

Calmly ploughing the waters, boats are not only a means of transport for getting from one place to another, but also an unforgettable travel experience. This is the best way to discover Lake Como and admire its wonderful landscapes; indeed, sometimes the only way to see some of the villas and noble palaces that have made it famous worldwide. By purchasing a "day pass" you can complete the entire journey in about an hour, staying on board or hopping off at your discretion at intermediate stops to visit the villages in this part of Lake Como.

Departure point: Como, piazza Cavour, jetty 4. To best follow this itinerary we recommend taking one of the boats that departs at 15 minutes past the hour.

Duration: 1 hour + any stops

A boat trip around the First Basin



 Not all boats are accessible to wheelchairs. At the time of purchasing the ticket, we recommend checking the motorboat schedule and the most suitable time. Furthermore, we make wheelchair users aware of problems in getting around the villages of Moltrasio and Torno due to the presence of steps and cobblestones.



On leaving the port in Piazza Cavour, note to the east the tracks of the funicular railway and to the west the neoclassical Volta Temple, housing a small museum dedicated to Alessandro Volta, the Monument to the Fallen by Giuseppe Terragni and the imposing Villa Olmo (for more information see itinerary 2). The boat rounds the breakwater dam with the imposing stainless steel sculpture "Life Electric" by Daniel Libeskind to the west and Punta di Villa Geno to the east, with its beautiful fountain (photo 1) whose water jet can reach a height of 45 metres. A little further north we pass the eclectic **Villa Cornaggia Medici** (photo 2) and head towards Cernobbio.



After the port of Tavernola, to the west we can admire the 19th-century **Villa Dozio** (photo 3) at the centre of a large English garden, a rare example of a level garden on Lake Como.



Beyond the mouth of Breggia stream it is possible to glimpse the glass pavilions of the conference and exhibition centre **Villa Erba** (photo 4), built in 1986 based on a design by the architect Mario Bellini who drew inspiration from the lake's ancient greenhouses. With its characteristic tower, the villa dates from the early 20th century and is a splendid jewel of eclectic neo-Renaissance style. Its name is linked to that of the Italian neorealist film director Luchino Visconti who spent part of his life here. Its gardens are particularly beautiful and it also has a dock and a former riding track that is usually open to public in summertime. The complex is used for international fairs and shows, conferences, events, celebrity marriages, as well as location for films like Ocean's Twelve or The Luzhin's Defense.



Beyond Villa Erba, we reach Cernobbio. On the beautiful lakeside square is the early 20th-century Art Nouveau style landing stage.

CERNOBBIO

Standing on the slopes of Mount Bisbino (1,325 metres above sea level), with 6,500 inhabitants it is one of the largest towns on Lake Como. Thanks to its delightful geographical position, it became an ideal holiday destination where the nobility built sumptuous palaces and villas. In the 19th century, tourism and industrial development in general profoundly changed its overall layout, turning Cernobbio from a small fishing village into a fashionable resort. Along the shore there are numerous cafés and restaurants where visitors can spend time relaxing. For anyone wishing to discover more of the small town, we suggest heading into the old town between the 18th-century **Church of Saint Vincent**, with its unusual terracotta façade, and the mediaeval **Piazzetta Castello**, before continuing along Via XX Settembre until it meets Piazza Bellinzaghi. Here we find the 17th-century **Chiesetta della Madonna delle Grazie** that houses a holy image of the Madonna of Milk. Turn towards the centre of Cernobbio following Via Regina and at no. 43 you will find **Casa Cattaneo**, designed in Rationalist style by Cesare Cattaneo in 1938-39. From Piazza Mazzini you can turn left to return to the landing stage. Lovers of Art Nouveau style should note at no. 7 Via Regina **Villa Bernasconi** with its beautiful decorations created in the most varied materials. Particularly worthy of mention are the elements shaped like butterflies and silkworm cocoons in honour of the commissioning client, the silk industrialist Davide Bernasconi owner of an important weaving mill that once stood in the villa's gardens. Also part of the complex were workers' houses and a nursery for their children. Villa Bernasconi now houses an interactive museum dedicated to the history both of the family and the building. www.villabernasconi.eu

The boat continues its journey and the imposing silhouette of world-famous **Villa d'Este** (photo 5), the pride of Cernobbio, appears before us. What is now one of the world's best-known and most luxurious hotels, popular with celebrities, tycoons and international stars, was built at the end of the 16th century by the powerful Como-born Cardinal Gallio. The villa's many owners, who all profoundly changed its aspect, include Caroline of Brunswick, the unfortunate wife of George IV, King of England. The Queen's Pavilion (red building) was built in her honour in 1856. It became a luxury hotel in 1873.

Our itinerary continues beyond the promontory of **Pizzo** (photo 6), where the villa of the same name stands. This owes its fame to its marvellous terraced garden, literally snatched from the mountainside by human hands and adorned with staircases, water jets, geometrically-shaped bushes and tree-lined avenues, including one named after the cypress trees. The villa is privately owned but hosts events and nuptials. The pop star John Legend and his wife-to-be Chrissy Teigen jetted here for their destination "I dos" in 2013. Here, boats that continue to Moltrasio round the promontory of Pizzo, making it possible to spot the villa's hillside octagonal mausoleum and in a more secluded spot overlooking the lake another of the villas that have made Lake Como famous worldwide, **Villa Fontanelle** (photo 7). It is best known as Villa Versace because for years it was owned by the fashion designer Gianni Versace and his family who often welcomed international celebrities here. Approaching the jetty of Moltrasio, higher up we see the white **Villa Passalacqua** (photo 8), an imposing and sombre 18th-century building partly hidden by trees, but recognizable thanks also to its beautiful terraced garden and magnificent staircase. To the right of the jetty is **Villa Salterio Erker Hocesvar** (photo 9) with a beautiful gable with neoclassical decorations. The names of these two villas are linked to that of the musician Vincenzo Bellini who stayed here at length even composing some famous arias, inspired by two women - the first, Giuditta Turina, with whom he had a passionate affair and the other, the opera singer Giuditta Pasta, who owned a villa in Blevio on the other shore of the lake.



MOLTRASIO



This is a village with about 1,600 inhabitants, with outlying hamlets that from the lake seem to climb up the mountainsides. From quarries in these mountains a dark stone, widely used in local buildings, was once extracted. For example, the Basilica of Saint Abbondio, the Basilica of Saint Fedele and the town walls of Como are all made from Moltrasio stone.

Just off the boat, we note on the left of the small square the Baroque **Oratory of Saint Rocco**. A portico links the small church with Posta Hotel, already present on an 18th century Theresian cadastral map. On the right on the other hand, is Villa Salterio Erker Hocevar with a plaque on the façade recalling that the maestro Bellini once

stayed here. The villa houses now a cafeteria. From here it is possible to reach the centre of the village by climbing Via Recchi, passing alongside private gardens and small walls and houses in Moltrasio stone. At the widening, turn left onto Via Durini and continue along the cobbled street to a small humpback stone bridge that crosses the spectacular waterfall of **Pizzallo stream**, around which the hamlet, the heart of Moltrasio, develops. Climbing again we reach a small square and the **Parish Church of Saint Martin**. The church has ancient origins as the Romanesque remains incorporated in the bell-tower testify. However, its current aspect is the result of the 16th and 17th-century renovation work. It houses precious works of art including 17th-century frescoes and stuccoes in the left aisle, a Renaissance Crucifixion and above all, a polyptych (Nativity with Saints) painted by the Leonardesque Alvise De Donati in 1507 in the right aisle. From here continuing northwards we could reach Tosnacco in 15 minutes and from via Linera follow the nice walk called "Via Verde" towards Laglio (7 km - *descriptions available at the infopoints and on www.provincia.como.it/informazioni-turistiche*).

If you don't want to walk the "Via Verde", the visit continues to the left of the church, following the panoramic road Via Besana with lookout points over Torno and Blevio (*children: watch out for cars*), and along the embattled walls of Villa Passalacqua to the bell-tower of the Church of **Saint Agata**, a jewel of Romanesque architecture (11th century). Although the building can only be visited a few days a year, it is nevertheless well worth climbing as far as here. Situated along the route of the ancient Via Regina (see box), the church has an interesting exposed stone structure with hanging arch decorations. Only a few fragments remain of the frescoes that once decorated it externally - including a Martyrdom of Saint Agatha and a Saint Christopher (13th century) - and internally it also retains some of its original decorations. To the left of the church, note the neo-Gothic gate of Villa Passalacqua. From here we retrace our steps and take the narrow passageway Pos Palazz on the right that, after about 40 metres, meets Via Raschi.

Return down this cobbled street, the so-called Scala Santa (or Holy Staircase), once used for religious procession, and near the lake turn left, passing in front of the Grand Hotel Imperiale with its monument to Vincenzo Bellini (1997) by the sculptor Massimo Clerici.

VIA REGINA

The western shore of Lake Como is now crossed for its entire length by state road no. 340, the so-called Strada Regina. The name of this road recalls the name of a historical route that once crossed Como to unite Milan to the Chiavenna Valley and Chur in Switzerland. According to tradition, its construction is attributed to the Lombard queen Theodelinda.

In reality, Via Regina dates from the Roman period (1st century BC), as historical sources document. However, the fact that the elements typical of important Roman roads (viaducts, milestones, horse stage posts) have never been found has led to suggestions that by Via Regia the Romans intended the lakeside way.

Indeed from the port of Como and with the wind behind them, the crafts of the Imperial Fleet stationed here could reach the northernmost point of Lake Como in little more than a day and in conditions of greater safety and ease compared to the land route, which was left to local traffic, light transport and pedestrians.

The boat now leaves the western shores of the lake to head east towards **Torno**. Approaching land we note a promontory on the left on whose tip are the beautiful gardens of the rest home **Casa di Riposo Prandoni**.

We thus reach Torno with its characteristic lakeside square (photo 10), overlooked by beautiful typical houses, a tourist harbour and the 15th-century Church of Saint Tecla. In ancient times, the village enjoyed a certain historical and economic importance thanks to the production of woollen cloth. However, after being destroyed in the 16th-century it never returned to its ancient splendour, although in a certain sense this helped preserve its mediaeval layout and typicality. Given its environmental characteristics, the wealth of its artistic heritage and its tourism offer, the village has been awarded an Orange Flag by the Touring Club of Italy.

TORNO

For anyone who decides to hop off the boat, we firstly recommend a stop to admire the small Church of Saint Tecla, a building probably of Romanesque origin extensively renovated between 1400 and 1600. As well as a delightful Renaissance portal, do not miss the beautiful Lamentation (Madonna over the Dead Christ) dating from the early 16th century in inlaid wood and paint. Back in the square, we continue our walk by gently climbing the old narrow streets that wind their way through the town, where it is possible to see staircases, stone buildings, fountains, small chapels and delightful views. Our next destination is the **Church of Saint Giovanni**. We cross the provincial road at piazza Caronti, continue along Via Tridi and Via al Pozzo and cross the main road again. The church stands in piazza San Giovanni. It was built in the 12th century, as testified by the slender bell-tower adorned with mullioned windows and blind arches, but was restored and extended in the 14th century based on the local gothic use of gabled-arches. The late 15th-century marble portal with statues and reliefs attributed to the Rodari School, who had already worked on Como Cathedral, is particularly beautiful.



The apsidal area is a triumph of Baroque stuccoes and paintings and is preceded by a partition wall with 17th-century frescoes and beautiful railings. Exiting the church there is a delightful garden on the right and a small cemetery that affords magnificent views of the lake. At this point, take the path again for Piazza Casartelli from where boats depart.

For trekking enthusiasts there are numerous itineraries like the **Strada Regia**, a 35-km long route that links Como to Bellagio on the hillside, the panoramic path to **Piazzaga** (550 m above sea level) and the Massi Avello (tombs of uncertain date, perhaps 5th century AD, dug out from enormous erratic granite masses) and the stepped path for **Mount Piatto** (600 m above sea level).

In Montepiatto it is worth reaching the Church of Saint Elisabetta for its beautiful panoramic views and the so-called **Pietra Pendula** or hanging rock, an erratic mass brought here by glaciers and "precariously balanced" above the chalky rock.

After the village of Torno, the boat heads either north towards Urio or south towards Como. In the first case, after the point of aforementioned Prandoni Rest Home, we can admire the adjacent gardens of **Villa Mia**, a late 19th-century residence for years owned by the Saudi royal family. On the same shore, even further north and in a secluded spot, is the imposing **Villa Pliniana** (photo 11). Built at the end of the 16th century for Anguissola, the Spanish governor of Como, the building incorporates an intermittent stream, the Pluviana, famous with natural history enthusiasts such as Pliny the Elder and Leonardo da Vinci. After crossing the subsoil and passing under the villa, the source runs into the lake through a pointed arch that opens up on the surface of the water. The charming villa seems blanketed in mystery and has always featured





in legends and at times fascinating, at times tragic events. The villa is now a luxury holiday resort.

Heading south towards Como on the other hand, on the left the boat coasts the shore of Blevio, a small village that gained a certain notoriety from the 19th century onwards as a resort favoured by the international jet-set. It is possible to make out a series of villas in succession. Starting from the southern boundary of Torno, the first is the unmistakable C-shaped **Villa Taverna** with two 18th-century wings that extend towards the lake and a 19th-century central body that is set back and has a large clock on its façade. The building has been divided up into luxury apartments. Next is **Villa Roccabruna** (photo 12) that since 2010 has been a five-star luxury hotel. The hotel stands on the area where the opera singer and Bellini's muse Giuditta Pasta (1797-1865) owned a villa.



To the left of the bell-tower of the Church of Saints Epimaco and Gordiano stands the fairy-tale **Villa Usuelli** (photo 13), a towering head house overlooking the waters where Maria Taglioni (1804-1884), one of the greatest ballerinas of her time, lived for many years. Maria Taglioni was the first dancer to appear on stage wearing the tutu and one of the first ballerinas to introduce the dance on pointe. To the right of the bell tower is monumental **Villa Da Riva** (photo 13), now home to the Italian pop singer Ivana Spagna. Next door is the neo-Renaissance **Villa Mylius Cademartori** (photo 14) with its characteristic turret; now a luxury apartment building, its many famous residents have included the Italian singer Milva and footballers Karl Heinz Rummenigge and Andrei Shevchenko. The last villa of note before returning to Como is the unusual **Villa Troubetzkoy** (photo 15). Built on a cliff top by a Russian prince in exile, it was inspired by Nordic chalets and features a lift that links the building to the road.



EVENTS

Concorso d'eleganza di Villa d'Este: (Cernobbio) May, vintage car exhibition and contest www.concorsodeleganzavilladeste.com

Orticolario: (Cernobbio, Villa Erba) - first week end of October, gardening and landscaping trade show www.orticolario.it

Chestnuts, witches and thereabouts: (Cernobbio, hamlet of Rovenna) first half of October, feast dedicated to chestnuts and the allure of witches with a street market and shows. www.castagnestregheedintorni.it

MARKETS

Cernobbio Wednesday morning (8.30 am - 1.00 pm)

ACTIVE HOLIDAY

 **Trekking:** Mountain routes from the upper outlying hamlets of Cernobbio (Rovenna or Piazza Santo Stefano) towards Mount Bisbino, the border with Switzerland or to the north (Via dei Monti Lariani, Sentee di Sort)

Boat hire: in Cernobbio and in Moltrasio. For information contact the Infopoints

Lidos and beaches: Bathing in the lake is forbidden in the municipalities of the first basin but there are lidos with pools and beaches for payment