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Swap Ascona for Positano

Positano, the charming, sun-soaked vertical Italian town on the Amalfi Coast, is on everyone's bucket list. Which is reason enough, unless you enjoy hearing English spoken at every trattoria (not to mention sitting bumper-to-bumper at the beach), to avoid it during the high season.

Consider [Ascona](#), Switzerland's secret slice of Mediterranean on upper Lake Maggiore. Like Amalfi's Positano, this tiny town in the Italian-speaking canton of Ticino (just 20 minutes from Italy) is ritzy and very much about enjoying the balmy climes by the water. After a few days of living like an Italian on Swiss soil, I noticed that Ascona has an attractive dual nature: snow-capped mountains fraternizing with palm trees and vineyards, bougainvillea-rimmed hotels with snappy service, mild-mannered (at least the ones I encountered) Vespa drivers who stop for (and often greet) pedestrians.

It's la dolce vita, Swiss-ified. You can swim, water ski or paddle board. There are wildflower-filled alpine trails for hiking and mountain biking. And, of course, boating. Take a hop-on, hop-off-style day [cruise](#). Rent a motorboat. Better yet, book a skipper to ferry you to lunch at the glamorous [Ristorante Milano](#) in Pallanza and then on for sightseeing in the [Borromean Islands](#). This way, you can relax with a few bottles of the region's acclaimed white merlot.



Colorful buildings line the waterfront of Lake Maggiore in Ascona, Switzerland, a short hop from the Italian border.

From Ascona, you can day-trip to the [Cardada Cimetta](#) cable car or the lost-in-time village of the [Valle Verzasca](#), known for its glacially chilled emerald-green river, a star summer attraction.

There are many gastronomic restaurants in Ascona. But the best meals are the simple ones, grilled meats and fish served with crisp local wine. At [La Cassetta](#), a historic stone lake house, classic Mediterranean fare is made more delightful by the al fresco setting. The rooftop restaurant at the stylish [Art Hotel Riposo](#) serves pastas and proteins whimsically dressed with terrace-grown daisies and herbs.

Grottos are a Ticinese signature. These rustic outdoor restaurants are all about hearty local flavors: boards of cheese and air-dried salami, vitello tonnato, polenta infused with savory mushrooms and pork shank. [Bed-and-breakfast](#)-style lodging is plentiful in Ascona. But as a stand-in for Positano, an ideal choice is the five-star [Hotel Eden Roc](#). You'll have spacious rooms, a serious spa (hydropools, sanarium, Kneipp path, Finnish sauna), a private beach (the hotel has its own Riva Aquarama boat), use of hotel Vespas and sommelier-led wine tastings under the vine-covered pergola.

Through July 1, [JazzAscona](#) will have 200 free concerts along the lakefront, a European homage to New Orleans-style music.

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