Hiking Italy's Lakes District - Alumni

Lago di Como, Lago di Lugano, Lago Maggiore
June 10-17, 2026



Features

- Seven days of incredible backpacking, 25-35 miles total
- Eight nights of mixed hotel and rifugio accommodations
- Stunning glacial lakes of northern Italy and Switzerland
- Cultural exploration of ancient villages, towns, and landmarks
- Elevation ranges from 2,000-6,000 ft
- Optional pre-trip activities in Turin

Cost: $3,655 Pre- and post-trip lodging included
Minimum Age: 18

Max Trip size: 12 participants
2 NOLS Instructors

Trip Description

Come along with NOLS on the latest addition to our Italian trip offerings! We are excited to offer the NOLS Alumni community this extraordinary adventure through one of Italy's most fabled regions.

The trip starts and ends in Turin, a stunning city home to the car manufacturer Fiat and many incredible museums. We recommend showing up a few days early and staying late if you can! To encourage a bit of sightseeing, we invite you to arrive early and join our team for an evening of wine and cheese tasting, a day before the trip starts. This also allows for extra time when dealing with travel delays, jet lag, or baggage snafus.

The trip officially starts with a group orientation at our hotel in Turin. The following morning, we will store in-town luggage, heft our backpacks, and catch a train to Como. This trip has no gear shuttle, so everything you want for the week will be in your pack when we depart Turin. Once in Como, we will walk to our hotel. After checking in, we will take a cable car to Brunate, high above Lago di Como on the Bellagio Promontory/Larian Triangle cliffs, for an optional day hike. There is also an option to explore the town of Como and enjoy its lakeside cafes.

You will spend the next two days hiking along the ridge line of the Larian Triangle and lodging in rifugi (backcountry hostels). The trail gradually descends to the town of Bellagio. We have time scheduled to explore this iconic community before continuing on with the trip.

Leaving Bellagio, we will take a ferry across Lago di Como to the town of Lenno. We'll spend a cultural day touring Villa Carlotta, an art-filled 17th-century villa with formal gardens in the morning and exploring the charming town of Menaggio in the afternoon. There is an optional scenic mountain hike this afternoon on the "Linea Codorna", part of the region's WWI defensive line.

Next, we will catch a bus across the Italian/Swiss border, check into our hotel, and explore the vibrant lakeshore city of Lugano. Lugano is the namesake of the second lake on our journey- Lago di Lugano. We will stay one night in Lugano before crossing back over the border into Italy.

On the second to last day of the trip, we will take a short morning bus to the train station and catch a train to Maccagno, on Lago Maggiore. We will check into the hotel and organize a day hike to the village of Agra.

On our last day, we will take a shuttle and ferry to Stresa to explore the Baroque masterpiece, Palazzo Borromeo. The palace's ornate design and prestigious art collection are the culmination of centuries of design evolution. In the afternoon, we will take a train back to Turin for a final dinner together before returning home.

Meals consist of set dinners, buffet breakfasts at hotels or rifugi, and picnic lunches on the trail. The group divides the lunch supplies and carries them to share the load.

This trip stays in small hotels (let us know if you're pals or a couple who want to share a room!) or rifugi (comfortable, hostel-style lodging with bunk rooms). This keeps our backpack weight down (no tents or heavy kitchen gear). Your instructors will arrange rooms at each establishment.

This trip is a great way to get reacquainted with NOLS in a convivial, relaxing, and visually stunning part of the world. Instruction is geared to your interests, with time for journal writing, photography, and more. Of course, non-alumni friends and family are also invited- this is a great way to introduce NOLS to your sidekicks.

A fantastic part of alumni trips is the group itself. NOLS alumni and their guests are an interesting crew, with diverse professional and personal backgrounds. Expect plenty of camaraderie, laughter, learning, and shared responsibility on this trip.

Trip Environment

Italy's Lake District offers a variety of mountain terrain—boasting grassy meadows, stands of conifers, large boulders and wide expanses of exposed bedrock jutting from the lakeshore. The majority of our trek follows established trails with limited signage. Weather at this time of year can vary widely—including hot, sunny days, or rain mixed with even heavy snow at higher elevations. Temps are likely to be in the mid 70s F during the days and near 50 F at night. There will be a lot of challenging up and down trail hiking from the lakeshore (elevation ~750 feet) across the valleys and peaks (5,200 feet) that surround the district's lake system.

The Italian lakes have a great variety of Mediterranean and alpine flora due to the mild climate and a broad altitude range. Wildflowers complement the magnificent and exotic plants found in the many formal villa gardens. Highlights include gorgeous peonies, brilliant orange lilies in shady meadows, clumps of blue-purple gentians, as well as alpine cinquefoil and cornflower. Olives flourish and white petal capers adorn garden walls. Capers, pickled or salted, are familiar ingredients of Italian cuisine.

One presence, albeit mysterious, that sets Lago di Como apart from the other northern lakes is the 'dreaded' Lariosaurus, a mythical reptilian creature said to resemble the famed Loch Ness monster in appearance and behavior. "Larry" (as nicknamed) is reputedly smaller, but much more ferocious than its mythic Scottish counterpart!

Roe deer, Chamois and eagles are common in the mountains around the lakes as well.

NOLS Staff

Our staff are NOLS employees and trained and certified accordingly. This means they maintain certifications in wilderness medicine and are trained to NOLS' high standards in risk management. They are senior staff who have spent years working and teaching in backcountry environments all over the world. Additionally, our staff specialize in bringing together groups of strangers and building the group culture and camaraderie that makes NOLS trips great.

Our staff bring language skills useful in the region and a flair for logistics that create a smooth and relaxing schedule. Our instructors have been running trips in Italy for well over a decade and are true specialists when it comes to the region's food and culture. They will ensure that you pick up some basic Italian language, history, and connections.

A Day in the life

In the mornings, generally about 8 a.m., the group gathers in a common area or dining room for breakfast. Options include various eggs, meats, bread, cereals and hot drinks.

After breakfast, the team returns to their rooms to change into hiking clothes (shorts, or hiking pants and t-shirt) and finish packing up. We'll gather outside with packs for a review of the day and route. The team hikes as a loose group along the trail, stopping for water and snack breaks as needed. Hikes vary, but are generally ~5-hours on the trail.

We arrive at our lodging where instructors will organize rooms. People re-group for additional optional hikes, or change from hiking clothes into comfortable, country travel wear for lounging around the lodging. Dress is not formal, so warmish casual clothes like hiking pants, fishing shirts and light pile jackets are common and appropriate around the common areas.

Our group dinners usually happen at a set time from a multi-course menu. Various meats and pastas are common options, with vegetables, breads and a desert selection. Meals (which are quite excellent) are included in the trip tuition, but alcohol is not. Participants often pair up to buy a bottle of wine, or folks order beer or spirits from the bar.

After dinner, groups often come together for parlor games and socializing. Most participants head to bed by around 10 p.m.

Difficulty Scale

This trip is rated 2 out of 5 on our difficulty scale.



We use a difficulty scale to help participants evaluate if a trip is right for them. It considers probable weather conditions, physicality of activities, and food and accommodations. You don't need to be a honed athlete, but pre-trip work to improve your strength, flexibility and endurance, is highly

encouraged to improve your enjoyment of the place. If you have specific questions regarding physical preparation and your readiness please reach out to the Alumni Trips Department.

Food on the trip

There will be plenty of food provided for everyone on the trip. We are happy to accommodate folks who have reasonable dietary needs and/or preferences. Please be sure to list your dietary needs on your registration paperwork.

If you're particularly keen on some particular trail food, please bring it along. We all have treats that we enjoy and bringing something special is a great way to keep motivation high.

Curriculum

This trip focuses on many traditional NOLS skills, competencies, and concepts, including map reading, hiking and group travel. The instructors will provide information necessary for the group to comfortably travel, as well as optional topics as desired by participants. These could include natural history, local history, leadership, decision making, and team function, among other things. Formal "classes" are few and mostly optional but informal discussions are plentiful. Anticipate a required base level of group management and cohesion— this is a mountain expedition.

About the Italian Lakes District

Lake Como

"How bless'd, delicious Scene! the eye that greets Thy open beauties, or thy lone retreats; Th' unwearied sweep of wood thy cliffs that scales, The never-ending waters of thy vales". - William Wodsworth

Lake Como forms an upturned 'Y' shape– rather like a tuning fork. The 146 km² expanse of Lago di Como is wholly in the administrative region of Lombardy. The lakes are fed mainly by the snowfields and glaciers of the neighboring Alps. The area, split by the lake's two southern arms (between Como, Bellagio, and Lecco), is also known as the Larian Triangle, or *Triangolo lariano*.

Bellagio

This jewel between Lake Como and the Italian Alps merits a stop all its own. Head out of the town center to Punta Spartivento, which offers sweeping views of the mountains and Switzerland beyond, including the spot where ancient Roman magistrate Pliny the Younger (the person, not the beer) kept a vacation villa 900 years ago.

Lake Lugano

This is a glacial lake situated on the border between Switzerland and Italy. In ancient times, Lugano's shores were adorned with cultivated cherry trees. Mostly in Switzerland, this lake looks the part, with alpine peaks rising over its bright blue water.

Lake Maggiore

Literally 'Greater Lake', Maggiore is Italy's second largest lake. The lake and its shoreline are divided between the Italian regions of Piedmont and Lombardy and the Swiss canton of Ticino.

The climate is mild in summer and winter, producing Mediterranean vegetation, with many gardens growing rare and exotic plants. Well-known gardens of the area include those of the Borromean and Brissago Islands, that of the Villa Taranto in Verbania, and the Alpina Botanical Garden above Stresa. There is never enough time to visit all of these astounding places but we will do our best to wander through the legions of flora in the area.

Expectations of Participants

The alumni trip atmosphere is more relaxed than a typical NOLS expedition. However, it's not a full-service vacation, or guided experience. You'll have to participate, carry your load, and help out as needed. These expeditions are fun, but they still require self-reliance, self awareness, risk management and sound decision making as we trek through remote areas where evacuation to modern medical facilities can take several days. Like all NOLS courses, these expeditions emphasize hands-on learning and the application of new skills in a variety of situations.

All participants need to complete and submit application materials, including a medical history form. These forms highlight the intersection of your trip's anticipated physical rigor and your current health and fitness status. Your forthright and timely completion and submission of the forms sets you and your trip up for success in the outdoors.

Alumni trips allow electronics and alcohol (for those of legal age in the country of the trip). Many participants find that these luxuries can add to the trip experience and local flavor. Excessive alcohol consumption is not a part of the culture of Alumni trips.

Trip Itinerary

June 8	Depending on connections and possible pre-trip plans, many participants will depart the U.S. on this day.	
June 9	We urge you to arrive in Turin on this day, allowing for jet lag recovery, possible baggage snafus, and some optional activities. For those in town, we'll host an optional "wine rally" at the Starhotels Majestic at 6 p.m., introducing local wines and cheeses. It's a chance to meet the group and get a taste of the region's fantastic food. Please RSVP.	Lodging: on your own, but we suggest Turin's Starhotels Majestic.
June 10	For those in Turin, we'll loosely organize some optional self-guided activities from our hotel. Our pre-trip group orientation occurs at 6 p.m. in the Starhotels Majestic lobby or nearby	NOLS will provide lodging at the Starhotels Majestic in Turin (we'll double up the same gender pairs). Dinner is on your own.
June 11	Pack up. Store in-town luggage. Take the train to Como, walk to the hotel, and check in. In the afternoon, take the cable car to Brunate. There is also an unstructured afternoon to explore Como. Hike ~5 miles	Lodging: Hotel Como, Como
June 12	Hike the ridgeline to Rifugio Riella, ~9 miles ↑1500 ft	Lodging: Rifugio Riella

June 13	Hike along the Bellagio Peninsula to the Sormano Observatory/ Ristorante La Colma. Shuttle to Bellagio, enjoy unstructured time in Bellagio, then ferry onwards to Lenno. ~ 3 miles ↑250 ft	Lodging: Albergo Lenno on Lake Como in Lenno
June 14	Cultural day. Visit Villa Carlotta in the morning and spend the afternoon exploring Menaggio. Optional scenic mountain hike on the "Linea Codorna," part of the region's WWI defensive line, and the small chapel San Maurizio.	Lodging: Albergo Lenno on Lake Como in Lenno
June 15	Bus to Lugano. Enjoy a self-guided walking tour of Lugano. Hike ~2 miles	Lodging: Hotel Zurigo, Lugano.
June 16	Catch the early bus to the train station, then catch the train to Maccagno. An optional day hike to Agra or Maccagno's old town and lakeshore is worth exploring. Hike ~6 miles ↑400 ft ↓400 ft	Lodging: Hotel Torre Imperiale, Maccagno.
June 17	Shuttle and ferry to Stresa for an exploration of the incredible Palazzo Borromeo. Train to Turin	Lodging is provided by NOLS at the Starhotels Majestic, Turin. Final dinner hosted by NOLS.
June 18	Depart Turin/fly home.	Breakfast at hotel included.

Trip Logistics

The trip starts and ends in the ancient city of Turin. Please plan on arriving in Turin a night early to allow for jet lag recovery, possible airline delays, optional wine tasting, and optional group day touring before our official trip orientation meeting.

Travel

Recommended Option

Turin (code: TRN) is served by Lufthansa regional flights out of Munich and Frankfurt. Depending on where your first touchdown in Europe, you may either clear customs in that city or in Turin. You don't need a visa, but customs will stamp your passport.

In Italian, Turin is "Torino;" two different words for the same city.

There is a bus service (**ARRIVA SADEM**) from the Turin airport into downtown and the Porta Nuova train station. Our group hotel is one block from this stop. The cost is € 6.00 for the local service (45-minute ride) or € 7.00 for the express service (30-minute ride).

Alternate Options

Milan is a workable alternative via Malpensa (MXP) or Linate (LIN) Airports. It's an easy train to Milan's Central Station to pick up a high-speed train to Turin (~1-hour).

When you arrive at Milan Malpensa Airport (MXP) you'll likely retrieve your luggage in Terminal #1. Follow the sign to the trains via a pedestrian tunnel. Purchase a ticket at the counter for a ride from Malpensa to Milano Centrale (~13.00 euros, one way). Trains leave hourly at 22 and 43 minutes after the hour. After your trip, it's easy to purchase a return train ticket in Turin directly to Malpensa Airport.

Please note that Milan's Stazione Centrale has some very good and inexpensive sandwich shops outside the secured train platform area. Consider picking up a bottle of water and a sandwich for the train ride if you're purchasing tickets in the main station.

At Milan Central Station, tickets are available from machines in the secured platform area to Turin Central Station. To use the ticket machines, select your language and use a credit card with chip technology. Alternatively, you can exit security and proceed into the Station Head House and go to the ticket windows for intercity trains. Purchase a ticket to Torino (station Porta Nuova—"per favore un biglietto per Torino andata solamente." Cost is about €38). Validate your ticket using the yellow trackside punch machine before boarding your train.

The train tickets are printed with important information. Typical wording might say "Carrozza 005, posti 31 finestrino." This means that you are on car 005, your reserved window seat is number 31. The trains are smoke-free and luggage is stored in the compartment or at either end of the carriage.

Depending on the train, the trip from Milan to Turin takes about 60 minutes. Turin has several train stations: the one you want is Torino Porta Nuova. Pre-booking and purchasing a ticket online is less expensive, especially for the high-speed ("frecce") trains. Web site: www.trenitalia.com/tcom-en

Lodging

The trip tuition includes paired lodging (akin to tenting in the field, we'll pair you in single gender rooms in town; if you're a pair with someone on the trip, please let us know!) at the Starhotels Majestic on the first and the final night in Turin. If you come early or want to stay in the area after the trip, booking.com is a reliable tool for Turin lodging.

Hotel information: Starhotels Majestic.

Storage of Personal Belongings

You can leave valuables and luggage in a secure area at our first hotel for the duration of the backcountry trip. While the storage is secure, NOLS assumes no responsibility for the stored items. Although our partners have never had a problem, think twice before storing electronics or other expensive items in your in-town luggage.

Currency

You'll need cash in the form of Euros for miscellaneous purchases and transportation throughout the trip. You'll receive the best exchange at your local bank, but money change kiosks are handy in most airports. US credit cards will work in most locations, including train stations, but it's often a good idea to give your credit card company a heads up that you're traveling internationally. About 100 Euros will be plenty of cash for the field portion of the trip for incidental purchases.

Tipping
Service industry tipping in Italy is common but not as high as it is in the US. 5-10% is standard in restaurants that do not charge a *servizio*. A *servizio* is a service charge and takes the place of a tip. Tipping other service workers is common as well but small amounts of 1-2 Euros is standard.

While tipping is common in the outdoor guiding culture, your NOLS Instructors are not driven to excellence by tips but rather a love for taking people outdoors. You are welcome to tip the Instructors if you choose, and many instructors are honored by a donation in their name to the NOLS Annual Fund which supports scholarships for future NOLS students.

Travel Insurance
Travel insurance is worth exploring in case unforeseen events cause you to change your plans or if NOLS has to cancel a trip for any reason. Check with your personal insurance carrier and credit card to understand what you already might have or check out cat70.com for a wide variety of options.

Carbon Footprint and Offset
Current estimates are that the Travel Industry accounts for ~8% of global emissions. This percentage includes everything from transportation to accommodation and shopping. NOLS recognizes that our business contributes to this problem but we do not have a comprehensive strategy at this point.

If you would like to offset part or all of the carbon emissions related to your Alumni trip, we recommend South Pole. Their calculator can help easily calculate your footprint and choose a project to contribute to. Here is a link to their calculator.

Immunizations / Vaccinations / Travel medications
International travel poses special health considerations. NOLS strongly advises that all participants traveling to international locations carefully consider what vaccinations or inoculations are required, recommended, or suggested for their specific travel itinerary. Consulting with a physician, travel medicine specialist, or other healthcare professional is strongly advised.

Visa / Passport - Attention International European travelers - Must read… Action Required

If your travels have you **entering or transiting (passing through or laying over in) the UK**, you will need to apply for and have an approved Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA) to continue to your destination.

This article explains that starting Jan 8, 2025, US and Canadian citizens will need to apply for the ETA to enter the UK.

Here's the link for how to apply.

As well, for NOLS International Alumni trips, your **passport must be valid for a minimum of 6 months post trip**. For example, if your trip in Europe concludes on July 30, 2025, your passport must be valid through January 30, 2026.

At some point in the future (July 2025?) Europe (EU) will be requiring a travel authorization for most countries that are visa-exempt. This includes USA citizens. Once this system goes into effect, you will need to apply using this new system before traveling and pay a small fee for the authorization.

You can read about this new program, check your requirements, and view the most up to date expected implementation date here.

Electricity stuff

You will have regular access to power plugs on this trip and be able to plug in and charge your devices. To do this, you will need a Type C adapter. Each lodging will have at least some available charging capability and Wifi.

Trip Registration

The best way to register is through the trip information page on the nols.edu website. A non-refundable deposit secures your spot on the trip. If any issues arise, please call the NOLS Alumni Department at (800) 332-4280. Your enrollment is complete with receipt of your full tuition and your completed application forms; these are **due 60 days before the start of your trip.**

All participants are required to submit registration materials, including a medical form. These forms highlight the intersection of your trip's anticipated physical rigor and your current health and fitness status while also providing NOLS information about things like your dietary needs.

NOLS is not responsible for additional costs incurred by late arrivals or evacuations. Those expenses are the responsibility of trip participants and we recommend purchasing travel insurance to mitigate the impact of unforeseen circumstances.

Do not book travel greater than 60 days before the start of the trip unless you have confirmed with NOLS that the trip will run. On rare occasions, we do cancel trips due to low enrollment.

Cancellation and Transfer Policy

For your reference, here is the Alumni Trips Cancellation and Transfer Policy. When enrolling on a trip, you will need to agree to this policy.

Suggested Readings

- *La Passione: How Italy Seduced the World* by Dianne Hales
- *The Culture Wars of the Late Renaissance: Skeptics, Libertines, and Opera* (The Bernard Berenson Lectures on the Italian Renaissance Delivered at Villa I Tatti) by Edward Muir
- *Milano&Fashion the story behind Dolce&Gabbana: Sensual Sartorial Sicilian* by Tibor Michaels
- *Leonardo da Vinc*i by Walter Isaacson
- *Italian for Dummies* by Onofri, Moller and Picarazzi.

Local Recommendations - Turin

- Museo Egizio- top Egyptian museum outside of Egypt.

- Royal Palace of Turin and Piazza Castello and the Shroud of Turin.
- Rent a bike! Torino has miles of dedicated bike trails that are fun to explore.
- The Royal Palace
- The Open Air Market (largest in Europe and a great place for a meal)

Fun facts about Turin

- Italy's capital of chocolate-gianduiotti and pasta gianduja, the precursor to Nutella
- Birthplace of the Aperitif
- The Turin area is the birthplace of the Slow Food Movement— see its unique selection of slow food restaurants.
- The birthplace of Eataly- two locations, one near our hotel
- Headquarters for Fiat Chrysler Automotive
- Home of the 2006 Winter Olympics
- Piedmont is a UNESCO World Heritage site.
- Turin's historic cafes birthed the unique coffee drink- Bicerin (espresso, chocolate and whole milk served layered in a small rounded glass).

Your Gear List

Upper Body Clothing	
Equipment	**Notes**
Base layer (light or midweight)	Wool or synthetic
Top layer (fleece jacket, or puffy)	Heavy weight fleece or a medium weight puffy layer
Long sleeve shirt	Synthetic "fishing shirts" are often preferred for their versatility and sun resistance.
Wind shirt (optional)	A lightweight, breathable, durable nylon wind shell, in either pullover or parka style
Rain jacket	A sturdy, waterproof jacket with a hood. Both coated nylon and breathable fabrics such as Gore-Tex® are acceptable
T-shirt (1-2)	A lightweight synthetic or merino wool t-shirt
Sports Bra or Tank (2-3)	Synthetic sports bra or a synthetic sports tank are recommended
Warm Hat	Synthetic or wool
Sun hat	Baseball cap or full brim
Wool or Fleece gloves	Light weight
Lower Body Clothing	
Equipment	**Notes**

Base layer (light or midweight)	Wool or synthetic
Wind/ Hiking pants	Breathable nylon wind pants or lightweight hiking pant
Hiking shorts	Nylon, quick dry shorts
Underwear (2-3 pairs)	Wear what's comfortable; cotton, silk, or synthetics are fine
Footwear	
Equipment	**Notes**
Approach or Hiking Shoes	You will need a sturdy pair of shoes to hike in. Consider trail hiking shoes or approach shoes for something lighter than traditional boots
Sneakers or non-hiking shoe	Something to wear around town and the hut. Sandals such as Chacos or flip flops are recommended.
Socks (2-3 pairs)	½ crew to crew length wool socks. Cotton socks are not advised
Miscellaneous Personal Gear	
Equipment	**Notes**
Medium sized Backpack	Must be big enough to carry personal items (e.g., water, food, clothing layers) and lunch—40-55L
Sleeping Bag Liner	Sleeping bag liner–we're using rifugio bunk beds with a basic sheet, pillow, and quilt. **A liner is a required**
Plastic Trash Bags (1-2)	One to two heavy-duty trash compactor bags (33 gallon) to help waterproof items in your pack
Water Bottles	Bottles with at total capacity of at least 2 Liters
Lip Balm (1-2)	SPF 15 or greater
Sunscreen	SPF 30 or greater
Sunglasses	Good-quality sunglasses with 100-percent UV protection; lenses should be dark
Headlamp	Bring spare batteries
Toiletries	Toothbrush, toothpaste, comb, brush, skin lotion, tampons, etc. Travel or trial sizes are enough. Ear plugs and eye covers can be nice
Swim Suit	Swimming in the lakes is a treat and some inns have pools!
Optional Items	
Trekking Poles	Most participants enjoy hiking with two poles. Some variants collapse for handy travel.
Hydration System	Very handy and popular

Book or e-reader	Bring something fun to read
Camera	We would love to see your photos post-trip!
Casual Clothes	Shirt/pants/skirt for dinner or hanging out around the rifugio
Pack Cover	Heavy weight and attachable to your pack
Rain Pants	Some folks like these for wet days
Pack Towel	If you want to shower in a rifugio
Ear plugs	Handy for sleeping in rooms with other people
Eye Mask	Great if you need the dark to sleep well
Gaiters	Short or tall gaiters to keep rocks and debris out of their shoes