

The Lugano area – a SOTA activator's dream

by Paul HB9DST / AA1MI, Spring 2022

HB/TI-101, HB/TI-102, HB/TI-131, HB/TI-132, HB/TI-136, HB/TI-142, HB/TI-146, HB/TI-147, HB/TI-149, HB/TI-150, HB/TI-151, HB/TI-152, HB/TI-153, HB/TI-158, I/LO-244

Lugano in the Italian speaking section of Switzerland, is very popular as a tourist destination. Besides being a fantastic place to spend time, it's a SOTA activator's dream. Anywhere near the city, if you look in any direction at all, you'll see SOTA peak after SOTA peak, and they're all so inviting.



Even more inviting is the fact that all of these summits are possible to reach by the average hiker with no technical skills (climbing/ropes/helmets/etc.) and the trails are very well marked and maintained. They range from the very easy to some that require hiking perhaps 2 hours or a bit more – but all are possible for any activator who has reasonable hiking experience and endurance.

Further, all these summits are accessible with public transportation. If you stay in a hotel in the area, you frequently also get a Ticino Ticket, which allows free travel on local trains and buses (with discounts on cable cars) so you can visit every corner of the southernmost Canton in Switzerland.

Visitors overnighiting in hotels, youth hostels or campsites that take part in the project can get a Ticino Ticket.

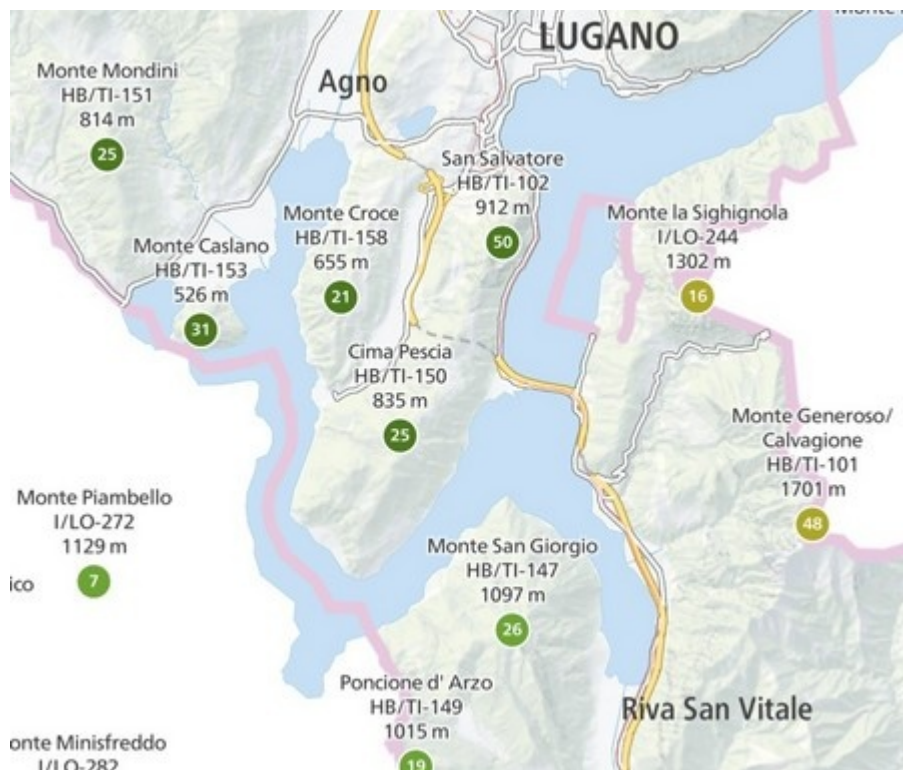
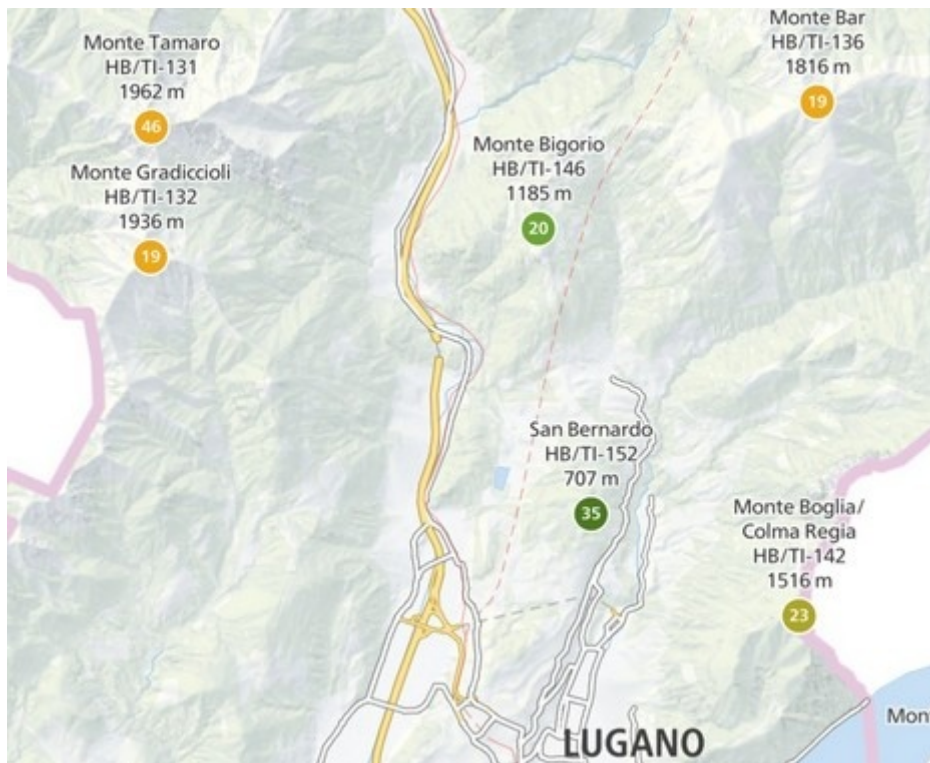
In this respect, I would like to recommend my favorite hotel: the Continental Park Hotel Lugano. It is a 3 minute walk to the Lugano main train station and the central bus station. If you are traveling with public transport, as I do, it is incredibly convenient. Booking ahead you can get prices reasonable by Swiss standards, the staff is friendly, the breakfast buffet is great, and there's even an outdoor swimming pool. Keep in mind too that there are luggage lockers at the train station for the day of your arrival/departure.

Note that for summits where you hike up, I am not including maps of the trails here. Instead, make sure you go to the SOTLAS website, which contains a wealth of information about each summit. You might not be aware, but on SOTLAS if you select Swisstopo as the mapping source, you can set the checkbox for “activation zones” – and these are then displayed in yellow. If you allow your smartphone location permission for the web browser, a blue dot (not shown below) indicates your exact position on the map and you can see immediately if you are within the activation zone.



Another tip: if you are traveling on public transport, be sure to download the SBB Mobile app provided free of charge by the Swiss Railways. It provides schedules for all trains, buses, boats, cable cars, etc. You can set it up for English, as well. You can get the latest timetable wherever you are. A convenient feature is the “Take me home” button – program it for the train or bus stop nearest to your hotel, then when on the road just tap this button and the fastest connections show up on your screen. I use it all the time!

HB/TI summits covered in this report:



1. Ride-up summits and easier hikes near Lugano

Let's start with the easiest summits – those where you can ride up the whole way, and then continue with those that involve only a modest hike.

HB/TI-102 San Salvatore



Located just south of the city center, this is one of the most famous landmarks of Lugano, and you can see this mountain with its radio/TV tower from virtually everywhere in the region. By far the easiest way up is with the famous funicular, which you board at Lugano Paradiso. The railway is divided into two sections; the first has a gradient up to 37%, and the second up to 61%, and you change in the middle station. Holders of the Ticino Ticket get a slight discount (cost is CHF 24 round trip in 2022).

The summit area, including a restaurant and a church, gets very busy, but you should not have any trouble finding a corner to erect a mast and set up an antenna. Of course, there are outstanding views in any direction.

HB/TI-101 Monte Generoso

After San Salvatore, the best known mountain in the Lugano area is Monte Generoso, which you can also see from the city by looking across the lake and to the south. You can hike up from the lakeside, but almost everybody takes the cog railway. Starting on the lake at the town of Capolago, the round-trip fare costs CHF 68 (a 30% less with the Ticino Ticket).



A highlight is a modern building called the “stone flower”, which has a restaurant and function rooms. On a beautiful summer day, there will be tons of visitors, but even so you will likely be able to find an out-of-the-way corner to set up your mast and antenna.

I/LO-244 Monte la Sighignola

On the map, you can see that LO-244 is not far at all from TI-101 – as the crow flies. And while it is a drive-up summit with plenty of parking, you approach from the north side, approaching from Lanzo d'Intelvi. But that's not a short, quick drive at all! It is also possible to hike up to the summit on the Swiss (south) side from the village of Arogno (see SOTLAS).



On the actual summit, there are a couple of benches that make a convenient operating position, but there will likely be lots of people.

HB/TI-152 San Bernardo

This is a good option for somebody who wants to do a quick, easy activation without going on a funicular or cog railway. It is located north of the city. Take the bus from the Lugano main station to Comano, Chiesa (or park there). From there, it's an easy 45 minute hike to the church sitting on the summit.



There are numerous benches near the church, some with great views, suitable for an operating position.

HB/TI-151 Monte Mondini

This summit is located to the west of the city. It's a relatively nondescript but easy activation, good if you're collecting uniques. Here is one possible route: from Lugano station, take the local train S60 to Magliaso, then take the bus to Curio, Molino di Curio. From there, it's an easy 1 hour hike to the summit.



The activation zone is in a wooded area with no views, and unlike almost all the other summits in this report, there is nothing special about it.

HB/TI-158 Monte Croce

This is another summit that is quite easy but does not offer much in terms of views. It is located west of the city, and from Locarno station you take the bus to Agra (note: the bus stop at Locarno station is not the main bus station but instead is located on the west side of the station, follow the signs closely for Bus 436, it can be confusing).



The summit area is simply a wooded area with no real charm. But if you need another unique, it's quite easy and quick to get to from Lugano.

HB/TI-153 Monte Caslano

When traveling by public transport, this summit takes a bit of time, but the effort pays off with some great views. Take the local train from Lugano station to Caslano. From there, the hike is just over an hour to the summit, half of it going through the town. At the summit, there is a small stone building with some railings that make a convenient spot to lash an antenna mast and also a bench to sit on and set up your station.



2. More ambitious hikes – north of Lugano

HB/TI-142 Monte Boglia

When you stand at the Lugano train station and look directly across the lake, the view is dominated on the left side by this mountain. It doesn't seem like you could take public transport very far, but indeed a bus goes quite far up. From the station, take the bus to Brè, Paese; this will involve one transfer to a second bus at Cassarate, Lanchetta.



View from the Lugano train station, Monte Boglia is on the left in the background; the bus travels to a village in the saddle between the two summits.



Panorama view from the summit looking down on Lugano.

The first half of the hike is through a forest area, the second half is in the open above the tree line. The summit itself has a bench, a signpost (where I attached my mast) and a summit cross. The views, as are typical for the summits in the area, are spectacular – and you can get a view of almost all the other SOTAs listed in this document.

HB/TI-136 Monte Bar

This one of my favorite summits in Ticino to bring visitors. Why? Besides a pleasant hike with wonderful views, there is a very modern Alpine hut with a restaurant just before you get to the summit. It's a great place to relax after an activation or have your non-ham guests wait while you head to the summit. You can also get a taste of some interesting local cuisine – one day, my daughter got spaghetti with wild boar sauce. The activation zone is quite large, and you can lash your mast to a signpost. There are, however, no benches or convenient items on which to sit.



With public transport, from the Lugano station take a bus to Tesserete station (the final stop of Bus 461). You have more than enough time for a comfortable transfer to Bus 448, but be sure to get off at Corticiasca, Paese, which is not the last stop. From there, the hike to the summit has an ascent of 820 meters and takes almost 2.5 hours. Going home, there is only one bus per hour, and there are no restaurants to sit at while waiting for the bus, so time things right.

HB/TI-131 Monte Tamaro and HB/TI-132 Monte Gradiccioli

This is a *classic* Ticino ridge hike with much to recommend it and is very popular. Some people do just one or the other activation, but to get both activations in the same day and still have time to catch the cable car down, you will start early and keep moving. Note, this is possible only from April to October when the cable cars are running (please check!).

This is an activation you probably want to do with public transport for at least one section depending on if you take a car and where you park it. These two summits are located midway between Locarno to the north and Lugano to the south. I have always started north and hiked south, just an arbitrary decision. From Lugano, take the local train to Rivera-Bironico. Walk about 15 minutes to the base station for the Mount Tamaro cable car. One way for adults (2022) is CHF 20, and there is no mention on the website about the Ticino Ticket. It starts operating at 0830 (please verify!). At the summit station there is a restaurant and a large playground area for young children.

Now you hike to the summit. The ascent is 500 meters, and it will take you just shy of 2 hours. On the way, you will pass the Church of Santa Maria degli Angeli,, designed by world-renowned architect Mario Botta and with paintings by Enzo Cucchi. This fascinating building is a masterpiece of contemporary architecture in the middle of the mountains.



The activation zone for Monte Tamaro is relatively large, but everybody (and there will be lots of people) congregate around the summit cross. There might be a few places to lash a mast, but you won't be on the top of the summit. For this photo, it was a foggy day: few people, but no views.



Now it's along the ridge to the second summit, Monte Gradiccioli. It's literally follow your nose, can't possibly get lost. On this segment, you drop down about 250 meters and then ascent another 250 meters; the stretch is 2.75 km and it takes an average hiker about 1 hour 15 minutes. At the top there is a summit cross and a signpost where you can lash your mast. On a nice day, again expect lots of people.



After this activation, it's time to go home. Continue heading south along the ridge, your destination is Monte Lema with its cable car. The hike is 6.75 km long (make sure to have enough water in the hot summer months!) and will take just shy of 2.5 hours.

The cable car fare is CHF 20, 20% discount with the Ticino Ticket. You get dropped off at the Miglieglia (Funivia) bus stop. The bus then takes you to the Magliaso, Stazione train station, where you catch the local train to Lugano. Important: the cable car stops operation at 1715 (1745 in high season, July and August), so allow plenty of time to get there.

HB/TI-146 Monte Bigorio

This summit is also midway between Lugano and Locarno, but I decided to include it in this report anyway. There's nothing really special about this summit unless you're looking for another unique. The ascent is almost 600 meters and it will take you a bit over 2 hours to get up there.

Getting to the trail head on public transport takes a bit more time than other summits, whether coming south from Locarno or going north from Lugano. From the Lugano station, take the local train to Rivera-Bironico, then change to the Bus 454 to take you to Rivera-Bironico. The entire trip will take you 40 minutes, which isn't actually that long in this neck of the woods.



The activation zone is relatively large, but don't expect to find any convenient places to sit or lash your mast. It's not a summit that lots of hikers go to (unless they're SOTA activators).

3. More ambitious hikes – south of Lugano

HB/TI-150 Cima Pescia

The easiest way to get to this nondescript summit is from the north where a bus goes quite high. However, from the south side, you start in Morcote, which is one of the most beautiful villages in Switzerland. In fact, the picturesque village is part of the Swiss federal Inventory of sites worthy of protection. With its characteristic small alleys, the arcades of old patrician homes, valuable architectural monuments and its natural beauty, Morcote is considered “the Pearl of Ceresio”.



You can get to Morcote by bus or, on some days, by boat from Lugano (check the schedule). The hike to the summit is more than 4 km long with an ascent of 570 meters; it takes an average hiker about 2 hours. The summit / activation zone is nothing special at all, just sitting in a wooded area with no views.

The views do come, however, on the way to the bus stop at Carona, Paese. You will pass by the San Grato Park, which on its website says, “With a surface area of 200,000 m², Parco San Grato boasts the largest collection of azaleas, rhododendrons and conifers, in terms of variety and quantity, in the whole Insubria region.”

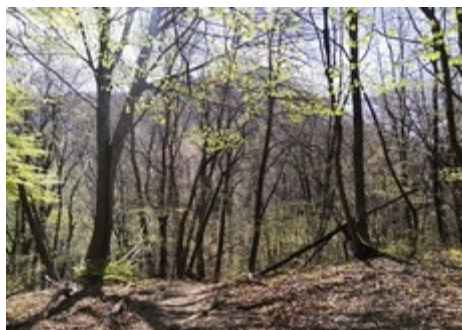
If you hike from the summit directly to the bus stop at Carona it is an easy 2.5 km. From that point, the bus takes you to Lugano Paradiso station (the base station of the HB/TI-102 San Salvatore funicular), where you can get a local train to Lugano.

HB/TI-147 Monte San Giorgio and HB/TI-149 Poncione d' Arzo

I put these two together because they are near each other and you get to both of them on the same bus. From Lugano, take the train to Mendrisio, where you pick up a mini-bus (Bus 526) which has its end station at the Hotel Serpiano. For the activation of HB/TI-149, however, you get off the bus at Meride, Crocefisso. As for the bus, note two things. First, there is a CHF 1.00 surcharge (2022). Second, this bus runs only twice a day – once in the morning (0900 from Mendrisio) and once in the evening (1730 from the Hotel Serpiano). Plan your hike and activations accordingly. It is possible to do both in one day.

Note also that until a few years ago, the Hotel Serpiano operated a private cable car going from Brusino-Arsizio (on the lake close to the village of Bonera). The summit station would then be a 1 km hike to the hotel. When I wrote an email to the hotel and asked if they intend to put the cable car into operation again, they replied, “Until now, we do not have information about it, so we do not know yet when it will open again.” That’s really a shame; not only was the cable car ride fun, it gave you considerable more flexibility as to when you could arrive and leave.

So, back to the bus. After getting off at Crocefisso, head southwest on the well-marked rocky trail to the summit. The first half is a slight grade going up; the last half is a zig-zag up a steep slope. The following photo shows the view after about the halfway point of the hike – where you can see the steep slope awaiting you.



When you finish the steep zig-zag section, you are in the activation zone with a large stone table and bench. However, this area is popular with other hikers and you won't be alone. You're better advised to continue for another 250 meters to the actual highest point. There is a signpost to which you can lash your mast, plenty of rocks to sit on, and far fewer people to deal with.



On TI-149

After the activation, you retrace your steps. A few meters before the bus stop, the marked trail heads north and you soon begin the ascent to HB/TI-147 San Georgio. The total hike from 147 to 149 is about 5.5 km, when you get to the mid point at the bus stop there is once again an ascent of 500 meters, and the hike will take an average person roughly 2.5 hours.

You will find this summit very busy, because many people who stay at the hotel (or park there) make this hike. Even so, there is plenty of room in the activation zone to put up a mast. Two good options are on the north side of the stone building on the summit, where there is a fence good for lashing a mast. You might even get lucky and snag one of the two benches on the lake side of the activation zone – what a view!



On TI-147

After the activation, it's somewhat more than an hour to the Hotel Serpiano and the bus stop. Be sure to plan enough time, because if you miss that 1730 bus there are few options. Go early enough, and enjoy a beer on the patio while waiting for the bus. Or why not do what I did – have a relaxing activation on one day, stay at the hotel overnight, and have another relaxed activation the next day. It was a very pleasant experience!

