

## A Postcard Tour of Northern Italy with a Swiss Segue

### Trip Highlights

- A visit to two famous gardens at Lake Como, Villa Carlotta and Villa del Balbianello
- Admire the villas that ring Lake Como from a private motor launch
- A ride through the Engadin Valley and over the Swiss Alps aboard the famous Bernina Express, one of Switzerland's iconic train journeys
- Stand on glacial ice surrounded by the 4,000 metre peaks of the Swiss Alps
- Hike some of the world's finest alpine trails in the Dolomites
- Visit the South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology, which unravels the fascinating story of Ötzi the Iceman
- Lunch in a mountain hut with a farmer/chef, quintessential paddock-to-plate dining
- Sample the crisp white wines of the Valtellina, Alto Adige and Friuli regions of northern Italy
- Refreshments in an elegant café in Trieste, the port where Europe's coffee-house tradition began
- Opera by night in a palace along Venice's Grand Canal – riot, scandal and misbehaviour in ruffles
- Visit a workshop of one of the craftworkers who carry on traditional trades for which Venice is known

### DAY 1-4

You'll be met at the airport in Milan and transported to [Villa la Mirabella](#) at Cadenabbia on the shores of Lake Como and just a short stroll from the famous garden at [Villa Carlotta](#) (and directly opposite the villages of Bellagio and Varenna, both easily accessible. The style is classical, rooms are simple but pleasing, there's a swimming pool and the place is meticulously run by Paolo and his family. We'll stay here for three nights.

Over the next two days we'll explore the lake and the villages and gardens that have made this a favourite for Milanese industrialists and Hollywood A-listers, including George Clooney. One of the standouts is Villa del Balbianello, the most visible of all Lake Como's villas, surrounded by sculpted gardens - the ficus that twirls itself around the columns of the loggia is trimmed – so they say – with scissors. The villa is a favourite for wedding parties, and also for movie makers. It was here that Daniel Craig appeared in the role of James Bond in the opening scenes of Casino Royale.

We'll explore Bellagio and Varenna, take a stroll around the tiny village of Orrido di Nesso, where a waterfall plummets down the hillside and probably eat too much gelato. Transport will be aboard a private launch and also the local ferries. We'll have a welcome dinner at Villa la Mirabella, a lunch on the waterfront at Albergo Plinio and another dinner at La Fagurida, perched in the hills above the lake.

Meals included: Breakfast daily, one lunch, two dinners

#### DAY 4-7

A private coach will take us on a 2 ½-hour journey north along the lake and across the Swiss border. Just past the resort town of St Moritz we'll turn into the Engadin Valley and stop at Pontresina, our home for the next three nights. Get ready to yodel.

We'll stay at [Hotel Saratz](#), a sleek, sculpted hotel with wonderful service and one of the best restaurants in town as well as a pure vegetarian restaurant, a fantastic spa and indoor and outdoor pools. We're staying here with half board, which means dinner here is included as well as breakfast. Dining in Switzerland is fantastically expensive and I don't want to send you broke, however it's a great menu with plenty of variety and you won't get bored with it. Alcoholic beverages are at your own expense here.

Pontresina is a ski town - the shop windows full of hiking boots and gore-tex clothing tell the story – the base for a vast network of mountain railways and lift systems of the Engadin Valley. Among them is the Diavolezza Gondola, which hoists you to a height of 3000 metres. Exit the gondola and you're straight onto ice, even in late June, standing on the rim of a supersize amphitheatre of peaks dribbling snow that feeds the Morteratsch Glacier in the valley below. If you're feeling energetic a short hike will get you to a system of fixed ropes, where you can clip on with a harness and climb like Spiderman to Piz Trovat for a view of the Bernina massif. Or do what I usually do and sit outside at the café over a hot chocolate and take far too many photos.

We'll spend two full days taking cable cars and ski lifts up the mountains, then easy and flattish walks, with whistling marmots and alpine ibex for company. Sighing heaps, and never neglecting the opportunity for yet another heiße schokolade (hot choc) at the huts that punctuate the Swiss mountain trails. We'll also take a short trip to chi-chi St Moritz, which is where Switzerland first entered the world's consciousness as a winter destination.

Meals included: breakfast daily, three dinners

#### DAY 7-10

We'll hop aboard the Bernina Express, one of the Swiss rail system's iconic trains, for the three-hour ride up the Engadin Valley, over the Swiss Alps at Alp Grum and on a sashaying ride through forests that line the Poschiavo Valley. You'll feel like you're starring in a mineral water ad, honestly. They sometimes tack an outdoor car onto the back of the Bernina Express – weather permitting – and the ride through mountains and forests with the wind in your hair – unforgettable.

We'll re-enter Italy at Tirano and stop at Bistrot Merizzi for lunch, they do a great gelato, then board our private coach for the journey across northern Italy to the Dolomites at Castelrotto, aka Kastelruth. The name of the town reveals the split personality of the Alto Adige/Sudtirol. Although it lies in Italy, the province likes to pretend it's still part of Austria, which it was until the Treaty of Versailles. The language, the food, the architecture and even the way people dress all remind you that you're in a very different part of Italy.

The scenery is mind blowing. Located where the top of the Italian boot slams into Europe's soft underbelly, the Alto Adige is an ice-sculpted region of limestone peaks that erupt skyward from lush alpine valleys where cows with clonking bells wade through wildflower meadows. In the villages that line the valleys, potted geranium spill from the balconies of half-timbered house. Laced through this chocolate-box scenery is a network of the world's finest alpine trails. We'll spend three nights here, staying at [Cavallino d'Oro](#), a very traditional guesthouse.

Weather permitting, we'll hike on the Alpe di Suisi, the largest high-altitude alpine pasture in Europe, and this can be tailored to take account of varying fitness levels. We'll have a meal up here at Gostner Schwaige. Want to be inspired? [Take a look](#) at this article in Conde Nast Traveller:

We'll also visit Bolzano, where nothing much in the city centre has been built since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The cityscape is dominated by bell towers and church spires, the most impressive of which is the Assumption of Our Lady Cathedral, which sits under a decorative tiled roof at the city's medieval heart. A highlight is the fascinating South Tyrol Museum of Archaeology, devoted to Otzi the Iceman, who lived in this region 5000 years ago and whose mummified corpse, emerging from a glacier in 1991, revealed much about the tools and sophistication of Stone Age life in the region.

The Dolomites is a fantastic spot for photographers and we'll arrange a special scenic photo shoot for those who might not be averse to an early morning adventure.

Meals included: breakfast daily, two lunches, two dinners

DAY 10-13

We'll take a private coach south to Trieste. Once the Adriatic port for the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Trieste is lovely city that takes its culture, food and architecture from Greece, Croatia and the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, and quite unlike any other Italian city. Handed to Italy after World War I, it's a grand city oddly adrift in the world, a faded rose with a wonderful inheritance of neo-classical and Art Nouveau palazzos and piazzas.

We'll spend three nights in the glorious [Savoia Excelsior Hotel](#), exploring the city and taking an excursion to the gardens at Castello di Miramare, built in 1860 by Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian as a love-castle for his wife. We might also take a ferry to Muggia, a fishing village built around a pretty harbour. It's an easy couple of days with coffee in a Viennese style café and perhaps an Aperol on the waterfront as part of an evening passeggiata, the evening promenade that takes place all over Italy. We'll catch our breath here and gather energy for the final stop in our journey.

Meals included: breakfast daily, one lunch, one dinner

## DAY 13-16

A private coach will deliver us to Venice, and whether this is your first time or fifth, you'll be knocked out. No other city projects itself so radiantly to the world, yet nothing prepares you for the moment when you board a vaporetto and set off past the baroque palaces along the Grand Canal. The reality of Venice is far more fabulous than anything the imagination could construct. Away from its grand squares Venice is a labyrinth of passageways that will propel you along – who knows where – until you come to a canal where tethered gondolas nod against their moorings, fracturing the watery reflection of the palaces into a kaleidoscope of burnt colours. Wander aimlessly and sooner or later you'll discover the Guggenheim Museum, Caffè Florian, the Rialto Market and a hundred more enchantments.

We stay three nights at the [Grand Hotel Palazzo dei Dogi](#), part of a 17<sup>th</sup> century palace in the Cannaregio district, home to the storied Jewish Ghetto and one of the few neighbourhoods still populated by Venetians. The hotel has a botanical garden – a rarity in Venice – and also a spa. We'll be exploring some museums, St Mark's Basilica, have coffee and cakes listening to the orchestra at Caffè Florian in the piazza and visit the workshop of some of the city's artisans. There's time for you to wander about on your own, and early mornings and late evenings when the crowds have gone and the cats come out are pure magic. There's a final dinner before we say arrivederci Venezia.

Meals included: breakfast daily, one lunch, one dinner

Day 16

Depart Venice, transfer to the station or Marco Polo Airport

Tour ends

**Cost TBA**

**What's included**

Transfers from Milan Malpensa Airport to Lake Como, and another transfer from Venice to the station/airport at the end of the tour

Safe and comfortable air-conditioned vehicle

Guided tours in all cities/towns

Fifteen nights accommodation in a double/twin room with breakfast

Admission to all historic monuments

Lunches on six days

Dinners on eight nights

Gratuities (driver/guide, city guides, servers etc)

Still water with meals, on the bus and on day tours

Wine: One bottle of red and one bottle of white for the table for each lunch and dinner at all included meals, except for the three dinners in Switzerland

What's Not Included

International air travel

Travel Insurance

Alcoholic beverages apart from wine, as above, with meals

Soft drinks

Laundry, mini-bar charges, phone charges, spa treatments and other optional services provided by the hotel

Lunches or dinners not included in the itinerary

Need more information?

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