

**Lake Maggiore** (Italian: *Lago Maggiore*, or *Verbano*; Latin: *Lacus Verbanus*) is a large lake located on the south side of the Alps. It is the second largest of Italy and largest of southern Switzerland. Lake Maggiore is the most westerly of the three great prealpine lakes of Italy, it extends for about 70 km between Locarno and Arona.

The climate is mild in both summer and winter, producing Mediterranean vegetation, with beautiful gardens growing rare and exotic plants. Well-known gardens include those of the Isola Madre, Isola Bella and the Isole di Brissago, that of the Villa Taranto in Verbania, and the Alpinia botanical garden above Stresa.

## Geography

Lake Maggiore is 68 km long, with a breadth which varies from 3 to 5 km, except at the bay opening westward between Pallanza and Stresa, where this reaches 10 km. It exceeds all the other Italian lakes in length, but in the extent of surface it falls considerably below the Lake Garda. Its mean height above the sea level is 193 metres; but as its depth greatly exceeds that measurement, the bed is almost everywhere considerably below the sea-level, and reaches no less than 179 metres below the sea. Its form is very sinuous, so that there are few points from which any considerable part of its surface can be seen at a single glance. If this lessens the effect of the apparent size, it increases the variety of its scenery. While the upper end is completely alpine in character, the middle region lies between hills of gentler form, and the lower end advances to the verge of the plain of Lombardy.



View of the upper lake from above Brissago

The lake basin has tectonic-glacial origins and its volume is 37 km<sup>3</sup>. The lake has a surface area of about 213 km<sup>2</sup>, a maximum length of 54 km and, at its widest, is 12 km. Its main tributaries are the Ticino, the Maggia, the Toce (by which it receives the outflow of Lake Orta) and the Tresa (which is the sole emissary of Lake Lugano). The rivers Verzasca, Giona, and Cannobino also flow into the lake. Its outlet is the Ticino which, in turn, joins the river Po just south-east of Pavia.

The lake's jagged banks are surrounded by the Lepontine Alps. The western bank is in Piedmont (provinces of Novara and Province of Verbano-Cusio-Ossola) and the eastern in Lombardy (province of Varese), whereas the most northerly section extends thirteen kilometres into the canton of Ticino, where it constitutes its lowest point above sea-level as well as that of Switzerland.

## Climate

Lake Maggiore weather is generally mild. It is known for its Mediterranean-like climate where tropical and sub-tropical plants can grow year-round. During winter, the lake helps to maintain a higher temperature in the surrounding region (since water releases heat energy more slowly than air). The temperatures are cooled down in summer by the breezes that blow on the water's surface changing its colour. The area enjoys nearly 2300 hours of sunshine a year and an

average annual temperature of 15.5 °C. The water of the lake has a comfortable temperature of 20 to 22°C in July and August. In winter snowfall is erratic and primarily affects the higher elevations. Rainfall is heaviest in May and lowest during the winter months.

## Towns and villages on the lake

Switzerland, Canton of Ticino	Italy, Piedmont Region Province of Verbano-Cusio-Ossola and Province of Novara	Italy, Lombardy Region Province of Varese
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ranzo</li> <li>• Gerra</li> <li>• San Nazzaro</li> <li>• Vira</li> <li>• Magadino</li> <li>• Tenero</li> <li>• Locarno</li> <li>• Ascona</li> <li>• Ronco sopra Ascona</li> <li>• Brissago</li> <li>• Minusio</li> <li>• Muralto</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cannobio</li> <li>• Cannero Riviera</li> <li>• Oggebbio</li> <li>• Ghiffa</li> <li>• Verbania</li> <li>• Baveno</li> <li>• Stresa</li> <li>• Belgirate</li> <li>• Lesa</li> <li>• Meina</li> <li>• Arona</li> <li>• Dormelletto</li> <li>• Castelletto sopra Ticino</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sesto Calende</li> <li>• Angera</li> <li>• Ranco</li> <li>• Ispra</li> <li>• Brebbia</li> <li>• Besozzo</li> <li>• Monvalle</li> <li>• Legiuno</li> <li>• Laveno-Mombello</li> <li>• Castelveccana</li> <li>• Porto Valtravaglia</li> <li>• Brezzo di Bedero</li> <li>• Germignaga</li> <li>• Luino</li> <li>• Maccagno</li> <li>• Tronzano Lago Maggiore</li> <li>• Pino sulla Sponda del Lago Maggiore</li> </ul>

## Islands

- Borromean Islands (three islands and two islets located between Verbania to the north and Stresa to the south)
  - Isola Bella
  - Isola Madre
  - Isola dei Pescatori (or Isola Superiore)
  - Isolino di San Giovanni (in front of Verbania)
  - Scoglio della Malghera (between Isola Bella and Isola Pescatori)
- Brissago Islands (close to Brissago)



- San Pancrazio (or Grande Isola)
- Isolino (or Isola Piccola or Isola di Sant'Apollinare)
- Castelli di Cannero (three small islands just off the shore from Cannero Riviera)
- Isolino Partegora (in the gulf of Angera)

## Sacro Monte di Ghiffa

The Sacred Mountain of Ghiffa is a Roman Catholic devotional complex in the *comune* of Ghiffa, (Piedmont, northern Italy), overlooking the Lake Maggiore. It is one of the nine Sacri Monti of Piedmont and Lombardy, included in UNESCO World Heritage list.



Sacro Monte di Ghiffa

## Events

The Spirit of Woodstock Festival is an annual open air festival at the end of July/beginning of August at Mirapuri.

## Historical events

Methane was first discovered and isolated by Alessandro Volta as he analysed marsh gas from Lake Maggiore, between 1776 and 1778.

In 1936, a Bugatti Type 22 Brescia Roadster, built 1925, was sunk in the lake by employees of Zurich architect Marco Schmucklerski, when Swiss custom officials investigated whether he had paid taxes on the car. The Bugatti was attached to an iron chain making it possible to recover it once the investigation was over, yet that never happened. When the chain corroded, the car sunk to the lake bed, where it was rediscovered on 18 August 1967 by local diver Ugo Pillon and became a favourite target for divers thereafter. When one of the divers, Damiano Tamagni, was killed in a hold-up on 1 February 2008, his friends from the Ascona divers' club decided to lift and sell the carwreck to raise funds for a yet to be created foundation named after the victim. The remains of the Bugatti were recovered on 12 July 2009. The sale took place at the Retro Mobile classic car exhibition in Paris on 23 January 2010. It was sold for 260,500 euros.

## References in literature

Lake Maggiore features in American writer Ernest Hemingway's novel *A Farewell To Arms*. The protagonist (Frederic Henry) and his lover (Catherine Barkley) are forced to cross the transnational border within the lake in a rowing boat to escape Italian Carabinieri.