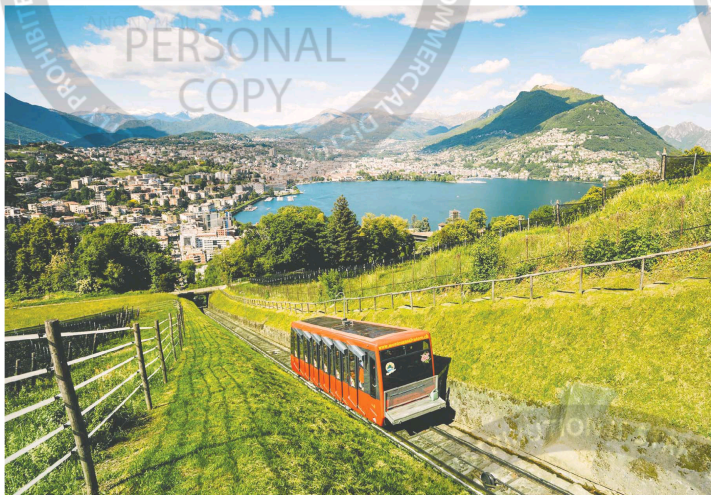


What really sets Ticino apart from the rest of Switzerland is the laid-back vibe, Italian charm and unpretentious yet delicious cuisine you'll find here on the sunny side of the Swiss Alps. — Mark Sissons



A funicular climbs Lugano's Monte San Salvatore, nicknamed the Sugarloaf Mountain of Switzerland. MILO ZANECCHIA

A SWISS SLICE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

IF YOU GO

Tucked between the Alps and Italy, Ticino offers the best of both worlds

MARK SISSONS

Here, in the only one of Switzerland's 26 cantons located entirely south of the Alps, sun-drenched, palm tree-lined promenades meet glacier-fed lakes. A Mediterranean climate and attitude prevail, but you can still savour la dolce vita served with a dollop of Swiss efficiency.

Mention Switzerland and chocolate, cheese, cows and army knives might come to mind, not pasta, gelato, Vespas or piazzas. Yet in the southernmost Swiss canton of Ticino, Italian language, culture, architecture and cuisine predominate. These are just a few of the qualities that make Ticino — midway between Zurich and Milan — an enticing destination, even for people from the German and French-speaking parts of Switzerland.

To be sure, Ticino's alpine vistas can be as beautiful as any place in the central or northern parts of the country, as can its postcard-perfect lakes, verdant valleys and peaceful pastures where the tinkle of cowbells accompanies the ringing of Romanesque church bells. But what really sets Ticino apart from the rest of Switzerland is the laid-back vibe, Italian charm and unpretentious yet delicious cuisine you'll find here on the sunny side



The Saturday morning market in Bellinzona's historic Piazza Collegiata. REMY STEINBOER/TICINO TURISMO

of the Swiss Alps.

Picture sipping a signature white Merlot del Ticino on a lakeside café patio — or in a granite grotto under the shade of a chestnut tree — while dining on Ticinese pumpkin soup, mortadella, busacca, risotto and fresh lake fish. Then watching the boats sail past over an espresso and fresh slice of torta di pane.

BELLISSIMA BELLINZONA

The capital of Ticino is not the canton's largest city of Lugano. It's the town of Bellinzona, just 20

minutes from Lugano by rail. Bellinzona, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2000. Together with a defensive wall enclosing the entire valley, the three castles that make up the Fortress of Bellinzona — Castiglione, Castello Montebello and Castello Sasso Corbar — once controlled this key strategic passage from the Alps to the Mediterranean.

For centuries protectors of this

cultural crossroads at the intersection of the trade and pilgrimage routes leading to the St. Gotthard, Lukmanier and San Bernardino passes, they remain among the most impressive examples of medieval defensive architecture anywhere in the Alps. Dominating a rocky peak overlooking the valley, Castiglione (as its name implies) is the largest of the trio. Built by the dukes of Milan in the 14th century to repel Swiss invaders from the north, its stone towers offer panoramic views of the Ticino Valley

Domestic flights departing from Zurich and Geneva service Lugano-Agno airport. Zurich airport is about two hours from Lugano by rail, and Milan Malpensa (MXP), about 90 minutes. The most scenic way to reach Ticino is aboard the Gotthard Panorama Express from Lucerne to Bellinzona and Lugano.

Where to stay

Lugano has a wide range of hotels. Luxurious options include The View Lugano, Hotel Splendide Royal and Grand Hotel Villa Castagnola. Located a block from the waterfront and a 15-minute walk from the Old Town, Hotel De La Paix is an excellent mid-range choice.

Getting around

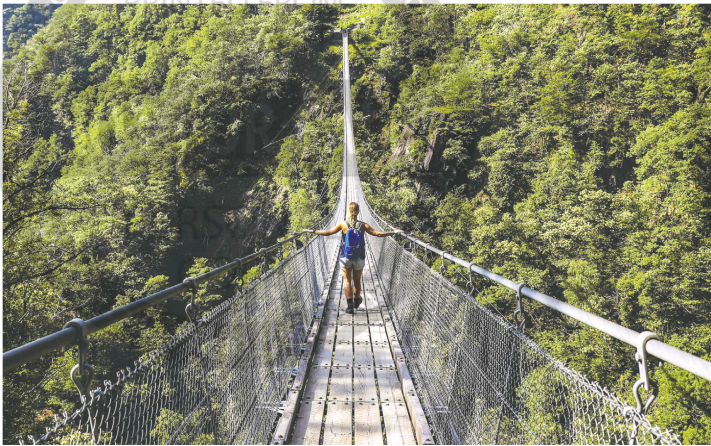
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More info

For everything you need to know to plan your Ticino stay, visit ticino.ch.

and the surrounding mountains toward lovely Lake Maggiore. Beneath Castiglione's thick walls, a fascinating museum displays artifacts dating back to Roman times and elaborate ceiling panels painted in the 15th century. And within them are expansive grassy ramparts offering plenty of space for the town's teenagers to loiter, local families to picnic, and visitors to contemplate what life must have been like during the age of knights and drawbridges. SEE SWISS ON 26

ENJOY BREATHTAKING VISTAS



The 270-metre-long Tibetan Bridge of Curzütt is one of the longest bridges in Switzerland. REMY STEINEGOER/TICINO TOURISM

4 The fit and footloose can also enjoy memorable vistas over the valleys and lakes of the Lugano region.

SWISS FROM BS

While in Bellinzona, hike to the famous Tibetan Bridge of Curzütt, suspended 130 metres above a forested mountain gorge and spanning 270 m, it is one of the longest bridges in Switzerland. Anyone willing to cross it can enjoy breathtaking views of the Magadino Plain, the nearby mountains, and the Fortress of Bellinzona, rising from the landscape like the setting of a fairy-tale.

PEAK EXPERIENCES

The fit and footloose can also enjoy memorable vistas over the valleys and lakes of the Lugano region's four panoramic peaks — Monte Brè, Monte San Salvatore, Monte Tamaro and Monte Lema. All are easily reached by bus and form part of Ticino's more than 900 kilometres of hiking trails and 400 km of mountain biking routes.

One of the most popular trekking routes is the Monte Tamaro

— Monte Lema passage, a high-alpine crossing that straddles Switzerland and Italy offering views of both countries. After a 10-minute cable-car ride, you reach the austere Chapel Santa Maria degli Angeli, designed in the 1990s by renowned architect Mario Botta and adorned with paintings by celebrated Italian painter Enzo Cucchi. A masterpiece of contemporary architecture, it blends seamlessly into its natural surroundings, jutting out dramatically

toward the horizon from a spur in the mountainside.

From Chapel Santa Maria degli Angeli, the trek takes you to the summit of Monte Tamaro, and then along the spine of the mountain until you reach Monte Lema several hours later. The entire route offers brilliant views of Lake Maggiore, Locarno, Bellinzona and Lugano, while the snowy Alps, including Monte Rosa and Matterhorn, are clearly visible the distance.

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JAMES BOND BUNGEE

Also visible from the summit of Monte Tamaro is the infamous Contra (Locarno) Dam from where James Bond famously plummeted in the opening scene of the 1995 movie *GoldenEye*, still considered one of the most spectacular stunts in cinematic history. Today, aerial thrill seekers looking to be shaken can take the same 220 m plunge off this dam, one of the highest in Europe. Fittingly called the *GoldenEye Bungee Jump*, it's the second-highest fixed bungee installation in the world.

After a leisurely drive through the timeless Ticino countryside, you receive a shot of liquid courage as an aperitif before strapping into your safety gear and jumping, head first into the abyss. Free-falling for a stomach twisting 7.5 seconds toward the reservoir Lago di Vogorno below, you hope, of course, to die another day.

LAKESIDE LUGANO

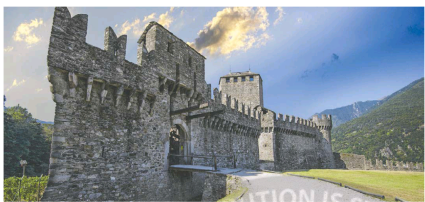
Nicknamed the Monte Carlo of Switzerland for the growing number of celebrities, entertainers and professional athletes who call it home, and the Rio of the Old World for its dramatic lakeside setting amid volcanic peaks, Ticino's largest city could easily be mistaken for a Mediterranean resort.

Spend a morning exploring the narrow, car-free streets that radiate from the Old Town's Piazza della Reforma, ringed with pastel-coloured, neoclassical palaces. After sipping a glass of prosecco at a waterside cafe along the passeggiata-friendly promenade. Then devote your evening to dining alfresco across the lake at a family-style grotto, and you'll find under Lugano's seductive spell. For a more strenuous excursion, take the funicular or hike to the summit of Monte San Salvatore, nicknamed the Sugarloaf Mountain of Switzerland after Rio's signature landmark. From here, you can explore the mountain-top village of San Salvatore, where 19th-century lavishly decorated residences and lavish 16th century Church of St. Giorgio. Then admire the exotic plants and flowers of Parco San Grato, all the time aware that while you may still be in Switzerland, all of a sudden you're in Italy.



Bellinzona is home to a complex of medieval fortifications. *JAN GEERK/SWITZERLAND TOURISM*

Devote your evening to dining alfresco across the lake at a family-style grotto, and you'll fall under Lugano's seductive spell.



Castello Montebello in Bellinzona. SILVANO CRIVELLI/BELLINZONA AND UPPER TICINO TOURISM



Ticino's largest city is Lugano, a lovely lakeside destination that's a popular holiday draw for both residents of Switzerland and foreign travellers. *MARK SISSON*



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