



**This itinerary covers North Lake Como, the upper part of Lake Como, famous for its lakeside holiday resorts and water sports. It is highly recommended for families, because it is the part with the widest beaches and shallowest water on the entire lake. The upper lake area also has historical villages, like Dongo that is linked to the end of the Fascist era, Gravedona, with one of the most important Romanesque churches in the entire province, Piona Abbey, which overlooks the bay of the same name in the Province of Lecco and excursions to discover the mountain villages in the inland area.**

**Departure point:** Piazza Paracchini, Dongo

Dongo can be reached by bus on line C10, by NLC boat or by car along the SS 340dir or the SS36 and SS 340dir

**Duration:** full day

## A day in North Lake Como



Dongo (photo 2) is on a plain formed by the Albano Stream at the mouth of Albano Valley. At the head of the valley is the important pass of San Jorio, which from as early as the Roman era connected North Lake Como to the Swiss valley of Mesolcina. In the 15th and 16th centuries Dongo, along with Gravedona and Sorico, formed the community of the Tre Pievi (or Three Parishes) that were the cornerstone for the diffusion of Christianity in the upper lake area, which was autonomous until the end of the 16th century.

### DONGO AND THE END OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR



On 27th April 1945, the German troops withdrawing towards Germany, hiding among them Benito Mussolini and some of his ministers, were stopped on the road between Musso and Dongo. The ministers were initially taken to **Palazzo Manzi** (photo 3) and were then shot on the lakeside promenade in front of the square. Benito Mussolini and Clara Petacci were taken to Giulino di Mezzegra and executed (28th April 1945). These facts and the history of the local partisans are well documented in the **End of World War II Museum**, in Palazzo Manzi, seat of the town hall. Palazzo Manzi was built

in 1824 and is one of the most expressive examples of the Napoleonic period on Lake Como. It was donated in 1937 by Giuseppina Manzi to the Municipality of Dongo that made it their administrative seat. Inside, the so-called Gold Room - where the Manzi family held their banquets - can be visited subject to booking.

For information see [www.museofineguerradongo.it](http://www.museofineguerradongo.it).


From Piazza Paracchini to the left of Palazzo Manzi take Via del Mercato, once the commercial centre of the village. Immediately after a portico, turn right onto Via Osteria to enter the old town centre. At the end of the road, turn right again and walk along Via Lamberzoni to the small Romanesque church of **Saint Maria in Martinico** (normally open), a building with a single central nave with sculptural decorations. From the church, take the cobbled Via dell'Erbole, then Via Interno a Martinico and Via Antica Regina to reach the ancient cluster of houses of Barbignano. On the other side of the river it is possible to see the large factories of the former Falck Iron Works, subsequently owned by Cagiva, that were an important source of employment for locals. Back at Palazzo Manzi, take Via Roma and Via Tre Pievi which gets onto the state road.

Cross the bridge over the Albano Stream and a little further ahead, on the right, is the beautiful **Franciscan Monastery of Madonna delle Lacrime** (normally open).

Built in the 16th century, it celebrates a miraculous event in 1553 when the "Our Lady with Child", a fresco in a niche of the church named after Our Lady of the River - saved several years previously from the stream in flood - suddenly began to shed tears. The parish priest of Dongo collected the tears in a chalice and the same year construction work began on the sanctuary. The church has a 17th-century aspect and is annexed to the monastery of the Franciscan monks.

About 50 metres further on, take Viale Mons. Bellesini, lined with rows of conifers, which leads to the **Parish Church of Saint Stefano** (photo 4 - open for religious functions).

Of ancient origins, it was rebuilt in the 18th century and adorned with frescoes by the maestri intelvesi, Carlo Scotti and Giulio Quaglio (see itinerary 6). Behind the church begins a beautiful **cycle-**

 **pedestrian lane** that flanks the lake, linking Dongo and Gravedona. Along the way there are benches, beaches, lidos and picnic areas. This walk lasts 50 minutes and is accessible to wheelchair users too.

Once in Gravedona and beyond the lido, flank Liro Stream on the left, then cross the bridge over the stream and continue straight ahead to the beautiful colonnade of the Parish Church of Saint Vincenzo and the Church of **Saint Maria del Tiglio**, a masterpiece of local Romanesque style.



### SAINT MARIA DEL TIGLIO

The church was built from the 12th century onwards on an existing early-Christian baptistery, traces of which remain in the square perimeter design with three apses, the baptismal font and fragments of mosaic flooring. The façade features alternating white stone (from nearby Musso) and grey stone and a huge octagonal bell-tower that makes the building seem to soar upwards. The church has a central layout with two orders; the lower one with three apses and the upper one featuring an elegant open loggia. The building has an exposed trussed vault ceiling. On a counter-façade to the left, the best preserved fresco is a 14th-century Last Judgement, but one of the most important pieces in the church is the wooden Crucifix. Dating from the 12th-century this is a unique example of carved wood from the local Romanesque period and with the exception of the arms, the entire piece comes from a single piece of wood.

The church is normally open.



About 300 metres after the church and beyond the landing stage on the lakeside promenade with at its the end the imposing bulk of **Palazzo Gallio**, a majestic building with towers and loggias, built in 1582 as a residence for Cardinal Tolomeo Gallio and now the seat of the Comunità Montana (Association of Mountain Communities). In Piazza Mazzini, follow signs for **Castello**, the oldest nucleus of Gravedona. Take Via Castello that leads to a small hill overlooking the lake with beautiful views over Saint Maria del Tiglio and the bay (photo 5). Continue to the left to Via Volta, where number 2 is the house where Alessandro Volta, physicist and inventor from Como, lived. Turn left and then take Via San Rocco on the right.

Once back on the state road, continue right for about 20 metres (look out for traffic) then take Via Dosi e Segna on the left. Climb to a junction where you move to the left to admire the church of **Saint Maria delle Grazie**, known as the Monastery (normally open during the tourist season), whose grassy courtyard affords splendid views of the town and of the bay of Gravedona. Dating from 1467, the Church of Saint Maria delle Grazie is owned by the Augustinian foundation. It is a typical example of a "church with transverse arches" featuring a central nave divided by five pointed arches that drop to the floor, creating the side chapels, and an exposed larch roof. Tall pointed windows illuminate the interior, which is richly decorated by Lombard Renaissance frescoes. Nearby is another church; the Romanesque Church of **Saints Gusmeo and Matteo** (normally open during the tourist season). Charmingly framed by plane trees, according to tradition it was built on the site of the martyrdom of the two saints around 1248. It is decorated with a "Glory" dated 1608 by Il Fiammenghino.



From Gravedona we can follow two different itineraries:



### PIONA ABBEY

By car or by boat too during summer, subject to checking the timetable, we can reach Olgiasca Peninsula, on the eastern shore of Lake Como where Piona Abbey stands. The history of Piona begins in 610 when an oratory dedicated to Saint Giustina was built on the peninsula. Reconsecrated in 1138, it became a Cluniac monastery in 1169. The abbey church is built based on the model typical of small Romanesque buildings in the Como area. Inside, two marble

lions supporting a holy-water font and 13th-century frescoes stand out in particular. At the side of the church is a fascinating cloister built between 1252 and 1275 in a style of transition between Romanesque and Gothic; it is surrounded by beautiful columns with figurative and plant motifs. Also in the cloister are two splendid 12th and 13th-century frescoes. The monastery began to decline shortly after the cloister was built, leading to its closure in 1798. Its rebirth began in the 20th century and it became an abbey in the 1970s. Around the abbey buildings there is a vast green area maintained by the Cistercian monks and a shop where visitors can buy excellent liqueurs and herbal infusions. *The abbey is open all year round - [www.cistercensi.info/piona](http://www.cistercensi.info/piona)*



### THE VALLEYS OF GRAVEDONA

Climbing the Valleys of Gravedona by car we reach the villages of Livo and Peglio, which still retain their old centres and rustic houses. A few hundred metres before the village of Peglio (655 metres) is the interesting complex of **Saint Eusebio** that consists of a church (normally closed), a portico, an ossuary, a rectory and a cemetery. Inside the church there are noteworthy frescoes by Mauro della Rovere, known as Il Fiammenghino, one of the leading painters in Lombardy between the 16th and 17th centuries. The views from the churchyard span the entire north lake area and Liro Valley. We climb to the village of Peglio, crossing the plain of Gorghiglio and passing by the small

oratory of the Madonna del Gorghiglio to reach Livo. The village still retains most of its original urban layout with its rustic houses in stone. Just outside the village, near the cemetery, is the 15th-century Church of **Saint Giacomo Vecchia** (normally closed) with a magnificent apse frescoed during the 15th century.

### EVENTS

**Festa del lago:** (Gravedona) fireworks and allegorical boats for the lake festival on 14th August.

**Events at Palazzo Gallio:** Palazzo Gallio in Gravedona regularly hosts classical music concerts and exhibitions of local products.

**Feast of Saint Jorio:** (Gravedona ed Uniti) on the first Sunday of August at San Jorio Pass (2,014 metres), between the San Jorio Valley and the Morobbia Valley in Switzerland, an Italian-Swiss celebration draws numerous participants on both the Italian and Swiss sides.

### MARKETS

**Dongo:** every first and third Thursday of the month.

**Gravedona:** every first and third Wednesday of the month.

### ACTIVE HOLIDAY

**Water sports:** a heaven for all water sports, in particular sailing, thanks to the presence of constant breezes; there are schools, hire points and clubs to suit everyone in all villages in North Lake Como. Ask for a list at any tourist information office.

**Bird-watching:** the upper lake area is home to the Pian di Spagna Nature Reserve, which can be visited on foot, by bicycle or by boat. As it is on an important migration corridor, it is a paradise for birdwatchers. [www.piandispagna.it](http://www.piandispagna.it)

**Beaches:** there are lidos with pools along the pedestrian promenade between Dongo and Gravedona.