

WHEN ONLY THE BEST WILL DO

Written by Lauren Price

The wedding is finally over and you're so in love you can't keep your hands off each other. And for our money, there's no better place for post-wedding bliss (and La Perla underthings) than Lake Como. As hard as it is to believe, this place was wildly fashionable long before George Clooney showed up a few years ago and bought an amazing house overlooking the lake to amuse his nearest and dearest.

On the southwest shore of the lake, embraced by the cloud-reaching snow-capped Alps (which makes this destination one of the best spots in Europe for parasailing), it's a spectacular *luna di miele* (that's Italian for honeymoon) destination for love happily ever after. Not 20 miles from Milan, this tiny lakefront city is a mélange of exquisite villas, 14th century cathedrals, windy cobblestone streets surrounding sunny piazzas and the gorgeous lakeside town that dusts its not so distant shore—Bellagio.

Splurge by booking a room at the legendary Villa d'Este in Cernobbio (it's the best of the best), on Lake Como's western side. Built in 1568 as the lakeside home for Cardinal Tolomeo Gallio—it became a hotel in 1873. Okay, we admit it. This is indulgence to the max—but worth every penny! Surrounded by some of Italy's most gorgeous gardens, it only gets better inside. From silky embroidered wall coverings and immense mosaic marble floors to breathtaking frescos—the stunning accommodations are no match for the impeccable service. Take a double dip in the lake-floating pool atop the blue-green waters of Lake Como then treat yourselves to a blissful visit to the Zen-infused spa. Stay undressed for breakfast in bed, but dress up for dinner in their award-winning Veranda or under century-old trees in the Grill's garden. For more information, visit www.villadeste.it.

After a few lakeside espressos nestled side-by-side in the Piazza Cavour, snuggle up for the magical ride on the hydrofoil to see balconies laden with blossoms that greet you everywhere in the tiny hill village of Bellagio—be sure to take advantage of the photo ops on the way up—where from the waterfront promenade, you can meander under ancient archways before the two of you climb seemingly hundreds of ancient stone steps along little side streets past tony shops huddled cheek by jowl and rococo-trimmed houses with window boxes teeming with red geraniums and fragrant bougainvillea. A walking tour should begin at Basilica di San Giacomo in old town's main square—Piazza della Chiesa (the nearby tourist office offers an excellent map to guide you). As you make your way up and down the steep stone stairways, be sure to climb the azalea-covered staircase to the neoclassical Villa Melzi to see the beautiful gardens, hand in hand. Stop for dinner at the Grand Hotel

Villa Serbelloni for fresh pasta beyond your wildest dreams that come dressed up in the likes of creamy red turnips and sweet melted butter—then finish up with their to-die-for chocolate soufflé.

Coming to Italy—honeymoon or no honeymoon—means shopping so prepare for doing it till the cows come home at some of the best outlet shops in the world. Two post-cuddling stops include the Armani Factory Store for bargains galore (read seconds) in nearby Vertemate and Ratti, one of just a handful of excellent silk warehouses found in Como. Not only fabric, you'll find fashion-famous accessories worth swooning over, too—all at deeply discounted prices.

Culture-infused afternoons: Even if you didn't read *The De Vinci Code*, you should still hop aboard for a quick train ride to see Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper* in Milan. This famous fresco was painted between 1495 and 1498 on the wall of an old Dominican monastery refectory, attached to the Church of Santa Maria delle Grazie. To see this painting with your own eyes is truly amazing—so definitely consider tearing yourself away from Como to see it—especially since its last renovation in 1999 has brought out more vivid, never before seen details, such as the creases of the tablecloth and more accurate facial features. You will have to plan ahead for tickets, though—at least a month before during the summer months (otherwise, it is possible to get same-day tickets). For more information, visit www.cenacolovinciano.org. Make a day of it and stay for a performance at the historic opera house—La Scala—before heading back on the last train just before midnight. First opened in 1778, this famous opera house has been closed for renovations, but reopens December 2004 (in the meantime, operas are being performed at the Teatro degli Arcimboldi on Via dell'Innovazion). We won't kid you—tickets are a hot commodity, so plan ahead. For more information, visit www.lascala.milano.it. If you'll die without a daily shopping fix betwixt all this culture, leave time to stop at Bruno Magli's outlet outpost on Via Manzoni, perhaps the Frette Outlet for 50% off their swank sheets on Via Visconti di Modrone or maybe more outlet browsing for Max Mara and Marina Rinaldi in Diffusione Tessile at Galleria San Carlo. Dinner? Doesn't matter. Everywhere and anything is divinely delicious though the short list of local favorites include Aimo e Nadia (it's got a Michelin star chef/owner), Don Lisander (which happens to be across the street from La Scala), Joia (vegetarians, plan to rejoice) and the Corso Como 10 Caffè (hot, hot, hot).

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