

An itinerary by car from Lake Como to the Italian shores of Lake Lugano, also called Lake Ceresio, 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.

Duration: full day

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

From Lake Como to Lake Ceresio



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** turn right into Via Roma (second road to the right), following the signs "Museo Etnografico e Naturalistico Val Sanagra". 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 **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.



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 the museum.

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




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 17th-century scagliola altar frontals. 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.org



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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 terminal of the Porlezza-Menaggio railway line and served the many international tourists who arrived from Lugano by steam boat.

 The old route of the railway has 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.



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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 Intelvi 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 extended 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



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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.



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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).



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Back to the car, bypass the diversion for **Castello** (photo 8) to reach **Puria**, the birth place of the architect and painter Pellegrino Tibaldi. Born in 1527, he operated 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. The village takes its name from the ancient fortifications, which in



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mediaeval times were known as "Castello Albogasio". Built on the foundations of this 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. For information: www.museocasapagani.it



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Drive back down to the state road SS340 and enter **San Mamete** (photo 10) after about 1 km. Leave the car 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 picturesque Via dei Portici, which overlooks the lake.

Back in the car, we reach the centre of **Oria**. Here it is possible to admire the places where the 19th century Italian novelist Antonio Fogazzaro set his famous novel "The Patriot", including the Villa Fogazzaro Roi (now managed by FAI - the Italian National Trust. For information and guided visits see www.fondoambiente.it) where the writer would stay for long periods. It stands on a lovely square that is also the churchyard of the Church of Saint Sebastiano.

From the villa you can walk to the boat dock of Oria along a lovely porticoed street. We retrace our footsteps and we take Via Antonio Fogazzaro, which after 400 meters ends onto the state road, which should be crossed heading to **Albogasio Inferiore**. We walk up the cobblestone street Via dei Ceroni to the 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 nice mule track flanked by monumental buildings, such as Palazzo delle Colonne and Villa Salve. The latter was designed by the Albogasio-born architect Isidoro Affaitati who mainly worked in Poland, especially in Warsaw (es.: Kazimierz Palace, Camaldolese Church). 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 Oria.



EVENTS

Solemn Feasts 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.



In Osteno, on the south shore of Lake Ceresio, visitors can admire the magnificent stalactites and stalagmites of **Rescia Caves** www.grottedirescia.it. In winter the caves are decorated and transformed into a small Christmas village.


MARKETS

Porlezza: Saturday

ACTIVE HOLIDAY

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

 **Environmental tourism:** check the activities organized by the Casa della Riserva ( Riserva Lago Piano) such as guided tours of the Nature Reserve Lago di Piano, courses, informative meetings, guided wildlife observations.

 **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).