura, 11; ☎ 030-916147; [www.corteregina.it](http://www.corteregina.it); closed Nov–Mar) doesn't enjoy the lake views of the Grifone, but this attractive hotel—housed in a stone building fronted by a vine-shaded terrace on a narrow side street—has nicer rooms and just as friendly a welcome for €70 to €95 for a double. The large tile-floored rooms have been recently renovated, with contemporary furnishings under modern wood-beamed ceilings and new bathrooms.

€€–€€€ Ezra Pound once lived in the pink-stucco **Hotel Eden** ★ (Piazza Carducci, 17/18; ☎ 030-916481; [www.hoteledenonline.it](http://www.hoteledenonline.it); closed Nov–Easter) on

a quiet side street leading to the lake in the center of town. The Eden has been modernized with taste and an eye to comfort, and the management is both friendly and helpful. You can see the lake from most of the attractive, contemporary rooms (€120–€170 doubles; breakfast €10), whose mirrored walls enhance the light and lake views. The marble lobby opens to a delightful shaded terrace and a swimming pier that juts into the lake.

€€€–€€€€ If you're looking for more of a resort hotel (or just something open through much of the off season), the modern **Olivi** ★★ (Via San Pietro, 5; ☎ 030-9905365; [www.gardalake.it/hotel-olivi](http://www.gardalake.it/hotel-olivi); closed Jan) offers a taste of the high life at fairly reasonable rates: €132 to €200 for two. It's not directly on the lake—which you can see from most rooms and the sunny terrace—but instead commands a hilltop position near the Roman ruins amid pines and olive groves. The rooms are decorated in varying schemes of bold pastels and earth tones, with dressing areas off the bathrooms, and balconies. There's a large pool in the garden and, to bring a lakeside feeling to the grounds, an artificial river that streams past the terrace and glass windows of the lobby and breakfast room.

€€ You can get a quick pizza (€7–€11) with a view of the lake from the terrace at **L'Archimboldo** (Via Vittorio Emanuele, 71; ☎ 030-916409; Wed–Mon).

€–€€ For better pizza—but no view—head to **La Roccia** (Via Piana, 2; ☎ 030-916392; closed Thurs and Nov–Mar), serving excellent food in unusually pleasant surroundings, especially if you sit in the large garden. The menu features more than 20 wood-oven pizzas (€4.50–€9), plus plenty of traditional pastas, including lasagna and excellent cheese tortellini in a cream-and-prosciutto sauce (€8).

€€ You'd think that a location smack in the heart of the main drag's boutiques and *gelaterie* would turn any restaurant into a pricey and awful tourist trap. That, normally, is too true—but not in the case of Sirmione's **Ristorante Al Progresso** ★ (Via Vittorio Emanuele, 18–20; ☎ 030-916108; closed Thurs off season and either Nov–Dec or Dec–Jan, depending on flow of tourism), an appealingly plain spot with a touch of style, low prices, and quite excellent home cooking. Fresh lake trout (€9.50) is often on the menu—simply grilled or served *al sirmionese* (boiled with a house sauce of garlic, oil, capers, and anchovies)—as is a tangy €9 *scaloppine al limone*, veal in a sauce made from fresh lemons grown on the lakeshore.

**EXPLORING SIRMIONE** In addition to its attractive though tourist-shop-ridden old town, Sirmione has many lakeside promenades, pleasant beaches, and even some open countryside where olive trees sway in the breeze. Anything you'll want to see can be reached easily on foot, though an open-air tram makes the short run out to the Roman ruins from the northern edge of the old town (except 12:30–2:30pm).

The moated and turreted **Castello Scaligero** ★ (☎ 030-916468; €4; Tues–Sun 8:30am–7pm) still guards the only land-side entrance to the old town. Built in the 13th century by the Della Scala family, who ruled Verona and many of the lands surrounding the lake, the castle warrants a visit mainly for the views from its towers.

From the castle, Via Vittorio Emanuele leads through the center of the town and emerges after a few blocks into the greener, garden-lined lanes that wind through the tip of the peninsula to the **Grotte di Catullo** ★ (☎ 030-916157; €4; Mar–Oct 14 Tues–Sun 8:30am–7pm, Oct 15–Feb Tues–Sun 8:30am–4:30pm). Whether these extensive ruins at the northern tip of the peninsula were actually once the villa and baths of the pleasure-loving Roman poet (and Sirmione native) Catullus is open to debate. But their presence here, on a hilltop fragrant with wild rosemary and pines, demonstrates that Sirmione has been a deservedly popular retreat for millennia, and you can wander through the evocative remains while taking in wonderful lake views.

If you want to enjoy the lake's clean waters, head to the small **Lido delle Bionde beach**, near the castle off Via Dante. In summer, the beach concession rents lounge chairs with umbrellas for €5 per day, as well as kayaks and pedal boats (€8 per hr.).

### Riva del Garda

Riva del Garda is not just a resort but also a real town (the northernmost on the lake), with medieval towers, a nice smattering of Renaissance churches and *palazzi*, and narrow cobblestone streets where the everyday business of a prosperous Italian town proceeds on its alluring way.

**LAY OF THE LAND** Riva del Garda is roughly 2 hours by **bus** from a number of nearby cities and lake towns, including Trent (24 buses daily), Verona (16 buses daily), Brescia (5 buses daily), the busy **train** station at Desenzano (6 trains daily; see “Sirmione” for details), and Sirmione (although from there only the 4:30pm run is direct; for all others, you must transfer at Peschiera).

It's far more genteel—if slower—to arrive by **boat** (☎ 800-551801; [www.navigazionealaghi.it](http://www.navigazionealaghi.it)). Schedules vary with the season, with very limited service in the winter, but in summer you can opt for one of three daily hydrofoils (80 min. from Gardone, 2hr. 10 min. from Sirmione), or the two daily ferries (2¼ hr. from Gardone, almost 4 hr. from Sirmione).

The fastest way to Riva **by car** is the A22, which shoots up the east side of the lake (exit at Mori, 13km/9 miles east of Riva). It's far more scenic to drive along the western shore, past Gardone, and along the beautiful cornice between Riva and Salò that hugs cliffs and passes through kilometer after kilometer of tunnels.

The Riva del Garda **tourist office**, which supplies information on hotels, restaurants, and activities in the area, is near the lakefront (*Giardini di Porta Orientale*, 8; ☎ 0464-554444; [www.gardatrentino.com](http://www.gardatrentino.com) or [www.garda.com](http://www.garda.com)). It's closed Sundays April to June 15 and September 16 to October; closed weekends November to March.

**ACCOMMODATIONS & DINING** Perhaps the least pretentious of the lake towns, Riva del Garda has a handful of affordable options for travelers.

€ **La Montanara** (Via Montanara, 18–20; ☎ 0464-554857; closed Nov–Easter), for example, ain't fancy, but it's cheap. The exceedingly basic, midsize rooms (€36 doubles) are squirreled away above an equally inexpensive trattoria in an old *palazzo* in a quiet part of the *centro storico*. It's all a bit down at the heels, but

immaculately kept, with a picture or two framed on the whitewashed walls to relieve some of the spartan-ness. The four rooms without private bathrooms have at least a sink, and cost just €32. The two units on the top floor are the best for their general brightness and high ceilings.

€€ The management at **Hotel Portici** (Piazza III Novembre, 19; ☎ 0464-555400; [www.hotelportici.it](http://www.hotelportici.it); closed Nov–Mar) pays much more attention to their ground-floor restaurant/bar under a portico of the main square than they do to the hotel, but perhaps that's because their rooms are mainly booked by tour groups—keeping this central and surprisingly reasonable choice off the radar of more independent travelers. Sadly, its location in the upper leg of the piazza's L-shape deprives almost all rooms of a lake view—and the functional units are boringly modern to boot, done up in a monotonous blue tone. Still, for these low prices—doubles from €64 to €100, depending on the season—you can easily cross the piazza to a cafe to get a view.

€€–€€€€ For a bit more scratch you can move across the piazza to **Hotel Sole** ★★ (Piazza III Novembre, 35; ☎ 0464-552686; [www.hotelsole.net](http://www.hotelsole.net); closed Nov to mid-Mar except at Christmastime and during frequent trade fairs), one of the finest hotels in town with a wonderful location right on the lake. The management charges a fair price yet still lavishes attention on the hotel's rooms and guests, with amenities from a casual cafe with lakeside terrace, to a rooftop solarium with sauna, to free bikes for guest use. This place screams class: a lobby filled with rare Persian carpets and abstract art, a sweeping circular staircase, and warm and luxurious rooms fitted with tasteful furnishings and marble-trimmed bathrooms. The best rooms are outfitted in antique style with balconies and lake views costing €112 to €180 for a double. Penny pinchers can get a modern-functional room overlooking the square and town for €96 to €160. Half-board in the formal restaurant is a steal at only €8 extra per person; full-board costs €15, but then you couldn't dine out.

€€–€€€ If the restaurants attached to the hotels above don't satisfy, indulge in the Teutonic side of this Trentino town at the noisy indoor beer garden of **Birreria Spaten** ★ (Via Maffei, 7; ☎ 0464-553670, closed Wed and Nov–Feb), occupying the ground floor of an old *palazzo*. Many of the German and Austrian visitors who favor Riva opt for the schnitzel-and-sauerbraten side of the menu, but you can also enjoy a pasta like *strangolapreti* (spinach-and-ricotta dumplings in a butter sauce; €8), one of 30 pizzas (€5–€9), or a simply grilled lake trout (€15). If you can't decide, the €14 *Piatto Spaten* is an ample sampler of Tirolean specialties: *cotechino* (spicy sausage), *wurstel*, *canederli* (a giant bread dumpling), a ham steak, and sauerkraut.

**EXPLORING RIVA DEL GARDA** Riva's old town is pleasant enough, though the only historical attractions of note are the 13th-century **Torre d'Apponale** and, nearby, the moated lakeside castle, **La Rocca**. Part of the castle interior now houses an unassuming **museum of local art and crafts** (Piazza C. Battisti, 3; ☎ 0464-573869; [www.comune.rivadelgarda.tn.it/museo](http://www.comune.rivadelgarda.tn.it/museo); €3; 10am–6pm, Mar 19–June 12 and Oct closed Mon).

### Get Physical in Riva

At the beach next to the castle you can rent rowboats or pedal boats for about €6 to €7 per hour (buy 2 hr., get a third free) from March to October daily 8am to 8pm.

For a more adventurous outing, check out the **windsurfing** at the **Nautic Club Riva** (Via Rovereto, 44; ☎ 0464-552453; [www.nauticclubriva.com](http://www.nauticclubriva.com)). Boards rent for €17 for an hour, €24 for 2 hours, or €39 all day. Multiday and weekly packages, as well as lessons, are also available.

You can rent **mountain bikes** from **Superbike Girelli** (Viale Damiano Chiesa, 15; ☎ 0464-556602) for €4 per hour or €10 per day, or from **Fori e Bike** (Viale dei Tigli, 24; ☎ 0464-551830) for €8 to €13 per day (the higher price for the better mountain bikes).

Most years, the tourist office runs a few **free guided tours** in English—weekends around the town itself, Tuesdays and Fridays to sights in the surrounding area. You must book in advance, by 5pm the previous day, at ☎ 0464-554444.

The main attraction is the lake itself, which Riva takes advantage of with a waterside promenade stretching for several kilometers past parks and pebbly **beaches**. The water is warm enough for swimming from May to October, and air currents fanned by the mountains make Garda popular for **windsurfing** year-round (see “Get Physical in Riva,” above).