



TOUR OF THE HAMLETS ON THE EASTERN SIDE OF BELLAGIO

Duration: Approx. 2 hours and 30 minutes

3 hours if taking extension options.

Comfortable footwear is required as the ground is uneven and cobbles can be slippery.

This itinerary will enable you to see more of some of Bellagio's little hamlets scattered on the eastern side of the promontory and, above all, Visgnola, up on the hill about a mile away from "Borgo", the town centre.



Starting from the boat terminal in Piazza Mazzini walk to the upper part of town. The main street at the top is Via Garibaldi, turn right and walk out of the town centre. Carry straight on for about 10 minutes (the street then becomes **Via Valassina**) until you come to the Cemetery on your left. This area is known as **Oliverio** and **Grena**. You have lovely views of the Lecco Branch of the lake and olive cultivations, which are in the land belonging to **Villa Giulia** ① . Further on, to your left, is the villa

itself. Across the road from the villa (on your right) is a grassy footpath area stretching to the other side of the promontory – it is known as the **Vialone**. The Villa was originally built in 1624 for a proto-physicist, Eudemio Camozio, who called it **Villa Camuzia**. At the end of the 18^o century Count Pietro Venini, a native of Bellagio, completely renovated it and called it Villa Giulia in honour of his wife. The villa itself, on three floors, is in neoclassical style. The lower floor is decorated with ashlar (bugnato) and two wings flank the main building. Count Venini purchased several plots of land surrounding the villa and had the part in front cleared in order to create a long stretch of grass **Vialone**, which allows both a view and access to the lake's two branches. After the death of Count Venini the villa passed into the hands of different owners. These included: Leopold I, King of Belgium; Antonio Mella who transformed it for a brief period into a hotel; Count Blome de Boule Schenenstein; the Polish Baron Gay and the Rumanian noble Kirakirschen. It currently belongs to a family from Milan. Shortly after the Villa Giulia, you'll see a small cobbled path on your left (**Via Cavada**). Follow this path up towards the mountain. Continue until you reach a small underpass with steps, ending at a point called **Località Pino**, near a small junction. The minor road ahead of you leads to the centre of Visgnola. Just behind you the main road to the right leads down to the centre of Bellagio and to the left to Lecco. The minor road behind you takes you to the **College of the Beata Vergine** **2**, bygone times a school and nowadays a nursing home, the **Casa di Cura Bellagio**. Our walk takes us to the centre of **Visgnola** so take the road ahead of you as you emerge from the underpass. Along the little side streets we can see some old peasant homes whose original structure is still intact. The road bends to the left and takes us into this little village's old square, **Piazza dei Canestri**. On your right is a bar, **Tabaccheria Mazzoni**, which maintains the aspect of a 19th century inn. Notice its original stone table outside, and take a closer look under it, you'll see the founding date (1892) on the cobbles. The interiors preserve most of the furniture and structure from those times. In the centre of the square there used to be a well where families would get their water supplies before aqueducts were installed. An underground passageway used to link the well to the old inn's cellars. Apparently this was not the only one in the area – it seem there were quite a few, each and every one more or less secret. Directly opposite the **Tabaccheria** and to the right of the local Alpini Association's headquarters there is a road, which leads to the **Church of San Martino** **3**, dedicated to Saint Martin Bishop and St. Mary of the Rosary. The church is a perfect example of 15th century architecture with alterations dating back to the Baroque period. During the 15th century both this and the building opposite (nowadays the S. Martino Cellars) formed the Community Hospital. On the 5th January 1510, it passed into the hands of the **San Pedemont** Dominican Friars from Como. We know as a fact that a few friars were permanent residents at San Martino and that they built a holiday home for their students from Como. Whilst here the students even formed a string orchestra. Unfortunately, the Dominican Friars were renowned not only for the fact that they were harsh teachers with strict rules and regulations, but also for their roles as both judges and inquisitors at the Court of the Inquisition. It was they, who questioned the accused and then deemed them guilty for heresy and witchcraft. In 1793 the complex of the convent was closed and confiscated. It became State property of the town of Olona and was later sold in auction to Giacomo Rezia in 1799. During the first part of the 19th century the church was entrusted to a chaplain. In 1857 a new parish church, S. Maria Annunciata in Breno, (see below) was instituted. The little church of San Martino now became part of the new church and San Martino's last chaplain, Cesare Aureggi, was appointed parish priest of this new church. Several valuable works were moved to the new parish church where they can still be seen. They include a fine picture of the Madonna of the Rosary. In 1945 it was declared a Sanctuary dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Just opposite the

church's main door at N°4 is a large doorway that led to the cellars of the former convent. This is now private property, the **Cantina di San Martino**. From this point, you have the option of extending our itinerary as far as the **S. Vito** hamlet – this takes about 20/30 minutes. To do so, follow the path, which goes downhill beyond the Church of S. Martino. When you reach the main road (leading to Lecco) cross carefully as cars speed along here. Now take the lane directly ahead of you. Continue towards the lake and you will soon see **the old church of San Vito** 4. Dating from before 1593, it was annexed to the property of the S. Martino Hospital. It was restored in 1928 and again in 1997. An ancient image of the Madonna can be seen inside, if only through the little window as the church is usually closed. When you return to the main road you have a choice of route: You may either retrace your steps by taking the cobbled lane immediately opposite or you can extend your walk by another 15 minutes and see something different. If you prefer the alternative route, turn left on the main road. After 20 metres cross over and take the road to the right (at the bus stop) going uphill. The road climbs quite steeply and curves a couple of times. Keep going and you are rewarded by a great view of Visgnola and in the distance, Bellagio's promontory! You eventually arrive at a gate marked **Proprietà privata**, take the narrow track to its right hand side and continue in the same direction. When the track brings you back to the narrow streets of Visgnola take the one with steps going down. This is **Vicolo Don Giuseppe**. In front of you, you will see the Tabaccheria on the piazza from where you started. **If you have not taken the extended walk start again here...** Proceed on the partially cobbled main road, which goes upwards to the left of the Tabaccheria. It leads to the Parish Church of **S. Maria Annunciata in Breno**, mentioned earlier. Before reaching the church you can see some old stone entrances framing green wooden doors. At the end of the main road, you arrive in **Piazza Don Cantoni** in the area known as Breno where the **Church of S. Maria Annunciata in Breno** 5 can be seen. There's a legend about why this church was built: A lord of the Castle (the present-day Villa Serbelloni) used to travel every day from Borgo to Visgnola. He would stop and drink water from a well (the same water that comes from the **Avelli** fountain now below the right side of the church, where water spurts from two granite heads with human features). This gentleman had trouble with his legs so he always went up to Visgnola on horseback. He noticed that before leaving the well, his horse would always perform a sort of bow. One day after stopping at this spot as usual, he suddenly felt his legs get better. He called his men and dug a trench in front of the well and he found an image of Mary with the Baby Jesus, which, according to this legend, is the one to be found in the choir of the church. He decided to build the church on this very spot and to dedicate it to the Madonna. The building dates back to the 16th century and became the parish church in 1857. Inside we can admire beautiful pictures on canvas and a sectioned icon behind the altar, the work of a local artist. Hung on the walls on the sides of the nave are three canvases, which date back to the end of the 15th century and originally belonged to the Church of S. Martino. The first on the left when entering shows St. Albert the Great discussing the Holy Scriptures and date back to the 16th century. He is surrounded by various religious figures as well as a man in civilian dress. Another canvas shows the Madonna on a throne with Baby Jesus, St. Dominic and St. Peter and in the lower part one notes a Pope and Sovereign, representing both spiritual and temporal power. On the opposite wall is a painting of the dead Christ, thought to be by the same artist. Turning right onto the main road, continue downhill until you get to the **ancient "wash house"** 6 which was recently restored. This is where the local women used to go to do their washing. Immediately after the wash house, turn left and follow the narrow uphill road, then take the steep but short cobbled path descending to the right towards Borgo, the town centre. Avoid coming out on the main road going to Lecco but keep to the track on the left. At the end of the track, turn left

on the gravel path running parallel to the road. You are in the hamlet called **Taronico**. On the right, you pass the **Latteria di Bellagio – the Dairy Shop 7**. Founded in 1933, the products in this shop come from milk supplied by farmers from the immediate surrounding area known as the Larian Triangle. They run relatively small family farms where cows graze up in the mountains during the summer thus guaranteeing top-quality milk. Proceed along the track into the heart of Taronico, and at the end turn right into the main road. If you wish to explore another hamlet, you can turn left and walk up along the old mule track as far as the characteristic hamlet of **Suira**. Cross the main road, heading straight down at the crossroads. You will come across the long stretch of grass Vialone again. Over to the right, in the distance you'll see Villa Giulia. A little further on to the left, you reach the **Carabinieri Police Barracks 8** which is where the old hospital (**Lazzaretto**) used to be. Nothing remains of the original structure as it was demolished and the police barracks was built in recent times. The brown building next door to the police station is the headquarters for the Association of Voluntary First-Aid workers, the local Health Centre and the Post Office. To the left of the police station is a small road – follow this until the end and then turn left. You'll pass through a relatively unknown part of Bellagio. At the end of this narrow track, you'll reach the main road. Cross over and follow the path **Via del Bello** up to the suburb of **Aureggio**. At the end of these steps on the left is the small 17th century church of **San Carlo Borromeo 9**. Take the path to the left (**Via dei Pini**) carry straight on and turn to the right onto the gravelled track. You now see the lake again, this is the south-western branch with glimpses of Villa Carlotta and Tremezzo. At the small cobbled square, carry straight on along the gravel path. This time the views are of the southeastern branch of the lake. At the bottom of the cobbled steps, you reach the main road, **Via Valassina**, leading back into Bellagio on the left. Cross carefully.

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