

LAGO DI COMO  
ITALIA

A WORLD WITHIN A WORLD

# Travel Journal

*10 itineraries in the  
province of Como*



*[www.lakecomo.it](http://www.lakecomo.it)*



Provincia di Como

# Introduction

What's beautiful and interesting to see on Lake Como?

This question is often asked at Tourist Information Offices in the Province of Como by the numerous tourists that choose Lake Como for their holidays or even a short break.

Along with the various publications already available, there's now a new one:

"Travel Journal - 10 itineraries in the Province of Como". This booklet is the result of all the work on hospitality the Tourism Sector of the Provincial Administration of Como has been carrying out for years at its Tourist Information Offices in Como-Bellagio- Menaggio; offices that each day welcome hundreds of visitors or receive e-mails requesting concise but complete holiday suggestions. Look through it with all the interest and attention it deserves and you'll no doubt find something that suits you and your children or any friends you may choose to spend your holiday with in our province.

*We'd love to know what you think about this new brochure and receive any feedback or suggestions you may have on how to improve it. Please send your comments to the following e-mail address: lakecomo@tin.it*

## Useful numbers



### IAT - TOURIST INFORMATION OFFICES

Como: piazza Cavour, 17

Tel. +39.031269712 – fax +39.031240111 - lakecomo@tin.it

Bellagio: piazza Mazzini (Imbarcadero)

Tel./fax +39.031950204 - prombell@tin.it

Menaggio: piazza Garibaldi, 8

Tel./fax +39.034432924 - infomenaggio@tiscali.it

Lecco: piazza XX Settembre, 23

Tel. +39.0341295720/721 - fax +39.0341295730 - info.turismo@provincia.lecco.it

Campione d'Italia: Corso Italia, 2

Tel. +41.91.6495051 – fax +41.91.6499178 - aptcampione@ticino.com



Provincia di Como

### PROVINCE OF COMO

#### Tourism Sector

Via Borgovico, 171 - 22100 Como

Tel. +39.0312755595 - Fax +39.0312755569

www.lakecomo.it - infoturismo@provincia.como.it

### NAVIGAZIONE LAGO DI COMO (NLC)

Via per Cernobbio, 18 - 22100 Como

Tel. +39.031579211 - Fax +39.031570080 - www.navigazioneelaghi.it - infocomo@navigazioneelaghi.it

### ASF AUTOLINEE (urban and extra-urban bus lines)

Via Asiago, 16/18 - 22100 Como

Tel. +39.031247111 - Fax +39.031340900 - www.asfautolinee.it - info@asfautolinee.it

### COMO BRUNATE FUNICULAR RAILWAY

Piazza De Gasperi, 4 - 22100 Como

Tel. +39.031303608 - Fax +39.031302592 - www.funicolarecomo.it - info@funicolarecomo.it

### AREGNO-PIGRA CABLE CAR

Via Spluga - 22010 Argegno

Tel. +39.031821344

# *Index*

1 - On foot around the streets of the Walled City	pag. 5
2 - A walk along the lake front	pag. 9
3 - A boat trip around the First Basin	pag. 14
4 - Visit to the Mid-Lake area and its gardens	pag. 19
5 - Lenno and the Sacred Mountain of Ossuccio	pag. 23
6 - Nature and Art in the Intelvi Valley	pag. 26
7 - From Lake Como to Lake Ceresio	pag. 30
8 - A day in North Lake Como	pag. 34
9 - By car from Bellagio to the Cyclists' Sanctuary	pag. 37
10 - The Treasures of the Larian Triangle	pag. 40

# *Key*



LIDOS  
& BEACHES



NO CAR ACCESS



PANORAMIC POINT



FERRYBOAT



CAR



DISABLED



FUNICULAR  
RAILWAY OR  
CABLE CAR



PICNIC AREAS



ON FOOT



FAMILY



BICYCLE



BUS



ACTIVE TOURISM  
& SPORT





*This easy itinerary will help visitors discover the city of Como; the historical, cultural and economic "capital" of the region. It will introduce them in detail to the Walled City, its numerous monuments and buildings and its most charming parts. The Walled City is a limited traffic zone, so it's ideal for families with children.*

**Departure point:** Piazza Cavour, Como

**Duration:** 1 hour 30 minutes + any stops

## On foot around the streets of the Walled City



To the north Como, which has a population of around 85,000, overlooks the lake, whilst to the east and west it is protected by the peaks of Spina Verde and the mountains of Brunate. Its origins date back to the 1st century BC when the Romans founded Novum Comum. The so-called "new" city had a typical Roman urban layout with a grid of perpendicular roads and solid walls on all sides, a layout that is still recognizable, in part, in the old town centre. A walking itinerary to discover the heart of the city can start from the lakeside square **Piazza Cavour**, created in 1871 when the old port was filled in. Turning away from the lake, take colonnaded Via Plinio to the left of Hotel Barchetta as far as **Piazza Duomo**, the city's civic and religious centre in the Middle Ages. Here we find the Municipal Tower, flanked by the Broletto and the town's majestic cathedral.

### CATHEDRAL

(foundations 1396 - dome completed 1740). Although built in different periods and styles, ranging from



late Gothic to Rococo, the harmony of its architecture is admirable. The façade dates from the mid-15th century and the decorations on the façades and portals, mainly the work of the Rodari brothers who were active between the late 15th and early 16th century, are particularly beautiful. Of particular note is Porta della Rana on the northern flank. By the front doors, the two podia with the statues of the Latin writers and illustrious sons of Como Pliny the Elder and Pliny the Younger are late Gothic in origin. Although pagan, they are situated to the side of the main portal. Inside, the Gothic-Renaissance central nave and aisles lead to the late 16th-century presbytery. Towering above it is a majestic cupola built around 1730 based on a design by Filippo Juvarra. The works of art housed inside include the wood altar of Saint Abbundius, a "Sacred Conversation" by Luini, a standard by Morazzone and nine 16th-century tapestries. The temple is 87 metres long and the cupola reaches a height of 78 metres.

The cathedral is open every day from 7.30 am to 7.00 pm.

### BROLETTO

Built in 1215, this is the ancient town hall that was modified in 1477 to make way for the construction of the cathedral. It still retains beautiful parietal decorations with bands of polychrome marble and its portico was once used for popular assemblies. Today, the hall on the first floor is used as an exhibition space. Next to Broletto is the **Civil Tower** whose bells, which now call the faithful, once called the citizens to attend the assemblies.

From **Piazza Verdi**, which is external to the apses of the cathedral, on the right it is possible to admire the neoclassical façade of the **Teatro Sociale** (Social Theatre) by G. Cusi (1811- 1813), preceded by a pronaos of 6 Corinthian columns.

Beyond the railway line is the soaring white façade of **Palazzo Terragni**, the former Casa del Fascio, a masterpiece of Italian Rationalism designed by Giuseppe Terragni between 1932 and 1936.

## PALAZZO TERRAGNI - former Casa del Fascio

This building is a milestone in modern architecture. Giuseppe Terragni, commissioned to design the seat of the Fascist party in 1932, built a structure that perfectly reconciles functionalism and modernity with tradition and classicism. For example, its position next to the city's cultural pole (the theatre) and above all, its religious pole (the cathedral) is symbolic and traditional, whilst the external white marble covering and layout - a perfect parallelepiped - are classical. Terragni also borrowed from Italian Renaissance architecture the idea of an inner courtyard around which the entire layout develops. All



these elements are however reinterpreted in a Rationalist and very personal key.

The extensive use of glazing and the reinforced concrete of the supporting structure are modern, as is the fact that all 4 façades are different, something due also to their different exposure to sunlight. The main façade deserves a particular mention; it looks like an extremely modern "loggia" consisting of 20 empty rectangles that frame a series of openings, windows and balconies and underline the different depths of the four floors. The loggia contrasts with the full façade on the right. Terragni intended this space to be used for a propaganda decoration, thanks to the use of photomechanical panels (now housed in the Art Gallery) that in fact, were never displayed. Terragni left nothing to chance with regard to the interiors either and himself designed the walls, doors and handles, skirting boards, floors, fixtures and fittings, lamps, tables, desks, shelving and chairs.

*The former Casa del Fascio now houses the Provincial Headquarters of the Financial Police, so can only be visited subject to obtaining authorization from the headquarters. For further information on Rationalism, see itinerary 2.*

Turning back towards Piazza Duomo, turn left and take Via Vittorio Emanuele II, Como's main shopping street and its beating heart. After the junction with Via Indipendenza, on the left is 17th-century **Palazzo Cernuzzi**, seat of Como's town hall since 1853. Inside it is possible to visit a beautiful colonnaded courtyard; indeed a central courtyard is a feature common to many buildings in the old town centre. In some cases, the large front doors conceal authentic treasures with marble columns, frescoes, stuccoes, gardens and nymphaeums waiting to be discovered by tourists who aren't in too much of a hurry. Opposite the entrance to the town hall, visitors can admire the Romanesque apse of the **Basilica of Saint Fedele**, which is topped by an elegant loggia and flanked by a historiated Romanesque portal.

## BASILICA OF SAINT FEDELE

Of ancient origin (6th century) and rebuilt in the 11th century in Romanesque style, the church has a



very unusual layout with a short central nave and side aisles, three apsidal conches laid out as a three-leaf clover and an ambulatory that, from the side aisles, continues ideally to embrace the apses. The façade on Piazza San Fedele is a 1914 refurbishment that incorporates a Renaissance rose window. Particularly beautiful are the external apse (Via Vittorio Emanuele) with an upper loggia on small columns in onion stone and the annexed "Portale del Drago" (Dragon portal), a gable-topped portal that houses a Romanesque sculptural masterpiece. Two scenes are represented - "Daniel in the lion's den" and "The Angel bringing Habakkuk" - as well as zoomorphic, phytomorphic and symbolic motives such as a

Chimera, a mermaid, a dog pointing a hare and several dragons. Inside it is possible to admire traces of the ancient decorations, including a 13th century fresco of the Blessed Virgin Mary in a mandorla.

*The basilica is open every day from 8:00 to 12:00 am and from 3:30 to 7:00 pm.*

 Access only from Via Vittorio Emanuele.

After visiting the church, take Via Vittorio Emanuele again as far as Piazza Medaglie d'Oro where the P. Giovio Archaeological Museum and the History Museum can be found.

## THE CIVIC MUSEUMS OF COMO

### P. Giovio Archaeological Museum



*Partial disabled access*

Housed in a beautiful 16th-century building, renovated at the end of the 18th century, its artefacts and collections narrate the history of Como from its origins to the 6th century AD. The Prehistoric and Proto-historic sections are extremely beautiful, in particular the artefacts that refer to the Culture of Golasecca, and the Roman section.

### G. Garibaldi History Museum (piazza Medaglie d'Oro)



*Partial disabled access*

The beautiful rooms in this building owned by the Olginati, a noble local family, house arms, paintings, uniforms and other items that narrate the history of Como and the Italian Risorgimento (anti-Austrian insurgence in 1848, Battle of San Fermo in 1859 and Giuseppe Garibaldi's stay). Another section bears witness to the products and quality of life on the lake over the last three centuries through the clothes, accessories and artisan artefacts, such as lace and bobbin lace, on display.

### Palazzo Volpi Civic Art Gallery (via Diaz)



*Partial disabled access*

The museum houses works of art dating from the 7th to the 21st century. Of particular interest are the mediaeval section with its precious sculptural and pictorial artefacts from several of the city's religious buildings, the 16th-century art gallery and the floor dedicated to the 20th century, with particular reference to the drawings of the Futurist Antonio Sant'Elia and the abstract works of the "Gruppo Como" group of artists.

### Volta Temple (viale Marconi)



This beautiful neoclassical building, constructed in 1927 to commemorate the centenary of the death of Alessandro Volta, is entirely dedicated to the illustrious Como-born physicist who was famous above all for having invented the battery, although he made numerous other contributions to the field of science. It houses many appliances, machines and instruments, as well as personal items belonging to the scientist.

<http://museicivici.comune.como.it>



4

Between the two buildings is mediaeval Via Balestra that makes it possible to glimpse the Roman section of the Archaeological Museum and leads to the south-eastern corner of the town walls where one of the three surviving mediaeval towers, **San Vitale Tower** (14th cent.), stands.

Turning back along Via Vittorio Emanuele, turn left onto Via Indipendenza and Via Pantera, as far as **Piazza San Fedele**. The square is one of the most charming parts of Como. Until the 19th century it was where the town's food market was held and is now a popular meeting place. What stands out here are some 15th and 16th century Renaissance houses with an exposed wood cantilever structure filled in with terracotta bricks laid out in a herringbone pattern. Continue by turning right and then left onto Via Adamo del Pero, Via Rovelli and **Via Cesare Cantù**. On this road, at no. 52, there is a building with beautiful graffiti decorations by a very young Antonio Sant'Elia, a Futurist architect who lived here. Worthy of note on the left are the façade of the **Liceo Volta** (Volta high school), preceded by a beautiful portico with eight late Roman cipollino marble columns (from the lost baptistery of San Giovanni in the atrium). Today, all that exists of the ancient Augustinian monastery (13th cent.) is the **Church of Saint Cecilia**, a Baroque jewel incorporated in the building. In the 19th century the remaining part of the complex was transformed by the neoclassical architect Simone Cantoni, to house a high school.

The avenue ends in the imposing mass of **Porta Torre** (1192) (photo 5). These are the best preserved remains of the mediaeval town wall commissioned by the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa to protect Como after the destruction by the Milanese of the Roman walls in 1127.

The tower, which is in Moltrasio stone, is 40 metres tall and has a large access arch topped by eight smaller arches on the northern side.

On the southern side, the side exposed to enemy incursions, it has two smaller arches.



5

## The War of the Ten Years and the Palio del Baradello



6

Whilst undergoing great political and commercial expansion, Milan began a dispute with Como, which led to a ten-year war that ended with the destruction of the town on Lake Como (1127).

With the descent into Italy of Frederick I of Swabia, the locals saw the opportunity to forge an alliance to vindicate and free themselves from Milanese rule.

In 1159 Frederick Barbarossa came to Como and the town welcomed him in jubilation. Tournaments were organized and celebrations held and he was symbolically handed the keys to the town. In exchange, Frederick commissioned the construction of

a defensive wall system, including the walls that surround the centre of Como. To this day, in September the town celebrates the triumphal entrance of the Emperor through the historical commemoration of the **Palio del Baradello**. (see box hereunder).

Beyond Porta Torre, there is a long tree-lined avenue from where it is possible to admire a long stretch of wall that culminates, to the east with the aforementioned San Vitale Tower and to the west with Gattoni Tower. A lively street market is held along here every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday (see box).

Diverting slightly from the itinerary, from Gattoni Tower in just a few minutes, by crossing Via Lucini and Roosevelt, it is possible to visit Como's Romanesque masterpiece, the **Basilica of Saint Abbondio**, an 11th-century church founded by the Cluny Benedictine monks. It has two bell-towers, a nave and four aisles and a deep choir decorated in the 14th century with a beautiful cycle of frescoes by the Lombard Giotto school portraying episodes of the Life of Christ.

Returning to Via Cesare Cantù, turn onto the second street on the left, Via Giovio. After a few dozen metres, at the junction with Via Diaz, is Palazzo Volpi that houses the **Municipal Art Gallery** (see box). From here continue by taking **Via Volta** on the right, once the heart of noble life in Como with its beautiful neoclassical buildings whose doors conceal sunny courtyards and lush gardens. In one of these buildings, at no. 60-62, the physicist Alessandro Volta was born in 1745 (not open to the public). At the junction with Via Cinque Giornate turn right and after the junction with Via Diaz take the first road on the left, **Via Vittani**. This is one of the most interesting and best preserved parts of the town. Due to its proximity to the port and trade, it was chosen by the Romans to build a theatre, which in the Middle Ages became the headquarters of the Vittani family (no. 14-16-22) that for many years fought the Rusca family for the rule of the town. In the 15th and 16th centuries sumptuous Renaissance buildings were built here (no. 33 has a characteristic fresco of a damsel looking out of a window).

A walk around the narrow streets of the old town centre ends in **Piazza Volta** with its decorated buildings, its cafés and above all, the monument to the town's most illustrious son Alessandro Volta.

## EVENTS

**Easter Fair** (from Maundy Thursday to Easter Monday): a market selling all kinds of goods and food delicacies along the mediaeval walls.

**Swing Crash Festival** (second half of June): a festival celebrating swing music and culture with concerts and dancing.

**"Como Città della Musica" Festival** (first half of July): music, shows and dancing in various parts of the city.

**Feast of Saint Abbondio** (from 31 August): a feast in honour of the patron saint with local cuisine, a livestock exhibition and entertainment for young and old alike.

**Palio del Baradello** (1st and 2nd week of September): a medieval reenactment event with competitions and a parade in period costume.

**Teatro Sociale Season** (from October to May): operatic, symphonic and light music, dance and theatre.

## MARKETS

**General** (Tuesday and Thursday mornings, Saturday all day) street market in Viale Battisti, Cattaneo and Varese.

**Food** (Tuesday and Thursday mornings, Saturday all day) indoor market in via Mentana.



*This itinerary will help visitors discover the lake front of Como and its beautiful villas, architectural itineraries and fantastic panoramic views. Although it is an urban itinerary, given its length we recommend wearing appropriate shoes. For convenience, it has been divided into two parts.*

**Departure point:** Piazza Cavour, Como

## A walk along the lake front



### FROM PIAZZA CAVOUR TO VILLA OLMO (1.5 km)

From Piazza Cavour, the ancient port filled in in the mid-19th century, turn left and follow Lungo Lario Trento. At the public gardens (*kids, there's a park here!*) flank the lake to the **Monument to European Resistance** (1983) by the sculptor Gianni Colombo on the left. The piece is composed of symbolic ladders, metal plates, on which letters of the heroes of the Resistance are engraved, and stones from Nazi concentration camps and Hiroshima (*kids, feel free to climb the ladders, it won't be seen as a sign of disrespect*). A little further on is the **Monument to Princess Mafalda** of Savoy (2002) by Massimo Clerici, in honour of the member of the Italian royal family who died in the concentration camp of Buchenwald and all women who were victims of Nazi camps.

The building standing before us is **Volta Temple**, a neoclassical building (1927) that houses a small museum dedicated to one of Como's most illustrious sons, Alessandro Volta, inventor of the battery and a great scientist; in his honour, the unit of measure of electrical potential is called the Volt (V).

To the left of Volta Temple, still on the shore of the lake, is the imposing **Monument to the Fallen** (1930-1933) built by Giuseppe Terragni based on a design by Antonio Sant'Elia, a Futurist genius from Como. Inspired by the sketches of this visionary architect, now housed in Como's Civic Art Gallery, Terragni designed a 30-metre reinforced concrete tower covered in blocks of Carso grey marble.

### THE RATIONALIST QUARTER



The Monument to the Fallen can be the starting point for a visit to the so-called **Rationalist Quarter**. In the 1920s and 30s, the area underwent intensive building activity with the contribution of numerous young architects who brought the seeds of Modernism to Italy, re-elaborated them and gave life to the Rationalist style. The most important of these was **Giuseppe Terragni** who between 1927 and 1929 was commissioned to design an apartment building, the **Novocomum** (photo 1 - viale Sinigaglia, 1). The overall layout is simple: a parallelepiped with two lateral wings forming a C shape. Terragni's work shows a juxtaposition of solids and empty spaces. For example, the addition of small iron balconies contrast with the removal, for four floors, of the corners formed by the meeting point of the façades. Cylindrical bodies with large glass windows were wedged into these cavities. At the time the building must have seemed so innovative that it scandalized traditionalists who wanted to demolish it and who nicknamed it the "Transatlantic" due to its curious shape. Also in viale Sinigaglia, at no. 2, is the **former Casa del Balilla** (Fascist youth organisation seat), now the municipal pool. Built based on a design by **Gianni Mantero** (1932-1936), as well as the pool, the building included a gym and a room for fencing and was the seat of the Opera Nazionale Balilla (the Fascist youth organization). The layout here too is very simple with three bodies, a central one covered in white marble and two lateral ones with dark red plaster on which the large strip windows with grey shutters stand out. Turning toward the Monument to the Fallen, bypass Sinigaglia stadium and continue along Viale Puecher where, at no. 6, is the home



of the **Canottieri Lario** rowing club, the masterpiece by Gianni Mantero. This building (1931-1932) too has a very simple layout with white walls lightened by windows that run like a ribbon along the entire length of the building underlining the horizontal profile of the side bodies that contrast with the vertical slender profile of the central building. It houses two jewels of the period's technology and engineering: a reinforced concrete diving tower with three cantilever platforms above the lake and an indoor rowing tank where it is possible to recreate the movement of the waters. A little older

than the Canottieri Lario (1930-1931) is the **hangar** of the International Como Flying Club (Piazzale Somaini – photo 2). The oldest seaplane flying club in the world is also home to the only seaplane flying school in Europe. Turn left and then right to reach **Casa Giuliani-Frigerio** (viale Fratelli Rosselli, 24), which completes our itinerary of the Rationalist Quarter. This was the last building (1939-1940) by Terragni who died in 1943. This apartment building has a complex structure with the traditional parallelepiped replaced and giving way to an unconstructed cube where the apartments are organized on levels that are staggered by half a floor, as is also clear on the façade. On the top floor, the "hanging garden" brings the roof floor to a single level. Also unusual are the purely decorative elements of the balcony panelling and the iron frameworks of the windows where it was possible to insert canvas sunshade panels.

At the end of Via Puecher, after Sinigaglia stadium and the **Aero Club**, is the start of the promenade of Villa Olmo, a pedestrian strip of about 500 metres that opened in 1957 and is dotted with beautiful late 18th - early 19th century villas and gardens (not open to the public) that overlook the lake creating a magnificent landscape and architectural setting.

 The walk can be covered in a wheelchair, but it does have some short stretches that are considerably steep.

The first we come across is **Villa Carminati Scacchi** built in neoclassical forms based on a design by Felice Soave (1787). The façade overlooking the lake has a beautiful double loggia crowned by putti statues and preceded by a small and charming Italian garden. At the end of the 1940s the villa was home to the Tessitura Scacchi weaving mill, founded by Giuseppe Scacchi, Cavaliere del Lavoro (Order of Merit for Labour) and Baron of the Holy Roman Church, father of the famous artist and contemporary art scout, Luca Gracco, and grandfather of the Hollywood actress Greta Scacchi.

After the 20th century Villa Musa stands **Villa Saporiti** (photo 3). Built between 1791 and 1793 for the noblewoman Eleonora Doria Sforza Visconti,



it was designed by Leopold Pollack. The Vienna-born architect created a villa with a neoclassical layout to which he added elements of Austrian Rococo, such as a sumptuous elliptical room on two floors. The room, which is lavishly decorated, extends out toward the lake, giving the façade its characteristic shape and earning it the name "La Rotonda" ("the Rotunda"). Villa Saporiti is now the seat of the provincial administration of Como and houses offices.

Built by Abbot Marco Gallio around 1615, **Villa Gallia** is also owned by the provincial administration. The building centres on a large hall, now used for conferences and as a boardroom. Two floors high, it is entirely decorated with mythological and allegorical landscape scenes. The hall is flanked by two loggias with three arches that open onto the façade. Of the garden, which once extended to the slopes of the hill behind the villa, only the part overlooking the lake remains. It has an Italian-style parterre where, amid various ancient statues, a modern "Medusa" by Mimmo Paladino stands out. The piece comes from Gianni Versace's private art collection, which was once housed in Villa Fontanelle in Moltrasio.

Next is **Villa la Galletta**, built at the end of the 18th century in a position set back from the lake so that it could be used as a winter residence. Its current neoclassical aspect is thanks to the German doctor Joseph Frank, a scholar of Alessandro Volta, who lived here until his death (1842)

After Villa la Gallietta is **Villa Parravicini**, designed by Luigi Canonica, official architect during Napoleonic rule for north and central Italy, who also designed the garden. The building stands out thanks to its monumental façade, with a central part crowned by a triangular gable and two just slightly visible side wings. Several rooms have entirely retained their original 19th-century decorations. It is now used to host events and parties.


Villa Pisa (circa 1840), which features a picturesque turret, is followed by **Villa De Santis** (formerly Villa Volonté and Villa Mondolfo). Standing on the site of an ancient monastery that was suppressed in 1785, it owes its current aspect to reconstruction work in the mid-19th century. It has two symmetrical bodies topped by triangular gables, connected by a colonnaded portico/veranda and crowned by a balustrade. On the side opposite Villa Olmo, a magnificent iron gate can be admired that was originally forged for Villa d'Este in Cernobbio.

The walk ends with superb **Villa Olmo** (photo 4). Built on the site where according to tradition a Roman villa once stood - that was mentioned by Pliny the Younger, it features a great specimen of elm (that gave its name to the villa). The gardens surrounding it are open to the public. It was the Odescalchi, one of the oldest noble families in Como, one of whose descendants was a Pope (Innocent XI, 1611-1689), who commissioned the building from the famous architect



Simone Cantoni between 1782 and 1789. The Odescalchi wanted a sumptuous residence that would give the family prestige and the architect from Ticino created a masterpiece of Lombard neoclassicism. Between the villa and the lake an Italian garden was created. With regard to the decorative apparatus on the other hand, both externally and internally, it was Marquis Odescalchi himself who provided indications with the intention of exalting the principles of the Illuminist philosophical culture by returning to themes and allegories from Greek mythology.

Particularly striking is the Ballroom with rich stucco decorations and frescoes. The room occupies two floors in height, divided by a beautiful balcony with a gilded wrought iron balustrade. It passed from the Odescalchi family to the Raimondi and then the Visconti of Modrone. The latter undertook considerable renovation work that included the affixing of the Visconti family coat of arms and creation of an English garden behind the villa. In 1925 it was sold to the Municipality of Como as a venue for cultural events. Since then it has become the natural centre for cultural activities in Como. (The villa is open during events or on weekdays, subject to a request being made to the caretaker).

 *The park is accessible, but most of it is covered in gravel.*

The itinerary is now back at the point where the walk began in Piazza Cavour. For those tired of walking, on the road for Cernobbio near Villa Olmo lido it is possible to take bus no. 6 or bus no. 11 to the centre of Como. Tickets must be purchased before boarding the bus, for example, at the parking metres in the lido car park. We recommend alighting in Lungo Lario Trento, at the corner with Via Cairoli.

## FROM PIAZZA CAVOUR TO VILLA GENO AND BRUNATE (1.7 km)


From Piazza Cavour continue eastwards toward the so-called hamlet of Coloniola, a quarter that once had a port and trading vocation and that at the end of the 19th century, thanks to the inauguration of the Como - Saronno - Milan railway (1885) and the funicular for Brunate (1894), became a popular tourist destination.

The first building we come across is **Hotel Terminus**, built in Art Nouveau style in 1902 as a bathing establishment for the nearby hotel, the **Palace**, formerly Hotel Plinius, which was built in 1899 for the Volta Exposition (which, based on the style of the great universal expositions of the period, wanted to celebrate the centenary of the invention of the battery).

On one side of Piazza Matteotti stand the Art Nouveau iron and glass roof of **Como Lago** train station, which dates from circa 1885 and on the other, the **bus station**, which dates from 1932.

Continue on Lungo Lario Trieste to the **funicular** station in Piazza De Gasperi, inaugurated in 1894 to connect Como and Brunate, a village that between the late 19th and early 20th centuries became a popular holiday resort for the upper classes of Milan. As it did then, it still affords some of the most spectacular views of the Pre-Alps of Lombardy.

Every day, trains hooked onto imposing cables climb the slopes of the mountain every 30 minutes and in just a short time cover a difference in altitude of 500 metres with an average gradient of 51%, a great experience that will thrill youngsters in particular.

 All walking enthusiasts should note that a path from Piazza De Gasperi leads to Brunate in about 1 hour and 15 minutes.

## BRUNATE



This is a small village with about 1,800 inhabitants that stands on the peak of the mountain

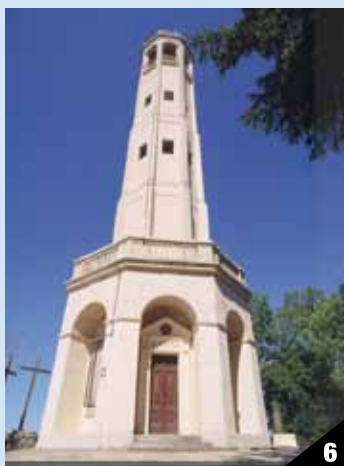


5

of the same name at a height of 715 metres above sea level. It became famous between the late 19th and early 20th centuries as a holiday resort and developed quickly in a tourist sense thanks to its magnificent panoramic views, healthy air and excursions to the mountains behind. From this golden era, two grand hotels remain - the Brunate and the Milano (no longer open) and many noble villas in eclectic and Art Nouveau style. A first panoramic viewpoint is at the foot of the former Grand Hotel Brunate (now apartments) which can be reached on foot from the funicular station in just a few minutes following signs for "**Belvedere**". From here

there are spectacular views of the city of Como (photo 5) and its grid of perpendicular streets of Roman origin, the lake basin, the Po plain and part of the Alpine chain (above the Mount Rose group). Nearby is **Villa Pirofca** (1902), one of the most majestic villas in Brunate. To build it, the owner surrounded himself with the most fashionable professionals of the period with the aim of constructing a small mansion.

We retrace our steps and turn left onto Via Roma where we can admire beautiful villas, in particular **Villa Cantaluppi Giuliani** at no. 13, which was commissioned in 1910 by the family that founded the pharmaceutical company of the same name. Its Art Nouveau decorations in cement, wrought iron, glass, ceramics and paint are extremely interesting. We follow Via



6

Roma, which bends slightly to the right, and then turn into Via Pissarottino soon reaching another panoramic point. Here, in a small cave, spurts forth the Pissarottino fountain (not drinking water).

Returning towards the funicular railway we recommend a quick visit to the **Parish Church of Saint Andrea** formerly a monastery in the 14th century and renovated in the 17th and 20th centuries. The church is linked to the mystical figures of Saint Guglielma and the blessed Maddalena Albricci, whose remains are housed here.

Brunate is also an excellent starting point for some fairly easy walks.

The first we'd like to mention leads to **Volta Lighthouse** (photo 6) in about 30-40 minutes. In S. Maurizio, it is a "symbolic" lighthouse built in 1927 to mark the 100th anniversary of the death of Alessandro Volta and offers breath-taking panoramic views of the area.

The itinerary begins near the aforementioned Church of Saint

Andrea. From Piazzale di S. Maurizio you can continue towards the CAO club and beyond along the trail known as the Dorsale del Triangolo Lariano.

Another beautiful and easy walk leads from Brunate, beyond the sports field, to **Mount Piatto**. For more information, contact the Tourist Information Offices.



Back in Como, we recommend continuing along Viale Geno, a road built in the mid-19th century as a private access road to Villa Cornaggia, subsequently made public, widened and redeveloped in the early 20th century. This shore of the lake contrasts ideally with the neoclassical one of Villa Olmo, presenting a series of buildings and villas built between the mid-19th and mid-20th centuries. In particular, we'd like to mention an old silk spinning mill, now a private residence, situated immediately beyond the funicular railway station. At no. 6A is **Villa Zucchi**, an interesting example of Rationalist villa built in 1949-1950. Many artists of the period worked on the villa including Ico Parisi, responsible for the interiors, and Massimo Campigli, who created a huge mosaic that still remains. Other villas worth mentioning include Villa Walter (no. 8a) that recalls Viennese villas and was designed in 1936 by the architect Frigerio for one of the most important local families in the silk industry and Villa Taroni (no. 9), built around 1910 drawing inspiration from English cottages revisited in a neo-Gothic key. At the end of the avenue, in a beautiful setting, stands **Villa Geno**, formerly Villa Cornaggia (photo 7).

The foundations of what is now a restaurant were built on a site of ancient religious tradition that became a monastery in the 12th century and a leper hospital in the 16th century. In the 19th century it was transformed into a private residence and in 1911 was purchased by the Municipality of Como who opened it to the public. In the 1950s the fountain, which has a water jet of 45 metres, and the lido were finally built; to this day, the latter is one of the favoured destinations of locals and tourists on hot summer days.



## ACTIVE HOLIDAY

**Pedalo hire:** near S. Agostino quay in Lungo Lario Trieste

**Sea plane:** c/o Aeroclub Flying School, piazzale Somaini - [www.aeroclubcomo.it](http://www.aeroclubcomo.it)

**Mini-golf:** lakeside public gardens

**Trekking:** walks to and from Brunate

**Jogging:** along the entire lakeside, from Villa Olmo park to Villa Geno

**Lidos and beaches:** Villa Olmo Lido with outdoor pools and Villa Geno Lido which has a sun terrace. Entrance fee payable.

In Como, bathing is strictly forbidden. It is also strictly forbidden to wear a bathing costume anywhere other than on the lido beaches.

**Funicular railway:** station in Piazza De Gasperi - [www.funicolarecomo.it](http://www.funicolarecomo.it)


*Calmly ploughing the waters, boats are not only a means of transport for getting from one place to another, but also an unforgettable travel experience. This is the best way to discover Lake Como and admire its wonderful landscapes; indeed, sometimes the only way to see some of the villas and noble palaces that have made it famous worldwide. By purchasing a “day pass” you can complete the entire journey in about an hour, staying on board or hopping off at your discretion at intermediate stops to visit the villages in this part of Lake Como.*

**Departure point:** Como, piazza Cavour, jetty 4. To best follow this itinerary we recommend taking one of the boats that departs at 15 minutes past the hour.

**Duration:** 1 hour + any stops

## *A boat trip around the First Basin*



 Not all boats are accessible to wheelchairs. At the time of purchasing the ticket, we recommend checking the motorboat schedule and the most suitable time. Furthermore, we do not recommend disabled wheelchair users stop at the villages of Moltrasio and Torno due to the presence of steps and cobblestones.



1

On leaving the port in Piazza Cavour, note to the east the tracks of the funicular railway and to the west the neoclassical Volta Temple, with its small museum dedicated to Alessandro Volta, the Monument to the Fallen by Giuseppe Terragni and the imposing Villa Olmo (for more information see itinerary 2).

After rounding Punta di Villa Geno to the east, with its beautiful **fountain** (photo 1) whose water jet can reach a height of 45 metres, and a little further north the eclectic **Villa Cornaggia Medici** (photo 2), we head towards Cernobbio.



2

After the port of Tavernola, to the west we can admire the 19th-century **Villa Dozzio** (photo 3) at the centre of a large English garden, a rare example of a level garden on Lake Como.



3

Beyond the mouth of Breggia stream it is possible to glimpse amid the greenery the glass pavilions of the conference and exhibition centre **Villa Erba** (photo 4), built in 1986 based on a design by the architect Mario Bellini who drew inspiration from the lake's ancient greenhouses.

With its characteristic tower, the villa dates from the early 20th century and is a splendid jewel of eclectic neo-Renaissance style. Its name is linked to that of the Italian film director Luchino Visconti who spent part of his life here.

Its gardens are particularly beautiful and it also has a dock and a riding track. The complex is used for international fairs, conferences, events and shows, as well as a film set.



4

Beyond Villa Erba, we reach Cernobbio. On the beautiful lakeside square is the early 20th-century Art Nouveau-style landing stage.

## CERNOBBIO

Standing on the slopes of Mount Bisbino (1,325 metres above sea level), with 6,000 inhabitants it is one of the largest towns on Lake Como. Thanks to its delightful geographical position it became an ideal holiday destination where the nobility built sumptuous palaces and villas. In the 19th century, tourism and industrial development in general profoundly changed its overall layout, turning Cernobbio from a small fishing village into a fashionable resort. Along the shore there are numerous cafés and restaurants where visitors can spend time relaxing. For anyone wishing to discover more of the small town, we suggest heading into the old town between the 18th-century **Church of Saint Vincent**, with its unusual terracotta façade, and the mediaeval **Piazzetta Castello**, before continuing along Via XX Settembre until it meets Piazza Bellinzaghi. Here we find the 17th-century **Chiesetta della Madonna delle Grazie** that houses a holy image of the Madonna of Milk. Turn towards the centre of Cernobbio following Via Regina and at no. 43 you'll find **Casa Cattaneo**, designed in Rationalist style by Cesare Cattaneo in 1938-39. From Piazza Mazzini you can turn left to return to the landing stage. Lovers of Art Nouveau style should note at no. 7 Via Regina **Villa Bernasconi** with its beautiful decorations created in the most varied materials. Particularly worthy of mention are the elements shaped like butterflies and silkworm cocoons in honour of the commissioning client, the silk industrialist Davide Bernasconi owner of an important weaving mill that once stood in the villa's gardens. Also part of the complex were workers' houses and a nursery for their children.

The boat continues its journey and the imposing silhouette of word-famous **Villa d'Este** (photo 5), the pride of Cernobbio, appears before us. What is now one of the world's best-known and most luxurious hotels, popular with celebrities and international stars, was built at the end of the 16th century by the powerful Como-born Cardinal Gallo.

The villa's many owners, who all profoundly changed its aspect, include Caroline of Brunswick, the unfortunate wife of George IV, King of England. The so-called Queen's Pavilion (red building) was built in her honour in 1856. It became a luxury hotel in 1873.

Our itinerary continues beyond the promontory of **Pizzo** (photo 6), where the villa of the same name stands. This owes its fame to its marvellous terraced garden, literally snatched from the mountainside by human hands and adorned with staircases, water jets, geometrically-shaped bushes and tree-lined avenues, including one named after the cypress trees that can clearly be seen from the lake.

Here, boats that continue to Moltrasio round the promontory of Pizzo, making it possible to spot the villa's hillside octagonal mausoleum and in a more secluded spot overlooking the lake another of the villas that have made Lake Como famous worldwide, **Villa Fontanelle** (photo 7). It is best known as Villa Versace because for years it was owned by the fashion designer Gianni Versace and his family who often welcomed international celebrities here. Approaching the jetty of Moltrasio, higher up we see the white **Villa Passalacqua** (photo 8), an imposing and sombre 18th-century building partly hidden by trees, but recognizable thanks also to its beautiful terraced garden and magnificent staircase.

To the right of the jetty is **Villa Salterio Erker Hocevar** (photo 9) with a beautiful gable with neoclassical decorations. The names of these two villas are linked to that of the famous Italian musician Vincenzo Bellini who stayed here at length even composing some famous arias, inspired by two women - the first, Giuditta Turina, with whom he had a passionate affair and the other, the opera singer Giuditta Pasta, who owned a villa in Blevio on the other shore of the lake.



## MOLTRASIO



This is a village with about 1,800 inhabitants, comprising varied outlying hamlets that from the lake seem to climb up the mountainsides. From quarries in these mountains a dark stone, widely used in local buildings, was once extracted. For example, the Basilica of Saint Abbondio, the Basilica of Saint Fedele and the town walls of Como are all made from Moltrasio stone.

Just off the boat, we note on the left of the small square the Baroque **Oratory of Saint Rocco**. A portico links the small church with Posta Hotel, already present on an 18th-century Theresian cadastral map. On the

right on the other hand, is Villa Sarterio Erker Hovevar with a plaque on the façade recalling that the maestro Bellini once stayed here. From here it is possible to reach the centre of the village by climbing **Via Recchi**, passing alongside private gardens and small walls and houses in Moltrasio stone.

At the widening, turn left onto Via Durini and continue along the cobbled street to a small humpback stone bridge that crosses the spectacular waterfall of **Pizzallo stream**, around which the hamlet, the heart of Moltrasio, develops. Climbing again we reach a small square and the **Parish Church of Saint Martin**. The church has ancient origins as the Romanesque remains incorporated in the bell-tower testify. However, its current aspect is the result of the 16th and 17th-century renovation work. It houses precious works of art including 17th-century frescoes and stuccoes in the left aisle, a Renaissance Crucifixion and above all, a polyptych (Nativity with Saints) painted by the Leonardesque Alvise De Donati in 1507 in the right aisle.

To the left of the church, following the panoramic road **Via Besana** with lookout points over Torno and Blevio (*children: watch out for cars*), we follow the embattled walls around the Villa Passalacqua garden to the bell-tower of the Church of **Saint Agata**, a jewel of Romanesque architecture (11th century). Although the building can only be visited a few days a year, it is nevertheless well worth climbing as far as here. Situated along the route of the ancient Via Regina (see box), the church has an interesting exposed stone structure with hanging arch decorations. Only a few fragments remain of the frescoes that once decorated it externally - including a Martyrdom of Saint Agatha and a Saint Christopher (13th century) - and internally it also retains some of its original decorations. To the left of the church, note the neo-Gothic gate of Villa Passalacqua. From here we retrace our steps and take the narrow passageway **Pos Palazz** on the right that, after about 40 metres, meets **Via Raschi**.

Return down this cobbled street, the so-called **Scala Santa** (or Holy Staircase), once used for religious procession, and near the lake turn left, passing in front of the Grand Hotel Imperiale with its **monument to Vincenzo Bellini** (1997) by the sculptor Massimo Clerici.

## VIA REGINA

The western shore of Lake Como is now crossed for its entire length by state road no. 340, the so-called Strada Regina.

The name of this road recalls the name of a historical route that once crossed Como to unite Milan to the Chiavenna Valley and Chur in Switzerland. According to tradition, its construction is attributed to the Lombard queen Theodelinda.

In reality, Via Regina dates from the Roman period (1st century BC), as historical sources document. However, the fact that the elements typical of important Roman roads (viaducts, milestones, horse stage posts) have never been found has led to suggestions that by Via Regia the Romans in fact intended the lakeside way.

Indeed from the port of Como and with the wind behind them, crafts could reach the northernmost point of Lake Como in little more than a day and in conditions of greater safety and ease compared to the land route, which was left to local traffic, light transport and pedestrians.

The boat now leaves the western shores of the lake to head east towards **Torno**. Approaching land we note a promontory on the left on whose tip are the beautiful gardens of the rest home **Casa di**



**Riposo Prandoni.** We thus reach Torno with its characteristic lakeside square (photo 10), overlooked by beautiful typical houses, a tourist harbour and the 15th-century Church of Saint Tecla. In ancient times, the village enjoyed a certain historical and economic importance thanks to the production of woollen cloth, so much so it even competed with Como. However, after being destroyed in the 16th-century it never returned to its ancient splendour, although in a certain sense this helped preserve its mediaeval layout and typicality. Given its environmental characteristics, the wealth of its artistic heritage and its tourism offer, the village has been awarded an Orange Flag by the Touring Club of Italy.

## TORNO

For anyone who decides to leave the boat, we firstly recommend a stop to admire the small Church of **Saint Tecla**, a building probably of Romanesque origin extensively renovated between 1400 and 1600. As well as a delightful Renaissance portal, don't miss the beautiful Lamentation (Madonna over the Dead Christ) dating from the early 16th century in inlaid wood and paint. Back in the square, we continue our walk by gently climbing the old narrow streets that wind their way through the town, where it is possible to see staircases, stone buildings, fountains, small chapels and delightful views. Crossing the provincial road and continuing along Via Tridi, Via al Pozzo and Via per Piazzaga on the left, our next destination is the **Church of Saint Giovanni**. It was built in the 12th century, as testified by the slender bell-tower adorned with mullioned windows and blind arches, but



10

was restored and extended in the 14th century based on the local gothic use of gabled-arches. The late 15th-century marble portal with statues and reliefs attributed to the Rodari School, who had already worked on Como Cathedral, is particularly beautiful.

The apsidal area is a triumph of Baroque stuccoes and paintings and is preceded by a partition wall with 17th-century frescoes and beautiful railings. Exiting the church there is a delightful garden on the right and a small cemetery that affords magnificent views of the lake. At this point, take the path again for Piazza Casartelli from where boats depart.



For trekking enthusiasts there are numerous itineraries like the **Strada Regia**, a 35-km long route that links Como to Bellagio on the hillside, the panoramic path to **Piazzaga** (550 m above sea level) and the **Massi Avello** (tombs of uncertain date, perhaps 5th century AD, dug out from enormous erratic granite masses) and the stepped path for **Mount Piatto** (600 m above sea level). In Montepiatto it is worth reaching the Church of Saint Elisabetta for its beautiful panoramic views and the so-called **Pietra Pendula** or hanging rock, an erratic mass brought here by glaciers and "precariously balanced" above the chalky rock.

After the village of Torno, the boat heads either north towards Urio or south towards Como. In the first case, after the point of aforementioned Prandoni Rest Home, we can admire the adjacent gardens of **Villa Mia**, a late 19th-century residence for years owned by the Saudi royal family. On the same shore, even further north and in a secluded spot, is the imposing **Villa Pliniana** (photo 11). Built at the end of the 16th century for Anguissola, the Spanish governor of Como, the building incorporates an intermittent stream, the Pluviana, famous with natural history enthusiasts such as Pliny the Elder and Leonardo da Vinci. After crossing the subsoil and passing under the villa, the source runs into the lake through a pointed arch that opens up on the surface of the water. The charming villa seems blanketed in mystery and has always featured in legends and at times fascinating, at times tragic events.



11



Heading south towards Como on the other hand, on the left the boat coasts the shore of Blevio, a small village that gained a certain notoriety from the 19th century onwards as a resort favoured by the international jet-set. It is possible to make out a series of villas in succession. Starting from the southern boundary of Torno, the first is the unmistakable C-shaped **Villa Taverna** with two 18th-century wings that extend towards the lake and a 19th-century central body that is set back and has a large clock on its façade. The building has been divided up into luxury apartments. Next is **Villa Roccabruna** (photo 12) that since 2010 has been a five-star luxury hotel, the Castadiva Resort, so named in honour of Vincenzo Bellini and his muse, the opera singer Giuditta Pasta (1797-1865), who owned a villa on which the hotel now stands.



To the left of the bell-tower of the Church of Saints Epimaco and Gordiano stands the fairy-tale **Villa Usuelli** (photo 13), a towering head house overlooking the waters where Maria Taglioni (1804-1884), one of the greatest ballerinas of her time, lived for many years. To the right of the bell-tower is monumental **Villa Da Riva** (photo 13), now home to the Italian pop singer Ivana Spagna. Next door is the neo-Renaissance **Villa Mylius Cademartori** (photo 14) with its characteristic turret; now a luxury apartment building, its many famous residents have included the Italian singer Milva and footballers Karl Heinz Rummenigge and Andrei Shevchenko. The last villa of note before returning to Como is the unusual **Villa Troubetzkoy** (photo 15). Built on a cliff top by a Russian prince in exile, it was inspired by Nordic chalets and features a lift that links the building to the road.



## EVENTS

**Concorso d'eleganza di Villa d'Este:** (Cernobbio) May, vintage car exhibition and contest  
[www.concorsodeleganzavilladeste.com](http://www.concorsodeleganzavilladeste.com)

**Chestnuts, witches and thereabouts:** (Cernobbio, hamlet of Rovenna) first half of October, feast dedicated to chestnuts and the allure of witches with a street market and shows.

## MARKETS

**Cernobbio** Wednesday morning (8.30 am - 1.00 pm)

## ACTIVE HOLIDAY

**Trekking:** Mountain routes from the upper outlying hamlets of Cernobbio towards Mount Bisbino or the border with Switzerland.



Combined trekking + boat itineraries. Also walks from Moltrasio and Torno to the mountains above

**Boat hire:** in Cernobbio and in Moltrasio. For information contact the Tourist Information Offices

**Lidos and beaches:** Entrance fee payable for Cernobbio lido (with pool) and Moltrasio lido  
*Bathing is strictly forbidden in the municipalities of the first basin.*

*This itinerary helps visitors discover some of the most famous places in the central part of the lake: the villages of Menaggio, Tremezzo and Bellagio, the villas and gardens and breath-taking views. It is covered by boat; in summer using a daily pass to move around at will from one village to another and in winter using the ferry service and limiting visits to Bellagio, Menaggio and Varenna alone.*

**Departure point:** usually Menaggio, but the itinerary is accessible in any direction.

Menaggio can be reached by bus on line C10, by NLC boat or by car along state road SS 340.

**Duration:** full day

## Visit to the Mid-Lake area and its gardens



For wheelchair users we recommend only the following stages of the itinerary: Menaggio centre and lakeside, Villa Carlotta, Bellagio lungo Lario Marconi and Punta Spartivento. Also check the boat schedule and the most suitable timetable at the NLC information desks or use the car-ferries which are always accessible.

With about 3,200 inhabitants, Menaggio is situated at the head of a wide valley that links it to Lake Lugano. From an urban layout point of view, the village consists in a centre and three outlying hamlets: Lovenò, with prestigious Villa Vigoni, Nobiallo and Croce. It has ancient origins and a prestigious artistic heritage. From the ferry landing stage, take Via IV Novembre and Via Mazzini on the right towards the centre as far as Piazza Garibaldi where you'll find the **tourist information office**. Here you can pick up a leaflet entitled "Historical Itinerary of Menaggio and its surrounding villages" that contains four itineraries; one covering Menaggio and the other three covering each of its hamlets.



For families, the tourist information office runs a fun quiz for the itinerary through the old town centre.

From Piazza Garibaldi take Via Calvi as far as the **Church of Saint Marta** on whose façade is a Roman memorial plaque dating from the 1st century AD, and above it an effigy of Menaggio Castle that has been adopted as the municipal coat of arms. At the end of Via Calvi stands the **Parish Church of Saint Stefano**; although it has ancient origins, its former structure is now hidden by restoration and refurbishment work. Behind the church, we climb along Via Castellino da Castelli to the **Castello quarter** and its prestigious portals. Destroyed by the Grigionesi in 1523, today the castle offers only an idea of what it must have been like in the Middle Ages, although it still retains imposing perimeter walls. Worthy of note is the **Church of Saint Carlo** with its characteristic Spanish-style bell gable. At the end of Via Castellino da Castello we continue on the left and after 20 metres take a small causeway on the left that passes right under the massive castle walls. Take Via Fabbri and at the end turn right and then, after about 20 metres, left into Via Strecioum. At the end of this street is one of the most characteristic and picturesque bridges over the River Sanagra. In a niche at the centre of the bridge we can admire a bas-relief (1965) by the local sculptor, painter and engraver Enrico Vannuccini.

We return to Piazza Garibaldi and follow the beautiful, well-tended lakeside promenade to the **Monumento alla Tessitrice** (a statue in honour of female silk weavers) (1988-1990) by Francesco Somaini. In Carrara marble and bronze, the piece was donated by the Mantero family, one of Como's leading silk industrialists who owned an important silk factory near Menaggio.



At the end of the lakeside promenade there is a mini-golf course and just beyond that the Lido (1934), a fine example of Rationalist architecture.

Those wishing to visit the charming Villa Mylius Vigoni can follow the itinerary for Lovenò described in the leaflet "Historical Itinerary of Menaggio and its surrounding villages". It outlines a walk lasting about 40 minutes to this small, but charming village popular with artists and leading figures from as early as the mid-19th century. Alternatively, Lovenò can be reached by taking bus C13 on the Menaggio-Plesio line.

## VILLA MYLIUS VIGONI



In 1829 the German banker and philanthropist Heinrich Mylius purchased a villa on high ground above Menaggio which, over the years, he extended and adorned to house his numerous collections of paintings, statues and precious furnishings. What he thus created was a house-museum that, thanks to the care and attention of his descendants, the Vigoni family, has remained intact to this day. A vast English garden, designed and built by Giuseppe Balzaretto, surrounds the villa, offering a natural and environmental backdrop of rare beauty. It boasts orchids, centuries-old trees, panoramic viewing points and

exotic plants that create a truly unique setting. Bequeathed by Ignazio Vigoni to the Federal Republic of Germany, the villa is now the seat of a prestigious Italian-German cultural association.

*The villa can be visited on Thursday afternoons at h 14:30 subject to booking - tel. +39.0344361232 - [www.villavigoni.it](http://www.villavigoni.it)*

**W**e return to Menaggio landing stage to board the boat that will take us to the entrance to Villa Carlotta. In winter, skip this stage of the itinerary and take the boat to Bellagio.

**Tremezzo**, or "middle land" as its name translates, is a small village of about 1,300 inhabitants that stands in part along the lakeside, with its 18th and 19th-century villas and low porticoed houses, and in part on the slopes of the mountains behind. Tremezzo has been admitted to the Association "I Borghi più Belli d'Italia" (the Most Beautiful Villages in Italy) since 2008.

## VILLA CARLOTTA

In 1690, marquis Giorgio Clerici built an imposing but sombre residence with an Italian garden in



a hollow between the lake and mountains. Its subsequent owner, Gian Battista Sommariva, adorned it with works of art and transformed part of the garden into a romantic park. In the mid-19th century the villa was given by Princess Marianne of Orange-Nassau to her daughter Charlotte on the occasion of her wedding to George II, Duke of Saxe-Meiningen. The latter was a botany enthusiast and he was the one who created the landscape garden that has made the villa famous. It covers 70,000 m<sup>2</sup> and boasts exquisite huge trees, 150 varieties of rhododendrons and

azaleas, ancient camellias and exotic plants. Its wealth of treasures continues inside the villa with precious works of art on the ground floor, in particular sculptures by Canova and his school, paintings by Hayez and Wicar, a frieze by Thorwaldsen, and meticulously preserved original furnishings on the main floor. Outside the villa, the Sommariva family sepulchral chapel is open to the public.

*Villa Carlotta is open every day from mid-March to mid-November - [www.villacarlotta.it](http://www.villacarlotta.it)*



There are two picnic areas in the gardens of Villa Carlotta, one of which is covered, as well as a cafeteria and a playground for children.

**A**fter visiting Villa Carlotta follow the lakeside walk around Tremezzo as far as Bolvedere (30 minutes). Along the way is the Art Nouveau-style **Grand Hotel Tremezzo** (1910), one of the most sumptuous hotels on the lake with period furnishings, paintings and ornaments, the **Sampietro porticoes**, under which there are shops, restaurants and cafés, and **Olivelli Park**.

Overlooking the lake, this beautiful and romantic green area was redeveloped and transformed into a Baroque Italian garden, by the Rationalist architect Pietro Lingeri around 1925. It has a double monumental staircase and grand fountain with statues. The unusual "Tarocchiera" is an octagonal 18th-century building that is currently used as an exhibition space.



A staircase, which is also fitted with a simple shower, provides direct access to the lake for a cooling swim.

Near the park is the **Church of Saint Lorenzo**, which was built in 1896, and then two sumptuous villas; **Villa Carla**, built in 1676 by Antonio de Carli, is an elegant building with sombre lines surrounded by a delightful park and preceded by a long staircase, and early 18th-century **Villa La Quiete** has a magnificent Italian garden, wrought railings and sumptuous interiors. We retrace our steps to the landing stage in Tremezzo (in front of Hotel Bazzoni) or in Cadenabbia (after Villa Carlotta) to head off to Bellagio whose promontory can clearly be seen from Tremezzo.



**Bellagio** is situated at the extreme tip of that section that divides Lake Como into two branches. Known as Borgo, the tourist resort occupies the external part of the promontory, whilst its numerous outlying hamlets are dotted all along the shores of the lake and on the slopes of the mountain up as far as Mount San Primo, 1,682 metres above sea level.

At the **tourist information office** near the landing stage in Piazza Mazzini you'll find details of a historical itinerary around Bellagio and two interesting walks in its outlying hamlets. From the office take Salita Mella on the opposite side of the square and at the top, turn left as far as Piazza della Chiesa to visit the Church of **Saint Giacomo**.

The basilica dates from the 12th century, but was extensively transformed in the 17th century before being returned to Romanesque style by an imposing refurbishment in the 20th century. Particularly interesting is its interior with three raised apses, a beautiful Baroque gilded wooden altar (17th century) by a local carver, an ambo recomposed using fragments of marble from the preexisting church, a Baroque wooden statue of the Deposed Christ by the Spanish school (16th century) and a 16th-century painting by the Lombard School of Our Lady between Saints Rocco and Sebastian.

In the same square, above and to the right stands **Torre Delle Arti**, a centre for temporary exhibitions (access from Salita Plinio). Adjacent to this is the seat of the Promobellagio Association, from where guided visits to the gardens of **Villa Serbelloni** depart.

## VILLA SERBELLONI

Villa Serbelloni is situated on Bellagio promontory and its gardens afford superb panoramic views of both the Como and Lecco branches of the lake.

The villa has an ancient history; owned by the Sfondrati family since 1533, in 1788 ownership passed to Count Alessandro Serbelloni who focused attention on the immense park where he built carriageways, avenues and paths covering about 18 kilometres. Visitors can now follow these to discover centuries-old, exotic and rare trees, grottoes, sculptures and the remains of mediaeval buildings. In 1907 it was sold to a Swiss company that turned it into Hotel Serbelloni.

The hotel was purchased and once again turned into a private villa by Princess Ella Walker who in 1959 bequeathed it to the Rockefeller Foundation.

Today Villa Serbelloni is a venue for scholars to holiday and meet.

*The park can be visited from March to November with guided tours every day except Mondays.*

*For information and bookings: Promobellagio - tel./fax +39.031951555 - [www.promobellagio.it](http://www.promobellagio.it)*



From Piazza della Chiesa descend on the right and take Via Eugenio Vitali to **Punta Spartivento** which affords magnificent views of the centre of the lake, framed by the mountains behind.

We retrace our steps and at the end of the road, descend towards the right keeping along the wall enclosing **Grand Hotel Villa Serbelloni**, one of the most luxurious hotels on Lake Como, originally built as a private villa in 1852.

We continue on Piazza Mazzini with its magnificent porticos and walk along the splendid lakeside promenade that has many points of interest from an historical point of view. Just beyond the small portico - the ancient access gate to the village - on the left is **Salita Serbelloni**. Climb a few steps and on the right, on the wall we can see a plaque commemorating the months the Hungarian composer Franz Liszt spent in Bellagio in 1837.

Continuing along the **lakeside promenade**, a little further on, outside Hotel Excelsior Splendide there is a modern-style plaque commemorating Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, a poet and founder of Futurism who died here in 1944.

We continue and beyond the car-ferry landing stage flank the lake, with its beautiful promenade and colourful flowerbeds.



Beyond Bellagio Lido, is the entrance to the gardens of Villa Melzi.

## VILLA MELZI



With its simple and severe neoclassical lines, it was designed by the architect Giocondo Albertolli in 1808 commissioned by Francesco Melzi d'Eril, vice-president of the Napoleonic Italian Republic and great friend of Napoleon himself. The park surrounding it, the first example of English garden on Lake Como, was created with great care by levelling land or raising small hills to make the area seem larger than it actually was. The layout of the vegetation too was the result of in-depth studies designed to increase

this optical illusion. Among the garden's trees and flowers there are also interesting sculptures, a small lake with water-lilies, an orangery fitted out as a museum and the neoclassical family chapel. Stendhal wrote extensively on the villa, whilst the pianist and composer Franz Liszt loved to spend time in the park and in particular, in the Moorish pavilion overlooking the lake.

The garden can be visited from the end of March to early November - [www.giardinidivillamelzi.it](http://www.giardinidivillamelzi.it)

**R**eturn to the ferry landing stage, in front of which is the road that crosses the recently-redeveloped Municipal Park where visitors can relax on benches surrounded by lush greenery.

From Bellagio it is possible to reach **Varenna** (photo 6), a splendid village on the eastern shore of the lake, either via boat or ferry. Here we immediately begin a charming lakeside



walk between the rock face and the water, just to the right of the landing stage, which leads us to the heart of the village. It has steep narrow streets and staircases that hide picturesque areas and excellent architectural features, such as the mediaeval Church of Saint Giorgio, Villa Monastero and Villa Cipressi (which can be visited from March to October). Vezio Castle, an ancient fortress in a splendid panoramic position, can be reached after an uphill walk lasting about 45 minutes.

## EVENTS

**Feast of Saint John:** (Bellagio) at the end of June with a wonderful torchlight procession through the gardens of the villas and typical cuisine.

**Bellagio and Lake Como Festival:** (various venues) summer classical music festival.

**Tremezzo Jazz Festival:** (Tremezzo) in August, live jazz music in Olivelli Park.

**Riflessi d'Arte:** (Menaggio) summer classical music festival.

**Blooming of azaleas in Villa Carlotta and Villa Melzi:** (Tremezzo and Bellagio) late April/early May, a spectacle of colour that should not be missed.

## ACTIVE HOLIDAY

**Water sports for all:** ask for a list of clubs and hire points from Tourist Information Offices.


**Golf:** one of the oldest golf clubs in Europe is 18-hole Menaggio Golf Club in Croce

**Fishing tourism:** fishing tourism activities are organized by Ittiturismo Mella and Silvio Hotel and Restaurant in Bellagio.

**Beach volleyball:** a fully-equipped beach next to Olivelli Park in Tremezzo.

**Falconry:** at Vezio Castle every day from March to October with bird of prey displays and shows.

**Beaches:** the waters of the Mid-Lake area are usually suitable for swimming.

 There is a small beach at Al Püunt along the road from Cadenabbia to Menaggio, which is also accessible by a slide board.

A walking itinerary to discover Lenno, a village in the Mid-Lake area overlooking the splendid Gulf of Venus that boasts authentic artistic jewels, including the world-famous Villa del Balbianello. A charming panoramic walk leads to the Sacred Mountain of Ossuccio, one of the nine pre-Alpine sacred mountains that make up the UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The itinerary covers an area known locally as Zoca de l'Oli or "oil hollow". In fact, the area enjoys such mild climate it is perfect for growing olives and producing olive oil.



**Departure point:** Lenno.

Lenno can be reached by bus on line C10, by NLC boat or by car along state road SS 340.

**Note:** the 45-minute walk from Lenno to the Sacred Mountain has a difference in altitude of 200 metres

## Lenno and the Sacred Mountain of Ossuccio



From Lenno landing stage follow lakeside Viale C. Lomazzi (photo 2) as far as Piazza XI Febbraio. Here we find the **Church of Saint Stefano** and the ancient octagonal **baptistery** dedicated to Saint John the Evangelist (photo 3). The current parish church was built on the foundations of a site of ancient religious tradition although the current building is the result of refurbishment carried out in the 16th-century.

Dating from the latter half of the 11th century, the baptistery is in beautiful local Romanesque style, with simple and sombre exterior and blind arch decorations, and houses fragments of mediaeval frescoes.



From the square, we cross the state road using the underpass, turn right and after the bus stop and post office, take the small lane on the left towards the **Sanctuary of the Beata Vergine del Soccorso** (via Soccorso).

At the "Cooperativa", continue for about 50 metres and then turn left. Pass in front of the Church of the Santissima Trinità, take Via Don Cadenazzi and follow it to the right before immediately turning left onto Viale Libronico. Continue straight ahead and turn right at the second junction, following signs for the "Santuario" (*Sanctuary*) as far as cobblestoned Via Pasquale Castelli. Follow it, keeping to the left and then cross Perlana Stream to reach the first chapel and the climb to the **Sacred Mountain**,



which is highly recommend for its artistic value, but above all the wide panoramic views it affords.



## THE SANCTUARY OF THE BEATA VERGINE DEL SOCCORSO



© Paolo Ortelli

Along the cobbled street that gradually climbs to the **Sanctuary of the Beata Vergine del Soccorso** (419 metres above sea level) are a series of frescoed chapels decorated with statues and stuccoes by the Intelvесе School. Dedicated to the Mysteries of the Rosary, these small temples were built between 1635 and 1714 and are part of the context of the pre-Alpine Sacred Mountains of Piedmont and Lombardy, sacred complexes at the entrance to the Alpine valleys in places of particular landscape interest. The aim of the Sacred Mountains

was to favour, by means of a pilgrimage, consolidation of the faith thanks to an admirable integration of spiritual, architectural, artistic and natural elements and at the same time to combat the diffusion of Protestant Reformation. The itinerary ends at the Church of the Beata Vergine that houses prestigious frescoes and stuccoes, as well as a 14th-century Our Lady with Child. The statue, which is venerated by many, is the work of the Campionesi Masters. To this day, the sanctuary is a destination favoured by numerous pilgrims, above all on the feast day of 8th September. In 2003 the Sacred Mountain of Ossuccio was declared a World Heritage Site.

From the sanctuary it is possible to reach the **Abbey of Saint Benedetto** in Val Perlana, a beautiful example of local Romanesque style (11th century). Taking about 2 hours, the walk is extremely demanding, but rewards anyone attempting it with spectacular views. Information at the Tourist Information Offices.



After visiting the church we retrace our steps to reach the 4th chapel. From here, continue along Via Giovanni Castelli for about 600 metres as far as Via Andrea Castelli on the right. At this point, signs for the Greenway begin; this is an approx. 10-km walk that links the villages of Colonno and Griante. The itinerary is marked by blue and yellow signs and on the ground by metal manhole covers with the words "Greenway of Lake Como". We can now decide to either continue straight to Lenno or visit **Comacina Island** (from March to October only).

In this case, we follow the Greenway by taking Via Andrea Castelli on the right as far as the landing stage for the island close to Malagufi Lido and the beautiful Church of Saint Maria Maddalena with its picturesque bell-tower.



## COMACINA ISLAND



This is the only island on Lake Como and despite its modest size (600 metres long, 200 metres wide and a perimeter of just 2 km) and the fact it is now uninhabited, it was once very important from both a religious and political point of view.

Fought over many times due to its strategic position, it was raised to the ground by the people of Como in 1169 as a vendetta for the island's alliance with Milan in the Ten Year War involving the two capitals. It retains many remains from its illustrious past including traces of a Roman wall, an early-Christian baptistery

with a double apse and above all, the Romanesque complex of Saint Eufemia (11th century). The only intact buildings are the Oratory of Saint Giovanni (17th century) and three Artists' Houses built in Rationalist style by the architect Lingeri in 1940. Many artefacts are housed in the Antiquarium Museum in Ossuccio, where tickets for entrance to the island can be purchased.

For information: tel. +39.034456369 - [www.isola-comacina.it](http://www.isola-comacina.it)

Continuing from Via Giovanni Castelli towards Lenno along the Greenway, cross the state road and 20 metres further on take the small road on the right that leads to the gates of Villa Balbiano, a 17th-century residence with a simple façade preceded by an entrance nymphaeum, a fountain and a beautiful Italian parterre with skilfully-clipped holm oaks and cypresses.



Using a small bridge, cross Perlana Stream and take Via Regina, entering the historical nucleus of **Campo**, a small and charming outlying hamlet of Lenno where there is a small beach with a shower.



Winding its way amid stone houses, narrow streets and descents to the lake, the itinerary passes in front of the entrance to Villa Monastero, which stands on the ruins of a 13th-century Benedictine monastery, and after a short mixed road continues by flanking



Dosso del Lavedo, which has picnic tables and a campsite. Just beyond Hotel Lavedo there is **Villa Balbianello** that can be reached walking up Dosso del Lavedo (1 km) or by taxi boat from the beach Lido di Lenno.



7

## VILLA BALBIANELLO

Built in the late 18th century for Cardinal Durini, it incorporates an ancient monastery and is one of the most beautiful parts of Lake Como. The magnificent loggia, "embroidered" by a climbing ficus, offers panoramic views of the Mid-Lake area spanning from Bellagio to Comacina Island. Unsurprisingly, the villa has been chosen many times as a film set; the most famous films shot here include "Star Wars: Episode II - Attack of the Clones" and "Casino Royale". On the upper floor of the



6

residence, accessible thanks to a guided visit that must be booked when purchasing a ticket, there is an unusual museum that brings together the art collections and travel souvenirs of the villa's last owner, the explorer Guido Monzino, a lover of expeditions and man of great culture. In his will, he left the villa to the Italian environmental protection agency, FAI. The garden has terraces and balustrades and faithfully follows the lay of the land; it is steep and craggy in some points and gently sloping in others. The villa can be visited from mid-March to mid-November. Detailed information on [www.fondoambiente.it](http://www.fondoambiente.it).



From Lenno Lido (a lido with facilities for which an entrance fee is payable), continue on the lakeside promenade past historical villas to return to the landing stage.

## EVENTS AND MARKETS

**Solemn feast of the patron saint of the Sanctuary:** pilgrimage to the Sanctuary on 8th September

**Feast of Saint John:** (Ossuccio) with fireworks, setting ablaze of the island and religious boat procession on the weekend nearest 24th June.

## MARKETS

**Mercato di Lenno:** Tuesday mornings on the lakeside promenade

## ACTIVE HOLIDAY



**Greenway of Lake Como:** Lenno is crossed by the Greenway, a gentle and panoramic 10 km pedestrian road that links Colunno and Griante. For this and other more demanding walks on the mountains of Lenno and Colunno, ask for leaflets from the Tourist Information Offices.

**Nautical sports:** on the lake between Lenno and Sala Comacina there are many places where motorboats, canoes, rowing boats and fishing tackle can be hired.

*A middle mountain valley that connects Lake Como with Lake Lugano, it was carved out for about 15 kilometres by Telo Stream and offers visitors beautiful landscapes, picturesque villages and prestigious artistic artefacts left behind by centuries of local skilled workers, the so-called "Intelvi Masters". From Lanzo d'Intelvi it is possible to reach the peaks of Mount Sighignola (1,300 metres) and the "Balcony of Italy", a renowned panoramic viewpoint.*

**Departure point:** Argegno

Argegno can be reached by bus on line C10 and C20, by NLC boat or by car on state road SS 340.

**Note:** The itinerary is best covered by car, but can also be covered by public transport by limiting stops to just Argegno and Pigra and including some transfers on foot. We therefore recommend wearing comfortable shoes.

**Duration:** full day

## Nature and Art in the Intelvi Valley




Argegno, the departure point of our itinerary, is a small picturesque village that stands at the mouth of Telo Stream, in an inlet of the lake. Lake Como reaches its maximum depth here (410



metres). The village is divided into two nuclei - the lakeside area and the old part. Along the first there are numerous bars, ice-cream shops and restaurants where visitors can spend time admiring the lake. Here also stands the neo-Romanesque Parish Church of the Santissima Trinità (circa 1920). The second part of the village clings to a rocky spur and features steep narrow streets, remains of fortifications, stone houses and narrow passageways.

Between the two areas are central Piazzetta Roma and an elegant **small mediaeval bridge** (12th century), one of the symbols of the village.



From here, by taking a small diversion, a 40-minute walk along a mule track on the left (south) side of Telo Stream, you arrive at the small 17th-century **Church of Saint Anna**. Numerous mills, where wheat, corn and chestnuts were ground, once stood along this road and in springtime a procession to propitiate the harvest was held here. Today, bearing witness to this past, many of the old millstones are used as decorative elements, niches and votive chapels. At the end of the itinerary, a short staircase leads onto a grassy square where the small sanctuary stands, affording  spectacular views of the lake. Inside, visible from the windows on the façade even when the church is closed, are sumptuous decorations, frescoes and stuccoes by the Intelvese School.

Another excursion we recommend from the centre of Argegno is the climb by **cable car to Pigra** (photo 2), a small mountain village on a green plain that affords splendid views of the lake and surrounding hills. Inaugurated in 1971, the cable car links the lake to Pigra in about 5 minutes on a route that is about 1.2 km long, with a difference in altitude of 600 metres and a maximum gradient of 95%. (For more information on costs and opening times, contact the Tourist Information Offices).

## FROM PIGRA TO VENINI REFUGE



Distance: 10km one way

Difference in altitude: 670m

Note: this itinerary is suitable for fit and skilled mountain and race bikers

Pigra is an excellent departure point for several beautiful mountain walks. The itinerary we recommend follows a historical military road, that although tarmacked has little traffic, especially on weekdays, making it possible to admire the landscape and spectacular views.

From Pigra cable car station head towards the centre of the village and then immediately follow signs for Boffalora Refuge. The road initially climbs to Alpe di Colunno (1,322 metres above sea level, 90 minute walk, 4.7 km from Pigra) with its characteristic cross, some "bolle", which are large, natural basins that have been adapted to collect rain water for livestock, and a shelter. The itinerary descends along the north slope of Cima della Duaria as far as Alpe Boffalora where the shelter of the same name stands (1,252 metres above sea level, 25 minute walk from Alpe di Colunno).

From the shelter, continue straight on and after 100 metres, at the junction for Ponna, keep to the left towards Venini Refuge. The dirt track climbs steeply passing by Alpe di Ossuccio (1,306 metres above sea level, seasonal sale of cheeses). From here, bypassing the entire head of Perlana Valley, we reach Alpe di Lenno situated at Bocchetta di Lenno, between Mount Lenno and Mount Galbigo. We recommend a short stop to admire views over Lake Lugano beyond the Bolla dell'Alpe. We then reach Venini Refuge, a place where visitors can find refreshment and accommodation (1,575 metres above sea level, an 85 minute walk from Boffalora, 5 km). The shelter is situated in a lush pass between Mount Galbigo and Mount Tremezzo.

The small cannon in front of the shelter reminds us that in the early 20th century this was a military accommodation facility that was part of the Cadorna Line, a defensive system built along the Italian-Swiss border by General Cadorna during the First World War. A few metres from the shelter, climbing back up the ridge that leads to Mount Galbigo, the first military posts come into view. From here it is also possible to enjoy spectacular views of Menaggio Valley and Lake Como. A further 30-minute walk towards Mount Tremezzo will reveal other remains of fortifications from the Great War.



Back in Argegno, we continue our itinerary by car taking provincial road SP13 towards San Fedele Intelvi, to discover a valley that has a great cultural heritage and offers opportunities to play sport and relax. It has given birth to generations of "immigrant" architects, painters, sculptors and stucco workers who, when they returned here to their homeland, left behind many interesting works of art. The road climbs steeply with wide bends that open onto vast, sunny plains surrounded by chestnut groves that are common in the entire Intelvese area. On the left we can make out the mass of Sasso Gordona and Mount San Zeno with a characteristic cone shape and a small church of the same name on its peak.

The first stop we recommend is in Muronico at the small church of **Saint Sisinnio** (photo 4), one of the oldest in the entire valley as testified by the bell-tower which is clearly in Romanesque style. Extensively renovated in the 17th and 18th centuries in the late Baroque style of the period, it houses precious examples of Intelvese art. The church is not open to the public, but a stop is more than rewarded by the views of the lake from the churchyard and the cobbled road running below it. To reach the church we recommend parking your car along the main road.



After Dizzasco, along the road on the left, in a notably raised position, is the Oratory of **Madonna del Restello**, built in 1717 to give thanks to Our Lady for surviving the danger of an outbreak of the plague. In fact, according to local tradition the inhabitants built a barrier here ("rastrelada" in local dialect) that cut off the way for inhabitants of the valley bottom and thus prevented contamination spreading. The small church, which is not open to the public, houses precious Baroque stuccos, frescoes and scagliola.

## THE INTELVI MASTERS AND THE ART OF SCAGLIOLA




Since ancient times the Intelvi Valley has been famous thanks to the skills of its artisans: master masons, stone cutters, sculptors, painters and stucco workers whose art was handed down from generation to generation for centuries and whose skills afforded them the name "magistri" or "masters". These families were called to work not only all over Italy, but throughout Europe. We can now find their work and their names (Bianchi, Scotti, Barberini and Carloni to name a few) from Rome to Turin and in Germany, Austria, Russia and Poland. Their homeland also bears witness to their great work as it was here that, like swallows in springtime, they always returned even if only for short periods. The Intelvi Masters came to the fore between the 17th and 18th centuries in particular, thanks to the plastic decoration of stucco and scagliola. The latter is an artistic technique that imitates inlaid marble using gypsum and natural dyes from minerals and vegetables.

*Examples of this work can be found in all churches in the valley and in the Museum of Stucco and Scagliola in Cerano Intelvi, which can be visited subject to booking – tel. +39.3487930214*




Continue along the provincial road to Castiglione, a mediaeval fortified village that has ruins of an ancient castle and fortified houses. A few kilometres further on we reach **San Fedele**, where we can park in Piazza G. B. Carminati. Worth visiting is the parish church of **Saint Antonio Abate** (photo 6) situated a few metres away in Largo IV Novembre. The church dates from the 12th century and has a beautiful Romanesque façade in local stone with a splayed arch portal and elegant sculptural decorations by the Intelvi Masters. It houses 16th-century frescoes attributed to Giovanni Andrea De Magistris. Also notable are the stuccoes and the scagliola altar frontals. Back in the car at the junction at the end of the village we follow signs for Pello and Lanzo d'Intelvi, turning left. After Pello we enter the municipality of Lanzo and more precisely, the outlying hamlet of **Scaria**, a small village well worth visiting. Veering to the right, we climb the hairpin bend that leads to Via de Aglio. We recommend parking here and continuing along Via Palli to the late Baroque Church of **Saint Maria di Scaria** (photo 7). Decoration of the building is linked to the name of the Carloni family, natives of Scaria. The frescoes in the vaults, nave and aisles, presbytery and apse are by Carlo Innocenzo, one of the leading Lombard Rococo painters, whilst the reliefs and stucco statues are by Diego. Due to its almost complete unity of style and skill, the Church of Saint Maria is considered one of the best examples of late Baroque on a European level. Along Via **SS. Nazaro e Celso** we reach the beautiful church of the same name (photo 8), situated outside the village near the cemetery (1 km - accessible by car too). The church, built in Romanesque style in the 11th century on an existing late medieval fort and preceded by an elegant Baroque portico, has a pictorial decoration that is interesting from the exterior, but that becomes sublime inside with the apsidal frescoes by Giovanni Andrea De Magistris and the cycle on the spans commissioned from the Tarilli, artists from Lugano. The church is only open on the Sunday nearest 28th July, but its interior is always visible thanks to an opening in the entrance door. The cemetery that encloses the church still retains its 19th-century layout and has neo-Gothic tombs with the remains of the deceased, including the tomb crucifixes of the Carloni brothers.



 From the Church of Saints Nazaro and Celso a path begins that makes it possible to reach Lanzo d'Intelvi after a 30-minute walk.

We return to the road for Lanzo, a village with a tourism vocation that boasts a golf course, winter sports facilities, horse riding centres and a network of well-signposted trails. At the roundabout turn right and after 100 metres left, following signs for the peak of **Sighignola** known as the "Balcony of Italy" (1,320 metres) that is reached after 6 kilometres. The square affords magnificent views over Switzerland



 both to the west over the city of Lugano and the Alpine chain and to the south over Mount Generoso and Capolago. On the return journey we recommend a stop in the village. The centre of **Lanzo** stands around Piazza Matteotti and Piazza Garibaldi where there are numerous bars, restaurants, beautiful stone houses, frescoed votive niches and the parish church of Saint Siro with magnificent 16th-century and Baroque decorations. Returning to the road we reach Pello and at the junction we can return to Argegno or continue the itinerary by taking the provincial road SP14 on the left for Porlezza. The road descends to **Laino**, the birth town of some of the most famous families of the "magistri Intelvesi" including the Quaglio, Frisoni and Scotti whose houses still remain. Outside the village is the **Parish Church of Saint Lorenzo** (photo 10) that retains part of its Romanesque enclosure and precious Baroque decorations. We continue on the provincial road SP14 that winds towards the shores of Lake Lugano with beautiful views of the village of Osteno and Valsolda on the other shore of the lake. From Osteno, we flank the lake towards Porlezza and quickly reach **Grotte di Rescia** campsite. This is the access point to the caves of Rescia carved out over the centuries by the chalky waters that have formed interesting stalactites and stalagmites and are open from Easter until the end of September. Just before Porlezza, after Crotto Galbigo, we note the small Romanesque church of Saint Maurizio. Here stood what was once an important nucleus of Porlezza, partly destroyed by landslides in the 18th century and now uninhabited. All that remains is the church of Saint Maurizio, largely carved and reintegrated from 1966 on. In Porlezza, at the traffic lights turn right towards Menaggio. Once across the Menaggio Valley, the road reconnects with Lake Como.



## Cheese

The Como area is a land of cheeses and this is particularly true of the Intelvi Valley where masterpieces of dairy art come from, including Zincarlin, a flavoured Ricotta cheese covered in black pepper and finely chopped herbs that can be left to mature for up to a year and Casoretta, a fatty cow's-milk cheese, with goat's milk sometimes added (about 10%) that is left to mature at least a month and is then used in pasta dishes or on polenta. Numerous producers sell their wares direct to the public in villages in the Intelvese area.

## EVENTS

**End of summer festival:** (Porlezza) grand firework display over Lake Lugano on 16th August, the feast of Saint Rocco.

**Rally:** in Intelvi Valley rallies are regularly organized including the trails for the final of the Rally Asfalto Italian Trophy in October.

**Schignano Carnival:** (Schignano) one of Italy's historical carnivals held on the Sunday before Shrove Tuesday and Shrove Tuesday.

**Santu Piscen:** (Argegno) 1st January, a living Nativity with over 100 figurants.

## MARKETS

**Argegno:** Piazza del Porto, Monday morning - **Porlezza:** Saturday all day

## ACTIVE HOLIDAY

**Golf:** 9-hole course at 1,000 metres above sea level at Lanzo Golf Club - [www.golfianzo.it](http://www.golfianzo.it)

**Paragliding:** in Intelvi Valley there are four take-off sites with different exposures to the wind and that can be used at different times of day - [www.vololibero-valleintelvi.it](http://www.vololibero-valleintelvi.it)

**Moto-cross:** a fully-equipped trial park in Cava di Lanzo Intelvi - [www.lanzointelvi.it](http://www.lanzointelvi.it)

**Winter sports:** downhill skiing and snow-tubing in Lanzo.

**Cycling:** although they do not have cycle paths, the roads around the Intelvi Valley and Pigra offer interesting itineraries for on-road cycling practiced at an amateur level. (see box).

**Trekking:** numerous trekking possibilities. Maps for sale at Comunità Montana Lario-Intelvese

*An itinerary by car from Lake Como to the Italian shores of Lake Lugano, through charming natural landscapes and ancient villages. Discover the sunny Valsolda Valley, a generous land that spans from Porlezza to the Swiss border. It has given birth to generations of migrant artists, such as the architect-artist Pellegrino Tibaldi and for years was home to the writer Antonio Fogazzaro who set his famous novel "The Patriot" here.*

**Departure point:** Menaggio

Menaggio can be reached by car on state road SS 340.

**Note:** the itinerary is best covered by car and on a Sunday given the conjunction with the opening of some of the churches and museums mentioned in the text.

## From Lake Como to Lake Ceresio



1


We depart from Menaggio and follow the road towards Lugano, which winds its way up the side of the hill. On our left soars Mount Crocione (1,670 metres), with Mount Grona (1,736 metres) on the right. At **Grandola ed Uniti** leave the state road after about 600 metres and turn right into Via Roma. Park straight away and, keeping to the right, continue on foot to visit the hamlet of **Cardano**. Follow the cobbled street, veering left between old stone houses, to reach the entrance to **Villa Bagatti Valsecchi**, which is enclosed by artistic railings. This 18th-century villa was largely refurbished in the late 19th century, gradually adopting its current aspect. Boasting a beautiful terraced park, the complex stands on a cliff carved out by the Sanagra, a stream that from Mount Bregagno crosses deep fractures in the land before plunging into Lake Como. On its way it forms the valley of the same name, characterized by a wild and unspoilt natural environment. Back in the car we head towards **Codogno** where we find



2

**Villa Camozzi** (photo 2) (park in front of the villa). The building looks like a traditional 18th-century residence with a square layout, a central atrium and rooms on three sides. It is currently the seat of the town hall and the **Ethnographic and Naturalistic Museum of the Sanagra Valley**, which houses some of the valley's historical and natural artefacts. It has rooms dedicated to palaeontology, ancient crafts and the former Menaggio-Porlezza railway, as well as dioramas representing the natural habitats, flora and fauna of this vast territory.

For information: tel. +39.034432115 - [www.museovalsanagra.it](http://www.museovalsanagra.it).

 A 45-minute walk leads from the villa to **Rogolone**, a huge, centuries-old oak tree that has been declared a natural monument and is the symbol of Sanagra Valley Park.

We continue by car along the provincial road SP8 past the Parish Church of **Saint Siro**, with its altars, frescoes and Baroque stuccoes, and the mediaeval village of Velzo. The road winds its way uphill through fields and after about 2.5 km leads to **Naggio** (photo 3), a beautiful village with typical narrow cobblestone streets and a distinctly mediaeval feel. Continue and about 500 metres further on Lake Piano Nature Reserve, Lake Lugano and Porlezza Plain all come into view. In the village of **Gottro**, park near the sign "Via per S. Giorgio". About 10 minutes further on is



3

the **Church of Saint Giorgio** (12th century). Built in Romanesque style, it has 15th-century frescoes that are clearly visible through two gratings on the façade. The church can only be visited on very few occasions, but we still recommend stopping for the views alone.



Back at the car park, take the staircase to the old town centre of Gottro and the **Church of Saint Stefano**. Open only in conjunction with religious functions and concerts, the church houses a precious 19th-century organ by the famous makers Fabbrica Serassi, as well as some of the oldest 17th-century scagliola altar frontals in northern Italy. Return to the car and in Carlazzo (481 metres), leave the diversion for the Cavargna Valley on the right.

### DIVERSION TO THE CAVARGNA VALLEY

Geographically, the Cavargna Valley straddles the Alpine and pre-Alpine strip at an average altitude of 1,500 metres and is an area of wild and unspoilt natural landscapes. In the past, the valley - in particular San Lucio Pass, the final destination of a wonderful 2-hour trek from Cavargna - was an important communication route. As well as beautiful panoramic views of the mountains and walks of all levels of difficulty, Cavargna (1,071 metres above sea level, the highest municipality in the province of Como) is home to the "Val Cavargna Museum", which houses ethnographic artefacts linked to local life and activities.

For information: [www.valcavargna.com](http://www.valcavargna.com)



4

Cross the village of Carlazzo and turn left at the roundabout. After about 300 metres cross the bridge, known as "**Ponte del Saltone**", which hangs 136 metres above the Cuccio River, to reach **Corrido**. The churchyard of the Church of Saints Materno e Martino affords spectacular views of **Porlezza** Plain and Menaggio Valley. At the town hall, turn left and descend to Porlezza, a tourist resort on Lake Lugano, which is also known as Lake Ceresio. From 1885 to 1939 the village was the end of the Porlezza-Menaggio railway line and served the many international tourists who came to Lugano by steam boat. The old route of the railway has recently been converted into a pedestrian and cycle path.

We continue by flanking the lake and just beyond the outlying hamlet of Cima Porlezza, turn right to visit the Sanctuary of Caravina.



5

### SANCTUARY OF CARAVINA

The sanctuary stands in an elevated position offering wonderful panoramic views of the Gulf of Lugano, with Mount San Salvatore on the right and the village of Osteno on the opposite shore at the mouth of the Intevi Valley.

The construction of the church is linked to a fresco; a miraculous image of Our Lady of Mercy once housed in a small country chapel. Cardinal Carlo Borromeo, Archbishop of Milan and Lord of Valsolda, turned the chapel into a sanctuary in 1582. The building was further expanded around 1640 and the decorative layout and in particular the beautiful frescoes in the presbytery and the two side chapels - masterpieces by Isidoro Bianchi, a native of the nearby town of Campione d'Italia - date from this period.

The Sanctuary of Caravina is open every day.

For information: tel.+39.034469004 - [www.caravina.org](http://www.caravina.org).



6

Back on the state road, after Cressogno keep to the right and follow signs for Valsolda. Just before entering the old tunnel, turn right and follow signs for **Loggio**, Puria and Dasio. In the hamlet of Loggio, park the car in Piazza Emilio Maderni.





7

Walk along Via Lucia and Via Galbiati to enter the old town centre. The presence of the image of the Holy Shroud on the walls of some of the houses here bears witness to the migration to Turin of a certain number of artisans who found work on the building sites of the palaces commissioned by the Royal House of Savoy. The Church of Saint Bartolomeo, with its solid gold sphere from Turin soaring above the bell-tower, also recalls this migration. By simply following the mule track Via alla Cascata, a short 15-minute walk leads from the church to the **Soldo Stream Waterfall** (photo 7).



8

Back on the road again, bypass the diversion for **Castello** (photo 8) to reach **Puria**, the birth place of Pellegrino Tibaldi. Born in 1527, he lived in both Italy and Spain and amongst others, worked on the Cathedral and Church of Saint Fedele in Milan, as well as on the decorations of the Escorial in Madrid. Park near the Parish Church of Saint Maria Assunta. Although this is a Romanesque church, Tibaldi's hand can clearly be seen in the restoration work carried out in the 16th - 17th centuries. Enter the old town centre by walking along Corso del Tempio and Via Salomone. Centred on the Church of Saint Pietro, it still retains several noble buildings and its typical layout, which developed between the 16th and 19th centuries, is almost intact.

Back in the car, turn right at the junction for **Castello** and cross the bridge over Soldo Stream. Park near the cemetery and take Via Gonfalonieri for a 10-minute walk to the lovely hamlet of Castello, which clings to a rocky spur.



9

The village takes its name from the ancient fortifications, which in mediaeval times were known as "Castello Albogasio". Built on the foundations of the ancient fortress, the village retains the semi-circular layout of the old defensive walls around the high ground that had hosted the nucleus.

From Piazza Paolo Pagani, walk along Via S. Martino to reach the church of the same name (open on Sundays). Its current form dates from the 17th and 18th centuries. With a single central nave, the interior offers an exceptional spectacle thanks to its vaulted ceiling (late 17th-century) that was frescoed by Paolo Pagani, a painter from Castello, when he returned from a long stay in central Europe. Walk along Via Cesare Jamucci to reach **Casa Pagani** (photo 9), the artist's local home that has been turned into a museum to honour the figures of the migrant artists, their relationship with their

land of birth and the towns they worked in, often beyond the Alps.

*Casa Pagani: tel. +39.034468181 – [www.lagodicoelugano.com](http://www.lagodicoelugano.com)*



10

Back in the car, descend to the state road and enter **San Mamete** (photo 10) after about 1 km. Park at the far end of the village in the car park on the left, near the mouth of Soldo Stream. Cross the state road and take Via Bellotti, which leads to a beautiful, rectangular square with porticoes on one side. From the end of the square, a wide staircase leads to the Church of Saints Mamete and Agapito, which was already standing here in the 12th century, as testified by the Romanesque bell-tower. Return to the square to cross the state road and then take the delightful Via dei Portici, which overlooks the lake.



Back in the car, at the entrance to Oria, a village on the Swiss border, take the road on the right towards Albogasio Superiore; park here and then continue to the state road on foot. Cross it and continuing on the right just after the bus stop follow Via Caravello to the centre of **Oria**. Here it is possible to admire the places where Antonio Fogazzaro set his famous novel "The Patriot", including the villa (open by prior arrangement: [www.fondoambiente.it](http://www.fondoambiente.it)) where the writer stayed for some time. It stands on a lovely square that is also the churchyard of the Church of Saint Sebastiano.

From the courtyard take **Via Antonio Fogazzaro**, a small road that winds its way between porticoes and narrow walls before opening onto the state road, which should be crossed. This is **Albogasio Inferiore** and continuing along Via dei Ceroni leads to beautiful Piazza Calderoni.

From here, take Via Renaldi and Via della Chiesa on the right to the Parish Church of the Annunciation.

Just to the left of the church is Via Caregià, a splendid mule track flanked by monumental buildings, such as Palazzo delle Colonne and former Palazzo Affaitati, now Villa Salve. Turn left into Via Carlo Barrera as far as Piazza Malombra and then take Via Montale behind the fountain that leads to the

**Church of Saint Ambrogio**, which stands in a beautiful panoramic position.

If we retrace our steps, we find ourselves back in Albogasio Inferiore where the tarmac road Via Maestri Comacini leads onto Via D'Annunzio. At the bus stop, take Via Castello to return to the car park.



## EVENTS

**Feast of the Sanctuary of Caravina:** (Cressogno di Valsolda) celebrations on 11th May (in commemoration of the miracle) and 8th September (solemn feast).

**End of Summer Festival:** (Porlezza) huge firework display on Lake Ceresio on 16th August for the feast of Saint Rocco.

**Serassi Festival:** (Carlazzo) August concerts of historical organs by the International Organ Circuit - [www.agimuslombardia.com](http://www.agimuslombardia.com)

## MARKETS

**Porlezza:** Saturday

## ACTIVE HOLIDAY

**Pedestrian-cycle paths:** former Menaggio-Porlezza railway and Lake Piano promenade.

**Fishing:** summer spin fishing courses at the house of Lake Piano Reserve.

**Trekking:** we recommend "The Path of the Four Valleys", a 50-km trek that leaves from Breglia in the Municipality of Plesio and crosses the Valsanagra and Valsolda Valleys (detailed leaflets available from tourist information offices).



In Porlezza there's a small **water park** that is open every day in summer.

In Osteno, on the south shore of Lake Ceresio, visitors can admire the magnificent stalactites and stalagmites of **Rescia Caves**.



*This itinerary covers North Lake Como, the upper part of Lake Como, famous for its lakeside holiday resorts and water sports. It is highly recommended for families, because it is the part with the widest beaches and shallowest water on the entire lake. The upper lake area also has historical villages, like Dongo that is linked to the end of the Fascist era, Gravedona, with one of the most important Romanesque churches in the entire province, Piona Abbey, which overlooks the bay of the same name in the Province of Lecco and excursions to discover the mountain villages in the inland area.*

**Departure point:** Piazza Paracchini, Dongo

Dongo can be reached by bus on line C10, by NLC boat or by car along the SS 340dir

**Duration:** full day

## A day in North Lake Como



Dongo (photo 2) is on a plain formed by the Albano Stream at the mouth of Albano Valley. At the end of the valley is the important pass of San Jorio, which from as early as the Roman era connected North Lake Como to the Swiss valley of Mesolcina. In the 15th and 16th centuries Dongo, along with Gravedona and Sorico, formed the community of the Tre Pievi (or Three Parishes) that were the cornerstone for the diffusion of Christianity in the upper lake area, which was autonomous until the end of the 16th century.

### DONGO AND THE END OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR



On 27th April 1945, troops escorting Benito Mussolini and some of his ministers were stopped on the road between Musso and Dongo. The ministers were initially taken to Palazzo Manzi (photo 3) and were then shot on the lakeside promenade in front of the square. Benito Mussolini and Clara Petacci were taken to Giulino di Mezzegra and executed (28th April 1945). These facts are well documented in the **End of World War II Museum**, in Palazzo Manzi, seat of the town hall.

Palazzo Manzi was built in 1824 and is one of the most expressive examples of the Napoleonic period on Lake Como. It was donated in 1937 by Giuseppina Manzi to the Municipality of Dongo that made it their administrative seat. Inside, the so-called Gold Room - where the Manzi family held their banquets - can be visited subject to booking. For information contact Imago Cooperative - tel. +39.034482572.

From Piazza Paracchini to the left of Palazzo Manzi take Via del Mercato, once the commercial centre of the village. Immediately after a portico, turn right onto Via Osteria to enter the old town centre. At the end of the road, turn right again and walk along Via Torrazza and Via Lamberzoni to the small Romanesque church of **Saint Maria in Martinico** (normally open), a building with a single central nave with sculptural decorations. From the church, take the cobbled Via dell'Erbolo, then Via Interno a Martinico and Via Antica Regina to reach the ancient cluster of houses of Barbignano. On the other side of the river it is possible to see the large factories of the former Falck Iron Works, subsequently owned by Cagiva and now divided up into several companies, but still an important source of employment for locals. Turning back towards Palazzo Manzi, take Via Roma and Via Tre Pievi. Cross the bridge over the Albano Stream and a little further ahead, on the other side of the state road, is the beautiful **Franciscan Monastery of Madonna delle Lacrime** (normally open). Built

in the 16th century, it celebrates a miraculous event in 1553 when the "Our Lady with Child", a fresco in a niche of the church named after Our Lady of the River - saved several years previously from the stream in flood - suddenly began to shed tears. The parish priest of Dongo collected the tears in a chalice and the same year construction work began on the sanctuary. The church has a 17th-century aspect and is annexed to the monastery of the Franciscan monks. About 50 metres further on, take Viale Mons. Bellesini, lined with rows of conifers, which leads to the **Parish Church of Saint Stefano** (photo 4 - open for religious functions). Of ancient origins, it was rebuilt in the 18th century and adorned with frescoes by artists of European fame, such as Carlo Scotti and Giulio Quaglio. Behind the church begins a beautiful **walk** that flanks the lake, linking Dongo and Gravedona. Along the way there are benches, beaches, lidos and picnic areas. This walk



lasts 50 minutes and is accessible to wheelchair users too. Once in Gravedona and beyond the lido, flank Liro Stream on the left, then cross the bridge over the stream and continue straight ahead to the beautiful colonnade of the Parish Church of Saint Vincenzo and the Church of **Saint Maria del Tiglio**, a masterpiece of local Romanesque style.



4



© Alessandra Mutti

5

## SAINT MARIA DEL TIGLIO

The church was built from the 12th century onwards on an existing early-Christian baptistery, traces of which remain in the square perimeter design with three apses, the baptismal font and fragments of mosaic flooring inside. The façade features alternating white stone (from nearby Musso) and grey stone and a huge octagonal bell-tower that makes the building seem to soar upwards. The church has a central layout with two orders; the lower one with three apses and the upper one featuring an elegant open loggia. The building has an exposed trussed vault ceiling. On



6

a counter-façade to the left, the best preserved fresco is a 14th-century Last Judgement, but one of the most important pieces in the church is the wooden Crucifix. Dating from the 12th-century this is a unique example of carved wood from the local Romanesque period and with the exception of the arms, the entire piece comes from a single piece of wood.

The church is normally open.

About 300 metres after the church and beyond the landing stage on the lakeside promenade we can admire **Palazzo Gallio**, a majestic building with towers and loggias, built in 1582 as a residence for Cardinal Tolomeo Gallio and now the seat of the Comunità Montana (*Association of Mountain Communities*). In Piazza Mazzini, follow signs for **Castello**, the oldest nucleus of Gravedona. Take Via Castello that leads to a small hill overlooking the lake with beautiful views over Saint Maria del Tiglio and the bay (photo 5). Continue to the left to Via Volta, where the house where Alessandro Volta lived stands. Turn left and then take Via San Rocco on the right. Once back on the state road and in front of the town hall, continue right for about 20 metres (look out for traffic) then take Via Dosi e Segna on the left. Climb to a junction where there is a sign indicating "Sentiero del Giubileo 2000 / Via Pessina" (*Path of the Jubilee 2000*). Move to the left to admire the church of **Saint Maria delle Grazie**, known as the Monastery (normally closed), whose grassy courtyard affords splendid views of the bay. Dating from 1467, the Church of Saint Maria delle Grazie is owned by the Augustinian foundation. It is a typical example of a "church with transverse arches" featuring a central nave divided by five pointed arches that drop to the floor, creating the side chapels, and an exposed larch roof. Tall pointed windows illuminate the interior, which is richly decorated by Lombard Renaissance frescoes. Nearby is another church; the Romanesque Church of **Saints Gusmeo and Matteo** (normally closed). Charmingly framed by plane trees, according to tradition it was built on the site of the martyrdom of the two saints after their relics were found around 1248. It is decorated with a "Glory" dated 1608 by Il Fiammenghino.

From Gravedona we can continue on two different excursions:



## PIONA ABBEY

By car or by boat too during summer, subject to checking the timetable, we can reach Olgasca Peninsula, on the eastern shore of Lake Como where Piona Abbey stands. The history of Piona begins in 610 when an oratory dedicated to Saint Giustina was built on the peninsula. Re-consecrated in 1138, it became a Cluniac monastery in 1169. The abbey church is built based on the model typical of small Romanesque buildings in the Como area. Inside,

two marble lions supporting a holy-water font and 13th-century frescoes stand out in particular. At the side of the church is a fascinating cloister built between 1252 and 1275 in a style of transition between Romanesque and Gothic; it is surrounded by beautiful columns with figurative and plant motifs. Also in the cloister are two splendid 12th and 13th-century frescoes. The monastery began to decline shortly after the cloister was built, leading to its closure in 1798. Its rebirth began in the 20th century and it became an abbey in the 1970s. Around the abbey buildings there is a vast green area maintained by the Cistercian monks and a shop where visitors can buy excellent liqueurs and herbal infusions. *The abbey is open all year round - [www.cistercensi.info/piona](http://www.cistercensi.info/piona)*



## THE VALLEYS OF GRAVEDONA

Climbing the Valleys of Gravedona by car we reach the villages of Livo and Peglio, which still retain their old centres and rustic houses. A few hundred metres before the village of Peglio (655 metres) is the interesting complex of **Saint Eusebio** that consists of a church (normally closed), a portico, an ossuary, a rectory and a cemetery. Inside the church there are noteworthy frescoes by Mauro della Rovere, known as Il Fiammenghino, one of the leading

painters in Lombardy between the 16th and 17th centuries. The views from the churchyard span the entire north lake area and Liro Valley. We climb to the village of Peglio, crossing the plain of Gorghiglio and passing by the small oratory of the Madonna del Gorghiglio to reach Livo. The village still retains most of its original urban layout. Just outside the village, near the cemetery, is the 15th-century Church of **Saint Giacomo Vecchia** (normally closed) with a magnificent apse frescoed during the 15th century.

*For visits to monuments that are normally closed and for guided visits contact the Imago Cooperative (tel. +39.034482572 – [info@imagolario.com](mailto:info@imagolario.com)).*

## EVENTS

**Festa del lago:** (Gravedona) fireworks and allegorical boats for the lake festival on 14th August.

**Events at Palazzo Gallio:** Palazzo Gallio in Gravedona regularly hosts classical music concerts and exhibitions of local products.

**Feast of Saint Jorio:** (Gravedona ed Uniti) on the first Sunday of August at San Jorio Pass (2,014 metres), between the San Jorio Valley and the Morobbia Valley in Switzerland, an Italian-Swiss celebration draws numerous participants on both the Italian and Swiss sides.

## MARKETS

**Dongo:** every first and third Thursday of the month.

**Gravedona:** every first and third Wednesday of the month.

## ACTIVE HOLIDAY

**Water sports:** a heaven for all water sports, in particular sailing, thanks to the presence of constant breezes; there are schools, hire points and clubs to suit everyone in all villages in North Lake Como. Ask for a list at any tourist information office.

**Bird-watching:** the upper lake area is home to the Pian di Spagna Nature Reserve, which can be visited on foot, by bicycle or by boat. As it is on an important migration corridor, it is a paradise for birdwatchers ([www.piandispagna.it](http://www.piandispagna.it)).

**Beaches:** there are lidos with pools along the pedestrian promenade between Dongo and Gravedona.



*This itinerary departs from Bellagio to discover the mountain zone, a very interesting area in terms of both landscape and nature. It climbs to the Ghisallo Pass, where the famous Sanctuary of Madonna del Ghisallo stands. Nearby is Jungle Raider Park, an adventure and amusement park built on trees, with trails to suit adults and children alike.*

**Departure point:** Bellagio

Bellagio can easily be reached from Como along provincial road SP 583 or by car and then NLC ferry from Varenna or Menaggio/Cadenabbia.

**Duration:** half day + any stops

## By car from Bellagio to the Cyclists' Sanctuary



The itinerary can be covered by car, with short stretches on foot. The fittest can also cover it by bicycle, following the legendary Ghisallo leg of the Giro d'Italia bike race. However, the total difference in altitude is 790 metres.

From the ferry landing stage in Bellagio, following signs for Lecco, take the road that climbs through the municipal park and at the end turn right. After passing Bellagio cemetery on the left, there are splendid views of the Lecco branch of the lake and a magnificent expanse of olive trees that stand inside Villa Giulia.

### VILLA GIULIA

Built in 1624, it was refurbished throughout at the end of the 18th century. With a neoclassical feel, it has three floors and a central body with two wings. The part of lawn in front of the villa, known as the Vialone, was dug out specially by one of its owners, Count Venini, so that he would be able to admire views of the Como branch of the lake.

The villa has had various owners including the King of Belgium, Leopold I, Antonio Mella, who turned it into a hotel for a brief period, Count Blome von Buol-Schauenstein, the Polish banker Baron Gay and the Romanian nobleman Kirakirschen; it is currently owned by a family from Milan.



After about 600 metres, at the roundabout follow signs for Asso, Erba and San Primo. Continue for about 2.5 km and near "Trattoria La Busciana", make a first stop in the small clearing in front of the restaurant to admire splendid views of Bellagio promontory (photo 2), the upper lake and the mountains all around. Return to the itinerary and after about 1 km turn left towards Chevrio - Makallè to one of the most beautiful panoramic points in Bellagio. About 200 metres after the turning follow signs on the left for "Trattoria Baita Belvedere"; the



restaurant is at the end of a short stretch of dirt track. Park in a space on the left and continue on foot. After about 10 minutes is the panoramic lookout point called **Belvedere Makallè**.

Return to the car and back on the main road turn left. Pass the village of Guello and after a straight



stretch of road there is a junction with the small church of Guello on the right. Continue on the left on the main road towards **Civenna** - Erba and after about 2.5 km is Civenna where another stop at the panoramic viewpoint on our left, near the playground, is possible. Here stands a statue of a blazing torch, a monument in memory of all those who have died in motorcycling accidents that is visited every year on 1st November during a huge and extremely heartfelt motorcycle rally.



Cross the village and continue for about 3 km as far as Colle del Ghisallo, the mountain pass that connects the promontory of Bellagio to Valassina.

At the pass, which is 754 metres above sea level, we are in the Municipality of Magreglio. Here we find the small **Sanctuary of Madonna del Ghisallo**.

According to ancient legend, its name derives from a certain Count Ghisallo who in the mediaeval period was attacked by bandits on these roads, at a point where there was a chapel dedicated to Our Lady. He vowed to build a church there if he survived the dangerous situation and indeed, was saved. The chapel was gradually extended until a church was built in 1623 at the peak of the climb to Mount Ghisallo. This climb is traditionally crossed from the north side during the Giro di Lombardia cycle race and has also been included several times in the Giro d'Italia. For this reason, Our Lady of Ghisallo is particularly venerated by cyclists and in 1948 Pope Pius XII proclaimed her universal patron saint of cyclists. On that occasion, a votive torch blessed by the Pope was brought from Rome to the sanctuary by relay race; the last two cyclist-torch bearers were Bartali and Coppi, who are commemorated in two statues at the entrance to the church.

### SANCTUARY OF MADONNA DEL GHISALLO



This small church houses numerous mementoes of cycling champions as over the years the sports' biggest stars have adopted the habit of donating them to the sanctuary. We thus find the bicycles used by Bartali, Coppi and Merckx to ride to victory in the Tour de France, the special bicycles used by Moser to establish the hour record and several pink, yellow and world-champion jerseys. By the 1990s there were so many items they no longer fitted in the small church. Designed and built next to the sanctuary, the Cycling Museum was inaugurated on 14th October 2006 during that year's Giro di Lombardia, with a ceremony attended by several past and present cycling champions.

However, the most important mementoes continue to be displayed in the sanctuary church.  
For information on the museum: [info@museodelghisallo.it](mailto:info@museodelghisallo.it) - [www.museodelghisallo.it](http://www.museodelghisallo.it).

Back in the car, from Ghisallo Pass we take the road in front of the square and continue towards Piano Rancio. After about 3 km, in Piano Rancio, park in the large car park on the SIMBOLO FAMIGLIE left and follow signs to nearby **Jungle Raider Park**. This is an adventure park built on trees with an ability trail suspended in mid-air, stretching between tree trunks with wooden boardwalks, Nepalese bridges and lianas connecting one tree to another. The park is open from April to early November and the trails, which vary in difficulty, suit adults and children aged 3 upwards.  
For opening times and days: [www.jungleraiderpark.com](http://www.jungleraiderpark.com).

Outside Jungle Raider Park, turn left and on the left take a dirt track called Via Menaresta. A 15-minute walk away is the source of the River Lambro which, as the name of the road suggests, is called Menaresta.

### THE RIVER LAMBRO

The Lambro - the main river in the Brianza area - begins life in the heart of the Larian Triangle, at 944 metres above sea level, near Pian Rancio. Here the river is little more than a trickle of water that springs forth from two sloping slabs of rock. The spring's name, "Menaresta" ("mena" meaning it goes and "resta" meaning it stays), mirrors its most unusual feature. In fact, it has a constant capacity all year round, but with an intermittent flow that means that periods during which the flow is more modest, are followed by moments of higher capacity. This is due to the peculiar subterranean water tank shaped like an upside-down syphon - when the water that collects in it exceeds the level of the bend, it flows out more copiously until it falls back below the outlet, thus decreasing external flow.



Return to the car and from the car park turn left and after a few metres, at a junction, turn right towards Bellagio. Just after the junction, we recommend stopping at the rock known as **Sasso di Lentina** (photo 6), one of the largest erratic masses in the area, transported here at the time of the glaciations.

In distant times, these masses became detached from the Alps and were transported south for several hundred kilometres by the glaciers. When these finally withdrew and melted, about 12,000 years ago, the rocks were deposited in areas that had completely different types of rock and soil. As a result, these masses attracted the attention of ancient populations that made them the focus of their religious cults or used them, much more prosaically, as material for buildings or for sculpting.



6

We now continue in the same direction until we reach a new junction with the small church of Guello and then continue straight as far as Bellagio (13 km) (photo 7), once again enjoying the magnificent views that open up along the way.



7

## EVENTS

**Motorcyclist meeting:** (Civenna) 1st November in front of the bronze flame erected at the most panoramic point on the Lake Como circuit.

**Giro di Lombardia cycling race:** in October the last 'Monument' of the European calendar, nicknamed "the Classic of the Falling Leaves", almost always crosses Ghisallo Pass.

## MARKETS

**Antique market:** (Magreglio) a lively antique market is held on the sanctuary square in Magreglio the second Sunday of the month.

## ACTIVE HOLIDAY

**Snow & Bike Park at San Primo:** lifts and facilities with itineraries of varying difficulty suited to all levels of downhill mountain biking. The same facilities serve two ski slopes in winter.

**Trekking:** the two-day trekking "Dorsale del Triangolo Lariano" crosses San Primo. Description leaflets from Tourist Information Offices.

*A circular itinerary to discover the wild and surprising eastern shore of Lake Como, with small villages that hide precious little jewels. It then moves from the lake to the mountains, climbing to the heart of the Larian Triangle, as the region between the branches of Como and Lecco is called, visiting "the holiday resorts" in vogue among the Milanese in the last century that to this day meet the needs of those searching for places to relax and to enjoy active tourism too.*


**Departure and arrival point:** Como

Como can be reached by car by taking the Como Centro exit on the A9 motorway and by Trenitalia or Trenord trains from Milan to Lugano.

**Duration:** full day + any stops


## The Treasures of the Larian Triangle



 The itinerary can best be covered by car with some transfers on foot; it can also be covered by bicycle for those with professional bicycles and a good level of fitness. The most demanding climb is 13 km long, with a difference in altitude of 800 metres and an average gradient of 7%. We recommend great care and attention as there are no reserved lanes and some sections of the road are very narrow and extremely busy.



From Como take the provincial road SP583 towards Bellagio. The road, which runs high above the lake, offers magnificent views over Como and the opposite shores of the lake. The first village we come across is **Blevio**, which is divided into seven hamlets many of which have several noble villas. We descend slightly to the lakeside village of **Torno**, which deserves a stop (for the visit see itinerary 3). The state road rises again on the woody slope and a short

 while later enters the Municipality of Faggeto Lario that links the mountain hamlets of Molina, Lemna and Palanzo and that of Riva on the lake, which has a small lido at the very end of the road open to vehicles. We continue again along the state road to reach Pognana Lario and then **Careno**, one of the most characteristic villages on the lake. We recommend a visit to it by parking just beyond the village and returning on foot to take the staircase just after the parish church that descends through narrow streets to the landing stage and the beach (see box). Just beyond Careno, the road reaches **Nesso**.

### CARENO and NESSO



Seen from the lake, **Careno** has a very unusual triangular shape with the small Romanesque church of **Saint Martino** (12th century) at its peak. We reach it by descending stone steps, along the way discovering panoramic binoculars formed by arches and narrow passageways between old houses. We can enjoy the feeling of peace and times gone by this village - that seems to slide into the lake - transmits. The church (normally closed) has some interesting frescoes and

externally features a portico, which opens towards the lake and has a charming mullioned arch and a tall stone bell-tower. It was the church of the community that remained independent for the entire Middle Ages. Skirt the church to reach the tiny beach, whilst the staircase descends to the small harbour served by the "Navigazione Lago di Como" company in summer.

**Nesso** is a village of prehistoric origin that was romanized at the end of the 1st century and became an important church with the spread of Christianity.

The church has Baroque forms with later stucco decorations and frescoes and houses the remains of the Bishop of Como, Rainaldo. Nesso is famous for its Orrido, a waterfall that drops into a tall, narrow gorge that divides the village in two. To visit Nesso, park near the branch road for Pian del Tivano. From here, a charming dirt track begins close to the lake that leads back towards the



Orrido. The best point for observing it is precisely from the Romanesque bridge of Civera where our walk ends, after passing the small square near the landing stage and the covered passageway of a beautiful house with wonderful views of the lake and a millstone hanging on the wall.



3

Return to the car to leave the lake and climb along the panoramic road that winds upwards to **Piani del Tivano** (photo 4), offering magnificent views on the way. This handy tarmacked road crosses the entire plain, which is situated at 900 metres above sea level. On Sundays, this grassy hollow is a popular destination for hundreds of tourists thanks to its wide, open green areas that are ideal for picnics and mountains walks in summer, becoming cross-country skiing, sledging and snow-shoe tracks in winter. The highest point of the road is in Colma, a popular observation point thanks to its views over the hills of Brianza, the Po Plain, the outline of the pre-Alps and the Valassina Valley. It is also popular with astronomy enthusiasts thanks to the **observatory**; run by the Gruppo Astrofili Brianza, it is open to the public for observations and guided visits (*for dates* [www.osservatoriosormano.it](http://www.osservatoriosormano.it)).



© Filippo Molteni

4

Colma di Sormano became famous in the 1970s when its extremely steep climb, known as the "wall of Sormano" (photo 5), was a leg in the Giro di Lombardia cycle race. Cancelled after just a few years due to its steepness that, exceeding 25% in some stretches, forced many cyclists to dismount and continue on foot, it remains popular with many cycling enthusiasts, so much so it was recently decided to turn it into an open-air museum, putting back on the tarmac comments and moments from the cycle races, recording the gradient and also a description of the vegetation at the sides of the road and the peaks that can be seen on the horizon. In recent years it has also been put back into the route of the historical race. On foot, the "wall" is a great shortcut for Sormano. By car on the other hand, follow the winding road that descends towards Sormano and Asso. After about a dozen kilometres we reach Asso, at the intersection of the Valassina and Valbrona Valleys. The road bends again, circling the centre, and then flanks the River Lambro. On the left we can note the waterfall of Vallategna, a thirty-metre drop of the Foce Stream into the River Lambro. Continuing beyond the Ferrovie Nord station we reach the centre of **Canzo**, a small holiday resort with beautiful shops and elegant patisseries, ideal for a quick and delicious break. About 1 km south of the village is



5

**Segrino Lake**, a small pre-Alpine lake where bathing is permitted, flanked by a 5 km pedestrian-cycle path. On the eastern side, the cycle path gives access to some small free beaches, whilst to the south, in the municipality of Eupilio, there is a lido to which access is possible subject to payment


## TYPICAL PRODUCTS of CANZO

In numerous patisseries in the village you'll find a wide range of typical **Nocciolini**, small, crumbly biscuits similar to amaretti (almond macaroons), but hazelnut flavoured. Still produced following ancient recipes, they are recognized by the Lombardy region as a "traditional agricultural and food product". After 15 years, the production of **Vespetrò** liqueur has begun again. The original recipe was perfected by the pharmacist Scannagatta from Canzo based on the one he prepared for Napoleon's soldiers in the 19th century. Made from aromatic herbs the liqueur is typically dark yellow and is to be enjoyed after meals.

We continue by flanking the lake and then take the road on the left towards **Pusiano**. The road descends, offering us views of another small Brianza lake, Lake Pusiano (photo 6), with its characteristic Cypress Island. At the traffic lights we turn right onto state road SS639 towards Erba. The road crosses the town of Pusiano, presenting us with **Palazzo Beauharnais** (15th-16th century), preceded by a public park completed by Eugène de Beauharnais, Napoleon's stepson and viceroy of Italy. On the left are the lake and island where the owners keep some non-autochthonous animals that have been saved and now roam free following closure of the zoo in Via Palestro in Milan.



6

**Lake Pusiano** is well worth a stop because, as well as beautiful walks, it is possible to hire pedalos,  go fishing on the small artificial lakes of Eupilio or go on mini-cruises on electrically-powered ferries (for information: [www.prolocobosisio.it](http://www.prolocobosisio.it)).

We continue straight for about 4 km until we cross, in the territory of Erba, Via Milano just beyond the bridge. Here we turn right to reach the centre, again flanking the river. At the roundabout we turn left, go over the level crossing and turn onto the central road, Corso XXV Aprile. After parking the car, we walk the entire length of the road until the staircase of the **Monument to the Fallen** (by Giuseppe Terragni, 1926-1929). Climb the long stone staircase to admire the panoramic views of Pian d'Erba and the beautiful bell-tower of the Church of Saint Eufemia, the symbol of the city. Behind the shrine there is the open air Licinium theatre. At the foot of the staircase is the entrance to the public park of Villa Majnoni through which it is possible to reach the charming village of Villincino, the ancient settlement crossed by a narrow and winding quarter introduced by a door topped by an elegant mullioned arch.

Drive back to Como along the "old road for Como" that begins on the left of the staircase as Via Bartesaghi. Along the road we note Pomerio Castle, a mediaeval manor house with elegant neo-Gothic mullioned windows and remains of a tower dating from the 11th century in Buccinigo d'Erba and in Albese con Cassano, the delightful rural Church of Saint Pietro, which has a leaning bell-tower.

From Tavernerio we suggest returning to Como via Ponzate and **Camnago Volta**: at the roundabout in the centre of the village continue straight along Via Primo Maggio. After a short uphill stretch, the road descends towards Como following the valley of the Cosia Stream with panoramic views of the city and on clear days, of the Alps of Piedmont. Just beyond the church in Camnago Volta turn left to reach Campora cemetery where we find the **Mausoleum of Alessandro Volta** who spent the last years of his life here. In neoclassical style and topped by a metal canopy, it is introduced by two life-size statues representing Religion, praying for her model son and Science, crying over her lover. The period lamp-posts at the entrance are fuelled by methane, a gas discovered by the scientist, and were placed there in 1999 to mark the bicentenary of the invention of the battery.



*From the car park above Camnago church begins Ponte dei Bottini path; a cycle/pedestrian path that exploits the old tramway that once linked Como and Lecco (1 hour return journey) with benches and stopping spots in the clearings.*

Back in Via Rienza, we can reach Como in just a few minutes, entering the city from Via Briantea.

## EVENTS

**Gnocchi festival:** (Pognana) on 16th August handmade gnocchi can be savoured whilst enjoying splendid views from the small church of Saint Rocco.

**Giubiana Feast:** (Canzo) last Thursday in January, a bonfire to chase away the winter with a grand celebration rich in rural symbolism.

**Biofera:** (Canzo) in September; a fair promoting organic culture and agriculture, with stands, conferences, workshops and shows for children.

**Madonna della Neve:** (Pusiano) a traditional celebration on 4th and 5th August with an amazing illumination of the lake and a firework display (on 4th) and religious celebrations with a snowfall on the sanctuary on the mountain (on 5th).

## MARKETS

**Erba** Thursday mornings, **Canzo:** Wednesday mornings

## ACTIVE HOLIDAY



**Mountain time trails:** for specialists, the Nesso-Colma di Sormano road has a real time route timing system giving cycling fans a chance to test themselves - [www.cicloviadeilaghi.it/porterelaxinbici](http://www.cicloviadeilaghi.it/porterelaxinbici)

**Winter sports in Pian del Tivano:** snow-shoes, cross-country skiing or bob, Pian del Tivano offers numerous possibilities for practicing the most "eco-friendly" winter sports.

**Sport climbing to Canzo/Scarenna:** the Canzo area is a heaven for excursionists and climbers, from the rocky gym of Scarenna, to the so-called "vie ferrate", the rock climbing routes up to the 3rd grade of the UIAA scale in the Corni di Canzo group of mountains.





