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Como, a charming commune nestled in northern Italy, boasts a population of around 84,000. Renowned as one of Lombardy's most enchanting and scenic destinations, Como is often eclipsed by the breathtaking Lake Como, which stretches along its northern edge. The city has been inhabited since the Bronze Age by Celtic tribes, and by the first century BC, it became part of the Roman Empire. Its strategic location at the edge of Lake Como has historically made it a vital hub for commerce and trade during the Middle Ages, prompting the construction of a defensive network, including the iconic Baradello tower, which still stands today. After periods of French and Austrian rule, Como was integrated into the Kingdom of Italy in 1859. Today, its a globally celebrated tourist destination, drawing visitors to explore its stunning lake and surrounding natural landscapes. The city itself offers a wealth of historical sites, gourmet dining, and cultural institutions. Surrounding the lake, charming towns like Cernobbio, Menaggio, and Bellagio add to its allure. Heres a list of 15 must-see attractions in and around Como: 1. Como Cathedral, a masterpiece of Gothic architecture dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, constructed in the 14th century and completed in the 18th century. Its faade features intricate stone carvings, statues, and decorative towers, while the interior boasts a grand dome adorned with gold artwork and elaborate designs. The vast space is highlighted by arches, columns, and naves. A visit to this landmark is essential for any traveler. Suggested tour: Como Walking & Eating Tour. 2. Como Archaeological Museum, housed in the Palazzo Giovio near the cathedral, showcases artifacts from ancient Greek times, including pottery, jewelry, stonework, and agricultural tools. Each exhibit is thoughtfully displayed with historical context. 3. Museo Storico Giuseppe Garibaldi, located in a restored palace on Piazza Medaglie, features lavishly decorated rooms and artifacts like furniture, lace, and clothing, offering insight into Italys historical traditions. 4. Basilica di Sant'Abbondio, a Romanesque church built by the Benedictines over an 11th-century foundation, features simple stonework on its exterior and an ornate interior with towering columns and frescoes depicting religious figures. The altars blue and gold hues add to its grandeur. 5. Como Botanical Garden, a serene escape with over 12,000 plant species, including rare orchids and Mediterranean flora, set within lush greenery. 6. Villa del Balbianello, a Renaissance villa with panoramic views of the lake, now a cultural center hosting art exhibitions. 7. Isola Comasina, a small island accessible by boat, offering tranquil walks and a glimpse into Comos natural beauty. 8. Palazzo Anguillara, a 16th-century palace with a vast collection of art, including works by Titian and Caravaggio. 9. Tempio della Concordia, a Roman temple repurposed as a church, featuring ancient mosaics and a striking dome. 10. Piazza della Vittoria, a lively square with historic buildings, cafes, and the Como Cathedrals spire. 11. Osteria del Pescatore, a cozy eatery serving traditional dishes like risotto and polenta. 12. Museo del Vetro, a glass museum with over 1,000 pieces, including Murano glass and local craftsmanship. 13. Lake Como Cruises, offering scenic boat tours to nearby towns and islands. 14. Parco delle Rimine, a forested area with hiking trails and wildlife. 15. Casa di Balbo, a 17th-century villa with a library and panoramic views, now a private museum. Each of these sites weaves a tapestry of history, culture, and natural beauty, making Como an unforgettable destination. The picturesque town of Brunate, perched high up on a mountain overlooking Lake Como, is a must-visit destination for those seeking breathtaking views and a taste of la dolce vita. The Funicular, a scenic cable car that whisks you up to the top of the mountain, offers panoramic vistas of the lake and surrounding landscape. After arriving at the summit, relax on one of the several terraces and restaurants, taking in the clear mountain air and enjoying the stunning views of Como and the lake. A leisurely boat ride on Lake Como is another excellent way to explore this beautiful region. With numerous tour companies offering trips from Como, you can choose a one-way journey to visit nearby towns like Cernobbio or Bellagio, or opt for a scenic cruise that highlights the lake's landmarks and rich history. Whether you prefer a relaxing boat ride or an action-packed adventure, Lake Como has something to offer. Cernobbio, situated on the western shore of the lake, boasts an impressive villa, Villa d'Este, originally built for an English queen. This charming town is also home to the Cernobbio Lido and Piazza Risorgimento, where you can enjoy fresh seafood, local wine, or simply people-watch in a picturesque setting. Venture to Punta Balbianello, a scenic promontory on Lake Como near Lenno, for a stunning hike through gorgeous woodland leading to the picturesque Villa Balbianello. This 18th-century Baroque villa complex boasts impressive architecture and sublime views of the lake from its terraces. Take in the breathtaking vistas across the water and surrounding countryside. Bellagio, often referred to as the most beautiful town on Lake Como, is a must-visit destination. Its unique location where three arms of the lake meet offers unparalleled views of the surrounding landscape. Stroll along the promenade, admire the picturesque gardens, and indulge in fine dining at one of the many excellent restaurants. Last but not least, visit Villa Serbelloni when in Bellagio, a historic complex that once served as a luxurious retreat for the Sfondrati Family during the 16th century. Its stunning location on top of the promontory provides breathtaking views of Lake Como and the Alps, making it an unmissable attraction. Looking forward to exploring the beautiful town of Menaggio on Lake Como. The public gardens are expansive and offer guided tours, featuring a rose garden and several wooded areas. After visiting Menaggio, head to Bellagio, where you can enjoy stunning views and take photos of the lake from the ferry port's open square. Don't miss the tunnel that runs through the town, perfect for motorists looking to bypass traffic. In Menaggio, discover fantastic restaurants with lake views and try your hand at boat hire. If you're feeling adventurous, visit Porlezza or Lenno for canyoning an exhilarating way to explore Lake Como's varied landscape. Alternatively, try rock climbing in the region's mountainous area, suitable for all skill levels from beginners to experts. For a memorable meal, dine at Trattoria La Costa in Albate, known for its friendly hosts and traditional Italian cuisine. End your day with a coffee at Caffè Mazzini near Como's harbour. Lake Como has long been a popular destination for European nobles and has also been featured in films like Oceans Twelve. Its history dates back to Roman times when Julius Caesar created a city called Novum Comum, which laid the foundation for modern-day Como. This spring is an ideal time to visit as the waterfront sidewalks are ready for exploration. Lake Como is once again open for walkers, offering a unique perspective on the azure dome of the Duomo di Como, one of Italy's last gothic cathedrals. The surrounding streets are lined with shops and restaurants, including A Picci, which sells silk handkerchiefs and scarves. Nearby Via Lambertenghi leads to Via Alessandro Volta, named after a renowned physicist who invented the electric battery. This area is known for its beautiful gardens built on Roman walls. A scenic walk along Lake Como's shores offers stunning views of the surrounding hills and the Alps. The Passeggiata Lino Gelpi path is particularly picturesque, with wisteria blooming in spring. Visitors can also explore the towns of Cernobbio, Torno, and Ossuccio, each offering a unique charm. For a different perspective, take a ferry or rent a private Riva runabout to explore the lake's northern shore. The town of Torno is particularly beautiful, with its red-tiled roofs and waterfront bell tower. Visitors can also visit Villa d'Este, a historic hotel that has been named one of the world's top hotels. Other highlights include Villa Carlotta, which features a 20-acre botanical garden, and Isola Comacina, the lake's only island, which offers stunning views and scenic trails. The San Giovanni Festival is held every June on the island, reenacting a historic fire with a red-tinted display. Visiting Lake Como, Italy: Discovering the Charm of Como City Looking forward to seeing everyone at the meeting tomorrow and discussing our strategies regarding visiting Lake Como, a destination that welcomes visitors all year round. Its elegant old town enclosed by 12th-century fortress walls is steeped in history and abundant in medieval architecture. The many flowerbeds and blossoming trees lend color to the streets whilst the city's atmosphere is laid-back, with plenty of cozy cafes where you can sit and enjoy a slice of local life. With its wide, flat streets, Como is far easier to explore than many of the small, neighboring towns and villages. A doubles at Albergo Terminus in Como from 277 (237). To subscribe to National Geographic Traveller (UK) magazine click here. You can also explore the city via a highly-rated guided tour, which includes several of the best things to do in Como, such as funiculars and boat rides, as well as local experiences that will make your trip more special and memorable. One of the best things to do in Como is to simply explore its old town on foot. With cobbled streets and cozy squares lined with historic buildings, shops, and restaurants, the historic city center of Como is really cozy. The nicest part of the old town is located between the lake and the remains of the old city wall, Porta Torre. Its in this area that you will find most shops, restaurants, quite a few churches, and several museums. Como's cathedral (Cattedrale di Santa Maria Assunta Duomo di Como) is its most important religious building and the third largest in the whole of Lombardy region. Construction began in 1396 but wasn't completed until late in the century. You will find those additional 'nice to see' places mentioned at the very end of this article. So if you are short on time, concentrate on the main sights and attractions in Como mentioned in the top 10 of this list. The Duomo di Como is a breathtaking blend of architectural styles, featuring a Gothic facade, Romanesque bell tower, and Baroque dome. As one of northern Italy's most beautiful monuments, it attracts visitors from around the world. The western facade stands out, boasting high columns adorned with statues on either side of the entrance and an impressive rose window. Beside the door, two statues depict Pliny the Elder and his nephew Pliny the Younger, paying tribute to influential Roman dignitaries who lived in Como. Dedicated to the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the cathedral's 'cross' style layout features a nave, side aisles, and a transept beneath the stunning dome. The dome itself is a masterpiece, topped with a lantern that floods the cathedral with light through numerous windows. On either side of the nave, nine 16th-century tapestries and paintings by Gaudenzio Ferrari and Bernardino Luini adorn the walls. Visitors can explore the cathedral on weekdays between 10:30 am and 5:00 pm. A must-see is the cathedral at night, when it's illuminated, making it an absolute stunner! For Christmas, the additional lighting makes a visit even more magical. Como Cathedral is also famous for its picturesque lakeside promenade, stretching almost six kilometers in length with perfect views of homes and boats. Start your stroll at Piazza Cavour, a charming square where locals gather to enjoy terraced cafes and bars. As you walk along the promenade, you'll discover street performers, concerts, and craft markets, creating an atmosphere that's always vibrant and full of surprises. Nearby lies Villa Geno, offering lovely views of villas on the west, a grassy area for sunbathing, and a pool for children. You can also hire bikes to cycle along the promenade or visit nearby landmarks like the famous Como fountain. As you continue your walk, you'll pass by Porta Torre, an ancient Romanesque gateway that dates back to the 12th century, showcasing impressive military architecture. Be sure to see the statue of Giuseppe Garibaldi nearby. The Tempio Voltiano museum sits on the waterfront, along with scenic gardens perfect for soaking up the views. Villa Olmo, A Treasure Trove of Art and History on Lake Como The Villa Olmo is a stunning villa located in the northwestern part of the city, on the shores of Lake Como. Its neoclassical architecture is a sight to behold, with beautifully tiled floors and intricate carvings adorning its walls. As you stroll through the tranquil English-style gardens, you can't help but feel a sense of serenity wash over you. The gardens themselves are free to enter, making this a must-visit destination for anyone looking to escape the hustle and bustle of city life. But what truly sets Villa Olmo apart is its impressive collection of art and artifacts. The villa's interior is filled with incredible frescoes, paintings, and statues that are sure to leave you in awe. The villa has been beautifully restored to its former glory and is now maintained by the municipality of Como. With no charge to walk through the main house, you can spend hours admiring the stunning architecture and artwork on display. ### ARTICLE Visiting the Volta Lighthouse in Brunate, a Must-see for Energetic Hikers If you're looking forward to taking a steep climb up a cobblestone road for an unforgettable experience, the Volta Lighthouse in Brunate is definitely worth visiting. The views from the top are simply breathtaking, taking in the majestic Alps and the surrounding lowlands. The most beautiful church in Como is a sight to behold. Another must-see attraction is the Chiesa di Santa Cecilia, built in the mid-1300s and located in the old town near Porta Torre. The Tempio Sacratio Sport Nautici, or Nautic Sports Shrine Temple, is an unusual church shaped like a ship and dedicated to Our Lady of the Miracle, which is completed in the 1960s. It's good to know that many smaller churches might have limited opening times, so it's best to check beforehand. Como has plenty of museums to explore, including the Tempio Voltiano and Silk Museum. Visitors can also visit the Archaeological Museum at Palazzo Giovio, the Pinacoteca Civica, or the Museo Garibaldi, a historical museum celebrating Como's past. Additionally, there are private museums like the Museo delle scienze Casartelli and MuRAC Museo Riformi Antiarei. If you have some free time, consider visiting one of these smaller museums. However, with so many amazing places to see on Lake Como, it might be better to prioritize your itinerary. Lake Como has plenty of charming towns like Bellagio and Varenna that are easily accessible by ferry. When in Lake Como, don't forget to try the local cuisine, particularly Risotto con filetti di pesce persico, a famous regional dish. But there's more to see on the lake than just its main city. Explore the surrounding towns, historic villas, and enchanting gardens for a truly unforgettable experience. To get the most out of your visit to Como city and its surrounding areas, take advantage of the map view on our website to plan your itinerary in advance. You can see that there are plenty of things to do and see here, so you can easily fill a day or even a few days with activities. However, if you have limited time, half a day is recommended at minimum to explore the old town, visit the Cathedral, and take a stroll along the lake's promenade. If you want to make the most of your trip, consider visiting Brunate village by funicular or exploring Villa Olmo. With one full day in Como, you can see all the main landmarks mentioned in our guide, including Brunate village and Volta Lighthouse. Alternatively, if you're planning a 2-3-day stay, you can visit some of the local attractions inside the town and enjoy a boat tour to relax. Many people visit Como on a day trip from Milan due to its proximity to the city center. However, with just one day, you may not be able to see more of Lake Como than just Como Town. Consider starting with a few hours in Como, followed by a fast ferry to Bellagio and then continuing to Varenna by boat. The location of Como offers many advantages for travelers, including good transportation connections, proximity to Milan and Lugano, and access to the city center. This makes it an ideal base for exploring the surrounding area for several days. When planning your trip to Lake Como, it's essential to research options like this guided tour that can help you make the most of your day.

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