



THE CENTRAL ITALIAN ALPS

LOMBARDY

Spectacular Alpine passes bordering Switzerland, the Italian lake district and the lowlands of the Po Valley all characterise the wonderful Central Italian Alps.

From the eastern coast of Lake Maggiore, taking in Lake Como and Lecco to the dramatic high cliffs on the western coastline of Lake Garda, the Central Italian Alps feature some of the best road touring and tourist-friendly regions of Italy.

WHERE IS IT?

The Central Italian Alps consists of a single region, Lombardy. Lombardy stretches from the border with Piedmont in the west at Lake Maggiore, to the shores of Lake Garda in the east. The northern Alpine border is shared with Switzerland whilst, in the south, Lombardy extends beyond Milan and Brescia into the extensive flatlands of the Po Valley.

Lombardy is certainly a region of contrasts, offering motorcyclists a rich choice of spectacular mountain passes and roads, beautiful lakeland scenery, cities rich in culture and history plus it's a region with a strong motorcycle background, with MV Augusta and Moto Guzzi being local residents.

Ask a group of bikers to name their favourite Alpine passes and you can be sure that either the Splügen or Stelvio will feature. Topping out at 2,757m above sea level, the Stelvio is the highest paved pass in Italy and second highest in the Alps, whilst the Splügen takes an audacious line across and

down vertical precipices complete with balcony sections which were cut from the rock back in 1823 (as shown in the image to the left).

Having travelled extensively by motorcycle over the past 40 years, I can tell you now, one of the finest motorcycle day rides in the world is to be found in Lombardy – with a brief detour over the border into Switzerland.

Starting off at the Splügen Pass and calling it a day at the Tonale Pass, where Lombardy meets Trentino, the route is 176 miles of Alpine and motorcycle heaven. I guarantee that you'll spend the day gasping at the natural scenery, which makes this journey such a pleasure, and in awe of the stunning engineering accomplishments which have made this ride possible.

I've ridden this route many a time and I never tire of the ride. Starting off at the Splügen Pass, you'll find yourself wanting to stop every 200 metres or so to check out the stunning line of the road and the precipitous drops down into the valley.

After a brief stop to catch your breath and a coffee in Chiavenna it's a quick blast into the Bregaglia Valley and over the Maloja Pass into St Moritz before turning south east back into Italy on the road to Tirano.

At Lake Bianco, under the glaciated 4,048m peak of Piz Bernina, you take the mountain road over to the Italian ski resort of Livigno where I like to stop and fuel up with another Italian coffee.

From Livigno it's a quick blast back over the Swiss border and down to the village of Stilfs before heading south east to Stilfs and the magnificent north-eastern approach of the Stelvio Pass.