

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 Cernezzi**, 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 Medaglia d'Oro where the P. Giovio Archaeological Museum and the History Museum can be found.

THE CIVIC MUSEUMS OF COMO

P. Gioivo 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>



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.



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 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.