

THE VAL D'INTELVI

The Val d'Intelvi is a beautiful valley that connects Lake Como with Lake Lugano. The valley 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 drive to the top of Monte Sighignola (1300 m.) "the Balcony of Italy" and enjoy the view of the Alps and Lake Lugano.

Route: Menaggio – Argegno – S. Fedele – Pello – Scaria – Lanzo – Laino – Claino con Osteno – Porlezza – Menaggio 73 km.



On the way to Rifugio Venini

Follow the road from Menaggio in the direction of Como and at Argegno (15 km from Menaggio) turn right and follow road SP13 in the direction of San Fedele Intelvi.

The road quickly ascends with wide bends that open onto vast, sunny plains, surrounded by chestnut woods, that are common in the entire Intelvese area. On the left we can make out the mass of Sasso Gordona and Monte 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, one of the oldest churches in the entire valley as testified by the bell-tower which is clearly in Romanesque style. The church was extensively renovated in the 17th and 18th century. Unfortunately it is not open to the public but from the church yard you can enjoy a wonderful view of the lake.

After the village Dizzasco, along the road on the left, is the **Oratory of the 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 the 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 houses precious Baroque stuccos, frescoes and 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 the the name of "**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 the Spring, they always returned even for short periods. The **Intelvi Masters** came to the fore between the 17th and 18th century 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. +39 348 7930214.

Continue along the provincial road to **Castiglione** (608 m), a medieval fortified village that has ruins of an ancient castle and fortified houses.

A few kilometers further on we reach **San Fedele** (779 m), one of the bigger towns in the valley. You can park in Piazza G.B. Carminati. Worth visiting is the **parish church of S. Antonio Abate** situated in Largo IV Novembre. The church dates from the 12th century and has a beautiful **Romanesque facade** with a splayed arch portal and elegant sculptural decorations by the Maestri Intevesi. It houses 16th century frescoes attributed to Giovanni Andrea De Magistris. Also notable are the stuccoes and the scagliola altar frontals.

Detour: From S. Fedele we recommend the breathtaking car trip to the alpine cheese farms. From San Fedele follow the road to Pigra passing through Blessagno. From Pigra follow the mountain road to Alpe di Colonna, Rifugio Boffalora (1200 m), Alpe di Lenno (1495 m) and from there to Rifugio Venini (1.576 m.). The road, not for unskilled drivers, offers magnificent views of both lake Lugano and Lake Como. At the farmhouses it is possible to buy the local cheeses and at the rifugi try the local cuisine.

Back in the car at the junction at the end of the town San Fedele you follow the signs for **Pellio and Lanzo Intelvi**, turning left. After Pellio you reach the village of Scaria which is well worth visiting. Veering to the right, you climb the hairpinbend that leads to Via de Aglio, We recommend parking here and continuing along Via Palli to the late Baroque church of **Santa Maria di Scaria**. Decoration of the building is linked to the name of the Carloni family, natives of Scaria. Due to its almost complete unity of style and skill, the church of Santa Maria is considered **one of the best examples of late Baroque on a European level**.

Along **Via SS Nazaro e Celso** you can reach the beautiful church of the same name, situated outside of the village near the cemetery. The church, built in Romanesque style in the 11th century on an existing late medieval fort is preceded by an **elegant Baroque portico** with an interesting pictorial decoration. Inside the church are **splendid frescoes** by Giovanni Andrea de Magistris. The church is usually closed but its interior is visible

thanks to an opening in the entrance door.

Turn back to the car and follow the road to **Lanzo**, a town with a tourism vocation that boasts a golf course, winter sport facilities, horse riding centres and a network of well-signposted trails. At the roundabout turn right and after 100 meters left, following the signs for the Sighignola peak know as the **Balcony of Italy** (alt. 1320 meters) that is reached after 6 kilometers. From the top you have magnificent views of Switzerland with the town of Lugano and the Alpine chain and of Monte Generoso. On the return journey we recommend a stop at Lanzo with its beautiful stone houses.

Back at **Pellio** take the **provincial road SP14** to the left for **Porlezza**. The road descends to Laino, the birth town of the most famous families of the magistri intevesi the Quaglio, Frisoni, and Scotti whose houses still remain. Outside the village stands the parish church of S Lorenzo which retains part of its Romanesque enclosure and precious baroque decorations.

You continue on the provincial road Sp14 that winds toward the shores of Lake Lugano. with beautiful views of the village Osteno and Valsolda on the opposite shore of the lake. From Osteno you flank the lake towards Porlezza and quickly reach the camp-site "Grotte di Rescia". 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.

Shortly before arriving at Porlezza (just past Crotto Galbiga) we recommend a small detour to the small Romanesque church of S. Maurizio at the foot of Monte Galbiga. Here stood what was once an important nucleus of Porlezza, partly destroyed by landslides in the 18th century and now uninhabited. At Porlezza at the traffic lights turn right towards Menaggio. Once across the Menaggio Valley, the road reconnects with Lake Como.



SS. Nazaro e Celso