

Gathering Adventures Italian Lakes

Seen through the eyes of Dave Schwartz



Our trip to the Italian Lakes began in the resort town of Stresa on Lake Maggiore. We stayed at the grand old Hotel des Iles Borromees. Art pieces line the hallways. The hotel had been frequented by Ernest Hemingway, and we sat at the bar now graced by his portrait.

There are several islands to explore by small ferry boat. Isola Bella (“Beautiful Island”) is covered by a palace and terraced gardens from the 17th-18th centuries built by the Borromeo family who ruled Milan. Fishermen’s Island has charming shops and cafes as well as a church whose original part is over 1,000 years old.

After two nights we took the winding road to the town of Bellagio on Lake Como. The mountains rise from the lakeshore so steeply that many of the streets are simply stairs for pedestrians where cars cannot go. Public taxi boats crisscross the lake so you can spend the day visiting different towns with scenic cafes.

Lake Garda, the largest of the lakes, came last. Sirmione is a resort town paradise that has a gelato shop on every corner! The food in all the restaurants was terrific. One evening a restaurant manager called for a taxi to take us back to our hotel, but there were no taxis available. So he gave his own car keys to a young employee in the kitchen who drove us home. Talk about Italian hospitality!





The nearby city of Verona dates to ancient Roman times. The Verona Arena is the third-largest Colosseum still standing, built in 30 A.D. to seat 30,000. Where gladiators once fought it now hosts outdoor opera performances. You can still make out the Roman numerals over the archways giving the number of each seating section!

Verona is best known as the setting for Romeo and Juliet. The two rival families in the play really existed, though it is not known if the story of the ill-fated teenage lovers is true. Huge crowds visit the restored 14th century house which popular tradition says was the home of Juliet's family to take photos on her balcony. We visited a vineyard for a tasting of its Amarone wine. The grapes had just been picked and filled dozens of long shelves as they lay drying until January when they will be crushed.



Unexpected moments often contribute to the adventure of traveling. On our last night, in Milan, we walked to the main square to see the cathedral. By chance we found a restaurant on the far side of the square where our third-floor window table gave us a beautiful view. As the evening grew dark, the cathedral lights came on, to the applause of the people in the square. Then the moon rose above the cathedral towers for a beautiful end to our trip.