

How Lake Garda became Italy's under-the-radar foodie wonderland

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[Lake Garda](#) is often described as “underrated”, but “misunderstood” is more accurate. Comparisons to Lake Como are inescapable, with Lake Garda generally positioned as a more laid-back, less flashy alternative. While there is truth to its unfussy charm, Italy’s largest lake more than measures up on the fancy front, especially when it comes to restaurants. [Lake Garda’s restaurant scene](#) balances innovative Michelin-starred dining rooms with time-honoured family-run fixtures. The restaurants alone warrant a visit here, and culinary cognoscenti would agree.

A beautiful road in Garda lake, Tremosine sul Garda, Lombardy district, Brescia province, Italy, Europe/Getty Images

Those lucky enough to score a reservation at the Camanini brothers’ [Lido 84](#) in Gardone Riviera have been making the pilgrimage for years. Home to one of the world’s most in-demand tables, the Michelin-starred mecca currently ranks seventh on the [World’s 50 Best Restaurants](#) list – Italy’s highest-rated. Chef Riccardo Camanini not only crafts dishes that tap into local tradition and ingredients, such as a risotto with stracchino and lake sardines, but he also approaches his craft academically, researching and reimagining historic recipes. His cacio e pepe ‘in vescica’, fully cooked inside a pig bladder, resembles an inflated balloon when presented tableside. Dramatic, yes, but it’s not just for show – it reinterprets a Roman-era preparation method, resulting in perfectly al dente pasta coated in an equally perfect, emulsified, silky, smoky sauce.

But Lido 84 is hardly the only draw. The five-star [Grand Hotel Fasano](#) partially occupies a former 19th-century hunting lodge that once belonged to the Austrian royal family. The Michelin-starred [Il Fagiano](#), helmed by chef Maurizio Bufi, sits on the ground floor of one of the property's oldest wings and earned its first Michelin star in 2024. His cuisine cleverly interplays local northern Italian customs with influences from his native [Puglia](#), like a standout dish that deconstructs then reimagines a San Marzano tomato with basil and cucumber.

Though the Michelin Guide debuted in Italy in 1956, Lake Garda didn't receive a star until 1980 for Maria and Danilo Filippini's still-standing (and still-starred) [La Tortuga](#). Most recently, the 2025 Michelin Guide recognised two restaurants with inaugural stars: [Casa Leali](#) and [Tancredi](#), bringing the lake's total number of starred restaurants to 14. Andrea and Marco Leali's Casa Leali inhabits a restored 15th-century farmhouse nestled into the rolling hills of Puegnago sul Garda, east of the lake. Dishes feature creative riffs on typical flavours, like *risolimone*, a risotto infused with local lemon powder, and tender trout with horseradish, bay leaf and anise.

"Lake Garda is an incredibly fertile gastronomic ecosystem," says chef Vincenzo Manicone. In February 2024, he took over the kitchen of Tancredi in Sirmione and landed a star before the year was out. "It is an area where there is no shortage of work and where tourism, Italian and international, creates constant opportunities for comparison. This continuous flow makes it possible to invest, experiment, and always raise the bar."

For Manicone, the dynamic mix of local tradition and global influence is key to the region's culinary vibrancy. It's an environment that pushes chefs to evolve and redefine what's possible, making each dish an opportunity to experiment and innovate. "Being part of the gastronomic scene in Lake Garda is extremely stimulating," adds Mancone. "The area is rich in different histories, culinary cultures, and traditions between the Brescian shore, where I operate, and the Veronese shore."

Limone Sul Garda cityscape on the shore of Garda lake surrounded by scenic Northern Italian nature. Amazing Italian citiesGetty Images

Though it's not just newly awarded chefs making an impact, longstanding culinary pillars are essential to Lake Garda's contemporary dining scene. Stefano Baiocco, who honed his talent under the guidance of Alain Ducasse, Pierre Gagnaire, and Ferran Adrià, oversees the restaurant at the five-star [Grand Hotel Villa Feltrinelli](#), a two-star destination since 2013. Leandro Luppi has retained a Michelin star at [Vecchia Malcesine](#) since 2004. Luppi moved to the lake in 1991, after having operated a restaurant in his native Bolzano, and opened Vecchia Malcesine inside a former 17th-century farmhouse perched above the town of Malcesine on Lake Garda's northeastern shore.

"We started with a very specific project," explains Luppi, "to be a reference restaurant for the lake, especially in using and giving dignity to freshwater fish. One step at a time, we have arrived at our intent." Luppi's playful, clever cuisine comes to life in two dynamic,

ever-changing tasting menus—his lake carbonara, for example, swaps the guanciale for marinated lake trout. For nearly twenty years, Vecchia Malcesine claimed the only star on the Verona branch until [NIN](#) in Brenzone sul Garda rose to Michelin ranks in 2023.

After a star-studded career that spanned Italy, Peter Brunel came full circle in 2019, opening his namesake restaurant on the very lake where he earned his first Michelin star back in 2003: his native Trentino. Hoping to “bring a star back to the lake,” he chose the hills of Arco for [Peter Brunel Ristorante Gourmet](#) and achieved his goal two years later. His cuisine, which he defines as “Trentino-Nikkei,” draws influence from both Peru and Japan.

“Upper Garda is a special area,” he explains. “Here we find a Mediterranean climate, and very high-quality raw materials – from oil to fruits of the earth, nuts, plums, grapes, vegetables, but also lake fish and mountain meats.” This intersection of landscapes and ingredients sparks his imagination and translates to the plate. His most iconic dish brings together Nipponese and Mediterranean sensibilities with refined aesthetics and creativity: A Lofoten Memory features marinated anchovies hanging like drying fish from a breadstick rack, set against an artfully arranged “seascape” of ingredients.

From the water to the woods to the mountains, the lake’s natural bounty also takes pride of place at casalinga (homestyle) trattorias, osterias, and agriturismos. At [Taverna del Capitano](#) in Brenzone sul Garda, the Brighenti family has been specialising in lake fish since 1961, and the Giacomini’s started serving up heartfelt Brescian cuisine in Salò on the Brescian shore in 1996. Due north, **Agriturismo San Michele Cà del Tocio** is nestled into the green hills above Malcesine and beneath the jagged slopes of Monte Baldo. Further afield in Arco (Trentino), the idyllic [Osteria Le Servite](#) champions local ingredients and customs.

So where to begin discovering the lake’s layered culinary richness? From Michelin stars to trattorias, osterias, and agriturismos, here’s a look at some of Lake Garda’s standout restaurants.

The most exciting restaurants in Lake Garda right now

Taverna del Capitano, Brenzone sul Garda

Situated on the lake’s quiet northeast shore, Taverna del Capitano opened in 1961 and feels equal parts once upon a time and modern. The affable Lino Brighenti oversees the dining room, a glass-enclosed terrace skirting the lakefront and a harbour packed with bobbing motor boats. His wife Lucia commands the kitchen, and sons Alessandro and Francesco also chip in. Lucia’s menu focuses on lake fish – no seafood in sight. It’s one of a handful of places to sample *sisàm*, a sweet and sour medieval method for preserving alborella fish, accompanied by chunky polenta blocks striped with black grill marks. Order it on its own or enjoy it as part of the “grande misto”, a generous sampler of all the fish starters. Classic house-made pasta dishes include “spaghetti con le agole” (a potent salt-

preserved fish) and maccheroni coated in hearty lake fish ragú. It's difficult to resist the allure of a mixed grill or fry of lake fish. Though if you're sharing the "grande misto", followed by a round of pasta, just one main course will suffice.

Trattoria Clementina, Rovizza di Sirmione

Roman ruins, a 13th-century fortress and thermal springs are among the sights that render Sirmione one of Lake Garda's must-visit destinations. Like in most well-trodden towns, eating well in Sirmione can be tricky. If you're not up for Michelin dining at Tancredi or La Speranzina and open a short detour, head to Rovizza, a village still within the municipality of Sirmione, for a meal at Trattoria Clementina. It's about a 10-minute drive from Sirmione's historic centre (and even quicker from the Peschiera del Garda train station – there's a taxi stand outside). The menu mingles land- and lake-based dishes steeped in local Brescian customs. Standout starters include beef tartare with onions, capers and mustard, as well as a lake fish trio featuring smoked trout carpaccio. Among the pasta highlights are capunsei (bread gnocchi dressed in butter, cheese, and sage) and house-made tagliolini with tench, a freshwater fish.

Tancredi, Sirmione

Michelin enthusiasts won't want to miss this newly starred lakefront restaurant in Sirmione's city centre. Chef Vincenzo Manicone executes his thoughtful, creative cuisine with a waste-free, sustainable approach, utilising every last bit of an ingredient and delivering bold flavours in the process. His signature King Crab Club Sandwich comprises steamed claws and legs instead of poultry and is finished with a mayonnaise made from oil extracted from the crab carapaces. Crispy waffles made with the same crab oil replace the typical "toast" layers. Zucca, Zucca, Zucca pays tribute to the Hokkaido squash in all its forms, from crème brûlée pulp to a gelato using the seed oil to crispy chips made from the peel. The terrace sits comfortably beside a daintily lush garden fringing the lake. If you can't secure an outdoor table, the dining room's floor-to-ceiling windows keep the lake in sight as you dine.

Peter Brunel Ristorante Gourmet, Arco

Located inland among the hills of Trentino, this Michelin-starred restaurant reflects not only its namesake chef's innovative cuisine, but also his fondness for art and music. Brunel creates an all-sensory experience that begins upon arrival: patrons can sip an aperitivo in the elegantly inviting welcome area before taking a seat in one of the dining room's teal velvet armchairs beside a wall of windows that look out to the leafy "dehors" garden. The Dolomites-born Brunel opened his restaurant following a star-studded career that took him across Italy. His menu fuses local heritage, particularly that of his native Trentino, with influences from Japan and Peruvian Nikkei cuisine. One of his signatures, the nigiri foie gras, is modelled on sushi and composed of roasted foie gras layered over rice and finished with algae and pisco. This spring, to mark his upcoming 50th birthday, he launched pb 50, a monthly rotating tasting menu that traces his nearly 30-year journey and the dishes that have defined it.

Osteria Le Servite, Arco

For a less formal bite in Arco, the idyllic Osteria Le Servite is housed in a former convent and situated in a vast vineyard that stretches towards snow-capped peaks on the horizon. The menu champions local ingredients and customs with dishes like bigoli pasta with lake sardines alongside creative selections like braised pork cheek gyoza or beet risotto with local raspberry vinegar, smoked straciatella and olive powder. In addition to à la carte, two tasting menus are available: Fire and Water. The extensive wine list is Trentino-centric, but Lombardy and Veneto also show strongly. Guests savour their meals in the snug, wood-accented indoor dining room or outside beneath the leafy pergola beside the vines.

Osteria dell'Orologio, Salò

Tucked into the cobbled streets of Salò on the lake's southwestern shore, the Giacomini family opened their beloved osteria in 1996. Dark wood accents and blue and white majolica tiles enhance the feels-like-home ambience, a cosy backdrop for feasting on dishes that exemplify Brescia's gastronomic heritage. On the menu is spit-cooked meat, a Brescian staple, as well as tortelli filled with bagòss, a bold saffron-flavoured cheese. "Luccio alla Gardesana", or Garda-style pike fish (with fragrant herbs, olive oil, and white wine), is served with creamy polenta, and bigoli pasta is tossed with lake sardines. The impressive wine list counts over 800 labels, with several from Lombardy.

Osteria Dalie e Fagioli, Manerba del Garda

Chef Fabio Mazzolini's Michelin star-studded career takes an unexpected, but fitting turn at Dalie e Fagioli. At this agriturismo, he redirects his attention from refinement to a more laid-back, though no less inventive, take on the local cuisine, reimagining classics with a playful twist. His experimental yet approachable menu surprises and delights, staying true to conventions without compromising on creativity. Spit-prepared meat, a cornerstone of the Brescian kitchen, is concealed inside pillowy tortelli resting atop a bed of polenta. Beef tartare packs a punch from curry mayonnaise and green apple purée, and lasagna is layered with radicchio, sweet potatoes, sage and smoked scamorza cheese. Various green plants enhance the lively, rustic ambience with wood floors and exposed beams, rendering the space even more homey.

Agriturismo San Michele Cà del Tocio, Malcesine

Nestled into the green hills above Malcesine and beneath the jagged slopes of Monte Baldo, this agriturismo boasts views just as memorable as its meals. For dinner, it's best to book a table before dusk to watch the sun radiate an orange glow as it slips behind the peaks along the opposite shore. Though the lake remains in view from the wooden patio, the menu draws mainly from the land and Trentino traditions, such as delicate carne salada carpaccio, strangolapreti (jumbo spinach and breadcrumb dumplings doused in a

sage butter sauce) and rabbit with speck and Asiago cheese. Less than ten minutes walking from the Monte Baldo funicular mid-station, it's a convenient spot to refuel either before or after a ride up the mountain.