



Locarno, Piazza Grande

Ticino is the only Swiss canton in which the official language is Italian. The mix of Swiss tradition and Italian lifestyle gives this part of Switzerland a unique character. Ticino has a mild climate, as spring arrives earlier and autumn lingers longer than in the rest of Switzerland. Ticino's flora is typical for the coexistence of plants of both Alpine and Mediterranean origin. And Ticino has two lakes, both shared with Italy: **Lake Lugano** and **Lake Maggiore**. In summer sailing, windsurfing, canoeing and swimming in the lakes and rivers are highly popular. And if you want la dolce vita, search no more – it is waiting for you in the numerous sub-tropical parks and gardens.



some highlights

BELLINZONA

Bellinzona is the capital of the canton Ticino. It's set in a valley of lush mountains, and stands at the southern side of two important Alpine passes, San Bernardino and St Gotthard. Bellinzona is a city of castles. Its grand trio of castles – **Castelgrande** (from around the 6th century and the city's largest), **Montebello** and **Sasso Corbaro** – were together declared a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** in 2000.

Everyone passes through Bellinzona as it's on the train route connecting Locarno and Lugano, and on the Zurich-Milan route. But Post buses also head north-east through the Misox (Mesolcina valley) to Chur (Grison). **Cabbio** (just a 45-minute bus ride from Bellinzona) lies peacefully among the majestic mountains of the southern Alps and has nice backpacker accommodation, with a waterfall for swimming in a great natural environment. Due to its central location, it is an ideal starting point for forays to the rugged mountainous north, as well as to the milder, culturally diversified south. And the Humanità Backpacker's also offers lots of different activities and courses; for details check their website www.humanita.ch

How to get there: Bellinzona has regular train connections from Italy (coming from Milan) and all over Switzerland: from Zurich (2h 15 min), from Lucerne (2h), Bern (3h 20 min) and Geneva (5h). From Bellinzona

to Cabbio it's just 45 minutes by bus. **① Tourist information** at Palazzo Civico in Bellinzona (091 825 21 31) »www.ticino.ch **Budget accommodation:** Humanità Backpacker's in **Cabbio/Lostallo** (091 830 14 81) »www.humanita.ch; (for accommodation in Bellinzona check »www.youthhostel.ch or ask at the tourist office).

THE LAKE MAGGIORE AREA

Locarno is a small town situated on the north end of Lake Maggiore. It's easy indeed to lose one's heart to this picturesque little town. One of the most attractive spots is the **Piazza Grande** and right behind it lies the old part of town, "la città vecchia." Built in the Middle Ages, it holds great architectural and cultural treasures. Open-air concerts, disco-nights on lake cruises and beach parties are but some of the offers geared to please a backpacker. It is **free to swim** in various convenient spots around the lake. During the **International Film Festival** (August 3rd – 13th) the town will be crowded and accommodation is difficult to find!

Locarno is also the starting point for a wide range of activities: whether sailing on Lake Maggiore or energetic mountain bike excursions. And the valleys of Ticino offer several hundred kilometres of **hiking** paths. For the adventurous, there is action such as bungee jumping or canyoning. Most striking of all Locarno's sights is the Franciscan

Santuario della Madonna del Sasso church, an impressive ochre vision floating above the town. The twenty-minute walk up is atmospheric in itself, or you could take the **funicular** from just west of the main train station. »www.ascona-locarno.com

How to get there: Half hourly trains from Bellinzona (takes 20 minutes).

① Tourist information at Largo Zorzi 1, in the same building as the casino (091 791 00 91).

Budget accommodation: Locarno Youth Hostel, Via B. Varenna 18 (091 756 15 00) »www.youthhostel.ch/locarno, it's a 20-minute walk, or take bus no 31/36 direction Ascona/Losone as far as the "Cinque Vie" stop, or take the Centovalli Railway to "St. Antonio" stop; Casa DaVinci, Via B. Rusca 6 (091 751 30 64), www.casa-davinci.ch, near Piazza Grande in the old town.

The **Maggia Valley**, north of Locarno, is a valley of natural beauty. This valley alone offers 700 km of hiking paths and it is the ideal place to go to on hot summer days, so don't forget your swimsuit! Ponte Brolla (4.5 km from Locarno) is a good starting point for the Maggia Valley. From there you can walk along the Maggia river, or straight to the delta, which has a beautiful, real sand beach! In the valley there is a lovely backpacker accommodation **off the beaten path** in a little village called **Aurigeno**, the Baracca Backpackers. Take bus no. 10 from Locarno to Ronchini. There, cross the river on foot (takes you about 15 min. – it's well marked). Baracca Backpackers has only 13 beds, so call ahead! »www.ascona-locarno.com

How to get there: (See above).

Budget accommodation: Baracca Backpackers in **Aurigeno** (079 207 15 54, closed April 1st – 22nd) »www.baracca-backpacker.ch

Ascona is Locarno's smaller twin on the opposite side of the delta of the Maggia. It's often called the "Pearl of Lake Mag-

giore". Ascona is worth a day trip! It is situated near the delta of the Maggia river, on the shores of a splendid and sunny bay. Ascona has developed a large pedestrian zone – traffic free – in its historical center. The village is known as a center for arts, and the backstreets are filled with art galleries and craft shops. »www.ascona-locarno.com

How to get there: about 10 minutes by bus from Locarno.

① Tourist information at Via Collegio 8 (091 791 00 91). Stay overnight in Locarno!

The Brissago Islands. A visit to the botanical gardens on the Islands of Brissago is a must for anyone staying in the region. A beautiful one or half-day trip! A boat brings you from every destination around Lake Maggiore to this beautiful island, home to fantastic flowers only seen in subtropical areas.

events

The people in Ticino are famous for their open-air parties in summer. Just keep your eyes open and you'll run into a party!

June 3rd – 5th Huge antique market in **Locarno** (old town)

June 23rd – July 6th New Orleans and Classic Jazz Festival, **Ascona**

July 8th – 17th "Moon and Stars" summer festival **Locarno** (Piazza Grande)

July 14th – 16th Blues Festival **Bellinzona** (at Piazza Governo)

July 21st – 23rd Summer Nights Dream **Locarno**. Summer festival with a huge fireworks display at 10:45 pm on Saturday

August 1st Swiss National Day. Fireworks and parties everywhere

August 3th – 13th International Film Festival **Locarno**. Meet the stars there (and don't forget to book your accommodation ahead!)

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Hotel Casa DaVinci

Looking for a nice place in the heart of the beautiful old town in Locarno? Located in a old historical house, free WLAN, bikes to rent, reasonable prices for private rooms. Ideal situated to start for all the activities in southern part of Switzerland!

www.casa-davinci.ch
Via B. Rusca 6 / Via della Motta 9, 6600 Locarno
Phone 091 751 30 64