



Italian Villas & Gardens of the Lake District: Lake Maggiore, Lake Como and Verona

Saturday, May 11 to Saturday, May 18, 2024

Tour arrangements by Classical Excursions



The Italian lakes have seduced travelers since the time of the ancient Romans, who made them a favorite holiday destination, building villas along the shores or near them. Later on, the lakes enchanted and inspired travelers on the Grand Tour – among these were Byron, Stendhal, Rossini, Bellini, Shelley, Turner, Liszt, Dickens and Henry James, who wrote to his sister Alice, “One can’t describe the beauty of the Italian lakes, nor would one try if one could...”

With these glorious descriptions in mind, the Institute of Classical Architecture & Art invites you to join an eight-day excursion arranged by Classical Excursions of some of the most breathtakingly beautiful villas, gardens and scenery in all of Italy, on Lake Maggiore (pictured above), Lake Como, Verona and surrounding areas. Retrace the steps of centuries of travelers to experience such villa and garden sights as Isola Madre, Isola Bella, Villa Taranto, Villa San Remigio, Villa Carlotta, Villa Balbianello, Villa della Porta Bozzolo, to name just a few. Lunch at Villa Giusti, Grand Hotel Villa d’Este, Villa Cicogna, Villa Rizzarda and others.

You will discover the Italian genius for design as you come to understand the villa and garden form. The group will explore landscapes that magically combine evergreens, and stonework, statues, fountains, cascades and pools (an inspired element of the Italian garden is the ancient understanding and manipulation of water), while harmoniously integrating villa, garden and surrounding countryside. Along the way, there will be time for shopping and enjoying elegant lakefront hotel accommodations, splendid Italian cuisine and a rich array of Italian culture.

OVERVIEW *of the* ITINERARY

SATURDAY – May 11 – Arrival to Milan, proceed to Stresa on Lake Maggiore

Arrive to Milan area by plane or train. Independent arrival to Lake Maggiore and the town of Stresa. Check in to the **Grand Hotel des Iles Borromées** for 2-nights. Welcome dinner.

SUNDAY – May 12 to TUESDAY, September 26 - Stresa

Today we'll enjoy a private boat ride on Lake Maggiore to visit the islands of Isola Madre and Isola Bella with lunch and touring.

MONDAY – May 13 – Stresa to Bellagio on Lake Como

After checking out of the hotel, we'll enjoy a number of special visits throughout the day. Late afternoon, check-in to **Grand Hotel Tremezzo** for 3-nights.

TUESDAY – May 14 and WEDNESDAY – May 15 – Bellagio

We will have touring both days with private visits to special places.

THURSDAY – May 16 – Bellagio to Verona

After checking out of the hotel, we have a day of touring. Arrive to the **NH Collection Palazzo Verona** for 2-nights.

FRIDAY – May 17 – Verona

Touring in the morning and lunch. Then free time to enjoy the town. Farewell dinner tonight.

SATURDAY – May 18 – Day for Departures

Breakfast at the hotel. Independent departures from Verona – options to head to Venice, which is 1 ½ hours away, or Milan, approximately 2 hours away.

Meals Included in the Itinerary: breakfast and lunch daily per itinerary, and four dinners.

Itinerary as of August 2023 and subject to updating by Classical Excursions.



MITCHELL OWENS will co-host our trip. Mitch is the American Editor of *The World of Interiors*. A journalist and lecturer since the 1980s, he specializes in interiors, architecture, gardens, and the history of style. Prior to joining *The World of Interiors*, he was the Decorative Arts Editor of *Architectural Digest*, where he hosted the The AD Aesthete podcast. He has been a reporter and columnist at the *New York Times*, was a founding editor of the LGBTQ magazine *Out*, and held editorial positions at *Nest*, *ELLE Decor*, *Traditional Home*, and *Travel + Leisure*. He has co-authored several books, mostly recently *Shingle and Stone: Thomas Kligerman Houses* (Rizzoli, 2022) and interior decorator Alex Papachristidis's monograph *The Elegant Life* (Rizzoli, 2022).

LANI SUMMERVILLE is Founder and Director of Classical Excursions and will be leading our journey. Classical Excursions has done a Lake District tour a number of times and is always well received by the homeowners and hosts.



Credit: Christine Harris

OUR HOTELS:

Grand Hotel des Iles Borromées

Located in Stresa, on the shores of Lake Maggiore. This majestic 5-star luxury property is in Belle Époque style dating to 1863. The architect was Antonio Polli. The hotel looks out to the Borromean Islands and is surrounded by park land and parterre gardens. It is located 55 miles from Milan. We will have a 2-night stay.



Grand Hotel Tremezzo

The hotel overlooks Lake Como. It is a 5-star luxury hotel – in the Belle Époque style inside our historic Palace built in 1910.



NH Collection Palazzo Verona

This is a 5-star luxury hotel in the historic city center where we will have a 2-night stay. Parts of the hotel are built around roman ruins and preserve parts of the palazzo dating back to the 14th Century.



TOUR HIGHLIGHTS: Lake Maggiore, Lake Como and Verona



ISOLA MADRE: Following in the footsteps of Queen Victoria and other luminaries is the boat trip to neighboring Isola Madre, the island garden also owned by the noble Borromeo family since the 16th century and one of the oldest botanical gardens in Italy, a lush fantasy of a double-loggia villa, hedges of camellias, palms, papyrus, bananas, Brazilian parrots, peacocks and pheasants. (image above)

ISOLA BELLA: A private motor launch takes us to Isola Bella on Lake Maggiore for lunch and to visit the “tiered wedding cake” garden from the 17th century, which is, as writer Edith Wharton describes, “richly ornamented with vases, statues and obelisks, jasmine, myrtle and pomegranate.” Nothing has been altered, including the island’s Baroque palace, to be visited as well, with its series of stunning Baroque reception rooms and amazing grottolike rooms decorated entirely with pebbles and shells. (three images right and below)





VILLA TARANTO in Pallanza, which is now a botanical garden (above). The garden was created by a Scotsman in 1931 on a property that dates much further back. The garden was opened to the public in 1952, and the villa is used for exhibitions, records storage and offices.

VILLA CARLOTTA: A private tour on Lake Como of the magnificently sited Villa Carlotta at Tremezzo positioned at the top of a series of terraced gardens. They are designed to look out of as well as look into—the panoramic views of the lake are spectacular, even more so from the upper stories of the villa, which contains a fine collection of early 19th-century neoclassical furniture, paintings of the Lombardian School and sculpture.



VILLA MELZI: We boat across Lake Como to the almost perfect lakeside setting of **Bellagio** for the restaurants and shops that charmingly line the lakefront (the original is superior to Las Vegas's version!). Further along the promenade is the neoclassical Villa Melzi, sited directly across from Villa Carlotta and surrounded by an English-style garden of exotic plants and cypresses. Here Liszt wrote his Dante Sonata.

VILLA DELLA PORTA BOZZOLO: The villa is at Casalzuigno, built in the 16th century, and with glorious 18th century gardens with stairs ascending from the villa, elaborate fountains, water features and an aedicula decorated with frescoes. The unusual main axis of the garden is parallel to the side of the villa – thus disregarding the classical rules of aligning the principal garden axis with the main room of the villa. (image right)



VILLA CICOGNA MOZZONI: We drive to Bisuschio near Lake Lugano for a very special day, touring the magnificent 16th-century villa, which partially encloses a beautiful sunken garden – a favorite of Edith Wharton. The owners will be our guides and hosts for lunch at this enchanting property. They are descendants of the original aristocratic family. A timeless quality resides here. (two images below)



VILLA MONESTERO is in Varenna overlooking Lake Como (images right). The location of the villa was originally a Cistercian convent dedicated to St. Mary Magdalen, and was probably founded before 1200. It was completely remodeled in 1567 and again in 1645, bringing it closer to what we see today.



GRAND HOEL VILLA D'ESTE: Lunch and visit is a memorable Lake Como highlight. We'll stroll through the magnificent Renaissance garden at incomparable. The garden begins near the lake, where a lawn and flowerbeds are laid out before a backdrop of a pair of walls, a Baroque grotto and fountain all composed of pebbles and shell-work of varying colors. (image right)



COMO: An afternoon is spent shopping and strolling through the town of **Como**, for centuries the center of the Italian silk textile industry and a mecca for designers and buyers. Mantero is just one of the renown companies in Como – and is still a family own company dating back to 1902.



VILLA BALBIANELLO: We'll tour of the Villa Balbianello at the Baroque watergate where our private motor launch has put us ashore. We ascend through the immaculately maintained gardens along paths bordered with plane trees and skirting the edge of Lake Como. Balustraded terraces, an 18th-century garden house and loggia overlook stunning views of the lake and mountains. We also view the elegantly decorated villa, which is filled with French and Italian antiques.



GIARDINO DI VILLA RIZZARDI: At Negrar are Giardino di Villa Rizzardi (images below), which possesses among other treasures a rare 18th-century semi-circular and tiered garden theater with high boxwood hedges that act as stage wings and changing room (theater is still performed here).



VILLA MOSCONI BERTANI (images left and below), a charming 18th-century building containing frescoed architectural features and figures and an extensive park with avenues, a lake and fountains.



VILLA ALLEGRI ARVEDI: North of Verona at Grazzana is the majestic 17th-century Villa Allegri Arvedi (below), another Edith Wharton favorite, famed for its broderied-parterre terrace and exquisite family chapel, both designed on a central axis with the villa.



VILLA GIUSTI: In Verona, we will tour and have lunch al fresco in the vast city garden of Villa Giusti, a fortress-like structure similar to the palazzos in Florence. Horizontal box parterres contrast with vertical cypresses, and a towering cliffside carved with a grotesque mask lure the visitor up the garden path; Mozart and Goethe were visitors.



