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# travel

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# World's best hotels

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# Best beds: *The Italian Lakes*

Laid-back waterfront or classic fantastic? Whatever you want from your great lake escape, w



## The grand one: Villa d'Este

Cheapest room is a 'Classic', at £498, B&B; cheapest lake view is 'Deluxe', from £665. **You needn't pay more for anything bigger — the villa's grounds are the attraction here** (villadeste.com/en).

PRICE

LOCATION

Lake Como — in vast formal gardens outside little Cernobbio — an **easy ride across the lake on the public ferry from Como city** and its Milan train links.

THE VIBE

Stately, clubby, oblivious to modernity — like its regulars, who **change for aperitifs and dinner**. (Though surely Bruce Springsteen wore jeans when he stayed.)



ROOMS

Most are in the historic main villa, others in a (less atmospheric) adjacent pavilion. Decor is 'heirloom' (**brass lamps, tasselled sofas, polished dressers**), with flashes of *Dynasty* (yes, Jacuzzis).

FOOD & DRINK

Aperitifs in the statuaried bar are a joy, as a pianist does Bee Gees. **Best lunch spot is Sundeck, by the pool**, which floats on the lake. But bypass Veranda (see below) for a steak dinner at the cosy, cocooning Grill.

BEST THING

While the road divides many other hotels from the lake, Villa d'Este's grounds run right to the shore.

WORST THING

**Veranda feels like a wedding marquee**

TRAVEL'S TIP

The best-value lake-view room is No. 429. As a Double Deluxe, it's **cheaper than a Junior Suite but, with its living area, feels as roomy**.



## The fairy-tale one: Grand Hotel des Iles Borromees

Doubles cost from £177, B&B. The fabulous, enormous Hemingway Suite (**the hotel featured in his novel *A Farewell to Arms***) starts at £2,684 (borromees.com).

Pole position on Lake Maggiore, a minute from the beach and a **10-minute amble to Stresa, with its nightlife, steamer port for the islands and cable car up 1,492m** Mount Mottarone.

**Immaculate opulence indoors and out**

**Lavish mirrors, art, chandeliers and mosaics adorn the public rooms.** Classic bedrooms have marble baths and balconies; the Chinese Room (No. 550) is a spectacle.

Buffet breakfast with the works is served in the luminous conservatory or on the terrace. The restaurant is a worthy splurge (**try scampi-filled ravioli, £21**) but there are many others in Stresa.

The kind, thoughtful staff, who treat everyone as if they were George and Amal; **ask about their private day-long boat tour** of the Borromeo Islands.



The **busy road** between the hotel grounds and the lake.

The drink to order is a **Hemingway Special (white rum, lime, grapefruit and maraschino liqueur)** in the Liberty-style Hemingway Bar.



## The spa one: Lefay Resort & Spa

Doubles go from £255, B&B, but with **spa treatments around £100 a pop**, you're better off with a programme ('Discovery', for instance, includes three days of treatments and meals, from £780; lefayresorts.com).

**High in the hills above Lake Garda** — so that beautiful stretch of sheening blue is a view to be savoured rather than something to splash around in. Think 'retreat', not 'resort'.

It's a fairly serious health spa — you'll see lots of **ladies lunching on leaves** in their dressing gowns — but this is Italy, so there's plenty of wine, pasta and cheerful *dolce vita* too.

Elegantly calm, in natural neutrals. **The cheapest rooms, Junior Suites, are the best value:** their terraces open onto gorgeous lawns and your de facto private loungers.



Two restaurants serve light Italian fare (including the resort's **signature health menu**) — but the lake views are the stars.

The grounds. Wooded glades, tinkling streams, **wildflower-strewn meadows**, birdsong on the breeze — and instant 'alone time' if you want it.

**The main menus don't change at all**

Save on lunches by 'borrowing' from the huge breakfast buffet and finding the **criminally under-used picnic tables** at the top of the hill; the view is the resort's finest.



now a hotel that'll float your boat...



The cheap-chic one:  
**I Due Roccoli**

Doubles from £88, room-only (bag this rate in April and October, when you can also get a lake-view suite for £123); otherwise, **stay on a Wednesday or Sunday, when there's 30% off** (idueroccoli.com).

Secluded in a sprawling park, the hotel basks in **vertiginous views over Lake Iseo and Isola Maggiore** — Europe's largest and loftiest lake island — wrapped in a blue girdle of Alps.

A 17th-century **haven of serenity and birdsong**, the hotel makes it easy to drift into the Italian Lakes' delicious time warp.

Plump for an upper floor lake-view room for the glorious sunsets; back rooms can be dark. **All have parquet flooring and antiques.**



Bags of romantic, candlelit atmosphere accompany a menu featuring **fresh lake and sea fish and fine wines from Franciacorte**, just south of Iseo.

**Breakfast on the terrace with lake views**

Gregarious types might feel isolated — it's a **winding 6km drive (15 minutes) down to the lake and Iseo Town.**

When booking, ask if the hotel is **due to host a wedding**; if so, consider asking for the **more private garden cottage with its own pool.**



The modern one:  
**Il Sereno**

Multo euro: doubles from £661, B&B — and that's with a partial lake view. **If you're spending this sort of cash, choose an Alcova or Grand Lago Suite** (from £785) for the full panorama (serenohotels.com).

**Lake Como, across the way from Clooney**

Young. Hip. Moneyed. A **Spotify founder married here and the wedding singer was Bruno Mars** (pictured), the MC Chris Rock and the best man Mark Zuckerberg.



Spain's uber-architect and designer Patricia Urquiola has worked her glass, copper, marble and terrazzo magic. **Even taps are works of art.**

One restaurant — All Lago — serves all the meals; its modern-Italian menu is a little fussy. **Mix up the mood by asking to eat on the terrace and at the bar too.**

The pool. Shocking-green **sunbeds line a timber deck that surrounds an infinity-edged watery wonder!** It's like swimming in the lake (without the weeds).

Rubbernecker. Since this is the first ever contemporary hotel on Lake Como (it's a showstopper, all right), **people buzz by on boats to gawp and snap**

**Il Sereno's classic wooden Riva boats are cheapest when hired for self-drive** — at £149 for one unforgettable hour, that's not bad. (Think of the Facebook posts.)

**Or try...**

**£90 Silvio, Lake Como**

**Because:** Bright, breezy rooms and apartments within walking distance of beautiful Bellagio town. Locals drive out here for the food. Doubles from £90, B&B (bellagiosilvio.it).

**£96 Belvedere, Lake Maggiore**

**Because:** Just staying on Isola dei Pescatori after the day-trippers depart is reason enough; the silence, sunset and fresh fish served right on the water seal the deal. Doubles from £96, B&B (belvedere-isolapescatori.it).

**£352 Villa Crespi, Lake Orta**

**Because:** It's your chance to play Scheherazade in a romantic, colour-drenched Moorish folly overlooking the pearly lake. The two-Michelin-star restaurant isn't half bad, either. Doubles from £352, B&B (villacrespi.it).

**£414 Grand Hotel Tremezzo, Lake Como**

**Because:** It's a gilded palace with moneyed guests to match, plus a pool that floats on the lake. Bucket-list bling. Doubles from £414, B&B (grandhoteltremezzo.com).

**Get me there**

**Citalia** (citalia.com) has three nights at Villa d'Este on Lake Como from £1,258pp, B&B, with flights from Luton or Manchester (add £10-£60pp for other airports). The closest hub to the lakes is Milan. **Alitalia** flies from London City and Heathrow from £65 return.

