

Varenna

Province of Lecco · Italy

TRAVEL GUIDE

Tripomatic



Overview

Varenna is a small village on the east shore of Lake Como, opposite the Bellagio promontory. Its pastel houses rise in steep stepped lanes from the water to a small main square with two medieval churches. Two lakeside villas with gardens lie at the southern edge of the village, and a medieval castle stands on the hill above.

Varenna has a train station on the line from Milan, and a ferry pier with frequent boats across the lake. This makes it one of the easiest bases on the lake without a car. It suits a quiet stay of two or three nights, short boat trips to the other shores, and walks on the old paths along the mountainside. Day visitors arrive by train and boat from late morning, so early mornings and evenings are the calmest times.

When to visit

May, June and September are the best months, with warm days and the villa gardens in full colour. April and October are quieter and still pleasant, although rain is common in spring and autumn. July and August are hot and humid, with afternoon storms and very busy trains and ferries. From November to March many hotels and restaurants close and boats run less often, but the village is calm and the light on the lake can be beautiful.

The biggest event is the Festa del Lago, a summer weekend festival with food stalls, music, a re-enactment of the arrival of refugees from Isola Comacina and, in most years, fireworks over the lake. The date changes from year to year, so check the program before you book.

MONTH	CONDITIONS	DAY °C avg / max	NIGHT °C avg / min	
January	Poor Poor for sightseeing	7° / 12° Feels like 4°	0° / -8°	Dry air · Calm winds
February	Fair Fair for hiking	9° / 16° Feels like 6°	1° / -7°	Dry air · Calm winds
March	Good Good for hiking	13° / 19°	5° / -2°	Dry air · Calm winds
April	Good Good for hiking	17° / 23°	9° / 3°	13 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds
May	Good Good for sightseeing	21° / 27°	13° / 8°	17 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds
June	Good Good for sightseeing	26° / 31°	18° / 12°	15 rainy days · Humid air · Calm winds
July	Good Good for sightseeing	27° / 31°	19° / 13°	Muggy, humid air · Calm winds
August	Good Good for sightseeing	27° / 32°	19° / 14°	Muggy, humid air · Calm winds
September	Great Great for sightseeing	23° / 28°	15° / 9°	Calm winds
October	Great Great for sightseeing	19° / 24°	11° / 5°	12 rainy days · Dry air · Calm winds
November	Good Good for hiking	13° / 19°	6° / -1°	Dry air · Calm winds
December	Poor Poor for hiking	8° / 13° Feels like 5°	1° / -7°	Dry air · Calm winds

Best months: September, October

Climate data: NASA POWER (MERRA-2) · 1996–2025

Top sights

A Villa Monastero was a convent before it became a lakeside villa. Its botanical garden runs for almost 2 km along the shore, with palms, citrus trees and exotic plants. The house museum shows the rooms and furniture of its last private owners. The villa is open all year, but on fewer days from November to March.

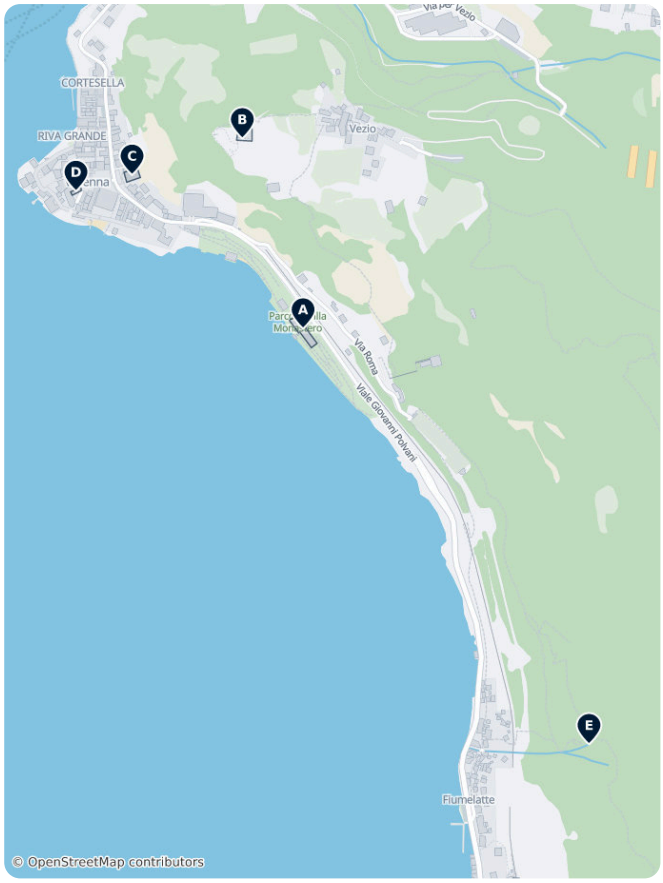
B Vezio Castle stands on the hill above the village, in the hamlet of Vezio. This medieval castle dates back at least to the 12th century, and its square tower was rebuilt in the 17th century. Climb the tower for wide views over the centre of the lake. Inside the castle walls, a small exhibition shows casts of the Lariosaurus, a sea reptile whose fossils were found in the area. It is a steep walk of about 30 minutes up from the main square.

C Chiesa parrocchiale di San Giorgio is the medieval parish church on the main square. Look for the large painting of Saint Christopher on the facade. Inside are old frescoes and a painted altarpiece.

D Chiesa di San Giovanni Battista is a small Romanesque church on the same square. It probably dates from the 11th century, which makes it one of the oldest churches on the lake.

E Sorgente di Fiumelatte feeds one of the shortest rivers in Italy, only about 250 m long. The stream appears in late March and usually dries up in October, rushing white with foam down to the lake. The hamlet of Fiumelatte is a 20-minute walk south of Varenna along the lakeside path, and the spring is about 10 minutes further up.

Next to Villa Monastero, the terraced gardens of Villa Cipressi also go down to the water. The villa is now a hotel, but the gardens are open to visitors with a ticket.



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What to experience

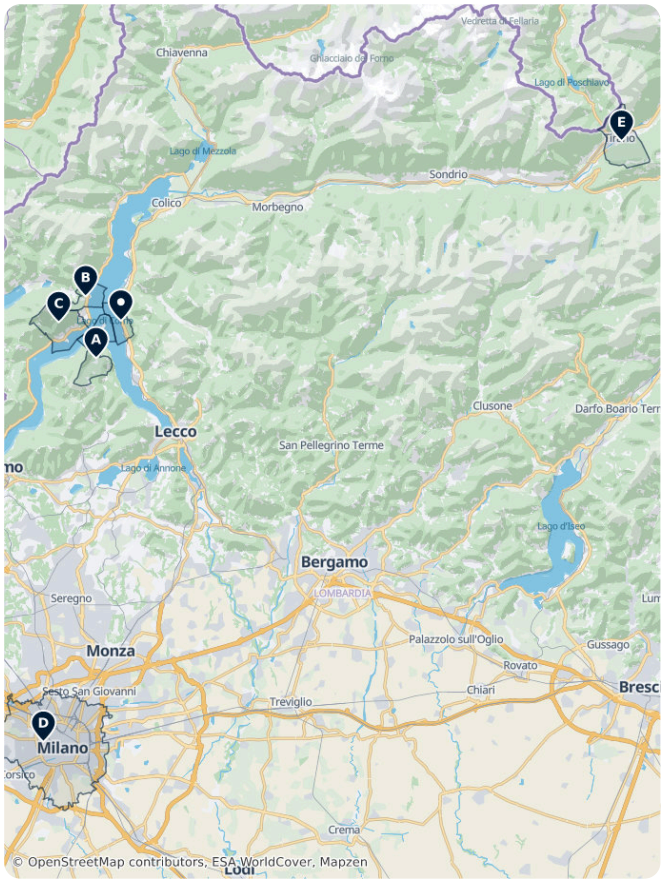
In Varenna, much of the day happens on the water or on the paths above it.

- **Cross the lake by ferry**: Cross to Bellagio and Menaggio in one day, with lunch on a different shore. The short crossings in the middle of the lake give the best views of the mountains all around.
- **Walk a stage of the Sentiero del Viandante**: This old path along the east shore links Varenna with its neighbour villages through olive groves, chestnut woods and small hamlets. Walk from Lierna to Varenna or from Varenna to Bellano, and take the train back. Wear good shoes, because some parts are steep and rocky.
- **Take an evening walk by the water**: After the last day visitors leave on the evening trains and boats, walk the lakeside path from the ferry pier to the small harbour. This is the quietest time of day in the village.
- **Swim in the lake**: In summer, small pebble beaches near the village are good for a swim. The water stays cool even in July.
- **Hike into the mountains**: Above Varenna rise the Grigna peaks. From Esino Lario, a short drive up the mountain, marked trails lead to mountain huts and wide views over the lake.

Day trips

Trains and ferries make day trips from Varenna easy. Here they are, from the closest:

- Bellano — 5 minutes by train, or a short ferry ride north. Walk on the platforms built into the rock of the Orrido, a deep gorge carved by a mountain stream.
- A Bellagio — about 15 minutes by ferry. The classic village at the tip of the promontory, with stepped lanes, a Romanesque basilica and the gardens of Villa Melzi.
- B Menaggio — about 15 minutes by ferry. A lively town on the west shore with a lakeside promenade and walks into the hills.
- C Tremezzina — about 30 minutes by ferry to Cadenabbia. Visit the gardens and art collection of Villa Carlotta, or take a boat to Villa del Balbianello near Lenno.
- Lecco — about 30 minutes by train. A small city at the southern tip of the eastern branch of the lake, with a lakefront and mountain views.
- D Milan — about 1 hour by direct train. Go for the cathedral, Leonardo's Last Supper (book weeks ahead) and the shops.
- E Tirano — about 1 hour 30 minutes by direct train. Tirano is the start of the Bernina Express, the Swiss mountain railway to St. Moritz.



Where to explore

Lake Como has its own guide, covering the whole lake and all its shores.

Across the water, Bellagio, Menaggio and Tremezzina are each a short ferry ride away. Como lies at the southern end of the western branch of the lake. Milan is the nearest big city and is easy to reach by train.

Getting there

- **By air**: Milan Linate Airport (LIN) is the closest, about 1 hour by car. Milan Bergamo Airport (BGY) is about 1 hour 10 minutes and Milan Malpensa Airport (MXP) about 1 hour 15 minutes by car. By public transport, go first to Milano Centrale and take the train from there.
- **By train**: Varenna-Esino-Perledo station is on the line from Milan to Lecco and Tirano. Direct regional trains from Milano Centrale take about 1 hour and run about every hour. Buy tickets online, in the Trenord app or at the machines in the station. The station is above the village, about a 10-minute walk down to the ferry pier. Trenord
- **By boat**: Public ferries link Varenna with Bellagio, Menaggio, Cadenabbia and other lake villages all year. A car ferry crosses between Varenna, Bellagio, Menaggio and Cadenabbia. Navigazione Laghi
- **By car**: The fast main road from Lecco runs mostly in tunnels above the shore. The old lake road is narrow and slow. Parking in the village is very limited, so see the driving section.

Getting around

- **On foot**: Varenna is small, and everything in the village is within a 10-minute walk. The lanes are steep and full of steps. A walkway built out over the water links the ferry pier with the old village, and a lakeside path continues south to Fiumelatte.
- **Ferries**: Boats are the best way to visit the other shores. Buy tickets at the ticket office by the pier, online, or on board for a small extra charge. In summer, arrive early, because queues for the popular crossings to Bellagio and Menaggio can be long. Navigazione Laghi
- **Train**: Regional trains connect Varenna with Bellano, Lecco and the villages along the east shore. They are useful for walks on the old path along the shore, because you can walk one way and take the train back. Trenord
- **Cycling**: Not practical. The village is steep and the roads along the shore are narrow and busy.

Getting around on foot & by bike

WALKABILITY

High

The village is small and everything is within a short walk, but the lanes are steep and full of steps.

CYCLING INFRASTRUCTURE

Low

The steep village and the narrow, busy lake roads make cycling impractical for most visitors.

Driving

- **Is a car worth it?**: Not for a stay in Varenna. Trains and ferries reach most places a visitor wants to go, and the roads along the lake are slow and busy in summer. A car helps only for the mountain villages above the lake.
- **Parking**: Spaces are few and paid. Use the pay car parks on the main road above the village or near the station, and expect them to be full by mid-morning on summer weekends. Ask your hotel about parking before you arrive.
- **Car ferry**: To cross the lake with a car, take the car ferry to Bellagio, Menaggio or Cadenabbia instead of driving around the lake.
- **Restrictions**: The lanes of the old village are steps and are closed to cars.

Food & drink

Look for fish from the lake. Typical dishes are risotto with perch fillets (risotto con filetti di pesce persico), grilled whitefish (lavarello), and missoltini, which are salted and dried shad, served with polenta. In the mountain villages above the lake you also find local cheeses and polenta dishes.

Most restaurants line the lakefront and the lanes around the small old harbour, and the tables by the water are the most expensive. For a simpler meal, try the lanes higher up in the village. Book a table for dinner in summer, because the village is small and fills up quickly.

What to eat & drink

LUNCH

Pizza Margherita
Thin-crust pizza topped with tomato, mozzarella, and basil, invented in Naples and still best there.

DINNER

Spaghetti alla Carbonara
Pasta with egg, cured pork cheek (guanciale), pecorino cheese, and black pepper, a Roman classic.

Risotto alla Milanese
Creamy saffron-infused rice dish from Milan, often served alongside braised veal shank.

Lasagna · Lasagne al Forno
Layered baked pasta with ragu, bechamel, and cheese, a staple of Emilia-Romagna cooking.

SNACKS & STREET FOOD

Prosciutto and Cheese · Prosciutto e Formaggio
Cured ham paired with regional cheeses, a common antipasto plate found nationwide.

SWEETS & DESSERTS

Gelato
Dense, slow-churned Italian ice cream, traditionally lower in fat and air than American-style ice cream.

Tiramisu · Tiramisù
Layered dessert of coffee-soaked ladyfingers and mascarpone cream, dusted with cocoa.

DRINKS

Espresso · Caffè
A short, strong shot of coffee drunk quickly, usually standing at a bar counter.

Wine · Vino
Italy is one of the world's largest wine producers, with regional styles from Piedmont's Barolo to Tuscany's Chianti.

Aperol Spritz
A bittersweet orange aperitif mixed with prosecco and soda water, a staple of the early-evening aperitivo.

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Safety & health

Varenna is very safe. Watch for pickpockets in the crowds at the ferry pier, at the station and on busy boats in summer.

The stepped lanes are steep and can be slippery after rain, so wear good shoes. The path up to the castle is also steep. On the old paths along the shore, carry water and check the weather before you go, because storms can build quickly on summer afternoons. The lake water is cold even in summer, and the bottom drops quickly near the shore, so swim with care.

History

Varenna began as a fishing village on a narrow strip of land between the mountains and the lake. Vezio Castle was built on the hill above it in the Middle Ages, and walls once linked the castle with the village below. In 1169 the people of Como destroyed the fortified island of Isola Comacina on the other shore. Many of its inhabitants fled across the lake and settled in Varenna.

The two churches on the main square come from this medieval village. Chiesa di San Giovanni Battista is the older one, and Chiesa parrocchiale di San Giorgio became the parish church. South of the village, a convent of nuns stood by the water for centuries. After it closed, it was turned into a villa, and later owners created the long botanical garden of Villa Monastero.

In the 19th century, travellers discovered the lake, and Varenna began to welcome visitors. Since the 1950s, Villa Monastero has hosted an international summer school of physics.

Country facts

Quick practical facts for Italy at a glance:

CURRENCY

EUR €

EMERGENCY

112

ELECTRICITY



Type C / Type F / Type L
230 V · 50 Hz

LANGUAGES

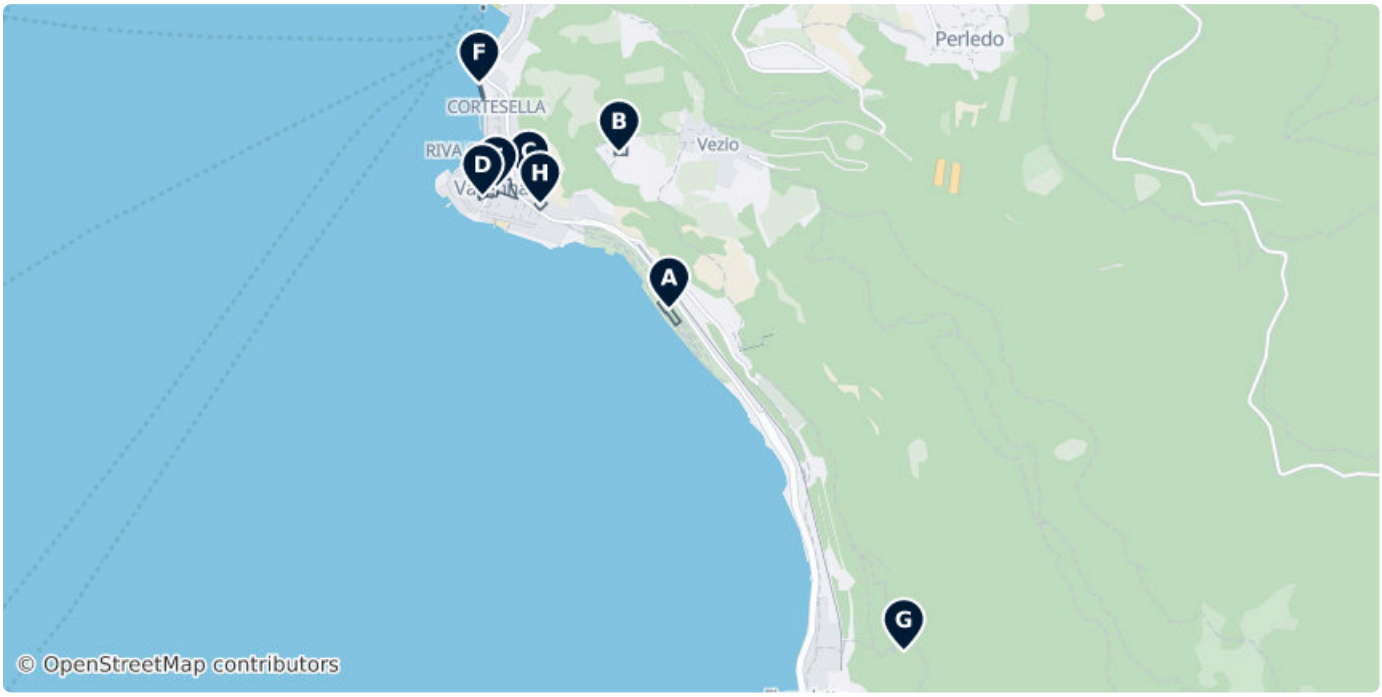
Italian

TAP WATER

Safe to drink

Varenna Essentials

The best of Varenna fits into one unhurried day. Walk the lakeside path from the ferry pier to the main square, with its two medieval churches. Visit the long lakeside gardens of Villa Monastero, then climb to Vezio Castle for the view over the centre of the lake. A short walk south leads to the spring of the Fiumelatte, one of Italy's shortest rivers.





A Villa Monastero

A former convent turned lakeside villa, with a house museum and a long botanical garden of exotic plants along the shore.

Viale Giovanni Polvani 4, 23829 Varenna
(46.00769, 9.28803)

villamonastero.eu, +390341295450



B Vezio Castle

A medieval castle on the hill above the village, with a tower, gardens, falconry displays and wide views over the centre of the lake.

Castle of Vezio, Perledo, Lombardy 23828, Italy
(46.01067, 9.28666)

castellodivezio.it, +393334485975



C Chiesa parrocchiale di San Giorgio

Varenna's Gothic parish church on the main square, with a large painted Saint Christopher on the facade and medieval frescoes inside.

23 Piazza Venini, Varenna 23829, Italy (46.01009, 9.28417)

chieseitaliane.chiesacattolica.it/chieseita..., +390341830228



D San Giovanni Battista Church

A small Romanesque church on the main square, probably from the 11th century, with remains of medieval frescoes.

Piazza San Giorgio, 23829 Varenna LC, Italy (46.00984, 9.28291)



E Piazza San Giorgio

The main square of the village, framed by its churches and old houses, just above the lakefront.

21 Piazza San Giorgio, Varenna 23829, Italy (46.01000, 9.28330)

F Passerella degli innamorati

A lakeside walkway built out over the water, linking the ferry pier with the old village.

Passerella degli innamorati, 23829 Varenna LC, Italy (46.01198, 9.28281)



G Sorgente di Fiumelatte

The spring of a very short seasonal river that rushes, white with foam, down to the lake from spring to autumn.

Galleria Fiumelatte, 23829 Varenna LC, Italy (46.00117, 9.29447)



H Museo ornitologico Luigi Scanagatta

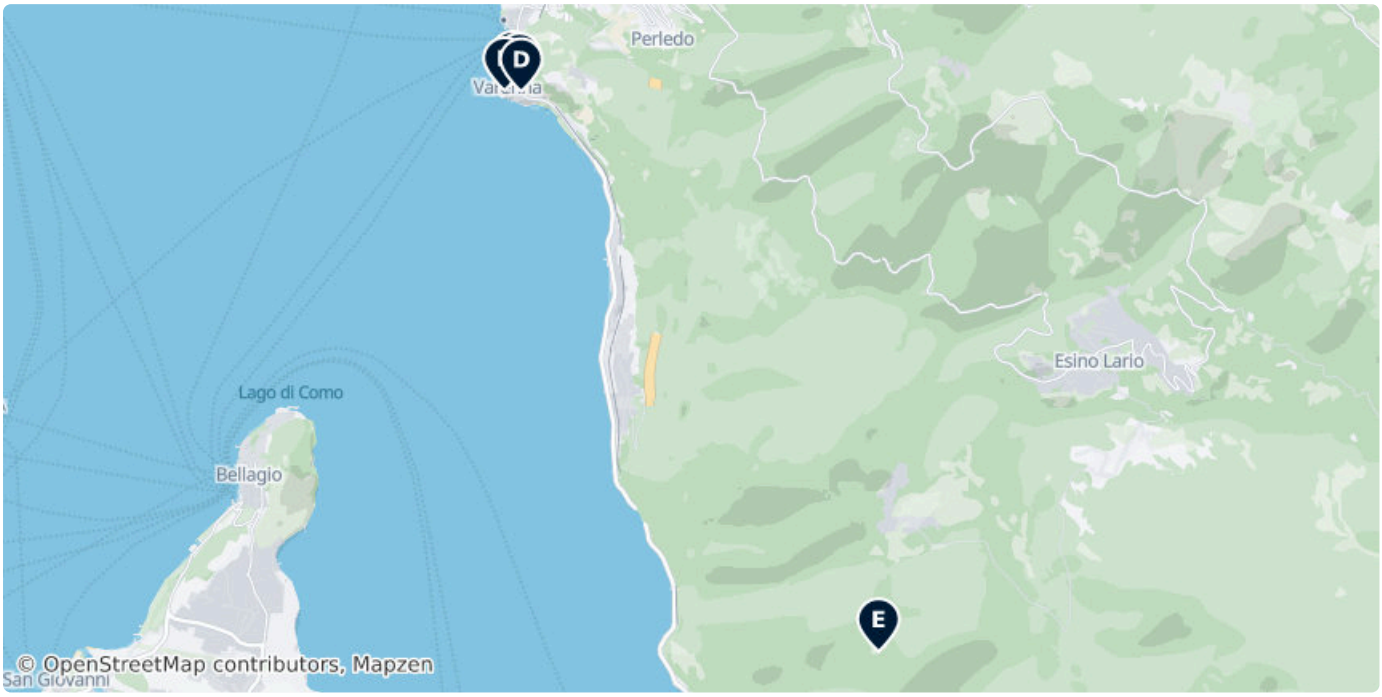
A small natural history museum with a collection of birds from the Lake Como area.

Via Quattro Novembre, 23829 Varenna (46.00968, 9.28449)

italia.it/it/lombardia/varenna/musei/museo-ornitologico-l...

Historic Churches

Varenna's religious architecture spans several centuries, featuring the 11th-century Romanesque San Giovanni Battista and the 13th-century San Giorgio. These sites preserve significant medieval frescoes, 16th-century polyptychs, and Baroque stucco work. The collection includes central parish buildings in Piazza San Giorgio and the isolated San Pietro in Ortanella, providing a comprehensive view of the stone masonry and spiritual history of the Lake Como region.





A Chiesa parrocchiale di San Giorgio

A 13th-century parish church in Varenna's main square featuring a blend of Romanesque and Gothic styles. The interior houses notable medieval frescoes and a significant 16th-century polyptych.

23 Piazza Venini, Varenna 23829, Italy (46.01009, 9.28417)

chieseitaliane.chiesacattolica.it/chieseita..., +390341830228



B San Giovanni Battista Church

An 11th-century Romanesque structure, recognized as one of the oldest churches in the Lake Como area. Its interior preserves primitive architectural elements and important 14th-century frescoes.

Piazza San Giorgio, 23829 Varenna LC, Italy (46.00984, 9.28291)



C Chiesa di Santa Maria delle Grazie

An 18th-century Baroque church located on the main square, featuring an ornate interior with gilded stucco and historic religious paintings.

Piazza San Giorgio, 23829 Varenna LC, Italy (46.01022, 9.28361)

lombardiabeniculturali.it/architetture/schede/1n080-00024

E San Pietro, Ortanella

San Pietro is a parish church in Ortanella, a frazione of Esino Lario, in the Province of Lecco in Lombardy, in northern Italy.

Via San Pietro, 23825, Italy (45.97691, 9.31452)

D Chiesa di Santa Marta

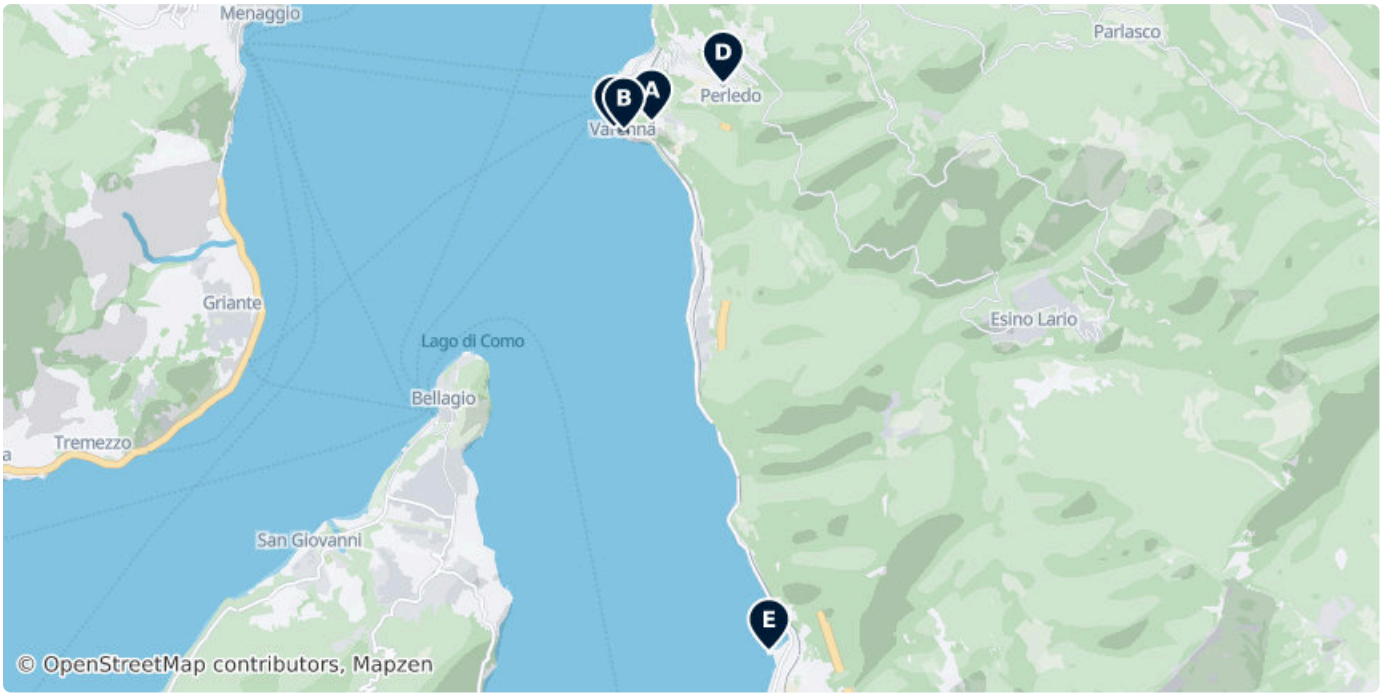
A small historic church located in the heart of Varenna, contributing to the town's traditional medieval architectural fabric.

5 Piazza Venini, Varenna 23829, Italy (46.00977, 9.28433)

lombardiabeniculturali.it/architetture/schede/1n080-000...

Historic Sites

Varenna was a fortified fishing village in the Middle Ages. Vezio Castle still watches over it from the hill, and the old squares keep the shape of the medieval village. South along the shore, Lierna has its own small castle hamlet on a point in the lake.





A Vezio Castle

A medieval castle with a square tower on the hill above Varenna, reached by a steep path from the village.

Castle of Vezio, Perledo, Lombardy 23828, Italy
(46.01067, 9.28666)

castellodivezio.it, +393334485975



B Piazza San Giorgio

The heart of the old village, with the parish church of San Giorgio and the Romanesque church of San Giovanni Battista.

21 Piazza San Giorgio, Varenna 23829, Italy
(46.01000, 9.28330)



C Piazza al Prato

A small square in the old village, surrounded by traditional houses and narrow stepped lanes.

3 Contrada del Prestino, Varenna 23829, Italy (46.01011, 9.28207)

E Lierna Castle

A small medieval castle hamlet on a point in the lake at Lierna, a few kilometres south of Varenna.

1 Via Riva Bianca, Lierna 23827, Italy (45.96588, 9.30095)

D Piazza Unione Europea

A cobbled square between the lakefront and the old village centre.

63 Via per Esino, Perledo 23828, Italy (46.01386, 9.29538)

DATA SOURCES

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