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# DISCOVER LOMBARDY

A special 16-page guide to the sights, tastes and delights of Italy's most varied and captivating region



Regione Lombardia



CAMERA  
DI COMMERCIO  
MILANO



Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri

## ABOUT THIS SUPPLEMENT



Visit us in Lombardy and your dreams will come true. Great centres of renaissance art, lakes, mountains and rivers make for a superb travel cocktail for you to discover. The extraordinary beauty of Lombardy

lies in her waterways where light reflects between shores rich in colour and life. Nature, culture, food, beautiful spas, sport and fun link Lombardy's lakes.

Garda, Como, Maggiore and Iseo, and hundreds of small stretches of water, are surrounded by green banks rich with art, history and culture, populated by ancient villas and breathtaking mansions, which have seduced the famous from Virgil to Churchill to today's movie stars.

Moreover, there is something unique for you to try: sailing through a circuit of lakes, tributaries and on the River Po. Glide along between verdant banks, through old locks, unexpected beaches of white sand and ancient buildings, on a river adventure like no other.

In the mountains of Lombardy are 110 peaks that exceed 3,000m and 600km of ski slopes that in summer make natural trails for hiking, cycling and mountain biking. A true paradise for every season.

Lastly, our artistic and cultural patrimony, a testament to an ancient civilisation, that exudes an intimate and discreet charm. Lombardy not only represents excellence in business, finance and trade; but beauty too. Be seduced by Lombardy: you will not regret it.

*Dr Pier Gianni Prosperini*  
Regional Minister of Tourism

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COVER IMAGE: Detail of Milan Cathedral, GETTY

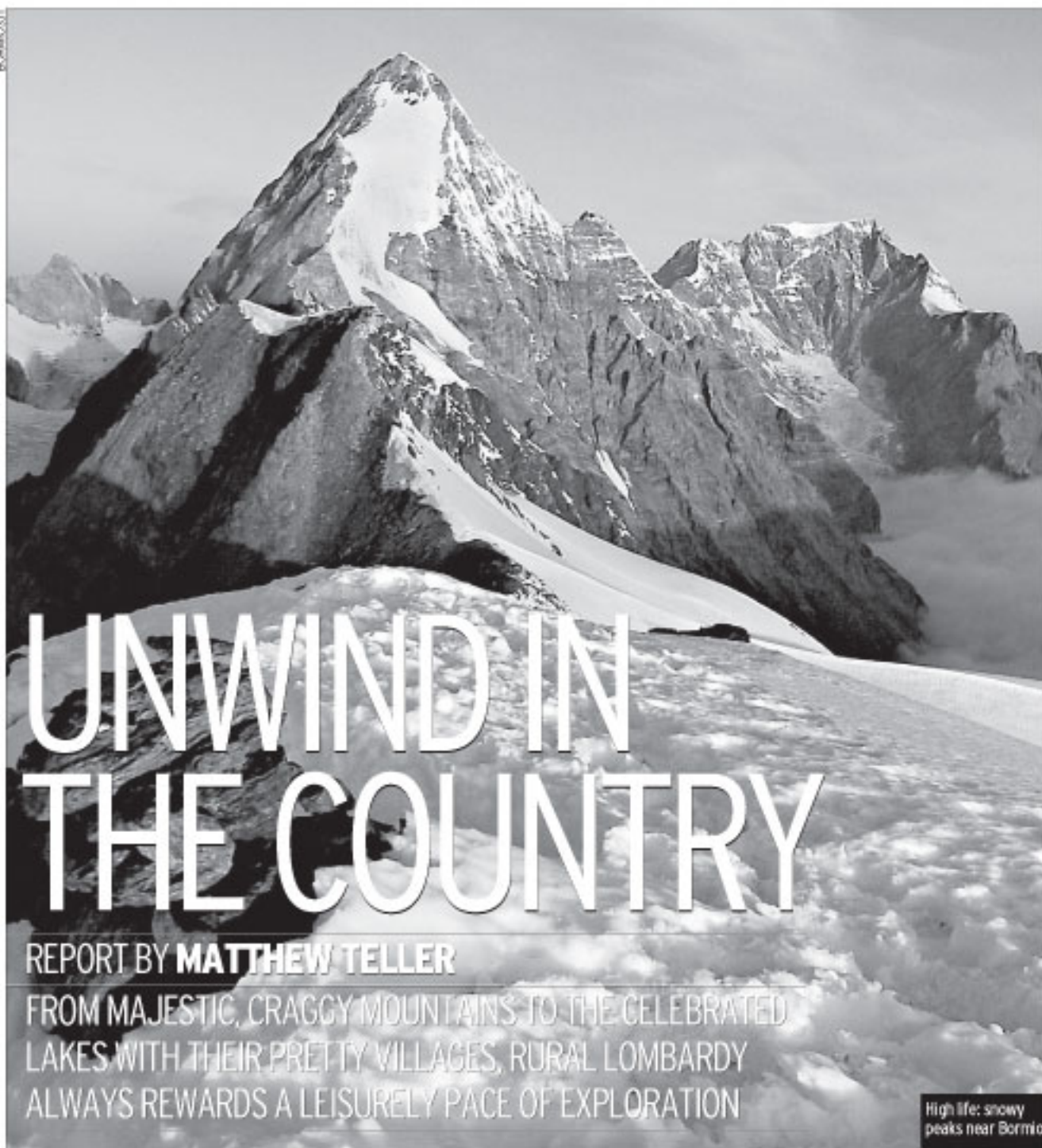
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REPORT BY **MATTHEW TELLER**

FROM MAJESTIC, CRAGGY MOUNTAINS TO THE CELEBRATED LAKES WITH THEIR PRETTY VILLAGES, RURAL LOMBARDY ALWAYS REWARDS A LEISURELY PACE OF EXPLORATION

High life: snowy peaks near Borio

**T**hough Lombardy is best known abroad for its big cities – especially Milan – it also boasts some of the finest rural landscapes in northern Italy. This is where the foothills of the Alps merge into the lowland plain of the River Po as it flows eastwards from Turin towards the Adriatic.

Lombardy's territory extends north to the mountain border with Switzerland, and also touches on every one of the major northern Italian lakes, from Como to Garda. Despite being landlocked, the region boasts an astonishing 600km (373 miles) of "coastline".

There are all sorts of hooks on which you might hang a rural holiday. Though the lower plains, south of Milan, are mainly vast fields growing risotto rice or other grains, broken up by ranks of willow or poplar tracing the lines of irrigation canals, further north, particularly around Bergamo and Brescia, there is some gorgeous rolling countryside with a long history of wine-making and agriturismo (farm-stay holidays). Or, of course, you could always dip

into the lakes for a spot of fully deserved sloth amid legendary natural beauty and a seductive Mediterranean microclimate. Further up, make your way into the magnificent high Alpine valleys for skiing, hiking or all kinds of cultural endeavours. And whichever you choose, excellent transport connections mean you can enjoy the best of what's on offer, whether it's venturing up to the mountains, spending a lazy afternoon cruising the lakes or relaxing with a glass of wine in the vineyards – even all three in a single day.

## THE LAKES

Arguably the most celebrated of all Italy's lakes is Lake Como, noted for its mild microclimate and the elegant villas – many with spectacular waterside gardens – that fringe its lapping waters. Como aside, the highlight of Lombardy's lake country is the stunning Brescian shore of Lake Garda, the largest lake in Italy. "Sirmione, gem of all the peninsulas, how happily I visit you!" trilled the Roman poet Catullus in 56 BC as he returned home to his lakeside villa. See page eight for more information about this famous spa destination.

Just around the apple-shaped bay, Garda's western shore holds

dramatic scenery: steep rock faces perched over the lake, rugged valleys and lush palms, bougainvillea and citrus trees lining the lakeside road. Stop in at old-fashioned Salò, idyllically sited on its own narrow bay, then take in the Vittoriale villa nearby. This was the home of nationalist hero Gabriele D'Annunzio and is a tribute to his shameless egotism, from the opulent Art Deco dining room, complete with gilded tortoise, to the submarine blue bathroom crammed with more than 900 knick-knacks.

Gargnano, a charming ex-fishing village a short way north, was home to D.H. Lawrence in an earlier decade, while Limone, the last town in Lombardy, is another celebrated beauty spot – named, disappointingly, not for the lemon trees which grow in abundance here but rather from the Latin word for frontier, *limen*.

But don't let Garda's fame blind you to the charm of Lombardy's smaller lakes. Midway between Garda and Como, unsung Lake Iseo nestles into a little S-shaped fold in the hills. Take the branch-line railway from Brescia to either Suzzano or Sale Marasino, on the Lake Iseo shoreline, for a ferry ride over to Monte Isola – the largest lake island in Europe, a mighty chunk of rock more than

3km long and 600m high. Cars are banned, so make time to roam on foot or with a rented bike. The perimeter road, dotted with excellent waterfront restaurants, is a comfortable 9km, or you could tackle a more challenging circumnavigation using hillside paths and trails which add up to about 15km.

Yet even Iseo doesn't exhaust Lombardy's lake charms. Trapped in the higher reaches of the Val Sabbia above Brescia is Lake Idro, the highest of the major Italian lakes (368m above sea level) and also the smallest (9.5km by 2km). It's a remarkably pretty spot, with wooded crags reaching down into cool, clear water and a succession of simple lakefront villages to explore at a leisurely pace.

## THE MOUNTAINS

Lombardy's Alpine ranges reach up to the Swiss frontier, forming a natural barrier of immense proportions. The Stelvio National Park takes full advantage: this vast wilderness features spectacular birdwatching and wildlife-spotting. The skiing up here is world-class, not least at the prestigious resort of Borio, which offers superb year-round Alpine sports and mountain hiking, and – due to its location on trans-Alpine trade routes



Languid waters: Isola Pescatori on Lake Maggiore. Below far left, Bagolino's Lenten carnival; and the historic town of Chiavenna



## VALLEY OF CARVINGS

The branch-line train from Brescia to Lake Iseo continues north, climbing into the high Val Camonica. This beautiful valley has been named one of Lombardy's World Heritage Sites by Unesco for its astonishing array of prehistoric rock carvings made by the local Camuni tribe.

They cover a period of several millennia: the simplest stick figures date from immediately after the last Ice Age, more than ten thousand years ago, while the most complex scenes – showing wheeled carts and domestic life – were made in the pre-Roman Iron Age.

The best place to sample this extraordinary art is at Capo di Ponte village in the upper valley, where it's an easy walk from the railway station to the hillside Parco Nazionale delle Incisioni Rupestri, an open area holding thousands of rock carvings.

The symbol of Lombardy, a stylised flower known as the Rosa Camuna, was adopted from one of these prehistoric carvings; you can see the original today in the village of Bedolino, 2km from Capo di Ponte. More information is at [www.invallecamonica.it](http://www.invallecamonica.it).

between northern Europe and Venice – is also full of history, its cobbled streets lined with palace-residences dating from the 15th and 16th centuries.

Bormio's valley, the Valtellina, is one of Lombardy's major ski areas: many smaller resorts pack the side valleys, while the adjacent Valchiavenna is another top destination, dominated by the historic town of Chiavenna, easily reached from Lake Como.

Bergamo's high valleys, too, offer plenty of interest: top choice for skiers is the high-altitude resort of Foppolo, at the head of the Val Brembana, but on your way up, stop off at San Pellegrino (where the water comes from), a fashionable spa resort for a century or more. Over in Bergamo's Valle Seriana, Clusone offers more cerebral diversions, in the form of striking 15th-century frescoes adorning its church that depict the dance of death.

James Bond fans should make time for a scenic drive above Brescia: the city is known for its arms industry, a mainstay of the local economy since the 16th century, and at Gardone Val Trompia you'll pass the factory of Beretta, makers of 007's favourite gun.

A few valleys over, tucked into the folded, craggy landscape

above Lake Idro, the dour medieval village of Bagolino comes alive every February for one of the most colourful of Lombardy's Lenten carnivals. Wrap up warm for the journey out here to sample all the costumed revelry and take part in traditional music and dance dating back to medieval times.

The mountains around Lecco need no introduction to serious climbers: these peaks are home to the Ragni di Lecco, a pioneering group of mountaineers who gained fame for their first ascents.

### THE COUNTRYSIDE

The best of Lombardy's countryside can be explored in the gently rolling landscapes around Brescia. To the west, towards Lake Iseo, the hilly Franciacorta wine district rising from the plain produces some classic wines. Top choice is the celebrated Franciacorta DOCG, Italy's finest sparkling wine and made according to Champagne methods, but there are also the Terre di Franciacorta DOC (white and red) and a host of lesser vintages to savour. Take time to walk the Strada del Vino Franciacorta path that winds for 80km through the area, passing visible vineyards, hotels and restaurants. More details are at

[www.stradadelfranciacorta.it](http://www.stradadelfranciacorta.it). Another attraction here – more prosaic, but perhaps just as enticing – is the Franciacorta Outlet Village at little Rodengo-Saiano ([www.franciacortacoutlet.it](http://www.franciacortacoutlet.it)), where brand-name stores sell designer-label fashion at up to 70 per cent off.

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## ON THE RAILS



The only way is up: the Trenino Rosso from Tirano climbs sharp inclines and traverses scenic, precipitous viaducts

Train buffs are in for a treat in rural Lombardy. Aside from regular services on the countryside's many branch lines, two narrow-gauge routes are worth making a special trip for.

High in the Alpine foothills, in the province of Sondrio, the town of Tirano stands virtually on the Swiss border. Photogenic narrow-gauge services, dubbed the Trenino Rosso ("Little Red Train"), make their way from Tirano's little station up to the ice-bound Bernina Pass (2,328m), terminating at the famous Swiss Alpine resort of St Moritz. From here, a circuit by bus back into Italy at Chiavenna, and thence up

the Valtellina to Tirano, completes the most scenic of mountain journeys. Full information is at [www.treninorosso.it](http://www.treninorosso.it).

In a different vein, the vintage Treno Blu ("Blue Train") forms a peaceful summer excursion from the hill-town of Bergamo, trundling on a short but scenic stretch of track alongside the Oglio river to Paratico on Lake Iseo. Boats collect passengers at Paratico for a full day of cruises and lake excursions before returning them by Treno Blu to Bergamo. For more details – and news of when a steam loco is hooked up for the run – consult [www.Ferrovieturistiche.it](http://www.Ferrovieturistiche.it).

# MEET THE MAESTROS

REPORT BY CHRIS MADIGAN

MILAN BOASTS FINE RENAISSANCE ART AND SOARING OPERA AND ARCHITECTURE, BUT THERE IS PLENTY TO PLEASE CULTURE VULTURES ALL ACROSS LOMBARDY

In September of this year, a 16-billion-pixel digital reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's fresco *The Last Supper* was uploaded to the internet. This was partly in response to the millions of people wanting to explore the so-called theories of *The Da Vinci Code*. However, while a high-resolution image scrolling across your computer screen might help you make your own mind up about the basis of Dan Brown's novel, to understand the power of this masterpiece, you have to see it in situ: in the refectory of the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie, in Milan.

Since the completion of a 20-year restoration of this fragile work, and the conversion of the refectory into a climate-controlled environment, visitors have been able to see *The Last Supper* in what most (although not all) experts agree is the way Leonardo intended.

Colour and clarity have been restored to it (so, for example, you can see that the conspiracy theorists' "mysterious hand" is actually Peter's, and the "Mary Magdalene" figure is clearly just a young man); and with them you can really see the humanity and character that Leonardo introduced to this very formal division of art.

The *Last Supper* was painted for one of the great patrons of the Renaissance, Ludovico Sforza. Fitting then that his home, the Castello Sforzesco, should now house two of Milan's best art collections. The highlight of the first of these, the Museo d'Arte Antica, is one of Michaelangelo's *Pietàs*. Unlike the *Pietà* in St Peter's, Rome, of Mary cradling her dead son, this unfinished work is more ethereal, and is believed to depict the spirit of Christ supporting the Virgin. This time, there really is a floating arm – Michaelangelo apparently intended to move the Christ figure but never got the chance.

The Pinacoteca has a wide variety of Renaissance masterpieces, from frescoes depicting tales from 14th-century poet Boccaccio's *Decameron*, to paintings by

Bellini and Filippo Lippi, as well as some late Mantegna.

There are more Mantegnas – including the visceral *Lamentation Over The Dead Christ*, in which the physical degradations of the crucifixion are laid bare – at another of Milan's Pinacotecas, the Brera. This is one of the world's best Renaissance collections – from Piero della Francesca and Raphael to the later Tintoretto and Veronese. But the collection doesn't stop in 1600: there's the Baroque realism of Caravaggio and even modern Italian work by the likes of Modigliani and De Chirico. The Pinacoteca di Brera is one of those museums you can drag a non-art lover around – as long as they appreciate architecture – because it is housed in a beautiful 18th-century palazzo.

The Brera is not the only modern art museum in Milan. The Civica Galleria d'Arte Moderna, the Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea and the Collezione Vismara between them cover the whole gamut from the Impressionists, via Picasso, to cutting edge installations and other Brian Sewell-baiting work.

Some more ribald works of art may be seen in the intriguing city of Mantua, in the extraordinary Palazzo di Te, built in the 16th century by the Mannerist Giulio Romano as a love nest for Mantua's ruler Federico Gonzaga and his mistress. Each salon is like a themed room in a brothel, the wildest being the Sala di Psiche, which shows an orgy of the gods – Jupiter as a snake raping a woman and a goddess becoming a cow to seduce a bull, all with randy elephants and camels in attendance. Meanwhile, the

Gonzaga dynasty's main property, the Palazzo Ducale, is best known for its naturalistic Mantegna frescoes of the family history.

All of Lombardy's cities can boast their share of art history and collections – there are fine Civic Museums in Pavia and Cremona, for instance.

In Pavia, the Museo Pavese del Risorgimento Italiano was created in 1885 by the Municipality of Pavia to preserve a vast number of documents, photographs, books and miscellaneous objects donated by the citizens of Pavia to preserve the memory of their role in the unification of Italy.

In Cremona there are no less than seven well-known museums: the Museo Antonio Stradivari; the Museo Berenziano; the Museo Civico Ala Ponzone; the Museo Civico Di Storia Naturale; the Museo Della Civiltà Contadina Della Valpadana; the Museo

Organologico-didattico and the Palazzo Comunale, Saletta Dei Violini.

Bergamo is another example. Though little known outside Lombardy and art experts, the Accademia Carrara has a fantastic collection of work including paintings by Botticelli, Raphael, Titian and Bellini, while also introducing you to local artists such as 20th-century sculptor Giacomo Manzù.

Meanwhile, nearby, the Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea is showing its "Future Of Futurism" exhibition until March 2008, featuring iconoclastic Italian art but also pieces by Gilbert & George, Andy Warhol,



and Damien Hirst. The Lombardy art scene isn't all about cherubs, you see.

## MUSIC

While Milan's *The Last Supper* has some rivals for the title of World's Most Famous Renaissance Painting, its opera house is undisputed number one. The Teatro alla Scala, built at the end of the 18th century, is not only an opulent setting for the grandest of musical forms, it is now acoustically excellent, after the refit completed in 2004. As it needs to be, because although there are expensive seats and exorbitant boxes, La Scala has always had the cheap loggione gallery, where impoverished true aficionados (the terrace supporters of opera, who look down on the champagne and prawn sandwich brigade) are unafraid of expressing their criticisms vocally – they've driven singers off-stage before.

La Scala's roll-call of premieres and performers is essentially a history of opera. The first production was Salieri's *Europa Riconosciuta*. Later, in the golden age of opera, the 19th century, Donizetti (*Lucrezia Borgia*), Verdi (*Otello*, *Falstaff*) and Puccini (*Madame Butterfly* and *Turandot*, under the baton of Toscanini), all put their operas on here first. In the 20th century the likes of

Maria Callas and conductor Herbert von Karajan performed here, as of course did Luciano Pavarotti. As a ballet venue as well, La Scala has had the feet of Fonteyn and Nureyev caress its boards.

The new principal guest conductor is Daniel Barenboim, who will be putting on Richard Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, as well as a programme of Beethoven – bringing a touch of German bombast to this most Italian of venues.

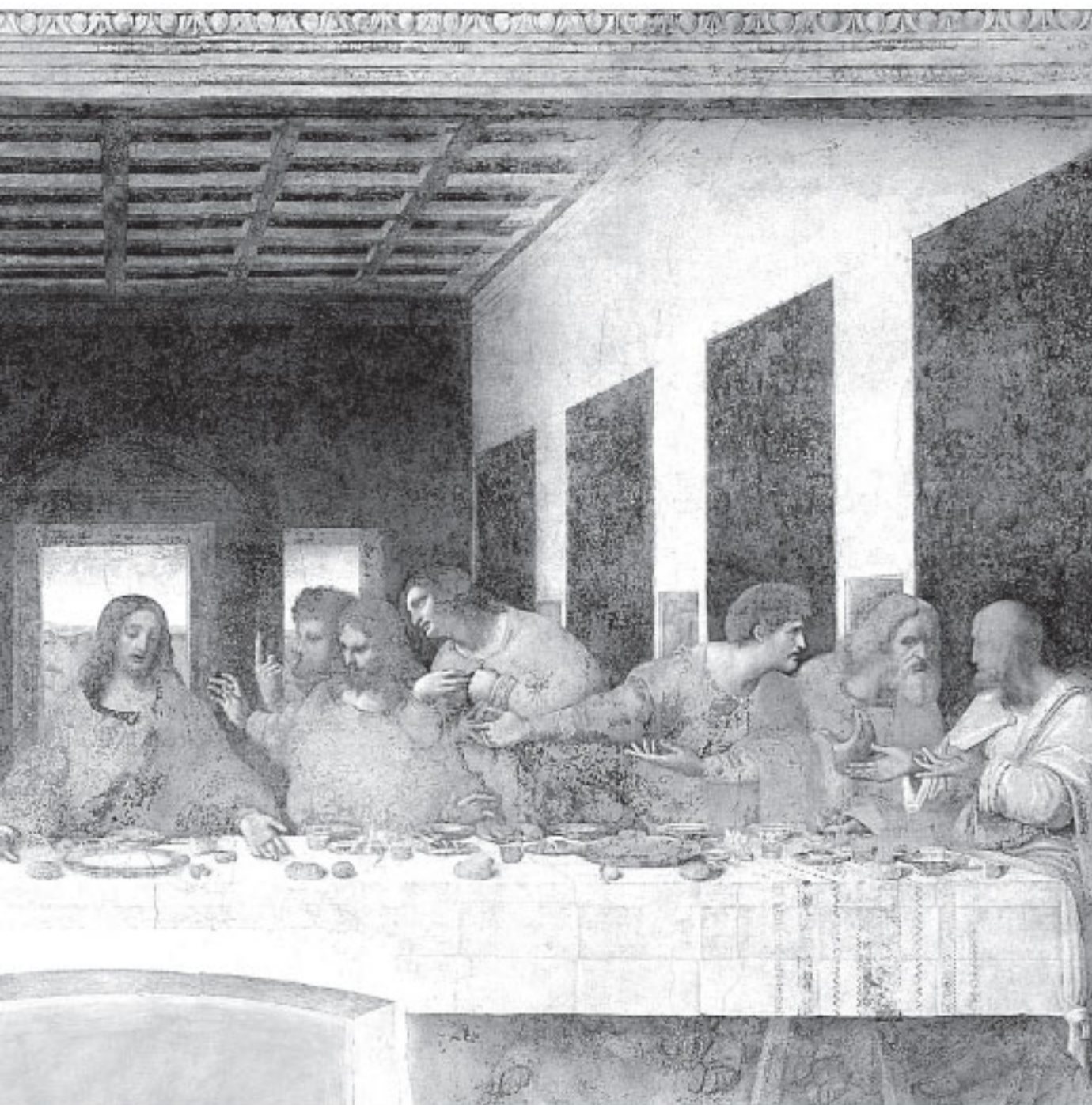
Milan's relationships with Verdi and Puccini are celebrated at other venues in the city too. Although Giuseppe Verdi actually failed his entrance interview for the Milan Conservatory, the music school has been renamed after him and regularly performs his work, along with that of Giacomo Puccini, who did manage to get in – and graduate. In 1999 another venue, the Milan Auditorium, was opened as the home of the Giuseppe Verdi Symphony And Choir.

Milan might claim the world's finest opera house, but it was to the south-east that opera was actually invented. Born and taught in Cremona, Claudio Monteverdi is credited with having written the first "proper" opera. He moved to the Gonzaga court in Mantua as a writer of madrigals, before being

**THE PINACOTECA HAS MANY RENAISSANCE MASTERPIECES, FROM 14TH-CENTURY FREScoes TO PAINTINGS BY BELLINI**

commissioned by the Gonzaga family to put on a musical drama for a carnival. *L'Orfeo* was the first time music and drama had combined on such a scale – and it stands up today. Following in Monteverdi's footsteps, 150 years later, a young Austrian named Wolfgang learnt his trade performing recitals in Mantua and Lodi.

Monteverdi's birthplace, Cremona, is a byword for musical excellence – not only in terms of composing and performance (the Choir & Consort Constanza Porta remains the place to go to hear Renaissance and Baroque music), but for musical instruments. From the 16th century, the finest string instruments have come from Cremona. First there were the Amati brothers, who perfected the F-holes in violins;



Fine encounters: clockwise from left, the Rondanini Pietà at Castello Sforzesco in Milan; The Last Supper by Da Vinci at Santa Maria della Grazie in Milan; the glass dome of Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II in Milan; Maria Callas and Ettore Bastianini at La Scala in 1960 and Rodolfo Dordoni's Piotta chair and footrest

then later came the Guarneri family and, most famous of them all, Stradivarius.

There are around 600 known examples of instruments by Antonio Stradivari still in existence – they are both artworks and pieces of scientific genius. Experts can still not quite explain the combination of wood treatments, laminates and subtle changes in shape (such as would please a Ferrari aerodynamics engineer) that make his violins so superior. You can see some examples of his (and those others') craft in the Museo Stradivariano and the Sala di Violini in Cremona's Palazzo del Comune.

#### ARCHITECTURE

With a great cultural heritage in music and art, there is always sure to be fine architecture. And the cities of Lombardy are almost living museums of the history of Italian architecture.

Take Brescia, for example. It has some of Northern Italy's best Roman remains, notably the Capitolino temple to Jupiter, Juno and Minerva.

There are Medieval streets with tower-gates next to Renaissance squares (the porticoed Piazza della Loggia is one of the finest examples, designed in part by Palladio); one square even has two cathedrals,

the 12th-century Rotonda competing with a 17th-century rival. And there are fine examples of the bombastic architecture of the Fascist period.

Sometimes the architectural history combines in one building, such as Pavia's delightful Certosa or Charterhouse, which blends Gothic and Renaissance styles seamlessly. It's a visual feast, from the terracotta cloisters, through the elaborate façade, based on The Duomo of Milan, to the opulent painted ceiling vaults and stained glass. Renaissance architecture is most prevalent in Mantua, where the playful work of Giulio Romano (he of the raunchy frescos) can be seen everywhere from his own house to that naughty Palazzo Te.

Milan itself, of course, has fine examples of just about every architectural style that has passed through Italy. The Duomo is one of the foremost Gothic cathedrals; and the stunning Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II. This huge

baroque shopping arcade dominates the city centre with its vast vaulted glass ceiling (which, sadly, the architect Giuseppe Mengoni fell from days before the opening ceremony). It was built to celebrate the unification of Italy and was decorated with mosaics of the crests of Milan, Rome, Florence and Turin. However, when you see AC Milan and Inter fans grinding their heels into the Turin bull's groin, you wonder about that unity.

Monza's Duomo is certainly worth a visit. The building, a remarkable marriage of Romanesque structure and Gothic decoration, is home to some unique artifacts and relics – including the celebrated Iron Crown of Lombardy used to anoint monarchs including Napoleon Bonaparte.

Not all Lombardy's architectural gems are on such a grand scale as its cathedrals. The Crespi d'Adda model workers' village, near Bergamo, is an interesting example of architecture that's fit for purpose. Nineteenth-century

cotton workers were provided with a cottage, their own vegetable garden, and easy access to services such as church, school, hospital and public baths. It looks a pretty attractive life to us now.

Architecture in Lombardy, however, is not only about Unesco World Heritage Sites such as Crespi d'Adda. Milan has a grand plan that is maintaining its development as we move deeper into the 21st century, and they are gathering talent from around the world to create landmark buildings and projects which may compete with those Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque masterpieces for postcard space in the future.

Daniel Libeskind is overseeing an enormous project to transform the enormous old fair complex of Milan into a vibrant district with offices, housing, a museum and public space. He has enlisted some of the most challenging architects of today to help him, including Zaha Hadid and Arata Isozaki.

Meanwhile Renzo Piano is doing the same in the suburb of Sesto San Giovanni, and Sir Norman Foster is conducting work in Santa Giulia.



NICOLA ZOCCHINI/ASSINA S.P.A.

#### DESIGN

Talking of modern artistic endeavours and craftsmanship, no discussion of the culture of Lombardy would be complete without a mention of Milan and its surrounding countryside's contribution to design.

Take a walk along the streets that make up Milan's Quadrilatero d'Oro (Via Montenapoleone, Via Spiga, Via Borgospesso, Via Sant'Andrea).

The clothes in the flagship stores of Armani, Versace, Missoni et al may not measure up to Renaissance paintings for artistic merit, but there is an exuberance to this living craft that is exciting to see.

Meanwhile, the shops themselves look fantastic. As well they might: Milan is the world's undisputed centre of interior and furniture design. In addition to the annual Salone del Mobile Internazionale – the Fashion Week of furniture – year round you can stroll streets such as Via Tortona and Via Durini for cutting-edge designer lamps and chairs.

And when, dressed in your Armani suit, you have selected your favourite piece by Artemide or Cassina, there is only one way you can possibly leave the city: in another piece of classic Lombard design – an Alfa Romeo Spider. Just don't try to fit all your furniture buys into it.

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GIUSEPPE CRIDONIA

# MAKE YOUR OWN WAY DOWNHILL

REPORT BY **CHRIS MADIGAN**

THE SKI RESORTS OF LOMBARDY HAVE IT ALL – TERRAIN FOR EXPERTS AND NOVICES ALIKE, FINE RESTAURANTS AND A CLUTCH OF WORLD-CLASS SPAS

**E**very weekend throughout the winter, thousands of Milanese and other Lombard city dwellers strap their skis to the roof racks of their sports cars, put on their ski pants and

jackets and head to the mountains. And rightly so: Lombardy boasts some of Italy's finest winter resorts – both internationally renowned centres of skiing and snowboarding excellence, and little gems the locals think they have to themselves.

Not for long, though. Sondrio province, up on the border with Switzerland, has probably the most world-renowned resorts: Livigno, Madesimo and two-time World Alpine Championship host Bormio. However Montecampione and the Adamello Ski area, both in Brescia province, run them close, as does the Bremboski group of resorts in Bergamo.

Lecco, near lake Como, has the day-trip ski areas Of Piani Bobbio and its neighbours; while in Varese you can enjoy winter sports of all types in the foothills of the Alps and close to Milan.

Italian skiing is always a joy: you can be as energetic or relaxed as you like. Big, wide open slopes, or lovely tree runs are just crying out for lazy carving turns; and this is one place where there's no shame in stopping at yet another lovely mountain restaurant for a coffee and a grappa.

However, those mountain restaurants, along with those in the resorts, are probably the reason you should put in some effort on the hill.

If you've had a challenging day on the nursery slopes, off-piste or in one of Lombardy's world-class terrain parks, then you really feel like you deserve your early evening Campari (a Lombardy speciality), followed by a dinner of tasty *osso buco* with polenta and some mountain gorgonzola. Well,

you'll need your energy – the après ski goes on pretty late...

Bormio came to many British ski enthusiasts' attentions in 2005, when the resort hosted the World Championships and Bode Miller skied most of the downhill course on one ski. But Bormio's history goes far further back.

#### SKI AND SOAK

The famous baths (see overleaf) are just one of the sights in the historic centre of Bormio – along with a 14th century library, 32 towers, palazzos and cobbled streets (around which an annual cross-country ski *Palio* is raced every year). Bormio's local skiing is excellent for intermediates, with some particularly good long red runs – including the famous Stelvio downhill course, widely regarded as one of the best on the World Cup circuit.

For new-school skiers and snowboarders, a relatively new attraction has been the Bormio 2000 terrain park, which includes a Superpipe. And with slopes running from higher than 3,000m, it's snow-sure.

The wooded slopes of Valdidentro, a short bus ride away, add an extra dimension to the local skiing. And it offers some alternative winter sports too: the Viola cross-country ski circuit has a magnificent setting, as does Husky Village, a centre for dog-sledding. Nearby Santa Caterina is an alternative base or a valuable addition to Bormio's skiing. North-facing, it keeps its snow well, and there has been recent expansion: a new chair lift has opened up a new sector. Plus, it has night skiing, which is always great fun.

#### SLIDE INTO THE PAST

Like Bormio, Livigno has always been an important staging post between Italy and Switzerland, and to this day retains its duty-free status – good news when it comes to après ski.

At the end of the skiing day, the party kicks off at the various bars at the bottom of the Mottolino and Carosello slopes. Later on, places such as Galli's

Head over heels: freestyle skiing in Valtellina, in the province of Sondrio



Winter warmer: Bormio is as famous for its spas as it is for its skiing

and the Kuhstahl are very lively indeed. And, in Echo, Livigno is proud to be home to Europe's highest brewery.

As those names suggest, there is a very international feel to Livigno. Not only does it take influences from over the nearby borders with Switzerland and Austria, but it has been a popular destination for British skiers for decades – particularly beginners.

Livigno's ski school has one of the best reputations in Italy. Its instructors are renowned for their English language skills, and are building a name for themselves teaching snowboarding too. The other attraction for beginners is one of the largest arrays of nursery slopes available anywhere in the Alps, plus those all-important progression runs – the first blues you try after escaping the bunny slopes.

The reason for the choice of nursery slopes is the unique layout of Livigno: the village threads along the base of a long valley, with ski slopes on either side. And with the valley running north-south, none of those slopes are either in cold shadow or

snow-melting sun all day.

However, this is not only a beginner's resort – more than half of the 110km of pistes are red, 20 per cent are black and there is some interesting off-piste adventure to be had. In addition, Snowpark Livigno has for some years attracted both top riders and first-timers at going for some air – indeed last season it hosted a Rookies' Festival, a year after a World Cup half-pipe event.

Madesimo, a popular ski destination for Brits which fell somewhat out of favour, is now attracting tour operators and holidaymakers back. Along with Campodolcino, at the mouth of the valley, it forms the Valschiavenna ski area, with 60km of pistes. The addition of a state-of-the-art gondola lift in 2006 to replace an old cable car (as well as the Sky Express funicular connecting the ski area to Campodolcino) dramatically increased uplift, and was a vast improvement.

As was the dismantling of part of the giant Torre hotel which somewhat dominated the resort. Now Madesimo has a much more balanced look to it and you can appreciate the pretty village

### THE REGION BOASTS BIG SKI CENTRES AND LITTLE GEMS THAT THE LOCALS THINK THEY HAVE TO THEMSELVES

centre, with its lovely church and narrow, winding streets.

Madesimo is a popular weekend getaway for the Milanese: they enjoy its beautiful, remote setting atop a switchback mountain road with lovely views, and its selection of restaurants of high enough quality to please even the demanding palates from the Lombardy capital. There is skiing to suit all tastes too.

The world renowned Canalone run is a black-run level off-piste itinerary that is within the abilities of most good intermediates. It barrels down from the highest

point, Rizzo Groppera, at 2,950m, below a spectacular ridge.

A more full-on off-piste experience awaits elsewhere, with the runs down to Fraciscio and Campodolcino. But there is also plenty for the intermediate to enjoy, particularly in the Val di Lei, on the far side of the ski area, and which also boasts the most remote feeling in the resort.

Another well-developed snowsports area is Adamello Ski, which includes the resorts of Passo Tonale, Pontedilegno, Temù and Vezza d'Oglio. Here, you can enjoy skiing at a snowsure altitude of 3,000 metres, on the glacier.

#### FASTEST TO THE SLOPES

Bergamo's Orio al Serio airport, sometimes known as Milan Bergamo, is not only a short hop from Milan itself, but grants access to Lombardy's skiing much more quickly than Milan's other airports. It's become the smart skier's airport of choice.

One of the resorts that has become a worthwhile short-break destination is Aprica. With 50km of pistes, which from the start of the season will all be linked, a snowpark and a lot of unpisted terrain, there is potential for all different levels of skier or rider.

There is also a dedicated cross-country mountain, plus an ecology centre, from which you can take guided nature walks – it's what you might call a holistic winter resort. Accommodation is available at every level, from simple alberghi and apartments to the extremely stylish Hotel Serenella, which wouldn't look out of place in Milan's Quadrilatero d'Oro fashion district.

Just 50km from Bergamo is Montecampione, which must qualify as one of the easiest ski resorts in the world to reach (put it this way: if you live south of Liverpool, you could be on the slopes there in less time than it takes to get to Birmingham).

The purpose-built, ski-in-ski-out resort lies on a terrace above the beautiful spa town of Boario Terme, which is an alternative base at the top of Lake Iseo (the

central of the three great Italian lakes). With two ski schools, it's a good place to make your first forays on skis; and if more experienced skiers exhaust the possibilities of the 80km of pistes and local off-piste routes, heliskiing operates from here.

Other winter activities include ice climbing on a spectacular frozen waterfall and moonlit (or torchlit) snowshoeing adventures by night. Less typically, nearby Valle Camonica has an indoor go-kart track – perfect for budding Lewis Hamiltons to take some revenge in the land of Ferrari.

The Bremboski area is another undiscovered gem near Bergamo. Between its three stations – San Simone and the linked Foppolo and Carona, it has almost 100km of pistes to offer, on hills with a good snow record.

San Simone and Foppolo are both purpose-built resorts, with all the services you'd expect, but there is a very pretty old village below Foppolo, where Lombard culture is very much to the forefront. As well as good value skiing, these resorts offer extensive cross-country and all have ice rinks.

Italian grandmothers like to tell boisterous children to calm down by saying "Piano, piano". But Lake Como is surrounded by several Piani where "gently, gently" isn't an instruction you'll want to resort to all that often.

The three small ski areas – Piani di Bobbio, Piani di Artavaggio and Piani di Erna – all share a lift ticket and are worth a quick visit, perhaps in conjunction with a springtime city break in Milan or on the lake. Bobbio has 20km of pistes set in a wide open bowl, which is a veritable playground after a snowfall. Artavaggio has 15km and Erna 8km.

Of course, winter sports are not only about downhill skiing or snowboarding. The drive towards eco-tourism and fitness has resulted in a growth in popularity of cross-country skiing – the sport where you don't only rely on gravity to get you moving.

The province of Varese,

extremely handy for Milan Malpensa airport (because that's where it is!), in the foothills of the Alps, has a number of noted Nordic ski centres, notably Cunardo, Brinzio and Sci Nordica Varese. Each of them serves prepared pistes (for both methods, "freestyle" and "classic" – the latter being the one with grooved tracks in the snow) on courses up to 10km long.

Some of those pistes are floodlit for night skiing; and they have clubhouses with changing facilities, cafes, equipment hire and, for the uninitiated into this tough but rewarding sport, instructors. Varese also has a top indoor ice rink (and a pretty handy ice hockey team to occupy it).

Again, you can hire equipment and take lessons, whether you favour the grace and technicalities of figure skating, or the grace, technicalities and brute force of hockey. In Lombardy, the possibilities are endless.

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Taking off: snowboarders are as well catered for as skiers on the slopes of Bormio, which has an exciting terrain park

# TEST THE WATERS

REPORT BY **MANDY POTTER**

LOMBARDY'S THERMAL SPAS HAVE BEEN CELEBRATED FOR THEIR CURATIVE POWERS SINCE ROMAN TIMES, AND STILL MAKE PERFECT PLACES FOR TOTAL RELAXATION

**M**ountainous, wooded and scattered with lakes – the varied landscapes of the Lombardy region hint at what lies beneath. For thousands of years, its provinces' mineral-heavy waters have been reputed to help alleviate a host of ailments, from arthritis to asthma. And, even if the only thing wrong with you is a little bit of niggling stress, Lombardy will soothe and calm you until you feel 100 per cent well again. You need only take one breath of some of Europe's cleanest air to realise that a few days here will do you the world of good.

There are 11 thermal resorts in the region, spread across the provinces of Bergamo, Brescia, Pavia and Sondrio. All have the collective aim of improving every visitor's health, through tailor-made programmes that mix the local water's healing properties with the chance to spend time enjoying the fresh air and spectacular landscape. Combine a tour of the springs with a stay in one of the Lombardy's finest spa hotels for the ultimate stress-relieving break.

One of the best places to base yourself is the photogenic town of Sirmione, on the shores of Lake Garda. Heady with oleander and palm, and tightly packed with laurel and olive trees. Its first modern thermal resort opened back in 1921 at the Grand Hotel Terme, before the discovery of two new springs.

A trip to Sirmione is like a voyage into another age of travel – the town's three grand hotels at the edge of Lake Garda are straight out of

an Agatha Christie novel, with canopied windows and rows of parasols looking out to the water. Spa treatments, however, are right up to date and use the latest products. Rising up from 2,500 metres below sea level, the waters of the local springs take about 20 years to reach the earth's surface, where they bubble over at 69 degrees celsius.

But, treating yourself at Sirmione and not taking advantage of the other spa towns across the region, is a little like sitting down to a meal and only eating the vegetables – there are a host of other places to relax and rejuvenate across Lombardy. Read on to discover which are best for you...

#### IN BERGAMO...

A brief hop from Bergamo airport, the city of Trescore Balneario hides in a lush sea of rolling hills scattered with medieval castles. It's a beautiful place, with ancient buildings full of surprising finds (don't miss Lorenzo Lotto's frescoes, which decorate the Santa Barbara Church and date from 1524). People have been taking advantage of the healing waters here since Roman times, and it's been a spa resort since the 15th century.

Trescore now has mud baths and warm mineral pools that can help ease respiratory and skin conditions. Combine a relaxing sojourn here with trips to nearby lakes Iseo and Endine.

#### IN BRESCIA...

The delights of a mountain climate are in full evidence in Angolo Terme, where pine-heavy woods and squeaky clean air combine at the base of the Alps. Its spa is hidden away in a massive 30,000 square metres of parkland, which you can navigate on numerous hiking trails.

You might come across one of the two onsite springs – San

Silvestro and Fonte Nuova, both of which pump out water laden with sulphur and bicarbonate.

There's a beauty salon here, and plenty to keep even the most easily distracted souls occupied, with mini-golf, tennis and thermal swimming pools. There are a huge array of treatments to choose from too – you can detox and destress in the thermal baths, soothe irritated skin with ozone pools, or blitz cellulite and unwanted fat with jet massage.

Nearby, down in the Oglio River plane and surrounded by towering mountains, Boario Terme has been tending to

*THERE ARE A HOST OF PLACES TO RELAX AND REJUVENATE ALL ACROSS LOMBARDY*

visitors since the 1700s. They come to take advantage of the spring water that still bubbles up at several points in the parkland – four different mineral-rich waters can help everything from indigestion to gout.

Now, the spa has added specialist clinics for dermatology and rheumatology, and a 7,000-hectare forest of African and American trees has been cultivated around it. Choose from a bewildering number of natural beauty therapies in the spa and return home a new (and much healthier) person. If you can bear to tear



BACINICCHI/BOSSANO

a great place to lose a few hours and enjoy the Alpine sunshine, or, if you're feeling brave, you can explore the nearby mountains, with treks up to 3,000 metres.

#### IN PAVIA...

Two kilometres from the village of Miradolo, at the point where three rivers converge, is one of the largest spa parks in the Lombardy, where swimming and hydrotherapy pools and a huge variety of other activities make for the perfect family day out. There's even a classic car museum in the grounds.

Take a picnic and enjoy the spa's setting right at the bottom of the tumbling terraced vineyards of the Bannine Hills. The water here is particularly good to drink, and mud baths and hydro massages are also specialities.

Nearby Rivanazzano is an entirely different proposition, bordering the oldest town in the region. The waters here have been used for 2,000 years and there's a serious spa where you can have regimes tailor-made especially for you, whether you have health problems or just want to get away from it all.

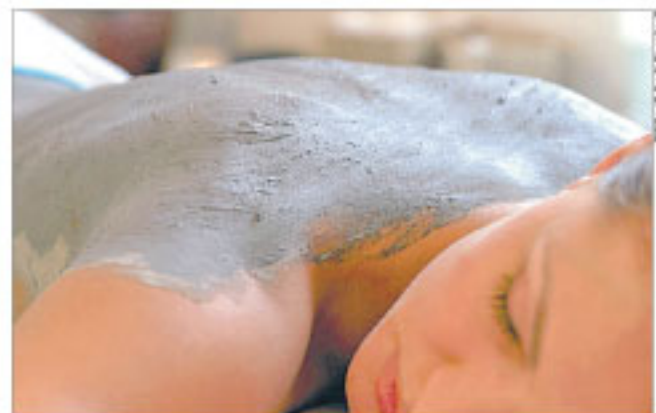
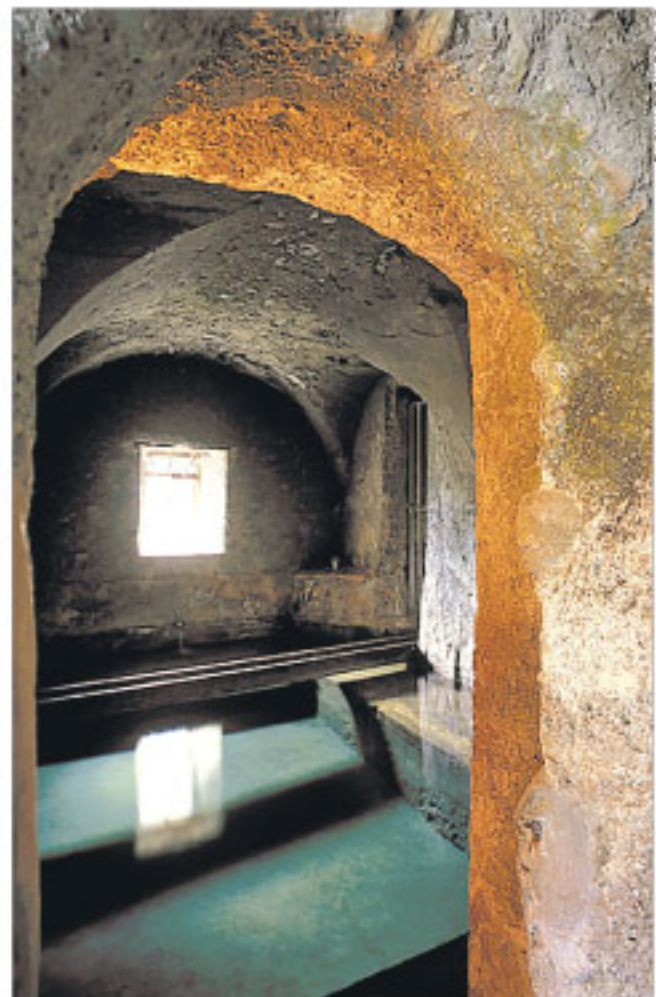
The waters of Salice Terme have also been used since

yourself away from all that serious relaxation, the area around Boario is recognised by UNESCO as an important site for prehistoric art, and you'll find more than 10,000 works dating back to 5000BC in the Simoni-Crape-Luine Park, just above the spa.

Meanwhile in Franciacorta-Ome, high in the hills above Brescia city, springs pump mineral-heavy waters into the Medieval town of Ome. Wandering its meandering lanes or exploring the many vineyards just outside town is a little like

therapy in itself, but serious spa business takes place nearby, at the Franciacorta spa. Here you can book in for a facial or massage, use the thermal waters, or enjoy the Turkish and hay baths.

The last spa in Brescia is just outside the tiny village of Val Sabbia, near Lake Garda and lost in pine woods and flower-heavy gardens. Because of its beautiful location, it's one of the most relaxing spas in the region, and a popular place for weddings and special events. Its 1,500 metre-long walking trail is



Roman times, but it wasn't until the 1920s that this spa resort became a place for the "it crowd" to go and recuperate. Now, there's a faded charm to the old resort (the main villa was built in 1902) that makes it easy to imagine the hustle and bustle of that era, when intellectuals such as the futurist pioneer Marinetti frequently breezed into town.

These days, you might be lucky enough to spot a football team – Juventus, Inter-Milan and Torino send players here for thermal treatments when they're injured. Make like a footballer's wife and pamper yourself rotten.

#### IN SONDRIO...

Last, but by no means least, Bormio is one of the most important thermal resorts in the Alps. Bordering the soaring landscapes of the Stelvio National Park, it's a good place to see snow throughout the year. You can even take to the slopes in midsummer in nearby Tonale.

There are signs of settlement as far back as the Bronze Age; archaeological finds have shown it was an industrial centre for the Etruscans; and by the time of the Roman Empire, Aquae

Burmiacae was a thriving spa town. There are nine springs here, mentioned by Pliny in his *Natural Histories* and still just as popular today. There are three main thermal baths.

The Bagni Vecchi has what might just be the world's first "infinity pool" – an outdoor swimming pool contained by a wall, so you can look from the water across to the mountains.

The Bagni Nuovi are set in the grounds of the elegant hotel of the same name. And the Terme di Bormio are a recently renovated architectural treat, and come complete with water slide and children's area. At these new Bormio baths, completed three years ago, you can bath in a warm open-air pool as snow falls around you, hike the wellbeing paths and warm up in the saunas. It's also has Turkish baths, a beauty centre and shiatsu massage.

Or, you can just swim in the Quattro Stagioni mineral pool and enjoy the spectacular view downwards into a valley white with fresh snow.

Indeed, if you make Bormio your base, you can also enjoy a whole range of exercise during you stay – from tennis and golf to skiing and fishing. Who could ask for anything more?

## EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW

### THE TREATMENTS

If you're a novice, the range of treatments on offer in a thermal spa can be utterly confusing. Here's our guide to what's what

#### Water-drinking therapy

Local mineral water is drunk in precise measures at precise times, and at specially tailored temperatures, to help detox the body and to aid digestion.

If water is transported far from the spring where it was bottled, many of the health-improving benefits are said to fade, so it's always better to "take the waters" close to where they are found. If you undergo this therapy at a spa, staff can help devise a complementary diet plan too.

#### Inhalation therapy

This helps minerals from the water to permeate various parts of the body, including the lungs and the ears, and this treatment is reputed to be good for illnesses such as bronchitis, sinusitis and emphysema.

Depending on the patient, the therapist will ask them to inhale the water in steam form or use an aerosol to take the minerals – or just to spend time in a room pumped full of health-improving vapours.

#### Bath therapy

A long soak in warm, mineral water-filled pools is blissfully relaxing and can aid stress-related illnesses and skin problems. In many spas, this type of treatment is combined with hydromassage.

#### Hydromassage

The power of water jets and ozone are combined to aid lymphatic drainage and soothe away troublesome orange peel. This treatment normally takes place in warm, comfortable mineral pools.

#### Mud bath

Mud soaks up minerals from the water and retains heat, making it an excellent material for wraps and compresses (and an extremely enjoyable way to get messy).

Mud is spread all over the patient, followed by warming sheets and blankets, and you stay cocooned in the mixture until it has taken effect. Mud baths are reputed to help shift unwanted weight and break down fat.

Premier pampering: clockwise from far left, outdoor plunge pools at Bagni Nuovi in Bormio; the new wellness centre at Terme di Sirmione on the shores of Lake Garda; a place to relax at Bagni Vecchi in Bormio; and a skin-nourishing mud treatment at Terme di Sirmione

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# INDULGE YOUR APPETITE

REPORT BY **CAROLINE BROMHAM** AND **JILL DORSEY**

WHETHER IT'S FRESH FISH, CHEESE, WINE OR EVEN SPECIALITY MUSTARD, YOU'LL FIND TASTES TO TANTALISE THROUGHOUT THE LOMBARDY REGION

**F**rom the sophisticated dishes of Milan's fashion-conscious residents to rustic alpine fare in the region's mountains and foothills, Lombardy's cuisine is as rich and varied as its spectacular landscape. Every province proudly boasts its own speciality: Como with its fish-based recipes inspired by the area's dazzling lakes; Sondrio with its terrace-grown grapes (which produce excellent wines); Cremona with its pungent mustard; Bergamo with its tangy Taleggio cheese. While each has its own distinctive flavour, they all share a passion for good food. From family-run trattorie tucked away in the medieval core of cobbled towns such as Bergamo to al fresco lakeside eateries and cosy mountain restaurants, you're never far from a delicious meal in Lombardy. In fact, the hard part is knowing where to begin your gastronomic adventure. For a tantalising taste of Italy's

most delicious region, read on...

**SONDRIO: VINEYARDS AND VALLEYS**  
Lombardy's rugged northern province, Sondrio, might seem like an unlikely place for growing grapes, but it's here that

wine-making has its ancient origins. Vines were cultivated even before Roman times by the region's earliest inhabitants – the Etruscans and the Ligurians. They clearly knew how to make a good drop: the area's wines even get honourable mentions from Latin authors such as Pliny and Virgil.

These days, Valtellina – Sondrio's largest valley – is where you'll spot steep terraces carved from the rocky hillsides. Cloaked in vines clinging to the slopes, they supply some of Lombardy's most delicious wines: rich, warming reds such as velvety Valtellina Superiore or Sforzato di Valtellina, packed with ripe fruit flavours. They're the perfect tipple with which to contemplate the wildly majestic scenery in a region described by Leonardo Da Vinci as "A valley surrounded by tall and terrible mountains, which makes really powerful wines."

What to eat to soak up such fine wines? Try intensely flavoured bresaola (cured beef), violino (smoked goat prosciutto), or warming pizzoccheri, a hearty dish of buckwheat noodles, cabbage, garlic and leeks glued together with melted cheese.

Taragna polenta is another waist-buster – simmered in milk, butter and cheese – and don't leave without tasting a frittir or two. The best are sciatt, cheesy fried buckwheat balls that are deliciously moreish.

**COMO: THE LAKE DISTRICT**  
George Clooney and his co-stars must have had a tough time keeping trim for Ocean's 12, filmed on location at Lake Como. While the lake and surrounding province are the stuff of travel brochures – all



Toast of Pavia: zuppa pavese; below left, fruit mustard from Cremona

glassy waters reflecting grand palazzi, and cobbled towns with postcard-perfect piazzas – the food in this famous province is just as worthy of A-list attention.

As you might expect, the lakes dotted around the region mean plenty of fresh fish. Grilled trout and rock bass are simple, tasty staples, but risotto with perch is a real treat – a bed of thick, creamy risotto infused with sage and butter, topped with hot, crispy perch fillet. Tiny alborelle are fried and eaten whole, while agoni (similar to sardines) are served with bay leaves. For more adventurous tastebuds, there's sun-dried, salted eel.

**LECCO: A BREATH OF FRESH AIR**

When stressed-out Milanese want to escape the city, they drive North to Lecco for the weekend. Like Como, its famous lake-scattered neighbour, Lecco also

uses plenty of fresh fish in its cooking. The fjord-like Eastern end of Lake Como juts into Lecco, with sleepy villages tucked along the shorelines beneath craggy peaks. It's here that you'll find fish dishes such as lavarello in carpione (marinated fish wrapped around diced vegetables) or bite-sized alborelle.

But beyond the lakes, towering peaks means lots of hearty, meat-based mountain fare, too – rabbit with buttery polenta, brasato (braised) beef, spezzatino (tender morsels of veal) with porcini mushrooms, and pork loin laced with pancetta. Round off a meal with full-bodied cheeses from the Valassina valley, famous for its creamy caprino.

**BRESCIA: FIZZING WITH FLAVOURS**

The best fizz in Italy? You'll find it in Franciacorta, Brescia's hilly wine-producing district. Pop open

a bottle of Franciacorta spumante and you'll understand why Italians talk about the area with such reverence. It's a fragrant, gently sparkling wine with subtle hints of fruits and spices. It's a delicate, easy-drinking wine – and if you over-indulge, you may want to try Brescia's other speciality the next day. Casonsei are giant ravioli stuffed with parmesan cheese, spinach and eggs: the ideal comfort food.

**BERGAMO: LOMBARDY'S CHEESE CAPITAL**

When Antonio Carluccio needs to stock up on cheese for his restaurants, he hops on a plane to Bergamo, the cobbled capital of the province from which it takes its name. Dodge Vespas in the narrow streets and you'll be rewarded with family-run food shops selling top-notch regional fare, including some of Italy's finest (and smelliest) cheeses. Tastiest of them all is

FROM FAMILY-RUN TRATTORIE TO LAKESIDE EATERIES, YOU'RE NEVER FAR FROM A DELICIOUS MEAL IN LOMBARDY



Local delicacies: risotto alla Milanese; left, tending the vineyards in Sondrio

Taleggio, ripened in caves in the nearby Taleggio valley to give it its distinctive tang. Then there's Formai de Mut (literally, "mountain cheese") from the Brembara valley, and Stracchino Bronzone, a soft cheese from the southern Sebino area. Make sure your bag is well-sealed before flying home with your pungent haul. And don't leave without a home-cooked meal at one of the town's traditional trattorie, where you can gorge yourself on cheesy specialities: Taleggio risotto and polenta taragna con funghi (polenta with butter, mushrooms, and, of course, lots of cheese).

#### VARESE: OFF-THE-BEATEN-TRACK TREATS

Tucked away in Lombardy's north-western corner, Varese lies in the green foothills of the Alps. It

might have escaped the tourist radar, but in-the-know Italians come here in search of brutti e buoni (literally, "ugly and tasty"), melt-in-the-mouth pastries made from sweet almonds, hazelnuts, vanilla and sugar. For the real deal, you'll need to visit Gavirate, a small town on the shores of Lake Varese where Costantino Veniani first invented the tasty morsels back in 1878. The town's sweetshops still make them by hand according to a closely guarded recipe. Famous sweet-toothed fans include Giuseppe Verdi, who used to make special detours to get his fix here.

#### MILAN: A FOOD RENAISSANCE

Milan's chic young things recently had a culinary change of heart. After a long spell of following the

latest food fads (you couldn't move for North African restaurants a few years ago), they've returned to their roots, and typical Milanese dishes are now the order of the day.

What does that mean? It means risotto alla Milanese: a creamy rice made with beef broth and saffron. It means veal tonne: veal cutlets covered in mayonnaise, tuna, anchovy and caper sauce. And it means gorgonzola cheese, gooey mascarpone and salamis as thick as your thigh. (Traditional Milanese fare is not for dieters!)

However, you can go some way to aiding digestion by eating as the Milanese do: over four or five hours. Start with a negroni – a rocket-fuel aperitif of bitter Campari, gin and red Martini over ice. Snacks and a couple of Negronis should see off at least one hour. Then, dinner must be eaten as if it's your last – slowly and respectfully. Dessert – usually pastries, if not panettone – then comes about an hour after you've finished off the food (and a few bottles of pinot bianco). Enjoy.

#### PAVIA: LIFE IN THE SLOW LANE

Just a short spin south of Milan is Pavia, Lombardy's most southerly province, where the pace of life seems snail-like in comparison to the frenetic capital. Yet the main city, also called Pavia, is a charming university town, so the restaurants are abuzz through term time with young diners and vociferous debate.

In spring, order frog – rarely eaten in any other part of Italy – served in a stew with light polenta. In summer, plump for crayfish pasta with a sparkling pinot grigio, and when winter closes in, inhale a bottle of Buttafuoco red wine ("fire thrower") and devour the region's most famous dish – zuppa alla Pavese, a hot broth

topped with a floating egg.

There's a story behind this unusual zuppa: during the torrid battle of Pavia between the French and the Spanish, the French king Francis I stopped in a village to ask for his last meal before surrendering. The villagers, threw everything they could think of into normal minestrone – toasted bread, grana cheese, eggs, and butter. The king was smitten. Half a millennium later, the Pavese still can't get enough.

#### LODI: THE DAIRY QUEEN OF LOMBARDY

Britain's chattering classes have done much to bring Italy's food to the fore. Such cooks want to be aware of the next big thing, and when it comes to cheese, it's all happening in Lodi. Parmigiano Reggiano and Grana Padano are big in Britain, but it's Granone Lodigiano that Italian chefs prefer. It's more piquant than other hard cow's cheeses – but more expensive by far.

Once you've bought your chunk at any Lodi market, get back to the villa and cook up a cassouela, a slow-cooked casserole of pork and cabbage. Or, if eating cassouela at a restaurant, order a bottle of San Colombano red wine – the only tipple robust enough to cope with that fabulous pungency.

#### CREMONA: CUISINE WITH A KICK

If Varese is Lombardy's pastry capital, and Lodi one of its cheese hubs, Cremona is the mustard centre. Here, mustard is transparent and sold with fruit in the jar to show off its translucence, while adding a fuller flavour. The resulting chutney is called Mostarda di Cremona Frutta Mista, which has a real kick, and is served with cold meats, cuts of ham and cheese.

If you can get hold of stracchino con mostarda on your

travels through Cremona, do so. It's a spicy cheese made with mustard oil – and proving rarer to find these days. If you fall for the taste, book a table at Manah ([www.manah.it](http://www.manah.it)), a chic eatery just outside Cremona with a wine list of biblical proportions. Go for a dry white with any mostarda dish; the staff will guide you.

#### MANTOVA: BUCOLIC IDYLL

Mantova (or Mantua as we might know it from Romeo and Juliet – the place where Romeo was exiled) is the purist's foodie destination.

This stunning corner of Lombardy countryside throws up unrivalled juicy pears, deep red grapes, apples, pumpkins, honey and some fantastic beef. But it's the salami that Mantova is best known for – the meat is strawberry-red in colour and soft in texture, and the garlic, black pepper and (sometimes) tongue that is added, makes the taste unique. Thankfully, there are some excellent Mantovan wines to complete your meat platter; the Garda Colli Montovani Rosso is just perfect.

#### MONZA AND BRIANZA: LOMBARDY'S MELTING POT

This is Lombardy's newest province, and one of its most visited thanks to the astonishingly well-preserved ancient centre – as well as its famous park, where the Formula One race takes place. Thus, Monza and Brianza's menus are heavily influenced by those other regions which hem them in: the creamy risottos of Milan; the fresh lake fish of Como; venison from Varese; and punchy red wines. Ristorante Saint Georges Premier in the park is probably the city's most famous restaurant; hearty dishes served in various grand quarters beside roaring fireplaces and beneath austere oil paintings, make this a great winter hideout.



Pungent: The world-famous gorgonzola cheese is made throughout Lombardy

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# TREATS FOR CHRISTMAS

REPORT BY DENNIS MALONEY

LATE EACH YEAR THE STREETS OF LOMBARDY ARE FILLED WITH FESTIVE BUSTLE, WITH GOODS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD ON OFFER AND DELICIOUS FOODS TO SAVOUR

**T**hink about shopping in Lombardy it's often of Milan and the Golden Square, an enclave of Italian finery, looping Via Monte Napoleone, Via della Spiga and Via Sant'Andrea. The roll call of Ferragamo, Valentino, Prada Uomo, Versace, Dolce & Gabbana, Missoni and Bottega Veneta is an impressive register of the school of high fashion. There's also the Armani-infested Via Manzoni where shoppers can wear, eat, drink, sleep and breathe Giorgio's wares. However, there is a time of year where the glitter and glitz of Milano is temporarily outshone – throughout the region.

Throughout Italy, Christmas festivities start early and in earnest. From November, up to the official start of the celebrations on the Immacolata on December 8 and through to the Epiphany on January 6, the markets of Lombardy are transformed with the scent of spiced vin brulé – mulled wine – hanging in the air, endless presepi or nativity scenes on most stalls and the accompaniment of the bagpipes of the Northern variation of the Roman Zampognari musicians, dressed as shepherds. Without the heavy tourism-based Christmas attractions of Rome, or the log-cabin and sleigh-ride overdrive of Trento, Lombardy offers enough magic and sparkle to have Scrooge humming the odd carol. The feast of Bej O Bej, Milan's patron saint, Sant'Ambrogio kicks off Christmas events in the city from December 7. This also sees the start of the opera season and is also the middle of La Triennale di Milano – an arts and culture festival that takes place every three years from October until mid-January. The annual Christmas market is a

big event in the Milanese calendar, commanding Piazza Sant'Ambrogio and representative of most markets in the region with stalls with local, national and international gifts, decorations, cakes and sweets. Potter around with a sweet crepe and bag the inevitable Panettone, which was invented here in Milan. The daily morning food market on Piazza Wagner is a good stop off, as is antique toy shopping on the third Saturday on Via Fiori Chiari. Most of Milan's markets continue to trade throughout the Christmas period, with some more festive than others.

Heading North out of Milan up to Monza provides an excellent opportunity to shop for the motoring enthusiast. It's the home of the Autodromo nazionale di Monza – the site of the Italian Grand Prix, and souvenirs are available all year round.

For those more interested in slightly more conventional gifts, Bergamo on Via Zucchi offers handmade and luxury goods, from cigar boxes to custom-made knives, leather stationery and homewares. The sweeter toothed are well catered for at Il Dolce Cortile on Via Italia, with hand-crafted chocolates, spicy exotic fruits and experimental combinations of flavours. La Rinascente offers a haven for those more interested in fashion-conscious retail therapy, housed in the grand Monza Largo Mazzini, this branch of one of Italy's best known high-end

department stores offers both big names and independent men's and women's designers along with accessories and beauty brands.

Leave the race track behind and head further north up to Lake Como and one of the larger Christmas markets in the region. From November seemingly the whole town's streets and squares become a global market. There are plenty of local goods in this famously pretty town with its mesmerising lakeside setting – its silks are the stuff of legend, for around 80 per cent of Europe's silk is produced here. But the dedicated market hunter can find antiques, clothes, toys and souvenirs from all over the world.

Foodies may be drawn to the organic market on the second Saturday on Via Ballarini, or the weekday general food market on Via Mentana. Heading down to Lecco, you're greeted with an unmistakable scent – chocolate. Icam is based here, one of the largest organic chocolate producers in the world producing a number of household brands including Green and Black's. The factory outlet sells a huge range, by the kilo or by the bar. This year Icam have released a range of bars and mouthfuls for football lovers – if you're a fan of Juventus, AC Milan or Inter Milan, you'll be happy. Christmas sees an additional range of seasonal specialities. Just follow your nose. For something slightly more rustic and traditional that you won't eat on the way home, try the antiques markets on Piazza XX Settembre or Lungo lago Battisti.

Further north toward Austria and to the Alps and Sondrio, there are many markets in the region but for a particularly warm fuzzy feel that belies the snow, there's a full programme of Christmas events in Livigno.

Doubled with a Christmas hut-making and snow-moulding contest, the Livigno Christmas market runs from the end of November to Christmas Eve, complete with Santa Claus. Speciality food and drink from candle and fairy-lit



stalls on Via Fontana create a picture-postcard scene.

There's also an ice sculpture exhibition in early December and the La Sgambada cross-country ski marathon. For the more energetic, visitors can combine shopping with free skiing in conjunction with participating hotels. Other shopping in Livigno is very compact with sports, cycling and skiwear, jewellery, watches, perfumes and duty-free goods. For the souvenir hunter, there's one stop shopping at Al Mastro Geppetto on Via Rin.

Going back via Milan and heading south east to Cremona, home of Stradivari and his violins, this small city on the left bank of the Po has another claim to

fame. Torrone – a Christmas nougat made from honey, almonds and egg whites – has its own festival in Cremona in late November, with some 80 stalls selling it in all shapes and forms. Another staple to the Christmas markets here is Mostarda di Cremona, whole fruits in a spicy mustard conserve. These and locally produced cheeses and oils can be bought from the Wednesday morning food market on Piazza Stradivari, which also holds a food and drink market over the weekends.

The city is undeniably proud of its musical heritage, especially in Baroque and Renaissance style, and there are many workshops and music stores with violins

being a particular draw – Cremona has the IPALL, a violin-making school. One of the more notable shops is the Marcello Villa e Vittorio Villa on Via S. Giuseppe: a workshop in a 16th-century building with tryout room, taking you back to the Renaissance.

West from Cremona, Pavia holds a two-day Christmas market of its own. This market is more reminiscent of traditional Austrian markets but with Italian wares. Stalls are wooden huts selling handmade nativity scenes and Christmas cribs alongside local takes on sausages and schnitzel, as well as Porchetta, the traditional roast pork sandwich. It's pretty much a must-do for its vin brulé, which is deceptively



Designer heaven: Milan is a perfect place to shop for Italy's most famous brands. Below, seasonal market treats and a violin maker in Cremona



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alcoholic, stronger than mulled wine, which may loosen the purse strings. Piazza della Vittoria also holds a furniture and book market on the first Sunday.

If flying in or out of Milan via Malpensa Airport it's well worth a stop in or around Varese. The lake district of the region, it takes on a serene beauty come winter and is perhaps best known for its paesi dipinti, painted artisan villages with small shops and curiosities. Varese itself is also very well known for shoes (the Varese brand start at around 100 euros upward), and footwear enthusiasts could happily wear down their heels in search of some new ones. The largest market can be found on

Piazza Kennedy with more than 200 stalls selling mainly food and clothes, and around the old town is a treasure trove of independent and bigger-brand outlets. A good route to take is from Corso Matteotti to Garibaldi Square.

Back into Milan, and there's just as much for the bargain hunter in the small shops off the Piazza del Duomo as there is for the couture obsessive in the Golden Square. There are also the flea markets in San Donato and Naviglio Grande and the countless factory outlets around the outskirts of the city, but for those searching for a more fairytale-style shopping break, the Christmas market in Milan

and indeed those throughout Lombardy, whilst admittedly not as grand scale as Germany, Switzerland or Austria, exude a charm and a love of the season that is very warm and personal. The fact is, that from November,

if you find a town or city within Lombardy, from Bergamo to Vigevano, chances are you'll find a Christmas market. While not everyone may be a fan of the Christmas cribs, antiques, candles and decorations that are synonymous with the history and culture of the region, the added bonus of local confectionery, meats, cheeses, wines and oils will ensure nobody is marching on an empty stomach. Or taking home an empty shopping bag.



## Win a weekend break for two in stylish Milan

Visit [telegraph.co.uk/lombardy](http://telegraph.co.uk/lombardy) to win flights to Italy's fashion capital and a two-night break in a luxury city hotel

Enter our exclusive online prize draw and you could win a fabulous break in Milan – staying in the chic Grand Visconti Palace hotel.

Just minutes from the city's historic centre, this luxurious four-star hotel is the ideal base from which to explore Lombardy's first city.

Its rooms are decorated and furnished in elegant Italian style, and facilities include a sizeable indoor swimming pool that overlooks the beautiful courtyard garden. There's

also a well-equipped health centre on site, and the fifth-floor restaurant serves fine Mediterranean cuisine with a modern twist.

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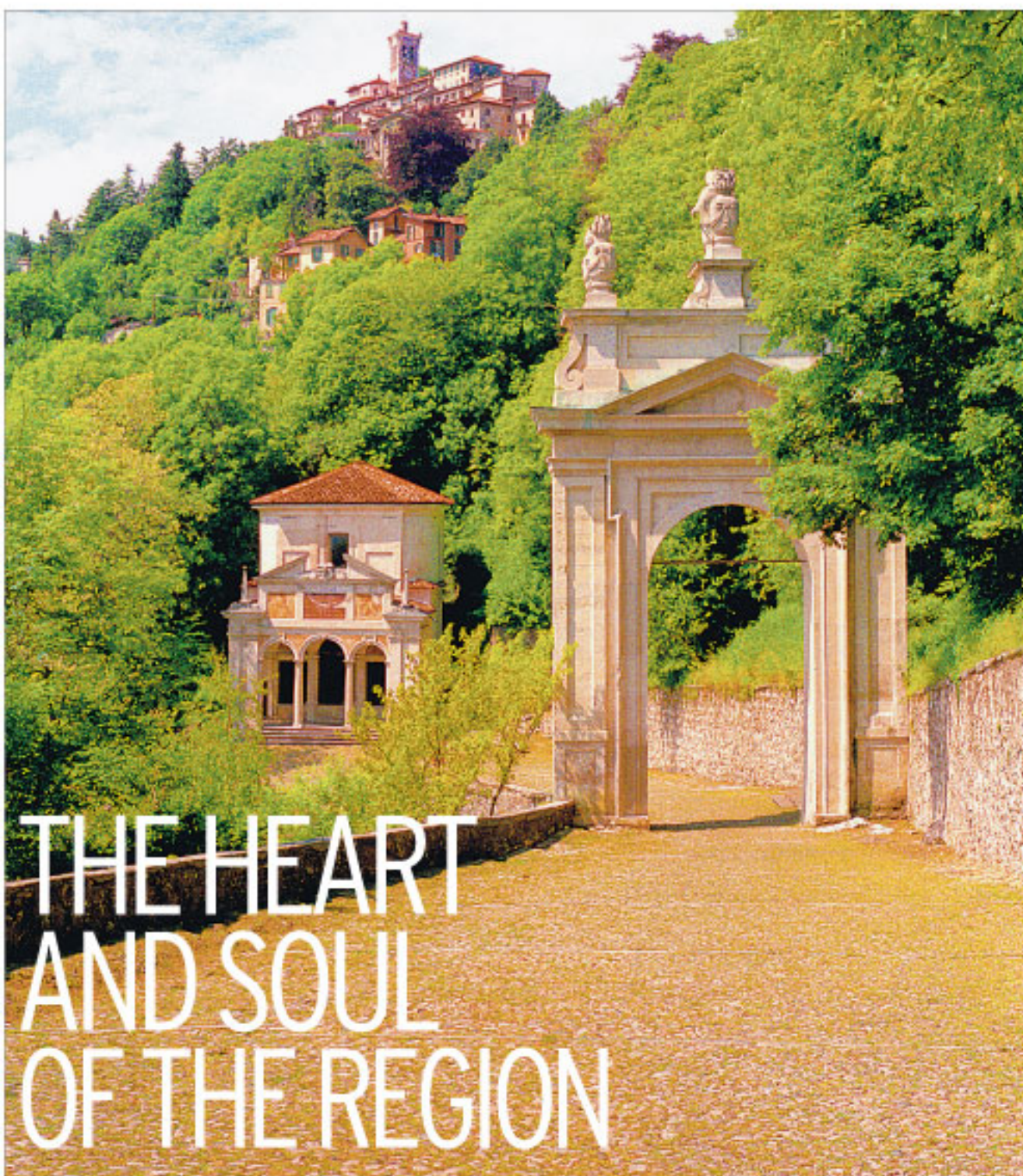
To enter the prize draw, just go online at [telegraph.co.uk/lombardy](http://telegraph.co.uk/lombardy) and leave your details. Entry is open until December 1, 2007.

**Alitalia**

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Terms and conditions: Prize is two return, economy class tickets from London Heathrow to Milan (Malpensa or Linate). Tickets must be used by 17 May 2008 and subject to availability in designated economy booking classes. Standard blackout periods apply (Christmas, Easter, bank holidays). Tickets are not exchangeable for cash or other alternatives. See the website for full terms and conditions.



# THE HEART AND SOUL OF THE REGION

REPORT BY **HENRY GRAY**

LOMBARDY HAS LONG INSPIRED PILGRIMS AS THEY TRAVELLED THROUGH, AND NOW A NEW BRAND OF TOURIST IS DISCOVERING ITS SPIRITUAL RICHES

**S**un, sand, sin and sex are losing their grip on modern tourism. More and more travellers are putting the "holy" back in "holiday".

It is a strange but heart-warming thing that in an increasingly secular age, one of the largest growth sectors in modern tourism is focused on destinations dedicated to religion. Consider two statistics. According to US government figures, Americans travelling overseas for "religious or pilgrimage" purposes increased from 499,000 in 2002 to 633,000 in 2005, a growth of 30 per cent. Religious tourism in Italy alone generates more than \$4.5 billion a year.

Lombardy, the northern Italian region around Milan, is playing a

huge part in this. Visitors are coming in ever larger numbers – not just because of its stunning mountains and lakes, the fertile plain of the Po, its enticing cuisine, its art treasures and the glories of Renaissance architecture. Nor yet is it the growing global prestige of Milan as a modern powerhouse of international fashion. The key ingredient is its astonishing religious and spiritual heritage. From Varese in the west to Mantua in the east, Lombardy appeals to the heart and the soul.

It has risen to the challenge with ease and élan – but this should not be surprising. It has been catering to the religious-minded tourist for more than 1,000 years.

Ever since Christianity emerged from persecution under the Romans and became the official religion of both the Western and the Eastern empires in the 4th century, pilgrims have been making their way from northern

Europe through Lombardy to the great religious centres of Rome and the Holy Land.

Known as the Lombard Way, it was described as the "Frankish Route" (because it crossed the Alps out of France) by St Willibald in 725. The name by which it is known today, the Via Francigena, was first documented in 876.

#### PATH OF THE PILGRIMS

By the high Middle Ages, Lombardy was established as a gateway to grace as penitents, both rich and poor, travelled to fulfil vows and seek divine favour.

Lombardy's track record of great hospitality for travellers shows an ancient tradition that continues unabated today. Pavia, one of the main stopping points on the Via Francigena, still provides physical comfort and spiritual support for the serious pilgrim or for what is now recognised as "religious tourism".

This is a growing phenomenon in which, whatever their personal religious convictions, visitors see more in churches, monasteries, convents and other holy places, much more than mere architecture or historical curiosity. There is a higher element to their appreciation, an awareness of greater horizons. When people have been visiting and praying in places for centuries, these spots can be perceived as imbued with spirituality. This is especially true of Lombardy.

Even with our modern attitudes, we find something in common with these ancient travellers and find ourselves – even those of us with little formal religious affiliation – somehow uplifted and marvellously connected across time. Faith and grace may be fiercely individual experiences, but this new breed of travellers find their visits to such places deeply enriching.



Sights to raise the spirits: Milan Cathedral, which has no fewer than 135 spires. Left, Sacro Monte of the Rosary in Varese, with its 14 chapels

Milan itself, the region's capital, may be a bustling modern city but it is uplifting to visit the very spot where the Emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan in 313, making Christianity the dominant religious force in Europe, one of the most fundamental social and spiritual shifts in human history. Here St Ambrose, one of the great fathers of the Church, lived and preached.

No one can fail to be uplifted by the white marble Duomo, one of the world's greatest cathedrals, an awe-inspiring Gothic masterpiece with 135 spires reaching up towards heaven. By contrast there is the simplicity of the Basilicas of San Simpliciano and Sant'Ambrogio, both founded by St Ambrose in the fourth century. And of course, there is the extraordinary experience of seeing the newly renovated Last Supper by da Vinci in the humble church of Santa Maria delle Grazie.

But spirituality need not be dominated by sheer grandeur. All over Lombardy are delightful villages and towns with a great deal to offer for contemplation.

#### TIME FOR CONTEMPLATION

To the east of the region, for example, you will find the treasure that is Mantova (also known as Mantua). It is in a glorious physical setting, surrounded on three sides by glistening lakes. Here is the birthplace of Virgil, not only one of Rome's greatest poets but the spiritual guide chosen by the immortal Dante for his *Inferno*.

The Rotonda di San Lorenzo is a haven of solace, evoking the Holy Land and reflections on Christ's last, awful journey and final resting place. The original Romanesque builders have carefully evoked the deep resonance of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, without a doubt a profound consolation for the footweary, soul-sore pilgrim of ancient times.

In Mantua, you easily become aware of the slow, inexorable passage of time and the spiritual aspirations of generations of pious builders. All around you are marvellously preserved historical monuments, but the imposing Duomo speaks directly to the heart with wonderfully blended architectural styles spanning centuries of devotion – Gothic, Romanesque, Neo-Classical...

Cultural tourists will be drawn to the 15th-century church of Sant'Andrea, with its classical façade. It houses the tomb of the great religious painter Mantegna but its crypt, even now a focus for Easter pilgrimages, held huge significance for our pilgrim forebears.

Here, under a simple arch, you will find two golden urns that,

according to legend, contained earth collected from under the cross by the Roman centurion who nailed Christ to it. The earth is said to have been transformed into blood when the soldier was martyred. No matter that the legend may strike us as rather unlikely – here, generations of the pious have prayed with an intensity that still resonates.

Faith, they say, can move mountains. Here in Lombardy, there are mountains that can move faith. In 2003 UNESCO declared nine "sacred mountains" in the lakelands of Lombardy and nearby Piedmont as World Heritage Sites. The Sacro Monte of the Blessed Virgin of Succour at Ossuccio, built in 1635 in the Como area, is both pretty and evocative. But it is the Sacro Monte of the Rosary at Varese that truly inspires.

Conceived in 1598 and built with the approval of Pope Pius V, it was erected on a site closely associated with St Ambrose. This landscaped mountain has 14 chapels dedicated to the mysteries of the rosary. Immensely powerful in its appeal to traditional Catholics, it also speaks powerfully across the denominations to invoke crucial stages in the life of Jesus.

Rising above a fascinating medieval village, pilgrims are invited to follow a 2km trail that rises more than 1,200ft (400 metres), punctuated by halts at which to contemplate, say, the Birth of Christ, the Presentation in the Temple, the Resurrection and the Ascension.

It is a monumental architectural complex that also provides solitude and calm. It also rewards the visitor with marvellous views. Varese has every reason to be tempted to the sin of pride.

Lombardy awaits you with a promise to reveal more than just its soul. It may help you to find your own.

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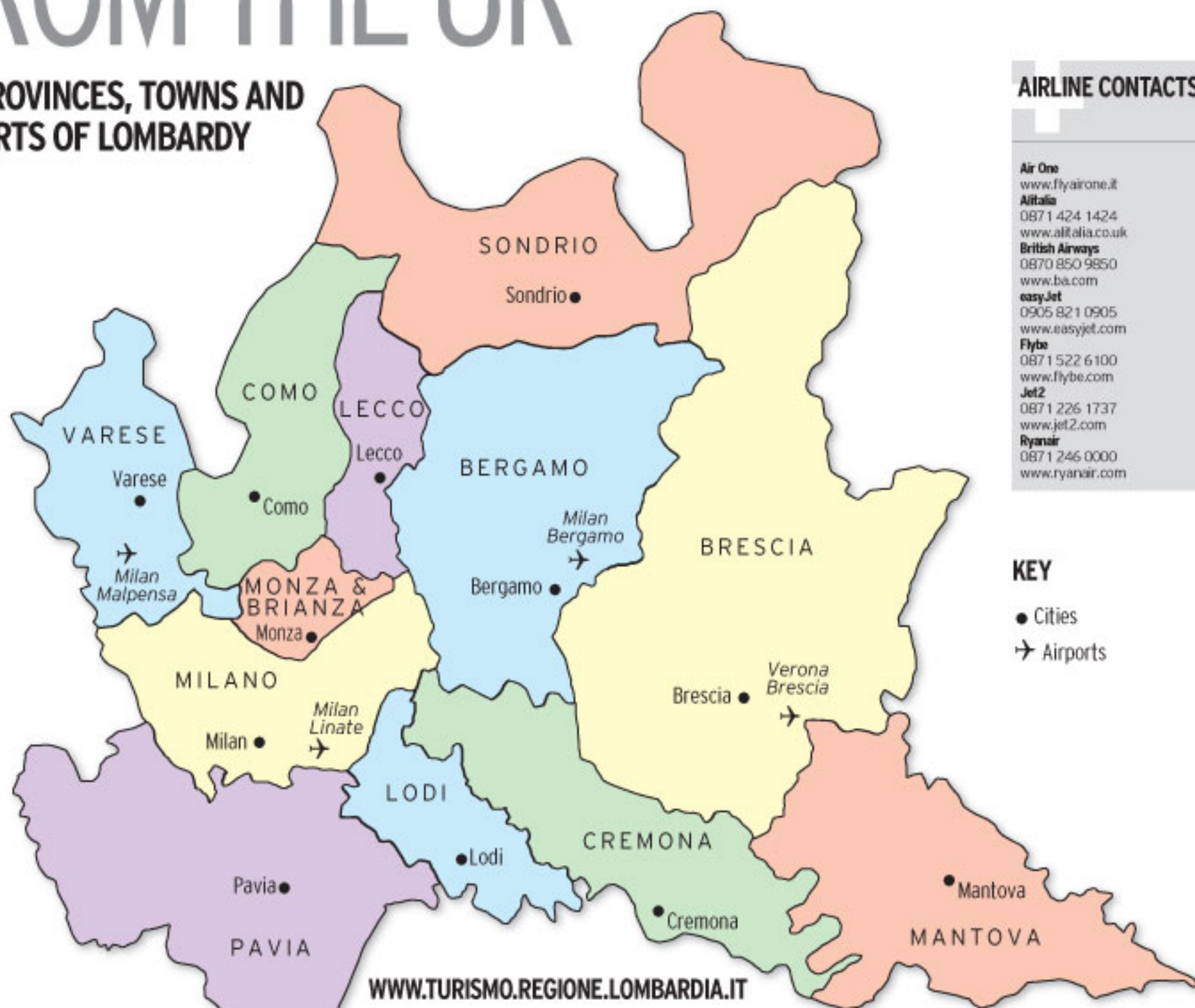
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# HOW TO GET THERE FROM THE UK

## THE PROVINCES, TOWNS AND AIRPORTS OF LOMBARDY



### AIRLINE CONTACTS

**Air One**  
www.flyairone.it

**Alitalia**  
0871 424 1424  
www.alitalia.co.uk

**British Airways**  
0870 850 9850  
www.ba.com

**easyJet**  
0905 821 0905  
www.easyjet.com

**Flybe**  
0871 522 6100  
www.flybe.com

**Jet2**  
0871 226 1737  
www.jet2.com

**Ryanair**  
0871 246 0000  
www.ryanair.com

### KEY

- Cities
- ✈ Airports

**O**f all regions, Lombardy is perhaps the best served in terms of flight links. Four international airports handle dozens of flights each day from all around the UK and the wide choice of arrival points means you can often match a low-cost fare with an amazingly short transfer time to your final destination.

As well as hire-car options, all Lombardy's airports offer easy, fast connections by bus or rail. You can generally turn up and

go, though Ryanair and easyJet offer click-through booking for bus transfers from their destination airports.

Note that "low-cost" can be misleading: the no-frills airlines claim a monopoly on the term, but it's worth comparing prices with the full-service carriers – especially if you're trying to book at the last minute. You might find BA or Alitalia matching up.

#### MILAN MALPENSA (MXP)

www.aeroporto.milano.it

One of Italy's major international gateways, Malpensa is nearer to

Switzerland than it is to Milan city centre (which lies 31 miles/50km south east) – but it has excellent transport links, including a fast train into Milan's Stazione Nord/Cadorna (40min) and express coaches to Stazione Centrale (1hr).

Malpensa also offers rapid access to the beautiful lake country to the north. Buses run direct to Como and the legendary Lake Como resort of Menaggio, as well as to Bergamo, Pavia and other towns, while the splendid Art Nouveau city of Varese is one change away on the train.

**From the UK:** easyJet from

Gatwick, Bristol and Edinburgh; Flybe from Birmingham and Manchester; Alitalia and BA from Heathrow.

#### MILAN LINATE (LIN)

www.aeroporto.milano.it

Linate is the ideal choice if you're heading to central Milan on a tight schedule. Much smaller than Malpensa, and located just four miles/seven kilometres east of the city, its bus links to Stazione Centrale or Corso Europa, near the Duomo, take less than 30 minutes.

**From the UK:** easyJet from Gatwick; Air One from London City; BA and Alitalia from Heathrow.

#### MILAN BERGAMO ORIO AL SERIO (BGY)

www.orioaeroporto.it

Milan's third airport – catering chiefly to no-frills carriers – lies on the outskirts of the handsome hill-town of Bergamo, 31 miles/50km northeast of Milan.

Onward transfers are straightforward: by express coach to Milan (Stazione Centrale or Stazione Lambrate; one hour) or Brescia, or by city bus into Bergamo.

**From the UK:** This is a major Ryanair hub, linked to Luton, Stansted, Prestwick, Newcastle, Liverpool and East Midlands – plus Bristol (flights began last week) and Bournemouth (due to start on December 22). Jet2 flies

here from Belfast international, Edinburgh, Leeds/Bradford and Manchester.

#### VERONA BRESCIA (VBS)

www.aeroporto.brescia.it

An airfield alongside Montichiari village near Lake Garda is now Verona-Brescia international airport (also known as "Gabriele D'Annunzio").

Verona lies more than 31 miles/50km to the east but nearby Brescia is a fascinating city boasting world-class galleries and splendid architecture. Both are easily reached, being served by non-stop airport buses.

**From the UK:** Ryanair from Stansted.

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Special thanks to Sistema Turistico Po di Lombardia and Provincia di Lecco

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