

TRAVEL WEEKLY

DECEMBER 8, 2025

BY NORTHSTAR



Legends begin on the **all-new *Disney Destiny***



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Savoring the 'sweet idleness' on two Italian lakes

By Mark Thompson

In the autumn, when the crowds have thinned along the shores of Italy's Lake Garda and Lake Como, there's time enough to stop and smell the lemons. We were in a northern Italian town called Gargnano in a 13th century convent founded by St. Francis of Assisi. It was Franciscan friars who introduced the cultivation of lemons on the shores of Lake Garda, whereupon the region became known as the Riviera dei Limoni.

As we followed our guide, Merlin, we hiked to one of the remaining masonry greenhouses known as *limonaie* that once lined the lake shore. With an annual harvest of 20 million lemons for export, the lemons of the Riviera dei Limoni provided extraordinary wealth to the region for multiple generations.

Merlin is a founding member of the region's agricultural cooperative, which works to protect Lake Garda's citrus and olive groves, vineyards and laurel stands. The cooperative's mission promotes tourism that honors local traditions and environmental stewardship.

At the cooperative's shop, Terre & Sapori, Merlin guided us through a tasting of citrus jams and compotes as well as various citrus and herb liqueurs. In the neighboring lakeside town of Salò, we wandered along the broad waterfront promenade lined with citrus trees bearing sun-dappled fruit.

Both D.H. Lawrence and Benito Mussolini spent time in Gargnano, proof that the region's appeal cuts across demographics. The town is home to Villa Bettoni, known locally as Little Versailles, a remarkable villa built from the phenomenal wealth derived from lemon groves.

Lefay Resort & Spa

In the hills above Gargnano, Lefay Resort & Spa is surrounded by a 27-acre park of olive groves and natural terraces. A Legend member of Preferred Hotels & Resorts, Lefay is an oasis of well-being and relaxation. Along with an outdoor infinity pool, the resort's spa includes seven types of saunas, six relaxation areas and various pools and whirlpools.

In keeping with the resort's focus on holistic health, the restaurant Gramen and its Michelin-starred chef champion the Mediterranean diet with their Vital Gourmet program that utilizes seasonal ingredients and extra-virgin olive oil alongside local citrus and herbs.

At Lefay, guests are free to wander in their robes, enhancing the resort's relaxed atmosphere. That sense of relaxation fosters a deeper sleep in the resort's guestrooms and suites, where balconies overlook the bucolic park and lake.

As D.H. Lawrence wrote about the area, "Everything is too nice for words [and] not a bit touristic."

One of the best ways to witness Lake Garda's magnificence is aboard a 1017 Frauscher Lido speedboat customized by Lefay. Nestled into the hills above the lake is the Museo della Carta, a museum

dedicated to the production of paper during the Middle Ages. Slightly farther afield in Gardone Riviera is Vittoriale degli Italiani, the monumental citadel and museum commemorating the life of the poet Gabriele D'Annunzio.

Passalacqua on Lake Como

For years, Lake Garda has hovered in the shadow of its more showy sister, Lake Como. Located about an hour from Milan, Lake Como is home to numerous historical, neoclassical villas.

Visitors to Villa del Balbianello are often struck with a sense of déjà vu, given the villa's appearances in films such as "Star Wars: Episode II — Attack of the Clones" and the 2006 "Casino Royale." The erstwhile home of Guido Monzino, the first Italian to scale Mount Everest, is both a monument to Monzino's fabled life as an explorer and a testament to the stewardship of the National Trust of Italy, which keeps the villa in pristine condition.

In the ancient village of Moltrasio on the southwest branch of Lake Como, the Italian tradition of *la villeggiatura* lives on at Passalacqua. An annual ritual for Italian families, *la villeggiatura* is a seasonal move from city to country — and often combined with the concept of *dolce far niente*, or "sweet idleness."



The restaurant and Italian garden at Passalacqua, a 24-room villa overlooking Lake Como.

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Originally built in the 18th century by Count Lucini-Passalacqua and subsequently owned by Italian composer Vincenzo Bellini, the 24-room Passalacqua sits above Lake Como, completely surrounded by seven acres of terraced gardens, fountains and a series of secret tunnels that lead down to the lake and private dock. A Legend member of Preferred Hotels & Resorts, the villa reopened in 2022 after a meticulous three-year renovation.

As you stroll through the sumptuous rooms, it's easy to time-trip back to an era when guests such as Napoleon Bonaparte and Winston Churchill fell under the spell of *vivere Italiano*.

Grand Hotel Tremezzo

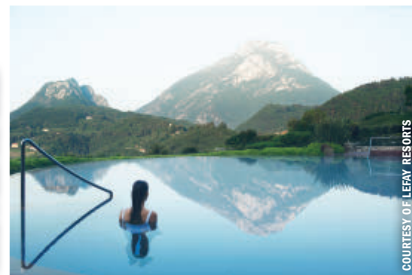
Slightly farther north along the lake lies the town of Tremezzo, where visitors wander through the 20-acre gardens and woodland of the 18th century Villa Carlotta. The villa's rooms are furnished with sculptures by Canova and paintings by Hayez while the elegant top-floor gallery offers breathtaking views of the lake.

One of the most picturesque hamlets along Lake Como, Tremezzo is home to the Grand Hotel Tremezzo, which was built in 1910 amid Villa Carlotta's botanical gardens. With lakefront views onto the Bellagio peninsula, guests at the art nouveau palace have access to the hotel's lido, where two Venetian motor launches sit ready to traverse the lake.

The beautifully appointed rooms and suites at the Grand Hotel Tremezzo feature custom-made mirrored chests that reveal hidden minibars, while televisions are concealed in vintage-style steamer trunks. Tucked into the hotel's wine cellar, the enoteca L'escalè prepares a tableside *cacio e pepe* served with black truffles. At the neighboring Villa Sola Cabiati, hotel guests can arrange for private dinners hosted amid a priceless collection of 18th century frescoes, tapestries and art masterpieces.

The Grand Hotel Tremezzo's fine dining restaurant, La Terrazza Gualtiero Marchesi, is named in honor of the Italian chef who revolutionized Italian cuisine with signature dishes such as saffron risotto with gold leaf and poached lobster on sweet pepper sauce. I ordered both and left not a morsel on my plate.

The next morning, I hiked to the summit of the hotel's belvedere, stood beneath a 300-year-old olive tree and gazed across the cerulean lake as birdsong filled the air. For centuries poets, writers, artists and composers have attempted to capture the beauty of these lakes — and yet there's nothing so beautiful as living in the moment.



Top left, the entry gate to Villa Sola Cabiati, where Grand Hotel Tremezzo guests can arrange for private dinners. Top right, the bar at Passalacqua, which is a Legend member of Preferred Hotels & Resorts. Above left, risotto with gold and saffron served at La Terrazza Gualtiero Marchesi at the Grand Hotel Tremezzo. Above, right, the indoor-outdoor pool at Lefay Resort & Spa at Lake Garda.