



Travel

# The alternative guide to travelling in Europe this year

Forget the obvious – these continental destinations should be next on your hit list

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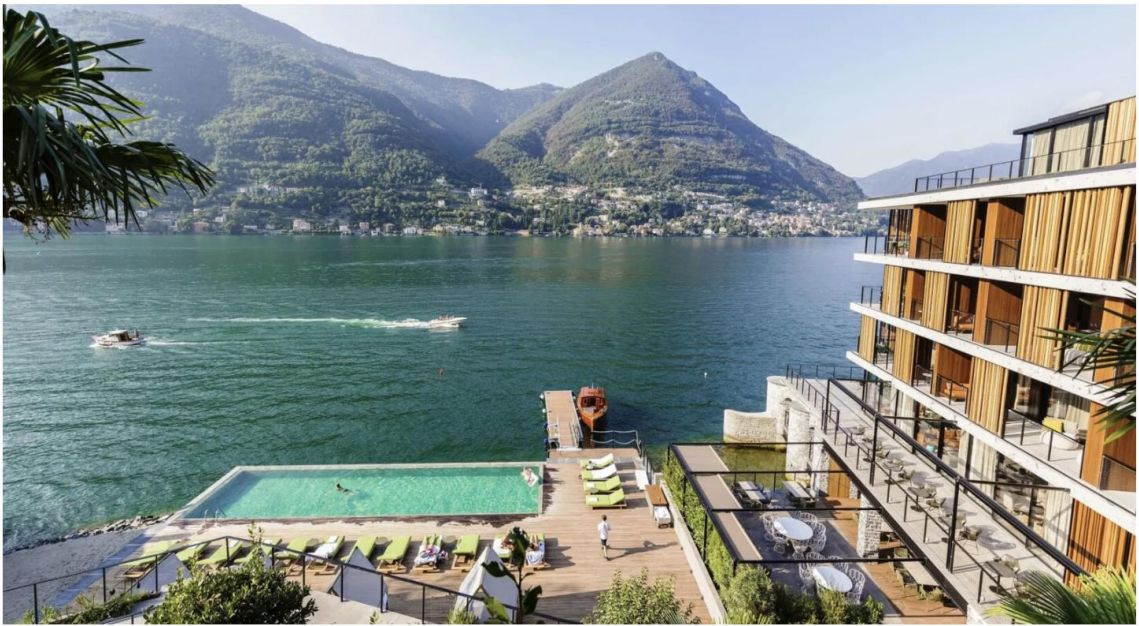


The big **travel** trend for 2023? There's more to life than Mykonos. This year, we're ditching the rule book on Europe. No more well-trodden paths. No more same-old resorts. Instead, it's all about the new. New destinations. Radical approaches. Patently uncommon experiences.

It's time to spread your wings, which is why we've found some of the most surprising, alternative or hidden-gem-status destinations for your 2023 travels. Whether it's an under-the-radar yacht spot on the Aegean Sea, the wavy music festival that you've never heard of, or some underappreciated beauty right on your doorstep, this is an itinerary with new stories to tell.

## Il Sereno: The buzzy hotel making Lake Como cool again

The glamour was fading from this A-list enclave – until a sleek new 5-star hotel transformed the shoreline and started winning every luxury gong going. *By Sam Parker*



You can see why George likes it. **Clooney**, that is, who bought a mansion on the cusp of Lake Como twenty years ago and has been linked to the Italian beauty spot ever since, the mere name enough to conjure the image of Gorgeous himself straddling a speedboat as it knives elegantly through the still water, mountains rising softly in the reflection of his Persol 3246s.

Not that it needs any stardust, this place. The views are pure Hollywood anyway, in the older sense of the word. I read somewhere once that the perfect feng shui for a home is a solid mountain at the back and a vast body of tranquil water at the front: throw in a supply of high-grade fettuccine, and it feels pretty close to a blueprint for inner peace. So here's the first thing to say about Il Sereno, the 5-star hotel poised on the lip of Torno, a sleepy town on the south of the lake: you will gasp. Ignore the peaceful gardens, ignore the chic and thoughtful decor, ignore the smiling concierge and walk straight to the balcony and gasp.

Once that's done with, you can turn around and take in the rest of it. The thing about these ancient strongholds of European glamour, where every hour of the day somehow feels like dusk, is that they are cool and sexy – not unlike a finely preserved movie star – but you do sometimes feel a certain yearning for some clean, sharp lines and a little freshly fitted glass. One of the reasons Il Sereno has been met with ripples of approval since it opened – it's been named the number one hotel in Italy, number one in Europe and fourth in the world – is the way designer Patricia Urquiola has deployed stone, bronze and walnut wood to transform the waterfront. One of the coolest things you can do at Il Sereno – one of the coolest things you can do anywhere, full stop – is take a little speedboat out from the hotel's private jetty and skim off to the centre of the lake, where you can see the hotel in context along the shoreline. It's *incongruent*, in the best possible way, like a child laughing in a circle of snoozing pensioners.



It's a vibe that extends to the lakefront pool and terrace and into the 30 suites, which are spacious but cozy, finished in warm-wood and minimalist, natural materials – not that you'll notice, much, given they also have floor-to-ceiling windows to lake-gawp out of. Breakfast and dinner are served closer to the water beside a series of stone arches; food at Il Sereno is presided over by Naples-born Michelin-starred chef Raffaele Lenzi, who makes the most of the fish swimming outside and draws on local and seasonal Italian ingredients (don't miss the home-made olive oil, for one). Like the building itself, everything from the service to the cocktail menu is relaxed and modern in the best way.

Como doesn't need George and in fact, you could argue it'd be better off without him. The tinge of A-list exclusivity that put the region on the map twenty years ago can feel like a bit of a burden today when so many of our ideas around travel are being rewritten. Il Sereno, then, feels like the burst of fresh air: a hotel that is the best of new luxury down to its smallest details, with the splendor of the grand old lake as its centrepiece.

*Il Sereno, doubles £643 per night, [serenohotels.com](https://serenohotels.com)*