

# The Culinary Traveler'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 (pronounced Tih-chee-no), 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. Favored 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



**LOCAL FARE:** Italian influences abound in Lugano, such as this well-garnished vegetable pie. KURT WINNER

contradiction to the lively scene below in Lugano's streets. The Hotel De La Paix in Lugano,

a short cab ride from the train station, is 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.

**LUGANO DELIGHTS!**

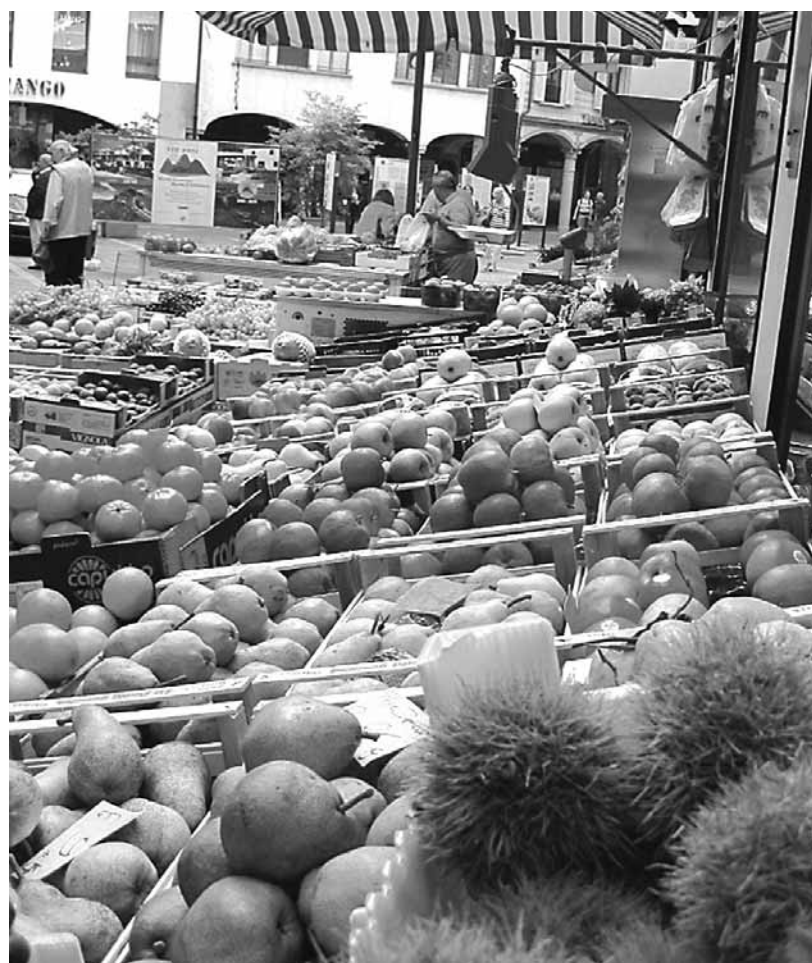
Along the way, weathered palazzos and churches touch bricks with the modern marvels of Mario Botta's glass architecture. Standing between the ancient and the new buildings in full sunlight you appreciate why Lugano has always been the sundeck of Switzerland.

In the heart of old town Lugano, jewels temp and couture beckons. Next door to these, comestibles explode onto cobbled streets with hairy green chestnuts curling up next to rosy tomatoes and salmon-colored 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 pillow-y scrambled eggs. Italian-style bacon, almost a prosciutto style, was not



**PICTURE PERFECT PAUSE:** The main piazza della Riforma is the gathering place in old Lugano. KURT WINNER



**RUSTIC FLAVOR:** Lunch at Grotto Del Parco in Morcote features fresh perch sautéed with artichoke hearts and served with roasted potatoes, a blend of flavors that were earthy and satisfying. KURT WINNER



**SWEET TREATS:** Elegant pastries beckon from behind glass cases in old town Lugano. KURT WINNER

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 in 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 11:13am, it will leave at 11:13am. 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.

The information that 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.

Disaster averted! Swiss efficiency and engineering is a joy for the traveler.

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 9:28am. How could a ferry be on time when wind and water effect travel time? But it arrived and departed exactly at 9:28am. 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 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 Mughul palace, a Venetian glass sitting room, and a French partied garden.

**SAVORY FAVORITES**

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 Franchesco 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 Franchesco 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 Cannelloni 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 flavors 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



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Lugano/Paradiso waterfront. We boarded our ferry and left exactly on time.

**A SHORT TRIP TO THE HEIGHTS**

From the dock we walked to the funicular (tram) that climbs up Mt. San Salvatore overlooking Lugano. By presenting our Swiss Rail Passes we saved twenty dollars. The passes are a must-have in Switzerland, you just don't need a car to worry about fuel, parking, or getting lost—it's a superb deal.

Crammed in with a loud Germanic group sporting shorts, black socks, and sandals, we grabbed the hanging straps and stood our personal space as they traded barbs and slapped each other on the back. Scary ride on so many levels, but not entirely due to their "black socks go with anything" mode.

The incline, which is carved into the side of the mountain, supports a track the car locks onto. We nervously hung on half-scared, half-thrilled as we recalled the tiny prayers of survival locked in the hearts of our youth. We chugged up just a few 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-colored 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 The Culinary Traveler for The Epoch Times since 2009 and has a flair for travel with flavor. Kurt Winner provides beautiful photographic details of their journeys.*

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

- [www.myswitzerland.com](http://www.myswitzerland.com)
- [www.ticino.ch](http://www.ticino.ch)
- [www.traintickets.myswitzerland.com](http://www.traintickets.myswitzerland.com)



**PROUD PALAZZOS:** These stately mansions still require housekeeping, so they have to air their rugs somewhere! KURT WINNER



**SCENIC WALK:** The Lugano promenade follows the curve of the lake and is a favorite for joggers, dog walkers, and sightseers. KURT WINNER

## The Epoch Times Geography Guru™

"Growing your geography knowledge"

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

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

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](http://www.SudokuWorks.com).

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

This week's solution