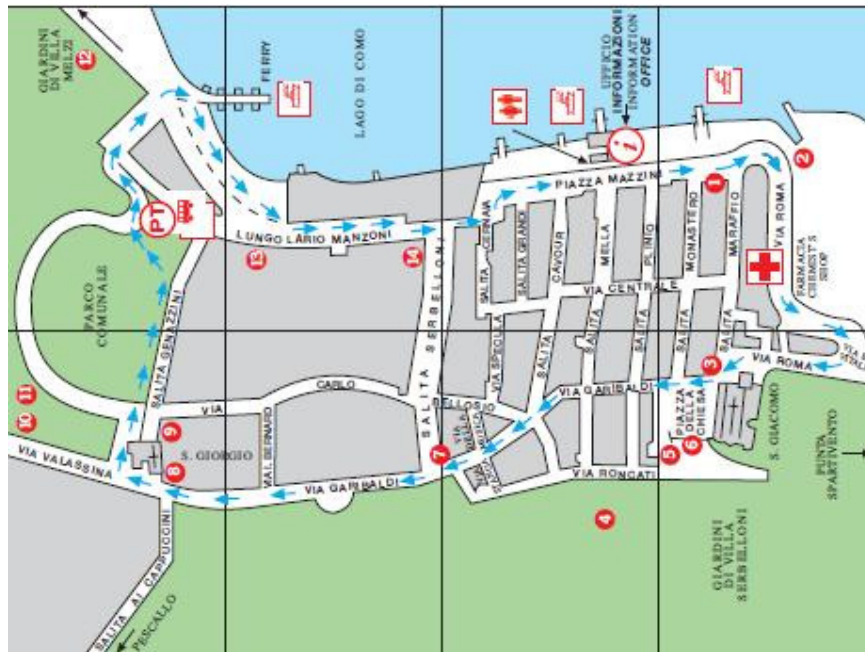




HISTORICAL TOUR & ITINERARY OF THE CENTRAL PART OF THE TOWN

Duration of tour: approx. 1 hour



The 22 suburbs scattered over the vast area of land stretching from the lakeside (229m above sea level) to the top of Mt. San Primo (1,686m above sea level) are all part of Bellagio. The “Borgo” is the town’s historic centre and was one of the first areas; in Bellagio to be inhabited. This itinerary will help the visitor to find out more about this main part of town .Our tour starts from Bellagio’s Tourist Office (IAT - by the public boat ticket office) in Piazza Mazzini, a rectangular-shaped “piazza” with its characteristic arcades that underwent radical changes during the 18th century following the extension of the area on the lakeside where the market was held. Opposite the boat landing stage No.1, under the arcade, is **1** a dark stone column with an inscription on it giving us details of the level of the lake’s waters in 1829 and below this, another date - 1868. Particularly abundant rainfalls caused the lake to flood in both years. Sadly, there have been other cases of flooding - they are not recorded on this column however.

From here, we start our tour by walking along the road pausing for a few minutes to admire the **2** entrance to the Grand Hotel Villa Serbelloni on the left, just after the first bend. It was originally built as a private villa in 1852 and was converted into a hotel called the Grand Hotel Bellagio, 20 years later. The name was changed to its present day one at the beginning of the 20th century when the Villa Serbelloni (nowadays property of the



Rockefeller Foundation of New York) became part of the hotel property. As we go uphill, instead of going straight up to the church square, we recommend taking a walk along the road to the left which leads us to the tip of the promontory called the “Punta Spartivento” which, literally translated, means the point where the wind divides. The views from here are exceptional and undoubtedly amongst the best on Lake Como. This is the point where the lake splits itself into three branches: to the right, the Lecco branch (southeastern branch); to the left, the Como branch (southwestern branch); and straight ahead of us, to the north, the Colico branch. A perfect backdrop is provided by the serene and majestic mountains so beautifully described by Alessandro Manzoni in his masterpiece, the “Promessi Sposi” -“The Betrothed”. Returning along the same road, we now head for the church square (Piazza San Giacomo) in the upper part of town. Here the most important feature is, of course, St. James’ Basilica, one of the best examples of the Lombard-Romanesque style architecture in this whole region. It was built from the end of the 11th century to the beginning of the 12th century and was decreed a National Monument in 1904. On the lower part of the bell tower is a Memorial plaque to those who died during World War One. It is thought that the lower part of the bell tower already existed as part of Borgo’s medieval defence system long before the church was ever built. The church was built incorporating this tower which was more or less the same height as the roof. The tower was later transformed into a bell tower. The actual bell tower as we see it today dates back to the 18th century and was restored in 1990. If you are interested in visiting the church interiors (well worth a visit), we advise you to go in through the main entrance and pick up the detailed information leaflet from the small table on the right. After visiting the church, if we stop for a few minutes in the square, you’ll see the Bar Sport - in bygone times a monastery. On the right hand corner of this building there is another **3** Memorial plaque on the wall which commemorates Teresio Olivelli who was born here. He was a brave officer of the Alpini regiment and founder of the clandestine paper “The Rebel”. He was bestowed with a gold medal for his bravery and was deported to the Nazi execution camp in Hersbruck where he gave his companions moral support and assistance right up to his death. If we now turn our backs to the bar and look across the square and upwards, we get a glimpse of the **4** Villa Serbelloni, an important conference and study centre which has been owned by the Rockefeller Foundation of New York since 1959. The grounds surrounding the villa cover a large portion of the promontory and can be visited from April to the end of October, only on guided tours which take place everyday except Mondays, at 11am and 3.30pm. Departure is from the gates behind the basilica’s beautiful apse. Tours are cancelled in the event of bad weather. Down to the right you can see **5** a tower which is all that remains of Bellagio’s medieval defence system. Right in the centre of the square is **6** a beautiful granite fountain which was made in 1897 by an Englishman, Mr. Pical, owner of the Villa Borné. The fountain was originally in the garden by the Villa Gotica and was created to celebrate the 60th anniversary of Queen Victoria’s reign. The fountain top’s original decoration was a star. Between 1908 and 1910 the fountain was moved from the Villa Gotica to the cobbled square. In September 1947, a statue of the Madonna Pellegrino (the Pilgrim Madonna) was carried in procession through the streets of Bellagio and to celebrate this special event, the fountain was embellished - the star was removed from the top of the fountain and was replaced with the statue of the Madonna as we see it today. Let’s now start walking up the Via Garibaldi which runs through the centre of Bellagio and which is full of all kinds of shops. Just before the end of this main street, on our right we see a wide flight of steps descending to the lakeside - **7** these are the Serbelloni steps, the “Salita Serbelloni”, flanked by colourful shops and a few restaurants and bars. To this day, the locals still call this area “the ditch”, a reminder that during medieval times this used to be the ditch which was used for defending the old town. In fact looking down towards the lake you can still see old large walls on the right - these were part of the medieval defence system which had three gateways to the Borgo’s town centre: One was where we are standing where there once used to be a draw-bridge; the second one was at the foot of the Salita Serbelloni



(where the little portico links the old walls to the Hotel Metropole); the third one was in the upper part of town near the church bell tower. Proceeding further along the Via Garibaldi, **8** we come to an elegant building on the right with a fresco of the town's coat of arms on it. This is Bellagio's Town Hall. Next to it is a small chapel (St. George's Chapel) which, like the Basilica of San Giacomo, dates back to the late 11th/early 12th centuries. Both the apse and the altar which originally faced east were moved to the opposite side of the chapel and the entrance was placed on the road side. Inside the statue of the Madonna of the "Cintura" (Belt). Also worth noting is the chapel's unique bell tower above the Genazzini Steps Salita Genazzini (once the only means of access to the upper part of town). If you go down a few steps beneath the bell tower, **9** you'll see on the Liberty style Council library built in 1914 by Domenico Vitali's heirs. Before heading down through the park to the lakeside, if you look a few yards ahead to the right, you'll see an interesting villa, **10** the Villa Gotica which we mentioned earlier. It was built as an Anglican church in neo-Gothic style towards the end of the 19th century and was converted into private apartments in the 1950's.

Proceeding downhill through the park, **11** we come across a tower to the left. This was where the water mechanism for the functioning of the Hotel Grande Bretagne's lift was. The Hotel Grande Bretagne is the large derelict building on the lakefront dating back to the mid 19th century which was used as a hotel for almost a century. In recent years it belonged to the Regional Government in Milan and was used as a prestigious Hotel & Catering school. In June 2000 it was bought by an important local industrialist. At the park's exit if you turn left and walk along the beautiful promenade with its magnificent Oleanders, you can go as far as the magnificent English-style gardens at the Villa Melzi **12**. They are open to the public daily between 9am and 6pm from March to beginning of November. Returning towards the Piazza Mazzini, you can see **13** a modern looking plaque on the walls of the Hotel Excelsior Splendide - this is in memory of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, a Futurist poet and inventor who died here in 1944. A little further ahead, at the foot of the Salita Serbelloni you can see another plaque **14** on the wall just a few steps up to the right. This was placed here in 1961 for the 150th anniversary of the birth of the Hungarian composer Franz Listz (1811-1886) and in memory of his stay in Bellagio in 1837. nWalking through the little archway, the old main entrance to Bellagio, we return to our starting point in the Piazza Mazzini. To the left, the very first hotel opened in Bellagio in 1825, the Hotel Genazzini, now called the Hotel Metropole.

We hope you enjoyed this