

# Rocca Scaligera

SIRMIONE, ITALY

*Italy's Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities preserves Rocca Scaligera for visitors.*

## VISITORS MIGHT FEEL LIKE

they're blasting back in time as they cross the drawbridge to Rocca Scaligera, one of Italy's best-preserved fortresses. The Scaligeri family (which ruled Verona in the late 13th and 14th centuries) ordered its construction in 1277 to protect the village and control commerce on Lake Garda. When Rocca Scaligera was completed in 1383, the area was an important point of defense for ruling nobles, who housed military supplies and their extensive fleet in the man-made harbor.

Various ruling parties further strengthened the fortress until the 16th century, when military defense shifted to another town nearby. Nobody ever took up residence in Rocca Scaligera (though prisoners were often held in the basement); it continued to serve as a port and storage depot for the town of Sirmione until the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities inherited it in the 1900s.

Today, travelers can explore the castle's courtyard, walk along its crenellated stone walls and climb 150 wooden steps to the top of one of the three towers. Those who are able to make it up are rewarded with panoramic views of Lago di Garda, the Monte Baldo mountain range in the distance, and classic wooden boats bobbing in the harbor below.

This straight-out-of-a-fairy-tale castle is a pristine glimpse into northern Italy's past—and one of the world's finest remaining examples of medieval port fortification.

Rocca Scaligera sits on the southern shores of Lago di Garda in the peninsular resort town of **Sirmione**, a two-hour drive east of **Milan**. The castle is closed on Mondays. You can buy tickets in person only or by booking a boat tour through a local company like **Consorzio Motoscafisti Sirmione**, which includes a stop at the castle. Sirmione is also known for its pedestrians-only center, thermal baths (don't miss **Terme di Sirmione**) and the ancient **Grottoes of Catullus**. Stay at the **Grand Hotel Terme**, a lakefront retreat and spa just outside the town center.

Pleasure boats now dock in a harbor that once protected a medieval military fleet.