

# Ticino



The summer air is rich and hot. The peacock-proud posers propel their scooters in and out of traffic. Italian weather. Italian style. And that's not to mention the Italian ice cream, Italian pizza, Italian architecture, Italian language. But this isn't Rome, Florence or Naples. It's the Switzerland that Heidi never mentioned.

Ticino (Tessin in German and French) is a strange mix. Classic, dark-haired Latin lookers rub shoulders with equally style-conscious blue-eyed blondes. There is a certain vibrant snappiness in the air of towns like Lugano. But this is Switzerland, after all, and the temperament is tamer than further south. A lusty love for Italian comfort food and full-bodied wines is balanced by a healthy respect for rules and regulations. And in the scattered valley hamlets the Italian spoken has a halting lilt that marks its distance from the honeyed heat of southern Italian conversation. The very manner of the people is demonstrative of how the canton manages a blend of Swiss cool and Italian passion.

The region offers a little of everything. A touch of the shimmering lake life can be had in Lugano and Locarno. Their mirror-like lakes, dotted by colourful villages with mansions and palm trees, are framed by grand, verdant mountains. To the north, the region's capital, Bellinzona is a quieter but stunning medieval fortress town. Those in search of rural quiet have come to the right place. Various valleys spread across the length of the northern half of the canton, blessed by homely hamlets, Romanesque chapels and endless hiking options past lakes and roaring mountain streams.

## HIGHLIGHTS

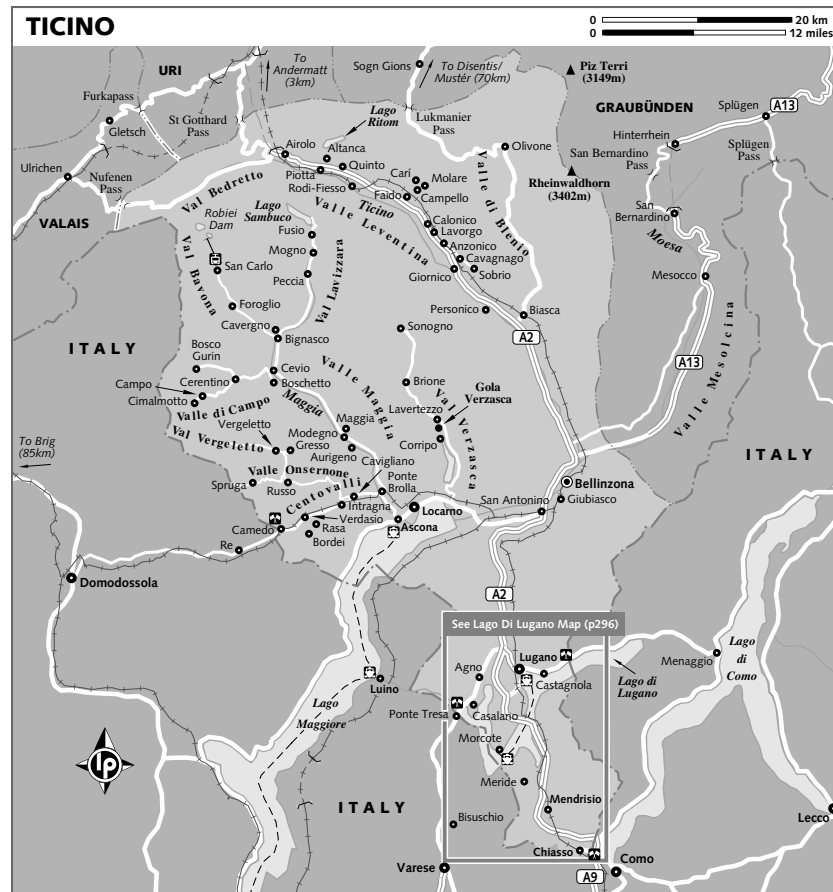
- Taking an aristocratic amble around Bellinzona's three **castles** (p289)
- Losing yourself in the high valleys, especially **Val Bavona** (p303), of the Valle Maggia
- Drinking in the lake views from Lugano's **Monte Brè** (p296) and **Monte San Salvatore** (p296)
- Feasting on the cream of the silver screen at Locarno's **Festival Internazionale di Film** (p300) in August
- Catching the spectacular **Centovalli Railway** (p302) to Domodossola in Italy



■ POPULATION: 314,600

■ AREA: 2812.5 SQ KM

■ LANGUAGE: ITALIAN



## History

Ticino, long a poor, rural buffer area between the Swiss German cantons north of the Alps and Italy to the south, was absorbed by the Swiss in the late 15th century after centuries of changing hands between the lords of Como and the dukes of Milan. In earlier days it had been a loosely controlled Lombard fiefdom and, before that, a Roman frontier stronghold.

When the founding cantons of the Swiss confederation, Uri, Schwyz and Unterwalden, had secured their independence of Habsburg Austrian control, they decided to move to protect the soft Alpine underbelly to the south. This they managed to do with surprising alacrity, defeating a su-

perior Milanese force at Giornico in the Valle Leventina in 1478 and taking fortified Bellinzona in 1503.

Napoleon came to upset the Swiss apple cart in 1798 and ended Swiss German domination of Ticino. For a while it became an independent republic, then in 1803 it entered the new Swiss Confederation concocted by Napoleon as a free and equal canton.

Only since WWII has it been able to emerge from its struggling rural slumber, and nowadays the region thrives as a services (mostly banking) centre and tourist attraction, especially for Swiss Germans looking for a little Italian style without leaving home. The establishment of a university at Lugano in 1996 was a significant step, as

the Italian-speaking population had long been caught between two hard options: study elsewhere in Switzerland in another language, or overcome bureaucratic hell to gain admission to Italian universities.

The region has its problems. With such a small percentage of the Swiss population, it counts for little in big national decisions. Wages are lower than in most of the rest of Switzerland. Ticinesi are attracted by big brother Italy, but often suffer a sense of inferiority, when not inferiority (not aided by the parading Gucci brigade that pops up from Milan on weekends), next to their southern cousins. Staunchly (but independently) Swiss, they don't readily identify with many political choices made north of the Alps, although recently Ticino has swung to the right on subjects like immigration and the debate on how far to become involved with the EU (answer: as little as possible).

### Orientation & Information

Ticino is the country's fourth-largest canton, bordering with Graubünden to the north and east, a small stretch of the Valais to the west, and with Italy to west, south and southeast. The climate is mild on the lakes and a little more extreme in the rural valleys. Average afternoon temperatures for Lugano are around 28°C in July and August, 17°C in April and September and 7°C in December and January. Locarno gets more than 2300 hours of sunshine per year.

In addition to the normal Swiss national holidays, the following public holidays are taken in Ticino:

**Epiphany** (Epifania or La Befana) 6 January

**St Joseph's Day** (Festa di San Giuseppe) 19 March

**Labour Day** (Festa del Lavoro) 1 May

**Corpus Christi** variable date

**Sts Peter and Paul Day** (Festa di SS Pietro e Paolo)

29 June

**Feast of the Assumption** (Assunzione or Ferragosto)

15 August

**All Saints' Day** (Ognisanti) 1 November

**Feast of the Immaculate Conception** (Immacolata

Concezione) 8 December

The regional tourist office is the **Ente Ticinese per il Turismo** (☎ 091 825 70 56; www.ticino.tourism.ch; Villa Turrina, Via Lugano 12, Bellinzona; ☎ 8am-noon & 2-6pm Mon-Fri).

Pick up a copy of the *Ticino Camping* brochure, which details the canton's 40 camping

grounds. Ask about the 30-odd mountain huts run by the **Federazione Alpinistica Ticinese** (FAT; www.capannei.ch) along the canton's hiking trails.

Wine is a big part of the Ticino experience. Pick up the *Le Strade del Vino* map-guide. It details wineries around the canton, their opening hours and products. To learn more about the Ticino love affair with Merlot, have a look at www.ticinowine.ch.

### Getting There & Around

The Lugano Region Pass gives free travel on Lago di Lugano, and on regional public transport in and around Lugano (including the funiculars up Monte Brè and San Salvatore). It also gives free or reduced rides on the cable cars and rack and pinion railways in the area, as well as half-price transport to and around Locarno and on Lago Maggiore. The price is Sfr72/96 for three/seven days. It is available for 2nd class only and issued from around Easter to October.

## BELLINZONA

pop 16,890 / elevation 230m

Strategically placed at the conversion point of several valleys leading down from the Alps, Bellinzona is visually unique. Inhabited since Neolithic times, it is dominated by three grey-stone, fairy-tale medieval castles that have attracted everyone from Swiss invaders to painters like William Turner. Turner may have liked the place, but Bellinzona has a surprisingly low tourist profile, in spite of its castles together forming one of only six UNESCO World Heritage sites in Switzerland.

The rocky central hill upon which rises the main castle, Castelgrande, was a Roman frontier post and Lombard defensive tower, and was later developed as a heavily fortified town controlled by Milan. The three castles and valley walls could not stop the Swiss German confederate troops from overwhelming the city in 1503, thus deciding Ticino's fate for the following three centuries.

### Information

**Bisi** (☎ 091 825 21 31; Via Magoria 10; Internet access per hr Sfr5; ☎ 2-7pm Mon-Fri)

**Post office** (Viale Stazione 18) To get here, walk left of the train station for five minutes.

**Tourist office** (☎ 091 825 21 31; www.bellinzona.turismo.ch; Piazza Nosetto; ☎ 10am-6pm) In the restored Renaissance Palazzo Civico (town hall).

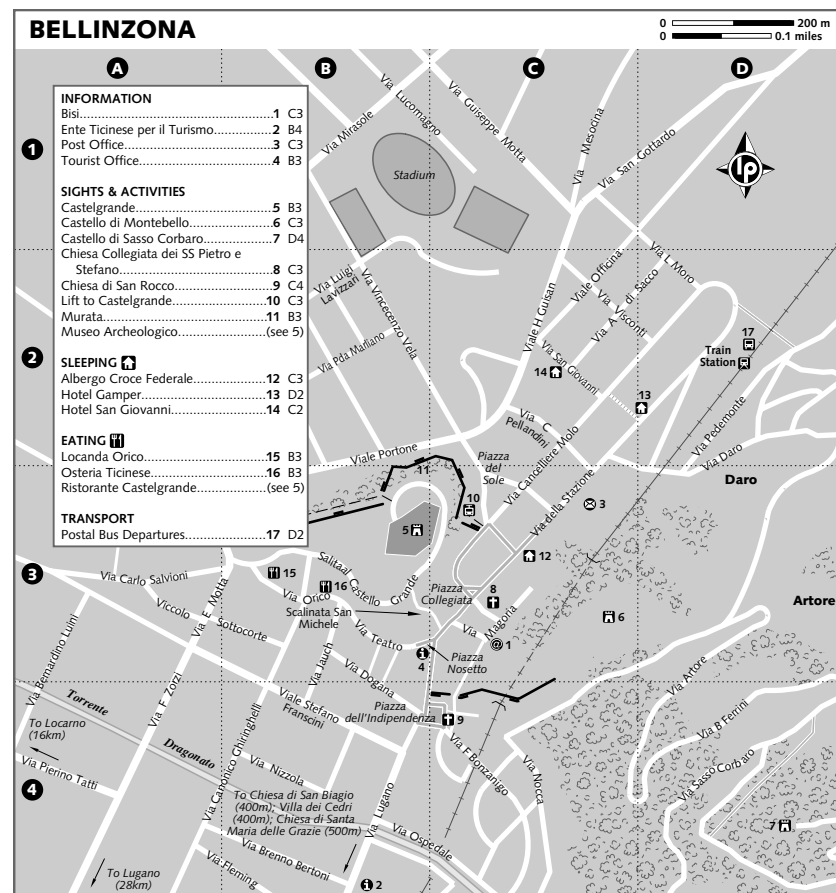
### Sights & Activities

A stroll around the cobblestone pedestrian-only old core of town is a treat. Keep an eye out for fresco-adorned churches and close-knit townhouses. South of Piazza dell'Indipendenza, the medieval huddle gives way to elegant, if ageing, villas.

### CASTLES

Without doubt, the city's three imposing castles are the main draw. To visit all three, get a general ticket (adult/concession Sfr8/4), which is valid indefinitely.

**Castelgrande** (☎ 091 825 81 45; Monte San Michele; admission to grounds free; ☎ 9am-midnight), dating from the 6th century, is the biggest fortification and is in the town centre. You can walk (head up Scalinata San Michele from Piazza Collegiata) or take the lift, buried deep in the rocky hill, from Piazza del Sole. The castle's **Museo Archeologico** (Archaeological Museum; adult/concession Sfr4/2; ☎ 10am-6pm) has a modest collection of finds from the hill dating to prehistoric times. More engaging is the display of 15th-century decorations taken from the ceiling of a former noble house in central Bellinzona. The pictures range from weird animals (late medieval ideas on what a camel looked like were curious) to a humorous series on the 'world



upside down'. Examples of the latter include an ox driving a man-pulled plough and a sex-crazed woman chasing a chaste man (!). The uncomfortable black seats you sit on for the 12-minute audiovisual on the castle's history were designed by Mario Botta and cost around Sfr1000 a pop!

After wandering the grounds and the museum, head west along the **Murata** (Walls; admission free; ☎ 9am-7pm Apr-Sep, 10am-5pm Oct-Mar).

**Castello di Montebello** (☎ 091 825 13 42; Salita ai Castelli; admission to castle free, museum adult/concession Sfr4/2; ☎ 10am-8pm) is slightly above the town and has a smaller museum that continues the study of medieval Bellinzona. From here it's a 3.5km climb uphill to **Castello di Sasso Corbaro**. At this point you should be too exhausted to explore the grounds, but lucky you – there are none. The castle hosts temporary **exhibitions** (☎ 091 825 59 06; adult/concession Sfr4/2; ☎ 10am-8pm).

#### CHURCHES & ART

Wandering south from the train station, you will first see the **Chiesa Collegiata dei SS Pietro e Stefano** (Piazza della Collegiata; ☎ 8am-1pm & 4-6pm), a Renaissance church with baroque touches and rich in frescoes inside. More immediately eye-catching is the **Chiesa di San Rocco** (Piazza dell'Indipendenza; ☎ 7-11am & 2-5pm), with its huge fresco of St Christopher and a smaller one of the Virgin Mary and Christ. Similarly decorated is the 14th-century **Chiesa di San Biagio** (Piazza San Biagio; ☎ 7am-noon & 2-5pm), the difference being that these frescoes are not 20th-century restorations. It stands 500m south of Piazza dell'Indipendenza.

Off the same square is the elegant **Villa dei Cedri**, set in lush **gardens** (admission free; ☎ 8am-8pm Apr-Sep, 9am-5pm Oct-Mar) and home to the city's **art collection** (adult/concession Sfr8/5; ☎ 2-6pm Tue-Fri, 11am-6pm Sat, Sun & holidays), mostly local and northern Italian works of the 19th and 20th centuries.

West over the railway line stands the **Chiesa di Santa Maria delle Grazie** (Via Convento; closed for restoration), a 15th-century church with an extraordinary fresco (much damaged by fire in 1997) of Christ's Crucifixion.

#### Sleeping

None of the functional hotels will win charm awards. Most are strung out along Via della Stazione.

**Albergo Croce Federale** (☎ 091 825 16 67; fax 091 826 25 50; Viale della Stazione 12; s/d Sfr100/150) The only place just inside the old town (part of the city wall stands menacingly behind it), this is a pleasant stop. Rooms are straight-forward but light, and the restaurant downstairs is cheerful.

**Hotel San Giovanni** (☎ 091 825 19 19; www.hotelzimmer.ch; Via San Giovanni 7; s/d Sfr50/90, d with shower Sfr120) The single main quality of this place is the low price of the cluttered rooms (with shared bathroom).

**Hotel Gamper** (☎ 091 825 37 92; hotel-gamper@bluemail.ch; Viale Stazione 29; s/d Sfr110/140) The top-floor box-like rooms offer good views. Rooms are functional and clean.

#### Eating

**Osteria Ticinese** (☎ 091 825 16 73; Via Orico 3; pasta Sfr11-15, mains Sfr13-16; ☎ daily) On the edge of the old centre, this cheerful spot attracts local office workers for a simple midday meal. Portions of standard Italian fare are generous, and you'll probably be fine with just pasta or a main.

**Locanda Orico** (☎ 091 825 15 18; Via Orico 13; pasta Sfr30-40, mains Sfr45-50; ☎ Tue-Sat) Behind the lace curtains in this low-slung temple to good food you come across such creations as *gnocchi di patate al timo annegati in un puree di zucca* (thyme gnocchi bathed in pumpkin puree).

**Castelgrande** (☎ 091 826 23 53; Castelgrande; mains Sfr35-60; ☎ Tue-Sun) It's not often you get the chance to eat inside a Unesco World Heritage site. The medieval castle setting alone is enough to bewitch. Elegantly presented Italian and Ticino cuisine will help too.

#### Getting There & Away

Bellinzona is on the train route connecting Locarno (Sfr7.80, 30 minutes) and Lugano (Sfr11.40, 30 minutes). It is also on the Zurich-Milan route. Postal buses head north-east to Chur (Sfr47). Postal buses depart from beside the train station.

#### NORTH OF BELLINZONA Biasca & Valle di Blenio

Biasca is, with the vague exception of its 13th-century **Chiesa di SS Pietro e Paolo**, of little interest but an important transport junction. If you pass through, head for the series of *grotti* on Via ai Grotti, a series of simple, traditional eateries huddled around simple

stone huts backing into the rocky mountain wall. **Grotto Greina** (☎ 091 862 15 27; Via ai Grotti 36; mains Sfr18-30; ☎ 10-1am Tue-Sun Apr-Oct) is a good example, serving up lashings of grilled meats with polenta. Trains run twice an hour from Bellinzona (Sfr7.20, 12 minutes).

Directly north of Biasca, the Valle di Blenio splits off the main route and heads for the Lukmanier Pass (Passo di Lucomagno). It is a barren-looking valley, laced with potential hiking options and modest skiing near the pass.

The main town along the way is **Olivone**, where you will find a **tourist office** (☎ 091 872 14 87; www.blenioturismo.ch). Staff can help with hiking tips in the surrounding mountains, among the least explored in the country. **Albergo Olivone e Posta** (☎ 091 872 13 66; fax 091 872 16 87; Via Lucomagno; s/d Sfr85/140) is the most enticing hotel, a sturdy establishment at the northern entrance to town. It has a decent restaurant (closed Sunday).

From Bellinzona get the train to Biasca (Sfr20.60, one hour) and change to the postal bus.

#### Valle Leventina

From Biasca, the motorway powers northwest to Airolo and on to the St Gotthard Pass into central Switzerland. Taking this road you'd never know that high above it is strung a series of hamlets offering superlative views, great walking (the Strada Alta, partly asphalted, runs about 45km from Biasca to Airolo) and the occasional fine feed.

About 7km northwest of Biasca, head for Personico for its **Grotto Val d'Ambrà** (☎ 091 864 18 29; mains Sfr16-28; ☎ Thu-Tue Apr-Oct), 500m outside the village. More than a century old, this is one of the most traditional of Ticino's *grotti*. The main restaurant building has a cosy dining area full of timber furniture. Outside, on balmy summer days, up to 100 people gather around the rough granite tables scattered about the dozen or so shaded *grotti* (the original stone buildings once used as houses and storage).

About 4km further, **Giorinico** (site of a major defeat of the Milanese by Swiss Confederate forces in 1478) boasts two Romanesque bridges, the finest example of a Romanesque church in Ticino (**Chiesa di San Nicolao**, on the south bank of the Ticino river), a picturesque old centre and a couple of decent places to stay and eat. For the latter, follow

the signs to **Grotto Rodai** (☎ 091 864 21 48; mains Sfr16-30; ☎ Tue-Sun Apr-mid-Oct), a typical *grotto* (simple stone structure, usually built into the side of a hill or mountainside).

If driving, you can head up to the Strada Alta, high up on the north flank of the Ticino river valley, at several locations. From Lavorgo, 4km northwest of Giorinico, a road winds up to the hamlets of **Anzonico**, **Cavagnago** and **Sobrio**. About 7km further on, another road leads from Faido to high points like **Campello**, **Molare** and **Carì**. At Molare you'll find a handy eatery on summer weekends, the **Locanda Chià d'Au** (☎ Fri dinner only & Sat & Sun Apr-Oct), behind the church.

At **Rodi-Fiesso**, the broad valley floor narrows to a claustrophobic gorge. Just outside the eastern entry to town, a Swiss customs and control point has guarded the way to the St Gotthard Pass since the 16th century. Today the restored **Dazio Grande** (☎ 091 874 60 66; Via San Gottardo; s/d Sfr85/125) has modern rooms, a small museum on the post's history and a restaurant (set menu Sfr38, open Tuesday to Sunday).

About 7km northwest of Rodi-Fiesso, you reach the sleepy valley town of Piotta. On the north side of the motorway here, Europe's steepest **funicular** (adult/child/senior one way Sfr13/6/11) heads up above the Strada Alta to **Lago Ritom**, a high dam from where walkers can head into the mountains. There's a restaurant with a few rooms (per person Sfr55, open April to October) behind the dam.

**Airolo** is a surprisingly big settlement at the head of the Valle Leventina, but not of great interest. If you want to cross the Alps into central Switzerland, this is the easiest route to follow. The Passo di San Gottardo (St Gotthard Pass) lies 7km north of Airolo. You can opt for the 17km tunnel or, when snow doesn't close it, the mountain road. The hourly train to Airolo from Bellinzona (Sfr20.80, 52 minutes) continues as far as Zürich and passes through the valley towns. From these you can connect by occasional postal bus to the hamlets of the Strada Alta.

You can sleep deep below the pass, underground! **La Clastra** (☎ 091 880 50 55; www.laclastra.ch; San Gottardo; s/d Sfr180/280; ☎ May-Oct) is a combination of Wellness hotel, restaurant, library, wine cellar (the 2003 Gransgreto Merlot is delicious) and seminar centre, all at 2050m above sea level buried deep in the rock beneath the St Gotthard Pass in what

was once one of the most impregnable of Swiss army bunkers, the San Carlo artillery base. Clearly, none of the 17 rooms, all individually laid out and decorated, come with views. Water comes from underground sources. Take a postal bus from Airolo to the pass. Booking ahead is essential.

West of Airolo, the quiet **Val Bedretto** climbs, slowly at first and then in sweeping curves through the bald Alpine terrain to reach another mountain crossing, the Nufenen Pass in the eastern Valais (see p140). The area is beloved of hikers in search of tranquillity.

## LUGANO

pop 48,120 / elevation 270m

Ticino's lush lake isn't its only liquid asset. The largest city in the canton is also the country's third most important banking centre.

Visitors can only wonder how so many locals can work in stuffy banks when they could be wandering the spaghetti maze of steep cobblestone streets that untangle themselves at the edge of the lake. And how can they resist the water sports and hill-walking opportunities available to them?

### Orientation

Lugano is on the shores of Lago di Lugano. The train station stands above and to the west of the Old Town. Take the stairs or the funicular (Sfr1.10, open 5.20am to 11.50pm) down to the centre, a patchwork of interlocking *piazze*. The most important one, Piazza della Riforma, is presided over by the 1844 neoclassical Municipio (town hall).

Paradiso, a southern suburb, is the departure point for the funicular to Monte San Salvatore (vaguely reminiscent of Rio's). The other mountain looming over the town, Monte Brè, is to the east. The airport is 3km west of the train station.

### Information

#### INTERNET ACCESS

**Manor department store** (Servizio Clienti area, 3rd fl, Salita Chiattono 10; per 30min Sfr5; ☎ 8.15am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, to 9pm Thu, 8.15am-6pm Sat)

#### MEDICAL SERVICES

**Doctor/dentist** ☎ 111

**Ospedale Civico** (☎ 091 805 61 11; Via Tesserete 46) Hospital north of the city centre.

### POST

**Post office** (Via Della Posta 7; ☎ 7.30am-6.15pm Mon-Fri, 8am-4pm Sat) In centre of Old Town.

### TOURIST INFORMATION

**Tourist office** (☎ 091 913 32 32; www.lugano-tourism.ch; Municipio Bldg, Riva Giocondo Albertolli; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat, 10am-5pm Sun & holidays Apr-Oct, 9am-noon & 2-5pm Mon-Fri Nov-Mar)

### Sights

#### OLD TOWN & CHURCHES

Wander through the mostly porticoed lanes woven around the busy main square, Piazza della Riforma (which is even more lively when the Tuesday and Friday morning markets are held). Via Nassa is the main shopping street and indicates there is no shortage of liquid cash in this town.

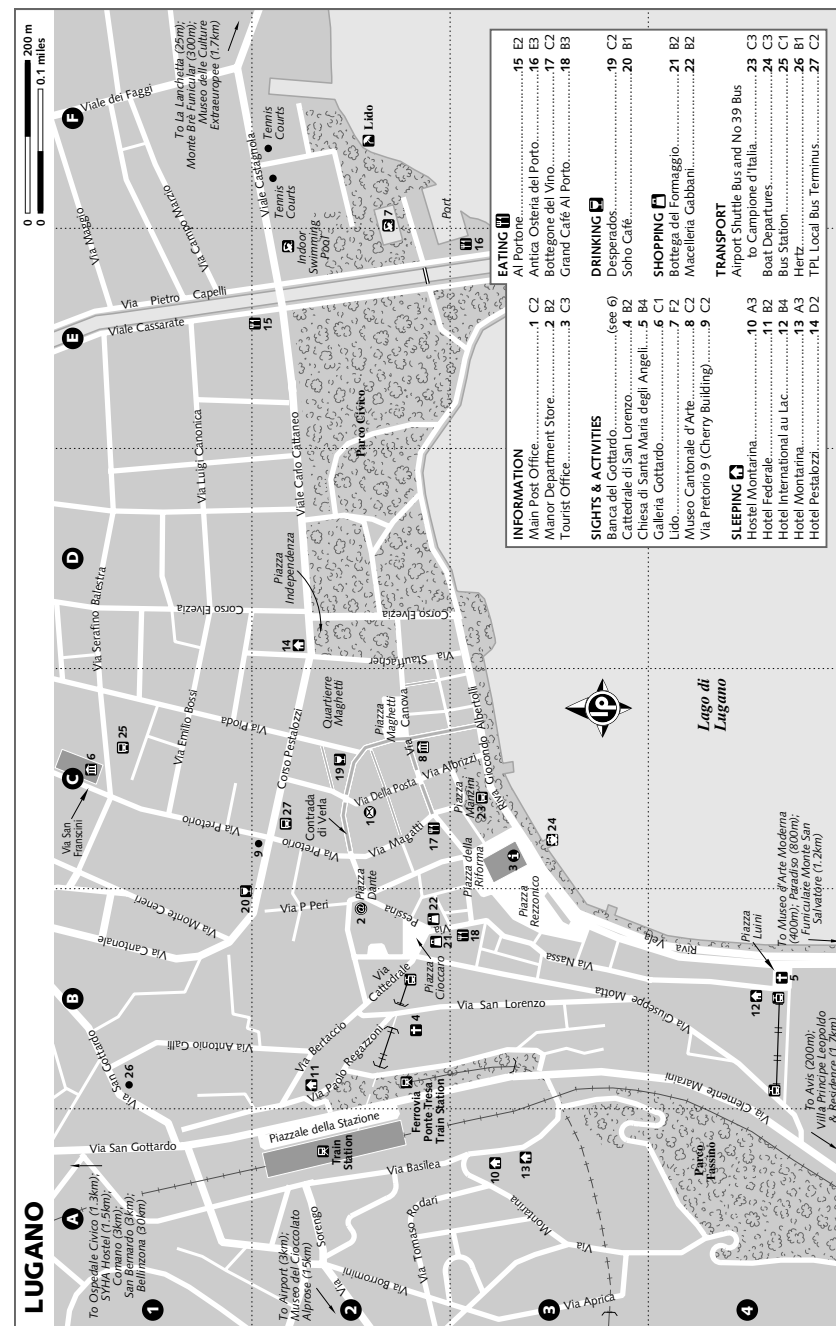
The simple Romanesque **Chiesa di Santa Maria degli Angeli** (St Mary of the Angels; Piazza Luini; ☎ 8am-5pm), against which a now crumbling former hotel was built, contains two frescoes by Bernardino Luini dating from 1529. Covering the entire wall that divides the church in two is a grand didactic illustration of the Crucifixion. The closer you look, the more scenes of Christ's Passion are revealed, along with others of him being taken down from the cross and his resurrection. The power and vivacity of the colours are astounding. Less alive is Luini's depiction of the Last Supper on the left wall. Much of the remainder of the church, in particular the apse, is also gaily frescoed.

Below the train station, the **Cattedrale di San Lorenzo** (St Lawrence Cathedral; ☎ 8am-5pm) contains some fine frescoes and ornately decorated statues.

#### MUSEUMS & GALLERIES

The **Museo Cantonale d'Arte** (Cantonal Art Museum; ☎ 091 910 47 80; www.museo-cantonale-arte.ch; Via Canova 10; adult/student Sfr7/5, special exhibitions Sfr10/7; ☎ 2-5pm Tue, 10am-5pm Wed-Sun) celebrates the work of modern artists from the region. There's more creativity from the cutting edge at the **Museo d'Arte Moderna** (Modern Art Museum; ☎ 058 866 69 09; www.mdam.ch; Riva Antonio Caccia 5; adult/11-14yr/15-18yr/student & senior Sfr11/3/5/8; ☎ 9am-7pm Tue-Sun). Housed in Villa Malpensata, it is one of the city's main art spaces.

Another is **Galleria Gottardo** (☎ 091 808 19 88; Via San Francini 12; admission free; ☎ 2-5pm Tue, 11am-5pm Wed-Sat), the private foundation of the Banca



del Gottardo, which puts on exhibitions ranging from sculpture to photography.

About 1.7km from central Lugano, in Villa Heleneum at Via Cortivo 24, is the **Museo delle Culture Extraeuropee** (Museum of Non-European Cultures; ☎ 058 866 69 09; www.lugano.ch/cultura; adult/student Sfr5/3; ☎ 10am-5pm Wed-Sun Easter-early Nov). The brew of tribal relics from far-off countries includes a collection of masks and statues soaked in sexuality. Take bus No 1 to get there.

Chomp into some cocoa culture at the **Museo del Cioccolato Alprose** (☎ 091 611 88 56; www.alprose.ch; Via Rompada 36, Casalano; adult/child Sfr4/1; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat & Sun). This is a great place to take the children or anyone with a sweet tooth. As well as getting a chocolate-coated history lesson, you can watch the sugary substance being made. Get there by the Ferrovia Ponte Tresa train (Sfr6).

## Activities

East of the Cassarate stream is the **Lido** (per day Sfr6; ☎ 9.30am-6pm May-Jun & Sep, 9.30am-7.30pm Jul-Aug, reduced opening hr rest of the year), with beaches and a swimming pool.

See the official guide for information about water-skiing and windsurfing. **Club Nautico-Lugano** (☎ 091 649 61 39) charges Sfr10 per hour for windsurfing. Pedalos near the boat landing can be rented for Sfr16 per hour.

### MARIO BOTTA IN THE PINK

Lugano's Mario Botta (born 1943 in Mendrisio to the south) has made an international name for himself as a leading light in contemporary architecture. Best known for his work abroad (like San Francisco's Museum of Modern Art and the Kyobo Tower in Seoul), Botta has also left an indelible mark on and around Lugano. The grand 12-storey Casino in Campione d'Italia is one example. Botta seems to have a thing about right angles and the colour pink. In the centre of town, his landmarks include the **Banca del Gottardo** (Via San Francini 12), a series of interconnected monoliths; the pink brick office block at **Via Pretorio 9** (known to locals as the Cherry Building because of the cherry tree planted on the roof); and the roof of the TPL local bus terminal on Corso Pestalozzi. At night it is illuminated...in a light pink.

## Festivals & Events

This classy town takes in some classical tunes during the **Lugano Festival** from April to May in the Palazzo dei Congressi. Free open-air music festivals include **Estival Jazz** in early July and the **Blues to Bop Festival** at the end of August. The lake explodes in a display of pyrotechnical wizardry around midnight on 1 August, Switzerland's **National Day**.

## Sleeping

Many hotels close for at least part of the winter.

## BUDGET

**Hostel Montarina** (☎ 091 966 72 72; www.montarina.ch; Via Montarina 1; dm Sfr25) The Hostel Montarina has rooms with four to 16 bunk beds. A buffet breakfast is available for Sfr12.

**SYHA hostel** (☎ 091 966 27 28; www.luganoyouthhostel.ch; Via Cantonale 13, Savosa; dm/s/d Sfr25/55/80; ☎ mid-Mar-Oct; 🚻) Housed in the Villa Savosa, this is one of the more enticing youth hostels in the country. Take bus No 5 to Crocifisso. Breakfast costs Sfr8.

## MIDRANGE

**Hotel Pestalozzi** (☎ 091 921 46 46; www.attuale.com/pestalozzi.html; Piazza Indipendenza 9; s/d with bathroom Sfr98/174; 🚻) A renovated Art Nouveau building, this is a good central deal. Rooms have a fresh feel, with crisp white and blues dominating the decoration. Some rooms have air-con. Cheaper ones have a shared bathroom in the corridor. The restaurant downstairs is a no-alcohol establishment.

**Hotel Montarina** (☎ 091 966 72 72; www.montarina.ch; Via Montarina 1; s/d Sfr80/120; ☎ mid-Mar-Oct; 🚻) Behind the train station is this charming hotel, whose best rooms are airy, with timber floors and antiques.

**Hotel Federale** (☎ 091 910 08 08; www.hotel-federale.ch; Via Regazzoni 8; s Sfr160, d Sfr190-260; ☎ Feb-Dec; 🚻) If you can afford the grand top floor doubles with lake views, this place beats many multi-stellar places hands down. A short luggage-laden stumble from the train station, it is in a quiet spot with immaculately kept rooms and friendly staff. There is wi-fi in the lobby.

**Hotel International au Lac** (☎ 091 922 75 41; www.hotel-international.ch; Via Nassa 88; s/d Sfr185/298; ☎ Apr-Oct; 🚻) From the balconies of the front rooms you will look straight out

over Lago di Lugano the lake. These are the best, but other cheaper rooms are scattered about the hotel. Rooms are comfortable, with a smattering of antique furniture. Out the back is a pool within the walled garden.

## TOP END

**Villa Principe Leopoldo & Residence** (☎ 091 985 88 55; www.leopoldohotel.com; Via Montalbano 5; s/d up to Sfr680/794; 🚻) This red-tiled residence set in sculptured gardens was built in 1926 for Prince Leopold von Hohenzollern, of the exiled German royal family. It oozes a regal, nostalgic atmosphere. The entrance looks away from the lake, but the gardens and many splendid rooms do not.

## Eating

For pizza or overpriced pasta, any of the places around Piazza della Riforma are pleasant and lively enough.

**Grand Café Al Porto** (☎ 091 910 51 30; Via Pessina 3; ☎ 8am-6.30pm Mon-Sat) This café, which began life way back in 1803, has several fine rooms for dining too. Be sure to take a look at the frescoed Cenacolo Fiorentino, once a monastery dining hall, upstairs. It's used for private functions.

**L'Antica Osteria del Porto** (☎ 091 971 42 00; Via Foce 9; mains Sfr25-35; ☎ Wed-Mon) Set back from Lugano's sailing club, this is the place for savouring local fish and Ticinese dishes like *brasato di manzo al Merlot con polenta gratinata e legume* (grilled beef with polenta and vegetables). The terrace overlooking the Cassarate stream is pleasant, and you also have lake views.

**Al Portone** (☎ 091 923 55 11; Viale Cassarate 3; mains Sfr30-50; ☎ Tue-Sat) For an upmarket meal, this place remains a sure bet for demanding gourmets. It has a lunchtime set menu (Sfr58) and a tasting feast menu at night (Sfr120). How about *guance di vitello confits al Merlot Redegonda e funghi* (confit of veal cheeks in Ticino Merlot and mushrooms)?

**San Bernardo** (☎ 091 941 01 00; Tera d'Súra; meals Sfr60-80; ☎ lunch & dinner Tue-Sat, lunch Sun) Head out of town for the warren of medieval alleys in Comano, where you'll discover this gourmet getaway. Opt for the summer pergola or muted designer dining room. The menu changes frequently and the emphasis is on slight twists to old recipes. The *quadrotti di zucca* (squares of pumpkin-filled

## AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Bottegone del Vino** (☎ 091 922 76 89; Via Magatti 3; mains Sfr30-45; ☎ Mon-Sat) Favoured by the local banking brigade at lunchtime, this is a great place to taste fine local wines over a well-prepared meal. The *manzo marinato su letto di spinaci* (marinated slices of uncooked beef on a bed of spinach) is perfect with a Merlot. The décor has a classic timelessness, with elegant timber furniture and cream table linen. Knowledgeable waiters fuss around the tables and are only too happy to suggest the perfect Ticino tippie to go with your food.

pasta with a sweetish chestnut sauce) melt in the mouth. Take a taxi.

## Drinking

**Soho Café** (☎ 091 922 60 80; Corso Pestalozzi 3; ☎ 10-1am Mon-Fri, 4pm-1am Sat) So that's where they are! All those good-looking Lugano townies crowd in to this long, orange-lit bar for cocktails. Generally chilled DJ music is turned up enough to create a buzz but not so much you can't hear yourself talk.

**La Lanchetta** (☎ 091 971 55 51; Via Castagnola 16; ☎ 10am-midnight Sun-Thu, 10-1am Fri & Sat) Sitting on the lake opposite the Hotel Cassarate Lago, this hip, dimly lit bar is perfect for pre-dinner drinks. Furniture and dress sense is black, although there is a little tongue-shaped snug that glows white.

**Desperados** (☎ 091 921 11 97; Via al Forte 4; ☎ 10pm-5am) This late-night disco bar is hot, cramped and sweaty – in other words the perfect nightclub. The entrance is on a tiny square off Vicolo Orfanotrofio.

## Shopping

**Macelleria Gabbani** (☎ 091 911 30 80; www.gabbani.ch; Via Pessina 12) You'll find it hard to miss the giant sausages hanging out the front of this irresistible delicatessen. The same people operate a tempting cheese shop, the **Bottega del Formaggio**, across the road.

## Getting There & Away

### AIR

From **Agno airport** (☎ 091 612 11 11; www.lugano-airport.ch), **Darwin Airline** (www.darwinairline.com) flies to London (City) via Bern, Rome (Fiumicino), Geneva and Olbia (in Sardinia).

**Flybaboo** (www.flybaboo.com) flies to Geneva and **Swiss** (www.swiss.com) to Zürich.

## BUS

Lugano is on the same road and rail route as Bellinzona. To St Moritz, one postal bus runs direct via Italy at least Friday to Sunday (daily late June to mid-October and late December to early January). The cost is Sfr67 (plus Sfr15 if you are using Swiss travel passes for a reduction) and it takes four hours. Reserve at the bus station, the train station information office or on ☎ 091 807 85 20. All postal buses leave from the main bus depot at Via Serafino Balestra, but you can pick up the St Moritz and some other buses outside the train station 15 minutes later.

## TRAIN & BOAT

For further train and boat information, see p290 and right.

## CAR & MOTORCYCLE

You can hire cars at **Hertz** (☎ 091 923 46 75; Via San Gottardo 13) and **Avis** (☎ 091 913 41 51; Via Clemente Maraini 14).

## Getting Around

A shuttle bus runs to the airport from Piazza Manzoni (one way/return Sfr10/18) and the train station (Sfr8/15). Get timetables from the tourist office. A **taxi** (☎ 091 971 21 21, 091 971 91 91) to the airport costs around Sfr20.

Bus No 1 runs from Castagnola in the east through the centre to Paradiso, while bus No 2 runs from central Lugano to Paradiso via the train station. A single trip costs Sfr1.20 to Sfr2 (ticket dispensers indicate the appropriate rate) or it's Sfr5 for a one-day pass. The main local bus terminus in central Lugano is on Corso Pestalozzi.

## AROUND LUGANO

The tourist office has picked out some of the best lakeside walks and written guides on them. If you'd rather float than use your feet, relaxing in a boat can be a blast.

For a bird's eye view of Lugano and the lake, head for the hills. The **funicular** (☎ 091 971 31 71; www.montebre.ch; one way/return Sfr14/20) from Cassarate (walk or take Bus No 1 from central Lugano) scales Monte Brè (925m). From Cassarate a first funicular takes you to Suvigliana (free up, Sfr1.60 down) to

connect with the main funicular. Or take bus No 12 from the main post office to Brè village and walk about 15 minutes.

From Paradiso, the **funicular** (☎ 091 985 28 28; www.montesansalvatore.ch; one way/return Sfr17/24) to Monte San Salvatore operates from mid-March to mid-November. Aside from the views, the walk down to Paradiso or Melide is an hour well spent. Children aged five to 16 pay half and those under five travel for free.

## LAGO DI LUGANO

Much can be seen in one day if you don't fancy a longer excursion. Boats are operated by the **Società Navigazione del Lago di Lugano** (☎ 091 971 52 23; www.lakelugano.ch). Examples of return fares from Lugano are Gandria (Sfr19.80), Melide (Sfr30.40 with entry to Swissminiatur included) and Morcote (Sfr28.90). If you want to visit several places, buy a pass: one/three days cost Sfr34/51 and one week costs Sfr62. There are reduced fares for children.



The departure point from Lugano is by Piazza della Riforma. Boats sail year-round, but the service is more frequent from late March to late October. During this time some boats go as far as Ponte Tresa, so you could go one way by boat and return to Lugano on the Ponte Tresa train. The Swiss Pass is valid and the Half-Fare Card gets reductions.

Trains run to Melide (Sfr3.20, six minutes). For Morcote (Sfr7.80, 30 minutes), get the bus from the Paradiso train station.

## GANDRIA

Gandria is an attractive, compact village almost dipping into the water. A popular trip is to take the boat from Lugano and walk back along the shore to Castagnola (around 40 minutes), where you can visit Villa Heleuneum and/or Villa Favorita, or simply continue back to Lugano by foot or bus No 1.

Across the lake from Gandria is the **Museo delle Dogane Svizzere** (Swiss Customs Museum; ☎ 091 923 98 43; admission free; ☎ 1.30-5.30pm late Mar-early Oct), at Cantine di Gandria, and accessible by boat. It tells the history of customs (and more interestingly smuggling) in this border area. On display are confiscated smugglers' boats that once operated on the lake.

## CAMPIONE D'ITALIA

It's hard to tell, but this really is a part of Italy surrounded by Switzerland. There are no border formalities (but take your passport anyway); many cars in the village have Swiss number plates and they use Swiss telephones and Swiss francs.

Euros (and any other hard currency), however, are equally welcome as there are none of the Swiss restrictions on gambling in Campione d'Italia. The 12-storey **casino** (☎ 091 640 11 11; www.casinocampione.it; admission free; ☎ noon-5am), converted by Lugano's favourite architect, Mario Botta, into Europe's biggest in 2005, does a brisk business. Smart dress is required. From noon to midnight you can take the No 39 bus from Lugano's Piazza Manzoni (one way/return Sfr7.40/12.80) to Campione d'Italia. The last return bus leaves at 12.40am, and then there's one at 6.39am.

## MONTE GENEROSO

The fine panorama provided by this summit (1701m) includes lakes, Alps and the Apennines on a clear day. It can be reached

by boat (except in winter), train (Sfr5.40) or car to Capolago, then the rack and pinion **train** (☎ 091 630 51 11; www.montegeneroso.ch; adult/under 5/6-12yr/senior & student return Sfr38/free/19/29; ☎ up to 10 a day Apr-Oct & early Dec-early Jan).

## CERESIO PENINSULA

South of Lugano, this peninsula is created by the looping shoreline of Lake Lugano. Walking trails dissect the interior and small villages dot the lakeside. The postal bus from Lugano to Morcote goes via either Melide or Figino, and departs approximately hourly. Year-round boats also connect Morcote and Melide to Lugano.

## Montagnola

The German novelist Hermann Hesse (1877-1962) chose to live in this small town in 1919 after the horrors of WWI had separated him from his family. As the years wore on and crisis followed crisis in Germany, topped by the rise of the Nazis, he saw little reason to return home. He wrote some of his greatest works here, at first in an apartment in Casa Camuzzi. Nearby, in Torre Camuzzi, is the **Museo Hermann Hesse** (☎ 091 993 37 70; www.hessemontagnola.ch; Torre Camuzzi; adult/child Sfr6/5; ☎ 10am-12.30pm & 2-6.30pm Tue-Sun Mar-Oct, 10am-12.30pm Sat & Sun Nov-Feb). Personal objects, some of the thousands of watercolours he painted in Ticino, books and other odds and ends help re-create something of Hesse's life. From Lugano, get the Ferrovia Ponte Tresa train to Sorengo and change for a postal bus (Sfr3.20, 37 minutes).

## Melide

Melide is a bulge of shore from which the A2 motorway slices across the lake. The main attraction is **Swissminiatur** (☎ 091 640 10 60; www.swissminiatur.ch; adult/child Sfr13/7; ☎ 9am-6pm mid-Mar-end Oct), where you'll find 1:25 scale models of more than 120 national attractions. It's the quick and easy way to see Switzerland in a day.

## Morcote

With its narrow cobbled lanes and endless nooks and crannies, this peaceful former fishing village (population 710) clusters at the foot of Monte Abostora. Narrow stairways lead to **Chiesa di Santa Maria del Sasso**, a 15-minute climb. Views are excellent, and

the church has frescoes (16th century) and carved faces on the organ. From there continue another 15 minutes upstairs to **Vico di Morcote**, a pleasant high altitude hamlet. About 5km further is Carona, worth a visit for the **Parco Botanico San Grato** (admission free). Apart from a stroll, you can see displays of **falconry** (adult/child/student Sfr14/10/12; ☎ 11am & 3pm Mon-Sat, 11am, 3pm & 5pm Sun & holidays).

**Parco Scherrer** (☎ 091 996 21 25; adult/child/student & senior Sfr7/1/5; ☎ 10am-5pm mid-Mar-Oct, to 6pm Jul & Aug), 400m left (west) from the boat stop, offers a bustling range of architectural styles, including copies of famous buildings and generic types (eg Temple of Nefertiti, Siamese teahouse). It's all set in subtropical parkland.

There are several lakeside sleeping options. **Albergo della Posta** (☎ 091 996 11 27; www.hotelmor.cote.com; Piazza Grande; s/d Sfr135/190) has charming little rooms (10 in all), most with views across the lake. It has its own restaurant.

The walk along the shore to Melide takes around 50 minutes.

## MENDRISIO & AROUND

pop 6640 / elevation 354m

South of Lago di Lugano is the Mendrisiotto and Lower Ceresio. It is a fine area for walking tours around the rolling valleys and unspoilt villages. Mendrisio is the district capital and has a useful **tourist office** (☎ 091 646 57 61; www.mendrisiotourism.ch). It has several interesting old churches and buildings, and is worth a visit for the **Maundy Thursday Procession** or the **Wine Harvest** in September.

For a good value bite, seek **Trattoria Romano Nuovo** (☎ 091 646 11 89; Via Andreoni 20; set lunch Sfr12, mains Sfr12-25; ☎ Mon-Sat), a family-run spot with abundant Ticino dishes and, better still, offerings from the owners' native Emilia in Italy (such as tortellini and tagliatelle).

Postal buses run from Lugano (Sfr6.60).

Exiting southeast from Mendrisio, a side road leads about 15km uphill and north along the **Valle di Muggio**, known for its cheese. This pretty drive ends abruptly in the hamlet of **Roncapiano**. Hiking enthusiasts

could start a climb of 2½ hours to **Monte Generoso** from here.

## MERIDE

pop 330 / elevation 583m

The **Museo dei Fossili** (Fossil Museum; ☎ 091 646 37 80; www.montesangiorgio.ch; admission free; ☎ 8am-6pm) in Meride, to the northwest of Mendrisio town, displays vestiges of the first creatures to inhabit the region – reptiles and fish dating back more than 200 million years. It may sound a little dry but the finds are important enough to warrant Unesco recognition of the area around Monte San Giorgio (where they were uncovered) as a World Heritage site in 2003. Near the town is a circular **nature trail**. You can reach Meride from Lugano by postal bus (Sfr10.40).

## LOCARNO

pop 14,320 / elevation 205m

With its palm trees and much vaunted 2300 hours of sunshine a year, Locarno has attracted northern tourists to its warm, Mediterranean-style setting since the late 19th century. The lowest town in Switzerland, it seemed like a soothing spot to host the 1925 peace conference intended to bring stability to Europe after WWI. Long before, the Romans had appreciated its strategic position on the lake and Maggia river for trade.

### Orientation & Information

Five minutes' walk west of the train station is the town's core, Piazza Grande. The **tourist office** (☎ 091 791 00 91; www.maggiore.ch; Largo Zorzi 1; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & holidays, 10am-1.30pm & 2.30-5pm Sun mid-Mar-Oct, 9.30am-noon & 1.30-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-noon & 1.30-5pm Sat Nov-mid-Mar) is nearby. Ask about the Lago Maggiore Guest Card and its discounts.

Piazza Grande is home to the post office, a shopping arcade and cafés with outside tables. North and west of the piazza is the old part of town (*città vecchia*).

### Sights

**SANTUARIO DELLA MADONNA DEL SASSO** Overlooking the town, this sanctuary was built after the Virgin Mary supposedly appeared in a vision to a monk, Bartolomeo d'Ivrea, in 1480. There's a small **museum**

(☎ 091 743 62 65; Via del Santuario 2; adult/student & child Sfr2.50/1.50; ☎ 2-5pm), a **church** (☎ 8am-6.45pm) and several rather rough, near life-size statue groups (including one of the Last Supper) in niches on the stairway. The best-known painting in the church is *La Fuga in Egitto* (Flight to Egypt), painted in 1522 by Bramantino.

Contrasting in style are the naive votive paintings by the church entrance, where the Madonna and Child appear as ghostly apparitions in life-and-death situations.

A funicular runs every 15 minutes from the town centre (Sfr4.50 up, Sfr6.60 return) past the sanctuary to Orisella, but the 20-minute walk up is not all that demanding (take Via al Sasso off Via Cappuccini) in spite of being a chapel lined path known as the Via Crucis.

### OLD TOWN

Plod the Italianate piazzas and arcades, and admire the Lombard houses. There are some interesting churches. Built in the 17th century, the **Chiesa Nuova** (New Church; Via Cittadella) has an almost sickeningly ornate baroque ceiling. Outside, left of the entrance, stands a giant statue of St Christopher with disproportionately tiny feet. The 16th-century **Chiesa di San Francesco** (Piazza San Francesco) has frescoes by Baldassare Orelli, while the **Chiesa di Sant'Antonio** is best known for its altar to the *Cristo Morto* (Dead Christ).

**Castello Visconteo** (Piazza Castello; adult/student Sfr7/5; ☎ 10am-noon & 2-5pm Tue-Sun), dating from the 15th century and named after the Visconti clan that long ruled Milan, today houses a museum with Roman and Bronze Age exhibits. Locarno is believed to have been a glass-manufacturing town in Roman times, which accounts for the strong showing of glass artefacts in the museum. This labyrinth of a castle, whose nucleus was raised around the 10th century, also hosts a small display (in Italian) on the Locarno Treaty.

### Activities

From the Orisella funicular stop, a cable car goes to **Cardada**, and then a chair lift soars to **Cimetta** (www.cardada.ch in Italian and German; return adult/6-16yr Sfr33/11; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat Jun-Sep, 9am-6pm Mon-Thu, 8am-8pm Fri & Sat Oct-May) at 1672m. From either stop there are fine views and walking trails. Paragliding is possible up here, as is winter skiing.

### WHAT'S COOKING IN TICINO?

If eating and drinking is your idea of a great time, Ticino is a must-visit. It's not just about standard pizza and pasta either. Some of your most satisfying eating experiences in Ticino will happen in *grotti*, rustic, out-of-the-way eateries, where in the warmer months you can sit outside at granite tables for wholesome local fare. Some are mentioned in this chapter, but fan(atic)s might want to track down the tri-lingual *Guida a Grotti e Osterie*, available in bookshops in Lugano and Locarno.

What rösti is to the Swiss Germans, polenta is to the people of Ticino. This maize-based staple alone is stodgy, but coupled with other ingredients becomes another ballgame. You might find it with *brasato* (braised beef) or *capretto in umido alla Mesolcinese*, a tangy kid meat stew with a touch of cinnamon and cooked in red wine. Polenta is good served with any game meat (*cacciagione*) in autumn.

*Cazzöla* is a meat dish with a savoury selection teaming up on one plate, served with cabbage and potatoes. More delicate dishes include *cicitt* (small sausages) and *mazza casalinga* (a selection of delicatessen cuts).

Plenty of enticing dishes from Italy have found their way over the border. Indeed, many restaurants in Ticino are run by Italians. Risotto (rice-based) dishes are common. A good version is with *funghi* (mushrooms), especially in autumn during the mushroom-picking season.

Down on lakes Lugano and Maggiore expect to find fish on the menus, especially *persico* (perch), *coregone* (whitefish) and *salmerino* (a cross between salmon and trout, only smaller).

Various cheeses are produced in Ticino. *Robiola* is a soft cow's milk cheese that comes in small discs. A cool, fresh alternative is *robiolino*, tubes of cow's milk cheese. Goat's cheese can also be found, along with various types of *formaggella*, a harder, crusty cheese.

Portions tend to be generous in Ticino, so the Italian habit of eating a *primo* (first course, generally of pasta) followed by a *secondo* (main) is by no means obligatory. Prices often make such gluttony onerous on the bank account anyway. Another common option is to have *mezza porzione* (half serving) of a first course and then a full serve of a second course.

For some broader tips on Swiss food and wine, see p51.

Locarno's climate is perfect for lolling about the lake. **Giardini Jean Arp** (Jean Arp Gardens) is a lakeside park off Lungolago Motta, with sculptures by the surrealist artist scattered among the palm trees. It is free to swim in various convenient spots around the lake.

## Festivals & Events

Locarno has hosted the two-week **Festival Internazionale di Film** (International Film Festival; ☎ 091 756 21 21; www.pardo.ch; Via Luini 3, CH-6600 Locarno), which has been held in August, since 1948. Cinemas are used during the day but at night, films are screened in the open air on a giant screen set up in the Piazza Grande.

## Sleeping

**Vecchia Locarno** (☎ 091 751 65 02; www.hotel-vecchia-locarno.ch; Via della Motta 10; s/d Sfr50/95) Rooms are gathered around a sunny internal courtyard, evoking a Mediterranean mood, and some have views over the old town centre and hills. The digs are simple enough, but comfortable (heaters are provided in the colder months). Bathrooms are in the corridor.

**Albergo Ristorante Cittadella** (☎ 091 751 58 85; www.cittadella.ch; Via Cittadella 18; s/d Sfr100/170) Aside from its well-known restaurant, this spot has a handful of pretty little rooms, individually decorated.

**Grand Hotel Locarno** (☎ 091 743 02 82; www.grand-hotel-locarno.ch; Via Sempione 17; s/d Sfr160/340; 📶 📺 📞 📧 📱 📷 📹 📻 📠 📡 📢 📣 📤 📥 📦 📧 📨 📩 📪 📫 📬 📭 📮 📯 📰 📱 📲 📳 📴 📵 📶 📷 📸 📹 📺 📻 📼 📽 📿 📠 📡 📢 📣 📤 📥 📦 📧 📨 📩 📪 📫 📬 📭 📮 📯 📰 📱 📲 📳 📴 📵 📶 📷 📸 📹 📺 📻 📼 📽 📿) Grand in name and looks, this

## AUTHOR'S CHOICE

**Osteria Chiara** (☎ 091 743 32 96; Vicolo della Chiara 1; pasta & mains Sfr15-30; ☎ Tue-Sat) Tucked away on a cobbled lane, this has all the cosy feel of a *grotto*. Sit at granite tables beneath the pergola or at timber tables by the fireplace for chunky dishes of *malfatti con zucca al timo* (big gnocchi-style pasta with pumpkin and thyme). From the lake follow the signs up Vicolo dei Nessi.

is an old-style relic of *belle époque* proportions standing in its own grounds. Rooms are a trifle faded but the best of them exude the luxury of bygone years in this historic building. Most of the 1925 Locarno peace talk delegations lodged here.

**Camping Delta** (☎ 091 751 60 81; www.campingdelta.com; camp sites Sfr37-47, plus per adult/child/senior & student Sfr18/6/16; ☎ Mar-Oct) Although pricey, this camping ground has great facilities and is brilliantly located between the shores of Lago Maggiore and the Maggia river.

## Eating

**Albergo Ristorante Cittadella** (☎ 091 751 58 85; Via Cittadella 18; mains Sfr30-50; ☎ Tue-Sun) This is the place to go if you enjoy fine fish – the upstairs section does not serve anything else. Downstairs the menu is not quite so focused on the aquatic and includes pizza for Sfr12 to Sfr19.50.

**Ristorante Centenario** (☎ 091 743 82 22; Lungolago Motta 17; set meals Sfr58-130, mains Sfr40-55; ☎ Tue-Sat) Although some think Locarno's temple to French *haute cuisine* is a trifle stuffy, this lakeside gem is a guarantee of fine dining. Making no concessions to anyone, even the menu is in French. Tuck into some *carré d'agneau rôti au romarin* (roast lamb cooked in rosemary).

## Drinking

**Sport Bar** (Via della Posta 4; ☎ 8-1am Mon-Fri, 10-1am Sat, 2pm-1am Sun) A fairly run-of-the-mill place by day, this rough and tumble bar with the red walled dance space out the back and beer garden on the side is an extremely popular hangout with Locarno's young and restless.

## Getting There & Away

Trains run every one to two hours from Brig (Sfr50, 2½ hours), passing through

Italy (bring your passport). Change trains at Domodossola.

Postal buses to the surrounding valleys leave from outside the train station, and boats (see below) from near Piazza Grande. There is cheap parking (per day Sfr3) along Via della Morettina.

## AROUND LOCARNO Lago Maggiore

Only the northeast corner of Lago Maggiore is in Switzerland; the rest slices into Italy's Lombardy region. **Navigazione Lago Maggiore** (NLM; ☎ 091 751 61 40; www.navigazione.laghi.it) operates boats across the entire lake. Limited day passes cost Sfr13.40, but the Sfr23 version is valid for the entire Swiss basin. There are various options for visiting the Italian side of the lake.

## Ascona

Ascona is Locarno's smaller twin (population 5060) across the Maggia river delta.

## SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

The late 19th century saw the arrival of 'back to nature' utopians and anarchists from northern Europe in Ascona. Their aspirations and eccentricities are the subject of the **Museo Casa Anatta** (☎ 091 791 01 81; www.mon-teverita.org; Via Collina 78; adult/student & senior Sfr6/4; ☎ 3-7pm Tue-Sun Jul & Aug, 2.30-6pm Tue-Sun Apr-Jun & Sep-Oct) on Monte Verità (take the small bus to Buxi from the post office; Sfr1).

The **Museo Comunale d'Arte Moderna** (☎ 091 759 81 40; Via Borgo 34; adult/concession Sfr7/5; ☎ 10am-noon & 3-6pm Tue-Sat, 4-6pm Sun), in Palazzo Pancaldi, includes paintings by artists connected with the town, among them Paul Klee, Ben Nicholson, Alexej Jawlensky and Hans Arp.

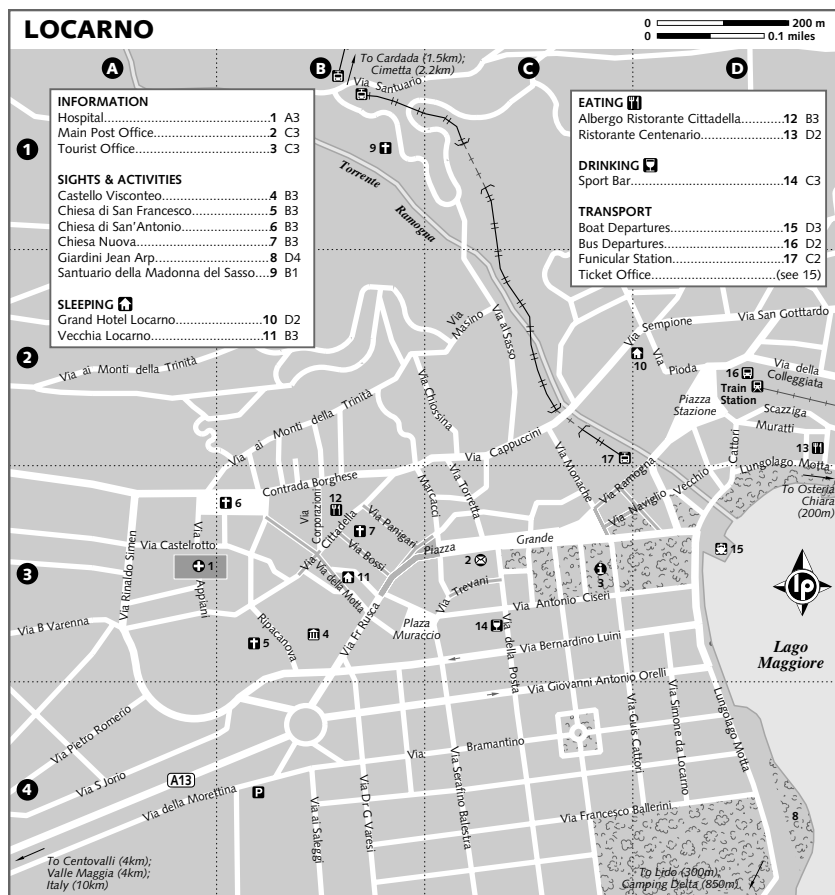
The **Collegio Papio** (Via Cappelle), now a high school, boasts a fine Lombard courtyard and includes the 15th-century **Chiesa Santa Maria della Misericordia**, with medieval frescoes.

For 55 years Ascona has hosted **Settimane Musicali**, an international classical music festival lasting from the end of August to mid-October.

## SLEEPING & EATING

Ascona is bursting with hotels and eateries, especially along the lakefront.

**Ristorante Antica Posta** (☎ 091 791 04 26; www.ti-gastro.ch/anticaposta; Via Borgo; s/d Sfr100/200) Aside from having a pleasant restaurant gathered





around an internal courtyard, this place offers 10 simple rooms in the heart of town.

**Ristorante della Carrà** (☎ 091 791 44 52; Via Caràdei Nasi; mains Sfr25-45; ☎ daily) Hidden inside off the street is this cosy courtyard with pergola, along with the inside dining area. Consider the *costata fiorentina alla griglia* (Sfr44), a grilled slab of prime beef. Fish is also available.

**Castello del Sole** (☎ 091 791 02 02; www.castellodelsole.com; Via Muraccio 142; s/d up to Sfr410/780; 📞 📺 📶) One of the most enticing upper range hotels in Ticino is set in magnificent gardens; this is *the* place to pamper yourself.

#### GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bus No 31 from Locarno's train station and Piazza Grande stops at Ascona's post office with departures every 15 minutes (Sfr2.80). Boat services on Lago Maggiore stop at Ascona.

## WESTERN VALLEYS

The valleys ranging to the north and west of Locarno team with grey stone villages, gushing mountain streams, cosy retreats, traditional *grotti* and there are some endless walking opportunities.

### CENTOVALLI

The 'hundred valleys' is the westward valley route to Domodossola in Italy, known on the Italian side as Val Vigezzo.

As you head west of the busy traffic junction of Ponte Brolla (with several fine eateries), 4km west of Locarno, the road winds out in a string of tight curves, often with surprisingly heavy traffic, high on the north flank of the Melezzo stream, which is largely held in check by a dam.

The quiet towns with their stone houses and heavy slate roofs, mostly high above the road and railway line on either side of the valley, make tranquil bases for mountain hikes. Among the best stops are **Verdasio**, **Rasa** and **Bordei**. Rasa is only accessible by cable car from Verdasio. **Ristorante al Pentolino** (☎ 091 780 81 00; d Sfr120; restaurant ☎ Wed-Sun), in the heart of Verdasio, offers nicely renovated rooms. You can enjoy hearty cooking at any time of the day (11am to 10.30pm, Sfr30 to Sfr35) at the granite tables beneath the pergola.

At **Re**, on the Italian side, there is a procession of pilgrims on 30 April each year, a tradition that originated when a painting of the Madonna was reported to have started bleeding when struck by a ball in 1480. More startling than the legend is the bulbous basilica built in the name of the Madonna del Sangue (Madonna of the Blood) in 1922-50.

A picturesque train along the valley, trundling across numerous precarious-looking viaducts, leaves from Locarno for Domodossola (Sfr30 return, two hours each way). There are up to 11 departures a day. Take your passport.

### VALLE ONSERNONE

Once known for its granite mines, this is one of the least visited of Ticino's valleys. About 10km west of Locarno along the Centovalli route, take a right at Cavigliano and swing northwest into barely inhabited territory. Clusters of stone houses form attractive hamlets along the way.

Shortly after Russo, a west branch road leads to **Spruga** (a popular starting point for walks with Swiss German visitors). The main road curves further north into the **Val Vergeletto**, whose main town bears the same name. It is a quiet, old place, except for the roar of the mountain stream past its houses and church. About 2km further west is the delightful **Locanda Zott** (☎ 091 797 10 98; r per person half-board Sfr66), with its child-friendly atmosphere, busy downstairs restaurant and renovated rooms upstairs, some with their own shower. The road peters out 6km west and the territory is great for hiking.

Make the excursion to nearby **Grosso**, perched high above Vergeletto at 999m. The views are great from this unadorned, close-knit hamlet where you may find a lone *osteria* open for lunch.

Up to five daily buses run from Locarno to Spruga. Change at Russo for Vergeletto and Grosso.

### VALLE MAGGIA

This mostly broad, sunny valley follows the river of the same name from Ponte Brolla, passing small villages, until at Cevio (the valley's main town) it splits, the first of several divisions into smaller valleys. The valley's **tourist office** (☎ 091 753 28 85; www.vallemaggia.ch) is in Maggia.

Among the earlier villages, **Modegno** and **Aurigeno** are worth a stop and look around. The former is a quiet conglomeration of grey stone houses, while the latter is known for its colourful frescoes. **Maggia** itself is handy for stocking up at the supermarket but otherwise without great charm.

**Cevio**, 12km northwest, holds more interest. Admire the colourful façade of the 16th-century **Pretorio**, covered in the family coats-of-arms of many of the town's rulers, mostly in the 17th century. About 1km away, the core of the old town is graced with 16th-century mansions. A short walk away (signposted) are *grotti*, cellars carved out of great blocks of granite that tumbled onto the town here in a landslide. There is a handful of hotels and eateries here.

Take the road for Bosco Gurin and after 1km, a side road to **Boschetto** that leads over a stream (note the riverside *grotti* of **Rovana**). This mostly abandoned hamlet is a starting point for local walks and has a haunting quality.

The road to Bosco Gurin slices up in seemingly endless hairpin bends to **Cerentino**, where the road forks. You have a couple of eating options here. The right fork leads 5.5km to **Bosco Gurin**, a minor ski centre (with a couple of hotels) and pleasantly sun-kissed high pasture village of slate-roofed, white-washed houses. It is the only town in Ticino where the majority language is German, a heritage of Valais immigrants. The other fork from Cerentino leads up the 8km-long **Valle di Campo** along a winding forest road to another broad, sunny, upland valley. The prettiest of its towns is **Campo**, with its scattered houses and Romanesque belltower. The valley is closed off (great views) by **Cimalotto**, where you can stay and eat in the rustic **Pensione Alpina** (☎ 091 754 11 91; www.pensionealpina.ch; r per person Sfr45; ☎ Apr-Oct).

Back in Cevio, the Valle Maggia road continues 3km to Bignasco, where you turn west for the **Val Bavona**, the prettiest of them all. A smooth road follows a mountain stream on its course through narrow meadows cradled between steep rocky walls. Its series of tightly huddled stone and slate-roofed hamlets is protected by a local foundation, but only inhabited from April to October. The valley sees no direct sunlight from November to February. For all that, its hamlets are irresistible. **Foroglio**

is dominated by a powerful waterfall (a 10-minute walk away) and home to **Ristorante La Froda** (☎ 091 754 11 81; meals Sfr45; ☎ daily Apr-Oct). Sit at one of five timber tables by a crackling fire for heaped serves of melt-in-the-mouth *stinco di maiale* (pork shank), served with the best polenta you are likely to taste. Wash down with a glass of Merlot. On summer days, lunch on the terrace in view of the waterfall.

At the end of the valley, just after San Carlo, a **cable car** (adult/child return Sfr20/10; ☎ mid-Jun-mid-Oct) rides up to the **Robiei dam** and nearby lakes, great for a day's hiking. A bus runs four times a day from Bignasco to San Carlo, from April to October.

From Bignasco it is 17km to **Fusio**, another pretty town surrounded by woods at the head of the **Val Lavizzara**. Stop in **Mogno** on the way to see the extraordinary 1996 cylindrical church designed by Mario Botta. The grey (Maggia granite) and white (marble from Peccia) interior doorway has a strangely neo-Romanesque air. From Fusio the road leads to the dam holding back the emerald **Lago Sambuco**, from where you can hike on to other artificial lakes as well as north over the mountains into Valle Leventina. In Fusio, the **Antica Osteria Dazio** (☎ 091 755 11 62; www.hats.ch; s/d Sfr170/220; ☎ Mar-Nov; 📞) is a beautifully renovated place to sleep, with loads of timber and Alpine charm. It has a restaurant, too.

Regular buses run from Locarno to Cevio and Bignasco, from where you make less regular connections into the side valleys.

### VAL VERZASCA

About 4km northeast of Locarno, this rugged 26km valley snakes north past the impressive Vogorno dam, which is fed by the gushing Verzasca (green waters), a delightful river whose white stones lend the transparent mountain water a scintillating emerald hue.

Just beyond the Vogorno lake, look to the left and you will see the picture-postcard hamlet of **Corripo** seemingly pasted on to the thickly wooded mountain flank. To reach it you cross the **Gola Verzasca**, a delightful little gorge. Up in Corripo you can eat (and possibly from 2006, sleep) at the basic **Osteria Corripo** (☎ 091 745 18 71; pasta Sfr12; ☎ Wed-Mon Apr-Oct).

About 5km upstream, **Lavertezzo** is known for its narrow, double-humped, Romanesque bridge (rebuilt from scratch after the 1951

floods destroyed it) and natural pools in the icy stream. Be careful, as storms upstream can turn the river into a raging torrent in no time. Stay at riverside **Osteria Vittoria** (☎ 091 746 15 81; s/d Sfr100/149), a bustling family lodge with its own restaurant and garden. Most rooms have balconies with views over the Verzasca.

Another 12km takes you to **Sonogno**, a once abandoned hamlet at the head of the valley that has been resuscitated largely due to tourism.

Postal buses operate to Sonogno from Locarno only every two hours (Sfr17, 70 minutes).