

The Culinary Traveller's Lugano: *Swiss La Dolce Vita!*

By KURT & MICHELLE WINNER

Palm trees, a temperate climate, villas, and Vespas! Is this really Switzerland? A few miles from the northern Italian border, Switzerland shares a lake and mountain with Italy. In the Swiss region known as Ticino, one of 26 cantons (states) in this small and culturally diverse country, you see Italian influences everywhere.

A BIT OF ITALY IN SWITZERLAND

Elegant people stroll here with Italian panache. The official language of the region is Italian. Favoured food items such as risotto, corn, cured meats, lardo (cured pork fat), and chestnuts appear on local menus. Merlot grape is king although Swiss white varieties are grown in the area. It is more Italian than Swiss, but it is not fully Italian either.

Ringed by mountains, the cement apartments and towers of glass rise up in the hills of Lake Lugano like birthday candles encircling a cake. Contrast this post-modern reprise with the tiny wood cabins or stone huts you see along the railroad tracks as you enter the region tucked up in the Swiss mountains.

Maintained for hundreds of years by the same families, these old structures serve as getaways for the locals. But as with most of the world's best water view locations, there is a growing number of "cold beds" as our guide called them (non-native or non-primary residences) "up in those cold, glass buildings." They were a complete contradiction to the lively scene below in Lugano's streets.

The Hotel De La Paix in Lugano is a short cab ride from the train station and a five-minute walk to the lake and ferry. Lugano's promenade follows the lake's contours, meanders under a canopy of trees, carves through gardens dotted with art installations, and is the preferred route for joggers, dog walkers, and sightseers.



Hairy green chestnuts curl up next to rosy tomatoes and salmon-coloured fruit in an old-town Lugano market. KURT WINNER

LUGANO DELIGHTS!

Along the way, weathered palazzos and churches touch bricks with the modern marvels of Mario Botta's glass architecture. Standing between the ancient and the new buildings in full sunlight, you appreciate why Lugano has always been the sundeck of Switzerland.

In the heart of old town Lugano, jewels tempt and couture beckons. Next door to these, comestibles

explode onto cobbled streets with hairy green chestnuts next to rosy tomatoes and salmon-coloured fruit. Green umbrellas line the territory of the café next door. A demure 19th-century pastry shop rules part of the tiny thoroughfare, each of its sweets carefully lining the gilded window in a siren's song of edible art.

In the morning we wandered downstairs to breakfast and sampled

local cheeses, airy croissants, fresh fruit, muesli, and pillowy scrambled eggs. Italian-style bacon, almost a prosciutto style, was not greasy and just salty enough to be perfectly balanced. Coffee and frothy cappuccino capped our morning repast and sent us scurrying toward the waterfront.

FRET-FREE TRAVEL

Swiss Rail Passes in hand, we could travel throughout the entire country by train, bus, or ferry. Trains in Switzerland are synchronized for ease of travel. The trains in Switzerland run on time: if the train is scheduled to leave at 11:13 a.m., it will leave at 11:13 a.m. All platforms have a large yellow sign that will tell you the track number, destination, departure time, class, and if the train has a dining car.

All the information you need is listed and it's clear and efficient. Trains are clean and electronically quiet, so there are no diesel fumes or noise. High speed trains run in excess of 85 mph, and tilt in the turns so you won't spill your cappuccino. Swiss efficiency and engineering is a joy for the traveller.

We checked the ferry schedule at the dock and had 15 minutes to take in the Riva Paradiso's main drag of five-star hotels and restaurants. Our ferry was scheduled to leave at 9:28 a.m. How could a ferry be on time when wind and water affect travel time? But it arrived and departed exactly at 9:28 a.m. A delightful 55 minutes passed on the calm water as we motored south.

Morcote to the south of Lugano is a small lakefront village, with ancient vineyards climbing the steep hills of the town up to a large church at the top.

After a crisp "arrivederci" from the ferry officer at the end of the gang plank, we walked to the Scherrer Park Gardens, a terraced arboretum full of subtropical plants arranged in exotic vignettes. Enchanted, we climbed higher through the garden and looked out to the Italian shore across the lake through a miniature Mughal palace, a Venetian glass sitting room, and a French partiered garden.

SAVOURY FAVOURITES

Arriving at restaurant Grotto Del Parco, I was looking forward to lunch. We sat on the terrace watching the locals fishing, boating, and sunning. Our server Francesco brought us the house cocktail to start; a curious blending of peach nectar, local Prosecco (Italian wine), and a waft of gin. We wanted a few minutes to look over the menu, but Francesco explained that the chef had prepared a special lunch and spirited the menus away!

We started with a nice bottle of locally produced Tremone Chardonnay 2007 of Ticino, and Beef Camelloni hand-rolled with house-made pasta filled with tender shredded beef and floating on a luscious tomato cream reduction.

"Secondi" we had local perch sautéed with artichoke hearts and simple roasted potatoes. The rustic flavours were earthy and satisfying. We finished our bottle of wine and last spoonful of dessert with a sigh and began our journey home to the Lugano/Paradiso waterfront.



The Lugano promenade follows the curve of the lake and is a favourite for joggers, dog walkers, and sightseers. KURT WINNER



Local housekeepers have to air their rugs somewhere! KURT WINNER



Lunch at Grotto Del Parco in Morcote features fresh perch sautéed with artichoke hearts and served with roasted potatoes, an earthy and satisfying blend of flavours. KURT WINNER



An affinity for everything Italian extends to dinner. KURT WINNER

degrees off vertical. At the top there should be a huge banner announcing that you have lived, but there was only a small signpost to tell you about the various trails you can take, including one down the mountain to Lugano.

If you feel like a celebration, a café serves ice cream, snacks, beer, and wine along with an unsurpassed view. Walk a bit along a trail to a tiny chapel and stand on its crumbly roof platform for a world-class thrill and a 360-degree view like no other.

Back at the café the "black socks" group was downing some amber-coloured liquid courage, perhaps steeling themselves for the ride down. But for now, in this moment on San Salvatore, on top of a mountain in Switzerland lit by the warm sun, this was la dolce vita!

Michelle Winner has been writing as the Culinary Traveller for The Epoch Times since 2009 and has a flair for travel with flavour. Kurt Winner provides beautiful photographic details of their trips.

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Quiz #299



HIGH AND DRY: Match the landlocked nation on the left with the associated mountain range on the right.

- | | |
|-------------|-----------|
| Bolivia | Airs |
| Nepal | Alps |
| Niger | Andes |
| Switzerland | Himalayas |
| Tajikistan | Pamirs |

Read The Epoch Times next week for the answer!

Answer for Quiz #298

THE I'S HAVE IT:

Hawkeye State; capital is Des Moines; location of scene in Grant Wood's American Gothic—IOWA

Hoosier State; capital is Indianapolis; National College Football Hall of Fame—INDIANA

Prairie State; capital is Springfield; Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library—ILLINOIS

Sudoku

		6	9		8		2	
3		8				5		
		9			4	2		
1	6			4				
8								7
				2			5	1
		3	2			9		
		1				6		2
	9		3		5	1		

Fill in the boxes using numbers between 1 and 9 so that each column, each row, and each 3x3 square contain all nine numbers only once.

Exclusive Epoch Times puzzle by Sudoku Works. Sudoku puzzles and software at: www.SudokuWorks.com.

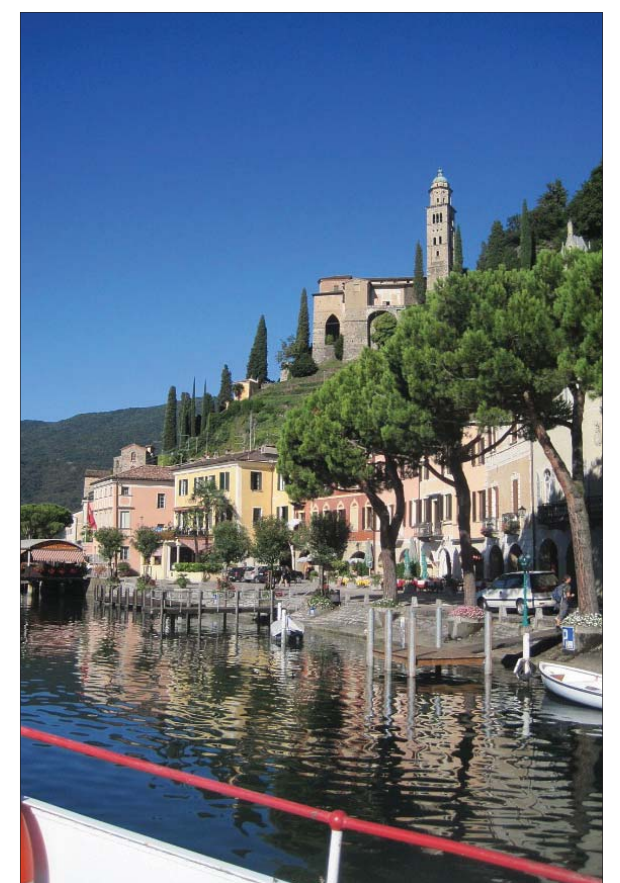
4	7	1	5	8	3	2	9	6
2	3	9	7	6	4	1	8	5
5	8	6	1	9	2	3	4	7
6	9	2	4	5	7	8	3	1
7	3	8	6	1	5	4	2	9
8	2	7	1	4	2	3	5	6
9	6	5	7	3	8	6	9	4
1	8	4	5	2	1	7	3	8
3	1	7	2	2	5	9	6	4
2	6	9	8	7	4	1	3	5

This week's solution

Evergreen Beauty & Wellness Centre
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Body Massage \$48/60mins
Foot Reflexology \$25/60mins

Tel: 647-341-5016; 416-598-9870
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422 Dundas St. W.,
Toronto, M5T 1G7
Business Hour: 10am-9pm (7Days)



The town of Morcote seen from the ferry. KURT WINNER