

6

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 Colonno (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 Colonno).

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 Galbiga. 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 Galbiga 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 Galbiga, 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 Pellio 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 Galbiga, 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.



9



10

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.golflanzo.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

Moto-cross: a fully-equipped trial park in Cava di Lanzo Intelvi - 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