

TRAVEL

Lake Garda...





Fifty shades of green Lakeside escapes

Next time you visit Italy, give the tourist traps a miss (beautiful though they are) and head, instead, to Lake Garda. Less than two hours flight from the UK, you'll find a microclimate that allows lemons, olives and vines to thrive in an area within easy reach of Alpine Austria, Switzerland and Slovenia, mountains to take your breath away and Italy's largest lake with its endless shifting colours, shadows and light. Sensual, scented and with an almost Mediterranean climate, it's easy to see why Lago di Garda ticks so many 'must have on holiday' boxes and why the discerningly classy George Clooney has made a home in the Italian Lakes.

With fifty shades of green in spring and summer – from the creamy ash flowers to cypressus, stone pine and oak – the hillsides of Lake Garda are awash with soothing colour and a day-long soundtrack of birdsong (no need for a soothing nature CD here). It's easy to see why this region has so enticed visitors. One of the area's most mesmerising

locations is Lefay Resort & Spa set high above Gargnano. This small village is a great location for foodies, boasting three Michelin star restaurants: La Tortuga, a good choice for local lake fish with a particularly impressive wine list; two-star Villa Feltrinelli in a picture-postcard setting and focusing on

vegetarian dishes such as its famous salad with a hundred different herbs and 25 flowers – and Villa Giulia for local whitefish, eels, sardines and pike.

Built in 11 hectares of stunning, natural, wildflower planted grounds, perfect for communing with nature, a spot of morning lakeside stretching, or for



chilling by one of the pools, Lefay was a winner in last year's Tatler Spa Guide and is Italy's only Eco-certified spa, awarded for its impressive eco credentials: recycling, sustainability, everything organic. Here, nature and nurturing – of guests' needs and the environment – go hand in hand. The 60 (yes, 60!) treatments focus on energy and healing work, from tui-na massage to acupuncture, moxibustion and massages that unblock your body's energy channels, relieving tension and promoting wellbeing; therapists undergo three years of in-house training, incorporating medical knowledge and anatomy with wellness principles, and the resort has four in-house doctors (including one of Italy's leading acupuncturists), devising 5-10-day programmes for sleep, weight loss, detox, sports and postural. Despite the emphasis on Traditional Chinese Medicine, Lefay is about as far as you can get from a hippy-dippy ashram: this architect-designed resort, built into the hillside, combines Swiss or German efficiency, expertise and comfort with unbeatable Italian warmth and charm.

If you can bear to tear yourself away, Lake Garda has plenty to offer, with Gardaland theme park for the kids and breathtaking Sirmione, with its fortress, only accessible on foot and so popular

that the local council is considering rationing visitors' access. There are many local oil and wine producers offering tastings and demos, as well as great routes for cycling and walking and boat trips on the lake.

For food lovers, lively Desenzano offers plenty of spots from which to enjoy the lake as you sip a spritz and also has a huge market every Tuesday morning, ideal for seeking out local produce. Slightly quieter is the beautiful town of Salò, declared a Republic during WWII by Mussolini. Replete with

history, it's also a good place for a meal at restaurants such as Osteria dell'Orologio, an antique taverna serving pasta and beans, veal stew, ossobuco, tripe and other trad classics, or Trattoria Le Rose with its fresh, modern Italian cooking, both highly recommended by locals. With many wines produced in this area – Bardolino, Grappello, Amarone, Franciacorta, Pinot Grigio, as well as grappa for those who are fans of the stronger stuff – the region is heaven for oenophiles. One recent discovery is the gorgeous refreshing white wine, Lugana, well worth keeping an eye out for. Of course, when eating you can find all your Italian favourites; good local choices include spaghetti also scoglio (classic seafood pasta) and cheeses such as Trementina and Tombea, both mountain cheeses. Other local favourites are Lido 84, a Michelin star restaurant at Gardone Riviera (which marks the beginning of the stunning 'Lemon Tree Riviera'). And, if you really are pining for city life, one of Italy's jewels is an hour's drive away: Verona, packed with stunning medieval buildings, Romeo and Juliet history (including that balcony) and a lively market, with Roman amphitheatre for opera and pop concerts.

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