Now add beautiful architecture, dramatically steep mountains and deep green forests set against a backdrop of blue waters - that's the Italian Lakes District.

On this 10 day adventure you'll explore both the iconic and lesser known areas of this region of Northern Italy, as well as the rarely visited Sesia Valley (Valsesia). With expert local guides, the culture, history, sights, sounds and tastes of Northern Italy will reveal themselves amidst a backdrop of some of the most stunning scenery on the planet.

All experienced in typical Active style – you'll hike through untouched villages, valleys and ridges of Valsesia at the foot of the Italian/Swiss Alps, sea kayak to quiet villages on Lakes Orta and Como, and embrace the relaxed pace of life, for which the Italians are renowned. For an espresso blend of glaciers, green meadows and forests; stunning lakes, villages and the finer things in life, the ‘Dolce Vita’ is an unforgettable trip.
**Highlights**

UNESCO World Heritage area  
Visit Sacromente, Varallo  
Hike Rifugio Crespi  
Hike Walser Hamlets  
Orta San Giulio Island  
Sea Kayak Lake Orta  
Village life in Orta San Giulio  
Hike the Mottarone mountain range  
Experience Lake Maggiore  
Hike Val Grande National Park  
Sea kayak Lake Como  
Hike to Vezio Castle

**Here's What's Included; We've Got You Covered.**

- **All guiding services**  
  Two experienced guides per trip. In Europe you'll have a Kiwi trip leader and a local European guide.

- **All accommodations**  
  Local lodges chosen for their comfort, charm and sublime views.

- **All meals**  
  Breakfast, lunch and dinner. You'll be treated to a culinary experience, to rival any in the world.

- **All activities**  
  Hiking, kayaking, historical sites and more.

- **All transport**  
  Airport transfers on the first & last days. When you're not travelling under your own steam, there will be comfortable air-conditioned vans to stretch your legs.
Itinerary

DAY 1
Arrive Milan Malpensa, visit Sacro Monte Varallo

Your trip begins in Milan, one of Europe’s most cosmopolitan cities, and the gateway to the Italian Lakes District. We’ll meet you at Milan Malpensa International Airport in the morning and we’ll head towards the Italian Alps, standing tall in the distance. After a short drive into the Piedmonte region, the wide plains turn to valleys and the horizon turns jagged as we enter Valsesia – one of the Italy’s least visited, but most beautiful valleys. Valsesia’s main centre is Varallo, the largest and first of many stunning towns that line the edges of the Sesia River and narrow side valleys. From Varallo’s town centre, we’ll hike up to the UNESCO World Heritage site of Sacro Monte di Varallo. Built in 1491 by a Franciscan friar, Bernardino Caimi, Sacro Monte is one of the oldest religious structures in Italy. Perched on a steep hillside above the valley, the intricate architecture and setting is surreal, with fantastic views down to the cobbled streets of Varallo below. With no through road to any other region, the dramatic beauty of Valsesia will reveal itself around every corner as we drive further to Alagna village, our home for the next couple of days and a great location to hike the trails of the incredible Monte Rosa range of the Alps.

Hotel Monterosa, Alagna Valsesia (Lunch, Dinner)
Hiking Distance: 5 kilometres (3.1 miles)
Ascent: 149 metres (490 feet)
Descent: 149 metres (490 feet)

DAY 2
Hike to Rifugio Crespi

This morning we’ll begin the hike right from our doorstep, making our way through the upper village of Alagna, characterised by immaculately groomed traditional chalets and cobbled pathways. Leaving the village, we’ll hike up through picture perfect pasture land, passing herds of cows and groves of fir trees. After a short time, we’ll arrive at Rifugio Pastore, a small hamlet which couldn’t be more beautiful if it tried – with exquisite chalets, rolling meadows and the backdrop of the south side of Monte Rosa range straight out in front. A perfect place to stop for a mid-morning espresso! After a short break we’ll continue our hike up through the dramatic Bors Valley, before a short steep hike up onto the Crespi basin – a huge alpine amphitheatre you have to see to believe. Dotted on the sides of the basin are the intact remnants of Walser stone mountain huts, built in 1504. Turning 360 degrees in this stunning plateau reveals the incredible Aguas Biancas waterfall, huge rock faces and the moraine walls of ancient glaciers. After lunch in the plateau, we’ll head back down to Alagna where we’ll have time to rest up and relax in the village before meeting for dinner.

Hotel Monterosa, Alagna Valsesia (All meals)
Hiking Distance: 11 kilometres (7 miles)
Ascent: 569 metres (1866 feet)
Descent: 569 metres (1866 feet)

DAY 3
Hiking the Walser hamlets of Valsesia

Today we’ll hike through and explore the side valleys that drop down into the main valley of Valsesia. In the fifth century A.D. the Walser people (of Germanic origin) settled in Switzerland. They soon made their
way across the Alps into Italy and the Valsesia area. Today, the Walser people are still thriving here and we'll have the chance to hike their trails and explore their communities and surroundings, characterised by hamlets perched on the side of the mountain slopes, century-old chapels and unique architecture. Our hike today will take us into the heart of the side valleys and up onto the ridgelines above the village of Rimella where we'll have incredible views of the Monte Rosa range. Later, we'll return to Alagna where the afternoon is yours to explore the village and visit the Walser Museum. Weather permitting, there is an option to take the gondola up to Passo dei Salati at 2987 metres (9800 feet) – a mind-blowing lookout point to the glaciers of the Monte Rosa range.

Hotel Monterosa, Alagna Valsesia (All meals)
HIKING DISTANCE: 11 kilometres (7 miles)
ASCENT: 667 metres (2187 feet)
DESCENT: 667 metres (2187 feet)

DAY 4
Hike down to Pella, boat to Orta San Giulio

This morning we'll drive a short distance back down the valley. From Varallo, we'll say goodbye to the steep green walls of Valsesia and head into the forests of the Vercelli province, passing the beautiful villages of Civiasco and Arola. Our next stop is Madonna del Sasso Sanctuary, a stunning complex built in the early 1700s, overlooking Lake Orta and out towards the Swiss Alps – the views are simply spectacular! After taking in the first of the Italian Lakes from this amazing vantage point, we'll hike down to the lakeside village of Pella where we'll board a boat across to San Giulio Island – the jewel in the crown of Lake Orta. We’ll have time to stroll the Via del Silenzio pathway around the Island and explore the quiet narrow cobbled streets, quaint courtyards and incredible 12th Century basilica. You'll feel like you've stepped back in time several hundred years! The time travel doesn’t stop there though, as we board our boat again and head a very short distance across to the village of Orta San Giulio, our home for the next couple of nights.

Hotel Santa Caterina, Orta San Giulio (All meals)
HIKING DISTANCE: 4.8 kilometres (3 miles)
ASCENT: 300 metres (984 feet)
DESCENT: 300 metres (984 feet)

DAY 5
Sea kayak Lake Orta

After breakfast this morning, we'll take to the lake by sea kayak and paddle past the numerous villages that dot the shoreline. Enveloped by dark green woodlands and old settlements, Lake Orta is the quietest of the Italian Lakes, making it the perfect place to stop off for a lakeside espresso and take in serene village life. Later we'll return to Orta San Giulio where there's time to walk the lakeside pathway and stroll up the cobbled pathways to the Sacro Monte chapels overlooking the village and across the western shores of Lake Orta – the views are breath-taking! If you’re keen to carry on paddling today, there’s plenty of opportunity to go a little further with our guides after we return to Orta San Giulio.

Hotel Santa Caterina, Orta San Giulio (All meals)
SEA KAYAKING DISTANCE: 10 kilometres (6 miles)

DAY 6
Hike the Mottarone mountain range
This morning we’ll drive a short distance to Armeno, a quaint village nestled in the foothills of the Mottarone mountain range, which runs the whole length of Lake Orta and divides it from Lake Maggiore. We’ll set off from Armeno, hiking along old cobbled pathways to the Church of Madonna de Luciago, with stunning views of pastureland to the south. It’s fields and forest the whole way to the top of the Mottarone, where you’ll be rewarded with expansive vistas from the Po Valley to the summits of the Alps. You’ll be struck by the view of Monte Rosa and the seven lakes that lie in this natural basin. We always allow plenty of time to soak in these views, so you can rest and then take a stroll in every direction. Later, we’ll take the easy way down - utilising the Funivia, which will take us to Stresa, literally across the street from our hotel! There’s time this afternoon to soak in the atmosphere of the narrow streets and lake promenade before we meet for dinner in one of the many charming cobbled squares.

**Hotel Lido Perla Negra, Stresa (All meals)**

**HIKING DISTANCE:** 10.5 kilometres (6.5 miles)
**ASCENT:** 968 metres (3175 feet)

**DAY 7**  
**Hiking Val Grande National Park**

Today we’ll hike through the largest wilderness area in Italy – the Val Grande National Park. Along a panoramic trail into the conifer forests and alpine meadows of the area, we’ll enjoy incredible views of the craggy peaks of the Alps to the north, and the blue waters of Lake Maggiore to the south. Where our hikes in the days before have passed through villages, our hike today is all about the wilderness and the combination of silence and grand views. Afterwards we’ll head back to Stresa for another exceptional local restaurant meal.

**Hotel Lido Perla Negra, Stresa (All meals)**

**HIKING DISTANCE:** 8 kilometres (5 miles)
**ASCENT:** 430 metres (1410 feet)
**DESCENT:** 430 metres (1410 feet)

**DAY 8**  
**Journey to Lake Como, hike to Vezio Castle**

This morning we’ll head to Lake Como – Italy’s most dramatic and iconic lake. Our home for the next couple of days is San Giovanni, one of the most beautiful stretches of lakeside settlement in the world. It’s easy to fall in love with this place. Just around the corner is Bellagio, sitting on the peninsula where the western and eastern arms of the lake meet, this town known as the ‘Pearl of the Lake’, is surrounded by exuberant gardens, a maze of steep stone staircases, gorgeous lake-side squares and incredible views to the Alps. If you’re keen to hike today, we’ll take a short boat ride across to the village of Varenna with its famous pastel coloured houses that seem to defy the laws of physics, perched on the steep green slopes that rise straight up from the lake. From here we’ll hike on the cobbled pathway and trail up to the hamlet of Vezio. The centre-piece of this tiny settlement is the Vezio Castle, the remains of a fortified watchtower built in the middle ages. The views from up here are spectacular. Later we’ll walk back down to Varenna before catching the boat back across the lake. Tonight you’ll be able to choose from a variety of local restaurants in nearby Bellagio for your evening meal.

**Hotel Locanda della Maria, San Giovanni (All meals)**

**HIKING DISTANCE:** 4.1 kilometres (2.5 miles)
**ASCENT:** 150 metres (495 feet)
DAY 9
Sea kayaking Lake Como

The steep walls of the Alps, dropping straight down into the clear waters of the lake, with stunning villages and coves dotted along the edges are a sight to behold. Around every corner, more and more of Lake Como’s charm reveals itself. You’ll be itching to explore! Explore is exactly what we’ll do, and all from a sea kayak, as we glide past the incredible coves, 17th Century houses and gardens that dot the lakeside – if there was a more perfect example of man-made structures and the natural environment coming together, we’re yet to see it! After our paddle, we’ll have time to soak in the charm and beauty of San Giovanni.

Hotel Locanda della Maria, San Giovanni (All meals)
SEA KAYAKING DISTANCE: 12.9 kilometres (8 miles)

DAY 10
Back to Milan Malpensa

This morning we’ll head back to Milan in time for afternoon flights. If you’re staying on, our team are happy to offer you suggestions on how best to spend your time. Either way, you’ll go home relaxed and refreshed after the beautiful hiking, kayaking and fine cuisine you’ll have taken in while exploring the Italian Lakes District.

(Breakfast)
Useful Info

No Forced Single Supplement
Most other travel companies charge all solo travellers a single supplement fee. We don't! When it comes to accommodation, our trip fares are based on a twin-share rate, which means we'll match you up with another person of the same gender to share a room with. If there's no one suitable to share with, there's no forced single supplement!

Trip Start
If you arrive on the first day of your trip, we can either pick you up from our joining hotel at 10:30am or the Milan Malpensa airport (MXP) at 11am.

Trip End
On the last day of your trip we'll drop you off at Milan Malpensa airport in time for afternoon flights. You can book a flight home departing anytime after 1pm on this day. If you're staying on in Milan, we'll be happy to book you extra accommodation and drop you off at our joining hotel.

Fitness
We've designed this trip to be fun, challenging and varied. Our trips aren't scenic bus journeys where you observe from a window, or stand on a touristy viewing platform to take pretty pictures. We'll get you into the back country to experience the Lakes District scenery up close, either by foot or kayak, so you'll need a reasonable level of fitness to enjoy yourself. Age and experience are not important, so you don't need to be young or extremely fit but you should be in the habit of doing some regular exercise. So get out there with a daypack on a short day hike from time to time and you'll be ready to join us.

Transport
Italy is a small country, but not quite small enough to get around under your own steam the whole time. We have our own comfortable air-conditioned vans with plenty of room to stretch your legs. Our guides make every journey informative and fun and may even play some local Italian music along the way. The great thing is, you won't be expected to be spending long periods of time in a vehicle anywhere on this trip - getting around the Lakes District will be largely up to you with your hiking boots on!
General Trip Information
You can find details on recommended flights and fitness, as well as trip start and end in the ‘specific information’ section at the end of each itinerary.

Accommodation:
Rooming is based on two people sharing a room with one or two beds, as you require. If you’re travelling by yourself and would like to be guaranteed your own room for the duration of the trip, a single supplement may be available.

Outdoor Experience:
Our trips allow you to make the most of the back country, whether you’re relatively new to hiking or a seasoned trekker. Our highly trained and experienced trip leaders will be at your side, safely guiding you to magnificent places that you wouldn’t get to on your own. The challenges are there, if you’re looking for them, all we ask is that you be energetic and in reasonable shape and we guarantee you’ll have an incredible time. You don’t need kayaking experience to enjoy paddling out on the water and you don’t need to be a serious cyclist to enjoy most of the rides we do. In fact, we have so many options available that you don’t need to ride or paddle at all if you’d rather hike or just laze around!

We hold all relevant government licenses and permits, and have an impeccable safety record. So with all the research, logistics, safety and hospitality taken care of, you can focus on the most important thing – making the most of your vacation!
Included:

Your trip includes just about everything, specifically:

- All guiding services. We have an experienced trip leader with every trip and also have a specialist guide on many of the activities to provide extra local knowledge.
- Comfortable accommodation for the entire period you are with us. We can also organise pre and post-trip accommodation for you if you like.
- Breakfast, lunch and dinner on most days, as indicated, and we cater for all dietary requirements. In some locations, where there are a wide variety of restaurants, we’ve found people prefer to check out the options on their own. Alcohol is not included, although we do spring a few drinks here and there!
- All activities described in the itineraries including hiking, kayaking, biking and via ferrata, except the optional extra activities available at additional cost.
- All transportation from trip start to end.
- The highest level of service from our guides and from our experienced team behind the scenes. We’re always here for you and we always go the extra mile!

Not Included:

The trip fare doesn’t include flights before or after your trip. This is your all-inclusive vacation and there are no hidden costs. You’ll have a few meals and drinks to cover, extra activities if you choose them, and you’ll probably feel like tipping your guides at the end of a fabulous trip, though you won’t need to pull out your wallet every few minutes on your Active Adventures trip!

Flexibility:

We’re really flexible and none of our itineraries are written in stone, so if you have a particular interest you’d like to include or you need to leave a trip earlier or join later (at a pro-rated fare), just let us know and we can almost always make it happen. Likewise, all adventure travel requires a certain amount of flexibility and we sometimes have to make minor changes to the accommodation or activities because of weather and availability, but we have plenty of options up our sleeve and the experience to keep your trip running seamlessly.

Itinerary Updates:

We update our itineraries annually, sometimes more often, so please check our website for the most up-to-date itineraries and pricing. We make every effort to ensure itinerary accuracy, though changes may occur without prior notice due to local circumstances.
**Best Trip....EVER**

No regrets. Not one bad thing to say. Jo and Andrea, our guides, were the best. They worked so well together. They were funny, encouraging, flexible. We were fortunate in only having five hikers. What a treat. If there were occasions you doubted your capabilities, Jo and or Andrea were there to help you through. The meals, (remember it’s pronounced Eataly) were outstanding. Accommodation was very good. Small local hotels were utilized. My experience was so good, I am now seriously considering Mt. Blanc or the Dolomites next year. Thank you Active Adventures.

Christine Jenkins – Ontario, Canada

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**Dolce Vita 2016**

We have taken many trips in our 60+ years to places across the United States, Canada, South America, Asia, New Zealand, Australia, and Europe. Our trip with Active Adventures to the Italian Lakes District and our extended visit in Italy has to be in our top three if not our favorite trip of all time! It was definitely Dolce Vita, the SWEET LIFE. The Italian Alps and the Lakes, the hikes and the paddling were certainly up to Active Adventure’s high standard. The beauty of the mountains and the Lakes and the invigorating way we experienced them were fantastic! The things that set this trip apart and put it over the top were the culture, food, and history of the region. Having the combination of Andy, our New Zealand guide, and Enrico, our native Italian, was awesome. Enrico helped us understand first-hand the Italian people and their way of life and gave us insights and access to more than we could imagine. It seemed everywhere we went, they all knew Enrico. The food experiences were unbelievable. The small size of our group and the relationship we built made it seem as if we were family and friends completing a once in a lifetime adventure. I can’t give enough kudos to Active Adventure these two guides for this marvellous experience.

Ernest Alphin – North Carolina, United States