

**Family
Attractions
around
Varese**

Compiled July 2011
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Family Activities in the Varese area

The Italian Lake District is a beautiful area, well known to tourists and increasingly popular for relocation. Although the obvious attractions of architecture and stunning scenery are well documented in guidebooks, it can be incredibly difficult to find information on the more child orientated and family friendly places to visit.

Word of mouth recommendation is almost always the best way of tracking down these elusive attractions and this can take a long time if you are a newcomer to the area.

This guide has been compiled to help residents enjoy their family day trips, whether you wish to find a fun swimming pool, a good place to sledge, play parks, animal parks, cycle paths, castles, the list is long and well worth investigating!

Beaches and Lidos

The lake beaches are generally gravel strips with varying levels of facilities. The size of these beaches varies considerably depending on how much rain has fallen.

Some towns have created lidos where you pay a small fee to enter a private enclosure. These are well kept and offer more facilities such as showers, toilets and refreshments.

The water temperature can get comfortably warm over the summer months, with Lago di Monate enjoying the highest temperatures. The water in the lakes is usually very clean and clear and fishes will happily swim around you. Note, there is no swimming in Lago di Varese due to a pollution incident a few years ago.

Lago Lugano - Caslano

Lido di Caslano has a sandy beach and grass area with pedalos and refreshments available. There is a small entrance fee.

Parking is available in the town car park.

Lido di Caslano, Via Golf, 6987 Caslano, Tel: 091 - 606 25 25 www.lidodicaslano.ch

Lago Lugano - Lugano

Lugano Lido is a very popular attraction featuring a sandy beach, Olympic swimming pool; a heated medium size pool; 2 small children pools; bar and restaurant. There is a small entrance fee.

Lugano has lots of convenient parking with many car parking meters accepting euros as well as francs (even though some don't mention it!)

Lido di Lugano, Via Castagnola 6, CH - 6906 Lugano, www.lugano.ch/sport

Lago Lugano - Porto Ceresio

Ristorante Lido da Bruno is a family friendly restaurant with a sandy/gravel beach area, safe access to the water and play equipment for the kids. It is a short walk from the main town. There is a small fee and you can rent sun loungers.

Ristorante Lido da Bruno, Via Mazzini 50, 21050 Porto Ceresio, www.lidodabruno.it

Porto Ceresio also has two or three sandy/gravel public beaches. Note there are signs saying no swimming and small boulders on the waterline.

Lago Maggiore – Ranco /Angera

There are a couple of good sandy/gravel beaches along the stretch between Ranco and Angera. The largest is on the outskirts of Angera. It has tall trees for shade and refreshments available from the new, modern cafe on the beach front.

Parking is possible on the side of the lake road or in the small car park by the ferry terminal.

Viale Liberta, Angera

Lago Maggiore – Ascona

Il Grande Lido is a popular summer spot offering a wide sandy beach, large grass area with trees for shade, waterslide, small pool, playarea and café. It is open May to September and entrance is free.

Via Lido, Ascona www.lidoascona.ch

Lago Maggiore – Castelveccana

Spiaggia Pubblica Seconda Darsena is a lovely sandy/gravel beach, with pedaloos and refreshments available. Not much shade, but great views of the mountains and lots of little boats moored just off the beach to watch or swim around.

The main car park is on Via Monfalcone, but this can be very busy in peak season and is a bit of a walk to the beach. Alternatively park in the grassy car park off Via Maggiore where it meets Via Europa and walk under the railway line turning left at the water front.

Lago Maggiore – Locarno

Large lido with a beach and grass area containing a variety of leisure pools and diving boards. The indoor pool complex has something to suit all the family with a small baby fun pool and two large pools, one usually featuring a large inflatable assault course and four great waterslides for different ages. Entrance is good value, especially the family ticket and there is parking close by for a small fee, free out of season. Refreshments available.

Lido Locarno, Via Respini 11, Locarno www.lidolocarno.ch

Lago Maggiore – Maccagno

Parco Giona is a lovely grass and wooded area on the banks of the lake with a wide pebble beach gently sloping into the water. There is a play area, skate park, refreshments and local museum at the site. Small car park.

Parco Giona, Via al Giona, Maccagno

Lago di Monate – Cadrezzate

Il Larice Club is hard to find, but one of the most popular lidos in the area. It has a large grass area with sandy/soil banks into the lake. The club offers showers, toilets and barbecue area with refreshments and beach volley-ball court. Sunbeds, pedaloos and canoes are available for rental. There is an entrance fee that varies depending on the day of the week. Weekends are more expensive.

Drive to the end of Via al Lago along the dirt track. There is a large grass car park on the right with a gated entrance to the club on the left. Parking is free.

Il Larice Club, Via al Lago, Cadrezzate

Lago Orta – Orta di san Giulio

Miami Beach is situated a few kilometres south of the town and offers a lovely sandy beach, good for children, with refreshments and pedaloos available for hire.

via Novara, s.s Gozzano, Orta san Giulio, www.spiaggiamiami.com/english/

Boat Trips

All the larger lakes offer boat trips and many offer ferries as well. They range from short shuttles across the lake to full day cruises along the lakeside stopping at various towns and islands along the way. The timetables for boat and ferry trips are available in leaflet form from the ferry terminals or on the internet (www.navigazionelaghi.it). Here is a small selection of trips on offer.

Ferry from Laveno to Intra

This is a car ferry that runs three times an hour during the main season across Lake Maggiore. It is reasonably priced and allows you to link up to leisure boat trips leaving from Intra. You can buy combination tickets from the ferry terminal in Laveno

Trips from Intra to Borromeo Islands

One of the many leisure cruises available from Intra. This trip takes you south to the cluster of Borromeo Islands near Stresa. These are beautiful places to stop and admire the views and landscaped gardens. They are all geared up for tourists. Isola Madre has lots of unusual peacocks roaming the island.

Ferry from Orta to Orta Island

Small motorboats moored off the main piazza in Orta di san Giulio will take you across to the tiny island in the lake. The island is not especially interesting, but the boat trip is good fun.

Ferry from Angera to Arona

A quicker and more exciting way to explore the west side of Lake Maggiore. A fairly regular timetable allows you to explore the pretty town of Arona (for pedestrians only). There is also a great play area just by the landing platforms. Beware that return ferries can leave from different jetties.

Boat from Lugano to Swissminiatur

This is a fun way to arrive at this great model village on the lakefront of Lake Lugano.

Cycle paths

Cycling is a very popular past time in this area. It is a common sight to see groups of men cycling along the roads and Italian children are encouraged to start cycling early. Recently, it seems, recognition has been made to the fact the roads are not a very safe environment to cycle with young children and there has been an explosion in the construction of dedicated cycle paths.

The Campo dei Fiori park map is well worth buying as it marks cycle tracks as well as walking routes and gives information on the gradient for each path. There are too many to list here!

Astrovia Locarno

An off road cyclepath running beside the river Maggia in Locarno. It is based on a 1 : 1,000,000,000 scale model of the Solar System. The Sun can be found at the end of Via Gioacchino Respini where the cyclepath starts and parking is available. Pluto, the final planet in the model, can be found 6 km away from this starting point in the village of Tegna.

Via Gioacchino Respini, Locarno

Ghirla to Ganna Cycle path

4km dedicated tarmac path along the side of Lake Ghirla. The path is tree lined and there is a large grassy lido to the side with refreshments available. One euro entrance. Also en route is a campsite with a café and small playarea. Parking by the campsite (half way along the route) or by the tiny church in Ganna.

Via O. Gariboldi, Ganna

Lake Varese

An excellent 27km cycle track around the lake offers families a day of leisurely cycling. There are refreshments available periodically along the route and parking in most places is free. The route is off road, generally flat and quiet once you move away from the popular areas of Gavirate and Schiranna.

Luino along the River Margorabbia

Newly completed off road track beside the river.

Monza Park (also in Parks and Playgrounds)

This is the largest enclosed park in Europe. Bikes and tandems are available to hire by the entrance. There are three planned routes around the park. Each of which is only a few kilometres. For longer rides link these together, or make up your own route! Play areas and refreshments are available.

www.parcomonza.org or www.comune.monza.mi.it/rd/images/ciclismo2.jpg

Sesto Calende along the Ticino River

This riverside route begins in the town and runs south for more than 30kms. The first section is graveled and off-road, followed by a short section (quarter of a mile) on a busy road. The route then turns onto a very quiet lane running beside the river. This is flat, popular with cyclists and fishermen and a pleasant route for families.

Parking is available in Sesto Calende or at the beginning of the 'quiet lane'. This is reached by taking the first right turn, after going under the motorway bridge, heading south from Sesto Celende.

Planned routes

Lake Comabbio - A 7km track is currently under construction round the lake of Comabbio. This will then be joined to the Lake Varese route via a 4km cycle path.
Castellanza to Torba
Laveno to Varese
Ponte Tresa to Ganna

Farms and Zoos

Azienda Agricola Pasquè

This diversified farm has a lovely collection of animals. They have large open pens and feeding is allowed. There are two play areas with a good range of equipment for different ages and an excellent café and restaurant. The farm is free and open all year.

Azienda Agricola Pasque, via I maggio 11 - Bernate di Casale Litta, www.pasque.it

Azienda Agrituristica Il Vecchio Castagno

This is really a restaurant which has developed its setting to include a handful of animals and small play area. They make their own icecream, have bee hives, grow their own fruit and the food is great!

Situated of the roundabout between Ispra and Angera, <http://ilvecchiocastagno.com/>

Falconeria Locarno

See birds of prey and watch a performance of eagles, hawks and owls daily from Tuesday to Sunday. Visit also includes a demonstration of Spanish horseback riding.

Falconeria Locarno, Via delle scuole 12, 6600 Locarno, www.falconeria.ch

Genoa Aquarium

Although perhaps too far for a day trip (2 hrs by car, each way), this aquarium deserves a mention. It is Europe's largest marine park and contains 71 tanks and 800 species including sharks, seals and penguins. Open all year. Note, there isn't a restaurant only a small bar selling snacks.

Acquario di Genova, Area Porto Antico, 16128 Genoa, www.acquariodigenova.it

Milan Acquarium

38 tanks of fresh and saltwater species

Via San Gadio 2, Milan Tel 0286 42051

Parco della Villa Pallavicino (also in Parks)

A small outdoor zoo situated within a park. This attraction offers a reasonable selection of animals and some fantastic views. The park is on a slope and there is an entrance fee. Refreshments and play area also available.

Parco della Villa Pallavicino, Via Sempione 61, Stresa, www.parcozoopallavicino.it

Parco Faunistico

Wildlife park predominantly featuring birds and small mammals which are housed around a small lake. It does also have tigers and leopards. Restaurant on site.

Parco Faunistico "La Torbiera", Agrate Conturbia, Novara, www.latorbiera.it

Safari Park Pombia

The safari section contains all the big game animals you would expect to find in a large zoo. There is also a small aquarium, reptile house, large model dinosaur park, farm area and magic show. A family of four can expect to pay around 60 euros entrance fee (children under 5 are free). Open all year.

PombiaPark, 28050 Pombia, Tel: 0321 956431, www.safaripark.it

Zoo al Maglio

Tucked away off the main road from Ponte Tresa, this small zoo contains a reasonable collect of animals. They range from monkeys and Jaguars to rabbits and goats. It is a low-key attraction and although one of the lion enclosures is definitely too small, the animals do seem well looked after. There is some play equipment, but no café. It is open all year and only a few francs entrance fee.

Zoo al Maglio, 6983 Magliaso, www.zoalmaglio.ch

Funiculars and Cableways

‘Bucket Ride’ Laveno

Unusual cable car ride from Laveno to the top of Sasso del Ferro. The cable car is an open metal ‘bucket’ capable of holding two adults. The ride takes about 15 minutes and the views across Lake Maggiore are fantastic. The food from the restaurant at the top is disappointing, but go on a beautiful day and you can spend time watching the hang-gliders take off from the launch pad close by.

Como to Brunate

Funicular starting on the waterfront at Como and rising up to the sleepy old village of Brunate. Stunning views from the top and refreshments available. Limited parking.

www.funicolarecomo.it

Monte Bre Lugano

Funicular railway from Lugano curling up to the top of Monte Bre. Beautiful views and some good walks available. Two restaurants at the top. The lower one has the most attractive setting. Limited parking available at the start. Open June to September.

www.montebre.ch

Monte Generoso

Cogwheel railway from Capolago, on Lake Lugano, to the summit of Monte Generoso. The journey takes 40 minutes and reaches 1704m. At the top there is a hotel/restaurant, small play area and a great opportunity for walking. Some of the paths are a little precarious so not suitable for young children. There is a flat, scaled, trail of the solar system that begins near the hotel and stretches for approximately 600 metres. The railway is expensive, about 80 euros for a family of four (under 6yrs free) but the views span all the lakes in the region and it is stunning to see. Follow the brown railway signs to Capolago. Car parking available. Open March to November.

www.montegeneroso.ch

Monte Lema

Cableway from Miglieglia to the top of Monte Lema using two groups of three carriages. At the top there is a restaurant-hostel and network of walking trails. Popular launching spot for paragliding and hang-gliding. Open March to November.

Funivia Monte Lema, CH - 6986 Miglieglia, www.montelema.ch

Monte Tamaro

Great attraction at the summit of Monte Tamaro featuring 'coaster-bob', 'flying fox', adventure park and play area as well as the starting point for mountain walks. The coaster-bob is similar to a roller coaster track using sledge-like carriages. Cheap, great fun and suitable for ages 3yrs+. The 'flying fox' is the longest zip wire in Europe and the adventure park is a ropes course for children and adults. There is a brand new play area situated next to the restaurant and great views available from the unusual modern church jutting out from the top of the mountain.

The cableway runs from Rivera and there is plenty of free parking available. Open March to November.

Monte Tamaro, CH-6802 Rivera, www.montetamaro.ch

Monte San Salvatore

Funicular railway from the Paradiso area of Lugano to the top of Monte San Salvatore. The funicular is in two parts and you need to swap carriages half way up. There is a restaurant at the top, a play area and a viewing tower. There are also links to further walks. Car parking available at the bottom. Open March to November.

Funicolare Monte San Salvatore, via delle Scuole 7, Paradiso, www.montesansalvatore.ch

Sacro Monte

Short funicular ride from Vellone on the north side of Varese to Santa Maria del Monte. There is a car park in Vellone where you must catch a bus to the start of the funicular. There is a nominal fee for the bus and funicular. Although both run frequently the journey can take a while if you miss the connection.

www.sacromonte.it/funicolare_sacromonte.htm

Stresa to Mottarone

A 20-minute cableway trip from Stresa to Mottarone at 1491 meters. Stunning views, restaurant, walks and mountain bike trails. In the winter skiing is popular and there are a few pistes of varying levels of difficulty.

Funivia Stresa-Alpino-Mottarone, Piazzale Lido, 8, Stresa, www.stresa-mottarone.it

Orselina Cableway

A funicular railway goes from Locarno to the Orselina cableway station. This cable route was recently remodelled and takes visitors to Cardada where new features have been built including a contemporary walkway jutting out from the mountainside and some interesting play equipment for children. There is a 'play path' waymarked, but beware that this is a nature walk without play equipment. A chair lift from Cardada allows visitors to reach the geological observatory. Various paths lead to alpine huts and the Trosa peak at an altitude of 1869m. Open March to November.

Via Ramogna, Locarno, www.cardada.ch

Ice rinks

Palaghiaccio

Covered ice rink, facilities for hiring equipment, ice-skating school, bar and services. Open all year, but does have unusual opening times.

Via Albani, 33, Varese

Centro Commerciale “Campo dei Fiori”

This shopping centre in Gavirate has a temporary, but very good, ice rink on the ground floor during the winter months. Skate hire is cheap. Open from 3pm weekday afternoons and longer during weekends.

Viale Ticino, 82, Gavirate

Centro Commerciale "Le Corti"

The central shopping centre in Varese offers a good temporary ice rink during the winter months. Skate hire available.

Piazza della Repubblica, 25, Varese

San Bernardino

This town has a good amount of snow throughout the winter and is great for winter walks and sledging. The ice rink is situated beside the river on the outskirts of town. Park in the car park next to the river and walk along the path ignoring the first road bridge until you reach a pedestrian bridge. Cross to the rink. Very cheap skate hire available from the small adjacent café. In summer the ice rink is a tennis court!

Macgugnaga

Beautiful small, winter resort for skiing and other snow activities. Outdoor ice rink situated at the end of the town by the ski lifts with cheap skate hire.

Mini Golf

There are mini golf courses throughout the region that appeal to all ages. Here is a short list of places which have them, but there are many more!

Ascona – Set back from the waterfront on east side of town

Caslano – By the waterfront carpark

Como – On the waterfront in the west side of town

Orta – By the public carpark at Orta di san Giulio

Quartino – Indoor at Miraflores, Zona Industriale 3, Quartino www.miraflores.ch

Varese – Behind Giardini Estensi

Museums and Castles

Museo Civico Di Scienze Naturali Bergamo

Very child friendly natural history museum with dinosaurs, hands on experiments and colouring sheets. Closed Mondays.

Museo Civico di Scienze Naturali "E.Caffi", piazza Cittadella, Bergamo
www.museoscienzebergamo.it

Chocolat Alprose Museum

Visit this small museum to learn about the history of chocolate and their production process, then finish off with free samples and a browse through the shop.

www.alprose.ch

Angera Castle

This beautiful castle dominates the area around Angera and Lake Maggiore. It is home to an extensive doll and toy museum and the exhibits are well displayed in contemporary cabinets. The castle also has lots of little rooms and staircases to explore, as well as a great tower to climb with stunning views from the top. Note the café has a poor selection of food and you are better off eating in town or bringing a picnic.

www.lagomaggiore.net/old/uk/attractions/rocca-angera.asp

The castles of Bellinzona

The three castles and the city walls of Bellinzona were built in medieval times. Castelgrande, Montebello and Sasso Corbaro have all been recently restored and are the main tourist attraction of the city. There are some great towers to climb and battlements to walk along. Each castle houses a small museum as well as offering impressive views across the valley.

www.bellinzoneaturismo.ch

Model Railway Museum

This is actually a permanent exhibition and houses many stationary models as well as beautiful working railway displays of all gauges. Fun for children and some adults! Contemporary displays with the promise of much larger working models to come.

*Via S. Franscini 24, **Mendrisio** www.gb-trains.ch*

Museo Nazionale della Scienza e della Tecnologia

Italy's largest science and technology museum. Also includes a Leonardo di Vinci section with models. Visit the collections, do activities in the interactive laboratories, take part in theatre activities and much more. Renovated during summer 2008.

Via S. Vittore 21 - 20123 Milano Tel 0248 5551 www.museoscienza.org/english/

Museo Nazionale del Cinema

Modern, interactive museum with excellent futuristic restaurant presented with colour changing tables and computer screen place mats! This museum is housed within the most famous landmark in Torino, The Mole Antonelliana. For a separate entrance fee a glass lift will take visitors up to the panoramic floor without any lift shaft. Closed Mondays.

Via Montebello, 15, Turin www.museonazionalecinema.it

Villa Panza

Owned by Fai, which is similar to the UK's National Trust, this is a fine 18th century property and contemporary art museum. The highlight for children is the fantastic 'light exhibition' on the upper floor. Florescent light bulbs of various colours are laid in otherwise empty rooms allowing people to move freely from coloured room to coloured room. There is also a room that magnifies sound.

Price is around 8 euros per adult and includes access to the gardens.

Piazza Litta, 1, Varese <http://www.fondoambiente.it/en/beni/villa-panza-collection-fai-properties.asp>

Volandia

Museum of flight situated next to Malpensa Terminal 1. Modern exhibition halls with some interactive spaces and play areas. Cafe available.

Volandia, Via per Tornavento n.15, Case Nuove, Somma Lombardo www.volandia.it

Parks and Playgrounds

Monza Park (also in Cycle Paths)

This is the largest enclosed park in Europe. Bikes and tandems are available to hire by the entrance. Play areas and refreshments are available.

www.parcomonza.org or www.comune.monza.mi.it/rd/images/ciclismo2.jpg

Parco Scherrer

This is a fantastic, exotic, garden full of interesting follies. The children can explore the Siamese Tea House, the Temple of Nefertiti, the Casa Araba, a sun temple, fountains, ponds and statues galore. There are also beautiful views across Lake Lugano. Parco Scherrer is situated on the edge of Morcote, which is a quaint old village with some pretty little restaurants. The park is inexpensive and parking is available in a small car park off the lake road. Open March to October.

http://www.lugano-tourism.ch/en/89/the_scherrer_park_.aspx?idActivity=92&idMod=171

Parco della Villa Pallavicino (also in Farms and Zoos)

Formal gardens and parkland on the side of Lake Maggiore. Also contains a small zoo.

Parco della Villa Pallavicino, Via Sempione 61, Stresa, www.parcozoopallavicino.it

Playgrounds

The play areas in Italy tend to be older with no safety matting. However a few of the playgrounds have had a recent upgrade and are much better quality. Here is a list of some, but there are many more

- Angera – Large playground on the waterfront
- Arona – Good playground on the waterfront by ferry port
- Besozzo – New play equipment on the outskirts of town
- Cernobio – Lovely modern equipment on the west side of Lake Como
- Gavirate – At the waterfront, on the cycle route
- Locarno – New waterfront park, plus at least two others
- Lugano – Great waterfront park for all ages, by the Lido
- Magadino – Short waterfront walk with wooden play equipment and mini golf
- Maccagno – Parco Giona on the waterfront, also skate park
- Melide – Large modern playarea across the road from Swiss Miniatur
- Stresa – Waterfront park and beach area
- Varese –
 - Giardini Estensi – play equipment at the bottom and top of the hill. Also at the top a miniature railway, which operates at weekends.
 - Giardino Pubblico – Behind the Stadium near the European School
 - Masnago
 - Schiranna – New equipment by the lido
 - Villa Toeplitz – Small play area within lovely park in Sant Ambrogio

Indoor play areas

Soft play areas are now opening all over the Varese area. They are quite expensive and most do not open until 3pm, but stay open very late especially at weekends.

Chiccolandia

Large indoor play area to compliment the children's clothing and toy store. Suited to younger children. Open Monday to Friday 3pm – 7pm, Saturday 10am – 7pm.

Via Tornese 10, 22070 Grandate, Como www.chiccolandia.com

Giro Giro Tondo

Soft play area for all ages.

Via Sorangana, Somma Lombardo

Il Villaggio di Piedone

Excellent, large indoor fun area for all ages includes bouncy castles and amusements with small snack bar.

Via Boffi, 219, Binago www.ilvillaggiodipiedone.com

Isola che non c'era

Small soft play area advertised for 3 to 10 year olds, but in reality even a four year old would find it hard to spend more than an hour here.

Via Gallarate, 51, Gazzada

Labirinto

Large indoor play area appropriate for all ages.

Via Milano, 177, Gallarate www.labirintogallarate.it

La Tana di Leon

Large, new play area. Well hidden and very quiet on weekdays. Open from 3pm – 7pm Tuesday to Sunday.

Via Sant'Alessandro 19, Castronno

Play Planet

Large play area open from 10.30am until late each day, though closes at 2.30pm on Mondays.

Via Maraini 15, Pregassona (Lugano)

Skiing

Families that ski or wish to learn, have a choice of good resorts around two hours drive from Varese. It is possible to go for the day, especially if you don't need to hire equipment or arrange childcare.

If your children are too young to ski, some resorts offer Mini Clubs which will take babies and children. These facilities are for the general public and can be booked just a few days in advance for whatever period of time you require. The childcare facilities in Pila, Cervinia, Courmayeur, Gressoney and Champoluc are all good and reasonable value.

Below is a list of the closest resorts to Varese:

Andermatt

Popular with intermediate and advanced skiers. Ski rental and lessons available.

Breuil-Cervinia

Large resort suitable for all abilities. Can ski into Zermatt, Switzerland. "Bianca Neve" Baby Club open December to April - www.montecervino.it/Inglese/sport/inverno/children.htm.

Champoluc

Good resort for intermediate skiers, linked to Gressoney and Alagna. Ski hire, Kike mini club and ski school available - www.monterosa-ski.com

Courmayeur

Large international resort, more expensive than the others featured here but great pistes available. Ski rental, ski school and Mini Club Biancaneve creche available.

Gressoney

Good all round, quiet resort with ski hire, Kike mini club and ski school available - www.monterosa-ski.com

Macugnaga

Quiet resort good for beginners. Ski hire and ski school available

Mottarone

Small, low altitude, resort with ski hire and ski school available. The closest resort to Varese

San Bernadino

A "snow secure" resort good for beginners and families. Ski hire and ski school available

Pila

Great all round resort with varied runs. Take the cableway from Aosta to avoid parking problems at the resort. Offers good independent childcare facilities - www.pila.it. Ski hire and ski school available

Valtournenche

Situated just a few kilometres from Cervinia this resort offers ski hire and ski school as well as being close to the Cervinia childcare facilities. Good for intermediate skiers

Sledging

In addition to the ski resorts that are great for tobogganing, it is worth noting that the north side of the Sacro Monte hill is a few degrees cooler than the south side and can frequently have snow when none exists in Varese.

Take a drive along the road from Varese to Brinzio and you will find a great sledging slope, popular with local children, between Rasa and Brinzio. It is on the left hand side and you can park just off the road on the right.

San Bernadino is particularly good for sledging as it has a large network of signed winter walks through the trees where you can pull the toboggans and let the kids enjoy the slopes.

North of Bellinzona there is the closest of dedicated toboggan runs. Take the chairlift from Leontica to Cancori and then from Cancori to Pian Nara. From here toboggan down the 5-kilometre long toboggan run - the longest in the Ticino! Toboggans are available for hire there. For further information contact Blenio Turismo, Olivone (Tel. +41 (0)91 872 14 87) or Nara (Tel. +41 (0)91 871 11 11).

Swimming pools and Water Parks

In Italy it is expected that everyone, including babies, who enter a swimming pool wear a swim hat. The hats are usually sold at the swimming pools or through sports shops. Italians also wear plastic shoes and dressing gowns when walking to and from the pool. Some pools will enforce this on all visitors so beware!

Atlantide, Savosa

Sports centre with indoor swimming pools and fun slide.

Via Campo Sportivo, Savosa (Lugano)

California Aqua Park

Collection of fun pools with wave machine, spa area and waterslides for all ages. No hats needed because it is in Switzerland. Beware of poor conversion rate if you pay in euros cash. Open every day.

S. Gottardo 4, Balerna (Chiasso) www.california-acquapark.ch

Centro Sportivo Laguna Blu

One large and one small pool, popular for swimming lessons. The pools have a temporary cover for the winter months.

Via Gerolamo Garoni, 7, Varese

Fit4Ever

Large sports centre featuring full size indoor pool, small pool and spa pool with waterslides. Outside in the summer months there is a fantastic aqua park with three pools, more slides for all ages, wave machine and infant area. There is also a sandy area for buckets and spades. Sunbeds can be hired or you can make use of the sun umbrellas for free and just bring a towel. The aqua park is expensive with a day pass for anyone over 5 yrs costing 11 euros. The sports centre is open everyday.

Via Garibaldi, 21, Brebbia

Il Poggio

One large free form outdoor pool with a graduated entrance into the water for small children. Il Poggio is a sports centre popular for tennis lessons and swimming in the summer months. It is set high up above Luvinata amongst the trees and is a lovely setting for a relaxing afternoon. Entrance is expensive, but the setting is lovely. Food available.

Via Poggio 20, Luvinata

Locarno Lido

Large indoor and outdoor pool complex. Four great indoor water slides and heated pool outside that you can enter from inside, lots of fun in the winter months! Very good value. (See also Beaches and Lidos)

Via Respini 11, Locarno www.lidolocarno.ch

Ondaland Aquapark

Biggest aqua park in Italy with slides, waves and rides for all. Very expensive and the water is cold! Open during the summer months.

Via Case Sparse 1, Vicolungo (Novara) www.ondaland.it

Palaghiaccio

Regular indoor swimming pool with ice rink in the same building. Next to the Ippodromo.

Via Albani, 33, Varese

Robur

Sports centre featuring two large and two small indoor swimming pools. The small pool has a good selection of water toys you can borrow from the adjacent cupboard for little ones and there is a plastic slide for under 5 yrs to use. Note, there are opening time restrictions to public use, so check before going.

Via Padre Samuele Marzorati, Varese

Schiranna

Lido open in the summer months, featuring one small and one large outdoor pool next to lake Varese. The lido also has a café and sun loungers. No shade.

Via Giovanni Macchi, Varese

Whirlpool

One large and one small outdoor pool belonging to Whirlpool, but open to the public for a small fee. Summer months only.

Off SS394 Varese to Gavirate road

Walks

This area of Italy has a fantastic network of walks in the mountains and around the lakes. There are routes marked from every cable car service and of course those paths mentioned previously for cycling also make great footpaths. A few places worth noting include:

Campo dei Fiori

A map of this 'parco regionale' can be bought from the rangers office situated in the carpark by Santa Maria del Monte on Sacro Monte or from the good bookshops in Varese. There is a great selection of routes for hiking and short strolls marked up and it is a beautiful area to explore.

Boardwalk at Porto Ceresio

Recently developed and perfect for an afternoon stroll this lake front path also passes by a nice shady playpark.

Breggia Gorge

Persevere past the ugly disused factory at the beginning to discover a beautiful gorge with wooden walkways, picnic spot and powerful little waterfalls. Heavily wooded and lots of steps so not appropriate for pushchairs. Gravel parking area at the side of the road.

Via San Nicolao, Mendrisio

Art Trail

A group of twenty artists have transformed this trail which begins in Mergoscia and leads through the entire Verzasca valley to Sonogno along the river on the opposite bank to the cantonal road.

Other activities and tourism attractions

Gardaland

The largest family amusement park in Italy. Similar to Disneyland with different themed areas, shows and restaurants to suit all.

www.gardaland.it

Grotto Remenon

Cave just north of Comerio. Follow the brown sign for the cave off the main road from Varese to Gavirate. The steep lane ends at the edge of the forest where a way marker directs walkers into the Campo dei Fiori. The cave is only open occasionally throughout the year, but if you time it right some volunteers will provide hard hats and guide you through the cave. The information board en-route states opening times.

Parco Avventura Tarzaning Center Gordola (Locarno)

Extensive ropes course adventure centre for children and adults. Open to individuals April to October at the weekend and weekdays also during July and August.

Via Tratto di Fondo 2a, Gordola www.parcoavventura.ch

Swissminiatur SA Melide

This outdoor attraction features some great models of all the main sites in Switzerland, including working cable cars. Little footpaths weave in and out the models and small trains and boats move around the attraction. There is also a restaurant, shop and some children's rides. Open March to November, daily. Parking is in the car park outside, but beware that the meters only take Swiss francs.

Via Cantonale, Melide www.swissminiatur.ch

Varese Bowling

Multi-lane bowling with other amusement machines and fast food bar. Can be used for birthday parties. There isn't a car park so parking is in the side streets. It is easily missed as it is in a basement beside the main road.

Viale Belforte, 165, Varese

Verzasca Dam

This huge dam was the location for the James Bond 'Goldeneye' bungee jump stunt. Today a bungee jumping company will take bookings for individuals who wish to experience the 7.5 second fall off the 220-meter-high Dam. Expensive to try and fun to watch others do! Mostly conducted at the weekend.

Verzasca Valley north east of Locarno <http://www.trekking.ch/eng/007.asp>