

LAKE COMO ITINERARY

March 19-21

This weekend to Lake Como is easily **one of the best weekends** I've done from Paris, combining cute **Italian villages**, **Italian food**, some rest and tranquility and **one of the best hikes** I have ever done. It's also easily doable in 48 hours. We rented a car for about €54, as we got a deal when booking at the same time as our flight, and the whole trip only cost us €35 in gas. But it is possible to take a bus or train to **Como**, then local buses or ferries around the lake (just watch out for limited Sunday and holiday schedules!) Mid-March was a great time to go, as it was warm enough but not too hot for hiking, flowers were starting to pop up, but there was still a majestic coating of snow on the mountain tops.

The whole trip, including the flight, car, gas, tolls, ferries and hotels (exclusive of meals—which are much cheaper in Lake Como than in Paris—and transportation to the airport in Paris) cost us €250.55 per person (with two people sharing one hotel room).

Date	To	Flight/Hotel/Car Details	Cost	Comments
Sat, March 19	Milan Malpensa	Easyjet flight 2782 8:30-10:00am Check in 06:30-07:50 Charles de Gaulle (Terminal 2B) To Milan Malpensa (Terminal 2) <i>Europcar</i> booking ref. 890722544 Pick-up: Malpensa Terminal 2 Ikc Somma Lombarda (Va) 21019, Tel. +39 (0) 2 58583526 10:00am <i>Hotel: Hotel Bellagio</i> Salita Grandi Bellagio, 22021 Phone +39031952202 dulac@tin.it Hotel Bellagio was excellent and included breakfast. The room was modern and spacious; the staff is very friendly and ready with good hiking and dining recommendations. You'll see the hotel from the ferry—just park anywhere when you get off the ferry and walk along the shore to the left (north) until you see the pedestrian stairway, <i>Salita Grandi</i> , on your right.	€143 each (flight + car) €102 total (hotel)	There were two of us sharing the car rental . Round trip flights were about €116 per person. <i>Europcar's</i> office is right outside the arrival doors in Malpensa's Terminal 2 and the parking lot is a 5 minute walk. It took just under 2 hours to reach Bellagio . We were lucky and hit no traffic but we did have to wait 10 minutes or so for the ferry from Griante to Bellagio (a 10-15 minute crossing, €12.40 for the car and 2 people). You can reach Bellagio without the ferry but it will take longer and unless you click on "Avoid Ferries", the GPS will send you the ferry route! Even driving back from Menaggio to Como, click "Avoid Ferries" if you prefer to drive. For dinner Saturday night, we stumbled upon L'Antico Pozzo Restaurant at Salita Mella 26, Tel. +39 031 951644. The food was innovative and tasty, mixing local specialties with classic Italian, friendly service, and there seemed to be a mix of tourists and locals as well.
Sun, March 20	Near Malpensa	Lake Como <i>Hotel: Hotel Oleggio Malpensa</i> Via Verbano 19 Oleggio 28047 The hotel by the airport (an 18 minute drive from the airport) was no frills but just fine for the quite reasonable price —I'd stay there again if I had another early flight. Don't arrive too early as there's nothing in the area, though there is a gas station right across the street—convenient if you're returning a rental car.	€149.50 total (hotel)	On Sunday, we took the ferry back to Griante then drove up to Breglia for the start of the #2 hike to Monte Grona (see below). We had dinner Sunday night in Como . It took a bit longer to battle the city traffic than I had expected, but at the same time, I'm not sure how many options we had to find food on a Sunday evening without going into the city center. We ended up at Osteria di Via Monti (Via M. Monti 38, Tel. 031 306 877, www.ostriadiwiamonti.it), which was cheap and excellent . We had eggplant parmesan and pasta but apparently most people go for the pizza .
Mon, March 21	Fly back to Paris	Car Return: Malpensa Terminal 2 5:30am Easyjet flight 2779 6:30-8:00am Check in 4:30-5:50 Milan Malpensa (Terminal 2) To Charles de Gaulle (Terminal 2B)	--	<i>Europcar</i> has a drop box so returning the rental car was no problem. The problem was going to work on Monday after the early wake-up! But the RER got me to the office by 9:15AM.

HIKES

The main purpose of our trip (aside from eating pasta) was to get in some good hiking. So before we left, I copy/pasted some possible hikes onto the bottom of the itinerary:

- 1) **Greenway:** Colonno to Cadenabbia (http://www.italianlakes.com/itineraries/itineraries_greenway.htm)
We didn't end up doing this hike only because we had limited time and we preferred to climb to greater heights if we had to choose. This site also has a wealth of other information:
<http://www.italianlakes.com>.
- 2) The **Rifugio Menaggio** is about a 1-1/2 hour hike up from the parking lot in the little village of Breglia. The views are spectacular of Lake Como. Meals of local dishes are served at the rifugio. The village of Breglia is about a 20 minute drive up from Menaggio. Driving up the hill from Menaggio in the direction of Lugano, take the first right turn which goes in the direction of Lovenno. Continue past Lovenno until you come to Plesio, from there follow the signs to Breglia where you where park. You can also take a bus up from Menaggio. One can also get good directions from the tourist office in Menaggio. The tourist office in Menaggio has a wealth of information about Lake Como and the surrounding area. English is spoken. Talk with Matilda. From Menaggio on the west side of the lake you can walk to top of **Monte Grona** – 1736 metres up and about six hours walking time.
I copy/pasted the above directions from the same site (http://www.italianlakes.com/itineraries/itineraries_men_rif.htm) but I also took a look at the **Walking Englishman's** excellent site (full of photos) on the hike from Breglia to **Rifugio Menaggio** (<http://www.walkingenglishman.com/italy1.htm>) and also from the rifugio (i.e. mountain hut) to **Monte Grona** (<http://www.walkingenglishman.com/italy2.htm>). I had been looking for information on the internet on hikes in the area and I didn't realize until we got there how extensive the trail system is. We started in **Breglia** and first by-passed the rifugio, going straight towards **Monte Bregano** (the highest mountain in the immediate area). We hiked for a good hour passed the turn-off for the rifugio but eventually turned around as we were up to our knees in fast-melting snow. We went back to the rifugio, had our lunch (leftovers from breakfast) on the picnic tables outside, and then continued another 40 minutes or so to the **summit of Monte Grona**. Although Monte Grona is not as high as Monte Bregano, we were quite happy for the change of plans, as the view over Lake Como and the surrounding mountains was absolutely incredible. On the way back were perhaps could have used better judgment—we took an unmarked path that we soon realized was the “**via ferrata**”, a route of chains by which you lower yourself down the cliff face. Going up that route would have been a much better idea than going down it, and even then, I don't recommend this route for the faint of heart or anyone without above-average upper body strength!

If you'd like to focus the weekend on the hiking, meet some fellow hikers, or you're just looking to cut costs a bit, stay at the Rifugio Menaggio (<http://www.rifugiomenaggio.eu/>). It would run you €15 per person per night or €50 per person for the overnight, breakfast lunch & dinner. On my next trip to the region, I will likely stay at the rifugio. I figure that with the same flight times, I could be at the rifugio by 2pm on Saturday afternoon (or you could save some time by parking in **Monte Breglia**, a bit higher up than Breglia). You certainly can't beat the view from the rifugio's front deck!