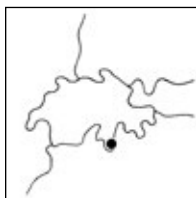




LUGANO



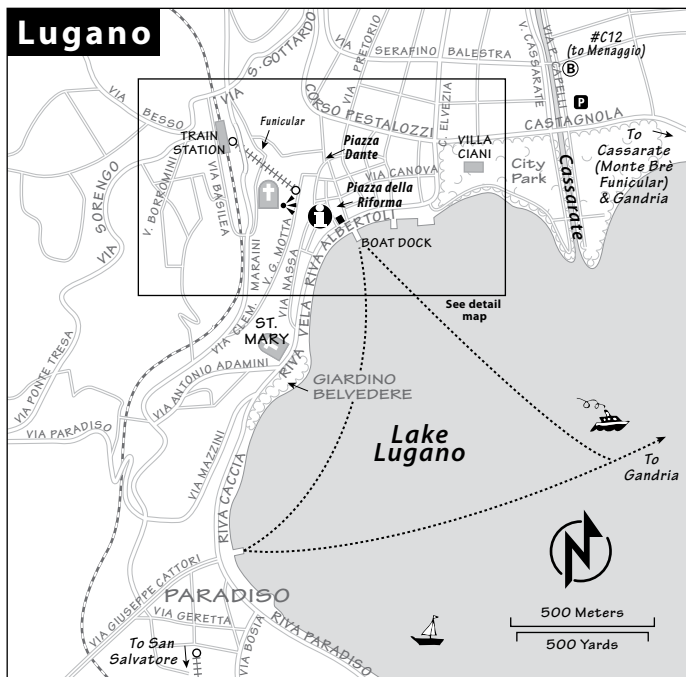
Lugano, the leading city of the Italian-speaking Swiss canton of Ticino, gives you Switzerland with an Italian accent. The town (population 60,000; metropolitan area 140,000) sprawls luxuriously along the shores of Lake Lugano. Just a short, scenic train ride over the Alps from the German and French regions of

Switzerland, Lugano has a splashy, zesty, Mediterranean ambience. It attracts vacationers from the rainy north with its sunshine, lush vegetation, inviting lake, and shopping. While many travelers come here for the fancy boutiques, others make this a base for hiking, cruising the lake, and passing lazy afternoons in its many gardens. Its mountains aren't mighty, its beaches are lousy, the cityscape is nothing thrilling, and it can all feel a little geriatric, but Lugano is the best spot to enjoy palm trees in Switzerland, and its charm merits at least a short visit.

PLANNING YOUR TIME

Lugano lies conveniently at the intersection of the Gotthard Panorama Express and the Bernina Express—two of Switzerland's more scenic train rides. Blitz sightseers arrive along the Gotthard Panorama route one day and take off on the Bernina Express the next.

If relaxing is on your itinerary, spend two nights and a full day here, arriving and departing on the scenic trains. With a day, spend the morning exploring the old town with my self-guided walk, then do a boat cruise and ascend a mountain lift (San Salvatore is best) in the afternoon. Extra time—and you'll have some—can be spent relaxing in gardens and along the lakefront.



Orientation to Lugano

The old town is on Lake Lugano, which is bordered by promenades and parks. A funicular connects the old town with the train station above. Nearly everything in this chapter (with the exception of the mountain lifts) is within a five-minute walk of the base of the funicular. The town of Lugano fades into other, smaller waterfront communities all around the lake (much of which lies in Italy).

Italian is the language of Lugano and its region (Ticino), which is surrounded on three sides by Italy (see “Italian Survival Phrases” in the appendix). In this corner of Switzerland, a *Strasse* (street) becomes a *Via*, and a *Platz* (square) becomes a *Piazza*.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Lugano’s main TI is in the **Town Hall** building, facing the boat dock (Mon-Fri 9:00-18:00, Sat until 17:00, Sun 10:00-16:00; shorter hours and closed Sun in off-season; Palazzo Civico, Riva Albertoli, tel. 058-866-6600, www.luganoturismo.ch). There’s also a branch at the **train station** (Mon-Fri 9:00-19:00, Sat until 13:00, closed Sun, shorter hours in off-season).

The TI offers different **excursions**, such as to the fishing village of Gandria; to the top of San Salvatore; and to the top of

Monte Brè, including a short boat ride (all tours well described on the website). Tours are given in two languages at the same time (usually Italian and English), and depending on who signs up, may lean much more heavily toward one or the other (tours cost 10 CHF and include transport or lift tickets worth much more, reservations required, all tours leave from the TI).

ARRIVAL IN LUGANO

The train station is on a hill above downtown. It has pay lockers (in the underground passage), WCs, a ticket office (daily 7:00-19:00), ATMs, a convenient small grocery (Piccobello, open long hours daily), a surprisingly genteel restaurant (Buffet della Stazione, with affordable pizzas), and a branch TI. The easiest way to get to the town below is by **funicular** (look for *funicolare* sign—it's by track 1 in the middle of the station, departs every 5 minutes, daily 5:00-24:00, 1.30 CHF, free with Swiss Travel Pass). The funicular deposits you right in the heart of the old town, at Piazza Cioccaro and the start of my Lugano Walk.

You can also **walk** (but not with wheeled luggage) or take **bus** #2 or #4 down the hill (for bus details, see "Getting Around Lugano," later).

HELPFUL HINTS

Wi-Fi: The city operates free Wi-Fi along the waterfront and in Piazza della Riforma (look for the Wi-Fi Lugano network).

To log in, you'll need a mobile phone that can receive texts.

Laundry: Il Girasole is a self-service launderette with English instructions a 15-minute walk away from the lake—or take bus #7 (direction: Pregassona) three stops from Lugano Centro to Piazza Molino Nuovo, then walk a block onward (daily 7:00-22:00, Via Giuseppe Bagutti 8, tel. 091-922-9900 or mobile 076-503-7964, www.lavanderiaselfservice.ch).

Local Guide: Lovely **Christa Branchi** teaches enthusiastically about her city and its history (180 CHF/1-3 hours, 220 CHF/half-day, 330 CHF/day, tel. 091-606-3302, christabranchi@hotmail.com).

GETTING AROUND LUGANO

The town center is easily walkable, and the two nearby hilltop excursions, San Salvatore and Monte Brè, start from funicular stations that are each a 20-minute lakeside stroll (in opposite directions) away from the center.

Buses can save time, though. All lines converge at the Lugano Centro terminal on the north edge of downtown. Bus #2 (2-4/hour) is the one to know: It conveniently links the Paradiso neighborhood (for San Salvatore), the train station, Lugano Centro,

Cassarate (for Monte Brè), and Castagnola (where the path to Gandria starts). Buy bus tickets from the English-speaking touchscreen machines at any bus stop (2-CHF “short-distance” ticket good for up to four stops, 2.50-CHF regular “Area 100” ticket valid for one hour; 7.50-CHF day pass—to buy, touch “Further Tickets,” then “Day Pass,” then select “Lugano”; all Lugano buses covered by Swiss Travel Pass, www.tpls.ch).

Lugano Walk

Resorty Lugano hides some interesting history, but let’s face it: You’re here to relax. Consider taking this short self-guided stroll to get yourself oriented... or just grab a gelato and wind your own way through the city center’s arcades and lakeside promenade.

Start on Piazza Cioccaro, at the base of the funicular that connects the train station with the town center.

- *With your back to the funicular, go down the narrow street to the right of the building at the bottom of the square.*



Via Pessina: In this tangled, colorful little corner are several small delicatessen-type shops run by Signor Gabbani. Stop in if you’d like to sample some of the best local cheese, bread, salami, and/or wine.

- *Bear right, and on your right, at Via Pessina 3, find the...*

Grand Café al Porto: This venerable, elegant institution is the most historic café in town. The 1803 above the fireplace is the date it opened—and also when Ticino joined the Swiss Federation. Once a convent (notice the fine *sgraffito* facade), the café evokes the 19th-century days when Giuseppe Mazzini and fellow Italian patriots would huddle here—safely over the border—planning their next move to unify Italy. Much later, as World War II wound down, US intelligence officer Allen Dulles (future head of the CIA) met right here with Nazi and Italian representatives to organize a graceful end to the war and prevent the Germans from ruining Italy with a scorched-earth retreat. And in more carefree times, this is where Clark Gable and Sophia Loren dipped cookies in their coffee.

- *Just past Grand Café al Porto, take a left at the fountain into...*

Piazza della Riforma: This square is Lugano’s living room. With geraniums cascading on all sides, the square hosts an open-

air cinema, markets (Tue and Fri mornings), and local festivals. The giant yellow building is the City Hall (*municipio*).

• *Facing the City Hall, make a 90-degree left turn and walk (between the farmacia and the white bank building) down...*

Via Canova: This street leads directly to the city park. Follow it for a few blocks, watching for the elegant gallery that burrows through a block (on your left after the second crosswalk). Just after that, on your right, you'll pass the **Palazzo Reali**, which displays ever-changing exhibits of primarily 19th- and 20th-century art (may be closed for renovation when you visit, main collection-8 CHF, covered by Swiss Travel Pass, Wed-Sun 10:00-17:00, Tue from 14:00, closed Mon, Via Canova 10, tel. 091-815-7971, <http://masilugano.ch>).

Next is the creamy little **Church of San Rocco**. Its rich frescoes celebrate the saint responsible for protecting the city against the plague.

Beyond the Church of San Rocco is the parklike **Piazza Indipendenza**. The giant head on its side is the work of Polish sculptor Igor Mitoraj, who has decorated squares all over Europe with similar sculptures. On your right is the vast, sterile **casino** building. Though its blocky, modern style doesn't quite fit the otherwise elegant architecture of this area, it does have an elevator leading up to a fine lake view (lake side of building—we'll pass there later on this walk).

• *Continuing straight across the street from Piazza Indipendenza, pass through the gate to come face-to-face with the pink palace in the...*

City Park (Parco Civico Villa Ciani): The park's centerpiece, the Villa Ciani, houses a fine-arts museum. Sprawling from here along the lake is a lush park filled with modern art and exotic trees from around the world. Its water gate evokes the 19th century, when this was the private domain of aristocrats. The flower beds are organized to show off maximum color all year long. If the weather's nice, stow your guidebook and remember you're on vacation as you explore this ingeniously



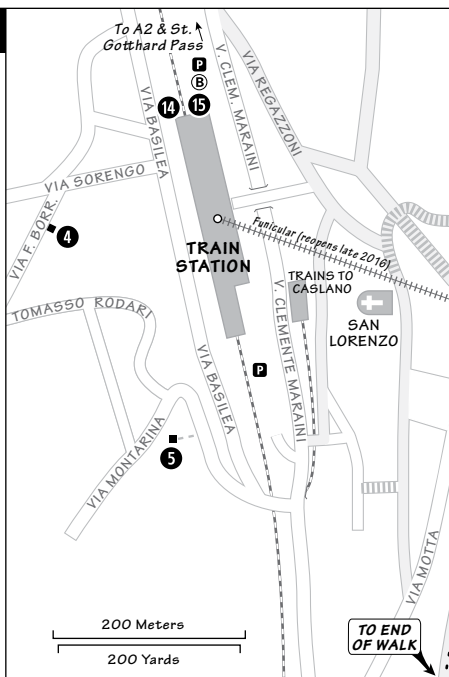
Lugano Center

Accommodations

- 1 To Hotel Int'l au Lac
- 2 Hotel/Rest. Pestalozzi
- 3 Hotel San Carlo
- 4 Albergo Stella
- 5 Hotel & Hostel Montarina

Eateries & Other

- 6 La Tinera
- 7 Bottegone del Vino
- 8 Piazza della Riforma Eateries
- 9 Manora Cafeteria
- 10 Co-op Cafeteria
- 11 Grand Café al Porto
- 12 To Launderette
- 13 Paddleboat Rental (2)
- 14 Buses to Malpensa
- 15 Buses to Tirano & St. Moritz



landscaped, people-friendly space. It's lit at night and particularly good for a late, romantic stroll (open long hours daily).

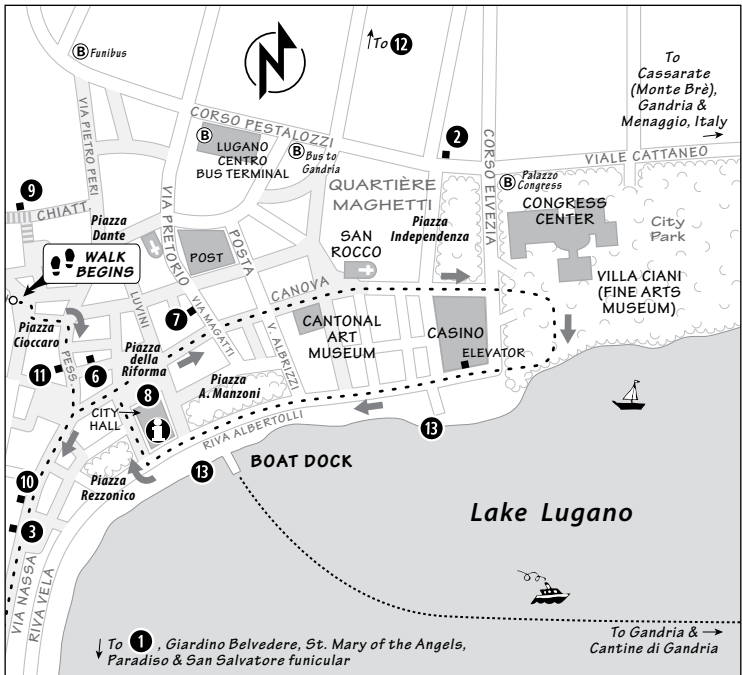
• *From the city park, walk back to the town center along the...*

Waterfront: This lovely promenade gets even nicer on Friday and Saturday evenings from late June through August (after 20:30), when the busy street is closed off to traffic and you'll find concerts and events in full swing.

On the right, the casino's top-floor restaurant overlooks the lake. If it's open, ride the glass *elevatore* up and down for a fun and free view (daily 12:00-15:00 & 19:30-24:00). Then continue strolling through the arcade or under the mulberry trees (a favorite of silk worms, dating from the time when silk was a local industry) until you reach the **TI** and the **boat dock** (for details on lake cruises, see "Cruising Lake Lugano," later). On the way, you'll pass several places to rent paddleboats (8 CHF/30 minutes).

Look across the lake for the village clustered around a huge, blocky, sand-colored building (lit up in bright colors at night). That's the Casinò di Campione, the largest casino in Europe, which





enjoys special legal privileges, granted by Mussolini when he saw what casino tourism had done for nearby Lugano. The casino dominates **Campione d'Italia**—a tiny enclave of Italy that's surrounded by Switzerland on all sides; residents use Swiss francs, have Swiss phone numbers and license plates, and pay Swiss taxes...but carry Italian passports.

- Back at the yellow City Hall building, cross the busy road (notice the pedestrian underpass nearby). A block inland from the TI is Piazza della Riforma again. The first left off the square is...

Via Nassa: This is one of Lugano's main shopping streets. For the next several blocks, just enjoy the wandering, window-shopping, and people-watching along this gauntlet of boutiques and jewelry shops under typical Lombardi arcades. On the right, at #22, the Co-op department store has a good selection of chocolates (just inside the door on the left), a basement supermarket, and a handy top-floor cafeteria with great views.

- Follow Via Nassa until it dead-ends at the small but historic...

Church of St. Mary of the Angels (Chiesa Santa Maria degli Angioli): This lakefront church, which dates from 1499, was part of a monastery (next door). Inside the church are the city's best frescoes.

The Passion and Crucifixion of Christ, the artistic highlight of all Ticino and the finest Renaissance fresco in Switzerland, is on the

The Story of Lugano

Lugano's history is tied to its strategic position: where the Italian world is pressed up against the Alps, and just below the most convenient alpine passes. The Celts crossed the Alps here and left their mark. The ancient Romans were here, too—the oldest sacred building in Switzerland is an early Christian baptistery on this lake.

In 1220, when the first road over the Gotthard Pass was built, the Swiss took an interest in acquiring the Italian-speaking region of Ticino, leading to a three-century-long battle for control. Several castles in the nearby town of Bellinzona recall a pivotal Swiss victory in 1513. With this success, the Swiss gained a toehold south of the Alps. At first, Ticino was ruled from farther north, as a sort of colony. But in 1798, after French troops invaded Switzerland and proclaimed the Helvetic Republic, locals stood up to Napoleon by creating an independent Republic of Ticino. The Ticinese couldn't rule themselves peacefully, though, and five years later (in 1803) they joined the reestablished Swiss Federation as a regular canton, on the same footing as the rest of Switzerland.

In the 19th century, Lugano—Italian-speaking, just a short trip from Milan, yet safely over the border in Switzerland—provided a refuge and staging ground for intellectual Italian revolutionaries. They'd meet here to plan the *Risorgimento*, the struggle for Italian unification (c. 1840-1869). Later in the 19th century, tourism arrived, and the grand lakefront hotels were built.

Today, Lugano is second among Swiss cities only to Zürich in its number of banks. It's easy for Italians and others with suitcases of hard cash—black money—to swing by and take advantage of the secret bank accounts. But the mentality here remains Italian. Rather than the Zürich model (“live to work”), the people of Lugano brag that they work to live.

wall that separates the nave from the altar area. Milanese Bernardino Luini, who painted it in 1529, is sometimes called the “Raphael of the North” for the gentle expressions and calm beauty of his art. Follow the action as the scenes from Christ's passion are played out, from Jesus being crowned with thorns (left) to the doubting apostle Thomas touching Jesus' wound after his Resurrection (right). The central dominating theme is the Crucifixion. The work is rife with symbolism. For instance, at the base of the cross, notice the skull and femur of Adam, as well as his rib (from which Eve was created). Worshippers saw this and remembered that without Adam



and Eve's first sin, none of the terrible action in the rest of the fresco would have been necessary. Luini spent a decade working on this fresco, applying his paints day by day, a section at a time, over thin layers of wet plaster.

Facing the giant fresco, look to your left to find the three smaller frames. This is Luini's *Last Supper*, which was sliced off a wall of the monks' dining hall and put on canvas to be hung here.

Finally, wander up to the front of the church. The altar is rich and unusual with its wooden inlay work.

• *Along the lakefront across from the church begins the...*

Giardino Belvedere: This delightful little garden park is an open-air modern-art museum. The building facing it was once a monastery, then the Grand Hotel Palace. This first grand hotel on the lake was radical in that it actually faced the lake. From here, survey the scene. Paradiso, the big hotel zone with its 80-foot-high fountain, is a 15-minute walk along the lakeside. From there, the San Salvatore lift zips sightseers to the summit. The ridge across the lake marks the border of Italy.

• *Our walk is finished. If you've got energy left, continue along the lakefront on the pleasant path to Paradiso; there you can summit San Salvatore, hop on a lake cruise, or do both.*

Sights near Lugano

MOUNTAIN LIFTS

Two handsome mountains (San Salvatore and Monte Brè) flank Lugano's city center, and you can conquer either one, sweat-free, by lifts. At about 3,000 feet, Lake Lugano's mountains are unimpressive compared with the mightier Alps farther north; if you've done some of the higher lifts in the Berner Oberland or Zermatt regions, nothing here will thrill you. Still, the commanding mountaintop views over the lake are enjoyable. Doing more than one is overkill; San Salvatore is best and relatively handy to Lugano town. Monte Generoso is a higher mountain that's a little farther from town.

▲ San Salvatore

The easiest and most rewarding peak on the lake, thanks to its fine panoramic views, San Salvatore (2,990 feet) rockets up from the Lugano suburb of Paradiso.

Cost and Hours: 30 CHF round-trip, half-price with Swiss Travel Pass, 2/hour—departs on the hour and the half-hour, 12-minute ride, transfer to another funicular midway up; lift runs daily mid-July-mid-Aug



9:00–23:00; rest of year 9:00–18:00, Fri–Sat until 22:30, closed Nov–mid-March; these are last-ascent times—last descent generally 30 minutes later; tel. 091-985-2828, www.montesansalvatore.ch.

Getting There: To reach the base of the funicular, either walk along the water (about 20 minutes south of the city center; keep your eye out for brown *funicolare* signs), or take bus #2 (direction: Paradiso, get off at Paradiso/Geretta stop, rather than staying on until the Funicolare San Salvatore stop).

At the Summit: You'll find good viewpoints, as well as a playground and a restaurant (reasonably priced if you buy the daily special with your funicular ticket—menu posted at valley station, food served 11:00–15:00, in high season also 19:00–23:00).

From the lift, be sure to climb five more minutes to the actual summit. On the way up, pop into the Salvatore Museum, with its small collection of religious art and exhibits on local geology (included in funicular ticket, closed Mon–Tue). At the top of the mountain, there's a small church surrounded by a view terrace. For the best panorama, climb to the rooftop of the church (entrance around the right side) for a sweeping, nearly 360-degree view. Unfortunately, the bay directly in front of Lugano is just about the only thing you can't see from up here.



Monte Brè

Departing from the other end of Lugano, in the suburb of Cassarate, this funicular takes you to arguably the best view down on the lagoon of Lugano itself (3,005 feet). There's a restaurant up top.

Cost and Hours: 25 CHF round-trip, half-price with Swiss Travel Pass, 2/hour—generally at :15 and :45 after the hour, 33-minute trip; lift runs daily June–Oct 9:10–18:45 plus July–Aug Fri–Sat until 23:05, off-season until 16:45, closed Jan–Feb; these are last-ascent times—last descent generally 30 minutes later, restaurant has lunch-and-funicular combo offer, tel. 091-971-3171, www.montebre.ch.



Getting There: From Lugano's old town, you can take bus #2 (direction: Castagnola) to the Cassarate/Monte Brè stop. Getting off the bus, walk a little farther along the water, then follow brown *funicolare* signs uphill to the left. Don't dawdle—the turnstile gate

closes with little warning shortly before the funicular departs. You can also reach Cassarate via the lake boat from downtown Lugano.

Monte Generoso

The tallest mountain but farthest from Lugano, Monte Generoso (5,590 feet) is high enough that you can see some of the more distant cut-glass peaks. A cogwheel train climbs up from the station at Capolago (at the south end of Lake Lugano) in 35 minutes, leaving you at Generoso Vetta, a 10-minute walk below the summit.

Cost and Hours: 54 CHF round-trip, half-price with Swiss Travel Pass, June–Sept roughly hourly 9:05–16:35, off-season until 15:35, few or no trains Nov–March, tel. 091-630-5111, www.montegeneroso.ch).

Getting There: From Lugano, take a regular train (15 minutes) to Capolago. You can also get there by boat, though it's slower and runs once a day.

CRUISING LAKE LUGANO WITH A STOP IN GANDRIA

Lake Lugano is made to order for a boat trip. The lake boats serve as regular public transport to a couple of car-free spots on the lake. You can either ride the boat around the lake or hop on and off the boat to explore. There's also a dizzying array of more elaborate excursions to choose from (such as a lunch trip, a grand tour, a shopping excursion into Italy, and an evening dinner cruise).



Boats and Schedules

The basic one-hour boat cruise does a loop from Lugano. It stops at a few desolate restaurants and hamlets along the far side of the lake, visits Gandria (a peaceful and picturesque little fishing town with several romantic view restaurants), then returns to Lugano (27.40 CHF round-trip including stopovers, 16.60 CHF for one segment, free with Swiss Travel Pass).

You can get off at any point, look around, and wait for a later boat; from Gandria, you can also return to Lugano by foot or bus (explained later). Note that if you're hopping on and off the boat, you'll actually cobble together the trip from various longer cruises, each with different itineraries. Some circle the lake clockwise, others counterclockwise, and not every boat makes every stop (the boat serves only those parts of the lake within Swiss borders). Pick up

the boat schedule (*orario*) or find it online (www.lakelugano.ch, tel. 091-222-1111). Study it carefully to note when the next boat comes and exactly where it stops. The schedule can be confusing, so ask at the TI or one of the boat docks if you need planning help.

Stops on the Lake

If you want to get off the boat, consider one of the following stops.

LUGANO

On the Far Side of the Lake

The best place to break your journey is at the adjacent stops of **Cantine di Gandria** and **Museo Doganale**, which are a quick walk from each other (boats dock at just one of these stops, not both). Cantine di Gandria has two traditional trattorias and wine grottos—great for a rustic meal or just a snack and a drink (daily 11:30–21:00, closed Oct–April, Grotto Teresa: tel. 091-923-5895, Grotto Descanso: tel. 091-922-8071). A five-minute walk from Cantine di Gandria takes you to the bright orange **Museo Doganale**, right on the Italian border, with underwhelming exhibits on customs and smuggling (3 CHF, no English but worth a quick visit, daily 13:30–17:30, closed mid-Oct–March, tel. 079-512-9907, www.zollmuseum.ch).

Gandria

This town, on the Lugano side of the lake, is the most popular stop. A dense cluster of houses hangs over the lake with a few lazy, romantic hotels and several inviting restaurants. The only “streets” are stairways and cool, narrow passageways between the lake below and the road above. Either of the two restaurants by the boat dock will do for a meal or drink (**Ristorante Roccabella**: tel. 091-971-2722; and just up the stairs, **Ristorante Antico**: tel. 091-971-4871). But it’s worth seeking out **\$\$\$ Locanda Gandriesi**, deeper into the village, which has better food and a smaller, quieter terrace (pasta and polenta dishes, open daily—even in winter; go left from the dock—it’s about a 5-minute walk, just below the church; tel. 091-971-4181).



Reaching Gandria by Bus: You can also connect Gandria and downtown Lugano by minibus (#490, 9/day Mon–Fri, 5/day Sat, none on Sun, 4.40 CHF, timetables at www.lakelugano.ch or www.rail.ch—search for stop “Gandria, Paese”). The bus stop in Lugano, called Al Forte, is across the street from Lugano Centro bus station, in front of Via Giovanni Nizzola 2. In Gandria, buses drop and pick up at the parking lot above the car-free village.

Returning to Lugano from Gandria: You can **walk** back to

Lugano along a great 45-minute lakeside path through restored olive groves, with multilingual signposts telling you all about olive cultivation (follow signs for *Sentiero dell'Olivio*). This path brings you to Castagnola, a suburb of Lugano; at the Castagnola post office, catch bus #2, #11, or #12 back into Lugano (or walk another 30 minutes).

You can also return to Lugano via **boat** or the **minibus** described above. Note that the last boat and bus depart from Gandria around 18:25 (confirm locally). If you miss these, you'll have to walk or fork over 40-50 CHF for a **taxi**.

Half-Day Plan

A pleasant way to spend a late afternoon and evening in summer is to catch a mid-afternoon boat (say 15:00) for the half-hour trip around the lake from Lugano to Gandria, and have a drink and appetizer—early diners always get lakeside tables. At around **17:00**, take the boat from Gandria to Paradiso, walk to the San Salvatore lift, and ride to the mountain summit (beautiful at twilight). Ride back down and walk along the lake back to Lugano. This plan works daily in the height of summer, and also Fridays and Saturdays in peak season, when the San Salvatore lift is open late (see listing earlier for details). Outside of those times, either go earlier in the day or skip the lift and just enjoy the walk back to Lugano.

CHOCOLATE EXCURSION

Alprose Chocolate Factory

On a rainy (or sweltering) day, a visit to this factory in Caslano, a small town near Lugano, makes a fun excursion (though it may be closed for renovation during your visit—call before you go). Alprose is one of Switzerland's smaller, less-well-known chocolate producers, but their factory is geared up for visitors and generous with free samples.

Cost and Hours: 3 CHF, no Swiss Travel Pass discount, Mon-Fri 9:00-17:30, Sat-Sun until 16:30, shop stays open a half-hour longer, Via Rompada 36, Caslano, tel. 091-611-8856, www.alprose.ch.



Getting There: The S60 suburban train runs from Lugano to Caslano (Mon-Fri 4/hour, Sat-Sun 2/hour, 20 minutes, direction: Ponte Tresa, covered by rail passes). The train leaves from the cute yellow antique train station across the street from Lugano's main station (marked *Ferrovie Luganesi*; go down the stairs). Machines and windows sell tickets (13.20-CHF day pass covers your return).

From Caslano station, cross the tracks and go one block downhill along Via Stazione, then turn right on Via Rompada (passing *Museo del Cioccolato* signs) a long block and a half to the factory.

Visiting the Factory: The machines are in operation Monday to Friday from 9:00 to 15:00, but you're always allowed a look at the factory. An elevated, enclosed, air-conditioned walkway lets you watch as big dollops of chocolate are dropped into plastic molds, cooled and popped out onto a conveyor belt, wrapped (mechanically), and packed (manually) into boxes. Next to the factory, a modest museum is set up in a tent. A 15-minute film describing the chocolate-making process runs continuously (ask for the English soundtrack). The shop sells fresh factory seconds for a reduced price. Picnickers can sit at tables next to a vending machine with drinks.

Sleeping in Lugano

Demand for hotel rooms in Lugano is more even than in other Swiss destinations, but prices are generally at their highest between April and October.

IN THE CITY CENTER

\$\$\$ Hotel International au Lac is a classic, elegant hotel with 78 rooms, old-school furnishings, some Lake Lugano views, and even a “museum” of relics from the hotel’s Victorian past. It’s conveniently and scenically located where pedestrian-only Via Nassa hits the lake. Four generations of Schmids have maintained the early-20th-century ambience since 1906, with old photos, inviting lounges, antique furniture, and, it seems, many of their original guests (family-friendly, air-con, elevator, terrace restaurant, fun view seats on balcony of bar, swimming pool, pricey parking, closed Nov-Easter, Via Nassa 68, tel. 091-922-7541, www.hotel-international.ch, info@hotel-international.ch). To reach the hotel from the station, either take the funicular down and walk (5 minutes), or take bus #4 (direction: Lugano Centro) four stops to Piazza Luini, right at the hotel’s front door.

\$\$\$ Hotel Pestalozzi Lugano, near the city park, is plain and vaguely institutional (it’s run by a nonprofit foundation). It offers 55 fresh, modern, somewhat sterile rooms—some with lake views. Though it’s a bit farther from the train-station funicular, this hotel is a better value (pricier rooms tend to have lake view and/or air-con—let them know what’s important to you when reserving, elevator, recommended and affordable restaurant, Piazza Indipendenza 9—but GPS works better with “Via Pietro Bianchi,” tel. 091-921-4646, www.pestalozzi-lugano.ch, info@pestalozzi-lugano.ch). From the station, you can reach the hotel quickly by

taking bus #2 (direction: Castagnola) four stops to Palazzo Congressi.

\$\$ Hotel San Carlo, also on the pedestrian-only shopping street, is conveniently close to the train-station funicular, with 20 small, quiet rooms (elevator, no air-con but fans, breakfast smaller than at comparable hotels, Via Nassa 28, tel. 091-922-7107, www.hotelsancarlolugano.ch, sancarlo@ticino.com).

NEAR THE TRAIN STATION

\$\$\$ Albergo Stella, a wonderful little oasis, offers 14 rooms between slick office buildings just behind the train station. Owners Daniel and Alexandra Hahne used to own an interior decorating store in Basel, and the hotel is their new playground. Enjoy the garden and the tiny swimming pool (RS%, some rooms have terraces, air-con, lots of stairs, Via Francesco Borromini 5, tel. 091-966-3370, www.albergostella.ch, info@albergostella.ch). From the station, find track 4 and walk to the end of the platform (keeping the station building on your right), turn left to cross the street by the big willow tree, head uphill for a few yards, then turn left up Via Francesco Borromini.

Hotel & Hostel Montarina, a creaky pink mansion in a palm garden overlooking the lake, has to be one of Europe's most appealing hostels. It's a great hotel option as well. It has 120 **¢ dorm beds**, as well as 24 **\$\$ private rooms**; half of these are antique rooms with classic furniture and shared bathrooms, and the other half are modern "comfort" rooms, with private bathrooms and air-conditioning. Surrounded by lush tropical gardens and an extremely inviting swimming pool, and with a helpful staff, this place is well worth consideration by those who usually don't stay in hostels (breakfast buffet extra, towels extra in dorm rooms, reception open 7:30-23:00, late-night train noise, lockers, small kitchen, pay laundry, free parking, closed Dec-Jan, Via Montarina 1, tel. 091-966-7272, www.montarina.ch, info@montarina.ch). At the train station, head to track 4, then walk along the platform with the station and lake on your left, and go through the parking lot toward the *Continental Parkhotel* sign. Just before the sign and a stone wall, take the sharp uphill turn to the right; halfway up the hill, go left through the gate marked #1.



Eating in Lugano

My recommended restaurants are all in the old town. You'll pay a premium to dine on Piazza della Riforma, but it can be worth the expense. Lugano is not the best place for lakeside dining—instead, cross the lake to the remote little grotto restaurants, or visit the town of Gandria (both options described earlier, under “Cruising Lake Lugano”). Good news for the wine-curious: You'll pay the same per liter for the little one-deciliter (about 3.5 oz) glasses as you do for the big half-liter (about 17 oz) carafes—so go with the small glasses and try several different wines. Experiment. The Ticino merlot is great.

LUGANO

IN THE OLD TOWN

\$\$\$ La Tinera, beloved by locals, serves affordable, traditional Ticinese cuisine (such as *bollito misto*, a beef stew offered every Tue). It's tucked away in an old wine cellar, with heavy wooden furniture and decorated with wine bottles and antique copper cookware (air-con, Mon-Sat 11:30-15:00 & 17:30-23:00, closed Sun, Via dei Gorini 2, just a block behind Piazza della Riforma, tel. 091-923-5219).

\$\$\$ Bottegone del Vino is a quality wine bar with indoor and outdoor ambience. There's a small, rustic food menu, too (just a few dishes). Sitting here, you feel in the know—but order carefully, as prices really add up (Mon-Sat 11:30-24:00, closed Sun, a block off Piazza della Riforma at Via Magatti 3, tel. 091-922-7689).

\$\$ Restaurante Pestalozzi, close to the city park and attached to the recommended hotel with the same name, cranks out reasonably priced Swiss, Italian, and vegetarian meals in an indoor, air-conditioned setting (daily 11:30-22:00, Piazza Indipendenza 9, tel. 091-921-4646, www.pestalozzi-lugano.ch).

Around Piazza della Riforma: Various restaurants offer decent but pricey food and great people-watching from outdoor tables on Lugano's main piazza. The ambience here is magical at twilight.

At **\$\$\$ Pizzeria Tango**, a helpful wait-staff serves pricey Italian cuisine with a Ticino influence. While many of its tables face the busy main piazza, its interior and the tables facing a quiet little square in the back are also inviting (daily 8:00-24:00, Piazza della Riforma, tel. 091-922-2701, www.tango-ti.ch).

Also consider **\$\$\$ Sass Café** (a classy wine bar with food, too), **\$\$\$ Olimpia** (the mayor's fave, below City Hall, with less expensive pizzas),



and **\$\$\$ Vanini Café** (tops for coffee and desserts; try the *marrons glacés*—candied chestnuts).

CHEAP EATS

Self-Service Cafeterias: Part of a chain, **\$\$ Manora** offers affordable, healthy food—a salad bar, pasta bar, main-dish counter where meat or fish is cooked in front of you, and lots more. Sit inside or out on the covered terrace (with a playground). As it has its own entrance (on Salita Chiattone, up the stairs 100 yards from the bottom of the train-station funicular), it stays open later than the Manoras in other Swiss cities. During business hours, you can also enter via the bridge from the third floor of the Manor department store (daily until 22:00, last orders at 21:00, Piazza Dante 2).

The Co-op's fourth-floor cafeteria, midway along the Via Nassa pedestrian mall, has a pretty rooftop terrace, but is otherwise a poor second to Manora, with a smaller selection and shorter hours (hot food only at lunch, Mon-Sat 8:00-19:00, closed Sun, Via Nassa 22).

Supermarkets: Try the midrange **Co-op** on Via Nassa, or the more upscale **Manor** off Piazza Dante. Both share the same hours (Mon-Sat 8:15-19:00, Thu until 21:00, closed Sun) and are in the basements of their similarly named department stores. On Sunday, your only option is the small **Piccobello** at the train station (daily 6:00-22:00).

Lugano Connections

The opening of the world's longest railway tunnel—the **Gotthard Base Tunnel**—has shortened travel times between Lugano and Zürich, Luzern, and the rest of northern Switzerland.

If you're not in a hurry, though, knit Lugano into your Swiss itinerary with **scenic trains**—take the 5.5-hour **Gotthard Panorama Express** train-and-boat combination to Luzern, or the **Bernina Express** bus-and-train combination to eastern Switzerland. More details about these trips are in the Scenic Rail Journeys chapter. Train info: toll tel. 0900-300-300, www.rail.ch.

Long-distance **buses** leave Lugano from various points around the train station. The Bernina Express and St. Moritz buses leave from the restaurant end of the station building (away from the lake), while airport buses leave from narrow streetside parking spaces at the end of track 4 (also going away from the lake). Allow extra time when departing, as you might need to ask for help, and bus stop locations may change due to construction work.

From Lugano by Train to: Luzern (every 2 hours, 2 hours, more with transfer), **Zürich** (2/hour, 2 hours, half with easy change in Arth-Goldau), **Interlaken Ost** (every 2 hours, 5 hours, change

in Olten, more with additional transfers), **Bern** (hourly, 3.5 hours, change in Luzern or Zürich), **Milan** (hourly, 80 minutes).

From Lugano by Bus and Train to the Upper Engadine: The **Bernina Express** bus (#731) leaves from outside Lugano's train station at 10:00 (daily April-late Oct only), connecting in Tirano with trains heading over the scenic Bernina Pass to Pontresina, Samedan, St. Moritz, and Chur (reservations required, tel. 081-288-6565, www.berninaexpress.ch; see the Scenic Rail Journeys chapter). A less scenic but quicker option with no changes is the **Palm Express** bus to St. Moritz (#631), which leaves Lugano's train station at 12:05 daily in peak season (mid-June-mid-Oct) and on Saturdays, Sundays, and Mondays the rest of the year (4 hours to St. Moritz; reservations required, tel. 058-448-3535, www.postbus.ch, use webcode 10037 to reserve; bus from St. Moritz to Lugano runs Fri-Sun in off-season). You can always reach St. Moritz from Lugano via **regular train** to Bellinzona, then bus to Thusis, then train to St. Moritz (almost hourly, 4 hours total).

From Lugano by Bus to Italy's Lake Como: An Italian-run local bus (#C12) goes from Lugano to Menaggio on Lake Como (nearly hourly, fewer on Sun, 1 hour, www.asfautolinee.it). From Menaggio, you can take a ferry across the lake to Varenna. This bus leaves Lugano from a stop on Via Campo Marzio, by the corner of Via Pietro Capelli. This is near the Lido stop of bus #2, in the Casarate neighborhood a little east of downtown. Tickets are sold at a newspaper kiosk on the far side of the Campo Marzio parking lot from the bus stop—not by the driver.

From Lugano to Milan's Airports: The closest major airports to Lugano are actually in Italy, near Milan: Malpensa Airport and Linate Airport (www.sea-aeroportimilano.it). The handiest way to reach Malpensa is to use the direct buses that leave from Lugano's train station—there are three competing operators, with stops right next to each other at the far end of track 4 (www.malpensaexpress.ch, www.jetbus.ch, and www.luganoservices.ch, about hourly, 80 minutes, 25 CHF, smart to reserve ahead). Alternatively, you can take the one-hour train to Milan's Central Station, from where a train (Malpensa Express) and/or shuttle buses leave frequently for Malpensa and Linate.