



Lake Como

travelling by water

History and stories

Itineraries

Descriptions

Travel information

Useful numbers





A service for residents, a marvel for tourists

The northern lakes of our country have always been a great attraction thanks to their pleasant environmental setting and surrounding landscape. Lake Como, with its memories of Manzoni's great book, is striking in the unusual, "fjord-like" appearance of its banks and the gradual advance of the lake basin into mountainous country, accompanied along its route by the "Regina", the ancient road that follows the outline of the western bank.

Lake Garda rests in a hollow surrounded by hills richly clad with olive-groves and lemon-groves, which flourish thanks to Garda's mild microclimate and help to make the lake an important tourist attraction.

Lake Maggiore still retains an elegant "fin de siècle" atmosphere, emphasized by the stylish villas along its banks and the special beauty of the Borromean Islands.

The intensive urbanisation that has occurred in the lakes zone has given rise to a very sharp increase in the demand for services, such as the high priority placed on the need for local public transport following the congested state of traffic along the roads bordering the lakes. Hence the ever-increasing importance of alternative transport systems such as that provided by Navigazione Laghi, present for over a century first as a private firm then as a public enterprise in this area, whose boat services advantageously connect the banks of our rivers.

Following the development that has occurred in the socio-productive context of our areas, Navigazione Laghi has decided to produce these new guidebooks as a useful aid for both residents and visitors to our beautiful regions, in the hope that they may provide a helpful service to our users.

The Governing Manager
Renato Poletti





Lake Ferry Company

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Lake Ferry Company

Passenger transport on the great Italian lakes is provided by a state company. This relatively young company was founded in the middle of the last century, when it inherited the service from the various private enterprises that had managed it since the 19th century.



Due to changes in the economic climate, these private companies abandoned the service, after which the State took it over as a public service.

Each lake experienced this changeover from private to public in its own individual way.

Public transport on Lake Como originally began in 1826, when the Lombarda company launched the Lario, a steamer also equipped, as a precautionary measure, with a sail mast.



THE SHIPYARDS OF LAKE LARIO

Shipbuilding around the lake has a long history. The first historical documents concerning boats in use on the lake date back as far as the 16th century. Until the end of the 19th century, the boats were built on the banks of the lake, in special covered areas called "sostre" in dialect. Here, timber was left to season for at least five years.

The various types of boat constructed in these shipyards included the *nav*, a craft of 8 metres in length and 2.7 metres in width, with a 7.5-metre mast. The boat was propelled by four oars and a hemp sail.

The *batel*, described by the writer Alessandro Manzoni, was smaller in size but similar to the *nav*. It was used to transport small numbers of passengers seated on rows of benches.

The *quattrassi* was used for shipping cargo on the upper lake. Four metres long, with reduced draught, it was ideal for transporting hay.

For years, the "Queens of the lake" were the *gondolas* (measuring between 17 and 25 metres long, and 5 metres wide) and the *comballi*, larger and with

a flat bottom, ideal for transporting sand, stones and hay.

The *gondolino* was a smaller version of the *gondola*. Measuring up to 17 metres in length, it was well-suited to passenger transport. An example can be admired at the Lariana Boat Museum in Pianello. Some *gondolas* still exist to this day, and on special occasions still sail the waters of the lake.



From the Falco to the Veloce

At the close of 1826 the Lombarda company launched a second steamer, the *Plinio*. The two boats sailed between Como and Colico, making adventurous landings and embarkations along the way. They would stop at Cavagnola to restock on timber and at Bellagio to allow passengers to change for Lecco.

Just four years later, another steamer joined the route. The

Falco, built and run by Giuseppe Camozzi of Nesso, had a glorious life, sailing regularly for twenty-eight years.

Shortly after, Duke Carlo Visconti brought his steamer, the *Arciduchessa Elisabetta*, from the River Po to the lake.

Thus divided between three owners, navigation on the lake attracted the interest of a group of Milanese bankers. They formed the Royal Imperial Steamer company, which was granted the licence for the service by the Austrian government.

The company took over the *Falco*, launched a new steamer, the *Veloce*, and thus quickly monopolised ferry services on the lake. In the meantime, having reached a state of irreversible disrepair, the *Lario*, the *Plinio* and the *Arciduchessa Elisabetta* were scrapped.



THE FIRST IRON STEAMER

In 1842 Count Porro commissioned the Zurich-based shipbuilding company Escher & Wiss to construct the Lariano steamer, pride of the Lariana company. The name Lariano was chosen after "Falco della Rupe" and "Trionfante" were both rejected. The launching ceremony was a stately affair, attended by the Archduke Ranieri and this entirely Como-based enterprise aroused great popular enthusiasm.

The technical features of this ship were superior to those of all its predecessors. Built entirely of iron, it was 33.5 metres long and 4.6 wide and equipped with a 42 horsepower engine capable of reaching a speed of 13 miles per hour. One serious problem, however, concerned timber replenishments. The long journey from the Bormio area meant that the timber often arrived late. In addition, according to ship's engineers, the poor quality of the wood caused considerable damage to the furnaces.

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The Lariana Company

Count Giovanni Pietro Porro entered ferry history when he founded the Lariana company for Motor Navigation. In 1843 the company built a new steamer, the Lariano, at the shipyards in Olmo, and in 1845 purchased another, named the Falco.

The Lariana company monopolized ferry services on the lake. A well-managed company, at the time of the Unification of Italy it boasted a fleet of five steamers: the Unione, the Lariano, the Forza, the Adda and the Vittoria.

Though not particularly fast, these ships were reliable, with engines of between 25 and 50 HP, limited capacity, and covered passenger areas.

Two important dates in ferry history are 1896, when the propeller replaced the wheel, and 1916, when the diesel engine took the place of the steam engine.

The Lariana company continued to do business with varying suc-

cess, changed its name, increased its fleet and, most importantly, added to its social role something altogether more modern – it became a driving force for both tourism and the economic development of the entire basin.

During World War II, routes were drastically reduced and boats were hidden and camouflaged, resulting in destruction or damage in many cases. This marked the end of the company, which was unable to fully recover and did

not survive for long. After a few difficult years, ferry services on the lake was taken over by the Ministry of Transport on August 12, 1952. The Lake Ferry Company became the owner of numerous boats: the Concordia, the Patria, the Plinio, the Baradello, the Milano, the Garibaldi, the Ballilla, the Moltrasio, the Gardena and the Bisbino.

A year later it acquired the steamers Brunante and Menaggio and a motor-ferry, the Tremezzina.



Today's fleet

1954 was the year in which the modern lake service really came into being. The fleet consisted of 3 motor-vessels "laghi" (lakes) series, 6 motorboats "uccelli" (birds) series, and 5 motor-vessels "fiori" (flowers) series. The twins motor-vessels Volta and Manzoni were built in Dervio. In 1958 the regular car-ferry started with the Stelvio, later joined by the Spluga and the Ghisallo.

1964 was Flying boat's year. It was called "Freccia del Lario", and it was the first hydrofoil in service, joined later by many others. Strengthening the hydrofoil service became the primary goal of the Ferry Company.

Today the fleet comprises about thirty boats. These include the old steamer "Concordia", still equipped with steam engines and wheel propulsion and used for tourist purposes because it recreates an old-time atmosphere. Together with this "historical boat", new and modern hydrofoils provide a regular service, transporting around 200 passengers at a time. There are also motor-ferries such Plinio, equipped for restaurant on board, it can carry 30 cars and it has 350

THE CAR FERRY

An attempt to meet the needs of the growing private car sector was made, albeit in a rather precarious fashion, after the second World War when a service was set up to transport cars from one side of the lake to the other. In 1946, a large boat was transformed into a motor-barge, named the Tremezzina, which sailed initially between Cadenabbia and Bellagio.



seats capacity; boats like Volta and Manzoni are also fitted out with restaurants facilities and finally there are also boats for passengers only as Promessi Sposi and Cormorano series.

Among new arrivals, motor vessels "Bisbino" and "Orione". They are built in modern style and their decks are con-

nected by staircases and elevator and equipped with kitchen and bar. Decks are covered, air-conditioned and host the restaurant halls lightened by large side windows.

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A QUALITY PUBLIC SERVICE

Around the 180-km perimeter of the lake, from one shore to another, from north to south and vice versa, the ships sail almost continuously.

Regular services on Lake Como provided by the Lake Ferry Company use daily routes covering 1000 km in off-peak periods to 2,600 km during holidays and at the height of the tourist season.

Steamers, ferry boats, hydrofoils, and catamarans constitute a fleet that is continuously being updated in order to provide an invaluable service for local people, as well as a charming way to travel for tourists.







Lake Como

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Lake Como



On any map of Northern Italy, Lake Como is easily identified. It resembles an upside-down Y, with two blue splotches on either side: to the right, or rather to the east, is the largest, Lake Garda, and to the west, Lake Maggiore.



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In order of size, Lake Como takes third place after Garda and Maggiore. Originally called Lake Lario, it stretches as far as the Rhaetian Alps to the north, and the hills of Brianza to the south. It can be divided into three basins, each with its own special features.

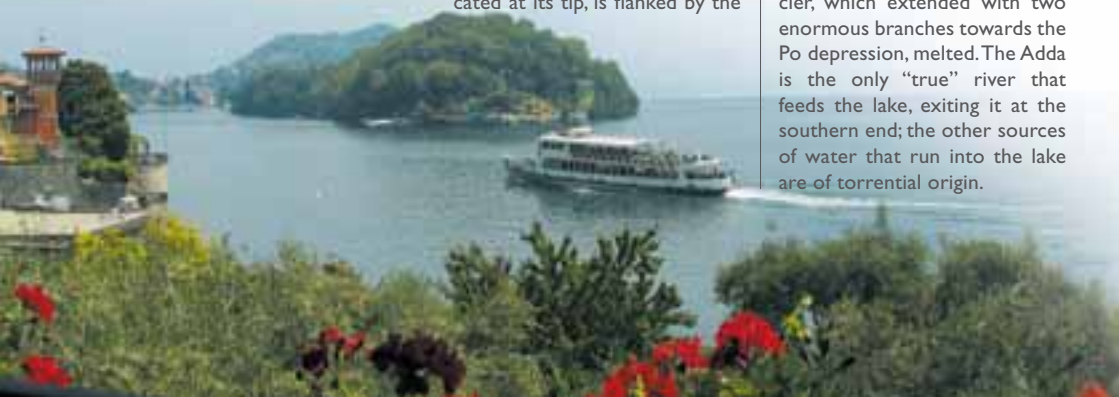
The south-west branch is narrow and winding, with steep wooded banks. Lario's only island, Isola Comacina, is situated here. The south-east branch, known as Lake Lecco after the city located at its tip, is flanked by the

Grigne mountains to the east (2410 m).

And finally the northern branch which is the widest and most exposed.

The three branches converge in the centre of the lake, right in front of the promontory of Bellagio, well-known for the beauty of its landscape and its long history as a haven for tourists.

Like the other big lakes that lie at the foot of the Alps, Lake Como has glacial origins. It was formed when the Abduano glacier, which extended with two enormous branches towards the Po depression, melted. The Adda is the only "true" river that feeds the lake, exiting it at the southern end; the other sources of water that run into the lake are of torrential origin.



The Lake's Dimensions

Surface	145	<i>square-kilometres</i>
Average altitude	199	<i>metres above sea level</i>
Length as the crow flies	46	<i>kilometres, from Gera, at the northern tip, to Como</i>
Maximum width	4,3	<i>kilometres from Menaggio to Fiumelatte</i>
Minimum width	650	<i>metres between Careno and Torriggeria</i>
Perimeter	180	<i>kilometres, larger than that of Lake Maggiore and Lake Garda due to its particular shape</i>
Maximum depth	414	<i>metres, between Argegno and Nesso. This is the maximum recorded depth of any Italian lake</i>

The history of Lake Lario

Already inhabited in prehistoric times, the area gained importance in the 2nd century with the arrival of the Romans, who named the lake "Larius".

A strategic road for those travelling to the northern provinces, protected by the stronghold of Como, "Via Regia" climbed upwards towards Val Chiavenna and Spluga.

In the period of the Communes, a number of towns prospered, proud of their independence from the city of Como.

In the 12th century, the federation of the Tre Pievi (Gravedona, Dongo, and Sorico) fought on equal footing with Como, sat at the table of peace of Costanza (1183) and won the right to mint coins. In the same period the Romanesque style flourished in architecture, sculpture and the decorative arts.

In 1335, the land belonging to the Diocese of Como passed to the Viscounts: from this point onwards, history became intertwined with that of the Milanese state.

The 1600s also represented a

period of cultural excellence as a result of the Counter-Reformation movement, which arose as a reaction to the territories that had fallen under the Protestant influence. This religious and cultural contrast is marked by the numerous Baroque churches built on the banks of lake. Their rich decoration in stucco and gold, soft colours and frescos in the vaults are the embodiment of the Catholic faith.

The finest paintings from this period are the works of Morazzone in Como and the Flemish painters in Peglio.

Villa d'Este in Cernobbio (1589) and Villa Serbelloni in Bellagio,

built in the early 17th century, belong to the era of Mannerism and Baroque. The many other villas in the area were built in the 18th and 19th centuries for Milanese nobility by architects from the capital of Lombardy.

Despite the influence of Milan, the region did manage to retain a well-defined cultural identity of its own. In fact, testimony to its particular charm lies in one of the most famous descriptions of landscape in Italian literature. The beginning of Alessandro Manzoni's *I Promessi Sposi* ("The Betrothed") describes the branch of the lake which turns south.



The climate

The thermal regulation produced by the water and the protection offered by the mountains ensure a mild climate, especially in the more isolated coastal area to the west, around Tremezzo.

Two main winds, or rather breezes, blow here: the Tivano, which blows in the morning from north to south, and the Brega, which blows in the opposite direction in the afternoon.



Flora and fauna

The climate and rainfall (2000 mm a year), which is heaviest in spring and autumn, provide a natural habitat for Mediterranean flora: olive, laurel and cypress populate the slopes at the sides of the lake.

In the gardens of the villas there are also tropical and subtropical

plants that have adapted well. There is not a great deal of amphibious vegetation, as areas of low-level water near the shore are limited.

Plankton is abundant, and feeds a wide range of lake fauna, including pike, perch, carp, trench, chub, bleak, rudd, twaite shad, and trout.

REGIONAL CUISINE

Traditional cooking around the lake is, of course, based on fresh-water fish. Because of its simplicity, it was once thought of as "homely", though nevertheless tasty and varied.

If you are offered misultitt, you will know that you are being offered dried twaite shad. Then there is carpione di pesce, first fried and then marinated in various herbs. Bleak, risotto with fillet of perch, and smoked trout in oil also feature on local menus. The prawn risotto is particularly good. Also typical of the region are courgettes fried in butter, with onion, pancetta, tomato and spices.

There are many types of salami from Brianza, and excellent cheeses, including a selection from Valsassina, a full-fat, flavoursome cheese called bitto from Colico, crescenza from Lecco, robiola, a kind of soft cheese, and spicy pecorino from San Carlino.

Polenta-based dishes find their way to the lake from the surrounding valleys, (the "polenta cunscia" has a strong garlic flavour), chicken, kid and forest game.

Must-try sweets include cotizza, a home-made flat bread made with flour, milk, sugar and lemon peel, and Resta de Comm, a soft, oblong-shaped cake with an olive branch hidden inside.



Economy and tourism

In addition to Como and Lecco, the two capital cities of the province situated to the south, there are about forty municipalities along the lake's shores and on its surrounding slopes.

The climate and beauty of the area attracted wealthy Lomard families who settled here from the 18th century onwards. They built sumptuous villas surrounded by parks and gardens, especially along the western shore from Cernobbio to Menaggio and around Bellagio and Varenna.

Luxury tourism made its appearance on the lake at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th.

The belle époque style dominated in the construction of new luxury hotels and the refurbishing of the large patrician dwellings.

Tourism later lost its role as the mainstay of the local economy, as most visitors were simply passing through the area or staying for a



weekend, and investment in the sector subsequently fell.

Silk production, once the area's main industry, was replaced by metalworking and mechanics.

The main factories are located in the Dongo-Gravedona area, between Colico and Varenna, and at Mandello Lario and Abbazia Lariana near Lecco, as well as in the two main cities.

Communications are difficult

here, not only due to the region's topography but also as a result of the increasing need for environmental protection.

Traffic, which was formerly concentrated on the Roman road, "Via Regia", on the western shore, is now heaviest along the trunk road that follows the railway between Lecco and Colico, on the route from Milan to Spluga and Valtellina.

The lake ferry service that has linked up the lakeside towns since 1826 is, of course, still going strong. The service constitutes a considerable incentive to tourism, which is still important to the local economy.



Famous visitors to the lake

Art, literature, music: for centuries, Lake Como has inspired the writings, works of art and melodies of countless famous visitors.



One could compile an anthology of the writings of those, like Manzoni, whose lives have been intertwined with the lake and its people, whether by birth, by chance or by choice.

Many Latin personalities have paid tribute to the lake since the middle ages. Foreigners have more recently included Bourget, De Musset, Longfellow, and Flaubert.

A host of famous personalities have been drawn to the lake's

special atmosphere, from Parini, Nievo, and Napoleon to Roosevelt, Liszt and Bellini. But it is impossible to list them all.

The area has also attracted brilliant architects, artists and craftsmen.

In a sense, art has always been part of the scenery here. Its presence is tangible in the streets and villages, in the unparalleled views, in the romantic and Baroque churches, in the great villas and in their surrounding gardens with their tra-

ces of Art Nouveau, many of which can still be admired today.

Although this is a simple brochure, we thought it fitting to include a passage by Stendhal from his short guide to travel in Italy, in which he describes lake Como.

Many poets, writers and philosophers made at least one trip to Italy in their lifetimes, and this inevitably included visit to the great lakes of Northern Italy.

THE ELDER AND THE YOUNGER



Lake Como has two famous sons, the Plinys. Pliny the Elder was born in Como in 23 AD. He wrote, in 37 volumes, the *Naturalis Historia*, which seems to contain everything known to science at the time, from geography to cosmology, from mineralogy to medicine, physiology and the history of art. His study constitutes an accurate portrait of knowledge in the classical period. Its originality lies in the fact that, rather than drawing up philosophical theories on the origins of the world and of matter, Pliny dedicated himself to empirical research, an approach that was far ahead of his times. In fact, it was his very curiosity that led to his death in 79 AD at Stabiae, today's Castellammare di Stabia, where he was studying the volcano, Vesuvius, a project which proved to be fatal.

His nephew, Pliny the Younger, who was present at the disaster, recounts his uncle's death in *Epistolario*. Later on, he became a lawyer and politician, consul and governor of Bitinia under the emperor Trajan.

LOVE ON THE LAKE

“When you write the story of two happy lovers, set it on the shores of Lake Como. I know of no other place so blessed from above, or where the enchantments of love seem more natural” This is how Franz Liszt described the enchanted atmosphere he encountered when he accompanied his beloved Marie d’Agoult to the shores of Lake Lario in 1837. On Christmas day the following year their daughter Cosima was born in Como. The name, Cosme in French, is thought by some to have been chosen by the parents of Wagner’s future bride as a sort of homage to the town of her birth.



What Stendhal wrote to a friend as a suggested rapid itinerary of the lake could have been written by any of us after a cruise on Lake Lario: “Let the boat stop at the Tanzi house; from there, carry on to Villa Pliniana: observe the intermittent fountain, which dates back to Pliny’s time. From there, carry

on to the Princess of Wales’ villa, then on to Balbiano and Villa Balbianino, a delightful house built by Cardinal Durini.

Observe the effect of the colonnade of Balbianino.

From there, proceed to Cadenabbia, a place that knows no winter.

A short walk from the inn is the

magnificent house of Signor Sommariva. Here we can admire two statues of Canova. You can give the custodian two francs and write your name in the visitor’s book”.

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A HOMAGE TO ALESSANDRO MANZONI

It is impossible to describe Lake Como in simple words and pictures without referring at some point to Alessandro Manzoni. By way of a small tribute, we have included the famous opening to the first chapter of his novel, *The Betrothed*, which is set on the lake.

Too obvious, some might rightly say. But perhaps most people remember no further than the first line, “One arm of Lake Como turns off to the south”.

Let’s read on a little bit, because what follows is a superb guide to the journey we are about to embark upon.

“One arm of Lake Como turns off to the south between two unbroken chains of mountains, which cut it up into a series of bays and inlets as the hills advance into the water and retreat again, until it quite suddenly grows much narrower and takes on the appearance and motion of a river between a headland on one side and a wide stretch of shore on the other. The bridge which connects the two banks at that point seems to make the change of state still clearer to the eye, marking the spot where the lake comes to an end and the Adda comes into being once more - though further on it again takes the name of a lake, as the banks separate, allowing the water to spread out and lose its speed among more bays and fresh inlets”.

SUBLIME LAKE, WHERE ALL IS NOBLE AND TENDER, WHERE EVERYTHING SPEAKS OF LOVE

*Stendhal was thinking of his favourite place, Cadenabbia, when he wrote these words, which paint an instant picture of the lake. They are spoken by the passionate Sanseverina, aunt of Fabrizio Del Dongo, in the author’s last and greatest novel, *The Charterhouse of Parma*.*





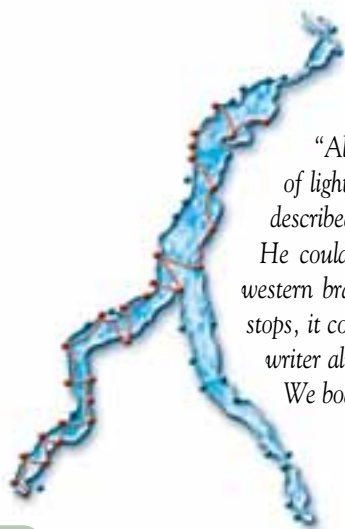
An aerial photograph of a lake, likely Lake Garda, with a dense forest of green trees surrounding the water. In the foreground, the white railing and part of the deck of a boat are visible. The text 'Itineraries' is overlaid on the upper part of the image.

Itineraries

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Northwards

in a cup of light



“All day long, relaxed and free from thoughts, swimming in a cup of light”. This is how the French historian Hippolyte Adolphe Taine described his boat journey on Lake Como in 1865.

He could have been following our own itinerary, northwards up the western branch to Colico. Today, although the boat makes all the same stops, it covers the 40 km in a shorter time than it would have taken our writer almost 150 years ago, no matter what kind of boat he sailed in. We board at Como, and disembark at Colico.

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Como

Altitude	201 m
Population	83,422

- **To see**
Lungolario. The landing stages for the boats of the Lake Ferry Company are located at the old port, built in 1871.
The Duomo
The Broletto
La Casa del Terragni, formerly Casa del Fascio.





San Fedele, the ancient cathedral.

I Musei Civici

(the Civic Museums)

La Pinacoteca Civica

(the Civic Picture Gallery)

Piazza Vittoria

Sant'Abbondio

Villa Olmo

Sant'Agostino (1300)

Romanesque portal, 15th and 17th-century frescoes, paintings by Morazzone.

Villa Geno, located on Punta Geno, with a beach and public park.

Il Museo della Seta

(the Silk Museum)



San Carpofo, Romanesque 11th and 12th-century basilica.

Castello Baradello, erected by Barbarossa in 1158 and demolished by the Spanish in 1527. Views of Como, Brianza, the lake and Brunate, 716 m, 6 km north-east, reachable by funicular.

- **The surrounding area**

Two km beyond Brunate, San Maurizio offers a view of the lake's second basin.

The Roman origins of Como, which was already inhabited in prehistoric times, are visible in the plan of castrum. It was Caesar who ruled the Roman town and built its complex series of fortifications.

Devastated by the Barbarians, its successive development was marked by alternations between

hostility and friendship with Milan, which it became part of definitively in the 15th century. The town made its fortune by the production of wool and silk.

After lengthy Spanish domination, the Austrians had their turn, followed by the French (1796-1814). Once again under Austrian rule up until the War of Independence, the town rebelled in 1848, creating an autonomous government until it was liberated by Garibaldi in 1859 and annexed to Piedmont.

The Lake Ferry Company departs from the bank at Piazza Cavour.

This was once the site of an ancient commercial port, surrounded at the time by palaces decorated with porticos. The port was buried in 1871.

In 1875, Via Plinio was opened, linking Piazza Cavour to Piazza del Duomo.

THE DUOMO

The Municipal Tower, the Broletto and the Duomo are all conveniently situated in piazza del Duomo, in the centre of Como.

Let's take a look inside the Duomo. The basilica provides the structure, with three naves and a transept which is cut off by circular apses of the same size as the central nave.

Construction began in 1396 and was concluded as late as 1740 with the completion of the dome, designed by architect Filippo Juvarra. The facade, built between 1455 and 1486, is Gothic in style, with some elements of the Renaissance, such as the two aedicule with statues of Pliny the Elder and Pliny the Younger, attributed to Jacopo and Tommaso Rodari, which flank the main portal.

Inside the church there are nine late 16th-century tapestries of Flemish, Ferrarese and Florentine origin.

We can also admire the grandiose wooden anchor made at the workshop of Giovan Angelo del Masino (16th century), the Pala di San Giacomo by Bernardino Luini and Lo Sposalizio di Maria by Gaudenzio Ferrari.



SANT'ABBONDIO

The church was consecrated in 818, and the ancient handwriting on the document shows that it was then called Sant'Abondio. The current building dates back to the 11th century, when it was built on the site of an early Christian basilica. Of considerable height, the church has five aisles with apsidal towers and a protruding choir. The interior is covered in wood, an unusual feature for a Romanesque church in this region.

The apse is decorated with a cycle of 14th century frescos by local artists representing the life of Christ. To the left of the altar is a statue of Saint Abbondio by Cristoforo Salari (1490).



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The town's sights can be seen during a short walk before boarding the ship. In addition to the Duomo, don't miss the Broletto, the ancient town hall built in 1215 in the Romanesque-Gothic style and subsequently redesigned. On your way back to the shore, have a look at the Voltiano Mausoleum, a small neoclassical temple erected in 1927, and the War Memorial of 1933, by the Como-born futurist architect Antonio Sant'Elia.

Directly behind is the Giuseppe Sinigaglia stadium and the Novocomum (1927-29) by Giuseppe Terragni, one of the finest examples of Italian Rationalist architecture. Along the banks we can admire

some 18th and 19th century villas nestled in the greenery, including Villa Parravicini and Villa Gallia, which dates back to 1615.

The most important is Villa Olmo, named for its giant elm (Olmo), a survivor of the forest that surrounded the Villa in Pliny the Younger's time.

The villa has been owned by the town council since 1924, and the gardens are now open to the public. The building is used to host exhibitions and congresses.

The Neo-classical Villa Geno, visible on the opposite shore, is also owned by the council.

Designed by Giacomo Tazzini, it was built in 1850, and is surrounded by public gardens of a

typically Romantic style. The boat is about to leave. It's time to board, and head northwards.

The first stop, just a few minute's journey away, is Tavernola.

Tavernola

This is a "service stop" for Ferry Company boats, a shipyard for the upkeep of the fleet.

Those who board at this stop can make use of the free, unattended car park owned by the council.

Keeping to the western shore of the lake, we sail on until we come to Cernobbio, just five minutes away.

THE "TEMPIO VOLTIANO"

On the western shore of the port there are some public lakeside gardens at the bottom of which stands a curious temple, now the Alessandro Volta (1745-1827) museum. Inside this classical-style building visitors can see the relics and records of Como's most famous inhabitant, inventor of the electric battery to which he gave his name.



THREE VILLAS TO VISIT

La Rotonda - Built by Leopoldo Pollack for the Marquis Villiani of Milan in the late 18th century, the villa is so-called because of its curved living-room, which overlooks the lake.

As well as the stucco-decorated living-room, it is worth taking a look at the staircase, designed by Luigi Cagnola. The villa is currently the headquarters of the Province.

Villa Gallia - Like the Rotonda, this villa is situated on Via Borgo Vico. It was built at the beginning of the 17th century to a simple design, with one central lounge of double height and two loggias on the ground floor, one facing the lake and one facing the mountains.

Villa Olmo - Built for the Odescalchi family, the building was begun under the architect Innocenzo Ragazzoni and subsequently taken over by the more famous Simone Cantoni. An outstanding example of the Neoclassical Lombard style, the interior is richly decorated with stucco and frescos. The great double-height lounge and the imposing three-story atrium are particularly impressive.

Italian style gardens lead down to the lake shore, whilst those at the back of the villa are of English style.



A SPECIAL KIND OF TOURISM

An unusual perspective - There is no need for cars at Lake Como. The best way to see it is to take a more unusual form of transport. The Lake Ferry Company offers historical vessels, modern hydrofoils and catamarans, as well as traditional steamers. These boats are able to capture the romantic atmosphere of the lake, its cities and its towns. They provide a view which is the opposite of the usual one: from the lake you get an unique prospective of the period villas, and relive the emotions of the "grand tours" of days gone by.

You don't have to take a boat to get a fantastic view - there is also the funicular which takes you from Como up to Brunate. More adventurous types can try the hydroplane. The only school in Europe that trains pilots to fly these curious aeroplanes is located in Como.

Business and Leisure - Another special area is business tourism. Congresses and meetings held at the lake are always particularly successful. But it is also possible to organise them on one of the Lake Ferry Company boats for an even more striking setting.

A myriad of locations, comfortable transport, and a range of entertainment options are available for leisure activities between working sessions.

Malpensa, Milan and Switzerland are a stone's throw away, making Como the ideal location for this form of tourism.



Cernobbio

Altitude	201 m
Population	6,802

- *To see*
Villa d'Este
- *The surrounding area*
Monte Bisbino, and the Sanctuary of the Blessed Virgin.
Villa Pizzo, also known as Villa Regina: inhabited in the 19th century by regal couples such as the Archduke of Austria and his wife Mary Elisabeth of Savoy, who took long trips on the lake on their boat, "Caicco", and Massimiliano d'Asburgo with his bride, Carlotta.
Villa Erba, passed down by marriage to the family of Luchino Visconti, is now a prestigious congress and exposition centre.

Cernobbio lies 4 km north of Como. This industrial town is very popular with tourists. It is situated at the foot of Monte Bisbino (1,325 m), which offers a magnificent view of the lake



from its peak. The town is famous mainly for the grandiose Villa d'Este (1565-70), designed by Pellegrino Tibaldi for Cardinal Tolomeo Gallo.

Overlooking the lake, the villa has a vast Italian garden to its rear, with a celebrated path leading up to the top of the hills, flanked by cypresses and broken at regular intervals by fountains that make it one of the most beautiful Renaissance walks in Italy.

At the beginning of the 19th century, when the complex was restored after many years of abandon, an area of steep mountain

was added, landscaped in the English style with rocks, wooded areas, streams and paths. In 1814 the villa became the residence of Caroline of Brunswick, wife of George IV of England, who named the villa after her remote ancestor, one Guelfo d'Este.

Today the villa is one of the most famous in Europe, a historical place of international significance where prestigious political, financial and scientific congresses are held.

From Cernobbio we take a ten-minute journey along the same shore towards Moltrasio.

To the right, on the other side of the lake, we can see the town of Blevio.



IL CAPRICCIO

At the beginning of the 14th century the Villa d'Este was the setting of an intense love story. It all began with Vittoria Peluso, a dancer known as the "bella Pelusina", who was married to a member of the Calderia family. Made a widow at a young age, she married General Domenico Pino. To celebrate her husband's triumphs in Napoleon's army, and perhaps for fear that he might be missing the military life, Vittoria had the Capriccio built. It was a reproduction of some of the Spanish strongholds the general had stormed, where he subsequently held military drills with his cadets, and where Vittoria often waited for him as if he were returning from one of his battles. The Capriccio is a maze of turrets connected to the rock of the hill by narrow communication trenches. However, the park around it has a very romantic atmosphere, with statues, temples and waterfalls. The grandiose Renaissance mosaic is also of great interest.

The property then passed from the Pinos to Caroline, Princess of Wales, who found it a comfort in her unhappiness, thanks also perhaps to a love affair certainly favoured by the magical location.

MOLTRASIO STONE

The stone quarries of Moltrasio were already famous in ancient times. This stone, traditionally used for building in the area, is characterised by grey-blue streaking. It was of great advantage to the Maestri Comacini who used it quite artistically in the construction of numerous buildings in the town and around the lake. In Vergonzano, in 1910, during excavations for a building site, two Gallic-Roman tombs were discovered, supported and covered by sheets of Moltrasio stone.

During the summer period some of the routes make this small detour, which adds another few minutes to the trip. If we choose to make all the stops, we now cross the lake and approach Blevio.

Blevio

Altitude	231 m
Population	1,194

This small town becomes very busy during the holiday season. It is surrounded by villas immersed in greenery overlooking the lake. As we approach the landing stage, we can admire the residences of some of the most famous names in 19th century theatre, such as the dancer Maria Tagliioni and the opera singer Giuditta Pasta, for whom Vincenzo Bellini composed *Sonnambula* and *Norma*.

We follow in the footsteps of the famous composer back across the lake in a northerly direction to Moltrasio, his chosen place of refuge during a serious illness in 1830. A stop here is an absolute must.

Moltrasio

Altitude	247 m
Population	1,623

- **To see**
Sant'Agata, a 12th-century Romanesque church.
San Martino
Villa Passalacqua

Moltrasio's villas, parks and gardens, wonderful views, and sunny climate have led some to call it "the Pearl of Lake Lario", although if truth be told the epithet has been applied to other places, too. According to experts in etymology, the name Moltrasio derives from the contraction of the Latin words *Mons Laricum*, meaning



"mountain of the larches". It is a plausible explanation, considering that in ancient times the shores of the lakes were covered in forest.

Others believe the name descends from *mons rarus*, others still link it to *locus de Oltraxio*, found in a document dated 1502.

Etymology is always a good exercise, and the variety of explanations are fascinating in themselves.

In the hamlet of Vignola stands the Romanesque church of Sant'Agata, with an 11th century bell tower in the typical Lombard style.

On the outside of the church we can admire a fresco dating back to the 12th century, which represents Saint Agatha with two poorly-dressed figures at her sides. Inside, there are paintings and frescos from later periods, including a prestigious depiction of the Virgin by a local artist, which dates back to the early 16th century.



There is also an artistic altar in engraved, gilded wood, and other works in the Gothic style.

If you have time, it is worth visiting San Martino (1207) in the hamlet of Borgo, a beautiful church richly decorated in marble and stucco containing fine works of art.

Of all the villas that occupy the most amenable positions in Moltrasio, the most interesting is Villa Passalacqua, designed by the architect Felice Soave. Surrounded by a large, shady park, it has bronze doors, a monumental stairway, large rooms and vast cellars. One famous guest in the art-filled home of the Lucini Passalacqua counts was Vincenzo Bellini.

Other illustrious homes include Villa Cambiaghi (La Fontanella), Villa Le Rose, Villa Stucchi, Villa Regina (now the Grand Hotel Imperiale) and Villa Erker, at which the composer also stayed.

Let's continue our journey. Crossing the lake once again towards Torno on the western side, we then stop at Urio, finally crossing the lake again to Pognana Lario on the eastern shore. All three journeys take less than ten minutes each.

VINCENZO BELLINI

Vincenzo Bellini stayed at Moltrasio from 1829 to 1833, as a guest of the Turina family. Giuditta Cantù, unhappily married to a rich land-owning Turina, became a sort of muse for the great Catanese composer.

La Sonnambula was written in Autumn 1830 in the villa belonging to the Passalacqua counts, who were music-lovers themselves.

Bellini often crossed the lake. At Blevio he rehearsed the opera with the opera singer Giuditta Pasta, who was on holiday there.

Torno

Altitude	225 m
Population	1,195

- **To see**
Santa Tecla
San Giovanni
Villa Pliniana

We disembark directly onto the square with its cafes, restaurants, and simple houses that extend to form a network of narrow, steep lanes up the slope. A short walk up the hill and we can admire a view of the lake and the port full of boats. The Spanish troupes razed the hamlet to the ground in 1552, though it still retains its ancient feel today.

Once famous for the production of fabrics and tapestries, today Torno is a tourist town. Boatloads of visitors come to admire the 15th century parochial church of Santa Tecla, facing the port, with its Gothic portal and roset-



te, and the 14th century church of San Giovanni, with its Romanesque bell tower and Renaissance portal.

Once again on board, in a few minutes we arrive at Carate-Urio (western side), two small villages joined together to make a single town.



GREAT LOVE STORIES IN TORNO

The villas of Torno have seen more than their fair share of love affairs! There was the "scandalous" relationship between Emilio di Belgioso and Anne Marie Berthier de Wagram at Villa Pliniana, and the story of the beautiful Laura Acton at Villa Taverna. Liszt, Wagner and Napoleon III all fell madly in love with her but she eventually married Marco Minghetti for love.

Villa Pliniana, built in 1573 by the Governor of Como, Count Giovanni Anguissola, has a vast Italian-style garden with wide terraces. It takes its name from the Pliniana Spring from which water gushes forth at regular intervals. The spring itself was named after the illustrious residents of the lake, the Plinys, who were fascinated with it. The villa played host to many famous guests in the 19th century, from Stendhal to Foscolo, Rossini to Berchet, Byron to Shelley, and Fogazzaro. The lake retains the magical atmosphere that greeted Massimiliano d'Asburgo and Bianca Maria Sforza, who came here five hundred years ago on their honeymoon.

Carate-Urio

Altitude	204 m
Population	1,201

Before joining up with Urio, the village was called Carate Lario. In the middle of the beautiful terraced park is the Castello, a villa built on the remains of an ancient fort. It is now the official headquarters of the Foundation for International University Residences. We cross the lake again, and in eleven minutes we are back on the eastern side, where we stop at Pognana. On the way there we can admire Faggeto, on the same shore, nestled among the forests and beech woods on the slopes of Mount Palanzone, and the hamlets of Molina (467 m), Lemma (533 m) and Palanzo (596 m), which are connected to the lake by terraced pathways.



Pognana Lario

Altitude	307 m
Population	747

Pognana developed partly along the provincial road and partly on the slope in a series of settlements of great interest. In addition to the San Rocco church, here we find modest stone buildings alongside important 17th and 18th-century constructions. On the opposite shore is Torrignia Laglio, which has no landing point. It is made up of two towns; Laglio, situated below the Buco dell'Orso, where the fossils of Ursus spelaeus were discovered, and Torrignia, situated on the narrowest point of the lake, at 650 metres.

Keeping to the eastern shore, we stop at Careno and Nesso, then sail on towards Brienno on the opposite shore.

The small village of Careno can only be visited on foot. Here we can see typical stone houses as well as two churches: the Romanesque San Martino and the 17th-century parish church Chiesa dell'Assunta.

Nesso

Altitude	300 m
Population	1,244

- **The surrounding area**

Vico, home to the 14th and 16th-century frescoes in the Romanesque church of Santa Maria. Beyond Vico, the road climbs up to the Piano del Tivano at 980 metres. The meadows of this valley are a popular stopping point for mountain walkers.

Nesso is full of enchanting views and characteristic nooks and crannies. The surrounding area is also very beautiful. Not to be missed is the ravine formed by the Tof and Nosè torrents, with its waterfall, made all the more stunning by the bridge, possibly of Roman origin, that crosses the gorge. Here too characteristic houses dot the slopes that lead down to the lake and then lead back up to the ruins of the castle, which was destroyed by Francesco II Sforza in 1531. Continuing our journey towards Brienno and Argegno on the western shore, we cross the deepest part of the lake (414 m), where Auguste Piccard tested out his bathyscaphe in the 1950s.





Brienno

Altitude 203 m
Population 395

Built in a defensive position on a narrow strip of land, the town is clustered around the parish church of Santi Nazaro e Celso, a Baroque reworking of a previous Romanesque building. The church of San Vittorio, now Sant'Anna, is one of the oldest Romanesque buildings on the lake.



Argegno

Altitude 210 m
Population 670

- To see
The church of Holy Trinity
- The surrounding area
Madonna del Soccorso
Sanctuary of Sant'Anna

Argegno is situated on an inlet of the lake at the mouth of the Val d'Intelvi, where Mount Sighignola and Mount Belvedere di Lanzo offer two exceptional views.

Argegno also has good views of the lake, extending as far as Bellagio to the north-east and Nesso to the south. Of Roman origin, the town was a fortified centre and part of a vast ancient defensive network.

In the Middle Ages, two castles were built near Sala, Lezzeno and Nesso.

The town centre is charming. Take a look at the terrifying gorge of the torrent Telo with its Roman bridge.

From Argegno a short cable ride takes us up to Pigra (860 m), where we can take in a stunning view of the lake and the surrounding mountains.

Travelling in north direction, we arrive at Isola Comacina.

In alternative some route stop before in Sala Comacina (altitude 213 m, population 650).

Isola Comacina

Our boat lands to the only island on the lake, which perimeter measures about two kilometres.

In the Roman and Byzantine eras, the island was a fortified site used to look out over the lake. It was ravaged in 1169 by the Comascs, allied to Barbarossa, for having sided with Milan during the battles between the towns that involved the entire lake region.

Given to the Italian government by the King of Belgium, who had himself received it as a gift, the island is now managed and cared for by a state controlled body.

Rich in prehistoric and historic relics, the island contains the remains of numerous sacred buildings from various epochs. The only one which remains intact is the Baroque oratory of San Giovanni.

In addition to the oratory, which stands on the remains of pre-existing ancient buildings, it is also possible to see the remains of the basilica of Santa Eufemia which dates back to the 7th century, before being reconstructed in the 11th century.

The remains of some of the other churches destroyed by the Comascs are just visible.

However, over and above the remains of ancient churches, the island has its own particular charm. Its unreal sense of peace can evoke intense emotions.

From the Island, the boat takes us to Lezzeno (oriental side), crossing the lake direction South-East and then coming back in Lenno, again on occidental shore.



THE FEAST OF SAINT JOHN

Each year the island holds a festival in honour of Saint John.

Held on the Sunday following St. John's day, the festival is popular with the many tourists who spend the early summer months around the lake.

The celebrations include a light and fireworks show on the lake.

THE MYSTERY OF THE CURSE

Isola Comacina is an inextricable tangle of epochs, symbols, remains, sovereignties, five churches and a trattoria, all crammed into a few square metres. The anonymous author of a short article on the island, published in 2003 by Domenicale, gives us an unusual perspective on Comacina:

"Some say that Como's only island existed before Como was a lake, when it was little more than a branch of the Adriatic Sea. It is not for me to tell the story of this small square of land and forest, nor to dwell upon the Greek traditions brought here by the Romans, nor to tell of how this very place became a stronghold of Christianity, for which it was named "Cristopolis" for many years, nor of how it gradually became an important location for the Eastern Roman Empire, for the Lombards and for the many ousted or runaway saints, kings and princes who found refuge and protection here, nor of how the pirate Barbarossa stayed on the island". He then goes on to tell of how the owner of the island, Signor Cavalier Augusto Caprani, moved by the fate of Belgium in the great War, gave the island to Albert, King of Belgium. The island then fell into the hands of Princess Maria José, an acquired Savoyard of Belgium birth and ancestry. "The island immediately came into the realm of Italian bureaucracy", placed under the control of two mixed Italo-Belgian commissions.

"But what is there, on Isola Comacina? What mystery, what marvellous sources of energy and spirituality? What diamantiferous basins?". Dear Sirs, I can tell you nothing of that. Take a boat, and go and see for yourself. There, where the flags of Belgium and Italy flutter in the wind. Do not fear the 12th-century jinx on the island "Oh island, you are cursed through the centuries". Go into the woods, and look for the five churches and for bilberries". Curiosity about the curse remains. The title of the article doesn't help us either, as it simply states "from the 1100s to the present day, if the island has been cursed, no one knows where or how or why...".



27

Lezzeno

Altitude 202 m
Population 2,039

Lezzeno is a town extended for 7 km, to be discovered by walking around its characteristic hamlets. From its shore you can have a panoramic view of the opposite side of the lake, embracing the Lavedo peninsula, which includes Villa Arconati Visconti also

known as Balbianello, the name of the promontory itself. Along the rocky shores, is the Bulberi or Carpi cave, where we can observe fascinating effects of light and water.

In the middle of Lezzeno, you can visit St. Quirico and Giulitta church, where inside you can admire the painted presbitery, a Giulio Quaglio work. Close to the church, the Santa Marta oratory with painted rest of



XVI century and valuable stucco work of XVII century. Interesting visits are also Madonna dei Ceppi, the rest of medieval



BONFIRES ON SAINT JOSEPH'S DAY

A competition between the various quarters of Lezzeno is held on Saint Joseph's day, March 19, in which locals compete to build biggest and most spectacular bonfire. Once the many fires that light up the night have been extinguished, a banner is awarded to the winning team.

fortifications at Castello, Bellini, Gelpi and Vigoni palaces.

Lezzeno also provides water sky, wakeboard and water sport activity schools. Next town is Lenno, where "Middle Lake area" described in the following chapter (page 32) starts. After that, we reach in succession Tremezzo, Villa Carlotta and always on occidental shore the boat stops in Cadenabbia.

We now continue to Bellagio, placed where the three branches of the lake converge, that is, the middle of the upside-down Y.



28

THE OLD SYSTEM OF WEIGHTS

A ceremony is held on January 5 to recreate an episode that took place in 1796, when the Spanish, rulers of Milan, introduced a new system of weights and measures that threw local commerce into disarray. On Boxing Day, the inhabitants of Bellano sent a group of representatives to ask for the old weight system to be reinstated. Following intense negotiations, they returned to their village on January 5 and announced that the request had been granted. The festival today constitutes a costumed re-enactment of the return of the delegates by boat. Those on the shore shout "new weight or old weight?" to which those on the boat reply "old weight", or "pesa vegia". Children then run along the shore dragging milk bottles, which, making a din, represent the uselessness of the Spanish weighing and measuring system. This is how legend tells it, at least. Consider, however, that in Lombardy dialect "pesavegia" means nightmare, so perhaps the ceremony held every January 5 is a simple ritual to banish bad luck, which has nothing to do with the Spanish.

The boat stops at Menaggio and Varenna and then, leaving the crowded centre of the lake behind, from Varenna we continue for 15 minutes up the eastern side of the lake to Bellano.

Bellano

Altitude	202 m
Population	3,238

Cut in two by the torrent Pioverna, Bellano is situated in one of the most beautiful corners of the Lario, tucked between the shore of the lake and the mountain that towers over it. For centuries Bellano was the biggest port of the entire basin. The centre still retains its haphazard alleyways and ancient noble houses. One of the most famous is the Cà del Diavol, or Devil's House, overlooking the ravine and shrouded in frightening ancient legends.

In the 19th century there were large silk mills in the town, though today the service sector is the mainstay of the local economy.



Dervio

Altitude	238 m
Population	2,704

This town has a medieval atmosphere, both in the centre and especially in the hamlet of Correnno Plinio, perched on a rocky spur sheer above the lake. This is offset by the more modern spectacle of the colourful sails of the windsurfers who practise the sport on the lake. Sights to see include the castle-enclosure of the Andreani counts, the streets and stairways carved into the rock, and the church dedicated to Saint Thomas of Canterbury. Continuing on down the lake we pass the neo-classical dockyard built by the architect Luigi Cagnola. Our next stop is Pianello on the





opposite side of the lake (the western shore). We remain on this side as far as Domaso, then sail to Piona (eastern shore) and finally on to Colico, the last stop on our journey.

Pianello del Lario

Altitude 213 m
Population 1,023

At Pianello there is an 19th century silk mill which today houses a museum. This collection of over one hundred boats, equipment and accessories from the 18th century onwards can teach us a great deal about the lake's nautical history.

Back on the boat, in a few minutes we reach Musso (altitude 201, population 1,100), an essentially agricultural and tourist village, where we stop before pressing on to Dongo.

Dongo

Altitude 208 m
Population 3,444

- *To see*
Palazzo Manzi
Santo Stefano
Santa Maria in Martinico
Santa Eufemia

Dongo is an industrial tourist town located at the entrance to the Dongana valley.

It is rich in history; for six centuries, until 1532, it was part of the Republic of the Three Pievis (Dongo, Gravedona and Sorico). Palazzo Manzi, then known as Polti-Petazzi, is now the headquarters of the town council. One of many villas from the Napoleonic era, it has been conserved perfectly.

Its modest, three-floor facade be-

lies the rich and refined interior, accessible through the colonnade with its large reception room.

Of notable interest is the large fresco in the vaults of the central lounge. The library and the oratory are also fine examples of Neoclassical elegance.

We now move on to Gravedona, in front of the Piona peninsula.





Gravedona ed Uniti

Altitude 201 m
Population 4,208

Gravedona cannot be visited in a hurry. Sights worth seeing include the church of Santa Maria del Tiglio, built towards the end of the 12th century, probably on the foundations of an early medieval baptistery. The exterior is characterised by its dark and light striped surface and its octagonal belfry in the centre of the facade. The church of San Vincenzo conserves the crypt of the Romanesque building, which dates back to

the early 11th century. The rest of the church was reconstructed in the 17th century.

The panoramically-situated Palazzo Gallio was built for cardinal Tolomeo Gallio between 1583 and 1586 by Tibaldi, who incorporated the remains of the medieval castle into his work.

The church of Santa Maria delle Grazie dates back to 1467. Inside are precious frescos painted by the Lombardy school in the early 1500s.

A few minute's boat ride from Gravedona we come to Domaso (altitude 216 m, population 1,400), a small town nestled against the slopes of the Sasso Pelo at the mouth of the torrent Livo. In the Carolingian period it was part of the famous Reichenau monastery on the lake of Costanza. Here too are 19th and 20th century villas, including Villa Camilla, now the town council offices.

Before we reach Colico, we stop at Piona, a small peninsula on the north-eastern shore which is part of the municipality of Colico. Here, the lake forms an inlet between Colico and Olgiasca, known as Lake Piona.

It is also worth taking a look at



the church of San Nicolao, built in the 11th century on the site of a pre-existing building. The bell tower was reconstructed in the 18th century after the original one collapsed, along with the mid 13th century cloisters, which were also reconstructed recently. Here we can also admire the combination of Roman and Gothic elements in the frame of the beautiful four-column portico in black and white marble.



THE ABBEY OF PIONA

This 11th-century Cistercian abbey offers a magnificent view of the lake. It is one of the finest examples of the Romanesque style typical of the region, built in the 12th century on the summit of the peninsula by Cluniac monks. Following a period of neglect and various usages, the building was restored at the beginning of the 20th century. It has belonged to its current residents, the Cistercians of the Abbey of Casamari, since 1937.



TWO FORTS

The city of Colico has two forts. Between 1603 and 1606, Count Fuentes ordered a fortress to be built on the Montecchio to defend the northern confine of the Duchy of Milan. It is a star-shaped construction built on a series of levels. At the top we can still see the governor's palace, whilst at the soldiers' quarters were situated below. The fortress has a varied history. During the political and military upheavals of the 1700s, it was besieged by the Austrians, the Spanish and the Piedmonts. In 1796 Napoleon ordered it to be dismantled and abandoned for good.

The other is the fort of Montecchio, built between 1911 and 1914. It is the only Italian fort built during the Great War that has conserved its original structure.



Colico

Altitude	218 m
Population	7,566

- **To see**
Forte Fuentes
Forte Montecchio
Villa Malpensata
Chiesa di San Rocco

Linked by road to Lecco, Chiavenna and Sondrio, Colico has been an important centre of communication since ancient times.

Because of its strategic position,

Colico suffered invasions and attacks which, along with frequent flooding from the river Adda, led to the almost total abandonment of the city at the end of the 17th century. When passes from Stelvio, Maloja and Spluga reopened, it came back to life and began to develop again.

We end our long journey from Como here, at the northern tip of the lake, almost at the spurs of the Alps.



The centre of the lake



The centre of the lake is for sure the most known area of Lake Como. It stretches from Lenno to Varenna and in the middle we find the promontory where Bellagio, the most famous amongst these towns, is set. From here the view extends from Tremezzo and Cadenabbia as far as the mountains that close off the basin to the north.

In the centre-lake area Varenna, Menaggio, Bellagio, Villa Carlotta, Tremezzo and Lenno are easily reachable, thanks to the frequent connections offered by the boat-shuttle of Navigazione Laghi.

The entire journey can be travelled over without stops, though each place merits a visit in order to enjoy the views and the special atmosphere that characterise the lake and its surroundings.

Other connections are possible, by using the car-ferry service between Cadenabbia, Bellagio, Menaggio and Varenna.

Lenno

Altitude	209 m
Population	1,832

• To see

Villa del Balbianello

Santo Stefano, a parish church with a Romanesque crypt (11th-12th century) remodelled in the 1500s. Contains interesting frescoes by the Bernardino Luini school.

Baptistry of an octagonal design (11th century)

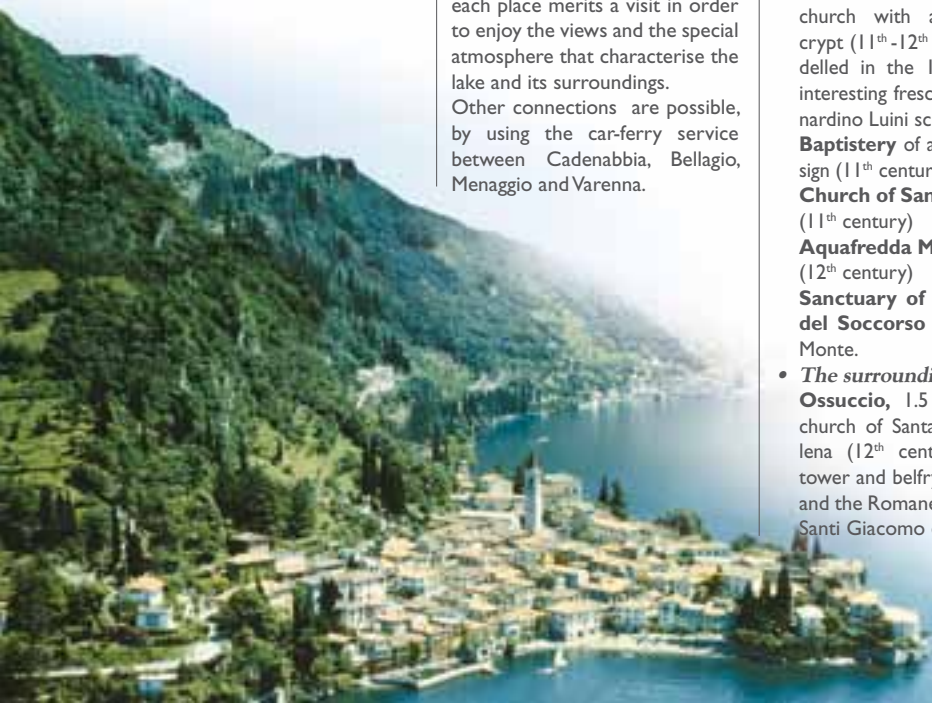
Church of Sant'Andrea (11th century)

Aquafredda Monastery (12th century)

Sanctuary of the Madonna del Soccorso with the Sacro Monte.

• The surrounding area

Ossuccio, 1.5 km away. The church of Santa Maria Maddalena (12th century) with bell tower and belfry (14th century) and the Romanesque church of Santi Giacomo e Filippo.





At Lenno the scenery that presents itself is a little different to what we have seen so far. Of course there are villas, gardens and parks here, too, but the town is not situated on the lakeside but is almost hidden from view in a deep inlet between the promontory of Lavedo and the tip of Portezza.

The view of the lake and the tip

of Bellagio from here is unique. The Villa del Balbianello, once owned by the Arconati Visconti family, stands on the very tip of the mound of Lavedo, offering a spectacular view.

For those who want to stay, Lenno is full of things to do.

A short walk takes you to the Sanctuary of the Madonna del Soccorso, sited 400 metres above Ossuccio, at the beginning of Val Perlana. A kilometre-long boule-

vard lined with 14 chapels, leads to the church. The chapels, built between 1635 and 1710, contain life-size statues in stucco and terracotta, and some fine frescos. The church, on the other hand, is of a different era, its central structure completed in 1537.

On our way back to Lenno we look out over the gulf of Venere and enjoy the landscape offering beautiful views of the numerous churches, villas and gardens.



VILLA DEL BALBIANELLO

The complex of buildings that make up the villa can be clearly seen from the lake, constituting an unmistakable reference point for boats.

The main building consists of two square structures on top of each other. The lower part of the villa contains the remains of a small Franciscan convent which stood on the tip of the promontory. The villa and the famous panoramic loggia were built by cardinal Angelo Maria Durini who bought the Villa Balbiano, built by cardinal Tolomeo Gallo in the 16th century at Ossuccio in 1787. The cardinal named this villa Balbianello, because of its smaller size and more cosy character.

The loggia is a great architectural invention as it allows a view of two opposite landscapes; from one side, the Tremezzina coast, from the other the basin towards Isola Comacina. From the embarcadero we can reach the churchyard of the little church, and from there climb up to the villa, following paths specially designed to offer the best views. The garden here is neither English nor Italian, but has its own unique style. It is designed in harmony with the coast and the lake, using the water as its main point of interest.

The villa had many different owners over the years before the Arconati Visconti family bought it and added new furnishings, works of art and libraries. The last owner was the count Guido Monzino, who left it to the FAI (National Environmental Fund), who he was sure would keep it as a "place of wonders", as it was referred to by its creator, Cardinal Tolomeo Gallo.



Tremezzo

Altitude	225 m
Population	1,252

- *To see*
The parish church of San Lorenzo
San Pietro a Balogno-Volesio
San Bartolomeo

Situated right in front of the Belgio headland.

The town faces the lake, its low houses with porticos broken up by flights of steps leading to the centre. The two-fold character of the town is influenced both by the lake and the hills, both of great charm and rare beauty.

Villa Carlotta

Just north of Tremezzo, a four-minute boat ride away, is Villa Carlotta. Built in the second half of the 18th century by the Marchesi Clerici, it was modified throughout the 19th century to compete with Villa Melzi located opposite, becoming one of the most sumptuous villas on the lake. The Sachsen-Meiningen dukes created the existing gardens, rich in citrus groves, camellias, palm trees, conifers and tropical plants. In 1801 the villa was purchased by Giovanni Sommariva, who

enriched it with works of art by Canova, Thorvaldsen, Appiani and Hayez, including Canova's Cupid and Psyche. In addition to the Italian garden, a splendid English garden was built, in which the spectacular blooming of azaleas and rhododendrons can be witnessed each year.

The Capella, designed by Giacomo Moraglia and rich in sculpture, is situated on the via Regina.

Today, Villa Carlotta is owned by the State. An autonomous board has been responsible for the upkeep of the villa and organising visits since 1929.



TREMEZZINA

The entire western coast between Campo di Lenno and Cadenabbia is known as the Tremezzina. It gets its name, roughly meaning "in the middle", from Tremezzo, the town located half way between Como and the end of the lake. It could also be that the name refers to the halfway mark of the Via Regina, which runs from south to north..



STENDHAL AND VERDI

Stendhal adored Cadenabbia, as he did the entire lake, of which he could be described as an honorary citizen. It was in Cadenabbia that he wrote the his passionate celebration of the “sublime lake, where all is noble and tender, where everything speaks of love”. Giuseppe Verdi composed some of the most famous sections of the romantic opera “La Traviata”, considered one of his masterpieces, while staying with the Ricordi publishers at Villa Margherita.

Cadenabbia

Cadenabbia, a hamlet of Griante (altitude 247 m, population 770) on the western shore of the Como branch.

This part of the coast, called “Riviera of the azaleas”, draws a large number of visitors in the spring, when its gardens and nurseries explode in a riot of colour. Vast and varied parks surround the villas here, which include the famous Villa Carlotta, our next stop, Villa Collina, Villa Maria and the Parks of the faggio and betulla. Cadenabbia, also the terminus of the Ferry Company ferries, is the closest to the lake of all the towns, and has a large number of hotels and tourist facilities.

Here we can enjoy the most open

view of the lake. If we go up to the San Martino natural oasis we can visit the Sanctuary of the Madonna delle Grazie, which stands in a beautiful meadow under the rocky Sasso San Martino. From here we can admire a view of the entire lake and the mountains on the opposite shore.

Cadenabbia has long been popular with the English, who established a community here that was so strong they even built the first Anglican church in Italy, in 1891. Over the years, it has also been visited by Giuseppe Verdi, Stendhal, naturally, Longfellow, Queen Victoria and, more recently, Konrad Adenauer.



ADENAUER IN CADENABBIA

The German chancellor Konrad Adenauer holidayed at Cadenabbia for ten years from 1957. The location was recommended to him by the minister of foreign affairs, Von Brantano, who was descended from a family from Griante, traces of whom date back to the 17th century. The chancellor described Griante as his “second home”. He spent his time walking, playing boules, and above all enjoying the peace and quiet. In her book entitled “Adenauer in Cadenabbia”, his secretary Annalise Poppinga describes his love of good wine, which he enjoyed with friends from the area. Among many anecdotes, she tells of a kind of toast they would make in slightly imprecise Latin, which is so simple it requires no translation: “Qui bene bibit, bene dormit. Qui bene dormit non peccat. Qui non peccat venit in coelum”.





THE CYCLISTS SANCTUARY

Cycling enthusiasts will find this interesting. Situated by the road that leads from Bellagio up to Magreglio (754 m) is the Sanctuary of B. V. del Ghisallo, patron saint of Italian cyclists. According to the wishes of Pious XII, it was established in 1949 at the finishing point of the arduous climb known as "the wall of Ghisallo". The little church contains paraphernalia relating to the sport. Nearby a monument to Fausto Coppi has been erected.

Bellagio

Altitude 229 m
Population 3,085

- To see
San Giacomo
Villa Serbelloni
Villa Melzi

The true "Pearl of Lake Lario" stands on a promontory in the centre of the lake, between its two branches. Due to its position, Bellagio boasts the most extensive and luminous view of the lake. The narrow streets and steps of the ancient, picturesque town creep up the hill behind, forming one of the most famous scenes in the world.

It is said that Pliny the Younger built his summer residence at the highest point of Bellagio.

Not to be missed is the walk up the Salita Serbelloni, called the "Fossato" or "moat" by locals in remembrance of its role in defending the town in the Middle Ages. Bellagio is right at the top of the central "triangle" of the lake, and is without a doubt one of the most stunning and talked-about Italian lakeside towns. By the 19th century it was already one of the best-known holiday destinations in Europe, loved for the colours of its waters and forests, the splendour of its gardens, the smell of its Mediterranean and al-

VILLA SERBELLONI AND VILLA MELZI

Villa Serbelloni, originally a castle and later a country house, was finally transformed into a villa at the end of the 15th century. Restructured again in the 17th century, it was used as a hotel in the last ten years of the 19th century. Today it is a congress centre.

The park is extremely vast, the biggest of the lake-side villas, covering the entire promontory above the village, with a splendid view of the two branches of the lake. Designed according to the principles of romantic landscape gardening, it is filled with wooded areas and glades, exotic plants and centuries-old trees.

Also overlooking the lake is *Villa Melzi*, a villa of extremely sober and elegant forms, with English-style gardens that run alongside the lake in a boulevard lined with plane trees. It was built between 1808 and 1810 by Giacomo Albertelli for Count Francesco Melzi, vice-president of the Cisalpine Republic and chancellor of the Kingdom of Italy. This noble residence, once described by Stendhal, has played host to many famous guests who left lasting evidence of their love for the lake.



pine flowers, its mild climate and unique atmosphere.

Our stop at Bellagio cannot be rushed, as in addition to the lovely views to admire, there are a number of churches, villas and parks to visit; Villa Serbelloni, Villa Melzi, the 12th century basilica of San Giacomo, the Romanesque churches of San Giorgio and San Martino and the Baroque San Giovanni Battista.

Those with a little more time, and those staying on in Bellagio, can also visit Villa Trivulzio, built in the 1700s and restructured a century later, when English-style gardens were added. Neo-Gothic Villa Trotti, with its Moorish decorations and gardens rich in rare plants, is another must-see.

A host of famous names have passed through Bellagio for various reasons. From Teodorico to Liutprando, from Ludovic the Dark with his wife Beatrice d'Este, to Leonardo. Visitors in the 1800s include the Empress of Russia, the Austrian Emperors Francis I and Ferdinand, Stendhal, and finally Liszt, who composed his sonnet to Dante and Beatrice.



Menaggio

Altitude	203 m
Population	3,181

- **To see**
San Carlo
- **The surrounding area**
Villa Mylius Vigoni

As we approach the shore, the view of Menaggio, with tall mountains rising up behind it, is stunning. Its appearance is typical of the lakeside towns - low houses with porches in the old town, with most of the surrounding space taken up by the gardens of the huge villas. We must leave the

town centre in order to see the villas in the hamlet of Lovenò, two km up the hill. These exclusive dwellings include the famous Villa Vigoni, with its large park, rich in exotic plants and dotted with neo-classical statues.

Enrico Mylius, a German banker and businessman, gave Gaetano Besia the go-ahead to restructure the villa around 1820. Today it is the headquarters of the Italian-German Villa Vigoni Centre, where seminars and congresses are often held.

Back in the town centre, among the medieval houses in the higher part of town stands the 17th century Romanesque church of San Carlo.

CHRISTMAS TREE DECORATIONS

Lombardy is famous for glass-making, and visitors to the area will find workshops dotted throughout the region. In this sector it is often difficult to distinguish art from craft. An unusual form of glassmaking has developed in Bellagio that is worth mentioning. The town has become a centre for the production of blown-glass balls, which are then painted and decorated and sold as Christmas tree decorations.



TOURISM FOR THE YOUNG

In summer, Menaggio is a young, lively place. For sporty types, this is the place to be! In addition to water sports, popular in the holiday season, there is rock climbing, horse riding, basketball, and tennis. For golf enthusiasts there is an 18-hole course with a view. Not to mention the opportunities for trekking, along a network of clearly-marked paths of all levels of difficulty.



Varenna

Altitude	220 m
Population	786

- *To see*
Villa Monastero
Villa Cipressi
San Giorgio
The Museum of Ornithology
- *The surrounding area*
Castello di Vezio
Fiumelatte

We are on the eastern shore of the lake, Varenna is sandwiched between the water and a wooded slope. The church of San Giorgio stands over this colourful village, which, with its steep alleyways and steps, conserves the appearance and atmosphere of an ancient hamlet. From the lakeside we can see the unmistakable outline of the Bellagio peninsula, and beyond it the Tremezzina shore. Here, the vivid traces of the

town's medieval past and the modern hustle and bustle of tourism live side by side in harmony. Oldest churches around the lake. Varenna, the nerve centre of the routes covered by the Lake Ferry Company (it is one of the termini for car ferries), has a regular layout that gives away its Roman origins. There are a number of churches to visit. San Giovanni Battista, built between the 11th and 12th cen-

CASTELLO DI VEZIO

The remains of the Castello di Vezio lie 3.5 km east of Varenna, on a high spur overlooking the entire central lake. Undoubtedly one of the main lookouts of the 12th and 13th centuries, it has a square tower protected by a circular wall. Originally, a second wall would have surrounded the first, also enclosing the entire town of Varenna.

The vast perimeter of the fortification shielded the population on more than one occasion from attacks during the rebellion against the region's domination.

Legend has it that the Lombard Queen Theodolinda had the church of San Martino and the Sant'Antonio oratory built as a symbol of her Christian faith.





FIUMELATTE

Not far from Varenna is the hamlet of Fiumelatte. It takes its name, meaning “milky river”, from a short, foaming stream which, apart from the milky colour of its raging water, has another unusual characteristic.

Fiumelatte begins in a mountain cave and plunges into the lake just 250 metres below. It appears in spring, in the second half of March, and disappears almost without warning six months later. It is the shortest stream in Italy.

turies, is one of the 12th-century parish church of San Giorgio has a pointed bell tower. 16th and 17th-century frescoes adorn the facade (Saint Christopher), whilst inside there are paintings from

the 11th and 16th centuries. The main square is faced by the 17th-century churches of Santa Marta and Santa Maria delle Grazie.

In addition, the Ornithology Museum, housed in the ancient Pa-

lazzo Venini, conserves a collection of birds native of Italy and in particular of the lake area and its neighbouring valleys.

THE VILLAS

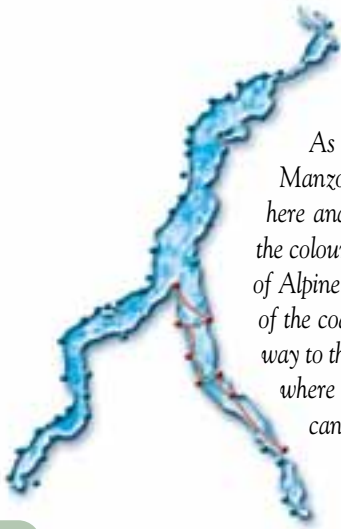
Villa Monastero is the old convent of Santa Maria, active for almost three centuries from the 1200s. It was turned into a holiday residence at the turn of the 16th century for the noble Mornico family.

In the second half of the 19th century, the German builder W.E. Kees carried out considerable restoration work on the building. Today it is a sumptuous villa owned by the CNR (National Research Board), where conferences and cultural events are often held. The park is renowned for its beauty. Located along the banks of the lake and equipped with artificial embankments, it is rich in rare species of trees, decorative features and important works of art, including the Gruppo della Clemenza di Tito, by G.B. Comolli (1830).

Villa Isimbardi or *Villa dei Cipressi* is an ancient building that was reconstructed in the 19th century. This villa is also surrounded by a park, overlooking the lake, with charming terraces and lines of cypress trees. Owned by the Municipality, like Villa Monastero it hosts meetings, congresses, and cultural events.



From the mountains to the Costiera degli Olivi



As soon as we board at Lecco and enter the branch of the lake Manzoni sailed on, we can see the difference between the landscape here and that around Como. The lake is sheltered by the mountains, the colours are harsher: overhanging rocks and precipices are reminiscent of Alpine lakes. We sail past small bays and ports, the hustle and bustle of the coastal towns, the peaceful beaches that fill up in summer, all the way to the Costiera degli Olivi. From there we continue north to Bellagio where our tour of the lake comes to an end, and where, if we like, we can start all over again.

40

Lecco

Altitude	214 m
Population	47,200

- **To see**

Ponte Vecchio, built by Azzone Visconti between 1336 and 1338 to consolidate his rule of the city and its surrounds.

I Musei Civici (The Civic Museums), founded in 1888.

They house collections of historical, archaeological, ethnographical and naturalistic material from Lecco.

The collections are divided between three sites: Villa Manzoni,

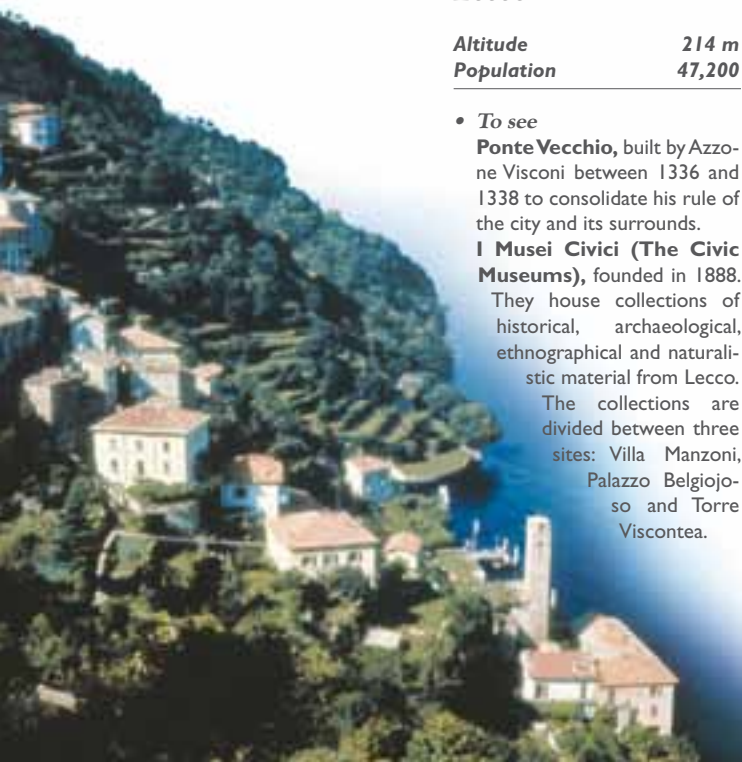
Palazzo Belgiojoso and Torre Viscontea.



- **The surrounding area**
Maggianico.

The church of Sant'Andrea, which houses a polyptych of the Madonna with Child and Saints, by B. Luini, the most important work of art in the region, and a triptych by G. Ferrari.

Piani d'Erna, 1329 m, a high wooded plain at the foot of Mount Resegone. Accessible by cableway from Malnago, 5 km east of Lecco.





The city of Lecco, capital of the province since 1992, extends onto the alluvial plain formed by the Adda as it leaves the eastern branch of the lake. It is dominated by Mount San Martino to the north and Mount Resegone to the east.

Of probable pre-Roman origin, the city had an important strategic and commercial role throughout the centuries due to its position along the axis that links Italy to southern Germany.

Long caught up in the battles between the communes and the empire and between the lords of Milan, in 1336 Azzone Visconti ordered the construction of a bridge over the Adda, today Ponte Vecchio, a fortified castle, of which a 15th century tower still

VILLA MANZONI

This was the home of Alessandro Manzoni's family for around two centuries.

The writer spent part of his childhood and young adult life here.

In 1818 it passed to the Scola family, who maintained it in its original state for 140 years, leaving it to the Lecco town council in 1960.

Today it houses the Manzoni Museum, a ten-room exhibition of first editions, manuscripts and relics of the life and works of the writer.

The villa also houses the Municipal Art Gallery, which contains the work of artists from Lecco and others who worked in the area, from the 16th to the 20th century.



remains, and the wall surrounding the city.

In the modern age it was the site of a large market and a flourishing manufacturing industry (arms and iron products), though it owes its fortune to the production of silk and other fabrics. When the textile industry declined, iron and steel and metalworking took over.

In the old town there are 15th century remains and numerous 18th and 19th century buildings, including Villa Manzoni, Palazzo Belgiojoso and the old hospital, now the town hall.

It is worth visiting the Torre Vi-

scontea, which is all that remains of the castle, demolished along with the wall at the end of the 18th century. It stands right in the heart of the city, in piazza XX Settembre. In the 19th century it was used as a prison, though today it houses the Renaissance Museum. From the lakeside piazza Cermenati, a short climb takes us to the church of Saint Nicholas. Of Romanesque origin, it was reconstructed in 1830 in the Neo-classical style by the architect Giuseppe Bovara, who also built the town hall and the Teatro Sociale.

THE SETTINGS OF "I PROMESSI SPOSI"

The introduction to The Betrothed is a description of Lecco, where the writer spent his childhood. In his work he captures perfectly the beauty of the changing landscapes - mountains that rise up from the water, reaching the sky...the roar of streams...white villas dotted along the slopes, like herds of grazing sheep - whose dramatic contrasts are due to the formation of the land, here much more austere and mysterious than the gentle slopes around Como.

A tour of Manzoni's haunts could start at Pescarenico, in southern Lecco, where the remains of the Fra' Cristoforo convent are located. Pescarenico is the only place specifically named in the novel. Then there is Olate, in the north of the town, believed to be the place where Lucia is born and where she marries Renzo. The Zucco promontory is where the palace of Don Rodrigo stood, and in Somasca, a hamlet of Vercurago, there are the remains of a castle that could be the one where the Innominato lived.





Boarding one of the Lake Ferry Company boats we head north towards our final destination, Bellagio. On the way we stop at six other lakeside towns - the first, Abbazia Lariana on the lake's eastern shore, is 23 minutes away.

Abbadia Lariana

Altitude	204 m
Population	3,233

- **To see**

San Lorenzo. This church, which faces the lake, is part of the ancient Benedictine complex.

The Silk Factory Museum.

- **The surrounding area**

I Piani Resinelli. Popular with skiers in winter and hikers in summer. The rock climbing school, named Ragni di Lecco or "spiders of Lecco", is situated here.

Abbadia Lariana stands on the promontory formed by the mouth of the torrent Zerbo. It takes its name from the Benedictine Abbey (Abbazia Benedettina) founded here in the 9th century. The cloi-



sters and a few frescos from the former church of San Vincenzo still remain.

In the south of the town there is a medieval tower, La Torraccia, which was used to survey the stretch of lake that ends at Lecco.

From Abbazia, the boat continues up the right side of the lake to Mandello, seven-minute's journey away.



SILK

The Monti Silk-Factory Museum is located within the old factory, which was restructured in 1818 by the throwster Pietro Monti. The spinning wheel, a large throwing machine and other antique machinery can be seen at work in the museum, which authentically recreates the workings of a mid-nineteenth century silk mill. The museum is a tribute to a great historical tradition and an industrial sector, now practically extinct, that played a large part in the economic development of the area.



THE GUZZI MOTORBIKE MUSEUM

The famous bike factory in Mandello del Lario now houses a museum where visitors can admire over 100 models produced from 1921, and all the racing bikes produced up to 1957, when Guzzi stopped competing after over 3,300 victories. A range of prototypes of motorbikes and engines are also on display.

Mandello del Lario

Altitude 214 m
Population 10,599

- **To see**
San Lorenzo
The Guzzi Motorbike Museum
- **The surrounding area**
San Giorgio, located in the south-east of the town, on the road leading to the Piani Resinelli, the 16th century oratory contains an interesting cycle of frescos in the folk style.
Santa Maria, a small Romanesque church, about 40 minutes' walk from the town centre.

Situated behind the Grigne mountains, Mandello is still a manufacturing town, though mechanics has long taken the place of



textiles. However, the town has made the most of its opportunities in the tourist sector.

The well-preserved medieval town centre is characterised by houses with porticos facing the lake.

The oldest accurate description of the church of San Lorenzo dates back to 1593. The church was demolished in 1600 and entirely reconstructed in 1613.

Back on the boat, we cross the lake to the western shore and Onno, an eight-minute trip. On the same side of the lake, we then stop at Vassena and Limonta, just a few minutes away by boat.

These three towns are actually hamlets of Oliveto Lario (208 m, population 1,000, with municipal headquarters at Vassena). The name reflects the area's main agricultural activities, grape and olive-growing.

Olive trees were introduced in Roman times and an excellent olive oil is still produced here.



A MUNICIPALITY WITH MANY HISTORIES

The three towns that make up the municipality of Oliveto Lario, all stations for the Lake Ferry Company, are testimony to the complex history of the lake. While Vassena belongs to the Diocese of Como and follows Roman Rite, Onno and Limonata belong to the Diocese of Milan, and therefore follow the Ambrosian Rite.

The lively history of the area is also reflected in its many architectural styles, from Roman remains to early medieval fragments to the rich Baroque period, which flourished until the late 18th century.

Onno

The first village belonging to the Oliveto Lario municipality is situated at the end of a stretch of wild landscape.

Those who wish to walk from town to town can take a small detour to the Baroque church of Sant'Anna, formerly San Fedele. Inside are medieval frescoes, including some from the early 11th century by Lanfranco da Lecco.

The majestic parish church of San Pietro Martire is severely Baroque in style. It contains a Crucifixion by Nicolao da Seregno dating back to 1432, which was taken from a house, known as "the devil's house", in the centre of the picturesque village. In the centre, a smooth, vertical wall known as the "stone of Onno" dominates.

Vassena

Vassena boasts the most stunning scenery of the three. A gentle walk along the lake as far as the port, where the remains of a tower and the church of San Nazaro are situated, is recommended. Above the trunk road, the elegant Baroque outline of the Santuario della Madonna del Carmine is visible, surrounded by the olive groves that characterise the whole area.



Limonta

Finally, we come to Limonta and the last part of Oliveto Lario, on the border with the municipality of Bellagio. Along with Civenna, Limonta was donated to the Milanese monastery of Sant'Ambrogio in 835 by the emperor Lotario, for which it produced farm goods, iron and oil. It remained

part of the Abbot's estate until the French revolution.

The Abbot's palace is connected to the church of Sant'Ambrogio, adorned with a portico, stucco decoration and 18th century frescoes, as well as carvings attributed to the Fantoni, a 15th century polyptych, and a Madonna by Paris Bordone (1500-1571).

The beauty of this land was described by Tommaseo and Tommaso Grossi in the historical novel "Marco Visconti".

To the south of the brief curve of the river is San Dionigi, and to the north the unique sanctuary of the Madonna del Moletto, formed by two churches built in 1606 and 1640, which houses frescos by Gian Paolo Recchi.

Limonta produces craft objects made from olive wood, many of which are sold to tourists in Bellagio.

Back on board our Lake Ferry boat, we leave Limonta and cross back to the eastern shore. In just eight minutes we are at Lierna.



Lierna

Altitude 202 m
Population 2,162

Rich in valleys and gardens, Lierna stands on a plateau covered with vineyards, with Mount Cucco (1,433 m) and Cima Pelagia (1,549) to the rear. Like all the towns around the lake, it enjoys a mild climate perfect for holidaymaking.

The remains of a Roman pavement, now at the museum in Lecco, are testimony to its ancient origins. Back then, the Romans were already making use



of the mineral water springs still active today in the Onedo Valley and Castello. This little promontory just north of the town was once an autonomous centre, with its own small church, San Maurizio. The parish church of Sant'Ambrogio overlooks Lierna from above. It was built in 1626, on the site of a pre-existing church of the same name. Those who have still not had their fair share of lake views can

climb beyond the village for one of the most spectacular views of the central lake and its entire western shore.

From Lierna we set off on the last leg of our trip. In twenty minutes we arrive at Bellagio, the celebrated "Pearl of Lake Lario" visited as part of our second itinerary on pages 34-35.

Bellagio really is the centre of the lake's world. Those who wish to prolong their trip can take another of the Lake Ferry Company boats and continue around the lake, towards Como and Colico or alternatively towards the other towns in the central part of the lake.

Each time you will discover something new, in a paradise of views, villas, churches, gardens and parks, and even romantic atmospheres that seems never-ending.

SIMPLE COOKING

The restaurants of the lakeside towns, particularly Mandello, Abbazia and Lierna, serve excellent lake fish in the traditional style. A very simple and traditional recipe combines fish with polenta.

Twate Shad are prepared according to an ancient method. Once scaled, they are threaded onto twine and left to dry in the sun, after which they are squashed with a wooden disk into boxes or vats with holes in the bottom to let the oil run out. At the end of this process, we now have what are known as "mis-soltini".

The fish is spread with a mixture of oil and vinegar and cooked slowly under the grill. It is served with cold or toasted polenta with a little parsley or wild salad. Alternatively, the fish can be left to soak in vinegar and served with a drizzle of strong, local oil from the olive presses at Ossuccio or Onno.

Go

at the right time

Shows and events

Bellano	<i>Pesa vegia</i> Historical parade and fireworks	january
Bellagio	Camelie flower on the lake Bellagio Festival	april june
Como	<i>Palio del Baradello</i> Comoestate Shows and games in the square	august-september july-august
Colico	Festival Musica sull'acqua	june-july
Dervio	"Lucie" rowing competition Fireworks on the lake - <i>Festa delle sponde</i>	june 15 august
Gravedona	Camelie flower on the lake Fireworks on the lake	march 14 august
Ossuccio/ Isola Comacina	Feast of San Giovanni	june
Lecco	Summer nights - Lecco Festival	june-september
Lezzeno	Regatalonga Rowing competition	june
Tremezzo	Friday's at Villa Carlotta – Concerts	july-august
Varenna	Lake Festival with fireworks	july

TRANSPORT

By air	Agno Lugano		+41 91 6101111
	Milano Linate		02 232323
	Milano Malpensa		02 232323
	Bergamo Orio al Serio		035 326323
By motorway	A8 Milano – Varese		
	A9 Lainate – Como – Chiasso		
	Svizzera A2 del San Gottardo		
By rail	Trenitalia	call center	199 892 021
	Trenord	contact center	02 72494949
By funicular	Como		031 303 608
By cableway	Argegno/Pigra		031 821344
By bus	Linea Como – Bellagio e Como – Colico		
	ASF Autolinee		031 247 111
	Linea Lecco – Bellagio		
	LINEE Lecco		0341 359 911

Fairs and Markets

Cernobbio	Felina Maxima – International catshow	february
	Comocrea – Textile design	march
	Proposte	may
	Orticolario	october
Como	Easter fair	easter period
	Book fair	august
	Fair of S.Abbondio	end of august

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<i>Bellagio</i>	36	Navigazione Lago di Como 031 950 180 I.A.T. 031 950 204 Villa Melzi 339 457 3838 Villa Serbelloni 031 951 555
<i>Bellano</i>	28	
<i>Blevio</i>	23	
<i>Brienno</i>	26	
<i>Cadenabbia</i>	35	Navigazione Lago di Como 0344 404 79
<i>Carate-Urio</i>	25	
<i>Careno</i>	25	
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<i>Colico</i>	31	Navigazione Lago di Como 0341 940 815 Forti di Fuentes e Montecchio 0341 940 322
<i>Como</i>	18	Navigazione Lago di Como 031 579 211 I.A.T. 031 269 712 Parco regionale Spina verde e Castel Baradello 031 252 554 Civica Pinacoteca 031 269 869 Civico Tempio Voltiano 031 574 705 Museo Civico, Storico e Archeologico 031 252 550 Museo Didattico della Seta 031 303 180 Villa Olmo 031 252 352
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<i>Dongo</i>	29	Ufficio Turistico 0344 825 72
<i>Fiumelatte</i>	39	
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Torno	24	Villa Pliniana 031 419 555
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