



TREMEZZO
Villa Carlotta.

Lake Como & the Valtellina

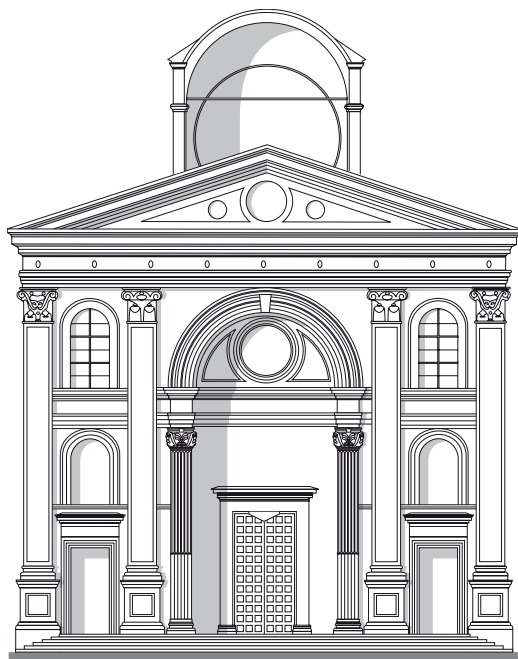
Beautiful Lake Como (*Atlas D*), below the alpine foothills, offers perhaps the most dramatic scenery of all the great Italian lakes. High, precipitous mountains fall sheer to the water and villages literally perch on narrow ledges of land. Virgil called it *Lacus Larius*, and the lake is still often known as Lario. Many of the towns on its shores, originally fishing villages, became resorts in the 19th century. The English Romantic poets Shelley and Byron came here, and Wordsworth lived here in 1790. Numerous villas surrounded by lovely gardens were built in the 18th and 19th centuries. The lake is subject to frequent floods and is swept regularly by two winds, the *tivano* (north to south) and the *brega* (south to north).



LAKE COMO HIGHLIGHTS

The most beautiful part of the lake is the centre, where the foreshore is wider and less steep. **Bellagio** (*map p. 227, 3*) is perhaps the loveliest of all the resorts. Fine villas with beautiful gardens can be found here (Villa Melzi; *p. 231*), as well as at **Tremezzo** on the west shore (*map p. 227, 5; p. 229*) and at **Varenna** on the east (*map p. 227, 3; p. 235*). Varenna also offers the dramatic Fiumelatte gorge and a medieval castle.

The town of **Como** (*p. 218*) has impressive examples of Rationalist architecture. For family holidays with simple restaurants and good lake swimming, the northern shore around **Gravedona** is recommended (*map p. 227, 1*). Good walks can be taken from Brunate to **Torno** (*p. 225*), Cadenabbia to **San Martino** (*p. 231*) and to the isolated **abbey of Piona** on its headland (*p. 237*).



BASILICA OF SANT'ANDREA

unusual carved decorations and basket-work motifs and at the bottom is a horizontal frieze of acorns and acanthus leaves.

Under the barrel-vaulted porch, a beautiful marble frieze with animals and birds surrounds the west door. The brick campanile of 1413 is a survival from the 11th-century monastery on this site.

The huge wide interior, on a longitudinal plan, has a spacious barrel-vaulted nave without columns or aisles. The rectangular side chapels, also with barrel vaults, are preceded by giant paired pilasters raised on pedestals. Between them, behind grilles, are small, lower domed chapels. The transepts, with the same proportions, are also rectangular. The feeling of spaciousness and light is unforgettable despite the fact that every wall surface is covered with painted decoration and *trompe-l'œil* work carried out under the direction of Paolo Pozzo in 1780 (when all the pilasters were also painted with monochrome candelabra against a yellow ground).

The decoration of the nave chapels survives from the 16th century, partly the work of pupils of Giulio Romano.

South side: Begin your visit here. You can appreciate Alberti's architecture in the first little chapel (the baptistery), whose walls are bare. The third chapel

(of St Sebastian) is frescoed by Rinaldo Mantovano (1534). The sixth chapel (of St Longinus) has a fine altarpiece, a 16th-century copy of the original by

Giulio Romano (now in the Louvre), while the frescoes, designed by Romano, were also executed by Rinaldo Mantovano. The one on the left shows the discovery of the Holy Blood.

Dome and crossing: The frescoes in the dome and apse are late 18th-century. On the left of the high altar is a kneeling statue in marble of the hunch-backed Duke Guglielmo Gonzaga at prayer (1572: he was known to have been extremely devout). Beneath the dome is an octagonal balustrade marking the centre of the crypt, where the precious

reliquary of the Holy Blood is kept (it is carried in solemn procession, the *Sacri Vasi*, on Good Friday). The crypt is opened on request.

In the north transept is a door that leads out to a piazza, from where you can see the exterior of the church and one walk of the Gothic cloister of the monastery that stood on this site. The transept chapel contains 16th- and 17th-century funerary monuments, including that of Pietro Strozzi, an ingenious work of 1529 with four caryatids, designed by Giulio Romano.

LEON BATTISTA ALBERTI

Leon Battista Alberti (1402–72) is one of the most important figures of the Italian Renaissance, not only for the buildings he designed as architect but also for his treatises: *De Pictura*, *De Statua* and *De Re Aedificatoria*. In these he expounded new codes of aesthetics and ethics which greatly influenced the work produced by the humanist painters, sculptors and architects of his day. He examined the idea of beauty based on theories of *misura*, or proportion, and explored the mathematical intricacies of linear perspective. His architectural works often have elements of ancient Roman buildings, such as barrel vaults, entablatures and polychrome marbles.

When he arrived in Mantua in 1459, he had already designed the Palazzo Rucellai in Florence and had begun to transform the church of San Francesco in Rimini into the Tempio Malatestiano, a monument to Sigismondo Malatesta, so that his reputation was well established. It was Ludovico II who commissioned him to design the huge church of Sant'Andrea in the centre of Mantua, which remains his most important completed architectural work. The centrally planned church of San Sebastiano, also by Alberti (*map 7*), was never finished. It is known that Ludovico and Alberti became friends (numerous letters survive) and the architect's passionate interest in ancient Rome was shared by Mantegna, who was at work for the Gonzaga in the same period.

North side: The sixth chapel has a strikingly simple painting of the Crucifix by Fermo Ghisoni. The fourth chapel has a wood ancona dating from 1616 by Antonio Maria Viani and two huge paintings by Lorenzo Costa the Younger. In the second chapel there is a beautiful altarpiece of 1525 by the more famous Lorenzo Costa.

The first little chapel, the Cappella del Mantegna (*kept locked but there is a coin-operated light*), is the **burial place of Mantegna**, chosen by the artist in 1504. It contains his tomb with his bust in bronze, possibly his self-portrait, in a roundel of porphyry and Istrian stone. The charming panel of the *Holy Family and the Family of St John the*

Baptist is almost certainly by Mantegna. Above is his coat of arms. The terracotta decoration and frescoes on the walls and dome, including the symbols of the Evangelists, were designed by Mantegna

and probably executed by his son Francesco. The painting of the *Baptism of Christ*, probably also to a design by Mantegna, is also the work of Francesco.

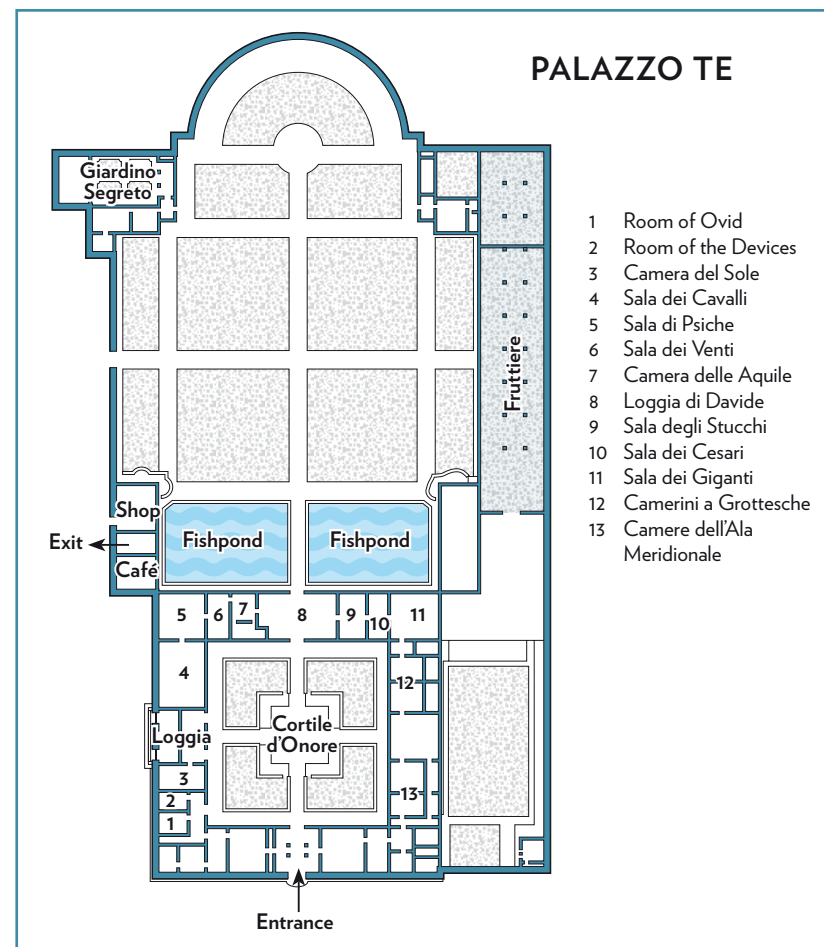
PALAZZO TE

Map 7. Open Mon 1–6, Tues–Sun 9–6. Combined ticket with Museo della Città in Palazzo San Sebastiano. T: 0376 323266, palazzote.it and museicivici.mn.it. There is a café and bookshop at the garden exit.

Palazzo Te, the summer villa of the Gonzaga dukes, stands on the southern outskirts of the town in an area that was once countryside, originally surrounded by water. It is entered by an isolated old gate with two eagles on the gate posts. One of the most important secular buildings in Italy, it was built for Federico II Gonzaga by Giulio Romano, on the site of the Gonzaga stables. Begun in 1525, the bold rustication and giant orders of pilasters give the façades a monumental appearance, although it is in fact built of brick and stucco since no building stone was available locally. Spaciously laid out around a courtyard with symmetrical loggias, it is Giulio Romano's most famous work, inspired by the great villas of Rome, and a masterpiece of Mannerist architecture. The rooms of the palace, bare of furniture, are of great interest for their extraordinary painted and stuccoed decoration, in particular on the ceilings. They were all designed by Giulio Romano, although he was helped in their execution from 1526 to 1535 by some of his many pupils, including Francesco Primaticcio and Rinaldo Mantovano. In theme the decoration is almost entirely secular, with its references to the Classical world: it was in this palace that Federico held his splendid entertainments and in 1530, when Emperor Charles V granted him the Dukedom of Mantua, Federico received his powerful imperial benefactor here. Its unusual name remains a mystery but is thought to have been derived from the name of the locality.

TOUR OF THE PALACE

The first room past the ticket office contains a model of the building and a portrait of Giulio Romano by Titian, his contemporary: Titian first came into contact with the architect during his frequent visits to the city. The two artists employed to collaborate on the decoration of Palazzo Ducale at the time this portrait was painted, around 1536, just after Palazzo Te had been completed inside and out. Titian's portrait was only rediscovered in the mid-20th century, when it was acquired by the province of Mantua and the Lombard Region. Historians have found the drawing for a centrally-planned building which the architect holds in his hand difficult to identify, so it may have been for a project never executed.



From here you pass through the small **Room of Ovid (1)** and **Room of the Devices (2)** (thought to have been part of the private apartment of Federico's mistress, Isabella Boschetti), with painted friezes, landscapes, and red marble fireplaces, to the **Camera del Sole (3)** with its lovely ceiling painting traditionally attributed to Francesco Primaticcio, Giulio Romano's most famous pupil: the chariot of the Moon with Diana is seen just arriving to drive away that of the Sun with Apollo. Seen from below, no part of either the horses' or Apollo's anatomy is left to the imagination. This ceiling, which also has lozenges against a blue ground with white stucco reliefs inspired by Classical coins and gems, is just the first of many other splendidly decorated rooms.

From here you can go out to the loggia on the wide **Cortile d'Onore** to see the way Giulio Romano has played with the rules of Classical architecture, designing sections

