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WALK AROUND THE SUBURBS OF BELLAGIO

Walking time: about 2 hrs.

Length of visit to the Nautical
Instruments Museum: about 30/60 mins.

This itinerary lets us get to know several characteristic suburbs of Bellagio leaving from the historical centre of the town.

From the Tourist Office of Bellagio situated in Piazza Mazzini we reach the upper part of the town by going up the picturesque steep street "Salita Mella" which leads upwards just opposite the Pier and once known as "Via dei Fiori" (Flower Street). At the end of this road we turn right passing up all of the busy Via Garibaldi until we reach the Town Hall of Bellagio, an elegant public building in yellow and next to the small Romanesque church of San Giorgio (XI century). Just on the opposite side of

the road from this church a flight of stairs leads to the characteristic suburb of **Pescallo**, known as a fishing village and the place where once upon a time the fish market was held. At the beginning of the 18th century the suburb of Pescallo was one of the three places on Lake Como in a position to offer the largest quantity of fish to the market in Como. We cross the small village that looks out on the Lecco branch of the lake and stop for a minute to admire the wonderful panorama on this part of the lake framed by the mountains with the peak of the Grigna (2,409 metres) in the background - steep sided and rich in iron.

In the second small square, an especially pretty corner of this suburb, you will find the tiny church of SS Biagio and Andrea, surrounded by dwelling houses **1**. We now pass up the road that goes upwards with fine private gardens along it and a field used as a nursery- garden, one of the main activity in Bellagio, besides tourism. There are a few family businesses producing above all outdoor plants sold all over Italy and Europe.

When we reach the main road for Lecco we turn left and follow the sidewalk that runs along a large piece of ground cultivated with olive trees. The cultivation of the olive on the Lake of Como goes back to Roman times. This tree has perfectly acclimatized and thrives on the hills of Bellagio, so much so that it has given its name to the suburb in which we are, **Oliverio**. Lake Como is today the farthest north point in Europe in which olive oil is produced. Local artisans use olive wood to produce various unique articles. At the end of the sidewalk on the left we spot a beautiful villa **2**. This was constructed in 1624 by order of the proto-physicist Eudemio Camuzio who called it Villa Camuzia. At the end of the eighteenth century, Conte Pietro Venini from Bellagio, completely renovated it and called it Villa Giulia, in honor of his wife. The neoclassical villa consists of three floors with the lower floor decorated in ashlar-work, and two wings have been added from the centre portion. Conte Venini bought the land around the villa and modelled out in front of the villa a stretch

of grass called the "Vialone" which allowed him to see and have access to both branches of the lake.

We now walk along this wide grassy avenue for its entire length.

If, for some reason it is not possible to use the Vialone or if you prefer to lengthen slightly the itinerary we suggest you go along the main road for another 50 metres and then take the first side road on the right which leads to the suburb of **Regatola**. **3** On the wall of the first house on the left you will spot a plaque recording the stay of the famous Como scientist, Alessandro Volta (1745-1827) inventor of the voltaic cell (1799), and also of the poet Giuseppe Parini. Shortly after on your right you'll find some steps leading down to the heart of the lovely and well preserved hamlet Regatola. The short detour is worth to be done.

Both the Vialone and this road meet up with the main state road to Como.

Cross this road with care and before turning left on it to reach the suburb of **Guggiate** stop in front of the entrance to the Hotel Silvio and admire the spectacle of this part of the lake framed splendidly by cypresses. **4** Turning with our back to the lake on the right up the hill you can see a Mausoleum built by the architect Balzarotto in the XIX century for Giacomo Poldi Pezzoli. Here one of the descendents of the family Gonzaga of Mantova, a friend of the owner, is also buried. This monument belongs to the private park of the present Villa Gerli, which lies on the lakeside. On the far side of the gateway in wrought iron, on the right there is a beautiful centuries-old example of tree called Liquidambar (Species: *Styraciflua* Family: *amamelidacee*).

5 Following the main road on the left, you will see the little square of the suburb of Guggiate where you will spot the oratory of S. Andrea at the side of which lies a large house, surrounded by a wall with an elegant gateway constructed in the XVII century by the Ciceri family. Several small roads leading to the hinterland of Bellagio branch off from this square.



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Returning onto the main road we cross the River Perlo and turn right to reach the suburb of **S. Giovanni**. At the end of the road you will see on the left an antique dwelling with tower with a sundial where the Nautical Instruments Museum is located **6**. This can be visited in Bellagio thanks to the collecting skill of Gianni Gini, traveller and collector. Inside we find more than two hundred precious instruments, which in the past centuries have allowed man to orient himself on the sea and to sail towards new worlds. Among the most interesting instruments in this collection we note the eighteenth century telescopes manufactured in Venice, compasses, solar clocks of various periods, a large series of marine chronometers and a stupendous planetarium in brass. The museum is open during the summer season from 10 am to 1 pm. Afternoon on appointment. Entry by payment. For information call Tel. +39.031.950.309.

Let us now follow the cobbled street and get into the centre of the suburb of S. Giovanni to go down to the lake. **7** On the right you see the Church of S. Giovanni, one time the main church of Bellagio district and focal point of the local religious life. We do not know much about the history of this edifice but it was certainly the first church built on the soil of Bellagio. It was certainly in existence in the X century but no trace remains as testimony of this period, although we suppose that the present-day oratory, to the south of the parish church, has been constructed on the foundations of the older building. The new church (which was seat of the archpriest) and dedicated to S. Giovanni Battista was built in 1584 and partly in 1685. The actual appearance is due to modifications carried out in the second half of the XVIII century. The front, in the baroque style, is flanked by a church tower with five bells, which play a magnificent concerto in SI2 naturale. On the inside of the church the most interesting work of art which we can still see today is an altar screen showing "The Risen Christ between Saints and Benefactors" painted by Gaudenzio Ferrari in the XVI century and an "Immaculate Virgin" of the school of Bernini. The church is open only on Sunday at 10.00 o'clock in the morning for the celebration of Mass.

The artificial grotto to be seen in the square is dedicated to the Madonna of Lourdes and was constructed in the years 1950 by Don Giulio Botta, Archpriest of S. Giovanni.

In the wharf and dock area in front of the church you can see the typical boats of lake Como called "Lucie", after Lucia, after the main character in Alessandro Manzoni's masterpiece "the betrothed", which takes place on lake Como. The boat has a framework of three arches, which allows it to be covered in case of bad weather or scorching sun.

The modern construction you see on the lakeside on the left if you face the lake is the Rowing School, which can boast 6 world champions to date. It is a meeting place for children and teenagers who wish to practice this sport.

We back again along the same route following this until we reach Guggiate. Half way along the upward slope returning on the main road, we go down the side road on the left leading to the suburb of **Loppia**. On your right going down you will find the flight of stairs that leads once again to the Vialone of Villa Giulia. Over the wall we see the Romanesque church of Santa Maria di Loppia (end of X century), **8** which one time had a little cloister, whose stones were then used in the construction of the Vialone. Now this church is in the park of Villa Gerli, a fine villa **9**, on the banks of the lake to our left. Constructed by the family Taverna in the second half of the XVIII century, it passed then to the family Poldi Pezzoli who enlarged it by adding two wings designed by the architect Giuseppe Balzaretto. Principe Trivulzio inherited it and in 1941; it was later purchased by Conte Gerli, who took particular pains to restore the Church of Santa Maria di Loppia. In the dock area is still to be seen a rare example of Larian (from Lake Como) Gondola, sailing craft which was used up to the end of the XIX century for carrying goods and animals.

Also this suburb was a small fishing village and it still retains the aura of past times. From here we advise you to reach the main centre again by crossing the romantic gardens of Villa Melzi **10**. The villa was constructed by Francesco Melzi D'Eril, vice president

of the Cisalpine Republic and still today it is private property of the descendants of this illustrious family. The park is famous for the blooming of the azaleas and rhododendrons in the spring season, but it is fascinating all along the year. We remind you that there is an entry fee, but the ticket is valid for the entire day and gives right of entry to the family chapel and the small Museum. If you have already visited this

property follow the asphalted road first going upwards and then downwards on the main Como road past the principal gateway of Villa Melzi at the lakeside. From here in a few minutes you can reach again the centre of Bellagio passing along the lakeside walk, known as Lungo Lario Europa.

Thank you for your attention and we wish you a pleasant stay in Bellagio.

