

# Instant weekend LAKE GARDA

It's got style,  
drama... and some  
damn fine lunches.

**Susan d'Arcy**  
hits the coolest  
waters in Italy



**Why should I go?** To be shaken and stirred. Moodily magnificent Lake Garda recently gave 007 a bit of a scare: its heart-stopping, helter-skelter roads, framed by the snowcapped Dolomites, are the backdrop for the all-important opening car chase in Bond's latest caper, *Quantum of Solace*, but filming on the lake's infamous hairpins has proved trickier than a night in with Pussy Galore. One accident left a £134,000 Aston Martin DBS rather soggy after an unscheduled close-up with Garda's mist-kissed deep-blue waters.

Garda is craggier than Como, more macho than Maggiore — and bigger than both of them. Vineyards trickle down to the water, where crenellated medieval castles, terracotta-topped villas and jauntily painted rowing boats vie for the title of most impossibly romantic Italian photo opportunity.

**What should I do?** Zigzag your way around the pretty, pastel-coloured lakeside towns on Gestione Navigazione Laghi's ferries and catamarans (00 39-030 914 9511, [www.navigazione.laghi.it](http://www.navigazione.laghi.it); one-day pass from £20). In the northeast, Malcesine's marzipan rows of houses are extremely cute and the port has a 20-minute cable-car link to Monte Baldo, which, at 5,900ft, is the perch for stunning panoramas.

A short chug across the lake takes you to Limone, which seduced DH Lawrence and Ibsen. A microclimate

has transformed this corner of northern Italy into a mini-Mediterranean, with scented lemon and knobbly olive groves. Bob back to the other side and towards the halfway mark to Garda, where waterfront cafes serve lazy-day espressos and delicious wafer-thin pizzas. Gargnano, on the opposite bank, has fine sun decks for slow-paced sundowners.

At the southern end, Sirmione juts out spectacularly from a thin peninsula and has thermal baths whose warm waters are drawn from 60ft down in the lake. For some northern exposure, strip for windsurfing at Torbole, Lake Garda being the windsurfing capital of... central Europe. Nothing like damning with faint praise, is there?

If you can tear yourself away from those mesmeric waters, Garda is surrounded by wine-growing regions such as Valpolicella. Splendid Verona is an easy day trip.

**Where should I stay?** The art-nouveau classic Villa Feltrinelli (0365 79 800, [www.villafeltrinelli.it](http://www.villafeltrinelli.it); doubles from £634, B&B, including drinks), outside medieval Gargnano, is the top address for the lake. In the 1990s, it was bought by the hotelier Bob Burns. He intended to retire here but, after the budget passed the £15m mark, he realised he'd have to turn it into a hotel. The result is utterly beautiful and quintessentially Italian, the Sophia Loren of lodgings. Every way you turn, you are greeted by the most



The imposing mountains around Lake Garda offer shelter, calm and tranquillity. Until all those motorboats start up, anyway

sumptuous vistas — even the door handles are works of art. A sunset trip on its custom-built mahogany boat, watching the mists out-tempt even Salome's best efforts, is magical.

Nearby, the family-run Villa Giulia (0365 71022, [www.villagiulia.it](http://www.villagiulia.it); doubles from £170, B&B) has beautifully landscaped gardens, with bougainvillea strewn like Christmas decorations over every stairway and door frame. It has an old-fashioned elegance, with a lovely lakeside swimming pool and a quiet terrace for alfresco eating. There's even a little private beach, with views of imperious Monte Baldo.

In Malcesine, Hotel Castello (39 0457 400 233, [www.h-c.it](http://www.h-c.it); doubles from £63, half-board) isn't going to win any architectural or style prizes, but it is lakeside and just a short cobblestoned walk into town, with friendly service and pretty good grub.

**Where should I eat?** La Tortuga (036 571251), on a backstreet in Gargnano, appears to be a bog-standard trattoria, but the home-made pasta and *lavarello* (lake fish served with capers and baby tomatoes) are mouthwatering — and, although it has a Michelin star, it's a bargain, with mains from £16. The place is tiny, so book ahead.

Another Michelin-starred option is Vecchia Malcesine (045 740 0469), in Malcesine. Here, Leandro Luppi conjures up a more tricky modern menu: dishes such as aubergine millefeuille and foie gras with glazed pears, served with to-die-for views over the rooftops and on to the lake. The four-course menu costs £55.

For something simpler and cheaper, Pino Due (045 725 5694), in Garda, doesn't mess around too much with that day's catch. It could be the freshest fish you ever eat. Expect to pay just £15 for two courses with wine.

**Getting there:** Rail Europe (0844 848 4070, [www.raileurope.co.uk](http://www.raileurope.co.uk)) has returns from London St Pancras to Brescia from £119, including overnight accommodation in a six-berth couchette. Ryanair (0871 246 0000, [www.ryanair.com](http://www.ryanair.com)) flies to Brescia from Stansted; British Airways (0870 850 9850, [www.ba.com](http://www.ba.com)) flies from Gatwick to Verona. Holiday Autos (0871 472 5229, [www.holidayautos.co.uk](http://www.holidayautos.co.uk)) has three nights' car hire, picking up in Brescia or Verona, from £86. Villa Feltrinelli can arrange private transfers from Brescia (1hr; £126, one-way) and Verona (75min; from £174, one-way). Villa Giulia offers private transfers from Brescia (from £91) and Verona (£106). Hotel Castello can organise coach transfers from Brescia or Verona (from £25 return).

■ Susan d'Arcy was a guest of Villa Feltrinelli and Rail Europe