

Italy: Lake Como & the Italian Lake District

Bike Vacation Only

While many claim to know the Italian lake district, few have visited Lake Iseo. Nestled between Lake Garda and Lake Como, this pristine lagoon is Lombardy's hidden gem—almost completely unknown to tourists. Here, you'll explore the lake's serene waters by boat, and its quiet shoreline by bike, before ferrying to charming Monte Isola to discover its 13th-century castle and hamlet. Our leaders will introduce you to the vineyards of Franciacorta, where you'll meet local vintners and sample their sparkling wines. Observe glaciers through the dome-windowed cars of the legendary Bernina Express en route to Switzerland's St. Moritz. After a glorious adventure, your knowledge (and enjoyment!) of the Italian lakes district will outshine that of mere tourists.

Cultural Highlights

- Sample delicious sparkling wines at a cantina in Franciacorta, Italy's "Champagne" region.
- Cycle the scenic lakeside bike paths around Lake Iseo, made famous when the artist Christo installed his "floating piers" here.
- Marvel at breathtaking scenery when you ride the UNESCO-listed Bernina railway, then cycle among the splendid Bernina peaks.
- Ride the easy bike paths of the Valtellina valley, blanketed in vineyard terraces among miles of dry-stone walls.
- Taste delicious Pizzoccheri pasta and local cheeses only found in Valtellina.

What to Expect

This tour features easy terrain and is ideal for beginner cyclists who are comfortable with gentle inclines and packed gravel paths. Unpaved terrain makes up approximately 10% of the total route. The tour primarily follows dedicated, well-marked bike paths and country roads. We recommend an E-bike for this tour. Road bikes are also available; however, on land-package days 2, 4, and 5, riders should expect short stretches of unpaved paths or roads. To better handle these sections, road bikes come equipped with slightly wider tires.

For those who would like assistance with hills, our VBT support vehicle is always available.

Tour Duration: 7 Days

Average Daily Mileage: 7-32 miles

Average Cycling Time: 1-5 hours

Group size: 22 max

Climate Information

Average High/Low Temperature (°F)

May 72°/49°, June 79°/56°, July 79°/59°, August 81°/61°, September 75°/55°, October 63°/47°

Average Rainfall (in.)

May 2.8, June 2.5, July 1.5, August 2.6, September 2.2, October 2.7

DAY 1: Your VBT Vacation Begins / Travel to Sulzano on Lake Iseo / Warm-up Ride / Welcome Reception and Dinner

Meet your fellow travelers and VBT trip leaders at 12:45 p.m. at the VBT pre-tour hotel in Sirmione.

Please have lunch before meeting them in the hotel lobby. There are several cafés and restaurants in Sirmione, and lunch is also available at Hotel Ideal's restaurant. You may store your luggage at the reception desk and change into your biking clothes using the hotel facilities. Your trip leaders will hold a 45-minute safety talk at the hotel. Afterward, take a short walk to board a private motorcoach. Along the way to Sulzano, scenically located on Lake Iseo, you will stop for a warm-up ride through the small lakeside town of Iseo, following the lakeshore and a local bike path for part of the way.

In the afternoon, settle into your romantic lakeside hotel in the picturesque village of Sulzano. You may recognize the postcard-perfect view of Monte Isola, made famous in 2016 when artist Christo installed The Floating Piers, a temporary yellow walkway connecting Monte Isola and the private islet of San Paolo to the mainland. In just 16 days, 1.3 million visitors walked these piers to experience this breathtaking setting.

Tonight, enjoy a welcome cocktail reception on the hotel's lakeside manicured terrace, where you can get to know your fellow travelers. Then, board a private ferry to Monte Isola for a welcome dinner in a very special and scenic location.

Today's Ride Choices

Afternoon: Warm-Up Ride — 12 km (7 miles)

What to Expect:

Today's warm-up ride follows easy roads into the charming town of Iseo. The route continues on flat terrain along Lake Iseo, partially following a bike path, before reaching Sulzano and your hotel. The roads are paved, with some pedestrian and car traffic along the way.

Cumulative Distance Range: 12 km (7 miles)

Included Meals: Dinner

DAY 2: Monte Isola Loop / Pisogne to Sulzano

After breakfast, set off to explore the stunning shores of Lake Iseo by private boat and bike. Also known as Sebino, the crystal-clear Lake Iseo is the fourth-largest lake in Lombardy, famed for its lush mountains, medieval towns, and scenic roadways carved into the hillsides.

A private boat whisks you to Monte Isola in just five minutes. Despite its small size, this island is officially recognized as one of Italy's "most beautiful villages" and was ranked the third Best European Destination in 2019. Take time to stroll its cobbled lanes and discover its countless old-world charms before setting off on a scenic six-mile loop around the island. Please note that on some summer weekends, local police may restrict bikes on the island. In this case, you'll follow a local guide on foot to explore the island's fishing heritage, browse local food shops, and learn more about this unique and picturesque destination before boarding the boat again.

Your journey continues across the lake, passing the picturesque private island of Loreto and along the dramatic western shoreline. Here, the road—carved into the mountainside—winds high along a cliff, passing a waterfall and cutting through short tunnels. Soon, you will disembark and continue cycling to Pisogne, where you'll find numerous options for lunch on your own. If you wish, take time to explore Pisogne's cobbled alleys and central piazza.

Later, between Toline and Vello, cycle along the sheer and rocky mountainside, where sweeping lake views unfold below and alpine vistas stretch beyond. In the distance, marvel at the dramatic rock formations, including the massive Bogn di Castro cliff.

Tonight, relax and enjoy your hotel's amenities before dining on the terrace.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Montisola Loop, Costa Volpino to Pisogne – 16 km (10 miles)

Afternoon: Pisogne to Sulzano – 16 km (10 miles)

What to Expect:

Today's ride, with the exception of a two-mile climb on Monte Isola, follows an easy, relaxing, and well-paved route, primarily along bike paths around Lake Iseo and Montisola. You will reach the starting points of the rides via two separate scenic trips by private motorboat—one lasting just 5 minutes and the other about 50 minutes.

Cumulative Distance Range: 16 – 32 km (10 – 20 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 3: Franciacorta: Italy's "Champagne" Region

After breakfast, head south into Franciacorta, affectionately known as the "Champagne" of Italy. This picturesque region of rolling vineyards is renowned for its exceptional sparkling wines, crafted from Chardonnay and Pinot Noir grapes, including Berlucci and Ca' del Bosco. The tradition of sparkling wine here dates back several centuries, even a year before Dom Pérignon arrived in the Champagne region of France in 1570.

This morning, follow a partially protected cycleway, passing peaceful monasteries and immaculately maintained vineyards. Around lunchtime, stop at a small, family-run winery, a charming estate founded around 1600 that also produces olive oil, honey, and farm-fresh ingredients. The grape harvest is still conducted entirely by hand to ensure uncompromised quality.

Join Francesca, your guide, who runs the farm with her brother Gianluca, for a tour of the cantina. She will explain their classic winemaking methods and why the winery sells its wines exclusively on-site.

Your tour concludes just in time for lunch on the sunny terrace. Begin with an *aperitivo*, sampling the house Brut and Satèn, each aged for 24 months before being freshly opened and served. Then, enjoy handmade *casoncelli*, a traditional stuffed pasta, lovingly prepared by Francesca's mother, Daniela, using farm-fresh ingredients.

After lunch, take a different route back to Iseo, weaving through quaint hamlets and passing local wineries. Enjoy some free time along the lake promenade, where you may want to indulge in a gelato or browse the local shops before another scenic journey back to your hotel by private boat.

This evening, dinner is on your own. Stroll through the hamlet of Sulzano or ferry to Montisola, exploring its pedestrian-only cobbled streets and vaulted alleyways. Find the perfect intimate restaurant tucked away on a quiet backstreet or dine along the scenic marina.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Clusane to Al Rocol – 28 km (17 miles)

Afternoon: Al Rocol to Iseo – 16 km (10 miles)

What to Expect:

Today's ride is easy to moderate, following gently rolling hills primarily on country roads and bike paths. The route is almost entirely on paved terrain. Your journey also includes two short and enjoyable private motorboat trips on Lake Iseo—one at the beginning and one at the end of the ride. An optional longer independent ride may be available—ask your trip leaders for details.

Cumulative Distance Range: 16 – 44 km (10 – 27 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 4: Oglio River Bike Path, Valcamonica / Savor Valtellina Cuisine

After breakfast, leave Lake Iseo by private boat to Marone, where you'll begin your final ride along the eastern bank. From here, cycle along the lake's shores, soon entering the green park of the Oglio River, a roaring alpine river whose source lies in the Alps. Follow its banks on easy country roads, passing farms, tiny villages, and scenic pathways. As you ride through Valcamonica, the largest valley of the central Alps, you'll be tracing what was once the only trade route to the Republic of Venice and the sea.

In prehistoric times, Valcamonica was inhabited by the Camuni, an ancient people conquered by Rome in the 1st century. Along your route, you'll encounter relics of their civilization, including the mysterious sanctuary of Minerva and the picturesque town of Cividate Camuno. The most remarkable remains are

the rock engravings, carved from the Neolithic to the Iron Ages, which were designated as Italy's first UNESCO World Heritage site in 1979. You will see some examples along the way.

Later today, travel via the Aprica mountain pass into the Valtellina valley, arriving in Tirano, a charming town nestled at the foot of the Bernina mountains and serving as a gateway to Switzerland. If you're familiar with the Giro d'Italia bicycle race, you might recognize the names of some of the legendary peaks surrounding you—Mortirolo, Gavia, and Stelvio—all famous epic stages of the race, featuring inclines as steep as 23%!

Settle into the eco-friendly Curt di Clement, where you'll be welcomed with a refreshing apple juice while enjoying a brief presentation on this historic house. Tonight, dine at a traditional local restaurant, savoring Valtellina's renowned specialties, including *Pizzoccheri*—buckwheat noodles served with Casera cheese—and Bresaola, a delicious dry-cured meat.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Marone to Oglio – 28 km (17 miles)

Afternoon: Oglio to Cerveno – 18 km (11 miles)

What to Expect:

Today's route follows Lake Iseo's eastern bank for several well-paved, flat miles before entering a valley along the Oglio Riverbanks, where some stretches are occasionally unpaved. The ride takes you through sunny open areas as well as forested, shaded sections, crossing the roaring river multiple times. With its varied terrain and ever-changing scenery, today's ride is anything but dull.

Cumulative Distance Range: 18 – 46 km (11 – 28 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 5: Ride the Bernina Railway / Cycle the Roseg Valley to St. Moritz, Switzerland

After a hearty breakfast, depart Tirano aboard the famous Bernina Express, an extraordinary rail journey that crosses the border into Switzerland and climbs toward the glistening Albula and Bernina glaciers.

This engineering marvel passes through 55 tunnels, crosses 196 bridges, and ascends inclines of up to 7%, making it the highest railway crossing in Europe. In 2008, portions of the Bernina Railway were designated a UNESCO World Heritage site for their remarkable engineering and early influence on the region's socioeconomics—the railway first opened in 1904. Seated in dome-window panoramic cars, you'll be treated to sweeping alpine vistas en route to your next cycling adventure.

Upon arrival in Pontresina, located in the Engadin Valley, take in the spectacular views of the surrounding peaks before setting off on your ride into the Roseg Valley. This route follows a gradual ascent along an unpaved, car-free road, where the only sounds are the crackle of your tires on gravel and the whir of horse-drawn sledges carrying passengers and goods to the remote Roseggletscher Mountain Lodge. Your scenic ride leads to this charming lodge, nestled at 6,000 feet, where you may choose to hike toward the glacier or simply relax and soak in the serene mountain setting. Savor a well-earned lunch, surrounded by breathtaking natural beauty.

Returning to Pontresina, continue cycling along an unpaved scenic mountain path, winding through a forest of towering spruce and larch trees and past the romantic shores of Lake Staz, eventually reaching St. Moritz. From here, shuttle back to Tirano.

Back in Tirano, take time to stroll the Old Town, exploring its medieval palaces and historic city gates, which some believe were designed by Leonardo da Vinci in the 15th century. Visit the Renaissance-era Basilica della Madonna di Tirano, built on the site where the Virgin Mary is said to have appeared in 1504. Your trip leaders will provide excellent dinner recommendations for you to enjoy at your leisure.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning-Afternoon: Pontresina to Roseg Gletscher and St. Moritz – 21 km (13 miles)

What to Expect:

Today's ride takes place mostly on well-packed, unpaved terrain, making it ideal for E-bikes and road bikes. The Roseg Valley ride follows a well-worn, there-and-back unpaved path. The first four miles to the lodge are uphill, while the return is a downhill descent. The five-mile ride to St. Moritz features undulating terrain, beginning on an unpaved forest path before transitioning to a wide, paved road leading into St. Moritz and along its scenic lakeshores. All together, it's a memorable and rewarding ride!

Cumulative Distance Range: 21 km (13 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 6: Valtellina Valley Bike Path to Lake Como

Today's ride follows a flat and relaxing route along the Adda River, from Tirano to the shores of Lake Como. You'll ride on the well-marked Adda River cycle path, passing through the Rhaetian and Orobie Alps, just south of the Swiss Canton of Graubünden. This region is a beloved paradise for cyclists of all abilities and has a longstanding cycling tradition—the Italian Touring Club first published a cycle tourist's guide to Valtellina in 1906, detailing more than 40 itineraries in this area of outstanding natural beauty.

As you ride, marvel at castles and churches perched high on the slopes, and pedal past terraced vineyards stretching for miles. This is the largest mountain terraced wine region in Europe, where more than 1,500 miles of dry-stone walls define the vineyards in a truly unique landscape. Ride alongside apple orchards and small farms, and later, pause for a picnic lunch featuring local specialties such as spelt salad, cheeses aged in mountain huts, and farm-fresh frittata.

In the afternoon, arrive at the stunning shores of Lake Como and check into your hotel in Colico. Settle in and take in the picturesque mountains reflected in the lake's serene waters. You may have time for a swim in the hotel pool or the lake, or to relax at the spa in cooler weather. Later, celebrate your journey with a festive farewell dinner on the lake's beautiful shore.

Today's Ride Choices

Morning: Tirano to Picnic Spot — 34 km (21 miles)

Afternoon: Picnic Spot to Desco — 17 km (11 miles)

What to Expect:

Today's ride follows the Adda River along a well-paved and easy bike path. An optional longer independent ride may be available—ask your trip leaders for details.

Cumulative Distance Range: 17 — 51 km (11 — 33 miles)

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 7: Your VBT Vacation Ends

Your tour concludes after breakfast.

In Colico, you can board a train to Milan's central railway station and Malpensa Airport. The railway station is just a five-minute walk from your hotel.

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodations

May vary depending on departure date.

Hotel Rivalago (Days 1-3)

Located in the charming village of Sulzano, Hotel Rivalago enjoys a serene location on the shores of Lake Iseo facing the island of Monte Isola. This romantic property is comfortable in every way, run by Antonella Pastore since its opening in 2006. During your stay, relax in the garden or on the jetty, take your meals al fresco by the lake, and lounge by the swimming pool after a day of exploring. Each air-conditioned room is cozy and well-appointed with all the amenities you need. Savor locally sourced meals lovingly prepared at La Veranda restaurant and stroll into town to explore.

Hotel Curt di Clement (Days 4-5)

Owned and operated by the noble Merizzi-Clement family, the Curt di Clement has been lovingly restored to its 16th-century beauty and transformed into an eco-friendly hotel. It is ideally located in the oldest part of Tirano, surrounded by the stone houses, chapels, wooden balconies and slate roofs that are typical of an Italian mountain village. Enjoy splendid views of the Bernina mountain range and relax on the sun terrace with a fresh breakfast sourced from local farms. Explore the berry and herb garden. And enjoy the local character and feel of a unique hotel designed with reclaimed natural material. Note that only rooms on the third floor provide air conditioning.

Hotel Seven Park (Day 6)

Close to the town center of Colico, right on the shores of Lake Como, the 4-star Seven Park Hotel was inspired by the symbolism of the number seven. Its brightly lit interiors provide a soothing setting while its Seven Beach Bar & Restaurant offers a generous buffet breakfast, plus lunch and dinner. The onsite

spa and wellness facility includes a Turkish bath, sauna, and massage. Spacious air-conditioned rooms with complimentary WiFi in this delightfully designed hotel are decorated in warm colors and simple clean lines.