

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** (photo1 - 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 Gallietta**, 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



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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 Pirota** (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



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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

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