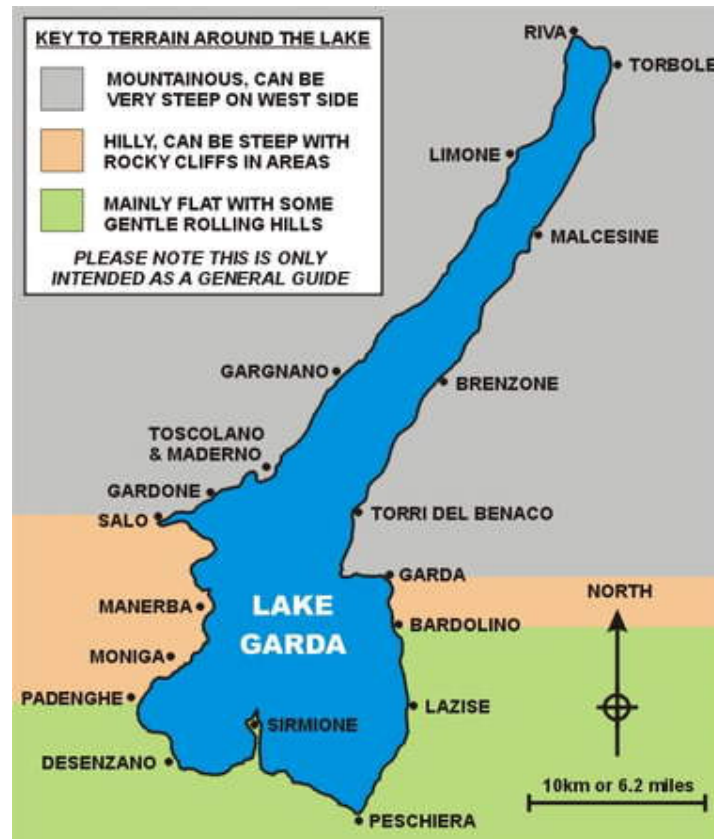


# Lake Garda



Flight time to Verona: 2 hours

Time difference: 1 hour ahead

Fly with: Thomsonfly. Ryanair. Easyjet. British Airways.

Passport validity: For duration of stay by UK passport holders

Visa: Not needed for UK passport holders

Weather: Best in our summer time. Average temperature for July & August is 30 degree's. The wettest time is October - December

Day trips: Verona. Venice. Dolomite Mountains

## **Visit to Lake Garda courtesy of**

### **Citalia Holidays & Westway Travel**

Lake Garda is the largest of the Italian lakes and it is situated in northern Italy, it can be accessed by flying into Verona airport. I spent 4 nights in Limone which is in the north and is an hour & 20 minutes from the airport. I spent each day travelling to other resorts around the lake & taking in all the sights that Lake Garda has to offer.

#### **Getting around**

Travelling around the lake is fastest by car, thanks to the tunnels that have been cut into the surrounding mountains. It is a scenic drive made famous by the more recent James Bond movies. Travelling by boat however is the most enjoyable way to get around. Visitors can purchase tickets at the ferry points in each town and travel to any resort they like. A pass for the north can be bought and a similar pass can be bought in the south. The ferries and water taxis run regularly, are reliable and are a fairly fast way of travelling. Limone to Malcesine for example takes just 30 minutes. In the South, Sirmione to Bardolino takes the same time. However Limone to Sirmione would take 2 & half hours by boat due to the stop offs en route, whereas it takes just an hour by road. All hotels have free copies of the timetables.

#### **The resorts**

Every resort we saw was different from the one before. Although each place was picture postcard pretty, each had something different to offer. Limone is surrounded by mountains and full of winding cobbled streets which lead you under archways and through tunnels to lake side cafes and boutique shops. Brightly coloured flowers spill over from every windowsill and gelati is sold on every street corner. At Malcesine there is a beautiful castle which is open to the public and can be hired for Weddings. Sirmione is flatter and so accessible to all, it has a lovely harbourside and a more bustling atmosphere. Riva is one of the largest resorts on the lake the grassy areas around the lake are full of sunbathers. Every resort is worth a visit.

## **Wine**

Lake Garda is famous for its wine. We drove through the region of Soave during our stay and in Bardolino we saw the town preparing for the yearly wine festival. There are vineyards all around the lake and wine tours can be arranged from any resort.

One of the biggest advantages of booking a stay at Lake Garda is its proximity to Venice:

## **Venice**



The beautiful, vibrant city of Venice can be experienced on a day trip from Lake Garda. It is a 3 hour drive from Limone, but the southern resorts are closer. The drive from Sirmione to Venice is 2 hours.

The drive finishes at the huge car park by the port, the same place where the airport shuttles run to. Then water taxis run frequently to Venice, which takes just a few minutes.

There is so much to see in Venice but the most famous attraction is the gondolas. Gondola stations are dotted throughout the city, the biggest one is in St Marks Square, but as queues can be very long it pays to find one away from the main square. Sometimes when the queue times are particularly long the gondoliers advise you to come back at a later time. When staying in Venice this

can be avoided by booking in advance with the hotels concierge. Gondolas take six people each and should cost between 80-90 euros. A private gondola for two people will cost more in the region of 100 euros. The ride around the city takes you through narrow canals, past Rialto Bridge and to St Marks Square and lasts around 20 minutes.



The Basilica in St Marks is one of the biggest landmarks in the city and there is no entrance fee, but the museum inside it has a charge. Long queues can be another problem here so arrive early. Venice is a popular stop for cruise liners, there were 5 of them docked up on the day I was there, so the city is very busy.





Cafe Florian in St Marks Square is perhaps the most famous, exclusive & reserved cafe in the city. As one of the oldest coffee houses its previous guests include Lord Byron & Charles Dickens. Waiters are dressed in white jackets and guests in the outdoor seating area are entertained by a grand piano and a violinist. To sit here with a coffee will cost around 12 euros, making it one of the most expensive places to stop, but perhaps worth it to spend half an hour being entertained in the heart of the city. All cafes in St Marks Square have a sit down charge and a service charge and are comparably expensive to the UK, but you can avoid this and control cost by exploring the many cafes and restaurants and food outlets on the outskirts of the Square. Food & drink in these areas is similar in price to London. You can expect to pay around 2.50 euros for a gelati on the outskirts but 4.50 when you're closer to the Square. Also a salad will be around 9 euros and a big slice of pizza should cost 7 euros.

For anyone thinking of staying in Venice, the Best Western Albergo Cavalletto & Doge Orseolo is in a fantastic location. It overlooks one of the gondola stations, is next to a lovely selection of shops and is within easy walking distance to St Marks.



One of the most famous events in Venice is the annual carnival. It is a street procession that takes place 40 days before Easter. Around 30,000 visitors come to see the costumes of those taking part and to see who will win the competition for best mask. As this very unique event is so popular with tourists early booking is strongly advised.

### **The Hotels**

It is worth remembering that many of hotels in this region are very old and traditional and therefore may not have the new and polished look from the outside that some of the large international chain hotels have. Rooms can vary in size & decor, meals tend to be buffet style, swimming pools can be a little smaller than usual, there may not be an abundance of facilities, but when you know what to expect you can be sure of a very enjoyable stay. The food is good, the service is excellent and you feel like you're staying in Italy, not a brand hotel that could be anywhere in the world.

## Limone



Limone is a very pretty, scenic and relaxed place to spend a week. I recommend staying in a hotel on the lake, so that you have lake views from the hotel bar or restaurant or rooms and you are just a short and pleasant walk to town. Otherwise you could feel like you could be in any resort in any part of the world.

The Splendid Hotel is in an excellent location in an elevated position overlooking the lake and the town is just a 5 minute walk away. The hotel rooms aren't very modern, but they all have a balcony. When making a reservation for a lake view room, I suggest requesting a room that overlooks the pool as well as the lake so that you avoid having pedestrians walking past.

Hotel Le Palme is the Splendids sister hotel and although it is much smaller I would recommend staying here. It is a converted 17<sup>th</sup> century villa making it the very first hotel in Limone. It is in the heart of town, it has a beautiful restaurant serving excellent food next to the lake, it has a piano bar, the rooms are more Italian and guests have use of the facilities at the Hotel Splendid. However, guests need to make sure they book for A la Carte half board, as standard half board guests can't take dinner on the lake view terrace and must eat indoors.





## **Gardone Riviera**

South of Limone is the Gardone Riviera. The only reason to come here is for the hotels. It isn't a resort, there is no town. There is the odd shop such a chemist but that is all there is to see. It's flat and so doesn't have the mountain scenery of Limone, but it does have the wonderful Hotel Grande Gardone Riviera.

Grand Gardone Riviera is situated on the lake and at lake level. It is a beautiful, traditional, chic and grand property. The outdoor areas for breakfast, for lounging around the heated pool and for taking a stroll are stunning. The emphasis is on customer service. Guests have the option of booking buffet or A la Carte meals. In Winnies bar (named after previous guest Winston Churchill) waiters wear white jackets and nothing is too much trouble. The cost of food and drink here is noticeably different to the Splendid in Limone, at 6 euros for a glass of wine it is double the price, but perhaps not completely unaffordable compared to UK prices.

Future guests should be advised that although all rooms are stated as lake facing, this doesn't necessarily mean lake view. The trees and greenery and

flowers that fill the grounds can obstruct the view from some rooms, and therefore a clear view needs to be requested at the time of booking.

Another point to note is that if guests want to take meals in the outside dining area (which they undoubtedly will) this also needs to be requested at the booking stage as seating is limited and popular.

When booking a stay here, consider a superior room as these are noticeably bigger, brighter and more modern than the standard rooms. And when booking a junior suite request to have not the small one, but the suite with the marble bathroom and double sized balcony.

For anyone thinking of booking a wedding in Italy, the Grand provides a stunning hall and a huge sweeping lake view terrace to wedding parties.

The hotel proves popular with older clientele, maybe due to the cost of staying here and the exceptional service, but a couple of any age who want nothing more than to relax in beautiful surroundings and be well looked after should consider staying here.

### **Sermione**

In the south, approx a 1 hour drive from Gardone Riviera, there is a peninsular which is the resort of Sermione. Southern resorts don't have the mountainous scenery available in the north, but Sermione is a popular and attractive resort. It is very flat which makes it the ideal choice for any guests with walking difficulties, and it's very much geared towards tourists with its abundance of cafes, shops and restaurants. The Castle provides a local excursion and a little of Italys history.

For guests that want to control the cost of a holiday to Lake Garda they could consider the Hotel Dulac. It isn't the most luxurious & central hotel, but it's the cheapest hotel Citalia offer in this region and it's a comfortable enough choice. It is comparable to a Travelodge inside in terms of decor and service. It's a 45 minute walk into town so the hotel provides a shuttle, but it is worth remembering this is a fairly irregular service and it stops completely at 7.00. Italy isn't the cheapest European destination to visit but no one has to miss out if they book a hotel like the Du Lac. If a guest wants to spend a week out and about exploring the area and just wants a base this is ideal.

### **Bardolino**



Bardolino is a southerly resort which can be reached by fast ferry from Sirmione in just 20 minutes. In the town there is a long and wide stretch of promenade which hosts the Bardolino wine festival in October each year. In front of the ferry point is a large and beautiful church which is free to the public. The cost of food and drink in the towns of every resort is similar: 2.50 euros for a glass of wine, 6 euros for a pizza, 1.40 euros for gelati.

Parc Hotel Gritti is in a good location, just a short walk along the river into town, and unlike other hotels it has a lot of facilities and activities to offer. It is a large sprawling complex which has an indoor pool, an outdoor pool, bike rental, a fitness & beauty centre, 5 restaurants and a golf course nearby. Clients should book superior rooms only as these rooms have been recently refurbished and are very attractive and modern. There are currently only 50 of them but the hotel are due to refurbish another 50 in winter 2011. Standard rooms have a very brightly coloured and jazzy decor, I wouldn't recommend them. This hotel is more popular with families as it has much more for children than other hotels around the lake and it is an easy walk into town.

## **Garda**

Just 15 minutes drive from Bardolino is the resort of Garda where I visited the Hotel Excelsior le Terrazze. It is a relatively new hotel built in 2008. It's modern and minimalist in design and good value for money when staying here, a glass of wine starts at just 2 euros. There is a lovely outdoor bar which is next to the swimming pool and breakfast area, which both overlook the lake. Similarly to the Grand Gardone Riviera, some views of the lake are obscured by trees and greenery. Dinner at the hotel is taken inside. The hotel isn't however suitable for the less mobile as there is a steep slope leading from the main road up to the hotel entrance. The rooms, although very nicely decorated, need to be chosen carefully, as the lead in rooms are quite small with just enough room to walk around the bed. I would select a superior room as they are bigger and also have a couch and a double sink. I would also request a high floor, as this would keep guests away from the busy road and would avoid overlooking the car park. The hotel was lovely and gets good reviews on tripadvisor. These are the most recent ones, left in October 2011:

[“Lovely, Relaxing Hotel”](#)

[“Did not want to leave!”](#)

[“Perfect Hotel with Perfect Location”](#)

## **Malcesine**

When I return to Lake Garda, Malcesine is the resort I would choose to stay in myself. It's just 20 minutes on the fast ferry from Limone and is a similarly pretty town, but there is more to see and do here. The main point of interest is the Castle which is open to the public and costs just 6 euros entrance. Weddings for up to 95 guests can be held here too on a stunning open air terrace overlooking the lake. There is also a cable car trip in Malcesine that costs 18 euros.

The Hotel Vega is officially a 3\* but it was the best hotel I saw in the whole of Lake Garda and it's featured by Thomson Holidays. Every room here is good in size, decor and location. Even the standard rooms overlook a pretty side street. The next room grade up is a side lake view. Partial lake views have a better view and I would request room 5 as it has a huge private terrace. Superior rooms are also available, some are newly refurbished but I would be confident in booking any of them. Although it doesn't have a pool, there is a large outdoor jacuzzi and sunbathing area with loungers. There are also steps leading down to the lake so guests can still swim. The hotel is in a fantastic location right in the centre of the town and the staff are very friendly.

I thoroughly enjoyed my stay to Lake Garda. It is a short flight was it was perfect for a long weekend, but there is enough to see and do that I would happily revisit for a longer duration. If you enjoy great wine, even greater food, stunning scenery and an abundance of quaint towns and pretty marinas to explore then this is the holiday destination for you.

If you would like to discuss Lake Garda with me or if you have any questions at all please feel free to contact Sarah on 01268 735301 or email me on [sarahfirth@westwaytravel.co.uk](mailto:sarahfirth@westwaytravel.co.uk)