

MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

Karen White investigates the charms of Lake Como and discovers that not everything in the area is saddled with an enormous price tag

WHEN YOU FIRST ARRIVE IN Lake Como the two most dominant things that stand out are the lake and the elegant properties that adorn its peaceful shores. You would be forgiven for thinking that there is not much more to do than shop for designer clothes in Via Emanuelle II or sit in a café enjoying a frothy cappuccino. And what is wrong with that, some of you might be thinking?

This is a conversation that we have had with many of our clients. Owning a beautiful property on the lake can come with a big price tag, so people need to be sure that before they commit to buying a property there are plenty of activities and interests to satisfy even the most sedentary of people.

A typical Liberty style villa on the shores of the lake could command an asking price of anything from €3m upwards. At the other end of the ladder, a two bedroom apartment with lake views in one of the desirable towns along the favoured western shore could be found for as little as €250,000.

From one of the property hot spots, Moltrasio, you can drive along the lake shore road and then up to San Fidele Intelvi. From here the mountains open up and invite you to stroll amongst the meadows and along the walking paths, taking in the breathtaking views. At Lanzo you are rewarded with views across to Lugano and the Swiss Alps. For someone who is looking to escape from the hustle and bustle of everyday life, a small, derelict stone property in a remote mountain spot along the way would carry a price tag of around €40,000-€60,000.

For the more adventurous property buyer, you can take the water plane from Como all the way up the lake. If you are considering buying a property on the lake, this is a great way to see your chosen property from the air. Sound property advice states that when purchasing a property, it is always good to know what your neighbours are up to. The water plane gives you that perfect opportunity to have a look over the garden hedge!

For those in search of arts and culture, a stroll around Piazza del Duomo will reveal the 14th-century Gothic-Renaissance duomo. Inside it is filled with centuries-old paintings and tapestries; the lavish exterior is simply stunning. If you want to be located close to the duomo you need to up the budget and be realistic. Being centrally located with designer

boutiques in one direction and art galleries and antique studios in another, a restored apartment in a beautiful palazzo will set you back anything from €800,000 upwards. Also, in July there is the Festival Como Citta della Musica with classical concerts featuring the works of Mozart and Rachmaninoff and dance from the Tokyo ballet company.

At first glance it may not be completely obvious that there are a range of golf courses around the lake. The Villa d'Este Hotel has its own 18-hole course which is open to non-members. Further down the lake you will find the Menaggio & Cadenabbia Golf Club designed around its natural terrain and narrow fairways. At Lanzo, set amongst the woods and mountains, you will find a beautifully manicured nine-hole course.

Historically January has always been a good time for new client enquiries and the start to 2011 is no exception. With enquiry figures up on last year, and increased activity with property viewings already, 2011 is showing positive signs of recovery.

For many people buying a property abroad it is very much a lifestyle decision. For the past two years there has definitely been some resistance with clients wishing to purchase properties abroad, especially given the strength of the euro. But the lure of a better lifestyle is hard to resist and many of our clients are now taking advantage of the excellent mortgage rates available from Italian banks.

As much as Lake Como is very special and offers something unique and romantic, there is always that desire to seek out those activities and leisure interest that we do on a regular basis. Just because you are living in another country, there is no reason not to continue with the things that you love doing. So whether you want to go paragliding, canyoning, alpine walking or take in a leisurely round of golf, Lake Como has everything you need to make your property purchase as close to perfect as possible.

Or, if you just want to sit on your terrace and watch the boats go by, then that's okay too. ●

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