

This itinerary helps visitors discover some of the most famous places in the central part of the lake: the villages of Menaggio, Tremezzo and Bellagio, the villas and gardens and breath-taking views. It is covered by boat; in summer using a daily pass to move around at will from one village to another and in winter using the ferry service and limiting visits to Bellagio, Menaggio and Varenna alone.

Departure point: usually Menaggio, but the itinerary is accessible in any direction.

Menaggio can be reached by bus on line C10, by NLC boat or by car along state road SS 340.

Duration: full day

Visit to the Mid-Lake area and its gardens



For wheelchair users we recommend only the following stages of the itinerary: Menaggio centre and lakeside, Villa Carlotta, Bellagio lungo Lario Marconi and Punta Spartivento. Also check the boat schedule and the most suitable timetable at the NLC information desks or use the car-ferries which are always accessible.

With about 3,200 inhabitants, Menaggio is situated at the head of a wide valley that links it to Lake Lugano. From an urban layout point of view, the village consists in a centre and three outlying hamlets: Loveno, with prestigious Villa Vigoni, Nobiallo and Croce. It has ancient origins and a prestigious artistic heritage. From the ferry landing stage, take Via IV Novembre and Via Mazzini on the right towards the centre as far as Piazza Garibaldi where you'll find the **tourist information office**. Here you can pick up a leaflet entitled "Historical Itinerary of Menaggio and its surrounding villages" that contains four itineraries; one covering Menaggio and the other three covering each of its hamlets.



For families, the tourist information office runs a fun quiz for the itinerary through the old town centre.

From Piazza Garibaldi take Via Calvi as far as the **Church of Saint Marta** on whose façade is a Roman memorial plaque dating from the 1st century AD, and above it an effigy of Menaggio Castle that has been adopted as the municipal coat of arms. At the end of Via Calvi stands the **Parish Church of Saint Stefano**; although it has ancient origins, its former structure is now hidden by restoration and refurbishment work. Behind the church, we climb along Via Castellino da Castelli to the **Castello quarter** and its prestigious portals. Destroyed by the Grigionesi in 1523, today the castle offers only an idea of what it must have been like in the Middle Ages, although it still retains imposing perimeter walls. Worthy of note is the **Church of Saint Carlo** with its characteristic Spanish-style bell gable. At the end of Via Castellino da Castello we continue on the left and after 20 metres take a small causeway on the left that passes right under the massive castle walls. Take Via Fabbri and at the end turn right and then, after about 20 metres, left into Via Strecioum. At the end of this street is one of the most characteristic and picturesque bridges over the River Sanagra. In a niche at the centre of the bridge we can admire a bas-relief (1965) by the local sculptor, painter and engraver Enrico Vannuccini.

We return to Piazza Garibaldi and follow the beautiful, well-tended lakeside promenade to the **Monumento alla Tessitrice** (a statue in honour of female silk weavers) (1988-1990) by Francesco Somaini. In Carrara marble and bronze, the piece was donated by the Mantero family, one of Como's leading silk industrialists who owned an important silk factory near Menaggio.



At the end of the lakeside promenade there is a mini-golf course and just beyond that the Lido (1934), a fine example of Rationalist architecture.

Those wishing to visit the charming Villa Mylius Vigoni can follow the itinerary for Loveno described in the leaflet "Historical Itinerary of Menaggio and its surrounding villages". It outlines a walk lasting about 40 minutes to this small, but charming village popular with artists and leading figures from as early as the mid-19th century. Alternatively, Loveno can be reached by taking bus C13 on the Menaggio-Plesio line.

VILLA MYLIUS VIGONI



In 1829 the German banker and philanthropist Heinrich Mylius purchased a villa on high ground above Menaggio which, over the years, he extended and adorned to house his numerous collections of paintings, statues and precious furnishings. What he thus created was a house-museum that, thanks to the care and attention of his descendants, the Vigoni family, has remained intact to this day. A vast English garden, designed and built by Giuseppe Balzaretto, surrounds the villa, offering a natural and environmental backdrop of rare beauty. It boasts orchids, centuries-old trees, panoramic viewing points and

exotic plants that create a truly unique setting. Bequeathed by Ignazio Vigoni to the Federal Republic of Germany, the villa is now the seat of a prestigious Italian-German cultural association.

The villa can be visited on Thursday afternoons at h 14:30 subject to booking - tel. +39.0344361232 - www.villavigoni.it

We return to Menaggio landing stage to board the boat that will take us to the entrance to Villa Carlotta. In winter, skip this stage of the itinerary and take the boat to Bellagio.

Tremezzo, or "middle land" as its name translates, is a small village of about 1,300 inhabitants that stands in part along the lakeside, with its 18th and 19th-century villas and low porticoed houses, and in part on the slopes of the mountains behind. Tremezzo has been admitted to the Association "I Borghi più Belli d'Italia" (the Most Beautiful Villages in Italy) since 2008.

VILLA CARLOTTA

In 1690, marquis Giorgio Clerici built an imposing but sombre residence with an Italian garden in a hollow between the lake and mountains. Its subsequent owner, Gian Battista Sommariva, adorned it with works of art and transformed part of the garden into a romantic park. In the mid-19th century the villa was given by Princess Marianne of Orange-Nassau to her daughter Charlotte on the occasion of her wedding to George II, Duke of Saxe-Meiningen. The latter was a botany enthusiast and he was the one who created the landscape garden that has made the villa famous. It covers 70,000 m² and boasts exquisite huge trees, 150 varieties of rhododendrons and



azaleas, ancient camellias and exotic plants. Its wealth of treasures continues inside the villa with precious works of art on the ground floor, in particular sculptures by Canova and his school, paintings by Hayez and Wicar, a frieze by Thorwaldsen, and meticulously preserved original furnishings on the main floor. Outside the villa, the Sommariva family sepulchral chapel is open to the public.

Villa Carlotta is open every day from mid-March to mid-November - www.villacarlotta.it



There are two picnic areas in the gardens of Villa Carlotta, one of which is covered, as well as a cafeteria and a playground for children.

After visiting Villa Carlotta follow the lakeside walk around Tremezzo as far as Bolvedro (30 minutes). Along the way is the Art Nouveau-style **Grand Hotel Tremezzo** (1910), one of the most sumptuous hotels on the lake with period furnishings, paintings and ornaments, the **Sampietro porticoes**, under which there are shops, restaurants and cafés, and **Olivelli Park**.

Overlooking the lake, this beautiful and romantic green area was redeveloped and transformed into a Baroque Italian garden, by the Rationalist architect Pietro Lingeri around 1925. It has a double monumental staircase and grand fountain with statues. The unusual "Tarocchiera" is an octagonal 18th-century building that is currently used as an exhibition space.



A staircase, which is also fitted with a simple shower, provides direct access to the lake for a cooling swim.

Near the park is the **Church of Saint Lorenzo**, which was built in 1896, and then two sumptuous villas: **Villa Carla**, built in 1676 by Antonio de Carli, is an elegant building with sombre lines surrounded by a delightful park and preceded by a long staircase, and early 18th-century **Villa La Quiete** has a magnificent Italian garden, wrought railings and sumptuous interiors. We retrace our steps to the landing stage in Tremezzo (in front of Hotel Bazzoni) or in Cadenabbia (after Villa Carlotta) to head off to Bellagio whose promontory can clearly be seen from Tremezzo.

Bellagio is situated at the extreme tip of that section that divides Lake Como into two branches. Known as Borgo, the tourist resort occupies the external part of the promontory, whilst its numerous outlying hamlets are dotted all along the shores of the lake and on the slopes of the mountain up as far as Mount San Primo, 1,682 metres above sea level.

At the **tourist information office** near the landing stage in Piazza Mazzini you'll find details of a historical itinerary around Bellagio and two interesting walks in its outlying hamlets. From the office take Salita Mella on the opposite side of the square and at the top, turn left as far as Piazza della Chiesa to visit the Church of **Saint Giacomo**.

The basilica dates from the 12th century, but was extensively transformed in the 17th century before being returned to Romanesque style by an imposing refurbishment in the 20th century. Particularly interesting is its interior with three raised apses, a beautiful Baroque gilded wooden altar (17th century) by a local carver, an ambo recomposed using fragments of marble from the preexisting church, a Baroque wooden statue of the Deposed Christ by the Spanish school (16th century) and a 16th-century painting by the Lombard School of Our Lady between Saints Rocco and Sebastian.

In the same square, above and to the right stands **Torre Delle Arti**, a centre for temporary exhibitions (access from Salita Plinio). Adjacent to this is the seat of the Promobellagio Association, from where guided visits to the gardens of **Villa Serbelloni** depart.

VILLA SERBELLONI

Villa Serbelloni is situated on Bellagio promontory and its gardens afford superb panoramic views of both the Como and Lecco branches of the lake.

The villa has an ancient history; owned by the Sfondrati family since 1533, in 1788 ownership passed to Count Alessandro Serbelloni who focused attention on the immense park where he built carriageways, avenues and paths covering about 18 kilometres. Visitors can now follow these to discover centuries-old, exotic and rare trees, grottoes, sculptures and the remains of mediaeval buildings. In 1907 it was sold to a Swiss company that turned it into Hotel Serbelloni.

The hotel was purchased and once again turned into a private villa by Princess Ella Walker who in 1959 bequeathed it to the Rockefeller Foundation.

Today Villa Serbelloni is a venue for scholars to holiday and meet.

The park can be visited from March to November with guided tours every day except Mondays. For information and bookings: Promobellagio - tel./fax +39.031951555 - www.promobellagio.it



From Piazza della Chiesa descend on the right and take Via Eugenio Vitali to **Punta Spartivento** which affords magnificent views of the centre of the lake, framed by the mountains behind.

We retrace our steps and at the end of the road, descend towards the right keeping along the wall enclosing **Grand Hotel Villa Serbelloni**, one of the most luxurious hotels on Lake Como, originally built as a private villa in 1852.

We continue on Piazza Mazzini with its magnificent porticos and walk along the splendid lakeside promenade that has many points of interest from an historical point of view.

Just beyond the small portico - the ancient access gate to the village - on the left is **Salita Serbelloni**. Climb a few steps and on the right, on the wall we can see a plaque commemorating the months the Hungarian composer Franz Liszt spent in Bellagio in 1837.

Continuing along the **lakeside promenade**, a little further on, outside Hotel Excelsior Splendide there is a modern-style plaque commemorating Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, a poet and founder of Futurism who died here in 1944.

We continue and beyond the car-ferry landing stage flank the lake, with its beautiful promenade and colourful flowerbeds.



Beyond Bellagio Lido, is the entrance to the gardens of Villa Melzi.

VILLA MELZI



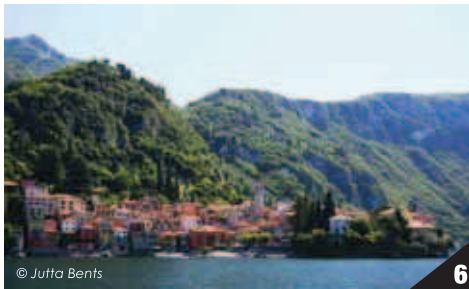
5

With its simple and severe neoclassical lines, it was designed by the architect Giocondo Albertolli in 1808 commissioned by Francesco Melzi d'Eril, vice-president of the Napoleonic Italian Republic and great friend of Napoleon himself. The park surrounding it, the first example of English garden on Lake Como, was created with great care by levelling land or raising small hills to make the area seem larger than it actually was. The layout of the vegetation too was the result of in-depth studies designed to increase

this optical illusion. Among the garden's trees and flowers there are also interesting sculptures, a small lake with water-lilies, an orangery fitted out as a museum and the neoclassical family chapel. Stendhal wrote extensively on the villa, whilst the pianist and composer Franz Liszt loved to spend time in the park and in particular, in the Moorish pavilion overlooking the lake. The garden can be visited from the end of March to early November - www.giardinidivillamelzi.it

Return to the ferry landing stage, in front of which is the road that crosses the recently-redeveloped Municipal Park where visitors can relax on benches surrounded by lush greenery.

From Bellagio it is possible to reach **Varenna** (photo 6), a splendid village on the eastern shore of the lake, either via boat or ferry. Here we immediately begin a charming lakeside



© Jutta Bents

6

walk between the rock face and the water, just to the right of the landing stage, which leads us to the heart of the village. It has steep narrow streets and staircases that hide picturesque areas and excellent architectural features, such as the mediaeval Church of Saint Giorgio, Villa Monastero and Villa Cipressi (which can be visited from March to October). Vezio Castle, an ancient fortress in a splendid panoramic position, can be reached after an uphill walk lasting about 45 minutes.

EVENTS

Feast of Saint John: (Bellagio) at the end of June with a wonderful torchlight procession through the gardens of the villas and typical cuisine.

Bellagio and Lake Como Festival: (various venues) summer classical music festival.

Tremezzo Jazz Festival: (Tremezzo) in August, live jazz music in Olivelli Park.

Riflessi d'Arte: (Menaggio) summer classical music festival.

Blooming of azaleas in Villa Carlotta and Villa Melzi: (Tremezzo and Bellagio) late April/early May, a spectacle of colour that should not be missed.

ACTIVE HOLIDAY

Water sports for all: ask for a list of clubs and hire points from Tourist Information Offices.


Golf: one of the oldest golf clubs in Europe is 18-hole Menaggio Golf Club in Croce

Fishing tourism: fishing tourism activities are organized by Ittiturismo Mella and Silvio Hotel and Restaurant in Bellagio.

Beach volleyball: a fully-equipped beach next to Olivelli Park in Tremezzo.

Falconry: at Vezio Castle every day from March to October with bird of prey displays and shows.

Beaches: the waters of the Mid-Lake area are usually suitable for swimming.

 There is a small beach at Al Püunt along the road from Cadenabbia to Menaggio, which is also accessible by a slide board.